

# Brahmakaravṛtti – Part II

---



SWAMI ADVAYANANDA

## Introduction

Consider a dark room in which is placed a book veiled by a cloth. To see the book, two steps are required:

- (1) removal of the cloth that veils the book and
- (2) illumining of the book with a source of light.

The cloth covering the book in the above example resembles the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) produced by the *āvaraṇa śakti* of *tūlāvidyā* that shrouds all inert objects.

The *antaḥkaraṇa* that is endowed with the reflection of Consciousness (*phala* or *cidābhāsa*) that proceeds forward to the region of the object, has to accomplish two functions for the object to be cognised: firstly, the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) covering the object has to be removed and then, secondly, the object has to be illumined. These two functions are successfully accomplished by the dual process of *vṛtti-vyāpti* and *phala-vyāpti*<sup>1</sup>:

1. Step I – *Vṛtti-vyāpti*: This is the pervasion of the object by the *antaḥkaraṇa*, wherein the *antaḥkaraṇa* takes a form identical to that of the object. If the object is, say a pot, the *antaḥkaraṇa* takes a *ghaṭākāra-vṛtti* i.e., a form exactly like that of the pot and removes the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) that covers the pot.

---

<sup>1</sup> The concepts of *tūlāvidyā* (secondary ignorance), *mūlāvidyā* (primary ignorance), *vṛtti-vyāpti* and *phala-vyāpti* have already been explained in 'Brahmakaravṛtti – Part I', which appeared in the June 2005 issue of *Tapovan Prasad*. It would be better to revise 'Brahmakaravṛtti – Part I' before reading this essay.

2. Step II – *Phala-vyāpti*: Even if the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) that is shrouding an inert object, like the pot, is removed, it does not independently shine forth, because the object is inert by nature. Once the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) is removed, the *phala* i.e., the *cidābhāsa* or the reflected Consciousness which is present in the *vṛtti* illumines the pot and it is then that the knowledge arises – ‘*ahaṃ ghaṭaṃ jānāmi* – I know the pot’. This illumination of the object by the *cidābhāsa* or *phala* is termed ‘*phala-vyāpti*’.

*Brahman* is not like other inert objects like a book, a pot etc., *Brahman* is of the very nature of Consciousness and is *svayamprakāśa* (self-effulgent). What is the process involved in knowing *Brahman*? In what way is the knowing process similar to that of cognising an inert object like that of a pot and in what way is it dissimilar?

In the course of these essays, we shall see that in the case of knowledge of *Brahman*, there is the need for *vṛtti-vyāpti* alone and that *phala-vyāpti* is redundant and impossible<sup>2</sup>.

## ***Vṛtti-vyāpti* admitted**

*Brahman* too is covered by an *āvaraṇa*. While an object like a pot is covered by the *āvaraṇa* produced by the *āvaraṇa śakti* of *tūlāvidyā*, the *āvaraṇa* with which *Brahman* is veiled is produced by the *āvaraṇa śakti* of *mūlāvidyā*.

Whatever be the cause of the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) – be it *tūlāvidyā* or *mūlāvidyā* – the similarity between the cognition process of an inert object like a pot and that of the self-effulgent *Brahman* is the presence of an *āvaraṇa* (veiling). As long as the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) exists, there can be no knowledge of the object – be it inert like a pot or self-effulgent as is the case with *Brahman*. Just as *vṛtti-vyāpti* is required to remove the *āvaraṇa* (veil) covering the inert object, so too *vṛtti-vyāpti* is required to remove the *āvaraṇa* covering the self-effulgent *Brahman*.

<sup>2</sup> The present essay focusses on the requirement of *vṛtti-vyāpti* for the knowledge of *Brahman*. The next essay, ‘*Brahmakāravṛtti* – Part III’ will explain the reason why *phala-vyāpti* is redundant and impossible in the context of the knowledge of *Brahman*.

