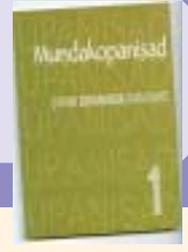


मुण्डकोपनिषद् Muṇḍakopaniṣad



(1.2.11 - continued from the last issue)

There are some sampradāyā in which these sannyāsins known as tridaṇḍins, live their whole life doing only upāsana because of their commitment to their theology. They have got certain karmas to do, and they do certain upāsana. They study Vedanta including Brahmasūtra in order to do upāsana since their conclusion is that the Lord is Brahman endowed with limitless virtues, and there is no question of oneself being Brahman. They surrender to the Lord, and do pūjās and meditation on the Lord that are enjoined by smṛtis. They cannot do vaidika karma like agnihotra because they are sannyāsins.

Again, bhaikṣyacaryām carantaḥ: they lead a life given to gathering alms. These are sannyāsins. Bhikṣā is the food collected by taking alms. They go around for the sake of bhikṣā which means they are following the life of bhikṣu. Śaṅkara says they need not even be sannyāsins because sannyāsa is generally taken only for jñāna. So, the mantra refers to the vanins who live in the forest. Since they do not have any possessions, they go out for bhikṣā.¹

They live a good life, so there should be a result for these people in the form of heaven. When any good person who lives a religious, pious life, who does not harm anybody, dies away—whether he is a Muslim, Christian or anybody—he must have good results waiting for him after death. These people have lived a religious life doing meditation most of the time. What happens to them after death?

Te virajāḥ sūryadvāreṇa prayānti: being pure, they travel by solar path. Dust is called rajas, which means impurity. Virajāḥ are the people who are free from pāpās. When they die away their souls ascend by the solar path,² the path that takes one to brahma-loka.

¹ भैक्ष्यचर्यां चरन्तः परिग्रहाभावात् । - मुण्डक भाष्यम्

² सूर्योपलक्षितेन उत्तरायणेन यथा । - मुण्डक भाष्यम्

It is purely an expression. From the standpoint of an end, a path is given here. They ascend to a place where immortal Hiraṇyagarbha of imperishable nature abides. Amṛta means nectar, drinking which the body becomes free from ill health; one gains youthfulness. Lord Viṣṇu appeared in the form of Dhanvantari, the heavenly physician and brought amṛta when the milky ocean was churned. Here amṛta means Brahmaji or Hiraṇyagarbha,³ the avyayāatman, who remains until the total dissolution of all names and forms. The place where Brahmaji resides is called brahma-loka.

These people go to brahma-loka. What happens to them after going to brahma-loka is not said here, because later the śāstra says that brahma-loka also is a place. Going to a place means that one is there until one leaves it. Therefore, one does not get mokṣa just by reaching brahma-loka.

The jīva has saṁyoga, association, with this body. The body will be there until the jīva has dissociation with it, which is called death. Any association is subject to dissociation⁴, therefore, brahma-loka also is vīyogānta, having separation at the end. If one has an extraordinary amount of puṇya, and hence is lucky enough to be taught by Brahmaji, one gets mokṣa. One is freed by the knowledge gained by the teaching, not by merely going to brahma-loka. The probability of gaining the knowledge in brahma-loka is greater, according to the śāstra. There one's mind is so clean that one gets that knowledge. But one must understand that going to brahma-loka is almost impossible because one has to do all the prescribed karmas and some special upāsānās. Going to brahma-loka is like becoming a zillionaire. A single individual becoming a zillionaire on this earth is very difficult. That may even be possible, but going to brahma-loka is not.

One more thing to note here is that one does not know how much puṇya one has to gain to go to brahma-loka. Until death, one has to keep doing the enjoined rituals and meditation, which is not an easy thing to accomplish. Therefore, it is better to give up pursuit of brahma-loka.

³ हिरण्यगर्भो ह्यव्ययात्मा अव्या-स्वभावः यावत्संसार-स्थायी । एतदन्तरास्तु संसार-गतयोऽपरविध्या-गम्वाः - मुण्डक भाष्यम्

⁴ संयोगो वियोगान्तः ।

Some people contend that brahma-loka is Vaikuṅṭha or Kailāsa or Goloka-br̥ndāvana and going to brahma-loka is mokṣa. Śaṅkara quotes two mantras from this upaniṣad and dismisses this contention. The first mantra (3.2.2) says, “All the desires and actions get dissolved in this body itself in the wake of knowledge”. The second mantra (3.2.5) says, “Having gained the knowledge of Brahman, they become everything”. So, mokṣa cannot be in the form of going to brahma-loka.

Śaṅkara further argues that the context here is aparā vidhyā; the topic of parā vidhyā is going to follow. Śruti cannot suddenly talk about mokṣa here. If mokṣa is achieved by aparā vidhyā, then what is the end to be achieved by parā vidhyā? Mokṣa is out of context here when the topic of aparā vidhyā is under discussion.

All actions are the subject matter of aparā vidhyā, which implies ignorance in the form of mistaking oneself as having doership, desires, actions and results of actions. So, it is characterised by all differences in the form of doer, accessories of action and results of action. The maximum that one can accomplish in this world of duality is brahma-loka which falls within saṁsāra characterised by ‘means and ends’. Means are limited, and therefore, ends are also limited. Here the ends refer to those accomplished through means. The doer is limited, so action is limited, and the result is also limited. If you sow one seed, you can get one tree only, if you are lucky.

Only for the person who develops dispassion for this saṁsāra there is eligibility for parā vidhyā. From the aparā vidhyā you go to parā vidhyā through the gate of vairāgya, dispassion. You turn your back to saṁsāra, but not because of disenchantment. A disenchanted person can neither enjoy this world nor hope for the other world, so he or she is not eligible for the pursuit of parā vidhyā. One discovers vairāgya by proper inquiry. Śruti, therefore, with great compassion talks about how one should reach the gate of dispassion. Here is an excellent verse that shows how to discover the limited nature of all our pursuits, and thereby, discover in oneself a desire for parā vidhyā.

To be continued....