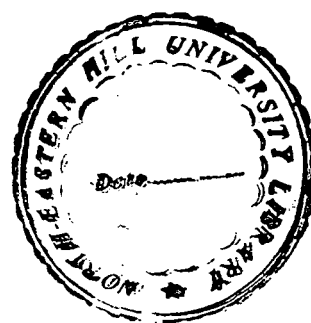


**EXISTENCE THAT IS BRAHMAN:  
A STUDY IN VIVEKĀNANDA**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY (M. PHIL.)  
IN PHILOSOPHY**

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY  
SHILLONG**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am immensely indebted to my Supervisor Prof. C. R. Agera for his invaluable guidance and kind help without which this dissertation would not have seen the light of the day. In him, I see not only academic excellence but also underlying concern to train young thinkers. His humility and understanding is a source of encouragement throughout the period in which I was engaged in the writing of the dissertation.

I gratefully acknowledge my gratitude to all my respected teachers in the Department for their kind gestures and valuable suggestions.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not express my special words of thanks to Swami Ekarthananda of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Library, Shillong, for his kind cooperation and allowing me to use the books of the library.

I also wish to express my gratitude to all my friends, well-wishers, librarians and the office staff of the Philosophy Department, Mr. Vanlalruata and Mr. Padam Bhusal for their kind cooperation. My deep appreciation goes to Mr. Joseph F. Khongbuh for printing the manuscript with keen interest and care.

I fail to find words to give vent to my innermost feelings for my mother for her silent sacrifice without which I would not have been what I am today. An occasion like the submission of a thesis brings back to my mind the memories of my dear father, who is no more with us. I owe him everything. I am highly grateful to my uncle, brother and my sisters for their ungrudging assistance and good will. This work is humbly dedicated to my grandmothers, Mrs. Hashi Rani Biswas and Mrs. Debala Das Gupta.

Shillong  
The 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2003

(Paramita Das)

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# *CHAPTER I*

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In my proposed dissertation, I will attempt to discuss the concept of existence as applicable to Brahman in the philosophy of Vivekānanda. Vivekānanda today is hailed as a Neo-Vedāntin. Neo-Vedānta is a Vedāntic response in the context of the Indian Renaissance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in India to some of the religio-philosophical queries that were raised by the intellectuals both in India and the West. Vivekānanda and Aurobindo are the two better known Neo-Vedāntins, who attempt an interpretation of Vedānta, being aware of the philosophical movements of the West. Vedānta itself, being a philosophy of the Upaniṣads, had to be presented as relevant to the modern, in particular, the political, concerns of India. Vivekānanda's is a modest attempt towards the reinterpretation.

In this reinterpretation, Vedāntic metaphysics is at the heart of the discussion. In India, the philosophy of Vedānta has been a living tradition not only through the monastic movements, but also through common man's affiliation to significant temple traditions. Vedānta is an absolutistic philosophy in as much as its metaphysics is centred around the concept of an ultimate, absolute reality termed Brahman. Numerous are the problems that an absolutist faces, speaking philosophically: How is the absolute related to the relative realities, be they of the subjective or the objective order? How is the world of experience to be accounted for? What about the reality of the subject? These are one set of questions. The order of questions relates exclusively to the nature of

the absolute Brahman. Brahman is said to be existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), bliss (*ānanda*), infinite (*ananta*) and eternal (*nitya*). How should we understand these characterizations in an absolutist philosophy? What is the relation that may be said to hold among them? Which one of them is of maximum significance? Within this set of questions, I shall study exclusively one such concept viz. existence, as applicable to Brahman with special reference to Vivekānanda's reinterpreted Vedānta.

How do we arrive at the concept of existence itself? World we are living in may be said to have a temporary existence, in as much as everything in it is subject to change. The realization that everything in the world changes, makes us ask the question: Can we conceive of anything unaffected by the welter of all changes? Can there be a reality that may be said to exist for all time, or as eternal? Following Vedānta, Vivekānanda believes it to be Brahman. Brahman, which is the reality indeed behind all the changes, is the existent Brahman (*sat-Brahman*). Vivekānanda thinks that traditional Vedānta itself is responsible for creating the confusion on the nature of Brahman by stating that Brahman is an existent, conscious and blissful reality (*sat-cit-ānanda*). These factors have often been taken to mean attributes, thus giving rise to a variety of schools of thought. Practical Vedāntin that he is, Vivekānanda emphasizes, not so much on the idealism of Vedānta, hence on the consciousness of Brahman, as on the existence (*sat*) of Brahman: Existence that is Brahman is closer to the heart of Vivekānanda's Neo-Vedānta. My dissertation will study only this limited aspect of Vivekānanda's absolutistic metaphysics. When we

realize this existence, it is said that there exists no diversity. Yet, the relativity of the world is upheld, in that the universe is a reflection of the infinite. Likewise the relativity of the individual self too is upheld in that the infinite existence is its true nature; the self thus will never vanish, it will abide forever, realizing its identity with Brahman. We limit ourselves by our *karma*, which, like a chain round our neck, has dragged us into this limitation. We do not know that we are that existent Brahman. Vedāntic absolutism provides for one absolute, the noumenon, manifesting at times as the phenomena of subjects and objects. It is not the case that there are two, something changing and something that does not change, in and through all the changes. It is the one and the same reality, which is in truth unchangeable. We have come to think of the body, mind and soul as many, but really these are the phenomenal manifestations of the one noumenon. The one appears in all these various forms. The absolute Brahman remains the same. Such absolute is the existent Brahman; it is existence as such.

In as much as it is the basis of the conscious, living selves (*ātman, jīva*); it is the conscient Brahman (*cit*); it serves as the ground of all life. Brahman is life as such. Just like the soul may be said to pervade the body, Brahman is said to pervade the universe, yet it is not exhausted thereby; it remains, while pervading the world, beyond it. Vivekānanda believes that the Upaniṣads, therefore the philosophies of Vedānta, mark the first flash of a conception of an indeterminate absolute, which is the underlying reality of all things. The absolute Brahman itself is indestructible, while all the relative things are subject to change. This Brahman is concealed in all things, and does not,

therefore, appear to be there. Yet, it is the underlying existence of all the existents. Therefore, the realization of the Brahman is regarded as the highest of all knowledge, all other knowledge and learning rank much lower to knowledge of Brahman (*Brahmavidyā*). Vivekānanda admits that the one, who truly realizes this unitary existence to be the immortal Brahman, realizes the ultimate truth (*sat, satya*). This is so, because it is ever perfect, beyond all changes and the evanescent qualities.

It is, indeed, the substratum (*ādhāra*) of all changes. The phenomena are, therefore, said to be appearances of Brahman, the substratum par-excellence. That Brahman is existence does not require any proof; Brahman is not unknown to anyone, avers Vivekānanda. Brahman is not a more objectively existing reality, but rather existence itself (*sat-eva*). The reality, underlying all existence (*sat*), -- the primal one from which everything originates -- cannot be described, because it has no form as such: it is pure existence (*sat-mātra*). Existence itself is ultimately real, because it cannot be denied, or sublated, otherwise it involves a self-contradiction. One may deny the existence of something, but the existence as such cannot be denied, for in that case denial would still exist, requiring thereby existence as such. Existence is primordial for any metaphysics. Nor can existence ever come out of non-existence. It is by the light of existence, that is Brahman, that we become aware of anything else as existent. That is the timeless reality, avers Vivekānanda, which world's metaphysicians have been searching from the time immemorial. Vedānta has given a conceptual formulation to *sat-Brahman*.

Thus, for the Vedāntin, the absolute Brahman is the source and the basis of all the relative. The relative originates from the absolute, is sustained by it, and is finally refunded in it. This cycle continues throughout eternity. Everything finds its eternal rest in existence. With the liberated perception, we can discover that one supreme *sat* in the world, and within oneself, says Vivekānanda. Existence is Brahman, in reality. It would be an error to imagine that there should be something behind Brahman, too. The essence of reality lies in the union of existence (*sat*) with all that is. It is the absolute existence, distinct from other relative realities. The core of my dissertation is a critical study of existence (*sat*) as identical with Brahman, as conceived by Vivekānanda in his Neo-Vedānta.

In the second chapter, I will mainly discuss the general concept of existence (*sat*). Philosophical discussion of the notion of existence has to take into account fictitious objects, abstract ideas, and, above all, physical objects subject to change. It is often observed that everything changes but successively, at times even in quick rapidity. Nothing exists forever. But everything does not become non-existent at the same time. This idea compels one to admit that all change is only a transformation of forms, and that there is no annihilation of the existent. Something does exist behind the welter of all changes. There are some philosophers who have denied the permanence of being, whereas others have denied the continuous transformation of things, that is to say, the permanent existence of things. The conception of permanence and change has played a vital role in the history of philosophy.

I will cursorily look into Greek philosophy, first, in this context, because the ancient Greek contribution to philosophy became an integral part of the method of western philosophizing later. The philosophy of Heraclitus points to the truth of becoming. Apparently, everything passes away, and nothing persists. Heraclitus admits that the essence of things is change, and, therefore, becoming is the reality. The becoming however occurs in the form of continual contrasts. The conception of eternity, which comes from Parmenides, it may be admitted, is not to be found in Heraclitus. Parmenides accepts everything within the one, the being; oppositions and contradictions are united in the harmony of the being. But Heraclitus maintained that everything changes. Parmenides, on the contrary, retorted that nothing changes. I will discuss this philosophy of being and becoming in order to understand the notion of existence from a general standpoint.

In Greek, the verb 'to be' has two syntactically distinct uses: firstly, a complete, or substantive use in which it determines a one-place predicate and, secondly, an incomplete use in which it determines a two-place predicate. I will explore these ideas from the standpoint of the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Plato's major explorations of being and non-being are exercises in the complete, or 'existential', use of the verb. Existence then becomes a predicate of everything. To be is to be something, and surely this is an account of existence. To Aristotle, however, the verb 'to be' has many uses. According to him, 'being', or *to on*, means 'what there is' or 'what exists'. It is in this sense that the verb 'to be' must be explored as having not one, but many, uses. The Aristotelian legacy is made use of by the Medieval Christian

philosophers, Aquinas, in particular. To Aquinas, metaphysics is the philosophy of being as such. Following Aristotle, Aquinas admits that there is a science that studies being as being. For him, 'being' (*ens*) is predicated analogically of substance. Aquinas sees existence as the highest actuality, the being as such.

I will further bring into the limelight the rationalistic understanding of existence, particularly, of Descartes, who began doubting everything, but could not doubt his own existence. To be precise, his thought proves that there is not nothing but something. I will also place some emphasis on another school of thought known as 'Existentialism', to show where the differences lie between the general understanding of 'existence' and the existentialist understanding of 'existence'. The fundamental difference, which should be considered right at the beginning, is that the existentialists admit existence as not merely related to being, rather to the knowledge about, and freedom in, man. They are primarily concerned about the being of man, therefore, about human ontology. They do admit that man is in the midst of things-in-the-world, but his existence is radically different from that of things in the world in virtue of his freedom. However, there exists a variety of existentialist movements. Yet, the existence of man is the centrality of every form of Existentialism. I will discuss Sartre and Heidegger, in this context, specifically because, in Sartre's philosophy, the fundamental dictum of Existentialism finds its explicit formulation: 'Existence precedes essence'. The dictum means that man first of all exists, and thereafter sets to define him. Essence is what a thing is, but existence is that it is. This strain of thought stands out in a special way

in the Existentialism of Heidegger. Heidegger, being a phenomenologist, accepts that phenomenology must give emphasis to the concretely existing human being rather than try to analyze 'essence'. Heidegger uses the term, *Dasein*, to refer to this being of man circumscribed in space and time. Precisely on account of this circumscription, Heidegger observes, man has got to be able to meet the challenge of death, his non-being.

More importantly, I will ramble a bit here on the history of Indian metaphysics, selectively though. I will highlight the Indian tradition, because the metaphysics of Vedānta and Buddhism, to which Vivekānanda is greatly indebted to, is specially interested in the philosophy of existence, or being. Vedānta understands the existence of man in terms of positive being, whereas Buddhism, especially the Mādhyamika school, conceives the same concern in terms of the non-being, or the negation of being. Vedānta admits that man's existence is spiritual. By experiencing the existence as the manifestation of the one non-dual Being, it does not create a sense of false dualism. The Being of Vedānta, therefore, can never be adequately equated with the existence of the Existentialist.

Like Vedānta, Buddhism, too, has, as its core, the spiritual existence of man. It is extremely important for us to recognize that both Vedānta and Buddhism are philosophies of human existence, and their final and respective goal are centered around the reality of human life. In this chapter, I will give a brief description of Nāgārjuna's conception of existence, because he is the advocate par-excellence of Mādhyamika

philosophy. Mādhyamika refuses to identify the ultimate being as existent, the way all existent beings are; for the existent beings are all relative. Mādhyamika, on the contrary, advocates the theory of 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*), which is only a symbolic expression given by the finite to the infinite. Nāgārjuna wants us not to take his theory of *śūnyatā* as a construction of any metaphysical speculation. He rather claims to see things as they are, namely, devoid of any permanent nature (*niṣvabhāvatā*). This possibly is the negative way of safeguarding the human existence.

