

Second Muṇḍaka Section 1

In the previous section the limited ends that can be accomplished through various means stated in the *karma-kāṇḍa*, that is, *aparā-vidyā* was discussed briefly. Now *parā-vidyā* is taken up again and unfolded. Śaṅkara introduces it as follows.¹ the subject matter of *parā-vidyā* is *akṣaram brahma* that was earlier revealed as one not subject to decay and death. The *upaniṣad* defined *parā-vidyā* as that *vidyā* by which *akṣaram brahma* is understood. Then, the results of *aparā-vidyā* were mentioned pointing out their limitations in order for one to discover in oneself a dispassion towards limited ends and develop a value for the subject matter of *parā-vidyā*. The *śāstra* thus helped to create the *adhikārin* for the *parā-vidyā*. Now the *upaniṣad* takes up the original request on the part of Śaunaka, namely, the knowledge of that, knowing which everything is as well known. That is the subject matter of *parā-vidyā*.

The teacher points out two *lakṣaṇas*, modes of revealing Brahman.² Both of them are very important.

One definition unfolds, by implication, the *svarūpa*, essential nature of Brahman. The other is *taṭastha*, an incidental definition, involving something distinct from the nature of Brahman, but by which it is known. This definition is meant to show that Brahman is not one of the objects in the world, but is the very cause of the world. Without the incidental definition one cannot understand Brahman as everything. The world as well as one's physical body, mind and senses are non-separate from Brahman. It does not mean Brahman has undergone a change to become all this. Had it been so, then Brahman would not be available at all for knowing. In the *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* one gets to know Brahman as neither the cause nor the effect. The cause-effect set-up is to prove that any effect is *mithyā* and it depends upon *satya* which is Brahman. So, all that is here is Brahman. That Brahman is 'I,' the *caitanya ātman*. Therefore, I am everything. By the knowledge of *ātman*, everything is as well known. In the following *mantras* both the above definitions are well brought out.

Mantra 1

Now, the first *mantra* here gives the incidental definition.³

तदेतत् सत्यम् ।

यथा सुदीप्तात् पावकाद्विस्फुलिङ्गाः सहस्रशः प्रभवन्ते सरूपाः ।

तथाक्षराद्विविधाः सोम्य भावाः प्रजायन्ते तत्र चैवापि यन्ति ॥ २।१।१

¹ अपर-विद्यायाः सर्वं कार्यमुक्तम् । स च संसारो यत्सारो यस्मान्मूलादक्षरात् सम्भवति यस्मिंश्च प्रलीयते तदक्षरं पुरुषाख्यं सत्यम् । यस्मिन् विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवति तत्परस्या ब्रह्म-विद्याया विषयः । स वक्तव्य इत्युत्तरो ग्रन्थ आरभ्यते । मुण्डक भाष्यम्

² Although the word *lakṣaṇa* is often translated as 'definition,' strictly speaking, no definitions of Brahman are possible. But in the tradition, there are two modes of revealing Brahman, which are known as *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* and *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa*.

tadetat satyam.

*yathā sudīptāt pāvakād visphuliṅgāḥ sahasraṇa prabhavante sarṇpāḥ.
tathākṣarād vīdhāḥ somya bhāvāḥ prajāyante tatra caivāpi yanti. (2.1.1)*

tad - that; *etat* - this; *satyam* - is the truth; *somya* - Oh pleasing one;
yathā - just as; *sudīptāt* - well-lighted; *pāvakāt* - from the fire;
sahasraṇaḥ - in thousands; *visphuliṅgāḥ* - sparks; *prabhavante* - come
out;

sarṇpāḥ - of the same nature (as of the fire); *tathā* - so too;
akṣarāt - from the Brahman; *vīdhāḥ* - varieties of; *bhāvāḥ* - beings;
prajāyante - are born; *ca* - and; *tatraiva* - into that alone; *apiyanti* -
they go back

This is the truth, oh pleasing one! From a well-lighted fire how innumerable sparks of the same nature as fire come out, so too, varieties of beings are born from the Brahman that is *akṣara*, and they go back into that alone.

Tad etat satyam : this is the truth. The *akṣara* taught in the previous chapter and known through *parā-vidyā*, is indeed *satya*. While talking about *aparā-vidyā*, the *upaniṣad*⁴ used the expression, ' *tad etat satyam*.' There, it was with reference to the results of *karma* mentioned in the *śāstra*, because the results never fail to unfold. They remain for endless cycles of creation, and get exhausted either by giving rise to experience or by neutralisation. They are relative *satya*. Here, the subject matter of *parā-vidyā* revealed in the *śāstra* is also *satya*, but it is absolute.⁵ Here, the word '*satya*' means that which is not negated at any time and which is the truth of everything. What was said before, *tad*, and what is going to be said now, *etat*, is *satyam brahma*. It is not subject to time. It is unborn and not subject to disappearance. Brahman is *śāstra-vedya*, known only through the *śāstra*.

If it is *śāstra-vedya*, then the knowledge of Brahman gained must be indirect; it cannot be direct knowledge.

The logic⁶ is this - anything that is known through the *śāstra* can only be indirect knowledge, being known only through the words of the *śāstra*, like *svarga*, *puṇya*, *pāpa* and so on. Since Brahman is also known through the words of the *śāstra*, the knowledge of Brahman can only be indirect. This is the conclusion.

³ The words such as *divyaḥ*, *amūrtaḥ* etc., of the next *mantra* deal with *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* of Brahman.

⁴ मुन्नष्टका १ ॥२ ॥१

⁵ यदपरविद्या-विषयं कर्म-फल-लक्षणं सत्यं तदापेक्षिकम्। इदं तु परविद्या-विषयं परमार्थ-सल्लक्षणत्वात्।
मुण्डक भाष्यम्