



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

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ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2022; 8(1): 26-28

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www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 22-11-2021

Accepted: 24-12-2021

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Vital force: An overview in the light of upanishad

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Abstract

The root of all forces in the world is Vital-force. It is the vital-force which performs all worldly deeds. In scriptures, the vital-force is considered as breather. We cherish the view that only air breathe..... s life. Sometimes our view proves to be wrong. We fail to understand the truth about the vital -force. In this case, we need to go through the scriptural illustration about life-force to understand it properly. In fact, life is a force. Its function resembles that of air. For this reason, we define life as air. Fundamentally, there are ten channels of life –force, namely Prana, Apana, Vyana, Udana, Samana, Naag, Kurma, Krukul, Devadatta and Dhananjaya. Although the former five elements are called Panchaprana in the scripture, vital -force exists alone in reality. The single vital -force functions independently in different parts of the body. Hence the root of all forces in the world lies in the vital-force. The disappearance of vital-force results in the death of living beings. However, the soul has no death and it assumes another body only. So it has been said in the scripture:

"Prāṇō hi bhagabānīśaḥ prāṇō biṣṇuḥ pitāmahaḥ.
Prāṇēna dhāryatē lōkaḥ sarbbaṁ prāṇamaṃ jagat."

Keyword: world, vital-force, prana, apana, vyana, udana, samana, naag, kurma, krukul, devadatta and dhananjaya

Introduction

The Upanisad is the storehouse of the vast knowledge of human civilization. There are mainly two parts of Upanisad. The first part comprises discussions and the second part deals with religious practices and the procedure of worship of Brahma. Both these parts contain the philosophy of vital-force. It has been said in Prasna Upanisad, The sun, which breathes life into every living being as it rises and makes them sleep when it sets, is actually life. The line is "Āditya habai prāṇō." (Praśna,1/5, pr,159.). Sage Pippalad has said in Prasna Upanisad that the function of Brahma (Prajapati) is to generate, grow and preserve living beings. Creation is His only mission. Creation leads to birth of "Dialectical twins". Twins consist of vital-force and matter which prevail everywhere. They give birth to worldly things. The creator exists in everything in the world. So it has been said; "Īśā bāsyamidaṁ sarbaṁ."(Īśā,1/1). Even inanimate objects have life. However we cannot realize the trace of life in them. The sun is life and the moon is the matter. The matter exists like the food of living beings. Both things with form and those without form are the different kinds of matter. The matter is always consumable. On the other hand, we know that living beings have the capacity of consuming things. The sun is the visible form of life. He is the Universal Form and the Universal Being. It has been said: "Sa ēṣa baiśbānarō biśbarūpaḥ" (praśna,1/7, pr.160). He is omnipresent in the world and exists in every living being. It animates everything in the world. It is also fire which reflects everything. The sun is both life and fire. It has three forms. Its providential form is called sun, its elemental form is fire and its supernatural form is life.

The vital-force regulates our body and senses. The body consists of sky, air, fire, water and earth. All senses and limbs are the means of securing knowledge and perform things. But they are not independent. They are regulated by vital-force . Apparently, we think the living being performs his deeds through life , apana, samana, vyana, udana, but they are interrelated. They are parts of the main vital-force. It is vital-force which coordinates the function of

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Panchaprana and protects the body. So life comprises both the coarse and subtle elements. In this context, there is a discourse on life-force in Kositaki Upanisad. Here it has been stated that a living being comes to know about his real self through the development of his consciousness. Once Pratyardan, the son of Kasipati named Divodas, achieved victory over gods and came to Lord Indra. Lord Indra was pleased to see his bravery and offered him boon. Pratyardan told Lord Indra to offer him something which would be used for the welfare for the whole mankind. Lord Indra wanted him to ask for the boon which might bring about his prosperity. Pratyardan said that it would not be a boon for him then. At this, Lord Indra told him that only the proper knowledge of self would be good for mankind. These lines may be cited here:

"Sa hōbāca! Māmēba bijānīhi.Ētadēbāham manusyāya hitatamaṁ man'yē. Yanmām bijāniyāt."(Kauṣītaki upaniṣada,3/23).

