

कठोपनिषद् Kāthopaniṣad

ऊर्ध्वमूलऽवाक्शाख एषोऽश्वत्थः सनातनः ।
तदेव शुक्रं तद्ब्रह्म तदेवामृतमुच्यते ।
तस्मिंलोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तदु नात्येति कश्चन । एतद्वै तत् । १ ।

This is the ancient Aswatha-tree whose roots are above and whose branches are spread below. That is verily the pure, that is Brahman, and that is also called the Immortal. In that rest all the worlds and none can transcend That. This verily is that.

This vallī too, like the last one, begins to determine the Brahma svarūpam by unfolding the nature of the jagat by comparing it to an Aśvattha tree.

A tree stands because of its roots. By seeing the girth, growth and height of a tree, one can appreciate the type, nature and length of the root—mūla—it must have. The jagat experienced by us is presented as a vṛkṣa. There must be a mūla for the jagat vṛkṣa, and the nature of mūla is being ascertained here by presenting the nature of the vṛkṣa.

Samsāra is likened to a tree—vṛkṣa. It is called vṛkṣa because (of the root-meaning) of it being felled—vṛkṣaśca vraścanāt. A tree is seen but its root is not seen. Just because the root is not seen, one doesn't dismiss the existence of the root. The very fact that the tree is shows that there is root. We see the kārya and come to know of the kāraṇa. Root, the kāraṇa is not seen. But it is very evident on seeing the tree, the kārya.

Another reason is all the features of a tree are found in the samsāra. There are branches and leaves in the tree and it becomes the abode for the birds. One could hear the chirping of the birds in the early morning. This jagat is also full of noises. There is a trunk also. New roots and new branches are coming. Some of them go up and some of them go down. There are flowers, fruits etc. and there are so many who live upon it. Samsāra is also likened to a tree. This jagat is like a vṛkṣa. It is said to be ūrdhvam meaning utkriṣṭam. It means that which is the most exalted. It is that which is beyond time and space.

Sankara says: yat Viṣṇoḥ paramaṁ padam tat ūrdva mūlam. The mūla is Viṣṇu and it is paramaṁ padam—the ultimate abode of the Sarvavyāpaka Viṣṇu. It is Brahman. It is the most exalted—ūrdhva— meaning, beyond time and space. The universe is compared to the aśvattha tree and Brahman is compared to the invisible root and support. By knowing the root and support, viz. Brahman, a person can attain mokṣa. To show that this is an ideal comparison, Sankara shows some common features between the tree and the universe. He is bringing out the common features— sādrśya dharmāḥ or sāmānya dharmāḥ in his long commentary.

Janma jarā-marāṇa śokādi anekānarthātmakeḥ —

This universe, no doubt, has got several pleasures in it, but there are many anarthās—problems also in it in the form of birth, old age, disease death etc. and this universe is constantly changing both at the micro and macro levels.

In the tree of life, there are so many thorns etc. The thorns here are birth, old age, death, sorrow etc., whose nature is full of afflictions – pratikṣaṇam anyathā svabhāvaḥ. Every second it assumes another form. Like a magician's tree, it assumes different forms. The tree also, because of wind etc. and because of the seasons, goes on changing. If there is no wind, you see one colour. If there is wind, then the leaves turn and you see another colour. It never remains the same; it is always moving.—Samsāra vṛkṣa also, being bound by time, is never seen again in the same form.

Pratikṣaṇam-anyathā-svabhāvaḥ Māyā-marīcy-udaka gandharva nagarādivat drṣṭa-naṣṭa-svarūpatvāt

It is changing every moment. Even when you see them, it changes like even magic or mirage water or a celestial city that you see in the clouds. Gandharvanagar is an excellent example for the nature of the jagat. It has drṣṭanaṣṭa svabhāva. At the time of darśan itself, it becomes naṣṭa— drṣṭasya naṣṭaḥ. Drṣṭaḥ means it is seen already. It is seen and it is gone. Therefore, even at the time of darśanaṁ, it goes away, and therefore, it has drṣṭanaṣṭa svabhāvaḥ like even the gandharva nagara.

