

*Sri Ganeshaya namah*

## MAHA PARIVRAJAKA

### Preface

*“Uttaram yat samudrasya Himadreschaiva Dakshinam  
Varsham tad Bharatam nama Bharati yatra santatih”*

*Gayatri devah kila geetakari dhanyastu yey Bharata bhumibhage  
Wwargapavargaspado marabhute bhavati bhuyah purushah saratwat*

*Durlabham Bharate janma paurashasyacha va pashoah  
Visargasya cha va jantoah vrikshapastana yorapi*

*Atrapi Bharatam Shreshttham Jambudveepe nahamne  
Yatoti kormabhuresha yatonya bhogabhumayah*

*Atra janmasahasranam sahasrairapi sattama  
Kadaschiuabhate janturmanushyam punyasanchayath*

*Desah prthvi tasyam simavath samudrantaram udichyaat  
Yojanasahasraparimanam tiriyatichatravartikshetram*

There are several citations as above which not only depict the fact that Bharata which extends from the Himalayas in the north to the legendary *Rama Sethu* in the south has been a nation from times immemorial, but modern intellectuals deny this fact. They cite the examples of kingdoms of the past being perpetually at war with one another and thus question how such people could constitute a nation. But those who raise this objection do not know the difference between a state and a nation as understood in our tradition. A king has the natural tendency of extending the boundaries of his kingdom. If he is devoid of this quality, the very essence of kingship is lost: *“Asantushto Dwijo nashtah, santushto hi mahipatih”* – A discontented *Brahmana* and a contented king are sure to be destroyed. It is something unique about Bharata that though there were different types of kingdoms in different places, and the kings were at war with one another, it has remained a nation from Himalayas in the north to the ocean in the south. *“Samrajyam bhojyam swarajyam vairajyam parameshtim rajyam maharajyamadhipatyam prithiviyai samudra paryantaya ekahraat – Samrajya, Bhojya etc. are different kinds of states in the country. Nevertheless, it is one Raashtra – Nation.”* is what the Vedas declare. *“Vayam rashtre*

*jagriyama purohitah*” – it is the bounden duty of the *purohita* to be vigilant and safeguard this unity. Such is the exhortation to the *purohitas*. If one asks, “what is the distinguishing mark of this nationhood?” It is to be found in the values and ideals that the people of this country cherish. It is the firm faith of our people that *Moksha* is the ultimate goal of this life and that one should lead a life that is compatible with this ultimate ideal. Only because these values and ideals have still survived, that people go on pilgrimage to innumerable holy places located in different parts of the country. Their ardent desire is to bathe in all the rivers of this country, as every river flowing through this land has potency of washing off sin. *Kumbhamela* holds an irresistible attraction for all. The prevalence of such common beliefs and values can be attributed to the Vedas, the Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and other holy scriptures as well as the great sages who initiated these great traditions in this country. The *Shastras* give valuable guidance not only to the common man but also to the warring kings. Even war has to be fought in a legitimate way as laid down in the *Shastras*. Keeping in view the kingly desire for conquest and extension of territories, the *Shastras* prescribe performance of *Ashwamedha* and the notion of single sovereignty over the whole country. This spirit of unity and patriotism still survives in our people. When our country attained independence 64 years ago after a continuous struggle of nearly twenty five centuries, an incredible event of 600 kings voluntarily giving up their separate kingdoms to be merged in the new Republic witnessed in this country, is something unheard of in the history of any other country of the world. Further, when the government declared the policy of “land belongs to the tiller” landlords voluntarily gave up their land to the government. Such a willing sacrifice can happen in no other part of the world. There would have been a bloodbath if such a policy was attempted in any other country. Thus, it is amply clear that Bharata was and continues to be a nation and will certainly survive as a nation. But those modern intellectuals who desire to know the essence of this Dharma cannot do so unless they free themselves from the vicious influence of western culture.

*Shastras* reveal that even this Dharma established by the sages of yore gradually loses its hold on the society in course of time. Dharma which stands firmly on four legs in the *Krita Yuga*, with the advent of new *yugas* gets deprived of these supporting legs one by

one, till in the *Kali Yuga* it is left with only one leg for its support. With the entry of the *Kali Yuga*, Parikshit who was none other than the scion of the noble *Pandavas*, being the son of Abhimanyu and grandson of Arjuna, behaves like a depraved youth. Offended on getting no response to his query from Shamika, who was seated in deep meditation, garlands him with a dead snake. If such is the effect of the *Kali Yuga* even on a person of noble descent, what could be its effect on common people! They begin to lose faith in the Vedas and begin to value more their own little knowledge. *Varnashrama* Dharma, which forms the bedrock of a healthy social order, gradually loses its hold on the society. Some clever people who depend solely on mere perception and inference, formulate their own individual ideologies. In the early stages, this is done with a semblance of respect to the Vedas. But later, like the Jaina ideologues, they totally abandon the Vedas. Further on, ever opposing the Vedas like Sugatha, some individuals begin to put forth independent ideologies. Those who are opposed to the Vedas try to get primacy for their individual theories by organizing partisan groups. The validity of such ideologies comes to be decided by the number of members of the partisan group. And thus, people begin to adopt deceit and force or violence to increase the membership of their group, and that leads to disruption of the social order. This is what has happened in Bharata during the last 2500 years.

This degradation became rapid with the coming of Buddha who repudiated the Vedas. Though there are clear evidences to maintain that Buddha was opposed to the Vedas, some modern scholars deny this. Buddhism was limited to the kingdom of Magadha up to three centuries after the demise of Buddha. Later on as Buddhism began to expand beyond Magadha and the number of its adherents grew, Buddhist scholars wrote many treatises wherein they expressed divergent views. **But every scholar claimed that he was faithfully reproducing the opinions of Buddha. Whatever that be, the one common theme of all these scholars is the repudiation of the Vedic tradition.** The opinion of some recent researchers is that Buddha was not opposed to the Vedas, but his followers have misunderstood his ideas. But there are contradictory opinions among the Buddhist scholars regarding this view also. It is futile to enter into these endless disputations. If in course of time it is unanimously accepted that Buddha was not

opposed to the Vedas, it will be only a matter of joy and satisfaction for us. That in the name of Buddha several books have been written during the last 2000 years, which have only contributed to the downfall of our country, has been irrefutably proved by History. The kings who were converted to Buddhism gave up war altogether and became impotent. In pursuance of the kings' edict that people must support Buddhism, overzealous adherents of Buddhism forcibly converted people to Buddhism. Those Buddhists who wanted to destroy the Vedic way of life did not hesitate even to help the foreign invaders to occupy this country. Stretching the idea of *Ahimsa* to ridiculous extremes, the kings made meat eaters untouchables. Having thus destroyed the nation, they themselves got destroyed by the very enemies of the nation, the Huns and the Muslim invaders whom they had helped. This is the reason why Shankara speaks very bitterly at the end of his denunciation of Buddhism. When the depredations of Buddhists reached an intolerable limit, Pushyamitra, a *Brahmana*, adopting *Apaddharma*, became a king and drove out the enemies of the nation and put down the traitorous Buddhists and established his unchallenged supremacy over the whole country. *Maharshi* Patanjali, the author of *Yogasutra*, got consecrated the *Aswamedha* at the hands of Pushyamitra.

About thirteen centuries ago, by the time of Shankara the Buddhist religion was limited to a few scholars and some ignorant people. But the wrong traditions initiated by Buddha, in course of time gave rise to diverse individualistic ideologies and cults and even superstitious beliefs. Vedic learning waned and *Varnadharma* got derailed. It was only with the tireless efforts of Shankara that this Dharma was restored. But the so-called modern intellectuals raise a noisy protest against this. This is nothing new. It started with Buddha. This is how their argument runs: "The concept of the division of *Varnas* as practiced now is erroneous. Any attempt to protect it is not correct. It is wrong to say that people born in the respective castes of *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* or *Shudra* naturally belong to that particular *Varna* and it is also wrong to prescribe unique functions and a unique way of life for each *Varna* on the basis of birth. This is because the supposed characteristics that are the distinguishing marks of different *varnas* are really not unique to the members of that particular *Varna* only. The so-called unique qualities – *Gunas* – of a particular *Varna* are not exclusive but found in the members of

the other *Varnas* also”. This argument needs to be examined carefully and with a balanced mind.

Before critically examining this argument one has to consider what this argument has already conceded and then analyze what remains to be decided. It has conceded that for an orderly social life a division into four groups based on the principle of *Varna* dharma is necessary. It is also conceded that this arrangement should be based on *Gunas*. Further what the *Shastras* prescribe as appropriate *Guna* for a particular *Varna* should be the deciding factor inclusion in a *Varna* – whether *Varna* should be decided on the basis of the present *guna* of the individual or on the basis of birth. Their argument is that *Varna* should be decided by worth and not birth – by an individual’s actions and character – *charana* and *charitra*.

How far is this contention correct? It is evident that all the three *gunas*, *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, are found in every individual. Each individual sometimes acts in a *sattvic* manner while at other times he may act in *rajasic* or *tamasic* manner, which means that the manifestation of a particular *guna* depends on circumstances and its presence cannot be detected if it is not manifest. Further, the very same *guna* gets manifested in different persons differently. *Tamas* may render a person lazy and keep him without activity. But it may send another person to sleep and may induce some other person to get drunk. A person may be angry under the effect of *rajas* while one may just frown, another person may thrash and another may even kill. When *sattva guna* is predominant one may embrace a child with love while other may begin to study a holy book and yet another go into deep meditation. Why do such differences exist? It depends on the intensity of the other two *gunas*. Though all the three *gunas* are present in everyone, different persons are driven to act differently. It may also drive a person to act differently at different points of time. Therefore, if only one could decide by observing a person the proportion in which these *gunas* exist in him and in what direction these are changing, then one may perhaps be able to decide his *Varna*. But is it humanly possible to decide it or measure these changes? Can any doctor examine his pulse and give a certificate for this? Or can it be measured with the help of any instrument? Even if it be possible, will anyone accept

such results arrived at by another person? Even if someone can decide it, what can be the criterion of this validity? If one can decide it unilaterally for oneself, it should not lead to conflict in society because the system of *Varna* is only for peace and harmony in the society.

Who can then determine the *gunas* of individuals? And for what purpose and how? These are the questions that confront us. Who can decide it if not God Himself? That which is not be done any human being is accomplished by God alone. This can be taken as the definition of God. None else can create either the world or the living beings. It is only God who is omniscient and omnipotent who can create them. I am the one who indulges in karma as prompted by my crazy will and who must perforce enjoy its fruits. On the other hand, the Almighty God is free from the performance of any karma or the enjoyment of its fruits, but is the perennial witness to my *gunas* and the karmas I indulge in under their influence. Thus it is only He, who is immanent in all beings, who can decide the individual's characteristic *guna*. If one asks what is the need for deciding the individual's *gunas* – it is this: I am caught inextricably in the maze of these *gunas* and the karmas that they induce me to perform. It must transcend these *gunas* to attain absolute peace. It is only He who can lift me out of this morass and bless me with Salvation - state which transcends these *gunas* and leads me to absolute bliss. I have to agree to attain this state of *Moksha*, I have to perform appropriate karma, prescribed by Him, to become deserving to attain *Moksha*. The karma that I have to perform should depend on my inherent *gunas* and should have the ability to regulate them. But I am ignorant of both: what those *gunas* are and how I can transcend them through karma. It is Almighty God who alone can determine this. How does God determine my *gunas*? He Himself has declared this. *Gunas* and karmas have a non-exclusive relationship and are mutually dependent. Each one is affecting the other perpetually. That is why *gunas* are extremely complicated. God, who is always witness to my *gunas* and karmas at the time of my death, determines my *gunas* in the next birth, making me take birth in an appropriate family. When I am born in that family, the appropriate karma is prescribed by Him for me. If I follow that, I can evolve to a higher plane. If I discard it, it leads to my regression. The declaration “*Chaturvarnyam maya srishtam guna karma*

*vibhagashah*” clearly enunciates how *gunas* originate: They have their source in individual *swabhava*. It implies that they are the product of the individual’s *samskaras* acquired in his past lives, and karma is what is prescribed for the present life (*janma*). It was because Buddha abandoned God that the path which could have led him to this conclusion was not open to him.

Thus far regarding *Varna* Dharma. Now what is *Ashrama* Dharma? A man with discrimination knows that tireless effort is inevitable all through in life – “*Kurvanneveha karmani jijivisheth shatam samah*”. Effort for what purpose? For attainment of *Moksha*. But there is no worldly life in *Moksha*, and as man is under the influence of the *gunas*, there is no liberation for man from worldly life. There is no instant transition to *Moksha*. An individual has to make his way towards *Moksha* only through worldly life. In view of this, *Shastras* have prescribed four-stage advancement towards the goal of *Moksha*. Those are the four *Ashramas*. The foremost is the *Brahmacharya Ashrama* wherein the effort is directed towards *adhyayana* or study. This *adhyayana* should at least introduce him to the concept of *Moksha*. The second is *Grihasta Ashrama*. In this stage the effort aims at performing karmas that prepare the mind for attaining *Moksha*. The third is *Vanaprastha Ashrama*. Though as a householder, one enjoys the worldly pleasures being prompted by *gunas*, subsequently the person having attained wisdom decides to spend his life in a forest abode and his effort there is directed towards performance of *tapasya* to attain *Moksha*. When this effort reaches its fulfillment, a person having reached a state of complete renunciation, will lead his further life always immersed in the thought of Almighty God and this is the final stage of *Sanyasa Ashrama*. These *Ashramas* are meant to lead a person by stages through virtuous deeds enabling him to transform his *gunas* and finally attain *Moksha* that transcends *gunas* following *Varnashrama* Dharma. Therefore, it is wrong for a person to claim “I am endowed with the *guna* of some other *Varna*, and hence, I can perform the karma of that *Varna* better and I will adopt that karma.” But that is not correct – *Shreyan swadharmo vighnati Paradharmath swanushtitaah*. *Swadharme nidhanam shreyah, para dharmo bhayavahah* – Even if a person cannot perform the karma of his own *Varna* properly, even the attempt made by a person to perform his prescribed karma brings him credit. Adopting the karma of another

*Varna* can only be harmful. Performing the karma prescribed for one's *Varna* alone is the way forward.

According to *Shastras*, accumulation of wealth is permitted only to the *Vaishyas*. If this injunction is viewed as being partial to *Vaishyas* and is prompting this argument, it is futile. The reason is: For a means of livelihood under unavoidable circumstances, a person is permitted by the *Shastras* to follow the vocation of another *Varna*. If on finding it more suitable, it is continued for five generations, they naturally merge with the adopted *varna*. The restrictions are only on *amushmika karmas* i.e. karma related with other worlds.

How proper performance of *Varna* Dharma alone leads to peace and prosperity in a society? Look at the history of our country. Our country has been the victim of repeated invasions during the last 2500 years. If Bharata was not prosperous, why would Persians, Greeks, Yavanas, Huns, Shakas, Arabs, British, French, Portuguese, Dutch and ever so many other marauders invade this country? Which other country has such a history to its credit? Just observe the inner vitality of this nation. Even after 9 to 10 centuries of depredations of the Muslim invaders and two centuries of British imperialistic exploitation, both aimed at destruction of this nation by inhuman cruelty, loot and deceit, this nation is not dead. It has not only survived, but is rising. Which other nation has this glory? Enemies of this nation sprang like mushrooms and got inflated and ultimately perished. Their life span was one or two centuries. But Bharata is alive and is immortal. Some of our intellectuals cannot see what is so crystal clear. Afflicted by blindness, they join hands with the enemies and try to destroy *Varnashrama* Dharma. But those who are loyal to Dharma need not despair. Though, ever so many Hiranyakshas, Hiranyakashipus, Ravana and Kamsas as well as Muslims and Britishers attempted to destroy it, all of them perished like a clod of earth striking a rock. Though we may feel distressed with this inability of some of our unwise fellowmen to appreciate the inner vitality of this Dharma, their lack of wisdom can bring no harm to it.



It is true that passage of time brings about deterioration in any system and people governed by that system show laxity in observing the codes of that system. This is the law of nature. Thus, whenever deficiencies crop up in a system, attempts should be made to set them right and not destroy what has come down from times immemorial. Remedy for headache does not lie in cutting off the head. The *varnas* are the limbs of the *Samaja Purusha*. *Varna* Dharma is the blood of this society. Even among those who have been converted to Christianity or Islam, it has persisted in one form or other, even after a lapse of centuries. The inhabitants of the Island of Bali even today proudly claim that they are adherents of *Varna* Dharma. Therefore, it is in the interest of all that the intellectuals and well-wishers of the society try to clean up this system and make it workable. Here is an instance that took place in Japan, where along some power lines, birds built nests and often got electrocuted, causing disruption in the power supply. At first they tried to solve the problem by killing the birds. Still, the birds did not stop building nests along the power lines. Scientists were asked to find a solution for this problem. After studying the problem from all angles, the scientists suggested that facilities should be created along the way parallel to the power lines for the birds to build their nests. The solution was implemented and the problem was solved and the birds were also saved. Similarly, intellectuals of our society should apply their mind and examine the deficiencies that have cropped up in *Varna* Dharma dispassionately and thoroughly and suggest solutions which can lead to peace and harmony in the society.

Some learned people say that *Varna* system has engendered a notion of superiority and inferiority and that has led to large scale conversions of our people to other religions. But what history says is quite contrary to this. Buddhism which had repudiated *Varna* Dharma had spread extensively in Sindh, Gandhara and Vanga. After the invasion of Muslims, all Buddhists in those regions got converted to Islam. Those regions have now become Pakistan and Bangladesh. But in Magadha, where the kings had protected and retained the *Varna* Dharma, such conversions did not take place. The region of Magadha has even now continued in Bharata by the name Bihar. The reason for Hindu religion surviving in Tripura is the preservation of *Varna* Dharma done by *Brahmanas* very intelligently. Not only this, even before the time of Shankara, the *Chandalas* who had

been converted to Buddhism, which had no *Varna* Dharma, became disillusioned with untouchability being practiced in Buddhism, and returned to their original Vedic Dharma. This clearly demonstrates the fact that there was no notion of superiority or inferiority in Vedic religion. But our people getting converted to Islam is only because of the ruthless methods adopted by Muslims and it is also known to all that conversions to Christianity have taken place because of deceit and inducements. In spite of this, it is all well known that even after such conversions, the new entrants in these religions have been treated as inferior members. Therefore, it is baseless to say that discrimination on the basis of superiority and inferiority was being practiced in Vedic religion and that resulted in conversions.

Whatever be the reasons for conversions, all those converted should be brought back to their *swadharma*. Even in the beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> century, Mahatma Devala of Sindhu Desha had ordained this and the same was continued by Medhathithi. They were contemporaries of Shankara, and there is no wonder if they were inspired by the exhortation of Shankara: “*Chandalostu Sa tu dwijostu gururityesha manisha mama*”. Recently many well known saints have continued this work. Under the guidance of Samarth Ramdas, Shivaji and through Hakka and Bukka, Vidyaranya had taken up this task. In modern times, Arya Samaj is doing this work on a large scale. Nowadays Vedic religion is being widely propagated through modern methods of communication like media and improved travel facilities. It is said that 70% of Americans call themselves Hindus as they have come to believe in Hindu Gods and Goddesses, rebirth and yoga. Churches are being closed down in western countries. The revolutions rocking Arab countries indicate that their separatist ideology is also coming to an end. In our own country, followers of these sects seem eager to return their ancient religion. The love of their *swadharma* which was latent till now is rising.

The state of affairs before the time of Shankara and that after him has so far been analyzed and that is enough for our present purpose. Now regarding this book which describes the life history of Shankara in the form of a narrative: In the splendid history of our ancient society, there is very little mention of *Sannyasis*. Therefore, even in the days

of Shankara, some people argued that *Sannyasa* Dharma was not in conformity with the injunctions of scriptures and that it found its sanctity in later *Smritis*. That this argument is wrong has been made clear in Shankara's commentaries. *Sannyasis* were there always, but they rarely attracted attention of general public, because of the way of life prescribed for them in the *Shastras*. They have to lead a life of renunciation, begging for their food from somewhere and live in isolation. But whenever there was a decline in Dharma, they came out of their isolation and in pursuance of *Apaddharma*, performed astonishing deeds. There are accounts of astonishing brave deeds performed by *Dandi Sannyasis* when Alexander invaded Bharata twelve centuries before the time of Shankara. Even up to this day the *Dandi Sannyasis* and other associates have followed this tradition. Madhusudana Saraswati, Samarth Ramdas, who gave guidance to Shivaji Maharaj, the sage Vidyanarya who guided Hakka and Bukka, the founders of Vijayanagara Empire, Guru Ganganath who guided Jhansi Lakshmibai are all glorious examples. It was mainly the *Bairagis* who prepared the ground work for the revolution of 1857. An episode that took place in the life of Madhusudana Saraswati was as follows: Akbar was the king in his days and Birbal was his minister. Rana Pratap had sacrificed not only his entire kingdom but everything that belonged to him just to protect Swadharma. Birbal, who was a relative of Rana Pratap, felt sad that he was the minister of Akbar who was a sworn enemy of Rana Pratap. As an act of expiation for this, he wanted to do something to serve his Dharma. He got an opportunity for it when he heard the news of Muslim *fakirs* massacring hundreds of Hindu *sannyasis*. At an opportune moment, when Akbar was extremely friendly with him, Birbal broached this subject. Akbar said that he would not interfere in the fight between *fakirs* and *sannyasis*. Birbal at once requested the king to make it a kingly edict. And accordingly a Royal *Sansad* was issued. Birbal took this to Madhusudana Saraswati, who was in Bengal and asked him to make use of it in appropriate manner. Madhusudana Saraswati took this to a Rana in Rajasthan and begged him for a gift. The king, feeling extremely happy that such a great *sannyasi* had visited his palace, said, "What gift you want? If I can, I will certainly give". Saraswatiji then asked for a platoon of soldiers. The king being shocked at this request by a *sannyasi*, felt scared of granting this unusual gift. Then Madhusudana Saraswati showed him the Sansad of Akbar. Relieved, the Rana granted his wish. Madhusudana Saraswati

ordained the soldiers into the Naga order and exhorted them to consider it their bounden duty to protect the *sannyasis* against the depredations of Muslim *fakirs*. These soldiers, in turn, decimated the *fakirs* and the problem was solved. Some say that the Naga order was initiated by Shankara, but I have found no basis for it.

In some versions of Shankara Vijaya, there is a mention of Shankara having got the Buddhists killed, but it is absolutely wrong for the simple reason that by the time of Shankara there were hardly any Buddhists left to be killed. But there were two killings – one in Srishaila and another in Karnataka. But they were not Buddhists but were *kapalikas*. Even that took place unavoidably at the hands of Shankara's disciples, in the act of protecting their Guru.

The miracles performed by sage Shankara are only two – Stopping the Narmada floods and *Prakaya Pravesha*. These are not products of some fertile imagination. They were achieved by attaining extraordinary powers. But these are not the reasons for Shankara's name being permanently enshrined in history. It is because of the depth and breadth of his personality, witnessed in the part played by him in resurrecting Dharma which was rapidly declining. Every biographer of Shankara is aware of the lack of historical sources, while writing his life history. His place of birth, abandoning his worldly life at the age of eight, being initiated into sanyasa by Govinda Bhagawatpada, writing commentaries on *Prasthan Traya*, covering entire length and breadth of the country on foot thrice and the end of this magnificent journey of life at the age of 32, these are generally accepted by most authorities. But lack of historical basis for many episodes described in several versions of Shankara Vijaya makes them feel dismayed. The main reason for it is the modern concept of history as propounded by westerners. History written under their concept may have detailed description of events. Perhaps history of several centuries can be compiled within the span of this measuring rod; but the benefit of its study is very little. "The only lesson that man learns from history is that he learns nothing" is a famous saying in English. Who can compile the history of Bharata, which being the *Karmabhoomi*, has always witnessed the conflict of Dharma and *Adharma*! What benefit can it ultimately bring? Evidently, all conflicts are actuated by the eternal clash of self

interest of individuals prompted by those inveterate enemies of man grouped as “*Ari-Shad-Varga*” – namely *Kama*, *Krodha*, *Mada*, *Moha*, *Lobha* and *Matsarya*. What interest can there be in a history which is repetitive? Therefore in our tradition, history is narrated in a different manner. Based on the main events and transformed by the imaginative power of the author, being blended with *Nava-rasas*, literature takes birth as history, which has the aim of noble instruction. There should be no detailed description of events and they will not be found there. But there should be such detailed discussion of Dharma that has to be learnt from it. Ramayana and Mahabharata are *itihisas* – history – only in this sense. We have to view Shankara’s life history only from this point of view.

All versions of Shankara Vijaya are in the style of *Puranas* and are undoubtedly beautiful. But those who have grown up in the modern atmosphere relish novel-like compositions. A few decades ago, the author of *Maha Brahmana* and *Maha Kshatriya*, Shri Devudu Narasimha Shastri, is believed to have composed a work *Maha Sannyasi*, depicting the life story of Shankara. But it has not been published. Later, Shri Lakshmi Narasimha Shastri of Mysore, has become renowned by his work on Shankara’s life history. The present book, *Maha Parivrajaka*, also belongs to the same genre – a narrative that reads like a fast-paced novel. During the course of narration, attempt has been made to include Shankara’s philosophy in a simple format wherever possible, but rather tough in other places. This book has adopted the episodes narrated in Shankara Vijaya of Madhava, but the topics connected with certain supposed incidents involving Padmapada, have been left out. The so called humorous repartees in the presence of the Guru himself, comparing the co-student Giri to a pillar or when the preceptor entrusted the work of writing commentary on his Bhashya to Sureshvaracharya, the latter creating factions after conspiring with other disciples and opposing the preceptor and as a consequence the preceptor having been scared to withdraw the entrustment or Sureshwara cursing Padmapada for that, are all fictitious slanders, deprecating each of the Shankara pentagon, born out of fertile and childish imagination of some people. The author, Madhava, also declares at the end: “*Litihyamashritya vadanti chaivam tadeva mulam mam bhashane pi yavatkritam tavadihasya kartuh papam tatah syadvigunam pravaktuh* – For telling this

story, the basis of which is only hearsay, twice that sin of the sinner accrues to him that indulges in its narration". I have taken this warning seriously and omitted even the mention of those episodes.

A new character not found in other versions is that of Prithvidharacharya. It is not just a fictitious character. Vellalakula Umamaheshwara Shastry has asserted the fact that Prithvidhara had written a commentary on Brahma Sutras and that he abandoned it after meeting Shankara. It is his opinion that Prithvidhara had attained eminence. Further in the Oufrect catalogue maintained in Bodleian Library of Oxford, there is the mention of a work named *Dwadasha Mahavakya Vivarana* written by Vaikuntha Puri. This work cites Prithvidhara as a disciple of Shankara. The initiation of the Dashanami order of Sannyasis is credited to him. "*Prithvidharacharyah tasyapi shishyah dashah thirtha aashrama varna aranya giri parvatha sagarah: Saraswati bharati cha puri namani vai dashah*". It implies that while Padmapada and other 4 disciples were entrusted with the work of propagating the message of Shankara, Prithvidharacharya, who had the capability of maintaining the discipline of the order, became the organizer. He took upon the responsibility of maintaining its constitution. In another reference in the same catalogue, he is named as Prithvidharacharya of Shringeri. But his name is not in the list of heads of Sringeri Peetha. Probably he had settled in Sringeri in his old age.

Swami Paramananda Bharati

## Chapter 1

### FROM KAILASHA TO KALADI

A remote village in Kerala. The surroundings are beautiful with all encompassing greenery. In the midst of coconut palms, banana plantations and rivulets, some festivity is going on in a house, and relatives and friends having finished their meal, are dozing off in one quarter. In another quarter women squatting on a mat are gossiping.

“Oh, Bhagavati, poor Aryamba has no kids. That is her only source of sorrow”.

“Which Aryamba are you speaking of?” another lady seated nearby quipped.

“It is Aryamba of Kaladi – the wife of Shivaguru”.

“Oh! No, no. Didn’t you know that after almost 27 years of married life, she gave birth to a male child?” The lady remarked, exhibiting a mark of surprise. “Is it so? I had no idea about it,” said the other, equally surprised.

“Whoever has visited them speaks very highly of the lad. It seems the boy is a gifted child. He is also very good-looking.”

Janakamma who was intently listening to this talk added “It seems he is very bright. They say that even at two he was asking all sorts questions which even his father could not answer!”

Krishnaveni, another woman in the group, had an interesting news about this prodigy – “At the age of six he had mastered the four Vedas, they say. It seems he grasps things after hearing only once.” The gossip continued.

“See, they have performed his *Upanayana* even at the age of three. They even say that he has mastered the power of *Gayatri*”.

“That is what I too heard. But poor Shivaguru! It seems he passed away. Do you know this young lad himself runs the *Gurukula* now!”

“I can’t just believe it”.

“My husband often goes that side for priestly duties. I will accompany him this time and see this wonderful lad!”

Who was this wonder child?

In the village Kaladi of Kerala had settled Vidyadhiraja of *Atri Gotra*. His son was Shivaguru. At the age of eight he was sent to *Gurukula*. He completed the study of *Krishna Yajurveda* along with six additional subjects known as *Shadanga*<sup>1</sup>. It was followed by a study of *Mimamsa*. He returned home at the age of twenty.

A village known as Veliyanadu was located at a walking distance of 10-12 hours from Kaladi. There lived a well known scholar by name Magha Panditha. He had a daughter named Aryamba. Her name in her parental home was Sati. As she attained the age of 13, many suitors came seeking her hand. Magha Panditha selected Shivaguru from among the suitors. Both the families were well to do and the wedding was performed in a grand manner.

Shivaguru started a *gurukula* in his house. Nearly ten students became his disciples. The house reverberated with the chanting of Vedas. After studies the youngsters indulged in boyish pranks. The guru and his wife always enjoyed this innocent mischief and never complained about it. Several years passed. A feeling of depression overtook the couple, as even after 26 years of married life they had not been blessed with a child. They

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<sup>1</sup> Shadangas are shiksha, grammar, meter, nirukta, astronomy and kalpa



decided to perform a religious penance. It was decided that the couple should render service to Vrishabhachaleshwara of Ooshabhadri for a period of two months. The religious austerities were to begin with the onset of *Uttarayana* on the *Pradosha* of the bright half of the month of *Pushya* and to end on the *Pradosha* of the bright half of the month of *Phalguna*. As long as they stayed there, they performed *pujas* and *japa* and entertained guests with a variety of food. In between on the night of *Shivaratri* in the month of *Magha* they observed fast and performed *puja* keeping awake the whole night. Next day was observed as *Paran*, a day of partaking meals after observing fast. Naturally next night brought sound sleep. Late in the night, an old man knocked at their door and sought shelter. Even at that late hour, Aryamba prepared food and served the old man. Shivaguru arranged for his sleep. Next day the aged guest, having been fully satisfied with their devoted attention to him, heartily blessed them that their religious austerities would come to fruition and departed. The couple, after finishing the austerities, returned to Kaladi.

Having worshipped Vrishabhachaleshwara, the outcome could only be positive. The couple were blessed by the Deity and Aryamba became pregnant in. *Apastamba* has laid down that with the onset of pregnancy, *Pumsavana*<sup>2</sup> must be performed. It is a ritual to ensure the protection of the foetus in the womb and also strengthen the confidence of the child bearing lady. *Rangavalli* depicting *Swadhistana* and *Ajna*<sup>3</sup> was drawn and the holy *Kalasha* was placed on it. Two little lasses prepared a concoction of banyan bud and paddy made into thin paste in milk. Waiting for Aryamba to exhale through the right nostril, this concoction was poured into it. This would ensure the birth of a male child. Later in the month of *Margashira*, *Seemantha* was performed. *Havan* was performed. A paddy seedling, the thorn of a wild boar and dried herbs of scent were placed in front of the *kalasha* and sanctified with the chanting of mantras. The wife was seated facing north and the husband picked up the sanctified wild boar thorn and slowly moved it on the parting of her hair backwards down her neck and cast it at the back. Later Soma Mantra was chanted in Sri Raga and a venerable lady played it on *veena*.

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<sup>2</sup> *Vyakte garbhe pumsavanam kuryaath.*

<sup>3</sup> Swadhishtana is just below the private organ and Ajna in the forehead.

Now Aryamba was with two souls. In tune with the desires of the growing babe in the womb, this is the time when cravings are experienced by the pregnant mother. But Aryamba was desireless. She had to observe several restrictions to ensure the safety of the growing baby. She was forbidden from fully immersing herself under water while bathing in rivers or sleeping without a pillow, nor could she exercise. Also she was forbidden from climbing stairs or keeping her hair unplaited, though after a bath she could do so for just drying. Once Aryamba, after bathing in the river and worshipping Lord Krishna in the temple, returned home with the sacred offerings. Shivaguru had a full view of his wife and remarked, “Arya, when I look at your beaming face, I feel that a brilliant kid is growing in your womb.” Aryamba blushed!

On the fifth day of the bright half of the month of *Vaishakha*, Aryamba developed labour pain. Shivaguru arranged for the *Samskara* of *Jatakarma*<sup>4</sup> which had to be performed in the labour room itself. “Let the delivery be easy and pleasant” with these words Shivaguru led his wife to the labour room, gently massaging her back. He chanted the mantra “*Ma twam vikeshirva Avadhishta*.” After the delivery, before cutting the umbilical cord, Shivaguru chanted the *Vatsapya* mantra. To expiate the baby having consumed the secretions in the womb, and for the development of its intellect, the baby was administered a little honey and cow’s ghee. And then the mother fed the baby with the milk of her right breast.

Three days after the birth of the baby, Aryamba asked Shivaguru, “How is the child’s horoscope?” Shivaguru just replied, “All is well” but did not say anything further.

Eleventh day was the full-moon day and the naming ceremony had to be performed on that day. The parents and the baby had their ceremonial bath. Discussion turned on the question of choosing the name. Shivaguru prodded his wife to suggest a name and she, in turn, threw the onus on him and at last Shivaguru himself had to decide: “This child is

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<sup>4</sup> *Prato nabhivardhanath pumsay jatakarma vidheeyate* – Manu Smriti

born to us with the grace of Lord Shiva. We are blessed. *Sham karoti iti shankarah.* *Shankara* is one who brings auspiciousness. Why not we name him Shankara?”

Aryamba readily assented saying “It is a sweet name. That is what I was also thinking.”

Shivaguru performed *puja* of the family Deity. Rice was spread out on a silver plate and the name Shankara Sharma was written on it with a turmeric piece and was shown to the *Brahmanas* assembled who touched it. They took the baby on their laps, tied the waist thread and in its right ear they spelt out the words “Your name Shankara Sharma” thrice. It was followed by the *Swasti Vachana* “*Swasti bhavanto bruvantu*”. The *Brahmanas* responded “*Swastyastu*”. The *Brahmanas* were treated to a sumptuous feast and were given enough gifts to gratify them. The baby was put in the cradle. They offered prayers to God to bless the baby with a sound health and long life.

Later, after some days, the ceremonial initiation of feeding had to be performed. Venerable ladies placed the sacred pot on the *Manipura Chakra* drawn in *rangoli*<sup>5</sup> Shivaguru having performed the five sacred offerings, seated himself on the wooden plank with wife and son. He addressed the *Brahamana* ladies and gentlemen assembled there with the chanting “*Namassadase namassadaspathaye namassakhinam purogananam chakshuse*” and prostrated before the *Brahmanas*. After completing the rituals the baby was ceremonially fed with the residual *Payasa* which was left over after offerings. Aryamba followed suit.

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Baby Shankara started toddling quite early when compared to a normal child. People were wonder stuck with such prodigious development of the child. Everyone wanted to pick up the toddler and fondle him. But no one succeeded. Stretching his body, he would wriggle out of their clasp. Girls would get angry with him saying, “You are a naughty

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<sup>5</sup> Navel is the place for Manipura Chakra; it is also the place of samanavayu whose function is to distribute the essence of the digested food to the whole body.

child.” They would go away knuckling their fingers in a gesture of dissatisfaction and disappointment.

By the time he completed his first year, Shankara had learnt to speak his mother tongue fluently. One day father was alone at home with the child. They were engaged in some light banter. After fondling the child for sometime, Shivaguru asked his son, “Tell me who I am.”

The child, in turn, questioned him, “With respect to whom?”

The father shot back, “What do you mean by that?”

The child clarified, “No, you are husband to mother and father to me. So I asked”.

“Look how he talks, mischievous fellow!” But mother in turn asked him “How are you related to me?” Without batting an eyelid he replied, “Son.” Aryamba embraced the little one and breastfed him.

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One day the toddler was moving repeatedly from the hall into a room with two doors, alternately choosing one of the doors. Shivaguru, who noticed this, asked the child

“What are you searching for?”

“I am not searching anything” was the reply.

“Then why are you moving alternately between the doors?”

“I noticed that here are two ways for reaching the room and I was trying to know the shorter route,” pat came the reply. The father, who knew astrology, derived the significance of this reply and felt sad instead of being cheered.

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Visitors who came to see the child brought gifts in the form of toys or a ball or a wheel. The child used to take gifts in his palm and would stare at it for sometime and then would smell it and then would lick it and press it. He would then strike the ground with it repeatedly and at last, throw it away. He would never look at it again. One day the mother who noticed this and asked him

“Child, why did you throw it away?”

Shankara replied, “I observed its shape, color, taste and its smell. I tested whether it is soft or hard. I tested the sound it made by striking it on the ground. Then there was nothing more to know about it. So, I threw it away.”

This reply, instead of gladdening the mother, made her feel sad.

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Shivaguru decided to perform his son’s *Chudakarma* even as the child had yet to complete one year of his age. *Smriti* says that *Chudakarma* performed at that age increases the lifespan and divine aura of a child. On an auspicious day of the child’s first year the mother and the child had their ritual oil bath. After completing his daily ritual, Shivaguru was seated on the wooden plank. The mother and the child sat facing east. After lighting the ceremonial fire, consecrated articles for performing the ritual were collected. A plantain leaf was placed, on which sugar, fruit, milk and ghee were spread with a mixture of hot and cold water. Then he shaved off the child’s hair except for a tuft at the back of the head. A young *Brahmachari* picked up the shaved hair and disposed it under a tree. *Arati* was performed to the child. At last some rice grains were spread out on a plate and arrangements were made for the ceremonial initiation of alphabet-learning. The ritual started with the worship of Lord Ganesha and Goddess Saraswati. The child was made to write on the rice grains in the plate. “*Aum namo Narayanaya, Aum namah Shivaya*” three times, while the child repeated the holy words as he wrote them.

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Once Shivaguru had gone along with the child to a spot outside the village to collect *Darbha* (long grass) under a huge banyan tree. After finishing the work, both sat under the tree and were relaxing. Shankara asked his father

“For how long have the earth, the sun and the moon been in existence?”

“For billions of years” replied the father.

“How did they come to be?”

“See my son, We are born out of food; food is produced by plants; plants grow in the soil, that is the earth; earth came out of water; water from fire; fire from air; and air from the sky”

“From what was the sky born?”

“From Almighty God!”

“How did Almighty God take birth?”

“He neither takes birth nor dies; He always exists.”

“Where does he reside?”

“He is everywhere.”

“Then why can we not see him?”

“Look here, *Akasha* is subtler than air and God is subtler than *Akasha*. When it is impossible to perceive *Akasha*, how can we see God?”

“If so, how do we know that He exists?”

“All that we see around us has evolved from Him. Hence, He must be existing. I will explain to you with an example. Go and pick up a fruit of the banyan tree.”

Shankara picked up one and brought it to his father.

“Break it open,” asked the father.

Shankara broke it into two.

“What do you see inside it?”

“Seeds”

“Break one of them.”

He broke it.

“What is there inside?”

“There is nothing.”

“If there is nothing, how can the banyan tree come out of it? There must be some power in it which creates that tree, but it is not seen. Similarly, the Almighty God has the power to create all these things which we see around us. But He is invisible.”

“If He is invisible, what is the use?”

“He can be seen; but it is difficult, say the learned.”

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On another day, the gardener brought some jackfruit and put the separated pieces in a basket and went away. Mother saw Shankara sitting idly in a corner and she wanted to engage him in some task. She told, “Shankara, come here. Count the pieces. I will go to the riverside and be back. By that time, you should have counted them.” Saying so, she went out for work. Just as she returned, she asked, “How many are there?”

Shankara answered, “One.”

Puzzled with his answer, she said, “I didn’t ask you to count the basket! I wanted you to count the pieces of jack fruit.”

Shankara reiterated his answer, “Yes, it is the fruit I am speaking of.”

Mother was still more puzzled “Well, it is basketful. How could it be just one?”

“Mother, I will take them out and you count them, or you take them out and I will count.”

Said Shankara.

“You take them out and I will count,” said the mother.

Shankara picked up a piece in his tiny hand and slowly lifted it and mother counted it as one.

He placed it aside and took out another.

“Two” said the mother.

“No, this is not two. You have already said that it is one.”

“What I told as one was that. This is two.”

“Ma, what is the difference between the two?”

She got more perplexed. She wondered what to do next. She herself picked up two pieces and held them together and put them in his palm and asked him to lift them up.

She said, “Two.”

An amused Shankara picked up two more and looked at her with smiling look.

She counted, “Four.”

“This is not four, Ma. You have yourself earlier said it is two. How can it be four now?”

Mother did not know what to say. She just admonished him, “You are a naughty fellow.”

She pinched his soft cheek gently and went away. At night when the child was asleep,

Aryamba asked her husband, “You were also witnessing what Shankara said about the pieces of the fruit. Do you know how I could have countered Shankara’s argument?”

“I too could not understand it. We have to get the clarification from himself, when he grows up. That is all.”

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Even when he was just three years old, Shankara learnt to speak Sanskrit fluently in the company of other disciples of the *Gurukula*. Unfortunately, Shivaguru was bedridden with illness by the age of fifty. His health did not improve at all. The wife and the disciples looked after the bedridden Shivaguru. But he could not be saved and died. Long grass (*Darbha*) was spread out with its pointed end towards the south. The dead body was laid on it with the head in the direction of south. Even a year before his death, Shivaguru had disposed off the *shroutagni* and had preserved only the *oupasanagni*. Relatives belonging to the same *gotra* came forward to perform the last rites. They chanted the mantras – “*Aayushah pranagam santunu/ Pranadapanum santunu*”. The *oupasanagni* was taken in a pot. The dead body was carried to the burning *ghat* in a bullock cart drawn by a pair of oxen. Leaving Shankara with other disciples, all the others went to the burning *ghat*. After completing the last rites, they bathed in the river and returned home.