If *Brahman* is *svayamprakāśa* (self-effulgent or self-luminous), where is the need to remove the *āvaraṇa*? The example of the dark room given earlier can be used to answer this query. Just as a pot or a book is covered by a cloth (*āvaraṇa*), the self-effulgent *Brahman* is also covered, like an incandescent lamp, a source of light, covered by a cloth. In both these cases, to see the object, be it the inert book or the luminous lamp, there is the need to remove the cloth veiling. So too, in the case of *Brahman*, even though it is of the nature of *svayamprakāśa* (self-effulgent) Consciousness, the veiling or *āvaraṇa* has to be removed, for without the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) being removed, *Brahman* will remain unknown. It is for the purpose of destruction of the *āvaraṇa* shrouding *Brahman*, that *Vedāntic Ācāryas* have admitted *vṛtti-vyāpti*. Swami Vidyananda in his *Pañcadaśī* (7.92) makes this point explicit:

ब्रह्मण्यज्ञाननाशाय वृत्तिव्याप्तिरपेक्षिता ।  
*brahmaṇyajñānanāśāya vṛttivyāptirapekṣitā* ।

In the cognition of *Brahman*, *vṛttivyāpti* is necessary to destroy the ignorance (veiling *Brahman*).

*Vṛttivyāpti* entails the pervasion of the object by the *antaḥkaraṇa*. In the case of the pot, the *antaḥkaraṇa* takes the form of *ghaṭākāra-vṛtti* i.e., the *antaḥkaraṇa* pervades the pot and takes a form exactly like that of the pot and destroys the *āvaraṇa* veiling the pot. There is no difficulty in comprehending this, for the finite *antaḥkaraṇa* (thought) can very well pervade another finite object like a pot and take its shape – ‘*ghaṭākāra-vṛtti*’. But *Brahman*, being infinite in nature, the question naturally arises as to how the finite *antaḥkaraṇa* (thought) can ever pervade the infinite *Brahman* and take the form of *Brahman* – ‘*brahmākāra-vṛtti*’.

This question is founded on the erroneous assumption that *Vedānta* postulates the pervasion of the *śuddha* (pure) *Brahman* by the finite *antaḥkaraṇa*!

## The Object of *Brahmākāravṛtti*

*Brahmākāravṛtti* does not pervade the pure *Brahman*. The Consciousness which is conditioned by the *antaḥkaraṇa* – termed 'sākṣī' (Witness) or 'pratyagātman' (inner Self) – is alone the object of the *brahmākāra-vṛtti*. Swami Vidyaranya (*Pañcadaśī* - 7.90) clarifies this when he says:

साक्षी एव धीवृत्त्या व्याप्यते अन्यवत् ।  
*sākṣī eva dhīvṛtṭyā vyāpyate anyavat ।*

Just as other objects (like pot etc.) are pervaded by the intellect, so too it is the *sākṣī* alone that is pervaded by the intellect.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of *sākṣī-pratyagātman* becoming the object of *antaḥkaraṇa* can be explained using the example of space. One cannot objectify and quantify the infinite and *akhaṇḍa* (impartite or partless) space, yet, the same impartite space, when conditioned by the walls of a jar or a room, becomes an object of quantification. We measure the volume of the space in the room; speak of cylindrical and spherical spaces; and also give appellations like 'pot space', 'room space' and so on. In the same way, the infinite and *akhaṇḍa Brahman*, when conditioned by the *antaḥkaraṇa*, becomes the seemingly finite and limited *sākṣī-pratyagātman*, and it is this *sākṣī-pratyagātman* that becomes an object of pervasion for the *antaḥkaraṇa*. The *Bhagavad Geeta* (verse 6.21) declares that the Self, even though beyond the reach of the senses, is still within the ken of the intellect – '*buddhigrāhyam atīndriyam*'.