Just as a tree disappears in the end, after living for a few years, the universe also will disappear at the end of pralayaṁ. Or at the time of jñānam, the universe is subject to total negation. There is a difference between pralayaṁ and jñānam. The disappearance of universe during pralayaṁ is called nāśaḥ

and the disappearance of the universe through jñānam is called bādhaḥ. The difference between nāśaḥ and bādhaḥ is nāśaḥ is subject to reappearance whereas in bādhaḥ, it is permanently negated.

Kadalīstambhavanniḥsāraḥ

It is like the stem of the banana tree. If one bark is removed, you see another bark and when that bark is removed, there is nothing inside. When you try to find whether there is sāra or essence or substantiality for the universe, we come to know that it is a mere nāma and rūpa only. When you enquire into pṛthvī, the earth, we come to know that there is no earth other than jalam which is the cause of the earth. The earth gets reduced into nāma and rūpa and when you enquire into its cause, then that will get reduced into nāma and rūpa and become something else. For example, a shirt, on enquiry, becomes fabrics, strings, cotton etc. The more you enquire into, the more it will get reduced into something else. According to modern science, it will get reduced into elements, then into molecules, then into atoms etc.

Aneka-śata-pākhaṇḍa-buddhi vikalpāspadaḥ -

It is an object of contention or debate for nāstikās (pākhaṇḍbuddhi)-philosophers. All nāstika darśanaṃs are pākhaṇḍbuddhis. They are Jainism, Buddhism, Charuvakas etc.. All are vikalpāspadam, meaning objects of contention. The contentions will be: whether the world is different from God or identical with God, whether it is a product of God, whether it is a part of God, whether the universe comes under existence category, non-existence category or a category of mixture. There are so many discussions.

It is debated by even āstika darśanās—the various philosophers who are the seekers of truth like Sankhya, Nyaya, Yoga, Vaisesika, Purvamimamsa and Uttaramimamsa.

Tatva-jijñāsubhiḥ -anirdhāritedannatvaḥ -

The truth of the samsara vṛkṣaḥ is not clearly ascertained by the seekers of Truth.

All the products can be brought under two categories. In one category, there is one cause which multiplies into many. One tree produces many seeds, and therefore, many trees – ekam to anekam. This is Sāṅkhya and Yoga approach to creation. One prakṛiti multiplies into manifold universe.

Vaiśeṣika and Nyāya went from the other side. Many components are joined together to produce one effect, like a car. Sāṅkhya and Yoga goes from ekam to anekam; it is called satkārya vādaḥ. Vaiśeṣika and Nyāya go from anekam to ekam. It is called Asatkārya vādaḥ. Buddhist philosophy is called saṅghāta vādaḥ. It is explained in samudāya adhikaraṇam in Brhma Sūtra. Pūrvamīmāṃsin says world is eternal. He says world is not created; it is eternally there. Vedantin says world is never created because it is eternally not there. – neha nānasti kinchana.

Pākhaṇḍbuddhi vikalpāspadaḥ refers to six nāstika darśanas. Tatvajijñāsabhiḥ refers to five āstika darśanas. Darsanas are confused and the confusion is removed by Vedanta.

Vedānta-nirdhārita parabrahma-mūlasāraḥ –

Its essence lies in its root, the supreme Brahman, ascertained in Vedanta. The limitless Brahman alone, which is the Ātmā, is the mūlam.

Avidyā-kāma-karmāvyakta-bīja-prabhavaḥ

It grows from out of the seed of ignorance, desire, action and the Unmanifested;

The origination of the universe is from the seed – avyakta (māya mūlavidhyā) bījam. Avidyā, kāma and karma are the components. This māya or avyaktam has got avidyā, kāma and karma of infinite jīvās. From that avyakta are born all the lokas. Each sūkṣma śarīra has got its own avidya, kāma and karma. Pure Brahman is also not the cause. Pure Māya also is not the cause. The world is born out of Brahma mūlam plus avyakta bijam.

Apara brahma vijñāna kriyā-śaktidvayātmaka hiraṇyagarbha āṅkuraḥ

It has for its sprout Hiranyagarbha, the inferior Brahman comprising two powers of knowledge and action;

Āṅkuraḥ is the main trunk arising from the seed. Hiranyagarbha is the trunk. Hiranyagarbha is the one who has got the icchā jñāna kriyā śaktiḥ.

