

The Great Life History Of Shankarachrya

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Abstract: With the establishment of the Brahmin settlement in Kerala, the north Indian Vedic philosophy also introduced. It was Shankaracharya, the famous philosopher of Kerala said to have lived by the end of the eight century, who has provided a Keralite commentary to the north Indian Vedic philosophy. Another important philosopher of Kerala, who provided new interpretation of the Vedic philosophy, was Sarvajnatma Muni, a contemporary of Bhaskara Ravi Manukuladitya during tenth century.

However, it was Gurumata philosophy by Prabhakara, Mitra, the disciples of Kumaraleela Bhatta, which could make its own influence in Kerala during the early times. Gurumata become so important in Kerala, By giving due consideration to the Vedic rituals and customs. In the later period, the Gurumata philosophy was replaced by the Advaita philosophy of Shankaracharya

Shankara was a fulltime Vedic scholar who had adopted the north Indian Vedic tradition and travelled throughout India for attaining further knowledge. Shankara is said to have born at Kaladi, on the bank of the river Periyar. He criticised the irrational rituals and customs of the Vedas in religious practices. He provided a new impetus and interpretation to the existing Vedic knowledge. From his childhood itself Shankara adopted to sanyasa in the Vedic tradition, and travelled widely. He met his guru Govindapadar, a disciple of Garudapada, at the banks of the river Narmada and learned the Advaita philosophy from guru. Afterwards Shankara went to Prayag and visited Kumaraleela Bhatta and there he defeated Mandanamisra, the famous Mimamsa scholar in Vedic discussion. Mandanamisra later accepted the name Sureswara and became a disciple of Shankaracharya.

Shankaracharya went to the different parts of India and held victorious discussions with Saktas, Saivites, Auhathas, Buddhist and Jainists. In the later period, it said that Shankaracharya went to Kashmir and occupied the Sarvajnapeedom to spread his philosophy all over India at that time. To spread his philosophy all over India Shankara established four mathas at four centres in India namely, Badharinath in the north, Dwaraka in the west, Puri in the east, and Sringeri in the south

Shankaracharya has formulated his advaita philosophy on the basis of the Upanishad philosophy. The whole essence of the basis of the Advaita philosophy can be seen in the hymn- "Brahmasatyam Jaganmithya, Jeevobrahmivanapara". He treated the individual souls as a part of the universal spirit. According to him universal spirit is the only reality and nothing else is real. Whatever is seen in this world is the part of the universal spirit. Shankaracharya further preached that "Aham Brahmasmi" (i am universe) and "Tatvamasi" (you and the Brahma are the same) though the universal spirit and the individual souls seems to be different, both of them are the same, thus declares the Advaita philosophy. Shankaracharya wrote commentaries on Ten Upanishads, Bhagavadgitha, Brahmasutra and Mandukhyakarika of Gaudapada. He explained his Advaita philosophy through these works, more explicitly through the commentary on Brahmasutra. Apart from these, Shankara wrote independent work like Vivekachoodamani, Sivanandalahari and Soundaryalahari.

I. INTRODUCTION

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II. THE GREAT LIFE HISTORY OF SHANKARACHARYA

This statement is made about God. It occurs in Vedas. The same thing may be said of sages, seers and philosophers- the most glorious personages who were responsible for the growth and development of our national culture. They did not want to fill the pages of Indian history with physical and material information such as dates, place, birth, period of life, etc. This is the characteristic of our culture. Their vital spirit is still present all around us. Their works alone testify to their spiritual, intellectual and creative powers. These great men will appear to us as God-men, when we understand their works. Their actions appear as superhuman. As they are beyond our ability to understand, we tend to think of them as miracles. But these extraordinary men are far above those miracles also. Leaving aside these miracles, if we just take their life story, even that would be wonderful and interesting. The lives of such persons with their pristine purity, reveal the very heart of Indian culture. Sri Adi Shankaracharya belongs to the galaxy of such men. The history of Indian culture, in fact, is the stream of lives of such great souls. In order to recover from the crises- the religious, moral, that crop up ideological or political in the society from time to time, the country anxiously awaits the help of inspiring and glorious personalities. It may be said that Sri Shankaracharya's birth took place in the same way, as a result of India's spiritual longing for redressal of its all-round suffering. It is the opinion of scholars that he belonged to the period between 788 and 820 A.D.

LIFE

Shankara was most likely born in the southern Indian state of Kerala, in a village named *Karati* or *Kalati* according to the oldest biographies, but some texts suggest the birthplace to be *Cidambaram*. His father died while Shankara was very young. Shankara's *supanayanam*, the initiation into student-life, had to be delayed due to the death of his father, and was then performed by his mother.

