

# A STUDY ON *BRAHMASŪTRA* II.3.50: *ĀBHĀSA/Ā EVA CA*\*

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## 0. Introduction

One of the most important topics for the followers of the Vedānta is how the individual Soul (*jīva*) can be derived from the highest Self (= *brahman*) and how the very same Self can be identical with the highest Self in the ultimate sense. The *Brahmasūtra* (hereafter *BS*) discusses this topic in the portion traditionally called “*aṃśādhikaraṇa*,”<sup>1</sup> where the author of the *sūtra* explains *brahman* and *jīva* via the whole-part relationship.<sup>2</sup> The *aṃśādhikaraṇa* begins with a *sūtra* that introduces the term “*aṃśa*.”

*BS* II.3.43:<sup>3</sup>

*aṃśo nānāvyapadeśād anyathā cāpi dāsakitavāditvam adhīyata eke*

[The individual Soul is] a part [of *brahman*], on account of the statements of difference, and [because] also in a different way some recite [that *brahman* has] the nature of fishers, gamblers, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

Principal commentators agree with the point that the term “*aṃśa*”

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of “*adhikaraṇa*” does not appear in the *BS* itself. Śaṅkara also does not directly mention any name of particular *adhikaraṇa*, but employs the word generally in the sense of “the topic of discussion” (cf. e.g. *BSSbh*, p. 52,9; p. 73,17; p. 89,4; p. 136,1 etc.). It may be a later invention of commentators and has been passed down in the tradition. Most editions have divisions by *adhikaraṇa*, but they are merely editorial.

<sup>2</sup> The same topic is discussed under *BS* I.4.22, where the idea of Kāśakṛtsna is introduced as an established view. According to Amalānanda, the view of Kāśakṛtsna was regarded as the *siddhānta* and followed by Bhāskara. See Nakamura [1951: 9–12].

<sup>3</sup> According to the *Śrībh*, this *sūtra* is numbered II.3.42 (*Śrībh*, p. 539.6–7).

<sup>4</sup> Translation based on Thibaut [1904a: 61] and Deussen [1887: 432], slightly modified by the present author.

indicates “an individual Soul (*jīvaḥ*).”<sup>5</sup> After showing the reasons why the individual Soul can be interpreted as a part of *brahman* in the following *sūtras* (*BS* II.3.44–47), the author of the *sūtra* discusses the human body in the form of which each individual Soul observes prescriptions of the *Vedas*. If every individual Soul has different experiences according to instructions or prohibitions of the *Vedas*, it accordingly follows that *brahman*, who is identical with each individual Soul, would also experience its results. One could theoretically imagine the case that *brahman* would perform an action as individual X and experience the result of the action as individual Y, which is namely mixing of actions and their results. This is not confusing, however, because the result of an action of X does not go beyond the body of X (*BS* II.3.48–49). Commentators on the *BS* share their understanding in principle regarding the argument in the *aṃśādhikaraṇa*, except for the reading and interpretation of the next *sūtra*, namely, *BS* II.3.50.

First, the *sūtra* has two readings: *ābhāsa eva ca* and *ābhāsā eva ca*. The former has been read by Śaṅkara and his followers, whereas the latter has been adopted by Bhāskara, Nimbārka, and Śrīkaṇṭha.<sup>6</sup> These variants already existed at the time of Bhāskara, since Bhāskara reads the *sūtra* with the plural form of the word “*ābhāsa*” while introducing the variant in the singular. Other commentators, such as Rāmānuja, also report these two variants. The difference in the readings, according to sub-commentators, stems from commentators’ interpretation of the concept “*ābhāsa*.” It is, of course, very notable, as Thibaut and Nakamura have already pointed out,<sup>7</sup> that there has already been a disagreement regarding the interpretation of the *sūtra* at the time of Bhāskara, and the disagreement might have been caused by these variant readings of the *sūtra*.

<sup>5</sup> Śaṅkara: *jīva īśvarasyāṃśo bhavitum arhati* (*BSŚbh*: 297.13). Bhāskara: *tadaṃśo jīvo ’sti* (*BSBbh ad* II.3.43). Rāmānuja: *jīvo ’yam brahmano ’mśa* (*Śrībh*, p. 542,1). Nimbārka: *paramātmāno jīvo ’mśaḥ* (*BSNbh*, p. 235,16).

<sup>6</sup> Bapat compares the reading of commentaries and comments, “The *sūtra* ‘*ābhāsa eva ca*’ 2.3.50 is read in some manuscripts [of the *BS*]. Similarly, Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Vallabhācārya, Vijñānavikṣu and Baladeva also read the *sūtra* ‘*ābhāsa eva ca*’.” On the other hand, the other manuscripts and the commentators like Nimbārkaācārya and Śrīkaṇṭha read the *sūtra* ‘*ābhāsā eva ca*’. Some manuscripts omit this *sūtra*” (Bapat [2004: 1], Supplementary explanations in the square brackets are by the present author.). Here, Bapat does not report Bhāskara’s reading of the *sūtra*. It is likely that she did not consult it, since the reference in her article does not contain Bhāskara’s commentary. Bhāskara’s commentary however is above all very significant in the present discussion, because Bhāskara, as discussed in the body text, recognizes the two variants of the *sūtra* and he himself adopts the “*ābhāsā*” reading.

<sup>7</sup> Thibaut [1904a: xcvi–xcviii] noticed these variants, compared the commentaries of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, and concluded that Rāmānuja’s interpretation of the *Sūtra* was not convincing. Nakamura [1951: 242–243] agrees with his conclusion. See Section 3.1, below, for further details.

In this paper, I would like to focus on their discussion concerning the number of “*ābhāsa*” and interpretation of the *sūtra*, which might accordingly give us a clue to understanding the divergence in opinions of Vedāntins regarding the relation between *brahman* and *jīva* and to explain other points of difference originating with the reading of the *sūtra*.

