



The Mīmāṃsaka versus Yājñika: Some Further Problem in the Interpretation of *Śruti* in the Indian Tradition

In the article 'Mīmāṃsā Before Jaimini', published in the *JICPR*, Volume IX, No. 2, I had raised some issues regarding the problems in the interpretation of what was regarded as *śruti* in the Mīmāṃsā tradition of understanding what was regarded as the Veda or rather the accepted text of the Veda according to the *śākhā* to which one belonged. The latter qualification is important, as the text of the *Saṁhitās* is not the same in the different *śākhās*, as we had pointed out in an earlier article entitled 'The Vedic Corpus—Some Questions' published in the *JICPR*, Vol. III, No. 1. The term Veda, in fact, is generally used

* This article is dedicated to the memory of Prof. R.C. Dwivedi, dear friend, a great scholar and a rare person genuinely committed to the cause of renewal of traditional learning in India in the contemporary context, and whose stray remarks in a telephonic conversation were the occasion of the writing of this paper.

to refer to a large, disparate variety of texts which have little unity, except the one imposed by the interpretation (which usually is achieved by ignoring or underplaying large parts) of the text which does not support one's preferred interpretation. There are, for example, no known Mīmāṃsā commentaries on the major Upaniṣads or any direct, detailed commentaries on the *Saṁhitā* and *Brāhmaṇa* portions of the Veda by the Vedāntic school of interpretation started by Bādarāyaṇa in the *Brahmasūtras*. But this large-scale ignoring of what are supposed to be integral parts of the text of the Vedas has not troubled anyone, either in the past or in the present. And yet, scholars go on blithely talking about the authority of the *śruti* in the Indian tradition and the lay public accepting it blindly on their authority.

The situation, however, is far more complicated than this simple dichotomy reveals. It is well-known, for example, that in the Bādarāyaṇa camp which regards the major Upaniṣads as the real *śruti*, there are deep differences between the various *ācāryas* regarding their interpretation, a difference they themselves consider to be so important that they highlight it by repeated emphasis and by criticizing the rival interpretations. Not only this, Yāmuna, the first great non-Advaitic *ācārya* after Śaṅkara, tries to establish the *prāmāṇya* of Āgama, along with that of the Vedas in his unjustly ignored book, entitled *Āgama Prāmāṇya* which tries to give the status of *śruti* to the *Āgamic* texts also. But as the so-called *Āgama* texts are various and varied, there is no distinct criterion by which one may decide which to accord the status of *śruti* and which to exclude from that foundational authoritative august status.

The Mīmāṃsā presumably, therefore, had tried to steer clear of all these difficulties and confined the term *śruti* not only to that part of the Vedic corpus which deals with sacrificial injunctions, but also treated the rest as *arthavāda*, that is, as some thing which was not to be understood literally, but rather in its relation to the sacrificial injunction which it reinforced and supported in some way or the other through its indirect bearing on it.

All this is fairly well-known, though its devastating implications for the concept of *śruti* are seldom realized or, even when realized,

tend to be underplayed by most scholars who write on the subject. But there is another dimension to the problem which, as far as I know, has been totally neglected up till now. This is the role of the *yājñika* in the interpretation of the *vidhi* according to which a particular *yajña* prescribed by the Vedas was to be performed. Normally, this is supposed to be the business of the Mīmāṃsaka, and Jaiminī's *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras* are a classic example of a discussion about these matters. And, most scholars do seem to think that it is the task of the *Mīmāṃsā śāstra* to decide and adjudicate on such matters. But in a recent discussion on the subject, R.C. Dewivedi pointed out that the Mīmāṃsaka's was only a theoretical interest in reconciling the seemingly discrepant and divergent statements regarding the *vidhi* pertaining to the different *yajñas* laid down primarily in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts which they regard as authoritative. But as far as the actual performance of the *yajña* was concerned, their authority was only indirect and secondary as there the *yājñika* reigned supreme. This is supported to a certain extent by Staal's observation that the *yājñikas* on being told that the procedures they were following differed from the one mentioned in the texts evinced little interest in the fact or made any attempt to bring their procedure in line with the one prescribed in the text.¹ But, strangely, Staal does not give the details of the discrepancy or see the implications of what he had observed for the theory of *yajña* as propounded in *Mīmāṃsā* as represented by Jaiminī and his chief interpreter, Śabara.

But even if we accept the overriding authority of the *yājñika* in the actual performance of the Vedic *yajña*, the question remains as to who is a *yājñika*, and what is his relation to the *mīmāṃsaka*. The former question is relevant as, according to the tradition, there is not just one *yājñika*, but many, four of whom are supposed to enjoy special status and authority and are known as the *hotṛ*, the *udgātṛ*, the *adhvaryu* and the *brahmā* representing respectively the *Rgveda*, the *Sāmaveda*, the *Yajurveda* and the *Atharvaveda*. But as it is the *brahmā* who is supposed to oversee, supervise and correct the mistakes of the others, the main authority for deciding what is a correct *vidhi* according to the *śruti* should be his and not that of the others. And this, in spite of the fact that he is not only supposed to be a late-comer into the picture, but also an interloper according to those who do not quite accept the

authority of the *Atharvaveda* to be on par with the other *Samhitās* of the Vedic canon. In fact, according to Gonda, even after the acceptance of the four-fold corpus of the Vedic *Samhitās*, 'various later texts continued to speak of the threefold Holy knowledge'. And, that 'even in modern times there have been brahmins who have refused to recognize the authority of the promulgators of the fourth Veda, because of a certain prejudice prevailing against it. Even today brahmins of the other Vedas do not dine or marry atharvanic (*paipplādins*) of Orissa'.²

This, if correct, would result in a strange situation indeed, for the person who is supposed to be invested with the final authority of deciding whether a particular *vidhi* is correct or not in the actual performance of the *yajña* when it is being performed, represents a Veda which itself did not enjoy the status of being a Veda for a long time and whose living carriers are discriminated against by brahmins of the other Vedas to such an extent that they do not even dine with them or marry their sons or daughters into their families. Now, it is not clear if Gonda is talking about the actual *yājñikas* who perform the sacrificial ritual in the *yajña* concerned, or those who only memorize and study a particular Veda in the traditional manner. For, in case he is talking of the *yājñikas*, then it is difficult to see how other *yājñikas*, belonging to the other Vedas, could possibly avoid dining with him if partaking of what was cooked during the ritual was an integral part of the sacrificial ritual itself.

But whatever be the mutual relations between the *yājñikas* representing the different Vedas in the Vedic *yajña* outside the sphere of the actual performance of the *yajña*, there can be little doubt that they cannot but be cordial and co-operative during the performance of the *yajña* as their functions are inter-dependent and hence have to form a co-ordinated coherent whole for its successful completion. And, this exactly is supposed to be the task of the *ṛtvikas* who have the actual responsibility of performing the *yajña*.

The injunction to perform the *yajña*, whether *nitya*, *naimittika* or *kāmya*, it should be remembered, is given by the *śruti*, that is, that part of the Vedas which contains such injunction. It is the texts known as the *Brāhmaṇas* which are usually supposed to contain these

instructions according to which the various Vedic *yajñas* are to be performed. And, it is obvious that the Vedic character of the *yajña* can only be ensured if the *yajña* is performed completely and strictly in accordance with the injunctions laid down in these texts, which are the *śruti* for this purpose.

But what are the authoritative injunctions of the texts in regard to these *yajñas*? There was pre-Jaimini tradition in this regard which itself was diverse in character and which can only be known and possibly reconstructed on the basis of his refutation of their views in his well-known text known as the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*. The problems raised by the refutation of the earlier interpretations regarding how the Vedic sacrifices were to be performed have been discussed by me in an earlier article entitled 'Mīmāṃsā Before Jaiminī—Some Problems in the interpretation of *śruti*' in the *JICPR*, Vol. IX. No.2. But the argument in that article was based on the assumption that the *yajñas* were actually performed according to the interpretation given by these thinkers and that the main point of Jaiminī's writing the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras* was to show that these interpretations were wrong and that the correct performance of the Vedic *yajñas* could only be that which he was giving in his *sūtras* unless, of course, the *vikalpa* or the alternative was permitted by the Vedic text itself. Prof. Dwivedi questions this assumption itself and suggests that it is the *yājñika* and not the *Mīmāṃsaka* who is the final authority regarding how a *yajña* is to be performed in accordance with the injunctions laid down in the *śruti* texts in this regard.

Prof. Dwivedi, unfortunately, is now no more and I do not know if he was exactly arguing for any radical difference between the positions of the *Mīmāṃsaka* and the *yājñika* in respect of the interpretation of the *śruti* with regard to the *vidhi* according to which any particular Vedic *yajña* was to be performed. In fact, if my memory is not playing any trick, he had compared the actual *yājñika* performing the ritual to the musician who actually plays or sings a *rāga*, and while doing so, interprets it. On the other hand, the *mīmāṃsaka* is like the musicologist, who theoretically talks about the *rāga* and determines what the *rāga* is, or rather ought to be. The analogy would perhaps be more suitable to western music where the music has a

written score which is being interpreted by the players and the music critic can easily determine whether the interpretation was true to the musical score, does justice to it or not.

But neither the Indian nor the western analogy seems to be relevant to this case as unlike the classical musician in India, the *yājñika* is not supposed to improvise at all and, unlike the western parallel, the *mīmāṃsaka* does not sit in judgement over what the *yājñika* actually does. There is, of course, a written text which is supposed to govern and play an authoritative, prescriptive role for both as the written score is supposed to do in western music. But neither the average *mīmāṃsaka* nor the *yājñika* has the original text before him as is the case with their western counterpart. In fact, it is surprising that not only does Jaiminī not write a detailed exegetical *Bhāṣya* on the relevant portions of the *śruti* dealing with these *yajñas*, but neither does any other *mīmāṃsaka* as far as I know. Śāyaṇa is, of course, the best known amongst those who have written such sort of *bhāṣyas*, but then neither he nor they were primarily *mīmāṃsakas*. Kumārila, who is a *mīmāṃsaka par excellence* may, for example, occasionally differ with Śabara on whether a particular *sūtra* of Jaiminī is to be taken as propounding a *pūrva-pakṣa* or a *siddhānta*, but he is not interested in going to the original *śruti* text for justifying his position to decide on the issue.

A more relevant analogy, perhaps, might be with the written text of a play and the traditions of critical interpretation on the one hand and of its actual performance on the other. The two are independent of each other, though they may sometimes take cognizance of each other, or even be influenced by what the other is saying or doing. The history of Shakespearean criticism and Shakespearean production are examples of this. But even in this case the text is appealed to by both and remains central to them, even though they may be as independent of each other as the Shakespearean critic and the producer or director of a Shakespearean play usually are. The *mīmāṃsaka* and the *yājñika*, however, do not seem to be concerned with the text, and there seems to have been no real diversity in *Mīmāṃsā* traditions after Jaiminī, though there is ample evidence in his own work that there were plenty of such trends before him. For the actual performance of the Vedic *yajñas*, there has hardly been any attempt to reconstruct

their history. Perhaps there were as many schools of *yājñikas* as the families hereditarily specializing in the task from times immemorial.

But neither the actually performing *yājñika* nor the theorizing *mīmāṃsaka* ever thought that they were *free* to interpret the Vedic texts enjoining the performance of the *yajñas* in the way they considered proper or even that they were engaged in any activity of interpretation at all. They believed that they were saying or doing what the relevant *śruti* texts enjoined them to say or do. But the crucial difference between them was that the *mīmāṃsaka* argued, while the *yājñika* did not. But the *mīmāṃsaka* could not but have been aware that there were alternative interpretations which he was rejecting on grounds which he regarded as justified and adequate. Thus, though the *mīmāṃsaka* may not consciously accept that he was interpreting, in actual fact he was doing so. The *yājñika*, on the other hand, was not concerned with disputation at all. He just carried on the tradition as he had learnt it in his family. But even he could not have been unaware that there were other traditions of performing the same *yajña*, at least in other regions, if not in other *ṛtvika* families of the same region. In other words, there must have been different *gharānās* of *yājñikas*, just as there are *gharānās* in music. Perhaps the various *śākhās* of the *Sāmaveda* were in fact *gharānās* of Vedic music and as almost all the *ṛcās* of the *Sāmaveda* are those which occur in the other *Samhitās*, one may assume that the case with the non-*Sāmavedic* *ṛcās* of the Vedic *Samhitās* was also the same. The various *śākhās* of the Vedas other than the *Sāmaveda* presumably had a difference not only with respect to the text of the Veda concerned but also with respect to the way the *mantras* had to be recited. The difference in the actual *mantras* of what is supposed to be the *same text* has seldom drawn the attention of the scholars and hardly any attention has been paid to the disastrous implications it has for the idea of *śruti* in the Indian tradition. Normally, it is assumed that the differences are minor and insignificant and hence do not affect the substantial unity of the text on the basis of which we designate it as that particular Veda. But the differences in the actual *mantras* are substantially large in the case of many of the *śākhās* and hence cannot be dismissed so lightly if we take the notion of the *śruti* seriously.

In fact, a traditional Brāhman was always asked not only about

his *gotra* and Veda etc., but also about the *śākhā* to which he belonged. This obviously implied that for him the authoritative *śruti* text was of the *śākhā* to which he belonged and this was accepted by everybody else in the tradition. The proverbial plurality of the Indian tradition perhaps derives from the fact that even what is to be regarded as the *śruti* in the tradition depends on the *śākhā* to which one belongs. And, if we further accept that the way the same *mantras* were recited, differed from *śākhā* to *śākhā*, as was the case with the *Sāmaveda*, the plurality of *śruti* is established at the very beginning of the tradition as for a *mantra* to be regarded as the same, not only its *varṇānupūrvī*, but even its *svarānupūrvī* has to be the same.

But, the plurality of the *śruti* that came into being was mitigated by two different factors. The first being that most of the *mantras* are not used in any of the actual sacrifices that are prescribed in the *śruti*, and hence have only an ornamental or subsidiary status in the *yajña*-centric tradition of interpretation of the *śruti*. To use the well-known *Mīmāṃsā* term, they are either *arthavāda* or *nāmadheya*. The same strategy was also adopted by the *brahman*-centric school of interpretation of *śruti* by making a radical distinction between *parā* and *aparā vidyā*, and relegating a large part of the Vedas to the latter, and considering only the parts dealing with the former as *śruti* proper. The other method adopted in the tradition was to *ignore* the *mantras* which were not an integral part of the sacrificial ritual, to underplay the *svarānupūrvī* requirement and leave it to the *yajña* specialist that is, the *yājñika*, to recite them the way he thought proper, and forget all those parts of the Brāhmaṇa texts which were not concerned with prescribing the details of the sacrificial ritual. This, of course, was the Jaiminī prescription. Bādarāyaṇa's prescription was just the opposite—ignore the *mantras*, treat the idea of *yajña* as metaphorical, concentrate on the Upaniṣads alone and give a *brahman*-centric interpretation of them.

Both the strategies succeeded, particularly with the followers of Jaiminī and Bādarāyaṇa, in removing the inconvenient plurality and diversity of the so-called *śruti* even from the consciousness of those who most loudly proclaimed their belief in it. As for others, they simply accepted it on trust and used the word 'Veda' without caring or worrying

about what was actually included in it.

The situation is, of course, disturbing for anyone who takes the notion of *śruti-prāmāṇya* seriously in Indian thought. But the *difference* between the *yājñika* and the *mīmāṃsaka* is more serious as they both opt for the *yajña*-centric interpretation of the *śruti* and do not understand the idea of *yajña* in any extended or metaphorical sense, even if such a sense is found in some of the *Brāhmaṇas* themselves. But the *mīmāṃsaka* at least is concerned with the text; in fact, his whole activity consists in reconciling apparently discrepant injunctions regarding how a *yajña* is to be actually performed and *arguing* why the alternatives suggested by others are wrong. The *yājñika* does nothing of the kind. He is not interested in the text—in fact, he may never have seen it himself. He does what he has seen being done in his family, or the way he is taught to do by those who perform the ritual. Still, one expects an interaction between the two and at least a *prima facie* attempt to ensure that the ritual practices conform to the procedures laid down in the *śruti* texts dealing with the matter. But if Staal's statement is to be believed, there is nothing like that in the case of the Vedic *yajña*. Instead, there is an utter indifference to the text, or rather its interpretation by the *mīmāṃsaka*, as is often found amongst the actual practitioners of an art regarding what the theoreticians say about it. The situation would, of course, have been different if the *yājñika* had been following some other school of interpretation of the *śruti* text, but the evidence does not suggest so. In fact Staal makes it even more clear in his reply to the comments on the interpretation of *dravya tyāga* by the three great Mīmāṃsā scholars in the pages of the *JICPR*. He emphasizes that the persons who perform the *yajña* were neither *Mīmāṃsakas* nor knew anything about *Mīmāṃsā*. Rather, as he writes, 'what they were first and foremost is practicing ritualists'. And, 'their knowledge of the ritual was not based upon the *Mīmāṃsā* or any of the *śrauta-sūtras* familiar to scholars, through their published editions'. Rather, they had learnt the ritual from their father, or other close relatives. As Staal writes, '...C.V. learned the ritual from his father and Itti Ravi from the father and the grandfather's brother, they practiced the rites as part of their tradition which is almost entirely oral'. And 'In case of conflict between the tradition and the published text of Baudhāyana,

Sāṅkhyāyana or Jaiminīya *Śrauta-sūtras* with which they were not on the whole familiar, they follow the former and not the latter'.³

On the contemporary evidence, therefore, it is obvious that what *counts* in the *actual* performance of the *yajñas* as described in the Vedic texts is not what the *mīmāṃsakas* say or what is *written* in the *Śrauta sūtras* concerning them, but the *tradition* of performing them as it has developed during all these millennia and the way it has been handed down in the families which have specialized in the art of performing the *yajñas* as enjoined in the Vedas. It is, of course, true that according to Staal, 'the differences of the living Numbudiri tradition with Baudhāyana's and Sāṅkhyāyana's texts as we know them are mostly minor; in the area of the *Sāmaveda*, the differences with the *Jaiminīya Śrauta sūtra* are somewhat more extensive'. But, strictly speaking, the deviation in the ritual procedure of a vedic *yajña* cannot be characterized as 'major' or 'minor', for if it is a deviation from the procedure laid down in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts then it will just not lead to the desired result but may even lead, as I argued in the earlier article, to the contrary or opposite of what was desired. One should not forget the warning given by the author of the *Mahābhāṣya* regarding what awaits one if one pronounces ordinary Sanskrit wrongly, let alone the Vedic *mantras* to preserve whose purity of recitation all the various methods were devised to keep not only their *varṇānupūrvī* but also their *svarānupūrvī* intact. As for the *vidhi* of a vedic *yajña*, it has not only to have particular the relevant *mantras* used in that *yajña* recited properly, but also all the other procedures involved in it performed exactly as prescribed in their minutest details in the *śruti* texts devoted to that subject. The so-called 'extensive' deviations from the *Jaiminīya Śrauta sūtras* in the area of *Sāmaveda*, therefore, are not more important than the 'minor' deviations from the procedure prescribed in the Baudhāyana and the Sāṅkhyāyana texts, provided one accepts these as authoritative. In fact, the *yajña* performed by the Nambudiri priests and extensively documented by Staal in his book *Agni* and also filmed and shown as an *example* of vedic *yajña* to many scholarly and lay audiences cannot be accepted as a *yajña* in the proper Vedic sense if what Staal has written is taken seriously. It will be a pseudo-*yajña* masquerading as the genuine one with all the adverse consequences for both the *ṛtvikas*

that is, the Nambudiri brāhmaṇas, and the *yajamāna*, that is, Staal, if what I had pointed out regarding the fate of the pre-Jaimini *yajña* performers in my article 'Mīmāṃsā before Jaiminī' has any validity. Staal, of course, is only a scholar and does not *believe* in the hocus pocus of the Vedic *yajña* and, in any case, he has already got the fruits thereof in terms of scholarly recognition from his peers for what he did. But what is surprising is that even the Nambudiri brāhmaṇas did not care whether what they were performing deviated from the correct prescribed *vidhi* or not. They also were perhaps satisfied, like Staal, with the immediate fruits of the *yajña* which they performed for his benefit. At a deeper level still, perhaps neither of them *cared* whether the procedure being followed by them in the performance of the *yajña* was in accordance with the injunctions laid down in the *śruti*, a concern that was paramount with Jaiminī and that led him to the writing of the *Mīmāṃsā sūtras*.