I have a definite purpose for bringing these two traditions in juxtaposition, viz. to see how they respectively understand their concept of existence. Vivekānanda, the Neo-Vedāntic Advaitin, uses the word 'being' to cover the concept of existence. To Vivekānanda, the true being can only be Brahman. The one supreme Brahman pervades the whole universe. There is only one existence. Vivekānanda is not like the western existentialist. One thing should be taken into consideration that Vivekānanda's philosophy does give adequate importance to both 'essence' and 'existence'. He says, human existence has to be understood subjectively as real. The intrinsic truth emerges out of one's inmost depth of existence. Vivekānanda believes that Buddha laid stress upon the moral side of the philosophy, whereas Śaṅkara, upon the intellectual side. Vivekānanda, the Neo-Vedāntic Advaitin that he is, at least thinks so. The first questions, then, for me, to consider are: What is meant by existence? Can it be equated with Being? Can we define existence in terms of reality? Even the sceptic assertion makes it clear that, after all, something does exist. The study of existence thus

becomes an ontologically significant issue, as there is not nothing but something. Advaita Vedānta is one philosophy in Indian tradition that has discussed this question in depth to prepare a ground for the specific perception of Vivekānanda during the Indian Renaissance. This brings me to the immediate background of Vivekānanda's philosophy.

In the third chapter, I shall discuss the classical Advaitin's thesis that Brahman is existence (*Brahma sat*) as an immediate background for the Neo-Vedānta of Vivekānanda. Classical Advaita Vedānta, drawing its inspiration from the Upaniṣads, conceives of Brahman as the only reality, or the Being. The Upaniṣads themselves, in the history of Indian metaphysics, shifted the centre of interest from the Vedic gods to the self (*ātman*) of man. They have an intricate analysis of the self, they distinguish between its outer husk and its inner reality. The body, the senses, the *manas*, the intellect and the pleasures and pains arising out of them are all tested, and found to be passing, changeful modes, not the permanent essence of Brahman. These are merely the sheaths, the outer covers, (*koṣas*), so to say, which conceal the inner, permanent reality, which cannot be identified with any of these; Brahman can only be identified with existence (*sat*). Advaitin's metaphysics can be summarized in a brief statement: Brahman is the reality, or existence (*sat*), the world is an illusory appearance (*mithyā*) of Brahman, and the so-called individual self is none other (*na paraḥ*) than Brahman itself. In this doctrine of 'oneness', or 'non-duality' (*advaya*), I will focus my attention only on the first of the component, viz. Brahman is the only existent.

Following closely the select statements of the Upaniṣads for its scriptural hermeneutics, Advaitin says that ‘all is Brahman’ (*sarvam khalu idam Brahma*), that matter and mind are not independent realities, but grounded in the same Brahman. Brahman is the absolute reality which pervades the world of multiple objects and selves. Advaitin has an insightful analysis of existence, clearly pitted against the concept of the Buddhist non-existence (*asat*) as the ultimate reality. Buddhism denies the reality of a self-identity of any substance, material or spiritual, but Vedānta admits the existence of the being which is permanent. In this sense, Buddhism is tentatively pessimistic, while Vedānta teaches that the whole universe is pervaded by the almighty being, and tells us to realize this being as everything. In explicating this position of classical Advaita, I will also highlight some significant ideas of Śaṅkara, here, in passing though.

Śaṅkara says that the distinction between subject and object is based upon the idea of space, time and causation. The existence of pure Brahman is, therefore, an axiom of knowledge; for upon that is based all other proofs. Like the sun that lies hidden behind a cluster of cloud formations, Brahman lies veiled by its own power. All that is said to be other than Brahman is the effect of *māyā*. That is the reason why we do not know Brahman as an object of knowledge. Brahman is only the subject of all knowledge. In stating that the world of objects is illusory (*mithyā*), Śaṅkara does not reject the world. Following Bādarāyaṇa, he grants it relative reality. He says that the existence of external objects cannot be denied, because it is perceived to ‘exist’ by all persons. But it is only an illusory appearance of the ultimate reality, Brahman. Śaṅkara

says that the dawn of knowledge of reality reveals what is really real, and, at the same time, dispel what is really relative and unreal. It is the ultimacy of the reality of Brahman that furnishes Śaṅkara with the clue to the mystery of the world.

There can be only one ultimate reality, and when it is perceived through its own nature, it is revealed to be Brahman, the one only existence (*sat*). Śaṅkara displays considerable amount of philosophical acumen: he reaches logically what he accepts first on the authority of the revealed tenets, namely, that the world originates from Brahman which is absolute existence and that Brahman has the power of manifesting itself in diverse apparent forms, without however really undergoing any modification. Advaita's viewing of the existent Brahman centres around the concept of the infinitude (*ananta*), for only that which is infinite can truly be the existent beyond thought and expression. Yet, the existence of Brahman is a fact of experience: No one can ever think of its non-existence, because no one can ever think of his own non-existence. The existence of the Brahman is thus woven inextricably with one's own existence at all the levels of consciousness. That is why it is said that the Brahman knows no change, and that it is eternal. The existence of Brahman is uncontradictable and, therefore, it is supremely real. So, existence of Brahman (*sat*) transcends the limitations of human thought, and we cannot conceive of the absence, or denial, of existence. This universal pure existence is thus the only entity whose contradiction is unthinkable. I would like to closely follow the implications of the identity asserted of the micro- and macro-cosms, while explicating the title of my dissertation.

But how does Vivekānanda conceive of the Advaitic identity asserted between existence and Brahman? My fourth chapter will focus on Vivekānanda's reflections on the problem. This indeed is the specific, however modest, objective of my dissertation. Vivekānanda's equation between the real and the existent is so fundamental to his Neo-Vedānta that it is possible for us to view his all other ideas from the perspective of the title of my dissertation.

Multiplicity, he tells us, is only apparent. The one, the real, and the existent are but synonyms. Unity is the only true reality, the only existent. Everything is grounded in the unique existence that is Brahman. Brahman alone is existence, all else is apparent, or a mere semblance of existence. This universe is but a reflection of the infinite. On the subjective level, we, too, are infinite, and that is our real humanity. But we often want so much to make of the little soul, the empirical self, the individual. Vivekānanda preaches untiringly this gospel of Brahman, and wants to rouse people from their spiritual stupor to actualize the tremendous potentiality that lay buried in them out of such realization. He emphasizes on the truth that there is identity between the individual and Brahman in their essential nature. Brahman is one existence.

Vivekānanda teaches that each individual has emanated from that supreme being as a spark emanates from a bonfire, and that each individual is a part and parcel of Brahman, who is the one stupendous whole, and that each individual is one with Brahman on the highest plane. Therefore, in his true essence, every man is divine, perfect and

everlasting. It is the existence that is Brahman that is the core of all objective and subjective reality. Brahman is like the thread which permanently connects the thought forms, deed forms, indeed everything apparently existent. It brings them together in a harmonious way and keeps them together in their place (read nature). This is *dharmā*, for Vivekānanda, in a profound sense.

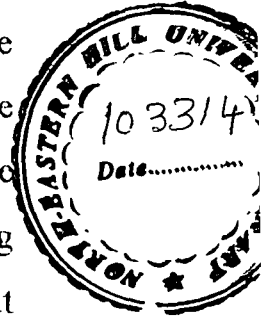
For Vivekānanda, metaphysics is primarily a study of the inner being which is Brahman, pervading in the dichotomy of object and subject. Being of Brahman itself is the point of their merger, thus making for Vedāntic non-dualism. If Brahman is the non-dual reality, reality itself is defined as that which can never be denied. Only that which undergoes no change and which does not cease to exist in any stage can be said to be real. Vivekānanda points out that existence is one undivided reality. Such existence that is at once Brahman is self-evident. It is not possible to deny such reality, for it is the very essence of everything. By analyzing the 'realities' given to our experience, viz. the world and the self, and even God, it cannot be said that there exists nothing, but something, although it cannot exhaustively be known. That which is self-existent is therefore at the same time self-luminous. Its existence is beyond doubt. Doubting it would be like saying that a visible object is seen but that there is no eye. The conscious subject, 'the thou', is already 'That'. The pure *sat* that is marked by the unity of existence is the underlying reality of Brahman. Everything proceeds from Brahman, everything recedes back into Brahman. Apart from Brahman, everything simply ceases to be, because it is not any more

sustained in existence. This is the reason why it is not in itself eternal, but temporal; not absolute, but relative.

Vivekānanda draws our attention to the realization of one's true existence with the illustration of the great souls (*mahātmā*). He himself had seen one such seer in Rāmakrishna. The seers of Brahman realize the non-dual reality by a process of negation. Take anything, says Vivekānanda, no matter what it is, which is less than the *sat*, the inner discrepancy at once proclaims that what we have taken is a mere appearance. But all appearance is that of reality. The alleged reality divides itself and falls apart into different factors. But it is, at the same time, entering into the same inner realm of Brahman, where everything is reposed and where everyone is restored in the unity of existence naturally. This contemplation, however, is not an abstraction. It is here that Vivekānanda is at once different from the classical Advaitin. After all, he preaches a Vedānta for the man in the world. The contemplation concerned does not make us visionary, much less turns our thoughts to emptiness. It rather makes the Unseen real and tangible to us. Vivekānanda knows the yearning of human heart. We all want that which is unlimited and eternal. Brahman is an inner longing which drives us constantly. Vivekānanda tells us that there is no permanent happiness in the finite, the changing, the fleeting. Yet, the finite is the field of our self-realization. The realization of the one unit existence carries us beyond ignorance, beyond the unreal. Vivekānanda's is a metaphysical agenda for every man that he should 'know himself' (*ātmanām viddih*). That Brahman is at once the death to all the afflictions of the world. When we realize Brahman, we are conscious

only of the one infinite existence, and when our thought is wrapped up in that one, our whole being is flooded with a new life that is Brahman. The truth of revelation is before us all: That which exists is one, men call it by various names (*ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*). Vivekānanda often probes into the Vedic vision which served the Upaniṣadic world view with its poetic and religious insights. Here, too, he is often different from the classical Advaitin.

It now follows that, if existence is Brahman, the plurality of the existents is like the waves of the ocean. The whole play of the universe is that of one unit existence. Vivekānanda says, following closely the Vedāntic metaphysics, that names and forms have created the differences among the existents. With the dawn of liberating knowledge, all illusions vanish, and one finds that all is nothing but Brahman. Despite the logic of the rejection of plurality, Vivekānanda knows that he has got to reconcile the unity with the apparent multiplicity, since he is a practical Vedāntin, and even a nationalist Vedāntin at that. I will have a close look at this problem of reconciliation in his thought in this chapter.



In my fifth and concluding chapter, I shall explore the advantage of viewing existence (*sat*) as fundamental, vis-à-vis the other 'aspects' of Brahman, say, consciousness (*cit*), or bliss (*ānanda*) in metaphysics. Moreover, there must be some difference between the two perceptions, "Brahman is existence" and "Existence is Brahman". This may have some bearing on the position of Vivekānanda vis-à-vis that of the classical Advaita metaphysics. An exploration into these two questions,

in my considered opinion, would be more significant than a mere summary of the earlier chapters for a conclusion. The infinite Brahman dwells in all human beings, and the latter are moving about like a potter's wheel propelled from within by the power of Brahman. What we empirically experience now does not exist in the absolute in that way, but it all becomes one. In the western context, the action performed by the actor and the result of his actions are seen as distinct. In Vedāntic absolutistic philosophy, they are seen, in the final analysis, as one and the same; they are seen as different only in manifestation. For all agency and action are enslaving in Advaita Vedānta. What is liberating is that Brahman is pure 'I am', which is Brahman. Brahman is existence absolute. This grandiose metaphysics is not without serious philosophical problems. A series of questions follow: Can we reduce all other aspects of Brahman to *sat-Brahman*? If we can, what insight would it render to Vedāntic metaphysics? Has the Vedāntic metaphysics finally turned into a Vedāntic ontology of human being? I attempt to give some provisional and tentative answers to the questions in this concluding chapter.

The method that I have followed in this dissertation has been largely descriptive. The descriptive method has the advantage of remaining close to the perceptions of the philosopher that one intends to study. Nevertheless, it is impossible for a student of philosophy to remain purely descriptive, in as much as his is a critical discipline. Naturally, I have judiciously followed the analytical method, too, in respect of concepts that I thought are worth critically analysing. I have drawn freely from the writings of Vivekānanda. My dependence on the

secondary sources has been only selective, as is evidenced by the bibliography.

# ***CHAPTER II***

## CHAPTER II

### EXISTENCE (*SAT*): A CONCEPTUAL FORMULATION

In this chapter, I would like to give a philosophical formulation of the concept of existence (*sat*). I find it imperative in view of world's metaphysics identifying the concept of existence (Being as such) with the ultimate Reality. Vivekānanda's attempt in identifying Brahman with *sat* to view it as *sat-Brahman* is, to be sure, one such metaphysical exercise. Being a Neo-Vedāntin, Vivekānanda paints his picture on the canvas of Advaitic metaphysics. This chapter is restricted to a general understanding of the concept of existence in the history of philosophy.

It is our observations that in the world everything exists for the time being or, in other words, everything is subject to change. Everything comes and goes but successively in quick rapidity. Apparently nothing lasts permanently. Yet, on deeper reflection, one is compelled to admit that all change is a transformation of forms and that there is no annihilation of the existent. Something of the old persists behind the multiplicity of changing forms. The realization of successive changes strikes our mind with an inescapable truth that something does exist behind the welter of changes. There are philosophers who have denied becoming to assert being, whereas others have denied being to make becoming itself the reality. But they all have found the need to carry on a discussion of the notion of existence, along with an account of fictitious objects, abstract ideas and, above all, physical objects subject to change. The concept of existence has been understood differently in different systems of philosophy.