Shankara's hagiography describes him as someone who was attracted to the life of Sannyasa (hermit) from early childhood. His mother disapproved. A story, found in all hagiographies, describe Shankara at age eight going to a river with his mother, *Sivataraka*, to bathe, and where he is caught by a crocodile. Shankara called out to his mother to give him permission to become a *Sannyasin* or else the crocodile will kill him. The mother agrees, Shankara is freed and leaves his home for education. He reaches a Saivite sanctuary along a river in a north-central state of India, and becomes the disciple of a teacher named *Govindapada*. The stories in various hagiographies diverge in details about the first meeting between Shankara and his *Guru*, where they met, as well as what happened later. Several texts suggest Shankara schooling with Govindapada happened along the river Narmada, a few place it along river Ganges in Kashi (Varanasi) as well as Badari (Badrinath in the Himalayas).

The biographies vary in their description of where he went, who he met and debated and many other details of his life. Most mention Shankara studying the Vedas, Upanishads and Brahmasutrawith Govindapada, and Shankara authoring several key works in his youth, while he was studying with his teacher. It was with his teacher Govinda that Shankara studied Gaudapadiya Karika, as Govinda was himself taught by Gaudapada. Most also mention a meeting with scholars of the Mimamsa school of Hinduism namely Kumarila and Prabhakara, as well as Mandana and various Buddhists, in *Shastrarth* (an Indian tradition of public philosophical debates attended by large number of people, sometimes with royalty). Thereafter, the biographies about Shankara vary significantly. Different and widely inconsistent accounts of his life include diverse journeys, pilgrimages, public debates, installation of Yantras and Lingas, as well as the founding of monastic centres in north, east, west and south India.

It is stated that Sri Shankaracharya was born of God's Grace to his parents. Kalati is a beautiful village in Kerala. Even today this fine village may be seen on the bank of river Poornaa. There lived a couple it name Shivaguru and Aryamba. Theirs was an orthodox Namboodri Brahmin family. Though rich, they led simple life both the husband a wife were well educated. More than that, they were devoted to God. They were worried only about not having any children even after long time. They made vows an appeal to all gods.

A son was born to Aryamba by the full Grace of Ishwara. The baby was named Shankara. Calculating according to solar calendar, the auspicious day has been said to be the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaishakha. The devotees celebrate - "Shankara Jayanti On that- day every year.

Shankara, being a divine incarnation grew up right from his childhood as a prodigy in every respect. It is said that at the age of eight he had understood the four Vedas. By the time he was twelve years of age, he had understood all branches of knowledge. And by sixteen he had written commentaries on those Vedanta which are considered to be his major works. Sharp as his intellect was, so was his heart very broad. Even at a young age Shankara, had become proficient in PrakritMagadhi and Sanskrit languages. At The first year of his age he had learnt Malayalam, his mother tongue, and Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas. During his second year he

was able to read and write in these languages. During his third year he was able to read and explain epics and mythology. Thus is it stated in some books written about him? Considered from an ordinary standpoint, one might feel that much of this may be an exaggeration. But instances of child prodigies endowed with a divine gift of brilliance are not uncommon.

AT GURUKULA

At the age of five Shankara's Upanayana was performed. By that time his father Shivaguru was dead. Only the mother had to bear the responsibility of bringing up the child pupil. Shankara was sent to the nearby Gurukula on the banks of river Poornaa. Under the guidance of Guru he studied the Vedas and its branches and also all other subjects. His brilliance brought credit to the entire Gurukula.

Shankara stayed in the Gurukula for eight years. By then he made such a thorough study of all the subjects that he had them at his finger-tips. More than any other subject, he was greatly interested in the Vedanta, the most advanced part of the Vedas, which is said to be the very core of spiritual truth. This is the highest and the culminating point of all knowledge. "By knowing which everything will be known, and that is what the Vedanta aims at," say the learned. Even at such a tender age Shankara was attracted towards that goal. This shows the greatness of his personality.

Shankaracharya paid a visit to Sharada Nilaya in Kashmir known as Sarvajna Peetha (the seat of the all-knowing). Those who are not all-knowing are not entitled to sit on it; no one could claim to be an expert in any religion or philosophy without sitting on it. Shankara did not wish to show himself off as Sarvajna. He felt that Sri Sharada Nilaya with Sarvajna Peetha was by itself a place worthy of visit by all devotees. Besides, Kashmir is the crown of Bharat. So he resolved to go there, lest the ancient Hindu religion should perish there.

There are four gates in four directions for entering Sharada Nilaya. Eminent scholars and philosophers had entered it from various directions and had established their scholarly merit but no one so far had adorned this chair of Sarvajna. Only who was from the South! Scholars of many group and communities were waiting for him in the premises of SreeSharada Nilaya. All were filled with a feeling of reverence to see him who was learned in both Jnana and Vijnana Yet the scholars in religious philosophies of Jaina, Bouddha, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyayas and Vaisheshika, confronted him at the time of his entry to the temple. Shankara defeated all of them in philosophical debate and then entered the temple through the Southern gate.

Acharya went to ascend Sarvajna Peetha. Sri Sharada, the presiding deity of all learning, herself set a test for him. Shankara passed this test also. After this the Goddess Herself blessed him, proclaiming his omniscience. So say the 'Shankara Vijayas'.

We can take this to be an allegory of all the struggles Shankara had to face in his life.

