Atmavidyāvilāsa
Śrī Sadāśiva Brahendra Sarasvatī

Introduction

Atmavidyāvilāsa is one of the most beautiful and direct accounts of how a jivanmukta lives. It is a small work spanning about sixty verses composed by the renowned brahmajñān Śrī Sadāśiva Brahmendra Sarasvatī, popularly known as Sadasiva Brahmam and Brahendral. It is no exaggeration to assert that this work gives a perfect description of how Brahendral himself lived.

Brahendral is supposed to have lived in the 18th century CE near the Kumbhakonam region in Tamilnadu. It is known from the work itself that Brahendral was a disciple of one Paramasivendra Sarasvatī, popularly known as Sadāśiva Brahman and Brahendral. It is no exaggeration to assert that this work gives a perfect description of how Brahendral himself lived.

Brahendral is supposed to have lived in the 18th century CE near the Kumbhakonam region in Tamilnadu. It is known from the work itself that Brahendral was a disciple of one Paramasivendra Sarasvatī. It is said that under his tutelage, Brahendral acquired complete proficiency in various philosophical branches like tarka, mīmāṃsā and vedānta. During his younger days, he was very fond of having hair-splitting debates with almost every vidvān he met. Not only did he defeat them effortlessly, he also teased them as having little or no intellectual capacity! Sensing that such an attachment to polemics would only lead him away from the goal of advaita brahma niṣṭhā, his guru once admonished him for not having any control over his tongue and instructed him to remain silent by refraining from every form of argumentation. So great was his guru bhakti that Brahendral at once stopped all his urges to argue and instead redirected that zeal inwards.

The result was the ‘mad’ paramahaṃsa - as he was known after that. It is said that even his guru yearned for the ‘madness’ that his disciple had got! What that ‘madness’ is, is the content of Atmavidyāvilāsa. Having shed the false notion of a personal self, Sadāśivendra Sarasvatī became Sadāśiva Brahmam and wandered off as an avadhūta.

The greatness of this work needs no further appreciation than the fact that all the Śrīgeri Saṅkarācārya-s from the time of Svāmī (Ugra) Narasimha Bhārati, widely known for their vairāgya and jñānaniṣṭhā, had a very high regard for this work besides having it as part of their nityapārayāṇa. Having said this, any further attempt to justify the greatness of this work seems rather redundant.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Śrī Śaṅkara Nārāyaṇan who was kind enough to provide me with a rare (and currently out-of-print) copy of this work with the source text and tamizh translation, published by the Kāmakoṭi Kośasthānam. I would also like to thank Śrī Ramesa Ramaṇan for providing me an english translation of this work from a different source, which is also out-of-print.

A note on the translation

The current translation is a slightly revised and edited version of the one provided by Śrī Ramaṇan. Atmavidyāvilāsa is written in a style whose essence cannot be so easily conveyed by a translation. The heavy usage of poetic similes and metaphors makes translation especially difficult and ‘forced’ at places. The current translation is not perfect. It is best that one spends some time learning some elementary sanskṛta, read this magnificent work in the original and use the translation only as a rough guide. Corrections, criticisms and suggestions for improvement can be sent to aparyap@gmail.com.

Śrī Dakṣināmurtaye ṇamaḥ,
Aparāyप्तम्रताः.
I bow down to that first and best of guru-s, who is immaculate, whose lotus hand sports the cinmudra, who bestows on his devotees all their desires and who overflows with endless bliss.

I bow down to that ancient teacher, who is pure bliss, who rests beneath the banyan tree, and whose lotus-hand having the (cin)mudra expounds the supreme wisdom awfully.

I bow down before the sandals of Paramasivendra (Sarasvatī), which serve as a boat, ever active in rescuing those who have fallen into the limitless ocean of samsāra and which knocks down to pieces all false views.

I now begin to say a few sweet words (of praise) in order that I may rest in my own Self, whose divine greatness has been awakened perforce by the teaching of my preceptor, Paramasivendra.

The Supreme Self shines, pure, enlightened and devoid of all modifications: It is unique, eternal and free from passion; It is an indivisible whole, untouched by maya and free from the guṇas (the threefold qualities, sattva, rajas and tamas).

