Sadvidya Journal of Sanskrit and Indian Knowledge Systems
DOI: 10.18311/sadvid/2024/48148

Prajñānetro Lokah

V. Vasanthakumari

Professor, Department of Vedanta, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady - 683574, Kerala, India;
vasanthavasudha@ssus.ac.in

Abstract

The Upaniṣadic statement *prajñānetro lokah* means the world is led by *prajñā* i.e. consciousness. The entire world gets its eye from consciousness. The ordinary meaning of the term 'consciousness' may be an awareness of something i.e. consciousness of right, consciousness of gratitude, etc. and it is the concrete sense of the word. Consciousness means 'awareness of something within oneself and the state or fact of being aware of an external object, state or fact' (Panda, N. C. Mind and supermind. D K Print world, 1: P-1). In the Penguin Dictionary of Psychology, the term consciousness is used to characterise the mental state of a person capable of having sensations and perceptions reacting to stimuli, having feeling emotion etc. But it has an abstract or general sense i.e. the general power that enables one to see, to hear, to speak, to understand, to enjoy etc. is also consciousness. In the Upaniṣads, the word is mostly used in this general sense and consciousness is placed as the cosmic existence. The article tries to establish how *Prajñā* or consciousness exists as the support and eye of this universe.

Keywords: *Cetanā, Consciousness, Lokah, Prajñānam, Prajñānetrah*

1. Introduction

Consciousness is the most mysterious and fundamental thing in Indian philosophy. The Upaniṣadic term *Prajñā* is meant as consciousness. Aitareyopaniṣad states that the whole universe exists with the support of consciousness. Śrī Śankara, the great *Advaita* philosopher explains consciousness in different senses such as *Avabodha* (awareness) and eternal cosmic existence etc. He considers it as the general consciousness, behaving like a central entity imparting consciousness to all. The whole universe has consciousness as its eye. It is the support of the entire universe. It is a principle as it imparts consciousness to all organs to carry on their functions. Aitareyopaniṣad says: *Prajñanetro lokah prajña pratiṣthā prajñanam brahma* (Aitareyopaniṣad- III- 1-3).

All creatures, that move and fly and of all that does not move are sustained by consciousness. This consciousness is pristine purity-pure consciousness or *prajñānam.* The literal meaning of *prajñānam* means pure or superior consciousness.

All sentient creatures merge in a conscious entity called '*Existence*' which is the cause of the universe i.e. cosmic existence. Śrī Śankara says: Absolute existence is the same as pure consciousness. A*tha sattaiva ca bodho bodha eva ca satta.* The root of this *samsara* tree is certainly pure, resplendent and of the form of the light of the self which is consciousness.

Though it is devoid of all attributes being known as the basis of the universe, it does exist, for it is an acknowledged fact that for the effects to dissolve there must exist something. Śrī Śankara says that consciousness exists and it is known to us because the body and the senses in their association are seen to perform their vital and organic functions. This achievement of unity for serving a general purpose is not possible unless there is intelligence which is not a part of this association. He says-*evam vāyavyāh aindriyakāsca ceṣṭāh samhataih kāryakaraṇair nirvartyamāna dṛśyante, taścaikārtha vṛttitvena samhananam nāntareṇa cetanamasamhatam sambhavati* (Taitiriyopaniṣad Śānkara bhāṣya -II-7-1).

He also says: "*Brahma* ātmatvena *prasiddhamasti*". *Brahaman* exists in the form of Ātmā. In Gītabhāṣya

**Author for correspondence*

Article Received on: 06.12.2024 *Peer-reviewed* Accepted on: 15.10.2024

he says that *cetana* is *buddhi* (intellect) which manifests itself in the aggregate of body and senses- *"kāryakāraṇa sanghāte nityābhivyakta buddhivṛttih cetanā"*. (Bhagavadgītā Śānkara bhāṣya - X- 22) In another context Śrī Śankara states: By the self to which belongs eternal consciousness as heat to fire, all the different states of mind such as pleasure, pain and delusion are perceived. He says that nothing can be produced from nothing and that the universe has its origin in a positive entity i.e. 'cetanā'. *satah eva aṇimnah sthūlam nāmarūpādimat kāryam jagadutpannam* (Chāndogyopaniṣad Śānkara bhāṣya - VI- 12-2).

The general consciousness, which is *prajñāna* is the vital consciousness i.e. *jīva*. Aitareyopaniṣad says: That by which one sees, hears, smells or articulates, speech or knows taste and distaste is the soul**.** *Jīva* being a principle of consciousness must certainly be matter less, devoid of matter. It is said to radiate the power of consciousness to all organs.

Prajñānam i.e. vital consciousness is a power of immense capabilities. In individuals, it manifests generally a life and particularly as the power of perception, comprehension, reflection, recollection, imagination, insight, thought, desire, emotion, impulse, will, firmness, vivacity etc. In *Aitareyopaniṣad bhāṣya* Śrī Śankara defines each term used for vital consciousness i.e. *samjñānam, vijñānam, ajñānam* etc.- *samjñānam-samjapti, vijñānam- kalādiparijñānam...* (Aitareyopaniṣad- III-1-2.) In *Gītabhāṣya* Śrī Śankara distinguishes *vijñānam* and *jñānam-jñānam nāma* śāstratah ācāryatah *ca* ātmādīnām *avabodhah. Vijñānam viśeṣatah anubhavah* (Bhagavadgītā Śānkara bhāṣya - III- 41.)

