

Sureśvara's Critique  
of  
Two Pre-Śaṅkara Views of Knowledge-and-action Combination

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INTRODUCTORY

1.1 In the course of philosophical development of the Vedānta, there occur a number of expositions of theory about various combinations (*samuccaya*) of action (*karman*), knowledge (*jñāna*)<sup>1</sup> and devotion (*bhakti*) as the way to liberation. Here, in this paper, I set aside the views which involve devotion in any combination and try to focus my attention on the view of the knowledge-and-action combination (*jñānakarmasamuccaya*) as the indispensable means to liberation; and for my purpose, I depend mainly on the works of Sureśvara.

1.2 Sureśvara criticizes three types<sup>2</sup> of view of the knowledge-and-action combination as held by pre-Śaṅkara Vedāntins. All the three postulate the necessity of both knowledge and action for liberation but differ as regards the importance of one or the other. They hold thus: (i) Knowledge is of primary importance and action is necessary as subsidiary to it, (ii) knowledge and action are of equal importance, (iii) action is of primary importance and knowledge is necessary as subsidiary to it. Among three, the first type of view of the knowledge-and-action combination includes two; (i) that the annihilation of desire leads one to liberation (desire-annihilation view,

*kāmapradhvamsavāda/kāmaivilayavāda*) and (ii) that the resolution of the world leads one to liberation (world-resolution view, *prapañcaviyavāda* .). I shall focus my attention on these two views and the problems allied to them. (I shall discuss the other two knowledge-and-action combinations elsewhere.) I may point out that we come across these two views in the Maṇḍanamīśra's list of the knowledge-and-action combinations where he mentions as many as seven views.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE VIEW OF DESIRE-ANNIHILATION

2.1 M.ĪRIYANNA explains this view thus; "*karman* as taught in the *pūrvakāṇḍa* was intended in reality to annihilate desire (*kāmapradhvamsa*) through its continued satisfaction --a result which was regarded as a necessary precondition of a successful pursuit of self-knowledge."<sup>4</sup> This explanation gives the view in a nut-shell. Let us now see it in detail. SV 343-344 (also SP on the same) inform us about the view.<sup>5</sup> This view postulates that the annihilation of desire by way of the fulfilment of it is indispensable for realizing the highest non-duality. Action is meant not for giving rise to the desire to know the Brahman; it is for the annihilation of it.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Śaṅkara and Suresvara who hold that action is utilized for the desire to know the Brahman, since it makes the latter possible after purification of mind (*cittasuddhi*),<sup>7</sup> the exponents of this view hold that the annihilation of desire itself secures for one the eligibility for knowledge.<sup>8</sup> And the annihilation of desire is possible through the fulfilment of it. According to this view, action is necessary for securing the

eligibility (*adhikāra*), viz. at the preliminary stage for liberation, and not at the final stage, viz. as the direct means to liberation.

2.2 After obtaining the eligibility, one gets all the grades of pleasures, beginning with those of human beings and ending with those of Hiranyagarbha, by means of the performance of all the sacrificial acts and meditation on the Hiranyagarbha. Later there remains for one nothing else to enjoy; i.e. one attains to the state of Prajāpati.<sup>9</sup> Thus one comes near liberation step by step by the continuous fulfilment of desire. And when there remains no desire to be fulfilled, that is the complete annihilation of desire, and eventually one realizes the highest Ātman.

#### THE VIEW OF WORLD-RESOLUTION

3.1 This view accepts the need of action as subsidiary to knowledge, and action for that matter is utilized for resolving the world. There is an explanation of this view in SV 379-383, and also Maṇḍamīśra gives us an explanation similar to that of SV in the course of his refutation of the above view in BSi (pp.26-27). Considering the instances of the injunctive statements in the ritual-section (*karmakāṇḍa*), one can hold that the justification of the resolution of the world appears intended. In the case of an injunction, 'One who is desirous of heaven should perform the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice.' (*jyotiṣṭomena svargakāmo yajeta*), the resolution of the notion (viz. the body is the Ātman) is implied in the acceptance that the