### 1. Śaṅkara on *BS* II.3.50

#### 1.1. Śaṅkara’s emphasis on the monistic *brahman*

Let us first read Śaṅkara’s commentary on the *sūtra*. Śaṅkara reads the *sūtra* with the word “*ābhāsa*” in the singular and understands the *sūtra* as follows:

*BSSbh ad* II.3.50:<sup>8</sup>

*ābhāsa eva ca* (BS II.3.50.)

*ābhāsa eva caiṣa jīvaḥ parasyātmano jalasūryakādivat pratipattavyaḥ*

And this individual Soul is to be considered as a **mere reflection** of the highest Self, like a reflection of the sun and other [sources of light] on the water.<sup>9</sup>

Śaṅkara continues:

*BSSbh ad* II.3.50:<sup>10</sup>

*na sa eva sāḁṣāt | nāpi vastvantaram | ataś ca yathā naikasmiñ jalasūryake kampamāne jalasūryakāntaram kampate, evaṁ naikasmiñ jīve karmaphalasaṁbandhini jīvāntarasya tatsaṁbandhaḥ | evam apy avyatikara eva karmaphalayoh |*

It is neither directly that (= the highest Self) nor a different thing. Therefore just as, when one reflection of the sun on the water trembles, another reflection of the sun on the water does not, so, when one individual Soul is connected with actions and results of actions, another self is not [on that account] connected with them. There is no mixing of actions and results.<sup>11</sup>

The question is why each individual Soul is independent of every

<sup>8</sup> *BSSbh*, p. 302,12.

<sup>9</sup> Translation based on Thibaut [1904a: 68] and Deussen [1887: 439], slightly modified by the present author.

<sup>10</sup> *BSSbh*: 302.13–15.

<sup>11</sup> Translation based on Thibaut [1904a: 68] and Deussen [1887: 439–440], slightly modified by the present author.

other when it conducts actions and experiences their results. Here the relation between the highest Self and an individual Soul is compared to the relation between the sun and its reflection on the water. Śaṅkara argues that each individual Soul does not have a reciprocal relationship with others, and therefore there is no mixing (*avyatikara*) among individual Souls in conducting actions and experiencing their results.

Śaṅkara's intention here is to emphasize the point that there is no other thing different from the highest Self. It seems contradictory, however, to argue that there is no other thing different from the highest Self and at the same time, an individual Soul is independent from the highest Self. One should ask then what is meant by the term "reflection."

### 1.2. Śaṅkara's use of the term "ābhāsa"

In his *BSSbh*, Śaṅkara uses the term "ābhāsa" in two different senses. First, it is used in the sense of "looking like," "pseud-," "fallacious," and so on.<sup>12</sup> Second, the term "ābhāsa" is employed in the sense of "reflection," as we see in the *sūtra* under discussion. This meaning can also be explained by the usage of the synonymous term *pratibimba* in the illustration of a reflection of the sun on the water:

*BSSbh* ad II.3.46:<sup>13</sup>

*yathā codaśarāvādikampanāt tadgate sūryapratibimbe kampamāne 'pi na tadvān sūryaḥ kampate*

As the sun does not tremble, even though its reflected image in a jar, etc., filled with water likewise trembles.<sup>14</sup>

*BSSbh* ad III.2.20:<sup>15</sup>

*jalagataṃ hi sūryapratibimbam jalavṛddhau vardhate jalahrāse hrasati jalacalane calati jalabhede bhidyata ity evaṃ jaladharmānuyāyi bhavati na tu parmārthataḥ sūryasya tathātvam asti |*

The reflected image (*pratibimba*) of the sun on the water dilates when the water expands, it contracts when the water shrinks, it trembles when the water is agitated, it divides itself when it is divided. It thus takes on all the attributes [and conditions] of the water, while the sun in reality remains as

<sup>12</sup> See examples such as *yuktivākyatadābhāsamāśrayāḥ* (*BSSbh*, p. 6,20), *bhedahetvābhāsāi* (*BSSbh*, p. 376,24), *hetvābhāsaiś* (*BSSbh*, p. 435,24), *tattadābhāsavyudāśena* (*BSSbh*: 462.7). For the general usage of the term "ābhāsa" in this sense, cf. "hetvābhāsa" in the *Nyāyasūtra* I.1.1.

<sup>13</sup> *BSSbh*, p. 299,24–25.

<sup>14</sup> Translation based on Thibaut [1904a: 64–5] and Deussen [1887: 436], slightly modified by the present author.

<sup>15</sup> *BSSbh*, p. 359,19–21.

it is [all the time].<sup>16</sup>

As is clearly shown in these common illustrations, Śaṅkara conceives of an image-reflection relationship between the highest Self and the individual Soul and employs the terms “*ābhāsa*” and “*pratibimba*” synonymously as indicating the individual Soul.<sup>17</sup> The individual Soul is “a mere reflection” and therefore is no real entity.

*BSŚbh ad* II.3.50:<sup>18</sup>

*ābhāsasya cāvidyākṛtatvāt tadāśrayasya saṃsārasyāvidyākṛtatvopapattir  
iti | tadvyudāsenā ca pāramārthikasya brahmātmabhāvasyopadeśopa-  
pattiḥ |*

And as the reflection is the effect of nescience, the worldly being that is based on it (= the reflection) must also be the effect of nescience. And through the removal of it (= nescience), there results the instruction that the [individual] Self is in reality identical with *brahman* (= the highest Self).<sup>19</sup>

The reflection is made by nescience (*avidyā*), and when it is removed, there remains the principle of *advaita* that is characterized by the identity of an individual Soul with the highest Self, namely, *brahman*. Under BS II.3.43, where the author of the BS states that an individual Soul is a part (*aṃśa*) of the highest Self, Śaṅkara reads “*aṃśa iva*” and interprets it to mean that the individual Soul is not a part for real but a part as it were. Such an interpretation is very typical for Śaṅkara, who always emphasizes the monistic aspect of his ontology, arguing that the worldly being is “a mere reflection” or “a part as it were,”<sup>20</sup> which disappears in the ultimate reality.

