

Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the April 2013 issue)

BRAHMAN CONDITIONED by maya and having the qualities of omnipresence and omniscience is the cause of the universe. However, in reality it is Satchidananda, non-dual, and self-luminous. Brahman alone is the meaning of all the scriptures, and it alone is called *pratyagatman*, inmost Self, by the Shaivites and realized by the *jivanmuktas*. This Brahman has been expounded and now, in the next twenty-five verses, the views stating entities other than Brahman as the cause of the universe are quashed, and the stance of Advaita is being gloriously established. In the next eight verses all the opponents are summarily set aside.

सांख्यैः प्रख्यापितं न क्षममिह जगतां निर्मितौतत्रधानं
हेतुर्नैतादृशोऽर्थे प्रभवति गदितस्तार्किकैरीश्वरोऽपि ।
नाणुः काणादबौद्धक्षपणकभणितो नापि निस्साक्षिशून्यं
तस्मादास्माकमेव श्रुतिगदितपरब्रह्मसिद्धं निदानम् ॥ १६ ॥

The Pradhana spoken of by Sankhya and Yoga (philosophies) is not capable of creating this universe. The Ishvara posited as the efficient cause of the universe by Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Tantra, and Pashupatas is also incapable of creating this universe. The atom propounded by the Buddhists, Arhats, and Vaisheshikas is also not capable of creating the universe. The Shunya propounded by Shunyavadins is also not capable of creation. Therefore, the Parabrahman spoken of in our scriptures is alone the primal cause of the universe.

The creation of the universe is an act that cannot be conceived by our minds because the universe itself is beyond our comprehension. By seeing a pot we can infer that it is made up of clay. Similarly seeing the external world and our inner selves, we conclude that the world is made up of differences, happiness, misery, and delusion and, accordingly, infer that this world should be made up of something having the same qualities. That is why Sankhya holds that the universe is created by Pradhana, Prakriti. However, to posit that Pradhana, which is not conscious, can create a universe for the purpose of exhausting the karmas and for the liberation of the conscious soul, by modifying principles like *mahat*, cosmic mind, is nothing but a imagination of one's brain. When the universe involves upon dissolution, *pralaya*, the modifications of *mahat* and the other principles also go away. Pradhana, which has the three *gunas* of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in equilibrium, is incapable of creating the universe. It is seen in practice that even small constructions like a portico of a house are efficiently done by persons with deliberate and conscious efforts and not by non-conscious things. Therefore, Pradhana, being non-conscious, does not have the capability to create the universe.

Now we see another school of thought. Indeed, each one of the objects in the universe has the same changeful nature. Let it be so. Then,

the special Purusha—Ishvara, untouched by afflictions or the results of actions, independent, conscious, and beyond grasp—creates the universe consisting of earth and other elements, just like the creation of objects like a pot. The Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Tantra, and Pashupata philosophies consider Ishvara to be the efficient cause of the universe, but Ishvara is also incapable of creating the universe. There is a possibility of one argument leading to another and various contradictory inferences being drawn. So, following the statements of the scriptures, we can hold that Ishvara cannot be the efficient cause of the universe. The arguments of Ishvara being the efficient cause of the universe have been quashed. Now arguments of other things being the material cause of the universe are being set aside.

The Vaisheshikas, Buddhists—Sautrantrika and Vaibhasika—and the Arhats hold that the *anu*, atom, is the material cause of the universe. Their line of argument runs thus: A cloth is made of threads, threads are made up of fibres, and fibres are in turn made from cotton. If one traces the source of each of these objects in this series, one ends up with the most basic unit, the atoms. Two atoms join together to form dyads, which in turn create different kinds of matter, like the four basic elements—earth, water, fire, and air. This is the opinion of the Vaisheshikas. The Buddhists believe that the atoms are the basic units, which are ephemeral and take the form of different objects, both inside and outside of us. Both these schools of thought essentially hold the same view in this respect. However, this is not how the universe is created. Curd is formed from the transformation of milk, just as a sprout is formed from the transformation of a seed. In both the cases the cause does not remain in its original form. This kind of transformation of the cause into the effect creates a difference

