

THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE IN THE QUEST FOR *BRAHMAN* ACCORDING TO A KARA

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to recapture the mind of a kara on the role of experience—both empirical and transcendental—in the quest for *Brahman*. There are two different opinions on the role of experience. One among them emphasizes the transcendental experience (*anubhava*) as an independent *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) which makes the *Brahmajijñāsa*, (knowledge of *Brahman*), the liberation possible. The other is that, for a kara, scriptures (Vedas and Upaniads) are the only *pramāṇa* which can reveal the nature of *Brahman* and thus experience cannot be held as another *pramāṇa* over and above the six which *advaita* tradition has accepted¹. The former view takes experience and intuition as primary, thus makes a kara more of a mystic, whereas the latter view considers knowledge through scriptures as primary, where in rational study is involved and whereby he is considered more a philosopher or a theologian. For a kara there is a realm where reason gets transcended resulting intuitive experience which is *Brahmanubhava*. This *anubhava* cannot be independent of *rūpī pramāṇa*; but is the excellent means which makes the liberative knowledge possible.

Key Terms: *brahmajijñāsa*, *anubhava*, *pramāṇa*, *rūpī pramāṇa*, *Manana*, *Nididhyāna*, trans-rational.

Introduction

The spiritual teachers who taught the means for self-realization represent the most creative element of intellectual history of India. a kara (788-820 or 826 CE)² is one of the prominent persons among them. He is known as the great exponent of *Advaita Vedānta* which is one of the most important spiritual traditions of India, which holds that the ultimate teaching of the Vedic tradition is essential non-duality between the individual self, the world and the Absolute self.

1. The Quest for *Brahman*: *Brahmajijñāsa*

a kara uses the term '*brahmajijñāsa*' to mean the enquiry or the quest for *Brahman*. The word '*jijñāsa*' is from the root word '*jñ*' prefixed with '*ji*' and suffixed with '*asa*.' The word '*jñ*', means 'to know.' The word '*ji*' means 'repeated or unflagging.'³ The root verb '*ā*' means 'desire.' But for a kara the term '*ā*' means 'hope,' which is a 'desire for

¹ The six *pramāṇas* accepted by *advaita* are: perception, inference, testimony, comparison, postulation and non-cognition (cf. Datta, *Six Ways of Knowing*, 27.)

² The dates of his life are uncertain. After exploring the whole question again during the last ten years, specialists now agree to place him in the eighth century CE and more probably in the second half of that century. (cf. Mayeda, *A Thousand Teachings*, 5).

³ Ivo, Coelho, *Understanding a kara: Essays by Richard De Smet* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2013), 406.

undefined good things.’ Thus the word ‘*jijñ sa*’ is ‘an unflagging desire to know.’⁴ (cf. BS Bh.1.1.1) Since it is a verbal noun, it retains the vigorous meaning of a verb as a process which is most creative. Therefore, ‘*jijñ sa*’ should not be understood merely as a ‘pure wish to know’ but it is the dynamic effort of a person making use of all his/her abilities and faculties - physical, psychical, moral and intellectual - for knowledge.⁵

Thus *brahmajijñ s* is the creative and dynamic enquiry for *Brahman* or *tman* or for self-realization which is the final supreme end of every human being (*mok a*) and which involves not an intellectual enquiry alone but the conversion and transformation of the whole person as the prerequisite for attaining the knowledge of *Brahman*.⁶

2. Meaning and Implication of ‘Experience’

In a general sense, experience is any mental event that has sensory, affective or volitional dimensions⁷ i.e. it is an event that occurs in the human subjectivity. Epistemologically considered the effect of such an event is that it provides a piece of knowledge and the epistemic justifications and empirical evidences given for proving its certainty.⁸ Thus every experience is related to the acquisition of knowledge.

