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APPROACH OF HINDUISM TO ITS SCRIPTURES

The *Vedas* occupy a unique position in Hinduism. Even the distinction between a believer and a non-believer is made in Hinduism, not on the ground of belief or dis-belief in God but on the ground of belief or disbelief in the authority of the *Vedas*. Six orthodox systems of philosophy, or *āstika darśanas* of Hinduism, as they are called, are regarded as orthodox or *āstika* simply because all these systems of philosophy believe in the authority of the *Vedas*. Some of these systems are regarded as *āstika* (orthodox) only on this ground even if they do not believe in the existence of God, e.g. Mīmāṃsā and Sāṃkhya philosophies, which do not believe in the existence of God, are regarded as *āstika darśanas* simply because they believe in the authority of the *Vedas*. Similarly Buddhism, Jainism, and Cārvāka are regarded as heterodox or *nāstika darśanas*, not on the ground that they do not believe in the existence of God but on the ground that they do not believe in the authority of the *Vedas*. In recent times, during the 19th Century, the Vedic authority has also been questioned by some thinkers of Hindu Renaissance movement like Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen, while others like Swami Dayananda Saraswati have, on the other hand, been famous for their championing the theory of Vedic infallibility and advocating religious and social reforms on the basis of an appeal to the Vedic authority.

Dayakrishna has raised certain significant questions about the Vedic corpus. "When one asks oneself the question as to what it is whose authority is being invoked or being denied, one does not find from the texts or the tradition any clear or definite answer", says Dayakrishna.¹ If it is regarded that the *Mantras* and *Brāhmaṇas* constitute the *Vedas*, then "do the Brahmanas", asks Dayakrishna, "include or exclude the Aranyakas and the Upanisads"? and again "in case they are taken to include the latter, the question would

1. Cf. Dayakrishna, "The Vedic Corpus: Some Questions", *JICPR* Vol. III, No. 1, Autumn, 1985, p. 103.

arise as to whether they include all of them or only some of them'. The problem of course is there, and Dayakrishna has done well in raising these significant questions for clarification. According to Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the term 'Veda' should apply only to the *Samhitās*, not to the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, and *Upaniṣads*. The usual approach, however, has been to include the *Mantras*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads* in the Vedic Corpus while excluding obviously the later *Upaniṣads*, some of which are composed even as late as thirteenth or fourteenth century. And this would be alright, I suppose, for our purpose in the present context. The definition given in *Āpastambīya Paribhāṣā Sūtra*, 1.33 includes both *Mantra* and *Brāhmaṇa* as the *Veda*- "*Mantra Brāhmaṇayoḥ Vedanāmadheyaḥ*". Sāyaṇācārya, it is true, has identified the *Mantras* to be the *Vedas*, although he also admits that the *Vedas* consist of both *Mantras* and *Brāhmaṇas*, simply because the *Brāhmaṇas* are only exposition of the *Mantras*, "*Yadyapi Mantra Brāhmaṇātmake Vedaḥ, tathā Brāhmaṇasya mantravyākhyānasvarūpatvāt mantra evādaḥ samamnāta*". *Āraṇyakas* and the *Upaniṣads*, except of course the later *Upaniṣads*, have been included also in the Vedic tradition as the *Śruti* (being literally heard by the disciples from their masters), and it would therefore be proper to have this extended use in our mind when we discuss about the Vedic corpus. "The real reason for calling the *Vedas* 'Śruti' ", according to Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, the Śankarācārya of Kanchi Kamakotipitham, the 68th in the line of succession from Ādiśaṅkara, "is that sounds that are inaudible to ordinary men were indeed heard by the Rishis, and these were then passed on by them to the disciples as they were heard by them. Thus, the Vedic sounds were revealed to the Rishis when they were properly attuned to receive them through their *Tapas*. Hence the *Vedas* came to be known as 'Śruti' or that which was heard."²

Some of the *āstika darśanas* like Vedānta not only believe in the authority of the *Vedas* but are also directly grounded in what is well-known as the *Prasthāna trayī* or threefold basic texts, viz. *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Brahma Sūtras*. *Upaniṣads* themselves are regarded as the concluding portion of the *Vedas*, as they are considered to be Vedānta proper (the end of the *Vedas*).

2. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, *The Vedas* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1988), p. 13.

