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## The enigma of the Bṛihadratha-Śākāyanya of Maitrāyaṇīya Āraṇyaka

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### Introduction

Vedic literature is divided into four parts- *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka* and *Upaniṣad*. If the etymological meaning of the word *Āraṇyaka* is taken, then it is comprehend that the part of the Vedas which was related to the study, meditation etc., in *Aranya*, that means in forest, that part was called *Āraṇyaka*. *Ācārya Sāyaṇa* has also confirmed this fact while commenting in *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*-

अरण्याध्ययनादेतद् आरण्यकमितीर्यते ।  
अरण्ये तदधीयीतेत्येवं वाक्यं प्रचक्ष्यते ॥<sup>1</sup>

That is because these books were read and meditated in the forest, the name of these books was called *Āraṇyaka*. Just as the sacrifices and other works of *grhasthāśrama* have been furnished in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, in the same way all the *yajñ*, *mahāvratā* and *hotra* etc., deeds of *Vānaprastha*, their interpretation and methods have been rendered in the *Āraṇyaka* texts.

According to Pt. Mādhavācārya Śāstri and Oldenberg, being bored with worldly parts or *karma*, in search of spirituality, which was studied and taught, in the Veda, that part was named *Āraṇyaka* <sup>[2]</sup>. In fact both the above interpretation seem to be one-sided. In the *Āraṇyakas* the spiritual explanation of the *yajñ* performed by the householders and philosophical thinking are also found in abundance. Even the *Brahmajñāna* and philosophy which has been developed in the *Upaniṣads*, its primary root is *Āraṇyaka*. The narrative selected for the present research paper is also a philosophical description.

This is *Āraṇyaka* belongs from *Maitrāyaṇī* branch of *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*. From the point of view of subject matter, it holds the equality with *Upaniṣads*. It has seven *prapāṭhakas*. In its first four *prapāṭhakas*, the description of *Bṛhadratha- Śākāyanya Upākṣāna* is found, according to which a king named *Bṛhadratha*, after giving the kingdom to his son and considering this body as perishable and finally attaining renunciation, he went away to forest. It is particularly noteworthy here that in this *Āraṇyaka*. *Bṛhadratha Ikṣvāku-kulotpanna*, while there is no mention of a king of this name in the *Ikṣvāku* dynasty in *Vālmiki- Rāmāyaṇa*. There, he does penance for a long time facing the sun. After lapse of thousands years, Lord *Śākāyanya* that means *Bhāskar* appeared with a body shining like ruthless fire. He asked the king for get up son or disciple and request for boon. In response to this, the king asks for the following boon from him-

1. God, I am not enlightened, but I have heard that you are enlightened. So give me enlightenment.
2. What is the element which, being overwhelmed by the fruits of virtuous and sinful deeds, attains the true and false, goes to the upper or lower world ?
3. What is the method of this material body, so that by leaving it one attains *sāyujya* in the soul itself ?
4. Who is the best among *Agni*, *Vāyu*, *Āditya*, *Kāl*, *Anna*, *Brahmā*, *Rudra*, *Viṣṇu* ?

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<sup>1</sup> Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, bhāṣya, sloka-6

<sup>2</sup> Āraṇyaka-cayanam, introduction, pp.6

**1<sup>st</sup> Boon:** Now the king asked for the first boon, just like the Yama-Nachiketā anecdote. Śākāyanya said that son, this questions is very difficult. You ask for some other boon. The king, thinking that Śākāyanya was asking me to ask for a boon related to some worldly happiness, so he used to say about the body and the vanity of the world-

‘भगवन्नस्थचर्मन्नायुमज्जामाँसशुक्रशोणितक्षेमश्रुदूषिकाविणवातमुत्रपि  
त्तकफ-  
संघाते दुर्गन्धे निःसारेऽस्मिञ्छरीरे किङ्कामोपभागैः  
कामक्रोधलोभमोहभयविदेष्येष्टवियोगानिष्टसम्प्रयो-

गक्षुत्पिपासाजरा मृत्युरोगशोकचैरभिहृतेऽस्मिञ्छरीरे किङ्कामोपभागैः’।

[3] which means ‘God! Bones, skin, nerves, marrow, flesh, Venus, blood, mucus, tears, faeces, urine, bile, phlegm foul-smelling exudate, what kind of sexual enjoyment in this body ? What kind of sexual enjoyment is there in this body which is overcome by lust, anger, greed, attachment, fear, sadness, jealousy, separation from pleasure, use of evil, hunger, thirst, old age, death, disease, mourning ?

