

Anna Concept in The Upaniṣads

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The origin of symbolization can be traced back to the nature worship of the Vedic sages i.e., the natural phenomena as well as cosmic forces as the God. Thus, the Supreme self-began to be worshipped symbolically through the medium of Sun, Uṣas, Wind, Thunder etc. We are not certain that they knowingly or unknowingly, did the same, but it is a fact that the sages whoever evoked a deity took him as the highest of all. From the Samhita, the symbolical interpretations went on and in the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas; it is observed that the symbols have been derived from nature, rituals and physical and psychological elements.

When we read the Samhitas through the historical point of view, it will become clear to us that the idea of withdrawal from the sacrifice -seeing fruitlessness cropped up among the sages but actually they could not withdraw themselves from the sacrifice and so they uttered the mantras full of metaphor and allegories. In the Sradhahoma of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa V. 25.2 it is mentioned that this is the pillar, the Earth is the Altar, the plants the Varhis, water the sprinkling water and the quarter the Parithis (limitations). There are such innumerable instances of symbolic expressions in the Vedic Literature. The analogous cognition that forms the essential elements of symbolical interpretation is found in the types of Brāhmaṇa expression rūpasamṛdhi. Symbolic or allegorical expressions reached their Zenith in the post-Brāhmaṇa literature-Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads.

Symbols are only the medium of meditation or Upāsana of the transcendental. Upāsana means Nairantaryena Tatparyapurassaro vyavaharah¹. Vedic texts assume that though the craving for the greater knowledge springs up from the

sacrifice and charity, still the importance of attentive mind is also appreciated in them. Drsyate tvagryaya buddhya². Upāsana is only a preliminary step for realizing the truth.

There are two types of Upāsanas - Brahmopāsana and Pratikopāsana. The first means the meditation on the qualified Brahman. [Brāhmaṇa eva gunavisiṣṭatvena cintanam.] The second requires a medium - a symbol for meditation. Sayana himself clarifies the same. The pratika or symbol is of two types- something related to sacrifice and not related to sacrifice. The saying that Annam Brahmetyupasita concentrates Anna as Brahman. ie Anna is the symbol of Brahman for a Sadhaka. This is a symbolic representation.

The concept of Anna has a different sense in the Upaniṣads. The concept is dealt with the major ancient Upaniṣads like Brhadāranyaka, Chandogya, Aitareya, Maitrayaṇī and Taittiriya. Actually, the main purpose of the Upaniṣads is to describe the origin of the Universe from the Sat or Cosmic principle or Prajāpati. The Upaniṣads are unique since expressing the view that the creator created the universe to experience the matter which he had created from his own Tapas. He after creating the Universe entered into it in the form of individual soul. This is that we, directly and indirectly, read from the Upaniṣads . The very word Ātman is an example for the same i.e. the word Ātman is derived from the root "Ad bhakṣaṇe " ie the Supreme Soul enters into the created souls for enjoying the matter which he had created. The same thing is well illustrated in the Aitareyopaniṣad. Taittiriya also illustrates the same thing differently. Chandogya also goes in the same way. The very same thing is expressed in the BrhadĀranyaka too.

The word "food" in the Upaniṣads has a much wider connotation than what is normally understood by it. "Food" stands for all the inputs required to sustain life both at the individual and cosmic levels.

The Creator, Prajāpati, through knowledge and contemplation (medha and tapas) produced seven kinds of foods viz., 1. Solid food, what we generally called as food for consumption by all 2. Milk (liquid food) 3. Sacrifice (yajña) 4. Symbolic offerings to gods 5. Speech 6. Mind and 7. Life-breath. The first four, "gross

foods", sustain our physical life. The last three, "subtle foods", are significant for our metaphysical life both at the individual and cosmic levels. The supply of these seven foods is never exhausted. Like Prajāpati Himself, man continues to produce them through work. Their significance is brought out by many descriptions like three worlds, three Vedas, the spirit of gods, ancestors and men, father, mother, and children in a family, as also what is known, what is to be known and what is unknown.

People consume food of various types endlessly, for ages, over centuries, and yet, the food is not exhausted. Why is it so, is the question raised in the Upaniṣad? How it is that food is not exhausted despite its being eaten for centuries? If anyone knows the reason why food is not exhausted despite its being consumed endlessly, such a person goes to the gods and partakes of the immortality or ambrosia of the gods. In other words, if the desire is to be absent, the world itself would become absent. The world in front of you exists because of your desires. If the desires of all created beings get absorbed into their sources, the universe will vanish in one second. It cannot exist. So, if the desires are not present, there will be no objects of desire and the world would have immediately extinguished itself.

The Creator fixed for himself the three kinds of food, viz, the mind, the speech and the vital force. The mind is the real seer, not the eyes, and the mind is the real sense-organ and not the other well-known ones; because it is observed that when the mind is elsewhere the eyes will not see their objects and the senses do not act for the purpose they are intended. Thus, it is to be concluded that the mind is the principal medium of knowledge. What are generally known as desire, resolution or determination, doubt, faith, or the absence of it, patience, or impatience, modesty, understanding, fear, are all, in fact, the mind itself operating in different ways and forms. One can feel a sensation through the mind even if one is touched from the back.

