

Human Intellect vs Shastra and Grace



Bhakti Rasāmṛta Sindhu Sādhana-bhakti chapter (1.2)-

uttamo madhyamaś ca syāt kaniṣṭhaśceti sa tridhā (16)
tatra uttamaḥ
śāstre yuktau ca nipuṇaḥ sarvathā dṛḍha niścayaḥ
prauḍha śraddho`dhikāri yaḥ sa bhaktāvuttamo mataḥ (17)

“According to one’s faith (see the two preceding verses of Bhakti Rasāmṛta Sindhu) a devotee is classified as topmost (*uttamādhikāri*), medium (*madhyama*) and junior (*kaniṣṭha*). The *uttama* is defined thus: The devotee who is expert in *śāstra* (scripture) and *yukti* (common sense) and is always firmly convinced due to mature faith is considered the topmost.”

From Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī’s commentary on verse 17: *nipuṇaḥ pravīṇaḥ sarvatheti tattva vicāreṇa sādhana vicāreṇa ca dṛḍha niścaya ityārthaḥ yuktiś cātra śāstrānugataiva jñeyaḥ-*

“The topmost devotee is expert in all respects in considering the philosophical truths and the truths on devotional practise and he is firmly convinced. The word *yukti* here, meaning ‘common sense’ or ‘logic’, is understood to be **only in obedience to the scriptures.**” Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī then quotes the following verse from (Bhakti Rasāmṛta Sindhu 1.1.45) -

Human intellect vs. Shastra and grace.

*svalpo'pi rucir eva syād bhakti tatvābodbhikā
yuktis tu kevalā naiva yad asyā apratiṣṭhitā*

“Even the slightest taste for *bhakti* can help one perceive and know its truths, but not mere *yukti* (logic, speculation), for that has no basis.”

*tatra madhyamaḥ
ya śāstrādiṣv anipuṇaḥ śraddhāvān sa tu madhyamaḥ* (18)

“The mediocre devotee is not so expert in scripture but has faith.”

*tatra kaniṣṭhaḥ
yo bhavet komala śraddhaḥ sa kaniṣṭho nigadyate* (19)

“The junior devotee (*kaniṣṭha adbhikāri*) has tender faith.”

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī’s commentary: *yo bhaved ityatrāpi śāstrādiṣvanipuṇa ityanuvartanīyaṁ śraddhā mātrasya śāstrārtha viśvāsa rūpatvāt.*

“Even though he is not expert in scripture, the *kaniṣṭha adbhikāri* **simply has faith that they should be followed** and he has faith in the purport of the scriptures.”

Here Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī shows that sceptic intellectuals are not even *kaniṣṭha adbhikāris*.

Excerpts from Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī’s Sarva-samvādinī on śāstra and reasoning

(Sarva Samvadini is a philosophical appendix of the Six Sandarbhas)

These excerpts deal with reliability of *śāstra* and the role of (human) reasoning vis-a-vis accepting knowledge from the *śāstra*. The context is that there are some statements in *śāstra* which appear to contradict human sense perception. Srila Jiva Gosvami first presents a sample of such statements:

nanu vede 'pi "gravanah plavante", "mṛd abravid apo 'bruvan' ity-ādi-darśanād anapatvam iva pratīyate.

[One might ask:] "We see even in the Vedas [Śatapatha Brāhmana 6.1.3.2,4] statements like 'The stones float' and 'The ground spoke and the water spoke,' which seem to indicate that the Vedas are unreliable."

NOTE: In other words, the statements of sastra seem to contradict our sense perception. So aren't these statements indicate that the Vedas are unreliable? The answer, as we shall see is "no". All statements of the Vedas, including the above quoted ones, are reliable. How it is so will be explained here.

ucyate, karma-viśeṣāṅgī-bhūtānām gravanam vīrya-vardhanāya stutir iyam.

This we answer -- this praise of the stones is for the purpose of increasing the potency of the stones, which serve a role in a particular ritual.

sa ca śrī-rāma-kalpita-setu-bandhādaḥ prasiddhatvena yathāvad eveti na doṣaḥ.

And this is indeed feasible, since it is well known that the same sort of address to stones occurred in such contexts as the building of the bridge which was arranged by Sri Rama. Thus there is no fault in this praise.

tatha, "mṛd abravīd apo 'bruvan" ity-ādaḥ tat-tad-abhimāni-devatāiva vyapadisyata iti jñeyam.

