

REVIEW

of the dissertation on a topic

The concept of anandamaya kosha according to Adi Shankaracharya

The dissertation was presented by Antonia Ivanova Nacheva, a full-time doctoral student at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", FCNF, Department of "Classical East" by professional direction 2.1. Philology, scientific specialty 05.04.06 Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (Indian literature and culture), with enrollment order No. RD 20-71 dated 17.01.2020, for awarding the scientific and educational degree "doctor "

by Prof. Dr. Gergana Rumenova Ruseva, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", FCNF, Department of "Classical East"

The documents presented by Antonia Nacheva - dissertation, abstract, autobiography, publications on the topic of the dissertation (the doctoral student has published six scientific articles on the topic of the dissertation), her participation in conferences at various academic institutions (she has participated in seven scientific conferences and forums organized by SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", the University of Library Science and Information Technologies - Sofia, Chinmaya Vishwa Vidyapeeth University, Ernakulam, India), protocols of successfully taken exams according to the doctoral minimum requirements, fully meet the requirements in terms of volume and content and demonstrate the qualities of the candidate for the defense of the scientific and educational degree "doctor" in professional direction 2.1. Philology, scientific specialty 04.05.06 Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (Indian literature and culture) in the "Classical East" department of the SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

One of the main concepts developed in Shankara's commentaries and works is the concept of the various receptacles (kosha) of consciousness, or the self, atman. It also includes the concept of the receptacle or body of bliss (anandamayakosha). This concept comes to the fore in many modern yogic practices, and reaching, handling, developing this bliss body is a major goal of many yogis. Therefore, it is imperative for yoga practitioners

to read at least one comprehensive and in-depth study on the subject, which is lacking in the world's Indological literature. In Indological scholarship, the debate about the nature of anandamayakosha and Shankara's ideas about it has been ongoing and is still relevant today. With the wide scope of ancient Indian texts studied - Vedas, main Upanishads, Brahmanas, Brahmasutras and Sankara's commentaries on some Upanishads and Brahmasutras, and with its many analyzes and reflection of already existing analyzes and opinions among Indologists, Antonia Nacheva's dissertation work is called to fill that gap. It takes great courage (and perhaps a considerable amount of ignorance (like Nachiketas - the "ignorant one" who reaches the threshold of the god of death, Yama, and learns from him about what happens to a person when he dies) to undertake a scientific study on such a complex and deep topic, even more for a person who is not an Indologist and does not know the Sanskrit language. I congratulate the PhD student and her supervisor Prof. Dr. Milena Bratoeva for the brave choice of this topic and the completion of this wide-ranging research.

I know Antonia Nacheva from her doctoral exam, in which she performed brilliantly, having her own analyzes in the development of the exam topic, and also eruditely quoting many profound Indologists. Antonia Nacheva graduated from the National Science and Mathematics High School "Acad. Lubomir Chakalov" with a chemistry profile. Subsequently, he completed his bachelor's degree at the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy - Sofia and is a biotechnological engineer. She also holds a master's degree in fine organic synthesis from the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy - Sofia and defended her second master's thesis at the Hahn Meitner Institute - Berlin, Germany, Department of Trace Elements in Life Science. This consistent education in the field of chemistry is a mark of the scientific potential of the doctoral student and her ability to learn and reflect, to analyze and synthesize ideas and experience.

This is also my observation of her work during these four years - Antonia Nacheva showed a very deep interest in the development of her topic. The PhD student has completed several yoga and Vedanta courses and a yoga teacher training course in India and is a practicing yogini, leading various yoga courses as well. Her desire, quite naturally, was to connect her yoga practice with a much deeper understanding—that of science and

research into Shankara's ideas and Shankara's own ideas, as well as the ancient Indian canonical literature upon which he commented, of the states of consciousness and their "containers" or bodies, largely realized, created, developed within various yogic practices. In the beginning, before she had read the main works and developments of the scientists on the topic of the dissertation, she relied primarily on modern practical yoga teachings and of the more popular and populist (often false due to inaccuracy) conceptions of yoga and in particular of the various koshas that these teachings offer. Gradually, however, she developed critical thinking in this area of study, and I am happy to note that populisms are hardly to be found in her work.

Another difficulty for a non-Indologist going "into the depths" of Indology is not knowing any of the Indian languages, in this case a good command of Sanskrit is necessary. Although Antonia Nacheva attended my Sanskrit course (in fact, sporadically), she did not manage to gain enough knowledge even to write the transliterations correctly, to know where to check them, what remains of the knowledge of the construction of complex words and how to determine their meaning. This requires, of course, that she only handles translations from Sanskrit to English or only some scientific translations into Bulgarian, which she does. Not working as a translator with the originals, on the one hand, does not allow her to focus and delve into the subtle nuances of the meanings, but from the point of view of saving time from translating one or another stanza from Sanskrit, she has the opportunity to examine a very wide corpus of texts, which she does.