The fact that neither of them *cared*, however, seemed to have derived from different reasons. For Staal, it was just a 'subject' of study. He obviously was not interested in 'performing' the *yajña* himself or believed that one could really achieve any fruit by doing it. The Nambudiri brāhmaṇas, on the other hand, perhaps genuinely believed in it, and like the *yājñikas* of old thought that the correct way of performing the *yajña* was the way they were taught to do it in their tradition, or perhaps that it did not really matter how it was performed, provided the requisite motive or attitude or *bhāvanā* accompanying the performance was alright. In case it was the latter, it would show the profound influence of the *bhakti* tradition in a realm which was supposed to be completely opposed to it. What is, however, more surprising is the fact that Staal does not seem to be surprised at the attitude of the Nambudiri brāhmaṇas or see its implications for the notion of *śruti* in the Indian tradition. Instead, he sees it only as an anthropological fact and records it as such.

Staal is, of course, not the only student of Indian tradition who does not see the problems which his own observations pose for the notion of *śruti*, as it has been usually interpreted and understood in the Indian tradition. Louis Renou tried to expose the myth of the authority of the Vedas in his well-known book entitled *le destin du Veda dans le Inde*. But myths die hard, and recently a scholar of Halbfass's eminence

has tried to come to the rescue of the myth. In his recent book, entitled *Tradition and Reflection*, he has devoted five out of ten essays to this topic. It is not my intention here to discuss in detail Halbfass's contention, but only to show how even a scholar of his stature could be blind to glaring counter evidence which would nullify his carefully built argument in at least one of the crucial chapters on the subject. The chapter is entitled 'Human Reason and Vedic Revelation as in Advaita Vedānta'. The theme is an over-worked one, as so many scholars have already written on the subject. Prof. K. Satchidānanda Murty's *Reason and Revelation in Advaita Vedānta*, written in 1959, is a well-known classic treatment of the subject. Halbfass refers to it, but does not specify where he differs from it. In fact, his references to Indian writing on the subject are so patronizing and full of self-righteousness that one wonders if western scholars would ever get rid of the hangover from the attitudes inherited from the bygone days of the imperial past. In the case of Prof. Halbfass, however, it is doubly distressing as he is not only an extraordinarily sound scholar, but also extremely sympathetic and fair to the multifarious sides of most issues as evidenced in his work entitled *India and Europe*. For such a person to write about the writings of many of the neo-Vedāntins that 'their apologetic goal often overshadows the requirements of philological accuracy and conceptual precision',⁵ sounds strange, particularly when he makes no efforts to substantiate the charge. Not only this, his own essays in the volume concerning this subject are neither grounded on 'philological' contentions nor seek any 'conceptual precision' concerning the subject. In fact, they do not even give any evidence of his having learnt any thing from his study of Indian philosophy on which he has spent a life time and of which undoubtedly he has detailed and profound knowledge, as he does not state the *pūrva-pakṣa* or try to demolish it to establish his *siddhānta*. Not only this, he does not even observe the norms of western scholarship as he gives no reason why he is once again writing on a subject when his conclusion is the same as that of Prof. K.S. Murty and where he differs from him, particularly when he explicitly refers to his work on the very object and writes, 'The critical and differentiated treatment of the topic in K.S. Murty's book *Revelation and Reason in Advaita Vedānta* (1959; second edn.

1974), which emphasizes the subordination of reason and argumentation (*yukti, tarka*) to the authority of Vedic revelation, is particularly remarkable and somewhat unusual contribution from the Indian side'.⁶ However, after this statement, Prof. Halbfass, for reasons best known to him, does not return to Prof. Murty's book or discuss anything that he has said regarding the issues therein.

Strangely, neither Prof. Murty nor Prof. Halbfass see the utter inadequacy of the use of the term 'revelation' in this context. And this, in spite of the complaint about lack of philological scholarship displayed by Indian scholars who have written on the subject. *Śruti* is not revelation if *Koran* is treated as the paradigmatic example of what 'revelation' is supposed to mean, or if God is regarded as the necessary source of the revelation in order that it may be considered as 'revelation'. Neither the school of Jaiminī nor of Bādarāyaṇa treat the Veda (whatever may be meant by that term as included in it in an extensional sense of the term) in any such way as to fulfil this condition. Nor does Śaṅkara, the founder of Advaita Vedānta, for that matter.

It may be urged that what ultimately matters is the notion of a foundational text whose authority is regarded as overriding and supreme in deciding what is to be accepted or not accepted, and not whether this text is treated as the word of God, or as 'revealed' by him. But even in this sense, does Jaiminī or Bādarāyaṇa or Śaṅkara treat the Veda as a foundational text whose 'authority' is to be accepted in *all* matters? First, it is well-known that Bādarāyaṇa and Śaṅkara do not accept the authority of those portions of the Vedic texts which prescribed the various *yajñas* including those that are supposed to be done for attaining *svarga* or heaven. Similarly, Jaiminī and his followers do not accept the authority of those portions of the text which are supposed to deal with *Brahmaṇa*, that is, the Upaniṣads. Second, the 'authority' of even these portions of the texts is accepted in a very selective manner, much of what one side takes in a literal manner, the other treats as *arthavāda*, that is, as primarily 'rhetorical' in intention. For Jaiminī, no declarative statements has any authority, as only injunctive or imperative statements constitute the *Veda*. And, Śaṅkara himself has urged that '*śruti's prāmāṇya* cannot even be conceived if it goes against what is well established by other *pramāṇas*.'⁷ (*na ca*

pramāṇāntaraviruddhārtha viṣaye śruteḥ prāmāṇyam kalpyate). The statement is far stronger than comes out in Halbfass's own rendering of it in his reference to this as it is not confined to perception alone, even though the examples given by Śaṅkara may seem to suggest that. In fact, a close look at the examples given may suggest that perhaps the issue was not so empirical as may appear at first sight. After all *śītognih* or 'cold fire' may more appropriately be regarded as a self-contradiction rather than as merely contrary to experience, though the addition that it makes things wet (*kleda yati iti*) may make one think in the opposite direction. But the use of the phrase *svavacanaviruddham* by Śaṅkara in his *Gītā Bhāṣya* (XIII, 66) which is also quoted by Halbfass, seems to strengthen our line of direction for the interpretation. In fact, Śaṅkara in the *Gītā Bhāṣya* is giving both *pramāṇāntaraviruddham* and *svavacanaviruddham* as alternatives and declares that if even a hundred *śrutis* (*śrutiśataṃ api*) were to say anything having either of these characteristics, it cannot be regarded as true.

Yet, though Halbfass refers to both of these, he does not *discuss* them at all. Rather, he avoids them, and skirts past them as if they had never been said and it was just an accidental, gratuitous, meaningless statement which Śaṅkara might have made when he was not fully alive to the far-reaching implications of what he had said. It is, of course, true that Halbfass does quote other passages which he construes as meaning the opposite of what is implied by these statements. But then, the obvious problem would be how to reconcile the two and not only this, but also what to do with the innumerable, factual, empirical statements scattered throughout the *śruti*. Halbfass does nothing of the kind and goes merrily along as if no serious objections had arisen to his position from these quotations or that there were no fundamental difficulties in the way of his interpretation if the quotations on p. 152 were to be construed the way he has construed them.

Our main interest here, however, is not to discuss whether Śaṅkara treats *śrutis* authoritative in empirical matters, but whether he displays an attitude to *śruti* which is in consonance with its being a *śruti* in the sense in which it is treated as a 'revelatory' text (a term used in this connection by everybody, including both Murty and Halbfass). I hope

everyone will agree that one cannot play fast and loose with a text one regards as 'revelatory' or distort its meaning out of all recognition if one doesn't like, or approve of it. In fact, even if one does it with an ordinary text, one forfeits one's claim to intellectual honesty. But if one does it in the case of a 'revelatory' text, then the minimum that one has to say in this matter is that the text is not being treated as 'revelatory' at all in any meaningful sense of the word. Unfortunately, Śaṅkara is guilty of just this and it is surprising that a careful scholar like Halbfass with all his talk of 'philological accuracy and conceptual precision' ignores this glaring counter-evidence to all that he has to say on the matter.

The Upaniṣads, for example, are accepted as the hard core of the *śruti* by Śaṅkara and amongst them the *Chāndogya* occupies perhaps a place which is only less than the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. And even those who try to dispute his authorship of the commentaries on many of them have not questioned the fact of his having written a *bhāṣya* on it. But as scholars are free to dispute anything on grounds which may appear unsatisfactory to them, we will assume, for the purpose of argument in this article that the commentary on the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* ascribed to Śaṅkara by the tradition was actually written by him. In any case, at least Halbfass accepts his authorship of the *Bhāṣya* on this Upaniṣad, if his statement on p. 210 of *Tradition and Reflection* is to be taken seriously. Now if we take the notion of *śruti* in sense which is accepted by everybody, including Halbfass, and see what Śaṅkara does with the well-known story of Satyakāma Jābālā in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, we will have an embarrassing dilemma on our hands. But, first, let us see what he has done with the *śruti* which he is supposed to have regarded as authoritative and revelatory in character. Here is what the original text is supposed to say regarding this episode. We will quote only the most relevant portion for our purpose. Satyakāma, who was the son of Jābālā, had asked his mother that he wanted to take to the life of *brahmacharya* and hence wanted to know what was his *gotra* or parental lineage. On being asked this question, she replied—*nāhametadveda tāta yadagotrastvamasi; bahavaham caranti paricārinī yauvane tvāmalabhe, Sāhametanna veda yadagotrastvamasi. Jābālā tu nāmāhamasmi Satyakāmo nama tvamasi sa Satyakāma eva Jābālo bruvīthā iti* (4.4).

Now this is simple and straightforward Sanskrit requiring no philological expertise for its understanding. And, Yet Śaṅkara comments on it in the following manner: *jabālā sā hainamputram uvāca nāhamaetatava gotramveda, he tāta yadagotrastvamasi, kasmānna vetsi, ityuktāha-bahu bhartṛgrhe paricaryājātamathithyabhyāgatādi carantayaham paricāriṇī paricarantīti paricaranaśīlavāham paricarṇacittatayā gotrādismaraṇe mama mano nābhūt. Youvane ca tatkāle tvāmalabhe labdhavatyāsmi. Tadaiva te pitoruparatah. Ato' nāthāham sāhamaetanna veda yadagotrastvamasi.* We need not quote further as what we want to convey should have become fairly clear to anyone with the least knowledge of Sanskrit.

The turns and twists which Śaṅkara introduces to make the story respectable and the so-called *śruti* acceptable to the social prejudices of his time would have been laughable if they did not also have a tragic aspect to them. Imagine the great *ācārya* making the poor Jābālā not only a slave all the time entertaining her husband's guests all the twenty four hours every day of the year, but had to kill her husband so that she may be provided an excuse for not knowing what the *gotra* of her son's progenitor was. But, even if we accept all the above hypotheses which Śaṅkara invents to save the situation, the lady could easily have found the *gotra* of her husband by inquiring from other members of his or her family. Such an easy and obvious alternative for finding the *gotra* of the child could be foreclosed only by postulating the simultaneous death of *all* the persons from both sides of the family who would have easily given her the information. But even this would not have sufficed, for there are always others such as friends or neighbours or other members of the caste, clan or *varṇa* who can give the information. Śaṅkara will have to postulate the death not only of all but also of any other *possible* person from whom such information could be derived. Moreover, Śaṅkara gives no reason why she did not try to get the information after her husband's death, particularly when she must have known that such information would be required at the time of her son's marriage, if not at the time of his studies.

She did not try to find because she *knew* that the information sought for, could not be found. And, this is what she is trying to say in so many plain words whose simple and obvious meaning Śaṅkara is

willfully trying not to understand, for that will destroy his private personal conception of what the *śruti* ought to say, or be. Or else, he is afraid of the undesirable consequences of the truth on society and public morality of his times. In either case, Śaṅkara is not being true to the *śruti*, nor displaying an attitude to it which one would expect to be displayed to a text deemed as 'revelatory'. But then, did he not know what he was doing? Did he not understand the plain meaning of the Sanskrit sentences which Jabālā spoke? Or, did he not know the so-called 'facts of life' or the absurdity of the hypotheses he had postulated to hide the truth? And, why did he not ask himself the simple question that if his hypotheses were correct, what was the point of the teacher saying *naitadbrāhmaṇo vivaktumarhati*, for there would have been nothing special in what he said to deserve the praise from the teacher?⁸

The simple and straight question in this context is whether Śaṅkara treats the *śruti* as *śruti*, that is, as something to whose truth his own personal, social and cultural prejudices are to be subordinated and from which he has to *learn* and *accept* whatever it says, even if it be against what one has been taught to believe as right or wrong, true or false, reasonable or unreasonable, rational or irrational. This may seem an impossible demand, as the very act of 'understanding' a text, or of 'interpreting' it implies that one has some implicit idea or ideas regarding what makes 'sense' or what is intelligible. And, if the condition of 'coherence' is accepted to make anything 'sensible' or 'intelligible', as the *sūtra* 1.1.4 of the *Brahma-sūtra* seems to require, then the question what exactly is meant by *samanvaya* of 'coherence' is bound to arise. *Samanvaya*, it should be remembered, can be attempted in more ways than one, and the *demand* for it already implies at least some submission to the requirements of both reason and sense experience. Besides these, the presuppositions of *samanvaya* or *ekavākyatā*, that is, total coherence in any sense, of the revealed text, creates a dilemma for any interpreter as to how far he can fulfil this obligation without being 'intellectually dishonest' to himself. The dilemma is writ large in the history of the exegesis of all texts which have been claimed to be revelatory. But this characteristic of the *śruti* in the Indian context has been radically different from the very beginning than the so-called revelatory texts in the other traditions.

First, what was to be really regarded as the *śruti* proper has never been very clear as what is to be included under the term 'Veda' has never been unambiguous. Second, there have been two major traditions of Vedic interpretation, those of Jaiminī and Bādarāyaṇa and thirdly even among the Bādarāyaṇa school, the great *ācāryas* and the *sampradāyas* founded by them have never agreed about the interpretation of Bādarāyaṇa's own text in the matter.

The situation thus, is deeper and more complicated than the earlier remark of Renou with which Halbfass opens his discussion, as the 'indifference' of the *yājñika* to the fact that his procedure of performing the Vedic *yajña* departs from what the authoritative texts say in the matter, a fact which Staal duly notes, is rooted in a tradition which treats the notion of '*śruti*' in a way which is unknown in religions deriving from the Judaic tradition. Staal, of course, is not troubled by the startling fact, while Halbfass just ignores the conflicting evidence or minimizes its import when he happens to notice it, as in the case of *Śitognih* or the 'cold fire'. But even if the *yājñika* had tried to make his performance of the ritual of the Vedic *yajña* in accordance with the so-called authoritative texts after finding from Staal that he was deviating or departing from the text, which text he would have relied on for his correction as, according to Yasuka Ikari and Harold F. Arnold 'the *Dvaidha sūtras* (22.1.12) record practices at variance with those described in the main *sūtra* text but authorized by different practitioners of the school, among whom the most frequently cited are Baudhāyana and Śāliki'. (*Agni*, Vol. II, p. 478). Now, this is extremely puzzling as the statement concerns the *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* which presumably was composed by Baudhāyana himself or, at least, belonged to the school founded by him or of which he was the most prominent member. But if it was so, and there seems no reason to doubt it, why should Baudhāyana himself authorize rules which are at variance with those which he framed himself?

The two other texts which are referred to as sources in Staal's book entitled *Agni*, the *Kauśītakī Brāhmaṇa* and the *Jaiminīya Śrauta Sūtra* do not discuss variations in performance of the Vedic *yajña*. But, interestingly, Asko Parpola, who has translated the relevant portion of the *Jaiminīya Śrauta Sūtra*, suggests that 'most of the *sūtra* portion of

the *JSS* is relevant to the understanding of the Kerala Agnicayana...’ (p. 701). And, though he has not explicitly stated why it is so, Parpola’s own presentation provides a sufficient ground for this. According to him, Bhavatrāta, who has written a commentary on the *Jaiminīya Śrauta Sūtra*, ‘was a Nambudiri brāhmaṇa who lived in Kerala’ and his father Mātradatta was spoken of highly by Daṇḍin, who lived around AD 700 (p. 700). If so, it is obvious why Kerala tradition of performing the *Agnicayan* should have been heavily influenced by the *Jaiminīya Śrauta-sūtra*, and not so much by others. This, however, raises the problem of regional traditions where each had its own authoritative *Śrauta-sūtra* and did not care if it differed even in important respects from what the other *Śrauta-sūtras* prescribed in the matter.