Shankara asked his maternal grandfather Magha, “Where did you carry my sleeping father?”

“Shankara, he has departed to higher realms, my child!”

“When will he return?”

“He cannot return, my child!”



Shankara went deep into thought.

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Magha Pandita who had arrived on hearing the death of his son-in-law, stayed back to console his daughter. Aryamba, shocked by the untimely death of her husband, remained dumbfound for many days. One day, Magha Pandita thought of a way of reviving her spirits and made a proposal for performing the *upanayana* of Shankara.

He said to Aryamba, “Now the *Gurukula*, which was being run at home, is also closed. Chanting of Vedas has also ceased. You are depressed. Can I suggest something?”

“Please do.”

“If you perform your son’s *upanayana*, you will derive satisfaction. Already, he can speak Sanskrit fluently. His pronunciation is clear. *Upanayana* can be performed even at the age of three for bright children. If you keep watching him performing his *Sandhya* and fire ritual, you can overcome your depression. Take a bold decision and perform his *upanayana*.”

Aryamba had her own problem. She said, “No doubt his *upanayana* can be performed. But after that, you will go back to the village. But Shankara will put a hundred and one questions to me – Why should *upanayana* be performed? What he should do afterwards? Why he should do? – Please tell me the answers to all such questions.”

Magha clarified, “Listen, at some point of time in the second month of the child’s development in the womb, *prana* gets into the embryo. At about the fifth month, sense organs develop and the mind and reason (*buddhi*) begin to function. At that time, the memory of the past life persists. With the birth of the child, it fades away. Mind and *buddhi* remain dormant and as time passes, these faculties begin to develop further. Mind is that which thinks and doubts. The child, newly born, learns about things by examining through sense perceptions of sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste and its mind develops. Normally, this development stops at the age of six. Till then, the power of reasoning does not develop.”

“How do we know that?”

“*Buddhi* is the faculty of discrimination with which one determines right and wrong. As children below six do not have a developed power of discrimination (*buddhi*), they do not feel shy of going about naked. They laugh without reason and also cry without reason. But as *buddhi* develops, they begin to feel shy of being naked. They stop laughing or crying without reason. But look at Shankara. He refuses to go about without wearing the loin cloth. He never laughs or cries without reason. There is something extraordinary about your son. It is proper to perform his *upanayana* even now, though he is just three. It is permitted in the *Shastras*<sup>6</sup> also. Now, *chitta* is faculty of memory. That begins to develop at the age of seven or eight. Then the child is sent to the *Gurukula*.”

“Why is Sun God specially worshipped after *upanayana*?”

“Power of discrimination is promoted by the Sun God. For instance, people with weak mind often turn mad at the time of eclipse because Sun’s energy is reduced at that time. This proves that it is the Sun God that promotes the power of discrimination. Therefore, Sun’s worship should begin when *buddhi* begins to develop.”

With the consent of his daughter for her son’s *upanayana*, Magha Pandita fixed an auspicious date for the performance of *upanayana*. On the preceding day, rituals started with the sacred oil bath, *udaka shanti*, offerings to Ganapati, sprinkling of holy water from a sanctified vessel and other formalities. The Magha couple themselves were to officiate in the *upanayana*. The next morning, the sacred oil bath was again performed. For development of speaking ability and better reasoning power, one needs the blessing of the presiding deities of *Aajna* and *Vishuddha Chakras*. Women drew in rangoli the *Aajna* and *Vishuddha Chakras* and the sacred pot was placed on it. It was followed by the ritual shaving of the young *brahmachari* and his bath, and he was clothed in a saffron colored dhoti<sup>7</sup>. Then the *mounji*<sup>8</sup> was tied around his waist along with a piece of deer skin. Then *samit*<sup>9</sup> was offered in the sacred fire and *raksha* was anointed on his forehead. With an invocation, which included the *pravara*, the young initiate made *pranama* to the

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<sup>6</sup> *Garbhashtamshu ityatra bahuvaachananirdeshath tritiya varshadarabhya upanayanasya kaalah uttami tyavagantavyam yatha bhagavatpadanam kriteeye vakshe upanayanam shratur – Sudarshana Suri’s commentary on Apastamba Grihyasutra 1.9.*

<sup>7</sup> *Kashayam brahmano manjishtham kshatriya haridram vaishyeti – Apastamba Sutra.*

<sup>8</sup> A belt made of *darbha* grass.

<sup>9</sup> Small dry sticks of *peepal* tree.

Fire God. All present were watching intently the young Shankara beaming with the brilliant aura of divinity. His eyes, though open, were turned inwards. Women who came to offer alms were reminded of *Vamana*. Some shed tears of joy as they offered alms. Some stood with folded hands forgetting the offering of alms. At night, Aryamba performed the ritual of warding off evil effect of so many eyes having watched the young initiate.

The next morning Magha, beginning the instruction of the *Sandhya* ritual, made a brief speech regarding *Gayatri japa* – “Before starting the *japa*, one has to mention the seer and the *devata* of the mantra and its *chandas*. *Vishwamitra* is the seer, the Sun God is the deity and *Gayatri* is the *chandas*. *Vishwamitra* was one of the *saptarishis*, seven great seers, born at the beginning of *Vaivaswata Manvantara*. He was born to Lord Brahma and conceived by mere thought. He was Koushika in his previous birth, and as a result of his austerities, was blessed with the memory of this sacred mantra. It is the Sun God who inspires our reason “*Nah dhiyah yah prochodayat/ Tad varenyam savithuh/ Devasya bhargah dheemahi*” – I am meditating upon the radiance of that God, is the meaning of that invocation. Its meter is *Gayatri* and it is known by the same name. It consists of three feet – which means lines. Each line has eight letters. But the first line “*tatsaviturvarenyam*” has only seven letters and hence it is known as *Nichrud Gayatri* meter. *Gayatri* meditation is to concentrate the mind on Sun God with the stream of consciousness turning into an unbroken thread like the flow of oil being poured down. One must control the mind from getting wayward. Did you follow?”

“Yes, I understood it. But who inspires the Sun’s mind?”

“It is the great Almighty God who inspires the Sun. But He is not visible like the Sun. Thus, one has to begin with the worship of the visible Sun and gradually turn one’s mind towards the Almighty.”

“Which is the residing abode of that Almighty?”

“He resides in one’s heart.”

“*Nah dhiyah* and *dhimahi* are in plural. What does it imply?”

“It implies the collective responsibility of *Brahmanas*. A *Brahmana* makes his livelihood on the money gifted to him by others. It is what he is offered as *dakshina* for devoting

his time for studies and imparting knowledge to others. But his indebtedness to the society does not end with mere studying and teaching. He has to give a lot more to the society. One sixth of his *tapas* goes to the general public, say the *Shastras*. Only this ensures the well being of the public at large. Hence, Gayatri meditation is the bounden duty of all *brahmanas*.”

“What is the significance of my receiving alms at the conclusion of yesterday’s rituals?”

“It is a foretaste of the kind of life you have to lead later when you go to *Gurukula*. There you have to live on alms.”

“Why is it so?”

“If all the disciples have to be fed in the *Gurukula* itself, it will be a burden on the Guru and his wife. That is not correct. Hence the disciples must get their food by seeking alms. Just as a bee collects honey from different flowers, food must be collected from different houses in small quantities. Hence this practice is called *Madhukari*. This helps in developing a feeling that the women of all households are like their mother. It also reduces the craving for food for the sake of taste. It also develops gratitude towards the society. It develops an attitude of indebtedness towards the society and prompts one to repay the debt by teaching them what he has learnt from the scriptures. Thereby, the pursuit of studying and teaching is perpetuated without a break.”

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Even after returning to Velianadu, Magha Pandita used to visit his daughter’s house frequently. It was his desire to spend as much time as possible with his daughter and grandson. Once he addressed his daughter and said, “Now Shankara has completed his fifth year. It is time we send him to *Gurukula*. But Velianadu is quite far off. You will not be able to visit him there often. He is still a small boy. It is better if we admit him to the *Gurukula* run by Narayana Dikshita in the neighboring village. If you send him there, you will be able to see him whenever you feel so.”

Aryamba readily agreed and took her son to Narayana Dikshita and left him there to pursue his education in the *Gurukula*. Though relatives often visited her house, she

missed her son very much. As advised by his grandfather, Shankara used to render whatever service he could in the *Gurukula*. He used to follow the elder disciples for collecting *darbha* and *samit*. When he went out to collect alms, women offered him alms with love and affection. He used to offer the alms so collected to the guru and used to partake of his food with the permission of the guru. If there was any special dish collected on any day, he used to share it with others. By and by, he began to realize the truth of his grandfather's words. His craving for tasty food was gradually reduced and he began to feel grateful to the society. He also developed a firm resolve to repay this debt by pursuing the study of holy books and imparting that knowledge to others.

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One day Narayana Dikshita saw Aryamba coming towards his house. He said to his wife, "Look, how the mother's affection works. It is not even a week since Shankara was admitted to *Gurukula*. Even so, she already misses him badly. She has come to meet him." As Aryamba reached the house, she enquired of her son's wellbeing. She was told that Shankara had gone out with others to collect *samit* and that he would return soon.

"There is something extraordinary about your son. He has become dear to everybody. He is very intelligent and also a picture of humility and obedience. Though you had no children for a longtime, you have at last got a worthy son."

This remark, instead of bringing joy, somehow made her sad, and Aryamba shed tears.

"What makes you cry, Aryamba?"

"It seems he wants to become a *sannyasi*. Last night in my dream, I saw him as a *sannyasi*. I could not bear my grief on seeing such a dream. That made me come here to see him today."

"Oh! Is that so?"

"For God's sake, do not tell him this."

"No, no, be rest assured. I will not tell him this."

On returning, Shankara saw his mother and made obeisance to her. She embraced him and enquired about his wellbeing.

“I am fine” said Shankara. His mother gave him some eatables which she had specially prepared for him. He shared it with others.

Shankara made rapid progress in his studies. He completed the study of the Veda traditionally prescribed for his family. Being blessed with the ability to grasp a subject even at one reading, Shankara completed the study of all the four Vedas and their connected subsidiary subjects within a year. The guru’s wife remarked to her husband, “Where is the need of any more teaching for him? He has already learnt everything.”

“I teach not to impart any further knowledge to him. But it is for my own upliftment” said Narayana Dikshita. The disciples had great love and regard for him.

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One afternoon, all the disciples were returning after having bathed in the river. One of them remarked. “Having hewed the wood in the morning, my whole body had become unbearable with sweat. After bathing in the river and rubbing the body with mud, now I am clean and feel refreshed.”

Another asked, “How does the body become clean if we rub it with mud and take bath?”

The former replied, “I do not know.”

He then turned to Shankara and asked him, “Can you tell me why it is so?”

“It is because mud is the cause and sweat is the effect” said Shankara.

“Please explain it in detail, so I may understand it.”

“Do you remember the mantra we learnt last week? *Prithivya oshadhaya, oshadibhyo annam, annat purushah*. Do you know what follows?” said Shankara laughing.

“Please tell.”

“*Purushat purishah*. It is only excreta from man.”

All had a hearty laugh. Shankara continued, “That is the difference between we mortals and Almighty God. He transforms excreta into edible fruit. But we make excreta of fruit. Excreta, urine and sweat, these are what man produces. Man evolved from the earth. Now, is it not clear that the cause of all this dirt is earth or mud? It has neither good smell nor bad smell. That is why all the dirt produced by the innumerable living

creatures as well as the sweet smell produced by the fruits and flowers of plants when absorbed by the earth, both get destroyed and become odorless mud. That is why we become clean if we rub our body with mud and take a bath.”

One of them asked, “How does that bad or good smell which is not in the mud come from the mud?”

Shankara replied, “If mud remains mud it will have no odor. But when mixed with water and heat, all these odors are produced. It is because of association. Each of us by ourselves is quiet and harmless. But when we are in a group, mixing with others, we become mischievous. It is like that in the case of mud also.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Once Shankara had gone to a small house for seeking alms. He called out “*Bhavati biksham dehi* – mother please give food.” There was no response. He called out again. Still there was no response. On repeating his request the third time, a woman responded from inside, “Oh! *brahmachari*, there is nothing in our house to offer you. We are extremely poor.”

Shankara replied, “I will receive whatever you give.”

There was some deliberation in the house. At last, she brought out a dry piece of pickle and put it in his begging bowl, and spoke with tears in her eyes, “People give you all sorts of good food. But this is all that I possess. Please accept it.”

Shankara was moved to tears. At night, in his dream, he saw Goddess Lakshmi. He prayed to her, “Oh Mother, kindly bless that woman with prosperity.”

“How could it be Shankara? In her past lives she was very rich, but did not help others even with a pittance. Now how can she hope to be prosperous? Don’t you know that I reward anyone only appropriate to the past karma?”

“Mother, has she not given this pickle to me now, even in her dire poverty? Let her get recompense for that.”

Mahalakshmi said, “So be it!” Recompense for charity also depends on the recipient of that charity. When Shankara awoke, he composed his famous *Kanakadhara* invocation.

Shortly after, the woman became relieved of all her misery. Even now the descendents of that family narrate this story. Their house is named *Swarnatillam* – the house of gold.

\* \* \* \* \*

One day the preceptor said, “Shankara, now you can pursue the study of Ramayana, Mahabharata and *Puranas* on your own. Those volumes are in a bundle there. You may pick them up and start your study. You can ask if you need any clarification” and pointed to the bundle containing those volumes. Shankara made a thorough study of all those works. There was no need for any clarification. He had hardly completed a year and a half of stay in the *gurukula*. The preceptor told him, “Shankara, you have learnt all that can be taught here. Hereafter, you have to study *Mimamsa*. But, there is no *gurukula* nearby where you can learn that subject. You will have to go to some distant place. As you are still a small boy, it is difficult for you to go to a far off place. Moreover, your mother misses you very much. You better go home for now and conduct some classes to students there.”

On that day the lady of the house arranged a delicious meal for all the disciples. They were not sent for alms that day. Shankara, who had hardly completed seven, got ready to return home. Everyone, including the preceptor and his wife, were full of tears. Shankara made obeisance to the preceptor and his wife and returned to Kaladi.

\* \* \* \* \*

On Shankara’s return, Aryamba felt as happy as she had felt when he was born. A *gurukula* was inaugurated in their house. This was a *gurukula* sans *gurudakshina*. Day by day Shankara’s fame spread far and wide. People eager to acquire knowledge came seeking his instruction. The house was always full of guests. When it became difficult for Aryamba to manage food for all visitors, the guests themselves cooked food and partook of it. Kulavarma, the king of Kerala, heard of this extraordinary boy. He felt an intense desire of meeting this prodigy. He sent his minister with gifts inviting Shankara



to his court. The minister, who came to Shankara, presented him with cash, a costly silk *dhoti* and fruits and conveyed the desire of the king to meet him. Shankara accepted only the fruits and returned rest of the gifts, but declined to visit the king's court. When the minister returned alone, the king realized his mistake and made amends by visiting Shankara's house in person. He stopped his chariot at a distance and walked barefoot to Shankara's house. A surprised Aryamba received the king with fanfare. The king made obeisance to Shankara and sat down humbly. He addressed Shankara and said, "Your goodself did not receive the gifts sent by us."

Shankara clarified, "As I am a *brahmachari*, I am forbidden from accepting such costly gifts. You being the protector of *Varnashrama Dharma*, how can I make you violate it?" The king replied very respectfully that he had sent those offerings as Shankara's father was not alive and he must be finding it difficult to manage household expenses, particularly with so many guests visiting their house.

Shankara replied humbly that by God's grace, under the noble king's dispensation, they did not feel any want.

The king showed him the plays that he had written and requested Shankara to review them. Then and there, Shankara went through the plays and suggested some minor corrections in grammar and said that the plays were well written.

The king continued, "I have a request."

"Please ask."

"So far, I am not blessed with children. I pray for your kind blessings."

Shankara instructed the king about the ritual to be performed to be graced with children, and blessed the king with a fruit. Aryamba felt proud of her son.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once, after worshipping in the temple of Lord Krishna, Aryamba went to the river for washing clothes. It was noon and the sun shone brilliantly. Under the scorching sun, even the sand had heated up. While returning, Aryamba tripped and fell. Those who saw this, shouted loudly, "Shankara, your mother has fallen!" Shankara ran. Other disciples also ran. But it was not possible for any of them to carry her. Shankara spread out the

wet saries on the sand and helped his mother to slowly walk on them. At last they reached home. Shankara was worried. “Mother has to go to the river everyday to wash clothes. She does not agree to get it done by anyone else. As for me, she thinks I am too young to be entrusted with that work. What shall I do?” There was nothing that he could do. But the next morning brought a miracle which astonished everybody. The river Purna had changed its bank and was flowing at the nearer bank. No one knew whether it was some unseen power that had brought about this or it was only a chance happening. Shankara’s joy knew no bounds. But the waters of the river were lapping against the walls of the temple of Lord Krishna. There was a danger of temple being flooded during the rainy season. Shankara changed the position of the idol to an elevated spot.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Mother, someone has come” shouted one of the disciples. Shankara was not at home. He had gone to the neighboring village to visit his preceptor who was indisposed. Aryamba came out of the kitchen and welcomed the visitors, and requested them to take seats. There were four visitors and they were comfortably seated on wooden planks offered by the disciples.

One of them said: “We belong to Thiruvananthapura. Two of us are scholars in *Nyaya Shastra*. One of us is an astrologer. As for me, I have studied a little *Mimamsa*. We had come to visit a person in Ooshabhadri. We have heard about your highly spoken son. We have come to see him. Where is he now?”

“He has gone to the neighboring village to meet his guru. Please be seated. He will return shortly” said Aryamba, and offered them fruit juice.

After some small talk, she gave the astrologer her son’s horoscope and requested him to look into it. He examined it and made some calculations and said, “Mother, your son’s horoscope is an exceptional one. He will become a brilliant scholar. *Brihaspati* is the lord of the house in his horoscope, which signifies that he will master the faculty of

speech. There is no doubt regarding his becoming a *Loka Pujya*. You are a blessed one in giving birth to such a son.”

“Will he enjoy good health and life span?”

“He will maintain an excellent health.”

“What about his life span?”

The astrologer was immersed in deep thought for a long while and then said, “Mother, there is a critical time in his eighth year. After crossing that danger, there is nothing to worry.”

“He will be able to overcome it. Won’t he?”

He further calculated even more exhaustively and said,

“Mother, he is destined to perform extraordinary tasks. Hence, he is bound to escape from that danger.”

Aryamba prayed, “Please suggest any propitiatory ritual which I can perform to ward off this misfortune that may trouble him.”

The astrologer consoled her, “Gods themselves will perform *japa* to save him. You need not worry. Have faith in Almighty God, and He will help you and your son.”

Shankara, who had just returned, overheard these words. As he entered the house, he saw the *Brahmana* guests and he prostrated before them reciting his *pravara*. They tried to stop him from touching their feet, and withdrew their feet. Later, they discussed the *Shastras*. After finishing their meal, they set out with a sense of fulfillment.

\* \* \* \* \*

Aryamba wore a downcast look. She felt depressed and unusually sad. Whenever she was alone, she quietly shed tears, but tried to be cheerful in her son’s presence. Once Shankara, who had observed this unusual change in his mother, said to her, “Mother, you seem to be in a great sorrow. Please tell me what you are worried about?”

She still tried to hide her feelings, “It is nothing.”

“Mother, you are hiding something. Please speak out.”

She remained silent.

“Mother, this body is not permanent. Father’s death has made it clear to me. But, are we not performing his *shraddha* annually? For whom are we performing it? It is only for his soul. Does that not imply that though he has left the body, father is not dead? Death is for the body but not for the soul. Then why should you grieve?”

Aryamba was only shredding tears as she heard these words. As days passed by, she felt less and less cheerful. Her life continued mechanically. One day Shankara, while sitting by his mother’s side, said to her, “I want to ask. May I ask you?”

“Yes” said the mother.

“If there is an end to this body of mine, as predicted by the astrologer, there will be nobody to perform father’s *shraddha*, nor there anybody to perform mine. In such a case, there will be great lapse in the *karma*. It will be wrong. You are well aware of it.”

She remained mute.

“There is a way out, which is in consonance with the *Shastras*. May I tell you?”

There was no reply.

“All the future *shraddhas* may be compressed into one and performed now itself.

Then there will be no lapse.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“It means that I must become a *sannyasi*. But that is impossible without your permission.”

She cried bitterly. That was her only reply.

“Mother, what is the use of crying? Please think over it and tell me.”

There was no reply from her. She got up and went inside. Shankara repeated his question to her once in a while. But she gave no reply. Days passed by.

Once Aryamba said to her son, “I have to go for bathing to the river. I am unable to carry back the wet clothes after washing. You better come with me to carry them home. I do not want to entrust this work to others.”

Shankara followed her with the bundle of clothes. Some disciples also followed him. Shankara kept the bundle by his mother’s side and finished his bath, wiped his body and applied ash on his forehead and standing knee-deep in the river, started his morning

*sandhya*. A number of boys were diving into the river and swimming. Grown up people were engaged in their observances after finishing bath. Women were gossiping as they washed the utensils. On one side, washermen washed clothes. On the other bank, fishermen were catching fish. On this side, Aryamba was rinsing a sari after washing it. Suddenly there was a loud call from Shankara.

“Mother, Mother!”

All stopped their work and looked in the direction of Shankara and rushed to him, leaving whatever they were doing.

Shankara was still shouting, “Mother, a crocodile has caught me. Please quickly permit me to take *sannyasa*.”

Aryamba appealed desperately, “For God’s sake, save my son.”

“Please permit quickly.”

“My son, do whatever you please.” And she fell unconscious.

“*Oum bhuh, sanyastam maya, oum bhuvah sanyastam maya, oum suvassanyastam maya*” chanted Shankara loudly, and continued, “*Oum bhuh swaha*.” As he chanted the last words, he tore off his sacred thread and threw it into the river. Meanwhile the washermen tied a rope to his waist and started pulling him out of water. Fishermen came in a boat from the other bank and attacked the crocodile with spears. Some threw stones at it. The beast turned on its belly and fell dead. They brought Shankara to the other bank, and turning to Aryamba, resuscitated her. When she regained her consciousness they informed her that Shankara had been saved and the crocodile killed. She rose and proceeded towards her son with unsteady steps and embraced him. But he stood still without any reaction. The wound made by the crocodile was still bleeding. A fisherman brought some leaves and applied its juice to the wound. The bleeding stopped.

Aryamba pleaded, “It is enough. Hence forward, you shall not come for bathing here. You can take bath at home. Come, let us go home.”

Shankara did not stir.

“Come, my dear son, let us go.”

There was no reply from Shankara.

“Please come.”

The fishermen thought that he was unable to walk and came forward to lift him up.

“Leave me alone, I can walk” said Shankara.

“Then, let us go” said the mother.

“Now I am a *sannyasi*. I am forbidden from returning home.”

Mother was dumbfounded. Words failed to come out of her mouth. An old man standing nearby said:

“You are a little chap of eight years. What meaning is there for *sannyasa*?”

Another said, “*Sannyasa* is only for the blind and the lame, because they can’t lead life otherwise. Why should you take *sannyasa*? You have a home, and an excellent plantation.”

Another old man said, “See my dear boy, even if one wants to take *sannyasa*, is there not a time and method for it? You must first become a householder. After sixty years, become *vanaprasthi* and then *sannyasi* in the end. Will anybody take *sannyasa* the moment one is born?”

Shankara did not get into arguments with any of them. Finally another old man said,

“Dear boy, listen to me. Your mother is all alone. Is it right to leave her and go away? Tell me, you are yourself look like other boys. Mother is god, father is god and so on. Your father also died. Your widowed mother has brought you up with so much concern. Is it right to leave her and go away? Forgot your mother also? Think about this. Don’t be rash.”

Aryamba, who was silently listening, finally said, “Shankara, please don’t do this. Listen to what all these elders are saying. Come, let us go home.”

“*Amma*, I have taken *sannyasa* with your permission in front of everybody and the *pancha bhutas*. It is certainly not right to return home.”

Aryamba gave out a loud cry, “Oh my fate!” Shankara stood unmoved. Many elders tried to reason out with him. Aged people tried to counter him with whatever *Shastra* they knew, telling him that he cannot become a *sannyasi*. Women shed tears. Young friends of Shankara bemoaned the loss of a beloved friend. At last Shankara firmly said, “It is not *Dharma* for me to return home after becoming a *sannyasi*.”

“Are you going to abandon me to die alone at home?” his distraught mother pleaded.

“Mother, please listen to me patiently. I am a *sannyasi* now. It is wrong for me to return. At any rate, you will not be alone. Relatives will be visiting you often. Even the disciples will be visiting you often and will look after your welfare. There will be no problem for you. However, I give this solemn promise to you. I shall return home in your last moment. Please bless me” said Shankara and made obeisance to her. He rose, and without looking back, proceeded to the temple of Lord Krishna on the other bank, and prostrated and went away. All the old people were terribly upset.

## Chapter 2

### FROM KALADI TO OMKARESWARA

To what destination is he bound? To hills and forests through wilderness; to caves; to river banks, with what purpose? In search of a *Sadguru*. On his way, he occasionally comes across some fishermen or pilgrims, but otherwise his road is bereft of any human contact. His search continues. In answer to his question, “Are there any *Mahatmas* around?” people point out some distant place and direct him there; but he doesn’t find a guru. By and by, he reaches the coast line near Mangalore. There is a scorching sun above. Could he find something to eat? Completely exhausted, Shankara collapses on the ground. From a nearby hut, fishermen come running. They give him some water to drink. He tells them that he is hungry. They give him some milk. They notice the wound on his leg and ask him about it. He tells them that he had been caught by a crocodile. He wished them all prosperity and proceeds further. Thus continued his relentless search.

Continuing his journey, he reached Sringeri. There, he sought alms and reached the banks of river Tunga and sat down for a while to rest. There he saw a wonder. It was a sultry afternoon and a frog was laying eggs under a boulder. A cobra, spreading its hood like an umbrella, was providing shelter to the frog. “It must be a very holy place,” thought Shankara. But he had still found no guru. He remembered the words of scriptures, “*Tad vijñānārtham sa gurumevabhigachchet*” and decided to continue his search without any let up till he found an apt guru. Somebody directed him to Mukambika from there. There, he had the *darshan* of the Goddess, but could not find a guru. He continued his journey on foot and, at last, reached the banks of river Narmada. Someone there informed him, “In Onkareswara, there is a famous sage named Govinda Guru. He is a grand old man revered by all. Pilgrims coming from far and wide,



invariably seek his *darshan*.” They showed him the way to reach there. He proceeded towards that place. At a distance, he observed some saffron clothes hanging to dry. That indicated the abode of the guru. The saffron clothes were fluttering in the wind as if they offered a hearty welcome to Shankara. He bathed in the river Narmada<sup>10</sup> and then went to see the guru.

Nearby, he saw a cave. But he could not see anybody near it. Probably the disciples had gone out to collect alms. He peeped into the cave and saw the sage Govinda seated in *padmasana*, with eyes shut. The moment he saw that face, he was certain that his search had come to an end. He felt immensely happy. He waited outside without making any obeisance<sup>11</sup>. By and by the disciples arrived after collecting alms. Shankara rose and proceeded towards the eldest among the disciples and bowed to him. The latter asked, “What do you want?”

“I have come for *darshan* of the Guru.”

“Now he is in *samadhi*. You cannot meet him.”

“I shall wait here till he rises from his *samadhi*.”

“Have you had your food?”

“Not yet.”

The disciple kept some food on a leaf and asked him to partake it. But Shankara declined, saying that he would not eat anything till he could have the *darshan*.

“There is no certainty as to when he will rise.”

“I will wait till then. It does not matter.”

The sage did not rise up that day nor did he the next day. On the third day, he opened his eyes. The disciples informed him about the arrival of Shankara. He instructed them to bring him into the cave and Shankara entered the cave. Chanting the mantra, *Na karmana na prajaya.....*” Shankara prostrated to the guru.

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<sup>10</sup> That bank is now called sankala ghat; in those days it was, perhaps, Shankara ghat.

<sup>11</sup> A *brahmana* carrying *samit*/flower/*darbha*/fire/water/mud/rice or doing *japa/havan* cannot be prostrated to – *Samit pushpa kusagnyambu mridannakshata panikah, japam homam cha kurvan nabhivadyed dwijam bhaveth - Smriti*

“Oh young boy, I hear that you have been fasting for the last two days. First go and have some food. Let us talk afterwards” said the guru. Shankara partook some light food and came back and stood before the guru with folded hands.

“You are very tired. Sit down. What is your name?”

“They call me Shankara.”

“Which is your native place?”

“I come from Kaladi of Kerala.”

“Have you had your *upanayana*?”

“Yes, it has been performed. Four months ago I took *Apatsannyasa*. Then I discarded my sacred thread.”

The guru raised his eye-brows in surprise.

“Was it because of this that you bowed to me without holding the *samit*?” he asked.

“Yes”, replied Shankara.

“What made you to take *Apatsannyasa*?”

Shankara explained the circumstances leading to his decision.

“When was your *upanayana* performed?”

“At the age of three.”

“Did you attend *gurukula* after that?”

“Yes.”

“For how many years did you study there?”

“For a year and a half.”

“What did you learn there?”

“Veda.”

“Which Veda?”

“All the four Vedas.”

The disciples were struck with wonder. Their jaws dropped down.

“What more did you learn?”

“The *Shadangas* and a little grammar.”

“How about *Purva Mimamsa*?”

“I haven’t learnt it.”

The guru asked him to recite some mantras of the Vedas at random. He also questioned him about the *shadangas* and grammar. Shankara answered all questions satisfactorily. The disciples were dumbfounded. The guru was convinced that this boy was extraordinary. “What a brilliant scholar he is at such an early age! And what determination! His birth is a divine incarnation to uplift and safeguard *Dharma*” thought sage Govinda, and decided to give him proper instruction and training.

“After sometime, you will be formally initiated into proper *sannyasa*. Till then you continue Gayatri *upasana*. There is no need for *Marjana* or *Prashana*. You can begin your *upasana* after offering *arghya*. You may go now. Nirmala Chaitanya arrange a place for Shankara’s stay here.” With these instructions to one of the disciples, he sent away Shankara.

Shankara used to render services compatible with his age and go for collection of alms. During the rest of the time, he performed Gayatri *upasana*. He often sat immersed in deep meditation, unaware of the outside world. At such times, the guru himself used to wake him up.

One day, the guru called Shankara and said, “I want to teach you about the creation of this universe, including the living beings. Listen! The universe is subject to the cycle of creation and destruction. This cycle has neither beginning nor end. It goes on and on. As before, prior to this creation, only *Brahman* existed. It is *Chetana*. It is so subtle as to elude all description. Just as the banyan tree exists in a potential state in its seed, the universe exists in *Brahman*. Just as ice exists in water as water before its formation, the universe, before creation, exists in *Brahman* as *Brahman*. This is the inert energy of *Brahman*. This is known as *Para Prakriti*, which ultimately assumes the form of the universe. All activity in this universe is caused by *Brahman*’s *Kriya Shakti*, the *Prana*. It is also known as *Apara Prakriti*. When there is the urge in *Brahman* for creation, the *Apara Prakriti* gives rise to *Mahat*, and *Mahat* gives rise to *Ahankara* or the ego.

From it arises the subtle *tanmatras* of *shabda*, *sparsha*, *rupa*, *rasa* and *gandha*. These seven categories along with *Apara Prakriti* is known as *Ashtadha Prakriti*.

“What is the meaning of *tanmatra*?”

“It means the subtle principle of an individual *guna*. That is, *shabda* has only sound, *sparsha* only touch, *rupa* only form, *rasa* only taste and *gandha* only smell. Creation, therefore, has to be brought about with extreme care and deliberation. That needs *buddhi* and *manas*. This *manas* should be free from all pollution and the *buddhi* should be extremely sharp and firm unlike our mind and *buddhi*, which wildly roam and lack firmness. Caused by the Will of the Almighty, such *buddhi* is formed from *Mahat* and *manas* is formed from *ahankara*. The *chetana* associated with the above *buddhi* and *ahankara* is *Hiranyagarbha*. He was the super most *tapasvi* and *yogi* during the previous creations. In the matter of *tapas* and *yoga*, there is none who can excel him. With the noble desire of effecting creation, he had performed severe penances. As a result of it, he attains that position with the blessings of the Almighty.”

“Then is he the first living being?”

“Yes; but unlike us, he is free from the gross body. He creates the five great elements in the following manner: when the subtle principle of *shabda* is drawn out of the pile of five *tanmatras*, its vibrations get activated and the element *Akasha* appears with the property of sound. As he draws out *sparsha tanmatra*, its vibrations are activated to produce the element *Vayu* with the properties of sound and touch. Similarly, with the drawing out of *rupa tanmatra*, it results in the element *Tejas* which includes *shabda*, *sparsha* and *rupa*. And from *rupa tanmatra* is born the element *Jala* with *shabda*, *sparsha*, *rupa* and *rasa* properties. From *gandha tanmatra* is born the element of *Prithvi* with all five properties – *shabda*, *sparsha*, *rupa*, *rasa* and *gandha* as its constituents. This process of evolution of the five great elements is known as *panchikarana*. Just as *Hiranyagarbha* appeared with the evolving of *manas* and *buddhi* earlier, *Prajapati* appears with the evolution of the five great elements. He does the succeeding part of creation.”

“To further the act of creation, he mixes the elements *tejas*, *jala* and *prithvi* in a certain proportion. Out of these three, *tejas* dominates over the other two. This gives rise to different kinds of innumerable brilliances like the sun, the moon, fire and lightning.

Similarly, when He mixes the three elements with water as the dominant constituent, innumerable liquids form like water, milk, fruit juice etc. evolve. Similarly, with the mixture of the three elements with *Prithvi* dominating, soils of different kinds evolve. This process is known as *trivritkarana*. These evolved items are the dwelling places of countless divine beings. *Tejas*, rainwater and soil once again mingle to produce different kinds of plants like trees, shrubs and climbers. Further, by mingling of these products, animal bodies are created. Such of those, who take birth initially, emerge from the earth directly. Therefore, they are called *ayonijas* and *brahma manasa putras/putris*. *Manu*, *Shatarupa*, *Marichi* and other *saptarshis*, *Sanaka* and others and *Kardama* and other *prajapatis* are those who are born in this manner. By virtue of their achievements in their earlier lives, great beings are rewarded with these positions during the present creation. They take birth at the beginning of creation. They are destined to be the path blazers and torch bearers for the succeeding generations. Later, children and grand children of Manu and Shatarupa are born and thus they become progenitors of the human race. Hence, there are known as *manavas*. After that, Manu and Shatarupa assume different animal forms by virtue of their yogic powers and become instrumental in the creation of different animals.”

Then, Shankara asked, “I have heard that *Parameshwara* creates this world. Who is He? What is his relation to *Brahman*?”

The Guru replied, “Didn’t I tell you *Para* and *Apara prakritis* are no other than *Brahmashakti*? *Brahman* perceived through them is termed as *Ishwara*. For instance, the shape of a golden ring is also gold. But, the gold that is identified through that shape is called ring. The same relation also holds here.”

“What is the purpose of the Creation?”

“It is for the purpose of karma and enjoyment of the living beings. If the world does not exist, there can be no karma nor any enjoyment. Hence, there is creation.”

On the basis of the above discourse of the Guru, Shankara deeply studied *Taittiriya* and *Chandogya* Upanishads. As there are varying descriptions of the process of creation in different Upanishads, they appear to be contradictory to the layman; but Shankara realized that there is actually no such contradiction.

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After a few days, Govinda Guru started a new lesson. He said, “Last time, I told you about the sequence of Creation. Never forget one point in that: When the entities *prana*, *avyakta* etc. up to the *jiva* come out of Brahman in that sequence, they do not come out getting separated from Brahman like an arrow from the bow. Brahman follows in each, equally throughout up to *jiva*. That is why *Shruti* says ‘All this is Brahman’. This is like gold following in a piece of it and further on in the ornament. In particular, a special feature of the human body is that the whole universe is also represented in its various parts. Now I will tell you about it in detail. Listen carefully:

“The spinal cord extending from the anus up to the back of the neck is called *meru*. To its left is the *ida nadi*, to its right the *pingala nadi* and in the centre is the *sushumna nadi*. *Nadi* is a vein. All these three meet at the centre of the eye brows. Along these *nadis*, there are 5 *chakra* – plexus. *Muladhara Chakra* is near the anus, *Swadhishtana Chakra* above it and below the genital organ, *Manipura Chakra* above it and below the naval, *Anahata Chakra* above it and below the heart and *Visuddha Chakra* above it and below the throat. Fractions of *panchikruta prithvi*, *jala*, *tejas*, *vayu* and *akasha* stay respectively in these *chakras*. Similarly, the force centres of sense organs nose, tongue, eyes, skin and ears respectively are also in these *chakras*. In the same order the five *vyahritis* – *bhuh bhuvah suvah mahah janah*, the individual goddesses *Sakini*, *Kakini*, *Lakini*, *Rakini*, *Dakini* and the collective gods of *pancha-bhuta* are also there.

“Above the *Visuddha Chakra* is the *Ajna Chakra* near the forehead. This is the place of a fraction of *prakriti* which is the cause of the *pancha-bhuta* of *antahkarana*, of the individual goddess *Hakini*, of the collective god *Hiranyagarbha* and of the *vyahriti* *Tapah*. Above *Ajna Chakra* is the *Sahasrara Chakra* like an inverted lotus. This is the place of the *vyahriti* *Satyam*, the individual goddess *Yakini* and *Ishwara*. It is through the *brahmarandhra* at the top of the skull that *Ishwara* enters into the body as support for life. Have you understood?”

“In what sense, the *chakras* are the force centres of sense organs?”

“It is like this: Smelling is by the nose, which is in the face. However, drawing of the breath while smelling is an act of *apana vayu*, which gets its power to act from the *Muladhara Chakra*. In this sense, it is the force centre of the nose. It is also the centre for *prithvi* and *gandha* and similarly others also.”

“What is *vyahriti*?”

“It is the name of the *devata*. The *devata* responds when called by this name, that is, it obliges. The sound of *vyahriti* is its acoustic nature. See how it is: the nature of an object is known by the sound it produces. For e.g., farmers store grains in huge and tall drums. They strike the drum with a stick from outside to know the grain-level inside it. Doctors diagnose the disease by listening to the pulse of the patient. But see here,...” and he struck his *kamandala* with a spoon, imitated its sound by uttering ‘tttin’ and continued,

“This ‘tttin’ that I uttered is only an approximation of the actual sound of the *kamandala*. Similarly, the uttered *bhuh* is only an approximation of the intrinsic sound of *prithvi*. Further, the *prithvi* in *Muladhara* and the *prithvi* outside are the same. Therefore, both have the same *vyahriti*. But the meditator’s utterance of *bhuh* being not exactly coinciding with the *vyahriti* of *prithvi*, it does not resonate with the utterance. Effort is necessary to make it exact. You know how two stringed instruments (Veenas) are matched. The strings of one are tightened and rubbed to make its sound coincide with the other’s. Similarly here, one should know from the *Shastra* the inherent nature of the *prithvi devata* and the meditator through Guru and go on setting himself in tune with the *devata* by meditation through the corresponding *vyahriti*. When he succeeds in this, his *buddhi* starts responding with the *buddhi* of the *devata*. Then the function of the *devata* could happen through the meditator also. This is referred to as his victory over the corresponding *bhuta*. For e.g., with the meditation of *Hiranyagarbha* who resides in *Ajna Chakra* through the *vyahriti Tapah*, when the meditator succeeds in producing the resonance, he gets the power to know past present and future and to know the minds of others. But, because attachment to the achievement is wrong, these abilities must be used only for protection of Dharma.”

The next day Shankara completed his morning *sandhya* and afterwards did *namaskara* to the Guru. The Guru kept his palm on Shankara's head and blessed. Shankara started his meditation. The Guru said to his other disciples,

“You bring *bhiksha* for Shankara also. Keep it for him. Do not wake him up if he is in *dhyana*. He will take it whenever he wakes up.”

Shankara bathed in the Narmada and sat for meditation in a small cave. If he was awake during noontime, he would eat the *bhiksha* kept for him. Otherwise, it would be lying there. Sometimes he would not wake up for 2-3 days. When awake, he would not speak with anyone. Other disciples would not dare to talk to him either. Once a disciple who went into the cave to give Shankara *bhiksha*, smelled an indescribable fragrance inside. He heard a low tone *bhuh* emanating from somewhere. He looked at Shankara's face and saw an unearthly luster in it, but not any movement of the mouth. He took back the *bhiksha*, ran to the Guru and told him what he had observed.

“Oh! Is that so! Then he has won the *prithvi bhuh*. Don't tell this anyone in the town. Otherwise, they may come to see him and his meditation will be disturbed,” told the Guru.

Winter set in. Shankara had not risen since four days. Keeping of his *bhiksha* at the entrance, seeing it again in the evening there itself, then distributing it amongst themselves, one morsel of it each, was going on everyday. Daily they would give the same report to the Guru. He, in turn, would say, “Don't wake him up!” On the fifth day, one elder disciple made bold to peep in. The moment he entered, it was unbearably hot inside, even when it was very cool outside. Irrepressible curiosity took him inside one more step, and Lo! He saw sparks of fire spitting out from the navel. He was scared and went running to the Guru and reported all to him. The Guru said,

“There is nothing to fear. He has achieved too much in too short a time. He has now won over *Agni*. Never disturb his meditation. You need not keep even the *bhiksha* for him.”

“How will he remain alive without food?”

“Now meditation itself is his food. By his thought, he can remove even the hunger of others.”



Though he said so, the Guru was himself scared when Shankara did not get up even on the eighth day. He ruminated within,

“If he is left like this, he will even pierce through *Rudra* knot and stay in *Sahasrara*. He will completely lose all initiative like *Ishwara*. He has to do a lot of things for the protection of Dharma. Therefore, it is better to wake him up.”

He got up. When the disciples followed, he asked them not to come. He went alone to see Shankara and entered the cave. He gently put his right palm on Shankara's head and shaking it, said,

“Shankara, it is sufficient my child. Get up.”

