



The liberation doctrine in *Brahmasiddhi* of Maṇḍanamīśra

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ABSTRACT

The issue of liberation is a recurrent theme in all schools of Indian classical thought. In case of *advaita-vedānta* it is deeply rooted in ontology. The problem of ontological status of the world was the bone of contention for two competing non-dualist schools of *vedānta* — *vivarāṇa* and *bhāmatī*. Maṇḍana's *Brahmasiddhi* can be regarded as an important source of inspiration for the latter. The present paper is an analysis of Maṇḍana's statements pertaining to the issue of *mukti* (or *mokṣa*) in contrast with those of Śankara, the exponent of *advaita* commonly (though erroneously) considered the creator and the most prominent representative of the school.

KEYWORDS

Indian philosophy; Hinduism; *vedānta*; *advaita*; *mokṣa*; *mukti*

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ADVAITA — THE VIEW OF MAṄḌANA

The school of Indian adualism (*advaita-vedānta*) is commonly associated with the name of Śaṅkara, supplemented with the title “teacher” (*ācārya*) — Śaṅkarācārya. The undoubtedly strong personality of Śaṅkara dominated the common reception to such an extent that the phrase “*advaita* of Śaṅkarācārya” is mostly used not with the intention to distinguish Śaṅkara’s version of *advaita* from other advaitic thinkers’ views but in the meaning of Śaṅkara’s authorship of *advaita* as a whole. It is however fair to admit that there lived another prominent author of *advaita*, contemporary with Śaṅkara, whose name was Maṅḍanamiśra (8th–9th c.). Maṅḍana was the author of only one work on *advaita*, *Brahmasiddhi*, which belongs to the so called “*siddhi*-literature”, along with *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* of Sureśvara and *Iṣṭasiddhi* of Vimuktātman. Before writing *Brahmasiddhi* Maṅḍana was one of the prominent exponents of *pūrva-mīmāṃsā* and author of several treatises on *mīmāṃsā* like *Mīmāṃsānukramāṇikā*, *Bhāvanāviveka* or *Vidhiviveka*. *Brahmasiddhi* seems to be the culmination of the philosophical development of his thought. Unlike Śaṅkara, Maṅḍana did not comment on any texts of the *prasthāna-trayī*,¹ *Brahmasiddhi* being an independent treatise. Nevertheless, it is Maṅḍana’s views, not Śaṅkara’s, that are quoted as *pūrvapakṣa* by such authors like Śrīdhara and Aparārkadeva (10th–11th c.). Earlier Maṅḍana’s propositions are adduced as *pūrvapakṣa* by Jāyantabhaṭṭa, the author of *Nyāyamañjarī* (9th c.) and Śālikanātha, an adherent of Prabhākara, when they argue against *advaita*, obviously considering *Brahmasiddhi* as the most representative work of *advaita*. Actually, it was the time when all *advaita-vedānta* was briefly described as *maṅḍana-matam* (the view of Maṅḍana). Though Maṅḍana’s and Śaṅkara’s approach to *advaita* was divergent in many an issue, it is of no avail to attempt to detect any polemics between them. They presumably did not know each other’s works. The two thinkers seem to belong to two different worlds. Śaṅkara was born in Kerala, Maṅḍana in ca two thousand kilometres distant Bengal. Young as he was, Śaṅkara was a *sannyāsin*, wandering from place to place and founding his *maṭhas*. Unlike Śaṅkara, Maṅḍana was a *gṛhastha*, all his active life following the *karma-kāṇḍa* path of a *mīmāṃsaka* which led him consequently to the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* of Upanishads. The isolation between the two great thinkers gave birth to two disparate approaches to *advaita* which in later times was to result in engendering the *bhāmatī* school and the *vivaraṇa* school of *advaita*. Many a factor contributed to the later sinking to oblivion of the significance of Maṅḍana. One of indubitable reasons is a legend erroneously identifying Maṅḍana with Sureśvara, one of Śaṅkara’s disciples, the author of *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*. According to the story, *mīmāṃsaka* Maṅḍana

¹ Scil. *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavadgītā* and *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*.

was to have been defeated in the debate by *advaitin* Śaṅkara and consequently became an *advaitin* himself, changing his name to “Sureśvara”. Unsubstantiated as it is, the belief has been widespread for ages and is shared by some even today, despite the compelling arguments of such scholars like Kuppaswami Mishra. Not only was the style of Sanskrit of the two philosophers different, but also their understanding of some propositions of *advaita* seem to be at odds.

