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Article

The Dakṣiṇāmūrti as the embodiment of Advaita: An Upaniṣadic and Śaṅkara's vision

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ABSTRACT

Basically, in Vedic literature, the fierce and gentle forms of Rudra are found. Most of the forms of Shiva idols belong to these two forms. Most of the gentle idols include Dakṣiṇā idols and dance idols. The idols belonging to the Dakṣiṇā stage bear witness to the proficiency of God in various disciplines. Characteristics of Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti is mainly described in Dakṣiṇāmūrtyupaniṣat and Śaṅkara's Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra where he is described as embodiment of advaita. In both the Stotra and the Upanishads, Brahma Himself, the form of knowledge, exists in the destruction of the ignorance of the living entity. The master of creation, existence and destruction resides under the banyan tree and in the posture of silence, gives the supreme knowledge that destroys ignorance to all the disciples. All these things mentioned in both places point towards Advaita. So, this present research paper described how the lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti is portraited as Brahma and he is the embodiment of advaita.

The three forms of God are imagined in the epics of Indian history and in the Puranas. The gods are worshipped as Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar. In the scriptures, he is mentioned as Brahma the creator, Vishnu as the preserver and Shiva as the destroyer. Basically, for the sectarian Shaivites or Vaishnavites, Shiva or Vishnu is the only one who possesses three powers. In the Shwetashwatra Upanishad, the god Rudra is also imagined as the source of the three powers.

ya ekā'varṇo bahudhā śaktiyogād varṇānanekān nihitārtho dadhāti.
bi caiti cānte visvamādou sa devaḥ sa no buddhyā śubhayā saṃyunaktu.[i]

Here lord Śiva is described as the creator, keeper and destroyer of this whole universe. He appears in many forms according to need. In reality, He is one and unique. There is no other being besides Him. Basically it also potraits his omnipresence.

tadevāgnistadādityastadvāyustadu candramāḥ.
tadeva śukraṃ tadbrahma tadāpastat prajāpatiḥ.[ii]

He is the form of parama brahma along with Agni, Āditya, vāyu, āpa and Prajapati. Always he stays among all of these and on the other hand all of these Gods are form of Śiva.

ajāmekāṃ lohitaśuklakṛṣṇāṃ bahvīḥ prajāḥ sṛjamānāṃ sarūpāḥ.
ajo hyeko juṣamāṇo'nuśete jahātyenāṃ bhuktabhogāmajo'nyaḥ.[iii]

He is the creator of this threefold world, always one and eternal. Even without taking birth, he is intoxicated with sensual pleasures. During the time of Universal destruction, the entire world took refuge in Him.

eko hi rudro na dvitīyāya tasthurya imān lokānīśata īśānībhiḥ.
pratyaṅ janāṃstiṣṭhate saṅcukopāntakāle, saṃsṛjya viśvā bhuvanāni goptā.[iv]

Basically, in Vedic literature, the fierce and gentle forms of Rudra are found. Most of the forms of Shiva idols belong to these two forms. Many of the idols are included in mythological stories. Some idols introduce a difficult Shiva theory. The fierce forms of Shiva are the Gajāsurasaṃhara idol, Tripurāntaka, Andhakāsurabadha, etc. Basically, towards the end of Vedic literature, mythological stories are mixed. The solar forms of Rudra such as Bhairava, Aghora, Roudra-Pāśupata, Virupākṣa etc. do not have any mythological stories. Again, among the gentle idols such as the idol with Uma, Vṛṣavāhana, Umā-Maheśvara etc., there is no mythological story. Most of the gentle idols include Dakṣiṇā idols and dance idols. The idols belonging to the Dakṣiṇā stage bear witness to the proficiency of God in various disciplines.[v]

Characteristics of Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti is mainly described in Dakṣiṇāmūrtyupaniṣat and Śaṅkara's Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra where he is described as embodiment of advaita. Basically Dakṣiṇāmūrti-stotra of Ācārya Śaṅkara has deep significance where he narrates nirguṇa Brahma, saguṇa Brahma God and the secret of his Praṇava is revealed. Essentially, the word is the form of Brahma. Ācārya Bhartṛhari also has accepted the word as the form of Brahma.

anādinidhanaṃ brahma śabdatattvaṃ yadakṣaram.
vivartate'rthabhāvena prakriyā jagato yataḥ.[vi]

Brahman is manifested in four stages. Parā, Paśyantī, Madhyamā and Baikharī; Jāgrat, Svapna, Suṣupti and Turīya – these are the four stages of Brahman consciousness. The eternal play of Brahman consciousness is flowing in creation, stability and destruction. The mystery of creation and destruction is also within Praṇava. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is depicted in the hymns as Guru and is the idol of Praṇava. Dakṣiṇāmūrti Guru-Brahma is the original Guru. The Supreme Lord Himself is the true Guru. According to Tantrics, He is the Supreme Shiva. Creation, maintenance, destruction, restraint and grace – these five powers are the extraordinary religion of Brahman. Among the five extraordinary actions, grace is His most important action. As Guru, He bestows grace and as a result, the search for the original Guru is completed.