It is thus that the authority of the *Vedas* gets further confirmed in the case of Vedānta Philosophy because of its direct dependence on the *Prasthāna trayī*. Once again, one finds that Dayakrishna has some reservations regarding *Prasthānatrayī* itself because according to him, "the general impression regarding the authoritative character of the so-called *Prasthāna trayī* for the Vedānta Acaryas is not sustained by the evidence, as many of them have not only not written any commentaries on the Upanisads or the Brahma-Sutras, but even on the Gīta which forms the third text of the triad".³ While generally agreeing with Dayakrishna in respect of his insightful observations, it is difficult to see why he is so incisive in his attack on Radhakrishnan in this regard when he says, "One wonders how, in the light of this evidence, the myth of the *Prasthānatrayī* came to be accepted even by such scholars as Radhakrishnan who himself wrote commentaries on the first three (i. e. the *Brahma-Sutras*, the Upanisads, and the *Gīta*), falsely imagining that he was following in the footsteps of the great Acaryas".⁴ Even in one of his recent articles also Dayakrishna refers to what he calls "the famous myth of the *Prasthāna Trayī*".⁵ *Prasthānatrayī* is not a myth, after all, because both the Ācāryas, Śaṅkara and Madhva, have written their commentaries on the *Brahma-sūtras*, *Upaniṣads*, and the *Gītā*, although Madhvācārya has also written an independent commentary on the *Bhāgavata* in addition. It is note worthy that the *Bhāgavata* was considered to be a natural commentary (*Akṛtrima bhāṣya*) on the *Brahma-sūtra* by Śrī Caitanya, and it was given a special status by the Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas with Caitanya's leanings. Such differences in emphasis on the traditional literatures are quite expected and natural. But from this it does not follow that the concept of *Prasthānatrayī* is only a myth. *Brahma-sūtras*, *Upaniṣads*, and the *Gītā* have a special status, so to say, in the Vedāntic tradition, and Radhakrishnan was obviously following in the footsteps of Ācārya Śaṅkara when he thought it necessary to write independent commentaries on all the three basic texts, the

3. Dayakrishna, *Op. Cit.*, p. 105.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Cf. Dayakrishna, "Vedānta in the First Millennium A. D.: The case study of Retrospective Illusion imposed by the Historiography of Indian Philosophy", *JICPR*, June, 1996, "The *Brahma Sūtras* remained entirely unnoticed until the appearance of Śaṅkara who wrote his commentary on them along with the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad gīta* which resulted in the famous myth of the *Prasthāna Trayī*".

Brahma Sūtras, Upaniṣads and the *Gītā*. As far as the *Upaniṣads* are concerned, it is worth noting, Śāṅkara has written his commentary only on ten *Upaniṣads*; it is further note-worthy that Rāmānuja and Madhva have also written commentaries on these ten *Upaniṣads* only. This by itself should point to the pre-eminence of the ten *Upaniṣads, Daśopaniṣad* as they are called, in the tradition; they are, *Īśa, Kaṭha, Praśna, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chāndogya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. It is true that many of the Ācāryas have not written independent commentaries on the *Upaniṣads* but from this it does not follow that the *Upaniṣads* do not form a triad (*Prasthāna trayī*) along with the *Brahma-sūtra* and the *Gītā* for the Vedāntic Ācāryas. The fact is that both the *Brahma-Sūtra* and the *Gītā* are supposed to contain the quintessence of the *Upaniṣadic* philosophy. Radhakrishnan's point was not entirely baseless when he said that "they (i.e. the *Brahma-Sūtra*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*) form together the absolute standard for the Hindu religion".⁶

But why are the *Vedas* considered to be so very important, so very authoritative in Hinduism? Bhartṛhari points out that different branches of learning which educate mankind have originated from the *Vedas*: "*Vidhātustasya lokānāṃ angopānaganibandhanāḥ, vidyābhedaḥ pratayante jñāna saṃskārahetavaḥ*."⁷ According to the great commentator Sāyaṇācārya, from the *Vedas* we come to know about the extraordinary ways by which we can achieve our good and eradicate the evil: "*Īṣṭaprāptiṣṭaparihārayoralaukikaṃ upāyaṃ yo vedayati sa vedaḥ*". That which cannot be known either through *pratyakṣa* (perception) or through *anumiti* (inference), that Reality can be known only through the *Vedas*, "*Pratyakṣeṇānumityā vā yastūpāyo no budhyate, Enaṃ vidanti Vedena tasmād Vedasya vedatā*." (As quoted by Sāyaṇa). According to Manu, the *Vedas* are like the eyes eternal through which everything can be seen or known, "*Pitṛdevamanuṣyānāṃ Vedaścakṣuḥ sanātanaṃ, aśakyaṃ cāprameyanca Vedaśāstramitisthitih*."