III. DISCIPLES AND PRACTICES

GURU FOR A MATCHLESS DISCIPLE

Shankara's main aim was to search for a Guru. His intense desire was to have as his Guru only a person who had realised Brahman. If this is the expectation of a disciple, is not that Guru most fortunate?. Shankara went towards North. He came to the banks of river Narmada after passing through many hermitages. There he found the hermitage of a Mahayogi. And this was Govinda Bhagavatpada. Seeing him in a state of deep samadhi, Shankara's heart was filled with satisfaction. His expectation had been fulfilled. What did Govinda Guru see when he woke to his conscious state? A boy-ascetic with a bright and radiant face, standing there with folded hands. The inner spiritual development was writ large on his face. After prostrating before the Guru, Shankara introduced himself. He requested that he may be accepted as a disciple. Govinda Yogi felt happy at the very first meeting as he had found the very type of person - the fittest disciple - for whom he had been waiting. Let alone teaching the pupil the mysterious secrets of the Vedanta, was it not a great pleasure for the Guru to find there a disciple who had not only digested the very philosophy of Vedanta but looked every inch the embodiment of that philosophy? Taking initiation from the Guru in a regular way to ascetic life, Shankara carried on his studies with all devotion.

For the boy Shankara who had obtained a marvellous success in comprehending the Advaita philosophy, "The spiritual Yoga" was very necessary. A person who at his will could forget himself and the world and enter the indescribable state of supreme peace! Such was the Guru. And the disciple was one who was qualified to attain that state. This was a preparatory step of Shankara in getting dynamic power which would facilitate the great work he was to do in future. Understanding the truth is different from experiencing it. Govinda Bhagavatpada enabled Shankara to attain this state of glorious experience. The wise who have attained this state call it the experience of the Infinite. This experience gave rich nourishment to Shankara's personality. The entire world appeared to be full of Brahman to him. After this the only thing that remained to be done was to communicate the bliss he had known and experienced to one and all through Vedanta. This work was assigned also to him by his Guru Govinda Bhagavatpada. He was asked to write, in the light of truth he had realised, commentaries on the three basic texts, namely the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras which are the spiritual treasure troves of Bharat. The Guru blessed him saying, "Whatever you wish, it shall be fulfilled by the power you have acquired from yogic practices." The next period of Shankara's life was devoted to the propagation of Vedanta.

PRACTICES

Among the disciples of Shankara the most prominent are four Padmapada, Sureshwara, Hastamalaka and Trotaka. Shankara nominated them as the chiefs of the four Vedanta centres he had established: Sureshwara for shringeri the South zone center, Padmapada for KalikaPeetha of a, Trotaka for Jyotih' peethaDwarak of Badari, and Hastamalaka for Govardhana Peetha of Jagannath. He told that at their lives should be dedicated to re-organise ancient Hindu Dharma.

Advaita Vedanta is based on śāstra ("scriptures"), yukti ("reason") and anubhava ("experiential knowledge"), and aided by karmas ("spiritual practices"). Starting from childhood, when learning has to start, the philosophy has to be a way of life. Shankara's primary objective was to understand and explain how moksha is achievable in this life, what it is means to be liberated, free and a Jivanmukta. His philosophical thesis was that jivanmukti is self-realization, the awareness of Oneness of Self and the Universal Spirit called Brahman.

Shankara considered the purity and steadiness of mind achieved in Yoga as an aid to gaining moksha knowledge, but such yogic state of mind cannot in itself give rise to such knowledge. To Shankara, that knowledge of Brahman springs only from inquiry into the teachings of the Upanishads. The method of yoga, encouraged in Shankara's teachings notes Michael Comans, includes withdrawal of mind from sense objects as in Patanjali's system, but it is not complete thought suppression, instead it is a "meditative exercise of withdrawal from the particular and identification with the universal, leading to contemplation of oneself as the most universal, namely, Consciousness". Shankara rejected those yoga system variations that suggest complete thought suppression leads to liberation, as well the view that the Shrutis teach liberation as something apart from the knowledge of the oneness of the Self. Knowledge alone and insights relating to true nature of things, taught Shankara, is what liberates. He placed great emphasis on the study of the Upanishads, emphasizing them as necessary and sufficient means to gain Self-liberating knowledge. Sankara also emphasized the need for and the role of *Guru* (Acharya, teacher) for such knowledge.

Few instances of Acharya's boundless mercy Though gifted with miraculous yogic powers, the Acharyas of old, never found leisure in their life time to write their autobiography. Self-effacement was the very spirit that governed their life and activities. And yet Sri AdiShankara was not averse to using his yogic powers for temporal uplift of the unfortunate, as for instance, in his permanently enriching a poor woman by instant composition of the Kanakadhara Stotram, a hymn in praise of Goddess Mahalakshmi, which made Goddess shower her bounty in the form of golden amalakas into the house. Such instances of Shankara's innate, boundless mercy abound in his short but effective life spans. The mysterious phenomenon of lotuses blossoming forth underneath Sri Sanandana's feet, as he strode across the swollen Ganga on hearing his Master's call out, even on others in the group scrambled towards the boatman, is well known. The leadership here, really would be demonstrative, yet remarkably silent and effective use of his yogic powers to emphasize the qualities of Sri Sanandana, who certainly deserved his Guru's grace.

