

catch them. The moth is enchanted by form and attracted by the brilliance of the flame. It flutters towards it with an agonising impatience and gets burnt. The fish, ravenously hungry at all times, in its gluttony, swallows the bait, is caught and thus meets its end in the stomach of fish-eaters. The poor honeybee, attracted by the fragrant smell of flowers, pursues its industrious vocation, collects honey from the flowers and hoards it in its hive, until at last, heartless man sets fire to the hive in order to loot the honey wealth of the bee.

Thus, Śaṅkara gives us five typical examples wherein each has met its doom because of its attachment to one or the other of the five senses. Most dramatic it becomes when Śaṅkara concludes with the exclamation, ‘What then is in store for a man who is attached to all these five?’

When a man of ignorance, having neither discrimination nor detachment, vulgarly runs after sense objects for his temporary nerve tickling, he becomes a sad victim of his delusion and meets a calamitous end for he has allowed himself to be bound by the five strong ropes.¹



दोषेण तीव्रो विषयः कृष्णसर्पविषादपि ।
विषं निहन्ति भोक्तारं द्रष्टारं चक्षुषाप्ययम् ॥ ७७ ॥

*doṣena tīvra viṣayaḥ kṛṣṇasarpaviṣādapi,
viṣam nihanti bhoktāram draṣṭāram cakṣuṣāpyayam. (77)*

77. *Sense objects are even more venomous in their tragic effects than cobra poison. Poison is fatal to one who swallows it, but the sense objects kill him who even looks at them with his eyes.*

At this juncture, Śaṅkara discusses how dangerous it is for a seeker to be attached to the enjoyment of sense objects. He has

¹ the Sanskrit word ‘guṇa’ has two meanings – (1) rope and (2) mental tendency.

already told us how tragic is the end of those living beings who have but a single sense appetite. In order to emphasise the virulence of sense poison, Śaṅkara gives yet another verse, which is very famous, inasmuch as, we often hear it being quoted from all pulpits.

Explaining the dangerous intensity of this poison, the Ācārya compares it with the venom of the cobra. If there is some distance between a cobra and an individual, the poison in the cobra cannot affect him. Nobody is known to have died of poison because he merely saw a cobra in a zoo. The venom can be fatal to a person only when he is bitten by a cobra. Compared with this, sense objects are more virulent because they can annihilate the individual who just looks at them. The organ of vision mentioned in the verse, represents all the other four sense organs and indicates a similar end when all other sense organs, individually or collectively, run after their sense objects, bringing about a total annihilation.



विषयाशामहापाशाद्यो विमुक्तः सुदुस्त्यजात्।
स एव कल्पते मुक्त्यै नान्यः षट्शास्त्रवेद्यपि ॥ ७८ ॥

*viṣayāśāmaḥ pāśādyo vimuktaḥ sudustyajāt,
sa eva kalpate muktyai nānyah ṣaṭśāstravedyapi. (78)*

78. *He who has liberated himself from the terrible bonds of desires for sense objects, (indeed), very difficult to renounce, is alone fit for Liberation; none else, even if he is well versed in all the six schools of philosophy.*

We have been told again and again that vairāgya is an essential and salient factor in the study of Vedānta. So, without total and complete vairāgya, the energy in us which is being spent in wrong pursuits will not be conserved for greater purposes of self-culture and ultimately of Self rediscovery.