“Shankara gradually woke up, opened his eyes, got up slowly and prostrated to the Guru. When he rose, Guru embraced him for a longtime like a mother. Both came out of the cave. After the Guru left, all disciples went to prostrate to Shankara, but he prostrated to them.

All disciples were eager to render service to the Guru, but the Guru did not require all that, as his wants were limited. Hence, there was an agreement that each disciple would perform a particular service everyday. One day, it was the turn of Shankara to procure alms for the Guru. After bringing alms, Shankara served it to the Guru and after cleaning up the place, he took his own food. Later he went out and wandered along the banks of the Narmada, deeply contemplating on the discourses of the Guru. Being lost in his thoughts, he sat down on a rock near the river. He remembered the lines of *Chandogya*, “*Tasya kva mulam syath anyatrannat? Annena shungena aapo mulamanviccha; adhihi shungena tejomulamanviccha; tejasa shungena sanmulamanviccha* – What other cause can be there for the body other than food? Food has its cause in water; water has its cause in *tejas*. As you proceed further in search of the cause of *tejas*, you find it is *Sath*”. This led to the thought, “This body is made from food. It implies that food is the essence of the body. Likewise, water is the essence of food and *tejas* is the essence of water.” Following the same train of thought, his mind proceeded from body to its source of evolution – to *Prajapati*, who has the five primordial elements as his body; there he saw the region of the ancestors, heaven and

other divine regions. Thence, it went further back to *Hiranyagarbha*. There, he witnessed a wonderful spectacle beyond description.

“What an amazing spectacle! Which are these two oceans?”

“These are *Ara* and *Nya*.”

“How wonderful is it! Which is this lake?”

“It is known as *Irammadiya* – It is the essence of food.”

“What is this *aswatha* tree?”

“It is the tree which secretes nectar.”

“If then, is it *Brahma Loka*?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Which is this golden *mandap*?”

“This is created by the Lord.”

“What are these other wonders?”

“You better see it for yourself.”

Shankara looked in the direction from where these words were coming. He could not see anybody. He could not find out from where these replies were coming. His mind was shaken on viewing this wonderful spectacle. He opened his eyes. In front of him flowed the ever familiar Narmada. Whatever he was seeing till then disappeared instantly. Again his train of thought continued:

“Whatever I saw till now, was it a dream or was it real?”

“What difference did you perceive between dream and reality?”

“That which disappears on waking is the dream world. There is no guarantee of viewing it again. But the world of the waking state is not like that. What was seen on the previous day appears again on the next day. Whatever task was half done is continued by us on the next day. Hence, the world of the waking state is real.”

“But even in the dream state, if one is asleep in the dream and wakes up, experience is similar. So, the dream state is equally real.”

“But the dream world is mental impression of the waking experience. It is a mere memory. There is no substance in it.”

“That is also true. The only difference between a substance and its mental impression is that the former is gross and the latter is subtle. From the point of view of

enjoyment, the gross substance and dream substance are same. Eating during the waking state or in a dream gives the same satisfaction. *Hiranyagarbha* derives his satisfaction solely from the world of mental impressions. His enjoyment is subtle, whereas, the living being needs gross substances for enjoyment. Hence they need the world of gross substances.”

After this, the train of thought led him to a different path. “I am asking questions and I am also getting answers. From whom are these answers coming? Are they coming from me? If they are coming from me, why should those questions arise in me? Is it possible that both question and answer abide in the same person?.....No, it is impossible.....or, .....are the answers coming from outside?.....It cannot be so. The answers are coming from within me. Oh! Then it is coming from someone different from me and he is within me. Likewise, others also are getting answers from within.....Oh! Now I know. He resides in everyone. Who can he be? Is he *Hiranyagarbha*.....but he is also one who has taken birth. Only, He is the first born. Hence, the all knowing *Sakshi* is necessarily a *Sakshi* for him also. If so, there can be no doubts for him. How can he have no doubts!.....It is because doubts arise in me only about entities different from me....yes, it is just that. Then what could be the reason for Him to have no doubts? Tell me.....Yes, now I understand. It is because there is nothing other than He. He is everything. Which is why he has no doubts about anything....as long as the craving for myself and mine are there, innumerable entities different from me continue to exist. One continues to entertain doubts regarding those entities. When the realization that I am not different from that Omniscient Almighty arises in me, then nothing other than me can exist. It is because the knowledge thus attained makes one realize that all that is to be heard has already been heard, and all that is to be contemplated has already been contemplated and whatever is to be learnt has already been learnt. It is that Omniscient Almighty – *yena ashrutam shrutam bhavati, amatam matam bhavati, avijnatam vijnatam bhavati – tad Brahma*.

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After a few days respite, the Guru began lessons on *Purva Mimamsa*:

“There are two sections in the Vedas known as *Karma Kanda* and *Jnana Kanda*. Now listen to the subject of *Karma Kanda*. This section teaches what one has to do to attain happiness during one’s lifetime as well as after death. It is not possible for us to know this through our own thinking. Generally people devise their own methods and try to attain happiness. But there is no guarantee that they will succeed. Many times, all such efforts culminate in sorrow. On the other hand, *Jnana Kanda* teaches us about salvation which leads to eternal happiness. This is beyond the scope of any guess or imagination. Therefore, the means of attaining happiness is to be learnt only from the Vedas.”

Shankara asked, “People come to conclusions on the basis of direct testimony or by induction. They trust this because, through such testimony, they have direct experience. Similarly, what could be the basis for having faith in the Vedas?”

“Listen, I will explain this to you. If the karma of previous incarnations of a being is in consonance with the karma being performed in this birth, it becomes fruitful. If not, it will not be fruitful. But previous incarnations are not subject to direct testimony. Hence, it is impossible for a person to just follow in the footsteps of another and expect similar attainments. When attainment of happiness is so difficult even during one’s lifetime, how much more inscrutable it is after death! Only the Almighty God, who resides in his heart, knows an individual’s karma of past lives. It is He who can give him a clue as to what he has to do to attain happiness. The Vedas are such revelations from Him. It is not a treatise written by any human being by virtue of his intelligence. It is superhuman. Hence, for all such matters which are beyond the reach of direct perception or of induction, the Vedas are the only testimony.”

“How can we know that the Vedas are the revelations of God Almighty?”

“This is determined by certain unusual characteristics of the Vedas. One such characteristic is that even from time immemorial, there is no name of any author associated with the Vedas. But in case of any other literary work, we know for certain who its author is. For instance, everyone knows that Valmiki is the author of Ramayana. Vyasa is the author of Mahabharata. Panini is the author of grammar. Passage of time does not make people forget this. If there was a human author of the Vedas, it could not

have been forgotten. But there is no such person within the knowledge of any human being.”

“Now take for example another characteristic. The Vedas incorporate the characteristics of music – these are *swara* and *matra*. The *swaras* are three, *rishabha*, *shadja* and *nishada*. These are respectively high, medium and low *swaras*. *Samaveda* has seven *swaras*. Further, how long a letter should be drawn out in pronouncing it is determined by *matra*. Indications are given for this on the basis of the notes produced by a cuckoo or a peacock and so on. Even the pronunciation of each letter is determined and fixed on the basis of eternal tradition. There are several instances in which a change of *swara* alters the meaning. There is a story regarding this – Tvasta was a demon. He wished for a son who could conquer Indra, and performed a sacrifice to beget such a son. As he reached the final stage of the sacrifice, the gods, being scared of this prospect, prayed to Goddess Saraswati to protect them. She agreed, and by virtue of her yogic power, she entered Tvasta’s of voice. At the conclusion of the sacrifice, it was the intention of Tvasta to pray “*Indra shatrur vardhasva*” – May the enemy of Indra prosper. In this chant, the second letter ought to be in *nishada*, the fourth in *rishabha* and the rest in *shadja*. But the intervention of the Goddess affected his voice and the notes got disturbed. He uttered second letter in *rishabha* and the rest in *shadja*, thus altering the meaning. Instead of conveying the intended prayer, ‘let the enemy of Indra prosper’, it conveyed the opposite – ‘let Indra, the enemy, prosper.’ Later, his son, Twaashtra was said to be have been killed by Indra. Thus, traditionally determined *swara* and *matra* have been in vogue from times immemorial. If these had been devised by a human composer, they could not have survived for so long.”

“The third characteristic is that the Veda is endless. According to the great Patanjali, even during his time, there were 1131 branches of the Vedas, namely *Shakala*, *Bashkala*, *Taittiriya* and so on and it would take nearly 50000 hours to recite them once. This shows how vast and endless is the Veda. It is impossible for any human being to compose such a voluminous composition.”

“It is also not possible that the Veda could have been written by several authors. In such a case, there would have been no unanimity of opinion expressed there. But the Vedas do not exhibit any such contradiction. All these four characteristics of the Vedas firmly establish that they are not the creation of any human being.”

In response to the above words of the Guru, Shankara sought a further clarification. “We are able to perceive directly *shabda*, *sparsha*, *rupa*, *rasa* and *gandha*, which are God’s creation. Whereas, we cannot hear the Veda directly, though it is also His creation. Then how is it obtained by men?”

“You are already acquainted with the mode of creation. After the creation of trees, shrubs and other plants, Marichi and other *saptarshis* as well as Sanaka and other *jnanis* got created from the earth. They were all great seers in their previous births, having performed *tapas* and yoga. They remember the Vedas studied by them in their previous births, by the grace of God.”

“Why others cannot also remember?” asked Shankara.

“The ability for memory comes to one according to his karma. Others indulge in only lust, fear, food and sleep. Therefore, their memories are restricted only to them. They indulge in them without being taught. But Marchi, *saptarshis* etc. would have done extraordinary *tapas*. They remember the *Karma Kanda* and Sanaka and others remember the *Jnana Kanda*. Whichever part one remembers, he becomes the seer of that part. They are only seers, but not the creators. Later, many of the progeny of *saptarshis* also became seers. Thus, the Vedas are eternal. Whatever you have learnt so far easily has to be studied further in depth. I will tell it next time.”

After a few days, the Guru started lessons on *Purva Mimamsa*. “This *Shasta* teaches what one has to do to attain worldly and heavenly happiness. But the Dharma that leads to such happiness is not within the reach of direct perception. The reason is, the karma that comes in the way of worldly happiness and the celestial regions, which are the basis of heavenly happiness are both invisible. Thus implies that the karma needed for attaining happiness has to be determined on the testimony of the Veda only. Hence the author, Jaimini, begins his work with the aphorism ‘*Athato Dharma Jijnasa*.’ Here, ‘*Atha*’ means ‘After’. After what? After the study of the Vedas. One who knows

Sanskrit may understand the literal meaning of the Vedas. But to grasp the clear knowledge of the Vedas, one has to take recourse to *jijnasa*, which means a proper discussion. ‘*Atha*’ – therefore – because a decisive knowledge of the Vedas has to be obtained – *Dharma jijnasa* has to be carried on – this is the commandment.”

Shankara sought a clarification: “How can one attain that knowledge through the Vedas, which cannot be attained by perception and other testimony? What is that which is extraordinary about the Vedas?”

“Vedas are of super-human origin. I told you the last time that they are *apaurusheya* – not of human origin. Understand this through the permanence of the relation between word and word-meaning. It is the experience of everyone that words which already exist in the mind, take the form of pronounced words. Tell me from where these words come to the mind?”

“What was heard from ancestors was recorded in memory, and from memory, the words come to the mind.”

“From where did the earlier generations get these words?”

“From their ancestors.”

“Therefore, words have no beginning and the relation between words and word-meaning is also without beginning. Therefore, words and word-meaning are not of any human origin. ‘*Sarvani rupani vichitya dheerah namani kritva abhivadan yadaste* – That Braveheart, after creating all the shapes, gave them names and addressed them with the names.’ In the same sense, the utterances of the Vedas are also without beginning, i.e. of supra-human origin.”

“Though the word and meaning are eternal, the group of words in a sentence has a special meaning. Hence, what if we say that the sentence is of human origin?”

“We need not entertain this doubt, because the meaning of the sentence depends only on the individual words in the sentence. If there is another meaning which is special, it has to be taught with the help of another sentence.”

“An identical meaning can be conveyed through different sentences using alternate words. Similarly, though the meaning of Vedas is unique, the sentences which

are used to convey them may be different depending on the sage who interprets it. If so, why should not Vedas be treated as of human origin?”

“It is not so. It is true that one who knows the meaning can convey it in alternate words. The commentators of Vedas precisely did that. But the Vedas are not the subject for other means of knowledge. Therefore, from the point of view of one who has to know the meaning of the Vedas, the sentences of the Vedas precede their understanding. The same rule applies to those seers who already know the meaning. Now, in the case of those like sage Vamadeva, who already know the meaning of the Vedas, there can be no objection to state that those sages, by remembering the very sentences through which they had understood the meaning, became seers of the Vedas. Why should we try to extend our limitations for memory to the seers also? What do we gain by that? Nothing. There is no inevitable reason to assume that they remember alternate sentences. Over and above this, understanding and remembering can happen only with the grace of God. ‘*Sarvasya chaham hridi sannivistah/ Mattah smritirjnanamapohanam cha.*’ Therefore, it is reasonable to say that God blesses the sages to remember the exact sentences that existed in the previous creation. By the Vedic declaration, ‘*Surya chandramasou dhata yatha purvamakalpayat / Divancha prithvincha antarikshamatho swah*’ it is evident that the whole cosmos is a replica of what existed earlier, and hence, the Vedas which are a part of that cosmos, must also be a replica of what existed earlier.”

“If so, why do different people grasp the meaning of the Vedas differently?”

“This happens because, the individual *sanskaras* come in the way of their grasping the correct meaning. Because of the wrong *sanskaras*, at the cost of the meaning heard, they imagine other meanings. *Jijnasa* is conducted to remove this anomaly. It is not a defect with the Vedas if different people interpret it differently. It is the defect of the listener. It is wrong to attribute the defect of the person to the means of knowledge itself. For instance, the tendency to view silver in a seashell is not the defect of the eye, but it is the defect of the *sanskara* of the viewer.”



“Now the reason for apprehending the meaning wrongly after listening has become clear. But what is the reason for even those who have undergone a proper *sanskara*, entertaining doubts after listening to the sentences of the Vedas?”

“It happens because it is not possible to clarify in one sentence the meaning of a profound idea. Several sentences have to be used to clarify it. Each sentence covers a single aspect and helps the listener in comprehending the overall meaning. Just as the direction of the house to be reached changes relative to the roads leading to that house, changing direction of the sentences is also unavoidable. Then it is natural that doubts arise. Therefore, it is necessary to listen carefully and patiently from start to end to grasp the overall meaning properly. If one follows this, doubts will not arise.”

The Guru continued, “But sentences conveying mundane matters are of human origin. Some of them depict the existing as non-existing (*maya*), or non-existing as existing (*alika*). There may also be instances of lies being uttered with an ulterior motive or half-truth uttered for plain cheating. Blunders and mistaken notions are always there. This is because a comprehensive vision can hardly exist while speaking of mundane matters. But the Vedas, dealing with spiritual matters which are not subject to perception and other means of knowledge, do not suffer from such defects. Vedic pronouncements are made keeping in view the entire cosmos, which includes both *kshetra* and *kshetrajna*. Hence, they are of supra human origin.”

In this way, Govinda Guru continued to impart sacred knowledge to Shankara. As Shankara was regularly witnessing rituals prescribed in the *Shruti* and *Smriti*, within a short span of time he came to master all the twelve chapters of *Mimamsa* treatise, which included the determination of validity of *mantra* and *arthavada*, the reason for differences in observances of rituals and the determination of who has the right to perform a karma and other matters.

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After a few days, Guru Govinda continued his teachings to Shankara. He said, “Today I want to tell you about the essence of the Upanishads. It is based on the daily experience of every human being. Therefore, it can be explained in simple language, which is very easy to understand. At first, you can learn it this way. It will help you later in understanding easily the discussions based on the *shastras*. However hard a person may try, he finds it impossible to eliminate sorrow and attain happiness. If one asks why it is so, one finds the answer in the Upanishads. It is because you do not know who you are. If you come to know who you are, sorrow can never even approach you. Then you will realize that you are that *Brahman*, the ocean of bliss.”

Shankara said, “But I know who I am. My name is Shankara and I am ten years old. I am a *sannyasi*.”

“Where did you sleep last night?”

“I slept in a corner of the temple.”

“What dream did you see then?”

“I dreamt that I was flying on the mountains beyond the Narmada.”

“Now tell me whether you the Shankara asleep in the corner of the temple or the one flying on the mountains.”

“During the dream I had contact with my mind, but not with my body. Therefore, I could see such dream.”

“Did you get sound sleep at least after that dream?”

“Yes, I had a dreamless sleep.”

“What were you in that dreamless sleep?”

“I do not know.”

“Just think and tell me.”

“It is not possible even to think about it.”

“Why is it so?”

“At that time, I had no contact either with my body or with my mind. Hence, it is not possible even to think about it.”

“Now think what it means. When you are in contact with both your body and mind, you are one lying down in the corner of the temple, and when you are in contact with only your mind you are the one flying on the mountains. But, when you have no contact either with your body or mind, you do not know who you are. But you are aware that you are not in contact with your body or its adjuncts. Now listen, I will tell you who you are in that condition. This body with the sense organs, mind and *prana* is known as *kshetra*. You, who cognizes this *kshetra* is *kshetrajna*. *Kshetra* is the object for you. The knower is necessarily different from the known. The very same, ‘You’ see the dream with the help of the mind and see the world with the help of the mind and body during the wakeful state. But during dreamless sleep, ‘You’ are alone. That is your real identity. The Upanishads speak of that you as *Brahman*.”

“What is *Brahman*?”

“It is the cause of this complete universe, just as gold is the cause of ornaments. An ornament is the effect of that cause. It is born. It undergoes change and finally gets destroyed. Thus the ornament is subject to change but gold does not change. Similarly, the world is a temporary phenomenon but *Brahman* is eternal. This is the first characteristic of *Brahman*. We can also learn the second characteristic of *Brahman* from

the example of the ornament. Each ornament is different from the other. One is not the other. Each ornament has a limiting form and it also has an end. But gold pervades every individual ornament. Thereby, the gold does not have the limitation that the ornament has. Hence it is limitless. Similarly, all worldly things have an end. But *Brahman* has no end. It is limitless. This is the second characteristic of *Brahman*. To know the third characteristic of *Brahman*, you examine your own mind, which is also a derivative of *Brahman*. With the help of your mind, you become aware of objects. The knowledge thus obtained is the knowledge of a ring or a bangle or of any other similar ornament. All these are changing. They necessarily have a limit. But the absolute knowledge that pervades all these is unchanging and endless. This is the third characteristic of *Brahman*. The knowledge acquired when viewed through your *buddhi* is changing. When you discard it, then you become the *Brahman*, which is ‘*Satyam, jnanam anantam*’. That is your true identity. The bliss that you experience then is real and not dependent on objects. There is nothing like sorrow in that state. Therefore, if you realize, “I am *Brahman* and not the body or its adjuncts”, you will always be in that bliss. Keep contemplating on this. Next time when I teach you the same subject in the language of *shastras*, you will understand easily.”

Govinda Bhagavatpada decided to formally initiate Shankara as a *sannyasi* on eleventh day of the bright half of *Kartika*. When this news spread, hundreds of *sadhus* and saints and thousands of pious people came to Omkareswara two days in advance and settled in temples, *ashrams* and *mathas* to witness this celebration, the like of which had never been witnessed earlier. Some professional priests approached Govinda Guru and offered to conduct certain rituals like *shraddha* for various deities and also the *viraja havan*. But Govinda Guru dispensed with them by telling them that those rituals were not required in the case of Shankara, as he had already taken *apatsanyasa*, and the rituals they sought to perform were required only in the case of *vidisha sanyasa*.

Sometime later, an old lady whom the Guru knew approached him and said, “Guruji, I have brought two loin clothes for Shankara. I have got them ready by rinsing new cloth in tender coconut water, mixing with ochre. I have also added lemon juice and

alum to it. Thereby, it will not lose its color when rinsed in water. Please give them to our dear Shankara.”

“Is he your Shankara and not ours?” asked the Guru in a light banter and promised to give it to Shankara. In the meantime, an old man came with a stick and bowed to the Guru.

“Guruji, I am one who renders service in the temple of Iswara. My name is Rankadasa. I learnt that you are going to initiate our Shankara into *sannyasa* on the coming *ekadasi*. At that time you will present him with a *danda*, won’t you? I consulted the *archaka* to know the prescribed length for the *danda*. Having cut a piece precisely as prescribed and having smoothened both the ends, I have prepared the *danda*. I beg you to please present only this *danda* to him,” said the old man humbly and laid the *danda* before the Guru.

The Guru asked him, “Do you know Shankara?”

“Oh, yes. Who does not know him in this town. I too know him very well. Whenever he visits the temple, he enquires after my wellbeing. Many a time, he gives me grapes and plantains. Our Shankara is a god.”

“Well, I will give it to him mentioning that you gave it.”

The initiation was slated for the next day. On the night previous to it, all the disciples sat surrounding Shankara, gossiping aimlessly. A senior *sanyasi* disciple held Shankara’s lush hair and said in fun, “Oh, Shankara, this hair will go tomorrow. What do you say about it?” “Good riddance,” replied Shankara. All burst into laughter. Everyone desired to touch him. But there was some strange fear. Shankara’s personality was such. Even then, they would get bold to touch him. Their intense desire would overcome that fear. The night passed like this. Early in the morning, Shankara went to the river and bathed. As per the direction of the guru, the barber shaved his hair and prostrated to

Shankara. Shankara asked him, “What is your name please?” He said, “Govinda.” Shankara wished him well. The barber lifted his shaved tresses and touched them to his eyes with reverence. He buried them in a pit at a place free from human footfall. Shankara entered the river for bathing. After finishing the bath he looked up to the guru and as directed by him, he chanted thrice in a low, medium and high tone, “*Oum bhuh sanyastam maya/ Oum bhuvah sanyastam maya/ Oum suvah sanyastam maya/ Oum bhurbhuvahssuvah sanyastam maya*” and made an offering of water. The guru further directed him to chant, “I am hereby relinquishing my desires for offspring, money or desire for human company - *Abhayam sarva bhutebhyo mattah swaha*” and again to offer water out of his cupped palms. He did as instructed. Then, he came out of the river naked and stood before the guru, who presented him with the loin cloth and asked him to wear it, telling him that the old woman had given it to him. Then he gave him ochre clothes to wear. The guru then formally instructed *pranava* to him and gave the *danda* saying that it was presented to him by Rankadasa. The boy Shankara stood wearing ochre clothes and holding the *danda* having smeared his forehead with sacred ashes, transformed to Shankara Bhagavatpada. Simultaneously, in the eastern horizon, there was the magnificent spectacle of the ochre coloured sun rising. Shankara Bhagavatpada walked ahead, following the rising sun. It was as if the Sun of divine knowledge had risen. The temple bells, gongs, drums and conches sounded in welcome. It signaled good fortune to those desirous of *moksha* and ill fortune for evil minded enemies of *Dharma*. There was an inexpressible surge of enthusiasm in the assembled gathering. All shouted in one voice, “Victory to *Sanatana Dharma*!”

\* \* \* \* \*

That very afternoon, the guru started teaching him the *Brahma Sutras*. Initially, he revised the *Purva Mimamsa* saying, “So far we analyzed and interpreted *Dharma*, which aims at attainment of worldly happiness and as well as heavenly bliss. All worldly happiness is tainted with blemishes as these are transient, mean, impure, mixed with sorrow, and attainable only with great toil. Even heavenly bliss is also impermanent. Though people indulging in such pleasures find joy in them, wise ones desire only

*Moksha*, which provides eternal, blemishless and ultimate bliss. This bliss is not a producible product like a pot made out of clay, nor could be procured by seeking it elsewhere, nor is it a result of any transformation, like curds obtained by transforming milk, nor subject to culture like medicine prepared by adding ingredients of certain desirable proportions and eliminating others with harmful properties. It is something that is ever present in us. But we have failed to experience it because of ignorance. But people are surprised to hear this. See, how this can be understood easily:

It is the experience of everyone that when he is in deep sleep, his connection with the gross body and the subtle body snaps, and he experiences intense bliss. The one in sleep then is the *Kshetrajna*. That is – the one who can cognize *kshetra* - the body. When he exists exclusively as *Kshetrajna*, to remain in bliss is his nature. Though this is a fact of experience, when once one rises from sleep to the waking state, one forgets that bliss and assumes a non-existent identity with the body, and imagines that one is a man or woman etc. and tries to attain some happiness. This phenomenon of attributing a non-existing relationship with the *Kshetrajna* is known as *adhyasa*. *Adhyasa* is that which makes one wrongly identify oneself. This ignorance which prevents *Kshetrajna* from knowing his real identity is the cause of *adhyasa*. ‘In deep sleep, without being aware of who I was or where I was, I was sleeping blissfully’ is what everyone reports, which happens to be nothing but ignorance. On the other hand, if he recognizes his real identity, this ignorance will be destroyed. But he cannot know by direct perception or guessing who he really is, because the sense organs and the *buddhi* are absent in deep sleep. The only way to know it is through the *Vedas*.

*Veda* declares that the *Kshetrajna* is *Brahman* and ‘Who is *Brahman*’ is elucidated in the *Brahma Sutras* on the testimony of the *Vedas*. Thus, it begins with the *sutra*, ‘*Athato Brahma jijnasa*’. *Atah* – therefore – because worldly or heavenly happiness is not permanent – *Atha* – later – after attaining discrimination and renunciation – one must desire to know *Brahman* - one must contemplate *Brahman*. *Brahman* can be understood only through this world, because this universe is caused by *Brahman*. Thereby, being generated from *Brahman*, it is sustained in *Brahman* and finally gets merged in *Brahman*. The second *sutra*, *Janmadyasya yatah*, tells us the same thing. *Asya* – of this world – *janma adi* – birth, sustenance and disappearance – *yatah* –from

which – is *Brahman*. That means *Brahman* is both material cause as well as the efficient cause of the world. The nature of *Brahman* is determined by this sentence.”

The Guru further elucidated: “This is how it is determined. The potter is the efficient cause for a pot and clay is the material cause. First consider the material cause. Pot, tile, brick or other similar products are the effects of the same clay. These effects are subject to breakage or destruction, which means that they are subject to change. But clay remains the same without changing. That which does not change is called *satya*, and that changes is *asatya*. Hence, pot and other products are *asatya* and clay is *satya*. Similarly, the world is *asatya* and *Brahman* which is its material cause, is *satya*.

“Another characteristic of *Brahman* is that it is infinite, which implies that there is no limitation of any kind to *Brahman*. This is determined as follows: the pot is not a tile and a tile is not a pot. Both have limitations. But clay has no limitation like pot or tile, as it pervades both. Similarly, all entities in the universe have some kind of limitation or other. But *Brahman* which pervades all objects in the universe has no such limitation. Hence, *Brahman* is infinite - *ananta*.

“The third characteristic of *Brahman* is *jnana*. This is determined as follows: Just as the potter wills and plans while making the pot, *Iswara* also, having entered into *Hiranyagarbha*, creates this universe. The potter’s knowledge of the pot or the knowledge of the tile is changing just as the pot or the tile is changing. But that unqualified knowledge which is free from adjectives ‘of the pot’ or ‘of the tile’ is unchanging – *satya*. Similarly, though the qualified knowledge of the objects of the universe to be created are changing, the knowledge unqualified with the adjectives is *satya*. This knowledge – *jnana*, is the third characteristic of *Brahman*.

“This *Brahman* is *satya*, *jnana* and *ananta*. ‘*satyam jnanam anantam*’. Here is a paradox which should be marked: Though the universe is *asatya*, inert and limited, it is not different from *Brahman*. But *Brahman* is different from the universe. This is the essence of *Vedanta*.



“Now, recollect what was earlier explained about the *jiva*. The real identity of the *jiva* is not revealed in either the waking state or dream state because of his association with the body. His true identity is revealed in deep, dreamless sleep. But *jiva* cannot recognize it because of his ignorance. Then how can the true identity be understood? It is from the scriptures. The scriptures declare that in deep dreamless sleep he is *Brahman*. You may verify this statement. In dreamless sleep the self is not associated with any worldly object or its affairs. Hence, there is no scope for any changes in that state. Also, there is no knowledge there which can be attributed to any object. Still, knowledge free from those objects must necessarily be there as it always exists. Hence, in that state he is knowledge himself, pure and unencumbered. Further, in that state, space and time which impose limitations, are non-existent. Hence, the state is infinite also. That shows it has all the three characteristics of *Brahman*. Moreover, another characteristic of *Brahman* as declared by scriptures is eternal bliss, which is also experienced during dreamless sleep. This is how the identity of *jiva* with *Brahman* is determined.”

Shankara wanted a clarification. “All the three characteristics distinguishing *Brahman* are present in me also. Still I may be different from *Brahman*. How could this be reconciled?”

“It cannot be so, because unqualified knowledge cannot be more than one. Anything that happens to be different from it will be the object of knowledge. Therefore, *Kshetrajna* is *Brahman* himself. ‘*Yoham so’sou yosou soham*’. Whoever I am, he is he. Whoever He is, he is myself”, say the scriptures”. With this Govinda Guru concluded his instruction. Having attained this supreme knowledge, Shankara sat with his eyes turned inwards, oblivious of the body and other external worldly things. His body became still and his breathing halted. His face became enveloped in a divine radiance. The Guru continued to observe him for quite a while. Seeing this brilliant young *sannyasi* gave him immense satisfaction. After watching him for a considerable time, he stroked his head and gently advised him to rise. Shankara rose and chanted the mantra, “*Na karmana na*

*prajaya dhanena tyagenaike amritatvamanushuh*”, prostrated to the Guru and stood up. The Guru embraced the young boy.

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The Guru indicated that Shankara himself would perform the *chaturmasya puja* of that year. All the *sannyasis* of different *ashramas* of Omkareswara had decided to participate in it. All were eager to watch the puja being performed by Shankara. There was also the apprehension that the puja was the precursor to Shankara’s departure from Omkareswara after this *chaturmasya*. The arrangements for puja and the feeding of thousands of people were made by the temple administration. Though all celebrations were going on on a grand scale, there was a certain feeling of inward sadness born out of some disappointment among the assembled gathering. All devotees, after bowing to Guru Govinda Bhagawadpada and Shankara Bhagawadpada, made bold to ask the latter, “Guruji, people are saying that you are departing from here after the *chaturmasya*. Is it a fact?”

Shankara replied with astonishment that he was not aware of it. Still people were not sure.

Rainy season set in. Umbrellas were taken out. The words on the lips of everybody were, “we know the rains are very heavy here. It appears it is going to be terrible this time.” The water level in the Narmada was rising. One afternoon it was raining in all its fury. There were terrifying thunderbolts and lightning. Cattle, screaming ‘*amba amba*’, ran to the sheds for shelter. The aged Guru Govinda was in his cave. Shankara and other disciples were in the nearby temple. They were discussing, “Water is rising in the river. It is quite probable that it may enter the cave. What is to be done?” After sometime, Shankara proceeded towards the river with three of the disciples. The evening was nearing its end. As the sky was densely clouded, darkness had set in early. As they descended the steps, they saw water lapping up on the third step. It was certain that the flood would rise further. Shankara ran back to the temple with the disciples. He addressed all the gathered disciples who were very much scared.

“The flood is rising. It may not be possible for any of us to sleep. All of you be watchful. If there is any sign of danger, I will inform you. Then you have to wake up Guruji and make arrangements for him to sleep on the platform in the temple. Some of you better stay in the temple. You three stand near the wall of the cave”. As they heard this, they tied up their *dhotis* above their knees. Shankara also followed suit. Taking up his *kamandal* and staff, he cautioned them not to come to the river, but to stay in their appointed places. He proceeded towards the river.

It was past eleven in the night. It was pitch dark. The river, flowing from east to west, had already risen on to the second step. On that spacious step itself Shankara sat facing the east, placing the *kamandal* in front of him, closing his eyes and started with an inhalation (*puraka*) and chanting ‘*Oum bhu, ous bhuuah, ous suuah, ous mahah, ous janah, ous tapah, ous satyam, ous tatsaviturvarenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi/ dhiyo yonah prachodayat/ ous apo jyotiraso amritam bhurbuvassuvarom*’. He performed *kumbhaka*. Starting from the *sahasrara*, remembering the *vyasti* and *samisti devatas* in every *chakra* up to the *muladhara*, he performed *rechaka*. Repeating the *puraka*, he proceeded in the reverse order of dissolution from *muladhara* to *svadhisthana* and initially focusing the *buddhi* on *kakini* and performing *kumbhaka* and finally establishing it on *varuna*, he entered the state of *Samadhi*. That was all.

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The rain subsided early in the morning. On noticing the Guru waking up, the disciples who were on watch outside entered the cave.

“Has the rain stopped?” asked the Guru.

“It has not completely stopped, but has subsided.”

“Call Shankara.”

“He has gone to the river. In the middle of the night he made us stay here keeping watch near you and went towards the river with his *kamandal* and staff. At night it was raining cats and dogs.”

On hearing this, the Guru was concerned and immediately set out to the river with his disciples. They saw an amazing spectacle there. Shankara was in *Samadhi*. The *kamandal* was in front of him. The advancing flood was terrifying. But everything behind it was calm. They all wondered what could be the secret. When they went near and observed in the twilight, they found Shankara's *kamandal* swallowing all the incoming flood like sage *Agastya's* mouth. Like the *brahmdanda* of *Vasishtha*, which swallowed all the *astras*, including *brahmastra* of Koushika, the *kamandal* was swallowing the raging floods. The river, having become pacified, was flowing calmly at the level of Shankara's navel. Shankara was seated oblivious of the outside world. The Guru did not wake him. He bathed and made obeisance to the river Goddess and told the disciples, "Let nobody wake him. Keep a watch near him and see that no one approaches him. At sunrise he will wake up himself."

Leaving some of the disciples to keep watch, the others returned. All the disciples realized that Shankara was a great sage of extraordinary spiritual powers. They now began to show the same devotion to him as they did to the Guru. Thereafter, they were scared of addressing him in singular as they used to earlier out of familiarity. They took recourse to plural while addressing him. 'You' changed to a respectful 'Thou'. The Guru's joy knew no bounds. There was in him a satisfaction that the knowledge imparted by him had come to fruition. It was confirmed that Shankara was the very Almighty *Parameswara* who had incarnated for the sake of the upliftment of the world.

One night, as it was customary, all disciples, before going to the bed, made obeisance to the Guru and Shankara was the last one to take his turn. The Guru asked him, "Are you feeling sleepy or can you sit for a while?"

"I am not sleepy. I will sit."

"All lessons in *shastras* have been imparted to you. Nothing remains now. I have not detained you here for discussing *shastras*. But time has come to speak of some other matters. Pilgrims had come from *Gurjara* country for *Vyasa puja*. I have become saddened and disturbed by what they narrated. These are a warning to the impending catastrophe. South of this place is a town called *Sthanaka*. 150 years ago Arabs who

came in ships occupied it. At that time, the empire of Pulakeshin the II extended from the *Kaveri* to the *Narmada*. He had appointed one *Avanijashaya Pulakeshi* as his satrap at *Navasatika* of south *Gurjara* country, who drove out the Arabs, exhibiting great valour. Recently during my boyhood, an Arab named Mir Khasim occupied *Sindhu Desha*. This region had many Buddhists who had enjoyed the patronage of the emperor *Harsha*. They helped Mir Khasim. Raja Dhir was killed in the battle. The Arabs perpetrated inhuman cruelty on the people. In the battles fought later, the Arabs had to retreat. In the western part of our country, *Dharma* is fast deteriorating. The root cause for all this is the treachery of the Buddhists. Though their strength has declined now, it still persists.”

“Kings invade a country by means of the strength of their army and establish their sway over the people of that country. But how could Buddha establish his supremacy over so many people?” asked Shankara.

“This is how it happens,” replied the Guru, “It is natural for people to have devotion to *Dharma*. It is only because of this, that adherence to the eternal and supra human *Vedic Dharma* is widely prevalent among people, and people with diverse natures also co-exist with mutual love and affection and lead a comfortable life. *Vedic Dharma* encompasses all points of view. When the influence of *Vedic Dharma* is on the decline, some who have great trust in their own intelligence, place before people certain ideas based on their own personal inferences. Some simple minded people who are not well acquainted with *Vedic Dharma*, come under the spell of these opinions. The followers who cannot realize that those ideas are one-sided and hence imperfect, develop intolerance towards other ideas. They try to spread those ideas refusing to entertain any debate or discussion. Like wild beasts they do not hesitate even to kill those who refuse to get converted and accept their religion. If they cannot achieve their object by such means, they adopt even deception to make converts to their religion. This is what has happened now. But it is not so in the age-old *sanatana Dharma*. It is supra human. As it includes all points of view, there is no scope for conflict in it. But if someone imposes conflict on it, there is provision in *Vedic Dharma* for use of force to destroy such attempts.”

The Guru continued his exposition. “Therefore, attempt should be made to rectify the present situation keeping in view the entire *Vedic* tradition. People with evil tendencies will always exist. This work has to go on without break. The leading part in this attempt has to be played by the *Brahmanas* and *Kshatriyas*. The king should have courage, bravery and the ability to weigh the strength and weaknesses of the enemies and friends, and a sharp intellect to decide the necessary steps to be taken in keeping with the prevailing situation. The *Brahmana* should possess the qualities of renunciation, power of concentration, knowledge and friendliness towards people. Both should have concern for the wellbeing of the people. The kings like Chandragupta and Vikramaditya managed such exigencies by virtue of their *kshatra tejas*. But it has become decadent now. That has to be revived. *Brahmanas* like Kumarila Bhatta have also been active and discharging their responsibilities. Their efforts are praiseworthy. But this has to be done more extensively. Keeping in view the *dharma* in all its entity, awareness of *Dharma* should be spread among the people of all the four *varnas*. Only then the influence of the individual-centered religions can be countered. For this great enterprise, as a fundamental task, a clear understanding of *Badarayana Sutr*as has to be inculcated among the scholars. On the basis of it, the way will be paved for the *Brahmanas* for doing *karma* prescribed in the scriptures. This devotion to their religious duties by the *Brahmanas* will influence other people also to observe *Dharma* in their day-to-day life – ‘*yadyadacharati shrestho tattadevetaro janah*’. If suitable arrangements are made for the members of the four *varnas* to participate on the same platform in listening to the *Puranas* or to take part as equals in temple festivities, or to conduct pilgrimages, or to bathe in holy rivers and seas on religiously significant occasions and other such sacred activities, everyone will develop a feeling of kinship. Keeping this in view, there should be proper organization, especially in the temples and pilgrim centres. On the whole, a proper spirit of devotion to God and religious practices prescribed in the *Vedas* should be extensively promoted and encouraged among all the four *varnas*. You have to carry out this onerous task. You have incarnated for this purpose. Therefore, you must write the commentaries on the three basic texts – the *Prasthan* Trayi. You must hold debates and discussions with the scholars. But you must take care to see that no one develops a sense

of defeat as a result of your debate and discussions. On the other hand, there should be a feeling of having attained knowledge in its comprehensive aspect. It should also generate a sense of fulfillment. You must conquer their hearts. Move around the country unintermitantly. As the month of *Margashirsha* sets in, you begin your journey. For the present, it will be wrong to go to *Sindhu Desha*. Proceed to *Sourastra* and get information about *Sindhu Desha* from there itself. Travel to *Kashi* after that. Have the health and longevity to achieve this great task”.

Shankara said, “*Bhagwan*, I can have the ability to do this task only with your blessings. Please bless me”, and prostrated to the Guru.

### CHAPTER 3 FROM OMKARESHWARA TO SOMNATH

The next day the Guru sent a message to his devotees in Saurashtra that Shankara had set out for Somnath. It was decided that Shankara would start his journey on the third day of the bright half of *Margashirsha* after *bhiksha*. The news spread to the people of Omkareshwara in no time. The co-disciples of Shankara felt an inexpressible sorrow at the impending departure of their revered friend. The temple administration arranged a farewell function to mark Shankara's departure with a sumptuous feast for all holy men of Omkareshwara. The president of the temple committee addressed the vast gathering assembled on that occasion and said:

“It is a matter of good fortune and great joy for all of us that *Pujya Govinda Bhagawadpada* chose Omkareshwara as his abode during his old age. Many of his disciples have already started on the mission of revival of *dharma* and are on peregrination in different parts of the country. Among them, venerable *Shankara Bhagawadpada*, who is like a jewel in that crown, and who is the beloved of all, has decided to leave us pursuing the same mission. Till now he has conquered the hearts of all of us at Omkareshwara, and hereafter there can be no doubt that he will conquer the hearts of everyone in *Bharata*.”

The speech of the president was suddenly interrupted by a shout,

“Our Shankara Bhagawadpada!”

Which was followed by a loud response in unison from the crowd, “Be victorious!”.



The president resumed his speech, “May God grant our Shankara a sound health and long life. I...I...I...” so saying, he became speechless and broke into tears. Everyone in the gathering was also moved to tears.

Shankara Bhagawadpada stood up and addressed the gathering, “My most beloved kin, I will teach you a prayer, please recite it with me, *Govindam paramanandam*”.

All sang with great fervour.

“I don’t know what good fortune of mine brought me to Omkareshwara. I found a Guru who is not only the most revered, but foremost among those who have attained the knowledge of *Brahman*, and the very embodiment of love. My life became sanctified. All of you looked after me with utmost affection. I am ever indebted to you. I pray Lord Omkareshwara to bless you with unalloyed happiness and peace. I have to depart from here. Please accord your permission”.

With these words he took his seat. Then all partook in the feast. Getting ready for departure, Shankara made obeisance to the Guru. Stroking the head of Shankara, he bade him farewell. As Shankara picked up his *kamandala* and the staff and got ready to depart, the people felt unbearable pangs of separation and bereavement. Unable to live without him, they followed him. Shankara was walking ahead and the people, though running, could not reach him. It is so for anybody. One could perhaps go in Shankara’s direction, but can never reach him.

It was three years ago that Shankara had abandoned his home and left Kaladi. Now once again he set out alone from Omkareshwara. The only difference was that he was just a eight year old boy then, and had no idea of his destination while leaving Kaladi. But now he was twelve years old and Somnath was his destination, where hundreds were waiting to welcome him. He travelled without halting anywhere and reached the town of Navasari in two weeks time. People of Somnath were waiting there for his arrival. They said that the journey to Somnath by road would be long and therefore had already made arrangement to cross the sea by boat. It was noon when they reached Somnath. Shankara

took his bath and had *darshan* of Somanatheswara. Shortly afterwards, food was served. At four in the evening a meeting was arranged. The president of the temple committee presided. He said to Shankara,

“You must have been tired by this long journey”.

