

## THE UNDIFFERENTIATED AND THE DIFFERENTIATED ASPECTS OF GODHEAD IN ADVAITA THOUGHT

Advaita thought, both Vedānta and Śaiva Siddhānta,<sup>1</sup> conceives of godhead in two aspects, the undifferentiated and the differentiated. It is *nirviśeṣa* 'without distinction' and *saviśeṣa* 'with distinction';<sup>2</sup> *nirguṇa* 'without quality' and *saḡuṇa* 'with quality';<sup>3</sup> *niṣkala* 'without part' and *sakāla* 'with part';<sup>4</sup> *amūrta* 'formless' and *mūrta* 'formed';<sup>5</sup> *akāla* 'beyond time' and *kāla* 'in time';<sup>6</sup> and *asabda* 'soundless' and *śabda* 'sound'.<sup>7</sup>

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1. The Vedānta and the Śaiva Siddhānta are both schools of Advaita thought. The former takes the word *advaita* to mean 'one', that the Brahman and the self are one. The Śaiva Siddhānta takes the word to mean 'not two', that God and the soul are inseparably united.

The following Śaiva Siddhānta texts cited are found in *Maikānda Śāstiram Patināṅgu*, vol. I and II, Tinnevely: The South India Śaiva Siddhānta Works Publishing Society (1969). *Civāṇānapotam* (SJB); *Civāṇānacittiyār* (SS); *Civappirakācam* (Siva.); *Tiruvānūtṭṭayan*; *Tirukkalirruppatiār*; *Tiruvantiyār*; *Neṅcuvūtututu*.

In translation:

Gordon Matthews, *Sivāṇānabōdham* Oxford (1948);  
J.M. Nallaswami Pillai, *Sivagnāna Bōtham*, Madras (1895)  
*Sivajñāna Siddhiyār* Madras (1913)  
H.R. Hoisington, *Siva Pirakācam*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. IV (1853-4), p. 127-244.  
G.U. Pope, 'The Tiruvānūtṭṭayan' in his: 'The Tiruvācācam; Oxford (1900).

2. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sūtras* London (1960) p. 449; *Vedānta Sūtras*, Sankara's Commentary, *Sacred Books of the East* vol. 34, p. lxi.
3. *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* vi. 11; *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* vi. 10; *Bhagavadgītā* xliii. 14; *Vedānta Sūtras*, *op.cit.* p. lxxvii; lxxi; lxxii.

Brahman in many passages of the Upanisads appears as both the material and the instrumental cause of the world.<sup>8</sup> It is both the *upādāna kārana* and the *nimitta kārana*. But in Sankara's Advaita, Brahman, the sole reality, is not subject to modification. To say that the world of 'names and forms' evolves from Brahman would detract from its immutability. Yet the need to account for the material world makes Advaita thought speak of another aspect of Brahman, *Īśvara* or Brahman veiled by the power of *māya*. The soul in the grip of *avidyā*, 'nescience', sees Brahman as *Īśvara* and as the creator and sustainer of the material world. *Īśvara* is thus both the material and the instrumental cause of the world. But *Īśvara* has no final reality; he has only a *vyavaharika satta* 'phenomenal reality'.<sup>9</sup> The Śaiva Siddhanta refers to godhead in its causal state (*kārana nilai*) as *Civam* and *Civan*, while *Mahesvaran*, *Urut-tiran*, *Viṣṇu* and *Brahma* are forms of *Civan* which function at the behest of *Civan*.<sup>10</sup>

There is a further reason why Advaita thought feels the need for a differentiated aspect of godhead. To the Advaita matter too has only phenomenal reality; it has no ultimate reality. So Brahman in its undifferentiated form

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4. *Svetā. Up.* vi. 19; *Mundaka Up.* II.ii.10; III.i.8; *Siva.* 14; *Tiruvuntiyar* 1; *Tirukkalirruppatiyar* 4.
  5. *Maitrā. Up.* vi. 3.
  6. *Ibid.* vi. 15.
  7. *Ibid.* vi. 22.
  8. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.* I.iv. 3-5; II.i.20; *Aitareya Up.* I.i. 1-3; *Mundaka Up.* I.i.7; II.i.20.
  9. *Vedānta Sūtras op.cit.* vol. 34, p.xxx; Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.* p. 236-7.
  10. *SS* I. 34; 35; 60; *Siva.* 17.

does not come into contact with matter. The Śaiva Siddhānta, however, grants that matter, *māya*, exists, but calls it *asat* 'non-existent'. It is 'non-existent' in the presence of God, who is *sat*, 'existent', as darkness that is dispelled by light.<sup>11</sup> Hence it is the differentiated aspect of God that has to do with creation.

