

# Isvara – the Creator



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*Īśvara* is Brahman with the *upādhi* or conditioning of *māyā*. The two powers of *māyā* are the *āvarana* and *vikṣepa śakti*. *Āvarana śakti* veils the Self and the *vikṣepa śakti* projects the world of names and forms. All these have been elaborated in earlier essays<sup>1</sup>. In this essay let us see how *Īśvara* is at once the efficient cause (*nimitta kāraṇa*) and material cause (*upādāna kāraṇa*) of the universe. In *vedanta* this concept is termed *Īśvara* being the '*abhinna-nimitta-upādāna-kāraṇa*'. Let us now understand these two terms — *nimitta kāraṇa* and *upādāna kāraṇa*.

## *Nimitta Kāraṇa* and *Upādāna Kāraṇa*

Creation necessitates two factors – the material substance from which a thing is created and an intelligent principle which fashions the creation. For example to create a pot you need the clay and the potter. The substance from which the *kārya* i.e., the effect is created is called the *upādāna kāraṇa* or the 'material cause'. The intelligent principle that propels and fashions the creation, is called the *nimitta kāraṇa* or the 'efficient cause'. These terms will become amply clear when we understand them with a few examples. In the creation of a pot, clay, the substance or material from which the pot is made is the *upādāna kāraṇa* or the material cause and the potter, the intelligent being who fashions the pot out of the clay is the *nimitta kāraṇa* or the efficient cause<sup>2</sup>. In the creation of gold

<sup>1</sup> For *Īśvara* refer to August 2003 issue of *Tapovan Prasad* and for the two powers of *māyā* the September 2003 issue.

<sup>2</sup> One more cause is sometimes pointed out – the *sahakāri kāraṇa* or the accessory cause. This consists of the potter-wheel and the stick that are the accessories in the creation of the pot. Even these 'accessory causes' are considered to be part and parcel of the efficient cause in many *Vedantic* texts.

ornaments, the goldsmith is the *nimitta kāraṇa* and gold is *upādāna kāraṇa*.

## Precise Definitions

The above two terms have been analysed much in Vedānta and have been precisely defined<sup>1</sup>.

1. The following is the definition of *upādāna kāraṇa*.

यत् कार्यस्वरूपे प्रविशति, यद्विना कार्यस्य स्थितिः नास्ति, तत् उपादानकारणम् उच्यते ।

*yat kāryasvariūpe praviśati, yadvinā kāryasya sthitiḥ nāsti, tat upādānakāraṇam ucyate.*

*Upādāna kāraṇa* or the material cause is that which pervades the effect and without which the effect will not be there.

Let us relate the definition to the example of clay and the pot. Clay is the *upādāna kāraṇa* or the material cause of the pot because:

- a. It pervades the pot and
- b. Without the clay there would be no pot

2. Now coming to the definition of *nimitta kāraṇa*,

यत् कार्यस्वरूपे न प्रविशति, किन्तु कार्यात् पृथक् स्थितं सत् कार्यम् उत्पादयति, यस्य नाशेन कार्यं न नश्यति, तत् निमित्तकारणम् इति अभिधीयते ।

*yat kāryasvariūpe na praviśati, kintu kāryāt pṛthak sthitam sat kāryam utpādayati, yasya nāśena kāryam na naśyati tat nimittakāraṇam iti abhidhiyate.*

*Nimitta kāraṇa* or the efficient cause is that which does not pervade the effect, and standing distinct from the effect, creates the effect, and in the destruction of which the effect is not destroyed.

<sup>3</sup> The famous Hindi Vedānta text *Vicāra Sāgara* of Śrī Śvāmī Nīścaladāsa has been translated and brilliantly commented in Tamil by Śrī Sivarāya a century and a half ago. The noted scholar Svāmī Vāsudeva Brahmendra Sarasvatī has translated this Tamil work into Sanskrit. The above definitions are reproductions from his monumental translation.

When we relate the definition to the example we find that the potter is the *nimitta kāraṇa* or the efficient cause of the pot because

- He does not pervade the pot like the clay.
- He stands distinctly apart from the clay and the pot.
- And even in his absence the pot continues to exist.