But, even if we leave aside the plurality of the *Śrauta-sūtras* and the existence even in them of the *Dvaidha-sūtras* along with the fact that because of historical reasons some *Śrauta-sūtras* acquired a prepondering authority in some regions and not others, the practicing *yājñika* could not have found much help from them at least on the basic issue as to what was to count as a *mantra*, for that was the issue of pivotal importance to him. The reason for this, according to Sāyaṇa, was that there is no single criterion or set of criteria for deciding what constitutes a *mantra* in the Vedic texts. According to him, ‘It is a good definition to say that whatever the sacrificing priest calls a *mantra* is such’.⁹ So the argument has turned full circle, and we are back from where we started. We had asked the *yājñika* to go to the *mīmāṃsakas* and the *Śrauta-sūtras* to learn his trade and perform the yajña properly, so that the desired fruit may be obtained. But the authorities on the text, or at least one of them, says in turn that they are the only ones who may decide in the matter.

So, was Prof. *Dwivedi* ultimately correct? Are the *mīmāṃsakas* and the *śrauta* texts basically like the musicologists and their musical texts which, though interesting in themselves, are of little relevance to the performing musician? Is the *Yajña-śāstra* then, like Bharata’s *Nāṭya Śāstra*, primarily a *prayoga-śāstra*? Isn’t *Sāmaveda* an integral part of the Vedic corpus and is it not concerned with ‘singing’ where it is ultimately a matter of ‘doing’ or ‘performing’ and not ‘knowing’? And, is it not a fact that in spite of all the emphasis on the preservation of

varṇāpūrvī and *svarānupūrvī*, the *Sāma* singer had not only to have *anrka Sama*, that is *Sama* ‘that had no *rk* base and was sung to meaningless syllables’,¹⁰ but also *stobha*, that is, ‘improvisation’ which goes against the whole spirit of preserving the Vedic text and the related ritual of *yajña* unchanged in any form whatsoever.

But perhaps the whole business of keeping the ‘*śruti* intact was only a façade which did not deceive anyone in the tradition, as they *knew* that what was ‘authoritative’ for them was *only* that which was accepted and done within the *śākhā*, *saṃpradāya*, *pradeśa* or region and *kula* or family. That was the *śruti* for them and if others followed other traditions, that was the *śruti* for them. No conflict was seen between the two and no discomfort felt at the situation as it seemed to have developed. Some, of course, did, and like Jaiminī, tried to straighten and regularize matters. But no practising *yājñika* seems to have taken the *mīmāṃsakas* seriously. And, as for Bādarāyaṇa, the various *ācāryas* who commented on the *Brahma-sūtra*, showed that his attempt to streamline the situation met with as little success as that of his other great counterpart, Jaiminī, in the mainstream of the Vedic tradition. Perhaps the ethos of the tradition was too much against any rigid, uni-model, unique interpretation of truth to permit any such attempts at the understanding of *śruti* to last for long. And, in fact, the *śruti* had proclaimed both in its *Samhitā* and Upaniṣadic portions that it not only permitted, but required multiple interpretations. *Śruti* was like the *Brahman*, formless and every interpretation was an imposition on it, an *adhyāsa* or an *upādhi*, a subjective projection of the interpreter who read into it what he generally thought to be most important and significant and meaningful in life and experience.

But while the concepts of *adhyāsa* and *upādhi* are negative, the *śruti*’s own view of that was positive and was really captured not by Jaiminī or Bādarāyaṇa, but by the author of the *Gītā* when he said—*ye yathā māṃprapadyante tāmstathaiva bhajāmyaham*¹¹ and—*patraṃ puṣpaṃ phalaṃ toyam ye me bhaktyā prayacchati*.¹² The Freedom that this reconstruction of *śruti* restored to it after all the attempts of the *varṇānupūrvī*, *svarānupūrvī* and *kriyānupūrvī* schools to put in as straight a jacket as possible, has not been noticed by most students of the subject. Śaṅkara’s attempt to reverse the trend and impose the

negative interpretation of plurality did not succeed as the other *ācāryas* from Yāmuna onwards successfully challenged it. As for Jaiminī's own attempt, the performing *yājñikas* had already taken over and they do not seem to have cared much for what the mīmāṃsaka theoreticians said in the matter.

Prof. Richard de Smet in an extremely ingenuous and subtle response to my earlier article on the subject,¹³ has suggested that while Jaiminī developed his doctrine of *apauruṣeyatva* in the context of the Buddhist and the Jaina criticisms of the Veda, the various *ācāryas* differed in their interpretation of the *Brahma-sūtras* because of the pre-theoretic 'interpretative' activities with respect to any text whatsoever. But he need not have gone to Gadamer for 'interpreting' the diversity in the interpretation of the *śrutis*, in the Indian context, the '*śruti*' itself is supposed to proclaim and demand its multiple interpretation and, so to say, sanctions it through its own authority. Also, the very notion of 'text' and 'authorship' have undergone a serious questioning since Gadamer wrote and to ascribe today the multiple interpretations of a text to the diverse 'prejudices' of its interpreters is to assume that the 'text' has a determinate, unambiguous, fully actualized-meaning of its own, an assumption which is highly questionable indeed.

As for the proposed genesis of the *apauruṣeyatva* hypothesis of Jaimini, there can be little doubt that it is highly interesting, though perhaps philosophically more relevant reasons may be found in Jaiminī's insight that an 'ought-sentence' cannot be legitimized or grounded either in perception or inference and that ultimately one has to postulate a 'foundational' authority for all 'ought sentences' from which they may derive their legitimacy, if infinite regress is to be avoided. Beyond these, Jaiminī may even be credited with the insight, though there is little to support it in the actual text, that the postulation of any human or divine authority for the legitimization of moral imperatives would compromise their 'unconditionality' as the 'lawgiver' will always be superior to the law he gives. In fact, the philosophical insights and the arguments embedded in Mīmāṃsā and the different schools of Vedānta have to be disentangled from the specific contentions in the interest of which they were presumably first

developed and which Prof. Smet has unjustifiably called pre-theoretical prejudices'. In fact, his own article makes a significant contribution in this direction.

The idea of *śruti* seems thus to be far more variegated and complex than the manner in which it has been understood in the light of the usual presentations of Mīmāṃsā and the Vedānta up till now. It is time that we look at the way the idea of *śruti* has developed over this long period of time and the diverse 'uses' to which it has been put by different thinkers for their own purposes.

Notes and References

1. Fritz Staal, *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983. (See especially Preface and General Introduction).
2. Jan Gonda, *Vedic Literature*, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1975. P.268.
3. *JICPR*, Vol. XI, No.1, p. 87. Italics author's.
4. Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*. State University of New York Press, 1991, pp. 131-204.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Bṛahdāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, III. 22.
8. It is interesting to find that Ānandagiri seems to be troubled by the question as to why Jabālā did not ask anybody else about the *gotra* of her son after his father's death, and suggests that it was due to *lajjā* or modesty on her part that she did not do so. The suggestion of course hardly makes sense unless one also assumes that there were no women members left on both sides of the family from whom modesty would not have prevented her to find the truth.

The twists and turns of later commentators on the issue are a fascinating example of how human ingenuity is used to hide from oneself and others the unpleasant truth if it is found in a supposedly sacred revealed

text. One extreme instance of this is when the guru's praise of the boy for speaking the truth in such a matter is taken to confirm the denial of the access of *śruti* on the part of the *śūdras*. Forgetting that if the guru's utterance in this context is taken in the way the learned commentator wants us to take, then the access to this *śruti* will have to be confined to *brahmins* and brahmins alone and denied to all the other *varṇas*, including the *kṣatriyas* and the *vaiśyas*.

Those interested in knowing these 'twists and turns' at first hand may see the original *Bhāṣya* on *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* by Śāṅkara along with the commentaries of Narendra Puri and Ānandagiri and notes by R. Subramannya Sastri, Varanasi, Mahesh Research Institute, 1982, pp. 140-41.

9. *Sāyaṇa's Preface to the R̥gveda Bhāṣya tr.*, Peter Peterson, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1974, p. 44.
10. Mukund Lath, 'Ancient Indian Music and the Concept of Man', *NCPA Quarterly Journal*, Vol. VII, No. 223, June-Sept, 1982, p. 5.
11. *Gita*, 4.11, Also see 7.21.
12. *Gita*, 9.26.
13. Richard de Smet, 'The Presuppositions of Jaimini and the Vedantins', *JICPR*, Vol. XI. No. 2.

❧ 10 ❧

Śyena yāga: The Achilles Heel of Śruti in Indian Tradition

Śyena yāga is one of the *yajñas*, mentioned in the vedic texts and it is supposed to be performed by one who desires to kill his enemy. The earliest reference to the *yajña* occurs, most probably, in the *Ṣaḍvimsā Brāhmaṇa* of the *Sāmaveda* where it is said that,

अथेष श्येनः ।
अभिचरन् यजेत ।
श्येनो वै वयसां क्षेपिष्ठः ।
यथा श्येन आददीतैवमेवैन्मेतेनादत्ते ।

There is also a reference in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* of *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* but there the term *Śyena* is said to refer not to the *yajña* which is also known by that name but to the sacrificial altar or *citi* which is built in the shape of the *Śyena* bird. Reference occurs,

'श्येनयितं चिन्वीत सुवर्गकामः श्येनो वै वयसां प्रतिष्ठः श्येन एव भूत्वा सुवर्गं लोकं पतति'

Later, it is mentioned in the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras* 1.4.5 which is

discussed in detail by Śabara in the *bhāṣya* of Sūtra 1.4.5.

The references, both in the *Ṣaḍvimsā brāhmaṇa* and the *Śabara bhāṣya* do not raise any question regarding the moral issues involved in the performance of such *yajña*, which ostensibly is undertaken to destroy one's enemy. The issues discussed relate to the question whether the term Śyena refers to the bird by that name or to the sacrifice described therein. Śāyaṇa's commentary on the relevant passage of the *Ṣaḍvimsā Brāhmaṇa* raises a number of *pūrva pakṣas* and concludes that the reference is to the Śyena sacrifice and not to anything else.

The ethical dimension of the question seems to have been raised later when the general question of animal sacrifices prescribed as a necessary part of the vedic ritual was raised as it was in conflict with the general injunction regarding the avoidance of violence or *himsā* which also is prescribed in the *Veda*. Most probably, it were the opponents of the vedic traditions who raised this issue. The defenders of the vedic tradition, particularly the ones concerned with the performance of those sacrifices which contained, as their necessary part, the ritual killing of animals, had to come to terms with this apparent contradiction at the heart of the vedic injunctions themselves. In fact, a moral conflict seems to be in evidence in the description of the ritual killing itself. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* has the following passage which mirrors this ambivalent feeling on the part of the sacrificer himself:

*paśurvai nīyamānaḥ sa mṛtyuṃ prāpasyat sa
devānānuakāmayataa itum, taṃ devā abruvannehi
svargaṃ vai tvā lokam gamiṣyāma iti, sa
tathetyabravītasya vai me yuṣmākamekaḥ
purastādaitviti tatheti tasyāgniḥ
purastādaitso 'gnimanupracyavat iti...anvenam
mātā manyatāmanu pitā 'nu bhrātā sagarbhyo 'nu sakhā
sayūthya iti janitraivenam
tatasamanumatamālabhante iti.*

(*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, 6th khaṇḍa of the 6th adhyāya; pp. 163-164, part, 1, of the Ānandāshrama edition.)

“As it was being led, the (sacrificial) animal saw ‘death’ around it. It did not want to go to the gods. The gods asked it to come to them (saying), ‘come we will lead you to heaven’. The animal agreed, saying, ‘let one of you walk before me’. Agni walked before it and it followed Agni....Let its mother (allow the animal to go); let its father and its brother, born of the same mother (allow him), let its friend, who is from the same herd, (allow him). It is to be taken with the permission of those related to it by birth.”

The theoretical discussion of the problem seems to have started later and the usual defence given by the Mīmāṃsā apologists was that as the ritual killing was itself prescribed in the *Veda*, it could not be considered as *himsā* proper. It was done for the sake of the performance of the *yajña* whose purpose was generally the attainment of *svarga* or heaven. This defence could, however, not be offered in the case of the *Śyena yāga* as its purpose was the killing of the enemy which undeniably was a case of *himsā* or violence in its extreme form. The dilemma posed by the *Śyena yāga*, therefore, was interactable as the *himsā* involved in it could not be defended in any way which did not conflict with the general vedic injunction concerning the unconditional avoidance of violence to any living being whatsoever. Yet, no orthodox believer in the *Veda* could deny that it was prescribed therein, like all the other vedic sacrifices many of which involve the killing of animals.

Thus, inevitably, the orthodox defenders of the vedic tradition became divided on the issue, some of them arguing that as it was prescribed in the *Veda* it was legitimate to perform it; the others, arguing that as its purpose was to commit violence in its extreme form involving the killing of human being, it could not be defended particularly as it was in direct conflict with the vedic injunction regarding the avoidance of violence.

In this context, an interesting distinction was drawn between the violence that was done for the correct performance of the Vedic *yajña* as prescribed in the text itself and violence as the end or purpose for which the *yajña* was performed. The distinction may be understood in terms of violence as means for the achievement of an end that is supposed to be intrinsically ‘good’ and violence as an end for which any means

may be used for its attainment. The distinction between 'ends' and 'means' on the one hand and 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' is well-known in discussions about morality. But if one accepts the notion of 'Śruti', the distinction can not, in principle, be drawn, for if one does so the very idea of Śruti will be undermined. If Śruti is regarded really as 'Śruti', then one will have to accept whatever is enjoined in it and no distinction can be drawn on the basis of the end which the prescribed *yajña* is supposed to achieve. It will be well to remember in this connection that all sacrificial injunctions in the vedic texts are in the form of hypothetical or conditional imperatives. They are always in the form that 'if one desires this, then one may perform this *yajña*.' The standard formulation is given in the context of heaven and reads as 'Svarga Kāmo yajeta'. One may put anything else in place of Svarga without affecting the standard formulation; what will be different is the sacrifice prescribed for attaining that end. There is, thus, no clear injunction as to whether one should desire the end sought for by means of the performance of the *yajña* prescribed for attaining it. The term 'Kāma' stands for desire in general and hence, the formula always says 'one who desires this, may perform such and such a sacrifice.' The Śyena yāga can not be treated as an exception and in case one does so, one questions the very notion of Śruti which is the basis of all the authority that is given to the vedic texts in the tradition.

It may be said that the injunction is in conflict with the unconditional injunction which prohibits violence or injury or *himsā* in any form whatsoever. But as far as Mīmāṃsā is concerned, it accepts contradiction in the vedic statements in case they are made in different context, even though it tries to mitigate the contradictions, as far as it can, in some way or other. But, even though it tries to do so, its basic premise is that in case the Śruti commands it, it has to be accepted, as otherwise it will cease to be Śruti in the strict sense of the term. A *mīmāṃsaka*, therefore, can not accept the distinction which is sought to be made between the Śyena sacrifice and other sacrifices, in case it is described in the text considered to belong to the vedic corpus.

The problem of violence is not confined to the śyena yāga alone, even though it seems to have been considered only in that context. Both the *Rājasūya* and the *Aśvamedha* sacrifices are also performed

for victory in battle which necessarily involves the killing of the enemy in large numbers. One may, of course, give the excuse that because a king is supposed to conquer other kingdoms as a part of his *dharma*, "the killing" involved in it will have to be regarded in the same way as it has been considered in the context of the killing of animals in other sacrifices. The point is that the *himsā* or violence involved in the end or purpose for which these *yajñas* are performed is itself a part of a larger end or purpose which is different in nature as it forms a constituent part of the *dharma* involved in being a "king". Also, if one remembers that a distinction has been made in the tradition between a *Sāttvika*, *Rājasika* and *Tāmasika* conqueror, then one will see that the ideal king is supposed to be one who engages least in violence in performing his role as a *vijigīṣu* which is forced on him by the very fact of being a king. But, then, it is only the *Sāttvika* king who would be justified in performing the *Rājasūya* or *Aśvamedha* sacrifices. Unfortunately, the Śruti is silent on this point and does not debar the *Rājasika* or the *Tāmasika* king from performing these sacrifices.

The issue of violence in the performance of the sacrifices enjoined in the *Vedas* raises a problem of a different kind. Much of the discussion that has occurred in the context of the killing involved in the vedic sacrifices has centered around the fact that such injunctions come in conflict with another injunctions in the same text which prohibits one from doing violence to everyone. But, if such an injunction had occurred in the *Veda*, would not the human conscience have raised the question regarding the justification of the violence that was involved in it? That something is said in a text which is regarded as the word of God or as foundationally authoritative for some reason or other does not preclude it from "questioning" by man, both in respect of its truth and value.

As far as the problem of 'truth' is concerned it has plagued the 'Śruti' texts in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. As they have accepted the authority of the "descriptive" sentences contained therein, while the similar texts in the Indian tradition have not had to face this difficulty as neither the Mīmāṃsā nor the Vedānta tradition have accepted the authority of sentences concerned with empirical matters of fact found in them. In fact, the Indian tradition seems to have even bypassed the whole realm of moral injunctions by consigning them to

a special class of text known as the *Dharma Sūtras* and the *Smṛti granthas*. The texts considered as ‘*Śruti*’ in the strict sense of the term, that is, the *Samhitās*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads*, are not supposed to say anything regarding legal and moral issues and are thought to deal with only transcendental matters which can not be known or understood by either perception or reason. The *Mīmāṃsā*, of course, equates ‘*dharma*’ with the performance of the *yajñas* prescribed in the Veda, but this is a strange meaning of ‘*dharma*’ as it is radically different from what is usually conveyed by that term in the text ostensibly concerned with it. Neither the *Dharma Sūtras*, nor the *Dharma Śāstras*, nor the *Smṛti* texts deal with the *yajñas* which are considered to be equivalent of ‘*dharma*’ in the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*. It is only the *Śrauta Sūtras* which deal with them and it is not clear what exactly is the relation between the *Śrauta Sūtras* and the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*. The *Śrauta Sūtras* themselves are sometimes supposed to form a part of the literature known collectively as the *Kalpa Sūtras*, comprising of the *Dharma Sūtras* and the *Gṛhya Sūtras*. This would mean that *dharma* in the Indian tradition comprises simultaneously all these three divisions within it, but this can not be said to be the understanding of *dharma* as propounded in the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*.