Greeks contributed to philosophy what proved to be of more permanent value to abstract thought; it became an integral part of the method of philosophizing. They applied Mathematics and the art of deductive reasoning to philosophy. Heraclitus was a mystic, but of a peculiar kind. The philosophy of Heraclitus points to the truth of becoming. Everything passes, and nothing persists. For him the essence of things is change, and therefore becoming is the reality. This becoming occurs in the form of continual contrasts. For him, following early cosmologist Empedocles, the primordial principle is fire, to which everything returns. Everything, like flame in a fire, is born by the death of something else. Death of one thing is the birth of another. Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the other's death, and dying the other's life. There is unity in the world, but it is a unity formed by the combination of opposites. Metaphysics of Heraclitus is sufficiently dynamic to satisfy the most hustling of moderns. Heraclitus himself, for all his belief in change, we may note, allowed something everlasting. The conception of eternity, which comes from Parmenides, it may be admitted, is not to be found in Heraclitus, but in his philosophy the central fire never dies. The world was ever, is now, and ever shall be an everlasting fire. But fire is something continually changing, and its permanence is rather that of a process than that of a substance. This fire is related to the spirit as the principle of life, namely the logos. The logos is one, and it is common to all men. Everything has its origin in the one logos, therefore everything is in one. The world however is ruled by strife, where oppositions and contradictions are united in harmony

Heraclitus maintained that everything changes. But Parmenides retorted that nothing changes. What makes Parmenides historically important to Western Philosophy is that he invented a form of metaphysical argument based on logic. Aristotle was to fall back upon it later. For Parmenides, Being is one, and, apart from it, there is only non-being which cannot be thought to exist. Being has no beginning, it has no end, so being has neither past nor future. It is also indivisible, because division implies reality of many beings. There is no possible transition from the one Being to the manifold and changing world, which our senses seem to reveal. That which is is, and cannot ever not-be; that which is not, is not, and cannot ever be. The real exists, and can never be non-existent. It follows that there is no such thing as coming-to-be out of non-existence, or perishing into non-existence.

‘Being’ has for Parmenides a strict and absolute sense: a thing either is or is not. If it is, it *is* completely and absolutely; if it is not, it simply is nothing. There are no degrees of being. A thing cannot be partly real and partly unreal. There can never be a state of not-being, in which what is could ever be, and there can be no transition from not-being to being or from being to not-being. Nor can there be any change of that which is; for that would mean that it is not at one time what it is at another. So, Parmenides holds that concepts like ‘becoming’, ‘perishing’, are false and meaningless. Only thought, as distinct from belief founded on the senses, has a real object. That, which is, is one and cannot be many. The unity of the real is affirmed as strictly and absolutely as its being. The real is unique; there is no second thing

beside it. There is only one way left to be spoken of it, viz. that *It is*. Being is what is, or what exists.

Are there other ways to characterize it? On this way are many marks. What is is unborn and imperishable, whole and unique, immovable, and without an end in time. Nor was it ever, nor will it be, since it is now all at once, one continuous. The real primary Being admittedly never began, and will never cease to exist. No second being could come out of nothing. Therefore, a changing world of many real things can never arise. There can be no becoming, or perishing, of anything real. This unique Being could become many by way of division. However, when this happens, it would not involve any fresh being, but only loss of unity. Otherwise, being is one, homogeneous and continuous, without any distinction of parts, and such a unity cannot be broken up. Parmenides declares that 'nothing' cannot exist; and since this 'nothing' is required to separate a plurality of discrete things, there can be no such plurality. The one Being is not imperfect, incomplete, and has no need or lack of anything. Parmenides rejects the Heraclitan opposites as well as the elemental fire constituting reality. The one being does not contain fire and earth, is not visible or tangible. It contains neither light nor darkness. It is an object of thought, not of the senses. Parmenides went on to deduce that 'what is' is altogether different from what it is commonly taken to be, since it is entirely immobile and totally exempt from change. The metaphysical problem of one and many, of appearance and reality, is such an ancient problem that it cuts across geographical boundaries in philosophy.

The problem is a product of our mind. The problem of existence arises because of the contradictory mental perceptions. On the one hand, we have the notion of becoming, and, on the other hand, we have also the notion of consistency, or ever-existent being, which does not change. The Upaniṣads and the Vedāntic philosophers, no less than the Greeks, grappled with the problem.

In Greek, the verb 'to be' has two syntactically distinct uses, in English, only vestigially so, however: Firstly, a complete or substantive use, in which it determines a one-place predicate, as may be expressed in 'X is', 'X is not'. Secondly, an incomplete use, in which it determines a two-place predicate, as is expressed in 'X is y', 'X is not y'. To this difference there answers a semantic distinction. The verb in its first use signifies 'to exist'. Plato had no separate word other than this. In English it has been termed as 'to be real' or 'to be the case' or 'to be true', all these senses being reducible to the notion of the existence of some object or state of affairs. In this second use, it is denoted to be an identity sign. Plato's major explorations of being and not-being are exercises in the complete, or 'existential', use of the verb. The different functions of the verb 'to be' is a proper step to identifying and resolving them. Existence then becomes a predicate of everything. Whatever is thought of must, in some form, 'be'.

The verb 'to be' cannot even be applied to a contrary, since no subject can be intelligibly relegated to a state contrary to being. Plato represents being as both 'absolute' and 'relative'. While difference is only 'relative', the description of a thing as 'different' is always an

incomplete description, awaiting some further reference to complete it. The description of something as 'being', or as 'what is', does not, in one use of that expression, call for any completion. And this latter use, in which one can say of something that it is and leave it there, is surely the existential use. For Plato, to be is to be something, and surely this is an account of existence.

To Aristotle, the verb 'to be' has many uses. Sometimes, instead of the infinitive *einai* in this formula, he writes the participle noun *to on*, which the lexicologists conventionally render as 'being', sometimes the same word, in the plural, which the lexicologists divorce from its singular counterpart by terming it 'things that are' or, perhaps, more intelligibly, 'existing things'. In *Metaphysics IV*, resuming the same subject, Aristotle amends his claim: Despite this multiplicity of use, there can be a single comprehensive science of *to on* and *ta onta*, and those, who looked for the elements of '*ta onta*', were very likely to be on the track of this science. In this context, 'being' or *to on* means 'what there is' or 'what exists'. It is this sense that the verb 'to be' must be exposed as having not one but many uses. At various places Aristotle says that the verb 'to be' in its existential role can have many senses. He says in *De Anima II* that, for living things, 'to be is to be alive'. Plainly, then, the word 'is' used in a correspondingly variety of ways. 'To be' means being so situated.

According to Aristotle, *Metaphysics* studies Being as such. For him, there are three orders of reality: (a) Those entities which have separate substantial existence but subject to change, studied by Physics.

(b) Those entities which are free from change, studied by Mathematics.  
 (c) Those entities which have separate existence and are free from change, studied by Theology. In Aristotle, we find reference to non-sensible substances, under the third order, namely God, conceived as the unmoved mover of the universe. The Aristotelian legacy is made use of by the Medieval Christian philosophers, Aquinas being by far the best known among them.

Metaphysics, for Aquinas, is the philosophy of Being as such. Being the core of the entire philosophical pursuits, it is treated as the first philosophy. Likewise a philosophical science of the divine (*scientia divina*), in as much as the divine may be considered as the fullness of being, is an inextricable bond between metaphysics and natural theology. Aquinas would not hesitate to identify them. Following Aristotle, he is convinced that there is a science that studies being as being. Like other theoretical sciences, metaphysics must have a given subject. According to Aquinas, this subject is being in general (*ens commune*), or being as being. Aquinas writes that 'being' (*ens*) is predicated analogically of substance. Being however cannot be predicated of these different kinds of substances univocally, but only analogically. To Aquinas, *esse* (i.e. existence, or the act of being) is perfection of every form, since a form is perfected by having existence, and it has existence when it actually exists. Existence was thus seen to be the actuality of essence, the actuality of all actualities and the perfection of all perfections. Aquinas, here, goes a step beyond Aristotle. Aristotle sees finite form as the highest actuality. Aquinas, on the other hand, sees existence as the highest actuality. Aquinas agrees

with Aristotle that 'being' is said primarily of substance, and secondarily of the other categories, because of their relationship to substances as the primary analogates as distinct from the secondary analogates. Being, then, is not to be construed as a genus, of which substance and the various accidents would be species. At the same time, we should not conclude from this that being is not realized in the secondary instances of being as well as in substance. According to Aquinas, being is intrinsically present in accidents as well as in substances, but in different ways.

The predicate *esse*, whose third person singular form is *est*, meaning 'is' or 'exists', is a somewhat peculiar one. Many would deny that it is properly a predicate at all. The expression 'that by which the individual X is (or exists)' is senseless, unless there is a sense in which 'is' or 'exists' is properly predicable of individuals. We can get out of this difficulty by denying that, in 'A is not' or 'A does not exist', the verb 'is' or 'exists' is a logical predicate. 'Existence' involved in a true affirmative statement consists in the truth of an affirmative predication. The sense of 'exist', in which one says that an individual 'came to exist', 'still exists', 'no longer exists', etc., is clear. The sense of 'to be' has the same reference as 'to live', if we are talking of the living organisms. *Esse* is an inseparable and conceptually distinct aspect of the individualized form itself. *Esse*, of itself, goes with a form, for form is actuality. For any given thing, that by which it exists, is its form. Existence makes no difference to, and can impose no restriction, the nature of that which exists. Since 'One Being' is simply one entity of whatever kind, it seems illegitimate to regard its being and its unity as

parts resulting from division and capable of further sub-divisions. Ultimately there exists one Being. One Being is not a mere abstraction, it proves to be a single, continuous and homogeneous substance filling the whole of space. This being as such is made into God, the fullness of being, in which all beings are ontologically grounded, by the natural theologians. Aquinas is further supported by his revealed theology for his identification of metaphysics and natural theology as the science of Being.

Descartes, a rationalist, who began doubting everything, could not doubt his own existence. *Cogito ergo sum* is the first postulate of his philosophy. When the sceptic says, 'I doubt whether anything exists', apparently this assertion does not involve his own existence, and so proves that after all something does exist. Descartes had realized, after doubting everything, that there is something rather than nothing: Being exists. The study of existence then is ontologically significant, in as much as there is not nothing but something. Unlike the earlier thinkers, for Descartes, self-existence is the basic fact on which all knowledge and logic are grounded. 'I exist' therefore became a basic premise in his metaphysics. The existence of the realm beyond nature is not formulated in a conceptual framework. The objective demonstration of the inner reality is not possible, its warrant however can be sought only in existential experience.

The Cartesian rationalism, that arrives by way of the methodical doubt at the subjective being, is still a metaphysical essentialism. The existentialist philosophers, in contemporary times, have transformed all

essentialistic metaphysics into an existentialism of human ontology. Here, we do not find existence related to being, rather to the knowledge about, and freedom (volition) in, man. Existentialists contend that man has forgotten his specific heritage and the dignity of life, he is considered as one of the things of the world. Existentialism aims at highlighting the freedom of man. Existentialism raises its voice of protest against an armchair ontology of reflective contemplation. It gives a variety of articulations to human feelings, volitions through its philosophy, as it was done through the ages of Romanticism, Nietzscheism and Bergsonism, in some respect, in the earlier periods.

There exists a number of different versions of existentialism. Yet, the existence of man is the centrality of existentialism. There is the nihilistic and atheistic existentialism of Nietzsche, Camus, Kafka and Sartre; the theistic existentialism of Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel and a great many thinkers of lesser fame. It is rather difficult to say whether Heidegger was a theist or an atheist. Heidegger, beyond his *Being and Time*, became a mystic, a poet, having deep faith in the ultimate mysterious nature of Being, or Reality. He arrived at it through a human nature, the being of man as circumscribed in time and space (*Dasein*). Did existentialism in him come a full round, in as much as man is a particular example of a universal conception of being?

Atheistic existentialism, of which Sartre is a better known representative among students of philosophy, declared with greater consistency the human reality. He found the concept of God incompatible with human existence. If God does not exist, there is at

least one being, whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man. The fundamental strain of existentialism finds its explicit formulation in Sartre's statement: "Existence precedes essence". What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world, and defines himself afterwards. In the assertion, "I am a man", the 'I am' denotes existence, and 'man', essence. Essence is what a thing is, and existence is that it is. Sartre makes it clear in his statement: "Man first is, and afterwards he is this or that".

If man, as the existentialists see him, is not definable, it is because, to begin with, he is 'nothing'. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. Man attains existence only to the extent that he proposes to be. Along with this comes the responsibility of freedom. For, if it is true that existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus, the first impact of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. This has made the critics of existentialism to brand it as subjectivism. The word 'subjectivism' is to be understood in two senses. Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the belief in the freedom of the individual subject. It may also mean, on the other, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity, especially when he looks for standards of knowledge and morals. The former sense is fully accepted by all the existentialists. The latter however is accepted by them in a considerably modified form. In the latter sense, it is not

scepticism implicit in subjectivism that the existentialists accept. They rather read in it an impetus for man to take responsibility for what he makes of himself by the exercise of freedom. This stands out in a special way in the existentialism of Heidegger.

