

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's *Siddhāntabindu*

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is best known as the author of the *Advaitasiddhi*, the last of the four monumental works that comprise the *siddhi* literature of Advaita (the others being the *Brahmasiddhi* of Maṇḍana Miśra, the *Naiśkarmyasiddhi* of Sureśvara, and the *Iṣṭasiddhi* of Vimuktātman). He was a monk and a follower of Śāṅkarācārya's non-dualist school of *vedānta*, and was an outstanding polemic writer who wrote many commentaries and independent treatises on non-dualist *vedānta* philosophy. He was also a great theologian and composed an extended commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, a commentary on the first verse of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and a monograph on *bhakti* theology, the *Bhakti Rasāyana*. He was a renowned philosopher who was proficient in all systems of traditional Indian philosophy.

The works of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī reveal him to be a versatile genius, a faithful commentator, an independent writer on Śāṅkarācārya's school of monism as well as an upholder of the concept of *bhakti*. His was a powerful polemical style popular amongst the philosophers of his time, and it made him a formidable writer on the *advaita-vedānta* dialectics.

Siddhāntabindu or *Siddhāntatattvabindu* is Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's commentary on Śrī Śāṅkarācārya's *Daśaślokī*, also known as the *Cidānandastavarāja* or *Cidānandadaśaślokī* or *Nirvāṇadaśaka*. In spite of being a commentary, the text deserves an independent status for its exhaustive exposition of *advaita* philosophy in its totality. It presents all the basic principles of *advaita* in the prima facie views (*pūrva-pakṣa*) and their refutations (*khaṇḍana*), and is a reliable and comprehensive digest of *advaita vedānta*. Numerous commentaries on it by eminent followers of this school substantiate this assertion.

The very meaning of '*Siddhāntabindu*' suggests that it is a summary or digest of the conclusions of *advaita* philosophy. The nature of the work, as is found in its brief refutation of other views in order to establish its own, places it under the category of polemical works (*vāda-prasthāna*), rather than under topical works (*adhikaraṇa-prasthāna*) in Indian philosophical literature. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī appeared at the height of the great controversy amongst the Indian philosophers over the question of the illusoriness of the empirical world. Philosophers of all other systems contested the notions of the illusoriness of the world and of *māyā/avidyā/ajñāna*, which is the source of this illusion. The ritualist Mīmāṃsaka-s and the Sāṅkhyā and the Nyaya

Vaśeṣika realists, on the one hand, and the theologians of the various sects who believed in the reality of God's creation, on the other, all attacked Śankarācārya's theories based on illusion. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī rose to his eminent position because of his perfect defense of the system in the neo-logical style of disputation.

Daśaślokī conveys the import of the Upaniṣadic great sentence 'That thou art' (*tat-tvam-asi*). Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, following Śankarācārya, elaborates its import in the *Siddhāntabindu*. He presents the viewpoints of various schools beginning with *cārvāka* and others on the nature of the Self, decisively examines them, and finally discards them in order to establish the *advaita* view that the Self is absolute and pure consciousness that is also devoid of any attributes. Due to ignorance (*avidyā/ajñāna*), the Self comes to be bestowed with the attributes of agency (*karṭṛtva*), etc. However, these do not concern the Self at all. The empirical existence (*jagatprapañca*) is a mere superimposition on Brahman by nescience. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī establishes (i) the positive (*bhāva*) and indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) nature of *avidyā*; (ii) the mutual superimposition (*tādātmyādhyāsa*) of the Self and the not-Self, which is the cause of 'I' and 'mine'; and (iii) the various methods on the interpretation of the great sentence, 'That thou art', such as the exclusive implication (*jahallakṣaṇā*), non-exclusive implication (*ajahallakṣaṇā*), exclusive-non-exclusive implication (*jahad-ajahad-lakṣaṇā*), etc. The commentary expounds the various theories about the nature of the individual self (*jīva*), e.g. the reflection theory (*pratibimbavāda*), semblance theory (*ābhāsa-vāda*) and limitation theory (*avaccheda-vāda*), though Madhusūdana Sarasvatī admits the theory that perception is creation (*dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi-vāda*) to be the chief vedāntic doctrine (*mukhya-vedānta-siddhānta*). It also elaborates the theories of various schools with regards to the cause of the universe, while expounding the import of the term '*tat*' (in '*tattvamasi*'). Here, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī establishes the vedāntic view that Brahman associated with illusion (*māyā*) is both the material (*upādāna*) and efficient cause (*nimittakāraṇa*) of the universe. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's commentary thus advocates the transcendental unity between '*tvam*' and '*tat*' (in '*tattvamasi*').

