

A Study of ‘Akṣara-puruṣottama’ Philosophy in ‘Swāminārāyaṇa-Siddhanta-Sudhā’

C. Upender Rao*

Abstract

The theory of Akṣara-puruṣottama darṣana has been logically established in Swāminārāyaṇa-siddhānta-sudhā, authored by pūjya Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa, the Sanskrit scholar and one of the prominent Mahārāj of the Smāminārāyaṇa tradition in the world. Akṣara-puruṣottama-theory was taught by Parabrahma Sahajānanda which is evolved from Vedic traditions and based on the Sanātana Dharma. This theory was described as a Parāvidyā, Ādhyātma-vidyā, Brahma-jñāna and Brahma-vidyā. Akṣara-Brahma is distinct from the Para-Brahma-Puruṣottama (Nārāyaṇa) who is the source of even Brahma and the cause for its origin. Ātman with the association of Akṣara-Brahman, has to serve the Para-brahma like a servant. This relation between Brahma and Para-Brahman is called ‘Swāmi-sevaka-bhāva’. Akṣara puruṣottama school of philosophy states that akṣara Brahman is distinct from parabrahman unlike the Advaita school of Vedānta. This school is closer to the philosophy of Dvaita vedānta, propounded by the great Pūrṇa Prajña where two distinct entities have been accepted by him.

Keywords: Akṣara-Brahman, Para-Brahman, Vedānta, Smāminārāyaṇa, Dvaita, Jīva, Brahma.

Introduction:

The theory of Akṣara-puruṣottama darṣana is very prominent and ancient. This theory has been logically established in Swāminārāyaṇa-siddhānta-sudhā, authored by pūjya Mahāmahopādhyāya Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa, a Sanskrit scholar and one of the prominent mahārāj of the Smāminārāyaṇa tradition in the world. Akṣara-puruṣottama-theory was taught by Parabrahma Sahajānanda which is based and evolved from the Vedic tradition. Though Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa has put his arguments on this theory in his book in this 21st century, which was in fact already established by his great teacher ‘Parabrahma Sahajānanda’, it is entirely based on Hindu Sanātana Dharma. This theory was described as a Parāvidyā (Muṇḍakopaniṣad, I. I.4,5), Ādhyātma-vidyā, Brahmajñāna and Brahma-vidyā (Vedānta darṣana, I.1.1,2) as described in whole Bhagavadgītā and Upaniṣads. Pūjya Sahajānanda swamiji used to say in his speeches that ‘in the path of Brahmajñāna one should know that Brahma

*Ph.D., Professor of Sanskrit and Pali, School of Sanskrit and Indic Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 110067, India, skt.scholar@gmail.com

is the Nirvikāra and Niraṁśa’, which means that Brahma is unchangeable and without his shares or portions. This Brahman is ultimate source of prakṛti and puruṣa. he is called Akṣara-Brahman.

But this Akṣara-Brahman is separate from the Para-Brahma-Puruṣottama (Nārāyaṇa), who is the source of even Akṣara-Brahma and a cause for his origin. Therefore every human being having united his own individual soul (jīvātman) with the Akṣara-Brahman, has to worship the Para-Brahma like a Sevaka (servant) (Bhadreśa Dāsa, Sādhu, “Swāminārāyaṇa-siddhānta-sudhā”, इत्येवं विज्ञाय स्व-जीवात्मानं तेन ब्रह्मणा सहैकीकृत्य परब्रह्मणो स्व-स्वामिभावेनोपासनं कर्तव्यम्- प्रकथनम्). This unity of (jīvātman) with the Akṣara-Brahman is based on their qualities, not on their svarūpa, as the svarūpa of jīvātman and Akṣara-Brahman is totally different (Bhadreśa Dāsa, Sādhu, “Swāminārāyaṇa-siddhānta-sudhā”, न ह्यत्रोक्तमैक्यं स्वरूपैकतां वक्ति, अपि तु गुणादिसाम्यताम् etc. 8.2.2.1). Thus the relation between the Akṣara-Brahma and Para-Brahma is called ‘Swāmi-sevaka-bhāva’. (Relation between the lord and a servant).