Lord Indra elaborated then the importance of self-knowledge. According to Him, the person who has knowledge about his true self gets rid of all kinds of sin. He said then, "I am life, I am soul, one must worship me as life and ambrosia. One lives in the world until one has life. It is life which determines one's longevity." It is stated in the following manner:

"Sa hōbāca prāṇō2smi prajñātmā taṁ mamāyuramṛtamityupāsasba.Āyu prāṇaḥ,prāṇō bā āyuh,prāṇa ebāmṛtam. Yābadasmin śarīrē prāṇōbasati tābadāyuh. Prāṇēna hyōbāmuṣmillōmkē amṛtatbamāpnōti." (Kauṣītaki upaniṣada,ṛtīya adhyāya,pr.*)"

It has also been stated in this Upanisad that consciousness or life is knowledge. Knowledge is the root of consciousness and it is known as Pragya. Through this Pragya one attains truth. According to the Upanisad, one, who understands true nature of life-force as something immortal, enjoys one's life fully and goes to heaven after death. The lines are as Follows:

Prajñāyā satyaṁ saṅkalpam. Sa yō mamāyuramṛtamityupāstē sarbbāmāyurasmillōmkē eti, āpnōtyamṛtam kṣitīm sbargelōkē. (Kauṣītaki,pr.)

Consciousness exists with life in the body and exit together at a particular time. Life-force is actually the titled science of soul. There is also the elaboration of the science of life in Upanisad. When someone sleeps, all his senses merge together with the soul. When the person wakes up, all senses start functioning differently. Again at the time of death, all senses merge together with soul. Hence in Upanisad, Lord Indra has said, "O human beings, you need not know sense-organ of speech, rather you must know the speaker; you need not know the sense-organ of smell, you must know the smellier; you need not know the sense-organ of sight, you must know the seer; you need not know the sense-organ of hearing, you must know the listener; you need not know the sense-organ of taste, you must know the taster. One should know the performer instead of performance. One should know the regulator of joy and sorrow instead of joy and sorrow. One must know the possessor of joy instead of joy itself. One should know the departed one instead of departure. One must know the controller of mind instead of mind itself." Our

senses depend on worldly objects as they are interrelated. The worldly objects can be experienced through our senses and senses are related to vital-force .

Vital-force is immortal. It is not affected by good deeds and misdeeds. vital-force makes people do good deeds to take them upward. Similarly it makes people commit misdeeds to take them to the hell. In our scriptures, this vital-force is designated as Lokpal, Lokadhipati and God. It is equivalent to one's soul. The following lines explain It.

"Yad yathā rathasya arēṣu nēmirarpitō nābhābarā arpitā ebamēbaitā bhūtamātrāḥ prajñāmātrāsu arpitāḥ prajñāmātrāḥ prāṇē arpitāḥ.Sa ēṣa prāṇa ēba prajñātmānandō2jārā2mṛtaḥ. Na sādhunā karm'maṇā bhūyōnnō ēbasādhunā kanīyān.Ēṣa hyēbainam sādhu karm'ma kārayati taṁ yamadhō nanīṣatē. Ēṣalōkapāla ēṣa lōkādhipatiḥ ēṣa sarbbēśaḥ.Sa ṣa ātmēti bidyāt sa ātmēti bidyāt. (Kauṣītaki, **)

There is an illustration of Chief vital-force In Chhandogya Upanisad. Here Angirasa has elaborated it. In ancient time, gods and demons used to fight frequently. Once gods sacrificed their Indra-prone life to defeat demons and started worshipping chief life force sourced from God as Onkar. On being angry at gods, demons tried to corrupt chief vital-force, but failed. It has been stated in Chhandogya Upanisad that the vital-force cannot be corrupted. Things consumed by this vital-force nourish body and sense-organs. After death, this vital-force leaves the body. In Chhandogya Upanisad, vital-force has been termed as Angirasa, suggesting the nourishment of body. The following lines may be cited here:

"Taṁ hāngirā udgīthamupāsāncakra ebāngirasam man'yas'hē2ngānām yadarasaḥ. (Chāndōgya"1/2/1-10).

In Brihadaranyak Upanisad, Sankaracharya has said that All the objects of the world consist of two things, namely vital-force and food. vital-force is revealing and immortal. Food is coarse and subject to growth and decay. vital-force is the cause and food is effect. It is found in following lines.

"Sarbbā ēba dbiprakārah. Antaḥ prāṇa upaṣṭambhakaḥ ḡḥasyēba stambhādi lakṣaṇaḥ prakāśakō2mṛtaḥ.Bāhyaśca kāryyalakṣaṇō2prakāśakaḥ upajanāpāya dharm'makaḥ ṛṇakuśamṛttikāsamō ḡḥasyēba satya śabdabācyā marttyaḥ. Tēna amṛta śabdabācyāḥ prāṇacchanna iti cōpasanhrtaḥ. Sa ēba ca prāṇō bāhyādhāra bhēdēṣu anēkadhā bistṛtaḥ. (Bṛhadāranyaka bhāṣya,1/6/3).