Maṇḍana’s doctrine of liberation (*mukti*), the *locus* of nescience (*avidyāśraya*) and individual soul (*jīva*) had a crucial impact on the views of the *bhāmātī* school of *advaita*.

SALVATION OR LIBERATION?

Liberation (*mukti*, *mokṣa*) is the essential issue not only in *advaita*, but also in all remaining Indian philosophical and religious systems, including Buddhism and Jainism. Each of the schools perceives a human being in fetters of nescience which is responsible for the endless chain of birth and death and each of them is regarded to be a peculiar path to freedom. Each of the systems can be considered as a kind of therapy for the disease of *samsāra* whereas the purpose of the western philosophical tradition is understood as achieving knowledge for its own sake. Practically oriented, the purpose of Indian systems seems more religious than philosophical. This is why, on the one hand, in this case it is hardly possible to separate philosophy from religion, on the other hand, however, the language here is more pragmatic than devotional. The western religious terminology prefers the word “salvation” to “liberation”.² “Salvation” is given by the Saviour who saves us from eternal death, whereas “liberation” does not envisage the necessity of any “liberator”. It can be said that “salvation” is “saving from”, while “liberation” is “liberating to”. Both the terms — *mukti* and *mokṣa* are derived from the root *muc*, found also in the phrase *iṣum muñcati* (“he shoots an arrow”). A man must be liberated like an arrow which means that before liberation he remains in bonds. Breaking the bonds is the aim of philosophy. According to *advaita* the existence of the bonds is manifest and does not need any proof. A man is born, suffers from diseases, experiences various sensations like cold, heat, pleasure, pain (*śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkha*), dies, is reborn and the cycle begins anew. Liberation means freeing the man from the never-ending circle of *samsāra*.

² The idea of liberation and freedom, however, is by no means unknown in Christianity. Cf. John 8.32: καὶ γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς (KJV: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”).

WHO IS TO BE LIBERATED?

The most fundamental statement of *advaita* is the the assertion of absolute oneness of Brahman, the Ultimate Being. If Brahman is the only real being, then everything referring to the bondage and liberation must in a way refer to Brahman. In other words, Brahman must be the one who wanders (*saṃsārin*), the one polluted with nescience (*avidyā-kaluṣita*) and the one requiring liberation.

Such a view must inevitably lead to paradoxical conclusions. If Brahman is in bonds of nescience, then one who is united with Brahman (*brahma-bhūya*) will never get rid of nescience and there is no possibility of liberation. It can be, admittedly, presupposed that it is not the individual soul (*jīva*) which is to be liberated and united with Brahman but that Brahman himself³ wanders (*brahmaiva saṃsaratī*) and the same Brahman is being liberated (*brahmaiva mucyate*). After all, the same and the only Brahman as *ātman* is in the innermost recess of each wandering soul (*jīva*). If so, however, how to account for the fact that the liberation of one soul does not entail the liberation of all other souls (*ekamuktau sarva-mukti-prasaṅgaḥ*)? The separateness of individual souls is indeed the effect of nescience which liberation removes. The one who wanders does so because of seeing the difference (*bheda-darśanena saṃsaratī*) and is liberated when he sees its lack (*abheda darśanena mucyate*). Therefore the disappearance of all divisions ought to involve a universal liberation (*sarva-mokṣa-prasaṅgaḥ*).

