

The Concept Of *Jnana* – In The Philosophy Of Sri Abhirama Paramahansa

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‘To know’ is an innate urge in man because of which man asks whys, what and hows. When the desire to know is directed to know the particular, it comes within the ambit of natural science and social science. But philosophy undertakes to understand what is knowledge?, what are the sources of knowledge, what are the limits of knowledge and what is the nature of knowledge? Besides, it examines the relationship among knower (*jnata*), known (*jneya*) and knowledge (*jnana*) itself. Every act of knowledge presupposes a conscious subject. Consciousness is presupposed in every act of knowing, be it sensory perception or inner perception by mind and the internal sense organs.

In Vedanta one finds a lucid analysis of the concept of self or atman. In kenopanisad it has been argued as to how the self remains as an entity which can neither be perceived through sense organs nor conceived through the mind. The means of presentation can not be presented. The eye can not be an object in the visual field says Witgenstein. Much before that the Indian thinkers, the Indian philosophers have argued that self being the basis precondition of all cognitive activities, it can not be cognized. That which being there eyes see how can it be seen? That which being there mind thinks how can it be thought about? That which being there speech is possible how can it be spoken about? The Vedantic dictum is that ‘know thy self’ (*atmanam vidhi*) because by knowing that everything is

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known. Since the atman or self is non-different from Brahman which is infinite, to know it is to know everything just as by knowing the clay everything made of clay is known. By knowing 'that' everything is known². Since it is infinite no predication is possible because every predication limits the infinite. Every predicate has a finite import. So to understand the infinite with a particular predicate is to make the infinite appear as finite. Upanisads do not make room for agnosticism. They say; that can be known only by becoming it. Brahman can be known only by becoming Brahman³. So they introduce another mode of knowing where the subject knows the object by becoming the object. In this mode of knowing, there is no duality between the knower and known, the subject and the object.

The concept of the phenomenon of knowing is alien to the nature of the self because there is nothing which is external to the self or different from the self. The self shines in its native glory and it is not subject to change or modifications. It is the ego of the individual which is subject to change or modification. But the transcendental 'I' or self is beyond change or modification. Abhirama underlines the unique distinction between the empirical experience and transcendental experience (*Brahmanubhava*). Empirical experience presupposes the distinction between the knower and the known. The subject and the object constitute the part of empirical experience without which empirical experience will become an impossibility. The two, condition each other therefore such knowledge is bound to be relative. As the empirical self is the subject in relation to the object, the transcendental self is the subject in relation to the individual subject. The transcendental subject or the pure self is mere witness of the empirical and all its activities. But the witnessing function on the part of the pure self does not tantamount to activity on its part because its mere presence tantamount to the witnessship of the supreme.⁴

The universe is an integral part of the cosmic wave or cosmic wheel. Each spoke on the wheel is intimately connected with other without any break. From the empirical point of view, the ego perceives the difference but from the transcendental point of view there is absolute identity. Abhirama reiterates that mind, intellect and ego are the product of *prakṛti* which has beginning and being the evolutes of *prakṛti*, they are subject to the influence of *gunas*. Since the pure self or the ultimate self is *trigunattita* (beyond the three *gunas*), it does not experience the trichotomy of knower, known and knowledge. The empirical knowledge is necessary for undertaking the transactions of life is known as *vyavaharika jnana* (pragmatic knowledge) where as the knowledge of the ultimate is called intuitive knowledge or *paramarthik jnana* or *yathārtha jnana*. According to Abhirama the soul which is beginningless and matter which is beginning are co-eternal realities and that they are two different aspects of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality.

The individual, i.e., *jiva* is a complex state of *anadi* and *adi* with equal potentiality. It is exclusively stated that *jiva* is *adi* where as *parama* is *anadi*.⁵ Interestingly both the eternal, beginningless (*anadi*) and those that have beginning (*adi*), the eternal and ephemeral co-exist in every particular.⁶ There is nothing which is not pervaded by 'Him' be it living or non-living, atoms or sub-atoms.⁷ Since every substance contains the eternal within it, it has the property of the ultimate. So every thing is essentially or potentially conscious.⁸ It is *prakṛti* which is responsible for *maya* on account of which the one is seen as the many and ignorance because of which an individual perceives *anadi* as *adi*. This is how knowledge and ignorance co-exist. *Anadi* is the *purusa*, the subject and *adi*, the *prakṛti* is the object of knowledge. Though the subject and object are essentially one, on account of ignorance, they are seen as many. Names and forms are mistaken to be real. There is a sense in which the relative particulars are also the content or the eternal essence within that. But to construe

