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## **Philosophical Influence on The Use of Pronouns in The English Language**

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### **Abstract**

The use of the pronoun replaced for the noun 'God' and of the pronoun 'I' are exceptions to the general rule that the first letter of each pronoun must be of capital letter only at the beginning of the sentence, otherwise of the small letter everywhere in the English language. Like the first letter of the noun 'God', viz., 'G' remains capital irrespective of all places, the first letter of the pronoun used in place of the noun 'God' must be of capital everywhere in the sentences. In the same way, the pronoun 'I' is used in the capital letter irrespective of all occasions in the sentences. What is the reason behind these two exceptional uses of pronouns? Only answer received from experts and grammarians of English language is that it is a convention followed from the time unlimited. But the convention must take some reasons to be established, it cannot be used and followed irrationally for ages. Answer is traced with satisfied reason on the philosophical foundation. The word 'God' takes the first letter as capital everywhere because of His supremacy and exceptional features that common human lacks. Same reason is followed for the first letter of the pronoun used instead of the noun 'God'. As *aham* is equated with the Supreme Being, individual self is not different from Supreme self, the use of the pronoun 'I' follows the same reason like that of the pronoun replaced by the noun 'God'. Moreover, distinctness and clearness give different status to the pronoun 'I'.

**Keywords:** *Brahman, Ahamkāra /Ego, Aham/Self, Ignorance*

In English language 'A noun is a word used for naming some person or thing' and 'A pronoun is a word used instead of a noun or noun-equivalent word.' So, Noun is a naming-word and pronoun replaces noun in subsequent sentences to prevent reiteration of the same word. When a noun or pronoun refers to one person or thing, it is considered to be in the singular number; when it refers to multiple people or things, it is considered to be in the plural number. Relation of verb with noun or pronoun or noun-like-words used in a sentence is called its case. The case is of three types-

(1) The nominative case occurs when a noun or pronoun is employed as the verb's subject, (2) It is in the objective case when it serves as a verb's object, (3) when it denotes relationship or ownership, it is in the possessive or genitive case. Again, when a pronoun denotes person or persons speaking, it is of First Person. When it states person or persons

spoken to, it is of second person and when it states person or persons spoken of, it is of Third person.

Thus, the forms of personal pronouns can be shown by the following chart:

	First Person		Second Person		Third Person	
	Singular Number	Plural Number	Singular Number	Plural Number	Singular Number	Plural Number
Nominative Case	I	WE	YOU (THOU)	YOU	HE/SHE /IT	THEY
Objective Case	ME	US	YOU (THEE)	YOU	HIM/HE R/IT	THEM
Possessive Case	MY/MINE	OUR/O URS	YOUR (THY/THINE)	YOUR/YO URS	HIS/HE R/HERS /ITS	THEIR/ THEIRS

The uses of different pronouns in the English language are quite different and unique. In general, a pronoun is used in a sentence in small letter but at the beginning of a sentence beginning letter of the pronoun is used in capital letter. This general rule does not apply to two purposes. First, the pronoun having First Person, Singular Number and Nominative Case i.e. ' I ' is used in capital letter everywhere in a sentence. Two, the first letter of a pronoun, used in place of a particular noun 'God' or Supreme Being, is used in capital letter everywhere, though this particular pronoun is of nominative case, third person and singular number.

What are the reasons behind these two exceptions? Why do these two cases violet the general rules for using pronoun in English Language? Why is the use of two pronouns different from that of others?

Experts and Grammarians of English language cannot give adequate answer to this question. It is a convention followed from the time immemorial. But a convention must follow some reasons to be established. Without any reason no convention has been followed blindly for ages. The reasons behind these two exceptions can be traced philosophically in this paper.