Food sustains life which performs different kinds of task. For this reason, life is called "Agnisomatmak". In many places, "Som" is called food or Anna and life is called fire which consumes Anna. It has been said too that life lies in food. It has been said in Taitiriya Upanisad that Force without food or sustenance cannot exist. So food and life exist together in the world. Following lines of Brihadaranyak Upanisad may be cited in this context:

"Kāryātmakē nāmarūpē śarīrabas'hē kriyātmakastu prāṇastayōrupaṣṭambhakaḥ. Ata kāryya kāraṇāmātmā prāṇaḥ. (Bṛhadāranyaka,bhāṣya,3/3/19).

The chief vital-force is vibrant. This vibrant life develops on the basis of velocity of objects in the sphere. The sustenance or nourishment develops the root-part. The external part is simply the transformed energy. Hence force or energy functions as both cause and effect.

In Upanisad, there is detailed description of the development of vital-force. There are both the concrete and abstract forms of Brahma. The abstract or invisible part is constant and the concrete or visible part is transitory and mortal. The concrete part is the basis of the invisible part. Sky, air etc. are the abstract parts and fire, water are the visible parts. Every object in the world is the manifestation of the invisible or abstract form of Brahma. The concrete or mortal forms finally merge into the immortal or invisible force. The cycle goes on. The earlier subtle parts are manifested in coarse forms later. There are five states of vital-force. Sky and air are the invisible states and fire, water and earth are the visible states. We cannot see the invisible and subtle parts of life-force. The subtle parts are manifested in action only. All parts of vital-force develop the different forms in the world. They are both cause and effect. All coarse and visible objects consist of five elements. The sun, moon and fire are providential forms, trees, rivers, bodies and iron are physical forms and sense-organs like eyes and ears are related to supernatural form. The vital-force performs different tasks in the world in five ways. On the other hand, senses function internally. Both external and internal parts constitute bodies. The final product of life force is manifested in the living body. (Chhândōgya 1/2/1-10).

In Vedanta, it has been said that the vital-force is not air or a vibrant thing. In their opinion, reasoning, feeling and ego manifest different states of mind. (Vēdānta darśana 2/8/9-12). According to Vedanta, the worldly life is simply the manifestation of supernatural vital-force. Life is subtle and minute form. In this way, vital-force is consciousness of living beings and every living object is a part of universal consciousness. In a living being, the consciousness remains active. In Vedanta, it has been said that our senses merge in life-force during sleep. During sleep, vital-force keeps up heart-beat, blood circulation and breathing. When one wakes up all sense-organs begin to work independently. Death takes away vital-force from body and sense-organs. Again at birth, vital-force again manifests itself in the living body. At that time sense-organs become active once again. So in Gita, Lord Krishna has said that soul migrates from one body to another. (Gītā, 15/7-8).

According to Vedanta, soul and life are closely related. Life is actually the external manifestation of soul. There is no function of soul or consciousness in a lifeless body. So in order to understand the existence of soul one has to know about vital-force. (Bēdāntadarśana, 4/2/12)

In order to gain command over vital-force, one needs to practice "Pranayam". It has been said, "Prāṇasanyamanam nāma dēha prāṇabidhāraṇam." (Yājñyabalka sanhitā) । For this purpose, some persons try to make Apana merge into vital-force and some make vital-force merge into Apana. When life and Apana cease to work, people get absorbed in Pranayam. (Gītā, 4/29).

Conclusion

Things which we see around us result originally from life-force. The same life-force is visible in different forms in the world. The soul is the possessor and outward things are its resources. The soul is constant, conscious and indifferent and external things are unconscious and mutable. The main stuff

of these mutable worldly things are termed in different ways, such as nature, illusion and something beyond description. In Sruti, it is called vital-force. It is the sole component of the external world. Hence it has been said:

“Māyāśabdasyāpi prajñānāmasupāṭhāt bijñānaśakti biṣayātbamāśaṅkyāha triguṇātmikāmiti".(4/6.)

Sage Kapila called it nature. It is felt through different sense-organs. Vital-force makes us gain different kinds of experience in the world. In the scripture, the worldly experiences and forms are believed to be apparent. The apparent forms of vital-force are mutable and transitory. Every object in the world reflects Ultimate Reality or Brahasatva. The vital-force, which has created the sun and the moon, has also given birth to our sense-organs and inherent power. If vital-force had not revealed itself in the forms of sun, moon, sense-organs, nobody would have realized the power, glory and beauty of Brahma reflected in the creation. Life-force is simply the revelation of Brahma and there is no other force in the universe.

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