It is to be noted that the *antaḥkaraṇa*, which has become pure and single-pointed by the practice of *sādhana catuṣṭaya*, turns inward (*antarmukha*) and it is only such an *antaḥkaraṇa* that is capable of cognising the *sākṣī-pratyagātman*<sup>4</sup>. The idea of

<sup>3</sup> This very same idea is also explained by *Nṛsiṃhasarasvatī* as follows, while commenting on *Vedāntasāra*: *Sa cittavṛtṭiḥ na śuddhabrahmaviśayinī kintu ajñānaviśiṣṭa-pratyagabhinnā-parabrahmaviśayinī ।*

"That *antaḥkaraṇa* mode (i.e., the *brahmākāravṛtti*) does not have as its object the Pure *Brahman*, but the Supreme *Brahman*, which is qualified by ignorance, and which is non-different from the inner Self."

the pure and subtle *antaḥkaraṇa* objectifying *Brahman* is also in consonance with the declarations of the *Upaniṣads* (*Kaṭhōpaniṣad*-1.3.12):

एष सर्वेषु भूतेषु गूढोऽऽत्मा न प्रकाशते ।  
दृश्यते त्वग्रयया बुद्ध्या सूक्ष्मया सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः ॥

*eṣa sarveṣu bhūteṣu gūḍho' 'tmā na prakāśate ।*  
*dṛśyate tvagryayā buddhyā sūkṣmayā sūkṣmadarśibhiḥ ॥*

This one is hidden in all beings, and hence does not appear as the Self (of all). But by the seers of subtle things, He is seen through a single-pointed and fine intellect.

If the *antaḥkaraṇa* only pervades the *sākṣī* and not the pure infinite *Brahman*, why at all use the term '*brahmākāra-ṛtti*' (thought of the form of *Brahman*)? Would it not be better to term the *ṛtti* that pervades the *sākṣī* or *pratyagātman* as *sākṣī-ākāra-ṛtti* (thought of the form of *sākṣī*) or *pratyagātma-ākāra-ṛtti* (thought of the form of the inner-Self)? The answer to this question is as follows:

- The *sākṣī-pratyagātman* is in truth the *Brahman* alone, just as pot-space is itself the infinite space. Hence to indicate the essential *Brahman* nature of the *sākṣī-pratyagātman* that is pervaded by the *ṛtti*, the *ṛtti* that pervades the *sākṣī-pratyagātman* is called '*brahmākāra-ṛtti*' and not merely *sākṣī-ākāra-ṛtti* or *pratyagātma-ākāra-ṛtti*.

- Further, the *brahmākāra-ṛtti* that pervades the *sākṣī-pratyagātman*, with its message of oneness with *Brahman* bestows on the *sākṣī-pratyagātman* its true status of being *Brahman*. Hence even though the *ṛtti* pervades only the *sākṣī-pratyagātman*, it is rightly termed *brahmākāra-ṛtti* and not merely *sākṣī-ākāra-ṛtti* or *pratyagātma-ākāra-ṛtti*. This idea will become clearer as we study the nature and *modus operandi* of *brahmākāra-ṛtti*.

<sup>4</sup> We see this idea of the pure mind perceiving *Brahman* confirmed by saints. 'It is the pure mind that perceives God, and at that time this ordinary mind does not function. A mind that has the slightest trace of attachment to the world cannot be called pure.' — Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

## Nature and modus operandi of *Brahmākāravṛtti*

The *sākṣi-pratyagātman*, though being one with the infinite (*akhaṇḍa*) *Brahman*, is thought to be finite (*khaṇḍa*). In other words, the infinite nature of *sākṣi-pratyagātman* is veiled by the finite concept that the individual entertains about himself. We have already seen that this veiling of the *sākṣi-pratyagātman*'s real nature is caused by the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) produced by the *āvaraṇaśakti* of *mūlāvidyā*.

This *āvaraṇa* (veiling) is removed by the *brahmākāravṛtti* – '*Ahaṁ Brahma asmi*'. This thought objectifies the *sākṣi-pratyagātman* and removes the *āvaraṇa*, by the force of its opposite content. The finitude (*khaṇḍatva*) of the self is destroyed by the definition of the infinite (*akhaṇḍatva*) Self provided by the '*Ahaṁ Brahma asmi*' *brahmākāravṛtti*.

