

## Freedom and Grace in Advaita Vedānta: Śaṅkara's Perspectives in the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi

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### Abstract

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Human freedom and divine grace are the two fundamental concepts that need to be considered when one deals with the doctrinal coherence of any metaphysical system. The imbalance between these two principles, such as taking advantage of human freedom to the extent of causing injury and sufferings to others, or being extremely submissive to the notion called divine grace with the pretense that human fate is extremely deterministic, becomes a challenge to the doctrine of 'theodicy,' that most of the Western Philosophers uphold with the intention of rescuing God from the responsibility of human sufferings. Since discovering coherency between the metaphysical concepts has been an essential component of a successful metaphysical system, finding that coherency between grace and freedom becomes an utmost agenda to solve problems raised against the concept of theodicy. The present paper basing its investigation into the text *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* discovers that important relation between the two, that successfully mitigates the disagreements and problems against theodicy.

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**Keywords:** devotion, dialogue, grace, freedom, theodicy

### 1. Introduction

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya of Kāladi (Kerala, 788-820 AD),<sup>1</sup> whose voluminous works on Advaita Vedānta have been responsible for the division of history of Advaita into pre-Śaṅkara Advaita and post-Śaṅkara, is the most systematic expounder of the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta.

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The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (VC), literally translated as the 'Crown Jewel of Discrimination' is a minor<sup>2</sup> philosophical treatise ascribed to Śaṅkara. The entire text expounds the fundamental philosophical concepts of Advaita Vedānta (AV) through a dialogical method between a guru (preceptor) and śiṣya (pupil) and accentuates the importance of 'viveka' (discrimination) in the nondual realisation. The text attempts to justify the human frailty and the metaphysical dissatisfaction experienced in the empirical order, and points out the necessity of viveka (discrimination) to rescue oneself from the frailty of empirical order. The task undertaken in this paper is to bring out its (VC) far-reaching implications of divine grace and its nexus to human freedom from the perspective of Advaita metaphysics. This objective is achieved by undertaking a critical study of various verses of VC that deal with the notions of śraddha (faith), bhakti (devotion), anugraha (grace) and mukti (freedom), and appropriating their objective to the fundamental metaphysical structure of AV as non-binding and indeterministic of human goal.

## **2. The Title 'Vivekacūḍāmaṇi'**

The title of the text '*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*' is compounded by three words of Sanskrit, namely, 'viveka,' 'cūḍā,' and 'maṇi,' implying 'discrimination,' 'crown (crest)' and 'jewel,' respectively. Whereas the subject matter of this text is Brahman, the method of discrimination (viveka) employed in this text is of paramount importance as it allows the title "*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*" (Crown Jewel of Discrimination) the following three fold interpretations.

Firstly, the title *viveka-cūḍā-maṇi* gives importance to the text itself. The text as a whole points out that due to its method of viveka this text is 'a highest Jewel' among all prakaraṇa-granthas.<sup>3</sup> The superlative degree in the title implies that apart from the inviolability of method (discrimination), the subject matter of the method in the text is 'Brahman,' the highest reality. In this way, the title, 'Crown Jewel of Discrimination,' being an apt description of what the text VC promises, stands as an open invitation to all seekers of truth.

Moreover, the importance of this text lies in its ability to deal with the problems regarding theory and practice in Śaṅkara's earlier writings.

Secondly, title *viveka-cūḍā-maṇi* gives importance to its subject matter, the Brahman. Brahman as the highest reality of upaniṣads, in VC, is declared to be 'the highest Jewel' attainable via discrimination (*viveka*). The auspicious nature of Brahman is characterised by the joint term *cūḍāmaṇi*. The term *cūḍā* denotes two important places of human body, namely 'heart' and 'mind.' Thus *cūḍāmaṇi* is the centre of a diadem of a jewel hanging around the neck, which is shining on the chest, above the heart, or the centre of a diadem of the Crown placed on the head, that remains resplendent from the rest as the highest Crown. Since the search for this resplendent Brahman is the primary goal of upaniṣads, the text gives importance to 'the resplendent Brahman as the highest Crown' in this text.

Thirdly, the text gives importance to its method '*viveka*.' The second term '*cūḍā*,' in *viveka-cūḍā-maṇi* translated as 'Crown,' would imply the act of discrimination (*viveka*) as the summit, indicating the specific method of discrimination (*viveka*) shown in VC is the most sublime among all other methods of discrimination. This is because the term '*viveka*' employed in this text is in relation to attaining the Real, the Supreme Brahman (*Sat*) by distinguishing from the unreal (*asat*), which is the primary goal of AV. Moreover the method of '*viveka*' qualifies its subject matter '*maṇi*,' because '*maṇi*' in question (Brahman) regains (realises) its originality or original shine only due to the function of '*viveka*' suggesting that despite the fact that the capacity to shine is inherent in the Jewel in question (Brahman), the luminosity is invisible (ineffective) to the seeker. The title relates this luminosity of 'Brahman' to the 'heart' and 'mind' suggesting the significance of association between the doctrine and practice in the process of discrimination of Real (*Sat*) from the unreal (*asat*). That means the text implies that Brahman, as the highest order of wisdom is not a matter of divine providence (intervention) in one sense, while one can deduce that the opportunity of discrimination is a divine intervention, that does not bind one's human freedom. In this sense, it is implied that the notions of *śraddha*, *bhakti* and *anugraha* gain their meaningful place only in the context of '*viveka*.' Thus in referring to the coordination of 'heart' and 'mind' as an important component of '*viveka*' the text indirectly points out to the insignificance of rest of the methods that do not advocate reading of *śruti* and their praxis, and subordinates them to "Crown method of Discrimination."

