

Sri Adi Shankaracharya



The permanent charm of the name of Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada, the founder of the Sringeri Mutt, lies undoubtedly in the Advaita philosophy he propounded. It is based on the Upanishads and augmented by his incomparable commentaries. He wrote for every one and for all time. The principles, which he formulated, systematized, preached and wrote about, know no limitations of time and place.

It cannot be denied that such relics of personal history as still survive of the great Acharya have their own value. It kindles our imagination to visualise him in flesh and blood. It establishes a certain personal rapport instead of a vague conception as an unknown figure of the past.

Shankara Vijayas

To those who are fortunate to study his valuable works, devotion and gratitude swell up spontaneously in their hearts. His flowing language, his lucid style, his stern logic, his balanced expression, his fearless exposition, his unshakable faith in the Vedas, and other manifold qualities of his works convey an idea of his greatness that no story can adequately convey. To those who are denied the immeasurable happiness of tasting the sweetness of his works, the stories of his earthly life do convey a glimpse of his many-sided personality.

Of the chief incidents in his life, there is not much variation among the several accounts entitled 'Shankara Vijayas'. Sri Shankara was born of Shivaguru and Aryamba at Kaladi in Kerala. He lost his father in the third year. He received Gayatri initiation in his fifth year. He made rapid strides in the acquisition of knowledge. In his eighth year he obtained with great difficulty the consent of his

mother and took up sanyasa. He started out in quest of a competent teacher. And eventually found Govinda Bhagavatpada (the disciple of Gaudapada) on the banks of the Narmada. He stayed with his Guru for a while. Under his command, he went to Kashi and Badri where he composed his unrivalled and unequalled Bhashyas (commentaries) on the Prasthantraya.

He went to meet Kumarila Bhatta, the champion of Karma Mimamsa. It was too late to hold any discussion with him, as he had commenced the penance of slow death as a means of expiation. As directed by Kumarila Bhatta, Shankaracharya went to meet his foremost disciple Viswarupa, also known as Mandana Mishra. The debate with Mishra, his eventual conversion to the views of Sri Shankara and his taking up Sanyasa, as Sureshwaracharya, are all well known.

Shankara then started on a tour of religious revival throughout India. He condemned un-Sastric practices, and re-established Vedic observances. He rid the society of many evils and restored the Vedic religion in its philosophical and practical aspects to its pristine purity and glory.

To safeguard the maintenance of this purity in the future, he established four Mutts in four directions. He entrusted them to the charge of his four foremost disciples. He ascended the Sarvajna Peetham in Kashmir. Before his 32nd year, he had completed this colossal work. It is beyond one's comprehension how he found time and energy for such accomplishment. In addition, he composed the great mass of literature that stands to his credit.

Unique Philosophy

He stands unique in the religious history of the world. As a philosopher he demonstrated that the religion of the Vedas was the only religion wide enough to embrace all faiths and philosophies. He had no quarrel with the believer who conceived of God as capable of manifestation in an image. Neither did he disagree with the abstract philosophers who could not conceive of God as the Personal Ruler of the universe. Sri Shankaracharya felt that the former's standpoint was as logical as the latter's.

He was able to perceive that there were many points of view, contradictory because no one had a full perspective of the Reality. He was prepared to say to both of them, 'You are right'. He felt that they were right so far as they went. He disagreed only when they presumed to say that their conception of what was right exhausted all.

He has made a place in his system for every variety of thought and practice. His system is like a huge edifice. It gives room for any kind of structure, architecture or ornamentation. He finds in the Vedic religion an infinite storehouse of thoughts and precepts suited to every possible temperament and stage of spiritual development.

The great Acharya realized in all its fullness the significance of such a religion. He was able to reconcile all the warring creeds and sects. The grateful world in its turn recognized him as a world-teacher or Jagadguru. Though his special forte was the enunciation of the Nameless and Formless Absolute, he was credited at the same time with the establishment of the six common forms of Hindu religious worship. This earned for him the title of Shanmata Sthapanacharya.

Without Classification

He was the most acute of philosophers. He was the most devoted of devotees. He preached the doctrine of the Self to a point he practically denied God any part in the regulation of our affairs. At the same time, he enunciated the seemingly contradictory doctrine that all our activities and its results depended on God and God alone.

His idea of renunciation was so high as to require us to throw off everything we call ours. He found nothing inconsistent in a king retaining his kingdom and attending to his duties, while being a renunciate in the heart. It is very difficult to understand, more so to appreciate, such a teacher. It was easy for him to descend to the level of others, place himself in their position and appreciate their attitude or conduct. However it is not so easy for others to rise to his level of supreme eminence. Before his breadth of vision, all things fade into insignificance.

Sri Shankaracharya as an intellectual phenomenon is as inscrutable as the Absolute, which he sought to explain to the sense-bound world in expressions of seeming limitation. As a devotee, he is equally elusive of any classification. He is a bhakta of Shiva, as much of Vishnu and in fact, of any other deity of the Hindu religion. He was a bhakta of the One who manifests in the all.

His intellectual grasp was unrivalled. His emotional piety was unequalled. He was the severest of logicians. At the same time, he was the most uncompromising upholder of "authority". In short, he defies categorisation.

Sri Shankara Digvijayam The Biography of Sri Adi Shankaracharya

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

These are the words of Sri Krishna spoken as an assurance given to humanity at times when there is a decline in adherence to Dharma, righteousness as enjoined in the scriptures. He declares that He descends to earth and ensures the sustenance of Dharma, annihilates the evil elements and protects those treading the path of morality. Such an incarnation was deemed necessary towards the end of the 8th century A.D, when a number of incorrect interpretations of the Vedic utterances were prevalent across the length and breadth of India.

The birth and life of Sri Adi Shankara Bhagavatpada, the beacon-light of Vedanta and reviver of the true import of Sanatana Dharma, substantiates his being regarded as an incarnation. The life of the Acharya is made known to us through the Shankara Digvijayam. While there are various Shankara Digvijayams in

existence, the most popular and traditional account of the events of the life of Bhagavatpada is attributed to the Madhaviya Shankara Digvijaya Sri Madhava, who later on became an ascetic and occupied the illustrious Sharada Peetham at Sringeri as the 12th Jagadguru with the name of Sri Vidyananda Sri Vidyananda, the illustrious Acharya who was the 12th Jagadguru of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham.

The popularity of Madhaviya Shankara Digvijayam is not just because of the splendid portrayal of the life of Sri Adi Shankara. The supreme erudition of the Sanskrit language, that Sri Madhava displays in every verse in poetically weaving the sketch of the great Acharya adds eloquence to the subject of the work.

This is a condensation of the Madhaviya Shankara Digvijayam highlighting those events in the life of our great Acharya that are remembered to this day with devotion and as a lesson of wisdom.

Sri Madhaviya Shankara Digvijayam

Vedic India in the 8th century A.D

More than thousand years had elapsed since The Buddha had appeared and preached his messages of compassion and the supremacy of ethics. He spoke of Dharma and Sangha but not of God. In the course of centuries following Buddha, the Buddhists evolved rigorous logic to defend their thought and rid themselves of what they thought as superstitions. Their logic did not feel necessity of God. But the masses among the Buddhists did not observe any of this reason or atheism. They knew Buddha and worshipped him as God. Buddhist Viharas were built in gigantic dimensions. Buddha's images made of costly metals and materials were installed and worshipped with great pomp and splendour. Swaying away from the pure Vedic injunctions but clinging on to their lower aspects, the spiritual life among the Buddhists was at a low ebb with the vigour and purity of Buddha having vanished. The masses had moved gradually towards abandoning the Vedic way of life, comprising of the various duties in accordance to the sacred tradition and the Ashrama - stages in life. There was a strong and urgent need for the revival of the Sanatana Dharma, lest it crumble to non-existence. Jaimini and Kumarila Bhatta awakened the ignorant people from their slumber of ignorance, and helped them to follow the Vedic rituals meticulously. The Vedic religion was codified into sutras of Purva Mimamsa, the Vedic rituals and sacrifices were revived and they gained a position of honour.

In the course of practice, the sacrifices and rituals were upheld as the ultimate goal and the true Vedic dictums were forgotten. Spiritual insight was conspicuous by its absence. At such a crucial juncture, Sri Adi Shankaracharya, respected

since across the world as the greatest philosopher and revered as an incarnation of Lord Sadashiva, walked the earth.