Shankara replied that the journey was quite pleasant and comfortable. The President enquired about the wellbeing of Guru Govinda. Shankara replied,

“It is true that he has aged, but he enjoys good health”.

Then the President addressed the gathering, “Remembering the most venerable Govinda Bhagawadpada, I shall speak a few words. The young Guru, who is before us here, is Shankara Bhagawadpada. He has studied *shastras* under the guidance of our Govinda Guruji for three years and received initiation into *sanyasa* from him. He has come here as directed by the Guru. During my last visit to the Guru, he had directly told me that we should all cooperate with him in his mission here. What greater fortune could be there for us? Therefore, I pray the young Guru to tell us what is expected of us.”

With this, he concluded his speech and took his seat.

“Let us decide what is to be done a little later. First I would like to know all of you individually. The Guru has told me that aliens have occupied *Sindhu Desha* and have been perpetrating atrocities on the populace. I am eager to know the details from you” said Shankara.

The President said, “Urjastabha, Yajneswara Dikshita and Deva Sharma, who are present here are those who had to flee from *Sindhu Desha* 7-8 decades ago as refugees, unable to put up with the atrocities of the enemies. Let them describe what they witnessed.”

Urjastabha began his narration:

“At that time I was just ten years old. An Arab named Mohamed Bin Khasim invaded our country with an army of fifty thousand<sup>12</sup>..”

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<sup>12</sup> Lane Poole: Medieval India p 7-8.

Even before he could complete, Yajneswara Dikshita started his narration,

“Urjastabha, only if you describe what happened from the beginning can the Guru understand the situation. Please listen to me Guruji, Khasim was not the first to invade our country. Even fifty years earlier to him, the Arabs were invading repeatedly and carrying away our wealth<sup>13</sup>. Our kings did not take these incidents seriously, thinking that they were just common robbers. Once they came with an army and attacked our country<sup>14</sup>. Then we defeated them and drove them out. Later, an Arab named Osman attacked our country. He was defeated by King Chacha in the battle, and the commander of his army was killed<sup>15</sup>. There was respite for sometime. Still, they attacked far flung villages and forcibly converted the innocent villagers to their religion<sup>16</sup>. It was only after that did Khasim arrive.”

Shankara then asked Urjastabha to continue. Urjastabha resumed:

“I was speaking of Khasim invading *Sindhu Desha* with fifty thousand soldiers. At that time our king was one named Dahir. He was a *brahmana*. The Buddhists were in small numbers then. When Khasim landed in the port of Devala, those Buddhists welcomed him and told him that they followed the religion of Buddha and that they were not believers in *Vedas*. They also told him that they were not his enemies and begged him not to trouble them. He agreed to do so on one condition that they should help him. Buddhists agreed and helped him in all possible ways<sup>17</sup>. They acquainted him with all secret routes and supplied his army with food. They spied over their own people and revealed their secrets to the enemy. In spite of all this treachery, Dahir fought with Khasim directly in Brahmanagar<sup>18</sup>. Dahir had employed some muslims as soldiers on contract basis. When their co-religionist Khasim came on against them, they deserted Dahir and joined Khasim and fought against Dahir. Raja Dahir fought with exemplary courage and gave up his life in the battle. The Muslim soldiers ransacked the city. Then

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<sup>13</sup> Tutrfatu Kiram & Al-Bahaduri. Trans by F.C. Murgatten P 432

<sup>14</sup> Armed Agression: Lane Poole; Medieval India p 5

<sup>15</sup> Arab Invasion of India: Majumdar p 29

<sup>16</sup> Annals of Rajaputana I: Tod p 75

<sup>17</sup> Chechanama: Elliot, History of India I p 161

<sup>18</sup> Chechanama: Elliot, History of India I p 170

the queen and other women of the palace performed *johar* and gave up their lives<sup>19</sup>. But Dahir's two daughters named Surya Devi and Pramila Devi fell into the hands of the invading soldiers<sup>20</sup>. All the remaining people were put to sword. They carried away many women and kept them for their pleasure<sup>21</sup>. They later marauded many cities of *Sindhu Desha* and set fire to them<sup>22</sup>."

Yajneswara interrupted him and said, "The contract soldiers of Raja Dahir being Muslims, it was natural for them to betray Dahir, because they were themselves aliens and ignorant of *dharma*. It was a blunder on our part to employ them as soldiers. But was it right on the part of Buddhists, who were our own people, to help the enemy? We have never come in the way of their practicing their religion."

Shankara said, "Yajneswara, let us discuss this question later. First please clear a doubt of mine. Buddhism then was widely spread, but now it is not so widespread. What is the reason?"

Devasharma gave his opinion, "The reason for this, as was narrated by my ancestors, was that the Buddhists, from the beginning, were traitors to our country. So far nobody has heard of Buddhists being patriotic<sup>23</sup>. They had helped the Greeks who invaded our country a thousand years ago. They never had any pride in their own country or religion or nation. They speak of the lofty principle of the whole world and all humanity being one and consider themselves as world citizens, but have betrayed our society. Taking advantage of this situation, Menander the Greek spread a false message, "Vedic Hindus are conspiring to usurp power from the Buddhist kings who are weak. Therefore, my fight is with those Vedic Hindus." This ensured the support of Buddhists to him. The weak Buddhist king, Brihadratha, did not fight with them at all. This enabled Menander to occupy all the country upto Ayodhya. Then, Pushyamitra, a *Brahmin* commander of Brihadratha, took charge of the army very cleverly and defeated the Greeks<sup>24</sup>. Then he got executed by the Buddhists who were traitors. He facilitated the ordinary Buddhists to practice their *Dharma*. He also performed the *Ashwamedha*

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<sup>19</sup> Chechanama: Elliot, History of India I p 171

<sup>20</sup> Briggs: Firishta IV p 410-411

<sup>21</sup> K.M. Munshi: Imperial Gurjars in Glory that was Gujarath Desh III p 50

<sup>22</sup> Briggs: Firishta IV p 405

<sup>23</sup> W.W. Tarn: Greeks in Bactria & India p 175

<sup>24</sup> Nehru: Discovery of India p 43; Smith: Early History of India; Sir John Marshall: Texila (1951) p

sacrifice under the guidance of the venerable Patanjali. By and by, the Greeks who had fled after being defeated returned and surrendered, seeking refuge. It was readily granted. In course of time, they got merged in the main stream of our society<sup>25</sup>. Buddhists helped the invading Kushans also<sup>26</sup>. They have been helping other invaders like Greeks, Bactrians, Huns, Shakas and now the Arabs. There has been no enemy who has not been helped by the Buddhists. This resulted in the people and the rulers getting tired of their treacherous acts, and consequently the Buddhists were isolated from the mainstream of society. The Huns and Muslim invaders, who took advantage of the treachery of Buddhists, later massacred them, cutting them into pieces like vegetables. Many of those Buddhists fled to Tibet. Many of them being terrified by the threat of slaughter, embraced Islam<sup>27</sup>. This is the main reason why the population of the Buddhists declined.”

Yajñeshwara had a counter to this, “If the Buddhists were decimated either by being killed or by conversion to Islam, does that not contribute to the reduction of our own population?”

“How is that?” interjected Devasharma. “Buddhists are our own people. But they have become Buddhists by lack of discretion. If by being killed or by conversion their numbers decline, it certainly does not make me happy. If they realize their mistake and return to *Vedic dharma*, then only can I be happy.”

Shankara agreed, “That is very true Devasharma, what are the other causes for their decline?”

“Another reason for their decline is the taking of the idea of *ahimsa* to extremes. Even 7-8 centuries earlier, the Buddhist king Harsha, being inspired by Ashoka, had prohibited the sale of meat. Those who sold meat secretly were caught and executed<sup>28</sup>. People rebelled against this. To pacify them, the Buddhist kings subsidized their vegetarian food by doling out money for three years. But what should the people do after that? Getting disgusted, they returned to the *Vedic* religion<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Smith: Early History of India (1924) p 213-14; Nehru: Discovery of India (1956) p 140

<sup>26</sup> Majumdar, Roy Chaudhary, Kalikumara Dutta: Advanced History of India

<sup>27</sup> Nehru: Discovery of India p 184

<sup>28</sup>

<sup>29</sup>

Yajneshwara intervened, “If meat eating is *ahimsa*, what about executing people? Is it *ahimsa*? That the kings are so foolish is the specialty of Kali *Yuga*.” Devasharma continued:

“I will tell you another reason for the decline of the Buddhist population, which will make Yajneshwara Dikshita happy. The kings proclaimed a law that all meat eaters should reside outside the town separately. If they had to come inside the town, they had to do so accompanied by ringing bells or beating drums. People refused to tolerate this indignity of untouchability and returned to *Vedic dharma*. This also led to the reduction of their numbers.”

Shankara asked them if there was anything more to be narrated.

“Guruji, if we go on narrating the tribulations undergone by our ancestors, there is no end to it. The sum and substance of it has been already narrated.”

Shankara then concluded:

“Urjastambha, Yajneshwara Dikshita and Devasharma have acquainted us with many important matters. All these are serious issues. Now it is already evening. You have to go for your evening *sandhya*. Dear President, can we meet in the evening tomorrow again?”

The President agreed and the meeting came to an end.

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The next day Yajneshwara Dikshita invited Shankara for lunch. Afterwards, all made obeisance to Shankara. In the end, Yajneswara called his two-year old grandson and made him bow to Guruji and said, “He is very naughty. When he is awake no one can sleep. So mischievous is he. But today he is sitting quietly watching you.”

“What is his name?” asked Shankara.

“Devala,” said Dikshita, and continued, “We and our previous generation have been useless people. We learnt some *Veda* and have been carrying on with priestly occupation. We have spent all our life running from one town to another because of Muslim persecution. We could contribute nothing for the social cause. Please bless

Devala, so that he may not suffer the same fate and also bless him that he may become a scholar and let the world benefit from him.”

Shankara placed his hand on Devala and said, “Devala, your grandfather tells me that when you are awake, no one can sleep. When you grow up, wake up all those who are asleep. Be blessed with a long life, free from diseases.”

The next day, in the meeting, Shankara addressed the gathering:

“The sum and substance of what was narrated yesterday was this: Enemies invaded our country. In their attempt to save their motherland, our people suffered defeat. This was followed by a massacre of our people by the enemies. Those who survived were converted to the religion of the enemies. What is the cause of all this disaster? Buddhists, who were our own people, acted treacherously. Why did they do it? It was because they nursed hatred against *Sanatana Dharma*. But the people of *Sanatana Dharma* never opposed their practicing their religion. Still, why did they hate *Sanatana Dharma*? We have to think about it. In *Sanatana Dharma*, there are people with different opinions like *Sankhya*, *Yogi*, *Vaisheshika*, *Bhagawata*, logicians and many others. Though they have differing opinions, they have not given up the framework of the *Vedas*. But Buddhists have abandoned it. They reject the principles of *varnashrama dharma* and sacrificial rituals. It does not matter if they merely disagree with it. But they hate it. What is the cause behind this irrational hatred? Can anyone of you tell me the reason?”

There was silence for a moment or two. No answer forthcoming, Shankara himself resumed:

“I will merely repeat what our most venerable Guru Govinda Bhagawadpada has said. Buddhism practices a personality cult. Unlike *Sanatana Dharma*, it is not supra-human. However intelligent an individual may be, the reach of his intelligence is limited. He cannot possess the ability to comprehend a problem in its totality. Therefore, his ideology is bound to be incomplete or imperfect. When he himself is unaware of this, how can his followers know this? But the fallacious idea that whatever their guru has told is unquestionably true and also the angry disapproval of whatever others have said leads to blind hatred for those who differ from them. This leads to all sorts of evils like treachery, violence and cruelty born out of hatred. This is the fate of all religions based

on individuals. As there are incurable defects in them, they are bound to die in the course of time. But so long as such cults persist, their followers create unrest and disorder in society and continue to accumulate sin as long as they live.”

With these words, he concluded his speech. After sometime, Yajneswara said,  
“Guruji, please advise us what we should do under these circumstances.”

“In your question the word ‘we’ implies not only *brahmanas*, but also *kshatriyas*. First see what the duty of a *brahmana* is. Strengthening *Sanatana Dharma* is the duty of both at all times. This is possible only with delivering discourses. But discourses can be given only after study. Hence, for the *brahmana* that and only that is the *tapas*. But his discourses should be given to all *varnas*. But the *dharma* to be practiced differs from group to group. Therefore, the range of these discourses have to be very vast and profound. The profundity of *dharma* is in *Shruti*. Its vastness is found in *Smriti*. *Shruti* has permanence, but *Smriti* is dynamic. This is so because *Smriti* prescribes what is relevant to the times. The laws of *Smriti* cannot be framed by anyone and everyone. Only those who have deeply studied *Shruti* and have gained wisdom, peace and restraint thereby, and who are steeped in *dharma* alone can do it.”

“What are the things to be noted in kingly *dharma*? In the sense the Dharma of a *Brahmana* is simple. But the *dharma* of the king is complicated. For a king it is not a violation of *dharma* if he adopts a crooked course to meet the exigencies of a particular period, without abandoning the principles of the eternal *dharma*, as such a course is necessary for the protection of the eternal *dharma*. All along the *Mahabharata* war, Lord Krishna taught this to the kings. But obviously still they have not learnt it. Often our kings deal with enemies in a straight forward way like a *brahmana*. This lack of discretion on their part spells disaster to themselves as well as *dharma*. A king should not be indiscreet. It is the duty of the *brahmana* to advise a king suitably by educating him in the above discretionary *dharma*. In view of this you all should be careful. What particular course of action should be followed may be decided by and by. We have the blessing of our Guru in this endeavour. What more do we need?”



## CHAPTER 4

### FROM SOMNATH TO KASHI

After a couple of days, Shankara decided to set forth from Somanath. After promising to return, he travelled to Dwaraka to obtain *darshan* of Lord Krishna, the God principally worshipped by him. After *darshan*, he stayed in the temple premises and got acquainted with the important people there. Even amongst them were many disciples of Govinda Bhagawadpada. He discussed various important matters with them for two or three days. But there were no scholars amongst them who had studied the *shastras*. Then he realized why the Guru had instructed him to go straight from Somanath to Kashi, and his eyes were set on Kashi now. He covered most of the distance on foot. Once in a while, whenever there was an opportunity, he travelled on horse cart or in a bullock cart. The purpose was to reach Kashi as quickly as possible. This purpose was achieved.

As soon as he reached Kashi, he bathed in the holy Ganga. On seeing this effulgent young *sanyasi*, people offered him alms even without his asking. He consulted some pilgrims as to where he could stay, and they directed him to a nearby *dharmashala*. He could see *pathasalas* all over the place. He also found a library there. Soon began his ceaseless study of books and discussion with scholars. In a short time he gained

recognition as an extraordinary genius. Now the only place he would visit on his own was the library, but a stream of visitors always waited for him at his place. Amongst them were eminent scholars and people with spiritual achievements. The discussions centered on issues of great import. The participants hardly noticed the passage of time. In the afternoon one or the other used to invite Shankara to their house for *bhiksha*. Sometimes *bhiksha* was brought to the place where he lived. Simplicity, profound learning, humility and the extraordinary ability to convey his thoughts in a manner that was within everybody's reach according to their understanding power soon elevated him to the esteemed position of a Guru.

One afternoon, seekers of knowledge were seated around him, getting their doubts cleared. At a distance sat a leper separately. He posed a question to the Guru:

"I have often heard in many dispositions of great men that the Soul Within is self luminous. What does it mean?"

"Listen, I will explain. All of us experience three states – the waking state, dream and dreamless sleep. During the waking state, one cognizes the external world with the help of sense organs. The knowledge thus acquired is what is known as awareness. Hence, the *jiva* in waking state is outward in awareness. What is the light in the daytime that helps him to see the outside objects?"

"It is sunlight."

"What helps him to cognize after sunset?"

"Moonlight."

"If even moonlight is not there?"

"It is the light of a lamp."

"If that is also absent?"

"Nothing can be seen."

"Listen further. The *jiva*, tired of the day's toil goes to sleep. He sees dreams. Then he is able to see chariots, horses and pathways. What are those objects?"

"Those are recollections of things seen during wakefulness."

"The one who sees these recollections is the *jiva* with inward awareness. Does this *jiva* have any sunlight or other light to view these dream objects?"

“Obviously, there is no such light.”

“Then how does he see those objects?”

“The objects in memory are self luminous. So what need is there for an external light?”

“Not so. During the waking state, there is no need for another light to see any light. But the picture of that light cannot be seen in darkness. To see it another light is required. Whatever is viewed in dream is only the picture of memory. There is need for some light to view it, isn’t it?”

“Yes, now I understand it. But I cannot yet say what that light is.”

“That light cannot be from outside. It must be some inner light. It is the light of the soul that is viewing the dream. Therefore, the soul is self-luminous.”

“Then, why don’t I see it?”

“You cannot see it because all your attention is glued to the dream.”

“The soul of the viewer of the dream is the same ‘I’ during dreamless sleep also, isn’t it?”

“No.”

“Then who is that soul?”

“He is the soul of that ‘I’ of the dreamless sleep.”

“Then one could have seen the light of the soul at least during the dreamless sleep. But why is not so?”

“It is not so because that light is behind you.”

“But there can be no front or back in dreamless sleep.”

“Then please tell me who you are. Are you not yourself that soul of the dreamless sleeper?”

“I do not know.”

“It is behind this ignorance. This ignorance is what makes you think that you do not know who you are.”

“Then who am I?”

“You are that very Soul. Until you come to know this, you are the one who is the viewer during the dreamless sleep.”

One day a student asked, “Some Buddhists say that this world is *shunya*. Some others say that it is imaginary like dream. Some *mimamsakas* opine that it is permanent without any creation or destruction. Some who agree that there is creation and final destruction say that *Ishwara* is its efficient cause and *Prakriti* its material cause. Some believe that it is uncaused and that it has evolved by itself from *Prakriti*. I came to this great place of learning enthusiastically, believing that I could learn much. But I am totally confused with the different and contradictory theories being taught here. I beg you to teach me the correct thing.”

This is how Shankara clarified:

“Joys and sorrows of life are within the day-to-day experience of everybody, and hence, to call this world *shunya* is not worth considering at all. So you can very well abandon that theory. Also the world is not imaginary like a dream because the friend whom we see in the dream afflicted with some disease is found to be healthy when we actually meet him in the waking state. Thus the same friend whom we see in a dream as afflicted with disease is not really so. Hence the world we see during the waking state is not dreamlike. Then you referred to the argument of some *mimamsakas*. They believe in the *Veda*. The *Veda* declares, ‘*Surya chandramasou dhatayatha purvamakalpayat / divancha prithvincha antarikshamathosvah*<sup>30</sup>’. That is *Ishwara* created the universe exactly as it was in the earlier *kalpa*. Consequently, how can one say that world is eternal? It goes against the Vedic pronouncement. Now, what the others say regarding *Ishwara* being the efficient cause and *Prakriti* being material cause, it goes against their own hypothesis of *Ishwara*’s omniscience. This is how it is: *Prakriti* being infinite, it cannot be measured, which implies that *Ishwara* also cannot measure it, which goes against His omniscience. If He can measure it then *Prakriti* cannot be infinite. Thereby even that theory is not tenable. Then you spoke of the theory which propounds that the universe evolved on its own from the inert *prakriti* without any efficient cause. This theory suffers from an error known as *vyaghata*, because *prakriti* being inert, cannot by itself initiate any activity, much less that of evolving itself into the universe. Thus, there it suffers

<sup>30</sup>

Rigveda Samhita 10.190.3

from self-contradiction. Hence, all these theories are wrong. The root cause for this error lies in the fact that all these theorists have arrived at their respective conclusions on the basis of inference. But conclusions made on the basis of mere logic have no finality. Even though it conforms to truth from a particular point of view, it may become invalid from some other point of view. In such matters there arises a need for another test of validity. But the scriptures declare that the Almighty God transforms Himself to be born in infinite forms – ‘*So kamayata bahusyam prajayeyeti*<sup>31</sup>. Thus, they conclude that Almighty God alone is both the efficient cause and material cause for universe. The example of the spider building its web confirms our belief in this dictum of the Upanishad. This alone is the correct proposition.”

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One of the participants in these meetings who always sat quietly and listened to these discourses, once came to Shankara when he was alone, and said,

“My name is Prithvidhara. May I ask a question?”

“You are free to ask any question.”

“For a pot the potter is the efficient cause and clay is the material cause. It is the function of the potter to create the shape. But though the clay gets different shapes like that of a pot or other objects, it continues to be clay, and hence as clay it remains devoid of any activity. On the other hand, in the case of *Brahman*, if it is the undivided efficient and material cause of the universe, then there arises a contradiction that being efficient cause, *Brahman* has activity. But being material cause, it must be devoid of activity. How can these be reconciled?”

Shankara asked Prithvidhara, who was all along standing, to sit down. As he sat down, Shankara said,

“This is how it has to be reconciled. The efficient cause attributed to *Brahman* is in its secondary meaning (*Gauna Artha*). In its primary meaning (*Mukhya Artha*), it is the first born *Hiranyagarbha* who is the efficient cause, and not *Ishwara*. *Ishwara* is devoid of activity. *Anena jivenatmana anupravishya nama rupe vyakaravani*’ – I enter in

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<sup>31</sup> Taittiriya Upanishad 2-6

the form of *jivatma* and sort out names and forms, so saying, He enters *Hiranyagarbha*. He has the potential to undertake creation and other activities. But He lacks the ability to translate His desire into action. This potentiality in Him is the character derived from *Prakriti* which is ultimately one of the primary transformations of *Brahman*. Therefore, *Shruti* attributes efficient cause of creation to *Brahman*, the source of that ability, just as the work of construction of a building is attributed to the owner, though the actual construction is done by the worker, as it is the owner who enables the worker to do the construction. Hence the attribution of efficient cause to *Brahman* in the scriptures should be taken in its secondary meaning. But *Brahman* continues to be the material cause for creation in its primary meaning.”

Prithvidhara was immensely satisfied with this clarification and said,

“May I seek your guidance frequently? I hope it will not inconvenience you.”

“It surely does not inconvenience me. You may come as often as you please.”

Shankara was always surrounded by people. Afternoons were treated as unscheduled question and answer sessions. At this session in particular, seekers of knowledge, like students, holy men and other men of spiritual aspirations used to gather around Shankara. Once the session prolonged till evening. Shankara got up and said that he had to go for bathing in the river. Some of his disciples followed him. As it was summer, the bathing *ghats* were crowded. As Shankara came, those who were near the upstream went to the downstream. Shankara finished bathing and smeared ashes on his forehead and carrying his *kamandal* filled with water of the sacred Ganga, staff in hand, started walking back. The disciples were clearing the people on either side to make way for Shankara. In the middle of the path sat a *chandala* with a couple of dogs. One of the disciples shouted at him,

“Don’t you see who is coming? Get up and clear the way.”

He got up slowly and looking once at Shankara and once at the disciples, said,

“Whom are you asking to clear the way? Is it the body or the soul?”

The disciple was flabbergasted not knowing what to answer. He only looked at the *chandala* in total confusion. The *chandala* himself continued,

“If you want the body to clear the way, there is no need for it to do so, because the body of everyone is born of clay and seven elements. If you want the inner soul to get

out of the way, it is the experience of everyone during deep sleep that soul has no relation to the body. Now tell me who should clear the way?”

All including that disciple stood dumbfounded. Shankara himself answered,

“My good man, you seem to know much. You are possessed of that true knowledge which even those who have studied *shastra* hardly know. You are certainly a great man. To me, you are equal to a Guru.”

On hearing this, the *chandala* turned towards the temple of Lord Viswanatha, with a smile on his face. Some of those who heard Shankara’s words were happy. Some others were astonished. But some could not understand it at all.

Next afternoon there was a gathering as usual. Everyone was silent. No one asked any question. Nor did they speak anything. Shankara himself started speaking.

“The supreme aim of life is *Moksha*, which is to know that one is nothing but the pure *Atman*. This is totally free from all pollution. *Atman* has absolutely no relation to either body or the organs of perception. Still, it has to be known through the mind. This is possible only if the mind attains purity equal to that of the *Atman*. How can one purify the mind? This is possible only with the performance of appropriate *karma*, without expectation of any desire for benefits. Now, while performing *karma*, the body must be clean. Tradition has prescribed certain rules for this purpose. After five or six years of boyhood, even children are not touched by the parents. Menstruating women keep themselves aloof, so that they do not come in contact with others. When it is unavoidable to touch a patient in order to serve him, they take bath after serving the patient and only after that they indulge in other activities. It is similar in the case of pollution related to birth or death of somebody among the kinsfolk, when people do not touch one another. This practice is necessary for keeping the mind clean.”

Shankara continued, “After all this, just recollect the incident that took place last evening. Nobody will say that it is wrong for those who have bathed and are proceeding for the *pooja* to not touch others. But a river is a public place. Everyone is free to enter this place. If someone, who is unclean, is obstructing your way, the best course is to avoid them and proceed. If that is not possible, there is nothing wrong in requesting them to give way and allow you to proceed. But it is certainly wrong if someone thinks that

the way is reserved for him alone and considers that those who are unclean are inferior, and shout at them to clear the way. Even the *Smriti* have laid down that all have equal right over public utilities like river, lake, well or roads. Though no one except the *archaka* has the right to enter the sanctum sanctorum of a temple, everyone has the right to have the *darshan* of God. Who is superior? Who is inferior? As there is only one God residing in everybody's heart. The *Veda* says, '*Namah punjishtebhyah, namo nishadebhyah*' – obeisance to Him who catches birds, obeisance to the hunter. *Brahmadasha brahmadasa brhmaiveme kithavaah* – fishermen are *Brahman*, those who carry stones toiling are *Brahman* and those who gamble are *Brahman*. That is why the learned say, *shuni chaiva shwapakecha pandithah samadarshinah* – whether it is a dog or a *chandala*, *pundita* views them with equal regard. Hence, we should not entertain any feeling about any person that he is inferior, nor should we treat anybody with disdain. We should not look down upon even an infant."

Having spoken so much, Shankara, without talking any further, left the place and proceeded to his room. After sometime, Prithvidhara, carefully stepping on his toes, entered the room slowly, did *namaskara* to Shankara and stood up. Shankara gave him the hymn, *Manisha Panchaka*, which he had composed in the morning. Prithvidhara read it slowly and prayed to Shankara. "I pray that I may be blessed with your grace always" and wiped his eyes wet with tears of joy.

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Another evening, the question and answer session had just ended when a young man came to Shankara. He was about twenty five years old. He was dark complexioned and had a bushy beard. His eyes were calm and he wore a *dhoti* a little below his knees and an upper cloth. During all question answer sessions, he used to sit quietly in a corner and at the end, would do a *namaskara* to the Guru and depart. But on that day, after making obeisance, he broke his silence and said, "I want to talk to you personally. When can I meet you?"



“You may come whenever you are free. You can always find me here except when I am taking *bhiksha* or having bath.”

“May I talk to you now?”

“You are welcome.”

After entering the room, he said, “Most revered Guru, my name is Vishnu Sharma. I had not revealed this to anybody here. Someone here addressed me as Sanandana, and since then, everybody calls me by the same name. I am a *Brahmana* from Chola country. My father passed away when I was young. I have no brothers or sisters. Even my mother passed away recently. I have lost all interest in worldly affairs. I beg of you to take me as your disciple.”

“Have you studied anything?”

“I have undergone instruction in my branch of the *Veda*.”

“Which is that branch?”

“*Sama Veda*.”

“Have you undergone any other instruction?”

“For nearly two years I have been living in Kashi. I have learnt some poetry and grammar. But I do not have much interest in those subjects. I want to study *Vedanta*. But I had no opportunity of learning it here in Kashi.”

“I have been seeing you every afternoon. Have you been able to follow the discussions here?”

“Yes, I could understand them. Therefore, I have come to seek refuge in you.”

“I am proceeding to Badrinath in a few days from now. It seems there it is bitter cold. You are from Chola country. Can you put up with such cold?”

“I have come prepared for all that.”

“Then, you may accompany me.”

On hearing that Shankara was going to Badrinath, Prithvidhara also set out with him after taking his permission.

As soon as it became known that Shankara was about to leave, the holy men of Kashi, setting aside all their other activities, came thronging to Shankara and expressed their surprise and disappointment at this decision of his to leave Kashi so soon. They

said to him, “We hope that there has been no discourtesy from any of us. We were thinking that you were going to settle here.”

“There has been no such thing. For the present, my work here is over. I shall come again. You have all treated me with extraordinary courtesy and have provided me with more comforts than I needed. I am thankful to you. Please permit me to depart.”

“When can we expect you to be back here?”

“It may take two or three years.”

One of the gentlemen present there, seeing Prithvidhara also ready to depart, asked him, *Acharya*, are you also leaving Kashi?”

“Yes.”

“How about your work in the *Vidya Peetha*?”

“I have given it up.”

“After all, you are a free man, being a *brahmachari* and you can follow any course. You are really a fortunate man.”

## CHAPTER 5

### KASHI TO BADARINATH

So began the journey to Badarinath. After crossing Haridwar and Hrishikesh, the journey was along foot tracks. Prithvidhara said to Sanandana,

“I am familiar with these parts. I will lead in the front. Let Guruji be in the middle. You follow Guruji.”

Thus, they started walking. The Himalayas came into view. They are sacred mountains, where Lord Shiva Himself resides. For those who are enlightened with knowledge and those who seek liberation, this is the ultimate refuge. As one walks along, one finds lofty peaks on one side and unfathomable abysses on the other side. In the main valleys flow the rivers Ganga and Yamuna that sanctify the world. In smaller valleys flow their tributaries, eager to merge with them. There are also innumerable streams. One also hears the splashing sounds of waterfalls everywhere. One also finds valleys of absolute silence which transport yogis to Samadhi. There are sky scraping tall trees, small trees, bushes and other plants of all description. One also hears the humming of bees from big bee-hives. One also comes across small hamlets inhabited by simple folk devoid of any deception or snobbery of town folk. The Guruji and the two disciples sought alms as they passed through these hamlets. After trekking some distance, they would find an ashram or some distance away a temple. These are the places where they would rest for the night. At every place of halting, people urged Shankara to stay there. At last, they reached Badarinath.

Leaving Sanandana behind, Shankara and Prithvidhara approached the chief of the temple and obtained permission for two rooms in the choultry. By the time they reached the rooms, it was five in the evening. After resting for a while, all three bathed in the Alkananda.

“It is already getting dark. Let us have a *darshan*, if the temple door is open” said Shankara.

“It will certainly be open. Let’s go,” said Prithvidhara. All three entered the temple.

What a shocking sight! The idol was missing. People were making obeisance to the empty altar. On enquiring how the idols came to be missing, they came to know that some years ago, when the temple was closed for winter, Buddhists had entered the temple when nobody was there, and removed the idol and threw it into the river Alkananda<sup>32</sup>. On hearing this, Shankara’s face turned serious. Sanandana was astonished. Shankara looked at Prithvidhara, who said, “I am little acquainted with the history of the Buddhists. I am not surprised at this, but I feel sad. That is all I can say.” Most of the night they spent without any further discussion.

The next day Prithvidhara met Brahmadata, the President of the temple committee. As he was entering the house, Brahmadata himself came out and on seeing Prithvidhara said,

“You are the *Acharya* of Kashi University. Aren’t you? I remember to have seen you when I came there on pilgrimage three years ago.”

“Oh! Venerable gentleman, I will explain the circumstances that bring me here. I have come here with a young *sannyasi*, named Shankara Bhagawadpada. Before coming here, he was in Kashi for a month. There I used to meet him everyday and hold discussions with him. I am convinced that he is none other than the Incarnation of Lord Shiva Himself. His guru is Govinda Bhagawadpada of Omkareswara. On his directions,

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<sup>32</sup> Buddhists had been doing such things even till 1980 in Sri Lanka.

Shankara Bhagawadpada has come here to compose the commentary on Brahma Sutra. I pray you to provide him all conveniences,” said Prithvidhara.

The President readily agreed and said,

“I shall consider it my good fortune to render whatever assistance is necessary and I shall make all arrangements. You only have to inform me the requirements.”

“A *vyasapeetha* for writing, palm leaves, pen and ink and a shelter where the manuscripts are not spoiled by rain are all necessary. Therefore, the place of his residence should be suitable for writing, and then arrangements should be made for food and sleeping. We two are with him. Arrangements have to be made for both of us also,” said Prithvidhara.

“Arrangements can be made as per your wishes. It is not suitable to reside in the *dharmashala* as there will be noise of the crowds of pilgrims. For writing a book, a calm place is required. The cave of *Vyasa* is more convenient. It is protected from rain and it is also relatively warm. There is also a small cave by the side of it. There you two can stay. I will send beds and thick blankets. As for food, during the winter too I will be present here. I will arrange it here. You may stay here as long as you please. I will arrange things for writing. Do not hesitate to ask me for anything you need.”

With these words, Brahmadata then set about making arrangements for the stay of the trio. In the cave of *Vyasa*, arrangement was made in one corner for writing, and a bed was arranged by the side. A can full of oil and wicks along with two brightly burning lamps were placed in the cave. Brahmadata then came to the *dharmashala* and did *namaskara* to Shankara and brought him to the cave with great devotion. He addressed him with all humility and said, “Venerable Guruji, our village has become sanctified with your coming here. You have come here to perform a great task. It is our good fortune that you have given us an opportunity to serve you. You can order us without hesitation for anything you need and you will get it.” Shankara viewed the arrangements and said,

“Dear Brahmadata, the arrangements made by you are superb. Now I can engage myself in work without any worry. Let Lord Badarinatha fully bless you and your family.”

After a day or two, Shankara said, “The work on the commentary has to start from tomorrow.”

Prithvidhara sought the permission of the Guru to copy down the text as it was dictated. Even Sanandana wanted to take the dictation and sought Guru’s permission. Shankara agreed and permitted both to take the dictation.

The next day both Prithvidhara and Sanandana rose early and as they finished their bath and morning prayers, Shankara came down to the river. Sanandana stayed with the Guru, and Prithvidhara returned to the cave and arranged the seats for the Guru and themselves. Keeping the *vyasapeetha* in front, and the original text of Brahma Sutra on a clean cloth, he adorned it with flowers and lighted incense. By then, Shankara, after taking bath and completing *japa* of *Oum*, remembered his Guru and made obeisance in the direction of Govinda Guru’s place. Returning to the cave, he took his seat and the two disciples did *namaskara* to him. After meditating for a while, all the three chanted the *Dasha Shanti* hymn, *Shanno mitrah.....*, and then Shankara began his commentary.

“First learn the outlines of the Brahma Sutra. The Sutras are composed to discuss statements of the Upanishads. The aim of all Upanishads is the same. But, while describing several matters, words and sentences are used in conformity with the context. Therefore, it becomes difficult to identify the aim of Upanishads and doubts arise. The Brahma Sutras have been composed to solve these difficulties. These sutras are divided into four chapters. The first is *Samanvayadhyaya*. This chapter deals with the reconciliation of the fact that all Upanishads aim at determining the identity of the Supreme Ultimate Being. He is none other than Brahman which is the cause of this universe. This unencumbered Supreme is beyond the reach of the mind and words. When the universe is considered as a superimposition on it that appears as Brahman with attributions. This is the Brahman which is amenable to worship. The second chapter is *Avirodhadhyaya*. This chapter establishes the doctrine that the universe is not different from Brahman, but Brahman is different from the universe. All the doctrines disapproving Brahman as the cause of the universe are refuted. By determining the different stages by which creation is accomplished, this chapter proves that there is no contradiction in this regard in various Upanishads. The third chapter is *Sadhanadhyaya*. In this chapter, the doctrine of the true identity of *jiva* with *Nirguna* Brahman is

established and the necessary steps to realize this identity are described. The fourth chapter is *Phaladhyaya*. It describes the fruits of liberation i.e. *Moksha*. The destruction of all the *karma* of the realized being, non recurrence of the cycle of birth and death are discussed herein. There are four sections in each chapter and there are several *adhikarana* in each section, totalling 192. Each *adhikarana* has several sutras. Some of them have a single sutra only. The total number of sutras in the Brahma Sutra is 555.

“This is the course followed in every *adhikarana*: First there is the *sangathi* which makes known the connection with the previous subject discussed. Then there is the subject matter chosen for the present discussion. Next follows the doubt that necessitated the present discussion. Then there are the objections that may be raised while clearing the above mentioned doubt, which constitute the *purva paksha* – the contrary view. The final conclusion after refuting the objections and establishing the doctrine is *swapaksha*. Every doctrine has to be established in these five steps only.”

Sanandana asked, “What is the subject matter of the first *adhikarana*?”

“Look, the first *adhikarana* is known as *Jijnasadhikarana*. There is only one sutra in it – *Athato Brahma jijnasa*. Jijnasa means the desire to know. To know what? To know Brahman. Therefore, Brahman is the subject to be known.”

“Why should one desire to know Brahman?”

“By knowing Brahman, one can attain *Moksha*.”

“What is *Moksha*?”

“It is the state of permanent bliss in which one has not even an iota of sorrow.”

“But we see even learned people who know *shastra* immersed in sorrow.”

“It is true. But after knowing Brahman, only when one realizes one’s identity with Brahman, one attains *Moksha*.”

“Brahman is the cause of the universe. It remains unchanged. I am only a part of this universe. I take birth and die. Hence it is impossible for me to realize that I am one with Brahman.”

“Please tell me who you are.”

“I am Sanandana, a celibate.”

“Where were you during sleep last night?”

“I was strolling about in Kashi.”

“Then, who were you, whether the one strolling in Kashi or the one sleeping in the cave of Badarinath?”

Both the disciples laughed, but could not find any answer. Shankara himself continued, “Where were you during deep (dreamless) sleep last night? And what were you then?”

“I know nothing about it.”

“This shows that though you are sure of your existence during dreamless sleep, you do not know who you were then. This is your ignorance – *avidya*. In dreamless sleep you have no connection with your body or your sense perception. Still, during the waking state, you wrongly imagine a connection and think that you are Sanandana. This is the *adhyasa* that you are indulging in. The ‘you’ existing in dreamless sleep is Brahman, say the scriptures. To know this is *vidya*, true knowledge. Remember what was earlier said, the universe is not different from Brahman but Brahman is different from the universe. Therefore, when you realize that the world is not different from you but you are different from the world, you become free from attachment to the body. Thus you achieve liberation. Therefore, the *sangati* of *jijnasadhikarana* is the realization of the fact that one does not know one’s real identity.”

Now it was the turn of Prithvidhara to pose a question. “It is the experience of all that the *sushuptatma* is *sanmatra*. That is, all one can say about it is that it exists, and no more can be said about it. Scriptures say that *sushuptatma* is itself Brahman. Therefore, Brahman also must be *sanmatra*. But how can the world be born out of *Sanmatra* Brahman?”

“This objection arises out of inference only. But inference cannot prove either the possibility or the impossibility of the world being born out of Brahman. In short, the doctrine of Brahman being the cause of the world is not subject to inference. It can only be verified by the testimony of scriptures. Hence, those who believe in scriptures must accept what the scriptures say,” replied Shankara.

“Be it so. It means that the testimony of the scriptures leads to the doctrine of Brahman as unitary, while the testimony of direct perception leads to plurality, and both results have to be accepted. This is so because one testimony cannot be contradictory to another. This acceptance leads to the conclusion that during one’s life time one has to



perform action or action based on knowledge. After death one can attain other worlds or *Moksha*. Thus activism (*karma*) and knowledge can be reconciled. On the other hand, if the world is denied, I am afraid it may end in support of Buddhism.”

“Certainly not. It does not in any way support Buddhism. This is how it can be deduced. The world is not different from Brahman. Hence, in its true identity, only Brahman remains and the world is not in it. This is the conclusion from the point of view of the cause. On the other hand, when viewed from the point of view of the effect, the world by itself is not absent, but changing and amenable to mundane transaction. This is because the world contains the unchanging Brahman in it. It is not *paramarthika satya*, but transitional *satya*. Further, the changing world gets reconciled with karma, and *sanmatra* Brahman with *Moksha*. Thus, in the doctrine propounded in *Shruti*, there is no place for either the *shunyavada* or karma combined with *jnana*, nor is there any place for the idea that *moksha* is only after death,” replied Shankara.

“If so, which is that *jnana* which has no relation to karma?”

“One who deems this world, which in its essence is not different from oneself, as different, becomes a *karmi*. One who is above this duality becomes a *jnani*. This non-dual *jnana* is *atmajnana*. It is what the *Shruti* names as *Sarvatma Bhava*. *Shruti* also mentions another kind of *jnana*. This *jnana*, based on duality, is of devotion towards a personal deity as an object of worship. This involves a combination of *jnana* and karma. It also involves attainment of different regions of heaven where one enjoys the fruit of one’s karma. But what was spoken earlier was absolute liberation mentioned in the *Shruti*.”

Then began the dictation by Shankara which was written down by the disciples. Sanandana and Prithvidhara took dictation by turns. The doubts that arose as they wrote were simultaneously being cleared by the Guru. The news of the commentary being composed by Shankara spread to *sadhakas* all over the country through the pilgrims visiting Badarinath. Some of them joined. The newcomers also sat and wrote down the commentary. Many made copies of it. After some days, afternoons were devoted for lessons in the commentary for the *sadhakas*, and writing of the commentary continued in the remaining time. For the *sadhakas*, what were hitherto hard nuts to crack now became

easy to understand. Their joy knew no bounds. This became the sole topic of discussion among the *sadhakas*. By and by, the Vyasa Cave was transformed into *Vyasashrama*.

One day, there was an incident that disturbed this calm routine and created a sensation. As usual, Shankara had begun his exposition. Everyday, some four or five old men wrapped in *kambals* were attending the session. The *sadhakas* did not take particular notice of them thinking that they came there for just passing time. The lecture session, which used to go on for about two hours, was about to come to an end that day. In the meantime, one of the old men shouted on top of his voice,

“You chap, what are you talking? All your talk is full of contradictions. Once you say Karma should not be abandoned, in the same breath you say to give up *karma*. Again you speak of harmonizing *jnana* and *karma*. You say that the world is *satya*, and you also say that the world is *asatya*, and again you say it is an illusion. What is the meaning of your words? There seems to be no limit to your contradictory statements. You claim that you are writing a commentary on the Brahma Sutras. You little fellow! What do you know of *shastra*?”

