

**ŚAṆKARA AND RENUNCIATION: A REINTERPRETATION**

by  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	i-iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
RESUME.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi-vii
ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii-xi
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>ŚAṆKARA AND RENUNCIATION: THE CONTROVERSY .....</b>	<b>1-27</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
<b>THE BASIC TYPES OF RENUNCIATION IN HINDUISM.....</b>	<b>28-55</b>
21- Is abandonment of the results of action the “core” of renunciation in Hinduism?.....	30-39
22- Is inner renunciation always an attitude?.....	39-43
23- The basic types of renunciation and their combinations.....	43-55
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
<b><u>KARMANISTHĀ</u> AND <u>JÑĀNANISTHĀ</u> AS STATES OF IGNORANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT .....</b>	<b>56-99</b>
31- The refutation of combination of action and knowledge.....	56-69
32- The main opposition between <u>karmanisthā</u> and <u>jñānanisthā</u> .....	69-99

## CHAPTER 4

### SARVAKARMASAMNYĀSA AS RENUNCIATION OF AUTHORSHIP 100-170

4.1- The basic sequence leading to liberation.....	100-134
4.2- Renunciation of authorship as a result of direct Self- knowledge.....	134-160
4.3- <u>Sarvakarmasamnyāsa</u> as distinct from <u>karmasamnyāsa</u> .....	161-170

## CHAPTER 5

### KARMAYOGA AS AN AUTONOMOUS PATH TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE 171-282

5.1- <u>Karmayoga</u> and rites.....	171-179
5.2- Meditation as part of <u>karmayoga</u> .....	179-192
5.3- The role of meditation in <u>karmayoga</u> .....	192-213
5.4- Qualification for the discipline of knowledge.....	213-235
5.5- <u>Karmayoga</u> as a means to direct Self-knowledge.....	235-282

## CHAPTER 6

### SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND RENUNCIATION.....283-377

6.1- Qualification for steadfastness in direct Self-knowledge.....	286-301
6.2- Direct Self-knowledge and injunction of physical renunciation.....	301-321
6.3- Renunciation for stabilization of direct Self-knowledge.....	321-336
6.4- Monasticism for attainment of direct Self-knowledge.....	336-349
6.5- Sureśvara's emphasis on physical renunciation.....	349-355
6.6- Śaṅkara's polysemic terminology of renunciation.....	355-376

**CHAPTER 7****ŚAṆKARA AND THE VALUE OF RENUNCIATION IN HINDUISM.....377-387****WORKS CITED.....388-395**



## ABSTRACT

For many centuries, Śaṅkara has been most often held to be the herald of monastic renunciation as a necessary condition for liberation. But this interpretation of Śaṅkara's position does not stand up to our systematic analysis of all the passages relating to the issue of renunciation in his authentic commentaries. Śaṅkara summarizes the major steps toward liberation in the following manner: the yoga of action (karmayoga), purity of mind (sattvaśuddhi), attainment of knowledge (jñānaprāpti), renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) and steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā). Our study demonstrates that the third step corresponds to an already direct knowledge of the Self and that the following renunciation does not refer to entry into monastic life, but rather to abandonment of authorship (kartrtvasamnyāsa), as a sine qua non for liberation. Monastic renunciation is then simply an auxiliary toward Self-knowledge for Brāhmaṇas alone. This interpretation does not contradict Śaṅkara's well-known refutation of the combination of action and knowledge toward liberation. Indeed, even if the purification gained through karmayoga (particularly by way of meditation on Brahman with attributes) does bring about direct Self-knowledge, the latter still leads to liberation in a completely independent manner as it remains the only antidote to ignorance. Thus, partly due to the polysemic or even ambiguous character of many terms related to renunciation in Śaṅkara's works, it is the disciples (headed by Sureśvara), rather than the master himself, who tended to put monastic renunciation at the core of "Śaṅkara's" tradition, thereby confining the quest for the ultimate human goal within the boundaries of monasticism.

## RESUME

On a le plus souvent vu en Śaṅkara le héraut du renoncement monastique comme condition nécessaire de la libération. Or, cette interprétation de la position de Śaṅkara ne résiste pas à notre analyse des passages traitant du renoncement dans ses commentaires authentiques. Śaṅkara résume ainsi les étapes menant à la libération: le yoga de l'action (karmayoga), la pureté d'esprit (sat-tvaśuddhi), l'obtention de la connaissance (jñānaprāpti), le renoncement à toute action (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) et l'absorption dans la connaissance (jñānanisthā). Notre analyse démontre que la troisième étape correspond à une connaissance déjà directe du Soi et que le renoncement subséquent présente comme condition sine qua non de la libération, non pas l'entrée dans la vie monastique, mais bien plutôt l'abandon du statut d'acteur (kartrtvasamnyāsa). Quant au renoncement monastique, il apparaît simplement comme un auxiliaire dans le cas des brahmanes. Cette interprétation ne s'inscrit pas en faux contre la fameuse réfutation śaṅkarienne de la combinaison de l'action et de la connaissance. En effet, même si la purification opérée par le karmayoga (particulièrement grâce à la méditation sur le Brahman avec attributs) peut conduire à la connaissance directe du Soi, cette dernière mène toujours à la libération de manière indépendante en tant que seul antidote à l'ignorance. Ainsi, en partie à cause de la polysémie, voire l'ambiguïté, de nombreux termes liés au renoncement chez Śaṅkara, ce sont plutôt ses disciples (Sureśvara en tête) qui placeront le renoncement physique au coeur de la tradition "śaṅkarienne" et tendront à monopoliser la quête du but ultime dans le cadre du monachisme.

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## ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY ŚAṆKARA

N.B.: 1- When a quotation from one of the following works will be in Sanskrit, the page number at the end of it or in the footnote will refer to the Sanskrit edition of the work. When the quotation will be in English, the page number will refer to the English translation of the work. However, most of the translations are mine and therefore not followed by a page number.

2- The verse number of a quotation is always given either in the running text or in the reference parenthesis, between the abbreviation and the page number.

### AUBh Aitareya Upanisad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1: Ten Principal Upanisads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Eight Upanisads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 2.

Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986.

### BUBh Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanisad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, Vol. 1: Ten Principal Upanisads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanisad, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya.

Translated by Swāmī Mādhavānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1934.

BSBh Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya

-Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, with the commentaries of Govindānanda,

Vācaspatimiśra and Ānandagiri, Edited by J. L. Shastri. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980.

-Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, Translated by Swami Gambhirananda. 4th ed. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983.

BGBh Bhagavadgītā Bhāṣya

-Śrīmadbhagavadgītā, with the commentaries of Śaṅkara, Ānandagiri, Nīlakantha, Dhanapati, Śrīdhara, Abhinavagupta, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and Śrīdharmadattaśarmā. Edited by Wasudev Laxman Śāstrī Panśīkar. Delhi: Indological Book House, 1984.

-Gita Bhashya, Translated by C. V. Ramachandra Aiyar. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1988.

CUBh Chāndogya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1: Ten Principal Upaniṣads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Chāndogya Upaniṣad, with the Commentary of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya. Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983.

ĪUBh Īśa Upaniṣad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, Vol. 1: Ten Principal Upaniṣads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Eight Upaniṣads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1. Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986.

KaBh Kathā Upaniṣad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, Vol. 1: Ten Principal Upaniṣads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Eight Upaniṣads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1.

Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986.

KeBh Kena Upaniṣad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1: Ten Principal Upaniṣads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Eight Upaniṣads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1.

Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986.

MāBh Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1: Ten Principal Upaniṣads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Eight Upaniṣads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 2.

Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986.

MāKBh Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Kārikā Bhāṣya

Ibid.

MuBh Mundaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1: Ten Principal Upaniṣads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Eight Upaniṣads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 2.

Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986.

PUBh Praśna Upaniṣad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1: Ten Principal Upaniṣads, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Eight Upaniṣads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 2.

Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986.

TUBh Taittirīya Upanisad Bhāṣya

-Works of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1: Ten Principal Upanisads. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

-Eight Upanisads, with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya, vol. 1.

Translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986.

Upa -Śaṅkara's Upadeśasāhasrī. Edited by Sengaku Mayeda. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1973.

-A Thousand Teachings. The Upadeśasāhasrī of Śaṅkara. Translated by Sengaku Mayeda. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1979.



## CHAPTER 1

### ŚAṆKARA AND RENUNCIATION: THE CONTROVERSY

Renunciation is certainly one of the most fundamental aspects of Indian thought. In various forms, the concept runs through all Indian religions and culture with an amazing radiance, nourishing reflection on the relationships between the individual and society, knowledge and action, metaphysical truth and practical reality, as well as between the ultimate spiritual goal and its means of attainment. It is not uncommon to find renunciation described as "the most fundamental trait of the Indian religious spirit" (Cenkner, 39). Louis Renou confirms such an understanding when he calls Hinduism "une religion du renoncement" (123). Along the same lines, Henri Le Saux, a Benedictine monk who also became an Advaitin renouncer, maintains that without referring to renunciation (samnyāsa), "il est impossible de comprendre à fond l'attitude religieuse de l'âme hindoue" (165). Karl H. Potter (1982, 118) believes that a history of Indian thought could easily be written on the basis of the opposition between active functioning in the world (pravṛtti) and turning away from the latter (nivṛtti). In his famous paper on "Le Renoncement dans les religions de l'Inde," Louis Dumont also sees "dans le dialogue du renonçant et de l'homme dans le monde le secret de l'hindouisme" (328). In his excellent work on the medieval debate on renunciation in Hinduism, Patrick Olivelle has studied how this theme has roots and influences in major aspects of religious practice and theology. He has shown how many issues that are inseparable from renunciation "have enormous implications with regard to all the concerns of theology and

religion: god, human nature, society, religious and ritual practices, and morality" (1986-87, 1:18). These issues include the problem of the respective contributions of knowledge and ritual actions as means to liberation from bondage (moksa), the question of whether the latter should be preceded by taking up the monastic way of life (samnyāsa), and the debate as to whether the liberated man is subject to any of the scriptural injunctions and prohibitions. Further, many would probably agree with Olivelle that monks are notably founders of most of the religious traditions in India and represent, with respect to the primary religious concerns, "the most creative element of intellectual history of India" (1975, 83).<sup>1</sup>

Although the concept of renunciation was only fully developed from the time of the Upanisads onwards, it has roots in earlier Vedic literature in various forms of inner and outer withdrawal from the world. We find in the Samhitās, the Brāhmanas and the Āraṇyakas themes in the spirit of renunciation such as tapas, antaryaiṇa, muni, vānaprastha and śramaṇa.<sup>2</sup> It is later on, mainly between the 10th and 5th century BCE, that the Upanisads emphasize inner renunciation and monasticism as the most determining aspects of spiritual endeavour. At the time of the great Epics which followed, the very plot of the most popular Bhagavadgītā was based on the opposition between respecting one's duty before society and abandoning it in favor of monastic life. Indeed, the famous dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna the warrior starts when, bewildered at suddenly finding

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<sup>1</sup> See also Nakamura 1991, 163.

<sup>2</sup> For a good account of the organic development of renunciation within the Indian spiritual tradition, see Heesterman 26-44.

himself face to face with his own cousins who compose the opposite army, Arjuna chooses to drop his bow and arrows and to renounce his soldier's duty. Commented upon by hundreds of Hindus, including many eminent representatives of the main schools of Hindu thought which later developed, the seven hundred verses of the Bhagavadgītā are in fact an ethical and metaphysical answer to the question of renunciation.

The oldest commentary on this text to have reached us is that of Śaṅkara who, according to recent scholarship, lived somewhere between 700 and 750.<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara attempted a synthesis of the main Vedāntic texts, that is, the Brahmasūtras, the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā in terms of an absolute non-dualism (advaita). According to this doctrine, liberation is attained through direct experience of the identity between the self (ātman) and the attributeless Brahman (the absolute unmanifest principle which is the source of the whole universe). This interpretation has deeply influenced the development of Hindu thought up to our times. Śaṅkara is in fact usually considered the greatest Indian philosopher, even by many who challenge important aspects of his thought. Whether opposed or favorable to Śaṅkara, it is against the background of his works that thinkers of following centuries clarified and developed many of their own positions. This is particularly true with

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<sup>1</sup> The dates 788-820 were earlier put forward by K. B. Pathak in 1882 and remained unchallenged until Nakamura's study which, in 1950, proposed the dates 700-750 (1983, 48-89). These were accepted by scholars such as Louis Renou (Journal Asiatique 143, 1955, 249-251), Daniel H. H. Ingalls (Philosophy East and West 3, 292) and Sengaku Mayeda (Upad, 3).

respect to renunciation. After Śaṅkara, a major concern of the middle age thinkers was to prove or to refute his position concerning the issues related to renunciation, all of which can be summarized as follows: is renunciation prescribed by the Veda and the Smṛti (i.e. the whole of sacred texts of divine and human origin respectively) and if so, what kind(s) of renunciation, for which person(s), at what time(s) in life, whether as an obligation or as an option, and for what purposes in the context of the many means prescribed for liberation by sacred texts.

Śaṅkara's works have been studied extensively by both religious thinkers and modern scholars. Especially within the last twenty years, several works have dealt in whole or in part with renunciation in Hinduism and in Śaṅkara. Why then a new study on Śaṅkara and renunciation? My contention is that a major misinterpretation of Śaṅkara's position on this point has occurred in the past and continues to prevail amongst religious thinkers and modern scholars. Thus, a systematic study of all aspects and contexts related to renunciation in Śaṅkara's works is still needed to arrive at Śaṅkara's own understanding of renunciation and to identify the exegetical processes involved in the misinterpretation. Olivelle (1986-1987) has already clarified the debate on renunciation between the Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita traditions, but ironically a complete study of the grounds of the controversy concerning the same theme within the Advaita tradition itself is still needed.

It should first be noted that the Vedāntasāra (16th CE<sup>1</sup>), the Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha (16th CE<sup>2</sup>) and the Vedāntaparibhāṣā (17th CE<sup>3</sup>), usually considered the three main traditional Advaita compendiums, do mention the existence of opposite opinions within the tradition as to whether monastic life following physical renunciation of Vedic ritual actions is necessary for liberation. In verse 21 of Vedāntasāra (Sadananda Yogindra 12) and in Vedāntaparibhāṣā 9.41 (Dharmarāja Ādhvarīndra 167), the divergence centers around the term uparati or uparama (desisting) as one of the “six treasures” (satsampatti) within the fourfold requirement (sādhana-catustaya) defining qualification (adhikāra) for the Advaita discipline of knowledge<sup>4</sup> which leads to liberation. According to these passages, some Advaitins believe that uparati means a withdrawal of the mind from external organs and does not indicate obligatory physical renunciation; others opine that it consists in a mandatory physical renunciation of Vedic ritual actions as part of an initiation into monastic life. Referring basically to the same opposition, the Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha contains a very clear and quite objective summary of the conflicting opinions about the role of ritual actions and of their physical renunciation with respect to direct

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<sup>1</sup> See Dasgupta 55.

<sup>2</sup> See Ibid., 218-220.

<sup>3</sup> See Ibid., 54.

<sup>4</sup> By the expression “discipline of knowledge” I understand the traditional hearing (śravaṇa), reflection (manana) and meditation (nididhyāsana) on the Vedāntic knowledge of the Upanisads and of some Smṛti texts such as the Bhagavadgītā - of course interpreted here in terms of non-dualism.

(or experiential) knowledge <sup>1</sup> of the Self, and about qualification for physical renunciation and for the Advaita discipline of knowledge.

Because names are often left unmentioned in these compendiums, it is quite difficult to know exactly who and how many amongst followers of Advaita were on either side of the debate. However, references to the Bhāmatī and Vivaraṇa schools in the Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha suggest that the controversy was understood at that time to go back as far as the division of the Advaita tradition into these two schools led respectively by Padmapāda (720-770) <sup>2</sup> and Vācaspati Miśra (-841-). <sup>3</sup> But there may very well have been differing opinions even within each school. Therefore, the various interpretations of renunciation in the Advaita tradition can be properly assessed only by first understanding Śaṅkara's position on the issue.

A survey of literature on Śaṅkara and renunciation by 20th century Hindu religious thinkers and by independent scholars brings to light the fact that, according to the prevailing modern interpretation, Śaṅkara is the advocate par excellence of physical renunciation as a necessary step for knowledge of the Self and liberation. Let us first consider the representatives of Śaṅkara's tradition. In his study of the contemporary Śaṅkarācāryas (the

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<sup>1</sup> We will use the expressions "direct knowledge", "immediate knowledge" and "(direct) experience" as synonyms. These stand for the traditional term aparokṣaiñāna, meaning a knowledge which is "not beyond sight," which is experiential, immediate, direct. They contrast with the parokṣaiñāna, the knowledge which is "beyond sight," that is, merely verbal, mediate, or indirect.

<sup>2</sup> See Nakamura 1983, 88.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Advaita pontiffs), although not quoting any one of them, Cenker suggests that, in their view, physical renunciation is not necessary for the discipline of knowledge: "A pandita of a Śaṅkara Vidyāpīṭha was unequivocal with me in pointing out that there was no absolute requirement for sannyāsa in order to pursue knowledge, but Ādi Śaṅkara advocated it for easier access to jñāna-yoga. The ascetical life releases one from household duties and family ritual. It frees one for a total pursuit of wisdom" (163). Talking of another informant as being a "highly qualified jñānī but not a sannyāsī" (Ibid.), Cenker seems again to suggest that in the milieu of modern representatives of Śaṅkara's tradition, physical renunciation is not seen as a necessary means. By contrast, on the basis of my own conversations with panditas and professors relatively close to the Śaṅkarācārya of Kāñci, I would say that they generally regard physical renunciation as necessary (either in this life or in a previous one) for complete knowledge of the Self and liberation. This point of view is expressed most radically by Candrasekhara Bhāratī, late Śaṅkarācārya of Śringerī and master of one of the Śaṅkarācāryas interviewed by Cenker in the course of his study. First, in the same manner as Śaṅkara, he states in his commentary on the Vivekacūdāmaṇī that Brāhmaṇas alone have access to physical renunciation and to the monastic life which follows. But, still talking in the name of Śaṅkara and referring to all other possible aspirants, he adds: "As they are disqualified for sannyāsa, which alone invests one with the right for Vedāntic enquiry, in their present life itself, they cannot know and realize Brahman" (Candrasekhara, 6). Thus, for this modern representative of Śaṅkara's tradition, renunciation is undoubtedly a sine qua non for liberation.

But that position is vigorously contested as a misinterpretation of Śaṅkara's teaching by at least one major figure from within the living Advaita tradition of today. A disciple of Swāmī Brahmānanda Sarasvatī (who was Śaṅkarācārya of Jyotirmaṭha between 1941 and 1953), still highly regarded by the successors of Swāmī Brahmānanda (Cenkner 126), and well-known for his teaching of Transcendental Meditation, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi writes in his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā: "The sanyasi [sic], or recluse orders, of Shankara's tradition have been interpreting Shankara-Vedanta as being completely closed to householders, who form the main section of society, and open only to themselves. This has resulted in spiritual decadence and in the moral downfall of Indian society" (257).

Interestingly, the shortcomings which are attributed to post-Śaṅkara Advaitins by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, are similarly attributed to Śaṅkara himself by some modern scholars. The Maharishi writes, regarding the severance of devotion and knowledge into two independent paths to liberation:

The idea of two paths became more predominant owing to the carelessness of the custodians of Śaṅkara's teaching. Since they followed the recluse way of life, they were naturally concerned with thoughts of the separateness of the Divine from the world; and, with the continuance of this situation generation after generation, the aspect of knowledge began to dominate Śaṅkara's tradition while the aspect of devotion gradually lost its importance (Ibid., 13).



Contrasting Śaṅkara with Maṇḍana Miśra (670-720),<sup>1</sup> a contemporary thinker, rather than with the later followers of Advaita (243), Suryanarayana Sastri thus explains the overemphasis on knowledge which he attributes to Śaṅkara himself:

The service of the saint and the devotion of the bhakta are not necessarily inferior to the wisdom of the sage, if by wisdom we mean a function of the internal organ.... The emphasis on knowledge as the sole means to realisation has been due to (1) an intellectual bias, perhaps due to the fact that metaphysics was the special pursuit of saṁnyāsins who had finished with their duty to society, (2) a defective psychology compartmentalising cognition, conation and emotion (242).

Also favoring Maṇḍana Miśra, Michel Hulin proposes a similar and even sharper contrast between him and Śaṅkara:

Stratégie coordonnée plutôt qu'éclectisme, la "méthode" de Maṇḍana laisse ainsi à chacun la possibilité de privilégier celui ou ceux de ces moyens particuliers qui s'adapterait le mieux à sa situation sociale, à son caractère, etc. Avec celui que la tradition nous présente comme un maître de maison à vie nous sommes loin de toute intransigeance sectaire, aux antipodes notamment de Śaṅkara et de son "hors du saṁnyāsa [sic] point de salut" (196).

Suryanarayana Sastri holds that a dualism between action and contemplation and a divorce between practical life and philosophy, based on a demoralizing doctrine of illusion, was "worked up by Śaṅkara" with the "most disastrous effects" namely, "the lethargy of

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<sup>1</sup> Nakamura 1983, 88.

Indians" and their "spirit of false resignation" (140-141). Coming to a similar conclusion, yet attributing the cause to Śaṅkara's followers, the Maharishi writes that "the teaching became one-sided and, deprived of its wholeness, eventually lost its universal appeal. It came to be regarded as mayavada, a philosophy of illusion, holding the world to be only illusory and emphasizing the detached way of life" (13).

Modern scholars usually understand that, according to Śaṅkara, any aspirant to liberation must, whether in one or many lives, go through the following steps: (1) karmayoga (performance of the ritual actions called nitya and naimittika without attachment to their results); (2) purity of mind brought about by karmayoga and giving rise to the intellectual conviction or mediate knowledge that the means to liberation is not action, but direct knowledge of the actionless Self; (3) physical renunciation of all ritual actions as part of initiation into monastic life; (4) practice of the discipline of knowledge (jñānayoga) consisting in śravaṇa (hearing), manana (reflection) and nididhyāsana (meditation). As summarized by Kalyanasundara Sastri, "one has to practice karma-yoga for the purpose of attaining the purification of the mind. This is the preliminary discipline, the ground work for spiritual progress. After attaining the purification of the mind, and after renouncing all karma, one treads the path of knowledge" (299). Combined with Śaṅkara's mention (in his BUBh 3.5.1, for instance) that only Brāhmaṇas have access to physical renunciation, this interpretation leads scholars to the conclusion that his teaching is addressed to them alone. Sengaku Mayeda writes, for instance, that "Śaṅkara's teachings were meant only for selected

samnyāsins" (1989, 199). Another specialist of Śaṅkara, Yoshitsugu Saway, ends a paper with the same conclusion: "For Śaṅkara, mokṣa is not possible without jñāna, and the road par excellence to jñāna is karma-samnyāsa. This samnyāsa, in turn, is possible only for brāhmaṇas. It was they for whom Śaṅkara's instruction was intended" (383).

Given such an understanding of Śaṅkara's position, some scholars have criticized his hermeneutical attitude while others have tried to rehabilitate him by providing what they thought to be a more accurate contextualisation of his commentaries. The accusing scholars blamed Śaṅkara for doing violence to sacred texts he had commented upon by holding inflexibly to his pre-conceived notion and projecting on them his own thought-system. T. G. Mainkar and P. M. Modi have been the most elaborate critics in this vein. After stating that the Bhagavadgītā teaches a combination of action, devotion and knowledge as the means to liberation, and advocates activism rather than physical renunciation, Mainkar concludes: "Śaṅkara has laid quite an undue emphasis on Knowledge, even at the cost of Karman and Bhakti; and in order to achieve this, he has understood additional words, reversed the sense of verses and finally changed the spirit of the entire poem.... It would not be an exaggeration to say that he is the least faithful interpreter of the Bhagavadgītā" (65). In a more detailed and relevant critique of Śaṅkara's commentary, Modi tries to show that although the Bhagavadgītā accepts both physical renunciation and disinterested action, defined as "Mental Renunciation of Actions" (78), it favours the latter (82). Modi accuses Śaṅkara of using "a variety of interpretational jugglery [sic]" (83) to

bypass the textual evidence of the Gītā. As a consequence, “a great number of verses in the Gītā which Shankara takes as dealing with Sannyasa have nothing to do with renunciation. In fact they are in favour of Yoga or Disinterested Action” (86-87).

Kokileswar Sastri is among the early 20th Century scholars who tried to rehabilitate Śaṅkara with respect to renunciation. In his Introduction to Advaita Philosophy, first published in 1924, he explains that if, according to Śaṅkara, action and knowledge are contradictory, it is because they “cannot both be the ultimate ends of life” (195), one leading to transient mundane prosperity and pleasure, the other to liberation from such transience. He then states that, for Śaṅkara, ritual actions must be performed until one has reached liberation (202). He finally interprets a few potentially confusing passages, where physical renunciation is recommended, as referring only to the enlightened man (226-227). Thus the author does not account for renunciation when it is enjoined by Śaṅkara to the seeker after liberation.

The more recent work by Kapil N. Tiwari suffers from the same shortcoming. Tiwari rightly notes that while a part of the Advaita tradition has resisted the interpretation of renunciation as a “life-negating principle,” many scholars, including people who consider themselves as Advaitins, have misunderstood Śaṅkara’s position (141). But Tiwari holds that whereas in the Dharmaśāstras, renunciation consists of one of the four stages of life, in Vedānta, it means only the consequence of the state of liberation through knowledge of the Self (47). “By non-performance of action or karma-samnyāsa,” says he, “the advaitins only mean that the Brahmavid or Brahmasamsthā acts but

automatically or spontaneously without any strain or struggle, due to the realization of the cosmic consciousness outside of which nothing remains" (139). Certainly, this description of the meaning of samnyāsa is a good attempt at accounting for the inner renunciation of all identification with mental activity, to which Śaṅkara gives much more attention and value than is usually realized. But again, while properly emphasizing the value of inner renunciation for Śaṅkara, it leaves the impression that he did not also strongly recommend physical renunciation as a means for liberation.

In a more faithful attempt to properly contextualize Śaṅkara's position on renunciation, Sarvapelli Radhakrishnan also considers that "the emphasis in Śaṅkara is not on retirement from the world, but on renunciation of the self" (633). He understands from Śaṅkara that "to gain salvation, one need not become saññyāsin.... Saññyāsins, however, are best entitled to it, since it is easier for them to acquire it than for others, since they are not called upon to undertake active worship, household duties or Vedic rites" (617). Radhakrishnan sees in Śaṅkara's works an "unnecessary emphasis" on knowledge as the only means to liberation, and he justifies Śaṅkara's attitude by presenting it as a rather fair reaction to the overemphasis of the Mīmāṃsakas on the obligation to perform rituals for liberation (627-628). After noting that the understanding of the relationship between knowledge and action can be misled by the ambiguity of the usage of the word karman, he clarifies the matter as follows: "If jñāna and karma are opposed as light and darkness, it is karma in the sense of selfish activity and jñāna in the sense of unselfish wisdom" (630). While, as a whole, Radhakrishnan's conclusions will be confirmed by our study, in

view of the many conflicting opinions we are now summarizing, we still need to understand exactly how Śaṅkara develops his position and how, starting from his exegetical endeavour, misinterpretations of his position may have arisen in the exegetical approach of his commentators.

More recently, Arvind Sharma has provided some clarification of the term samnyāsa itself as potentially referring, in Śaṅkara's usage, either to "the abandonment of identifiable forms of outward action" or to "the inward abandonment of action" (108). This could suggest with good reason that when Śaṅkara firmly holds to the idea that "samnyāsa is concomitant of jñāna" (113), samnyāsa signifies abandonment of identification with the limited self as a result of an already direct knowledge of the Self and not as a means for access to the discipline of knowledge. Indeed, physical renunciation used by the seeker after liberation as a means for achieving immediate Self-knowledge cannot logically be concomitant with that knowledge, as this would contradict its role as a means towards the latter. However, Sharma concludes his paper by saying that through such an interpretation of samnyāsa and jñānavoga as conditions for liberation, Śaṅkara rather diverts the message of the Gītā in favor of "the seekers on the path of knowledge" (115). Thus, whether Śaṅkara sees either inner or outer abandonment as the key message of the Gītā, is still not clear. Further clarification of Śaṅkara's commentaries is therefore needed with respect to the meanings of, and the connections between, samnyāsa, jñānavoga and jñāna.

Another significant contribution along the same lines has been made by Karl H. Potter. This author sees a fundamental discontinuity

between Śaṅkara's teaching on renunciation and the monasticism of the Daśanāmin order of monks which, according to Śaṅkara's hagiographies, was founded by him. The implications of Śaṅkara's writings, he says, "when properly understood, are profoundly antithetical to the assumptions and practices of the order he is supposed to have founded" (1982, 113). First, Potter points out that in Śaṅkara's peculiar usage of the term, samnyāsa is almost invariably "identical with liberation while living" (1981, 35). He rightly notices that "Śaṅkara, when speaking of samnyāsa, frequently describes it in terms that seem appropriate only to the liberated person" (Ibid.). He explains that if the commentator does insist on the idea that one can obtain liberation only from the stage of samnyāsa, it is not, as usually understood, in the sense that every aspirant has to go through the monasticism of the fourth stage of life (samnyāsāśrama), but rather that the aspirant can be liberated only if he reaches the state of complete inner renunciation from action through direct Self-knowledge. Potter further understands, namely from Śaṅkara's CUBh 2.23.1, that one can reach this state of inner renunciation from the stage of householder or from any of the other stages of life in the usual sense of the term (1982, 120). Potter specifies that this perspective is not a mere verbal accommodation that could be disregarded by saying that post-Śaṅkara Advaitins merely enlarge the category of samnyāsins so as to also include the monk still aspiring to liberation (Ibid., 117). Rather, this new approach brings into play the fundamental question of determining which, knowledge or physical renunciation, is the cause of the other from Śaṅkara's viewpoint. Potter argues here that, for Śaṅkara, renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) is

the effect of direct Self-knowledge and, being internal only, for all practical purposes, amounts to direct Self-knowledge itself and to the ensuing liberation.

Along the age-old chain of Advaita commentators, it is in Vidyāraṇya, the author of the Jīvanmuktiviveka, that Potter finds the climax of the complete reversal of Śaṅkara's understanding: "For Vidyāraṇya, one gives up actions and gains knowledge. Śaṅkara's position is diametrically opposed. As he sees it, an agent cannot have knowledge, and a true knower cannot act. Thus, it is knowledge which leads to the abandonment of action, not the reverse" (Ibid., 118). Hence, Potter adds, the imputation of an elitistic social philosophy would suit Vidyāraṇya rather than Śaṅkara (Ibid., 120).

Although Potter's studies certainly provide enlightening guidelines in the understanding of renunciation in Śaṅkara, they seem to overlook the importance also given by Śaṅkara to physical renunciation as a means for the seeker after liberation. While one of the major tasks of a re-evaluation of Śaṅkara's interpretation of renunciation consists in describing the respective functions of inner and outer renunciation in his economy of knowledge and liberation, Potter does not account for the passages where Śaṅkara values physical renunciation as a significant means in the context of the path of knowledge. Although, as we will see, Śaṅkara does recommend in various places physical renunciation either for the seeker or for the enlightened, Potter states: "It is evident that Śaṅkara does not teach withdrawal from the world at any point along the path of spiritual progress, even at the samnyāsa or jīvanmukta stage" (1981, 35). The scholar seems to make no room for, nor see any usefulness in, physical



renunciation of the seeker: "... someone who does not have that knowledge of the reality of nondifference.... must continue to act. If he refrains from performing certain kinds of acts he may purify himself and become worthy for pleasurable sojourns in heaven, or for high-status rebirth, but he gets no closer to liberation" (1982, 115). After introducing the four traditional requirements for the seeker's entrance to the path of knowledge, Potter seems to suggest that these virtues come, without any other intermediary stage, immediately before the state of samnyāsa which he defines as liberation itself: "It becomes very apparent that a person must be imbued with strong positive moral inclinations when he enters the samnyāsa stage" (1981, 36). Thus, according to Potter, in Śaṅkara's commentaries, renunciation of all actions is to be understood only in the light of the "thesis that Self-knowledge necessarily renders action of any kind impossible" (Ibid., 35). Since what is referred to here is an inner renunciation through immediate Self-knowledge, it would be fair to interpret this impossibility of acting as a living reality only on the level of the experience of one's ultimate identity with Brahman, and not on the level of the individual self which persists even after liberation and which represents, through its daily actions, the jīvan, or living aspect of, jīvanmukti (liberation-in-this-life). But, when he tries to make a case for the incongruity of Śaṅkara being the historic founder of the monastic tradition which has been attached to his name for centuries, Potter erroneously applies this intrinsic absence of activity characteristic of Self-experience alone, to the physical dimension of renunciation: "... we may well doubt that the philosopher Śaṅkara had anything at all to do with the founding of

the Daśanāmins. It would have been out of character for him to form a social institution around what he considered to be a samnyāsin, since he insisted that they were incapable of action and thus entirely outside of society" (1982, 121). It does not seem proper, in my opinion, to conclude that because the enlightened person is "incapable of action," in other words, because of his renunciation of the sense of being the doer or author (kartṛtvasamnyāsa) of mental and physical actions, he has necessarily abandoned social activities on the physical level as well. Absence of action and of the sense of authorship on the level of direct knowledge of the actionless Self does not necessarily mean absence of activity and undertakings on the physical and mental levels as such. In another work, Potter himself puts one on guard against committing such a metaphysical error, when he specifies about the enlightened person: "...from the 'higher standpoint' (pāramāṛthika) he is liberated and thus incapable of ordinary knowledge, action and experiences, but from the 'lower standpoint' (vyāvahārika) he is a samnyāsin or renunciate, capable of all such things" (1981, 34).

In The Chapter of the Self, Trevor Legget adds the following point to the debate. He holds that although, in Śaṅkara's commentary on the Gītā, direct knowledge of the Self generally precedes renunciation, the latter appears as a physical abandonment of rituals which allows full time for meditation and for stabilizing the direct knowledge acquired by the aspirant: "The whole tenor of the commentary, however, is that the - apparently - enjoined seclusion, renunciation, and even meditation, are in practice natural results of the Knowledge which he already has" (170). This significant

observation will be further investigated and developed in the present study. But since Legget's interpretation gives to renunciation of all actions the value of physical abandonment within the stages given by Śaṅkara as necessary to liberation (Ibid., 55), it debars from emancipation all aspirants who do not or cannot physically abandon rituals, and brings us back again to the same controversy as to whether or not monasticism is mandatory.

After all these arguments and counterarguments about Śaṅkara's understanding of renunciation, ironically, a question still remains: what did Śaṅkara exactly say about renunciation? Do Śaṅkara's writings carry so much ambiguity as to render impossible any attempt at identifying a univocal and consistent position? If so, many of his Advaitin interpreters would not have misunderstood him, but would have rather brought what each of them saw as the proper solution to problems left unresolved by the founder of their tradition. Or, can we reconstruct Śaṅkara's thinking on this theme in a way that will enable us to sort out, with solid evidence, his real standpoints from the spurious ones?

I think that Śaṅkara's commentaries contain enough material for such a consistent reconstruction in spite of the fact that some of the author's expressions have a tendency to create ambiguity. My basic contention is as follows: while Śaṅkara put emphasis above all on renunciation of authorship (kartrtvasamnyāsa) through direct Self-knowledge as the means to liberation, and considered physical renunciation as a secondary, optional means only for Brāhmaṇas, very early custodians of his tradition (even a direct and influential disciple such as Sureśvara) and, later on, modern Indologists, often reversed or

misunderstood his interpretation and saw in physical renunciation a necessary step for all human beings aspiring to Self-knowledge and liberation.

How then could such a deep hermeneutical change on such a fundamental theme take place, especially since it seems to have happened unknowingly and in a spirit that was apparently faithful to the founder of the tradition? How could semantic shifts produced by various Advaita interpretations of Śaṅkara often occur with apparent legitimacy, that is, in the name of Śaṅkara himself? These are questions whose significance many Indologists have not even glimpsed and which no one has yet tried to answer in a systematic and exhaustive manner.

It appears therefore indispensable to bring to light all the semantic data related to the theme of renunciation in Śaṅkara's works and to understand correctly the respective roles of the various types of renunciation in all contexts. The results of this research are based on a systematic analysis of all aspects of renunciation in the works of Śaṅkara which are usually considered by modern scholars as authentic (Upad, 6): the autonomous work entitled Upadeśasāhasrī, the commentary on the Brahmasūtra and on the Yogasūtra,<sup>1</sup> and those on

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<sup>1</sup> Although the authenticity of the Vivarana on the Yogasūtrabhāṣya traditionally attributed to Śaṅkara is not as well recognized as that of the others listed here, a growing number of scholars tend to endorse it, among whom Paul Hacker, Hajime Nakamura, Sengaku Mayeda, Trevor Legget (Upad, 65), Tilmann Vetter and Wilhelm Halbfass (Halbfass, 139 and 224-228). However this position has been challenged recently by T. S. Rukmani (see bibliography). On the other hand, the Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivarana hardly contains any reference to the concept of renunciation: only with the words vairagya in sūtra 1.16 and saṁnyāsa or saṁnyāsin in sūtra 4.7, the three words being

the Aitareya, the Brhadāraṇyaka, the Chāndogya, the Īśā, the Kathā, the Kena, the Māndukya (with the Kārika), the Mundaka, the Praśna and the Taittirīya Upanisads, along with the commentary on the Bhagavadgītā.<sup>1</sup>

The method employed for this research consisted of first identifying all aspects related to renunciation in these fourteen works and in noting everything said by Śaṅkara on each of them. Then all the clearer passages on each aspect were used to shed light on the more ambiguous ones with respect to the same aspect and in relation to other topics. This exercise was carried out by assuming consistency on the part of the author unless convincing evidence to the contrary was forthcoming. All possible use of cross-references by the author himself (such as verses already commented upon elsewhere and quoted by Śaṅkara in somewhat different or clearer contexts) was made to obtain a more precise definition of Śaṅkara's viewpoint on a topic. This exegetical cross-reference called upabrmhana is most relevant in Śaṅkara's case, because it is fundamental to his own approach. As noticed by Boyd Henry Wilson, "the use of one scripture

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interpreted, it seems, in the sense of an inner renunciation (See Pātañjala-Yogasūtra-Bhāṣya Vivaraṇam of Śaṅkara-Bhagavatpāda, 1952, edited by Polakam Sri Rama Sastri and S. R. Krishnamurthi Sastri. Madras: Government Oriental Manuscripts Library). All things considered, the Vivaraṇa and its authenticity are not key elements for the understanding of Śaṅkara's interpretation of renunciation.

<sup>1</sup> According to Hacker, Mayeda and Legget, a commentary on the Adhvātmopātala of the Āpastamba-Dharmasūtra is also rightly attributed to Śaṅkara by the tradition (Upad, 6 and Legget 166-175). But there is even less evidence here than for the Vivaraṇa. As we will focus on a controversial issue, for more reliable conclusions, it seems safer to exclude this work from our study.

to help interpret or support the interpretation of another scripture passage is referred to as upabrmhana. The method of upabrmhana is Śaṅkara's primary use of śruti for purposes of interpretation" (143). Thus our approach will differ from the common tendency of Indian Advaita scholars who try to understand Śaṅkara's ambiguous or difficult passages on renunciation through various sub-commentaries rather than through evidence internal to his authentic works. An example of the undesirable consequences of this tendency is found when Saroja suggests that Sarvajñātman's (750-800<sup>1</sup>) and Vidyāranya's position on monasticism as "a pre-condition of realisation" is in direct continuity with Śaṅkara's viewpoint (158-159). Thus this study will deliberately bracket many commonly accepted interpretations of later Advaita authors. Reference will be made to them mainly to contrast their understanding of renunciation with Śaṅkara's. Besides, our intention is not to tackle the even more complex problem of the validity of Śaṅkara's interpretation in relation to the texts he commented upon. The object of our study is to establish what Śaṅkara really said on renunciation, whatever its validity. It is only after a complete intratextual analysis of this theme in his works has been carried out that a proper assessment of the validity of Śaṅkara's hermeneutics in this respect will be possible.

A general factor which predisposes one towards misunderstanding Śaṅkara's position on renunciation seems to be the presence in his commentaries of many polysemic key terms related to this theme which can all designate on the one hand a means or a step

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<sup>1</sup> See Nakamura 1983, 88.

to reach direct Self-knowledge, and, on the other hand, a natural characteristic attached to that knowledge. In his BGBh 255,<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara notes that this situation is found in the Vedāntic texts themselves: “Indeed, everywhere in the scripture concerning the supreme Self, the characteristics of the man who has achieved the goal are also taught as means, because [the latter] have to be cultivated through effort. The Lord now mentions these means which are to be cultivated through effort and which become characteristics.”<sup>2</sup> This semantic phenomenon should be distinguished from ambiguity proper which may entail a defect in expression consisting in the author’s failure to check polysemy even when he intends a single specific meaning. We will rather term this situation as polysemy or semantic multivalence. Thus, for us, while a polysemous word may be more liable to create ambiguity due to its potential reference to at least two meanings, it is not necessarily ambiguous, since a proper evaluation of the context may show without doubt that only one of the possible meanings is proper in that specific case.

However, whatever the reasons, Śaṅkara seems not to have taken enough precautions in his own commentaries to prevent this polysemy from falling too easily into ambiguity and misinterpretation. So much so that in many places the correct interpretation of renunciation in Śaṅkara requires either a vast or a very detailed contextualisation. Thus, especially when an interpreter

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<sup>1</sup> See also BGBh 14.25.

<sup>2</sup> sarvatraiva hyadhyāt maśāstre kṛtārthalakṣaṇāni yāni tānyeva sādhanānyupadiśyante yatnasādhya tvād yāni yatnasādhyaṇi sādhanāni lakṣaṇāni bhavanti tāni śrībhagavānuvāca (BGBh 255, 114-115).

of Śaṅkara holds a priori physical renunciation as necessary for acquisition of Self-knowledge, it is rather easy, provided he makes a few (more or less forced) contextual adjustments, to see in a term that refers in reality to a characteristic of immediate Self-knowledge, an intermediary step or a means which necessitates monasticism in one way or the other.

Because confusion and inconsistency are still frequent in secondary literature on the typology and terminology of renunciation in the Hindu context, our first step will be, in the second chapter, to define in a univocal manner the basic types of renunciation found in Hinduism at large as well as in Śaṅkara's commentaries. Then, from the third chapter onwards, we will present the results of our analysis as such.

The layout of the dissertation reflects quite obviously the themes and terminology of the commentary on the Bhagavadgītā. But this does not entail overevaluation of the importance of this work in respect to Śaṅkara's standpoint on renunciation. In fact, after analysis, it is clear that while in his commentaries on the Brahmasūtras and the Upanisads, the discussions about renunciation are rather scattered and for the most part dealt with in commentaries on merely 10 sūtras or verses, throughout his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, Śaṅkara comes back again and again to various aspects of this theme. Thus the proper understanding of renunciation in the BGBh is hardly dissociable from that of the whole thrust of Śaṅkara's approach to the Bhagavadgītā. Clarity of exposition therefore requires the structure of the thesis to be based on his interpretation of this text. In turn, this is a way of testing the



extent to which the results of the analysis of the treatment of renunciation in all the other commentaries harmonise with those found in the BGBh. The thesis layout became, a posteriori, a way to obtain a better sense of Śaṅkara's consistency on this theme throughout his authentic works. There was never enough evidence to bring forward the hypothesis that a change in Śaṅkara's opinion during his lifetime may have been at the source of his polysemic or ambiguous expressions when dealing with renunciation. On the contrary, with respect to the latter, one meets with the same basic positions and the same semantic phenomena throughout Śaṅkara's authentic works as listed above. Thus, I tend to support Wilhelm Halbfass when he questions Vetter's hypothesis that one may identify significant changes and inconsistencies in Śaṅkara's treatment of the methods of liberation due to chronological development of his thought (Halbfass 139-143).

In chapter 3, we will show first how, in Śaṅkara's commentaries, karmanisthā (steadfastness in action) and jñānanisthā (steadfastness in knowledge) refer mainly to states of consciousness and, only secondarily, to means of liberation. Karmanisthā means primarily a state of being that is based on ignorance of the actionless Self, and jñānanisthā, the state of direct knowledge of the same Self, which ensures liberation. Thus, most of the time, when karmanisthā is said by Śaṅkara to be inferior, it is in contrast with the jñānanisthā of the already liberated person and not of the aspirant physically abandoning ritual actions in order to enter the jñānanisthā consisting of full dedication to mediate knowledge of the Self.

The main polysemic terms in the BGBh are the four following stages given by Śaṅkara as the way to liberation: purity of mind (sattvaśuddhi), attainment of knowledge (jñānaprāpti), renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) and steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā). In the fourth chapter, we will show that, in this crucial scheme, renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) does not mean physical renunciation necessary for the discipline of knowledge (hearing, reflection and meditation), but renunciation of authorship (kartrtvasamnyāsa) as a result of an attainment of knowledge (jñānaprāpti) of the Self that is not merely discursive, but experiential. Therefore jñānanisthā here does not mean the discipline of knowledge, but rather the state of remaining steadfast in the experience of the actionless Self once identification with authorship has been destroyed along with ignorance.

In the light of this reinterpretation, karmayoga comes to be seen as an autonomous path leading to steadfastness in immediate Self-knowledge which, in turn, is the sole means for liberation. As a consequence, Śaṅkara's refutation of the doctrine of combination between action and knowledge (jñānakarmasamuccayavāda) with respect to liberation also appears in a new light. Against this background, we will discuss in the fifth chapter the means of knowledge offered outside of monasticism, in karmanisthā (or karmayoga). We will try to find out whether they include (by definition) the inner means (antarāṅga) of meditation and the discipline of knowledge, and finally what the roles and limitations of karmayoga are with respect to direct Self-knowledge and liberation.

Chapter 6 will then consider all aspects of physical renunciation before and after attainment of direct Self-knowledge, from issues of qualification and objects of renunciation, to questions concerning the role and justification of the monastic way of life. This will open up what seems to me the most decisive break between Śaṅkara and his tradition concerning renunciation: while, in contrast with his master, Sureśvara seems to show more liberalism in that he makes physical renunciation and monastic life available not only to Brāhmaṇas, but to all dvijas, on the other hand, he makes this physical renunciation necessary for entering the discipline of knowledge, thereby debarring from qualification for direct Self-knowledge those who are qualified for monastic life (dvijas) but do not take it up, and those who are not even qualified for it (Śūdras and women). Besides, the further assumption put forward by Sureśvara's disciple Sarvajñātman, that liberation in this life without monasticism can only be explained by inferring that the latter was done in a previous life, will be shown to be uncharacteristic of Śaṅkara.

On the basis of all this data, we will finally try to lay out Śaṅkara's basic terminology of renunciation by identifying the polysemic scope of key terms such as samnyāsa (renunciation), tyāga (abandonment), nivṛtti (abstention from action), aksaropāsaka (worshipper of the immutable), and vidvān (knower).

Hopefully this research will be consistent enough in its method, interpretations and conclusions to provide a larger area of agreement on renunciation among interpreters of Śaṅkara and a more accurate starting point for understanding the development of this theme in the post-Śaṅkara period.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BASIC TYPES OF RENUNCIATION IN HINDUISM

As a first step towards a systematic study of renunciation in Śaṅkara's works, it will be useful to establish a proper typology of renunciation in the broad context of Hinduism, the religion and culture which Śaṅkara drew from and enriched. Even today, the secondary literature on renunciation in the Indian context is often confused and weakened by the lack of an accurate, systematic and consistent terminology. Thus, not only is research often caught up in incomplete or inaccurate descriptions of the different aspects and values of renunciation, but the vagueness of its terminology also surreptitiously holds us back from deepening our understanding of the fine network of relationships which provides an amazing strength to this theme in Indian spirituality.

It will be worthwhile to first identify instances of terminological confusion, vagueness or inconsistency in secondary literature on this theme. This will lay stress on the need of introducing a more systematic typology of renunciation. Of course, statements in primary literature may also often seem to be ambiguous, as if unconcerned with systematic and univocal definitions. For this very reason, such definitions become even more necessary in the scholar's apparatus. I will therefore define what appears to me as the four basic types of renunciation in Hinduism, particularly in Advaita Vedānta, using categories already found in primary literature, but formulating them in such a way as to avoid as much ambiguity as possible. These four types and their subcategories

will be determined on the basis of the object being abandoned. This object can be 1) any physical action or practice prescribed by the scriptures, and/or a possession; 2) the result or, metaphorically, the “fruit” (phala) of action; 3) a layer of mental activity which is grosser as compared with a finer one or with direct Self-knowledge, and which is abandoned through a meditative process where the awareness is gradually withdrawn toward the Self, from gross (sthūla) to more and more subtle (sūkṣma) levels of mental fluctuations (vṛtti); 4) the authorship (kartṛtva), that is, the “doership” or agency of action, abandoned as a result of direct experience of that Self which is beyond the realm of the ever acting and changing prakṛti and thus not bound like the acting ego (aḥamkāra) which pertains to the latter. These types will be defined in terms of their respective characteristics, as well as their relationships and possible combinations.

It could be argued that while this terminological endeavour aims at providing devices for a good methodological starting point, its components themselves are born of what is already one possible interpretation among others, of the theme they are meant to interpret. This, however, is an unavoidable part of the hermeneutical enterprise, where one is to always intuit the whole from the parts and the parts with the whole, back and forth in an infinitely refinable process of understanding. Furthermore, the proposed typology is, of course, not meant to replace, but to be added to, and enriched by, the existing methodological tools provided by various disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, and so forth.

## 2.1- Is abandonment of the results of action the “core” of renunciation in Hinduism?

When defining renunciation in his book Dimensions of Renunciation in Advaita Vedānta, Kapil N. Tiwari gives indiscriminately, as the object to be abandoned, sometimes the results of action (80), at other times, egoism -his translation of ahamkāra (17, 40) - or ignorance (73). In conclusion to his study, he identifies renunciation in Śaṅkara as “spiritual action sustained by jñāna” (141) - the latter consisting of direct Self-knowledge. Tiwari seems to suggest that all these perspectives merge in the nature of one and the same kind of renunciation. But Śaṅkara considers renunciation of the results of action as meaningful even in the case of one who is still ignorant of the Self. We thus question Tiwari’s identification of the abandonment of the results of action with the abandonment of ignorance as an outcome of Self-knowledge. Another scholar, M.G. Bhagat, concludes his Ancient Indian Asceticism by emphasizing that true renunciation is not mere physical abandonment of activity and apathetic indifference, and states that the essential Indian teaching on this theme is “renunciation in action, not renunciation from action” (316). He then equates this understanding of renunciation with abandonment of the results of actions (karmaphalatvāga). Similarly, Patrick Olivelle points out that the great revolution of the Bhagavadgītā was to insist that “true renunciation ... consists in abandoning the desire for the results (phala) of one’s action, while continuing to engage in activity” (1978, 33). With the same spirit, Karl H. Potter writes in his Presuppositions of Indian Philosophy, that

while the position of various Indian philosophers varies widely as far as the theory of paths is concerned, "one point on which everyone agrees, however, is the importance of nonattachment to the fruits of actions as the core of renunciation" (38).

No one can deny the importance of nonattachment to the results of action in Hinduism, especially in the Bhagavadgītā. But the question as to whether it constitutes the very heart of renunciation needs a closer examination of this type of abandonment (which certainly ranks among the basic ones) and of its relationship to what could be defined as the other fundamental types.

What does the tradition usually mean by renunciation of the results of action? The definition given by M. M. Agrawal, I think, provides a good synthesis of how it is understood by modern scholars. It is "not that one should not be concerned with the results of one's actions, but that one should not make the results of actions one's motive for acting" (44). First, this definition obviously assumes that the action's motive will not only be unattached to the results, but will also be conducive to the environment's welfare. The author explains that while no agent or doer can avoid the primary motive that his good actions will benefit others, giving up the result of action would be to disallow the rise of a second motive nourished by the doer's interest (45). Other writers such as F. Edgerton and S. Radhakrishnan seem to refer to the same notion when talking respectively of "unselfishness" (57) and "disinterestedness" (572).

Now, although the key to the understanding of the specific value of this type of renunciation is alluded to here and there in secondary literature, very few writers consistently take all its consequences

into account. Potter says, for example, that "renunciation constitutes a route to the removal of bondage" and that "complete freedom is the removal of all karma." However, a little further, he specifies that "renunciation must be with respect to the results of actions" (1965, 23). What, then, is the object of that renunciation which brings about liberation, action itself or its results? Potter gives no clear answer to this question in his Presuppositions of Indian Philosophy. In the Hindu context, complete freedom is moksa (liberation). In spite of the divergent interpretations found on this issue in the various schools of philosophy, the common core in the understanding of the large majority who believe in liberation-in-this-life would be that liberation is a state of consciousness in which one knows one's identity with that Self which is beyond the sphere of the eternal becoming of Nature (prakṛti); inner "removal of all karma" thus occurs even in this life because one knows by direct experience that the real nature of one's consciousness is beyond the ever changing flow of prakṛti. But does the fact of renouncing the results, that is, as already defined, of not being concerned about the results of one's actions on oneself, necessarily mean that one is free from all action, free from the sense of being an acting ego (aḥamkāra) limited by time, space and contingencies? In the above passage, Potter seems to imply that this is so, since he suggests that, in the context of the path to complete freedom, the main object of renunciation has to be the result of action. Many other scholars, such as Bhagat (240) and S. Dasgupta (488), adopt the same viewpoint. They repeat the common formulation that to one who does not expect results, action is not binding. Bhagat adds that by abandoning all expectation of results, man is able to surrender "his



will, desire and action at the feet of the Lord" (241-242). Here the author does not state clearly whether the surrender is attributed to the enlightened or to the yet ignorant man. Certainly, renunciation of the results of action defined by Agrawal as the mere absence of the motive of self-interest still belongs to the realm of mental fluctuations (vyrttis) within prakṛti. Therefore, abandonment of the results cannot be equated with the absence of identification with the boundaries of fluctuations pertaining to the same prakṛti. As recognized by most Hindu traditions, this absence of identification with prakṛti's activities is characteristic of liberation and is ensured by the conscious awakening to the Self which is beyond the physical and mental fluctuations of prakṛti. It follows that if Agrawal's definition is to be maintained, particularly in the context of Advaita Vedānta, methodological consistency requires that renunciation of the results of action be clearly distinguished from renunciation of authorship, that is, from the elimination of the impression of being the author of the various forms of actions such as feeling, thinking, perception and physical movement, all of which pertain in fact to the limited individual self. If this distinction between renunciation of the results of action and abandonment of authorship is not drawn, then vagueness, confusion, contradictions and misinterpretations are bound to invade the very subject whose understanding one is supposed to clarify. There may be a way to avoid this inconsistency by changing Agrawal's definition. This possibility will be examined later.

Most of secondary literature cites the Bhagavadgītā in support of the idea that abandonment of the results of actions lies at the heart

of renunciation. In fact, this work not only distinguishes renunciation of authorship from abandonment of the results as defined by Agrawal, but actually accords a higher place to renunciation of authorship as compared to the giving up of the results of action.

In chapter 12, Kṛṣṇa asks Arjuna to unite with Him (128) or, if impossible, to reach Him (129) through the “yoga of practice” (abhyāsavogena), or, if unable even of this, to perform actions (1210) “for My sake” (madartham), or finally, as the last recourse (1211), to proceed with the “abandonment of the results of all actions” (sarvakarmaphalatyaṅgam). It would not be relevant here to go into the subtleties of the different levels of consciousness and practice referred to in this sequence. But the text quite clearly states that renunciation of the results of action cannot be equated with renunciation of authorship, particularly from Advaita’s point of view. This is for two reasons. First, unity with Kṛṣṇa certainly implies that one’s identity is beyond the activity of the three gunas which belong to prakṛti alone, and that one has therefore abandoned the sense of being an active ego bound by mental and physical activities. Hence, since in the hierarchy given here by the Gītā, the value of renunciation of the results is quite distant from that of union with Kṛṣṇa, it follows that the renunciation of authorship implied in this union, and the abandonment of action’s results are clearly distinct. The second reason is that, although abandonment of the results seems to be the most accessible type of renunciation, it represents the last option and would therefore hardly be described as the most important or fundamental one. Thus, it is rather renunciation of authorship -

although variously interpreted by different schools - that is presented here as the “core” of renunciation.

Śaṅkara certainly separates these two types. He writes for instance in his BGBh 12.12 that the option of abandoning the results of action given as a means to immortality in verse 12.11 at the end of Kṛṣṇa’s hierarchical list of means, is in fact addressed to the man who has no direct knowledge of the Self: “Renunciation of the results of all actions is not taught at first as the means to bliss, but [only] when the unenlightened man engaged in action is not capable of taking to the means taught previously.”<sup>1</sup> To substantiate the idea that when immortality is said to come from renunciation of results, it applies to the enlightened man alone, Śaṅkara then quotes Katha Upanisad 2.3.14: “When all desires lying in one’s heart fall off, then a mortal becomes immortal; he attains Brahman here [in this life].”<sup>2</sup> And when commenting on this verse in his KaBh, he gives the following interpretation: “When all desires of the one who sees the supreme Self fall off, are dissolved because of the absence of anything else to be desired.... then, he who was mortal before enlightenment, becomes immortal after enlightenment, by virtue of the elimination of death characterized by ignorance, desires and actions.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Śaṅkara

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<sup>1</sup> aiñasya karmani pravṛttasya pūrvopadiṣṭopāyānusthānā-  
śaktau sarvakarmaṇām phalatvāgah śreyahsādhanaṁ upa-  
diṣṭham na prathamameva (BGBh 12.12, 510).

<sup>2</sup> yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye 'sya hr̥di śritāḥ |  
atha martyo 'mr̥to bhavatyatra brahma samaśnute ||  
(KaBh 2.3.14, 103).

<sup>3</sup> evam paramārthātma darśino yadā yasminkāle sarve kāmāḥ  
kāmayitavyasyānyasyābhāvāt pramucyante. viśīryante  
atha tadā mṛtyaḥ prākṛabodhādāsītsa prabodhottarakāla-

clearly differentiates between renunciation of desire for the results which is based on direct Self-knowledge, and that done by the man who is still unenlightened. In the first case, renunciation of desire is simultaneous with giving up ignorance and action. It must therefore be understood as abandonment of authorship. Śaṅkara suggests elsewhere that, in fact, it is the abandonment of authorship that finally ensures full renunciation of the results: "... I am not a doer, [hence] I have no longing for the result of action ..." <sup>1</sup> Maharishi Mahesh Yogi sees the same causal relationship in his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā when he writes: "When the doer is attached to the action, the result of the action is naturally attached to the doer. But when the doer is not attached to the action, the results are not attached to him" (218). It is in this context that Śaṅkara understands as mere praise the Gītā's reference to peace or immortality immediately after renunciation of the results of action even in the case of the person who is still ignorant of the Self: "... the unenlightened's renunciation of the results of action is similar to the abandonment of all desires. Through this similarity, the abandonment of the results of all actions is praised ..." <sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, in his excellent exegetical work on the Gītā, Robert N. Minor sees renunciation of the results of action and abandonment of authorship not as "two distinct objects but as the

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mavidyākāmakarmalakṣaṇasya mṛtyorvināśādāmṛto bhavati (Ibid.).

<sup>1</sup> ... nāhaṃ kartā na me karmaphale spṛhā ... (BGBh 4.14, 198)

<sup>2</sup> ... sarvakāmatyāgasāmānyamaiñakarmaphalatyāgasyāstīti tatsāmānyātsarvakarmaphalatyāgastutirayam ... (BGBh 12.12, 511)

same viewed from two angles,” as “two sides of one coin” (1982, 465). The first side is the “realization of the distinction of the true self from Nature” (Ibid.). This is the experiential knowledge that one is not acting at all, that one has abandoned all identification with being a doer of activities that in fact pertain to prakṛti. The second is “the practice of action without attachment to the results of the action” (Ibid.). This unifying perspective does hold true in the case of one who abides by both renunciation of the results and of authorship at the same time, but it does not account for the abandonment of the results in the case of the unenlightened, who still harbours the impression that he is a doer bound by his actions and their results. Besides, although rightly insisting on the importance of reaching the inner state of non-involvement with action, when identifying types of renunciation, Minor tends to overemphasize abandonment of the results of actions. Commenting on verse 9.28 which mentions freedom from action as a condition to know Kṛṣṇa, he defines samnyāsayoga (the means of this freedom as given by the verse) only as “renunciation of the results of actions” (Ibid., 300). Contrary to Śaṅkara and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, he even seems to suggest in at least one instance that renunciation of authorship is a consequence of renunciation of the results of actions: “non-attached to the results of action and, thus,<sup>1</sup> ‘perfect in actionlessness’” (Ibid., 485).

Particularly in the light of Śaṅkara’s comments quoted above, it seems more appropriate to clearly separate renunciation of the results of action as defined by Agrawal, from that of authorship. For

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis added.

terminological purposes, we may identify two kinds of abandonment of the results of action, one pertaining to the state of ignorance, and the other to the state of liberation, the latter being the result of renunciation of authorship. It is only the second one which constitutes “two sides of the same coin” along with renunciation of authorship.

Renunciation is often understood in terms of abandonment of desires, as suggested by expressions like niskāmakarman (action without desire). As underlined by Śaṅkara, renunciation of desires can be seen as synonymous with abandonment of the results of action inasmuch as both have motives as objects of abandonment. But because abandonment of desires is often given as a characteristic of enlightenment, one has to be particularly careful when interpreting its nature in different contexts. Secondary literature often talks of it in terms such as “unselfishness” (Edgerton, 57-58), or “complete eradication of egoism” (Tiwari, 40). But does someone behaving in a generous and altruistic manner necessarily know the Self? While such a statement is untenable, the reverse is true in the context of Hinduism: being unidentified with the individual self and unconnected with its authorship, one who knows the Brahman-Ātman by direct experience necessarily behaves as a mere instrument of Nature or God, and then only is he really free from selfishness. Therefore, even when preceded, for example, by the epithet “complete,” categories such as unselfishness cannot clearly describe the full range of renunciation of desire, as they apply to the mental and emotional structures of the individual self which, as such, cannot function without desires and motives. Particularly from the Advaita viewpoint, desirelessness and disinterestedness reach their

full significance only when the abandonment of motives is the natural result of abandonment of authorship based on identification with a Self that is uninvolved with any activity, including that of having a desire or of not desiring the result. Eliot Deutsch clearly sees this point when he says that according to the Gītā, niskāmakarman is possible only through discrimination between the Divine and Nature (164). Thus, to use Sanskrit terms, we could say that niskāma is conditional to naiskarmya, i.e. to actionlessness based on immediate knowledge of the Self as actionless.

## 2.2- Is inner renunciation always an attitude?

When considering mental renunciation (as distinct from the physical), most of secondary literature defines it in terms of an “attitude” of non-attachment or of “indifference” in relation to either the results or authorship. Olivelle states that a major contribution of the Gītā in the understanding of renunciation is to have defined it as “an internal attitude of detachment and not a mere separation from society or an escape from social duties” (1990, 146-147). Elsewhere, Olivelle refers to the same concept with the expressions “inner quality of detachment” (1981, 271) and “inner virtue of detachment” (272), but without further specifying its nature. In his Presuppositions of India's Philosophies, Potter states that the discrimination between the Self and the non-Self, and the attitude of non-attachment represent for most Hindu philosophers the “immediate conditions of freedom” (1965, 40). However, he does not specify the link between these two. Rather, he tends to confuse cause and effect by defining

both as an attitude: describing freedom, he writes that "it is not a result at all but an attitude" (1965, 19). Needless to say, an attitude is a blend of mental and emotional activity of the ego, which the freedom of direct Self-knowledge is not. While respecting here the notion that liberation is not the result of an action, Potter overlooks the fact that it is not an attitude either, since it does not pertain to the field of Nature's activity, but rather to the unbounded nature of direct Self-knowledge. Thus, although Potter gives its proper place to renunciation of authorship in other works, his terminology in Presuppositions of India's Philosophies fails in clarifying the issue.

In a discussion on Śāṅkara, Robert Stevenson notes the difference between abandonment of the results of action by the unenlightened and by the Self-knower: while saying on the one hand that "the ignorant may (...) attain release from the effects of actions through the desireless attitude mentioned above, or by dedicating them to the Lord" (529), Stevenson specifies that the ideal of freedom in action is "an attitude of non-attachment, based in the knowledge of the self as non-agent" (577). In these two quotes, both types of abandonment of results are said to be attitudes. Even if one accepts them as attitudes, they can certainly not be of the same nature, since they pertain in one case to a Self-knower and, in the other, to one ignorant of the Self. Elsewhere, while mentioning that "disinterest for results [is] born of knowledge of the nature of God" (526), Stevenson still defines sacrifice born of knowledge (jñānavaiñā) as a "mental attitude" (Ibid.). One can but assume that experiential knowledge of the Self does have a major impact on emotions and thoughts, in such a way as to deeply change a person's attitudes towards action, its



results and life in general. However, the attitudes referred to here remain within the realm of the individual, active self; they do not belong to the experience of the actionless Self which characterizes the real nature of renunciation of action and its results once identity with that Self has been rediscovered. When defined as an attitude, renunciation of the results of actions experienced along with direct Self-knowledge accounts only for the individual conditions in which it is lived, but not for the inactive, unbounded and completely detached awakening to the Self which forms the very basis of the emergence of non-attached attitudes as such, and which implies renunciation of authorship.

Minor defines non-attached action as "acting with an attitude of renunciation" (1982, 206). Elsewhere, although he clearly understands direct Self-knowledge (jñāna) as the discrimination between the Self and prakṛti, which takes place beyond all activity, Minor still considers it an attitude: "The place of the search for jñāna is as the means of attaining the attitude appropriate to the furtherance of nonattached action (karmayoga)" (1980, 347). Along the same lines, renunciation entails "renouncing of attitudes which cause attachment to action" (1980, 342). As we can see, the notion of attitude has so invaded this field, that renunciation has become the attitude of giving up an attitude... Thus, the full consequences of Minor's definition of direct Self-knowledge or jñāna seems to escape him. From the Advaita perspective, these consequences are as follows: since only that which is beyond action can free man from the limitations of action and its results, and since direct Self-knowledge is beyond all activity, the renunciation issuing out of it is not of the nature of an attitude, but of

a silent witnessing (sāksitva) which is beyond authorship, beyond all activity, including the thought that one does not feel attracted towards the results of action or the reflection that one's identity is indeed beyond all activity.

Even when defining renunciation as unity with either the qualified or the attributeless Brahman (25), both of which transcend the activity of Nature, Tiwari still understands renunciation as a "spiritual attitude" (17), as an "attitude of mind" (102). In his book on yoga, C. T. Kenghe also erroneously presents discrimination between action and inaction as an attitude: "The Gītā therefore advises that a Yogin should always consider Nature as doer and himself as nondoer. It is such an attitude that leads to complete unattachment and evenness of mind" (100). It must be noted that this passage immediately follows a discussion in which the author explains that the Gītā advocates renunciation of the results alone, rather than actions themselves. To me, the full explanation of the teaching of the Gītā on the discrimination between Nature and the Self requires the introduction of a third object of renunciation, that of authorship, which is different from that of physical actions as such and from that of the results of action. In terms of Advaita, even inner renunciation in the form of a "meditative act" (Tiwari, 23) does not account for the full range of renunciation, because the introvert, renunciative activity of meditation is in order to transcend all activity, including its own process of transcending. It follows that the basic state of renunciation to which meditation leads cannot be an act, even a meditative one, since it consists in the experience of being devoid of all activity and

authorship. As Henri Le Saux beautifully notes, at this level, "il n'est point en vérité 'd'acte' possible de renoncement" (204).

### **2.3- The basic types of renunciation and their combinations**

So far, we have been discussing types of renunciation which are of a mental nature, which occur in consciousness alone, that is, simply as an attitude of the mind, or by virtue of the mind's awakening to the Self, or finally in terms of both at the same time. These types do not involve physical abandonment of possessions and reduction of physical activity in one's daily routine. They are of a qualitative nature only. Another sort of renunciation can typically be recognized as a physical and quantitative one - although, when done in accord with the scriptures, it certainly involves a mental form of detachment from, or renunciation of, worldly pursuits. It entails observable, physical giving up of at least some kinds of activities and/or possessions. We will call this type physical renunciation. So let us now proceed with a formal definition of all major physical and mental types of renunciation and with a discussion of their possible combinations.

A broad definition of what I call physical renunciation is given as follows by Olivelle: "World renunciation is defined as the abandonment of all activities (karma) connected with life-in-the-world" (1978, 27). In his works, Olivelle uses the metaphoric expression "life-in-the-world" to mean the non-monastic or non-reclusive way of life led by the great majority of people; in turn, "world renunciation" is connected with monasticism or reclusion.

Elsewhere, Olivelle rightly specifies that karman does not mean only ritual activity, but “encompasses everything that is enjoined in scriptures” (1981, 268) for those who remain “in the world,” that is, for those who pursue a social active life, usually centered around family ties and obligations. Thus karman includes all of the individual’s dharma or duty prescribed according to his caste (varṇa) and stage of life (āśrama), including for instance, in the case of a Kṣatriya householder, fighting a war in order to protect his people.

Olivelle points out that, in the Brahmanical period, renunciation was referred to in terms of homeless wandering and mendicacy, whereas it became centered later on around the abandonment of ritual activity and the rite of initiation into formal renunciation (i.e. monasticism), “whose main focus is the abandonment of all accessories of the ritual, such as the sacred fires, the sacrificial thread, the top-knot, and the sacrificial utensils” (Ibid.). Thus, somewhat technical definitions will be found in classical writers, as for instance in the later Advaitin Vāsudeva: “Renunciation is the abandonment of rites known through injunctions -the śrauta and smārta, the permanent, occasional, and optional-, after reciting the praiṣa ritual formula” (Olivelle 1976-1977, 22).<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted here that, according to Śaṅkara for instance, even when prescribed by the scriptures, physical renunciation is not necessarily attached to adoption of monastic life with its

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<sup>1</sup> tatra samnyāso nāma vidhito grhītānām nityanaimittika-kāmyaśrautasamārtakarmanām praiṣamantram samuccārya parityāgaḥ (Olivelle 1976-1977, 1:31).

characteristic attributes.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the already enlightened man, it can be followed by mere wandering mendicancy.<sup>2</sup> Thus, particularly according to Śaṅkara, proper physical renunciation can be formal, when including the rite of initiation into the samnyāsa stage of life (samnyāsāśrama); or informal, when leading to simple wandering mendicancy. Generally speaking, physical renunciation is therefore, in the case of a householder, the physical abandonment of possessions and/or cessation of prescribed duties and practices which were carried out thus far, and, in the case of a student (brahmacārin), non-adoption of duties, practices and possessions pertaining to the householder's stage, their abandonment being in both cases in favour of the life of a wandering mendicant, whether a formal samnyāsin or not.<sup>3</sup>

According to the scriptures, when unaccompanied by direct Self-knowledge, physical renunciation has to be formal and accompanied by abandonment of the results of the various monastic practices, thus leading to the life of an unenlightened monk.<sup>4</sup> When preceded or

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance BUBh 3.5.1, 335-339.

<sup>2</sup> See AUBh intro, 12. For a discussion concerning this issue, see also below, section 6.2.

<sup>3</sup> Although the passage to the vānaprastha stage involves physical renunciation, it is not complete, as it maintains some rituals done in the householder's stage and it is not connected with wandering mendicancy. By physical renunciation we will always mean here wandering mendicancy, whether formal or informal.

<sup>4</sup> According to Vidyāranya's jīvanmuktiviveka, this kind of physical abandonment is one of the two types called renunciation of the seeker (vividiṣāsamnyāsa), the other type being the renunciation of the desire-impelled (kāmya) karmans (181); for the author, women and Śūdras can practice the first one and enter samnyāsāśrama (182-183).

accompanied by permanent direct Self-knowledge and renunciation of authorship, it automatically includes renunciation of all results, and corresponds, from Śaṅkara's viewpoint, to a wandering mendicancy that is free even from the sense of being the doer of the actions of wandering and begging. As we will see in chapter 6, Śaṅkara also seems to refer to a kind of physical renunciation where direct Self-knowledge is not yet permanently established, and which serves for "maturation" (paripāka) of this knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

The second main object of renunciation is the results of action. So far, we used the most common definition of this type, which is the absence of a selfish or self-centered motive to guide one's mental or physical actions. Since it relates to the absence or presence of a motive, that is, of an element of the active mind or psyche, its specific or characteristic sphere, in this definition, is the emotional and mental

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The Jīvanmuktiviveka's great popularity helped in diffusing the notion of vividiśāsamnyāsa and vidvatsamnyāsa (see next footnote) which are now also commonly used in reference to Śaṅkara. But because Śaṅkara's position differs from Vidyāraṇya's, and to avoid any confusion, we will not use Vidyāraṇya's terminology.

<sup>1</sup> It seems to be the physical renunciation based on unstable direct Self-knowledge that Vidyāraṇya calls vidvatsamnyāsa (renunciation of the knower) in his Jīvanmuktiviveka (183-184, 287-288). He argues that because Yājñavalkya is said in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad to have cursed Śākalya to death, he was not completely enlightened when he physically renounced. So, although he was a knower (vidvān), he needed physical renunciation to stabilize this knowledge. Hence the term vidvatsamnyāsa. On the contrary, Śaṅkara seems to acknowledge Yājñavalkya's complete enlightenment by mentioning him in the midst of a series of references to fully enlightened people (BSBh 3.4.9).

structure of the individual self. In this sense it can be called an "attitude", since the absence of a selfish motive will leave room in the active psyche for another, more detached, affective and cognitive relationship, or attitude, towards one's mental and physical actions. Being an active modification (vṛtti) of the mind, and a blend of emotional and mental aspects, this renunciation of the results can be understood as an attitude in the same way as we say that, whatever his level of consciousness, someone had a spontaneous positive attitude towards a particular event.

Now, two questions may be raised here. First, is this attitude only the spontaneous effect of the experience of the Self? If not, is it also a general moral guideline of which is uplifting to remind oneself, once in a while, or rather something to be consciously maintained on a more or less permanent basis, as a definite practice of renunciation? Second, does the definition of renunciation of the results of action arrived at so far include a criterion by which one may judge if one has indeed no selfish motive and is thus really living out what is described by the definition?

I think that most scholars would answer the first question in the same way as that of S. Dasgupta, and would maintain that renunciation of the results of action is not only an effect of the experience of the Self, but also a formal practice: "It is by our attempts at the performance of our duties, trying all the time to keep the mind clear from motives of pleasure and enjoyment, that we gradually succeed in elevating it to a plane at which it would be natural to it to desist from all motives of self-interest, pleasure and enjoyment" (444-445). A few pages later, Dasgupta adds that this "plane" from which

results of action are spontaneously abandoned, is nothing other than the experience of the Self: "The person who realizes the true nature of his self, and knows that the self is unchangeable and infinite, cannot feel himself attached to the results of his actions and cannot be affected by ordinary mundane desires and cravings" (457). The question to be asked then is whether the practice consisting in "trying all the time to keep the mind clear from motives of pleasure and enjoyment" is even possible or really conducive to the experience of the Self. If we recognize the path towards the Self as a process of de-excitation opening the psyche to the absolute silence of its transcendental level, we may seriously doubt if this is at all possible, if this "trying all the time" in the midst of daily activities would ever succeed in transcending its own activity and really lead to the awareness to the Self. It would seem more realistic and practical to understand renunciation of the results of action mainly as an effect of the degree of experience of the Self reached during periods of meditation of limited duration and also, when required, as a general principle to be remembered once in a while, rather than as a constant practice. Thus, as the Gītā itself seems to suggest with respect to the man of action as well as to the monk, it would be meditation, not the practice of abandoning results, that would play the main role in developing renunciation of the results of action. This interpretation is actually strongly argued by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā (134 and 384-387).<sup>1</sup> Whatever the pros and the cons on this issue, from a typological point of view, it will be sufficient

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion on this question, see Marcaurelle 1988-1989, 25-45.



to recognize that, apart from the value of a spontaneous effect issuing from direct Self-knowledge, renunciation of the results of actions may be understood (by some) as a general attitude rather than as a "trying all the time."

