

Message 13406

Please mail your comments, suggestions and corrections to :

harshanand\_16@indiatimes.com <mailto:harshanand\_16@indiatimes.com> or  
harsha\_r\_murthy@rediffmail.com <mailto:harsha\_r\_murthy@rediffmail.com>

From: "harshanand\_16" <harshanand\_16@yahoo.com>  
Date: Fri May 17, 2002 1:25 am  
Subject: Sri Shankaracharya

Jaya Jaya Shankara !  
Namastripurasundaryai !  
Namō Chandramouleeshwaraaya !  
Namō Naarasimhaaya !

Greetings to dear brothers and sisters on this sacred day of Shankara Jayanthi. So great and majestic majestic was his life that it is not possible for ordinary mortals to speak about his divine Charita completely. This is just a selection of some inspiring articles by great men on Srimadacharya, the great incarnation of Dakshinamurthy.

The influence of Advaita Vedanta preached by Sri Shankaracharya has pervaded the whole of world. It was this message of Vedanta that Swami Vivekananda, the messenger of Sri Ramakrishna, the harmoniser of all religions propagated in the east and the West. The realization of Advaita is the final stage of religious experience. But Shankara never disdained the steps that have to be traversed to attain this stage. It is for this reason that Shankara appears to us an enthusiastic organizer of worship, devotion and rites. He was not merely a monist traversing the path of knowledge. A rare and supreme devotion tempers his entire life and all his writings. The whole of Hinduism is brilliantly and uniquely reflected in the ideals of his life. The effulgent form that he gave to the Sanatana Vedic Dharma may have been dimmed by the passage of time, but it has not been obliterated. The Hindus owe an eternal debt to this teacher whose life span extended over only thirty-two years. He opened up a new and radiant horizon for the spiritual life of India and brought about a revolutionary transformation in her social life. To call Srimadacharya a mere monist would be to denigrate his personality and his impact. His life in fact appears to be a meeting ground of Advaita, Dvaita and he has gone beyond all these stages to stand effulgent in the radiant light of the self. Rarely among the great does one encounter such harmonization.

Swami Vivekananda has said: " The modern civilized world marvels at the writings of this sixteen year old boy." The modern civilized world is a world of science and reason. Shankara was able to establish the religion of the Vedanta on the firm foundation of science and reason.

Shankara's life offers interpretation of his philosophy. Hence it would be of immense inspiration to know about the life of this great incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurthy. This is a presentation of his life based on Anandagiri's Shankara Vijaya, Maadhaveeya Shankara Vijaya and works by Swami Apoorvananda.

Acharya Shankara is one of those god-men who have appeared in the world in historical times in order to establish religion firmly.

Shankara's advent took place at a very critical period in the national and in the religious life of India. At that time the Buddhist faith in the Indian sub-continent has passed through many stages of rise and fall for over a thousand years. It had sunk to a condition in which it was not only of absolutely no use for Indian religion and culture, but was positively ruinous. Subjected to the influence of degenerate Buddhism, the eternal Hindu faith had become enfeebled, devastated and disintegrated.

Within two centuries of Acharya's lifetime, India had to encounter the powerful incursion of the Islamic faith. Degenerate Buddhism would not have possessed the vigor to resist the onrush. It was only the immense strength of the Vedic faith, which is eternal and man-made, and is the repository of universal truth, that could stand and did effectively resist the inroad of Islam. The advent, the career, the life work and the teaching of Acharya endowed the Hindu faith with the energy needed for the task ahead of self-defence and survival and ensured the everlasting stability of the Vedic religion by firmly establishing it on very sure foundations. Such a claim for Shankara is amply supported by historical evidence. Has Shankara not come on the scene, it would have been quite within the bounds of possibility that Hinduism got transformed into a veritable Islamistan. If the Hindus of today can legitimately be proud of their great Vedic religion, it is in no small measure due to the services of this thirty-two year old monk. This needs to be adequately realized by all especially those belonging to man-made cults and sects who dismiss Acharya as a Mayavadi. It is unfortunate that some people indeed have succumbed to falsehood despite of Acharya's efforts. Shankara strengthened the foundations of the eternal Vedic faith to such an extent that the vigor imparted by him was an unending support in later years to the work and mission of people like Madhwa, Ramanuja, Nimbaraka etc. this is an undeniable historical fact. In Shankara's life and teaching and propagation lies embedded the immense vitality, which is responsible for the safe preservation and sure sustenance of the eternal Vedic faith. To designate Shankaracharya as just an upholder of Monism, just like any other sectist Acharya's is a tone down to his gigantic personality and to dilute his contribution. Not in any of his writings does any evidence exist of one-sided outlook, the narrow vision, the vigorlessness, and the incompleteness, which are the characteristics of most of the later preachers and teachers. Indeed Shankara was the greatest, the noblest and the most luminous representative of expansive, universal and all embracing Sanatana Vedic Dharma. All that is sublime, strengthening, glorious in the Vedanta faith as it obtains today is the handiwork of this distinguished monk, and this is true not only in respect of the philosophical aspect of that faith, but also in respect of its practical side. The resplendent story of Sri Acharya's life is a veritable lighthouse illumining the path of the universal Vedic faith. Acharya Shankaracharya is not to be ranked with ordinary religious aspirants. To style him as a Siddha, a perfected master is also not saying the whole thing about him. Lets bow down to the great guru and seek his blessings to escape the limiting world of material consciousness and to fly in the skies of the attributeless Parabrahman.

A brief account of Srimadacharya's glorious Life :

About 2500 years ago, when the spiritualisation of the people greatly reduced, all the Gods and the Rishis went to Kailash and pleaded with Lord Shiva to revive the world. Lord Shiva agreed with their request and informed that he will be born in this world. Lord Brahma, Indra and others also agreed to be born in this world to help Lord Shiva. In Kaladi, Kerala, a learned brahmin, by the name of Sivaguru, and his wife, Aryambal, spent their life in pooja and in giving alms to poor and in other good deeds. This childless couple went to Trichur and performed puja for 48 days to Lord Vadakkunathan (Lord Shiva) and prayed for a son. Lord Shiva melted in their devotion and appeared before them and told them "I am extremely happy with your devotion and you will get what you want. But tell me whether you want a number of dull children or a son who is extremely intelligent, who will live for a short period only." The couple replied the decision could not be theirs as the Lord knows what is good for them.

Lord Dakshinamurthy, pleased with the reply, was born to Aryambal under the star "Thiruvaithhirai". As the Lord had already promised that he will be born to do good to this world, the child was named Sankara. Sam means prosperity and Karathi means the giver. All the visitors stood in awe at the divinity of the child and said "This is not an ordinary child".

As Sankara grew up, he attracted everybody with his intelligence and kindness. At the age of three, he was given "Aksharabyas", i.e., the learning of writing and reading. At the age of four, he lost his father. At the age of five, he was initiated in Brahmacharyam i.e., the holy thread ceremony was conducted and he was sent to Gurukul for learning of scriptures. As per the practice the brahmachari has to go from house to house and take alms and submit this to his guru. On a Dwadasi day Sankara happened to go to the house of a very poor lady jand asked for the alms. The lady did not have a single grain of rice in her house to give. However she had kept a single Amla fruit for herself as it was a Dwadasi day. She unhesitatingly gave this Amla fruit to Sankara as she could not send a Brahmachari empty handed. Sankara was moved by her selflessness and the poverty of the lady and prayed to Goddess Lakshmi in a beautiful sloka which is called "Kanakanaka Dhara Stotram". On completion of this stotram, Goddess Lakshmi appeared in person and showered a rain of golden coins on the poor lady's house.

One day, the rishis came to him and reminded him of his duty to the land in spreading spiritualism. Sankara agreed it was time to become a Sanyasi and go all over the country to kindle religious fervor. One day when Sankara was taking bath, a crocodile caught hold of his leg. Sankara called out to his mother. Aryambal came running and to her horror she found her son in the grip of the crocodile and she cried that she did not know how to help her son.

Sri Sankara informed his mother that his life was nearing to an end, but if he became a Sanyasi, he could start a new life as a sannyasi. Thus Sri Sankara obtained permission from his mother to become a sannyasi.

Sri Sankara went in the search of a Guru to be formally initiated as a Sannyasi. At the banks of the river Narmada, he found the river gushing forth into floods. By using his powers, he encapsulated the river in his Kamandal (a vessel sannyasi's carry) and released it in the banks of the river. Sri Govinda Bagawathpathar, an ascetic who saw this, marvelled at Sri Sankara and took him on as a Shishya. Sri Govinda Bagawathpadar taught various vedas to Sri Sankara. He

also taught about Advaita, the principle that every one in this world is the manifestation of God and that God and Atman are one and the same. He advises Sri Sankara to go out in the world and spread this truth throughout the country.

Sri Sankara went to Kasi and by that time, he had a lot of disciples. One of them, Sanandhyaya, was drying the clothes of his Guru and suddenly Sri Sankara called him to the other bank of the river as he needed the clothes urgently. Sanandhyaya, little realising that he would drown, starts walking into the river. However, the Grace of his Guru resulted in a lotus materialising wherever he was keeping his foot. When asked as to how did he cross the river, he says that when his Guru calls, he is not to worry about anything. Sri Sankara named him as Padma Padar (lotus feet).

Once, in Kasi, when Sri Sankara was going to the Vishwanath Temple, his path was blocked by an "untouchable" who was accompanied by his wife and 4 dogs. The disciples of Sri Sankara shouted at him to make way, and to keep a distance. The untouchable smiled and said, ""According to your principle of Advaita, which you practice, all the Jivatma are same as God. How do you ask me to go? How am I different from your Paramacharya? What you say is unreasonable. How can I go away from myself?"

Sri Sankara realised that it was not an ordinary person and understood that it was Lord Shiva himself who had come along with His escort and the four Vedas. He prostrated before the Lord and sang five slokas called "Manisha Panchakam". Lord Shiva presented himself along with Visalakshi and blessed Sri Sankara.

When Shri Sankara was 16, a very old Brahmin of ill health started arguments with him about Brahmasutra bashyam which Shri Sankara had written. Shri Sankara was astounded by his intelligence and arguments but they continued their discussion. The arguments continued for days together and the more Shri Sankara argued, his ideas crystallised more and more and he understood that the old man was none other than Vyasa Rishi, who was the creator of Brahmasutra. Sri Sankara said that he has done a great disrespect to the sage by entering into an argument. Vyasa Rishi said "I fully agree with your bashyam and I wanted to establish that yours is correct. I bless that you should live another 16 years and you should spread this Advaita throughout the country."

Sri Sankara learnt that there was a great learned person by the name Mandana Mishra who lived in Mahishmati and who followed the Karma Mimaamsa method of devotion. Sri Sankara arrived at his house and found his house was closed and Mandala Mishra was carrying out some rituals inside his house. Sri Sankara entered the house by using his powers and entered the house. Mandala Mishra became very angry and shouted at Sri Sankara. But Sri Sankara smiled and explained the uselessness of such rituals.

However, Mandana Mishra admired the intelligence of Sri Sankara and started discussions with him after completing the rituals. Sri Sankara said that there should be a judge to decide the winner and suggested that Sarasawani, the wife of Mandala Mishra, to be the judge. Sarasawani, who was extremely intelligent and learned, realised that Sri Sankara was none other than Lord Shiva, did not want to declare her husband as the loser. She suggested that both of them should wear a garland of flowers and whichever garland fades first, that person would be the loser. Naturally, Sri Sankara won. As per the original condition, Mandana Mishra became an ascetic and started to leave the house. Unable to bear the separation, Sarasawani

stood transfixed and told Sri Sankara that according to our faith, the husband and wife, even though have two bodies, are spiritually one and she would be incomplete without her husband.

Sri Sankara accepted this and started discussion with this lady. Saraswani showered questions like rain and Sri Sankara gave very beautiful answers and Sarasawani acknowledged him, and followed Sri Sankara and her husband's footsteps.

In their travels, they reached Sringeri in Karnataka, which is on the banks of Tungabadra. While Sri Sankara and Mandala Mishra were walking, Sarasawani did not move and stood fixed in the sands of Tungabadra. Sri Sankara turned back and realised by his divine powers that Sarasawani did not want to proceed any further and created a seat for her for spreading the Advaita. This seat is today called the Sharada Peetham or the Seat of Sharada. This was the first Mutt installed by Sri Sankara, with the direction that all the heads of the Mutts will be called Sankaracharayas and they will have a lineage of Shishyas or disciples.

When Sri Sankara was in Sringeri, he divined by his superior powers that his mother was in her deathbed, and as per his promise while taking Sanyas that he would be by her side while she breathes her last, he reached Kaladi and paid his last respects to the old lady. Aryambal was happy that her son had come back. Sri Sankara prayed to Lord Venkateswara who appeared in person and blessed Aryambal. Sri Sankara did the last rites for his mother but the people of Kaladi said that a Sanyasi does not have the right to do the last rites, but he did not hear that and carried the body of Aryambal and put her in the pyre himself and lit it himself.

After the death of his mother, he went all over the country and converted the people of other faith to Advaita. He revived a number of temples and using his powers, he established a number of Yentras in these temples to spread the blessings of Parasakthi. During his travels, he arrived at Mukambi, a religious place in Karnataka. A poor brahmin came to Sri Sankara with his deaf and dumb son and prostrated before Sri Sankara. Sri Sankara asked the boy, "who are you?". The dumb and deaf child, for the first time, opened his mouth and explained, "The body is not me, it is the Paramatma who is my body." Sri Sankara was pleased with his answer and he gave an amla fruit and named this boy as Hastaamalakan. (Hastaa means hand and Amalakan means amala). Hastaamalaka became one of the principle disciples of Sri Sankara.

Sri Sankara, with his three principle disciples, namely, Padmapadar, Sureshwarar (Mandala Mishra) and Hastaamalaka, went from place to place, and preached Advaita. Sri Sankara gave intense training to his disciples. One of the other disciples, Giri, while listening to the discourses, would not ask any doubts, would not open his mouth, and would be silent all the time. Some of the other disciples thought that this Giri was a dumb idiot and did not know anything. One day, all the disciples were ready to listen to Sri Sankara's discourses. Sri Sankara waited for Giri to arrive. Ultimately, Giri turned up but instead of keeping silent on that day, burst forth into eight slokas which had never been heard by the disciples earlier. These were the creation of Giri. On hearing this, all the disciples felt ashamed and praised Giri. These slokas are called "Thotaka ashtakam". Giri was named as Thotakar by Sri Sankara.

Sri Sankara visited Thiruvidaimarudur in Tanjore district of Tamilnadu, which is a great religious place, and the ruling deity in the temple was Lord Shiva. The learned Saivites of the temple

informed Sri Sankara that Lord Shiva is the creator and that they are all merely lowly life created by Lord Shiva, and if that was so, how does Sri Sankara say that they were one with the Lord ? They did not agree with the Advaita principle. Sri Sankara asked them to enter the temple. As they reached the Sanctum Santorum of the temple, there was a thunderous statement "Satyam is Advaita". This was repeated thrice and it was also followed by a hand which came out of the Linga which conformed the truth. All the learned persons acknowledged the principle of Advaita and accepted Sri Sankara as their Guru. Even today, there is a Sankara Mutt at Thiruvaimarudur and there is a linga with a hand materialising out of it.

Sri Sankara visited Thiruvanaikar, near Trichy in Tamilnadu. In this temple, the Goddess Akhilandeswari was having a fierce power and people who went to have her darshan could not stand the fierceness of this Goddess. Sri Sankara created two sets of earrings which are called Tatankam and he presented these to the Goddess. The fierceness of the deity reduced. This tatankam, the earrings, has been maintained over time by the Acharyas of the Kanchi Mutt.

Sri Sankara visited Tirupathi and recited the Sloka "Vishnu pathathi keshanta stotra" which describes the Lord from his foot to the head. He wanted the people to visit the Lord in great numbers and get his blessings, he established an yantra. From that day the number of followers of the temple increased and is increasing day by day.

Arjuna tree is the tree of "Marutha" and the place where Lord Shiva appears as a Linga under this "Martha" tree is called Arjuna Kshetra. The Thiruvadaimaruthur which Sri Sankara visited earlier is called Madhyaarjunam. Srisaila, in Andhra, is called Mallikarjunam as Lord Shiva resides under a Marutha Tree which has also got Jasmine creepers on this tree. Sri Sankara visited this tree and became ecstatic on seeing the linga at the foot of this tree. His happiness flowed like the waves of a flood and became a sloka called Sivanandalahiri.

Near Srisailam, there is a forest called Hatakeshwaram, that no man enters. Sri Sankara entered this place and did penance for many days. During this time, a Kabalika, by name Kirakashan appeared before him. Kapalikas are a set of people who live in the burial grounds and pray to God by giving human and animal sacrifice. They were against Advaita which preaches love and affection and shuns violence. He asked Sri Sankara that he should give his body as a human sacrifice to Lord Shiva. Sri Sankara was happy to hear this request and agreed. Kirakashan was about to cut off Sri Sankara's head when Lord Narasimha appeared in the form of a lion and killed Kirakashan. Sri Sankara completed his travels and went to Badrinath. Lord Vishnu appeared before him and told that his sculpture in Alaknanda river should be taken out and a temple should be built for it. This temple is called Badrinarayan temple and is one of the important religious places for Hindus.

Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada !

A discourse by His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Mahaswamigal Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham

This day is the birth anniversary of Sri Sankara. It was by His avatara that the Vedas and the Works of the Rishis were rehabilitated. It was only by their rehabilitation that the

observance of the holy Sri Ramanavami, Sri Narasimha Jayanti, Sri Krishna jayanti, Uttarayana Sankranthi and Sivaratri and other holy days was revived. The avatara of Sri Sankara made the remembrance and celebration of other Jayantis possible. Sri Sankara jayanti comes off every year on the 15th day of the Maadhavi month in the Vasanta Ritu. Like the pure white jasmine, which is also called Vasanti and Maadhavi, may the Vasanta madhava jayanti fill our spiritual perception with its own rich fragrance.

Who is Sri Sankara? He is lokasankarah; he makes for the welfare of the whole world. He is Siva Himself. Sivam means auspiciousness or what is propitious.

What does 'Sam' mean in the name 'Sankara'? It means sukham, bliss or aananda. The Brihadaraanyakopanishad speaks of it as 'Priyam', that which is dear. Ordinarily, the people of the world do not know where that sam, priyam or aanandam can be found. Hence they are afflicted with worldly sorrows. Sri Bhagavatpada was filled with compassion at the sight of world thus afflicted. He desired that men should enjoy the unlimited bliss of self-realisation What is that bliss by realising which Sri Sankara Himself left misery far behind? Sri Sankara says: "One's own self is Sukam or bliss. One's own self is all. One's own self is Brahman. Brahman alone is all that we perceive. Everything is the effect of Brahman. The cause itself is the effect. The effect is non-different from the cause. Everything is Sam or bliss. Let this Sam or bliss be enjoyed, in all our experiences. Let it be enjoyed as one's own inner self or Atman."

In the world Everything external to the self is dear for the reason that it is related to the self. The self alone is ultimately dear to everyone. Realisation of the self as non-different from Brahman is Supreme Bliss.

Sri Sankara taught that Paramaatman is one, tat everything is Brahman and that all is one. What the veda taught is also what Sri Sankara taught. Sri Sankara said that as all is Brahman there is nothing apart from Brahman materialists hold that the world alone is real and the Brahman does not exist. The Nyaaya logicians and other dualists said that the world and Brahman are both real. The Buddhists denied both the world and no reality in its own right apart from Brahman is the teaching of Sri Sankara.

Even in Buddhistic days, the systems anterior to it did not cease to exist. Charvaaka philosophy could not displace the systems of thought before its time. But on the emergence of Sri Sankara's philosophy, all earlier systems lost their appeal like stars losing their light on the rising of the Sun. Need it be said the partial light becomes dimmed before the Supreme and limitless effulgence of Universal Light? The methods of Bhakti, Upaasana and ethical virtues, and the conflicting paths of Tantra, Aachaara, Yoga and Samadhi, all these get absorbed in the indivisible Bliss of the non-dual Atman just as river flowing east, south, west and north get merged in one ocean. That Supreme Bliss is the goal of all these paths.

The teaching of the Bhagavatpada, as well as the teachings of other Aachaaryas, which, following the Vedas, are intended for the purification and elevation of one's Atman, prescribes that the

Dharmas mentioned in the vedas should be practised by men in accordance with their respective Varnas and Ashramas. The Varnashrama Dharmas have been ordained by Sastras, not merely to foster among men an attitude of mutual helpfulness or only to promote the general cooperative material well-being of society. They have been prescribed for self-purification which they effect by developing peace, an essential means to liberation, and which cannot be otherwise experience.

The four means to Moksha, viz. Vairagya and others, accrue to a person by observance of his own Varnashrama Dharmas; and their dedication to Sri Hari. In the view, Sri Sankara closely follows the Gita where it is said:

tasmaat saastram pramaanam te kaaryaakaaryavyavasthitau  
Therefore in the determination of what should or should not be done, Sastras are your mentor and guide. The word 'tasmaat' meaning, 'therefor', which occurs in this sloka, refers to a reason in the Sastraic determination of what should or should not be done. What is the reason? It is set out in the immediately preceding slokas of the Gita in that very context. In these slokas Sri Krishna says:

The gateway to hell which makes for self-destruction is three-fold, namely, desire, anger and avarice. Hence these three ought to be given up. One released from these three gates of darkness practices what makes for his elevation and then attains the supreme goal. But, if one violates the sastraic injunction and acts according to one's will and pleasure, one does not attain self-realisation. He can neither be happy nor reach the supreme goal."

After these verses occurs the verse beginning with 'tasmaat saastram pramaanam te'. Thus Sri Sankara follows the Gita when He declares that the observance of Varnashrama Dharma leads to self-purification and elevation of the Atman.

Expounding his Bhashyas and the truths enshrined in the Upanishads, in a language which is profoundly sublime and yet transparently simple, the ascetic that was Sri Sankara traversed the whole of the Bharata Bhoomi on foot, from Rameswaram in the South to the Himalayas in the North. Rivers and sacred spots, villages and towns and temples have all been sanctified by him, and their spirituality augmented by his yantras and mantras and the invocations he made. Generally speaking, there is no holy spot in India, whose sanctity has not been heightened by his association. Even now, in every part of the country, people speak with pride that the temple in their place had been satisfied by Sri Sankaracharya and made famous by the Yantra he established. In all regions, where Vedic studies were prevalent, there is no spot where Sri Sankara's Bhashyas have not been studied with devotion by those who sought liberation, following the Guru-sishya sampradaya. Even now, Sri Sankara's Bhashyas are learnt in every place where Vedic studies are in vogue.

The growth of modern science is said to be responsible for the increase of lethal weapons calculated to destroy all life and too be pregnant with infinite danger to the world. Yet, from another angle, on calm and careful reflection, it will be clear that the growth of

science shows the way for the promotion of peace among men. Fifty years ago, physicists held the view that matter was made of number of distinct elements and they held the theory of absolute difference among things. Now however, denying the distinctiveness of individual elements of matter and mutual difference between what is with form and mutual difference between what is with form and what is without form, they proclaim that they are all evolutes of one Energy. Thus it will be clear to all thinkers that modern scientists are giving up the theory of difference and are gradually getting oriented to the philosophy of non-difference. Especially great savants like Einstein, Sri James Jeans and Eddington have come very near the doctrine of Advaita taught by Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada. Declaring that the phenomenal world of perception is not ultimately true, but only relatively real, they have come in effect to reject difference itself. The scientific thought of the present day progressively approximates to and supports the conclusion of Sri Sankara in the repudiation of the world of difference. This modern view will prepare the way for inculcating a sense of peace in the world. With the obliteration, through proper insight of sense of difference among the citizens of the world, among leaders of men, and among administrators, the wise, the brave and the thoughtful ones will no longer feel that others are different from themselves. They will realise their oneness even with the men of enemy countries. Themselves afflicted by the afflictions of the people of those lands, they will prove to be the foundation for raising the edifice of world peace.

On his holy day of anniversary of Sri Sankara's birth, may the truth, Advaita or non-difference to which modern scientific thinkers are getting attuned, a Truth which has been proclaimed by eternal Sruti, and which has been rendered radiant by Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada be broadcast to all the world by thinkers and wise men, each in his measure, with earnestness and fervor. May the malady of absence of peace which afflicts all mankind be cured by the life-giving nectar of the realisation of non-difference. May 'Sam' in the name of Sankara, i.e., peace, reign everywhere.

The genius of Bhagavatpada

Saastram saareera meemaamsaa  
Devastu paramesvarah !  
Aacaaryaah Sankaraachaaryaah  
Santu janmani janmani

Every one of us is anxious that he should not be born again, that he should not have another janma. All Saastras have been propounded to show the way to get rid of future births. They teach us how to bring about the cessation of the alternations of birth and deaths, Sankara says: punarapi jananam punarapi maranam. But the sloka I have quoted seems to contradict this universal desire to annul all future births. On the other hand, it seems to contain a prayer for any number of janmas in the future. But, the prayer also contains three conditions. It says, "if, in every future birth the sheet anchor of my faith and understanding is the Saareera Meemaamsa, is my study, if the God I worship is Paramesvara Himself, if the Guru who will be my refuge is Sri Sankaracharya, it does not matter how many janmas I am to take.

May these three be granted to me in life after life." This is the prayer of one among the crores of sishyas (disciples) of our Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada.

In a similar manner, Sri Sankara himself says in the Sivanandalahari Stotra:

Naratvamdevatvam nagavanamrigatvam masakataa,  
pasutvam keetatvam bhavatu vihagatvaadi jananam  
Sadaa tvat-paadaabja smarana paramaananda laharee  
vihaaraasaktam chet hridayamiha kim tena vapushaa

"Let me be born as a man, as a god, as a bird, as a monkey which jumps from tree to tree, as a mosquito, or even as a worm. I do not decline any janma if only it is given to me to enjoy the bliss of contemplating the Lotus Feet of Sri Paramesvara. What does it matter which form the body takes?(Kim tena vapushaa?)

The heart must be pure and directed to God, though the body be ugly or even despicable. A handsome body concealing a heart devoid of devotion will only degrade human nature instead of elevating it. In fact, good men dread the prospect of another life(punar janmam), only because they are afraid their heart should be fouled by the enticement of the world.

God is the ocean of mercy. He loves us all. Devotion to Him is the sure way to our salvation. The Guru shows Him to us and instructs us in the Saastras that speak about Him. The Guru is most literally our friend, philosopher and guide in the fullest sense of that expression. In the sloka quoted at the beginning, the sishya prays that the Guru for him should always be Bhagavatpada Sri Sankara. True, many others had also been called "Aachaaryas", like Bhishma and Drona. We have also Sayanacharya, Udayanacharya, Bhaskaracharya and many others. In fact the propounder of every Saastra went by the name of Acharya. Regarding the qualifications of an Acharya, it has been laid down that he one who teaches the meanings of the Saastras, puts them into practice himself, and establishes others in those aacharas.

Aachinoti ca saastraathan  
Aachare sthaapayaityapi;  
Svayam aacharate yasmaat  
Tasmaad aachaarya uchyate.

In respect of others like Drona, Bhishma, and Charaka, the suffix "Acharya" has to be specially added to their names. But when the word "Acharya" is by itself used, it denotes only Sri Bhagavatpada Sankara.

According to tradition, our Bharatadesa was originally divided into 56 kingdoms. (the Bhagavata Purana speaks of the Saptadveepas and of the vedas having been current in all of them. We have references to Mitra and Varuna in literature of Mesopotamia and Scandinavia). Our Acharya traversed on foot all the 56 kingdoms of Bharatadesa and established the Advaita Tatva as the final truth of Vedanta. Prior to him, the Saankhyas propounded the theory of plurality of atmas and denied a

Paramatman. The Meemaamsakas, on the other hand, affirmed the superiority of observing Vedic rituals (vedokta karmaanushtaana) over jnana as the means to moksha. The Buddhas said that there was no sayyavastu and promulgated the Soonya Vaada. The Jains advanced the Sapta-bhangi-naya and adopted a shifting criterion of truth. Thus, there were as many as 72 schools of thought. when the Aachaarya appeared on the scene, many of them were in conflict with one another. it was in this predicament that the Eesaana of Sarva Vidyaas took human form as the son of pious Sivabhakta, Sivaguru by name, and his devoted wife, Aaryamba. Before that event, both Sivaguru and Aaryamba, who were yearning for a child, had an identical dream in which they were asked if they wanted a number of long lived but stupid sons or one learned child, who will, however, be short-lived. Not able to decide between the two choices, they said that they would abide by the will of God Himself. Accordingly, Sankara was born, destined to die in his eighth year. When he was eight years old, he confronted his mother-his father having predeceased her-with the dilemma of either agreeing to see him die devoured by a crocodile in the river near their home or consenting to his renouncing the world by embracing the sanyasa asrama. The first occasion, in the dream, was a dilemma realizing to the birth of her child, while this one was a dilemma realizing to his death. Now too, knowing not how to decide, she left the choice to her son, to do as he thought best, and the result was that the child Sankara became the Acharya Sankara.

A person acquires a new lease of life similar to the old, upon his adapting the Sanyaasa Aasrama in the prescribed manner. And so, our Acharya, who was "born again" as a Sanyaasi, got a repetition of the eight years of life originally allotted to him. In the second lease of life, he sought a guru on the bank of the Narmada, Govinda Bhagavatpada by name. after completing his novitiate under him, Sri Sankara went to Kasi where he wrote the Bhashyas, Prakaranagranthas and the stotras. All the scholars of Bharatadesa, who came to stay in Kasi in their pilgrimage to that holy city, listened to the Bhashyas which they carried to their respective regions on their return. To give the seal of approval to Sankara's exposition of Brahma Sutra, Sage Vyasa, the author of the Sutras himself appeared as an ordinary, old man of ugly appearance, and invited Sri Sankara to a debate, which went on without intermission, for days together, neither disputant getting the better of the other. Amazed at this, Sri Sankara's disciple Padmapada discerned by divine vision (jnana drishti) that the old man was none other than Vyasa himself and exclaimed:

Sankaras sankarassakhshaat vyaso naraayano harih ! tayoh vivaaade  
sampraapte kinkarah kim karomyaham !!

"Sankaracharya is Bhagavan Sankara Himself. Vyasa is Hari, the Supreme Narayana. When these two are engaged in debate, what can I, humble attendant, do?"

Vyasa was so pleased with the exposition of his Brahma Sutra by our Acharya that he declared that Sankara's teaching was the Vedanta tatva. Giving him another lease of life for sixteen more years, Vyasa desired our Acharya to travel through out the whole of Bharatadesa and establish the truth of Advaita Vedanta. Our Acharya said that his mission has been accomplished when he laid his Bhashya at the feet of

the sage. But he was told that though scholars who had gathered in Kasi had carried the text of the Bhashya to their homelands the Acharya should go to those places to give darshan to the people living there. Thus it was that the Acharya traveled throughout our country and, in diverse places, he found a number of shrines at which he established the worship of Sri Chakra, dedicated to the Goddess Uma, who is the embodiment of the Brahmavidya, spoken of in the kenopanishad.

It is worthy of note that Buddhism, Jainism, the Saankhya, and the Meemaamsa systems of thought were prevalent and popular, in each case, the philosophies that were propounded prior to it, were still current. But after the advent of Acharya, all the earlier systems lost their hold on the minds of the people and Advaita Vedanta, taught in the mahaavaakyas of the Upanishads, gained universal acceptance. Other schools of Vedanta that arose and are prevalent in particular parts of our country are only small deviations of Advaita. To Sri Sankara belongs the distinction of having liquidated all other anterior systems, vaidika and advaidika alike. So conclusively convincing was the was the Advaita tatva, which he established as paramataatparya the supreme import of the Upanishads, that other thinkers willing gave up their differing views, and acquiesced in it, wholeheartedly. Great philosophers of foreign countries too were attracted to it in such a measure that they expressed their undisguised admiration of its sublimity. at the hands of our Achaarya's successors, Admiration of its sublimity. At the hands of our Achaarya's successors, Advaita Vedanta acquired an added brilliance, as it was sharpened on the grinding stone of dialectical controversies with critics belonging to other schools of Vedanta. Swami Vivekananda proclaimed "Let the lion of Vedanta roar", and carried the message of Advaita which he declared as " the most scientific philosophy" to America and Europe. Thus our Achaarya's matam became Sarva sammatam (accepted by all). The matam, however, was not a theory which he advanced on his own; it was the Supreme Truth of Upanishads he expounded. it was Aupanishadam matam.

It is remarkable that our Acharya established the Upanishadic truth of Advaita within the brief period when he was in his teens. his span of life was very short compared to that of Sri Sayanacharya, who, treading the path of Sri Sankara, wrote his monumental Bhashyas on all the Vedas, and also that of many other posterior Acharya who promulgated one or the other of the six paths of devotion proclaimed by our Acharya in the form of Shanmatam, and thereby earning the distinction of being "Shanmatasthaapanacharya".

Siva, Vishnu, Devi and other manifestations of the Supreme are worshipped by us, Hindus, every day. The vratas relating to the worship of these manifestation survive in our midst today only because of our Acharya. For, if he had not been born, Buddhism, Jainism, the Saankhya and Meemaamsa would still be flourishing in our land, and all of them together would have expelled God from the hearts and minds of our people. If today, we celebrate Sri Rama Navami, Janmashtami, Sivaratri, Durga Puja and other festivals connected with the different manifestations of the Supreme, Sri Sankara alone has made it possible. It is to remind ourselves of the irredeemable debt that we owe to our Acharya and to express our gratitude to him for his service to our religions that we a celebrate

Sri Sankara Jayanti.

#### BHAGAVATPADA'S SERVICE TO HINDUISM

Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada taught us the truth that all the deities we hereditarily worship are but the manifestations of the One supreme Paramaatma. He established the worship of the moorthies of Siva, Vishnu, Ambika, Surya, Vinayaka and Subrahmanya all sanctified in the Vedas, and each having a specific Gayatri Mantra. If worshipped with devotion, all of them will enable us to attain the paramaatma, proclaimed by the Vedas as Sat Purusha, or Brahman. In that way he established the practical interpretation of the Gita teaching.

Yo yo yaam Yaam tanum bhaktah  
sraddhaya architum icchati;  
Tasya tasyaachalaam shraddhaam  
Taam eva vidadhaamyaham

and came to be known as Shanmatasthaa-panaacharya. He traveled in all the 56 kingdoms of this country, where the Vedas were prevalent, and proclaimed the Advaitic principle of Oneness of God. Like the same God who is within us and within everything we perceive, the seer, the seen and the seeing (drashta, drisyam and drishti) are all aspects of the same paramaatma.

In darkness, a rope is mistaken for a snake. But when examined with a light, we will find that the supposed snake is only a rope. The superimposed snake disappears, when disappears, when light (knowledge) is thrown on it. Even for an illusion, there must be a basis in reality. the bases in the above example being the rope. All illusion will be superimposed on truth, and conversely what remains after the illusion is dispelled is the truth. When a person wakes up from a dream, everything seen and felt in the dream disappears, and what remains is only the dreamer. It means that we project ourselves into the objects of our dream. When the dream passes away on the dawn of awakening, we realise that there is nothing outside us. Similarly, the reflection in a mirror has no substantiality, but is only an appearance of what already exists. When we realise, with the aid of jnana, that God is the only ultimate Truth and everything else is illusion, anger, desire, hatred, pain, grief and other emotions will not affect us. We begin to dwell in the fullness of Supreme Bliss. This idea is clearly brought out by Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada in the first verse of his Sri Dakshinamurti Ashtaam.

Visvam darpana drisyamaana nagaree tulyam nijaantargatam,  
Pasyannatmani maayayaa bahirivodbhootam yathaa nidrayaa;  
Yah saakshaatkurute prabodhasamaye svaatmaana-mevaadvayam,  
Tasmai sreegurumoortaye nama idam Sree Dakshinaa-moortaye.  
The last verse in this Ashtakam is :

Bhooramhamsyanolo anilombaramaharnaatho himaamsu:pumaan,  
Ityaabhaati charaacharaatmakam idam yasyaiva moortyashtakam!  
Naanyat kincanavaidyate vimrusataam yasmaat parasmaad vibho  
Tasmai Sree gurumoortaye nama idam Sree Dakshinaa-moortaye!!

The verse points out that earth, water, fire, air, ether, Sun, moon,

and purusha are all one. Paramesvara bears the name of Ashtamurti and it is He who appears in the eight forms enumerated above. Therefore, when we turn our thoughts inward and make some research, we arrive at the realisation that Paramatma is the Ultimate Truth. We cease to covet anything. But this does not imply inaction; on the other hand, for the welfare of the world (lodosamgraha), each of us has to perform the duty assigned to him. when we do so with the Advaitic consciousness of oneness of God we shall be able to perform our duties, freed from every attachment. The Acharya made his appearance in the world to teach us this great truth and has, thereby, rendered an invaluable service to humanity. By paying homage to this great religious and spiritual preceptor, who reoriented philosophic thought to its Upanishadic traditions and whose achievements within a short span of life is unparalleled in history, we shall earn his grace which will guide us along the path of God-realisation. It is due to Sri Bhagavatpada and his compositions in praise of the different manifestations of God that a new life has come to be breathed into temple worship and the festivals associated with temples. Had it not been for him the observance of such festivals like Janmashtami, Vinayaka Chaturthi, Sri Rama Navami and Sivaratri in our homes would have ceased owing to the spread of atheism. Our elders, who profited from the teachings of Bhagavatpada, adhered to the various religious observances. It is their abundant faith that is responsible for the continuance of these observance even today, in spite of the neglect of succeeding generations.

By his upadesa, Sri Adi Sankara became a Jagadguru (world teacher) in the fullest meaning of that expression. We are proud to call ourselves his followers and to pay homage to him. But there is one drawback in us, and that is, we do not live up to the advice tendered by him. Each one of us is enjoined to perform the daily anushtanaas prescribed for him, to worship the deity hereditarily worshipped, and to meditate on the mantra given to him by a guru. But unfortunately, in these days, we thin of God only when faced with some calamity, and begin to do this pooja or that. Of what avail are these special poojas and rituals, if we have not built up our spiritual life on the bases of the anushtaanaas, enjoined upon us? In fact these special rituals to ward off a threatened calamity may not become necessary at all if we had been strictly adhering to our anushtaanaas, which are the means by which man can acquire the fund of divine grace without which not an atom will move in this universe. In the absence of this basic requirement, whatever else we do later on, will not bear fruit.

My stay in Madras will have produced some result if at least those who claimed allegiance to the Math observed the sastraic way of life and perform the basic anushtaanaas and, in that way, recapture the spiritual glory that once was ours. Otherwise, I will be in the same predicament as the commander of an undisciplined army. Spiritual discipline is as rigorous as military discipline. If we really want to fulfill the purpose of life, we must subject ourselves to that discipline. Then we need fear none. Purity in our life will command for us the respect and regard of the rest of the world.

Guru Bhakthi !!!

A discourse by His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Jayendra Sarasvathi

Svamigal Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham

It is said that Guru(preceptor) is greater than God, devotion to preceptor is more meritorious than that to God. If we ask why, the answer is that God has not been seen by any one, But the preceptor is present here and now before us. If a Preceptor who is immaculate and pure, full of wisdom and steadiness of vision completely free from weakness, were available to us, the mental peace in search of which we pray to God is at our reach by devotion to the preceptor. Hence it is declared

"Gurur - Brahma  
Gurur - Vishnuh  
Guru -devo Maheswarah  
Gurur - sakshat Param Brahma  
Tasmai Sri Gurave namah

The Preceptor is Brahma, Vishnu, is the God Maheswara, is verily Brahma itself. Salutation to such a Preceptor

In this verse it is to be noted that total identity between the Preceptor and Brahman reality is declared. Incidentally, since in this verse both Siva and Vishnu are clubbed together, if we prostrate before the preceptor uttering this verse we will get the sense of the identity of Siva and Vishnu.

God performs the works like creating and protecting the world. But the preceptor does not have these responsibilities. God has an 'office' while the Preceptor does not have one. It is much easier to get things done by the grace of the preceptor than by the officer God whom we will have to disturb.

Whatever great and auspicious qualities God possesses, the Preceptor also has, namely, blemishless purity, truth, devoid of deceit or dissimulation, complete control of the senses, infinite compassion and wisdom. The only difference is that we are able to see the Preceptor by our eyes, while God is invisible. Hence if we begin to develop devotion to the preceptor clinging to his holy feet we will gain with ease all the benefits that we expect from God with effort. That is why our elders said that devotion to Preceptor is superior in its effects than that to God.

However we should not forget to practice devotion to god, because we are led to the presence and proximity of the Preceptor only by God. If the grace of God were not operating, how could one get near the Preceptor at all?

Acharya Sankara has stated in the beginning of the Vivekacudamani that three things are hard to obtain without God's Grace. They are (1) birth as a human being, (2) desire to know the truth and to get liberated and (3) the attainment of holy Preceptor.

"Durlabham trayameva etat devanugraha - hetukam

manushyatvam mudmukshutvam-purusha-samsargah"

For all people at all ages, the Preceptor is one only. He is Dakshinamurthy.

"Sa purvesham api guruh  
Kaalena-anavacchedaat."

How could true knowledge have been transmitted to one Preceptor except through Preceptor of that Preceptor except through Preceptor of that Preceptor and so on? If we thus trace the line or Preceptor backwards, God Himself ultimately will become the First preceptor to his first disciple. That is why we are told not to forget God.

Sometimes this matter is stated in a different way. If instead of speaking of God and Preceptor as two different persons, if we treat them as one and the same and assume that God has appeared in the form of a Preceptor, we need not practice two-fold devotion separately as devotion to the Preceptor. we can consider God Himself as the preceptor and surrender to Him totally. He will save us by His grace through the preceptor in human form who after all is only His manifestation. hence we are taught even at the very outset that the preceptor is the basis of trinity of God viz. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

"Gurur - Brahma  
Gurur - Vishnuh  
Gurur - Devo Maheswarah  
Gururs - Sakshat Param Brahma  
Tasmai Sri Gurave namah

The meaning of the above verse is used sometimes to be explained more tastefully with reference to Sage Vyasa who is the most important of all the teachers of the Brahma-vidya.

"acatur-vadano brahmaa, dvibaahur-aparo-harih;  
Aphaalalocanah sambhuh, bhagavaan baadaraayanah."

'Baadaraayana' is another name of Vyasa. He is Brahmaa without four faces. He is Vishnu with only two hands; He is Siva without the eye on the forehead. Such is the greatness of Vyasa-Baadadraayana.

There is no one greater than the preceptor. We should have full faith in him. It should be genuine faith. if we have faith that God himself has appeared in the preceptor's form, then even God is not necessary. This faith and the devotion that we nourish towards Him, will of themselves redeem us.

For the Vaishnava, devotion to Preceptor is the most important and primary.

If we commit and offence against God, there is no need to seeking pardon from God himself. It is enough if the Preceptor pardoned us. God's anger will at once be appeased. On the contrary, if one offends the preceptor, and seeks pardon from God, nothing would happen. God himself would tell him that He is helpless in the matter. he will ask us to get the pardon from the preceptor alone.

The Preceptor can intercede on behalf of the disciple and recommend to God to pardon the sinner. God will never disregard this recommendation. If, on the contrary, the preceptor is sinned against there could be none to protect the sinner. There is a verse which tells us this.

"Gurur-pitaa, gurur-maataa, guru-daivam, guru-gatih,  
Sive-rysgte gurustraataa, gurur rushte na kascana.

That is why the scriptures enjoin the devotion to the preceptor. If a Preceptor, perfect in all respects is not available, one has to take to some Preceptor as a spiritual guide even though he is of a grade less and practice devotion to him and through him to God.

No benefit accrues to God or Guru by our devotion to them. The great benefit is only ours. What is that?

We have impurities and are fickle-minded. We are not able to fix the mind in one point even for a second. Only when we set our thought on one who is ever pure, is full of wisdom, is constant and inflexible like a dried wood, that state of immutability will be won by us also. We will become the same as He. The object of our thought need not necessarily be God. It may be any object or any person whom we consider to be possessed of such spiritual qualities as those of a Preceptor. We will become one with Him. Only when the mind stops to wander, self will shine forth. That is, we will know our true nature of bliss. Devotion to Guru or God is indispensable for the restraint of the mind.

In the Chandogya Upanishad itself it is declared that only by the grace of the Guru true knowledge is possible. It says "aacaaryavaan purusho veda" (only one who has a Preceptor, gains true knowledge).

It puts the idea in the form of short story.

A man belonging to Gandhara (now known as Kandahar) was kidnapped by some dacoits and was abandoned blindfold in a forest. what will be his predicament? How could he return to his country not knowing where he was?

Similar is the case with us. Maya, the deluding power, has left us blindfold in the world. In the above story, some wayfarer happens to come on the way in the forest. He removes the blind and instructs him on the way back to Gandhara. The poor man follows the instructions and reaches his place.

Similarly, we are now blinded by ignorance and can, following the instruction of the Preceptor, get our ignorance removed and attain release. This is the parable in the Chandogya Upanishad.

Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada, renowned as the world teacher (Jagadguru), sings the praise of the Guru everywhere. He asked "What if one has all the glories? What is the use of it all if his mind is not bound to the lotus feet of the Preceptor?" He asks "what if?" not once, but repeatedly. In the poem Gurdvashtakam (consisting of eight verses),

he asks as a refrain at the end of every line "What if" in all the 32 lines.

And also in the teaching just on the eve of his casting off the mortal coils he commands; "Take to a Preceptor who is a savant and is pure. Then do service at his holy feet every day. Seek the instruction on Brahman, symbolised in the single syllable Om! Listen to the Mahavaakyas of Upanishads!"

"Sad-vidvan upasrpyatam pratidinam  
tatpadukaa sevyatam brahmaika akasaram  
arthyatam srutisriri-vaakyam samaakarnyataam."

There is no parallel to the Guru. He may be compared a philosopher's stone which turns the base metal into gold. But even this comparison is not Quite correct because the philosopher's stone turns base metal only into gold. it does not transform that metal into another philosopher's stone. But the Preceptor turns even the dullard into a wise sage like him.

When we look at the line of the Preceptors one by one, and our Paramacharya, the doubt deepens whether there could be any one comparable to him. We should contemplate on the Paramacharya not merely as a God walking amidst us but the Supreme non-dual Brahman who is beyond all difference and determinations.

Narayana Narayana

The life and work of Sri Sankara By Prof. P. Sankaranarayanan

Among the renowned personalities celebrated in the hagiographies of the world, by far the most distinguished for all time is Sri Sankara, reverently referred to as Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada, or simply as the Bhagavatpada. Whether considered, as tradition and the Puranas would have it, as an incarnation of Lord Siva Himself or only looked upon as a surpassing human being, either way, he is pre-eminent among the prophets and religious leaders of all times. His achievements during the little over three decades of his earthly life constitute a marvel of uncommon rate.

He was an intellectual prodigy who attained a phenomenal mastery over the scriptures even when he was less than eight years of age. Using the Sanskrit language with a felicitous clarity all his own, he wrote elaborate commentaries on the tripod of Hindu religion and philosophy evincing a dialectical skill which even to this day is the despair and envy of his adversaries. The original treatises that he produced on Advaita Vedanta ranging from a single verse to a thousand for all grades of mental comprehension live even today as fresh as ever, in the thoughts and tongues of men. His triumphal digvijaya to all parts of our land more than once had a double purpose, to vindicate the truths of Advaita Vedanta against the onslaughts of its disputants and to purify our religious theories and practices out of the accretions that had gathered round them by the lapse of time and the

inroads of perverted minds. Mere sacerdotalism which went by the letter ignoring the spirit and the corruption of designing people had for long fouled the clear springs of our pristine religion, resulting in the adoption of ways of worship which were neither civilised nor moral. All this had happened before Sri Sankara came on the scene. He accomplished the stupendous task of ridding our religion of its unfortunate excrescence and raised it to a pedestal of worshipful dignity. Buddhism, the rebel child of the Vedic religion and philosophy, denied God and the soul, laid the axe at the very roots of Vedic thought and posed a great danger to its very survival. This onslaught was stemmed betimes, compelling Buddhism to seek refuge in other lands. While the credit for this should go primarily to the Mimamsaka, Kumarila Bhatta, it was because of Sri Sankara's dialectical skill and irrefutable arguments that it ceased to have sway over the minds of the inheritors of Vedic religion.

Having thus enthroned our ancient religion and philosophy in the hearts and minds of his countrymen, Sri Sankara established in several parts of the country guardians of his teachings to preserve and propagate it to countless generations of the future. While these should have been numerous when he established them, five stand to this day as pontificates bearing his name, and function at Kanchi, Sringeri, Puri, Dwaraka and Badri, covering the whole of Bharata Varsha. There is not in legend or in history a life like Sri Sankara's so short in years and yet so packed with achievements in the realm of the spirit and whose glory extends beyond the bounds of space and time. No wonder that even today, much as protagonists of other schools may regret and protest, Vedanta is identified with Advaita which Sri Sankara drew out of the Upanishads, distilled out of the Bhagavad Gita and described in his commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, and that this school of Vedanta has compelled the conviction and obtained the assent of the thinking minds of the West.

It is unfortunate that no biography of Sri Sankara was written by his contemporaries. For details about his life, we have to depend on Sankara Vijayas composed at different times long after he lived. They do not agree in all particulars about his life. The traditional date of Sri Sankara varies from that assigned to him by modern historians. While the latter fix him as having lived from 788 to 820 A.D., the tradition determined by the pontifical succession in the celebrated Pithas that he established take him to a time long before the Christian era. Be that as it may, we may glean from the different biographies extant today a generally accepted account of his life and work.

It is agreed on all hands that Sri Sankara belonged to a Nambudiri Brahmana family of Kerala in the hamlet of Kaladi situated on the banks of the Churna river. His father was a pious wealthy person called Sivaguru and his mother was Aryamba. Not blessed with a son for a long time, the devout pair went to worship Lord Siva in the nearby celebrated temple at Trichur. The story goes that, pleased by their devotion, the God appeared before them in a dream and asked them to choose between a number of long-lived sons who would remain ignorant and stupid and one who would live for eight years only, but would be possessed of phenomenal intellectual gifts. Sivaguru and his wife had no hesitation in choosing the latter. According to the legend, it was conveyed to them that Lord Siva Himself would condescend to be born to them.

In fullness of time, Aryamba bore a child carrying such divine marks on its person that those who beheld it proclaimed it an incarnation of Lord Siva Himself. It was given the significant name of Sankara, calculating by the season, the day and time of its birth and also as if to predict the great service the child was destined to render to the world. (Sam Karoti iti Sankarah: 'Sankara' is one who does good). As ill-luck would have it, Sivaguru passed away before the child was five years old and it was then brought up with care and affection by his mother. With the assistance of her kinsmen, Aryamba got the upanayanam ceremony performed for her precocious boy who then mastered all the Vedas and Sastras which seemed to wait on his lips, eager to be uttered by him for their own sanctification.

The eight years of the boy's allotted life were drawing to a close. The fateful day dawned. On that day it happened that Aryamba and Sri Sankara went to the Churna river to bathe. The mother finished her ablutions and was resting on the bank of the river. Suddenly she heard a cry of distress from her son telling her that a terrific crocodile had got his leg in its mouth and was dragging him down. The agony of the mother was indescribable.

Then Sri Sankara told her that he could free himself from the grip of the monster if, then and there, he assumed the Sannyasa asrama bringing about thereby the 'death' of his former condition and the start of a new life. Else, the crocodile would devour him and that would be the end of his physical life. 'Choose' said he, 'this instant; for there is no time to lose. Shall I pass away devoured by the crocodile or shall I live converting myself into a sannyasin?' Aryamba was in a dilemma; but her maternal instinct made her consent to Sri Sankara to live as a sannyasin if thereby she could keep him alive. Then and there, standing in the water, the boy Sankara uttered the incantation which automatically admitted him into the holy order of mendicant sannyasins. And, for a wonder, the crocodile loosened its grip and disappeared from water to appear again on the sky, so the story goes, as a celestial Gandharva released from his erstwhile curse by which he was condemned to be an aquatic monster. Thus Sri Sankara 'died' as a Brahmachari at the ordained age of eight and obtained a further lease of another eight years.

Upon Aryamba quite innocently bidding her son accompany her home, Sri Sankara reminded her that he had become a sannyasin, that he had betaken to an itinerant life and must take leave of her. The mother was anguished at this, grieving as to who could take care of her son. She wailed in disappointment that it was not given to her to see her son grow up, marry and raise a progeny for the continuation of his line. Sri Sankara consoled her by saying: 'Mother dear! Do not grieve. The whole world will be my home hereafter. All those who will initiate me into the sacred lore will be my fathers. All women who give me bhiksha (alms) will be my mothers. The peace that shall be mine by the realisation of the Atman will be my consort. All my disciples will be my sons.' He however promised to be at her bedside in her last moments and speed her way to heaven by his presence. Aryamba then gave him unwilling leave to depart. Sri Sankara traveled on foot from Kaladi to the Narmada banks visiting many a sacred spot on the way. There, in a place called Omkar Mandhata on the bank of river Narmada which from then on is called Sankara Ganga, he met

Govinda Bhagavatpada who formally admitted him into the sannyasin order according to the prescribed rituals and imparted the Brahma Vidya to him. After serving his guru, for some time, obeying his command. Sri Sankara went to Kasi (Varanasi) and engaged himself in writing commentaries on the tripod of Hindu philosophy, namely, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras. At this time an interesting incident happened in the life of Sri Sankara. One morning, he was returning to his monastery after a bath in the Ganga. Leading four dogs an outcaste, who should not approach him, came along.

He was bidden by Sri Sankara to go away from his path. Upon this, the outcaste queried him as to what he bade to go away; if it was the outcaste's body or his Atman. If it was the former, he said, it was compacted of the same five elements as Sri Sankara's own body and was not different. So it need not go away. If it was the Atman, then according to the Advaita that Sri Sankara taught, the Atman of all persons, brahmana or outcaste, was one only and, being identical and all-pervasive, it cannot move away. Sri Sankara immediately understood that his questioner was no ordinary outcaste, but a realised soul and broke forth into a pentad of verses acclaiming the outcaste's greatness. Sri Sankara said in the verse that he deemed a person of such spiritual realisation to be his Guru, be he an outcaste or a brahmana. According to the legend, it was Lord Siva Himself who appeared as this outcaste. The dogs were the four vedas. The outcaste and his retinue vanished and Lord Siva appeared and blessed Sri Sankara exhorting him to finish writing his commentaries.

Another incident occurred some time later. While Sri Sankara was instructing his disciples in his Vedantic commentaries, an aged brahmana appeared before him with a request that he would be pleased to resolve some of his doubts. A vigorous discussion followed between the Master and the brahmana who disputed for a number of days with elaborate arguments Sri Sankara's interpretation of one of the tersest of the Brahma Sutras. This went on for eight days, each side vindicating its stand and there was no prospect of its conclusion. At this time, one of Sri Sankara's disciples, Padmapada by name, wondered who the doughty debater was. In an intuitive flash it struck him that he must be the great Bhagavan Vyasa, the author of the Brahma Sutras. He exclaimed: 'Sankara is Siva and Vyasa is Narayana Himself. When these gods themselves dispute, what can a mere mortal like me do?' Sri Sankara then realised who his disputant was. Prostrating before him he begged to be blessed. Sage Vyasa there upon lauded the fidelity of Sankara's commentaries and gave them the imprimatur of his approval. Now the extended eight years of Sri Sankara's life were about to be over. Adding another sixteen years to the span of his life, Vyasa bade him propagate the Advaita Sastra in the far reaches of India.