IV. ADVAITA VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY OF SHANKARACHRYA

Advithaphilosophy is one version of Vedanta. Vedanta is nominally a school of Indian philosophy, although in reality it is a label for any hermeneutics that attempts to provide a consistent interpretation of the philosophy of the Upanishads or, more formally, the canonical summary of the Upanishads,

Badarayana's Brahma Sutra. Advaita is often translated as "non-dualism" though it literally means "non-secondness." Although Shankara is regarded as the promoter of Advaita Vedanta as a distinct school of Indian philosophy, the origins of this school predate Shankara. The existence of an Advaita tradition is acknowledged by Shankara in his commentaries. The names of Upanishadic teachers such as Yajñavalkya, Uddalaka, and Badarayana, the author of the Brahma Sutra, could be considered as representing the thoughts of early Advaita. The essential philosophy of Advaita is an idealist monism, and is considered to be presented first in the Upanisads and consolidated in the Brahma Sutra by this tradition. According to Advaita metaphysics, Brahman—the ultimate, transcendent and immanent God of the latter Vedas—appears as the world because of its creative energy (Maya). The world has no separate existence apart from Brahman. The experiencing self (Jiva) and the transcendental self of the Universe (Atman) are in reality identical (both are Brahman), though the individual self seems different as space within a container seems different from space as such. These cardinal doctrines are represented in the anonymous verse "Brahma Satyam JaganMithya; JivoBrahmaivanaaparaha" (Brahman is alone True, and this world of plurality is an error; the individual self is not different from Brahman). Plurality is experienced because of error in judgments (Mithya) and ignorance (Avidya). Knowledge of Brahman removes these errors and causes liberation from the cycle of transmigration and worldly bondage.

HISTORY OF ADVAITA VEDANTA

It is possible that an Advaita tradition existed in the early part of the first millennium C.E., as indicated by Shankara himself with his reference to tradition (*Sampradaya*). But the only two names that could have some historical certainty are Gaudapada and Govinda Bhagavadpada, mentioned as Shankara's teacher's teacher and the latter Shankara's teacher. The first complete Advaitic work is considered to be the *Mandukya Karika*, a commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, authored by Gaudapada. Shankara, as many scholars believe, lived in the eight century. His life, travel, and works, as we understand from the *digvijaya* texts are almost of a superhuman quality. Though he lived only for 32 years, Shankara's accomplishments included travelling from the south to the north of India, writing commentaries for the ten *Upanisads*, the cryptic *Brahma Sutra*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and authoring many other texts (though his authorship of only some is established), and founding four *pitras*, or centres of (Advaitic) excellence, with his pupils in charge. Shankara is supposed to have had four (prominent) pupils: Padmapada, Suresvara, Hastamalaka and Trotaka. Padmapada is said to be his earliest student. *Panchapadika*, by Padmapada, is a lucid commentary on Shankara's commentary on the first verses of the *Brahma Sutra*. Suresvara is supposed to have written *Naiṣkarmya Siddhi*, an independent treatise on *Advaita*. Mandana Mitra (eight century), an earlier adherent of the rival school of Bhatta Mimamsa, is responsible for a version of Advaita which focuses on the doctrine of '*Sphota*', a semantic theory held by the Indian philosopher of language, Bharṭṛhari. He also accepts to a greater extent the

joint importance of knowledge and works as a means to liberation when, for Shankara knowledge is the one and only means. Mandana Mitra's *Brahmasiddhi* is a significant work, which also marks a distinct form of Advaita. Two major sub-schools of Advaita Vedanta arose after Shankara: "*Bhamati*" and "*Vivarana*". The *Bhamati* School owes its name to Vachaspati Mitra's (ninth century) commentary on Shankara's *Brahma Sutra Bhaṣya*, while the *Vivarana* School is named after Prakasatman's (tenth century) commentary on Padmapada's *Panchapadika*, which itself is a commentary on Shankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*. The prominent names in the later Advaita tradition are Prakasatman (tenth century), Vimuktatman (tenth century), Sarvajñātman (tenth century), SriHara (twelfth century), Citsukha (twelfth century), Anandagiri (thirteenth century), Amalananda (thirteenth century), Vidyaranya (fourteenth century), Shankarananda (fourteenth century), Sadananda (fifteenth century), Prakshananda (sixteenth century), Narsimhashrama (sixteenth century), Madhusudhana Sarasvati (seventeenth century), Dharmaraja Advarindra (seventeenth century), Appaya Diksita (seventeenth century), Sadasiva Brahmendra (eighteenth century), Chandrashekhara Bharati (twentieth century), and Sacchidanandendra Saraswati (twentieth century). *Vivarana*, which is a commentary on Padmapada's *Panchapadika*, written by Vachaspati Mithra is a landmark work in the tradition. The *Khandanakhandakhadya* of Sri Hara, *Tattvapradipika* of Citsukha, *Pañcadasi* of Vidyaranya, *Vedantasara* of Sadananda, *Advaitasiddhi* of Madhusudana Sarasvati, and *Vedantaparibhasa* of Dharmaraja Advarindra are some of the landmark works representing later Advaita tradition. Throughout the eighteenth century and until the twenty-first century, there are many saints and philosophers whose tradition is rooted primarily or largely in Advaita philosophy. Prominent among the saints are Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Tapovanam, Swami Chinmayananda, and Swami Bodhananda. Among the philosophers, KC Bhattacharya and TMP Mahadevan have contributed a great deal to the tradition.

METAPHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHY

The classical Advaita philosophy of Shankara recognizes a unity in multiplicity, identity between individual and pure consciousness, and the experienced world as having no existence apart from Brahman. The major metaphysical concepts in Advaita Vedanta tradition, such as *Maya*, *Mithya* (error in judgment), *Vivarta* (illusion/whirlpool), have been subjected to a variety of interpretations. On some interpretations, Advaita Vedanta appears as a nihilistic philosophy that denounces the matters of the lived-world.

For classical Advaita Vedānta, Brahman is the fundamental reality underlying all objects and experiences. Brahman is explained as pure existence, pure consciousness and pure bliss. All forms of existence presuppose a knowing self. Brahman or pure consciousness underlies the knowing self. Consciousness according to the Advaita School, unlike the positions held by other Vedanta schools, is not a property of Brahman but its very nature. Brahman is also one without a second, all-pervading and the immediate awareness. This absolute Brahman is known as '*Nirguṇa* Brahman' or

Brahman "without qualities," but is usually simply called "Brahman." This Brahman is ever known to itself and constitutes the reality in all individuals selves, while the appearance of our empirical individuality is credited to 'Avidya' (ignorance) and 'Maya' (illusion). Brahman thus cannot be known as an individual object distinct from the individual self. However, it can be experienced indirectly in the natural world of experience as a personal God, known as 'Saguna Brahman', or Brahman with qualities. It is usually referred to as 'Ishvara' (the Lord). The appearance of plurality arises from a natural state of confusion or ignorance (*Avidya*), inherent in most biological entities. Given this natural state of ignorance, Advaita provisionally accepts the empirical reality of individual selves, mental ideas and physical objects as a cognitive construction of this natural state of ignorance. But from the absolute standpoint, none of these have independent existence but are founded on Brahman. From the standpoint of this fundamental reality, individual minds as well as physical objects are appearances and do not have abiding reality. Brahman appears as the manifold objects of experience because of its creative power, *Maya*. *Maya* is that which appears to be real at the time of experience but which does not have ultimate existence. It is dependent on pure consciousness. Brahman appears as the manifold world without undergoing an intrinsic change or modification. At no point of time does Brahman change into the world. The world is but 'Avivarta', a superimposition on Brahman. The world is neither totally real nor totally unreal. It is not totally unreal since it is experienced. It is not totally real since it is sublated by knowledge of Brahman. There are many examples given to illustrate the relation between the existence of the world and Brahman. The two famous examples are that of the space in a pot versus the space in the whole cosmos (undifferentiated in reality, though arbitrarily separated by the contingencies of the pot just as the world is in relation to Brahman), and the self-versus the reflection of the self (the reflection having no substantial existence apart from the self just as the objects of the world rely upon Brahman for substantiality). The existence of an individuated *jiva* and the world are without a beginning. We cannot say when they began, or what the first cause is. But both are with an end, which is knowledge of Brahman. According to classical Advaita Vedanta, the existence of the empirical world cannot be conceived without a creator who is all-knowing and all-powerful. The creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the world are overseen by *Ishvara*. *Ishvara* is the purest manifestation of Brahman. Brahman with the creative power of *Maya* is *Ishvara*. *Maya* has both individual (*vyasti*) and cosmic (*samasti*) aspects. The cosmic aspect belongs to one *Ishvara*, and the individual aspect, *Avidya*, belongs to many *Jivas*. But the difference is that *Ishvara* is not controlled by *Maya*, whereas the *Jiva* is overpowered by 'Avidya'. 'Maya' is responsible for the creation of the world. 'Avidya' is responsible for confounding the distinct existence between self and the not-self. With this confounding, 'Avidya' conceals Brahman and constructs the world. As a result the *Jiva* functions as a doer (*karta*) and enjoyer (*bhokta*) of a limited world. The classical picture may be contrasted with two sub-schools of Advaita Vedanta that arose after Shankara: *Bhamati* and *Vivarana*. The primary difference between these two sub-schools is based on the