Our second question concerning renunciation of the results of action is whether the definition we have taken from Agrawal contains a criterion whereby we might know if the renouncer is really devoid of selfish motives. My contention is that it does not. How can one ensure that there is not even an unconscious selfish motive behind a particular action or, as a matter of fact, behind all actions that a human being may perform? How may one ascertain that no impression, left deep in the unconscious by previous experiences, may not surreptitiously become the major guiding principle of one's action at the cost of what would really be the need of the present moment for all beings in the environment? In other words, what is the criterion for the absence of a selfish motive in one's whole psyche. The following answer is given in Agrawal's analysis: "The disappearance of the motive of self, which is often hidden, is effected naturally when attachment is annihilated. The uncovering of the motives of self and the perception of one's attachment is self-knowledge" (49). This statement seems to convey that non-attachment and "self-knowledge" are the criterion for the absence of a motive of self-interest. But what kind of non-attachment is it? If it is with respect to the results, then we would have the following tautology: the criteria of non-attachment to the results (here "motive of self") is non-attachment to the results. If, on the other hand, this non-attachment is based on the experience of the actionless Self and is therefore

primarily in regard to authorship, then Agrawal's definition of "self-knowledge" as "uncovering of the motives" and "perception of one's attachment" (which refers to transformations occurring in the individual self) contradicts the nature of direct knowledge of the Self which is beyond perception and so forth. Thus, here, Agrawal's criterion lacks consistency. The only passage where the author clearly suggests direct Self-knowledge as the criterion for unselfish action is the following: "A person with the discriminative knowledge of the self, inwardly unattached, naturally chooses to act from the standpoint of moral respect for persons" (67-68). But the relationship Agrawal makes between this "discriminative knowledge" and the above "self-knowledge" remains unclear and we are left with no decisive criterion.

My contention is that the criterion of complete renunciation of the results of action (or of unselfish action) can only be the deepest type of renunciation, that of authorship. Especially from the Advaita viewpoint, it is only when one has realised one's identity as a non-doer in the silent nature of the Self, that in its own relative sphere, the individual self automatically becomes the smooth instrument of the completely beneficial will of Nature or God (depending on the viewpoint). Maharishi Mahesh Yogi clearly argues along those lines in his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, using the word Being as a synonym of the Self:

Being forms the basis of nature. When the mind comes into full unison with Being, it gains the very status of Being and thus itself becomes the basis of all activity in nature. Natural laws begin to support the impulses of such a mind: it becomes as if one with all

the laws of nature. The desire of such a mind is then the need of nature, or, to put it in another way, the needs of nature are the motive of such activity (284).

Thus the ultimate criterion to ascertain whether one has renounced all selfish motives is the abandonment of all sense of authorship through direct experience of the Self. Renunciation of authorship lets Nature automatically work out its cosmic beneficial motives within its own active field (ksetra), of which the body and the individual self are part. In turn, we could say that the criterion - and definition - of renunciation of authorship is the renouncer's direct experience of the Self as uninvolved with any action and desire/will to act.

We have thus demonstrated that a fully valid definition of renunciation of the results of actions cannot be arrived at without introducing and defining the concept of the renunciation of authorship. In fact, left to itself, renunciation of action's results is never integral. It is true that even without the help of any other means, accomplishment of rituals and of one's duty without caring for their results is recognized by the Gītā and also usually by its Hindu commentators as a purifying process. However, for the purposes of a rigorous definition, abandonment of the results of action as explained by Agrawal and others is an uncertain, unstable and incomplete mental condition.

Thus, the fact that renunciation of the results can be resorted to by the unenlightened and can as well be the spontaneous result of direct Self-knowledge, gives to this type of renunciation the largest scope of semantic possibilities, whether its various meanings belong to a plausible or dubious interpretation. These semantic possibilities

cover the following range: 1- practice consisting of a constant effort or a controlled attitude to avoid selfish motives; 2- practice of recalling once in a while a precept stating the importance of doing the right action without being concerned with its results; 3- a general or particular spontaneous altruistic attitude in the individual self, which is not concomitant with direct experience of the Self; 4- a general or particular spontaneous altruistic attitude in the individual self, which is concomitant with direct experience of the Self. From a typological or non-normative point of view, the most holistic definition of renunciation of the results of action would include all of these semantic possibilities.

Whatever the definition favoured by different authors, I think it would be fair to hold that it is the degree of openness of the awareness to the Self that determines the degree of unselfishness and thus the depth of renunciation of results. More precisely, on the path to liberation, renunciation of the results of action becomes progressively inseparable from that of authorship. The value of the object of abandonment gradually shifts from the motive of self-interest to all motives or desires; that is, to the total de-identification from even the act of desiring itself, whatever its content. While selfish desire tends to be the characteristic object for renunciation of results, all desires in as much as they constitute forms of mental activity with which one identifies, could be said to represent the specific sphere of renunciation of authorship. Since one continues to identify with the limitations of the individual self when one only carries out renunciation of the results, it follows that, contrary to what is often stated, it is not specifically renunciation of the results of

action that delivers from bondage, but renunciation of the sense of authorship.

The last major type of renunciation can be equated with the meditative process wherein a layer of mental activity is abandoned in favour of a more subtle one, or of direct Self-knowledge. As formulated by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, meditation is used "in order to renounce the most refined state of thought and thus reach Self-consciousness. This is the whole concern of Sanyasa - the renunciation of everything in the field of relativity and detachment from all aspects of life, gross and subtle" (332). This form of abandonment is quite beautifully expressed in Katha Upanisad 2.1.1: "The self-existent Lord pierced holes towards the outside. Therefore one sees the outer objects and not the inner Self. Desiring immortality, a discriminating man turns his eye within and sees the indwelling Self." <sup>1</sup> The Bhagavadgītā twice associates the expression "renouncing all actions" with the practice of meditation, namely in verse 12.6: "But those who worship me, renouncing all actions in Me, regarding Me as the Supreme, meditating on Me with single-minded yoga ..." <sup>2</sup>; and in verse 18.57: "Mentally renouncing all actions in Me, regarding Me as supreme, resorting to the yoga of the intellect, do thou ever fix your mind in Me." <sup>3</sup> Thus we can fairly say that the meditative process consisting of

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<sup>1</sup> parāñci khāni vyatṛnatsvayambhūstasmātparāñ paśyati nāntarātman. kaściddhīrah pratyagātmānamaikṣadāvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvamicchan (KaBh 2.1.1, 85).

<sup>2</sup> ye tu sarvāṇi karmāṇi mayi samnyasya matparāḥ | ananyenaiva yogena mām dhyāyanta upāsate || (BGBh 12.6, 506).

<sup>3</sup> cetasā sarvakarmāṇi mayi samnyasya matparah |

withdrawing the awareness from gross to finer levels of mental activity towards the Self, is another major form of renunciation in Hinduism.

This type of abandonment is of course to be combined with physical renunciation and renunciation of the results of all practices in the case of the formal renouncer. As we will see, according to Śaṅkara, renunciation through meditation must also normally accompany abandonment of the results of ritual actions as part of the karmayoga of a man pursuing an active life. Finally, still according to Śaṅkara, with or without physical renunciation, it is enjoined on the Self-knower who has not yet stabilized renunciation of authorship, and it may be used as part of the same combination by the completely enlightened man (the sthitaprajña) for the welfare of the world (lokasaṃgraha)<sup>1</sup> or simply as he wishes.<sup>2</sup>

The following chart summarizes the types of renunciation we defined on the basis of the object and nature of renunciation:

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buddhiyogamupāśritya maccittāḥ satatam bhava ||  
(BGBh 18.57, 746).

<sup>1</sup> See Bhagavadgītā 3.20 and 3.25.

<sup>2</sup> See Śaṅkara's explanation of the attributive adjective kriyāvān ("engaged in actions") given to the enlightened man in MuBh 3.1.4, 167.

TYPE	OBJECT	NATURE
1- Physical renunciation	a prescribed action or a possession	physical
2- Renunciation of the results of action	results of action (particular selfish desires)	mental (renunciation in attitude)
3- Meditative renunciation	a layer of mental activity	mental
4- Renunciation of authorship	authorship of action (all desires, selfish and unselfish)	based on direct Self- knowledge (renunciation in the Self)

As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, according to Śaṅkara, the proper combinations and relationships between these types can be summarized as follows. Type 1 and/or type 2 are not necessary and/or sufficient conditions for type 4. Type 1 is available only for the Brāhmaṇa seeker after liberation as an optional auxiliary for knowledge. Type 3 is the universally available, most proximate means for type 4. Type 4 is a sufficient condition for type 2, and normally leads to type 1 (in the case of Brāhmaṇas only), as suggested by the scriptures. Moreover, type 4 alone is a necessary condition for liberation.

### CHAPTER 3

#### KARMANISTHĀ AND JÑĀNANISTHĀ

#### AS STATES OF IGNORANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

In Śaṅkara's thought, the nature, role and relationships of the different types of renunciation which we identified in the previous chapter can be understood only within the context of the two most basic categories defining the means of liberation: steadfastness in action (karmanisthā) and steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā). In turn, the nature, role and relationships of action and knowledge as means of liberation is dealt with by Śaṅkara mainly in terms of whether they have to be combined or whether only one of them can lead the aspirant to liberation, and if so, which of the two.

#### 3.1- The refutation of combination of action and knowledge

A great deal of Śaṅkara's hermeneutical skill was directed against the advocates of the doctrine of combination of knowledge and rituals (jñānakarmasamuccayavāda) as a necessary means for liberation. Śaṅkara's main opponents on this issue were the supporters of the orthodox Pūrvamīmāṃsā doctrine, the prominent inveterate ritualists of his time. However, many of Śaṅkara's arguments in this debate could be used for a refutation of the viewpoint of other Vedāntins of his time (or somewhat earlier), such as Brahmadatta, Maṇḍana Miśra and Bhartṛprapañca (who propounded the identity-in-difference doctrine or bhedābhedavāda



later developed by Bhāskara),<sup>1</sup> or of later Vedāntic commentators such as Rāmānuja. But let us summarize Śaṅkara's argument against these thinkers by using the doctrine of the Mīmāṃsakas as a starting point.

According to Pūrvamīmāṃsā, the Self is distinct from the body, the sense-organs and the mind. It is that which proceeds to a different world, such as heaven (svarga), when at the time of death the body ceases to function. The Self is eternal and omnipresent. But it is also an agent or doer (kartr) and an experiencer (bhoktr): it performs actions, and experiences internal objects (such as pleasure and pain) and external objects of the environment through contact with the mind, the sense-organs and the body.<sup>2</sup>

Still according to Pūrvamīmāṃsā, liberation from transmigratory existence is a state of unsurpassable happiness (svarga) which comes at the time of death only when merits and demerits resulting from actions, which are the cause of further embodiment, become exhausted by the mere process of having been all experienced by their doer on account of the law of karman. Proscribed actions (pratisiddhakarmans) and desire-prompted rites (kāmyakarmans) - which lead only to limited goals in this world or hereafter - are understood to be the cause of bad and good births respectively, while performance of obligatory rites (nityanaimittikakarmans), prescribed for a general well-being and

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<sup>1</sup> For two succinct and clear summaries of the respective doctrines of all of these in regard to jñānakarmasamuccayavāda, see Potter 1981, 40-44, and Hiriyanna 1980, xiii-xxx.

<sup>2</sup> See the summary of the positions of the two schools of Pūrvamīmāṃsā on this issue in Jha (26-35).

according to stages of life, has no positive result and consists merely in avoiding the sin of not doing something enjoined by the scriptures.<sup>1</sup> These obligatory rites are said to be without results, including that of purification, because if purification were considered a merit resulting from action, it would never cease to be produced by these continuing ritual actions; accordingly, it could never cease to be experienced and could never bring cessation of further births meant to ensure the perpetual experience of this purification. So, by avoiding the first two types of action and by doing the third, merely because the scriptures prescribe them, the seeker after liberation will be liberated from further reincarnations simply when all the effects of his past actions will have been experienced and therefore exhausted. Thus, liberation results from automatic cessation, and mere absence of, further subjection to experiencing the results of action. Still according to Pūrvamīmāṃsā, knowledge of the Self taught by the scriptures cannot bring about the cancellation of the results of past actions. In fact, it has no independent result of its own because it stands in a subordinate relation to sacrificial action. It can only inform the individual about the everlasting nature of his Self and thus motivate

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<sup>1</sup> Actions enjoined by the scriptures are classified into four types: 1- the obligatory daily rites (nityakarmans), such as oblations in the fire (agnihotra) and donation of food; 2- the obligatory occasional rites (naimittikakarmans) performed at particular occasions such as at the start of Vedic learning (upanayana) and after the death of a parent (śrāddha); 3- the desire-prompted rites (kāmyakarmans), that is, the numerous rites that one can do to achieve a personal goal such as the birth of a son or increased wealth; 4- expiation rites (prāyaścittakarmans) which are those performed to purify oneself for not having performed certain prescribed acts.

him to do rituals and meditations leading to a specific result such as heaven after death.<sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, for Śaṅkara, direct knowledge of the Self as taught by the Upanisads is the sole cause of liberation. The Self (ātman) is identical with Brahman, the non-dual pure consciousness which forms the ground of the universe, which is without boundaries and attributes and therefore devoid of any modification whether due to authorship (kartrtva) or to experiencing (bhoktrtva). When Brahman-Ātman is known by direct experience, ignorance is annihilated and also, as a consequence, the superimposition on the Self of all limiting adjuncts (upādhis) such as authorship and experiencing. As Brahman-Ātman manifests its unsurpassable bliss in the mind, all attachment to anything else, which is the seed of further births, is “burnt”, that is, rendered inoperative. To know by direct experience that the Self is identical with Brahman, the mind requires no action. This knowledge is distinct, for instance, from an action of meditation, which involves the deliberate activity of repeatedly reproducing the thought of the object meditated upon. Although a mental modification in the form of the partless Self (akhandākāravrtti), this direct experience of the Self is of the nature of any knowledge, that is, dependent on the object (vastutantra) and not on one’s action (puruṣatantra). As Śaṅkara explains in his BSBh 1.1.4: “Even though meditation, i.e. thinking, is mental, yet because it is dependent on man, it can be done, not done, or done in different ways by him. But knowledge arises from its valid means and those have for their

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<sup>1</sup> See the summary of the positions of the two schools of Pūrvamīmāṃsā on this issue in Jha (36-39).

objects things as they already are.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, once the proper conditions of knowledge are created (for instance, opening the eyes in the case of a visual perception, or complete purity of mind in the case of direct experience of the Self) knowledge arises in the form of the object as it already exists, without any scriptural injunction, effort or action to sustain itself. On the contrary, action is based on will, effort and on the various modalities through which it can be accomplished. Thus, Śaṅkara's theory of knowledge justifies the notion that immediate knowledge of the Self is independent from action.

Not only is Self-knowledge distinct and independent from action (whether mental or physical) in terms of its cognitive nature, but also in terms of its role in bringing about liberation. The independence of Self-knowledge in bringing liberation is often justified by Śaṅkara from a logical point of view based on the understanding of the Self as non-active. Accordingly, the independence is due to the fact that the said knowledge cannot coexist with action at the same time in the same person. This notion is reiterated time and again by Śaṅkara in his commentaries. More precisely, it means that a man cannot at the same time attribute to himself both the sense of authorship, and absence of authorship. Since immediate knowledge of the Self is knowledge of oneself as devoid of authorship and of mental fluctuations caused by perceptions and superimposed on the Self due to ignorance, it cannot possibly exist at the same time with a

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<sup>1</sup> dhyānam cintanam vadyapi mānasam tathāpi  
puruṣenakartumakartumanyathā vā kartum śakyam.  
puruṣatantratvāt. jñānam tu pramāṇajanyam. pramāṇam ca  
yathābhūtavastuviśayam (BSBh 1.1.4, 83).

knowledge of oneself as doer and experiencer (TUBh 1.9.4, 277). In his ĪUBh 18, Śaṅkara gives the following allegory: "For when the knowledge that fire is hot and luminous has arisen in a person, there cannot arise in that same person the illusion that fire is cold or not luminous."<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as actions such as rites presuppose attributions to oneself of notions pertaining to duality, such as authorship, means and result, they cannot be said to coexist, in the same person and at the same time, with knowledge of the Self as devoid of any limiting adjuncts and duality. Therefore, according to Śaṅkara, even before considering what the Upanisads say on the results of knowledge and action (either rituals or meditation), their combination for the sake of liberation is simply not possible from a logical point of view based on the Upaniṣadic descriptions of the Self.

As we will see in the course of our study, this point is connected to a major case of misplaced emphasis. There has been a tendency in post-Śaṅkara Advaita to center the debate concerning the role of action and knowledge with respect to liberation around the opposition between the means provided to those who remain active in society (the karmayogins) and the means of those who lead a monastic life (the formal samnyāsins). It is true that Śaṅkara sees higher efficacy in a life of full-time steadfastness in the discipline of knowledge that only physical renunciation of the time-consuming daily duties and of the various obligations of a man in society can provide. But monasticism has never been his main emphasis in the

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<sup>1</sup> na hyagnirusnah prakāśaśceti viññānotpattau yasminnāśraye tadutpannam tasminnevāśraye śīto 'gniraprakāśo vā ityavidyāyā utpattih (ĪUBh 18, 13-14).

larger and more important debate of determining the proper means for liberation. A passage of the ĪUBh 8 specifies that the opposition is not between the discipline of knowledge and these rituals, but between experience of the Self and ritual activity done with the sense of authorship: "Only a fool would wish to combine that knowledge of the oneness of the Self ... with any work, or with any other knowledge." <sup>1</sup> The expression "with any other knowledge" (jñānāntareṇa), that is, any meditative practice as opposed to the direct experience of the Self as a non-doer, must include even those of the formal renouncer, because even they are based on his effort and, as such, can never be the cause of liberation, while the object-dependent direct Self-knowledge can. Indeed, because any practice is a form of action and because action can produce only impermanent results, no amount of meditative practice can be the direct cause of liberation. As stated by Śaṅkara, "Nor can liberation be achieved through pursuing a practice (sādhana) of liberation, because anything that depends on a practice is impermanent." <sup>2</sup> Moreover, because the Brahman-Ātman is eternally that through which everything is known, it "cannot be said to be associated with action by virtue of its being the object of the action of knowing, because.... Brahman is

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<sup>1</sup> ...yadātmaikatvavijñānam. tanna kenacitkarmanā jñānāntareṇa vā hyamūdhah samuccicīṣati (ĪUBh 8, 8).

<sup>2</sup> nanu mokṣasādhanaṁ vidhānān mokṣaḥ setsyati. na: sādhanāyattasyānityatvāt (BSBh. 1982 edited by Anantakrishna Śāstri, Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series [reprint from Nirnayasagar Press], 616).

denied to be an object of the action of knowing. It is equally denied as an object of the act of meditation.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, even in the case of the formal renouncer, that knowledge of the Self which cannot coexist with activity is not the one where, due to ignorance, the Self is still experienced as the object of an act of knowing or meditation. The only Self-knowledge that is radically opposed to activity is that where the Self is experienced as the silent witness of all processes and objects of knowledge. From this perspective, which is the most important for Śaṅkara, whatever their intensity, the meditative practices of the formal renouncer are as opposed to direct Self-knowledge as are rituals and other types of meditation done by the man who is still active in society.

Given his understanding of knowledge, action and liberation, Śaṅkara develops his economy of liberation according to a purely functional principle: one can reach a goal only through proper means. Scriptures prescribe various means for many goals other than liberation. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.5.16 reads, for instance: “There are indeed three worlds, the world of men, the world of the Manes and the world of the gods. This world of men is to be won through the son alone, and by no other rite; the world of the Manes through rites; and the world of the gods through meditation” (159).<sup>2</sup> These three worlds are declared improper for the goal of liberation for

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<sup>1</sup> na ca vidikriyākarmatvena kāryānupraveśo brahmanah. . . . vidikriyākarmatvapratishedhāt. . . . tathopāstikriyākarmatvapratishedho ’pi bhavati (BSBh 1.1.4, 78).

<sup>2</sup> atha trayo vāva lokā manusyalokah pitrloko devaloka iti so ’yam manusyalokah putrenaiva jayyo nānyena karmanā karmanā pitrloko vidvayā devaloko. . . (BUBh 1.5.16, 705)

example in verse 4.4.11 of the same Upanisad: "Miserable are the worlds enveloped by a blinding darkness. To them, after death, go the people who are unenlightened and unwise." <sup>1</sup> In contrast, verse 4.4.14 then declares, referring to the Self: "Those who know It become immortal, while others only attain suffering." <sup>2</sup> According to Śaṅkara, such statements clearly indicate that although the obtaining of a son, sacrificial performance and meditation serve as means to the three worlds, they do not free one from the ignorance and sorrow to which these worlds are said to amount. On the contrary, experience of the non-dual Self is said to be obtained by knowledge alone and it alone is stated as the means to immortality or liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. Since Self-knowledge, on the one hand, and various kinds of actions, on the other, are described as two distinct types of means leading to the two distinct results of temporary sojourn in some heavenly world, and liberation from the latter, there is no reason to advocate their combination.

But, on what account does Śaṅkara say that direct knowledge of the Self needs no help at all to result in liberation? According to him, on the path to spiritual freedom, the mind must first be purified through rituals, proper understanding of the scriptural means of knowledge (śabdapramāṇa) concerning the Self, and various forms of meditation. Once complete purity is attained, the mind fully understands -verbally and experientially- the purport of the

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<sup>1</sup> anandā nāma te lokā andhena tamasāvṛttāḥ |  
tāmste pretyābhigacchantyavidvāṃso 'budho janāḥ || (BUBh 4.4.11, 924).

<sup>2</sup> ye tadviduramṛtāste bhavantiyathetare duḥkham evāpiyanti |  
 (BUBh 4.4.14, 925).



scriptures on the Self. It becomes spontaneously and fully open to the immutable Self, to the self-effulgent, pure consciousness, of which it is but a semblance of modification. This rediscovery of the mind's real nature is called the emergence of knowledge (jñānotpatti). As a spontaneous and immediate result of this emergence comes the destruction of ignorance (avidyānivṛtti) of the real nature of one's Self. And with annihilation of ignorance also immediately ensues the eradication of its effect, that is, the erroneous superimposition on the Self of limiting adjuncts such as authorship and experiencing. Then the whole apparent multiplicity of agent, means and results are seen as modes of the Brahman-Ātman, leaving no room for something other than the infinity of the Self, for something that would have to be achieved through action.<sup>1</sup>

The awareness of the multiplicity of authorship, means and results is the basis of the qualification for rituals and meditation, as well as the condition for the relevance of a scriptural injunction with respect to a particular person. Indeed, to be applicable, the theory and praxis of Pūrvamīmāṃsā need the knowledge of oneself as a doer, the recognition of an object of desire to be enjoyed by the doer and an action prescribed to the doer in order to obtain his object of desire. Now, according to Śaṅkara, doership (or authorship), desire, and active enjoyment do not apply to the enlightened man whose intellect rather identifies with the actionless, desireless and silently witnessing Self; accordingly, any prescribed action for enjoying whatever object of desire is no longer relevant in his case. With the

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<sup>1</sup> See BSBh 3.4.16.

sublation of this active and bound awareness through knowledge of the silent, infinite Brahman-Ātman, there remains no place for the obligation, nor for the injunction of ritual performance.

Moreover, through the absolute contentment found in one's own Self, the mental residues of past actions (sañcitakarmans) are rendered inoperative in creating further desires for objects. While results of past actions which have already begun to fructify in the present life (prārabdhakarmans) continue until exhaustion, the actions performed for the rest of the present life (āgamikarmans) by the liberated-while-living have no binding power any longer, since agency and experiencing is no more attributed to the Self and since nothing remains as different from the ever-free Brahman-Ātman. Hence comes also, immediately after the destruction of ignorance, the state of simply remaining established in the knowledge of the Self even for a man leading an active life in society, ensuring liberation from any limitation in this very life as well as after the body's death. And following complete purification of the mind, emergence of knowledge and annihilation of ignorance, remaining established in the Self needs no practice or effort, which would otherwise make action a means of liberation. Indeed, explains Śaṅkara, because liberation is of the very nature of the Self "like the heat of fire, it cannot be said to be a consequence of human activity" (BUBh 4.4.6, 501).<sup>1</sup>

Śaṅkara summarizes his position in the following lines of the TUBh:

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<sup>1</sup> svābhāvikaścedagnyuṣṇavadātmanah svabhāvaḥ sa na śakyate puruṣavyāpārānubhāvīti vaktum (BUBh 4.4.6, 918).

The emergence of knowledge cannot be imagined for a person hindered by accumulated sins. On the wearing away of those hindrances, knowledge will emerge; from that will follow the cessation of ignorance, and from that the complete cessation of unending becoming (samsāra). Moreover, a man who perceives something as non-Self desires that non-Self. And the man of desire performs actions. From that follows unending becoming - consisting of embodiment etc. - for the sake of enjoying the results of these [actions]. On the contrary, by reason of the absence of an object, there arises no desire in a man who sees the unity of the Self. And since, due to the absence of any "other," desire cannot rise with regard to oneself, there ensues liberation which is continuance in one's own Self ...<sup>1</sup>

Thus, insofar as ignorance has to be removed for liberation to occur and insofar as knowledge alone can remove ignorance, that knowledge is a completely independent means to liberation. Once knowledge has emerged, no other causal factor enters into play to remove ignorance. To attain the Self, that is, to be permanently established and liberated in the experience of the non-dual Self, simply amounts to removal of ignorance, which knowledge alone is capable of achieving. Śaṅkara makes his point thus:

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<sup>1</sup> upacitadurita prati bandhasya hi vidyot patti rñāvaka lpatē. tatksave ca vidyot patti h syāttata ścāvidyānivṛttistata ātyantikah. samsāro paramah. api cānāt madarśino hyanāt mavisayah kāmah. kāmaya mānaśca karoti karmāṇi. tata stat phalopabhogāya sarīrādyupādāna laksana h samsārah. tadvyatirekenāt māikatva darśino viṣayābhāvāt kāmānutpattirāt māni cānanyatvāt kāmānutpattau svāt manyavasthānam moksah ... (TUBh 1.11.4, 278).

While the [Self's] true nature is for ever attained, It is simply covered by ignorance. In the same way as the non-perception of a mother-of-pearl which appears as silver through misapprehension just amounts to the covering by a false knowledge, so also its [subsequent] perception just amounts to knowledge, because the purpose of knowledge is in removing the covering by false knowledge. Similarly here also the non-attainment of the Self is simply the covering by ignorance.

Therefore the attainment [of the Self] is simply the removal of the latter.<sup>1</sup>

As light alone can remove darkness, so, also, knowledge alone can remove ignorance. Thus, it is due to its belonging to the sphere of ignorance that action is said to be a means contradictory to that of direct Self-knowledge. But it should be recalled that action here includes even the meditative practices of the formal renouncer.

Moreover, from Śaṅkara's viewpoint, the analysis of the effects of action show that they cannot bring about a knowledge of the Self leading to liberation. The four possible effects of any action are: creation (utpatti), transformation (vikāra), acquisition (āpti) and purification (samskāra). First, knowledge of the Self cannot be produced since, being consciousness itself, it pre-exists any effect of action, unlike, for instance, attainment of heaven which comes into

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<sup>1</sup> nityalabdhasvarūpatve 'pi satyavidyāmātram vyavadhānam. yathā grhyamānāvā api śuktikāyā viparyayaena rajatābhāsāyā agrahanam viparītaiñānavyavadhānamātram tathā grahanam iñānamātrameva viparītaiñānavyavadhānāpohārthatvāiñānasya. evamiḥāpvyātmano 'lābho 'vidyāmātravyavadhānam. tasmādvidyayā tadapohanamātrameva lābho (BUBh 1.4.7, 666).

existence only as a result of appropriate sacrifices.<sup>1</sup> Even if Self-knowledge and liberation could be produced, they would then be as impermanent as all products found in the world. But both are said by the Upanisads to be eternal. If liberation were a transformation of something it would also have the defect of impermanence. Nor can Brahman-Ātman be acquired or attained, for it is all pervasive, ever-attained by everyone (although erroneously apprehended in the condition of ignorance). Finally, since purification amounts to addition or removal of some quality, it cannot apply to Brahman-Ātman which is ever the same, ever pure, neither improvable, nor impairable.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2- The main opposition between karmanisthā and jñānanisthā

According to many commentators, the opposition highlighted by Śaṅkara between karmanisthā and jñānanisthā simply involves two paths or types of practice: one based mainly on rites (karmayoga) and the other based on the Advaita discipline of knowledge consisting in hearing, reflection and meditation. My contention is that, although found in Śaṅkara's system, this form of opposition between karmanisthā and jñānanisthā is secondary as compared to a more basic opposition which is often overlooked. The main contrast is not between two paths involving antagonistic practices, but between two opposite states: one consisting of steadfastness in the false impression of being the author of mental and bodily actions, and another

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<sup>1</sup> See BSBh 1.1.1, 8.

<sup>2</sup> See BSBh 1.1.4, 32.

consisting of steadfastness in direct knowledge of the Self which is never bound by authorship and action. The contrast is thus very similar to the one between action as pertaining to the sphere of ignorance and bondage, and knowledge as belonging to the sphere of experience of the Self's true nature and liberation.

This misinterpretation on the part of many commentators of Śaṅkara is partly due to his bivalent use of the term jñānanisthā as possibly referring to the discipline of knowledge, or to immediate Self-knowledge. Given this semantic scope for ambiguity, let us first try to understand the meaning of nisthā for Śaṅkara.

The word nisthā appears in the adjectival form nistha in a compound of the last sentence of Mundaka Upaniṣad 1.2.12 which reads as follows: "For knowing that Reality, with sacrificial faggots in hand, he should go to a teacher who is versed in the Vedas and steadfast in Brahman (brahmanistham)."<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara comments the passage in the following manner:

... one who, having renounced all actions, remains steadfast (nisthā) in the non-dual Brahman alone, is a brahmanisthah, just as with the words japanisthah (steadfast in mental repetition) and taponisthah (steadfast in asceticism). Steadfastness in Brahman is not possible for the acting man (karminah), because action and Self-knowledge are contradictory.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchet samitpāṇih śrotriyam brahmanistham (MuBh 1.2.12, 152).

<sup>2</sup> ...hitvā sarvakarmāṇi kevale 'dvaye brahmaṇi nisthā yasya so 'yam brahmanistho japanisthastaponistha iti yadvat. na hi karmino brahmanisthatā sambhavati karmāt maijñānayorvirodhāt (MuBh 1.2.12, 153).

Since, according to the spirit of the Upanisads, a teacher whom a student approaches for knowledge of Brahman must already know the Self by direct experience and be liberated, it is obvious that the word brahmanistha must mean in this context, as rendered by the translation, a steadfastness in the state of Brahman, and not a practice involving only mediate means of acquiring Self-knowledge. Śaṅkara's understanding of nisthā as being with respect to the non-dual Brahman "alone" (kevale), could hardly be understood differently. To clarify the meaning, Śaṅkara mentions two other compounds containing the word nistha: japanistha and taponistha. But, surprisingly, both words joined here with nistha refer to a practice and not to a state: japa consisting in the repetition of one or several mantras, and tapas representing some form of asceticism. Since a student goes to an Upaniṣadic teacher not because he is involved in practices but rather because he has reached the goal of all practices, the common element between the two nisthas given as examples and the brahmanistha cannot be the idea of practice. Hence it can only be the notion of steadfastness. All three nisthas here mentioned are understood to be steadfastly absorbed in something. In the first case, it is in knowledge, while in the latter two, it is in practices which are actions and therefore contradictory to direct knowledge of the Self. The contrast favoring knowledge of the Self against karmans in the last sentence quoted, certainly suggests that the brahmanistha is not characterized by any type of practice. Thus, the comparison introduced by Śaṅkara holds true only insofar as steadfastness is concerned.

We therefore have two possible meanings in Śaṅkara's understanding of the word nisthā (or nistha): one referring to a state of being and another referring to a practice. But we have seen that the very example given by Śaṅkara to clarify its meaning could be somewhat ambiguous and misleading. Interestingly, this is precisely the kind of ambivalence which is likely to accompany the word nisthā, especially in the BGBh. Such is also the case in MuBh 3.2.4 where means of attaining the Self, such as strength, are described: "Since this Self is not attainable by one who is without strength, by one devoid of strength, bereft of the vigour created by constant steadfastness in the Self (ātmanisthājanita)..."<sup>1</sup> Here, does "constant steadfastness in the Self" refer to the practice of mediate means of knowledge such as meditation or to the state of naturally remaining established in the direct experience of the non-dual Self? Since, in this context, "steadfastness in the Self" is said to create a strength which is in turn a means for the goal of attaining the Self, one could be led to interpret the said steadfastness simply as a mediate means of knowledge. But in KeBh 2.4, where he quotes the same passage, Śaṅkara specifies that the strength which brings about the liberating Self-knowledge does not come from any practice, such as yoga, but from direct Self-knowledge:

... the strength produced by wealth, by a friend, a mantra, a medicine, asceticism, or yoga cannot overcome death, for it is produced by impermanent things. But the strength produced by Self-knowledge is acquired through the Self alone and not by

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<sup>1</sup> yasmādayamāt mā balahīnena balaprahīnena ātmanisthājanitavīryahīnena na labhyo (Mu 3.2.4, 172).



anything else. Thus, because the strength of Self-knowledge does not come through any other means, that strength alone is capable of overcome death.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it seems more appropriate to understand the ātmanisthā of the MuBh as meaning a state of samādhi in the Self which would lead to a strength consisting of a stable experience of the same Self even in the waking state of consciousness<sup>2</sup> and, on that basis alone, bringing about complete "attainment of the Self."

However, in all of Śaṅkara's other glosses on nisthā and nistha as used by the Upanisads,<sup>3</sup> the word refers quite clearly to the notion of practice. For example, the same word brahmanistha seems to carry the sense of practice in another verse of the Mundaka Upanisad as well as in Śaṅkara's gloss. The passage says: "To them alone should one

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<sup>1</sup> dhanasahāyamantrausadhitapoyogakṛtam vīryam mṛtyum na śaknotyabhibhavitum anityavastukṛtatvāt. ātmavidyākṛtam tu vīryamātmanaiva vindatenānyenetyato 'nanyasādhanatvādātma-vidyāvīryasya tadeva vīryam mṛtyum śaknotyabhibhavitum (KeBh 24, 29).

<sup>2</sup> See the whole of Śaṅkara's commentary on the same verse (KeBh 24) where it is explained that the Self is really known only when it is recognized not only in the state samādhi without mental fluctuations but also in all mental modifications outside of that state: "Being the seer of all cognitions and nothing but the true nature of the power of consciousness, through cognitions themselves, the Self appears as not different [even] in the midst of cognitions. There is no other way for its knowledge. Therefore when Brahman is known as the innermost Self of cognitions, then it is known, then Its complete realisation occurs."

ātma . . . sarvaopratyavadarśī cicchaktisvarūpamātrah pratyavaireva pratyavesvaviśistatayā lakṣyate nānyaddvāramātmano vijñānāvātaḥ pratyavapratyagātmatayā viditam brahma yadā tadā tanmatam tadā tatsamyagdarśanamityarthah (KeBh 24, 27).

<sup>3</sup> See the concordance by Jacob.

expound this knowledge of Brahman who are engaged in the practice of disciplines, versed in the Vedas, and devoted to Brahman (brahmanisthāh)..." (3.2.10, 171).<sup>1</sup> And Śaṅkara rightly understands the brahmanisthās to be this time the yet ignorant students rather than the enlightened teacher: "...brahmanisthāh, devoted to the inferior Brahman, and seekers of the knowledge of the supreme Brahman..." (Ibid.)<sup>2</sup> The commentator's gloss on brahmanistha in Praśna Upaniṣad 1.1 is even more precise: "...these were brahmaparā, having approached the inferior Brahman as the supreme one, and brahmanisthāh, engaged in practices [conducive] to Him."<sup>3</sup> The term nisthā also occurs in Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.20.1 with the same meaning and is here translated by Swāmī Gambhīrānanda as "devotion": "'One acquires faith by devoted service only. Devotion has surely to be sought after.' 'O venerable sir, I seek after devotion.'" (CUBh, 555).<sup>4</sup> Śaṅkara then comments: "Nisthā is devotion (paratvam) in things such as the service of the teacher, for acquiring knowledge of Brahman."<sup>5</sup>

The only occurrence of the word nisthā in the BSBh<sup>6</sup> introduces its last sense, that of "culmination." It appears in the last sentence of the commentary on sūtra 21.15: "And we said that all means of

<sup>1</sup> kriyāvantah śrotriya brahmanisthāh... teṣāmevaitām brahma vidvām vadate... (MuBh 3.2.10, 174)

<sup>2</sup> ...brahmanisthā aparasmīnbrahmanyabhiyuktāh parabrahma bubhutsavah... (MuBh 3.2.10, 175)

<sup>3</sup> ...brahmaparā aparaṁ brahma paratvena gatāh... tadanusthānanisthāśca brahmanisthāh (PUBh 1.1, 106).

<sup>4</sup> ...nististhanneva śraddadhāti nisthā tveva vijijñāsitavyeti nisthām bhagavo vijijñāsa iti (CUBh 7.20.1, 560).

<sup>5</sup> nisthā guruśuśrūṣādistatparatvam brahmavijijñānāya (Ibid.).

<sup>6</sup> See the word index by Mahadevan, 1973.

knowledge culminate (nīsthā) in It [Brahman].”<sup>1</sup> The same meaning is conveyed in the BGBh. Śaṅkara writes on verse 18.50: “[Here] nīsthā means culmination, final stage. [Final stage] of what? It is the supreme, final stage of the knowledge of Brahman.”<sup>2</sup>

So far we have seen the word nīsthā rendered by “steadfastness”, “devotion”, or “culmination.” Among other translations by various scholars are “devotedness” and “continuance” (ĪUBh 8, 16), “consummation” (BGBh 18.55, 605), “abidance” (Ibid., 606), “commitment” (Cenkner 60), “path,” “way of life,” “basis,” “system,” and “law” (Minor 1982, 107). It seems to me that while “steadfastness” suggests in a more efficient way the meaning of a state of being, the word “devotion” carries a clearer sense of involvement in a practice. But to avoid any confusion with the use of devotion as bhakti, I prefer, as a whole, to translate nīsthā as “steadfastness,” which can carry both the meanings of absorption in a discipline or practice, and in an object of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

The compound karmanīsthā or steadfastness in action can therefore mean (theoretically as well as in Śaṅkara’s works) regular practice of rites etc., or absorption of the awareness in the sphere of karman, which amounts to ignorance and bondage. Similarly, the compound jñānanīsthā or steadfastness in knowledge can mean practice of the discipline of knowledge, or absorption in the immediate knowledge of the Self which alone yields liberation. But by

<sup>1</sup> tatra sarvaopramāṇānām nīsthā mavocāma (BSBh 21.15, 385).

<sup>2</sup> nīsthā paryavasānam parisamāptirityetat. kasya brahma jñānasya yā parā parisamāptih (BGBh 18.50, 74).

<sup>3</sup> In a previous paper, I rendered nīsthā by “condition or way of living” (Marcaurelle 1987, 26). I now prefer “steadfastness.”

using the phrase “steadfastness in knowledge” to translate jñānanisthā, we are still left even in English with a possible ambiguity between reference to a mediate or to an immediate knowledge of the Self. That is why we will be careful in always defining the exact meaning of this word according to different contexts.

The reader may now ask whether we consider karmanisthā as a synonym of karmayoga and, if so, why not use the latter, a more common term? The two words are indeed synonyms to us as well as to Śaṅkara. In his BGBh 3.4, for example, he uses the word karmanisthā and jñānanisthā to mean respectively the karmayoga and jñānavoga mentioned by the Gītā in verse 3.3.<sup>1</sup> True, Śaṅkara uses the compound karmanisthā only a few times.<sup>2</sup> But we chose to use this term to

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<sup>1</sup> “Or: since steadfastness in knowledge and steadfastness in action (jñānakarmanisthā) are mutually opposed, and thus cannot be practiced simultaneously by one and the same person, it might be concluded that either of them can lead to liberation (puruṣārtha) independently of the other. In order to convey the idea that steadfastness in action (karmanisthā) leads to liberation, not independently, but by being the cause of the attainment of steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā), and that steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā), having been gained through steadfastness in action (karmanisthā), leads to liberation independently, without the need for anything else, the Blessed Lord says.” athavā jñānakarmanisthayoh parasparavirodhādekena puruṣeṇa yugapadanuṣṭhātumaśakyatve satītaretarānapekṣayoreva puruṣārthahetutve prāpte karmanisthāyā jñānanisthāprāpti-hetutvena puruṣārthahetutvaṁ na svātantryeṇa jñānanisthā tu karmanisthopāvalabdhātmikā satī svātantryeṇa puruṣārthaheturanyānapekṣetyetamarthaṁ darśayisyannāha bhagavān (BGBh 3.4, 144).

<sup>2</sup> Only three times in the BGBh for instance (3 intro and 3.2), and nowhere in the BSBh. Apart from the BGBh, karmanisthā and jñānanisthā occur the most often in the ĪUBh, in spite of the small size of the commentary in comparison for example to the BUBh and the

show more clearly an otherwise unobvious characteristic of the words jñānayoga and karmayoga in Śaṅkara's works, that is, their common reference to steadfastness in either a state of being or a practice. Indeed, while the semantic scope of the word yoga is commonly limited to the meaning of "practice" or "discipline," that of the word nisthā seems more flexible in that it allows a complete definition of the nuances related to jñāna- and karmayoga in Śaṅkara's usage.

We will therefore retain two main meanings for the word nisthā: steadfastness (with the twofold extension of practice and state of being) and culmination. These meanings are found in the BGBh. But, in contrast with their usage in other works by Śaṅkara, they are much more closely related to the whole purport of the commentary and, at the same time, their proper contextualisation is often more arduous. Accordingly, we will first deepen our understanding of the nature of karma- and jñānanisthā in Śaṅkara's view.

To understand the expression karmanisthā we now have to address the other word of the compound, that is, karman. Does it always mean ritual actions which are enjoined by the scriptures according to varṇa and āśrama, or also a state of being which is based on the superimposition of authorship and thereby prompting to action in general, including rites? As rightly pointed out by Radhakrishnan (630-631) and Potter (1982, 115), for Śaṅkara, the basic meaning of karman is that which is done by one who perceives himself as a doer and which, feeding on the desire to achieve a result, either good or bad for him, perpetuates the cycle of birth and death.

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CUBh. For karmanisthā, see verses 1, 14, and especially 8 where it occurs several times.

This is made clear time and again by Śaṅkara. The definition refers to both profane and religious types of action. Śaṅkara insists that desire is also found in the case of a person who feels the pious responsibility to perform only non-harmful and obligatory rites prescribed by the scriptures:

In the same way as desire-prompted rites such as the new and full moon sacrifices are enjoined on one who has the defect of desiring heaven etc., so also the obligatory daily rites are enjoined on the one who has defects such as ignorance, the seed of all evils, who has such ensuing defects as attachment, aversion, reaching for the desirable and avoiding the undesirable, whose involvement in action is impelled by both of these, and who tries to seek good and avoid evil. They are not motivated solely by the scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

A few lines later, Śaṅkara contrasts this man of desire, not with the formal renouncer in search of liberation (who would still be subject to seeking good and avoiding evil), but clearly with the one who has already reached liberation through direct knowledge of the non-dual Brahman-Ātman: "And one whose knowledge of rites and of their instruments etc. has been sublated cannot be involved in rites.

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<sup>1</sup> yathāsvargakāmādidosaṁvato darśapaurṇamāsādīni kāmyaṇi  
karmāṇi vihitāni tathā sarvānarthabījāvidyādidosaṁvataḥ  
tajjaniteṣṭāniṣṭaprāptiparihārarāgaḍveśādidosaṁvataśca  
tatpreritāviśeṣapravṛtteriṣṭāniṣṭaprāptiparihārārthino nityāni  
karmāṇi vidhīyante, na kevalam śāstranimittānveva (BUBh 1.3.1, 628).

Because involvement in rites must be preceded by a knowledge of specific actions with their means and so on.”<sup>1</sup>

Following the spirit of another passage of the same Upanisad, Śaṅkara describes again the man absorbed in ignorance and karman in even more deprecating terms: “It has been said that an unenlightened man identified with his caste, order of life etc., and controlled by righteousness, is dependent on gods and others like an animal, because [he thinks] he has duties to perform for them.”<sup>2</sup> Again he contrasts him with the already liberated man: “If, knowing Brahman, he becomes free from this beastly existence consisting of the bondage of duty, how could he be prompted to get involved - as if bereft of freedom - in the qualification for the bondage of karman and not in the qualification for knowledge (vidyādhikāra) which is the means to liberation from the latter.”<sup>3</sup> Although the term “qualification for knowledge” could seem to refer to qualification for the discipline of

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<sup>1</sup> na copamarditakriyākāraḥ kādīvijñānasya karmapravrttirupapadyate. viśistakriyāsādhanaḥ vijñānapūrvakatvātkriyāpravrtteḥ (Ibid.).

<sup>2</sup> atrāvidvānvarṇāśramādvabhimāno dharmena niyamamāno devādikarmakartavyatayā paśuvatparatantra ityuktam (BUBh 1.4.5, 686).

<sup>3</sup> brahma vidvāṃścettasmātpaśubhāvātkartavyatābandhanarūpāt pratimucyate. kenāyam kāritaḥ karmabandhanādhikāre 'vaśa iva pravartate na punastadvimokṣanopāye vidyādhikāra iti (BUBh 1.4.16, 687-688).

Compare my above translation with that of Swāmī Mādhavānanda which does not make evident the repetition of the word “qualification” (adhikāra) - the significance of which will be discussed further in this thesis: “If by knowing Brahman he gets rid of that bondage of duty which makes him an animal, as it were, under what compulsion does he take up the bondage of ritualistic work as if he were helpless, and not the pursuit of knowledge which is the means of freedom from that?” (BUBh 131).

knowledge, Śaṅkara's reference to the knowledge of Brahman and to freedom from the bondage of duty (which has earlier been connected with superimposition of authorship) suggests quite clearly that the man to whom the qualification for knowledge is attributed, has already attained liberation. Therefore, the qualification for knowledge in the case of such a man does not refer to his capacity to pursue the discipline of knowledge, but to his ability to have direct Self-knowledge and its ensuing result, namely liberation. Since the translation of vidyādhikāra, by Swāmī Mādhavānanda, as "pursuit of knowledge" (131) suggests a mediate knowledge, it does not seem proper here. It could give the impression that the unenlightened man is here contrasted with some advanced seeker after knowledge (and formal renouncer), which is not the case. From Śaṅkara's point of view, the Self-knower is here attributed qualification for a direct Self-knowledge that has already been attained and that has already eliminated the tendency of the intellect to become absorbed in authorship, action, and wordly results. Thus, according to its technical meaning, qualification (adhikāra) means here that the direct knower of the Self deserves to obtain a specific result from of his Self-knowledge. This result is liberation both in this life and hereafter, a complete and self-sufficient inner freedom that needs no further karman for its sustenance.<sup>1</sup>

If, for Śaṅkara, karman cannot exist without a state of being which is based on ignorance and superimposition of authorship, it follows that both the terms karmanisthā and karmayoga (roughly

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<sup>1</sup> For further details on the use of adhikāra for knowledge in the case of the enlightened man, see chapter 6.1.



synonyms for our author)<sup>1</sup> must mean first of all a “steadfastness” in authorship and action, and in the second place only, a practice of karman. And, it is quite clear from the passages of the BUBh we have just quoted that when Śaṅkara thus opposes karmanisthā and jñānanisthā, he does not contrast the practice of karman with that of mediate knowledge of the Self (necessarily preceded by physical renunciation according to many interpreters), but the state of being based on ignorance, with that based on immediate Self-knowledge and from which liberation ensues. This is in agreement with Śaṅkara’s understanding of the main purport of this Upaniṣad: “The whole of this Upaniṣad,” he writes, “is exclusively devoted to showing the distinction between the sphere of knowledge and ignorance” (BUBh 1.4.10, 118).<sup>2</sup> Since Śaṅkara understands that the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā and the Brahmasūtras all teach the same knowledge of the non-dual Self, according to him, this intent of the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad can very well be attributed to all these texts as well as to his own commentaries and finally to the comparison often made by him between the two fundamental concepts of karmanisthā and jñānanisthā.

This basic position can also be verified in the BGBh. After describing, in the introduction to verse 18.11, characteristics of the enlightened man, such as “without acting at all or causing to act,” Śaṅkara thus introduces his counterpart:

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<sup>1</sup> For nuances concerning their synonymity, see the beginning of the following chapter.

<sup>2</sup> sarvā hīyam upaniṣat vidyāvidyāvibhāgapradarśanenaivopakṣinā (BUBh 1.4.10, 679).

On the other hand, since complete abandonment of action is impossible for the man qualified for rites who bears a body by reason of regarding the body as himself, who is unenlightened, who has the firm knowledge that he is a doer because his experience of the Self's authorship has not been discarded, he is qualified only for the performance of actions enjoined by the scriptures [and] accompanied by abandonment of the results of actions.<sup>1</sup>

Even more significant is the comparison between the two nisthās where Śaṅkara states that "[mere physical] renunciation (samnyāsa) and karmayoga are not possible in the case of the knower of the Self."<sup>2</sup> If the knower of the Self cannot accomplish the simple act of physically renouncing rites, it is because, while this type of renunciation is understood by Śaṅkara to be accompanied by authorship, on the contrary, the Self-knower has no sense of being the doer of any action, by virtue of his direct experience of the actionless Self. On the other hand, because the seeker after liberation still has the experience of authorship, it is possible for him to physically abandon rites in order to devote himself to the discipline of knowledge. In the context of what is, according to Śaṅkara, the most basic contrast between karmanisthā and jñānanisthā, the seeker using mediate means of knowledge after physically abandoning rites is as much in the sphere of ignorance and authorship as the

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<sup>1</sup> yah punaradhikṛtaḥ sandehāt mābhimānitvena dehabhṛdaiṅ  
'bādhitāt makartṛtvavijñānatayāhaṁ karteti niścittabuddhis-  
tasyāśeṣakarmāparitvāgasvāśakvatvāt karmaphalatvāgena  
coditakarmānuṣṭhāna evādhikāro (BGBh 18.11, 689).

<sup>2</sup> ātmaavidastu samnyāsakarmayogavorasambhavāt (BGBh intro 5, 244).

karmayogin who continues to perform rites. Again, this shows how, from Śaṅkara's viewpoint, the major opposition between karmanisthā and jñānanisthā is not on the level of mediate means to liberation but on the level of states of being.<sup>1</sup>

In verse 3.3 of the Gītā, the two nisthās are expressly mentioned as jñānayoga and karmanyoga: "As taught by Me in the beginning, O sinless one, there is in this world two types of steadfastness (nisthā): in jñānayoga for the sāṃkhyas and in karmanyoga for the yogins."<sup>2</sup> Are these two nisthās understood by Śaṅkara in the same manner as we have seen so far? The gloss coming immediately after the word nisthā in the commentary is sthitiranusthevatātparyam (BGBh 141), which we would translate by "steady application, dedication to what is to be accomplished."<sup>3</sup> Nisthā seems, therefore, at first glance to refer to a practice rather than to a state of being.

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<sup>1</sup> It is in this spirit that Śaṅkara determined the context, reference and addressee of injunction in the verses of the Gītā. However, some commentators detect artificiality in his exegetic application of the two nisthās: "the technique of declaring that certain passages are meant for 'the ignorant' was used because the Gītā did not often teach the system that the commentator proclaimed" (Minor 1980, 339). Inasmuch as, contrary to a current misinterpretation in this respect, Śaṅkara's basic scheme of the two nisthās does not favor formal renunciation leading to jñānanisthā as a mediate means of Self-knowledge, but rather jñānanisthā as immediate knowledge itself, it becomes much less relevant to argue that our commentator is not as a whole faithful to the Gītā.

<sup>2</sup> loke 'smindvividhā nisthā purā proktā mayā 'nagha |  
jñānayogena sāṅkhyānām karmayogena yoginām ||  
 (Gītā 3.3, 141)

<sup>3</sup> While Mahadeva Sastry (Śaṅkara 1985, 92) does not translate the gloss, Ramachandra Aiyar (BGBh, 106) gives "discipline, intended for steady practice." Swāmī Gambhirānanda (Śaṅkara 1984, 135) is nearest to our translation with "steadfastness, persistence in what is undertaken."

Śaṅkara then gives his definition of each niṣṭhā:

The steadfastness in the yoga of knowledge - yoga being knowledge itself <sup>1</sup> - has been taught for the sāmkhyas, those possessed of the knowledge arising from discrimination between the Self and the non-Self, who have adopted [physical] <sup>2</sup> renunciation immediately after studentship, who have well ascertained the meaning of the Vedāntic knowledge, who are paramahamsaparivṛājakas and established in Brahman alone.

The steadfastness in the yoga of action - yoga being action itself - has been taught for the yogins, the men of action. <sup>3</sup>

While it seems quite clear that karmanisthā is described here only in terms of practice, it is not as easy to determine whether Śaṅkara associates jñānanisthā with people who already have direct knowledge of the Self - in which case jñānanisthā would be a state of

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<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that Śaṅkara's compound analysis "jñānameva yogastena" on jñānayogena and "karmaiva yogaḥ karmayogastena" on karmayogena have been wrongly translated by "knowledge itself being yoga" and "action itself being yoga" (Cf. BGBh, Śaṅkara 1984 and Śaṅkara 1985). Rather, in both these avadhāranapūrvapada karmadhāraya, the subject is yoga and the predicates (followed by eva) are respectively knowledge and action, a structure that is reproduced in our translation. In other words, it is yoga (the subject) that is attributed two different values or predicates (jñāna and karman), rather than jñāna and karman being called yoga.

<sup>2</sup> The term is kṛtasamnyāsānām, literally "those who have done renunciation." In medieval times, this term technically refers to formal renunciation. The context also suggests this here.

<sup>3</sup> tatra jñānayogena jñānameva yogastena sāmkhyanāmāt maviṣaya-vivekaijñānavatām brahmacāryāśramadeva kṛtasamnyāsānām vedāntavijñānasuniścītārthhānām paramahamsaparivṛājakānām brahmanyevāvasthitānām niṣṭhā proktā. karmayogena karmaiva yogaḥ karmayogastena karmayogena yoginām karminām niṣṭhā proktetvarthah (BGBh 3.3, 141-142).

being - or with people who take recourse to formal renunciation in order to achieve that experience through full-time practice of the discipline of knowledge. The ambiguity emerges from the fact that almost all characteristics attributed to the "sāmkhyas" can be theoretically understood to refer to both mediate means for the experience of the Self or to that very experience. First, the expression "knowledge arising from discrimination between the Self and the non-Self" can mean the discrimination required as part of the fourfold discipline (sādhanacatustaya) even before starting the discipline of knowledge, or it can refer to a discrimination based on direct knowledge of the Self. Hence the question arises: is the renunciation of those "who adopt [physical] renunciation" the expression of an already accomplished renunciation of authorship or a way to dedicate oneself full-time to the discipline of knowledge? Further, does the compound "who have well-ascertained the meaning of the Vedāntic knowledge" mean ascertainment through hearing, reflection and meditation only or through direct experience also? If it is through the latter, did it happen before or after physical renunciation? Then, are the "paramahamsaparivrājakas" simply members of the fourth āśrama, whether enlightened or not, or specifically those who are enlightened? The last compound "established in Brahman alone" is probably the only one where ambiguity can hardly arise. In Śaṅkara's works, this kind of statement refers invariably to direct Self-knowledge.

As a first step in trying to answer these questions, we can summarize them in the following way: is there a progression between the first and the last attribution, or are they referring through

various angles to the same state of enlightenment? Śaṅkara's usage of the third attribution ("who have well ascertained the meaning of the Vedāntic knowledge") in BSBh 1.4.22 suggests that he understands it as a direct knowledge of the Self. The evidence comes from the fact that he presents it on equal footing with the "irrefutable knowledge" and with the realisation of Unity:

Otherwise, the seekers after liberation could not gain an irrefutable knowledge. Neither could they reach a well-ascertained meaning (suniścittārthatvānupapatteśca). For the knowledge about the Self that is sought here is that which is irrefutable and which sets at rest all questions, as declared by the following Śruti passages: "Those who have well ascertained the meaning of Vedāntic knowledge (vedāntavijñānasuniścittārthāḥ)" [Mu. 3.26], "What delusion, what sorrow can persist there for one who has realized Unity?" [Īś. 7].<sup>1</sup>

If the third and the fifth (or last) attributions in our list are indicative of direct Self-knowledge, the fourth, that is, the simple name "wandering mendicants" (paramahamsaparivrājakānām) must be indicative of the same as well. Hence the only possible progression is between the first two and the others. The remaining question is therefore whether the first attribution ("knowledge arising from discrimination between the Self and the non-Self") means a preliminary knowledge or already the direct experience of the Self.

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<sup>1</sup> anyathā ca mumuksūṇām nirapavādavijñānānupapatteḥ. suniścittārthatvānupapatteśca. nirapavādam hi vijñānam sarvākāksānivartakamāt mavisayamisyate. 'vedāntavijñānasuniścittārthāḥ' [Mund. 3.26] iti ca śruteḥ. 'tatra ko mohah kaḥ śoka ekatvamanupaśyataḥ' [Ī. 7] (BSBh 1.4.22, 335).

The answer to this question will determine the role given by Śaṅkara to physical renunciation (the second attribution) as part of this major definition of jñānanisthā.

Since viveka (discrimination) can consist of either immediate or mediate knowledge, since the “knowledge” that yoga is (in the compound jñānayoga) can also have the two values, and since the immediate context of the commentary on this verse seems to give no more precision in this respect, a possible answer would be that the two meanings are valid and apply respectively to the liberated person and the seeker after liberation. In this basic definition of jñānanisthā by Śaṅkara, physical renunciation could thus be both the means and the result of immediate knowledge of the Self and liberation. But a comparison of this passage with similar ones from Śaṅkara’s works will show that while both these are possible, physical renunciation is mainly an effect of direct knowledge of the Self and, even more important, is never given as a necessary condition for the latter.

Our analysis of all passages on the two nisthās in Śaṅkara’s works reveals that while jñānanisthā is sometimes opposed to karmannisthā in terms of means toward immediate knowledge of the Self, most often, as already evidenced through key examples in this chapter, the opposition between these two nisthās is defined in terms of states of ignorance and of direct Self-knowledge. This in turn gives much more importance, in Śaṅkara’s doctrine, to physical renunciation as an expression of the inner renunciation of authorship rather than as an aid to its acquisition.

Let us start with a passage stating the opposition of karma- and jñānanisthā as means toward immediate Self-knowledge. Quoting

verse 3.3 in his commentary on 2.11, Śaṅkara states that since jñāna depends on the concepts of non-authorship and oneness, and karman, on those of authorship and multiplicity, they cannot be found in the same person at the same time. He goes on to say that the same distinction is found in Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.22, but then develops the idea that renunciation is prescribed for one who has no desire and is still seeking for the experience of the Self:

...it has been pointed out by Śruti that all actions, Vedic and others, are only for the unenlightened man who has desires. In 'Abandoning them, they lead a life of mendicacy' [Br.4.4.22], renunciation has been prescribed for him who is devoid of desire and wishes only for the world of the Self. This separate mention would be improper if the combination of Vedic rites and knowledge had been intended by the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, a combination of rites and Self-knowledge is impossible not only as far as the states of ignorance and experience of the Self are concerned, but also between the two main means for direct Self-knowledge, that is, between the karmayoga of the man active in society, and the jñānayoga of the monastic seeker after liberation who, having abandoned rituals, fully devotes himself to the discipline of knowledge. Yet, most important to note at this point is that, in almost all other cases, the definition and justification of the opposition

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<sup>1</sup> ... avidyākāmaṇḍata eva sarvāṇi karmāṇi śrautādīni darśitāni, "tebhyo vyutthāya pravrajanti" iti vyutthānamāt mānameva lokamicchato 'kāmasya vihitam, tadetadvibhāgavacanamanuppannam syāt yadi śrautakarmajñānayoh samuccayo 'bhipretah syādbhagavatah (BGBh 2.10, 43).



between the two types of nisthās is in terms of contrasting ignorance with immediate knowledge of the Self.

For example, in his commentary on Gītā 2.21, having established through an extended discussion that the man described in the verse as neither causing to slay nor slaying, is indeed beyond authorship and action by virtue of his direct Self-knowledge, Śaṅkara states:

Therefore, the distinguished man of knowledge who perceives the immutability of the Self, and the seeker after liberation as well, are qualified only for renunciation of all actions. It is because of this that Lord Nārāyaṇa distinguishes the sāmkhyas - the men of knowledge - and the unenlightened - the performers of actions -, and enjoins two [types of] steadfastness: "In

jñānayoga for the sāmkhyas, in karmayoga for the yogins." <sup>1</sup>

The key point here is that, while the whole discussion preceding this statement legitimates physical renunciation solely on the basis of the spiritual achievement of the enlightened man, Śaṅkara has both the above mentioned "seeker after liberation," and physical renunciation as a means of acquiring knowledge, creep into the sphere of jñānanisthā only at the end of his argumentation. Moreover, to support his standpoint, the commentator then quotes passages which again contrast only the liberated-while-living and the unenlightened: "... the Lord will be often referring to this distinction for instance when saying that 'with the mind deluded by the acting ego, the

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<sup>1</sup> tasmādviśesitasyāvikriyāt madarśino viduso mumuksośca sarvakarmasamnyāsa evādhikārah. ata eva bhagavānnārāyaṇaḥ sāmkyānviduso 'vidusaśca karmināḥ pravibhaiya dve nisthe grāhayati 'jñānayogena sāmkyānām karmayogena yoginām' iti (BGBh 2.21, 73).

ignorant of truth thinks "I am the doer" [3.27], 'while the knower of Truth' [3.28] thinks 'I am not doing.' Similarly in 'having mentally renounced all actions, he rests' [5.13].<sup>1</sup> Thus, although, according to Śaṅkara, physical renunciation as a means to liberation may have a role within the domain of jñānanisthā, it is not its most representative type of abandonment.

Furthermore, one aspect of Śaṅkara's definition of jñānanisthā in BGBh 3.3 leads us to other passages describing the two nisthās, in the larger context of which emphasis is given to physical renunciation as an expression, rather than as a means of immediate Self-knowledge. The peculiar element of the definition of jñānanisthā in this verse is that, according to Śaṅkara, the sāṃkhyas physically renounce immediately after the stage of studentship.<sup>2</sup> Why is there a specific time mentioned when it is well-known to Śaṅkara from the Upanisads that one can physically renounce from any stage of life? If we take this definition literally, we are led to the odd conclusion that in this famous and fundamental definition of the two nisthās by the Gītā and Śaṅkara, the term jñānanisthā does not even account for the nisthā of those who renounce physically after the stage of householder or that of hermit (vānaprastha). Of course, for Śaṅkara, this cannot amount to prohibition of such a renunciation for these categories of people, as it would contradict passages of the Upanisads that do allow it. The

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<sup>1</sup> ...etameva vibhāgam punaḥ punardarśayisyati bhagavān. atattvavidahamkāravimūdhāt mā kartāhamiti manyate tattvavittu nāham karomīti. tathā ca sarvakarmāṇi manasā samnyasyāsta ityādi (BGBh 2.21, 74).

<sup>2</sup> For other statements of the same time for physical renunciation, see BGBh 2.54, 2.72, 4.21 and TUBh 1.11.4.

explanation of the mention of this particular time is to be found elsewhere.

Śaṅkara interprets the expression "purā proktā" used in verse 3.3 as meaning: taught by Kṛṣṇa "at the beginning of Creation."<sup>1</sup> Using the terms pravṛttidharma and nivṛttidharma instead of karma- and jñānanistha, Śaṅkara also states in his introduction to the Gītā that they were taught by Kṛṣṇa at the beginning of the universe:

Having created this universe and desirous of ensuring his sustenance, He, the Lord, first created Marīci and other Prajāpatīs, and made them hold on to the dharma stated in the Veda and characterized by involvement in action (pravṛtti). Then He created others such as Sanaka and Sanandana and made them adopt the dharma of abstention from action (nivṛtti), characterized by knowledge and detachment.<sup>2</sup>

The group of Sanaka are known for their life-long celibacy, that is, for having not engaged in the householder stage of life after completion of their period of studies (brahmacarya), and are described in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as most pure and free from desire (BGBh intro, 2). While we cannot be sure that Śaṅkara saw these people in particular as already liberated at the end of their studies, at this point we can at least suppose that if in the BGBh 3.3 he specifies that renunciation occurs immediately after this period, it is because he has in his mind, so to

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<sup>1</sup> purā pūrvam sargādaḥ prajāḥ sṛstvā (BGBh 3.3, 141).

<sup>2</sup> sa bhagavān sṛstvedam jagat tasya sthitim cikīrṣur marīcivādīnagre sṛstvā prajāpatīn pravṛttilakṣaṇam dharmam grāhayaṁ māsa vedoktam. tato 'nvāmsca sanakasanandanādīn utpādya nivṛttidharmam jñānavairāgyalakṣaṇam grāhayaṁ māsa (BGBh intro, 2-3).

say, the primordial scene of the foundation of the two nisthās at the beginning of Creation.

In his ĪUBh 2, Śaṅkara develops the theme of the two nisthās by quoting a passage from the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 10.62.12: "There are two outstanding paths (pathānau): the path of action first and then renunciation; of these, the path of renunciation excels." <sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara further specifies their relationship in his introduction to verse 9: "Here, in this mantra, the first purport of the Vedas is the mention of steadfastness in knowledge through abandonment of all desires. ... The second purport of the Vedas is the mention of steadfastness in action for the men of ignorance who wish to live [a hundred years] and for whom steadfastness in knowledge is not possible ..." <sup>2</sup> A few lines further, he thus describes the situation of the man following the path of action: "... ignorance and desire are [the characteristics] of the man steadfast in action ..." <sup>3</sup> Since the mere fact of being a formal renouncer or of practicing the discipline of knowledge does not remove ignorance, it is clear that even though the two nisthās are called "paths," they still contrast, above all, the state of ignorance with that of direct experience of the Self, rather than the

<sup>1</sup> 'imau dvāveva panthānāvanuniskrāntatarau bhavatah kriyāpathaścaiva purastātsannyāsaścottareṇa' tayoh sannyāsapatha evātirecayati ... (ĪUBh 2, 4). After sannyāsapatha, the Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Press edition adds: "that is, the giving up of the three kinds of desire through the path of non-involvement" (nivṛttimārgenaīśanā-trayasya tyāgaḥ; Īśāvāsyopaniṣat, Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Press, 1909, 6).

<sup>2</sup> atrādyena mantreṇa sarvaiśanāparityāgena jñānanisthoktā prathamo vedārthah ... aiñānām jīviṣūnām jñānanisthāsambhave ... karmanusthoktā dvitīyo vedārthah (ĪUBh 8, 7-8).

<sup>3</sup> ... aiñātvaṃ kāmitvaṃ ca karmanisthasya ... (ĪUBh 8, 8)

way of life of the active man with that of the formal renouncer.<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara's gloss on pravṛtti and nivṛtti in Gītā 18.30 presents the same idea in quite similar terms: "And involvement in action: involvement in action is activity, the path of action, which is the cause of bondage. And abstention from action: abstention from action is the path of renunciation which is the cause of liberation."<sup>2</sup> Because nivṛtti is here directly associated with liberation, and because only direct Self-knowledge can yield this result, the term cannot refer here to mere monasticism. It does not even represent monasticism as the only way to direct Self-knowledge, since as a most fundamental soteriological notion, it would then fall short of accounting for people who do get liberation without monasticism. Thus nivṛtti means here abstention from action in the sense of abandonment of the binding nature of action, that is, in the sense of renunciation of authorship; in this respect, it is a correlate of direct Self-knowledge, and it is independent of any particular way of life. This is even suggested by the fact that when, at the end of their period of studies, some people adopt nivṛtti as a monastic way of life after their enlightenment, the inner nivṛtti or abstention from action connected to their state of liberation-in-this-life must logically have been achieved prior to nivṛtti as a monastic way of life.

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<sup>1</sup> In BUBh 4.5.15 (545) Śaṅkara quotes the same passage from the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka as evidence for the prescription of the samnyāsa stage of life. Thus for our commentator the nisthā based on samnyāsa may include formal renunciation, but the latter is not a necessary prerequisite for that nisthā which is first of all characterized by abstention from action (nivṛtti) in the form of renunciation of authorship. Similarly, even though, as pointed by Olivelle, Manu's dharmaśāstra system uses the term nivṛttidharma to define the

In Brhadāraṇyaka Upanisad 3.5.1, Brāhmaṇas are said to have undertaken physical renunciation due to their knowledge of the Self: "Knowing this very Self the Brāhmaṇas renounce the desire for sons, for wealth and for the worlds, and lead a mendicant's life" (330).<sup>1</sup> In his commentary on this verse, Śaṅkara clearly says that they already had direct knowledge of the Self and that their physical renunciation was simply the natural consequence of their absence of desire for any wordly object. Although the Upanisad does not mention it, he also says that they renounced instead of getting married, that is, they

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(monastic) fourth stage of life and makes it "a synonym of renunciation" (1984, 106), at least in Śaṅkara's case, it is not this way of life as such that leads to liberation. Thus, when studying Śaṅkara, the association of pravṛttidharma with the way of life of the householder and of nivṛttidharma with monasticism may be misleading if the value of nivṛtti as abstention from action based on direct Self-knowledge is not taken into account. Let us take for instance Olivelle's following statement in reference to Manu-smṛti 1288-89: "The dharma of renunciation was called nivṛttidharma, since it entailed abstention from action and stopped the cycle of birth and death. The dharma of the householder, on the other hand, was called pravṛttidharma, since it consisted of activity and furthered the life cycle" (1978, 30). While it would be beyond the scope of this study to identify precisely Manu's position on this, we can say that, from Śaṅkara's perspective, liberation from the cycle of birth and death is not brought about by nivṛtti as a monastic way of life, which is suggested by Olivelle's statement, but as a state of direct Self-knowledge. Thus, although in Śaṅkara's usage, pravṛtti and nivṛtti can refer to ways of life as such, they mainly account for states of consciousness in the context of which an enlightened householder can be considered to be steadfast in the nivṛttidharma, and a formal renouncer and seeker after liberation still engaged in duties such as meditation, can be rightly understood as still engrossed in the pravṛttidharma.

<sup>2</sup> pravṛttim ca pravṛtṭiḥ pravartanam bandhahetuḥ karmamārgaḥ. nivṛttim ca nivṛttirmokṣahetuḥ samnvāsamārgaḥ (BGBh 18.30, 714).

<sup>1</sup> etaṃ vai tamāt mānam viditvā brāhmaṇāḥ putraisaṇāyāśca lokaisaṇāyāśca vyutthāyātha bhikṣācāryam caranti (BUBh 3.5.1, 809).

physically abandoned everything just after the stage of brahmacarya (334). Not the least, he adds the adjective “ancient” (pūrve)<sup>1</sup> to the word Brāhmaṇas while it is not found in the verse itself. Leaving aside questions of validity concerning this interpretation, it is quite clear that Śaṅkara has the same kind of primordial scene in mind when commenting on this passage of the verse. Again in chapter 3 of the Gītā, while introducing verse 17, Śaṅkara paraphrases this very passage from the Upanisad and states that Kṛṣṇa wants to show by this verse that “the same meaning taught in the Śruti is what He intends to explain in this Gītā scripture.”<sup>2</sup> Verse 17 is a clear description of the enlightened man for whom “there is no duty to perform” (kāryam na vidyate) because of his total self-sufficiency with the experience of the Self: “But for that man who rejoices only in the Self and is satisfied with the Self, and is contented only in the Self, there is no duty to perform.”<sup>3</sup> And if it is in him that the common message of the Gītā and of the Śruti on jñānanisthā as opposed to karmanisthā is to be found, then the opposition is between the enlightened and the ignorant, not between the physically renouncing seeker and the people of other stages of life. As further evidence in support of this, in his BSBh 4.1.2, after quoting this verse of the Gītā, Śaṅkara contrasts its description of a man who has no more duty to fulfill, with the unenlightened man who must pursue (or repeat) the

<sup>1</sup> See translation: BUBh 3.5.1, 335 and Sanskrit text: BUBh 813.

<sup>2</sup> evam śrutiyarthamiha gītāśāstre pratipādayisitāmāviṣkurvannāha bhagavān (BGBh 3.17, 155-156).

<sup>3</sup> yastvātmaratireva svādātmatrptaśca mānavah |  
ātmanyeva ca samtustastasya kāryam na vidyate |  
(Gītā 3.17)

practice of hearing, reflection and meditation (817-818). Therefore, since, on the basis of Śaṅkara's own cross-references and understanding of the scriptures as a unified whole, this unenlightened seeker is opposed to the enlightened man of verse 3.17, to the "ancient Brāhmaṇas" of the Upanisad and to the jñānanistha defined in verse 3.3, it follows that in the commentary on the latter verse, the first attribution given to this jñānanistha, that is, "discrimination arising from the knowledge between the Self and the non-Self," which precedes physical renunciation, would not consist in mere verbal knowledge, but in direct experience of the non-dual Self.

Accordingly, in Śaṅkara's understanding of jñānanisthā in Gītā 3.3, the most plausible explanation to the unexpected restriction of physical renunciation after the stage of brahmacarya, is that the commentator looks at this jñānanisthā in the same way as he understands it in the other passages we quoted, that is, not as a means to knowledge aided by physical renunciation, but as a state of direct Self-knowledge finding spontaneous expression in physical renunciation. In other words, for him, the essential opposition between karmanisthā and jñānanisthā consists in that, in life, there are those who, living the completely fulfilling experience of the non-dual Self, have no desire for any means and result, and those who, because of the lack of experience of that same Self, have desires for various means and results, each according to their understanding of the goal of life. Physical renunciation is thus mainly an expression of immediate Self-knowledge rather than a means to it.

Further evidence to this effect is given by Śaṅkara himself in a few other places of his BGBh. First, the commentary on verse 3.4 is



even clearer regarding Śaṅkara's understanding of jñānanisthā or jñānayoga. There, he gives "actionlessness" (naiskarmya), "exemption from action" (niskarmabhāva) and "steadfastness in the real nature of the inactive Self alone" (niskriyātmavarūpenaivāvasthāna) as synonyms of the "action-free steadfastness in jñānayoga" (karmaśūnyatām jñānayogena nisthām).<sup>1</sup> All these terms certainly do not suggest that jñānayoga is here a practice, even if it consisted of the Advaita discipline of knowledge. In agreement with Śaṅkara's usual terminology, the expression "steadfastness in the real nature of the inactive Self" can only correspond to the immediate knowledge that is beyond all practices. Further, in 3.5, Śaṅkara considers that it is again for the sāṃkhyas whom he calls elsewhere "the seers of the supreme reality" (paramārthadarśinah),<sup>2</sup> and "who are unmoved by the guṇas by virtue of their being without movement," that karmayoga is out of place.<sup>3</sup> In verse 18.3, the opponent quotes verse 3.3 to support his opinion that the discussion about obligatory daily rites found in the verse applies to sāṃkhyas as well as to karma-lyogins. Then Śaṅkara tries to demonstrate that sāṃkhyas (also called by him jñānanisthas) are not at all concerned with the issue of karmanvoga because they "do not perceive action in the Self" (nāpi te karmānyāt māni paśyanti),<sup>4</sup> they are "the true saṃnyāsins]" characterized by [their] being beyond the three guṇas"

<sup>1</sup> Sanskrit text: BGBh 3.4, 145.

<sup>2</sup> BGBh 18.3, 679.

<sup>3</sup> sāṃkhyānām . . . jñāninām tu guṇairacālyamānānām svataścalanābhāvātkarmayogo nopapadyate (BGBh 3.5, 146).

<sup>4</sup> BGBh 18.3, 678.