called *parināma-bheda*, difference arising out of the transformation of one thing to another. Here we do not see such transformation either in the case of the *mahat* or of the atom, and so neither of them can be held to be the material cause of the universe. In this case, even if we were to accept them to be the material cause of the universe, the cause and the effect do not come together. A tree and its branches are different only in form, but in essence they are the same tree. Similarly, in the present context, even if we were to accept that there is transformation, we do not see any new substance being created, and so we cannot accept the position of the presence of a cause and an effect here.

It is established that neither the *mahat* nor the atom are the material cause of the universe. The Shunyavadins hold that Shunya is the cause of the universe. Shunyavadins believe that since in this kind of creation of the effect upon the transformation of the cause, the cause is non-existent, existence comes out of non-existence. That cannot be, because we see that when a pot is made out of clay or a sprout comes out a seed, the previous forms of the causes are destroyed and a new form is created, due to the transformation of the cause that existed then. Nothing can come out of nothing. In his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, Acharya Shankara says:

The nihilists do not admit any lasting and persisting cause (inhering in the effect), so that their view amounts to saying that something comes out of nothing. And they show that existence comes out of non-existence when they assert, 'The effect cannot arise without destroying the cause; for the sprout comes out of a seed when the latter is destroyed and a pot out of a lump of clay when the latter is destroyed. Were a product to come out of an unchanging cause, anything could come out of anything and anywhere; for the cause is common to all.' Thus since (according to them) the sprout and the

rest emerge from the seed and the rest when these latter get swallowed up in non-existence, they conclude that existence comes out of non-existence.

With regard to this we say: Existence does not come out of non-existence. If something can come out of nothing, then it becomes useless to refer to special kinds of causes, since non-existence as such is indistinguishable everywhere. There is no distinction, as regards the nature of non-existence, between the non-existence arising from the destruction of the seed and the rest and the horn of a hare, both being equally unsubstantial (false). Had there been any distinction, then only would the assertion of such separate causality be meaningful as, 'The sprout comes out of the seed alone, and the curd out of the milk alone'. But when an indistinguishable non-existence is posited as the cause, the sprout and the rest may as well spring out of a hare's horn and the like. This is, however, contradicted by experience. If, again, distinctive attributes be ascribed to non-existence on the analogy of the lotus etc. having (features) like blueness etc., then on that very analogy of objects like lotus etc., non-existence will turn into existence by the very fact of possessing distinctive qualities. Moreover, non-existence can never be the source of anything, precisely because it is non-existent like the hare's horn etc. Were existence to arise out of non-existence, all the effects would be imbued with non-existence. But that goes against experience, for all things are perceived to exist as positive entities with their respective distinguishing features.⁹⁰

Acharya Shankara quashes Shunyavada again in his commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and considers it even unworthy of refutation: 'As for the view of the nihilist, since it is contradicted by all the evidences of knowledge, no attempt is being made to refute it.'⁹¹ However, some modern scholars opine that Acharya Shankara was too harsh with Buddhism and

did not take the concept of Shunyavada in the proper sense:

Shaṅkara takes the word 'Shūnya' in the sense of mere negation and says that Shūnyavāda which is pure nihilism is contradicted by all valid means of cognition. It stands self-condemned. The Shūnyavādin, says Shaṅkara, cannot legitimately negate all phenomenal practices unless he finds higher truth (*anyattattva*). Shaṅkara therefore summarily dismisses Shūnyavāda taking it to be below criticism. But really Shūnyavāda does admit such higher truth (*Tattva*) and is absolutism.⁹²