In the Brhadāraṇyaka first Chapter 6th session named as SaptannaBrāhmaṇa, there is a statement :Verily this Universe is made up of three things name

colour and action. A sound is the material of these names, for all rises from it. It is their common feature, for it is common to all names. It is their self, for it supports all names. The principal functions in our body are speech, mind, and prāṇa, through which we do everything that we can do in this world. The words that we utter, the thoughts that we think, and the energy that we have - these are the constituent factors of our personality through which we deal with others, which we regard as our endowments or faculties of action. These have to be set in tune with the outer world which is three in number viz., this physical world, the atmospheric world, and the celestial world, or the divine paradise.

The speech is to be identified with the celestials, the mind with the Pitṛs, or ancestors in the atmospheric realm, and the Prāṇa with all created beings here in this physical world. The idea behind this meditation is that everything conceivable should be set in tune with one's being. So, you have here symbols for meditation which take into consideration whatever is immediately present in the family, whatever is the object of your learning the Vedas, whatever is regarded by you as the entire creation, the three realms of being, the three worlds mentioned here and the inhabitants of all the three worlds. Nothing is left out; everything is brought into consideration. This is the central intention of this Upaniṣad meditation, an enhancement of the magnitude of the subject, which is achieved by the absorption of the objects into the subject so that they may not come and interfere with the meditation.

There are three types of objects - known objects, objects which are to be known, and objects which have not been known. All these three types have to be identified with speech, mind, and Prāṇa. The Prāṇa is something inscrutable. The Prāṇa is a different realm altogether over which we have no control. We can direct our thoughts by the employment of consciousness and we control our speech by the use of common sense, but we have nothing to say in the matter of the movement of the Prāṇa which has its way. It works of its own accord by a law which is independent, as it were, of the one over which we have nothing to not some say. We can stop thinking, we can stop speaking, but we cannot stop breathing or restrain the activity of the Prāṇa, completely.

The analysis provided here in these passages of the Upaniṣad is intended to gain entry into a realm that transcends the ordinary realm of speech, mind, and Prāṇa as individuals. By analysis of this kind, we begin to understand; what is the reason behind the limitation imposed upon speech, mind, and Prāṇa. When the limitation is understood we gain mastery over the limitation. We become unlimited in our capacity over these functions, and then one does not have an imposing force in front of him. Then he becomes the lord over everything.

People generally are in a position to console themselves and reveal their tranquillity even after losing everything they possess, provided that their soul-power is intact. People do not grieve so much for the loss of wealth as for the loss of themselves. You know very well that you are more valuable than your wealth. You have a greater love for yourself, ultimately than for anything that you possess. So, if everything that you have is lost completely, and you alone are left finally, single, unbefriended, unconnected with others, yet you have a satisfaction of your own - after all, I am. If you also are not to be, that would be much worse than losing everything that you have or might have had.

So, the contemplation is that the Ātman is superior to everything external and processional. And, as is the connection between the circumference and the centre of the wheel or the spokes of the wheel with the axle, so is the connection between the entire world of possession outside and the self within. They have to be co-ordinated proportionately and harmoniously to establish a union between the external and the internal, finally laying the proper emphasis on the Universal Internal, which is the Ātman, which, when realized, puts an end to all greed for wealth, and, then, even a need for possession becomes absent because the Ātman is all the wealth of the world. The Ātman is not merely the centre in you, but the centre which is everywhere.

The Three Fold Nature of the World

Everything in this world can be classified into names, forms, and actions. Trayam vā idam, nāma rūpam karma teṣām nāmnām vagityetatesamuktham, atohi sarvāṇi namanyuttiṣṭhanti. Etadesam sama etaddhi sarvaihi nāmabhiḥ samam eta-

desam Brahma etaddhisarvāṇi nāmāni bhīharti ³ Name, form, and action are the three categories into which everything can be brought together. What we call a name is one of the characteristics of objects. The appellation or the categorization of objects is called name. It is a part of a language, and so what we call name is nothing but speech; says the Upaniṣad.

The Upaniṣad says that speech is the common equalizing factor existing and operating behind and before all ordinary expressions by way of naming, wording, etc. Speech is Brahman itself, because it supports in a universal form, as it were, every type of verbal expression or linguistic manifestation. In the same way as all names or word-formations are rooted in a fundamental universalized source, viz, the transcendent speech, all forms that we perceive or visualize have a common background. There is a general form that manifests itself as particular forms. What we call form is nothing but a kind of thought which the senses make, a function of isolation performed by the senses from the general reservoir of forms which has many other forms within it, apart from the one that we perceive with our eyes, even as a block of stone may contain many statues inside it. You cannot know how many statues are inside a block of stone.