Coming to the specific use of the word *anubhava*, two kinds of experiences are recognized in the *advaita* tradition: 1) empirical experience which gives empirical knowledge (*apara vidya*) and 2) trans-empirical experience which gives knowledge of those realities beyond sense (*para vidya*). The experiences acquired by our perception, inference and other forms of reasoning which are often valued as epistemological justifications and empirical evidences for providing certainty to them are all included in the former category. These experiences are mediate or indirect as they are relative to knowing faculties and are knowledge conditioned.⁹ Latter kind of knowledge is beyond empirical; it is the non-dual, direct experience of the transcendental reality.

3. *Brahmajijñ s* : From Rational To Trans-Rational Experience

Brahmajijñ s which is the dynamic inquiry for *Brahman*—the Absolute—is an attempt which includes rational analysis of empirical experiences and which may eventually transcend the rational realm. The rational analysis of one’s empirical experience gives the logical assurance that there exists self-evident, self-illuminating Witness-Consciousness which is not involved in the actual process of knowing but at the same time makes knowledge possible. In the same way, the study of the Ved s which can be conducted using all our sensible, logical and rational capacities may bring us to the logical assurance of the fact of the *Brahman* as existing. a kara lays down the general rule that ‘the unseen has to be

⁴ Richard De Smet, *The Theological Method of a kara* (Dissertatio ad Leuream in facultate Philosophica Pontificiae Universitatis Gregorianae, Unpublished manuscript, 1955), 80.

⁵ De Smet, *The Theological Method of a kara*, 79.

⁶ Coelho, *Undersatmding a kara*, 68.

⁷ Thomas A Forthoeffel, *Knowing Beyond Knowledge: Epistemologies of religious experience in classical and modern Advaita* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, 2002), 15.

⁸ D. N. Tiwari, “Advaitic Critique of Experience,” *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 27, no. 1&2 (January-April 2000): 133.

⁹ Ibid.

determined from the seen' (BS Bh. 1.4.15). In this sense *brahmajijñāsa* proceeds from rational and it leads to the trans-rational experience.

The logical conclusion—which we may receive from analysis of empirical experience as well as from rational study of the scriptures—alone is not the *jñāna* which provides liberation. This logical assurance points to a necessarily 'ought-to-be' existing reality and which must be experienced; only then the knowledge of it will be complete. For that, the rational realm must be transcended which may result a 'trans-rational experience'. Transcending the reason does not mean negating human faculty of reason or empirical dimensions of experience. In and through those experiences transcendental realization can be made possible, which is the liberative knowledge. The peculiar epistemological contribution of a *kara* consists in the conception that knowledge of the empirical realm leads to the knowledge of the self.¹⁰

3.1. *ruti* Pramāṇa - *ravāṇa*, *Manana* and *Nididhyāna* - The Only Medium For Transition

The whole sacred scriptures of Hinduism are divided in to two: *ruti* and *Smṛiti*. *ruti* literally means 'what is heard' that is, those texts those are eternal, authorless and which are transmitted orally. Vedas and Upaniads belong to this group. *Smṛiti*, literally means 'what is remembered', and are the texts those written by the great sages basing on the revealed texts of *ruti*. Bhagavadgītā, Manu, various Darśanas, etc. include this group.¹¹

A *pramāṇa* is "an active and unique cause of the *prama* or valid knowledge."¹² Thus a *pramāṇa* is the means of valid knowledge. In addition to other *pramāṇas*—perception, inference, comparison, non-cognition, and postulation—a *kara* admits *abda* or the verbal testimony (the word, written or spoken) as a *pramāṇa*.¹³ Generally speaking, *abda* can be seen as a *pramāṇa* for our knowledge of the empirical world as well as ultimate reality.¹⁴ *Advaita*, however is not primarily concerned with *abda-pramāṇa* as a vehicle of secular knowledge. As a *pramāṇa* of the empirical world, it does not have a sphere which is exclusively its own and which, by nature, it alone is capable of transmitting. The special nature of *abda* for *advaita*, therefore, lays in its function as a means of knowledge for ultimate reality.¹⁵ Thus *abda-pramāṇa*, which has its object the ultimate reality, has recourse only to *ruti*, because *ruti* alone, and not any other *pramāṇa*, can reveal the nature of ultimate reality, other *pramāṇas* remain as a contributive help for the attainment of Self realizing knowledge.¹⁶ *ruti* texts are important because they are the eternally revealed texts and the knowledge of its subject matter i.e. the nature of ultimate reality, cannot be gained by

¹⁰ N.K. Devaraja, *An Introduction to Sankara's Theory of Knowledge* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1962), 69.