Heidegger, being a phenomenologist, admits that phenomenology must look at the ordinary experience of the concretely existing human being; rather than try to analyze 'essence', we must look instead at the structures, which are essential to the human being's 'state of being'. For Heidegger, phenomena are not mere 'appearances', in the phenomenological conception of phenomenon, that is, what one has in mind. Rather what is in the mind shows itself as the Being of entities. Approach to Being, beginning with human being, is the starting point for Heidegger's *Being and Time*. It is an irreducible and ultimate fact that the human beings exist in the world. The human being is 'there' (*Da-sein*) already. Heidegger hence uses the term *Da-sein* to refer to this being, to the 'there-ness' of human being. Any analysis of *Da-sein*'s being, then, is existential rather than transcendental. In such an analysis of man, we see the being of man every minute confronted by non-being. For man's being is contingent, it can cease to be, 'a useless passion', to use a Sartrean phrase. Heidegger observes that man has to be aware of the inevitability of death every moment to enable him to meet the challenge of death.

In the Indian tradition, the metaphysics of Vedānta and Buddhism are specially interested in the philosophy of existence, or being. However, Vedānta conceives the existence of man in terms of

positive being, whereas Buddhism, especially in its Mādhyamika manifestation, conceives of the same concern in terms of the negation of being. Unlike some of the existentialist philosophers, the transcendence of human being is at the core of both Vedānta and Buddhism. The greatest feature of a Vedāntic view of man is its acknowledgement of the divinity of man: Man's existence is spiritual. The self of man is eternal, immortal, hence it extends beyond death. Apparently weak, however through spiritual struggle, man can transcend the strong grip of cause-effect determinism and become completely free. In this freedom, Vedānta further accepts the unity of existence. By experiencing the existence as the manifestation of the one non-dual Being, it does not create a false dualism, in which the western existentialists may be said to be swamped. Most of them could not come out of the duality of 'being and time', 'being and nothingness', 'eternal and the temporal', 'reason and the paradox/absurd', -- in short, freedom and determinism

In Vedānta, the real, or being, is conceived as the ground of the phenomena, or beings. Being is identified with Brahman, therefore the ultimate reality is *sat-Brahman*, the existence-Brahman. But how is it related to man? Brahman is the object of the notion of the ego, and it is immediately known by everyone. No one says that 'I do not exist'. To do so would be plainly self-contradictory. This 'I-notion' of everyone proves that Brahman cannot be said to be unknown at any time. The 'I' (*asmi* as distinct from *aham*) is revealed as the innermost being of all. The absolute existence is present in all existents, specially in the human reality. It is the same in each of its special appearances. Though present

everywhere, it is phenomenally different in empirical values and degrees. But for these empirical distinctions and variations, the absolute simply is Being as such.

It should not now be difficult for us to recognize that the difference between the two philosophies of Existentialism and Vedānta is radical. The Being of Vedānta, being spiritual in nature, can never be adequately equated with existence of the existentialists, in particular, of the non-theistic persuasions. Possibly, it cannot be equated with the being of philosophies founded purely on sense experience. This is so, despite our ungrudging acknowledgement of the existentialist movement as having rightly upheld the glory and dignity of human life at a critical juncture in western philosophy and culture.

Like Vedānta, Buddhism, too, has, at its core, the spiritual existence of man. But it pursues it strictly with the analysis of human experience and thought. Indeed, it is known for its scientific and rational approach to life. We can say that both Vedānta and Buddhism are philosophies of human existence, hence both adopted means and goals envisaged around the reality of human life. The ultimate goal of both these great thought systems is not a theistic and personal God, but the highest reality of human life itself, not necessarily confined to space and time. As the reality revolves around life, both the Vedāntic and the Buddhist thinkers endeavour to unveil the deeply hidden and the ever growing mysteries of life. However, we may note that Vedānta and Buddhism, especially the Mādhyamika, follow the two diametrically opposite methods in their philosophies of existence.

Nāgārjuna is the greatest advocate of Mādhyamika philosophy. His 'Middle Path' is opposed to the extremes of either positivism or negativism, skepticism or absolutism. Because Buddha laid emphasis on the analysis of human experience itself, Mādhyamika refused to identify the ultimate being as existent, the way all existent beings are; for the existent beings are all relative. The absolute cannot be relatively existent. The absolute then must be identified as the 'non-existent', 'nothing', 'void' or 'emptiness' (*asat, śūnya, nivāṇa*), not in the sense that it is non-reality, but in the sense that the notion of existence, generally applicable to relative realities, cannot be applied to the absolute. Mādhyamika advocates the theory of 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*), which is a symbolic expression given by the finite to the infinite. His dialectic method, of 'neither this nor that; nor both; nor none', tries to clear up the false conceptions, opinions and conjectures (*dr̥ṣṭi*) about the real. Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika philosophy claims to tread the middle path between the nothingness of the nihilists and the main view that 'every thing exists', advocated by the Sarvāstivādins.

According to his theory, the Void, or Emptiness (*śūnyatā*), all things are non-essential by nature. All are empty, or *śūnya*, of their self-nature (*svabhāva*), and are dependent (*paratantra*) on one another for their origination and decay (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Nāgārjuna does not deny the existence (*bhāva*) of the things. He does not also affirm the non-existence (*abhāva*) of the things. He denies rather the self-existence (*svabhāva*) of the things, and advocates the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of things. By means of his dialectic method, Nāgārjuna tries to prove the emptiness of all relative things, so that they may not vitiate

the absolute and the relativity of the becoming. All things are contingently co-produced, because there is nothing essentially real. Everything is 'de-void' of its own substantiality. Nāgārjuna argues that this coming and going (*gatāgata*) is the process of becoming of the matter (*dhātus*). Nothing is permanent. The world is the flux of interrelated origination and decay.

The world is not real, or unreal, or both, or none. It is entirely phenomenal. One causes the appearance of the other, which, in turn, causes something else to appear, and the process goes on *ad-infinitum*. There is no past or future, because time does not exist in the continuity of the infinity. Time and space are simply the succession of events and elements. In this process of events and elements, there is no eternity or annihilation. There is no reality or non-reality. Everything is one infinite Void. Nāgārjuna's theory of *śūnyatā* may not be read as denying existence. Rather it may be read as upholding that all the physical and mental elements of existence do exist, but they do not exist absolutely. They exist as becoming and not as being. Their existence is based on their function. The element, that does not function either as a subject or as an object, is beyond perception. Without the relativity, based on the function of the elements of existence, the finite world of ours is impossible to exist indefinitely. Sooner or later, they will exhaust their potentialities, and the world of our will cease to exist forever. It is the non-substantiality, or the *śūnyatā* of the individual elements of existence, which allows them to overlap on each other for their continuity.

Nāgārjuna wants us not to take his theory of *śūnyatā* as a construction of a metaphysical speculation. It claims to see things as they are. Everything has an inter-linked process to pass through. There is a sense in which past is present in the future, making at once the past, present and future all inter-linked. The Middle path, or the Mādhyamika view, says that everything is in the middle. There is nothing that has got the preceding and the following, nothing is unconditioned and uncounted. This theory is not an analytic principle but a synthetic method. *Śūnyatā* is not baseless. It is the true interpretation of the Buddha's teaching of detachment (*nirāsakta*) from the (*saṃsāra*) of suffering (*duḥkha*). It can be said that, where the Buddha refuses to be positive about the nature of the things, Nāgārjuna affirms the emptiness, or the *śūnyatā*, of the things. Nāgārjuna uses his 'symbolic' logic of negativism. Could this be yet another version of the Vedāntic logic of 'not this and not that' (*neti neti*)? Both the early Buddhism and the later Vedānta perhaps influence each other. The early Upaniṣads like the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya* were perhaps composed relatively at the same time that Buddha preached his doctrine. Likewise the philosophy of oneness, truth, *nirvāṇa*, bliss, *vijñānam*, in the teachings of the Buddha, runs parallels to the thoughts of the Upanishadic philosophy of *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anantam*, *ānandam*, *mokṣam*, *Brahman*, and so on. There is a sense of concord between the two ancient schools of thought. The later Vedānta, specially the Advaita, or the non-dual Vedānta, is remarkably influenced by the global look, or universalism, of Buddha's teaching. The process of mutual influence between the early Buddhism and Upaniṣads is today generally acknowledged by the scholars.

So far we have seen selectively how the concept of existence is understood in western philosophy and Indian philosophy. Vivekānanda, the neo-Vedāntic Advaitin, uses the word 'being' to cover provisionally all forms of existence. He realizes that one supreme Brahman pervades the whole universe. Manifold beings are the reflection of the one underlying absolute Brahman, who is Being as such. Such Being is Brahman. The Existent Brahman is also the consciousness Brahman, in as much as the reality of human existence realizes the truth of the absolute. Hence, the many gets completely eclipsed in conscious experience, which is beyond all relativity. Following the spirit of Vedānta, and testified by his own personal experience, Vivekānanda accepts the unity of existence. There is only one, eternal, unchanging, infinite, the 'one without a second' (*ekam advitīyam*).

Unlike the western experience of the dichotomy between existence and essence, because of its own cultural milieu, Vivekānanda's philosophy does give adequate importance to both essence and existence. Vivekānanda says, human existence has to be understood subjectively as the real. The intrinsic truth emerges out of one's inmost depth of existence. Vivekānanda believes that Buddha laid stress upon the moral side of the philosophy, whereas Śaṅkara, upon the intellectual side. Śaṅkara rationalized an intellectually coherent system of Advaita, drawing sustenance from the Upaniṣads. Several centuries later Vivekānanda attempts to make the same Advaitic philosophy relevant to our contemporary times. This he does by way of grasping the reality of Advaitic Brahman as essentially existence. This makes for the unity of all beings, more importantly, of human life. We can say

that Vivekānanda infused life into it and gave it a dynamism, much needed at a particular stage of history in India.

According to Vivekānanda, existence is a necessity of thought, and the existence of the Absolute, therefore, is a necessary existence. The individual souls (*jīva*) bespeak of the unity of existence of all mankind. While asserting the ontological truth of oneness of all existence, Vivekānanda provides for a social philosophical foundation for the unity of human existence, in as much as Vedānta implies that we ourselves are that absolute existence. Breaking out of society conceptually, we are to note that the whole of this universe is one unity, one existence, at its deepest ontological level. We look upon this one existence in different forms. The different forms are the images, which do not have ultimate significance, though they may have pragmatic significance. What 'is' is only *sat*. *Sat* is the ultimate Brahman, in whom everything else subsists. Vivekānanda admired Buddha as the foremost 'existential' philosopher, or the philosopher of life. He also admired Śaṅkara, who gave the same philosophy of existence a conceptual schema. Thus, in Vivekānanda one may find a creative synthesis between the thoughts of Buddhism and Vedānta. This is a Neo-Vedānta in yet another sense.

# *CHAPTER III*

## CHAPTER III

### ADVAITA ON SAT-BRAHMAN

In this chapter, I would like to highlight the understanding of *Sat-Brahman*, according to Advaita Philosophy, as an immediate background for Vivekānanda's conception of Brahman as *Sat*. Vivekānanda's metaphysics is a Neo-Vedāntic metaphysics. Naturally, it reinterprets the traditional, or classical Vedānta, taking into account the features of Indian Renaissance in the early nineteenth century. With the advent of the British in India, there was an awakening of the Indian consciousness in its own philosophical, religious and cultural heritage, thanks to the impetus provided by the early Orientalists. It is well known that the Non-dualistic tradition in Vedānta is known as Advaita. Its metaphysical insights can be summarized in a brief statement. Brahman is the reality or *sat*, the world is an illusory appearance of Brahman, and the so-called individual self is none other than Brahman itself. This is a philosophy of non-dualistic absolutism. The core of its metaphysics is the nature of the absolute Brahman. I will focus my attention only on the first of the component: Brahman is the only existent reality (*sat*).

Existence (*sat*) is a universally valid conception of Brahman. In denying objective validity to every other conception of Brahman, the intellect ends up admitting existence as something irrefutable, for its denial logically involves a contradiction. By 'existence' is simply indicated that reality is opposed to non-existence. All negation or denial ends up in the idea of existence, which is the ultimate limit of all negation. It is the root of the universe of all discourse, for the negation of

the world presupposes existence (*sat*) as the basis and limit of negation. The same argument can be extended from the universe of discourse to the content of the discourse, or the world. The world, when traced back to its ultimate root, in an ascending order (*tarataniya parampariyena*) of subtleness, makes one apprehend the idea of existence (*sat-buddhi-niṣṭha*) as its ultimate resort or ground. Unless one has the idea of existence (*sat*), one cannot say that certain things exist. The idea of existence (*sat*), or pure existence, is therefore a logical necessity, it is self-valid, in a sense. It is a primary concept.

Therefore, Brahman is pure existence (*śanmātram brahma*). Existence is absolute. Advaitin has grasped this truth in stating that Brahman is *sat*. We cannot think of existence as having an origin. Existence is known or revealed, but not differentiated in relation to various things existing. Existence is one, though it is revealed in and through different things. Brahman as pure existence is common to all as their substratum. Pure existence as Brahman is not an abstract idea, or an empty notion, but something that is direct and immediate, and is revealed in all our knowledge and experience. Brahman is that essence which is present within all.

Advaita Vedānta's metaphysical message is in accordance with the intention of the Upaniṣads. Its foundation can be traced back to the Vedas, especially that part of the Vedas known as the Upaniṣads. It is also based on tradition, in a special way congealed in the *Bhagavadgītā*. Further, it is rooted in the philosophical reflections embodied in the *sūtra* literature of *Bādaṇāyana*. Revelation, tradition and philosophy have

contributed to the formation of the non-dualistic Vedānta. For sure, all Vedānta is exegetical in nature, but it is an exegesis that gives due importance to tradition and human reasoning.

