

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya's Kāśī Pañcakam

With the commentary Tatva Prakāśikā

by

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मनोनिवृत्तिः परमोपशान्तिस्सा तीर्थवर्या मणिकर्णिका च ।

ज्ञानप्रवाहा विमलाऽऽदिगङ्गा सा काशिकाऽहं निजबोधरूपा ॥ १ ॥

manonivṛttiḥ paramopśāntissā tīrthavaryā maṇikarṇikā ca ।

jñānapravāhā vimalā''digaṅgā sā kāśikā'haṁ nijabodharūpā ॥ 1 ॥

मनोनिवृत्तिः manonivṛttiḥ – quietude of the mind, परमा paramā – supreme, उपशान्तिः upaśāntiḥ – peace, सा śā – that, च ca – indeed, तीर्थवर्या tīrthavaryā – the holiest of the holy, मणिकर्णिका maṇikarṇikā – the ghat Maṇikarṇikā, ज्ञानप्रवाहा jñānapravāhā – the flow of knowledge, विमला – vimalā' – pure, आदिगङ्गा ādigaṅgā – the original Ganges, सा sā – that, काशिका kāśikā – Kāśī, अहम् Aham – I am, निजबोधरूपा nijabodharūpā – having the form of one's own awareness.

I am that city of Kāśī in the form of my own pure awareness. The supreme peace that is the quietude of the mind is that Maṇikarṇikā ghat, the holiest of the holy. The flow of the waking consciousness is the divine Ganges.

Kāśikā means Kāśī, one of the holiest pilgrimage centres of India. The suffix *ka* does not enhance the meaning, like the *bālaka* meaning *bāla*, boy, and *kanyakā* meaning *kanyā*, girl.

In the statement, *kāśikā'haṁ*, I am that Kāśī, the literal meaning is already left behind. *Kāśaḥ prakāśaḥ asyā asti iti Kāśī*. Kāśī means Atman, the Awareness Absolute, in which everything shines. As Śrī Śaṅkarā says in *Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotraṁ* (1) *viśvaṁ nijāntartagaṁ*, the universe is included in one's Self.

'I am' is the crux of Vedānta. Who am I? 'I am' is the most fundamental experience, the common matrix of all living beings. In fact, 'I am' is already present before anything else in the waking consciousness. Everything – pleasure, pain, religion, God etc. – exists only because of 'I am'. The entire content of the waking consciousness has its origin in 'I am'. What is the essence of 'I am'?

Vedāntins are *upādānaikaśaraṇā* meaning that the matrix is the most important for Vedāntins. If we take the world on its face value as a real collection of things and investigate its cause, we may end up concluding that Īśvara created this universe

from some material or out of nothing. This extreme duality is against the tenets of Vedanta and science. We have to understand that consciousness is the matrix of the universe. The universe is the content of waking consciousness, an appearance in the consciousness.

'I am' is the starting point of the waking state. It is the primordial intelligence. We should discover the true nature of 'I am' instead of rejoicing over a few superimpositions like 'I am a parent', 'I am a musician', 'I am rich', 'I am an American', 'I am a Brahmin', etc. There is no truth in such notions. We should not attach anything to 'I am'. 'I am' is the awareness of the being. That self-shining awareness is the Kāśi.

How do we know the existence of a pot? It does not declare its existence by itself. A conscious being has to validate its existence through the agency of the eyesight and the mind. Shining is of two kinds. One is shining of the outside light. But, there is knowledge of the pot only when the pot shines in the knowingness. Pot has to be loaded into one's consciousness to be recognized by him. There cannot be an existence that is altogether unknown to the conscious being. Thus, a pot is not svayamprakāśya, self-shining; it is paraprakāśya, shines by the light, by the light, by the eyesight and by the mind as the content of the waking consciousness. On the other hand, 'I am' shines in its own light.

'I am' is prior to perception and conception. 'I am' is not an idea; it is prior to the mind. Time and space are categories of the mind. There is time only when there is a thought and there is space only when we identify with the body. As we identify with the body, we are limited in space, and as we identify with the mind, we get caught in the flow of time. Therefore, 'I am' is prior to both the body and mind. It is Kāśi, the spaceless timeless self-shining conscious presence.

Purāṇās tell us that Kāśi is the center of the universe. The infinite has center everywhere/ The infinite has center everywhere. God is the Infinite centered in every human heart. 'I am' or Kāśi is that center. Physical body is a speck in the universe, not 'I am'. The entire universe springs up from the waking consciousness, is in the waking consciousness, is sustained in the waking consciousness, and resolves in the same.

Sā tīrthavaryā maṅikarṇikā ca. The Maṅikarṇikā ghat in Kāśi is the popular cremation ghat and yet the most sacred. Most dead bodies in and around Kāśi are brought there for cremation. The pious take bath there and conduct their prayers. This ghat symbolizes the negation of identification with the body. One has to die to the body to become awake to the truth. As long as we take the body to be ourselves, the truth remains far off in spite of what we say or do. Intellectualization of the truth is not the truth. The truth will reveal itself only when we prepare ourselves for the revelation, and the preparation is the negation of the identification with the body.