(guṇātītalaksane ca paramārthasamnyāsino viśesitatvāt)<sup>1</sup> and they are “seers of the supreme truth” (paramārthadarśinah)<sup>2</sup>. Finally, the same type of description reappears in the introduction to chapter 5: “Because, with the words ‘in jñānavoga for sāmkhyas,’ steadfastness in jñānavoga, which is characterized by remaining in the true nature of the actionless Self and which belongs to the sāmkhyas, the knowers of the Self’s reality, is distinguished from steadfastness in karmavoga which pertains to those who do not know the Self ...”<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, for Śaṅkara, the opposition between karmanisthā and jñānanisthā is mainly one between, on the one hand, ignorance of the Self accompanied by authorship and, on the other hand, immediate knowledge of the Self accompanied by absence of authorship. In this context, physical renunciation is the expression of the annihilation of authorship and of the duality between agent, means and results. When, much less often and with less emphasis on Śaṅkara’s part, jñānanisthā means steadfastness in the discipline of knowledge, then renunciation becomes an aid to full absorption in its practices. However, in the context of the opposition between the two nisthās, contrary to a widespread misinterpretation of Śaṅkara’s position, there is no evidence 1- that jñānanisthā as immediate knowledge of the Self must be accompanied by physical renunciation in order to yield its result (i.e. liberation); 2- or even that the jñānanisthā

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 679.

<sup>3</sup> ‘jñānavogena sāmkhyānām’ ityanena sāmkhyānāmātmatattvavidāmanāt mavit kartṛkakar mayoganisthāto niṣkriyāt masvarūpā-vasthānalaksanāyā jñānavoganisthāyāh prthakkaranāt... (BGBh intro 5, 245) See other quotations of verse 3.3 with the same emphasis in BGBh 2.21, 13.2, and 18.67.

consisting of the discipline for attaining this immediate knowledge must be accompanied by physical renunciation to fulfill its purpose.

Thus, so far, we have showed that, according to Śaṅkara, a person steadfast in action (karmanistha) is one who is still without the experience of the Self and who therefore has to continue the performance of rites. On the other hand, two types of persons can be said to be steadfast in knowledge (jñānanistha): most prominent, the one already liberated from the bondage of action through his steadfastness in the experience of the Self, and, much less emphasized by Śaṅkara, the one seeking after this experience through the discipline of knowledge in the context of monasticism.<sup>1</sup> Let us now consider these categories in light of Śaṅkara's whole sequence of awakening to the experience of the Self as a means to liberation.

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<sup>1</sup> As will be seen further on in detail, according to Śaṅkara, one may abandon rites and take recourse to monasticism even when still unenlightened. As contrasted with the case of the unenlightened person still obliged to pursue rites, the qualification for abandoning the latter includes being a Brāhmaṇa and being detached (virakta) from all goals other than liberation.

## CHAPTER 4

### SARVAKARMASAMNYĀSA AS RENUNCIATION OF AUTHORSHIP

#### 4.1- The basic sequence leading to liberation

Many an interpreter of Advaita hold that, as a way to proceed from the sphere of ignorance characterizing karmanisthā, to that of knowledge referred to by jñānanisthā or jñānavoga, Śaṅkara advocates that, at some point, the aspirant must physically abandon all rituals and become a formal samnyāsin as a prerequisite to start the Advaita discipline of knowledge proper. At first sight, some passages of Śaṅkara's commentaries seem to support such an interpretation of his standpoint, particularly those where he lists the steps towards liberation and gives renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) as one of them. Hence, it will be useful to identify the major landmarks toward liberation as stated by Śaṅkara in those passages which constitute more or less formal summaries of the whole path to liberation. When the occasional mention of the practice of karmayoga or bhaktiyoga is taken into account, the most elaborate enumerations include six steps altogether, culminating with liberation. For a better comparison of these various series, we will start with the most complete and similar lists first, and then give the others while leaving a blank space when one of the steps mentioned in the most elaborate lists is skipped by Śaṅkara. My contention is that, in this variously expressed basic sequence toward liberation, sarvakarmasamnyāsa (renunciation of all actions) constitutes a necessary step only inasmuch as it consists in abandonment of

authorship and not in physical renunciation; accordingly, the basic sequence is not chronological, as usually understood, but rather logical, and serves as a universal description of the process of liberation, accounting for the enlightenment of both people maintaining an active social life and physical renouncers.

Among the 15 enumerations that will be presented here, the first five include the expression sarvakarmasamnyāsa in a nominal or verbal form:

A- BGBh 5.27<sup>1</sup>

- 1- "karmayoga"
- 2- "purity of mind" (sattvaśuddhi)
- 3- "attainment of knowledge" (jñānaprāpti)
- 4- "renunciation of all actions" (sarvakarmasamnyāsa)
- 5- "steadfastness in the right insight" (samyagdarśananisthānām)
- 6- "immediate liberation" (sādyomukti)

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<sup>1</sup> "It has been said that those renouncers who are steadfast in the right insight obtain immediate release. And, on every occasion, the Lord has already stated and will be saying that karmayoga, performed in a spirit of dedication to Īśvara with one's whole being and offered to Him - the Brahman - leads to liberation through purity of mind, attainment of knowledge and renunciation of all actions." samyagdarśananisthānām samnyāsinām sādyomuktiruktā karmayogaśceśvarārpitasarvabhāveśvare brahmanyādhvāya kriyamāṇaḥ sattvaśuddhijñānaprāptisarvakarmasamnyāsakramena moksāyeti bhagavānpade pade 'bravīdvaksyati ca (BGBh 5.27, 276).

B- BGBh 5.12<sup>1</sup>

1-

2- "purity of mind" (sattvaśuddhi)

3- "attainment of knowledge" (jñānaprāpti)

4- "renunciation of all actions" (sarvakarmasamnyāsa)

5- "steadfastness in knowledge" (jñānanisthā)

6- "liberation" (mokṣa)

C- BGBh 5.17<sup>2</sup>

1-

2-

3- "those whose Self is That" (tadātmanah)

4- "having abandoned all actions" (sarvāṇi karmāṇi samnyasva)

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<sup>1</sup> "To complete the sentence: the unified man, the steady-minded man who is resolved that he does actions for the sake of the Lord and not for his benefit, having abandoned, having completely given up, the results of action, attains the steadfast peace - arising from steadfastness - called liberation, through purity of mind, attainment of knowledge, renunciation of all actions and steadfastness in knowledge."

yukta īśvarāya karmāṇi karomi na mama phalāyetvevaṁ samāhitah sankarmaphalam tyaktvā parityaiya śāntim mokṣākhyaṁ āpnoti naisthikīm nisthāyām bhavām sattvaśuddhijñānaprāptisarvakarma-samnyāsajñānanisthākrameneti vākyaśeṣah (BGBh 5.12, 257).

<sup>2</sup> "... those whose Self is That, those whose Self is the supreme Brahman, those who are intent (nistha) on That - intent meaning 'attached to,' 'devoted to' - those who, having renounced all actions, dwell in Brahman alone.... this kind of people go never again to return..."

... param brahmāt mā yeṣāṁ te tadātmanastannisthāh nisthābhiniveśastāt parvaṁ sarvāṇi karmāṇi samnyasva brahmaṇyevāvasthānam yeṣāṁ te tannisthāh... gacchantyevamvidhā apunarāvrttim... (BGBh 5.17, 264)

5- "those who are intent on that [Self]" (tannisthāh)

and

"dwelling in Brahman alone" (brahmanye vā vāsthānam)

6- "they go never again to return" (te gacchanti ... apunarāvṛttim)

D- BGBh: intro <sup>1</sup> NB: steps 1-3 and 4-6 are given at separate places.

1- "dharma characterized by involvement in action" (pravṛttilakṣaṇo dharmah)

2- "purity of mind" (sattvaśuddhi)

3- "attainment of the ability to be steadfast in knowledge"

(jñānanisthāyogvatāprāpti)

and

"emergence of knowledge" (jñānotpatti)

4- "renunciation of all actions" (sarvakarmasamnyāsa)

5- "steadfastness in knowledge of the Self" (ātma jñānanisthā)

6- "highest bliss" (niḥśreyasa)

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<sup>1</sup> ... highest bliss ... is attained through the dharma of steadfastness in knowledge of the Self preceded by renunciation of all actions. ... The dharma consisting of involvement in action ... when practiced with the sense of dedication to the Lord and without hankering for the results, brings about purity of mind; and, in the case of one whose mind is purified, it becomes the cause of even the highest bliss by being the means of gaining the ability to be steadfast in knowledge and the cause of emergence of knowledge."

... niḥśreyasam ... sarvakarmasamnyāsapūrvakādātma jñānanisthā-rūpāddharmādbhavati ... pravṛttilakṣaṇo dharmo ... īśvarārōpana-buddhyānuṣṭhīyamāṇaḥ sattvaśuddhaye bhavati phalābhisandhi-varjitah, śuddhasattvasya ca jñānanisthāyogvatāprāptidvārena jñānotpattihetutvena ca niḥśreyasahetutvamapi pratipadyate (BGBh intro, 6-7).

It is usually understood by commentators that, in these lists, “attainment of knowledge” is not the direct knowledge of the Self; it does not consist in the experience of the identity between ātman and Brahman. It is rather a deep intellectual conviction - arising usually from both purity of mind and study of the scriptures, including the Upaniṣads - that the ultimate goal of life is liberation from all limited and impermanent states (including sojourn in heaven), and that its means is not action or its combination with knowledge, but immediate knowledge of the actionless Self alone. In his work on the contemporary Śaṅkarācāryas, Cenkner summarizes quite well the prevailing interpretation about Śaṅkara's understanding of “attainment of knowledge” in such enumerations:

The selfless activity sanctioned by the Bhagavad Gītā prepares the student for commitment to knowledge (jñāna-niṣṭhā) and subsequently for more advanced religious growth. As he observes injunctions from the scripture, duties and rituals, the student gradually learns that knowledge of the Self is beyond human activity. Śaṅkara speaks of the elimination of ritual and religious duties after the rise of knowledge. The karma yoga of the Gītā, which consecrates activity as selfless and altruistic, is but the initial path in spiritual development. Such activity serves as a means to achieve educational competency, a means prior to advanced religious instruction, a preparatory moment, to perfect intellectual capacity. Once this moment is past, the religious seeker renounces such activity and commits himself wholly to the path of knowledge (60-61).



It is thought that, at the last stage given here, the aspirant has the purity of mind that allows him to physically abandon his ritualistic duties (renunciation of all actions), his family links and possessions, and to take up the life of a monk or renouncer (samnyāsin) in order to devote his whole life to the path or discipline of knowledge (steadfastness in the right insight) consisting mainly in hearing (śravaṇa) from the master, reflection (manana) and meditation (nididhyāsana), and representing the only direct means of liberation.<sup>1</sup>

As stated by Kalyanasundara Sastri, "from karma-yoga there arises the purification of mind; and from that, mediate knowledge; and therefrom renunciation of action; and after that, establishment in immediate knowledge which is known as jīvan-mukti..." (300) Thus the whole sequence is not taken as logical but as chronological.

Accordingly, physical renunciation is understood to be enjoined as a necessary step towards liberation and to be adopted in due time. Such is also the opinion of Swāmī Gambhirānanda when commenting on the same enumerations as above in the introduction to his English translation of the BGBh:

Śaṅkarācārya ... says that spiritual unfoldment proceeds along the following stages: practice of scriptural rites and duties with a hankering for results; practice of the same as a dedication to God

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<sup>1</sup> This kind of interpretation is brought to the fore when, for example, Yoshitsugu Sawai translates the jñānaprāpti found in BGBh 5.27 (list A) and in 5.12 (list B) by "the attainment of the means of knowledge" (373, 376), thus adding the word "means" to the compound and making it even clearer that reference is to mediate knowledge only. Sawai also states that the sequence of BGBh 5.12 (list B) describes the path of the vividhāsāmnayāsin, that is, of the formal renouncer aspiring to liberation (376).

without expecting rewards for oneself [karmayoga]; purification of the mind or moral excellence along with upāsanā (devotion to and meditation on the qualified Brahman); acquisition of [mediate] knowledge [jñānaprāpti] from a teacher and the scriptures, followed by renunciation of all rites and duties (monasticism), which makes one fit for steadfastness in that [mediate] knowledge [jñānanisthā]; steadfastness in that knowledge; removal of ignorance and self-revelation [immediate knowledge] of the supreme Brahman, which is the same as Liberation (Śaṅkara 1984, xxi-xxii).

My contention is that, on the contrary, attainment of knowledge (jñānaprāpti) is already the very experience of the actionless Self, and renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) is the abandonment of authorship that automatically follows from such a direct knowledge. So let us now consider the context of the first three lists, which are all given in chapter 5. In BGBh 5.19, Śaṅkara states that verses 5.13 to 29 describe the renouncer of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsin): "...from '[having] mentally [renounced] all actions' to the end of the chapter, the topic is the renouncer of all actions." <sup>1</sup> Thus, it would be fair to say that, for all practical purposes, the sequences of 5.12 (list B) and 5.27 (list A) are respectively the introduction (or at least the foreword) and conclusion of this specific section, especially in view of the fact that the last three verses, from 27 to 29, are turned toward the next part of the Gītā, being a kind of summary of meditation as developed in chapter 6. Now, according to

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<sup>1</sup> ... sarvakarmasamnyāsiviśayam prastutam sarvakarmāṇi manasetyārambhyādhyāvāparisamāpteh (BGBh 5.19, 268).

Vedic exegesis, one of the six criteria (sadlingas) for finding the purport of a text is the principle of unity of the initial and concluding passages (upakramopasamhāraikya).<sup>1</sup> It assumes that, a Vedic text being infallible, its introduction (upakrama) and conclusion (upasamhāra) must agree. Hence, if the meaning of a particular statement is not obvious, it can be interpreted in reference to the undubious fact that the text expresses a basic single idea from beginning to end. Śaṅkara does use this very important criterion in a number of places,<sup>2</sup> even adding the notion of harmony with the development (madhya)<sup>3</sup> as well as between the introduction and the conclusion. This criterion can thus be made use of here.

If, for the sake of consistency, Śaṅkara did write according to this rule, then the enumerations found in verses 12, 17 and 27 of chapter 5 must agree and convey the same meaning. If, according to Śaṅkara, the main theme of this section is the renouncer of all actions, of what type is his abandonment? Is it physical or mental or both? As a first indication, a reading of the verses themselves conveys quite clearly that, from 5.13 to 26, the Gītā describes in various ways the state of inner renunciation of the enlightened person and ascribes to him liberation from birth and death. The brief introductions given by Śaṅkara to these verses confirm this purport. Just before verse 13, we read: "But as for the man who sees the supreme reality..."<sup>4</sup>; then, before verse 18: "Now He says how the wise men, whose ignorance has

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Murti 81-86.

<sup>2</sup> See BSBh 1.4.16-17, 1.4.19, 2.4.20, 3.3.7 and 3.3.17, for example.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance BSBh 1.4.19 and 3.1.5.

<sup>4</sup> yastu paramārthadarśī saḥ (BGBh 5.13, 257).

been destroyed by the knowledge of the Self, see the Reality”<sup>1</sup>; again before verse 21: “Moreover, he who rests in Brahman...”<sup>2</sup>; and finally before verse 24: “What sort of person, resting in Brahman, attains Brahman? He says...”<sup>3</sup> Because physical renunciation alone cannot yield the result of liberation, because no explicit mention of physical renunciation is found in Śaṅkara’s commentary on this section, and because abandonment of authorship is the type of renunciation that pertains exclusively to one who directly knows the actionless Self, the renunciation of all actions that is said by Śaṅkara to be elaborated in these verses can only be abandonment of authorship as a spontaneous and immediate result of direct Self-knowledge. And because, according to proper exegesis, the beginning and the end of the section must be congruent, the expression sarvakarmasamnyāsa (renunciation of all actions) found in the three lists of chapter 5 must mean abandonment of authorship (kartṛtvasamnyāsa), and not physical renunciation.

Moreover, the commentary on verses 5.7 to 9 explicitly refers to the liberated-in-this-life who, although continuing his active way of live in society, has abandoned all sense of authorship: “Though performing action for the welfare of the world, the man of right insight who remains in such a state is not tainted, not bound by

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<sup>1</sup> yesām jñānena nāśitamātmano jñānam te paṇḍitāḥ katham tattvam paśyantītyucyate (BGBh 5.18, 265).

<sup>2</sup> kimca brahmaṇi sthito (BGBh 5.21, 269).

<sup>3</sup> katham bhūtaśca brahmaṇi sthito brahma prāpnotītyāha (BGBh 5.24, 274).

actions.”<sup>1</sup> Immediately following this, our commentator introduces the next two verses with the words: “And, in reality, such a person does nothing.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is to the enlightened man who has not physically renounced, that Śaṅkara attributes the statement of the next verse which starts with “I do nothing at all” (naiva kimcit karomi). Again, because it is said of one who still pursues ritual actions, the absence of action cannot be understood here as involving physical renunciation, but only renunciation of authorship. In addition, after quoting verses 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 32, 33, 37 and 41 of chapter 4, Śaṅkara specifies in his introduction to chapter 5 that all these refer to renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa). And, in his commentary on verses 4.19 and 4.24, he clearly states that even the knower of the Self who pursues his usual life in society after attaining liberation is indeed a renouncer of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsin).<sup>3</sup> Thus, in chapter 5, the theme of renunciation of all actions is meant to account for the enlightened who is still active in society as well as for the enlightened formal renouncer. Because the only common feature of renunciation belonging to both these types of enlightened persons in the sequence toward liberation is that of authorship, it is clear that the term sarvakarmasamnyāsa (renunciation of all actions) given in the three above enumerations from chapter 5 can only refer to abandonment of authorship, and that it simply stands as the inner characteristic of any enlightened person.

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<sup>1</sup> samyagdarśītyarthah. sa tatraivam vartamāno lokasamgrahāva karma kurvannapi na lipyate. na karmabhirbadhyata ityarthah (BGBh 5.7, 254).

<sup>2</sup> na cāsau parmārthatah karoti ... (BGBh 5.8, 254)

<sup>3</sup> Complete analysis of these passages will be done in the next section.

As a consequence, because immediate Self-knowledge is a sine qua non for abandonment of the sense of authorship, the latter must be preceded, in the sequence toward liberation, by the attainment of a knowledge (jñānaprāpti) of the Self that is not only intellectual (or verbal), but already experiential. Moreover, since only karmayoga and the purity of mind produced by it are given as preliminary steps to that immediate knowledge, physical renunciation is simply not found in this basic sequence toward liberation. On the contrary, the whole sequence liberally accounts for the liberation of anyone, whether active in society, or a formal renouncer.

Let us use again the criterion of unity of the initial and concluding passages, and connect the process of liberation as stated in the introduction of the BGBh (list D) with some concluding remarks made by Śaṅkara in the last chapter of the same work. Commenting on verse 18.17, he first confirms its meaning: "Therefore, it has rightly been said that, because his awareness is without the taint 'I am the doer,' the wise man neither kills nor is bound." <sup>1</sup> He then points out that this reference to non-killing through absence of authorship echoes verse 219 which declares: "he slays not, nor is he slain." Thus, in the commentator's eyes, the Gītā comes full circle with the essential message that through experience of the actionless Self, one reaches absence (i.e. renunciation) of authorship and, as a result, freedom from everything, including ritual obligations:

Having started with "It does not slay, nor is It slain" [219]...

having briefly stated at the beginning of the scripture, in "He who

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<sup>1</sup> tasmādyuktamuktamahamkrtatvabuddhilepābhāvādvīdvānnahanti na nibadhyata iti (BGBh 18.17, 700).

knows [the Self] to be indestructible" [2.21], the disappearance of the qualification for actions in the case of the man of knowledge, having introduced this absence here and there in the middle, and developed it, here, by way of summing up the purport of the scripture, [the Lord] concludes by saying that the man of knowledge neither kills, nor is bound.<sup>1</sup>

Since the items "emergence of knowledge" (jñānotpatti) and "renunciation of all actions" (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) are given in the introduction to the Gītā (list D) as part of "the dharma which constitutes the purport of the Gītā" (gītārthadharmā),<sup>2</sup> according to the said criterion of unity, they must convey the same basic message of the Gītā as stated in the above quoted comment on verse 18.17, and therefore also mean respectively the rise of immediate knowledge of the Self and the abandonment of authorship that logically ensues.

Referring to verse 18.12, Śaṅkara then elaborates on the synthesis of verse 18.17 by adding that those who are not bound by the results of action (in this life and at the time of death of the body) are the "renouncers" (samnyāsinām) who do not see themselves as "bearers of a body" (dehabhrt), in other words, as having the sense of authorship which, in the state of ignorance, is part and parcel of the way in which the body is experienced:

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<sup>1</sup> nāyam hanti na hanyata iti pratijñāya... vedāvināśinamiti viduṣaḥ karmādhikāranivṛttim śāstrādaḥ samkṣepata uktvā madhye prasāritāṃ ca tatra tatra prasaṅgam kṛtvehopasamharati śāstrārthapindīkaraṇāya vidvānna hanti na nibadhyata iti (Ibid., 700-701).

<sup>2</sup> BGBh intro, 6.

Thus, in the absence of the idea of bearing a body, the samnyāsins completely renounce actions generated by ignorance; it is therefore proper to say that the three kinds of results of action (the disagreeable ones, etc.) do not accrue to them; and in the case of others, which is opposite, it is inevitable that the results do accrue. This teaching of the Gītā scripture has thus been concluded.<sup>1</sup>

Because, in various places, absence of authorship is attributed by Śaṅkara to people active in society as well as to formal renunciators, these remarks provide further evidence that, in Śaṅkara's understanding of the essential message of the Gītā, and as a necessary step in the process of liberation, the compound sarvakarmasamnyāsa has the universal significance of abandonment of authorship as a result of sublation of ignorance through direct knowledge of the Self, and not the limited value of a physical renunciation available to a small minority.

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<sup>1</sup> evam ca sati dehabhrttvābhimānānupapattāvavidvākrtāśesa-karma-samnyāso-papatteḥ samnyāsināmanistādi trividham karmanah phalam na bhavatītyupapannam tadviparyayācetaresām bhavatītyetaccāparihāryamityeṣa gītāśāstrasyārtha upasamhrtah (BGBh 18.17, 701).



Let us now consider another sequence:

E- BGBh 18.10<sup>1</sup>

1- "karmayoga"

2- "having perfected himself" (samkrtāt mā san)

3- "perfectly knowing that he is himself the Self"

(āt mānamāt matvena sambuddhah)

4- "mentally renouncing all actions" (sarvākarmāṇi manasā samnyasya)

5- "steadfastness in knowledge characterized by actionlessness"

(naiskarmyalakṣaṇām jñānanisthām)

6- "highest bliss" (niḥśreyasa)

First, the phrase "perfectly knowing that he is himself the Self" refers quite clearly to direct experience of that Self. Using such a strong expression to mean mere intellectual conviction would be quite odd in comparison with Śaṅkara's usual wording. Moreover, the word

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<sup>1</sup> "...being established in the true nature of the Self is the only means of the highest bliss ... The person qualified [for rites] who, having gradually become purified in mind through the practice of karmayoga in the way described above, perfectly knows himself to be that Self which is actionless by virtue of being devoid of modifications, 'having mentally renounced all action' [and] remaining 'without acting nor causing to act' [5.13], attains steadfastness in knowledge which is characterized by actionlessness ..."

... ātmasvarūpāvasthānameva param niḥśreyassādhanaṁ ... yo 'dhikṛto puruṣaḥ pūrvoktena prakāreṇa karmayogānuṣṭhānena krameṇa samkrtāt mā san janmādivikriyārahitaṭvena niskriyamātmanamātmatvena sambuddhah sa sarvākarmāṇi manasā samnyasya naiva kurvanna kārayannāśīno naiskarmyalakṣaṇām jñānanisthāmaśnute... (BGBh 18.10, 688)

“mentally” (manasā) specifies that renunciation is not here of a physical, but of a mental nature. Again, the object of renunciation is “all actions,” suggesting mental as well as physical ones. The question before us is therefore: what type of renunciation includes direct knowledge of the Self as well as mental renunciation of both mental and physical actions? One could answer, in reference to the other lists as well as to this one, that sarvakarmasamnyāsa means both renunciation of authorship and physical renunciation as a consequence of the former. But if we assume that starting from purity of mind, all steps of the sequence are necessary, this interpretation would make physical renunciation a mandatory addition to that of authorship as a means to liberation, which would contradict the fact that in chapter 5, for example, the sequence also accounts for the process of liberation of those who maintain their social life even after enlightenment. Therefore, here also the meaning can only be renunciation of authorship (kartrtvasamnyāsa) as defined earlier. Because it refers to a mental phenomenon, “mentally renouncing all actions” cannot simply mean physically abandoning the performance of rites as such. Yet, because it is a matter of renouncing not only a few actions, but “all” of them, the object of renunciation must be here activity in general. The only type of renunciation that refers to a mental phenomenon alone, and has all activity as its object, is abandonment of authorship. Thus, what is said to be given up here is the sense of authorship, the illusory experience of being the author of “one’s” mental and physical actions. And this renunciation is possible only through the immediate knowledge of the Self as the witness of all activity.

Other enumerations support this hypothesis from a different angle. In these passages, it is annihilation of either ignorance, identification with the non-Self, name and form, desire or action that is mentioned instead of renunciation of all actions, but with the same structural function (corresponding to level 4), that is, as a result of "attainment of knowledge" (whose various synonyms are always given on level 3). And if, as with action and desire, ignorance is abandoned as a consequence of attaining a certain knowledge of the Self, according to Śaṅkara's basic metaphysical position, that knowledge can only be a direct experience of the Self, since it alone can eradicate ignorance of the actionless and absolute Self. Therefore, a common characteristic of all the following sequential enumerations is that, in the same manner as abandonment of ignorance, renunciation of desires and actions arises from a knowledge that is already immediate:

F- KaBh 2.3.14<sup>1</sup>

1-

2-

3- "enlightenment" (prabodha)

4- "annihilation of death characterized by ignorance, desire and action"

(avidyākāmakarmalakṣaṇasya mṛtyorvināśāt)

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<sup>1</sup> "Then he who was mortal before enlightenment, is immortal after enlightenment by virtue of the elimination of death characterized by ignorance, desire, and actions..."

atha tadā martyaḥ prākprabodhādāsīti sa prabodhottarakālamavidyā-kāmakarmalakṣaṇasya mṛtyorvināśādamṛto bhavati... (KaBh 2.3.14, 103)

5-

6- "a mortal becomes immortal" (marivah ... 'mrto bhavati)

G- KeBh 1.2<sup>1</sup>

1-

2-

3- "having known oneself as Brahman" (brahmātmeti viditvā)

4- "having abandoned identification of the Self with the ear, etc."

(śrotrādyātmabhāvam parityajya)

and

"having separated from this world characterized by the empirical life of identification with "mine" and "I" ... having abandoned all desires"

(vyāvṛtyāsmālokaṭ ... mamāhambhāvasamvyavahāralakṣaṇāt-  
tyaktasarvaiṣaṇā)

5-

6- "they become immortal" (amrtā ... bhavanti)

---

<sup>1</sup> "Therefore, having known oneself as the Brahman which is called the ear of the ear etc., having given up, abandoned, identification of the Self with the ear etc. ... Having departed, having been separated, from this world characterized by the empirical life of identification with 'mine' and 'I' in regard to son, friend, wife and relatives, having abandoned all desires, they become immortal, free from the nature of mortality."

ataḥ śrotrādeḥ śrotrādilakṣaṇam brahmātmeti viditvā 'timucya  
śrotrādyātmabhāvam parityajya ... pretya vyāvṛtyāsmālokaṭputra-  
mitrakalatrabandhusu mamāhambhāvasamvyavahāralakṣaṇāttvak-  
tasarvaiṣaṇā bhūtvetyarthaḥ. amrtā amaraṇadharmāno bhavanti  
(KeBh 1.2, 19).

H- ĪUBh 1-2<sup>1</sup>

1-

2-

3- "contemplation of the Self which is the supreme Truth"

(paramārthasatvāt mabhāvanayā)

4- "the whole aggregate of modifications known as name, form and action abandoned"

(nāmarūpakarmākhyam vikārajātam ... tyaktam)

and

"qualification only for renunciation of the triple desire for son, etc."

(putrādyeśanātrayasamnyāsa evādhikārah)

5- "steadfastness in knowledge of the Self" (ātmaññānisthatayā)

and

"As far of the knower of the Self is concerned, the Self is thus to be protected" (evamātmaavidah ... ātmārakṣatavyah)

6-

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<sup>1</sup> "... the whole aggregate of modifications known as name, form, and action will be abandoned through the contemplation of the Self which is the supreme Truth. He who is thus engaged in the contemplation of the Self as God, is qualified only for renunciation of the three kinds of desire (for son etc.), and not for action, ...

As far as the Self-knower is concerned, the purport of the [first verse of this] Vedic text is that the Self is to be saved through renunciation of the threefold desire for sons etc., that is, through steadfastness in Self-knowledge."

... sarvameva nāmarūpakarmākhyam vikārajātam paramārthasatvāt mabhāvanayā tyaktam svāt. evamīśvarāt mabhāvanayā yuktasya putrādyeśanātrayasannyāsa evādhikāro na karmasu...

evamātmaavidah putrādyeśanātrayasamnyāsenā ātmaññānisthatayā ātmārakṣitavyah ityeṣa vedārthah  
(ĪUBh 1-2, 2-3).

I- KaBh 23.15 <sup>1</sup>

1-

2-

3- "rise of the knowledge of the Self as Brahman"

(brahmātmapratyavopajananāt)

4- "annihilation of the knots of ignorance" (vinastesvavidyāgranthiṣu)

and

"desires are completely annihilated" (kāmā mūlato vinaśyanti)

5-

6- "a mortal becomes immortal" (martyo 'mrto bhavati)

J- TUBh 1.121 <sup>2</sup>

1- "ritual actions" (karman)

<sup>1</sup> "When the knots of ignorance are destroyed by the rise of the opposite cognition that the Self is Brahman, that 'I am indeed the Brahman and not a transmigrating soul', then the desires originating from the knots are totally destroyed. Then a mortal becomes immortal..."

... tadviparītabrahmātmapratyavopajananāt  
brahmaivāhamasmyasamsārīti vinastesvavidyāgranthiṣu  
tannimittāḥ kāmā mūlato vinaśyanti. atha martyo 'mrto bhavati...  
 (KaBh, 23.15, 103)

<sup>2</sup> "The scriptures ...enjoin duties (karmans) to the seekers after liberation for the wearing away of accumulated sins.... The rise of knowledge cannot be imagined for one who has hindrances constituted by accumulated sins. On the wearing away of those sins, knowledge will emerge; from that will follow the cessation of ignorance, and from that the absolute cessation of transmigratory existence."

... upāttaduritaksavārttham karmāṇi vidadhacchāstram  
mumukṣūṇām... upacitaduritapratibandhasya hi  
vidyotpattirnāvakaḥpate. tatksaye ca vidyotpattiḥ  
syāttataścāvidyānivṛttistata ātyantikāḥ samsāroparamaḥ (TUBh 1.121, 278).

2- "wearing away of obstacles consisting in accumulated sins"

(upacitaduritapratibandhasya ... tatksaye)

3- "emergence of knowledge" (vidyotpattih)

4- "elimination of ignorance" (avidyānivrttih)

5-

6- "cessation of transmigratory existence" (samsāroparamah)

K- TUBh 1.11.1 <sup>1</sup>

1- "śrauta and smārta ritual actions are to be practiced"

(kartavyāni śrautas-mārtakarmāni)

2- "eradication of sins accumulated in the past"

(pūrvopacitaduritaksaya)

3- "and on the rise of knowledge"

(uditāyām ca vidyāyām)

4- "complete absence of action" (karmanaiṣkimcanyam)

5-

6-

We can see that in the last two enumerations, which are worked out from nearby passages, "elimination of ignorance" (list J) assumes the same function as "complete absence of action" (list K), both

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<sup>1</sup> "...before the realization of Brahman, the śrauta and smārta ritual actions are to be practiced regularly.... And it will be shown that on the rise of the knowledge of Brahman... there is complete absence of action. Hence it is understood that ritual actions lead to emergence of knowledge through the eradication of sins accumulated in the past." ... prāgbrahmavijñānānniyamena kartavyāni śrautas-mārtakarmāni ... uditāyām vidyāyām ... karmanaiṣkimcanyam darśaviśyati. ato 'vagamyate pūrvopacitaduritaksayadvāreṇa vidyotpattiyarthāni karmāṇi (TUBh 1.11.1, 273-274).

representing the result of emergence of knowledge. Since, in Śaṅkara's doctrine, nothing other than direct Self-knowledge can sublimate spiritual ignorance, it is fair to conclude that the same immediate knowledge is referred to as the logical cause of "complete absence of action," which thereby must be understood as renunciation of authorship. Moreover, while contextualizing the latter enumeration, Śaṅkara clearly states that this emergence of knowledge (vidyotpatti) leading to the elimination of ignorance is not possible when impurities are still present, which again indicates that the said knowledge is already a direct experience of the Self.<sup>1</sup> As indicated in KaBh 21.2, renunciation of desires, which is at the same structural level in the basic sequence, can be understood as the result of an already immediate knowledge of the Self: "having known such a constant and unshakable immortality ... Brāhmaṇas ... do abandon the desire for progeny, wealth, and the worlds."<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that this triple desire for progeny, wealth and the worlds is also usually the object to be abandoned by the seeker after liberation, a semantic ambivalence which can again lead to misinterpretation. As Śaṅkara emphasizes in many places, such a renunciation of authorship and desires could of course be followed by physical renunciation, but its combination with the latter is not presented as obligatory for liberation. The following sequence gives as an expression for knowledge of the Self the

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<sup>1</sup> For translation and text, see preceding note.

<sup>2</sup> tadevambhūtam kūtaśthamavicālyamamṛtatvam viditvā ... brāhmaṇāḥ ... putravittalokaīśanābhyo vyutthiṣṭhantyevevyarthah (KaBh 21.2, 86).



“unfailing memory” of it. Again, the context suggests that it is direct in nature:

L- CUBh 7.26.2<sup>1</sup>

1- “purification of knowledge consisting of perception of objects”

(viṣayopalabdhilakṣaṇasya vijñānasya śuddhiḥ)

2- “purity of mind” (sattvaśuddhau)

3- “unfailing memory of the plentiful Self” (bhūmātmani dhruvā ... smṛtiḥ)

4- “deliverance from the knots residing in the heart”

(hrdayāśrayāṇām granthīnām vipramokṣaḥ)

5-

6-

Here memory cannot mean the ordinary one, since mere remembrance of the thought of the Self cannot result in the “deliverance from the knots residing in the heart” which yields

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<sup>1</sup> “After purification of food... after purification of the knowledge consisting of perception of objects.... After purification of food, then comes the purity, stainlessness, of the mind, of the internal organ possessing that [pure food]. After purity of mind then comes unfailing, continuous, memory, unforgetfulness, of the plentiful Self as it has been realised. After the attainment of memory, then comes the deliverance from, the complete emancipation from, the destruction of, all the knots residing in the heart, which are the fetters of objects created by ignorance and hardened by the impressions from experiences of many past lives.”

āhāraśuddhau ... tasya viṣayopalabdhilakṣaṇasya vijñānasya śuddhirāhāraśuddhī ... tasyāmāhāraśuddhau satyām tad vato 'ntahkaraṇasya sattvasya śuddhirnaimalyam bhavati. sattvaśuddhau ca satyām yathāvagatē bhūmātmani dhruvā avichinnā smṛtiravismaraṇam bhavati. tasyām ca labdhāyām smṛtilambhe sati sarvesām avidyākṛtānarthapāśarūpāṇām anekajanmāntarānubhava- bhāvanākathinīkṛtānām hrdayāśrayāṇām granthīnām vipramokṣo viśeṣeṇa pramokṣaṇam vināśo bhavatīti (CUBh 7.26.2, 565).

immortality. Indeed, that “unfailing memory” has to be the permanent experience of the Self in the midst of waking, dreaming and sleeping states.

The next list confirms in another way that the knowledge arising directly out of the purifying effect of karmayoga (here called bhaktiyoga) is already a direct experience of the Self. It states that those who obtain knowledge through bhaktiyoga and “grace” (prasādāt) therefrom, obtain a knowledge which puts them “beyond the gunas,” that is, beyond all activity of Nature, including the sense of authorship. Therefore the said knowledge can only be that which is immediate and which spontaneously results in renunciation of authorship:

M-BGBh 15 (intro) <sup>1</sup>

1- “bhaktiyoga”

2- “grace” (prasādāt)

3- “through attainment of knowledge” (jñānaprāptikramena)

4- “having gone beyond the gunas” (gunātītāh)

5-

6- “liberation” (mokṣam)

The last two lists given below can be seen as complementary. They feature as their third item the compounds “attainment of knowledge” or “emergence of knowledge” which occur eight out of a

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<sup>1</sup> “... therefore those who serve Me with bhaktiyoga achieve liberation through [My] grace, having gone beyond the gunas through attainment of knowledge.”

... ato bhaktiyogena mām ye sevante te prasādāijñānaprāptikramena gunātītā mokṣam gacchanti ... (BGBh 15, introduction, 609)

possible fifteen times in the series under discussion here. The repeated use of these expressions in the same logical order strenghtens my contention that, in spite of some variations, these enumerations do form a coherent whole, and that the cross-references established in comparing these lists are also reinforced by word usage.

N- BGBh 1210 <sup>1</sup>

1- "merely doing actions for my sake"

(madarthamapi karmāṇi kevalam kurvan)

2- "purity of mind and profound absorption" (sattvaśuddhiyoga)

3- "attainment of knowledge" (jñānaprāpti)

4-

5-

6- "perfection" (siddhim)

O- BGBh 3.4 <sup>2</sup>

1- "karmans such as sacrifice" (kriyānām vaiñādinām)

2- "purity of mind" (sattvaśuddhi)

3- "emergence of knowledge" (jñānotpatti)

4-

5- "steadfastness in knowledge" (jñānanisthā)

6-

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<sup>1</sup> "Even by merely doing actions for My sake, without practice [of meditation], you will attain perfection through purity of mind, yoga [glossed as samādhāna (profound absorption) in the commentary on verse 129] and attainment of knowledge."

abhyāsenā vinā madarthamapi karmāṇi kevalam kurvan siddhim sattvaśuddhiyogajñānaprāptidvārenāvāpsyasi (BGBh 1210, 509).

<sup>2</sup> "By not performing, by not undertaking, actions, activities, such as sacrifices which, done in this life or in a previous one and producing purity of mind through destruction of sins committed in the past, thereby bringing about steadfastness in knowledge through emergence of knowledge ..."

na karmanāmanārambhādaprārambhāt karmanām kriyānām vaiñādināmiha janmani janmantare vānusthitānām upātta-  
duritaksaya hetutvena sattvaśuddhikāraṇānām tatkāraṇatvena ca  
jñānotpattidvārena jñānanisthāhetunām... (BGBh 3.4, 144-145)

To summarize, in spite of some terminological variations, the above enumerations convey the same essential sequence towards liberation. Even more important, once the second level, that is, purity of mind, is established, the sequence is not chronological, but rather logical. It does not bring to light the steps that the aspirant must go through during a certain period of time, but rather the logical consequences that automatically and immediately follow in terms of the process of liberation when the purity of mind needed for that liberation has been achieved. In other words, Śaṅkara's sequence means that when, in the context of a proper understanding and meditation of the scriptures, complete purity of mind has been reached, direct knowledge of the Self spontaneously and immediately dawns; as a logical result, because ignorance of the true nature of the Self is thus removed and because the Self is then known as the silent witness of all mental and bodily activities, the liberated intellect automatically abandons the sense of authorship (in Śaṅkara's words, "all actions"); as a further logical and immediate consequence, the intellect remains absorbed in the experience of the Self, without any further identification with authorship and activity even in the midst of waking, dreaming and sleeping: it has reached permanent "steadfastness" (nisthā) in immediate knowledge of the Self, knowing the latter as a simple witness to the ongoing activities occurring in waking, dreaming and sleeping; finally, resulting from this whole sequence of logical prerequisites leading to liberation-in-this-life as just described, the sixth level (liberation) specifies that deliverance from the cycle of rebirth is also ensured when the present body dies.

It follows from this interpretation that the sequence is universal in character. Because it does not entail the obligation of physically renouncing and taking up the life of a monk, it accounts for the process of liberation of any man, that is, whether he be a karmayogin active in society or a recluse. In this understanding of the sequence, the question of the respective efficiency of karmayoga and of the discipline of knowledge (jñānayoga) as practiced by the formal samnyāsin comes before the purity of mind, not after. Śaṅkara's intention being here to elucidate the universal process of liberation, he does not favor the mediate means of knowledge through monastic life over the mediate means of ritual actions. Rather, this sequence is meant to reaffirm the basic theme that re-emerges repeatedly in his works concerning the means of liberation: no activity, whatever its quantity, can free man from ignorance, whether it be the ritualistic enterprise of a karmayogin or the full-time meditation of a recluse; rather, immediate Self-knowledge alone brings that supreme liberation. And its logical result consists in renunciation of "all actions," in abandonment of the sense of authorship, finitude and bondage that is due to spiritual ignorance.

As mentioned in my introduction, a few commentators of Śaṅkara have favoured this kind of interpretation. After introducing the sequence given in BGBh 5.12, Trevor Legget insists, for instance, that the third level, namely, attainment of knowledge (jñānaprāpti), "means a direct vision of Self; it is not simply an intellectual idea" (55). Elsewhere, he refers as follows to this type of enumeration in the BGBh: "The doctrine is summed up in many places; for instance II.69 says that when they have realized the Self (quoting V.17 -

tadbuddhayas tadātmanas), their duty (adhikāra) consists in renunciation of all actions and devotion to Knowledge (jñānaniṣṭhā)" (Ibid., 170). However Legget suggests that he still understands the renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) that follows, as a physical one, and steadfastness in knowledge of the Self (jñānaniṣṭhā), as a practice rather than a permanent state, when he writes a few lines later that, as an exception, some experiencers of the Self, such as enlightened kings, may remain active in society: "In the Gītā commentary, however, Śaṅkara allows certain exceptions to the rule that jñānaniṣṭhā must entail samnyāsa. . . . In the commentary to IV. 2, several kings who were practicing jñānaniṣṭhā are given as examples" (Ibid.). Legget understands that the experience referred to by the expression "attainment of knowledge" is not yet stabilized and will ideally be "reinforced, or rather protected from disturbance of remaining prārabdhakarma" (Ibid., 171) by a physical renunciation that will allow full absorption in the discipline of knowledge. Although the notion of having to strengthen, at some point on the path, a knowledge of the Self that is already direct, but not yet lived permanently, is indeed mentioned in a few places by Śaṅkara,<sup>1</sup> it does not fit the context of the enumerations under discussion here. Why? Mainly because such an interpretation prescribes physical renunciation in view of liberation as a universal rule, and regards the absence of it as an exception, an understanding that misses Śaṅkara's point behind these enumerations, which is simply to show from a logical point of view the universality of direct Self-knowledge as the

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<sup>1</sup> We will address this issue later on in chapter 6.3 while discussing the yogārudha of BGBh 6.3.

sole means of liberation, even before considering the question of the active and reclusive ways of life as means to reach it.

On his part, Karl Potter understands that "samnyāsa is liberation - so that it is tautologous to say one must pass through it to be liberated ..." (1981, 35) In the context of the basic sequence under discussion, however, sarvakarmasamnyāsa cannot be rigorously equal to liberation. This is so because if Śaṅkara understood sarvakarmasamnyāsa and liberation as synonymous, it would have been redundant and useless to mention them as distinct items in the sequence. True, even when the sequence conveys that one achieves liberation by "starting" with attainment of knowledge (jñānaprāpti) and "going through" renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) and steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā), in fact, nothing more happens at the experiential level: direct knowledge of the Self is fully there at the "beginning" as well as at the "end." All possible ambiguity is removed by understanding that from purity of mind onwards, the whole sequence is logical rather than chronological, and that, in this logical unfoldment, the function of the compound sarvakarmasamnyāsa is to underline, as a consequence of direct Self-knowledge, the disappearance of the sense of authorship, and of the usefulness of action for liberation.

In the final analysis, the fact is that either Śaṅkara held such a perspective, or his works are deeply self-contradictory. However, while his expressions are certainly ambiguous at times, there is not enough evidence to support the charge of lack of consistency. First, it must be recalled that our author often recognizes, in the same manner as the Bhagavadgītā, the possibility of attaining liberation without



physically abandoning rituals and adopting the life of a formal renouncer. For example, following a clear description of knowledge of the Self as a direct experience in Gītā 4.14, Śaṅkara writes about the next verse: "If you don't know the Self, then [perform action] for purification of [your] mind; if you know the Reality, [do it] for the welfare of the world as did the ancients, such as Janaka, in olden times . . ." <sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, the commentator here says that people have reached liberation in the past and still can, without taking recourse to physical renunciation. It would then be self-contradictory to make the latter a prerequisite for liberation. It could be argued that no contradiction may be imputed here, because people, such as Janaka, who reach liberation without physical renunciation are merely exceptions to the rule outlined by the basic sequence to liberation which does comprise physical renunciation. But nowhere does Śaṅkara state that any of the enumerations we have given apply only to the formal renouncer, and nowhere does he say that the attainment of liberation by the man active in society is an exception to the sequence conveyed by these enumerations. On the contrary, the main argument of his BGBh, and particularly of the first five chapters, clearly indicates that, for him, this sequence is universal in character in that it accounts for the process of liberation of both the man maintaining his social life and the formal renouncer. Let us take, for instance, his commentary on verses 5.24 to 27. First, Śaṅkara

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<sup>1</sup> anāt maiñastvam tadāt maśuddhvartham tattvaviccelloka-  
samgrahārtam pūrvairjanakādibhiḥ pūrvataram kṛtam . . . (BGBh 4.15, 198). A similar description is found in BGBh 3.20.

introduces them by asking the question: "What sort of person who, remaining in Brahman, attains Brahman?"<sup>1</sup> When verse 5.25 states that ṛsis (Vedic seers) obtain liberation in Brahman, Śaṅkara glosses "ṛsis" by "men of right insight, renouncers" (samyagdarśinah samnyāsinah). The word ṛsi obviously carries the whole prestige of the Vedic tradition and of its ancient sages. It would be quite improper to believe Śaṅkara to mean here that, among ancient Vedic ṛsis, only the ones who took formal renunciation attained liberation. This would be going counter to the basic traditional acknowledgment that a ṛsi is by definition an enlightened person, whatever his way of life. In addition, as we will see below, the enlightened kings - hence active in society - who handed down the complete Vedic knowledge are also called ṛsis. Accordingly, by the gloss "samnyāsinah," the commentator can only be referring to renunciation of authorship. In his introduction to verse 27, Śaṅkara states again that liberation is for "men of right vision, renouncers" (samyagdarśinah samnyāsinah), and then, that "on every occasion" (pade pade) Kṛṣṇa has said and will say that karmayoga leads to liberation through purification of mind, attainment of knowledge and renunciation of all actions. Here Śaṅkara quite clearly refers to one single sequence toward liberation that is valid for all: he insists in presenting, as a key for understanding the Gītā, that the latter teaches not one message for the man active in society and another for the formal renouncer; rather, it conveys, time and again, the same basic sequence for liberation which necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> katham bhūtaśca brahmaṇi sthito brahma prāpnotī (BGBh 5.24, 274).

entails direct knowledge of the Self and renunciation of authorship that follows from it, whether one pursues active life in society or not.

The introduction to chapter 4 and the commentary on verse 4.2 convey the same idea even more clearly. In the introduction, Śaṅkara says:

In the [last] two chapters has been exposed the yoga which consists in steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā) accompanied by renunciation (sasamnyāsa) and reached through karmayoga. Therein is comprehended the Vedic doctrine concerning involvement in action (pravṛtti) and abstention from action (nivṛtti). And it is this yoga that forms the teaching of the Lord throughout the Gītā...<sup>1</sup>

Verse 4.2 then states that, for a long time, this knowledge had been preserved by kings, which Śaṅkara confirms thus: "Royal ṛsis, those who were kings as well as ṛsis, knew this yoga thus received through a regular succession of Kṣatriyas."<sup>2</sup> If it is held that Śaṅkara understands the yoga taught by the Gītā to include physical renunciation as a rule, then it would be a rather odd commentary on Śaṅkara's part to maintain with the Gītā that this yoga had been taught by Kṣatriyas who, according to the commentator,<sup>3</sup> do not even have access to physical renunciation! Considering how important it is in the Vedic tradition that the teacher live that which he teaches,

<sup>1</sup> yo 'yam yogo 'dhyāyadvayenokto jñānanisthālakṣaṇaḥ sasamnyāsaḥ karmayogopāyo yasmin vedārthaḥ parisamāptah pravṛttilakṣaṇo nivṛttilakṣaṇaśca gītāsu ca sarvāsvayameva yogo vivakṣito bhagavatā... (BGBh, intro 4, 182)

<sup>2</sup> evam kṣatriyaparamparāprāptamimam rājarsayo rājānaśca ta ṛsayaśca rājarsayo vidurimam yogam (BGBh 4.2, 183).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the beginning of BGBh 2.10.

how could the kings have properly handed down a yoga which, requiring formal renunciation, they were not even eligible for in the first place! I do not think that Śaṅkara allowed this aberration in his commentary, nor that he merely paraphrased the verse in order to overlook the challenge it presents to the thesis of mandatory physical renunciation. My contention is that, in Śaṅkara's mind, the handing down of the yoga of steadfastness in knowledge accompanied by renunciation is perfectly compatible with kings, simply because the reference is to renunciation of authorship, not to physical abandonment of rituals and social responsibilities. Thus, when Śaṅkara says, in the introduction quoted above, that this yoga comprises both involvement in action (pravṛtti) and abstention from action (nivṛtti), the former means the state of identification with activity due to ignorance of the Self, and the latter, renunciation of authorship as a consequence of an already direct knowledge of the Self. This yoga simply contrasts the state of ignorance and the state of direct knowledge of the Self, not the way of life of the man active in society and that of the formal renouncer. Finally, when Śaṅkara states that this yoga is but the essential message of the Gītā, it confirms that, in his eyes, the variously formulated sequence toward liberation is a single universal and logical process of liberation valid for everyone without exception and involving no injunction of physical renunciation.

Specific passages describe how liberation is reached normally through either the active, or the reclusive, way of life, without ever having to justify this by the concept of exception to the injunction of

physical renunciation.<sup>1</sup> Our commentator writes for instance on verse 4.19:

He, the one possessing the vision described in the previous verse, whose undertakings, actions undertaken, are all, as many as they are, devoid of desires and of their incentives, of desires and of their causes, [and] accomplished without purpose, as mere movements, for the welfare of the world if one leads an active life, and for the bare maintainance of life, if one abstains from active life ...<sup>2</sup>

Another statement in favor of universal access to liberation whatever the way of life, is found in chapter 14. Even after specifying that verses 23 to 25 apply to the formal renouncer, in verse 26, Śaṅkara takes the initiative of addressing the description of the process of liberation also to the active man, while, according to the preceding context as understood by the commentator, the verse could have referred only to the formal renouncer: “And he, the monk, or the man of action (karmin) ...<sup>3</sup> who serves Me, the Īśvara, Nārāyaṇa, residing in the heart of all beings ... becomes qualified for liberation.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As we will see, exception to the rule of physical renunciation is mentioned by Śaṅkara in the case of the already liberated person, not in reference to the seeker after liberation.

<sup>2</sup> yasya yathoktadarśinaḥ sarve yāvantaḥ samārambhāḥ sarvāṇi karmāṇi samārabhyaṇta iti samārambhāḥ kāmasaṃkalpavarjitāḥ kāmaistatkāraṇaiśca saṃkalpairvarjitāḥ mudhaiva ceṣṭāmātrā anuśṭhīyante pravṛttena cellokasaṃgrahārtham nivṛttena cejīvanamātrārtham ... (BGBh 4.19, 209)

<sup>3</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>4</sup> mām ceśvaram nārāyaṇam sarvabhūtaḥ dayāśritam yo yatīḥ karmī vā ... sevate ... moksāya kalpate (BGBh 14.26, 605).

By now, it should be quite clear, that Śaṅkara's standpoint on the process of liberation is that, first, it requires the quality of purity which allows permanent direct knowledge of the Self; second, the logical result of the said knowledge is that renunciation of authorship is spontaneously ensured, leaving nothing else but eternal "resting" or steadfastness in that knowledge which is the ultimate means of liberation from transmigratory existence. This sequence is such a key issue to Śaṅkara's understanding of renunciation that the rest of this chapter will be devoted mainly to adducing more detailed evidence for our new reinterpretation. At the same time, full application of this reinterpretation will be carried on in the numerous contexts of Śaṅkara's works where knowledge of the Self and renunciation are referred to.

#### **4.2- Renunciation of authorship as a result of direct Self-knowledge**

Śaṅkara's commentaries on verses 4.20 and 4.23-24 show more clearly than any other passage that, in the author's usage, the expression sarvakarmasamnyāsa can indeed mean renunciation of authorship alone (i.e., unaccompanied by physical renunciation) as a result of immediate knowledge of the Self, and can thus be characteristic of the Self-knower who has not physically abandoned ritual actions. In his introduction to verse 4.20, Śaṅkara writes that if "for some reason" (kutaścinnimittāt) one cannot physically renounce ritual actions after the rise of right knowledge of the Self (utpannāt masamvyagdarśanah), then, "even though engaged in action

as before, 'he does nothing at all' [4.20], because 'his actions are consumed in the fire of knowledge' [4.19]. His actions turn out to be non-action" (akarma).<sup>1</sup> A little further, he insists that "because the man of knowledge is endowed with the insight of the actionless Self, the action done by him is in reality non-action."<sup>2</sup> In the introduction to verse 4.23, Śaṅkara also specifies that this verse describes the man who, due to some reason, continues to perform ritual actions even after his enlightenment and to whom "absence of action" (karmābhāva) applies in spite of appearances.<sup>3</sup> Then Śaṅkara interprets the Brahman-sacrifice described in verse 4.24 as being performed by such a Self-knower who has not physically abandoned ritual actions. This man, he insists, is "a renouncer of all action" (sarvakarmasamnyāsin). The commentator thus leaves no doubt that the compound means here renunciation of authorship alone, as it coexists with the physical performance of rites:

Thus the action performed even by one desiring the welfare of the world, is in reality non-action, for it has been sublated by the knowledge of Brahman. This being so, it is most appropriate, for the purpose of praising right insight, to represent as a sacrifice the knowledge of one in whom karman has indeed disappeared, who is a renouncer of all actions.... Therefore, all actions cease to

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<sup>1</sup> pūrvavatkarmani pravṛtto 'pi naiva kiñcitkaroti. jñānāgnidagdhakarmatvāt. tadīyam karmākarmaiva sampadyate (BGBh 4.20, 210).

<sup>2</sup> viduṣā kriyamānam karma paramārthatō 'karmaiva tasya niskriyāt madarśanasampannatvāt (Ibid.).

<sup>3</sup> BGBh 4.23, 215.

exist for the man of knowledge who recognizes that all this is but Brahman...<sup>1</sup>

At least two English translators of the BGBh seem to have missed the purport of this passage, providing yet another example of the misinterpretation still prevailing around such expressions from Śaṅkara's works. Both their renderings suggest that by sarvakarmasamnyāsin, Śaṅkara refers to a formal renouncer, that is, to a monk who is uncharacteristically represented as performing a sacrifice. Ramachandra Aiyar translates the middle part as follows: "It thus becomes exceedingly appropriate to represent the Knowledge of even the samnyāsin who has retired from action and renounced all actions, as yaiñā (sacrifice)..." (BGBh 163) Swāmī Gambhīrānanda displays an even more explicit monastic bias: "This being so, in the case of the monk from whom action has dropped off, who has renounced all activity, viewing his Knowledge as (a kind of) sacrifice, too, becomes justifiable..." (Śaṅkara 1984, 209) First, these interpretations overlook Śaṅkara's introduction to this verse (24) wherein he conveys that, in his eyes, the performer of the sacrifice described by the verse is the same person that is clearly said in verse 23 to be a Self-knower that did not physically abandon ritual actions after his enlightenment. Indeed, as a link between the two verses, Śaṅkara simply introduces the second verse as the explanation for the

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<sup>1</sup> evam lokasamgraham cikīrṣunāpi kriyamāṇam karma paramārthato  
'karma brahmabuddhyupamrditatvāt. tadevaṃ sati nivṛttakarmano  
'pi sarvakarmasamnyāsinah samyagdarśanastutyartham  
yaiñatvasampādanam jñānasya sutarāmupapadyate...  
tasmādbrahmaivedaṃ sarvamityabhijānato viduṣaḥ  
sarvakarmābhāvah... (BGBh 4.24, 217)



situation described in the first: "What is then the reason for saying that an action underway is entirely dissolved, without producing its result? The answer is: Because..."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as is implied in the comment on verse 24 quoted above, attribution of the term sarvakarmasamnyāsin is not determined by the condition of physical renunciation, but by the absence of duality and authorship in the enlightened man, which applies to the seemingly active Self-knower as well as to the enlightened monk. It is also significant that Śāṅkara quotes verse 23 at the end of this passage, pointing out again that the subject-matter of verse 24 is the same seemingly active enlightened man:

...no ritual action such as the agnihotra is ever found deprived of the knowledge of the distinctions between action, accessories and result, and devoid of the sense of authorship and of hankering for results. But in this action the knowledge of the distinctions between accessories - such as ladle -, action and result has been sublated by the knowledge of Brahman; hence it is no action at all. ... as it is mere external movement, the action of the man of knowledge turns out to be non-action. Hence it was said that his action "is entirely dissolved" [4.23].<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> kasmātpunah kāraṇātkriyamāṇam karma svakāryārambhamakurvatsamagram pravīṇyata ityucyate yatah... (BGBh 4.24, 216)

<sup>2</sup> ... sarvamevāgnihotrādikam karma ... dr̥ṣṭam nopamr̥ditakriyākāraṇakarmaphalabhedabuddhimat kartṛtvābhimānaphalābhisamdhirahitam ca idam tu brahmabuddhyupamr̥ditārōpaṇādikāraṇakriyāphalabhedabuddhimat karmāto 'karmaiva tat ... bāhyaceṣṭāmātreṇa karmāpi viduṣo 'karma sampadvate 'ta uktam samagram pravīṇyata iti (BGBh 4.24, 217-218).

Therefore Śaṅkara does use the word sarvakarmasamnyāsa to mean renunciation of authorship alone. Even more important, the purport conveyed by this usage as well as others already discussed, is that the commentator's emphasis with respect to renunciation is not at all towards physical abandonment as a means to liberation, but rather to establish renunciation of authorship as an indispensable characteristic of any liberated-in-this-life, whether living in the city or alone in the forest.

The emphasis on renunciation of authorship is also rendered quite explicit when the notion of sarvakarmasamnyāsa is used by Śaṅkara in connection with the adverb manasā ("mentally"). In the Gītā itself, manasā and its synonym cetasā are adverbial to the phrase "renouncing all actions" (sarvakarmāṇi samnyasya) respectively in verses 5.13 and 18.57. Verse 5.13 states that after mentally renouncing all actions, one rests in the body as if in a nine-gated city. In his commentary, Śaṅkara glosses manasā as "discriminative knowledge" (vivekabuddhyā), and as "seeing non-action in action" (karmādāvakarmasamdarśanena),<sup>1</sup> the second formula being used in verse 4.18 to describe the liberated-in-this-life. He further clarifies that this type of renunciation is the result of immediate knowledge of the Self, with his remark that this abandonment is part and parcel of sublation of ignorance and that the enlightened renouncer continues to live simply out of the effect of the prārabdhakarmans that brought about his present body:

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<sup>1</sup> BGBh 5.13, 257.

But the idea of resting in the body is appropriate for him who sees the Self as distinct from the combination including the body, etc. And it is possible for him to renounce mentally, through wisdom, through discriminative knowledge, the actions of the non-Self superimposed on the supreme Self because of ignorance. Even in the case of him who has attained discriminative knowledge and is a renouncer of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsinah), it is possible to rest in the nine-gated-city - the body - as if in a house, inasmuch as the awareness of being distinct [from the body] arises in reference to the body itself by virtue of the continuing influence of unspent latent impressions from actions which have started to bear results [in bringing the present body into existence]...<sup>1</sup>

Even though Śaṅkara specifies, at the beginning of his comment on verse 5.13, that the actions referred to as being renounced are nitya-, naimitika-, kāmya- and pratisiddhakarmans,<sup>2</sup> in fact, the primary object of renunciation is here authorship. This is made explicit a few sentences further by the phrase "having abandoned verbal, mental and bodily actions" (tyaktavānmanahkāvaceṣṭah), as it

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<sup>1</sup> dehādisamghātavyatiriktāt madarśinastu dehe āsa iti pratyaya upapadyate. parakarmanām ca parasminnāt manyavidyayāropitānām vidvayā vivekajñānena manasā samnyāsa upapadyate. utpannavivekavijñānasya sarvakarmasamnyāsino 'pi gehe iva dehe eva navadvāre pure āsanam prārabdhaphalakarmasamskāraśeṣānu-vṛttiyā dehe eva viśeṣavijñānotpatterdeha evāsta ityasti... (BGBh 5.13, 259)

<sup>2</sup> The same enumeration is given in BGBh 6.4 in a similar context of complete mental renunciation.

is certainly not possible to abandon mental actions without knowing the Self as a silent witness of all mental fluctuations.

However, there is evidence that Śaṅkara also understands verse 5.13 - and 12.16, a verse with a similar wording - as expressing physical renunciation of the enlightened man. He states in his introduction to chapter 6 that "to forbid the fourth stage of life would also contradict the Lord's own statements in many places," <sup>1</sup> and quotes verse 5.13 and 12.16 among other examples where, in his eyes, the monastic stage of life is referred to. Verse 12.16 is part of a sequence that clearly describes the liberated-in-this-life in a way similar to the famous section about the man of steady intellect (śhitaprajña) from 2.54 to 2.72. It reads: "He who is without desire, pure, skilled, impartial, free from fear, who has renounced all undertakings (sarvārambhaparitṛyāgi), who is devoted to Me, he is dear to Me." <sup>2</sup> Thus, for the commentator, while physical renunciation is also meant here, it is a result of, not a means for, immediate knowledge of the Self.

Turning now to BGBh 5.13, if in order to take into account its larger context, we examine the comment on 5.7-8, <sup>3</sup> the physical aspect of the enlightened man's physical renunciation appears only as a possible consequence of renunciation of authorship which remains the only form of renunciation that is necessary for liberation. According

<sup>1</sup> tatra tatra bhagavatā svavacanāni darśitāni tairvirudhvyeta caturthāśramavipratishedhah (BGBh 6, intro, 284)

<sup>2</sup> anapekṣaḥ śucirdakṣa udāsino gatavyathah | sarvārambhaparitṛyāgi yo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyah || (BGBh 12.16, 515)

<sup>3</sup> Both 5.8 and 5.13 are quoted by Śaṅkara in BGBh 18.3 to prove that the Self-knowers are beyond the scope of injunction or prohibition of karmayoga and physical renunciation.

to Śaṅkara's comment, verse 5.7 describes the enlightened person who continues to pursue his life in society for the welfare of the world (lokasamgrahāya).<sup>1</sup> When introducing verse 5.8, which states in a way similar to 5.13, that the enlightened man becomes aware by direct experience that "I do nothing at all," Śaṅkara suggests by the use of the pronoun "he" that verse 5.8 refers to the same socially involved person described in verse 5.7: "Neither does he<sup>2</sup> really do anything" (na cāsau paramārthatah karoti).<sup>3</sup> Verse 5.8 undoubtedly describes the state of consciousness of the enlightened, and not a practice of repeating "I do nothing," because, as stated by the verse, this absence of doing prevails even during sleep (svapan), and it is obviously impossible to pursue any practice in deep sleep. Thus, according to our commentator, through the expression sarvakarmasamnyāsa or the like, both verses 5.8 and 5.13 describe essentially a state of renunciation of authorship through direct knowledge of the Self. While, to him, verse 5.8 accounts for the Self-knower pursuing social life, 5.13 does so for the formal renouncer. While both verses mean primarily renunciation of authorship, one of them suggests physical renunciation only as an optional consequence of, not at all as a means to, direct Self-knowledge.

Although verse 18.57 also uses sarvakarmāṇi samnyasya - this time with cetasā, equally glossed by vivekabuddhyā<sup>4</sup> - in his introduction to the sequence 18.56-65, Śaṅkara attributes this

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<sup>1</sup> BGBh 5.7, 245.

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> BGBh 18.57, 746.

renunciation to the unenlightened karmayogin, agreeing with the spirit of the verse where it is enjoined by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna: "Now will be praised the yoga of devotion to the Lord" (sa bhagavadbhaktiyogo 'dhunā stūyate) which consists in "worship of the Lord through one's [appropriate] karmans" (svakarmaṇā bhagavato 'bhārcana).<sup>1</sup> Hence, here, the phrase refers to a practice rather than to the state of liberation-in-this-life.<sup>2</sup> Although without manasā or cetasā, verses 3.30 and 12.6 use sarvāṇi karmāṇi samnyasya with mayi ("abandoning all actions in Me"), which Śaṅkara also associates with karmayoga. In 3.30, the same expression is understood as a general abandonment to the will of the Lord yet accompanied by a sense of authorship:

"Renouncing all actions in Me... with the awareness that I am a doer acting for the Lord as His servant."<sup>3</sup> According to Śaṅkara, in 12.6, the phrase is spoken in a context of meditation on Brahman with attributes,<sup>4</sup> which, from his viewpoint, is associated with unenlightenment and karmayoga.

Thus, these usages of sarvakarmāṇi samnyasya show that, in Śaṅkara's commentary as well as in the Gītā, this phrase refers to inner renunciation either as a process of gradually calming the mind through meditation or as the state of renunciation of authorship on

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<sup>1</sup> BGBh 18.56, 744.

<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkara seems to recognize a reference to the same practice by the use of the compound samnyāsayoga in verse 9.28 (BGBh 9.28, 436), and even gives the principle of abandoning all actions in the Lord as valid at the lowest level of the practice of karmayoga (see BGBh 12.11).

<sup>3</sup> mayi... sarvāṇi karmāṇi samnyasya... aham karteśvarāya bhṛtyavatkaromītyanayā buddhyā (BGBh 3.30, 167). A similar description is found in BGBh 12.11, 509.

<sup>4</sup> mayi viśvarūpe, as glossed in BGBh 12.7, 507-508.

the basis of immediate Self-knowledge, whether accompanied or not by physical renunciation.

This has major consequences for the understanding of Śaṅkara's repeated statement that liberation can only be reached through knowledge as connected with renunciation. We have seen that, according to our author's basic soteriological standpoint, knowledge alone can annihilate ignorance and its binding effects. Why then is Śaṅkara introducing renunciation as an additional means? In his statements joining knowledge and renunciation for the purpose of liberation, what is the nature of renunciation? Is it physical, is it abandonment of authorship, or both? Is it a means for the experience of the Self or one of its characteristics? And what is the exact relationship between the two notions? Does one precede the other (logically or chronologically), are they concomitant, or are they metaphorically presented as identical?

Let us first look at the positive <sup>1</sup> words used by Śaṅkara to express the connection between renunciation and knowledge as the means to liberation. In the BGBh 211, for instance, cessation of grief and delusion which are the cause of transmigratory existence are said to come to an end "through knowledge of the Self preceded by (pūrvaka) <sup>2</sup> renunciation of all actions" (sarvakarmasamnyāsa-

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<sup>1</sup> As distinguished from the negative terms such as the negative particles a- and rahita, both meaning "without" and which will be considered later on.

<sup>2</sup> In his BSBh 1.3.38 (281), Śaṅkara uses pūrvaka in the sense of "through": "But the conclusion stands that a Śūdra has no right to knowledge through the Vedas" (vedapūrvakastu nāstyadhikārah śūdrāpāmiti sthitam). But this usage does not seem to be frequent in Śaṅkara's texts. Because here in BGBh 211, the sense of "through" is

pūrvakādātmañānāt).<sup>1</sup> In the BGBh 18.66, “steadfastness in knowledge of the Self preceded by (pūrvikā) renunciation of all actions” (sarvakarmasamnyāsapūrvikā ñānanisthā)<sup>2</sup> is said to pertain to the enlightened man. In the BGBh 18.55, the word sahita (accompanied by)<sup>3</sup> is used to connect the two notions: it is said that knowledge must be “accompanied by renunciation of all actions” (sarvakarmasamnyāsasahitasya).<sup>4</sup> In the BUBh 4.5.15, the two are coordinated by the particle ca (and): “complete knowledge and renunciation of everything” (ātmapariññānam sarvasannyāsaśca) represent the means of immortality.<sup>5</sup> In some places, renunciation (samnyāsa) is said to serve as an auxiliary (aṅga) to knowledge (ñānāṅgatvena).<sup>6</sup> In the above examples, renunciation precedes or accompanies knowledge. But the reverse is also stated: in the introduction to chapter 5 of the Gītā, it is renunciation (samnyāsa) as “accompanied by knowledge” (ñānasahitasya) that is considered the means to perfection.<sup>7</sup> In the BGBh 18.8, it is also knowledge that precedes (or accompanies) renunciation, as liberation is said to be “the result of abandonment of all actions preceded by knowledge”

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already connected with the whole compound it is not likely that pūrvaka also means the same.

<sup>1</sup> BGBh 211, 40.

<sup>2</sup> BGBh 18.66, 731.

<sup>3</sup> Sasamnyāsa (“with samnyāsa”) is also used with the same meaning, for instance, in BGBh 4, intro, 182; BUBh 4.5, intro, 939. Saha samnyāsenā, where saha is synonymous with sahita, occurs for example in BUBh 4.4.23, 937.

<sup>4</sup> BGBh 18.55, 743.

<sup>5</sup> BUBh 4.5.15, 744.

<sup>6</sup> See for example BUBh 24, intro; 25, intro; 35.1; and BGBh 3, intro.

<sup>7</sup> BGBh 5, intro, 246.



(jñānapūrvakasya sarvakarmatvāgasya phalam).<sup>1</sup> Finally, Śaṅkara points out in his introduction to the Gītā (BGBh 7) that “knowledge is characterized by renunciation” (jñānam samnyāsalakṣaṇam).

As is evident from these few examples, the various wordings concerning the relationship between renunciation and knowledge in Śaṅkara's commentaries show some ambiguity. One is not always sure as to what precedes what, or if both are concomitant, or if all these expressions always refer to the same type of knowledge and the same kind of renunciation. Undoubtedly, such ambiguity is partly responsible for centuries of misinterpretations about the intent of their author. As mentioned earlier, the now prevailing Advaita doctrine on the matter is that one must physically renounce in order to have access to the discipline of knowledge which alone opens the awareness to direct experience of the Self and to liberation. But we will now demonstrate that these statements about the relationship between renunciation and knowledge are not meant by Śaṅkara to establish physical renunciation as a mandatory means for direct Self-knowledge. On the contrary, renunciation of authorship alone is necessarily associated with that knowledge.

Let us start by considering the problem from a logical point of view. First, when knowledge is said to be the means of liberation, it can only be immediate, because no mediate knowledge, which always amounts to mental activity, can annihilate the superimposition of mental activity on the immutable Self. Second, we can say that irrespective of which precedes the other, they must be joined at some

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<sup>1</sup> BGBh 18.8, 684.

point. So let us first consider the nature of their conjunction as such. As already established, according to Śaṅkara, karmayoga does not lead to liberation without the emergence of direct knowledge of the Self. This is also true for physical renunciation as nobody can attain perfection "by mere renunciation, by merely abandoning action, without knowledge" (kevalātkamaparitvāgamātrādeva jñānarahitāt).

<sup>1</sup> So, if both karmayoga and physical renunciation - in other words, the monastic way of life in itself - do not yield liberation without emergence of immediate Self-knowledge; if, as also recognized by Śaṅkara, the latter can occur without physical renunciation for Janaka and many others in the Upanisads; and if, in spite of this, knowledge must still be accompanied by renunciation as a means to liberation, then, barring the possibility that Śaṅkara is involved in a self-contradiction, the said renunciation can only be that of authorship.

The logical means to remove the ambiguity in the relationship between renunciation and knowledge is exemplified in the discussion of the following passages. In BGBh 3.20, Śaṅkara explains that if Janaka and others attained liberation, then they did it "verily without renouncing ritual action" (asamnyasyaiva karma).<sup>2</sup> Yet, in BGBh 2.70, Śaṅkara writes that "liberation is attained only by the man of knowledge who has abandoned desires, who is a man of steady intellect, a renouncer (yati), and not by the non-renouncer

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<sup>1</sup> BGBh 3.4, 145.

<sup>2</sup> BGBh 3.20, 159. In his introduction to chapter 3 (137), Śaṅkara also uses asamnyāsin to qualify the brahmacārin (student) who has not yet (physically) renounced ritual actions. In these two cases, the asamnyāsin is thus a "non-physical-renouncer."

(asamnyāsinah) who cherishes desire..."<sup>1</sup> So, within a few pages of the same work, one passage says that liberation can be attained without renunciation and the other says that it cannot, still using the same word: asamnyasya (merely shifted from the verbal to the nominal form in the second quotation). Does this amount to an elementary contradiction? No, because according to the evidence gathered so far, it can be easily removed by saying that, in the first case, "without renouncing ritual action" means "without doing physical renunciation," which is consistent with Śaṅkara's basic position about physical renunciation, in that this type of renunciation is not mandatory for liberation. In the second case, however, "non-renouncer" means the one who has not renounced authorship, who has not reached the type of renunciation which is concomitant with immediate knowledge of the Self and which in this respect alone is a sine qua non for liberation.

A similar ambiguity as to the status of renunciation is found in MuBh 3.24. Glossing the words of the verse which says that tapas cannot be attained without liṅga, Śaṅkara writes: "Tapas here means knowledge and liṅga, renunciation (samnyāsa)."<sup>2</sup> The purport is that [the Self] is not attained through knowledge unaccompanied by

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<sup>1</sup> viduṣastyaktaiśanasya sthitaprajñasya yatereva mokṣaprāptirna tvasamnyāsinah kāmakāminah... (BGBh 2.70, 129) In BGBh 18.2 (676) and 18.66 (762), Śaṅkara also uses the word asamnyāsin (non-renouncer) to refer to those who are still subject to the results of their actions and, thus, to transmigratory existence. In verse 18.12 (691) of the same, atvāgin (non-renouncer) is glossed as aiñā (ignorant). In all these cases, the asamnyāsin is thus a "non-renouncer-of-authorship."

<sup>2</sup> We shall not discuss here the validity of this interpretation.

(rahitāt) renunciation.”<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara adds that, through the help of knowledge and renunciation, “the man of knowledge, the man of discrimination, the knower of the Self” (vidvānvivekyātmavit)<sup>2</sup> enters the abode of Brahman. On the basis of the clarifications outlined thus far, it would seem that since renunciation is associated here with a discrimination or knowledge that is a necessary condition of liberation, it can only refer to renunciation of authorship. If physical renunciation were meant here as a necessary companion of knowledge, it would go counter to Śaṅkara’s defense of the universal access to liberation through knowledge, whatever the way of life.

On his part, after rendering samnyāsa by “monasticism” in a footnote to his translation of the commentary, Swāmī Gambhirānanda reflects:

Śaṅkara is very emphatic that external renunciation is necessary (see introductions to this and Aitareya Upaniṣads). But Ānanda Giri seems to differ. Says he, “Why should this be so, since the Vedas mention the attainment of the Self by Indra, Janaka, Gārgī and others? That is a valid objection. Sannyāsa consists in renunciation of everything; and since they [the wise] had no idea of possession, they had the internal renunciation as a matter of fact.”<sup>3</sup> The external sign is not the idea intended” (MuBh 163-164).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> tapo 'tra jñānam. liṅgam sannyāsaḥ. sannyāsarahitā jñānāna labhyata ityarthah (MuBh 3.24, 172).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> As we will see the word “but” should be added here.

<sup>4</sup> Here is Ānanda Giri’s comment: katham. indrajanakagārgīloraḥṛtī-nāmapyāt malābhaśravaṇāt. satyam. samnyāso nāma sarvatvāgāt makastesāmapī svatvābhimānābhāvādastye 'ntarah samnyāso bāhyam tu liṅgamavivaksitam (Mundakopaniṣat, 1889).