Śaṅkara is undoubtedly the greatest exponent and consolidator of Advaita. It may be argued that, in actuality, Advaita has no founder, in the sense in which we speak of the founders of other schools. Advaitins trace their ideas to the Vedas. In as much as Vedas are held to be impersonal (*apauruṣeya*) by Advaita, the system itself is authorless. All the Advaita teachers are said to be only preceptors, not founders. According to Śaṅkara, the real is that which simply is, which eternally lasts, it suffers no contradiction. The real therefore is eternal and unsublatable. Therefore Brahman alone is absolutely real, never being subject to contradiction. All else is called 'real' only by courtesy. The distinction between one individual and another, the existence of a plurality of things, the attribution of attributes to the absolute are all concessions to the truths made from the relative point of view. Brahman is not unknown to anyone, Brahman is an objectively existing reality. If anyone thinks Brahman as non-existing, he contradicts, in as much as his own existence is at stake, in as much as Brahman, being of the nature of existence, is pure existence. If so, one who denies Brahman denies his own existence. One can doubt and deny the existence of external reality, as well as the world of internal experience, but such denial does not affect the pure 'I', which is the limit as well as the possibility of all doubt and denial. The pure 'I' is pure existence (*sat*).

Vedānta, which is founded on the Upaniṣads, proclaims the unique and sublime message of the oneness of all existence. This applies to the plurality of subjects, too: “You are the immortal all-pervading Ātman, the universal soul or the supreme Brahman”. To Advaita, nothing other than Brahman exists, there is no duality or diversity, nothing other than Brahman. All duality, and the realm of action it engenders -, are all due to metaphysical ignorance (*avidyā*). The false notion of plurality is functioning from time immemorial. This is only an appearance, and not real. The absolutely real is the *sat*, and the absolutely true knowledge, the knowledge of Brahman. That is real (*satyam*), whose nature by which it is cognized, remains constant. Real existence is never sublated; real existence is one without a second (*advaya*). This single, self-luminous existence neither rises nor sets. It is the ever-existent eternal light. To the *sat-Brahman*, the end of human aspirations finds its final satisfaction. An individual soul is merely a reflection of the Brahman. Here, Advaitin gives an example to make it clear. The sun reflected from millions of globules of water appears to be millions of suns, and in each globule is a miniature picture of the sun-form. So all these souls are but reflections of the one real soul (*ātman*). Their plurality is not real, it is a mirage.

The central doctrine of Advaita then is that there is but one existence. The whole universe is one in Brahman. Because Brahman is pure existence, it cannot have any attributes. Existence itself is not an attribute. The concept of Brahman as existent Brahman is the summit of the idea of unity of all existence that modern science, specially quantum physics, today, is tending to. In the concept of *sat*, Vedānta reaches a generalization, beyond which a higher generalization is not possible. It is

the one entity out of which all effects have evolved. It is, therefore, the consummation of all science, the explanation of every phenomenon. Whatever exists in it, for it has all come from the imperishable Brahman (*akṣara*). This one entity, which is experienced at times either as change only or as changeless only, either as attributes only or as substances only, either as phenomenon only or noumenon only. When the one is 'seen', the other disappears.

To illustrate this, Vedāntin brings an analogy of the rope and the snake, an analogy that has become synonymous with Vedānta. When the snake is experienced in the rope, the rope experientially and totally disappears. When the rope becomes visible, the snake disappears. It implies that, because the experience itself is real, experience cannot be devoid of an objective content. There is only one existent, whatever exists is one. Unchangeability can be asserted only of the absolute Brahman. There can be then no real change at all; the change is apparent. It is a feature affecting only the individuality of those who do not feel the identification of all existents with Brahman. For the Brahman of the Advaita Vedānta, being the one without a second, there is not even a possibility for an external explanation, because there is nothing outside it. It is the basis of the universe, both objective and subjective. All subjects are little channels, little expressions, all living inside of that ocean of existence (*sat*). One undifferentiated existence is the principle of oneness in Vedānta. Vedānta establishes the existence of Brahman in all creatures, and 'exorcises' the sense of diversity. When illusions vanish, the whole world of objects and subjects reverts to be Brahman alone. The one has manifested itself as many: matter, mind, thought, the life,

intellect etc. Thus Advaita in its absolutism transcends the plurality, inherent in materialism, mentalism, vitalism and varieties of western idealism.

Existence is this supreme oneness, which alone is real, since there is nothing else but it-self (*sat-eva*). We are, however, warned that existence is not to be supposed to be an attribute of reality but the very essence of it. Hence the parallel western discussion how existence is applicable to the absolute reality, say, God, is not relevant to Advaita. It is not the case that first there is a reality called Brahman to which existence is attributed. It is rather the case that the absolute Brahman, in its nature (*svarūpa*), is pure existence. The existence of Brahman is known on the ground of its being the 'self' of everyone, and everything. Śaṅkara's insight is invaluable:

This universe is verily Brahman – such is the august pronouncement of the Atharvaveda. Therefore, this universe is nothing but Brahman – for that which is superimposed on something has no separate existence from its substratum.<sup>1</sup>

The absolute Brahman is thus all-existence. Throughout the Vedāntic ontology it has been held that the absolute Brahman is the pure existent. If it is also held to be consciousness (*cit*), it is for the sake of freeing the absolute reality from the possibility of turning it into mere abstraction. Likewise, if it is further said to be indescribable bliss

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1. Tattwananda, Swami, *The Quintessence of Vedanta*, A translation of Acharya Sankara's *Sarva-Vedānta-Siddhānta-Sārasaṅgraha*, Swami Ganananda, Kalady: Advaita Ashram, 1960, p. 48.

(*ānanda*), once again, it is to free it from the possible misunderstanding of conceiving of the pure existence as a mixture of pain and pleasure. Besides, it displays Advaitin's concern for the state of liberation as bliss supreme. But for this pragmatic and pedagogic concern, Brahman is not characterized by the predicates of existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*). It is rather an existence that is identical with consciousness and bliss. They represent the nature (*svarūpa*) of Brahman.

Brahman is thus the only ontological reality. The individual selves and the world are non-different from Brahman. All this is, indeed, Brahman. Brahman has no genus, because there is no reality similar and co-eval with Brahman. If there were any other reality distinct from Brahman, Brahman would not be one without a second. When Brahman is said to be *sat*, what is meant is that it is not *asat*, or unreal. Reality is that which is not unreal, that is to say, reality is not 'object', not 'subject', because these terms are co-relate, whereas reality is devoid of all relations. This is of course a negative way of stating the nature of reality. Advaitin is aware of the philosophical significance of negative definitions. Śaṅkara would not allow any positive statement about reality; since all positive statement involves predication. To posit some character to it is at once to predicate that character of it. But to predicate something of reality that is Brahman is to say that, in reality, there is something which is pitted over against the reality that is Brahman. That something will have to be the object of knowledge and hence unreal. To predicate anything of reality, therefore, amounts to indicating that it is not reality. Hence, nothing can be said in positive terms as to what reality is. Only negatively, it is defined as what it is not. Therefore, the import of the

positive definition that Brahman is real (*sat*) is, as a matter of fact, negative: that it is not unreal (*asat*). There is nothing else to describe Brahman except as *sat*. To accept *sat* is to accept Brahman. Existence and Brahman are inseparable like fire and its heat, indeed, they are identical. The ultimate one is the very perfection of existence, one self-effulgent being hidden in all beings. It is by the light of Brahman's consciousness that we become aware of everything else as existent, as though it were an extension of Brahman. Brahman is the inexhaustible source of the whole universe. The moment we feel 'I am', we are conscious of existence – Brahman (*sat-Brahman*)

Advaitin highlights the difficulty of defining *sat-Brahman*. For an adequate definition is given only in terms of a genus and a difference, both of which are not applicable to Brahman. Much less can we give a secondary definition of the *sat-Brahman*, since secondary definition aims at definition of an entity with respect to another. Existence, having no 'other', cannot have a secondary definition. The undifferentiated existence is an unquestionable fact, accepted by all consciously or unconsciously. In other words, existence is self-evident. *Sat* cannot be explained by any other than itself. The Upaniṣads have grasped it in saying that '*sat* fills everything'. Existence, which is limitless, which is unmixed and uncombined, which knows no change, is the impartite, infinite existence. The real existence, when it gets mixed up, muddled up, with the elements of nature, is called human existence. This existence, which we empirically know, which is the limited existence, is simply a reflection of that illimitable (*ananta*) *sat-Brahman*. *Sat-Brahman* itself, that interpenetrates the whole of existents, is unknown and unknowable .

This is so, not in the sense of the agnostic, but in the sense that to know it would be a blasphemy, because we are that already. *Sat* is therefore what can, in no time, in no place, under no circumstances, be the object of denial. If at all, it can only be the subject of denials. The Brahman is the Being as such of the classical metaphysics, and its existence is a necessity. Existence itself remains unchanged, in spite of the fleeting things of the world. The contingent existents are the free and spontaneous expressions (*līlā*) of the infinite and necessary existence.

Śaṅkara, consistent with his teaching that no definition can really express Brahman, through a process of interpretation and purification, takes us beyond the ordinary meaning of such terms as *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda* and *anantam*, to their most elevated, supra-mundane significance (*paramārtha*). Thus he says, the term *sat* is first understood according to its ordinary sense as applying to material realities, such as clay, wood etc. But, when spoken of Brahman, it has not the same meaning. Moreover, the term *sat* is there in union with *cit*, *ānanda* and *anantam* to warn us that Brahman is not the inert, unconscious, afflicted by pain and finite reality. Śaṅkara identifies the attribute *sat* as the proper nature of Brahman. What really exists is *sat*, and we ourselves are that *sat*. This is the general drift of Advaita philosophy, that holds all existence to be Brahman. For it, all the forms of existence, namely, of matter, life, mind and the self, are the different manifestations of the same existence stuff known as Brahman. *Sat* is the underlying noumenon of all phenomena, animate and inanimate, subjective and objective. It is the *sat* which is the pure-Brahman, that is at once the substrate of the world-appearance. The world has no reality of its own: it is non-real, it is like unto the unreal.

Yet, the world is not unreal, like the sky-flower or the horns of a hare, because it does appear. All appearances are of the real; nor are they real which Brahman alone is. That is why the world is said to be indeterminable (*anirvacanīva*), being the product of the indeterminable principle of *māyā-avidyā*. The world exists only by the light of Brahman. Existence (*sat*), which is Brahman, identifies itself with itself, because existence is the root of the universe, both in its macro-cosmic and micro-cosmic manifestations.

In conclusion, we may say that Advaita Vedānta establishes the existence of Brahman in all things and creatures, and overcomes the sense of diversity by asserting that Brahman is of the nature of existence. Brahman is that Being, 'that the sun cannot dry, fire cannot burn, sword cannot cut', because it is the only existent. *Sat-Brahman* transcends all limitations of phenomenality. *Sat-Brahman* is enduring, central, regulative, and reposing eternally in the midst of changes. It is essential and infinite, and infinite alone can comprehend the finite, not the other way round. It is only when its powers are alluded to in its manifestation in the objects of nature that it is seen as finite. *Sat-Brahman* indicates the true nature of *sat*. People cannot conceive it in their mind, but know it instinctively, making it self-evident. Śaṅkara says, 'know *sat* to be Brahman'. Brahman is the real, the absolute; nature is its objective manifestation. Brahman is what *sat* is, and nature is what *sat* appears. This one *sat* is the source of manifestation of all that is known and seems to be. *Sat* is the oneness, the unity of all, the reality of all life. When we say *sat*, Brahman is asserted. One represents the other. *Sat* is Brahman, and Brahman reveals itself in and through the existing things.

# *CHAPTER IV*

## CHAPTER IV

### VIVEKĀNANDA ON EXISTENCE THAT IS BRAHMAN

In this chapter, firstly, I would like to explicate the term Existence (*sat*), according to Vivekānanda's understanding. In his philosophy, the words, 'Being' and 'Existence' have been used synonymously for the Sanskrit term *Sat*. Secondly, my focus would also be on the illustration of the ultimate reality, which is Brahman, in the philosophy of Vivekānanda. The concern here is to see how existence is applicable to Brahman. I will arrive at the conclusion that there is an identity between Existence (*sat*) and Brahman. A corollary of this identity is that everything existent in the world is the manifestation of the absolute Brahman. We cannot think of Brahman being derived from other realities, because Brahman itself is the supreme reality that is the ground of all other realities.

Let me now take up the term 'Existence' (*sat*) for an analysis. The Sanskrit word *sat* means Being. To quote Vivekānanda:

All that we see and feel about things is pure and simple existence "is-ness". It stands for that which is existence itself, extremely subtle, indefinable, all pervading. It is one taintless, indivisible, pure consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Vivekānanda here suggests that, behind the world of perception and emotion, there lies a reality which is the ground of all existents, and

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1. Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VIII, Mayavati: Advaita Ashram, 1963, p. 3.

that such a reality is simple, all pervasive and subtle. It is the existence as such (*sat*). However, *sat* should not be confused with the phenomenal existence of things that are perceived by the senses, or felt emotively by the internal organs. As a mirage cannot be seen without the desert, nor a painting, without the canvas, so the reality of the world of appearances cannot be perceived without the substratum, *sat*. Therefore *sat* is the very essence of Brahman. All other aspects of Brahman are, in a sense, reducible to it. More in agreement with Śaṅkara than Rāmānuja, Vivekānanda affirms that *sat* can have no internal modes, since it is not a whole-of-parts. Parts can be only in matter, which Brahman is not. What truly “is” is only *sat*. Consequently, none other than *sat* can be called real, or truly existent. There is nothing akin to the *sat*. What is not *sat* (existence) must be *asat* (non-existence). Vivekānanda goes on, from here, to draw his conclusion that whatever exists is one. For existence that is single is also singular. Existence is not qualified, or differentiated, in terms of different existent things, but existence itself is revealed in and through existing things.