the particular as particular that is devoid of supreme essence is caused by ignorance. Just as jiva, the unit consciousness is subject in relation to the empirical world which constitute its object, individual jivas are object in relation to universal self or *Brahman* which is the subject. When on account of acquisition of right knowledge, one perceives the supreme self in every particular, there remains no difference between the self and not-self because the same self is perceived in every where in every particular.

Abhirama seems to have clearly inclined towards Ramanuja in so far as he holds that knowledge reveals itself. Knowledge is self luminous. It reveals the subject as well as the object. In this respect there is a clear affinity between Abhirama and mimamsakas. But unlike Mimamsakas he holds that consciousness is an essential property of the self. It is not accidental but intrinsic to the nature of the self. Even in deep sleep self enjoys bliss. That is why after waking up one reports that one had good sleep or sound sleep. Since self is non-other than Brahman, it partakes the nature of Brahman which is of the nature of truth, consciousness and bliss (*saccidananda*). So self consciousness is a blissful experience which defines nature of the self in its native stance. Self being presupposed in every act of empirical perception, it can not be an object of perception. Self can not be an object of knowledge because that being there all forms of empirical knowledge is possible. Self is known by itself. When the self is known, every thing is known because self partakes in the nature of *Brahman* and the world of multiplicity is nothing but varied expression of *Brahman*. So *Brahman* and the world are constituted by the same essence. That which is *Brahman* from macrocosmic point of view, is *atman* from microcosmic point of view. When *Brahman* becomes embodied, it is termed as *atman*. So *atma jnana* is not different from *Brahma jnana* and that is the highest knowledge. So the knowledge of *Brahman* in form of 'I' am Brahman (*aham Brahmasmi*), that self is Brahman (*ayam atma Brahma*), that though art (*tattvamasi*), etc., is told as the highest knowledge

differently termed as *yathartha jnana*, *Brahma jnana*, *atma jnana* and *paramarthic jnana*.

The domain of human mind is one of conflict and struggle. The struggle is between 'what is' and 'what shall be', the actual and the ideal, between the predicament that mind exists and the ideal state one seeks to achieve, the conflict between being and becoming and the existential dilemma that one encounters.⁹ Abhirama underlines the fact that as is your mind, so is the world. What we think and feel and the way between how we act is projected by ourselves, the world. So the world that we come across is in a sense created and beginning by us. Since human mind is finite, the projected world also appears finite and limited which is the cause of misery. As we think, so we become. If we think subtle, we become subtle and if we think crude, we become crude.¹⁰ This view can be said corollary of his ontology where Abhirama expounds the doctrine of *pinda* (microcosm) and *Brahmanda* (macrocosm) trying to show the essential identity between the two. This is the upanisadic vision so far as he takes the ultimate cause of this universe as the nature of pure consciousness and it is one consciousness which has metamorphosed itself in to many. Since every thing has come out of one, it partakes the nature of the one, the primordial entity which is of the nature of truth, consciousness and bliss. Since the world of diversities are nothing but manifold expression of the same substance, it can not be taken as ultimately true. In his language consciousness is the only truth, the primordial truth and it resides in every particular as its essence.¹¹ Though the world of names and forms (*nama rupa*) is subject to change, subject to birth, growth and decay, consciousness which is its underlying essence does not die. Since every thing has come from one and shall ultimately merge in the one therefore the source and the ultimate goal is also one. Consciousness is there in the beginning and at the end and in between which is the essence of every particular.¹² Since consciousness is the ultimate substance, every

thing small or big, whether an ant or an elephant, an atom or a galaxy partakes of the nature of consciousness.