Then began the triumphant digvijaya of Sri Sankara. The first opponent of Advaita which is the philosophy of the Upanishads (known as the Uttaramimamsa) was the Purvamimamsaka who believed in the primacy and the immediacy of the Vedic Karmic rituals as the means to Moksha. One of the staunchest protagonists of this school was Kumarila Bhatta who lay on the banks of the Ganga at Prayag (modern

Allahabad) at the point of death, having immolated himself by fire for the sin of gurudroha (being a traitor to one's Guru), which he acquired by furtively learning the tenets of Buddhism from a Buddhist savant in order to controvert them later. Kumarila, according to the legend, was an incarnation of Kumara, son of Lord Siva. He told Sri Sankara of his predicament which disabled him from debating with him. He bade him go to his own disciple, Mandana Misra living in Mahishmati, saying that he (Mandana) was a more uncompromising ritualist than himself.

Sri Sankara hastened to Mandana's place. On arriving at the city, he was at a loss to discover Mandana's house. He enquired of a woman who was passing by and was told that in the verandah of a house two parrots would be chirping between themselves whether the Vedas were true in their own right or if their truth was derived. That, she said, was Mandana's house. Arriving there, Sri Sankara found the door closed against intruders as a sraddha ceremony was being then performed by Mandana. The story is that Sri Sankara let himself in by his yogic powers. Parrying the abuses of the householder who was wroth at a sannyasin interposing himself in a sraddha ceremony, Sri Sankara said that he did not come there for anna bhiksha (alms of food) but made him agree to a vada bhiksha, (alms of knowledge) after the sraddha ceremony was over. The disputants agreed that Mandana's wife Sarasavani who was said to be an incarnation of the Goddess Sarasvati, (Mandana being Brahma himself), should act as umpire to the debate. The wager was that if either was defeated, he should adopt the asrama of the other, that is, either Sri Sankara should become a householder or Mandana should take to monastic discipline. Leaving them to debate between themselves, Sarasavani went to attend to her domestic chores. Before doing so, she adorned each disputant with a garland of flowers saying that the person whose garland showed signs of fading must be considered to have been defeated.

The debate went on for a number of days. At the conclusion of the sessions on a particular day, Sarasavani invited both of them together for bhiksha signifying that her lord Mandana had become eligible for alms as only a monk is, in other words, that he had been defeated and should, according to the wager, become a sannyasin. This he did, adopting the name Suresvara and thence forward accepted the supremacy of Advaita. He became one of the foremost disciples of Sri Sankara who had earlier, when he was in Kasi acquired a disciple in the person of Sanandana. This disciple came to be known as Padmapada because the river Ganga caused lotuses (padma) to bloom at every step of his foot (pada) to give support to him, when once in his ecstatic devotion to Sri Sankara, he walked right on the stream to fulfil a command of the master on the other bank.

Sri Sankara then traveled to Badri on the Himalayas where His guru Govinda and His guru's guru Gaudapada were living in the enjoyment of nirvikalpa samadhi. He made them revert to world consciousness by singing the famous Dakshinamurti Stotra. He received their blessings and went to Kailas. According to the story he was affectionately received by his Great Original, Lord Paramesvara who blessed him with five Siva Sphatika Lingas, the oval emblems of Siva made of transparent crystals and a transcript of Soundaryalahari, a century of hymns in praise of the Divine Mother. As ill-luck would have it,

he lost the later fifty nine of these verses which he subsequently replaced by his own composition. The five lingas given by Siva were known as Mokshalinga, Varalinga, Bhogalinga, Muktilinga and Yogalinga. Sri Sankara then returned to Kedara where he installed the Muktilinga and established one of his pontificates, in the nearby Badri, which is called the Jyotish Pitha. Proceeding thence to Nepal, he vanquished the Buddhists who denied the soul and God. He installed the Varalinga at Nilakanta Kshethra which is even now in worship at Nepal.

Wending his steps southward the Bhagavatpada went to Dwaraka in the Western corner of India, sacred to the memory of Sri Krishna. He established the Kalika Pitha there and also a pontificate. Crossing the country travelling eastward, he came to Puri where he founded the Vimala Pitha after worshipping Lord Jagannatha. Thence he went to Srisailam in the Andhra Pradesh where he composed the famous hymn Sivanandalahari and installed a Srichakra in front of the shrine of the presiding goddess Sri Bhramarambika. It was at this time that Sri Sankara vanquished the Kapalikas and put down the homicidal practice to which they were addicted to in their religious worship.

It was at this time that Sri Sankara's supreme spirit of self-sacrifice and his boundless compassion towards even an enemy with murderous intent was evidenced. (The sage of Kanchi used to narrate the incident with his deep feeling of Guru Bhakthi). The chief of the Kapalikas wanted to do away with Sri Sankara. But he knew that such a divine person could not be done away with unless he himself gave his consent for that. The Kapalika, in addition, also knew the loving heart of Sri Sankara and his self-sacrificing nature. So he made bold to request Sri Sankara himself to give permission to behead him! He further said that he would offer the head to his god Kapali, the dreadful form of Siva, and by this offer of the head of a true monk he would reach the heaven of Kapali.

Without a moment's hesitation Sri Sankara gave his hearty approval for the atrocious request! He said, "Till now I had been thinking that the human body alone is incapable of being of service to fellow beings. The hide of the sheep serves as blanket, that of the cow for making musical instruments. The nerves of many animals find use as strings. So on and so forth. But the human body, once dead is just burnt or buried, without being of any use to anybody. I have been thinking so till now. But now, dear man, you say that my head would serve to confer Kalpali's heaven itself on you. I am glad to be utilised thus. If you are sure that I am a true monk do quickly chop off my head before my disciples turn up".

Unmoved by even such an exalted expression of love the Kapalika aimed his sword on Sri Sankara. But before it could touch the neck of Sri Sankara, the Kapalika himself fell dead due to the outburst of the wrath of the Almighty Vishnu in the Man-lion form of Narasimha.

Traversing thence to the Western Ghats, Sri Sankara worshipped Sri Mukambika. There he discovered the dumb prodigy who, on being cured of his defect, became his disciple and attained the name Hastamalaka. Another of the disciples was one Giri by name, generally considered to be backward by his fellow-disciples. Receiving a special mark of grace from Sri Sankara, he broke forth into a soul-stirring hymn of eight verses in praise of his guru, celebrated as the Totakashtaka,

himself getting the sannyasa name of Totakacharya.

Resuming his travel, Sri Sankara went to Karnataka and reached Sringagiri (Sringeri). Here he erected a shrine to Sri Sarada, established another pontificate known as the Sarada Pitha and installed there the Bhogalinga from among those that he had brought from Kailas.

Meanwhile, Sri Sankara's mother was on the point of death. True to his promise to her, Sankara hastened to her bedside and invoked the grace of Vishnu to take her to Vaikuntha. As a sannyasin should not engage in any kind of ritual, his kinsmen refused to permit him to perform the lady's obsequies himself. Upon his insisting that the duty to one's mother overrode all rules and that he would himself perform his mother's cremation, they all to a man, withheld their co-operation. Sri Sankara carried the dead body to the backyard of his house unaided by anybody and lighted the funeral pyre by invoking his spiritual prowess. Sri Sankara went thence to Tirupati where he established the Dhanakarshana Yantra which, to this day, draws vast sums of wealth from pious devotees. Reaching Jambukeswaram in modern Tiruchirapalli, he tempered the ferocity of Akhilandeswari, the presiding Goddess by installing a shrine to Sri Vighneswara in front of Her, and fixing on the ears of Her person two rings known as Tatankas in the mystically designed Srichakra pattern. He then went to the land's end in Rameswaram to worship Lord Ramanatha in the Linga that he celebrated in his Dvadasalingstotra. in praise of the Lingas installed in the twelve (dvadasa) foremost temples of Siva. Returning, he visited Chidambaram and left the Mokshalinga, another of those he got in Kailas, to be worshipped there.

Travelling through the length and breadth of the country over, Sri Sankara ultimately reached Kancheepuram near Madras. Kanchi is known as one of the seven Mokshapuris of our sacred land (places which confer Liberation) and has had, through the ages, a memorable political, literary, cultural and religious history. Scholars and saints of all denominations and sects have either visited it in their time or taken permanent residence there. It has been the venue of philosophical disputations of all schools of thought. No religious leader considered his mission fulfilled or his victory complete unless he vanquished rivals of other faiths in that famous city. As its name signifies, Kanchi is the waistline of the earth and its central spot. It was but appropriate that Sri Sankara also should go to this place to proclaim the Advaita Vedanta vindicating it against other schools of religion and philosophy. Acclaimed by everyone as the supreme master of all that is to know, Sri Sankara ascended before a large assembly the throne of omniscience known as the Sarvajna Pitha at Kanchi.

He then mitigated the ugrakala, the fierce aspect of the Goddess Kamakshi drawing it into a Srichakra which he placed in front of Her and consecrated it. After renovating the temple to Lord Vishnu in the person of Sri Varadaraja, he asked the reigning king of Kanchi to fashion the city in the form of a Srichakra giving the central place to the shrine of Sri Kamakshi.

A few things are noteworthy in this connection. Kanchi is famous for its numerous temples in honour of Vishnu and Siva. But the main tower

of all of them, howsoever distant they may be from the temple of Sri Kamakshi, face it without exception. The processional idols of all these shrines are taken round this Kamakshi temple when their annual festivals are celebrated. In none of the Siva temples of Kanchi is there a shrine for Siva's Consort, that of Kamakshi doing service for all of them. The city is famous as the place where Brahma himself performed a yajna attended by all the celestials.

No wonder that Sri Sankara chose Kanchi to establish the pontificate known as the Kamakoti Pitha there. Of the five Lingas which he got from Kailas, he reserved the Yogalinga for worship by himself here in the Kamakoti Pitha. Entrusting the four chief maths that he had established in the important religious centers of the country in-charge of each of his four eminent disciples, Sankara chose the fifth that he established in Kanchi known as the Saradamatha, for his own stay and ministration. These five maths function to this day as bastions of our ancient Sanatana Dharma in general and of Advaita Vedanta in particular. They have had since Sri Sankara's time a long and illustrious line of pontifical successors who bear his hallowed name and continue to discharge the great mission that he entrusted to them. The Math associated with the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham has a special significance by reason of its being the place where Sri Sankara spent his last days and finally shed his mortal body merging into the beautitude of Brahmanubhava.

The text of the Srimukhas (pontifical epistles) granted by the Jagadgurus of the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha since time immemorial refers to Sri Sankara as Nikila-Pashanda-Kantakotgha patanena visadi- krta-Veda-Vedanta-Marga-Shanmatha-Pratishthapa-kacharyah: i.e. describes him as 'one who swept off the thorns that encumbered the various forms of worship of the six manifestations of God'. Worship of these deities had waned in our land due to the inroads of Buddhism and Jainism. It was Sri Sankara who rescued them from oblivion and rid some of them of their unholy encrustations. Particular mention may be made of the vamachara practices in the Sakta religion and the abhorrent rituals of the Kapalikas. Hence Sri Sankara is gratefully spoken of as Shanmathapratishtapakacharya, which means, not one who established the six forms of worship for the first time but one who revived and gave strength and stability to the existing ones. Nor were they to Sri Sankara six different, and much less, opposed forms. They are six alternative ways in which the same Supreme God is worshipped according to the preference of the worshipper. Each chooses his Ishta devata among them, determined by his family tradition (kulachara) and his inclination (ruchi), and accommodates the rest also in a subsidiary way in his pattern of worship. Thus Sri Sankara was a great integrator within the fold of the Vedic religion and he brought about intra religious amity among all those who professed the Hindu faith.

Such was the life and work of the illustrious Sankaracharya who packed within a brief period of thirty-two years a series of achievements which are unequalled both in their content and their variety. Judged by any test, as a writer, as a poet, as a thinker and debater, as a prophet and mystic, as a religious organiser, and by any aspect of his diversified personality Sri Sankara is unique among the great men of the world. He holds a pre-eminent position among the

Master Minds that have shaped the thoughts and actions alike of their contemporaries and of posterity. Above all, the Advaita Vedanta that he expounded to such artistic perfection is the one and only philosophy that will effectively make for personal liberation from the shackles of life on the one hand, and for universal amity and peace liquidating social and national rivalries on the other. The Vedanta associated with his name belongs not to one section of the Hindus only. It is the philosophy of the entire humanity and deserves to be carefully studied and scrupulously practised by men in every part of the globe. Most truly, Sri Sankara is referred to with love and devotion as Lokasankara, the most brilliant among the benefactors of mankind for all time and in all times.

A grand Social Idealist By By Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

The Advaitism of Sankara is a system of great speculative daring and logical subtlety. Its austere intellectualism, its remorseless logic, which marches on in different to the hopes and beliefs of man, its relative freedom from theological obsessions, make it a great example of a purely philosophical scheme. Thibaut, who cannot be charged with any partiality for Sankara, speaks of his philosophy in these words "The doctrine advocated by Sankara is, from a purely philosophical point of view, and apart from all theological considerations, the most important and interesting one which has arisen on Indian soil; neither those forms of the Vedanta which diverge from the view represented by Sankara, nor any of the non-Vedantic systems can be compared with the so called orthodox Vedanta in boldness, depth and subtlety of speculations." It is impossible to read Sankara's writings packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking, without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of a very fine penetration and profound spirituality. With his acute feeling of the immeasurable world, his stirring gaze into the abysmal mysteries of spirit, his unswerving resolve to say neither more nor less than what could be proved, Sankara stands out as a heroic figure of the first rank in the somewhat motley crowd of the religious thinkers of medieval India. His philosophy stands forth complete, needing neither a before nor an after. It has a self-justifying wholeness characteristic of works of art. It expounds its own presuppositions, is related by its own end, and holds all its elements in a stable, reasoned equipoise.

The list of qualifications which Sankara lays down for a student of Philosophy brings out how, for him, philosophy is not an intellectual pursuit but a dedicated life. The first, "discrimination between things eternal and non-eternal" demands of the student the power of thought, which helps him to distinguish between the unchanging reality and the changing world. For those who possess this power, it is impossible to desist from the enterprise of metaphysics. "Renunciation of the enjoyment of the reward here and in the other world" is the second requirement. In the empirical world and man's temporal life within it there is little to satisfy the aspirations of spirit. Philosophy gets its chance, as well as its justification, through the disillusionment which life brings. The seeker after truth must refuse to abase himself before things as they

are and develop an austere detachment characteristic of the superior mind. Moral preparation is insisted on as the third requisite, and, lastly, longing for liberation (mumukshutvam) is mentioned. We must have a mind disposed, as St. Luke expresses it, "for eternal life."

Sankara present to us the true ideal of philosophy, which is not so much knowledge as wisdom, not so much logical learning as spiritual freedom. For Sankara, as for some of the greatest thinkers of the world like Plato and Plotinus, Spinoza and Hegel, Philosophy is the austere vision of eternal truth, majestic in its freedom from the petty cares of man's paltry life. Through the massive and at the same time subtle dialectic of Sankara there shows forth a vivid, emotional temperament, without which philosophy tends to become a mere game of logic. A master of the strictest logic, he is also master of a noble and animated poetry which belongs to another order. The rays of his genius have illumined the dark places of thought and soothed the sorrows of the most forlorn heart. While his philosophy fortifies and consoles many, there are, of course, those to whom it seems to be an abyss of contradiction and darkness. But whether we agree or differ, the penetrating light of his mind never leaves us where we were.

Sankara appeared, at one and the same time, as an eager champion of the orthodox faith and a spiritual reformer. He tried to bring back the age from the brilliant luxury of the Puranas to the mystic truth of the Upanishads. The power of the faith to lead the soul to the higher life became for him the test of its strength. He felt impelled to attempt the spiritual direction of his age by formulating a philosophy and religion which could satisfy the ethical and spiritual needs of the people better than the systems of Buddhism, Mimamsa and Bhakti. The theists were veiling the truth in a mist of sentiment. With their genius for mystical experience, they were indifferent to the practical concerns of life. The Mimamsaka emphasis on karma developed ritualism devoid of spirit. Virtue can face the dark perils of life and survive only if it be the fine flower of thought. The Advaita philosophy alone, in the opinion of Sankara, could do justice to the truth of the conflicting creeds, and so he wrote all his works with the one purpose of helping the individual to a realisation of the identity of his soul with Brahman, which is the means of liberation from samsara.

In his wanderings from his birthplace in Malabar to the Himalayas in the north he came across many phases of worship and accepted all those which had in them the power to elevate man and refine his life. He did not preach a single exclusive method of salvation, but composed hymns of unmistakable grandeur addressed to the different gods of popular Hinduism-Vishnu, Siva Sakti, Surya. All this affords a striking testimony to the universality of his sympathies and the wealth of natural endowment. While revivifying the popular religion, he also purified it. He put down the grosser manifestations of the Sakta worship in South India. In the Deccan, it is said that he suppressed the unclean worship of Siva as a dog under the name of Mallari, and the per-nicious practices of Kapalikas whose god Bhairava desired human victims. He condemned branding or marking the body with the metallic designs. He learned from the Buddhist Church that discipline, freedom from superstition and ecclesiastical organisations help to preserve the faith clean and strong, and himself established ten religious orders of which four retain their

prestige till to-day.

The life of Sankara makes a strong impression of contraries. He is a philosopher and a poet, a savant and a saint, a mystic and a religious reformer. Such diverse gifts did he possess that different images present themselves, if we try to recall his personality. One sees him in youth, on fire with intellectual ambition, a stiff and intrepid debater. Another regards him as a shrewd political genius, attempting to impress on the people a sense of unity. For a third, he is a calm philosopher engaged in the single effort to expose the contradictions of life and though with an unmatched incisiveness. For a fourth, he is the mystic who declares that we are all greater than we know. There have been few minds more universal than his.

Sankara's system is unmatched for its metaphysical depth and logical power. Thought follows through naturally, until Advaitism is seen to complete and crown the edifice. It is a great example of monistic idealism which it is difficult to meet with a absolutely conclusive metaphysical refutation. Sankara holds up a vision of life acceptable in the highest moments of poetry and religion, when we are inclined to sympathise with his preference for intuition to the light of the understanding. So long as he remains on this high ground, he is unanswerable. But a lingering doubt oppresses the large majority of mankind, who very rarely get into these exalted heights. They feel that it is unjust to leave in such high disdain the world in which they live, move and have their being, and relegate it to ajnana or darkness, offering merely a solace that all disagreeable appearances will quickly vanish in the eternal light. For them the all - transforming sunlight of the heights is spurious, and they declare that Sankara's system is one of mystical indifference to fact. That human suffering will be healed, that the whole world will vanish like a pitiful mirage, that all our trouble is of our own making, and that in the world's finale all people will find that absolute oneness which will suffice for all hearts, compose all resentments and atone for all crimes, seem to many to be pious assumptions. The entranced self-absorption which arms itself with sanctity, involves a cruel indifference to practical life hardly acceptable to average intelligence.

Sankara knows all this, and so gives us a logical theism which does not slight the intellect, does not scorn the wisdom of ages and is at the same time the highest intellectual account of the truth. What is the relation between the absolutism of intuition and the empirical theism of logic, Sankara does not tell us; for as Goethe wisely observed, "man is born not to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins, and then to restrain himself within the limits of the comprehensible". Sankara recognises that there is a region which we cannot penetrate, and a wise agnosticism is the only rational attitude. The greatness of Sankara's achievements rests on the peculiar intensity and splendour of thought with which the search for reality is conducted on the high idealism of spirit grappling with the difficult problems of life, regardless of theological consequences, and on the vision of a consummation which places divine glory on human life.

Supreme as a philosopher and a dialectician, great as a man of calm judgment and wide toleration, Sankara taught us to love truth,

respect reason and realise the purpose of life. Twelve centuries have passed, and yet his influence is visible. He destroyed many an old dogma, not by violently attacking it, but by quietly suggesting something more spiritual too. He put into general circulation a vast body of important knowledge and formative ideas which, though contained in the Upanishads, were forgotten by the people, and thus recreated for us the distant past. He was not a dreaming idealist, but a practical visionary, a philosopher, and at the same time a man of action, what we may call a social idealist on the grand scale. Even those who do not agree with his general attitude to life will not be reluctant to allow him a place among the immortals.

Sankara and the West By Prof. Ninian Smart

Sankaracharya had become known to the West mainly as secondhand. The reason for this is his enormous influence upon modern expositions of the essentials of Hinduism. An important feature of the latter has been the thesis that all religions essentially point to the same goal, to the realization of the Self. Indeed, much of what counts as Vedanta in the West (as expounded, for example, by Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood and others) essentially derives from Sankara. By contrast the Vedantic interpretations of Ramanuja and Madhva, for example, are much less well known. One reason for this situation is that Sankara's brilliant exegetical technique and philosophical thinking were crystallized in the doctrine of differing levels of truth—a principle which can naturally be applied to the problem of seeing differing religious formulations as lying on a continuum from popular cults, through theism, to the absolutism expressed in Sankara's idealism. The principle resolves certain apparent contradictions between religious beliefs.

Another cause of the influence of Sankara in recent times has been the fact that at the time when western philosophy and Indian philosophy came into fruitful symbiosis-- in the later part of the 19th century, absolute idealism, derived from Hegel, was the dominating motif in Western philosophising. Its apparent analogy to Advaita Vedanta led to frequent expressions of a new synthesis between East and West.

In the present century also there was the pioneering work of Rudolf Otto, in his *Mysticism East and West*, which made an important comparison between Sankara and Eckhart, thus encouraging the interest in assimilating the results of the contemplative life, whether East or West, to the same goal of realizing an absolute lying beyond the personal God, and issued in a wider synthesis between Christian, Sufi, Buddhist and Hindu mysticism (i.e.) mysticism in the sense of the pursuit of the contemplative life, resulting in the realization of some kind of realization or union or rapport with ultimate Reality. More recently there are such works as W.T. Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy* which come to general conclusions compatible with the world picture delineated in Sankara's writings.

Consequently it is not absurd to say that Sankara lies behind the picture of a Hinduism, and specially of Hinduism in its higher

contemplative forms presented to the West in the present century. The interest in such an Advaitic Hinduism (admittedly modified in various ways by modern exponents, both East and West) has been boosted by the increased concern both among young and old in the West for direct experiential tests of religious truth and the interest in mysticism.

It is true that this Western concern for Eastern forms of contemplation has different forms, and is sometimes negative. It is sometimes negative in that it expresses an alienation from traditional forms of religion in the West and from the social milieu in which traditional Christianity made living sense for the majority of the population. Dissatisfaction with present religious practices and institutions is not necessarily the correct basis for an exploration of the ideas and ideals of Sankara. Nevertheless it testifies to the sense that religion, to be revitalised, needs to be made directly experiential-and the implicit experientialism of Sankara and of modern Advaitic Hinduism therefore can have a powerful appeal. However, Sankara is not the only teacher to whom people in the West, thus dissatisfied with traditional formulations and practices, are liable to turn. There is, as it happens, an even greater interest in Buddhism. This is partly because Buddhism in the past was a 'universal' or missionary religion. Whereas Sankara was primarily teaching and working within the structure of the Indian tradition, Buddhism even before the time of Sankara was already widespread over Asia. This 'universalism' of Buddhism, as expressed in the diversity of cultural forms in which it works, makes it easier to assimilate in the Western context. It also happens that the Vedic principle of transcendental revelation, less prominent in Buddhism, is less well adapted to present-day Western consciousness, which is so explicitly anti-authoritarian in matters of religion. This is where Vivekananda's Advaitic humanism scored, in that it was pitched in terms of the realization of man's potential, a theme of course implicit in Sankara, but obscured by the fact that his best-known work consists in the interpretation of a scriptural tradition.

Another problem from the point of view of the modern West is Sankara's doctrine of Maya. It is true that "illusion" is not the best translation. Nevertheless it has become commonly accepted in the West, and rather misleadingly, that the central teaching of Hinduism about the world is that it is unreal. As a merely metaphysical doctrine this might not matter, but it seems to have valuational consequences. Hence present-day concerns to alter and change the real world for the better, both materially and socially, run counter to the Western interpretation of Hinduism as world-negating. To say the least, this tension is unfortunate. As Ramanuja pointed out with critical clarity, Sankara's criterion of "illusoriness" was impermanence - a very different idea from unreality. Moreover, the usual Western picture of Hinduism is mainly grounded on ignorance and derivative from stupid folktale about Hindu self-mortification (of course, the phenomenon exists, but is almost never seen in context by Westerners). This trend against idealistic accounts of the world has created wrong judgments about the new formulations on Hinduism inspired ultimately by the revolutionary work of Sankara.

Another reaction towards Sankara in the West is represented by the specifically Christian sentiments. Since Christianity by definition focuses above all on Christ and since Christ is a personal figure-

thus implying the personal character of God--there is disquiet at the transcendence of Isvara contained in Sankara's account of ultimate reality. It is also a theme in many modern Hindu writings. e.g., the late Paul Tillich in his expositions of a new Christian theology, who would seem to be in close agreement with this idea. But on the other hand, the great bulk of Christian theologians are, doubtless inevitably, wedded to a picture of ultimate reality very different from that delineated in Sankara's writings.

My own view is that these issues will be resolved in the process of the dialogue between religions. I do not think that the divergences between different schools of thought and spiritual traditions can be glossed over. Sankaracharya himself would not have approved of such a glossing over. He was a great reformer, a tremendous philosopher and exegete, and he was concerned to stake out a true picture of spiritual reality, in distinction from other viewpoints. It follows therefore that he will remain a central human exponent of religious ideas and will thus play a vital role in the dialogue of religions and ideologies to which I have referred.

Tributes by Ancient and Medieval Saints

Sri Padmapadacharya

Honey-bees from all directions seek the ambrosial nectar in the lotus which grows in the sacred lake, the Manasasaras. Like those bees, devout and disciplined seekers of wisdom draw inspiration and instruction from the Bhashyas that came out of the lotus lips of the supreme Teacher, Sri Sankara before whom I bow my head in humble obeisance.

Sri Suresvaracharya

Salutations with body, mind and speech to the glorious Sun that is Sri Sankara struck back by the lustre of whose knowledge the splendour of the solar orb became dim like the moon, and the effulgent renown of whose disciples enveloped all the countries from the Far East to the Far West and dispelled the darkness of ignorance from every region.

Sri Totakacharya

The sunlight of Sri Sankara's intellect has completely expelled from the recesses of my heart the darkness of ignorance which is the cause of ceaseless swinging between birth and death. Bands of disciples adorned with the excellences of Vedic lore, self-control and humility and taking refuge in His Holy Feet are immediately liberated from samsara. I shall be teneering my obeisance to that pre-eminent ascetic till the end of my life.

Sri Sarvajnatmamuni

I bow to Sri Sankara whose holy feet are worshipped and by contact

with whose exposition the besmirched dirt of faulty interpretation of the Veda by perverted reasoning was completely removed and the name, Nitya Saraswati of the Veda has its true meaning restored.

Sri Appayya Dikshita

The relative Path of attaining the fruit of contacting the personal forms of God by leading the souls to the respective celestial regions is shown by the different Upanishadic Upasanas (contemplations) and expounded by the various Bhashyas. But, like a river flowing into the ocean and becoming an indivisible part of it, that Path finds its Goal in the ocean of (Advaitic) bliss, the greatest fruit of human aspirations and the sanctuary of Shastra (the Veda), which have been unveiled by Acharya Pada.

Hails the auspicious word (the Bhashya) flowing from the lotus face of Bhagavat-Pada explaining the Brahman bereft of all duality, destroying every possibility of rebirth taking a thousand different arms of expositions due to the contact of various Acharyas anterior to me, as the celestial river (Ganga) issuing from the feet of Vishnu assumes different shapes and colours by flowing through different types of land and helps mortals to avoid rebirth.

A cambodian Inscription

[An inscription in an ancient temple known as Bhadreswaram in the forests of Cambodia refers to one Sivasoma who was the teacher of king Indravarman. About the teacher Sivasoma, it says. "By whom were learnt all the Sastras from Bhagavan Sankara whose lotus feet were swarmed by the bees of the bowing heads of all learned men without exception."]

GREAT MINDS ON THE GREAT MASTER  
Swami Vivekananda

I have neither the time nor the inclination to describe to you the hideousness that came in the wake of Buddhism. The most hideous ceremonies, the most horrible, the most obscene books that human hands ever wrote or the human brain ever conceived, the most bestial forms that ever passed under the name of religion, have all been the creation of degraded Buddhism.

But India has to live, and the spirit of the Lord descended again. He who declared "I will come whenever virtue subsides", came again, and this time the manifestation was in the South, and up rose the young Brahmin of whom it has been declared that at the age of sixteen he had completed all his writings; the marvellous boy Sankaracharya. The writings of this boy of sixteen are the wonders of the modern world, and so was the boy. He wanted to bring back the Indian world to its pristine purity, but think of the amount of the task before him... The Tartars and the Baluchis and all the hideous races of mankind came to India and became Buddhists, and assimilated with us, and brought their national customs and the whole of our national life became a huge stage of the most horrible and the most bestial customs. That was the inheritance which that boy got from the Buddhists, and from that time to this day his whole work in India is a re-conquest of this Buddhistic degradation by the Vedanta. It is still going on, it is not yet finished. Sankara came as a great

philosopher and showed that the real essence of Buddhism and that of the Vedanta are not very different, but that the disciples did not understand the Master and have degraded themselves, denied the existence of the soul and of God and have become atheists. That was what Shankara showed and all the Buddhists began to come back to the old religion.

The greatest teacher of the Vedanta philosophy was Shankaracharya. By solid reasoning he extracted from the Vedas the truths of Vedanta, and on them built up the wonderful system of Jnana that is taught in his commentaries. He unified all the conflicting descriptions of Brahman and showed that there is only one infinite Reality. He showed too that as man can only travel slowly on the upward road, all the varied presentations are needed to suit his varying capacity. We find something akin to this in the teachings of Jesus, which he evidently adapted to the different abilities of his hearers. First he taught them of a Father in heaven and to pray to him. Next he rose a step higher and told them, "I am the vine, you are the branches", and lastly he gave them the highest truth: "I and my Father are one," and "The kingdom of Heaven is within You" Shankara taught that three things were the great gifts of God: (1) human body (2) thirst after God and (3) a teacher who can show up the light. When these three great gifts are ours, we may know that our redemption is at hand. Only knowledge can free and save us but with knowledge must go virtue.

Books cannot teach God, but they can destroy ignorance; their action is negative. To hold to the books and at the same time open the way to freedom is Shankara's great achievement.

Shankaracharya had caught the rhythm of the Vedas, the national cadence. Indeed I always imagine that he had some vision such as mine when he was young and recovered the ancient music that way. Anyway, his whole life's work is nothing but that, the throbbing of the beauty of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble)

"Whenever the dharma decays, and when that which is not dharma prevails, then I manifest myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil, for the firm establishment of the national righteousness I am born again and again." So says, the Bhagavat Gita and never was any prophecy more conclusively vindicated than this, by the appearance of the Sankaracharya.....

This wonderful boy-for he died at the age of thirty two had already completed a great mission when most men were still dreaming of the future. The characteristic product of oriental culture is always a commentary (on the earlier Scriptures). By this form of literature the future is knit firmly to the past, and though the dynamic power of the connecting idea may be obscure to the foreigner, it is clearly and accurately conveyed to the Eastern mind. By writing a new commentary on a given sutra, the man of genius has it in his power to re-adjust the relationship between a given question and the old answer. Hence it is not surprising to find that the masterpiece of Sankaracharya's life was a commentary on the Vedanta Sutras.

The whole of the national genius awoke once more in Sankaracharya. Amidst all the brilliance and luxury of the age, in spite of the rich and florid taste of the Puranic period, his soul caught the mystic whisper of the ancient rhythm of the Vedic chants, and the dynamic power of the faith to lead the soul to super-consciousness, became for him the secret of every phase of Hinduism. He was on fire with the love of the Vedas. His own poems have something of their classical beauty and comprehensive sentences of the Upanishads, to which he has contributed links and rivets.

Sankaracharya wandered, during his short life, from his birthplace in the South as far as the Himalayas, and everything that he came across in his travels related itself to the one focus and centre in his mind. He accepted each worship, even that which he was at first adverse. But always he found that the great mood of One-without-a-second was not only the Vedic, but also the Puranic goal.

This is the doctrine that he expresses in his twelve epoch-making commentaries especially in his crowning work, the commentary on Vedanta Sutras. And this idea, known as the Advaita Philosophy constitutes, for the rest of the Hindu period, the actual unity of India.

Western people can hardly imagine a personality such as that of Sankaracharya. In the course of so few years to have nominated the founders of no less than ten great religious orders, of which four have fully retained their prestige to the present day; to have acquired such a mass of Sanskrit learning as to create a distinct philosophy, and impress himself on the scholarly imagination of India a pre-eminence that twelve hundred years have not sufficed to shake; to have written poems whose grandeur makes them unmistakable, even to the foreign and unlearned ear; and at the same time to have lived with his disciples in all the radiant joy and simple pathos of the saints-this is greatness that we may appreciate, but cannot understand...

The work of Sankaracharya was the relinking of popular practice to the theory of Brahman, the stern infusion of mythological fancies with the doctrine of the Upanishads. He took up and defined the current catchwords-maya, karma, reincarnation, and others-and left the terminology of Hinduism what it is today.

His complete appropriation by this nation only shows that he is in perfect unison with its thought and aspiration.

Annie Besant

(The) proclamation (of Buddha) was not made primarily for India. It was given in India, because India is the place whence the great religious revelations, go forth by the will of the Supreme. Therefore was He born in India, but His law was specially meant for nations beyond the bounds of Aryavarta, that they might learn a pure morality, a noble ethic disjoined-because of the darkness of the age-from all the complicated teachings which we find in connection with the subtle, metaphysical Hindu Faith.

Hence you find in the teaching of the Lord Buddha two great

divisions; one, a philosophy meant for the learned, then an ethic disjoined from the philosophy so far as the masses are concerned, noble and pure and great, yet easy to be grasped. For the Lord knew that we were going into an age of deeper and deeper materialism, that the nations were going to arise, that India for a time was going to sink down for other nations to rise above her in the scale of nations. Hence was it necessary to give a teaching of morality-fitted for a more materialistic age, so that even if nations would not believe in the gods they might still practise morality and obey the teachings of the Lord. In order also that this law might not suffer loss, in order that India itself might not lose its subtle metaphysical teachings and the widespread belief among all classes of people in the existence of the God, and their part in the affairs of men, the work of the great Lord Buddha was done. He left morality built upon a basis that could not be shaken by any change of faith, and having done His work, passed away. Then was sent another Great One, Sri Shankaracharya, in order that by His teaching He might give the Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy which would do intellectually what morally the Buddha had done, which intellectually would guard spirituality and allow a materialistic age to break its teeth on the hard knot of a flawless philosophy. Thus in India metaphysical religion triumphed, while the teaching of the Blessed One passed from the Indian soil, to do its noble work in lands other than the land of Aryavarta, which must keep unshaken its belief in gods, and where highest and lowest alike must bow before their power. That is the real truth about this much disputed question as to the teaching of the ninth Avatara (Buddha), the fact was that His teaching was not meant for His birthplace, but was meant for other younger nations that were rising up around, who did not follow the Vedas, but who yet needed instruction in the path of righteousness; not to mislead them but to guide them, was His teaching given. But, as I say, and as I repeat, what in it might have done harm in India had it been left alone was prevented by the coming of the great Teacher of Advaita. You must remember that His name has been worn by man after man, through century after century; but Shri Shankaracharya on whom was the power of Mahadeva descended was born but a few years after the passing away of the Buddha, as the records of the Dwaraka Math show plainly-taking date after date backward until they bring His birth within sixty or seventy years of the passing away of Buddha.

Paul Deussen (Kiel, Germany)

This system of Vedanta as founded on the Upanishads and Vedanta Sutras and accompanied by Sankara's commentaries on them-equal in rank to Plato and Kant-is one of the most valuable products of the genius of mankind in his researches of the eternal truth.... The conclusion is that the Jeeva being neither a part nor a different thing, nor a variation of the Brahman must be the Paramatman, fully and totally himself, A conclusion equally held by the Vedanta by Sankara, by the platonic Plotinus and the Kantian Schopenhauer. But Sankara in his conclusion, goes, perhaps more fully than any of them.

Charles Johnstone

What shall we say then of Master Sankara? Is he not the guardian of

the sacred waters, who by his commentaries has hemmed about against all impurities of time's jealousy, first the mountain-tarns of the Upanishads, then the serene forest-lake of the Bhagavad Gita and last the deep reservoir of the Sutras, adding from the generous riches of his wisdom, lively fountains and lakelets of his own, the crest-jewel, the Awakening and Discernment.

Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon)

Others have written commentaries and books on Vedanta Sutras and the Upanishads, but there is none who is venerated as Sankara is all over the sacred land. It may be noted that even a Roman Catholic Missionary has discovered the harmony of the Vedanta with Christian Philosophy (Vedanta Vindicated by Rev J.F. Pessein), and has so far as his dogmas have permitted him, accepted Sankara's exposition. The Hindu does not worship many Gods. What he does is that he has the same respect for the faith of others as he has for his own. (Post-script to the introduction to Prapanchasaara, Vol. XVIII of the Tantrik Texts, edited by Aruthur Avalon).

Rev. J.F.Pessein

"Great credit is due to Sankara and his school for having fought strenuously against the upholders of self-existence of the material world and brought the whole universe under the sway of God to whom it owes not only its organisation but also its very being. Sankara understood that the independent existence of another being would imply limitation of God." (Vedanta Vindicated by J.F.Pessein).

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, First President of India.

The name of Sankara is a name to conjure with, not only in India, but in other parts of the world. We all admire the wonderful way in which, within a short span of 32 years, he managed not only to study almost all philosophy, but also write a tremendous lot and tour all over the country from Cape Comorin right upto Himalayas.

Jawaharlal Nehru

I have mentioned in this letter the names of some kings and dynasties who lived their brief life of glory and then disappeared and were forgotten. But a more remarkable man arose in the south, destined to play a more vital part in India's life than all the kings and emperors. This young man was known as Shankaracharya. Probably he was born about the end of the eighth century. He seems to have been a person of amazing genius. He set about reviving Hinduism. He fought against Buddhism - fought with his intellect and arguments. Sankaracharya's record is a remarkable one. Buddhism, which had been driven south from the north, now almost disappears, from India. Hinduism becomes stirred up intellectually by Shankara's books and commentaries and argument. Not only does he become the great leader of the Brahman class, but he seems to catch imagination of the masses. It is an unusual thing for a man to become a great leader chiefly because of his powerful intellect, and for such a person to impress himself on millions of people and on history. Great soldiers and conquerors seem to stand out in history. They become popular or

are hatred, and sometimes they mould history. Great religious leaders have moved millions and fired with enthusiasm, but always this has been on the basis of faith. The emotions have been appealed to have been touched.

It is difficult for an appeal to the mind and to the intellect to go far. Most people unfortunately do not think: they feel and act according to their feelings. Yet Shankara's appeal was to the mind and intellect and to reason. It was not just the repetition of a dogma contained in an old book. Whether his argument was right or wrong is immaterial for the moment. What is interesting is his intellectual approach to religious problems, and even more so to the success he gained inspite of this method of approach.

The Vedanta system arising out of the Upanishads, developed and took many shapes and forms, but was always based on the foundation of the early Vedanta. Shankara (or Shankaracharya), built a system which is called the Advaita Vedanta or non-dualist Vedanta. It is this philosophy which represents the dominating philosophic outlook of Hinduism to-day.

How the Absolute Soul, the Atman, pervades everything, how the one appears as the many, and yet retains its wholeness, for the Absolute is indivisible, all these cannot be accounted for by the process of logical reasoning, for our minds are limited by the finite world. Finite individuals cannot imagine the infinite without limiting it; they can only form limited and objective conception of it. Yet even these finite forms and concepts rest ultimately in the Infinite and Absolute. Hence the form of religion becomes a relative affair and each individual has liberty to form such conceptions as he is capable of.

Shankara accepted the Brahminical organization of social life on the caste basis, as representing the collective experience and wisdom of the race. But he held that any person belonging to any caste could attain the highest knowledge.

There is about Shankara's attitude and philosophy a sense of world-negation and withdrawal from the normal activities of the world in search of that freedom of the self which was to him the final goal for every person. There is also a continual insistence on self-sacrifice and detachment.

And yet Shankara was a man of amazing energy and vast activity. He was no escapist retiring into his shell or into a corner of the forest, seeking his own individual perfection and oblivious of what happened to others. Born in Malabar in the far south of India, meeting innumerable people, arguing debating, reasoning, convincing, and filling them with a part of his own passing and tremendous vitality, he was evidently a man who was intensely conscious of his mission, a man who looked upon the whole of India from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas as his field of action and as something that held together culturally and was infused by the same spirit, though this might take many external forms. He strove hard to synthesize the diverse currents that were troubling the mind of the India of his day and to build a unity of outlook out of that diversity. In a brief life of thirty-two years he did the work of as many long lives and

left such an impress of his powerful mind and rich personality on India that it is very evident today. He was a curious mixture of a philosopher and scholar, an agnostic and a mystic, a poet and a saint, and, in addition to all this, a practical reformer and an able organizer...

There is a significance about (the) long journeys of Shankara throught out this vast land at a time when travel was difficult and the means of transport very slow and primitive. It would seem that Shankara wanted to add to the sense of national unity and common consciousness. He functioned on the intellectual, philosophical and religious planes and tried to bring about a greater unity of thought all over the country. He functioned also on the popular plane in many ways, destroying many a dogma and opening the door of his philosophic sanctuary to everyone who was capable of entering it.

Rajaji

Sri Sankara crossed the ocean of Maya as easily as one steps over a small irrigation channel in the field. He wrote a number of Vedantic works for imparting the knowledge of the Self. He composed a number of hymns to foster the sense of devotion in the hearts of men and this I consider to be his greatest service... If Sri Adi Sankara himself, who drank the ocean of knowledge as easily as one sips water from the palm of one's hand, sang hymns to develop devotion, it is enough to show that knowledge and devotion are one. No other testimony is needed. Sri Sankara has packed into the "Bhaja Govindam" song the substance of all the Vedantic works that he wrote and he has set the truth of the union of devotion and knowledge to melodious music which delights the ear... Goddess of learning Herself speaks through Sankara. He spoke about what he thoroughly knew... Sri Sankara's teaching is not only for the Sanyaasins who have renounced the world. He sings also for the ordinary men who eke out their livelihood with the labour of their hands... Sri Sankara speaks from experience... Sri Sankara says that by no other means can one find the bliss that one can find through renunciation. You must accept this as true when one so great as Sankara declares it. He has experienced the bliss of renunciation and preaches it to others. The great Acharya who had attained the highest wisdom has blended devotion, wisdom and austerities.

Dr. Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar

Sri Shankaracharya was almost unique in the history of thought. He combined in himself the attributes of a poet, a logician, a devotee and a mystic as well as being the architect of the monistic system of philosophy that bears his name. He was an inspired poet whose appeal was, in turn, to every human feeling and sentiment. His descriptions of nature and his appraisal of human and divine personality reached the summit of art, and his command over the navarasas (nine kinds of poetic flavour or sentiments) was superb.

At the same time, In his commentaries on the Prasthanatraya ( the three bases of Vedanta, viz., the Upanishadas, Brahma-sutras and the Gita), he displayed a rare faculty or relentlessly logical and concatenated argument and refutation, and such subtlety of reasoning as has been rarely surpassed in the philosophical writings of the

world. He vindicated and firmly established the Advaita philosophy which has been described as one of the supreme achievements of Hinduism.

Sankara was simultaneously the author of some of the sweetest lyrics like Saundaryalahari, which are devoted to the description of the personal God head in several manifestations....

In the Vivekachudamani Shankara says: "Deliverance is not achieved by repeating the word 'Brahman' but by directly experiencing Brahman."

Having proceeded so far, Shankara thereafter expounds the view that the nirakara (formless) Absolute becomes akaravat or embodied for the individual worshipper as a personal saguna God which is but a form in which the Absolute can be comprehended by the finite mind.

The religion of a personal God is not a mere dogma but is a product of realization and experience. As the end religion is sakshatkara, what is termed bhakti is a striving for this sakshatkara or realization by means of a personal God or a symbol, Pratika, which may be an image, a painting or an object in nature. It will thus be seen that Shankara does not exclude or expel the framework of the external world. This is an aspect which is not always understood by those who deal with the Vedanta system.

It may be observed that similar conception (about the oneness of the individual soul and the Absolute) and thought have occurred to men and women in many other countries and in other ages. St. Catherine of Genoa exclaims, "My 'me' is God, nor do I recognize any other 'me' except God Himself"; and the Sufi saint, Bayazid stated, "I went from God to God, until they cried from 'me' in 'me', 'Oh thou 1'." When someone knocked at the saint's door and asked "Is Bayazid here?" his answer was "Is anybody here except God?"

In that remarkable compilation of Aldous Huxley entitled The Perennial Philosophy occurs the following passage: "That are thou. Behold but one in all things, God within a God without. There is a way to reality in and through the world, and there is a way to reality in and through the soul. But the best way is that which leads to the Divine ground simultaneously in the perceiver and in that which is perceived."

That inspired medieval philosopher, Ruysbroeck, has stated: "The image of God is found essentially and personally in all mankind. In this way we are all one, intimately united in our external image which is the image of God and the source in us of all our life."

Perhaps, however, one of the truest successors of Shankara was Spinoza. According to him the totality of all existing things is God. God, according to him, is not a cause outside of things, which passes over into things and works upon things from without. He is immanent, dwelling within, working from within, penetrating and impregnating all things. In this short treatise, Spinoza utters the truth as manifested to him: "Nature consists of infinite attributes. To its essence pertains existence so that outside it there is no other essence or existence. It thus coincides exactly with the essence of God."

What may be called the Shankara system has thus pervaded and influenced not only all aspects of Indian thought but has had significant repercussions amongst medieval Christian saints, Sufi divines, and more recent thinkers like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. There is, furthermore, a growing body of scientific thinkers, who, confronted by the phenomena and development of nuclear, atomic and cosmic theories, feel irresistibly drawn to Shankara's enunciations as the most legitimate and satisfactory explanation of the universe, physical, psychological and para-psychological.

The special glory of Shankara is that over and above being the protagonist of the monistic approach, he is the author of innumerable stotras (hymns) as already stated. The jnana of Shankara is not a cold study of books but a warm-hearted striving to realize the truth, which when turned towards a personal deity, becomes bhakti. Shankara is as insistent as Buddha on the supreme importance of ethics as one of the fundamentals of spiritual life. But his outlook on Karma, on temple worship and on domestic ceremonial is synthetic and harmonious, and not at all destructive. (Vedanta for East and West I VIII-6)

Colonel Jacob

It may be admitted that if the impossible task of reconciling the contradictions of the Upanishads and rendering them into a harmonious and consistent whole is to be attempted at all, Sankara's system is about the only one that could do it.

#### MAJOR WORKS OF SRI SHANKARACHARYA

Major works :

commentary on brahmasuutra

commentary on bhagavad giitaa

commentary on the following upanishhads :

iisha, aitareya, kaTha, kena, chaandogya, taittiriya, prashna, brhadaara.nyaka, maaNDuukya and muNDaka. The authorship of the commentary of shvetaashvataropanishhad attributed to shankara is slightly doubtful. In addition there is the wonderful commentary of Shankara of the mANDUkya upanishhad.h.

Minor philosophical works :

upadeshasaahasrii {Thousand teachings}

viveka-chuuDaamaNi {crest jewel of discrimination}

aatma-bodha{awakening of atman}

drig-drishya-viveka {discrimination between the seer and seen}

aparokshhaanubhuuti {not invisible realization}

shata-shlokii {a hundred slokas} {attribution doubtful}

sarva-darshana-siddhaanta-sa.ngraha (attribution is doubtful)

{collection of the essence of all schools}.

yoga suutra bhashya vivarna (a subcommentary on the vyasa's

commentary of yoga sutras).

commentary on the adhyatma patala of the apastamba suutraa {yoga for

right living}.  
Commentary on vishhNusahasranaama  
Commentary on sanat.h sujaatiiya  
Commentary on lalitaatrishati

Verses :

-X- indicated below indicates availability of the verses in transliterated format on the web. Some of them have an introduction and translation. Please note that though all the below verses are attributed to Shankara, the attribution of some is doubtful. Most of the verses indicated as available are available at Sanskrit Document List. Please e-mail me if you need like to know the current state of progress in transliteration and translation.

-X-shrii mahaagaNesha paJNcharatnaM  
-X-dakshiNaa-muurtiistotra (praise of Shiva)  
-X-guruvaashhTakaM (eight poems to the Guru)  
-X-bhaja govindaM  
-X-shivaanandalaharii (wave of bliss of Shiva)  
-X-saundaryalaharii (attribution doubtful) (wave of bliss of Devi)  
-X-tripurasundarii ashhTakam --tripurasundarii veda pada stotra --  
bhavaanyashhTakaM (eight verses to bhavaani, na taato na maataa)  
-X-annapuuraNaa-stotra (praise to the giver of food)  
--vishhNu-shhaT-padi (six verses to VishhNu, avinayamapanaya vishhNo)  
-X-shriiga.ngaa stotraM (Praise to river/goddess Ganga)  
--shriiga.ngaashhTakaM (bhagavati tava tiire)  
-X-devii-aparaadha-kshamaapaNa-stotra (praise to Devi for forgiveness)  
--vedasaara-shiva-stotra (praise of Shiva as the essence of Veda)  
--shivanaamaalyashhTakaM (eight lines in praise of Shiva)  
-X-shiva-aparaadha-kshamaapana-stotra (praise to Shiva for forgiveness)  
-X-kaupiina-paJNchakaM (five verses on the loin cloth of an ascetic)  
-X-manishha paJNchaKaM -X-nirvaaNa-shhaTakaM (six verses on liberation)  
-X-shivamaanasapuujaa (mental worship of Shiva)  
-X-shriigovindaashhTakaM (eight verses on the glory of Govinda)  
--prapa.nchasaar  
[ Message over 64k, truncated. ]

-----  
--  
=====

==  
Messages 14079-14086

SRI ADI SHANKARACHARYA

Jaya Jaya Shankara !

Namastripurasundaryai !

Namo Chandramouleshwaraya !

Namo Naarasimhaaya !

A FEW WORDS .....

This is an offering of tribute at the feet of Sri Shankaracharya, the incarnation of Shiva. So great was and so majestic was his life that it is not possible for ordinary mortals to speak about his divine Charita completely. This is just a selection of some episodes from his inspiring Life.

The influence of Advaita Vedanta preached by Sri Shankaracharya has pervaded the whole of world. It was this message of Vedanta that Swami Vivekananda, the messenger of Sri Ramakrishna, the harmonizer of all religions, propagated in the east and the West.

The realization of Advaita is the final stage of religious experience. But Shankara never disdained the steps that have to be traversed to attain this stage. It is for this reason that Shankara appears to us an enthusiastic organizer of worship, devotion and rites. He was not merely a monist traversing the path of knowledge. A rare and supreme devotion tempers his entire life and all his writings. The whole of Hinduism is brilliantly and uniquely reflected in the ideals of his life. The effulgent form that he gave to the Sanatana Vedic Dharma may have been dimmed by the passage of time, but it has not been obliterated. The Hindus owe an eternal debt to this teacher whose life span extended over only thirty-two years. He opened up a new and radiant horizon for the spiritual life of India and brought about a revolutionary transformation in her social life.

To call Srimadacharya a mere monist would be to denigrate his personality and his impact. His life in fact appears to be a meeting ground of Advaita, Dvaita and he has gone beyond all these stages to stand effulgent in the radiant light of the self. Rarely among the great does one encounter such harmonization.

Swami Vivekananda has said: " The modern civilized world marvels at the writings of this sixteen year old boy." The modern civilized world is a world of science and reason. Shankara was able to establish the religion of the Vedanta on the firm foundation of science and reason.

Shankara's life offers interpretation of his philosophy. Hence it would be of immense inspiration to know about the life of this great incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurthy. This is a presentation of his life based on Anandagiri's Shankara Vijaya, Maadhaveeya Shankara Vijaya and works by Swami Apoorvananda.

Dedicated to the holy feet of Mahatripurasundari, Chandramouleshwara and Lakshmi Nrisimha, who have filled my being with their limitless grace, assuming the form of my gurus Shankaranandanatha and Chidanandanatha, is this humble piece of literature that tries to present before you a small picture of the divine life of our Acharya.

Acharya Shankara is one of those god-men who have appeared in the world in historical times in order to establish religion firmly. Shankara's advent took place at a very critical period in the national and in the religious life of India. At that time the Buddhist faith in the Indian sub-continent has passed through many

stages of rise and fall for over a thousand years. It had sunk to a condition in which it was not only of absolutely no use for Indian religion and culture, but was positively ruinous. Subjected to the influence of degenerate Buddhism, the eternal Hindu faith had become enfeebled, devastated and disintegrated.

Within two centuries of Acharya's lifetime, India had to encounter the powerful incursion of the Islamic faith. Degenerate Buddhism would not have possessed the vigor to resist the onrush. It was only the immense strength of the Vedic faith, which is eternal and man-made, and is the repository of universal truth, that could stand and did effectively resist the inroad of Islam. The advent, the career, the life work and the teaching of Acharya endowed the Hindu faith with the energy needed for the task ahead of self-defense and survival and ensured the everlasting stability of the Vedic religion by firmly establishing it on very sure foundations. Such a claim for Shankara is amply supported by historical evidence. Has Shankara not come on the scene, it would have been quite within the bounds of possibility that Hinduism got transformed into a veritable Islamistan.

If the Hindus of today can legitimately be proud of their great Vedic religion, it is in no small measure due to the services of this thirty-two year old monk. This needs to be adequately realized by all especially those belonging to man-made cults and sects who dismiss Acharya as a Mayavadi. It is unfortunate that some people indeed have succumbed to falsehood despite of Acharya's efforts. Shankara strengthened the foundations of the eternal Vedic faith to such an extent that the vigor imparted by him was an unfailing support in later years to the work and mission of people like Madhwa, Ramanuja, Nimbaraka etc. this is an undeniable historical fact. In Shankara's life and teaching and propagation lies embedded the immense vitality, which is responsible for the safe preservation and sure sustenance of the eternal Vedic faith.

To designate Shankaracharya as just an upholder of Monism, just like any other sectist Acharya's is a tone down to his gigantic personality and to dilute his contribution. Not in any of his writings does any evidence exist of one-sided outlook, the narrow vision, the vigorlessness, and the incompleteness, which are the characteristics of most of the later preachers and teachers. Indeed Shankara was the greatest, the noblest and the most luminous representative of expansive, universal and all embracing Sanatana Vedic Dharma. All that is sublime, strengthening, glorious in the Vedanta faith as it obtains today is the handiwork of this distinguished monk, and this is true not only in respect of the philosophical aspect of that faith, but also in respect of its practical side. The resplendent story of Sri Acharya's life is a veritable lighthouse illumining the path of the universal Vedic faith.