¹¹ Paul Deussen, *The System of the Vedanta*, trans. Charles Johnston (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1912), 23.

¹² D.M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing: A Critical Study on the Vedanta Theory of Knowledge* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ Swami Satprakashananda, *Methods of Knowledge: Perceptual, Non-perceptual and Transcendental According to Advaita Vedanta* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1965), 193.

¹⁵ Swami Satchidanandendra Sarasvati, *The Method of Vedanta: A Critical Account of the Advaita Tradition*, trans. A.J. Alston (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, 1989), 61.

¹⁶ Coelho, *Understanding a kara*, 262.

any other means of knowledge (BS Bh.1.1.3). In this capacity *abda pramāṇa* is synonymous with the Ved s or the *ruti*.

ruti reveals *Brahman* or *ātman* which is the ultimate reality and this knowledge is the self-realization, which the *brahmajijñāsu* seeks for. For a *kāra* a morally prepared inquirer by undertaking the study of scriptures under the guidance of a teacher (*guru*) can achieve this self-realizing knowledge. *kāra* suggests some pre-requisites from the part of the enquirer for the moral conditioning before that person undertakes the study of the scripture proper; among which the important are fourfold disciplines (*s dhanacatuṣṭaya*), which are *viveka* (discernment), *vairāgya* (detachment), *amādam dhis danasampatti* (six virtues beginning from mental control – the six virtues suggested are: *ama* (mental control), *dama* (control of the senses), *uparati* (withdrawal), *titikā* (fortitude), *sam dhāna* (single pointedness of mind) and *raddh* (faith) and *mumuk utva* (desire for liberation) (BS Bh. 1.1.1).

When one is qualified in this way, that aspirant gets in to the proper Vedic training under the guidance of an appropriate teacher through the triple process of *rava ā* (hearing), *manana* (reflection) and *nididhy sāna* (contemplation). The triple process in relation to the acquisition of the *brahmajijñāna* is described in the *Bhadra yaka Upaniṣad* in the course of Y tnavalkya's instruction to his wife, Maitreyi.

The self my dear Maitreyi, should be realized - should be heard of, reflected on, and meditated upon. By the realization of the self, my dear, through hearing, reflection and meditation, all this is known (Br U 2.4.5. and 4.5.6).

3.1.1. *rava ā* and *Manana*: Stages of Rational Analysis

rava ā and *manana* are the first two of the triple process. *rava ā* means not mere hearing but involves listening and exegetical study of the sacred scripture and *manana* means rational reflection. These two steps constitute a discipline of exegesis.¹⁷ This is done strictly through the guidance of a teacher (*guru*). And it is in this stage the rational analysis of empirical cognitive experience and the nature of consciousness in such an event of knowledge is undertaken. This we find in the Upaniṣads. For example, in a pedagogical dialogue between Prajapati and Indra, narrated in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (8. 7-11) we find the progressive development of the concept of the self which is consciousness from the waking stage of self through the dreaming and self in the dreamless sleep to the absolute self, which is Pure Consciousness. That is to say, in the stages of *rava ā* and *manana*, under the guidance of the *guru*, all possible rational understanding on the reality by way of Vedic words as well as by the analysis of empirical experience is undertaken.

