Introduction

We have seen in detail the various introductory topics like the nature of the adhikārī (qualified aspirant), the mode of approaching the Guru, the questions to be inquired upon and the way the Guru propounds the teaching based on the adhikārī’s accomplishment in the sādhana-catustayā. All these topics were only an introduction, to set the stage for beginning the teaching of Vedānta. We shall now enter into Vedānta proper by first studying its methodology. The methodology of Vedānta proceeds sequentially in two waves:

1. Adhyāropā or deliberate superimposition, and
2. Apavāda or the subsequent negation.

A traditional Vedantic verse (vedānta-sampradāyasloka) makes this amply clear:

अध्यारोपपापवादाभ्यायं निप्रपच्छ प्रतिपद्यते ।
शिशुपाणिः बोधिसिद्धेऽयं तत्त्वज्ञेः कर्त्यलि:
क्रमः ।।

Adhyāropāpavādābhvām
nisprapaṇcaṃ prapaṇcyate, sisyānām bodhasiddhyarthanām
tattvajñānāh kalpitāḥ kramaḥ

The methodology of adhyāropā and apavāda has been adopted to reveal the nature of the Self which is free of the world of plurality. This methodology has been fashioned in the past by the wise so that the student may comprehend the Truth.

In this essay we shall study the methodology of Vedānta by understanding its two component steps: adhyāropā and apavāda.

Adhyāropā – Definition

The word ‘adhyāropā’ means ‘superimposition’. It comes from
the Sanskrit verbal root 'ruh' which means 'to grow'. When the prefixes adhi + ā are added to the causal form of 'ruh', the meaning significantly changes – 'to erroneously or falsely attribute the properties of one thing on another' or, in other words, 'to superimpose'. This concept of adhyāropa or superimposition is explained in Vedānta using the famous rope-snake example. Under the deluding cover of semidarkness, when one mistakes a rope to be the snake, there is the wrong ascription of the properties of the snake like its markings, raised hood etc. on the rope. In Vedānta Sāra, Śrī Śvāmī Śadānanda defines adhyāropa using the very same example.

Adhyāropa is the superimposition of the unreal on the real, like the false superimposition of a snake on a rope which in truth is not a snake.

Adhyāropa is deliberate superimposition

It is very interesting to note that adhyāropa or superimposition is not done by the student but by Śāstra (the Scriptures) and the Guru (the Teacher). They do it intentionally, consciously, calculatingly and for a definite purpose. It is precisely for this reason that even though adhyāropa, as a Sanskrit word, only means 'superimposition', in English we translate it with a little freedom as 'deliberate superimposition'. Any superimposition, be it a snake on the rope, silver on the mother-of-pearl or the mirage waters on the desert sand, has to have three components:

1. The superimposer – the one who superimposes
2. The superimposed object
3. The substratum on which the illusory object is superimposed

In the case of the rope-snake example the superimposer is the perceiver of the snake, the superimposed object is the illusory snake and the substratum is the rope which is real. In the case of the vedantic adhyāropa the Guru is the superimposer, jīva-jagat-īśvara is the superimposed and Brahman is the substratum.

1 A fourth factor is also required in all normal superimpositions and that is ignorance but here we shall see that it is compassion, not ignorance.
The only difference between an erroneous superimposition as in the case of rope-snake and this deliberate superimposition is that one sees the snake on the rope due to ignorance but here the Śāstra and Guru superimpose the triad of jīva-jagat-īsvara on Brahman not out of ignorance but out of compassion for the student.

How is compassion the very foundation of adhyāropa? To answer this question let us briefly see the purpose of the Guru's adhyāropa (superimposition). The student comes to the Guru with full earnestness seeking liberation. But he (the student) has a firm notion that the world exists and that he himself is a limited individual. Alas! It is only these delusory notions that cause and constitute bondage! Yet, the Śāstras and the Guru initially accept this ignorant standpoint of the student and begin the Teaching. The Guru points out that the world, about whose existence the student is so sure, has come from māyā and that māyā has Brahman as its substratum.