It is hard to establish positively if the above reasoning is a proof that Maṇḍana was conversant with the views of Śaṅkara on the nature of Brahman and *avidyā*, at this juncture, however, he unquestionably argues against a view shared by Śaṅkara and his adherents. The issue of the *locus* of nescience (*avidyāśraya*) is the bone of contention between the *bhāmatī* and *vivaraṇa* schools of later *advaita*. According to *vivaraṇa* nescience is located in Brahman as the only possible *locus*. Otherwise we would posit the existence of something apart from Brahman which would contradict the essential thesis of adualism. However this view engenders another complication since it permits of the existence of nescience in the absolute being, identified with pure consciousness. To avoid the difficulty, *uttarapakṣa* in Śaṅkara's BSBh 1.4.2–3, arguing against a supporter of *sāṅkhya*, locates the seminal power of nescience (*avidyātmikā bīja-śaktiḥ*) in the Highest Lord (*parameśvara*). Thus the Highest Lord, not Brahman, would be the *locus* of *avidyā* (*parameśvarāśrayā avidyā*). Such a view may serve as a convenient way to explain why individual souls share experiences. If *avidyā* is an error of an individual soul, the relative existence of the

³ "Himself" or rather "itself"? A consequent partisan of the idea of Brahman being impersonal will obviously opt for the latter. At this juncture, however, we consider Brahman as being liberated or wandering etc., which can hardly be referred to impersonal absolute.

phenomenal world being its projection, then the commonality of experiences is inexplicable. If it is the Highest Lord that is the basis of *avidyā* and the one responsible for the relative existence of the world, then individual souls, unaware of their true form (*rūpa*), slumber in his great sleep which guarantees the intersubjectivity of experiences.⁴ Nevertheless, the solution is only apparently valid, in reality it just transfers the problem to another plan. The point is that the Highest Lord, as distinct from Brahman, might be nothing but a figment of Brahman's imagination. Consequently, even if Brahman is not to be understood as the immediate source of the error engendering the relative existence of the phenomenal world, it is the source of projecting the equally erroneous existence of the Highest Lord. Moreover, it being so, the removal of the seminal power which is located in the Highest Lord by the liberating knowledge (*vidyā*) would inevitably entail simultaneous liberation of all individual souls.

As for its logical construction, the problem resembles a little the question of theodicy — how to vindicate divine providence in view of the apparent existence of evil? In case of *advaita* the question is — how to vindicate the absolute oneness of reality in view of the apparent plurality universally experienced? If Brahman is “one without the other” (*ekam evādvitīyam*), *avidyā* cannot exist as “the other” beside with Brahman, then logically it must exist in Brahman. On the other hand, Brahman is the pure consciousness, the *vidyā* itself, then the coexistence of *vidyā* and *avidyā* in one Brahman would be inexplicable. There is evident contradiction between the proposition of absolute oneness of Brahman and the experience of plurality in *saṃsāra*. If the *locus* of *avidyā* is Brahman, then Brahman cannot be the pure consciousness (*cit*). If *avidyā* exists beyond Brahman, then Brahman is not the only being (*sat*).

Maṇḍana distinguishes between two modes of being — absolute being (*sat*) of Brahman and phenomenal being (*bhāva*) of *saṃsāra*:

Nescience is not the nature of Brahman, neither is it something else beside it. It is neither ultimate non-being, nor being. This is why it is called “nescience”, “illusion”, “false appearance”. Were it the nature of anything, it would be eventually this or that reality, not nescience. If it were ultimate non-being, it would not be part of everyday experience, like a sky-flower. So it is unpredicable.⁵

The phenomenal world (*saṃsāra*), whose mode of existence is denoted by the root *bhū*, is unpredicable (*anirvacanīya*) in terms of ultimate being, expressed by the root *as* (part. *sat*). It cannot be stated that the phenomenal world “is” (*asti*) in the sense Brahman “is”, nor is it correct to say that it is an absolute

⁴ Cf. BSBh 1.4.3: *svarūpa-pratibodha-rabitāḥ śerate saṃsāriṇo jīvāḥ...*

⁵ BSi 9: *nāvidyā brāhmaṇaḥ svabhāvah, nārthāntaram, nātyantam asatī, nāpi satī; evam eveyam avidyā māyā mithyāvabhāsa ity ucyate. svabhāvaś cet kasyacit, anyo ṅanyo vā paramārtha eveti nāvidyā; atyantāsattve kha-ḥṣṣa-sadṛśī na vyavahārāṅgam; tasmād anirvacanīyā.*

non-being (*atyantāsat*). An absolute non-being is logically non-existent and is never an object of everyday experience (*vyavahārārtha*), like a sky-flower (*kha-puṣpa*), a barren woman's son (*vandhyā-putra*) or a hare's horn (*śaśa-viṣāṇa*), to mention but a few illustrations used to express thorough impossibility. Nonetheless, the phenomenal world is undoubtedly an object of our experience. Therefore its ontological status is defined as “unpredicable in terms of being and non-being” (*sad-asad-anirvacanīya*).