Mayeda studied the usage of the term *ābhāsa* in Śaṅkara’s *Upadeśasāhasrī* and concluded that, “*ābhāsa* (reflection) of *ātman* is

<sup>16</sup> Translation based on Thibaut [1904a: 159] and Deussen [1887: 526], slightly modified by the present author.

<sup>17</sup> Later commentators divided the relationship between the highest Self and the individual Soul into three types, after the key terms of whose ideas they are called *ābhāsavāda*, *pratibimbavāda* and *avacchedavāda*. It is clear from these illustrations that Śaṅkara has not established such categories (Cf. Shima [1987: 47]).

<sup>18</sup> *BSŚbh*, p. 302,15–17.

<sup>19</sup> Translation based on Thibaut [1904a: 68–9] and Deussen [1887: 439–40], slightly modified by the present author.

<sup>20</sup> *aṃśa ivāṃśa* (*BSŚbh*, p. 297,14).

Thibaut [1904a: xcvi–xcviii] compares the commentaries of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja: “We next have the important Sūtra II, 3, 43 in which the soul is distinctly said to be a part (*aṃśa*) of Brahman, and which, as we have already noticed, can be made to fall in with Śaṅkara’s view only if *aṃśa* is explained, altogether arbitrarily, by ‘*aṃśa iva*,’ while Rāmānuja is able to take the *Sūtra* as it stands”.

introduced on the basis of the concept of *avidyā* (i.e., *adhyāropaṇā*, *adhyāsa*).”<sup>21</sup> We reach a similar conclusion that the concept of reflection, which is unique to Śāṅkara, is based only on the assumption that the individual Soul is produced by nescience and appears as if a part of *brahman*. Likewise, Nakamura took up Gauḍapāda’s use of the term “*ābhāsa*” in the *Gauḍapādakārikā* IV.26 and IV.45 and related them to the technical terminology of *viññānavāda* Buddhists.<sup>22</sup> This fact suggests to us that Vedāntins such as Gauḍapāda and so on who are usually claimed to be the proponents of illusionistic monism followed the Buddhist use of the term “*ābhāsa*.” In the same way, Śāṅkara applied the Buddhist terminology to the term “*ābhāsa*” in the BS and interpreted it as “reflection.”

1.3. Against the view of the Sāṃkhya and the Vaiśeṣika  
 Śāṅkara criticizes then the view of the Sāṃkhya and the Vaiśeṣika that there are many and all-pervading Selfs.

*BSSbh* ad II.3.50:<sup>23</sup>

*yeṣāṃ tu bahava ātmānas te ca sarve sarvagatās teṣāṃ evaiṣa vyatikara  
 prāpnoti | katham | bahavo vibhavaś cātmānaś caitanyamātrasvarūpā  
 nirguṇā niratiśayās ca | tadarthaṃ sādharmaṇaṃ pradhānaṃ tan-  
 nimittaiśāṃ bhogāpavargasiddhir iti sāmkyāḥ | sati bahutve vibhutve ca  
 ghaṭakuḍyādisamānā dravyamātrasvarūpā svato ’cetanā ātmānas ... iti  
 kāṇādāḥ |*

Only for those, on the other hand, who maintain that there are many Selfs and all of them are all-pervading, it follows that there must be mixing [of actions and their results]. In what way? According to the followers of the Sāṃkhya, there exist many all-pervading Selfs, whose nature is pure consciousness, that are devoid of qualities and unsurpassed. For their purpose, there exists *pradhāna* common [to all] through which they (=the Selfs) obtain enjoyment and liberation. According to the followers of Kaṇāda there exist Selfs, but they are, despite being many and all-pervading like jars and walls etc., mere substances and insentient by themselves [...].<sup>24</sup>

If one accepts such a view, there would be mixing of actions and their results, since there is no distinction among Selfs. From the viewpoint

<sup>21</sup> Mayeda [1958: 175]. (Translated by the present author).

<sup>22</sup> Nakamura [1955: 437–8; 451–452].

<sup>23</sup> *BSSbh*, p. 302, 17–25.

<sup>24</sup> Translation based on Thibaut [1904a: 69] and Deussen [1887: 440], slightly modified by the present author.

that the highest Self (= *brahman*) is single (*advaita*), Śaṅkara cannot, of course, accept the plural *ātman*s.

Śaṅkara here criticized the followers of Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika about the plurality of the Self (*ātman*), but his discussion does not deal with a problem regarding the difference between the two readings, “*ābhāsa(h)*” and “*ābhāsā(h)*.” There are several possibilities why Śaṅkara did not discuss this problem: he did not have such a variant reading, he knew the variant and distorted it intentionally, or he considered it not worth discussing. To investigate this further, let us next read the commentary of Bhāskara, who is well known as a critic of Śaṅkara.

## 2. Bhāskara on BS II.3.50

Bhāskara, who may be assumed to have lived and worked a few decades later than Śaṅkara, reads BS II.3.50 with “*ābhāsā(h)*” in the plural and interprets the word “*ābhāsa*” in a different way.

*BSBhbh ad II.3.50:*<sup>25</sup>

*ābhāsā eva vā* (BS II.3.50.)