The theory of Akṣara-puruṣottama darṣana as found in Upaniṣads

This Akṣara-puruṣottama-theory was present in all ancient texts of Vedic literature but it was mainly described in Upaniṣads. In spite of this, even most of the renowned teachers in India could not unfortunately perceive it. The Upaniṣads constitute the end part of the Vedas. Since they form the end part of the Vedas, they are also collectively known as the Vedānta. ‘Anta’ means, the end-portions and Veda means knowledge. Vedānta thus not only means the end-portions of the Vedas but also means the ultimate of all kinds of knowledge.

The Upaniṣads, the Brahmasūtras and the Bhagavadgīta occupy a very important place in Hindu religious philosophy. Together they are considered the thrayī that lead to the ‘Place of Brahman’ (prasthāna-trayī). Of all the Upaniṣads, Brihadāranyaka, Aitareya, Chāndogya, Kausītakī, Kena, Taittirīya, Íśa and Kaṭha Upaniṣads are considered the most ancient and which were composed long before the emergence of Buddhism. This Akṣara-puruṣottama-theory was explained in Íśāvāsyopaniṣad as,

Íśāvāvyamidam sarvaṁ yatkiñca jagatyām jagat

Tena tyaktena bhuñjīthāḥ mā gr̥thaḥ kasyasviddhanam (Íśāvāsyopaniṣad, I. 1.1) thesametheorywasexplainedasa ‘jyeṣṭha-lokapraṭiṣṭhāpaka’ in Kenopaniṣad (4.9), as a ‘mr̥tyu-mukha-pramocaka’ in Kaṭhopaniṣad (3. 15), as a ‘parātparasya pradarṣaka’ in Praṣṇopaniṣad (5. 5) as a ‘sarva-vidyā-pratiṣṭhā-bhūtaḥ’ in Muṇḍakopaniṣad (1.1.1) as a ‘turyāvasthā-samveṣana-prabhuh’ in a Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad.

Prājña does not comprehend anything, neither himself nor others, neither truth nor falsehood. But that turīya is forever everything and the witness. The same theory has been described in Taittirīyopaniṣad as ‘Ānandamayopasamkramaṇa-hetuḥ’ in the 8th Anuvāka such as ‘sa eko manuṣya-gandharvāñāmānandaḥ etc.’ (2.8.2) The same theory was explained as a ‘Prajñānātma-samyojakaḥ’ in Aitareyopaniṣad (3.3) and as ‘sattattva-prabhodakaḥ’ in Chāndogyopaniṣad (6.2.1) and as a

‘sarvāntaryāmi-pratyāyaka’ in Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad (3.7. 1-22). Thus we can find the sources of this philosophy in Upaniṣads.

The theory of Akṣara-puruṣottama darśana as found in Bhagavadgītā

In Bhagavadgītā Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna, ‘So far I have described to you the knowledge of Sāṅkhya-yoga. Now listen to me O Partha, to that (path) which is suitable to your intelligence, by which you can be released from the bondage of karma. When your mind remains impervious to the conflicting statements of the Vedas and becomes stable and fixed in *samādhi* (absorption in the self), you have then achieved the perfect state of ‘buddhi-yoga’.

Arjuna asked, He who is established firmly in the equanimity of his mind (*samādhi*) and has attained skill in the stability of mind (*sthitaprajñatā*), what is his language? How does he speak and how does he sit and walk? He further asked Kṛṣṇa, saying, O Puruṣottama, what is that Brahman, What is Adhyātma (inner Self) and what is karma? What is said to be Adhibhūta (the primeval being) and what is referred to as Adhidaiva (the Supreme Deity)? The Supreme Lord replied,

*Akṣaram brahma paramam
svabhāvo'dhyātmamucyate,
bhūta-bhāvodbhava-karo
visargaḥ karma-sañjitaḥ* (Bhagavad Gītā, 8.3)

Indestructible Brahman (Akṣara-Brahman) and Brahman who is beyond (Para-Brahman), One’s own self are called Adhyātma. The cause behind the creation of all the beings is called karma. Here one can see the mention of two kinds of Brahman: Akṣara Brahman and parabrahman. The same Parabrahman is also called ‘Puruṣottama-nārāyaṇa’ who is the self-governing and self-sufficient, endless in the swāminārāyaṇa tradition. Parabrahman is always called ‘Akṣara-puruṣottama’ who is not bound by the māya of nature. He is the divine and unparalleled one.