*Brahman* or God is the Supreme Being or Highest Being. There are different views on the nature of God, but all the views agree to the point of the supremacy of God. *Brahman* is the eternal light, eternal consciousness. It is eternal, perpetual, unending self-luminosity. The being who is in his essence the light and life of all, who is world-conscious, is *Brahman*. To feel all, to be conscious of everything, is his spirit. The Supreme Being is all-pervading; therefore, he is innate good in all. "*sarvavyāpi sa bhagavān tasmāt sarvagatah śiva.*"<sup>1</sup> This light and life of all is not only in space, but the all-feeling being is in our souls. The mortal and immortal are both comprehended in something which is different from both the mortal and immortal, which is meant as the *antaryāmin* or the indwelling principle, the supreme reality holds together in itself both the mortal and immortal, the object and the subject, matter and consciousness. The ultimate reality, according to Sankara, the founder of Advaita Vedanta, is *Ātmā* or *Brahman*, which is pure awareness (*jñāna-svarūpa*) or consciousness of the pure self (*svarūpa-jñāna*), which is devoid of all qualities (*nirgunā*) and all categories of the intellect (*nirviśes*). *Brahman's* potency (*śakti*) is linked to *māyā* or

*mūlāvidya*, which manifests as the qualified *Brahman* (*saguna*, *saviśeṣa*, or *aparā Brahman*), the Lord (*Ivara*), or the God who creates, preserves, and destroys this world. Like *Advaita Vedānta*, Spinoza in Western Philosophy believes in one Substance which he calls God, the only reality devoid of all qualities and categories. He describes the substance as *Causa sui* meaning that the only reality is a self-explanatory and all-inclusive. Whereas, according to Ramanuja, propounder of *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta*, the Absolute is equated with God. He is *Brahman* and must be a qualified unity (*saviśeṣa*). God represents the entire universe, and matter and souls make up His body, as He is their soul. There are two ways to think about God: as cause and as effect. God is still the cause in the condition of dissolution (*Pralaya*), where His body is made up of unembodied souls and subtle matter. The subtle matter turns gross at the state of creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*), and the unembodied souls – aside from the *nitya* and *mukta* souls – become embodied in accordance with their *karmas*.

Vivekananda defends the position of Saṅkara's *Advaita Vedānta* on the concept of God. He believes that Absolute God are not two and God is not a creation of *Māyā*. From the Metaphysical point of view, reality is absolute *Brahman*, the same reality viewed from the religious point is God. He who is supremely real, is also the object of our devotion and worship. That is why Vivekananda emphasizes the all-pervasive nature of God. God is present everywhere and in everything.

“Through his control the sky expands, through his control the air breaths, through his control the sun shines, and through his control all live. He is the reality in nature. He is the soul of your soul.”<sup>2</sup>

Again, Vivekananda is in favour of the opinion that God is indescribable and our language with a limited capacity is inadequate to represent Him properly. Thus, the God cannot be described accurately in our common usage. All our attempts to describe the God through imposing some characters to Him are nothing but our limited ways of effort for knowing infinite through finite, universal through particular.

“You cannot describe Him by any other language. All attempts of language, calling Him father, or brother, or our dearest friend, are attempts to objectify God, which cannot be done. He is the Eternal Subject of everything.”<sup>3</sup>

From the above discussion it can be said that God, as Supreme Being or Highest Being, is an exceptional noun which is replaced by a particular pronoun of which first letter is used in capital letter irrespective of place where it occurs.

The concept of capitalizing the pronoun ‘I’ may be viewed into two ways- (1) popular view or Egoistic View, and (2) Spiritual view. According to the former view, ‘I’ is superior to others. No one can know more than I, can acquire more wealth than I etc. Here ego plays a vital role and always ‘I’ fights for holding better position, more wealth, and more fame than others. Ego can take many different forms, such as pride in one’s wealth, knowledge, beauty, or power. The ego of wealth may lead me to show my vanity of having a lot of money and casting an exceptional life style with expensive possessions. I can represent my ego of knowledge expressing my pride of having the number of academic qualifications and creative works in academic realm. I consider myself as the source of all knowledge and without any humility try to humiliate others who know less than I do, who have a smaller number of degrees than I have. In the same way the ego of beauty may entice me to show my looks to such a degree that I intentionally make other people feel inferior. The nature of ego compels humans to talk or think too much about themselves, to

pose them to a higher estimate than their actual position. As I think that I am superior to others, and I prefer myself to others, the pronoun 'I' is used everywhere in English Language in capital letter.