*yeṣāṃ bahava ātmānaḥ sarvagatās ca teṣāṃ eva vyatikara iti darśayiṣyan sāmānyadūṣaṇam āha — adhyātmavidyābhāsā*<sup>26</sup> *veda-bāhyā darśanabhedā iti | sarveṣāṃ ātmanāṃ sarvaśarīrasantateḥ sarva-vyavahāravatyikaraḥ prāpnotīti |*

About to show that just for those who assume many and all-pervading Selves there would be [the problem of] mixing [of actions and their results], [the author of the *sūtra*] states a general refutation: their various views are **fallacies** of Self-knowledge which are not founded on the *Vedas*. There would be [otherwise] mixing of all activities, since all Selves continue to exist in all bodies.

The structure of the argument is the same as that which appeared in Śaṅkara’s commentary. Bhāskara replies to those who have the idea that *ātman*s are many and all-pervading. Bhāskara does not interpret the term “*ābhāsā(h)*” as “reflections” but as “fallacies” of views

<sup>25</sup> As for the edition of *BSBhbh*, an unpublished text edited by the present author is used. The text is therefore referred to by the number of the *sūtra* or the page number of *BSBhbh(Dv)* when needed.

<sup>26</sup> Dvivedin reads *avidyā ābhāsā* for “*adhyātmavidyābhāsā*.” It is difficult to adopt his reading since none of our manuscripts support it. To construe the text with *avidyā* in the plural, though otherwise *sandhi* would be broken, is also difficult. His manuscripts might have had missing syllables (*dhyā* and *tma* in *a-dhyā-tma-vidyābhāsā*) with double *sandhi* (*vidyā-ābhāsā*) applied. See *BSBhbh(Dv)*, p. 142,24.

asserted presumably by followers of the Sāṃkhya and the Vaiśeṣika. Bhāskara also argues that if one accepts the view that *ātman*s are many, the problem of mixing would arise. Therefore, their views are fallacious.

Bhāskara was aware of the variant reading “*ābhāsa(h)*” in the singular and introduces it as follows:

*BSBhbh ad II.3.50:*

*apare tv “ābhāsa eva” ity ekavacanāntaṃ sūtraṃ paṭhitvānyam arthaṃ varṇayanti — paramātmābhāso jīvaḥ pratibimbātmā saṃsāry avidyā-parikalpitaḥ | tasya parimitatvād “asantater (BS II.3.49)” “avyatikara (BS II.3.49)” iti |*

Others, however, read the *sūtra* in the singular, “*ābhāsa eva,*” and explain its meaning in a different way: the individual Soul is a **reflection** of the highest Self, which is a reflected image in itself, transmigrating (*saṃsārin*) and conceptualized by nescience. Since it (= the reflection) is limited in size, [the previous *sūtra* says] “because it has no continuity, there is no mixing.”

Here, Bhāskara refers to the variant most probably commented by Śāṅkara<sup>27</sup> and his commentary on the *sūtra*. The individual Soul is, according to Śāṅkara’s monistic principle, just “a reflected image in itself (*pratibimbātmā*).” In the framework of Bhāskara’s *bhedābheda* cosmology, however, it is not necessary to assume “a reflection” of the highest Self, because Bhāskara refutes the existence of “nescience (*avidyā*)” and criticizes the notion of an illusory world that is produced by nescience.<sup>28</sup>

*BSBhbh ad II.3.50:*

*tad ayuktam ābhāsasyāvastutvābhyupagamāt | avastunaḥ śaśaviṣāṇa-kalpasyācetanasya kuto bandho mokṣo vā karmādhikāro vā | na ca paramātmanaḥ saṃsāritvam astīty uktam purastāt | ato nārṣaḥ pāṭha iti |*

It (= the above stated interpretation) is not correct, because it is accepted that a reflection is not a real entity. How can an unreal entity like a horn of the hare which lacks consciousness have bondage or liberation, or be qualified for ritual activities? Moreover it has been stated earlier that the highest Self is not involved in *saṃsāra*. Therefore this reading is not authentic.

<sup>27</sup> Bhāskara himself states that he is going to criticize the points where previous commentators, such as Śāṅkara, deviated from the traditional interpretation. Cf. Kato [2008: 63–4].

<sup>28</sup> See Kato [2012: 64–66].



The reading of the *sūtra* with “*ābhāsa(h)*” in the singular and the interpretation based on the reading is reasonable to Śāṅkara, who argues, as seen above,<sup>29</sup> that the individual Soul is a mere reflection produced by nescience and has no real entity. It is not acceptable, however, to Bhāskara, who maintains that the individual Soul is not a mere reflection but a real entity. It is a real part of *brahman*, as the *sūtra* explains, and it performs an action and experiences its result. From Bhāskara’s viewpoint, Śāṅkara’s reading and interpretation of the *sūtra* is not authentic (*ārṣa*), whereas Śāṅkara must have claimed that his interpretation was authentic. Such a divergence in opinion regarding the wording of the *sūtra* “*ābhāsa/ā(h)*” originates in the difference of the ontological position of Śāṅkara and Bhāskara.<sup>30</sup>

As to the term “*ābhāsa*,” Bhāskara uses it three times in the compound *hetvābhāsa*<sup>31</sup> and once in the compound *yuktyābhāsa*,<sup>32</sup> all in the sense of “fallacies,” and he himself does not use it in the sense of “reflection.” As a matter of fact, Bhāskara criticizes the concept of “reflection” and negates the assumption that the individual Soul is a reflection of the highest Self:

*BSBhbh* ad IV.3.13:

*nanu ca saṃsārī jīvo nāma paramātmābhāsaḥ | tasya paricchinnatvād  
gatir upapadyate |*

*atrocyate — ko 'yam ābhāso nāma | kiṃ vastubhūto 'thāvastubhūta iti |  
yadi tāvad avastubhūtas tadā tasya svargāpavargayor adhikārābhāvaḥ  
śaśaviṣṇānavat | atha vastubhūtaḥ sarvagataś cety abhāvaḥ |*

(Opponent:) However, the individual Soul is transmigrating and a reflection of the highest Self. Going [to the moon<sup>33</sup>] is possible for the individual Soul, because he is limited.