Even amongst those who believe in the authority of the *Vedas*, there is a controversy whether the *Vedas* are eternal or they are

6. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu view of life* (Blackie & Son publishers, Bombay, 1983) p. 18.

7. *Vākyapadīya*. I. 10.

created by God. The controversy between the Mīmāṃsaks and Naiyāyikas in this regard is well-known. According to the Mīmāṃsaks, the *Vedas* are eternal, *apauruṣeya*, not creation of any person. The Ṛṣis of the *Veda* are not the creators, not the authors of the Mantras; they only discovered the same (*Ṛṣayo mantradraṣṭāraḥ*). "We Hindus", says Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, one of the typical representatives of Hinduism, "call the Vedas, our Sacred texts, as *Apaurusheyam* meaning not authored by purusha or man, man being merely an instrument of God to spread His words".⁸ Udayanācārya, the great Naiyāyika, has tried to prove that the vedas have originated from God, they are not eternal. For this, the Vedic *mantra* itself "*Tasmāt yajñāt sarvabhūtā ṛcaḥ sāmāni yajñire*" is cited as an evidence. As the *Vedas* are produced by God, who is eternal and omniscient, they are the means of valid knowledge according to the Naiyāyikas, whereas the validity of the *Vedas* on Mīmāṃsaka's view is because of the fact that they are eternal and as such free from all human defects.

Śruti passages including the Vedic *mantras* are evidently given different interpretations by the philosophers of different schools to suit their theories. On the Vedāntic view, the *Vedas* emanate from *Brahman*; this is corroborated by Śruti itself as follows: "*Asya mahato Bhūtasya niḥśvasitaṃ yat Ṛgvedo yajurvedaḥ, Sāmavedōtharva Vedaḥ,*" "The Rgveda etc. have been breathed forth from that great Being."⁹ This has been cited by Ācārya Śāṅkara in his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra*, 1.1.3, *Śāstrayonitvāt*. It is interesting to note that Śāṅkara has given two alternative explanations of this *Brahma Sūtra*. In one of the interpretations Śāṅkara says that *Brahman* is the source of the great body of scriptures possessing the quality of omniscience, for the emanation of a body of scriptures possessing the quality of omniscience cannot be sought elsewhere but in omniscience itself. It is found that the man from whom some special doctrine referring to one particular knowledge originates, as for instance Grammar from Pāṇini, possesses a more extensive knowledge than his work. What idea then shall we have to form of the supreme omniscience and omnipotence of that Great Being who in sport as it were, like a man easily sending forth his breath, has produced the vast body of scriptures known as *Ṛgveda*

8. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

9. Cf. *Byhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II. Iv. 10.

etc., the mine of all knowledge (*sarvajñānākaraśya*), consisting of manifold branches (*anekasākhā bheda bhinnasya*), the source of the distinction of all the different classes and conditions of gods, animals, and men (*Deva tiryakmanuṣya varṇāśramādi prabibhāga hetoḥ*). Here Śāṅkara has enumerated the special distinctions of the Vedic scripture and has also pointed out the greatness of *Brahman* who is the source of such a body of scriptures. In the second interpretation of the same sūtra, Śāṅkara has pointed out that the scriptures like *Ṛgveda* etc. are the source i.e. the means of right knowledge through which we understand the nature of *Brahman*. Through scripture only as a means of right knowledge *Brahman* is known to be the source of the origin, sustenance and the destruction of the world (*śāstrādeva pramaṇāt jagato janmādikāraṇam Brahmadhigamyata ityabhiprāyaḥ*).