As we will see later on,<sup>1</sup> the understanding that Śaṅkara emphasizes external renunciation as a means to liberation in the introductions to MuBh and AUBh represents yet another misinterpretation, since most of the discussions therein are meant to throw light on the value of renunciation of authorship and to give a Vedic authority to physical renunciation of the enlightened. Secondly, contrary to Gambhīrānanda, I contend that the question "Why should this be so?" is raised by an hypothetical opponent (pūrvapakṣin), not by Ānanda Giri himself. It must be noted first that the opponent's argument does not aim at invalidating Śaṅkara's equation between liṅga and renunciation in its widest sense. In this passage, neither the opponent nor Ānanda Giri try to deny this connexion between liṅga and some form of renunciation - yet to be determined. The issue introduced by the objection is rather: what type of renunciation should be understood as a synonym for liṅga? And when raising the idea that some people do achieve Self-knowledge without physical renunciation, the opponent suggests that he understands Śaṅkara as believing monasticism to be necessary for that knowledge. By answering "This is a valid objection," Ānanda Giri agrees with the opponent that people do achieve enlightenment without physical renunciation, and explains this by the fact that they have this inner (antarāh) renunciation which is abandonment of "everything," in other words, "absence of the idea of possession" or ownership (svatva), undoubtedly equivalent to freedom from authorship. Then, just

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Poona: Anandāśrama Saṃskṛit Press, vol. 9, 324, 43). N.B.: [gārgī] is amendment for the misprint: mārgi.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter 6.

before saying "The external sign is not the idea intended," Ānanda Giri inserts the word "but" (tu), the key word which interestingly is missing in Gambhīrānanda's English rendering. This oversight is closely related to the translator's misinterpretation. The statement following "but" must be a restriction to something already said. In view of Ānanda Giri's well-known orthodoxy, it is certainly not against the Upanisad. Is it then as an opposition to what Śaṅkara said regarding the latter? "The external sign is not the idea intended" certainly does not oppose the significance of inner renunciation just pointed out by Ānanda Giri; it is rather a natural consequence of it. It should also be noted that inner renunciation is the only idea developed by Ānanda Giri following the answer "That is a valid objection." Since Ānanda Giri favours inner renunciation, the "but" cannot be a restriction to the latter. Nor is it likely to condemn Śaṅkara's alleged emphasis on physical renunciation, since it is not preceded by any reference to it in the immediate context. It can therefore only be a restriction to "That is a valid objection." It would have been self-contradictory on Ānanda Giri's part to say that the Upanisad teaches inner renunciation, and then to add "But the external sign is not<sup>1</sup> the idea intended," in order to mean that in Śaṅkara's interpretation the external sign is the idea intended. With the same intent, one would have rather said something like: "the Upanisad teaches inner renunciation and the external sign is not the idea intended [whereas Śaṅkara wrongly favours it]." The "but" is in fact the crucial point at which Ānanda Giri departs from the

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis is mine.

opponent's viewpoint and corrects it by underlining that Śaṅkara does not refer to physical renunciation and, in fact, agrees with the opponent's position on renunciation. So, what is pointed out as wrong by Ānanda Giri is not Śaṅkara's interpretation, nor that of the opponent regarding the nature of renunciation in this verse, but the misinterpretation of the opponent with respect to Śaṅkara. Thus, taking recourse to Ānanda Giri's commentary, Swāmī Gambhīrānanda comes to attribute to Śaṅkara the very viewpoint that Ānanda Giri is trying to refute as a possible misinterpretation of Śaṅkara's commentary... Such is sometimes the imbroglio found in the interpretation of Śaṅkara's views on renunciation.

Other passages clearly show that abandonment of authorship is the only form of renunciation that is required by Śaṅkara as a necessary means, along with knowledge, for the purpose of liberation. At the beginning of his introduction to chapter 4 of the Gītā, our commentator describes the yoga that was taught by Kṛṣṇa in the preceding chapters as "accompanied by renunciation and characterized by steadfastness in knowledge" (jñānanisthālakṣaṇaḥ saṁnyāsaḥ).<sup>1</sup> Then, commenting on verse 4.2, he agrees, as we have already seen, that "the royal rsis, those who were both kings and rsis, knew this yoga thus handed down in regular succession among Kṣatriyas." If this yoga included physical renunciation as necessary on the path to liberation, these generations of Kṣatriyas, who, according to Śaṅkara do not have access to this type of renunciation, could not have reached the goal and could not have taught something to which

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<sup>1</sup> BGBh 4, intro, 182.

they were not even entitled. Again, we do not think that Śaṅkara is overlooking what, for many modern scholars, would seem to contradict his so-called dogmatic position on physical renunciation. Rather, when the yoga or steadfastness in knowledge leading to liberation is qualified by sasamnyāsa, it simply means immediate knowledge as necessarily "accompanied by renunciation [of authorship]." In BUBh 4.4.23, at the end of the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Janaka, Śaṅkara confirms that the latter is now indeed "identified with Brahman" and has reached liberation-in-this-life. As a concluding remark, the commentator adds: "The discussion of the knowledge of Brahman is complete, with its auxiliaries and procedures and with renunciation."<sup>1</sup> It is quite obvious that if physical renunciation were a prerequisite for acquiring complete instruction from Yājñavalkya, Janaka would never have received his teaching, and if it were also a necessary condition for liberation, Janaka could not have been enlightened. Thus, again, renunciation means that of authorship; or, because parts of the dialogue (such as 3.5.1 and 4.4.22) deal with physical renunciation by the aspirant and the enlightened, it could also mean that type of abandonment, with the understanding that it is enjoined as a more or less optional<sup>2</sup> aid to full absorption in knowledge for Brāhmaṇas.

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<sup>1</sup> parisamāpitā brahmavidyā saha sannnyāsenā sāṅgā setikartavyatākā (BUBh 4.4.23, 937).

<sup>2</sup> It must be recalled that, even as a Brāhmaṇa, Yājñavalkya himself physically renounced, not before, but after his enlightenment. Hence, for all practical purposes, according to the depiction of his rather late physical renunciation in the Upaniṣad, which Śaṅkara does not even consider as a possible exception, physical renunciation seems to have been simply optional for him.



The concept of physical renunciation after the rise of direct Self-knowledge has always been well recognized in the Advaita tradition. What has often been missed, however, is that the abandonment of all actions referred to so emphatically by Śaṅkara, most of the time means the very renunciation of the enlightened, not the physical one which is an aid to knowledge. It is "through the strength (bala) of his knowledge of the Self" that Yājñavalkya abandoned his "attachment to unending becoming (samsāra) in the form of wife, son, wealth, etc." and then physically renounced the householder type of life.<sup>1</sup> Hence the primacy goes to the inner abandonment of authorship occurring as a result of direct Self-knowledge. When talking about the enlightened man in his gloss on BGBh 18.49, Śaṅkara points out, without any allusion to the physical nature of the renunciation, that "actions disappear because of the awakening to the self as being the actionless Brahman."<sup>2</sup> Although this may entail physical abandonment of karmans, it does not necessarily imply it. Again, in a formulation such as "established in Brahman, non-performer of action, renouncer of all actions" (brahmani sthito 'karmakrtsarvakarmasamnyāsi), found in the BGBh 5.20 without any suggestion of physical abandonment, the very word sequence used by Śaṅkara to describe the Self-knower seems to simply reiterate that renunciation of authorship is the consequence of direct Self-knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> yājñavalkyo lokasādhārāṇo 'pi sannāt maiñānabalādbhāryāputra-vittādisamsaratim parityajya praiñānatṛpta ātmaratirbabhūva (BUBh 25.16, 777).

<sup>2</sup> nirgatāni karmāni yasmānniskriyabrahmāt masambodhāt (BGBh 18.49, 733).

<sup>3</sup> BGBh 5.20, 269.

Interestingly, in some passages, a relation of identity is even established between knowledge and renunciation. The MuBh 3.26 defines the word samnyāsa as the very experience of Brahman:<sup>1</sup> “Their minds have become purified through the yoga of renunciation (samnyāsa), through the yoga characterized by abandonment of all action, through the yoga consisting (svarūpa) in steadfastness in Brahman alone.”<sup>2</sup> The same equation is made in BGBh 5.6. The verse reads: “But renunciation, O mighty-armed, is hard to attain without yoga. The sage intent upon yoga reaches Brahman before long.”<sup>3</sup> With the understanding that renunciation and Brahman, the two objects of attainment stated here, are one and the same, and finding support from a passage of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad that equates the two,

<sup>1</sup> Here, Olivelle reads samnyāsa as “a discipline undertaken by a yati,” i.e. by a monk (1981, 266). Śaṅkara’s interpretation differs first in that the yati is not necessarily seen as a monk. This is evidenced by the fact that Śaṅkara glosses yatayah (yatis) simply by yatanaśīlāḥ (habituated to exertion). Besides, the expression “yoga of samnyāsa” is referred to in the introduction to the Upaniṣad to show that karman cannot coexist “with the insight of the identity of the Self and Brahman” (brahmātmaikatvadarśanena saha), and in the comment on 3.1.4 to show that even though this verse refers to the knower (vidvān) as “involved in practices” (kriyāvān), yet he “disports in the Self” (ātmaṁkrīdah), “rejoices in the Self” (ātmaṁratih), is “steadfast in Brahman” (brahmanisthah) and provides absolutely no proof that knowledge has to be combined with action to yield the result of liberation. Hence everything indicates that samnyāsa here refers above all to an inner renunciation which, as we saw, can only be that of authorship. A second point of difference with Olivelle is that Śaṅkara seems to regard samnyāsa as the goal of the discipline, that is, as “steadfastness in Brahman alone.”

<sup>2</sup> te ca sannyāsayogātsarvakarmaparityāgalaksanayogāt kevalabrahmanisthārūpādyogāt ... śuddhasattvāḥ (MuBh 3.26, 172-173).

<sup>3</sup> samnyāsastu mahābāho duḥkhamāptumayogataḥ | yogayukto munirbrahma na cireṇādhiḡacchati || (BGBh 5.6, 251)

Śaṅkara holds that “renunciation, the topic under discussion, is termed ‘Brahman,’ because it consists in steadfastness in the knowledge of the supreme Self.”<sup>1</sup> This remark is undoubtedly characteristic of Śaṅkara’s usual approach and wording on the subject of renunciation, and brings again to light how much clearly, from his perspective, renunciation means, above all, abandonment of authorship as an essential characteristic of immediate knowledge of the Self.

Interestingly, a gloss from BGBh 18.49 shows a significant hesitation between the idea that knowledge and renunciation are identical and the notion that the former precedes the latter. Our commentator writes that the knower of the Self attains to perfection “through renunciation, that is, through right insight; or through renunciation of all actions preceded by the latter” (samnyāsenā samyagdarśanena tatpūrvakeṇa vā sarvakarmasamnyāsenā).<sup>2</sup> The identification of samnyāsa with right insight is quite equivalent to that with Brahman in the BGBh 5.6. In both cases we seem to have a metaphorical identity between renunciation and direct Self-knowledge, in that the two words are not employed with their primary usage (mukhāvṛtti), but rather with one that is secondary (guṇāvṛtti or lakṣanāvṛtti).<sup>3</sup> It seems proper to analyse this

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<sup>1</sup> paramātmajñānanisthālakṣaṇatvātprakṛtaḥ samnyāso brahmocyate (BGBh 5.6, 252).

<sup>2</sup> BGBh 18.49, 733.

<sup>3</sup> As noticed by Ivan Kocmarek, Śaṅkara does not see a significant difference between guṇāvṛtti and lakṣanāvṛtti: “they seem nothing more than alternative appellations for the general concept of non-primary designation” (16). It is with Sureśvara and particularly with Sarvajñātman that, along with the famous standard Advaita subdivision of lakṣanā into three types, the distinction between the two was fully developed (Ibid., 18-19). In fact the difference was

metaphorical identity in a way similar to Sarvajñātman's when dealing with the mahāvākyas (great sayings) of the Upanisads such as "Thou art That." According to him, this kind of metaphor can be understood either in terms of guṇavṛtti, that is, on the basis of a common quality, or in terms of lakṣaṇāvṛtti, that is, on the basis of some connection with the primary usage (Kocmarek, 48-50). Using Sureśvara's explanation from Naiskarmyasiddhi 255, Sarvajñātman holds that the individual "I" can be metaphorically said to be That [supreme Self] because it shares the following qualities with the latter: inwardness, subtlety and the (apparent) nature of consciousness (Ibid., 49). This equation is thus explained in terms of guṇavṛtti. In the same manner, we can understand that renunciation is said to be Brahman or its direct knowledge, because it is also characterized by actionlessness. Then Sarvajñātman explains "Thou art That" in terms of jahada jahallakṣaṇā, which is, according to him, the only type of lakṣaṇā properly accounting for such statements, and in which a part of the usual meaning of both terms is left out and a part of it is retained. In "Thou art That," the primary sense of remoteness implied by "That" is left aside and the primary sense of duality contained in "I" is also abandoned (Ibid.). Yet a portion of the remaining semantic scope of both "I" and "That" remains common, namely the sense of pure and absolute consciousness (Ibid., 77). Similarly, in the case of renunciation and knowledge of Brahman, the primary meaning of

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already given by Kumārila, guṇavṛtti being defined in his Tantravārttika as the secondary usage based on similar qualities found in the two primary meanings, and lakṣaṇāvṛtti being defined as the secondary usage occurring when there remains a connection with the primary usage (Ibid., 15).

renunciation as the physical action of abandoning a material object is left behind, and the primary meaning of knowing something (namely Brahman) as an object is dropped. The remaining common meaning between renunciation and direct knowledge of Brahman is then the absence of all activity and authorship.

Now, coming back to the comment on Gītā 18.49, the intent of the second gloss on “through samnyāsa” seems to present the relationship between knowledge and renunciation no longer in terms of identity but in terms of cause and effect: “or through renunciation of all actions preceded by the latter [right insight].” Renunciation is no longer equal to Self-knowledge, but an effect of it. This statement again confirms the basic sequence leading to liberation that was identified earlier in many passages, where renunciation of authorship follows the emergence of immediate knowledge (iñānotpatti) and yields a permanent state of being as actionless as the Self (iñānanisthā).

Let us now turn to the various quotations given at the beginning of our discussion on the relationship between renunciation and knowledge, and try to summarize Śaṅkara’s position on the subject. First, at least some of these statements do enjoin physical renunciation as a means of full absorption in the discipline of knowledge, particularly those passages where renunciation is said to be a subsidiary element or auxiliary (aṅga) of knowledge. For instance, in the introduction to chapter 3 of the BGBh, it is enjoined on the seeker after liberation (mumukṣu) and then justified by quotations from various sources, stating the possibility of adopting samnyāsāśrama early in life, directly after studentship

(brahmacarya).<sup>1</sup> Commenting on BUBh 3.5.1, Olivelle clearly defines renunciation's role as aṅga with respect to knowledge:

A ritual, according to Mīmāṃsā, contains two types of actions and things: principal and subsidiary. The latter has no independent purpose, but serves the principal to attain its object. Here Śaṅkara, using ritual categories, regards knowledge as the principal element that causes liberation, and renunciation characterized by the abandonment of rites and ritual instruments as a subsidiary element within the process of acquiring knowledge and achieving liberation (1986-87, 1:88-89). Thus, from Śaṅkara's perspective, renunciation as an aṅga of knowledge is physical in nature, and is not an indispensable condition for liberation as is knowledge.

Except for the monosemic usage of aṅga, all the other terms expressing the relationship between renunciation and knowledge do not seem to be reducible to the expression of a single invariable connection between the two notions. They seem to leave room for polysemy, and to define different connections according to context. For instance, pūrvaka can be used to state that renunciation precedes knowledge or vice-versa. Moreover, as stated by Śaṅkara in his BGBh 255, accordingly as one considers a scriptural statement as applying to a seeker after knowledge or to an already enlightened person, it can be a means (for the aspirant) or a characteristic (for the enlightened). Because this also applies to statements of renunciation, the

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<sup>1</sup> BGBh 3, intro, 137.

relationship between the latter and knowledge will vary according to the state of consciousness of the person to whom it refers.

Taking into account the various aspects discussed so far, we can summarize Śaṅkara's viewpoint on the relationship between renunciation and immediate Self-knowledge as a means to liberation in the following manner:

If immediate Self-knowledge precedes renunciation, then, according to context, the latter is 1- above all, abandonment of authorship or 2- possibly, both the latter and abandonment of all practices. Here, direct Self-knowledge is the logical cause of abandonment of authorship because it alone can destroy ignorance and its effects, such as superimposition of authorship on the Self (BSBh 2.3.48, 513).

If renunciation precedes immediate Self-knowledge, then, according to context, renunciation is 1- when possible - and for Brāhmaṇas only - <sup>1</sup> physical abandonment of ritual actions (itself preceded by some mediate knowledge about the real nature of the Self) as an auxiliary to the discipline of knowledge and/or 2- the inner process of withdrawal (mainly through meditation and available to both the karmayogin and the formal renouncer aspiring to liberation) until the cessation of all mental activity in the experience of the Self (akhaṇḍākāravṛtti) <sup>2</sup> or 3- most basic of all meanings, renunciation of

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<sup>1</sup> For Śaṅkara's restriction of physical renunciation to Brāhmaṇas, based on his literal reading of the word Brāhmaṇa when associated with physical renunciation, see BUBh 1.4.15, 125; 3.5.1, 334; 4.5.15, 552; MuBh 1.2.12, 110; BGBh 2.11, 34; Upad 2.1.2, 211.

<sup>2</sup> Here, the inner process of renunciation can be said to be the "cause" of immediate Self-knowledge only in the sense that it serves in

authorship understood as the middle term of the logical sequence which goes from attainment of immediate knowledge of the Self (jñānaprāpti) to "resting" or being permanently steadfast in that knowledge of the actionless Self (ātma jñānanisthā).

Finally, if renunciation "is" immediate Self-knowledge, it simply represents, in a figurative way, a characteristic of the direct experience of the Self, in other words, the absence of the binding sense of authorship.

In the final analysis, abandonment of authorship remains that type of renunciation which is so intimately related to the actionless and unbounded nature of direct Self-knowledge that, even though a simple characteristic of the latter, it also acquires the status of a sine qua non of liberation. In our opinion, if Śaṅkara insisted so much on that characteristic of the Self, it is because, for his opponents, knowledge of the Self remained in the field of mental activity and identification to boundaries such as the body, which was erroneous knowledge for the great revivalist of Advaita.

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eliminating the obstacles to the pure reflection of the Self in the intellect.



#### 4.3- Sarvakarmasamnyāsa as distinct from karmasamnyāsa

According to the prevailing understanding among interpreters, the compound sarvakarmasamnyāsa in Śaṅkara's works always means physical abandonment (samnyāsa) of all (sarva) ritual actions (karmans) prescribed by the scriptures for the first three stages of life (āśramas). It is commonly understood that Śaṅkara will use this compound equally, and only, for the physical renunciation of both the seeker after enlightenment (vividisāsamnyāsa) and the enlightened (vidvatsamnyāsa). But a systematic, comparative and contextual analysis of Śaṅkara's use of words and compounds conveying the meaning of renunciation proves the case to be otherwise. The following analysis will shed more light on a third possible meaning of expressions such as sarvakarmasamnyāsa, that is, renunciation of authorship accompanied, or even unaccompanied, by physical renunciation. We have already indicated that the purport of the step termed sarvakarmasamnyāsa in Śaṅkara's exposition of the logical sequence toward liberation is renunciation of authorship without mandatory physical renunciation. In support of this view, we will now demonstrate that other passages convey the same basic viewpoint.

In his introduction to chapter 5, Śaṅkara explicitly distinguishes between a type of renunciation which is free from the limitation of authorship, and another that is not. He clearly makes a separate case of "the renunciation of action (karmasamnyāsa) which, accompanied by the sense of authorship, applies to a few actions [only], and which is different from the renunciation of all actions (sarvakarmasamnyāsa)

previously referred to and done by the knowers of the Self.”<sup>1</sup> First, it should be noted that Śaṅkara distinguishes the two types of renunciation by adding the word sarva (all) to the compound referring to the renunciation that is devoid of authorship. Second, let us set aside possible but inadequate interpretations of the comparison. When, in this passage, the author compares karmasamnyāsa with sarvakarmasamnyāsa, he does not contrast inappropriate physical renunciation motivated by rājasic or tāmasic tendencies such as laziness or misunderstanding,<sup>2</sup> with proper physical renunciation motivated by a mediate knowledge concerning the true nature of the Self. Evidence for this is provided by the fact that, while commenting on “samnyāsa and karmayoga both lead to the highest bliss” (verse 5.2), Śaṅkara specifies that the incomplete renunciation, referred to by him as “mere renunciation of ritual actions” (karmasamnyāsātkevalāt), does lead to liberation: if a rājasic or tāmasic renunciation called karmasamnyāsa yielded this result it would contradict the scriptures, which is untenable for Śaṅkara. Furthermore, whereas Śaṅkara suggests that karmasamnyāsa entails the sense of authorship and sarvakarmasamnyāsa does not, physical renunciation as accompanied by mere mediate knowledge of the Self’s freedom from authorship (which is a mental activity) is not bereft of that authorship, because only direct experience of oneself as identical with the actionless Self can eliminate the sense of being a doer. Indeed, when devoid of direct

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<sup>1</sup> karmasamnyāsātpūrvoktātmavitkartrkasarvakarmasamnyāsavilakṣaṇāt satveva kartrtvaviññāne karmaikadeśavisayāt (BGBh intro 5, 245).

<sup>2</sup> For a short description of this type of renunciation, see BGBh 18.7-8.

knowledge of the actionless Self, the act of physically renouncing is also characterized by authorship. "Because the Self is immutable," writes Śaṅkara, "the fact that authorship etc., comes from ignorance holds good with regard to all actions alike."<sup>1</sup> Our author explains in his BGBh 4.18 how the sense of authorship is found in all people who do not know the actionless nature of the Self by direct experience, whether they have physically renounced or are still living in society:

...and superimposing on the Self action pertaining to the body etc., one thinks: "I am a doer, this ritual action is mine, I must enjoy its result." In the same way, one thinks: "I shall remain quiet, so that I may be without fatigue, free from action, happy;" having superimposed on the Self the cessation of activity pertaining to the body and the senses and the ensuing happiness, one imagines: "I am doing nothing now, I am quiet and happy."<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on Gītā 18.24, Śaṅkara further specifies that "even the doer of a sāt̥tvic action is ignorant of the Self and has the sense of being an acting ego (sāhamkāra)."<sup>3</sup> Whether the renouncer having physically abandoned ritual actions is simply lazy or an ardent seeker after liberation totally devoting himself to the discipline of knowledge, his renunciation is not complete and does not involve

<sup>1</sup> tat ca sarvakriyāsvapi samānam kartṛtvāderavidyākṛtatvama-  
vikriyatvādātmanah (BGBh 2.21, 74).

<sup>2</sup> ... dehādvyāśrayam karmāt manyadhyāropyāham kartā  
mamaitat karma mayāsyā phalam bhoktavyamiti ca. tathāham  
tūsnīm bhavāmi yenāham nirāvāso 'karmā sukhī syāmiti  
kāyakaranāśrayavvāpāroparamam tatkr̥tam ca  
sukhitvamāt manyadhyāropya na karomi kimcittūsnīm  
sukhamāsamityabhimanyate lokah (BGBh 4.18, 203).

<sup>3</sup> sāt̥tvikasyāpi karmano 'nāt mavitsāhamkārah kartā (BGBh 18.24, 711).

eradication of ignorance and its effects, because it does not include abandonment of authorship. Moreover, in his BUBh 4.3.22, Śaṅkara even refers to practices of the unenlightened formal renouncer as specific “karmans” (692) which define him as a monk in contrast to people belonging to other stages of life. Thus, the abandonment of “a few karmans” pertaining to karmayoga and the adoption of those pertaining to monasticism, even when they exclude everything but the discipline of knowledge, is not what the commentator understands by sarvakarmasamnyāsa in his introduction to chapter 5 of the Gītā.

Nor does Śaṅkara oppose karmasamnyāsa to sarvakarmasamnyāsa in the following terms: karmasamnyāsa in the sense of sāt̥tvic and appropriate physical renunciation unaccompanied by mediate knowledge, versus sarvakarmasamnyāsa in the sense of karmasamnyāsa when accompanied by mediate knowledge. This is because discrimination between the reality of the Self and the non-Self (āt̥mānāt̥mavastuviveka), which includes the general mediate knowledge about the Self’s freedom from authorship, is a condition for initiation into sāt̥tvic formal physical renunciation. Thus, the first element of the opposition cannot even exist: by definition, there can be no appropriate and sāt̥tvic physical renunciation without general mediate knowledge. As the above proposed opposition includes a term that is not even valid, it is not likely to be the meaning intended by Śaṅkara.

Nor is Śaṅkara contrasting proper physical renunciation by the seeker after liberation with the enlightened’s physical renunciation accompanied by permanent immediate Self-knowledge. A detailed

analysis is needed to refute this interpretation. The whole introduction to chapter 5 aims at showing that the question (answered by verse 5.2) as to which of the two - karmayoga or karmasamnyāsa - is superior, does not apply to the liberated-in-this-life <sup>1</sup> because, according to Śaṅkara, these options represent two paths for the unenlightened and, by definition, involve the sense of authorship. Śaṅkara's viewpoint in this regard is well summarized by Karl Potter:

But any action can only proceed on the basis of the assumption of a difference between agent and action, action and result.

Precisely because the liberated self is one who no longer recognizes any such distinctions, it follows that one who knows his Self cannot perform any action at all, whether enjoined by scripture or otherwise. By the same token, as Śaṅkara sees it, the notion that scripture enjoins action upon the Self-knower must necessarily be mistaken (1981, 41).

In particular, according to the context of chapters 4 and 5, the idea of threading a path defined by the conditions of ignorance of the Self is incompatible with both the enlightened man continuing his life in society, and the enlightened formal renouncer. Whether he pursues ritual actions just for the welfare of the world (lokasaṅgraha) or

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<sup>1</sup> According to Śaṅkara, Gītā 18.3 also features the same kind of situation. In verses 18.2-3, says the commentator, "the options concerning renunciation [of desire-prompted rites or of all rites] and abandonment [of the results of all rites] concern only the ones that are qualified for rites. But those who see the supreme reality ... are outside the purview of these options."

... karmanyadhikṛtānpratyevaiśa samnyāsatyāgavikalpāḥ. ye tu paramāthadarśināḥ ... na te vikalpārthāḥ (BGBh 18.3, 679).

abandons them physically, the Self-knower remains beyond the obligation of undertaking karmayoga or physical renunciation, which are enjoined for two types of unenlightened people. Before contrasting karmasamnyāsa and sarvakarmasamnyāsa in the passage under discussion (taken from his introduction to chapter 5), Śaṅkara first rejects the possibility that karmayoga be mandatory for such a Self-knower:

...it is taught that, owing to the contradiction between right and false knowledge as well as between their effects, for the Self-knower, there is no possibility of karmayoga - the opposite of the latter [renunciation of all actions] - <sup>1</sup> which is accompanied by the sense of authorship based on false knowledge and which consists in a state where the Self is active. Wherefore it is rightly said that, for the Self-knower whose false knowledge has disappeared, karmayoga, which is based on erroneous knowledge, is impossible. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Here, the authors of the three complete English translations of the BGBh now available completely miss the significance of the word sarva in the compound sarvakarmasamnyāsa, which often distinguishes, in Śaṅkara's usage, renunciation of authorship by the Self-knower from the renunciation of the seeker. Alladi Mahadeva Sastry translates "sarvakarmasamnyāsam ... tadviparītasya ... karmayogasya" with "Karma-Yoga, the reverse of Karma-Samnyasa" (Śaṅkara 1985, 157); Gambhīrānanda, with "Karma-yoga - which is opposed to renunciation of actions" (Śaṅkara 1984, 236); and Ramachandra Aiyar, with "karma-yoga - which is its (renunciation's) opposite" (BGBh, 183).

<sup>2</sup> ... tadviparītasya mithyāiñānamūlakakartṛtvābhimānapurāṇasasya sakriyāt masvarūpāvasthānarūpasya karmayogasya ... samyagiñānamithyāiñānatatkāryavirodhādabhāvaḥ pratipādyate yasmāttasmādātmavido nivṛttimithyāiñānasya

This is also specified as follows in BGBh 3.5: "...for the men of knowledge who, not moving from their Self, are unmoved by the gunas, karmayoga is not possible." <sup>1</sup> However, verse 5.2 states that "karmayoga is superior to karmasamnyāsa." Because both the enlightened physical renouncer and the monastic seeker after liberation have physical renunciation (karmasamnyāsa) in common, the latter could be interpreted here as the enlightened's physical abandonment and therefore be viewed as inferior to the karmayoga of the unenlightened person. To avoid this, Śaṅkara distinguishes sarvakarmasamnyāsa from karmasamnyāsa, specifying that, in the case of the latter, the sense of authorship is still prevailing while it is completely absent in the former by virtue of direct Self-knowledge. In his BGBh 18.11, he underscores that the possibility and impossibility of sarvakarmasamnyāsa are functions, respectively, of the absence and presence of the sense of authorship in the form of identification with the body. The notion usually conveyed by the word sarva is here expressed by the adverb aśeṣataḥ (completely) which is borrowed from the verse:

... for the wearer of a body, for the ignorant, it is not possible to abandon, to renounce, action completely, entirely.... Therefore, the complete renunciation of action is possible only for the seer of

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viparyaya jñānam ūlaḥ karmayogo na sambhava tīti yuktamuktam svāt... (BGBh intro 5, 244)

<sup>1</sup> jñāninām tu gunairacālyamānānām svataścalanābhāvāt karmayogo nopapadyate (BGBh 3.5, 146).

the supreme reality, who is not the wearer of a body, that is, does not regard the body as the Self.<sup>1</sup>

In BGBh 18.48, the same impossibility and possibility are explained respectively in terms of ignorance (avidyā) and direct knowledge of the Self, leaving no doubt that the renunciation referred to is the result of enlightenment:

... it has been said that because, due to ignorance, action is superimposed on the Self, it is not possible for the unenlightened to renounce action completely "even for a moment" [3.5]. On the contrary, as ignorance has been dispelled by knowledge, the enlightened is indeed able to abandon action completely ...<sup>2</sup>

Let us now summarize our answer as to why, in the passage quoted from the introduction to chapter 5, the contrast made by Śaṅkara between karmasamnyāsa and sarvakarmasamnyāsa is not between physical renunciation, and the same accompanied by abandonment of authorship. We have seen that both karmayoga and karmasamnyāsa (physical renunciation) are opposed to sarvakarmasamnyāsa experienced by the enlightened man in the form of renunciation of authorship. Particularly according to the context of chapters 4 and 5 of the commentary, the second term of the opposition also includes the inner renunciation of the Self-knower

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<sup>1</sup> ... dehabhrtā 'jñena na śakyam tyaktum samnyasitum karmānyaśesato nihśesena... tasmāt paramārthadarśinaivādehabhrtā dehāt mabhāvarahitenāśesakarmasamnyāsaḥ śakyate kartum (BGBh 18.11, 690-691).

<sup>2</sup> ... karma tadāt manyavidyādhvāropitamevet yavidvānnahi kaścitksanama pyaśesatastyaktum śaknotītyuktam. vidvānstu punarvidyayā 'vidyāyām nivṛttāyām śaknotyevāśesataḥ karma parityaktum... (BGBh 18.48, 732).



who has not adopted monastic life. We have already established that, in chapter 4 and 5 of the BGBh, the renunciation attributed to the “knowers of the Self” and identified in the passage under discussion as having indeed been “previously referred to,” applies to enlightened people that may be active in society as well as to formal renouncers, and is termed as sarvakarmasamnyāsa in both cases. Thus the sarvakarmasamnyāsa of the enlightened man still in society is as opposed to karmayoga and karmasamnyāsa, as that of the enlightened monk. The reason is that sarvakarmasamnyāsa is opposed to karmayoga and karmasamnyāsa, insofar as it refers to abandonment of authorship, not insofar as it refers to the combination of abandonment of authorship and physical renunciation. Hence, the meaning intended by sarvakarmasamnyāsa in the introduction to chapter 5 must be specific enough to account for the renunciation of all direct Self-knowers, whether they be in society or living as a recluse. Now, while the enlightened monk possesses both physical renunciation and renunciation of authorship, the enlightened person, pursuing his or her duties as before possesses only the latter. Accordingly, it is only their shared type of renunciation, i.e. abandonment of authorship, that can serve as the opposite pole of both karmayoga as karmasamnyāsa.

Thus, the only valid interpretation of this contrast between karmasamnyāsa and sarvakarmasamnyāsa remains the opposition between physical renunciation accompanied by a general mediate knowledge, and renunciation of authorship (kartrtvasamnyāsa) as a result of immediate knowledge of the Self in either the enlightened man continuing his life in society or the enlightened physical

renouncer. Again, sarvakarmasamnyāsa is really meant to identify that type of renunciation which is devoid of authorship and is a universal characteristic of the state of liberation-in-this-life.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It could be pointed out that because even the liberated-in-this-life is said to be still subject to the influence of his prārabdhakarmans (effects from actions done in previous lives that have started to reach fruition in the form of the present life's conditions), so that actions are not really "all" abandoned. It is indeed understood in Advaita that direct knowledge of the Self destroys only sañcitakarmans (effects from all past actions that have not yet reached fruition) and āgāmikarmans (effects from actions done in the present life and that will reach fruition in the future); so that the human life of the enlightened person continues to feel the results of action until the prārabdhakarmans get exhausted through being experienced during the remaining lifetime. But commenting on the scriptural statement that "all" (sarva) actions are burnt by the fire of knowledge, Ramana Maharshi observes that it is in respect to prārabdha- as well as to sañcita- and āgamikarmans that "when there is no karta [doer] none of them can hold out any longer" (Ramana Maharshi, 349). He then provides the following example: "if a man with three wives dies, it is asked, 'Can two of them be called widows and the third not?' All are widows. So it is with prarabdha, agami and sanchita" (Ibid.). He goes on to say that the statement that prārabdhakarmans are not eradicated by knowledge is made from an empirical standpoint where the body and movements of the enlightened person can be seen to continue as before. "But from the jñāni's point of view," he adds, "there is only the Self which manifests in such variety. There is no body or karma apart from the Self, so that the actions do not affect him" (Ibid.).

## CHAPTER 5

### **KARMAYOGA AS AN AUTONOMOUS PATH TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE**

In view of the fact that physical renunciation is not a part of the necessary steps in the universal sequence toward liberation, karmayoga appears under a new light. Although it is connected with the bondage of action, it has the power to generate enough purity of mind for the direct experience of the actionless Self to occur and to lead spontaneously to liberation. What then are the practices covered by karmayoga according to Śaṅkara? What are, in karmayoga, the roles of remote means (bahirāṅgas) such as ritual actions and of proximate means (antarāṅgas) such as meditation, for bringing about direct Self-knowledge? Do the proximate means include the discipline of knowledge? How does Śaṅkara explain the exact relationship between karmayoga's belonging to the realm of bondage, its power to ensure the rise of immediate Self-knowledge, and the refutation of the theory of the combination of action and knowledge as means for liberation (jñānakarmasamuccayavāda)? These are the questions which now need to be answered in order to understand the specific value given by Śaṅkara to inner and outer forms of renunciation in the broad context of the different means and ways of life variously conducive to liberation.

#### **5.1- Karmayoga and rites**

Following Bhagavadgītā 3.3 and Śaṅkara's commentary thereupon, we have so far identified karmanisthā with karmayoga.

As stated by the Gītā itself in verse 6.1, the karmayogin is “he who performs his bounden duty without leaning to the results of karman.”

<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara explains that while some rites prescribed by the scriptures are already obligatory by virtue of their purifying effect for the man who does not desire liberation (BSBh 3.4.32, 789-790), they become even more purifying and conducive to the rise of direct Self-knowledge and liberation, for one who, desirous of liberation, performs them without attachment for their results (BSBh 4.3.34, 792). Strictly speaking, karmayoga would therefore be only a part of a greater category within the sphere of karmanisthā. Since the karmayogin differs from other karmins in that he aspires to liberation <sup>2</sup> and cultivates abandonment of the results of his actions, we can therefore distinguish within karmanisthā two types of steadfastness in action: one which is based on attachment to results of actions, and which aims at goals different from knowledge of the non-dual Self and liberation, and which we may call karmamārga, the path of action; and another steadfastness which is based on renunciation of the results of actions, which aims at liberation, and which we may call karmayoga, the yoga of action. <sup>3</sup> While, in the first type, one is simply considered a karmin, one is a karmayogin in the second.

Since some people may be aspiring to liberation, but are not qualified for the sacrifices which are usually attached to karmayoga,

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<sup>1</sup> anāśritah karmaphalam kāryam karma karoti yah ... (BGBh 6.1, 282)

<sup>2</sup> In many passages, Śaṅkara defines the karmayogin as a seeker after liberation (mumukṣu); see for example, BSBh 4.1.18, BGBh 3.30, 4.11, 4.38, and 18.6.

<sup>3</sup> The same distinction is made by Mahadevan between karmamārga and karmayoga (1940, 22).

the latter can be extended to mean unattached performance of whatever means of purification one is eligible for. Thus, two more types of people who do not practice Vedic sacrifices are also to be included in the category of karmavogins: 1- the unenlightened people who, although normally qualified for Vedic sacrifices, cannot perform them (widowers, for instance) but who, aiming at liberation, can still pursue without attachment practices which are recommended for people in general, such as repetition of mantras (japa) and yogic meditation which is available irrespective of any social condition (BSBh 3.4.38, 794); 2- the unenlightened people belonging to the varna of Śūdras and who, even though not permitted Vedic studies and practices, can nevertheless pursue, for liberation and without attachment, the practices attached to their varna as well as those recommended for people in general (BSBh 3.4.38, 794). The fact that Śaṅkara considers karmayoga as bhaktiyoga, that is, "the worship of the Lord through one's duty (svakarmanā)" (BGBh 18.56, 607),<sup>1</sup> supports the idea that all people who, whatever their social status and competence, perform their prescribed duty without attachment to their results, are karmavogins.

Finally, the group of unenlightened people who, whether normally qualified or not for sacrifices, neither desire liberation nor practice anything prescribed by the scriptures, would be within the category of karmanisthā insofar as it means the state of ignorance and bondage of authorship, but outside that category, insofar as it consists of the performance of practices prescribed by the

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<sup>1</sup> svakarmanā bhagavato bhavarcanabhaktiyogasya... (BGBh 18.56, 744)

scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

Karmans dealt with in the scriptures are traditionally classified into four categories: nityakarmans (obligatory daily duties), naimittikakarmans (obligatory rites which are occasional or periodical), kāmyakarmans (desire-prompted rites, i.e. done for a particular benefit) and pratisiddhakarmans (prohibited actions). For karmayoga, the Gītā recommends the performance of only the nitya- and naimittikakarmans (i.e. niyatakarmans), without attachment for them and for their result, an attitude which purifies the mind: "Whatever obligatory action is performed, O Arjuna, merely because it ought to be done, leaving attachment and also the fruit, such abandonment is regarded as sāttvic" (18.9).<sup>2</sup> But others passages of the Gītā (and Śaṅkara's commentaries upon them) suggest that karmayoga as cultivation of non-attachment to results applies in fact to all actions: "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in sacrifice, whatever you give away, whatever austerity you practice, O son of Kuntī, do that as an offering to Me" (9.27).<sup>3</sup> Thus, the concept of karmayoga is again expanded beyond its more restricted definitions: the non-attachment required in karmayoga is applicable not only to obligatory daily duties, but to any action in life.

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<sup>1</sup> We will mention later the destiny of these people according to the scriptures.

<sup>2</sup> kāryamityeva yatkarma niyatam kriyate 'rjuna |  
saṅgam tyaktvā phalam caiva sa tyāgaḥ sāttviko mataḥ ||  
 (BGBh 18.9).

<sup>3</sup> yatkarosi yadaśnāsi vajjuhosi dadāsi yat |  
yattapasyasi kaunteya tatkurusva madarpaṇam ||  
 (BGBh 9.27).

In fact, a definition of karmayoga based only on the above fourfold classification of karmans in terms of external, identifiable aspects of actions, would be misleading, because karmayoga is not a function of the performance of a particular type of action but rather of the attitude of non-attachment present even when a rite formally defined as desire-prompted happens to be performed. As specified by Śaṅkara, "indeed, in cases such as the desire-prompted agnihotra, it is admitted that by the destruction of the desire [for the result], the agnihotra ceases to be desire-prompted. So, actions produce different results, according as they are done with or without expectation." <sup>1</sup> It follows that if an action formally defined as an obligatory rite were done with a desire for a specific result, it would become a desire-prompted rite and would spoil the spirit of karmayoga. Hence, for Śaṅkara, karmayoga must be defined as the performance of at least the nityanaimittikakarmans and of all other non-prohibited actions without attachment to them nor to their results.

The practice of this non-attachment is often described by Śaṅkara as total abandonment of actions themselves and of their results to the Lord, Īśvara: "He who does all actions, resigning them to Brahman, depositing them in Īśvara, with the thought that he does them for His sake, as a servant does for his master, abandoning attachment even for liberation, he is not soiled, not bound, by evil, like a lotus-leaf by water." <sup>2</sup> The idea of mine-ness (mamatva) is not to be

<sup>1</sup> drstā ca kāmyāgnihotrādaḥ kāmapamardena kāmyāgnihotrādhānistathā matipurvakāmatipurvakatvādīnāṃ karmaṇāṃ kāryaviśeṣasvārabhatvam drṣṭam (BGBh 4.24, 217).

<sup>2</sup> brahmaṇīśvara ādhāya nīkṣīpya tadartham karomīti bhṛtya iva svāmyartham sarvāṇi karmāṇi mokṣe 'pi phale saṅgam tyaktvā

entertained by the karmayogin, as his spirit must be "I perform action for the sake of the Lord alone, not for my benefit." <sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, even the intent of pleasing the Lord must be abandoned (BGBh 2.48, 77). <sup>2</sup>

But what is meant exactly by the purifying effect of this performance? In respect to the accomplishment of actions as such, regardless of the doer's attitude, Śaṅkara first explains - following the Gītā - that the Vedas are the expression of how the world revolves according to its Creator, Īśvara (BGBh 3.16, 117). And if, in accord with this world-vision, the Vedas prescribe to man rites that will satisfy gods, ṛsis and manes, it is because, at all levels, the wheel of life is a constant exchange of "food" (BGBh 3.11, 113). If man does not maintain his contribution as a giver to the rest of the world, he becomes a thief (BGBh 3.12, 114). Thus we can say that performance of rites purifies man in that it maintains his individual life in tune with the basic organizing principle of the universe.

But then how exactly does renunciation of the results of all actions also produce in itself a purifying effect? First, Śaṅkara remarks that it maintains steadiness of mind: "Therefore the purport is that only such a performer of action who gives up the thought of the result, can become a yogin, a man of composure, one whose mind is not distracted - because the cause of the mind's distraction, namely

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karoti yaḥ sarvakarmāṇi. līpyate na sa pāpena na sambadhyate  
padmapatramivāmbha sodakena (BGBh 5.10, 255-256).

<sup>1</sup> Īśvarāyaiva karma karomi na mama phalāya (BGBh 5.11, 256).

<sup>2</sup> Īśvaro me tusyavīti saṅgam tyaktvā (BGBh 2.48, 108).



the expectation of the result, has been renounced.”<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara specifies elsewhere that while performing actions, “one should pay more attention to the means rather than to the end” (TUBh 1.12, 282).<sup>2</sup> This way of doing thus contributes to evenness of mind. In turn, this calmness tends to loosen the grip of bondage on the awareness: “... even if they are binding by nature, actions naturally cease to be so by virtue of mental equanimity ...”<sup>3</sup>

But, of course, for Śaṅkara, only immediate knowledge of the Self can free from all bondage, and any type of renunciation done by one who is still unenlightened will result in limited freedom as long as its effect of purification has not allowed the mind to experience its non-dual essential nature. What is then for him the difference between renunciation of the results of action in karmayoga and that renunciation which really ensures liberation? In a passage already quoted above (BGBh 5.11, 193), while stating that the karmayogin should avoid the feeling of mine-ness, Śaṅkara manifestly attributes authorship to him when mentioning that his thought should be for example, “I do this for the Lord.” In the context of Śaṅkara’s understanding of the Self, absence of mine-ness with presence of authorship at one time in the same person is contradictory, unless absence of mine-ness is relativised or, perhaps, applicable only to the results of action and not to things such as the body or the mind which

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<sup>1</sup> tasmādyah kaścana karmī sa samnyastaphalasamkalpo bhavetsa yogī samādhānavānaviksiptacitto bhaveccittaviksepahetoḥ phalasamkalpasya samnyastatvādityabhiprāyah (BGBh 6.2, 287).

<sup>2</sup> upāye 'dhiko vatnah kartavyo nopeve (TUBh 1.12, 279).

<sup>3</sup> ... bandhanasvabhāvānyapi karmāṇi samatvabuddhyā svabhāvānnivartante ... (BGBh 250, 110)

will always be experienced as “possessions” of the individual self as long as the non-dual Self is not known by experience to be the universal witness. So, in the context of karmayoga, either Śāṅkara simply understands absence of mine-ness in a relative sense, or applies it only to results of action.

We saw in chapter 2 that when, in verse 12.12, the Gītā states that from abandonment of the results of actions “peace follows immediately” (tyāgācchāntiranantaram), Śāṅkara feels the need to distinguish two types of renunciation of results: that of the unenlightened and that of the enlightened. In BGBh 6.2, the same difference and resemblance is established between karmayoga and the “true” (or supreme) renunciation (paramārthasamnyāsa) which, as contrasted here by Śāṅkara with the mere physical renunciation of verse 6.1, must be equivalent to renunciation of authorship. Again, both enlightened and unenlightened men share the attribute of being renouncers of the results of action. But the first renounces the latter because he has relinquished the authorship of all actions through direct Self-knowledge, and the second does it as part of a purifying discipline, while authorship of actions has not yet been abandoned:

There does exist a similarity between karmayoga and true samnyāsa as far as the agent is concerned. Since he has renounced all actions together with its means, he who is a true samnyāsin abandons the thought about all actions and their results - the cause of the desire that leads to involvement in action. While

performing action, the karmayogin also gives up the thought of the result of action.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, because, for Śaṅkara, the discipline of karmayoga belongs by definition to the sphere of kārmāṇisthā, that is, to the domain of authorship due to ignorance of the non-dual Self, its renunciation of the results of actions has a limited purifying and liberating value. On the other hand, as it is based on immediate knowledge of the Self and on renunciation of authorship which ensues, the renunciation of results of actions pertaining to the sphere of jñānanisthā is simply included in the state of complete non-attachment to, and liberation from, all forms of bondage.

## 5.2- Meditation as part of karmayoga

The Vedāntic approach to the means of liberation divides them into external aids (bahirāṅgas) such as nityakarmans, and internal aids (antarāṅgas) such as meditation. It is well established that the internal aids are comparatively more direct and efficient for the attainment of immediate knowledge of the Self and liberation. Therefore, as part of the assessment of karmayoga in Śaṅkara's economy of liberation, we must determine whether a practice such as meditation is included (by definition) in karmayoga and its nature

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<sup>1</sup> asti paramārthasamnyāsenā sādṛśyam kartṛdvārakam  
karmayogasya. yo hi paramārthasamnyāsī sa  
tyaktasarvakarmasāadhanatayā sarvakarmatātphalaviṣayam  
samkalpam pravṛttihetukāmakāraṇam samnyasyati. avamapi  
karmayogī karma kurvāṇa eva phalaviṣayam samkalpam  
samnyasyati (BGBh 6.2, 286).

and role in comparison with mediate and immediate knowledge of the Self found in the sphere of jñānanisthā. Moreover, as we will see, meditation is in fact the most powerful procedure of inner renunciation leading to direct Self-knowledge and renunciation of authorship. Whatever role meditation plays in karmayoga, it is therefore of major significance in understanding the relationships between the various forms of renunciation in our author's economy of liberation.

Śaṅkara provides definitions of meditation in many places in his commentaries. The Sanskrit terms used by him when referring to meditation are usually upāsana(ā), vidyā, dhyāna, abhyāsa or nididhyāsa. It is a very significant fact that in both the contexts of the discipline of knowledge and karmayoga, Śaṅkara defines meditation essentially in the same manner. In his PUBh 5.1, where meditation on Om is said to be "a means to the realization of the inferior and superior Brahman" (parāparabrahmaprāptisādhana), he gives the following definition of that process: "an unbroken flow of self-identification [with the object of meditation], which is not interrupted by other thoughts of a different kind, and which is like the [unflickering] flame of a lamp in a windless place." <sup>1</sup> Still accounting for cases where the object is either the qualified or the attributeless Self, another passage defines it as a process of inner renunciation that allows the attention to retire from gross to finer and finer levels of

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<sup>1</sup> ātmapratyayasantānāvicchedo bhinnaiātīyapratyayāntarākḥilīkṛto nirvātasthadīpaśikhāsamah... (PUBh 5.1, 128) For similar definitions of meditation, see BGBh 6.35, 8.8, 12.3-4, 12.9 and 13.24; BUBh 1.3.9; CUBh intro and 7.6.1-2; TUBh 1.3.2-4.

mental existence and to identify with the object - in this case, the supreme Self alone: "Withdrawing the senses of hearing etc. from their objects - sound etc. - into the mind, then withdrawing the mind into the inner Cogniser (pratyakcetayitr),<sup>1</sup> and [finally] contemplating the latter with one-pointedness, is said to be meditation."<sup>2</sup> It could be objected that, according to Śaṅkara, this type of meditation describes a practice that is available only to formal renouncers, not to karmayogins. But immediately after this definition, Śaṅkara quotes Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.6.1 as an authority in the matter and, in his comment on the latter verse, he also defines meditation by giving deities (devatā) as a possible object, thus connecting the process of meditation in both verses to the qualified Brahman also.<sup>3</sup> Therefore karmayogins are also qualified for the type of meditation that culminates in the experience of the inner actionless Self.

In his book on the contemporary representatives of Śaṅkara, Cenkenner reports that modern Śaṅkarācāryas do prescribe meditation as part of karmayoga (170). However, many scholars consider that it does not suit the seeker after liberation at this level. Contrasting the Yoga of Patañjali and the Advaita discipline, with karma- and bhaktiyoga, Pandurang V. Kane remarks that "the path of Karmayoga

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<sup>1</sup> Cenkenner glosses pratyakcetayitr by "buddhi" (75). It rather means the actionless Self as, a few lines below, Śaṅkara glosses the ātmanam that yogins "see" (paśyanti), by the same pratyakcetayitr.

<sup>2</sup> dhyānam nāma śabdādibhyo viśayebhyaḥ śrotrādīni karanāni manasyupasaṁhṛtya manaśca pratyakcetavitarīkagrataḥ yatcintanam taddhyānam (BGBh 13.24, 573).

<sup>3</sup> More evidence for the close connection between meditation on the qualified Brahman and nididhyāsana as part of the discipline of knowledge will be given in the next section.

(performing good deeds and acts prescribed by Śāstra without hankering for rewards) and Bhaktiyoga (wherein there is deep devotion to God and self-surrender) appears to me more suitable and practical for ordinary human beings" (1977, 5:1462). According to Hiriyanna, meditation is to be adopted "in the later phase" of life, as a preparation for the life of a formal samnyāsin (1952, 11-12). Mircea Eliade also opines that, according to the Gītā, yogic meditation is reserved for the monk alone (164).

In fact, when interpreted without recourse to a larger context, the scriptures themselves may sometimes give the impression that karmayoga includes only rites and no meditation. For example, after telling Arjuna in Gītā 3.7 that one who engages in karmayoga excels, Kṛṣṇa enjoins in the next verse to pursue nitya and naimittika actions: "do thou perform obligatory actions" (niyatam kuru karma tvam).<sup>1</sup> In 18.3 and 18.5, these obligatory actions are referred to as "sacrifice, gift and austerity" (yajñadānatapah karma). The same three terms are used in Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.22 to describe the means through which "Brāhmaṇas seek to know the Self." Here Śaṅkara specifies that the term sacrifice (yajña) includes "those performed with things and those consisting of knowledge" (BUBh, 524),<sup>2</sup> which could suggest that the term yajña also includes the mental sacrifice consisting of meditation. But in BSBh 4.1.18, Śaṅkara quotes the same passage within an argument that makes the category of sacrifice preparatory to, rather than including, meditation:

<sup>1</sup> Niyatakarmans (nityanaimittikakarmans) are also said to be performed in verses 18.7 and 18.9.

<sup>2</sup> yajñeneti dravyayajñā jñānavajñāśca (BUBh 4.4.22, 932).

“Even so, Agnihotra and other rites are not absolutely useless when they are not associated with meditation. Why? Since the Śruti declares in ‘They seek to know It through sacrifice’, that rites such as Agnihotra are without distinction conducive to meditation.”<sup>1</sup> In addition, BUBh 6.2.16 associates the path defined by the same terms (yaiñena danena tapasā) with “mere ritualists” (kevelakarminah) who do not meditate and therefore go only to the path of the manes. So although some ambiguity remains as to the meaning of jñānavaiñā in BUBh 4.4.22, the main tendency is to exclude meditation from the phrase “sacrifice, gift and austerity.”

Following the Upanisads, Śaṅkara mentions in numerous places that three possible fates await the unenlightened people (those belonging to the sphere of karmanisthā) at the time of death. They either go to the Brahmaloka through the path of the gods (Northern Course), or to inferior heavens such as Indraloka through the path of the manes (Southern Course), or get reborn as small animals. Access to the path of the gods and to that of the manes comes respectively from practice of meditation (here termed vidyā i.e. knowledge) and performance of the obligatory rites: “Knowledge and action,” says Śaṅkara, “are mentioned here as opening the paths of the gods and of the manes.... For those who are neither qualified for the path of the gods through the practice of meditation nor for the path of the manes through the performance of rites, there is the ever rotating third path

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<sup>1</sup> tathāpi nātvantamanapeksam vidyāvihīnam karmāgnihotrādikam kasmāt - ‘tame tamātmānam yaiñena vividīṣanti’ ityaviśeṣe nāgnihotrāder vidyāhetutvena śravaṇāt (BSBh 4.1.18, 853).

involving [birth as] a tiny creature.”<sup>1</sup> In the commentaries on Chāndogya 5.10.3 and Praśna 1.9, the performance of sacrifices, gifts and austerities is not associated with the path of the gods, but with the path of the manes, which confirms that it does not include meditation.

On the other hand, the numerous meditations addressed to the karmayogin by the Upanisads as well as by the Bhagavadgītā prevents one from concluding that meditation, the most proximate means to immediate knowledge of the Self, is unavailable outside of monasticism.

At least two hypotheses could be put forward to explain why meditation is prescribed for karmayogins while not included in what could be considered as the basic list of karmayoga's practices. It could be said that if only the term sacrifice is mentioned in this basic list, it is because 1- the meditations prescribed for karmayogins are only those which are to be done during the performance of sacrifices; or 2- because sacrifices stand as the most important means in the discipline of the karmayogin, meditation being only optional or secondary. Let us respond to these hypotheses from Śaṅkara's viewpoint.

The first hypothesis is dealt with by Śaṅkara in his BSBh 3.3.42. The opponent claims that meditation on the letter om as udgītha and such other practices is necessarily enjoined as part of sacrifices, but never independently. Śaṅkara retorts that meditation cannot always

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<sup>1</sup> vidyākarmaṇī hi devavānapitryānayoḥ pathoḥ pratipattau prakṛte. ... ye na vidyāsādhanaṇa devayāne pathyadhikṛtā nāpi karmaṇā pitryāne tesāmesa ksudraiantulaksano 'saktādvartī tṛtīyah panthā bhavati (BSBh 3.1.17, 612-613). See also among other passages the introduction to KeBh, 34-35, and BGBh 8.24-26.



be a mere feature of sacrifices because the Chāndogya Upaniṣad specifies that they are simply rendered more effective by meditation and do not need the latter to achieve a relative degree of efficacy by themselves (that is, when done by non-meditators). Thus, concludes Śaṅkara, meditations have their independent existence and results, and can therefore be objects of injunctions unconnected with sacrifices (722-725).

In his BSBh 4.1.7, Śaṅkara remarks that when considerations of posture of meditation arise in the scriptures, they cannot refer to meditations related to sacrifices, since if it were so, these details would have been regulated by the prescriptions connected to rites. And, for instance, the sitting posture is advised to favor an easy flow of awareness toward subtle levels of the object, which is characteristic of deep meditation unrelated to outward ritualistic activities (830-831). Śaṅkara goes even further by distinguishing a subtle type of meditation available in karmayoga which is different from those connected with sacrifices. He notices that there are “meditations whose results are proximate to liberation, which relate to the slightly modified non-dual Brahman and are spoken of in such sentences as, ‘made up of mind and having prāṇa as the body’ [Mu. Up. 2.2.7], and [other meditations] which enhance the [results of] rites and rank among ritual auxiliaries ...”<sup>1</sup> In CUBh 8.15.1, he also confirms that part of the householder's duty is “withdrawing, bringing back, all

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<sup>1</sup> upāsanāni ... kaivalyasannikṛstaphalāni  
cādvaitādīśadvikṛtabrahmaviśayāni ‘manomayah prāṇaśarīrah’  
ityādīni karmasamrddhiphalāni ca karmāṅgasambandhīni (CUBh  
 intro, 352).

his organs into the Self, into Brahman in his heart” and immediately specifies that this is to be accomplished outside of rituals: “and, as indicated by the word ‘organs,’ abandoning rites ...”<sup>1</sup>

Even if the independence of meditation from sacrifices were agreed upon, it could still be argued, in terms of the second hypothesis mentioned above, that people retired in the forests (vānaprasthas) and formal renouncers are usually more fit and have more time for meditation than householders, so that, even if available and enjoined, meditation remains secondary in the life of the householder and therefore in karmayoga - the householder being the main representative of that way of life.

Let us explore Śaṅkara’s position on this matter. Although no indication is given about this in his commentary on Gītā 3.3 where the two nīṣṭhās are defined, a cross-reference to this verse made in the comment on verse 8.23 suggests that practice of meditation is basic to the definition of karmayoga. Śaṅkara’s cross-reference comes here in support of his idea that, when verse 8.23 uses the word “yogins” to refer to both those who do not return and do return to human life after death, it borrows the term from 3.3. In turn, Śaṅkara’s contextualisation of verse 8.23 allows us to see that these “yogins” include first of all those who practice meditation and, as a result, proceed by the path of the gods at the time of death, and in the second place those who merely perform rituals and, as a consequence, go along the path of the manes. Śaṅkara indeed specifies that here the

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<sup>1</sup> ... āt māni svahrdaye hārde brahmaṇi sarvendriyāni sampratīṣṭhāpyopasaṁhṛtya indriyagrahaṇātkarmāṇi ca sannyasya... (CUBh 8.15.1, 605)

word "yogins refers to yogins as well as to karmins. Yet the latter are so in a secondary sense, as they have been thus referred to in the passage, 'in karmayoga for the yogins'[3.3]."<sup>1</sup> By stating that, in verse 3.3, those who do only rites, that is, the karmins, are referred to in a secondary sense by the word "yogins," Śaṅkara certainly suggests that he expects the followers of karmayoga to be first of all true yogins, that is, adepts of yogic meditation. Elsewhere, as part of the teaching of the Upanisads on how to avoid becoming evil due to evil actions, our commentator directly advocates for the karmayogins still destined to the world of the gods, the practice of yoga and even of the parisaṅkhyāna meditation which is quite clearly described as the highest meditative form (equivalent to nididhyāsana) in the Upad 2.3.114-116: "Therefore, in order to gain sovereignty (svātantrya) at the time [of death], the trustful aspirants after the next world should be carefully following the dharma of yoga, practicing the parisaṅkhyāna meditation, and creating relief through particular merits."<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkara also attributes the practice of both rites and meditation to the karmayogin when, in his BGBh 121, he compares him with the enlightened<sup>3</sup> jñānanisthas who have abandoned all actions, a description that reminds us of the two nisthās of verse 3.3:

The meaning is: those who are thus ever disciplined are regularly engaged in actions such as rites for the Lord [and] in the

<sup>1</sup> yogina iti yoginah karmināścocyate. karminastu gunatah 'karmayogena yoginām' iti viśeṣanādyoginah (BGBh 8.23, 403).

<sup>2</sup> tasmāttatkāle svātantryārtham yogadharmānusevanam parisaṅkhyānābhyāsaśca viśiṣṭapunyaopasāyaśca śraddadhānaih paralokārthibhirapramattah kartavya iti (BUBh 4.4.2, 647).

<sup>3</sup> For evidence that these jñānanisthas are already liberated, see next footnote as well as Śaṅkara's commentary on verses 8.3-5.

prescribed manner, with their mind concentrated. Resorting to no other refuge, those devotees worship Thee, meditate on Thee, as manifested in the Universal Form; and those, others, also, who, having given up all desires and renounced all actions, meditate on Brahman, characterised as the Imperishable<sup>1</sup>.... among them... which are the better versed in yoga?<sup>2</sup>

Again, in BUBh 4.5.15, Śaṅkara does include in the various stages of life meditation as an inner means for the emergence of immediate knowledge of the Self:

This being so, if we now examine the comparative efficacy, for bringing forth Self-knowledge, of the duties pertaining to the different orders of life and which concern only the unenlightened, we find that virtues such as absence of pride, which are mainly intended for the control of the senses, and meditation, knowledge, non-attachment, etc., which relate to the mind, are the proximate aids.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The commentary on verse 8.4 clearly shows that although these jñānanisthas are said by the Gītā to be "meditating" on the Imperishable, according to Śaṅkara, they are already enlightened. Since it is attributed, in Śaṅkara's eyes, to "the sages who are one with the Lord" (bhagavatsvarūpānām satām, 505) meditation on the Imperishable means in fact knowing It through direct experience, and not indirectly in the form of practice. More evidence will be given towards this interpretation further on.

<sup>2</sup> evam satatayuktā nairantaryeṇa bhagavat-karmāḍau yathokte 'rthe samāhitāḥ santah pravṛttā ityarthah. ye bhaktā ananyaśaraṇāḥ santastvām yathādarśitam viśvarūpam paryupāsate dhyāyanti ye cānye 'pi tyaktasarvāśaṇāḥ samnyastasarvakarmāṇo yathāviśeṣitam brahmākṣaram .... teṣām ... ke yogavittamāḥ (BGBh 121, 500-501).

<sup>3</sup> athaivam sati avidvadvīṣayānāmāśramakarmaṇām balābalāvicāraṇāyām. ātmaññānotpādanam prati yama-pradhānānām

The same idea is found in BSBh 3.4.27:

Hence means such as sacrifices, control of mind and of senses, which are the duties of the respective stages of life, are all desirable for the emergence of knowledge. Yet, among these, means of knowledge such as self-control are proximate to knowledge, because they are connected with the latter by the passage 'He who knows it as such' [Br.4.4.23], while means such as sacrifices are external, since they are connected with the 'seeking to know' [Br.4.4.22].<sup>1</sup>

One could understand that, in the last two passages, the remote and proximate means are in fact attributed only respectively to the karmayogin and the formal renouncer, so that meditation remains for all practical purposes the exclusive means of the latter. But in BUBh 6.2.15, Śaṅkara connects the expression "who know this as such" with the practice of meditation on the five fires by householders, and states that, when yet unenlightened at the time of death, the latter do follow the path of the gods as a result of their practice of meditation, in the same way as do the unenlightened vānaprasthas and samnyāsins who practice their own type of meditation:

Therefore those householders who know as above, that they are born of fire, that they are children of fire ... and those who meditate with - not on - trust on the Self as the Brahman-Truth.

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amānitvādīnām mānasānām ca dhyānaijñānavairāgyādīnām sannipatyopakāraṇatvam (BUBh 4.5.15, 948).

<sup>1</sup> tasmādvaijñādīni śamādamādīni ca yathāśramam sarvānyevāśramakarmāṇi vidyotpattāvapeksitavyāni. tatrāpyevamviditi vidyāsamyogātpratyāsannāni vidyāsādhanaṇi śamādīni vividiśāsamyogāttu bāhyatarāṇi vaijñādīni (BSBh 3.4.27, 804).

i.e. Hiranyagarbha, in the forest, i.e. the hermits and monks who always live in the forest, all reach the flame deity.<sup>1</sup>

As a consequence, in Śaṅkara's view, meditation, that is, the most proximate means (antarāṅga) for the emergence of direct knowledge, does not belong exclusively to those who have physically renounced rites. It can even be said to be the most important practice in karmayoga.

As interpreted by Śaṅkara, scriptures deprecate either practice of rites alone,<sup>2</sup> or both rites and meditation<sup>3</sup> when each is used exclusively. Our author explains that "here the denunciation of the single performance of either [meditative] knowledge or action is for the sake of their combination, not for mere denunciation."<sup>4</sup> It is now quite clear that, ideally, rites and meditation both ought to be used as part of karmayoga. In spite of this insistence on the combined use of meditation and rites in Vedāntic scriptures, the Bhagavadgītā seems at times to relax the requirements of the path. This is especially true of 12.8-11, where, quite obviously as part of karmayoga, practices are advocated in descending order of difficulty only according to the capacity of the aspirant to perform them, so that, after meditation which comes first, the last and easiest practice consists simply in

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<sup>1</sup> tasmādye grhasthā evaṁ agniḥ hamaḥ nyapaty aṁity evaṁ ... viduste ca ye cāmi aranye vānaprasthāḥ parivrājakāścāraṇyānityāḥ śraddhāṁ śraddhāyuktāḥ santah satyam brahma hiranyagarbhāt mānam upāsate na punaḥ śraddhāṁ copāsate te sarve 'rcirabhisambhavanti (BUBh 6.215, 994).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance BGBh 9.19-20, ĪUBh 8, BSBh 3.1.7 and 3.3.52.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance ĪUBh 9 and 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> tayorjñānakarmanorihaikaikānusthānanindā samuccicīṣayā na nindāparaivaikaikasya (ĪUBh 9, 8).

renunciation of the results of actions. But, as we saw, Śaṅkara confirms that the latter is really the lowest technique. It follows that, from his viewpoint, while karmayoga can, when loosely defined, rest solely on rites and renunciation of its results, its raison d'être, in other words, its efficacy, is rooted in the combined use of rites and meditation. That is why even if karmayoga cannot be defined strictly in terms of this combination, Śaṅkara insists that, on this path, priority should be given to meditation:

The purport of the passage is that, giving up as much as possible one's natural action and knowledge, one must therefore try one's best to practice those rites or meditations which are enjoined by the scriptures and which are the means of attaining the Southern or the Northern Path.... It is further understood that, among these, greater attention should be given to the means of attaining the Northern Path.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, as suggested by the Mundaka Upaniṣad and confirmed by Śaṅkara, the very eligibility to the specific Advaita discipline of knowledge consisting of hearing, reflection and contemplation, is based mainly on previous practice of meditation. When the Mundaka Upaniṣad states that knowledge of Brahman should be given only to those who are engaged in practices, versed in the Vedas, and devoted to Brahman, Śaṅkara glosses these terms thus: "Those who are engaged in practices (kriyāvantaḥ), devoted to the performance of

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<sup>1</sup> tasmātsarvotsāhena yathāśakti svābhāvikakarma iñānahānena daksinottaramārgapratiṭṭisādhanaṁ śāstrīyaṁ karma iñānaṁ vā 'nutisthediti vākyārthaḥ... atrāpyuttaramārgapratiṭṭisādhana eva mahānyatnaḥ kartavya iti gamyate (BUBh 6.2.16, 997).

duties as mentioned earlier;<sup>1</sup> versed in Vedic studies; steadfast in Brahman, devoted to the inferior Brahman and seeking identity with the supreme Brahman.”<sup>2</sup>

These various passages reveal with sufficient clarity, I believe, that even though the householder has to devote himself to rites, and as a consequence, does not have as much time for meditation as one who has physically renounced rituals, his focus must also mainly rest on the inner means for liberation which meditation provides. To exclude meditation from karmayoga, to consider it as secondary or optional for that stage, or to see it as trivial and even unworthy compared to the Advaita discipline of knowledge proper, is therefore a major misunderstanding of Śaṅkara's teaching concerning the path to Self-knowledge and liberation. Such a misunderstanding contributes towards confining Śaṅkara's teaching within a monastic way of life by spiriting the proximate means of knowledge of the Self away from people who remain active in society.

### 5.3- The role of meditation in karmayoga

Even if it were agreed that meditation is of first importance in karmayoga, according to the now prevailing understanding in the

<sup>1</sup> Commenting on a preceding verse, Śaṅkara defined kriyāvān as “one who is possessed of practices like knowledge, meditation, detachment and so on.” kriyāvāñiñānadhyanavairāgyādikriyā yasya so 'am kriyāvān (MuBh 3.1.4, 167).

<sup>2</sup> ... kriyāvanto yathoktakarmānusthānayuktāḥ. śrotriya brahmaṇiṣṭhā aparasminbrahmaṇyabhiyuktāḥ parabrahma bubhutsavaḥ (MuBh 3.2.10, 174-175).



Advaita tradition, it could still be argued that karmayoga creates a purity of mind that merely allows one to start upon the discipline of knowledge proper which is the only direct means for experiencing the actionless Self. Advocates of this position would hold that the culmination of purity acquired through karmayoga is the fulfilment of the four prerequisites which simply allows one to set out upon the discipline of knowledge, and which must include abandoning karmayoga and active social life in favour of monasticism. True, the prerequisites given by Śaṅkara in his BSBh 1.1.1 do suppose a good degree of inner purity, as they consist of discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal, non-attachment to the enjoyment of the results of actions here and hereafter, excellence in practices such as control of mind and senses, and desire for liberation. But the misinterpretation of Śaṅkara's position derives from the understanding that karmayoga cannot include the discipline of knowledge among its practices, and that one has to come out of it in order to commence the said discipline.

As stated by T.M.P. Mahadevan, "the Vedic karmans ... produce non-attachment for the pleasures of this and the next world that perish. It is out of a spirit of non-attachment that one renounces the world and gains eligibility for Vedānta-study" (1958, xxvi).

Karmayoga and the purity it produces are not understood as a means to immediate knowledge of the Self, but only as a way to embark upon the discipline, or path, of mediate knowledge: "Disinterested and dedicated action (niskāma-karma, karma-yoga) serves to purify the mind, and thus becomes a remote auxiliary of the path of knowledge" (Mahadevan, 1974, 397). It is understood that combining karmayoga

with the discipline of knowledge would be contradictory to Śaṅkara's principle of absence of combination (samuccaya) of action and knowledge toward liberation. Hence formulations such as the following by Hiriyanna: "In other words, karma-yoga qualifies directly for jñāna-yoga or the acquisition of right knowledge and not for moksa" (1949, 56). In her study of Śaṅkara's BGBh, G. V. Saroja is even more explicit on the necessity to become a formal renouncer in order to start the discipline of knowledge, which is typical of the prevailing understanding in the contemporary Advaita tradition:

The sāṅkhya-yogin is the one who has understood the purposelessness and worthlessness of the worldly life. As a result, he reaches a worthy preceptor and gets all his doubts cleared. Only in this stage, śravaṇa or hearing the Upaniṣadic texts comes in the jñānamārga. It is to be clear that this virakta and mumukṣu has already renounced his svadharma and taken up to the fourth order of saṁnyāsa or renunciation (124-125).

In her thesis on post-Śaṅkara Advaita, S. Revathy also clearly presents the Advaita discipline of knowledge as separate from karmayoga:

"The stage of life where one is devoted to the meditation upon Brahman is saṁnyāsa. Meditation upon Brahman is not possible in the case of those who are in one of the [first] three stages of life. It is because they have to perform the duties relating to their respective stages of life" (233-234). As a consequence of this type of understanding of the role of karmayoga in Śaṅkara's economy of liberation, interpreters of Advaita usually hold with respect to Śaṅkara that "significant spiritual development for him is brought about not by

effective activity (karma yoga) in social and ritual life, but by knowledge alone" (Cenkner, 49).

But, as we will now show in the next two sections, this represents an unsuspected departure from Śaṅkara's position. On the contrary, Śaṅkara teaches 1- that meditation on the qualified Brahman leads to the very threshold of immediate knowledge of the Self, 2- that the discipline or path of knowledge (jñānayoga or jñānanisthā as steadfastness in mediate knowledge) is also available as part of karmayoga's practices, 3- that karmayoga thus leads directly to immediate knowledge of Ātman-Brahman, 4- that all these are not at all in contradiction with the principle of absence of combination of action and knowledge because it is not the various forms of mediate knowledge and ritual actions that can never possibly combine, but rather immediate knowledge and any activity (more precisely: the sense of authorship).

A close study of Śaṅkara's descriptions of the effects of meditation on the qualified Brahman (the main characteristic of meditations pertaining to karmayoga) shows that, not only does it deserve to be practiced by the seeker after liberation, but it actually leads him to the threshold of liberation by perfectly preparing the mind to transcend all activity in the silent experience of the Self.

According to Śaṅkara, meditation on the qualified Brahman is associated with karmanisthā insofar as the sense of authorship is still present in the meditator: "But so far as meditation on the qualified Brahman is concerned, a subsequent performance of Agnihotra etc. is possible, since the authorship for such a meditator remains intact"

(BSBh 4.1.16, 842).<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, since there is no meditation on the qualified Brahman without authorship and mental action (as is also the case with karmayoga itself), this meditation cannot bring about immediate knowledge of the Self and liberation.

We have seen earlier that meditation increases the efficacy of rites in producing their result.<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkara mentions some other effects of meditation on the qualified Brahman: attenuation of sins, which is probably another expression for purification of mind; acquisition of divine powers; and graded liberation,<sup>3</sup> which consists in reaching the world of Hiranyagarbha (the qualified Brahman existing at the finest level of phenomenal existence) at the time of death and getting liberation later on from there, without having to be reborn as a human being.<sup>4</sup> But there are actually different planes within the world of Hiranyagarbha and their attainment is a function of the level of perfection attained through meditation (BUBh 6.2.15, 632).

A similar but distinct result is termed as attainment of identity (āpatti) with the deity that is meditated upon (CUBh 1.11.9, 87). It can be produced either by combination of rites and meditation or by meditation alone in the case of an unenlightened formal renouncer (BUBh 1.3.28, 62). The highest level of the world of Hiranyagarbha is Hiranyagarbha himself, described thus by Śaṅkara in his KaBh: "The principle called Hiranyagarbha, which was born first, from the Unmanifested, and which consists of both consciousness and

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<sup>1</sup> sagunāsu tu vidyāsu kartṛtvānativṛtteh sambhavadatyāgāmyapyaṅnihotrādi (BSBh 4.1.16, 852).

<sup>2</sup> See also BSBh 4.1.6 and 4.1.18, CUBh 1.1.10 and BUBh 21.3.

<sup>3</sup> See BSBh 3.2.21, 619.

<sup>4</sup> See CUBh 8.15.1, KaBh 2.3.16 and PUBh 1.10.

unconsciousness, is called the Great Soul that is higher than the intellect." <sup>1</sup> The only principles higher than this are māyā and the Purusa, states the next verse of the Upanisad. <sup>2</sup>

The attainment of identity with the deity is different than reaching some level of the world of Hiranyagarbha after death, in that it can be reached during human life itself. Referring to a meditation on the qualified Brahman, Śaṅkara distinguishes between the meditations in which unity prevails with the qualified Brahman during the human life of the meditator, and those in which the symbol used remains an obstacle to that immediate identity: "But in the case of [meditation on] symbols, there is no fixity (kratutvam) on the [qualified] Brahman because, in such a meditation, the symbol predominates" (BSBh 4.3.15, 893). <sup>3</sup> In his BUBh 1.3.9, he describes this type of fixity as resulting from meditation in terms of "the emergence of the experience of the deity's form and the like, as one's self, in the same way as one experiences the ordinary self." <sup>4</sup> According to another description, this identity even prevails in the perceptions of the waking state outside of meditation proper:

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<sup>1</sup> avyaktādyatoprathamam jātam hairanyagarbham tattvam bodhābodhāt makam mahānāt mā buddheḥ para ityucyate (KaBh 1.3.10, 82).

<sup>2</sup> Hiranyagarbha is called the "total of all Prāṇas" in PUBh 6.4 (500), "and in Him, as comprising the (cosmic) subtle body, are strung together all creatures. Hence He is jīvaghaṇaḥ, a mass of creatures" (PUBh 5.5, 476).

<sup>3</sup> na tu pratīkeṣu brahmakratutvamasti pratīkapradhānatvādūpāsanasya (BSBh 4.3.15, 890).

<sup>4</sup> ... taddevatādisvarūpāt mābhīmānābhivvyaktiriti laukikāt mābhīmānavat (BUBh 1.3.9, 634).