different interpretations for 'Avidya' and 'Maya'. Shankara described 'Avidya' as beginningless. He considered that to search the origin of 'Avidya' it is a process founded on 'Avidya' and hence will be fruitless. But Shankara's disciples gave greater attention to this concept, and thus originated the two sub-schools. The *Bhamati* School owes its name to Vachaspati Mīśra's (ninth century) commentary on Shankara's *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, while the *Vivarana* School is named after Prakasatman's (tenth century) commentary on Padmapada's *Pañchapadika*, which itself is a commentary on Shankara's *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*. The major issue that distinguishes *Bhamati* and *Vivarana* schools is their position on the nature and locus of 'Avidya'. According to the "Bhamati" School, the *Jiva* is the locus and object of 'Avidya'. According to the "Vivarana" School, Brahman is the locus of 'Avidya'. The *Bhamati* School holds that Brahman can never be the locus of 'Avidya' but is the controller of it as *Ishvara*. Belonging to *Jiva, tula-avidya*, or individual ignorance performs two functions – veils Brahman, and projects (*viksepa*) a separate world. *Mula-avidya* ("root ignorance") is the universal ignorance that is equivalent to *Maya*, and is controlled by *Ishvara*. The *Vivarana* School holds that since Brahman alone exists, Brahman is the locus and object of *avidya*. With the help of epistemological discussions, the non-reality of the duality between Brahman and world is established. The *Vivarana* School responds to the question regarding Brahman's existence as both "pure consciousness" and "universal ignorance" by claiming that valid cognition (*prama*) presumes *avidya*, in the everyday world, whereas pure consciousness is the essential nature of Brahman.

SHANKARA'S VEDANTA AND MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

Shankara's Vedanta shows similarities with Mahayana Buddhism; opponents have even accused Shankara of being a "crypto-Buddhist," a qualification which is rejected by the Advaita Vedanta tradition, given the differences between these two schools. According to Shankara, a major difference between Advaita and Mahayana Buddhism are their views on Atman and Brahman. According to both Loy and Jayatilke, more differences can be discerned.

DIFFERENCES

Atman, According to Shankara, Hinduism believes in the existence of Atman, while Buddhism denies this. Shankara citing Katha Upanishad, asserted that the Hindu Upanishad starts with stating its objective as

... This is the investigation whether after the death of man the soul exists; some assert the soul exists; the soul does not exist, assert others." At the end, states Shankara, the same Upanishad concludes with the words, "It exists."

Buddhists and Lokayatas, wrote Shankara, assert that soul does not exist.

There are also differences in the understanding of what "liberation" means. Nirvana, a term more often used in Buddhism, is the liberating realization and acceptance that there is no Self (Anatman). Moksha, a term more common in

Hinduism, is liberating realization and acceptance of Self and Universal Soul, the consciousness of one's Oneness with all existence and understanding the whole universe as the Self.

SIMILARITIES

Despite AdiShankara's criticism of certain schools of Mahayana Buddhism, Shankara's philosophy shows strong similarities with the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy which he attacks. According to S.N. Dasgupta,

Shankara and his followers borrowed much of their dialectic form of criticism from the Buddhists. His Brahman was very much like the sunya of Nagarjuna. The debts of Shankara to the self-luminosity of the Vijnanavada Buddhism can hardly be overestimated. There seems to be much truth in the accusations against Shankara by Vijnana Bhikshu and others, that he was a hidden Buddhist himself. I am led to think that Shankara's philosophy is largely a compound of Vijnanavada and Sunyavada Buddhism with the Upanishad notion of the permanence of self-superadded.

According to Mudgal, Shankara's Advaita and the Buddhist Madhyamaka view of ultimate reality is compatible because they are both transcendental, indescribable, non-dual and only arrived at through a via negativa. Mudgal concludes therefore that

... the difference between Sunyavada (Mahayana) philosophy of Buddhism and Advaitaphilosophy of Hinduism may be a matter of emphasis, not of kind.

V. CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPORTANT SOF SHANKARACHARYA TO THE STUDY OF KERALA HISTORY

THE PATH THAT SHANKARA SHOWED

By that time the Acharya had probably gone round the whole of Bharat two times. He had travelled from Rameshwara and Kanyakumari of the South to Kashmir of the North, from Jagannath of the East to Dwaraka of the West, and had visited many places of pilgrimage. He got many temples renovated and inspired many to a righteous living.

Sri Shankaracharya showed an example how a man should live. The life should shine forth with pious qualities like knowledge, devotion and asceticism. He preached the way Advaita. That means everything in the world is Brahman and all are one. The world is constantly changing. These changes are neither important nor real. The reality that lies behind all these things and activities Brahman. One should develop an eye to see God everywhere and in everything. People who have that view, take the whole world for the mother-land, and treat all human beings as their brothers.

Shankara wrote philosophical books to help the people understand Hindu Dharma. Alongside he wrote mantras, hymns that nourish devotional feelings in people. The hymn 'Bhaja Govindam' composed by him has been a very popular song all over Bharat. "If you want to get rid of the miseries of life and fear- of death, pray to Govinda.

INFLUENCE ON HINDUISM

Shankara lived in the time of the so-called "Late classical Hinduism", which lasted from 650 till 1100 CE. This era was one of political instability that followed Gupta dynasty and King Harsha of the 7th century CE. It was a time of social and cultural change as the ideas of Buddhism, Jainism and various traditions within Hinduism were competing for members. Buddhism in particular had emerged as a powerful influence in India's spiritual traditions in the first 700 years of the 1st millennium CE. Shankara, and his contemporaries, made a significant contribution in understanding Buddhism and the ancient Vedic traditions, then transforming the extant ideas, particularly reforming the Vedanta tradition of Hinduism, making it India's most important tradition for more than a thousand years.

