

T. S. RUKMANI

ŚAṆKARA'S VIEWS ON YOGA IN THE
BRAHMASŪTRABHĀṢYA IN THE LIGHT OF THE
AUTHORSHIP OF THE
YOGASŪTRABHĀṢYA-VIVARAṆA

*Etena yogaḥ pratyuktaḥ.*¹ The commentary of Śaṅkara under this *sūtra* makes it clear that Śaṅkara is totally opposed to the *yoga* theory of *prakṛti* being the material cause of the universe. On the other hand, the importance that is given to *yoga* practices in his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* reveals that Śaṅkara is not against the methodology of *yoga* as long as it suits his purpose. This dual attitude of Śaṅkara towards *yoga* assumes significance in the light of the question of Śaṅkara's authorship of the *Yogasūtrabhāṣya-vivaraṇa* (YSBhV). I had written a brief preliminary paper on this that appeared in this journal and would like to add a few more points as a sequel to that paper.

In my earlier paper I pointed out that all the well-known works attributed to Śaṅkara are either original works or commentaries on original works, the only exception being the *Māṇḍūkya-kārikābhāṣya*, the authorship of which is still in dispute. If this is to be judged an authentic work of Śaṅkara, then it must be admitted that it stands on a different footing altogether from the others works accepted as Śaṅkara's. For one thing it is a commentary on his guru's work² and it is also not just a commentary but a significant work in its own right. The emphasis of the *Kārikābhāṣya* is on establishing the *vivartavāda* as against the *ajātivāda*, which finds prominence in Gauḍapāda's work.

Śaṅkara as a commentator is on par with authors like Praśastapāda, Vātsyāyana, Śabara and Vyāsa. Each one of these great commentators has a distinctive voice. Each not only clarifies the intent of the respective *Sūtrakāra* but carries his commentaries beyond the mere texts, leaving them richer and elevating them to a higher philosophical plane. These commentators have taken upon themselves the pioneering work of interpreting their respective *sūtrakāra* and appear to have a philosophical commitment to the school they are interpreting.

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Thus it would be futile to expect Vātsyāyana, Praśastapāda, Śabara or Śāṅkara to have commented on the *sūtras* of other schools. At best they look for corroboration of their own philosophical viewpoint in whatever work they study. This is an important point one should bear in mind while looking at the question of the authorship of the *YSBhV*.

While dealing with philosophical schools, it is again of vital importance to consider which aspect of philosophy is being given more importance by a particular philosopher or even a particular commentator while interpreting the *sūtras*. For instance, while Gautama's *Nyāyasūtras* would like to emphasise the epistemological viewpoint, it is the ontological standpoint which is given prominence in the *Vaiśeṣikasūtras*. If we look at Śāṅkara's commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* (*BS*.) what stands out boldly is his ontological approach. For Śāṅkara *Brahman* is the One and only truth and the only being and all else is not-truth. Thus the ultimate is a single principle or *vastu* called *brahman* and any system which advocates more than a single ultimate being cannot be true in the final analysis; of necessity it must be dealing with a lower level of being for Śāṅkara. To imagine that with these strong views Śāṅkara would yet write a commentary on a commentary of the *Yogasūtras* (*YS*.), which is an out and out dualistic school, is not an easy matter.

If we examine the *BSBh.* closely we find that of the six systems of philosophy Śāṅkara accepts the methodology of *Nyāya* logic and makes use of its reasoning at quite a few places.³ But Śāṅkara's acceptance of the methodology of *Nyāya* for his arguments cannot be extended to mean that he also supported its ontological stand. Since Śāṅkara refutes the *Vaiśeṣika* doctrine vehemently time and again,⁴ it goes without saying that Śāṅkara opposes the philosophy of both *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika* as they do not lead to the ultimate goal of realisation of *Brahman*. Thus one can understand why Śāṅkara did not write a commentary on Gautama's *Nyāyasūtras* much less one on Vātsyāyana's *Nyāyasūtrabhāṣya*.