Divine Descent

The Madhaviya Shankara Vijayam, the most popular and widely accepted account of Sri Adi Shankara's life, describes the advent of Sri Adi Shankara thus - 'The One sitting under the banyan tree, Lord Dakshinamurti (Shiva), the Teacher of the Supreme Truth through the medium of silence, left his place of meditation. He is now moving about in the form of Shankaracharya, imparting his precious advice of knowledge to the world, which has been caught in the boundless dense forests of ignorance and is threatened seriously by the approaching flames of the forest fires of family bondage.' -

अज्ञानान्तर्गहनपतितान् आत्मविद्योपदेशैः

त्रातुम् लोकान् भवदवशिखातापपापच्यमानान् ।

मुक्त्वा मौनं वटविटपिनो मूलतो निष्पतन्ती

शंभोर्मूर्तिः चरति भुवने शंकराचार्यरूपा ॥

Shankara was born to Aryamba and Shivaguru, a Nambudri Brahmana who belonged to the Vedic branch of Krishna Yajur Veda. Shankara's birthplace was Kalady in Kerala, on the banks of the Poorna river. Kalady is situated a few miles from Tiru Shiva Perur (present-day Trichur), which contains the Shiva mound Vrischachala where Shivaguru and Aryamba prayed and were blessed with the divine child. This event of the birth of Sri Shankara in 788 A.D that marked the beginning of the revival of the Vedic system is described thus in the Madhaviya Shankara Vijayam - 'Just as the Divine Mother, Parvati begot Sri Subrahmanya, the virtuous Aryamba begot Sri Shankara on the auspicious Vaisaka sukla panchami (fifth day of the waxing moon during April-May) in the year 788 A.D, when the star attributed to Lord Shiva, Arudra was in ascendance with the Sun, Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in exaltation.' -

लग्नेशुभे शुभयुते सुषुवे कुमारं

श्री पार्वतीव सुखिनी शुभवीक्षिते च ।

जाया सती शिवगुरोः निजतुङ्ग संस्ते#

सूर्यकुजे रविसुते च गुरौचकेन्द्रे ॥

From Brahmacharya to Sanyasa

Shivaguru passed away when Shankara was yet a child. The mother Aryamba brought him up and performed his Upanayana according to tradition. The boy Shankara proved to be a prodigy and completed his Vedic education and Sanskrit studies very early in life. His faith in God even as a young brahmachari was intense, and events that unfolded began exposing his divine avatara. In one such occasion when He had gone to beg for alms, as a Brahmachari is ordained to, he came across a house with a lady in utter poverty. On seeing the young brahmachari, her heart melted, and expressing with great sorrow that she was unable to offer even a small quantity of food, with utmost humility, offered the only dried amalaka left in the house. The young Shankara, moved by the miserable condition of the large-hearted lady instantaneously composed a hymn on Lakshmi (known as Kanakadhara Stotram) praying for the relief of the family. Goddess Lakshmi instantaneously showered the house with the gold amalakas.

Once Sri Shankara's aging mother fell unconscious while returning from a bath at the river. Sri Shankara invoked the river and prayed that she change her course and flow near their home so as to facilitate his mother. The following morning, the people of Kalady were struck with awe when they found that the river indeed had changed its course, giving in to the young brahmachari's earnest appeal.

Sri Shankara felt the call of Sanyasa but Aryamba was unprepared to part with her only son, the solace of her widowhood. One day when Sri Shankara was bathing in the river Poorna, a crocodile caught his leg and started dragging him in. He appealed to his mother to give him permission to take Sanyasa conferring on him a Punarjanma (a new birth). Aryamba knew that she would have the satisfaction of at least having her son alive even if it were in the robes of a Sanyasin. On the other hand, if the crocodile does not free her son, she would still be consoled by the fact that her son would abandon his body as an ascetic. Still, trembling with fear, Aryamba consented to Sri Shankara's request and lo! The crocodile released its hold on Shankara. Shankara was now free to embrace Sanyasa and entrusted his mother into the care of his relatives. Aryamba, still grieving over Sri Shankara's decision, said that her consent in accordance with Shankara's request was only to taking Sanyasa but not to allow the relations to perform her obsequies. So, in order to pacify his mother, Sri Shankara made the following statement, as described in the Madhaviya Shankara Vijayam (Verse 5.71) -

अहन्यम्ब रात्रिसमये समयान्तरेवा

संचिन्तय स्ववशगाऽवशगाऽथवामाम् ।

एष्यामि तत्र समयं सकलं विहाय#

विश्वासमाप्नुहि मृतावपि संस्करिष्ये ॥

'Oh mother! When you think of me I will give up all my work and come to you, whether you think of me at day, night or in between them (Sandhya time, that occurs at sunrise and sunset), whether you are conscious, unconscious or burdened with sorrow. If you die, I will myself perform your last rites. You can believe me.'

Initiation and study under Sri Govinda Bhagavatpada

Shankara then left Kalady in search of a Guru. The Guru of all the Gurus, the Acharyas of all the Acharyas, Lord Parameshwara in human form, the young boy Shankara, despite having mastered all Sastras by then, resolved to seek Upadesham from a Guru and get his self acquired knowledge made wider, holy and pure by a spiritual teacher. He found his Guru on the banks of the river Narmada, in Govinda Bhagavatpada, disciple of the famous Gaudapada, the author of the famous Karika on Mandukya Upanishad.

Madhaviya Shankara Vijayam (Verse 5.91) describes Shankara's meeting Govinda Bhagavatpada in beautiful verses, rich in meaning:

तीरद्रुमागतमरुद्विगत श्रमः सन्
गोविन्दनाथवनमध्यतलं लुलोके ।
शंसन्ति यत्रतरवो वसतिं मुनीनां
शाखाभिरुज्ज्वल मृगाजिन वल्कलाभिः ॥

'The deer skin and the bark of wood hanging from the trees are the indications of the abode of sages. Sri Shankara went to the middle of this forest, enjoyed the cool breeze and felt relieved of the fatigue caused by his walking and saw the abode of the sage, Sri Govinda Bhagavatpada.'

Shankara praised the great sage recalling the latter's previous birth as Patanjali, portrayed thus in the text (Verses 96-97).

उरगपतिमुखात् अधीत्य साक्षात्
स्वयमवनेर्विवरं प्रविश्य येन ।
प्रकटितमचलातले सयोगं
जगदुपकारपरेण शब्द भाष्यम् ॥

'Having learnt all Vidyas from Adishesha in the nether world, you came to this world to give it the Yoga Sutras and Mahabhashyam (Bhashyam on Panini Sutras of grammar).

तमखिलगुणपूर्णम् व्यासपुत्रस्यशिष्यात्
अधिगत परमार्थम् गौडपादान्महर्षेः ।
अधिजिगमिषुरेष ब्रह्मसंस्थामहं त्वाम्
प्रसूमरमहिमानंप्रापमेकान्त भक्त्या ॥

'You have attained the highest spiritual realisation through the instruction received from the great Gaudapada, a disciple of Suka, the son of Vyasa. I salute thee, the repository of all virtues and have come praying for instruction in the truth of the Supreme Brahman.'

When Sri Shankara was thus praying, Sri Govinda Bhagavatpada deeply immersed in Samadhi, intuitively learnt even in that state about the greatness of the visitor, got out of his supreme consciousness and asked, 'Who are you?' To this, Shankara replied in terms indicative of his great spiritual attainment.

स्वामिन्नहं न पृथिवी न जलं न तेजो
स्पर्शनो न गगनं न तद्गुणावा ।
नापीन्द्रियाण्यपि तु विद्धि ततोऽवशिष्टो
यः केवलोऽस्ति परमः सशिवोऽहमस्मि ॥

To repeat Shankara's own words that are couched in ten verses (known as Dasa Shloki), each with a refrain 'only one remains, and that Shiva I am', the first and last verses are reproduced below.

