

BOOK REVIEW

BRAHMASUTRA- SHANKARABHASHYAM

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY SWAMI SHUDDHABODHANANDA SARASWATI

In the entire gamut of English Vedantic literature to date, topics of vital importance such as the exact nature of aparoksha atmajnana / Brahmajnana, Brahmasakshatkara, moksha (liberation), the source and the nature of the Veda as svatah-pramanam, the modus operandi of Vedanta pramana, the defectless samagris (prerequisites) necessary for the Vedanta pramana to function, an analysis of when a pramana fails to function, the role and the criterion of correctness of Vedantic prakriyas (modes of teaching) are rarely described comprehensively with scriptural authenticity and corroboration. On the contrary, several wrong notions about these are found freely floating around based on mere hearsay. This lacuna is made good by this commentary, which is an outcome of thorough research.

The book is written in a style suitable for beginners and advanced mumukshus alike. Even the Vedantic teachers will find it very useful. The commentary leans very effectively on Ratnaprabha gloss. It also picks up relevant explanations from gloss of Purnanandiya, Nyayanirnaya and Bhamati.

The nature of Brahmajnana is dealt with in a greater detail mainly in the context of bhashya portion, 'avagati paryantam jnanam' and 'anubhava-avasatvat bhutavastuvishayatvat cha Brahmajnanasya'. Nowadays, there is a lot of confusion and lack of clarity in Vedantic teaching and more so on the nature of aparoksha Brahmajnana. Some claim that the experience of Brahman is indispensable in gaining self-knowledge without explaining its precise nature and the role, whereas others refute it outright. In fact this is an age-old controversy. This commentary traces the origin of this controversy in Vedantic lore and presents the conclusive discussion affirmed by the acknowledged Vedantic masters.

Some of its other unique highlights are:

(i) The gamut of Vedanta (ii) The nature of Moksha and Brahmasakshatkara with contrast between paroksha and aparoksha jnana (iii) Modes of reasoning employed in Brahmasutras (iv) The order of superimposition (adhyasa-krama) (v) Varying degree of love due to differential adhyasa (vi) Definitions of anubhava(experience) and jnanam (knowledge) (vii) The nature of Vedanta pramana (viii) The role of Karmayoga and Bhagavadbhakti (ix) The role and relevance of Vedantic prakriyas (modes of teaching) and its application to the concept of moolavidya.

Such topics have rarely, if ever, been addressed in a work of this nature in a comprehensive and centralized manner.

Every topic discussed in the book is corroborated by scriptural passages firmly establishing its authenticity. This English commentary faithfully follows the method adopted by Sri Vidyanaraya Muni: 'I explain the meaning of the Sruti and refrain from saying anything based on mere speculative logic' (Panchadashi, Ch.-8-67).

The detailed contents and an exhaustive multiple index will help the reader to locate the topic easily whenever some point is to be clarified. For the benefit of those readers who are familiar with Sanskrit language the quoted original Sanskrit passages are given either in the body of the book or in the footnotes. The material is rounded off with a highly useful summary and an epilogue that highlights the essential constituents of Brahmajnana. This commentary is a very significant contribution from the author, who rises to the level of fulfilling Cardinal Newman's requirement -- 'An author is one who has got something to say and who knows how to say'.

Review by Prof. Lopa Mehta

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