Here lies the outstanding difference between Mīmāṃsā, known as Pūrva Mīmāṃsā also, and vedānta that, while Vedānta lays emphasis on the philosophical portion (*jñāna kāṇḍa*) of the *Vedas*, consisting of the Upaniṣads, Mīmāṃsā is a staunch believer in the ceremonial portions of the *Vedas* known as *Karma kāṇḍa*. Jaimini goes to the extent of declaring that, "as the purport of the scripture is action, those scriptural passages whose purport is not action are purportless" "*Āmnāyasya kriyārthatvādānarthakyaḥ*".¹⁰ The whole commentary or Śāṅkarācārya on Brahma sūtra 1. 1. 4. "*Tattu Samanvayāt*" is devoted to the refutation of this view of Mīmāṃsā which is action-orientated and gives a pragmatic interpretation of the scriptural, meaning. The entire body of scripture, according to Vedānta on the other hand, possesses authority only in so far as it gives information about *Brahman*, an existing Reality. This is a major difference between Vedānta and Mīmāṃsā. Another point of difference between these two systems is that, while Mīmāṃsā holds that the *Vedas* are eternal and do not depend on any agent either for emanation or creation, Vedānta believes in the *Vedas*, having emanated from God. But *īśvara* or the Lord, it should be noted, is not free to create the *Vedas* as He likes, according to Vedānta; He manifests it in the very form it had in a previous aeon, and since there is no absolute beginning of the world, there was no time when the *Veda* was wholly non-existent. The beginninglessness

10. Jaimini, *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*, 1.2.1.

of the world and the manifestation of the *Veda* in strict dependence on its prior form are also to be known only from the *Veda*. According to Sri. Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, "the point to note here is that even God is not said to have brought the Vedas into existence. It would be incorrect to say that we created our own breath. It exists from the time we started existing. So are *īswara* and the Vedas".¹¹ The views on the *apauruṣeyatva* of the Vedas are practically, however, not very much different from each other as far as *Mīmāṃsā* and *Vedānta* are concerned, as is evident from the following remarks of Vācaspati, "*Puruṣasvātantryamātraṃ, apauruṣeyatvaṃ, rocayante Jaiminiyā api taccāsmākaṃ, api samānaṃ . . .*"¹².

The Vedas have the status of the revealed text and that is why they are regarded as *Śruti*, while other literatures like the *Bhagavadgītā*, *Āpastamba's Dharma sūtra*, *Manu Smṛti*, *Kapila Smṛti* etc., although considered quite important in the tradition, have got a secondary status in comparison with *Śruti* texts and are regarded as *Smṛti* or tradition. *Smṛtis*, being the work of human authors and being dependent on human memory, cannot be infallible. Śaṅkarācārya is quite clear on this issue, as is evident from his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*, 2.1.1., "*Smṛtyanavakāśa doṣa prasanga iti cet nānyasmṛtyanavakāśa doṣaprasangāt*". Here Śaṅkara explicitly points out that "the authoritativeness of the *Veda* with regard to the matters stated by it is independent and direct, just as the light of the sun is the direct means of our knowledge of form and colour", "*Vedasya hi nirapekṣam svārtha prāmānyaṃ Raveriva rūpaviśaye*". As far as *Smṛtis* are concerned, only those *Smṛtis* which follow *Śruti* are to be considered as authoritative, while all others are to be disregarded, says Śaṅkara. "*Śrutyānusāriṇyaḥ Smṛtayaḥ pramāṇaṃ, anapekṣyā itarāḥ*". This is very much in keeping with the tradition of *Mīmāṃsā*¹³, where *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*, 1.3.3., states, "*Virodhe tvanapekṣam syādasti hyanumānaṃ*". i.e. "Where there is contradiction between *Śruti* and *Smṛti*, *Smṛti* is to be disregarded; where there is no contradiction *Smṛti* is to be recognised as there is inference in that case of *Smṛti* being founded on *Śruti*."

11. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

12. Vācaspati Miśra, *Bhāmātī*, 1.1.3.

13. Cf. *Smṛtipramāṇyādihikaraṇa*, *Śruti-prābalyādihikaraṇa* etc. in the *Mīmāṃsā sūtras*, for Jaimini's approach to *Smṛti*.