न भूमिर्नतोयं न तेजोनवायुर्नखंनेन्द्रियं वा न तेषां समूहः
अनेकान्तिकस्वात् सुषुप्त्येक सिद्धिस्तेदेकोवशिष्टः शिवः केवलोऽहम् ।
न चैकं तदन्यद् द्वितीयं कृतः स्यात् नवा केवलत्वं न चाकेवलत्वम्#
न शून्यं न वाशून्यमद्वैकत्वात् कथं सर्ववेदान्त सिद्धं बवीमि ॥

'I am neither the earth nor water nor fire, nor air, nor sky, nor any other properties. I am not the senses and even the mind. I am Shiva the divisionless essence of consciousness.'

Hearing these words pregnant with the spirit of non-dualistic consciousness, the sage was delighted and replied, 'Through the power of Samadhi I see that you are the Lord Shiva descended on earth in human form

स प्राह शंकर स शंकर एव साक्षात्

Having said this, Sri Govinda Bhagavatpada stretched his legs outside the cave and showed his feet. Sri Shankara worshipped the Guru by performing Puja to his feet. By his conduct, Sri Shankara indicated to the world that the first duty of a disciple is to perform Puja to his Guru's feet. Sri Shankara pointed out that it is only the knowledge obtained from the Guru after service to him that can yield fruits and so he did humble service to the Guru. Highly pleased, Govinda Bhagavatpada imparted to Shankara the knowledge of Brahman through the four Mahavakyas (great Vedic sentences). The great Guru then taught Sri Shankara the Vedanta Sutras of Vyasa, the essence of Vedanta philosophy. Once, when the river Narmada was in spate, causing great discomfort to the people, Sri Shankara without disturbing the penance of his Guru, brought the river under control by uttering the Pranava (Aum). Before long, Sri Shankara completed his formal studies under the Guru. Sri Govinda Bhagavatpada now asked his gifted disciple to go to Varanasi, where all learned men converged and blessed Sri Shankara to bring out commentaries on the Brahma Sutras.

Sri Shankara at Varanasi

Sri Shankara reached Varanasi, had a dip in the holy Ganges, offered his prayers at the shrine of Sri Vishwanatha and stayed at the city for sometime. Just as pieces made of iron get attracted to a powerful magnet, those who were ripe enough to understand the subtle teachings of the Vedas were drawn towards Sri Shankara at Varanasi. Of these, the first disciple of Sri Shankara was an illustrious young brahmachari who was named Sanandana on initiation into Sanyasa.

One day when Shankara was going with his disciples to the Ganges for midday ablutions, he noticed an outcaste approaching them with a pack of four dogs. Shankara and his disciples asked him to keep out of their path. But the hunter raised an issue -

अन्नमथात् अन्नमयं अथवा चैतन्यमेवचैतन्यात् ।

द्विजवर दूरीकर्तुं वाञ्छसि किं ब्रूहि गच्छ गच्छेति ॥

The outcaste responded thus, 'This body comes has its source in the same material food and performs the same functions in the case of both a Brahmana and an outcast. If the question is addressed to the Atman, the witnessing consciousness, the Atman is the same in all unaffected, by anything that is of the body. How do differences such as 'This is a Brahmana, this is a chandala' arise in the non-dual experience? Is the sun changed in the least whether it's reflection is seen in a pot containing liquor or in the holy Ganges? Is the Akasha in a

golden pot different from the one in the mud pot? The one universal, unblemished spirit, is shining alike in all bodies ' is this not the truth?'

Sri Shankara was struck with the chandala's Atma Jnana and exclaimed that a person who sees the world as Atman only and whose mind is firmly established in that conviction is worthy of worship irrespective of whether he is a Brahmana or an outcaste by birth. He admitted, 'I am sure the pure consciousness shines alike in Mahavishnu as also in flies. All objective phenomena is false ' he who is ever established in this consciousness is my Guru, worthy of respect, be he an outcaste by birth. All objects presented to consciousness are false and unreal, what is inherent in all these is pure consciousness alone, and that pure consciousness is the 'I'. A man established in such an awareness is indeed a Guru to me.' This, Sri Shankara conveyed through his composition called Manisha Panchakam, a few verses of which are -

जाग्रस्वप्न सुषुप्तिषु स्फुटतरा या

संविदुज्जृम्भते या ब्रह्मादि पिपीलिकान्ततनुषु प्रोता जगत्साक्षिणी ।

सैवाहं न च दृश्यवस्त्विति दृढप्रज्ञापियस्यास्तिचेत्

चण्डालोस्तुसतु द्विजोस्तु गुरुरित्येषा मनीषामम ॥

Scarcely had he finished speaking when the outcaste vanished from the site and in his place Lord Shiva and four Vedas appeared. Moved by joy, awe and devotion, Shankara said in praise of Lord Shiva, the Ashtamurti.

'I am the servant when I am conscious of myself as the body. I am thy part when awareness of Jiva dawns on me and when Atman consciousness becomes established, I recognise myself as one with thee. Such is the teachings of the scriptures. By realising which all the dullness of ignorance within and without is eradicated; to contain which there is no receptacle; to burnish which there is no grinder; to dig which there is no mind; to attain which all the renouncing monks make strenuous efforts in solitude ' to that Being, the essence of all the Sastras, my salutations! The Sastras are of no avail unless accompanied by Guru's Grace; Grace is useless unless it generates awakening; and awakening is purposeless unless it gives the knowledge of the Supreme Truth. To that Supreme Truth who is not different from myself and who fills the understanding with wondrous rapture, my salutations!'

To that great Sanyasin who saluted thus with tears of devotion in his eyes, God Shiva said, 'You have realised My true being. My blessings rest on you and Vyasa alike. Vyasa edited the Vedas. He composed Brahma Sutras (aphorisms on the subject of Brahman). You have got a real understanding of the purport of the Vedas and should write a commentary on the Brahma Sutras, by which the false theories have to be refuted, both through reason and through scriptures. The commentary that you are going to produce will receive praise from exalted beings like Indra. You spread the Knowledge of Truth in the world and appoint competent disciples as guardians of the Vedic path in different parts of the

country. Having accomplished all these, you return to My state with the satisfaction of having fulfilled your mission.' After commissioning Shankara thus, Lord Shiva disappeared.

Sri Shankara's commences His unparalleled works

Thrilled by the experiences Shankara set his mind on the task ahead. Shankara left Kashi (Varanasi) joyfully after taking dips in all the holy waters in and around Kashi and started on his journey to Badri, which he thought was more conducive to carry out his mission ordained by lord Shiva. Reaching Badri he held discussions with the sages there and then, he wrote in his twelfth year his most profound commentary on Vedanta Sutras of Vyasa. It was during his stay in Varanasi that he wrote his commentaries on Gita, Upanishads and Brahma Sutras, which are the authorities on the Vedanta Sastras and are known as Prasthanatraya. The Bhashyas (commentaries) of Shankara are monumental works covering the import of the Vedic teachings and supplemented with clear reasoning and lucid exposition. The system of Vedanta, which Shankara propounded through these works, is what is known as Advaita or Non-dualism. After this, Sri Shankara returned to Varanasi, where pupils gathered round him to learn his exposition of Vedanta. At Varanasi the great Acharya surrounded by Sanandana and other disciples shone like the disk of sun amidst its brilliant rays. He also wrote commentaries on Sanatsujatiya, Nrisimhatapani, Vishnu Sahasranama and Lalitha Trishathi.

At Kashi Shankara commenced his next task namely to propagate his tenets as set out in his prasthanatraya Bhashyas. He taught his disciple Sanandana the commentaries in depth. Sanandana's devotion to study, austerity in life and capacity to understand the subtleties of philosophy endeared him to Shankara, at the same time generating jealousy in others. Sri Shankara decided to highlight to the world, Sanandana's exemplary devotion to the Guru, and so one day, he called Sanandana who was on the other bank of the Ganges to come immediately. Sanandana stepped on the waters of Ganges who brought out a lotus to support him wherever he placed his feet on her sacred waters. To the astonishment of the others, he reached safely and Shankara named him Padmapada (lotus footed).

Shankara's refutations of other philosophies

The Pashupatas whose doctrine was that Ishwara and Jiva were distinct and at the time of Moksha (Final emancipation), the qualities of Ishwara percolate into Jiva, challenged Shankara to disprove their doctrine. Shankara with the help of scriptural quotations and their proper interpretations, controverted their doctrine and answered that Moksha, if considered an event in time, has to have an end like all other events in time. He also argued 'If the inherent qualities of Ishwara should go into Jiva, the quality alone cannot enter. However if all the qualities enter the Jiva, then it means that Lord Pashupati has become the ignorant individual soul.' By such powerful arguments the pride of Pashupatas was curbed.