Basically, Brahman is the object of the world, and as a result of this distorted state, the world is reflected, just as the reflection of the viewer in a mirror is reflected. It is reflected because of Maya; the distorted nature of the world is created by Maya. But with the removal of the veil of Maya, the eternal and non-dual truth, Brahman, the divine form of the Guru Dakṣiṇāmūrti, exists.

viśvaṃ darpaṇadṛśyamānanagarītulyaṃ nijāntargataṃ
paśyannātmani māyayā bahiribodbhūtaṃ yathā nidrayā.
yaḥ sākṣīkurute prabodhasamaye svātmānamevādvayaṃ
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṃ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye.[vii]

This visible world is the result, the world is essentially situated in the unique Brahman in an unmanifest state. The emergence of the world as result is due to the influence of Maya. Just as a magician can perform magic by his cleverness, similarly, the Guru in the form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti manifests the world from Brahman by his power of illusion. Although the Guru in the form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti is Brahman and he is also the world born of illusion.

Dakṣiṇāmūrti himself is the form of truth, and his manifestation in the form of the universe is also the form of truth. Although there is a duality of truth and falsehood, world and Brahman for the living beings, this duality is absent for Śiva. For him, everything is the self. Since all things are true, there is no existence of falsehood in the Deity of Dakṣiṇāmūrti.

In reality, when a person perceives an object through his eyes etc., then the knowledge of that object arises in the mind. But in the case of Dakṣiṇāmūrti Brahman, in the opposite way, he blossoms his knowledge outwards. Śiva's knowledge is essentially eternal and true. That knowledge itself bursts forth outward, just as the light of a lamp inside a multi-holed vessel spreads through the holes in all directions.

Due to ignorance, the living entity becomes egoistic. This ignorance arises from the power of illusion. In fact, illusion and ignorance are not the same thing. The illusion is the power Brahman and the ignorance of the living entity cause of ego. Ignorance is inherent in illusion, but illusion is separate. Illusion is actually the form-power of the divine Dakṣiṇāmūrti, which is the cause of this universe. This power is not false, but the egoistic pride arising from the power is false. Ignorance is destroyed by the knowledge of the divine form of Brahman.

Godhood is possible through hearing, meaning-contemplation, meditation and chanting. The first part of the sadhana of speech is hearing. The sequence of sadhana is hearing the verbal form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, chanting his kirtan, then imbibing the words in the mind, meaning-contemplation and meditation as a result. This verbal form of Dakṣiṇāmūrti is the universal form of the Paramapada or the supreme letter, Oṅkāra.

Under the banyan tree, the young man, the Guru, is teaching his wise disciples in silence. The reason for choosing the banyan tree here is that the banyan tree is a symbol of the universal life force. Hundreds of trees grow under this tree, which is a sign of the manyness of one. Boyhood youth, the old age and death - these are the consequences of physical time. Therefore, it is part of nature. The Guru is the person who is the ruler of nature. From

boyhood to youth, life increases, then decreases. In youth, life gets the ultimate meaning. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is therefore Cidghanavigraha, eternal youth. In his youth, the joy of a boyhood, the wisdom of old age, and the emptiness of death are included. When one grows old, knowledge comes, this is the law of nature, but it does not apply to Dakṣiṇāmūrti. Therefore, he is eternally young.

citraṃ vaṭatarormūle bṛddhāḥ śiṣyā gururyuvā.
gurostu mounaṃ vyākhyānaṃ śiṣyāstu chinnasaṃśayāḥ.[viii]

Dakṣiṇāmūrti is the relabel of lord Śiva. Dakṣiṇāmūrti is God. He is denoted by Pranav. In the conclusion of the hymn states –"śuddhajñānaikamūrti praṇavārtha" . Therefore, while meditating on Dakṣiṇāmūrti Guru, one should meditate on Praṇavārtha. Ācārya Patañjali also says that Praṇava is the vācaka and God is the vācya. "tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ"[ix] He has mentioned both knowledge and action as the signs of God.

"kleśakarmavipākāśairaparāmṛṣṭaḥ puruṣaviśeṣa īśvaraḥ"[x] In terms of knowledge, He has the omniscient nature. "tatra niratiśayaṃ sarvajñabījam"[xi] In terms of action, the power of the Guru to release the bonds. This power of God is the omnipotent greatness. He is staying with everyone and emerges in everyone in his own form. In Tantra, which is called Mahāśakti. He emerges from the very matter and resides in the sky in complete spirituality.