This Brahmā is Hiranyagarbha in whom these kinds of bliss become unified, and in whom dharma resides as the cause of that bliss, and consciousness of that bliss, and unsurpassed dispassion. This bliss of His is directly perceived everywhere by one who is versed in the Vedas, free from sin, and dispassionate.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Śaṅkara specifies on many occasions that, since this bliss is still tainted by authorship and experiencing, it is not the imperishable felicity of the Self, and therefore cannot eliminate desire, bondage and suffering. Thus, he writes in his AUBh: "Therefore, the idea intended here is that even the state characterized by merger in agni and other deities - which has been explained and which is the result of the combined practice of meditation and rites - even this is not enough for the removal of the sorrows of transmigratory existence."<sup>2</sup> Commenting on the Māṇḍukyakārikā, he also underlines that the goal of meditation on Hiranyagarbha, that is, experiencing his bliss, is different from that of direct knowledge of Brahman, that is, from liberation referred to here by "immortality":

Therefore, since [meditation on] Hiranyagarbha (sambhūti) has a different goal, its censure is for the purpose of finding fault in it

<sup>1</sup> yatraite ānandabhedā ekatām gacchanti dharmaśca tannimitto jñānam ca tadviśayamakāmahatatvam ca niratiśayam yatra sa eṣa hiranyagarbho brahmā tasyaiśa ānandah śrotriyenāvriṇenākāmahatena ca sarvataḥ pratyakṣamupalabhyate (TUBh 28.3-4, 306).

<sup>2</sup> taśmādagnyādidēvatāpyavalakṣaṇā 'pi yā gativyākhyātā jñānakarmasamuccavānusthānaphalabhūtā sā 'pi nālam samsāraduḥkhopaśamāyetyayam vivakṣito 'rtho 'tra (AUBh 1.21, 332-333).

as compared with knowledge of Brahman which is the means of immortality; because, even though a means of eliminating impurities, it is not [directly] conducive to immortality.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, it should be recalled that, in the final analysis, according to Śaṅkara, all efforts of the seeker after liberation serve solely to remove obstacles to the correct knowledge of the Self through purifying body and mind. In many passages, Śaṅkara specifies that the condition for direct knowledge of the Self is complete purity of mind. In the BGBh 252, he clearly equates the condition for eradicating ignorance with purity of mind:

When, at that time when, your intellect will cross, go, beyond the confusion of delusion, the turbidness consisting of delusion and of lack of discrimination, by which the discriminative knowledge between the Self and the non-Self is disturbed and the internal organ is turned towards objects of senses, that is, when your intellect will attain purity.<sup>2</sup>

Also referring to the direct experience of Brahman, he writes in his MuBh 3.1.8:

What then is the means for its attainment? It is said: through clarity of intellect, ... Clarity of the intellect comes about when the latter remains transparent and peaceful on having been made clear as a mirror, water, or the like ... As one's mind, one's

<sup>1</sup> ato 'nyārthatvādamrtatvasāadhanam brahmavidyāmapesya nindārtha eva bhavati sambhūtyapavādah yadyapyaśuddhiviyogaheturatannisthatvāt (MāKBh 3.25, 219).

<sup>2</sup> yadā yasmin kāle te tava mohakalilam mohāt makamavivekarūpam kālūṣyam, yenāt mānāt mavivekabodham kaluṣīkṛtya visayam pratyantahkaranam pravartate, tatte tava buddhirvyatitarisyati vyatikramisyati, śuddhabhavamāpatsyata ityarthah (BGBh 252, 112).

internal organ, has become pure, completely cleansed through this clarity of intellect, one is able to see Brahman; accordingly, therefore, one sees, perceives, obtains, that

Self ... <sup>1</sup>

The context of other similar passages may not be as explicit as to whether the knowledge resulting from karmayoga's purifying power is mediate or immediate, which may lead interpreters to see it as only mediate, thus reducing the scope and role of karmayoga's practices. But there is no reason to interpret differently from the above passages statements such as "knowledge of Reality arises in a perfected man through purification of the mind." <sup>2</sup>

In fact, there is strong evidence in Śaṅkara's commentaries that, as long as it is practiced in the spirit of the doctrine of non-duality, any meditative practice will be a means of liberation inasmuch as it produces enough purity for immediate knowledge of the Self. In his BSBh 3.4.26, Śaṅkara quotes a passage from the Smṛti which even says that, through their purifying effect, karmans, that is, ritual actions and meditation, translated here by "duties", are the cause of the emergence of what is called "the supreme goal" and what must therefore be, here also, immediate knowledge of the Self: "Duties burn

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<sup>1</sup> kim punastasya grahane sādhanamityāha. jñānaprasādena...  
tadyadā ... ādarśasalilādivatprasāditam svaccham  
śāntamavatisthate tadā jñānasya prasādah syāt. tena  
jñānaprasādena viśuddhasattvo viśuddhāntahkarano yogyo brahma  
drastum vasmātatastasmāttu tamātmānam paśvate  
paśyatyupalabhate... (MuBh 3.1.8, 169) See also MuBh 3.1.9.

<sup>2</sup> samskrtasya sattvasuddhidvārā tattvajñānotpattih (KeBh 4.8, 36).



impurities away. The supreme goal being knowledge, when impurities are burnt away by duties, knowledge emerges.”<sup>1</sup>

In various places, Śaṅkara suggests that meditations on the qualified Brahman can create enough purity to cause the rise of direct Self-knowledge. He says for example in his CUBh: “These meditations are helpful to the knowledge of non-duality by way of illuminating the Reality through purification of the mind.”<sup>2</sup> And in BUBh 4.4.22: “Through sacrifices, those performed with things and those consisting of knowledge [meditation],<sup>3</sup> both of which aim at purity; and one who, being purified, has a pure mind, will attain knowledge without obstruction.”<sup>4</sup> Again, the prevailing interpretation among contemporary Advaitins will be to understand the said attainment of knowledge as a mere intellectual conviction (ātmanātmavastuviveka) which, as prescribed by the scriptures, would lead one to the discipline of knowledge only through adoption of a monastic life. But, whatever may be the role of the discipline of knowledge proper - which is not discussed here and will be dealt with later on - the

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<sup>1</sup> kaśāyapaktih karmāṇi jñānam tu paramā gatiḥ |  
kaśāye karmabhiḥ pakve tato jñānam pravartate ||  
 (BSBh 3.4.26, 802-803)

<sup>2</sup> tānyetānyupāsanāni sattvaśuddhikaratvena  
vastutattvāvabhāśakatvādadvaitajñānopakāraṇāni (CUBh intro, 352).  
 In his translation, Swāmī Gambhīrānanda renders  
 “vastutattvāvabhāśakatva” by “glimpse of the reality of Brahman,”  
 but avabhāśakatva is much stronger in meaning: it rather signifies  
 “illumination,” which confirms my contention here.

<sup>3</sup> In his BGBh 18.70, Śaṅkara mentions that the jñānavaijñā or sacrifice consisting in knowledge is mental only and therefore amounts to deep meditation.

<sup>4</sup> vaiñeneti dravyavaijñā jñānavaijñāśca samskāṛārthāḥ. samskrtaśya  
ca viśuddhasattvasya jñānotpattirapratibandhena bhaviṣyati (BUBh 4.4.22, 932).

various passages given above clearly suggest continuity, rather than discontinuity and opposition, between karmayoga and the process of complete purification that leads to direct experience of Brahman-Ātman. This continuity is conveyed quite clearly when Kathā Upanisad 1.3.13 describes a process of withdrawal of awareness from the gross to more and more subtle levels of existence, and in which the man of discrimination should merge the organ of speech into the mind, the mind into the intellect, the intellect into Hiranyagarbha and the latter into the Self. And Śaṅkara comments on the subtler levels of the merger as follows: “He should settle knowledge, i.e. the intellect, in the Great Soul, in the First-Born [Hiranyagarbha]. The idea is that he should make Self-knowledge as clear in its nature as is the First-Born. And that Great Soul, he should expand into the peaceful ... Self.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while meditative activity cannot be the cause of creation or purification of the Self, any form of meditation that withdraws the attention deep within can eventually bring a level of purity which allows the non-dual reality of the Self to shine spontaneously in the intellect. Saying that meditation on the qualified Brahman renders the intellect as pure as the realm of the subtlest phenomenal existence implies attributing to it tremendous power and efficacy. It would even be fair to say that through this comment Śaṅkara suggests that most of the purifying work toward immediate knowledge of the Self is already done when meditation on the

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<sup>1</sup> jñānam buddhimātmani mahati prathamaje niyacchet.  
prathamajavatsvacchasvabhāvakamātmano  
vijñānamāpādayediti yarthah. tañca mahāntamātmanam  
yacchecchānte ... ātmani (KaBh 1.3.13, 83).

qualified Brahman has reached its pinnacle in the identity with Hiranyagarbha. Moreover, the last sentence quite obviously describes the passage from identity with Hiranyagarbha to identity with the non-dual Self, that is, from meditation on the qualified Brahman (involving authorship) to experience of the non-qualified Brahman (devoid of authorship). And the ability to arrive at the latter is presented in continuity with the gradual process of inner renunciation already started with meditation on the qualified Brahman associated with karmayoga. Other passages also describe that this type of meditation gradually and naturally leads to its own transcendence into experience of the actionless Self. It can therefore be considered as a means to a complete inner renunciation marked by a spontaneous culmination\disappearance of meditation on the qualified Brahman in the experience of the attributeless Self. Commenting on Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.11.1, Śaṅkara writes that, after practicing meditations on various aspects of the qualified Brahman such as the nectar and the sun, “some enlightened person who behaved like the Vasus and others, who enjoyed pleasures such as the red ambrosia, who had realised his identity with the sun as his own Self by following the process stated above, became absorbed (samāhitah), [and] seeing this mantra, came back from his absorption ...”<sup>1</sup> A little further, in verse 3.23, Śaṅkara specifies that this absorption really corresponds to direct experience of the Ātman-Brahman, since the man who knows thus “becomes the eternal and

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<sup>1</sup> kāścitvidvānvasvādisamānacarano rohitādyamṛtabhogabhāgī yathoktakrameṇa svātmānam savitāramātmatvenopetya samāhitah san etam mantram drstvottthito... (CUBh 3.11.1, 419)

unborn Brahman which is not limited by periods of rising up and setting down.”<sup>1</sup> This is also confirmed by the comment that meditation on om is “a means for the attainment of the lower and the supreme Brahman.”<sup>2</sup>

In his BSBh 3.4.38, Śaṅkara even acknowledges that one can reach liberation through meditation outside the formal study and contemplation of the Upanisads (the traditional iñānayoga), as he quotes the following passage from Manu Smṛti: “Doubtless, a Brāhmaṇa can succeed merely through japa.”<sup>3</sup> the latter being simply mental repetition of mantras.

Śaṅkara explains that, although meditations on the qualified Brahman are within the realm of ignorance, they can lead to immediate Self-knowledge inasmuch as their activity is eventually transcended in the experience of the actionless Self. In the following passage, he does so on the basis of Taittirīya Upaniṣad 3.21, which is part of a sequence where Bṛgu performs meditations (called tapas) meant to gradually recognize subtler and subtler levels of the

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<sup>1</sup> udayāstamayakālāparicchedyam nityamajam brahma bhavatītyarthah (Ibid., 3.11.3, 420).

<sup>2</sup> parāparabrahmaprāptisādhanatvena (PUBh 5.1, 128).

<sup>3</sup> japyenaiva tu samsidhyedbrāhmaṇo nātra saṁśayah (BSBh 3.4.38, 810). A doubt may arise as to whether “can succeed” (samsidhyet) really means “can attain liberation.” But the rest of Śaṅkara’s commentary on this sūtra is quite clearly referring to the “highest goal” (parām gatim) as attained by various means. In his commentary on Manu Smṛti 2.87 (48), Kullūkabhaṭṭa gives the same meaning to the verb: “A Brāhmaṇa obtains undoubted perfection, he can reach liberation, merely through japa (brahmaṇo japyenaiva niḥsaṁdehām siddhim labhate moksaprāptiyogvo bhavati).

qualified Brahman (the gross level of creation, the vital force, the mind, intellect) and to finally bring about merger in the non-dual bliss:

From such Śruti texts as "Seek to know Brahman through tapas" [Taitt 3.2.1], karmans such as tapas and service to the master, which are means for the rise of knowledge, are called ignorance, since they consist of ignorance. Bringing forth knowledge through them, one transcends death, that is, desire.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, according to Śaṅkara, although pertaining to karmavoga, meditation on the qualified Brahman does purify the mind enough to bring the seeker after liberation up to the very threshold of immediate knowledge of the Self. We say "threshold" only, because, as long as an attribute of Brahman is still binding the awareness of the meditator (a situation characteristic of meditation on the qualified Brahman), immediate knowledge of the Self is not available. To have direct knowledge of the attributeless Self, one has to transcend the experience of the binding attribute, and therefore the very meditation on the qualified Brahman. At the very moment when it is ultimately transcended, the experience of the purely silent Self dawns. Here, achieving transcendence is the key dimension that differentiates between steadfastness in karman (karmanisthā) and steadfastness in direct Self-knowledge (aparokṣajñānanisthā): as long as one is bound by the sense of authorship that accompanies meditation on the qualified Brahman, one remains in karmanisthā.

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<sup>1</sup> 'tapasā brahma vijijñāśasva' ityādiśruteḥ. tapasādividyotpattisādhanaṃ gurūpāśanādi ca karma avidyātmakatvādaavidyocyate. tena vidyāmutpādyā mṛtyum kāmamatitarati (AUBh intro, 328-329).

But, when, as a culmination of the purity gained through this meditation, transcending of all binding mental activities of meditation occurs, and the Self is experienced as pure silent consciousness, one has stepped into jñānanisthā, steadfastness in [direct] knowledge [of the Self].

In addition, while nididhyāsana is usually understood by followers of Śaṅkara to be much superior to meditation on the qualified Brahman, from the various definitions of meditation given by Śaṅkara, it can be shown that it is in fact the continuity and culmination of meditation on the qualified Brahman, not something wholly opposed to the latter or radically different in nature. This is because in both meditation on the qualified Brahman and nididhyāsana, the process is essentially the same, that is, repeated experience of a thought, gradually moving from its grosser to its more subtle levels. As defined in the introduction to the CUBh, “meditation means establishing a continuous flow of similar modifications of the mind in relation to some object as presented by the scriptures, (and) uninterrupted by any foreign idea” (6).<sup>1</sup> In his BSBh 4.1.1, Śaṅkara characterizes both upāsanā and nididhyāsana as the repetition of mental actions: “Besides, the words upāsanā and nididhyāsana denote an act (kriyā) characterized by inner repetition.”<sup>2</sup> In his BSBh the

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<sup>1</sup> upāsanam tu yathāśāstrasamarthitam kimcidāmbanam upādāya tasminsamānacittavrttisamtānakaranam tadvilakṣanapratyayānantaritam (CUBh intro, 352).

<sup>2</sup> api copāsanam nididhyāsanam cetvantarṇītāvrttigunaiva kriyābhidyate (BSBh 4.1.1, 826). Swāmi Gambhirānanda (CUBh, xx) and A. P. Mishra (20) understand on the basis of the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya Vārtika 2.4.232-234 that Sureśvara clearly distinguishes the process of nididhyāsana from that of upāśana.

commentator specifies that Brahman is meditated upon with attributes because it is not possible for people with less purified minds to know it directly, that is, without attributes:

Even the statements as to [Brahman's] magnitudes [such as having four feet or sixteen parts], are not meant for establishing the existence of something different from Brahman. What are they meant for then? They serve the purposes of the intellect,

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Swāmī Gambhirānanda opines that, according to Sureśvara, nididhyāsana "is not ordinary meditation, but a meditation of a higher order in which there is no sense of exertion of will, no conscious employment of the thinking process, and no intellection whatsoever. ... and yet it falls just short of aparoksānubhūti or the direct realisation of the Self" (xx). Is Sureśvara departing from the viewpoint of his master here? Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.4.5 reads: "The Self, my dear Maitreyī, is to be realized (draṣṭavyaḥ) - it is to be heard of, reflected of, meditated upon (nididhyāsitavyaḥ). Through realization (darśanena) of the Self, my dear - through hearing, reflection and experience (vijñānena), all this is known" (āt mā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyyāt mano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānenedam sarvam veditam). Sureśvara has the following comment on this in his Vārtika 2.4.232-234: "... If through vijñāna is used, why is nididhyāsana first mentioned? Through vijñāna is said for the purpose of eliminating the doubt about dhyāna, because the word nididhyāsana can be wrongly taken to be dhyāna. Before [attaining] the goal (avāt), dhyāna etc. are needed for bringing about the emergence of knowledge; on the contrary, as to its specific meaning, vijñāna is declared to result in liberation alone" (... vijñānenetyatha katham nididhyāsanamucyate || dhyānāśaṅkānivṛtttyartham vijñāneneti bhanyate | nididhyāsanāśabdena dhyānamāśaṅkyate vataḥ || vijñānotpattihetutvam dhyānādeḥ prāgavādiṣam | svārthameva tu vijñānam muktimātraphalam smrtam || 1982, 695). Here Sureśvara seems to define nididhyāsana from the perspective of its culmination in the very immediate knowledge of the actionless Self, which alone yields liberation. Thus, this comment may not necessarily entail contradiction with Śaṅkara's qualification of both nididhyāsana and upāsana as mental acts at other levels of experience.

i.e. of meditation.... For, as men can be of dull, middling or superior intellect, they are not all capable of fixing it on the infinite Brahman that is devoid of modifications.<sup>1</sup>

So, while the process as such is quite similar in the case of meditation of the qualified Brahman (usually associated with karmavoga) and in the one pertaining to the discipline of knowledge, the major difference between the two is simply that in nididhyāsana, due to purity already acquired namely through meditation on the qualified Brahman, the meditator seems to be able to have his mind more easily absorbed in abstract Upaniṣadic thoughts such as "Thou art That." This will be exemplified by the following two definitions, the first one referring to meditation on the vital force which is the entity termed here as deity: "Meditation is mentally approaching, that is, dwelling on, thinking of, the form of a deity or the like as it is presented by the explanatory portions of the Śruti relating to the objects of meditation, with no interruption from ordinary thoughts ..." <sup>2</sup> Even if introduced in the context of Gītā 12.3 where, according to Śaṅkara, the object is the attributeless Brahman, the following definition is quite the same as the one above in terms of procedure: "Meditation is reaching proximity [with the deity] by making it the object of meditation as

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<sup>1</sup> unmānavyapadeśo 'pi na brahmavyatirikta vastvastitvaprati-  
pattyarthaḥ. kimarthastarhi buddhyarthah. upāsanārtha itī yāvat. ...  
na hyavikāre 'nante brahmaṇi sarvaiḥ pumbhiḥ śakyā buddhiḥ  
sthāpayitum mandamadhyamottamabuddhitvāt pumsāmiti (BSBh 3.2.33, 662).

<sup>2</sup> upāsanam nāmopāśvārtthavāde yathā devatādisvarūpam śrutyā  
iñāpyāte tathā manasopagamya āsanam cintanam  
laukikapratyavāvyavadhānena ... (BUBh 1.3.9, 633-634)



prescribed by the scriptures, and dwelling on it for a long time with a continuous flow of the same thought like a thread of [descending] oil.”<sup>1</sup>

It is most significant that in BUBh 4.2.4, Śaṅkara describes the whole range of both these types of meditation within one single process of completely transcending all meditative activity into the experience of the actionless Self: “Thus, by stages, the meditator identifies himself with the vital force which is the self of everything. Having withdrawn this self of everything into the inner Self, the seer then comes back to the state of the Seer, to the Self that is described as ‘Not this, not this,’ to the fourth [state of consciousness].”<sup>2</sup>

It follows from these definitions that, apart from knowledge of the non-dual Self to be acquired from the scriptures, it is complete purity that remains the key condition for emergence of immediate Self-knowledge, not any particular means aiming at this purity. And, to me, this is the reason why Śaṅkara clearly states in the following passage that even remote means such as trust can in some cases be considered as the single cause of the rise of knowledge:

For, in life, effects may be considered to be produced separately, from distinct causes, or from their combination. And these causes operating separately or in combination can again be divided in terms of their various efficiency.... Sometimes, the actions of

<sup>1</sup> upāsanam nāma yathāśāstram upāśvasyārthasya viśayīkaranena sāmīpyam upagamyā tailadhārāvatsamānapratyavayapravāhena dīrghakālam yadāsanam tad upāsanam ācakṣate (BGBh 123, 702-703).

<sup>2</sup> evam vidvāṅkrameṇa sarvātmaṇi prāṇam ātmaṇi venopagato bhavati. tam sarvātmaṇi pratyagātmany upasamhrtvā draṣṭurhi draṣṭrbhāvaṃ neti netītyātmaṇi turīyaṃ pratipadyate (BUBh 4.2.4, 859-860).

one's past life are the cause, as in the case of Prajāpati. Sometimes it is tapas... Sometimes ... factors such as trust are the single cause of attaining knowledge. Because they remove obstacles such as violation of dharma. And because hearing, reflection and meditation on Vedānta scriptures are directly related to that [Brahman] which is to be known, they being the spontaneous cause of the knowledge of Reality when obstacles such as bodily and mental effects of wrong actions have disappeared.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, all these passages suggest that the condition of complete enlightenment through the teaching of the scriptures is simply purity, not purity as an exclusive result of full-time discipline of knowledge following formal renunciation (which is only one possible means among others). Moreover, nothing suggests in the last citation that practices pertaining to karmayoga cannot be combined with the discipline of knowledge.

As also specified by Śaṅkara, proximate means such as meditation are more powerful than others in purifying and gradually calming mental activity until complete disappearance of the latter in the experience of the actionless Self. Again, the crucial question is whether the proximate means consisting of the discipline of

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<sup>1</sup> loke hi naimittikānām kāryānām nimittabhedo 'nekadhā vikalpate. tathā nimittasamuccayah. teṣām ca vikalpitānām samuccitānām ca punarguṇavadaguṇavattvaktvato bhedo bhavati...  
kvacijjanmāntarakṛtām karma nimittam bhavati. yathā prajāpateh. kvacittapo nimittam... kvacit... ekāntaiññānalābhanimittatvam.  
śraddhāprabhṛtīnām adharmādinimittaviyogahetutvāt.  
vedāntaśravanamanananididhvyāsanānām ca sāksāiññeyavisayatvāt.  
pāpādipratibandhaksaye cāt mamasoh  
bhūtārthaiññāna nimittasvābhāvāt (BUBh 1.4.2, 649).

knowledge is available only after one has adopted monasticism, or also within karmayoga, in addition to yajña, dana and tapas. When comparing Śaṅkara's discussion quoted above on the relationship between the proximate and remote means of knowledge, with Sarvajñātman's introduction to this topic in his Samksepasārīraka, one is struck by the monastic spirit prevailing in the disciple. Instead of stating the availability and possible complementarity of remote and proximate means to all classes of people, Sarvajñātman readily introduces the whole subject in terms of opting for the proximate means after abandoning the remote ones: "Explain to me through reasoning the means to the knowledge (of the Self), namely, the proximate and remote means (by mutually) distinguishing them in the form 'this one should be observed' and 'this one is to be abandoned'" (Veezhinathan, 652).<sup>1</sup> This way of understanding the relationship between the proximate and remote means is probably based on Sureśvara's statement that the remote means may bring only an "inclination toward the Self" (pratyakpravaṇatām),<sup>2</sup> not direct knowledge itself. But, as already shown, from Śaṅkara's perspective, this does not mean that their practice has to be abandoned in favour of a monastic life in order to start upon the proximate means, including the discipline of knowledge.

In his BUBh 6.2.15,<sup>3</sup> Śaṅkara explicitly connects the proximate means referred to by the phrase "those who know this as such" with

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<sup>1</sup> antarāṅgabahirāṅgasādhane bhedatah kathaya tadbubhutsitam |  
iñānajanmata idam jidhrkṣitam heyametaditi copapattibhiḥ ||

(Veezhinathan, 652).

<sup>2</sup> Naīskarmyasiddhi 1.49 (Balasubramanian 1988, 51).

<sup>3</sup> See also CUBh 5.10.1 for a similar description.

householders as well as with formal renunciators: "But who are 'those who know this as such?' The householders of course.... students are also meant by the words 'who know this as such'.... and those hermits and monks who always remain in the forest, who meditate..." <sup>1</sup> In his BSBh 3.4.48, Śaṅkara also clearly states that apart from the remote means of knowledge which are attached to his stage of life, the householder is also enjoined to perform practices more typical of "other stages," namely, means such as the discipline of knowledge defined in BUBh 4.4.22 as proximate and which only the formal renouncer can practice on a full-time basis by virtue of being free from the many obligations of a householder:

Because the scriptures prescribe for him many duties connected with his stage of life and which require great effort, such as sacrifices; and duties of other stages, such as non-injury and control of senses, <sup>2</sup> are [also] there for him inasmuch as it is possible. <sup>3</sup>

Can we thus say that, according to Śaṅkara, people of all castes and stages of life are qualified for the proximate means of knowledge of the Self including the discipline of knowledge which alone results in liberation? We saw that, when the required purity is attained by the

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<sup>1</sup> ke punaste ya evam vidurgrhasthā eva... api brahmacārīna evam viduriti grhyante... vānaprasthāḥ parivrājakāścāraṇyanyāḥ upāsate... (BUBh 6.2.15, 994)

<sup>2</sup> indriyasamyama, which is equivalent to dama, and said to be a proximate means to Self-knowledge in BUBh 4.4.22.

<sup>3</sup> bahulāyāsāni hi bahūnyāśramakarmāṇi yaiṇādīni tam prati kartavyatayopadiṣṭānyāśramāntarakarmāṇi ca yathāsambhavamahiṃsendriyasamyamādīni tasya vidyante... (BSBh 3.4.48, 818-819)

aspirant, the proximate means of meditation on the qualified Brahman may eventually lead to its own disappearance and to the aspirant's complete absorption in the actionless Self. Now, passages in Śaṅkara's works also clearly state that at least some form of discipline of knowledge comprising hearing, reflection and meditation is available to all people whether one is a householder, a Śūdra, a formal renouncer or in any other social situation. So let us now consider Śaṅkara's position on the qualification for the discipline of knowledge.

#### 5.4 Qualification for the discipline of knowledge

Prescriptions given by the scriptures are always directed toward an addressee. Determination of the addressee is made in terms of the concept of adhikāra which is variously translated as eligibility, competency or qualification. Adhikāra means the qualification(s) required for the right to engage in a performance and to get its result(s). In BSBh 3.4.36, a doubt is raised as to whether widowers, women, Śūdras and others who are not qualified for performance of rites, are nevertheless qualified for knowledge. Commenting on this sūtra and the following one, Śaṅkara answers that various scriptures talk about people who were not qualified for ritual actions but did get knowledge and liberation, such as Raikva (a widower), Vācaknavī (a woman), Gārgī (a woman) and Saṁvarta (an ascetic who roamed about naked). In verse 38 he concludes thus: "And, having a perceptible result, knowledge qualifies for hearing and so on, any one who desires it, by reason of mere absence of prohibition. Therefore nothing stands in the way of the qualification of widowers

and others.”<sup>1</sup> Although the conclusion as such is quite clear, the relationship between the fact that knowledge has a perceptible result (eradication of ignorance and liberation therefrom) and the “mere absence of prohibition” is given in a rather laconic fashion. “Having a perceptible result” seems to define fruition of immediate knowledge of the Self into sublation of ignorance and liberation as wholly independent from fruition of ritual action into indirectly perceived results such as attainment of heaven at the time of death. So, contrary to the opponent’s viewpoint as given in the introduction to sūtra 3.4.36 and which supposes that a combination of ritual action and knowledge is necessary for obtaining the result consisting of liberation, lack of qualification for receiving the result of action does not imply failure to obtain the result of knowledge. Hence, anyone who wishes to obtain the result of knowledge is qualified for the discipline of knowledge and its result, unless prohibition to do so is found in the scriptures, which is not the case as noted by Śaṅkara. Agreeing with the following sūtra (3.4.39), Śaṅkara then states that, in comparison to being outside a stage of life (āśrama) as is the case of widowers and the like, belonging to one gives qualification for the practice of ritual actions and therefore provides a more complete means for the emergence of knowledge. Thus, it goes without saying that householders are also qualified for the discipline of knowledge and that their continued practice of ritualistic duties does not debar them from hearing, reflection and meditation on the Upanisads. In his

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<sup>1</sup> drtārthā ca vidyā pratisedhābhāvamātrenāpyarthhinamadhikaroti śravaṇādiṣu. tasmādvīdhurādīnāmapyadhikāro na virudhyate (BSBh 3.4.38, 810-811).

BSBh 4.1.18, Śaṅkara also states that remote and proximate means can work together to bring about knowledge. According to him, daily obligatory actions (nityakarmans) “become the cause of the attainment of Brahman, subserving proximate causes such as hearing, reflection, faith, devotion; [thus] they contribute to the same result than knowledge of Brahman.”<sup>1</sup> Again nothing in the comment on this sūtra indicates that rites have to be abandoned before proximate means may start to be used.

The same viewpoint is clearly expressed in the commentaries on the Upanisads. Answering a doubt as to whether the statement “I have realised it myself” from Brhadāraṇyaka Upanisad 4.4.8 means that only one person ever obtained knowledge of Brahman, Śaṅkara replies that it is not so, “because Śruti states that it is for the sake of everybody” (sarvārthaśruteḥ).<sup>2</sup> In TUBh 1.12, when responding to an opponent claiming that the rise of immediate Self-knowledge depends on ritual actions and that, as a consequence, only the householder stage of life is allowed by the scriptures, precluding the samnyāsa stage which has none of these rites, Śaṅkara first recalls that the hermit’s (vānaprasthya) and the renouncer’s (samnyāsa) stages of life are said to include other practices which are also conducive to Self-knowledge: “Practices (karmāṇi) such as Agnihotra are not the only ones. There is also celibacy, austerity, truthfulness, control of the mind and of senses, non-injury and similar practices

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<sup>1</sup> nityamagnihotrādi ... brahmādhigamakāraṇatvaṃ pratipadyamānaṃ śravaṇamananaśraddhātātparyādvantaraṅgakāraṇāpeksaṃ brahmavidyayā sahaikakāryaṃ bhavatīti sthitam (BSBh 4.1.18, 853-854).

<sup>2</sup> BUBh 4.4.8, 923.

which are commonly associated with other stages of life, particularly meditation and steadiness of mind ...”<sup>1</sup> Then, answering the objection that liberation comes not from knowledge, but simply from the mechanical wearing away of accumulated results of actions, Śaṅkara concludes the whole discussion as follows:

There is surely no such rule that knowledge arises from the mere elimination of obstructions, and not from the grace of God or the practice of austerity, meditation, etc., because non-injury, celibacy, etc., are subsidiary to knowledge, and hearing, reflection and meditation are its [direct] causes. Hereby is established the existence of other stages of life. And it is also established that everyone is qualified for knowledge, and that supreme bliss is by way of knowledge alone.<sup>2</sup>

Since Śaṅkara's purpose in this argument is to prove that availability of rites is not a necessary and unique prerequisite for arriving at immediate Self-knowledge, and that people in other stages of life who do not perform rites also have access to that knowledge, the conclusion that “everyone is qualified for knowledge” simply aims at establishing that people in the samnyāsa stage of life also have access to it through the proximate means of knowledge. Needless to say, the

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<sup>1</sup> na hyagnihotrādīnyeva karmāṇi brahmacaryam tapah satvavadanam śamo damo 'himsetyevamādīnyapi karmāṇītarāśramaprasiddhāni ... dhyānadhāraṇādilakṣaṇāni ca (TUBh 1.12, 278).

<sup>2</sup> na hi pratibandhaksavādeva vidyotpadyate na tvīśvaraprasādatapodhyānādyanuṣṭhānāditi nivamo 'sti. ahimsābrahmacaryādīnām ca vidyām pratyupakāra katvātsākṣādeva ca kāraṇatvācchravanamanananididhyāsanānām. atah siddhānyāśramāntarāṇi. sarveṣām cādhikāro vidyāyām param ca śreyah kevalāyā vidyāyā eveti siddham (TUBh 1.12, 279).



word “everyone” (sarvesām) also qualifies for these proximate means householders still practicing ritual actions. As a matter of fact, the last two sentences of this passage can really be considered an excellent summary of Śaṅkara’s basic hermeneutical intent, which has been missed by so many interpreters. They include 1- the establishment of a universal qualification for knowledge of the Self; 2- the demonstration of knowledge of the actionless Self (and renunciation of authorship ensuing from it) as the sole cause of liberation even for those who pursue an active life; 3- the validation of the stage of life based on physical renunciation as a possibility for those (Brāhmaṇas) who can devote themselves entirely to the proximate means of knowledge or have already reached liberation.

Although, according to Śaṅkara, whatever his stage of life and caste, anyone is qualified for the proximate means consisting in the discipline of knowledge, some restrictions given by the scriptures bring about the subdivision of the latter into two types, which we will call the discipline of knowledge based on Śruti scriptures - mainly the Upanisads - (śrautaiñānavoga), and that based on Smṛti scriptures such as the epics and the Purāṇas (smārtaiñānavoga). In his BSBh 1.1.1, Śaṅkara states that the study of the ritualistic portions of the Śruti is not necessary for that of the Upanisads, “as it is logically possible for one who has studied Vedānta to undertake a deliberation on Brahman even without deliberation on the religious rites” (7).<sup>1</sup> There is only a slight indication that, according to Śaṅkara, this may also apply to women, who do not have access to the Śruti scriptures

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<sup>1</sup> na dharmajijñāsāyāḥ prāgapadyadhīta vedāntasya brahmajijñāsopapattih (BSBh 1.1.1, 29 and 33).

connected to rites: he gives as an argument in his introduction to BUBh 24, the fact that, as part of the story of the Upaniṣad, “the knowledge of Brahman as a means to immortality has been imparted to Maitreyī, who was without the means to perform rites” (243).<sup>1</sup> However, respecting the traditional prohibition of the study of the Śruti addressed to Śūdras, Śaṅkara holds that the latter are qualified only for a discipline of knowledge based on the epics and Purāṇas “because the Smṛti declares that the four castes are qualified for the study of the Itihāsas and the Purāṇas.”<sup>2</sup> Yet it remains that a Śūdra has no qualification by way of the Vedas.<sup>3</sup>

However, a few passages in Śaṅkara’s works seem to mean that the discipline of knowledge is available only to Brāhmaṇas who have taken to physical renunciation. These statements apparently contradict what we have established so far concerning the universal availability of the discipline of knowledge when including its śrauta or smārta forms. The most categorical statements are found in the Upadeśasāhasrī. This could be decisive in light of the fact that the latter is now widely recognized as an authentic non-commentarial work and would therefore be likely to feature a more personal

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<sup>1</sup> maitreyyai ca karmasādhanaṛahitāyai sādhanatvenāmṛtatvasya brahmāvidyopadeśād (BUBh 24, intro, 757-758).

<sup>2</sup> Thus, when referring to this passage, Mayeda states that “the upper three classes of people, excluding Śūdras, are entitled to the knowledge of Brahman” (Upad, 228), the picture is incomplete and potentially misleading, as that knowledge is indeed available to the Śūdras, but simply through sources other than the revealed texts known as Śruti.

<sup>3</sup> itihāsapurāṇādhigame cāturvarṇyasyādhikārasmaranāt. vedapūrvakastu nāstyadhikārah śūdrāṇāmiti sthitam (BSBh 1.3.38, 281).

approach on Śaṅkara's part. According to this work, knowledge of Brahman "should be repeatedly related to the pupil until it is firmly grasped, if he is dispassionate toward all things non-eternal which are attained by means [other than knowledge]; if he has abandoned the desire for sons, wealth and worlds and reached the state of a paramahansa wandering ascetic ... if he is a Brahmin ..." (Upad 21.2, 211).<sup>1</sup>

As also said in the Upad 1.13.27, "the meaning of the Veda herein determined, which has been briefly related by me, should be imparted to serene wandering ascetics by one of disciplined intellect" (134). Finally, in the following passage, the prescription of renunciation is not explicitly prescribed along with, but rather juxtaposed to, the injunction of going and receiving knowledge from a teacher:<sup>2</sup>

49. Actions result in things being produced, obtained, changed, or purified. There are no results of action other than these. Therefore one should abandon [actions] together with [their] requisites.

50. Concentrating upon Ātman the love which is [now set] on external things ... a seeker after the truth should resort to a teacher (Upad 1.17.49-50, 165).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> sādhanaśādhyaṁ anityāt sarvasmād viraktasya tyaktaputra-vittalokaisaṁnāyapratipannaparamahamsapārivrāṇyāva ... brūyāt punaḥ punaḥ yāvād grahaṇam drdhībhavati (Upad 21.2, 191).

<sup>2</sup> Since Mayeda indicates in a note (Upad 171) that in this passage the prerequisites start with verse 50, we can infer that, in this particular context, he does not interpret physical renunciation stated in verse 49 as part of the qualification for the discipline of knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> utpādyāpyavikāryāni saṁskāryam ca kriyāphalam | nāto 'nyat karmanah kāryam tyajet tasmāt sasāadhanam ||

These are the only passages from the Upad that can be interpreted as making physical renunciation a necessary requirement for entering the discipline of knowledge. As will be further established in the next chapter, it is not sufficiently recognized that these passages are actually the only ones in all of Śaṅkara's works to state this condition. One can even say that, as compared to other descriptions or acknowledgement of the prerequisites by Śaṅkara in his various works, their importance is lessened and their status can be seen as ambiguous rather than contradictory in relation to the commentator's typical viewpoint.

Let us first consider arguments in favour of this contention. Immediately after giving the requirement of being a monk and a Brāhmaṇa in Upad 2.1.2, Śaṅkara substantiates his position by giving an excerpt from Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1.2.12-13. Verse 12 reads: "A Brāhmaṇa should resort to renunciation after examining the worlds acquired through action.... For knowing that [Brahman], he should indeed go, with sacrificial faggots in hand, to a master versed in the Vedas and steadfast in Brahman."<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara specifies in his commentary on this verse that "the Brāhmaṇa is mentioned because he alone is specially qualified for acquisition of knowledge by

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tāpāntattvād anityatvād ātmārthatvāc ca vā bahih |  
saṃhṛtyātmaṇi tām prītim satyārthī gurum āśrayet ||  
 (Upad 1.17.49-50, 139).

<sup>1</sup> parīkṣya lokāṅkarmacitānbrāhmaṇo nirvedamāyāt, ... |  
tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchetsamitpāṇih śrotriyam  
brahmaṇiṣṭham ||  
 (MuBh 1.2.12, 152).

renouncing everything" (MuBh 110).<sup>1</sup> In light of Śaṅkara's various statements on the availability of the discipline of knowledge for all, this comment may simply mean that the kind of discipline of knowledge that is preceded by physical renunciation concerns Brāhmaṇas alone, which does not forbid other people from resorting to the discipline of knowledge without monasticism. Moreover, in the introduction of the KeBh, where the commentator also quotes Mundaka Upanisad 1.2.12, the latter's prescription of physical renunciation appears as one possible application of the more general virtue of detachment (vairāgya) which could then be understood as the really universal prerequisite for the discipline of knowledge. Śaṅkara first introduces the topic in the following manner: "... the desire to know the indwelling Self arises only in that desireless (niṣkāmasya) man of pure mind who is detached (viraktasya) from all connections with transitory, external means and ends by virtue of the rise of a special kind of tendency in this life or in previous ones."<sup>2</sup> He then cites Katha Upanisad 21.1, which talks of a discriminative man who turns his attention toward the Self, following which he quotes Mundaka Upanisad 1.2.12. He thereafter specifies his understanding of the two quotations: "In this way alone, does a man of detachment acquire the competence to hear, meditate on, and realize the

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<sup>1</sup> brāhmaṇasyaiva viśeṣato 'dhikārah sarvatyāgena brahmadevāyāmiti brāhmaṇagrahaṇam (Ibid.).

<sup>2</sup> ... viśuddhasattvasya tu niṣkāmasyaiva bāhyādanityātsādhyaśādhanaśambandhādiha kṛtāpūrvakṛtādvā saṃskāra-viśeṣodbhavādviraktasya pratyayāt maviṣayā jijñāsā pravartate (KeBh intro, 15).

knowledge of the indwelling Self, and not otherwise" (KeBh 34).<sup>1</sup>

After quoting Mundaka Upaniṣad 1.2.12, in the rest of his introduction Śaṅkara seems to waver between the general condition of detachment for everyone and the specific condition of renunciation for the Brāhmanas. But at the end of the introduction, he qualifies the aspirant with detachment alone:

Therefore this desire to know the indwelling Self, in the case of a man who is detached from all seen and unseen results attainable by external means, is being shown by the Vedic text beginning with "Willed by whom" .... It can be imagined that someone, having found no refuge in anything other than the indwelling Self ... properly approached a master who is established in Brahman and asked: (Ibid. 36-37).<sup>2</sup>

As pointed out by Boyd Henry Wilson in his dissertation on Śaṅkara's use of scriptures, when our commentator quotes many passages, "there is seldom any explanation of these multiple citations: the common theme easily discerned from the citations is in itself sufficient explanation" (177-178). Hence, as suggested by the reference to the "detached man" (quoted above) in the presentation and conclusion of this topic in the introduction to his KeBh, the common theme here does not seem to be the prerequisite of physical renunciation as stated in Mundaka Upaniṣad 1.2.12, but rather a

<sup>1</sup> evam viraktasya pratyaḡāt maviṣayam viiññānam śrotuṃ mantuṃ viiññātuṃ ca sāmāthyam upapadyate nānyathā (Ibid. 16)

<sup>2</sup> tasmā dṛṣṭā dṛṣṭebhyo bāhvasādhanaśādhvebhyo viraktasya pratyaḡāt maviṣayā brahma jiiñāseyaṃ kenasi tamityādiśrutvā pradarśyat ... kaścīd gauruṃ brahma niṣṭhaṃ vidhivad upetya pratyaḡāt maviṣayā danyatra śaraṇaṃ apaśyat ... papraccheti kalpyate (Ibid.).

detachment (vairāgya) that does not necessarily entail monastic life. In the BSBh, Śaṅkara also identifies qualification for acquiring Self-knowledge from a teacher by bringing in and interpreting Mundaka Upaniṣad 1.2.12 in terms of detachment or reversal of attention toward the Self, without referring to physical renunciation: “And after finding fault with the lower knowledge, it is shown that one alone is qualified for the higher knowledge who has no attachment [for the former].”<sup>1</sup>

This manner of interpreting the value given by Śaṅkara to the prerequisite of being a Brāhmaṇa and a monk for the discipline of knowledge can be substantiated by his comment on Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5.11.7 where, with faggots in hand, householders rather than samnyāsins are said to duly approach the teacher – himself a king rather than a monk. These householders are identified as Brāhmaṇas by both the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (in 5.11.1) and Śaṅkara, who thereby seems to contradict the requirement of Upad 2.1.2 as much because the king has already gained knowledge without satisfying the criterion of being a Brāhmaṇa, as because the Brāhmaṇas receiving knowledge from him are not formal renouncers. Yet Śaṅkara’s comment on verse 5.2.7 reads:

Therefore, although they were great householders, deeply versed in the Vedas, and Brāhmaṇas, they abandoned their pride of being great householders etc. and, desiring knowledge, they approached the king according to the rules, faggots in hand, without [minding the fact that he was not of the Brāhmaṇa] caste. Other seekers

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<sup>1</sup> ninditvā cāparām vidyām tato viraktasya paravidyādhikāram darśayati (BSBh 1.2.21, 190).

after knowledge should behave in the same manner. And he imparted the knowledge even without initiating them. The meaning of the story is that, in the same way as he imparted knowledge to competent persons, so also should others do.<sup>1</sup>

Barring the possibility of an elementary contradiction, how could the author of Upad 21.2 write this if the application of the prerequisite of being a Brāhmaṇa and a monk for the discipline of knowledge were not in some way restricted in his eyes?

There is even evidence from the Upad itself that the requirement of physical renunciation for entry into the discipline of knowledge is not intended as universal. Immediately after commenting upon the citation from Mundaka Upaniṣad 1.212-13, Śaṅkara gives a passage from Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.11.6 to support the idea that knowledge should be obtained through a teacher. This section of the latter Upaniṣad is in fact a dialogue between Aruṇa and his son, and the verse preceding the one quoted by Śaṅkara reads: "Of such a Brahman, a father should speak to his eldest son or to a competent pupil,"<sup>2</sup> which Śaṅkara glosses without any reservation concerning the fact that the two men are not monks. Moreover, in the second chapter of the prose part of the Upad, Śaṅkara introduces a man of the brahmacarya (student) stage of life in the role of a disciple:

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<sup>1</sup> yata evam mahāśālā mahāśrotriya brāhmaṇāḥ santā mahāśālātvādvābhimānam hitvā samidbhārahastā jātito hīnam rājānam vidyārthino vinayenopajagmuḥ. tathānyairvidyopāditsubhirbhāvitavyam. tebhyaścādādvidyā manupanīyaivopanayana-makrtvāiva tāt. yathā yogyebhyo vidyāmadāt tathānyenāpi vidyā dātavyetyākhyaikārthah (CUBh 5.11.7, 495).

<sup>2</sup> idam vāva tajiyeṣṭāya putrāya pitā brahma prabrūyāt prapāyāya vānte vāsine (CUBh 3.11.5, 420).



“A certain student, who was tired of transmigratory existence characterized by birth and death and was seeking after final release, approached in the prescribed manner a knower of Brahman who was established in Brahman and sitting at ease ...” (Upad 22.45, 234)<sup>1</sup> It must also be noticed that the Upad contains another elaborate description of the requirements for the discipline of knowledge that does not mention physical renunciation: “This [highest means of purification] should be always taught to the seeker after final release whose mind has been calmed, whose senses have been controlled, whose faults have been abandoned, who is acting as prescribed [in the scriptures], who is endowed with virtues, and who is always obedient [to his teacher]” (Upad 1.16.72, 156).<sup>2</sup>

How is one to explain these conflicting statements concerning the requirements for the discipline of knowledge? Are they simply self-contradictions on Śaṅkara’s part or can they be understood consistently on the basis of his own exegetical approach? One must first note that, when commenting on the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā, Śaṅkara does not express any reservation concerning the fact that on many occasions these texts imply the possibility of commencing the discipline of knowledge without physical renunciation. In fact, the scriptures’ statements towards this are often so evident and treated so much so by Śaṅkara, that one can

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<sup>1</sup> sukham āśīnam brāhmaṇam brahmaṇiṣṭham kaścīd brahmacārī janmamarāṇalakṣaṇāt saṃsārān nirvinno mumukṣur vidhivad upasannah ... (Upad 22.45, 203)

<sup>2</sup> praśāntacittāya jitendriyāya ca prahīnadosāya yathoktakāriṇe | guṇānvitāyānugatāya sarvadā pradeyam etat satatam mumukṣave || (Upad 1.16.72, 129).

hardly argue on any reasonable ground that their commentator just overlooked them whenever he could (especially in the Upad), without noticing that he was contradicting his own tacit agreement with the obvious meaning of the scriptures. As an example, we can even start with a passage from the same Mundaka Upanisad which says in verse 1.1.3: “Śaunaka, a great householder, having approached Āṅgiras according to the rules, asked ...”<sup>1</sup> First, according to Śaṅkara’s comment on BSBh 1.3.35, the Śaunaka family belongs to the caste of Ksatriyas. Besides, as stated by the comment on the preceding verse of the Mundaka Upanisad (143), Āṅgiras was part of a line of rsis (hence, a Brāhmaṇa), and received the knowledge from Bharadvāja, as “either his son or disciple” (svaśiṣyāya putrāya vā), meaning that Bharadvāja could have been a complete Self-knower while being a father, that is, without having become a monk even though he was a Brāhmaṇa. Even when facing this situation, Śaṅkara glosses verse 1.1.3 without any reservation: “Śaunaka, the son of Śunaka, a great householder, having approached, having gone to, the teacher Āṅgiras, disciple of Bharadvāja, duly, in accordance with the scriptures, asked, enquired ...”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the commentator does not seem to see any contradiction between this episode exemplifying an appropriate entry into the discipline of knowledge and the prerequisite of being both a Brāhmaṇa and a monk for the same purpose. This is in fact Śaṅkara’s consistent approach with respect to the many similar cases

<sup>1</sup> śaunako ha vai mahāśālo ’ṅgirasam vidhivadupasannah prapaccha | (MuBh 1.1.3, 143).

<sup>2</sup> śaunakah śunakasyāpatyam mahāśālo mahāgrhasthah āṅgirasam bhāradvājaśiṣyamācāryam vidhivadyathā śāstramityetat. upasannah upagataḥ saṁ prapaccha prstāvān (Ibid.).

found in the texts he commented upon. As another example, one could cite his comment while introducing the third part of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad where the ṛṣi Bhr̥gu receives knowledge from his father Varuṇa: "The story 'Bhr̥ghu, the well-known son of Varuṇa...' is meant to praise knowledge, as it shows that it was imparted to a son by a father."<sup>1</sup> Thus, in Śaṅkara's mind, far from introducing a deviation with respect to the prerequisite of formal renunciation, this episode of entry into the discipline of knowledge without the latter glorifies knowledge as a kind of universal value. Similarly, Śaṅkara has no problem with the Brāhmaṇa Śvetaketu receiving instruction from his father Āruṇi in chapter 6 of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, as part of a long and continuing tradition of enlightened householders.<sup>2</sup> A similar lineage of knowledge among householders listed in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 6.5.1-3 is also genuinely recognized by Śaṅkara in his commentary on the same. When, in Chāndogya Upaniṣad 4.4.1-5, it is as a brahmacārin that Satyakāma Jābāla is initiated into the Upaniṣadic knowledge by Haridrumata Gautama, our commentator doesn't show any reservations either; equally so when, pictured later on as enlightened (4.9.2-3) and married (4.10.2), Satyakāma Jābāla also accepts brahmacārins (4.10.1). Where even kings are seen teaching the knowledge of Brahman, Śaṅkara maintains the same kind of undefensive comment, namely in CUBh 5.11-24, where king Aśvapati shares his wisdom with three householders, in BUBh 21 where Ajātaśatru, king of Vārāṇasī, does the same with the Brāhmaṇa

<sup>1</sup> ākḥhyāyikā vidyāstutaye, priyāya putrāya pitrokteti bhr̥gurvai vāruṇiḥ (TUBh 3.1.1, 313).

<sup>2</sup> See CUBh 6.4.5.

Gārgya Dṛptabālāki, as well as in BUBh 6.2 and CUBh 5.3-10 where Pravāhaṇa, king of Pañcāla, instructs Śvetaketu and his father Gautama, as part of “a line of Ksatriya teachers” (ksatriyaparamparavā).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Śaṅkara is not seen trying to justify any abnormality when king Janaka is enlightened by Yājñavalkya in BUBh 3.1 and 4.1-4, even if, according to the commentator, the latter section contains (in 4.4.22) the most important Upaniṣadic injunction of physical renunciation;<sup>2</sup> the same attitude is found in CUBh 4.1-2 when the Brāhmaṇa and widower Raikva teaches king Jānaśruti Pautrāyaṇa. When in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.6 and 3.8, Yājñavalkya expounds his teaching to Gārgī and when, even before physically giving up the practice of rites, he reveals the knowledge of Brahman to his wife Maitreyī (2.4 and 4.5), Śaṅkara does not try to diminish the liberal significance of these episodes. Finally, it is to a woman, his wife Maitreyī, that in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.5.6, Yājñavalkya states the very nature of the discipline of knowledge, namely, that the Self “should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon,” a dialogue which again Śaṅkara does not try to reduce in scope or to justify as an exception in relation to a supposedly universal prerequisite of formal renunciation for entrance in the discipline of knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> This is specified by Śaṅkara in his BUBh 6.28 (988).

<sup>2</sup> “If, however, renunciation is supposed to be enjoined anywhere, it should be primarily here, it is not possible anywhere else” (BUBh 4.4.22, 528). yadi punaḥ kvacidvidhiḥ parikalpyeta pārivrājyasya sa ihaiva mukhyo nānyatra sambhavati (935).

Thus, the Upaniṣads commented upon by Śaṅkara feature a striking liberality concerning access to the discipline of knowledge. This brief survey already brings forward strong evidence that, according to these scriptures, if physical renunciation is to play a role, it is nothing more than an optional auxiliary to knowledge of the Self. My contention is that Śaṅkara's authentic commentarial works explicitly agree with this position, but that the Upad is ambiguous rather than contradictory in relation to the other works, simply because its own text features opposite requirements: while stating that being a Brāhmaṇa and a monk is necessary for access to the discipline of knowledge, it tells on the other hand the story of a brahmacārin receiving knowledge from an enlightened teacher.

Accordingly, one exegetical rule would be that if physical renunciation is presented as a necessary condition, it is because the addressee is a Brāhmaṇa. We saw that, according to Śaṅkara, physical renunciation is an auxiliary (āṅga) for knowledge of the Self, yet addressed to Brāhmaṇas alone.<sup>1</sup> Considering, as seen in the many passages just referred to, that the commentator also endorses the Upaniṣads' liberality in terms of access to knowledge, the requirement of being a Brāhmaṇa and a monk stated in the Upad most probably means that if one is a Brāhmaṇa, one has to become a monk in order to have access to the discipline of knowledge, and not that one has to be a Brāhmaṇa and a monk. As a consequence, these two requirements are valid only for Brāhmaṇas and do not preclude

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<sup>1</sup> As also noticed by Mayeda (Upad, 228), throughout his works, Śaṅkara consistently maintains his position that the addressee of the injunction of physical renunciation is always and only a Brāhmaṇa.

any person from the discipline of knowledge, which would be confirmed in the Upad itself when a brahmacārin is said to be instructed on knowledge of the Self.

This raises the following question: is it not contradictory to make physical renunciation a necessary requirement for access to the discipline of knowledge in the case of Brāhmaṇas, and to acknowledge on the other hand that some Brāhmaṇas go through that discipline and even get its result, namely liberation, without the said physical renunciation? To understand how this may not be contradictory from Śaṅkara's viewpoint, we have to approach the issue from his own hermeneutical perspective. The major presupposition to recall here is that, according to him, being Śruti and thus divine in origin, the Upaniṣads are by nature free from mistakes and contradictions. Even when they do prescribe physical renunciation for Brāhmaṇas as an auxiliary for the discipline of knowledge, and paradoxically do account for the enlightenment of Brāhmaṇas who did not take to that type of renunciation, one should not impute contradiction to these scriptures, but should rather try to resolve the apparent conflict with the use of proper exegetical rules as given in Pūrva- and Uttaramīmāṃsā. Although Śaṅkara never directly addressed the question as to why the Upaniṣads prescribe physical renunciation as an auxiliary for the aspirant Brāhmaṇa, and yet mention many cases where this has obviously not been followed, we may make use of his explanation of the fact that people are reported to reach knowledge and liberation without ritual actions which are prescribed at least as a remote auxiliary (bahirāṅga) for entry into the discipline of knowledge. According to Śaṅkara's interpretation of Brahmasūtra

3.4.36-37, the claim that people are qualified for knowledge of the Self even when deprived of the auxiliary requirement consisting of ritual actions, is explained by the fact that Śruti and Smṛti texts give indicatory marks (liṅga) suggesting that such people, among them the widower Raikva,<sup>1</sup> and ladies such as Gārgī, did attain immediate knowledge of the Self. Applying the same exegetical rule to the auxiliary means consisting of physical renunciation, we may also infer from indicatory marks found in the many passages referred to above, that even without physical renunciation, Brāhmaṇas are said by the scriptures to reach mediate as well as immediate knowledge without fulfilling the auxiliary condition of physical renunciation. Hence, if anything, physical renunciation has to be considered as optional rather than necessary even for the Brāhmaṇas. Then, according to Śaṅkara, in what sense is this not contradicting the injunction of physical renunciation for Brāhmaṇas? Again, our commentator has not dealt with this issue. But a like situation is highlighted by Śaṅkara's interpretation of the relationship between the injunction of ritual actions and the availability of knowledge without these rites. According to his understanding of Brahmasūtra 3.4.36, even when knowledge is available without ritual actions, it is preferable (ivyāyas) to perform these rites. It can be said in a similar fashion that even when knowledge is available for Brāhmaṇas without physical renunciation, it is preferable for these Brāhmaṇas to physically renounce. This exegetical principle explains quite simply why

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<sup>1</sup> Being deprived of the assistance of his wife during the sacrifices, the householder who has become widower cannot perform them anymore.

Śaṅkara can on the one hand very naturally accept that Brāhmaṇas are qualified for the discipline of knowledge even without entering monastic life, and, on the other hand, strongly prescribe monasticism for them. We can also hold on this basis that he is here quite faithful to the spirit of the Upanisads themselves. Thus, the apparent contradiction found in the Upad between the Brāhmaṇa-monk requirement and the dialogue between a teacher and a brahmācārī can be resolved on the background of Bādarāyaṇa's and Śaṅkara's way of interpreting these types of conflicting statements.

Based on the fact that the Upad is non-commentarial, Mayeda opines that this work is more likely to represent the free expression of Śaṅkara's real personal position on renunciation:

If the Upad were a commentary, like the Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, on some text or other, Śaṅkara might have been compelled to recommend karman though it was against his will. However, the Upad is not a commentary on any text. Therefore, it is certainly an expression of his own view that Śaṅkara insists on a complete renunciation of karman... (1964-66, 70)

According to Mayeda's interpretation of the requirement of being a Brāhmaṇa and a monk as stated in the Upad, "it should be kept in mind in order to understand Śaṅkara's doctrine that he accepts as qualified for his teaching a Brahmin who is in the state of paramahansa wandering ascetic" (Upad, 228). The scholar ends up by stating that "Śaṅkara's teachings were meant only for selected samnyāsins..." (1989, 199). But a major consequence of our understanding of Śaṅkara's position is that such a conclusion is not consistent enough, even with respect to the Upad, as Mayeda himself



suggests when, noticing that a brahmacārin is said to be taught in verse 2.2.45, he reflects that “the requirement of being a paramahamsaparivrāṇika might not be very strict” (Upad, 97). Thus, to determine Śaṅkara’s position on the matter, one must take all of his works into consideration. Having done this, the conclusion is that, according to him, the śrauta or smārta disciplines of knowledge are universally available without physical renunciation, while the latter is prescribed as an optional, yet emphasized, auxiliary only for the Brāhmanas’ śrauta discipline of knowledge.

But the question remains as to why Śaṅkara didn’t state generously this universal availability in the Upad if he really meant it? At least two answers could be proposed here. The work may be inauthentic or at least partly so. But according to Mayeda’s research on this (1965), there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. So this answer remains unsatisfactory. It may also be proposed that the Upad was addressed only or at least mainly to Brāhmanas. With respect to this, Mayeda gives the following account of the contemporary situation Śaṅkara had to deal with:

Śaṅkara would not teach his doctrine to city dwellers. In the cities the power of Buddhism was still strong, though already declining, and Jainism prevailed among the merchants and manufacturers. Popular Hinduism occupied the minds of ordinary people while city dwellers pursued ease and pleasure. There were also hedonists in cities, and it was difficult for Śaṅkara to communicate Vedānta philosophy to these people. Consequently he propagated his teachings chiefly among samnyāsins, who had

renounced the world, and intellectuals in the villages, and he gradually won the respect of Brahmins and feudal lords (Upad, 5). As is often the case in ancient Indian history, it is very difficult to assess such descriptions. In light of what we have established so far I would put it this way: although he understood his teaching to be available to all castes, for socio-historical and/or strategical reasons, in practice, Śaṅkara may have taught mainly to Brāhmanas who were probably the most qualified to understand the subtle argumentation of his revival, the most concerned about it, and the most competent to spread it throughout society once converted to his doctrine.<sup>1</sup> This could explain why he sometimes wrote as if his teaching and that of the Upanisads were addressed only to Brāhmanas. But this does not mean that no one else had access to that knowledge. So, in light of our reinterpretation, physical renunciation as a necessary requirement is far from being typical of Śaṅkara, because it does not reflect his usual liberal position expressed in the universal availability of knowledge and in the emphasis on renunciation of authorship.

It has thus been demonstrated that, in Śaṅkara's eyes, karmayoga equips the aspirant with a very powerful means of inner renunciation, a meditative procedure which, while bringing the mind from gross to subtlest levels of phenomenal experience, purifies it in such a way as to allow it to easily open to the reality of the non-dual Self through the scriptures, the enlightened teacher and, if necessary,

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<sup>1</sup> A similar situation is found in our century: preferring to spread his message mainly in English, the language of a very small fraction of his country, Vivekananda was able to reach a vast national and international audience.

repeated hearing from the teacher (śravaṇa), reflection (manana) and meditation (nididhyāsa) as part of the discipline of knowledge, whether based on Śruti or Smṛti texts. In this context, meditation or nididhyāsa appears as the culmination of an inner process of renunciation with which the aspirant should already have become familiar through other forms of meditation practiced in karmayoga. Because departure from active social life is not mandatory for starting with the discipline of knowledge, the latter, that is, jñānayoga or mediate jñānanisthā, can even be seen as part of karmayoga. Even if one argued that the words jñānayoga and mediate jñānanisthā are always exclusively associated with monasticism by Śaṅkara, it would still be proper to say that the part-time practice of śravaṇa, manana and nididhyāsa as such is declared by him to be available to the seeker after liberation pursuing an active social life.

### 5.5- Karmayoga as a means to immediate Self-knowledge

These clarifications shed completely new light on numerous passages where Śaṅkara literally states that karmayoga can lead to direct knowledge of the Self. First, it is fair to conclude from our study of the basic sequence leading to liberation, that because sarvakarmasamnyāsa is not to be understood as physical renunciation, karmayoga as comprising both ritual actions and the discipline of knowledge represents a self-sufficient means for the rise of knowledge in Śaṅkara's economy of liberation. Second, it is also obvious that because Śaṅkara wholeheartedly defends physical

renunciation after attainment of enlightenment, he also recognizes that the Self-knower did acquire enlightenment before the said physical renunciation, that is, through a discipline where ritual actions and the discipline of knowledge must have been combined. To hold here that only full-time absorption in the discipline of knowledge can yield Self-knowledge and liberation would be baseless, because it would contradict the fact that many are said to physically renounce active social life only after enlightenment, and that, as an obvious consequence, a combination of part-time practice of the discipline of knowledge along with rituals can lead the householder to direct Self-knowledge before his physical renunciation. Third, in various places, Śāṅkara writes for all to read that karmayoga leads to immediate Self-knowledge through purification of the mind. Thus, he says in the BSBh 3.4.34: "And such texts as 'He who has to his credit these eighty-four sanctifications,' which allude to the fact of these Vedic rites being well-known as sanctifying, occur in the Smṛtis with the idea of showing that knowledge arises in one who is sanctified by them" (792).<sup>1</sup> Stating that the very vision of the rsis is the result of karmayoga, the context of TUBh 1.10 quite clearly specifies the immediate nature of the Self-knowledge attained through this discipline: "It is obvious that the visions of the rsis concerning the Self etc., are for one who is engaged in the daily obligatory duties enjoined

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<sup>1</sup>lyasyaite 'stācatvārimśatsamkārā ityādvā ca saṃskāratvaprasiddhirvaidikeṣu karmasu tat saṃskrtasya vidyotpattimabhipretya smṛtau bhavati (BSBh 3.4.34, 809).

in the Śruti and the Smṛti, who is without selfish desires, and who seeks after the knowledge of the supreme Brahman.”<sup>1</sup> In a similar spirit, TUBh 1.4.3 reads: “karman is meant to eliminate accumulated sins, following which knowledge manifests.”<sup>2</sup> It is further said in TUBh 1.12: “Yet it was said that, in terms of the attainment of one's Self, the daily obligatory actions become the cause of knowledge by way of removing the hindrance constituted by accumulated sins done in the past.”<sup>3</sup> Besides, karmayoga does not lead to direct Self-knowledge only when the aspirant is already very pure and practically on the verge of liberation. This is indicated by the following passage where, in an earlier stage of his life, the enlightened man is said to have been attached to desires in the same way as other people:

Then, for the man who, [after] engaging in actions out of ignorance or out of defects such as desire, got his mind purified by sacrifices, gifts, or austerity, there arises the knowledge of the supreme truth that all this is simply the One, the Brahman, the non-doer; and while action and the motive for action have disappeared, what may be seen as being involved in action for the welfare of the world, as assiduously as he did previously, is no action...”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> evam śrautas mārteṣu nityeṣu karmasu yuktasya niskāmasya param brahma vividiṣorārsāṇi darśanāṇi prādurbhavantyāt mādiviṣavāṇīti (TUBh 1.10.1, 272-273).

<sup>2</sup> karma copāttaduritaksavārtham. tatksaye hi vidvā prakāśate (TUBh 1.4.3, 235).

<sup>3</sup> svāt malābhe tu pūrvopacitaduritapratibandhāpanavadvārena vidvāhetutvam pratipadyante karmāṇi nityānīti (TUBh 1.12.1, 278).

<sup>4</sup> yasya tvaiñānādrāgādidoṣato vā karmaṇi pravṛttasya yajñena dānena tapasā vā viśuddhasattvasya iñānamutpannam paramārthatattvavisavamekamevedam sarvam brahmākārtr ceti.

Introducing BGBh 4.42, Śaṅkara also grants to karmayoga the power to give direct Self-knowledge through purification: "...the man who, by virtue of the practice of karmayoga, has his doubts cut asunder by knowledge which arises from the elimination of impurities, is not bound by actions because they have indeed been consumed in the fire of knowledge ..." <sup>1</sup>

Many interpreters would argue that because Śaṅkara prescribes physical renunciation as a requirement for the discipline of knowledge at least a few times in his works, it is to be always understood at least as an implicit additional step even when the author does not mention it. According to this viewpoint, the purity of mind referred to in excerpts such as the above merely allows for the rise of knowledge consisting of the discrimination between the real and the unreal (the well-known prerequisite for entry into the discipline of knowledge), and leaves unstated the fact that, after attaining this intellectual distinction, one has to go through two other mandatory steps before direct Self-knowledge: first, enter the samnyāsāśrama by physically renouncing active social life, second, commence and pursue the discipline of knowledge. Or, it might be suggested that if the purity apparently said to be produced by karmayoga is already enough for direct Self-knowledge, the whole sequence starting from discrimination between the real and the

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tasya karmani karmaprayojane ca nivṛtte 'pi lokasamgrahārtham  
yatnapūrvam yathā pravṛttistathaiva karmani pravṛttasya  
yatpravṛttirūpam drśyate na tat karma... (BGBh 211, 44)

<sup>1</sup> ... karmayogānusthānādaśuddhiksayahetukajñānasamcchinna-  
samśayo na nibadhyate karmabhirjñānāgnidagdha karmatvādeva...  
(BGBh 4.42, 239)

unreal, and proceeding through physical abandonment, and so forth, must have been left unstated by Śaṅkara between the stage of karmayoga and the attainment of the said purity. It is, however, clearly not possible to maintain this position, for instance, in the following case which explains Janaka's enlightenment through the same purifying power of karmayoga. It is well-known that Janaka never took recourse to physical renunciation. So, Śaṅkara states here that in the context of karmayoga, that is, without physically abandoning ritual actions, "by means of actions dedicated to Īśvara, Janaka and others attained perfection, perfection meaning here either purity of mind or the emergence of true knowledge ..." <sup>1</sup> Similarly, while BGBh 3.19 reads: "For, since, performing action without attachment, for the sake of Īśvara, man attains the supreme, liberation, by means of purity of mind," <sup>2</sup> the next verse uses the same terms to describe the life of Self-knowers such as king Janaka before their enlightenment (which obviously occurred without physical renunciation and full-time involvement in the discipline of knowledge): "If such people as Janaka had not attained right insight, then the verse should be explained as follows: they tried to attain perfection by steps, through action which is the means of attaining

<sup>1</sup> Īśvarasamarpitena karmanā sādhanabhūtena samsiddhiṃ sattva-suddhiṃ jñānotpattilakṣaṇam vā samsiddhimāsthitā janakādaya... (BGBh 2.11, 45)

<sup>2</sup> asaṅkto hi ya smāt samācarannīśvarārtham karma kurvan mokṣamāpnoti puruṣaḥ sattvaśuddhidvāreṇetyarthah (BGBh 3.19, 158).

purity of mind.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, Śaṅkara establishes an unbroken continuity between karmayoga, its purifying power, and the rise of direct Self-knowledge.

It will now be worth examining some examples of misinterpretation on the role of karmayoga with respect to Self-knowledge, in the work of two of his most famous commentators, Ānanda Giri and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. Let us first give the passage from Śaṅkara and interpret it by using the immediate context. The BGBh 5.5 says:

The meaning is as follows. The state, called liberation, which is reached by the sāmkhya, by those renouncers who are steadfast in knowledge, is also reached by the yogins. The yogins are those who perform their duties, as a means for the attainment of knowledge, dedicating them to Īśvara, without aiming at results for themselves. By them also is that state reached, through the attainment of renunciation based on true knowledge ...<sup>2</sup>

In his introduction to the following verse, Śaṅkara specifies Kṛṣṇa's statement as follows: “the saṁnyāsa which is based on knowledge is considered by Me as sāmkhya; and the latter is the true yoga.”<sup>3</sup> He then adds that if in verse 5.6 renunciation is used as a synonym of

<sup>1</sup> athāprāptasamyagdarśanā janakādayastadā karmanā sattvaśuddhi-sādhanaabhūtena kramena samsiddhimāsthitā iti vyākhyeyah ślokaḥ (BGBh 3.20, 259).

<sup>2</sup> yatsāmkhyaairiñānanisthair samnyāsibhiḥ prāpyate sthānam mokṣākhyaṁ tadyogairapi jñānaprāptiyupāyatvenēśvare samarpya karmānyātmanah phalamanabhisamdhāyānutisthanti ye te yoginastairapi paramārthajñānasamnyāsaprāptidvāreṇa gamyate ityabhiprāyah... (BGBh 5.5, 250)

<sup>3</sup> jñānāpekṣastu saṁnyāsaḥ sāmkhyaṁ iti mayābhipretah. paramārthayogaśca sa eva (BGBh 5.6, 251).



Brahman, it is as the “true one” (pāramārthikah)<sup>1</sup> and “because it is characterized by steadfastness in the supreme knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

“Brahman,” he then says, “is the true samnyāsa characterized by steadfastness in the supreme Self.”<sup>3</sup> If we start with the items of verse 6 and then add those of verse 5, the multi-termed equation possesses sound internal consistency:

(verse 6): true samnyāsa = Brahman = steadfastness in the supreme knowledge = steadfastness in the supreme Self =

(verse 5): samnyāsa based on knowledge = sāmkhya = true yoga.

The purport is quite clear: all these expressions imply immediate knowledge of the Self.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, if at the beginning of the comment on verse 5, the sāmkhyas are referred to as “those renouncers who are steadfast in

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> paramāt maiñānanisthālakṣaṇatvāt (BGBh 5.6, 252).

<sup>3</sup> brahma paramārthasamnyāsam paramāt maiñānanisthālakṣaṇam (Ibid.)

<sup>4</sup> In a spirit that is quite similar to BGBh 5.5-7, the commentary on verse 249 of the same work uses sāmkhyabuddhi to refer to immediate knowledge of the Self, and [karma]yogabuddhi to mean the way of attaining the latter: “Wherefore, in the wisdom (buddhi) of yoga, or better, in its ripening into the wisdom of sāmkhya, seek refuge, search for an asylum which opens freedom from fear.” yata evam yogaviśayāyām buddhau tatparipākaiāyām vā sāmkhyabuddhau śaraṇamāśrayamabhayaaprāptikāraṇamanviccha prārthayaśva (109). Further evidence in support of this interpretation is found in BGBh 251 wherein sāmkhyabuddhi is said to be characterized by “supreme insight” (paramārthadarśana) and to be typical of the enlightened man of verse 246. In BGBh 239, sāmkhyabuddhi is also said to be that “knowledge which is the immediate cause of the cessation of the defect which is the cause of transmigratory existence [characterised by] grief, delusion and so forth.” sāmkhye ... buddhirjñānam sāksātchokamohādisamsāra hetudoṣanivṛttikāraṇam (96-97).

knowledge” and who attain liberation without any other condition, in agreement with the above contextual equation, they must already be renouncers of authorship and already liberated-in-this-life, and not formal renouncers still on the way to direct knowledge of the Self. It is from this perspective that Śāṅkara then contrasts with them, the yogins, that is, the unenlightened people who still need “the attainment of renunciation [of authorship] based on true knowledge” in order to be liberated. Thus Śāṅkara is not saying here that at some point the karmayogin will reach a mediate knowledge of the Self that will make him adopt physical renunciation as a means to liberation, but rather that karmayoga itself will lead to immediate Self-knowledge and to renunciation of authorship as its logical consequence. This is confirmed by the remaining part of the comment on verse 5.6 and by the one that follows. First, Śāṅkara confirms that the “sage equipped with yoga” mentioned by verse 5.6 “soon reaches Brahman” (brahma nacireṇādhigacchati).<sup>1</sup> Commenting on verse 5.7, he then states that “the one equipped with yoga ... who has become the Self in all beings, ... who stays in such a state, though performing

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<sup>1</sup> BGBh 5.6, 252.

action for the welfare of the world, is not tainted, not bound <sup>1</sup> by actions.” <sup>2</sup> If the true samnyāsa equated with Brahman which has just been described as the state of liberation-in-this-life can be reached by the karmayogin without having to physically renounce ritual actions (i.e. while continuing to perform them for the welfare of the world), then, since this case is not presented as an exception to a rule, it follows that the renunciation referred to in the commentary on verse 5.5 is not physical abandonment of ritual actions as a condition for entering the discipline of knowledge, but rather, renunciation of authorship as a result of an already arisen immediate knowledge of the Self.

However, Ānanda Giri and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī take the same reference to renunciation as a prescription of physical abandonment of rites in order to commence the discipline of knowledge. As presented by Ānanda Giri, in the first passage from

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<sup>1</sup> A very similar description is found in the introduction to verse 4.42, which closes chapter 4 and is thus separated from 5.5 by only four verses: “Because he who, by practicing karmayoga, gets his impurities destroyed and thereby obtains the knowledge that cuts his doubts to pieces, ‘is not bound by actions,’ his actions having been burnt by the fire of knowledge ...” yasmāt karmayogānuṣṭhānādaśuddhikṣaya-hetukaiñānasamcchinnaśaśvo na nibadhyate karmabhirjñānāgnidagdhakarmatvādeva ... (239) BGBh 9.28 addresses similar words to Arjuna: “... having your self, your mind, equipped with yoga and renunciation, liberated from the bonds of action while yet living, and when this body will fall, you will come to, arrive at, Me.” ... yukta ātmāntahkaranam vasya tava sa tvam samnyāsavogayuktāt mā san vimuktaḥ karmabandhanairjīvanneva patite cāsmiñśarire māmupaiśyasyāgamisyasi (436-437).

<sup>2</sup> ... yogena yuktaḥ ... sa sarvabhūtāt mabhūtāt mā ... sa tatraivam vartamāno lokasamgrahāya karma kurvannapi na lipyate. na karmabhirbadhyata ithyarthah (BGBh 5.7, 253-254).

BGBh 5.5 quoted above, the knowledge on which renunciation is based as a condition for reaching liberation in the case of the karmayogins is only mediate, as it is said to be simply “pravojaka,” that is, “prompting [to physical renunciation].” In his Śāstraprakāśikāṭikā on Sureśvara’s BUBh Vārtika, Ānanda Giri contrasts “direct realisation of Reality” (tattvasākṣātkarana) with “knowledge prompting [to renunciation and the discipline of knowledge]” (pravojakaiñāna).<sup>1</sup> He also uses the latter term when commenting on BGBh 5.5: “...by means of renunciation preceded by true knowledge, by prompting knowledge, even karmins reach that state...”<sup>2</sup> Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is even more explicit: “Even yogins reach that state in this life through purity of mind, through steadfastness in knowledge connected with hearing etc. preceded by renunciation, or through the same as carried on in a future life.”<sup>3</sup> In contrast with these two convergent interpretations, our contextualisation has shown that Śaṅkara’s intention is not to prescribe physical renunciation as a necessary step after karmayoga, but to emphasize that liberation comes through a knowledge of the actionless Self which is characterized by the inner renunciation of authorship, even though the said knowledge may be reached, as a result of purity of mind, through practices pertaining to the domain of action.

<sup>1</sup> Sureśvara 1894, 35.104, 1256.