eligible person who differs from the body after his performance of the Jyotiṣṭoma is understood as the enjoyer in heaven.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the prohibitory injunction also has in purview the resolution of the world.<sup>11</sup> It resolves the actions caused by attachment (*rāga*) etc. So also in the daily and occasional rites (*nityanaimittikakarmans*) there is a resolution of inherent (*svābhavika*) action.<sup>12</sup> Thus these injunctions of the Veda give rise to certain resolutions which are appreciated in ordinary dealings.<sup>13</sup> All these injunctions are prescribed with a view to making one eligible for the knowledge of the Ātman (*ātmaññānādhikāra*) by means of the resolution of the world (body, action etc.).<sup>14</sup> Here it is known that the resolution of the world is an indispensable step to attainment of the eligibility for liberation. More exactly speaking, this resolution of the world brings about equipment of the mental control, control of the external senses etc. (*samadamādisādhanasampat*) which is one of the four prerequisites (*sādhanacatuṣṭaya*) for obtaining the knowledge of the Ātman.<sup>15</sup> Hence it is said that the essential teaching of the Upaniṣad comprises not in any Mahāvākya like 'That you are' (*tat tvam asi*) but in '(He who knows it as such) has secured mental control, control of the external senses, renunciation of action and its fruit, endurance of heat, cold etc., concentration of mind, and sees the Ātman in his own self.' (*śānto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito bhūtvātmany evātmanam paśyati*, BU 4.4.23). One who has secured the eligibility performs sacrifices, observes the Vedic injunctions about them and realizes the real nature of the Ātman gradually through concentration

on action.<sup>16</sup>

#### EXPONENTS OF THESE VIEWS

4.1 Suresvara does not mention the names of the exponents of these two above-stated views at the places where he discusses them. Here it may be asked, 'Who are the exponents of these views?' S.L. PANDEY attributes the desire-annihilation view to Brahmadata.<sup>17</sup> He takes the authority for his attribution from the *Bhavasuddhi* (Anandapurna's commentary on BSi).<sup>18</sup> As stated above, the first and the second views in Mandanamisra's enumeration of the seven views of knowledge-and-action combination are the world-resolution view and the desire-annihilation view respectively. BSi describes the former as the view of some (*kecid*)<sup>19</sup> and the latter as of others (*anye*).<sup>20</sup> Now we get some informations about the same in the commentary of BSi. While commenting on the world-resolution view, Anandapurna says *brahmadatta-matam aha -- kecid iti*,<sup>21</sup> and at the place of Mandanamisra's refutation of the view (viz. BSi p.28 lines 8 ff.), he says, *brahmadatta-matam niraha -- tatra neti*.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, while commenting on the desire-annihilation view, he says, *ekadesyantaram aha -- anye tv iti*. Following the description of Anandapurna, we could say that the exponent of the world-resolution view is Brahmadata and that of the desire-annihilation view is some other *ekadesin*. It seems that PANDEY has made a mistake in this behalf, for he remarks, "the *ekadesi* is identical with Brahmadata in later Advaita."<sup>23</sup> This remark shows that he thinks the word *ekadesyantara-mata*

above to be meant for the view of Brahmādatta and not for the desire-annihilation view. True, the word *ekadeśin* can at some other time be referring to Brahmādatta, such as for example in the *Candrikā* (a commentary on the *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* at 1.67).<sup>24</sup> But the word *ekadeśyantara* 'another *ekadeśin*' itself suggests the existence of an *ekadeśin* different from one already mentioned --the word *ekadeśin* literally means 'another thinker (here: school of Advaita philosophy).'

