Svarajya Siddhih: *Attaining Self-dominion*

Gangadharendra Saraswati

(*Continued from the previous issue*)

Is Ajñāna Abhāva*?*

The method of *pratyakṣa*, perception, leads to the universal, clear, and unambiguous cognition of ignorance, such as 'I am ignorant; I do not know me properly; I do not know Brahman'. However, this is not the *sāmānya-abhāva*, general absence, of knowledge, *jñāna*. In Indian logic, in the relation of *saṁyoga* or contact between two entities, one entity is a *pratiyogi*, adjunct, the superstratum; the other is an *anuyogi*, subjunct, or the substratum. When you see a pot on the floor, the pot is the *pratiyogi* and the floor is the *anuyogi*. In the case of fire and smoke, smoke is the *pratiyogi* and fire is the *anuyogi*. In the case of a fire on a mountain, fire is the *pratiyogi* and the mountain is the *anuyogi*. However, in Indian logic, *abhāva* or absence is recognized as a positive cognition. For example, when we say, 'there is no pot on the floor', there is a cognition opposite to that of 'there is a pot on the floor'. The latter is a positive cognition and the former is a negative cognition. Therefore, *abhāva*, non-existence, or absence is a real fact. However, the cognition of non-existence or absence requires previous knowledge of the entity that is absent. How do I know that the pot is not on the floor if I have not seen any pot earlier? The entity of which *abhāva* is cognized is called *pratiyogi* or the counter-positive. In the case of the absence of the pot on the floor, the pot is the *pratiyogi* and the ground is the *anuyogi* or *dharmi*. In the case of an empty water tank, water is the *pratiyogi* and the tank is the *dharmi*.

Ajñāna, ignorance, is not a general absence of *jñāna*, because cognition of the absence of *jñāna* will require that *jñāna* be the *pratiyogi* or that there be the previous knowledge of *jñāna*, which is absurd. So, because of the absence of the *dharmi-pratiyogi* correlation, the general absence of knowledge is not proved. Moreover, the cognition of ignorance of knowledge is exhibited in statements like 'me' and 'mine' and there cannot be a general absence of such knowledge that is not known before. The relation between ignorance and knowledge is not like the relation between an empty water tank and water. Because knowledge does not occur in ignorance, the relation is not of a superstratum and substratum. In the case of absence in a substratum other than where the object in question is generally found, the counter-positive-ness has a distinguishing characteristic. For

example, when one says 'the cloth does not exist in the jar', the existence of the cloth is denied, and so it is the counter-positive. A jar is a different substratum than the cloth and hence the property of jar—jar-hood—is the distinguishing characteristic, *avacchedaka*, of the counter-positive-ness of this *abhāva*, non-existence, of the jar in the cloth. Similarly, when a cake is absent in a pudding, the cake-ness is the distinguishing characteristic of the counter-positive-ness of this absence. This kind of absence is called *avacchinna-pratiyogītā-abhāva*, non-existence with a counter-positive-ness distinguished by a characteristic. Ignorance is not a non-existence with a counter-positive-ness distinguished by the characteristics of certitude of Atman, valid knowledge, Self-realization, and the like, because these experiences occur in the same substratum or person where ignorance occurs. Also, the cognition 'I do not know Brahman' is always present in the person who is ignorant.

Ignorance is also not *prāgabhāva*, previous non-existence, because such a previous non-existence is not admitted here. Even if it were to be admitted, there is no counter-positive and there is no concurrence of the counter-positive. Further, none will admit the counter-positive-ness distinguished by the general characteristic of knowledge in this previous non-existence. Previous non-existence of ignorance cannot be admitted because ignorance is beginningless. Ignorance is also not *atyantābhāva*, absolute non-existence, because it is destroyed at the dawn of knowledge, as taught in the Bhagavadgita: 'But those whose ignorance is destroyed by the knowledge [of the Self],'[16] and 'Destroyed is my delusion and I have gained my memory' (18.73). Ignorance is a positive entity, which is the root of all duality and which obscures the reality and distracts one from it.