The unit of matter and the unit of consciousness are integral part of the whole universe. One need not look for purusa over and above the creation. The whole universe represents the unique co-presence of purusa and prakrti. So purusa and prakrti are ontologically real in and through different particulars. To illustrate this he is taking an example of seed and tree which are nothing but the subtler and grosser manifestation of the same underlying reality. Seed is the cause and tree is the effect. Similarly when tree is the cause, seed is the effect. Pinda and Brahmanda are likely to be seed and tree respectively. Without pinda there is no Brahmanda and vice-versa. Without microcosm there is no macrocosm and vice-versa. Pinda is the root cause, Brahmanda is its subtler form and Brahmanda is the cause where pinda is its subtle form. It is in pinda that jiva resides which is not different from Brahman which is the cosmic locus.¹³ This can be understood through anumana (inference)

Abhiram categories *manas* (mind) in to five kinds, i.e., *mana*, *vimana*, *kumana*, *sumana* and *amana* and maintains that they are the evolutes of prakrti. The five basic elements, i.e., sky, air, fire, water and earth are the constituents of five *manas* and different organs of the body.¹⁴

Corresponding to five *manas* there are five levels of soul. *Mana* is related to *jnanatma*, *vimana* is related to *tattvatma*, *kumana* is related to *jivatma*, *sumana* is related to *dhyanatma* and *amana* is related to *paramatma* and placed in the elements of earth, water, air, fire and ether respectively.¹⁵

The five *manas*, five basic elements, five sense organs, five motor organs, five vital airs, the five classification of soul are intimately interrelated with each other and inseparable from the absolute. This again shows the oneness of *pinda* and *Brahmanda*, subject and object. The absolute absorbs the things of contradictory nature.

Whatever is true of macrocosm is true of the microcosm. The Mahabharata war can be taken as symbolic of the war between the individuals. It is the symbolic of the war between good and bad, right and wrong. The war situation is also the indicative of the fact that self when embodied comes under the influence of the *gunas*. Though there is an ongoing war within, it is the self which witnesses the war. The notion of hell and heaven is visualised by Abhirama in a different way. He says that one can meaningfully discover heaven and hell within the human body. Though the infinite consciousness lies within, the city of *Brahman* is within, one does not discover it. Explain this Taittiriya upanishad describes five kosas in man namely *annamaya kosa*, *pranmaya kosa*, *manamaya kosa*, *vijnanamaya kosa* and *anandamaya kosa* and corresponding to these five layers there are objective correlates such as matter, life, mind, intellect and ananda respectively (Taitt. U., 2.1). Here ananda is an existential state characterized by bliss.

Abhirama is explicit about the essential identity between microcosm and macrocosm (*pinda* and *brahmanda*). He says *Brahmanda* evolves from microcosm (*pinda*) and vice-versa. He emphatically declares that what is in the *pinda* is also in *Brahmanda* and vice-versa. Therefore he holds that the knower (*jnata*), known (*jneya*) and knowledge (*jnana*) are non-dual. Every thing is pervaded by *Brahman*. The vedantic vision of unit is underlined by Abhirama¹⁶. 'He' is all pervasive. There is no particle of the universe which does not bear 'His' glory. His concept of *sabdha Brahma* and *nama Brahma* bears eloquent testimony to his vision.

The concept of evolution profounded by Abhirama confirms oneness and unit of microcosm and macrocosm. The evolution is initiated by the playful nature of *Brahman (lila)*. First of all it burst in to *anadi purusa*, the beginningless *purusa* and that which is beginning that is *prakrti* or *adi*. Abhirama's view about the evolution of the world almost has affinity with the

sankhya evolution of the world and evolution marks the dis-equilibrium in the *gunas* of *prakrti*. So the state preceding creation is the state of harmony and equanimity among the *gunas* and the world we encounter witnesses the perpetual conflict among these different *gunas*.

The knowledge of unit, oneness and identity can be had not through empirical means but through intuitive comprehension. One can realize the identity of inhalation and exhalation which produce sound like '*hamsa*' or '*soham*', contains the secret of highest knowledge as it tells us 'I am that and He is me'. This knowledge is termed as '*Ekaksara*'. 'I' here means *jiva* and 'He' *parama*. This is in nutshell sums up the metaphysical secret that is the identity between 'I' and 'He', the *jiva* and *Brahman*. This is the very easy way of comprehending the absolute.¹⁷ '*Hamsa*' (I am He) is the only truth.⁵⁴ One who is established in this truth is bound to think that there is only one agent for all actions. This takes away the sense of agency and subsequently a person does not feel attached to the fruits of actions and he performs actions with the sense of instrumentality as a result, the karmic fruit is offered at the divine.¹⁸ The highest knowledge that is the knowledge of *Ekaksara* that is 'I am *Brahman* (*aham Brahmasmi*) contains the highest truth in a condensed form.