Since the 'viveka' of Advaita philosophy is the only means that leads to the realisation of the highest crown, the notion of grace (anugraha) taken in isolation does not have any liberative value. This implies that the notion of divine grace in VC needs to be understood in a different sense than the popular notion of receiving some favours from God in a real time. The thrust of the title 'Vivekacūḍāmaṇi' also entails that practicing the method of self-realisation and realising it is more important than any external aid, namely, divine grace, or mere textual and intellectual knowledge of Brahman.

### **3. The Religious Significance in Vivekacūḍāmaṇi**

The disciplines of philosophy and religion are closely associated in the Indian tradition than many other traditions. Consequently, many of its adherents accept AV as a religion.<sup>4</sup> However it should be noted that, "the very word 'religion' being Western in origin, when applied to the Indian context, prejudices the issue. The entire attempt to impose the Western concept of 'religion' over Vedic thought is a mistake."<sup>5</sup> The Western concept of 'religion' distorts the significance of the Vedic hymns, the Vedic deities, and the entire world that articulates a certain relationship between human beings, nature, and the celestial beings in poetic forms. Moreover the common sense view on religious experience presupposes that experience is dualistic in nature as it implies a subject who experiences the objective world. But the Advaitic notion of experience in general and that VC in particular, contradicts the commonsense view on experience. This is because, the Advaitic experience is the realisation of one's true self, which already 'exists as the fruit in the palm of one's hand'<sup>6</sup> as the nondual and subject-objectless reality. Therefore the religious significance of VC consists not in adoring a God in the Western sense of the word, but merely an endorsement for spiritual disciplines (sādhana) which are so rich with a sound philosophical method that are aimed at facilitating the realisation of one's own nondual Self. Hence in VC, and AV in general, the concept of religion can be replaced with or subordinated to an appropriate concept that complementary to the method of 'viveka,' namely, spirituality.

In the context of appropriating its religious significance to the spirituality, and adhering to the basic metaphysics of AV as nondual reality, the act of 'worship' of guru in the first verse of VC can be construed as merely a means of recognising the Ultimate Reality in the teacher himself, and the devotion (śraddha) becomes an intense attempt by the seeker to recognise the reality of one's own Self.<sup>7</sup>

This is obvious in the introductory verse of VC, wherein Śaṅkara prostrates before the guru expressing one's reverence to Brahman. The absolutist respect is given to the teacher because, he alone bears the true knowledge of Brahman, and is capable of imparting that true knowledge to the seeker. Thus devotion here is merely an homage paid to the guru, recognising his excellence. Hence, from the perspective of the realised this devotion (to God) becomes merely a provisional posit, whereas for the ignorant (persons of ordinary intelligence) it is a means to concentrate their mind to the higher truths.

### 3.1 The Notion of Śraddhā (Faith)

The notion of śraddhā (faith) in VC consists of an affective facet and a cognitive facet. The affective trait of śraddhā involves devotion, piety, affection, and love towards guru and what the śruti (scripture) instructs.<sup>8</sup> The affective facet of śraddha is marked by the personalistic devotion towards the Brahman. This affective facet of faith makes the seeker to intensely desire his goal. But the verse 6 of the text says: " Let people quote the scriptures and sacrifice to the gods, let them perform rituals and worship the deities, but there is no liberation without the realisation of one's identity with the Ātman..."<sup>9</sup> The text makes distinction between quoting scriptures and performing sacrifices without realisation of one's self.