The eternal tradition of Akṣara-puruṣottama darśana advises us to understand the difference between the Akṣara (Akṣara-Brahman) and ‘Puruṣottama’ (Para-Brahman). Akṣara-Brahman is the cause of this creation and maintaining this entire movable and immovable creation. But the Para-Brahman is causing even to that Akṣara-Brahman and therefore even the Akṣara-Brahman is under the superior rule of Para-Brahman.

When we consider the concept of Brahman in historical perspective, according to some scholars (Das gupta, Surendranath, 2006: 20-21) the concept of Brahman which has been the inspiration and highest glory for the philosophy of Vedānta in India, had acquired a great significance in the Śatapatha *Brāhmaṇa*. But in Ṛgveda, the meanings of word Brahma, according to celebrated commentator Sāyaṇa are different. There the meanings of word Brahma means differently such as food, food offering, chant of the sāma singer etc. which are mainly related to the sacrifices. It is described there, that there are two great forces of Brahman, he who knows these forces becomes a great force himself. In another hymn Brahman was described as the ultimate entity in the universe that is identified with Prajāpati, Puruṣa and Prāṇa.

In Ṛgveda this puruṣa was described as a supreme who pervades the whole world with only fourth part of Himself, the remaining three parts transcend to a region beyond. He is at once the present, past and future (Ṛgveda, X. 90, Puruṣa sūkta).

Vedānta darṣana begins with the same Brahman, when it says, ‘Athāto Brahma Jijñāsā’ and continues, ‘Janmādyasya yataḥ’(Vedānta darṣana, I. 1.1,2). Someone may argue that here only one Brahman has been mentioned by sage Vyāsa in his Brahma-sūtras, but the ‘swāminārayaṇa siddhānta-sudhā’ says that ‘Athāto Brahma Jijñāsā’ means Atha ataḥ, Brahma (=Brahmaṇoḥ) jijñāsā, which means the curiosity to know about the two kinds of Brahman. These two kinds of Brahman are summed up by one word ‘Brahma’ with a presumed derivation of ‘Brahmaṇoḥ jijñāsā, Brahmajijñāsā’.

Therefore, those who seek the liberation from the cycle of births and deaths have to serve the Para-Brahma through the means of devotion (Bhakti). But the devotion should be practiced after achieving oneness with the Akṣara-Brahman in their individual self.

The same teaching pertaining to two kinds of Brahman has been described in Upaniṣads in ancient period but some teachers could not perceive it. For example such teaching can be seen in Praśnopaniṣad in the context of explaining the meaning of praṇava. Sage Pippalāda says- “etadvai Satyakāma paraṁ chāparaṁ brahma yad omkāraḥ (Praśnopaniṣad 5.2). Pippalāda says- 'O Satyakāma, this Onkāra is known as Parabrahman and Aparabrahman’’. Thus in this *mantra* we can clearly see two kinds of Brahman being described in Praśnopaniṣad, one is Para-Brahma and other is Aparabrahma.

This very teaching is called Brahmavidyā in Upaniṣads. It was explained in Muṇḍakopiniṣad (1.2.13) 'Yenākṣaraṁ puruṣaṁ veda satyaṁ provāca tām tatvato brahmavidyām'. Here the word ‘akṣara’, used in Muṇḍakopiniṣad is the same Aparabrahman which was explained in Praśnopaniṣad and the word puruṣa stands for ‘Para-Brahman Puruṣottama’. Therefore brahmavidyā means the knowledge of akṣara puruṣottama.

Not only in Upaniṣads, but also in Bhagavad Gītā which is a part of prasthāna-trayī. Similar teachings of Brahmavidyā can be found in the eighth chapter, when Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa 'O, Kṛṣṇa, what is that Brahman (Absolute)? What is adhyātma (spirit)? What is karma (action)? What is called adhibhūta (matter)? And what is termed adhidaiva (divine intelligence) (Bhagavad Gītā 8.1) ? The Divine Lord replies –‘the supreme indescribable is Brahman (parabrahman), one’s own self (the individual Ātman) is adhyātma (spirit=chaitanya) and the primal resolve of God (visarga), which brings forth the existence of beings is called Karma (action) (Bhagavad Gītā 8.3). In the fifteenth chapter of Bhagavad Gītā lord Kṛṣṇa says 'I’m wholly beyond the perishable world of matter (kṣetra) and I am superior even to the imperishable brahma, both in the world as well as in the Vedas’. Also sage Veda Vyāsa in his Brahma sūtras (Brahma sūtras 1/1/1, pp.1) explained about the Aparabrahman and Para-Brahman starting from the aphorism-“Athāto Brahma jijñāsā” till the end of the text.