Types of Renunciation

All actions have to be given up following the procedure mentioned in the scriptures, and the aspirant has to humbly approach the guru. The guru should be a person who has realized Brahman, has renounced the world, and is the best teacher among mendicants. He should be capable of removing the ignorance of the disciple by teaching him the essence of Vedanta. The lotus-feet of such a guru should be saluted and he should be served by word, mind, and actions to attain the knowledge of Brahman through spiritual practices like hearing, cogitating, and meditating on the teachings of the Vedanta.

Objection: It is not proper to renounce actions as the scriptures prohibit the giving up of actions, both *nitya* and *naimittika*, through statements like, 'by doing karma, indeed, should one wish to live here for a hundred years,'[17] and, 'having offered the desirable wealth to the teacher, do not cut off the line of progeny.'[18]

Reply: Without sannyasa or renunciation you cannot do spiritual practices like hearing, cogitating, and meditating, and hence sannyasa is necessary. Persons belonging to the other stages of life like Brahmacharya, Grihastha, and Vanaprastha can do these spiritual practices only when not performing actions.

Objection: It was while being engaged as very active householders that persons such as Janaka, Yajnavalkya, and Ajatashatru performed these practices and became established in Brahman. And so, it is quite possible to attain the knowledge of Brahman being engaged in actions, there is no need for renunciation.

Reply: This is not so. The Shruti presents three stages of life or ashramas, 'there are three divisions of virtue',[19] and says that 'all these become the attainers of the virtuous worlds; the man established in Brahman attains immortality'

(ibid.). Thus, persons belonging to the three ashramas other than the Sannyasa ashrama only can attain the virtuous worlds. The term 'established in Brahman' by meaning clearly indicates that only monks attain immortality.

Objection: How can the term 'established in Brahman' point only to monks as that is not the derivative meaning?

Reply: Here the conventional meaning should be taken into account and not the derivative meaning. The term 'established in Brahman' denotes a total absorption in Brahman and absence of other activities. This is not possible for persons belonging to the other three stages or ashramas because the Shruti or the Vedas speak of sin being incurred on the non-performance of the duties enjoined upon one's stage of life. However, the monk has renounced all actions according to the procedure prescribed by the Vedas and hence incurs no sin on non-performance of actions. Being steadfast in Brahman through spiritual practices like the restraint of the mind, the restraint of sense organs, is the appropriate duty of a monk.[20] So has it been said: 'In meditation of the Vedantic truth one should pass one's time till the approach of sleep and so on till death; never should one allow the least quarter to sensuous desires in the mind.'[21] This establishes that the term 'established in Brahman' refers only to a monk. Also, the possibility of persons belonging to the other stages of life being constantly engaged in spiritual practices is quashed. Persons in these stages of life can perform spiritual practices and realize Brahman. The narrative of the scriptures gives only an indication towards the possibility of these persons attaining knowledge, but their right to knowledge cannot go against the injunctions of the Vedas to perform their duties of various actions like sacrifices. If it were not so, the indication in the statement, 'the sacrifice is taking place in the cows' would imply that cows have a right to perform sacrifices instead of the intended meaning of the sentence that the sacrifice is taking place in the cowshed.

(*To be continued*)

References

16 Bhagavadgita, 5.16.
17. *Isha Upanishad*, 2.
18. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 1.11.1.
19. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 2.23.1.
20. For a similar discussion see Shankaracharya's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* 3.4, 18–20.
21. Quoted in *Laghu Vākya Vṛtti* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1998), 35–6. Also see *Siddhantalesha Sangraha*, 1.14.

The attainment of the Absolute is called the Knowledge of Brahman. But it is extremely difficult to acquire. A man cannot acquire the Knowledge of Brahman unless he completely rids himself of his attachment to the world. When the Divine Mother was born as the daughter of King Himalaya, She showed Her various forms to Her father. The king said, 'I want to see Brahman.' Thereupon the Divine Mother said: 'Father, if that is your desire, then you must seek the company of holy men. You must go into solitude, away from the world, and now and then live in holy company.'

The manifold has come from the One alone, the Relative from the Absolute. There is a state of consciousness where the many disappears, and the One, as well; for the many must exist as long as the One exists. Brahman is without comparison. It is impossible to explain Brahman by analogy. It is between light and darkness. It is Light, but not the light that we perceive, not material light.

—*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 307