3.1.1.1. Understanding 'Vedic Word' - The Means for Valid Knowledge

Understanding Vedic word is the first among the direct means (*rava ā*, *manana* and *nididhy sāna*) for the knowledge of *Brahman* (*brahmajijñāna*). From the point of *brahmajijñāna* s , *rava ā* means hearing. *rava ā* includes first of all, listening, repeating and learning the sacred texts by heart. Secondly, understanding the meaning of the text; linguistic

¹⁷ Coelho, *Understanding ākāra*, 88.

and grammatical. Thirdly, to get convinced of all the possible objections raised against this meaning and then finally to know inner rationality and consistency of the sacred texts. This study is exegetical making use of all rational faculties.¹⁸

After *rava a* the next stage is *manana*. *Manana* is personal reflection on what is learnt. Here the disciples makes themselves clear on the inner rationality of what is learnt and they confront all the possible objections inspired from the other *pram as* so as to show that it can never be contradicted. *Manana* releases and relieves knowledge from doubt.¹⁹ When both inner rationality and complete non-contradiction are secured, full credibility and the completion of *manana* is obtained.

3.1.1.2. Analysis of the Knowledge in the Event of Empirical Experience

According to *advaita*, Consciousness is the omnipresent reality which all appearances are superimposed; underlying the empirical object of perception there is the same Consciousness only as it is 'limited' or 'conditioned' by that object. In the process of perception the inner sense organ, i.e. *anthakara a*, through the external sense organs goes out to that object. By reaching the object the *anthakara a* achieves a formal identity with that object, just as water, going out of a tank through a drain to a tub, assumes the form of the tub on reaching it.²⁰ Consciousness as limited by the inner sense and as assuming the form of the object is called by the *advaitins* a '*v tti*' (mental mode). The function of the mental mode is to unconceal the object by removing the veil of ignorance. This unconcealing or knowledge of the object is made possible because the *anthakara a*, which has taken the form of the given knowledge reflects the Pure Consciousness and in the process of knowledge the reflection of consciousness is bound up with the *v tti* just like fire on the red hot iron ball. Without *v tti* there cannot be the perception of the object. One needs the functioning of a psycho-physical organism in order that empirical objects may be directly perceived.²¹

V tti - as a modification of the inner sense and as having an intentional object that is being perceived - plays the role of or has the function of removing the concealment of object. Now, how can we be aware of the fact of knowledge within? The *v tti* does not require another *v tti* in order to be directly perceived; were it so, there would have been an infinite regress. A *v tti*, while revealing its object is also must immediately be perceived without needing another *v tti*. This self-illuminating revealer is Witness Consciousness or *S k i Caitanya*. The Witness Consciousness manifests an external object only when there is an appropriate *v tti* to remove its concealment. But a *v tti*, not having concealment, is directly manifested by the Witness Consciousness or *Cit* without needing another *v tti*.²²

Thus in every knowledge situation there is a principle which is the self-evidencing, self-known and self-illuminated principle which is the cause of every illumination and which is

¹⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁹ Anantanand Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge in a kara*, *Monographs of the society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy no.10* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii press, 1991), 107.

²⁰ Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, 61.

²¹ Bina Gupta, *Reason and Experience in Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 2009), 128.

²² Gupta, *Reason and Experience in Indian Philosophy*, 129.

called *Sak i Caitanya* or the self.²³ Logically speaking there must be such a Self, if not, the chain of knowledge—knowledge of knowledge, etc.—would be meaninglessly infinite and the knowledge would become impossible.

Again when we analyze the structure of consciousness in the characteristic classification of four fold experience—originally given in *M ndukya Upani ad*—we reach a final self-evidencing Self which is called *tur ya*. The phases of consciousness are given as waking, dreaming, sleeping, and *tur ya* state. The waking (*j grat*) state is characterized by the consciousness of external objects other than cognizer himself/herself. In the waking stage the self is a perceiving and understanding self. In the dream stage, marked by internally directed consciousness (*anthaprajñā*), we are aware of mental states, more inward than sense-organs. The sleep state, where the subject is not inclined towards the object nor does it see any dream, is marked by consciousness as unified (*prajñā naghana*). This state does not mean there is no consciousness at all, but, unlike waking and dreaming stages there is no objects, or consciousness is not ‘referred to’ anything,²⁴ but the consciousness free from its activity in the state of deep sleep is not the real self. Because even after a deep sleep we are able to have the knowledge about the state of deep sleep as ‘I slept not having known anything’ this itself is a knowledge about the state of deep sleep thus there must be a self behind the state of deep sleep who is not a part of any process but may be silent observer and that is the *tur ya* experience of the real self, self-evidencing Witness Consciousness. Thus the analysis of the structure of the consciousness reveals the necessity of a Witness Consciousness which *advaita* terms as *Sak i Caitanya* or *Cit* which is the self.²⁵

