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) illuminining 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 anīāhkarāṇa 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:

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

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1 The concepts of tūlāvidyā (secondary ignorance), mūlāvidyā (primary ignorance), vṛtti-vyāpti and phala-vyāpti have already been explained in 'Brahmakaravrūttī – Part I', which appeared in the June 2005 issue of Tapovan Prasad. It would be better to revise 'Brahmakaravrūttī – 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 – ‘ahārin ghaṭam 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.

**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 sakti of tūlāvidyā, the āvaraṇa with which Brahman is veiled is produced by the āvaraṇa sakti 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.

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2 The present essay focusses on the requirement of vṛtti-vyāpti for the knowledge of Brahman. The next essay, ‘Brahmavākyavṛtti – 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 āvarana? 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 (āvarana), 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 āvarana has to be removed, for without the āvarana (veiling) being removed, Brahman will remain unknown. It is for the purpose of destruction of the āvarana shrouding Brahman, that Vedāntic Ācāryas have admitted vṛttī-vyāpti. Swami Vidyaranya in his Pañcadasī (7.92) makes this point explicit:

\[ ब्रह्मान्याय्यानानास्या वृत्तिव्याप्तिरापेक्षिताः \]

In the cognition of Brahman, vṛttī-vyāpti is necessary to destroy the ignorance (veiling Brahman).

Vṛttī-vyāpti entails the pervasion of the object by the antahkaraṇa. In the case of the pot, the antahkaraṇa takes the form of ġhaṭākāra-vṛtti i.e., the antahkaraṇa pervades the pot and takes a form exactly like that of the pot and destroys the āvarana veiling the pot. There is no difficulty in comprehending this, for the finite antahkaraṇa (thought) can very well pervade another finite object like a pot and take its shape – ‘ṛgaṭākāra-vṛtti’. But Brahman, being infinite in nature, the question naturally arises as to how the finite antahkaraṇa (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 antahkaraṇa!
The Object of Brahmākāravṛtti

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

साक्षी एव धीवृत्तम व्याप्यते अन्यवत्।
sākṣi eva dhīvṛttiā vyāpyate anyavat

Just as other objects (like pot etc.) are pervaded by the intellect, so too it is the sākṣi alone that is pervaded by the intellect. 3

The idea of sākṣi-pratyāgātman becoming the object of antahkaraṇa can be explained using the example of space. One cannot objectify and quantify the infinite and akhanda (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 akhanda Brahman, when conditioned by the antahkaraṇa, becomes the seemingly finite and limited sākṣi-pratyāgātman, and it is this sākṣi-pratyāgātman that becomes an object of pervasion for the antahkaraṇa. 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 atindriyam'.

It is to be noted that the antahkaraṇa, which has become pure and single-pointed by the practice of sādhanā catuṣṭaya, turns inward (antarmukha) and it is only such an antahkaraṇa that is capable of cognising the sākṣi-pratyāgātman4. The idea of

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3 This very same idea is also explained by Nṛsinhasarasvatī as follows, while commenting on Vedaṇtaśāstra: Sā cittavṛttiḥ na sūddhabrahmaviśayāni kintu ajñānaviśeṣa-pratyagābhinnam-parabrahmaviśayāni

4 “That antahkaraṇa mode (i.e., the brahmakaravṛtti) 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 antahkarana objectifying Brahman is also in consonance with the declarations of the Upanisads (Kathopanisad-1.3.12):

एष सर्वेषु मृतेषु गृहोऽत्मा न प्रकाशाते।
दृष्ट्यते त्वमचया बुद्ध्वा सुखमया सुखमदार्शिभि॥

esa sarvesu bhutesu gudho’tmā na prakāsate
dṛśyate tvagryaya buddhyā suksmayā suksmadarśibhiḥ॥

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 antahkarana only pervades the sākṣi and not the pure infinite Brahman, why at all use the term ‘brahmākāra-vṛtti’ (thought of the form of Brahman)? Would it not be better to term the vṛtti that pervades the sākṣi or pratyagatman as sākṣi-ākāra-vṛtti (thought of the form of sākṣi) or pratyagatma-ākāra-vṛtti (thought of the form of the inner-Self)? The answer to this question is as follows:

● The sākṣi-pratyagatman is in truth the Brahman alone, just as pot-space is itself the infinite space. Hence to indicate the essential Brahman nature of the sākṣi-pratyagatman that is pervaded by the vṛtti, the vṛtti that pervades the sākṣi-pratyagatman is called ‘brahmākāra-vṛtti’ and not merely sākṣi-ākāra-vṛtti or pratyagatma-ākāra-vṛtti.