Vivekānanda, following closely on the Upaniṣadic text, “All this is Brahman”, makes Brahman everything, *Sat Ekameva Advitīyam*, ‘the One without a second’. This universal *sat* embraces all reality. Vivekānanda would consider *sat* as the ultimate nature of Brahman. By the words, ‘one only’, Vivekānanda means to suggest that there is nothing else, coming under the category of ‘its’ product. Brahman does not produce any effect as distinct from itself. Again, the phrase ‘without a second’, Vivekānanda amplifies as follows: In the case of such

products as pot etc., some other efficient causes (*nimitta-kāraṇa*), like potters and others, are seen by us. Pot, for example, is different from clay/earth, but is what is transformed of the earth. In essence pot is not different from the earth. But the transformation is brought by a potter, who is different from the earth. But the transformation is brought by a potter, who is different from both the pot and the earth, of which the pot is made. Even so, there arises the possibility of having some other second thing, which is different from existence (*sat*), and, yet is 'the cause' associated with existence. This is a genuine possibility, speaking philosophically. But Vivekānanda repudiates it by the phrase, 'without a second' (*advitīyam*), closely following the Upaniṣads. So, *advitīyam* means that *sat* has no second thing without itself (*sat-eva*). The same existence (*sat*) continues in a different configuration. For instance, a snake in motion is straight, but, in rest, it may form into a coil. Likewise, earth continues in different forms as dust, a lump of clay, a pot or simply pot-shreds. Vivekānanda continues his analysis. The word *sat-eva* is connected with the verb, *āsīt* and the adverb *āgre*. The adverb, *āgre*, is the adverb of time, meaning 'in the beginning'. Before the creation of the universe this existence was all that was there. Even now it surely continues to be existence (*sat*). The verb is the third person singular preterite, 'was', in agreement with the adverb. But, in creation, the existence now stands qualified by name and form and also as an object of the word 'this' (*idam*).

'This' (*idam*) is specified to mean existence: 'this' has also been born anew. It is existence itself that was there, in the beginning, as the object denoted by the word 'this'. If we are to fall back on the earlier

analogy, it is just like the continuance of earth itself as the object denoted by the words, 'lump of clay', 'pot' etc. In the beginning, this world was just Being (existence), one only without a second. It is emphasized that in the beginning this was existence (*sat*) alone, nothing else, -- without the multiplicity of names and forms. As someone, after rising from deep sleep, realizes that, in deep sleep, all that existed was a mere existence. In other words, he realizes that, before creation, the ground of all that is about to be cannot be anything other than a mere existence without any other characterization.

Vivekānanda says that the intended meaning is that all this is the product of existence, and therefore, existence can be one only, without a second. 'All this' stands for not only the objective world, but also the subjective world. Hence, we, too, have been identified with existence, even after being merged in existence. It is precisely at this that Vivekānanda relies on the *Chāndogya* text, "That Thou Art". You are that which is existence (*sat*). Existence of all existents is ultimately one existence, and that is the Being of the absolute Brahman. Existence itself cannot be questioned, therefore, Brahman cannot be denied. It is the fundamental truth that underlies all that exists. This is the fundamental wonder that has given rise to world's diverse metaphysics. Metaphysics has began with the concept of being: Why is there something, and not nothing? Existence, therefore, is a necessity of thought, and the existence of the absolute, therefore, is a necessary existence. Necessity of being is at the root of all ontological arguments in philosophy. That is to say, existence is not predicated of the absolute, but identified with it. The existence that is the absolute is said to be

complete (*pūrṇa*) and infinite (*ananta*). All existences, actual or possible, are ultimately one existence. Existence (*sat*) is the permanent principle of unity in the midst of changes. To Vivekānanda, the Sanskrit word for truth also means 'is-ness' (*sat*). *Sat* is existence, being, and also truth. In Vivekānanda's Vedānta, truth is ontological even before it becomes epistemological. But, to reach the truth of 'is-ness', we must transcend all that we now know of 'existence'. There is no real (*sat*) world of ultimate value, even so there is no real (*sat*) individuality of the *jīva*, or separate soul: eventually, the individuality of the world and the soul, as compounds, will go to pieces. Only that which is beyond any further analysis is the 'simple', therefore, indestructible, existence that is absolute. The absolute Existence-Brahman (*sat-Brahman*) alone is truth, freedom, immortality and bliss. In Vivekānanda's soteriology (*sādhana-vicāra*), all struggle to lose this individuality constitutes virtues. Everything in the universe, most of all, all spiritual disciplines (*yogas*), is a struggle and strife to break down this individuality either consciously or unconsciously.

Existence then is the real essence of the universe. All things are only modifications of existence. When existence becomes known, all other things become known. Vivekānanda therefore understands *sat* (existence), which is one without a second, and is the supreme reality, as also *mūlam*, meaning the 'root'. Existence is therefore the 'radical', it is the root of the universe. Existence is radical in yet another sense, viz. the radical, or primal, cause. Existence is not only the root of all existents, but, even during their continuance, they all have in existence their abode. Even as pot, statue etc., have their basis in earth, and also

continue to exist in earth, so too, every existent<sup>2</sup> is most radically founded in existence, and continues to exist in existence. Such radical existence, that sustains everything else, both of the objective and subjective world, is the absolute one. This one is the one infinite Brahman, everything else is its manifestation. This one, reigning in whatever existent, is Brahman. Vivekānanda, often known for his exuberance, writes:

This universe is you yourself, the undivided you; you are throughout this universe. You are immortal only when you are the whole. You are fearless and deathless only when you are the universe; and then, that which you call the universe is the same as that you call God; the same that you call existence (*sat*), the same that you call the whole. It is the one undivided Existence which is taken to be manifold world which we see, as also others, who are in the same state of mind as we.<sup>2</sup>

We may not however miss, in Vivekānanda's exuberance, the transition from his ontology to theology to anthropology and to cosmology. It is the existence-Brahman who is the underlying reality of God, self and the world in names and forms.

There is something in us which is free and permanent. But it is not the body; neither is it the mind. The body is dying every minute, in as much as there is the continuous regeneration of the cells. The mind, too, is constantly changing, in as much as its states are in a constant

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2. Vivekananda, *In Search of God and Other Poems*, Mayavati: Advaita Ashram, 1968, p. 68.

flux, now fearful, now euphoric, now happy, now sad. Body is a complex, so is the mind; and, as such, they can never reach to a state beyond all change. But beyond the momentary sheathing of gross matter, beyond even the finer covering of the mind, is the Existence-Brahman, the true being of man, the permanent, the ever-free. It is the freedom of the absolute existence that is percolating through layers of matter as well as thought. In spite of the colourings of name and form, it is ever asserting its unshackled existence. Its deathlessness, bliss, peace, divinity shine out, and make themselves felt, in spite of the thickest layers of ignorance. It is the real man, the fearless one, the absolutely free. This Being, this Brahman, the unchangeable, is beyond all conditions, and, as such, it has neither birth nor death. Vivekānanda affirms that the infinite Brahman is within us, and that we all can feel the strength within Brahman. The transcendent, indivisible, incomprehensible existence of the impersonal Brahman breaks forth within us from time to time, and, indeed, through the entire cosmos. The entire cosmos is soaked with Divinity, but neither the cosmos nor the self covers its entire Being. Its transcendence is beyond both the macro-cosmic and the micro-cosmic world. Vivekānanda is faithful to the Vedic vision of the *puruṣasukta*. What Vivekānanda has grasped here metaphysically, Aurobindo was to express mystically, at once contributing to the diversity and richness of Neo-Vedānta.

*Sat* implies Brahman. *Sat* is not the attribute of Brahman, rather it is the very essence of Brahman. Brahman alone, beyond diversity, is indescribable and incomprehensible. When we adopt a transcendental standpoint, we speak of the non-dual Brahman. The same non-dual

Brahman, projecting the cosmos through *māyā*, may be called the immanent God. Immanent God is a relational being, related to the world as the creator, sustainer and destroyer, related to the *jīva* as the object of the latter's devotion. However, there is no real conflict between the two aspects, dynamic and static. Vivekānanda says, these are various forms of the same oneness of plural existence:

*Jammādyasya yataḥ* – From whom is the birth, continuation and dissolution of the universe<sup>3</sup>

Vivekānanda notices that what is spoken of, here, is the immanent Brahman. Such Brahman is the eternal, the pure, the all-knowing, the all-merciful, the teacher. But the existence-Brahman is the foundation of the universe. It is the 'clay or substance', out of which an infinite variety of 'artefacts' are fashioned. All existence is ultimately one. The universe, both objective and subjective, comes out of Brahman, rests in it, and merges in it. Brahman is the inner self of all beings (*sarva-bhūtāntarātmā*). It is not separate from us, nor from the universe, for all are in it. We live, move, and have our being only in it. It is all pervading, and nothing can exist independent of it. When seen through time, space and causality, the same Brahman is immanent. However, freed of these categories, Brahman is one undivided whole. Then, it is not confined to this universe. By being about and beyond,

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3. Vivekananda, *Advaita Vedānta: The Scientific Religion*, Edt. Swami Yogeshwarananda, Mayavati: Advaita Ashram, 1952, p. 47.

Vivekānanda guards the transcendence of the primordial existence, or the absolute. It transcends the entire range of cause and effect. Vivekānanda's prophetic words have become the modern *mantra* of Neo-Vedānta:

I see God in all that exists. I see him as completely in the least fragment as in whole cosmos.<sup>4</sup>

The cosmos is essentially the absolute Brahman, appearing as names and forms. The absolute, however, in truth, cannot be divided. It is prior to every form of existence, the starting point of all experiences. It is at once self-existent and self-luminous. It cannot be in itself divided, because it is simple and not compound, hence, in itself, it can never change. Incorporeal, it is not tied to anything physical. Contrary to the spirit of positivistic philosophy, Vivekānanda upholds the Upaniṣadic transcendental idealism: The spirit lies far beyond the realm of experience as much as of expression. The absolute Brahman is beyond the range of speech and thought; we cannot define, or limit it as an object of relative experience. It is rather the real of all experiences, the real subject without any object, or, to use a somewhat puzzling phrase, 'objectless subject'.

A merely linguistic and categorial description of Brahman is fraught with even more linguistic infelicities, because it is through Brahman that everything is known. Existence is the presupposition of

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4. Mannumel, Thomas, *The Advaita of Vivekananda*, Madras: T. R. Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1991, p. 91.

all knowledge. Brahman is known through every pulsation of knowledge and awareness. As a razor stays hidden in its sheath, as fire lies dormant in wood, similarly the absolute Brahman fills the whole body, even to the tip of the nails. We do not see it directly, what we see is our own ideation of it, which cannot but reflect the imperfections of empirical knowledge. It is the limit of the human knowledge. Upaniṣads have their own images which are intuitively suggestive. Brahman is called *prāṇa*, when it is said to breathe by its own breath; when it sees, it is called the vision; when it hears, it is called the hearing; when it thinks, it is called the mind. These are but names, suggestive of its transcendence, for its functions (*karma-nāma*) are all centered in Brahman. Brahman is distinct from, yet, immanent in, the world of change and process. Vivekānanda realizes the epochal truth that the Brahman, the real 'Self' behind our tiny and fleeting egos, is the real source of strength and the human excellence. He admits:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal.<sup>5</sup>

He goes on to elaborate on this:

That is your own nature. Assert it, manifest it ... Nature is like that screen which is hiding the reality beyond. Each good thought you think or act upon is simply tearing the veil, as it were, and the purity, infinity, the God behind manifests itself more and more.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Tathagatananda, Swami, *Meditation on Swami Vivekananda*, New York: Vedanta Society, 1994, p. 1.

6. *Ibid.*

Even as the objective world is a screen that hides the absolute, the subjective individuality, or the psychological egoity, too, is a screen, which has to be torn asunder. Only when the ego is completely gone, do we become soul-conscious, do we realize the supreme truth that is identical with the primal existence of being. Brahman is the unity of existence, at its ontic level, before it ever becomes either the self-awareness or self-bliss. In the whole of this universe there is but one existence, and the one existence refracts itself through the prism of *māyā*. But the light that the primal existence is remains the one monochromatic existence undivided in itself. It remains beyond the ken of experience, in all its purity. Vivekānanda says:

No books, no scriptures, no science, can ever imagine the glory of the Self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists or ever will exist.<sup>7</sup>

It does not surprise me that Vivekānanda often has recourse to theistic language, when he has exhausted the metaphysical expressions. It only speaks for his ability to move from absolutism to theism of the Upaniṣads with equal ease. Not for nothing is he called a practical Vedāntin.

The existence Brahman is the one infinite Being, when the saving knowledge itself dawns, all illusions then vanish, and man finds everything to be nothing but Brahman. 'I am that one existence' is a

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7. Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, Mayavati: Advaita Ashram, 1963, p. 274.

mystic realization. This perfectly accords with the Upaniṣadic agenda of 'Know thyself' (*ātmānām Viddih*). The answer to the agenda is 'I am Brahman' (*aham-Brahma-asmi*). The critics of Vedānta, in general, and of Vivekānanda's Advaita, in particular, have tended to brand this philosophy egoistic. Such statements as 'I am Brahman', 'I alone exist', seem to be the natural corollary of his Neo-Vedānta. This is nothing short of solipsisms, it may be contended.