And in statements like "The ground spoke", "the water spoke," we should understand that the demigods presiding over these elements are being referred to.

tad evam sarvatraiva sarvathāivāpta eva vedah.

Therefore the Vedas are in all situations and in all respects reliable authority.

NOTE: "In all situations" and "in all respects" indicate that *all portions* of sastra are reliable, and *not that only some* portions (dealing with devotional life, etc.) are reliable. It also indicates that they are reliable authority for all time, not that in the modern age of "scientific progress and advancement", the Vedas somehow lose their authority.

kintu sarvajñeśvara-vacanatvena sarvajña-jīvaḥ durūhatvāt tat-prabhāva-labdha-pratyakṣa-viśeṣavadbhir eva sarvatra tad-anubhave śakyate na tu tarkikāiḥ.

But since they consist of the words of the all-knowing Supreme Lord, finite living beings who do not know everything have difficulty construing what they mean, and so only those who have by His power received special perceptive capacity are able to in all instances realize their meaning. Mental speculators are not able to do this.

NOTE: People who are merely adept in logic and / or having degrees from the nondevotee academia especially those who have associated with members of the nondevotee academia and whose beliefs, attitudes, understandings and desires have become distorted can neither understand, nor honestly claim to understand, the meaning of sastra.

tad uktam puruṣottama-tantrē, "śāstrārtha-yukto 'nubhavah pramānam tūttamaṁ matam. anumādya na svatantrah pramāṇa-padaḥ yayuh" iti.

This is stated in the Purusottama-tantra: "Realization incorporating the ideas taught in śāstra is considered the most excellent means of correct knowledge. Inference and the other means of knowing cannot independently claim authority."

NOTE: Inference means reasoning, and independent inference refers to reasoning not based on sastra, that is, (fallible human) reasoning based on (fallible human) sense perception.

tathaiva matam brahma-sūtra-kāraih, "tarkāpratiṣṭhānāt", "śrutes tu śabda-mūlatvat" ity-ādau. tathā ca śrutiḥ, "naiṣa tarkena matir apaneya proktanyenaiva su-jnānāya prestha", "nīhārena pravṛta jalpyaś ca" ity-ādyah. jalpa-pravṛttas tarkika iti śruti-padarthah.

This is also the opinion of the author of the Brahma-sutras in such sūtras as "Because logical speculation is never final" (2.1.11) and "No, because the revealed scriptures say otherwise, and knowledge of the Supreme is derived from transcendental sound" (2.1.27). There are also such statements of sruti as: "My dear boy, this knowledge cannot be obtained by mental speculation. It can be properly understood only when an especially qualified person speaks it" (Katha Upanisad 1.2.9) and "They are enveloped in a fog and prone to useless talk." (Rk-samhita 10.82.7) The sense of the word jalpyah in this sruti text is "speculators engaged in useless talk."

NOTE: Upon seeing Brahma-sutra 2.1.27 quoted above, one might think that for knowledge of the Supreme, yes, one must depend on sastra, but in other cases, such as within the empirical field, can one depend on sastra? That is clarified here:

ataeva varāha-purāṇe "sarvatra śakyate kartum āgamam hi vinānumāna / tasman na sa śaktimati vināgamam udīkṣitum" iti.

Thus it is said in the Varāha Purāna: "In all situations one can always apply the traditional authority of scriptures even without using logic. Therefore logic is impotent to see the truth without the help of scripture."

yat tv āgame kvacit tarkena bodhana dṛśyate tat tatraiva śobhanam āgama-rūpatvāt, bodhana-saukaryartha-mātroddiṣṭa-tarkatvāt.

And when we see sometimes in the revealed scriptures that information is provided by speculative logic, it is in those cases praiseworthy because it is part of scripture, being speculation offered only for the sake of making understanding easier.

NOTE: The scriptures also teach very reasonably in order to make understanding easier.

yadi ca yat tarkena sidhyati, tad eva veda-vacanam pramanam iti syat, tada tarka evastam, kim vedeneti vaidikam-manyā api te bahya evety ayam abhiprayah sarvatraiva.

Persons who imagine themselves followers of the Vedas may say "If something is proven by logic then it must be the very words of the Vedas and authoritative. So let us use logic; what need have we of the Vedas?" But those who speak thus are actually opponents of the Vedas, and this is indicated everywhere.

ata eva teṣāṃ sṛgālatvam eva gatiṃ ity uktāṃ bhārata.