## The Vedic Tangle

Is *Īśvara* the *nimitta kāraṇa* or the *upādāna kāraṇa* of the universe? If the Lord is the *nimitta kāraṇa* i.e., the efficient cause, then he has to be different from the world. But the *Vedas* declare that he pervades the creation — *tatsrṣṭvā tadevānuprāviśat* — having created it He pervaded it'. As defined earlier, the efficient cause has to remain different from the creation, as seen in the case of the efficient cause of the pot, the potter being different from the pot.

If it is not possible to posit the Lord as the *nimitta kāraṇa* why not consider the Lord as the *upādāna kāraṇa*, the material cause of the universe? This would not be logically tenable because the world is inert and if the Lord were the material cause of the universe then it would amount to the Lord being inert. To explain — the effect being the gold ornament helps us to infer the nature of the cause also as being that of gold. In the same way the material cause of the inert world has to be only inert and not otherwise. But the *Upaniṣads* emphatically declare the Lord to be the 'very embodiment of Consciousness — *prajñānaghana*'. Also the *Vedas* declare that the Lord stands apart from the created universe — *atyatiṣṭhat daśāṅgulam*. Since the material cause cannot stand apart from the effect, we cannot posit the Lord to be the material cause. Thus both ways we have a problem — a seemingly insurmountable scriptural tangle.

Further, the contradictory nature of the statements within the Scriptures itself — some claiming that the Lord pervades the creation and others extolling him as distinctly apart from the creation — is disturbing. Is there any way out of it?

## The Vedantiç Solution

*Vedānta* says that all these seemingly unconquerable problems are surmounted effortlessly if one understands the true nature of *Īśvara*. *Īśvara* is *Brahman* with the *upādhi* or conditioning of *Māyā*

i.e., *Īśvara* = *Brahman* + *Māyā*. The *Brahman* aspect of *Īśvara* is of the nature of Consciousness and the *Māyā* aspect of *Īśvara* is inert. The *Māyā* aspect of *īśvara* is the cause of the universe. Thus the inert universe has the inert *Māyā* as the *upādāna kāraṇa* or the material cause. The *Vedic* statements that talk of the Lord pervading the creation is only with respect to His *upādhi* — *māyā*, which is the material cause. And as the material cause it is inert, needless to say He pervades the inert universe.

But as the *Brahman* aspect, *Īśvara* is *jñāna-svarūpa*, pure knowledge. In this aspect *Īśvara* becomes the *nimitta kāraṇa* or the efficient cause — the one who fashions this enormously wonderful and variegated creation. In this aspect He is at once distinct and unaffected by the inert world of names and forms. Thus, the *Vedic* statements that speak of the Lord as being distinctly apart from the creation is only with respect to *Īśvara's Brahman* aspect and not the *Īśvara's māyā* aspect. Note that by definition the *nimitta kāraṇa* has to remain apart from the effect. Thus *Advaita Vedānta* solves this seemingly convoluted problem quite effortlessly. We thus see that *Īśvara* is both the efficient cause and the material cause.

### The *Upaniṣadic* example

One would say that the above answer is strikingly beautiful for its ingenuity. However, are there real life examples where we can see one and the same thing being the *upādāna kāraṇa* as well as the *nimitta kāraṇa*? Or is it just a philosophical hypothesis that has to be swallowed unquestioningly? Swami Sadānanda in *Vedānta-Sāra* takes the example of the common spider and its web example provided in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*<sup>1</sup> and clarifies.

शक्तिद्वयवद् अज्ञानोपहितं चैतन्यं स्वप्रधानतया निमित्तं स्वोपाधिप्रधानतया उपादानं च भवति । यथा लूता तन्तुकार्यं प्रति स्वप्रधानतया निमित्तं स्वशरीरप्रधानतया उपादानं च भवति ।

*śaktidvayavad ajñānopahitaṁ caitanyam svapradhānatayā nimittaṁ svopādhipradhānatayā upādānaṁ ca bhavati. Yathā lūtā tantukāryam prati svapradhānatayā nimittaṁ vasaśarīrapradhānatayā upādānaṁ ca bhavati.*

<sup>1</sup> *yathornanabhiḥ sṛjate grhṇate ca..... Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.1.7*

Consciousness conditioned by ignorance, possessed of the two powers, when considered from its own standpoint is the efficient cause and when considered from the standpoint of its *upādhi* or conditioning is the material cause of the universe. Just as the spider, when considered from the standpoint of its own self, is the efficient cause of the web and when looked upon from the standpoint of its body, is also the material cause of the web.


