

*brahmānandanidhirmahābalavatā'haṅkāraghorāhinā
saṁveṣṭyātmani rakṣyate guṇamayaiścaṇḍaistribhirmastakaiḥ,
vijñānākhyamahāsinā śrutimatā vicchidya śīrṣatrayaṁ
nirmūlyāhimimaṁ nidhiṁ sukhakaraṁ dhīro'nubhoktuṁ kṣamaḥ. (302)*

302. *The treasure of the bliss of Brahman is enwrapped by the mighty and dreadful serpent of the ego sense, and jealously guarded for its selfish use, by its three fierce hoods, the three guṇas. The wise man who destroys it by severing its three heads with the great sword of Realisation, in accordance with the teachings of the scriptures, alone can enjoy this treasure which brings Bliss.*

In the serenade of his poetry, Śaṅkara brings in the refrain of what has already been said.

The treasure of the 'infinite bliss of Brahman' is kept secret in the undisturbed cave of the physical body. This treasure is being guarded by a serpent, the ego sense, the individuality. Individuality is represented by a serpent in all religions. The serpent that tempted Eve, the serpent upon which Śrī Kṛṣṇa danced and destroyed, the serpent in the holds of the peacock – the vehicle of Lord Subramanya – the serpent that is worn as an ornament by Lord Śiva, all these represent the ego sense, which is the stockpile of all our stupidities. This powerful, terrible serpent, the ego, protects the treasure trove of blissful Brahman (Brahmānanda). For its own selfish ends, this ego coils round the treasure and protects it. This ego (ahaṅkāra) in us will not allow us to realise the state of Brahmananda. It expresses itself at all times through one agitation or another.

A triple-headed serpent is this ego. Its terrible hoods¹ are the guṇas – sattva, rajas and tamas. This serpent can be destroyed only by the sword of direct perception (vijñāna).

By no other means can we end the ego. The ego can be ended by the sword of Knowledge, forged by direct perception, which is gained through a sincere and intelligent study of the scriptures.

¹ *caṇḍai – bhīkaraiḥ; mastakaiḥ – terrible hoods*