

SRI SHANKARA DIGVIJAYAM

AN CONCISE ENGLISH TRANSLATION ADAPTED FROM
SRI MADHAVIYA SHANKARA DIGVIJAYAM BY SRI VIDYARANYA

ISSUED ON THE AUSPICIOUS OCCASION OF THE PRATISHTHA KUMBHABHISHEKAM OF
SRI ADI SHANKARACHARYA BHAGAVATPADA TEMPLE AT SRINGERI.

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CHAPTER 1. VEDIC INDIA IN 8TH CENTURY A.D

More than a 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.

CHAPTER 2. DIVINE DESCENT

She Madhaviya Shankara Vijayam, the most popular and widely accepted account of Sri Adi Shankara's life, describes the advent of Sri Adi Shankara thus –

अज्ञानान्तर्गहनपतितान् आत्मविद्योपदेशैः
त्रातुम् लोकान् भवदवशिखातापपापच्यमानान् ।
मुक्त्वा मौनं वटविटपिनो मूलतो निष्पतन्ती
शंभोर्मूर्तिः चरति भुवने शंकराचार्यरूपा ॥

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.

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
सूर्येकुजे रविसुते च गुरौचकेन्द्रे ॥

CHAPTER 3. 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.

CHAPTER 4. 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 Mahabhasyam (Bhasyam on Panini Sutras of grammar).

तमखिलगुणपूर्णम् व्यासपुत्रस्यशिष्यात्
अधिगत परमार्थम् गौडपादान्महर्षेः ।
अधिजिगमिषुरेष ब्रह्मसंस्थामहं त्वाम्
प्रसृमरमहिमानंप्रापमेकान्त 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 केवलोहम् ।
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.

CHAPTER 5. 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 मनीषा मम ॥

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.

CHAPTER 6. SRI SHANKARA'S COMMENCES HIS UNPARALLEL WORKS

Shrilled 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 prasthanathraya 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).


CHAPTER 7. SHANKARA'S REFUTATIONS OF OTHER PHILOSOPHIES

She 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 Patanjalas 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.

CHAPTER 8. THE MEETING WITH BHAGAVAN VYASA

hankara'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.

CHAPTER 9. 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.

CHAPTER 10. 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 अग्र आसीत् ।
ब्रह्मवा इदं अग्र आसीत् एकमेव ।
सदेव सौम्य इदं अग्र आसीत् ।
एकमेव अद्वितीयं ब्रह्मञ्च ।

CHAPTER 11. 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.

CHAPTER 12. 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 हृषीकवर्गं 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 हृदयेऽनवद्यं 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.

CHAPTER 13. 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.

CHAPTER 14. SRI SHANKARA AT 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.

CHAPTER 15. SHANKARA'S BOON TO ARYAMBA

uring 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.

CHAPTER 16. 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.

CHAPTER 17. 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.

CHAPTER 18. VISION OF GAUDAPADA

Back to Kashi and sitting on the banks of the Ganga, the Acharya had a vision of Gaudapada. The Acharya prostrated before him in great excitement. Gaudapada spoke to the Acharya appreciating his attainments, in words and smiles that excelled the soothing influence of even moonlight. Shankara replied with great humility and emotion and read out his commentaries on Mandukya Upanishad and Karika on the same. Highly pleased, the deathless and desire-less sage Gaudapada disappeared after blessing the Acharya.

CHAPTER 19. ASCENDING THE SARVAJNA PEETHAM AT KASHMIR

The Acharya came to know about a temple with four gates for Goddess Sharada in the Kashmir region. The temple was famous for its ‘Throne of Omniscience (Sarvajna Peetham)’, signifying that only an omniscient one can sit on that throne. Scholars from the Western, Eastern and Northern directions had in the past opened the three respective entrances, but till then there had been no learned men from the South. Sri Shankara who hailed from the South felt that he was divinely ordained to attempt to ascend the Sarvajna Peetham. So, the Acharya left for Sharada Temple in Kashmir. The people greeted Sri Shankara enthusiastically and hailed his advent as a lion ruling over the forest of Advaita.

The Acharya approached the Southern entrance when at once a group of controversialists stopped him. Adherents of Kanada’s Nyaya School, Sankhyas, Buddhists, Digambara Jains, and the followers of Jaimini put the Acharya to severe test in their own systems. The Acharya’s replies convinced every one of them that the Acharya was proficient in all philosophies and they opened the Southern entrance. Holding the hand of Padmapada, the Acharya was about to ascend the Throne of Omniscience when he heard the voice of Goddess Sharada. The Goddess challenged him that it is not enough if a person is omniscient but he should also be pure. Shankara cannot be said to be pure because of his stay at the palace of the king Amaruksa.