Śaiva Siddhānta puts forward yet another argument in favour of this distinction. To say that Civan is the instrumental cause of the world of matter would be to implicate him in *karma*, the law of action and reaction. Hence the Śaiva Siddhānta draws a distinction between two types of creatorship, 'directing creatorship' *prayo jaka kartṛtvam*, and 'directed creatorship', *prayo jya kartṛtvam*. God in the Śaiva Siddhānta acts by volition, not action; he is a creator of the former type.<sup>12</sup>

This motif of an intermediate god or demiurge is seen even in the R̥gvedic myths of creation.<sup>13</sup> Virāt in the Vedic hymn intervenes in the act of creation. He emerges from the primeval Puruṣa, and then from him again Puruṣa emerges. And then from the body of this second Puruṣa creation emanates. In the hymn to Viśvakarman too we see the waters or primeval substance emerging from Viśvakarman, and then god as creator appears on the waters to perform the act of creation.

The crux of the matter is this. Man here attempts to conceive of God, who is beyond the reach of mortal mind, God who comprehends within himself mind and matter. A beautiful attempt to describe such an inconceivable Reality

11. *SJB* vii.1; Gordon Matthews, *Sivanānabōdham* p. 19; 53.

12. *SJB* i.2.; Gordon Matthews *op.cit.* p. 32; *Civānānapāṭiyam*, Tinnevely; The South India Śaiva Siddhānta Works Publishing Society (1936) p. 100; V.A. Devasenapathi, *Śaiva Siddhānta* Madras (1974) p. 72.

13. A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads*, Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 32, p. 438; Paul Deussen, *Philosophy of the Upanisads*, New York (1966) p. 132-3.

is seen in the Creation hymn of the *R̥gVeda*.<sup>14</sup> *Tad ekam*, 'that One' of the Creation hymn, is beyond all polarities, beyond being and non-being, death and life, darkness and light. Only such an One, who comprehends all these polar opposites, could be the basis and source of all differentiation.

In the Upanisads, Brahman is often referred to in the neuter gender.<sup>15</sup> To characterize it as male or female or to posit qualities of godhead would be to limit it, to circumscribe it. We see also attempts to describe this one Reality. Brahman is described in positive terms as possessing manifold characteristics, as *saviśeṣa*, or negatively as excluding all definition, as *nirviśeṣa*. But both descriptions proving inadequate, the Upanisads often fall back upon the words *neti neti* 'not so, not so'.<sup>16</sup> These negative descriptions of the Transcendent One, which defies definition, pave the way for the higher Brahman, the *nirviśeṣa*, *niṣkāla*, *nirguṇa* Brahman of Vedānta thought, while the positive formulations of the nature of Brahman as possessing quality, difference and form, give rise to *Īśvara* and the many gods of Hinduism.

The undifferentiated aspect of Brahman, or God 'as He is in Himself', his essential nature, is referred to as his *svamūpa* (Tamil: *corupa nīlai*) and the differentiated aspect as *Īśvara*, *Māhesvaran*, *Viṣṇu*, etc. is termed *tatastha* (Tamil: *tatatta nīlai*), 'not essential'.<sup>17</sup>

*Tatastha* literally means 'stationed on a slope'.<sup>18</sup> A more appropriate opposite of *atastha* would be the term *kūtaṣṭha* 'stationed on a peak', an epithet which often

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14. x. 129.

15. *Bṛhad. Up.* III. viii.8; *Chāndogya Up.* VI. viii.6; ix.1; *Kena Up.* 3; 10; 11 etc.

16. *Bṛhad. Up.* II. iii. 6; III.ix.26; IV.ii.4; iv.22; v.15

17. Radhakrishnan, *op.cit.* p. 237.

18. Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolph Roth, *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*, St. Petersburg (1861).

appears in Advaita literature with reference to the undifferentiated or *svarūpa* aspect of Brahman.<sup>19</sup> *Kūṭastha* would then be Brahman as it is inaccessible to or inconceivable by the mind of man and 'stationed', therefore, as if 'on a peak', while *tatastha* would be the conceivable, accessible aspect of God, 'stationed' as if within reach 'on a slope'. These forms are not *anādi mūkta* 'beginningless and free' like God in his *svarūpa* state and will cease to be when creation dissolves into *māyā* at the time of *pralaya*, 'world destruction'. They are but the many forms in which the incomprehensible Reality becomes comprehensible to the mind of man.