The *brahmākāravṛtti* – '*Ahaṁ Brahma asmi*' implies: '*ahaṁ sākṣī pratyagātmā paraṁ Brahma asmi* – I, the inner witness Self am the Supreme *Brahman*.' *Brahman* is eternal, pure, intelligent, free, true, supreme bliss, infinite and one without a second. Therefore the *brahmākāravṛtti* – '*Ahaṁ Brahma asmi*' means: 'I, the inner witness Self am *Brahman* which is eternal, pure, intelligent, free, true, supreme bliss, infinite and without a second'.

Swami Sadananda makes this point clear in his *Vedānta Sāra*:  
अहं नित्य-शुद्ध-बुद्ध-मुक्त-सत्यस्वभाव-परमानन्द-अनन्त-  
अद्वयं ब्रह्म अस्मि ।

*Ahaṁ nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-satyasvabhāva-  
paramānanda-ananta-adṛyaṁ Brahma asmi* ।

Each of these terms '*nitya*', '*śuddha*' etc., negates certain notions of limitation (*khaṇḍatva*) present in the *ajñānī*'s (ignorant person's) concept of the self.

**Nitya** (Eternal): Negates impermanance (*anityatva-śaṅkāṁ nirākaroti*).

**Śuddha** (Pure): Indicates that the Self is free from defects such as *avidyā* (*avidyādi-doṣa-rāhityam*).

**Buddha** (of the nature of Knowledge): Asserts the self-effulgent nature and thus precludes inertness (*svaprakāśa-svarūpatvena jādyāḍīkam vyavacchidyate*).

**Mukta** (Free or Liberated): Indicates the absence of all conditionings – gross body, subtle body and causal body (*sarvopādhi-rāhityam*).

**Satya** (True): Indestructible (*avināśī-svabhāvatvam*).

**Paramānanda** (Supreme Bliss): This term 'Supreme Bliss' describes one's nature as that of Infinite Bliss (*niratiśaya-ānanda-svarūpatvam*).

**Ananta** (Infinite): Indicates the absence of any kind of limitation—space, time or objectification (*deśataḥ kālato vastutaḥ ca aparicchinnatvam*).

**Advayam** (Non-dual): Asserts oneness by denying the presence of plurality (*nānātva-niṣedhena ekatvaṁ bodhyate*).

Thus, even though the *brahmākāravṛtti* objectifies the *sākṣi-pratyagātman*, yet, the *brahmākāravṛtti*, with its powerful message of identity of the inner Self with *Brahman*, removes the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) covering the inner Self and reveals its real nature of being one with *Brahman*. Hence the use of the term '*brahmākāravṛtti*' is doubtlessly well justified.

## Akhaṇḍākāravṛtti

*Brahmākāravṛtti* is also known in many *Vedāntic* texts as '*akhaṇḍākāravṛtti*'. This term literally means 'the thought (*vṛtti*) which has taken the impartite or partless form (*akhaṇḍa-ākāra*)'. There are two important reasons why *brahmākāravṛtti* is also called *akhaṇḍākāravṛtti*.

● The *sākṣi-pratyagātman*, being in truth *Brahman*, is *akhaṇḍa* (impartite or partless) in its essential nature. Hence the term *akhaṇḍākāravṛtti* for *brahmākāravṛtti*.

● The *Mahāvākyas* envisage the *akhaṇḍārtha* or impartite meaning, which is nothing but the oneness between the

individual Self and the Supreme Brahman. Since the *brahmākāravṛtti* (*ahaṁ Brahma asmi iti vṛtti*) enshrines this *akhaṇḍārtha*, *brahmākāravṛtti* is also termed *akhaṇḍākāravṛtti*.

### **Akhaṇḍākārākāritavṛtti**

*Brahmākāravṛtti* or *akhaṇḍākāravṛtti* is also termed in some Vedāntic texts<sup>5</sup> as '*akhaṇḍākārākāritavṛtti*' (*akhaṇḍa-ākāra-ākārita-vṛtti*). What do the two words '*ākāra*' and '*ākārita*' refer to in the above term?

