Dimensions of Ultimate Experience- Aham Brahmasmi

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The Vedas and Upaniṣads are the unquestionable sources on the Knowledge of the Ultimate Truth. These authoritatively declare the essence of Truth as Brahman, the consciousness beyond all empirical existence. Brahman is the innermost principle of being that stimulates the nature of every realm of mind, every sense organ and after all, the body itself. With the help of numerous examples Upaniṣads proclaim the meanness of all material objects by inculcating the real value of the omnipresent consciousness which can be experienced in the human birth itself. Human birth occurs when the merits and sins of a being in his birth is brought to equal measure. The entry to the human world is in fact a blessing in the sense that those who are keen to pursue the path of merit by involving in virtuous deeds and attaining true knowledge. The heritage of India unveiled in the authentic texts of Upaniṣads enunciates the scheme of living appropriate for a man with integrity towards knowledge.

The perspective of Upaniṣads in the realm of philosophical observation and true knowledge is epigrammatic in the four Mahāvākyas- "Ayamātma Brahma", "Prajñānam Brahma", "Tattvamasi" and "Aham Brahmāsmi". By conceiving oneself in all other beings, one has to proceed for the goal of human birth which is otherwise indicated as the liberation. From the impermanent experiences gained from the material world, a real adherent of the path leading to liberation moves deliberately to the state of renunciation and invalidate the objective world. In the journey towards the attainment of true knowledge, he approaches the competent

preceptor who lives in the Brahmaniṣtha. Being realized of the capability of the newcomer, the preceptor advises him the great version of knowledge dealing with his own self. The principle of self pervaded in the objective world is discriminatively taught to him with the help of examples. The aspirant strives to grasp the meaning of the ideas presented by the preceptor. When the preceptor becomes confident of the competency of the aspirant, he advises him the noblest concept of "Tattvamasi". He becomes overwhelmed with the unique experience of the luster of knowledge. This experience of indefinable bliss leads him to the discriminative knowledge "Aham Brahmāsmi" (अहम् ब्रह्मास्मि) - 'I am Bramhan' [1]. The entire theory of Advaita Vedanta can be understood from this Mahāvākya. The main concern of this deliberation is that if you know how to look and learn the door is there and the key is in your hand. Nobody else can give you the key or the door to unlock the truth except yourself. The fact is that if one knows how to learn through self-observation one can see that the body has its own intelligence inherent in it, but it requires a great deal of sharp thinking to observe it. The understanding of this intelligence is Self-Knowledge that is the knowledge of the whole universe, gross or subtle including the whole of the humanity. The more you understand the self the more clarity on truth will be there. Self knowledge has no end. Nor does one can come to an achievement or conclusion of something different. Self-knowledge is an endless river.

Now, coming to the Mahāvākya: Brahmāsmi (अहम् ब्रह्मास्मि) - it implies that अहम् ब्रह्म अस्मि "I am Bramhan" ie ; I am not different from Brahman. But from the contextual premise of thinking it can be read as: अहम् अस्मि ब्रह्म - I myself is Brahman. According to Sankara, Brahman knew "I am Brahman," not I or anything else. It is the seer of sight. It is that which is immediate and direct self within. It can be described as that which is beyond all and everything that exists. Sankara clearly asserts that God knows God and none but God can only know Himself. In the very process of knowing everything that is transitory falls of. All becomes one when the knowledge of the Truth as Brahman occurs. The implication here is that whether one is a sinner or saint, merge into this great Wisdom. It