Dakṣiṇāmūrti is the embodiment of knowledge. He is not limited to any specific form. Being abstract, he is omnipresent.

Dakṣiṇāmūrti Śiva is described in the Dakṣiṇāmūrtyupaniṣad. This Upaniṣad belongs to the Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda tradition. At the beginning of the Upaniṣad, sages like Śaunaka asked Mārkaṇḍeya Muni ten questions about the mysterious Śiva doctrine. In response, Mārkaṇḍeya Muni describes the nature of the god of knowledge, Dakṣiṇāmūrti, and imparts knowledge about the Supreme Truth. At the beginning of the Upaniṣad, he describes Dakṣiṇāmūrti as the deity of knowledge and the deity of creation, existence, and destruction. In describing the nature of Dakṣiṇāmūrti, he says-

sphaṭikarajatavarṇaṃ moutikīmakṣamālāmamṛtakalaśavidyāṃ jñānamudrāṃ karāgre.
dadhatamuragakakṣyaṃ candracūḍaṃ trinetraṃ vidhṛtavividhabhūṣaṃ
dakṣiṇāmūrtimīḍe.[xii]

In this Upaniṣad, Śiva is described as the inhabitant of a banyan tree. He is the deity of speech or word, but his knowledge is not achieved through words. In his knowledge, the darkness of ignorance is dispelled. With the destruction of ignorance, only knowledge remains. He resides in the silent posture and teaches the great saying 'Tattvamasi'. He is described as the great teacher. By listening to the mantra, meditating on it, one can move towards the Supreme Truth. The mantra 'So'aham' should be chanted till death. Reciting this mantra, considering that Brahman and mantra are not different, is the way to pursuit of knowledge. By meditating on the Supreme Soul with a single mind, one can move towards liberation. Control of the mind from external matters is necessary. In the philosophy of yoga, it is described as yoga. The presence of God is possible through the combination of knowledge, devotion and detachment. As a result, ignorance is removed and light arises.

By analyzing the meaning of the word Dakṣiṇā, he has been described as synonymous with knowledge. Dakṣiṇā is the intellect that can reveal Brahman in the form of knowledge. The word Dakṣiṇāmūrti is derived from two words, dakṣiṇa and murti. 'Dakṣiṇa' means south and 'murti' means form. He is Śiva facing south, symbolizing the direction of death and ignorance- meaning He destroys ignorance.

In the explanation of Dakṣiṇāmūrti stotra ācārya Anirvāṇa described the word 'dakṣiṇā'. Basically 'dakṣa' is a technical term, which means ability of creation. The creator is also Dakṣa. In the Puraṇas he is described as Prajāpati. So, those who has the ability of creation is called Dakṣiṇa. Creation is manifestation from darkness to light. 'Dakṣiṇā' also means the power kindness of Guru. This grace, in which the form of a deity is taken, is Dakṣiṇāmūrti. He who is Dakṣiṇāmūrti, is the embodiment of knowledge. In Buddhism, knowledge is wisdom, and grace is compassion. Wisdom is emptiness. Buddha is the embodiment of emptiness and compassion. Śiva is the same.

Both the Both the Dakṣiṇāmūrti Stotra and the Dakṣiṇāmūrti Upaniṣad describe Dakṣiṇāmūrti Śiva as Brahma and as the world guru. This Śiva is the Advaita Brahma. There is no other theory other than Śiva. Śaṅkarācārya's famous statement is worth mentioning in this context:

brahma satyaṃ jaganmithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ.
anena vedyaṃ sacchāstramiti vedāntaḍiṇḍimaḥ.[xiii]

In both the Stotra and the Upaniṣads, Brahma Himself, the form of knowledge, exists in the destruction of the ignorance of the living entity. The master of creation, existence and destruction resides under the banyan tree and in the posture of silence, gives the supreme knowledge that destroys ignorance to all the disciples. All these things mentioned in both places point towards Advaita.

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[i] Śvetāśvataropaniṣad, 4/1.
[ii] Ibid., 4/2.
[iii] Ibid., 4/5.
[iv] Ibid., 3/2.
[v] Jitendranath Bandopadhyay, Paňcapāsanā, p. 139-141.
[vi] Vākyapadīya, brahmakāṇḍa, 1.
[vii] Dakṣiṇāmūrtistotram, 1.
[viii] Ibid., 12.
[ix] pātaňjalayogadarśana, samādhipāda, 27.
[x] Ibid., 24.
[xi] Ibid., 25.
[xii] Dakṣiṇāmūrtyupaniṣad, 8.
[xiii] Brahmanāmāvalī, 21.

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