When one looks at the position that *Yoga* occupies in Śāṅkara's *BSBh.* a number of interesting points arise. The various meditations occupy an important place in Śāṅkara's *BSBh.*, as is well known. Thus the general acceptance of the *Yoga* methodology is very much in



evidence here. Apart from the approval of the *Yoga* methodology for spiritual progress, Śaṅkara's *BSBh.* also accords a very high place to *Yoga*, including the divine powers that accrue to one practising *Yoga*. There are places where *Yoga* as a system is lauded and where Śaṅkara quotes Patañjali's *Yogasūtras* in support of his arguments.⁵ He quotes frequently from *Upaniṣads* like the *Śvetāśvatara* and *Muṇḍaka* for corroboration of yogic powers.⁶ He mentions *yama*, *niyama*, *dhyāna*, *samādhi* and other yogic means that help one in spiritual progress.⁷ He clearly believes in the acquisition of various superhuman powers (*siddhis*) like *aṇimā*, *mahimā*, *paracittapraveśa*, *śarīranirmāṇa* and so on.⁸

But while accepting *Yoga*'s methods for spiritual progress, Śaṅkara does not, at any stage, dilute his opposition to the ontological stand of *Sāṅkhya-Yoga*, i.e. dualism. One must make and understand this clearcut distinction in the *bhāṣya* of Śaṅkara. It is one thing to use the method of logic of the *Nyāya* system in one's arguments; it is also perfectly normal to adopt the means prescribed by *Yoga* for one's spiritual progress. But one cannot argue from that, that Śaṅkara also accepts all that *Yoga* stands for. Nowhere does Śaṅkara compromise his total commitment to *advaita*; therefore it is but natural for Śaṅkara to oppose the dualism of *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* throughout the *BSBh.*

In fact Śaṅkara has refuted the dualism of *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* in many ways and questioned many of its doctrines. While ruling out the insentient *pradhāna* as the cause of the universe under *sūtra* I.1.5., Śaṅkara in the same place admits the past and future knowledge of the *yogīs*. In denying that the *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* stand has a vedic basis,⁹ Śaṅkara quotes from many *Upaniṣads* and asserts that it is *māyā* which is referred to by the word *ajā* and therefore the *Sāṅkhya-Yoga pradhāna* has no Vedic authority. Strangely enough, in proving this, the power of *Yoga* itself is cited, for Śaṅkara states that through the *Yoga* of meditation the seers entered *Brahman* and saw the hidden power which is *māyā*.¹⁰ Thus while *yoga* as a means is accepted, its principle of *pradhāna* is rejected.

Under *sūtra* II.1.1. the philosophy of *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* that admits a plurality of souls is criticised by stating categorically that the scripture of Kapila, i.e. *Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga* by implication, is antagonistic not only because it assumes an independent *prakṛti* but also because it

admits a plurality of souls.¹¹ The same point is made under II.1.3. Śaṅkara upholds the methodology of *Yoga* under this well-known *sūtra* as a means to enlightenment. Śaṅkara quotes from the *Brhadāraṇyaka*, the *Kaṭha* and finally from the *Yogasūtras* themselves to vindicate yogic methodology. But he attacks the claims of both *Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga* as means to liberation.¹²

Liberation can only come through the realisation of the unity of the self which is declared as such by the *Upaniṣads*; Śaṅkara refutes *Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga* as soteriological systems. He thus says that both *Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga* are dualists and they do not perceive this unity of the self.

Not satisfied with disputing the claims made by *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* with the help of the *Upaniṣads* and other texts, Śaṅkara tries to question their principles independently in the next section.¹³ Thus the very basis of an insentient *pradhāna* being the cause for creation is questioned. The series points to an intelligent ultimate principle, rather than to the insentient *pradhāna* of *Sāṅkhya-Yoga*, says Śaṅkara.