THE SAVIOUR IS BORN .....

Acharya Shankara is not to be ranked with ordinary religious aspirants. To style him as a Siddha, a perfected master is also not saying the whole thing about him. To accomplish a mission of Providence was he born under divine auspices as Consciousness Awake. He took birth in a noble Brahmin family of the Nambudari caste in the province of Kerala at the southern end of India. In Malayalam, 'Namp'

means faith and 'Puri' means being full. Accordingly, the Brahmin who is filled with faith in the scriptures is a Nampurī or Nambudari Brahmin. Shankara was born and lived at the village of Kaladi, beautiful with groves of coconut and betel, mango and plantain and with river Alwa (also known as Purna) flowing beside. His father was Shivaguru; a gem of a Brahmin community and mother was Vishista Devi (some biographers call her Aryamba), a woman who was goddess-like.

Shivaguru was the only son of Vidyadhara and a scholar versed in the scriptures. When he was at his studies in his preceptor's place, he at first had no idea of returning home at all. The earnest desire of his heart was that he should spend all his life learning and teaching the scriptures. But because of the importunities of his father, he returned home from his preceptor's place and rather late in life entered upon the life of the householder. In due course the father passed away and Sivaguru took on himself the responsibility of maintaining the small household, and along with it, in tune with his interest in the scriptures, he spent long hours in study and instruction. A small Devottara property (property donated to the Gods) helped him to supply all the wants of the small family.

Time passed and Shivaguru grew old, but he was childless. The Hindu idea is that one's getting wedded to a wife is only for the purpose of getting saved from the hell of "Put" by begetting a son. But such a consummation was not yet the let of Shivaguru. There was also no joy in the heart of the Childless Aryamba. The couple deliberated to take a vow. They decided to take refuge with Chandramouleshwara Shiva, the ever-awake god who had his abode on the Vrisha hill not far away their village. For a few days they lived only on roots, and then they subsisted only by drinking the holy water, which washed the feet of Shiva. Always praying with a full heart they kept on fulfilling their vow, offering worship and adoration and engaging themselves in penance, till their bodies became weak and feeble. Even before a year had gone by Shivaguru had a dream one night. Sadashiva in a resplendent body white like camphor and with matted locks appeared before him. In a sweet voice the Lord said, "Child! I am well pleased with your devotion. Tell me what your longing is. I shall fulfill it." Shivaguru fell flat at the feet of the God of the Gods and prayed, "Please grant me the boon of a son who will be long-lived and all-knowing".

With a smile on the lips Lord Ashutosha replied, "If you long for an all-knowing son, he will not be long-lived. If on the other hand, you desire to have a son who will have long life, he will not be all knowing. Do you ask for an all-knowing son or for one with a long life? Choice is yours!"

Deeply religious by nature that he was, Shivaguru prayed for an all-knowing son. Then Mahadeva, the great Lord, told him, "Your desire will be fulfilled. My dear son, you will indeed get an all-knowing son, In fact I myself will come down as your son. You need not continue your penance. You may return home with your devoted wife."

Overwhelmed by the joy of the occurrence and filled with ecstasy Shivaguru made obeisance to the Lord's feet. Being told of the details Of the dream vision, Aryamba felt herself exceptionally blessed. The pure-hearted couple then returned home and spent their

time in worship and adoration of Shiva. It was the fifth day of the fortnight of the full moon in the month of Vaishakha. The time was the auspicious mid-day hour. At this divinely ordained hour in 686 AD, Aryamba was delivered of a son. The child was charmingly glorious like a very child-become God Shankara. On his looking at his son's face Shivaguru's delight knew no bounds. He resolved in his mind to make generous offerings of money and cows and lands to Brahmins, and in view of his having obtained the Son by the grace of Sri Shankara or Shiva, named the newborn one "Shankara". Every Avatar who has come down to earth as a Religious Teacher for the fulfillment of a divine mission has been born by the will of providence in a manner that is supernatural and mysterious. The few Supermen who were born in historical times for the resuscitation of religion all made their advent in ways which were extraordinary. Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ are well-known illustrations. That Acharya Shankara too was born partaking of the nature of God Shankara and that he came to earth especially for fulfilling a divine mission will become clear as we proceed with the story of his life.

Shivaguru duly performed the rites to be done after the birth of a child and had the horoscope of the newborn baby cast by the astrologers. He was delighted to find that the dream in which he had a boon from Shiva had indeed come true. He saw that his son was of a divine lineage and bore the marks of an incarnation.

Note: also in obedience to the commands of Mahadeva, the gods took birth as humans in order to be of help in Shankara's mission of firmly establishing Vedic Dharma. Padmapada was born of Vishnu's lineage; Hastamalaka came from Pavanadeva's lineage. In Brahma's line came Sureshwara and in Brihaspati's avatar came Anandagiri and Chitsukha in Varuna's lineage. The mark of wheel on the boy Shankara's head. The impress of the third eye on the forehead and the sign of the trident (Trishula) on the shoulders made wise men decide that he was an incarnation of Shiva.

Even from boyhood Shankara was distinguished for his quiet disposition and sharpness of intellect. The superior genius and the extraordinary intelligence, which were to fascinate humanity in his later years, were clearly sprouting in him even when he was a boy. This wonder of a child had even by his third year finished reading many books in his mother tongue Malayalam, and by only listening to the readings and chanting of the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas learnt them by heart. The most surprising thing about the boy was that he was a Sruthidhara (a person able to repeat in full all that he hears just once). Whatever he read or heard got indelibly impressed in his memory.

SHANKARA IN GURUKULA .....

Shivaguru was extremely happy to find his son endowed with supernatural intellectual acumen. He made up his mind to have the boy's Upanayana ceremony (the investiture with the sacred thread which distinguishes a Brahmin) performed even in his fifth year, and then to send Shankara on to the preceptor's house for study. But the fates willed differently. Shivaguru died before he could have the Upanayana done. Aryamba was overwhelmed by this sudden bereavement. She dutifully performed the funeral rites of her husband, and

shedding profuse tears of agony she repaired with her little son to her father's house to seek asylum there in her forlorn condition. But she did not forget the last wish of her departed husband. As soon as Shankara reached his fifth year she returned with him to her own home and performed the Upanayana according to scriptural injunctions, after which she sent him to the preceptor's house to be taught and trained.

Hardly had a few days gone by, when the Guru was charmed by the genius and the devotion to learning, which he saw in his young pupil. The correctness of the boy's mode of pronouncing words and the sharpness of his intellect quite fascinated everyone. Shankara assimilated effortlessly the contents of all the books he was taught, and what was more, he sat beside his Guru when he explained the scriptures to offer pupils and by mere listening to the exposition very easily mastered all of them too. No wonder that within a short time the young Shankara became the Guru's favorite. Two years had not passed, but Shankara was already proficient in the Upanishads and the Puranas, in Itihasa and Smriti and in the various philosophical systems like Nyaya, Sankhya, Patanjala and Vaisesika. Indeed he was as well versed as Brihaspati, the teacher of the celestials.

In accordance with the rules governing residential pupils staying and studying in Guru's house, Brahmachari Shankara used to go out for alms every day. One day he went to the house of a poor Brahmin for alms. The Brahmin was an extremely poor householder. There was not in his house that day even a handful of rice to be given away as alms. The Brahmin housewife, not knowing what to do, gave Shankara an Amalaka fruit (Emblic myroblam), and shedding profuse tears told him of their indigent state. The woman's terrible poverty deeply moved the tender soul of Shankara. Standing there in a word of compassion he composed a hymn to goddess Lakshmi, the great mother who removes poverty and misery, and in a voice choked with tearful weeping and with all his heart centered in Her he laid at the feet of Bhagavati his soulful prayer for the redress of the poor woman's plight. Pleased with the hymn, which is known all through the world to this day by the devoted as the great Kanakadhara Stuti, Goddess Lakshmi appeared before him and said, "My dear child! I know what is in your mind. But the members of this poor family did not, in their past lives perform any meritorious acts which will enable me to bestow on them, wealth and riches." The boy Shankara then gave a reply to the Mother, " Why Mother! This housewife just now gave me an Amalaka fruit. If you are minded to favor me, set this family free from poverty." The boy's request brought joy to the Goddess, who said, " So be it. I shall give this family lots of Amalakas of gold." Shankara was delighted to hear words and assured the Brahmin lady that she would very soon acquire wealth and returned to the guru's house. At dawn the next day when the Brahmin couple awoke from sleep they saw their whole courtyard bestrewn with Amalaka fruits of gold. Overwhelmed with joy, they started picking and gathering the fruits of gold and told everyone that it was the Boy-Brahmachari Shankara's blessing that had helped them to so much wealth. The news of the boy Shankara's supernatural power spread on all sides. This brief incident was revelatory of the spirit of compassionate concern for others, which Shankara possessed.

Supermen endowed with divine authority stay in the embodied state

holding on to just one support, the urge of compassion. We are indeed fascinated on coming to know of the expression of the quality of compassion in the life of Shankara even from his very early boyhood. We shall in the course of this biographical narrative have occasion to become acquainted and be lost in silent wonder as a result of it with the way in which in later years this stream of compassion of which Shankara was the source, moistened hundreds of dried-up souls and brought contentment to numerous hearts that were arid and thirsty and parched. And we shall realize beyond any possibility of doubt that the Lord and Shankara born of his aspect are oceans of motiveless and disinterested grace and compassion.

Endowed as Shankara was with a superhuman genius and a sharp intellect and with the uncommon skill of a Sruthidhara (of retaining in the memory everything heard even once), he had not to stay with his Guru for long. While even the very intelligent students took at least twenty years to acquire mastery of all scriptures, Shankara was able to acquire that mastery in only two years time with the blessing and the favor of his Guru. As we know from biographies, Shankara mastered, even in his boyhood, all knowledge, including the secret knowledge, and much of this knowledge was acquired by him without any assistance from his teacher. He studied the philosophical systems of Nyaya, Sankhya, Mimamsa, Patanjala etc. and also the Buddhist philosophical systems like Sautantrika, Yogachara, Madhyamika, Vaibhashika etc. he also studied Jaina and Charvaka systems of philosophy. In addition, he also acquired especial proficiency in Itihasa, Purana, and Smriti literature. He had studied very many books on his own.

The Guru considered himself especially honored in having as his pupil a boy of such unmatched intelligence and caliber. Blessing Shankara again and again, permitted him to return home long before the expiry of the prescribed term of pupil hood.

SHANKARA, PERSONIFICATION OF VAIRAGYA ....

Meanwhile Aryamba had negotiated Shankara's marriage with a beautiful girl in the neighborhood. Hardly had her son returned home from the Guru's abode, she told him of her resolve to get him married. The scriptures have enjoined that soon after schooling is done and the pupil has left the Guru's abode to the parental home, he should get married. The wedded state has to closely follow the state of studies. The Grihastha Ashrama had to be taken up at the close of Brahmacharya Ashrama, and not for a day should he remain unassigned to the legitimate Ashrama. But Shankara would not under any circumstance agree to get married. Aryamba tried many ways of persuasion and shed many a tear. But Shankara whom his widowed mother considered as the only hope of all her future happiness and welfare stood firm in his determination not to get into matrimony, and he would not relent. Such grimness of resolve on the part of a boy surprised the mother and bewildered her.

Shankara as a Brahmachari, now lived on at home and devoted himself to learning and teaching. But it was the serving of his mother that was for him his all-important duty and his greatest discipline. He ensured his mother's comfort and happiness by attending on her and serving her in all sorts of ways. The little boy's measureless

proficiency in studies and uncommon skill in instructing brought him much renown, and within a few days his fame spread on all corners. Even aged scholars in large numbers began to come to him for a deeper study of the scriptures. His sublime and simple exposition of scripture and flare of genius on the part of a boy of seven were indeed indicative of Divine Power.

The devout Aryamba used to go for a bath to the river Alwai (or Purna) everyday. (Alwai is also the name of a town, and the river Purna flowing by the town naturally came to be called Alwai too. Alwai is a railway station on the Trichur - Ernakulam broad gauge line and is 17 kilometers from Ernakulam. Alwai town is situated at a distance of 55 kilometers from Trichur. From Kaladi, Alwai is about 96 kilometers). And on her way back home, she offered worship at the shrine of Keshava who was her family deity.

The Alwai was adored as a sacred river in those parts. The river was a long way off from Shankara's house, but yet his mother, with great steadfastness, went to the river every day for the holy bath. Once in the summer season Aryamba went to the river as usual, but even though a long time passed away she did not return home, and Shankara was very much worried. He went in search of her and as he was walking along the riverbank he saw her lying unconscious on the roadside. In deep misery at the sight he wept profusely and started nursing his mother back to her senses and when she came round he then slowly led her home by hand.

Shankara was by nature ardently devoted to his mother, and so his feelings on seeing the condition of his mother were such as no words can portray. Her suffering quite unnerved him. All in tears he sent forth a prayer to God saying, " Lord, Thou art indeed omnipotent. If Thou only wishest, anything is possible. I cannot bear to see this suffering of my mother. Be gracious and bring the river closer to our house. Then there will be no more suffering for my mother." This was his only prayer and longing and it overwhelmed his heart and soul, day and night he was immersed in this one supplication to the Lord.

The All-merciful Lord is not deaf to the prayers of devotees. He does hear them. Shankara's entreaty moved Him and He responded. During the night, rains were so heavy that the river changed its course. Breaking through its north bank, the Alwai River began to flow by the village of Kaladi. Aryamba was indeed very proud of her son's achievement and started telling everyone, "It is as a result of the prayers of my son Shankara that the Lord has brought the river close to our house". This miraculous incident was big news and spread within a few days to all corners of the area. People came in groups to have a sight of this wonder boy. Indeed through the will of the Lord many an impossible thing becomes possible, and along with it the glory of devotion as well as the glory of the devotee gets proclaimed.

Rajashekhara was the ruler of Kerala at that time and when he came to hear of Shankara's divine powers, he was filled with wonder. He himself was a very well read man delighting in the study of the scriptures. He was also of a pronounced devotional temperament, and was full of respect for the sacred books and the learned. Coming to know of the unprecedented depth of scholarship and the abundance of divine power in a Brahmin boy of seven, the ruler ardently desired to

meet him. He sent his chief minister to Shankara, with the gift of an elephant and extended an invitation to him to meet him at the royal place. When the minister in all humility told Shankara of the king's desire, Shankara said, " O best of donors, of what avail is an elephant to those who live only on alms, whose clothing is only deer-skin and whose daily round of duties consists of sun-up and sun-down prayers, adoration of fire, study of Vedas, teaching, and the service to the Guru? O minister, carry this reply of mine to your royal master, and expressly tell him that a monarch's primary duty is to endeavor to ensure that the four Varnas duly perform the duties allotted to their particular stations and lead righteous lives. A king should never good people to wrong ways through temptation." With these words he declined the invitation to call at the royal palace.

This behavior of Shankara in no way displeased or angered the King. On the other hand, he became even more drawn to the precocious boy. Accompanied by the ministers of state the ruler himself arrived at Kaladi one day in order to meet Shankara in his own place. He saw Shankara clad in deer-skin with a cord of grass as a belt round his loins, and the white sacred sacrificial thread on his left shoulder and under his right arm. All round him were seated Brahmin scholars engaged in scriptural study. Shankara cordially welcomed the king showing him the respects due to royalty. In years he was but a boy, in demeanor and conduct he was one of the eminent and wise.

The Kerala monarch's object in coming to Kaladi was to test and measure Shankara's scholarship. Even after a brief discussion with Shankara on the import of the scriptures was it possible for the ruler to realize that the boy was a prodigy distinguished by intellectual sharpness and extraordinary discriminating skill, and he was naturally charmed and amazed. That Shankara was endowed with divine powers, the king had now not the least doubt. Both king and the boy merged into a discussion of scriptural themes for a long while, much to their delight. The monarch then laid at the feet of Shankara many gold coins, and paying obeisance to him begged him to accept the money and the gift. But in a severe way did Shankara tell the royal donor, " Noble King, I am a Brahmana and a Brahmachari. Of no use to me are these gold coins. The Devottara property made over to our family by your forefathers for our service in the temple is quite sufficient to meet my and my mother's expenses. By your kindness, we experience no want in our home."

Shankara's desirelessness, renunciation and disinclination to receive gifts greatly astonished the king. Holding together his palms in reverence he said, " Worshipful one, such sentiments are indeed becoming of you and you only. I consider myself blessed indeed. But how can I take back to myself the gift I have intended and set apart for you? Please distribute the money yourself to worthy recipients. " Without a moment's delay Shankara replied smiling, " You indeed are the monarch of the land. It is more in your line to be able to know the deserving and the undeserving than a Brahmachari devoted to scriptural studies. The gift of learning is the sacred duty of a Brahmin, while the gift of wealth is the duty of the ruler. It is for you to therefore distribute this wealth to fit and deserving folk."

The monarch saluted Shankara's genius and bent his head in reverence to his brilliance and ordered the distribution of the offered money

among the Brahmins assembled there. This incident of Shankara's refusing to accept the preferred money made a deep impression on the ruler's mind. He saw that Shankara was not merely a scholar well versed in all the scriptures, but that the boy was a person of superhuman parts, possessed of powers that were divine in quality. And he was so much drawn to this boy-marvel that from then on he visited Shankara's house everyday to benefit by his holy company. Rajashekhara was the author of books like Balabharatha and Balaramayana and these dramas in Sanskrit he read out to Shankara and had corrections made according to his suggestions. The tidings of the king's offer of favors to Shankara and of Shankara's spirit of desirelessness soon spread all round. And even from far off places did many people come to see him, and many scholars flocked to him to hear from him an exposition of the scriptures.

=====  
==

#### SHANKARA ACCEPTS TURIYASHRAMA ....

One day it so chanced that a few astrologers arrived at Shankara's home. Aryamba and her son Shankara accorded them a proper reception. After discussing the contents of the scriptures in various ways, the astrologers expressed a desire to look into the horoscope of Shankara. On examining the horoscope they said that the time of Shankara's birth bore the indication of the descent of an incarnation and they foresaid too that he would become a wandering monk. But an examination of the astrological position in regard to the longevity of his life revealed to them that Shankara would be short lived. They saw that death might overtake him in his eight or sixteenth or thirty-second year. On coming to know this, Aryamba was deeply distressed. But she was told that through penance and austerity the possibility of death at the eighth year could be averted and an extension of life by another eight years could be obtained. But death at the sixteenth year could not, the Brahmins asserted, be escaped except through divine will. When the Brahmin astrologers took their leave, their foretelling of coming events had its reaction on Shankara's mind, but the reaction in his case was of a different kind from that of his mother's case. He resolved to embrace monasticism. He knew that there was no possibility of attaining the knowledge of Truth without resorting to monk hood. And in the absence of knowledge of Truth there was no possibility achieving liberation from the bondage of relative existence. Shankara had just then entered on his eighth year, and that was exactly the time when death might come to him. Therefore Shankara's only thought now was about how he could manage to take to monasticism.

As day succeeded day, the desire to embrace monasticism became stronger and stronger in Shankara. He was quite determined on taking to Sanyasa. One day he found a suitable opportunity to speak to his mother about it and told her of his intention of becoming a monk. Hardly did he mention to her his idea when Aryamba started weeping and wailing. Embracing him and kissing him she said, " Hush child, is it right for you to speak such a thing. You are such a tender stripling now. Let me pass out of life first, and then you may turn out to be a monk. Whom but you I have for a hold. If you turn out a monk and walk out of home, who is there to look after me, my child?

Who will take me to places of pilgrimage? Who will perform my funeral rites when I die? No, no, my dear, as long as life pulsed in my body I shall not let you become a Sanyasin."

Shankara remained quiet. Here was a command from the mother not to embrace Sanyasa. There seemed to be no way out of the situation, and Shankara prayed with an earnest heart to the Lord beseeching him to make it possible for him to take Sanyasa. He knew that he had been born with the mission of preaching the super-knowledge of Advaita and he knew that for the carrying on of that mission it was imperative that he took to Sanyasa. He was however confident that the petty desires of men and women cannot stand against the divine will.

One day, early in the morning, Shankara accompanied by his mother went for a bath in the Alwai River. Many others were bathing there. Aryamba finished her bath and came up to the bank. Shankara was still in the river bathing, when a crocodile caught hold of him. He shouted out, " Mother, save me, save me! I am seized by a crocodile."

Instantly did Aryamba plunge into the river to try to save her son. Others on the spot also caught hold of Shankara's hands and tried to pull him up to the bank. But the crocodile continued to pull him down to deeper waters. Between the pull-up and pull-down, Shankara said, " Mother I am definitely being taken down by the crocodile. I am in my last moments. You did not permit me to take Sanyasa. If at least now you give me permission for Sanyasa, I shall, contemplating on God, mentally take to the dying hour Sanyasa and give up life. Even this will give me liberation."

Aryamba saw that there was no hope of saving Shankara from death. She said weeping, " My son, so be it. I grant you the permission to be a monk." Saying this she fell down in a swoon. Having thus obtained his mother's permission Shankara with a concentrated mind surrendered himself at the feet of the Lord and took Sanyasa. All his being was filled with an indescribable feeling of bliss. All of a sudden, the crocodile vanished from that place, leaving Shankara free. The crocodile indeed was Lord Sri Narayana, who had answered Shankara's prayers. As a result of this taking to Atura Sanyasa the death at the eighth year to which Shankara was destined was obviated. Shankara and his mother were brought to the bank. Regaining conscience after a while, Aryamba hugged Shankara in a warm motherly embrace. She led Shankara back towards home. Shankara then told his mother, " It is not for me to stay at home here after. I am a monk. The scriptures have prohibited a Sanyasin's residing in his own old house. I shall therefore stay under a tree."

Aryamba felt as if the weight of the sky had descended on her head. Weeping and sobbing she said, " what is this that you say my boy! You are but a child, how indeed can you renounce home now? How long am I going to live? You may indeed leave home after I die."

Shankara did not however loosen his resolve. He said, " It was with your permission, mother, that I took to Sanyasa at the last moment, with all my heart. I am one born of your womb, and I shall not render false an utterance of yours. I shall carry out my renouncing home."

He consoled the wailing Aryamba with these words, " Who do you think

saved me from becoming a prey to the crocodile? That very God will look after everything. Whether it be day or night, if in your last moment you but think of me, I shall wherever I may then be, know of it, and I shall reach your abode. Before life ebbs out of you I shall help you have a vision of your chosen deity. That indeed is the essence of all pilgrimages."

The circumstances which attended Shankara's birth now came to Aryamba's memory and she saw that all these happenings were but inevitable and in a voice choked with emotion said, " So be it my son, I bless you by heart and soul that you attain your desired goal."

It was now clear that Shankara's earnest prayers had reached the Lord. By the grace of the Lord, Aryamba's entire being was filled with an ineffable joy. She would no longer hinder her son's ascending to the absolute Brahman. Shankara then prostrated at the feet of his mother, and receiving her blessings on his head walked out to have a view of the family deity Sri Keshava Bhagavan. And the sun just rose to view on the eastern horizon.

KESHAVA ! NARAYANA ! HARI HARI .....

Aryamba, very like a mad woman followed behind Shankara. Hundreds of villagers, both men and women, also followed the boy monk. On every lip was the question, where is Shankara going? With slow and gentle steps and downcast looks, Shankara arrived at the temple of Keshava. An ocean of love Supreme was surging within his being then. He leaped out from Symbol to Reality, from Form to Formless, from worldly bondages to Universal boundlessness, from microcosm to macrocosm.

Shankara knelt down before the image of Keshava. The eternal anguish that lies hidden in the great silence of creation welled out from within his heart. Tears of deep love flowed down his cheeks. With eyes closed, he saluted the deity in a charming hymn of mellifluous rhythm composed by himself, and adored and worshipped it. After holding Keshava in an ardent embrace, he came out of the temple, when the priests drew his attention to the dilapidated condition of the temple. The Alwai had been changing its course for some years past, and this had weakened the temple structure, which was about to collapse. Shankara saw that unless the image was removed to a safer place, it would soon be lost in the riverbed. So, after getting the approval of all the people, Shankara, with the image of Keshava leaning on his chest carried it to a secure place and set it there and requested the assembled villagers to construct a temple at the spot.

There are other accounts of this incident. One is that when Shankara went in for sight of the holy image, there was a voice from heaven and Keshava told him, " please remove me from here to safer and secure place and fix me up there. This temple will fall down into the river the very next moment ". And Shankara carried out the divinely given message, and transferred the image to a safer spot. Yet in another biography of Sri Acharya, it is said that Sri Krishna himself gave dream instructions to Shankara for the removal of the image to a new area.

While studying the great commentary (the Mahabhashya) of Patanjali

for his lessons on grammar, Shankara had learnt from his Guru that the master-yogi Patanjali himself had been staying in a cave by the river Narmada for a thousand years in deep Samadhi. He was now known as Govinda Bhagavatpada. He was the chief of the incomparable Sri Gaudapaadaachaarya. Govindapada was no ordinary saint, but a great yogi who had realized the ultimate Truth and had his mind firmly established in the knowledge of Advaita Brahman. On hearing from his teacher of Govindapada, Shankara had mentally selected him as his Guru and had been waiting impatiently for the blessed moment when he could sit at his feet and attain the knowledge of Advaita. That auspicious time had now come for the realization of Shankara's ardent desire of discipleship under Govindapada.

AT THE FEET OF GOVINDA BHAGAVATPADA ....

Step by step did Shankara leave the village behind, and proceeded north. Aryamba followed behind. So did the villagers too. As the margin of the village was reached Aryamba said, " My child! Here at the outskirts of the village you may put a cottage and carry on with your austerities. Do not go away leaving me unsupported." This was her last effort to restrain him from going away. But he made all of them see things aright and again made his obeisance to his mother and silently marched out northward in the direction of Narmada.

Shankara was his mother's only son, and yet he left his widowed mother in a helpless state and went away! Was he not cruel-hearted? Is this after all, the ideal of Sanyasa? No ! Shankara offered, in the form of Arghya or oblation, his devotion to his mother at the altar of a larger good. For fulfilling the divinely ordained purpose did he leave unfulfilled his duty to his mother, and walk out of his home. But he was ever deeply attached to his mother. At every level of his being his mother was to him a veritable Yashoda and he was the little Krishna, the darling of her affection.

Where lay the Narmada? Who will give him the direction of the way to it? Shankara had only heard that Narmada lay somewhere in the north, but did not exactly know the path leading to it. But trusting the goodness of chance, he trod on and on. An eight year old boy full of dispassion towards worldly pleasures and having cast off mother's affectionate shelter now went about in the eternal quest of the human soul, the search for the ultimate truth.

Those who saw this shaven-headed boy clad in a Sanyasi's orange-coloured robe with staff and water bowl called kamandala in hand, could not take their eyes off from him but gazed on in speechless wonder. Loving mothers, who saw him, shed silent tears thinking of his mother who had borne this beam of brilliance, and a strange but tangible sensation. Sensation of Vatsalya- mother's filial love for the child welled up in their tender bosoms heart. Shankara himself was unaffected by anything he heard or saw. Inquisitive glances, compassionate sighs, eager queries, nothing affected him. He was indifferent to everything except the Spirit and Reality. Meditating with a one-pointed mind on the All-pervading Supreme Energy, the soul behind all creation, he walked on. In the coolness of the mornings he would cover long distances on foot and at noon do Madhukari-ask for alms, accepting food, well-cooked or ill, judging not, from wayside temples or a hamlet hut. After rest for a while under tree shade, he

was again on his feet, spending the nights under trees or in temple yards. Thus in the quest of the Unknown he passed through many a village and populated human habitations, towns and cities, crossed many a field and meadow, wild animal infested forests, hills and dales, rivers and rivulets and trod along many unknown paths.

Shankara thus, absorbed in thought, did make his way north towards Narmada in order to find his guru who would bestow on him the wisdom of self-knowledge. Shankara was indeed the model of what an aspirant should be. Qualities like a peaceful temperament, a rigid restraint of the naturally outgoing senses, a climate of moderation in all things, an overflowing abundance of love not rooted in selfishness, a spiritual wander-lust that would not quiet down till the very Everest of Self-Knowledge was reached, were what marked him as the most eligible candidate for spiritual Sadhana. After many days and weeks of traveling, something told the heroic boy that his quest was nearing its end. He began to ask everyone he met where he could find Govindapada. He had by then reached Omkarnath by the river Narmada. There he learnt that a great Yogi had been living in an ecstatic trance for hundreds and thousands of years in a cave. Shankara's heart was filled with indescribable ecstasy. Advancing a short distance, Shankara met a few old monks who lived in and near the caves at Omkarnath and he enquired them of Govindapada. They marveled at him. The gray-haired ones looked on in amazement at the arresting figure of the boy-monk, whose eyes shone with a strange luster and revealed a soul within, of immense potentiality and promise. They soon learnt a few details about him, about his native place and the object of his quest. Seeing how learned and cultured he was, they marveled all the more. How far indeed was Kerala. This boy at an age, when others of his years were still playing with toys and battling with the alphabet, had come alone and on foot, all the way from home in search of a Guru! And he had mastered all the scriptures with their numerous commentaries at such a tender age and what was ever more wonderful was that not only did he digest and assimilate them, but also attained the state of knowledge beyond knowableness.

An old monk told Shankara, " Child. The holy Yogi Govindapada lives in that yonder cave. He has been in trance for a long long time. The march of time touches him not. None here knows how long he has been in that state. In the hope of having the privilege of listening to his words, when he emerges out of his Samadhi, we have been waiting here, and have grown old in waiting. Blessed indeed are you child! Commendable is your Guru Bhakti. "

Shankara listened to these words with bated breath. In joy and amazement his mind and heart throbbed. And very eagerly he asked the old monk, " May I get the Darshan of the great sage? " " Yes, you certainly may." Answered the good old monk, " But the entrance to the cave is extremely narrow, and within the cave it is all dark. There is a lamp here, light it and walk into the cave, and you can see the great sage."

Shankara did not waste a single moment. He lighted the lamp and led by its dim light, found his way into the cave, and there in a corner found a tall majestic figure in Padmasan. His body was emaciated, and matted locks in plenty covered his head. His long drawn eyes closed in meditation had an invisible charm. His skin was dry but his body

beamed with eternal effulgence. Seeing the eternal hermit sitting in Samadhi like the great lord Shiva himself, Shankara's heart was flooded with an inexpressible sublime bliss and driven by a powerful urge of devotional emotion he fell prostrate before the deathless master, and with tears welling up from within and flowing down his tender cheeks, he stood with folded hands and broke into a hymn, " Lord, you are the greatest among the Yogins. You have come here to earth to impart the knowledge of Parabrahman to those who seek refuge in you. You are verily the sage Patanjali, the personification of Yoga Shastra. You are born of the great serpent king Ananta. Like the drum of Mahadeva, you sound and resound supreme wisdom. Your glory is infinite. You have perfection, having imbibed total knowledge from Sri Gaudapada, the disciple (son according to some scriptures) of Shukadeva, the son of Vedavyasa. I beseech you to accept me as your pupil and bestow on me the knowledge of Brahman. Rise O Lord, from your ecstasy and grant the prayer of this humble seeker by opening to him the doors of the Final Truth."

Then the assembled monks witnessed a wonder. The rigid body of Govindapada relaxed, a quiver passed through his frame, his suspended faculties awoke to the exterior. He heaved a deep sigh and opened his eyes. The silent entranced idol was now living God. Shankara fell prostrate before the awakened sage. The assembled monks followed suit and offered salutations to the great sage. The cave reverberated with joyous peal and supplication. Gradually the mind of the great Yogi came down to the plane of consciousness of the physical world. The news, that the arrival of a boy-monk had broken the thousand-year old Samadhi of Govindapada, soon spread far and wide. It brought countless souls, men and women, from distant places to Omkarnath for the audience of the King of the Yogis. This turned that Sylvan peaceful spot into a holy place of pilgrimage pulsating with life.

Just one look at Shankara was enough for Govindapada to realize that this was the boy he had been waiting for. He immediately understood that it was in order to instruct this boy, the Shiva Incarnate in the discipline of Advaita Sadhana that he had been waiting in ecstasy for a millennium. One of Shankara's outstanding contributions he foresaw was to be the writing of monumental commentaries on Veda Vyasa's Brahma Sutra, and thereby spreading the true knowledge of Advaita or non-dualism, the science of realization of the self as the one without a second.

Advaita Vedanta is a very ancient philosophical system. Acharya Shankara preached its doctrine with a singular fullness and clarity and convincingness, his exposition of its standpoint displaying rare analytical power with a unique power of argumentative ability and refuting capacity. Shankara did not of course newly propound the doctrine for the first time (like Madhwa or Ramanuja, who actually found their doctrines on the basis of their limited understanding of scriptures) but had instead imbibed it from a distinguished lineage of seers. The mighty sage Badarayana Vyasa gave a strong philosophical foundation to Advaita theory by writing out the unparalleled Brahma Sutras. Later he taught this secret science to his son Shuka Muni. From Shuka Deva, it was passed to Shankara through Gaudapada and Govindapada.

Govindapada, at an auspicious moment, formally accepted Shankara as

his disciple, after having the prescribed rites performed in the manner enjoined in the Vedas. Without losing any time, Govindapada started instructed Shankara, the discipline of Yoga. Other Sanyasin's also accepted his discipleship. The aged monks at the place who had till then to be content with being in the silent proximity of the trance-merged Govindapada now sat with Shankara to receive spiritual instruction. The course of studies started with Hatha Yoga in the first year. Shankara easily mastered

the techniques of Hatha Yoga before the year was out. Raja Yoga, the science of disciplining the mind-stuff, was then taken up. Shankara stained mastery in this discipline in the second year. As a result he became gifted with psychic powers like telepathy, clairvoyance, movement in space unseen and above all death at will.

In the third year, Govindapada initiated his disciple very confidently into the high discipline of Jnana Yoga, the Realization of Ultimate Reality through Knowledge. Man's final destiny lies not in reaching anything distant and new and foreign to his self but in simply knowing and asserting what he really is. Salvation is not so much attainment as affirmation. Jnana Yoga is thus the royal road to perfection since it helps us perceive Truth in its naked unity devoid of any trappings, coverings or maskings. And only a Sadhaka who is utterly free from all illusions and delusions, who is remarkably clear-minded and fearless, who is not stained by any longings, high or low, and who is qualified to make the last, bold leap into the Impersonal beyond and like a salt-doll lose all sense of individuality in the ocean of Infinity, only such a Sadhaka can be a Jnana Yogi. But if ever there was a qualified aspirant fit to be initiated into this Royal Science, Govindapada intuitively felt, it was this boy. Govindapada made Shankara undergo through the duly regulated scheme of Sravana-Manana-Nidhidhyasana i.e. hearing the spiritual truths and secrets from the mouth of the preceptor, investigating and discussing it and constant contemplation on it. Then he established Shankara firmly in the higher planes of spiritual striving and truth-experiencing. He found that, as the popular saying goes, Shankara became oil as soon as a suggestion of mustard was given, unlike most others in whose case a lot of squeezing of mustard was needed before a drop of oil could be made to flow out. Soon Shankara's mind came to dwell all the time in super-sensual regions of ever new divine thrills which he experienced through meditation on the One Self. Brahma Jyoti, the brilliance, the Light Infinite was shining on his face and was pulsating through his limbs. His entire persona beamed with a radiant charm and a celestial glow. The normal tendency of the human mind to roam out was now one of indrawnness, and it was with an effort and a pressure that he could force his faculties down to the plane of earthly phenomena. In a very short time he came to attain the Nirvikalpa Samadhi in which all mentation merges in one unchanging Awareness, all modifications disappear in one continuing Is-ness. Govindapada found that Shankara's spiritual practice and education completed and he had reached the came of spiritual striving, the last rung of the ladder. He needed no more training and no further instruction. He had become firmly established in Self-Knowledge. And the Upanishads found a new and fresh verification of their statement : " When that Supreme Brahman is realized, the heart's knots get snapped, all doubts are resolved and one's actions become dissipated." Shankara was now a living

illustration of the great utterance, " The knower of the Supreme attains the Highest" and of the declaration, " The Knower of the Supreme verily becomes the Supreme."

As a piece of wood placed amidst incandescent embers soon becomes glowing fire, so had Shankara's contact with Govindapada made the disciple indistinguishable from master. The one was now as Purna-perfect as the other. The practice of Hatha Yoga had brought to Shankara unsought many Siddhis or occult powers. Clairvoyance and clairaudience, assuming light and subtle forms, bursting into hugeness, becoming atomic or cosmic, flying through space, entering and operating other bodies and minds, death at will, all these Siddhis were now matters of course for him, because all the laws, gross and subtle, of Nature responded to his volition. But the man of true illumination never gives a thought to these acquired powers and if at all he now and then makes any use of them it is only for doing some good to humanity. The so-called miracles emanate from a sense of passion on his part.

The rains set in and Omkarnath and the Narmada were a panorama of enchanting loveliness. But the rains were unusually heavy that year and the waters of Narmada swelled above the danger mark. The banks were submerged and the whole area was a sea of water. Village folk with their domestic animals moved to higher areas of safety. Govindapada was, in one of his frequently occurring trances, in the cave and was not conscious of the rising of the river. It became very clear soon that the waters would enter his cave and he would be drowned. The monks saw that it might not be possible to de-trance him quickly and the only way out was to lift him away. But to handle a Sage in Samadhi that was the height of discourtesy and they were in a fix. Shankara surveyed the situation and acted quickly. He placed his Kamandala near the entrance to the cave, and in an assuring voice told the anxious monks, " You do not worry. There is no need to disturb in any manner our Guru in Samadhi. The rushing flood waters will quietly enter the jar and be contained in it. They will not enter the cave any further." The monks smiled at the childish behavior of Shankara and felt he was indulging in doll-playing, but great was their surprise to see the madly rushing mighty volume of waters being received into the jar and being held in its small capacity. The cave was safe, afloat as it were amidst the surrounding expanse. Everyone marveled at this expression of Shankara's deep devotion to his Guru and of his supernormal powers. After a time, the floods subsided and Govindapada came out of Samadhi. Learning of the incident of the jar and the flood-waters, he was highly pleased and placing his holy right palm on Shankara's head in a warm blessing he said, " My son, you are indeed Loka Sham Kara - the doer of good to the world. You are indeed cast in the mould of the Supreme Mahadeva. My Guru Gaudapada had long ago told me that you would come to me. His Guru Shuka Mahamuni had informed him that just as you have contained the surging torrents of the Narmada in an earthen jar, you will by your lucid and irrefutable commentary on the Brahma sutras, succeed in reconciling all the apparently conflicting creeds and the mutually exclusive theories, on the high plane of the universally valid and all-inclusive philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. It is in order to fulfill this mission that you have come down to earth. I bless you that you may brilliantly succeed in performing your life's task in a manner that will shed the true light on all humanity for all ages to

come. May you in your commentaries and works bring out the true import and the full sense of all the Vedas."

In the writings of Madhavacharya, we find that hearing from the mouth of Govindapada, the Mahavakya-the great sentence, Shankara entered into Asampragnata Samadhi. On coming down from this Samadhi he found his Guru absorbed in trance. To bring him down to the plane of material consciousness, Shankara suppressed the current of Narmada.

Govindapada felt that his part in the training of Shankara to function as an Acharya had been played and that the time for his departure from the world of relative existence had come. He called Shankara to him one day and asked him, " My son do you have any doubts in your mind? Do you feel in you any imperfection, or want or incompleteness? Or are you at peace with yourself and with the entire universe, feeling the tough of reality in everything and the consciousness of Fullness in all? " Shankara in a tone of profound gratitude and utmost humility, but expressive of deep satisfaction and undisguised certitude replied to his Guru, " Sire, by your grace I see that there is nothing for me to be yet learnt, nothing to be yet acquired. You have filled me through and through. My contentment is through and perfect. My only wish is to be graciously permitted by you to remain merged for ever in unbroken Samadhi and experience the bliss of Nirvana." Govindapada after a moment of silence addressed Shankara in a calm and collected voice, " My son, you are born with a divine mandate to re-establish the Vedic religion. There is a cosmic purpose in your advent. The pursuit and attainment of individual salvation is not the mission of an exceptional soul like you. Your task is not to merely swim safely across the turbulent waters of life and death, which you have done as naturally as a fish swimming in a river. You have to help others to do the swimming across. You are not a mere pilgrim, you are a carrier of men. See reflections of Rama, Krishna and Vyasa in yourself. I have been waiting for a thousand years at the behest of my Guru to instruct you in the doctrine of Advaita, otherwise I would long ago have cast off my physical frame. Now my task is done. The treasure of Jnana I inherited from my Guru I have passed down to your eminently worthy hands, and you are destined to accomplish much. It is now high time that I enter final deliverance in self-realization. I shall drop my body like a sere leaf and merge with Parabrahman. Proceed now to Varanasi, the Mokshapuri - the city of salvation. You will have a vision of Lord Shiva Mahadeva and ParashaktiBhavani. They will instruct you, and you act according to their guidance. You are not just an individual, but a whole institution in yourself, not just an isolated star but an entire Solar System. "

Shankara listened and acknowledged the behest with silent consent. On an auspicious day selected for the purpose, Govindapada smilingly cast off his aged body in Samadhi. The pious disciples performed the enjoined last rites on the banks of Narmada in devotion and solemnity befitting the prince of Yogis.

An ordinary Jiva takes several births to reach the final goal of existence, and he plods along a particular religious path. His effort is all praiseworthy, no doubt. But Shankara was not of the ordinary. In three different and exalted Yogas he has attained mastery, an unusually short period for such a Himalayan achievement. This fact

demonstrates not only the powers of the great Siddha Yogi Govindapada, but also the receptive powers of Shankara in the spiritual field. At Omkarnath, at the time when Shankara reached illumination, there stayed many old Sanyasins, each mature in his own way, who all became disciples of Govindapada too. But it was Shankara only who mastered the three Yogas in such a short time. Others could possibly achieve the same after several hundreds of births. Shankara had appeared in human form with a reserve of immense spiritual powers in order to fulfill a mission under a divine dispensation. The several instances of Shankara's uncommon spiritual powers have been narrated in this sketch of his life till now. It is no wonder then that the world's veneration has been pouring at the feet of this boy prodigy all down the ages. The scriptures in describing the nature of the Lord say, " One who knows the truths about the projection and the subsiding of the universe, about the arrival and the course of departure of beings, and about knowledge and nescience may be styled Bhagawan - Vishnu Purana 6-5-78 ." It is God, the possessor of the six divine attributes that incarnates as Ideal Man to lead humanity on the path of true religion. It is indeed lucky that in the case of Shankara we have a fairly full record of all his doings from birth. This record is the account of a continuous opening out of amazingly extraordinary faculties. It is the fascinating story of a charming childhood, a precocious boyhood, a full-blooded pupil hood, a sweet mother-son relationship, a stern renunciation at a tender age, as astonishingly rapid practice of Yogic discipline, and a total realization of Reality. It is worthy to note that neither in the case of Rama nor of Krishna is there any systematically and chronologically recorded evidence of schooling and discipleship. We have to be satisfied with brief accounts and suggestive points. Vasishta, the great sage gave Sri Rama instructions in scripture. But we find Sri Rama there already as the Ideal Man and knower of Paramatman-Supreme Self. In Sri Krishna's case, we are told that after his sacred thread ceremony, he studied the scriptures under sage Sandipini. Some of the Puranas hold that Sri Krishna underwent Tapasya-spiritual discipline at Badarikashrama though he was already the knower of the Brahman established in the self, repository of knowledge and revealer of the essence of all scriptures. The Bhagavata says that Sri Krishna stayed at Sandipini's hermitage for sixty-four days mastering one art each day and becoming proficient in all the traditional sixty-four arts in record time. The spiritual depth, the supreme knowledge and the supernormal faculties expressed in the lives of supermen whom the world adores are certainly not the product of any instruction, training or practice. They are inborn and possessed from very birth. So too is the highest realization of God theirs, not by any penance or striving, it is already theirs when they are born. The exercises they undergo are for setting an example to men, for doing good to the world, for resuscitating religion. That is why we do not find an identical preparatory stage in all the Avatars, not a uniform course of discipline in all of them. The mode of life, the stages of development, the ways of equipping themselves, the manner of working out the life mission, all these differ from Avatar to Avatar, according to the needs of the times and the demands of the age.

Shankara was just eleven now. We stand amazed at his mastery over different systems of Yogas and the manifestation of supernatural powers in him at so tender an age. We shall observe henceforth that

such powers were pre-eminently needed for the fulfillment of the Divine Mission.

#### MOKSHAPURI KASHI, THE CITY OF SALVATION .....

After the passing away of Govindapada, Shankara along with a few other Sanyasins proceeded towards Varanasi even as his Guru had counseled him. He passed through the Vindhya forests, and visited Prayaga, the great confluence of rivers and a noted pilgrim center. From there he walked on to Kashi, the city of knowledge and salvation. He stayed in the Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi in a secluded and quiet spot. Suffused as his mind was with the consciousness of Brahman, he found Varanasi peculiarly suited to his temperament. Bathing in the waters of the holy Ganga and having the Darshan of Lord Vishwanatha and Mother Annapurana Visalakshi every day, he was immersed most of the time in meditation, his cultured mind freed from all worldly fretters, easily finding its habitat in the contemplation of the ` Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma ` - the Absolute that is Truth, Wisdom and Infinity. It was not however possible for him to stay for long in solitude. He got easily `discovered'. He was self-luminous and earnest seekers and scholars flocked to him in increasing numbers. He was too kind-hearted to turn them away even for the self-absorption that he so much relished. He gladly began teaching them and telling them of the Ultimate Truth. Within a very short time, his vast learning, unusual gifts of exposition, astounding intellectual keenness and charming personality became the talk of the town. Scholars and monks belonging to diverse philosophical sects and schools and owing allegiance to various systems of thought approached Shankara and had their doubts cleared on the Ultimate Truth. Shankara's life task of re-establishing the pure Vedic faith in the whole of India thus had its auspicious beginnings in Varanasi.

Shankara re-established in the undivided Bharat, the Sanatana Vaidika Dharma by freeing the entire country from the baneful influence of distorted and decayed Buddhism and Jainism. It was because of his life that the Vedas and Vedic faith were protected and preserved. He did not build the monastic order only ( the ten monastic orders Shankara established are Tirtha, Ashrama, Vana, Aranya, Giri, Parvata, Sagara, Saraswati, Bharati and Puri). He entrusted the great responsibility of sustaining and protecting the Sanatana Dharma to the Sanyasins, especially to the Abbots of the Maths he established. As a result of this within a short time the Vedic religion revived in the whole of India. He was the architect of the glorious renaissance. It was because of the vitality infused into the Vedic Dharma that in later years despite heavy onrush and oppression of the outsiders and people of differing creeds that India could stand firm and maintain her distinct cultural identity. Hence even today the Sanatana Vedic Dharma is not only alive but her influence in full glory has spread throughout the globe.

Even from pre-historic times, Varanasi has been one of the chief centers of Sanatana Vedic Dharma. It has verily been the abode of the serene God, Shiva Vishwanatha ever lost in the contemplation of his own Gory. Countless generations of spiritual aspirants of diverse

schools and renowned scholars of varied interests have realized the fulfillment of their mission in the holy city of Kashi. At the time of Shankara's arrival in Varanasi, there lived in it aspirants belonging to many different sects- Shaiva, Pashupata, Sankhya, Patanjala, Soura, Shakta, Ganapatya, Jaina and Bauddha orders of seekers and scholars, all intent on achieving the Supreme God in ways suited to them. Many of them were drawn to Shankara hearing the news of his arrival and about his genius and soon Shankara's lodgings became a place of sacred pilgrimage. Many, to establish the superiority of their view points, would enter into debate with Shankara. He lent them patient hearing and with comfortable ease disarmed them all by irrefutable reasonings.

In the presence of the genius and personality of the boy-Sanyasin, the parties aspiring for victory were humbled and the opposing contestants felt blessed realizing the Truth. The earnest inquirers would get all their doubts resolved and desire new light in their spiritual lives. The Sadhaka would feel gratified and receive great inspiration in strengthening his spiritual living. Shankara's stay at Varanasi led the spiritual thought-current of the place to flow in full-flood state.

#### SANANDANA FINDS HIS GURU IN SHANKARA .....

A Brahmin youth named Sanandana of the Chola country in South India happened to arrive at Varanasi when Shankara was staying there. He had been for a long time journeying through many places in search of a realized Guru who would put him on the sure path to Ultimate Knowledge. It did not take him long to come to hear of the eminence of Shankara. He heard of Shankara's supernatural power and uncommon genius and developed a high regard for Shankara and made bold to go to him one day with a request to him to be his Guru. Shankara was delighted to meet Sanandana. He surveyed the supplicating youth, saw his worth, and after putting a few queries in order to know something of his past, gave him permission to stay with him. An intimacy of few days was sufficient to convince Sanandana his Guru of the godly life of Shankara. He made a gift of himself to his Guru. He ardently believed that if he could get the grace of Shankara, he could attain the summum bonum of life- the self-realization. So one day he begged of Shankara to initiate him into Sanyasa. Shankara was in a gracious mood and on an auspicious day, initiated Sanandana into Sanyasa. Thus Sanandana became the first Sanyasi disciple of Shankara.

Sanandana was in every way worthy of Shankara. Even as a boy he had developed a religious turn of mind, felt an intense dispassion for things of the world and had proceeded to a hill called Ahobala in the south to realize God-vision. He had heard that Nrisimhadeva, the man-lion incarnation of Narayana, who is easily pleased with men and fulfils ardent desires of those who pray for his vision was ever available to sincere seekers in that place. Living on a fruit-diet in the forests on the hill, Sanandana had engaged himself in the worship of Nrisimha. His yearning for God-Vision grew intense day by day. One day a youthful hunter came to him and asked him, " why is it that you live alone in this desolate uninhabited forest ? " Sanandana did not like to give out his real intention, nor did he like to be guilty of

an untruth. So he gave the hunter a clever reply, " I am looking for a creature with a lion's face and a human body. Can you help me find it? " The hunter retreated without a word and then returned after a while with an image of Nrisimha wrapped in green leaves and bound by tender creepers. Sanandana prostrated before this image and burst into a prayer. The hunter disappeared from view and the living form of Nrisimhadeva stood before Sanandana, asking him, " Dear child, ask for a boon." Sanandana asked for the boon of Abhaya, fearlessness and " It is also my prayer that you appear before me to help me out of any difficulty I may find myself in, whenever I remember you and desire your intervention. " " Be it so, " said Nrisimha as he withdrew out of sight.

Blessed Sanandana regarded it as a stroke of singular good fortune that a Guru of Shankara's eminence had condescended to adopt him as his disciple. He was highly devoted to his Guru. Guruseva was indeed his penance. Like his very shadow, he constantly stayed by the side of Shankara. His greatest Sadhana lay in serving his Guru. Endowed with a superior intelligence and a deep knowledge of the scriptures, he was able to win the complete confidence of his master whose favorite he soon became. He was literally to Shankara what Hanuman was to Sri Rama. On may an occasion he saved the life of Shankara from coming to an untimely end, never hesitating to put his own life into danger.

Shankara's masterly proficiency in the Vedic scriptures and his study of and training in Yoga under the expert direction of Govindapada had helped him to scale the heights of the realization of the ultimate reality. He was established totally in self-awareness. To him, in his lofty perch, Brahman alone was Truth, the universe but an illusion, and the seemingly bound soul, Jiva, was none but the Brahman. The grand non-dual knowledge of the individual soul and the Total Brahman, the Supreme soul, is experienced in the deepest state of super-conscious Samadhi or utter indrawnness. However on the worldly plane where the normal senses function in our practical day to day work and behavior, it is possible in a partial way to maintain undistorted this perception of Brahman in all, only as a result of prolonged and steady practice. Over and above everything else, the Grace of God is needed. The attainment of this state of experience is extremely different and a very rare privilege for ordinary mortals. It is but natural for great men and Avadhootas like Sri Dattatreya, Sri Shankara, Sadashiva Brahmendra etc.

=====  
==

BHAVANI, THE SUPREME QUEEN OF THE COSMOS .....

For the accomplishment of divine task, Shankara was destined to live in the world, established in the experience of the undivided Brahman, rooted in the perception of Absolute Reality. Therefore, Adya Shakti, the Primal Energy or Power, as if overcome by a mood of immense grace ( which is but her very nature), and with the object of ensuring the enrichment of the knowledge of Brahman, showed a Lila-cosmic play, to bestow on Shankara, Brahmadrishhti- the recognition and perception of Absolute Reality.

It is the Absolute endowed with 'Gunas' or attributes, the Saguna Brahman, that works out the projection and preservation and the dissolution of the three worlds. In the attributeless Absolute which is indifferent to Shakti, there is no authorship of the universe. And what is this Guna aspect of Saguna Brahman? It is a great Shakti capable of bringing about strange impossible transformations possible that constitutes the Guna-quality or the Upadi- modification of the Absolute Brahman. It is only by taking the help of these Gunas or attributes that the undifferentiated and unconditioned Brahman becomes conditioned, endowed with attributes and subject to differentiations. The Saguna Brahman is as it were, the Ocean of Forms for the Formless, the Aroopa.

That which is the attributeless Absolute Supreme Self to the man of wisdom on his wisdom-plane, that same substance endowed with attributes is Ishwara or God on the plane of dual consciousness. This is the image of all rasas or artistic graces rolled into one and the abode of all powers. Says Sri Chandrashekhara Mahaswamikal, the very incarnation of Shankara and literally the mouthpiece of Sri Kamakshi, " The Chit Shakti, the power that is effulgent Consciousness and the Brahman of Vedanta are non-different even as water and its cooling power are non-different". That is why the aspirant on reaching this stage of experience says, " Knowing the secret that Kali is one with Brahman, I have discarded once for all, both righteousness and unrighteousness, religion and non-religion ( Sadhakas of Srividya are well aware of this, and practice exactly this during the Chidagni Homa).