As he spoke, he stared at Shankara with red hot eyes. His lips were quivering. Though his body showed advanced age, his voice was young and energetic. Prithvidhara, trying to calm down the atmosphere stood up and approached the old man, sat beside him and touching his shoulder, spoke in a humble conciliatory tone,

“You are like our father. You should not shout like this.”

Now the old man turned against him, “When I am asking that boy something, who are you to intervene? Just go back to your place.”

A dazed Prithvidhara now looked at Shankara. Lo! He is the very picture of calmness. Prithvidhara had a sharp mind. Without uttering another word he quietly went back to his place. Then, Shankara spoke in a voice unaffected by this incident.

“*Bhagawan*, I am only a boy. But your scholarship is unmatched. I beg you to correct me if I have spoken something wrong.”

The old man was still not appeased,

“The talk of correction will come later. First answer my questions, if you can.”

Shankara replied in all humility, “One who is still having desire has to engage in *karma*. But one, who has overcome desire, has no need for *karma*. This is what the Lord

Himself has ordained. I have only repeated those words. Further, the worship of Godhead involves the combination of *jnana* and *karma*. But the one who has learnt the shastra and who has mastered the four fold path of *sadhana*, needs no more *karma* as he constantly dwells in *Atman*. As this knowledge transcends duality, *karma* becomes redundant. This is the conclusion of Bhagwan Vyasa also. Now the world in its casual view is Brahman, which is *paramarthika satya*. But it is transactional *satya* from the mundane point of view. But keeping in view the layman, who is ignorant of the ultimate truth, the world is an illusion. If there is anything wrong in this, please correct me.”

“That may not be wrong. But you stated that the world is indefinable. What do you mean by that?”

“The Brahma Sutra ‘*tadananyatvamarambhanashabdadibhyah*’ helps us to conclude that Brahman is not different from the world. But this world has activity which is not in Brahman. Therefore, the one who is on the quest may have two views of the world at the same time, that is, spiritual as well as mundane. From his view it is not possible to say decisively whether the world is Brahman or different from it. Should one not call it as indefinable?”

“Yes, that is also correct. Now tell me what is the efficient cause of the world?”

“It is Brahman.”

“Why should *Pradhana* be not the efficient cause?”

“As it is inert, it cannot have the necessary activism for creation.”

“Then is this activism in Brahman?”

“No, it is not in Brahman also.”

“How can creation take place then?”

“It can take place if both are combined.”

“Does the activism that appears in this combination belong to Brahman or *Prakriti*?”

“It is of *Prakriti*.”

“Why did you speak of a combination then?”

“Though the activism is of the *Prakriti*, this comes about because of its association with actionless Brahman. If there is Brahman, there can be activity, if not, no activity.”

“If so, this association makes Brahman an agent, which militates against the true nature of Brahman. How do you explain this?”

“It need not be. A magnet without being itself active, can induce activity in a piece of iron which is nearby.”

“Well then, which is the first creation?”

“The sky.”

“How can that be a thing? It is only a void without an enclosure.”

“If so, when a bird enters it, this lack of enclosure should disappear, and there should be no room for another.”

“The other bird may occupy some other place.”

“In that case, the sky giving refuge to the other bird must be another sky.”

Some members of the audience laughed. Prithvidhara looked at the audience with a stern face. There was silence again. The old gentleman continued,

“I will test your knowledge of Upanishads now. Tell me whether the jiva, at the time of his death, carries or not to the next birth the subtle elements which are the seeds of the body.”

“He does carry.”

“He can obtain them where he goes. Why should he take them along?”

“That is what the *Shruti* says. In the fifth section of *Chandogya* Upanishad it is stated that the element water takes the shape of man.”

“Then, is element water alone the constituent of the body?”

“It is not so. All the elements are the constituents of the body.”

“How do you come to that conclusion?”

“This element water has undergone threefold transformation.”

“Why should they be carried?”

“*Prana* which is nothing but creative energy cannot move without being associated with matter.”

“There is no movement for *Prana*. ‘*Agnim vagapyeti vatam pranah*’ – *Vak* enters *agni*, and *prana* enters *vayu*. Is that not what is stated in *Shruti*?”

“That statement should be taken only in its secondary meaning.”

“How do you justify it?”

“*Shruti* also states ‘*Vanaspatin keshah*’- hair enters trees. This contradicts direct perception. Therefore, to reconcile the two seemingly contradictory testimonies, we have to take it in its secondary meaning.”

“*Shruti* states that Brahman being with all *rasas* and all *gandhas* has attributes. It also states that Brahman is *Arasa* and *Agandha* and hence without attributes. Then, should we take Brahman as both with attributes and without attributes?”

“It is wrong to say that same Brahman is both with and without attributes.”

“Then do you venture to say that *Shruti* is wrong?”

“I do not mean that. But the meanings of both statements must be reconciled.”

“How do you reconcile them?”

“Brahman is without attribute in Itself. But attributes appear when with an adjunct.”

“Why should one not say that Brahman is ‘*Sarvarasa*’ and the description that Brahman is without attributes is only an exaggeration?”

“*Shruti* also says that Brahman is *asthula*, *ananu*, *ahrasvam* and *adeergham*. If one says that these are also exaggerations, then the opposite attributes *stula*, *hrasva*, *anuthva* and *deerghatva* will remain stuck to Brahman.”

“Are *rasa* and *gandha* materials or not?”

“These are materials.”

“As materials are eternal, then, from the point of view of the adjunct, the qualified Brahman is also eternal. How can this be reconciled?”

“It is eternal, but not *satya*.”

“Then, what is *satya*?”

“That which is non-transformed and also eternal is *satya*.”

“If matter is taken as eternal, how can you prove that Brahman is non-transformed and eternal?”

“It is proved by the knowledge that a transforming object is not different from Brahman.”

This series of rapid questions and answers left the audience dumbfounded. There was a profound silence. Looking at the boy and the old man all trembled. After finding

that the answers to all his questions were satisfactory, the old man who still seemed to be angry said,

“You little urchin, you will be shaken to your roots on hearing my next question. Listen!”

As he spoke these words, Shankara stood up and folding his hands in token of obeisance, said,

“You are free to ask any question.”

“Sit down and talk.”

“Please do not consider it as a disobedience of your commandment. It was wrong on my part to have spoken so far while being seated. I must speak to you with due respect by standing. Answers to your questions can come from me only with your grace.”

Now the old man softened a little.

“Shankara, you just now stated that Brahman is non-transformed eternity. Then how can world be born out of it?”

“The *Shruti* states *Ko addha veda, ka iha provochat, iyam visristih yata ababhuva* – who can divine how this varied creation came into being; Who can describe it here? And also the words of Lord Himself, *Na me vidussuraganah prabhavam maharshayah* – Neither the gods nor the sages know my origin.”

“If that were true, then shall we retain the idea of Brahman being the efficient cause and abandon the words of *Shruti* ‘*ko addhaveda.....*’ or shall we retain the words of *Shruti* and consider Brahman’s position as efficient cause as only a statement without meaning?”

“If we retain the former, the nature of Brahman’s role as efficient cause cannot be determined. In the latter case, it is not possible to determine the source of creation.”

“Then how do you reconcile them?”

“It can be reconciled if Brahman as efficient cause is considered as a superimposition.”

“What is the nature of this superimposition?”

“Brahman being basically without activity enters in the form of *jiva* and performs the act of creation, and this action, though actually performed by *jiva*, is attributed to Brahman in a secondary sense. This constitutes the superimposition.”

“How can you conceive of action-less Brahman performing the act of entering with *jiva* form?”

“This apparent activity is nothing but immanence. It is evident that Brahman is immanent in *jiva* as well as *jagat*. Entering is only its manifestation. Even this is a superimposition.”

“You said that Brahman is also the material cause. Is this also superimposition?”

“It is not.”

“How do you justify your answer?”

“It is because *Kutastha* Brahman is determined by this fact of Brahman being the material cause. Hence it is not superimposition.”

There was silence for a few moments. The old man and the boy were staring at each other. Suddenly there was a thunderous sound that seemed to shake the earth. Everyone was stuck dumb. Nothing was visible. All those who were listening to the conversation fainted and seemed to have lost their senses. Lo! The old man now appeared in his true form as Sage Vyasa. At once Shankara moved forward from where he was standing and fell at his feet. He held the sage’s feet firmly and remained prostrate, till, at last, the sage himself lifted him up and embraced him.

“Shankara, I do not perceive any difference between you and Shuka. On hearing that you were writing a commentary on Brahma Sutra in the same cave where I once lived, I came to see you. I heard your discourses. When all of you were away I read your commentary. Still not being fully satisfied, I came here in disguise to test you and I put many questions to you. If in the course of your replies you had not stood up and made obeisance to me, you could not have recalled the very answers you had yourself found out. I am deeply satisfied with your extremely good behaviour, your scholarship and courteous conduct. Now your life span is almost coming to an end. Yet there are many great tasks to be performed by you. I now bless you with twice that life span. After completing your work here, depart immediately. You must reach out to all parts of the country and lay the foundation for the revival of Dharma. The decline of Dharma may

continue for another three or four years because it is *Kali Yuga*. You have to resist it. Later, on the basis of your efforts, Dharma will be revived. You are none other than Lord Shiva incarnate for that very purpose.” With these words, Sage Vyasa disappeared.

Shankara stood petrified, saying to himself, “What a pity! He disappeared without my getting an opportunity of uttering a word.” Among those who were present there, Prithvidhara and Sanandana regained their consciousness first and started enquiring what had happened.

Shankara spoke regretfully, “The Sage Vyasa, whom I was eagerly looking forward to meet since I entered this cave, came and gave me his *darshan*, blessed me and disappeared before I could speak even a single word with him.”

An amazed Prithvidhara said, “Was that old man who argued with you Sage Vyasa?”

“From the very fact that the questions being asked by him were all on the Upanishads, I had an inclination that he must be Sage Vyasa and hence I thought it would be irreverence if I continued to speak with him sitting. Hence I stood up and spoke humbly to him. But soon he disappeared. My good fortune was limited to this short encounter. Please disperse the gathering and then you too may leave this place.” As the audience began dispersing, they talked excitedly of the unusual visitor.

“It seems that old man was none other than Vyasa himself. Who else can speak so spiritedly! But our Shankara is really a great man. It is our good fortune that we are his disciples.”

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The work on the commentary of the three great foundations of Vedanta was coming to an end. Except on the days prohibited for study of holy books, the disciples did not miss even a single day of their lessons and discourses on the commentary. Prithvidhara and Sanandana were always busy with either writing down the commentary or attending the classes or daily rituals. All the three were provided with *bhiksha* at Brahmadata's house. Pilgrims visit Badarinath during the season beginning from *Jyestha* to *Karthika*. Prithvidhara used to discuss with them matters regarding protecting Dharma. He would collect information regarding those interested in working for the



protection of Dharma and would establish contact with them. On the basis of this he decided what route would be most appropriate for Shankara to return to Kashi from Badarinath and informed Shankara about it.

One day the Guru asked Prithvidhara, “I hear that Sanandana was your student. Is it true?”

“Yes, he learnt some grammar from me.”

“I learnt that you were also teaching Brahma Sutra. Is it true?”

“Yes, I was teaching a commentary on it written by me. But after my contact with you, I threw it into the Ganga. Now Sanandana and I are both your disciples.”

“I intend initiating Sanandana into *sannyasa*.”

“It is a good idea. He very well deserves it. Moreover, he is intelligent and also unattached to worldly things. Guruji, I am also waiting for *sannyasa deeksha* from you.”

“You will also be initiated into *sannyasa* in course of time. I feel that you have to take a great responsibility in the coming days. Your work will be of a different nature.”

“I am ready to carry out your command. My life is dedicated to you.”

“Prithvidhara, your life is dedicated to the protection of Dharma not to me.”

On an auspicious day, Sanandana got initiation into *sannyasa* and became Padmapada. After receiving *upadesha* of *pranava mantra*, he begged the Guru, “Please bless me so that I can constantly ruminate on *Atman* and attain knowledge in this very birth.”

“*Tathastu!* But never neglect the work of safeguarding Dharma.”

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One day, after *bhiksha* in Brahmadata’s house, Shankara said, “We came here almost three years ago. Our work is completed without any obstacle. In this, your part is also great. It is now time for us to return. Please tell me what service I can render to Lord Badarinath and I shall perform it.”

“Guruji, the devotees come and make obeisance to the mere altar where there is no idol. I do not know what to do in this matter. Please advise me as to what can be done in this regard.”

“The only thing to be done is to reinstall the idol with proper rituals.”

“But how do we recover the idol?”

“Let us search for it in the river. If we find it, we can reinstall it. Otherwise, another idol has to be arranged.”

“At present the flood has receded. Let us start searching for it from tomorrow itself.”

Brahmadatta summoned expert swimmers. After searching extensively they located the spot where the idol was submerged. To retrieve it, it was necessary to tie it with a rope and pull it up. There was none amongst the swimmers who could hold their breath so long. Shankara offered to try and holding the rope and entered the river. He did not come up for a long time. Everyone became concerned. Brahmadatta was extremely scared. At last Shankara came up. All gave a sigh of relief. Shankara was holding a broken arm of the idol.

Brahmadatta, looking at the broken arm, said, “The idol is broken. How can it be installed?”

Shankara pacified him saying, “If the arm of a child is broken, do we discard him?” You may install Badarinath in whatever condition the idol is. The idol has been tied to the rope. It must be pulled up carefully, avoiding rocks. I will go down again there. Start pulling only when I shake the rope.”

With these words Shankara again entered the water. The idol was pulled up with a lot of effort. The people who had gathered raised slogans in praise of Badarinath and Shankara. The installation ceremony was fixed for an auspicious day in the bright half of *Vaisakha*. Priests were called from Srinagar. The installation ceremony was conducted in all splendor and was attended by enthusiastic devotees. The excitement of the devotees was indescribable. But the only regret was that there was no priest at the temple to conduct the daily rituals. Shankara suggested that someone amongst them who knew the rituals could manage it presently, and by and by he would arrange a permanent priest. Two or three days later, as planned by Prithvidhara, all the three left for Nepal.

## CHAPTER 6

### BADARINATH TO NEPAL

Prithvidhara, who was the *acharya* of *Kashi Vidya Peeth*, was well acquainted with people from all parts of the country, as he used to be in touch with pilgrims who visited Kashi. As Shankara's travel plan was decided upon, arrangements for his journey and stay in different destinations became easy and smooth as people in different destinations used to be kept informed well in advance. All along his way, people stood waiting for him. He used to teach them prayers and inspire them to lead their lives following Dharma. He also used to discuss *shastra* with scholars. All this made him dear to the people along his path. Shankara and his disciples faced no problems regarding alms or their rest. After several days of ascending and descending of mountains, they at last reached Pashupatinath. A large crowd of people eagerly awaiting his arrival welcomed him enthusiastically with the beat of drums and the sounds of clarions and conches. But Shankara, who entered the temple, soon came out. What he saw inside made him feel disgusted. The whole premises was stained with the blood of bulls, sheep and other animals who had been offered as sacrifice to the deity. Even the *Shivalinga* was soaked in blood. Dogs went about fearlessly licking the *Shivalinga*<sup>33</sup>. Shankara just said that he

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Such a sight can be seen even today in the Kali temple at Dakshina Kali near Kathmandu.

would visit the temple again at leisure, and departed to the place arranged for his stay. The scholars and Brahmanas assembled there made obeisance to him chanting the mantra *Na karmana.....*

Shankara asked them about the scene he had witnessed in the temple. They explained to him that the practice of animal sacrifice was in vogue in the temple. “We had not planned to take you to the temple immediately after your arrival. People took you there in their enthusiasm. Please pardon us. We do not know when this practice of animal sacrifice began in the temple. But it has been going on for a long time. Only on *Shivaratri* is there no animal sacrifice. On that day we go and wash the temple premises and perform *punyah* and *rakshoghna* and also *rudrabhishekam*.”

Then Prithvidhara addressed the gathering. “Guruji will be staying here for some days. It will be better if in the mornings and afternoons assembly of scholars, and in the evenings discourses by Guruji are arranged. If you all follow his teachings and receive his blessings, it will ensure the well being of all of you and also the prosperity of this town.” The routine, as suggested by Prithvidhara, started the next day. Within a day or two Shankara’s brilliance became evident and scholars made copies of his commentaries on the triple foundation (*Prasthan Traya*) of Vedanta. Shankara dealt with important parts of the commentary for scholars, and for the common public he taught prayers. He also delivered discourses on the *Shiva Purana*. The king of Nepal, on coming to know of these programs, came to have a *darshan* of Shankara, who enquired about the well being of the king and his family and also about that of his people. The king was greatly impressed with Shankara and visited him several times thereafter to seek guidance.

One afternoon, during discussions, one of the learned men raised a question, “Yesterday we heard from you regarding the three states. But we could not understand how during deep dreamless sleep one experiences bliss, though cut off from all external connections.”

Shankara explained, “During dreamless sleep, there is neither *buddhi* nor other outward faculties. Therefore, there is neither external awareness nor internal awareness at that time. That means the ‘I’ of waking and dream states is absent. But that does not mean the enjoyer of bliss is absent. Otherwise, who else can there be to experience the bliss of dreamless sleep? Thereby, it is evident that though I am there, I do not know

who I am. This is because of *adhyasa* regarding myself. The *Shruti* reveals this secret thus – *Sata tada sampannobhavati*, one merges in *Sadbrahman* at that time. Now *ananda* is Brahman and hence, one also experiences bliss.”

“How to know that one is merged in Brahman then?”

“Listen! *Satya*, *Jnana* and *Ananta* are the characteristics of *Sadbrahman*. The true self, evident in dreamless sleep, also has the same characteristics. So, one must have merged in Brahman then.”

“If that is so, then is the *tvam* in the statement *Tatvamasi*, the inner self in deep sleep – *Pratyagatma*?”

“Yes.”

“What a pity! All these days we assumed that *tvam* means the ‘I’ of waking state, and as a result, we could not rightly comprehend the meaning of *Tatvamasi*. We are truly enlightened by your teaching and we are grateful to you for this.”

“You can also see that *tvam* is not the ‘I’ of the waking state from what the Lord has exhorted us in the Gita – *Kshetrajnam chapī mam viddhi*. *Kshetrajna* is the one who is knowing the *kshetra* i.e. the body etc. He must be different from *kshetra*. If not, it is impossible to know the *kshetra*. *Kshetra* includes both the gross body and the subtle body. The ‘I’ of waking state, as well as the ‘I’ of dream state are both connected to these bodies. Hence, they cannot be *Kshetrajna*. But the true self evident in dreamless sleep is clearly different from the outward conscious ego. Thereby, that true self alone is *Kshetrajna*.”

Another scholar asked, “If so, the ‘I’ of waking state and ‘I’ of the dream state are not Brahman?”

Shankara replied, “There is nothing which is not Brahman. But the activity of the ‘I’ of waking state and dream state are not in Brahman. These are only apparent forms of Brahman in *rupas* through *buddhi* and other *karanas*. In its *swaroopa*, Brahman is action-free.”

“What is the difference between *swaroopa* and *rupa*?”

“*Swaroopa* is that which is self-sustained without the aid of any external support, whereas *Rupa* is that which has no existence without a support.”

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On another day a person belonging to the *Pashupata* cult had this question to ask: “The world is created for *jiva*, and we believe that *Ishwara*, who is none other than *Pashupatinatha*, is the efficient cause and *Pradhana* is the material cause for the world. But what you have been telling in your discourses is different from this. Will you please explain what is wrong with our view?”

“There is nothing wrong in saying that *Ishwara* is the efficient cause. But to say that He is only the efficient cause and *Pradhana* and *Purusha* are different is not correct.”

“Why?”

“According to your belief, all the three are immanent in everything and also without parts. Aren’t they?”

“Yes.”

“If so, there can be no link between *Ishwara* and *Pradhana*. In such a case, there can be no creation and *Ishwara* cannot dominate over *Pradhana* and *Purusha*.”

“Suppose the link is *samavaya*?”

“In such a relation, one supports and the other is supported. If *Pradhana*, *Purusha* and *Ishwara* are independent, what supports which cannot be decided.”

“What if *Pradhana* is linked to *Ishwara* as His energy?”

“This could be possible if the energy and the possessor of the energy were to be different. But it is evident that energy is one with *Ishwara*. Hence, the only explanation can be that *Pashupatinatha* is both the efficient cause and material cause of the universe, and this explanation is beyond all errors.”

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The next day Prithvidhara told Padmapada, “I will be absent for two days. I have to go to a nearby village to meet a scholar. Please look after Guruji,” and went away.

The following day Shankara called Padmapada and said, “Here is a small *Sougatha* treatise. Make a copy of it. I am going out for a walk around the forest and will shortly return.” Moving about in the forest, Shankara reached a cross path. There he lost

his way. He walked and walked without any clue as to where he was going. It was afternoon when he came out of the forest into an open area. Shankara had been wandering without food or water and he fell down tired. Pleasantly a woman of about forty years of age walking with a pitcher of water a little distance away. Shankara called out in feeble voice, “Mother, please give me some water.”

“Why?”

“To drink.”

“The pitcher is here. Come here and take.”

“Mother, I am dead-tired. All my energy is gone. I cannot walk. Kindly bring it and give it to me.”

“What do you mean by saying that all energy is gone? Just the other day you were saying that the energy and possessor of the energy are not different. Now, how can your energy abandon you? Come here and drink it.”

“Mother, please give me water first. Let us argue later.”

“If you concede that what you said was wrong, I will bring water to you. If you still maintain that you are right, you have to come yourself and drink.”

“I concede that I was wrong. Please give me some water. After drinking I will prove to you that what I said was right. For having told a lie being a *sanyasi*, it will be an act of expiation to drink water given by you.”

The woman came out of her disguise and blessed Shankara saying, “My dear son, I heard your discourse. I wore this disguise as I felt like playing a prank on you. You are unbeatable. I know what you are going to say later. Now I will give you water to drink.” With these words, she gave him water. As Shankara finished drinking water, She blessed him again with the words, “*Sarvatra Yashsvi Bhava*” – ‘Be victorious everywhere’, and disappeared.

After this, Shankara found his way back to the residence. Padmapada anxiously asked him where he had been for such a long time, and asked, “What about your food?”

Shankara said, “It is better that you take your food. I am not hungry. I do not need any food now.” With these words, he went into deep meditation.

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Once the king of Nepal visited Shankara and invited him and the disciples for *bhiksha*. Shankara said, “I will accept your invitation if you agree to fulfill a request of mine.”

“The Maharaja said, “I know that a desire that rises in you is only for our own good. I will certainly carry out your command.”

“Some changes are to be effected in the temple of *Pashupatinath*.”

“It shall be as you desire. Please tell me what changes have to be made.”

“Animal sacrifice should be discontinued. *Puja* must be conducted as prescribed in the Veda. This can be brought about only with a royal proclamation.”

The King replied, “Here Vedic influence has declined because of the influence of Buddha. Somehow, on *Shivaratri* the *Rudrabhisheka* is performed by local priests. But there are no scholars here. How can Vedic rituals be arranged here?”

“For the present, let the local priests continue to perform *puja*. In course of time, I will arrange the services of learned *archakas*.”

“This arrangement will solve the problem. Please tell me what is to be done now.”

The guests were given *bhiksha* in the palace. After returning, Shankara sat discussing with Prithvidhara for a long time: “Is there anybody to get the temple cleaned up and to perform *Kumbhabhisheka*?”

“There is none in the vicinity. It is because of Buddha’s influence. If you permit, I shall perform it under your guidance.”

“Let it be so.”

The Maharaja ordered the renovation of the temple. All arrangements were made for the celebration. People were informed through village officials about the impending *Kumbhabhisheka*. *Brahmanas* who had some training in the Veda arrived a week in advance. They practiced whatever Vedic *mantras* they knew by chanting them in unison. Prithvidhara assigned different tasks to individual *brahmanas*. The program went on for three days, as prescribed in the *shastra*. On the final day, *Kumbhabhisheka* was performed. Shankara performed *abhisheka* to Lord *Pashupatinatha* with holy water from the *kalasha*. Vedic *mantras* were chanted and *havan* was performed in a way that had never been witnessed before in that temple. Padmapada sang *mantras* from the



*Samaveda*. Many musical instruments were played in unison with the drumbeat and clarion sounded by the villagers. Thousands of people partook in the sumptuous feast. Such a celebration had not been witnessed during the living memory of the people. It was Prithvidhara who received accolades for the excellent arrangements. The Maharaja begged Shankara to make him his disciple. The next day, Maharaja received the *mantropadesha*. After a couple of days Shankara and his disciples set out on their journey to Kashi.

## CHAPTER 7

### NEPAL TO KASHI

While still in *Pashupatinath*, Prithvidhara made enquiries with pilgrims about the shortest route to Kashi, what places of pilgrimage were to be found on the way, which were the temples where rituals had been stopped and the scholars whom they could meet on the way. Accordingly, he decided upon a route for the return journey. Wherever possible, he used to send messages in advance. All along the way, programs were conducted to discuss Vedanta and *Mimamsa* with scholars. People following a Vedic profession were exhorted to study the Vedas more intensely. Matters regarding renovation of temples were also discussed. Common people were taught prayers, and discourses on Ramayana, Mahabharata and the *Puranas* were held. Urged by the people of the cities in the vicinity of their route, Shankara's entourage visited places on either side of the route. Thereby, travel was prolonged. However the required message reached those for whom it was meant. After all, the purpose of his travel was only to spread the right message.

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Shankara's retinue was staying in a village on their way to Kashi, when Padmapada said, "Guruji, within two hours of walking distance from here there is a town called Narasimhapura, where they say there is a temple dedicated to Lord Narasimha. If you permit me, I will go and have *darshan* and return."

"When will you return?"

"I shall return by tomorrow evening."

"You may go."

"Padmapada after reaching the temple sat there immersed in Lord Narasimha. Just when he was getting ready to return the temple priest said, "Tomorrow it is Narasimha *Jayanti*. All the people of this town participate in it. Why don't you stay for a day more, partake of the feast and then return?" Overjoyed, Padmapada, not wanting to miss this auspicious occasion, agreed to stay.

"We will all be very happy if you perform the *puja*," said the priest.

"What a miracle! My Lord has created for me an opportunity to perform His *puja*." So saying, Padmapada readily agreed. The next morning, he performed the *puja* with devotion. In the evening he sang hymns from the *Samaveda*. People of that town had never heard the singing of the *Samaveda*. All enjoyed it and urged Padmapada to stay with them for few more days. He declined saying that he had promised his Guru that he would return the very evening. They packed all the offerings made to the deity consisting of sweets and other eatables in a big bag and gave it to him. On his return, Shankara asked Padmapada,

"What is it in the bag?"

Padmapada gave details of his visit. Opening the bag, Shankara was surprised to see the contents and said, "There are enough eatables in the bag to last for a week, and we need not go anywhere for *bhiksha* till it lasts." He opened it and distributed the contents to all those who had gathered there and also took his share. The bag became empty.

It took nearly thirty days for them to reach Kashi. People came in large numbers to meet Shankara. The scholars of Kashi had already come to know that Shankara had written the commentary on Brahma Sutra. Many of the scholars made copies of it. The learned people of Kashi urged Prithvidhara to prevail upon Shankara to stay in Kashi for sometime and teach them the commentary on the Brahma Sutra. The students also made

a similar request to Padmapada. When this was conveyed to Guruji, he said, “We may not be able to stay long here enough to teach Brahma Sutra, but we can have question and answer sessions in the afternoon and discourses in the evenings.” Accordingly, question and answer sessions and discourses were arranged.

One afternoon a scholar said, “There are many doubts regarding the Vedic dictum *Tatvamasi*. If you explain in brief the meaning of that dictum, later I can ask questions.”

“In the above dictum, *Tat* refers to Brahman, the ultimate *Satya*, *Jnana* and *Ananta*. As the Brahman is the material cause of this universe, one has to ignore the changes, the inertia and the limitations of the universe and take into account only Brahman, which is immanent in it. Further, *Tvam* refers to the individual soul, the *kshetrajna*, the one who comes to our experience in dreamless sleep. As one ignores the universe and concentrates on the Brahman immanent in it to realize the true nature of the universe, one has to ignore the superimpositions noticed during the waking state or dream state and concentrate on the soul evident during dreamless sleep to realize Brahman. A deep rumination on this leads to the conviction that one is none other than Brahman.”

“Is it possible to experience this identity with Brahman?”

“Dreamless sleep being a matter of common experience, the identity with Brahman is already known. But due to *adhyasa* during the waking state, it is difficult to stay put in this conviction. Therefore, the scriptures say that this conviction is not possible for those who do not have discretion and dispassion.”

“Is it possible to attain this conviction through the practice of yoga by attaining a steady state of mind?”

“It is not possible, because doership persists even during the practice of the steady state of mind. But in the identity with Brahman, doership disappears.”

“Can it be achieved by doing the *japa* of the sentence *Tatvamasi*?”

“No! Doership becomes stronger by *japa*, instead of getting destroyed. The only way is *nididhyasa* – i.e. *keeping* the mind continuously in *Atman*.”

“Even in this case, steady state of mind is the result. Isn’t it?”

“True, but attaining this steady state of mind is the result of contemplation on the identity with Brahman and not the instrument.”

“Is this experience a unique state like the waking state or dream?”

“It is not so. Just as the realization that one is a male transcends one’s age, the experience of identity with Brahman transcends all states.”

“My question is this: Is the experience of identity with Brahman possible only when one has attained the steady state of mind?”

“No, not so. Steady state of mind is also a state of mind. It is related to the *kshetra*. It has nothing to do with *Atman*. The experience of identity with Brahman is possible only when *adhyasa* is destroyed, and nothing short of it.”

“Destroying *adhyasa* does not result in the destruction of the world. In that eventuality, what is the relation of the realized being with the world?”

“Look here! Since Brahman is the material cause of the world, all is Brahman. When one realizes that nothing is different from Brahman, one also realizes the identity with everyone and everything. This is *sarvatma Bhava*. After this realization, one transcends all duality.”

Another person had this question: “I have been studying your commentary. At certain places *Maya* has been described as a superimposition on Brahman and at some other places it has been described as Brahman Itself. In yet other places it has been described as indeterminate because it is not certain whether it is Brahman or different from Brahman. These are contradictory. How can such contradictions be reconciled?”

“Starting from visible *Maya*, the invisible Brahman has been described in three stages. In the first step, depending upon the understanding capacity of the ignorant, it has been described as a superimposition on Brahman. In the second step, relying on the principle inseparability of *shakti* and *shaktiman*, it has been described as Brahman itself. While there is no activity in Brahman, *Maya* has activity. Therefore, a doubt arises as to whether it is Brahman or not. The confusion that arises in the mind of the seeker leads to a conclusion that it is indeterminate. Hence the seemingly contradictory descriptions have been made keeping in view of the seeker’s ability to grasp. But ultimately *Maya* is Brahman. Same is the case with names and forms.”

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Yet another student raised this question: “Your commentary states in some sections that the realization of Brahman comes only through the scriptures. In some other

sections it states that realization has to be achieved not only through scriptures but with the aid of logic. Please clarify.”

“Look, what is to be proved is of two types. Some are comprehended through the sense organs, but some transcend them. There are five types of testimony. They are – direct perception, inference, comparison, *arthapatti* and scriptures. The propositions which are within the reach of the senses, come within compass of the first four. Those propositions which are beyond sense perception are to be realized with the help of *Shruti*. Dharma and *adharma* and things beyond *Prakriti* are beyond sense perception, and thus come within the compass of *Shruti*. Still, the Dharma meant for the uplift of *jiva* depends on matters related to *Prakriti*. Therefore, in the discussion of this Dharma, *Shruti* cannot contradict the other testimonies. So far, it pertains to *karmakanda*. But in *jnanakanda* a question arises – as Brahman transcends *Prakriti*, there can be no place for other testimony in *Brahmajijnasa*. Still, Brahman has to be understood only through the world. Hence till one obtains the knowledge of Brahman, other testimonies are valid and necessary. At this stage, *Shruti* cannot contradict other testimonies. But after the knowledge of Brahman, when speaking of ultimate and unencumbered Brahman, there is absolutely no place for other testimonies. Only *Shruti* is the testimony.”

“How can the testimony of the *Shruti* be confirmed at this stage?”

“This happens during the experience that occurs after deep contemplation – *nididhyasana*. For that matter, all testimonies are confirmed in experience only. But the exception in the case of *Shruti* is heaven and other regions.”

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Once when Shankara was seated with his two disciples, he asked a question, “Why do those who quest for *Moksha* take shelter in hills and forests?”

“They take shelter there because they find peace there.”

“Where is the need for peace for those in the quest of *Moksha*?”

“Without peace, one cannot contemplate on the *Atman*.”

“Why do they not find peace in towns and villages?”

“In such places, people, by nature, have love and hate. Hence there can be no peace there.”

“There may be persons who are not in the quest of *moksha*, and yet are without love or hate. They are likely to be in the quest for *Moksha* later. Don’t such people need peace?”

“Yes, they need.”

“Peace is necessary for the contemplation on *Atman*. But is there no need for peace for ordinary people?”

“They too need it. But for contemplation on the *Atman* a profound peace is necessary.”

“Where should such people go for the peace of mind that they need?”

Prithvidhara was silent for a while and then said, “I don’t know.”

“Listen, I will tell you” said Shankara and continued, “After leaving Onkareswara, on the orders of Guruji, I went to *Gurjara Desha*. There I saw many people without love or hate, who had migrated to that country from *Sindhu Desha*.”

“Why did they migrate?”

“*Sindhu Desha* was invaded by some barbaric foreigners. The people could not put up with the atrocities committed by those *mlechas*. Hence they migrated.”

“What were the kings of that country doing?”

“Though they fought bravely, they could not succeed. They were all killed.”

“Why did they not succeed?”

“The Buddhists, who are our own people, helped the invaders.”

“Oh my God!” cried Prithvidhara. Padmapada was also shocked.

“Guruji, tell us what happened.”

“Some *mlechas* who call themselves *musalman* succeeded in the war with the help of Buddhists, who betrayed our people. They killed our kings and then, like beasts, butchered the unarmed people and carried away their women. They converted to their religion all those who surrendered. They claim that their religion is better than other religions. With followers of this character, it must be a better religion indeed! They want that their religion should spread everywhere. They adopt these methods to achieve this end. What can the helpless people do except to migrate to neighboring areas!”

There was silence for a long while. Then Shankara described all the details that had come to his notice and at last said, “Thus, it is clear that peace depends on several

factors. One needs peace for contemplation on the *Atman*. One also needs peace for the study of the *shastra*. One who is engaged in karma also needs peace. Even the common civilians need peace. How is this peace maintained? This needs able and farsighted rulers. To safeguard this, the people and the rulers must be committed to their respective *swadharma*. Only then, can peace be maintained. Those who are in search of *Moksha* can engage in their *sadhana* only in such an atmosphere. When their *sadhana* fructifies they take shelter in forests or hills. Now you may think over this matter.” With this, Shankara concluded his talk.

These problems had never occurred to the mind of Prithvidhara. He was unsettled by this narration and was deeply absorbed in thought, “What should be done to maintain this peace? What steps can ensure this? While preaching his new religion of non-violence, was it not Buddha’s aim to establish peace? But where did it culminate? The kings stopped fighting and subjects turned into traitors. Non-violence only created opportunity for those who swore by the sword. Finally they too were destroyed. Did not Buddha realize the absurdity of his principles? Or did his followers misinterpret his teachings, and thereby, destroyed others and finally themselves got destroyed? Whatever it is, it is of no use mulling over it, as whatever might have happened in the past cannot be reversed now. But it has a lesson for us now. However intelligent or good a person may be, he cannot alone decide what is good for the society. Therefore, it is dangerous for me alone to decide what is to be done at this juncture. Then what is the way forward?” Thus Prithvidhara was absorbed in thought. But he could not decide on the future course of action. Evening came on. He finished his evening *sandhya vandana* mechanically. Then he went in, did *namaskara* to the Guru, and stayed in that posture without rising. Somehow, it took quite a while for him to get up. The same thoughts came to his mind again. “By the by, this is not the first time in history that Dharma has declined, nor the first time that the country has been invaded. This has been happening again and again since time immemorial. But Dharma has survived all these onslaughts. How has it withstood such crises? It has survived by the strengthening of *varnashrama* Dharma. The *Brahmana* and the *Kshatriya* have worked in unison to achieve this. Therefore, there is nothing for ordinary people like me to think afresh about it. We have to follow the traditional method. The Vedic tradition should be revived and continued with some

change in practices to suit the present conditions. But what the changes should be, cannot be decided by anyone and everyone. It has to be decided only by great men like our Guru. I am, after all, his foot soldier. I will only do what he directs me to do.” Thus Prithvidhara made up his mind.

After one or two days, a meeting of the learned men of Kashi was arranged at the instance of Guruji. While speaking at that meeting, Shankara said,

“The city of Kashi is known for its learned men and Lord Vishwanatha. People from all over the country cherish a desire to prosecute their learning here. It means that the wise men of Kashi have an unequalled status. Can anyone of you tell us what are the duties of a *brahmana*?”

Virupaksha Shastry stood up and quoting a verse from *Bhagawad Gita* stated that a *brahmana* is born only to pursue the path of *shama*, *dama*, *shaucha*, simplicity, commitment to *shastra*, knowledge of *shastra* and self realization. A *brahmana* devoid of these qualities is only a *brahmabandhu* – a mere relative of a *brahmana*, but not a *brahmana* by himself. Then Shankara wanted someone to describe the duties specially prescribed for *brahmana*. Parameswara Dikshita stood up and said that pursuit of knowledge, spreading that knowledge among the common folk, performing *yajna* and *daana* are common to *brahmana*, *kshatriya* and *vaishya*, whereas managing the performance of *yajna*, spreading spiritual knowledge in the society and accepting *daana* are the duties prescribed only for the *brahmana*. Finally Shankara gave this message:

“Virupaksha Shastry and Parameswara Dikshita have very well explained the duties of a *brahmana*. *Taittiriya Upanishad* declares that pursuit of knowledge and teaching to the public are the most important duties of a *brahmana*. Why are these so important? It is because the Dharma can be sustained only through these. So long as pursuit of knowledge and teaching are carried on effectively, people adhere to dharma. It is only through Dharma that an individual attains his higher goal – whether prosperity or *moksha*, and neglect of Dharma results to his decline. Hence pursuit of knowledge and its dissemination is the noblest *tapas*. In this process, a *purohita*’s role is very important. It is so because he is the one who, before anybody else, becomes aware of what is good for the people at large. Let us be aware, because we are the *purohita* of this nation. *Shruti* declares *vayam rashtre jagriyama purohitah*. It implies that the *purohita* has not



only to consciously adhere to his duties, but also awaken others to perform their respective duties. What are the characteristics of a *purohita*? He is the one who speaks what is dear to everyone. He is the friend of all. He is a person with equanimity. He is not the one who blows his own trumpet. He speaks the truth. He is simple and straightforward. He does not engage in money lending. He practices tolerance. He never betrays others. He does not demand anything from others. He practices restraint and has control over his senses. The sum and substance of all this shows how important the role of a *brahmana* is in the society. Society is *sama-aja* or equivalent of Almighty. *Brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* and *shudra* are parts of that Almighty. *Brahmana* represents the face of Almighty. The five sense organs and the brain, that is instrumental in reasoning, are located here. The welfare of the whole body depends on the working of this part. It is well known that the body goes towards what the mind decides to be pleasant and moves away from what it considers unpleasant. In a similar manner, the society follows what the *brahmana* decides is in its interest or otherwise on the basis of Vedic tradition. But the good and bad for a society change from time to time. Therefore, the *brahmana* should decide what is good or bad for a society keeping in view the changing times. Therefore, he must be well versed in *shastra*, farsighted, a person who is ready to sacrifice his self interest for the general good and a person of deep contemplation. He must always be concerned for the welfare of the society. These qualities are greatly needed at the present moment. Look how it is:

To the west of this place lies *Sindhu Desha*, which has been under attack by foreign Islamic hordes since the last 150 years. People are being subjected to atrocities, which have never been heard of. They have become refugees in their own land and are forced to migrate to neighboring provinces. You must try to get information about these occurrences from the pilgrims who come from those places. You must take advantage of the tradition of pilgrimage established by the ancient sages of our country. You must give proper guidance to all – to common people as well as the rulers. If the *brahmana* does not rise to the occasion and perform his duty as the time demands, in course of time the invaders will reach Kashi also. It will be disastrous if the rulers do not keep themselves vigilant till such time. After completing the study of Veda prescribed for them, rulers have to attend to the affairs of governance promptly and consequently they

cannot continue the pursuit of knowledge any further. On the other hand, for a *brahmana*, pursuit of knowledge is the primary occupation. Keeping this in view, you have to act responsibly. Arise and awake. Do not wait till things get out of control. Virupaksha Shastry, is there any thing else to be discussed?”

Someone stoop up and raised a question, “Here I have to refer to a question put by one of my students. After reading Buddhist literature this was what he had to ask. According to Buddha, one does not inherit one’s caste from birth. It seems one gets it from the *guna*. There are persons born in the *brahmana* caste who have *tamas* as the predominant quality, while there are persons born in a *shudra* family with *sattva* as their predominant quality. Hence caste should not be determined on the basis of birth, said Buddha, and rejected the traditional caste divisions. What is the answer for this?”

“Can any one of you answer this?” asked Shankara.

There was silence for a while. Then Virupaksha Shastry said, “It is better if you yourself answer this.”

