



## RECONCILIATION OF THE SEVEN CONTRADICTIONS

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Mr. R. M. Nujc rya's seven *p rvapak a*-s in *r -bh ya*, his commentary on the *Brahma-s tras*, are generally regarded as the *m h p rvapak*, as it criticizes one of the basic concepts of Advaita-Vedānta, namely, *ajñāna* or *avidyā*. Since Mr. R. M. Nujc's period is definitely later than that of Mr. A. Kara, whatever the conciliation be on the dispute regarding A. Kara's own period, it becomes important to every present day Advaitin that these *p rvapak a*-s (PP) and their *siddhānta*-s (Sid) are known, for it is very possible that these doubts might arise and persist even after reading the *prasthāntay -bh ya* of A. Kara. This paper endeavors to present these seven prima facie questions of the Viśiṣṭadvaitin and the Advaitin's reply.

### 1. Brahman cannot be the locus of *ajñāna*, ignorance?

PP: Advaitins say that it is *ajñāna* that is the cause of *saṁsāra*. Where is this *ajñāna* located? Is it located in Brahman, or is it located in the *jīva*, individual. If it is said that *ajñāna* is located in Brahman, then we say that the *svārūpa* of Brahman is *jñāna*, as revealed in the *Taittirīya* text "*satyam-jñānam-anantam-brahma*". *Ajñāna* is opposed to *jñāna*, and therefore, Brahman cannot be the locus of *ajñāna*, like even light cannot be the locus of darkness, for they are both mutually opposed to each other. Also, such a claim that Brahman is the locus of *ajñāna* will make Brahman ignorant which will seriously damage its status as "all-knowing", *sarvajñāna*.

Sid: There are two types of *jñāna* - *svārūpa-jñāna*, essential consciousness, and *dharma-bh tā-jñāna*, attributive consciousness. The saltiness of the salt is *svārūpa*, its essential nature, without which salt will not be salt anymore. The heat and light principles are the essential nature of fire, without which fire will not be fire anymore. So also, *svārūpa-jñāna* constitutes the essential nature of Brahman, without which Brahman will not be Brahman anymore. And on this, there is mutual agreement that the essential nature of Brahman, its *svārūpa*, is *jñāna*. Now what is this *dharma-bh tā-jñāna*? It is like salt-water, or hot iron ball, to extend our examples. The saltiness of the salt-water is not the essential nature of water, but caused due to presence of salt in the water, and which saltiness gets attributed to water; so also, the heat and glow of the hot iron ball, is not the essential nature of iron ball, but has been acquired from fire, of which these are essential nature.

Now, when you say *ajñāna* is opposed to *jñāna*, is it opposed to *svārūpa-jñāna* or *dharma-bh tā-jñāna*? Both of us agree that *ajñāna* is opposed to only *dharma-bh tā-jñāna*, attributive consciousness. Both of us also agree that Brahman is of the nature of *svārūpa-jñāna*; so Brahman cannot be opposed to *ajñāna* and therefore, can very well be its locus. Your *p rvapak a* arises out of the confusion you have between the *svārūpa-jñāna* and *dharma-bh tā-jñāna*. If this distinction between essential and attributive consciousness is understood, then this *p rvapaksa* will not arise.

Now, we shall state our own *pakāra* on what is the locus of *avidyā*. It can be either the *jīva* or Brahman itself; and we shall quickly add that for us Advaitins, the essential nature of *jīva* is Brahman and hence what appears as a choice is really not an either or.

When we say Brahman is the locus of *ajñāna*, it has to be understood that this *ajñāna* is nothing but the power of Brahman to produce ignorance and illusions in individuals, much the same as that of a magician's power. Though the audience are all stupefied by the power of the magician, the magician himself is not stupefied. So also, Brahman being the locus of *ajñāna* does not cause any damage to Brahman's *sarvajñānavatva*.