Of the two categories recognized in *advaita*, namely the seer (*dr̥k*) and the seen (*dr̥śya*), the seer is non-dual and pure consciousness, though it appears threefold, i.e. God (*īśvara*), the individual self (*jīva*) and the witnessing self (*sākṣin*), due to limiting adjuncts (*upādhi*). The three states of waking, dream and deep-sleep of the *jīva* are also discussed here in detail. The *vedānta* theory of

creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*), i.e. the theory of quintuplication (*pañcīkaraṇa*), is explained in detail together with the theory of triplication (*trivītkaraṇa*) which is also accepted by certain advaitic writers. The commentary also explains the concept of the witnessing Self, and maintains that Brahman, being the base of all proofs, cannot be spoken of. Thus, we get a brief and yet adequate account of *advaita* philosophy from this work.

At the end of the work, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī mentions that he undertook this work at the repeated request of his disciple, Balabhadra, and that this digest (*nibandha*), though brief and easy to understand, is pregnant with much content, like the wish yielding gem *Cintāmaṇi* (of Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya, 1300 CE) — an assertion that can be corroborated if we view that the *Siddhāntabindu* only explains in a nutshell what is available in Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's magnum-opus *Advaitasiddhi*, a landmark in the history of Vedānta dialectics. Thus, the *Siddhāntabindu* defends the basic tenets of *advaita vedānta* through reasoning (unlike his *Advaitasiddhi* that employs hair-splitting polemic) and brings out in brief the philosophic implications of this short work of Śankarācārya, viz. the *Daśaślokī*.

While the *Daśaślokī* expounds in a very simple and lucid way (by negating what is opposed to advaitic essence), the fundamental doctrine of *advaita vedānta*, i.e. the identification of individual self with the supreme reality, Brahman, the *Siddhāntabindu* not only brings out the terse philosophical import (as embedded in the *Daśaślokī*), it also shows the taste of the style and argumentative skill of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. As through hair-splitting polemic in Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's magnum-opus *Advaitasiddhi* the basic tenets of *advaita vedānta* are defended by refuting any objection that may raise against them (i.e. *advaita vedāntins*), the *Siddhāntabindu* presents Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's non-dualistic views in a concise and yet exhaustive manner through reasoning—often leading as a guide book to the post- Śankarācārya *advaita vedānta* in general and its sub-schools in particular.

Among the famous available commentaries on *Siddhāntabindu*, mention may be made chronologically of the *Bindusandīpana* of Puruṣottama Sarasvatī (sixteenth century CE), a direct disciple of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, the *Laghuvyākhyā* of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha (seventeenth century CE), the *Nyāyaratnāvalī* of Brahmānanda Sarasvatī (seventeenth century CE), a disciple

of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha, the *Siddhāntasindhu* of Rāmarāya Vidvatkavi (1875–1914 CE), and the *Binduprapāta* of Vasudev Shastri Abhyaṅkar (1863–1942 CE). Besides, a lucid summary of the *Siddhāntabindu* called *Siddhāntabindusāra* by Tārānātha Tarkavācaspati (composed in 1793 Śakābda = 1871 CE) is also available.

The workshop will be structured thematically which will provide students with an informed overview whilst enabling them to focus on particular topics. The focus will be placed on acquiring a general understanding of the worldview, concepts and methods of *advaita vedānta* through Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. Whenever possible, the ideas expressed therein will be discussed in the light of modern/Western ideas. *Siddhāntabindu* encourages examination of interactions between different schools of thought, and this will be undertaken where appropriate. Translated Sanskrit texts will be provided by authorial explanations and contextualisations, giving the reader an understanding of the argumentative context and philosophical style of Indian texts.

While the workshop will aim to be an introduction to classical *advaita* philosophy suitable for the philosophically curious, the workshop will not aim to be an introduction to philosophy. Instead, the expected typical audience will include undergraduates who have taken at least a first course in philosophy, graduate students in philosophy seeking to broaden their philosophical horizons, and interested general readers with some prior background in philosophy. Thus, the workshop will be an essential resource for both beginners and advanced students of philosophy and Indian studies.