Shankara spoke thus, “This is a complicated question because in the Veda as well as *purana* and *itihasa* there are references to persons born in *brahmana* family, becoming *kshatriya*. There are also references to persons born in *shudra* family having become *brahmana* sages who became seers of the mantras. There is no need to discuss each one of these in detail here. But I will make a brief analysis of this phenomenon. Each person is endowed with all the three *gunas*. Each of these *gunas* manifests itself in different persons on different occasions in different ways. For instance when *sattva guna* manifests itself, a person tends to be contemplative and goes into meditation, while another person may engage himself in the study of scriptures. But a habitual thief may just be induced to embrace his child with real affection, and he will certainly not read scriptures nor perform meditation. To understand the reason for such a complicated response from different persons, we have to go to the root of the matter. The *gunas* are caused by the nature of the person, which means that they are the result of the karma *samskara* of the past lives of a person. *Guna* are as complicated as karma. No one can say which of these will manifest themselves at what point. No one can free himself from these *gunas* without realization of the *Atman*. When the *guna* prevail, who can decide what karma has to be performed to progress towards *atma jnana*? No one can decide it

for himself, nor can anyone decide it for others. Everyone who is sitting here knows that dharma and *adharma* cannot be determined by any individual mind. It can be determined only with the help of the Veda. This is what Veda says – *Brahmana* is created for performing *yajna*, *kshatriya* is created for protection of the *yajna*, *vaishya* is created for providing resources for *yajna* and *shudra* is created for supporting of *yajna*. Thus the arrangement in society is for perpetuating *yajna*. Therefore, *yajna* implies protection of Dharma. Now, God Almighty presides over all *yajna*. He is also immanent in everybody. After deciding the role to be played by each and every person in the conduct of *yajna*, He arranges that each may be born in appropriate caste and assigns appropriate karma for each person with the advice that if he performs his particular karma, it is good for him. Hence Buddha who accepts the doctrine of rebirth according to the *vasana* of the previous births cannot reject *varna* doctrine, as that will be self-contradictory. Since *gunas* change from time to time in everybody, does Buddha prescribe for each person different *varna* at different moments? He may not hesitate to say so, because after all he propounds the doctrine of momentary truth. At this point you may be perplexed by a doubt that certain individuals mentioned in the Veda, *purana* and *itihasa* transcended their respective castes and achieved excellence in the karma of some other caste. Did they not violate the code of *varnashrama* dharma? Yes, they did, but they achieved it by virtue of extraordinary *sadhana*. What a rigorous *tapas* did the *shudra* Kavalilusha perform to become a seer of mantras. But an ordinary person can hardly achieve such a feat. It will be like a jackal attempting to play tiger by branding its body. Particularly in *Kali yuga*, the spiritual attainment of an individual is on the decline. No one can undertake such an adventure. Therefore the *Shastra* declares that a person reaches his goal by following the karma of his caste by birth – *Swakarmanana tamabhyarcha siddhim vindati manavah*, so long as *varna* Dharma is protected, a society will be happy and prosperous. If it is violated, it leads to sorrow. With the passage of time, the *yuga* change and the observance of Dharma becomes lax. By the end of *Dwapara yuga* there was already considerable decline of Dharma and consequently the society underwent suffering. The transgression of dharma has further continued in *Kali yuga* and thereby the society has experienced untold calamities. If this is taken as inevitable and we show a passive response to it, it is also *adharma*. Hence, you should all be engaged in the pursuit

of right knowledge and thereby practice your *swadharma*. The name of our nation is *Bharata*. People of this country enjoy the pursuit of knowledge. Being engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, you must also try to dispel the darkness around you and lead others from darkness to light.” Thus concluded Shankara.

One of the learned men assembled there remarked, “Guruji, Kumarila Bhatta is the one who is already following this path”.

Shankara continued, “I have heard about him and I have also read his books. Where does he live?”

“Just nearby, he lives in Prayaga.”

“Oh! Then I must meet him,” with these words Shankara immediately started for Prayaga with his retinue.

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Kumarila Bhatta played a significant role in stemming the tide of Buddhism. In any community, the majority are simple minded people who lack any depth of knowledge. They are not versed in philosophy. But they are loyal followers of the leaders of their group. Even amongst the leaders some are well versed in ideology, some others do not have such knowledge but are capable of inciting their followers to action, only with an aim of perpetuating their leadership. Though the former group of leaders may not be conspicuous in the group, they are influential in the group. The Buddhist community is also similarly structured. The society solved the problem of these trouble-makers politically. The simple-minded Buddhists were allowed to lead a peaceful life and follow their religion peacefully, but those who were traitors were executed by Pushyamitra<sup>34</sup>. In addition to it, Islamic invaders destroyed them<sup>35</sup>. Their *stupas*, *sangharamas*, *viharas* and even the statues of Buddha were destroyed by those invaders. Bakhtiyar Khilji invaded Bihar and slaughtered all Buddhists. Those who surrendered were converted to Islam. Some of the Buddhists ran away to Tibet and China with their books. This is how the Buddhist problem was solved. Still there were many amongst the common people who were sympathetic to Buddhism. The learned people had an apprehension that if

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<sup>34</sup> Rhys Davids: Jour Pali Text Soc (1896) – “There is no proof to establish any deliberate preplanned or systematic attempt on the part of Vedic rulers to annihilate the Buddhists. The very idea of forcible extinction is basically wrong.”

<sup>35</sup> Vincent Smith: Early History of India p.382

people were allowed to cherish their love for Buddhism, the old problem may revisit. An effective solution had to be devised by the Vedic scholars. The solution for this problem was to find an effective answer to the philosophy of Buddhism, and thereby take the wind out of the sails of Buddhist propagandists.

The pioneer in this was Kumarila Bhatta, who tried to refute Buddhism on the basis of *karmakanda*. He thought that the only way to expose the deficiencies of Buddhist philosophy was to undertake a study of that philosophy under a Buddhist guru. Accordingly he disguised himself as a Buddhist and got himself admitted to a Buddhist *gurukula*. The guru who had no deep knowledge of the Vedas, used to berate them in a foul language repeatedly. Kumarila, who could not withstand this, was once moved to tears. The guru and his disciples thus discovered that he was a follower of the Vedas. In a fit of rage, which far surpassed their anger against Islamic invaders who had slaughtered their fellow Buddhists, the guru and his disciples beat him up and drove him out of the *gurukula*. He was pushed down the stairs which resulted in the loss of one of his eyes. All reactionary religions based on commitment to an individual founder are similarly intolerant. History has enough proof of such intolerance.

On arriving at Prayaga, Shankara made enquiries about Kumarila Bhatta with the people he came across. “Alas! He is about to die” said one of them, and informed where he could be found.

Shankara queried, “Why? What happened to him?”

“Oh! Leave it. It is just madness. Having studied Buddhist religion from a Buddhist guru, he repudiated that religion. This led to the reconversion of many people to the Vedic religion. Instead of rejoicing in the good work he had accomplished and continuing that work throughout his life, he is committing suicide. He thinks that he has betrayed his guru and this is his expiation for the sin. It is all foolishness. What is the use of one being learned, if one does not have discrimination. He is seated in the lotus posture on a pile of rice husk which is set on fire from below. It seems the process of his expiation is to die slowly thus” said he and departed in disgust, slapping his forehead. Shankara hurried to that spot and discovered that Kumarila was indeed seated covered upto his neck on rice husk which was slowly burning. Shankara was saddened at this spectacle. He addressed Kumarila thus:

“My name is Shankara. I came here to meet you with great expectations. What strange spectacle am I seeing! Bhatta, please come out immediately. Let us talk and settle the matter.”

Kumarila Bhatta spoke in a feeble voice, “Venerable Shankara, I know you. I read your commentary on the Brahma Sutra. It is an extraordinary work. Now I am not in a position to entertain you in a fitting manner. I cannot even make *namaskara* to you. Please pardon me for that.”

“Respected Kumarila, your survival is absolutely necessary for the protection of Dharma. Please abandon this ordeal.”

“No, I cannot come out. My lower parts are already burnt.”

“I will myself lift you out of this pile and sprinkle water to save you.”

With these words, Shankara stepped forward. But Kumarila screamed,

“Please desist from this attempt to save me. Leave me to my fate. Please do not come in the way of my expiation.”

“Kumarila, was Kacha, who learnt *sanjeevani* from Shukracharya for helping gods, a betrayer of his guru? It is not right to consider what you have done in the interest of Dharma as a sin. How can a person who abuses Veda be considered as guru? How can it be considered as betrayal if such a guru’s ideology is repudiated? If a wild beast has gained entry into the house, it is not a sin to get rid of it by a clever ploy. What you have done is right and in agreement with *Shastra*. But to what you are doing now is pure indiscretion. I will lift you out of this pile of burning husk.”

“Please do not attempt it. I implore you not to save me. Allow me to follow my own *samskara*.”

“Alas! I came here to acquaint you with my commentary and to proceed on the mission of saving Dharma with your help. What a pity that we are in this predicament.”

“Respected Shankara, you may pursue that mission with the help of my disciple Mandana Mishra of Mahishmati. Go there. What help can you get from me? I am already above 80 years. Leave me to my fate.”

After sometime, Kumarila was burnt to death. As he left the place with his disciples, Shankara remarked, “If one willingly burns oneself to death slowly, what

fortitude one must be possessing! This is an example of the disasters that happen when Dharma is interpreted narrowly.

He now set forth towards Mahishmati to meet Mandana Mishra.

## CHAPTER 8

### PRAYAGA TO MAHISHMATI

Mandana Mishra, the disciple of Kumarila Bhatta, was a scholar par excellence. His wife, Ubhaya Bharati Devi, was equally learned. Having come to know of each other's scholarship even before their marriage, they had fallen in love and married. Their clans were also well known for their scholarship and tradition. These two were like the crowns of respective clans. Their marriage was celebrated in a grand manner.

After marriage Mandana pursued his studies and discussions of *Shastra* diligently. After performing his *nitya* karma, he used to engage in the teaching of *shastra* and discussions on it with Ubhaya Bharati Devi. Thus his life was totally devoted to *shastra*. Even the light-hearted conversations of the couple were interspersed with humor which was scholarly. People were so impressed with the scholarship of the couple that they named them 'Brahma and Saraswati'. Mandana Mishra had earned the title of *Shastra Kesari* for his mastery over *Mimamsa Shastra*.

Mandana lived in a large house. It was always buzzing with the sweet talk of his children. There were disciples who had come from far off places to study *shastra* under him. Scholars interested in getting clarifications and discussions also thronged his house. Mandana was already sixty years of age by then.

After setting out from Prayaga, Shankara and his disciples reached the outskirts of Mahishmati by noon. There was a pond nearby, just fifty steps away from their path. A group of women were busy washing clothes and gossiping and singing. Shankara asked Padmapada to go and enquire the address of Mandana Mishra. Padmapada proceeded towards the women with his head bowed down and asked for the address and returned. The women after replying, had burst forth in laughter. Padmapada reported to Shankara the information he had collected from the women,

“If we go straight ahead, we will come across a banana plantation. Immediately after that if we turn right his house is the last. It seems that the parrots in the cages will begin to chatter as we reach there.”

“Why did it take you such a long time in getting this simple information? By the way, why were those women laughing so loudly?”

“I feel shy of reporting all that they said.”

“It does not matter. Please tell me what they were laughing about.”

“They said ‘many a wandering *sanyasi* came here to hold disputation with Mandana and they were all defeated in argument by him. All of them, after performing expiation, have returned to *grihasta ashrama*. God knows which girl in our town has now the good luck of getting married.’ So saying, they all laughed heartily.”

Shankara also had a hearty laugh. Prithvidhara just smiled but Padmapada stood without any inkling of laughter. All three proceeded towards Mandana’s house.

At that time, *shraaddha* (death anniversary) of his father was being performed by Mandana. The front door was closed. The front of the house was not adorned with the usual *rangoli*. It was *kutapa kala* (interval from 11:40 to 12:20 in the noon). Mandana had washed the feet of the *brahmanas*. He was just about taking them for their meal when Shankara and his disciples reached the house. As they approached the house, the parrots started chattering “Is the Veda a means of knowledge by itself or it needs outside testimony? Who is the giver of the fruit of karma? Is it karma itself or is it *Ishwara*? Is *Jagat* permanent or transitory?” Shankara was wonderstruck. If mere parrots have acquired such knowledge, how learned must Mandana be? Hearing the chattering of the parrots, people of the neighboring houses came out. On seeing Shankara and his disciples they said,



“Today they are performing *shraaddha*. You will not get *bhiksha* there. Please come to our house.”

Shankara said, “No, thank you. We will have our *bhiksha* only after meeting Mandana.”

“Today you cannot meet him before evening.”

Shankara stood without answering. In the meantime a boy ran into the house from the rear entrance and shouted,

“Some *sannyasis* have come.”

Shankara got the idea! He made his disciples sit on a platform near the front door and he entered the house through the rear entrance. The sixty year old Mandana, a stickler for karma, sat there with holy grass and black sesame in his hand. A sixteen year old *sanyasi*, Shankara, stood at the door. Mandana was furious with rage. How dare he enter the house through the rear entrance!

“Wherefrom, you shaven bloke?”

“From above the neck,” was Shankara’s reply.

Mandana, grinding his teeth, asked, “I asked the way you came here.”

“Oh! What did it say?”

“It said your mother is a widow.”

“You asked the way and you got scolded by it?”

“What are you blabbering? Are you a *surapita*<sup>36</sup>?”

“No, *sura* is not yellow, it is white.”

“Oh! You know the colour of *sura* also?”

“I know only its colour, but you know its taste also.”

The invited *brahmanas* were astonished at the shrewd repartees. Shankara cleverly interpreted every question of Mandana literally, dropping its intended meaning. They were scared. They realized that this was no ordinary *sanyasi*. They thought it was better to pacify Mandana, and said, “Mandana Mishra, during the performance of a *shraaddha* one should not lose temper under any circumstance. It is better to make him also an invitee to represent Lord Vishnu.”

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<sup>36</sup>

Sura – liquor; Pita - drunk

Mandana realized that he could not go against the words of the *brahmana*. Under the force of the circumstance, he calmed himself and asked the *sanyasi*, “What is your name?”

“They call me Shankara.”

“Please sit in the *Vishnusthana*. Come, I will wash your feet.”

“Venerable Mandana, beside me there are two others waiting outside.”

“They shall have their food later. First now you will have it.”

With these words Mandana ritually washed the feet of Shankara and made him occupy the *Vishnusthana* for taking food. Just when Mandana was about to offer holy water, symbolic of the permission to start the meal, Shankara stopped Mandana and said,

“I have not come here for mere food for *bhiksha*. I seek also the *bhiksha* of disputation with you. Now first offer me the holy water for the *bhiksha* of disputation.”

“I agree,” said Mandana.

“When do we start?”

“We shall start from tomorrow.”

Mandana’s hand shook as he offered the holy water. Bharati Devi, who watching Shankara from the inner quarters had a sign of ill omen with her right eye slightly twitching. After the invited *brahmanas* and Shankara had their food, the disciples also had their food along with others. Later Shankara and his disciples proceeded to a nearby temple. The news of Mandana’s proposed disputation with an unknown young *sanyasi* spread like wild fire in the town. It also spread to neighboring villages.

The next morning arrangements were made for the disputation in a big hall of the house. This was the place where discourses were delivered and discussions were held. There was a dais where two seats were arranged for the disputants. All learned people of Mahishmati, students and general public from the town and villages gathered there in large numbers. Shankara reached the place well in time. When he was shown the seat by a volunteer and asked to sit there, he declined and instead sat near the wall. Mandana entered the hall and everybody stood up. Shankara also stood up in a gesture of respect for the learned Mandana. He approached Mandana and led him to his seat, holding his hand, and requested him to take his seat. Mandana asked Shankara to take his seat first. But Shankara politely declined and said, “No, you are very elder to me. You should sit

first.” After Mandana was seated, he sat. There was absolute silence in the hall. But there was a great tumult in Mandana’s head. His mind was in total confusion about the nature of this young *sanyasi*. “I can hardly gauge this fellow. Today he is totally different from what he appeared to be yesterday.” Somehow he collected himself and after surveying the arrangements, he said,

“Shall we begin the disputation?”

“We can, but there should be someone to preside over the deliberations,” said Shankara.

“Is it so?” said Mandana and scanned the audience for a suitable scholar amongst them. Whomsoever he tried to fix his attention upon was avoiding his gaze in a clear indication of hesitation. Nobody was willing take that responsibility. At last, one of the assembled women suggested that the lady of the house could very well preside. Mandana laughed and looked at Shankara, who readily assented. Mandana was taken aback with surprise. He queried, “Are you agreeable?”

“Certainly!”

The proposal was conveyed to the lady of the house. She came out and asked, “What is the matter?”

Mandana said, “One of the audience proposed your name to preside over the disputation and Shankara has agreed to it.”

Shankara was asked again whether he agreed.

“Respected sir, I have heard about your profound scholarship even when I was in Prayaga. You need not hesitate on any account. Please give your assent,” said Shankara.

A third seat was arranged as directed by Mandana. Bharati Devi handed over all her household responsibilities and took her seat. There was loud applause from the audience, particularly from the ladies' side. As president, she called upon Yajnanarayana Dikshita, the secretary of the *gurukula*, to spell out the *shanti mantra* as invocation.

Dikshita stood up and chanted, “*Namassadase, namassadasaspathaye, namassakhinam puroganam chakshushe.....*”

The president then said,

“Now both of you state your respective positions briefly, then take oath and begin.” She requested Mandana to start. Mandana’s proposition and oath followed.

“For getting rid of sorrow and acquiring happiness, the only way is karma as ordained by the Veda. Vedas, which are eternal, have laid down that prohibited karma lead to sorrow and desire oriented karma are for acquiring happiness. The routine karma for which no fruits have been mentioned are to be performed as one’s duty. If these karma are abandoned, one loses one’s right to perform desire oriented karma. The ultimate aim of right living is to perform routine karma without neglect and then to perform the desire oriented karma to live happily in the world. If one aims at liberation which obviates repeated births, one has to give up both prohibited karma and desire oriented karma and lead a righteous life without neglecting routine karma. This eliminates both sorrow and happiness and also protects one from the fault of neglect of duty (*pratyavaya dosha*). In sum and substance, there is no happiness or *moksha* without karma. Veda are the testimony for it. Further if I fail to prove my point and get defeated and you succeed in proving your point of view, I shall become your disciple.”

Then the chairperson asked Shankara to state his position and take oath. Shankara said, “The world has no permanence. Happiness in this world as well as in other worlds is also transitory. The basis of karma is the difference between *jiva* and the world. But both *jiva* and universe are none other than Brahman. Brahman is *Ananda*. Realization by *jiva* that the world is not different from Brahman leads to his ultimate bliss. Upanishads are the testimony for this assertion. This is my statement under oath. It is enough if you either establish your proposition or disprove mine for me to become your disciple. Now may I ask questions?” Having said this, Shankara turned to the chairperson for permission.

“You may proceed with your questions,” said the chairperson.

Shankara directed his question to Mandana, “According to you, karma alone is the giver of fruit. But you are aware that any karma is destroyed the moment it is performed. How then can it become the giver of fruit?”

“Karma gets destroyed only after producing its result. In course of time the performer of that karma enjoys its fruit.”

“Before being enjoyed by the enjoyer, how can you call it as the fruit?”

“It is not so. The performed karma takes a special form known as *apoorva*. It is this *apoorva* which gives the fruits of karma.”

“This *apoorva* must also be inert like karma as it is but a special state of karma. Then how can something that is inert, give any fruit independently?”

“What you are stating amounts to raising objection against *Shruti*, because *Shruti* says that one who desires heaven must perform *gyotistoma*. In all these commandments of *Shruti*, the performer of karma is understood and hence the benefit of karma is stated. Therefore, without casting any doubt on such statements, one has to conclude that karma alone is the giver of fruit. Even in practical experience, after all in winter, it is only by wrapping oneself in a blanket that one gets rid of cold. In view of this, why should not karma be the giver of fruit?”

“Such doubts could have arisen, if *Shruti* was silent about the giver of the fruit. But it clearly states that God Almighty is the giver of fruit – *Sa va esha mahanaaja atma annado vasudanah*. It does not just end there. It also states that Almighty *Ishwara* makes one do the dharma or the *adharma* necessary to receive the karma *phala*. *Esha hyeva sadhu karma karayati tam yamebhyo lokebhyo unninishate, esha vu eva asadhu karma karayati tam yamadho ninishate* – whomever He wants to uplift, He makes him perform the good deed. Whomever He wants to cast into the nether worlds, He makes him do ill deeds. I am not contradicting your concept of *apoorva*. But I say that Almighty God is the giver of results by following karma or *apoorva*. Further, in the instance of the blanket, the individual who knows the connection between the karma and its fruit indulges in the act of wrapping himself with the blanket and experiences a feeling of warmth at that time. But in the karma ordained by *Shruti*, the performer of the karma does not know the karma-fruit relation. The fruit results in the course of time, depending upon the time, place and other circumstances. Therefore, the inert karma or *apoorva* cannot be the giver of results. It has to come from *Ishwara*.”

Shankara waited sometime for a counterargument. But in the absence of one he proceeded further.

“The Vedas associate a particular god with every karma. Why don’t you accept that god as a part of the karma?”

“They do not have body etc. to receive the offerings. Just as a *brahmana* cannot partake of food offered at different places at one and the same time, the gods also cannot receive offerings made in *yaga* conducted at different places simultaneously.”

“Your illustration is appropriate. But it is not so with all karma. For instance, many can offer *namaskara* to the same person simultaneously. Similarly, an embodied god can receive offerings from many people at one and the same time. Therefore, there is no contradiction between karma and god being embodied.”

“I concede that it is true. But if a god is embodied, it goes against Veda being an acceptable testimony (*pramana*).”

“Please clarify how.”

“The authority of the Veda is decided upon the fact that the sound, its meaning and the relation between these two are eternal. If Indra and other gods have bodies this relation snaps after the death of their bodies. Will this not affect the authority of the Veda?”

“Indra and other words found in the Veda point to certain hierarchical positions, which are denoted as Indra and others, and not those who are subject to birth and death. The names of Indra and other gods denote certain positions they occupy like king, army commander etc. The creation of the individuals like Indra and others takes place with the words, *Ethey* and so on. According to Veda, Prajapati created gods with the word *Ethey* and the *pitru* with the word *indavah* etc. *Shruti* also tells us that these gods have several forms. After naming thirty three gods, all those gods are merged into one god and then *Shruti* asks, ‘who is that god?’ and answers that he is *Prana*. It means that a single god *Prana* has many forms simultaneously. Therefore, a particular god can partake in several *yajnas* conducted simultaneously and be a part of each of those karmas. Moreover, as a god is endowed with the power of being unseen though present, it can participate in different karmas without being seen as present.”

Mandana had no answer to refute this and remained silent. Shankara continued, “You spoke of another matter that by performing *nitya karma* one overcomes the fault of *pratyavaya*, and by abandoning desire oriented-karma and prohibited-karma one becomes freed from heaven and hell. Therefore, if one leads one’s life as above, he attains *moksha* after his life. Have I quoted your statement correctly?”

“Yes” said Mandana.

“There is no authority for this contention. Moreover, this is not convincing because it does not take into account the karma accumulated over several births. It also

does not take into account the karma done during the present birth. There will necessarily be other births to experience the fruits of these accumulated karma.”

“The performance of prescribed karma of daily routine can destroy these sins. Can’t they?”

“It cannot be. Having asserted earlier that performing prescribed daily routine karma, one can only overcome *pratyavaya*, now you cannot include any other sin. Moreover, even if you contend that they result in *punya* which obliterates the earlier sins, it cannot destroy the earlier accrued *punya*. It only compounds present *punya* with the earlier *punya*. On the other hand, there is no certainty that it will completely destroy the accumulated and presently incurred sins. Thereby, one has a residue of both sins and *punya*. And further, as long as a person performs karma with a feeling that he is the doer, there will surely be either sin or *punya*. Therefore, *moksha* cannot be attained.”

“It is true that an action performed with a feeling of doership may be disastrous. But that feeling itself may not be disastrous.”

“Almighty bestows the ability to act according to actions performed with doership. When there is doership, there is always tendency to commit a *papa* or *punya*. Further, this feeling cannot be destroyed by action. Rather, it gets strengthened. Hence, one cannot avoid repeated birth and death through karma.”

Everyone was silent as though dumbstruck. There was no counter argument from Mandana. The chairperson called upon Mandana to put forward his arguments to counter the opposite side.

Mandana then started his arguments. “The Brahman in the Brahman-*Atman* identity, as depicted in the Upanishads, is bereft of karma and it has no give-and-take activity. So, it is of no use. Moreover, *Shashtra* has clearly declared that any sentence which does not specify an action is futile.”

“It is not so. As the words and sentences in Upanishads have described such a Brahman in clear terms, those are not meaningless words.”

“I did not say that those words are meaningless. I only mean that they do not refer to any action. If those statements are interpreted as talking about the nature of the doer and the *devata*, i.e. the god, then Brahman can be the object of ritual worship and thereby a part of karma. If even this is denied, then those statements become futile.”

“Even this contention is wrong. In the state of identity with Brahman, *Tatkena kam pashyet* – the very concept of doership is denied, whom doth one see and with what? Just on the other hand, it is the noblest *purushartha* which obliterates all kinds of sorrow. Therefore, it is wrong to apply the principle of *karmakanda*, which denies meaning to statements lacking prescriptive content, to *jnanakanda* also.”

“As the *upasana* of Brahman, without knowing Brahman, is a futile exercise, it is correct to say that *Brahmajnana* is meant for *upasana*, *Atmetyevopasita* - considering as *atma upasana* should be performed, this is what the *Shruti* itself says”

“Your contention is wrong because there is a lot of difference between the knowledge of karma and the knowledge of Brahman. The subject matter of karma jnana is karma performed bodily or through speech or mentally. Happiness is the fruit of that karma. There is disparity in this fruit depending upon the nature and ability of the performer. Therefore, an embodied person is not free from likes and dislikes. But the fruit of Brahmajnana is to become disembodied. A disembodied soul has no likes and dislikes. To be disembodied is itself *moksha*. That *moksha* cannot be the fruit of any karma. There is another difference between the fruit of karma and the fruit of Brahmajnana. The fruit of karma is transitory, whereas the fruit of Brahmajnana is eternal. Further, dharma means karma. There is no connection between a disembodied soul and dharma – *anyatra dharmat, anyatra adharmat / anyatrasmat kritakritat anyatra bhutaccha bhavyaccha* – it is different from dharma, it is different from adharma. It is also different from cause and effect. It is different from past and future. This is what the *Kathopanishad* says. Further, *Shruti* says *Brahmaveda Brahmaiva bhavati* – one who knows Brahman becomes Brahman himself. Therefore, in Brahmajnana, there cannot be any distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped and hence, Brahmajnana cannot be a part of *upasana*. *Shruti* states this unequivocally, *Tadeva Brahma tvam viddhi nedam yadidamupasate* – Know that it is Brahman, and that which you objectify and worship is not Brahman.”

“How is it that Brahman is not related to any action? After all, one understands it only with the act of reasoning!”

“On the contrary it is *Anyadeva tadviditat atho adviditadadhi* – it is different from what is known and what is unknown.”



“Such a thing is not in the experience of any person. A thing that exists must come within the purview of knowledge. If not, its existence is illusory.”

“It is not so. That which does not come under knowable or unknowable is one’s true self. One can know only that which is different from oneself. Thus, the one that knows all that is different from him is experienced in dreamless sleep. Mandukya Upanishad calls Him *Prajna*. He is free from the superimposition of mind. Therefore, it is impossible to know Him. But, He is one’s true self, and hence, it is also not possible not to know him. He is Brahman.”

“In the statement *Atma mantavyah nididhyasitavyah*, use of the ending *tavya* denotes that *Atman* is the object of *manana* and *nididhyasana*. The *tavya* ending implies a commandment. It means that *nididhyasana* is also *upasana*.”

“No, not so. Though a seeker of liberation is in his quest for *Atman*, by the compulsive force of eternal *vasana*, his mind is always after external objects. *Nididhyasana* is prescribed to counter this waywardness of the mind. This is not a commandment. If it were a commandment for *upasana*, in course of time it ought to have resulted in the procurement of something other than one’s self. But what one procures is the realization of one’s identity with Brahman, and this identity is what takes place here and now. Therefore, the use of the ending *tavya* is not meant as a commandment, but is only a pseudo commandment.”

“If that is so, will it not render the *Shastra* false in view of the rule *Aamnayasya kriyarthatvadanarthakhyamatadarthanam* – The very meaning of *Shastra* is action. Therefore, statements which do not culminate in action are futile and meaningless.”

“No, not so. That rule prevails in *karmakanda*, where duality is accepted. But that rule is not applicable in *jnanakanda* in making known the Upanishadic *Purusha*.”

“But even the person, who has heard the Upanishads, continues to have a mind oriented in duality. Therefore, it is wrong to say that self realization takes place here and now.”

“Self realization cannot be achieved by mere hearing of the Upanishads. It has to be followed by *manana* and *nididhyasana*. There is a vast difference between the knowledge obtained by hearing the Upanishads and that obtained by hearing other subjects. In the case of other subjects, the knowledge culminates in being grasped by the

mind. But in the case of Upanishads, it goes beyond mind and reaches the self which is *kshetrajna*. Only in such a person who has gotten this experience does the duality disappear. He becomes disembodied. For such a person there is nothing to be liked or disliked.”

“If that is so, as soon as the sense of difference dies, does he also die?” The scholars seated there broke into loud laughter. Mandana looked at them with a deprecating stare. All fell silent. But Shankara replied laughing,

“*Shastras* testify to the fact that even after death a person has heaven or hell or likes and dislikes. But one who has attained *Brahmajnana* continues to live without the consciousness of the body – a state in which he has neither likes nor dislikes.”

“Then what is the meaning of becoming disembodied?”

“Though a person experiences disconnection with the body during dreamless sleep, regaining connection after waking is embodiment, which is nothing but false knowledge. It is *adhyasa*. Knowledge of no relationship with the body is disembodiment.”

“We the *mimamsakas* maintain that the *jiva* after death goes to other worlds and do not deny *adhyasa*. The *jiva* who attains the other worlds must be other than the body. But *adhyasa* is not false knowledge. It is used in its secondary sense. By saying ‘my body’, one knows that one is different from one’s body, which is nothing but a secondary usage.”

“We cannot say thus. In the expression of secondary usage, ‘Devadatta is a lion’, there is the knowledge of Devadatta as well as the lion, and their difference. But when a person says ‘I am a man’, one does know that ‘I’ and hence it cannot be secondary usage, but is false knowledge. But in case of a *Brahmajnani*, he treats his body as a snake treats its skin cast out on an anthill. He is disembodied. He is Brahman says *Shruti*.”

Mandana had no further argument. The assembly fell silent. At last the chairperson said,

“All arguments and counter arguments are over. The proceedings have come to an end.”

So saying, she rose and went inside. The assembly sat in deafening silence. Mandana then said,

“I do not have any further questions. Please be seated for sometime” and went inside. Bharati Devi had bolted the door from inside. He gently knocked. The door did not open. He proceeded to the hall where *yajna* used to be conducted. The fire was still simmering. He stood looking at it for a while. Tears welled in his eyes with uncontrollable sorrow. Wiping the tears, he circumambulated the fire and made *namaskara*. He sat before the fire and his whole past came to his mind in review.

“What a travesty! I thought karma was everything. Without understanding that Upanishads speak of a principle that transcends karma, I entered into a futile argument with the *sanyasi*. What a sin have I committed! Assuming him to be a wayward young fellow, I committed another sin. Without understanding properly, I maintained that Jaimini has rejected the notion of *Ishwara*. If this boy had not come, I would have continued in my errors even further. It must have been some *punya* that brought me out of that great ignorance. It is perhaps the worship of fire god performed by me without seeking any fruit that has helped me now. Though I foolishly abandoned Almighty, Almighty did not abandon me. He has helped me in gaining this supreme knowledge. That boy is no boy. He is none other than an incarnation of the Almighty. After all, what is it that I gave him! Just a few days food. But what a blessing has he bestowed on me! Supreme Knowledge!”

He was again in tears. Wiping his eyes, he returned. For the first time, in the presence of all the assembled scholars, he made *namaskara* to Shankara. The learned viewed this with a shudder. They had never witnessed Mandana falling at the feet of anybody.

“*Bhagwan*, I surrender to you,” said Mandana.

“Your preceptor, Kumarila Bhatta sent me here to meet you. Both of you have endeavored with great sincerity to save Vedic dharma from the onslaught of Buddhism. Your experience in this field is unparalleled. It is my desire to see that your abilities are fully utilized in that direction in the coming days, so that this menace is fully eradicated. Kumarila has given up his life. Therefore, you and I have to jointly undertake this work. Come, let us start this work now.”

With these words, Shankara got ready to leave the place. Bharati Devi, having come to know of this, came out with a smiling face. Shankara asked her permission to

take leave of them. But she said, “You cannot depart from here yet. It is true that you have succeeded in the debate that went on for the last few days. But do not forget that I am the life partner of your adversary. You are bound to defeat me also to fulfill your oath.”

Mandana laughed. Shankara also answered with a laugh, “Mother, I take your words as a blessing.”

“When shall we begin?”

“If it suits you, we can begin from tomorrow itself.”

“Let it be so.”

The gathered audience was electrified at this development.

The next day there was a huge gathering. All the women of Mahishmati had come to witness this marvelous debate. But Mandana kept away from the assembly. Mandana’s better-half had now taken his place. As in the previous days, Shankara occupied his seat.

Bharati asked, “Shall we begin?”

Shankara said, “Who shall be the chairperson today? Is it not Mandana?”

“Venerable saint, there is no need for that. There is also no need of statement of principle or oath. It is enough if you answer all my questions. That will imply victory over both of us.”

“Please proceed with your questions.”

An avalanche of questions started with questions on grammar. There seemed to be no end to the questions. In one or two days questioning on grammar came to an end. Then began questions on prosody. Then it was about *nirukta*. It continued with questions on astrology. People had only heard of the scholarship of Bharati, but nobody had witnessed such a display of her learning. Now they realized that she was the very incarnation of Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Many days passed thus, but her questioning did not come to an end. She mused, “He seems to be all-knowing. Let me try *alankara shastra*.” She started her questions on it and, in particular, on *nava rasa*. Questioning continued throughout the day and evening came on. At last she put a question on the *kama shastra*. Shankara closed his ears and humbly said,

“Mother, remember, I am a *sanyasi*. I have no knowledge of that *shastra*.”

Bharati retorted, “You have agreed to this debate without any conditions. If you are unable to reply, the oath taken by Mandana will not be valid and you may go.”

Without speaking another word, she entered the inner quarters in victorious anger. All the assembled people were dumb stuck.

One of them commented, “Whatever you say, it was wrong on her part to have put such a question to a *sannyasi*.” But another remarked, “Look at the shrewdness of the lady!” Yet another said, “When a woman takes up a challenge, see to what extent she can go. She may not stop at anything.” Many of them sympathized with the predicament of Shankara. But Shankara, like a tiger caught in a trap, paced up and down. Padmapada, like a star-struck one, went out and sat outside. Prithvidhara simply stared at Shankara, wondering what he would do next. At last, Shankara said,

“Prithvidhara, Please call the lady.”

Bharati Devi came out. Shankara said to her, “Mother, please allow me a month time. I will answer your question.”

Bharati Devi readily agreed.

“Prithvidhara, Padmapada, come let us go,” said Shankara and left the place with his disciples.

Mandana, who was inside, came to know of the developments from his disciples. He asked, “Bharati, what is this you have done?”

She said, “How can I be a mute witness when that lad is snatching you away from me? He has sought a month's time. Let us see what happens after that.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Shankara walked on and on with his two disciples. But the disciples had no inkling what the preceptor would do next. Not a word passed between them. They just followed the Guru mechanically. Wherever there was some shelter, in a temple or under some tree, they would rest for a while and then would continue their journey without exchanging even a single word. They seemed to be on an aimless journey without any destination. They neither sought nor were offered any alms. Thus they walked on for two to three days. They were walking by the side of some mountains when Shankara suddenly halted,

“Padmapada, just hear what that commotion is about.”

The disciples carefully listened to the sound. They remarked, “Yes, yes, we hear some people crying. There seem to be many people around.”

“I will sit here. You go and find out what this crying is all about.”

Prithvidhara said, “I will stay with the Guru. You go and make enquiries.”

Padmapada departed. He returned and informed, “A king named Amaruka had come with his retinue on a hunting expedition. It seems while on his way back, he felt giddy and fell down. His attendants came running to him and found that he was dead. There are about 25 to 30 people in his retinue. All of them are crying.”

Shankara asked, “What would be the age of the king?”

“He may be about forty five years.”

“How long has he been dead now?”

“He must have died an hour ago.”

For a moment or two Shankara was deeply immersed in thought. Looking towards the hill, he asked, “Go and find out quickly whether you can find a lonely place on the hill with some convenience of water.”

After surveying the place, they returned and reported, “There is an excellent cave with a streamlet nearby. It is a place fit for dwelling.”

All three climbed the hill and reached the cave. Shankara examined the place and then asked in a serious tone,

“I am now conferring a solemn responsibility on you. Are you prepared to bear the burden?”

“Guruji, we are here to obey any commandment of yours.”

“I shall enter the body of the king. I will return after some days. Till then, you must protect this body. Can you bear this responsibility?”

The two dumb-founded disciples stood staring.

“Oh!” screamed Padmapada.

“What is this ‘Oh’? Do you mean that it is impossible?”

“No, not so. I know that it is possible. Matsyendranath had done it.”

“Then what is your problem?”

“He became enamored with the newly acquired body and continued to stick to it. It took a lot of effort from his disciple Gorakhnath to bring him back.”

“In such a case, you are there to bring me back.”

“Guruji, please excuse me, what if there is some danger to your body here?”

“I will take care of that myself. You need not worry about it.”

“Guruji, please excuse me if I ask an impertinent question. Is it not *papa* for a *sanyasi* to enter into another body?”

“Who is it that will be transacting in that body? Is he a *sanyasi* or a *grihasta*?”

“It may be true that he is a *grihasta*. But the mind is that of a *sanyasi*.”

“During a dream when one is separated from the body, does the *jiva* acquire *papa* or *punya*? Don’t you remember the mantra of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad?”

“Why should you undertake such an adventure?”

“I have to get Mandana<sup>37</sup>.”

“What if you do not get him?”

“That does not concern you.”

There was silence for a while. Then Shankara asked,

“Have you any more questions?”

“No.”

“Are you prepared to take the responsibility?”

“Yes, I am ready. Kindly pardon me for having transgressed my limit in asking such questions. I beg you to continue to bless me as before,” and he fell flat at the feet of Shankara for doing *namaskara*.

Later, Padmapada spread out Shankara’s blanket in the cave and covered it with a sheet. But Shankara did not lie on it as he had anticipated. Instead, he sat in the lotus posture, performing *pranayama*, he left a part of his subtle body in his body and, emerging through the *brahma randhra*, proceeded and entered the king’s body through the latter’s *brahma randhra*. The king suddenly woke up and opened his eyes. The royal retinue shouted with joy. The Raja said, “Feeling giddy I fell down. Nothing has happened to me. Come, let’s go.”

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<sup>37</sup> After very great effort we have got this Mandana whose dedication Dharma is total, who has seen the other side of the ocean of all shastra and who is extraordinary fame – Shankara Vijaya 13.40

The king's retinue was amazed at this development. Their joy knew no bounds. All returned to the palace with the king.

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The king now started managing the affairs of the kingdom with extraordinary skill. When problems arose, his solutions were better than that of his council of ministers. He showed equal affection for all the three queens. The eldest son was crowned as crown prince in a hurry. On noticing this, the youngest queen Kanakamanjari and the chief minister, no doubt, felt happy, but were also greatly surprised. By and by, the surprise gave rise to suspicion. How could a dead person return to life? They started a secret confabulation. At last they decided to save this king at any cost. Appropriate instructions were issued to spies. After about three days the minister received reports. Based on them, instructions were given to secret agents to carry out a plan to ensure that they did not lose the king again. The agents went on to carry out the instructions.

Meanwhile in the cave, Padmapada and Prithvidhara kept secret vigil on the body. In the afternoon while one of went out for procuring *bhiksha*, the other looked after the body. They would have their meal late in the afternoon. But on one side, behind a bush at the back of the cave, there was whispering going on:

“What is to be done? One or the other is always present here.”

“Today is the turn of the wrestler. Thin fellow has gone to get *bhiksha*.”

“We have been waiting, but got no chance.”

“We may get a chance. But what can be done? Guruji is in *dhyana*. Even a look at him gives one shivers.”

“No, no! He is in *Samadhi*. He is unconscious. We will do our job in a minute and run away.”

Today it was the turn of Prithvidhara to procure *bhiksha*. He did not return on time. Padmapada was tired of waiting and came out of the cave. He descended a few steps and stood at the turning, in expectation of the other. After a while, feeling giddy in the heat, he sat down. But there was no sign of Prithvidhara.

“Come, come I say. Wrestler has gone. It is the right time. The job must be finished quickly.”



One was holding a pot with burning charcoal and the other held a bag which had a piece of cloth drenched in oil. Silently both sneaked into the cave. The second fellow put the cloth close to Shankara. The first one blew his breath on the coal. A small flame appeared. He put a big camphor piece on it. There was a sudden surge of flames and the oil cloth caught fire. Both of them ran away.

Padmapada was immersed in the thoughts of the fast approaching limit of five days. Shankara had still not returned. If the limit expired, this whole adventure would end up in futility. Mandana's wife would not entertain them if they went seeking Mandana after the expiry of the limit. What will Guruji do then? In trying to do such a grave thing, he may end up in some fuss. He wondered whether he would be able to see Guruji again at all. How long could the body be guarded? While Padmapada was distracted with his misgivings, Prithvidhara appeared at a distance.

As they approached the cave, Prithvidhara asked, "Padmapada, what is this burning smell?"

"Yes, yes. I do not know what it is."

"When did you leave the cave?"

"About 10 minutes ago."

"Come quickly."

Both ran to the cave. What they saw there gave them the fright of their lives. The secret agents had set fire to the body and gone. Both ran to the streamlet and brought water in their *kamandala*. Lo! There stood Shankara in his loin cloth, laughing at their discomfiture. They stood staring him with wide open eyes. They surveyed his body from top to bottom. A couple of fingers and toes were burnt. But the clothes were completely burnt. Padmapada fell at his feet and said, "Guruji, I failed to carry out my responsibility. Please pardon me."

"Padmapada, Lord Lakshmi Narasimha Swami has saved us both. Why do you worry now? Come on, let us go. Let us go back to Mandana's house." With these words, Shankara went inside the cave and chose some clothes from the package. He bathed in the stream and changed his clothes and all of them set out for Mahishmati.