However, we stick to the stance of Acharya Shankara as, by far, his philosophy is most rational, as Swami Vivekananda says: 'Shankaracharya arose and once more revived the Vedanta philosophy. He made it a rationalistic philosophy. In the Upanishads the arguments are often very obscure. By Buddha the moral side of the philosophy was laid stress upon, and by Shankaracharya, the intellectual side. He worked out, rationalised, and placed before men the wonderful coherent system of Advaita.'⁹³

Who witnesses Shunya? For every phenomenon there should be a witness. If Shunya is to be accepted, then some entity should witness it. If no one witnesses Shunya, then it cannot exist. In creation and dissolution, does Shunya have a witness or not, or is it the cause? If we were to hold that Shunya does have a witness, then it cannot be held any further that Shunya is the cause of the universe, because the witness will precede Shunya. If we were to hold that there is no witness of Shunya, then its very entity cannot be established, forget about holding it as the cause of the universe. When a sprout comes out of a seed, the seed-form is destroyed. When a pot is made from clay, the clay-form is destroyed. However, the effects, the sprout and the pot, do have the characteristics of the seed and the clay and so,

the seed and the clay are the material causes of the sprout and the pot respectively. This illustration does not have any contradiction. Even the cause here, which is the seed or the clay, cannot be said to have come from Shunya. Every transformation takes place in a positive entity. There cannot be a transformation from non-existence. Therefore, there is no valid proof for holding that Shunya is the cause of the universe. And so, based on the teachings of the Upanishads, we, the Advaitins, hold that Brahman alone is the efficient and material cause of the universe.

The viewpoint of Sankhya has been summarily set aside in the last verse. However, an allegation could be raised: how can one hold that some persons desirous of seeking liberation have lesser intellect as they too have their faculties of understanding and reasoning. Even the scriptures extol sage Kapila, the propounder of Sankhya philosophy: 'The sage Kapila, when he was born in the beginning, and whom he (God) saw as he was being born.'⁹⁴ He had many disciples who have created a tradition, have proclaimed his omniscience, and have put forth varied arguments in support of his philosophy. They have reaffirmed the means of liberation mentioned in his books. However, they have got into a path of delusion.

It is a case of *andha-go-laṅgūla-nyāya*, the maxim of the blind man and the bull's tail. This maxim is based on a story. There was a son who had wealthy parents and was brought up in luxury. He always indulged in sense pleasures and extravaganza. He had friends who used his wealth for their enjoyment. Once he invited his friends for hunting in the forest. When the excitement of hunting was at its peak, his friends took him to a lonely spot in the forest, drugged him, robbed him of all his money and valuables, blinded him, and fled. Deserted, he tried going home, but could not. A rogue saw his

condition and decided to make fun of him. The rogue guided the blind man's hand to the tail of a wild bull and said, 'Hold on to this. It will lead you home.' The rogue then hit the bull hard and made it run. The blind man listened to the advice and held on to the tail even after getting knocked around by the bull, which was running amok. He did not leave the tail because he believed in the words of the rogue whom he considered his saviour. Such is the predicament of people who blindly believe in dualistic philosophies in utter discard to the noble path shown by the Vedas. Such people lose their resolve. Therefore, in the next verse the path shown by the tradition of teachers, including Badarayana and Acharya Shankara, is being reaffirmed and the view of Sankhya is being completely, and specially, countered following *pradhāna-mallānyāya* or the maxim of defeating the leader of the wrestlers. The maxim is that if one has to defeat many opponents, it is enough if the chief opponent is completely defeated, and then the other opponents automatically lose ground. It is in this spirit that the next verse quashes the Sankhya view.

(To be continued)

References

90. Acharya Shankara, commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra*, 2.2.25–6, in *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Śāṅkarācārya*, tr. Swami Gambhirananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2011), 414–15.
91. Acharya Shankara, commentary on *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.3.7, in *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Śāṅkarācārya*, tr. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), 439.
92. Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2003), 272.
93. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.139.
94. *Shvetashvatara Upaniṣad*, 5.2.