<sup>2</sup> ... pravojakaiñānam paramārthaiñānam tatpūrvakasamnyāsa-dvāreṇa karmabhirapi tadeva sthānam prāptam... (BGBh 5.5, 250)

<sup>3</sup> tairvogibhirapi sattvasuddhyā samnyāsapūrvakaśravaṇādi-puraḥsarayā jñānanisthayā vartamāne bhaviṣyati vā janmani sampatsyamāṇayā tatsthānam gamyate (Ibid.)

We saw in the third chapter that, according to Śaṅkara's interpretation of Gītā 3.3, the karmayoga and jñānayoga prescribed respectively to yogins and sāmkhyas refer first of all to the state of ignorance for the former and to enlightenment for the latter. The same division is conveyed by the categories yogabuddhi (wisdom of yoga) and sāmkhyabuddhi (wisdom of sāmkhya). Using these terms, Śaṅkara also clearly states that karmayoga leads to direct Self-knowledge. In BGBh 211, sāmkhyabuddhi and yogabuddhi are described thus:<sup>1</sup>

... sāmkhyabuddhi is the conviction - arising from the investigation of the meaning of the [said] section - that because the Self is devoid of the six modifications such as birth, it is no doer; and those knowers to whom it pertains are the sāmkhyas. Before the dawn of this conviction is yoga, defined as the performance of actions as a means of liberation, based on the notion that the self is distinct from the body and that it is a doer and enjoyer, [as well as] accompanied by discrimination between dharma and adharma. This wisdom is yogabuddhi; and the performers of action to whom it pertains are the yogins.<sup>2</sup>

Let us specify the meaning of yogabuddhi or "wisdom of yoga." When understood in this context, the word yoga is defined four times in the

<sup>1</sup> See also BGBh 3, intro, for a similar definition.

<sup>2</sup> ... buddhirātmano janmādisadvikriyābhāvādakartātmeti prakaraṇārthanirūpanādyā jāyate sā sāmkhyabuddhiḥ. sā yeṣāṃ jñānināmucitā bhavati te sāmkhyāḥ. etasyā buddherianmanah prāgātmano dehādivyatiriktatvakartṛtvabhoktṛtvādvapekṣo dharmādharmavivekapūrvako moksasāadhanānusthānanirūpana-lakṣaṇo yogah. tadviśayā buddhiryogabuddhiḥ. sā yeṣāṃ karmināmucitā bhavati te yogināḥ (BGBh 211, 42).

BGBh as including karmayoga (or simply karman) and evenness of mind as expressed by the words samādhivoga, samabuddhitva or samatvabuddhi. Samādhivoga seems to suggest the practice of meditation. But, unfortunately, the compound is used only twice in the BGBh (2.39 and 4.38) - as part of the definition of the present notion of yoga - and the author merely mentions it without comment. In the Gītā and in Śaṅkara's commentaries, expressions based on the word samatva (equanimity, evenness, balance) are used to describe various levels of equanimity. First, they may refer, from a broad perspective, to a quality that is worth developing by the seeker after liberation;<sup>1</sup> second, they can be understood as a result of meditation and as a major prerequisite for immediate knowledge of the Self;<sup>2</sup> finally, they will appear as a characteristic of the state of liberation-in-this-life.<sup>3</sup> Hence, it is probably fair to say that, as part of the discipline of action, samabuddhitva and samatvabuddhi may refer to a general quality to be developed, to a result of meditation or to a major prerequisite for direct knowledge of the Self; on the other hand, because of the well-known meaning of samādhī as absorption in meditation, samādhivoga can hardly refer to anything else than the practice of meditation

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance BGBh 2.48, 2.49, 10.5, 13.9, 18.57.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance, BGBh 5.29, MuBh 3.1.2 and BUBh 4.4.23.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance BGBh 2.51, 5 intro, 6.9, 6.29, 7.18, 7.29-30, 12.4, 12.14, 15.11.

which then also appears as being included in the “wisdom of yoga,” that is, in karmayoga.<sup>1</sup>

However the most significant point in the context of the value of karmayoga, or yoga as termed here, is that in the context of all four definitions, Śaṅkara states that it leads to direct Self-knowledge. For instance, in his BGBh 239, the author starts with a definition of sāmkhyabuddhi as “the knowledge pertaining to the discrimination of the supreme reality and which is the direct means for eradication of the defect causing transmigratory existence, including such things as sorrow and delusion.”<sup>2</sup> Sāmkhya is therefore the direct knowledge that brings about liberation. The commentator then gives the definition of yoga, mentioning that it leads to that sāmkhya knowledge:

Hear now about the wisdom (buddhi) concerning yoga, which is the means of attaining that [wisdom concerning sāmkhya], and which is about to be told. It is karmayoga, i.e., performance of

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<sup>1</sup> In his translation, Ramachandra Aiyar glosses samādhivoga by “(meditation)” (BGBh 239, 70). Also in support of samādhivoga as practice of meditation within the “wisdom of yoga” (or karmayoga as more commonly called) is the fact that when samādhivoga is used for the definition of yoga in 239, it is complementary to “karmayoga” which is described there as performing actions without attachment (niḥsaṅgatayā), while when samabuddhitva or samatvabuddhi are used (250 and 5.4), they are complementary to “performance of one’s dharma” (svadharmamanuṣṭhan) and “mere karmayoga” (karmayogam ca kevalam) respectively. Thus samabuddhitva and samatvabuddhi seem to refer to non-attachment, while samādhivoga adds another dimension apart from non-attachment, which is most likely meditation.

<sup>2</sup> sāmkhye paramārthavastuvivekavisaye buddhiriñānam sākṣacchokamohādisaṃsārahetudoṣanivṛttikāraṇam (BGBh 239, 96-97).

karmans, and yoga of absorption (samādhivoga), for the purpose of propitiating the Lord, without attachment, i.e., after having repelled the pairs of opposites.<sup>1</sup>

The same relationship is found between yoga and sāmkhya in BGBh 2.49: "Wherefore seek shelter ... in the wisdom of yoga, or rather in the wisdom of sāmkhya which later arises when yoga attains maturity."<sup>2</sup> In the comment on the following verse, Śaṅkara's reference to freedom from virtue and vice as a result of knowledge obtained through karmayoga suggests that, by knowledge or wisdom, he really means, again, direct experience of the Self: "Hear what result is obtained by one who performs his duty with evenness of mind. One who is endued with wisdom, who is possessed of the wisdom of evenness, casts off, abandons, here, in this world, both virtue and vice, merit and demerit, through purification of mind and attainment of knowledge ..." <sup>3</sup> In the same spirit, BGBh 4.38 reads: "Having reached perfection in yoga, perfecting [himself], attaining competence, through yoga, through karmayoga and samādhivoga, the seeker after liberation realizes that knowledge, in time, after a long time, in

<sup>1</sup> yoge tu tatprāptvyupāve nihsaṅgatayā dvandvaprahāṇapūrvakamīśvarārādhanaṁ the karmayoge karmānuṣṭhāne samādhivoge ca imāmanantaram evocyamānām buddhim śṛṇu (Ibid., 97).

<sup>2</sup> yata evam yogavisayāyām buddhau tatparipākaiāyām vā sāmkhyabuddhau śaraṇam ... anviccha (BGBh 2.49, 109).

<sup>3</sup> sa matvabuddhiyuktah sansvadharmamanutisthan yat phalam prāpnoti tacchrubuddhīti. buddhiyuktah samatvaviśayayā buddhyā yukto buddhiyuktah. sa jahāti parityaiatīhāsmimloke ubhe sukrtaduṣkṛte puṇyapāpe sattvaśuddhiññānaprāptidvāreṇa ... (BGBh 2.50, 109-110)



himself, by himself alone.”<sup>1</sup> Again, in BGBh 5.4, karmayoga is said to be the means of reaching the immediate Self-knowledge to which the wisdom of sāṃkhya corresponds: “sāṃkhya and yoga mean saṃnyāsa and karmayoga when [respectively] associated with knowledge and evenness of mind etc. which are the means of the said knowledge ...”<sup>2</sup>

It is thus quite clear that karmayoga as comprising the deeply purifying meditation on the qualified Brahman and the discipline of knowledge based on the Upanisads is in itself a sufficient means to immediate Self-knowledge. But then, it may be asked, how does Śaṅkara reconcile 1- the statement which claims that meditation as comprised in karmayoga creates only the purity allowing the experience of Hiranyagarbha, and the other claim which specifies that it does produce the necessary purity; 2- the refutation of the doctrine of combination of action and knowledge (jñānakarmasamuccayavāda) for achieving liberation, with karmayoga’s ability to directly bring about immediate knowledge through purity of mind?

In the BGBh this reconciliation will best be brought to light by a study of the compound jñānanisthāyogyatā (ability to be steadfast in knowledge) which is used seven times in this commentary in a similar context, that is, always presented as a result of karmayoga. Yet the meaning of this expression is not easy to ascertain and can be easily misunderstood. According to a common Advaita interpretation, it means competency to embark on the discipline of knowledge. As

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<sup>1</sup> taijñānam svayameva yogasamsiddho vogenā karmayogena samādhivogena ca samsiddhah saṃskṛto yogvatāmāpanno mumuksuḥ kālena mahatātmani vindati (BGBh 4.38, 235-236).

<sup>2</sup> tāveva saṃnyāsakarmayogau jñānatadupāyasamabuddhitvādisamyuktau sāṃkhyayogaśabdavācyau ... (BGBh 5.4, 249-250)

explained by A.G. Krishna Warriar, because at best, karman “purifies the mind and makes it a fit instrument for the intuition of the identity of Ātman and Brahman.” jñānanisthāyogvatā means only “fit for the steady cultivation of jñāna” (432). However, my contention is that in Śaṅkara’s BGBh, jñānanisthāyogvatā or ability to be steadfast in knowledge does not mean fitness to start upon the discipline of knowledge, but fitness, capacity or ability to experience or maintain the direct experience of the actionless Self. As contrasted with the ability to know Hiranyagarbha (which we may call hiranyagarbhajñānayogvatā), in other words, as opposed to the result of the highest degree of purity available in the sphere of authorship and bondage, jñānanisthāyogvatā specifically identifies, although as still issuing from karmayoga, the result of the supreme degree of purity which alone allows direct knowledge of the actionless Self beyond Hiranyagarbha.

Let us first look at Śaṅkara’s comments on BGBh 4.10 and 18.10, which provide examples where, even in the case of people who have not taken up formal renunciation, highest purity alone is given as a condition of immediate Self-knowledge. Verse 4.10 is introduced by Śaṅkara as follows: “This path to liberation is not trodden just in the present time, but has been so even in ancient times.”<sup>1</sup> This obviously refers to the tradition said to be handed down by Kṣatriyas in BGBh 4.1-2 and whose path is thus completely within reach of people who have not physically renounced. Further on, Śaṅkara concludes his comment on verse 4.10 with: “Purified by the fire of knowledge ...

<sup>1</sup> naiṣa mokṣamārga idānīm pravṛttah kim tarhi pūrvamapi (BGBh 4.10, 192).

having reached supreme purity, many have reached My being...<sup>1</sup> Thus, the path of karmayoga used throughout life by people such as Ksatriyas is said to bring about both the supreme knowledge and the extreme purity that yield liberation in Kṛṣṇa. In his BGBh 18.10, Śaṅkara glosses quite emphatically the highest level of purity that ensures immediate Self-knowledge even in the case of the karmayogin, of "the one who, having abandoned attachment to action and the desire for its fruits, performs daily obligatory rites."<sup>2</sup>

And when will he not hate a disagreeable work and not be attached to an agreeable one? This will now be stated. It is when he is filled with sattva, filled with, pervaded, possessed of the sattva which is the cause of discrimination between the Self and the non-Self. And, as a result, he is a wise man, possessed of, endowed with, wisdom, with an understanding characterized by knowledge of the Self. By virtue of that wisdom, he is the one whose doubts have been dispelled, whose doubts caused by ignorance have been dispelled ...<sup>3</sup>

It follows from both these passages that, according to Śaṅkara, direct Self-knowledge can be quite naturally the result of complete purity acquired through karmayoga. On the basis of his other statements

<sup>1</sup> bahavo...jñānatapasā pūtāḥ parām śuddhim gatāḥ santo madbhāvam...āgatāḥ... (BGBh 4.10, 192)

<sup>2</sup> yah karmani saṅgam tyaktvā tat phalam ca nityakarmānuṣṭhāyī (BGBh 18.10, 687).

<sup>3</sup> kadā punarasāvakuśalam karma na dvesti kuśale ca nānuṣajjāta ityucyate sattvasamāviṣṭo vadā sattvenāt mānāt mavivekavijñāna-hetunā samāviṣṭaḥ samvyāptaḥ samyukta ityetaḥ. ata eva ca medhāvī medhayāt maiñānalaksanayā praiñayā samyuktastadvānmedhāvī medhāvitvādeva chinnaśaśchinno vidyākṛtaḥ śaśayo... (BGBh 18.10, 687-688)

concerning the possible combination of rites with the discipline of knowledge, it would be fair to assume that, here, Śaṅkara held implicitly the possibility that the discipline of knowledge be included at some point as part of the karmayogin's practices; to believe that he also understood physical renunciation as necessary between the state of complete purity and attainment of immediate Self-knowledge would amount to over-interpretation.

In the BGBh, the compound jñānanisthāyogyatā is used once in the introduction, once in verse 3.16 and 5 times between verses 18.45 and 18.56. Let us first analyse its usage in the last chapter. BGBh 18.45 refers to the “perfection which is characterized by the body and senses being capable of steadfastness in knowledge after all impurities have been washed away by the performance of one's duty.”<sup>1</sup> There is no real indication here as to how the commentator understands the word perfection. But we find a clue in the question he then asks and the following answer: “Is this perfection [attained] directly by just performing one's duty? No...”<sup>2</sup> Theoretically, this could refer either to the issue of the possible combination of ritual practices with immediate Self-knowledge as means of liberation, or to the problem of the possible combination of ritual practices with the discipline of mediate knowledge as means of direct knowledge, or finally to both these issues. BGBh 18.46 is not really more explicit: “... worshipping, adoring, propitiating, Him, Īśvara, through his own duty,

<sup>1</sup> samsiddhim svakarmānuṣṭhānādaśuddhikṣaye sati kāyendriyāṇām jñānanisthāyogyatālakṣaṇām samsiddhim (BGBh 18.45, 726).

<sup>2</sup> kim svakarmānuṣṭhānata eva sāksātsamsiddhiḥ. na... (Ibid., 726-727).

as stated above, each according to his caste, a man attains perfection, which is characterized by being capable of steadfastness in knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> The introduction to verse 18.49 adds a few remarks which make the matter somewhat more complicated: “It has been said that the perfection arising from action is characterized by the ability to be steadfast in knowledge. Seeing that the result of the latter perfection, namely, the perfection of actionlessness which is characterized by steadfastness in knowledge, should be told, the Lord proceeds with this verse.”<sup>2</sup> We now have two “perfections”: the first consists of the ability to be steadfast in knowledge and has as its result the second, that is, actionlessness. Still, we lack sufficient clues to bring our question to a firm conclusion. Is the first “perfection” the ability to be steadfast in immediate Self-knowledge and the second, liberation; or is the first, the ability to be steadfast in the discipline of knowledge and the second, immediate Self-knowledge? No definite answer can be given at this point. But the comment on verse 49 as such reveals that the first perfection is already the ability to be steadfast in direct Self-knowledge, and the second, liberation: “... on account of his perfect knowledge of the Self as the actionless Brahman, he is without action; this state of his is actionlessness and that actionlessness is

<sup>1</sup> ... svakarmāṇā pūrvoktena prativarnam tamīśvaramabhyarcya pūjavitvārādhyā kevalam jñānanisthāyogyatālakṣaṇām siddhim vindati mānava manuṣyaḥ (BGBh 18.46, 727-728).

<sup>2</sup> yā ca karmajā siddhiruktā jñānanisthāyogyatālakṣaṇā tasyāḥ phalabhūtā naiṣkarmyasiddhirjñānanisthālakṣaṇā vaktavyeti śloka ārabhyate (BGBh 18.49, 732-733).

perfection...”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, no one can live the “perfection” of being free from activity without being able to directly experience the actionless Self. Thus, the second “perfection” seems to be liberation from the bondage of all activity as a result of “perfection” consisting of the ability to directly know the Self. Śaṅkara then gives another possible meaning for perfection of actionlessness: “...or perfection of actionlessness can be interpreted as the perfection, the attainment, of actionlessness, the state in which one remains as the actionless Self. That state is supreme, different from any perfection resulting from action; it is the state of immediate liberation (sadyomukti)...”<sup>2</sup> As contrasted with a state that depends on action, the term sadyomukti seems to refer to immediate and complete liberation from transmigratory existence after death of the body, as opposed to gradual liberation (kramamukti) through sojourn in brahmaloka for those who have only direct knowledge of Hiranyagarbha. Sadyomukti is clearly used with that sense in BGBh 8.23, for example.<sup>3</sup> So this

<sup>1</sup> ... yasmānniskriyabrahmātmā sambodhātsa niskarmā tasya bhāvo naiskarmyam naiskarmyam ca tatsiddhiśca sā naikarmyasiddhiḥ ... (BGBh 18.49, 733)

<sup>2</sup> ... naiskarmyasya vā siddhirniskriyāt masvarūpāvasthāna-lakṣaṇasya siddhirniṣpattistām naiskarmyasiddhim paramām prakṛstām karmajasiddhivilakṣaṇām sadyomuktyavasthānarūpām ... (BGBh 18.49, 733)

<sup>3</sup> Talking of the Northern path or path of the gods, Śaṅkara writes: “The ones who depart, who die, through that path, the knowers of Brahman, those persons who have been devoted to meditation on Brahman, go to Brahman. ‘In course of time’ has to be understood here. For those established in right insight, who attain immediate liberation (sadyomukti), there is verily neither any going to, nor returning from, any place whatever...” tatra tasminmārge prayātā mṛtā gacchanti brahma brahmavidō brahmopāśanaparā janāḥ.

optional meaning does not modify the conclusion reached so far that the perfection resulting from action is a Self-knowledge that is already immediate in nature.

The introduction to verse 50 then recapitulates verses 18.46 to 49, which we just covered:

In the case of him who has attained the perfection of the nature previously stated through the performance of his own duty which consists in worshipping the Lord, and who has acquired the discriminative knowledge concerning the Self, the manner in which is reached the perfection characterized by actionlessness and consisting of steadfastness in Self-knowledge alone, has to be explained.<sup>1</sup>

Although, again, some ambiguity could reappear about the nature of “the discriminative knowledge concerning the Self,” we can fairly say, on the basis of the quotations from the commentary on 18.49 just cited, that it also means immediate Self-knowledge followed by a state of freedom from action, a state of inner renunciation of the sense of being a doer which, as just specified by Śaṅkara, is actually not distinct from the very knowledge of the Self. Then, imitating verse 18.50 which mentions Brahman instead of actionlessness as the final goal (or second “perfection”), the commentator adopts this new word. But because he equates Brahman with the Self, the idea of the

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krameneti vākyaśeṣaḥ. nahi sadyomuktibhājām samyagdar-  
śananisthānām gatiṛāgatiṛvā kvacidasti... (BGBh 8.24, 404-405)

<sup>1</sup> pūrvoktena svakarmānuṣṭhānaneśvarābhyaṛcanarūpeṇa janitām  
prāguktalakṣaṇām siddhim prāptasyotpannāt mavivekajñānasya  
kevalāt mavijñānanisthārūpā naiṣkarmyalakṣaṇā siddhiryena  
krameṇa bhavati tadvyaktavyam (BGBh 18.50, 734).

second perfection consisting in the freedom of actionlessness gets somewhat muddled: "The one who has achieved perfection, is he who, by worshipping the Lord through his duty, has achieved perfection which comes from his grace and which is characterized by the body and organs' ability to be steadfast in knowledge.... He attains Brahman, the supreme Self ..." <sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara notes that by saying "How he who has reached perfection attains Brahman..." <sup>2</sup> the verse itself refers to two "perfections." "The repetition," says he, "is for the sake of what follows." <sup>3</sup> Immediately after, he summarizes in one sentence what will be developed by Kṛṣṇa in verses 51 to 55. Here again, the first perfection will be defined in terms of steadfastness in knowledge and the second one as Brahman and the Self. But, in a somewhat obscure fashion, steadfastness in knowledge seems to be given two values, one being the means, and the other, the goal. Indeed, the "process" referred to here is first said to be steadfastness in knowledge, and then, to lead to the latter:

How, in what manner, consisting of steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthārūpeṇa), he attains Brahman, the supreme Self, that, that manner, the process of attaining steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthāprāptikramam), do you learn from Me, understand with certainty, from My words. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> siddhim prāptah svakarmanēśvaram samabhyarcya tatprasādaiām kāyendriyāṇām jñānanisthāyogyatālakṣaṇām siddhim prāptah.... brahma paramāt mānamāpnoti... (BGBh 18.50, 734)

<sup>2</sup> Emphasis on the two words is mine.

<sup>3</sup> siddhim prāpto yathā brahma tathāpnoti nibodha me | (Ibid.)

<sup>4</sup> tadanuvāda uttarārthah | (Ibid.).

<sup>5</sup> yathā yena prakāreṇa jñānanisthārūpeṇa brahma paramāt mānamāpnoti tathā tam prakāram



A little later, Śaṅkara then uses the compound “attainment of Brahman” (brahmaprāpti) seemingly to refer to the second perfection, and then specifies that if it is said by Kṛṣṇa to be a nisthā, it is in the sense of “culmination, final stage” (nisthā paryavasānam parisamāptih),<sup>1</sup> suggesting again the notion of liberation. On the other hand, the first steadfastness in knowledge is said to be a process. Verses 51 to 55 do describe a process involving meditation (verses 51 to 53), devotion (54 to 55) and, from Śaṅkara’s viewpoint, even physical renunciation: “abandoning all objects except those only which are necessary for the bare maintenance of the body” (18.51).<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, here, steadfastness in knowledge seems to refer to the discipline of knowledge, which appears to contradict the evidence gathered so far toward understanding the word “ability to be steadfast in knowledge” as competence in direct knowledge of the Self. But, as we will show through the analysis of a passage from BGBh 2.11 quoting verse 18.50, the ability corresponding here to the first perfection is indeed connected with direct experience of the Self and the process that follows can be understood as a renunciation pursued by the direct Self-knower and aiming at simply “resting” in, or stabilizing, that experience.

The introduction to verse 2.11 consists of a long argument against the combination of action and knowledge as a means to liberation. Toward the end of the discussion, Śaṅkara considers the

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iñānanisthāprāptikramam me mama vacanānnibodha tvam  
niścayenāvadhārayetyetat (Ibid.).

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> ...viṣayāṁstyaktvā sāmartyāccharīrasthitimātrahetūnkevalān-  
muktivā ... (BGBh 18.51, 738)

case of people such as King Janaka who are said by verse 3.20 to have attained “perfection” (samsiddhim) “through action alone” (karmanaiva). If these people were already enlightened, answers Śaṅkara, then, although they did not abandon actions physically, “they reached perfection solely through the knowledge that ‘gunas act upon gunas’ [3.28].”<sup>1</sup> Hence, here, knowledge of the Self is immediate and perfection means liberation, which is confirmed by the gloss “perfection, liberation” (samsiddhim mokṣam)<sup>2</sup> on verse 3.20 where perfection is attributed to Janaka and others. But in the case where Janaka and others may not have yet attained liberation, Śaṅkara understands perfection as “purity of mind or perfection characterized by emergence of knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> We saw in the previous chapter that the word jñānotpatti is consistently used by Śaṅkara to mean direct Self-knowledge. Hence, purity and knowledge are here at the level of the direct experience of the Self. Then, the commentator adds as an argument against combination of action and knowledge: “And He [Kṛṣṇa] will again speak of the steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā) of one who has attained perfection, through words such as these: ‘How he who has attained perfection [reaches] Brahman’ [verse 18.50].”<sup>4</sup> Śaṅkara then offers the following summation: “The conclusion of the Bhagavadgītā is therefore that liberation is attained

<sup>1</sup> ‘gunā guṇeṣu vartante’ iti jñānenaiva samsiddhimāsthitaḥ (BGBh 211, 45).

<sup>2</sup> BGBh 3.20, 159.

<sup>3</sup> sattvaśuddhim jñānotpattilakṣaṇām vā samsiddhim (BGBh 211, 45).

<sup>4</sup> siddhim prāptasya ca punarjñānanisthām vakṣyati ‘siddhim prāpto yathā brahma’ ityādinā (BGBh 211, 45).

by knowledge of Reality alone, not by knowledge conjoined with actions.”<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the knowledge which is here the sole means of liberation is immediate in nature. Moreover, Śaṅkara suggests by this reference to verse 18.50 that in the latter the word perfection is synonymous with the purity of mind or emergence of knowledge attained by Janaka and others at the pinnacle of karmayoga. Thus, according to this cross-reference, that steadfastness in knowledge which remains after purity of mind and emergence of knowledge - reminding us of the basic sequence toward liberation as shown in the previous chapter - which cannot be combined with action and which is the sole means of liberation, must be immediate in nature. We can now understand how, besides the idea that the perfection of immediate Self-knowledge results in the perfection of liberation in the form of actionlessness, Śaṅkara can also speak of a first perfection consisting of direct Self-knowledge leading to another perfection also consisting in the same knowledge, but in terms of permanent steadfastness. Yet, because it also involves physical renunciation, the “process” of steadfastness in knowledge referred to in BGBh 18.50 and described, according to Śaṅkara, from verses 18.51 to 55, must then be understood as complete absorption in the experience of the Self, preceded by physical renunciation on the part of one who already has direct Self-knowledge and who just has to “rest” in it or make it absolutely unshakable (which, as we will see, is more explicitly the case in BGBh 6.3, with “the one who has attained to yoga” or yogārudha). But it must be recalled that, according to other

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<sup>1</sup> tasmādgītāsu kevalādeva tattvajñānānmokṣaprāptiḥ na karmasamuccitāditi niścito ’rthah (BGBh 2.11, 45).

statements in Śaṅkara's works, the same steadfastness in immediate Self-knowledge as a means to liberation is also possible for people such as Janaka and others who do not physically abandon actions.

The last occurrence of jñānanisthāyogyatā in the section 18.45 to 18.56 provides a good summary of our discussion here: "The result of bhaktiyoga consisting in worshipping the Lord through one's duty is attainment of perfection, the ability to be steadfast in knowledge. Resulting from this [ability], steadfastness in knowledge culminates in the result, namely, liberation."<sup>1</sup> Nothing indicates here that the steadfastness in knowledge which is part of the concept "ability to be steadfast in knowledge" is of a different nature than the steadfastness in knowledge which results in liberation and which is therefore immediate. Hence the ability to be steadfast in knowledge is simply the capacity to experience immediate knowledge as the means of liberation, not the capacity to pursue the discipline of mediate knowledge (preceded or not by physical renunciation) as a means to immediate knowledge. Accordingly, it is fair to say that the word "ability to be steadfast in knowledge" distinguishes, among the degrees of purity gained through karmayoga, that which is conditional to experience of the Self from that which is conditional to experience of Hiranyagarbha.

The conclusion of the comment on verse 18.56 just quoted corresponds exactly to an observation made by Śaṅkara in verse 3.16 about the section 3.4-8:

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<sup>1</sup> svakarmanā bhagavato 'bhyananabhaktiyogasya siddhiprāptih phalam jñānanisthāyogyatā. yannimittā jñānanisthā moksaphalāvasānā (BGBh 18.56, 744).

The purport of this section is, therefore, that ritual action must be performed by the unenlightened man qualified [for it]. In the passage beginning from "By the non-performance of actions [3.4]," and ending with "Indeed, without action, even the bare maintenance of the body would not be possible [3.8]," it was declared that before attaining the ability to be steadfast in Self-knowledge (prāgāt maiñānanisthāyogvatāprāpteh),<sup>1</sup> karmayoga should be performed as a means thereto, by him who does not know the Self and who is qualified [for ritual actions]...<sup>2</sup>

Now, the comment on verse 3.5, which is part of the sequence referred to here, clearly connects the end of karmayoga's usefulness (and therefore the ability to be steadfast in knowledge) with direct experience of the Self: "Because of a separate mention for the sāmkhyas, karmayoga is assuredly meant only for the unenlightened and not for the men of knowledge. As regards the men of knowledge, who are unmoved by the guṇas and are naturally devoid of action, karmayoga is out of place."<sup>3</sup> The same purport is also stated very

<sup>1</sup> Ramachandra Aiyar's translation of this compound reflects his understanding of yogvatā as referring to mere fitness for the discipline of knowledge: "before he becomes qualified for the practice of devotion to Self-knowledge" (BGBh 3.16, 117). But to clearly convey his interpretation, he has to add "practice," a word that does not appear in Śaṅkara's compound.

<sup>2</sup> tasmā daiñēnādhikṛtena kartavyameva karmeti prakaraṇārthah. prāgāt maiñānanisthāyogvatāprāptestādarthvena karmayogānuṣṭhānamadhikṛtenānāt maiñēna kartavyamevet yetat "na karmanāmanārambhād" ityata ārabhya "śarīrasvatrāpi ca te na prasidhyedakarmanah" etvevamantena pratipādya... (BGBh 3.16, 154)

<sup>3</sup> sāmkhyānām prthakkaraṇādaiñānāmeva hi karmayogo na jñāninām. jñāninām tu guṇairacālyamānānām svataścalanābhāvāt karmayogo nopapadyate (BGBh 3.5, 146).

straightforwardly in BGBh 2.46 when, using the word adhikāra (qualification) instead of yogyatā (ability), Śaṅkara states that the karmayogin has to continue the performance of rituals until he attains qualification (adhikāra) for steadfastness in knowledge. In order to support the idea stated in verse 2.46 that the use of actions prescribed by the Vedas is to direct knowledge of the Self what a well or a tank is to an all-spreading flood, Śaṅkara quotes verse 4.33 as saying that “all action in its entirety [attains its consummation in knowledge, O Pārtha].”<sup>1</sup> In BGBh 4.33, knowledge is clearly declared to be the means of liberation (mokṣasādhane) and to correspond to the all-spreading flood, which indicates its immediate nature. Then, Śaṅkara concludes his comment on 2.46 as follows: “Therefore, even though rituals stand simply in the place of wells, tanks, etc., they must be performed by the man who is qualified for actions, before he reaches qualification (adhikāra) for steadfastness in knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, Śaṅkara asserts once more that it is the attainment of the ability for direct - not indirect - Self-knowledge through karmayoga that brings an end to the usefulness and necessary performance of the latter.

When used with the criterion of unity of the initial and concluding passages, this understanding can shed light on the occurrence of the compound jñānanisthāyogyatā in Śaṅkara's introduction to the Gītā and previously used as part of the 15 series

<sup>1</sup> ‘sarvaṃ karmākhilam [pārtha jñāne parisamāpyate] [4.33] iti ca vaksyati (BGBh 2.46, 106).

<sup>2</sup> tasmāt prāgi jñānanisthādhikāraprāpteh karmanya dhikṛtena kūpatadāgādvyarthasthānīyamapi karma kartavyam (Ibid.)

describing the sequence toward liberation. Referring to the dharma consisting in karmayoga, Śaṅkara writes: "... and for one with a pure mind, it even becomes the cause of supreme bliss (śreyas) through attainment of the ability to be steadfast in knowledge and through emergence of knowledge." <sup>1</sup> We can see again how the expression "ability to be steadfast in knowledge" is there to give to the "one with a pure mind" the distinct status of the direct knower of the actionless Self who alone can experience the "supreme bliss" of liberation. Because purity leads to both Hiranyagarbha and liberation, without such a characteristic, there would be no way to differentiate the Self-knower from some other person whose purity is not enough for freedom from steadfastness in karman, that is, from the boundaries of action and its result, i.e. the attainment of Hiranyagarbha. Consequently, it is now clear that, from Śaṅkara's point of view, karmayoga leads to immediate knowledge of the Self as well as to Hiranyagarbha, and that there is no contradiction between the two statements, because the dividing line between the two types of result is the degree of purity attained by the mind: in the first case, the level of purity can allow only perception of the most subtle level of phenomenal existence, while in the second, purity enables the mind to know by direct experience that Self which transcends even the subtlest of all active modes of being.

How are the conclusions arrived at so far to be understood in terms of Śaṅkara's refutation of combination between action and

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<sup>1</sup> śuddhasattvasya ca jñānanisthāyogvatāprāptidvārena jñānotpattihetutvena ca niḥśreyasahetutvamapi pratipadyate (BGBh intro, 7).

knowledge with respect to liberation? A frequent misinterpretation of the issue must first be brushed aside. It goes without saying that karmayoga as comprising the practice of rituals, and samnyāsāśrama as characterized by the absence of these and by full-time practice of the discipline of knowledge, cannot be combined at the same time for one and the same person, simply because it is not possible for the same individual to do and not to do rituals at the same given place and period of time. But, contrary to a common interpretation, this is not the opposition on which Śaṅkara's refutation of combination of action and knowledge as means to liberation is based. The reason is that, in themselves, neither karmayoga, nor samnyāsāśrama as comprising the discipline of mediate knowledge lead to liberation: in terms of post-mortem fate, their result can only be either the world of manes (pitṛloka) or the world of gods (devaloka), the latter having Hiranyagarbha as highest attainment. Both karmayoga and samnyāsāśrama lead to liberation only indirectly, that is, inasmuch as, through complete purity of mind, they generate immediate knowledge of the Self, which alone is the unaccompanied and independent means to liberation by virtue of being the only element that is opposed to ignorance of the actionless nature of the Self and that can therefore sublimate it. So, although karmayoga and samnyāsāśrama as comprising the discipline of knowledge cannot be combined, from Śaṅkara's perspective, this absence of combination is not really significant with respect to identification of the direct and real means of liberation.

It is true that, in order to refute the doctrine of necessary combination of knowledge and action, from time to time, Śaṅkara uses



among other arguments the fact that the samnyāsa stage of life or samnyāsāśrama, which is by definition without obligatory and periodical rites, is prescribed by the scriptures for Self-knowledge and liberation.<sup>1</sup> But from his perspective, this only proves that, since there exists an authorized path to liberation which is without rituals, it follows that the latter are not meant by the scriptures to be necessary for liberation. This argument does not claim that because samnyāsāśrama is without obligatory and periodical rites and because it allows full-time absorption in the discipline of knowledge, it is the only means to liberation. This is clearly conveyed, as we have already seen, when Śaṅkara states in BGBh 211 that Janaka and others did attain liberation through knowledge unaccompanied by rites even if they performed these throughout their life. Although liable to misinterpretation, the same is asserted in the introduction to the MuBh. Arguing against the doctrine of combination of knowledge and action, Śaṅkara writes:

And by mentioning “while begging for alms” [Mu 1.21] and “through the yoga of renunciation” [Mu 3.26], [the Upaniṣad] shows that though people in all stages of life are qualified for knowledge by itself, still it is knowledge of Brahman as founded on renunciation alone and not associated with action that is the means of liberation. And this is because of the opposition between knowledge and action; not even in a dream can action coexist with the insight of the unity [of the self] with Brahman.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for instance BSBh 3.4.17, 770 and BGBh 211, 37.

<sup>2</sup> jñānamātre yadyapi sarvāśramiṇām adhikārah tathāpi samnyāsanisthaiva brahmavidyā mokṣasādhanaṁ na karmasahitī

It must first be noted that the mention of “while begging for alms” is another example of using the authorized samnyāsāśrama simply as a proof that rites are not always mandatory for the whole life and that accordingly they cannot be said to be necessary along with knowledge for bringing about liberation. Reference to this passage does not mean that samnyāsāśrama is the only state in which knowledge can lead by itself to liberation. Evidence for this is found in the fact that, in his commentary on Mundaka Upaniṣad 1.21, which is cited in the passage we just quoted, Śaṅkara confirms that this verse merely identifies people belonging to the samnyāsāśrama, who practice meditation on Hiranyagarbha and who, having not attained liberation, go at the end of life “along the Northern Path, indicated by the word sun.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, samnyāsāśrama is certainly not said here to be the privileged way for the application of knowledge as the only means to liberation. As for the citation “through the yoga of renunciation,” from verse 3.26, we previously concluded that it conveys either renunciation of authorship or the latter accompanied by physical renunciation. The compound “with the vision of the unity [of the Self] with Brahman” used for the explanation then given by Śaṅkara in the above excerpt also clearly indicates that the incompatibility is between action and direct Self-knowledge, and not between action and the discipline of knowledge as practiced in the samnyāsāśrama.

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‘bhaiksyacaryām carantah’ ‘sannyāsavogāt’ iti ca bruvandarśayati. vidyākarmavirodhācca. nahi brahmāikatvadarśanena saha karma svapne’pi sampādayitum śakyam (MuBh intro, 141).

<sup>1</sup> sūryopalaksitenottarāyanena pathā (MuBh 1.211, 151).

Following this statement, the commentator refutes the combination of action and knowledge even in the case of enlightened householders. It is only in the context we are now proposing that such a refutation can make sense. The first two verses of the Upaniṣad give names of people who handed down the knowledge through the ages; among whom were householders. Seeing that this could support the doctrine of the combination of knowledge and action, Śaṅkara retorts:

Indicatory marks such as the fact that among householders some are founders of the tradition of the knowledge of Brahman, have no power to annihilate the established principle. For when even a hundred injunctions cannot bring about the co-existence of light and darkness, how could mere indications do so?<sup>1</sup>

Again, in a context obviously referring to enlightened knowers of Brahman, “light” and “darkness” can only refer to the impossibility of combining immediate knowledge of the actionless Self and its ignorance in the form of the sense of authorship of action.

It follows that when Śaṅkara argues against the combination of action and knowledge as means of liberation, it is not for the sake of prescribing physical renunciation and the ensuing samnyāsāśrama as necessary for gaining mediate and immediate knowledge, but simply and repeatedly for the sake of establishing that immediate

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<sup>1</sup> yattu grhastheṣu brahma vidyāsampradāyakartrtvādi līṅgaṃ na tatsthitam nyāyam bādhitum utsahate. nahi vidhiśatenāpi tamah prakāśayorekatra sadbhāvaḥ śakyate kartum. kim uta līṅgaih kevalairiti (MUBh intro, 142).

knowledge alone can sublate ignorance of the actionless nature of the Self and can thus really lead to freedom from change and mortality.

Śaṅkara's rejection of the combination of knowledge and action is most clearly and briefly stated in his BSBh 3.4.25-26. He says in his comment on 3.4.25 that knowledge is independent from action in producing the result of liberation: "For this reason, because knowledge is the cause of liberation, the ritual actions (such as 'lightning up a fire') that are enjoined for the different stages of life, are not needed by knowledge for producing its own result."<sup>1</sup> Yet he mentions indirectly in 3.4.26 that these same actions can generate the said knowledge: "According to the horse's restricted suitability, it is not used for drawing a plough, but harnessed to a chariot;<sup>2</sup> similarly the duties of the stages of life are not needed for the fruition of the result of knowledge, but only for its emergence."<sup>3</sup> Thus Śaṅkara's doctrine about the respective functions of action and knowledge with respect to liberation can be stated as follows. All prescribed actions, i.e. all practices (whether meditation on the Upaniṣadic mahavākyas as performed by the monk or even sacrifices as performed by the

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<sup>1</sup> ata eva ca vidyāyāḥ puruṣārthahetutvādagnīndhanādīnyāśramakarmāṇi vidyayā svārthasiddhau nāpekṣitavyām ... (BSBh 3.4.25, 801)

<sup>2</sup> To use another parallel while leaving aside the dimension of time, in the same way as clouds give rain which in turn make the mango tree grow, following which the latter yields its fruit independently, as if out of its own nature, so also all karmans (all practices) generate purity of mind which in turn give rise to immediate Self-knowledge, the latter spontaneously and independently leading to liberation by virtue of its exclusive ability to sublate ignorance.

<sup>3</sup> yathā ca vogvatāvaśenāśvo na līṅgalākarsane yuiyate rathacaryāvāṁ tu yuiyate. evamāśramakarmāṇi vidyayā phalasiddhau nāpekṣyanta utpattaū cāpekṣyanta iti (BSBh 3.4.26, 803).

householders) lead to direct Self-knowledge through purification of body and mind; thus the rise of immediate Self-knowledge is dependent upon the (various) purifying powers of all practices, whether they be sacrifices or the discipline of knowledge, whether these are combined by the householder, or uncombined, as in the case of the monk; yet once purity of body and mind is complete and, as a consequence, immediate knowledge is established, then that knowledge needs no other practice or means to bring about liberation, since the latter comes spontaneously as a result of eradication of ignorance and of its effects such as identification with the boundaries of mind and body and transmigratory existence.

It is on the basis of this understanding that Śaṅkara can feel totally consistent in stating, on the one hand, like the Gītā, that ritual actions of karmayoga should be performed (or should not be physically abandoned)<sup>1</sup> for the sake of, and until attainment of, direct experience of the Self, and on the other hand, that it is impossible to combine ritual actions and knowledge as means of liberation. It is also on the basis of this understanding that, in passages such as the following one, which features the same structure, iñānanisthā is to be

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, with support from the scriptures, Śaṅkara also claims that, before enlightenment, when complying with the prerequisites of the discipline of knowledge, a man of the Brāmana caste, and he alone would preferably abandon ritual actions in order to devote himself entirely to hearing, reflection and meditation. Yet the scriptures also give to that same man the option of practicing rituals until he attains immediate Self-knowledge.

understood as an already immediate knowledge,<sup>1</sup> not as the discipline of knowledge:

...in order to convey the truth that steadfastness in action leads to the goal, not independently, but by leading to the attainment of steadfastness in knowledge, whereas steadfastness in knowledge, having been gained through steadfastness in action, leads to the goal by itself, without anything else, the Lord says:<sup>2</sup>

Again, Śaṅkara's position on this question has been deeply misunderstood by many scholars. In his introduction to his translation of the BGBh, Ramachandra Aiyar first blames a modern tendency to understand Śaṅkara's doctrine in terms of a combined use of the path of action and of the discipline of knowledge:

"According to this interpretation the Knowledge based Activity must be practiced<sup>3</sup> by the spiritual aspirant right upto Liberation, without his ever having to embrace the samnyāsin's life of complete renunciation of works" (BGBh xvii). Referring to the advanced aspirant of liberation, the translator then says:

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<sup>1</sup> In his comment on the same verse, Śaṅkara gives as synonymous with "steadfastness in jñānavoga" (used here as an equivalent of jñānanisthā) the words "actionlessness," "state of non-action," "absence of action" and "remaining in the true nature of the actionless Self," which all suggest renunciation of authorship as a result of immediate knowledge of the Self (BGBh 3.4, 145).

<sup>2</sup> karmanisthāyā jñānanisthāprāptihetutvena puruṣārthahetutvam na svātantryeṇa. jñānanisthā tu karmanisthopāyalabdhāt mikā satī svātantryeṇa puruṣārthaheturanyāpekṣetvetamartham darśavisyannāha bhagavān (BGBh 3.4, 144).

<sup>3</sup> This understanding is different from mine in that I do recognize that, in Śaṅkara's works, the Brāhmaṇa can, and is encouraged to, "embrace the samnyāsin's life" based on physical renunciation of obligatory and periodical rites.

His total dedication to reflection, ipso facto, implies his complete renunciation of the life of activity. Since it is only the constant reflection on the Self that directly leads to Self-Realisation, which is Perfection\Liberation, the Path of Knowledge alone is the proximate means to that Goal.

The Path of Action, according to the Ācārya, is only the remote means to the Goal. It is the remote path that leads to the proximate path of Knowledge.... By following the path of Action exclusively ... he gets the competence to take the Path of Knowledge (Ibid. xvii-xviii).

It should first be noted that this statement is partially true from Śaṅkara's viewpoint, in that karmayoga can lead the Brāhmaṇa to a state of detachment that will induce him to abandon all obligatory and periodical rites in order to enter saṁnyāsāśrama and devote all his time to the discipline of knowledge. But the deep misinterpretation consists in the misunderstanding that when Śaṅkara says that karmayoga brings about liberation only indirectly, by first leading to jñānanisthā (or jñānayoga), it means that karmayoga (active life in society) can merely bring the seeker after liberation to the threshold of the discipline of knowledge, entry into which requires the adoption of the monastic life. But, in most contexts where Ramanandhra Aiyar reads steadfastness in, or yoga of, mediate knowledge, Śaṅkara means in fact steadfastness in, or yoga consisting of, immediate Self-knowledge.

Yoshitsugu Saway's article on "Śaṅkara's theory of saṁnyāsa" provides a very good example of the logical steps on the basis of which Śaṅkara's doctrine on knowledge as the sole means of

liberation can be turned upside down even when presented with apparent rigour. Saway first writes: "The theory that jñāna alone is the direct means of attaining mokṣa provides the philosophical foundation for the way of life called saṁnyāsa" (375). Again, it must be said that this is true in terms of justifying physical renunciation for the Brāhmaṇas, but not for making it necessary for the discipline of knowledge. Does Saway interpret saṁnyāsa as a possibility or as a sine qua non condition? The answer is quite clearly given in his conclusion. The author misses so thoroughly the sense of inner renunciation of authorship often conveyed by the word saṁnyāsa in Śaṅkara's works that he hardly sees any room left, in his doctrine, for karmayoga and any addressee other than the monk:

In Śaṅkara's elaborate discussion of the way to mokṣa, saṁnyāsa - the life of a wandering ascetic - is repeatedly advocated, while other possible paths are mentioned only in passing - mentioned so seldom indeed that it is difficult to be sure exactly what Śaṅkara thought about them. For Śaṅkara, mokṣa is not possible without jñāna, and the road par excellence to jñāna is karma-saṁnyāsa. This saṁnyāsa, in turn, is possible only for brāhmaṇas. It was they for whom Śaṅkara's instruction was intended (383).

In Sengaku Mayeda's analysis, the misinterpretation crystallizes in the finding that "Śaṅkara's treatment of action is self-contradictory" (Upad 88-89).<sup>1</sup> Mayeda observes:

In the Upadeśasāhasrī (I,17,44) Śaṅkara says that action can take place only before acquisition of knowledge of Ātman, since a firm

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<sup>1</sup> A conclusion endorsed by Saway (373).



belief that "Thou art That" removes any notions of belonging to a certain caste and so on, which are the prerequisites to the performance of action. This statement is indeed negative, but it implies paradoxically<sup>1</sup> the positive meaning that action should be performed before one can achieve cessation of nescience....

Practically speaking, therefore, the aspirant should perform actions until his attainment of final release (Ibid., 92).

Mayeda's description seems quite accurate to me, except for the identification of a paradox. His understanding becomes more explicit a few lines further. After mentioning practices such as abstinence from injury, austerities and study recommended in the Upad to students involved in the discipline of knowledge, Mayeda is surprised that Śaṅkara "considers these means to be compatible with knowledge, though they are unquestionably actions" (Ibid.). We can see that, from Mayeda's viewpoint, the absence of combination should be between the discipline of knowledge and any other practice, which is why he sees a contradiction in Śaṅkara's doctrine. But, according to Śaṅkara, the incompatibility is rather between immediate Self-knowledge and any physical as well as mental activity, including that of the discipline of knowledge.

Mayeda also sees a contradiction between two of Śaṅkara's statements on the practice of prasamkhya or parisamkhyāna meditation (which according to him are not clearly distinguished in Śaṅkara's writings). He notices that Śaṅkara "rejects the opinion of those who assert jñānakarmasamuccayavāda that prasamkhyāna

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis is mine.

meditation should be observed until Ātman is apprehended (Upad. I,18,9 ff.), but in the chapter entitled "Parisamkhyāna" in the Upadeśasāhasrī (II,3,112-116) he prescribes parisamkhyāna meditation for those seekers after final release ..." (Ibid., 88) But Mayeda misses the fact that if Śaṅkara refutes the opponent's position in Upad 1.18.9 ff., it is because the latter holds that meditation as an activity is the means to liberation: "So it is prasamkhyāna meditation that is the means," says the opponent, "and nothing else ..." (Upad 1.18.17, 174). To this, Śaṅkara replies with the argument that this kind of means does not pertain to the Upaniṣads which teach a goal that is not attainable through activity - an answer that perfectly agrees with his basic position on this whole issue, namely, that immediate knowledge of the actionless Self alone yields liberation: "Ends to be attained by actions should be stated in the scriptures before [these Upaniṣadic doctrines] and final release is not [an end to be attained by actions], since it is ever-existing" (Upad 1.18.19, 174).<sup>1</sup>

View points on the relationship between ritual actions and knowledge as attributed by Appaya Dīkṣita to the Vivaraṇa school<sup>2</sup> in his Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha give an idea of how Śaṅkara's doctrine has been misinterpreted within his own tradition. We saw that, according to Śaṅkara, karmayoga as comprising both proximate means (such as meditation on the qualified Brahman and the discipline of knowledge) and remote means (such as ritual actions) does lead to direct Self-knowledge. We also noted that, in his introduction to the

<sup>1</sup> krivāsādhyaṃ purā śrāvyam na mokṣo nitvasiddhataḥ (Upad 1.18.19, 149).

<sup>2</sup> See Appaya Dīkṣita 1:347-348.

Kena Upanisad for instance, Śaṅkara identifies an intermediate stage which results from karmayoga as consisting of ritual actions and meditation on the qualified Brahman, and which gives “a desire to know the indwelling Self” (pratyaḡāt maviśayā jijñāsā).<sup>1</sup> According to my reinterpretation, this desire will lead the Kṣatriya and Vaiśya karmayogins to add the discipline of knowledge to their practices, while it will make the Brāhmaṇas physically renounce ritual actions in order to devote himself entirely to the same discipline. But, as indicated by the Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha’s exposition, a major post-Śaṅkara tendency is to view karmayoga as excluding the discipline of knowledge and as leading to knowledge of the Self only in the sense of producing a desire to know which leads one to monastic life and the full-time discipline of knowledge: “... there is practice of karma till, on the purification of the intellect, there is the rise of a leaning towards what is within (i.e., the Self), in the form of a desire to know; thence follows renunciation.... karma is practiced only up to (the generation of) the desire for knowledge” (1:334).<sup>2</sup> While in Śaṅkara’s works the main emphasis is that karman is to be practiced only up to immediate Self-knowledge, it becomes “only up to the desire for immediate knowledge” in later Advaita, which is consistent with viewing physical renunciation as optional in Śaṅkara’s case and with considering it as necessary in the case of many of his followers.

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<sup>1</sup> KeBh intro, 15.

<sup>2</sup> ...cetasah śuddhau vividīśādirūpapratyakprāvaṇvodayavaparyantam karmānuṣṭhānam...vividīśāparyantameva karmānuṣṭhāne (Appaya Dīkṣita 2:85).

While it is to be expected, according to Śaṅkara, that karmayoga as comprising the discipline of knowledge should lead to direct Self-knowledge, later Advaitins who see physical renunciation as necessary have to account for the enlightenment of people such as King Janaka. One way to explain it is by considering such cases to be “exceptions,” as does Saroja in her Tilak and Śaṅkara on the Gita: “This is the reason for Śaṅkara’s repeated emphasis of jñāna prededed by samnyāsa as the only means to realisation. Exceptional cases like Janaka can never be considered as the general case” (126). First, it must be noted here that neither the Upanisads, nor the Gītā, nor Śaṅkara say that Janaka’s process of enlightenment, for instance, is to be considered an exception. Second, Saroja should have identified the scriptural rule with respect to which this case is an exception; she has not. Interestingly, nowhere in her book does she mention that, according to Śaṅkara, only Brāhmaṇas are enjoined to renounce physically. It is in fact quite obvious that, from Śaṅkara’s viewpoint, non-Brāhmaṇas such as Janaka certainly cannot be exceptions to a rule of renunciation that doesn’t even apply to them! A real exception to the injunction of physical renunciation as an auxiliary to gain direct knowledge is certainly Yājñavalkya who, although a Brāhmaṇa, physically renounced only after his enlightenment,<sup>1</sup> not as a means to the latter. The enlightened Brāhmaṇas of Brhadāraṇyaka

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<sup>1</sup> Vidyāraṇya considers that because Yājñavalkya sometimes shows a temper in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, he was not completely enlightened and that he physically renounced “to obtain peace of mind” (287). But in his comment on Brahmasūtra 3.4.9, Śaṅkara introduces him without any reservation along with other enlightened men (vidvāṃsah) and knowers of Brahman (brahmavidām).

Upanisad 3.5.1 and 4.4.22 should also be considered exceptions to the same injunction since they had achieved immediate Self-knowledge before renouncing physically. Says 3.5.1: "Knowing this very Self the Brāhmaṇas renounce the desire for sons, for wealth and for the worlds, and lead a mendicant's life" (330);<sup>1</sup> and 4.4.22: "The ancient men of knowledge, it is said, did not desire children, thinking: 'What shall we achieve through children, we who hold this Self as our world.' They, it is said, renounced their desire for sons, for wealth and for the worlds, and lived a mendicant's life."<sup>2</sup> If anything, these real exceptions to the injunction of physical renunciation suggest that the latter is not necessary either for the discipline of knowledge or liberation. Besides, the only situation where Śaṅkara suggests the notion of exception with respect to the rule of physical renunciation is with the already enlightened person "in whom right insight of the Self has arisen" and "who finding that for some reason he cannot abandon action, may continue to engage in it as before."<sup>3</sup>

Another post-Śaṅkara argument in favor of the obligation of physical renunciation, found as early as Sarvajñātman, an immediate disciple of Śaṅkara, entails a ritualisation of the role of physical renunciation oddly reflecting the Pūrvamīmāṃsā's mentality. It

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<sup>1</sup> etam vai tamāt mānam viditvā brāhmaṇāḥ putraisaṇāyāśca vittaisaṇāyāśca lokaisaṇāyāśca vyutthāyātha bhikṣācaryam caranti ... (BUBh 3.5.1, 809)

<sup>2</sup> etaddha sma vai tat pūrve vidvāṃsaḥ prajāṃ na kāmavante kiṃ prajāyā karisyāmo veśāṃ no 'yamāt mā 'yam loka iti te ha sma putraisaṇāyāśca vittaisaṇāyāśca lokaisaṇāyāśca vyutthāyātha bhikṣācaryam caranti ... (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> ... utpannasamyagdarśinah ... kutaścinnimittātkarma paritvāgā-sambhave sati ... pūrvavatkarmani pravṛttah (BGBh 4.20, 210).

gives to physical renunciation and monastic life an exclusive power to generate a special kind of merit, an idea that is completely foreign to Śaṅkara's works. According to Pūrvamīmāṃsā, rituals enjoined by the scriptures generate an unseen potency (apūrvā) which continues to operate after performance of the ritual, in order to bring about the result of the latter- heaven for instance.<sup>1</sup> Sarvajñātman understands the apūrvā generated by monasticism to be necessary for achieving the result consisting of liberation. As mentioned in his Samksepaśārīraka 3.359 and 3.361, and as well summarized in the following words of the Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha,

since the sins that obstruct the rise of knowledge are infinite, some are removable by the practice of sacrifice etc., some are removable by the unseen potency [apūrvā] from renunciation.... And thus, for those householders, who practice hearing (study) etc., in the intervals of karma, there is attainment of knowledge, not in this life, but only after attaining renunciation, in another life. As for those like Janaka and others, who attain knowledge, even while being house-holders, their attainment of knowledge is due to renunciation in a prior life (1:346).<sup>2</sup>

In a context suggesting this to be representative of the whole Advaita tradition, the notion of exception and of the unseen potency

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<sup>1</sup> See Jha 256.

<sup>2</sup> vidyotpattipratibandhakaduritānāmanantatvāt kiñcid vajñādyanuṣṭhānanivartyaṃ kiñcit samnyāsāpūrvanivartyaṃ iti ... tathā ca grhasthādīnāṃ karmacchidreṣu śravanādyanutisthatām na tasmin janmani vidyāvāptiḥ, kim tu janmāntare samnyāsam labdhvaiva: veśāṃ tu grhasthānāmeva satām janakādīnāṃ vidyā drśyate, teṣāṃ pūrvajanmani samnyāsādvidyāvāptiḥ (Appaya Dīkṣita 290).

of physical renunciation from a previous life are brought together by A. G. Krishna Warriar as follows:

...for those who had their renunciation and Vedāntic studies in prior lives but failed to win success may, in the present life, achieve it in any station of life; indeed, a fresh act of renunciation would be superfluous for them. Such exceptions apart, the injunction to renounce actions associated with varṇas and āśramas is deemed compulsory; renunciation is an indispensable auxiliary in the pursuit of self-knowledge (442).

Thus, through unseen potency and unseen lives, prominent post-Śaṅkara Advaitins have constructed a rationale for physical renunciation as a sine qua non for Self-knowledge which contradicts the liberal position of the founder of their tradition. One finds the most eloquent evidence for this when examining all of Śaṅkara's references to practices performed in a previous life. First, he never talks of the production of unseen potency but only of mind purification; even more important, he gives as examples of these practices the remote as well as the proximate means, and connects them only once with the monastic context. The terms referring to practices done in previous lives in Śaṅkara's works are: krivānām vaiñādīnām i.e. "karmans such as vaiñās" (BGBh 3.4, 144); vidvāsamuktam nityamagnihotrādi vidvāvihīnam i.e. "obligatory rites such as agnihotra being associated or not with meditation" (BSBh 4.1.18, 853); karma (BUBh 1.4.2, 101); āśramakarmabhiḥ i.e. "karmans of stages of life" (BSBh 3.4.38, 810); remote as well as proximate practices referred to by the word karma (TUBh 1.12, 278-279); sādhana i.e. "means" (BSBh 3.4.51, 822); the type of meditation known as

prasamkhyāna (Upad 1.18.15-16, 148); yogābhyāsa i.e. practice of yoga, presented in the following reference as part of monastic life (BGBh 6.44-45, 336-38). Accordingly, nothing in Śaṅkara's works suggests that physical renunciation is necessary in a previous or a future life to ensure knowledge of the Self and liberation. A major deviation has occurred on this major issue in later Advaita, since, as far as Śaṅkara is concerned, "knowledge brooks no temporal limitation [related to stages of life, etc.], as it has no association with any time and is not dependent on definite causes" (MuBh intro, 80).<sup>1</sup>

Thus, from Śaṅkara's perspective, even though karmanisthā (or karmayoga) cannot lead directly to liberation by reason of its basic involvement with the sense of authorship, nevertheless, since it does include the discipline of knowledge, it can produce the purity necessary for the mind to access, through the scriptures, that experiential steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthā) which alone is free from authorship and which alone yields liberation. Thus understood, karmayoga is still not an independent means to liberation, but, contrary to a common interpretation of Śaṅkara's viewpoint, it can lead independently to the direct knowledge of the Self which, in turn, serves as the independent means of liberation.

However, from a strict terminological point of view, it should be noted that the term karmayoga as used by Śaṅkara does not account for all possible ways of obtaining immediate knowledge, as our author mentions once in passing that both karma- and jñānanisthā are for

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<sup>1</sup> vidyāyāṅkālaviśeṣābhāvādānīyatanimittatvācca  
kālasaṅkocānupapatteḥ (MuBh intro, 142).



the "[first] three varnas." <sup>1</sup> It follows from this indication that, in Śaṅkara's use, these terms refer only to the disciplines of action and knowledge of people who have access to the Śruti literature. Thus, for a more precise and all-including terminology in the description of the relationship between action and knowledge in Śaṅkara's works, I propose the following terms, definitions, and relationships:

1- Karmayoga means performance of ritual actions, preferably along with the practice of meditation on the qualified Brahman, by the dvijas (members of the first three castes); 2- varnadharma means all practices related to any one caste, which include therefore also those prescribed for the Śūdras, those available for example to widowers from the first three varnas who cannot perform ritual actions as before, and proximate means of knowledge such as mental japa and those found in Patañjali's yoga and Smṛti texts; 3- the discipline of knowledge is the threefold universally available practice of hearing, reflection and meditation on the doctrine of the non-dual Ātman-Brahman based either on the Śruti texts for dvijas or on the Smṛti texts for Śūdras; 4- jñānanisthā or jñānayoga understood as a means to immediate knowledge of the Self <sup>2</sup> is the practice of the discipline of knowledge after physical renunciation, that is, following adoption of monastic life, and is available to Brāhmaṇas alone.

In terms of relationships between these categories with respect to the goal of liberation, the two most important points are first that

<sup>1</sup> traivarnikānām dvividhā dviprakārā niṣṭhā (BGBh 3.3, 141).

<sup>2</sup> It must be recalled that most of the time in Śaṅkara's works, jñānanisthā or jñānayoga means steadfastness in an already immediate knowledge of the Self.

the discipline of knowledge can be combined with karmayoga or varnadharma, or, loosely speaking, that karmayoga or varnadharma “include” the discipline of knowledge; second, that jñānayoga as a discipline preceded by physical renunciation is not necessary for direct Self-knowledge and liberation. Thus these clarifications account for all possible ways of attaining immediate Self-knowledge while respecting the universal availability of the latter as expressed in Śaṅkara’s works.

## CHAPTER 6

### SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND RENUNCIATION

We have already established that in Śaṅkara's works, iñānanisthā means primarily steadfastness in immediate Self-knowledge and, much less frequently, full-time steadfastness in mediate knowledge based on physical renunciation and monastic life. While some passages may be somewhat ambiguous in this respect, others leave no doubt about the immediate nature of the state of knowledge referred to by iñānanisthā. In the following excerpt, for example, the experience of oneness with Kṛṣṇa is equated with iñānanisthā and with the means of liberation: "...absorbed in Me, they are knowers of Brahman and see their non-difference with Īśvara, taking refuge in Me, the Supreme Lord. It means that they are steadfast in knowledge alone. Many, numerous [people]... have attained, have arrived at My Being, Īśvara's Being, liberation." <sup>1</sup> In BGBh 18.12, Śaṅkara also states that "those who are steadfast in the right insight alone can never fail to uproot the seed of transmigratory existence, namely ignorance, etc." <sup>2</sup> Besides, he clearly distinguishes this steadfastness from even the highest form of practice, namely meditation on Brahman:

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<sup>1</sup> ... manmayā brahmavidā īśvarābhedadarśino māmeva parameśva ramupāśritāḥ. kevalaiñānanisthā ityarthah. bahavo aneke madbhāvam īśvarabhāvam mokṣamāgatāḥ samanuprāptāḥ (BGBh 4.10, 192).

<sup>2</sup> nahi kevalasamyagdarśananisthā avidvādisamsārabījam nonmūlayati kadācidityarthah (BGBh 18.12, 691-692).

Departing, leaving, through this, on that path, the knowers of Brahman, those persons who have been devoted to meditation on Brahman, go to Brahman. "In course of time" has to be understood. For those steadfast in the right insight, who attain immediate liberation, there is verily neither any going to, nor returning from any place whatsoever ...<sup>1</sup>

It is due to such direct Self-knowledge and to the renunciation of authorship which spontaneously follows that, as rightly emphasized by Karl Potter (1981, 41), Śaṅkara insists on the idea that it is impossible for the enlightened person to perform any action. Although the enlightened man may continue to live in society as before, his intellect is permanently established in the knowledge of the non-dual actionless Self and he is therefore not bound by the sense of authorship and by any mental or bodily activity: "Similarly, here also, as regards the man of knowledge in whom the dualistic experience of accessories (such as offering), actions and results has been sublated by his experience of Brahman, actions are in fact non-actions, since they are mere external movements ..." <sup>2</sup> The notion of absence of duality as the basis of absence of action is further developed in BUBh 2.4.14: "Therefore, so long as there is ignorance, the ordinary life involving actions, their accessories and their results goes on, but not in the case of a knower of Brahman. For, [to him]

<sup>1</sup> tatra tasminmārge payātā mrtā gacchanti brahma brahmavido brahmopāśanaparā janāḥ. krameneti vākyaśeṣaḥ. nahi sadyomuktibhājām samyagdarśananisthānām gatiṛāgatiṛvā kvacidasti ... (BGBh 8.24, 404-405)

<sup>2</sup> tatthehāpi brahmabuddhyupamrditārpanādikāraḥ karmakriyāphala-bhedabuddher bāhyaceṣṭāmātreṇa karmāpi viduṣo 'karma sampadyate ... (BGBh 4.24, 218)

everything is the Self, and there are no auxiliaries or results of actions apart from the Self.”<sup>1</sup> We have already seen how this absence of action is expressed in the basic sequence toward liberation as “renunciation of all actions” (sarvakarmasamnyāsa) preceded by immediate knowledge of the Self (jñānaprāpti) and followed by steadfastness in that knowledge (jñānanisthā).

The following question may now arise: if jñānaprāpti is already an immediate knowledge of the Self, and sarvakarmasamnyāsa, the state of liberation from action, why is there the need for another logical step, namely, jñānanisthā, in the process of liberation?<sup>2</sup> The question is neither raised nor directly addressed by Śaṅkara, but the answer can be inferred from some of his comments. My contention is that Śaṅkara adds jñānanisthā because he wants to emphasize that the means to liberation is mere continuance in the experience of the Self’s actionlessness as opposed to the need to practice some meditation or ritual action, and because freedom from transmigratory existence is ensured by continuance in this absolute actionlessness as opposed to unstable or temporary experiences of it.

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<sup>1</sup> tasmāt avidyāvāmeva satyām kriyākāraḥ kaphalavyavahāro na brahmavidah. ātmatvādeva sarvasya. nātmavyatirekeṇa kārakam kriyāphalam vāsti (BUBh 2.4.14, 769).

<sup>2</sup> In another study, I advanced the hypothesis that in this sequence, jñānanisthā could mean a process of reunification from a prior separation between Self and non-Self similar to that found in Sāṃkhya-Yoga (Marcaurelle 1987, 113). But based on further study of Śaṅkara’s descriptions of the awakening to higher states of consciousness, I came to the conclusion that there is not enough evidence for the existence in his works of such a preliminary separation.

In this chapter, we will start with the theme of spontaneous and permanent steadfastness in actionlessness as opposed to the need of any practice, and then consider the notion of dwelling in direct Self-knowledge as a the means through which this knowledge is stabilized. We will also discuss the role of physical renunciation as an expression, as a means of stabilizing, and finally as a means of attaining, the continuance of Self-knowledge as actionless. This will be followed by a discussion on Sureśvara's departure from his master on the relationship between renunciation and qualification for knowledge, which I regard as a most crucial deviation from Śaṅkara's position within the Advaita tradition. Drawing on all our findings, we will finally try to identify the basic elements of Śaṅkara's polysemic terminology of renunciation.

### 6.1- Qualification for steadfastness in direct Self-knowledge

According to the doctrine which combines knowledge and action as a means of liberation, and which was advocated by certain pre-Śaṅkara thinkers such as Bhartṛprapañca, even after his enlightenment, the Self-knower is still subject to scriptural injunctions and must continue all the practices prescribed for him, that is, a combination of ritual actions (karmans) and meditation (iñāna). Śaṅkara rejects this position by pointing out that, due to his knowledge of the actionless Self, the enlightened's being itself is free from authorship: "...realizing the Self's absence of authorship, he does

not do any action, not even that of begging and so forth.”<sup>1</sup> The Self-knower simply “rests happily because he abstains (nivṛtta) from all interest for external things,”<sup>2</sup> having no need to accomplish anything more, and therefore nothing more to accomplish. In fact, specifies Śaṅkara, even his abstention from action (nivṛtti) is only “figurative,”<sup>3</sup> since in this case there is no identification to the authorship of any process of abstaining or of giving up.

If there is anything which remains to be done, Śaṅkara then suggests that it is simply to stay in that state of immediate knowledge characterized by the absence of doing: for the Self-knowers, he writes in his BGBh 3.17, “there is nothing else to do than to be steadfast in Self-knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> Really speaking, there is no doing in remaining in the direct experience of the actionless Self, and liberation can be said to be just that silent anchorage of the awareness in knowledge of the action-free Self: “therefore liberation consists in being established (avasthānam) in one’s own Self after the cause [of bondage] consisting of appropriation of ignorance, desire and action has disappeared.”<sup>5</sup> But the outward consequence or natural expression of this permanent inner renunciation and steadfastness in

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<sup>1</sup> ... ātmanah kartṛtvābhāvaṃ paśyannaiva kimcidbhikṣātanādikam karma karoti (BGBh 4.22, 214).

<sup>2</sup> nivṛttabāhyasarvaprājāna itī sukhamāsta ityucyate (BGBh 5.13, 258).

<sup>3</sup> “When the activity of the aggregate of his body and senses ceases, abstention from action is attributed to him figuratively” (kāryakaraṇasamghātavyāpāroparame nivṛttirupacaryate - BGBh 13.2, 534)

<sup>4</sup> ātmañānanisthāvyatirekenānyatkāryamasti (BGBh 3.17, 155).

<sup>5</sup> tasmāt avidyākāmakarmopādānahetunivṛttau svātmanāvasthānam mokṣa (TUBh intro, 259-260).

the actionless and desireless Self can be the outer, physical, abandonment of practices that were performed before enlightenment but which have now served their purpose. Thus, if one attains enlightenment before the stage of householder, one no longer needs to engage in the latter to attain purity and Self-knowledge; one has simply to remain in his actionless Self-awareness: "Needless to say, he who renounces directly from the stage of studentship and who remains all his life established (avatisthati) in Brahman alone, he attains to extinction in Brahman." <sup>1</sup>

Śaṅkara brings up various reasons to explain why the enlightened person is not subject to injunctions and has no practice of any kind to pursue. A major argument is that because the enlightened man has attained the experience of his Self as being free from all contingencies, he does not identify anymore with any one of the spacio-temporal and socio-religious conditions used by the scriptures to assert his qualification (adhikāra) for this or that prescribed action. However, mainly due to their different understanding of the Self, most of Śaṅkara's opponents hold that anyone abstaining from actions prescribed for him by the scriptures incurs sin and can therefore not be liberated. Advocates of Pūrvamīmāṃsā even assume that when the scriptures enjoin physical renunciation, it is for people who, due to some infirmity or blindness or other similar reason, are not able to perform ritual actions. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> kimu vaktavyam brahmacarvādeva samnyasya vāvaijīvam yo brahmanyevāvatisthate sa brahmanirvānamrcchatīti (BGBh 272, 133).

<sup>2</sup> See AUBh intro, 17 and BUBh 4.4.22, 528.



To convey the meaning of absence of identification with spacio-temporal and socio-religious contingencies, in his BSBh 1.1.4, Śaṅkara borrows the term aśarīra (unembodied) from a few Upaniṣadic verses.

<sup>1</sup> While commenting on the word dehabhrt (embodied) occurring in Bhagavadgītā 18.11, he also uses the term adehabhrt to mean “unembodied.” The term refers to a state which can be lived by a human being, not to some post-mortem condition: “Thus since embodiment is the result of false cognition, it is established that the man of knowledge is not embodied even during his life time.” <sup>2</sup> This is because “the Self’s embodiment and unembodiment simply follow from discrimination and absence of discrimination, respectively.” <sup>3</sup> Thus, according to Śaṅkara, the prescription or prohibition of something has no universal applicability irrespective of one’s state of consciousness. It is only if one erroneously superimposes contingencies on the attributeless Self that one will perceive oneself as an addressee of this or that injunction or prohibition. “Such scriptural injunctions as ‘A Brāhmaṇa shall perform a sacrifice,’” says the commentator, “hold good only when one gets involved in the superimposition of various things such as caste, stage of life, age, condition.” <sup>4</sup> In the same manner as actionless steadfastness in Self-

<sup>1</sup> Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.12.1, Katha Upaniṣad 1.2.22 and Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.7 as quoted in BSBh 1.1.4, 27, 40, 42.

<sup>2</sup> tasmānmithyāpratvayanimitatvātsaśarīratvasya, siddham jīvato 'pi viduṣo 'śarīratvam (BSBh 1.1.4, 97).

<sup>3</sup> vivekāvivekamātreṇaivātmano 'śarīratvam saśarīratvam ca (BSBh 1.3.19, 235-36).

<sup>4</sup> tathāhi. 'brāhmaṇo vaieta' ityādīni śāstrāṇvātmani varṇāśramavayo 'vasthādiviśeṣādhyāsamāśritya pravartante (BSBh intro, 24).

knowledge, absence of superimposition and qualification may spontaneously culminate in physical renunciation. In his introduction to BUBh 2.4, Śaṅkara elegantly states, using the same word samnyāsa in both cases, how physical renunciation naturally follows from the inner renunciation of superimposition: "For a man whose perception of himself as a Brāhmaṇa, a Kṣatriya or the like, has been sublated, ritual actions and their instruments, which are the effects of that [perception], are automatically renounced (samnyāsa) because of the renunciation (samnyāsa) of that perception."<sup>1</sup> Here again is found the structure already brought to light, in which an already direct Self-knowledge (jñānaprāpti) produces the inner abandonment of ignorance, superimposition and authorship (the generic term of which abandonment would be sarvakarmasamnyāsa), which in turn may simply remain internal or may express itself in physical abandonment of various practices (also termed by Śaṅkara as sarvakarmasamnyāsa).

Another way to demonstrate that the enlightened man has nothing to perform pertains to the notion of usefulness of action or practice. First, because action is a means for purification and direct Self-knowledge, when the latter is achieved, all further practices are no longer relevant. To convey this idea, Śaṅkara recalls the following proverb: "When the desired object is already attained, what man of knowledge would strive for it?"<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, with knowledge of oneself as the omnipresent Brahman there is a sense of having

<sup>1</sup> yasyaiva puruṣasyopamarditaḥ pratyayo brahmakṣatrādyāt maviṣayah. tasya tatoratyayasamnyāsāttatkāryānām karmanām karmasāadhanānām ca arthaprāptaśca samnyāsaḥ (BUBh 2.4 intro, 758).

<sup>2</sup> istasyārthasya samprāptau ko vidvānyatnamācaret (BUBh 4.4.22, 935).

accomplished everything which had to be accomplished

(kṛtyakṛtyatā), leaving no room for desiring any other attainment:

With the advantage of the all-spreading flood at hand, there arises no desire to construct wells and tanks or to get the result of such an endeavour; similarly, when knowledge and its result, i.e. emancipation, have been attained, it is not possible to desire any other result or to wish for an action as a means to that [other result].<sup>1</sup>

Śaṅkara further develops the idea that one's response to scriptures is determined not by the scriptures themselves, but by the subjective, non-universal, understanding and experience of one's self and of one's goal.<sup>2</sup> The significance of different or even opposed states of

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<sup>1</sup> kaivalyaphale hi jñāne prāpte sarvataḥ samplutodake phale kūpatadāgādikriyāphalārthhitvābhāvavat phalāntare tatsādhanabhūtāyām vā kriyāyām arthhitvānupapattiḥ (BGBh 18.67, 757).

<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkara specifies on various occasions that man's ever subjective response to scriptural injunctions and the unusefulness of the latter in some people's eyes does not invalidate their authority. A very good discussion is found on this in BUBh 21.20: "People have innumerable desires and various defects, such as attachment. Therefore they are lured by such things as attachment to external objects, and the scriptures are powerless to hold them back; nor can they impell those who are naturally detached from external objects to pursue them. On the contrary, scriptures only declare what leads to good and what to evil, thereby indicating the specific connections between ends and means.... In this matter people choose particular means by themselves, according to their taste, and the scriptures simply remain neutral, like the sun or a lamp for instance. Thus, one who does not recognize even the supreme goal of man sees his [own] goal according to the way it occurs to him, and wishes to use corresponding means." anekā hi puruṣānāmicchā, rāgādayaśca doṣā vicitrāḥ. tataśca-bāhyaviṣayarāgādyapahrtacetaso na śāstram nivartayitum śaktam. nāpi svabhāvato bāhyaviṣayaviraktacetaso viṣayesu pravartayitum

consciousness in this respect is interestingly brought to light by drawing a parallel between the enlightened person and the irreligious man: "So also, neither does one who does not believe in the existence of the Self engage in actions [prescribed by the scriptures], because he thinks that there is no next world."<sup>1</sup> Hence, opposing the commentators who consider the prescription of the householder āśrama and of all its rituals as universally mandatory, Śaṅkara concludes that since this āśrama consists in performing various ritual actions for the purpose of immediate Self-knowledge, when the latter is attained, then, for "one who sees the Self as ever existing" (nityasiddhāt madarśinah),<sup>2</sup> there is no reason to enter the householder āśrama after studentship. Thus, again, the state of contentment in the actionless Self spontaneously expresses outwardly in the physical abandonment of, or more precisely here, in the abstention from, ritual actions.<sup>3</sup>

Although for Śaṅkara the notion of adhikāra or qualification is irrelevant for the enlightened person as far as practices are concerned, he also uses this term to describe the relationship between direct

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śaktam. kintu śāstrādetāvadeva bhavatīdamīṣṭasāadhanamidama-  
niṣṭasāadhanamiti sādhyā sādhanasambandhaviśeṣābhivyaktiḥ  
tatra puruṣāḥ svayameva yathāruci sāadhanaviśeṣeṣu pravartante.  
śāstram tu savitrpradīpādivadudāsta eva. tathā kasyacit paro 'pi  
puruṣārtho 'puruṣārthavadabhāṣate yasya yathā 'vabhāṣaḥ sa  
tathārūpam puruṣārtham paśyati tadanurūpāṇi sādhanānyu-  
pāditsate (742-743).