#### SUREŚVARA'S CRITICISM OF THE DESIRE-ANNIHILATION VIEW

5.1 Suresvara criticizes this view in various ways: Though it is said that desires are not destroyed even in hundreds of years; rather, they increase as fire burns more and more by receiving more and more of oblation.<sup>25</sup> This is based on the general understanding about the nature of desire.<sup>26</sup> Further he says that the fulfilment of desires does not set one free from desire, nor does the performance of sacrificial acts destroy desire, rather, it effects the enjoyment of some ends. It is only the way for annihilating desire to contemplate on what is opposite thereto, viz. the defects of all the objects.<sup>27</sup>

5.2.1 He attacks the logical defect in the view. One who has attained the state of Prajāpati cannot hear the Śruti about the joy of the Brahman, because it is only the human beings who are capable of doing the same. Even if one heard the Śruti, one would not desire the joy of the Brahman because one is already enjoying the joys of

Prajāpati.<sup>29</sup>

5.2.2 Also attaining the state of Prajāpati is not the invariable channel to liberation. Insofar as the knowledge of the Brahman, or liberation is concerned, all the adjuncts (*upādhis*) are the same, that is to say, adjuncts such as Prajāpati-hood have no significance whatever in respect of Truth, i.e. when liberation is attained.<sup>29</sup>

Taking the instance of ether, Suresvara states, "There is no excellence of ether even if one regards it in association with its adjuncts which make one call it a pot or a valley, and consider it to be different as being distant or near, imaginary or non-imaginary."<sup>30</sup> (*nā' 'kāśasya viśeso 'sti kumbha-droṇyādyupādhiṣu / dūrāntikādi-bhinneṣu kalpitākalpitesv api //*)

#### SUREŚVARA'S CRITICISM OF THE WORLD-RESOLUTION VIEW

6.1 Not only in the explanation of this view seen above but also in the criticism of the view, do we find the similarity between SV and BSi: The world-resolution view postulates that through the observance of the injunctions in the ritual-section one acquires the eligibility for liberation. But the eligibility for ritual-section and that in knowledge-section cannot stand together. Each injunction has (i.e. aims at) its own fruit and there is no mutual expectancy between them, action and knowledge. Hence the eligibility for each differs from that of the other.<sup>31</sup> If both the ritual- and knowledge-sections have

the same fruit, viz. liberation, then heaven etc., viz. the fruits of the ritual-section, could not be accidental, they would be the channel to liberation, just like a village located on the way to a town. A village may serve as subsidiary to a town.<sup>32</sup> But such is not the case in respect of heaven etc.; these are different aims of human beings.<sup>33</sup> The resolution of the world is neither the purport of the ritual-section nor that of the knowledge-section. The purport of the ritual-section is what is not known such as heaven, and that of the knowledge-section is what the Advaitins point out as already known, viz. the Brahman.<sup>34</sup> Therefore the resolution of the world cannot be the purport of both the sections of the Veda.

6.2 Again, there is no Śruti support for the resolution of the world: (a) If Śruti has the resolution of the world as its fruit, then the Brahman cannot be the purport of the Śruti.<sup>35</sup> (b) Nor do the texts of the knowledge-section have the resolution of the world as their purport.<sup>36</sup> (c) If by resolution of the world is understood the destruction of all the undesirables (*anarthas*), then knowledge, viz. the final aim of human beings, would be futile.<sup>37</sup> Only by the knowledge of the Brahman is ignorance destroyed and therein is attained the ultimate aim of the human beings.<sup>38</sup> To the contrary, the Śruti itself declares the decay of the body etc. in "(The Brahman is) non-gross, non-subtle, neither short nor long, not red .... (*asthūlam anany ahrasvam adīrgham alohitam* ...., BU 3.8.8); there is, indeed, no need of postulating the resolution of the world



in connection with attainment of liberation.<sup>39</sup>

6.3 And, actually, there is no world to be resolved. The past has already ceased to exist, the future is yet to come into existence and the present will disappear of its own accord, for it is but an effect (of ignorance). There is no need of an injunction (*niyoga*) to bring about the resolution of the world. Otherwise, it would be the resolution of non-existence.<sup>40</sup>

6.4 By the destruction of the world, the cause of differentiation (*bhedakāraṇa*) is not destroyed.<sup>41</sup> Taking the instance of rope-serpent, rope is not seen even when the appearance of serpent is resolved in darkness. Only by the knowledge of the rope there is resolution of the appearance of serpent.<sup>42</sup> So also it is the knowledge of the Brahman that destroys the cause, viz. ignorance.<sup>43</sup>