### 2. *Jīva* cannot be the locus of *ajñāna*

PP: If it is said that *jīva*, the individual, is the locus of *ajñāna*, then such a claim suffers from mutual-interdependency, for individuality itself is an effect of *ajñāna*, of which it is its locus. How can *ajñāna*, the cause of *jīvatva*, be dependent upon its effect as its locus?

Sid: When we say *jīva* is the locus of *ajñāna*, the *doṣa* of *anyonyābhāvā*, mutual-interdependency, arises only if they are considered as cause and effect in the sense of the cause preceding the effect and the effect succeeding the cause. But this is not so; *ajñāna* and *jīvatva* are not to be considered sequentially as cause and effect, but as two interdependent aspects of the same fact, like fatherhood and son-ship. It is the advent of the son which makes a person a father – viewed in this manner, it is the son who caused the father, whereas it is the father who is the cause



of the son. Viewed as interdependent, there should be no difficulty in accepting the interdependency between *ajñ na* and *j vatva*, and one being the *raya* of the other.

As far as the effect being the locus of its cause, we observe in everyday life that pot, the effect, is the locus of clay, its material cause; so this presents no problem.

Further, *Advaitasiddhi* declares that both *j vatva* and *ajñ na- rayatva* are *an di*, beginningless, and thus there is no inconsistency in this mutual interdependence both in terms of its origination and existence. One of the basic precepts of Advaita Vedānta is the grant of six elements as *an di*, based on *ruti-pramāṇa*. They are “*j va a vi uddh cittath jiv varayo bhid av dy tat cito yoga*” *J va*, *vara* and the *bheda* between them, Brahman, *avidyā* and their *sambandha*, are all considered as *an di*-s by Advaitins.

*Brahmasiddhi* says that the *j va* is said to be the locus of *ajñ na* only by the reason of the association of the defect of *ajñ na* with it. How does this defect of *ajñ na* associate itself with the *j va*? In reality, there is no association; Brahman limited by *ajñ na* is the material cause of the *jagat*; *ajñ na* being only *anup dhi*, limiting adjunct, cannot be the material cause, but can only be an instrumental cause of *jagat*. Like even the dirt in the mirror is wrongly considered as belonging to that of the reflection, and the reflection is regarded as tainted per se, so also Brahman, which is *nitya- uddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāva*, and whose essential nature is *sat-cit- nanda-ananta- tm*, when reflected in *ajñ na*, which is *malina-sattva*, comes to be regarded as the tainted limited *samsāra* called the *j va*.

*J vatva* is spoken of only by the reason of being limited by *ajñ na*, and *j va- rayatva* of *ajñ na* is spoken of only by reason of association with the defect of *ajñ na*. Their mutual interdependency has to be understood thus.

### 3. *Ajñ na* cannot conceal Brahman

PP: *Ajñ na* cannot conceal Brahman since the *svar pa* of Brahman is *jñ na*.

Sid: *Ajñ na* can conceal Brahman since it is not opposed to *svar pa-jñ na*. *Ajñ na*, of which Brahman is the *raya*, locus, is opposed to only *dharmā-bh tā-jñ na*, attributive consciousness, as has been explained earlier.

PP: If it is admitted that *ajñ na* can conceal Brahman, then does it not compromise the nature of Brahman as *svayam-prak ā*, self-revealing?

Sid: *Ajñ na* conceals Brahman similar to the clouds concealing the Sun. Like even the cloud conceals the Sun, without harming Sun's self-luminosity, so also *ajñ na* conceals Brahman, without harming Brahman's self-luminosity. Self-luminosity means being luminous independently, without being dependent on any external aid. However, the perception of such luminosity is dependent upon the preconditions for a *pram ā* to operate being met. Merely because the necessary conditions for operation of a *pram ā* are not met, it cannot be concluded that an object is not self-luminous, for that would lead to validation of the conclusion of a blind man that the Sun is not self-luminous, because he cannot see it. In short, self-luminosity depends upon being luminous without any external aid, and it not dependent upon it being perceived. So, *ajñ na* conceals Brahman in the sense of preventing the *j va* from knowing his own nature.