Antonia Nacheva's dissertation is the result of her long-standing and consistent interest in the subject, both theoretical and practical. Proof of her deep interest are her six publications on the mentioned issue, her participation in numerous conferences and other academic events. The enthusiasm, dedication and energy with which the doctoral student sets about developing her articles, reports, works and with which she participates in the academic life at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and not only make a strong impression.

Antonia Nacheva's work focuses on the concept of the five receptacles of the soul (panchakosha) and in particular the anandamayakosha ("a receptacle consisting of bliss") as presented in the works of Shankara (8th - 9th century), the founder of Advaita Vedanta.

In order to clarify the essence of anandamayakosha, which is the main aim of the dissertation (as stated in the introduction), the PhD student researches the meanings of the two components of the compound word - anandamaya and kosha, in the Rigveda, Atharvaveda, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Brahmasutra, Gaudapadarika, Bhagavadgita and of the compound word itself in Shankara's commentaries on the major Upanishads, the Brahmasutras, the Gaudakarika and the Bhagavadgita. Antonia Nacheva sets herself four tasks (Introduction, pp. 10–11): 1. Tracing the meanings of panchakosha and anandamayakosha in the Taittiriya Upanishad and analyzing Shankara's comments on this Upanishad; 2. An examination of the development of the semantics of the words ananda and kosha from the Vedas up to and including Shankara's commentaries; 3. Analyzing Shankara's commentary on the Anandamayadhikarana chapter of the Brahmasutrabhashya (1.1.6) and 4. Examining all the koshas to clarify the overall concept of the panchakosha ("five receptacles") of the soul and hence to clarify the position of the anandamayakosha within this concept.

The dissertation has a total volume of 365 pages, of which 351 pages are the main scientific text and consists of a Table of Contents, List of Abbreviations, Introduction, five chapters, each neatly and clearly divided into chapters and subchapters, Conclusion, Scientific Contributions and Bibliography. Contains two color tables prepared by the PhD student.

The paper is well structured, which contributes to the achievement of the main aims and objectives of the study, clearly stated in the Introduction. The author is well acquainted with the extensive literature on the subject of the dissertation. In the Bibliography section, it indicates 155 titles of specialized literature on the researched issues and 15 titles of sources that it analysed.

In addition to the objectives, tasks and scope discussed above, the methodology and structure of the dissertation are also clearly stated in the introduction. The research is primarily textual, with the author analyzing the above texts as well as the exegesis applied by Shankara. The author approaches the question by applying comparative, etymological, semantic and discourse analysis and approaches interdisciplinary, applying achievements of philosophy, cultural studies, anthropology and history where necessary. Here, an

overview of the many studies related to the topic of the dissertation is made, and the object and subject of the study are indicated. The object and subject of the study are not correctly stated - the object of the study, as the title suggests, is anandamayakosha according to Shankara's works, and the subject is Shankara's own commentaries. The introduction presents a well-developed and logically coherent work.

In the first chapter, basic studies of Shankara's lives are systematized and examined, and a brief description of his life is offered. The main studies on the dating of Shankara (he most likely lived, as the doctoral student points out, in the period 780-820) have been examined sequentially. Here, the doctoral student justifies her choice of sources by indicating the conclusions from the application of various stylometric and other methods for elucidating Shankara's authorship of ancient texts.

The second chapter explores the etymology and semantic development of the words ananda and kosha in appropriately selected sources. Here, Antonia Nacheva very consistently traces the meanings in the sources, systematizes them and separates them from each other, connecting them with other important concepts for ancient Indian thinking: ananda with tapas, soma, rasa, atman, brahman, amrita, vidya, prajna, etc. and states of consciousness such as savikalpa samadhi and deep dreamless sleep, and kosha with soma, the ritual vessel (for soma), antariksha (air space) and the inner space in the heart, with the heart as the receptacle of atman, etc. Shankara's teacher Gaudapada's idea of pancakosha is also discussed here.