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

4 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 āvaraṇa-sakti of mūlāvidyā.

This āvaraṇa (veiling) is removed by the brahmākāravṛtti – 'Aham 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 'Aham Brahma asmi' brahmākāravṛtti.

The brahmākāravṛtti – Aham Brahma asmi implies: 'aham sākṣi pratyagātman param Brahman 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 – Aham Brahman 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-सुदुः-मुक्त-सत्यस्वभाव-परमानन्द-अनन्त-
अद्वयं बहु अस्मि।

Aham nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-satyasvabhāva-
paramānanda-ananta-advayaṁ Brahma asmi

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

Nitya (Eternal): Negates impermanence (anityatva-saṅkām 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 inerntness (svaprakāśa-svarūpatvena jādyādikam vyavacchidyate).

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

Satya (True): Indestructible (avināsi-svabhāvatvam).

Paramānanda (Supreme Bliss): This term ‘Supreme Bliss’ describes one’s nature as that of Infinite Bliss (niratishaya-ānanda-svarūpatvam).

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

Advayam (Non-dual): Asserts oneness by denying the presence of plurality (nānātoa-niśedhena ekatvam 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 avaraṇa (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-akāra)’. 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 brahmākāra-vṛtti (aham Brahma asmi iti vṛtti) enshrines this akhaṇḍārtha, brahmākāra-vṛtti is also termed akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti.

**Akhaṇḍākāra-kārita-vṛtti**

Brahmākāra-vṛtti or akhaṇḍākāra-vṛtti is also termed in some Vedāntic texts\(^5\) as ‘akhaṇḍākāra-kārita-vṛtti’ (akhaṇḍa-ākāra-ākārita-vṛtti). What do the two words ‘ākāra’ and ‘ākārita’ refer to in the above term?

This term ‘akhaṇḍākāra-kārita-vṛtti’ (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)\(^6\). The idea of the Infinite seemingly taking a form has already been explained with the example of space\(^7\). 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 brahmākāra-vṛtti, the āntākṣarāna has taken the form (ākārita) of this sākṣi-pratyagātman and not the pure Brahman. Hence the special term ‘akhaṇḍa-ākāra-ākārita-vṛtti’ for brahmākāra-vṛtti.

**Conclusion**

It is to be noted that mere parroting or a mechanical repetition of ‘Aham Brahma asmi’ cannot be considered as brahmākāra-vṛtti. The ‘Aham Brahma asmi’ thought has to be a ‘knowledge-powered-thought’ packed with the significances like ’nitya’, ’suddha’ etc., as described earlier. This will happen

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\(^5\) Vide Vedānta Sāra of Swami Sadananda – ‘evanācāryeva......brahmāsmite akhaṇḍākāra-kārita cītāvṛttīḥ udeti’

\(^6\) Akhaṇḍasya brahmānukāraḥ akhaṇḍākāraḥ, sākṣi pratyagātmanā ityarthāḥ, tasya sākṣinah pratyagātmanah ākāraḥ rūpaṁ yaya vṛttya upādyate sa akhaṇḍākāra-kārita-vṛttih, brahmākāra-vṛttih ityarthāḥ

\(^7\) Refer to the earlier subheading—'The Object of Brahmākāra-vṛtti'
only with the right enquiry into the mahāvākyas attained by the grace of the Guru. When the brahmākāra-vṛtti arises, at that very moment the āvarana (veiling) covering the sākṣi-pratyagātman, preventing the knowledge of its infinite nature, is destroyed.

What happens to the brahmākāra-vṛtti once the āvarana 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 vṛtti illumines the pot leading to the knowledge: ‘aham ghaṭam jānami—I know the pot’. Does the phala in the case of brahmajñāna illumine Brahman or not? What about statements in the Upaniṣads like ‘yan-manasa na manate—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