Whatever form you wish, you can extract from the stone. Likewise, from this general ocean of form, you can extract any particular form. That depends upon the structure of the eyes and the nature of the light rays that fall upon the object, and many other things. It is how the general universal form is received or reacted upon by the structure of our eyes that is responsible for the type of perception of forms with which we are familiar in this world. Hence, there is the visual isolation of a particular aspect of the universe of forms for perception, assisted by every other sense-organ. Universal sound is there; the universal taste is there; universal touch is there. And from this universality of sensation, a particular aspect is segregated, isolated or extracted by a particularly given sense of an individual or a species of individuals, and then we have a common world of perception, as we call it.

The common form is the equalizing factor behind particular forms. Sarvaih rupaih samam: This is common among all forms. Just as the same wood may be present in various types of furniture The Universal Form is Brahman, as is the Universal Name, which is everywhere. Likewise, there is a general form of action and a particular type of it. Individuality is the source of action, which is the complexity of body, mind, etc., the intellect included. Action proceeds from individuality. The nature of the action that one performs is determined by the nature of the pattern of individuality into whose mould one is cast. Otherwise, there is no such thing as any determined action.

How one conducts oneself in a given atmosphere is what is called action. Now, this manner of conducting oneself depends upon the nature of the individuality itself. The determining force behind the way of conducting oneself in the world is the nature of one's personality which is not merely the body, but everything that is inside it, also, the five vestures, or three layers, as we may call them. So, this is, also a kind of abstraction. There are many ways in which one could conduct oneself. There are many types of actions possible, other than the one we are performing, but we do only certain types of action because they alone are possible under the circumstances of this particular individuality of ours. Thus, there is a general reservoir of possibility out of which particular actions emerge based on different types of individuality.

In this general possibility of action, God's action, which we may call Hiranyagarbha's action or Virat's action, there is the potentiality of every type. From that source, a particular possibility arises. The universal possibility is the equalizing factor behind all particular possibilities of action. The general form of possible action matches at the root of every particular manifested action. Etad esam brahma: This universal action is Brahman itself, because it is common to all, and etadd hi sarvāṇi karmāṇi bibharti, because it supports all particular actions.

The Cosmic Form is called Amṛtam. Name and form are called Satyam; the apparent reality is Satyam; the visible world is Satyam. It is real from its point of view and to the extent it is workable, but the immortal is behind it.

The Cosmic Being who is called Prāṇa here is immortal, and that is the ocean of all possibilities of name, form and action, whereas what we call ordinary name and form from our point of view, the visibilities and the possibilities of formation are only temporarily real. They are Nāma-Rūpa; they are Satya or true for the time being only, not eternally. The eternal Reality is Amṛta-Prāṇa, Immortal Force. This Supreme Being is covered over by Nāma-Rūpa Prapañca - the name and form world. We are unable to see the ocean because of the waves dashing on the surface. We see only the movement of waves. The basic substratum is not visible on account of the activity on the surface. There is a substratum behind every name, every form, and every action. If that could be discovered and plunged into, one becomes immortal at once and frees oneself from the clutches of births and deaths, which are the characteristics of all particularized names and forms. This is the philosophy and the advice given to us in the concluding portion of this chapter of the Upaniṣad.

A symbolic approach to meditation

In the Upaniṣads, there are symbolic Advaitic meditations known as vidyās, which train the mind of the aspirant to search beneath the coverings of various external objects such as honey (madhu), the sun (Āditya), and fire (pañcāgni) their common spiritual core. The Madhu vidya is the contribution of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. In these meditation techniques, which focus on the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm, the practitioners attempt to identify their centre of consciousness with Saguṇa Brahman (Brahman with attributes). For example, the Madhu vidya meditation on honey, or sweetness, or bliss begins: This earth is honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this earth. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this earth, and the intelligent, immortal being, the soul of the individual being each is honey to the other. Brahman is the soul in each; he indeed is the Self in all. He is all."⁴

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad being an Āraṇyaka and Upaniṣad at the same time expresses the quality of both. Through the Madhu Vidyā and Anna vidyā contemplation on these matters are being employed, these are for preparing the Sādhaka

towards the uninterrupted meditation on these great Vedic dictums, desires are obliterated, and we receive the highest realization of pure consciousness, known as nirvikalpa samādhī. The mind's reflection of pure consciousness reverts to its source of light, the Self-luminous Brahman, just as our face, when reflected in a broken mirror, reverts to our face itself. Subject and object's pure consciousness and perceived consciousness become one. At last, we discover that the ocean of pure consciousness that we had thought was outside ourselves is, in reality, within. We are by nature Brahman eternal, free, ever-blissful the One-without-a-second. As this is a known fact that through gross symbolic statements the subtle matters can be easily meditated, as in the case of Arundhati star which is a small one and for showing the same the big stars staying near used to be shown as Arundhati and later, all those are being denied the real Arundhati is being introduced. Likewise, for showing the Brahman all the matters are being introduced as Madhu, Āditya and fire, then the actual Brahman is being introduced as Brahman itself.

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in The Upaniṣads: Breath of the Eternal, 146.
3. BrhadĀraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1/6/1
4. BrhadĀraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 2.5.1, in The Upaniṣads:
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