The final vedantic Truth is that Brahman alone is true and that there is no māyā or world or the creator of the world (īsvara), or the perceiver of the world (jīva) or anything else either apart from Brahman or even superimposed on Brahman. And hence even the very acceptance of the presence of māyā, the world etc., even as a superimposition on Brahman for the sake of the student is a definite case of undeniable but forgivable adhyāropa! The Guru, the very ocean of incomparable Knowledge, ever being established in a pure Brahman, out of compassion, deliberately superimposes the triad of jīva-jagat-īsvara (individual-world-Creator) on Brahman for the sake of initiating the Teaching.

Adhyāropa is unavoidable

Any teaching has to start from the plane of the student and bring him/her to the level of the teacher. The student is in the plane of ignorance. The teacher is at the level of wisdom. A bridge has to be created between these two different and seemingly incompatible levels. And it is the spiritual Teacher alone who creates this bridge to the Truth. The student cannot be expected to rise at the very beginning to the pinnacles of the Guru’s experience even though the Guru’s experience alone is true and his is illusory. If the
Teacher at the very outset says that all that the student perceives — the world of names and forms, the equipments of the body, mind and intellect, the waking, dream and deep-sleep states of consciousness etc. are not there, then instead of helping the student, he will only be overwhelming the student and injuring him by stunning him. The student may even be thoroughly put off by the utterly incomprehensible nature of the Guru’s teachings. And that will be an irreparable damage to the whole teaching process. A proper, ample and strong base of understanding for the student has to be built by the Teacher before he can launch him to the higher realms of the experience of Truth. Hence the Guru initially, deliberately, consciously and calculatingly accepts that there is the seen world of names and forms. Then slowly but steadily he helps the student to come to his level of the final understanding,

\[ \text{brahma satyam jagannathyā jīvo} \]

\[ \text{brahmaiva na aparāḥ} \]

Brahman alone is true, the world is false and the Self is nothing but Brahman.

Hence the Teacher, assuming the presence of the world, īśvara — the creator, māyā and so on is only initiating the teaching and helping the student to progress. There is a definite need for this adhyāropa, the initial deliberate superimposition used by the Guru.

**Adhyāsa and Adhyāropa**

Thus we see both the student and the teacher superimpose the triad of jīva-jagat-īśvara. But then there is a mountain of difference between the two. The student’s superimposition is based on his own present state of ignorance while the Guru’s superimposition is based on his compassion and wisdom, to initiate the student into the Teaching. In order to clarify the vital difference between the superimposition used by the Śāstras and the Guru and the superimposition under which the student is labouring, a few texts of Vedānta indicate two words with regards to superimposition:

1. Adhyāsa
2. Adhyāropa.

Though in Sanskrit both mean the same i.e. superimposition, these texts use the word

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The word adhyāsa is derived from the Sanskrit verbal base ‘āsa’ which means ‘to throw’. The prefix ‘adḥi’ and ‘ā’ is added to the root to modify the meaning — ‘to superimpose’.
adhyāsa to refer to the ignorance-based naturally existent superimposition of the student and adhyāropa for the wisdom-based deliberate superimposition of the Teacher.

**Apavāda**

The next step after adhyāropa is apavāda. The adhyāropa of the Guru contains within itself the arsenal to destroy the adhyāropa. To use a traditional example, a thorn is used to remove a thorn and finally the thorn which was used to remove the original thorn is also thrown away. In the burning ghat, they use a stick to keep the fire stirred up while burning the corpse. But in the process that very stick is also burnt and even the last remaining bit of the stick is put into the fire to be totally destroyed. ‘Yēna tyajasi tat tyaja – renounce even the very instrument by which you renounce’. The same principle is used here too - the adhyāropa removes the adhyāsa of the sīya and finally the adhyāropa also crumbles. This total negation of adhyāropa after it has served its purpose is called ‘apavāda’. To understand how adhyāropa works and how it contains within itself the means for apavāda, and how the apavāda is done we shall now see in brief the wonderful structure of the vedantic adhyāropa and apavāda.