The news of Shankara's entry into another body spread like lightning in Mahishmati. After leaving Amaruka's kingdom, Shankara and his disciples reached

Mandana's house on the last day of the deadline agreed upon. The path was lined with milling crowds. Mandana and his wife Bharati, came forward to receive him. Bharati Devi was the first to make *namaskara* to Shankara. She humbly addressed Shankara and said, "Noblest of saints, I went beyond my limits in my arguments with you. It was due to the natural weakness of those who are householders. Moreover, I could not gauge your real identity. Now I am convinced that you are the very Lord Almighty who has incarnated in this form. Please pardon me."

Mandana chanted the hymn, *Na karmana*, and doing *namaskara* to Shankara, said, "I am now ready to follow you. Henceforth, I am your servant."

Shankara addressed Bharati Devi and said, "Mother, even great men sometimes behave contrary to their nature. That happens because of destiny on which they do not have control. Therefore it is wrong to view it as an error. I did not see any mistake in you at all. You are my mother. I am your devotee. I pray you to accompany us. You must abide with us. There is time still for Mandana to be initiated into *sanyasa*." Next morning Mandana distributed his property to his children. He gave away in charity whatever he had kept for himself. He blessed his children as they fell at his feet. Wearing a simple dress, he got ready to depart. Bharati Devi also put on simple clothes and followed him. Mahishmati bade the couple farewell with a heavy heart. Now the enlarged retinue of Shankara set out towards Srishaila in the south.

## CHAPTER 9

### MAHISHMATI TO SRISHAILA TO TIRUPATI

Srishaila is a mountainous area with thick forests, streams and caves. There one can see *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* co-existing. It is an abode for saints. It is also a place where *kapalikas* live. Even wild beasts have made their home there. The mountain of Srishaila has struck a balance between these conflicting elements and stands in perfect equanimity. Shankara's retinue arrived here attracted by the saints and holy men as well as the *kapalikas*. They searched for a suitable place and settled there. Sometimes they procured alms from small hermitages and sometimes pilgrims provide them with flour and grains. Bharati Devi prepared food out of those collections. As before, here also there were gatherings attended by the *sadhus* and saints. Often pilgrims also participated in those gatherings. Shankara's discourses were immensely liked by all. Once, moved by Shankara's discourse on self-realization, the *sadhus* shut their eyes and attained that state of realization. But the pilgrims, though they had a blissful experience on hearing the discourses, could not fully realize the significance of Shankara's teachings, which was beyond their reach. They remained dissatisfied. One of them asked,

“Revered Guru, we are ignorant people. We could only surmise that you are describing something extraordinarily beautiful. Can people like us also attain that state of self-realization? If possible, will you please tell us what is the *sadhana* for it?”

“Please listen, I will explain. It is certainly possible to attain self-realization. There is only one path for that, which is devotion in God. Now see what this devotion

means. Normally man applies his own abilities to overcome the problems he faces in life. Only when he fails in his efforts does he surrender to God. This is the beginning of devotion. He is a devotee in distress. This devotion helps him to come out of his distress. This is because devotion destroys the sin responsible for the distress. Being encouraged by this success he prays for more worldly acquisitions. Now he is a devotee seeking goodies. Again he gets what he wants because prayer helps him to acquire *punya*. After getting all that he prayed for, he again relapses into old ways forgetting God and commits yet more sins. This makes him a devotee in distress again. Thus, he remains in the vicious circle of devotion in distress, devotion for worldly acquisitions and relapsing into devotion in distress and goes round and round in the cycle of birth and death, always immersed in unending joys and sorrows. But a time comes when he worships God without being prompted by any desire. This brings about a change in him. He becomes disillusioned with all duality like joy-sorrow, profit-loss and so on. He begins to think, ‘who could be this God? I have never seen him. But when I forget him, I am plunged in sorrow, and when I remember him that sorrow gets destroyed. Let me forget for a moment these dualities. But who is this God?’ Thus he gets involved in a search for God. He becomes a *jijnasu*. Now he is a devotee in search of God. When such an irrepressible desire for seeking God arises in the mind of a devotee, it is an indication that God has now entered his heart. It is because of His grace that God, who was far away, gets nearer to him. As this devotee goes on thinking of God with deep devotion, God leads him to a Guru. Now it is the same God that is in the heart of the Guru also. But his specialty is that he has had the *darshan* of God. Therefore this Guru shows God in true perspective. From his words the devotee comes to know that the same God who is in the heart of all is also in my heart. The devotee, who was all along outward looking, now becomes inward looking and ultimately he has the *darshan* of God. Now he is a devotee who has the light of knowledge. When he spends several birth-death cycles, with his mind always inward looking, he, at last, has self-realization. Therefore, we should never have the misfortune of forgetting God.”

On the same day, one of the persons attending the gathering was a *kapalika*. He stood up and asked, “My Lord, what are the attributes of a Guru who has achieved the *darshan* of God?”

“God is himself peace. Therefore, one who has darshan of Him also becomes peaceful. His behavior is gentle. Nobody will be provoked by him. He treats people in distress with kindness and helps them. He follows a good conduct as ordained in the Veda. He is free from evil ways.”

“What is the way to find a *sadguru*?”

“One has to worship God with flowers. One must chant his prayers. One must also make *japa* of His names. Keeping in mind the fact that the same God is immanent in all persons, one must show love to all. Such a behavior pleases God and He will show one a *sadguru*.”

From the next day, more and more *kapalikas* started participating in the gathering. In course of time, there was marked reformation in their behavior. They gave up their regular habit of drinking. This made their women folk happy who also started attending the gathering. In course of time, there was regular worship of God, bereft of dark practices in their houses. This brought them peace. But, their leader, Ugrabhairava, lost his peace on observing these changes in his followers. With the number of his followers dwindling day by day, he started hating Shankara. Prithvidhara noticed Ugrabhairava watching from proximity the gathering and the attempt of his followers to avoid his sight. He conferred with Padmapada and decided to take precautions for the safety of the Guru. Padmapada took special care to avoid repetition of his lapse which had led to a near disaster. Ugrabhairava stealthily observed Shankara’s routine, trying to gather information as to when Shankara would be alone. One day, after having bath and smearing his body with ashes, he came to Shankara when he was alone and made obeisance. Shankara asked, “May I know who are you?”

“My name is Ugrabhairava. We are all *kapalikas*. We are the devotees of Lord Kalabhairava.”

“Which is your native place?”

“This forest itself is our native place. Which is your native place, my lord?”

“We are wandering monks. We have no particular town as ours.”

“Did you like this place?”

“It is a good place.”

“I saw you performing *tapas*. I will show you a better place nearby. Come with me.”

“No, thank you.”

“How do you manage your food?”

“We procure it by begging.”

“How long you plan to stay here?”

“I will stay here till my work is finished?”

“What is your work?”

“You will yourself come to know of it by and by.”

“What does it mean?”

“I have no time to discuss it now. We will talk about it later. Now it is getting late. You may go now.” With these words, giving him a mango, he sent away Ugrabhairava who left the place quietly.

He had not observed Padmapada, who was sitting just behind the ochre clothes spread out for drying.

One afternoon, after the gathering was over and the audience had departed, Shankara proceeded to the spot and sat for meditation. It was winter when nights start earlier, and the sky was already getting dark. Padmapada lighted the lamp and came out. Nearly half an hour had elapsed and he noticed the movement of a shadow in the light of the lamp. He carefully observed it. There was a man in front with a dog following him. He had no doubt that the man walking slyly was none other than Ugrabhairava. He rose quickly and sounded a note of warning. Prithvidhara also got ready immediately. Ugrabhairava, who reached Shankara, stared at him. Just as he was about to take out his sword, the dog barked. At once he did *namaskara* to Shankara and returned. The dog followed him, barking at Prithvidhara and Padmapada. After that incident, they were constantly watching the Guru very carefully for his safety.

On another day there was a gathering of saints for the discourse. The program was expected to go on for two hours. The first hour went without any hindrance. Then suddenly there appeared Ugrabhairava, fully drunk, his body smeared with ash and wearing a garland stringed with human vertebrae, loudly uttering some incoherent words. He rushed towards Shankara with his scabbard swinging by his side. Making wild

gestures at Shankara, he shouted, “Who the hell are you to teach us *Shastra*? Having transgressed my place, how dare you think of driving me out! Do you know who am I? I am Ugrabhairava. Just watch what I am going to do to you.” In a split second he drew out his sword and swung it at Shankara. The assembled saints screamed in horror. Just when the sword was about to land on Shankara, Padmapada rushed forward and held tightly the raised arm of Ugrabhairava. He shoved his knee into the assailant’s stomach. Ugrabhairava was thus knocked down, and as he fell, Padmapada seized his sword and severed his head with one powerful stroke and gave out a triumphant shout. All shuddered on seeing this frightening appearance of Padmapada, who seemed to be out of his senses. The *kapalika* women, who were in the gathering, at once rose and brought *kumkum* and ashes from the temple and smeared him with them. They lighted camphor and performed *arati* and made obeisance to him. Padmapada shed his terrible visage and assumed his peaceful countenance. The former disciples of Ugrabhairava carried his dead body, buried it and heaved a sigh of relief. After two days, Shankara and his disciples set out towards the south while the *kapalika* bid them a tearful farewell.

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Next they reached Tirupati, the abode of Lord Venkateshwara, also well known as the seven hills. They took bath in the temple pond and after performing their morning rituals had the *darshan* of Lord Venkateshwara. The manager of the temple greeted the Guru with all respect and devotion and said, “Venerable saint, a large number of pilgrims visit this temple. All of them desire to stay here for a long time to offer their services to the Lord. Most of them are poor people. It has become a problem to make arrangements for all of them. I seek your blessings in this regard.”

Shankara established a *dhanakarshana yantra* there and made a permanent arrangement for the pilgrims.

An Andhra king by the name of Sudhanva had come there for offering *puja* in the temple. He attended the discourses given by the Guru on the Brahma Sutra commentary. Being convinced of the greatness of the Guru he once came to him when he was alone. After doing *namaskara* he introduced himself and said, “In the Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna says *swakarmana tamabhyarcha siddhim vindati manavah*. What is the meaning

of *siddhi* here? Which karma shall I practice for achieving that *siddhi*? I pray, please explain to me.”

“Sudhanva Maharaja, you have asked a very good question. Please hear carefully what I say.” Then Shankara described the dharma of a ruler (Raja Dharma) to him.

“*Siddhi* mentioned here is nothing but eternal peace. The abode of this peace is God. Therefore, to attain identity with God is the ultimate aim of life. There cannot be a unique way for everybody to reach this aim. It is because *samskara* and abilities differ from person to person. These depend on the karma performed in earlier births. God arranges for the birth of each person in one of the four different *varnas*, depending on these factors and has prescribed appropriate karma for each *varna*. Hence, this karma itself is his Dharma. Only when everyone practices the karma prescribed for his *varna*, can all lead a peaceful life. This means peace ensues only with the mutual cooperation for complementary functioning of all the four *varnas*.

Further, it is the duty of the ruler to protect *varna dharma*, and thereby to maintain the unity of all the four *varnas*. He has to perform invariably the routine karma prescribed for him in the *Shruti*. But as a ruler, unlike his subjects, he may have to face extraordinary situations. In such situations he has to perform certain extraordinary functions. Such a situation has already occurred at some places in our holy land. *Mlecchas* have invaded Gandhara and Sindhu *desha*. These are not merely invasions for looting wealth. They are also committing atrocities on the populace. For what purpose? They believe that their religion is the only superior religion. They want everyone in the world to embrace their religion. To achieve this, they will not hesitate to kill innocent people or to set fire to their houses or to carry away their womenfolk and mass convert all of them. These murderers are taking the help of Buddhists who swear by non-violence. Their mutual hatred of Veda has brought them together. Thus the hatred of Veda culminates into the hatred for motherland. Such situations cannot be faced by ordinary citizens. Only the kings can face it and find suitable means to counter it. Though the problem of Buddhists has been overcome because of several political developments, the invasions of *mlecchas* encouraged initially by Buddhist collaboration, has still been going on.”



“The policy to be followed when there are wars caused by greed for more land, fought between our own kings, is different from that when *mlechas* invade our country. There are several instances of the defeated *mlecha* king, pretending friendship towards the victorious king, killing him later treacherously and thus succeeding in taking over his kingdom. To get so easily cheated is by no means the sign of an able king. It is no dharma if the mutual rivalry between our kings leads to friendship with an alien invader. The policy to be followed in such situations is, *vayam panchadhikam shatam* – by themselves, Pandavas are five and Kauravas are hundred. When facing a common enemy, they are together 105. The *mlecha* king may get defeated and run away. But he may return to invade again. Our kings feel satisfied with driving such invaders out of the country. They should chase him further up to his own country and destroy his very roots. Otherwise, mere driving them out of our borders will result in our coffers becoming empty. The loss of our fighting forces will not stop. The kings of Sindhu Desha had employed some mercenary *mlecha* soldiers. But when there was a war with the *mlecchas*, those mercenaries deserted their employer and became instrumental in the death of our king. Therefore, it is dangerous to employ aliens in sensitive positions. Further, it is equally dangerous not to punish suitably those of our countrymen who prove to be traitorous. *Tyajadekam kulasyarthe, gramasyarthe tyajet kulam. Gramam janapadsyarthe tyajeth* - these are relevant to the present situation in deciding the dharma of the ruler. You must constantly confer with *brahmanas* who are known for their equanimity and loyalty to dharma, and take necessary steps to safeguard dharma. This is the path to be followed by a ruler to achieve his ultimate aim, which is also the true worship of God.”

One or two days after this, when Shankara and his disciples were getting ready to set out for Karnataka, the king of Vidharbha who was present there told them that it was not safe to go there because of the danger they may face from the *kapalikas*. But Shankara told him that if it were so, it was all the more necessary to go there. But the king of Vidarbha could not gauge the personality of Shankara. The king Sudhanva, on the other hand, prayed to Shankara, “Venerable Guru, please undertake this journey, and I will also accompany you with my army.” On hearing this, the king of Vidarbha felt ashamed of himself and went away without a word.

## CHAPTER 10

### TIRUPATI TO KALADI

Shankara and his disciples started on their journey towards Karnataka. The army of king Sudhanva marched in front, followed by Shankara's retinue. In Karnataka, a person named Krakacha was the chief of the *kapalikas*. He was an evil minded tyrant and also a drunkard. Unlike the *kapalikas* of Shrisaila, he had a small army of men with swords. People, being afraid of him, had limited the worship of God to their homes. Open celebrations and public discourses on holy books had come to a halt. But the people having come to know by word of mouth the greatness of Shankara, were eager to see him. Still, they were afraid of coming out in the open for the fear of the *kapalikas*. But learning that there was an army to protect them, they ventured out and made arrangements for discourses in temples. People started attending these discourses in large numbers. There was a wave of enthusiasm among the people. Angered by this Krakacha came with his fighting men and tried to obstruct these discourses. Sudhanva's commander addressed the *kapalikas*' army and issued an ultimatum to them:

“Those of you who want to save your lives may lay down your arms and return to your homes. Or you may participate in the celebrations taking place in the temple and receive the blessings of the Great Guru. But those who have no desire of living any longer may get ready for fighting. I am ready here to knock you down.”

This warning sent a shudder through the spines of the *kapalikas*. They were totally confused as to what to do next. Some were willing to surrender. Some wanted to

fight. Ultimately most of them surrendered. Krakacha, who was in a fiery rage, rushed forward sounding a battle cry with those of his few followers who had remained with him. Immediately the commander severed his head with an arrow. The remaining fighters laid down their arms and surrendered. Thus the menace of *kapalikas* in Karnataka was completely eliminated. Shankara send back king Sudhanva with his blessings.

Before continuing his journey further south, Shankara deputed Mandana and his wife along with Padmapada to go to Sringeri. He told them that he would join them there a month later and continued his journey with Prithvidhara. As he reached the border of Kerala, he said to Prithvidhara, “My mother is awaiting her last days. While taking leave of her, I had given her word that I would be by her side in her last days. Therefore I will proceed to Kaladi. I will be back in Sringeri in about a month. To me it appears that you should go about in Kerala to know the developments there and join me in Sringeri. Let us decide about our future course of action there.”

Walking briskly, Shankara reached Kaladi. In all new places on the way, he was received with great fervor by large crowds. But in his own town he walked alone and reached his house. Except his old disciples, Narayana Nambudri and Viswanatha Nambudri, there was nobody to look after his mother. The house, which was always full of relatives and friends, now seemed to be deserted. Shankara quickly proceeded to his mother lying on the cot, and touched her feet saying, “Mother, I am Shankara. I have come.” She opened her eyes slowly. She extended both her hands and embraced him and said,

“At last, you have come Shankara! I knew that you would come. Are you well?”

“I am alright mother. But how are you?”

“After all I am as one should be in her last days. But do you get your *bhiksha* regularly without any difficulty?”

“I have no problem. I get enough.”

“Take care of your health.”

“Yes mother, I do.”

“Go and have your bath and first take your meals and come. Narayana, if food is ready, please serve him.”

Shankara asked Narayana, “What food does mother take?”

Narayana replied, “She took some food day-before-yesterday. But yesterday she had only some boiled watery-rice.”

Shankara turned to his mother and said, “What will you have for your food today?”

“I shall also have meal with you.”

“Guruji, your arrival has given her strength. She is also asking for food,” said Narayana with a laugh.

Shankara himself washed the clothes his mother had kept aside for washing and spread them out for drying. After bath he took some cooked rice from Narayana and mixing it as told by him, he took to mother. He made her get up and fed her with his own hands. Then, even as she sat there, he cleaned the bed and made her lie down again. Afterwards he took his own food.

Shankara later asked his old disciples, “How is Magha Pandita and how is our Acharya Narayana Dikshita? Are they doing well?”

“Both of them passed away. Narayana Dikshita’s wife has survived him. Their son runs the *gurukula*. Daughter-in law and children are with them.”

“Is it so? Then I must once go there and meet them.”

“Let us go. I will also accompany you.”

Shankara continued to serve his mother in all respects except for cooking. After two days, the condition of her health somewhat worsened. With her eyes closed, she called out, “Shankara!”

He said, “I am here, just at your bedside,” and held her hands.

“Shankara, I have heard people speaking highly of you. It makes me very happy. At last, you have come to me. Now I feel comforted. I am happy that you have kept your word. You teach me what I have to learn in my last moment, so that I may attain the Feet of God Almighty.”

“Mother, the last moment is not for you. It is only for the body. You have to survive the body to attain the Feet of God.”

“Tell me what exactly is attaining the Feet of God.”

“It means to be with Lord Krishna eternally. To merge in Him. Everyday you rise and come from Lord Krishna and you go back to Him again. But now, you are going to Him to be with Him permanently.”

“What does it mean by dying, ‘you rise and come from Him daily, and also go back to Him daily’?”

“Don’t you rise from dreamless sleep everyday and as well go back to dreamless sleep every night? That is what I said. Do you know where you are during dreamless sleep? You are with Krishna. That is why you experience pure and unmixed joy then. That joy rests only with Krishna. It cannot be anywhere outside. Now do you understand what I said?”

“Tell me more of it.”

“Look mother, the joy you used to experience in dreamless sleep as a small girl is same as that you experience when you are old. There are no ups and downs in that joy. It is the same joy wherever you sleep or whenever you sleep. It is only because you have a body that you awake and forget that joy of Krishna. But hereafter, there will be no body and there will be no forgetting Krishna. Forgetting happens only because of the body.”

“How is it possible not to forget? Does it mean I will have no more births?”

“When there is no body, how can there be any birth?”

“But there is the body!”

“**Mother, even now you have no body.** See how it is. In deep sleep, when you are merged in Krishna and are in bliss, do you possess any body?”

“True, there is no body then.”

“That is what I told you. If you forget this, you get connected to the body. Otherwise, there is no body at all.”

“But Krishna Himself had a body.”

“Yes, it is true he had. But like all other bodies, it too died one day. Even so, does He not exist now? There is no going or coming for Krishna. He is always. You also abode in Him always. You too neither come nor go.”

“Shankara, you have revealed to me a very profound information. What you said is really enlightening. This means that neither you nor I have any body. What a pity!

All along I foolishly believed that I am nothing but this body and suffered in consequence. Now I understand. It is only Krishna that exists. There is nothing like ‘you’ or ‘I’. Hereafter, there can be no sentimental attachment. And there can be no more sorrow. How beautiful it is.” Then she called Narayana and Viswanatha to her bedside and said, “You both have served me well. I wish you the best. Now you may all go. Leave me to my peace now.” With those words she closed her eyes. By noon she had expired.

With the help of Narayana and Viswanatha, Shankara brought the dead body and laid it outside the house. Water was fetched from the river and was poured on the body. He circumambulated the body thrice and put some grains of rice in the mouth of the corpse. Shankara lamented, “Mother, you brought me up with all love and affection. But I did not render any service to you when you were alive. I went away leaving you alone. You always addressed me as ‘apple of my eye, my darling’ and blessed me to live long. The only service I am rendering to you is to put these few grains of rice in your mouth at the last moment. Please pardon me.” With these words, Shankara broke into tears. A piece of white cloth was spread on the dead body. Narayana went to fetch the priest. With him came a crowd of *Nambudri Brahmanas*. The older people amongst them started a debate:

“Who will perform the last rites? Shankara is prohibited from performing it. He has torn his holy thread and thrown it away. Who else is there?”

Shankara interjected, “Narayana can perform it.”

“His parents are alive. How can he perform it?”

“If so, let Viswanatha perform it.”

“What authority has he to perform this karma?”

“Please tell me who else can do it.”

“Ten days of last rites, and sixteen *shraddhas* over the whole year! Why should anyone take this responsibility?”

“One can take all this property and do it.”

Someone in the crowd said, “What is that property he speaks of? Ask him.”

Another said, “Who wants your property, get lost!”

Shankara thought for a while and then came forward to lift the body, saying, “Leave it to me. I will myself perform it.”

The assembled *brahmanas* shouted, “We will not allow a person who has thrown away his holy thread to cremate the body in the funeral grounds.”

Shankara was quiet for a while and then said, “I will perform it in the backyard. Now you may all go.”

“You do whatever you like. It is none of our concern.” With these words, all the *brahmanas* who had gathered there, dispersed. On hearing this noisy debate, people of other communities came to see what the dispute was about. The old disciples of Shankara came there on the sly. The firewood required for cremation was brought by *shudras*. With the cooperation of all these persons, the cremation was performed in the backyard. In course of time those who carried the hearse near the leg came to be called *kappalli illam* and those at the head were named *taleyattipilli illam*. After bathing in the river, all returned and did *namaskara* to Shankara. The young *brahmanas* said to Shankara, “Guruji, it is but natural that you are disgusted with the behaviour of the old people. We are all your followers. We seek your blessings. Please do not get angry with those elderly people. No doubt they have behaved towards you in an insensitive manner. It is only because they know not who you are<sup>38</sup>!”

The next day Shankara met his old disciples and friends at his old *gurukula*. Shankara did *namaskara* to the wife of the old Guru and made enquiries about her wellbeing. Old memories recurred to the mind. Shankara recounted briefly his experiences during his sojourn in the North. He referred to Badarinath and said, “Many people go on pilgrimage to that place. But there is lack of proper *archakas* there. Moreover, the study of the Veda is on the decline. I had promised to send *archakas* there. If four or five of you go there and undertake the mission of saving Dharma, it will be a great service.” On hearing this, young men enthusiastically offered their services. Shankara wrote a letter of introduction to the President of Badarinath Temple, Brahma Dutta, and sent the young men to Badarinath. He informed them all that his next destination was Sringeri, and set out on his journey alone, departing from Kaladi for the second time.

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<sup>38</sup> The memorial of Aryamba was rejuvenated by Sringeri Jagadguru Shankaracharya Sri Narasimha Bharati Mahaswami. The Students of Shankara who got disgusted with the behaviour of their elders have continued with the method of corpse disposal as tradition even today. The fuel for burning the corpse among the *Nambudri Brahmanas* is to be brought only by *shudras* and the burning takes place in the backyard.

## CHAPTER 11

### KALADI TO SRINGERI

By that time Mandana and his wife, as well as Padmapada had settled down in Sringeri after having found a residence there. When Prithvidhara also reached that place, they made preparations to accord a grand welcome to Shankara. With the cooperation of the residents of the town, they decorated the town with buntings and banners. Some people were sent in advance to receive Shankara as he reached the outskirts of the town. As he entered the town, there was sounding of bugles, beating of drums and blowing of conches and gongs. Slogans, ‘Victory to Shankara’ resounded everywhere and were even heard in neighboring villages. Shankara, seated on a platform, addressed the people thus:

“Sringeri is a place which is supremely peaceful and holy. It is a fit place for performing *tapas*. Great sages like Rishyasringa had performed *tapas* here. Innumerable scholars of *Shruti* have transformed Sringeri into a holy place of pilgrimage. This place deserves to be the centre for learning of Veda and Upanishads in Southern Bharata. From Mahishmati of Northern Bharata venerable Mandana Mishra has arrived to adorn this town and settle here. He is the direct disciple of the renowned scholar Kumarila Bhatta and is a man of sterling character. He is going to be initiated into *sanyasa* on the ninth day of the bright half of *Chaitra*. He will settle down here permanently and conduct lessons and discourses. He will also be traveling all over the south. I pray to the presiding deity of town Goddess Sharada to bless this town to become a centre of learning for the whole of South India under his able guidance.”

On the previous day of his initiation into *sanyasa*, Mandana observed a fast and performed *shraddha* and *viraja homa*. On Lord Rama’s birthday his initiation into



*sannyasa* was performed. Mandana now became Suresvaracharya. Shankara urged him to speak few words of blessings to the huge gathering that had assembled there.

Mandana addressed the gathering thus: “Vedas teach karma *marga* for the wellbeing in this world and *jnana marga* for *moksha*. Karma performed with great pains gives only limited fruit. On the other hand, some restrict themselves to routine karma as ordained in the *Shruti*, abandoning desire-oriented karma, and worship God Almighty. This helps them to possess a pure mind which leads them to renunciation. Such people are fit to take up *jnana marga*. Such a person, once he is on the highway of knowledge gives up all kinds of karma and develops self restraint, contemplates on the Supreme Being, who is none other than his own self. This leads him to the attainment of identity with Paramatma. Shankara Bhagawadpada taught me this supreme lesson and liberated me from the bondage of karma. He has ordered me to continue my life here. He being Lord Dakshina Murthy, who can defy Yama, the God of Death, it appears to me that his centre of activity is in the south. The responsibility which he has bestowed on me is immense. I can manage that responsibility only with his grace and the cooperation of all of you. I will honestly endeavor to discharge that responsibility.”

Suresvaracharya, who hailed from north and who was a *Shukla Yajurvedi*, became the first *acharya* of the southern centre at Sringeri. He started teaching the Vedas and delivering discourses. The learned men of Sringeri, having become acquainted with his great scholarship and excellent character developed great devotion towards him.

Sribali is a village in the region of Mangalore and it is now named Shivalli. Learned men and men devoted to karma had come from that village to attend the inauguration of the southern centre at Sringeri. Accepting their invitation to visit their village, Shankara went there with Prithvidhara and Padmapada. Discourses and lessons on the scriptures were conducted there. Scholars and *sadhakas* from surrounding villages also came to participate in these discourses. When a holy man comes to a place, invariably people in distress approach him for relief. Such a person came to Shankara one day and having done *namaskara*, said, “Venerable Guru, my name is Prabhakara Sharma, and we are *Rigvedi*. This is my son aged 12 years. He is still unable to speak. He has no interest in anything. He eats food only when offered. But, on his own, he shows no interest in food also. He has never mixed with other boys even for playing.

People suggested that he will be alright if his *upanayana* is performed. Even that was done, but there is no change. Fearing that it might be because of some evil spirit, we took remedial measures for it. But all that was of no avail. Doctors say that he is perfectly healthy and that he needs no treatment. He is our only son. We pray that you may kindly bestow your grace on him and set him right.”

Shankara stroked the boy’s head and asked him, “What is your name, boy?”

There was no reply.

Shankara pointed to his father and asked the boy, “Please tell me his name.”

Again there was no reply.

“Why are you so inert, boy?” asked Shankara.

“I am not inert. I am the Atman, remaining the same always. I have no urge to undertake any activity,” said the boy and remained silent. Shankara was astonished and also felt happy. Noticing that the boy had attained self-realization as easily as one can recognize an *amalaka* in the palm, he named him Hastamalaka. Prabhakara Sharma was dumbstuck and asked, “Venerable sage, I was under the misapprehension that my son was haunted by an evil spirit, and hence, I was in great sorrow. Now I am free from that sorrow.” After repeated obeisance to Shankara he asked his son to follow him home. Shankara remarked:

“It is now clear that he is a *jnani*. It is better he follows me rather than following you. As he always remains without any activity, he will be of no use to you. On the other hand it may cause you more sorrow if he remains with you. Hence I will take him along with me. Please entrust him to me.”

“My predicament is like the one who comes in expectation of interest, but loses the principal itself,” thought Sharma and was engrossed in deep thinking.

Shankara consoled him saying, “God will bless you with some more children. Those children will live long and will be intelligent. They will also be devoted to their parents. But I will take this boy along with me.”

Sharma asked the boy, “Are you ready to accompany him?” There was no reply from the boy. Instead, he made obeisance to his father and went and stood behind Shankara. Sharma was in tears. Wiping his eyes, he left the place.

At the end of the discourse, after a day or two, Shankara spoke about the arrangements to be made for regular worship at the Pashupatinath temple in Nepal. “I am very happy with the regular study of Vedas in your village. But in the northern border of our country, the study of the Vedas is on decline. In Nepal, the condition of Vedic studies is deplorable. Large number of pilgrims visit Pashupatinath, which is the most important place of worship there. But no one there knows the proper conduct of worship. If some young men from here go and do this work there, it helps in preserving Dharma. Will any of you volunteer for this work?”

After sometime, one of them asked, “Who looks after the arrangements there?”

Shankara said, “The king of Nepal himself will look after the arrangements. He will provide you all facilities.”

“How can we contact him?”

“I will give you an introductory letter. I have already spoken to him. It is enough if you show that. You will be provided with all amenities.”

“If it is so, we are ready to go there,” said five young men.

Shankara sent them to Nepal with a letter of introduction. Even now the same arrangement continues. (This arrangement was disturbed when an atheist government came to power there recently. But people rebelled against that government and unseated them from power and restored the old arrangement.)

After returning from Sribali, Shankara began the teaching of the commentaries. A twenty-year old young man used to attend these classes. He was tall and well built and had never spoken to anyone in the class. Everyone had noticed that he was the earliest to come to the class and sit in a corner. One day, after the lesson, he came to the Guru, prostrated with great devotion and introduced himself thus:

“Venerable Guruji, my name is Giri. I belong to Kerala. It is my desire to be with you and render my service to you. Will you kindly permit me?”

“Have you studied the Vedas?”

“To some extent.”

“Which Veda?”

“Atharva Veda.”

“What is the means of livelihood of your father?”

“He is a *vaidya*. We have a small garden also.”

“Are your parents aware of your coming here?”

“Only with their permission have I come here. I have told them that I have no interest in worldly life. My mother was saddened, but father consoled her saying that my horoscope indicated that I would become a *sanyasi*. He has heard about you. He directed me to approach you.”

Thereafter, he took charge of all services to the Guru. Supplying neem sticks for brushing teeth, washing clothes, arranging the seat and making arrangements for worship were all looked after by him.

Once he had gone to the river to wash clothes of the Guru. It was already time for the class to begin. Students had already assembled and one of the householders who regularly attended the classes remarked looking at Shankara,

“May the lesson be started now?”

Shankara replied, “Giri has not yet come. I am waiting for him.”

But the householder, pointing to a pillar where Giri always sat, laughingly remarked, “Giri is already sitting here.”

“Where is he?” asked Shankara.

He pointed to the pillar where Giri used to sit everyday and said, “There is he sitting.”

Many of the assembled students laughed, but the Guru showed no reaction. A little later Giri came running and sat by the same pillar. Then the Guru started the lesson. At the end of the lesson he announced that Giri was being initiated into *sannyasa* the day after and that there would be no class the next day.

Giri was surprised by this and so were the others.

The next day in the assembly, after the initiation of Giri into *sannyasa*, Shankara said to Giri, “Speak a few words on any topic you want to.”

Giri was a bit scared. Still he rose and spoke not to the assembly, but to the Guru. “*Bhagavan*, I have no ability to speak on *shastra*. Except listening to your nectar-like words for the last two months, I have not heard any *shastra*. However, from the very moment I saw you, I have been feeling that I am getting liberated from this ocean of worldly misery. After hearing your words, I have no regret for not having studied any

*shastra*. You are scholar par-excellence in all *shastra*. Still you are full of compassion for a humble fellow like me. You have been traveling all over the country only to uplift the lowly. I surrender to you. Please show me the way.” After speaking these words he recited eight stanzas he had composed in a meter called *Totaka* and made obeisance to Shankara, shuddering and shedding tears. Later he became famous as Totakacharya. Such a miracle can happen only with the grace of the Guru. How else can it be explained? By and by, the person who had made fun of Giri, comparing him to a pillar, made *namaskara* to Shankara and said, “I committed a great blunder through my words. Please pardon me. Please bless me also to become a *sadhaka* like Giri.”

Shankara remarked, “If the mind does not become *sattvik* and inward-looking, there is no use in listening to Vedanta. Speaking harsh words is a grave wrong. Cultivate *sattvik* character in thinking. Then naturally words also become *sattvik*.”

After few days, on the thirteenth day of bright half of *Ashadha*, Prabhakara Sharma’s son who had come with Shankara from Sribali was initiated into *sanyasa* and became Hastamalakacharya. Shankara got a *vaartika* written on his commentary on Brihadaranyaka Upanishad by Suresvaracharya, who also wrote an independent work named *Naishkarmya Siddhi*.

One day, Prithvidhara entered the Guru’s room and did *namaskara* to him. Shankara asked him, “What did you notice during your tour of Kerala?”

“He replied, “Whenever I came here to speak about it, you were busy talking to someone or other. If you are free now, I will tell you what I noticed there.”

“You may tell me now as I am free. I am not sure whether I will be free any other time,” said Shankara.

Prithvidhara began. “You had told us that invading muslims had converted people of Sindhu Desha by barbaric means. I learnt that in Kerala some people are carrying on a similar program through deceit.”

Shankara was eager to know the details. He asked Prithvidhara, “Who are they? What deceitful methods are they adopting?”

“About seven hundred years ago, people known as Christians were living in Syria. There they were subjected to tyranny by their enemies. They came as refugees to our coastal area and settled there. A king known as Samudriya gave them refuge and

assigned a separate area for their settlement. Their requests went on growing as time progressed. He recognized them as a separate community for representation in the village *panchayat*. He also issued an edict granting them equal rights with our own people<sup>39</sup>. There was a lake near their settlement. Our people were using the water of that lake for bathing and drinking. After some days, the Christians also started coming there. They then began to tell our people, ‘We are not *Bharatiyas*. We are Christians. We have been bathing and drinking water from this lake. You have also been drinking the same water. Thereby, you have also become Christians.’ Our people, who were rather simple-minded, got confused. The news spread everywhere. The *brahmanas* of that area declared that those people were outcasts. Since then, all those people who used the water of that lake have become Christians.”

Shankara felt sad on hearing this. He said, “Please tell me what happened next.”

Prithvidhara continued, “There were two groups among those Christians. One group resented this deceitful act of their brother-Christians and wrote a complaint to the Head of their religion<sup>40</sup>- ‘Some of our co-religionists are converting simple-minded foolish people to Christianity through fraudulent means and are also extorting money from them. If such fraud is not stopped, it will bring a bad name to Christianity.’ When the other group came to know of it, they stopped the extortion. But our people, who had been converted, began to feel deceived, and regretted that they were neither Christians nor *Bharatiyas* anymore. At last a reply was received from the Head of their religion – ‘Be it through force or be it through deceit, do whatever you can. That is not important. But continue your program of conversion and also get money from them at any rate.’ Since then, conversions are being carried on through force or deceit. Thousands of our people have now been converted to Christianity. They are also donating money.”<sup>41</sup>

“On hearing you, I do not know whether to laugh or to cry. However, presently we are not able to take any steps to counter this. Therefore, let us sidestep this issue for the moment. But look how the Divine Goddess has blessed us in our work so far. Now we have with us four disciples who are traditionally devoted each to one of the four

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<sup>39</sup> R.G. Pothan: Syrian Christians of Kerala (1963) p 22 and p 32-33

J.H. Lord: The Jews in India and the Fareast (1907) p.62-63

<sup>40</sup> K A Nilakantha Sastri: History of South India (1958) p.429

<sup>41</sup> Francis Day: The Land of Perumals (1863) p.234

Vedas. Hastamalaka is a *Rigvedi*, Sureswara is a *Yajurvedi*, Padmapada is a *Samavedi* and Totaka is an *Atharvavedi*. What does this play of the Goddess indicate?”

Prithvidhara smiled and said, “It indicates four directions of the country.”

“What you have said is correct. Now Sureswaracharya is already managing the south. If Hastamalaka gets established in the east, Padmapada in the west and Totaka in the north, the arrangement will be complete.”

“Guruji, it is a superb idea.”

“Now the question is which places in the other three directions are suitable for establishing the centres. In the west Dwaraka is the best place. In the north my choice is Badarinath. But I have not traveled to the east. Tell me what is your suggestion for the east?”

“If you indicate the requirements of the place, I can think about it.”

“The place should be well known to the people. It is better if it is a place of pilgrimage, so that people can find places to stay.”

“If we think of the extreme border in the east, Kamrup should be ideal. It is the place where Dhruva performed his *tapas*.”

“No doubt your view is correct. But it is difficult for people to go so far.”

“Then is Puri the abode of Lord Jagannatha, the proper place?”

“It is an excellent place. If four *Amnaya Pithas* are established in the four directions, the whole country will be like an altar for performing *yajna*. Now get ready to proceed to Puri. Contact the king of that place and the learned *brahmanas* there and decide upon the place. How much time do you require for this work?”

“It may take me almost a month to reach there. It means that I may need at least two or three months.”

“If not three, you may take four months. For your journey make use of the chariots of the travelers. You need not always go on foot. I will reach that place with Hastamalaka and Totaka in four months. Will you be able to complete your work within that time?”

“Venerable Guruji, what you have willed is bound to be completed. Please send me with your blessings.”

Prithvidhara then set out for Jagannath Puri.

The next day, Shankara addressed his four *sannyasi* disciples, “The time has come for me to speak to you on an important matter. Please listen to me attentively. *Purushanna param kinchit sa kashtha sa pragatih* – there is no aim of life greater than *moksha*. But attainment of *moksha* is not possible in an atmosphere where there is no peace. And Dharma is the basis of peace. Dharma gets manifested in the form of karma. *Shastra* are the basis for karma. *Tasmat shastram pramanante karyakarya vyavasthitou*. There are two parts of the karma – *vyashti karma* or individual karma, and *samishti karma* or collective karma. Individual karma results in acquiring the desired fruit and getting rid of unwanted effects. Collective karma, like digging wells planting trees and so on, does eventually good for oneself and immediate good for the society. Studying of scriptures is a *vyashti karma*, on the other hand, conducting discourses is a *samishti karma*. Study of scriptures is the bounden duty of the *brahmana* and conducting discourses is what he should never neglect. Only a *brahmana* has the right to conduct discourses. It is his greatest *tapas*. *Svadhyaya pravachanaveti na ko moudgalyah taddhitapastaddhitapah*.

Why this is termed the greatest *tapas*? The welfare of the whole society depends on this. As long as this is carried on satisfactorily there will be peace and amity in the society. If it is neglected, peace gets disturbed. Hence, it is the greatest *tapas*. Similarly, for the *kshatriya*, ruling the country justly and wisely and never to retreat in the battle constitutes *tapas*. For the *vaishya*, to carry on business in a just manner is *tapas* and for *shudra*, nurturing the society through production of necessary goods is the *tapas*. But the responsibility of training the different *varnas* for their respective duties is the responsibility of the *brahmana*. History bears witness to the fact that this dharma has been practiced from times immemorial only because of the *brahmana*.

Thus, discourse cannot be limited to a particular *varna* or particular subject or particular time. It is true that a single person cannot conduct discourses for the benefit of all at all times on all subjects. But keeping in view the people of different *varnas* within his periphery, he should impart knowledge to them in accordance with their competence. In this holy land there are people of different sects each devoted to different gods. They may be *Vaishnava*, *Saura*, *Shaiva*, *Shakta*, *Ganapatya* or *Kaumara*. All of them are devotees of God in general. *Sarva deva namaskara Keshavam pratigachhati*. But some



indulge in *tamasik* worship. We have to encourage them to change over to *sattvik* worship, taking due care to see that their devotion to God is not impaired. At the same time we have to ensure that no one develops hatred towards Gods of other faiths. Therefore we have to teach them to install Vishnu, Surya, Shiva, Shakti and Ganapati for their regular ritual worship. This can be made possible through discourses on the *Puranas*. Discourses on the *Puranas* is not necessarily limited to those who are not authorized to study the Vedas. It should be for all the *varnas*. *Shravayet chatur varnam* – all four *varnas* must necessarily be made to hear the *puranas*, says Bhagavan Vyasa. Hence, you have to arrange training in *Shastras* in order to develop scholars and to make them conduct discourses for the benefit of all *varnas*. You have to take pains to collect a band of disciples who are bright, capable and farsighted. You have to be constantly traveling to look out for such people.

In the coming days there is a possibility of the situation getting worse. People of all *varnas* are becoming more and more *tamasik*. It should be your endeavor to stem this rot. All the four of you are enlightened beings. You are no more in need of regular *sadhana* like *shravana*, *manana* and *nidhidhyasana*. Though you have transcended the three *gunas*, you have to resort to *sattva* and engage yourselves in this great task. Let not people think that you are merely devoted to Vedanta. You have to inspire the laymen who are not acquainted with *Shastra* to become actively involved in *sat-karma*. The destruction of *tamoguna* is possible only by being actively engaged in routine karma ordained in the *Shastra*. May you guide the people of the four *varnas* in the path of righteousness. May all *sadhakas* be benefited by you. Now you will adorn the four centers in the four directions of our holy land as *Jagadgurus*.”

As Shankara concluded his speech the four disciples were in tears. They apprehended that the Guru may now be separated from them and this made them sad. Their love for Shankara had overwhelmed even their *Atma Jnana*.

It was time for Shankara to set out for Puri. He approached Bharati Devi and prostrated. But she immediately withdrew and said, “What a travesty this is! I must do *namaskara* to you and not to receive from you.”

“Mother, you are none other than the presiding deity of this place, Sharada Devi. I am your son. Now I have come to take leave of you.”