But, if we accept this view as a reason for using the pronoun 'I' in capital letter everywhere in English Language, then some mishaps arise.

(1) This view shows an attitude that society does not approve. Society must have a common out-look and common goal. But ego breaks this unity and makes a man flatter, whimsical and dictator. In the social contest this egoistic view is really harmful. According to Radhakrishnan,

“Every individual must subdue his senses, which make for self-assertion; pride must give place to humility, resentment to forgiveness, narrow attachment to family to universal benevolence.”<sup>4</sup>

Actually, the ego is a product of our immense state of ignorance. We preferred appearance to reality. We are guided by the misconception that people will be attracted to our appearance, to our outer beauty which will fade with age. The beauty of spirit is true beauty; it is not changed or fluctuated due to any outer influences. But beautification of the appearance entirely depends on the outer factor. For example, wrinkles on our face may change our look after a certain age, or expensive dress or valuable cosmetics increase our beauty for a short period. If we do not have the beauty of spirit, no one will be attracted to us forever. As the beauty of appearance is in flux, people's attraction to us gets fluctuated all the time. Wealth, which we like most, is the most effective cause of expressing vanity. The vanity for wealth can disappear when we suffer from a serious illness or any other miserable event in day-to-day life. Such types of unexpected calamity occurred in our life may drain our finances which causes upwards down changes in the economy.

(2) This view is inconsistent with the view of using first letter of the pronoun, replaced by the noun 'God', in capital letter everywhere in the English Language. If the first letter of the pronoun, placed in lieu of the noun 'God', is used in capital letter for universal and permanent nature of God, for His supremacy, etc. then ego cannot be sole reason for using the pronoun 'I' in capital letter everywhere in the English Language, as ego, I have already mentioned, is quite temporary. So, universal and permanent nature of the pronoun 'I', like the 'God' replacing pronoun, should be traced for using this pronoun in capital letter.

According to the Spiritual view, *Ātmā* is the same as *Brahman*. 'I' or 'Aham' is an inseparable entity to the Supreme Being. “That thou art” (*Tat tvam asi*) and “I am Brahman” (*Aham Brahma asmi*) signify that the principle underlying the world as a whole, and that which forms the essence of man, are ultimately similar. The establishment of the spiritual character of *Brahman* and the removal of the uncertainty about its existence are both accomplished by its identification with *ātmā* or soul. The pronoun 'I' is the symbol of self-consciousness. The self is always expressed and known within this symbol of 'I' and its real nature is reflected in relation to 'I'. The self is the spiritual centre of experience and this nature is always appeared in the form of 'I'. For the nature of spirituality, the 'I' can never be the product of the association of the self with anything dead and inert. The 'I' is the symbol of representing the self, and there is no alternative way of expressing self except 'I'.

“There is, however, another sense also of the ‘I’- the ‘I’ to suggest the unique spiritual nature of self. In this sense, the application of the ‘I’ to the self is only natural. *Knowledge* of the self as ‘I’ is never contradicted.”<sup>5</sup>

In self-conscious state the self is aware of itself, the subject itself is the object of its awareness. The spiritual, which is higher than the empirical, must transcend this subject-object dichotomy.

“There is, in the self of man, at the very centre of his being, something deeper than the intellect, which is akin to the Supreme.”<sup>6</sup>

Following the *Bhāgavad Gītā* Vivekananda describes the *Ātmā*

“The god went home, and at last found that he is the Self, beyond all thought, One, without birth or death, whom the sword cannot pierce or the fire burn, whom the air cannot dry or the water melt, the beginningless and endless, the immovable, the intangible, the omniscient, the omnipotent Being; that It was neither the body nor the mind, but beyond them all.”<sup>7</sup>

From this view of Vivekananda, this aspect of man is similar to Divine Being, and the awareness of this aspect is the pronoun ‘I’. As the pronoun ‘I’ is akin to the Devine Being, the pronoun ‘I’, like Supreme Being, is used in Capital letter everywhere in the English Language.