This dual description of God, furthermore, is relative to man's condition of 'knowledge' or 'ignorance'.<sup>20</sup> Man blinded by *avidyā*, 'nescience', 'sees' God objectively, as apart from himself, as endowed with form and attribute. This is to see God in his *tatastha* form. But in *jñāna* 'knowledge', man 'sees' God intuitively, experientially, in union with him; it is to know God's essential nature, his *svarūpa*. Man's destiny, likewise, is determined by his perception. To 'see' God as *tatastha* is to go at death to the world of the gods and thereafter to be enmeshed again in *samsāra*, worldly existence'. To 'know' God's *svarūpa* aspect is not to go anywhere but to experience liberation straightaway, to 'become one' with Brahman.<sup>21</sup>

In a different classification the Saiva Siddhānta speaks of God as *arūpam* 'formless', *arūpuruṣam* 'without and with form', and *urūpam* 'with form'.<sup>22</sup> God in his transcen-

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19. *Vedānta Sūtras op.cit.* vol. 34, p.28;186;327; *The Bhamati Catuṣṣūtrī* (Commentary on Sankara's commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras*) ed. S.S. Suryanarayana Sastri and C. Kunhan Raja, Madras (1933) p.38; *Bhagavadgītā* vi.8; xii.3; xv.16; *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* of Sankara, ed. Swami Madhavananda, Calcutta (1944) 191; 507; *Naiṣkram-yasiddhi* of Suresvaracarya, trans. S.S. Raghavachār, Mysore (1965) ii.11; 15.
20. *Vedānta Sūtras, op.cit.* vol. 34, p. 62.
21. *Ibid.* p. lxxi; 232; vol. 38, p. 392; 400-2.
22. M. Dhavamony, *Love of God according to Saiva Siddhānta*, Oxford (1971) p. 306 n. 5.

ent form is *aravam*; in his *liṅga* form he is *aruvuravam*, and when conceived of with form and feature, he is *uravam*.<sup>23</sup> The four paths to God defined by the Śaiva Siddhanta relate to these 'forms' of God. Service and physical worship of God in his temple is *cariyai* (Skt. *carya*); physical and mental worship of the *liṅga* form is *kiriya* (Skt. *kriyā*); mental worship of the transcendent *aravam* form is *yōkam* (Skt. *yoga*); God-realization through hearing, reflection, and meditation is the highest path of *ñānam* (Skt. *jñāna*).<sup>24</sup>

There is a difference, however, between the Advaita Vedānta and the Śaiva Siddhanta in their conception of God's essential nature and man's response to it. The Vedānta hesitates to make positive formulations about Brahman; it would prefer to describe Brahman in negative terms. In the Śaiva Siddhanta, on the other hand, God, even in his *svarūpa* form, is not devoid of personality. He is also Civan, the supreme God, to whom is ascribed omnipotence, omnipresence and other auspicious qualities. And unlike in the Advaita Vedānta, the soul here is distinct from God. So man's response to God in his *svarūpa* and *tatastha* forms is one of *jñāna* mixed with *bhakti* 'devotion'. In fact, *bhakti*, as the Śaiva Siddhanta understands it, comprehends worship, ritual, *yoga* *jñāna* as constituting man's total response to God. Here man as a person responds with *bhakti* to a God endowed with personality.<sup>25</sup> *Arul* 'grace', which is essential nature of Civan in the Śaiva Siddhanta, is conceivable only of a God endowed with personality.<sup>26</sup> So the *svarūpa* and *tatastha* aspects of God in the

23. SS. i. 38; 55; 70; *Tiruvānuppayan* i.5; These three 'forms' are also referred to as *nitkalam*, *nitkala-cakalam* and *cakalam* respectively. See *Siva*. 14 commentary p. 51-2. The commentator explains all three as *tatatta* 'forms' of Civan.

24. *Civanānapātiyam*, *op.cit.* p. 428-9.

25. Dhavamony, *op.cit.* p. 276; 340; 368-9.

26. *Tirumantiram*, Madras; The South India Saiva Siddhanta Publishing Society (1942) 1769; 1770 etc.

Saiva Siddhanta do not coincide altogether with the undifferentiated and differentiated views of Brahman in Sankara's Advaita philosophy. But they do agree in that they refer to God 'as he is in himself' and as he is accessible to the mind of man.

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