The nature of Hiranyagarbha is Omniscience (vijñāna śakti) and Omnipotence (kriyā śakti). The kāraṇam is called Parabrahma. The kāryam is Aparabrahma.

Sarva-prāṇi-liṅga-bheda skandhaḥ

It has for its trunk the diverse subtle bodies of all creatures;
The subtle bodies of all the living beings of various varieties are the branches
of the saṁsāra vṛkṣa.

Tṛṣṇā-jalā avaseka udbhūta darpaḥ

Its vigour of growth results from the sprinkling of water of desire:
Darpaḥ means arrogance, but here darpaḥ means the magnitude or its
majesty. The magnitude or vastness of the saṁsāra vṛkṣa is because of
the pouring or sprinkling of water of desire - Tṛṣṇājalā avaseka. The saṁsāra
vṛkṣa is nourished by the desire-watering.

Buddhīndriya viṣaya pravāl āṅkuraḥ

It has for its tender sprouts the objects of the senses of knowledge;
Every sense object is the secondary branch. They are the secondary shoots
- pravāl āṅkuraḥ.

Śruti smṛti nyāya vidyopadeśa palāśaḥ

Its leaves are Vedas, the Smritis, logic, learning and instruction;
Śruti means Vedas. Smṛti means all the non-Vedic literature. Nyāya indicates
tarka and mīmāṁsā śāstram. All the branches of aparā vidyā are compared
to leaves. Śruti smṛti and nyāya which are required for Śāstra study are
the palāśaḥ—leaves of the saṁsāra vṛkṣa.

Yajña-dāna-tapa ādi aneka kriyā supuṣpaḥ

Its lovely flowers are the many deeds such as sacrifice, charity, austerity
etc.;

Saṁsāra vṛkṣa has got attractive flowers of puṇya karmās like yajña dāna
tapa etc. prescribed by the Śāstra

Sukha duḥkha vedanānekarasaḥ

Its various tastes are the experience of happiness and sorrow;
Vedanā means anubhavaḥ –experiences. When one gets puṇya phalam, he
experiences sukha. When he gets pāpa phalam, he experiences duḥkha.
When he gets miśraphalam, miśra anubhava. Varieties of such experiences
are the rasam—juice—consumed by the living beings.

Prāṇyupajīvyānantaphalaḥ

Its innumerable fruits are the means of subsistence of beings;

There are infinite puṇya pāpa phalas because of infinite karms and upasanas sought after—upajīvyān— by living beings.

Tṛṣṇā salilāvaseka –prarūḍha- jaḍīkṛta- dṛḍha-baddha-mūlaḥ

It has its secondary roots well developed, entwined and firmly fixed through the sprinkling of water of desire (for those fruits);

Because of puṇya, one enjoys sukha rasa. Naturally he wants to repeat this again and again. As a result of that tṛṣṇā—avarice comes. Rāga and dveṣa follows. Puṇya pāpa anubhava alone is salilam—water. Entertaining rāga and dveṣa thoughts repeatedly alone are waters which we constantly spfinkle. Because of pouring of rāga and dveṣa and kāma krodha waters alone, the saṁsāra tree is nourished.

Satya-nāmādi saptaloka brahmādi -bhūta pakṣīkṛta -nīḍaḥ

It has for its nests the seven worlds beginning from the one called Satya, built by the birds which are the living beings from Brahma downwards;

The 14 lokas are the various branches of the saṁsāra tree and all the branches are occupied by varieties of birds. The tree, branches or the leaves themselves do not taste the fruits. Birds taste the fruits. All the jīvās are the birds. Right from Brahmaji onwards upto an ordinary insect, all have built their nests of 14 lokas like Satya etc. in the huge tree. Bodies are the nests as it were, built by Brahmaji.

Prāṇi sukha duḥkhod-bhūta harṣa śoka jāta nṛtya gītavādi

Trakṣvelitā-sphoṭita hasit ā-krūra rudita hāhā munca-munchcetyādy aneka śabdakṛta tumulībhūta mahāravaḥ

It has its uproar, rendered tumultuous through the various sounds arising from dancing, singing, instrumental music, disport (play, jest etc.), clapping of the arms, laughing, pulling, crying, exclaiming ‘Alas, alas!’, ‘Leave me, leave me!’ induced by mirth and grief arising from the enjoyment and pain of living beings.