The great teacher was thus a terror to controversialists and was an object of adoration to others. His commentaries on the Prasthanatraya restored among the masses, the true understanding of the Atman, the all-pervasive Force, as

declared by the Upanishads. Madhaviya Shankara Vijayam portrays beautifully the battle which Shankara fought through his commentaries against the false arguments and theories that were as rampant as widely different, scattering the true unified concepts enshrined in the Vedas and Upanishads - 'The (significance of) Atman was about to be slaughtered by the Buddhists by their policy of Nihilism. However, Kanada the founder of Nyaya Vaiseshika system established the existence of the Atman, as a definite entity with the powers of knowing and willing. Kumarila Bhatta the founder of the philosophy of Vedic ritualism showed man the direction to reach his destination but made him a slave of Vedic ritualism. The Sankhyas saved put forth the doctrine of the lower and higher nature of the Supreme, namely Prakriti and Purusha. The Patanjalis brought forth their teachings on the controls of Prana. The materialistic Charvakas did not at all perceive the Atman and attributed everything to the Pancha Maha Bhutas (five great elements). It was only Sri Shankara who raised the Atman from such a miserable position to the status of the Supreme Being through his doctrine of the identity of the individual spirit with the Supreme Being.' Controversies raged but then, such controversies and attacks of critics only helped to highlight the excellence of his commentaries.

The meeting with Bhagavan Vyasa

Shankara's Bhashyas were put to severe test not only by the teachers of various schools of thought but also by the sage Vyasa himself. One day when Shankara on the banks of Ganges almost finished the day's class to his pupils, an old Brahmana appeared. When told that Shankara has established a doctrine of non-dualism through his commentaries on Brahma Sutras, the old Brahmana sought Shankara's explanation on the various Sutras, and entered into a long debate extending over a number of days. After eight days, it struck Padmapada that the Brahmana was none other than Vyasa, the very incarnation of Lord Vishnu and revealed this to Sri Shankara. Shankara prostrated before him and prayed for a candid opinion of his on the Bhashyas. Sri Vyasa pleased with the request pronounced that Shankara alone has known the real meaning of his sutras. Sri Vyasa then blessed Sri Shankara that with the help of the commentaries on Vedanta Sutras and many allied writings, he would be able to refute all opposing doctrines and thereby become famous in the world.

With words of joy, Vyasa rose to depart. Shankara said, 'I have nothing else to do. I have completed the commentaries, expounded them and refuted all hostile doctrines', and then expressed his desire to cast off his physical frame. Sage Vyasa said, 'No! You should not end your life now. There are many learned men, leaders of hostile schools of thought and you will have to defeat them, as otherwise the infant of aspiration for spiritual freedom that has taken birth from you will perish premature. The intensity of my joy on reading your commentary prompts me to give a boon. The creator had given you only eight years of life. The satisfaction you gave to Agastya and other sages by your learning won for you an extension of life by eight years. May you live for another sixteen years by the blessings of God Shiva! Your commentary will shine till the end of time.' Shankara prostrated before the sage Vyasa who then departed.

Sri Shankara and Kumarila Bhatta

After Vyasa left, Shankara started on a spiritual conquest of the whole land of Bharat. Starting on his journey, Shankara decided to go to Prayag with a view to win over Kumarila, the staunch upholder of the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas. Having reached Prayag, he came to know that Kumarila was about to enter into a fire, as an act of expiation for betraying his teacher from whom he had the tenets of Buddhism. Sri Shankara rushed to the place where Kumarila was, only to see him already standing in the oven of husk. Kumarila recognised Shankara, narrated to him his work against the Buddhists, his awareness about Sri Shankara's Bhashyas and his desire to write a Vartika (explanatory treatise) on his Bhashyas. Kumarila explained how he was not in a position to break his vow of expiation and therefore could not undertake the Vartika work. He further expressed his conviction about Sri Shankara being born to protect the doctrine of Advaita and how he had become sinless on seeing Sri Shankara.

Shankara replied thus, 'I recognise you as an incarnation of Skanda, the son of Shiva. Sin can never affect you. I can save you by extinguishing the fire and you may write the Vartika.' Kumarila who was a firm adherent of right conduct very politely declined the offer of saving him and instead requested for initiation into Brahma Vidya. He added that if Shankara could defeat Mandana Mishra, whose actual name was Vishwaroopa and famous as the great exponent of the ritualistic interpretation of the Vedas, it would clear all obstacles in the mission that Shankara had undertaken. Sri Shankara could then make Mandana his own disciple and get the Vartika written. Shankara then imparted to Kumarila the knowledge of Brahman, and Kumarila hearing the Upadesham of Shankara realised his oneness with Brahman, dispelling his sense of individuality. Shankara then proceeded to Mandana's place called Mahishmati, in present-day Bihar.

Shankara's debate with Mandana

Shankara entered Mandana's house and saw him cleaning the holy feet of Sages Vyasa and Jaimini, whom Mandana was able to bring there on account of his penance, for the conduct of a ceremony performed by him as per the Sastras. Mandana, who disliked Sanyasins, entered into a violent wordy duel with Shankara. The sages pacified Mandana and then he welcomed Sri Shankara's challenge along with the condition that the loser of the debate would become the disciple of the victor.

Mandana fixed the next day for the debate and requested Jaimini and Vyasa to be the judges. But they said that Mandana's wife Ubhaya Bharati, accepted as an incarnation of Goddess Saraswati shall judge the debate. The following day, Sri Shankara initiated the debate, announcing his proposition of the unity of all existence as follows:

'Brahman, the Existence-Conscious-Bliss Absolute (Sat-chit-ananda) is the one ultimate Truth. It is He who appears as the entire world owing to ignorance, just as a shell appears as silver. When the illusion gets dispelled, the silver dissolves into the substratum, the shell. Similarly, when ignorance is erased the whole world dissolves into its substratum Brahman, which is the same as Atman. This

is the supreme knowledge, as also Moksha (liberation from births and deaths); and the Upanishads are the authority for this proposition.'

Mandana made his proposition, emphasising the tenets of his faith thus: 'The non-Vedantic part of the Veda dealing with effects produced by Karma is the real authority; actions alone (Karma) constitute the steps leading to Moksha and embodied beings have to perform action till the end of their lives.'

Ubhaya Bharati put a garland of flowers on the neck of the two contestants, declaring that the person whose garland withers will be considered defeated. The debate went on for several days. Ubhaya Bharati accepted that the cogent arguments of Shankara had overcome the contentions of Mandana and gave her verdict subjecting Mandana to defeat. The flower wreath on Mandana's neck also faded. Mandana adopted Sanyasa in accordance with the wager. Ubhaya Bharati gave Bhiksha to both Sri Shankara and Mandana, indicating that her husband was now a Sanyasin.

Mandana, however, still had some questions regarding the aphorisms of Jaimini and their relation to the Absolute Truth, as propounded by Sri Shankara. When Sri Shankara clarified, Mandana prostrated and said, 'You are the nature of pure consciousness, yet for the sake of ignorant men you have assumed this human body. You have saved all with the single statement - Tat tvam asi, and explained the great soul indicated in the Upanishads, the crest-jewel of the Vedas, as indestructible and one without a second.' Praising thus, Mandana then surrendered himself at the feet of Sri Shankara.

आत्माम्बा इदमेक अग्रआसीत् ।
ब्रह्मवा इदं अग्र आसीत् एकमेव ।
सदेव सौम्य इदं अग्र आसीत् ।
एकमेव अद्वितीयं ब्रह्मय्य ।

The debate with Ubhaya Bharati

Ubhaya Bharati too praised Sri Shankara but then added 'You cannot claim complete success over my husband until I, his better half, have been defeated by you. Though you are an embodiment of divinity, I have a desire to debate with you.'

Ubhaya Bharati convinced Sri Shankara to agree to a debate. For seventeen days a protracted debate continued. Finding Sri Shankara invincible in Vedic lore, philosophies and other Sastras, Ubhaya Bharati struck on the idea of questioning him on Kama Sastra, the science and art of love between the sexes, knowing that Sri Shankara was a celibate from boyhood. Sri Shankara accepted the challenge but requested a month's time to resume the discussions.