Shifting the attention from *pradhāna*, whose basis for being the material cause of the manifested world was attacked and rebutted in the earlier *sūtras*, Śaṅkara now questions the notion of God being the efficient cause of the universe. In the introduction to *sūtra* II.2.37. Śaṅkara states that some, following *Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga*, conclude that God, who is the ruler of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, is just an efficient cause. The significant point here is that he includes *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* along with the *Māheśvaras* and the *Vaiśeṣikas* as among those who advocate the theory of God's being just an efficient cause of the universe. It is also important to notice that Śaṅkara draws attention to the *Yoga* doctrine and says that even admitting a special type of *puruṣa* over and above the other *puruṣas* will not solve the problem as that *puruṣa* is admitted to be indifferent to everything.¹⁴ And he makes the statement that the ideas about God which the *Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga* adherents uphold are not logical. There seems to be an apparent contradiction in Śaṅkara admitting *Īśvara* as an efficient cause in the *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* system when earlier in II.1.3. he had already acknowledged only *pradhāna* to be the sole cause for creation in *Sāṅkhya-Yoga*. As is well-known BS. II.2.37 is concerned with rebutting the idea that *Īśvara* is an efficient cause as it is in contradiction to the concept of unity



advocated by Śaṅkara's *advaita*. So Śaṅkara, it seems, is grouping together all those systems which believe in *Īśvara* whether in a weak sense or in a strong sense, and dismisses all of them collectively. Thus one need not make much of this apparent contradiction in this context.



Śaṅkara in one place advocates realisation of *Brahman* in *saṃrādhana* by the *yogis*, where *saṃrādhana* is translated as *samādhi*.¹⁵ But one does not get the impression that Śaṅkara is talking about *samādhi* in the yogic sense of *saṃprajñāta samādhi*. *Samādhi* is being used in the sense of devotion, *dhyāna*, *ekāgratā*, a looking inwards. It thus conforms to the *Upaniṣadic upāsana*.¹⁶ In fact he uses the word and then feels the need to define it in order to make its meaning clear. He relies on *śruti* and *smṛti* for this statement.¹⁷ Earlier in II.3.39. also Śaṅkara depends on *śruti* to show that *samādhi* is a means to self-realisation. While it appears that this is close to the yogic *samādhi*, Śaṅkara's predilection for knowledge as the means to self-realisation makes this hard to believe. One should go back to *sūtra* II.1.3 & 4 where Śaṅkara makes it clear that he is willing to accept *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* so long as they do not go against *śruti*. He emphasizes the fact that *Brahman*-realisation cannot be obtained either by *Sāṅkhya* knowledge or the path of *Yoga* independently of the *Vedas*. Liberation is a state of identity with *Brahman*¹⁸ and cannot be associated with any action. 'Since no action can take place without bringing about some change in its locus, the self cannot be the basis of any action'.¹⁹

Śaṅkara in I.1.4 goes on to distinguish between meditation and knowledge by stating that meditation is a mental action while knowledge is not something one does.²⁰ Knowledge is not what one does but which comes to us from direct perception and is a transcendental experience not dependent on human action or the act of meditation. Thus, one can only take *saṃrādhana* to be a means in the path to self-realisation. In III.4.26 & 27 Śaṅkara states that sacrifices, self-control and so on, are but the means to the emergence of self knowledge. A hierarchy amongst these is also laid down, placing the yogic means of *sāma*, etc., closer to knowledge than sacrifice. But everyone of them, whether internal or external, is only the means to knowledge which alone can result in self-realisation. Thus in III.4.26 Śaṅkara states the *siddhānta* that while knowledge can depend on other factors



like *karma*, devotion, etc., for its emergence, once it has emerged it does not depend on any other-factor for producing its own result, namely liberation.²¹ In view of the above it becomes difficult to agree with Trevor Legett when he mentions this *sūtra* as one where Śaṅkara confirms seeing *Brahman* in profound meditation.²² At best these things were all only indirect means for the final result of knowledge.

