

More precise and authoritative, more eloquent and impressive than an international constitutional lawyer is Ādi Śaṅkara here cascading an irresistible logical thinking. Not only can there be no prārabdha for the Self, but for a Man of Perfection, even his body can have no prārabdha. To gainsay this would be ridiculous, for he, in his absolute state of Realisation, does not perceive or recognise the existence of the physical body. “When you start pondering deeply”, says Śaṅkara, “you cannot accept that there is prārabdha even for the physical body¹ of a Man of Perfection.”

This assertion is now explained in detail –

The superimposed snake is apparently visible only to a deluded observer. It is very well-known that it has no reality. The play of the three bodies is but an illusion superimposed upon the Self; so where is reality for the body? Again that which is unreal can never be born; the snake in the rope has no birthday. The body that is superimposed upon Brahman cannot be said to have been born ‘due to prārabdha’. The ghost on the post was never born, so it can never die; the unborn is undying. The body that is never born has no death or decay; birth and death of the body are both superimpositions on the Self. Summing up his arguments, Śaṅkara, with biting ridicule asks, “How can there be prārabdha for the unreal, which naturally is unborn and, consequently, non-existing?”

In short, the witty Ācārya indicates that prārabdha cannot be either for the Self or for the body which is the not-Self. It can only be in the imagination of the deluded perceiver.



ज्ञानेनाज्ञानकार्यस्य समूलस्य लयो यदि ।
तिष्ठत्ययं कथं देह इति शङ्कावतो जडान् ।
समाधातुं बाह्यदृष्ट्या प्रारब्धं वदति श्रुतिः ॥ ४६३ ॥

¹ *vicāryamāne śarīrasyāpi prārabdhaṁ kalpanāmātram.*