

THE FAITH OF ASCETICS AND LAY SMĀRTAS. (A study of the Śāṅkaran Tradition of Śṛṅgeri). By YOSHITSUGU SAWAI. Vienna, 1992. Pp. 199.

This excellent study of the Smārta traditions of Śṛṅgeri is a doctoral thesis prepared under the direction of Prof. Ingalls at the Harvard University, USA and is edited by Prof. G. Oberhammer as volume XIX of the publications of the *de Nobili Research Library*, Institute for Indology, University of Vienna. This book contains the results of careful investigations into ŚRADDHĀ or FAITH as understood and practiced by the ascetics and the South Indian brahmin community known as *smārta-s*. This narrow field is further narrowed down to the case study only of those who owe allegiance to the Śrī Śāṅkarācārya *maṭha* at Śṛṅgeri and again to the limited period of the last three centuries.

Great scholars have written books on Śāṅkara's Vedānta, concentrating only on the metaphysics, or epistemology or philosophy of the system. A few scholars have undertaken research

also into the *smārta* tradition in Madras. But that was a study of Hindus in general. Thus the practical aspect of the *smārta* tradition has been ignored all the time. Hence arises a necessity for the present study. Thus Dr Sawai justifies his investigation (pp. 37-38).

Dr Sawai has chosen for his study the following basic source materials: (1) The two long Sanskrit poems, viz. the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* compiled by *Abhinavakālidāsa* Mādhava in the 18th century (p. 21) and the *Guruvamśakāvya* written by Kāsi Lakṣmaṇa Śāstri, 18th century (p. 19); (2) some of the well known works of Śrī Śaṅkara, such as the *Bhagavadgītābāṣya*, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, *Śivānandalahari* etc., some of the devotional poems of Saccidānanda Śiva Abhinava Nṛsiṃhabhārati, the 33rd pontiff of the Śṛṅgeri *maṭha*; (3) some recent English books (about 18 in number) brought out by the staunch devotees of that *maṭha*, such as R. K. Aiyar, L. N. Sastry, K. R. Venkataraman and others; and (4) Dr Sawai's personal interviews with the last pontiff H. H. Abhinava Vidyatirtha of Śṛṅgeri, with a few inmates of the Śṛṅgeri *maṭha*, with Śrī Paṇḍit Srinivasa Sastry of Pune, and with a number of devotees, who visited Śṛṅgeri on pilgrimage, during the time when the author stayed there for the present study.

Dr Sawai's work is divided into four parts. The first part is introductory in nature. It fixes the date of Śrī Ādi Śaṅkara in the eighth-ninth century and that of the *Mādhavīya Śaṅkaradigvijaya* in the eighteenth century. It analyses the concept of *śraddha* and *bhakti* in the light of what the author calls Śṛṅgeri tradition. In the second part the author deals with, in detail, how through different channels, the *śraddhā* is expressed by the lay *smārta* devotees of Śṛṅgeri *maṭha*, such as their religious practices with a deep devotion to Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, as an incarnation of god Śiva; to the Śṛṅgeri pontiffs as incarnations of Śrī Śaṅkara; and to goddess Śāradāmbā as supreme Mother Goddess, said to have been installed by Śrī Śaṅkara himself at Śṛṅgeri.

The third part is devoted to the discussions on the religious commitment of the *saṃnyāsin*; on the concepts of *saṃnyāsa*, *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna* as they are found in Śrī Śaṅkara's works and in the Śṛṅgeri tradition of to-day. The fourth part contains the conclusions of the author's present investigation. Here Dr Sawai tries

to show us that *śraddhā* towards scriptures; to the *guru's* instructions; and to the yogic practices is of utmost importance for *saṃnāsin* to achieve his goal, viz. Liberation. But, as far as the lay *smārtha* is concerned it is only *bhakti* that is more important than *śraddhā* for attaining the desired goal, viz. prosperity. The author tells us that all the four paths, viz. *jñāna*, *bhakti*, *karman* and *yoga* are found meeting at Śṛṅgeri i.e. in the sincere worship offered by one and all to the Mother Goddess Śāradāmbā at Śṛṅgeri. The author concludes his book with a brief note on what he calls the dynamic and complex structure of *smārta* faith.

Thus Dr Sawai could succeed in producing an interesting thesis, which is well documented and totally perceptive in nature, in spite of the fact that the field of his research happens to be restricted to one small sect.