(Bhāskara:) To this we reply. What is this reflection? Is this a real entity or unreal? If it is unreal, first of all, then it would have no qualification for heaven or liberation like the horn of a hare. Being real and all-pervading [at the same time] — that does not exist.

Bhāskara repeats a similar argument to that used for the refutation of

<sup>29</sup> See Section 1.2.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Kato [2012: 66-68].

<sup>31</sup> *BSBhbh(Dv)*, pp. 9,13; 27,20; 110,11.

<sup>32</sup> *BSBhbh(Dv)*, p. 145,27. Dvivedin reads “*yuktyā savilasita*.” Van Buitenen amended it to “*yuktyābhāsavilasita*” in *BSBhbh(vB)*. One of our manuscripts also supports vB’s reading, so we adopt the reading “*yuktyābhāsavilasita*.”

<sup>33</sup> The term “*gati*” is explained under *BS* II.3.19 with reference to the passage “*candramasam eva te sarve gacchanti* (to the moon they all go)” in *KauU*, I.2.

Śaṅkara's interpretation of *BS* II.3.50. Here Bhāskara employs the term “*ābhāsa*” in the sense of “reflection” only in reply to the opponent, probably Śaṅkara, who uses the term in that meaning. Śaṅkara insists, by way of introducing a rather strange use of the term “*ābhāsa*,” that the transmigrating being that has no real entity is entitled to reach heaven or attain liberation. Bhāskara refutes this assumption by way of showing a *prasaṅga* that negates Śaṅkara's illusionistic concept of “reflection.”

As far as we could judge from the above-examined uses of the word “*ābhāsa*” in their commentaries on the *BS*, Śaṅkara's interpretation of the term “*ābhāsa*” as “a reflection” seems rather unnatural. It may mean that Śaṅkara intentionally changed the traditional reading, which paved the way for an interpretation of the *sūtra* as intended by him. Before we conclude this, however, we should consider further evidences from other commentaries on the *BS*.

### 3. *Rāmānuja and Nimbārka on BS II.3.50*

#### 3.1. Rāmānuja's interpretation

Rāmānuja's *Śrībhāṣya* is the third oldest of the extant commentaries on the *BS*. He is known for his criticism of *advaita* and *bhedābheda* from the *viśiṣṭādvaita* point of view.<sup>34</sup> Here is Rāmānuja's interpretation of the *sūtra*:

Śrībh *ad* II.3.49:<sup>35</sup>

***ābhāsa eva ca*** (BS II.3.49.)

*akhaṇḍaikarasapraṅkāśamātrasvarūpasya svarūpatirodhānapūrvakopādhibhedopapādanahetur ābhāsa eva | prakāśaikasvarūpasya prakāśatirodhānaṃ prakāśanāśa eveti prāg evopapādītam |*

The argumentation by which it is sought to prove that [that being] whose nature is nothing but undivided and unchangeable consciousness is differentiated by limiting adjuncts which presuppose concealing [that] essential nature, is **a mere apparent (fallacious)** one. For, as [we have] shown before, concealment of the light of that which is identical with light means destruction of [that] light.<sup>36</sup>

Rāmānuja reads the *sūtra* with the term “*ābhāsa(h)*” in the singular

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Dasgupta [1940: 165]; Srinivasachari [1934: 207–18].

<sup>35</sup> *Śrībh*, p. 545,6-9.

<sup>36</sup> Thibaut [1904b: 565] (Boldfaced by the present author).

and interprets it as “fallacious.” His interpretation of the term “*ābhāsa*” is the same as that of Bhāskara. The difference between Bhāskara and Rāmānuja lies in whose argument they regard as “fallacious.” Bhāskara regards the view of the Sāṃkhya and the Vaiśeṣika as fallacious, whereas Rāmānuja criticizes the view that the differentiation of individual Souls from the highest Self is due to the limiting adjuncts that conceal the true nature of *brahman*. This view, according to the editor of Śrībh, belongs to those who assert that *brahman*, which is nothing but light, is concealed by nescience (*avidyā*).<sup>37</sup> Judging from the content of this assertion, this view belongs most probably to Śaṅkara. This means that Rāmānuja considers Śaṅkara’s argument to be fallacious, which is quite different from the interpretation of Bhāskara.

In contrast to Bhāskara, who records the variant “*ābhāsa(h)*” in the singular, Rāmānuja employs the variant “*ābhāsā(h)*” in the plural.

Śrībh ad II.3.49:<sup>38</sup>

“*ābhāsā eva*” iti vā pāṭhaḥ | tathā sati hetava *ābhāsāḥ* |

An alternative reading of the *sūtra* is “*ābhāsā(h)*” (in the plural). That being so, [the meaning would be that the various] reasons [set forth by adherents of that doctrine] are **fallacious**.

It appears that Rāmānuja attached little weight to the point whether the *sūtra* reads “*ābhāsa(h)*” or “*ābhāsā(h)*.” In both cases, according to Rāmānuja, the term “*ābhāsa*” means “fallacious.”

Thibaut noticed these two variants reported in Śrībh and compared them with the commentary of Śaṅkara. He concluded, “I confess that Rāmānuja’s interpretation of the *sūtra* (which however is accepted by several other commentators also) does not appear to me particularly convincing.”<sup>39</sup> Nakamura, who compared the commentaries of Śaṅkara, Bhāskara and Rāmānuja, was also negative about the interpretation of Bhāskara and Rāmānuja and commented: “It is by all means impossible to construe it as ‘*hetvābhāsa*,’ as Rāmānuja and Bhāskara did.”<sup>40</sup> Rāmānuja’s interpretation is in fact difficult to

<sup>37</sup> *kiṃ cāvidyāyā prakāśaikaśvarūpaṃ brahma tirohitam iti vadatā svarūpanāśa evoktaḥ syāt* (Śrībh, p. 85,4-5).