Works themselves cannot cause liberation, for it can be achieved only by renunciation and discrimination.<sup>10</sup> The affective facet of śraddha leads to the personalistic attributes such as devotion (bhakti), piety, love and obedience which only signifies the intense desire of the seeker to attain liberation. Therefore, in VC, the affective facet of śraddha gives a derivative meaning to God. As far as AV is concerned, the conception of God is imperfect, and Iśvara (God) is only for the sake of the devotees and for worship (kevalam upāsanārtham)."<sup>11</sup> The real meaning of śraddha in VC is: "Acceptance by firm judgement as true of what the scriptures and Guru instruct, is called śraddha or faith, by means of which Reality is perceived."<sup>12</sup>

Here it should be noted that acceptance does not amount to blind acceptance, but acceptance through the careful reasoning and analysis of the content of the śruti that leads to the conviction of the truth, which is attainable one-minded concentration of the reality.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that in VC, Śaṅkara does not put forth the notion of God and therefore the religious context is limited to employing certain religious obeisance such as the act of prostration, salutation, reverence to the guru and obedience to the tradition. Given the general subject matter of the text, and considering the import of Advaita, Śaṅkara's addressing guru Govinda implies that he was addressing earthly guru. For it is extremely unlikely that a genius thinker of his nature would uphold the notion of God (heavenly guru), when he knows that there exists none other than once own self. Accordingly, one can conclude that the affective facets of śraddha is the means to approach the personalistic God (aparā Brahman), which is an imperfect representation of Śaṅkara's nondualistic reality known as parā Brahman.

The cognitive aspect of faith involves in finding the object of faith through a process of knowing which includes attention, perception, memory, reasoning, judgement, imagining, thinking, and speech.<sup>13</sup> The Knowledge of Brahman is the central theme as far as AV is concerned, for by knowing the Brahman one becomes Brahman Itself (brahmaveda brahmaivabhavati).<sup>14</sup> The central theme of VC is the transcendental, impersonal knowledge of the nondual Brahman realised in highest knowledge and not the realisation in bhakti.<sup>15</sup> Therefore in VC defines bhakti as "seeking after one's real nature."<sup>16</sup> In VC, this realisation is a progressive attempt of the individual self to free itself from the meshes of body and senses, and experience itself in the transcendental realm.<sup>17</sup> The logical analysis in the text the reveals nondual character, explaining the individual self (jīva) as really the Supreme Self (Ātman). In order to achieve this nondual knowledge of Brahman, VC describes a fruitful discussion of the śiṣya with the guru, that leads to the discrimination of the Real (Sat) from the unreal (asat).<sup>18</sup> The text brings to light in a cogent manner the nature of Brahman and the experiential realisation of that nonduality (Brahman).<sup>19</sup> Hence the cognitive facet of śraddha in VC demands the complete Self-knowledge attainable through the method of discrimination (viveka).

The affective facets and cognitive facets of śraddha in VC are not to be considered as two separate watertight compartments. In VC, the initial devotion towards guru and of what the śruti instructs is a means to accept by firm judgement the teachings of śruti. Therefore the real import of devotion in VC is its cognitive facet, which 'seeking after one's real nature'<sup>20</sup> or the 'inquiry into the truth of one's own self.'<sup>21</sup> Hence, the affective facet is merely an phase that leads to the cognitive facet of śraddha, culminating into the ultimate nondual realisation of Brahman.

However in the absence of a real God, save a provisional posit, one requires to determine the exact relation between śraddha and divine grace (anugraha).

### 3. 2 The Notion of Anugraha (Grace)

The religious teaching by and large consider that religious faith opens up the possibility of divine grace. The catholic teachings on grace ensure that works are important requirements for the gift of divine gift.<sup>22</sup> The protestants proposed the doctrine of sola fide-sola gratia, by which Martin Luther upheld that faith alone even without works a man can be saved, i.e., divine grace can be achieved.<sup>23</sup> The concept of grace in VC requires special attention and needs to be treated carefully. The grace in VC is neither attainable by faith nor works, and it does not consist in accepting certain favours from God. The third verse of VC defines grace to certain very basic aspects of life namely, human birth or gift of human life, an intense longing for liberation and the providence of a teacher.<sup>24</sup>

At this juncture one can question the authenticity of this interpretation, as AV speaks of human birth is caused due to avidyā. Therefore equating human birth with divine grace seems to be a problematic claim. However there is an important way in which this problem needed to be solved. AV upholds that human birth is the result of bondage to the illusory avidyā. This is a legitimate claim. But the doctrine of law of karma, despite the contrary claim, teaches that the human birth is still a result of divine grace because the human body is not a natural selection of the individual self to realise the fruits of one's actions. The doctrine of law of karma in Bṛhdāraṇyaka Upanṣad Bhāṣya (BṛUB) declares that the individual self in the transmigratory state due to its vāsanās (residue elements) and upādhis (adjuncts) clings to many type of bodies (an appropriate body) in a manner in which a leech moving on a blade of grass reaches its end, and takes hold of another. What is important to note here is that, though the past actions of the individual self (jīva) determine the kind of body required, the most demeritorious individual self (jīva) assumes the form of worms, mosquitoes etc., and the lesser meritorious jīva takes the form animals, while only that jīva who balances with good acts and bad acts assumes birth in the human body.<sup>25</sup> Hence the ultimate realisation cannot be possible when living under the instrumentality of lower forms of beings. Therefore the upaniṣads declare that realisation is rarest a gift, made possible only through the human birth. In addition to it should be born in mind that the human person is gifted with sharp intellect and decision making power.