Sri Shankara and his disciples, all masters of Yogic powers, traveled along the skies, and located a dead body, that of king Amaruka. Sri Shankara discussed with his disciples about the prospect of entering the King's body, study the effects of the forces of love by remaining a witness, and then re-enter his body which would have to be safeguarded by his disciples. Padmapada gave his full consent but quoted a precedent of a Yogi Matsyendra as a possible pit fall. Sri

Shankara met his arguments in his own superb manner: 'In the case of one who has realised even here that the self is without all contacts, and is the relationless eternally pure spirit, the commandments and prohibitions of the Sastras have no application. All fruits are non-existent for one who has realised the world as a mere appearance. A true knower is free from any sense of good and evil. So even if I indulge in the enjoyment of sex love, no evil will result from it. However in order that the world may not be misled by the action of a Sanyasin like me, I will gain the experience of sex life through the body of this dead Amaruka, which I am going to enliven by temporarily identifying myself with that body.'

Shankara then entered the body of Amaruka by yogic powers, and lived in the palace effecting able and just administration. He also gathered the knowledge of love. Meanwhile, the ministers of Amaruka concluding from the remarkably superior gait of the king apprehended that some noble soul had entered the King's body and ordered that all uncared for dead bodies in the kingdom be burnt. The expiry of the stipulated period was reminded by his disciples who came as musicians to the palace. Sri Shankara withdrew his subtle body from the body of the King. Even as Sri Shankara re-entered his body, the king's emissaries having found it unguarded had already set it on fire.

Sri Shankara immediately recited a hymn addressed to Lakshmi Narasimha (Lakshmi Narasimha Karavalamba Stotram). By the grace of Narasimha, the fire got extinguished and Sri Shankara emerged from the cave. He traveled to Mandana's house through the skies, was received reverentially by Mandana and Ubhaya Bharati with ecstasy and was offered a throne like seat. Ubhaya Bharati addressed him thus, 'You are that Sadashiva who is the lord of Brahma and of all the Devas and other beings, and also the master of all Vidyas. You took all the trouble to master the science of sex love just to conform to the ways of the world. That we have met with defeat at your hands is not a matter of shame for us, just like moon and stars do not go into disrepute when the sun suppresses their light. I must now go to my heavenly abode. Permit me.' Sri Shankara replied, 'I know you are Saraswati, the consort of Brahma and the sister of Shiva and you are of the nature of pure consciousness. I shall in future be instituting temples of worship for you in Rishyasringagiri (Sringeri) and other places. I beseech you, to manifest yourself in all those temples, receiving the adoration of devotees and bestowing boons on them.' Agreeing to do so she disappeared from the physical world.

Mandana became a follower of Shankara having extinguished all worldly desires and ambitions. Shankara imparted to him the Mahavakya 'Tat tvam asi' and gave him the name Sureshwara. Shankara having thus brought the celebrated Mandana into his own fold started again on his mission.

The Kapalika's request

A Kapalika, an observer of Tantra, performed austerities to get a boon from Shiva, which would enable him to attain to Kailasa with his human frame. Lord Shiva had declared that his desire would be fulfilled if he could perform a sacrifice offering in fire the head of a King or an all knowing person. The Kapalika approached Shankara, narrated to him his ambition and said, 'You are a man of renunciation without attachment to the body; you live only for the good of others. Sages like Dadhichi gladly gave to others their impermanent physical

body. Be gracious enough to give me your head.' So saying the Kapalika prostrated. Sri Shankara who was full of mercy to suppliants said, 'Gladly shall I give you my head. This body is perishable. If it perishes for the good of another, what greater glory there can be? But you should take away my head in absolute secrecy when my disciples are away and I shall sit in a lonely place for you to take off my head.'

Accordingly, the Kapalika came at the fixed time and Sri Shankara sat in intense meditation, ready to sacrifice his body. Madhava Vidyaranya brings out in superb verses, the picture of the sage at this juncture.

आसीनमुच्चीकृत पूर्वगात्रं सिद्धासने शेषितबोधमात्रम् ।
चिन्मात्रविन्यस्त हृषीकवर्ग समाधि विस्मारित विश्वसर्गम् ॥

'Sri Shankara withdrew his senses into the mind and the mind into the spirit. With his neck and back bone steady, his palms lying supine on the knees, his face calm, his eyes half open and fixed as though on the nose tip, he sat there in the state of the Supreme Bliss, completely oblivious of his surroundings.'

Just as the Kapalika was approaching the Acharya with his sword lifted up, the whole plot flashed in the mind of Padmapada owing to his deep meditation. Padmapada's whole personality flared up like a burning mass of fire. He had attained Siddhi in the Narasimha mantra. The consciousness of Narasimha took possession of him and he became an embodiment of ferocity, leapt into the sky, came down, caught hold of the Kapalika, and tore open his chest with his nails as Narasimha did to Hiranyakashipu. The other disciples hearing the sound and commotion, rushed to the place to find the Acharya in Samadhi and the corpse of Kapalika lying nearby. With the aspect of Narasimha in the form of Padmapada still roaring, Sri Shankara came out of Samadhi and saw before him the formidable Narasimha. Sri Shankara sang hymns to pacify Narasimha -

त्वमेव सर्गस्थितिहेतुरस्य त्वमेव नेता नृहरेऽखिलस्य ।
त्वमेव चिन्त्यो हृदयेऽनवर्यं त्वामेव चिन्मात्रमहं प्रपद्ये ॥

Sri Shankara also mentioned that the Kapalika had in fact been graced with freedom from rebirths by dying at the hands of the Lord. Padmapada was thus brought back to his normal state from the super-consciousness of Narasimha. Thus Sri Shankara had once again brought out Padmapada's austere devotion and had also indirectly paved way for the Kapalika's goodwill.

The coming of Hastamalaka

The Acharya continued his travels and visited holy places like Gokarna, Hari-Shankara (present-day Harihar where he sang eleven verses in praise of the combined form of Shiva and Vishnu), as well as Mookambika, the temple of great spiritual power where he stayed for several days adoring the Devi. One day he went to a village by name Sri Bali that was full of observers of Dharma. There, a Brahmin by name Prabhakara came to the Acharya with a young son. Prostrating before the Acharya he submitted how his young son seven years old was

behaving like an idiot, as though his mind is undeveloped. He does not play with other boys, even if others beat him he does not get annoyed, he cares not for food sometimes. He has not even learnt the alphabets. The early period of his life has gone in vain ' he lamented.

The Brahmana made the boy who was shining in appearance like a firebrand covered with ashes, to prostrate before Shankara but the boy continued to be in the prostrate position. The Acharya lifted him up and addressed the boy thus, 'Who are you? Why are you thus behaving like an inert being'? To this the boy replied in twelve verses expounding the doctrine of the spiritual self. These verses comprise what is famous as Hastamalakiyam, the truth having become as natural to him as an amla fruit (gooseberry) in the palm of one's palm. Shankara told the Brahmin that the boy knows the truth of the Atman by virtue of his practices in his past life, has no attachment to material objects, has no sense of 'I' ness with regard to the body, and it is best he does not stay with the Brahmana but follow him as his disciple. Shankara took him along as Hastamalaka, the third important disciple.

Sri Shankara at Sringagiri (Sringeri)

The great sage traveled to Sringagiri (Sringeri) where the sage Rishyasringa had for a long time meditated on the Supreme self. The place was inhabited by a large number of virtuous people who were hospitable and regular in performing Vedic Yagas. There, the Acharya expounded to the learned and receptive scholars his commentaries, the doctrine of unity of the self with Brahman and rid the people of their superstitions. At Sringeri he had a temple built as graceful as Indraloka, and installed therein an image of the Divine mother and instituted her forms of worship. Recalling Her assurance in Mandana's mansion the Acharya invoked the Divine mother to reside in Sringeri as Sharada. There she resides even to this day granting devotees their prayers.