This is a brilliant example to bring home the idea of one and the same thing being both the material as well as the efficient cause. The spider creates the web from its own glands. It does not use any material apart from itself to create the web. Thus its own body becomes the material cause, the *upādāna kāraṇa*. But as a conscious entity it conceives the web design. Then it becomes the efficient cause, the *nimitta kāraṇa*. In the same way the *upādhi* (conditioning or adjunct) of *Īśvara*, the inert *māyā* becomes the *upādāna kāraṇa* and the conscious aspect of *Īśvara* becomes the *nimitta kāraṇa*.

Another example that can be used to elucidate this point is the classic *vedāntic* example of a dream. The mind stuff becomes the *upādāna kāraṇa* and the mind-conditioned consciousness becomes the *nimitta kāraṇa* of the dream world.

## Conclusion

We have thus elaborately seen how *Īśvara* is both the *nimitta kāraṇa* and *upādāna kāraṇa*. In *Vedānta* this is technically termed the Lord being the *abhinna-nimitta-upādāna-kāraṇa* — *abhinna* = same or non-different, *nimitta kāraṇa* = efficient cause and *upādāna kāraṇa* = the material cause. This is a very important concept in *Vedānta* and it is necessary to understand it thoroughly.

It would be ideal to summarize this whole discussion with the blessed words of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya — “As *Īśvara* is endowed with limitless power, the Lord projects, in conjunction with His *upādhi*, *māyā*, the whole universe comprising of both the sentient and the

<p><b>SWEET THOUGHT</b></p>	<p>Man is never punished <i>for</i> his sins but <i>by</i> his sins.</p>
 <p>Sri Krishna Sweets PURE GHEE SWEETS</p>	<p>Swami Chinmayananda</p>
<p>PONDY BAZAAR ADAYAR ANNA NAGAR PH: 4312345</p>	

non-sentient. Let no one raise the question as to how the Lord, the one existent Reality, devoid of a second, and without anything external to Himself, creates all this by Himself. The Lord Himself is both the material and the efficient cause; and He creates, preserves and destroys the universe which consists of the moving and the unmoving alike. As pure Consciousness, where the characteristics of the Lord are predominant, He is the efficient cause of the universe. But when the adjunct of *māyā* is predominant, the Lord is regarded as the material cause of the universe. When the spider weaves its web, in as much as it is endowed with consciousness, it is the efficient cause of the web. But in as much as it draws the filament from its own body, it is also the material cause of it. The same law holds good in relation to the Lord and the universe<sup>1</sup>". May the grace of the Lord be with us in understanding and reveling in His true glory! May we by His grace become one with Him!!

<sup>1</sup> *Sarva-vedānta-sāra-saṅgrahaḥ*, verses 330-334

अनन्तशक्तिसम्पन्नो मायोपाधिक ईश्वरः। ईक्षामात्रेण सृजति विश्वमेतच्चराचरम्॥  
 अद्वितीयस्वमात्रोऽसौ निरुपादान ईश्वरः। स्वयमेव कथं सृजतीति न शङ्क्यताम्॥  
 निमित्तमप्युपादानं स्वयमेव भवन्नप्रभुः। चराचरात्मकं विश्वं सृजत्यवति लुम्पति॥  
 स्वप्राधान्येन जगतो निमित्तमपि कारणम्। उपादानं तथोपाधिप्राधान्येन भवत्ययम्॥  
 यथा लूता निमित्तं च स्वप्रधानतया भवेत्। स्वशरीरप्रधानत्वेनोपादानं यथेश्वरः॥

Meet life as it reaches us. With or without the things our minds demand, our life can be a glorious joy; a brilliant success. But for this we must discover something else to depend upon. That something Else is the Everything, the glorious Radhe-Shyam, seek Him in yourself. In the hushed silence of inspired joy, in the roaring laughter of silent meditation, in the motionless dance of ecstasy, in the freezing heat of *tapas*, He whispers His deafening message, "I am you – you are Me."

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