The exclusion of *dharma* in the sense in which it is used in the *Dharma Sūtras*, the *Gṛhya Sūtras* and the *Smṛti* texts is literally “shocking”, as the other great traditions deriving from the Vedic texts, that is, the *Brahma Sūtras* also does not seem to deal with it. Thus, the whole realm of empirical fact and the one relating to normative ideals governing personal, social and political life seem to be excluded from the purview of the texts known as the *Śruti* in the Indian tradition. What is left is only the sacrifices mentioned therein for ends that are both *dr̥ṣṭa* and *adr̥ṣṭa* and the statements about *Brahman* and those asserting the *Ātman*’s identity with it. The former are basically centered around the attainment of *Svarga* which may be regarded as *adr̥ṣṭa*, even though it ostensibly has all the elements of *dr̥ṣṭa* in it. As for the other *yajñas*, they all are concerned with the attainment of ends which are *dr̥ṣṭa* in the usual sense of the term. The great exception is the *Agnihotra* which has to be done by every person belonging to the first three *varṇas* who accepts and follows the *Vedas* completely.

(It is not clear whether the persons belonging to the *Kṣatriya* and the *Vaiśya varṇas* are also supposed to perform the daily *Agnihotra*). Yet, as the non-performance of the *Agnihotra* by the person concerned is supposed to result in adverse consequences (*pratyavāya*) for him, it too may be taken as being performed to ward off those evil consequences which will occur if it were not to be performed. There are some other sacrifices like the *satra* about which it is not clear whether they are performed for the sake of attaining any *dr̥ṣṭa* or *adr̥ṣṭa* results, as is the case with most sacrifices.

The overwhelming presence of the desire for the attainment of some sensible or supersensible results through the performance of vedic sacrifices has been as much an embarrassment to later thinkers as the *Śyena yāga* which is ostensibly performed for the killing of one’s enemy. It has been suggested that the real *yajña* is not performed for the attainment of any fruit whatsoever, not to talk of an end such as the killing of an enemy. The idea of *niṣkāma karma* hangs heavily on the whole discussion of the vedic *yajña* amongst modern thinkers and few can accept the killing of animals as a ritual requirement of many of the sacrifices. The followers of *Ārya samāja* have vehemently rejected the usual interpretation of the texts which enjoin the ritual killing of animals. And, even many of those who do not believe in the interpretation given by the *Ārya samājists*, refuse to accept the killing of animals as a necessary part of traditional sacrifices when they actually perform them. Not only this, even when the actual performance of the *yajña* departs from the *Vidhi* prescribed in the *Śrauta Sūtras*, the *yājñika* performing the sacrifice does not seem to be disturbed by this discrepancy. In the sacrifice filmed and described in detail by Prof. Fritz Stall in his book “*Agni*”, no animals were sacrificed and even when the discrepancy between the text and the actual performance was pointed out, it did not result in any attempt at changing the actual procedure of the *yajña*. In his own words, “when the Nambudiri ritualists are told that, according to classical texts, certain rites used to be performed differently in the past, they said, ‘interesting’. Not for a moment would they consider changing their own ritual practice in the light of such information. They perform the ritual as they have learnt from their preceptors. It is *their* tradition.”

The freeing of the idea and the practice of *yajña* from the way it was propounded in the *Śrauta* and the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras* seems to have started from the earliest times. The Jaiminīya *Brāhmaṇa Upaniṣada* tells the story of Yajñavalkya, who when repeatedly pressed by Janaka to answer as to how a sacrifice should be performed when there is nothing to sacrifice, replies, “if there is nothing to sacrifice one should offer the *āhuti* of ‘*satya*’ or truth in the fire of *śraddhā* or faith”. The statement has multiple meanings at many levels and has a profundity not easy to comprehend. The sacrifice of truth does not seem to make sense but what Yajñavalkya seems to be saying is that ultimately all the knowledge that one has along with all the “certainty” which one entertains regarding it has to be given up for the simple truth of faith in the real that alone exists. “Truth” can never comprehend reality and hence has always have to have an element of “untruth” in it.

But, in the present context what is more interesting is to find that Yajñavalkya is prepared to concede that a sacrifice can be performed even without all the *vidhis* prescribed in the texts for it. Not only this, he seems to give up the essentials of the vedic sacrifice which consists of the *mantra*, the *devatā* and the *dravya tyāga* in the sacrificial fire. The standard formula or the *dravya tyāga* is “*Agnaye idam, na mamā*”. It may be said that the essence of *tyāga* is preserved in the giving up of the truth or “*satya*” but, by no stretch of imagination, “truth” can be considered a *dravya* and, in any case, there can be no ‘*svatva*’ regarding it as it is one thing that is truly universal and belongs to everyone who has the capacity to grasp it. There is, of course, such a thing as the imparting of knowledge and the term *Vidyā-dāna* is used in respect of it but, firstly, there is no real giving up of knowledge when one “gives” it to another and, secondly, the giving in this case is only to human being and not gods and, strangely, increases or enhances it.

The inner conflict in the tradition regarding the vedic sacrifice is, however, not found in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, though there are some suggestions of it. Yajñavalkya, it should be remembered, is not rejecting or opposing the performance of the vedic *yajña*. He is *only* suggesting an alternative to it when it can not be performed because of the conditions stipulated by Janaka. The *Gītā*, on the other hand, expressly rejects the vedic sacrifice in its famous verses 2.42-46, but it also

extends the notion of *yajña* and ‘frees’ it from its vedic context. Not only this it applies the Sāṃkhyan distinction of *sāttvika*, *rājasika* and *tāmasika* to the *yajñas* performed by man and gives the detailed characteristics in chapter 17.11-13. Strangely, however, it mentions *yajñas* performed according to ‘*vidhi*’ prescribed as one of the characteristics of the *Sāttvika yajña*. This, in essence returns back to the orthodox *mīmāṃsā śrauta* concept of *yajña* except that it excludes the characteristic of being “*sakāma*” from it. The exact term used is ‘*aphalākāṃkṣī*’. Most of the vedic *yajñas*, it may be remembered, are “*sakāma*” in character and hence would not qualify for being ‘*sāttvika*’ on this criterion. Not only this, if Arjun’s question, asked in 17:1, is taken seriously, then this can not be considered as an answer to it, for it expressly asks whether those who perform the *yajñas* in deliberate contravention of the rules prescribed for it, may be regarded as *sāttvika*, *rājasika* or *tāmasika* in case they do so with *Śraddhā*. The exact wording of the question is

“ये शास्त्रविधिमुत्सृज्य यजन्ते अद्रव्यान्विताः
तेषां निष्ठा तु का कृष्ण सत्त्वमाहो रजस्तमः ॥”

The *sakāma* character of the vedic *yajña* has created difficulties for many who accept the authority of the *Veda* in the Indian tradition. This perhaps was due to the influence of the *śramaṇa* tradition which actively renounced the worldly desires and the ends for which most men strive in their life and which they try to achieve by all means, including the performance of the vedic sacrifices. Add to this, the violence that was an inevitable part of many of the *yajñas* prescribed in the tradition and one can understand why it became increasingly difficult for the orthodox followers of the vedic tradition to approve of them as they not only violated the increasing sense of unity with all living beings and compassion for them inculcated by the *śramaṇa* traditions, but also conflicted with vedic injunction against violence itself. The *Śyena yāga* was even more difficult to accept, even though it was prescribed in the *Śruti*, as it was performed for the expressed purpose of killing an enemy.

The debate around it, thus, is a part of a large debate about the *yajña* portion of the *Śruti* itself and except for the very orthodox

followers of the *mīmāṃsā-śrauta* tradition, the others seem to have opted for the *aupaniṣdika* stream of the vedic tradition which either bypassed the whole *yajña* centered portion of the earlier vedic texts altogether or gave it symbolic interpretation in terms of something inner and subtler where desire itself was to be sacrificed at the altar of that which was the reality of everything including oneself.

The idea of *Śrutī* is compromised in either way and infact, is negated in a more fundamental sense than one can imagine. *Śrutī*, after all, is something that can not be tampered with and if one is allowed to question it to the slightest extent then it ceases to be *Śrutī* in the strict sense of the term. And, if one is allowed to choose which part of the *Śrutī* one will accept or believe in then the *Śrutī* remains “*Śrutī*” only in name. The Indian tradition has, luckily on unluckily, function in both ways. It has allowed the two contradictory streams to develop from the vedic source, the *mīmāṃsaka* and the *upanīṣadika* and permitted a choice between them. And, even within these streams it has allowed choices to be made. The diverse interpretations of the *Brahma Sūtra* are evidence of it and so also is the controversy about the *Śyena* sacrifice mentioned above. Further more, if one remembers, that neither of the two traditions admits the validity of any statements referring to empirical matters of fact as authoritative, one would realize that the term *Śrutī* is used in the Indian tradition in a Pickrickian manner. It means nothing. It is a term devoid of any meaning, even though it is used with all the aura of authority that usually surround such words. It is a myth, like the myth of the *puruṣārthas* or the *prasthānatrayī* or the *mokṣa*-centric character of Indian philosophy which we have tried to point out elsewhere. Myths die hard, but once they are exposed and “known” as myths, they begin to lose hold on our minds and gradually fade away into ‘nothingness’ which was their real “reality”.



Is the Doctrine of *Arthavāda* Compatible with the Idea of *Śrutī*?

Traditions, it seems, cannot live without the notion of a ‘Final’ authoritative text which gives *all* the truth, that is, or can be and which provides answers to all questions that can possibly be asked. And yet, they cannot *accept* everything that is said in the *Śrutī* as true. For the simple reason that it goes *against* what is ‘known’ to be true on the basis of a large body of experience shared by human beings everywhere. Also, there is an apparent incompatibility between many of the statements in the text, and hence reason can not accept incompatibility in what is claimed to be true. Thus, both perceptual experience and rational requirement stand in the way of the acceptance of the so-called authoritative foundational, final, complete and infallible text as ‘really’ such and force the believer in them to adopt all sort of strategies to ‘save’ the text from obvious obscurities and inconsistencies, so that somehow the ‘claims’ may still be sustained in the face of incontrovertial evidence against them. The doctrine known as *arthavāda* was one of such strategies adopted in the Indian tradition. The term is primarily

associated with what has come to be known as the Mīmāṃsā school of philosophy in India, but there is no necessity for this. The term may be applied to any attempt which tries to save the ‘truth’ of that which is regarded, by definition, as incapable of having any ‘untruth’ in it and yet which probably appears to be full of it.

Arthavāda, in fact, may be of many kinds even though Mīmāṃsā thinkers have addressed themselves to certain types only. The Vedāntins have their own *arthavāda*, though they do not talk of it in that way. In fact, if the idea of *Śruti* is generalised to mere any text that is treated as ‘authoritative’ by any tradition, then each such tradition would also have its own doctrine of *arthavāda* as they are two sides of the same coin, the one necessitate the other. Thus, one would not only have traditions of *arthavāda* say, the *Quran* or the *Bible* which may be legitimately regarded as *Śruti* in the accepted sense of the term, but also the writings of such thinkers as Marx which have been treated virtually in the same way by those who believe in them.

But if the writings of Marx are accepted, even provisionally, as *Śruti*, then the way is opened for an investigation into the realm of what may be called the “secular *Śruti*” and the diverse traditions of *arthavāda* that have been developed by their votaries in the context of their interpretation.

The notion of a ‘secular *Śruti*’ may appear as a contradiction-in-terms to many who are habitual to see the idea. *Only* in the context of some infallible authority, whether divine or superhuman even human beings who had attained perfection such as the Mahāvīra and the Buddha.

Ultimately, it is the attitude of the believers which determines what is to be regarded as *Śruti*, and not the source from which it is supposed to emerge. After all, even the authority of God has not been able to convince the believers in the rival traditions of revelations as the Judeous, Christian, Islamic world or those that have occurred in the Indian tradition.

There is, thus, no basic difference between the non-secular *Śrutis* and the secular *Śrutis* except perhaps in the fact that the latter have generally not had the comprehensiveness and the coercion of the former,

at least till recent times. Marxism may seem to be an exception to that, as it has not only a complete theory of history and the persecution of the heretics, but also the coercive power of the state to enforce all this. But Marx left the comprehensive blue print of this revelatory text to the future when the pseudo-history of man would have ended and ‘real’ history begun.

Marx, however, stands only midway between the two extreme poles of ‘*śruti*’ which may be called the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’ as he is too closely associated with the coercive power of the state and the ‘prophetic’ mode of thinking which is so common with those streams of the ‘*śruti*’ that derive from the Hebruc tradition. The ‘secular’ version becomes more apparent in the attitude displayed by those who call themselves ‘Wittgensteiniens’, ‘Kantians’, ‘Hegelians’ or the many other varieties of them, as there is no question here either of using of coercive power of the state to persecute or convert those who do not agree with the way one understands the ‘master’. Yet, though the ‘prophetic-persecutory’ complex is absent, there is the same acrimonious debate amongst the ‘disciples’ about the real meaning of what the master said. But this can only occur if the so-called ‘master’ is regarded as ‘superhuman’, that is, someone not afflicted with the conditions which are the fate of every normal human being. In other words, he is not regarded as a human being who is inevitably subject to fallibility and incompleteness in *all* that he says, or does or feels. Not only this, it is to take what he has written too seriously in the sense that every word, or even comma(,) that has been used has to be examined microscopically to get the hidden ‘real’ meaning which is there in the text and which, if discovered, will be found to be not only “true” but full of such profound insight into both the human situation and the reality in which it is embedded or which encompasses it so completely that the truth about the one inevitably involves or implies the ‘truth’ about the other. But, it is obvious that such an “insight” can hardly be the same not only across different “texts” by different authors but even among the different texts by the same author.

The problem of the “identity” of both the “texts” and the “author” is puzzling indeed, even though little attention has been paid to it in the *recent* secret discussion on the subject. The problem, of course, is

compounded by the fact that those who try so assiduously to “discern” or “discover” the real meaning of the so-called texts seldom agree among themselves, whether they consider themselves as ‘disciples’ or ‘opponents’ of the ‘master’ who propounded the texts and proclaimed the ‘truth’ through it.

The problem basically arises not because of something inherent in the specific situation, particularly as both the problem of “unity” and the unitariness of understanding is present in other context also, but because of the attitude that one brings to the understanding of the texts as they are treated not as something uttered or written by a human being with all his frailties, inconsistencies, incompletenesses and unclearities which are the essential lot of every man or woman in this world. Every one knows this in his or her own case but somehow refuses to believe this in the case of those whom one regards as a master. It is, thus, the attitude which creates the *Śruti* as once the attitude changes and the so-called *Śruti* regarded as human creation it no more carries an aura of infallibility about it. It is seen, for, what it is, something full of inconsistencies, incoherences, contradictions, vain claims to truth which can easily be controverted by reference to counter-evidence and fallacies inherent in the arguments given in support of it. It is not that one does not see the positive achievements and admire the insights or wonder at the skill displayed in the construction of the ‘Houses of Reason’ that the masters built. One can not read a Plato or a Kant or any other great thinker without these feelings at every step, but once one sees all texts as human creations the attitude remains the same, appreciative and critical at the same time. One is prepared to learn and learns all the time, but one is also dissatisfied at every page and turn of the argument. One sees through the little tricks, that the ‘master’ has played, and, though one excuses them, one is not taken in by them.

The same thing happens to the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, the *Gīta* or *Quran*, the *Bible*, the Torah or any of the other innumerable texts revered as revelation by the devotees or the disciples who can not bear to treat or think them otherwise. It is true that the attitude to these is in-built almost from the moment of one’s birth, as one is always born into a family and a community which treats them as such and thus, one can hardly even think of treating them otherwise. In

addition, in the case of some of them there are severe punishments, including death, if one expresses any doubt about their being the repository of all truth that ever was, or is, or shall be. But most members of such communities are aware, however dimly, that there are persons belonging to other communities who do not regard those sacred text in the same way. And, they obviously do not see these “sacred texts” of other communities in the same manner as the members of those community do. Paradoxically, each sees the ‘holes’ in the other’s claim but somehow fails to see them in one’s own.

The situation thus created would have been comic except for the fact that the devotees and the disciples of each supposedly sacred text feel it their sacred duty to fight those who believe in their own ‘sacred’ text and even eliminate them from the face of the earth, if they can. The history of religious wars is well known but the history of extra-religious wars has been as bloody and full of passionate hatred and vengeance as the former. Who does not know of the perennial conflict between the *Śīyā* and Sunni or the other various sects in the Islam. As for Christianity, the conflict between the Catholic and the Protestant is well known, though the far deeper conflict between western and eastern or “Greek” Christianity is seldom talked about. The persecution of the heretics has been there since the birth of the Christianity itself, but no one seems to see that the concept of heresy and the persecution of those who are guilty of it is “in-built” in the very notion of “orthodoxy”, as the latter can not be understood without the former.

The problems of “orthodoxy” and “heresy”, however, arise not because there is anything in the so-called sacred texts to necessitate it, though they may certainly facilitate or obstruct depending upon the tone and content of what they say in them, it is the interpretation of the text by human beings which leads to the difference and as everyone knows, the problems of “interpretation” can not be settled by all the strategies developed by the discipline of hermeneutics as they derive not so much from the texts but from the interests and attitude of the interpreter. This becomes clearer when we consider the history of interpretation of texts which will be considered as “secular” by everybody as, ostensibly they have nothing to do with what has been called “religion” up till now. There is as much dispute about what a

Hegel or a Kant or a Wittgenstein really meant and in spite of the labours of so many scholars, little seems to have been settled. The example of Wittgenstein's "disciples" fighting among themselves regarding what the 'master' really meant reminds one of the differences between, say, Padmapāda and Sureśwara who were also immediate disciples of Śaṅkara. It may be remembered in this connection that Śaṅkara's Bhāṣya on the *Brahma Sūtras* is itself not a *Śruti*, even though the Advaitins generally treat it in the same way as they do the *Brahma Sūtras* which paradoxically is also not a *Śruti* according to the tradition. In fact, even the *Gīta* has not been accorded the status of *Śruti*, even though such a claim has been made for it. Only the *Upaniṣads*, and amongst those which are known by that name only some of them, are accorded that status. Yet, both the *Brahma Sūtra* and the *Gīta* are accorded, by common consent, an authority, at least among the Vedāntins, the same status as the *Upaniṣads*. But surprisingly, even the works of the foundational masters of the different "Schools" of Vedānta enjoy the same status from their followers for the simple reason that they treat them with the same attitude as do the followers of disciples anywhere else. The name of the 'master' or the 'text' does not matter, for the disciples or the follower it contents the final truth, even though there is always a dispute even amongst them regarding what this final truth is.