The semantic distinction between the two Sanskrit roots denoting “existence” — *as* and *bhū* — enabled Maṇḍana to admit of *sui generis* existence to the phenomenal world and maintain the thesis of ultimate oneness of Brahman. The question of the *locus* of nescience still remains open. Having rejected the view that Brahman is the *locus* as logically incoherent, Maṇḍana had only one choice: the *locus* of nescience must be the individual soul (*jīva*):

As for the question to whom the nescience belongs — we reply: to souls. [...] As it has already been stated, souls are stained with nescience, not Brahman. Brahman is clear and eternally luminous, devoid of any external object.⁶

Nescience cannot belong to Brahman because Brahman, whose essence is knowledge, is free from any imagination (*tasya vidyātmanah kalpanā-sūnyatvāt*). The idea of the Highest Lord (*īśvara*) fails to solve the problem. The only possible *locus* of *avidyā* is an individual soul.

Maṇḍana's solution may preserve the oneness of Brahman and account for the relative reality of the world, but simultaneously involves two other difficulties. Firstly, if the world is a false projection of an individual soul, how to explain the fact that each soul projects the same relative reality and the realities projected by all souls are intersubjectively verifiable? Secondly, how is it possible that the soul, which is a product of nescience, is simultaneously the source of the nescience? Perception of soul (*jīva*) is indeed erroneous perception of absolute Self (*ātman*) as plurality of individual selves. If soul is a figment of imagination, then imagination cannot be preceded by soul, since before imagination there was none (*kalpanāyāḥ prak tad-abbāvāt*). If we posit that there was soul anyway, we will make the error of mutual dependence (*itaretarāśraya-prasaṅgāt*). We cannot draw the conclusion that soul exists from the existence of imagination and then to establish the existence of imagination assuming the existence of soul. In short, we cannot draw a conclusion from an unestablished (*asiddha*) premise.

The first objection is easily rebutted by stating that the intersubjective verifiability is itself part of projection. It is only due to imagination that souls are different from Brahman and from one another:

⁶ BSi 10 and 12: *yas tu kasyāvidyeti jīvānām iti brūmaḥ. [...] uktam etaj jīvānām avidyā-kaluṣitatvaṁ na brahmaṇah. tad dhi sadā viśuddha-nitya-prakāśam anāgantukārtham.*

P: But souls are not different from Brahman [...]

S: It is true from the ultimate standpoint, but they differ through imagination.⁷

As for the second objection, Maṇḍana refrains from a univocal answer, suggesting three possible solutions without opting for any of them. Some maintain that the objection of drawing a conclusion from an unestablished premise, or even of assuming the conclusion in the premise (*petitio principii*) may exclusively pertain to establishing the reality of something (*vastu-siddhi*) which does not apply to illusion (*māyā*). Illusion (*māyā*) indeed consists in incoherence and impossibility. Others assert that mutual entailment in case of soul and imagination is not an error since both lack the beginning (*anāditvād ubhayoh*), as it is in case of the succession of seed and stem (*bījāṅkura-santānayoṛ iva*). Still others consider nescience to be the material cause (*upadāna*) of the world of plurality. The world of plurality has no beginning, thus the error of mutual entailment cannot pertain to it, nor has it any aim, thus all questions about the purpose of the creation of the world are groundless.⁸

Regardless of the fact that Maṇḍana refuses to opt for any of the above three solutions, nonetheless he shows that the error is explainable and arguments are possible. It is not for their deficiency that he would rather dispense with further inquiry but for the peculiar nature of object. It would be pointless to quest for any logical coherence in nescience which consists in error (*vibhrama*):