On the contrary, this is a philosophy, vanquishing the narrow empirical self, or the hedonistic ego; more positively, a philosophy of the unity of all exists, going far beyond even a humane altruism. A realized soul loves everything as an extension of one's own existent self. Hate is impossible, to him. Indeed, even theoretically, when each one thinks 'I am Brahman', each one is the whole of that principle. If anyone thinks Brahman as non-existing, he himself becomes non-existence. This is a theoretical absurdity. Brahman is that essence which is present within all. Speaking of Brahman is at once the affirmation of one's own primordial existence. Existence is revealed in and through existing things, most of all through oneself. Vivekānanda was fond of repeating the Upaniṣadic "I am He" (*So'ham*). Even on death bed, he would repeat the Upaniṣadic *mantra*, convinced of the truth of the nature of absolute as existent.

In this infinitely diverse creation, whatever existed before, whatever would exist hereafter, and whatever exists now, the eternality of the existence-Brahman is the only incontestable truth, for Vivekānanda. That is identical with 'the Thou', resolving the duality of

all object and subject. Every moment our body is changing; like every moment the surging waves of the ocean is changing, the shore, too, is changing with the ebb of the tides. But the water is the same majestic ocean. Similarly, our innermost Brahman is the same. Everything is noumenally that one. Only phenomenally the differences are true, but they are true, in degree, and not in kind. Oneness is the secret of everything. All is one, which manifests itself either as body, or thought, or life, or even as limited soul. The existence Brahman is the 'is-ness' of all, the unity of all, the reality of all life and all existence. It is only illusively thought that there are many things, but, in truth, there is none but one, and that one is of the nature of pure existence. Brahman is that which we can never drive out by any power of discursive reasoning or the flight of imagination. Vivekānanda's metaphysics is not an ethereal theism, but a robust transcendentalism of the self, that cannot be rationally dismissed without serious logical contradictions. His merit consists in making such a transcendentalism meaningful in our day to day life. Practical Vedāntin he has remained till the end.

In conclusion, there is no existence (*sat*) other than the one supreme Brahman. That existence is the underlying reality of subject and object alike. The difference between the object and object, subject and subject, object and subject, is not in the nature of things, but in the mind. So, the idea of 'many' is the creation of the mind. We cannot say positively what the differentiation of anything is, but that 'Being' is the only positive proof we have of anything. The objectification and subjectification are only a faint imitation of that one existence Brahman. *Sat* alone is infinite and impartite. If it were finite and partite,

it would be a compound, subject to origination and destruction and, hence, could not be *sat*. Names and forms therefore must not be conceived as the limbs of *sat*. They are mere appearances. Beyond the appearances, there is only pure existence. The analogy of the wave and the ocean given by Vivekānanda beautifully captures the nature of the existence-Brahman. The wave, limited by its apparent form, is small in comparison with the vast ocean. When the wave loses its individual character and merges with the ocean, it gains its true identity. As pure and simple water, the wave is always one with the ocean. The wave has no 'life' apart from the ocean. The ocean takes the form of a wave due to adjuncts (*upādhis*). Existence that is Brahman is the living, dynamic unity, realizing itself through changing states and qualities. The nature of such a being cannot be described except as existence (*sat*). *Sat* is not related to anything, for there is nothing else with which it can be related. *Sat*, which is the most pure Being, cannot be delimited by any determinations and relations. It is simply the ultimate Reality, i.e., Brahman.

# ***CHAPTER V***

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter is divided into two unequal parts. The first part sums up briefly the study in the previous chapters. In the second part, I have attempted an amplification of some of the corollaries that may be said to have emerged from my study. The conclusion arrived at here, are only tentative. They may have to be worked out in greater depth, which I hope to do in the coming days. The force of the corollaries, if presented in the form of the interrogative, becomes compelling. Did Vivekānanda succeed in reducing the Vedāntic absolute to existence-Brahman (*sat-Brahman*)? What philosophical or religious insight is brought to bear upon the Vedāntic metaphysics by this exercise? Does Vedāntic metaphysics transform, under Vivekānanda, itself into a human ontology?

In my introductory chapter, I have given a statement of the problem chosen, here, for study. Brahman the Vedāntic absolute is said to be existence, consciousness and bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda-Brahman*). While Vivekānanda has given elaborate explication of each of the above aspects of Brahman, I am fascinated by his reflections on Brahman as existence (*sat*). It is here, I thought, Vivekānanda can be shown to be a metaphysician of no mean calibre. The only problem that one is likely to face here to sift out his meanings from an exuberance of words. But the exuberance is not without a philosophical lesson. Vivekānanda does his Neo-Vedāntic metaphysics, unlike Śaṅkara, with perceptible feelings of the heart. Hence, I have exclusively limited

myself to study 'existence that is Brahman' (*sat-Brahman*). The problem of the thesis then has more to do with the approach to Vedānta than with content. The traditional approach is the assertion that Brahman is existence. The new approach here is that Existence is Brahman. This makes Vivekānanda to abide in the company of the stalwarts of metaphysicians, both western and Indian.

In the second chapter, I gave a conceptual formulation of existence. The concepts of 'existence', 'being' and 'reality' have often been used synonymously by world's metaphysicians. Hence it would be imperative on my part to elucidate the concept of existence in both Western and Indian tradition, briefly though. The classical problem of being has gradually become the problem of existence over the years. Hence my probe began with the problem of being and becoming, of permanence and change in the early Greek philosophy. Greeks contributed a great deal of philosophical literature in this context. One school of thought held that the essence of things is change, or becoming. The other school of thought held that being, or permanence, is the core of reality. Heraclitus advocated the former position, and Parmenides, the latter. Heraclitus, for all his belief in change, however, allowed something everlasting: i.e., fire that elementally constitutes everything. Does this suggest that Heraclitus finally abandons his position that there is nothing permanent in the universe? Not really, for fire is a continuous succession of discrete charges of energy. But the Heraclitan philosophy of change is vehemently countered by Parmenides, to whom something exists as abstract essence; yet others have a concrete physical existence. In either case, change is only

apparent. The word 'being' has been used to designate the reality that persists behind the welter of all changes. We find the conception of eternity from the philosophy of Parmenides. Parmenides admits that being is one and, apart from it, there is only non-being, which cannot be thought to exist. Thus we see that being, reality and existence cause to represent the fact of permanence, eternity, from the earliest times. When a sceptic doubts everything, his assertion does involve his own existence, at once invalidating either his sceptical theory or his own existence. There is no coming-to-be out of non-being; nor is there an absolute perishing into non-existence of what exists. By implication, if there is something and not nothing, being is the core of reality, and the philosophy of permanence is the truth.

If used to represent existence, being has a strict sense: a thing either is or is not. It cannot be both at the same time. Being and non-being are opposed as contradictories. This sense is captured by the forms of the verb 'to be'. 'To be', in its fundamental use, signifies, 'to exist'. Whatever we think must be in some form 'be', either as actually existing or as an essence or as a imagined idea. For Plato, every being is an eternal essence; beings are only copies of the eternally existent essence, which he calls the 'form' or 'idea'. I have also highlighted in the chapter some of the important ideas of Aristotle on being. Through the concept of being, Aristotle lays the foundation for a realistic metaphysics. He uses the word *to on*, which has been rendered as 'being'. Being means 'what there is' or 'what exists'. The pluralist that he is, Aristotle admits the plurality of 'what exists', therefore, of beings. Because 'to be' in its existential sense is realized in many things, beings

are many, yet, they all participate in one being as such. Aristotle is not only a pluralist, but also a realist. Hence, to him, 'to be' means being situated in the world of time and space. The Aristotelian legacy is practised by the Medieval ages. To be, in its existential sense, applied to animate beings, avers Aquinas, is equivalent 'to live'. We see, here, 'to exist', 'to be' becomes equivalent 'to live'. I have also looked into the rationalism of Descartes for a philosophy of being. Descartes, by way of a methodological device, doubted the existence of the doubter. The being of the self is therefore indubitable. Existence now is, at least, on the epistemological plane, the self-existence. All our subsequent knowledge is grounded in the knowledge of self-existence. Descartes built his system on the principle of *cogito*, which he discovered to be indubitably real.

The attempt to move from a metaphysics of being to that of human being matures in the existentialist philosophy. Hence, I surveyed existentialism to see how this school of philosophy understands the notion of human 'existence'. The scope of existentialism on the problem of being is much narrower than that of the classical metaphysicians, be it Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas or Descartes. It gets so narrowed down that it becomes now an ontology of human existence. Human existence is such that, for man, to be is to be free. In this sense, strictly speaking, only man can be said to exist, as 'standing-out' of the inauthentic existence of the innumerable objects and the human crowd. Clearly existentialism wants to articulate the importance and glory of human life that consciously attempts to authenticate its existence. Man is not to be defined in terms of an abstract nature; but in terms of his

existence, which is a project of freedom. Human existence is not made once and for all, but is in the process of continually making itself. Man is nothing but what he makes of himself. The philosophers, here, are selectively chosen. I have preferred mainly Sartre and Heidegger, for the simple reason that their concept of freedom is better linked with the concept of human existence.

I have further enquired in the chapter how the conception of existence has been understood in Indian Philosophy, and where the differences lie with Western philosophy. Vedānta and Mādhyamika have specially engaged my attention. This is so, because these two schools have elaborated discussion on being and non-being, or existence and non-existence, as the starting point of their metaphysics. Moreover, being and non-being are also basic to their method of philosophizing. Vedānta identifies being with Brahman, the ultimate truth and destiny of human life. Brahman is the underlying reality of the world appearance. Subjectively, it is the inner core of what we refer to as the 'I'. 'I' itself represents the all-pervading Brahman, therefore it may not be identified with the ego of the western psychologists. From the phenomenal standpoint, the 'I' is covered by all material conditions and psychological accretions. Together the conditions and accretions may constitute physicalism, mentalism and vitalism. The 'I' reveals as the innermost being of what we encounter in the 'isms'. The equation of the Brahman and 'I' is at once the philosophy of identity inherent in the absolute, conceived as the existence, or Being as such.

Buddhism is the other school, especially in its Mādhyamika manifestation, which has engaged my attention, here. By way of negation, or non-being, Buddhism has an insightful analysis of existence itself. Vedānta establishes the existence (*sat*) as the ultimate reality, whereas Buddhism establishes the primacy of the non-existence (*asat*) as the ultimate reality. Both Vedānta and Buddhism together give us a rare insight in the metaphysics of Being, the one, positively, and the other, negatively. A probe, briefly though, into Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika philosophy gives us a rare insight into the existence as 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*), that is at once transcendental. Nāgārjuna maps out a middle path, which can correct the excesses of a positive formulation of existence. The merit of the path is the reminder that the absolute must not be reduced to the relative, that the language of the relative is inapplicable to speak of the absolute truth. Nothing relative is essentially real, rather everything is inter-related. Existence of the physical and the mental elements (*dharmas, dhātus*) is not denied by Nāgārjuna, but rather their absolute reality. Both the early Buddhism and later Vedānta influence each other. Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* sees things as they are, as 'incapable holding themselves' (*nisvabhāva*), things are 'empty'. Nāgārjuna identifies his theory of emptiness with Buddha's teaching of no-soul (*anatta, anicca*), liberation (*nirvāṇa*) and the moral detachment (*anāsakti*).

I find Vivekānanda's understanding of existence to be integrating the views of Vedānta and Buddhism. Yet, he remains a committed Vedāntin, in as much as the foundations of his Neo-Vedānta is the Upaniṣadic philosophy. To Vivekānanda, existence (*sat*) is the only

reality, manifesting in the universe through different names and forms. However, all the names and forms are, if considered real, are only concession to our ignorance. Unlike the classical Advaitins, Vivekānanda uses 'being' to cover existence of empirical as well as transcendental reality. This is partly because of his concern for a practical Vedānta for common man. But, this is not a ploy, but a gradual training of our perception, that finally realizes the absolute existence, in which the separateness of all object and subject is to vanish like the morning mist. Vivekānanda is aware that we are finite beings, not naturally prone to conceive of the infinite beyond our imagination. We are in the world of duality, where the language cannot fully express the transcendent; indeed our speech itself is made possible by the transcendent. The transcendent, before it is expressed as the sound in a speech, is existence. Vedānta is par-excellence a philosophy of being, or existence, to Vivekānanda. Existence is Brahman. Its denial, Vivekānanda observes, is not possible even to the sceptic, in as much as the sceptic does not doubt his own existence. Existence then is primordial Being, Brahman, in the language of the Upaniṣads. Knowledge of Being is consequently not a mere discursive reasoning, but has the ontological significance to man. The metaphysical problem why there is something and not nothing receives a theoretical formulation in Vivekānanda: existence is Brahman

In my third chapter, I have looked into Advaita Vedānta's conception of Brahman as existent (Brahma-satyam), because Advaita constitutes an immediate background for the Neo-Vedānta of Vivekānanda. Though this is not a chapter on Śaṅkara's Brahman as

existent, I have taken the liberty of drawing from his philosophy some important ideas, because he is the best known Advaita metaphysician. The fundamental principle of Advaita philosophy that Brahman is existence is an elaboration of the Upaniṣadic insight that Brahman is 'one without a second' (*ekam-eva-advitīyam*) Advaita Vedānta, drawing its inspiration from the Upaniṣads, conceives Brahman as existence; and such existence can be one, admitting none other, like it, or unlike it; much less, admitting within itself a self-division. It is an impartite reality. The metaphysics of the school can be stated as follows: Brahman is the reality (*sat*), the individual is non-different from Brahman, and the world is nothing other than the names and forms of Brahman. The names and forms have an empirical reality, as distinct from transcendental reality. This is what is meant by the assertion that the world is an illusory appearance of Brahman. However, I have focussed my attention on only the first principle of metaphysics, viz., Brahman is the only existent.