#### THE BASIC STANDPOINT OF SUREŚVARA

7.1 The basic standpoint of Sureśvara on the relationship of knowledge and action is found in clear shape in his criticism of the Mīmāṃsā view of liberation which says: *kevalebhya eva karmabhyo mokṣasya siddhatvāt*, "because liberation is attained only through action."<sup>44</sup> His criticism of a view of knowledge-and-action combination is found here and there in his works. His arguments of criticism reveal the following as his standpoint: (i) Liberation is attained only through the knowledge of the Brahman. Since action is by nature opposed to knowledge, there is

no possibility of mutual relationship between the two, viz. knowledge and action. The seventh view in Maṇḍanamisra's enumeration stated above, i.e. action and knowledge are opposed and in no way associated with each other, can be (and actually is) attributed to Sureśvara (and also Sāṅkara).<sup>45</sup> (ii) Though knowledge does not depend on action, action becomes useful as the means to achieving the ultimate aim of human beings by generating the eligibility for the discipline of knowledge. In other words, action is useful for the purification of mind (*cittaśuddhi*). To this effect is Maṇḍanamisra's enumeration of the fourth view, viz. all the actions, due to their bifunctional character, are subservient to the eligibility for the knowledge of the Ātman (*vividiṣāpakṣa*).<sup>46</sup> We may say that knowledge is the sole cause of liberation and action can be the cause of the desire to know the Brahman (*vividiṣā*).<sup>47</sup>

#### CONCLUDING REMARK

8.1 As we have seen in our discussion above, the desire-annihilation view and the world-resolution view assert the necessity of action at the stage of acquiring eligibility for liberation. Though Sureśvara attacks both these views in various ways even pointing out the logical defects, it may not be justified to say that he criticizes them as the views of knowledge-and-action combination. As stated above, Sureśvara himself admits the utility of action at the preliminary stage for liberation. Therefore, if it is said that he criticizes the view of knowledge-and-action combination by refuting both the desire-annihila-

tion view and the world-resolution view, he would be taken to criticize himself as an exponent of the view of knowledge-and-action combination. He himself has to be called an adherent of the view of knowledge-and-action combination. His criticism of the two views, as noted above, points to his difference with their exponents in respect of the stage at which action is to be considered as useful. He holds that it can be useful for *cittasuddhi* which makes it easy for one to acquire the knowledge of the Brahman, whereas the two exponents in question assert that action is indispensable for acquiring eligibility for the knowledge of the Brahman.

#### N O T E S

In the following, the abbreviations adopted here:

- BSi *Brahmasiddhi* (*Brahmasiddhi*, (ed.), K. KUPPUSWAMI SASTRI, Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1937).
- SP *Śāstraparakāśikā* (*Brhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣyāvārttika with Ānandagiri's Commentary Śāstraparakāśikā*, 3 vols, Poona: ĀnSS 16, 1892-1894).
- SV *Sambandhavārttika* (see SP, Vol. 1).

- 1 The word *jñāna* 'knowledge' here really means *viññāna* as will be seen from SV 357 quoted under note 2; for difference between *jñāna* and *viññāna*, see S. HINO, *Suresvara's Vārtika on Yājñavalkya-Maitreyī Dialogue* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), pp.43-46.
- 2 SV 357: *viññāna-karmaṇos tredhā yady ucyate samuccayaḥ/*

*pūrvoktaikātmya-tātparyād vedasyāsau na yujyate //; the Naiskarmyasiddhi 1.20 (M. HIRIYANNA, Naiskarmyasiddhi with Jñānottama's Commentary Candrikā, revised ed., Poona: Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series 38, 1925): karmano 'ngāngi-bhāvena svapradhānatayā 'tha vā / sambandhasyeha samsiddher jñāne saty apy adosatah //*

