



Muṇḍakopaniṣad Mantrā 2



अथर्वणो यां प्रवदेत ब्रह्मा
अथर्वा तां पुरोवाचाङ्गिरे ब्रह्मविध्याम् ।
स भारद्वाजाय सत्यवाहय प्राह
भारद्वाजोङ्गिरसे परावराम् ॥ १।१।२ ॥
atharvaṇo yām pravadeta brahmā
atharvā tāṃ purovācāṅgire brahmavidhyām ।
sa bhāradvājāya satyavāhaya prāha
bhāradvājōṅgirase parāvarām ॥ 111|211

purā – in the beginning; yām – which; brahmā – Brahmaji; atharvaṇe – to Atharvā; pravadeta – taught; tāṃ – that; brahmavidyām – knowledge of Brahman; atharvā – Atharvā; aṅgire – to Angir; uvāca – taught; saḥ – he (Angir) satyavāhāya – to Satyavaha; bhāradvājāya – one who was born in the family of Bharadvāja; prāha – taught; bhāradvājaḥ – Bharadvāja; parāvarām – that which comes through a teacher and then a student; aṅgirase – (taught) Angiras.

‘In the beginning, Atharva taught to Angir that very same brahmavidya given by Brahmaji to him. Angir taught it to Satyavaha who was born in the family of Bharadvāja. Satyavaha handed down this knowledge, that passes from the higher to the lower, to Angiras.

Brahmā atharvaṇe yām pravadeta: that which Brahmaji taught to Atharva. The upaniṣad uses two word-forms for Atharva¹. In the first mantra it was akārānta (ending in ‘a’) atharvan-śabda and in this mantra it is nakārānta (ending in ‘n’) atharvan-śabda. Atharvāya and Atharvaṇe, both of them are dative case. The form Atharvāya comes from the akārānta word. So, Atharva had two names. Some called him Atharva and others, Atharvā. This nakārānta usage is more popular.

The word pravadeta in the mantra, meaning ‘must teach’, needs to be read as ‘prāvadat’, meaning ‘taught’. The usage is called chāndasa, Vedic expression. Pāṇini mentions in his grammar many word-forms appearing in the Veda that do not conform to general rules. He brought all of them within the grammar rules by making one single rule.² The variations in the forms can be with respect to tense, gender, number, case ending and so on. Pāṇini lists all these irregular expressions found in the Veda in the above section.

¹ अथर्वशब्दो अकारान्तो नकारान्तश्च । अत्र मन्त्रे अथर्वणो इति नकारान्तः प्रयुक्तः । पूर्वं प्रथम मन्त्रे अथर्वाय इति अकारान्तः प्रयुक्तः ।

² व्यत्ययो ह्युल्लम् ३।१।८५ इति पाणिनि-सूत्रेण छन्दसि कालस्यनियमात् प्रवदेत इति च्छान्दसम् । प्रावददित्यर्थः ।

What was taught by Brahmaji to Atharvā, Atharvā imparted the same brahmavidhyā to Aṅgir. Therefore, the same brahmavidhyā is coming down unadulterated, just as Brahmaji gave to his son. So, it can bless us.

Atharvā initiated the sampradāya. He had to transfer the knowledge from his head to another head. How he transferred this knowledge from himself to another is the sampradāya. This sampradāya was initiated by Atharvā in this śaunaka śākhā, teaching the same brahmavidyā to Aṅgir³, his own śiṣya. Aṅgir taught to Bharadvāja., Bharadvāja is a person born in the gotra, family of Bharadvāja. His name is Satyavaha, the one who follows the truth. Bharadvāja taught to Aṅgiras.⁴ He taught the same Brahma-vidyā. Though the word Brahma-vidyā is not mentioned here, an equivalent word 'parāvarām' is used.

Parāvarā means that which is received from the teacher, who comes first, by a disciple who comes later. Avarā means lower. Here the word 'lower' signifies that which occurs later. It is lower in order, not in quality. If we interpret this as lower in quality, then it implies that the content and the quantity of the knowledge is subject to a process of attrition as it is handed down from teacher to disciple. Being the knowledge of Brahman, the whole, this knowledge is not subject to verbal entropy. Here avarā does not mean lower in quality but later in time. Therefore, the guru got it first; the śiṣya being taught by the guru got it later. In this interpretation⁵ the compound 'parāvarām' has to be considered as chandasa, Vedic usage, because the words of the compound do not have the capacity to join together in that sense.

Without assuming chāndasa, we can interpret the word parāvarām as follows. ⁶ It is karmadhāraya compound which is resolved as that vidyā which covers the subject matter of both parā vidyā and avara vidyā. This will be said in the next mantra. Parā means the cause. The cause is first in order and so it is parā. Avarā is the effect. Both are Brahman. This vidyā deals with Brahman that is both cause and effect, the effect being not separate from the cause. The word parāvarā is used for Brahman later in this upaniṣad.⁷ Sankara gives this second meaning also.⁸ Parā vidyā reveals Brahman. Avarā vidyā is everything else. Everything else is also Brahman. Therefore, this brahma-vidyā pervades the subject matter of both parā vidyā and avara vidyā.

Satyavaha taught this knowledge to Aṅgiras. The brahma-vidyā paramparā is established here. Śruti herself does this by stating many names. Thus, we have a set up now. We have the teacher Aṅgiras here, who has this knowledge and who is available to teach. Somebody can approach this Aṅgiras and get the knowledge from him. Śaunaka does this, and the dialogue between Aṅgiras and Śaunaka is reported on the following mantras. From here onwards the dialogue begins.

To be continued...

³ अङ्गिरिति रेफान्त-नामा ।

⁴ अङ्गिरसिति सान्तनामा ।

⁵ परस्मात्परस्मादवरेण प्राप्ता इति परावरा । मुण्डक भाष्यम् अस्मिन् पक्षे सामर्थ्याभावाद् आर्ष समाप्तः

⁶ परा चासौ अवरा चेति कर्मधारयः

⁷ भिध्यते हृदय ग्रन्थिः ॥ । तस्मिन् दृष्टे परावरे ॥ २।२।८

⁸ परापर - सर्व विध्या विषय व्याप्तेः वा तां परावराम् । मुण्डक भाष्यम्