Thus it is stated in the Mahābhārata (Śānti-parva, 180.47-49) that these people will become jackals in their next lives.

yat tu śrotavyo mantavyaḥ ity-ādiṣu mananaṃ nāma tarko'ngīkṛtaḥ, tatraivam evam uktāṃ yathā kūrma-purāṇe, pūrvāparāvirodhena ko nv artho'bhimato bhavet / ity-ādyam uhanam tarkaḥ śuṣka-tarkaṃ ca varjayet iti.

And when speculation/conjecture/reasoning under the name of "reflecting" is acknowledged in such statements as "It should be heard about and reflected on" (Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.4.5), it is in the following sense that such is being said, as stated in the Kurma Purāna: "Speculation means to conjecture in such ways as asking which meaning of a text is appropriate without contradicting what precedes and follows it. Dry speculation, however, should be rejected."

NOTE: In other words, reasoning is okay when we use it to understand the meaning of sastra.

(Inspired by an article on siddhanta.com. July 1, 2004)

**virodho vākyayor yatra nāprāmāṇyam tad iṣyate
yathāviruddhatā ca syāt tathārthah kalpyate tayoh**

**”When two scriptural statements contradict each other, one is not taken as inauthentic.
One should give the meaning in such a way that the contradiction is removed.”**

(Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta 1.232)

AND:

CAITANYA CARITAMRTA ADI 2.86:

***bhrama, pramāda, vipralipsā, karaṇāpāṭava
ārṣa-vijña-vākye nāhi doṣa ei saba***

bhrama–mistakes; pramāda–illusion; vipralipsā–cheating; karaṇa-apāṭava–imperfection of the senses; ārṣa–of the authoritative sages; vijña-vākye–in the wise speech; nāhi–not; doṣa–faults; ei–these; saba–all.

“Mistakes, illusions, cheating and defective perception do not occur in the sayings of the authoritative sages.

CAITANYA CARITAMRTA ADI 7.107

***bhrama, pramāda, vipralipsā, karaṇāpāṭava
īśvarera vākye nāhi doṣa ei saba***

bhrama–mistake; pramāda–illusion; vipralipsā–cheating purposes; karaṇa-apāṭava–inefficiency of the material senses; īśvarera–of the Lord; vākye–in the speech; nāhi–there is not; doṣa–fault; ei saba–all this.

“The material defects of mistakes, illusions, cheating and sensory inefficiency do not exist in the words of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Canakya Niti Śāstra -

*pustaka-pratyayādhitam nādhitam guru-sannidhau |
sabhā-madhye na śobhante jāra-garbhā iva striyaḥ ||*

“The scholar who studies books with his intellect and analysis without studying from the Guru does not shine in an assembly of truly learned men, just as an illegitimate child is not honored in society.” (17.1)

*paṭhanti caturo vedān dharmā-śāstrāṇy anekaśaḥ |
ātmānam naiva jānanti darvī pāka-rasam yathā ||*

“One may know the four Vedas and the Dharma Shastras, yet if he has no realization of his own spiritual self, he can be said to be like the ladle which stirs all kinds of food but knows not the taste of any.” (15.12)

*a aḥ di vedo mukhe stra vidy
kavitva ^ ca gadya ^ supadya ^ karoti
guror aḥ ghri padme mana cen na lagnam
tatafki ^ tatafki ^ tatafki ^ tatafkim*

"One may master the Vedas with its six philosophical theses, one may have memorised all the sacred scriptures and one may be able to compose the most exquisite poetic or prose verses. But if the mind is not fixed on the lotus-feet of the Guru, then what of it, what of it, what of it, what of it?" (Śankarācārya)

The most intelligent person in the universe, Brahmā, spoke:

*jānanta eva jānantu kim bahūktya na me prabho
manaso vapuṣo vāco vaibhavam tava gocaraḥ*

"My great knowledge can not grasp You. My mind is also not ordinary, but still I cannot grasp Your glorious greatness. Let everyone say that they know You. I cannot perceive Your prowess with mind, body or words!" (Śrīmad Bhāgavata 10.14.38)

He also said:

*athāpi te deva padāmbuja dvaya prasāda leśānugrhitā eva hi
j ānāti tattvaṁ bhagavan mahimno na cānyam eko'pi ciram vicinvan*