The Advaita views that Brahman alone is existent centres around the concept of the infinitude (*ananta*). For only that which is infinite can be truly the existent; only that which is infinite can be truly the existent, in as much as there is nothing else to delimit it. If it is true that there is something, and not nothing, the absolute exists as the fullness of existence. All else should have only a derived existence. No derived existence can ever be infinite. The existence of Brahman is a fact of experience. No one ever thinks of his non-existence, therefore, no one ever doubts of the innermost core of his own subjectivity (and also of the objective world). Advaita Vedānta admits that *sat* is a universally

valid conception of Brahman. The denial of existence involves contradiction. Pure existence is not an abstract idea, but something directly and immediately experienced as being present within all. Advaita has grasped this truth in stating that Brahman is the underlying reality of all that exists. All that exists, objective and subjective, is the manifested Brahman, the one impartite existence, now, in myriad forms and names.

Śaṅkara believes that the knowledge of Brahman as existent is direct. The moment one feels 'I am', one is conscious of existence. Such a self-consciousness is an integral part of every experience, cognitive, emotive or conative. Thus the experience of Brahman is self-referential. No secondary definition is possible to describe Brahman, because secondary definitions aim at defining an entity with respect to something other than itself. The assertion 'I am' is prior to 'I am that', or 'I am not that'. *Sat* cannot be explained other than by itself. Therefore the purport of all discourse is the assertion of existence. It is this existence which is said to be identical with Brahman, the absolute. It is the substrate of the objective as well as the subjective world. Hence the existent Brahman is the supreme being in which everything subsists. Śaṅkara's philosophy is the outcome of the exclusive emphasis on this one metaphysical principle of Brahman being existence. Other aspects of Brahman being consciousness and bliss are the epistemic, moral and aesthetic amplifications of the principle of existence, which is never subject to any change substantially. The axiological goal of Advaita is to lead one from the apparent flux and the fluidity of becoming to the eternality of being. And the eternality of being is one's own existence

freed from the psycho-physical adjuncts and accretions of phenomenality. In identifying existence with the absolute Brahman, it is no more the quality of Brahman, but what Brahman is in its nature. Hence, it is not the case that Brahman has existence, but that Brahman *is* existence. Against this backdrop, I am to project Vivekānanda's thesis that Existence is Brahman.

In the fourth chapter, which is the core of this dissertation, I have studied how Advaita identity asserted between existence and Brahman is viewed by Vivekānanda. To be sure, Vivekānanda's neo-Vedānta is a reassertion of the classical Vedāntic truth that Brahman is existence. But there is a different approach followed by Vivekānanda. Being a product of Indian Renaissance, Vivekānanda is aware of the western philosophies of existence, being and life. Naturally his way of approach is considerably different from that of the classical Advaitins. Aware of the centrality of the concept of existence in world's metaphysics, he begins his journey in Vedāntic philosophy from the viewpoint of existence, and identifies it with the Vedāntic concept of Brahman, the absolute. Hence, the title of the thesis 'Existence that is Brahman' (*sat-Brahman*). I have drawn my attention exclusively to the concept of existence (*sat*) before Vivekānanda identifies it with the Vedāntic absolute. This equation between Brahman and existence is so fundamental to his neo-Vedānta, that it should be possible for anyone to view all his other ideas from the perspective of the truth of identification between existence and Brahman.

Śaṅkara's conception of non-duality helped Vivekānanda to explicate his own position. He does not hesitate to seek help from the Advaitic predecessors. Multiplicity, he tells us, is only apparent. It is superimposed on the one non-dual absolute. The one, the real and the existent are but synonyms. All separation is only a concession to our phenomenality: it does not exist, it is not real. There is but one existence, which is at once the infinite, consciousness and the ever blessed. In that one existence, we dream all other various dreams of the physical world, society, morality and religion. It is not the case that our other 'dreams' have no significance. They are empirically real, but they do not in themselves possess the final reality, or value. They are the play of names and forms of the one existence that is Brahman. Take away the names and forms, what remains is 'It' (*idam*). This 'It' represents *sat* only. *Sat* should be conceived in its true sense of the term as bare existence, or being as such. *Sat* is the support, or the substratum, the ontological ground, of the world of appearances, that is given to our sense experience and thought experience. But the one existence, underlying the universe of empirical experience, however, reflects Itself from the lowest worm to the highest and most perfect being of Buddha. Vivekānanda therefore thinks that even as an amoeba is an involved Buddha, Buddha himself is an evolved amoeba. This is a rare perception of existence, pure and simple, manifesting itself into the world of phenomenality. This also bespeaks of Vivekānanda's genius at a creative synthesis between Vedānta and Buddhism

Following the general Vedāntic trend, Vivekānanda considered *sat* as the ultimate nature of Brahman, and not as a quality thereof.

Indeed, no existence can ever be predicated. Whatever exists in this universe is suffused with Brahman, in as much as it first is, only then it is such and such. Therefore, what existed and what exists and what will exist is the *sat-Brahman*. Vivekānanda, going with the Upaniṣads, views the *sat-Brahman*, as the *sat-ekameva advitīyam*, the 'one without a second'. Therefore, it cannot be thought of in terms of anything else. If, however, we persist in this futile attempt, it stands qualified by names and forms, vitiating its nature. On the contrary, Brahman is the substance, out of which an infinite varieties of beings are fabricated empirically. But for this the absolute is indivisible.

Vivekānanda tells us that, when we have known Brahman as the ontological ground of everything, we also will have realized the unity of all existence. This is as good as saying that we now know the true nature of Brahman. Neither the change nor permanence is denied by Vivekānanda. Being and becoming both are true, but on their own plane, judged by a science of ontology. Vivekānanda's imagery of the vast ocean and the innumerable waves thereof is pedagogically insightful. Apart from the ocean, the waves cannot be sustained as the existents. Each wave is different from the other. Its cadence, curvature, its surge and breaking are all different. Yet, they are the different manifestations of the same ocean. The ocean itself is one great existent mass of water. Likewise existence that is Brahman manifests itself through changing qualities. To Vivekānanda, existence remains inherently permanent in all the objects, so that they really express in infinite ways the one supreme Being. Birth and death, life and decay, generation and regeneration are all manifestations of that eternal

existence. Existence alone, which is one without a second, is real, all the rest of the reals are, like waves of the ocean, only manifestations of names and forms. Names and forms do not have ontological significance. In the reassertion of the Vedāntic philosophy by Vivekānanda, we must not forget his concern for practical Vedānta. Physical world does not get totally annihilated, but is transformed into different configurations. It is the field of human action, which has all the validity that a *karmavādin* asserts. Vivekānanda here is very different from Śaṅkara. He is closer to *Gītā's* spirit of *niṣkāmakarma* than Śaṅkara, who advocated *karma-saṁnyāsa*, on account of his *jñānayoga*. The world of multiplicity has a purpose, it is the field for the soul-making. It is the realization, not the doctrine that Brahman, the existence, is the core of our being, that is liberative to man in the world. Man's true existence is open to transcendence. The materialistic existence, built up with atoms and molecules, constitutes only a relative and temporal existence, but its moorings are eternal. It is in Brahman that is existence *per se*. It is the absolute fullness.

Having briefly summed up the results of my previous chapters, I must now hasten to identify the corollaries that follow from my study, and tentatively amplify them. Has Vivekānanda succeeded in transforming Advaitic Brahman into a *sat-Brahman*? What philosophical insight is gained in exclusively conceiving the absolute in terms of existence?

It is not without reason that the classical metaphysicians began their metaphysics with the notion of being. Being is a primary notion.

The principle of identity, along with that of contradiction, became therefore the first self-evident principle of all logic and epistemology. Vivekānanda had the insight that the Upaniṣadic absolute has to be grasped as the existence par excellence, existence, not as a quality, but as the existent substance. Brahman first is, before he can be thought of as anything else. The absolute hence is *sat-Brahman*.

In conceiving of Brahman as anything other than existence, there is the great danger of anthropomorphism, to which philosophies and religions alike have fallen prey. The rigour of reason has proved beyond doubt that all our ideas of Brahman are largely anthropomorphic. Vivekānanda, as a Vedāntic metaphysician, reminds us time and again that we create our own realities and worship them, thus paying reverence to our own mental representations. In thinking of the absolute in terms of existence, this danger is largely overcome, in as much as we confront here our own existence as being identical with the absolute. This way Vedānta is heuristic, in as much as we, in our philosophical pursuit, end up with our own self-discovery, because we are that Brahman. 'I am It' is a cardinal principle of Vedānta. There is no difference between 'It' and 'I'. 'I' here is a unity of all existence.

For Vivekānanda, this cardinal principle has served as the bedrock of a meaningful social and political philosophy. Vivekānanda's Neo-Vedānta goes far deeper than the theological and humanistic socio-political philosophies. We reach out to others in inter-subjectivity, because the other is an extroverted self. The self and the other are, at the ontic level, the one and the same. They both represent the same pure

existence. Vivekānanda incarnates the Upaniṣadic principle, 'all is dear for the sake of the self', in highlighting the nature of Brahman as pure existence. The struggle of western existentialists, rooted as they are in fundamental duality, is to some extent overcome by Vivekānanda in the Vedāntic non-dualism. Even within the non-dualistic metaphysics, the emphasis on existence as the nature of reality has warded off possible traces of anthropomorphism and its consequent infelicities. Purity in self-existence is made the basis of all human motivations.

Vivekānanda asks, if we do not pay reverence to ourselves, how can we pay reverence to others? Everything is in pure existence, emerging from it only. Because of our ignorance we see various existing things, instead of existence that is Brahman. He asks: Are not all our ideas of the external the same? Can we ever know the world as our mind represents it to us? Has not science proved already that the senses are deceptive and can never know things as they are? He further observes that, where science ends, philosophy begins, taking us to confront the truth of one existence, manifesting in the diversity of name and form. The absolute Brahman, equated with existence, cannot be described with other qualities, because we cannot think of the substantive existence as derived from other relative realities. Vivekānanda's vision is free from a great many metaphysical, theological, dogmatic commitments. It should also be acceptable to all, because to deny it runs the risk of denying one's own existence. One may ask, if metaphysics and theology are taken away from Vedānta, what will remain of it? It is precisely here that Vivekānanda has made metaphysics a human ontology. Vedānta becomes a scientific system,

with him, of thought based on extended psychology and extended ethics. Vedānta, free from religious ceremonies, however, evolves its own forms in innumerable ways of serving living beings. To serve others means to serve oneself, only because existence, as the supreme reality, is everywhere. Thus, the abstract Advaita of the classical period comes, for Vivekānanda, transformed into a living, dynamic Advaita of everyday life. Vivekānanda aims at the harmony of existence. Realization of *sat-Brahman* is the human goal. We have become identified with existence after being merged in existence. We are that which is existence.

If Vivekānanda has identified the absolute with the existence as such, where does his philosophy stand vis-à-vis the problem of being and becoming? We know the early Greek philosophy was the amplification of the Heraclitan and Parmenidian problems of change and permanence. Is not the universe one connected whole? Is not the division of it into external and internal an arbitrary one? According to Vivekānanda, to be sure, the universe is one connected mass. One may begin from the external, and come to the internal, or vice-versa. The universe has come out of the infinite ocean of existence, and will go back to it again. It is evolving and involving from all eternity. Viewed as a single unit, it can have no change, or motion. Yet, viewed as multiple, it is a surging movement (*samsāra*), but all change is within the permanent existence. Thus, we see that Vivekānanda is closer to Parmenides than to Heraclitus. But change is not denied altogether, it has its validity at the empirical level. All change is a play of the infinite existence.

The empirical reality of the universe is acknowledged, because even a non-dualist and an absolutist has to account for the relative reality and change of fleeting relative reality. The universe is a manifested, or projected, form of Brahman, created through the combination of matter. But the absolute reality, which is of the nature of existence, is what informs all creations. The inner core of all that is relative is the absolute, but for it, it would be non-existent (*asat*). To Vivekānanda, and all Vedāntin, for that matter, the relative is not non-existent, but only ~~relative~~ in its literal sense of what is 'transformed from'. The relative is a transformation of the absolute, as if the relative is the refraction of the one existence. The whole of existence is Brahman and its unity, for the time (*tat kāla-utpanna*), is refracted.

In conclusion, in presenting his thesis that existence is Brahman, Vivekānanda may not be said to place before us any new truth, distinct from what the classical Advaitins have given to us. But he brings in a new approach to the problem of Vedāntic metaphysics. This is made possible, perhaps, due to his awareness of a philosophy of being in the west gradually transforming into a philosophy of human ontology. In the course of this transition, he clearly sees how a philosophy of being becomes a philosophy of life and human existence. This perception has helped him to overcome some of the infelicities of western classical metaphysics, especially in its problem of change and permanence, as well as of the western existentialists.

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