Vedānta-vihita-brahm-ātma-darśan-āsaṅga-śastra-kṛtoccheda

It is felled by the weapon of detachment consisting of the realization of the identity of Brahman and the Self as inculcated by Vedanta

With the weapon of detachment – asaṅgaśāstra – one should lift himself to his real svarūpa. The asaṅgaśāstra talked in the 15th chapter of Gita is vairāgyam before knowledge.

Eṣa samsāravṛkṣo'śvattho'śvatthavat
This tree of the world is like an aśvatthaḥ tree

This is the samsara vriksha which the upanishad is talking about and it is called aśvatthaḥ. Aśvatthaḥ śvaḥ na tiṣṭati iti— meaning it is anitya. It is a tree which will not stay eternally in future. It will go away in pralayam and will permanently go away by jñānam.

Kāma-karma-vāteritanitya-pracalita-svabhāvaḥ
its nature is ever unsteady, like the peepul tree, shaken as it is by the wind of desire and deeds.

Aśvatthaḥ is a tree which is constantly moving because of the powerful wind. Similarly the samsara vṛkṣa also constantly moves. The world is tossed about, the jivas are tossed about by the powerful wind of kāma karma vātaḥ

Svarga-naraka- niryakpretādibhiḥ -śākhābhiḥ avākśākhāḥ
It is avaaksakhah—downwards are its branches, consisting of heaven, hell and states of beastss and ghosts ;

Sanātano-a'nāditvāc-ciraṁ pravṛttaḥ |
It is sanatanah—existing from time immeorial, having no beginning.
It is continuing for a very long time until Videha mukti because it is beginningless— ānāditvāt . ciraṁ pravṛtta: It continues for a very long time. Samsaara does not have a natural death in time. Everhything in the creation which is born in time, will go away in time. There is only one thing which does not have a natural death, that is ignorance. It can be destroyed only by gaining knowledge.

yadasya –samsāra-vṛkṣasya -mūlaṁ tadeva- śukraṁ- śubhraṁ- śuddhaṁ
jyotiṣmat –caitanyātma-jyotiḥsvabhāvaṁ -tadeva –brahma- sarvamahatvāt

Tatdeva, that very thing—which is the root of the tree of the world—is; śukraṁ, white, pure, resplendent—being in reality the light of the Self which is Consciousness.

Tat brahma, that, indeed is Brahman, being the greatest of all;

Brahman is very pure. This means though Brahman is associated with maya for the production of the samsara vriksha, the association does not contaminate Brahman. Therefore it is suddham. This is because Brahman happens to be of a higher order of reality and maya or mulaavidya happens to be of a lower order. Vivarta -upaadana karanam Brhama is paaramarthika satyam. Parinaami upaadana karanam (mulaavidya) is vyaavahaarika satyam. Satta bhedaat brahman's purity remains in tact. It remains Jyotishmat – self effulgent..

Tadevāmṛtam avināśa-svabhāva-mucyate kathyate- satyatvāt |
that indeed is called indestructible by nature, being true.

Vācārambhaṇam vikāro nāmadheyam anyadato martyam |
All else is false, being 'mutable, existing as mere name dependent on speech

Tasmin-paramārthasatye- brahmaṇi lokā gandharvanagara-marīcyudaka-
māyāsamāḥ

Hence it is mortal. Tasmin, on him, on Brahman that is absolutely true; sarve, all; lokah, the worlds—which are comparable to a city in the sky, or water in a mirage, or jugglery and which vanish on the realization of the supreme Truth;

paramārtha darśanābhāvāvagamanāḥ śritāḥ āśritāḥ sarve samastāḥ utpatti
sthitilayeṣu

It is śritāḥ, are fixed—during creation, existence and dissolution.

Tadu tadbrahma nātyeti nātivartate mṛdādīmiva ghaṭādikāryam kaścana
kaśritapi vikāraḥ | etat vai tat ||

kaścana, nothing whatsoever—no modification; ātyeti, transcends; tat tu, that – that Brahman; just as the products like pot etc. do not transcend (their material) earth etc. This verily is that.

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