



38. Bondage in Action (145-146)

बीजं संसृतिभूमिजस्य तु तमो देहात्मधीरङ्करो
रागः पल्लवमम्बु कर्म तु वपुः स्कन्धोऽसवः शाखिकाः ।
अग्राणीन्द्रियसंहतिश्च विषयाः पुष्पाणि दुःखं फलं
नानाकर्मसमुद्भवं बहुविधं भोक्तात्र जीवः खगः ॥ १४५ ॥

*bījam saṃsṛtibhūmijasya tu tamo dehātmadhīraṅkuro
rāgaḥ pallavamambu karma tu vapuḥ skandho'savaḥ śākhikāḥ,
agrāṇīndriyasaṁhatiśca viṣayāḥ puṣpāṇi duḥkham phalam
nānākarmasamudbhavaṁ bahuvidhaṁ bhoktātra jīvaḥ khagāḥ.* (145)

145. *Ignorance is the seed for the tree of samsara. Body-identification is the sprout, desires are its tender leaves, work is its water, the body is its trunk, the pranas are its branches, the sense organs are its twigs, the sense objects are its flowers, different miseries born out of the varieties of actions are the fruits and the individual jiva is the bird perched upon it.*

The picture of the ‘tree of life’ or the ‘tree of samsara’ is etched here by Šaṅkara, his philosopher’s pen moving with the throbbing of his poetic heart. The ‘seed’ for this ‘tree of samsara’ is tamas which is synonymous with avidyā, ignorance, vāsanās, causal body and non-apprehension of Reality. If the seed is once roasted in fire, that is, if the vāsanās are burnt in the fire of Knowledge, there would no more be any tree at all.

The ‘sprout’ is the intellectual conception and strong conviction that this body is the Self, which is of course, the first expression of avidyā. The first couple of ‘tender leaves’ are the desires. As long as I do not recognise the Self, I consider myself to be the body. When I am the body, I am anxious to preserve it. ‘I

want this,' 'I want that' thus all desires start. Desires are expressed in two ways – likes and dislikes (the couple of leaves). The growth of the tree can be arrested even at this level by destroying the sprout, or at least by neglecting to water it.

The 'water' is the egocentric activity undertaken to fulfil the desires of the body. At this stage, the growth of the tree can be prevented by stopping the supply of water. In case it is not possible to stop the watering, the addition of two drops of nitric acid will do the trick. If in the activities of the ego, two drops of spirit of dedication are added, the tree will soon be destroyed. Therefore, dedicated activity (*niṣkāma karma*), is advocated here, which will ultimately destroy the *vāsanās*, the very seeds.

The 'trunk' is the body. If activity is undertaken motivated by desires, the tree grows stronger and becomes the trunk, which is the gross body in each one of us. The 'branches' are the *prāṇas*. The *prāṇas* are five in number – *prāṇa*, *apāna*, *samāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*. As the five main branches of life's activities, these maintain the body and its functions, just as the branches maintain the trunk of the tree.

The 'twigs' are the sense organs. They depend upon the *prāṇas*. If the branches are removed, the twigs cannot remain. When the *prāṇas* depart, the sense organs can no longer function. The sense organs are of two types – the organs of perception and the organs of action. They are so named because of their special functions of reception of stimuli and responses in the world outside.

The 'flowers' are the sense objects. They always have the tendency to attract. Each sense organ has its sense objects, just as each twig has its flowers. All sense objects can be classified under forms and colours, smells, sounds, tastes and touches. The classification depends upon the organs of perception, just as the flowers depend upon the twigs.