The dispute about the interpretation is perennial and in case some of the disciples get into positions of power, they do not hesitate to eliminate those who espouse or support a different interpretation by fair means or foul. The story of the 'right' and the 'left' deviation in Marxism is well known. So also is the fate of those who espouse them during the times when Stalin was in power. Luckily, in most other cases of "secular" *śruti* the situation has not been as desperate and bloody as in the case of Marxism but even in the case of the so-called sacred *śrutis* the story has not always been the same as the one usually associated with the Judaic, Christian, Islamic traditions. Both the Vedic and the Āgmic traditions of India tell a different story. It is not that there has been no conflict or abuse or denunciation of the one party by the other and at times even violent conflict between them. But there is no evidence of sustained persecution and large scale killings of one

by the other as is so well documented in the history of Judaic religion. In fact, the Nazi and the Soviet persecutions were not something new in the long history of the west in this regard. The Chinese are perhaps another examples where the conflict among confucianism and Taoism and Buddhism never took that violent turn which is so evident in the history of Christianity or Islam in the West. These different examples suggest that systematic and violent persecution of the "other" especially those who were regarded as heretics is not endemic to either so called 'sacred' or 'secular' *śrutis* as has been generally considered up till now. It can occur in the case of both, especially if what is regarded as *Śruti* itself demands such an elimination of those who refuse to be "converted" or oppose or differ from what it proclaims as the final truth in the matter. This becomes easier if, those who believe in such a kind of "*Śruti*", whether it be sacred or secular, also exercise political power through which they can coerce and kill other. On the other hand if the *Śruti* itself allows a pluralism than it is difficult for its believer to persecute those who differ, for the simple reason that the *Śruti* itself permits a difference of opinion in regard to what is to be ultimately considered as true or real.

But, whatever, be the character of the texts regarded as *Śruti* and whether it be 'secular' or 'sacred', it always creates a problem for those who regard it as such. This is inevitable as the text is bound to consist not only of inner inconsistencies, but also of statements which are false or improbable in the perspective of the empirical knowledge that we have about the world. The problem of the 'truth' of empirical statements always haunts the text which is regarded as *Śruti*, as empirical knowledge continuously enlarges, involves and modifies itself due to the collective experience of mankind. This advancing knowledge disturbs the truth of the empirical statements in the texts known as *Śruti* continuously and challenges the believer to "save" their truth in face of the mounting evidence against them. The account of creation has given in the sacred texts of the Judaic-Christian-Islamic traditions, is a case in point, as the increasing evidence for the theory of evolution poses a serious challenge to it. There are other innumerable instances where the "believers" in the sacred texts had to resort to diverse subterfuges and transparent unsuccessful devices to 'save' the

truthfulness of the sacred text. But these attempts only satisfy the believers, for they would go to any length to save their belief from the least little bit of doubt in it. It is well known, at least among Psychologists that human beings can not tolerate for long what Festinger has called "Cognitive Dissonance". They have to come to terms with it in some way or other. But in purely cognitive context the situation is met with the other ways which do not involve such transparently deceptive manouvers as are adopted by the "believers" in a context which they persist regarding as purely cognitive. In other context, such as those of the natural sciences, one either gives up the theory or modifies it or questions the correctness of the counter evidence and ask the observation or the experiment to be repeated.

The usual strategy adopted in the case of the texts which are regarded as *Śruti* by the believers to treat those portions of the text which seem to be "obviously" false in case of increasingly accumulating counter-evidence is to argue that the seemingly "false" portions of these texts should be interpreted not in a literal but a metaphorical manner. This is the use of language which primarily occurs in poetic and literary contexts where the question of "truth" is not raised in the same manner as is done in purely cognitive context and in case someone does it, it's total irrelevance is immediately seen by everybody. The recourse to non-literal interpretation of ostensibly declarative statements which are clearly empirical in nature opens the door to a plurality of interpretations amongst which it is impossible to decide which was the "real" meaning of the text concerned. This, as everybody knows, is a virtue in the poetic creations of man where the multiplicity of meanings adds to the richness and profundity of what is being conveyed by the text concerned. This, however, is generally treated as a defect in context where thought is supposed to be engaged in a purely cognitive enterprise. One may argue that the 'poetic' component of the texts regarded as *Śruti* gives them a richness and profundity which they would otherwise lack. But the dilemma remains, for if the text is treated in this manner than many of the questions which are both vital and inevitable in the context of cognitive claims of truth cannot be raised in respect of it. One enters the realm of feeling and imagination which undoubtedly has a validity of its own, but where questions of

'truth' and 'falsity' become either totally irrelevant or assume a meaning which is radically different from the one usually associated with them. Once the door is open to a metaphorical interpretation of the text which is supposed to be "truer" then the so-called literal interpretation which is contemptuously dismissed as trivial, there can be no limit to what the text "really" means as it all depends on the insight, ingenuity and profundity of the interpreter concerned.

This is the realm where *arthavāda* takes over and the text begins to be divided in what is to be taken as really authoritative and what is merely rhetorical in nature. All metaphorical interpretations are not, and need not be rhetorical. But, the rhetorical element generally derives its strength from the metaphorical use of language.

The classical Indian interpretation of the vedic text introduce the notion of *arthavāda* to get around the difficulty of having to deal with the "truth" of empirical statements in it which could be so easily questioned. The *mīmāṃsā* thinkers therefore, adopted the strategy of treating all declarative statements in the *Śruti* as being primarily there in order to facilitate the acceptance of the injunctive statements mentioned therein. Thus, only the *Vidhiniṣedha Vākyas* were to be regarded as genuine portions of the *Śruti* all the rest being treated as ancillary to it. This, of course, raise another problem for them as many of the injunctive statements in what they regarded *Śruti*, were of the form "one who wants this, ought to perform this *yajña*". Standard formulation of which was "*Svargakāmo yajet*". But as many of these injunctive statements were for the achievement of empirical ends, such as rain or begetting a son, the effectivity of those injunction could easily be checked by seeing whether they really occurred or one really get a son. The usual way to get around the difficulty was to suggest that the relevant *yajña* was not performed in proper manner. On the other hand, in the case of the achievements of such non-empirical ends as the achievement of *Svarga* they developed the notion of *apūrva* and *adrṣṭa* to suggest that an invisible chain of consequences occurred because of the performance of *yajña* to ensure that the desired result occurred after death. In a sense, the notions of *apūrva* and *adrṣṭa* even in the case of those sacrifices which were performed for the achievement of empirical ends, as there was always a time-interval between the

performance of the sacrifice and the attainment of the desired result. In any case, this bold attempt on the part of the *mīmāṃsā* thinkers to save the 'truth' of the *Śruti* resulted not only in the verb-centric theory of language but also in the most ingenious and subtle attempt to treat the whole informative discourse, including the names of gods, kings and persons and events associated with them, as essentially having no independent meaning of its own but as deriving its whole meaningfulness from its relationship with the injunctive statements which command to do something or another. Prabhākara's is perhaps the most ingenious attempt in this regard, though sufficient attention has not been paid to it, as far as I know.

The doctrine of the *Arthavāda* takes a different turn with the *Vedāntins* who treated the *Upaniṣadika* part of the *Veda* as *Śruti* proper and treated all the sentences, except those which referred to *Brahman*, as having the character of *arthavāda* for them, the injunctive statements found in the *Veda* certainly had a validity but only in the realm of *Vyavahāra* and not in the realm of *paramārtha*. In this regard they differed radically from the *mīmāṃsakas* who considered them alone to be the authoritative part of the *Veda*. Surprisingly, however, they agreed with the *mīmāṃsakas* in not according any authority to the descriptive- declarative-informative sentences relating to the empirical world. *Śaṅkara*'s well known statement in this regard that 'even if a hundred *Śrutis* were to declare that fire is cold no one would believe it', has generally been laid down or ignored all together. So, the so-called *Śruti* in the Indian tradition has only been regarded as 'authoritative' either for the injunctive statements that are contained therein or for statements concerning *Brahman*, but *never* in respect of any statement concerning matters of fact which may be found there. Ultimately it is only that which is unknowable by sensory experience and reason, which is regarded as the proper subject matter of *Śruti*. The rest is all basically irrelevant as no question of truth can, or ought, to be raised regarding it.

The '*arthavāda*', thus, is the necessary accomplement of *Śruti*, as once a text, whether secular or sacred, is regarded as '*Śruti*', the believers have to come to terms with the 'ostensibly' and 'provably' false statements in it. For a text to be regarded as *Śruti*, it has to be

considered both infallible and complete, a requirement which no human creation can ever fulfill. What is to be regarded as *arthavāda* may, however, vary depending upon what is considered authoritative by the believers concerned, or those among them who are given the power to take a final decision in this matter. Thus, what is regarded as "*arthavāda*" may be different even in respect of the same text giving rise to different sects of '*Sampradāyas*', schools of interpretations, each accuses the other of misinterpreting the text or doing injustice to it. This, it may be noted, is generally not the case with the literary text where differences in interpretation are supposed to add to the richness of the texts and the multidimensionality of meanings content in it. This is an important difference between the literary texts and the "texts regarded as *Śruti*" because the latter are supposed to be cognitive in nature and hence are believed to entertain a "truth-claim" in the ordinary sense of the word.

A comparative study of what has been regarded as "*arthavāda*" in the texts regarded as "*Śruti*", whether secular or sacred, in different cultures and civilizations has not been made. But in case such a comparative study is undertaken, it is bound to yield rich results and may even enlighten us regarding the dominant strategies which different cultures and civilization have adopted in this regard.

The term "*arthavāda*" is, perhaps, not very adequate to convey what exactly is intended in this context. The terms "*arthābhāsa*" or "*arthādhyāsa*" or "*arthāropa*" may perhaps be more adequate as they at least indicate that the acceptance of the usual meaning associated with the words or the sentences is mistaken. Such a situation occurs regularly in poetic contexts where it is called *Vyañjanā* or even *Dhvani*. But the notion of *Lakṣaṇa*, *Vyañjanā* and *Dhvani* have not been used in the context of thought, though there is no reason why they are, with suitable modifications, should not be extended to this domain also. In fact, the whole paraphernalia of *Alaṅkāra*, *Dhvani* and *Rasa* may be transposed to the realms of thought, an enterprise that has not even been attempted up till now. Some post-modernist thinkers have done something of this sort, but mostly "unconsciously" as they do not seem to show an awareness of the distinction between the texts which are regarded as "*Śruti*" and those which are not regarded as such. The

difference, as we have said earlier, emanates from the attitude which one entertains in respect of a text resulting in regarding it not as a work of mortal human being with all its weaknesses, but of someone who can say nothing wrong and has said all that can ever be said on anything whatsoever.

❧ 12 ❧

The Myth of the *Prasthāna Trayī*

The view that the roots of the Indian philosophical tradition lie in the *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahma Sūtras* and the *Gītā* is so widely accepted that it is taken to be almost axiomatically true by scholars and laymen alike. These are the primal sources from which the stream of Indian philosophy is supposed to have flown for millennia, and if we want to know the essence, we should seek their original texts and decipher the truth contained in them in order to understand the spirit of Indian philosophy. A recent book, for example, Somraj Gupta's *The Word Speaks to the Faustian Man* (1991), mentions these as '*prasthānatrayī*' on the very title page. Yet, he does not ask himself even the simple question as to what that philosophical stream is for which these three texts provide the starting point or the *prasthāna* as they call it in the tradition.

Even the blindest student of the subject knows that neither Buddhism nor Jainism ever accepted the authoritative nature of any of the texts of the Vedic tradition. Do the protagonists who regard the

prasthāna trayī as being the foundational source of the stream of philosophising in India wish to deny the 'Indian' character of the two philosophical traditions? In case they do, let them say so openly and not hide behind the facade of a falsity that masquerades as axiomatic truth. And even if we accept the preposterous claim that the Buddhist and Jaina traditions of philosophizing do not form an integral part of the philosophical traditions of India, would the other schools conform to the definition which has been set up by some to determine what constitutes a genuine Indian philosophical tradition?

The moment we ask this question, we are faced with the incredible fact that except for Vedānta, none of the other schools of Indian philosophy measure up to this criterion even in a *prima facie* manner. Who would say that Nyāya or Vaiśeṣika or Sāṃkhya or Mīmāṃsā derive from these three texts in any meaningful manner? Mīmāṃsā, as everyone knows, does not accept the *Upaniṣads* and has never been concerned with them in its long history of over two millennia from the time its foundational *sūtra* text was written. As for the *Gītā*, no one in his wildest imagination would even dream of thinking that Mīmāṃsā has ever had anything to do with it.

Nyāya, which even at the *sūtra* stage tried to uphold the authority of the *Vedas*, explicitly rejects the notion that all reality is one, a view which one may plausibly ascribe to the *Upaniṣads*. In fact, even the defence of the *Vedas* by Gautama in the *Nyāya Sūtras* is extremely ambiguous as he equates it with the authority that one accords to the *Āyurveda*. As for the criticism of the Upaniṣadika view, it is explicit in the *Sūtras*.

It is true that Udayana in his *Ātmatattva Viveka*, specially in its concluding portion, shows a strong inclination towards the extreme Advaitic interpretation of the Upaniṣadika position as developed in the *Brahma Sūtras*, the *Gaudapāda Kārikā*, and Śaṅkara's commentaries on the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahma Sūtras*. But the honeymoon, if it ever happened there, was short-lived, as the long debate on Śaṅkara Misra's *Bheda Ratnama* showed. The reality of difference became the central bone of contention between the *Advaitins* and the non-Advaitins even though it is not clear how the Naiyāyika will accommodate

this reality in his conception of *mokṣa*, or the state of liberation.

As for the *Brahma Sūtras* and the *Gītā*, no Naiyāyika seems to have paid much attention to them, except the great Vācaspati Miśra I, whose case is unique as he not only wrote authoritatively on Nyāya, but also on Vedānta and Sāṃkhya giving us new directions for their interpretation. He is perhaps the first person to exemplify the trend in the Indian philosophical tradition of thinkers who write on a number of different philosophical schools and contribute to their development. Yet, though this has been the case with many a thinker, no one has cared to see the inter-relationship between their different works or evaluate the arguments that they have given in support of each of them. Many of these arguments must have been opposed to one another as they were in support of radically different positions. In any case, no Naiyāyika, except Vācaspati Miśra I, has ever written, even individually, on the *Brahma Sūtra*, or the *Gītā* or the *Upaniṣads* or accepted their authority in any sense of the term.

As for Vaiśeṣika, it is well known that it does not accept the authority of *śabda prāmāṇya* and hence cannot be suspected of recognizing any of the texts in the Vedic or non-Vedic tradition as authoritative. The *prasthāna trayī*, therefore, is totally irrelevant to it, as it has been for Sāṃkhya which is supposed to have an independent origin and has continued to lead an autonomous life of its own. The philosophical system known as Yoga in the Indian tradition has generally been regarded as allied to Sāṃkhya as far as the epistemological and metaphysical aspects were concerned, and while its methodology of spiritual praxis may have something to do with the various *upāsanaṅs* mentioned in the *Upaniṣads*, it is basically independent and pursues a line of *sādhana* which is different from the one prescribed either in the *Upaniṣads* or the *Gītā*. It should be remembered in this connection that the *upāsanaṅs* prescribed in the former are rejected by Śaṅkara in the sense that, according to him, they do not lead to *mokṣa*, and that the paths prescribed in the *Gītā* are very different from those that are prescribed in the *Upaniṣads*. Thus none of the five major non-śramaṇika traditions in Indian philosophy have anything to do with the so-called '*prasthāna trayī*' texts which

have been loudly proclaimed to be the source of all philosophies in India.

The same is true of all the *āgamika* traditions of India. We have already mentioned Buddhism and Jainism. The non-śramaṇika *āgamika* traditions such as the Pāśupata, the Pañcarātra, the Śaiva Siddhānta, the Vīra Śaiva and the Kaśmīra Śaivism or the Pratyabhijñā have the same attitude with respect to the *prasthāna trayī* texts as do the non-Vedāntika traditions which, at least nominally, began to accept the authority of the *Vedas* at some period in their long history. Some of the *āgamika* schools, such as Vīra Śaivism, are openly hostile and reject the Vedic tradition of which the *prasthāna trayī* texts are supposed to be an integral part. Others have independent texts of their own which they regard as authoritative.

It is true that sometimes some important person in these traditions has written on one of the *prasthāna trayī* texts. The most well-known example is that of Abhinava Gupta who wrote on the *Gītā*. But, as is obvious in his case, they do not regard the text they write upon as authoritative in the same sense as those which belong to their own tradition.

In fact, the question of the independent authority of non-śramaṇika *āgamika* texts was raised by Yāmunācārya, the first non-Advaitika Vedāntika ācārya in his *Āgama Prāmāṇya* in the eleventh century, a clear indication that even those who wanted to ally themselves with the Vedic tradition were not satisfied with its claim to being the *sole* authority on the tradition, *excluding* all other sources which were highly regarded in the tradition. Śaṅkara's inclusion of the *Gītā* amongst the basic texts was already an evidence of this, though it has never been seen as such. In fact, the attempt by some well-meaning persons to include it amongst the *Upaniṣads* had been rejected by the tradition and it enjoyed only the stature of a *smṛti* and never a *śruti* in the Indian tradition. Thus, even though it was regarded as the word of God by many people, it was never given the status accorded to those texts which were regarded as 'Vedic' in the tradition.

Yāmunācārya, it seems, wanted to widen this notion of the basic authoritative texts of the tradition even though, for some strange

reason, the *Gītā* has never, as far as I know, been recognized as an *āgama* in the Indian tradition. The other great non-Advaitic *ācāryas* continued what Yāmuna had begun, but adopted a strategy which was different. On the one hand, they accepted the authority of all or at least some of the texts included in the *prasthāna trayī* but interpreted them in a way that was radically different from the one given by Śaṅkara. On the other hand, they included texts other than the ones regarded as belonging to the *prasthāna trayī* group and treated them as *equally* authoritative. This was specially the case with the *Śrīmadbhāgavat* which, in fact, became the main text for them and the interpretations of both the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahma Sūtras* had to accord with it.