He who was erstwhile bound merely by his own ignorance, was engaging in (worldly) activities and felt bewildered (as a consequence of that), now shines as a sage, having, by God’s grace, shaken off his shackles, with the knowledge of the Ātman (his own Self).

The wise man, having cast off his natural propensities born of prakṛti, having realized his real nature as sat, cit and ānanda, rejoices having attained to dignity by a mere side-glance of the great teacher.

I bow down to that first and best of guru-s, who is immaculate, whose lotus hand sports the cinmudra, who bestows on his devotees all their desires and who overflows with endless bliss.

By the grace of his guru, the enlightened one rejoices silently, having quieted his ego and with his mind submerged in his own nature as Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

The best of sannyāsī-s, delights at will in incomparable bliss, with the burdens of his heart cooled by the surging waves of grace flowing from the great guru.

The best of sannyāsī-s, from whose heart darkness has been dispelled by the sun-like radiance of his guru’s grace, plays in the boundless ocean of bliss.

The calm sage rests, knowing the Ātman that remains after merging, with the intellect, the five great elements in the reverse order of evolution.

He wanders about with his desires crushed and with his pride, self-esteem and envy discarded, realizing in his mind that this universe in its entirety is unsubstantial and of the nature of mayā alone.

The yogī, free of (all) burdens, rejoices in the bliss within, knowing for certain that, in reality, there is no trace of māyā or any of its effects in the pure Self.
He sports like a child without any idea of ‘I’ or ‘mine’, immersed in the ocean of pure happiness, (innocently) delighted at the various actions of (worldly) men. 14.

\[ \text{Abhútakamjñàlo jadabhirãmôpa: kàpti} \]
\[ \text{Aatmãraâma yâtirãdvyàkôjñâpsta} \]

Having discarded the (illusory) bondage of karma and delighting in the Atman, the prince of sannyâsi-s wanders about in the outskirts of the jungle as if he were an idiot, like a blind or deaf person. 15.

\[ \text{Shãtãva ñàdàpàûî: Shãtanamãsañâtvådvanàdàr} \]
\[ \text{Râman rasi átâkà râmî yânãtanâpa} \]

Firmly established in peace, the happy one rests on the beautiful bed of his own anûnda, serene and unruffled by all other sensations. 16.

\[ \text{Ummûliñînàtiparà: Svaàkãtravàrayàpàvàvà:} \]
\[ \text{Svàtaàmanamôdhiàî Svaàrâjyàmîmîn vârâjâte yâtîrayà} \]

The king of sannyâsi-s supremely shines in his own kingdom, in the majesty of his own blissful Self, having uprooted his enemies - the sense pleasures - and with complete non-attachment as his own nature. 17.

Even if the sun becomes cool, even if the moon scorches, even if fire burns downward, the jivanmukta knows it to be the work of mayà and does not wonder at that. 18.

\[ \text{Aânàvârîvàjyà Pràjñâmànàkànàrà} \]
\[ \text{Vihàrayà Sàmbàmàrâj: Svaraàsûkhaàbhàvàhí Sàvàtà ràmyà} \]

The king of renunciates sports in the expanse of equanimity and bliss, riding on the high neck of the elephant of Right Knowledge after vanquishing his enemy in the form of ignorance. 19.

\[ \text{Shàtanàhàkàtàidà: Sûmàmaàhítâmnàs: kàpti} \]
\[ \text{Pàrâûôùnàshiràbhàvàcà ràtènâtàndàsamàjàktàvatàsîk} \]

He who delights in Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, shines supreme with the blemish of egoism quieted, with his mind calm and composed, and with his thoughts cool and pleasant like the full moon. 20.

\[ \text{Tiñnàrâkà bhàûtí Svaàyamûkhaàvàdàpa} \]
\[ \text{Kàpità Pràjñàvatà Kàpàntààjìnaàbhàvà kàpàntà ðvàrayà} \]

Fully engrossed in the enjoyment of his own bliss, he remains in another world, as it were; and as strikes his fancy, here, he is engaged in thought, and there, he is singing, and there, he is dancing. 21.
The ascetic dances fearlessly, like a peacock, in a forest filled with the luscious fruits of liberation and the pleasing flowers of perfect knowledge. 29.