This profound philosophical theory has been explained by parama-pūjya swāmi Sādhu Bhadresha dasa in his ‘Swāminārāyaṇa Sidhānta Sudhā’, which is an outstanding Sanskrit text compiled in an ancient classical style of Vedic literature. It explains the profound philosophy in a lucid style of Sanskrit.

This text not only possesses the beautiful descriptions of Divine teachings of Bhagwān Swāmi Nārāyaṇa, who lived in India in between 1781 and 1830 CE, incarnating from the divine abode of akṣaradhām and revealed the Akṣara puruṣottama philosophy as the means for emancipation (mokṣa); but also possesses the profound teachings of Brahma Vidyā, through the Vedic principles and through the Śāstras such as Upaniṣads and Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahma sūtras. This text therefore can be considered as a unique contribution of swāmiji in the realm of Indian philosophy.

Swamiji's efforts also prove that the age old tradition of Brahma-Vidyā is still in its continuity in India. This text ‘Swāminārāyaṇa Sidhānta Sudhā’ reveals the philosophy of akṣara puruṣottama as taught by Bhagwān Swāminārāyaṇa two hundred years ago.

Cause of this universe and the nature of Para-Brahman

From times immemorial in India the ancient sages contemplated on the ‘cause of this creation’. It was an important investigation in India from Vedic period. Vedānta said that the Brahma is the cause of this creation. But in later time, philosophical theories like Dvaita, Advaita etc. gave their own interpretation in this matter. Advaita Vedānta says that the cause is basically of two types, "nimitta" and "upādāna" and says that Brahma is the Upādāna cause for this universe. In what way the earth is the Upādāna cause for the pot, in the same way the Brahman is also the upādāna cause for this universe. Therefore the cause and the effect can't be different and the Brahma himself evolves as a universe. But this is not appropriate as Brahman and the universe, both have distinct qualities. Therefore the Swāminārāyaṇa-siddhānta Says that Para-Brahman is distinct from the Brahman, he is the cause even to even Akṣara-Brahman.

Conclusion

Akṣara Puruṣottama School of philosophy states that akṣara Brahman is distinct from Para-Brahman unlike the Advaita school of Vedānta. In Akṣara Puruṣottama School of philosophy, ‘Akṣara’ refers to ‘Akṣara-brahman’ and ‘Puruṣottama’ refers to ‘Para-Brahman’. This theory seems to be similar to the philosophy of Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita vedānta schools, where two distinct entities have been accepted by Paramapūjya Rāmānujācārya and Paramapūjya Śrī Madhvācārya. Akṣara-puruṣottama-darṣana maintains Brahma and Parabrahma. The Svāminārāyaṇasiddhānta-sudhā also presents the self (jīvātman) as distinct from Brahman (Akṣara-Brahman). Both Akṣarabrahman and the jīvātman are identified as distinct entities (Bhadreśa Dāsa, Sādhu, “Swāminārāyaṇa-siddhānta-sudhā”, जीवः परब्रह्मणोऽक्षरब्रह्मणः ईश्वरेभ्यश्च भिन्नं नित्यं चेतनं च तत्त्वम्, इत्यादिः.), this is where we find the similarity.

Akṣara-puruṣottama-darśana says that akṣara-brahma is distinct from the Parabrahman. Like Parabrahman, Aparabrahman is also eternal and one and beyond three guṇas (qualities), a cetanā (sentient), entity and always divine. Replete with infinite liberating virtues and devoid of the qualities of illusion, it is eternally without faults. The form, quality and powers of Akṣarabrahman are always dependent on Parabrahman. By Parabrahman's eternal wish it becomes the cause, support, pervader, controller of creation, which is called Jaḍacidātmaka. Actually the akṣarabrahman is metaphysically one entity, but it serves in different ways through 4 kinds of forms. In this school of philosophy, Māyā is composed of three guṇas 1. Eternally changing (Jaḍa) 2. A material cause of the creation of infinite brahmāṇḍa 3. As the cause of ego and attachment of jīvas and īśvaras. This very Māyā has been the cause of the births and deaths since eternity. Akṣara-Brahman and Para-Brahman are forever unattached with the Māyā (illusion).

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