Shankara has an unparalleled status in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. He travelled all over India to help restore the study of the Vedas. His teachings and tradition form the basis of Smartism and have influenced Sant Mat lineages.

He introduced the Pañcāyatana form of worship, the simultaneous worship of five deities – Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva and Devi. Shankara explained that all deities were but different forms of the one Brahman, the invisible Supreme Being.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Hinduism, founding monasteries, edifying disciples, disputing opponents and engaging in philosophic activity that, in the eyes of Indian tradition, help revive "the orthodox idea of the unity of all beings" and Vedanta thought.

Prior to Shankara, views similar to his already existed, but did not occupy a dominant position within the Vedanta. Nakamura states that the early Vedanta scholars were from the upper classes of society, well-educated in traditional culture. They formed a social elite, "sharply distinguished from the general practitioners and theologians of Hinduism." Their teachings were "transmitted among a small number of selected intellectuals". Works of the early Vedanta schools do not contain references to Vishnu or Shiva. It was only after Shankara that "the theologians of the various sects of Hinduism utilized Vedanta philosophy to a greater or lesser degree to form the basis of their doctrines," while the Nath-tradition established by him, led "its theoretical influence upon the whole of Indian society became final and definitive.

MATHAS

(Vidyashankara temple) at Sringeri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri

Shankara is regarded as the founder of the Daśanāmi Sampradāya of Hindu monasticism and Śaṅmata of Smarta tradition. He unified the theistic sects into a common framework of Shanmata system. Advaita Vedanta is, at least in the west, primarily known as a philosophical system. But it is also a tradition of renunciation. Philosophy and renunciation are closely related:

Most of the notable authors in the advaita tradition were members of the sannyas tradition, and both sides of the tradition share the same values, attitudes and metaphysics.

Shankara, himself considered to be an incarnation of Shiva, established the Dashanami Sampradaya, organizing a section of the Ekadandimonks under an umbrella grouping of ten names. Several other Hindu monastic and Ekadandi traditions remained outside the organisation of the Dasanāmis.

AdiSankara organised the Hindu monks of these ten sects or names under four Maṭhas (Sanskrit: मठ) (monasteries), with the headquarters at Dvārakā in the West, Jagannatha Puri in the East, Sringeri in the South and Badrikashrama in the North. Each math was headed by one of his four main disciples, who each continues the Vedanta Sampradaya.

Yet, according to Pandey, these Mathas were not established by Shankara himself, but were originally ashrams established by Vibhāṇḍaka and his son Ṛṣyaśṅga. Shankara inherited the ashrams at Dvārakā and Sringeri, and shifted the ashram at Śṛngaverapura to Badarikāśrama, and the ashram at Angadeśa to JagannāthaPurī.

Monks of these ten orders differ in part in their beliefs and practices, and a section of them is not considered to be restricted to specific changes made by Shankara. While the dasanāmis associated with the Sankara maths follow the procedures enumerated by AdiSankara, some of these orders remained partly or fully independent in their belief and practices; and outside the official control of the Sankara maths.

According to Nakamura, these mathas contributed to the influence of Shankara, which was "due to institutional factors". The mathas which he built exist until today, and preserve the teachings and influence of Shankara, "while the writings of other scholars before him came to be forgotten with the passage of time".

CONTRIBUTIONS

Every one of the several schools which developed in the past Shankaraage, bears the influence of Sri Shankara's teachings in one form or other. His message boils down to the formula – natural growth, assimilating what is compatible and 'co-existence' with what is incompatible. Sankara left his Guru at the age of 12 and started traveling all over, which he did for the next 20 years. All his contributions were made during this time.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILOSOPHY

There was a very urgent need to make the scholars of the day understand the philosophical import of Vedas. Shankara was one of those great interpreters. His commentaries of Brahma Sutra, Bhagavad Gita and the 13 major Upanishads was one of the greatest happenings of Hindu Religion. The scholars, who were interpreting the Vedas like the blind describing an elephant, started getting the holistic view. They started realizing that apart from the worship of idols in temples and strict observance of rituals, there was another dazzling part of Sanathana Dharma. This was the philosophy of Advaita. Shankara interpreted Vedanta philosophy in a strictly non dual, monistic spirit. In essence this philosophy

involves in understanding that all that is present in the world is a monistic entity called "Brahman". What we see as different beings and different things is due to Maya. Shankara told them that it was extremely difficult to put this in to practice in real life. This involved in seeing beyond the veil of Maya. He explained to them the crux of Upanishads and Gita, which gave methods for such a realization.