### 4. *Jñ na* cannot remove *ajñ na*

PP: If it is accepted that *jñ na* is not opposed to *ajñ na*, which was the argument put forward to explain the locus of *ajñ na*, then there is a consequent problem that arises out of this position; that, *jñ na* cannot remove *ajñ na*, since it is not opposed to *ajñ na*.

Sid: We say that this is the same confusion between *svar pa-jñ na* and *dharmā-bh tā-jñ na* that continues to haunt the Viśiṣṭhādvaitin. As *svar pa-jñ na*, *jñ na* is not opposed to *ajñ na* – it has no capacity to remove *ajñ na* – if anything, it reveals *ajñ na*, much the same as the Sun which is covered by the cloud reveals the cloud itself. But as *dharmā-bh tā-jñāna*, *jñ na* is opposed to *ajñ na* and hence has the capacity to remove *ajñ na*. So in our view, *jñ na* and *ajñ na* are both opposed to each other.

### 5. *Ajñ na* cannot be a positive entity

PP: *Ajñ na* cannot be a positive entity, *bhava-r pa-ajñ nam*, as it signifies mere absence of knowledge. The use of *nañ-pratyaya* itself confirms its *abhāv rtha*. The experience “that I do not know” is only an antecedent negation of *jñāna*, and not a positive state by itself. How can such an *ajñ na* be positive in nature?



Sid: Only nothing can come out of nothing. The position of *abh v tbh votpatti* transgresses the *pram a- stra*, the science of epistemology. If *ajñ na* is regarded as *abh va*, then both *vara a- akti*, the power to conceal Brahman and *vik epa- akti*, the power to project *jagat* cannot be admitted of something that is *abh va*, non-existent. If it is admitted, then it has to also be admitted that anything can come out of nothing, which would lead to complete breakdown of metaphysics, epistemology and the principle of cause and effect. So, since *ajñ na* positively makes the substratum appear as some other object, for example, a rope as a snake, it is only proper that it is defined as a positive entity.

As regards the usage of *nañ-pratyaya*, it is known that the *nañ-pratyaya* can be used in six different senses. तत्-सादृश्यं-अभावाद्गतदन्तत्त्वंतदल्पता | अग्रारस्त्वविरोधश्चनअर्थाः षट्प्रकीर्तिताः ||

*s d yam* – likeness, *abr hma a* - like a Brahmin,  
*abh va* – absence, *akrodha* - absence of anger,  
*anyatva* – distinction, *apa a* - not a cloth,  
*alpat* – smallness, *anudar* – having slender waist,  
*apr astya* – unfitness, *ak la* - improper time,  
*virodha* – opposition, *asura* – not a God, a demon.

Now the question is in what sense has *nañ-pratyaya* been used in the word *ajñ na* – according to us Advaitins, it has not been used in *abh v rtha*, instead it has been used in *virodh rtha* – *ajñ na* is opposite of *dharmabh ta-jñ na* and hence it has to be a positive entity. In fact, even you, Vi i dvaitins use *nañ-pratyayato* indicate a positive entity when you speak of ‘*acit*’. In *r-bh ya*, R m nuj c rya admits that *ajñ na*’s character as antecedent negation of *jñ na* is not sustainable. The reason is according to Vi i dvaitins, both *sva pa-jñ na* and *dharmabh ta-jñ na* are eternal, and therefore, they are forced to concede *sa koca*, contraction of *dharmabh ta-jñ na* not as a negative, but as a positive.

Look at this question. Is zero a number? Zero and infinity are imagined numbers, because their existence cannot be proved in material reality.

Hence for the reasons stated above, we conclude that *ajñ na* can be, in fact, has to be a positive entity.

## 6. *Ajñ na* is irremovable

PP: *Ajñ na* is *an di*, and it has no material cause itself. So, its status is similar to Brahman in that it too becomes eternal and cannot be removed at all. If something which is *an di* is accepted as removable, then it can be argued that Brahman also can suffer the same fate, and its status of being *jñ na-sva pa* will come under threat.