Shankara in his commentary on the Saririka, has supported both the Saguna and Nirguna aspects of Brahman and moreover has assigned a place of importance to the adoration of the Saguna Brahman as enjoined in the Sruti and Smriti. Indeed the adoration of the attributes-endowed Absolute is an unavoidable, indispensable step to the attainment of the attributeless Absolute. The wisdom of non-duality is the last word and the final step to attainment of the attributeless Absolute. The wisdom of non-duality is the last word and the final achievement of all spiritual effort. The Sruti says it that whether one takes to the realization of the truth of the Supreme Indestructible Brahman or to the adoration of the Saguna Brahman depends on one's position in regard to native equipment and to attendant circumstances. An individual may be innately qualified either for the one or the other, and the environment, condition, stage of growth etc. of the person may also influence the choice. Shankara was the best of the knowers of the Brahman, and he standing at the meeting point of wisdom and devotion, Jnana and Bhakti, said, " O Paramatman, though the distinction that obtained between thee and me has been obliterated and in consequence the sameness has set in between us, I am really Thine. Never art though mine. For even though the ocean and the wave are identical and non-different, the wave is after all the ocean's and the wave can never claim the ocean as a part of it. "

One day in the very early hours while the darkness of night was still lingering, Shankara accompanied by his disciples was proceeding to the Manikarnika Ghat for the daily ablution at dawn in the holy waters of Ganga. On the way, a pathetic sight attracted his eyes. On the path leading to the river sat a young woman. She was the very

picture of grief. A dead body, evidently of her husband, lay on the ground, its head resting on her lap. She was wailing loudly and soliciting help from all present there for the proper performance of the funeral rites of her departed husband. She had been sitting with a corpse in such a way that the narrow path leading to the Manikarnika Ghat was quite blocked. Shankara waited for long, it was getting quite late for the bath, and there was no other path leading to Manikarnika Ghat. He had, therefore, to ask the sorrowing woman, "Mother, if you will remove the corpse to one side of the pathway, we can move on to the river ". The woman seemed to be so overwhelmed with grief that she could not pay attention to Shankara's words. On being repeatedly requested by Shankara for the removal of the lifeless body to one side of the pathway, the woman responded telling him, " Why, Great Soul, why do you not yourself ask the corpse to move aside ?" Hearing her words Shankara told her in a voice choked with compassion, " Mother, you are besides yourself with grief. Can a corpse ever move of its own accord! Has it in itself the needed momentum for moving aside? " The woman then fixed her gaze on Shankara and spoke, " Why, you best of ascetics, you hold that it is the one and only one Brahman who is the sole authority of the universe and Shakti is indifferent. Is this not so? When Brahman is ever present everywhere, why should not the corpse then move? " Hearing the woman's utterance which was pregnant with wisdom, Shankara stood astounded and began to think over its import.

But where was the woman now? And where was the corpse? In a trice everything had receded. What divine sport was this! Shankara's mind was filled with an indescribable joy. Within and without, he experienced the sportive play of the Great Enchantress, Mahamaya, who is none but Adya Shakti or the Primal Energy. It was because of her glance that earth and heaven throbbed. Bending on his knees, Shankara began to sing in praise of the Goddess Mahatripurasundari, the sole refuge of the universe.

" Oh Goddess Supreme ! Brahman, Vishnu, Maheshwara, Indra, Chandra or Surya or any one for the matter of that have I never known. I am taking refuge at thy feet. Thou art my sole shelter. Thou my only heaven, Mother Bhavani! I have surrendered myself to thee. In debate and in danger, in error and in alien lands, in water and in fire, on hills, among foes and in forests, do thou protect me every where and in all places. Thou art alone my sheet-anchor. Thou alone my only refuge security- Bhavanyashtakam !"

Shankara now realized that the Goddess Supreme, the dispenser of boons to humanity, who is worshipped by the Lord of the Universe Himself, had out of her divine and mysterious Grace, made him become aware intensely of her magnanimous glory and grace. She was it, he understood the Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer of this phenomenal universe and it was She again that bestowed material abundance and also the final salvation from conditioned existence. It was by the inducement of Her glance of Divine Sport that the Universe blossomed out. It was in her affection-filled bosom that the Universe had its being, and it was she who bore in Her, being the granary of the cosmic universe. All this Shankara realized with clarity and fullness by a moment of Mother's divine Grace. His heart felt strangely filled. He finished his bath at the Manikarnika Ghat and came back to his residence with an enchanted mind. His mode of

thought and his pattern of behavior now underwent a revolutionary change. He had already experienced that the individual Soul-Jiva and the Infinite Soul Brahman were identical and non-different. He now understood that the attributeless absolute Brahman was just a witness, a mere spectator and no more. The authorship of the universe was that of the Primordial Energy Adya Shakti.

Shankara had become established in Samadhi Yoga and in the Supreme knowledge of non-dual Brahman. But he had not yet attained to a complete measure of the knowledge and the outlook and the attitude that, on the plane where the Jiva functions, and in the region of the practical and the pragmatic, "The universe in entirety is of the stuff of Brahman Absolute ". But Shankara's advent was only for the purpose of working out a divine mission. His enjoinder of self-bliss by remaining immersed in Nirvikalpa Samadhi, which is the state of unqualified self-absorption, would not help him to accomplish his life's purpose. He would have to work out a practical application to life and labor on earth, of his experience of the Absolute Reality subsisting in all created objects and of his perceiving of the Absolute Reality everywhere and in all places. Only then, and only that way, would he become the meaningful living embodiment of the Great Utterance, "All this indeed is verily Brahman", and this Supreme self-knowledge of the non-dual Reality would be reflected in his life.

SRI VISHWANATHA, LORD OF THE UNIVERSE ...

Even as Mother Bhavani thus played Her Cosmic Lila in the life of Shankara, Mahadeva, the cosmic consort of Bhavani also one day set up a very wonderful sport with the object of perfecting Shankara's self-knowledge of the Absolute Reality on the practical, tangible material, work-a-day plane of living and doing. On another day, when Shankara with his disciples was going to bath in the holy Ganga, saw a loathsome sight near the Manikarnika Ghat.

A Chandala (an untouchable and worker at the cremation ground, at the very bottom of the social scale and devoid of any culture, a very primitive of men, extremely ugly in appearance and of a terrifying form) with four dogs held in leash, was approaching in a disorderly manner from the opposite direction.

Finding no other way of avoiding a confrontation with him, Shankara addressed him and said, "Oh, you Chandala, step aside one side with your canine company, and let us pass". The Chandala did not appear to have listened to his words at all, and did not tarry of deflect, but continued to advance. Shankara in a somewhat excited voice cried out again, "Stop, fellow, stop. Restrain and pacify your curs. Leave a passage free for us".

The terrible looking Chandala burst out into hideous guffaw and turning to Shankara, spoke out in Sanskrit verses, "Whom are you asking to move aside , Sir? Are you demanding the self to do so or the body to do so? The Self is omnipresent, non-active, ever pure by nature. If instead you ask the physical body to move aside, you know that the body is inert matter, how can it move aside at all? And moreover, in what respect is your body distinct and different from any other body? You say that you are firmly established and rooted in

the Supreme Truth and there is but One non-dual entity, 'One without a Second'. I see that your claim is all false, you are indulging in vain pride. Is there any difference between the Chandala and the Brahmin from the viewpoint of the knower of the Truth? Are the sun reflected in the water of Ganga and the sun reflected in the wine different and separate from each other? Is this your knowledge of the All-ness the Absolute Reality, so circumscribed? "

Hearing these words of the Chandala, surcharged with wisdom, Shankara was both amazed and ashamed. That this was without a doubt the play of the Divine, he clearly perceived. Then and there he folded his palms in adoration and spoke prayerfully, "He who perceives all beings with an awareness of Same-sightedness, acts in consonance with that perception of sameness in all, he indeed is my Guru. You Chandala are my Guru. I bow down at his holy feet a million times".

All of a sudden the Chandala and his canine company disappeared. But Shankara beheld another sight. The Divine form of the eternal Lord and Father of the Universe, Sri Mahadeva, radiant and shining with the light of thousands of crores of suns and fire, stood before him in all glory holding in His hands the four Vedas. These eternal scriptures were what Shankara had seen as dogs before. The skull in which the Chandala had held wine before now appeared as a Kumbha of nectar. Shankara's mind was filled with intense devotion. He bowed down at the feet of the Great

Guru of the Universe and burst into a hymn of praise :

" I reflect on the One Great God, who is the enemy of passion, the Lord of all beings, the annihilator of sin, the great lord, the wearer of the elephant skin, the most excellent one, springing from whose matted locks the waters of the Ganga flow.

I take refuge in Him who is without birth, the eternal, cause of all causes, the all auspicious one, from whom the universe gets expression, the Being beyond the three Gunas or qualities, who is beyond all darkness, the One without beginning and end, the Supreme, the Purifier in whom is no duality.

Salutation to Thee, O Lord, salutation to Thee who art of the form of the Universe, salutations to Thee again and again, who art of the form of knowledge and Bliss. Salutations to Thee over and over again, O Thou who art unattainable by rigorous spiritual practices and meditations. Salutations to Thee who are reachable by the Vedic Knowledge( the underlying Supreme non-dual Truth of the Brahman), Salutations to Thee again and again."

Pleased by this hymn, Lord Mahadeva placed his hand on Shankara's head and said to him, "Child, I am pleased and gratified. I wish that through you should come about the re-establishment of Vaidika Dharma on earth, the Spiritual Discipline enjoined and elaborated in the Vedas. You must give out a flawless exposition of Vedanta and blow up the religious theories which are vitiated by false apperception, leading men to duality and darkness. You must write out a commentary on the Brahma Sutra of Vyasa and firmly establish that knowledge of Brahman, which is the chief import of the Vedanta philosophy. You have to preach the Vedic faith in such a way as to make it available

to all. And at the conclusion of your allotted task, you will be united with me. For the everlasting welfare of the world, you have taken birth as a manifestation of me on this earth". Having spoken thus, Mahadeva disappeared from view.

Shankara's whole being had stood enraptured by this Divine vision, and now he came back to a sense of the outer world. Like one in a trance, he mechanically finished his bathing in the Ganga and his visit to the shrines. How to carry out the Divine behest was the one preoccupation of his mind now. After deep thinking and contemplation, he decided to proceed to Badarikashrama for writing out the commentary on Brahma Sutra. Thereupon on an auspicious day, he made obeisance to Lord Vishwanatha and Mother Annapurana and with his disciples journeyed on in the direction of the holy place of Badarikashrama.

AMIDST THE HIMALAYAS .....

Badarikashrama is a Tirtha, a holy place with sacred associations, in the Himalayas. The access to it not easy. The twelve-year boy Shankara did not however mind the difficulties of the ascent and went up with determination to reach the place. On his way to Badari, he made it a point to visit all places of pilgrimage and have Darshan of all the different divine images in the temples. With great piety, he worshipped and adored the Gods in all the shrines. Proceeding along the holy banks of Ganga, he passed through places like Prayaga and soon found himself in Haridwar.

Haridwar had always been the home of many monks from ages past, and his arrival at that spot of hallowed associations brought great joy to Shankara. Haridwar is the gateway to the Himalayas. Shankara performed the religious rites due to be done by pilgrims at that holy place and then proceeded towards Hrishikesh, which in olden times was verily a Yagna Bhumi, a sacrificial region. From now on we shall perceive in Shankara, an Acharya, a Jagadguru whose role is of establishing Dharma, true faith.

Acharya was no doubt firmly rooted in the Supreme self-knowledge of the Brahman. Surely it was not for being immersed in Samadhi, the super-conscious state, and for the experiencing of the bliss of the self-hood that his advent had come about. The compelling mission, the grand purpose, of his life was rather virile consolidation, and the firm establishment once again of the whole Vedic Dharma, the Vedic faith.

We see in Shankara's life a bright illustration of the manner in which the knower of Truth, a Jnani lives on in this world of relative values and conditioned existence even after he has attained the Knowledge of the non-dual Unity. The knower of the Truth lives on seeking refuge in Vidyamaya ( the higher aspect of the Cosmic Illusion which turns one to right perception and away from false judgment, Sri Devi's grace to be precise) and holding on to devotion to God, compassion towards beings and dispassion towards objects of enjoyment. His life on earth has two aims, teaching people the higher learning and himself tasting the Rasa, the divine sweetness of the Divine Bliss.

Those who ascend to spiritual realm are of two kinds, the Jivakotis and the Ishwarakotis. The latter are especially endowed individuals. But the patterns of life of these two categories of persons differ and are unique in their own separate way. The Jivakotis can gain the highest self-knowledge by means of spiritual practice and prayer and through intense austerity, but cannot, after coming down from Nirvikalpa Samadhi stay very long in this world. When the great power, Kundalini reaches the Sahasrara, the plane of conscious is Chidakasha and after the union of Paramashiva and Sridevi, which is nothing but realization of the individual Soul as the Universal soul, Paramatman, perfect knowledge is attained and Nirvikalpa Brahma Samadhi follows. Yogi attains perfect bliss and becomes firmly established in Supreme Parabrahman. Now the self can linger in the physical body at the most for twenty-one days. And then, their bodies fall off like dried up leaves. They are then freed for all time from the riddle of life and death and attain Nirvana liberation, which unlike other lower states of attainment of heavenly worlds (which most other dualistic sects mistake for Moksha, the final liberation), is the consummation of all spiritual striving, the very omega of perfection. But in the case of those who are anointed ones endowed with special commands, i.e. Avatars, their embodiment is for the fulfillment of a divine purpose, for the ensuring of the welfare of the world and living beings. They are men out of the ordinary, sent to earth by God as his very manifestations. Their number is few. Whenever there comes about in the world a decline of the true spirit of religion, then the Lord, as promised in the Gita, sends out His anointed souls to arrest the decline of the true religious faith in the world and to re-establish that faith on firm foundations. The advent of these extraordinary spiritual stars is not for the acquisition of self-knowledge for themselves since they are already endowed with this knowledge. They are born liberated. They come down in order to show the dwellers on earth that the eternal path to perfection which men have forsaken and forgotten and in order to lead men on to the way to salvation.

These supermen with divine commissions the greatest of the Knowers of Brahman, but at the same time in response of the especial wish of the Lord, they slide down a little from the final state of Beatitude which is attained only with great difficulty, and for the good of the world, they tarry for a time in the region of duality. In the consciousness of the All-ness of the One Reality, there are two different reaches, one is Jnana- knowledge and the other is Vijnana or super-knowledge or specially verified knowledge. Even on the plane of remaining in Nirvikalpa Samadhi, there are several grades and levels of knowledge-acquisition and these are described in the scriptures. For instance, these states find a mention in them Brahmaivid, Brahmaividvara, Brahmaividvariyan and Brahmaividvarishta. Brahmaivid means a knower of Brahman, and Vara, Variyan and Varishra are suggestive of ascending comparative degrees of excellence and fullness. The normal human being, the ordinary Jivakoti, who takes to spiritual striving can attain Brahma Jnana, but cannot reach the state of Vijnana or super-specialty.

As long as the commissioned supermen referred to above, having, by the desire of the Lord, come down from the region of the super-conscious state of Samadhi, inhabit the world of living beings, their only wish being to do good to the world. If they remain immersed in

deep Samadhi, no teaching and instructing of people becomes possible. Therefore, they do, in accordance with the wish of the Lord, reside in the world, perceiving the reality which is Brahman immanent in all things. That Bhakti or devotion which follows and is consequent on Jnana or knowledge is indeed fruition of right Bhakti. Pity the fools who indulge in duality, terming it Bhakti. We perceive this true and unique Bhakti in Acharya's life by the will of the Divine.

This is the view of the scriptures in general. However, by divine grace, a Sadhaka can indeed perfect Vijnana, by which the Kundalini returns to lower Chakras, allowing the Sadhaka to remain in undisturbed bliss of Brahman, at the same time allowing him to carry out his day to day worldly activities. This exactly is what is taught to followers of Srividya. Most scriptures ( I should say most Yogic and Tantric scriptures to be precise, since I personally cannot claim detailed study in other areas) however stop at Sahasrara since this is indeed meant to be the end of the journey for a Jivakoti. However, in Samayachara, (the very soul and essence of it being Srividya), Vijnana is but a natural course of study since the perfection in Srividya indicates that the Sadhaka is out of the ordinary. However, due to various injunctions in scriptures which ban public discussions on this highly esoteric and highly guarded methodology and theory of Vijnana ( to be handed over by a Guru to a disciple who is eligible to receive this lofty knowledge) and the descent of Kundalini by will. This piece about Kundalini is my own addition and none of the biographies of Acharya speak about it. Ascent of Kundalini makes a Jnani and a tailored descent of Kundalini, possible with certain Tantric techniques and most importantly by Sri Devi's grace, makes a Vijnani.

Shankara conducted himself in his work on the practical plane by taking the attitude of the devotion of the devotee. Making devotion the sporting field, he collected and rested his mind-stuff on that Brahman. Again, in order to re-establish the glory of the centers of sacred pilgrim spots in which the presence of Gods and Goddesses is felt and experienced, he undertook extensive pilgrimages, though to hi, such a discipline was of need whatsoever, for he was himself the very spirit of pilgrimage incarnate.

Shankara had also not come to earth only to preach Advaita Vedanta, though indeed the Advaita experience of the One without a Second is the last word in all spiritual striving. His advent was also for the re-establishment of the Vedic faith, the way of thought and life enunciated in the Vedas, which is all-inclusive of the different attitudes and modes of approach. Few indeed are those who are qualified to receive the acme of knowledge of the non-dual absolute directly. Only when through worship and adoration of the Gods and Goddesses who are the effulgent forms and manifestations of the Parabrahman's ( or Parashakti's) several expressions and aspects and powers, the mind-stuff becomes purified and spotless, does the truth of the non-dual Absolute shine in it. It is because of this that the scriptures enjoin instructions regarding the performance of good deeds and rituals like ceremonial worship, adoration, fire sacrifices etc. These instructions are prescribed to different aspirants and salvation-seekers each suited to the degree and the stage of development in them. This is also the reason why Acharya propelled by a desire to do good to very many people, interested himself in the

renovation of the different places of pilgrimage. During his itinerary throughout the length and breadth of India, he not only re-consecrated the sanctuaries of the places but his visits to these sacred spots did much more than merely recharging and reviving the spirit of those places. His wanderings were really big campaigns of national awakening on the front of popular religion. He performed appropriate rites and ceremonies at all the places he visited, and thus helped the especial glory of each place to become more manifest. The genius of each locality became better appreciated and became more operative than till then. As a result of this, there was a religious revival in the society. Numberless men and women came to know from him the true significance of divine worship and took to assiduously adoring the Gods and goddesses. As the Gita puts it wisely, "What the great souls or leaders practice, the standard set by them, the people and the mass common folk emulate, follow". Even up to this day, it is the ideals highlighted by Acharya that inspire people in respect of the worship and adoration of deities. Hence does the pilgrimage part of Acharya's life work forms an important aspect of his mission of resuscitating religion in the land of Bharat.

Arriving at Hrishikesh, Acharya first proceeded to the temple of Yagneshwara Mahavishnu, the Lord of Sacrifices. In days long gone by, a community of sages had installed at this place, the image of Mahavishnu to be adored at the time of performing Yagnas or sacrifices. But now when Acharya went into the sanctum, he found the pedestal barren and empty. There was no image of any aspect of Lord, and there was no arrangement of any kind for any worship of God. Acharya was sorely disappointed and grief-stricken. He soon gathered information from the people of the locality to the effect that, frightened by the troubles caused by Chinese bandits, the priests of the temple had concealed the image of Sri Vishnu somewhere in the bosom of the bed of the holy Ganga. But afterwards, even in spite of extensive search to recover the image, it had not been possible to locate it and re-install it. All this information made Acharya feel down-cast. He remained silent for a moment and then plunged into meditation. Coming out of his deep trance after a while, he asked the local Brahmin inhabitants of the place, "In case the missing image is found and recovered, are you willing and ready to re-install it and make the necessary arrangements for the regular worship and service?" All of them gave their ready assent in great joy. Thereupon Acharya rose from his place, walked a short distance along the bank of Ganga and pointing to a spot there, announced, "Here lies the holy image". To the great surprise of all, after just a little effort, the image was found intact. The people of the place were overjoyed at the discovery and soon on an auspicious day, to the accomplishment of the prescribed rites, got the image re-installed on the altar in the temple. Acharya stayed on there for a few days and brought satisfaction to all by his philosophical and religious discourses and instructions. He then resumed his pilgrimage and set off towards holy Badari.

India is pre-eminently the land for pilgrimage. And in this vast stretch of the Punyabhumi or the sacred land, no region is more inspiring and invigorating than the Himalayas. The Himalayas are no lifeless rock and stone, no inert slope and peak, they pulsate with spiritual vibrations of high intensity, they are the treasure-house of deep spiritual emotions and urges. The serene and meditative

atmosphere of the Himalayas which are the haunt even of the Gods in heaven, powerfully acted on the highly poised mind of Acharya and brought about an indescribable change in his attitude. His usually introspective mind became indrawn all the time. Marching up the mountains was often a test of endurance and a risk to safety, but the great soul, and the one already liberated while living in the body, a Jivanmukta, bore cheerfully the rigors of the difficult ascent.

Close to Hrishikesh is Lacchman Jhoola, famous as the spot where Vidura underwent his religious austerities. Getting across the Ganga here, Acharya surmounting a high mountain uninhabited but covered with forests, reached Vyasashrama. Beyond that place, the path lead towards Devaprayaga. There are five holy Prayagas or river-confluences on the Himalayas and among them, the holiest is Devaprayaga where the rivers Alakananda and Bhagirati mingle together. It is a pilgrim center of great sanctity. At this place, Acharya offered worship at the temples of Sri Rama and Sita, Hara and Parvati, and Ganesha, and also performed the rites associated with the sacred place, and experienced immense satisfaction in consequence. On entering the Himalayan region, Acharya became extremely indrawn and deeply introspective and more and more introvert. His disciples were, with great care, looking after his physical safety and well-being. The Acharya, except when he was actually walking along his way, was most of the time immersed in meditation. Passing Bilwakedara on the way, Shankara and his disciples reached Srinagar. This place was also known as Sriksheeta. In the past, this place was the capital of the rulers of Uttarakhand. Among the many temples in this place, the best known were those of Kamaleshwara Shiva and Sri Vishnu. Another fact of importance about the region was that five centers known as Siddha Peethas or seats of enlightenment, proclaimed the predominance of Vamachara Tantric modes of spiritual discipline. The five Peethas were known as Sriyantrasita, Rajarajeshwari, Kamasammardini, Chamunda and Mahishamardini. In those days, the practice of offering human sacrifice was in vogue among the Tantrika residents of that place.

As the news of Acharya's arrival at the place went around, groups and groups of people flocked to him to listen to his discourses on religion and morals. Acharya came to know from the people of the locality that the practice of human sacrifice was indulged in by the Tantrikas, and he called the Tantrikas to a discussion. The community of Tantrikas came in a body and engaged Acharya in a debate. Acharya however in a very calm and composed way, explained to them the true significance and import of spirituality and scriptures and corrected them of their perverted notions and retrieved them from their infatuation for the earful rite of offering human sacrifice. Even the very stone piece which had served as the altar for the offering of human sacrifice was cast away to the depths of the river waters. So through was the transformation wrought by Acharya.

What a cruel rite this human sacrifice is! And all this in the name of religion and faith too! The primordial power is the Eternal Mother of all created beings. Is it at all possible that she is pleased and propitiated by drinking the blood of Her own children and the offering of the severed heads of Her own offspring. Sri Durga purposefully avoided killing even an evil Asura like Mahisha out of compassion for her wayward son. The Devas had to make her drink Madhu

to make her wild with anger so that she could do a higher good to the world by destroying the demon. Sri Devi is thus the very personification of compassion and love. Whatever colourful words and logic may be used by people like Vimalananda and some others, the fact remains that Vamachara is condemnable in most cases. The tantras themselves have stated that Vamachara is indeed for Pashu or Tamasic Sadhakas. Tamas can lead no where. These are very critical times when a lot of nonsense is being pushed in the name of Tantra and Sadhana. In the light of this, Acharya's message gains all the more importance.

Leaving Srinagar, Acharya continued his journey and passed through Rudraprayag and arrived at Nandiprayag. All these places are well-known places of pilgrimage in the Himalayas. At every place he visited, crowds of people came to see and hear him, and he instructed and exhorted them to preserve and safeguard the Vedic faith and culture. Just beyond Nandiprayag, lies the shrine of Badari. It is there that the lovely confluence of the Mandakini and Alakananda is situated. The charming and awe-inspiring sublime surroundings of this sacred spot had once cast their spell on sage Vasishtha and drawn him to this region. Vasishtha performed severe austerities at this place to win boons from Lord Shiva. It was this sage who installed in that shrine, the deity known as Vasishteshwara Shiva. Closely are the mountain stream Virahi Ganga and the shrine of Viraheshwara Mahadeva. It is believed that in days of yore, Lord Shiva, overwhelmed with grief at the separation from Sati, his consort, did very severe penance at this place. The sacred memory of this act of Shiva proclaims even today the especial glory of the locality and pilgrims who come to the place tangibly feel the powerful undulation of great pathos which is awakened in them on arrival here by thoughts of the Shiva-Shakti separation.

The Acharya found immense delight in these visits to the many sacred centers pulsating with holiness and steeped into serenity. The visits were a soul-enthraling experience to him and his disciples. The Acharya next went towards Garuda Ganga. Tradition has it that at this spot, the great bird devotee Garuda went through severe austerities for the vision of Vishnu. Indeed all places on the Himalayas are surcharged with the spirit of high austerity and ascetical life. That is why the Himalayas are designated as Devatma, the divine souled mountains. That spot at which a great soul attains perfection through a course of spiritual discipline contains for a long time to vibrate with the thought-currents of his experiences. And many aspirants of subsequent periods get the rare opportunity of strengthening and enriching their own spiritual life by availing themselves those thought-currents. The though waves of a Master Spirit do not abate or die with his physical death, they live on and act on kindred souls despite distances in time and space.

Crossing one after another, many peaks of the Himalayas, Acharya and his disciples reached Jyotirdhama. The ruler of that area came to hear about the arrival of the Acharya and personally went forward to greet and welcome the adorable monk and with great earnestness and warmth, accorded him a befitting reception. Four temples in that region were dedicated to Vasudeva, Nrisimha, Durga Devi and Jyotirlinga Shiva. Acharya visited them all and offered worship at each of them to the great joy of himself and the followers. The Acharya did not leave Jyotirdhama at once. At the earnest

importunities of the ruler, he condescended to stay on at the place for a few days. Needless to add, the period of his sojourn there saw, as in the case of other places visited by him, an upsurge of spirit in the people.

Even long before Acharya arrived at a place all over the Himalayan region, he was well-known as the one possessed of super-human wisdom, sublime realizations and astounding versatility. The most remarkable fact about him was his age. He was only twelve then. But a divine radiance enveloped his whole being. He struck everyone as the very acme of monasticism. His disciples, by physical age, were older than him. Coming to learn of his arrival accompanied by aged disciples at Jyotirdhama, a huge assemblage of men, Brahmin scholars and spiritual aspirants flocked to have a look at the young and brilliant Acharya. His tireless exposition of the truth of the non-dual Brahman and of the contents of the Vedas charmed every listener. The incomparable celestial charm of the boy-monk, the divine glow on his child-like countenance beaming with bliss of Sacchidananda, his two eyes effulgent with indrawnness and subjective absorption, his severely pleasant form and above all the extreme sweetness of his demeanor and character, filled the minds of all with amazement on the one hand and delight on the other. The Acharya's listeners and pupils were much senior in age and worldly experiences than him. But the boy-monk, by his clear exposition of the scriptural contents and by the great force of his personality immersed and nourished in the profound experience of Brahman realization was able to completely free everyone from doubts and fill all minds with intellectual contentment and satisfaction.

In the hymn to Dakshinamurthy, the south-facing Shiva, composed by Acharya, there is a very captivating picture of a strange scene : " This indeed is wonderful, under a banyan tree are seated old, aged disciples before a youthful master. The master sits mute or silent and by his eloquent silence, dispels all the doubts of the disciples". " He, who sitting silent emanates the knowledge of the Supreme Brahman, he, the young, most eminent of the als, surrounded by the assemblage of hoary-headed devout aspirants for the knowledge of Brahman, he holds Jnana Mudra in his palm and is the very embodiment of bliss, merged and satisfied in Self, with eyes closed, him that Dakshinamurthy do I adore".

In this hymn the Acharya has described, as it were, his own Guru aspect. He was verily the incarnation of Dakshinamurthy, the greatest of all Gurus. By his mere presence and proximity, lit the lamp of wisdom in many a soul and conferred the elixir of immortality in the life of vast number of beings. As the rising of sun automatically dispels the covering of darkness, so does the mere sight of a Knower of Brahman drive away the darkness of ignorance in a man. To the superficial eye, the Knower of Brahman also inhabits a physical body like that of an ordinary man, but in fact even his body is one that is beyond nature, super-physical, transmudane. He is light and consciousness and nothing else.

People have observed in the proximity of great saints like Sri Narasimha Bharati Mahaswamigal and Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahaswamigal of Sringeri Sarada Peetham and also Sri Srimat Paramacharya Chandrasekhara Mahasannidhanam of Kanchi Kamakoti

Mahapeetham as also in the presence of Sri Ramana, a strange power of divinity that automatically dispels all doubts. A learned scholar once had a doubt whether he had to take Sanyasa to achieve realization or continue as a householder. He sat thinking about it in front of the altar where Sri Paramacharya of Kanchi was performing Pooja to Sri Mahatripurasundari and Sri Chandramouleshwara. Automatically he heard the voice of the Acharya ringing in his ears, " Son, why take Sanyasa? Why cant you achieve what you want to, living as a normal householder? You are not meant to become a Sanyasin. What difference does it make any way? Worship Bhagavati Sri Kamakshi with devotion and nothing will remain impossible to you any more". The Guru's counsel brought tears of joy in his eyes. When he later went to receive Prasadam from Acharya, the great sage smiled meaningfully at his disciple who was now cleared of all doubts. Such is the greatness of the Acharyas of the lineage of Adi Shankara, who have carried the light of Brahmavidya even to this day, in an unbroken chain, Avicchinna Parampara. My Salutations to the great Guruparampara.

Many eager aspirants from all over the Himalayan region, athirst for knowledge availed themselves of the presence of the Acharya and felt themselves blessed. Leaving Jyotirdhama behind, Acharya visited one after another the shrines of Vishnu Prayaga, Dhauli Ganga, Brahmakunda, Vishnukunda, Shivakunda and Ganesha Tirtha and many other holy spot too and reached Padukeshwar. It is said that the king Pandu performed severe penance and ardent worship here and obtained the vision of Ashutosha Shiva. Now a days, trip to the Himalayas is comparatively an easy affair. At present, year after year, more than a hundred thousand pilgrims drawn from many parts of India visit Badari Narayan at the season of pilgrimage. There are arrangements now for quick transport of pilgrims by motor bus, and pilgrims who go to Badari Narayan can easily return Hrishikesh within a few days. Good roads have been laid, hotels have come up, and the wayside Chatis or rest-houses provide residential facilities to the pilgrims. But most pilgrims still prefer to go on foot the distance to Badari Narayan believing that there is greater religious merit in arriving at a shrine as a pedestrian rather than as a bus-passenger. But in the days when Acharya toured the Himalayas, conditions were quite different. Very few people dared think of going to these traditionally holy shrines as no one could be sure of reaching them alive at all. Death on the way from cold, starvation, wild animals or accidents like land slides or snow fall. In fact any one who left on a tour of the higher Himalayas in those days was quite meaningfully said to be leaving on a Mahaprasthana, a grand going or a great departure. For it was a going which might never know a coming back. And inaccessible holy places were called the veritable gateways to the great departure, the last parting.

Though Acharya had reached the pinnacle of the realization of nundual Brahman consciousness, and was gifted with unfathomable learning and far-famed eloquence, from the view point of age, physical build and bodily strength, he was only a boy of twelve years. Yet, divinely commissioned for fulfilling His mission he had, during a period of three months, defied the hazards of difficult mountain tracks and the frowns and inclemencies of the nature and moved on foot. He crossed many a river and rivulet, passed through dense forests teeming with wild, ferocious beasts, stayed in many inaccessible mountain caves,

surmounted many tall peaks and overcame innumerable obstacles in the way.

Badari Kshetra soon became visible at a short distance. The altitude of the area is 10,224 feet above sea level. Acharya and his disciples reached a very holy place there called Bhuvaikuntha. The unparalleled loveliness of this sacred spot and its solemn surroundings were such as to automatically transport the mind, to a plane beyond physical consciousness, to the world of the super-sensuous. At this place did the sages Nara and Narayana perform penance in days of yore. On two sides of the region, two snow covered mountain peaks, as white as foam, named Nara and Narayana, stood aloft in noble grandeur proclaiming the glory of that ancient past. Close by, flowed in its own majestic course, the river Alakananda carrying down cold glacial waters as also the spiritual message of the Himalayas. Just by the side of the temple of Narayana were hot springs. Acharya and his disciples bathed in the hot springs and went to the shrine of Badrivishalji. But the four-armed idol of Badari Narayana installed by the sages in the Satyayuga or the Golden Age was not to be seen in the shrine. In the place of that idol, they were worshipping a Salagrama stone. Acharya performed in the prescribed manner the worship due to the deity and came out of the temple with a heavy heart. The temple priests had assembled there to have a view of him. Addressing them, Acharya enquired, " O venerable priests, why is the shrine without the idol of Narayana? I have heard it said that in all the four yugas, the lord dwells at this sacred site".

The priests answered, " O great soul! In consequence of the depredations of Chinese bandits, our forefathers found it advisable to conceal in safety the holy image in some spring nearby. But in spite of intensive search, the image could not be recovered yet. Therefore, all along, since the Lord has been worshipped here in the symbol of the sacred Salagrama stone". Hearing this account, Acharya became immersed in deep thought, and remained absorbed in meditation. On returning to normal consciousness, he slowly rose with a one-pointed mind and proceeded towards the Naradakunda springs. The disciples, temple priests and the pilgrims all followed him in mute wonder. Reaching the springs, Acharya stood motionless for a moment and then started getting down into the waters of the spring. The priests who saw him going into the spring, were greatly alarmed and cried out, " Great One, do not get into these springs. They are connected underneath with the Alakananda river. The under-current will draw you into the deep bottom of the river. Quite a number have lost their lives by getting into these springs. Please come away!" Acharya did not pay any heed to the alarm raised. He dived into the springs and came out holding in his hands, a four armed image of Narayana. But on scrutiny, it was found that the image was a broken one. A few fingers of the right hand of the image were seen to be broken, and so the image being one which had suffered a mutilation of limbs was not worthy of worship. He cast away the broken image into the river Alakananda and once more plunged into the springs. Again he came up with a Narayana image in his hands. But what a wonder! He had risen with the very same broken Narayana idol he had first picked up and cast aside. Without any hesitation, he immersed the image in the currents of the water and plunged into the springs a third time to come out again with an idol in his hand. It was the same broken idol once more. Holding it in his hand, and no longer impelled to cast it

away, Acharya reflected in amazement, "This is indeed Divine Sport". Then he heard an oracle from the heavens, " Great Acharya, do not hesitate. In this age of Kali, it is this broken image that will receive worship here". These words stirred the depths of Acharya's heart. With a mind overwhelmed by devotion, he rose from the waters carrying on his shoulders the image of Narayana, the refuge of all humanity and the source of the world's auspiciousness. The place and its surroundings resounded with shouts of joy. This miraculous happening astounded the people. The Acharya then, in accordance with the prescribed modes, did the ceremonial bathing of the image, and with his own holy hands installed the Narayana idol in the shrine. An installation by Acharya meant the transmission of a powerful spiritual current whose efficacy would remain unimpaired for many a millennium. The Acharya entrusted the responsibility of worshipping the installed deity, laying down the procedures for the worship, to a worthy group of his Brahmin followers, who had come all the way from down south. He then proceeded in the direction of Vyasashrama.

THE LIBERATING COMMENTARY ON THE BRAHMASUTRAS.....

Not far from the temple of Badrivishalji, is a triangular piece of territory. At the farthest end of this area is a mountain. At the foot of this mountain is situated the Vyasashrama of great antiquity. It looks like hug cave. Close to is the Keshavaprayag, at the confluence of river Alakananda and Keshava Ganga. All round rise the Himalayas, eternally clad in snow. It is said that Bhagavan Badarayana Vyasa composed the Mahabharata with its one hundred thousand verses, sitting in this very cave located high and far away from the din and bustle of the maddening crowd of the world. Adjacent to the cave on its right side is a temple of Sri Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, while a temple of Ganapathi is situated on the left.

There are legends about it all. Vyasa composed in his mind the one hundred thousand verses of Mahabharata for the mankind, but was cogitating about the means to teach his disciples this holy Samhita Grantha, work of collections. Unless the whole thing was recorded in writing, it could not at all propagated. Coming to know of this anxiety of Sri Vyasa, Lord Brahma, the ancestor of the world, appeared before the sage and told him, " I suggest you think of Ganesha for this work. He will be the transcriber of your literary piece."

Vyasa accordingly remembered Ganesha, and in an act of immediate response, the great God Ganesha made himself manifest to him and told the sage, " I shall willingly be penman for your treatise. But once the transcribing starts, my pen will not rest even a moment. It must be kept ceaselessly engaged. If at any time you are not able to chant the verse to be penned, and in consequence my pen is made to stop working even only once, I shall drop the transcribing then and there altogether".

Vyasa reflected and then remembered that his composition could be summarized to eight thousand verses, which were so abstruse and hard to comprehend that only he himself and his gifted son Sri Shukamuni

could grasp their sense. So he imposed a counter-condition and told Ganesha, " You must not transcribe anything of what I say unless you first understand the import of it fully". Ganesha expressed assent. And the dictation and the writing began. Ganesha of course, was well versed in all branches of learning, but when the turn of the abstruse verses came, even he had to do a little thinking and probing before writing and this gave the needed time to Sri Vyasa, now and then, to catch up with that extraordinarily fast writer. It was in this strange way that Mahabharata and other Puranas were written. Goddess Saraswati used to be sitting at the place, as the witness to the whole affair, verifying the entire writing.

On reaching Vyasashrama, the Acharya let himself go into deep meditation for a few days. Then he busied himself with composing his Bhashya or commentary on the Brahma sutras which was to be acclaimed not only by the men on the earth but also by the Gods in the heaven as a masterpiece never heard or seen before. Even as the commentary was being composed, he taught it all to his disciples. By the force of his meditation, he comprehended the natural import and the hidden, inner, deeper and true sense of the Sutras, and wrote the commentary in the light of and on the lines of that comprehension.

The news of Acharya's staying in a remote Himalayan cave, for the purpose of composing the commentary, soon spread all round, and aspirants and scholars belonging to different faiths and varying schools started assembling at Vyasashrama. Every day between periods of writing out the commentary, Acharya imparted counsel to his disciples and the aspirants on the practice of Yogic discipline. In this way, the time was spent very usefully in dealing out and explaining the commentary, discussing the true import of the scriptures and practicing yogic techniques. The minds of all the disciples were lifted to a very high plane and all of them lived and moved at high levels of spiritual thinking and feeling.

SANANDANA IS NOW PADMAPADA .....

Among the disciples of Acharya, Sanandana was the most worthy of him in all respects. Sanandana possessed a very keen intellect, profound scholarship, deep attachment to the sacred Vedic scriptures, a superior talent, a versatile genius and above all an unbounded devotion to the Guru, and naturally he was the best-beloved of Acharya. Therefore, the other disciples, human as they were, looked on Sanandana, perhaps unknown to themselves, with a rather jealous eye. This did not escape Acharya's eye. And in a strange manner he made everyone understand and concede the superiority of Sanandana.

One day Sanandana had on some errand reached the other side of the Alakananda river. He had crossed the river by means of a bridge close by which spanned the river. Desiring to give to all, an exhibition of his dear disciple's unique greatness and unequalled Guru Bhakti, Acharya just at that moment, making it appear that he was in a pressing need of the disciple's services, cried out in a loud voice, " O Sanandana, come to me at once !"

This fright-filled call of his adored master disturbed Sanandana a

great deal. He felt for sure that his master was in some danger and was in need of immediate help. But he saw that getting to the opposite bank of the river by walking over the bridge back would mean a precious while. The call of his master was a distress signal and had to be responded to immediately. He was in no mood to calculate and count the pros and cons of his action. And so he answered his master's call by simply getting into the Alakananda river and walked. The water was ice-cold and was such as to benumb the limbs and freeze the body to death. The current was strong enough to sweep away even an intoxicated elephant. But in Sanandana's mental horizon, there was no river to be crossed, no cold to be borne, no danger to be faced. Only the call of the master sounded in his ears and only the imperative need to be near his master., as expeditiously as possible, worked in his mind. He was utterly oblivious of every other consideration. His spontaneity of behavior stuck the onlookers on the other bank as rash madness. They were sure that he would sink in the water and perish. They raised shouts of alarm and waved at him in warning. Sanandana was deaf and blind to everything. His body was divinely protected. And then, a miracle happened. The corporeal frame of the water-walking disciple did not sink. At every step of his foot, bloomed a lotus and supported him, and he crossed the river walking verily on the bed of lotuses. This was the Divine mother's play. Sanandana ran breathless and stood before Acharya for his commands. The other disciples stood amazed at this supernatural happening and were dumbfounded. Then pointing to Sanandana, Acharya addressed his other disciples, " You have now witnessed what immense grace the Bhagavati has on Sanandana. Henceforth Sanandana will be called Padmapada, the lotus-footed ". Padmapada was quick to see through Acharya's purpose in calling back from the other bank. He was not vain or proud. On the other hand, he was overcome with a sense of humility and a spirit of dedication and he bowed again and again at the holy feet of his adored master. He was rooted in faith that the Guru's grace was the sole means of crossing the deep ocean of transmigratory existence, ` Guru Kripa Kevalam'. He fully appreciated the rare blessedness of close association with an incarnation of the Supreme like Acharya Shankara. He saw this as a result of the grace of such a Guru, aspirant could be the recipient of Chaturvargaphala, the four-fold goals of life, and that to the seeker of the Self, because of this, the vision of the Self could come under his easy control and become a matter of felt experience. Surely his Guru, the spiritual master was no mere human being though he was in a physical body. Padmapada clearly showed that the Guru really was that Conscious Supreme which dwells as the Self in the body and that the power of the Guru was in fact the Chit-Shakti or the Supreme Spirit as power, which alone animates and enlightens all of the universe.

Some of Acharya's biographers say that this incident took place at Uttarakashi whilst others say it took place on the bank of Ganga at Varanasi.

The other disciples, by this time, had realized their shortcomings and begged of Acharya's pardon. The Acharya blessed them and asked them to emulate Sanandana and make their rare human birth blessed.

=====  
==

By now Acharya had finished the work of composing commentaries on sixteen well-known books namely, the Brahma sutras, the twelve Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Vishnu Sahasranama and Sanatsujatiya. To all of his disciples, he had taught his commentaries intimately from end to end. He had also instructed them thoroughly in the practice of several spiritual disciplines and had inculcated in them the virtues of calmness, self-control, forbearance, indifference, and had trained them in Pratyahara- restraining the senses from their objects, Dhyana- meditation, Dharana- one-pointed concentration and Samadhi - going beyond self-consciousness to super-consciousness. He had, in a remarkable way, perfected the growth of the inner spiritual culture of his disciples. It was, as if, he had come to Vyasa Tirtha for the especial fulfillment of this task. Within a period of four years, he had completed doing all this work. The disciples were full of exhilaration. An upsurge of missionary enthusiasm and a noble desire to share with others the treasures they had received, and they spoke to the Acharya about the ways and means of popularizing his gospel among the ordinary people. Acharya listened and expressed his approval. He was now ready to play the new role of Lokacharya, the prophet of the people and that of Jagadguru, the World-Teacher.

Setting out from Badari, Acharya and his disciples proceeded to Jyotirdhama. Like the peals of a ringing bell traversing the void and striking the ears of men at a distance, the glory of Acharya's super-human life and labors reached far away places. Many scholars of established repute and renown, and men in varying strata of life became his ardent followers as he moved along. The ruler of Jyotirdhama who had already become an ardent devotee of the great Acharya, made all arrangements for the Acharya's stay at Jyotirdhama. He also hastened out to welcome and greet his adored Gurudeva. Soon Jyotirdhama was transformed into a center of religious festivity. Many scholars, men of distinction, monks and aspirants owing allegiance to different schools of faith, persons well-known for their many achievements, and good folks of all kinds, flocked there. The place resounded with joy. Acharya and his disciples explained to people at different corners, the import and significance of the commentaries which had been composed. The scriptures were analyzed and discussed and their sense and significance were pondered over, and there were recitals over the glory of the Vedas. Hearing from the great Acharya himself, his exposition of Advaita, all were charmed. It was a time of spiritual high-tide in the Himalayan abode.

The good ruler of Jyotirdhama enlisted many learned copyists to the work of copying the invaluable commentaries and several copies of these divine treatises soon got ready. But the religious enthusiasm that the Acharya enkindled was not confined to the literary and intellectual sphere. It touched and covered every section of the people, and every aspect of community existence. Acharya knew the value of temple-worship in the religious life of people. He selected for appointment as temple priests, persons with vast knowledge and deep devotion, and caused the worship in all the temples and shrines to be performed with a high fidelity to scriptural injunction and tradition and with deep earnestness and application. The temples began to pulsate with a new life and spirit. During the onrush of the Buddhist faith that had swept over the country, many Hindu temples had been destructed, neglected and abandoned, but the constructive

genius of the Acharya caused all of them to be reclaimed and renovated, the deities reinstalled with arrangements for proper worship. The good ruler of the place, true to his profession of Prajaparipalana, protecting the people, warmly co-operated with Acharya and of his own accord did all he could to make his subjects pursue learning, adhere to exemplary conduct and live religiously. And the ruler himself practiced what he preached. The Acharya ceaselessly exhorted the householders to take to the worship of Panchayatana, the five deities - Shiva, Devi, Ganesha, Vishnu and Surya and to the performance of the five great sacrifices- service of the Gods, of the Pitrus or ancestors, of the sages, men and of all living creatures. Acharya's stay on the mountains, in this manner, in a very short time, powerfully stirred up a wide-spread resurgence of a spirit of vigorous spirituality and the ages old Vedic dharma got itself securely re-established.

After a happy and useful stay of a few days at Jyotirdhama, Acharya, along with his devoted flock, journeyed to the other pilgrim centers of Uttarakhanda. The Puranas proclaim the glory of Kedara Kshetra as rapturously as they sing the greatness of Badari. In this pilgrimage, the ruler of the place also accompanied Acharya. Under the royal command, an advance party of officers marched ahead of the party repairing and setting right the hilly paths, providing the necessary facilities, thus making it for the pedestrians to walk along. Even then, the journey from Jyotirdhama to Kedara was quite a hardship to pilgrims, it tested their physical endurance. Taking the path along Nandiprayag, the party arrived at Kalpeshwara, the holiest of spots among the Pancha Kedars, the five Kedars. Places with inspiring associations like Gopeshwara, Anasuya Devi were then crossed, and Rudranath, the fourth of the Kedars, was reached. At all these places, large number of people thronged to have a look of the great Acharya. Acharya on his part, satisfied every heart by his spiritual counsel and instruction. His influence served to install into every one, a new zeal to live a spiritual life.

Acharya's next halt was at Tunganath, the third Kedara, at an altitude of 12,072 feet. Situated on a lofty mountain, its expansive sight was fascinatingly beautiful. Till far north, shone the strikingly white snow-clad Himalayas, the enchanting view of whose majesty struck the onlookers at Tunganath dumb with awe. Such a superlatively captivating, such an irresistibly charming sight was not seen until then. The region is verily a bed of all-white blossoms where Kedareshwara, the lord of all the Yogis is ever present to lift his devotees from all specks of duality. Nature shining in her dark green radiance, her tresses of hair flowing out, her whole being merged in a deep meditation on her Lord Mahadeva, ever busy with the task of showering love and care on her children caused a feeling of intense love and devotion in the heart of the enlightened Acharya. His mind was completely lost in the contemplation of the Divine Infinity.

This state of at-one-ment with the One and All is a condition which all can aspire after and eventually achieve. So long as man lives and moves and has his being in the consciousness of the small ego, the little, limiting individuality, the narrow self, the range of compass of his mind is very much circumscribed and exceedingly narrow. But when the man dips and merges his individuality-consciousness in the

Universal consciousness i.e. when the Vyashti is lost in the realms of Samashti, he has a vision of the uttermost reaches of feeling and outlook. Man can then identify himself with the entire bosom of the universe. The bliss of that state is without a parallel. Man then, feels himself submerged in the ocean of supreme cosmic joy, Virat Ananda. The individual personality is then annihilated. As drops of rain falling in the ocean become the ocean, the limited human personality, freed from all limitations, becomes the illimitable. Man, the insignificant, then passes from the petty to the Mightiest, from mundane life to Supreme existence and from earthly joy to Infinite Bliss.

This is a clear demonstration of the fact that Acharya was a perfected Vijnani, and not merely a Jnani as some foolish Vamacharis claim.

Tunganath was a reputed center of learning, and the scholars of that place were extremely to have seen and heard the great Acharya. The flow of sermons from Acharya brought them no little joy, and their feeling of regard for the Acharya was so profoundly deep that to perpetuate his holy memory, they even made and installed a stone image of him. The image found a place among the revered images in the shrine.

Leaving Tunganath, Acharya in the next lap of his pilgrimage, visited and sanctified by his visit, many places like Sonitapur, Guptakashi, Madhyameshwara ( the second Kedara ), Mahishamardini, Shakambari, Triyugi Narayana, Shonaprayag and Mundkata Ganesha ( the headless Ganesha). In due course Acharya arrived at Gaurikunda where Bhagavati Gauri once performed penance. Gaurikunda is 6,500 feet above sea-level. The place is famous for its big hot spring and is in consequence a favorite resort of pilgrims. Anyway, children always run to their mother, who in turn makes everything fine and good for her children.

The region of Kedara begins from Gaurikunda. Pilgrims who cannot bear the intense cold of Kedara choose to stay at Gaurikunda, in the cozy lap of the Supreme Mother. Tradition also has it that Gauri Devi conceived Kartikeya at this place. Having taken bath at the hot spring, Acharya visited the shrines at that place, took some rest and then passed along to places like Chiravasabhairava, Bhimasena's slope and arrived at Kedara Kshetra.

Kedara is an extensive plateau region, triangular in shape. Enclosed by mountain ranges, shrouded in eternal snow, the place is enveloped in an unbroken stillness and a sublime grandeur. The high altitude of the place naturally subjects every visitor to breathing difficulty. The Lord of Kedara is indeed a deity, whose living presence is palpable to devotees. At their mere remembrances of Him, Lord Shiva becomes graceful to his devotees. Kedara is the meeting place of pilgrimages. In the Mahabharata it is mentioned that the five Pandava brothers passed through Kedara during their Mahaprasthan, the last journey.

When Acharya arrived at the holy Kedara Kshetra, his usually poised mind rose to heights of divine ecstasy, indescribably intense. In an attitude of bliss and veneration, he visited and adored Kedaranath

and kept the religious observances appropriate to the place. Kedara is at a height of 11,753 feet. Situated at a much higher altitude than Badari, it is much colder. The disciples of Acharya felt greatly distressed in the intense cold. The tender-hearted Acharya could not bear the sight of their suffering and a mood of deep compassion came over him. He went into meditation and was able to divine the presence of a hot spring nearby. In pursuance of the Acharya's instructions, the men in the king's party removed the snow, the rocks and boulders at the place pointed out. A little excavation brought to light, the hot spring. And great was the joy of all, for a hot spring at such altitude is a rare thing indeed.

At Kedara, Acharya was, most of the time, absorbed

in meditation. It is not precisely recorded how many days he stayed at Kedara. Some hold that he remained at Kedara for a month. Everyday, he went to temple of Kedareshwara and remained in ecstasy for a long time. Having tasted the divine delight of the company of Kedareshwara, Acharya set off towards Gomukhi, the source of Bhagirati or Ganga.

His path lay across Gaurikunda, Triyugi Narayana and Buda Kedara and then passed through the difficult climb of the formidable mountain pass of Paoali (11,364 feet above sea-level) and through forests infested with ferocious wild animals. The march was an encounter with death at every step and after as long as a fortnight's advancing, the Acharya was able to get the first glance of Ganga. The celestial river which purifies all the three worlds with its nectarine waters has put on at this place, an unique beauty and grandeur of form, and shines with an unsurpassing brilliance. Forcing hard rocks off their base, tirelessly making a way through mountain walls, the river has flowed ceaselessly on keeping an exuberant flow. The Ganga symbolizes a perpetual moving on, a non-stop reaching out, an endless questing forward. Charming townships, prosperous cities, quiet villages, enchanting groves, populous settlements, all these in large numbers get sanctified, purified by her holy waters, and the sacred river flows on to reach the great receptacle, the Ocean. The mountain walls echo and the deep forests resound and re-echo with the sound of the joyous ripples of Sri Ganga hymning in praise of Lord Mahadeva. Catching a glimpse of the divine river, and thrilled by that experience, Acharya was filled with delight and exhilaration and chanted out a sweet hymn in adoration to the Goddess Ganga.

" O Goddess and Divine Mistress, Consort of the Lord Supreme, Mother Ganga, Thou art the deliverer of the three worlds. On Thy bosom sport wavy ripples and Thou hast thy abode on the crest of Shankara, the doer of good; oh symbol of purity, grant that my mind may ever abide at Thy lotus feet".

" O Bhagirata propitiated stream Bhagirati, bestower of bliss, Mother Dear, the glory of Thy waters is lauded in the scriptures-is it not for little of me to comprehend Thy greatness, Gracious one, protect and save ignorant me .....".

walking up the banks of the Bhagirati, the Acharya proceeded to the source of Ganga, Gomukhi. Not only was there a Ganga outside to him, there was an immortal Ganga within him with its current of abounding

grace and sanctity. The Gomukhi region is literally impassable. Up till Gangotri, there is some sort of path trodden by a few people. But not even footmarks are seen beyond Gangotri in the direction of Gomukhi. When the river is frozen hard, one has to tread over ice to reach Gomukhi. The region is all a kingdom of ice, a territory devoid of human beings, uninhabited by beasts and birds. The stoutest heart might get terrified by the sombre forlornness of the area. But Acharya was fearless. And fortified, as it were, by divine strength, emboldened by a super-human resolution, the Acharya, caring not for life or death, walked on to Gomukhi. Not many mortals would dare even of a trip to the scarce Gomukhi eternally buried in snow, and utterly devoid of vegetation.

Of course today the position has improved, and Gomukhi now attracts a growing number of pilgrims in the season. Beyond Gangotri, Dharma Salas etc with facilities for lodging and boarding have sprung up on the way to Gomukhi. But in the days of Sri Acharya, the picture was an entirely different one. The Ganga in Gomukhi is only thirty to forty yards in width. During the six winter months, the flow of Ganga becomes slower and width narrower.

It is said that the river Ganga came down from heaven to earth through the matted locks of Lord Shiva. To check the torrent, Ganga assumed the form of a glacier and flowed in three streams, Bhagirati, Mandakini and Alakananda. From Satpanth glacier, it has broken up into three currents and flowed in three directions. The one and the same Ganga flows in three streams.

Reaching Gomukhi, the Acharya was in a exuberance of self-delight. The scenery all round was fascinating in a variety of ways, and the poetic Being of the Acharya was thrilled to rapture. The distant horizon seemed to get merged in the infinite. It was ice and all ice to the farthest limit of vision. Of incomparable beauty was that ice-bound panorama, golden in the rays of the sun, under a dustless clear sky. The heavenly stream Bhagirati was gushing through an opening shaped like a cow's head, earning it the name, Gomukhi.

Because of the difficulties caused by snowfall and hail-storm, Acharya had to return to Gangotri to ensure the safety of his disciples. There was heavy snowfall all along the path and the lives of Acharya and his followers were endangered several times. The pilgrimage to Gomukhi required for its successful accomplishment, great fortitude and mighty forbearance on the part of Acharya and his devotees.