Since an error has no beginning it seems futile to quest for its objective.⁹

It is in the light of this statement that all Maṇḍana's deliberations on the purpose of creation, kindness or cruelty of the Creator etc. ought to be construed. A large number of statements of this type do not reflect their author's real views. Maṇḍana makes them as if he felt compelled to do so by the opponent but if it had not been for the demands of the debate he would never have raised such issues considering them futile and unnecessary. The student of Maṇḍana's texts ought to be extremely attentive to be able to tell the difference between *uttarapakṣa* which is merely part of argumentation against the opponent's views and actual opinion of Maṇḍana expressed as *siddhānta*. The distinction between the two is not always clear and they can easily get confused. At this juncture the *siddhānta* is the proposition that nescience (*avidyā*) belongs to the individual soul (*jīva*) and it is the soul that is to be liberated.

⁷ BSi 10: *nanu na jīvā brahmaṇo bhidyante [...] satyaṃ paramārthataḥ kalpanayā bhidyante.*

⁸ BSi 10: *tatrānāditvān netaretarāśrayatva-doṣaḥ, aprayojanatvān na bbeda-prapañca-sarga-prayojana-paryanuyogāvakāśaḥ.*

⁹ BSi 11: *anādau vibhrame hetv-anveṣam asaṃprāptam iva.*

THE WAY TO REMOVE NESCIENCE

The soul becomes liberated when it rids itself of its nescience. What is the way (*kenopayena*) then of removing the nescience? Maṇḍana poses the question and replies:

But what is the way of removing the nescience? By listening, thinking, exercising meditation, celibacy and other means applicated by *śrāstras*.¹⁰

On the grounds of these words Maṇḍana is often classified as an exponent of the *jñāna-karma-samuccaya-vāda*, i.e. combination of knowledge and action. According to this view, liberation is not only dependent on knowledge but also on human activities, performing sacrifices included. The followers of this opinion believe that between action and liberation there is a real cause-and-effect relation. The above words of Maṇḍana might confirm his approval of this belief. The problem is, however, that Maṇḍana himself more than once advocated the view that liberation is not essentially different from Absolute Being, therefore it cannot be effect of any cause. Effects of any action performed in the phenomenal world are of the some nature as their cause — are also phenomenal, as well as something done in a dream cannot cause results in the waking state. Either Maṇḍana contradicts himself or his words are misinterpreted and *jñāna-karma-samuccaya* is wrongly associated with his name. A closer study of *Brahmasiddhi* confirms the latter.

The paradox lies in the fact that activities like listening, thinking, meditating etc., intended to remove nescience, belong themselves to the world of nescience which they are intended to remove. Listening presumes the division into the listener, listening and the listened (*śrotr-śravaṇa-śrotavya-vibhāga*). Thus it might be affirmed that listening to the words about rejecting all divisions of the world of multitude (*prapañca*) is pointless since the listening itself introduces its own, new divisions. It would certainly be the point if listening pertained to removing all other divisions excluding the ones introduced by listening itself (*śrota-śravaṇa-śrotavyāti-vibhāga-parihānya*), which is not the case. The words refer to the removal of all divisions in the general sense (*sāmānyena*) without any exception. Accordingly listening to the words is apparently opposite to the perception of difference (*bheda-darśana-pratīyogī*) and gradually leads to its thorough annihilation. Once the difference is thoroughly annihilated, concurrently disappear listening, meditation etc. and differences between them. Then *ātman* shines (*prakāśate*) — pellucid (*svacca*) and pure (*parīśuddha*).

From the standpoint of Maṇḍana, nescience is gradable, it is not identical in each point. Consequently, as far as ignorance (*avidyā*) is concerned, various

¹⁰ BSi 12: *kena punar upayenāvidyā nivartate? śravaṇa-manana-dhyānābhyāsair brahmācaryādibhiḥ ca sādhanā-bhedaibḥ śāstroktaiḥ*.

approximations to knowledge (*vidyā*) can be considered, while all the approximations themselves belong to the sphere of nescience and must eventually disappear. Such is the internal structure of nescience rooted in the erroneous perception of difference that one of its elements can be juxtaposed to another. Maṇḍana illustrates his point by analogy with removing a powder dissolved in water by means of another powder counteracting with it. The powder liquidates the other powder and disappears itself. What remains is clear water ‘in its own form’ (*svarūpāvasthā*). Similarly in case of a soul (*jīva*):