3.1.2. The Result of Analysis: Rational Assurance of ‘The Real’

The analysis of knowledge process in the empirical level as well as the analysis of the structure of consciousness makes logically clear the necessity of a final self-evidencing principle, *Cit* which is the Self (*tman*). Self is certainly the inner most as behind all stages of experience and behind it nothing further inner (*antara*) is conceivable.²⁶ But having logical surety is not enough to ascertain the existence of the reality. Thinking or having abstract knowledge about something is different from actually experiencing it.

Though from the analysis of experience it is clear that the self as the pure consciousness is a logical necessity as the highest point of possibility of cognition, but apart from this rational assurance, do this essence that makes experience possible really exists. The ontological value of the reality is to be considered. The knowledge becomes complete when one is able to realize the existence of the *Cit* i.e. Self (*tman* or *Brahman*) beyond the rational assurance of the existence of such reality. For this, one has to transcend the empirical and rational experience. The phase of contemplation (*nididhy sana*) makes this possible. However these empirical experiences are not meaningless, first because, only in the context of these experiences the trance-experience becomes a legitimate issue for discussion and

²³ Debabrata Sinha, *The Metaphysics of Experience in Advaita Vedanta: A Phenomenological Approach* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1983), 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁶ Sinha, *The Metaphysics of Experience in Advaita Vedanta*, 82.

second that without the gradual transcendence from the empirical to the trans-empirical one cannot reach that state of self-realization.²⁷

3.1.3. Nididhy sana: From Rational Assurance to the Experience of the Real as 'Existent'

Now a transition from the rational assurance received on the very possibility and logical necessity of self, we have to grow higher to the experience of existence of the self. That is to say the rational dimension has to be transcended and this is made possible by the stage of *nididhy sana*, which is contemplation and which culminates in intuitive direct experience of the Real as existent. *Advaita* keeps to the point that real enlightenment can come only through concrete intuition or immediate knowledge (*anubh ti*) and not through rational abstraction. Through transcendental experience alone we are presented with reality.

For a *kara*, the process of contemplation consists in *dh ra a* (retention) and *abhy sa* (repetition) tending towards *sam dhi* (ecstatic absorption). This is *dhy na-yoga*, the highest form of knowledge, which consists in abiding constantly in the *tman*, bearing in mind that the *tman* is all and nothing else is really existent.²⁸ (cf. BG Bh. 6.25)

The word often used for this final stage of liberation is '*nididhy sana*.' It is a combination of four words. '*ni*', '*di*', '*dhy*', and '*sana*'. '*sana*' means the comfortable *yoga* posture (bodily) to be adopted for undisturbed mediation, '*dhy*' means the intellect which is to be fixed itself exclusively, '*di*' with ever-renewed intensity (as implied by this repetitive prefix '*di*'), '*ni*' upon the truth previously ascertained.²⁹ Thus this word implies fixing the intellect with ever renewed intensity upon the truths already ascertained in a posture which is conducive for it. It demands a cessation of all mental modifications (in common with all forms of *yoga*) and a positive truth and reality to be concentrated upon.

a *kara* insists that *yoga* concentration is useless so long as this positive truth is not thoroughly ascertained. This assimilative concentration on truth already heard, discussed and unreservedly accepted, is unmixed with *manana*. a *kara* was convinced that *dhy nayoga* stands beyond reasoning and actions; actions, even the ritual actions, can often impede salvation (cf. US 18, 9-21,105-108, 222).³⁰

3.2. Brahm nubhava: The Resulting Trans-Rational Experience

From what we have said so far it is clear that a socially and morally prepared enquirer, with the help of an enlightened teacher, after applying the rational capacity in the study and understanding of Vedic words, can get into the contemplative *sam dhi*. This contemplation results in an experience where in the liberative meaning of the scripture is experienced. What is 'referred to' by the scriptural words is experienced as existent. This liberative experience is called *Brahm nubhava*. It is a transition from empirical and rational to the trans-rational. In this process all the *pram as* could be contributive and finally the *pram a* of *ruti* makes the realization possible. The final experience transcends all the *pram as*. *Brahman* of a *kara*, while it transcends the *pram as*, does not transcend the

²⁷ Tiwari, "Advaitic Critique of Experience," 135.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Tiwari, "Advaitic Critique of Experience, 290.