Not only this, the king further says that in this visible world all inanimate beings are transitory. Many *Chakravartin* emperors attained the divine world. I also see the bad effects of *Gāndharva*, *Asura*, etc. That’s why you are my saviour. Lord, I am like a frog in this world. You are my speed.

**The Nature of soul:** After this, Śākāyanya is pleased and tells the king about the nature of the soul-

‘यऽएषोऽसाविविष्टम्भनेनोर्द्धमुक्कान्तो व्यथमानोऽव्यथामानस्तमः  
प्रणुदत्येषऽआत्मेत्याह भगवान्मैत्रिरित्येवैह्याहाथ यऽएष  
सम्प्रसासः३दोऽस्माच्छरीरात्समुत्थाय परं ज्योतिरुपसम्पद्य स्वेन  
रूपेणाभिनिष्पद्यतेऽएषोऽआत्मेति होवाचैतदमृतमभयमेतद् ब्रह्मेति । [4]  
which means one who drives the wavering and unsteady darkness, which spreads like the infinite sky, that is soul and it is well said by Lord *Maitri*. The supremely merciful one who emerges from this body as the Supreme Light and is incomparable forms, that is soul. It is nectar, fearlessness and *brahma*. And in the end it is said that this knowledge is the mystery of all *Upaniṣads*. Here there is a fact and observation that Śākāyanya told *Brhadhratha* that after getting enlightenment, henceforth you will be known as ‘*Marut*’ [5].

**Second boon:** In the second boon, the king had asked that what is the element that, being overwhelmed by the fruits of virtuous and sinful deeds, attains the true and false, goes to the earth or the underworld? In response to this Śākāyanya answered-‘अस्ति खल्वन्योऽपरो भूतात्माख्योऽ योऽयं सितासितैः  
कर्मफलैरभिभूयमानः सदसद्योनिमापद्यताऽइत्यवाङ्चोर्ध्वा वा  
गतिर्द्वन्दैरभिभूयमानः परिभ्रमतीत्यस्योपव्याख्यानं पञ्चतन्मात्रा  
भूतशब्देनोच्यतेऽथ पञ्चमहाभूतानिशब्देनोच्यन्तेऽथ तेषां यत्समुदयं  
तच्छरीरमित्युक्तमथ यो ह खलु वाव शरीरमित्युक्तं स  
भूतात्मेत्युक्तमथाश्रितोऽस्यात्मा बिन्दुरिव पुष्करा इति स वा  
एषोऽभिभूतः प्राकृतैर्गुणैरित्यथोऽभिभूतत्वात्समूढत्वं प्रयातः  
समूढत्वादात्मस्थं प्रभुं भगवन्तं कारयितारं नापश्यद्गुणौघैरुह्यमानः  
कलुषीकृतश्चास्थिरश्चञ्चलो लुप्यमानः खचरः कृतस्यानु  
फलैरभिभूयमानः परिभ्रमतीति । [6] That is the material body being overwhelmed by the fruits of virtuous deeds, attains the

true and false form goes to the underworld. It is called the body of the five great elements and the body made of them is called the material body. The soul depends on the material soul, like a drop of water in a lotus, gets enlightened by being overwhelmed by these natural qualities, and because of being enlightened, the self cannot see the almighty. Instability, fickleness, lust, anxiety etc. pride are obtained from the sins flowing with virtues. Believing that he is me, this is mine, he puts himself in bondage and travels everywhere to enjoy the fruits of his deeds.

**Third boon:** In the third boon, the king has known what the method of this evil soul is so that by leaving it, the soul can attain *sāyujya*. In response to this, Śākāyanya is answered-अयं वाव खल्वस्य प्रतिविधिर्भूतात्मनो यद्वेदविद्याधिगमः स्वधर्मस्यानुचरणं स्वाश्रमेष्वेवानुक्रमणं स्वधर्मस्य वाऽएतद्भ्रतं स्तम्भशाखेवेतराण्यनेनोर्ध्वभागभवत्यन्यथाऽवाङ्पतत्येष स्वधर्मोऽभिहितो यो वेदेषु न स्वधर्मातिक्रमेणाश्रमी भवत्याश्रमेष्वेवावस्थस्तपस्वी वेत्युच्यतेऽइत्येतदयुक्तं नातपस्कस्यात्मज्ञानेऽधिगमः कर्मसिद्धिर्वेत्येवं ह्याह । तपसा प्राप्यते सत्त्वं सत्त्वात्सम्प्राप्यते मनः ।