Yāmunācārya had commented on the *Gītā*, but had left the *Brahma Sūtras* and the *Upaniṣads* aside. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, faced the challenge directly and wrote the famous commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras* treating Śaṅkara's interpretation as a *pūrvapakṣa*. Thus began the long debate between the *Advaitins* and the non-*Advaitins* regarding the interpretation of the *prasthāna trayī* texts; but none of the non-*Advaitika ācāryas* confined themselves to these texts alone, or commented on all of them, all the time.

Rāmānuja did not write any independent commentary on the *Upaniṣads* as Śaṅkara had done, even though, like him, he wrote on the *Gītā*. In fact, except for Madhva, none of the non-*Advaitika ācāryas* wrote separately on the *Upaniṣads* as perhaps they thought that a successful non-*Advaitika* interpretation of the *Brahma Sūtras* was sufficient, as the latter was supposed to contain the essence of the former.

All of them, of course, wrote on the *Brahma Sūtras* and some of them also on the *Gītā*. But there were *ācāryas* like Nimbarka who wrote only on the *Brahma Sūtras* and left the *Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads* alone. But what is even more interesting is the inclusion of the *Śrīmadbhāgavat* as an independent text, first by Madhva and then by Vallabha and still later, by the followers of Caitanya who gave up the whole *prasthāna trayī* tradition altogether. Madhva according to B.N.K. Sharma, the well-known authority on Dvaita Vedānta, had written a work entitled the *Bhāgavattātparya Nirṇaya* on which two

vyākhyās were written by Yadupati (AD 1630) and Śrīnivāsa Tīrtha (AD 1640), respectively, the manuscripts of which are available at Udipi and Mysore.

Vallabha, of course, wrote both on the *Brahma Sūtras* and the *Gītā*, but he laid an even greater emphasis on the *Śrīmadbhāgavat*. Caitanya did not write anything, but his disciples, Rupa Goswami and Jiva Goswami, gave up even the practice of writing on the *Brahma Sūtras* and concentrated only on the *Śrīmadbhāgavat*.

Thus the only text which may possibly claim to be a '*prasthāna*' text for the pre-Caitanya Vedāntic tradition of philosophy in India is the *Brahma Sūtras* and not the *Upaniṣad* and the *Gītā* along with it, as is generally claimed. But this will be true only of the pre-Caitanya Vedāntic tradition and not for any of the other schools of Indian philosophy, whether Vedic or non-Vedic. The *āgamika* traditions of India have never accepted them, nor have those non-Vedāntika schools which have, mistakenly, been ascribed to the Vedic tradition. There has been nothing like one '*prasthāna*' in the Indian tradition, as has been evident time and again in its long history. Even such a late thinker as Swāmī Nārāyaṇa, the founder of the sect by that name sometime in the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century in Gujarat, for example, accepted the *Vedas* and the *Brahma Sūtras* as authoritative texts but also added to them, texts such as the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* which no one had even thought of as an authoritative basic text before. In fact, his list is quite perplexing as it includes, besides *Viduranīti*, *Vasudeva Mahātmya* and the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*.

The inclusion of *Vasudeva Mahātmya* is strange, but stranger still is the inclusion of *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* and *Vidura Nīti* by him. Does it indicate that spiritual leaders at this time were becoming aware of the importance of legal and political-cum-social texts for guidance in the changing situation that was developing all around? Further, there is the added question as to why Swāmī Nārāyaṇa chose the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* instead of the *Manusmṛti* which one would expect he would do. Perhaps the former served his purpose better. In that case, the differences between these two basic texts of the Dharma Śāstra tradition in India will have to be explored in this light.

A more radical departure seems to have occurred in the writings and practice of Nārāyaṇa Guru who came from Kerala and lived during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. Not only did he not write on the *Brahma Sūtras* or the *Gītā* but he built temples without any idol in them. This was in that true Advaitika tradition which ultimately believes only in the formless and the nameless one. It is also reminiscent of Dayānanda Sarasvatī who also completely gave up the worship of images, as a result of his return to the origins and acceptance of the *Vedas* as the only authoritative source for the tradition.

The idea that there was some sort of '*prasthāna*' for all of the diverse philosophical traditions of India is not found in the ancient texts. Perhaps, the idea arose sometime in the seventeenth century when Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, the well-known Advaita thinker, wrote his *Prasthāna Bheda*. But those who have derived inspiration from the title have not carefully read the contents of this work as its main contention is that the differences in the various philosophical traditions of India derived from the differences in their *prasthāna bheda*, which is their starting point. This would imply that the uniqueness of Vedānta lies in its starting point, or in the basic texts which it treats as authoritative, and not in the compelling nature of the arguments which are given in support of its position. This, to a certain extent, parallels the Jain position that it is the *dr̥ṣṭi bheda* which accounts for the differences between the different traditions of philosophy in the country. But how far such a contention accords with Madhusūdana's position in *Advaita Siddhi*, is difficult to say. *Prima facie*, there seems to be an apparent contradiction, as the latter work is justly famous for its arguments against Vyāsātīrtha II given in his *Nyāyāmṛta*.

Whatever is the origin of the idea that the *prasthāna trayī* texts have been the source of all philosophical traditions in India, is a myth and should be recognized as such. It is sustained neither by evidence nor argument. It is *not* true even of those schools which are generally considered as '*Vedāntic*' in the tradition. Only the *Brahma Sūtras* may be said to provide the basis for this claim to a great extent, but neither Yāmuna nor the post-Vallabha masters wrote on it. And, many of them *openly* advocated the authority of other texts not included in the

prasthāna trayī texts. It is time that the myth be buried and forgotten by all those who are more in favour of intellectual honesty than of their own private prejudices and predilections, or the particular school of philosophy they may happen to love or espouse in the Indian tradition.

ॐ 13 ॐ

Is “*Tattvam asi*” The Same Type of Identity Statement as “The Morning Star is the Evening Star”?

“*Tattvam asi*” is the well-known statement from one of the oldest *Upaniṣads* which has been the subject of interminable controversy of the Indian philosophical tradition where the question is raised as to how exactly it is to be understood or interpreted. It has at least two thousand years of history behind the diverse attempts at determining what it means. The statement, “the morning star is the evening star”, on the other hand, does not have such a long history behind it as it was first formulated by Frege in the nineteenth century to bring to the attention of the philosophical world in the West a distinction which has since become famous and has led to a great deal of philosophical discussion. There has been, as far as I know, no controversy regarding its interpretation, or any discussion concerning what exactly it means. Yet, both the statements share a common problematic as they point to two seemingly different entities which are regarded as totally different from each other and yet which are really identical in a fundamental sense that is not known to those who see them as different. In fact,

normally the question of denying their difference does not arise as the difference is rooted in a foundational experience which normally does not permit the raising of any doubt about it.

The assertion of identity, therefore, derives from a more powerful, deeper and fundamental source negating the certitude of the experience on which the assertion of difference was earlier based. But what can be the possible grounds for preferring the asserted identity over the earlier assertion of the difference which was also based on seemingly substantive grounds? Why should the assertion of identity overrule the assertion of difference, or be regarded as now fundamental and truer is the essential question in both the contexts.

There are two different questions involved in any consideration of these two statements deriving from two very different traditions of philosophizing in the two major traditions of the world. The first relates to the problem as to what an identity statement exactly means. The second relates to the question as to why the identity statements even if true, be regarded as more fundamental or “truer” than the statement asserting the difference between the two. And though the discussion until now, both in the Indian and the Western tradition, has been confined to the assertion of an identity statement in respect to entities which were earlier considered to be different, there is no need to do so, as there is, at the same time, the problem of coming to know that two things which were considered to be identical are really different, thereby annulling the identity which was asserted earlier. The objection may be raised that the very statement that the two entities were regarded as identical points to the fact that there was some difference between the two, as otherwise they would not have been regarded as “two”. However, the objection assumes that a “true” identity statement cannot in principle be made about any entities which are even numerically different. This would, of course, imply that no difference whatsoever could ever be permitted in the context of the assertion of a “real” identity. But then even the assertion of identity in the case of such statement as “*Tattvam asi*” or “the morning star is the evening star”, will be deceptive as there will be some difference between the two arising from the fact that they were considered to be different. In fact, the difference between

the “morning star” and the “evening star” does not disappear when it comes to be known that both the expressions refer to an identical objects, that is, the planet “Venus”. The distinction between “sense and reference” is itself based on this difference, as it is held that while the senses of the two expressions are different, their referent is the same. However, even when the identity of the referent is known, the difference in the senses does not disappear.

Traditionally in order to avoid this difficulty, it was usually held that proper names have no connotation and that they derive their meaning only from the object that they name. On the other hand, it was held that common nouns have only connotation but no denotation, and that was supposed to be the reason for the view that the existence of what they connoted was still to be established as one did not know whether the properties connoted by those words actually applied or belonged to some entity. But such a view, though widely prevalent, goes counter to the fact that most proper names have a “meaning” attached to them which one can easily read off from the name itself. One can, for example, easily tell whether the name belongs to a Hindu or a Muslim or a Christian and not only this, but also whether one is a German, Russian, Chinese or Japanese. One may, of course, be sometimes mistaken in this, but then one can always be mistaken about anything. The point is that one can, in most cases, tell correctly the properties which belong to the person whose name it is supposed to be. Moreover, as the same name belongs to many different persons and sometimes even to pet animals, to consider such proper names as purely denotative seems obviously mistaken. It is perhaps only in an ideal language that each existent object in the world will have its own name which would be applied to no one else and which would designate no other properties which would belong to the person or object whose “name” it is. The numerical identification of objects tries to do just this as in such a language the object is given to no one else. But even in such a language after one has become acquainted with the object to which the number has been assigned, one begins to associate the number itself with the peculiar specification of the object to which the number was assigned. From that point onwards, the numerical designation

ceases to be purely denotative as is known to everyone who has tried to give numbers to individuals and called them by that name.

In fact, the problem of identity arises in the context of proper names also. The same child who is known by his or her pet name has also a formal name at school and other children in the school know him or her by that name. In such a situation, if a friend comes home for a visit and hears the child called by her pet name, he would normally think that it was someone else who was being addressed. So it becomes a learning experience to find that her friend whom she called "Siddhant" at school is known as "Tin Tin" at home. Thus, for her, "Tin Tin" is "Siddhant" would be as much a piece of information as "the morning star is the evening star" was for Frege or "Tattvam asi" was for "Śvetaketu". In fact, the same situation would obtain if in place of two proper names which apply to the same object, we would have a definite description for one of the proper names, say for example, that "Siddhant" is the one who stood first in his class or who had obtained the highest score in the cricket match which his school team had played against another school. The definite description can be made as precise as one wants so that it may apply only to the object which bears that name.

A definite description functions as uniquely denotative, even though it connotes specific properties, for it connotes them in such a way that they apply only to one individual in the world. But it is not necessary that an object may have only one definite description, which applies to it alone. In fact it may have more than one definite description which uniquely designates it, and then there can be a significant identity statement asserting that the object designated by one definite description is the same as the one designated by the other definite description. The statement "the morning star is the evening star" may thus be constructed as a statement of identity between two definite descriptions which were not known to apply to the same object earlier.

The theory of proper names and definite descriptions has gone through a complicated discussion, but the niceties and the subtleties introduced by it are irrelevant to the point that we are making in the context of the analysis and understanding of what an identity statement involves and means. In the statement "the morning star is the evening

star", both the "morning star" and the "evening star" are objects of perception, the only difference between them being that one is observed in the morning while the other is observed in the evening. The identical object to which these two expressions refer is supposed to be the planet "Venus". The identity asserted, therefore, can only be on some other ground which would most probably be theoretical one as even if we admit that the planet Venus is observable through other means, the identity of the perceptual object with the one that is perceived as the morning star and the evening star will most probably be on theoretical considerations.

In the Upaniṣadika statement, on the other hand, the "Brahman" which is one term in the identity statement cannot normally be taken to be an object of perception or introspective experience, while the "ātman" which is the other term in the identity statement may be regarded as the object of introspective experience. In case this is accepted, one term of the identity statement deriving from the *Upaniṣads* would have to be held to be theoretical in nature. While the other term is considered to refer to something that is experienced. However, it may also be held that the self, which is introspectively known can never be regarded as the *ātman* for the *ātman* is that which can never be the object of experience, whether introspective or perceptual. This, of course, has been the usual contention at least among the *Advaitins*; however, in case this is accepted, the *ātman* would also have to be treated as a theoretical postulate introduced to understand the unity of experience underlying the changing mental states which alone are the objects of introspective experience. The theoretical necessity of postulating the unity of the world or all that is "object" in the concept of Brahman, is matched by the theoretical necessity of postulating the *ātman* to account for the unity of all that is experienced by the self. The identity statement, according to this interpretation, asserts the identity between two theoretically postulated entities for understanding experience in its objective and subjective aspects, and thus will be radically different from the statement of identity between the morning star and the evening star.

In the second statement, the two entities whose identity is being

asserted are already objects of perceptual experience and hence after the realization that the two objects which were seen at different times are really the same, nothing further need be done except the annulment of the mistaken notion that they were different. As against this, the identity statement concerning the *ātman* and the *Brahman* results in the demand for the experiential realization of that identity, for the two are still experienced as different. In fact, the two are not experienced at all as they are the result of a theoretical insight, and hence demand experiential realization of the identity between them. Neither the *ātman* nor the *Brahman* are directly experienced, and hence require a special spiritual praxis for their existential realization in experience. There has, therefore, to be a two-fold *sādhana*, one for the actual realization in one’s experience of the *ātman* and the other for the realization of the *Brahman*. There seems, however, to be a radical difference between the two as the *ātman* refers to the unity of the self which in some sense is already included in all experience. But while the *ātman* has the unity which is a part of all experience, that which is experienced as object is obviously not experienced in the same way. The difference would become clearer if instead of the *ātman* and the *brahman*, we talk of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. The *Puruṣa* as the witness consciousness is an essential element of all conscious experience, and though in the Sāṃkhyan framework it cannot be regarded as the unity underlying all experience or as even unifying it in any sense whatsoever, it still is present in all experience. *Prakṛti* on the other hand, is only the postulated unity of all that is “object”, including not only mental and physical processes but also the functioning of intellect and reason, along with even the sense of egoity or “I-ness”. But it is never directly experienced as the witness-consciousness is.

In the Sāṃkhyan framework what is attempted to be realised is only the *Puruṣa* as bereft of all identification with the “object” in any sense whatsoever, and not the *prakṛti*. The Sāṃkhyan paradigm thus starts with the assertion that the experienced identity of the self with the “object” at any level is mistaken for the two are radically different from each other. Here, we start with an experienced identity which on theoretical grounds is supposed to be mistaken and hence what is

asserted as the difference between that which is experienced as identity. The self naturally identifies itself with “I-ness”, reason and other mental processes. It also identifies itself with the body and its various organs, particularly in the processes of knowing, feeling and willing. I open my eyes and see; I feel pain and say that I am in pain; I will to lift my hand and I do so. Thus the act of identification is existential and experiences all the time. It is only some theoretical considerations which lead one to the conclusion that such an identification is mistaken and that “I” cannot be the one who knows, feels, wills or reasons. The demand in this case then, is to realize that one is not what one usually considers oneself to be and, therefore, one has to successively de-identify oneself from all that is “object” to one’s consciousness, that is the body, the mind, the intellect, the sense of “I-ness”, or anything else which may appear as object to one’s consciousness and with which one identifies almost naturally.

The theoretical considerations which lead one to the realization of oneself as “*Puruṣa*” should therefore be different from the theoretical considerations which lead one to postulate oneself as “*ātman*” and attempt to realize or actualize it in one’s lived experience, if one is to maintain a distinction between the “*Puruṣa*” of Sāṃkhya and the “*ātman*” of Vedānta. But somehow the *Vedāntins*, including the *Advaitins*, have failed to make this distinction, even though they have interpreted the Upaniṣadika statements such as “*Tattvam asi*”, “*ahaṃ brahmāsmi*”, “*Sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahman*” differently. Not only this as we had pointed out long ago in an article entitled “*adhyāsa—a non—Advaitika* beginning in Śaṅkara Vedānta”, Śaṅkara himself starts his well-known “*Bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtras* with a *Śaṅkara adhyāsa* and not with an *Advaitika adhyāsa* as one would have expected him to do. The difference between the two emanates from what one considers to be mistaken, the difference or the identity. In Sāṃkhya, as everyone knows, the fundamental mistake consists of *identifying* the self with anything else. While in Advaita Vedānta, it consists of thinking oneself to be *different* from anything else. The fundamental assertion, therefore, in the former is of radical difference where, because of ignorance, identity is experienced. In the latter, on the other hand, what is asserted is identity where, because

of ignorance, one experiences distinction and difference. In both cases, however, the mistake is actually experienced and when, on theoretical grounds, it is realized that the mistake is a real mistake, the demand is for such a transformation of experience that the mistake is existentially annulled and that which was considered to be real on theoretical grounds is actually experienced existentially in place of what was experienced earlier. Thus, neither in Sāṃkhya nor in Advaita Vedānta is the mere theoretical realization of what is regarded as true sufficient, as from their perspective the theoretical apprehension of reality is never sufficient in itself since it only provides a ground to actually strive for an existential realization in one's experience. There is little point in knowing that the way one experiences reality in one's consciousness is fundamentally mistaken without trying to change that way of experiencing so that one begins to live a life in which one's consciousness undergoes such a transformation that one experiences reality in a different way. The usual correlation of theoretically argued philosophical positions in Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedānta with techniques of spiritual praxis are supposed to result in this transformation of what was theoretically grasped into an actual lived experience that can be made intelligible in some way.

The paradigmatic example of a mistaken apprehension given in the tradition confirms this, for the snake which was seen and which aroused fear in one completely disappears when one realizes that it was not a snake but a rope. In the rope/snake example, which is usually given by the *Advaitins* in this connection, when the snake appears, the rope is completely absent and when one realizes that one was mistaken, what appears is only the rope and not the snake. But though the example is usually given and entails the complete disappearance of the snake after one has realized that it was really a rope, the question is raised as to what happens to the multiple differentiated reality of the world after one has realized that the *ātman* is not different from anything else. The problem of *jīvana-mukti* or the achievement of complete liberation even while one is alive raises this problem in a tangential way.