Abhirama is a non-compromising rationalist. Though all his works are tempered with devotional fervour, he is rationalist at the core. He would agree with the rationalists that the real is rational both in microcosmic and macrocosmic dimension. This is well brought out by the *pinda-Brahmanda* identity theory profounded by Abhirama. The ultimate reality not only transcends the finite domain but also is immanent in every unit structure however tiny it may be. Since the whole universe is nothing but outer expression or objective manifestation of the same principle, one can see the cosmic unit, the *bhooma* in *anu* and *Brahmanda* in the *pinda*. So reason has to be empowered in the manner so that it helps one to transcend the domain of

finite when one realizes that the finite has its own boundaries. So it is the work of reason to draw boundary of reason. This is where *bhakti* stands out as paramount. When the right knowledge dawns one becomes liberated from the bondage of multiplicity. So to see the difference is to run in to bondage. Real knowledge enables one to see that one beneath the many. As a result one escapes the distinction, captivity of sentiments and binding propensities. Since the reality is rational at the core, reason gives us the clue for understanding the reality in its dynamic aspects.¹⁹ Depending on where one stands in the journey to the ultimate or runs of the ladder that one occupies Abhirama classifies knowledge in to seven categories.²⁰

(i) *Subhescha Jnana* (Good wishes):- This is a kind of knowledge arouse out of reading sacred books, participating *satsanga* etc. It results in happiness and detachment.

(ii) *Bichāranā Jnāna* (Understanding):- This knowledge creates the discrimination between eternal and non-eternal, real and unreal, bondage and liberation.

(iii) *Tanumanas Jnana*:- When body and mind remain detached from sense-enjoyment, the kind of knowledge arouse in our mind is called *Tanumanasa Jnana*.

(iv) *Sattapati Jnana*:- When mind turns in word being detached from the external world, the kind of knowledge that arises in us is called *sattapati Jnana*, (*satta* means the stuff, the foundation, i.e., the self).

(v) *Asamashakti Jnana*:- When we realize the ultimate agentship of the ultimate and work, being an instrument in the hands of divine, the kind of knowledge out of which it arises is called *asamashakti Jnana*.

(vi) *Padartha bhavini Jnana*:- When there is only spiritual desire to be one with *Brahman*, the kind of knowledge out of which it arises is called *padartha bhavini Jnana* 'Padarth' means the substance. God alone is the only substance.

(vii)*Turyoga Jnana*:-When all the previous knowledge is achieved, this knowledge spontaneously or naturally flows. This is the knowledge of non-difference of individual self from the supreme self. This is the highest kind of knowledge equated with *tattvamasi* (*Tat tvam asi*-That thou art).This is called *sattvika Jnana* or '*Ekaksara mantra*'.

But Abhirama takes more comprehensive view of action, knowledge and devotion and says that neither one attains the highest state through action nor knowledge nor devotion without the grace of the divine. Here come the role of *bhakti* and surrender. Action and knowledge must be tempered with devotion so that they yield the optimal result. The man of highest knowledge has to be the man of devotion because he is the man who sees one in every thing and therefore takes the whole cosmos as his family, treats every one as his kindred. When knowledge is blended with devotion, it takes the form of *nirguna bhakti*. Similarly an action must also be permitted with *bhakti* so that whatever one does, one thinks that one does the action to please the lord and one performs action as His effective instrument as the result of which the sense of 'I' and 'mine, the egotism does not affect the moral agent. Though human life is important, one should always remember it, one should always upper most in ones mind that because of the ignorance one is likely to mistake the relative as absolute. *Moksa* is not an extraneous attainment. It results only when self instead of identifying itself with the body on account of the influence of *avidya*, realizes its true nature that it is of the nature of *sat, cit* and *ananda*. As a matter of fact according to Abhirama *atma* is ever free and is never in bondage. The so called bondage is apparent in so far as because of the transient influence of *maya* one takes the body- mind complex to be the self. This is the nature of ignorance which rise at the root of *samsara* or the world and that provides the clue that when one over comes ignorance by attaining the right knowledge, one gets established in the highest state which is of the nature of *sat-cit & ananda*.