To come back to the discussion on the position of *Yoga* in the *BSBh.*, in *sūtras* IV.1.7–11 Śaṅkara exalts the role of *dhyāna* and *ekāgratā* and he also defines them in this context. Śaṅkara defines *dhyāna* as that which induces a continuous stream of similar thoughts. This agrees with what Vyāsa states in the *Yogasūtrabhāṣya* (*YSBh.*)²³ *Ekāgratā* is also used as a synonym of *dhyāna* and there is no attempt to define further *ekāgratā* in yogic terms. If Śaṅkara wanted to talk about *saṃprajñāta* and *asaṃprajñāta samādhi* here was another opportunity which presented itself. But Śaṅkara does not do so. On the other hand, when one looks at the definition of *dhyāna* in the *YSBhV.* by the Vivaraṇakāra, what strikes one is the un-Śaṅkara language and a rambling about the same idea in different ways.²⁴ Both these definitions are given in the notes and a comparison of them will convey the idea that is being discussed. Anyone looking at the two will be struck by the looseness and lack of crispness in style of the Vivaraṇakāra. It is difficult to believe that Śaṅkara wrote in such a style. One interesting point is that Śaṅkara does not talk about *samādhi* here or elsewhere although, according to Patañjali, *samādhi* is indispensable for *kaivalya*. It seems that to Śaṅkara, the *BSBh.* author, *dhyāna*, *ekāgratā*, and *samādhi* all stand for the same thing and do not require extensive discussion. But the Vivaraṇakāra not only defines *samādhi* rather clumsily compared to Śaṅkara the *BSBh.* author, but also gets into a discussion about the difference between *samādhi* as means and *samādhi* as the end. He says that *samādhi* as the end is meant to signify a special state of the mind and *samādhi* as means is the stream of ideas entering into the very nature of the object of meditation, becoming one with the object itself.²⁵

At this point it will be interesting to compare the other two famous commentaries on the *YSBh.*, the *Tattvavaiśārādī* (*TV.*) and the *Yogavārttika* (*YV.*) regarding this point. While Vācaspati Miśra in the *TV.* does not bother to talk about *samādhi* as means and *samādhi* as

end, Vijñānabhikṣu, very much like the Vivaraṇakāra, draws our attention to this distinction. This is one more point in favor of the argument that Bhikṣu was familiar with the *Vivaraṇa*, and should be added to the reference²⁶ already pointed out.

Śaṅkara refers to yogic powers at many places in the *BSBh*. In the *bhāṣya* on *BS*. IV.2.14., while talking about Śuka, he refers to the yogic *siddhis*. In *sūtra* IV.4.15 Śaṅkara recognises the power of the *yogī* to create new bodies. He also supports the yogic idea that the *yogī*'s mind controls other minds. Śaṅkara even poses the question of the same *ātman* appearing as the separate rulers of the created bodies.²⁷ In this context it is relevant to note that Bhikṣu also discusses whether the *nirmāṇaśarīra* has the same *ātman* or not. Bhikṣu takes the relationships between the *ātman* of the *yogī* and those of the created bodies as that between a whole and its parts.²⁸ Vācaspati Miśra does not raise this question at all while the Vivaraṇakāra discusses it in his usual loose style. Śaṅkara in the *BSBh*. very crisply concludes the argument of the *ātman* and does not raise the question of reaping or not reaping the fruits of actions not committed. But the Vivaraṇakāra is not able to keep his arguments tightly structured and lets himself be led into other topics.²⁹ Looking at the style of the two, Śaṅkara and the Vivaraṇakāra, it is difficult to believe that both texts could have been written by the same person.

This brief survey of the position of *Yoga* in the *BSBh*. makes it clear that Śaṅkara was not an opponent of the *Yoga* system in so far as its methodology for mind purification goes. He also speaks favourably of the *siddhis* that *yogīs* can acquire. He also makes the distinction very much like the *yogī* between the external and internal means of *yoga*. Thus while *yama*, *niyama*, etc., can be classified under external means *dhyāna*, *śamādhi*, *ekāgratā*, *śama*, *dama*, etc., can be called the internal means. As Śaṅkara allows for the grace of *Īśvara* and talks of *Īśvara* (*saguṇa brahman*) being proximate to *nirguṇa brahman*, one can also say that there is scope for *Īśvarapranidhāna* in the yogic sense in the *BSBh*.³⁰ Unlike his opposition to *Sāṅkhya*, Śaṅkara also does not talk very disparagingly of *Yoga*. But the moment one comes to the ontological position of *Yoga*, Śaṅkara groups it along with *Sāṅkhya* and attacks them jointly for their dualistic stand. He is then uncompromising in his criticism.