On reaching Gangotri, Acharya's mind was filled with compassion for those weak men and women, who were incapable of visiting the liberating Tirtha of Gomukhi. He knew that the arduous journey was not for everyone. So, in an overflow of pity for the feeble, Acharya got a temple of Ganga and Shiva erected at Gangotri. He blessed the place that, if pilgrims went up to Gangotri and had a Darshan of the deities at that temple erected by him, they would actually reap the high benefits of a trip to and a view of Gomukhi itself. Tradition has it that Acharya, with his own holy hands, installed a Shiva Linga and an idol of Ganga Devi at Gangotri.

VEDAVYASA BLESSES SHNAKARA .....

Acharya stayed a few days in Gangotri and then left for Uttarakashi. Uttarakashi is an ancient sacred spot and pilgrim center. Countless Yogis and Rishis passionately eager to attain final liberation have practiced arduous and lifelong penance here, making the very atmosphere of the region vibrant with spirituality. The river Ganga is north-flowing in this place, and it encircles this sanctuary in the form of beautiful crescent and flows on, proclaiming the glory of the holy spot. The sky-kissing surrounding mountain ranges shut off Uttarakashi from the tumult of the worldly maddening crowds and serve to enhance the solemn sublimity of this place of penance.

At the time of arrival at Uttarakashi, Acharya attained the age of sixteen. He now seemed ready to return to his trans-physical realm of existence. Almost all the time, he was absorbed in Samadhi. Padmapada and others were agonized to notice this trend in him. Acharya had heard the call of the infinite and appeared to be getting ready for the final emancipation.

Vijnananauka, the boat of Supreme Wisdom is a treatise composed by Acharya. It is important to us because it gives us a picture, partial though, of the state of his mind at this period. He writes :

1. The self that is attained by the mind, purified through practices of austerity, rituals, charity and the like and as a result, free from all attachment, and renouncing all worldly and royal gifts, I am that Eternal Supreme Brahman.

2. The Truth, that the learned realize in deep meditation and constant contemplation upon the Self after discrimination and by worship of the Brahman-knowing Guru, I am that Eternal Supreme Brahman.

3. He, who is bliss-personified, Self-effulgent, who holds in check the Universal illusion in his greatness, who is attained in the realization of the limitless thought, 'I am Brahman', I am that Supreme Self.

4. He, who is beyond mind and words, in the ignorance of whom the phenomenal world exists and with the advent of whose knowledge as the self, the objective creation vanishes, I am that pure, boundless Eternal, Supreme Brahman.

5. He, the one without a second, the Transcendental Brahman, is reflected in fullness in the hearts of the yogis in Samadhi, attained by stoppage of sense faculties following the Vedanta assertion, Neti Neti, 'not his not this, this is not the reality, this is not the absolute', I am that Supreme Brahman.

6. He, by a single particle of whose inherent bliss the entire universe is made blissful, by whose revelation all things are revealed, whose beauty is manifest in all that is beautiful, I am that Supreme Eternal Brahman.

7. He, who is the infinite, the cause of all causes, the all pervading, the womb of all, the inactive, the auspicious, the abstract, attainable through Pranava, the deathless, the formless,

the resplendent, I am that Eternal Supreme Brahman.

8. He alone attains that final beatitude in the lotus feet of Vishnu who has quenched his great thirst by drinking the nectar of real knowledge and thus crossed the ocean of ignorance and duality via the boat of Super knowledge of the Brahman.

The disciples thought deeply over some means of bringing their adored master's fast soaring mind to the plane of normal human functioning. So, after long deliberation on the matter, they went to the Acharya with the prayer that they might be taught his Bhashya in detail, with all its nuances and profundities, as he alone was the competent authority for exposition of their right and full import. The plan worked. After earnest and repeated appeal, they succeeded in making the Acharya agree to impart sermon and instructions on Bhashya.

One day in the forenoon, Acharya was expounding to his disciples, the commentary on the Saririka Sutras when an aged Brahmin appeared at that place. The lesson was stopped as the venerable old man stepped in and everyone there got up and with great reverence, requested him to take a seat. But without taking the offered seat, the Brahmin queried, " I hear that a certain Sanyasi here expounds the commentary on the Brahma sutras. Can you tell me where he is ? "

The disciples answered, " this is our Guru Shankaracharya, who has all the scriptures stored in his memory and they are all at finger tips. He has written a commentary on the Saririka sutras which has silenced all differences in interpretation. He is now teaching us that valuable treasure".

The old man now took a seat and made a request to the Acharya, " They call you the commentator on the Brahma sutra composed by Veda Vyasa. Well, let me see, please tell me the import of the first section of the third chapter".

With great humility Acharya submitted, " To all masters who know the import of the sutras, I offer my salutations. There is in me no such egoistic feeling that I am a great comprehender of the sutras. And yet, I shall try to give a correct answer to what you have asked me about".

With these words, Acharya started giving out a lucid and correct explanation of the sutra that the Brahmin had asked. His was a very thorough, highly learned and extremely convincing exposition, but yet, Acharya found in the old Brahmin a very powerful contestant. Hardly had the Acharya expounded a point with his natural unmatched brilliance, the aged Brahmin cut short with what struck everyone as an unassailable objection. Following close on the youth's heels did the old man throw out a shattering query or a devastating refutation. But Acharya did not reel. With great steadiness and in an unperturbed way, he met the Brahmin's objection with replies, strikingly sensible and impressively rational. But the old man would not be silenced. He would put forth another argument, only to draw out a more powerful counter-argument from Acharya. Indeed this battle of wits went on for long. Tirelessly did the Brahmin shower on the young head of the Acharya, questions dealing with highly mystical problems, only to bring out the illumining flashes from his genius. In this volley of

dialogue, the whole of the Brahma sutras, the four Vedas, the Karma Kanda, the Jnana Kanda, many scriptures, various philosophies, all came in for analysis, elucidation, research and summing up.

The astoundingly deep scholarship, the astonishing power of memory, the limitless sweep of intellect, the rare depths of introspection, and the uncommon skill in debate of both the combatants, so far removed in age from other, but so alike in wisdom and learning, made the disciples dazed and dumbfounded as the entertaining warfare went on. The discussion went on till past midday when the Brahmin suggested that they adjourn for the day and resume the debate the next day. The Brahmin rose and walked away in the direction from which he had appeared.

The next day was a repetition of the first day. When the morning class had assembled and the Acharya had started teaching his disciples, the aged Brahmin stepped in and began to discuss high philosophy exactly from the point where it had been left the previous day. A sharp debate ensued. The Brahmin raised questions which were extremely complicated provoking. Acharya, with unruffled temper, always gave convincing replies. The Himalayan debate raged for seven days (seventeen days according to some biographers). On the seventh day when the Brahmin had, as usual departed, Padmapada, who, of all the disciples, had followed this clash of high talent and top ability with keen understanding, approached the Acharya in private and asked him, " Master, who is this Brahmin who knows so well the hidden truth, mystery of Vedanta? Who other than Vedavyasa can possibly possess all this superior scholarship, this sharp intellect, this great skill of debate? Is it possible that Vedavyasa comes here in the disguise of this Brahmin and we stand outwitted as to his real identity? "

Acharya smiled and replied, " You are correct my dear, it is indeed the great Vedavyasa who is coming here everyday in the disguise of the old Brahmin. Well, if the Brahmin repeats his visit tomorrow I shall ask him to let us know who he is".

On the eighth morning, the Brahmin again entered Acharya's abode with a hard nut of a question for the young adversary to crack. Acharya first gave a suitable reply to the question and then fell reverentially at the feet of the Brahmin in an act of deep adoration and with all earnestness, addressed him saying, " Great soul, we have been eager to know who you are. Kindly satisfy our curiosity by letting us know your identity. All of us instinctively believe that you are indeed Vedavyasa Krishnadvaipayana. If our inference is right, please throw off your disguise and assume your real form. You are the first among the Gurus, and I feel blessed by this rare boon of these visits from you. Deign to accept my salutations".

The spontaneity and sincerity of Acharya's words touched the Brahmin deeply and he told the Acharya that his inference was correct and that he was indeed Vedavyasa. In an instant, the aged Brahmin was gone and in his place was seen a serene majestic figure, dazzling like lightening and brilliantly dark like the rain clouds. The crown of matted locks on his head, the sacred sacrificial cord on his body, the robe of the skin of black antelope round his loins, the wisdom-filled countenance and the grace-pouring eyes created a palpable

atmosphere of divinity round the intensely human personality of Vedavyasa. A beatific smile played on his lips and placing his hand on Acharya's bowed head, the greatest of the sages blessed the young Sanyasin.

The poetic vein the Acharya immediately came into play and his veneration for Vedavyasa took shape as a beautiful hymn. He said, " O Great Sage Krishnadvaipayana, my life has become blessed by the sight of your holy feet. You have ever been devoted to the good of the others. You have performed mighty deeds for the benefit of the mankind, and your services, like your name, will live for all times to come. You are the compiler of the eighteen Puranas. You have classified the Vedas into four parts. You know the past, the present and the future. There is nothing on earth that you do not know. Your being is like the milky ocean, and out of it has come the Mahabharata like the moon. You have done infinite good to the world. Your glory knows no end and your activities are marvelously beneficial to one and all. I salute you as the foremost of the Gurus".

The eighteen Puranas which are the works of Vedavyasa are, Brahmapurana, Padmapurana, Vishnupurana, Bhagavatapurana, Markandeyapurana, Varahapurana, Agnipurana, Bhavishyapurana, Brahmavaivartapurana, Skandapurana, Lingapurana, Vamanapurana, Shivapurana, Naradiyapurana, Matsyapurana, Kurmapurana, Garudapurana and Brahmandapurana. The great Suta, in enlisting the characteristics of the Puranas in the Brahmavaivartapurana says, "There must be found in a Purana the following five marks - a description of creation, an account of the final deluge, tracing the lineage of the moon, the sun etc., a statement of the rights of the fourteen manus, and an enumeration of the rulers of the solar and the lunar dynasties. Scholars consider that the Upapuranas ( which include Kalikapurana, Nrisimhapurana etc. Some also count Devibhagavata here. But modern scholars feel that Devi Bhagavata is the fittest work to be called a Mahapurana. Instead some feel Bhagavata should be classified as a Upapurana ) also must possess these five distinguishing features. The Mahapuranas contain the following ten characteristics : an account of creation, of sustenance and destruction, a description of the process of protective nourishment, and of the course of desire, a glorificatory mention of each one of the fourteen Manus, a description of the final deluge, a definition of liberation, singing the glories of the Lord, and singing the praiseworthy qualities of the community of the Gods, individually and severally.

Vyasa felt delighted as much as Acharya's discovery of his identity as at his right understanding of his gifts and greatness. Taking the seat offered by Acharya, he said, " Wise boy, your erudition has quite charmed me. You are divinely gifted, with attributes unequalled on earth or in heaven. There is not one on earth who could have answered even one of my queries, while you answered them all to my complete satisfaction. Among the spiritual teachers, you are a class apart. I have come to love you as much as I love my son Shuka. Hearing that you have written a commentary on my sutras, I came to see you. I am convinced by my tests that you are indeed worthy of the big task of commenting on my sutra. I knew long ago that the lord Mahadeva himself would, in the form of a human Shankara write a commentary on my sutra".

Acharya, with great humility placed his commentary in the hand of Vedavyasa. Vyasa went through the commentary and was immersed in it for quite some time. Extremely pleased, he gave out his estimation of the work of the Acharya, " My dear son, this commentary is indeed worthy of you. At places you have cast reflection i.e. oblique hints at the sutra. I am very glad you have done so. Young and brilliant scholar that you are, you have the intuition to grasp the true sense of all things. I foresee a great future for you. Like the Sun in its dazzling glory of brilliance, you too will remove the darkness of ignorance in the world by spreading the glory of Self-knowledge of Advaita Brahman. The world will be amazed to witness the play of your astounding genius. All my unexpressed and implied thoughts in the sutra have been brought out by you in your commentary in a way in which no one could have done. Of course in one sense this does not surprise me. For I know that your being and your powers are derived from Mahadeva, the Supreme Being. You are verily Him. Your Guru Govindapada and his Guru Gaudapada are my lineal descendants, for Gaudapada learnt the scriptures from my son, Shukadeva. I now charge you with a continuation of your noble work. You have to write commentaries on the two other Prasthanas also, one the Sruti and the other the Smriti".

Acharya finds an important place not only in the lineage of Advaita Guru Parampara, but also in the Srividya Guru Parampara. This lineage, beginning with Mahatripurasundari, with other Gurus like Sri Dakshinamurthy, Sri Anandabhairava, Sri Hayagriva, Sri Dattatreya and Lopamudra, also lists Acharya as an important Guru. There are many variations here, and what I list here is my own lineage, which is very interesting to note because of its striking similarity with Advaita Guruparampara.

Narayana, Brahma, Kapila, Atri, Vasishtha, Sanaka, Sanandana, Bhrigu, Sanatsujata, Vamadeva, Narada, Gautama, Shunaka, Shakti, Markandeya, Kaushika, Angirasa, Kanva, Jabali, Bharadwaja, Parashara, Vedavyasa, Shuka, Gaudapada, Govindapada, Shankara Bhagavatpada, Sureshwara, Vidyashankara, Vidyaranya, Nrisimha Bharati, Sacchidananda Shivabhinava Nrisimha Bharati, Chandrasekhara Bharati, Valukeshwara Bharati, Vidyabhinava Valukeshwara Bharati to my own Sri Gurunatha. There are however some Acharyas after Sureshwara, both householders as well as belonging to the Jagadguru Parampara of Sringeri Sarada Peetham, that I have omitted here.

" I have already accomplished that work also, " said Acharya and produced the other parts of his works to Vyasa. Vyasa was quite amazed to see the prodigious labors of the young Acharya, and went through all his writings- commentaries on Sruti and Smriti- with a one-pointed attention indicating absorbing interest, and then said, " All this is very well done indeed. The production is eminently worthy of the producer. It is all as it should be. I am in a transport of joy".

Acharya now threw a bombshell as it were. He made a submission to Sri Vedavyasa Bhagavan, " Sir, I have done all the work that you expected of me. Kindly give me the permission to terminate my physical existence in Samadhi in your very presence here and now".

Padmapada and other disciples were at their wit's end. Vedavyasa was

also astonished. He remained sunk in thought for a while. There was silence all around. And then Vyasa Bhagavan looked up said, " No Shankara, your task, contrary to what you think, is not yet finished. Much yet remains to be done. You have to meet and vanquish in debate all the renowned scholars in the land of Bharata and bring them round to your point of view of scriptural truth. You alone can do it. Extremely pleased with your work, I have come here to grant you a boon of extended life-span. My dear boy, destiny had fixed your span of life at eight years first. But you took Sanyasa and by the grace of Mahakala, the death-destroying Shiva, your life was extended by eight years. It is the gracious dispensation of the Supreme lord that you live for another sixteen years in this body till the age of thirty-two. Your first task now is to vanquish Kumarila Bhatta. Then you have to journey across the vast Bharata, traversing the holy land from end to end, in order to confront, conceive and convert all those who contradict your views, sticking to duality and ignorance. Your foremost work will be to harmonize the different schools of thought. You will also have to hoist aloft the flag of Advaita, establish Vedanta on a sound basis and proclaim the glory of the Brahman to all. On your shoulders rests not the destiny of an individual, but a whole nation's spiritual welfare ".

Acharya felt there was nothing to be said by him. He bowed down in approval, and Vedavyasa disappeared from view. Acharya felt the absence and became sorrowful. The minds of all the disciples were freed from the dark, hovering clouds of anxiety, and there was now no fear of their Acharya's quitting the world early. They were overjoyed and happy at the extension of his life-span.

After Vyasa left, Acharya became very eager to carry out the instructions of Sri Vyasa. His first task was to conquer Kumarila. His mind was now pre-occupied with this one thought. Acharya came to know from scholars present there that Kumarila was holy soul, who had vanquished in debate various philosophers and propagandists of anti-Vedic schools, and had re-established on a firm footing, the karma kanda of the Vedas. This section of the Vedas deals with rituals and extols their value. Acharya also came to know that the aged scholar, Kumarila Bhatta now lived in Prayaga.

The disciples of Acharya were eager to know about Kumarila about whom they heard good things. A Brahmin scholar there narrated the life and labors of Kumarila Bhatta.

Bhattapada's life is quite out of ordinary and his doings are such as to excite our wonder. It is quite obvious that his taking birth as a human being is solely for the purpose of re-establishing on this land of the Aryas, the ancient Vedic faith and culture. He was born in the Chola country in South India in a Brahmin family devoted to a religious discipline and exemplary living. From the very boyhood, he was devoted to the Vedas. The well-known Buddhist logician, Dharmakirti, is Bhattapada's nephew. Dharmakirti got converted to Buddhist faith, and became very proficient in Buddhist philosophy, after undergoing a course of instruction under the Buddhist teacher, Dharmapala. He then came to the Chola country and challenged his uncle Bhattapada to a debate. Kumarila was vanquished in the debate and according to the solemn undertaking given, it became a matter of honor for Kumarila to switch over to Buddhist faith, to learn it

better. He then went to the Buddhist Vihara at Nalanda and became the pupil of Dharmapala and studied Buddhist logic under him. Though circumstances compelled him thus to embrace the Buddhist faith, his inborn respect for and belief in the Vedic religion remained full as ever.

Anandagiri, in his biography of the Acharya says that Kumarila Bhatta went to Nalanda in order to study Buddhist philosophy. Bhattapada himself tells Acharya when the two meet each other, " In order to refute any school of thought, one should master the philosophy of that thought and have a thorough knowledge of its theory and practice. I had no knowledge of the tenets of Buddhism and so in order to combat Buddhism I had to master its philosophy and know all the intricacies of its workings and beliefs. So I was compelled to enter a Buddhist Vihara and be a Buddhist pupil and learn Buddhist doctrines ".

It is said that one day, the Buddhist teacher Dharmapala, seated in the midst of his disciples among whom was Kumarila, started abusing and ridiculing the Vedas. Kumarila felt extremely agonized at heart, to hear his condemnation of the sacred Vedas, and with face bent down, began to shed tears. The Buddhist Bhikshus noticed him weeping, and enquired about the cause for it. Kumarila was too grief-stricken to explain away his remorse and so told them frankly, " The teacher is vilifying the Vedas, this has cut me to quick". The Buddhist monks acquainted the teacher of his clear evidence of Kumarila's lingering sympathies for the Vedas which he was supposed to have discarded. This infuriated the teacher, and he admonished Kumarila saying, " Why do you weep in this way? Your tears clearly show that even now, you are a Veda-believing Hindu at the core, covered superficially by a guise of Buddhism. Donning the garb of a Buddhist you have been deceiving us."

Kumarila did not choose to pocket the accusation without protest or let the tirade against the Vedas go unchallenged. He entered into an argument with his teacher and said, " Sir, you have been vilifying and speaking ill of the Vedas, quite in an immoderate way for no reason whatsoever". The straight remark from an anguished heart in righteous protest roused the ire of the Buddhist teacher and in an excited voice, he challenged the pupil saying, " If you think that way, argue and establish the illogicity of my remarks and judgments ". Then began a long debate, a philosophical duel on a high plane of thought and feeling, a battle of keen wits, between teacher and pupil. Kumarila effectively smashed the successive positions and attitudes of the teacher, who found himself more and more powerless to contend against his own pupil who overwhelmed and confounded him with unanswerable refutations and forthright arguments. Kumarila was easily able to establish the Supreme authority and the unbeaten superiority of the Vedas. Having quieted down the teacher by the power of his greater understanding and argumentative skill, he declared, " Without the grace of the omniscience one, the individual soul cannot achieve omniscience. Buddha at first trod the path of Vedic faith and he became proficient in the profound wisdom of the Vedas, but then he rejected and disowned, repudiated and discarded the Vedas. In what manner can we style his behavior other than call it the practice of downright thieving?"

The strong and the severe remark of Kumarila made the Buddhist teacher red in anger, and he burst out, " You are defaming the lord Tathagata. The only proper atonement for this high sin of yours is the doing away with your life by throwing you down the roof of this lofty mansion". Hardly had these words come out of the teacher than the excited monks forcibly pushed Kumarila down the tofty mansion. In their display of vengeance, the disciples outran the teacher. The fast dropping Kumarila quickly composed himself into Yogic steadiness, remembered the Lord and uttered, " If the Veda be true, may my life be protected".

And the miracle happened. In spite of his having been rolled down from a great height, Kumarila did not die. He sprang up safe and sound. The disciples of Dharmapala could not believe their own eyes. But the news of this wonderful event soon spread all around the place. The Brahmins of the place who followed the Vedic religion, said in this incident lay a victory for them, and honored Kumarila in various ways. They also took away Kumarila in pomp from the precincts of the Nalanda Vihara. The incident did not end there. Rather it sparked off a heart-rending conflict between the Hindu and Buddhist communities of the day. To the Hindus, the miraculous escape of Kumarila from death seemed to be no less than the victorious assertion of the superiority of their faith. Making Kumarila their leader, the Hindus arranged a big assembly and challenged Dharmapala to a debate. The conditions of the debate were very harsh. That party to the debate which suffered a defeat had to change over to the faith of the victor or death by entering a fire of husk, called Tushanala.

At the time of Kumarila, the follower of every religion was firmly convinced that his was the only true religion and his the best among all faiths, and the worth of a religion and its superiority were all determined by debate and discussion.

From all corners of India, Buddhist monks came to Magadha to participate in the great assembly where the big debate was to be held and the superiority of the Vedic faith or the deteriorated Buddhist faith was to be established. The sparking brilliance of Kumarila put into shade the arguments of the Buddhists. Dharmapala, despite all his eminence and notwithstanding the tireless efforts he and his followers made to turn the tide of the discussion in their favor, lost the debate. He however refused to change his faith and decided to sacrifice his life. In fulfillment of the terms of the debate, Dharmapala entered husk-fire, letting his body die a slow death in the smoldering flame.

This victory of Kumarila over the Buddhists had a national impact, and here was a new awakening among the followers of the Vedic faith. A grand Ashwamedha sacrifice was arranged to celebrate this victory by Adityasena, the king of Magadha. The celebration was a clear sign of the waning of popular support for Buddhism.

Kumarila was victorious in his campaign of resuscitating the Vedic faith wherever he went in North India, and he effectively lowered the prestige and brought down the influence of Buddhism and Jainism. He then left for South India on a victorious campaign of propaganda with a view of strengthening the roots of Hinduism. After his vanquishing of the best of the Buddhist teachers, Dharmapala, Kumarila found no

one ready to face him in a debate. Everywhere, he demonstrated by argument, how the Vedas contained the true faith and how they were not man-made, but trans-human.

Also to be noted is that Kumarila is held to be the part-incarnation of Skanda Bhagavan. Mandanamishra, of whom we shall hear later, was born of the powers of Brahma. It was lord Mahadeva who directed them to be born on earth in order to assist Acharya in the work of re-establishing the Vedic faith. Kumarila is credited with having conquered the Jains as much as he conquered the Buddhists. He was a man of great initiative and power and proved much more than a match to many well-known religionists of that day. He was also a noted writer and wrote with authority on the Mimamsa philosophy. His authoritative works Sloka-Vartika, Tantravartika, Manavadharmasutra etc have made his name immortal.

This fascinating account of Bhattapada as narrated by the Brahmin of Uttarakashi deeply impressed the Acharya's disciples. The great services of Kumarila to the cause of the mother faith filled them with reverence and admiration for him.

BEHEST FULFILLED .....

Determined to carry out the behest of Sri Vedavyasa, Acharya set out on a world-conquest on the religious plane. His first objective was to meet and vanquish at Prayaga, Bhattapada, a very great scholar and make him write a Vartika or a critical explanatory work on his own commentary on the Brahma sutras. This indeed was a new chapter in Acharya's play.

From here on, we shall find Acharya playing with single-minded devotion, the role of one who, with zeal and fervor, preached and spread, defended and strengthened the cause of Vedic dharma. Holding aloft the flag of Sanatana dharma, the Religion Eternal, he traversed India from end to end for sixteen years from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, from Assam to Trans-Kashmir regions, on foot, broadcasting the message of Vedanta. For no less than twelve hundred years had Buddhism and its doctrines flourished in India, and Hinduism had, in consequence been weakened and enfeebled. To this emaciated Hinduism, Acharya infused vigor and rendered it invincible. He also gave the necessary philosophical background and scriptural sanction to various views and sects and schools of thought and furnished the needed intellectual justification for many Vedic positions and stands, making them more acceptable to the rational-minded. He thus made Hinduism a co-operative assembly, highly organized, well-knit of expansive faith.

In the spread of Buddhism in India, the royal patronage and state support had played a great part. With the active patronage of the rulers of the land, it was easy for Buddhism to register a phenomenal expansion and practically the whole land of Bharata. It would appear that the Buddhist order of monks spoke to the common people thus, " The king of the land is ours. Deny and discard the Vedic way. The Vedas are all unworthy of credence, because the Vedic declarations are not demonstrable by direct proof or indeed by any other proof ".

Through such assertions and arguments, did the Buddhist order of monks try to induce and compel the public to take increasingly to the State-supported Buddhist faith.

The Acharya had no resources other than his spiritual profundity, and strong in the strength of the spirit, he went out holding the torch of enlightenment, and dispersed the dense darkness of national decay. His campaign of world-conquest on the plane of religion and philosophy, without the backing of the state or royal authority is a unique phenomenon of great significance. The Hindu community had in those days forgotten that the Hindu way of life was rooted in the Vedas, and as a result of this, twisted out of shape and created in its wake several other schools of thoughts, most being no more than just dry rituals and dull doctrines. At this critical juncture, Acharya's advent brought light and solace. In his walking-tour covering the whole of India, he established by discussion and by citation of scriptural authority, the fact that the several branches of Hindu religious culture were all but parts and aspects of the grand tree of the Veda and that all the Indian schools of thought and sects of philosophy had sprung out of the one Sanatana Vaidika dharma. The Acharya had to carry on debates with as many as seventy-two varying religious sects of the time. He proved beyond doubt that all these several attitudes and ideas had their roots in the Vedas, which were their origin and source, and thus he established the universality of Vedic philosophy. Acharya's powers of planning, his constructive way of executing things, his farsighted vision, all these were of astonishing interest to his contemporaries, and no less are they of astonishing interest to us, moderns. History has not many examples of individuals who did so much, so thoroughly, so enduringly and in such a short time as Acharya did. He opened the highway of Vedanta to the followers of the traditional Vedic faith. For this monumental service, Acharya and only Acharya, next only to Dakshinamurthy and Sri Krishna, will for all time be venerated by all as the Jagadguru, the world-teacher.

The Acharya had, even during his earlier wanderings, paid visits to most of the shrines and sacred places on the banks of the Ganga. He now desired to visit and worship at the many holy spots on the banks of the sacred Yamuna, and so moved down along the Yamuna towards the direction of Prayaga. On the way he touched Kurukshetra, the site of the epic Mahabharata battle where the Gita was first given out. In course of time, he reached Vrindavan, the playground of Sri Krishna's boyhood. At this sacred place, the Acharya, with great veneration and devotion, went to see many spots associated with Krishna's benign boyhood and visited the famous temples in the region. At the shrine of Lord Krishna, his mind was overcome with divine love for the Supreme Guru of Gita, and reverentially offered a sweet hymn at the feet of Krishna.

The eight verses are famous as Sri Krishnashtakam.

1. May he, who is ever held in embrace by Sri Lakshmi, the Goddess of abundance, who is all-pervading, in whose physical form is the entire created world—the animate and the inanimate, who is the theme of the Vedas, who is the unattached and impartial witness of the actions of the human intellect, who is ever pure, who is the remover of the ills of the devotees, destroyer of the dark forces, who is lotus-eyed, and

the holder of the club, the conch, and the Sudarshana Chakra, who wears a garland of wild flowers of unstained glory, who is everlasting sweetness, who is that worthy refuge of all and the Lord of the Universe - Sri Krishna be visible to me.

2. May he, from whom has emerged all this universe composed of ether, air, water, fire and earth, who is the destroyer of Madhu, who by his own Guna of Satva protects the infinite creation, who at the time of deluge withdraws everything into himself, who is the all-pervading substance and the refuge of all and the Lord of the Universe, that Krishna be visible to me.

3. May he, whom the pure-minded sages, by practicing first the Yogic injunction of restraint and Pranayama thus subduing all the mental faculties, perceive in their heart as Vishnu - the adored of the three worlds, who has assumed the Maya body, who is the shelter of the entire Universe, that Sri Krishna grant me his vision.

4. May he, whom the Vedas declare , ` One without second, stainless, He stays in the world and controls the world, but Him the world knows not", who is the supreme director of the play of the universe, who is the sole object of contemplation of Gods, sages and mankind, who is the bestower of liberation to all living beings, refuge of the entire universe and the Lord of the world, that Sri Krishna be visible to me.

5. May he, by whose power Indra and other Gods became powerful and conquered the demons, without whose doing no one can act and has any freedom to do anything at all, who takes away the pride of poetic talent of the world, conquering all the learned, refuge of the Universe, that Sri Krishna be visible to me.

6. May he, without meditation on whom a man is born in a lower body like a pig, without knowledge of whom man is oppressed with the dread of birth and death, without the remembrance of whom man gets the body of hundreds of worms, who is the refuge of the universe, that Krishna grant me his vision.

7. May he, who is the destroyer of fear and remover of delusion, who is the help of the helpless, who has the complexion of a new rain-cloud, who is the playmate of the children in Gokula and a friend of Arjuna, who is self-existent, the parent of all beings and giver of happiness to beings according to their karma, that Sri Krishna be visible to me.

8. May he, the birth less Lord of the universe, who appears in the form of Vishnu for the deliverance of the pious, like a bridge of righteousness, whenever there is a frightening decline of Dharma, who is devoid of all changes, whose glory the Vedas sing, who is the lord of the Vrajabhoomi, that Sri Krishna grant me his vision.

=====  
==

By now Acharya had finished the work of composing commentaries on

sixteen well-known books namely, the Brahma sutras, the twelve Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Vishnu Sahasranama and Sanatsujatiya. To all of his disciples, he had taught his commentaries intimately from end to end. He had also instructed them thoroughly in the practice of several spiritual disciplines and had inculcated in them the virtues of calmness, self-control, forbearance, indifference, and had trained them in Pratyahara- restraining the senses from their objects, Dhyana- meditation, Dharana- one-pointed concentration and Samadhi - going beyond self-consciousness to super-consciousness. He had, in a remarkable way, perfected the growth of the inner spiritual culture of his disciples. It was, as if, he had come to Vyasa Tirtha for the especial fulfillment of this task. Within a period of four years, he had completed doing all this work. The disciples were full of exhilaration. An upsurge of missionary enthusiasm and a noble desire to share with others the treasures they had received, and they spoke to the Acharya about the ways and means of popularizing his gospel among the ordinary people. Acharya listened and expressed his approval. He was now ready to play the new role of Lokacharya, the prophet of the people and that of Jagadguru, the World-Teacher.

Setting out from Badari, Acharya and his disciples proceeded to Jyotirdhama. Like the peals of a ringing bell traversing the void and striking the ears of men at a distance, the glory of Acharya's super-human life and labors reached far away places. Many scholars of established repute and renown, and men in varying strata of life became his ardent followers as he moved along. The ruler of Jyotirdhama who had already become an ardent devotee of the great Acharya, made all arrangements for the Acharya's stay at Jyotirdhama. He also hastened out to welcome and greet his adored Gurudeva. Soon Jyotirdhama was transformed into a center of religious festivity. Many scholars, men of distinction, monks and aspirants owing allegiance to different schools of faith, persons well-known for their many achievements, and good folks of all kinds, flocked there. The place resounded with joy. Acharya and his disciples explained to people at different corners, the import and significance of the commentaries which had been composed. The scriptures were analyzed and discussed and their sense and significance were pondered over, and there were recitals over the glory of the Vedas. Hearing from the great Acharya himself, his exposition of Advaita, all were charmed. It was a time of spiritual high-tide in the Himalayan abode.

The good ruler of Jyotirdhama enlisted many learned copyists to the work of copying the invaluable commentaries and several copies of these divine treatises soon got ready. But the religious enthusiasm that the Acharya enkindled was not confined to the literary and intellectual sphere. It touched and covered every section of the people, and every aspect of community existence. Acharya knew the value of temple-worship in the religious life of people. He selected for appointment as temple priests, persons with vast knowledge and deep devotion, and caused the worship in all the temples and shrines to be performed with a high fidelity to scriptural injunction and tradition and with deep earnestness and application. The temples began to pulsate with a new life and spirit. During the onrush of the Buddhist faith that had swept over the country, many Hindu temples had been destructed, neglected and abandoned, but the constructive genius of the Acharya caused all of them to be reclaimed and renovated, the deities reinstalled with arrangements for proper

worship. The good ruler of the place, true to his profession of Prajaparipalana, protecting the people, warmly co-operated with Acharya and of his own accord did all he could to make his subjects pursue learning, adhere to exemplary conduct and live religiously. And the ruler himself practiced what he preached. The Acharya ceaselessly exhorted the householders to take to the worship of Panchayatana, the five deities - Shiva, Devi, Ganesha, Vishnu and Surya and to the performance of the five great sacrifices- service of the Gods, of the Pitrus or ancestors, of the sages, men and of all living creatures. Acharya's stay on the mountains, in this manner, in a very short time, powerfully stirred up a wide-spread resurgence of a spirit of vigorous spirituality and the ages old Vedic dharma got itself securely re-established.

After a happy and useful stay of a few days at Jyotirdhama, Acharya, along with his devoted flock, journeyed to the other pilgrim centers of Uttarakhanda. The Puranas proclaim the glory of Kedara Kshetra as rapturously as they sing the greatness of Badari. In this pilgrimage, the ruler of the place also accompanied Acharya. Under the royal command, an advance party of officers marched ahead of the party repairing and setting right the hilly paths, providing the necessary facilities, thus making it for the pedestrians to walk along. Even then, the journey from Jyotirdhama to Kedara was quite a hardship to pilgrims, it tested their physical endurance. Taking the path along Nandiprayag, the party arrived at Kalpeshwara, the holiest of spots among the Pancha Kedars, the five Kedars. Places with inspiring associations like Gopeshwara, Anasuya Devi were then crossed, and Rudranath, the fourth of the Kedars, was reached. At all these places, large number of people thronged to have a look of the great Acharya. Acharya on his part, satisfied every heart by his spiritual counsel and instruction. His influence served to install into every one, a new zeal to live a spiritual life.

Acharya's next halt was at Tunganath, the third Kedara, at an altitude of 12,072 feet. Situated on a lofty mountain, its expansive sight was fascinatingly beautiful. Till far north, shone the strikingly white snow-clad Himalayas, the enchanting view of whose majesty struck the onlookers at Tunganath dumb with awe. Such a superlatively captivating, such an irresistibly charming sight was not seen until then. The region is verily a bed of all-white blossoms where Kedareshwara, the lord of all the Yogis is ever present to lift his devotees from all specks of duality. Nature shining in her dark green radiance, her tresses of hair flowing out, her whole being merged in a deep meditation on her Lord Mahadeva, ever busy with the task of showering love and care on her children caused a feeling of intense love and devotion in the heart of the enlightened Acharya. His mind was completely lost in the contemplation of the Divine Infinity.

This state of at-one-ment with the One and All is a condition which all can aspire after and eventually achieve. So long as man lives and moves and has his being in the consciousness of the small ego, the little, limiting individuality, the narrow self, the range of compass of his mind is very much circumscribed and exceedingly narrow. But when the man dips and merges his individuality-consciousness in the Universal consciousness i.e. when the Vyashti is lost in the realms of Samashti, he has a vision of the uttermost reaches of feeling and

outlook. Man can then identify himself with the entire bosom of the universe. The bliss of that state is without a parallel. Man then, feels himself submerged in the ocean of supreme cosmic joy, Virat Ananda. The individual personality is then annihilated. As drops of rain falling in the ocean become the ocean, the limited human personality, freed from all limitations, becomes the illimitable. Man, the insignificant, then passes from the petty to the Mightiest, from mundane life to Supreme existence and from earthly joy to Infinite Bliss.

This is a clear demonstration of the fact that Acharya was a perfected Vijnani, and not merely a Jnani as some foolish Vamacharis claim.

Tunganath was a reputed center of learning, and the scholars of that place were extremely to have seen and heard the great Acharya. The flow of sermons from Acharya brought them no little joy, and their feeling of regard for the Acharya was so profoundly deep that to perpetuate his holy memory, they even made and installed a stone image of him. The image found a place among the revered images in the shrine.

Leaving Tunganath, Acharya in the next lap of his pilgrimage, visited and sanctified by his visit, many places like Sonitapur, Guptakashi, Madhyameshwara ( the second Kedara ), Mahishamardini, Shakambari, Triyugi Narayana, Shonaprayag and Mundkata Ganesha ( the headless Ganesha). In due course Acharya arrived at Gaurikunda where Bhagavati Gauri once performed penance. Gaurikunda is 6,500 feet above sea-level. The place is famous for its big hot spring and is in consequence a favorite resort of pilgrims. Anyway, children always run to their mother, who in turn makes everything fine and good for her children.

The region of Kedara begins from Gaurikunda. Pilgrims who cannot bear the intense cold of Kedara choose to stay at Gaurikunda, in the cozy lap of the Supreme Mother. Tradition also has it that Gauri Devi conceived Kartikeya at this place. Having taken bath at the hot spring, Acharya visited the shrines at that place, took some rest and then passed along to places like Chiravasabhairava, Bhimasena's slope and arrived at Kedara Kshetra.

Kedara is an extensive plateau region, triangular in shape. Enclosed by mountain ranges, shrouded in eternal snow, the place is enveloped in an unbroken stillness and a sublime grandeur. The high altitude of the place naturally subjects every visitor to breathing difficulty. The Lord of Kedara is indeed a deity, whose living presence is palpable to devotees. At their mere remembrances of Him, Lord Shiva becomes graceful to his devotees. Kedara is the meeting place of pilgrimages. In the Mahabharata it is mentioned that the five Pandava brothers passed through Kedara during their Mahaprasthan, the last journey.

When Acharya arrived at the holy Kedara Kshetra, his usually poised mind rose to heights of divine ecstasy, indescribably intense. In an attitude of bliss and veneration, he visited and adored Kedaranath and kept the religious observances appropriate to the place. Kedara is at a height of 11,753 feet. Situated at a much higher altitude

than Badari, it is much colder. The disciples of Acharya felt greatly distressed in the intense cold. The tender-hearted Acharya could not bear the sight of their suffering and a mood of deep compassion came over him. He went into meditation and was able to divine the presence of a hot spring nearby. In pursuance of the Acharya's instructions, the men in the king's party removed the snow, the rocks and boulders at the place pointed out. A little excavation brought to light, the hot spring. And great was the joy of all, for a hot spring at such altitude is a rare thing indeed.

At Kedara, Acharya was, most of the time, absorbed

in meditation. It is not precisely recorded how many days he stayed at Kedara. Some hold that he remained at Kedara for a month. Everyday, he went to temple of Kedareshwara and remained in ecstasy for a long time. Having tasted the divine delight of the company of Kedareshwara, Acharya set off towards Gomukhi, the source of Bhagirati or Ganga.

His path lay across Gaurikunda, Triyugi Narayana and Buda Kedara and then passed through the difficult climb of the formidable mountain pass of Paoali (11,364 feet above sea-level) and through forests infested with ferocious wild animals. The march was an encounter with death at every step and after as long as a fortnight's advancing, the Acharya was able to get the first glance of Ganga. The celestial river which purifies all the three worlds with its nectarine waters has put on at this place, an unique beauty and grandeur of form, and shines with an unsurpassing brilliance. Forcing hard rocks off their base, tirelessly making a way through mountain walls, the river has flowed ceaselessly on keeping an exuberant flow. The Ganga symbolizes a perpetual moving on, a non-stop reaching out, an endless questing forward. Charming townships, prosperous cities, quiet villages, enchanting groves, populous settlements, all these in large numbers get sanctified, purified by her holy waters, and the sacred river flows on to reach the great receptacle, the Ocean. The mountain walls echo and the deep forests resound and re-echo with the sound of the joyous ripples of Sri Ganga hymning in praise of Lord Mahadeva. Catching a glimpse of the divine river, and thrilled by that experience, Acharya was filled with delight and exhilaration and chanted out a sweet hymn in adoration to the Goddess Ganga.

" O Goddess and Divine Mistress, Consort of the Lord Supreme, Mother Ganga, Thou art the deliverer of the three worlds. On Thy bosom sport wavy ripples and Thou hast thy abode on the crest of Shankara, the doer of good; oh symbol of purity, grant that my mind may ever abide at Thy lotus feet".

" O Bhagirata propitiated stream Bhagirati, bestower of bliss, Mother Dear, the glory of Thy waters is lauded in the scriptures-is it not for little of me to comprehend Thy greatness, Gracious one, protect and save ignorant me .....".

walking up the banks of the Bhagirati, the Acharya proceeded to the source of Ganga, Gomukhi. Not only was there a Ganga outside to him, there was an immortal Ganga within him with its current of abounding grace and sanctity. The Gomukhi region is literally impassable. Up till Gangotri, there is some sort of path trodden by a few people.

But not even footmarks are seen beyond Gangotri in the direction of Gomukhi. When the river is frozen hard, one has to tread over ice to reach Gomukhi. The region is all a kingdom of ice, a territory devoid of human beings, uninhabited by beasts and birds. The stoutest heart might get terrified by the sombre forlornness of the area. But Acharya was fearless. And fortified, as it were, by divine strength, emboldened by a super-human resolution, the Acharya, caring not for life or death, walked on to Gomukhi. Not many mortals would dare even of a trip to the scarce Gomukhi eternally buried in snow, and utterly devoid of vegetation.

Of course today the position has improved, and Gomukhi now attracts a growing number of pilgrims in the season. Beyond Gangotri, Dharma Salas etc with facilities for lodging and boarding have sprung up on the way to Gomukhi. But in the days of Sri Acharya, the picture was an entirely different one. The Ganga in Gomukhi is only thirty to forty yards in width. During the six winter months, the flow of Ganga becomes slower and width narrower.

It is said that the river Ganga came down from heaven to earth through the matted locks of Lord Shiva. To check the torrent, Ganga assumed the form of a glacier and flowed in three streams, Bhagirati, Mandakini and Alakananda. From Satpanth glacier, it has broken up into three currents and flowed in three directions. The one and the same Ganga flows in three streams.

Reaching Gomukhi, the Acharya was in a exuberance of self-delight. The scenery all round was fascinating in a variety of ways, and the poetic Being of the Acharya was thrilled to rapture. The distant horizon seemed to get merged in the infinite. It was ice and all ice to the farthest limit of vision. Of incomparable beauty was that ice-bound panorama, golden in the rays of the sun, under a dustless clear sky. The heavenly stream Bhagirati was gushing through an opening shaped like a cow's head, earning it the name, Gomukhi.

Because of the difficulties caused by snowfall and hail-storm, Acharya had to return to Gangotri to ensure the safety of his disciples. There was heavy snowfall all along the path and the lives of Acharya and his followers were endangered several times. The pilgrimage to Gomukhi required for its successful accomplishment, great fortitude and mighty forbearance on the part of Acharya and his devotees.

On reaching Gangotri, Acharya's mind was filled with compassion for those weak men and women, who were incapable of visiting the liberating Tirtha of Gomukhi. He knew that the arduous journey was not for everyone. So, in an overflow of pity for the feeble, Acharya got a temple of Ganga and Shiva erected at Gangotri. He blessed the place that, if pilgrims went up to Gangotri and had a Darshan of the deities at that temple erected by him, they would actually reap the high benefits of a trip to and a view of Gomukhi itself. Tradition has it that Acharya, with his own holy hands, installed a Shiva Linga and an idol of Ganga Devi at Gangotri.

VEDAVYASA BLESSES SHNAKARA .....

Acharya stayed a few days in Gangotri and then left for Uttarakashi.

Uttarakashi is an ancient sacred spot and pilgrim center. Countless Yogis and Rishis passionately eager to attain final liberation have practiced arduous and lifelong penance here, making the very atmosphere of the region vibrant with spirituality. The river Ganga is north-flowing in this place, and it encircles this sanctuary in the form of beautiful crescent and flows on, proclaiming the glory of the holy spot. The sky-kissing surrounding mountain ranges shut off Uttarakashi from the tumult of the worldly maddening crowds and serve to enhance the solemn sublimity of this place of penance.

At the time of arrival at Uttarakashi, Acharya attained the age of sixteen. He now seemed ready to return to his trans-physical realm of existence. Almost all the time, he was absorbed in Samadhi. Padmapada and others were agonized to notice this trend in him. Acharya had heard the call of the infinite and appeared to be getting ready for the final emancipation.

Vijnananauka, the boat of Supreme Wisdom is a treatise composed by Acharya. It is important to us because it gives us a picture, partial though, of the state of his mind at this period. He writes :

1. The self that is attained by the mind, purified through practices of austerity, rituals, charity and the like and as a result, free from all attachment, and renouncing all worldly and royal gifts, I am that Eternal Supreme Brahman.

2. The Truth, that the learned realize in deep meditation and constant contemplation upon the Self after discrimination and by worship of the Brahman-knowing Guru, I am that Eternal Supreme Brahman.

3. He, who is bliss-personified, Self-effulgent, who holds in check the Universal illusion in his greatness, who is attained in the realization of the limitless thought, ' I am Brahman', I am that Supreme Self.

4. He, who is beyond mind and words, in the ignorance of whom the phenomenal world exists and with the advent of whose knowledge as the self, the objective creation vanishes, I am that pure, boundless Eternal, Supreme Brahman.

5. He, the one without a second, the Transcendental Brahman, is reflected in fullness in the hearts of the yogis in Samadhi, attained by stoppage of sense faculties following the Vedanta assertion, Neti Neti, ' not his not this, this is not the reality, this is not the absolute', I am that Supreme Brahman.

6. He, by a single particle of whose inherent bliss the entire universe is made blissful, by whose revelation all things are revealed, whose beauty is manifest in all that is beautiful, I am that Supreme Eternal Brahman.

7. He, who is the infinite, the cause of all causes, the all pervading, the womb of all, the inactive, the auspicious, the abstract, attainable through Pranava, the deathless, the formless, the resplendent, I am that Eternal Supreme Brahman.

8. He alone attains that final beatitude in the lotus feet of Vishnu who has quenched his great thirst by drinking the nectar of real knowledge and thus crossed the ocean of ignorance and duality via the boat of Super knowledge of the Brahman.

The disciples thought deeply over some means of bringing their adored master's fast soaring mind to the plane of normal human functioning. So, after long deliberation on the matter, they went to the Acharya with the prayer that they might be taught his Bhashya in detail, with all its nuances and profundities, as he alone was the competent authority for exposition of their right and full import. The plan worked. After earnest and repeated appeal, they succeeded in making the Acharya agree to impart sermon and instructions on Bhashya.

One day in the forenoon, Acharya was expounding to his disciples, the commentary on the Saririka Sutras when an aged Brahmin appeared at that place. The lesson was stopped as the venerable old man stepped in and everyone there got up and with great reverence, requested him to take a seat. But without taking the offered seat, the Brahmin queried, " I hear that a certain Sanyasi here expounds the commentary on the Brahma sutras. Can you tell me where he is ? "

The disciples answered, " this is our Guru Shankaracharya, who has all the scriptures stored in his memory and they are all at finger tips. He has written a commentary on the Saririka sutras which has silenced all differences in interpretation. He is now teaching us that valuable treasure".

The old man now took a seat and made a request to the Acharya, " They call you the commentator on the Brahma sutra composed by Veda Vyasa. Well, let me see, please tell me the import of the first section of the third chapter".

With great humility Acharya submitted, " To all masters who know the import of the sutras, I offer my salutations. There is in me no such egoistic feeling that I am a great comprehender of the sutras. And yet, I shall try to give a correct answer to what you have asked me about".

With these words, Acharya started giving out a lucid and correct explanation of the sutra that the Brahmin had asked. His was a very thorough, highly learned and extremely convincing exposition, but yet, Acharya found in the old Brahmin a very powerful contestant. Hardly had the Acharya expounded a point with his natural unmatched brilliance, the aged Brahmin cut short with what struck everyone as an unassailable objection. Following close on the youth's heels did the old man throw out a shattering query or a devastating refutation. Bt Acharya did not reel. With great steadiness and in an unperturbed way, he met the Brahmin's objection with replies, strikingly sensible and impressively rational. But the old man would not be silenced. He would put forth another argument, only to draw out a more powerful counter-argument from Acharya. Indeed this battle of wits went on for long. Tirelessly did the Brahmin shower on the young head of the Acharya, questions dealing with highly mystical problems, only to bring out the illuming flashes from his genius. In this volley of dialogue, the whole of the Brahma sutras, the four Vedas, the Karma Kanda, the Jnana Kanda, many scriptures, various philosophies, all

came in for analysis, elucidation, research and summing up.

The astoundingly deep scholarship, the astonishing power of memory, the limitless sweep of intellect, the rare depths of introspection, and the uncommon skill in debate of both the combatants, so far removed in age from other, but so alike in wisdom and learning, made the disciples dazed and dumbfounded as the entertaining warfare went on. The discussion went on till past midday when the Brahmin suggested that they adjourn for the day and resume the debate the next day. The Brahmin rose and walked away in the direction from which he had appeared.

The next day was a repetition of the first day. When the morning class had assembled and the Acharya had started teaching his disciples, the aged Brahmin stepped in and began to discuss high philosophy exactly from the point where it had been left the previous day. A sharp debate ensued. The Brahmin raised questions which were extremely complicated provoking. Acharya, with unruffled temper, always gave convincing replies. The Himalayan debate raged for seven days (seventeen days according to some biographers). On the seventh day when the Brahmin had, as usual departed, Padmapada, who, of all the disciples, had followed this clash of high talent and top ability with keen understanding, approached the Acharya in private and asked him, " Master, who is this Brahmin who knows so well the hidden truth, mystery of Vedanta? Who other than Vedavyasa can possibly possess all this superior scholarship, this sharp intellect, this great skill of debate? Is it possible that Vedavyasa comes here in the disguise of this Brahmin and we stand outwitted as to his real identity? "

Acharya smiled and replied, " You are correct my dear, it is indeed the great Vedavyasa who is coming here everyday in the disguise of the old Brahmin. Well, if the Brahmin repeats his visit tomorrow I shall ask him to let us know who he is".

On the eighth morning, the Brahmin again entered Acharya's abode with a hard nut of a question for the young adversary to crack. Acharya first gave a suitable reply to the question and then fell reverentially at the feet of the Brahmin in an act of deep adoration and with all earnestness, addressed him saying, " Great soul, we have been eager to know who you are. Kindly satisfy our curiosity by letting us know your identity. All of us instinctively believe that you are indeed Vedavyasa Krishnadvaipayana. If our inference is right, please throw off your disguise and assume your real form. You are the first among the Gurus, and I feel blessed by this rare boon of these visits from you. Deign to accept my salutations".

The spontaneity and sincerity of Acharya's words touched the Brahmin deeply and he told the Acharya that his inference was correct and that he was indeed Vedavyasa. In an instant, the aged Brahmin was gone and in his place was seen a serene majestic figure, dazzling like lightening and brilliantly dark like the rain clouds. The crown of matted locks on his head, the sacred sacrificial cord on his body, the robe of the skin of black antelope round his loins, the wisdom-filled countenance and the grace-pouring eyes created a palpable atmosphere of divinity round the intensely human personality of Vedavyasa. A beatific smile played on his lips and placing his hand

on Acharya's bowed head, the greatest of the sages blessed the young Sanyasin.

The poetic vein the Acharya immediately came into play and his veneration for Vedavyasa took shape as a beautiful hymn. He said, " O Great Sage Krishnadvaipayana, my life has become blessed by the sight of your holy feet. You have ever been devoted to the good of the others. You have performed mighty deeds for the benefit of the mankind, and your services, like your name, will live for all times to come. You are the compiler of the eighteen Puranas. You have classified the Vedas into four parts. You know the past, the present and the future. There is nothing on earth that you do not know. Your being is like the milky ocean, and out of it has come the Mahabharata like the moon. You have done infinite good to the world. Your glory knows no end and your activities are marvelously beneficial to one and all. I salute you as the foremost of the Gurus".

The eighteen Puranas which are the works of Vedavyasa are, Brahmapurana, Padmapurana, Vishnupurana, Bhagavatapurana, Markandeyapurana, Varahapurana, Agnipurana, Bhavishyapurana, Brahmavaivartapurana, Skandapurana, Lingapurana, Vamanapurana, Shivapurana, Naradiyapurana, Matsyapurana, Kurmapurana, Garudapurana and Brahmandapurana. The great Suta, in enlisting the characteristics of the Puranas in the Brahmavaivartapurana says, "There must be found in a Purana the following five marks - a description of creation, an account of the final deluge, tracing the lineage of the moon, the sun etc., a statement of the rights of the fourteen manus, and an enumeration of the rulers of the solar and the lunar dynasties. Scholars consider that the Upapuranas ( which include Kalikapurana, Nrisimhapurana etc. Some also count Devibhagavata here. But modern scholars feel that Devi Bhagavata is the fittest work to be called a Mahapurana. Instead some feel Bhagavata should be classified as a Upapurana ) also must possess these five distinguishing features. The Mahapuranas contain the following ten characteristics : an account of creation, of sustenance and destruction, a description of the process of protective nourishment, and of the course of desire, a glorificatory mention of each one of the fourteen Manus, a description of the final deluge, a definition of liberation, singing the glories of the Lord, and singing the praiseworthy qualities of the community of the Gods, individually and severally.

Vyasa felt delighted as much as Acharya's discovery of his identity as at his right understanding of his gifts and greatness. Taking the seat offered by Acharya, he said, " Wise boy, your erudition has quite charmed me. You are divinely gifted, with attributes unequalled on earth or in heaven. There is not one on earth who could have answered even one of my queries, while you answered them all to my complete satisfaction. Among the spiritual teachers, you are a class apart. I have come to love you as much as I love my son Shuka. Hearing that you have written a commentary on my sutras, I came to see you. I am convinced by my tests that you are indeed worthy of the big task of commenting on my sutra. I knew long ago that the lord Mahadeva himself would, in the form of a human Shankara write a commentary on my sutra".

Acharya, with great humility placed his commentary in the hand of Vedavyasa. Vyasa went through the commentary and was immersed in it

for quite some time. Extremely pleased, he gave out his estimation of the work of the Acharya, " My dear son, this commentary is indeed worthy of you. At places you have cast reflection i.e. oblique hints at the sutra. I am very glad you have done so. Young and brilliant scholar that you are, you have the intuition to grasp the true sense of all things. I foresee a great future for you. Like the Sun in its dazzling glory of brilliance, you too will remove the darkness of ignorance in the world by spreading the glory of Self-knowledge of Advaita Brahman. The world will be amazed to witness the play of your astounding genius. All my unexpressed and implied thoughts in the sutra have been brought out by you in your commentary in a way in which no one could have done. Of course in one sense this does not surprise me. For I know that your being and your powers are derived from Mahadeva, the Supreme Being. You are verily Him. Your Guru Govindapada and his Guru Gaudapada are my lineal descendants, for Gaudapada learnt the scriptures from my son, Shukadeva. I now charge you with a continuation of your noble work. You have to write commentaries on the two other Prasthanas also, one the Sruti and the other the Smriti".