Human being is responsible for his choices, as it is gifted with immense amount of freedom, so as to choose the right path, either to ultimate realisation, or to choose to be born again in any form, human or lower forms, in accordance with the merits of one's actions. Hence the notion of divine grace in this sense does not determine human choices, neither do they influence one's actions, but allows acts according to one's choice despite having known the consequences of one's actions. Yet one should reiterate that though human actions are not predetermined by the presence of divine grace, the realisation one's true self is possible only because the human birth has been made possible in the series of events of realisation of the merits of actions from lower animals to higher, culminating in the human birth, which is not chosen, but was prior to one's human choices. Hence the verse 3 of VC points out divine grace as very foundational to human person and exists in the form of human birth along with longing for liberation and the protective care of guru.

The text VC places enormous emphasis over the male brāhmins as most deserving candidates for the ultimate realisation. VC says that those who neglect such grace are committing an irrevocable mistake, just as one travelling over the back of the crocodile, mistaking it for a wooden log.<sup>26</sup> While solving the apparent gender issue is not in the scope of this article, one can take recourse to certain popular interpretations that give due considerations to the interpretation of phrase 'male brahmin.' Some of the Advaitic scholars defend this interpretation by saying that the meaning of the phrase do not point out to the male brahmin exclusively, but to certain basic human characters namely, 'virility', 'manliness' and 'strength of character,' which denote every persons, irrespective of one's gender specificities, who are bold and intelligent in their decisions. This interpretation seems to be very useful considering the historical situation in which this text was written, and looking at the example of some great women of the upaniṣads who actively participated in the dialogues and discussions on the subject it seems to be a legitimate interpretation. Thus though human birth is a grace that is availed, one needs to show some amount of strength of character, discipline and courage. Similarly longing for liberation and striving to find an appropriate guru, would be part of that courage, whereas availability of them would be something that one cannot have control of. Hence taking into consideration the reasons and arguments posed above one can conclude that divine grace (anugraha) is made available to everyone, irrespective of one's gender, caste and creed, the objective of which is the ultimate realisation, yet all have a choice either to accept this calling or to continue in bondage of ignorance.

However the question regarding why in VC the gender issue is emphasised needs to be answered by an historian, and not in the scope of this article.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. The Dialogical Method

The methods employed in the text and the nexus of these methods to the ultimate goal in VC determines in what sense the divine grace is a divine gift. The text VC is written in a dialogical form between the guru (preceptor) and the śiṣya (seeker). In VC, dialogue is a tool to explore or indicate various dimensions of its religious aspects, and hence it is of paramount importance for the ultimate realisation. The method of dialogue in VC entails that divine intervention has no place without the knowledge of human person. The divine intervention can take place only when one reaches the perfect nondual realisation. Therefore divine intervention is not a doctrine that determines human freedom, but an event of gaining complete awareness of Brahman.

The dialogical method in VC consists of three components, namely, guru, śiṣya and instruction.<sup>28</sup> The dialogical method ensures mutual respect and relation between its components, that becomes a crucial parameter to understand the dimension of each one, that in turn leads to the knowledge of ultimate realisation. The devotion of śiṣya to the authoritative verbal testimony is the first phase of dialogical method, and it is of paramount importance to the entire religious enterprise. This consists in reading the text devotedly, and listening attentively to what the guru instructs. The opening verse of VC exemplifies the necessity of this attitude of śiṣya in the acts of his devotion and prostration to śruti, guru, and the tradition. The primary purport of śruti is to introduce the knowledge of Brahman. The reading of śruti in itself does not amount to realisation, for it gives merely an idea of reality, and not the experience of reality. This limitation is accounted in the following verse: "Let people quote the scriptures and sacrifice to the gods, let them perform rituals and worship the deities, but there is no liberation without the realization of one's identity with Ātman."<sup>29</sup> It points out to the emptiness and the limitations of śruti when it says: "Loud speech consisting of shower of words, the skill in expounding the scriptures, and likewise erudition-these merely bring on a little personal enjoyment to the scholar, but are no good for liberation."<sup>30</sup>

Mere reading of scriptures gives only relative knowledge about the Brahman. Further VC: 59 says, "The study of Scripture is useless so long as the highest Truth is unknown, and it is equally useless when the highest Truth has already been known."<sup>31</sup> The first part of this verse conveys the inability of śruti text alone in bringing the knowledge of Brahman, and it is ineffective without the knowledge of the reality. Hence the knowing of the reality does not proceed from śruti is thereby clarified. Śruti might introduce the reality, but there is something more to know the reality. One of the authors rightly comments that, though the Brahman is extra textual reality, yet, Brahman is only textually accessible for the readers.<sup>32</sup> Brahman is not the reality in śruti, for śruti cannot contain It.