But why exactly are these revealed texts, Śruti as they are called, of paramount importance at all? Ācārya Śaṅkara and others have, as we have seen already, ascribed their infallibility to the fact that either they are not known to be created by any human being, they are *apauruṣeya* and eternal or they owe their origin to an omniscient Being i.e. God and so on. Although Naiyāyikas, Mīmāṃsakas and Vedāntins, all accept the *Veda* as authoritative, they of course advance various reasons for its authoritative character. In the contemporary framework Halbfass has raised the same question once again in a straight forward, though in a slightly different, way, when he asks, "Why did they rely on the Veda, and only on the Veda? Why not on any other kind of 'revelation'? Why did they not simply recognize the need for 'revelation', or 'objective epiphany', as such and in general"?¹⁴ Buddhists at least did not subscribe to such a view. Halbfass seems to find an answer to the above question in the "internal multiplicity and variety" of the Vedic literature. The *Veda*, according to Halbfass "contains a great variety of forms of expression and instructions. It documents the thought of many centuries, and reflects fundamental changes in orientation. But, in a sense, it is this internal multiplicity and variety itself, this challenging and suggestive chaos, that accounts for the significance of the Veda in Hindu philosophy. It provides an elusive and ambiguous guidance, an open, yet authoritative frame work, with suggestive hermeneutic patterns and precedents and inherent appeals to human reflexivity".¹⁵ I have little difficulty in agreeing more or less with what Halbfass has to say about the Vedic authority, but it is not clear to me why Halbfass talks of "chaos" and "elusive and ambiguous guidance" in the context of Vedic literature. The *Vedas* certainly do not deserve such downright condemnation, at least no more than any other revealed text or world-literature for that matter. Such derogatory terms could be applied as a matter of fact in case of any richly suggestive literature, provided our aim is to find fault with the same. The real cause of the attraction of the *Vedas*, according to me, lies in its antiquity along with its highly suggestive character; there is no question of its being chaotic or ambiguous. Yāska has talked of several interpretation of the *Vedas*. The different interpretations are possible because of this highly suggestive

14. Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection* (State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 39.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

character of the Vedic literature which has come down to us in different phases from the most ancient times. We do not know about any author of this vast literature and it is also not possible on our part to assume that the *Veda* owes its origin to a particular sage or seer. The *Vedas* are rather the revelations manifesting themselves for the entire mankind from the earliest times, revelations that were received by the earliest receptive spirit of man. That is why the *Vedas* stand on a separate footing, so to say. It is undoubtedly most significant that when we begin to speculate about the origin of the *Veda*, we cannot ascribe its origin to any particular man, any particular *Ṛṣi*: so to say. The *Ṛṣi* only is the receptacle of the revelation. It is this, that endows the *Vedas* with a unique and a sort of primeval attraction in the mind of man. When we come to fix the date of the *Ṛgveda*, we find a great deal of controversy of course amongst the Eastern and the Western scholars. However, there is no doubt about its being "the oldest literary monument of the Indo-European languages"¹⁶ This speaks of its antiquity. This antiquity along with its highly suggestive literature developing through different phases of *Karmakāṇḍa*, *Jñānakāṇḍa* etc. on which a varieties of interpretation could be put has made it permanently attractive to the human mind throughout the ages, and its unique position as a revealed text is also ensured by these very characteristics.

But one thing should be born in mind when we are discussing the attitude of Hindu scholars to the Vedic authority. It is not that different parts of the *Vedas* are equally authoritative for all the Hindu philosophers or *Ācāryas*, It has already been pointed out earlier that because of *Mīmāṃsā*'s emphasis on the *Karmakāṇḍa*, the whole of the Vedic corpus is given an action-orientated interpretation by the philosophers of the *Mīmāṃsā* school whereas the *Vedāntins* give greater emphasis on the passages giving information about *Brahman* like *Tattvamasi* (That Thou art) and *Satyam Jñānam anantam Brahma* (*Brahman* is truth, knowledge and infinite) etc. than on any action-orientated passage. But although in matters of ultimate Reality or *Brahman*, the Vedic authority is regarded as supreme or infallible in *Vedānta*, if any passage of the *Śruti* comes

16. A. C. Macdome, *A Vedic Reader* (Oxford University Press, 1951), Introduction, P. xi.

in conflict with empirical facts and with other means of valid knowledge in connection with mundane matters, such passage cannot be taken as authoritative. Under such circumstances the *Śruti*, texts must be given a figurative or allegorical interpretation. Thus we come across the well-known statement of Śaṅkara, "*Na ca Śruti śatamapi śitogniraprakāśo veti brūvatprāmāṇyamupaiti.*"¹⁷ Hundreds of *Śruti* texts cannot be regarded as *pramāṇa* if they declare fire to be cold or devoid of light. "No one can accept something which is opposed to what is seen", says Śaṅkara in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Bhāṣya*, 1.4.10, "*Na ca dṛṣṭāvirodhaḥ kenacidabhyupagamyate*".