To this challenge, the Acharya answered that from his birth he had done no sin with this body of his, and what was done with another body will not affect this body. Sharada’s voice became silent accepting the explanation and the Acharya ascended the Throne of Omniscience, to the ovation of the people there. The heavenly conch Shells blew, kettledrums sounded like roaring of the oceans, and flowers rained down in praise of Sri Shankara.

CHAPTER 20. THE END OF THE INCARNATION

Sri Shankara thus ascended the Sarvajna Peetham signifying the triumph of the doctrine of Advaita. Sri Shankara subsequently left for Badri after deputed the others to Sringeri and other places. At Badri he again preached his doctrine to followers of the Patanjali school who accepted Advaita as the true import to the Vedas. In this way, Shankara though Shiva’s Avatara, started his life as a seeker of truth at the hands of Govinda Bhagavatpada, dived deep into the secrets of the Upanishads, recovered the gold mine of Advaita, wrote the great commentaries and other Advaita treatises. He also composed hymns on Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, Subrahmanya, Sharada, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Narasimha including

Shivananda Lahiri, Soundarya Lahiri and all the time remained a teacher until he reached the thirty second year of his life.

The Acharya then went to Kedara, the holy land of Shiva. Tradition has it that the Acharya disappeared from sight at Kedarnath. Madhaviya Shankara Vijayam portrays the same incident in a manner fitting its poetic splendour thus ‘ “There came a concourse of Rishis and Devas with Brahma as their head to lead the incarnate aspect of Shiva back to his pristine state in Shivaloka. The divine bull Nandi came and stood before him. To the chorus of hymns, rain of Kalpaka flowers, the great Sanyasin mounting the back of Nandi with Brahma supporting him transformed himself into real form as the great Shiva and attained to his divine abode.’

CHAPTER 21. THE GENIUS OF SRI SHANKARA

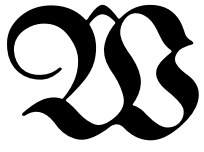
Sri Shankara’s versatile genius is highlighted through the several Shankara Vijayams. That Sri Shankara visited many holy places like Tiruvanaikkaval, Kanchipuram, Tirupati, Tiruchendur, etc. and contributed to the temples is known from these accounts of Sri Shankara’s life.

It is Sri Shankara’s contribution to the stabilisation of Sanatana Dharma in all its forms that remains today as a mark of his divine descent. While the followers of Sanatana Dharma regard Sri Shankara as a realised soul descended to sustain Dharma, Sri Shankara is considered by all as the highest of intellectuals the world has ever produced. Yet Sri Shankara was not only a philosopher but also a great Bhakta. Sri Shankara instituted the worship of Ganesha, Shiva, Shakti, Surya, Vishnu and Subrahmanya, all on the same pedestal pointing towards the one God worshipped in different forms. His compositions on all the deities contain poetic excellence that thrill the common man, touch the emotions and carries the sadhaka forward step by step. Shankara has emphasised that deliverance cannot be had except by Atma-Jnana. The paths of Karma, Bhakti and Jnana are steps in the ladder to realise the Atman, the summum bonum of human life. Total surrender to God as the culmination of Bhakti has been accepted by Sri Shankara as a sure means of attaining salvation because such surrender embodies Jnana. In a prayer to Vishnu, Sri Shankara says,

तत्पि भेदापगमे नाथ तवाह न भामकीनत्वम् ।
सामुद्रोहि तरङ्गः क्वचन समुद्रो न तारङ्गः ॥

Oh Lord, even after realising that the Truth that; There is no real difference between Jiva and Brahman, I beg to state that I am Yours and not that You are mine. The wave belongs to the ocean, not the ocean to the waves.

CHAPTER 22. SRI ADI SHANKARA AND SRINGERI SHARADA PEETHAM



e, the present generation are extremely fortunate to be in the midst of the twelfth birth centenary of Shankara. The great spiritual organisation at Sringeri established by Sri Shankara has made a cultural conquest of the country without any physical force and has stood the test of time and gained veneration, respect, help and patronage from various rulers irrespective of their religion. Scholars of repute, administrators and others in different walks of life, in modern times have remained loyal to the Sringeri Mutt that has had a line of highly philosophical, saintly and scholarly Pontiffs in its illustrious lineage. The farsighted organising ability of Adi Shankara has proved itself in Sringeri, to be colossal and amazing.

It was given to the thirty third Pontiff of Sringeri Sharada Peetham, Sri Sacchidananda Shivabhinava Nrisimha Bharati Mahaswamigal, who is considered a purnavatara of Sri Shankara, to initiate Shankara Jayanti Celebrations, throughout the country. It was this Jagadguru who resurrected the long forgotten Kaladi and caused the publication at one and the same time the complete works of Sri Adi Shankara. It is the grace of the great Shankara Bhagavatpada that the Sringeri Sharada Peetham has played such a significant role.