Abandoning this worthless world resembling a desert, the divine swan sports freely in this excellent lake of Knowledge and full of the sweet waters of perfect bliss. 30.

The great recluse, like the cuckoo, sings soft and sweet words in the grove which is made cool by the sacred lore of the upanishads and where all the vedas are in bloom. 31.

The excellent man of wisdom, like the great lion, sports in the huge forest of bliss, having driven away the tigers of sins and having torn asunder the wild elephant of delusion. 32.

The ascetic plays like a wild young elephant in the high regions of the lofty peaks of supreme Knowledge, with the cool waters of contemplation, beyond the reach of the lion of ignorance. 33.

(Sometimes,) the samnyasi meditates on the Truth, on the banks of a river, with his eyes fixed on the tip of his nose and with his mind withdrawn from names (and forms). 34.

The sage shines supreme, silent and placid, with the ground under a tree as his resting place and with his palm as the begging bowl, wearing no clothes, decorated with the jewel of non-attachment. 35.

The ascetic dances fearlessly, like a peacock, in a forest filled with the luscious fruits of liberation and the pleasing flowers of perfect knowledge. 29.

The king among samnyasi-s shines forth, resting serenely on the soft bed of bare ground, with the cool breeze serving as a fan and with the full moon as a lamp. 37.

The king of ascetics sleeps peacefully on a broad slab of stone, beautifully shaped by the pure waters of the river flowing beside it, while the southern breeze (from the Malaya hills) blows gently. 38.

The (profoundly) silent sage, ever engaged in inward meditation, takes the alms placed in his hands as food and wanders along the streets like an idiot. 39.

The yogi does not censure anything; nor does he really rejoice in anything. With a perfectly cool heart, he remains as a mass of overflowing bliss. 41.

The yogi remains in a state of plenitude, like an unruffled lamp, having cast aside all scriptural argumentation and having completely rejected (even) ordained duties. 42.

The yogi sees nothing, nor does he speak; he does not hear any word that is spoken; he remains immersed steadfast in the incomparable abode, unmoving like a log of wood. 44.
The best of sannyāsī-s, having subdued all his sense organs and having wiped out all traces of attachment to sense objects, roams about having attained incomparable contentment. 52.

The king of sannyāsī-s rests alone, established in the Self and enjoying inner bliss; he rejects nothing that comes to him and never desires what does not come to him. 53.

Alone, the mendicant disports himself as he pleases, free from (all) bondage, having reached the stage of perfection, which is pure and limitless knowledge and bliss. 54.

The king of all those who are free from desires, shines supreme, depending on no one and with his mind lost in the Truth, which is beyond the entire universe of appearances. 55.

The paramahamsa shines forth, having reached the form of endless Knowledge and having lost all sense of difference due to the compassionate glance of his teacher. 56.

The ancient, serene and immutable one, with no beginning or end, always remains as a mass of Knowledge and Bliss and of the nature of pure existence. 59.
The ultimate Truth, deathless, unaging and unborn, extremely subtle, without any cause and devoid of all distress, exists as pure Knowledge. 60.

That (supreme) Truth, which is the highest bliss, deathless and ever near, the other shore of the ocean of samsāra, exists as the endless, fearless and equanimous bliss. 61.

Devoid of taste, smell and form, free of sattva, rajas and tamas, the incomparable and fearless Brahman shines forever. 62.

Thus, blessed with the gracious glance of my guru, I have spoken of the essence of the true meaning of the upaniṣad-s in sixty two flawless verses composed in the ārya metre. 63.

The wise man, who contemplates on this work describing the splendour of Ātmavidyā everyday, will grow mature in the wisdom of the supreme Self and reach at once the ultimate Truth. 64.

Thus ends this work called Ātmavidyāvilasa composed by Sadasivendra, a disciple of the guru Paramśivendra. 65.