<sup>38</sup> Śrībh, p. 545,9-10.

<sup>39</sup> Thibaut [1904a: xcvi].

<sup>40</sup> Nakamura [1951: 242] (Translated by the present author). Nakamura states that Bhāskara and Rāmānuja interpreted the word in the sense of “*hetvābhāsa*” but it may cause the misunderstanding that they used the technical idea of “*hetvābhāsa*” of the Naiyāyika. Here, Bhāskara and Rāmānuja intended that the ideas (*vidyāḥ*) or the argumentation (*hetu/hetavaḥ*)

understand. Rāmānuja interprets the *sūtra* to be criticizing the doctrine of Śaṅkara.<sup>41</sup> However, the author of the *sūtra* is here against the view of the Sāṃkhya and the Vaiśeṣika, with which Śaṅkara, Bhāskara and Nimbārka<sup>42</sup> agree. In this respect, Rāmānuja's interpretation is disagreeable. In another respect, however, the conclusion of Thibaut and Nakamura that Rāmānuja's interpretation is "not convincing" and "impossible to construe" is disagreeable. If we carefully examine the usage of the term "*ābhāsa*" in other places in the oldest three commentaries on the BS, Rāmānuja's interpretation, "fallacious," is quite normal. By contrast, Śaṅkara's interpretation, "reflection," is very exceptional. In order to show that Śaṅkara's interpretation is limited to a narrow context, we will examine the interpretations of other commentators.

### 3.2. Nimbārka's interpretation

Nimbārka,<sup>43</sup> whose ontological idea is often called *svābhāvika-bhedābheda*, shares Bhāskara's view concerning the concept of *bhedābheda*.<sup>44</sup> As far as their ontological point of view is concerned, both agree with the point that *brahman* has two aspects, namely, *bheda* (difference or diversity) and *abheda* (non-difference or unity), and they are both real.<sup>45</sup> As to the interpretation of the *sūtra* under discussion, Nimbārka reads "*ābhāsā(h)*" in the plural and gives a very short commentary as follows:

*BSNbh* ad II.3.50:<sup>46</sup>

*pareṣāṃ kapilādīnāṃ vyatīkaraprasaṅgāt sarvagatātmavādās cābhāsā eva |*

The arguments of others such as Kapila and so on that the self is all-pervading are **nothing but fallacies**, because the problem of mixing [of actions and their results] would follow from that.

employed by the opponents are "fallacious (*ābhāsa*)."

41 This assumption is chronologically impossible. It is of course possible that other proponents who preceded the BS asserted the doctrine that *brahman* is differentiated by limiting adjuncts, but it is not very realistic.

42 See section 3.2, below.

43 For the date of Nimbārka, Bose [1943: 14–17] places Nimbārka after Madhva. Dasgupta [1940: 399–400] also discusses the possibility of Nimbārka's being even later than Vallabha.

44 Srinivasachari [1934: 155] refers to Kokilesvara Sastri: "According to Kokilesvara Sastri, the system of Nimbārka is probably based on the tradition of Auḍulomi formulated by Bhāskara". This argument has much to do with our present discussion and is also very interesting, but unfortunately I have not yet been able to access the source, because Srinivasachari did not give any bibliographical information.

45 Bose [1943: 252].

46 According to the *BSNbh*, this *sūtra* is numbered II.3.49 (*BSNbh*, p. 239,3).

Nimbārka's reading and interpretation of the *sūtra* with the word "ābhāsā(h)" in the plural are the same as those of Bhāskara. Nimbārka identifies the opponents as Kapila, etc., as Bhāskara did. It was unnecessary also for Nimbārka to suppose "a reflection" of the highest Self as Śaṅkara did, because the *bheda* aspect of *brahman* is also real.

Nimbārka's commentary would serve as evidence supporting the view that "ābhāsā(h)" in the plural is an authentic reading of the *sūtra*, but it is very strange that he does not refer to the variant, "ābhāsa(h)," even though he must have known the variant from previous commentaries.<sup>47</sup> Since his immediate disciple Śrīnivāsa,<sup>48</sup> in his sub-commentary *Vedāntakaustubha* on the *BSNBh*, does not refer to "ābhāsa(h)" in the singular,<sup>49</sup> it is possible that Nimbārka and Śrīnivāsa accepted Bhāskara's reading and interpretation of the *sūtra* as an established view and felt no need to inquire into the problem of two variant readings. In any case, we are very short of studies on Nimbārka, so this point should be carefully examined in the future in a more systematic manner.

#### 4. Evaluation of later commentators

In the above sections, we have examined the commentaries of Śaṅkara, Bhāskara, Rāmānuja, and Nimbārka. Through this examination, the point in question became clearer. That point concerns why it was Śaṅkara alone among major commentators who gave his unique interpretation of the term "ābhāsa." Most likely, this question is closely connected to the fact that Śaṅkara did not pick up the problem of the variant readings "ābhāsa(h)" and "ābhāsā(h)" under *BS* II.3.50. Did Śaṅkara distort the *sūtra* and read *ābhāsa(h)* for *ābhāsā(h)*? Or, chronologically speaking, did Bhāskara fabricate the variant *ābhāsā(h)* and Nimbārka and his follower adopt Bhāskara's reading? We will go further into this matter with the help of sub-commentaries on the *BSSbh*.

47 Dasgupta [1940: 400] states, "Nimbārka's bhāṣya in many places shows that it was modeled upon the style of approach adopted by Rāmānuja". If it is true, Nimbārka must have known the variant reported by Rāmānuja.