We agree with him when he says that the usual English rendering of the Sanskrit *śraddhā* as *faith* is inexact. Dr Sawai seems to be in agreement with W. C. Smith's view that the word connotes the affirmative religious altitude, the positive, rather than negative, stance on moral and spiritual matters (p. 38). This view seems to touch the traditional definition: *śraddhā nāma śāstrācāryopadiṣṭe'rthe āstikyabuddhirūpo viśvāsātīśayah*.

However it is good to bear in mind that this *śraddhā* as well as *bhakti* (emotive veneration born of the intense *śraddhā*) of the lay *grhastha-s*, is not basically different from that of the ascetics, even though the *grhastha-s* make use of them for *pravṛttidharma* (i.e. the prescribed right conduct that leads to rebirth), while the *saṃnyāsin-s* observe them for *nivṛttidharma* (i.e. the prescribed right conduct conducive to Liberation). In the same way, the *śraddhā* and *bhakti* of the Śṛṅgeri tradition and those of all the other religious and philosophical traditions found elsewhere in India are essentially one and the same, even though the details of their objects (*viśaya*) such as the names and forms (*nāma* and *rūpa*) of *gurus*, holy places, gods goddess etc. may differ from tradition to tradition. Of course, if one could be courageous enough to ignore completely these unimportant differences and also if one could go beyond them all, then one would be happily able to realize that the spirit and vigor of pure *śraddha* and *bhakti* is pervading and pulsating in all traditions of all the great religions of the world. So, Dr Sawai's

present investigation, though confined to a very limited field, seems to open a new vista to a realization of the ideal brotherhood of the religions of the world in some distant future. We heartily congratulate Dr Sawai on his success in writing a good readable monograph.

However there are inaccuracies in the thesis. A few of them are: The verse *Yasya deve parā bhaktiḥ . . . . . mahātmanaḥ* does not occur in Śrī Śaṅkara's *Dakṣiṇāmūrtistotra* (cf. p. 51). On the other hand it occurs only in its commentary *Mānasollāsa* (X. 23). In fact the commentator himself has coolly appropriated the verse from its original source *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (last verse).

The statement contained in the hemistich *tasmān na viśvā-sapadam . . .* (SDV, XIII. 23), is not of Kumārilabhaṭṭa's disciples (cf. p. 56), but only of Śrī Śaṅkara's own disciples who were friends of Padmapāda. Here they are depicted as pleading with their Master, for Padmapāda, and against Sureśvara.

In the Jābālopaniṣad (*khaṇḍa* 5) it is the expression *vivarna-vāsāḥ* and not *adrohī* (cf. pp. 132 and 151), that is employed to describe a wandering monk as 'wearing uncoloured cloths'. *Adrohī* signifies 'One, who is free from ill-will'.

On page 29-30 Dr Sawai touches the vexed question of the date of Śrī Śaṅkara. In that context he remarks: Formerly, as late as 1897, the Śṛṅgeri *maṭha* was maintaining that the Ācārya was living during 745-769 A.D.; and in the early twentieth century the *maṭha* has revised the above date and now assigns the Ācārya to 788-820 A.D. (p. 29). Here, one is tempted to add: Formerly, at least as late as 1910 the Śṛṅgeri tradition was inclined to assign the Ācārya Śrī Śaṅkara to the first century B.C.: For example, the Sanskrit verses published by the pontiff of Śṛṅgeri, in that year (reproduced on pages 1-2 of the Sanskrit section of the souvenir *Kāladi* (1966) ed. by K.R. Venkataraman) tell us that Śrī Śaṅkara was born 2000 years earlier. Further in his *The Never to be Forgotten Empire* (1904), Dr B. Suryanarayana Rao wrote that according to the list of Śṛṅgeri pontiffs copied from the manuscript which was at that time, in the *pūjā* box of the then Śṛṅgeri pontiff. Śrī Śaṅkara was born in 44 B.C. It is obvious that Dr Sawai could not consult these publications. While the reviewer points out this, his aim is not to advocate the tenability and untenability of the above

traditional date of Śrī Śaṅkara. His only aim here is to add strength to Dr Sawai's statement that the Śṛṅgeri tradition has considerably changed in recent times its view regarding the question of the date of Śrī Śaṅkara.

Professor Danier H. H. Ingal of the Harvard University has written a scholarly, but brief Foreword for the book. It is certain that students of Indian philosophy and religions will welcome this book of Dr Yoshitsugu Sawai.

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