The second part of the verse in VC validates the claim that śruti in itself can only introduce Brahman, but it cannot reveal the Brahman. It is useless when the real Brahman is known. Thus the present study considers that śruti is transcended due to its inability to reveal Brahman completely, as it can only indicate the knowledge of Brahman. This view is further supported by the following verse of VC: "For one who is bitten by the serpent of ignorance, the only remedy is the knowledge of Brahman, of what avail are the Vedas and (other) scriptures, mantras (sacred formulae) and medicines to such a one?"<sup>33</sup> Though this phrase does not deny the use of śruti and mantras in realisation, it is not content with them, because despite its reference to imperceptible transcendent entities, it only remains at the level of relative knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Even in BṛU also Śaṅkara considers an objection, which says that hearing śruti does not result in liberation, and it is only with the addition of injunction that liberation is attained: "The Self is to be heard, to be considered, to be reflected upon."<sup>35</sup> The consideration and reflection have to follow the hearing, and śruti can be admitted as a means of knowing Brahman only in so far as it is connected with its import.<sup>36</sup>

The second phase of dialogical method is reasoning upon what is heard from śruti and the teachings of guru. This process consists in reflecting in oneself what is contrary to the instructions of śruti, and clarifying it through a dialogical discussion with the guru. This clarification brings about the conviction of the truth of the textual knowledge. "Through the devotion to right discrimination he will climb to the height of union with Brahman."<sup>37</sup> Reading of śruti and acceptance of it by firm conviction implies that śiṣya is set to view the reality of the world differently from what he sees.<sup>38</sup> There is a constant effort to discriminate between the apparent and the Real.

The seeker attempts sees the reality trans-empirically, employing his reason to the fullest human capabilities.

The third phase of dialogical method consists in meditation-in-absorbed concentration (*nididhyāsana*) over the insight that is achieved due to the reasoning over the textual knowledge of śruti. According to VC, the constant meditation-in-absorbed concentration brings about the intuition of Brahman, or the insight into the nature of the reality. In order to define what is intuition one may have to articulate it in this manner: Intuition,<sup>39</sup> so to say, is a faculty of a comprehensive vision of reality that reason, logic, and language alone cannot provide with. It is construing entire reality in its wholeness, and rejecting every fragmentariness of the reality. If the reality is infinite, then it can be viewed as an infinite whole only by means of intuition. Intuition is supra-rational in nature, for according to VC systematic reasoning culminates into intuition as the final proof.<sup>40</sup> Though intuition follows the reasoned enquiry, it is beyond cause and effect relation, and therefore it is not the effect of a reasoned enquiry. Thus though reading of śruti, reasoning and meditation-in-absorbed concentration are essential for gaining the knowledge of Brahman, intuition in itself is beyond the sum total of all the three. Dialogical method in itself is not adequate to gain the insight into the nature of the reality. It is in this sense that one can uphold the notion of divine grace.

Intuition in VC is a trans-empirical enterprise. In VC, the intuitive knowledge (*anubhava*) is gained as the result of the analysis of śruti (comprising all the injunctions)<sup>41</sup> assisted by the repetitive instruction of guru on, a group of sentences that belong to the genre of "That, thou art."<sup>42</sup> From the *vyāvahārika* perspective, this intuitive knowledge of nonduality gained through the realisation (discerning knowledge) of *upadeśa vākya*, "That, thou art," is the pinnacle of all knowledge. This insight of Brahman through the successive meditation-in-absorbed concentration transforms the seeker into the ultimate realisation, which is expressed in the great saying, "aham brahmāsmi." This transformation is not a divine grace, but the realisation of divine itself. Therefore "aham brahmāsmi" is a step further to *tat-tvam-asi*, which is merely a divine grace. Certainly perfect realisation is much more than mere divine grace, for divine grace necessarily presupposes some duality, whereas in perfect realisation there is none. If human birth were a divine grace, bestowed along with free human choices (freedom), is perfect realisation which is beyond all desires for human freedom equivalent to perfect freedom?

## 5. Human Freedom in the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi

The trans-empirical insight of Brahman is taken as divine grace as it is beyond all the methods realisation. However this insight, despite being divine grace belongs to the realm of duality and a step away from the ultimate realisation. However this insight has been attained by legitimate implementation of human freedom with in the bounds of initial divine grace. Freedom in this context is not a political one, rather a religious one, that denotes to a freedom as a fundamental provision available for each human person by his very birth, whereby human person's choices are not determined by the influence or intervention of a divine power, against which the human person is incapable of. However insight into the nature of reality, which is trans-empirical knowledge is a new divine grace, a divine grace of higher order, attained through the proper implementation of available freedom as human persons. It is a logical conclusion now, that just as initial divine grace in human birth has been transformed due to the practice of human freedom, the divine grace of higher order points to a freedom more perfect than in human form. In this sense, though trans-empirical form of divine grace in the realm of duality, there cannot be anything beyond to assert than the state that the trans-empirical divine grace point to. It is in this sense that the ultimate realisation 'aham brahmāsmi' becomes a perfect state of freedom.