48 Cf. Bose [1943: 66–7].

49 See *VK*, p. 239,6-8.

4.1. Vācaspatimiśra's *Bhāmatī*

The *Bhāmatī* of Vācaspati (A.D. 950–1000<sup>50</sup>) is the oldest sub-commentary regarding *BS* II.3.50 under discussion, since another old sub-commentary, the *Pañcapādikā* of Padmapāda records commentaries only up to *BSŚbh* I.1.4. Although *Bhāmatī* is the oldest source we can consult for the interpretation of the present *sūtra*, Vācaspati does not report the variants or make any comment on this matter.

Since Vācaspati is known for his critique of Bhāskara,<sup>51</sup> Vācaspati must have known the variant reported in *BSBhbh*. Amalānanda, the author of the *Vedāntakalpataru*, is well known for a critic of Bhāskara but does not report any variant of *BS* II.3.50. Of course we can note that Amalānanda did not deal with the portion not dealt with by Vācaspati, but this fact is not very easy to accept. The problem of the reading “*ābhāsa(h)*” and “*ābhāsā(h)*” may not have been a controversial point for the followers such as Vācaspati and Amalānanda, or perhaps, they neglected the point in order to enhance the legitimacy of Śāṅkara's reading.

4.2. Anubhūtiśvarūpa's *Prakaṭārthavivarāṇa*

While Vācaspati did not provide a commentary on *BS* II.3.50, Anubhūtiśvarūpa,<sup>52</sup> the author of the *Prakaṭārthavivarāṇa*, digested a discussion between Śāṅkara and Bhāskara. He identified the reading “*ābhāsā(h)*” as one read by Bhāskara.

PAV ad *BSŚbh* II.3.50:<sup>53</sup>

*yad ādye sūtre jīvasyāṃśatvam āsūtritaṃ*<sup>54</sup> *tadavacchedābhiprāyeṇa* [...] <sup>55</sup> *ity uktvādhunā “ābhāsa eva ca” ity evakāraṃ prayuñjānaḥ* “*rūpaṃrūpaṃ pratirūpo babhūva (KaṭhU, V.9–10.)” ityādiśrutisiddhaṃ pratibimbapakṣaṃ svarahasyaṃ sūtrayām āsa bhagavān sūtrakāraḥ | tad vyākhyāti — “ābhāsa eva” ityādinā |*

The venerable author of the *sūtra*, in the opening *sūtra* [of this *adhikaraṇa*<sup>56</sup>], brought forth the idea that the individual Soul is a part [of *brahman*], with the intention of distinguishing [the individual Soul from *brahman*], having stated [...], he now, by way of using the word “*eva*” in

50 Cf. Acharya [2006: xviii–xxviii].

51 Cf. Nakamura [1950: 88–98].

52 For the date of Anubhūtiśvarūpa, we follow Revathy's dating “during the first half of 13th century A.D.” (Revathy [1990: 4]).

53 PAV, p. 659, 10–14.

54 I follow the conjecture of the editor.

55 I assume a lacuna here.

56 *BS* II.3.43.

“*ābhāsa eva ca*,” has put in the form of a *sūtra* his own doctrinal secret, “reflection theory” established by Upaniṣadic statements such as “he assumed each and every form.” [Śaṅkara] explains it by “*ābhāsa eva*” and so on.

PAV ad *BSSbh* II.3.50:<sup>57</sup>

*atra bhāskarahaḥ “ābhāsā eva ca” iti sūtram paṭhitvā (sic.) advaitavādā ābhāsā eva ceti vyākhyāya pratibimbapakṣam dūṣayām babhūva “pratibimbasyāvastutvābhyupagamāt” iti |*

With reference to this, Bhāskara, having recited the *sūtra* as “*ābhāsā eva ca*” and having explained that the views of Advaita are **entirely fallacious**, refuted the reflection theory as follows: “because it is accepted that a reflection is not a real entity.”

According to the summary of Anubhūtiśvarūpa, Śaṅkara, following the intention of the author of the *sūtra*, read “*ābhāsa(h)*” in the singular and explained his idea of reflection. By contrast, Bhāskara read “*ābhāsā eva ca*” and criticized the monistic view of reflection, stating, “*pratibimbasyāvastutvābhyupagamāt.*” Bhāskara indeed read “*ābhāsasyāvastutvābhyupagamāt,*” but it does not make a big difference, because the terms “*ābhāsa*” and “*pratibimba*” have no distinction in the present context, as we have already seen in Śaṅkara’s use of the terms.<sup>58</sup> The point of their controversy is clearly shown by Anubhūtiśvarūpa, with the exception of one statement. Anubhūtiśvarūpa misunderstood that Bhāskara considered the views of Advaita to be fallacious (*ābhāsā*), possibly influenced by the commentary of Rāmānuja.<sup>59</sup> Bhāskara did not relate the term “*ābhāsa(h)*” to his critique of Śaṅkara, but of the followers of the Sāṃkhya and the Vaiśeṣika.<sup>60</sup> According to this interpretation, therefore, the author of the *sūtra* excluded the views of the Sāṃkhya and the Vaiśeṣika.

We cannot get a clue as to the authenticity of the two readings “*ābhāsa(h)*” and “*ābhāsā(h)*” from the statement of the PAV, but, we can ascertain that the problem derives from the difference of interpretation between Śaṅkara and Bhāskara and has been long discussed in Vedānta traditions.

<sup>57</sup> PAV, p. 659,24-27.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Section 1.2.

<sup>59</sup> See Section 3.1.

<sup>60</sup> See Section 2.

## 5. Another Variant

We have discussed above the problem of *BS* II.3.50 mainly focusing on two variant readings, namely “*ābhāsa(h)*” and “*ābhāsā(h)*.” As a matter of fact, however, there is another variant of *BS* II.3.50, according to Bhāsara. *BSBhbh(Dv)* reads *vā* for *ca* in the *sūtra*. This unique reading, which is found only in Bhāskara’s commentary and not attested by any other commentaries or sub-commentaries, is agreed with by most of our *BSBhbh* manuscripts.