The *Advaitin* starts from the postulate of the unity of everything and the Sāṃkhya starts from the fact that anything which is an object

to consciousness cannot have consciousness as its property. This appears, paradoxically, to share the same view of "*adhyāśā*", which is regarded as the foundational mistake in both the systems. It is, of course, true that the *Advaitin* also asserts the primacy of consciousness especially in its witness aspect and focusses attention upon the fact that it alone remains constant while all that appears to it as object is variable. It does not emphasize the identification aspect of the consciousness with that which appears as "object" to it. It seems to be more interested in the constancy and invariability of consciousness vis-a-vis all that appears to it; but it gives no ground for holding that what is inconstant or variable is unreal. Not only this, it does not appear to make a distinction between the variability within an object and the variation that arises from the succession of one object by another in consciousness. In fact, it does not even distinguish between the change and variation in objects of consciousness which are due to consciousness itself and those which are due to changes in the objects of consciousness themselves. Normally it ascribes change in consciousness either to objects or to *saṃskāras* left by past experience, or even by *anādi vāsanā* for which no explanation is given.

The close affinity between the Sāṃkhya and the Advaitic analysis arises perhaps from the fact that the *advaitin* has not taken seriously his own insight deriving from the Upaniṣadic statement "*Sarvaṃ khalvidam̐ Brahman*" has concentrated more on such statements as "*Tattvam̐ asi*" or "*Ahaṃ brahmāsmi*", which dominates Advaitic thinking, and not that of the *brahman*. Had it done so, the *advaitin* would have tried to discover how he reached the concept of *brahman* in the first place. If our attention shifts from the *ātman* to the *brahman*, then we would see that it arises from our search for the unity underlying the multiplicity of the world and as we ourselves are a part of the world, it, that is, the *brahman*, would also be one's innermost reality, just as it is of everything else. But then one need not postulate *ātman* as a distinct element is one's thought. It is the *ātman*-centric thought of the *Advaitins* that has created all the problems which could have easily been avoided if they had taken the *brahman*-centric thought of the Upaniṣadika tradition more seriously. But then the identity statement

would have been that the *Brahman* which underlies the multiplicity of the world and provides it with both unity and reality does the same for me and hence the reality in me is identical with it.

The *Advaitin*, on the other hand, seems to have started with the *ātman* as the underlying reality of all our conscious experience providing the both unity and reality, and as this cannot be something unconscious, it gives it the essential quality of consciousness or even considers it as identical with consciousness. There seems, however, no necessity for attributing consciousness to the reality that provides unity to the whole world as the *Jaḍa Prakṛti*, or inanimate matter, can also be considered to provide it adequately as the Sāṃkhya thought. But the Sāṃkhya had to postulate a separate principle for understanding consciousness, unlike the thoroughgoing materialists such as the Cārvakas who regarded consciousness as one of the emergent properties of matter. Ultimately, then the dispute between the materialistic identification of everything with matter or energy and the spiritualist's identification of everything with the *ātman* or the *brahman* consists in the fact that the latter is supposed to be intrinsically, inalienably and substantively conscious. But then the problem arises as to how to understand the inert matter that surrounds us everywhere; if it is essentially unconscious, it cannot be derived from a principle the essential reality of which consists of being conscious. Śri Aurobindo is perhaps the only thinker who has taken this problem seriously and argued that the denials of both the spiritualists and the materialists are one-sided as matter could not be so "material" if it could give rise to consciousness. However, he has not argued that the spirit could not be so "spiritual" if there was such a thing as matter in the world. Instead of taking this line which was implicit in his own argument, he has tried to explain matter in terms of the realization of one of the possibilities, inherent in consciousness itself, that is, of forgetfulness of seemingly putting everything aside and for the moment losing oneself almost completely in the given content of itself. Matter, therefore, for him is a seeming forgetfulness of consciousness where the latter appears to be completely concealed behind the mask of unconsciousness.

The worlds between matter and self-conscious mind shave not

been the subject of much attention in either Sāṃkhya or Advaitika thought. But there is the large world of life as in the plants or of consciousness in the animal world which also demands unity and reality of its own. Similarly, there is also the problem of the reality of these worlds to the world of matter and to the world of human beings who create cultures and civilizations and live primarily in a world consisting of symbols and meanings devised by themselves. The theory of evolution tries to realise these worlds, but fails to account for the radical discontinuities between them. Śri Aurobindo, on the other hand, has taken into account the principle of life independently of the world of mind but does not seem to have paid attention to the radical distinction between the world of plants and the world of animals nor does he discuss the distinctive autonomy of these realms and the significance of each in terms of its own reality.

However, the problem of an identification statement with respect to each of these realms and to all the realms together poses the same problem, that is, whether the identity asserted denies the differences within the realm or between the realms and if it does so, what does this denial actually mean. The assertion of the identity, however, always entails the fact that the asserted identity is more fundamental and "real" than the apparent difference which seems to be "real" in the first place, but on reflection, is not found to be so. The status of the "apparent" difference may, however, be a matter of dispute, as some may regard it to be only secondary in character, while others may consider it to be totally illusory or delusory or even the result of a delusion which is rooted in the psychology of the perceiver. The psychological foundations of the delusion may beside to lie not in the mind of the individual person but rather in what constitutes the psyche of humanity as a whole, thus giving the delusion the character of a shared, "objective" appearance which is common to all human beings. The difference between the illusion of which we talked about earlier and this delusion lies in the fact that while the former illusion is normally a result of the structure of the physical senses that all human beings have, the delusion occurs because of the common psychic propensities which all human beings possess just because they are human. Also, just as there can be

a difference between a psychic delusion belonging to one single individual or a group of individuals and those that belong to all human kind as such, the illusions may also be the result of the specific physical structure of an individual human being or group of human beings and those which result from the fact that one shares the common biological structure with all human beings by virtue of the fact that they are human beings. The appearance, then, may result from many different causes, but its essential character lies in the fact that it is shown to be "unreal" by critical reflection which uncovers the ground of the "appearance" and reveals why that which "appears" to be so ought not to be regarded as real. But, as we have already pointed out, the "appearance" may not only be of differences, but also of identity, as the critical reflection has no special bias towards either identity or difference. In either case, one is presented with the problem as to how one is to conceive of that which the critical reflection has shown to be mistaken, and what exactly happens to this mistake when it is realized to be a "mistake". The problem relates to the issue as to whether after the mistake is realized as a "mistake", it disappears or continues to persist in one's consciousness even though it is realized to be a mistake. In the former case, the realization dissolves the experience of what was taken to be a mistake, while in the latter case, the correction operates only at a theoretical level and has only a marginal influence on the "appearing" illusion or delusion, as the case may be.

Besides this important difference, there is another which does not seem to have been noticed until now, particularly in the context of the distinction between the Sāṃkhya and the Advaitika examples of what constitutes the foundational ignorance of which we are required to get rid of. In the Advaitika perspective, as we had noted earlier, it is the experience of difference which is regarded as illusory, while in the Sāṃkhya analysis it is the identity which is regarded as the basic mistake. But what is this "identity" which is regarded as the foundational mistake in the Sāṃkhyan perspective? The identity, obviously, if it is to be meaningful, has to be between things which are different in some sense. When, for example, one regards oneself as "identical" with the body or the mind, or the *buddhi*, or the sense of

"I-ness", or egoity, one is identifying oneself with something which one also regards as different in some way or other. The realization that the identity is in some sense mistaken is merely to become aware that the underlying difference which was being presupposed by the experience of identity is more fundamentally real than one had taken it to be. The de-identification achieved through the Sāṃkhyan process of realization does not, or ought not to, result in the non-awareness of that from which one realizes oneself to be utterly and absolutely different. Is it possibly the same in the Advaitin realization which may be regarded as the opposite pole of the Sāṃkhyan realization? In other words, does the Advaitika analysis imply that the appearance of "difference" somehow presupposes or implies an identity between those that are experienced to be different, and that the difference merely consists in the awareness that the "identity" which was presupposed was more fundamental and real than the difference which one had accepted to be the primary reality?

This of course, is not the Advaitika position as it is usually presented, though if the ideal of *jīvana-mukti* or liberation within life is accepted, then it would follow that it is only the interpretation that we have given above which will be in accord with the ideal. In fact even the usual interpretation of Sāṃkhya is done in such a way that in the state of complete de-identification or *kaivalya* one is not supposed to be aware of anything at all. But as we have argued elsewhere, if this were to be accepted as the true Sāṃkhyan position, then there would remain nothing to distinguish it from the Advaitika position as it is usually understood. On the other hand, if the ideal of *jīvana-mukti* is accepted for Sāṃkhya also, as is usually done for Advaita Vedānta, then the only difference between them would consist in the fact that while for the former the experience of the difference of the self from everything else will be a primary fact of self-consciousness; in the case of the latter, it will be the experience of identity and not the difference.

However, in the cases of both Sāṃkhya and Vedānta, the problem of identity and difference is primarily related to the experiencing consciousness and not to the objects of which the consciousness is aware. The Fregean example of the "the morning star is the evening

star" relates to two objects of consciousness which are really identical but are supposed to be different. One will, therefore, have to distinguish between those problems of identity which arise in respect to objects of consciousness and others which arise from the relation of the experiencing consciousness to any object whatsoever. Nevertheless, as the objects themselves may be of a different order, the problem with regard to them may also occur at different levels. The identity, for example, of five plus three and four plus four or six plus two is an identity of a different kind than the one between "the morning star" and "the evening star". Similarly, the identity between two theories in science which were earlier supposed to be different is a matter of a very different order as here the assertion of identity only means that whatever can be derived from one can also be derived from the other and what cannot be derived from the one cannot also be derived from the other. The basic difference in all such cases where the identity asserted belongs to two different objects of consciousness, whether at the perceptual or the non-perceptual level, is that one generally ignores the ontological status of the illusory apprehension and the problem of what happens to it when the illusion gets corrected. On the other hand, as consciousness itself can become an "object" in introspective apprehension or self-consciousness, the problem of an illusory apprehension of identity or difference with respect to it begins to have "existential" consciousness for self-consciousness. This, to a certain extent, occurs also in all those cases where the primary reference is not to physical objects but to psychic states themselves or to meanings which are apprehended or feelings and emotions as generally happen in cases of aesthetic apprehensions.

The problem of the assertion of identity in the context of an illusory difference that was previously apprehended as real, has to be differentiated depending upon the types of objects between which identity is being asserted. Not only this, one has also to distinguish the levels at which the identity is being asserted; unless this is done, one will have the mistaken impression that the problem of the assertion of an alleged "real" identity in the face of an apprehended difference would be seen as of only one type. This would necessarily lead to

avoidable controversies regarding what an alleged statement of "real" identity means, as has been the case until now. The western discussion on the subject has generally been confined to statements asserting identity between statements which primarily belong to a cognitive discourse, and where the "referents" are usually clearly identifiable physical objects. This seems to be the basic ground of the distinction between "sense" and "reference" which Frege indicated in his well-known paper on the subject. The Indian discussion, on the other hand, appears to have confined itself primarily to epistemological issues at the psychological or experiential level, little caring about the identity issue in respect to physical objects which Frege points out in his famous example. The issue then, has been discussed in the two traditions in limited contexts and it is time that it is widened to cover not only these two diverse traditions of philosophizing but that it should go beyond them.

14

Can the Analysis of Adhyāsa ever Lead to an Advaitic Conclusion?

That something is taken as something else cannot be a sign of ‘unreality’ of either, and yet this has been the ground of the rejection of the reality of the ‘non-self’ by *Advaitins* since Śaṅkara wrote his famous *bhāṣya* on the *Brahma Sūtra* and described the identification of the self with the non-self as the foundational *adhyāsa* on which all other erroneous cognitions are based. But the so-called *adhyāsa*, if it is one, proves only that the ‘non-self’, should not be taken as self, and not that the non-self is ‘unreal’. In fact, if the non-self were really unreal the *adhyāsa* could not have arisen. The usual example of “seeing” the rope as snake is given to illustrate such an erroneous identification. But the example, if reflected upon seriously proves just the opposite. Both the snake and the rope are ‘real’. It is *only* the cognition of the ‘rope as snake’ which is erroneous and needs to be corrected. In fact the rope could not, in principle, have been seen as snake, if there were no snakes in the world. But, if the ‘reality’ of snake is a pre-condition of the ‘seeing’ the rope as snake, then the

example usually given proves just the opposite of what the *advaitins* want to prove.

Śaṅkara, of course, has not given the example of “seeing” rope as snake at least in the beginning of his discussion on *adhyāsa* in his *bhāṣya* on the *Brahma-Sūtra*. Instead, he gives two examples: one, referring to the ‘seeing’ of “*Śukti*” as “*Raja*” and the other as ‘seeing’ two moons instead of one. The two examples are, however, so radically different that if one is taken as the paradigmatic example of *adhyāsa*, the other can not be so understood. The first example, that is ‘seeing’ “*Śukti*” as “*Raja*” is similar to that of ‘seeing the rope as snake, since both “*Śukti*” and “*Raja*” are present there in the world and are known independently of each other. On the other hand, ‘seeing’ two moons instead of one usually takes place if one presses the eye-lid and no one is lead to “believe” that there are two moons even when one ‘perceives’ them to be so. This, perhaps, is due to the reason that one ‘knows’ that the ‘seeing’ of two moons is the result of something that has been done by oneself, or even by someone else if the other has pressed one’s eye-lid, and that one can easily see the moon as one if the finger is removed from the eye-lid. Here, there is no *adhyāsa* as not only one is not ‘identifying’ the one moon with the two moons but also “knows” that the two moons that one ‘sees’ are not “really” two, but that the one moon itself is ‘appearing’ as two because of a particular pressure one has put on one’s eye-lid. In fact, one not only ‘knows’ that there are not only not two moons in the sky, but also that one can ‘see’ two moons whenever one likes by just pressing one’s eye-lid again. One can play the game as many a time as one likes and it is only because one is not ‘deceived’ that no appropriate action relating to the erroneous cognition ever occurs. In fact, there is no erroneous cognition at all, and no “erroneous identification” to deserve a name of *adhyāsa* as Śaṅkara seems to have thought.

One may, of course, apply the term *adhyāsa* to both the examples, as Śaṅkara seems to have done. But, then one would how to accept that there can be radically different kinds of *adhyāsa* and not just one as most of the *Advaitins* seem to have thought up till now. But, in case there can be more than one kind of *adhyāsa*, one would have to explore the different types of erroneous cognitions and identifications that take place and delineate the deep, typical differences between them.

Unfortunately, as far as I know, no one seems to have attempted to do this up till now.

Perhaps it may be said that the advaitins' contention relates to the cognitive enterprise as whole and contends that no cognition in the ordinary sense is possible without the identification of the 'self' with the 'non-self' at some level. The 'identification with the 'body', for example, is a precondition of all perceptual knowledge, and the one with *buddhi* for all rational knowledge, that is, knowledge based on *anumāna* or inference.

But even on such interpretation of the *Advaitin's* position, the reality of the body and the *buddhi* will have to be admitted as without it, no identification would be possible. Not only this, the occurrence of *adhyāsa* implies that both the objects are already "known" to one as, in case one of the objects is totally unknown that can not be "superimposed" on the one that is being experienced. Śaṅkara seems to be aware of the problem as he suggests that the self or the *ātman* is not completely *aviśaya* that is something which is not an "object" at all for, if it were to be so then how could the not-self be superimposed on it. This, perhaps, is not the exact reason why Śaṅkara makes the self or the *ātman* as the referent or the "object" designated by "I" or what he calls the "*asmad-pratyaya*". "न तावदयमेकान्तेनाविषयः, अस्मत्प्रत्ययविषयत्वात्". The reason, more probably, is to emphasize the "experiential imigiacy" with which the self is experienced and which is radically different from the way all other objects are experienced even at the perceptual-sensuous level. The reference to "*asmad pratyaya*" seems unfortunate and even misleading as the "I", or the sense of the "I", that is being referred to, has nothing "linguistic" about it. Instead it is the existentially experienced sense of "I-ness" which is being talked about and which is perhaps better conveyed by the term *aham-kāra* used in the Sāṅkhyan sense. In fact, Śaṅkara seems to have been misled by the terms "*yuṣmad and asmad*", forgetting that the former, in its ordinary usage, does not refer to object in "general" but objects of a certain type only, that is those that may be regarded as another human being. But in case this is correct what is referred to by the term *yuṣmad* is not "*ekāntenāviśayaḥ*" as Śaṅkara seems to think, but also "*aviśayaḥ*" in the sense that it too has the sense of "I-ness" or thinks of itself, as the

"object" of "*asmad-pratyaya*" to use Śaṅkara's language. Not only this, for the other human being I am a *yuṣmad* that is, someone who is an "object" though not completely an object in the sense in which inanimate objects of nature are.

Surprisingly, Śaṅkara himself questions the necessity, of the immediacy or *aparokṣatva* for the objects between which the *adhyāsa* is supposed to occur. He had himself said that the self is not "एकान्तेन अविषय" but later on questions the necessity of this by pointing out that there is no such Law or *Niyama* that both the objects between which the *adhyāsa* occurs have to be immediate objects of consciousness "नचायमस्ति नियमः पुरोऽवस्थित एव विषये विषयान्तरमध्यसितव्यमिति", as is usually the case with the objects of perception. He gives, in this connection, the example of *Ākāśa* which is not perceived by anybody and yet on which the *adhyāsa* of colour etc., is super-imposed.

अप्रत्येक्षऽपि ह्याकारो बलास्तलमलिनताद्यध्यस्यन्ति

The example is strange indeed, for as Dr. Mukund Lath has pointed out in a discussion on the issue it will make *ākāśa* an *aviśayaḥ* like the self and there would be the problem of distinguishing the different types of *aviśayaḥ*.

Moreover, *ākāśa* is not an object of perception than it must be an object of inferences. But what is the *hetu* of this *sādhya*. In other words, what is the ground for believing that there is such a thing as *Ākāśa* and that even if there is such a thing it cannot have the quality of colour in it.

The so-called superimposition of qualities such as colour or to use Śaṅkara's own term "*malinā*", that is, tarnished or of a dark colour, do not seem any different from the quality of sound which is usually ascribed to it. The only reason that appears to have been given in the tradition for the postulation of *ākāśa* seems to be that it is the substance in which sound inheres. However, *ākāśa* unlike all the other four elemental substances [all the other *pancamahābhūtas*], that is, earth, air, fire and water is not, as Śaṅkara has pointed out, object of perception. But in case the only reason for the postulation of *ākāśa* as an independent *mahābhūta* is that we need a substratum for sound,

then sound or *śabda* will have to be eternal for, if it were to be non-eternal, then it will have no quality whatsoever when the sound is absent and thus become like *nirguṇa brahman* which will obviously not be acceptable for the advaitins.