**The structure of Adhyāropa and Apavāda**

The experience of the student at his present level of ignorance is ‘I am a limited individual in this vast universe experiencing the objects of diverse names, sounds, touch, forms, colours, tastes and smells’. He feels that he, the subject, is limited in time and space. This is due to his identification with the upādhis – the gross, subtle and causal bodies (anātmani ātmabuddhiḥ). Also, he feels that he is suffering, buffeted about by the relentless waves of joy and sorrow. This is due to his mistaken sense of reality in the world of objects (jagati satyabuddhiḥ). The Guru knowing well that the dichotomy of the subject-object relationship, caused by the wrong understanding of the subject and the object, is the crux of the whole problem, seeks to guide the student to the vision of akhanḍa-eka-rasaitva – the one unbroken homogeneous Existence-Consciousness-Bliss by cutting asunder the duality of the subject-object relationship. Let us now see how the Guru analyses the nature of the subject – the limited individual and the object.

Tapovan Prasad
- the perceived world of names and forms and how beautifully he dismantles the whole subject-object relationship.

The nature of the subject

The experience of the student is 'I am so and so', 'I am the son of so and so', 'I am this collection of body, senses, prānas, mind, intellect'. The Guru first starts explaining the nature of the upādhis - the body, mind etc. It is made of the five elements - space, air, fire, water and earth, it undergoes modifications and so on. But are these upādhis the Self? They cannot be the Self since the body, mind etc. are objects perceived by me, the perceiver. And what I see cannot be me for what I see is different from me. The seer and the seen are different and the seen can never be the seer. Thus the upādhis are all negated as the not-Self and the Self is pointed out as the pure Witness Principle. But what is the nature of this Self, the witness of the upādhis and the world of names and forms? With the help of the Śruti (Scriptures), yuktī (logic) and anubhūti (experience), the Guru points out the nature of the Self to be Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.

Now that the nature of the subject is seen to be Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, let us see how the nature of the object also is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.

The nature of the object

Using the Śruti declarations, the Guru points out that the world of names and forms has come into being from māyā, the causal seed of the universe which has Brahman as its substratum. Then the Guru reasons with the student that if the world has come from māyā then the world must be māyā only, for the effect is nothing but the cause. The effect is nothing but the superficial appearance of names and forms on the cause. All clay pots are nothing but clay and all waves nothing but water. In this way, the world of names, sounds, touch, forms, colours, tastes and smells is reduced to its cause - māyā.

Once this is done the Guru shows that māyā has as its substratum the Supreme Brahman.

3 Please note that after the inquiry into the nature of the subject even the upādhis like the body, mind etc., are reduced to the status of the object for they are in the category of the perceived. They are also thus a part of the world and not the Self.
just as the superimposed snake has as its substratum the rope. Thus māyā is a superimposition on Brahmaṇa. Superimpositions are false and the substratum alone is true. The snake is false and the rope alone is true. Mirage waters are false, the desert sand alone is true. In this way māyā too is falsified and what remains is Brahmaṇ which is of the nature of Pure Existence, Consciousness and Infinite Bliss.

Thus both the ‘subject-Self’ and the ‘object-world’ is shown to be of one nature – Existence, Consciousness and Infinite Bliss. If they are both of one nature then the distinction between them is illusory. The whole subject-object relationship is thus shattered and the student comes to the perception of akhaṇḍa-eka-ṛasa – one, unbroken homogeneous Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. With this the Teaching is complete and once the sīṣya actualises this as his own direct experience, the Guru’s job is done.

What is to be noted here is how the adhyāropa of both the subject and the object contain in themselves the means for their subsequent apavāda (negation). When the Guru explains the body, mind and the other upādhis, as being known by the Self, though he has deliberately posited the presence of the upādhis, he has also sown the seeds to negate the upādhis as the not-Self, for that which is perceived cannot be me, the perceiver. Also when he says that the māyā-created world has Brahmaṇ as its substratum, though he has deliberately posited the presence of the world, please note how he has strategically created a method to dismantle the world, for when you call the world a superimposition, it has to become false and only the substratum Brahmaṇ can be true.

Conclusion

This is in a nutshell the most ancient methodology of deliberate superimposition (adhyāropa) and subsequent negation (apavāda) of Vedānta. The essays which will appear in the future issues will be further explanations on what we have covered here in brief. By His grace and blessings, as we proceed to elaborate the adhyāropa-apavāda methodology of Vedānta we would be able to see the very majesty and beauty of the philosophy of Vedānta and get a peep into the sacred hearts of our rishis.