“Then, my Lord, those who are blessed with the grace from Your two lotus feet, can understand Your greatness, but not others, though they may investigate for a long time.” (Śrīmad Bhāgavata 10.14.29)

and:

*r̥ṣe vidanti munayah praśāntātmendriyāśayāḥ
yadā tad evāsat tarkais tirodhīyeta viplutam*

“O Rishi Nārada! The Munis (wise saints) can know Him when they are peaceful and in control of their minds and sensual desires. However, He disappears from those who engage in wicked sophical reasoning.” (Śrīmad Bhāgavata 2.6.40)

and:

*panthas tu koṭi-śata-vatsara-sampragamyo
vāyor athāpi manaso muni-pungavānām
so 'py asti yat-prapada-simny avicintya-tattve
govindam ādi-puruṣam tam aham bhajāmi*

“I worship Govinda, the Original Person. The truth about even the tips of His toes is inconceivable even in billions of years to the *yogīs* who control their minds by regulating their life airs, or to the greatest wise men.” (Brahma Samhitā 5.34)

Here the *avaroha pantha*, the path of descending knowledge, which is bestowed upon a devotee by the Lord, when He is pleased with his humble service, is contrasted with the *āroha pantha*, the ascending path, or independent efforts by intellectuals, who depend on their own brain substance.

From a webforum April 11, 2005 —

Advaitadās: “The intellect is a material instrument with which (alone) one cannot gauge transcendence. Kṛṣṇa says:

*bhūmir āpo'nalo vāyuh kham mano **buddhir** eva ca ahankāra*

“My eight external mundane elements are earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, **intellect** and ego....” (Bhagavad Gītā 7.4)

Intelligence, however, becomes sacred when it is applied with devotion:

*teṣām satata yuktānām bhajatām prīti-pūrvakam
dadāmi buddhi yogam tam yena mām upayanti te*

"To those who constantly worship Me with love I give the *divine intelligence (buddhi yoga)* to attain Me " (Bhagavad Gītā 10.10)

Third devotee -
Rādhe Rādhe!

What I wonder is for those who bring their intellectual capabilities to the forefront when approaching sastra where does it end? Does one then demand to intellectualize each aspect of Gaudiya theology and demand proof and validation before simply denoting something as being without merit or truth? If so then what happens, intellectually, when confronting Kṛṣṇa's lila? Can one intellectually conceive of a young boy lifting Govardhan Hill with his pinky? Wouldn't that same type of intelligence cast aside most, if not all, of Kṛṣṇa's lila? Or is there something more realistic about the Putana, Tmavarta, Kaliya or Kesi lilas? So my challenge is where does an individual decide where faith is applicable and where it ends and then where "reality" begins and ends? If one approaches lila with intellect then there is bound to be issues. One cannot simply deem the areas they are uncomfortable with as areas approachable with intellect at the forefront while approaching areas they are comfortable with by employing faith above intellect. This isn't a buffet where one can decide what is meaningful and what is distasteful. This is a dish we either accept in its entirety or it is something we don't accept.

I have met some devotees over the years that find themselves more drawn to Srila Jiva Goswami's work because it is considered to be more based on philosophy and intellectual tenants. However you cannot simply put his work out of the context of the greater Gaudiya tradition and context. No matter how you twist and turn it Gaudiya theology demands aspects well beyond intellectual capabilities and even, in some respects, overrides intellectual capabilities.

This isn't to say that being an intellect is contrary to devotion. However it can only act as the guiding source up to a point. That is why Sadhu, Sastra and Guru are at the basis of our theology. Virtually everything divine is beyond our intellect. So as Advaita has pointed out intelligence becomes sacred when it is applied with devotion and ultimate faith in Sadhu, Sastra and Guru.

Advaitadās :

Considering Jiva Goswami's more intellectual books - in his Tattva Sandarbha and Sarva Samvadini and throughout his commentaries on the Bhagavata Tenth Canto, Jiva Goswami has always followed the line of the Kṛṣṇa -stories and has implicitly said the stories are literally the way they are described. **This is what I call buddhi yoga or divine intellect!**

It is said in Bhagavad Gita - *mayyarpita mano buddhih* - "Offer your mind and intellect to Me." However, reversely we can judge a tree by its fruits. If an intellectual devotee comes out with intellectual speculations about Kṛṣṇa Lila or scriptural statements, that contradict the commentaries of the Acaryas, then what can we say about that person's devotion?