CHAPTER EIGHT

CRITICISM OF THE SARVASTIVADINS

Now Shamkara takes up the doctrine of the Vaishnavas for refutation. In so far as they advocate that God is the efficient as well as the material cause of the world, Shamkara agrees with them because this view is consistent with the authority of Shruti and for that matter, with his own doctrine. He attacks only those tenets of the school which are not backed by Shruti.

a) Criticism of the Theory of Causation

Before taking up the criticism, Shamkara places the opponent's viewpoint before us and gives us the following account of the Pāncarātra School.

According to the Vaishnavites, Vāsudeva is the highest Reality. Its nature is pure knowledge. It assumes four forms, or to be technically more fair, 'Vyuhas'. They are: Vāsudeva, the highest Ātman; Sāŋkarśana, the individual soul; Pradyumna, the mind and finally, Aniruddha, Ahankāra, i.e., the "I" consciousness. According to them, Vāsudeva is the ultimate Cause. It manifests itself into the latter three

1. Vide Shārīraka Bhāṣya on 2/2/43.

2. It may be noted here in passing that the above description of the Bhagavatas as given by Shamkara is supported by Mahābhārata XII, 347.
effects. The Vaishnavites say that a man who worships this Vasudeva devoutly for a hundred years by means of offerings, prayers and meditation will finally be emancipated.

As against the view that Vasudeva is the Supreme Soul, he is beyond Prakṛti, he is the inner soul of everything and that, after assuming himself in the initial three forms, he himself remains untainted, Śaṅkara has nothing to say because all this is supported by Shruti and as such does not contradict his own assertions. For example, the Chāndogya Upaniṣad says clearly, "He is one, he becomes three". Śaṅkara respects their devotional approach to the Supreme Soul in so far as it is adjoined by Shruti and the Śrāvṇas both. But as to their contention that the individual soul is produced from the Supreme soul, he retorts furiously. So the theory of causation of the opponent comes first in the course of attack on the Pāncarātra School.

Śaṅkara points out a serious difficulty in admitting that the highest Soul originates the individual soul. He says that it would make the soul non-eternal in nature. Whatever is produced is non-eternal. This result, being universally true, would attribute impermanence to the soul if it is admitted to be an effect. And if the soul is impermanent, then, says Śaṅkara, the concept of liberation would amount to a cry in the wilderness. There will be no final release because the

1. Vide VI/26/2.
impermanent soul can never reach the highest being.

The Bhagavatas hold that the soul (Sankarśana) originates the mind. They say further that the mind in turn produces 'I' consciousness or the Aniruddha. The mind at the same time is regarded an instrument in the Pāncarātra school of Philosophy. This thesis, the monist points out, is contradicted by experience. It is never observed that an agent produces an instrument. Devadatta, the agent, for example, cannot be the cause of an axe, the instrument. No analogy is available from our everyday experience to prove the opponent's stand. Śaṅkara asserts further that no Shruti passage supports this view of the Bhāgavatas.

b) Criticism of the Ultimate Reality

The Bhāgavatas may say that Sankara, Pradyumna and Aniruddha are the different forms of Vāsudeva. Therefore, they are endowed with knowledge, glory, might, power, valor

1. The Śārīraka Bhāṣya on 2/3/17 may be referred to bring out Śaṅkara's point clearly.

2. As against the above declaration of Śaṅkara, that no instance is available from practical life to prove the production of an instrument by an agent, one feels inclined to recall his example of spider, producing threads out of himself.

3. Śārīraka Bhāṣya on 2/2/43.
and lustre. So they are defectless, self-supporting, permanent and perfect divinities. Hence they are all powerful to originate the mind and the 'I' consciousness. Śaṅkara disproves the opponent's point of guard on the plea that it gives rise to further difficulties. The summary of the difficulties, is given below.

1) If the Bhāgavatas mean to say that the four divinities have the same attributes, then they are in reality positing four Lords and not one, whereas the purpose can be served even by one Lord. Because all the four Lords are endowed with equal quantity of lordly character, therefore, only one can independently discharge the duties of the other three. Hence, it is a useless addition of the latter three, when the function can be accomplished even by one Lord, viz. Vāsudeva. This criticism made by Śaṅkara is undoubtedly cogent because more than one independent sovereign Omnipotent Reality can never be admitted to be simultaneously existing.

11) If the above position is granted, i.e. Śaṅkarāṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha are regarded as three different forms of Vāsudeva, then Śaṅkara would point out that the Bhāgavatas are going against their held view that Vāsudeva is the sole Reality. This shows that the doctrine of the Bhāgavatas is logically untenable.