Acharya finds an important place not only in the lineage of Advaita Guru Parampara, but also in the Srividya Guru Parampara. This lineage, beginning with Mahatripurasundari, with other Gurus like Sri Dakshinamurthy, Sri Anandabhairava, Sri Hayagriva, Sri Dattatreya and Lopamudra, also lists Acharya as an important Guru. There are many variations here, and what I list here is my own lineage, which is very interesting to note because of its striking similarity with Advaita Guruparampara.

Narayana, Brahma, Kapila, Atri, Vasishta, Sanaka, Sanandana, Bhrigu, Sanatsujata, Vamadeva, Narada, Gautama, Shunaka, Shakti, Markandeya, Kaushika, Angirasa, Kanva, Jabali, Bharadwaja, Parashara, Vedavyasa, Shuka, Gaudapada, Govindapada, Shankara Bhagavatpada, Sureshwara, Vidyashankara, Vidyaranya, Nrisimha Bharati, Sacchidananda Shivabhinava Nrisimha Bharati, Chandrasekhara Bharati, Valukeshwara Bharati, Vidyabhinava Valukeshwara Bharati to my own Sri Gurunatha. There are however some Acharyas after Sureshwara, both householders as well as belonging to the Jagadguru Parampara of Sringeri Sarada Peetham, that I have omitted here.

" I have already accomplished that work also, " said Acharya and produced the other parts of his works to Vyasa. Vyasa was quite amazed to see the prodigious labors of the young Acharya, and went through all his writings- commentaries on Sruti and Smriti- with a one-pointed attention indicating absorbing interest, and then said, " All this is very well done indeed. The production is eminently worthy of the producer. It is all as it should be. I am in a transport of joy".

Acharya now threw a bombshell as it were. He made a submission to Sri Vedavyasa Bhagavan, " Sir, I have done all the work that you expected of me. Kindly give me the permission to terminate my physical existence in Samadhi in your very presence here and now".

Padmapada and other disciples were at their wit's end. Vedavyasa was also astonished. He remained sunk in thought for a while. There was silence all around. And then Vyasa Bhagavan looked up said, " No

Shankara, your task, contrary to what you think, is not yet finished. Much yet remains to be done. You have to meet and vanquish in debate all the renowned scholars in the land of Bharata and bring them round to your point of view of scriptural truth. You alone can do it. Extremely pleased with your work, I have come here to grant you a boon of extended life-span. My dear boy, destiny had fixed your span of life at eight years first. But you took Sanyasa and by the grace of Mahakala, the death-destroying Shiva, your life was extended by eight years. It is the gracious dispensation of the Supreme lord that you live for another sixteen years in this body till the age of thirty-two. Your first task now is to vanquish Kumarila Bhatta. Then you have to journey across the vast Bharata, traversing the holy land from end to end, in order to confront, conceive and convert all those who contradict your views, sticking to duality and ignorance. Your foremost work will be to harmonize the different schools of thought. You will also have to hoist aloft the flag of Advaita, establish Vedanta on a sound basis and proclaim the glory of the Brahman to all. On your shoulders rests not the destiny of an individual, but a whole nation's spiritual welfare ".

Acharya felt there was nothing to be said by him. He bowed down in approval, and Vedavyasa disappeared from view. Acharya felt the absence and became sorrowful. The minds of all the disciples were freed from the dark, hovering clouds of anxiety, and there was now no fear of their Acharya's quitting the world early. They were overjoyed and happy at the extension of his life-span.

After Vyasa left, Acharya became very eager to carry out the instructions of Sri Vyasa. His first task was to conquer Kumarila. His mind was now pre-occupied with this one thought. Acharya came to know from scholars present there that Kumarila was holy soul, who had vanquished in debate various philosophers and propagandists of anti-Vedic schools, and had re-established on a firm footing, the karma kanda of the Vedas. This section of the Vedas deals with rituals and extols their value. Acharya also came to know that the aged scholar, Kumarila Bhatta now lived in Prayaga.

The disciples of Acharya were eager to know about Kumarila about whom they heard good things. A Brahmin scholar there narrated the life and labors of Kumarila Bhatta.

Bhattapada's life is quite out of ordinary and his doings are such as to excite our wonder. It is quite obvious that his taking birth as a human being is solely for the purpose of re-establishing on this land of the Aryas, the ancient Vedic faith and culture. He was born in the Chola country in South India in a Brahmin family devoted to a religious discipline and exemplary living. From the very boyhood, he was devoted to the Vedas. The well-known Buddhist logician, Dharmakirti, is Bhattapada's nephew. Dharmakirti got converted to Buddhist faith, and became very proficient in Buddhist philosophy, after undergoing a course of instruction under the Buddhist teacher, Dharmapala. He then came to the Chola country and challenged his uncle Bhattapada to a debate. Kumarila was vanquished in the debate and according to the solemn undertaking given, it became a matter of honor for Kumarila to switch over to Buddhist faith, to learn it better. He then went to the Buddhist Vihara at Nalanda and became the pupil of Dharmapala and studied Buddhist logic under him. Though

circumstances compelled him thus to embrace the Buddhist faith, his inborn respect for and belief in the Vedic religion remained full as ever.

Anandagiri, in his biography of the Acharya says that Kumarila Bhatta went to Nalanda in order to study Buddhist philosophy. Bhattapada himself tells Acharya when the two meet each other, " In order to refute any school of thought, one should master the philosophy of that thought and have a thorough knowledge of its theory and practice. I had no knowledge of the tenets of Buddhism and so in order to combat Buddhism I had to master its philosophy and know all the intricacies of its workings and beliefs. So I was compelled to enter a Buddhist Vihara and be a Buddhist pupil and learn Buddhist doctrines ".

It is said that one day, the Buddhist teacher Dharmapala, seated in the midst of his disciples among whom was Kumarila, started abusing and ridiculing the Vedas. Kumarila felt extremely agonized at heart, to hear his condemnation of the sacred Vedas, and with face bent down, began to shed tears. The Buddhist Bhikshus noticed him weeping, and enquired about the cause for it. Kumarila was too grief-stricken to explain away his remorse and so told them frankly, " The teacher is vilifying the Vedas, this has cut me to quick". The Buddhist monks acquainted the teacher of his clear evidence of Kumarila's lingering sympathies for the Vedas which he was supposed to have discarded. This infuriated the teacher, and he admonished Kumarila saying, " Why do you weep in this way? Your tears clearly show that even now, you are a Veda-believing Hindu at the core, covered superficially by a guise of Buddhism. Donning the garb of a Buddhist you have been deceiving us."

Kumarila did not choose to pocket the accusation without protest or let the tirade against the Vedas go unchallenged. He entered into an argument with his teacher and said, " Sir, you have been vilifying and speaking ill of the Vedas, quite in an immoderate way for no reason whatsoever". The straight remark from an anguished heart in righteous protest roused the ire of the Buddhist teacher and in an excited voice, he challenged the pupil saying, " If you think that way, argue and establish the illogicity of my remarks and judgments ". Then began a long debate, a philosophical duel on a high plane of thought and feeling, a battle of keen wits, between teacher and pupil. Kumarila effectively smashed the successive positions and attitudes of the teacher, who found himself more and more powerless to contend against his own pupil who overwhelmed and confounded him with unanswerable refutations and forthright arguments. Kumarila was easily able to establish the Supreme authority and the unbeaten superiority of the Vedas. Having quieted down the teacher by the power of his greater understanding and argumentative skill, he declared, " Without the grace of the omniscience one, the individual soul cannot achieve omniscience. Buddha at first trod the path of Vedic faith and he became proficient in the profound wisdom of the Vedas, but then he rejected and disowned, repudiated and discarded the Vedas. In what manner can we style his behavior other than call it the practice of downright thieving?"

The strong and the severe remark of Kumarila made the Buddhist teacher red in anger, and he burst out, " You are defaming the lord

Tathagata. The only proper atonement for this high sin of yours is the doing away with your life by throwing you down the roof of this lofty mansion". Hardly had these words come out of the teacher than the excited monks forcibly pushed Kumarila down the tofty mansion. In their display of vengeance, the disciples outran the teacher. The fast dropping Kumarila quickly composed himself into Yogic steadiness, remembered the Lord and uttered, " If the Veda be true, may my life be protected".

And the miracle happened. In spite of his having been rolled down from a great height, Kumarila did not die. He sprang up safe and sound. The disciples of Dharmapala could not believe their own eyes. But the news of this wonderful event soon spread all around the place. The Brahmins of the place who followed the Vedic religion, said in this incident lay a victory for them, and honored Kumarila in various ways. They also took away Kumarila in pomp from the precincts of the Nalanda Vihara. The incident did not end there. Rather it sparked off a heart-rending conflict between the Hindu and Buddhist communities of the day. To the Hindus, the miraculous escape of Kumarila from death seemed to be no less than the victorious assertion of the superiority of their faith. Making Kumarila their leader, the Hindus arranged a big assembly and challenged Dharmapala to a debate. The conditions of the debate were very harsh. That party to the debate which suffered a defeat had to change over to the faith of the victor or death by entering a fire of husk, called Tushanala.

At the time of Kumarila, the follower of every religion was firmly convinced that his was the only true religion and his the best among all faiths, and the worth of a religion and its superiority were all determined by debate and discussion.

From all corners of India, Buddhist monks came to Magadha to participate in the great assembly where the big debate was to be held and the superiority of the Vedic faith or the deteriorated Buddhist faith was to be established. The sparking brilliance of Kumarila put into shade the arguments of the Buddhists. Dharmapala, despite all his eminence and notwithstanding the tireless efforts he and his followers made to turn the tide of the discussion in their favor, lost the debate. He however refused to change his faith and decided to sacrifice his life. In fulfillment of the terms of the debate, Dharmapala entered husk-fire, letting his body die a slow death in the smoldering flame.

This victory of Kumarila over the Buddhists had a national impact, and here was a new awakening among the followers of the Vedic faith. A grand Ashwamedha sacrifice was arranged to celebrate this victory by Adityasena, the king of Magadha. The celebration was a clear sign of the waning of popular support for Buddhism.

Kumarila was victorious in his campaign of resuscitating the Vedic faith wherever he went in North India, and he effectively lowered the prestige and brought down the influence of Buddhism and Jainism. He then left for South India on a victorious campaign of propaganda with a view of strengthening the roots of Hinduism. After his vanquishing of the best of the Buddhist teachers, Dharmapala, Kumarila found no one ready to face him in a debate. Everywhere, he demonstrated by argument, how the Vedas contained the true faith and how they were

not man-made, but trans-human.

Also to be noted is that Kumarila is held to be the part-incarnation of Skanda Bhagavan. Mandanamishra, of whom we shall hear later, was born of the powers of Brahma. It was lord Mahadeva who directed them to be born on earth in order to assist Acharya in the work of re-establishing the Vedic faith. Kumarila is credited with having conquered the Jains as much as he conquered the Buddhists. He was a man of great initiative and power and proved much more than a match to many well-known religionists of that day. He was also a noted writer and wrote with authority on the Mimamsa philosophy. His authoritative works Sloka-Vartika, Tantravartika, Manavadharmasutra etc have made his name immortal.

This fascinating account of Bhattapada as narrated by the Brahmin of Uttarakashi deeply impressed the Acharya's disciples. The great services of Kumarila to the cause of the mother faith filled them with reverence and admiration for him.

BEHEST FULFILLED .....

Determined to carry out the behest of Sri Vedavyasa, Acharya set out on a world-conquest on the religious plane. His first objective was to meet and vanquish at Prayaga, Bhattapada, a very great scholar and make him write a Vartika or a critical explanatory work on his own commentary on the Brahma sutras. This indeed was a new chapter in Acharya's play.

From here on, we shall find Acharya playing with single-minded devotion, the role of one who, with zeal and fervor, preached and spread, defended and strengthened the cause of Vedic dharma. Holding aloft the flag of Sanatana dharma, the Religion Eternal, he traversed India from end to end for sixteen years from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, from Assam to Trans-Kashmir regions, on foot, broadcasting the message of Vedanta. For no less than twelve hundred years had Buddhism and its doctrines flourished in India, and Hinduism had, in consequence been weakened and enfeebled. To this emaciated Hinduism, Acharya infused vigor and rendered it invincible. He also gave the necessary philosophical background and scriptural sanction to various views and sects and schools of thought and furnished the needed intellectual justification for many Vedic positions and stands, making them more acceptable to the rational-minded. He thus made Hinduism a co-operative assembly, highly organized, well-knit of expansive faith.

In the spread of Buddhism in India, the royal patronage and state support had played a great part. With the active patronage of the rulers of the land, it was easy for Buddhism to register a phenomenal expansion and practically the whole land of Bharata. It would appear that the Buddhist order of monks spoke to the common people thus, "The king of the land is ours. Deny and discard the Vedic way. The Vedas are all unworthy of credence, because the Vedic declarations are not demonstrable by direct proof or indeed by any other proof". Through such assertions and arguments, did the Buddhist order of monks try to induce and compel the public to take increasingly to the

State-supported Buddhist faith.

The Acharya had no resources other than his spiritual profundity, and strong in the strength of the spirit, he went out holding the torch of enlightenment, and dispersed the dense darkness of national decay. His campaign of world-conquest on the plane of religion and philosophy, without the backing of the state or royal authority is a unique phenomenon of great significance. The Hindu community had in those days forgotten that the Hindu way of life was rooted in the Vedas, and as a result of this, twisted out of shape and created in its wake several other schools of thoughts, most being no more than just dry rituals and dull doctrines. At this critical juncture, Acharya's advent brought light and solace. In his walking-tour covering the whole of India, he established by discussion and by citation of scriptural authority, the fact that the several branches of Hindu religious culture were all but parts and aspects of the grand tree of the Veda and that all the Indian schools of thought and sects of philosophy had sprung out of the one Sanatana Vaidika dharma. The Acharya had to carry on debates with as many as seventy-two varying religious sects of the time. He proved beyond doubt that all these several attitudes and ideas had their roots in the Vedas, which were their origin and source, and thus he established the universality of Vedic philosophy. Acharya's powers of planning, his constructive way of executing things, his farsighted vision, all these were of astonishing interest to his contemporaries, and no less are they of astonishing interest to us, moderns. History has not many examples of individuals who did so much, so thoroughly, so enduringly and in such a short time as Acharya did. He opened the highway of Vedanta to the followers of the traditional Vedic faith. For this monumental service, Acharya and only Acharya, next only to Dakshinamurthy and Sri Krishna, will for all time be venerated by all as the Jagadguru, the world-teacher.

The Acharya had, even during his earlier wanderings, paid visits to most of the shrines and sacred places on the banks of the Ganga. He now desired to visit and worship at the many holy spots on the banks of the sacred Yamuna, and so moved down along the Yamuna towards the direction of Prayaga. On the way he touched Kurukshetra, the site of the epic Mahabharata battle where the Gita was first given out. In course of time, he reached Vrindavan, the playground of Sri Krishna's boyhood. At this sacred place, the Acharya, with great veneration and devotion, went to see many spots associated with Krishna's benign boyhood and visited the famous temples in the region. At the shrine of Lord Krishna, his mind was overcome with divine love for the Supreme Guru of Gita, and reverentially offered a sweet hymn at the feet of Krishna.

The eight verses are famous as Sri Krishnashtakam.

1. May he, who is ever held in embrace by Sri Lakshmi, the Goddess of abundance, who is all-pervading, in whose physical form is the entire created world-the animate and the inanimate, who is the theme of the Vedas, who is the unattached and impartial witness of the actions of the human intellect, who is ever pure, who is the remover of the ills of the devotees, destroyer of the dark forces, who is lotus-eyed, and the holder of the club, the conch, and the Sudarshana Chakra, who wears a garland of wild flowers of unstained glory, who is

everlasting sweetness, who is that worthy refuge of all and the Lord of the Universe - Sri Krishna be visible to me.

2. May he, from whom has emerged all this universe composed of ether, air, water, fire and earth, who is the destroyer of Madhu, who by his own Guna of Satva protects the infinite creation, who at the time of deluge withdraws everything into himself, who is the all-pervading substance and the refuge of all and the Lord of the Universe, that Krishna be visible to me.

3. May he, whom the pure-minded sages, by practicing first the Yogic injunction of restraint and Pranayama thus subduing all the mental faculties, perceive in their heart as Vishnu - the adored of the three worlds, who has assumed the Maya body, who is the shelter of the entire Universe, that Sri Krishna grant me his vision.

4. May he, whom the Vedas declare , ` One without second, stainless, He stays in the world and controls the world, but Him the world knows not", who is the supreme director of the play of the universe, who is the sole object of contemplation of Gods, sages and mankind, who is the bestower of liberation to all living beings, refuge of the entire universe and the Lord of the world, that Sri Krishna be visible to me.

5. May he, by whose power Indra and other Gods became powerful and conquered the demons, without whose doing no one can act and has any freedom to do anything at all, who takes away the pride of poetic talent of the world, conquering all the learned, refuge of the Universe, that Sri Krishna be visible to me.

6. May he, without meditation on whom a man is born in a lower body like a pig, without knowledge of whom man is oppressed with the dread of birth and death, without the remembrance of whom man gets the body of hundreds of worms, who is the refuge of the universe, that Krishna grant me his vision.

7. May he, who is the destroyer of fear and remover of delusion, who is the help of the helpless, who has the complexion of a new rain-cloud, who is the playmate of the children in Gokula and a friend of Arjuna, who is self-existent, the parent of all beings and giver of happiness to beings according to their karma, that Sri Krishna be visible to me.

8. May he, the birth less Lord of the universe, who appears in the form of Vishnu for the deliverance of the pious, like a bridge of righteousness, whenever there is a frightening decline of Dharma, who is devoid of all changes, whose glory the Vedas sing, who is the lord of the Vrajabhoomi, that Sri Krishna grant me his vision.

=====  
==

HASTAMALAKA, THE EMBODIMENT OF SELF-REALIZATION .....

Sriveli was the home of nearly two thousand Brahmin families. The Brahmins of the place were all very devoted to the faith they held and they preserved, according to tradition and rule, the sacred fire ever aflame in their homes and were highly proficient in the performance of Vedic rituals. They accorded the Acharya a right royal welcome befitting a deity and received him with all honors. Right in the middle of Sriveli was situated a fascinatingly beautiful temple of Hara Parvati. After offering worship to the parents of the universe, the Acharya lodged at a convenient place. Crowds of people came to his abode for the pleasure of a sight of his holy being. His exposition of the Advaita philosophy charmed the hearts of all the hearers.

Prabhakara was a Brahmin resident of Sriveli. He was earnest in the performance of his religious duties and was well versed in the scriptures. However, his only son, who was then thirteen years old, was totally dumb. The parents were naturally disconsolate. Hearing of the glories of the Acharya, Prabhakara led his son to the holy presence of the Acharya along with pious offerings of fruits and sweets. His only desire was to redeem his son from his dumbness by making him the recipient of the Acharya's grace.

The deficient boy no sooner saw the Acharya than he fell at his feet. Prabhakara prostrated at his feet with deep devotion and told him, "Lord, kindly explain to me, for what reason this boy is mute. With great I got his Upanayana ceremony performed. But the boy speaks not a word. Till now he has not even learnt the alphabets and there is no question at all of his reading the Vedas and other sacred scriptures. Never once has he called out to his father or mother. Never does he express his feeling of hunger and thirst. You are an ocean of compassion. Please bestow your grace on him and make him normal".

Acharya was quick to act. No sooner had Prabhakara made his request than the Acharya accosted the boy with a verse of queries.

" Dear child, Who art Thou? Whose art Thou? Where to art Thou going? What is Thy name? Whence hast you come? Do Thou satisfy me by telling me of all these things in a clear manner. Thy sight has kindled extreme delight in me".

The boy looked straight into the Acharya's shining eyes and spoke out immediately a reply in a very sweet voice and also in a verse:

" I am not a human being, nor God nor Yaksha. Neither Brahmin nor Kshatriya nor Vysya nor Sudra am I. A Brahmachari nor a householder nor a forest-dweller nor a mendicant I am. I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As the sun is the impeller of all human efforts, likewise, He who is the impellent of the working of mind and eyes and of all the sense faculties, who is without adjunct and vast as the sky, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

Like the warmth of the Fire whose Eternal nature is that of

consciousness, who is immovable and without a Second, holding on to Him do the inert objects-sense faculties- like mind and eyes and others engage themselves in their several activities, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As the reflected image in the mirror which is not a different entity from the object, like unto that the reflected image of the Self in the mirror of mind, the apparent appearance of consciousness, termed as living being, He who is inseperate from the Brahman, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As when the mirror is removed the image disappears and the inconceivable only True face remains, likewise when the faculties of the mind are checked, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As even when bereft of sense faculties like the mind, eyes etc He who shines behind the mind of the minds, eye of the eyes, and still who is beyond the reach of the sense organs of mind-eye-and others, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As the sun, who at the same time gives light to many eyes and makes visible the different objects, likewise, the one and the only reflector of all the faculties of the mind, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As by reflecting the sunlight the eyes are able to see things, likewise, the Sun becomes manifest by the effulgence of Him and imparts visibility to the eyes, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As the one Sun reflected appears in several forms according to whether the surface of the water is calm or ruffled, likewise, He who though being one appears as different in different shapes to minds calm or ruffled, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As the most ignorant of minds think the Sun to be clouded and non-luminous, likewise, the ignorant minded take it as a bound one, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity.

As he alone who, in all living beings and different objects, exists, still whom none of them can touch, he who is like the sky ever pure and serene, I am that Ever Self-aware Entity".

That a boy who had been dumb right from birth should answer the Acharya's questions by means of a verse revelatory of the nature of the Self was something which astounded everyone there. The Acharya told the disciples, " This boy is surely a knower of Brahman. Were he not, he could not have given such a profound description of the nature of the Self in a manner, so full of the nature of the knowledge of the reality. Like a Myrobalan fruit -Amalaka, in the hand, is the knowledge of Brahman within easy reach and in the palm of this boy. This hymn sung out by him will go down famous as the Hastamalaka hymn".

Acharya heartily blessed the boy and then spoke to his father Prabhakara, " OH son, your home is not the place for this boy. As a results of meritorious deeds of a very high deed in his last birth, and by virtue of a hard penance, this boy is established in the

knowledge of the Brahman. This explains his dumbness. He is hence so reluctant to exchange words with anyone. He carries on in this body just to live out the momentum of his previous births. He has not consciousness of the ego of his body. What awareness and recognition of worldly relations and of father and mother can you expect of him? All that he is the Being which is knowledge Absolute. Leave this boy with me forever".

Prabhakara was not prepared for this proposal. He remained stunned. Till then, he had, at least, a mute boy to claim as his son, but now along with the joy of seeing his muteness cured came the shock of having to lose him altogether. Heaving a deep sigh he said, " Lord, all that you say may be true. But how indeed can I live on without my only son with me? I simply cannot think of it. Besides, his mother has all her life centered around him. I shall acquaint her with the happenings and let you know".

Prabhakara went to the Acharya next morning with his wife and son. The mother literally bathed the Acharya's feet in tears and prayed on to him weeping, " O God-like Acharya, may you shower your grace on me and restore my son to normalcy. Anything is possible to you if you but will it. Even the dead comes back to life if you just give a call. Deprived of my son, how can I live my life? Cure him of his present malady but leave him to remain with me".

The mother's wailing filled the Acharya's heart with pity. But he saw what she did not, and he, deigned to enlighten her. In his sweet and comforting voice, he told her, " Mother, calm yourself. Grieve not for your son vainly. A Siddha Yogi is now inhabiting your son's body. Therefore you can never succeed in making your son take an interest in the ordinary worldly life".

This information came as a surprise to the parents. Not knowing what to say or do, they gazed at the Acharya. Acharya then desired to rouse their memory of a past incident and spoke to the woman saying, " Perhaps you remember that when your son was two, you left the child in a hut on the banks of river Yamuna and went to the river for a dip. The boy was playing about and fell into the river and was drowned. You recovered the dead body and came to a Yogi, who was engrossed in Samadhi on the banks of the Yamuna nearby. Your cries melted the Yogi's heart and by means of his Yogic power, he entered the child's body. And your son rose back to life and activity. It is that perfected soul that inhabits your body. That is how your son is a man of perfect wisdom. And so, you can never make him lead a worldly life. I have had to narrate all this divine happenings only to convince you".

The words of the Acharya helped the parents to recall the incident of the past. The son too, for the first time spoke to the woman saying, " Mother, you are now acquainted with my identity. Why do you strive to bind me to a life of worldliness? Do please grant me your permission cheerfully to stay with the great Acharya. I pray that you may become the mother of a worthy and good son, and my prayer shall not go in vain".

They parents were wondering if they were having a dream, so quick and sudden had the march of incidents been. They concluded that it was

all the dispensation of the providence. The Acharya too advised them to bow to the inevitable and wisely, let the ordained course of events have its way. The bereaved Brahmin couple saw wisdom in Acharya's words and returned home in a pensive mood.

The Acharya initiated the boy into the discipline of Sanyasa according to the sanctioned mode of the scriptures. He was named Hastamalaka Acharya. No longer was the boy dull and no longer was he mute. His countenance was aglow with the brilliance of the knowledge of the Brahman. Out of his mouth now flowed words of Supreme Truth. He became one of the foremost disciples of the Acharya.

Having accomplished his task in Sriveli, the Acharya now proceeded towards Sringeri. For the fulfillment of the divine task, he was going like a mountain stream torrentially crossing all obstacles and dangers, making out a path for himself by throwing out rocks as it were that came in front, establishing new columns of glory in the inward march of Sanatana Vedic Dharma.

The Acharya brought the sweet nectar of comfort for the suffering hearts of those, who were born out with pain and obstruction, troubled with doubts and disbelief, overcome with desire and pride, he went on proclaiming the message of hope and joy, showing the path to the all-pervading bliss in the Supreme Parabrahman.

SRINGERI, THE ABODE OF SHARADA PARAMESHWARI .....

On the way to Sringeri, the Acharya gave religious instructions to many men and women. He had discussions and debates with people of different views. Acharya was not going alone now, but thousands of people were following him. He received a dazzling Hero's welcome everywhere.

When at the age of eight Acharya had started on from Kerala as a Sanyasi, with the staff and kamandala in hand, in search of Guru Govindapada, he had come to Sringeri also called Sringagiri on the way. He had liked that place greatly. The natural beauty of the place, sublime environment and deep forests surrounding it had left a deep impression on his mind. Particularly the sight of venomous snakes living peacefully with frogs appeared to him to be expressive of the lofty spiritual atmosphere prevailing there. On enquiry, he found out that the place had been the sacred abode of sage Rishyashringa, who had practiced severe austerities there. His impressions had become stronger as a result of this information. He had right then decided to establish his first monastery in Sringeri.

When the local Chalukya king learnt that the Acharya with his disciples was approaching Sringeri, he gave his officials instructions for his proper reception. Sringeri is a hilly region with rich scenic beauty. The mountain-river Tungabhadra that emerged in the confluence of the two streams Tunga and Bhadra, flowed at the foot of Sringeri and gave it a greater charm. A popular saying about this river goes as follows, 'Tunga Pana Ganga Snana', i.e. drinking the water of this sacred river has the same effect as taking a dip in the holy Ganga. The disciples of the Acharya were very happy to come

to know of that delightful and lonely place. The Acharya expressed his desire to stay in that place which seemed to him to be an abode for the performance of penance.

As the news of the Acharya's stay in Sringeri spread, many spiritual aspirants seeking liberation and devoted to the scriptures began to assemble there. Within a short time, the place became a settlement of spiritual aspirants. Acharya engaged in the task of building up the spiritual lives of all by expositions of his commentaries and other scriptures by his religious instruction and spiritual discourses. The great Acharya advised the aspirants to learn the qualities of restraint of passion, self-control, forbearance and withdrawal of mind from sense objects and to strive to attain Samadhi by constant contemplation of the great words and by sincere meditation.

Gradually a fine temple and monastery were built. The Acharya himself installed the Srichakra and installed the divine presence of Goddess Sarada. Sarada Parameshwari, the chief deity here, is much more than just an aspect of Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. She is Mahatripurasundari, the triple form of Lakshmi-Saraswati-Gauri. She is the supreme queen Rajarajeshwari. The Acharya also established various other deities like Bhadrakali, Hanuman, Ganesha and Bhairava for the protection of the place. Thus, at the express desire of the Acharya was established the Sringeri math, with a stability lasting over hundreds of decades for the infinite good of the world.

It is said that the Acharya requested the Goddess to come to Sringeri and stay there for ever in the Srichakra that he had established. The divine enchantress told him that she would agree if he promised to her that he would not turn back and see her, while they walked to Sringeri. Acharya agreed and started walking towards Sringeri. The Goddess followed him, with the melodious noise of her foot-Chain keeping the Acharya informed about her presence. However as they reached Koodali, where Tunga and Bhadra rivers join to form Tungabhadra, the noise of the twinkling bells from the Mother's ornament stopped. This was because of the sand in that region. Fearing that the Goddess had returned back, Acharya happened to turn back and the Goddess stopped right there and refused to move any further. The Acharya, as per his promise had to establish a temple there for the Goddess, who gracefully promised the Acharya that she would visit Sringeri during the nine days of Navaratra.

The establishment of the Sringeri math by the Acharya is, in many ways, a very significant event in the spiritual history of the world, especially of India. The order of monks set up by the Acharya there to maintain and carry on Vedic dharma gave immense strength to Hindu spirituality and greatly helped the stability of religion. Acharya's Advaita Vedanta made no small contribution to the universal religion. One could say that all the different religions of the world are different branches of the vast tree of Advaita. All spiritual endeavor finds its goal in Advaita knowledge. There is no conflict between Advaita Vedanta and any other theory or religion. There are no cultist worships of a particular form of God or any concept. In the awareness of Advaita, all conflicts are resolved.

Staying in Sringeri the Acharya wrote many invaluable books full of instructions and shining with the spirit of renunciation. These

include, Vivekachudamani, Aparokshanubhuti, Drigdrishyaviveka, Atmabodha, Bodhatara, Vedantakesari, Atma-anatma-viveka, Sarvadarshana Siddhanta, Prapanchasara Tantra and Lalita Trisati Bhashya.

During the Acharya's stay in Sringeri, a Brahmin youth called Giri (Anandagiri according to some biographers) became his disciple. Giri did not know much of reading or writing. But that completely pure-hearted young man had devoted himself to the service of his Guru from the very first day of his coming. According to the scriptures, it is only through attendance on service of the Guru that the disciple attains knowledge. Together with attendance on the Guru, tireless Giri was always ready to look after the needs of his brother-monks. Within a short time, the good-looking, soft-spoken Giri became a great favorite with all, particularly so with the Acharya.

The disciples of the Acharya were all vastly learned. They were worthy disciples of the great Acharya in exposition of the scriptures and debating skill. Indeed, from that point of view, Giri was no where equal to the other disciples. But incomparable was his devotion to his Guru. When the Acharya gave his disciples lessons on the scriptures, Giri would sit near the Acharya respectfully listening attentively to all that was said. He never failed to do that.

One day Giri was washing the garments of his Guru in the river nearby. It was the hour of teaching of scriptures. The disciples had assembled. Finding the disciples ready to commence with the benediction from the Upanishads, the Acharya said. " Please wait, Giri will come presently".

When after waiting it was found that Giri had not yet come, Padmapada said, "Can Giri understand your exposition of the scriptures?"

The Acharya smiled meaningfully and remained silent. Meanwhile, washing the linen in the river Giri felt that looking at hi, the great Acharya was blessing him with a graceful expression. His whole being was radiant with a divine light. Now, indeed he had been blessed by Lord Dakshinamurthy himself, who had descended to earth in the guise of the Acharya. He felted that he had mastered all knowledge. He ran back to the Acharya. On reaching the Acharya's abode, he at once bowed down at his feet. Magnificent verses, full of rhythm flowed out of his mouth.

This famous hymn composed by Giri in praise of Sri Adi Shankara is called Totakashtakam. This is a beautiful poem in the Totaka metre (which had twelve syllables in each line).

The other disciples were surprised to hear these verses couched in pure Sanskrit and full of deep meaning. Blessing Giri profusely, the Acharya in great affection bade him sit near him. Everyone realized that it was through the grace of Guru that Giri had attained this rare gift. Everyone talked about this wonderful happening, and this incident helped people to realize the utmost importance of Guru's grace. On an auspicious day, the Acharya initiated Giri into Sanyasa. He was given the name of Totakacharya.

The writing of the commentary on the Brahma sutras may be regarded as

one of the main tasks performed by the Acharya. The Brahma sutra is also referred to as Saririka sutra or Vedanta sutra. In the Brahma sutra, there is in particular, a philosophic discussion on the bondage and attainment of liberation of all creatures. The Brahma sutra of Vedavyasa is written in the form of aphorisms. For this reason, the meaning of the sutras cannot be understood by the ordinary people. Without the aid of the commentary, it is impossible to understand the import of the sutras.

Even though Bodhayana and others had written commentaries before the Acharya and even after him, Ramanuja, Madhwa, Nimbaraka and others wrote commentaries on this work, the volume Saririka Mimamsa, written by the Acharya occupies a special, unique and supreme place of importance for a number of reasons. This commentary is an authoritative work on the Advaita doctrine, which is the sole and the ultimate reality. It also contains a subtle analysis of the Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sankhya and Buddhist systems of philosophy. For this reason, the commentary is a detailed philosophical work, full of deep scholarship. This is not even approachable by other commentaries written on the Brahma sutra by other commentators. Like the Brahma sutra, the commentary thereon is also difficult to understand. Hence more needed to be done to make the knowledge of the Brahma sutras available to the common man.

Sage Gautama propounded the Nyaya system. He is also referred to as Akshapada. In this philosophical system, sixteen principal objects are recognized, proof, object of proof, doubt, necessity, example, deduction, preposition, argument, inference, controversy, discussion, dispute, logical fallacy, pretext-evasion, category or kind, and the point of defeat or failure in argument. Through the grace of God, the knowledge of the nature of these objects is attained and thereupon through hearing and thinking of and deep meditation on the Self, the false ascription of self to the physical form ceases. Through cessation of false knowledge, there is destruction of anger, malice and delusion. Pravritti(desire), both good and evil, is destroyed through the destruction of imperfection. Through the cessation of both good and evil, there is cessation of birth and this leads to complete cessation of sorrow and final emancipation.

In Vaisesika philosophy, seven categories viz. substance, quality, action, generality, particularity, inheritance and non-existence are recognized. Through the knowledge of the similarity and dissimilarity of these seven categories is attained the knowledge of discrimination between these categories. As a result of such discrimination, according to Vaisesika system, through deep thinking one learns to discriminate between the self and the non-self. Thereupon, through deep contemplation and meditation, one attains the knowledge of the self and this leads to liberation in the form of complete cessation of sorrow or pain. This system was propounded by sage Kanaada.

Kapila is the founder of the Sankhya system of philosophy. In this system, twenty-five principles or Tatvas are recognized. They are nature, intelligence, egoity, the five subtle elements, the eleven senses, the five gross elements and Purusha (the person endowed with attributes). Getting from the preceptor instructions on the Sankhya system, one is advised to deeply think and contemplate on these elements. This results in an awareness of the distinction between

Prakriti or primal energy and Purusha or the soul, leading to liberation in the form of complete cessation of the three kinds of sorrow. Here, there is no recognition of the existence of God.

We have seen how Vedavyasa himself had appeared before the Acharya at Uttarakashi and had extended his life-span by another sixteen years and how he had directed the Acharya to defeat Kumarila Bhatta in debate to make him thereafter write the Vartika (explanatory treatise) on the commentary. Following this direction, the Acharya had met Kumarila. But Kumarila had told the Acharya that if his chief disciple Mandana could be defeated in a debate, he could be made to write the Vartika on the commentary. We have seen before that Mandana, defeated in the debate, had become the Acharya's disciple. On arrival at Sringeri, the Acharya remembered in particular about the writing of the Vartika. One day, he sent for Sureshwara and told him, " Son, the holy Vedavyasa had told me about having explanatory notes to my commentary written. It is my desire that you should write the Vartika on the commentary of sutra Bhashya".

Hearing the Acharya's instructions, Sureshwara said, "Revered sir, it is beyond my powers to write an explanatory treatise on YOUR commentaries on the Brahma sutras. Nevertheless, I shall try my best to carry out your instructions". The Acharya blessed Sureshwara profusely and gave him permission to withdraw.

Obeying his revered Guru's directions implicitly, Sureshwara engaged very earnestly in the task of writing the Vartika. Gradually this came to be known by other disciples and the possible results of such an enterprise caused great worry to quite a few of them.

Padmapada and the other disciples took into account the fact that Sureshwara was an exponent of the Mimamsa system. He had become a monk only a short while ago. It was possible therefore that he would establish the superiority of the karma kanda in his treatise. It was also possible that he would establish the superiority of the Mimamsa system in such a fashion that the significance of the commentaries would be distorted and its importance would suffer. As a result of these doubts and musings, an uncomfortable atmosphere was created.

The extremely brilliant Acharya noticed the dissatisfaction among his disciples and was greatly alarmed. He one day informed Sureshwara, " My so, do not write the treatise on the commentary. At present you should write such an authoritative work on Advaita Vedanta reading which the other disciples may have their unfounded fears dispelled".

Making his obeisance at the Acharya's feet, Sureshwara indicated his silent consent to the Acharya's proposal and took his leave. On a later occasion the Acharya sent for Padmapada and said, " You see, it is the desire of many that you should write a Vartika on the Brahma sutra Bhashya. But instead of writing a treatise, you should explanatory notes on the commentary and in it your ideas will be made clear". Directed thus by the Acharya, Padmapada engaged himself in the task of writing the explanatory notes.

Meanwhile, following his Guru's instructions, Sureshwara within a few days wrote an authoritative philosophical work called Naishkarmya Siddhi, on the Brahman and the self in a beautiful style,

theoretically significant and rational in approach, and presented it to the Acharya. Reading to book very attentively from end to end, Acharya was delighted. Sureshwara's deep knowledge of Advaita, profound scholarship, wonderful style of writing, his capacity to use sentences appropriate to the meaning, his demolition of the views of the opponents with irrefutable logic, and the great force with which he established his conclusions, all impressed the Acharya. He blessed Sureshwara and said, " Dear son, do not be sorry for not being able to write the Vartika. Do write treatises on my commentaries of the Taittiriya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads. It is through these works that you will attain immortal fame in the world".

Sureshwara was overwhelmed by this demonstration of the infinite affection and grace of his Guru. The Acharya then sent for the other disciples and bade them to read Naishkarmya Siddhi. All were charmed to read the work. None entertained any doubts now about Sureshwara's scholarship or his devotion to Advaita Vedanta.

For the maximum propagation of Vedanta, the Acharya directed all his disciples to write according to their capacities, different treatises based on Advaita. Anandagiri wrote the currently accepted explanatory notes on the commentaries of Brihadaranyaka and Chandogya Upanishads. He was also the author of many other works like Nirnaya Kala, Totaka Sloka and Srutisara Samuddharana.

Sureshwara also wrote a critical treatise on Nrisimha utara tapini Upanishad. Apart from critical explanatory notes on the Taittiriya and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads, he wrote treatises on the hymn Dakshinamurthy Stotra (called Manasollasa). His Panchikarana Tika is also held in a very high regard by scholars.

Learning that Padmapada was writing explanatory notes on the commentaries on the sutra, the Acharya expressed a desire to listen to these notes. Considering himself blessed at the request, Padmapada read out to the Acharya all the explanatory notes written by him. The Acharya praised the efforts of Padmapada and named the collection of notes as Vijayadindima. Padmapadacharya also wrote other valuable treatises like Vijnanadipika, notes and commentary on Acharya's Prapanchasara Tantra and the commentary on the Panchakshari Mahamantra of Sri Mahadeva. It is said that Padmapada also wrote an authoritative work giving a chronological account of the Acharya's triumphal career, but it was lost by the ravages of time. From that unpublished work of Padmapada, the later chroniclers collected much material on the Acharya's inspiring life.

Vedavyasa had directed that Kumarila Bhatta should write the critical treatise. Kumarila in turn had expressed the desire that Mandana should write the treatise. But divine dispensation was otherwise and no critical treatise was written on the Acharya's commentary on the Brahma sutras. Meanwhile, the incident of the writing of the treatise being stopped had caused quite a reaction in Padmapada's mind. He considered himself very guilty in having set up an obstacle in the way of his Guru's will. His heart was filled with deep remorse and as an atonement for his sin, he mentally prepared to set out on a pilgrimage.

As desired by the Acharya, Padmapada wrote out notes on the whole

commentary and making a sacrificial present of it to his Guru one day, sought his permission to undertake a pilgrimage. Reading his disciple's thoughts, the Acharya said, " My son, to live in the company of the Guru's feet is the real pilgrimage. The water washing the Guru's feet is truly the waters of holy places. Seeing your chosen deity in the Guru and attending on him constantly is the true service rendered at holy places. Do not go to far away places leaving your Guru. When you are tired after your walks by day, you will be tired and will fall asleep at night. There will be no time for meditation and for contemplation of the Reality". Thus instructing him variously, the Acharya tried to prevent Padmapada from going on a pilgrimage. But seeing the deep spirit of renunciation and firm resolve of his disciple, the Acharya blessed him many times and gave him the sought permission.

On an auspicious day, Padmapada along with a few other disciples set out for Holy Rameshwara and Setubandha. On the way, he visited the shrines of Kalahasti, Kanchipuram, Pundarikapuram and Shivaganga and arrived at the ancient shrine of Srirangam. His maternal uncle's place was nearby. Padmapada and the other disciples who accompanied went there. Seeing his nephew after a long time, his maternal uncle received him cordially and requested him to stay on there for some time.

This maternal uncle was himself a ritualistic and learned Vaishnava Brahmin. He was a follower of the karma kanda part of the Vedas, as propagated in those times by Prabhakara. Even though he was deeply annoyed at the sight of his nephew being a monk, he managed to conceal his feelings and variously provided for Padmapada's comfort.

Now, Prabhakara mentioned here is not to be confused with the father of Hastamalaka. The Prabhakara referred to here was the chief disciple of Kumarila Bhatta. After Bhattapada's death and Mandana's Sanyasa, Prabhakara became the chief of the school of Mimamsa.

After the strain of the journey was relieved, Padmapada told his uncle about his Guru and engaged in a discussion of the scriptures with him. The uncle was himself vastly learned. He was of the Dvaita or dualistic school while Padmapada followed the Advaita or the non-dualistic system. The discussion gradually led to controversy and disputation. In the face of Padmapada's reasoning and logic, his uncle was not able to hold on to his own for long. The uncle's mind chafed with envy at this. Padmapada had brought his book Vijayadindima along. Asked by his uncle about the book, he said, " I have written notes on the commentary of my Acharya on the Brahma sutras. These are the notes called Vijayadindima".

Taking the volume up and reading part of it attentively, Padmapada's uncle realized that the publication of the volume would mean a strong attack on Dvaita and on the very basis of karma kanda. He resolved upon destroying the book. He, however, praised the work profusely and said, " I am strongly inclined to read it up from end to end".

Padmapada was greatly delighted to hear from his uncle such high praise of the notes written by him. At the importunate requests of his uncle, he had to stay on there for three days. The villagers were charmed to hear Padmapada's discourses and his exposition of the

scriptures. On the fourth day, Padmapada along with the other disciples left for the holy Rameshwara. The book Vijayadindima was however left with his uncle at the latter's great eagerness to read it. It was arranged that Padmapada would take it back on his return journey.

Having read the volume attentively, his uncle pondered thus, " If this book is published, my Guru Prabhakara's fame will decline". He did not have the intellectual power to refute the views put down in the book through debate. He, therefore, set fire to his own house one night and destroyed the book. Padmapada meanwhile was full of joy after visiting the holy shrines and on his way back to Sringeri, came back to his uncle's place in a happy frame of mind. Even as he entered the village, he found that his uncle's place was burnt up. Seeing Padmapada, his uncle feigned grief and striking his head by way of grief, he particularly expressed his sorrow for the book that was destroyed.

Consoling his uncle Padmapada said, " Please do not grieve on account of the loss of that volume. Through the grace of my revered Guru, I shall be able to write another book based on even stronger arguments and logic. I shall refute in the new book with all my power the arguments that you offered from your side during our debate". The uncle found that all his efforts were in vain. He nevertheless concealed his real feelings and showed great affection for his nephew. He decided on destroying Padmapada's sanity by administering poison and accordingly he poisoned Padmapada's food. As a result, Padmapada became insane. Even though Padmapada recovered through the treatment of the local doctors, he was not completely normal. Becoming aware of the wicked scheme of Padmapada's uncle, the other disciples left for Sringeri along with Padmapada. Traveling towards their destination for a day or two, they learnt from a group of pilgrims that the Acharya had left for Kerala. In order to meet the Acharya they too started for Kerala.

#### CHALLENGE MET AND MASTERED .....

When Padmapada was on pilgrimage, everyone at Sringeri felt his absence deeply. Moreover the weight of sorrow that he carried away in his heart had struck chords of grief in the minds of all. The Acharya however remained unaffected and constantly sought to bring about perfection in the lives of all there. One morning while the Acharya was engaged in the exposition of the scriptures to his disciples, he suddenly realized that his mother was remembering him on her death-bed. He stopped the lesson and went into meditation. Later, he addressed his disciples thus, " My mother is thinking of me on her death-bed. I have promised her that at the moment of her death I shall be present at her feet. I have to go to my mother without any delay".

Immediately after saying this, the Acharya exercised his Yogic powers and reached his mother in Kerala in the flash of a second. Acharya's mother was on her death-bed. An old woman attendant was sitting near her. It was then that the Acharya reached there and bowed down at his mother's feet. To meet her son after such a long time so

unexpectedly, Aryamba was overcome with emotion. She caressed her dear boy in a hundred ways. She forgot all her pain at the sight of her darling son. However the Acharya was filled with sadness when he found his mother so afflicted with old age and illness. He said, " Dear mother, I have come to nurse you and to attend on you. Forget your grief and be well again. Tell me what your trouble is and I shall nurse you back to health through proper medicine and diet".

Aryamba said, " My dear, I am very pleased to see you in good health. I am decrepit and old. My only solace will be death in your arms. Our relatives have treated me very cruelly. If this old woman attendant had not been there, I would have died much earlier. After my death see that she does not suffer. That will give me solace and satisfaction. Now please go and have bath and take your meal".

When the Acharya returned after having his bath and meal as directed by his mother, Aryamba said, " Darling, now do arrange for my Last Journey. I had lived on all this time in the only hope of seeing you. Now I have met you again. I have no other desire except that you arrange for my salvation".

The Acharya realized that the moment of his mother's death was very near. He began to speak to her of the nature of ultimate reality and said, " Mother, you will attain salvation even as you know the nature of the Supreme Brahman".

Listening to the Acharya's discourse for some time, Aryamba said, " My dear, I am a simple woman. How I can grasp the nature of Brahman without attributes, the reality that is beyond thought and speech? My dear, please show me some beautiful manifestation of the Divinity as in an image that brings joy to the heart".

Learning of his mother's desire the Acharya remained silent for a while. Then he said, " Mother shut your eyes and concentrate your mind on God. This will enable you to be blessed with a vision of lord Shiva, the Lord of the Lords". With a view to his mother's satisfaction, he began to say a hymn in the Bhujanga Prayata metre to lord Shiva in his eight forms. Pleased at the Acharya's hymn, Mahadeva sent his messengers to bring Aryamba to Shiva Loka. But Aryamba was frightened at the sight of the terrible-looking messengers of Shiva, who were adorned with snake and tridents. She said, " Darling, how terrible they look! I will not go with them".

Acharya then sent the messengers of Shiva away with great humility. Thereafter he meditated on Narayana and sang now a hymn of Vishnu, the Lord of Lakshmi. Meanwhile many villagers had collected there to witness that supernatural phenomenon. Pleased at the superb hymn and the Acharya's devotion, Lord Narayana, holding the conch, discus, mace and lotus in his hands, appeared before Aryamba, radiating divine light in all directions. Joyous at this vision of her beloved deity, Aryamba blessed her son profusely. By then, the messengers of Sri Vishnu had also appeared there in a beautiful flying chariot. It was as if Aryamba's house had been transformed into Vaikuntha. Thereupon the messengers of the Lord took her up on the flying chariot. The chariot, in the course of its flight, passed through the regions of the wind, sun, moon, lightning, Varuna, Indra and the effulgent worlds like Archis and Ahas, inhabited by Gods including

Brahma and finally reached Vishnu Loka. Aryamba thus reached the lotus feet of the Lord.

The Acharya considered himself blessed at being able to be present near her in her last moment and provide for her salvation by making possible, the vision of her cherished God. He knew that his mother, like all mothers, was apart of the mother of the Universe, the Supreme Parashakti. His devotion to the mother had arisen from the Himalayan peaks of Brahman consciousness and had mingled with the holy waters of Bhakti. With a heart full of satisfaction, he remembered the last instructions of his mother and prepared for her funeral rites. By then all his relatives had assembled there. Addressing them, the Acharya said, " It was my mother's desire that I should perform her funeral rites. Even though these are not proper for a monk, my supreme duty is carrying out the instruction of my mother. So please arrange for it".

Hearing the Acharya's words, his relatives became greatly excited and called him a cheat, a hypocrite and an avaricious person. They said, " You, being a monk, have no right to perform the funeral rites of your mother. We will never allow you to act thus against the scriptures and come into possession of the property".

Even as the Acharya adopted the tone of greater and greater humility, his relatives became more and more agitated and rude. They abused him in foul language. The Acharya put up with all this silently and told them, " I have decided in accordance with my mother's wishes to give away all the property to this old woman who took great care of my mother in her last days". Hearing this, the Acharya's greedy relatives left the place in violent anger. They banned anyone from helping the Acharya in performing the funeral rites. The Acharya gathered some firewood with the help of the old woman and had a funeral pyre prepared in the garden yard of the house where Aryamba had lived. He carried with great difficulty his mother's body there and made a fire by his yogic powers. His relatives did not help him in cremation in any way, not even by giving a little fire to light the pyre.

It is said by some biographers that the Acharya cursed the class of relatives who had been cruel to his mother and later refused to allow him to perform her funeral rites. They have, since then come to be known as people belonging to the Patana Shaakha or the fallen branch. It can be seen to this day that the people belonging to this class have made no progress at all. Most of them turn out to be dumb in their studies and as a result have had to make a living out of odd jobs, not quite fit for the Brahmin community. They live in poverty and ignorance. It is also believed that the Acharya, on hearing their cries for forgiveness, blessed them with knowledge and progress after a period of three hundred years.

In the earlier part of the last century, the great Yogi, believed to be the very incarnation of the Acharya, his holiness Sri Shivabhinava Nrisimha Bharati Mahaswamikal of Sri Sringeri Sarada Peetham recognized the exact spot of Aryamba's funeral and also the house in which the Acharya spent his childhood days. Kaladi, the birth place of the great Acharya was in total neglect then. The great Yogi of Sringeri, re-established the glory of this holy place and built

temples of Sri Adi Shankara and Sri Sarada. He also established a Veda Pathashala and a Shankara math. The Sanskrit college in Kaladi is considered to be the best of its kind in south India. My revered Guru, Sri K.P. Shankara Shastry was the principal of this college for a long time. Now, Kaladi is one of the largest pilgrim attractions in Kerala.

In course of time, the local king Rajashekhara heard about the Acharya's arrival in Kerala. At the same time, he also learnt from his officials of the cruel treatment to which the Acharya was subjected by his relatives. Rajashekhara had met and known the Acharya long ago. Then the Acharya was only eight years of age. He had realized that the boy was indeed an uncommon genius. Later the stories of the Acharya's writing of the commentaries on the sutras, of his triumphal career and the establishment of the monastery at Sringeri had reached even distant Kerala. Hearing all this, the king had come to develop great respect for the Acharya. Coming to know of the arrival of the great teacher admired by the world at Kaladi and also learning that he was in great trouble because of ill-treatment by his kinsmen, the king came to see the Acharya with all his ministers. At the very sight of the serene figure of the monk whose aspect radiated tranquility, profundity and contentment, the king was filled with devotion and admiration. He considered himself blessed and fortunate.

After an exchange of proper greetings and courtesies, the king himself wanted to hear everything about the conduct of the Acharya's relatives. With great restraint and humility, the Acharya gave him an exact account of his mother's last wish and of the cruel attitude of his relatives. He then said, " O king, it is after all the way of this world which is full of illusion. I am not in the least sorry for this. It was my mother's last desire that the old woman attendant should receive all her property. You please arrange for this".

Hearing what the Acharya had to say, the king heaved a long sigh in sorrow and disappointment at the conduct of the relatives of the Acharya. He said, " O great sir, I am meting out punishment to your relatives for their inhuman conduct towards you. Brahmins cannot be given sentences of death, I cannot punish them physically but I will banish them from the kingdom".

Even as they heard the royal orders, the relatives of the Acharya realized the great danger that were in for. Finding no other way, they apologized in a body, to the Acharya. Seeing them repentant, he said, " Well, I have not felt the slightest pain at your cruel behavior towards me. Your offence is against the religion, in the court of the holy Lord. May he forgive you".

Witnessing such forgiveness, kindness and generosity of the Acharya, all there praised him. Thereupon the king made all arrangements for the Acharya's residence there and with deep respect took leave. Many people flocked to the village of Kaladi to see him and benefit from his instructions.

ACHARYA AS A SOCIAL REFORMER .....

Witnessing the sad deterioration of social life over the whole of

Kerala, king Rajashekhara had been giving his thought since long on social reform. But considering the influence and the predominance of the some bigoted Brahmins he had not ventured to undertake his task. The arrival of the Acharya appeared to him to provide the proper opportunity for this. He decided to institute social reform under the Acharya's instructions and guidance. Resolving thus, the king soon came t the Acharya.

Learning the king's desire, the Acharya said with bowed head, " Well, this is a noble task indeed. I shall do all that lies within my powers. Tell me clearly what you want to do".

Getting encouragement from the Acharya, the king said with humility, " Sir, it is impertinence to talk with you on this matter. But I have a feeling that if you write a treatise giving directions on social reform, I could take steps to follow them. You are well aware of the state of society in Kerala. So please act to realize public good".

Agreeing to the king's suggestion, the Acharya said, " Very well, I shall draft a brief code. You should all discuss its good and bad points and then institute it. This will be conducive to the country's welfare".

A scribe was appointed. The Acharya dictated the articles of the code and the scribe wrote them down. Thus, a small code-book incorporating sixty-four edicts came to be written within a short time. The king was very happy and read it with complete attention. The book was given the title, Shankara Smriti, the code of Shankara.

Full of hope and enterprise, the king convened a big meeting to which the Brahmins, who were the leaders of various groups were invited. The object of the meeting was to discuss the merits and demerits of the code. Many Nambudari Brahmin scholars were also present at the meeting. At the special request of the king, the Acharya also attended the meeting. After the edicts enunciated in the code were read out, the Brahmins present there unanimously declared that the principals put forth by the Acharya were all against the scriptures and were pernicious for society. Then the Acharya challenged them all to a debate. A furious debate with a lot of shouting ensued. The scholars gradually were silenced by the super-human scholarship and divine brilliance of the Acharya. But they refused to admit defeat.