Again, like the nature of Supreme Being, this aspect of ‘I’ cannot be described in language but none can deny the presence of ‘I’ or self-consciousness. Reality is termed variously as self-consciousness, the innate experience of ‘I’. Kumarila describes it in *Śloka Vārtika* “Self-conscious is ultimate and there is no state when its existence can be doubted.” “*Ātmapratyayavijñeyojñātānaḥsarvadaivahi*”<sup>8</sup> The ‘I am’ current exists while I am in the waking, dreaming, sleeping or deep-sleep states. The fourth state, called as ‘*turiya*’ continuously resonates with in me. This gets validated because on waking up from deep slumber I confirm my experience of a peaceful rest. This ever-present state is self-consciousness. Everything appears and disappears in this state, as fleeting experiences. They are concepts created by ‘I’ is debatable. But the creator ‘I’ is beyond debate. In Western Philosophy Descartes, too, wants to build his philosophy on this ever-existing reality, the reality of self- consciousness.

“*Cogito ergo sum* means that my consciousness is the means of revealing myself as something existing. Here is the indubitable truth of the inseparability of thought and thing.”<sup>9</sup>

*Cogito ergo sum* viz., ‘I think, therefore I am’ proves the certainty of the subject ‘I’. I can doubt everything but I can never doubt ‘I’ as doubting being, as a subject who is doubting. The existence of ‘I’ is so clear and distinct that Descartes thinks that no other things can be perceived or intuited with such amount of certainty. No other suppositions of skeptics are able to upset it. And consequently, he regards *Cogito ergo sum* as the first principle of the philosophy. The denial of the existence of ‘I’ presupposes the existence of ‘I’ as the being who denies.

As a result, it can be concluded that God, as the Supreme Being, bears capital letter for the first letter of the pronoun, replaced by that very noun. In the same way, ‘I’ or *Aham* or Individual soul is akin to the Supreme Being and ‘I’ as self-consciousness, is beyond debate and so the pronoun ‘I’ is used with capital letter everywhere in English Language

As the Egoistic view of capitalizing the pronoun 'I' is rejected on the reasonable ground, the possessive case and objective case of the First Person- Singular Number should not hold capital letter anywhere except the beginning of a sentence. Before going to Possessive case, few words should be expensed to explain the particular words 'Possessiveness' and 'Possession'. Possession and Possessiveness are totally unrelated. Possession is a physical state but possessiveness is a mental attitude. The man should denounce possessiveness, not possessions. Possessiveness is defined as excessive desire to acquire, possess and dominate. The sticky desire springs from dependence and lack of self- sufficiency. The root cause is a sense of emptiness, incompleteness, deficiency. But 'I' is totally fulfilled, entirely self-conscious, completely satisfied. Ignorance of 'I' causes an imaginary void. Desire arises in mind to acquire as well as possess things to fill void. Possessiveness arises out of lack of self- awareness or self- consciousness. Thus, the possessive form of 'I' i.e. my/mine is a distortion of the real nature of the 'I' as self- consciousness and the cause of this distortion is the ignorance of the real nature of 'I'. From the ignorance of the real nature of 'I', we give an overemphasis on ego, and right then possessiveness becomes prominent.

"The ego is the knot of our continued state of ignorance and so long as we live in the ego, we do not share in the delight of the universal spirit."<sup>10</sup>

So, the possessive form of 'I' i.e. my/mine will hold small letter everywhere in English Language except beginning of a sentence. Thus, ignorance of real nature of self creates ego and ego desires possessions, another name of which possessiveness.

But the possessive case of the Supreme Being does not follow this principle. As the Supreme Being is the creator of this universe, He is everything and everything is He. There is nothing for Him to possess and He has no possessiveness for anything. Saṅkar maintains *Brahman-Kāraṇa -Vāda* as he recognizes that Brahman is the cause of the world. However, because it views the world as only a phenomenal manifestation of Brahman, his theory is known as *Brahman-Vivarta-Vada*. *Brahman* associated with *Māyā* is the material cause as well as the efficient cause. The entire cosmos, including the material world and individual souls, is a true modification of *Brahman*, according to *Rāmānuja*, who believes in *Brahman-parinama-Vāda*. Hence, there are different opinions about the process of creation, all are agreed that the Supreme Being is the creator. As He is the creator, there is nothing for Him to possess. So, his possessive form is only a pseudo use. It is an exceptional possessive form and so, it is used everywhere with capital letter for the first letter of this possessive form.