So it is, when due to listening etc. the perception of difference disappears, along with it also the difference [between listening etc.] disappears, since nothing individual is left. Then there is nothing but soul, pellucid and clear.¹¹

Drawing another analogy, Maṇḍana compares listening, meditating etc. to digestive juices which having digested other liquids become digested themselves etc., or like a poison neutralizing another poison and consequently disappearing.¹²

This brings up another question: How is it possible for separateness to be removed by means of something separate (*bhedena*)? It is due to the fact that separateness consists in opposition (*bheda-pratipakṣatvāt*). To be separate is tantamount to being opposed to some other separate thing. The opposition between two elements results in mutual removal. Nescience is incoherent and intrinsically contradictory and the possibility of self-annihilation is inextricably connected with its essence. Because of nescience a soul is separated (*vibhakta*) from Brahman. Therefore when nescience disappears what remains is exclusively the own form of Brahman (*brahma-svarūpam eva*). Brahman transcends all separateness (*bhedātīta*). Listening, meditating etc. are evidently elements of variety, they are however in opposition to the perception of difference (*bheda-darśana-pratipakṣatvam*). This being the case, they remove the difference and consequently they remove they remove themselves, as rooted in difference.

Now is it correct to say that liberation, which is the vision of Brahman (*brahma-dr̥ṣṭi*) is caused by activities like listening, meditating etc.? In other

¹¹ BSi 12: *evam eva śravaṇādibhir bheda-darśane pravīṇyamāne viśeṣābhāvāt tad gate ca bhede svacche pariśuddhe svarūpe jīvo ’vatiṣṭhate.*

¹² BSi 12–13: *yataḥ payaḥ payo jarayati svayam ca jīryate. yathā ca viśaṁ viśāntaramśamayati svayam ca śamyati.* The first example is somewhat debatable. Sans. *payas* may refer to any liquid, depending on context, milk included. For Madeleine Biarreau *payas* here means just “milk”. If so, however, how to account for the caus. root *jī* (*jarayati*), in Biarreau’s translation *digérer* (digest)? Milk can hardly digest another milk and then get digested itself. This translation does not seem to make much sense. Tilmann Vetter presents a more plausible interpretation. Once caus. *jī* means “digest” (*verdauen*), then *payas* must be the “digestive juice” (*Magensaft*). Cf. Biarreau, 1969; Vetter, 1969: *passim*.

words, is it true to call Maṇḍana an exponent of the *jñāna-karma-samuccaya* doctrine? Maṇḍana himself denied it categorically, citing ĪśU 11 which he construes in a peculiar way:

He who knows at the same time both *vidyā* and *avidyā*,
crosses over death through *avidyā* and attains immortality through *vidyā*.¹³

Knowledge (*vidyā*) and nescience (*avidyā*) are mutually connected (*sabite*) and related as the objective and the means to achieve it (*upayopeya-bhāvāt*). Is it tantamount to the proposition that knowledge is something to be achieved by means of nescience as the means leading to its achievement (*sādhana*)? If it were so, knowledge, being a transitory result of an activity (*kṛtakatvād anityatam*), would not be eternal. Maṇḍana solves the problem as follows:

Therefore it is said: “death through *avidyā*”. It is to be understood that nescience is not the means to achieve knowledge but it is nescience itself which is removed by nescience, namely listening etc. Here “death” stands for “nescience”. Once it is removed one achieves immortality, here called “knowledge” in its own form like a crystal-clear jewel freed from any colouring caused by place.¹⁴

Maṇḍana states explicitly: “nescience is not the means to achieve knowledge” (*nāvidyā vidyāyāḥ sādhanam*). Nescience, that is listening etc., everything enjoined by *śruti* (*vidhi*) and everything prohibited by *śruti* (*niṣedha*), belongs to the *karma-kāṇḍa*, the department of the Veda treating on the sacrificial rites etc. called *pūrva-mīmāṃsā*. An action like sacrificial rites etc. do not lead to knowledge or liberation, the two being identical which Maṇḍana repeatedly emphasizes in his argumentation. Therefore nescience cannot be the means to achieve knowledge (*vidyāyāḥ sādhanam*) but can be the means of self-annihilation. The doctrine of *jñāna-karma-samuccaya*, i.e. the combination of knowledge and action, teaches that knowledge (*jñāna*) supported by action (*karma*) is the cause of liberation which is not Maṇḍana’s opinion. Thus it seems fair to conclude that Maṇḍana is not an adherent of the *jñāna-karma-samuccaya* doctrine.

