Atma Bodha

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Atma Bodha

అత్మ భోద

నమం shriSha NkarAnandagurupAdAmbujanmane .
saviAsamahAmohagrAhagrAsaikakarmaNe ..

– panchadashI

‘I bow at the lotus feet of the Guru, Shankara, whose function is to eliminate the alligator of delusion (moha) with all its branches.’

Atma Bodha, meaning self knowledge, was composed by Adi Shankara sometime in the 8th century.

To quote Sri Radhakrishnan ‘The Advaitism of Shankara is a system of great speculative daring and logical subtlety. Its austere intellectualism, its remorseless logic, which marches on indifferent to the hopes and beliefs of man, its relative freedom from theological obsessions, make it a great example of a purely philosophical scheme. It is impossible to read Shankara’s writings, packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking, without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of a very fine penetration and profound spirituality. With his acute feeling of the immeasurable world, his stirring gaze into the abysmal mysteries of the spirit, his unswerving resolve to say neither more nor less than what could be proved, Shankara stands out as a heroic figure of the first rank in the somewhat motley crowd of the religious thinkers of medieval India ....

Shankara taught us to love Truth, respect reason and realize the purpose of life. Twelve centuries have passed, and yet his influence is visible.’
His influence on Indian philosophy is so enormous that most of the later philosophies that evolved in India had either to agree with him or disagree with him, quoting him nevertheless.

Shankara, in his indisputable style, allows a place for Karma and Bhakti while emphasising the prime necessity of jnana for the realization of the Self. For example, while commenting on Bhagavadgita 18.45, he takes Bhakti to be identical to jnana by quoting 7.16-18 of the gItA where Krishna says that a jnAni is one of His Bhaktas.

In Vivekachudamani, he goes on to say that Bhakti is one of the most conducive causes for liberation. Similarly, in the third verse of atma bodha, he says that karma is not opposed to ignorance, though it can not destroy ignorance. Undoubtedly a great religious reformer and philosopher, Shankara embraces within his fold all pantheism while maintaining the principle of non-duality.

Though Shankara is famous for his commentaries (bhAshya-s) on the three major texts considered as ‘launching pad’ for liberation (prasthAnatrayI, the triple cannon), namely bhagvad gItA, brahmasUtra-s, and upaniShad-s, he has composed a large number of stotra-s (hymns in praise of various gods) and also brief expositions in prose and verse (prakaraNa-s). Atma Bodha falls into the last category. A rare but an excellent commentary of this work in Sanskrit has been provided by Swami kRiShNAnandAshramI and has been translated in to english by Vidyaratna Menon. Other noteworthy translations of the text are by Swami Chinmayananda, Swami Nikhilananda, TMP Mahadevan, and Parthasarathy, to name a few.

The text of Atmabodha avoids the technicalities found in the vedas, but conveys the message of jnana yoga (the path of knowledge) to the layman. In a short compendium of sixty eight stanzas, the knowledge of the Self is described in an unique and simple style. Shankara starts with the requirements of the aspirant, and goes on to explain the nature of world-Samsara, the embodiments of the soul, the influence of mAyA and the superimposition of Atman. He describes the meditation technique based on
aphorism ‘I am Brahman,’ the supreme being, ‘Aham Brahmasmi’, and elucidates the fruits of Self-realization and the state of the jivanmukta (liberated soul).

Since the realization of the Self can not be had from books or scriptures, Shankara insists on the necessity of instruction by a Self-realized Guru (teacher). The intense desire to liberate and the effort required by the sAdhaka (aspirant) is emphasized. If there is no effort, there can not be a result. As Sri Radhakrishnan says ‘People in our society have resolved to renounce nothing, but wish to enjoy the fruit of renunciation.’ The vedanta kesari puts it ‘The goal we desire (should be) to reach the ideal society of the prophets, a society of just, peaceful, morally and intellectually progressive community of non attached and responsible individuals, the means we adopt therefore must be worthy of the ends. Then only the real age of millennium will dawn wherein one feels that the whole world is one’s family of kith and kin, a place for nothing but love and fellow feeling, in short a vasudhaivakuTumbakam (universe as a family).’

Commenting on the first verse of Atma Bodha, the sanskrit commentator, Swami kRiShNaNandAshramI, remarks that Sri Shankaracharya composed the three great bhashyas (of the upaniShads, gItA, and brahma sUtra) for the guidance of people qualified by birth, environment, circumstances, and mental, moral and spiritual development. Out of great compassion for the rest of the masses, Shankara composed Atmabodha for explaining the knowledge of the Self.

The treatise of the knowledge of self, Atmabodha, is meant for those whose sins have been destroyed by religious austerities, who are calm, devoid of attachment and are persons desirous of liberation (i.e. mumukShu-s desirous of mokSha). The qualified are those who have the four fold requisites, 1. discrimination between real and unreal (viveka) 2. non-attachment (i.e indifferent to the results of one’s action) 3. desire for emancipation (mumukShu-s) and 4. the six fold qualities,
a. sAma (restraint of internal senses)
b. dAma (restraint of external senses)
c. uparati (control of senses, without jumping from one object to another)
d. samAdhAna (mind constantly on the Self)
e. titIkShA (indifferent endurance)
f. shraddhA (faith).

The rest of the sixty seven verses may be roughly classified in to the following subjects, means for emancipation (2-5), sa.nsAra (6-12), various sharIra-s (embodiments) (13-19), adhyAsa (15-19), aha.nkAra (26-30), doctrine of neti-neti (31-36), sAdhanA (37-39), self-realization (40-46), vision of a jnAnI and characteristics of a jivanmukta (47-53), and finally the nature of Brahman (54-68).

May the great AchArya, one of the greatest persons to grace this planet, Shankara, make us aware of His grace.

॥ अत्मबोधः ॥

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.. AtmabodhaH ..

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.. AtmabodhaH ..
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అత్యంత దక్షిణానికి సహా మారయం పుస్తక | 11

వానను మాత్రమే మాత్రమే మాత్రమే | 2-11

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నాగారుడిని ఆశ్చర్యం చేసుకోకానిరు | 1

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పండిమంలు పంచించండి కారి ప్రమాణము ॥ 3011

పండిమంలు రేతులను సంపాదించండి ।
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(విప్పడిన పదాలం పని నిశితం చేసాం)

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౬౭ సరÁǸదం సĮ¦ƱƝ¹నం Ňª నచɨȌ´ȍŸƣ ।
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హృƱûɅƲƥ ౬౯ ౬౪ ౬౧ ౬౩ ౬౫ ౬౬ ౬౭ References in introduction include notes from the translations by Swami Nikhilananda, TMP Mahadevan, Vidyaratna Menon, and the sanskrit commentary by Swami Krishnanandashrami. Transliteration is by Kim Poulsen (poulsen at dk-online.dk). Comments by Giridhar giridhar at chemeng.Isc.ernet.in Additional proofreading by Avinash Sathaye sohum at ms.uky.edu, David Lyttle dhlyttle at hotmail.com, and Sunder Hattangadi,
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