It is not only that *Śruti* cannot be valid if it comes in conflict with other means of valid knowledge, as mentioned above; the attitude towards *Śruti* is, in any case, not a servile one, if the generic approach of the Ācāryas like Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva to *Śruti* are to be counted in this regard. Each one of these great Ācāryas gives novel interpretations of the *Śruti* by emphasising different *Śruti* - statements or even by giving different interpretation of the same *Śruti*-texts such as *Tattvamsi*. (That thou art). Even the text "*Sa ātmā tattvamsi Śvetaketo*" of *Chāndogya* is construed as "*Sa ātmā atattvamsi*" in order to make room for the dualistic Vedānta of Madhva. Looking at the way these Ācāryas deal with *Śruti*-texts, one may wonder, at least in certain contexts, if they are only paying a liployalty to the *Śruti*. Let us take the case of Śaṅkara in a somewhat greater detail. It is true that he refers to *Śruti* passages from time to time in order to corroborate his advaita theory and explicitly points out that *Brahman* which is most abstruse is to be comprehended through revelation (*Śruti*), not through mere reasoning (*tarka*).¹⁸ Reasoning has a significant role to play in so far as it follows the *Śruti* texts (*Āgamānusari tarka*). *Brahman* is said to be *Śabdāmūla śabdapramāṇaka*,¹⁹ by Śaṅkara, to show that without the help of the *Śruti* texts *Brahman* cannot be comprehended in any case. *Vākyaṛtha vicāraṇa* (analysis of the meaning the passages of the *Śruti*) is a necessary prerequisite of the realisation of *Brahman* or *Brahmāvagati*.²⁰ But which *Śruti* texts are to be analysed and

17. Śaṅkara's *Gītā Bhāṣya*, 18.67.

18. Cf. Śaṅkara's *Brahma sūtra Bhāṣya*, "Śrutyavagāhyam evedam atigētibhijram Brahma, na tarkāvagāhyam".

19. Cf. Śaṅkara, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, 2.1.27.

20. *Ibid.* 1.1.2. "*Vākyaṛtha vicāraṇādhyavasāna nirvrttā hi Brahmāvagatih.*"

which particular texts should assume priority in this regard, whether all *Sruti* texts are of equal authority or there are some texts which are of secondary importance, all this is decided by Śankara himself in accordance with his Advaitic leanings. This is the most interesting feature of the attitude of Hindu thinkers towards the scriptures or *Śruti*. Wherever *Śruti* in the sense of authority, a group of texts coming down to us from time immemorial, comes to clash with other means of valid knowledge, it is suggested by Śankara that such *Śruti* passage be taken in a secondary sense.²¹ This explicitness shows that *Śruti* in the sense of authority is merely subordinate to other means of valid knowledge according to Śankara. *Akhaṇḍārthaka vākyas* like *Tattvamasi* are, on the other hand, authoritative as distinguished from *vidhivākyas* and *samsargāvagāhi vākyas* in Śankara Vedānta, *Vākyārtha* ultimately comes to *mahāvākyārtha* and *vicāraṇa* is a critical analysis leading to the realisation of Advaita, where we take into consideration not only the explicit meaning but also the implicit significance of statements like *Tattvamasi*, not merely *vācyārtha* but also the *lakṣyārtha* is taken into consideration. All the statements of the *Upaniṣads* are obviously not of the same status, according to Śankara. Whenever scriptural passages speak of creation in detail or of *Brahmapariṇāma* with all its paraphernalia, their actual purpose according to Śankara lies elsewhere. All such scriptural passages speaking of *pariṇāma*, or actual transformation of *Brahman* are significant according to him only in so far as they make us realise the non-dual self or the identity of the *Brahman* with *Ātman* which alone makes us free. His own words in this regard are significant and are worth citing at some length. "*Na ceyam pariṇāmaśrutiḥ pariṇāmapratipādanārthā, tatpratipattu phalānavagamāt, sarvavyavahārahīna Brahmātmabhāva partipādanārthā tveṣā tatpratipattau phatāvagamāt*".²² The *mahāvākyas*, as they are called, have a privileged status, therefore, according to Śankara so far as *Brahmānubhava* is concerned which alone constitutes the *paramapurūṣārtha*, the highest end (*niḥśreyasa*). They are called *akhaṇḍārthaka vākyas* to be contrasted with *samsargāvagāhi vākyas*; though relational in form, they simply point to an identity of meaning of the expressions (*anyonyatādātmya*). As Śankara clearly points out in his *Vākyā Vṛtti*, "*Samsargo vā viśiṣṭo vā vākyārtho*

21. Cf. *Brahma Sūtra Bhaṣya*, 2.1.13, "*Yadyapi Śrutiḥ pramaṇam svaviśeṣe bhavati, tathapi pramaṇantareṇa viśayapaharīṇyapara bhavitumarhati, yatha mantrarthatvadeu*".