With its subject, "The Concept of Anandamayakośa According to Sankara's Commentary on the Taittirīya Upaniṣad," the third chapter is central to the Dissertation, and with its more than one hundred and thirty pages and six subchapters, each with many subchapters, constitutes the main corpus of the study. The first sub-chapter deals with the structure and content of the Taittiriya Upanishad. Then, in the second sub-chapter, the methods of exegesis used by Shankara in his commentaries on the Taittiriya Upanishad are described and explained very expertly. Then in the following sub-chapters (from 3.3 to 3.5.) a very thorough, logical and comprehensive analysis is made of the various parts of the Taittiriya Upanishad and Sankara's commentaries on them. Excerpts from other Upanishads quoted by Shankara in elucidating the meaning of the Taittiriya Upanishad are

also analyzed here. As Nacheva points out, the Anandavalli section contains the basis of the doctrine of the five receptacles or the five bodies (atman). The author comes to the conclusion, with which I fully agree, that according to the Taittiriya Upanishad and Shankara's commentary on it, the sequential experience of these five bodies is like an inner ritual that leads to unceasing bliss (ananda) and to the integration of all bodies into one experience. Also described here is the process of building the inner altar from the outside inward—from the annamaya kosha, the receptacle/body consisting of food) inward to the anandamaya kosha (that consisting of bliss). The passage through the five receptacles/bodies to the innermost, that of bliss, is also explored. In subsection 3.2. is another idea - that of experiencing and rejecting identification with the various koshas, through austerity, tapas or (self-)knowledge, yogakshema 'retention of the acquired' and samajna 'deep understanding' of the Brahman present in the body. The basic Advaita Vedanta concept of the merging, identity of atman and brahman is also discussed here. The concept of Ishvara - saguna brahman ("brahman with qualities"), which is the receptacle of nirguna brahman (brahman without qualities) is also explained in detail. The PhD student skilfully handles the ideas of the different sheaths as different states of consciousness and equates the penultimate step to enlightenment with the filling of the anandamaya kosha, in which one merges or experiences saguna brahman with the state of savikalpa samadhi, and the last step - the complete identification of atman and brahman - with the experience of nirguna brahman and the state of nirvikalpa samadhi This chapter is detailed and very thoroughly developed. Antonia Nacheva shows very good research skills and ability to analyze and summarize. In the research in this third and in the fourth chapter, in addition to her scientific supervisor, the practical experience of the doctoral student helped a lot, because it implies a deeper insight into the meanings of concepts, especially those related to meditative practice, self-knowledge and asceticism.

Together with the third the fourth chapter has no less significance. It explores the concept of anandamaya kosha in Sankara's commentary on Brahmasutrabhasya 1.1.6. For the sake of completeness, the main philosophical ideas in the Brahmasutra are examined, as well as the relationship of these ideas to the ideas of the older Purva Mimamsa school. Shankara's five-step dialogic format for conducting a philosophical argument is also presented here. The doctoral student offers a new interpretation of the question of the

identity of the anandamaya kosha with the supreme self (atman). According to her, a synthesis of the level of experience is visible in Shankara's ideas - their identity or difference is related to the experience during meditation of the transition from the manifested to the unmanifest and vice versa - from the unmanifest to the manifested. In this sense, states flow into one another. According to Nacheva, "Anandamaya kosha is not brahman, but contains brahman, and is the veil, the last step to union with the absolute, or is union, the source of bliss in form" (author's abstract, p. 31).

A fifth, final chapter expands the focus of the study to place the study of the anandamaya kosha in its logical context—the concept of the five receptacles/bodies (kosha). Here the texts *Atmabodha* and *Vivekachudamani*, traditionally attributed to Sankara, of his commentaries on *Brahmanandavalli* of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *Brahmasutra* 1.1.6 and excerpts from the main Upanishads are thoroughly analyzed. The PhD student points out that the receptacles/bodies/sheaths (kosha) have as their innermost essence the atman and are alive and sentient from his energy of consciousness. But the identification with these sheaths must, according to Shankara, be recognized and rejected. Here, the doctoral student also brings out the connections between entities in the micro- and macroworld and points out that *pranamaya*, *manomaya* and *vijnanamaya* koshas correspond to *hiranyagarbha* or "having the golden womb (Brahman)", i.e. the Brahman who appeared from a golden womb (from a golden egg) who creates the world.

The conclusion is short and clear, and due to the fact that after each chapter there is a summary, the scientific contributions of the development are correctly presented here.

I have several recommendations which, in my opinion, will contribute to the even higher scientific value of the work.

1. It seems to me that the development will only gain if, after the introduction, a chapter "Research on the topic" is separated, in which to include: A) the sub-chapter "Research on the topic" from the introduction; B) the parts presented in the sub-chapter "Aims and tasks", which indicate which of the tasks the doctoral student sets herself, in which scientific works are examined and C) the bibliography, described fully and in detail in the individual chapters and in the summaries of each of the chapters. Some of the titles mentioned in the introduction are not present in the bibliography, which means to me that

they were not used in the development of the dissertation. In such a chapter this can be pointed out and explained why they were not taken into account. Given the large number of scientific works related to the topic that Antonia Nacheva has reviewed and classified, such a chapter would be very useful for future researchers of the topic.