The Brahmins after mutual consultation, took recourse to a novel and crafty design to have their way. At two places in Kerala, separated by nearly fifty miles, the Brahmins arranged for two meetings on the same day and at the same time. The delegates at both the meetings separately informed the king that they were challenging the Acharya to debate, if he could defeat them in debate, they would accept his code. The king tried in vain to have the meetings held on different dates, but neither side agreed to change the date or the time of the meeting.

The king felt himself in deep trouble. In this helplessness, he informed the Acharya pf all this. The Acharya was sitting then in Baddha Padmasana, closed lotus posture. Hearing everything, he slowly went into a deep trance. On his face there shone an indescribable

divine radiance. That meditative aspect of the Acharya impressed the minds of present there with a divine consciousness. Awakening from the trance, the Acharya said in a solemn voice, " The Brahmins want to test my credibility. Let the meetings be arranged to their wishes. I shall be present in both the meetings and participate in the debates".

The king was astonished to hear this declaration apparently impossible of realization, from the Acharya. He could not understand anything of this. The king of course had heard of the Acharya's supernatural powers. But he could not see how it would be possible for him to be present at both meetings at the same time.

On the appointed day, at a meeting held under the chairmanship of the king, the Acharya silenced all the Brahmins by giving proper replies to the hundreds of questions raised by them. It was clearly established before all that the code formulated by him was in conformity with the scriptures including the Vedas and Puranas. The Brahmins were astonished at the numerous quotations from the scriptures cited by the Acharya who was so learned in the four Vedas, the Vedangas and all the philosophical works and who could easily retain in memory whatever he had once heard or read, correctly reproducing it ever afterwards. They were compelled to admit defeat, but they still hoped that the deliberation of the other meeting would be favorable to them. For the Acharya was after all engaged in debate with them and had no chance of being present at the other meeting.

But meanwhile an unimaginable development upset all the plans of the Brahmins. Acharya Shankara multiplied himself by his divine powers and at the appointed hour was present at the other meeting also. Answering all the queries of the scholars and clarifying all doubts, he silenced him. But the Brahmins were unable to give answers to the questions raised by him and hanging their heads down in shame, admitted defeat. They too cherished the hope that the Acharya would certainly be defeated at the other meeting.

But when the results of both the meetings came to be known, all were surprised. Bowing down before the young monk o such supernatural powers, the Brahmins became the chief instrument for instituting the principles laid down in the code of Acharya in society. Man's puny strength is everywhere humble by divine laws.

The holy life of the Acharya had greatly influenced the life of king Rajashekhara. He was a deeply admiring follower of the Acharya. One day when the king had come to visit the Acharya and many religious topics were being discussed, the Acharya said to the king, " Dear, how are your literary works progressing these days? Have you written any new books?"

Questioned thus by the Acharya, the king sighed and said, " No indeed sir, I have given it all up now. It is a sad story. I cannot get over it eve today. The three plays that I read out to you long ago, have been destroyed by fire as if by way of a curse of God. I have been so mortified by this that I do not feel like writing any new plays".

The Acharya realized the depth of the king's feelings on the matter. Deeply symphatising with him for this loss, he said, " I can well understand what you have felt. A book is as dear to its author as his

own child. Children are born out of one's body while books are created by the mind. You had read out the plays to me. I had liked them so much that I still remember all that the three books contain from beginning to end. If you so desire, you may have them written down and thus recover the texts".

Astonished at the Acharya's words, the king said, " O the great Guru, verily of the form of Narayana, please do this favor on me and I shall be ever grateful to you". Scribes were appointed by the king who took down the Acharya's dictation. Thus in a few days, the Acharya dictated from his memory, the contents of the three plays that he had heard from the king long ago and only once. Reading the books, the king found that the Acharya had dictated the very words that he had written. He bowed down at the Acharya's feet again and again. The people of Kerala were charmed to learn of the Acharya's feat of memory.

The Acharya now wanted to return to Sringeri but the king would not let him go. He humbly and repeatedly requested the Acharya to reform the religion prevailing in the country. Seeing such importunate eagerness on the part of the king, and also considering the deterioration of religion in the country, the Acharya agreed. Accordingly, he had a swift courier dispatched to Sringeri to his disciples with the message that they should come to Kerala.

=====

==

A FEW WORDS TO THE IGNORANT.....

A glorious chapter in the Acharya's inspiring unfolded now. From now on, for sixteen long years, he would be seen in the role of an ideal Leader of Lokasangraha. It is true that his many accomplishments like reading up the four Vedas and all philosophical systems and all scriptures by the eighth year of his life, attaining perfection in Yoga and experience of all branches of learning in the twelfth year, writing commentaries on many works including the Brahma sutras before he was sixteen are all evidences of his untiring capacity for work. Yet his inexhaustible energy in the last phase of his life surprises us.

In fact, abstention from all activity by remaining without work and without maintaining the sacred fire is not real Sanyasa. On the contrary, true renunciation consists in doing work for the good of the people in order to please God, indifferent to the consequences of work either here or hereafter, without attachment to or dependence on the fruits of the work performed, without coveting the merits of one's actions. He who undertakes such work for the good of the world is in fact the true Sanyasin. The Acharya had spent every moment of his life in strict performance of his duty in the mission of bringing about the welfare of all creatures. According to the Acharya, before the attainment of the ultimate knowledge, karma yoga consists in the performance of all works prescribed by the scriptures without attachment to the results of work and surrendering all merits of the work performed to God. It is improper to give up activity before the attainment of knowledge. This is harmful for existence both here and hereafter.

Acharya had attained perfection in yoga. He had also attained the

full knowledge of Brahman. The joy of constant communion in yoga with the supreme all-pervading being would have been his, only if he had wanted it. Everyday, in an exalted state of Samadhi he would experience the awareness of Aham Brahmasmi and would feel in himself the nature of Shiva, the supreme Lord without form and attributes, without bondage and without deliverance, full of the bliss of consciousness. His devotion to and the self-sacrifice in the mission of the welfare of all creatures in spite of this experience of communion with the Ultimate Reality lights up a radiant world before us. The picture of that shining young monk, his head shaven, stick and kamandala in hand, brings to our minds a divine inspiration and fills hundreds of hearts with religious feeling. Slowly and calmly, he trudged over the whole of India, including Kashmir and even Nepal and many other places outside India of today, and had the temples repaired and rites of worship instituted. He held debates with those of views opposed to truth and explained the meaning of scriptures. He thus brought the solace and protection of Sanatana Vedic dharma to seekers and turned those who strayed from the right path back to morality and religion.

If we but once ponder over the enormous labors involved in all these activities, we are bound to be astonished. The religions that have been propagated in the world so far have mainly spread through the patronage of the government in power. It is only in the case of the propagation of the Vedic religion that we find an exception. The Acharya proceeded alone holding aloft the banner of Vedic dharma fortified by divine strength, inspired by the strength of his own universal self. Bugles did not sound behind him, soldiers did not march nor did he run overnight from a place to escape from opposition (Ramanuja did just that). There were only the solemn and holy verses of the Vedas, the chanting of mantras and singing of prayers to Gods and Goddesses.

It was not an easy career of conquest that the Acharya had undertaken. Many a time his life was in danger. But he accepted everything, faced all dangers. No situation could weaken the peace and equilibrium of his soul. In all circumstances he was ever the same, unshakable and unaffected. This practical aspect of the Acharya's nature appears to be particularly fascinating and we are filled with respect to observe how in all his work and endeavor he remained self-contained. His was indeed a noble existence, a truly great life. He was not only for India but for the entire world.

Even though some ignorant dualists, especially the Gaudiyas call the great Acharya, a Mayavadi, in reality he preached the doctrine of Advaita Brahman which is the only way to escape from Maya. A certain foolish group feels no compunction in holding the Acharya responsible for the present laziness and inertial in the national life of India. If everything is due to Maya, of what avail is individual initiative in this state of illusion? This misinterpreted though is what is behind the reluctance to undertake activity. Acharya's entire life was a living commentary to the doctrine that he preached. We are not prepared to agree with fools who hold this untiring leader responsible for the inaction of Hindus. All we have from his life is the ideal of great work and inspiration for it. His life of activity inspires a sense of duty in our hearts. Now, the Madhwas have a limited following in the south especially in coastal Karnataka, the

followers of Ramanuja in Tamilnadu and the Gaudiyas and others in parts of Bengal. It is indeed the light of Advaita that has spread across the length and breadth of the country. Now these sectarian philosophies, with no bearing to universality can never even hope to approach the place of importance that Advaita Vedanta holds in the altar of the world's spirituality.

SHANKARA DIGVIJAYA .....

Soon, many disciples arrived at Kerala from Sringeri and respectfully presented themselves before the Acharya. Meanwhile, learning of the talking tour of the great Acharya, many householder disciples of the Acharya also assembled there to partake of his holy company. Thereafter, on an auspicious occasion, accompanied by his disciples and devotees and also by king Rajashekhara, the Acharya started on the holy mission of establishment of true religion. First of all, the Acharya traveled through many parts of Kerala, having temples repaired there and spreading the Vedanta system of philosophy through exposition of the scriptures.

The Acharya with his disciples had come to Mahasura, a place of pilgrimage in Kerala. Performing his worship and saying his hymns at the temple there, he was giving discourses when Padmapada and his friends arrived there. Seeing him, the Acharya was greatly delighted and greeted him cordially. As Padmapada bowed down at his Guru's feet, the Acharya placed his hand on the disciple's head and said, "Dear son, are you well?"

All the suppressed feelings in Padmapada's heart now came out, overflowing his eyes with tears, Padmapada wept like a little child. The Acharya holding his hands, made him sit up and asked him why he was weeping. Padmapada told him of all that had happened after he had left Sringeri. He also said that the destruction in fire of Vijayadindima at his uncle's place caused him the greatest pain. He also spoke of the incident of poison being administered to him. When Padmapada had calmed down somewhat, the ever kind Acharya said in a sweet voice, words of wisdom comforting his disciple, "Dear child, do not indulge in futile grief. No one can escape the bitter consequences of past karmas. It is much better to bear patiently the pain that cannot be cured. There is nothing to grieve over the destruction of the book. Apart from the supreme Brahman every thin else is transient. You had read out to me the explanatory notes on the first four sutras. I still remember them fully. I will dictate from my memory and you may take it down. I bless you that the notes on these four sutras alone will make you immortal. Do not grieve".

Thereupon, the Acharya caressed his disciple affectionately like a small child. In that affectionate motherly caress of the ar, Padmapada's mind was refreshed. He became calm. After he had written the notes on the four sutras from the Acharya's dictation, Padmapada's mind was filled with an indescribable serenity and with that the desire to write more books vanished from his heart for ever. From that time on, due to the influence of the holy company of his revered Guru, Padmapada's confusion of mind and exhaustion of body were completely removed and he was purified in spirit and in body

like the sky after the clouds have gone. Padmapada's brother-disciples were also very happy to see Padmapada return to normalcy.

In this triumphal career more than a thousand disciples and Brahmin scholars had accompanied the Acharya.

A majority of the disciples, both monks and householders, of the Acharya consisted of Brahmins and he specially endeavored to make the Brahmins devoted to the duties allotted to them. For this reason, many who belong to castes other than Brahmins, blame him, calling him illiberal and partial. According to them, he showed special favors to the Brahmins.

In one place of his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, the Acharya writes, " Vedic religion is protected if Brahmin-hood is protected". From this we learn the extent of his goodwill for the efforts directed towards the Brahminism. The fact that the Brahmins have helped immensely the work of protecting religion as the upholders and preachers of it, has to be admitted by all.

The Acharya however, opened the gates of the attainment of religion for all by instituting the worship of the five Gods viz. Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva and Durga and the performance of five supreme sacraments - the worship of Gods, all progenitors, mankind, every being in the creation and the Vedas, as the foundation of the Vedic dharma and had given rights to everyone according to worth in performance of religious duties. In his commentaries, he further observes, " It is true that the Sudras cannot perform sacrifices but there is no scriptural ban on the right of a Sudra to attain the knowledge of the Brahman". Speaking of Vidura, the son of a maid-servant, referred to in the Mahabharata, the Acharya says, " It is not possible to prevent the attainment of knowledge by persons like Vidura who attained the knowledge Supreme through tendencies transmitted from past birth". According to the Acharya, " The attainment of the knowledge of the Supreme Brahman is founded on the Vedas. There is a notion prevalent in the society that women and sudras are entitled to read the Vedas". As to the right of women to attain the knowledge of Brahman, there are the shining examples of Gargi, Maitreyi and Sulabha. The question naturally arises-since which period women have been deprived of the right to read the Vedas. No one can doubt the knowledge of the Vedas and the of Brahman of Ubhayabharati.

On the rights of women and Sudras to read the Vedas, many books have been written and there have been many controversies and much dispute. One may look for the solution in the Sruti itself. In the Aitareya Brahmana, Vedic sages like Bhrigu and Angirasa are found to confer the right to perform sacrifices on the Sudra sage, Ailusha. So we have evidence in the Vedas itself of the fact that in special cases a qualified Sudra would not be deprived of the right to perform sacrifices.

Besides, it is also seen that Sudra sage Kavasha is the seer of several invocations in the Rig Veda Samhita. In Samvarga Vidya, the king Janashruti who was desirous of attaining the knowledge of Brahman by listening to Vedic discourses, is described as a Sudra. Jabala Satyakama, the son of Jabala, a maid-servant who had served

many a master, was accepted because of his devotion to truth, as a Brahmachari by Haridrumata Gautama who had his Upanayana performed. He was given the right to study the Vedas.

No one can doubt the knowledge of Brahman of Narada who was also a son of a maid-servant. The truth is that whatever the caste in which a man of good deeds and of auspicious tendencies transmitted through previous births happens to be born, no one can deprive him from attaining ultimate knowledge. The Acharya did not attack existing beliefs and the great inspiration for religion and for the attainment of ultimate knowledge that he left behind in his life and works, has been transmitted to all levels of society and has urged all people to live religious lives.

Reading the Vedas and attaining the knowledge of Brahman are not always the same. The Acharya says, " It is Anagnitwa, the deprivation of the right to maintain the sacrificial fire that makes the Sudras deprived of the right to perform Vedic ceremonies. But this cannot be the factor depriving one from attaining the knowledge of Brahman. For even a Sudra can have requisites or the desire to attain knowledge of Brahman and also the intellectual capacity to attain knowledge of self".

Sudhanwa, the king of Karnataka and Ujjain had also become the Acharya's disciple. He and the king of Kerala also accompanied the Acharya. The pilgrims were going in a procession with flags and banners and with ceremonial musical instruments like the conch, the bell, the damaru and the mridanga. As they were walking, the disciples were chanting verses from the Vedas in a chorus. The solemn notes of Aum resounded everywhere. To meet this party of pilgrims, villagers in groups in many places on the way waited in deep devotion with articles of worship in their hands, giving a ceremonial welcome with burning incense. The villagers considered themselves blessed by worshipping the Acharya and him welcoming with lights. It was an inspiring sight. The central figure of that procession was indeed the Godly Acharya. The youthful monk, with his eyes half-closed in meditation, was walking slowly. Raising his hand in Abhaya Mudra, a gesture of benediction, he was showering blessings on all. All were captivated to hear his discourses and his exposition of the scriptures.

Within a few days, the Acharya reached Madhyarjuna, the famous Shaiva pilgrimage center. The Acharya was very happy to see the deity and worship him. Most scholars at that place were believers of mere rituals, as prescribed by the karma kanda. After the evening prayers, a big meeting was arranged on the temple courtyard. Hearing the Acharya's flawless and rational exposition of the theory of Advaita and the self, most decided to accept the Acharya as their Guru. This greatly perturbed the scholars of that place who followed the karma kanda.

Next day also, the Acharya seated in Siddhasana, making the Tatva Mudra in his hands, began to give discourses to the assembled people. All of them were listening to him in silence when one Brahmin from among the scholars stood up and said, " O revered sir, Our Madhyarjuna Shiva is a deity ever-awake to our prayers. We worship and adore him. If we hear an express instruction from that Supreme

Lord to the effect that the Advaita is correct, we shall all then accept it".

There was complete silence in the meeting. The Acharya went into a deep trance. His face expressed the calm of joyous communion with the Self. Awaking from meditation, the Acharya left his seat and went to the temple-door and knelt down in prayer, saying, " O Lord of Madhyarjuna, you indeed are the essence of all Upanishads. It is your glory that is proclaimed in the Vedas. You are the Lord of all Gods, you are All-knowing. Please reveal before all the truth that Advaita which is the main point of the Vedas is true and thus remove the doubts of all".

Even as the Acharya's prayers were over, a miraculous incident astonished everyone. The inside of the temple was bathed in a divine light and with it there was a voice from the heavens, deep and grave as the running clouds, saying, " Advaita is true, Advaita is True, Advaita is True".

That sudden and unthinkable development overwhelmed all, taking their very senses away. At this demonstration of the Acharya's supernatural powers, all were astounded and speechless with wonder, and rendered absolutely immobile. Everyone fully realized that the Lord of Madhyarjuna was ever-awake. Under the Acharya's influence the truth was revealed that the image that the local Brahmins were worshipping for so long with devotion was not a mere image. It was in fact a symbol of the Supreme Consciousness ever-awake. He listened to prayers and responded to the cries of the soul. The deep inner meaning of image-worship was revealed through the Acharya.

All scholars bowed down at the feet of the Acharya and accepted the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta as the ultimate truth. At the pressing desire of all, the Acharya stayed on at Madhyarjuna for a few more days and performed worship at the shrine there and filled the hearts of everyone with his religious discourses. Then the holy Acharya left for Rameshwaram.

Arriving at the holy place of Tulaja Bhavani on the way, the Acharya reformed the different ceremonies of worship of Bhavani, Lakshmi and Saraswati by explaining the true nature of religion to these creeds.

At Tulaja Bhavani, there lived many Shakta followers of Vamachara. Many of them indulged in practices like Narabali and Yoni Puja. These so called Shaktas indulged in the name of religion, in meat, wine and women and had thus considerably sullied the moral life of society. As a result of their diabolical rituals, people were misled to indulge in many evil practices. The Acharya knew this and therefore decided upon reforming these Vamachara tantrics.

One day during his stay at Tulaja Bhavani, some Vamacharis came to the Acharya and began to abuse him as a hypocritical ascetic. Explaining their own view they said, " The primal source of the world is Shakti and it is her that we worship. There is no importance of your Advaita knowledge whatsoever. You too should follow this creed. This will bring you supreme good".

The Acharya listened to their arguments patiently. Then he said, "

There can be no deliverance through senseless rituals by which you claim to please Shakti. In the scriptures it is written that one should never take to meat and wine. By taking meat and wine, you have lowered yourselves. You have stayed away from the region of the Brahman. Do not call yourselves Shaktas any more. Try for deliverance from sins through atonement and by surrendering yourselves to the supreme Brahman".

The followers of Vamachara were filled with self-remorse at these words of the Acharya, full of substance and quite in accordance with the scriptures. The Acharya initiated them into Samayachara worship of the great Goddess and showed them the proper way to attain self-realization. His invaluable works like Prapanchasara Tantra, Tantravatakrama and the Saundaryalahari acted as guides to the path of liberation by way of worship of the supreme Parashakti , at the same time following the rules laid down in the Vedas.

Thereafter, the Acharya came to the holy Rameshwaram. In the Ramayana and the other scriptures it is written that Sri Rama had installed the Linga of Sri Ramanatheshwara and since then, the holy place had had great attraction for Hindus from all over India. It is one among the twelve Jyotirlingas. The Acharya too, on his arrival at the shrine ceremonially worshipped the holy Linga. Many pilgrims had assembled there to see him. Through ritual worship, exposition of scriptures and hymns sung to the glory of Mahadeva, the place took on the aspect of a great religious festival. The Acharya stayed with his disciples at that famous shrine for three months.

From holy Rameshwaram, the Acharya with his disciples arrived at Srirangam, visiting many holy places on the way. At that time, Vaishnavas belonging to the six communities of Bhakta, Bhagavata, Vaishnava, Pancharatra, Vaikhanasa and Karmahina lived there. There was great enthusiasm among them when they learnt that the Acharya had arrived there nearly with three thousand disciples. Arriving at the holy shrine of Srirangam, where Bhagavan Narayana lay in his eternal bed, the Acharya first of all visited the temple. Going through the rites of worship and singing hymns to the Lord in great devotion, the Acharya was in a divinely exalted mood. The immense devotion of the Acharya touched the hearts of all. Even those Vaishnavas who maintained at heart an attitude of enmity towards the Acharya, were captivated by his great devotion. During his stay there, the Acharya would spend long hours in the rites of worship.

In spite of this, Vaishnavas belonging to different sects engaged in debate with the Acharya in order to uphold their own narrow view points. One day the leader of a Vaishnava community said to the Acharya, " I have marked myself with the auspicious signs of Vishnu and with symbols like the conch and disc. I am a great Vaishnava. I shall therefore go to Vaikuntha. Why don't you mark yourself with those marks, instead of just smearing your body with useless ash? It is said in the scriptures, " Those who have the foreparts of their hands marked with the signs of conch and disc, their necks bedecked with garlands made of Tulasi and Lotus beads, and their forehead marked with the sign of Gopichandana called Urdhwapundra, are Vaishnavas". Hearing the words of the ignorant man, the Acharya said, " But is there any corroborative evidence of this in the Vedas? You see, in the Vedas it has been said that liberation is attained

only through the knowledge of the Brahman. Rigorous penance to destroy sin and worship of God for the purification of the heart, these are indeed the injunction of the Vedas. On the contrary, in the Brihannaradiya Purana, the burning of marks into one's body is expressly forbidden. So where is your claim of scriptural support? Just as a Sudra does not become a Brahmin by simply wearing the tuft of hair and the sacred thread, this is also a figment of imagination. A being attains the state of Shiva when his notion of distinctive existence is removed by the meditation on the truth. Therefore you too should worship the five Gods and thus purify your heart, perform the five sacramental rites and thus purge yourself of sin and by contemplating on the truth, attain the knowledge of the true self".

The five Gods are Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Ganesha and Durga. The re-introduction of the worship of the five Gods was a special contribution of the Acharya to the Sanatana Vedic dharma. It is usual practice to worship one of the Gods among the five as the chosen deity of the spiritual aspirant according to his own tastes, Samskaras and qualifications, the other four being worshipped as auxiliary deities. For example a Srividya Upasaka would worship Sri Devi Panchayatana with Mahatripurasundari as the main deity. Similarly one could also worship Shiva or Ganesha Panchayatana. One's cherished deity is the principal one to be adored, the others help the aspirant to this end. The cherished deity has to be worshipped as Saguna Brahman. It is this Brahman that is the efficient and constitutive cause of the universe. It is by His grace that the spiritual aspirant attains gradual emancipation. The other Gods are pleased by worship and remove the obstacles to the path of spiritual aspirant. It is the same Brahman looked at from the point of view of Maya that is called Saguna Brahman. That which is free from illusion is called Nirguna Brahman. This Nirguna Brahman is the substrate of illusion of the universe. The Brahman with attributes is the efficient cause of the universe and the Maya is the ultimate material cause of the world. it is because the same Brahman has the Saguna and Nirguna states that it is regarded as the undivided efficient cause of the universe.

The five great sacramental rites are :

1. Brahma Yagna - Reading and teaching the Vedas and scriptures.
2. Pitru Yagna - rituals for the progenitors or the ancestors.
3. Homa - lighting the sacrificial fire everyday and periodical special rites.
4. Bali - worship by giving food to animals and birds.
5. Nr Yagna - Attendance on the guest by way of giving food and other necessities of life.

By continuous practice of the five rites, one is freed from sin and has one's mind is purified. A person with mind thus purified can attain gradual emancipation by a vision of his cherished God through mental concentration gained in worship.

Worship of the five Gods and the performance of the five sacramental

rites have been made the basis of religion in the Acharya's Vedic dharma and it has grown on this foundation, making aspirants at each mental and spiritual level gradually worthy of salvation.

The Acharya's generous discourse full of meaning touched the heart of the Vaishnava leader. Showing great humility, he bowed at the Acharya's feet and said, " Lord, your instruction is sweet like the very nectar. From this day, I shall make every effort to carry out your instructions". As a result of the Vaishnava leader accepting the Acharya's creed, many of his community became disciples of the Acharya. Vaishnavas of other sects also gradually became the disciples of Acharya. Staying there nearly for a month, the Acharya reformed the Vaishnava society and by his discourses made people generally devoted to their respective religious duties.

The Acharya then visited with his disciples, places like Subrahmanyadesha and Subhaganapuram and in course of journey reached Kanchipuram. Everywhere, the Acharya untiringly gave religious discourses to the seekers of truth and created in the minds of all his listeners the desire to attain the ultimate reality. On the way, he also reformed different creeds of worshippers such as the Kartikeyas, Hiranyagarbha, the sun worshippers, worshippers of Mahaganapathy, Ucchishtaganapathy and Haridraganapathy etc. the Acharya knew very well that all are not worthy recipients of the Advaita truth. Thus, he would consider the aptitudes of people and in terms of it encourage them either to seek Advaita knowledge directly or to perform rites and ceremonies of worship of deities as steps leading to the Advaita view.

ESTABLISHING THE KAMAKOTI PEETHAM AT KANCHI .....

Learning that the Acharya had come with many disciples to his kingdom of Kanchipuram, the local Pallava ruler Nandi Varman received him and welcomed him. The local scholars also expressed their deep respect for the Acharya. Blessing the rulers, the Acharya made his abode in the Ekamra forest outside the town.

Kanchi has been the place of learning from time immemorial. It is regarded as one among the seven Mokshapuris, the cities of salvation. The scriptures praise it saying Nagareshu Kanchi. Also, it is believed that the city of Kanchi is in the form of a Srichakra, with the sanctum of Sri Kamakshi forming the bindu of the Srichakra. It is in this holy place that the great sage Agastya meets lord Vishnu in his Hayagriva avatar and obtains instructions from him on Srividya and also the great hymn of Lalita Sahasranama. Sri Kamakshi is said to be the Sthoola or the gross form of Mahatripurasundari. This is the only manifestation of the Devi as Mahatripurasundari Sri Rajarajeshwari on this earth. Kanchi is also known as the Oddiyana Peetham, the fourth and the most sacred of the four seats of the great Goddess Mahatripurasundari.

Tantrikas were predominant in Kanchi. When the Acharya went to Sri Kamakshi temple, he had the Darshan of the great Goddess in the Bila or a cave there. Since Sri Kamakshi was the essence of all Gods and Goddesses in the universe, her eyes shown with the brilliance of millions of Suns. Her eyes were so dazzling that none could look at the divine image. In order to make her manifest in her benign aspect,

the Acharya consecrated the Srichakra in front of Sri Kamakshi. The Acharya, who was an adept in mantra Shastra and agama Vidya, drew with own hands, the Srichakra on a Salagrama stone in front of Sri Kamakshi. The Acharya also had all the radiance of the Goddess concentrated in the Srichakra, so that the ordinary devotees could have a look at the divinely beautiful image of the Supreme mother of the Universe. Then, the Acharya also requested the king to have a temple constructed there. According to the Acharya's instructions, the rites of worship of the great Goddess were entrusted to highly orthodox Brahmin scholars who were capable of performing the extremely complex modes of worship of the Goddess.

The Acharya also marked off Kanchipuram in two parts as Vishnu Kanchi and Shiva Kanchi. The holy Lord had appeared as Shiva and Vishnu at the two places in order to fulfill the desires of the devotees. At Shiva Kanchi the great Lord Mahadeva manifested himself in his earth-image as a Sand Linga and was worshipped as Ekamreshwara. The glory of that place had spread far and wide. But the temple was ruined by ravages of time and the rites of worship had become a mere formality. It was for this reason that at the express desire of the Acharya, the repair work of the temple was begun and orthodox Brahmins were appointed to introduce proper ceremonies of worship in accordance with the scriptures.

Kanchi, apart from being the foremost of the Shakti Peethas, is also the Prithvi Linga Kshetra. The great Lord Mahadeva has manifested in his five elemental forms called the Pancha Mahabhoota Swaroopa. As earth Linga in Kanchipuram along with Sri Kamakshi, as water Linga in Jambukeshwaram - known as Jambukeshwara along with Goddess Akhilandeshwari, as fire Linga in Arunachalam - as Arunachaleshwara along with Abheetakuchamba, as air Linga in Kalahasti - as Sri Kalahastishwara along with Jnanaprasoonambika, as Akasha or space Linga in Chidambaram -as Nateshwara with Sri Shivakamasundari Devi.

The condition of Vishnu Kanchi had deteriorated even more. The Acharya was greatly distressed to see the poor state of the shrine and of worship there. Sri Varadaraja Vishnu had remained installed there from very ancient times. The Acharya took great pains to have the temple repaired and made so good an arrangement for the worship of Sri Varadaraja that there was praise for him everywhere.

The Acharya also established the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham in Kanchipuram for the propagation of Sanatana Vedic dharma and also Advaita Vedanta. The illustrious Acharyas of this great Peetham have continued to guide people in spiritual and social matters up to the present day.

Thereafter with his disciples the Acharya visited Tamraparni, Venkatachala and Vidarbha and arrived at Karnata - Ujjain. Sudhanva, the king of Karnata-Ujjain, had accompanied the Acharya from Kerala. At the pressing desire of the ruler, the Acharya had come to his kingdom to establish religion. The Acharya had already heard of the predominance of the Kapalikas there. Krakacha, the king of the Kapalikas lived in that region with his mighty army of Kapalikas. He also possessed many supernatural powers and attainments. In the name of religion, Krakacha indulged in many diabolical practices. The king was too afraid of Krakacha's powers and of his army to oppose him in

any way.

Learning that the Acharya was arriving with his disciples, Krakacha was bent upon lowering the Acharya's prestige and if need arose, even to kill the Acharya and his disciples. He accordingly kept his Kapalika soldiers in readiness. Immediately as the Acharya arrived, Krakacha, red-robed, his body covered with ashes from the crematorium, holding a human skull in one hand and a spear with scimitar in the other, appeared in a deadly form before the Acharya and insulted him in indecent language like a mad man. But the Acharya was unruffled and bore it all calmly.

King Sudhanva was greatly distressed at his Guru being subjected to such insult. He requested Krakacha to refrain from his insults. But it was of no avail. Thereupon the king ordered his followers to turn the miscreant out of that place at once. Deeply insulted at this royal order, Krakacha raised his sharp scimitar and thundered out, " If I do not cut your heads off, in vain do I then bear the name of Krakacha".

Krakacha left in anger and ordered his men to get ready for battle. Soon after this the disciples of the Acharya were greatly frightened to see that Krakacha's soldiers thundering forth with their war-drums and raising their sharp tridents, shouting wildly. Fearing that they were going to be killed, the devotees of the Acharya sought refuge at his feet. The Acharya however was unaffected. Finding the Kapalika soldiers advancing, Sudhanva ordered his soldiers to resist and putting on armor and taking up shield, bow and arrows, himself drove forward in his chariot.

The army of Krakacha could not withstand the speed and attack of the well-disciplined royal force and was scattered and made to flee leaving the dead and the wounded on the battle-field. Finding his men fleeing, Krakacha laid down his arms and approached the Acharya saying, " You wicked fool, look at my powers. You will soon face the consequences of your acts".

Holding the skull on his palms, Krakacha went into meditation. Soon the skull that he held in his hands was filled with wine. Drinking that wine, he invoked upon Samhara Bhairava, which is the most terrible aspect of Bhairava. In a second Samhara Bhairava appeared there, his terrible roar reverberating on all sides. Just as Krakacha fell on his knees and prayed to Samhara Bhairava to kill the Acharya, the roaring Bhairava was violently angry and said in a sharply rebuking tone, " You wretch, you have opposed me. Shankara is born of my powers. You have, by insulting him, actually insulted me. I am going to punish you for this and all your other faults". Even as he spoke these words, he cut off Krakacha's head. Seeing this, the Acharya bowed down to the great Bhairava and praised him in a hymn. Pleased with this beautiful hymn, Bhairava disappeared after blessing the Acharya affectionately. Realizing the greatness of the Acharya, the other Kapalikas sought refuge at his feet. The merciful Acharya forgave them and after rites of purification consisting of different forms of expiation, gave them instructions on the ultimate reality. Following the Acharya's instructions, the Kapalikas gave up their evil practices and engaged in Sandhya Vandana, worship of the five deities and the performance of the five sacred duties. With the death

of krakacha, the influence of the Kapalikas with their evil practices disappeared in that region and the Vedic dharma was re-established there.

After delivering the Kapalikas from sin, the Acharya went to different places in Karnataka like Mallapura, Marunghanagara and reformed the doctrines of Carvaka, Saugata, Kshapanaka, Jain, Buddhist, Kukkura-Sevaka (worshippers of Dog), Vishwaksena worshippers and the followers of Kamadeva (Cupid God of Erotic love). He then proceeded in the course of his travels towards Andhra Pradesh. Having journeyed through many places in Andhra, the Acharya spread the knowledge of Brahman and

Self. Thereafter, at the request of the people of the Kalinga country, he engaged himself in the reform of the people there, who had strayed into evil ways. Everywhere people were greatly impressed by the Acharya's personality and his liberal interpretation of the scriptures. In course of his travels. The Acharya arrived at the holy city of Puri. He went into the famous Jagannath temple there, only to find the altar there empty.

During oppression by Kalayavana, priests of the place had buried the casket containing the wooden image of Lord Jagannath on the banks of lake Chilka. During a period of Buddhist attacks that followed, it was further moved elsewhere. Later, through the support of some ruler, one lakh Salagrama stones were installed and on that very altar, rites of worship were instituted. The Acharya was filled with deep sorrow at the sight of the altar without the image of Narayana. He plunged into deep meditation and when he awoke, he said, " That relic casket is buried on the eastern banks of Lake Chilka on the northern side, under the largest banyan tree. If only that spot is dug up, the casket will be recovered".

Rapturous cries of triumph resounded everywhere. Taking the Acharya's words as the voice of the heaven, the royal officials dug up the indicated spot. Their joy knew no bounds when the casket was recovered. In great pomp and show, the casket was brought to Puri. There were joyous festivals at Puri. On an auspicious day, amidst choruses of praise and tumults of joy raised by countless men and women, the image of the Lord was installed in the shrine of Jagannath. The Acharya also established a math in Puri to propagate Vaidika Dharma. The Acharya and his disciples then happily proceeded towards the kingdom of Magadha.

The general impression of the ignorant is that the Acharya and his followers of Advaita do not accept Ishwara or God. This is completely baseless. In the life of the Acharya and in his writings, we find him to be a confirmed believer of God, dependent of him and seeker of his grace.

Ishwara is the material and efficient cause of the universe. He cannot be known by mere physical knowledge of the commentaries. He is Omniscient, All-powerful, Omnipresent Parameshwara, bestower of the fruits of karma, good or bad, and the giver of Moksha. Advaita Vedanta accepts both karma and grace. God is the bestower of grace and ordainer of karma. But grace depends upon God while karma is dependent upon one's past deeds in the earlier births.

The Acharya accepts God and Bhakti in the empirical level, whereas on the absolute level, where there is One alone, there is no possibility of dualistic Bhakti. When there is but One, where is the possibility for a spiritual aspirant to worship someone or something other than his own self? There is hence no possibility, at the Absolute level, of Bhakti that depends on the quality and distinction of the worshipper and the worshipped. There is no God apart from Self.

TRUTH OF VEDANTA SPREADS.....

Having traveled through many places including Magadhapura and Yamasthapura on the way to Magadha and pursuing his career of conquest in debate, the Acharya in the course of his travels now approached the holy city of Prayaga. The Buddhists were still influential in Magadha. But unable to face the great Acharya, they refused to come out. None dared challenge the Acharya in a debate. Everywhere common people would however gather to see the Shiva-like Acharya and to hear him interpreting the scriptures. Untiringly, he would satisfy the spiritual thirst of everybody. The Acharya had debated with many people of wrong views of whom the worshippers of Kubera, Indra and Yama may be mentioned in particular. Even though the worshippers belonging to these different views had been pursuing wrong paths and senseless superstitions, they would all regard themselves as believers and followers of the Vedas. The Acharya listened to their views patiently and reformed all of them.

At Yamasthapura lived many worshippers of Yama. Their arms were tattooed with the signs of the buffalo and hot iron marks. They were terrible to look at and were always fond of wild dancing. One day the leader of the worshippers of Yama came to the Acharya and said, " O great Acharya, we are the worshippers of Yama. The deity whom we adore is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the three worlds. He alone can deliver creatures from bondage. In the Vedas too it is said, Yamaya swaha. Thus he alone can take the fruits of sacrifice. Accordingly it is Yama who is the only supreme Brahman. It is he who created the Rudra and other glorious Avataras. It is in this Yama that the Vishnu has his origin. From his navel has arisen Brahma whose complexion is blood-red and it is this Brahma who is the creator of the eight Gods of the eight directions, of the planets and the Sun, of the motion and rest in the entire universe. It is this Yama who represents truth in his nature and is naturally pure and liberated. He is the primal cause of all matter. Through his mere worship, ignorance is removed. Thereafter, liberation in the state beyond the form of the White Yama is attained".

Calmly listening to these words, the Acharya said in a sweet voice, " You are talking against the truth. Remember Katha Upanishad, in it you will find that Yama is not Brahman. Again you will observe in Markandeya Purana that the great Lord Mahadeva, affectionately disposed towards his devotees, compelled Yama by force to give up his devotee Markandeya. Because he stayed awake on the holy night of Shivaratri, a devotee named Sundara was saved by the attendants of Shiva from the hands of Yama. Behold further that wearing these signs cannot lead to liberation. It is knowledge that is the cause of

liberation. You should accordingly abandon these outward signs and be devoted to the Advaita Brahman. You may continue to worship Yama as a personal God without any desire. This will help in the purification of your minds. Liberation can be possible only when one had attained the knowledge of Brahman by way of purification of the soul. There can be no liberation by mere ritualistic worship of Gods alone".

The worshipper was won over by the clear and rational instructions of the Acharya. He took refuge at the Acharya's feet and became attached to the rites of the five sacrifices and the worship of the five deities for the purification of the mind as means to attainment of the knowledge of the Brahman. Under the Acharya's directions, his disciples also performed purificatory rites and began to follow the true path of religion. Staying there nearly for a month, the Acharya directed the spiritual aspirations of the worshippers of Yama towards the attainment of supreme joy.

At Yamasthapura, the Acharya's stay was crowned with a success greater than expected. The unshakable influence of the Acharya's personality was felt by many people.

At the time of Acharya's advent, the religious life of the Hindus had become sullied and was full of diverse errors. As a result of the formidable onslaught of Buddhism, the ceremonial part of the Vedic religion was in a moribund state. People had lost respect for the Vedas. Like the Charvakas, they too said, 'The hypocrite, the cunning and those who are active at night- these are the authors of the Vedas'.

The Acharya had to engage in debate with eighty chief Hindu, Buddhist and Jain sects. Even leaving aside the Buddhists and Jains, we have to consider the fact that the Hindus had strayed from the true Vedic dharma and were now grouped into different narrow, dualistic doctrines. The main reason of this was the attack of the Buddhists. But the strange thing was that even all Hindus following their mistaken ways would consider their own theories infallible, in accordance with the Vedas and as the only means of attaining Moksha. As a result of the propaganda of the Buddhists, with royal support, spread over hundreds of years, common Hindu folk had come to doubt the existence and the eternity of the Vedas. Thus like branches dropping off from the main trunk, the different theories of Hinduism had torn themselves off from the life-source of the Vedas. Religious practice had become largely a matter of wearing of external marks, and senseless rituals. The divine Acharya established the authority of the Vedas and reformed all the creeds of Hinduism and thus made the people follow the Vedas.

The Acharya gradually approached Prayaga. Several years ago, directed by Bhagavan Vyasa, he had come to this holy place. It had not been possible then for him to stay at Prayaga or to be acquainted with the religious ideas of the people there. This time, he made the confluence of the three rivers, his abode. Performing the daily rites of pilgrimage, he used to give religious instruction to the people assembled there.

There was a great commotion everywhere at the auspicious coming of the Acharya. Three thousand people were following a young monk of

unostentatious life. Many of them were distinguished and learned Brahmins and scholars. It was indeed a Sight! It was, as if an ocean was on the move, an ocean into which different rivers poured.

Prayaga was not only the greatest of holy places from very ancient times, it was also a well established center of religion and culture. Pious Hindus of many different sects lived here to attain salvation. Among the followers of different doctrines here, the names of the worshippers of Vayu (wind), Varuna (Water), Bhumi (earth), Tirtha (pilgrim center), Manuloka (the world of Manu), Akasha (sky), Varaha, followers of the theories of Guna, of Paramanukarana (Atomic Causation) and the Sankhya theorists deserve special mention.

Hearing the news of the Acharya's arrival, scholars of different views engaged in debate with the Acharya in order to establish the superiority of their respective views. With infinite patience, the Acharya listened to their views and then convinced them by reason and by the authority of the scriptures of the imperfection of their views. He said that the worship of the Saguna Brahman should be taken to, without any desires. Only then would it lead to the purification of the mind. In the heart of the purified soul, there is the radiance of Advaita Brahman whose nature is ` Existence - Bliss- Knowledge ` and there is liberation resulting from this knowledge of identity of the Advaita Brahman and the self. Accordingly every spiritual practice is but a step to the attainment of Advaita knowledge.

One day, the leader of the Sankhya theorists greeted the great Acharya and respectfully said, " O noble Acharya, we are adherents of Prakriti or nature which is the ultimate cause of the universe. It is also the material cause of the universe. Smritis like the Manu Samhita support our theory. It is from Prakriti that the principles like the intellect have originated. Prakriti is the state of equilibrium of the Gunas. Even though without form, Prakriti assumes form. This world indeed the manifestation of Prakriti".

Hearing these words, the Acharya said, " What you say is against the Vedas. The Vedas do not regard Prakriti as the ultimate reality. It cannot be accepted as the cause of the universe too. The Saguna Brahman created the universe by cogitation. It is the Chaitanya Shakti or the supreme power of consciousness of the Ishwara alone that is capable of cogitation. Prakriti, without intelligence cannot of itself achieve this power of witnessing. I advise you to take to the devotion of the Supreme Brahman, through which alone liberation is possible".

Thereafter, the Acharya advanced many more irrefutable arguments and convinced the Sankhya theorists to follow the true Vedic path of Advaita Vedanta. Thus staying at Prayaga for nearly three months, he set up before all the Supra-personal origin of the Vedas and the greatness of the knowledge of identity of Advaita Brahman and the self. After establishing the glory of the Vedas and Advaita theory everywhere and reforming various creeds, the Acharya with his disciples left for Kashi, the abode of lord Vishwanatha.

Nearly twelve years before this, the Acharya had come to Kashi as a wandering monk. At that time he was not much known. Today he was Acharya Shankara, respected by all and revered in the entire country.

Surrounding by lakhs of disciples, he was touring India corner to corner on a mission of establishment of religion, as the greatest exponent and representative of Sanatana Vaidika dharma. Leaving Prayaga, the Acharya walked for seven days to reach the holy city of Kashi. Everywhere on the way crowds gathered to see that supremely serene monk. None returned empty-handed. He filled the hearts and souls of all with an ineffable joy by his charming exposition of the scriptures and by his divine radiance of love and integrity. His writings opened the eyes of many to the knowledge of the Advaita Brahman.

=====  
==

The written works of the Acharya bear witness to the high level of his scholarship and his poetic genius, never possible in a normal human being. He explained in his commentaries the philosophical treatise of the abstruse and difficult spiritual works represented by the three Prasthanas with such ease and simplicity as to fascinate every scholarly and wise reader. The language of the commentaries is elegant, sweet and mature. The style is pleasant and sweet at the same time. The Acharya has explained these difficult scriptures in a language so beautiful that the reader does not feel that he is discussing some complex and abstruse subject. He has refuted the conclusions reached in different theories with arguments so full of power and skill that none have been able to confront them. The Acharya has established the philosophy of Advaita with examples so fascinating that there is no room for doubt in accepting them. In this matter, we feel proud of the Acharya as the greatest among the philosophers, not of India alone but the entire world. incomparable also was the poetic genius of the Acharya. It is indeed rare to come across a combination of poetry and philosophy. His poems unquestionably are always rich in different, moods, contents and ideas, like an ever-moving current of joy, like mines full of bright treasures of meaning and rich sources of tender imagination. Through his poems, he has expressed very skillfully the theory of Advaita. In the poems of the Acharya there is a strange power that charms, there is an unparalleled quality that intoxicates one. Is there a reader whose heart will not echo the somber tones of hymns like Bhaja Govindam. The inner message of these hymns overwhelms one's soul and carries the mind away from the transient life and world full of sorrow to a super-sensual realm in quest of all-pervading joy.

In reading his incomparable hymn Saundaryalahari, who will not feel the Acharya's delightful play in a realm of noble imagination, the uniquely charming manner in which he expresses his thoughts and the ever-present tenderness of the words that he chooses?

" O Goddess, may the line that parts your hair on your head bring us good. It is, as if, the flowing outlet for the waves of beauty on your lotus-face and on that, the vermilion mark, tingled with red, stays like the red glow of morning sunlight". Such descriptions are indeed charming expressions of the tenderness of imagination. Later in the same hymn in what graceful tilting words he craves a merciful glance from the supreme Goddess, " O thou ever-auspicious Goddess, Grace my miserable self too, in spite of my being far removed from Thee (for lack of devotion), with the long-ranging and compassionate

look of Thy eyes, which defeat the slightly blooming blue water lily in beauty. By this my humble self shall feel blessed, while to Thee, it involves no loss. The rays of the moon fall alike, indeed, on a mansion and a wilderness".

Of the works that are prominently associated with the Acharya, twenty-two are commentaries, fifty-four consist of treatises and discourses and seventy-five are hymns.

Entering the city of Kashi, the Acharya first of all went to the temple of Vishwanatha. The shrine was full of pilgrims. The deity was being worshipped through diverse offerings. Some were reading hymns, a chorus of voices raising loud notes of praise to the deity. Some again sought the favors of the Lord by Gala Vadya, making `Bam Bam; sound in the mouth. Entering the temple full of overflowing emotion, the Acharya performed the worship of Sri Vishwanatha. He was immediately transported into a deep trance. That all-pervading and formless Being had assumed form in his heart as Existence, Bliss and Knowledge.

As soon as the news of the Acharya's arrival spread, many pilgrims assembled there in order to see the great monk. Having seen the Acharya, people felt they had actually seen Vishwanatha Shiva himself and all, considered themselves blessed and satisfied.

Having performed his worship of lord Vishwanatha, the Acharya stayed somewhere at Manikarnika. The arrangement for the stay of the disciples was made at different places on the banks of the holy Ganga.

Among the five holy spots of Kashi, Manikarnika is a famous sacred place, giving liberation to those who go there earnestly. According to the Puranas, the spring there was dug by Sri Vishnu himself with his Sudarshana Chakra. In the Kashi-khanda and other Puranas, it is written that Lord Vishnu practiced severe penance there, seeking the favors of Mahadeva. When Sri Mahadeva was shaking his head in appreciation of Vishnu's penance, his ear-ornaments, inlaid with gems, stones and snakes, dropped from his ears. This place where the ornaments of the Lord landed came to be called Manikarnika.

The present cremation Ghat at Manikarnika is not very old. It is the Harishchandra cremation Ghat on the banks of Ganga that is the original and the only famous cremation Ghat in Kashi. In 1760 A.D. the Hindu treasurer of a Nawab of Lucknow purchased a plot of land at Manikarnika and had his mother cremated there and it is since then that the place has become a cremation ground. The Manikarnika that is mentioned here is the holy place of Manikarnika and not the present cremation Ghat of Manikarnika.

The auspicious arrival of the Acharya at that time was a big event in the civic life of Kashi. Not much time was required to spread everywhere the news that Shankaracharya had arrived in Kashi with thousands of disciples. Soon hundreds of men and women began to assemble everyday at Manikarnika Ghat in order to visit him. there was no dearth of ascetics, aspirants, monks, scholars and Brahmins in Kashi. All sought the true religion of the Acharya. Aspirants of diverse views would strengthen the spiritual current of Kashi by their religious practices and penance. Among them were the Shaivas,

Shaktas, Vaishnavas, followers of the doctrine of karma kanda, worshippers of moon, worshippers of mars, Ananta, Siddha Gandharva, Vetala, Vamacharis, Worshippers of Hirantagarbha, sun, Ganesha in his various forms, Raja yogis, HathaYogis, dualists, followers of Charvaka theory and adherents of many other doctrines.

Gradually scholars expounding different theories challenged the Acharya to debate in order to establish their respective views. The Acharya had debate with the exponents of all the views and in course of the debates he refuted all these theories and established the supremacy of Advaita.

One day, several Mimamsakas who followed the doctrine of karma approached the Acharya and humbly said, " O great Acharya, we are the followers of the doctrine of karma. The creation, preservation and destruction of the universe are brought about by karma alone. Through good work, results are attained and from evil deeds, evil consequences emerge. If one performs good deeds, one is born as a Brahmin. If, on the other hand, one commits sin, one is reborn as a Sudra in consequence. Great men like Janaka realized the ultimate truth only through work, accordingly it is the injunction of the scriptures that the seekers of liberation should engage in good deeds leading to it. No one can refrain from mental or physical work".

The Acharya said in a pleasant voice, " From the expression in the Sruti, ` Yasya Etat Karma ` , which means ` this universe is whose creation', it is clear that this world is the creation of the supreme Brahman or Ishwara. That self-existent, omniscient God whose nature is truth is the cause of this universe. Karma can never be the cause of the universe. All that is born of a cause, is in the nature of effect to a cause and therefore, is transient. Accordingly you should meditate on the eternal, immortal and immutable self. It is through this kind of meditation that you will realize supreme bliss and attain liberation.

Work is of two types, Sakama-that which is performed with desire of owing the result and Nishkama-that which is performed without desire. When good deeds are done without desire of getting the results, i.e. without attachment to their consequences, the mind is purified and with that pure mind it is possible to contemplate the Brahman and to attain the state of Samadhi".

Listening to the Acharya's significant discourse, the followers of the doctrine of Mimamsa realized their error and according to the Acharya's instructions endeavored to realize the truth of Parabrahman.

On an other occasion, the worshippers of Gandharva approached the Acharya and said respectfully," Master, we are the worshippers of the Gandharva named Vishwvasu. Through his grace, we are fortunate to have acquired the knowledge of Nada Vijnana, the knowledge of sound. Creatures can thus be liberated only by worship of Vishwvasu".

In reply, the Acharya said in a solemn voice, " The knowledge of Nada may indeed be acquired through the worship of Vishwvasu. But one cannot attain liberation this way. In the Vedas, the supreme Brahman is described as being soundless, touch less , colorless, undiminishing etc. from this, it is clear that Brahman is beyond and

separate from sound. The aspirant who realizes the supreme Brahman who is beyond sound and form is the true knower of the Vedas and of the ultimate reality. You should worship that Brahman and thus be freed from the bondage of ignorance".

They were blessed to accept with heads lowered in submission, the advice of the Acharya. The chief scholars in Varanasi at that time including Bhasvarananda, Guptamishra, Vidyendu and others were all in turn defeated in argument by the Acharya. Thus during his stay of over three months in the city of Kashi, the Acharya made many adherent of erroneous views follow the Vedas and gave instructions on the nature of Brahman and self to countless men and women. The main disciples of the Acharya like Padmapada, Sureshwara, Hastamalaka also defeated in argument many adherents of erroneous views and made them devoted to the Vedas. The essential truth of Vedanta began to spread everywhere. The Self had been almost annihilated by the materialistic Charvakas and by Buddhists who believed in physical existence alone, regarding the body as the Self. By the Acharya's analytical powers, the tides of time turned and the roots of theism and superstition were destroyed. Many scholarly logicians failed in their determined efforts to refute the commentaries of the Acharya and like gold that becomes brighter by rubbing, cutting or heating, the commentary on the Brahma sutras emerged even more brilliant after being closely examined by those who challenged it. Thus the Acharya's exposition of Advaita Brahman was established in Varanasi and from Varanasi as the center, spread to be established in many distant places.

The Acharya was liberal in his approach. He would never ask anyone to give up his own views. By citation of scriptures and by his powers of argument, he would point out the errors in others' views point and by reforming it would make it consistent with the Vedas. He would also ask all to be devoted to the worship of Gods.

Within a short time there was a big transformation in the thinking of the spiritual aspirants and scholars in Varanasi which was at that time the main center of Hindu religion and culture. Scholars and philosophers engaged themselves with deep attention in the discussion of Vedanta. As a consequence of the commentaries and other works of the Acharya being copied and published in the form of books, scholars with great eagerness began to undertake a detailed study of all these works. Thus filling Varanasi in a flood of resurgent ideas, the Acharya, accompanied by his disciples, left for Saurashtra at the very earnest desire of the people of that place.

ASCENDING THE SARVAJNA - SARADA PEETHA .....

The great Acharya proceeded towards Saurashtra accompanied by a huge conquering army of devotees and disciples. At every place through which the monks passed, great crowds would collect to have a look at the Acharya and listen to his heavenly discourses. Many scholars and Brahmins also accompanied the Acharya. In order to institute the rites of worship of the five deities among the common people, the Acharya would some Brahmins behind in different places so that they

might teach the rites of worship to the people. Also in order to propagate Vedanta philosophy he has Sanskrit schools, tolas and Chatushpathis (institutes and universities of Sanskrit learning) set up under the patronage of highly learned Hindus and renowned scholars who accompanied him. Thus permanent provision was made for the propagation of the Vedanta philosophy and Vedic culture.

Wherever the Acharya rested in the evening, crowds of people would gather to see him. All would arrive to derive the benefits of having the Darshan of a God. After a walking tour spread over many days, the Acharya reached Ujjain, the capital of the kingdom of Avanti. At the news of the Acharya's arrival, the capital was bedecked with flags and banners and with the king in front, hundreds of distinguished men and women came out on the way to receive the Acharya and welcome him.

Here, the temple of Mahakala was famous. The Acharya, with his disciples, went first to pay his respects to the deity. He worshipped Mahadeva by composing a charming hymn in his glory. During the worship of the Lord, the solemn notes of drums and tambourines rang out and the whole place was filled with the fragrance of the Agaru scent and burning incense. At the news of the arrival of the Acharya a large crowd had already gathered. All were eager to have a glimpse of the great monk. His attitude of overwhelming devotion touched the hearts of everyone. Seeing the unostentatious mode of life of the noble Acharya, they were all the more curious. After the rites of worship were over, the Acharya came out of the temple and made his abode in the huge courtyard of the temple.

After accepting alms that were offered to him, the Acharya sent for his disciples Padmapada and said, " The famous scholar Bhaskara Pundit lives in this town. Go to him and informing him of my arrival here, tell him that I am challenging him to a debate".