³⁰ Coelho, *Understanding a kara*, 149.

experience itself.³¹ That is to say this *anubhava* is not an instrumental to produce another realization; rather this *anubhava* is the *jñāna* and is the self-realization.

3.3. Interdependence of *Manana*, *rava a* and *Nididhy sana*

For a *kara*, *ruti* is the only means for the liberative knowledge. All other *pramāṇas* and consequent knowledge may remain as contributive to this self-realizing knowledge. The three process of *ruti* - *rava a*, *manana* and *nididhy sana* - are interdependent. In the absence any one other two cannot operate. Without *rava a*, exegetical study of scripture, there can be no *manana*. That implies a *kara* dismisses independent reasoning as a suitable means for arriving at accurate knowledge of *Brahman*. If so, any kind of reasoning will not lead one to liberative contemplation (*nididhy sana*) and to consequent *Brahm nubhava*.³² That is to say, reflecting on any good words that is heard will not lead us to liberating knowledge, and also, reason if it is used without the content of *ruti* does not provide liberating knowledge.³³

There can be no reliance in the independent *dhyāna yoga* for liberation without *ruti*. Every *dhyāna yoga* is *citta-vṛtti-nirodha*, that is, cessation of all mental modifications, an emptying of their diversity. If this is affirmed the *dhyāna* would become contentless and the experience can become an experience of nothingness. But a *kara* does not hold so, one has to meditate up on the truths received from *ruti* which has passed in-and-through - *rava a*, *manana* and *nididhy sana* - and such experience is not *śūnya* (empty) but *pūrva* (fullness), and that is liberating experience.³⁴ Thus *rava a*, *manana* and *nididhy sana* integrally functions together and have the common aim of liberative knowledge.

It shows that *brahmajijñāsa* is a science depending primarily upon the authority of the sacred body of traditions which it must in no way depart from, but reassess, explain, defend and grasp thoroughly. It is not the fruit of the individual's philosophical insight and sagacity, but a priceless heritage which he/she receives from the past and ought to transmit to the future.³⁵

4. Can *Anubhava* Be Another *Pramāṇa*?

One of the most revealing passages concerning a *kara*'s analysis of experience comes in BS Bh. 1.1.2. This *śāstra* establishes *Brahman* as the source of the origin and the dissolution of the world. Here a *kara* surveys the various means at our disposal for gaining the knowledge of the supreme. Here while holding that *ruti Pramāṇa* as the appropriate means, he makes room for inference and reasoning as significant helps in this intellectual process. But he continues:

In the inquiry in to *dharma*, *ruti*, etc. are the only *pramāṇas*; but in the inquiry in to *Brahman*, *ruti*, etc. and experience (*anubhava*), etc., are valid as far as possible, since

³¹ Devaraja, *An Introduction to Sankara's Theory of Knowledge*, 70.

³² Anantanand, Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge in a kara*, Monographs of the society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy no.10 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii press, 1991) 44.

³³ Satprakashananda, *Methods of Knowledge*, 196.

³⁴ Coelho, *Understanding a kara*, 149.

³⁵ De Smet, *The Theological Method of a kara*, 161.

knowledge of *Brahman* ultimately terminates in experience and since it has for its object an accomplished subject (BS Bh.1.1.2).

