

RIDDLE NO. 9

HOW THE UPANISHADS CAME TO BE MADE SUBORDINATE TO THE VEDAS ?

In the preceding chapter it was shown that originally the Upanishads were not a part of the Vedas and that the two in the matter of doctrine were opposed to each other. It is instructive to compare the later relations between the Vedas and the Upanishads. The later relations between them are best illustrated by the controversy between two philosophers, Jaimini and Badarayana.

Jaimini is the author of a work called the Mimamsa Sutras while Badarayana is the author of Brahma Sutras. Jaimini is an upholder of the Vedas and Badarayana is an upholder of the Upanishads.

The point of dispute was—Is it necessary to perform sacrifices ? The Vedas say ‘yes’ and the Upanishads say ‘no’.

The position of Jaimini is stated by Badarayana in his Sutras 2-7, and explained by Shankaracharya in his commentary.

Jaimini contends that¹:

“No one undertakes a sacrificial act unless he is conscious of the fact that he is different from the body and that after death he will go to heaven, where he will enjoy the result of his sacrifices. The Texts dealing with self-knowledge serve merely to enlighten the agent and so are subordinate to sacrificial acts.”

In short Jaimini says that all that Vedanta teaches is that self is different from the body and outlive the body. Such a knowledge is not enough. The self must have the aspiration to go to heaven. But it can’t go to heaven unless it performs Vedic sacrifices which is what his Karmakand teaches. Therefore his Karmakand is the only Salvation and that the Jnankand from that point of view is quite useless. For this Jaimini relies on the conduct of men who have believed in Vedanta²:

¹ See Badarayana Sutra 2 and Shankara’s comment on it.

² See Badarayana Sutra 3 and Shankara’s comment.

‘Jaimini versus Badarayana’ was the title given to this chapter which was later scored out. This is a 9-page typed MS with modifications in the first two pages by the author.—Ed.

“Janaka, emperor of Videha performed a sacrifice in which gifts were freely distributed (Brih. 3.1.1). I am going to perform a sacrifice sirs (Chh. 5.11.5). Now both Janaka and Asvapati were knowers of the Self. If by this knowledge of the Self they had attained Liberation, there was no need for them to perform sacrifices. But the two texts quoted show that they did perform sacrifices. This proves that it is through sacrificial acts alone that one attains Liberation and not through the knowledge of the Self as the Vedantins hold.”

Jaimini makes a positive assertion that the scriptures unmistakably declare¹ “that knowledge of the Self stands in a subordinate relation to sacrificial acts”. Jaimini justifies it because he says² “the two (knowledge and work) go together (with the departing soul to produce the results).” Jaimini refuses to give an independent position to Badarayana’s *Jnanakanda*. He takes his stand on two grounds.

First³: “Knowledge of the Self does not independently produce any result.”

Second⁴: According to the authority of the Vedas “Knowledge (of Self) stands in a subordinate relation to work.”

This is the position of Jaimini towards Badarayana’s *Jnanakanda*.

What is the position of Badarayana towards Jaimini and his *Karma Kanda*? This is explained by Badarayana in Sutras 8 to 17.

The first position⁵ taken up by Badarayana is that the Self spoken of by Jaimini is the limited self i.e., the soul is to be distinguished from the Supreme soul and that the Supreme soul is recognized by the Scriptures.

The second⁶ position taken up by Badarayana is that the Vedas support both knowledge of Self as well as sacrifices.

The third⁷ position taken up by Badarayana is that only those who believe in the Vedas are required to perform sacrifices. But those who follow the Upanishads are not bound by that injunction. As Shankaracharya explains :

“Those who have read the Vedas and known about the sacrifices are entitled to perform work (sacrifices). No work (sacrifice) is prescribed for those who have knowledge of the Self from the Upanishads. Such a knowledge is incompatible with work.”

¹ See Badarayana Sutra 4.

² See Badarayana Sutra 5.

³ See Badarayana Sutra 6 and Shankara’s commentary.

⁴ See Badarayana Sutra 7.

⁵ See Badarayana Sutra 8.

⁶ See Badarayana Sutra 9.

⁷ See Badarayana Sutra 12.

The fourth¹ position taken up by Badarayana is that *Karmakanda* is optional to those who have attained Bramhanand. As Shankaracharya explains :

“That some have of their own accord given up all work. The point is that after knowledge some may choose to work to set an example to others, while others may give up all work. There is no binding on the knowers of the Self as regards work.”

His last and final² position is that :

“Knowledge of the Self is antagonistic to all work and so cannot possibly be subsidiary to work.”

And as evidence in support of it he relies³ on the scriptures which recognizes Sannyas as the fourth Ashram and relieves the Sannyasi from performing sacrifices prescribed by the *Karmakanda*.

Many such Sutras can be found in Badarayana indicating the attitude of the two scholars of thought towards each other. But the one given above is enough as it is so very typical. If one stops to consider the matter the position wears a strange appearance. Jaimini denounces Vedanta as a false Shastra, a snare and a delusion, something superficial, unnecessary and unsubstantial. What does Badarayana do in the face of this attack ? Does he denounce the *Karmakanda* of Jaimini as a false Shastra, a snare and a delusion, something superficial, unnecessary and unsubstantial as the Upanishads themselves did ? No. He only defends his own Vedanta Shastra. But one would expect him to do more. One would expect from Badarayana a denunciation of the *Karmakanda* of Jaimini as a false religion. Badarayana shows no courage. On the contrary he is very apologetic. He concedes that Jaimini's *Karmakanda* is based on the scriptures and the scriptures have authority and sanctity which cannot be repudiated. All that he insists on is that his Vedanta doctrine is also true because it has also the support of the scriptures.

This is not all. What Badarayana does is to use the term Vedanta to cover two senses. He uses it so as to emphasize that the Upanishads do form a part of the Vedic literature. He uses it also to emphasize that Vedanta or the *Jnyanakanda* of the Upanishads is not opposed to the *Karmakanda* of the Vedas that the two are complimentary. Indeed this is the foundation on which Badarayana has raised the whole structure of his Vedanta Sutras.

This thesis of Badarayana—which underlies his Vedanta Sutras and according to which the Upanishads are a part of the Veda and there is

¹ See Badarayana Sutra 15.

² See Badarayana Sutra 16.

³ See Badarayana Sutra 17.

no antagonism between the Vedas and Upanishads—is quite contrary to the tenor of the Upanishads and their relation to the Vedas. Badarayana's attitude is not easy to understand. But it is quite obvious that Badarayana is a queer and a pathetic case of an opponent who begins his battle by admitting the validity of the premises of his adversary. Why did Badarayana concede to Jaimini on the question of infallibility of the Vedas which were opposed to the Upanishads? Why did he not stand for truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth as expounded by the Upanishads? The Badarayana has in his Vedanta Sutra betrayed the Upanishads. Why did he do so?