Would such a person have written a commentary on a commentary of the *YS*? His approval of the yogic means can explain, however weakly, a work like the *Yogatārāvalī* being attributed to Śaṅkara. But it is difficult to believe that an uncompromising *advaitin* like Śaṅkara would have written a commentary of the *YS*. A committed *yogī* like Bhikṣu wrote a commentary on the *Vedāntasūtras* and also independent works on the *Vedānta* system like the *Upadeśaratnamālā* and the *Brahmādarśa*. But in all these works he has brought in his yogic bias and attacked vehemently the *advaita* of Śaṅkara. It is thus natural for any committed person not to compromise his convictions. For these reasons it is difficult to believe that Śaṅkara, a committed *advaitin*, wrote the *Vivaraṇa*.

In addition when one looks at the section dealing with *Īśvara* in the *Vivaraṇa* one comes across many more points difficult to imagine as coming from Śaṅkara the author of the *BSBh*.

Under *BS*. I.1.5 the answer given in *BSBh*. to the *Sāṅkhya* objection, that before creation Brahman can see nothing as it has no body, is very different from the way the *Vivaraṇakāra* answers a similar objection in the *Vivaraṇa*. Śaṅkara's answer draws attention to the fact that *Brahman* has eternal consciousness as a *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and so does not depend on a body for this. A transmigrating soul on the other hand, he says, depends on a body, etc., due to ignorance, but not God whose knowledge is free from obstacles. He quotes *Śvetāśvatara* VI.6 and III.19 in support of his arguments. The *Sāṅkhya* advocate questions his differentiating between God and soul as according to the *advaitin* they are identical, (*Br*. III. VII.23). Śaṅkara answers that in truth there is no difference, but when there are limiting factors like a body, etc., then they are viewed differently.

Under the same circumstances the *Vivaraṇakāra* starts by saying in answer to the objection that *Īśvara* cannot be omniscient as he has no body, that he has a body. But when it is pointed out that this will lead to *Īśvara* being non-eternal, he retreats and says *Īśvara* has no body. To get out of the contradictory situation of God's both having and not having a body he then says that 'in the case of the same *ātman* which is in the process of liberation it has a body and when liberated it has no body'. How the argument shifts from *Īśvara* to an individual *ātman* is not made clear here. When the objection is raised that in the case of *ātman* one is dealing with different times the *Vivaraṇakāra* just

silences the opponent by saying that 'here also we understand different times.' And the statement that follows is particularly surprising for he says, 'Moreover being *Īśvara* it is possible to be both at the same time and to have instruments and not to have instruments.'

The entire argument is curious. In the case of *Brahman* and *Īśvara*, as there is a difference due to the presence of *māyā*, one can say that the one has instruments and the other does not have instruments. But in the system of *Yoga* where *Īśvara* is the supreme *puruṣa* and there is none above *Īśvara* how can he be both at the same time?

It is significant that the Vivaraṇakāra quotes the same verse from the *Kāthopaniṣad*, but not the whole verse as this would not suit his argument. The operative phrase in the verse is '*matvā dhīro na śocati*'. The other two lines he quotes are also from the same *Upaniṣads* which Śaṅkara quotes in this context in *BSBh.*, but they are from different chapters. But unlike Śaṅkara, who connects these quotations with his thesis by stating that 'it is thus proved that unembodiedness, called liberation, is eternal and different from the results of works that have to be performed', the Vivaraṇakāra leaves the argument in mid-air and goes on to another objection. Somehow all of this does not fit into the style of Śaṅkara the *bhāṣyakāra*.

There are many such difficult points in the *Īśvara* discussion, but it is not possible to go into all of them here. However under *BS. II.1.3*, as mentioned earlier, Śaṅkara states clearly that in the *Yoga* system as in *Sāṅkhya*, *pradhāna* is considered to create the universe independently.³¹ In the *Yogasūtras* and the *Vyāsabhāṣya* and following that in the *Vivaraṇa* *Īśvara* acts as an efficient cause in the creation of the universe. If the author of the *BSBh.* and the *Vivaraṇa* were the same Śaṅkara how could this discrepancy be explained away regarding such an important concept of *Yoga*?

NOTES

¹ *BS. II.1.3.*

² The lineage being Gaudapāda then Śaṅkarācārya.

³ *BSBh. II.2.1.* Also S. Sankaranarayanan-*Śrī Śaṅkara and Nyāyadarśana — a new perspective*, Adyar Library Bulletin, 1990, pp. 111–150.