In the objective case 'I' converts it to 'Me'. Whenever it considers itself as an object or body, not a subject, it loses its real nature and consciousness as its essence. *Ahaṁkāra* or ego is not the same as the soul indicated by the word 'I', *Aham*. *Ahaṁkāra* consists in the identification of the self with the body through *karma* (past attachment) and ignorance. So, *Ahaṁkāra* is an impure state of the self which may be wiped out by knowledge but *aham* or self is real, beyond production and destruction. The term *aham* or 'I' is applied to the body or object only in its secondary sense. The objective case of 'I' i.e. 'Me' is really different from the subjective case or the nominative 'I'. The *Aham* or 'I' or soul possesses subjectivity as its intrinsic inalienable property and it cannot be something transferred to the self from anything external to it. *Ahaṁkāra* or ego is of the same substance and of the same nature as that of the physical body. *Ahaṁkāra* is like physical body perceivable, objective but *aham* or

self is opposed to it, as a perceiver and is subjective in nature. *Ahamkāra* is the objective case i.e. 'Me' and self or *aham* is the subjective case i.e. 'I'.

The 'I' or *aham* is not to be confused with the *ahamkāra*, the product of *prakṛti*. The 'I' or the *aham* and the *ahamkāra* are different from each other. The *ahamkāra* of which the Lord speaks in the *Gītā*, is one of the modes of *prakṛti* and is included in the things that constitute the physical body.

“*prakṛiteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśhaḥ ahankāra-vimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate*”<sup>11</sup>

Such an *ahamkāra* is the cause of making the body appear as something other than what in reality it is. So, *ahamkāra* or 'Me' as the objective case is an appearance but *aham* or self or 'I' as subjective case is a reality. For Rāmānuja, the individual self is pure, perfect and blissful both intrinsically and inherently; but due to influence of egoism and selfishness on the mind the infinite knowledge and bliss of the infinite self-face contraction which causes the entrance of the self into the bodies of created beings. He demonstrates that

“The soul is of the nature of bliss, knowledge and purity and that pain, ignorance and impurity are the qualities of *prakṛti* and not of the self.”<sup>12</sup>

The former is the Subjective or Nominative case of the First Person, Singular number and latter is the objective case of the same as the former is permanent and latter is not permanent and is vanished in time after realization of the former. The individual self or *jīva*, according to Sankara, is a subject-object complex. It is known as the *Sākṣin* and its subject element is pure consciousness, which is the same as Brahman or the Supreme Being. "I" is this subject element. However, the internal organ known as the *antaḥkaraṇa*, which is *bhautika* since it is made up of all five elements, is the object element. Individuality or *ahamkā*, is caused by *avidyā*, the source of internal organs. When *avidyā* is destroyed by *jñāna* and the *Sākṣin* or subject element is realized as the *Brahman* which it always is. So, the *ahamkāra* or *avidyā* oriented object element is not permanent element, objective case of the First Person- Singular Number i.e. 'Me' must hold small letter in English Language following general rules of using pronoun.

As the Supreme Being, God is regarded as the qualified substance (*viśeṣa* or *prakāri*), the immanent inner controller (*antaryāmi*), and the unchanging Mover of this world process. God is the unchanging controller of all changes and the limitations of matter as well as the miseries and imperfections of the individual souls do not affect the essence of God. In no condition He identifies Himself as body or matter or object. So, he has no objective case in true sense. The objective use of the pronoun instead of Supreme Being is of no use in reality but colloquial use is pseudo and so the objective case of the pronoun, replaced by the Supreme Being holds capital letter as the beginning letter everywhere in English Language. The use of the capital letter as the beginning letter of the objective case of the pronoun, used instead of the Supreme Being, shows a difference between the use of that particular pronoun and that of the other pronouns. The objective cases of all other pronouns fall under general category and so, follow the general rules but the objective case of the Supreme Being is exceptional.

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