In order to establish the nexus of human freedom with the divine grace (anugraha) it is required that human persons modify their choices and adapt to the situations in proposition to the progress they make in the path of discrimination. Since human freedom in itself is a limited concept, in VC the power of realisation in itself transforms human choices in accordance with its discrimination. Thus empirical human freedom in itself is a limitation from the point of view of ultimate realisation, where the realised is completely free. This can be understood from the following interpretation, which says that only from empirical perspective the modifications of human egoism are perceived. "That by which all those modifications such as egoism as well as their subsequent absence (during deep sleep) are perceived, but itself is not perceived, know thou that Ātman-the knower through the sharpest intellect."<sup>43</sup> In this context the human freedom is experienced in its perfectness, as there is absence of all material hindrances. Referring to the experience of absence of everything the text further instructs saying, "whatever is experienced by any one has that person as the witness to it (sākṣikam).

In respect of an object which is not experienced by any one, there is no meaning in speaking of a witness who perceives."<sup>44</sup> In this manner it is established that Ātman is absolutely free from all the limitations of human thought<sup>45</sup> (which consists in perception, witnessing and reasoning), and the guru defines it: "Brahman is Existence, Knowledge, Infinity, pure supreme, self-existent, eternal, and indivisible Bliss, not different (in reality) from the individual soul, and devoid of interior or exterior. It is (ever) triumphant."<sup>46</sup> Hence in VC, in the progressive path of realisation amounts to realisation of oneself as the perfect human person, which is equivalent with the perfect human freedom advanced through the attainment of divine grace (anugraha).

## 6. A Critical Appraisal

The text VC gives a new meaning to the human existence by acknowledging the very human birth as the gift that is availed to realise oneself from the bondage. The human body itself primarily a means, as if it were a grace already availed to liberate oneself from bondage. All other graces that can be spoken of are secondary, and are implied in the primary grace. The text also drives home the point that, God does not determine the human fate, but rather, from the empirical perspective the human being is free. God does not bind human persons. This conclusion answers the famous problem of theodicy. The human sufferings are not the works of God or a divine being, but the result of human choices. God does not play the dice, but the human seems to be actively involved in it.

The appropriate treatment of divine grace in the form of human birth through the available human freedom brings about the advanced state of divine grace, which is trans-empirical insight into the nature of the reality. Just as grace in human birth avails opportunity to exercise one's free choices, the trans-empirical divine grace avails free choices in accordance with one's progress in one's soteriological enterprise. The practice of free human choices availed by this higher order of divine grace, the insight of Brahman, leads to the realisation of the true nature of human person, which is realisation of oneself as oneself, the aham brahmāsmi, the complete human person in his divine nature. In this state of existence the perfect freedom transcends divine grace, and one exists in nonduality, as "aham brahmāsmi."

To sum up, grace in VC can be interpreted in dual perspectives. Primarily it entails an opportunity availed to human person by his very birth as a human being into the world, of which he himself is not responsible. In this sense it does not go against the human freedom, and completely solves the problem of theodicy. Secondly, grace in VC points out to the results obtained due to the continuous discrimination of Real and unreal. Here though grace is beyond one's efforts, the human person is responsible for its attainment. In this sense empirically, it does not limit the human freedom, and answers to the problem of theodicy. Thus empirically grace and human freedom are not binary oppositions but co-exist in a progressive measure. Trans-empirically divine grace entails a power beyond human efforts. However it maintains duality. The trans-empirical divine grace, which is the insight of Brahman opens up new possibilities of freedom, and the fulfilment of them according to one's capabilities brings about the state of perfect freedom, a state of existence beyond divine grace, but as the divine itself.

## References

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<sup>1</sup>There are differences among the scholars about the exact date of Śaṅkara, though there is not much dispute about the role assumed by him as the one who stemmed the tide of atheism and rejuvenated the Vedic tradition as a holistic way of life. In contrast to the views of historians, who have settled to narrow down the extent controversy to within two centuries, it is worth noting that the traditional date upheld by most of the Śaṅkarite's monasteries are much divergent from the critical scholarly opinion. The proponents of the Kāñcī Maṭha tradition, basing their arguments from the evidence found in Puṇya-Śloka-Maṅjari, Prācīna-Śaṅkara-Vijaya and Ātmabodha's commentary called Suṣmā persisted the traditionalist view that Śaṅkara lived from 508 BC to 476 BC (Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati, *Adi Śaṅkara-His Life and Times*, (Bombay, 1988), 108). According to Pandey, this chronology of Kāñcī Maṭha tradition errs by anti-dating Śaṅkara by more than a millennium, and the modern historians are of the opinion that the multiplication of Śaṅkaras and of other monastic pontiffs is only the consequence of the artificial gap created by antedated chronology. Hence on the basis of the evidences from Śaṅkara-madāra-saurabha and Śaṅkarābhyudaya of Nīlakantha Bhatta, Śaṅkaravijaya of Kṛṣṇabrahmānanda, and Āryavidyā-Sudhākara of Yajñeśvara Cimana, discovered through a manuscript by K. B. Pathak, the present settled view of Śaṅkara's period is 788 to 822 AD. (Govind Chandra Pande, *Life and Thought of Śaṅkarācārya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2011), 43, 45.