is significant to note that this union does in no way affect the Wisdom. In this context it is required to understand that अहम् ब्रह्म अस्मि points to Brahman, He only knows Himself as Brahman whereas, अहम् अस्मि ब्रह्म implies that the understanding refers to the person who can claim that he is Brahman, for, he has the self-knowledge which is the knowledge about Brahman that can be had through the referential texts –the Vedas and Upaniṣads. As Brahman alone can say that अहम् ब्रह्म अस्मि, this is not at the level of any individual existence. The same can be put in another way: Description is not that which is described. The Vedas and Upaniṣads disclose that Brahman can be known only in Its knowable form as described in these texts as such and such. Truly speaking, Brahman is beyond that and is not that which is described. If one is caught in the described you cannot know the description and in this sense one can claim that अहम् अस्मि ब्रह्म " I myself is Brahman", but in reality he is not. The experience of a true scholar proceeding through the path of knowledge is well explained in the Upaniṣadic elaboration, "ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति"[2]. The knower of the Brahman becomes the Brahman itself. When an aspirant who is desirous of imbibing brahmavidyā knows (veda) "Brahman" in the way this Upaniṣad has shown, then his own Ātman also becomes Brahman itself (Brahmaiva bhavati). Here, there is a need to acknowledge the point of oneself becoming Brahmarūpa. Further, to quote :तद्विज्ञानेन परिपश्यन्ति धीरा आनन्दरूपममृतं यद् विभाति"[3] . "Tadvijñānena" based on the context this means that the wise see that divine blissful being by getting a thorough knowledge of that becoming brahmarupa and enjoing the आनन्दरूपममृतं and shining there. Does this mean that the jīva enjoying the eternal bliss has become one with Brahman? This is the truth disclosed by the Upaniṣad and as Angira Muni closes with the words, "तदेतत् सत्यम्"– "Tadetat satyam" – "O Shaunaka! Whatever I have said till now is the supreme truth. This is the ultimate eternal principle. Do not doubt it" [4]. Taking in view the elaboration on the Brahmāsmi whatever the Upaniṣad says is related to the अहम् अस्मि ब्रह्म and not अहम् ब्रह्म अस्मि, for, Brahman alone can say that I am Brahman and all other exhibits on Him are bhāvasvarūpa that one has to stay in this premise till all to get absorbed in Brahman. Then only it can be said by Brahman "I am

Brahman and there is nothing second leading to Knowledge of Brahman. Thus, this Upaniṣad concludes with the explanation of the supreme truth, as the bhāvasvarūpa of Brahman. Again, there is another point in discussing the explication on "ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति" that-when one says "Brahmavid", if one looks into the deeper implication of the term it can be said that there is the distinction of Brahman and the knowers of Brahman which does not satisfy the logical condition of अहम् ब्रह्म अस्मि,. The enjoyment of आनन्दरूपममृतं and विभाति also point out to such a discretion. The oneness with Brahman which is the ultimate truth comes in time when all lives are absorbed by Brahman in destruction (laya) and later comes out during creation in a different cyclic process. It is like when death comes it does not ask one when it should take place; it comes and then goes, takes oneself. It destroys you on the spot. Once again, as the Upaniṣads disclose, it can be said that one who knows Brahman, really, he does not know but thinks that He is known. Actually, one who knows Brahman becomes Brahman Himself and there is nothing else.

Considering the nature of Brahman, It is said that " नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन। यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूं स्वाम् ॥"[5] . Then Brahman cannot be attained by descriptions as this or that. Then how can one say that I am Brahman ? ब्रह्म वा इदमग्र आसीत्तदात्मानमेवावेत् । अहं ब्रह्मास्मीति । तस्मात्तत्सर्वमभवत्तद्यो यो देवानां प्रत्यबुध्यत स एव तदभवत्तथर्षीणां तथा मनुष्याणां तद्धैतत्पश्यन्नृषिर्वामदेवः प्रतिपेदेऽहं मनुरभवं सूर्यश्चेति । तदिदमप्येतर्हि य एवं वेदाहं ब्रह्मास्मीति स इदं सर्वं भवति ॥[6] : This self was indeed Brahman in the beginning. Then, It knew itself only as "I am Brahman." Therefore it became all. Because Brahman was alone in the beginning it knew Itself as Brahman and there only अहम् ब्रह्म अस्मि has its relevance which is beyond the premise of human cognition. Along with that it is also said that one who experiences this in the pristine pure realm of intelligence also becomes this all-pervaded Brahman. The rare experience of oneself and the whole universe as Brahman is much difficult to be attained. Even then, the meaning of human birth finds its perfection in this experience alone. The eradication of false views on Brahman leads one to the essential knowledge of oneself beyond comparison.

References :

1. Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.10 of the Yajur Veda
2. Mundaka Upaniṣad: 3/2/9)
3. Mundaka Upaniṣad: 2/2/8).
4. Mundaka Upaniṣad: 3/2/11)
5. Mundakopaniṣad. III.ii. 4)
6. Brhadaranyakopaniṣad.1/4/10