

The Faith of Ascetics and Lay Smārtas: A Study of the Śāṅkaran Tradition of Śrīgeri. By YOSHITSUGU SAWAI. Edited by GERHARD OBERHAMMER. Publications of the de Nobili Research Library, Volume XIX. Vienna: Sammlung de Nobili, 1992. 199 pp.

This book explores the faith (*śraddhā*) of ascetics (*saṁnyāsīn*) and lay adherents of the Vedic tradition (*smārta*) found at the Śrīgeri monastery (*maṭha*) in Karnataka, reputedly established by the eighth-century Advaita Vedāntin Śāṅkara. It also shows how Śāṅkara's thought has been adapted by the *maṭha*'s current spiritual leaders (called Śāṅkarācāryas) and their followers to meet "their own particular religious needs" (p. 11), such as a focus on ritual activity and devotional worship rather than on renunciation or meditative realization of nondual *brahman*. Today a few *saṁnyāsīns* study Śāṅkara's writings concerning release (*mokṣa*) by *brahman* knowledge, but Śrīgeri is far more a pilgrimage center for lay *smārtas* who worship the goddess Śrī Śāradā and visit the Śāṅkarācāryas (also called *jagadgurus*) for boons and advice.

After introducing Wilfred C. Smith's concept of "faith," Sawai describes *saṁnyāsīn* faith as confidence in sacred text (*śāstra*) and teacher (*guru*), which assists intellectual contemplation (*nīdīdhyāsana*) of nondual *brahman*, and includes performance of various yogic and ritual actions. The faith of lay *smārtas*, however, is primarily seen in devotion (*bhakti*) to Śrī Śāradā and the *jagadguru*, along with performance of daily karmic duties, such as sun worship (*saṁdhyāvandana*). These activities aim for heaven (*svarga*) rather than *parabrahman*.

Sawai then gives a well-researched description of activities of lay *smārta* students (*brahmacārīns*) and householders at Śrīgeri. Pilgrimage to and *pūjā* offerings at the Śrī Śāradā temple make evident what Sawai calls "Tantric Advaita," in which devotees aim to gain *Śrīvidyā* by worshipping Śāradā on the Śrī *cakra*. More analysis of "Tantric Advaita," which combines devotion, knowledge (*jñāna*), action (*karma*), and *yoga*, would have been welcome, especially in light of Douglas Brooks's recent work on *smārta Śrīvidyā* Tantrism.

The next chapters describe *smārta* veneration of Śāṅkara and his incarnations today, the Śrīgeri Śāṅkarācāryas. Sawai refers at length to the *Śāṅkara-digvijaya* (*ŚDV*), a hagiography of Śāṅkara and manual of *saṁnyāsīn* customs ascribed to the fourteenth-century Advaitin Mādhava-Vidyāraṇya, but convincingly dated by Sawai to the eighteenth century. Highly esteemed at the *maṭha*, the *ŚDV* describes Śāṅkara as Śiva himself, taking birth to protect the Vedic path and lead his followers to release (often seen as a heavenly abode). Sawai shows that the *ŚDV* Śāṅkarā does not follow the model of knowledge- and *mokṣa*-focused renunciation found in the Śāṅkara *bhāṣyas*, e.g., he performs his mother's funeral rites, does intense *gurubbhakti*, and uses various supernatural powers. One also wonders what the eighth century Śāṅkara would have made of lay *smārta* worship of his image during the *Śāṅkara-jayantī* birthday festival. While illuminating, this section would have benefited from fewer passages in Sanskrit and more on the nature of hagiography. Sawai continues that lay *smārtas* also view Śāṅkarācāryas primarily as omniscient miracle workers using yogic powers or mantras to cure illness and provide boons (and not as teachers of *brahman* knowledge). While the Śāṅkarācāryas reject divinity, they are not traditional *saṁnyāsīns*. Along with ethical and ritual instruction of lay *smārtas*, they perform *karma*-bearing activities such as daily worship of Śrī Śāradā, festival participation (while wearing elaborate robes and jewelry), and some *maṭha* administration.

This book has many merits: solid textual research, interviews with and writings of recent Śāṅkarācāryas and their followers, and a very good outline of the *maṭha*'s history. A major contribution is Sawai's look at the insufficiently studied relationship of Śāṅkara's philosophy to actual Hindu religious life today. Yet the book also has weaknesses: it is quite dissertation-like, requires familiarity with Sanskrit, and at times needs better integration and more analysis. For example, the discussion of faith seems grafted on, rather than integral to, the interesting study of change and continuity in Śāṅkara's Advaita tradition. Finally, it is self-admittedly dated; the bibliography ends in 1983, relegating to footnotes references to William Cenkner's important work on the Śāṅkarācārya tradition, *A Tradition of Teachers* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983). Still, it would be a valuable addition to any library utilized by scholars of Indian religions.

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