Although Śaṅkara did not provide a note on the term “*ca*” in *BS* II.3.50, his interpretation of the word “*ca*” would be clear, because we can read *the sūtra* in connection to the opening *sūtra* of this *aṃśādhikaraṇa*, namely, *BS* II.3.43.

II.3.43: “*aṃśo nānāvyapadeśād anyathā cāpi dāśakitavādītvam adhīyata eke.*”

II.3.50: “*ābhāsa eva ca*”

According to Śaṅkara’s interpretation, the individual Soul is “a part (*aṃśa*)” of the highest Self, “and also (*ca*)” it is nothing but “a reflection (*ābhāsa*)” of the highest Self.

If we accept Śaṅkara’s assumption that the individual Soul is a reflection of *brahman*, this interpretation would be no problem. If, on the other hand, we follow the interpretation of other commentators, there is no need to connect two *sūtras* in such a way. As a matter of fact, it is a bit fanciful to bridge these two *sūtras*, because the topic of the discussion changes slightly after II.3.47.<sup>61</sup>

Nakamura, following Bhāskara’s commentary, adopted the reading of *vā* for *ca*. Nakamura did not mention any particular reason why he adopted “*vā*,” but as far as we can infer from his translation of the *sūtra*, he understood that the word “*vā*” stresses the sentence.<sup>62</sup>

The *PAV*, by contrast, reports that Bhāskara reads “*ābhāsā eva ca*,”<sup>63</sup> which is external evidence supporting the “*ca*” reading. The point of discussion in the *PAV*, however, is whether the word “*ābhāsa*” should be in the singular or the plural, and the author and the editor of the *PAV* might not have paid full attention to this point.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Nakamura [1951: 238–41].

<sup>62</sup> Nothing but *ābhāsa*, indeed (*ābhāsā eva vā*). “實に *ābhāsa* にほかならず” (Nakamura [1951: 241]. Translated by the present author).

<sup>63</sup> See Section 4.2.



Since the word “*vā*” has many meanings and is sometimes even exchangeable for *ca*, we should not rush to a conclusion. Nevertheless, we stress that most of our *BSBhbh* manuscripts agree with the “*vā*” reading, which may well have to be investigated more carefully in comparison with other commentaries and their manuscripts.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

As seen above, the difference between “*ābhāsa(h)*” and “*ābhāsā(h)*” is not just a matter of difference in two readings of the text, but also a question that bears on the fundamental difference of ontological viewpoints of Vedāntins: Śāṅkara, who stresses the non-difference (*advaita* or *abheda*) aspect of his ontological viewpoint, reads “*ābhāsa(h)*” in the singular and interprets it to mean “a reflection,” and Bhāskara and Nimbārka, who are negative about the idea that worldly beings are illusory, adopt “*ābhāsā(h)*” in the plural and understand the *sūtra* in a different way.

As to the question about whose interpretation is authentic, we have no convincing conclusion so far, although we are able to divide these commentators and sub-commentators into two groups according to their preference for readings and interpretations, which can be summarized as follows:

### Śāṅkara-Advaita-Vedānta

Commentator	Reading of the <i>sūtra</i> (meaning)	Variant Reading (meaning)
Śāṅkara	<i>ābhāsaḥ</i> (a reflection)	—
Vācaspatimiśra	<i>ābhāsaḥ</i> (a reflection)	—
Anubhūtiśvarūpa	<i>ābhāsaḥ</i> (a reflection)	<i>ābhāsāḥ</i> (fallacious)
Amalānanda	<i>ābhāsaḥ</i> (a reflection)	—

### Non-Śāṅkara-Vedānta

Commentator	Reading of the <i>sūtra</i> (meaning)	Variant Reading (meaning)
Bhāskara	<i>ābhāsāḥ</i> (fallacious)	<i>ābhāsaḥ</i> (a reflection)
Rāmānuja	<i>ābhāsaḥ</i> (fallacious)	<i>ābhāsāḥ</i> (fallacious)
Nimbārka	<i>ābhāsāḥ</i> (fallacious)	—

As far as the use of the term “*ābhāsa*” in the commentaries is concerned, the interpretation of Śāṅkara and his followers that the term means “a reflection” seems somewhat unusual. Since the

reflection theory is based on Śāṅkara's assumption that the individual Soul is produced by nescience, the interpretation of Śāṅkara and his followers is simply extraordinary. Moreover, when we take into account the fact that Śāṅkara's interpretation of the term "ābhāsa" is influenced by Buddhist terminology, the interpretation and reading of Śāṅkara and his followers cannot be regarded as an authentic one. Finally, to sum up our discussions above, we may conclude that Śāṅkara did not follow the traditional way of interpretation but gave a unique interpretation. To be precise, he changed the traditional reading "ābhāsā(h)" in the plural into the singular "ābhāsa(h)," in order to interpret *BS* II.3.50 in connection with II.3.43, in the framework of his newly introduced concept of illusionistic monism.

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- Bhāmātī* See *BSSbh*(2).  
*BS* *Brahmasūtra*.  
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*BSBhbh*(vB) *Śātrikamīmāṃsābhāṣya*, ed. by J.A.B. Van Buitenen, see Kato 2011.  
*BSNbh* *Brahmasūtra* with *Vedāntaparijātasaurabha* by Nimbārka and *Vedāntakaustubha* by Śrīnivāsa, ed. by Dhunḍhirāja Śāstri, Kashi Sanskrit Series 99, Benares, 1932.  
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*KaṭhU* *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad*, see LV.  
*KauU* *Kauṣṭhiki-Upaniṣad*, see LV.  
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