

The Ācārya indicates that this is precisely what is happening in our lives. The body is misunderstood as the Ātman, the Self. That is all. The consequences are a house, a car, a wife, plenty of money, anxieties of how to procure it, having procured it how to keep it and having kept it, the responsibility of guarding it day and night, radio, television, air-conditioning, pleasures, parties, entertainments and recreations, all these can heap unnecessary, meaningless agonies (anarthavrāta), upon our heads. The more we identify with the body, the more are our life's botherations. Thus, holding on to an unreal thing becomes the essence of all bondage.¹ This is the second definition of bondage. The first definition was in the previous verse where it was declared that considering the anātman to be the Self, was bondage (verse – 137).

Bondage is nothing other than the identification with the unreal, the perishable, the changeable, the variable, the mutable together called the anātman, the not-Self. Ādi Śaṅkara, in this verse, addresses the reader as 'friend'. 'Listen, O friend!' he says. This spirit of camaraderie brings the mighty Master to our level. First the Teacher explained 'what was anātman'. Then he explained 'what was Ātman' now he is explaining 'the nature of bondage'.

In the unhappy wedlock of Ātman and anātman, this ego is created and in each of us, it is this ego which supplies our sense of limitations, the bondages in life.



अखण्डनित्याद्वयबोधशत्या स्फुरन्तमात्मानमनन्तवैभवम् ।
समावृणोत्यावृतिशक्तिरेषा तमोमयी राहुरिवार्कबिम्बम् ॥ १३९ ॥

*akhaṇḍanityādvayabodhaśakte sphurantamātmānamanantavaibhavam,
samāvṛṇotyāvṛtiśaktireṣā tamomayī rāhurivārkabimbam.* (139)

¹ *yo'sadgrāhaḥ sa hi bhavati bandhaḥ*

139. *Āvṛti* (*the veiling power*), is of the nature of *tamas* (*ignorance*). It covers the Self whose glories are infinite, which is indivisible, eternal and one without a second, just as Rāhu covers the sun during a solar eclipse.

In these verses, Śaṅkara revels in the irrepressible surge of his poetry. Though there is not much progress in the flow of ideas, Śaṅkara delights here in his subjective experience of Brahman.

This great Self is immutable, eternal and one without a second. The glory of the Self is never away from us. It is always present in us illumining both the inner pulsations of the mind and the outer presence of objects. Even though this Consciousness is always present in us, it is not readily available for our cognition because of the veiling over it created by *tamas*. How does this great Consciousness come to be covered by *tamas*? How can ignorance cover Knowledge? Śaṅkara answers this doubt by an illustrative example from nature, just as the sun ‘covered’ by Rāhu during the solar eclipse (rāhurivārkabimbam).

The phenomenon of the solar eclipse is explained with characteristic poetic expression in Hindu mythology. It is said that Rāhu, a demon swallows the sun during the eclipse but Rāhu is a demon having only a head and no trunk. So when he swallows the sun by the mouth, it emerges out from his neck. Here is science wedded to poetry!

When the moon comes between the sun and the observer (on the earth), the phenomenon is termed as the solar eclipse. In fact, the moon only ‘covers’ the sun from the vision of the observer. How can the moon really cover the sun? The moon is comparatively smaller than the sun. The moon does not and cannot cover the sun. Since the sun is so far and the moon is nearer and the observer on the earth is so very much smaller than both, it appears as though the moon has ‘covered’ the sun. All the same, the moon has obstructed the observer’s vision of the sun. From his standpoint, the sun is completely covered. If we could move away even a little from the shadow of the moon we will see that the sun is not covered at all.