Padmapada informed Bhaskara pundit of the Acharya's arrival and of his intention to meet the former in debate. Hearing this, the pundit also said that he too was eager to have a debate with the Acharya. Very soon the news that there was to be a debate between the Acharya and Bhaskara pundit spread in the town. Thousands of people gathered in the temple of Sri Mahakala. After a respectful exchange of greetings between the two, the debate began. The debate gradually led to sharp controversy and intricate arguments. Both were distinguished scholars and excellent orators versed in the skilful use of words. After a sharp discussion lasting for a long time, Bhaskara gave up his vain attempt of establishing his own views and began attacking the views of his opponent. He said, " In your view, it is the Prakriti or nature that creates distinction between the individual soul and the supreme Self. In reality however that is impossible. For whether existing in the supreme self or in the individual soul, Prakriti can never be the source of distinction. This is because the state of living creatures and that of the soul are both created after Prakriti".

The brilliant Acharya said, " If that is so, how can the mirror be the source of distinction between an object and its reflection? If the mirror can be the source of distinction between an object and its reflection whenever there is but an object, with the help of consciousness alone (face to be reflected), why should not Prakriti

be the source of distinction between the living creature and the supreme Self? "

The Acharya presented such powerful arguments in refutation of Bhaskara's view that gradually he began to lose his brilliance before those who were present in the meeting. Defending his point view, the Acharya attacked the Bhedabheda (distinction and identity) theory of Bhaskara sharply saying, " It is true that between the lumps of earth from which earthen vessels are made and the material of the earthen vessel there is a difference on account of their being two different things viz. finished earthen vessel and just a lump of earth. There is also identity because of the earth being common between them. But there cannot be distinction and identity at the same time within the SAME quality. Therefore it is highly improper to speak of Bhedabheda - distinction and identity at the same time". The Acharya established his view with the help of many other points. Unable to hold himself before the very embodiment of knowledge, Bhaskara was gradually forced into silence. The scholars present in the debate declared that the Acharya had won the debate. With lowered head, Bhaskara left the meeting.

In course of his travels, the Acharya passed through many places in Avanti, having temples repaired and the Vedic way set up. Scholars like Bana, Dandi etc were also defeated in debate and became the disciples of the Acharya. Many other scholars and followers of Buddhism and Jainism were also defeated by the Acharya who also had debates with scholars belonging to different sects like Vaishnava, Shakta, Shaiva, Pashupata and Saura. Thus the fame of Advaita spread everywhere.

After visiting Avanti, the Acharya arrived at Saurashtra (the ancient Kambhoja) and having visited the shrines of Girnar, Somnath and Prabhasa and explaining the superiority of Vedanta in all these places, he arrived at Dwaraka. All these places were holy and linked with the memories of Lord Krishna. Even though Jains, Buddhists and dualists were prominent in these places, hearing of the Acharya's supernatural scholarship, none of them dared face him in debate. Everywhere the victory of the Acharya and the glory of Advaita Vedanta were proclaimed.

The Acharya arrived at Dwaraka, traveling with his disciples along the coastal path from Prabhasa. Having bathed in the holy waters of river Gomati, he went to the temple of Dwarakadhisha Krishna. He was overcome with joy in the worship of Lord Krishna with a deep feeling of devotion. Many pious men and women lived in that holy city. He inspired all to pursue pure-hearted single-minded spiritual practice leading to the awareness of the identity between the individual Self and the supreme Brahman through desire-less performance of rites and forms of worship, as laid down in the Vedas.

Leaving the town of Dwaraka, the Acharya passed through the shrines of Kanaka, Gurjara and Pushkar and arrived at Sindh. Even before the Acharya's arrival in those places, the stories of his Himalayan achievements had reached. He was greatly honored everywhere. Followers of diverse views came to respect and follow Advaita after hearing the Acharya's lucid exposition of the Vedanta.

From Sindh, the Acharya went to many places of pilgrimage, villages, settlements and towns, preaching the Vedic dharma. He reached thus the country of Gandhara (which was situated between the modern Kabul and Peshawar). At Purushapura, (modern Peshawar), Buddhism was still cruelly dominant. In many monasteries, Buddhist monks lived in large numbers. They were however too doubtful of their own views and philosophy to face the incomparable brilliance and scholarship of the Acharya in a debate. This fact proclaimed the victory of the Vedic dharma everywhere. The Acharya fulfilled the desires of people who sought truth by asking them to follow the Vedic path.

At the cordial invitation of the people of Bahlika country (undivided Punjab), the Acharya proceeded to that region. It was a charming mountainous place. The climate was cool and very healthy. The scenic beauty was breathtaking. Learning that the Acharya had arrived there to propagate and establish Vedic dharma, the local Jaina community was much agitated. The Jainas in a body, challenged the Acharya to debate and a sharp debate began on the basis of Syadvada, the doctrine of sevenfold predication. But the Jaina scholars were unable to hold their own against the Acharya and left the meeting dejectedly. Realizing the superiority of the Acharya's teachings, the people sought his instructions.

At that time, the influence of the Buddhists in the Bahlika country was also not negligible. The Acharya had great debates with Buddhist teachers of Madhyamika (nihilism) and Vijnanavada (subjective idealism) schools. But they appeared to lose all their brilliance in the face of the arguments and conclusions advanced by the Acharya. The Acharya proved that Lord Buddha's spiritual practice was in accordance with the Vedic injunctions and that he attained unqualified supreme knowledge. He had also preached the Vedic truth and the eightfold spiritual practice. It is because they had not properly understood the instructions and the life of Lord Buddha that Buddhists were preaching their theories against the Vedas.

The Acharya went up to Iran and Iraq with his followers and defeating the scholars of these countries, reestablished Vedic dharma there. Muslim invasion of these countries had not yet taken place. Some deteriorating Buddhist influence was however present there, which was purged by the Acharya.

Thereafter, the Acharya established his victory over Kamboja (region of North Kashmir), Darada (Dabistan) and many regions situated in the desert and crossing mighty peaks, entered Kashmir.

The Acharya eventually arrived at Sarada Peetham in Kashmir. This place was at that time an important center of Hindu culture. Eminent scholars from all over India and spiritual aspirants lived there, adding to the glory of the place. There was quite a commotion among the people there at the arrival of the Acharya.

There was at the Sarada Peetham, a famous shrine of the goddess of learning. Inside the temple there was a pedestal known as the Sarvajna Peetha, the seat of omniscience. He alone who was All-knowing was entitled to sit on the pedestal of omniscience. The pedestal was guarded by famous scholars from all over India.

If any scholars arrived there with the ambition of ascending the pedestal of omniscience, they would have to defeat scholars belonging to all the different sects residing around the temple and the right to enter the temple would be acquired by the common consent of the scholars.

Many scholars had come from distant countries to sit upon the Sarvajna Peetha, but none had the fortune of ascending the Peetha. Thus, for long the right to sit upon it was looked upon as a rare privilege, difficult even for the Gods.

After arrival at the Sarada Peetha, one day the Acharya was sitting on the banks of Krishna Ganga when he heard the voices of some scholars. They were saying in the course of their discussion, " Well, he may be an all-conquering scholar but why should we accept his views? He has not yet been able to defeat the scholars here in argument. Besides the Goddess Sarada has also not conferred the title of omniscience upon him. Till this happens, we shall not accept the Acharya's teaching".

Hearing this, the disciples were distressed and requested the Acharya to ascend the Sarvajna Peetha. At the eagerness of his disciples, the Acharya gave silent assent to their request and proceeded towards the temple of Sri Sarada. There was a great commotion among the local scholars at the sight of the Acharya approaching the temple. Immediately they gathered at the four gates of the temple and prepared to challenge the Acharya to debate. There was great excitement everywhere. Many men and women belonging to the place had assembled there out of curiosity on hearing the news.

Asking the other disciples to wait, the Acharya proceeded with some of his important disciples like Padmapada, Sureshwara, Hastamalaka and Totaka towards the holy temple. Seeing the Acharya approaching the disputants addressed him thus, " O noble monk, with what object have you come to attain this great honor? Do you have the qualification the attainment of which alone leads to the right of entry in this temple? Are you versed in all branches of learning? Are you omniscient?"

Holding his head up a little, the Acharya said, " I know all the scriptures. There is nothing beyond the knowledge of my Self. If you want you may test me".

After this exchange of talk, Vaisesikas of Kanada school, Sankhya followers of Kapila, logicians of the Gautama school, Mimamsakas following Jaimini, Buddhists of Sautantrika, Vaibhasika, Madhyamika and Yogachara schools and Jain scholars of Swetambara and Digambara sects standing at the various gates engaged in debates with the Acharya.

An eminent scholar of the Kanada school put a question to the Acharya saying, " O great teacher, if you have mastered all branches of knowledge, tell us what the nature of matter is according to the Vaisesika theory? What is the reason of a Dvayanuka compound ( compound of two atoms) arising out of two atoms? Whence comes the Anutva (atomic quality) in the above compound? "

As soon as the Acharya had heard the question, he said smilingly, " In the Vaisesika theory, it is the dual number belonging to the two atoms of the compound which is the reason of the atomic quality inherent in the two atoms' compound".

Thereafter there were diverse arguments on both sides on the mysteries of the theory of matter. Hearing the Acharya's powerful conclusions, the followers of Kanada school desisted from further dispute and bowed down to the Acharya. Seeing this, the Nyaya scholar who was the follower of Gautama, proudly faced the Acharya and put his question to him, " Well, what is the difference between Kanada's and Gautama's views of liberation and what is the nature of matter according to Gautama ?"

The Acharya replied in solemn tones, " In Kanada's view, the Self devoid of qualities remains like the sky without any possibilities of regeneration - inactive and unattached. In Gautama's view however, existence in this liberated state is endowed with bliss and consciousness. In connection with the nature of matter it is clearly seen that in Kanada's view there are seven types of matter and in Gautama's view there are sixteen categories. There is no conflict between the two views on the nature of matter. Both the theories admit that liberation comes through a knowledge of Reality. The views of Kanada and Gautama are again the same on God, the creator of the universe and the Supreme regulator of all".

Hearing this reply of the Acharya, the theistic logician was satisfied and showing great respect for the Acharya, desisted from debate. Seeing this, a scholar of the Sankhya school arrogantly obstructed the Acharya's path to the temple and questioned him, " Well, can you tell me if the causation of the material universe by original Prakriti in the Sankhya theory, an independent phenomenon or subject to control by the Self as consciousness?"

The Acharya replied in easy tones, " That primordial Prakriti which consists of the three Gunas and has diverse manifestations and which is the source of this material universe is an independent agent according to Kapila. But the truth according to Vedanta is that even this primordial Prakriti is subject to the supreme Brahman that is of the nature of consciousness". Thereafter, there were diverse and intricate arguments on both sides and the Sankhya scholar was eventually quite satisfied and desisted from further debate.

Seeing the Acharya proceed towards another gate, Buddhist and Jain scholars challenged him to a debate. Among the Buddhists, scholars of all the four sects - Madhyamika, Yogachara, Soutantrika and Vaibhashika were present. They said to the Acharya in an insolent manner, " O monk, explain the differences among our four sects and also explain the distinction between the two different theories of Bahyartha Vada (theories of the existence of external objects). What is again the difference between Vedanta and these four doctrines?"

Without pausing a moment for deliberation, the Acharya replied, " Among the followers of Bahyartha Vada, the Sautantrikas say that all objects are known through inference while the Vaibhashikas contend that these are directly perceived. In both the theories, all matter is regarded as momentary every moment, that is to say, matter is

regarded as transient. According to the nihilistic Madhyamika view, every thing by nature is void. The awareness of the world is due to a stream of momentary consciousness. In nirvana, even this awareness vanishes. Then everything is realized as void. According to Vedanta, the eternal Brahman alone which is pure, intelligent and free by nature is true. Everything else is illusory and false. If the Sunyavadi (nihilist) regards the void as something existent and the Vijnanavadi (idealist) regards Vijnana (knowledge or consciousness) as fixed and unchanging by nature, there is no difference between them and Vedanta".

The Buddhists were so pleased with the Acharya's rational reply that they all said in unison, " Acharya, you are the fittest person to enter the temple".

But the Jainas did not stop at this. The Jains of the Digambara school demanded of the Acharya arrogantly, " O monk, tell us the real meaning of the word Astikaya. What object is denoted by this word?"

The Acharya smilingly replied, " Since you desire to hear the answer to this question, let me give the answer. By the five words Jivaastikaaya, Pudgalaastikaaya, Dharmaastikaaya, Adharmaastikaaya and Akaashaastikaaya, the following five objects -life, body, virtue, vice and sky are denoted. That which expresses the word `Asti' (to exist) is called Astikaaya. The root `Kai' means sound and from it is derived the word `Astikaaya'".

Hearing the Acharya's words, the Jaina teachers said with great respect to the Acharya, " It is but impertinence to seek to test you. You are a limitless ocean of knowledge and learning. You know all the scriptures and all the branches of learning. We consider ourselves greatly honored even to be defeated by you. Please enter the temple".

But even this did not satisfy the scholars' desire for debate. Even though Mandana, the greatest of the Mimamsakas was accompanying the Acharya as his disciple, the Mimamsakas said to the Acharya by way of a question, " What is the nature of sound or word in Jaimini's view? Is this a substance or a quality?"

The Acharya said in a sweet voice, " Sound is based on letters. The letters are constant and pervasive. When through the ear one becomes aware of the sound, its existence is accepted. Sound accordingly is a particular type of substance according to Jaimini and not a quality".

The Mimamsakas marveled at the Acharya's reply. They said humbly, " We did not put this question in order to test you. We asked only by way of a long standing custom. Please enter the temple".

Thus hearing proper replies to scriptural questions, the scholars who opposed the Acharya honored him in various ways and opened the temple gate so that he might go unimpeded up to the Sarvajna Peetha - the pedestal of omniscience.

People who had assembled in the temple courtyard acclaimed the Acharya's victory. Musical instruments rang out everywhere - their solemn notes filled the air. Amidst that tumult of joy, the Acharya drank of the holy waters of the spring adjacent to the temple and

worshipped the Goddess Sarada in a melodiously rhythmic hymn. Everyone at this moment heard an incredibly melodious voice from the heaven, " Dear son Shankara, I am pleased with you. I bestow on you today the title, Sarvajna (omniscient, all-knowing). You alone are worthy of sitting upon this Peetha".

The divine voice of Sarada, the mother of the universe reverberated through the temple. Hearing the divine voice, the Acharya felt an ineffable celestial joy in his heart. This unthinkable event made everyone convinced of the living existence of the Goddess at that place. Taking his seat upon that Peetha bedecked with pearls and jewels, the Acharya satisfied everyone present by explaining the true nature of the great Goddess Parashakti. That unforgettable event was fondly treasured as an imperishable memory in all hearts. It did not take long for the story of the Acharya's ascent on the Sarvajna Peetha to spread everywhere. Staying in the holy Sarada Peetha for some days, the Acharya explained Advaita, Brahman and Self to the common public and formally initiated many worthy recipients into the worship of Sridevi by way of Samayachara, firmly on the basis of Advaita Vedanta.

Thus the Acharya rose to the greatest heights of honor. Can it be a matter of wonder that the Acharya who was Shiva incarnate, whose scholarship compelled the defeat of Mandana born of Brahma's powers, who was declared to be omniscient by the goddess Sarada herself, would be accepted as a Divine being at all? After this, Advaita towered above all the other traditions and entered into the very heart and thus released a tremendous movement in the spiritual world. as a result, deteriorated Buddhism and Jainism lost their luster and became evanescent and gave great impetus to the reawakening of Sanatana Vaidika dharma.

FROM KASHMIR TO ASSAM AND GAUDA .....

Leaving Sarada Peetham, the Acharya toured many places in Kashmir and arrived at Srinagar. Finding a Shiva temple on a nearby low hilltop, he went to visit the deity there. After visiting the holy deity and worshipping him, the Acharya went to visit the famous shrine of Parashakti at the foot of the hill. Many spiritual aspirants and worshippers lived there undertaking spiritual practices to please the great Goddess. Arriving there, the Acharya worshipped the Goddess overwhelmed by a unique feeling of affection and devotion. His heart was so full of the glory of the goddess that he proclaimed the majesty of the Goddess in a melodious hymn.

The city of Srinagar, which is believed to be constructed in the shape of Srichakra, is also associated with the great hymn of Saundaryalahari. It is said that this great hymn has its origin in the teeth of the Supreme Mother Lalita Mahatripurasundari. The Acharya, during his stay in Srinagar, (some biographers say in Varanasi) disappeared for a time. He transported himself to Mahakailasa, the abode of Paramashiva. There on a wall, he found this great hymn written. He began to read it, but as he read it, Ganesha, the offspring of Shiva, began rubbing it from below, lest this great sage should publicize this highly esoteric hymn in the world of men.

So the Acharya could master only the first forty one verses, and in place of what had been erased, he composed an additional fifty-nine verses and made it a full text of hundred verses and published it in the world of men. The Acharya, along with the great jewel of Saundaryalahari, also brought from Mahakailasa, five sets of Ratnagarbha Ganapathy, Srichakra and Chandramouleshwara Linga. These were handed over to Padmapada, Totaka, Sureshwara, Hastamalaka and others who were designated as the heads of the monasteries that the Acharya established in Badari, Dwaraka, Puri, Sringeri and Kanchipuram. The worship of these divine images of Parabrahman, that the Acharya received directly from Mahadeva have been worshipped regularly with immense devotion by the Acharyas of these monasteries till the present day.

The hymn is incomparable not merely from the point of view of poetry and composition but a solemn and beautiful expression of the manner of his acceptance in life of the Parabrahma Shakti. The profound devotion and humility of the Acharya touches the heart of every reader of the hymn. The Acharya has used beautifully in his hymn, all possible similes and metaphors that are known in Sanskrit. There are some doubts regarding the Acharya's authorship of this divine hymn. However, a close look at Subhagodaya, a treatise on Srividya written by Sri Gaudapaadaachaarya establishes Acharya as the author of this hymn beyond any doubt. It is indeed the content of this treatise that is seen reflected in Saundaryalahari.

The Acharya's life was always blessed by the grace of the divine Mother of the cosmos. It was this supreme Parashakti who had appeared to him as Annapurana in Kashi. Again she played her part as Ubhayabharati and then as Sarada, playfully testing the Acharya. She as Mookambika showered her grace on him again. As Kamakshi Mahatripurasundari she manifested in front of him yet again. Thus the Acharya and his successors have always been devoted to the worship of Sridevi, the Chitshakti inseparable from Parabrahman.

The Acharya stayed in Srinagar for a few days preaching the glory of Parashakti and Vedanta. Leaving the Kashmir valley, the Acharya in his expedition of spiritual conquest, followed the course of the Chenab along its bank to step on to the plains and visiting in course of travel, places of pilgrimage like Taxila, Jwalamukhi and Haridwar, arrived at Naimisharanya of Puranic fame.

The glorious story of the Acharya's ascent on Sarada Peetha and the conferment upon him, the title of omniscience had already spread everywhere. For this reason, even though in places like Taxila the Buddhists and Jains were still predominant to some extent, none dared to face the Acharya in debate. Taking this opportunity, the Acharya and his disciples preached among the people the excellence of the Vedanta religion.

The Acharya was, above all, liberal in his approach. He would not ask any one to abandon his own views. He would not even demand of the Buddhists and Jains that they should abjure their faiths. In order to bring about the spiritual welfare of all, he would only demonstrate the imperfections of their views and would ask them to undertake spiritual practice advocated in the scriptures. He combined in his person, the qualities of a Jnani, a Bhakta and a Yogi. According to

him, Brahman alone is truth and the universe that we see externally is an illusion. The universe has no existence apart from the Brahman.

The Acharya was also not in favor in making the Shaiva a Vaishnava or vice versa. On the contrary, he would ask everyone to worship his chosen deity as the symbol of Brahman. Even though he was firmly established in the knowledge of Advaita Brahman, he performed the ceremonial worship of Gods and Goddesses as symbols of Saguna Brahman in order to reveal the universality and the vast form of Vedic dharma. The great saying ` Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma', Verily all this is Brahman, found concrete expression in the Acharya's life.

The Acharya directed his disciple Paramakaalaanala, knowing him to be a devotee of Paramashiva to preach devotion to Shiva, based on Advaita and Saguna Brahman. Similarly, he directed his disciple Lakshmana to preach devotion to Narayana, Divakara to preach the glory of Surya, Girijakumara to establish the glory of worship of Ganesha, Batukanatha to preach the worship of Bhairava and Tripura Kumara to spread the knowledge of Shakta doctrine, all based on Advaita and Saguna Brahman. Thus during his life-time itself, the Acharya instituted different forms of worship of the Saguna Brahman through his disciples, in terms of their different aptitudes and qualifications.

The Acharya further said that it is through the knowledge of Brahman alone that absolute liberation is attained. In the state of liberation, the living creature is freed from its physical existence and attains identity with the Parabrahman. But through the worship of Saguna Brahman, one attains concentration of the mind and also the grace of the different Gods and Goddesses who are worshipped. In terms of different aptitudes of the recipients, there is need for rites of worship for different spiritual aspirants. Not everyone can comprehend the truth of Nirguna Brahman. A person who has four spiritual attainments i.e. he who can discriminate between the eternal and the transient objects, who is indifferent to the enjoyment of fruits of one's action here and hereafter, who practices restraint of passions, self-control, abstinence, forbearance, faith and profound meditation and who sincerely seeks liberation, is worthy of receiving the knowledge of the non-dual Brahman.

In the past, the Naimisharanya was an important center of Vedic culture, particularly for those who followed the ritualistic part of the Vedas. There are many references and instances of it in the Puranas. The Acharya on his arrival at Naimisharanya, was deeply distressed in not able to find any signs of the past glory. There was no hermitage of the Rishis, nor was any Vedic chanting heard. Instead there was a complete dominance of Buddhist Tantrikas. The Acharya stayed for quite some time and gradually reformed all the Buddhist Tantrikas. He explained to all that the instructions in the path of knowledge that was given by Lord Buddha was not different from Advaita Vedanta. As a result, many became devoted to Vedic rites and worship.

Leaving Naimisharanya, the Acharya arrived at Ayodhya, the birthplace of Sri Rama. There too through the spread of Buddhism, the worship of Hindu Gods and Goddesses was almost extinct. Arriving at the famous temple of Sri Rama, the Acharya had the shrine repaired and rites of

worship instituted. He also gave instructions on the significance of the worship of Sri Rama. As a consequence of his preaching, many took to the worship of the five deities.

Thus, in spite of Buddhist dominance in all those places the Acharya went on preaching about the necessity of Vedic rites and worship of the Lord in accordance with the Vedas and traveling through places like Mithila and Nalanda, arrived at holy Gaya.

From very ancient times Gaya was a great pilgrimage center for offering oblations to forefathers. From different parts of India, people came to offer oblations at the lotus feet of Sri Vishnu for the sake of deliverance of their departed ancestors.

At the place where Lord Buddha attained Buddha-hood, there was a large temple which housed an image of Buddha. In course of time, the place had become a very sacred pilgrimage center for the Buddhists all over the world. before this, the Acharya had declared Lord Buddha to be one of the ten incarnations of Sri Vishnu in his Dashavatara Stotra. Indeed it was through spiritual practices following the Vedic path that Lord Buddha had attained the state of realization. The nirvana that he spoke of was not an empty state of mind but a state full of joy. Nirvana in the Buddhist theory as preached originally by Lord Buddha and Moksha according to Vedanta are synonymous. However, the later followers of Buddhism misinterpreted the teachings and gave a different account of Buddha's doctrine. The Acharya clarified this point and reformed many Buddhist sects.

As a result of the Acharya's acceptance of Buddha as an incarnation of Sri Narayana, the foundations of the Buddhist religion were weakened. The Brahmins of Gaya instituted the worship of Lord Buddha as an incarnation of Sri Vishnu. The effect of such worship was tremendous. House-holder Buddhists of different social levels devoted themselves to the worship of Buddha as an incarnation of Sri Vishnu. Within a short time in places around Gaya and also in far away places, people in large numbers found refuge in Vaidika Dharma.

Leaving the holy city of Gaya, the Acharya explained and preached the Vedic faith in different places of Bengal. Within a short period, the Sanatana Vaidika Dharma came to be instituted at different levels of the society. At that time, Buddhist and Hindu Tantrikas were very powerful all over Bengal. Very few people knew about the very existence of the Vedas. As a result of the Acharya's arrival, Hindu scriptures began to be read and taught in different parts of Bengal. In some places, the house-holder disciples accompanying the Acharya had images of Shiva and Kali installed and encouraged their worship. Scholars were fascinated to hear the exposition of the scriptures and the explanation of the greatness of the Vedas from the Acharya. Shankaracharya was accepted as the visible, living incarnation of the Lord by all.

Completing the work of religious reform in Bengal, the Acharya proceeded towards Pragjyotishapura, Kamarupa and Assam. All over Assam and particularly in Kamarupa, the Tantrikas were predominant. They were accomplished in charms and spells and were skilled in the rites of destruction, mental distraction and bringing the opponent into subjugation. Learning that the Acharya had arrived with his

disciples and hundreds of devotees, the then ruler of Pragjyotishapura came out on the way with his officials to greet and receive the Acharya with great respect. Blessing the king, the Acharya with his vast band of disciples, accompanied by the king, arrived at the foot of the Kamakhya hill, the seat of the Yoni Peetha of Goddess Kamakhya, famed in the Puranas. The Acharya ascended the hill and performed the rites of worship at the shrine of Parashakti and remained in meditation for three continuous days. Looking at that meditative, solemn and serene figure, all were filled with respect and devotion for him. The Acharya and his disciples gave instructions in Vedic dharma in terms of the capacities of the listeners. Before the towering personality of the Acharya, all heads were bowed and many became his disciples and engaged themselves in the practice of Vedic Dharma.

Within a few days, the Tantrikas of Kamarupa influenced by the Buddhists and led by a Kashmiri Tantrik Abhinava Gupta, challenged the Acharya to debate. Abhinava Gupta tried his best to hold his own but facing the uncommon genius of the Acharya, who was the very embodiment of Sridevi, was something quite beyond his caliber. He had to admit his defeat. As a result, people became attached to Vedic dharma and following the rituals laid down by Rishis like Yagnavalkya, engaged in the worship of the Divine mother by modes of Samayachara.

Abhinava Gupta was not only a powerful Tantrika, but also a very renowned scholar. Refuting Vedanta, he had written a Shakta commentary on the Brahma sutra. Defeated in argument, Abhinava Gupta considered himself deeply offended and humiliated. He realized that there was no scholar in the whole world who could defeat the scholarship of the Acharya. As long as the Acharya was alive, the destruction of Vamachara and of gory Tantrik rituals was inevitable. He engaged himself in secret magical rites to bring about the Acharya's death.

Within a few days, signs of an incurable ailment - anal fistula - manifested itself in the Acharya's body. The illness became gradually more serious and the pain was insufferable. There was suppuration and bleeding. The Acharya was however calm and unruffled. He continued giving instructions to various spiritual aspirants without giving a single thought to his body or pain. The disease worsened. The Acharya became extremely weak. Even in that state, the Acharya remained calm and continued to guide his devotees. The supreme Acharya even refused to cure himself, which was just a matter of silly game for him. The disciples were greatly concerned for their beloved master and attended on him to the best of their abilities. Padmapada became anxious for proper medical treatment of the ailment. Asking for permission to send for a doctor, they requested the Acharya.

With a smile, the Acharya said, " My sons, why are you so agitated? A disease is cured only cured through suffering and even if it is inevitable that I should die of it, I have not the slightest regrets. Do not make futile efforts at treatment".

Hearing word of such indifference from their Guru, the disciples held back their tears with great difficulty and said, " Lord of the Yogis, Indeed you have not the slightest attachment to your body, but

master, you are our life even as water is life to the creatures that live in it. Saints live for the good of the world even though they themselves have attained their objects of self-realization and are without any desire. You should save yourself for the good of the others. We know that you will not use your limitless powers to cure yourself. But at least allow us to do what is best possible by us".

At this importunate request, the Acharya's heart was overcome with pity. He gave permission for doctors to be brought. The royal physician of that country began treating the Acharya using powerful drugs. But the illness showed not the slightest signs of abatement and on the contrary worsened day by day. All physicians who tried to cure the Acharya gave up hope. The disciples were plunged in sorrow. Meanwhile the overjoyed Abhinava Gupta waited for the moment when the Acharya would breathe his last. The Acharya meanwhile bore in silence the terrible pain of his illness and prepared for death.

The Acharya's patience leaves a deep impression on our minds. Having attained the supreme knowledge, he lived in the state of a Jivanmukta. There was no trace of desire in his heart. He viewed life and death with the same detached attitude. The life of the Acharya is a bright example of how a person who has attained the knowledge of Brahman lives in this world. His was an existence in the supreme being beyond joy and sorrow. The only attitude of his mind towards the world was one of charity.

There was no hope of recovery. The Acharya's death appeared to be inevitable. But would the divine Mother ever permit the victory of the evil? By divine dispensation, the Ashwini Kumaras, the celestial doctors appeared in the garb of young Brahmins. The disciples of the Acharya were surprised to see the young doctors radiantly full of splendid beauty. The eyes of both were painted with collyrium. Books in their hands, they appeared before the Acharya and said, " O great Acharya, it is impossible to treat your ailment for it has occurred from the spell of another person. The only remedy lies in divine intervention". After saying just this, the Ashwini twins went away. The disciples were full of grief and bewildered. The Acharya entered into unbroken Samadhi.

Padmapada was greatly agitated. The thought that his Guru was about to die was unbearable to him. Finding no other way, he desperately prayed to his adored deity Sri Nrisimha Bhagavan for the recovery of his Guru. The compassionate Lord, pleased at the deep prayers of his devotee, appeared before Padmapada and said, " Child, there is no disease affecting your great Guru's body. The anal fistula he is suffering from is the result of some Tantrik incantation. Only if you can bring about a counter-spell by the incantation of powerful divine mantras, the Acharya will recover". Saying this, the Lord blessed Padmapada and vanished.

Padmapada, who was an adept in mantra Shastra, had written a commentary on Prapanchasara Tantra. Without wasting any time, he engaged himself in the rites of casting a counter-spell. Abhinava Gupta, who had observed all this from a distance did not remain inactive and proceeded to defend himself. There was bitter struggle between the forces exerted by the spells on either side. But Padmapada, who was a great devotee of Mahatripurasundari,

Chandramouleshwara and Nrisimha, and an expert in Tantra Shastra won the battle, defeating the wicked Vamachari by the purity of his path of Samayachara. Within a few days, Abhinava Gupta discovered the incipient signs of anal fistula in his body and fearing public disgrace, fled home. Soon, the Acharya was fully recovered and the Tantrika expired.

The disciples of the Acharya were overjoyed to find their master completely cured. But the Acharya expressed his deep regrets when he learnt of the death of Abhinava Gupta. The incident surprised and frightened the Tantrikas who lived and practiced black magic in Kamarupa. They realized that the aim of Tantric practices was not to be for mean attainments. From now on, Advaita became the only goal of Tantra, which was indeed its true goal. Practices of Tantra, if followed without desires and in complete devotion to Parashakti leads to the knowledge of Brahman. Thus reforming the local Tantrikas, the Acharya initiated them to the Dakshinachara mode of worship of the Goddess.

The Acharya then proceeded towards Gouda (North Bengal) where the Vedic Dharma was almost on the point of extinction. In Gouda, Murari Mishra and Dharma Gupta were renowned scholars of Mimamsa philosophy. Learning that the Acharya was about to arrive in Gouda, they prepared to challenge him in debate. But learning that Mandana the greatest scholar of Mimamsa was accompanying the Acharya as his disciple, they gave up all hopes of debate.

One day, Dharma Gupta approached the Acharya and saluting him with reverence, said, " O noble Acharya, we have read your commentaries. Still we want to hear from you the points of difference between the conclusions of Vedanta and those of Mimamsa".

The Acharya then said, " Child, you have put a good question. It is because the fruits of work are transient that there is need for Vedanta. Through the knowledge of the unity of Brahman and the Self, as preached by Vedanta, the ignorance of the aspirant is removed and he attains the state of spontaneous liberation. The liberation that consists in the destruction of ignorance is not the result of Karma. Nor is this liberation a created object or a stage of existence. For this reason liberation is eternal. Of course for the person who has desire, there is need for Karma. Through this karma, various degrees of happiness are attained and the mind is purified and becomes fit to receive the Vedanta knowledge and one attains the capability of pursuing the path of the Ultimate Truth. Realizing that assumption of the ego in objects like the body that are not part of the Self is an error, and that movement again in the cycle of life and death is inevitable even after attaining different Lokas or heavenly stages in terms of one's good works, one comes to attend the knowledge of the supreme Brahman".

Thus after discussion of different topics Dharma Gupta realized the correctness of the Acharya's teaching and became a disciple of Advaita Vedanta. The people of that region were also inspired by Dharma Gupta to adopt a Vedic life.

Praching in different places of gouda, the Acharya with his disciples arrived at the banks of the Ganga. One evening, the Acharya was

sitting all by himself in meditation at a lonely spot, when he saw a Yogi of great brilliance and radiant presence appear in front of him. The whole place was enveloped in the light that radiated from his being. As soon as that figure of wonderful appearance, covered all over with matted locks came to him, the Acharya left his seat and bowing down at the feet of the serene being with folded hands, requested him to be seated.

The august person cast a pleasant look at the Acharya and blessed him. Then he said in a voice full of grace and charm, " Dearest son, you have completely attained supreme knowledge. Like a boat helping one across a river, you have helped millions across the oceans of ignorance and duality. Indeed you have brought me great joy. I am Gaudapada, your Parama Guru. I have come here to bless you".

With his palms joined on his head that was bowed and shedding tears of bliss, the Acharya said, " O great Guru, ocean of kindness, since you have glanced upon this servant with favor, your blessings will give me strength. The vision of your holy presence itself is a great presence. Boundless is my great fortune".

Pleased at the words of the Acharya, so full of humility, Sri Gaudapada said, " Dear Child, I was very keen on seeing you when I learnt of your wonderful achievements. You have written wonderful commentaries on the Brahma sutra and on the Upanishads. In your commentary on the Mandukyakarika, the real significance of the Karika written by me has been very well brought out. I m particularly delighted at this and have come to see you for this reason. Ask any boon that you like".

In overwhelming joy, the Acharya said in a choked voice, " O great Guru, by seeing you in person, I have, as it were, attained a vision of the Paramatman. What boon can be greater than this? Yet, I beg of you the boon that the minds of all my devotees and followers, in all times to come, should be ever-immersed in the knowledge of Eternal consciousness of Parabrahman".

Saying ` So be it', the great master Sri Gaudapada disappeared. The Acharya in great joy passed the night in giving an account of the vision of the great Guru to his disciples.

ENDING THE AVATARA, THE GREAT DEPARTURE .....

A few days after this incident, it was learnt from many sources that the rites of worship of Pashupathinath had been stopped in Nepal. Because of Buddhist dominance, the worship of the Hindu God was completely stopped. Even the holiness of the shrine was variously affected. Religious opponents had defied the temple by throwing forbidden things into it. The Hindus lived in great misery and suffering. The local ruler was also inactive and indifferent.

The disciples of the Acharya were deeply mortified to learn this. They urged the Acharya to proceed to Nepal. Finding them so eager, the Acharya, directed by divine will, proceeded towards Nepal. Traversing forests infested with ferocious animals and climbing

mountain ranges the party gradually reached the region of Pashupatinath in Nepal. It was a solitary and charming spot. The environments were solemn. The serenity, silence and peace of ages seemed to surround everything there.

The local king received the Acharya and his disciples with due respect. Blessing the king and giving him a piece of advice, the Acharya proceeded towards the temple of Sri Pashupatinath. He was distressed to find no arrangements for rites of worship in the temple which was dirty and dilapidated without repairs. At the direction of the Acharya, the disciples, with great care swept the dirt, cleaned the temple and saluting the deity and went through the rites of worship.

People in large numbers arrived in Nepal to have a Darshan of the Acharya and also of Sri Pashupatinath. Living in the temple courtyard, the Acharya began to give discourses for the assembled people. Hearing the ultimate truth by the Acharya, the hearts of all were filled with an eternal delight. The Buddhist intruders were so much shaken at the arrival of the Acharya that without facing him, they left Nepal for other faces. Soon, entire Nepal witnessed a resurgence of spiritual feeling at the reawakening of the Sanatana Vaidika Dharma. The scholarly Brahmins who accompanied the Acharya began to instruct the localites in the daily duties, the rites of maintaining a perpetual sacred fire, worship of the five chief deities and the performance of the five great sacrifices. The king also showed an interest in these auspicious activities. At the Acharya's special desire, the temple of Pashupatinatha was repaired and the rites of worship properly instituted. Thus within a short time, Veda and Vedanta spread all over Nepal. Centers of study on the Vedas and the scriptures were set up in different places.

The story goes that Buddhist monks who followed Vajrayana and Vamachara tried to kill the Acharya by Kritya and Abhichara Prayogas and by creating natural calamities sought to raise difficulties in the way of his going to different places. But the Yogic power and the divinity of the Acharya, who was ever protected by Sri Mahadeva and Sri Nrisimha, defeated the evil powers of the Vamacharis. The Acharya was unscathed and overcoming hundreds of obstacles, spread the glory of Vedanta all over Nepal.

At the earnest request of many disciples, the Acharya then set out for Badari. The Acharya remained immersed in the contemplation of Brahman for long hours. The disciples protected his life with great difficulty. Day by day, the meditative mind of the Acharya was immersed in the fathomless depths of the ocean of Brahman. The Acharya duly arrived at Jyotirdhama on the way to Badari Kshetra.

Staying there for a few days, the Acharya satisfied all with his divine discourses and spiritual instructions. After having imparted new life by the life-giving Mantras of the Vedas to moribund Sanatana Dharma all over India from the Himalayas to the oceans, the Acharya again set feet in Uttarakhanda for the second time. There were discussions, worship, and spiritual sacrifices everywhere. The festival of divine joy seemed to be endless.

Those who were charmed at the Acharya's Darshan earlier, had

assembled again in order to have the joy and satisfaction of being in the holy company of the Acharya. All felt that it was as if the entire knowledge, richness, strength, vigor, fame and beauty of the supreme Lord himself that was fully manifest in this great person. Indeed he was incarnation of Shiva. Such perfection was not possible for an ordinary human being.

There was a great transformation in the Acharya's heart ever since he had a vision of Sri Gaudapaadaachaarya. His mind was eager to be constantly immersed in meditation. The disciples were worried to notice their Gurudeva in this introspective mood. They realized that their revered Guru was now prepared to merge in his own self. His life-span of thirty-two years was now complete. In spite of repeated efforts, the disciples were unable to bring down the Acharya to material plane of earthly consciousness.

One day, the Acharya thus addressed his disciples, " You see, the task for which I assumed this physical existence is over. Now, you should be prepared to lead lives permeated with the truth of Vedanta and preach the glory of Vedanta to the world. establish yourselves in the knowledge of Aham Brahmasmi, your mission will only then be right. If you have anything to ask, say it".

With his eyes full of tears, Padmapada said, " Lord, we have nothing further to ask. The path that you have shown by your very life will be followed by us through your blessings. You are the beacon-light of our lives. Bless us that we may follow the path shown by you".

The also gave his disciples a clear indication of for future the future programme of work and also made them aware of the noble idea of renunciation and service to humanity. In his life, it is the truth of Atmanaa mokshaartham Jagadhitaaya Cha, for one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world, that found expression. It is not Atmadhyana alone that comprises the whole of a Sanyasin's endeavor, he has at the same time to take upon himself, the great responsibility of establishing and maintaining Varnashrama Dharma. The Acharya laid special emphasis on propagating spiritual practices. The abbot would not stay at one place, he would move about for the preaching of religion and would watch with care the efforts of ordinary people to realize a higher and nobler religion through the observance of Varnashrama Dharma.

After taking steps to set on a firm foundation his life-long endeavor to re-establish the Vedic Dharma and also ensuring the future success of his work, the Acharya appeared to have completed all the tasks of his life and prepared for the FINAL JOURNEY.

The Acharya soon went on his way to Badari Narayana. King Sudhanva and many other disciples were accompanying him. The Acharya was extremely delighted to arrive at Badari Dhama for the second time. Repaired and bedecked with buntings and banners, the temple was looking incomparably beautiful. The worship and services to the deity were also being conducted regularly according to the scriptures. In a lilting verse-eulogy the Acharya composed and offered his salutations to Narayana. This famous hymn is known as the 'Harimeede' hymn. Ever dwelling in the state of self-realization, the Acharya composed the verse identifying Sri Narayana as his very Self.

The monks, scholars, and kings regarded the Acharya's arrival as a special favor of the heavens. The Acharya was all the time introspective. At his direction, his disciples gave discourses on the nature of Brahman and Advaita Vedanta. The Sanyasin disciples of the Acharya were all great masters themselves. By rendering their shining spiritual lives, bright with renunciation and full of knowledge and devotion, to be dedicated ceaselessly to work, ensuring the good of the people, the Acharya transmitted bright faith and tremendous inspiration to the hearts of all who came to him.

After staying in Badari Kshetra for some time, the Acharya then left for Kedara. Most of the time he remained in deep Samadhi. The same Acharya who for sixteen long years had carried on religious preaching tirelessly, had eagerly traversed hundreds of miles on foot, was now stable like the Brahman. Disciples like Padmapada were engaged in a vain bid to bring the mind of their Gurudeva down to the earth plane.

Duly arriving at holy Kedara, the Acharya immediately went to the shrine and remained immersed in worship there. The Acharya's being refused to come down from the plane of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. He was indifferent even to food and nourishments. After several days had passed thus, one afternoon the Acharya addressed his disciples in a sweet voice saying, " My dear Children, the task of this body is over. The time has come to merge with my own real self. If you have any questions, please ask me".

Hearing these words, the disciples were thunder-struck. They could not speak. After a long silence, when the surge of emotions within had subsided somewhat, Padmapada said, his eyes full of tears, " Sir, by your grace, all over desires are fulfilled. We are fully satisfied. We have nothing further to ask. We feel that the execution of the instructions of our revered Guru is the only duty before us now".

The other disciples were silent. After a short silence, the Acharya said, " I bless you with all my heart that you may be crowned with success in your endeavors. As long as you remain in your earth existence, go on preaching Sanatana Vaidika Dharma according to the previous instructions given by me. The knowledge of Brahman and the Self that I have given you has been obtained through a long line of illustrious Gurus and it should be passed on to worthy aspirants".

The Guru lineage is : Narayana, Brahma, Vasistha, Shakti, Parashara, Vedavyasa, Shukadeva, Gaudapada, Govindapada and Sri Shankara.

" May you attain the state of Parabrahman." This was the great Acharya's last blessing to his disciples.

After this, the Acharya became silent and went into deep meditation. His entire body shone brilliantly with the brightness of thousands of Suns. He entered into the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. His earthly remains also transformed into a dazzling bundle of light and disappeared into the image of Sri Kedareshwara.

The Acharya was an incarnation of Mahadeva. Gods like Vishnu, Indra, Chandra, Vayu, Agni and others appeared in the skies along with

Rishis and Siddhas in order to take him back to his own abode. At that time, the whole sky was filled with thousands of lightning-colored flying chariots. The Gods showered heavenly Mandara flowers on the head of the Acharya who was in monk's robes and sang his praises. Then the Gods decorated and brought Nandi, the celestial Bull whiter than milk and the swan. The Acharya, now assuming his original form as Sri Mahadeva, bedecked with matted locks and sickle moon, got up on to Nandi's back, resting on Brahma's shoulders. Parijata flowers began to fall on him like drops of rain. Indra, Vishnu and the other Gods sang hymns and took Shankara back to his eternal abode.....

Thus stands before us the glorious life of our Acharya. By entrusting the heavy responsibility of the maintenance and propagation of Dharma on an all-renouncing order of monks, freed from worldly responsibilities, the Acharya has put the Sanatana Hindu dharma on a firm foundation. Those who are burdened with worldly responsibilities may find it practice, preservation and propagation of Dharma. The foreseeing sage had accordingly brought his disciples together and setting up Maths or monasteries in different parts of India, gave a concrete shape to this programme. This farsightedness of the Acharya astonishes us. The deep thought that the Acharya gave to the problem of maintaining intact, the beneficent character of Hinduism in accordance with Varnashrama and suited to the requirements of different times and places and the different aptitudes of its adherents, keeping the great far-reaching Vaidika dharma free from all turbidity and rescuing its ideologically ramified structure from erroneous conclusions, giving greater luster to the glory of his life. By rectifying wrong notions and semi-Vedic conclusions of the theories with the exponents of which he came into contact in the course of his triumphal tour all over India, he gave a Vedic character to all doctrines. He also took steps to preserve the distinct character of these doctrines. This reveals strikingly the generous nature of the Acharya.

The Acharya revealed his identity at the special request of King Sudhanva in the following words :

" In the Satya Yuga Brahma was the teacher of the world. in the Treta Yuga, it was Vashista. In Dwapara, Vedavyasa was the great teacher. For Kaliyuga, I am the world's teacher".

The advent and departure of Srimadacharya are both events of past. But his life and message are not set down in the pages of history alone, they have directed the course of Sanatana Dharma and have shed a soft radiance on the inner significance of Vedic Dharma. This becomes clear in the solemn lilting verse with which the Acharya concludes his masterpiece Vivekachudamani.

` Just as a traveler who has lost his way in the desert goes about in futile search of water and getting no trace of it, sinks further into misery, so in this world, man, deluded by illusions and errors, finds no end to his troubles. His whole being seems to be obscured in the blazing sun of worldly preoccupations. Where is the shade? Where is the water that can bring solace? The shade is but truth of Self, the ever-pure, ever-wise and ever-serene. For the person parched by the heat of worldly affairs, the supreme knowledge of the identity

between the Brahman and Atman is the cool water'. Glory to this message of the Acharya that shows this eternal majesty of man in his spiritual crisis down the ages.

Even after long centuries, today the mission of Shankara-Bharati is not over. Acharya has not become out of date. Despite the myriad forms of wealth and accomplishments of man today, there is no end to his sorrow and suffering, for his good sense and wisdom are being clouded over with newer forms of error and delusion. Man is being tortured by lust, avarice, conceit and hatred in their various aspects, what is the way out? This way lies solely in man's realization of his own self as being non-different from the universal self. When everything is the self, who remains separate from the self to be hated or envied? Within all men burns brightly the light of an indivisible essential consciousness. Every human being represents the greatest truth of Brahman in the world in the acceptance, realization and propagation of this undeniable truth. The extraordinary life of thirty-two years of Srimadacharya is a living expression of this tremendous reality.

We have to remember the Acharya's life anew today. From his life-message, we have to find the means and inspiration of resolving the many conflicts of life in the knowledge of the self. Salutations to the incarnation of Sri Dakshinamurthy, the greatest teacher of the universe, salutations to Sri Krishna, the Jagadguru, salutations to Sri Vedavyasa, the teacher of the humanity, and salutations to Sri Adi Shankaracharya, the embodiment of all the three great teachers.

Jaya Jaya Shankara

Hara Hara Shankara

Jaya Jaya Shankara

Hara Hara Shankara !!

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/advaitin/message/14086>

---

-----  
--  
=====  
==

[http://sanskrit.gde.to/doc\\_z\\_misc\\_shankara/SCW.itx](http://sanskrit.gde.to/doc_z_misc_shankara/SCW.itx)

%  
\begin{document}  
\engtitle{.. Shri Sankara's Works ..}##  
\itxttitle{.. shrII shaN^kara granthaavaliH ..}##\endtitles##  
shrII shaN^kara granthAvaliH .

## (in ten volumes - total pages 6163)##

##Published by Samata Books, Madras  
(First published 1910, Samata revised Edition 1981)

Publsiher: V. Sadanand, Samata Books  
10 Kamaraj Bhavan, 573 Mount Road (=3DAnna Salai)  
Madras 600 006, India  
Printed at All India Press, Pondicherry, India)  
(Ten Volumes, total 6163 pages)

DETAILED CONTENTS IN ALL 10 VOLUMES=20

Volume 1:## stotrANi ##(a total of 65 stotraMs - 440 pages)##

gaNesha stotrANi:## (2 stotrams)##

gaNesha paJNcharatnam.h## (5 sholakms)##  
gaNesha bhujaN^gam.h ##(9)##

subrahmaNya stotrANi: ##(1 stotraM)##

subrahmaNya bhujaN^gam.h## (33)##

Ishvara stotrANi:## (14 stotrams)##

shiva bhujaN^gam.h## (40)##  
shivAnandalaharI## (100)##  
shivapAdAdi keshAntavarNanastotram.h## (41)##  
shivakeshAdi pAdAntavarNanastotram.h##(29)##  
vedasAra shivastotram.h##(11)##  
shivAparAdhakshamApaNa stotram.h## (15)##  
suarNamAlAstutiH## (50)##  
dashashlokI stutiH ##(10)##  
dakshiNamUrTi varNamAlAstotram.h## (25)##  
shrii dakshiNamUrtyashhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
shriimR^ityuJNJayamAnasikapUjAstotram.h ##(46)##  
shivanAmAvalyashhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
shivapaJNchAksharastotram.h## (6)##  
umAmaheshvara stotram.h ##(13)##

devI stotrANi: ##(13 stotrams)##

saundaryalaharI## (100) (? 103)##  
devIbhujaN^gastotram.h ##(28)##  
AnandalaharI## (20)##  
tripurasundarIvedapAdastotram.h## (110)##  
tripurasundarImAnasapUjA stotram.h## (127)##  
devI chatuHshhashhTyupachArapUjAstotram.h ##(72)##  
tripurasundaryashhTakam.h ##(8)##  
lalitApaJNcharatnam.h## (5)##  
kalyANavR^ishhTi stavaH ##(16)##  
navaratnamAlikA## (9)##  
mantramAtR^ikApushhpamAlAstavaH ##(17)##  
gaurIdashakam.h ##(10+1=3D11)##  
bhavAnI bhujaN^gam.h## (17)##

hanUmat stotram.h## (1 stotraM)##

hanumatpaJNcharatnam.h## (5+1=3D6)##

vishhNu stotrANi:## (11 stotraM)##

shriirAma bhujaN^gaprayAta stotram.h## (29)##  
lakshmI nR^isi.nha paJNcharatnam.h ##(5)##  
lakshmI nR^isiMhakarUNarasa stotram.h## (17)##  
shrii vishhNUbhujaN^gaprayAta stotram.h## (14)##  
vishhNupAdAdi keshAntastotram.h ##(52)##  
pANDuraN^gAashhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
achyutAshhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
kR^ishhNashhTakam.h## (8)##  
hari stutiH ##(43)##  
govindAshhTakam.h##( 8+1=3D9)##  
bhagavanmAnasapUjA ##(10)##

sa.nkIrNa stotrANi: ##(23 stotras, including some on shiva, devi,  
etc)##

mohamudgaraH ##(31)##  
kanakadhArA stotram.h ##(18)##  
annapUrNashhTakam.h## (8+4=3D12)##  
mInAkshI paJNcharatnam.h## (5)##  
mInAkshI stotram.h## (8)##  
dakshiNAmUrTi stotram.h## (19)##  
kAlabhairavAshhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
narmadAshhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
yamunAshhTakam.h## (I) (8)##  
yamunAshhTakam.h## (II) (9)##  
gaN^gAshhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
maNikarNikAshhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
nirguNamAnasapUjA## (33)##  
prAtaH smaraNa stotram.h## (4)##  
jagannAthAshhTakam.h## (8)##  
shhaT.h padI stotram.h## (7)##  
bhramAmbAshhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
shiva paJNchAkshara nakshatramAlA stotram.h## (28)##  
dvAdasha liN^ga stotram.h## (13)##  
ardha nArIshvara stotram.h## (9)##  
shAradA bhujaN^gaprayAtAshhTakam.h## (8)##  
gurvashhTakam.h## (8+1=3D9)##  
kAshIpaJNchakam.h## (5)##

##Volume 2:## prakaraNa prabandhAvaliH## (30 works - 343 pages)##

prabodha sudhAkaraH ##(257 shlokams)##  
svAtmaprakAshika## (68)##  
manIshhApaJNchakam.h## (5)##  
advaitapaJNchakam.h## (5)##  
nirvANa shhaTkam.h## (6)##  
advaitAnubhUtiH ##(84)##  
brahmAnuchintanam.h## (28)##  
prashnottara ratnamAlika ##(67)##  
sadAchArAnusandhAnam.h ##(55)##

yogatArAvalii ##(29)##  
upadeshapaJNchakam.h## (5)##  
dhanyAshhTakam.h## (8)##  
jIvanmuktAnandalaharii ##(17)##  
anAtmashriivigarhaNa prakaraNam.h## (18)##  
svarUpAnusa.ndhAnAshhTakam.h## (8+1=9)##  
yatipaJNchakam.h## (5)##  
paJNchIkaraNam.h## (prose)##  
tatvopadeshaH ##(87)##  
ekashlokii ##(1) ##  
mAyApaJNchakam.h ##(5)##  
prauDhAnubhUtiH ##(17)##  
brahmaGYAnAvaliimAlA ##(20)##  
laghuvAkyavR^ittiH ##(18)##  
nirvANamaJNjarI ##(12)##  
aparokshAnubhUtiH ##(144)##  
vAkyavR^ittiH ##(53)##  
svAtmanirUpaNam.h## (153)##  
AtmabodhaH ##(68)##  
shatashlokii## (100)##  
dashashlokii ##(10)##

##Volume 3: ##upadesha rachanAvalI ##( 3 works - 466 pages)##

vivekachUDamaNiH  
upadeshasAhasrii (gadyaprabandhaH, padyaprabandhaH)  
sarvavedAntasiddhAntasArasa.ngrahaH

##Volumer 4:## prapaJNchasAraH## (573 pages)##  
(paTala 1-33)

##Volume 5: ##laghubhAshhyam.h## ( 5 works - 535 pages)##

shrII vishhNusahasranAmastotrabhAshhyam.h  
sanat.h sujAtIya bhAshhyam.h  
shrII lalita trishatI bhAshhyam.h  
hastAmalakIya bhAshhyam.h  
adhyAtmapATala bhAshhyam.h

##Volume 6: ##shriimad.h bhagavadgItA bhAshhyam.h ##(592 pages)##

##Volume 7:## brahmasUtrabhAshhyam.h ## (adhyAya 1,2,3,4 - 885  
pages)##

##Volume 8: ##upanishhadbhAshhyaANi## ( 10 upanishhat.h - 923 pages)##  
IshopanishhadbhAshhyam.h

kenopanishhat.h (pada bhAshhyam.h)  
kenopanishhat.h (vAkya bhAshhyam.h)  
kaThopanishhadbhAshhyam.h ##(adhyAYa 1, adhyAya 2)##  
prashnopanishhadbhAshhyam.h  
muNDakopanishhadbhAshhyam.h ##(muNDaka 1,2,3)##  
mANDUkyopanishhatkArikA bhAshhyam.h  
aitareyopanishhadbhAshhyam.h ##(adhyAya 1,2,3)##  
taittirIyopanishhadbhAshhyam.h (shIKshAvalli,  
bR^ighuvalli, brahmAnandavalli)  
nR^isi.nhapUrvatApanyupanishhadbhAshhyam.h  
(prathamopanishhat.h, dvitIyopanishhat.h, tR^itIyopanishhat.h,  
chaturthopanishhat.h, paJNchamopanishhat.h)

##Volume 9: ##chhAndogyopanishhadbhAshhyam.h## (572 pages)##

##Volume 10:## bR^ihadAraNyakopanishhadbhAshhyam.h## (834 pages)##