<sup>1</sup> tathā nairātmyavādyapi nāsti paraloka iti na pravartate (BGBh 13.2, 533).

<sup>2</sup> TUBh 1.12, 278.

<sup>3</sup> See also BGBh 4.21, 158 for a statement vidvatsamnyāsa from the stage of brahmacarya for the same reason.

Self-knowledge, stable experience of it and liberation. As already defined, adhikāra usually means qualification for both performing something and obtaining the result of this performance. Now, even though, as we saw, steadfastness in immediate Self-knowledge precludes any sense of performance or activity, Śaṅkara also uses the term adhikāra to mean qualification for steadfastness in direct Self-knowledge as opposed to steadfastness in karman. When glossing Kṛṣṇa's advice to Arjuna, he writes for instance: "And your qualification (adhikārah) is for karman alone, not for steadfastness in knowledge (jñānanisthāyām)."<sup>1</sup> It should be pointed out that here jñānanisthā does not mean the discipline of knowledge, first because in the last sentence of the comment on the previous verse, karmanisthā is compared to wells and tank, and jñānanisthā, to the all-spreading flood of direct experience of the Self. Since these two sentences are the last and the first of two adjoining verses, no change of meaning is indicated by Śaṅkara and jñānanisthā therefore refers to direct Self-knowledge in both verses. But because, here, qualification for steadfastness in immediate Self-knowledge is not with respect to any performance or practice, its nature needs to be specified. From the negative point of view, to have adhikāra for jñānanisthā is to have no qualification for action and its results; from the positive standpoint, it means deserving, having a right to, the result of direct Self-knowledge, that is, liberation.

In the comment on verse 2.21, the reply to an objection raised by an opponent sheds some light on the nature of adhikāra when related

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<sup>1</sup> tava ca karmanvevādhikāro na jñānanisthām (BGBh 2.47, 106).

to direct Self-knowledge. Determined to show that karmans are enjoined to both the Self-knower and the ignorant, the opponent tries to find fault with Śaṅkara's distinction between what is suitable and not suitable for the Self-knower and the ignorant, and points out the uselessness of stating that knowledge is prescribed for one who already has it (and therefore does not even need it): "Even knowledge is enjoined on the unenlightened alone, because enjoining knowledge on those who already have it would be as useless as grinding flour [over again]. Then, it is not proper to hold the distinction according to which actions are enjoined on the unenlightened and not on the enlightened." <sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara then answers that what is addressed to the enlightened person is not the prescription of additional learning or practice, but the absence of anything to practice: "The objection does not hold, because there is the distinction of [respectively] the presence and absence of something to be performed.... And nothing remains to be performed after understanding the meaning of such precepts regarding the true nature of the Self as '[This Self] was never born.'" <sup>2</sup> Thus, unless the seeker after liberation is mentioned - which is relatively rare -, when in BGBh 247 and in other passages Śaṅkara uses the expression "adhikāra in jñānanisthā," jñāna does not mean the discipline of knowledge, which would amount to something to be performed, but an already immediate knowledge of Brahman-

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<sup>1</sup> nanu vidyāpyaviduṣa eva vidhīyate viditavidyasya pistapesanavadvidyāvidhānānarthakyaṭ. tatrāviduṣaḥ karmāṇi vidhīyante na viduṣa iti viśeṣo nopapadyate (BGBh 221, 73).

<sup>2</sup> na. anustheyasya bhāvābhāvaviśeṣopapatteh . . . natu tathā na jāyata ityādyāt masvarūpavidhyarthajñānottarakālabhāvi kimcidanustheyam bhavati (Ibid.).

## Ātman.<sup>1</sup>

In many similar contexts referring to the enlightened man, it is renunciation of all actions that is specified as the object (or area) of qualification. Actually, in terms of being the object of qualification, steadfastness in knowledge and renunciation of all actions seem to be equivalent in Śaṅkara's mind, as suggested by the following passage:

But the Self-knower who knows that all this aggregate of differences amounts, like the night, to mere ignorance, is qualified only for renunciation of all actions, and not for engaging in them.

The Lord accordingly will show in verses such as "Those who have

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<sup>1</sup> A similar ambiguity occurs with the word anustheya ("to be done," "to be observed") for instance in "the steadfastness in jñānayoga alone which is observed by the Self-knowers, the sāṃkhyas" (jñānayogenaiva nisthāmāt mavidbhiḥ sāmkyairanustheyām; BGBh 3.17, 155). If something is still "observed," then it could be presumed that these "knowers" know the Self only mediately and are therefore only seekers after liberation. But using the same "ātmavit" (Self-knower) compound, Śaṅkara says at the end of the comment on the same verse that "For him, for such a Self-knower, there is nothing to do, to be done" (ya īdrśa ātmavittasya kāryam karaṇīyam na vidyate nāsti; Ibid., 156). As evidence toward the understanding that Śaṅkara does see the Self-knower described by verse 3.17 as already enlightened, and his jñānanisthā as already immediate in nature, we can refer to the fact that after quoting this verse in his BSBh 4.1.2, the commentator contrasts this knower with the man who, lacking direct experience, still needs meditative repetition of the Upaniṣadic sentences: "But for one who does not get this experience quickly, the repetition is meant for bringing it about" (vasya tu naiṣo 'nubhavo drāgiva jāyate tam pratyanubhavārtha evāvrttyabhyupagamah; 831). Thus we can again see how, without taking the larger context into account, various commentators may have been led by such ambiguities to understand jñānanisthā as the discipline of knowledge, and samnyāsa, which is often associated with it by Śaṅkara, as a necessary physical abandonment for pursuing this discipline. See also BGBh 3.3 and 3.4 for the same usage of anustheya.

their intellect absorbed in That, whose Self is That,” that such a man is qualified only for steadfastness in knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

But what is the precise relationship between these two kinds of qualification? Evidence that this renunciation of all actions is based on immediate rather than mediate knowledge of the Self is found in BGBh 5.7-9 where, after describing a Self-knower who continues his social life for the welfare of the world, Śaṅkara presents his qualification as follows: “The knower of Reality, that man of right insight who, in all the movements of the senses and the mind, sees only inaction in actions, is qualified only for renunciation of all actions, because he sees the absence of action [in himself].”<sup>2</sup> So, according to this explanation, qualification for renunciation is a result of immediate Self-knowledge. A similar statement is found in BGBh 2.21: “Therefore, in the Gītā scripture, one possessed of Self-knowledge is qualified for renunciation, not for action.”<sup>3</sup>

As compared to qualification for steadfastness in direct Self-knowledge, qualification for renunciation of all actions introduces the specific notion of physical abandonment. In a context where samnyāsa or sarvakarmasamnyāsa have this meaning, the

<sup>1</sup> yasya tu punarñisevāvidyāmātramidaṃ sarvaṃ bhedajātamidam jñānaṃ tasyāt maiñāsya sarvakarmasamnyāsa evādhikāro na pravṛttau. tathā darśayisyati 'tadbuddhayaṣṭadāt mānaḥ' ityādinā. jñānanisthāyāmeva tasyādhikārah (BGBh 2.69, 128).

<sup>2</sup> yasyaivam tattvavidah sarvakāryakaraṇaceṣṭāsu karmasvakarmaiva paśyataḥ samyagdarśinastasya sarvakarmasamnyāsa evādhikārah karmaṇo 'bhāvaadarśanāt (BGBh 5.9, 254-254).

<sup>3</sup> tasmādgītāśāstrāt maiñānavataḥ samnyāsa evādhikāro na karmaṇi (BGBh 2.21, 75-76). Equivalent statements are found in IUBh 1, 5 and in KeBh intro, 36.



relationship between qualification for steadfastness in direct Self-knowledge and that for physical renunciation would be one of cause and effect: one is qualified for physically renouncing because one has qualification for immediate Self-knowledge. Whether the enlightened man physically abandons all practices or not, his qualification for direct Self-knowledge automatically qualifies him for physical renunciation. He may express this qualification in the concrete form of cessation of all practices, but he does not have to. This is clearly stated by Śaṅkara when referring to people such as Janaka who pursue their social life as they did prior to enlightenment: "The meaning is that though the stage of renunciation of ritual actions had been reached, they attained perfection while pursuing ritual actions, that is, without [physically] abandoning them." <sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, in spite of their continued performance of these ritual actions, Śaṅkara also refers to the same people as "having attained the state where ritual actions are only to be abandoned ... because they are possessed of the insight of the actionless Self." <sup>2</sup>

The question arises as to whether this qualification for physical renunciation is what is meant by sarvakarmasamnyāsa as found in the series of logical steps toward emancipation given above, in chapter 4. This does not seem to be so, because, as we saw, in these series, sarvakarmasamnyāsa plays the same role as abandonment of

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<sup>1</sup> karmasamnyāse prāpte 'pi karmanā sahaiva samsiddhimāsthitā na karmasamnyāsam kṛtavanta ityeṣo 'rthah (BGBh 2.11, 45).

<sup>2</sup> karma parityaktavyameveti prāpte ... niskrivāt madarśanasam-pannatvāt BGBh 4.20, 210-211. "Having attained abandonment of action" (karmaparityāge prāpte) is also used in reference to the same context in BGBh 4.23, 215.

ignorance (avidyā), which clearly indicates that it means an inner renunciation consequent to immediate Self-knowledge. Besides, we have also shown that sarvakarmasamnyāsa as a necessary logical step to liberation accounts for a state of consciousness that is free from the boundaries of authorship and activity even in the midst of actions such as sacrifices, a meaning that is quite different from qualification for physical renunciation. To summarize, immediate knowledge of the Self spontaneously results in renunciation of authorship. Representing two major logical steps toward liberation, knowledge and renunciation also automatically provide qualification for physical renunciation.

Of course, this does not make the enlightened man the only person qualified for physical renunciation. Śaṅkara also uses the expression adhikāra for renunciation of all actions in the case of the seeker after liberation: "Therefore, the distinguished man of knowledge who sees the immutable Self, and the seeker after liberation, are qualified for renunciation of all actions alone."<sup>1</sup> But,

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<sup>1</sup> tasmādviśeṣitasvāvikriyāt madarśino viduṣo mumukṣośca sarvakarmasamnyāsa evādhikārah (BGBh 221, 73). Swāmī Gambhīrānanda has the following confusing translation: "Therefore, the enlightened person distinguished above, who has realized the immutable Self and is a seeker of Liberation is qualified ..." (Śaṅkara 1984, 66) Saway translates the sentence as if the subject is both enlightened and seeker after liberation: "Therefore, for the enlightened one who sees that ātman is unchangeable and who is eager for mokṣa, the renunciation of all actions is the only proper course" (376). This is also inaccurate, since the long discussion that precedes this sentence in BGBh 221 describes the same knower (vidvān) as "being the Self" (viduṣa ātmatvāt; 72) etc., hence as clearly enlightened. Consistently with his translation, Saway opines that in Śaṅkara's works, as compared to renunciation of the seeker, "far rarer

the key point here is the following: interpreters have often missed the fact that, most of the time, when Śaṅkara mentions qualification for renunciation alone, he attributes it to the already enlightened person, not to the seeker after liberation, a misinterpretation that completely shifts the emphasis from physical renunciation as an expression of a direct Self-knowledge, to physical renunciation as a necessary means to mediate and immediate Self-knowledge.

Thus, having attained liberation-in-this-life, the enlightened has two alternatives: "if he leads an active life, his movements are merely physical, without intention, [only] for the welfare of the world; if he leads a monastic life, they are for the bare maintenance of life."<sup>1</sup> As is the case in this citation, welfare of the world is usually the main reason given for choosing not to physically abandon ritual actions. In his comment on the next verse, Śaṅkara first invokes the impossibility of physically renouncing "due to some reason" (kutaścitnimittāt),<sup>2</sup> and then adds, as a positive justification, the idea of welfare of the world, and as a negative reason, "desiring to avoid the reproach of the wise men" (śiṣṭavigarhaṇāpariṇihīrsavā).<sup>3</sup> In BGBh 3.26, welfare of the world is defined in terms of giving the example of a virtuous life to unenlightened people: "Then what should he do? The man of

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is the vidvatsamnyāsa of the jīvanmukta, who has achieved emancipation even before his formal act of renunciation" (377). Again this remark shows a major misinterpretation of terms related to renunciation in Śaṅkara's works.

<sup>1</sup> mudhaiva cestāmātrā anusthīyante pravṛttena cellokasamgrahārtham nivṛttena cejjīvanamātrārtham (BGBh 4.19, 209). The monk does only the actions necessary to the proper functioning of his body, such as eating.

<sup>2</sup> BGBh 4.20, 210.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

knowledge should engage them in, make them perform, all actions, performing himself diligently, proficiently, the very same actions that the unenlightened men do."<sup>1</sup> Whatever the reason given for continuing social life as before, the enlightened man experiences the Self as the actionless witness of all purposes and actions. He is not bound by any sense of authorship or result of action, whether sañcitakarmans, āgāmikarmans, or even prārabdhakarmans.<sup>2</sup> The same inner immutability ascribed by Śaṅkara to the enlightened monk in the following passage also applies to the still socially active direct Self-knower: "However, as his behaviour looks similar to common human ways of doing, he becomes a doer when people attribute to him the authorship of actions such as begging ... But from the standpoint of his own experience born of factors such as the valid means of knowledge offered by the scriptures, he is surely not a doer."<sup>3</sup>

Kamalakar Mishra has criticized what he considers Advaita's incompatibility with the amelioration of society through socio-cultural activities:

Morerover, in the classical Advaitism the person who attains Jīvanmukti, lives just to work out his remaining prārabdha-karma. He can do no positive work with regard to society, as he becomes niṣkriya (inactive). He is like one who has taken

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<sup>1</sup> kimtu kuryājjoṣayetkārayet sarvakarmāṇi vidvān svayam tadevāvidusām karma yukto 'bhiyuktaḥ samācaran (BGBh 3.26, 163).

<sup>2</sup> See for instance BGBh 13.23.

<sup>3</sup> lokavyavahārasāmānyadarśanena tu laukikairāropitakartrtve bhikṣātanāḍau karmaṇi kartā bhavatim ... svānubhavana tu śāstrapramāṇādijanitenākartaive (BGBh 4.22, 214).

preparatory leave prior to the retirement from one's services,  
and counting one's days for the final retirement ... (51)

Pursuing social life for the welfare of the world after enlightenment is certainly not Śaṅkara's emphasis. Yet he recognizes the value of this choice in his commentaries on verses 2.11, 3.20-26, 4.15, 4.19-24 and 5.7 of the Gītā. Thus, according to me, Kamalakar Mishra's general critique of Advaita's shortcoming in this respect would not apply to Śaṅkara but rather to those who interpreted him as teaching obligatory monasticism.

## 6.2- Direct Self-knowledge and injunction of physical renunciation

We have seen that, according to Śaṅkara, physical renunciation of prescribed practices is a spontaneous result of direct Self-knowledge. Yet our commentator understands some passages of the scriptures as enjoining physical renunciation to the already enlightened person. Thus, after identifying the unenlightened's renunciation (avidvatparivrāja) as different from the one referred to in the following quote, Śaṅkara writes in his BUBh 3.5.1: "He who knows the self, therefore, should resort<sup>1</sup> [pratipadyet] only to the Paramahansa type of renunciation, which is characterized by the turning away from (desires), and which consists of the abandonment of all rites and ritual

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis is mine.

instruments" (Olivelle 1986, 1:91).<sup>1</sup> Is this really taken by Śaṅkara as an injunction? And why is there any kind of injunction for the enlightened person, since in his case physical renunciation is spontaneous?

The best answer to these questions is probably found in the introduction of the AUBh. In this discussion, the opponent is an advocate of combination of knowledge and action for the purpose of liberation. His main argument is that, because allusion to renunciation in verses such as Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.5.1 is mere praise of knowledge rather than injunction, or prescription of renunciation for disabled people who are disqualified from rites (7), there exists no such non-performer (akarmīṇaḥ) belonging to a distinct order (āśramāntarasya) for whom knowledge of the Self would be meant (4); thus the Upaniṣad teaches knowledge in the form of meditative practice only to one who also does rituals (6). Śaṅkara answers thus: "Not so; because when the supreme knowledge is reached and when there is no looking for result, action is not possible.... When one knows that his Self is Brahman... action is impossible."<sup>2</sup> It is quite clear that here Śaṅkara uses the case of the enlightened man to show that one does find people who are unassociated with karmāṇaḥ. He further specifies that such a man is not subject to scriptural injunctions "because he has realized the Self that is beyond the range

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<sup>1</sup> tasmātparamahamsapārivrāṇīyameva vyūthānalakṣaṇam pratipadyeta ātmavitsarvakarmasādhanaparityāgarūpamiti (BUBh 3.5.1, 813).

<sup>2</sup> na paramārthavijñāṇe phalādarśane kriyānupapattēḥ... brahmāhamasmītyātmatvena vijñāṇe... kriyā nopapadyate (AUBh intro, 325).

of injunctions.”<sup>1</sup> And he declares even more boldly: “Nor can he be impelled by anything, since even the scriptures emanate from him. No one can be impelled by a sentence issuing out of his own knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> Doubtless, all this can only refer to the enlightened person and not to the seeker after liberation.

The opponent then claims (10) that if in the case of the Self-knower, there is no goal (pravojana) attainable through rites, likewise there will be no aim in the act of renouncing, since Gītā 3.18 states that the Self-knower has nothing to achieve “through non-performance” (akrtena). Śaṅkara retorts that this is not so, “since renunciation consists in mere cessation from activity” (Ibid.)<sup>3</sup> and is therefore not like an action to perform for accomplishing a goal. It is a characteristic of the person (purusadharma), rather than a performance on his part (11). Thus physical renunciation is again presented as a natural consequence of direct Self-knowledge. Thereupon the opponent reiterates the idea that there is in fact no injunction of physical renunciation: “Then, as renunciation comes spontaneously [arthaprāptatvāt], it is not to be enjoined. If the supreme knowledge of Brahman dawns in the stage of householder, the inactive man may

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<sup>1</sup> niyogāviśayāt madarśanāt (Ibid.).

<sup>2</sup> na ca sa niyoktum śakyate kenacit. āmnāyasyāpi tatprabhavatvāt. na hi svavijñānotthana vacasā svayam niyujyate (Ibid.). Śaṅkara also writes in his BUBh 21.20: “When the transcendent Brahman is realised as the only existence, there is neither instruction nor instructor nor the result of receiving the instruction, and therefore the Upaniṣads are useless - it is a position we readily admit” (219). ekasminbrahmaṇi nirupādhike nopadeśo. nopadeśā. na copadeśagrahanaphalam. tasmādupanīṣadām cānarthakyaṁ ityeta dābhyupagatameva (744).

<sup>3</sup> akriyāmātratvāt vyutthānasya (AUBh intro, 326).

continue in that state and there is no need to move away from it.”<sup>1</sup> The argument does not hold, responds Śaṅkara, “since the stage of householder is a product of desire.”<sup>2</sup> We already noted that Swāmī Gambhīrānanda, translator of this commentary, interprets this kind of statement as precluding immediate Self-knowledge from householders, which would contradict other statements by Śaṅkara brought to light here in the last chapter. Śaṅkara’s answer is in fact somewhat pithy and certainly more subtle than Gambhīrānanda believes. It does not mean that a householder cannot obtain knowledge and liberation; it rather refutes the notion implied by the opponent’s argument, according to which a householder can be both “non-active” (akurvataḥ) and belonging to the householder stage of life with all the desires and practices it entails. In other words, Śaṅkara answers from the point of view of the ultimate reality that one can either identify with the desireless and actionless Self or with the personality of a householder nourished by desire, but not with both at the same time. It is the desireless state of Self-knowledge, and not the monastic way of life as such, that is here opposed to the desireful householdership. The fact that Śaṅkara has this meaning of householdership in view is confirmed when he writes further in the introduction that “the highest result of duties pertaining to the stage of householder has been summarized as identification with the deity

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<sup>1</sup> vyutthānam tarhyarthaprāptatvānna codanārhamiti. gārhaṣṭhye cetparam brahma vijñānam jātam tatraivastvakurvata āsanam na tato 'nyatra gamanamiti cet (Ibid.).

<sup>2</sup> kāmapravuktatvādgārhaṣṭhyasya (Ibid.).



[Hiranyagarbha],”<sup>1</sup> which applies, as we saw, only to unenlightened people, and not to enlightened persons who apparently pursue the desireful life of a householder.<sup>2</sup> Thus, holds Śaṅkara, if the householder is really enlightened, he is desireless and, as a consequence, he can only abandon all practices and all attachments, which are based on desire and which even include staying in a particular home, always receiving food from the same person, and so

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<sup>1</sup> gārhasthyāśramakarmāṇi teṣāṃ paramaphalamupasaṃhṛtam devatāpyayalakṣaṇam (Ibid., 327).

<sup>2</sup> However Śaṅkara does oppose the stage of life of the renouncer with that of the householder just before mentioning Hiranyagarbha as the result of steadfastness in action: “And the integral practice of such means of knowledge as celibacy is possible [only] for those who have gone beyond the stages of life, [while] it is impossible in the householder stage” (brahmacaryādividyāsādhanaṇām ca sākalyenātyāśramiṣūpapattergārhasthye ’sambhavāt; Ibid., 327). Let us first clarify the expression “those who have gone beyond the stages of life” (atyāśramins). A few lines before the above citation, Śaṅkara introduces it within a quotation from Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.21. In this verse, a master is said to teach Brahman to students who are atyāśramins. Since Śaṅkara also attributes integral practice of celibacy to these atyāśramins, he seems to see them as monastic seekers after liberation. Yet, the most plausible interpretation of Śaṅkara’s description of the limited means of householders in the passage quoted above is not to assume his self-contradiction on the universal availability of knowledge and liberation, but to understand that, in accord with the intent of the whole AUBh’s introduction, this is mentioned to prove that there exists a way of life based on physical renunciation and prescribed for Self-knowledge, and that, as a consequence, it cannot be claimed that liberation comes from knowledge as combined with ritual actions. Besides, Śaṅkara specifies that it is “the integral practice” of the mentioned disciplines that cannot be pursued by the householder, implying as we have already seen elsewhere, that the latter also has access to these means.

forth (12). He therefore adopts the mendicant way of life "as a matter of course" (Ibid.),<sup>1</sup> and not out of being enjoined to do so.

The opponent then argues that since regulation (nivama) is to be followed by the monk with respect to begging of food, etc., it is proper to understand that ritual actions are also to be engaged in by the enlightened householder. Śaṅkara answers that the enlightened householder is outside the range of injunction. The opponent retorts that if this is so these scriptural injunctions become useless, which is untenable. Śaṅkara rejoins that they remain useful for the unenlightened. He then adds that while prescriptions of sacrifices like Agnihotra suppose in the sacrificer the desire of a goal, namely heaven, for which the scriptures indicate sacrifice as the means, the regulation with respect to begging does not imply any purpose (prayojana) for which a prescription would be needed: the only purpose of the monk is to satisfy the natural desire to eat that is indispensable for the mere sustenance of the body (13). The opponent then comes back with the argument that if it serves no purpose (prayojana) the restriction from the scriptures with respect to begging will be useless, which is unacceptable (14). Śaṅkara answers that the injunctive formula is not a prescription but only a sort of confirmation of the monk's natural absorption in knowledge and of his inner and outer renunciation: "No, because that restriction is the result of previous practices (pravṛtti), and an overriding of the latter involves enormous effort." <sup>2</sup> The commentator then specifies that

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<sup>1</sup> arthāt (Ibid., 326).

<sup>2</sup> na.tanniyamasya pūrvapravṛttisiddhatvāttadatikrame  
vatnagauravāt (Ibid., 327).

even when the tendency to simply live out of begging is already a spontaneous expression of a state of inner renunciation based on direct Self-knowledge, the explicit injunction of physical renunciation (addressed to Self-knowers for instance in Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 3.5.1) specifies that the enlightened's natural tendency to physically abandon all means which are no longer useful for him, is to be allowed to express itself concretely in the form of physical renunciation:

"Because the renunciation that is virtually attained (arthaprāptasya) is restated (punarvacanāt), it is proven that the man of knowledge has to do it." <sup>1</sup>

Another question pertaining to the relationship between direct Self-knowledge and physical renunciation is that if, whether a Kṣatriya, a Vaiśya or a Śūdra, anybody who becomes enlightened is beyond the range of scriptural injunctions and prohibitions, then why hold that among enlightened people, only Brāhmaṇas are allowed to physically renounce? As we saw, Śaṅkara even mentions with respect to the Kṣatriya as well as to the Brāhmaṇa, the possibility of being devoid of any identification with the characteristics of their caste and, at least theoretically, their qualification for physical abandonment of rituals. A tentative explanation of Śaṅkara's viewpoint on this apparent contradiction may be taken from his comment on Gītā 3.20 where, paraphrasing Kṛṣṇa's advice to Arjuna, he states that, if Arjuna thinks that rites will not have to be performed after reaching enlightenment, "even then, in accordance with prārabdhakarman, and also solely for the welfare of the world - the latter consisting of

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<sup>1</sup> arthaprāptasya vyutthānasya punarvacanādviduṣaḥ kartavyatvopapattiḥ (Ibid.).

keeping people back from the wrong path - you should perform action." <sup>1</sup> Thus it seems that, for Śaṅkara, it is prārabdhakarman (expressing as birth in a Brāhmaṇa or Kṣatriya family, etc.) that remains the criterion of qualification for physical renunciation in the case of enlightened men, even if they experience the Self as the attributeless witness of prārabdhakarmans and of any other phenomenal reality. Although Śaṅkara didn't address this issue clearly, his approach could be seen as consistent with the Advaita understanding that the liberated-in-this-life is unaffected by any karman by virtue of the perfect reflection of the actionless Self in his intellect, while his individual self (jīva) is still experiencing the effects of the prārabdhakarmans on the empirical level.

Verse 2.23.1 from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad is very well-known for its statement on the relationship between qualification for immediate Self-knowledge and physical renunciation. It runs as follows:

There are three divisions of dharma. One comprises sacrifice, study and charity. The second is austerity alone. The third is the brahmacārin living in the house of his teacher, where he dedicates himself for life. All these go to the virtuous worlds; the man established in Brahman (brahmasamsthah) attains immortality. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> tathāpi prārabdhakarmāyattastvam lokasamgrahamevāpi lokasyonmārgapravrttinivāraṇam lokasamgrahastamevāpi pravojanam sampāśyankartumarhasi (BGBh 3.20, 159-160).

<sup>2</sup> trayo dharmaskandhā yaiṇo 'dhyayanam dānamiti prathamastapa eva dvitīyo brahmacāryācāryākulavāsī tṛtīyo 'tyantamātmanamācāryakule 'vasādayansarva ete punyalokā bhavanti brahmasamstho 'mṛtatvameti (CUBh 2.23.1, 404).

Here the basic ambiguity relates to the word brahmasamstha, “the one established in Brahman,” which defines the qualification for liberation. According to some commentators, brahmasamstha means the seeker after liberation pursuing full-time discipline of knowledge in the samnyāsa stage of life; for others, it refers to the already enlightened person, whatever the stage of life he seemingly lives in. The first opinion is described as follows in the Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha:

Yet others, however, say thus: he, of whom, in the words “He who is well established in Brahman attains immortality,” Scripture declares being well-established, or ending in Brahman, that is to say, being fixed therein, which consists in not engaging in any other activity, for him there is eligibility, in the principal sense, for hearing (study) etc.... And this being well-established in Brahman does not come about for those who remain without renunciation, in other orders of life, because of distraction due to the performance of duties prescribed for each one’s order of life (1:350-351).<sup>1</sup>

In his Gūdārthadīpikā 18.49, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī interprets the passage in a similar way:

The wandering ascetic (paramahamsapārivrājaka) alone is presented in the Śruti passage “the one established in Brahman attains immortality” as being different from [people belonging

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<sup>1</sup> apare tu - “brahasamsthō ‘mrtatvameti” iti śrutyauditā yasya brahmaṇi samsthā samāptih. ananyavyāpārāt varūpam tannisthatvam. tasya śravaṇādiṣu mukhyo ‘dhikārah. ... sā ca brahmaṇi samsthā vīna samnyāsamāśramāntarasthasya na sambhavati. svasvāśramavihitakarmānusthānavaiyagryāt (Appaya Dīkṣita, 292).

to the three divisions of virtue. Capable of reflecting on the Vedānta statements, he approaches the guru, a wandering ascetic having achieved the goal. It is for him that the Brahmasūtra starting with "Hence thereafter a deliberation on Brahman" has been written by Lord Bādarāyaṇa.<sup>1</sup>

On the contrary, Potter understands that, according to Śaṅkara, the brahmasamstha is by definition a liberated man: "The fourth way, that of being 'fixed in Brahman,' belongs to the true wandering mendicant (parivrājaka), and it is he alone who is freed from further births and deaths, unlike the other three, who will eventually be reborn" (1982, 116).<sup>2</sup>

So the question remains as to whether, according to Śaṅkara, brahmasamstha means any enlightened man or one who reaches enlightenment only after having resorted to physical renunciation in order to devote himself totally to the discipline of knowledge. More

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<sup>1</sup> etādṛśa eva 'brahmasamstho' mṛtatvam eti' iti śrutyā dharmaskandhatrayavilakṣaṇatvena pratipāditah paramahamsaparivrājakah paramahamsaparivrājakaṁ kṛtakṛtyam gurumupasṛtya vedāntavākyavicārasamartho yam uddiśya 'athāto brahma jñānā' ityādicaturlakṣaṇamīmāṃsā bhagavatā bādarāyaṇena samārambhi (BGBh 18.49, 733).

<sup>2</sup> Interpretations of modern scholars are also divergent: Patrick Olivelle identifies the brahmasamstha as the "renouncer" and as a category of people "who set their mind on liberation" (1974, 34), while in his History of Dharmaśāstra, Kane favours an interpretation similar to Potter's: "The last clause about 'brahmasamstha' differentiates the three āśramas from him who has knowledge of brahma and holds fast by it. That portion says that the consequence of the knowledge of brahma is immortality; but it does not say expressly or impliedly that the stage of parivrājaka is a means of attaining the knowledge of brahma. So one may doubt whether samnyāsa as an āśrama is spoken of here ..." (21:420-421)

precisely, does brahmasamstha define only the formal physical renouncer of the fourth āśrama, or a physical renouncer that does not belong to any āśrama, or, whatever the āśrama, any renouncer of authorship, or some combination of these?

In his comment on this verse, Śaṅkara attributes at least three major viewpoints to the opponent (CUBh 146-149): first, "immortality" (amrtatva) is simply excellence (atiśaya) within "the virtuous worlds" (punya-loka); second, this immortality comes from the combination of the practice of rites, or of any prescribed dharma, with knowledge consisting of meditation on om; third, people from the four āśramas can reach the said immortality inasmuch as they conform to this combined practice. Thus from the opponent's viewpoint, there exists no such thing as a kind of life that would be conducive to liberation without the practice of both rites and meditation together. This is mainly what Śaṅkara will try to refute.

Interestingly, in all of the Upaniṣads, the expression brahmasamstha occurs only there, so that it is impossible to compare this occurrence with others in the Upaniṣads themselves or in Śaṅkara's comments. We have already seen that the similar compound brahmanistha can imply either mediate or immediate knowledge of Brahman. Thus it provides no decisive clue to our enquiry.

But two citations of this verse by Śaṅkara in his CUBh do suggest that, to him, brahmasamstha refers to an already enlightened person. Immediately after describing how the knower of Brahman (brahma-vidah) lives on the basis of his prārabdhakarman in spite of his enlightenment, Śaṅkara virtually equates that enlightened man with the brahmasamstha of verse 2.23.1: "And concerning the passage

'the man established in Brahman attains immortality,' we said that for a knower of Brahman there can be no action after the emergence of knowledge."<sup>1</sup> In the introduction of the CUBh, the commentator also equates with the brahmasamstha the man who has been freed from ignorance through knowledge of the non-dual Self: "Therefore ritual actions are enjoined only on those who have defects such as ignorance, not on one who is possessed of the knowledge of non-duality. Hence [the Upaniṣad] will declare: 'All these go to the virtuous worlds; the man established in Brahman attains immortality.'"<sup>2</sup>

We can recognize here the same fundamental position on Śaṅkara's part: immediate knowledge of the Self alone leads to liberation. We have already pointed out that in various passages, he clearly mentions that even monks who are completely devoted to meditation on Brahman but who are yet without direct experience of the actionless Self may only reach Hiranyagarbha at the time of death.<sup>3</sup> So from a logical point of view it cannot be that mere full-time absorption in the discipline of knowledge in the context of samnyāsāśrama ensures immortality. It seems therefore fair to say that, as far as these cross-references are concerned, direct Self-knowledge is the main characteristic of the brahmasamstha.

As BSBh 3.4.20 refers to Chāndogya 2.23.1, it can also be used to clarify Śaṅkara's interpretation. So let us look at the commentator's

<sup>1</sup> jñānotpatterūrdhva ca brahma vidah karmābhāvamavocāma  
'brahmasamstho 'mrtatvameti' iyatra (CUBh 6.14.2, 536).

<sup>2</sup> tasmāda vidyādidoṣavata eva karmāṇi vidhīyante  
nādvaitaijñānavataḥ. ata eva hi vakṣyati - 'sarva ete punyalokā  
bhavanti brahmasamstho 'mrtatvameti' iti (CUBh intro, 352).

<sup>3</sup> See CUBh 5.10.2, 359 and MuBh 1.2.11, 107.



definition or characterization of brahmasamstha in both these passages. First, in CUBh 223.1, Śaṅkara distinguishes the brahmasamstha from people merely following the rules of an āśrama: "Austerity (tapas) means [practices] such as the hard cāndrāvāna [fasting]. A person possessed of these is called tāpasa or parivrāt. The brahmasamstha is not meant, [but] one who simply follows the dharma of a stage of life ..." <sup>1</sup>

Parivrāt is somewhat confusing in this passage, since Śaṅkara also uses this word later on in his comment to refer to the brahmasamstha. Does the commentator mean here that parivrāt is synonymous with tāpasa or that by the word tapas the verse includes both the tāpasa stage of life (corresponding to vānaprastha) and the parivrāt's stage (corresponding to mere samnyāsāśrama) on the basis of their common practice of austerities? According to Ānanda Giri by the word parivrāt Śaṅkara means here mere samnyāsāśrama: "The word vānaprastha [in fact the word actually used by Śaṅkara is 'tāpasa'] also indicates the inferior parivrāt." <sup>2</sup> When discussing the issue of the etymological or conventional meaning of brahmasamstha elsewhere in his comment, Śaṅkara significantly uses as an example the fact that even if the word parivrāiaka is etymologically derived from pārivrāiṇya (wandering man), it is used in the conventional sense of a man belonging to an āśrama, i.e. the well-known samnyāsāśrama (CUBh 154). This allusion seems to confirm that, when subdividing

<sup>1</sup> tapa iti kṛcchracāndrāvānādi tadvāmstāpasah parivrādvā na brahmasamstha āśramadharmamātrasamstho ... (CUBh 223.1, 404-405)

<sup>2</sup> vānaprasthagrahanamamukhyasya parivrāṇo 'pi pradarśanāyam (Śaṅkara. 1904. Chāndogyaopaniṣat. Ānandagirikṛtāṭīkāsamvalita-śāṅkarabhāṣyasametā. Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, vol 14, 115).

tapas into tāpasa and parivrāt Śaṅkara understands parivrāt to mean parivrājaka in its conventional sense, that is, the man simply belonging to the samnyāsāśrama, the physical renouncer without immediate knowledge of the Self as opposed to the enlightened brahmasamstha. In another section of the comment, the opponent holds that "in the passage 'The second is austerity alone,' both the parivrāt and the tāpasa are understood by the word tapas" and that "whosoever among these very four is a brahmasamstha meditating on om, attains immortality." <sup>1</sup> When replying to this interpretation, Śaṅkara does not refute that tapas also stands for the person belonging to the samnyāsāśrama, but that it does not include the man (called here parivrāt and parivrājaka) who has sublated duality and for whom alone brahmasamstha is possible: "And the statement that by the word tapas, the parivrāt also is referred to is wrong. Why? Because the state of brahmasamstha is possible for the parivrājaka alone who has got rid of the experience of differences." <sup>2</sup> Of course, we are again faced here with an apparent contradiction, as the commentator attributes the state of brahmasamstha that is said to be beyond āśramas, to the parivrājaka, while the latter has been defined as the conventional term for the person belonging to the fourth āśrama... So we need to further investigate the meaning of

<sup>1</sup> tapa eva dvitīya ityatra tapaśabdena parivrāttāpasau grhītau... tesāmeva caturṇām yo brahmasamsthaḥ prañavasevakah so 'mrtatvameti (CUBh 223.1, 405).

<sup>2</sup> yaccoktam tapaśabdena parivrādapyukta iti. etadasat. kasmāt? parivrājakasyaiva nivṛttabhedapratyayasya brahmasamsthatāsambhavāt (Ibid., 407).

brahmasamstha, as well as the sense of parivrāt and parivrāika when associated with brahmasamstha.

The first definition of brahmasamstha in CUBh 223.1 reads thus: "But the one not [yet] defined is the parivrāt, the fourth one, the brahmasamstha, the well-established in Brahman." <sup>1</sup> A similar definition is found in BSBh 3.4.20: "For the term brahmasamstha implies a consummation in Brahman, a steadfastness in It, consisting of the absence of any other involvement." <sup>2</sup> The most important indication favouring the interpretation of this absorption in Brahman as an already immediate knowledge is as follows. In almost all contexts of his CUBh 223.1 where brahmasamstha is found and where parivrāt \ parivrāika are given as synonymous with it, Śaṅkara associates with these synonyms either the knowledge of nonduality and \ or the absence of desire in exactly the same way as he does in other, clearer, contexts with the liberated-in-this-life. He writes:

This being so, whoever has sublated the experience of differences from which injunctions of duties come to be observed, he abstains from all duties because their cause ceases to exist as a result of the experience of Unity arising from the valid scriptural means of knowledge ... and the one who abstains from duties, is said to be established in Brahman. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> aviśiṣṭastvanuktah parivrāt tūriyo brahmasamsthoh brahmaṇi samyak sthitah (Ibid., 405).

<sup>2</sup> brahmasamstha iti hi brahmaṇi parisamāptirananyavyāpārātā-rūpam tannisthatvam abhidhīyate (BSBh 3.4.20, 795).

<sup>3</sup> tatraivam sati yam bhedapratyayam upādāya karmavidhayaḥ pravṛttāḥ sa vasyopamarditah ... ity etadvākyapramāṇaia nitenai-katvapratyayena. sa sarvakarmabhyo nivṛtto nimittanivṛtteḥ sa ca nivṛttakarmā brahmasamstha ucyate (CUBh 223.1, 406).

This quite clearly describes physical renunciation on the basis of direct Self-knowledge. By introducing elsewhere the idea that the obligation of performing rituals applies only to those who do not have non-dual Self-knowledge, Śaṅkara also implies that, in contrast, the brahmasamstha does have this knowledge: "We say that the person who is possessed of the experience of differences, whose perception of differences has not been sublated by knowledge, is qualified for actions." <sup>1</sup> The opponent concludes that if the parivrāt is the one with the experience of Unity, then people having reached this experience could continue in their respective āśrama and be in fact parivrāt. "No," retorts Śaṅkara, "because, in their case, the perception of differences like 'me' and 'mine' has not ceased.... Hence, because of the absence of 'me' and 'mine,' the mendicant (bhikṣu) is the only one to be parivrāt, not householders and others." <sup>2</sup> Thus, the contrast here is between people who are, and people who are not, beyond the sense of authorship or possession based on authorship, not between people who have, and do not have, all the time to be absorbed in the discipline of knowledge. Accordingly, the brahmasamstha already has immediate Self-knowledge. It seems that if Śaṅkara goes so far as to introduce the outward characteristic of a bhikṣu (mendicant) to specify that he is in fact referring to the enlightened man, it is because he tries to establish that if the householder does attain this knowledge of Unity and the ensuing inner renunciation, he will

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<sup>1</sup> bhedapratyayavānanupamarditabhedabuddhirvidyayā yah. sa karmanvadhikṛta ityavocāma (Ibid., 407).

<sup>2</sup> na.svasvāmitvabhedabuddhyanivṛtteh... tasmāt svasvāmitvābhāvādbhikṣureka eva parivrāt na grhasthādiḥ (Ibid.).

spontaneously abandon the state of householder and all its practices because they are of no further use to him. Here, reference to the mendicant seems to provide Śaṅkara with the clearest symbol of an authorized stage of life that does not require rites and leads to liberation through knowledge alone. However, while the brahmasamstha is indeed defined by Śaṅkara as a physical renouncer, his renunciation is by virtue of direct Self-knowledge, not for the purpose of gaining it, and his attainment of immortality is through the same immediate knowledge, not through full absorption in the discipline of knowledge within a monastic context. It is in this very sense that the brahmasamstha or parivrāt is said by the commentator to be atyāśramin, that is, "beyond āśramas" (154), including the samnyāśāśrama of the seeker after liberation fully absorbed in the discipline of knowledge.

Following this statement, Śaṅkara specifies the difference between such a renunciation and identification with the monastic way of life which, with respect to the latter, is based as much on ignorance as the householder stage of life: "And it follows that this alone is the parivrāiṣa mentioned in the Vedas, and not the possession of the sacred thread, the three staves, the water pot, etc." <sup>1</sup> He then quotes the following passage from the Smṛti: "Therefore, the yatis who have seen the Supreme do not undertake duties. Therefore, the knower of Reality is without sign, he has no distinguishing sign." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ataścedamevaikam vedoktam pārivṛāiṣam na vaiñopaviṭatridandakamandalvādiparigraha iti (Ibid., 408).

<sup>2</sup> tasmātkarma na kurvanti yatayah pāradarśinah. tasmādalīngo dharmaiño 'vyaktalīngah (Ibid.)

These equally suggest that even when living as a mendicant after physical renunciation, the enlightened man does not have to be visually associated with the samnyāsāśrama by way of acquiring the traditional equipment of a monk. Similar statements are found in other commentaries. In BUBh 3.5.1, the knowers of Brahman abandon both rites and “the emblem prescribed by the Smṛtis, which emblem is just an instrument that reveals their renunciatory state and thereby procures a living for those who resort to (renunciation) merely as an āśrama” (Olivelle 1986-87, 1:84).<sup>1</sup>

Even though BSBh 3.4.20 introduces the quite different idea that the brahmasamstha has to abide by a specific dharma, the latter seems mainly for the sake of remaining absorbed in that already available experience of the Self or to stabilize it through control of mind and senses:

But his dharma, [consisting of means] such as control of senses and organs, strengthens the state of brahmasamstha; it does not go against it. The duty for his order of life is steadfastness in Brahman (brahmanisthatvam) alone, supported by control of mind and senses; [whereas] sacrifices, etc. are the duties of other people; and he incurs sin by transgressing his duty.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> smārtam liṅgam kevalam āśramamātraśaraṇānām jīvanasāadhanam pārivrajyavyaṇīakam (BUBh 3.5.1, 813). See also Olivelle’s accurate description of such an atyāśramin (1986-87, 1:55).

<sup>2</sup> śamadamādistu tadīyo dharmo brahmasamsthatāyā upodbalako na virodhī. brahmanisthameva hi tasya śamadamādyupabrmhitam svāśramavihitam karma yaiñādīni cetareṣām tadvyatikrame ca tasya pratvavāyah (BSBh 3.4.20, 795).

In CUBh 223.1, Śaṅkara denies that such means represent mandatory practices as they are addressed to one who already has the experience of Brahman, even if not yet on a permanent basis. In answer to the opponent's argument that because the knowledge of Unity eliminates all injunctions, means of control such as yama and niyama cannot apply to the parivrājaka, Śaṅkara writes: "No, because [these rules] are meant for restraining a person who may have lost the experience of Unity because of hunger and so forth."<sup>1</sup> So, even when considered as an unstable level of Self-knowledge, the state of brahmasamstha is far more advanced than the use of hearing, reflection and meditation after physical renunciation in the case of the seeker after liberation with no direct experience of the Self at all.

It follows that, when pārivrājya, parivrāt, parivrājaka and bhikṣu are associated with brahmasamstha, they imply physical renunciation on the basis of direct Self-knowledge. This is conveyed quite clearly, at the end of the comment on Chāndogya 223.1, when Śaṅkara states that, for the householder, pārivrājya is the natural outcome of attaining the (experiential) knowledge of Brahman-Ātman's non-duality:

Therefore, it is proven that pārivrājya, the state of brahmasamstha, characterised by abstention from duties, is only for the man who has the experience of Unity arising from the Vedāntic valid means of knowledge. Hence, when the

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<sup>1</sup> na.bubhuksādinaikatvapratyayātpracyāvitasyopapatternivrttyar-  
thatvāt (CUBh 223.1, 407).

householder has the knowledge of Unity, pārivrājya<sup>1</sup> naturally follows<sup>2</sup> (arthasiddham).<sup>3</sup>

Thus Potter's conclusion on Śaṅkara's CUBh 223.1 seems quite justified:

As Śaṅkara interprets the Chāndogya's "ways" or stages they are not a series of steps one must mount successively on the way to liberation, but just four kinds of people. Any one of the first three kinds, or for that matter any kind of persons whatsoever, provided he gains true knowledge of the nondifference of things, thereby becomes a person of the fourth kind. But he can't be both at once (1982, 120).

Considering the whole of CUBh 223.1, we find here again the basic sequence toward liberation also identified in various other places:

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<sup>1</sup> In view of the prescription of physical renunciation for Brāhmaṇas alone, it goes without saying that here Śaṅkara refers mainly to the latter.

<sup>2</sup> pārivrājyam arthasiddham is variously translated as "he has to resort to monasticism as a matter of course" (CUBh, 155); "he also naturally attains the position of a Wandering Mendicant" (Potter 1982, 124); "his samnyāsa is really implied therein" (Warrier, 426). Because the opponent mentions the sin of non-performance of rites in the next sentence, pārivrājya must be understood here as being expressed physically, yet not as the outcome of an injunction. Hence our translation. Another interpretation could be that pārivrājya is "self-evident" even if the householder does not take recourse to physical renunciation. But then it would be odd on the opponent's part to bring in the question of physical abandonment immediately thereafter.

<sup>3</sup> tasmādvēdāntapramāṇajānīkatvapratyavavata eva karmanivrttilakṣaṇam pārivrājyam brahmasamsthatvam ceti siddham. etena grhasthasyaikatvavijñāne sati pārivrājyam arthasiddham (CUBh 223.1, 408).



performance of ritual actions, immediate knowledge of the non-dual Self, spontaneous abandonment of the sense of authorship and possession, which is here in turn followed by a spontaneous physical renunciation ensuring the state of brahmasamstha (the jñānanisthā of the BGBh) and, as a final result, immortality (liberation).

### 6.3- Renunciation for stabilization of direct Self-knowledge

Śaṅkara's comment on verse 6.3 of the Bhagavadgītā is another instance where physical renunciation is connected with a Self-knowledge that I will again interpret as direct, but which is usually understood as being only indirect. The verse runs as follows: "For the meditative man (muni) who wishes to ascend to yoga, action is said to be the means; when the same person has ascended to yoga, quiescence (śama) is said to be the means."<sup>1</sup>

In his Naiṣkarmyasiddhi 1.50, Sureśvara quotes this verse as evidence for the fact that rites produce, as said in verse 1.49, an "inclination towards the Self" (pratyakpravanatām), and that, once the latter is attained, they are spontaneously abandoned (Balasubramanian 1988, 51-52). Thus, according to Sureśvara, attainment of yoga corresponds to an inner disposition toward acquiring Self-knowledge, not to Self-knowledge itself. On his part, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī holds that yoga means here vairāgya, i.e. detachment (BGBh 6.3, 288), which seems equivalent to "inclination towards the Self" but from the perspective of withdrawing one's

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<sup>1</sup> āruruksurmuneryogam karma kāraṇamucyate |  
yogārudhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kāraṇamucyate || (BGBh 6.3, 287).

interest from empirical objects. After quoting Gītā 6.3, the Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha also states along these lines: “There is practice of karma till, on the purification of the intellect, there is the rise of a leaning towards what is within (i.e. the self), in the form of a desire to know; thence follows renunciation ...” (1:334)<sup>1</sup> But my contention is that, in the present context, attaining yoga means reaching immediate, though not necessarily permanent, Self-knowledge, and that dhyānavoga (yoga through meditation) consists of a discipline aimed at stabilizing that yoga or direct experience of the Self.

Although the Gītā’s description of meditation in this chapter is valid

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<sup>1</sup> cetasah śuddhau vividiṣādirūpapratyakprāvaṇyodavaparyantam karmānuṣṭhānam. tatah samnyāsa ... (Appaya Dīkṣita, 285). The citation of Gītā 6.3 in the Siddhāntaleśasaṅgraha appears within the discussion of the following portion of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.22: “This the Brāhmaṇas desire to know through the study of the Veda, sacrifice, gifts, penance and fasting” (tametam vedānuvacanena brahmaṇā vividiṣanti yajñena dānena tapasā ’nāśakena; BUBh 929). Appaya Dīkṣita concludes about this passage as well as about Gītā 6.3 that for both the Vivaraṇa and Bhāmatī schools, “karman is practiced only up to [the rise of] the desire for knowledge” (vividiṣāparyantameva karmānuṣṭhāne; 285). But if we follow Appaya Dīkṣita’s logic in his understanding of Gītā 6.3, then karman would be the means used until the desire to know the Self, called yoga, is attained. Moreover, the yogāruruksu (the one desiring to attain yoga) would in fact desire to attain the desire to know... But, as stated in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.22, the use of means such as sacrifices already expresses the aspirant’s desire to know. Thus the prescription of karman by the Gītā for him to acquire that desire would be of no use. Our interpretation solves the contradiction by understanding that yoga means immediate knowledge of the Self. So, as supported by what we have already said on the power of karmayoga to lead to direct experience of the Self through purification of mind, in Śaṅkara’s interpretation of both Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.22 and Gītā 6.3, the karmayogin does his practices with the desire to attain immediate Self-knowledge, not with the desire to attain the desire to know!

for all seekers after liberation, according to Śaṅkara's interpretation, it is used in this context by one who has already reached immediate Self-knowledge and aims at stabilizing it. Thus dhyanayoga is here equivalent to steadfastness in immediate Self-knowledge, but with emphasis on its stabilization rather than on simply "resting," as in the case of one whose experience is unshakable.

Let us first look at how Śaṅkara understands the expression "one desiring to ascend to yoga." Āruruksu is from the desiderative of ā / ruh. According to definitions from Apte's Sanskrit Dictionary, the root can mean, among other possibilities, "to ascend, mount, bestride, get upon" or "to attain, gain, get to, reach." In the present context, the choice of one or the other of these two series makes a major difference in interpreting the whole commentary on this verse. In his BGBh, Śaṅkara gives two possible direct objects to the verb ā / ruh: yoga (as given in the verse itself) and dhyanayoga. The shift in meaning is clearest when dhyanayoga is used as direct object. If we translate by "ascend to dhyanayoga," it means attaining dhyanayoga, that is, merely starting the yoga of meditation; if we render by "ascend dhyanayoga" it means "climbing" possibly up to the climax of the yoga of meditation, that is, up to immediate Self-knowledge. My contention is that, to agree with all aspects of Śaṅkara's comments concerning this verse, the derivatives of ā / ruh have to be understood and translated in the following manner: if their object is dhyanayoga, the statement means "to ascend dhyanayoga," more precisely, to climb up to the top of the "ladder" of meditation which is immediate Self-knowledge; if their object is yoga, the statement

means "to ascend to yoga," that is, to reach yoga which, in this context, consists of direct Self-knowledge.

This interpretation is based on the following evidence. First, in his introduction to chapter 5 of the Gītā, Śaṅkara quotes the second part of verse 6.3 in the midst of other citations that clearly refer to physical renunciation of the already enlightened man, indicating thereby that he understands "one who has ascended to yoga" (yogārudha) as "one who has reached direct Self-knowledge," and the physical and mental renunciation referred to by "quiescence" (śama) as already based on this knowledge. The entire passage is worth citing:

Because, with the words "in jñānavoga for the sāmkhyas," stead-fastness in the yoga of knowledge which is characterized by dwelling in the essential nature of the actionless Self and which pertains to the sāmkhyas who know the reality of the Self, is distinguished from steadfastness in karmayoga which is practiced by the ones who do not know the Self. Because he has accomplished his goal, the Self-knower has no need for anything else. And because the statement "For him, there is nothing to do" [3.7] says that there is nothing else to do. Because in passages such as "Not by non-performance of duties" [3.4] and "But renunciation, O mighty-armed, is hard to attain without yoga" [5.6], karmayoga is enjoined as an accessory to Self-knowledge; and because in the passage "when the same person has ascended to yoga, quiescence (śama) is said to be the means," it is stated that for one in whom right insight has emerged (utpannasamyagdarśanasya), karmayoga does not exist

[anymore]. Moreover, because actions other than those necessary for the sustenance of the body are excluded in the passage "By performing only actions that are for the sake of the body, he does not incur sin"; and, because by the passage "united, the knower of Reality should think 'I do nothing at all'" [5.8], it is taught that the person who knows the true nature of the Self should, through composure of mind, never have the experience that he is doing, even with regard to actions such as seeing and hearing undertaken simply for the sustenance of the body.<sup>1</sup>

We clearly find again here the basic idea that karmayoga leads to immediate Self-knowledge which in turn expresses itself in physical renunciation and steadfastness in that experience without any obligation to perform rites, and with an awareness that is fully focused on the actionless nature of the Self. The fact that verse 6.3 is also given in support of this idea strongly suggests that, in Śaṅkara's mind, it also conveys physical renunciation following direct Self-knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> 'jñānayogena sāmkhyanām' ityanena sāmkhyanāmāt matattva-vidāmanāt ma vitkartṛkākarmayoganisthāto niskriyāt masvarūpā-vasthānalakṣanāyā jñānayoganisthāyāḥ prthakkaranātkṛtavyatvenāt mavidah prayojanāntarābhāvāt 'tasya kāryam na vidyate' iti kartavyāntarābhāvavacanācca 'na karmanāmanārambhāt.'  
'saṁnyāsastu mahābāho duḥkhamāptumayogataḥ.'  
ityādivacanāccāt maiñānāṅgatvena karmayogasya vidhānāt.  
'yogārūḍhasya tasyaiva śamaḥ kāraṇamucyate' ityanena  
cotpannasamyagdarśanasya karmayogābhāvavacanāt. 'śārīram  
kevalam karma kurvannāpnoti kilbiṣam' iti ca śārīrasthitikāraṇa-  
tiriktasya karmaṇo nivāraṇāt 'naiva kimcit karomīti yukto manveta  
tattvavit' ityanena ca śārīrasthitimātraprayuktesvapi  
darśanaśravanādikarmasvāt mayāthāt myavidah karomīti  
pratrayasya samāhitacetastayā sadā 'kartavyatvopadeśāt... (BGBh 5 intro, 245)

Also in support of our interpretation of ā / ruh derivatives is Śaṅkara's gloss of āruruksoh (one who wishes to ascend) as "one desiring to ascend, not having ascended, not able to stand still (avasthātum) in dhyānayoga." <sup>1</sup> Since avasthātum can also mean "remain, stay" and even "enter, reach, attain to," one could interpret the latter part of the gloss as "not able to attain to the yoga of meditation," in other words, "not able to start the practice of meditation." Thus Potter renders yāvaddhyānayogā rohanāsamarthastāvadgrhashtenādhikṛtena kartavyam karma <sup>2</sup> with "a householder should practice karmayoga until he is able to practice dhyānayoga" (1981, 301). <sup>3</sup> But we saw that, according to Śaṅkara, meditation is already used by the karmayogin as his most important means, and that in light of the prerequisites to start the discipline of knowledge, he must already be skilled in control of mind (śama) and senses (dama), which ability comes mainly through practice of meditation. In addition, as stated by the verse itself, it is the "muni" (which we translate as the "meditative man") that is said to wish to ascend to yoga. As pointed out by Olivelle, in Sanskrit literature, the word muni is often used to designate the monk (1984, 131). But a systematic analysis of all occurrences of muni in the BSBh, the BGBh (apart from the context of verse 6.3), the Upad and in at least the

<sup>1</sup> ārodhumicchato 'nārūdhasya dhyānayoge  
'vasthātumaśaktasyaivetyarthah (BGBh 6.3, 287).

<sup>2</sup> BGBh 6 intro, 282

<sup>3</sup> There seems to be a contradiction between such a translation and Potter's emphasis that Śaṅkara advocated access to mediate and immediate knowledge even for the karmayogin who does not take recourse to physical renunciation.

comments on all verses of the Upanisads where it is used, reveals that, according to various contexts, on 14 occurrences, muni refers seven times to the liberated-in-this-life,<sup>1</sup> four times to the liberated-in-this-life presented as still practicing meditation,<sup>2</sup> and three times to a meditator.<sup>3</sup> Hence it is quite likely that muni is also understood here as one already performing meditation. It also follows that when, as stated by the verse and Śaṅkara, this meditator wishes to ascend to yoga, it does not mean desiring to start the practice of yoga in the sense of meditation, but desiring to attain to yoga as direct Self-knowledge. Accordingly, it seems appropriate to translate dhyānayoge 'vasthātumaśaktasya as “not able to stand still in dhyānayoga,” or more precisely, not able to open the mind to the experience of the silent Self.

This is confirmed by Śaṅkara's peculiar characterization of yoga as a state of Self-consciousness on many occasions in his comment on chapter 6. After describing experiences of “standing still in the real nature of the Self” (ātmasvarūpe sthitah) in the comment on verse 21 (307), and of “standing still in the reality of the Self” (ātmātattve sthitah) on verse 22 (308), Śaṅkara says on verse 23 (Ibid.) that these features describe “yoga as characterized by standing still in the Self” (ātmāvasthāviśeso yogah). This definition of yoga is very similar to the one given by Gītā 253: “When your intellect, bewildered by the Śruti, will stand immovable, steadfast in samādhi, then you will attain

<sup>1</sup> Pages refer to Sanskrit texts: BUBh 3.5.1, 464; 4.4.2, 691. MāKBh 2.35, 206. BGBh 2.56, 117; 2.57, 117; 2.69, 128; 10.26, 457.

<sup>2</sup> Pages refer to Sanskrit texts: BSBh 3.4.47, 817. BUBh 3.5.1, 816. BGBh 10.37, 463; 14.1, 587.

<sup>3</sup> Pages refer to Sanskrit texts: KaBh 21.5, 91. BGBh 5.6, 252; 5.28, 279.

to yoga.”<sup>1</sup> Here Śaṅkara glosses “in samādhi” with “in the Self, wherein the intellect is fixed.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, apart from the sense of “discipline” or “set of practices” which is, of course, also found in the commentary on chapter 6 and elsewhere, a possible meaning of yoga is immediate Self-knowledge. In BGBh 6.17, for instance, yoga is clearly given the role of immediate Self-knowledge with respect to liberation, as it “brings about the destruction of the entire misery of transmigratory existence.”<sup>3</sup>

As a consequence, in the context of the commentary on chapter 6, we have enough evidence to interpret the derivatives of ā / ruh as conveying only two possible meanings which entail direct Self-knowledge: “to ascend dhyānayoga,” in the sense of reaching its climax in actionless Self-consciousness; and “to ascend to yoga,” in the sense of attaining the same Self-experience.

With this background, let us now turn to Śaṅkara’s comment on the second statement of verse 3: “On the other hand, for the same person, when he has ascended to yoga, quiescence, tranquility, abstention from all actions, is said to be the means, the way.”<sup>4</sup> In his

<sup>1</sup> śrutivipratipannā te vadā sthāsyati niścālā |

samādhāvacalā buddhistadā yogamavāpsyasi || (BGBh 253, 112).

<sup>2</sup> samādhau samādhīyate cittamasminniti samādhirāt mā (Ibid., 113).

<sup>3</sup> sarvasamsārāduḥkṣayakṛt (BGBh 6.27, 304).

<sup>4</sup> yogārūḍhasya punastasyaiva śama upaśamah sarvakarmabhvo nivṛttiḥ kāraṇam yogārūḍhatvasya sādhanam ucyata ityarthah (BGBh 6.3, 287). While the edition used here reads “yogārūḍhatvasya,” the one by H. R. Bhagavat (1929, Bhagavadgītā with Śaṅkarabhāṣya, Works of Śaṅkarāchārya, vol. 2, 2d ed., Poona: Ashtekar and Co, 101) has yogārūḍhasya. The latter reading seems more plausible because otherwise the subject of the same predicate (kāraṇam glossed as sādhanam) would oddly change within the same sentence: it would be first a person (yogārūḍhasya) and then a concept (yogārūḍhatvasya).



introduction to the chapter, Śaṅkara specifies the purpose of using quiescence as a means even after having reached yoga: “for the same person, when he has ascended to yoga, quiescence alone is prescribed as the means for the fruition (phalam) of yoga.”<sup>1</sup> The point seems that the man having reached yoga or direct Self-knowledge is to use quiescence for the benefit of this very knowledge. My contention is that quiescence then serves as a way to stabilize this knowledge and to ensure its fruition in liberation. In the same way as, in the sequence toward liberation studied earlier, attainment of immediate Self-knowledge (jñānaprāpti) gives qualification for physical renunciation and steadfastness in this knowledge alone in view of getting the result of the latter, namely, liberation, so also here, attainment of yoga qualifies for quiescence and simply remaining in the state of yoga for the sake of ensuring the goal of yoga, namely, destruction of transmigratory existence. Although conveyed by different words, by and large, the structure is the same. However the commentary on chapter 6 clearly presents the means to be employed by the Self-knower as a prescription. This can be understood by the fact that while stating in his introduction to chapter 5 that quiescence is used by those “in whom [immediate] right insight has emerged,” Śaṅkara will also recognize, when Gītā 6.37 refers to the yogabhrsta (one fallen from yoga), that one may eventually lose this experience. So, compared with statements on steadfastness in direct Self-

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Since yogārūḍhasya then becomes a mere technical repetition of its first occurrence at the beginning of the sentence, it has been omitted in the translation.

<sup>1</sup> tasyaivārūḍhasya śama eva kartavyam kāraṇam yogaphalam pratyucyata iti (Ibid., intro, 283).

knowledge studied thus far, those found in chapter six of the BGBh bring to light another dimension, namely the enjoined process of stabilization of immediate Self-knowledge.

The question may arise as to why the need to stabilize Self-knowledge? True, some of Śaṅkara's statements seem to refute this, arguing for instance: "For the knowledge of the Self emerging once for all is able to remove ignorance, and no progressive development is admitted here" (BSBh 4.1.2, 817).<sup>1</sup> Mike Bos has discussed this issue in a paper, concluding that although admitting that ignorance might still persist through the effect of prārabdhakarman even in the case of the enlightened person, more or less consistently, Śaṅkara "tries to moderate these statements and in some cases even retract them" (174). But, in my opinion, according to evidence given by Śaṅkara, even before complete eradication of ignorance, one may have direct experience of the Self without it being permanent, which would explain why Śaṅkara states on the one hand that enlightenment as a permanent state of Self-knowledge is unshakable, and on the other hand that direct Self-knowledge as such can sometimes be lost. Commenting on an analogy between the throw of an arrow to a target, and attainment of Brahman, our commentator writes: "After that, after hitting that [target], one should remain one with that [Brahman] like an arrow."<sup>2</sup> Two steps are clearly distinguished here: attaining Brahman and remaining fixed in it. This is referred to in BUBh 1.4.7 as

<sup>1</sup> sakrdutopannaiva hyātmapratipattiravidyām nivartayatīti nātra kaścīdapi kramo 'bhyupagamyate (BSBh 4.1.2, 830).

<sup>2</sup> tatastadvedhanādūrdhvaṃ śaravattanmayo bhavet (MuBh 2.2.4, 131).

"Self-knowledge and its train of remembrance (smrtisantāna)."<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara first states that remembrance of Self-knowledge is not enjoined, "for it comes automatically. That is to say, as soon as Self-knowledge arises from hearing a sentence describing the Self, it really annihilates the false knowledge about It."<sup>2</sup> But he later admits that, due to the possible effect of prārabdhakarman, there may be the need "to regulate the train of remembrance of the knowledge of the Self by having recourse to means such as renunciation and dispassion; but it is not something that is to be originally enjoined, being, as we said, already known as a possible alternative" (93).<sup>3</sup> The need for stabilization of direct experience of the Self is thus explained by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā:

In order that transcendental bliss-consciousness may be lived at all times, it is necessary that it should not be lost when the mind comes out of meditation and engages in activity. For this to be possible the mind has to become so intimately familiar with the state of Being that It remains grounded in the mind at all times, through all the mental activity of thinking, discriminating and deciding, and through all phases of action on the sensory level. For this in turn, it is necessary that the process of gaining transcendental consciousness through meditation and that of engaging in activity should be alternated, so that transcendental

<sup>1</sup> ātma viiññānatat smrtisantāna (BUBh 1.4.7, 663).

<sup>2</sup> arthaprāptatvāt. yadaivātmapratipādakavākyaśravaṇāt ātma viśayam viiññānam utpadyate. tadaiva tad utpadyamānam tad viśayam mithyā viiññānam nivartayadevotpadyate (Ibid., 662).

<sup>3</sup> tvāgavairāgyādisādhana balāvalambena ātma viiññāna smrtisanta tir-niyantavyā bhavati. na tvapūrvā kartavyā. prāptatvāt ityavocāma (Ibid., 664).

consciousness and the waking state of consciousness may come close together and finally merge into one another to give rise to the state of cosmic consciousness, the state in which one lives bliss-consciousness, the inner awareness of Being, through all the activity of the waking and dreaming states and through the silence of the deep sleep state (184).

The theme of stabilization of direct Self-knowledge is also expressed by the IUBh in terms of the importance of “protecting” the already attained Self-experience through physical renunciation and steadfastly dwelling in that immediate knowledge:

As far as the Self-knower is concerned, the purport of this Vedic text is that the Self is to be saved by way of steadfastness in Self-knowledge through renunciation of the threefold desire for sons, etc. Now, as for the other person who is unable to comprehend the Self because of his knowledge of the non-Self, the mantra teaches this [about performing karman].”<sup>1</sup>

A striking similarity can be seen between these passages and the function of quiescence in BGBh 6.3. The role of quiescence would be to “protect,” to render unshakable the immediate Self-knowledge that has already been attained. The MāKBh 4.86 presents an interesting summary of the way of being that follows immediate Self-knowledge, when it presents it as both something natural, already accomplished, and something to be pursued deliberately for the stabilization of Self-

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<sup>1</sup> evamātmaavidah putrādyeṣanātravasamnyāsena  
ātmañānanisthatayā ātmā raksitavyah ityeva vedārthah.  
athetarasyānātmañānatayā ātmagrahaṇāyāśaktasyedamupadiśati  
mantrah (IUBh 2, 3).

knowledge: "This dwelling in the true nature of the Self is the natural modesty, humbleness, of the Brāhmaṇas... Knowing Brahman as described, as naturally quiet, he should attain the quiescence (śamam) that is a natural disposition and the very nature of Brahman, he should remain established in the true nature of Brahman." <sup>1</sup>

It is with this perspective that the process of śama as withdrawal from all activities seems to be most consistently understood when described thus in the BGBh 6.3: "To the extent he abstains from actions, to that extent, being free from worry and his senses being subdued, he gets composure of mind. This being so, he quickly becomes one who has ascended to yoga (yogārūdhah)."<sup>2</sup> But another ambiguity is raised here by the word yogārūdhah. If, according to both the verse and Śaṅkara, one has already attained yoga as a condition to use quiescence, then why is it stated here by the commentator that, following the practice of śama, one will become again a yogārūdhah? My contention is that, unfortunately without warning, Śaṅkara gives two meanings to yogārūdhah: one referring to the state just before starting to use śama, i.e. to unstable Self-experience, and the other corresponding to the state following the use of śama, i.e. the attainment of permanent Self-experience.<sup>3</sup> In the

<sup>1</sup> viprāṇām brāhmaṇāṇām vinayo vinitatvam svābhāvikam yadetadātmasvarūpeṇāvasthānam... evam yathoktam svābhāvopāśāntam brahma vidvāṇśamamupāśāntim svābhāvikīm brahmasvarūpām vrajedbrahmasvarūpeṇāvatistheta ityarthah (MāKBh 4.86, 251).

<sup>2</sup> yāvadyāvatkarmabhya uparamate tāvattāvannirāvāsasya jīṇḍriyasya cittam samādhīyate. tathā sati sa jhatiti yogārūdhobhavati (BGBh 6.3, 287-288).

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of āruha as "mounting" (a horse, etc.) can be used to clarify these two meanings of yogārūdhah: in the first case, the aspirant

introduction to verse 6.5, the commentator clearly describes the yogārūḍha in terms of the liberated-in-this-life: "When a person thus attains to yoga, then his self is raised by itself away from transmigratory existence, this multitude of evils." <sup>1</sup> Also, in verse 6.11, Śaṅkara announces that characteristics of the yogārūḍha will be given in forthcoming verses (6.18-23), which account for the experience of pure Self-consciousness during meditation and for its result as liberation.

Śaṅkara's introduction to chapter 6 is a long refutation of an opponent who holds the doctrine of combination of knowledge and action. Śaṅkara understands that the yoga taught in chapter 6 is prescribed after physical renunciation and is therefore not for the householder. Hence, particularly in order to prove that there is no obligation to perform rituals on the part of one who has ascended to yoga, Śaṅkara underlines for example that "statements such as 'free from desire and possession' are incompatible with the householder." <sup>2</sup> But it must be remembered that, in the context of verse 6.3, it is immediate Self-knowledge that constitutes the criterion of qualification for physical abandonment of the householder's life and for absorption in quiescence. Thus, in accord with other parts of his works, here karman remains an aid to direct experience of the Self and śama is understood as a means for stabilization of the latter as part of

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yogārūḍha would be "just mounted" on the direct experience of the Self, whereas in the second case, the enlightened yogārūḍha would be "firmly riding" on it.

<sup>1</sup> yadaivam yogārūḍhastadā tenātmānoddhṛto bhavati samsārādanarthavratāt (BGBh 6.5, 289).

<sup>2</sup> na ca grhastasya nirāśīraparigraha ityādivacanamanukūlam (BGBh 6 intro, 284).

steadfastness in immediate Self-knowledge. Interestingly, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's comment on verse 6.3 reflects a similar viewpoint:

Thus it is through activity that transcendental consciousness is gained. Moreover, the mind, travelling as it were on the ladder of activity from the relative state of waking consciousness to the silence of the transcendental field of absolute consciousness, and again from there to the activity of the waking state, establishes eternal harmony between the silence of the Absolute and the activity of the relative. This is cosmic consciousness, in which transcendental consciousness, the state where one "has ascended to Yoga," becomes permanent.... "The man who has ascended to Yoga:" a man whose mind has risen from the waking state of consciousness to the transcendental state of consciousness, in which his mind is in full Union with the Divine. This state of Yoga in transcendental consciousness becomes permanent in cosmic consciousness through increase of calmness [sama], or the infusion of Being into the nature of the mind. That is why the Lord says that calmness is the means when ascent to Yoga in transcendental consciousness has been gained (391).

Thus, while our interpretation of Śaṅkara's sequence toward liberation as universal and logical rather than chronological remains valid, physical renunciation following experiential Self-knowledge can be understood as a spontaneous and free expression of the latter, or as an optional means for full absorption in it, for the purpose of maintaining or bringing about its stability. Having brought to light Śaṅkara's misinterpreted and unsuspected emphasis on physical renunciation based on direct Self-knowledge, let us now consider how

our author also understands this type of renunciation as an auxiliary to starting with the discipline of knowledge.

#### 6.4- Monasticism for attainment of direct Self-knowledge

New questions arise in the light of this interpretation of the respective roles of karmayoga and physical renunciation in Śaṅkara's works. If, as we have seen, our commentator teaches that karmayoga can lead to direct Self-knowledge through purity of mind, and if his emphasis is much more on the validity of physical renunciation after this Self-consciousness has been reached, then, from his viewpoint, what is the use of giving up rites prescribed for karmayoga before the rise of this experience? This can in turn be elaborated into the following questions. According to Śaṅkara, is physical renunciation prescribed by the scriptures for the seeker after liberation? If yes, for what kind of seeker? At what point on his path? What are the objects to be abandoned? And finally, what reasons are given by the scriptures to justify such a renunciation?

It is very important here to understand the main doctrine against which Śaṅkara was fighting to establish his own. The advocates of Pūrvamīmāṃsā argued that the Śruti prescribed neither the inner renunciation of authorship, nor monastic life as a means to pursue Self-knowledge. They understood that there was only one real stage of life, namely, the householder's; that physical renunciation was only for the disabled; and that all passages seemingly prescribing it for people qualified for rites were mere praise (stuti) of meditation. Mainly against this position, Śaṅkara endeavoured on every occasion



to prove that Śruti texts 1- do prescribe inner renunciation as a necessary means or correlate of direct Self-knowledge which in turn leads to liberation; 2- do mention physical renunciation as a spontaneous expression of, and as a means to reach or stabilize, direct Self-knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Our author substantiates his position in various places by quoting passages from the Śruti and the Smṛti that allow the seeker after liberation to enter samnyāsāśrama either immediately after the period of studies (brahmācarya),<sup>2</sup> or after the stage of the householder (gārhastya) or finally after going through the third one (vānaprastha): "Thus because the four stages of life are enjoined equally, there is an option of belonging to any one of them singly or to all of them successively"<sup>3</sup> (BSBh 3.4.49, 806).<sup>4</sup>

As already mentioned, according to Śaṅkara, renunciation is for Brāhmaṇas only. What then should be their inner disposition for obtaining qualification? For the sake of accuracy, it is important here to distinguish qualification for the discipline of knowledge, which is open to all, from qualification for physical renunciation. Their confusion under one single qualification leading to mandatory physical renunciation has been a major cause of misinterpretation of Śaṅkara's thought. In his BUBh 4.5.15, he recalls that "all actions are for

<sup>1</sup> For Śaṅkara's most detailed discussion of these issues, see BUBh 4.5.15, 544-552. See also BUBh 4.4.22, 527-528.

<sup>2</sup> See also BSBh 4.20, 777 and BUBh 4.5.15, 551.

<sup>3</sup> See also AUBh intro, 17-18 and BGBh 3 intro, 85.

<sup>4</sup> tasmāccaturṇāmapyāśramānāmupadeśāviśeṣāt tulyavadvikalpa-samuccayābhyām pratipattiḥ (BSBh 3.4.49, 819).

the unenlightened man with desire," <sup>1</sup> while "the absence of the impulsion of desire" (kāmapravṛttyabhāvāt) is sufficient reason to say that "for a detached <sup>2</sup> seeker after liberation, statements such as 'He should renounce even from the student life' [Nārada-parivṛāka Upaniṣad 77] are proper, even if he is without [immediate] knowledge." <sup>3</sup> In his introduction to the Aitareya Upaniṣad, he also states that "the Vedic passages referring to [the performance of ritual actions] throughout life are meaningful with respect to the unenlightened souls who do not seek liberation." <sup>4</sup> So it is quite clear that if a Brāhmaṇa already has a strong desire to know the Self after completing the stage of studentship, since the discipline of knowledge is the most direct means for Self-knowledge, the logical and appropriate conduct is, from Śaṅkara's viewpoint, to enter the saṁnyāsāśrama for the sake of devoting oneself entirely to that discipline.

Now, as we saw, Śaṅkara considers that the karmayogin practicing ritual actions can be a seeker after liberation. How does this agree with the above idea that practice of rites is for karmins who do not desire liberation? The commentator does not address this

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<sup>1</sup> avidvatkāṁikartavyatām hyavocāma sarvakarmaṇām (BUBh 4.5.15, 948).