22. Cf. Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtra Bhaṣya*, 2.1.27.

nātra sammataḥ, akhaṇḍāikarasatvena vākyārtho viduṣāṃ mataḥ". The direct meanings of the words 'Thou' and 'That' for example in the statement 'Thou art That' being mutually incompatible, Śāṅkara suggests that *bhāgalakṣaṇā* should be adopted for the proper understanding of this statement. Rāmānuja and Madhva on the other hand have their own respective axes to grind in this regard. This clearly shows the attitude of Hindu thinkers to the scriptures; although the authority of *Śruti* texts is considered to be of supreme importance, we do not find any slavish imitation or following of *Śruti* by the Ācāryas in any context. Different interpretations of *Śruti* texts are not only permitted; such interpretations are actually taken resort to by the different Ācāryas in order to establish their own theories.

Here our survey cannot be said to complete even in a working sense, unless it is pointed out that certain specific texts other than the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* are considered to be of paramount importance and authority in certain schools of Hindu thought. The most important in this regard is *Srīmad Bhāgavata* which, as has been pointed out earlier, was considered to be a non-artificial or natural commentary (*akṛtrima*) *Bhāṣya*) on the *Brahma-sūtra* of Bādarāyaṇa by no less a personality than Śrī Caitanya who was the leader of the medieval Bhakti movement. It is said that Śrī Caitanya never felt the necessity of writing an independent commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras* on account of this nor did his immediate disciples, following him, write any such commentary. The necessity was felt only later when Baladeva Vidāyā bhuṣana had to take up the challenge at a philosophers' meet of proving that Caitanya's disciples belonged to an independent school of thought, and it was Baladeva Vidyābhuṣana who subsequently took on himself the task of writing an independent commentary from the *acintya bheda bheda point of view* on the *Brahma Sūtras*, known as *Govinda Bhāṣya*. Such is the unique prestige and importance of *Srīmad Bhāgavata* in the Vaiṣṇavite school of thought. Corresponding to this we also have Śaiva-śākta *Āgamas* on which great Tāntiric scholars like Abhinavagupta rely heavily. Somānanda in his *Śīvaḍṛṣṭi* refers to the school of Śāktas as allied to his own Śaiva school. *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* is referred to as *Śakti-sūtra* by Bhāskara.²³ By the end of eighth century Śaivism had spread

23. Cf. M. M. Gopinath Kaviraj, *Aspects of Indian Thought* (The University of Burdwan, 1984.), pp. 179-180.

throughout India and they had their own corpus of scripture known as the *Āgamas*. The *Tiru Vacakaṁ*, of Manikka Vasagar (Manikya Vācaka in Sanskrit) along with the works of a series of saints devoted to Lord Śiva, known as the *Tāmilveda'*, deserve a special mention in this context. Above all, there is the *Bhagavad Gītā*, of course, which although considered to be a *Smṛti* text, is the most important and the most influential of all the Hindu scriptures, as is evident from the numerous commentaries written on it not only by the ancient Ācāryas but also by modern scholars like Balgangadhar Tilak and Vinoba Bhave. Mahatma Gandhi had held the *Gītā* in the highest esteem. But once again, the interpretations are so very different from each other, whether it is in the case of a Śāṅkara, a Rāmānuja or a modern scholar like Tilak, that there is enough scope for independent thinking even within the frame-work of the *Gītā* itself. Such is the highly suggestive style of its writing that the ideology of a votary of *ahimsā* like Mahatma Gandhi, of a devotee like Rāmānuja, of an Advaitin like Śāṅkara, and of a *Karma-yogi* like Tilak can all be accommodated easily within its framework. A purely rationalist interpretation of the *Gītā* has also been attempted in modern times by Bairagi Misra of Orissa.²⁴ This, in a nut shell, speaks of the attitude of Hinduism towards its different scriptures which, to say the least, allows sufficient room for independent thinking within the framework of loyalty and devotion; one of the reasons for this lies in the very open-endedness and the open texture of the Scriptures themselves.

24. Cf. G. C. Nayak, *Philosophical Reflections* (Indian council of Philosophical Research, Delhi, 1987), 'Rationalism of the Gita', pp. 79-82.