When Maṇḍana writes about actions which destroy ignorance, he does not mean achieving liberation but rather eliminating the obstacles preventing its arrival. Nevertheless, liberation is a positive reality and does not exclusively consist in the removal of nescience. Maṇḍana resorts to the metaphor of sunset

¹³ ĪśU 11: *vidyām cāvidyām ca yas tad vedobhayaṁ saba | avidyayā mṛtyuṁ tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute* || Paramananda, 1919.

¹⁴ BSi 13: *ata āha — avidyayā mṛtyuṁ iti. eṣo ’rthaḥ nāvidyā vidyāyāḥ sādhanam. kiṁ tu avidyayā śravaṇādi-lakṣaṇayāpy avidyaiva nivartate. mṛtyur ity vidyayivocyate. tasyām nivṛttāyām vidyā-rūpopalakṣitam amṛtam aśnute svarūpāvasthānāṁ sphaṭika-maṇir ivvopādhyāśraya-nibandhanoparāga-tyāgāt.*

and sunrise, using the compounds *avidyāstamaya* (the set of nescience) and *vidyodaya* (the rise of knowledge). Thus “the set of nescience” (*avidyāstamaya*) is not to be understood as *definitio per essentiam* of knowledge and liberation, but rather as *definitio descriptiva*.

WHAT IS LIBERATION?

The descriptive definition of liberation as “the set of nescience” (*avidyāstamaya*)¹⁵ includes the noun “set” (*astamaya*) which commonly refers to a sunset or a moonset. The “set of ignorance” is concomitant with the “rise of knowledge” (*vidyodaya*). The knowledge (*vidyā*), however, must not be regarded as the means to achieve liberation, nor is liberation the result of knowledge.

Liberation is not its result, it is not anything to be achieved, it is not something else.¹⁶

In short, knowledge is liberation in itself. The relation of knowledge and liberation is the relation of identity, not the relation of cause and effect. The cause precedes the effect, whereas knowledge and liberation are simultaneous.

At this juncture, however, a doubt may arise. Simultaneousness (*tulya-kālatā*) implies the existence of two distinct elements occurring at the same time, which cannot be the case when the point at issue is oneness.¹⁷ Here is Maṇḍana’s reply:

The same thing can be explicated in terms of existence or in terms of non-existence, as it is when we say: “The moment the jug disappears, the broken pieces come into being”.¹⁸

The breaking of the jug is not essentially different from the arising of the broken pieces. Similarly, the removal of nescience is not essentially different from liberation or nonconcurrent with it.

Liberation is also defined as “Brahman achievement” (*brahma-prāpti*) (BSi: *passim*), although this “achievement” is not associated with any movement towards Brahman or any path to him. Since the soul (*jīva*) is in its essence nothing different or separated from Brahman, achieving Brahman is in fact tantamount to the accomplishment of one’s own form (*svarūpa-prāpti*), or rather its revealment (*svarūpānirbhāva*). An illustration of this exposure of the true

¹⁵ BSi 119: *avidyāstamayo mokṣaḥ*.

¹⁶ BSi 119: *na ca mokṣaḥ phalaṁ tasya sādhyo ca cāparaḥ*.

¹⁷ BSi 122: *nanv ekatve tulya-kālatāpy anupapannā*.

¹⁸ BSi 122: *ekasyāpi vastuno bāvābha-rūpeṇa vyapadeśāt, yathā — yadā ghaṭo naśyati tadā lapālāni jāyante iti*.

nature is a crystal with a red object behind it. After removing the red object the crystal, which is not inherently red, reveals its true form.