2. I recommend removing *Adi* from the phrase *Adi Shankara*. The word *adi* is not Shankara's first name, but means "first", "initial". This entry could confuse the Bulgarian reader. In this sense, I suggest that in the eventual publication of the work, only *Shankara* should remain in the title, removing the word *acharya*, which means "teacher", "mentor".

3. When I read the end of the second very detailed sub-chapter 2.1, with the conclusions of which I fully agree, the following questions occurred to me, which could in the future provide a perspective for research and are related to the purpose of the present development: Why is the meaning of the word *ananda* in Shankara's works and commentaries not explored as was the word *kosha* in them? On pp. 83-85 it is interesting to consider the meaning of the word *ananda* in the non-dualistic tantric traditions of Kashmir, which could not have had any influence on Sankara because they are later. At the same time, the occurrences in the Epics are "In the epics *ananda* is an antonym of *śoka* (suffering) and also a synonym of *duḥkābhāva*, absence of suffering¹⁶⁴" (p. 85), and in note 164 we are expected to find out who expressed this thought, but it is actually about how in the *Nyāyakosha* the word *ananda* is defined. The next sentence also raises suspicions: "In Buddhist and Jain literature the word *ananda* does not occur, there again *sukha* is used." again without reference. Did the PhD student go through all the Buddhist and Jain literature and find the word *ananda* and its later cognates missing? The following sentence: "In the *Ramayana* the term is used 35 times and in the *Mahabharata* 43 times where it means simply joy." raises the following question: Did the PhD student trace these meanings and in which translation? Is the next sentence "In the *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* the state of liberation is described as the absence of suffering but without the positive feeling of *ananda*, bliss." is this also your observation and from looking at which *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* texts did you make this observation? This last page of the chapter (85), and also the sub-chapter on Kashmir Shaivite Tantrism (whose notions of *ananda* may be included, but in a different context) (83-85) do not detract from the enormous and systematic labor thrown into its overall development, but give it a slightly immature look

and in my opinion should either be changed (with proper references and additions) or removed from the dissertation. The doctoral student examines in detail a sufficiently large corpus of texts specifically related to the objectives of her dissertation. It is not necessary to include in her study all ancient Indian texts.

The objections I have to the dissertation largely stem from the fact that the PhD student does not know the Sanskrit language, but nevertheless has a strong desire to use many Sanskrit words in transcription and in transliteration. The excessive use of Sanskrit words even where they are not needed, not only makes it difficult to read, but also because of the incorrect transliteration is a sign of ignorance of the translation or the Bulgarian language correspondence of the word (e.g. on page 311 *adhyaya* should be *adhya* and denotes “a chapter or part (of a work).” The use of erroneous Sanskrit variant does nothing to aid understanding, moreover the word has no conceptual meaning tied to the topic).

During the internal discussion (and before that, during the examination of the doctoral student's articles by our colleagues and of articles and chapters from the development, especially by the supervisor), many errors of a different nature were noted - spelling, syntax, style, semantics, transliteration of Sanskrit concepts and names. Unfortunately, after apparently correcting the work, there are still numerous errors, which largely detracts from the scientific values of the work. The doctoral student should definitely have approached this problem even more seriously and carefully, because it is unacceptable to have such an abundance of errors and inaccuracies in a dissertation work.

Despite the many inaccuracies and errors that must be corrected in the eventual publication of the work, I believe that the work is built on a very broad basis, its scientific value as the only research of its kind is significant and exceeds the requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific doctorate degree.

The work of Antonia Tsankova inspires with the many quotes from the ancient Indian canonical texts and with the very topic that is the focus of the dissertation - bliss. It is something that each of us has experienced, it is primordial to life, but it is also something that each of us constantly strives for. And further: *ānandaṃ brahmaṇo vidvān / na bibheti kadācana* "He who knows the bliss of brahman/ never fears" (Taittiriya Upanishad 2.4)

I accept the conclusions and summaries formulated in the concluding part of each of the chapters of the dissertation, which have a contributing nature to science and practical value. They show unequivocally that the doctoral student has fulfilled the set research goals and tasks. The study is built clearly and logically on a very broad textological basis and has a contributing character to world science.

The work of Antonia Ivanova Nacheva corresponds to the criteria for a doctoral dissertation. The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation work and accurately and correctly reflects its contributing points.

I rate positively dissertation work and I strongly recommend the respected scientific jury to award Antonia Ivanova Nacheva the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 2.1. Philology, scientific specialty 04.05.06 Literature of the peoples of Europe, America, Africa, Asia and Australia (Indian literature and culture).

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31.03.2024, Sofia