This passage has become a controversy centered around the question whether according to a *kara*, *ruti* is the only source of the final knowledge of the *Brahman* (i.e. *ruti* as *pramā* which would bring about *mokṣa*), or the final emancipatory knowledge is to be brought about by experience (*anubhava*) (i.e. whether *anubhava* is a *pramā* which functions as a means of *Brahma*-knowledge). A *kara* repeatedly declares that *ruti* is the only means of knowing the *Brahman*; that the *Brahman* cannot be known except by means of the *Vedāntic rūtis*, and there by subscribing to the position that the *rūtis* are the only means of knowing the *Brahman* (BS Bh.1.1.3). But at the same time he seems to oppose these statements when he asserts that the knowledge of the *Brahman* culminates in experience (*anubhava*), and that this experience brings about liberation.³⁶ Basing the interpretations on these seemingly conflicting statements, there can be a confusion regarding whether *ruti* or *anubhava* is the final means of knowing the *Brahman*.

Those who affirm *anubhava* to be a *pramā*, argue that in BS Bh.1.1.2, a *kara* explicitly refers to *anubhava* as a *pramā*; and *anubhava* validates the knowledge received through *ruti* in matters of ultimate reality.³⁷ *Anubhava* can act as a *pramā* in the matters pertaining to *Brahman* in a way that it cannot in matters pertaining to *dharma*.³⁸ And again it is argued that, for a *kara*, *ruti* is a valid means of knowledge about *Brahman* in the practical world (*vyāvahārika* realm), and *anubhava* is a means of valid absolute (*pāramārthika*) knowledge. Because knowledge through *ruti* implies duality of knower and the known, but *anubhava* does not.³⁹ Those who affirm *ruti* and denies the *pramā* status for *anubhava* shows that, for a *kara*, *ruti* is the sole valid source of knowledge for *Brahman*; it is not only the 'logical source' of the knowledge of the *Brahman*, but also an adequate and fruitful (i.e. leading to *mokṣa*) source.⁴⁰

The commentary on BS 1.1.2, which states *anubhava* as a *pramā* has to be understood properly from its contexts. Here a *kara*, after *anubhava* adds "etc.", which suggests that no special significance is being attached to *anubhava*.⁴¹ Further, this commentary on 1.1.2 must be read along with the commentary on 1.1.3, where a *kara* clearly states that *ruti* is the only *pramā* for *Brahmajñāna*. In the above mentioned *sūtra* (BS Bh.1.1.2) he uses *anubhava* in a wide sense "to include any experience which can be analyzed to support and reinforce Vedic revelations of *ruti*."⁴²

If one Consider *anubhava* as another *pramā* it raises various philosophical issues. A *pramā* is an active and unique cause of the *pramā* or knowledge. If *anubhava* is considered another *pramā* validating *ruti*, it undermines the theory of intrinsic validity of knowledge which a *kara* holds. For him knowledge is valid in itself unless it is contradicted

³⁶ Gupta, *Reason and Experience in Indian Philosophy*, 268.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Arvind Sharma, "Is *Anubhava* a *Pramā* According to a *kara*?" *Philosophy East and West: A Quarterly of Asian and Comparative Thought* 42, no.3 (July 1992): 521.

³⁹ Ibid., 522.

⁴⁰ Gupta, *Reason and Experience in Indian Philosophy*, 268.

⁴¹ Ibid, 270.

⁴² Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished*, 114.

by subsequent knowledge.⁴³ If *anubhava* is placed as the *pramāṇa* which validates *rūti*, then it needs another *pramāṇa* to validate its knowledge and the chain will go to the infinity. It would mean valid knowledge is impossible and it is amount to say that the liberation is not possible.⁴⁴

If *anubhava* is the proper *pramāṇa* for the knowledge of *Brahman*, then *rūti* cannot be considered as a *pramāṇa*, for any *pramāṇa* has its own unique area of knowledge which other *pramāṇas* cannot reach, but can only contributively assist.⁴⁵ Every *pramāṇa* makes known only what is not an object of another *pramāṇa*.⁴⁶ If *anubhava* and *rūti* have the same area and object of knowledge, i.e. *Brahman*, either of them ceases to be *pramāṇa*.