<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkara also writes: "Accordingly, in the case of those who are detached, owing to the tendencies created in previous lives, it is desirable to resort to the other stage of life [i.e. saṁnyāsa]" (tasmāt janmāntarakṛtasamskārebhyaḥ viraktānāmāśramāntarapratipattirevesyate; TUBh 1.12, 279).

<sup>3</sup> viraktasya mumuksoḥ vināpi jñānena 'brahmacaryādeva pravrajat' ityādyupapannam (BUBh 4.5.15, 948).

<sup>4</sup> yāvañjīvādīśrutīnām avidvadamumukṣuvisaye kṛtārthatā (AUBh intro, 328).

question directly. A tentative answer, of course, could be that the intensity of the desire for liberation would not be strong enough in some karmayogins to lead them to abandon everything for monasticism. Another factor is suggested by the mention of “some reason” (kutaścinnimittāt)<sup>1</sup> for the impossibility of physically abandoning rituals even in the case of the enlightened man, which could apply for the unenlightened as well, for example in terms of family responsibilities before old age.<sup>2</sup> Thus, absence of desire for spiritual goals limited to transmigration, and desire for liberation from the latter is the main criterion as far as qualification for physical renunciation is concerned in the case of the unenlightened. Yet it is acknowledged by the commentator that the urge for physical renunciation could be tempered by various practical reasons.

Since desire for liberation is needed for entry into samnyāsāśrama and since it is also the last item among the four prerequisites for the discipline of knowledge, as if representing the culmination of the others, we can fairly say that qualification for the discipline of knowledge and for physical renunciation share these four requirements. And this is probably one of the reasons why these two types of qualification, and the areas to which they respectively provide entry, have been often merged, making the discipline of knowledge and physical renunciation inseparable means for liberation. But, they have always to be kept distinct if one wants to understand Śaṅkara’s proper perspective on the means of liberation.

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<sup>1</sup> See BGBh 4.20, 210.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Kauṭilya asks to first make provision for one’s wife and sons before entering samnyāsāśrama (Kane 2:1:932).

In terms of objects to be abandoned, while the enlightened man is without any obligation to wear the signs of the samnyāsins, the case of the unenlightened is not addressed explicitly by our author. He clearly says what the physical renouncer and seeker after liberation should abandon, but never mentions if he has to keep some objects, particularly the single staff (ekadanda) which has been associated for centuries with the followers of Advaita.<sup>1</sup> In his BUBh 4.5.15, he writes: "Hence pārivrāṇya is recommended for seekers after liberation, as in the following passages: 'the very renunciation of all prescribed karmans...' "<sup>2</sup> The word karmans actually stands here for all rituals, their accessories and their results: "And because all actions, means and results, which belong to ignorance, are meant to be destroyed through Self-knowledge, the opposite of ignorance; and because means such as the holy thread belong to the same."<sup>3</sup> And even duties of the samnyāsāśrama as a means to reach Hiranyagarbha are to be abandoned. Indeed, because, as said above, all karmans are to be given up by the seeker and because they include the holy thread, the following comment seems to contrast both renunciation of the seeker and of the enlightened, with mere belonging to the samnyāsāśrama: "And apart from that [renunciation of the seeker and of the enlightened], there exists another kind of monasticism which is an

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<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, as early as the 8th century C.E., the samnyāsins belonging to Śaṅkara's tradition are called "single-staffed" (ekavainavinah, ekavenupānayah) by Bhāskara (Olivelle 1986, 1:52).

<sup>2</sup> ityataḥ pārivrāṇyam mumukṣūṇām praśamsanti 'tyāga eva hi sarveṣāṃ muktānāṃ api karmaṇām ... (BUBh 4.5.15, 948)

<sup>3</sup> sarvakriyāsādhana phalānām ca avidyāvisayānām tadviparītāt mavidyayā hātavyat vanestātvāt. vaiṇopavitādisādhanaṇām ca tadvisayatvāt (BUBh 3.5.1, 814).

order of life and a means to the attainment of the Brahmaloka and so on; it is with respect to the latter that means like the holy thread and distinguishing signs are enjoined.”<sup>1</sup> However, as noticed by Olivelle against Potter’s statement that, in Śaṅkara’s works, the term paramahamsa applies only to the enlightened man, the Paramahamsa Upaniṣad 46-47 refers to two types of paramahamsa samnyāsins,<sup>2</sup> one without any emblem and the other with emblems such as the loin-cloth and the single staff (1:56). So it is quite likely that, concerning both the enlightened and the unenlightened samnyāsins abandoning the means for Hiranyagarbha, Śaṅkara followed the Paramahamsa Upaniṣad.

Among the various considerations related to physical renunciation, reasons likely to validate it receive most of the commentator’s attention. One argument is that while knowledge succeeds in leading to liberation, actions fail to do so: “And because liberation is not a result, action is of no use for the seeker after liberation.”<sup>3</sup> Śaṅkara also explains in the BGBh 2.21 that following hearing of the Vedas, two types of understanding can arise: either that the Self is a doer and that it has to perform some action in order to enjoy its result, or that it is a non-doer (akartr) and that there

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<sup>1</sup> tadvyatirekeṇa cāstyāśramarūpam pārivrāṇyam brahmalokādīphalaprāptisādhanaṁ yadvīṣayam vaiṇopavitādisādhanaṁ vidhānam līṅgavidhānam ca (Ibid., 815).

<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkara never mentions the first three categories of samnyāsins stated by various Upaniṣads, namely the Kuṭīcaka, Bahūdaka and Hamsa types. For a description of these categories, see Kane, 4:230; Sharma 1939, 28-33.

<sup>3</sup> mokṣasya cākāryatvānmumukṣoḥ karmānarthakyaṁ (BGBh intro 3, 137).

remains nothing to do after knowing its real nature. He adds that the person qualified for action is the one who perceives himself as a doer and who therefore sees himself as being enjoined to perform some action by the scriptures. He then includes the seeker after liberation as well as the already enlightened man in the other category:

“Therefore, the distinguished man of knowledge who sees the immutable Self, and also the seeker after liberation, are qualified for renunciation of all actions alone.”<sup>1</sup> So, even if the seeker after liberation is still bound by the sense of authorship, and still must pursue the discipline of knowledge, it seems that for Śaṅkara, his deep conviction about the actionless nature of the Self is enough to qualify him for physical renunciation.

Given the metaphysical background concerning the supreme Self, Śaṅkara's argumentation in favor of physical renunciation then relies on a purely functional principle. Renunciation is to be resorted to, he writes, “also because liberation implies steadfastness in the immutable true nature of the inner Self. It is indeed not proper for one who wishes to reach the eastern sea [liberation] to take the same path [actions] as the man who wishes to reach the western sea [brahmaloka], i.e. who proceeds in the opposite direction.”<sup>2</sup>

Conversely, people who do not desire the actionless Self are not qualified for physical renunciation: “Because of the statement ‘Desiring this world alone,’ it is understood that those who desire the

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<sup>1</sup> tasmādvīṣeṣitasyāvikriyāt madarśino viduṣo mumukṣośca sarvakarmasamnyāsa evādhikārah (BGBh 221, 73).

<sup>2</sup> pratyaḡāt māvikriyasvarūpaniṣṭhatvācca moksasya nahi pūrvasamudram jigamiṣoh prātilomyena pratyaksamudram jigamiṣunā samānamārgatvam sambhavati (BGBh 18.55, 743-744).

three external worlds are not qualified for pārivrāṭya, for a resident of the Banares area who desires to reach Hardwar does not head towards east.”<sup>1</sup>

Violence against animals for the sake of sacrifice, and more frequent occasions of sinful acts are further reasons given by Śaṅkara (only on three occasions) to suggest that the householder āśrama is less conducive to knowledge and liberation when compared with the three other āśramas. For example, in contrast with the householders' situation, the commentator says:

Those qualified persons - brahmacārins, forest-dwellers and mendicants - in whom defects such as crookedness do not exist - there being no reason for them - gain this untainted Brahmaloka through its appropriate means. Such is the goal for those who combine ritual actions (karman) with meditation<sup>2</sup> (jñāna).<sup>3</sup>

However, here, superiority over the householder stage of life is not exclusive to the stage of saṁnyāsa; in addition, no stage of life guarantees liberation, as in the very context of the passage just quoted, people belonging to the other three stages, including saṁnyāsāśrama, are said to go to brahmaloka. Accordingly, in Śaṅkara's mind, even this kind of depreciation of the householder stage raises only a mitigated opposition between social active life and

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<sup>1</sup> etameva lokamiccantaḥ ityavadhāraṇāṇna bāhyalokatrāyepsūnām pārivrāṭye 'dhikāra itigamyate. na hi gaṅgādvāram pratipitsuh kāśīdeśanivāsī pūrvābhīmukhaḥ prati (BUBh 4.4.22, 932).

<sup>2</sup> See also BUBh 4.5.15, 551 and TUBh 1.12, 280.

<sup>3</sup> māyetyevamādayo doṣā yeṣvadhikāriṣu brahmacārivānaprasthabhikṣuṣu nimittābhāvāṇna vidyante tatsādhanānūrūpeṇaiva teṣaṃ saṃsāra virājo brahmaloka ityeṣā jñānavuktakarmavatām gatiḥ (PUBh 1.16, 112).

the samnyāsa stage of life as far as the means of liberation is concerned.

In his BSBh 3.4.47, Śaṅkara comments that the samnyāsāśrama may be termed as meditateness (mauna) “because it has knowledge as its essential component” (iñānapradhānāt).<sup>1</sup> Since the samnyāsāśrama does not entail the obligation of performing ritual actions as in the other stages, it allows full absorption in the discipline of knowledge and is in this sense more appropriate to the goal of liberation. From this perspective, even if all stages can lead a man directly to liberation, because ritual actions receive a lot of the aspirant’s attention in the first three stages, by comparison, they seem more conducive to goals such as the world of manes and of gods, than to liberation. Thus, from Śaṅkara’s viewpoint, injunction of the samnyāsāśrama brings to light its unique focus on the means of liberation, “since pārvīrājya is meant as an auxiliary for full maturation<sup>2</sup> of the knowledge of Brahman.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, knowledge remains the means of liberation while physical renunciation is only one of its auxiliaries and is, practically speaking, optional.

Another major argument in favor of physical renunciation of the seeker after liberation is the model offered by ancient sages even if their own physical abandonment was the result of a personal choice and therefore unrelated to any injunction or suggestion from the scriptures. According to Śaṅkara, this model and its consequences for the seeker after liberation are expressed in verses 3.5.1 and 4.4.22 of

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<sup>1</sup> BSBh 3.4.47, 817.

<sup>2</sup> See also BUBh 4.4.7, 508.

<sup>3</sup> brahmaiñānaparipākāṅgatvācca pārvīrājyasya (BSBh 3.4.20, 796).



the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad. In light of his interpretation, the passage dealing with this in verse 4.4.22 reads as follows: "Desiring this world [the Self] alone, monks renounce their homes. This is [the reason for it]: the ancient men of knowledge, it is said, did not desire children, thinking 'What shall we achieve with children, we who have the Self as our world.'" <sup>1</sup> In his comment, Śaṅkara first suggests that contemporary enlightened people follow the model embodied by the ancient ones: "Therefore, after knowing this Self, Brāhmaṇas should just renounce, they should not engage in karmans, because the ancient Brāhmaṇa men of knowledge did not desire children." <sup>2</sup> A little further, he also includes the seeker after liberation as addressee of the injunction: "Therefore, desiring [this] world, the Self, they renounce

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<sup>1</sup> etamevapravrājino lokamicchantah pravrajanti. etaddha sma vai tatpūrve vidvāmsah prajām na kāmavante kim prajayā karisyāmo yeśāṃ no 'yamāt mā 'yam loka iti (BUBh 4.4.22, 929).

<sup>2</sup> tas mādetam ātmānam viditvā pravrajeyureva brāhmaṇah. na karmārabherannityarthah. yasmātpūrve brāhmaṇā evaṃ vidvāmsah prajāmakāmayamānāh (Ibid., 934).

their homes, they should <sup>1</sup> renounce ...” <sup>2</sup> Still further, he makes an explicit connection between the model of the past, and the present time: “Because ancient men of knowledge, abstaining from ritual actions concerning children etc., did renounce their homes, therefore people of today also renounce them, that is, should renounce them ...”

<sup>3</sup> Reading the same connection in verse 3.5.1, when commenting thereupon, Śaṅkara adds “ancient” to the word “Brāhmaṇas,” which is in fact unqualified in the verse proper:

Since the ancient Brāhmaṇas, knowing this Self as different in nature from means and results, renounced the whole domain of means and results, which is characterized by desire, and led a mendicant life, giving up actions producing visible and invisible results, as well as their means, therefore today also the Brāhmaṇa, the knower of Brahman, having mastered, known

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<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara provides various reasons to justify his reading an injunction of physical renunciation even when the text has no explicit indication (such as the optative mood) for it. He argues for instance that the presence of the eulogy (arthavāda) “This is [the reason for it],” after the statement of renunciation, becomes useful only if the latter statement is a prescription (527). Moreover, says our commentator, since in the sentence preceding the passage under discussion, the Upaniṣad states that “Brāhmaṇas seek to know It through the study of the Vedas, sacrifices,” since this is certainly recognized as an injunction by the opponent, and since the subject of all verbs stated in this context refer to the same subject, there is no reason to understand that the statement of renunciation is not an injunction also (Ibid.). The argument of a common subject for at least two verbs is also used as a key point in BUBh 3.5.1 (338, 341).

<sup>2</sup> tasmādāt mānam lokamichantah pravrajanti pravrajeyuh ... (BUBh 4.4.22, 934).

<sup>3</sup> yasmātpūrve vidvāmsah prajādikarmabhvo nivṛttāḥ pravrajitavanta eva. tasmādadhunātānā api pravrajanti pravrajeyuh (Ibid.).

completely, scholarship, the state of a scholar, the knowledge of the Self, having gone through the whole of Self-knowledge, with the teacher and the traditional texts, renounces desires.<sup>1</sup>

When introducing the reason given by verse 4.4.22 in his commentary on sūtra 3.4.15 of the Brahmasūtra, which he reads as “Moreover some [renounce actions] according to their liking,” Śaṅkara clearly describes these ancient Brahmanas as already enlightened and their physical renunciation as unconnected with injunction:

Moreover, some, men of knowledge who have direct experience of the result of knowledge, relying on that [experience], point out that there is no need for having children and for means conducive to other purposes. In relation to “according to their liking,” there is this Śruti passage from the Vāiasaneyins [the custodians of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad] ...<sup>2</sup>

In spite of these clear indications of physical renunciation based on immediate Self-knowledge, contemporary as well as medieval interpreters have seen in these ancient Brāhmaṇas mere seekers after liberation. Ānanda Giri describes them as “possessing knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> yasmātpūrve brāhmaṇā etamātmānam asāadhanaphalasvabhāvam viditvā sarvasmātsāadhanaphalasvarūpādeśanālakṣaṇāt vyutthāya bhikṣācāryam caranti sma. drṣtādrṣtārtham karma tatsāadhanam ca hitvā. tasmādadvyatve 'pi brāhmaṇo brahmavit pāṇḍityam paṇḍitabhāvam. etadātmavijñānam pāṇḍityam nirvidya niḥśeṣam viditvā. ātmavijñānam niravaśeṣam kṛtvetyarthah ācāryata āgamataścaīṣaṇābhyo vyutthāya (BUBh 3.5.1, 816).

<sup>2</sup> apicaike vidvāmsah pratveksīkṛtavidyāphalāḥ santastadavastambhātphalāntarasādhaneṣu prajādiṣu pravojanābhāvam parāmrśanti. kāmakāreṇeti śrutirbhavati vāiasaneyinām ... (BSBh 3.4.15, 788)

leading to reflection" (vicāraprayojakaiñānavantah).<sup>1</sup> In her recent thesis, Revathy also understands that their knowledge is "mediate" and that their renunciation "is in order to attain the direct knowledge of Brahman" (228). Even when Śaṅkara explains the totally free physical renunciation of these enlightened men, Swāmī Mādhavānanda, the English translator of the BUBh, interprets the author as referring to seekers after liberation. After Śaṅkara's statement "this renunciation of their homes by the sages can take place simply by their knowing the world of the Self," the translator gives the following footnote on "knowing:" "That is, indirectly, from the teacher and the scriptures; direct realisation is not meant" (BUBh 4.5.15, 550). This interpretation is definitely unfounded, as Śaṅkara also suggests in a few other places that these knowers are already enlightened. He writes in the introduction of his BUBh 24: "And because the knower of Brahman has fulfilled all desires, he cannot, with such a fulfillment, have any desire. The Śruti also says, 'we who have this Self as our world' [4.4.22]." <sup>2</sup> Before quoting the same passage in BSBh 4.1.2, he says: "Thus the Śruti... shows the absence of any duty for the knower of the Self," <sup>3</sup> adding thereafter that meditation would be for the one who has not yet reached the same state. <sup>4</sup>

The freely chosen physical renunciation of ancient sages therefore becomes the source of injunction of that type of

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<sup>1</sup> BUBh 3.5.1, 456.

<sup>2</sup> brahmavidāścāptakāmatvādāptakāmasya kāmānupapatteḥ. 'yesām no 'yamāt māyaṃ lokah' iti ca śruteḥ (BUBh 24 intro, 757).

<sup>3</sup> tathāca śrutiḥ... ityātmaavidah kartavyābhāvaṃ darśayati (BSBh 4.1.2, 831).

<sup>4</sup> See also BSBh 3.4.9, 765 and AUBh intro, 7.

abandonment for the contemporary seeker after liberation, and a kind of invitation for the fully liberated-in-this-life. Paradoxically, those who physically renounced only after enlightenment serve as model and inspiration for taking recourse to physical renunciation before enlightenment. Yet the paradox seems consistent with the various arguments describing the nature of Self-knowledge, actions and their respective results, and justifying physical renunciation of the aspirant. Whether one is already enlightened or not, the intent of the physical renouncer is the same: to remain in knowledge alone, as it constitutes the only means of liberation. But it should be noted that this interpretation is in sharp contrast with that in which the ancient knowers would be mere seekers after liberation. Because these knowers did achieve liberation before their physical abandonment, one can see again the primacy given by Śaṅkara to direct Self-knowledge whether it is associated or not associated with physical renunciation as a means for its rise. When physical renunciation has not been necessary even for the enlightenment of people who serve as its models, it cannot be considered as a sine qua non of enlightenment, but rather as a simple auxiliary.

#### 6.5- Sureśvara's emphasis on physical renunciation

In his paper on "Śaṅkarācārya: the Myth and the Man," Potter argues that a complete reversal of Śaṅkara's position occurred in the fourteenth-century with Vidyāranya, pontiff of the Śringeri Matha, author of the famous Jīvanmuktiviveka, and often identified with Mādhava, the author of Śaṅkara's most popular hagiography entitled

Śaṅkaradigvijaya. As summed up by Potter: "For Vidyāraṇya, one gives up actions and gains knowledge. Śaṅkara's position is diametrically opposed" (1982, 118). Although, in his paper, Potter neglects the fact that Śaṅkara also prescribes physically giving up action for gaining knowledge, he rightly identifies a major reversal of emphasis between the two authors, from renunciation of authorship as a result of direct Self-knowledge to physical renunciation as a necessary means for the latter. However, there is strong evidence that the reversal of Śaṅkara's position started much earlier, with Sureśvara (8th century), who is considered along with Padmapāda as Śaṅkara's most influential pupil.

According to T. M. P. Mahadevan, the differences between Sureśvara and his master are "of minor importance" (1958, xiii). While this is probably true for all other points of the doctrine, it is not the case as far as renunciation is concerned. One sometimes notices in secondary literature the tendency to see in Sureśvara a more liberal thinker with respect to the criterion for access to knowledge. Summarizing Śaṅkara's BSBh 1.3.34-38 on Śūdras' qualification for knowledge, Paul Hacker overlooks the fact that Śaṅkara allows them access to the discipline of knowledge through the Smṛti literature, and suggests that for the Brahmasūtra commentator the only possible circumstance is "dass durch Wirkung der Samskāras aus einem früheren Dasein in Ausnahmefällen ein Śūdra zur Erkenntnis und damit zu ihrer Frucht (der Erlösung) gelangen könne" (1950, 11). Referring to the Vedāntasārahavārttikarājasamgraha, a text traditionally attributed to Sureśvara, which states that Śūdras also

samnyāsāśrama to all of the first three castes. In his Vārtika on BUBh 3.5.1, he first exposes his master's viewpoint: "‘Brāhmaṇa’ is used to identify a distinct qualified person, because there is no injunction of renunciation for Ksatriyas and Vaiśyas in the Śruti." <sup>1</sup> In the next two verses, he then gives his own interpretation: "Since the Śruti declares renunciation to be for the three varṇas without distinction, the word Brāhmaṇa should be understood as a synecdoche [mentioning the first type of dvijas to mean all of them]." <sup>2</sup> According to Ānandagiri's comment on this verse, Sureśvara refers here to Upaniṣadic statements such as "one may renounce even from brahmacarya" <sup>3</sup> (Jābāla Upaniṣad 4), which do not specify that the invitation to physical renunciation is addressed to Brāhmaṇas alone. <sup>4</sup> Sureśvara then points out how restricting physical renunciation to Brāhmaṇas alone, even in the case of enlightened people, involves a contradiction: "When the knowledge is attained that cuts away the understanding of being qualified for karman, why forcibly restrict the qualification for renunciation?" <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> adhikāri viśeṣasya jñānāya brāhmaṇagrahaḥ |  
na samnyāsavidhir yas mācchrutau ksatriyavaiśvayoh ||  
(Sureśvara 1894, 3.5.88, 1253).

<sup>2</sup> travānāmaviśeṣeṇa samnyāsah śrūyate śrutau |  
yadopalakṣaṇārtham syādbrāhmaṇagrahaṇam tadā ||  
(Ibid., 3.5.88, 1254).

<sup>3</sup> brahmacaryādeva pravrajat (Ibid.). The same passage is quoted by Śaṅkara for instance in BGBh 3 intro, 137.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the various opinions found in Dharmaśāstra about qualification for renunciation in terms of varṇas, see Olivelle 1984, 111-115, and Kane 22:942-946.

<sup>5</sup> karmādhikāravicchēdi jñānam cedabhyupeyate |  
kuto 'dhikāraṇiyamo vyutthāne kriyate balāt ||  
(Sureśvara 1894, 3.5.90, 1254).

In the same manner as Śaṅkara, Sureśvara gives everyone access to knowledge. For instance, he specifies a statement by his master in the following manner: "Since no man is excluded from qualification [for knowledge], the commentator said 'for all men.'" <sup>1</sup> However, in a few places Sureśvara clearly states that one has to physically abandon rites in order to start with the discipline of knowledge. While in the introduction of the BUBh, Śaṅkara says, without mentioning anything concerning physical abandonment, that the Upaniṣad is addressed to the one that is detached (viraktasya) <sup>2</sup> Sureśvara states the following requirement at the beginning of the introduction to his sub-commentary: "He alone is qualified for Vedānta who has renounced all actions, who wishes to cast off transmigratory existence and to know the Unity." <sup>3</sup> In his Naiṣkarmyasiddhi, the pupil describes again the process of access to knowledge as preceded by physical renunciation, a kind of account that later became the dominant way of interpreting Śaṅkara himself on this matter:

From the performance of daily obligatory duties merit arises.  
From the origination of merit comes destruction of sin; and from  
this arises purification of the mind, and from this comes the  
understanding of the real nature of bondage; and therefrom  
dispassion arises; and from this comes a longing for liberation;  
and from this comes the renunciation of all actions and their

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<sup>1</sup> sarveśāmapī ca nṛṇāmadhikāro'nivāritah |  
yato 'taḥ sarvato nṛṇāmitibhāsyakṛdabravīt ||  
(Sureśvara 1982, 1.1.1025, 185).

<sup>2</sup> BUBh intro, 609.

<sup>3</sup> tyaktāśeṣakriyasyaiva samsāram prajihāsataḥ |  
jijñāsoreva caikātmīyam trayyanteṣvadhikāritā ||  
(Sureśvara 1982, 1.1.12, 17).



means; then there is the practice of yoga; and from this comes the inclination in the mind towards the inner Self, and then there arises the knowledge of the meaning of the texts such as "tat tvam asi," and from this results the destruction of ignorance ... (Balasubramanian 1988, 53).<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while in fact contradicting Śaṅkara's viewpoint, this position is presented for instance by R. Balasubrahmanian as part and parcel of the Advaita tradition:

Though scripture has enjoined the performance of nitya-naimittika-karmas, the spiritual aspirant who seeks liberation renounces, according to Advaita, these karmas and pursues the discipline of śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsana. ... Should he accept meditative practice, there would be justification for his renouncing nitya-naimittika-karmas, as the two cannot be practiced at the same time (Ibid., 344).

It seems therefore that while, on the one hand, Sureśvara opened physical renunciation to more people than his master, on the other, he closed the discipline of knowledge to a much greater number of people by making monastic life necessary for the latter. Moreover, although granting qualification for direct Self-knowledge to everyone, including the Śūdras, he reserves the discipline leading to it for monks alone. While his successor Sarvajñātman does not seem to have

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<sup>1</sup> nityakarmānuṣṭhānāddharmotpattiḥ dharmotpatteḥ pāpahāniḥ. tataścittaśuddhiḥ. tataḥ samsārayāthātmyāvabodhaḥ. tato vairāgyam. tato mumukṣutvam. tatastadupāyaparveṣanam. tataḥ sarvakarmatatsādhanasannyāsah. tato yogābhyāsah. tataścittasya pratyakpravaṇatā. tatastatvamaśyādivākyaṛthaparijñānam. tato vidyocchedah ... (Balasubramanian 1988, 53)

addressed this problem directly, he resolved the contradiction by stating that if one gets enlightenment in a particular life outside samnyāsāśrama, the explanation can only be that he physically renounced and adopted monastic life in some previous life. Thus physical renunciation could remain necessary for access to knowledge and enlightenment could also be opened to everyone in this life.<sup>1</sup>

### 6.6- Śaṅkara's polysemic terminology of renunciation

Having clarified Śaṅkara's position on the various dimensions of renunciation is it now possible to arrive at a systematic account of his terminology on this theme? The possibility of assigning one single meaning for every occurrence of words such as samnyāsa or sarvakarmasamnyāsa is set aside by Śaṅkara himself when pointing out, for instance in his BGBh 255, that, in the scriptures, the same description could be understood as referring to the characteristics of the enlightened person or, on the basis of another possible context, to the means that the seeker of liberation tries to cultivate in himself in

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<sup>1</sup> How precisely was Śaṅkara's position gradually transformed and/or misinterpreted during centuries, and what was Sureśvara's exact influence on qualification for the Advaita discipline is a question that needs further study. Also, what is their respective legacy in terms of the 20th century trends in Advaita monasticism? These are other questions worth pursuing. According to Saway, there is no evidence that Sureśvara's qualification of all dvijas for physical renunciation "was ever accepted as authoritative in Śringeri Matha" (382). As noticed by David M. Miller and Dorothy C. Wertz, the daśanāmī samnyāsins of Bhubaneswar are "mainly Brahmins" (76). Yet, as reported by Wade H. Dazey, the contemporary daśanāmī samnyāsins do include monks from all dvija classes (302). Further clarification is therefore needed.

order to reach enlightenment. In light of this, it seems that trying to establish the number of times each word related to renunciation is used with this or that specific meaning would be in vain. What will be significant on the other hand, is 1- to identify the scope of polysemy or ambiguity for each term; 2- to indicate and employ some semantic devices for recognizing a possible ambiguity, as well as for identifying the most appropriate meaning according to the context and in light of Śaṅkara's basic position as expressed in clearer passages; 3- to complete the picture of how, based on Śaṅkara's polysemic terminology, interpreters may have misunderstood him. So, we will now proceed to identify all the meanings conveyed in Śaṅkara's comments by the following terms: samnyāsa, samnyāsin, karmasamnyāsa, sarvakarmasamnyāsa, tyāga, tyāgin, karma(pari)tyāga, sarva(pari)tyāga, sarvakarma(pari)tyāga, yati, nivṛtti, pārivṛājya, parivrāt, (paramahansa)parivrājaka, sāṃkhya, akṣaropāśaka, vidvān. The various meanings of each term will always be presented in a semantic sequence that moves from the more literal and common purports of the term to the less obvious ones, in other words, from the meaning of overt physical renunciation to that which stands for some form of renunciation even in the midst of continued performance of rites and active social life.

First, concerning Śaṅkara's usage of the word samnyāsa, the evidence gathered so far makes it quite clear that the following comment by Potter does not hold true for the whole of Śaṅkara's work:

It is interesting to note that Śaṅkara the philosopher regularly avoids using the term samnyāsa, favoring other, to his mind, less

ambiguous, expression. He is quite aware that traditional usage identifies samnyāsa as the fourth and highest stage of an ideal life, and that there exist varied opinions about what that stage consists in. In the main passages where Śaṅkara confronts the social implications of this thesis [that only the self-knower is a true samnyāsin], he prefers to utilize an alternative list of "stages of life" which, like the standard list, stems from ancient sources but which he finds more clearly reflects his understanding (1982, 116).

The situation is much more complex and ambiguous than suggested here. To substantiate his point, Potter analyzes Śaṅkara's comment on Chāndogya Upaniṣad 2.23.1 and the statement that only the brahmasamstha reaches immortality. It is true that Śaṅkara does not use the word samnyāsa in this comment. But the possible ambiguity rather resides here in the derivatives of pari / vrai meaning "wandering." It is also true that in this comment as well as in BUBh 3.5.1 which is also referred to by Potter, Śaṅkara clearly distinguishes, to quote the scholar again, between the way of "the wandering mendicant (parivrājaka), the ascetic who is not 'fixed in Brahman'" and "the fourth way, that of being 'fixed in Brahman,' [which] belongs to the true wandering mendicant (parivrājaka)" (Ibid.). But it could be argued by an advocate of mandatory renunciation that the first parivrājaka is merely taking samnyāsa as a way of living based on smārta rules, while the other is a true seeker after liberation following the Upaniṣadic prescription of physical renunciation for gaining Self-knowledge. Along Potter's perspective, this could be refuted by stating that the Smṛtis also enjoin pursuit of liberation as

the main duty for the formal samnyāsin<sup>1</sup> and that therefore the only person who can differ from the formal samnyāsin following his duty is the “true” parivrājaka, that is, the enlightened man qualified for physical renunciation by virtue of his direct Self-knowledge, but who may not have renounced physically. Nevertheless, one can realize the ambiguity of the term parivrājaka when what is meant is only the enlightened person as being liberated-in-this-life, whatever his way of life. Added to this is the fact that, as we saw, the same word parivrājaka creates even more shades of ambiguity in these passages from CUBh and BUBh, when used with reference to the monastic seeker after liberation in the BSBh’s comment on Chāndogya Upanisad 2.23.1, in Upad 21.2 where one has to be a paramahansa parivrājaka to be qualified for knowledge, and in the BGBh where Śaṅkara never clearly differentiates the paramahansa parivrājaka from the monastic seeker and from the monastic enlightened man. So, although Potter is basically right in his understanding of Śaṅkara’s emphasis on inner renunciation, his perspective on the commentator’s terminology is rather sketchy.

Let us start with the semantic pole of the word samnyāsa which conveys the sense of physical renunciation. The root sam-ni ✓ as can mean to deposit, to lay down or aside, to give up, to abandon. According to one definition of samnyāsa identified by Olivelle, it is found in many medieval texts in the sense of “the performance of the rite by which one becomes a renouncer” (Olivelle 1981, 271). Olivelle remarks that “once samnyāsa became fixed as the title of the rite, the

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<sup>1</sup> See Manu Smṛti 6.35-36.

expression samnyāsam karoti comes to be used with increasing frequency with reference to the performance of the rite ..." (272). However, Śaṅkara's use of samnyāsa with the verb √ kr seems to convey either formal physical abandonment of ritual actions associated with the recitation of the praisa and initiation into samnyāsāśrama, or physical renunciation in general. As an example of the first meaning, in BGBh 4.15, our commentator glosses Kṛṣṇa's advice thus: "Do you, therefore, for that reason, i.e. because action was performed even by the ancients, surely perform action; neither sitting quiet, nor renunciation of action should be resorted to" (149).<sup>1</sup> Because here mention is already made of simply "sitting quiet," the addition of "nāpi samnyāsah kartavyah" seems to refer to formal entry into samnyāsāśrama. But when the commentator writes elsewhere that people such as Janaka "did not renounce karmans" (na karmasamnyāsam krtavantah),<sup>2</sup> because the physical renunciation of an enlightened person does not have to be associated with adoption of samnyāsāśrama, the expression does not necessarily mean the rite of initiation into this stage of life.<sup>3</sup>

Śaṅkara's clearest way of suggesting that he refers to renunciation simply as a monastic way of life (even when including the discipline of knowledge) is to put the restrictive words eva, mātra and kevala after the word samnyāsa (or tyāga): "Neither through samnyāsa alone, by mere, by simple abandonment of action devoid of

<sup>1</sup> kuru tena karmaiva tvam na tūsnīmāsanam nāpi samnyāsah kartavyastasmāttvam pūrvairapyanuṣṭhitatvāt (BGBh 4.25, 198). For another example, see BGBh 6.10.

<sup>2</sup> BGBh 2.11, 45.

<sup>3</sup> For another example, see BGBh 3.3.

knowledge, does he attain, does he reach, to perfection, to steadfastness in the yoga of knowledge characterized by actionlessness.”<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that in such contexts, Śaṅkara does not refer to the way of life of people who take to samnyāsāśrama in order to run away from social responsibilities, because this type of abandonment is distinctly identified as rājasic and un conducive to direct Self-knowledge (BGBh 18.8), whereas the mere samnyāsā referred to here is said to lead to this knowledge in the same way as karmayoga (BGBh 5.2). Hence, even when samnyāsa and tyāga are followed by eva, mātra and kevala, they refer to samnyāsāśrama as including the discipline of knowledge, yet without direct experience of the Self.

When corresponding to samnyāsa as physical renunciation, the word samnyāsin can of course mean the formal physical renouncer having entered samnyāsāśrama. Responding, for instance, to the viewpoint that rites must be performed to avoid sin, Śaṅkara writes: “It is not possible to ascribe sin to the samnyāsin for non-performance of the worship of Agni etc.; this is as much so as in the case of brahmacārins who are men of action and not even samnyāsins.”<sup>2</sup> The word mātra is also used with samnyāsin in MāBh 12 to specify the formal renunciation of “those who are mere samnyāsins, who are

<sup>1</sup> nāpi samnyasanādeva kevalātkarmaparityāgamātrādeva jñānarahitātsiddhim naiśkarmyalakṣaṇām jñānavogena niṣṭhām na samadhiḡacchati na prāpnoti (BGBh 3.4, 145). Kevala is often found with a similar context in BGBh 5.2-5.

<sup>2</sup> nahyagnikārvādvakaranātsamnyāsinah pratyavāyah kalpayitum śakyo yathā brahmacārīṇāmasamnyāsināmapī karminām (BGBh 3 intro, 137).

possessed of dull or average intellect, who still consider themselves aspirants, who tread the virtuous path ...<sup>1</sup>

We have so far considered samnyāsa and samnyāsin as conveying the sense of physical renunciation without direct Self-knowledge. Samnyāsa can also refer to physical abandonment after attainment of direct Self-knowledge, as when Śaṅkara says that “the one possessed of Self-knowledge is qualified for samnyāsa alone.”<sup>2</sup> As already pointed out, if this entails adoption of wandering mendicancy (as part of samnyāsāśrama or not), it will only be due to preference on the part of the Self-knower, not by reason of an injunction. The same can be said of samnyāsin in passages such as the following: “As for him who sees inaction in action, by virtue of that very insight of inaction etc., he is free from action, a samnyāsin, doing merely what is necessary to maintain life ...”<sup>3</sup>

We found earlier that, according to Śaṅkara, when used in a metaphoric sense as in Gītā 5.3, samnyāsa can mean immediate Self-knowledge itself. Similarly, without any sense of physical renunciation, samnyāsin can simply mean the enlightened man who has automatically renounced authorship by virtue of his direct experience of the actionless Self. Faithfully expanding on Gītā 5.3, Śaṅkara even says that the enlightened karmayogin “who neither dislikes pain and the objects that cause it, nor desires pleasure and the

<sup>1</sup> mandamadhyamadhiyām tu pratipannasādhakabhāvānām sanmārgagāminām sannnyāsinām mātrānām ... (MāBh 12, 194)

<sup>2</sup> ātmañānavataḥ samnyāsa evādhikārah (BGBh 221, 75). See also the absolute samnyasya with the same meaning in BGBh 272, 233.

<sup>3</sup> yastvakarmādidarśī so 'karmādidarśanādeva nīskarmā samnyāsi jīvanamātrārthaceṣṭah ... (BGBh 4.20, 209)



objects that cause it, should be known, recognized, as a constant samnyāsin, even though he is engaged in action.”<sup>1</sup> Although the purport of this type of comment has been widely missed, it is also in this sense that Śāṅkara calls the man of steady intellect (sthitaprajña) a samnyāsin (hereby precluding liberation from the non-samnyāsin): “The attainment of liberation is possible only for the man of knowledge, for the man of steady intellect who has abandoned desires, for the disciplined man, but not for the non-samnyāsin, the one that cherishes desires ...”<sup>2</sup> However, some contexts remain definitely more ambiguous than the latter one. For instance, when commenting on Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.22 which, according to Śāṅkara, validates physical renunciation both before and after direct Self-knowledge, our commentator writes: “Thus for a samnyāsin who knows Brahman, both kinds of karmans, whether done in the past or in the present life, are destroyed, and no new ones are undertaken.”<sup>3</sup> The reference to destruction of karmans certainly suggest that the one “who knows Brahman” is an enlightened person. But what is the relationship between his enlightenment and his qualification as a samnyāsin? Śāṅkara gives no clue in the immediate context as to the

<sup>1</sup> yo na dvesti kimcinna kāṅksati duḥkhasukhe tatsādhane caivamvidho yaḥ karmani vartamāno 'pi sa nityasamnyāsīti jñātavya ityarthah (BGBh 5.3, 247-248).

<sup>2</sup> viduṣastyaktaiśaṇasya sthitaprajñasya yatereva mokṣaprāptirna tvasamnyāsinah kāmakāminah ... (BGBh 2.70, 129) Śāṅkara often uses the word samnyāsin to mean the enlightened person, whether he has physically abandoned all practices or not. See for instance MuBh 3.1.4, 150; BGBh 5.25-26, 206-207; 9.22, 307; 15.5, 491; 18.2-3, 444-448.

<sup>3</sup> evam brahmavidah sannnyāsina ubhe api karmanī kṣīyete pūrvajanmani krte ye te. iha janmani krte ye te ca. apūrve ca nārabhyete (BUBh 4.4.22, 936).

answer. So, at least four meanings are possible here: either samnyāsin means that the man became formal samnyāsin and through this gained enlightenment, or that he informally renounced karmans after enlightenment, or that he did the same formally, or finally that by virtue of his direct experience of Brahman, he is simply a renouncer of authorship, without reference to his external way of life. It seems to me that all these meanings are possible, but in the context of Śaṅkara's thought as a whole, the most characteristic is certainly the last one. Interestingly, the same situation is found almost word for word in BGBh 2.46: "Similarly, whatever utility, result of action, there is in all the Vedas, in duties prescribed by the Vedas, that also is available in the result of knowledge - corresponding to the all-spreading flood - for the Brāhmaṇa who is a samnyāsin and who knows the nature of the supreme Reality." <sup>1</sup> Although the four meanings are again possible, it is easier here to verify that Śaṅkara does not make formal physical renunciation a prerequisite of enlightenment, for immediately after this statement, he quotes Chāndogya Upaniṣad 4.1.4 which states that people can also have the knowledge that a simple widower (therefore a non-physical renouncer) by the name of Raikva possessed. <sup>2</sup>

Another and last meaning of samnyāsin, based on the Gītā's description of the karmavogin as "a samnyāsin and a yogin," is

1evam tāvāṁstāvat parimāṇa eva sampadyate sarveṣu vedesu vedokteṣu karmasu yo 'rtho yat karmaphalam so 'rtho brāhmaṇasya samnyāsinah paramārthatattvam vijānato yo 'rtho yadvijñānaphalam sarvataḥsamplutodakasthānīyam tasmimstāvāneva sampadyate (BGBh 2.46, 106).

<sup>2</sup> For other ambiguous usage of samnyāsin, see MuBh 3.1.4-5, 150-152; BGBh 5.28, 208; 8.11, 276; 14.1, 464.

connected by Śaṅkara to the unenlightened's renunciation of the results of action: "His being a samnyāsin," says he, "is by virtue of the renunciation of the thought of the results of action; and his being a yogin is by virtue of his performance of action as an auxiliary to yoga ..." <sup>1</sup>

While samnyāsa and samnyāsin can refer to physical renunciation with direct Self-knowledge, to the same without knowledge, to renunciation of authorship alone, and to giving up the result of action, the compound karmasamnyāsa is found to convey only the first two meanings. Karmasamnyāsa is frequently used for instance in the introduction to chapter 5 of the BGBh as well as in its first two verses to mean the formal physical renunciation without direct Self-knowledge which consists, as we saw in chapter 4, in abandoning only "a few actions" without giving up authorship. Mere physical abandonment is also conveyed by the same compound when used to refer to rājasic and tāmasic renunciation in BGBh 18.9 (553). <sup>2</sup> However, the same karmasamnyāsa means physical renunciation based on immediate Self-knowledge when Śaṅkara states, about enlightened people such as Janaka, that "although [qualification for] karmasamnyāsa had been reached, they attained perfection while pursuing karman, that is, without performing karmasamnyāsa." <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> karmaphalasamkalpasamnyāsātsamnyāsitvam yogāṅgatvena ca karmānusthānāt ... yogitvam ... (BGBh 6.2, 285)

<sup>2</sup> For karmasamnyāsa as formal physical renunciation, see also BGBh 6 intro, 213; 6.37, 240.

<sup>3</sup> karmasamnyāse prāpte 'pi karmanā sahaiva samsiddhimāsthitā na karmasamnyāsam krtavantah ityeso 'rthah (BGBh 211, 45).

We showed in chapter 4 that, as part of the necessary steps in Śaṅkara's basic sequence toward liberation, sarvakarmasamnyāsa means renunciation of authorship alone. But it can also mean formal physical renunciation without direct Self-knowledge, as in the introduction of BGBh 3, where the commentator says that "sarvakarmasamnyāsa is enjoined on the seeker after liberation as an auxiliary to knowledge." <sup>1</sup> Yet, as we saw, when in verses 3.30, 126 and 18.57, the Gītā uses the expression sarvāṇi (or sarva-) karmāṇi samnyasya, meaning "renouncing all actions" in Kṛṣṇa, Śaṅkara understands it as part of karmayoga. It means either giving up attachment for the results of actions (BGBh 3.30 and 18.57) or a process of inner renunciation induced by meditation on Brahman with attributes (BGBh 126).

This semantic overview of the root sam-ni / as and its derivatives thus gives clear indication that its use in Śaṅkara's works is polysemic, at times ambiguous, and always needs careful contextualisation. A very similar semantic diversity is found for the root (pari) / tyaj and its derivatives which also mean to "abandon," the optional prefix pari adding the notion "entirely." As pointed out by Olivelle (1981, 270) and myself (1987, 120), although not consistently, the Bhagavadgītā tends to use / tyaj and its derivatives with reference to the results of action and attachment (sāṅga). Śaṅkara follows this tendency in his comment on verses 18.1 to 18.12, using these words to define the inner abandonment of the unenlightened

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<sup>1</sup> jñānāṅgatvena mumukṣoḥ sarvakarmasamnyāsavidhānāt (BGBh 3 intro, 136).

karmayogin. But elsewhere in his works we find almost the same semantic variations as with sam-ni ✓ as.

First, tyāga is glossed with samnyāsa seemingly in the sense of physical renunciation in BGBh 16.2. Sarvatyāga, “abandonment of everything,” is used with the same meaning in MuBh 1.212 when Śaṅkara states that only Brāhmanas are eligible to it (152). Sarvakarmaparityāgin is also used in the same sense in BGBh 14.25, as indicated by the fact that the renouncers then keep only the actions necessary for the bare maintenance of the body (605). But soon thereafter, Śaṅkara specifies that the same compound could be understood also as a characteristic of the enlightened, suggesting that it can indicate physical renunciation after enlightenment. Such is also the case with karmaparityāge prāpte in BGBh 4.23, which Śaṅkara uses in the same way as the karmasamnyāse prāpte of BGBh 2.11, meaning that even “when he has attained [qualification for] abandonment of karman,” the enlightened person may pursue ritual actions (215). In BGBh 4.20, karmaparityāga refers to the direct Self-knower’s physical renunciation by stating its impossibility (karmaparityāgāsambhave) due to “some reason” (210). Derivatives of ✓ tyaj also present renunciation simply as a quality of the enlightened man, irrespective of the monastic or socially active ways of life, or even in reference to socially active persons. Without any consideration of way of life, PUBh 4.10 (127) states that the sarvatyāgin (renouncer of everything) “knows everything” (sa sarvajñah). Similarly, in BGBh 7.28, “... the men of virtuous actions... are said to be of firm resolve, to have, through their resolute sarvaparityāga, the settled understanding that the

supreme Reality is thus only, and not otherwise.”<sup>1</sup> Finally, sarvatvāga is given in MuBh 3.1.2(166) as one of the means on a path of yoga that is said to be accompanied by karmans, suggesting thereby that the compound refers here to a process of inner renunciation for the karmayogin.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this survey on derivatives of √ tyaj reaffirms Śaṅkara’s polysemic usage of key terms related to renunciation and clarifies the semantic background out of which later misinterpretations have occurred.

The word yati is another term commonly designating the ascetic or the monk. It is of course used in this sense by Śaṅkara, for instance in his MuBh 3.1.5, where the Upanisad prescribes means such as truth, tapas and continence to the yati and where the commentator glosses the word with “bhikṣu” (167). Yati also conveys the meaning of a monastic aspirant in BGBh 14.26 (605) and 18.52 (739), both of which are contextualized by the comment on their preceding verse in terms of abandoning everything except that which is necessary for bare maintenance of the body. On the other hand, in passages such as BGBh 4.21-22, yati means the enlightened person having performed physical renunciation. As presented in the introduction to verse 21,

On the other hand, he who, unlike the above-mentioned person, has realised his identity with Brahman, the all-pervasive, innermost actionless Self, even before engaging in ritual actions, who, being bereft of expectation for seen and unseen objects of

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<sup>1</sup> ... punyakarmanām ... evameva paramārthatattvam nānyathetyevam sarvaparitvāgavratena niscitaviññānā drdhavratā ucyante (BGBh 7.28, 373).

<sup>2</sup> A similar usage is found in MuBh 2.27, 162.

desire, sees no purpose in action aimed at securing the latter, renounces action with its auxiliaries, and does merely [what is necessary] for the maintenance of the body, such a yati, steadfast in knowledge, is liberated.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, yati is used by Śaṅkara with reference to the enlightened man irrespective of his way of life. The best example of this is found in BGBh 255-68, where the word occurs seven times even though found only once in the Gītā itself (verse 60). In his introduction to this sequence, Śaṅkara explains that these verses account for the enlightenment of the person remaining active in society as well as for the physical renouncer:

To the person who got engaged in steadfastness in the yoga of knowledge after renouncing ritual actions from the very first [stage of life], as well as to him who got engaged in the same by way of karmayoga, the distinctive marks of, and the means [used by], the man of established intellect are taught from "When a man completely casts away" [255] to the end of the chapter.<sup>2</sup>

It must first be noted that, in view of this broad contextualization, in the light of Śaṅkara's ideal of physical renunciation based on direct Self-knowledge from the stage of brahmācarya, and because of his

<sup>1</sup> yah punah pūrvoktaviparītaḥ prāgeva karmārambhādbrahmaṇi sarvāntare pratyaḡātmaṇi niskriye samjātāt madarśanaḥ sa dr̥ṣṭādr̥ṣṭeṣṭaviśayāśīrvivariitayaḥ dr̥ṣṭādr̥ṣṭārthe karmaṇi prayojanamapaśyansasādhanaṁ karma samnyasya śarīravātrāmātraceto yatirīñānaṁ niṣṭho mucyate (BGBh 4.21, 211).

<sup>2</sup> yo hyādita eva samnyasya karmāṇi jñānāyogaṇiṣṭhāyām pravṛtto yaśca karmayogena tayoh sthitapraiñasya prajahātītyārabhyādhvāyaparisaṁāptiparyantaṁ sthitapraiñalakṣaṇaṁ sādhanam copadiśyate (BGBh 255, 114).

recognition of enlightenment even in the case of householders, the “steadfastness in the yoga of knowledge” referred to must be understood as already immediate in nature and must be equated to the jñānanisthā of the basic sequence toward liberation. In verse 260 (120), yati is used in its etymological sense of “striving” as it is said that even the striving wise man (yataṭaḥ ... puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ) is driven away by senses. Yati thus refers here to the seeker after liberation, irrespective of his way of life. But when the task of controlling the mind and senses is accomplished, yati then is used for the “self-controlled” man of direct Self-knowledge. This is suggested for instance by the comment: “For, steadfast is the wisdom of the yati who remains thus, whose senses are under control by virtue of the strength of practice ...”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, here, it is by virtue of the universally available means of self-control, and not by the status of a physical renouncer, that the yati is said to be the only one qualified for liberation:<sup>2</sup> “Desiring to establish, through an example, that the attainment of liberation is only for the yati who is a man of knowledge, who has abandoned desires, and whose intellect is steady, and not for the non-saṃnyāsin longing for objects of desire, the Lord proceeds.”<sup>3</sup>

Most significant is the fact that, in Śaṅkara’s works, the word nivṛtti (withdrawal or abstention from action), which is commonly

<sup>1</sup> evamāśīnasya yater vaṣe hi yasyendriyāṇi vartante  
bhvyāśabalāttasya praiñā pratisthitā (BGBh 261, 121-122).

<sup>2</sup> For similar statements where yati is glossed by saṃnyāsin and attributed liberation, see BGBh 5.26, 207; 8.11, 276; 15.5, 491.

<sup>3</sup> viduṣastyaktaīśanasya sthitapraiñāsya yatereva moksaprāptirna  
tvasaṃnyāsinah kāmakāminā ityetaṃ artham drṣṭāntena  
pratipādayisyannāha (BGBh 270, 129).



associated with formal renunciation, and which also identifies the path of liberation as opposed to pravṛtti (the path of transmigratory existence) basically covers the same semantic scope as yati and derivatives from sam-ni ✓ as, and ✓ tyai. The only difference is that, in the same way as yati, it never refers to renunciation of the results of action. A first meaning of nivṛtti is abstention from any action while yet retaining the sense of authorship: "...because pravṛtti and nivṛtti are both dependent on a doer. All matters involving action, accessories and so forth, do exist in the domain of ignorance, yet only as long as Reality has not been attained ..." <sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the same external dimension of involvement in, and abstention from action is referred to in the next verse, although applying here to the enlightened man who did abandon the sense of authorship through his direct Self-knowledge. His actions "are performed without expectation, without purpose, as mere bodily movements; when done by one involved in actions (pravṛttena), they are for the welfare of the world; when done by one abstaining from actions (nivṛttena), they are for the mere maintenance of the body ..." <sup>2</sup> Thus, with its second meaning, nivṛtti still refers to a reclusive way of life (as opposed to a socially active one), yet the sense of authorship is no longer attached to it, as it is lived by the discriminating men of direct Self-knowledge. In BGBh 6.3 (287), we come across nivṛtti as a process of inner renunciation when śama is defined as "nivṛtti from all actions"

<sup>1</sup> ... kartrtantratvāt pravṛttinivṛttiyorvastvaprāpyaiva hi sarva eva kriyākāra kādīvyavahāro 'vidyābhūmāveva ... (BGBh 4.18, 200)

<sup>2</sup> samkalopairvarjitāḥ mudhaiva cestāmātrā anusthīyante pravṛttena celloka samgrahārtham nivṛttena cejjīvanamātrārtham ... (BGBh 4.19, 209)

(sarvakarmabhvo nivrttiḥ). Finally, the sense of inner renunciation of authorship irrespective of the way of life is conveyed by nivrtti or nivrtta in passages such as the following: "In him ... there arises the knowledge concerning the supreme reality that all this is only one, the Brahman, the non-doer. Although abstaining (nivrtte) from action and its purpose, he is involved (pravrttiḥ) as assiduously as before, for the world's welfare. While appearing as involvement in action, such an involvement is no action ..." <sup>1</sup> In KaBh 2212, nivrtti consisting of inner renunciation of all activity is clearly given as the condition for experiencing the Self: in contrast with "those whose intellects are attached to the outside objects" (bāhyasaktabuddhīnām) are "the wise, the ones who are withdrawn (nivrtta) from external activity, who discriminate, who see, who directly experience, Him, the Īśvara, the Self, in accord with the teaching of the master and the scriptures ..." <sup>2</sup> Similarly, Śaṅkara states in BGBh 18.13 that "as shown by these passages, when Self-knowledge arises there is nivrtti of all karmans." <sup>3</sup> Thus, it is this inner renunciation of all identification to activity that defines nivrtti as the only means to liberation.

Accordingly, to believe that with the term nivrtti, Śaṅkara advocates renunciation through monastic life in a gloss such as the following,

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<sup>1</sup> yasya ... jñānamutpannam paramārthatattvaviśayamekamevedam sarvam brahmākārtr ceti. tasya karmaṇi karma pravoiane ca nivrtte 'pi lokasamgrahārtham yatnapūrvam yathā pravrttistathaiva karmaṇi pravrttasya yatpravrttirūpam drśyate na tat karma ... (BGBh 211, 44)

<sup>2</sup> tametamīśvaramātmānam ye nivrttabāhāvavrttayo 'nupaśyanti ācāryāgamopadeśamanu śāksādanubhavanti dhīrā vivekinah ... (KaBh 212, 95-96).

<sup>3</sup> ... ityātma jñāne samjāte sarvakarmaṇām nivrttim. darśayati (BGBh 18.13, 694).

would be a major misunderstanding: “Pravṛtti, involvement, the cause of bondage, the path of action. And nivṛtti, abstention, the cause of liberation, the path of saṁnyāsa.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the semantic scope of pravṛtti shows that the latter is the cause of bondage only inasmuch as it entails the sense of authorship due to spiritual ignorance, and the semantic scope of nivṛtti reveals that the latter is the cause of liberation only inasmuch as it entails withdrawal from the sense of authorship through direct Self-knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Although polysemic and at times ambiguous, Śaṅkara’s usage of saṁ-ni ✓ as, ✓ tyai and nivṛtti reveals a soteriology that is based on the sine qua non of Self-knowledge accompanied by inner renunciation of authorship, and not on any outer condition such as physical renunciation.

We have already seen in the previous chapters that the words vyutthāna, pārivṛāja, parivrāt, (paramahansa) parivrājaka, sāṁkhya and bhikṣu can refer to both the formal renunciation of the seeker after liberation and the (formal or informal) physical renunciation of the enlightened. Thus, vyutthāna and pārivṛāja can be understood by Śaṅkara as synonyms, and similarly parivrāt, (paramahansa) parivrājaka, sāṁkhya and bhikṣu.

Exceptionally, in Śaṅkara’s works, the word akṣaropāsaka (“worshipper of the Imperishable”), which is often associated with physical renunciation, does not seem to follow this polysemy, as it appears to qualify only the enlightened person. In Gītā 8.3, akṣara is

<sup>1</sup> pravṛttim ca pravṛtīḥ pravartanam bandhahetuh karmamārgah, nivṛttim ca nivṛttirmokṣahetuh saṁnyāsamārgah (BGBh 18.30, 714).

<sup>2</sup> For a similar connection between pravṛtti and bondage as well as between nivṛtti and liberation, see ĪUBh 14, 23.

said to be the supreme Brahman, a designation understood by Śaṅkara as the attributeless nature of Brahman (BGBh 8.11, 276). In his study on the contemporary Advaita tradition, although not mentioning the word akṣaropāśana, Cenkner defines what is usually understood by that term: "Concentration without an object, that is without name and form, is concentration upon the meaning of the great Upaniṣadic axioms" (171). However, in his introduction to Gītā 12.13, Śaṅkara clearly defines the akṣaropāśaka or worshipper of the Imperishable in terms of his direct non-dual Self-knowledge, contrasting him with meditators who still see a duality between their Self and the Lord:

And here, yoga consisting of the deep focus of the mind on Īśvara in the universal form [Brahman with attributes], and performances such as ritual actions for the sake of Īśvara, have been prescribed, based on the distinction between the Self and Īśvara. ... Having said in "They do reach Me" [12.4] that, with respect to the attainment of liberation, the akṣaropāśakas are independent, [Kṛṣṇa] shows, in "for them I become the deliverer" [12.7], that the others are dependent on someone else, namely Īśvara. For, if they were considered as one with Īśvara's Self, it would have been unclever to speak of the process of their deliverance, they being the akṣara itself by reason of seeing the absence of difference.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> atra cātmeśvarabhedamāśritya viśvarūpa īśvare  
cetahsamādhānalakṣaṇo yoga ukta īśvarārtham karmānuṣṭhānādi  
ca. ... 'te prāpnuvanti māmeva' iti akṣaropāśakānām  
kaivalyaprāptau svātantryamuktivetaresām pāratantrya mīśvarā-  
dhīnatām darśitavāṁsteśāmaham samuddharteti. yadi hīśvarasyāt-  
mabhūtāste matā abhedadarśitvādakṣararūpā eva ta iti

A close study of the word aksaropāsaka in Śaṅkara's works reveals that nowhere does it convey any other meaning.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, when it is associated with paramahansa parivrāṇika and sāṃkhya in the BGBh, from Śaṅkara's viewpoint, their common reference to the enlightened person becomes more explicit. Moreover, since the aksaropāsaka is thus quite often associated by Śaṅkara with contexts of physical renunciation, it implies that the latter is based on immediate Self-knowledge.

The word vidvān (knower) is another term closely related to renunciation, being often given by Śaṅkara as an addressee (adhikārin) of the injunction of renunciation. Its proper understanding is also essential to a faithful account of Śaṅkara's position on renunciation, because it determines whether the commentator addresses the prescription of renunciation to one who has or hasn't attained direct experience of the Self. This semantic assessment can make all the difference between understanding Śaṅkara as emphasizing physical renunciation as a means to, or as a consequence of, direct Self-

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samuddharanakarmavacane tānpratyaśalam syāt (BGBh 1213, 511-512).

<sup>1</sup> The only possible comment where the aksaropāsakas could be perceived as simple aspirants is when Śaṅkara states in BGBh 18.67 (761) that they are possessed of the means (sādhana) connected with knowledge and stated in Gītā 1213-20 and in some passages from chapters 13 to 15. But the following part of the comment on 18.67 (762) clearly indicates that these aksaropāsakas are in fact liberated-in-this-life, as the triple result of action is said not to accrue to them and as they "have obtained refuge in the unity of the real nature of the Self and the Lord" (labdhabhagavatsvarūpātmaikatvaśaraṇānām). Accordingly, the means referred to in the comment on 18.67 are those that the aksaropāsaka used in order to reach his state of aksaropāsaka, not after becoming one.

knowledge. A common meaning of vidvān is “meditator.” “In the Upanisads,” writes Śaṅkara, “the roots √ vid (to know) and √ upās (to meditate) are seen used interchangeably.”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, vidvān can be used to distinguish one practicing any form of meditation in contrast with people who perform only rites. This distinction is made, for instance, in MuBh 1.210-11 where people who perform only rituals are said to go through the (Southern) path of the manes at the time of death and to be reborn as humans or beasts, and where vānaprasthas, formal samnyāsins and vidvāns, glossed by Śaṅkara by “householders who are devoted mainly to meditation” (grhasthāśca jñānapradhānāḥ) are said to go through the (Northern) path of the gods and to remain in the world of Brahmā until complete enlightenment (151). Thus, a first type of opposition is created here between those who are devoid of knowledge (aviduṣām) because they do not practice the inner cognitive process of meditation, and those who are knowers (viduṣām) in the sense that they do practice meditation, whatever their way of life (CUBh 5.4.2, 480). The meditator is also called a vidvān or knower by virtue of his seeking after the Self: “That very supreme Self, he, the vidvān, asks for, wishes to attain ...”<sup>2</sup> However, when contrasted with the already enlightened vidvān, who sees the scriptures as emerging from himself (AUBh intro, 325), the meditating and aspiring vidvān will then be considered an avidvān. This occurs for instance when, after justifying the physical renunciation of the enlightened

<sup>1</sup> vidyupāstyośca vedāntesvavyatirekeṇa pravogo drśyate (BSBh 4.1.1, 826).

<sup>2</sup> yameva paramāt mānamevaiṣa vidvānvṛnute prāptumicchati ... (MuBh 3.23, 171)

vidvān, Śaṅkara declares: "Even the avidvān who seeks after liberation has to do pārivrāṣya." <sup>1</sup> Yet, a few sentences further, this ignorant seeker after liberation can regain the status of a vidvān when compared with those who do not desire the Self and give all their attention to rites and their results: "But the idea that the whole of man's life is filled only with karmans ... has been dismissed, since it applies to the avidvān ..." <sup>2</sup>

It follows from this semantic analysis that Śaṅkara's polysemic usage concerning renunciation attracts the charge of being unstable, ambiguous, easily mistaken and very demanding in terms of contextualisation. But, it also follows that a proper contextualisation provides evidence of the author's unsuspected liberality with respect to qualification for knowledge and liberation. In the usage of derivatives from saṁ-ny ✓ as and ✓ tyaj, as well as in nivṛtti, yati, pārivrāṣya, parivrāt, (paramahansa) parivrāṣaka, sāṁkhya, akṣaropāśaka and vidvān, we find expressed his primary emphasis on abandonment of authorship and on spontaneous physical renunciation as part and parcel of a direct Self-knowledge that leads spontaneously to liberation without any additional help from karmans. It goes without saying that such a semantic schema will enable us to better understand how later commentators have misinterpreted or transformed Śaṅkara's influential legacy.

<sup>1</sup> aviduṣāmapī mumukṣuṇā pārivrāṣyam kartavyameva (AUBh intro, 325).

<sup>2</sup> yattu puruṣāyuh sarvaṁ karmaṇaiva vyāptam ... iti tadavidvadviśayatvena parihrtam ... (AUBh intro, 329)

## CHAPTER 7

## ŚAṆKARA AND THE VALUE OF RENUNCIATION IN HINDUISM

Prior to examining the controversial and intricate issue of Śaṅkara's interpretation of renunciation, we first constructed a typology of renunciation as a methodological instrument for a systematic, intratextual analysis of all aspects of his works related to this theme. Besides physical renunciation, abandonment of the results of action, and the meditative process of inner withdrawal from grosser levels of mental activity, it was the last and fourth type identified as renunciation of authorship, which proved to be the most revealing conception in the case of this author, as it plays the key role in his understanding of the basic movement toward liberation.

In brief, according to Śaṅkara, every man is eligible for liberation through immediate Self-knowledge alone, whatever his position in the varṇāśrama system. Because any action or practice is not opposed to spiritual ignorance, only direct knowledge of the actionless Self can sublimate the ignorance of the Self's silent, unbounded, immortal nature, and eliminate the consequent superimposition of an active and mortal nature on it. This is how Śaṅkara categorically refutes the doctrine of the combination of action and knowledge for the purpose of liberation (jñānakarmasamuccayavāda). The basic sequence leading to liberation starts with the practice of karmayoga. The main effect of this discipline is to create purity of mind. Now, contrary to a common interpretation, this purity can already attain the level which allows the emergence of direct Self-knowledge. Hence, from purity of mind upward, the sequence toward liberation put forward by Śaṅkara is a



series of logical consequences in accord with the author's soteriological system. First, purity of mind (sattvaśuddhi) ensures the rise of [direct] knowledge (jñānotpatti) of the Self, which results in the spontaneous abandonment of ignorance and of its effects such as superimposition of authorship (kartrtva), action and the results of action on the Self (sarvakarmasamnyāsa). In turn, this automatically allows the simple "resting" or steadfastness in [direct] knowledge (jñānanisthā) which is beyond the need of any further practice or karman. The whole sequence ensures, from a logical viewpoint, the final result of liberation (mokṣa) from all boundaries in this life, and from transmigratory existence at the time of physical death.

The major consequence of the reinterpretation of this sequence is that sarvakarmasamnyāsa no longer conveys the sense of physical renunciation as a compulsory step toward Self-knowledge and liberation. Contrary to a widely shared view among interpreters of Śaṅkara, it also follows that karmayoga is an autonomous path to direct knowledge of the Self. In this respect, it includes one's varṇāśrama duties and the major proximate means of liberation, that is, the Advaita discipline of knowledge (hearing, reflecting and meditating on the Upaniṣadic sayings, or on the Smṛtis in the case of Śūdras), as well as the practice of meditation on the qualified Brahman. Appearances notwithstanding, this agrees with Śaṅkara's refutation of the combination of knowledge and action for liberation: while the combination of ritual actions and meditation results in direct Self-knowledge through complete purification of the mind, this resulting knowledge remains the only cause of eradication of ignorance and of liberation from its effects.

In this context, physical renunciation is valued by Śaṅkara under the following terms. It is an auxiliary prescribed only to Brāhmaṇas for full-time absorption in knowledge. Considering the many exceptional cases of Brāhmaṇas who, according to the scriptures, have reached enlightenment without that type of renunciation, for practical purposes, it must have been considered as optional by Śaṅkara. The purpose of the full-time absorption in knowledge ensured by physical renunciation and the object that is abandoned vary according to the level of consciousness of the renouncer. If Self-knowledge is already direct and permanent, then physical renunciation of all practices previously performed, including the discipline of knowledge, spontaneously expresses the fulfilment of having reached the goal of all means, the absolute contentment of the Self wherein no desire for anything yet to be achieved through whatever means can any longer arise. If Self-knowledge is direct, yet unstable, then physical renunciation of rituals serves to stabilize that experience through full absorption in the discipline of knowledge. If, finally, knowledge of the Self is only mediate, then physical abandonment of ritual actions serves in attaining direct experience of the Self by also allowing full-time practice of the discipline of knowledge. So, for the seeker after liberation, the value of physical renunciation and monasticism lies in allowing full-time dedication to the most direct means of Self-knowledge, and not in being the only way of life capable of bringing about that knowledge.

As rightly pointed out by Mayeda, "it is highly probable that jñānakarmasamuccayavāda in many varieties was prevalent among Mīmāṃsakas and Vedāntins while Śaṅkara was active. Śaṅkara,

therefore, seems to have taught his teachings to, or fought against, mostly thinkers holding various types of jñānakarmasamucayavāda" (Upad, 90). Accordingly, Śaṅkara's whole enterprise of establishing the validity of renunciation was part of the process of detaching knowledge from action so that the former could be left as the sole means of liberation. In this context, the type of renunciation to be vindicated most energetically was that of authorship through direct Self-knowledge. This was because the doctrine of knowledge as a self-sufficient means of liberation logically ensued from demonstrating that direct Self-knowledge automatically results in abandonment of authorship (kartrtvasamnyāsa), and that the latter is in turn followed by a state of inner silent actionlessness (naiskarmyalaksanā jñānanisthā) ensuring liberation from all boundaries without any additional help. Demonstration of the validity of physical renunciation found only a second place. Such argument was not used to prove that liberation is reached only through recourse to monasticism, but to contend that because the scriptures prescribe a stage of life that is without ritual action, it cannot be claimed that the latter is necessary for liberation. Thus, fundamentally, the basic incompatibility referred to by Śaṅkara to refute the doctrine of the combination of knowledge and action was not that between the way of life of the first three stages of life and samnyāsāśrama, but between superimposition of authorship on the Self, and spontaneous abandonment of that superimposition through direct knowledge of the Self as actionless.

This is the basis on which, according to me, a proper evaluation of Śaṅkara's interaction with, and contribution to, Indian thought can

be undertaken. These results can shed new light on our assessment of Śaṅkara's interpretation of the texts he commented upon, on the relationship between him and his Advaita tradition, and on our understanding of the major periods of Indian philosophical thought. Since each one of these areas would need an extended enquiry, it is beyond the scope of this study to present a detailed evidence to bear on any tentative answer to these questions. We can, however, identify some promising directions for further research and propose some hypotheses.

Since Śaṅkara has been often criticized for imposing mandatory physical renunciation on liberal texts such as the Bhagavadgītā, we can already see that he was much more faithful to the spirit of this text than is usually admitted by his critics. As far as renunciation is concerned, I actually tend to see amongst the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā, and his commentaries a fundamental continuity emphasizing the meditative process of inner renunciation as a means to direct experience of the Self, and renunciation of authorship - freedom from the limitations of the acting ego - as the foremost correlate of Self-knowledge and liberation.

I have underscored on many occasions the fact that Śaṅkara's treatment of renunciation has been misinterpreted by his own tradition. Among academics, Karl H. Potter first identified this situation. From within Śaṅkara's tradition, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi arrived at a similar conclusion as early as 1967. One reason for this misinterpretation, on Śaṅkara's side, certainly lies in his polysemic and even ambiguous terminology concerning renunciation. Interestingly, in his study on the author's usage of the words avidyā, nāmarūpa,

māyā and Īśvara. Hacker concludes, in perhaps too radical a fashion, that Śaṅkara lacked interest in defining monosemic vocabulary and in proper systematization: "Nach dieser Betrachtung müssen werden wobei als allgemeine Eigentümlichkeit des Denkens Śaṅkaras eine Abneigung gegen Definitionen und eine souveräne Sorglosigkeit gegenüber begrifflicher Systematik festhalten..." (1951, 285). As we saw, Śaṅkara remains very rigorous and consistent in terms of issues such as the role of action and knowledge, yet, for whatever reason, he leaves key terms related to renunciation open to polysemy and misinterpretation.

At least three exegetical predispositions account for the misinterpretation on the part of later Advaitins. First, Sureśvara's injunction of formal physical renunciation (monasticism) as a prerequisite for access to the discipline of knowledge. Given Sureśvara's reputation as a direct disciple of the founder of the tradition and as one of the greatest exponents of Advaita, his authority has exerted a strong influence on later readings of Śaṅkara's commentaries. The second exegetical predisposition which may explain the misinterpretation is the "previous life" argument. Clearly stated perhaps for the first time by Sarvajñātman, Sureśvara's disciple, it is the rule according to which, when scriptures refer to people who have reached enlightenment in this life without monasticism, one must suppose that they have adopted monasticism in a previous life and have thus been able to accomplish most of the spiritual purification during this earlier mandatory stage. The third predisposition is another exegetical subterfuge to deal with the case of enlightened people still active in society. One is to understand

them as “exceptions” to the general injunction of monasticism which remains a necessary means for complete Self-knowledge. These three exegetical predispositions erased the major contradictions that arise in Śaṅkara’s works when one interprets the author as stating that physical renunciation is a sine qua non of Self-knowledge. They disallowed many later Advaitins to realize that enlightened people still socially active are not sort of peripheral to an unavoidable monastic path of knowledge, but perfect examples of the very core of Śaṅkara’s message, of his emphasis on Self-knowledge and inner renunciation alone as the universal, correlated and necessary conditions for liberation.

The results of the present study justify a more in-depth analysis of the profound consequences of statements such as the following by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi:

Misunderstanding itself has taken the shape of a tradition, unfortunately known as Shankara’s tradition. . . . when, in course of time, this teaching lost its universal character and came to be interpreted as for the recluse order alone, the whole basis of Indian culture also began to be considered in terms of the recluse way of life, founded on renunciation and detachment (14-15).

In his comparison between Śaṅkara and his followers, Hacker notes that while, for the former, avidyā (ignorance) is simply a kleśa or mental “cause of suffering,” with the later Advaitins it becomes a śakti or cosmic power (1951, 250). Thus post-Śaṅkara Advaita proceeds to “a materialization of ignorance into the cosmic substance.”<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> “Die Materialisierung der Avidyā zum Weltturstoff” (Hacker 1951, 266).

process was perhaps intimately connected with the post-Śaṅkara emphasis on compulsory monasticism: in the same way as the physical universe was to be rejected for being a manifestation of ignorance, life in society had to be outwardly abandoned as the human and social crystallization of the same nescience. The process of monopolization of the path to liberation by the monastic institution transformed Śaṅkara's emphasis on the incompatibility between action and direct Self-knowledge into the opposition between a karmayoga with hardly any proximate means of knowledge for householders, and a jñānayoga with its reserved discipline of knowledge and liberation for monks alone. Śaṅkara's interpretation of physical renunciation as a simple optional auxiliary for Self-knowledge was thus lost sight of.

Accordingly, when interpreters encountered passages in Śaṅkara where, for instance, the enlightened "knower" (vidvān) is said to be qualified for physical renunciation alone as a result of his enlightenment, proper emphasis on physical renunciation as a means to the latter required them to see him as possessed of mere mediate knowledge.

The epic period of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, commencing around 500 BCE, is the common reference point in identifying the rise of Hinduism as distinct from the earlier Brahmanism of the Vedas and the Upanisads. In this context, modern scholars tend to see a fundamental break between the Upaniṣadic doctrine of renunciation and its reinterpretation by the Bhagavadgītā. Usually, it is understood that in the Upanisads, full inner renunciation and the ensuing liberation entail physical renunciation and the monastic way of life, but that these inner and outer aspects of

renunciation become separated in the Mahābhārata and particularly in the Bhagavadgītā. The earlier ascetical renunciation formulated by the Upanisads is thus softened, "domesticated," to use Olivelle's expression, and disappears in favor of a universal qualification for inner renunciation even in the midst of social life. Endorsing Madeleine Biardeau's conclusions<sup>1</sup> on this, Charles Malamoud writes for instance that they "montrent comment le passage du brāhmanisme ancien à l'hindouisme implique une réévaluation complète de l'opposition initiale homme dans le monde\renonçant.... la délivrance (ou le salut) n'est plus affaire purement individuelle et cesse d'être l'apanage du renonçant pour devenir la perspective promise à l'humanité entière" (12-13). Similarly, Olivelle sets up a radical opposition between the Upaniṣadic mentality and that of the Bhagavadgītā. According to him, in the Upanisads, "where one lives and how one makes a living are inseparable from the aim of one's life. Ascetic life style and livelihood cannot be separated from the ascetic goal" (1990, 132). On the contrary, "the Gītā, in dissociating mokṣa from the life-style of renunciation, dissociated it from all life-styles, including that of life-in-the-world. The goal of life is separated from the mode of life" (1978, 33).<sup>2</sup> According to this theory and to Śaṅkara's common representation as the herald of compulsory physical renunciation, our author should have neglected the viewpoint of the Bhagavadgītā and favored the earlier paradigm of liberation through monasticism. But we showed that, with respect to both the Upanisads and the Bhagavadgītā, Śaṅkara emphasizes inner renunciation of

<sup>1</sup> See Biardeau, 30-1 and 126.

<sup>2</sup> See also Olivelle 1990, 146.



authorship as the only form of renunciation indissolubly linked with liberation, the ultimate goal of life. It is true that one can find a shift in emphasis, for instance, between the Samnyāsa Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā, and one can identify a tendency in Hindu culture to associate the last stage of life with liberation as when, for instance, the discipline of samnyāsāśrama is called moksadharma.<sup>1</sup> But there is no conclusive evidence that, as a whole, the Upaniṣads indissolubly link liberation with monasticism; their connection may be privileged, but it is not necessary. And this also turns out to be Śaṅkara's basic interpretation of the value of renunciation.

Accordingly, a model emphasizing continuity, rather than radical opposition, between early Brahmanism and Hinduism, akin to the one proposed by J. C. Heesterman, seems more appropriate in describing the passage from the Upaniṣads to Śaṅkara's commentaries, by way of the Bhagavadgītā. According to Heesterman, the principle of renunciation is already deeply embedded in the Vedic ritualistic worldview and "the difference between classical ritualism and renunciation seems to be a matter of degree rather than of principle. The principle is the individualization of the ritual, which could not but lead to its interiorization" (41-42). From the conclusions reached through our study, we can fairly say that Śaṅkara brought out the full consequences of the old Vedic principle of interiorization of sacrifice by emphasizing renunciation of authorship through experience of the Self as actionless. Śaṅkara no less took into account the various traditional modes of living and showed how both life in society and

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<sup>1</sup> See Olivelle 1990, 146 and 1984, 106.

monasticism allow the process of inner renunciation to culminate in the exalted state of absolute freedom from all limitations, which he viewed as the highest goal of human life.

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