There is another problem with Śaṅkara's use of the term, बालः "balaḥ" raises and which, as far as I know, has not been noticed. According to Śaṅkara it seems that only the ignorant suffer from *adhyāsa* as they alone superimpose "*malinatā*" on *ākāśa* but, those who "know" the truth in this matter also "see" the *ākāśa* as *malīna*, though they are not "deceived" by the appearance as was the case with those who were ignorant. The correction, however, even in their case, is only "theoretical" as it does not effect their perceptual experience in any way, whatsoever. We had drawn attention to this fundamental difference between the two types of *adhyāsas* in our paper entitled, "Two types of appearance and two types of reality", published long ago in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie Belgium* (Oct., 1957).¹ The *advaitin*, however, would scarcely be satisfied with a "theoretic" correction only as it would make the whole process of *Sādhana* which is supposed to lead to the self realization unnecessary.

The larger problem that Śaṅkara's example opens relates to the question as to how purely theoretical entities which are based only on *anumāna* can have perceptual qualities superimposed on them because of *adhyāsa*. The other possibility opened up by the example is the one where a theoretical postulated entity based on some inferential necessity has purely theoretical qualities ascribed to it which, later on, are found to be erroneous and hence which retrospectively are ascribed the character of *adhyāsa*. Also if once such possibilities are admitted, the "self" itself may be seen as not something which is directly experienced but theoretically postulated to understand on account for the experience one have. If so, the so-called superimposition on it may be as theoretical as the self itself and may, later on, found to be correct or incorrect depending upon the exigencies of the theoretical requirement concerned.

The deeper contention, perhaps, is that the 'objectivating act' of consciousness itself is the root cause of the foundational mistake as it makes the 'self' think of itself as an 'object' which it can never be. But why should it be so, is never made clear.

There is also the other problem as to why a knowledge based on erroneous identification need itself be necessarily wrong. The body may be 'perceived' correctly, even if the self's identification with the body is wrong. The perception of objects through the body senses is not affected in any way by the identification of the 'self' with the body. Similarly, the 'correctness' or the 'incorrectness' of any inference has nothing to do with the supposedly "false" identification of the 'self' with *buddhi* or the rational faculty in man. The perceptual or the inferential cognition may not occur *without* the identification, at least at the human level, but such a non-occurrence has to do with the validity or invalidity of the cognition concerned.

At a still deeper level the *advaitin* may be said to be objecting to the 'objectivating' function of consciousness itself and pointing out that what is 'constituted' by this act is taken to be 'real' as is obviously supposed to be true in the case of drama and it may be said that all that is apprehended as 'object' shares this characteristic. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, the well known *advaitin*, is supposed to have said something to this effect. But, firstly, there is no identification of the 'self' with the 'not-self' here and if that is the essence of *adhyāsa*, then this can not be regarded as *adhyāsa* in the accepted sense of the term. Secondly, if consciousness has this capacity of 'objectivating' within itself, then the exercise of that capacity could not be a mistake except when one regards the object as having an independent reality of its own without reference to the consciousness that bring it into being.

It may be urged that the problem is not so much with the 'objectivating' function of consciousness as with its 'identification' with what it 'objectivates', particularly if it begins to 'see' itself as an object because of this act of 'objectification' through which it brings the object into being. But this is only another name for 'self-consciousness' through which or in which alone the 'self' become aware of itself. At the level of consciousness, one is aware *only* of object and not of the fact that one is aware of it. Animals are generally supposed to have only this kind of awareness, even though the higher ones among them show many of the emotions that man possesses. Human beings, on the other hand are supposed to be distinguished by the further fact that they are not only aware of objects as the animals are, but also

aware of the fact that they are aware of the objects. This 'second-order awareness' gives rise to a whole new set of phenomena amongst which the most interesting and intriguing is the 'idea' of the 'self' itself. This gives rise to the notion of the 'ideal self' or the 'self-as-it-ought-to-be' as distinct from the 'self-as-it-is' and makes one strive to be that which one ought-to-be.

The achievement of self-consciousness thus, leads not only to the awareness of the 'self' as 'object', but also to a dissatisfaction with what one finds oneself to be. In fact, the 'ideality' of any 'object', whether it be the self-seen-as-object or something else, is always a function of self-consciousness, as consciousness only apprehends the object in its 'facticity' and the pleasure or pain that it might cause or occasion. Psychological hedonism, thus, is the natural attitude of consciousness. It turns into ethical hedonism only when self-consciousness reflects on it and treats it as the norm for itself. But if it were to reflect on its own reality, it would see that it can never accept 'hedonism' as a norm for itself, as it has already introduced an element of questioning into everything it apprehends in terms of an ideality which it knows only roughly. This knowledge is mainly negative in character as it is generally sure that what obtains should not be, but seldom as to what it should be.

The element of 'ideality', thus, is a result of self-consciousness and is, in fact, an imposition on consciousness. Consciousness functions, by its very nature, at the hedonistic level, but when it becomes an 'object' of self-consciousness, it acquires an 'ideal' dimension which is in conflict with the way it naturally functions. This is the root cause of conflict in man, as he finds himself not to be what he should be. The 'ideality' of consciousness like that of all other 'objects' is, thus, a function of self-consciousness. But if self-consciousness itself is the foundation of *Adhyāsa* or 'objectification' and the identification with it, then the 'ideality' of the self along with that of all 'objects' will also be mistaken. But the 'ideality' of consciousness is the same as *ātman* and if both the 'idea' and the 'ideal' of *ātman* are the result of the fundamental illusion which self-consciousness projects through its objectivating function, then what will happen to the whole enterprise of "*ātmanam viddhi*" on which the whole advaitic enterprise is based.

The realms of both *dharma* and *adhyātma* arise because of the distinction between 'what is' and 'what should be', a distinction which would not have been there but for the fact of self-consciousness which introduces it in the realm of 'fact' itself.

The 'fact' of self-consciousness, thus, has a double aspect, as though it happens to be a 'fact' it introduces the distinction of 'fact' and 'ideality', within the realm of 'fact' itself. Paradoxically, it does not remain untouched by this distinction as, reflexively, it can turn on itself and find it *not* to be what it should be.

The advaitins, strangely, finds fault not with this or that characteristic of self-consciousness, but with the very fact of self-consciousness, itself. But this is to strike at the very roots of that which makes the reality of *adhyātma* and *dharma* possible.

The ultra-radical advaitin accepts the suicidal consequences of his relentless logic and banishes the 'seeking' for the realisation of *ātman* to the realm of 'illusion' as, according to him, the *ātman* is *nityasiddha* and not *sādhana-siddha*, as the deluded 'seeker' thinks. Also, if the whole activity of *Sādhana* belongs to the realm of illusion, then does the argument of the advaitin not belong to the same category?

In fact, the *Advaitin* has to accept a distinction between the *ātman* when it is realised and the situation when, according to him, it is not realised, that is, one does not "realise" oneself to be the *ātman*. This distinction has to be admitted even if the *ātman* is supposed to be *nityasiddha* and not *sādhana-siddha*. The distinction, however, can not be made intelligible, especially if the very procedure or processes by which one comes to the awareness of the idea of *ātman* are regarded as based on a fundamental error, as the *advaitin* tends to do.

The advaitin faces the dilemma in another form, when he discuss the problem of *Jīvanamukti*, that is, whether one "lives" even after one has realised the *ātman*. For, if one allows for the fact of *Jīvanamukti*, then one will have to admit some sort of an identification with the body and the mind, as without such an identification, one can not conceive of "living" in the usual sense of world. The ambiguous, puzzling and paradoxical nature of the idea of *Jīvanamukti*, in the context of the ideas of "sublation" and "identification" does not seem to have been

the subject of critical attention except perhaps in the work of Śrīnivasa Rao on the subject.

The *Jīvanamukta's* identification with the psycho-physical complex, it may be said, is not the same as the one that occurs in those who have not "realised" the *ātman* or achieved liberation. But, then, identification need not necessarily be erroneous or be of such a nature as to lead to bondage. It may be of a different type and hence need to be distinguished for purposes of analysis, a task that the *advaitin* does not seem to have performed.

One need not, however, go to the exemplars of *Jīvanamukti* to find examples of 'identification' that are harmless. *Nāṭya* provides a superb example of it at the ordinary day-to-day level of living and has been the subject of reflection since at least the time of Bharata onwards in the Indian tradition. It is surprising, therefore, to find that the *advaitin* has taken no serious note of it, or tried to meet the challenge it poses for his theory of identification. There seems no *prima-facie* reason why the snake-rope or *śukti-rajat* illustration of *adhyāsa* be taken as a paradigmatic example of it and not the *nāṭya*.

The identification of *Jīvanamukta* with the psycho-physical complex, however, is only because of the necessity of "living" and does not achieve any positive purpose except perhaps when he or she guides others on the path of *adhyātma*, or the realisation of the self. The characters in a play, on the other hand, play a positive role as without it one can neither understand nor appreciate. The identification with the play thus, is a necessary condition here for the revelation of the "reality" embodied and evoked in the play. The "identification", of course, is not a total identification as it is supposed to be in the case of the "rope-snake". It is more of an imagined, or "assumed" identification, an "as if" attitude where one "knows" that it is not "really" so, but still behaves as if it were what one knows, it is not. This willed suspension of what one knows to be true is shared with the one that is found in the *Jīvanamukta's* attitude. But while the latter is a burden which one carries on due to the exigencies of "living" or because one has to exhaust the *karma* whose effect has already been set in motion, in the case of the former it is a "free" act of imagination which gives access to a world which brings joy. And in some cases, it

gives not only joy but also insightful understanding of the human situation if the play is really great and is acted well.

The "identifications" with the characters in a dramatic representation or novel is well known and has provided material for the construction of various theories amongst those who are interested in the subject. But little distinction has been made between the "identification" of the spectator or the reader and the one that happens in the case of the actors or the writers or the director. As for the problem of "identification" in other arts such as architecture and music, as far as I know, no one has ever discussed it. Both Bharata and Aristotle concentrate on the drama for building their theories about art and as the Indian and the western tradition have generally followed their formulation of the subject, the portrayal of human situations and the identification on the part of the spectator with them resulting in the experience and enjoyment of 'virtual' emotions has continued to be the paradigmatic example of what identification means in the context of art.

The "active identification" in the moral realm where it is a precondition of concern, care and sympathy for the "other" has hardly engaged the attention of thinkers. Besides this, there are other "real" meaningful realms "constituted" by conflicting "identifications" such as that of sport or patriotism or membership of a class, caste, *varṇa*, region, language, or *sampradāya* or *āśrama*. One cannot call oneself a *sanyāsin*, a *bhikṣu* or even an *advaitin* without some of identification.

Ultimately, then, the question is not of erroneous identification or superimposition or *adhyāsa* as the *advaitin* has thought but whether it occurs in consciousness or rather at the self conscious level and whether it is "free" in the sense that one *can* withdraw from it and is not too much affected by it. The *Gītā* had propounded some such idea, but the *advaitin* seems to have missed it. The *Gītā's* contention that one cannot live even for a moment without action and hence the idea that one can "live" without any "identification" at all is a contradiction-inters. Its own solution of the problem is to suggest that one can have an "identification" which does not lead to bondage, as it is not "real" identification resting on the error which both the *advaitin* and the Sāṃkhyan thinkers have emphasized. Rather, it is an

“assumed” identification knowing fully that it is wrong. Still, one does so for certain purposes as is the case with the witnesses of a dramatic performance or when one engages in moral action. In the later case the “identification” is only implicit while, in the former case it is self consciously explicit as without it one can not “understand” the act of going to witness the performance. The non-attachment preached by the *Gītā* is only another name for this. In fact, the ideal advocated by the *Gītā* is fully embodied in Kṛṣṇa himself who continuously exemplifies throughout his behaviour what this ideal of “identification-without-identification” is?

In fact, the idea of *avatāra* itself implies this, as the Lord who incarnates himself cannot do so without assuming this seemingly incompatible duality involved in the very notion of the “embodied self”. The Lord himself as Kṛṣṇa, it should be remembered, uses the term “*ahaṃ*” to refer to himself. The term indicates the embodied self or the “ego” or the *jīva* in the advaitic vocabulary and that Kṛṣṇa should be constrained to use it suggests that the “identification” involved need not necessarily be based on *avidyā* or ignorance.

“Identification”, thus, may be of many kinds and what is called *adhyāsa* by the advaitins and illustrated by the paradigmatic example of the rope-snake or the *Śukti-Rajat* illusion is only one of them. It is also the least important as it can only lead to fear and flight or greed and delight. It may, on the other hand, give rise to doubt as one may begin to wonder that the thing does not move at all and hence could hardly be snake or the “shine” that one is seeing is not exactly the one which is usually given by silver. The point is that the example on which the advaitin has built his whole edifice is so weak that it can hardly support his case. He has not even thought of the other possibility that one may mistake the snake for a rope and the fatal consequences that may follow on this type of wrong identification. Will the *Brahman*, then, be like the rope and the world like a snake or conversely. The whole thing is so “childish” that one wonders how so many intelligent people could have been taken in by it for so many years.

There is another aspect of the rope-snake illusion, which has not been taken notice of. This relates to the fact that there are some ‘identifications’ which are involuntary in the sense that one is born

with them while the others are voluntary or acquired.

The identification with the body is perhaps the most involuntary identification that we know of. It is also the most foundational, primal and natural identification as it is not only the seat of pleasure and pain, but also responsive to our acts of will and thus the main centre through which we “act” in the world. Others too identify us primarily through our bodies and even in it mainly through the face as becomes evident when one has to identify a dead body. In fact, there is a radical distinction between the identification of the “self” with the body and the identification of the “others” with his or her body. The former, though involuntary and natural, is always secondary while the latter is almost always primary. K.C. Bhattacharya has drawn attention to this fact in his remarkable work entitled “*Subject as Freedom*” wherein he had built his whole philosophical edifice upon the notions of “identification” and “de-identification” and suggested that when one has de-identified one realises that the “identification” must have been “voluntary” in the sense that it need not have been there as there was no “necessity” about it. But he has not seen that the “de-identification” does not set one “free” as one relapses into the identification once more. The “freedom” was only momentary and even illusory as one does not become “free” of the identification and relapses into it again and again. In fact, it is an “identification” one cannot do without as it is the very condition of one’s being alive and living in the world.

The “free” identification in most cases, thus, is not free at all. And, this is the case not only with the body but also with the gender, language and memory. The case of gender and language is peculiar as one can, at least these days, get one’s sex changed through operation and one can learn another language sometimes with greater facility than one’s own. There are also persons who are bi-lingual just as we are told that there are those who are bisexual. Such cases, however, have not been studied in depth to find what exactly happens to one’s identification in their case. As for the cases in which the change in one’s sex occurs naturally, the identification with the past of one’s earlier bodily self must present intriguing problems which, as far as we know, have not been investigated. The detailed study by Garfinkel is of one such case deal with the problem.

In any case, the problem of identification with and through memory, is even more complex as even in ordinary, normal cases there is a large part of one's life of which one has probably no memory. No one remembers about one's life in the womb or the experience of being born or the hundred and one things that happened to one in one's childhood. Yet, one not only believes that it was the same 'self' which was there in all these experiences but also celebrates one's birthday. There is also the problem of false memories, suppressed memories and memories "edifying" for purpose of self-adulation or oneself-adoration. Yet, it is *only* through memories and the "owning" of them by the self that one gets an identity.

Identification may, of course, be correct and the notion of "erroneous identification" presupposes this. There is, for example, nothing wrong in identifying a rope as a rope, or a snake as a snake. But the advaitika theory of *adhyāsa* and in a sense, the Sāṃkhya theory also, implies just this. This is because, as we pointed out earlier, the so-called "correct identification" would not be possible without the erroneous identification of consciousness with something that is not consciousness. Thus, even if one grants that the foundational identification of the self with the not-self is a mistake, it does not follow that all identifications in the realm of the not-self are bound to be "incorrect" because of this. The criterion of a "correct" identification in the realm of the not-self is not dependent on the fact whether the whole realm of the not self is itself the result of a "wrong" identification.

The relegation of the whole world to the status of *māyā* in Advaita Vedānta seems to be based on this fundamental mistake as even within the "*Māyā*" there remain the distinctions between the true and the false, good and the evil and the beautiful and the ugly.

The situation in Sāṃkhya seems to be similar to that of Advaita Vedānta, even though it has not been described in the same way, and appears to rest on the same mistake. The whole "world", in Sāṃkhya, is a 'creation' of the "identification" of *puruṣa* with *ahaṃkāra* or *buddhi* or *manas* or the senses including both the *jñānendriyas* and the *karmendriyas*. But this does not, and can not render this whole world "unreal" just as the whole world of not-self can not be considered as

Māyā only because it presupposes the identification, in some sense or other, of the self with the not-self.

The Sāṃkhyan-advaitika interpretation of the phenomenon designated as *adhyāsa* seems untenable on all counts and it is surprising that thinker after thinker have repeated the interpretation as if it were a self-evident truth. But no example of erroneous cognition, particularly if it be perceptual in character, can ever establish the "unreality" of either of the objects which are said to be "erroneously" identified with each other.

It is, of course, true that *only* the advaitin draws this conclusion. None of the other vedāntins do this. As for the Sāṃkhyans, it is true that they accept the independent reality of *prakṛti*, but it is not clear what do they exactly mean by this as the whole world of *Vyakta* or manifest *prakṛti* from *ahaṃkāra* to the five gross elements, according to them, is due to the erroneous identification of *puruṣa* or the pure consciousness with that which it is not, that is, the non-self or the "object" or the *prakṛti*. The more than two thousand years old contention taken by many to be the most distinctive contribution of Indian philosophy, thus, is *non-sequitor*, a fallacy which should have been known as such long ago. It is time that the *adhyāsa*, if we may be so allured to call it, is realised for what it is and laid to rest and buried for ever so that the Indian mind is freed of the *māyā* by which it has been entranced all the years. It is time to get liberated from the *adhyāsa* that the advaitic analysis of *adhyāsa* has imposed on a large part of the philosophical intellect of India. But perhaps it has been bewitched by it too long to want to be liberated from it. The "bondage" of love can be more entrancing than the desire for liberation. Did not the Gopis tell Uddhava this?

Note

1. Also included in Daya Krishnas, The art of the conceptual, Delhi, ICPR and Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1989.