<sup>2</sup>The term minor here indicates to the volume of the work than to its philosophical significance.

- <sup>3</sup>Prakaraṇa-grantha is an independent philosophical treatise that is written in a lucid style, dealing with a particular topic of Prasthānatraya (three foundational works). Prakaraṇa-grantha contain four indispensable elements (anubandha catuṣṭaya): the determination of the fitness of a student for the study of the treatise and the subject matter (adhikāri); the subject matter (viśaya); the mutual relationship between the treatise and the subject matter (sambandha); and the object to be attained by the study (prayojana) (John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 235). The most important prakaraṇagrathas are Upadeśasāhasī, Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, Ātmabodha, Aparokṣānubhūti, Pañcikaṛaṇa, Vākyavṛtti, Laghu-Vākyavṛtti, Advaitānubhūti, Śatsloki, Daśasloki, Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka and Maniśapañcakam (Complete Works of Śrī Śāṅkarācārya, Vol. 15, 16 (Srirangam: Sri, Vani Vilas Press, 1910)).
- <sup>4</sup>N. K. Devaraja, "Contemporary Relevance of Advaita, *Philosophy East and West*, 20:2(1970), 129.
- <sup>5</sup>Bina Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge, and Freedom* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 6.
- <sup>6</sup>Vākyamapratibandham sat prakparokṣāvabhāsate; karāmalakavadbodhamaparakṣam prasūyate. -PD I. 62.
- <sup>7</sup>John Grimes, (2004). *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śāṅkarācārya Bhagavatpāda*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004), p. 14.
- <sup>8</sup>C. D. Sebastian, "Trajectory of Rational Faith in the Non-Vedic Traditions," *Journal of Sacred Scriptures*, 7:2 (2013), 194-195.
- <sup>9</sup>Paṭhantu śāstrāṇi yajantu devān kurvantu karmāṇi bhajantu devatāḥ; ātmaikyabodhena vināpi muktiḥ-ṛna siddhyati brahmaśatāntare'api. -VC: 6. VC: 9 & 11.
- <sup>10</sup>VC : 9 & 11
- <sup>11</sup>nirguṇamapi sat Brahma...saguṇam upāsanārtham upadiśyate, BSB I. 2. 4. In Advaita the Brahman of upāsana is determinate, known as Iśvara. Iśvara is Brahman endowed with the imperfect empirical attributes for the sake of worship.
- <sup>12</sup>Śāstrasya guruvākyasya satyabuddhyavadhāraṇam; sā śraddhā kathitā sadbhiḥ yayā vast'ūpalabhyate. -VC: 25.
- <sup>13</sup>C. D. Sebastian, "Trajectory of Rational Faith in the Non-Vedic Traditions," *Journal of Sacred Scriptures*, 7:2 (2013), 194-195. MāU III. 2. 9; BSB IV. 4. 7.
- <sup>14</sup>VC: 31-32.
- <sup>15</sup>All other Vedāntic traditions following vaiṣṇavism extoll devotion (bhakti), and not Advaita Vedānta.
- <sup>16</sup>Mokṣa-kāraṇa-sāmagryām bhaktir eva garīyasī; sva-svarūp'ānusandhānam bhaktir ity abhidhīyate. -VC: 31. VC: 31-32.
- <sup>17</sup>VC: 31-32.
- <sup>18</sup>Ity'ācāryasya śiṣyasya samvāden'ātma-lakṣaṇam; nirūpitaṁ mumukṣūṇāṁ sukha-bodh'opapattaye. -VC: 578.
- <sup>19</sup>buddhir vinaṣṭāgalitā pravṛttiḥ brahm'ātmanor ekatay'adhigatyā, -VC: 219. idam na jāne'apy' anidam na jāne kim vā kiyad vā sukham asty' apāram. -VC: 481.
- <sup>20</sup>svasvarūpānusandhānam bhaktirityabhidhīyate, -VC: 31.