मनसः प्राप्यते ह्यात्मा यमास्वा न निवर्ततऽइति ॥ [7]

That means, its method is teaching of *Vedavidya*, following self- religion, following ones *āśrama*, performing ones religious acts. Like the branch of a pillar, all these lead to upward movement, otherwise it goes downward movement. Vedas propounded *swadharma*. Those who do not transgress their dharma, they remain situated in their hermitage. Man becomes ascetic only after being situated *āśrama*. Self-knowledge is not possible without penance and *karmasiddhi* is also not possible. *Sattva* is attained by penance, mind is attained by *sattva*, and soul is attained by mind. There is no rebirth after getting of soul.

**Fourth boon:** In the fourth boon, the king has asked that among *Agni*, *Vāyu*, *Āditya*, *Kāl*, *Anna*, *Brahmā*, *Rudra*, *Viṣṇu*, who is the best? In response to this, Śākāyanya says-ब्रह्मणो वावैताऽअग्न्या स्तनवः परस्यामृतस्याशरीरस्य तस्यैव लोके प्रतिमोदतीह यो यस्यानुषक्तऽइत्येवं ह्याह ब्रह्म खल्विदं वाव सर्वं या वाऽस्याऽअग्न्यास्तनवस्ताऽअभिध्यायेदर्चयेन्निहुयाच्चातस्ताभिः

सहैवोपर्युपरि लोकेषु चरत्यथ कृत्स्नः क्षयऽएकत्वमेति पुरुषस्य पुरुषस्य ।

[8] That means these are the best of *Brahma*’s essence. In the world, man worships according to the purpose of those fire etc. and attains happiness and prosperity. By worshipping all these one attains successive worlds and when all the *karmas* are destroyed, the person attains the supreme man and becomes the supreme man.

Hence, it is clear that all the concepts that the Veda scholars believe about *Āraṇyaka* are found in the anecdote of this *Āraṇyaka*. Forest related knowledge-science is demonstrated in this. Along with this, there is a deep reflection of many transcendental and philosophical subjects. King *Brhadhratha* being detached from the world, went to the forest and got knowledge about the supreme element by worshipping the sun. When *Sūrya* is pleased, he is asked to ask another boon. This episode reminds us of the *Yama-Naciketā* dialogue. Ultimately Śākāyanya has to give him the boon of enlightenment. After knowing enlightenment, its definition becomes ‘*Marut*’. This only occurs in the *kāthopaniṣad*, where one of the names of *yajñāgni* becomes *naciketāgni*.

<sup>3</sup> Maitrāyaṇī-āraṇyaka, 1.3

<sup>4</sup> ibid, 2.2

<sup>5</sup> अथ भगवाञ्छाकायन्यः सुप्रीतस्त्वऽब्रवीद्राजानं सहाराज बृहद्रथेऽश्ववाकुवंशध्वज शीघ्रमात्मज्ञः कृतकृत्यस्त्वं मरुन्नाम्नेति विश्रुतोऽसिति। ibid, 2.1

<sup>6</sup> ibid, 3.2

<sup>7</sup> ibid, 4.3

<sup>8</sup> Ibid,4.6

In the second verse, it has been asked that what is the movement of the soul after death and on what basis does the living being move to other worlds. It is beautifully described here. Almost such rendering answer to the third verse that to walk on the path of self-realization, worldly activities cannot be completely abandoned. For such a person, it is very important to perform rituals, follow his *āśrama* religion.

And in the end what Śākāyanya has said in the answer to the fourth boon, one remembers the *yakṣa-upākhyāna* of *kenopaniṣad*. Even there, after the *devāsura* battle, the *devas* become proud of their power. Ultimately the supreme compassionate *brahma* made him realize his real power and it was proved that in reality the infinite powers seen in different gods are not of those gods, but of *brahma* only. This very fact has been explained here by saying 'सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म' and in the end by telling the method of worshipping fire, the worship of fire has been described as the means of attaining successive worlds. Therefore, this *Āraṇyaka* is definitely the source of later *upaniṣad* literature, there is no contradiction in this.

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