This term '*akhaṇḍākārākāritavṛtti*' (*akhaṇḍa-ākāra-ākārita-vṛtti*) has to be understood as follows: the thought (*vṛtti*) which has taken the form (*ākārita*) of the form (*ākāra*) taken by the infinite (*akhaṇḍa*)<sup>6</sup>. The idea of the Infinite seemingly taking a form has already been explained with the example of space<sup>7</sup>. The infinite space takes a seemingly finite form as pot space, room space and so on. So too, the infinite Brahman seems to take a limited form of the *sākṣi-pratyagātman*, because of the *upādhis*. It is this limited form of *sākṣi-pratyagātman* that is meant by '*akhaṇḍa-ākāra*' (the form taken by the Infinite). In *brahmākāravṛtti*, the *antaḥkaraṇa* has taken the form (*ākārita*) of this *sākṣi-pratyagātman* and not the pure Brahman. Hence the special term '*akhaṇḍa-ākāra-ākārita-vṛtti*' for *brahmākāravṛtti*.

### **Conclusion**

It is to be noted that mere parroting or a mechanical repetition of '*Ahaṁ Brahma asmi*' cannot be considered as *brahmākāravṛtti*. The '*Ahaṁ Brahma asmi*' thought has to be a 'knowledge-powered-thought' packed with the significances like '*nitya*', '*śuddha*' etc., as described earlier. This will happen

<sup>5</sup> Vide Vedānta Sāra of Swami Sadananda - '*evamācāryeṇa.....brahmāsmiiti akhaṇḍākārākāritā citta-vṛttih udeti*'

<sup>6</sup> *Akhaṇḍasya brahmāṇaḥ ākāraḥ akhaṇḍākāraḥ, sākṣi pratyagātmā ityarthah, tasya sākṣiṇaḥ prayagātmanaḥ ākāraḥ rūpaṁ yayā vṛttyā upādīyate sā akhaṇḍākārākāritavṛttih, brahmākāravṛttih ityarthah*

<sup>7</sup> Refer to the earlier subheading—'The Object of *Brahmākāravṛtti*'

only with the right enquiry into the *mahāvākyas* attained by the grace of the *Guru*. When the *brahmākāraṁṛtti* arises, at that very moment the *āvaraṇa* (veiling) covering the *sākṣi-pratyagātman*, preventing the knowledge of its infinite nature, is destroyed.

What happens to the *brahmākāraṁṛtti* once the *āvaraṇa* is removed? Does it stay or does it also disappear? And how does *Brahman* shine forth? In the case of an object like a pot, there is the requirement of the second step of *phala-vyāpti* wherein the *phala* or *cidābhāsa* that is present in the *ṛtti* illumines the pot leading to the knowledge: '*ahaṁ ghaṭam jānāmi*—I know the pot'. Does the *phala* in the case of *brahmajñāna* illumine *Brahman* or not? What about statements in the *Upaniṣads* like '*yan-manasā na manute*—that which cannot be thought of by the mind'—which speak of the impossibility of the mind pervading *Brahman*? Don't they contradict statements which indicate *Brahman* being cognised by the mind?

These questions will be taken up in the next essay.

## Remembering with Gratitude

The rare cover picture of Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda in the *Jayanti* issue (May 2005) is strikingly majestic – *simhaavalokanam* (leonine look). This picture reminds us of His exhortation, "Look up and see what the *Guru* sees." Let us also remember with gratitude Brni. Shanti Chaitanya, who is no more with us, for this picture from her private collection. Today, thanks to the *Jayanti* gift of *Tapovan Prasad*, it has become the priceless possession of hundreds of thousands of devotees all over the world.

The prayer in the same issue highlights Sri Sankaracharya as an *Avatara* of Lord Siva, and the work He did, the *avatara karyam*. It is also a universal prayer for the welfare of all. May His Grace and Pujya Gurudev's blessings be forever with *Tapovan Prasad*, which is also the *prasada* of Pujya Sri Tapovan Maharaj.

Swamini Nishthananda