- 3 BSi p.26 line 23-p.28 line 7.
- 4 M. HIRIYANNA, "Prapañca-vilaya-vāda --A Doctrine of Pre-Śāṅkara Vedānta," *Journal of Oriental Research Madras*, Vol. 1, Pt. 2, 1927, P.109.
- 5 SV 343-344: *anye tv āhur na śaknoti kāma-saṃdūṣitāsayaḥ / draṣṭuṃ tat param advaitam sarva-kāmāsāṃptih // dvaitaikatva-matīhābhiḥ sūtrāntam phalam āpya nā / prajāpatyam padam bhuktvā tad-aikātmyam prapadyate //*
- 6 SP 343: *idāniṃ karmano jñāna-śeṣatve 'pi kāma-vilayadvārā tasya tac cheṣatvam na vividiṣadvāreti matam āha /*
- 7 Cf. S. HINO, "An Observation on Suresvara's Vārtika 2-5 of Yājñavalkya-Maitreyi Dialogue (BU 2.4)," *CASS Studies Number 5*, Poona: University of Poona, 1980, pp. 169-178.
- 8 SP 343: *kāmadhvaster jñānādhikāra-hetutvam sādhayati /*
- 9 SP 344: *tair tair manusyatvam ārabhya sūtrāntam phalam krameṇa prāpya sautrān bhogān bhuktvā tad-dehamāni tad-anyānupabhukta-kāmayitavya-karma-phalābhāvāt sarvato nivṛtta-kāmaḥ prajāpatir ātmarūpam anubhavaty evaṃ karmanām kāma-vilaya-mukhena dhī-hetutve dvāram prajāpatyam padam ityarthah /; cf. T.M.P. MAHADEVAN,*

*The Sambandha-Vārtika of Sureśvarācārya*, Madras:  
University of Madras, 1972, pp.176-177.

- 10 SV 379 & BSi P.27 lines 1-3.
- 11 SV 381 & BSi P.27 lines 4-6.
- 12 SV 381.
- 13 SV 382 & BSi P.27 lines 6-7.
- 14 SV 383 & BSi P.27 lines 7-8.
- 15 BSi P.27 lines 8-12.
- 16 SV 395, 396, 399 & 400.
- 17 S.L. PANDEY, *Pre-Śāṅkara Advaita Philosophy*, Allahabad:  
Darshan Peeth, 1974, pp.225-226, 356 & 238-241. He  
also attributes this view to Bhartrprapañca. I do not  
enter this matter which is debatable.
- 18 PANDEY, *op. cit.*, p.241.
- 19 BSi P.26 line 24.
- 20 BSi P.27 line 13.
- 21 N.S. ANANTAKRISHNA SASTRI, (ed.), *Brahmasiddhivyākhye*,  
Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, 1963,  
p.116 lines 1-2.
- 22 *Ibid.* P.120 line 13.
- 23 PANDEY, *op. cit.*, p.237.
- 24 HIRIYANNA, *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, introduction p.xxiii note  
1. Or, there is the word *ekadeśin* in the *Brahmasūtra-  
śāṅkarabhāṣya* 4.3.14 (*The Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, 3rd ed.,  
Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1948, p.499 lines 9-10),  
but it is not known as to who is referred to.
- 25 SV 345-346.
- 26 Maṇḍana also says to the same effect, the satisfac-  
tion of desire does not annihilate desires but creates

further desires. And both SV 346 and BSi (p.29 lines 24 ff.) cite the *Manusmṛti* 2.94 to make this clear.

This argument is based on the common understanding of the nature of desire.

27 SV 347 & 349.

28 SV 348.

29 SV 350.

30 SV 351.

31 SV 398.

32 SV 400-405 & BSi p.28 lines 16-17.

33 SV 407.

34 SV 424; cf. SV 425.

35 SV 393.

36 SV 395.

37 SV 398.

38 SV 396.

39 SV 426.

40 SV 394.

41 SV 390.

42 SV 392.

43 SV 391.

44 The *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* 1.9 ff.

45 BSi p.28 lines 6-7: *anye tu --paraspara-virodhiṇoḥ karmātma-jñānayoḥ dvaitādvaita-viśayatvenāsambandha eveti manyante /*

46 BSi p.27 lines 20-22: *anye tu --saṃyoga-prṛthaktvena sarva-karmanām evātma-jñānādhikāranupraveśam āhuh. .../*

47 I have pointed out and discussed in detail that Suresvara accepts the necessity of action for the

purification of mind at the preliminary stage for liberation, in my paper (already referred to under note 7).