या शारदाम्बेत्यभिधां वहन्ती कृतां प्रतिज्ञा प्रतिपालयन्ती ।

अद्यापि श्रृङ्गेरिपुरे वसन्ती प्रद्योततेऽभीष्टवरान् दिशन्ती ॥

At Sringeri a new disciple, Giri joined the Acharya. He was noted for his obedience, industry, righteousness, devotion to the service of the teacher whose requirements he anticipated and fulfilled; he could never do anything smacking of disrespect; will not sit listlessly before him, talk too much in his presence, walked always behind the Acharya never showing his back. The others took him to be a dull uninformed person and were indifferent to him. The Acharya knew his heart and waited to bring forth his greatness to others. One day, Giri was late in coming to the morning class. Others were restless and urged the Acharya to commence the class even without Giri. The Acharya out of his love for Giri awakened in him the knowledge of the Supreme. Giri came to the class dancing and uttering a great hymn in the metre known as Totaka. The devotion to the Guru is an aid in the ladder that helps a man in ascending to that high state of spiritual absorption. It was the grace of the Acharya that enabled Giri, one thought to be a fool, to compose a hymn full of wisdom and poetic skill. As this poem is in the Totaka metre, the Acharya called him Totakacharya. This poem brief but superbly beautiful and well reasoned is an introduction to the study of Vedanta and is known as Totakashtakam.

The Acharya continued his work at Sringeri, asked his four principal disciples to write treatises on Vedanta. Sureshwara wrote Naishkarmya Siddhi, an exegesis on two of Acharya's commentaries on Brihadaranyaka and Taittiriya Upanishads (Vartika). Padmapada composed his famous work on the Brahma sutra bhashyas of the Acharya while Ananda Giri (Totaka) and other disciples produced works full of spiritual fervour.

Shankara's boon to Aryamba

During this time the Acharya had an intuition that his mother was passing through her last days and informed his disciples. The great Siddha that Sri Shankara was, he transported himself to Kaladi in no time. On seeing the worn out condition of his mother he prostrated before her. Aryamba was freed from all distress on seeing him. In spite of his being a Sanyasin, known for non-attachment, he became tender in his heart on seeing his mother. On Aryamba's request about the knowledge of the Supreme, Sri Shankara began to instruct her on the Impersonal Brahman which however she could not absorb. Then he recited a hymn on Shiva, which brought in the emissaries of Shiva with tridents and the rest. The mother appeared frightened. Then he recited a hymn on Vishnu on hearing which she saw the radiant form of Pure Consciousness within. Aryamba left her mortal coil with her mind absorbed in the Lord. When the Acharya called his neighbours and former relatives for help in cremation, they scorned at him thus, 'O Sanyasin, what rights do you have to perform such rites?' They stood adamant and refused even to give fire to cremate the body. Unperturbed by their stand, the Acharya himself generated fire out of his own right hand and completed the cremation. Then he cursed the people of the place, 'May you become incompetent to study the Vedas! May no Sanyasin visit your place for bhiksha! May you cremate your dead bodies in your own house compounds!'

After the Acharya had conferred the eternal state of Vaikunta on his mother he traveled through several places spreading his doctrine of oneness.

Padmapada's Panchapadika and his devotion

Padmapada who had completed the exegesis as commanded by the Acharya went on a long pilgrimage in the North and the South. At Srirangam, he left his manuscripts with his uncle. Returning from Rameshwaram, he was shocked to be told by his uncle that his manuscripts were lost in a fire. Downhearted, he headed towards the Acharya who was in Kerala and narrated his tale of woe. The Acharya comforted his disciple with sweet and enlightening words, 'None can overcome the effects of Karma. I had foreseen these things and spoken to Sureshwara. While we were in Sringeri you had read out to me five chapters of your work. I remember it and I shall now dictate it and you may take it down.' Padmapada took down the whole book as dictated and on completing it danced in joy. Thus Padmapada's work on the Brahma Sutra Bhashyas of Sri Shankara came to be known as Panchapadika.

The Acharya continued his travels winning in argument over various scholars including Jains, Madhyamikas, Lingayats and followers of Bhatta Bhaskara. Some of them took to violent physical means, to put down which King Sudhanva with his army fought them. In his further triumphant tours he went to Karmapura

where he won victories over Navagupta, a leading thinker of the Shakta School. But cunningly he followed Sri Shankara pretending to be a disciple and then used black magic to cause injury to the Acharya. The Acharya suffered physically but warded off all medical remedies insisted upon by his disciples. At last, by the grace of Lord Shiva, the Ashwini devas appeared and declared that the disease has been caused by black magic and will not respond to treatment. Padmapada was terribly angry on knowing this and by his mantra Shakti transferred the disease to Navagupta himself, thus displaying his devotion yet again.

The four Amnaya Mutts

Shankara consolidated his work by establishing in the four directions, four Mutts called Amnaya Mutts to sustain and foster the sacred tradition of Sanatana Dharma. Keeping in mind that the Mutts should serve as places of spiritual wisdom and peace for all seekers of the Truth, Sri Shankara chose spots bountiful with natural splendour and serenity. Sri Shankara chose Puri in the East and Dwaraka in the West, both being located on the shores of the sea. The Acharya also chose Badrinath in the North and Sringeri in the South for the natural aura that these places had, owing to the towering scenic mountains and at both places.

Sri Shankara assigned one Veda for each of the Mutts, signifying that each Mutt would play a significant role in taking efforts to sustain and propagate that particular Veda. Thus Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharvana Veda were assigned to Puri, Sringeri, Dwaraka and Badrinath Mutts respectively. Sri Shankara also nominated his four chief disciples, one to each of these Mutts. He assigned Sureshwara to Sringeri, Padmapada to Dwaraka, Hastamalaka to Puri and Totaka to Badri. That all these Mutts function to this day shows the vigour of the movement started by Shankara for the propagation of Advaita Vedanta and Sanatana Dharma as a whole.

The Amnaya Peethams

Of the large number of disciples who had the rare and inestimable privilege of serving the great Acharya Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada, four stand out prominent. Each one of them was unrivalled in his own way: Padmapada for intense devotion, Totaka for exemplary service, Hastamalaka for supreme self-realisation and Sureshwara for deep learning

It is well-known that Jagadguru Sri Adi Shankaracharya established four Maths in the four corners of India for the sustenance and propagation of Sanathana Dharma in the country. Each of these Amnaya Peethams had their divinities, tirthas, sampradaya, so on all of the details of which are given below.

The four disciples of Sri Adi Shankaracharya were later on installed as Acharyas of the four Maths by Sri Adi Shankaracharya himself as follows.

1. [Sri Hastamalakacharya](#) as the Acharya of the Govardhana Math in the East.
2. [Sri Sureshwaracharya](#) as the Acharya of Sringeri Sharada Peetham in the South.
3. [Sri Padmapadacharya](#) as the Acharya of the Dwaraka Math in the West.
4. [Sri Totakacharya](#) as the Acharya of Jyotir Math in the North.

The fact that all these Maths function to this day shows the vigour of the movement started by Shankara for the propagation of Advaita Vedanta and Sanatana Dharma as a whole.

The Amnaya Peethams

	East	South	West	North
Name of the Peetham	Govardhana Math	Sringeri Math	Kalika Math	Jyotir Math
Place of Location	Puri (Orissa)	Sringeri (Karnataka)	Dwaraka (Gujarat)	Badrikashrama (Uttaranchal)
Divinities	Jagannatha (Purushottama, Shakti-Vrsala Vimala)	Malahanikara Linga, Varaha, Shakti-Sharada	Siddheshwara Shakti-Bhadra Kali	Narayana Shakti-Purnagiri
Tirtha	Mahodadhi (Bay of Bengal)	River Tungabhadra	River Gomati	River Alakananda
Veda	Rig Veda	Yajur Veda	Sama Veda	Atharva Veda
Sampradaya	Bhogavala	Bhurivala	Kitavala	Nandavala
Mahavakya	प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म (Prajnanam Brahma)	अहं ब्रह्मास्मि (Aham Brahmasmi)	तत्त्वमसि (Tattvamasi)	अयमात्मा ब्रह्म (Ayamatma Brahma)
Titles to the Pontifical Seat	Aranya, Vana	All the titles, particularly, Saraswati, Puri, Bharati, Aranya, Tirtha, Giri, Ashrama	Tirtha, Ashrama	Giri, Parvata, Sagara
First Acharya of the Peetham	Sri Hastamalakacharya	Sri Sureshwaracharya	Sri Padmapadacharya	Sri Totakacharya

SHANKARAS PRIMARY DISCIPLES

Sri Hastamalakacharya

In the village called Sribali there was a learned Brahmana named Prabhakara. He was very rich. But neither his learning nor his affluence gave him any pleasure as his only son appeared to be an idiot. The boy was as lovely as Cupid, as lustrous as the sun, pleasant like the moon and patient like the earth. But he behaved like an idiot. It was with great difficulty that his Upanayana was performed. He never played, never talked, never got angry and never studied.