Knowledge through any *pramāṇa*, in its final phase is an '*anubhava*,' i.e. there is revelation of their particular objects. Since the object of *rūti* is the supreme, the consequent *anubhava* also is supreme and is trans-rational. If all *pramāṇas* culminate in *anubhava*, it cannot be the case that *Anubhava* itself is another *pramāṇa*. In the case of *rūti*, it leads to the *anubhava* - immediate knowledge - of the identity of the *ātman* and the *Brahman*, in this process *rāva a*, *manana* and *nididhyāna* are integral.

There is no indication that *ācārya* ever held the view that there is a supreme *pramāṇa* or means of knowing called "*anubhava*." *Brahmānubhava* or the experience of the *Brahman* is not, according to *ācārya*, another *pramāṇa* besides the six, which Advaitins accept.⁴⁷ *Brahman* can be known only through Scripture, and through no other *pramāṇa*.⁴⁸ *Anubhava* is the non-dual direct experience of *Brahman*, which is liberation itself.⁴⁹ *Brahmānubhava*, is the liberating *jñāna*, is not a *pramāṇa* but it is beyond the distinction of *pramāṇa* and *prameya*⁵⁰ (*prameya* is 'knowables' i.e. anything that can be known).

Conclusion

The ultimate aim of human being is *mokṣa*. According to *ācārya* this can be achieved through the knowledge of *Brahman*. *Brahmajijñāsa* removes all veils which conceal the real nature of Self which was never absent and thus *Brahmānubhava*, the liberative experience is made possible. In this process the experience or *anubhava* has greater role to play. The empirical experience in the event of knowledge of external objects rationally gives surety that there should exist a Self which makes all the empirical knowledge possible. In the same way the study of Vedic words and the rational reflection on them makes the enquirer logically clear that the absolute should exist. Thus empirical experiences and rational capacity are necessary for *Brahmānubhava*, without which liberation would be impossible. But, the assurance given by empirical and rational experience alone is not the liberation. There must be metaphysical content corresponding to this rationally logically assured reality. The experience through contemplation, which transcends the reason, makes such a logical

⁴³ Devaraja, *An Introduction to Sankara's Theory of Knowledge*, 119.

⁴⁴ Rambachan, *Accomplishing the Accomplished*, 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁶ Devaraja, *An Introduction to Sankara's Theory of Knowledge*, 59.

⁴⁷ Gupta, *Reason and Experience in Indian Philosophy*, 278.

⁴⁸ Devaraja, *An Introduction to Sankara's Theory of Knowledge*, 68.

⁴⁹ Kim Skoog, " *ācārya* on the Role of *rūti* and *Anubhava* in Attaining *Brahmajñāna*," *Philosophy East and West: A quarterly of Asian and comparative thought* 39 no.1, (January 1989): 71.

⁵⁰ Gupta, *Reason and Experience in Indian Philosophy*, 278.

assurance realized as the reality existing. This *anubhava* is the liberative knowledge and this is *mukti* which is the highest aim of human being. Thus *anubhava* cannot be independent of *ruti pramāna*. *rava*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* are the three interdependent and integral operational functions of *ruti pramāna* making the liberative knowledge possible. The fruitful result of their operation is *Brahmajñāna* or *Brahm anubhava* which is liberation. Thus a *kara* is not a mystic in the sense making a blanket statement of pure unknowability of intuition, but he gives rational means which will surely lead one to the transcendental experience. At the same time he is not purely a rational thinker in the sense depending on reason alone for the self-realization. For him there is a realm where reason gets transcended resulting intuitive experience which is *Brahm anubhava*, the liberation.

Abbreviations used

BG Bh.	<i>Bhagavadgītā Bhāṣya</i>
Br U	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</i>
BS Bh.	<i>Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya</i>
BS	<i>Brahmasūtra</i>
Ch U Bh.	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya</i>
Ka U	<i>Kāhaṇḍikā Upaniṣad</i>
Mu U Bh.	<i>Mundaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya</i>
Ta U	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad</i>
US	<i>Upadeśasahasrī</i>

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