⁴ cf. *BSBh. I.1.5, II.1.11, 12, 29, II.2.11, etc.*

⁵ *BSBh. II.4.12, IV.1.10.*

⁶ *Ibid., III.2.5, III.2.24.*

⁷ Ibid., III.3.28, IV.1.9, IV.1.13.

⁸ Ibid., I.1.5, I.3.27, I.3.33, II.1.25, III.2.5, III.2.21, III.3.32, III.3.37.

⁹ Ibid., I.4.7, etc.

¹⁰ Ibid., I.4.9.

¹¹ Ibid., II.1.1.

¹² Ibid., II.1.3.

¹³ Ibid., II.2.1.

¹⁴ Ibid., II.2.37.

¹⁵ Ibid., III.2.24.

¹⁶ samrāḍhanam ca bhaktidhyānapraṇidhānādyanuṣṭhānam.

¹⁷ pratyaksānumānābhyām śrutismṛtibhyāmityarthaḥ.

¹⁸ brahmabhāvaśca mokṣaḥ tasmānna saṃskāryopi mokṣaḥ.

¹⁹ M. R. Yardi *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya of Śrī Shankaracharya* Samvit No. 8, Sept. 1983, p. 23.

²⁰ dhyānam cintanam yadyapi mānasam tathāpi puruṣeṇa kartumakartumanyathā vā kartum śakhyam, puruṣatantravtvāt. jñānam tu pramāṇajanyam — — —.

²¹ utpannā hi vidyā phalasiddhim prati na kiñcidanyadapekṣata utpattim prati tvapekṣate.

²² Trevor Leggett, *The Complete Commentary by Śaṅkara on the Yogasūtras*, p. 27.

²³

(1) apica dhyāyatyartha eṣa yatsamānapratyayapravāhakaraṇam, *BSBh.* on IV.1.8.

(2) tasmindeṣe dhyeyālaṃbanasya pratyayasaiikatānatā sadṛśaḥ pravāhaḥ pratyayāntareṇāparāmrṣṭo dhyānam. Vyāsabhāṣya on *YS.* III.2.

²⁴ tasmindeṣe dhāraṇāvṛttiviṣaye nābhicakrādaudhyeyālaṃbanasya dhyeyo deśādih, tadālaṃbanasya. pratyayasya (ekātānatā) sadṛśappravāhaḥ. tulyapratyayānām pravāha ekākāraḥ pratyayasantānaḥ pratyayāntareṇa vijātiyena aparāmrṣṭaḥ anākīrṇaḥ tat dhyānam. *Vivarana* under *YS.* III.2.

²⁵ ucyate — yogaḥ samādhiriti cittasthitiviṣeṣo vivakṣitaḥ. iha tu pratyayasantāna-syaiva dhyeyasvabhāvāvaśeṣāt dhyeyākāratvamaṅgami viśeṣaḥ. *Vivarana* under *YS.* III.3.

²⁶ *Vārttika* under *YS.* III.39.

²⁷ evamekopi sanvidvānaisvaryaogādane kabhāvamāpadya sarvāṇi śarīrāṇyāviśati. ekamanonuvartini samanaskānyevāparāṇi śarīrāṇi satyasamkalpatvātsrakṣyati sṛṣṭeṣu ca teṣūpādhībhedādātmanopi bhedenādhiṣṭhātṛtvam yokṣyata eṣaiva ca yogaśāstreṣu yogināmaneka-śarīraprayogakriyā. *BSBh.* under IV.4.15.

²⁸ Rukmani *Yogavārttika*, Vol. IV, pp. 12ff.

²⁹ kecittu kṣetrajñā apyanye pratikāyabhedam bhavanti manvate. kecidatra codayanti akṛtābhyāgamam. anye tu tadanurūpopārjitakarmanāḥ kṣetrajñā bhavanti parihāramāhuh. *Vivarana* under *YS.* IV.4.

³⁰ *BSBh.* under I.2.29.

³¹ tatrāpi śrutivirodhena pradhānam svatantrameva kāraṇam — — — *BSBh.* under II.1.3.

University of Durban-Westville
S. Africa