When Sri Shankara chanced to go to that village, the boy was about 13 years of age. The anxious father took his son to Shankara to see if anything could be done for him. In his first glance, the Acharya realised the greatness of the boy. He asked him who he was. The boy answered the question in chaste Sanskrit verse, expounding the real nature of the Self.

As the boy was not suited to the life of a householder, the Acharya accepted him as his disciple and gave him Sanyasa. As the essence of truth had been so lucidly explained by the boy, like a gooseberry in one's palm, he was named Hastamalaka. His extempore verses had the rare distinction of being commented on by the illustrious Acharya himself.

Though he attended the classes held by the Acharya, it was more to verify his own experience than to gain proficiency in dialectics. It was suggested to the Acharya that, by reason of his realisation of the Self, Hastamalaka was pre-eminently competent to write a Vartika(Sanskrit commentary in verse) on the Sutra Bhashya. The Acharya negated the suggestion by pointing out that Hastamalaka's plane of consciousness always dwelt on the supernal Self. He would not stoop to write books. When the Acharya placed him on a higher level that those engaged in dialectics, the disciples were naturally curious to know how one who was not known to have devoted any attention to learning the sastras could be proficient in realisation. Sri Shankara explained the phenomenon.

On the bank of the Jamuna, a great sage was seated in contemplation when some brahmin girls came there to bathe. One of them had a baby two years old. She placed him by the side of the sage and asked him to take care of it till she bathed. The baby slowly crawled into the river and was drowned. The mother was aghast.

She took out the dead body of the child and wept bitterly before the sage. The sage was quite oblivious of the happenings awoke from his samadhi. He was moved by pity for the grieving mother. By the powers of his yoga, he left his body and entered the body of the child. The dead child sprang into life. That child was Hastamalaka. This explained how he came to have such an all-comprehensive knowledge without any apparent instruction.

Sri Sureshwaracharya

विश्वं मायामयत्वेन रूपितं यत्प्रबोधतः ।
विश्वं च यत्स्वरूपं तं वार्तिकाचार्यमाश्रये ॥

A lucid gloss He wrote upon the Truth
That the illusion which pervades the world
Is embedded nowhere but in the mind--
Sureshwaracharya, Him I salute!

Sri Sureshwaracharya was the most talented disciple of Shankara Bhagavatpada, who placed him as the chief of Sringeri Sharada Peetham in the south.

Though Sri Sureshwara was a disciple of Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada, the fact remains that he was elder to the preceptor, contrary to the normal age relation that exists between a preceptor and his disciple. The relation between Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada and Sri Sureshwara was unique. In his character, he combined the humility of a disciple belonging to the ancient Indian spiritual tradition and the robust independence of a free thinker.

It is an interesting fact that Sri Sureshwaracharya (then known as Mandana Mishra) became a disciple of Sri Bhagavatpada after a defeat in a polemical combat of wits. Yet it was a very successful failure. He took the defeat in all humility. He became a most sincere and true disciple.

The influence, which emanated from the personality of Sri Sureshwaracharya was ineffable like music and beauty. Its claim upon others was great because of its revelation of a spontaneous self-giving. This is the very reason why the Sringeri Sharada Mutt at which he presided, gathered an ever-growing loyalty of the loftiest kind. Simplicity was the essence of his life at Sringeri where he lived for a long time.

Even before becoming a disciple, he was in the centre of the world of Vedic, traditional scholarship of his times. It is however not the revelation of his great scholarship, but the great challenge he faced, the course he opted, of flowing generosity and atonement, and the prophetic understanding he displayed that made him great as a person.

The Vedic Tradition

The Vedic tradition is continued in the two Mimamsa schools. Poorva Mimamsa along with the Uttara Mimamsa or Vedanta, is only with the direct continuation of the Vedic culture. The Poorva Mimamsa system took the ritualistic tradition of the Vedic culture. It helped a methodical interpretation of the otherwise complicated Vedic injunctions about rituals. It also supplied a philosophical justification for the beliefs which formed the source and authority for the rituals.

Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada heard of Kumarila Bhatta, the leader of one of the two branches of the Poorva Mimamsa school of philosophy. Kumarila Bhatta's acceptance of the Vedic authority was total. He did not care to admit the existence of God. The great powers of argument of Kumarila Bhatta and the stories of his miraculous deeds in vanquishing well-known Buddhist scholars to reestablish the authority of the Vedas were almost known to everybody in the land. According to Kumarila Bhatta, the Vedas are eternal like the world.

When Sri Bhagavatpada heard of Kumarila Bhatta, he was immolating himself in a fire of husk as an act of expiation. Sri Bhagavatpada asked the great Vedic scholar to stop the act of immolation, and come out to argue with him because the Poorva Mimamsa attitude to the existence of God was not correct. It was so even according to the authority of the Vedas which the Poorva Mimamsa scholars accepted as supreme. Kumarila Bhatta explained that in deference to Vedic injunctions, for which mission his life was devoted, the act of immolation should not be stopped in the middle. He had to purify himself according to his own convictions.

Mandana Mishra

Kumarila Bhatta however requested Sri Bhagavatpada to go to Mahishmatipura to meet his disciple Mandana Mishra and win him over to Advaita. He also added that the superiority of the Advaita doctrine will be revealed to the world if Mandana Mishra gets defeated in a combat of logic.

Kumarila Bhatta described Mandana Mishra as the dearest of his disciples, and a great scholar in all branches of learning. Sri Bhagavatpada blessed Kumarila Bhatta and accepted advice for the debate with Mandana Mishra.

Contrary to the normal course of a disciple seeking a guru to earn his grace by devotion, loyalty and service, it was Sri Bhagavatpada who went to Mahishmatipura in search of a disciple.

The Magadha empire, with Pataliputra as its capital, stretched far and wide in those days. Mahishmatipura was an important town in the extensive Magadhan empire.

Sri Bhagavatpada reached the city of Mahishmatipura with his followers. The passers by in the street gave him a graphic description of the place of Mandana Mishra.

It was like a Royal Palace because of Mandana Mishra's affluence. His father Hima Mitra was an honoured pandit in the court of the Kashmir kings. He belonged to Kannauj Gowda Brahmin community. Mandana Mishra received the best of traditional training at the feet of Kumarila Bhatta and perfected his

scholarship. He settled at Mahishmatipura as a house-holder with his wife Ubhaya Bharati. She was the daughter of learned and pious Vishnu Mitra living on the banks of Sonabhadra river.

Mandana Mishra and Ubhaya Bharati were an ideal couple, each of them equal to the other in all branches of learning, ethical character and strict observation of Vedic injunctions. Ubhaya Bharati was supposed to be an avatara of goddess of learning, Saraswati Devi, as Mandana Mishra was supposed to be an avatara of Brahma. His scholarship and the reverence in which he was held earned him the honorific epithet of 'Mandana Mishra'. His real name was Vishwarupa.

When Sri Bhagavatpada reached the mansion of Mandana Mishra, it was found bolted from inside. Sri Bhagavatpada, as a Sanyasin, had no right of admission into a house found closed. Such are the rules of Smriti, which govern the daily conduct of traditional Sanyasis. Sri Bhagavatpada pondered a little. He had firmly decided to redeem Mandana Mishra from the rigidity of dogmatic ritualism. Therefore he felt like using his extraordinary Yogic powers. Great Yogi and Siddha Purusha as he was, Sri Bhagavatpada entered the house through the closed door.

Unwelcome Sanyasi

Mandana Mishra had an innate dislike for Sanyasis because in his staunch belief of ritualism, he felt that only those who wished to escape the rigours of Vedic injunctions found a refuge in the Sanyasa ashrama. Moreover when Sri Bhagavatpada entered the house, it was a time when the presence of a Sanyasin was most unwelcome. Mandana Mishra was performing a shraddha and the Brahmins were about to be fed. The entry of Sri Bhagavatpada at such a time caused a disturbance and Mandana Mishra was infuriated.