1. Śārīraka Bhāṣya on 2/2/44.
iii) Experience tells us that the cause and the effect must be different from each other in a few respects. There cannot exist causal connection between them if they are absolutely similar in all respects. The Bhagavatas do not acknowledge such difference between Vasudeva on the one hand and the other three on the other hand. In order to get out of the difficulty mentioned above, they have attributed exactly the same character to all the four lords. Moreover, if the given objects are exactly similar in all respects, we have no means to determine which of them is the cause and which the effect.

iv) Finally, there is no reason why Vasudeva should assume only limited number of forms. There is nothing to deter us, says Shanka, from contemplating that the Vasudeva assumes unlimited forms, beginning from Brahmadeva down to the blade of grass.

c) The Concept of Emancipation

According to the Pāncarātra Schools, says Shanka, emancipation is individual soul's unity with the Supreme soul. In order to do away with any conception otherwise than this, it has been declared emphatically by the Śīrakāra that the soul cannot be said to have originated because otherwise it would become impermanent. It is worthwhile to note here that the Bhagavatas conception of emancipation is slightly different from what has above been told by Shanka. They advocate that liberation is achieved when the soul reaches its destination—'Vaikuntha'—for ever.
Shamkara seems to try to bring this conception very close to that of the Vedāntins when he says that emancipation, according to the Bhāgavatas, means unity of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul.

Shamkara shows another contradiction in the doctrine of the Bhāgavatas. On the one hand, they say that the mind and the 'ego' are distinct entities; on the other hand, they maintain that they are non-distinct from Vāsudeva. In fact, no two entities originating from the same cause can ever be distinct in themselves. If they are, they can never be said to have originated from one and the same cause. According to the doctrine of Satkāryavāda, causal relation between two entities indicates that they have some common characteristics. Hence, if 'B' and 'C' are two given effects of 'A', they cannot be absolutely different from each other.

d) Ill-Speaking of the Scriptures Condemned

The Bhāgavatas says that Shandilya acquired this knowledge of the Pāncarātra School when, it is said, he was greatly disappointed over not winning the highest Bliss even by studying the four Vedas. This is clearly speaking ill of the Vedas and therefore, retorts Shamkara, this doctrine must at once be altogether rejected. It may be observed here that Shamkara is rather unconvincing when he raises the objection of "Veda-Pratisēda", i.e. contradiction of the utility of Veda. In fact, Rāmānuja is right in bringing out
a relevant passage from the Chandogya Upanishad where the apparent ill-speaking of the Vedas by Narada is not really intended, but it is only to emphasise the topic under discussion. Similar may be the case with the Shandilya's dissatisfaction which led him to denounce the authority of the Vedas. But the power of Shańkara's exhortation is not at all diminished by this finding of Ramanuja. In fact, anybody, who doubts the utility of Vedic authority in any way, is, in Shańkara's eyes, a man who should never be heard.

e) Ramanuja's Interpretation Considered

Ramanuja is the only commentator who has defended the position of the opponent in the concluding Sutra of the Discussion at issue. However his interpretation should be judged keeping in view the following facts:

(i) The word "Ca" of the Sutra is a clear indication of the continuity of the topic contained in the immediately preceding three Sutras. These earlier Sutras decidedly refute the opponent. Whether that refutation is directed against the Pāncarātra School or any other School is a different question. But still it is a refutation and its line of attack is carried on in the last concluding Sutra too. This point is definitely in favour of Shańkara's interpretation.

1. "Śrī-Brāhmaṇa" on the Brahma-Sūtras 2/2/45.
2. VII, 1/2-3.
In fact, if we take into consideration the theme of the whole quarter, it is decidedly to refute the opponent and hence does not favour Rāmānuja.

ii) Let us compare the concluding Sūtra with the following three Sūtras:

विदित व्याख्यानंकर्तर | कनिष्ठाः परात्मतंत्वं | कथितलता न |

It may be observed in the light of these Sūtras, that the tone of the concluding Sūtra, which has been interpreted by Rāmānuja as supporting the opponent's position, is undoubtedly combative.

iii) Moreover, it is not in accordance with the Indian tradition to conclude a topic defending the thesis of the opponent.

iv) Rāmānuja has paraphrased the Sūtra as विदितिविद्यान्याख्यानं As विदितिविद्यान्याख्यानं ति जातायो विदितिविद्यान्याख्यानं ति जातायो ।

In that case, as Dr. S.K. Belvalkar rightly suggests the wording of the Sūtra should have been प्रतियोगाख्यानं and not विदितिविद्यान्याख्यानं ।

But there is no denying the fact that Rāmānuja's interpretation of this Sūtra, is on the whole appealing. Keeping in view the wording of the Sūtra in question, it does not strike absolutely incorrect in the mind of an impartial critic. George Thibaut has appreciated Rāmānuja's

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1. "The Brahma Sūtras of Bādarāyaṇa," Page 205 (of Notes)
division and remarked that it is not "an unnatural proceeding
to close the polemical pada with a defence of that
doctrine which--in spite of objections--has to be viewed as
the true one". 1

The present attack against the Bhāgavatas covers
42-45 Sūtras of the second Quarter of the second Chapter of
the Brahma-Śūtras. It will not be going off the track to
mention here that the Śūtras 42nd and the 43rd are
interpreted by all the commentators, except a few like
Madhva, in the same manner as Śaṅkara. Madhva interprets
the Śūtra so as to make it an a attack on the contention
that the Shakṣī of the Lord can create the world
independently. Thus we see that the 45th Śūtra assumes the
form of a general attack. But we find Śaṅkara condemning
the opponent throughout. Śrīkantha takes it to be a general
condemnation. His grounds for the same are, of course,
different from those of the other commentators.

1. Vide his Introduction to the translation of Śārīraka
Bhāṣya, page (LII).