POSITIVE CHARACTER OF LIBERATION

Liberation is not different from knowing reality (*tattva-jñāna*). Hence a frequent error in the understanding of the *advaita*-doctrine is identifying knowledge with the cause of liberation. According to this view, liberation is the purpose of an action or a series of actions (*sādhyā*), something to be achieved as an effect (*kārya*) of a cognitive act. Nonetheless, the purpose and effect of cognition is not liberation but grasping of the object of cognition:

The effect of cognition is visible — it is the comprehension of the object of cognition by the cognizer.¹⁹

It can be argued that the cognition of the Highest Self may have an additional effect which is liberation.²⁰ However, it cannot be so, since liberation is not something to be achieved (*asādhyatvāt*) as an effect (*phala*), not being a product of any cause (*hetu-janya*). If liberation were the result of a cause or a number of causes, which are elements of relative reality (*saṃsāra*), which is ineffective and removable, it would lose the essential constituents of its nature (*tattva-cyuteḥ*), i.e. ultimateness and irremovability. Liberation is the ultimate end to wandering.²¹ Being a result, it would be removable (*kāryatve vināśāt*), and once it has been removed, the wandering would begin again (*puṇaḥ saṃsārāt*).

On the one hand, liberation is not different from the removing of ignorance (*avidyā*), on the other hand it is not the result of this removal. One might contest the justness of the view on the removability of ignorance. If cognition consists in the removal of ignorance, then how can the further removal of the removal be possible?²² One cannot delete the deletion! By accepting the negative nature of liberation being the result of knowledge and consisting exclusively in removing ignorance, Maṇḍana could easily avoid this difficulty. Maṇḍana, however, rejects such a purely negative understanding of liberation. By claiming that liberation cannot be the result, in which case it would be removable, he does not mean only the removal of bonds, the annihilation of ignorance, but above all a positive form of liberation (*bhāva-rūpa*). The liberation

¹⁹ BSi 78: *jñānasya hi dr̥ṣṭam eva phalam — jñātrā jñēyasyābbhivyāptiḥ*. Here Maṇḍana uses three derivatives of the verbal root *jñā*: *jñāna* — cognition, *jñātr* — cognizer, *jñeya* — the object of condition.

²⁰ BS 78: *ātma-jñānasya phalāntaram apīśyate mokṣaḥ*.

²¹ BS 78: *ātyantikī ca saṃsāra-nivṛttir mokṣaḥ*.

²² BS 78: *nanu kāryo 'pi nāśo na naśyati*.

is immeasurable happiness (*niratisāyānanda*). The attributeless ultimate being can be predicated solely negatively, according to the Upanishadic *mahāvākya* “no-no” (*neti neti*) (BrU 4.5.15). Nevertheless, it is the very same Upanishadic texts that call Brahman ‘being-consciousness-bliss’ (*sac-cid-ānanda*). In the first chapter of his *Brahmasiddhi* Maṇḍana argues that the triad is not to be interpreted as attributes of Brahman, or as a *definitio per accidens* (*taṭastha-lakṣaṇā*), but as the essence, or the *definitio per essentiam* (*svarūpa-lakṣaṇā*).²³ Brahman is positive Bliss (*ānanda*)²⁴ experienced by the liberated self.

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Abbreviations:

- BSBh — *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* by Śaṅkara
 Bsi — *Brahmasiddhi* by Maṇḍana Miśra
 ĪśU — *Īśavāsyopaniṣad*
 KJV — King James Version

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²³ For the discussion of the subject see: Sajdek, 1995.

²⁴ *sac-cid-ānanda*. Contrary to the first two, it is not easy to render the meaning of the last part of the triad in translation. In English “bliss” is the term used most frequently, contrasted with the feelings of a lower order, rendered as happiness or pleasure (*sukha*). In German translations, along with *die Wonne*, sometimes appears *die Glückseligkeit*, which is arguably the best rendering of the idea of *ānanda*. Biardeau uses the noun *la béatitude* which may be associated with some sensual pleasures as in the popular vision of Muslim paradise. Whichever term we choose in English, it must be kept in mind that *ānanda* is not only “bliss” etc., but also, or even primarily, the highest attractive power, the object of highest love (*para-premāspadatva*). As Maṇḍana puts it — “the Self is desired by all creatures, even a little worm” (*sarvasyoyam ātmāśīḥ krimer api*).

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