Hot and harsh exchanges followed. The Brahmins found the situation going out of control. They wished to set it right. They suggested to Mandana Mishra to invite Sri Bhagavatpada to participate in the shraddha by occupying Vishnu Sthana. Staunch ritualist as he was, Mandana Mishra was fully bent upon saving the ritual. He invited Sri Bhagavatpada accordingly.

But Sri Bhagavatpada declined to accept the invitation. He explained to Mandana Mishra that he did not come for bhiksha but for a polemical debate. Mandana Mishra who had never met his match in learning before was willing for a dialectical fight. He gladly welcomed it. The shraddha was allowed to be finished as ordained. The debate was fixed for the next day.

The Eight-day Debate

They met the next day after daily ablutions normal to their respective ashramas. Ubhaya Bharati, the wife of Mandana Mishra, agreed to serve as the judge as they both sought her help expressing confidence in her impartiality and appreciation for her wisdom and scholarship. She was the only scholar available who could follow the disputants in their flight to sublime heights.

As Ubhaya Bharati was a housewife, with her daily chores, which included the preparation of daily food for the disputants, she gave them each a garland of flowers. She said that the person whose garland faded away first was the person

vanquished. To make the dispute more purposeful, they agreed to a wager. The person worsted in the debate should become the disciple and accept the ashrama, way of life of the victor.

They were giants of erudition, both of them supreme in the knowledge of the Vedas. The discussion continued daily without hindrance to their daily rituals, rest and other exigencies.

From day to day, Mandana Mishra saw new light in the arguments of Sri Bhagavatpada. He was losing faith in his own past convictions. His faith in Bhagavatpada was growing to a stimulating climax. On the eighth and the last day of the discussion, Mandana Mishra was fully convinced of the superiority of the doctrine of Sri Bhagavatpada. As Sri Bhagavatpada said, 'Once the conditioning factor (the nescience) vanishes, the soul becomes one with the Brahman.' When Mandana Mishra realised the limitations of his own standpoint and the Truth of Sri Bhagavatpada's view, he found that his flower garland had faded. He fell prostrate before Sri Bhagavatpada, touched his feet and said in a trembling voice, 'O Teacher of the World, pardon me and my audacity. I have offended you for these eight days. Hold your fury, O Jagadguru! and shower your grace on this humble servant.'

Ubhaya Bharati disappeared from the mortal vision and regained her celestial form as Saraswati Devi, the Goddess of Knowledge. She however granted a boon to Sri Bhagavatpada that she would be immanent at a place where he may invoke her presence. Mandana Mishra gave all his earthly belongings to the needy at the last Vedic ritual which he performed before he took sanyasa at the hands of Sri Jagadguru Shankara Bhagavatpada.

Sri Bhagavatpada gave his disciple the name of Sri Sureshwaracharya. He took him on his march from place to place. Soon Sri Bhagavatpada reached Sringeri where he invoked the presence of Goddess of Knowledge. He installed Sri Sureshwaracharya as head of the Mutt.

Sri Sureshwaracharya wrote elucidating metrical commentaries (Vartikas) on Taittiriya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishadic Bhashyas of Sri Bhagavatpada. Sri Sureshwaracharya also wrote commentaries on the Dakshinamoorti Stotra and Panchikarana of Sri Bhagavatpada. The commentary on Dakshinamoorti Stotra became famous as the Manasollasa Vartika. He also wrote a succinct monograph presenting an analytical picture of the fundamental teachings of Sri Bhagavatpada. This book became well-known as Naishkarmya Siddhi. Sri Sureshwaracharya also wrote a commentary called Balakrida on the Smriti of Yajnavalkya. Next to Sri Bhagavatpada, he stands as the foremost author in the field of Advaita.

Sri Padmapadacharya

In the land of the Cholas, on the banks of the Kaveri, there was a devout Brahmana called Vimala. He was blessed with a boy. While in his teens, he mastered all the Vedas and showed an extreme distaste for worldly life. He earnestly hoped for a guru who would lead him across the ocean of samsara. Refusing to marry, he travelled with the purpose of finding such a guru. Fortunately for him, Sri Shankara was staying at Kashi, expounding his inimitable Bhashyas. The boy Padmapada resplendent with Brahma-Tejas ran to

him and threw himself at his feet. The Acharya perceived the learning, courage and earnestness of the newcomer. He accepted him as his disciple. He initiated him into the Sanyasa Ashrama under the name of Sanandana.

He was first of Shankara's disciples. He was first in more than one sense. His unrivalled devotion so pleased the teacher that, in appreciation of his earnest search for truth, the Acharya took the trouble of explaining to him his works thrice. This partially engendered in the other disciples a feeling of misgiving, which the Acharya immediately took care to eradicate.

When Sanandana and a few other disciples were once on the other bank of the river Ganga, the Acharya called them to come to him. No boat was available. But Sanandana, secure in faith and grace of the Acharya, stepped on the water and began to walk. Struck with his devotion, the divine Ganga showed her admiration by placing lotuses on the water to support his feet at every step. To the astonishment of all, he unconcernedly crossed over to the other bank where he was duly rewarded by the embrace of the Acharya. It was a mark of affection, which no other disciple had ever received. In memory of this incident, he was henceforth known as Padmapada at the desire of the Acharya.

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There is a famous incident of his saving the life of the Acharya. A devotee of Bhairava, a Kapalika took advantage of the nobility of the Acharya. He begged him to give his head as an offering to the terrible Bhairava. The Acharya willingly consented. But he warned that his head must be taken without the knowledge of his disciples, especially of Padmapada.

When the disciples had all gone to have their bath in the river, the Kapalika came. He found the Acharya in Samadhi. He raised his sword to smite and sever the head. Unfortunately for him, Padmapada intuitively divined the nefarious intention of the Kapalika. By force of his meditation on Lord Narasimha, he assumed the latter's form. He pounced upon the Kapalika and tore him to pieces. Having done this, he sent up a terrible roar of triumph.

His co-disciples rushed to the spot and the Acharya rose from his Samadhi. He was as much astonished as the others. With great difficulty, he made Padmapada resume his form. They were all surprised to learn that in his Purvashrama, Padmapada was a staunch devotee of Nrisimha. He had contemplated on Narasimha while doing penance on the hills of Ahobila.

Padmapada also related an incident. A hunter asked him what he was doing in the forest. When told that he was seeking Narasimha, the hunter said that there was no such being as he knew every inch of the forest. Padmapada insisted that indeed there was such a being and described minutely the form of man-lion. The hunter said that he would produce the man-lion the next day before sunset.

The hunter roamed about in search of the elusive being. Failing to catch it in the stated time, he decided to take away his life. Narasimha was pleased with the hunter's devotion and steadfastness. He appeared before the hunter who

immediately put the rope round the neck of Narasimha and dragged him to the presence of Padmapada. Surprised beyond measure, Padmapada could not help asking the incarnate Deity how it happened. Sri Narasimha replied that even Brahma had not shown such earnestness in contemplation as the illiterate hunter.

Sri Totakacharya

Totakacharya had neither the learning of Sureshwara and Padmapada nor the realisation of Hastamalaka. But he was unrivalled in scrupulous personal attention to the Acharya. He found pleasure in looking after the personal comforts of the Acharya as a devoted servant. His co-disciples naturally entertained a lesser idea of his intellect. Even Padmapada was not free from this misconception.

Once when Totaka had gone to the river for washing clothes, the Acharya waited for his arrival before he would begin his exposition. The other disciples were impatient. Padmapada could not restrain himself. He said: 'Why should we wait for one who is no better than a wall?' Sri Shankara naturally did not relish this remark. He felt the necessity to teach Padmapada. So by a mental flash, he endowed Totaka with all the knowledge of the sastras.

When Totaka returned from the river, he was literally in bliss. He addressed the Acharya in a few brilliant stanzas in Totaka metre. Since then, known before as Giri, he got the title of Totakacharya. He was counted among the foremost disciples of Sri Shankara. He condensed the essential teaching of the Upanishads in a small treatise. This is called Sruti Sara Samuddharana composed in the same Totakametre.