Apart from his interpretations he also wrote several simple to understand books and verses to explain his philosophy. One of them is the Nirvana Shatkam, which clearly explains in the simply possible manner This great philosophy of Advaita:

CONTRIBUTIONS TO REFORM OF RELIGION

Shankara traveled the length and breadth of our country at least twice. Wherever he went, he visited the local temples and systematized the agama worship at each temple. In most of the temples he also wrote a hymn praising the God/Goddess. In some cases he also installed a Chakra, so that the activities of the temple go on without problems. These created an upsurge of faith in the common man and temples once again regained their great status. During his visit he met many great Vaisesikas of Kanada school, Sankhya followers of Kapila, logicians of the Gautama school, Mimamsakas following Jaimini, Buddhists of Sautantrika, Vaibhasika, Madhyamika and Yogachara schools and Jain scholars of Swetambara and Digambara sects. He argued with them for days and defeated them. Many of them became his disciples and started helping him in propagation of philosophy.

He also argued fanatic followers of Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Subrahmanya and Adhithya and convinced them that all gods are equally important. He established the practice of Pancha Vighraha Aradhana. These brought to an end the tussle that was going on within Hinduism and helped the religion grow.

He had several virtual wordy warfares with the Thantrics who were following Vamachara. He convinced them that the methods that they were following will not help them to attain salvation but helped them to get occult powers. This brought to an end the very common phenomenon of Bali (Sacrifice of humans) and also abhorrent methods of trying to please God by use of Alcoholic drinks and women.

CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE

Scholars are in complete agreement that he wrote 65 stothras in praise of Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Subramnya, holy rivers etc. These are mellifluous and musical pieces of art of the highest quality. Some of these stothras like DasaSloki, Nirvana Shatkam, Nirvana Dasakam, Bhavani Ashtakam and Mohamudgaram are finest poems telling us the essence of the philosophy of Advaita. Of them Moha Mudgara, otherwise known as Bhaja Govindam is possibly aimed at the common man. Those musical, yet very simple words of wisdom teach the common man the highest philosophy possible. Though all the prayers are well known, those which are specially known to most of the people are SoundaryaLahari, Shivananda Lahari, Annapurnashtakam, Manthra Mathruka Pushpa Mala, Ranganathashtakam, Panduranashtakam, Manthra Mathruka Pushpa mala etc.

VI. CONCLUSION

Sri Adi Shankaracharya belongs to the galaxy of such men. The history of Indian culture, in fact, is the stream of lives of such great souls. In order to recover from the crises—the religious, moral, that crop up ideological or political in the society from time to time, the country anxiously awaits the help of inspiring and glorious personalities. 788–820 CE: This is the mainstream scholarly opinion, births of Shankara in mid to late 8th century CE. These dates are based on records at the Śringeri Śāradā Pīṭha, which is the only matha to have maintained a relatively unbroken record of its Acharyas; starting with the third Acharya, one can with reasonable confidence date the others from the 8th century to the present. The Śringeri records state that Shankara was born in the 14th year of the reign of "Vikram Aditya. Thus, while considerable debate exists, the pre-Christian Era dates are usually discounted, and the most likely period for Shankara is during the 8th century CE.

Shankara was most likely born in the southern Indian state of Kerala, in a village named *Karati* or *Kalati* according to the oldest biographies, but some texts suggest the birthplace to be *Cidambaram*. His father died while Shankara was very young. Shankara's *supanayanam*, the initiation into student-life, had to be delayed due to the death of his father, and was then performed by his mother.

Life is made a way for others it is the main aim to fill the page of Indian history with physical and material information such as Dates, Place, Birth, Period of life etc. This is the vital spirit is still present all around us. Shankara's hagiography describes him as someone who was attracted to the life of *sannyasa* from early childhood. The biographies vary in their description of where he went, who he met and debated and many other details of his life most mention Shankara studying the Vedas, Upanishads and Brahma Sutra. His brilliance brought credit to the entire Gurukula from an incident that happened during his stay at the Gurukula. One can understand his deep concern for the poor and distressed persons.

Shankara's primary objective was to understand and explain how *moksha* is achievable in his life. Shankara's

philosophies and practice are mainly focused. This objective Shankara considered the purity and steadiness of mind achieved in yoga as an aid to gaining *moksha*. Knowledge of Brahman springs only from inquiry into the teaching of Upanishads. He placed great emphasis on the study of the Upanishads, emphasizing them as necessary and sufficient means to gain self-liberating knowledge.

Advaita philosophy is one of the major contributions of Shankara. Advaita philosophy is one version of Vedanta. In reality it is a label for any hermeneutics that attempts to provide a consistent interpretation of the Upanishads. Brahma Sutra Advaita is often translated as non-secondness. Shankara is regarded as the promoter of Advaita Vedanta. The existence of an Advaita tradition is acknowledged by Shankara in his commentaries.

Sri Shankaracharya showed an example how a man should live. The life should shine with 4th with pious qualities like knowledge, Devotion and Asceticism. He preached the way of Advaita. The one should develop an eye to see God everywhere and in everything. Shankara wrote his official book to help the people understand the Dharma.

Advaita is believed to have died aged 32 in 12 BCE at Kedarnath in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand. A Hindu pilgrimage site in the Himalayas. Some texts locate his death in alternate locations such as Kanchipuram and somewhere in the state of Kerala in 12 B.C.

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