REFERENCES.

1. Kena.U., 1.5-9
2. Ch.U., 1.8.7
3. Mun.U., 3.2.9.
Brahma vid Brahmaiva bhavati
4. A.Ramamurty, Advaitik Mysticism of Sankara,
p-34, Edition-2006.
5. A.S., P-291
*Eka Brahma benee bhaga,
Samana Shakati.
Jiva parama rupare,
Sarvabhute Sthiti.*
6. K.B., p-3
*Bhage anadi, Bhage adi,
Rahichha chara chara bhedi .*
- 7..D.G, p-226
*Kastha, pasana, taru truna,
Phala, puspore dekha.
Je jahara bhava jahinki,
Tahin pankaja mukha.*
8. K.B., p-3
*Samana Shakatiki dhari,
Rahichha sarva ghata puri.*
9. Ibid., P-58
*Prabruti Nibruti Samara,
Lagichhi Sakala Yugara.*
10. Ibid., P-7
*E mana bhabuthae yaha,
Kale prapata hue taha.*
11. Ibid., P-7

*E maya samsara asatya,
Hetu chaitanya satya, satya.*

12. Ibid., p-11

*Kahai Abhirambai,
Hetu upare kichhi nahi.
Antakalare ate hetu,
Mun ate yehi, 'sehiti tu'.*

13. Ibid., p-30

*Manji hoila mula pinda,
Gachhati hoila Brahmanda.
Gachharu jeun phala hela,
Se sina pinda bolaela.
Pindaru Brahmanda janmila,
Brahmandu pinda janma hela.
Enu e samsara ananta,
Kie kariba aba anta.
Yaha kahili tote muhin
Anumanare bujha tuhi.*

14. B.L., p-719

*Akasharu karna, vayu tharu janme charama,
Agniru netra, jalaru rasana janmila,
Pruthi tattvu nasikati janama hoila.
Vak indri askasharu, hoela utpati,
Vayuru pani janmila, ahe Biswapati.
Aparu janme upasta, prutiruti payu,
Agniru pada janmila, ahe mohabahu.
Mastake amanar sthana,
Karnare rahichhi kumana,
Netrare sumana rahichhi,
Nasare mana rahiachhi,
Mukhare bimanara sthan*

E pari chhanti pancha mana.

15. S.S.S., p-141

Akashe achhi paramatma,

Karnare rahichhi Jivatma.

Netrare dhyana atmasthana,

Nasare achhi atmajnana.

Mukhare achhi tattvatma,

Epari achhi pancha atma.

16. S.S.S., p-140

Nama Aname Chhanti puri,

Enu sakala thane Hari.

17. K.B, p-25 & 65

Ananta Rahasa Lagiachhi,

Hamsa re khela sina achhi.

Jagat sunya hoi achhi,

Ajapa sutrare rahichhi.

Manaru samsaya chhadila,

sahaja sutre hetu kala.

**Hamsa ulate thiba rahi,*

Sunatu mana nara sain.

Param kahe Sa Sa,

Jiva kahai ham, ham.

18. Ibid., p-63

Yaha Karao Bhabagrahi,

Taha matra mun karuthai.

Enu e Jete Karmaphala,

Tumbar sina Adimula.

E bhabe drudha mana jara,

Ehi sahaja Ekaksara.

Dekhatu Jnana netre jai.

19. S.G, p-157

*Jenu e Amsha atei Amshinkara,
Rahi achhi avidyare bandi Hoi.
Karma karu achhi ruddha ghare rahi,
Janijiba Jetebele se nijaku,
Tyaga Karideba deha indriyaku,
emananka adhinata chhindaiba,
Svadhina hoina urdhe drustideba.
Amsha Amshinkara hoiba milana,
Eha muktiboli sunithao mana.*

20. A.S., p-321

*Ekare Shubhescha,
Dui Vicharana hoi.
Tini Tanumanasa,
Chaturtha Sattapati,
Panche asamsakti go mata,
Padartha bhavino sastha,
Turyoga gatiti sapta.*