- <sup>21</sup>svātmataṭṭvānusandhānaṁ bhaktirityapare jaguḥ, -VC: 32.
- <sup>22</sup>You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. –James 2:24.
- <sup>23</sup>Martin Luther, (1954). Introduction. Commentary on Romans, trans. J. Theodore Mueller. Grand Rapids: Kregel Classic, Zondervan.
- <sup>24</sup>Durlabham trayam evaitadaivānugraha-hetukam; manuṣyatvaṁ mumukṣutvaṁ mahā-puruṣa-saṁśrayah. -VC: 3.
- <sup>25</sup>BrUB IV. 4. 2 says that at the time of death the light of the self, when the organs are united in the heart, reveals the impressions of the kind of future body which will be suitable for the experience of the results of the self's past actions.
- <sup>26</sup>Śāntira-poṣaṇārthī san ya ātmānaṁ didṛkṣati; grāhaṁ dārudhiyā dhṛtvā nadīm tartum sa gacchati -VC: 84.
- <sup>27</sup>For better clarification see the chapter two and four of unpublished doctoral thesis: Walter Menezes, Reality and Experience in Advaita Vedānta: A Thematic Study of the Conception of Ātman in the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śāṅkara (Mumbai: Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, 2014).
- <sup>28</sup>Jñātr-jñeya-jñāna, -VC: 239.
- <sup>29</sup>paṭhantu śāstrāṇi yajantu devān kurvantu karmāṇi bhajantu devatāḥ; ātmaikyabodhena vināpi muktiḥ-ṛna siddhyati brahmaśatāntareapi. -VC: 6.
- <sup>30</sup>vāg-vaikharī śabda jhari śāstra vyākhyāna kauśalam; vaiduṣyaṁ viduṣāṁ tadvad bhuktaye na tu muktaye. -VC: 58.
- <sup>31</sup>avijñate pare tattve śāstr'adhītis tu niṣphalā; vijñate'api pare tattve śāstr'adhītis tu niṣphalā. – VC: 59.
- <sup>32</sup>Francis X. Clooney, Theology After Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1993), 65.
- <sup>33</sup>Ajñāna-sarpa-daṣṭasya brahma-jñān'auśadham vinā; kimu vedaiś ca śāstraiś ca kimu mantraiḥ kim auśadhaiḥ. –VC: 61.
- <sup>34</sup>Kim Skoog, “Śāṅkara on the Role of Śruti and Anubhava in Attaining Brahmajñāna,” 70.
- <sup>35</sup>BrU II. 4. 5.
- <sup>36</sup>Kim Skoog, “Śāṅkara on the Role of Śruti and Anubhava in Attaining Brahmajñāna,” 70.
- <sup>37</sup>uddhared ātman'ātmānaṁ magnaṁ saṁsāra-vāridhau, -VC: 9.
- <sup>38</sup>Śāstrasya guruvākyasya satya-buddhy'avadhāraṇam; sā śraddhā kathitā sabdhiḥ yayā vast'ūpalabhyate.- VC: 25.
- <sup>39</sup>Different authors have different interpretations about intuition. According to Radhakrishnan, “Intuition is the basis of all thinking. Though inarticulate in itself, it gives rise to all discourse. In the very logical proof there is a grasping of the intellectual togetherness as a whole, an intuition of the whole as sustained by different steps” (S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life (London: Unwin Books, 1964), 143). He claims that intuition is the basis of all discourse as it is the source of all ideas, high and low, spiritual and logical. Intuition goes beyond reason, yet it is not against reason. The faculty of intellect is included in the higher faculty of intuition, and so intuition can never be irrational. “Intuition is not a-logical but supra-logical. It is the wisdom gained by the whole spirit, which is above any mere fragment thereof, be it feeling or intellect” (S. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life, 116). The same import could be found in one of the contemporary authors as well. that The faculty

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of intuition is the total awareness of reality that makes no division or dissection of the things presented to it (Ramesh Chandra Pradhan, *Metaphysics*, (Bhubaneswar, Utkal University: Centre of Advanced Study in Philosophy, 2009), 91).

<sup>40</sup>VC: 474.

<sup>41</sup>Vidvān sa tasmā upasattim iyuṣe mumukṣave sādhu yathokta kāriṇe; praśāntam cittāya śamānvittāya tattvopadeśam kṛpayaiḥ kuryāt. -VC: 42.

<sup>42</sup>Bhrānti-kalpita-jagat-kalāśrayam svāśrayam ca sad-asad-vilakṣaṇam; niṣkalam nir-upamānavad-hi-yat brahma tat tvam asi bhāvay'ātmani. -VC: 257; also see, VC: 254-263; For better clarification see the chapter four of unpublished doctoral thesis: Walter Menezes, *Reality and Experience in Advaita Vedānta: A Thematic Study of the Conception of Ātman in the Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śaṅkara* (Mumbai: Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, 2014).

<sup>43</sup>Sarve yen'ānu bhūyante yaḥ svayaṁ n'ānubhūyate; tam ātmānam veditāram viddhi buddhyā susūkṣmayā. -VC: 214.

<sup>44</sup>Tat sākṣikam bhavet tat tat yad yad yen'ānubhūyate; kasyāpy ananubhū'tārthe sākṣitvam n'opayujyate. -VC: 215.

<sup>45</sup>tat sarvaṁ brahm'aiva pratyastāśeṣa-bhāvanā-doṣam. -VC: 227b.

<sup>46</sup>Satyam jñānam anantaṁ brahma viśuddham param svatas-siddham; nity'ānandaika rasam pratyag abhinnaṁ nirantaram jayati. -VC: 225.