Vijñānam in Sanskrit is used to denote a specific consciousness i.e. consciousness of facts, objects, ideas etc. His *Taitiriyopaniṣad bhāṣya* also explains consciousness as *avabodha- jñānam brahmeti jñānam jñāptih avabodhah.* The consciousness of *Brahman* is inseparable from the nature of *Brahman* like light from the sun or heat from fire for it is its very nature- *"yad brahmaṇo vijñānam tat savitṛprakāśavadagnyuṣṇavacca brahmaswarūpāvyatiriktam swarūpameva tat"; na tatkāraṇāntarasavyapekṣam* (Taitiriyopaniṣad Śānkara bhāṣya -II-1-1). The light of the consciousness or *Brahman* is reflected on whatever has been created and thus some amount of consciousness is induced in all creatures. Śrī Śankara says that there is nothing in the world which is fully devoid of consciousness. He ascertains that *Brahman* is the original reservoir of consciousness which serves as the source of consciousness for all others. Sri Ramakrishna Deva explains *Vijñāna* as follows- "It is to know God distinct by realising his existence through an intuitive experience and to speak to him intimately". He clearly states that these and other similar functions of the internal organ, being the means of perception of the witness who is pure consciousness, constitute the limiting adjuncts of *Brahman* that is of the nature of pure consciousness.

While explaining consciousness as *antaryāmi*, Śrī Śankara says the self indeed is the inner consciousness of the entire creature and that it is self-knowing by ascertaining the self is to be of that nature itself. Thus the consciousness of all beings derives the power from the consciousness of the self. Consciousness is all-pervading but it is imperceivable. It is perceived up to the tip of the nail, as a razor lies in a sheath occupying a part of it or as fire rests in the wood but pervading it entirely. According to him plants also have consciousness. They also experience pleasure and pain. He says: *cetanāvantah sthāvarāh* (Chāndogyopaniṣad -VI-11-2). In Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad it is stated that plants breathe with the help of *mahat brahman* i.e. consciousness.

The term *'prajñā'* is also used for *prāṇa*. As consciousness vibrates it is called *prāṇa*. *prānanneva prāṇo nāma bhavati. Prāṇa* is *prajñātma* as it is the power of producing physical activity. *Prajñātma* is the power of producing knowledge. As the fragments of *Brahman* that dwelt in body forms were called souls, the omnipresent *Brahman* came to be called the cosmic soul or God ahead. Sri Ramakrishna Deva says: One becomes unconscious by meditating on the universal consciousness (God). The Ātman is itself the light of consciousness by nature and it illuminates everything by the light of its *Caitanya*. The vital power of consciousness that is active everywhere must naturally be conscious of everything, every happening, every need, every fulfilment etc. Ātman is the vital principle. Its radiation of consciousness to the *Indriyas* enables them to function like conscious entities, to grasp sensations and transmit them to the brain. Then it receives impulses from the brain and translates them into action. When the Ātman leaves the body all the *Indriyas* lose their consciousness and become insensible and inert.

Sri Ramakrishna says "Losing consciousness by contemplating God through whose consciousness even inert matter appears to be conscious and hands, feet and body move! People say that the body moves of itself, but they do not know that it is God who moves it" (Gospel of Sri Rama Krishna. -II P- 915). Hence *prajñāna* or pure consciousness is Ātmā. So the general consciousness which is śuddha *caitanya* is the vital consciousness. It is the means of knowledge. This consciousness became designated as *Antaryāmi, Hiraṇyagarbha, Virāt, Devata* etc. *Prajña* is *Antaryāmi* as it is the impeller of all beings and it governs everything. *Virāt* is the firstborn being possessed of a body. *Hiraṇyagarbha* is the deity presiding over the *samastilingaśarīra* and *Virāt* presides over the *samaṣṭi sthūlaśarīra*. Thus all stand in consciousness or *prajñā* at all times in creation, preservation and destruction.

2. Conclusion

Advaita Vedanta upholds that knowledge may be viewed in two aspects: the empirical and metaphysical. Metaphysically the fundamental essence of knowledge is pure consciousness, beyond the relative duality of the knower and the known. Consciousness is the source and the end of everything. It is the radical and ultimate oneness of reality. Pure consciousness is self-luminous and self-existent. It is the non-relational non-dual reality. Empirical or relative knowledge is an expression of this pure consciousness through the mental mode of a cogniser. The empirical knowledge takes different relational forms according to the nature of the objects i.e. internal cognitions (subjective) which are psychological and external sense perceptions (objective) which are psychophysical. Hence *Advaitins* will reach the non-dual absolute pure consciousness only through a synthetic analysis of these subjective and objective forms. All enquiries on consciousness lead to the subtlest of all this witnessing consciousness, which cannot be negated.

3. References

English books

1. Gangaram Panda (2018). Sanakara's Interpretation of Upanisads, S. N. Publication, Delhi.
2. Jaya Shanmugam (2016) The Upanisads, Motilal Banarasidas Publications Pvt. Ltd., Delhi.
3. Panda N. C (1996). Mind and supermind, Vol -I D K Print world, New Delhi.

Sanskrit books

4. Bhagavadgītā Śānkara bhāṣyam (1988), Motilal Banarasidas Publications Pvt. Ltd., Delhi.
5. Ekādaśopaniṣadah (1996), Motilal Banarasidas Publications Pvt. Ltd., Delhi.
6. Prasthānatraya Bhāṣya, Panoli. V. (2008), 5 volumes, 3rd Edition, Mathrubhumi Publishers, Kozhikode.