Also, if *ajñ na* is positive entity, how can such a positive entity be destroyed by knowledge of Brahman, for we do not see anything that positively exists being removed from its existence by mere knowledge – pot remains a pot even after one knows it is a pot.

Sid: Even though *ajñ na* has no material cause, it is revealed by the *ruti-pram a* that it is removable by *jñ na*, which *ruti* does not speak of removability of Brahman. If anything, Brahman is described as *nitya*, *sth u*, *acala*, *san tana* etc. Also, *ajñ na* is accepted as *pari mi*, something that is subject to modification, but Brahman is spoken of only as *vivarta*, transfigurative, even when it is spoken of as material cause of the *jagat*. So, while *ajñ na* can be destroyed, Brahman can never be subject to destruction.

Also, when we say *ajñ na* is *bhava-r pa*, positive, we do not grant it absolute reality, for what is absolutely real cannot be removed, and what is absolutely unreal, need not be removed. In our experiences will illusory objects, we notice that the illusory object appears to be positively there, yet stands negated on the rise of the knowledge of the substratum.

Also, that something is *an di* does not necessarily make it *ananta*, for *pr gabh va*, prior non-existence is *an di*, but *antavat*, subject to end.

## 7. *Ajñ na* cannot be said to be inexpressible (*anirvacan ya*)

PP: *Ajñ na* cannot be defined as *sadasadbhy m vilak a amanirvacan yam* – as something that cannot be categorically said to be either *sat*, existence, or *asat*, non-existence. The reason is *b dha*, negation of *ajñ na* is not



supported by *pramā*; hence, the non-negated *ajñāna* and experiential objects resulting from it are all of the nature of *sat*, and not different from *sat*. In the world we see a vastu belongs to either *sat* or *asat* – there cannot be a 3<sup>rd</sup> category besides these *ko idvayam*, extremities. So, the definition of *ajñāna* propounded by Advaitins is not acceptable.

Sid: It would be easy on the intellect to categorically state something as belonging to one category or the other. However, stating *ajñāna* categorically as either *sat* or *asat* will both be incomplete and will eventually fail in communicating its true nature. We concede a genuine difficulty in defining *ajñāna* categorically, but definitions need to truly reflect the nature of what is being defined. An illusory object cannot be equated to the son of a barren woman; a *vandy putra* never exists in all three periods of time, and therefore, is *atyanta-asat*. Whereas an illusory object such as a snake appears to exist while it is being experienced, but gets negated when the knowledge of underlying substratum arises, at which time the proper conditions exist for the *pramā* to operate. While it is true that the snake never existed in all three periods of time, due to ignorance, the snake appears as though existent during its perception.

This unique initial experience of reality for some time, and its later negation, compels us to define its nature as something unique which cannot be categorically stated in terms of ordinary reality or unreality – thus we say it is *anirvacanayam*, indescribable in terms of ordinary reality. Such a definition, if it can be called one, does not violate the law of opposites. How? What is the opposite of extremely cold? Is it extremely hot, or mildly cold, or not cold? Please note that extremely hot and extremely cold do not constitute opposites within the law of opposites.

*Ajñāna* is *pari masvabhava*, one whose nature is subject to modifications. Being subject to modification, it is subject to destruction, by *jñāna* in this instance. *Ajñāna* stands negated on the rise of *jñāna*. Anything that is negated cannot be categorized as *sat*. But as it relates to the knowledge produced by *pramā*-s, it is not *asat* either. Therefore, our definition of *ajñāna* as something that cannot be categorically said to be either *sat* or *asat* stands validated.

Thus we find that *r R m nujac rya'sp rvapak a-s* arise out of the primary confusion between *svapna-jñāna* and *dharma-bhāta-jñāna*. Later Advaitins have been able to offer answers to these objections, and establish the reasonableness of Advaitin understanding of the truth about *ajñāna*. Advaita's view is not opposed to the fundamentals of every school, instead it is inclusive and provides for all of them in its comprehensive scheme.

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