

# On Sutras and Sutrakaras

(Excerpts from an essay by T.Krishnamacharya)

## What are Sutras

What is the meaning of *Sutra*? What are the characteristics of *Darsanika* and *Adarsanika sutras*? What is the most significant aspect of the *sutras*? What are the characteristics of a *sutrakara* and how did they live? I am summarizing my answers to these questions, about which I was approached for help.

The characteristics of *sutras* are explained in the following verse:

*Alpaksaram asandigdham saravat visvatomukham  
Astobhyam anavadyanca sutram sutravido viduh*

"A *sutra* is characterized by words that are terse, precise, have no ambiguity, are very meaningful and universal. They are facts presented in a very respectable manner".

## Classification of Sutras

The *sutras* are generally classified into *Darsanika sutras* and *Adarsanika sutras*. (The studies which results in the realization of the different *tattvas* are the *Darsanika Sastras*.) *Darsanika sutras* can be further divided into *Vaidika sutras* and *Avaidika sutras*. Those *sutras* which present subjects (completely) respecting the *sruti* are known as *Vaidika sutras*. *Adarsanika sutras* can be divided into three groups -

- (i) *Srauta sutras*
- (ii) *Garhya sutras* and
- (iii) *Dharma sutras*.

It is the study of these that became the basis for living, for our people.

All *Darsanas* are presented in *sutra* form. Some of the authors of well known *sutras* are

- (1) *Shri Veda Vyasa*, author of *Bramha sutra*
- (2) *Shri Jaimini*, author of *Mimamsa sutra*
- (3) *Sage Kapila*, author of *Samkhya sutra*
- (4) *Sage Patanjali*, author of *Yoga sutra*
- (5) *Sage Kanada*, author of *Vaisesika sutra*
- (6) *Sage Gautama*, author of *Nyaya sutra*
- (7) *Shri Panini*, author of *Vyakarana sutra*

## Sutrakaras

What are the characteristics of *Sutrakaras*? How did they live?

*Sutrakaras* lived for a long time, had a great parentage (lineage) and sought the highest clarity. They were initiated to *vedic* study through *upanayana samskara* from a *satguru*. They received instructions on *vedas* and *vedangas* and on completing their study, took leave of their teacher appropriately. Then they married a person from a good family belonging to the same *varna*. They continued their *vedic* study and taught the same and through this uninterrupted practice had a vision of the *Atman*, clarity on what is proper and improper in terms of food, clothing, action etc. They also had the great fortune of delving into *dhyana*, *bhakti* and *prapatti*.

Those who did not have this long, disciplined life could not have understood the secrets of the *Vedas*. How can someone with a little knowledge of the *sruti* ever understand the complex secrets of this *prapanca* which is always in a state of flux and the unchanging all pervading *Parabramha*? It is possible that some *siddhas* lived with the same intensity but not for that long. However, the others who did not live like *Patanjali* could not have composed *sutras* of his calibre. If they did, they did not carry any credibility.

Every *tattva* has some power. This power varies according to the state of evolution. Some of these *tattvas* can be perceived through the senses, while the others which are subtle are not seen (through senses). All *tattvas* have an external and a hidden power. *Varna*, *Sabda* and *Pada* are also *tattvas*. Letters, sound and words have both *Dharma* i.e character and *Artha* i.e. meaning. These characteristics are always hidden in them. The *Sabda* used in our daily life and the words of *Darsanikas* are also with character and meaning. Therefore, words are always used in all enquiries.

## Word and Meaning

The relationship between the word and its meaning is eternal. It is not a fabrication. The great poet *Kalidasa* has established this in the first verse in '*Raghuvamsa*'. The word *pranava* which instructs *Paramatma* is a classic example, according to the *Mandukya Upanisad*. The character of a *sutra* has been explained earlier --- however, the essence of the word '*sutra*' is *Paramatma* or *Bramha*. All the *tattvas* are held together by that force, as explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The synonym for *sutra* - *tantu* is included in the 1008 names of *Visnu*. The commentator, *Parasarbhata* has interpreted *tantu* to mean *Sri Visnu* himself. The prefix "*Su*" represents the natural and auspicious characteristics. *Amara Kosa* confirms that *Sutra* and *Tantu* are synonyms. Just like different precious gems tied together in a string appear to be a unit, the different words used in the *sutras* convey one meaning i.e. the characteristics of *Bramha*.

The colophon to this essay states - "This essay regarding *Sutras* was composed to clear the doubts of my son Desikachar in the year *Roudri* on *Sukla Paksa Navami* which is a Tuesday during the month of *Margasirsa*" (This corresponds to 13th of January 1981)

(Summarised and translated from the Sanskrit essay of T. Krishnamacharya by T.K.V. Desikachar and S.Sujaya)