“When can I expect you back here?”

Shankara simply smiled and started on his journey. She stood unable to speak even a word. She wondered, “I do not know whether he likes me much or does not like me at all. He has remained a riddle till the end. Who is this lad? He has always been busy with some work or other. He has been always travelling. What an enormous pressure of work has he to bear!” She closed her mouth with the border of her sari and cried, “He has conquered my affections more than my son. But to entertain such affection is not right for me. What if it is not right! After all, he is none other than my own soul. That is why this affection. No, it can’t be. This affection is wrong. Therein lies duality. This is not right. Hereafter, I will give up the feeling that I am Bharati and remain steadfast in *Atman*.” Muttering these words to herself, she wiped out her tears. Shankara had by then approached Sureshwaracharya, who immediately rose and did *namaskara*.

Shankara said, “I have come to take leave of you. Hereafter Hastamalaka shall settle down in Puri, Padmapada in Dwaraka and Totaka in Badarinath. Now I have to proceed to Puri.” With these words, he set out with his three disciples, leaving no chance for Sureshwara to reply. The news of his departure was not known to anybody in Sringeri. This was always the case with him. When he reached a place, thousands of people thronged to welcome him. But when he departed, he did so without informing anybody. Three days after Shankara’s departure Bharati Devi expired. Her soul merged in the presiding deity, Sharada Devi.

## CHAPTER 12

### SRINGERI TO PURI

As Shankara's retinue entered Puri, the king there welcomed them with due honours at the gate of the city. The *brahmanas* of the temple of Lord Jagannath chanted Veda mantras. Gongs and drums were sounded. People enthusiastically welcomed the holy men. The king requested Shankara to adorn a palanquin, but Shankara merely touched it and continued to walk. In a spacious open space in front of the palace a meeting was arranged. First the Maharaja performed the ritual worship of Shankara's feet, followed by Prithvidhara's introduction of Shankara to the audience. Shankara then delivered his words of benediction.

From the very next day, classes were started for imparting lessons in Vedas and *Shastras*. During the course of these lectures the assembled scholars raised questions to get their doubts cleared in the light of the *Shastras* they had already studied. The young *sannyasi* as usual gave enlightening replies to clear their doubts. The king was highly impressed with this and invited all the scholars of his kingdom to participate in this program. This was exactly what Shankara had intended.

One day a young man asked a question, "Guruji, why has God created this world?"

"It is for the living beings to enjoy and also to attain salvation. If there is no world, there can be neither enjoyment nor salvation for the living beings."

"Living beings were created long after the world was created. How is it appropriate to say that world is created only for the living beings?"

“That is not right. The living being is neither born nor dies. He always exists. *Na jayate mriyateva kadachit nayam bhutva bhavita vana bhuyan*. Have you not heard these words from the *Bhagawadgita*?”

“I have heard this. But I have not understood it. I thought that the *jiva* did not exist earlier. He will be born newly and he who takes birth necessarily dies.”

“It is not like that. The birth and death of the body is a matter of direct perception. But the *jiva* within is neither born nor dies. The *jiva* is different from the body.”

“How is this possible?”

“Look, you sleep in your house. But in your dream you wander here and there. During that time you will not be able to know even if a snake crawls on your body. Does this not make it clear that you are different from your body?”

“Now it is clear to me. I am indebted to you for this clarification. As it is my own experience, it cannot be denied. But I still have some doubts. Though I am different from the body, I may also take birth newly along with the body.”

“It is not so. The *jiva* always exists. See the reason: Living beings can perform only those tasks which they have already learnt and cannot perform those tasks which they have not learnt. But a newly born baby already knows how to suck its mother’s breast for milk. There was no occasion for it to learn this after being born. You may observe this in the animal world also. Newly hatched lizard knows how to catch a fly without being trained for it, or a newly born scorpion knows how to sting. How could all these happen? It is the case of a transfer of skill developed in the previous births. This establishes that the living being had another body earlier.”

“I still have some doubts. I learn the task I am now performing through this body. The experience of learning is stored in the mind. But when the body dies, the mind also dies with it, as it is a part of that body. Whatever is learnt in the previous birth should necessarily get destroyed along with the body. How can it be transferred to a new body in the next birth?”

“It is a good question. Listen to the reply attentively. This gross body is inert. It has no ability to work independently. The five functional organs get the work done by it. Let us call these five organs, *vaak* – speech. Let us call the five sense organs and the mind, *manas* – mind. Let us call the five *pranas*, *prana*. These three are different from

the body. When these three get some action performed by the body, the action so performed gives rise to a reaction. If it is a good action, the reaction is also good. If it is a bad action, the reaction is also bad. The good reaction destroys the bad reaction and bad reaction destroys the good reaction. As death approaches, man becomes bed-ridden. At this stage, first it is the speech that ceases its function. Before ceasing its function, it collects some of the reactions imprinted on it and transforms them into a conglomerate known as *vagvritti*. Then it merges into the mind, which is still functioning. At that time, the person on his death-bed cannot talk, though he is able to see or hear. Next is the turn of the *manas* – mind. It wraps together a part of the reactions made on it and transforms them again into a collection known as *manovritti*. This *manovritti* ceases its further activity and merges into the *prana*. Further, as in the case of mind and speech, *prana* also collects a part of the reactions on it and forms them into a collection known as *pranavritti* and ceases activity.”

“What is the meaning of *vritti*?”

“*Vagvritti*, *manovritti* and *pranavritti* are the seeds of speech, mind and *prana* in the subsequent body. They determine the characteristics of the next birth. Thus, whatever is inherited from the previous birth is known as *prarabdha karma*.”

“If only a part of the reactions have been passed on to the next birth, what happens to the remaining part?”

“The remnants of these reactions are retained in the speech, mind and *prana*, and get activated in some other future birth. This is known as *sanchita karma*. The *aagami karma* performed in this birth encompasses the *vagvritti*, which in turn encompasses the *manovritti*, and further it follows the *pranavritti*. The *jivatma* is encased in them. Eventually the *pranavritti*, carrying with it the heat of the body, leaves the body through any one of the nine outlets of the body. *Jivatma* also leaves the body with it. The body which was so long beautiful and attractive becomes repulsive. What was hitherto being welcomed by kith and kin now becomes frightful even to the wife:

*Yavatpavano nivasati dehe, tavatpruchati kushalam gehe*

*Gatavativayu deha paye, bharya bhibhyati tasmin kaye*

“Though it is beyond any doubt that a person has to abandon all that he had earned with great effort prompted by irresistible desire; that desire does not abandon him even when he is on his death-bed:

*Angam galitam palitam mundam, dashana viheenam jatam tundam*

*Vriddho yaati grihitva dandam, tadapina munchatyaasha pindam*

“Does he even once think of that Supreme God who always resides within him? Boyhood days are spent in playing. Youthful days are spent in love affairs and old age spent in worries. Not a moment did he spend in thinking of God. What for he lived at all?

*Balastavat kreedasaktah, tarunastavat tarunisaktah*

*Vriddhastavat chintasaktah, parame brahmani ko pinasaktah*

“In each birth, one has different husband, wife, sons or daughters. On every such occasion one develops attachment to that particular family. But later who are they and who is he? What is the meaning of all these attachments?

*Kate kaanta kaste putrah, samsaro yamateeva vichitrah*

*Kasyatvamva kuta aayatah, tatvam chintaya yadidam bhratah*

“Alas! Is this not all that life is about!”

“Then this body is either burnt or buried. But the soul that was occupying this body makes voyage to different worlds carrying with it the accumulated tendencies of the previous births. Those fruits of his karma which he could not enjoy here will have to be enjoyed in those other worlds. To enjoy his good karma, he proceeds to heaven, and for bad karma he has to descend to hell. These good and bad karma are stored in *vak*, *mano* and *prana vrittis*. For experiencing the fruits of those karma he dons a special kind of body known as *aativahika*. Of these good and bad karma the lesser has to be exhausted first and the greater later. After experiencing the good and bad karma this way, he returns to the earth to further experience the remnants of his karma.”

“What is the proof to show that such worlds exist?”

“*Shastra* are the only proof for it. Still, we can infer that such worlds exist. For instance, everyone is aware of the fact that during a dream, a living being undergoes strange experiences in strange places even though separated from the gross body. Similarly, after death, when separated from the gross body, and in union with *vak*, *mano* and *pranavritti*, a person may experience joys and sorrows.”

“But the dream world is mere imagination.”

“Even if the dream world is mere imagination, the joys and sorrows experienced in it are not imaginary. If one has bad dreams, he seeks to get rid of them through some counter measures. Suffice it to say that we cannot wish away these facts by merely calling them imagination.

“Now I will dwell upon the process by which a person returns to this earth. The astral body enters some grain conveyed back to the earth through rain. From thence he has to find a suitable progenitor so that he may get a body which is appropriate for his *vak*, *mano* and *pranavritti*. He may have to wait in order to get the right parent. In the meanwhile if such grain is consumed by some other person, after digestion it is ejected in the form of excreta. After all such wanderings, ultimately he finds the right parent and enters his body. Through him he enters the mother’s body, where his body begins to develop. In the sixth week after conception, the *pranavritti* becomes first active and it is followed by the *manovritti* which gets activated in the eighteenth week. Hence, even in his sojourn in the womb, he experiences joys and sorrows. After nine months when he comes out of the womb his *vagvritti* gets activated. These *vrittis* get activated in the reverse order in which they had merged in one another at the time of death. In accordance with the *pranavritti*, the person becomes masculine, feminine, neuter, healthy or unhealthy. In accordance with the *manovritti*, the person becomes insane, dull, average, brilliant or a yogi. Further, in keeping with the *vagvritti*, one acquires dumbness, stammering, ability to converse well or reticence. Having acquired such qualities at the time of birth, he grows up and in this process every individual grows up to be a unique person with unique features. Thus it is evident that the unique features of an individual are a result of his karma. As he grows up, he once again indulges in karma which are good, bad and indifferent. Accordingly he acquires tendencies and *vritti* and gets caught in the cycle of birth and death:

*Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam, punarapi janani jathare shayanam*

*Iha samsare bahu dustare, krupaya pare pahi murare*

“The only way out of this endless cycle is to strive for the grace of God. If this is not done, all our life will be spent in mindless adventure which is nothing but an exercise

in futility. Once I saw a ninety year old man trying to learn some grammar sutra. This is an instance of that mindless adventure. Now let us all sing:

*Bhaja Govindam bhaja Govindam, Govindam bhaja mudha mate*

*Samprapte sannihite kale, nahi nahi rakshati dukrunkarane*

Everyone recited it with devotion. The prayer ended. Still nobody left the place. There was profound silence. They slowly got up, did *namaskara* to the Guru and quietly departed.

One day, he gave an in-depth exposition of Dharma which touched the heart of every scholar present. By the way, he made a proposal to establish the Eastern centre at Puri for protection of that Dharma. He also introduced Hastamalakacharya to the audience. The Maharaja fully endorsed the proposal and promulgated an edict for its establishment. The concerned officials conferred with Prithvidhara and took necessary steps to carry out the order of the Maharaja. Very soon the centre was established. Shankara then initiated Prithvidhara into *sannyasa* and leaving Hastamalakacharya there, continued his journey to Dwaraka with the other disciples. Hastamalakacharya settled in Puri as planned earlier.



## CHAPTER 13

### PURI TO DWARAKA

Dwaraka was not a new place for Shankara. The disciples of Govinda Bhagawatpada had already started their mission there. Having the *darshan* of Shankara after nearly twelve long years made the people ecstatic with joy. The establishment of the Western *Pitha* at Dwaraka was accomplished with ease. Padmapadacharya became the Jagadguru of the Western *Pitha*. In the next lap of his journey to Somnath he was accompanied by only two of his disciples. A large gathering received him there. Shankara decided to halt there for sometime. He was invited for *bhiksha* by several people. But he had no time to visit every house. So, he had to choose. Shankara said to his disciples, “Tomorrow we shall visit Yajneswara Dikshita’s house for alms. He has a grandson named Devala. He is about 15 years old now. When we go there, you have to watch him.”

The next day all the three reached Yajneswara Dikshita’s house. After performing the ritual washing of Shankara’s feet, Yajneswara invited the other two also. But the other two did not accept that honour. Instead they washed their own feet and entered the house. Seeing that three leaves were spread for serving food, they asked two leaves to be removed, saying that they would take their food after the Guru had finished and they would partake their meals with others. Yajneswara said,

“We have grown up under the rule of *mlechas*. We are not aware of the holy tradition. Please pardon me.”

After the Guru was served food, it was the turn of others to have it. Prithvidhara asked Devala to sit by his side. But he did not agree. He wanted to serve them food and take his meal after all the guests were fed. But all except Prithvidhara and Padmapada got up and waited until those two had their food. In the third round, the others had their

food. Through this incident Prithvidhara and Padmapada came to be acquainted with Devala.

After food Shankara spoke a few words of advice to all those assembled there. Devala had some questions to ask. “Guruji, in Mahabharata, Bhishma, while lying on a bed of arrows, preached the essence of Dharma to Yudhistira. But the same Bhishma, even on seeing Draupadi's *chira-haran*, remained a mute spectator. Was that right or wrong?”

“Devala, that was not the only occasion when he was mute. He remained silent on many such occasions. That was certainly not right. But your question is, how can such a person teach the essence of dharma. He had the knowledge of dharma. He had renounced worldly pleasures. He was a brilliant thinker. But it was a grave error on his part to decide the question of Dharma partially, while applying it to himself. Still, he was not an *adharmi*. It was fate which made him commit such blunders. Therefore, his faults are not to be emulated, though his teachings are worth following. Have you not heard the saying *yanyasmakagam sucharitani tani tvayopasyani no itarani*?”

“I have another question. In the case of Rama and Bhishma, both sacrificed for their father, and Bhishma's sacrifice was more intense than that of Rama. In spite of it Rama is held as the mode of obedience to father and not Bhishma. Why is it so?”

“Bhishma's sacrifice only helped *adharma*. On the other hand, Rama's sacrifice led to the triumph of dharma. We may defend by saying that Bhishma's fault was due to destiny. Had it not been committed, wicked people would not have been eliminated totally. Nevertheless, his fault was a fault indeed. Therefore, Bhishma cannot be an exemplar of obedience to father.”

“I have another question. Vishwamitra was an expert in archery. What is the delicate point of dharma in his bringing Rama and Lakshmana, though they were still boys, to overcome Maricha and Subahu?”

“Viswamitra was a *Brahmana*. He is forbidden from taking up arms. It is the duty of a *Kshatriya* to protect the sacrificial fire.”

“What happens when the king is incapable of performing that task?”

“In such an unavoidable circumstance, *brahmana* also can take up arms. People of all *varnas* can also take up arms.”

“Even when Dasharatha offered his services for the protection of the *yajna*, why did Vishwamitra insist on taking Rama and Lakshmana?”

“Vishwamitra was endowed with foresight. He knew that though Dasharatha could overcome Maricha and Subahu, he would not be able to face the serious consequences that were bound to arise, as it would not stop at that. A *Brahmana* should have such foresight.”

“If *brahmanas* are allowed to take up arms, was taking up arms by Kripa, Drona and Aswathama right?”

“It cannot be right because they aligned themselves with *adharma*. A *brahmana* can take up arms only either in self defense or when the king is incapable of protecting dharma.”

“How is the question of Dharma and *adharma* decided?”

“It is a complicated question. It has to be deliberated upon and decided. Still I will explain it in brief. *Moksha* is the final aim of life. Any karma that proves to be an impediment in pursuing the path of *moksha*, either for oneself or others, either directly or indirectly, either now or later is to be considered as *adharma*. On the other hand, any karma that facilitates that path is dharma. The deeper you contemplate over this statement clearer will be your conception of dharma.”

“This is my dharma or *adharma* is decided relative to *moksha*. What if one holds *moksha* itself relative to something else?”

“First of all learn that *moksha* is not relative to anything. *Moksha* is to get established in one’s own true identity. It is everlasting bliss which is unsurpassed. As it is the ultimate desire of everyone, it is also the ultimate aim of life. Further, one’s true identity is not different for different beings. Ultimately the true identity of all is the same. Therefore, it cannot be relative. It is absolute. When one gets confused about one’s true identity, and gets veiled in a false identity, one goes after the mirage of worldly happiness. It certainly is relative. It is also conditioned by various factors. It is something to be achieved through desire. It can be had only with tiresome effort. Attaining such happiness only further whets desire, ultimately ending in sorrow. It is true that scratching when it itches gives happiness of a sort. But no sensible person would invite itch just to get the happiness of scratching. Nor does he want that itch to remain uncured. Therefore,

desire for sensual happiness is not what a person with discrimination entertains. On the other hand, bliss of liberation is natural. It is not something to be gained with painful effort. It is absolutely free from sorrow.”

“Guruji, I want to study these things deeply. How can I proceed?”

“Read Ramayana, Mahabharata and the *smriti* of Manu and others. Whenever you have any doubt, consult Prithvidharacharya and Padmapadacharya. Padmapada will have his headquarters at Dwaraka and he will be traveling in the western parts. Prithvidhara will be visiting this place often, though he may not stay here. Pursue your studies deeply.”

“I have been studying *smriti*. But their application seems difficult.”

“At certain points it may be difficult. At the present also there are such difficulties. Special circumstances call for special remedies. But the one who prescribes such remedies must have deeply studied the *shastra*. He must be non-violent and one who adheres to dharma. He must show equanimity and impartiality in his treatment of others. Devala, mind these words and proceed further in your studies. May you progress in your endeavor<sup>42</sup>.”

Yajneshwara Dikshita’s joy knew no bounds. He embraced his grandson and said, “Devala, you have been blessed by Lord Parameswara.” Old memories filled his mind and his eyes were filled with tears.

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<sup>42</sup> This Devala became a *smritikara* in later days.

## CHAPTER 14

### DWARAKA TO BADARINATH

*Dharma Peethas* were now established in the East, the West and the South. The task of establishing it in the North, in Badarinath, yet remained. Shankara continued his journey northwards with Totaka and Prithvidhara. They had to travel through deserts, forests and cross mountains. Except for temples and choultries here and there, they had to take shelter in caves or dilapidated old mandaps. As they traveled away from villages, the only food they had was the dry *rotis* they had procured from the previous villages. This was the third time that Shankara was traversing the Himalayan region starting from the *sethu* in the extreme south. Why had the Lord to take this trouble? It was because of protecting dharma. If we had not swerved from the path of Dharma the Lord would have been spared this trouble. By violating Dharma, what a serious crime we have committed! Curse on our lust, on our lethargy and our short-sightedness! We have lost even the ability to know that we are transgressing Dharma. Still we are under the illusion that we are very wise. What a misfortune!

At one place, Totaka was carrying Shankara's clothes for washing. He was shocked to see blood stains on those clothes. After cleaning and washing those clothes, he informed Prithvidhara about it. Both decided that Shankara needed rest for sometime. Totaka administered some medicines but they had no effect. After examining Shankara, they came to the conclusion that the Guru was suffering from *vayu dosha*, which in turn resulted in constipation and piles. The ingredient of the medicines was a preparation made from ghee, which could not be made in the forest. They had to get it from some village. Hence they halted for treatment on their way in the nearest village. It took sometime to procure the necessary ingredients of the medicine. All this time Shankara was bedridden, suffering intense pain. Even after procuring the necessary herbs, there were no facilities for preparing the medicine. Still, with the help of the villagers the

medicine was prepared. Totaka rinsed a thread of cotton in the juice extracted from one of the herbs and treated the fissures caused by piles. They also administered some oral medicine and made the Guru lie down and take rest. After nearly a month of treatment, Shankara regained his health. The two disciples heaved a sigh of relief.

Prithvidhara remarked, “I was under the impression that this malady was caused by some sorcery practiced on Guruji.”

“No Prithvidhara, just as the curse of a foolish *brahmana* had no effect on Lord Krishna, no sorcery can work on our divine Guru,” said Totaka.

“Then could it be the effect of some past karma?”

“What is the meaning of past karma for Lord Shiva?”

“Then what else could be the reason?”

“It is the effect of the bodily karma performed during this life.”

“What bodily karma do you mean?”

“It is his incessant travel. By now Guruji is about thirty one years old. He left his home in his eighth year, which means that he has been traveling for 23 years without rest. He has also been tiring his faculty of speech. Both of these have contributed to the increase of *vatha*. Whatever be the cause, it is a great relief now that he has been cured.”

The journey continued. All along the way, Thotaka had been administering the medicine without fail. At last the journey ended. All the three reached Badari. The Northern *Peetha* was established under the supervision of Brahmadatta. Totakacharya became the Jagadguru of this *peetha*. The young men of Kerala, who had been sent here by Shankara, had come with their wives and taken charge of their work in the temple. They had also started the program of the study of Vedas for the benefit of the *brahmana* boys of the surrounding villages. There was a renewed enthusiasm in town.

As on the previous occasion, even now Shankara’s residence was in the cave. On a day of respite from studies, he was sitting alone in the cave. It was nearing sunset. A venerable old man entered the cave. He was dressed in saffron clothes and was wearing a garland of *rudraksha*. His copper *kamandal* was shining in the light of the setting sun. His brilliant eyes radiated peace. Shankara immediately rose, prostrated and had him seated and then stood before him with folded hands. He asked Shankara to be seated and then said,

“Shankara, I heard that learned men have highly admired your commentary on the three basic scriptures. I have come to see you. I have heard that you have written a commentary on my writings on the Mandukya Upanishad.”

On hearing these words it became clear to Shankara that the venerable visitor was none other than Gaudapadacharya. Shankara fell at his feet and did not rise for a considerable time. On being made to rise, Shankara said with all humility,

“*Bhagawan*, some *punya* has given me now the good fortune of having your *darshan*. This is the commentary on your writings. Please touch it with your blessed hands and give it to me.” Gaudapada touched the commentary and placed it aside and said,

“Shankara, I cannot stay for long. I want to know just this. The scriptures give the mud-pot example for Atman-World relation. But, I have used the rope-serpent example. Tell me how you have reconciled these two comparisons.”

“*Bhagawan*, the pot with transactions is not free from mud, but there is no transaction in mud. Briefly, there is mud in the pot, but no pot in the mud. Similarly, there is *Brahman* in *Jagat* and not *Jagat* in *Brahman*. Further, *Atman* is *Brahman*. So the former half of the sentence implies *Sarvatma Bhava* i.e. the realization that himself is everything. The latter half is experienced in the dreamless sleep. Still a doubt arises in the mind of the seeker that the world is visible. How can we say that it does not exist? To clarify this perplexing doubt, you have given the instance of serpent and rope and its application is as follows. When we say that the world is visible, if we consider it to be different from the seer, that is the *Atman*, then it is wrong. It is so because, there can be nothing other than the *Atman*. If still one raises the doubt that the world is visible, the world that is seen is an illusion like the serpent that appears in the rope, i.e. the illusory knowledge of the rope. Similarly, *Jagat* is the illusory knowledge of *Atman*. But the visibility of *Jagat* is a fact. Therefore, the right knowledge is that though it is not different, it appears to be different, just as the knowledge that the rope appears to be what it is not – a different serpent. Such knowledge is right knowledge. Similarly, though the world appears to be different from one’s own self, it is not so. It is *Atman*. Thus the instance of mud and the pot is applied when cause and effect relation is under

consideration. When the identity of *Atman* and *Brahman* is under consideration, the instance of serpent and the rope given by you becomes relevant.”

On hearing this clarification, Gaudapada was immensely pleased. He spoke at last, “Shankara, you have rightly grasped my intended meaning. By the by, one of the tasks to be accomplished by you is this. In Kashmir there is the celebrated *Sarvajna Peetha*, which is located in the temple of Goddess Sharada. The arrogant learned men of that place pose a challenge to anyone who attempts to adorn that seat by challenging him for a debate. It is appropriate that you adorn that seat. If you succeed in that no one will be foolish to criticize your commentary. For the last many centuries, nobody has made bold to occupy that seat. Face the challenge of those adversaries and be successful.” He blessed Shankara with these words and disappeared.



## CHAPTER 15

### BADARINATH TO KASHMIR

Shankara seriously contemplated over the parting words of Gaudapada for quite sometime even after the latter had left the cave. Then he came out and spoke to Totaka and Prithvidhara about it. Prithvidhara agreed with the advice of Gaudapada and said,

“Guruji, there is not even a single shortcoming in your commentary which needs to be pruned, nor is there any matter of virtue that needs to be added. Still, in course of time, it is not unlikely that some people who are unable to comprehend the significance of your commentary will try to pick holes in it by interpreting it narrowly. If you succeed in winning the honor of occupying the *Sarvajna Peetha*, no one will dare to do so. Therefore, it is necessary that you go to Kashmir and achieve this unique distinction.”

Accordingly, all three set out for Kashmir. They reached the temple of Goddess Sharada and had *darshan*. Prithvidhara enquired about the *Sarvajna Peetha*, and the president of the temple opened a big door, showing him a throne studded with precious stones. The dazzling throne almost blinded the three visitors. The president described to them the history of the celebrated *Peetha* in all its details. Prithvidhara then said to the president,

“Now a learned man has come to ascend this *Peetha*. How should he proceed?”

The president, in turn, said, “I thought you were visitors interested in merely seeing the *Peetha*. I feel happy as well as surprised with your words. It is really a matter of pride and honor for me that such an event is going to take place in my lifetime. But it is difficult to make arrangements for it at such a short notice. The pundits of Kashmir have to be informed. It takes at least two weeks for this to be done, as they are in different parts of Kashmir. Please give me the details of the person intending to ascend the *Peetha* and I will send letters to all the learned men.”

The letter which Prithvidhara wrote ran thus:

‘Born in Kerala, having been initiated into *sanyasa* at the age of eight, having completed the study of all the *shastras* by the age of sixteen and having written the commentaries on the ten Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita and Brahma Sutras, Shankara Bhagavatpada is now of thirty-one years of age. Having been directed by the Venerable Gaudapada to undertake this task of ascending the *Sarvajna Peetha*, he has come here to Srinagar. It is our firm belief that there is no scholar, living or yet to be born, who has the ability to defeat him in debate. If there is any such person, he may come forward to hold a debate with him here. Shankaracharya is ready to face him.’

The learned men of Kashmir were naturally provoked on perusing this challenging letter, and arrived at the venue of the debate with their respective troupe of disciples. What gorgeous robes had they adorned themselves in! What dazzling rings studded with precious stones did they adorn their fingers with ! What multicolored turbans adorned their heads! Their foreheads painted with marks of their sects they entered the venue laughing disdainfully at the one who had dared to challenge them. Shankara, Prithvidhara and Totaka viewed the descending army of pundits and just smiled.

The debate began the next day.

The first encounter was with a Buddhist scholar. He declared that he was a Buddhist and then asked Shankara, “If you are a *sarvajna*, tell me what philosophy I uphold.”

Shankara, in turn, asked him, “Tell me first whether you are a nihilist or a *vijnanavadi* or a *sarvastitvavadi*. If you are nihilist, you are not at all present here. Neither are you talking to me, nor is there a *Sarvajna Peetha* here. All is naught. Hence it is no use talking to you. Tell me what you are.”

“I am not a nihilist. I am a *sarvastitvavadi*.”

“According to your doctrine, the world constituted out of four elements, the earth and so on, exists. You maintain that the constituent atoms and the ego are physical. Your doctrine further holds that all activities are carried on by these constituents. But this is wrong because the atoms have no consciousness. They are inert. They cannot create a body. Without a body there can be no functioning of ego.”

“I maintain that they can function. From a seed, there comes the sapling, leaves, stem, branches, flower and fruit. All these are inert. Similarly, *avidya*, *samskara*, *vijnana*, *jagat*, *sharira*, awareness and *dukha* arise in that order.”

“Your assertion of cause and effect is invalid because you believe in the doctrine of momentariness. Therefore, you cannot relate precedent moment to antecedent moment by assigning cause and effect relation. Then, your statement that the world is an effect of certain causes also falls flat. You also maintain that the effect does not arise unless the cause is destroyed. To illustrate it you give the example of the birth of the mango tree by the destruction of its seed. If it is so, then a mango tree must be born out of the destruction of tamarind seed also, as there is no difference between the destruction of the two, both being *abhava*. Explain why a mango tree does not take birth from the absence of tamarind seed or else you get out of this place,” thundered Shankara. He quickly folded up his turban and left the place.

The next contender claimed that he was a *vijnanavadi*.

Shankara asked him, “Will you explain what your doctrine is or shall I do it?”

As he had witnessed the defeat of his predecessor, he was rather subdued. He said, “I will explain my doctrine. You may question me later. *Sarvastitwavada* was not the doctrine preached by Buddha. He preached *vijnanavada* which can be explained thus: The awareness of a material object includes the shape of that object. If one asks why there are different perceptions, the answer is – these arise out of the strange mental impressions accumulated from times immemorial.”

“Your argument is faulty. Though the awareness of a thing includes the shape of the thing, it does not include the thing itself. The material object is separate from the awareness of that object. This is how it is: If the pot you are seeing is not different from its awareness, how does a blind man become aware of the pot?”

“He comes to know of it through the sensation of touch.”

“Then the eye is the testimony for the knowledge of the visible pot that is outside. For the same pot, for the feeling of touch, skin is the testimony. Thus it becomes clear that the same object has different characters, and each character needs a different testimony for perception. Thus the awareness of the object being the result of a

testimony, how can you hold that the knowledge of the object and the object are the same?”

“After all, in a dream, one becomes aware of an object even though there is no object there.”

“But that contention is not valid. The manifestations in a dream depend on the *buddhi*. On the other hand, during waking state, *buddhi* depends on the outward manifestation. Therefore, it is absurd to try to prove that what holds good in a dream also holds good in the waking state. A friend, seen in a dream to be alive, may actually be dead, and one who is actually alive may be seen to be dead in a dream. There is another aspect. The one who views the *vasana* in a dream must necessarily be different from those *vasanas*. The one who can distinguish the *vasana* and sensory objects of the waking state corresponding to them must be eternal. Your doctrine of momentariness prevents you from entertaining any idea of an eternal knower. This is a great lacuna in your doctrine.”

On hearing this the *vijnanavadi* was thrown into a state of confusion. Wondering whether he should, unlike his ancestors, use his discretion and abandon Buddhism and return to the religion of the Veda and continue to live in Bharata or stubbornly hold on to it and leave the country. He left the venue of the debate crestfallen. At least, at that moment, everyone noticed that he left the venue. But nobody knew what happened to him later. The news of the defeat of the Buddhist scholar spread in the city and its surrounding villages. Now a large number of people thronged the venue and the place was jam-packed. It was a different matter whether the audience understood or not the arguments and counter-arguments. But the retreat of each adversary of Shankara was greeted with loud applause.

It was now the turn of a Jain scholar. Shankara confronted him with the following argument, “Your religion postulates objects *Jiva*, *Ajiva* and others. All these are subject to the doctrine of *Sapta Bhangi nyaya*, viz. *syadasti*, *syannasti*, *syadasticha*, *nasticha*, *syadavyaktah*, *syadasticha vaktavyascha*, *syannasticha vaktavyascha* and *syadasticha nasticha avaktavyascha*<sup>43</sup>. How can two contradictory aspects of the same thing appear

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<sup>43</sup> Syat = somehow in one view; asti = is; na = is not; vaktavya = describable; avaktavya = not describable; cha = and.

simultaneously? Even if it appears so, it can only lead to doubtful knowledge and not comprehensive knowledge. Similarly, *vaktavya* and *avaktavya* become mutually contradictory. Further, your doctrine postulates the *jiva* to be of the same dimension as the body that encases it. This is also wrong because then the *jiva* also becomes impermanent as the pot.”

The Jain pundit was left with no answer. Next came a Pashupata. According to his religion, God is a mere instrument for the creation. *Prakriti* is the material cause. Further, *Prakriti*, *Purusha* and *Ishwara* are separate entities and *Ishwara* is just the *Purusha* with a special aspect. Shankara pointed out the defect in this doctrine, “*Ishwara* will have to have love and hatred because he creates beings which are inferior, superior and ordinary.”

He countered this contention with the argument, “What if karma is the cause of this?”

“If so, you will be obliged to admit that *Ishwara* and karma are related, as motivator and motivating agent. This suffers from the error of mutual dependence. Further, according to your doctrine, *Purusha* is indifferent. Hence he cannot perform any karma. Then, without karma, how could *Ishwara* give birth to him?”

The next adversary was a follower of the school of *tarka*. He also believed in the theory that *Ishwara* is the instrument of creation and that *Prakriti*, *Purusha* and *Ishwara* are different. Pashupatas and Vaisheshikas also depend on this logic. Shankara queried him,

“According to your doctrine, for *Ishwara* to take hold of *Prakriti* and perform the act of creation, He should be embodied. But body comes into existence only as a result of creation. Therefore, your *Ishwara* cannot be the instrument of creation. On the other hand, if you postulate that *Ishwara* possesses the body before creation, you will have to accept enjoyership for him. Then there will be no difference between *Purusha* and *Ishwara*.”

Many more contenders retreated unable to meet the objections raised by Shankara. The last to be engaged was a *Sankhya*. He put forward his doctrine opposing the principle laid down in the Vedas that Brahman is the material cause of the universe.

“Pot and other inert objects are caused by other inert materials like the earth. Similarly the inert *Pradhana* is the material cause for the *Jagat*.”

“Without the support of a *chetana*, *Pradhana* cannot become active. *Pradhana* cannot cause the universe independently.”

“How about flow of water, where there is no *chetana*?”

“But, for water to flow there needs to be a slope. Have you not observed men creating a slope to facilitate the flow of water?”

“If you insist on the necessity of the support of *chetana*, there is *Purusha* who is endowed with *chetana*.”

“But according to your doctrine, *Purusha* is indifferent. He is neither a motivator nor demotivator.”

“Suppose the *Purusha* is like the indifferent magnetic needle which induces action in iron nails?”

“This motivation happens because of proximity. If this is accepted, the proximity of *Purusha* to *Pradhana* being eternal, creation also becomes eternal. There will be no scope for its destruction. This is contrary to the existing order.”

“Your doctrine also postulates that *Ishwara* is indifferent. How do you reconcile that?”

“Listen to me! It is established by the testimony of *Shruti* that *Ishwara*, in His true identity, is devoid of action. But coupled with *Maya*, He induces action.”

“If you postulate *Maya* with *Ishwara*, you too become a dualist like us.”

“Listen, *Maya* is not different from *Ishwara*. It is His energy.”

The *Sankhya* expert also thus being defeated, the debate came to an end. People who had assembled to witness the debate shouted slogans hailing the victory of Shankara, invoking the blessings of Goddess Sharada. The president of the temple came to Shankara and led him to the *Sarvajna Peetha* – the seat of the omniscient. As Shankara was about to ascend the first step with his right foot, a Goddess appeared on the topmost step and holding her palm against Shankara, shouted,

“Stop! You are forbidden from ascending this seat. I am the presiding Goddess of this seat. It is not enough that the person intending to ascend this seat is an

unparalleled scholar. He must also be of pure character. You, though a *sannyasi*, entered the body of another and had contact with a woman. You have no place here.”

“Mother, was it a householder or a *sannyasi* who made that contact?”

“Though it was a householder who indulged in that contact, in reality it was the *sannyasi* who was inside.”

“Gender, *varna* and *ashrama* are only for the gross body and not for the subtle body. *Shastras* declare that the same subtle body gets different gross bodies depending upon the karma.”

“One’s *samskara* is in accordance with one’s karma. This *samskara* manifests itself in the *buddhi*. Is it not wrong on the part of the *buddhi* which has the *samskara* of a *sannyasi* to enter the body of a householder?”

“Mother, if pure water in a vessel is poured into an impure vessel, the pure water becomes impure. But remember that I entered a dead body which had no *buddhi* at all. Therefore I have not become impure. Moreover, the subtle body has no connection with the gross body. Sulabha was not been polluted even though she entered the body of Janaka while arguing. Or, Uttanaka was not polluted when he entered the body of his guru’s wife to protect her from Indra. It is not just that. *Ishwara*, while performing the act of creation, though He enters the *Jivatma*, does not become polluted. Then how did I become polluted on entering the dead body?”

“The *samskara* of contact with a woman affects the *buddhi*. Your reentering the *sannyasi* body with that *buddhi* makes you polluted.”

“Oh Mother, if that *samskara* persisted in me, I would not have returned to this body. After returning, if Bharati Devi had insisted on my replying to her question, and, if I had replied, then probably I would have contacted the pollution of talking about that subject. But she was farsighted enough not to press me for an answer. By myself I did not refer to it at all. Above all, if that *samskara* had persisted in me, I could not have had your *darshan* now.”

At this exchange of words, the Goddess laughed and said, “My son Shankara, the fact that you are above any such pollution and are born to revive Dharma are not matters that I do not know. Winning over Mandana with all possible means was absolutely necessary in achieving the noble purpose of reviving Dharma. In order to bring to light

your unparalleled scholarship, it was inevitable for Bharati Devi to pose a question on *Kama Shastra* and for you to enter the dead body to answer that question, being prompted by destiny. I conducted this argument only to make all this known to the world at large. You have won even this test. Now come, ascend the throne.”

Shankara ascended the throne step by step and adorned the *Sarvajna Peetha*. There was all round applause. Drums, gongs and bugles were sounded. Conches were blown. Slogans hailing the victory of Shankara filled the air. Goddess Sharada blessed him.

The congregation was thrilled to see the Goddess appearing in person to bless Shankara. They all shouted in ecstasy,

“What a miracle! How fortunate are we!”

As the Goddess withdrew her hand from Shankara’s head, she disappeared. Without stopping there even for a moment, Shankara walked away from the venue towards the east with Totaka and Prithvidhara.



## CHAPTER 16

### KASHMIR TO KAILASHA

The three halted in a village on the way. It was a small hamlet with about one hundred houses. A temple there provided them shelter. Nearby, there was a rivulet. They stayed there for two or three days. One evening, the temple priest finished the evening *puja* and filled the lamps with sufficient oil to last the whole night and left for home. Shankara called the two disciples near him and said,

“Please sit down. I have to speak to you about certain important matters. Listen to me carefully. I have often said that for attaining *moksha*, peace and restraint in the society is a necessary condition. But now the peace is getting disturbed. Firstly it is due to the Buddhists and secondly due to the invasion of the *mlechas*. Look at the Buddhists. Twelve or thirteen centuries ago the Buddha said something. There is no certainty about what he said. Now what his followers are saying has to be taken as what he preached. But those followers are propounding contradictory doctrines in the name of Buddha. But each of those doctrines has been refuted. Still, one thing is certain. Buddha was opposed to the Vedas and the *Varnashrama* Dharma. Because of this fault his followers became traitors to the society. All along they helped the invaders. But by God’s grace, kings like Pushyamitra have put them down. Still there are some so-called scholars as well as common people who have been taken in by the colorful words of peace and non-violence preached by Sugata. The task of reclaiming them to *Sanatana Dharma* still remains to be accomplished. But my fear is that even in future people like Sugata may spread many fallacious doctrines. It may not be so damaging if, like the *Sankhyas*, they try to spread

their doctrines keeping themselves within the ambit of the Vedas. That will not result in people becoming traitors. At least, like Jains, if they indulge in their own fanciful ideas, there will be no harm. But subverting the Vedic tradition is highly damaging.”

Prithvidhara interjected, “I find an impediment in reforming the followers of Sugata.”

“What is the impediment?”

“It is true that there is a lot of difference between the nihilistic doctrine or *vijnanavadi* doctrine and the doctrine propounded in the Vedas that the realization of the identity of the Atman with Brahman results in the negation of the *jagat*. But those who are not sharp enough to discern this difference think that Sugata is not opposed to the Vedas and thereby continue as his followers. To prevent this, will it not be better if *Sagunopasana* of the Almighty alone is promoted among the people?”

“That may not work. If people come to know that the Vedas speak of *Nirguna Paramatma*, people may think that the two aspects are contradictory, and they may lose faith in the Vedas. Then they may embrace Sugata’s doctrine more easily. Therefore, it is not the right course of action. We have to place before the people the comprehensive view of the Vedas. We must also teach them to choose what suits their grasp. It is what the *Puranas* and *Itihasas* do.”

Prithvidhara had another suggestion, “The Buddhists have organized their *sangha* and thus Buddhism spread rapidly. Why should we not also organize *sangha* for the propagation of the message of the Vedas?”

“By organizing a *sangha*, the purpose of uniting the society cannot be achieved. It only adds one more sect to the already existing number of sects. Look at the Buddhists. There are four or five sects. Even among the Jains, there are sects. All man-made divisions are bound to decay in the course of time. *Yajjatan tanmartyam* – death is inevitable for anything that is born. Those who are incapable of looking after even their own wellbeing can hardly achieve anything that is good for the society. God Almighty has designed an eternal system which takes care of the wellbeing of everybody. And that is the *Varnashrama Dharma*. The fact that the tradition of the Vedas has survived from times immemorial is itself proof that it is God Almighty’s design.”

“But now the very *varnashrama dharma* is on the decline. How can it be explained?”

“It may be on the decline, but it will not get destroyed. It is the dharma and *tapas* of the *brahmana* to stem this decline by resorting to the study of the scriptures and propagating their message. The society looks up to the *brahmanas* for guidance. Therefore, it is imperative to protect *brahmana* dharma. A *brahmana* has to cultivate the qualities of sacrifice, learning, forbearance, farsightedness and courage, as well as friendliness towards the entire society. Let your aim be to prepare such *brahmanas*.”

“What should be our immediate plan of action? How should we proceed?”

“Immediately you have to counter religious conversion. First you must find out how anyone, whoever he may be, is able to convert our people. A considerable section of our society consists of innocent people. They get misled by the deceptive words of wicked people. This is the reason for the increase in the number of people who ridicule the Vedas. Look at how Buddhists deceive the people. They arrange some innocent people to sit in front of a wall and tell them to ask questions and say that Buddha is going to answer them. When they ask some question, somebody sitting behind the wall answers them. This is sufficient to convert them to Buddhism. Further, you know the kind of deception practiced by the Christians in Kerala. But, if even such credulous people are in contact with a *brahmana*, they are not likely to fall into such traps. Therefore the *brahmana* should never be out of reach of such innocent people. Now, how did those credulous people become victims of such deception? It is because of indifference to the tradition of Vedas, or it may be because of certain incentives offered as bait. How did even some intelligent people become victims? It is because they did not properly understand the message of the Vedas. The solution for such people is to teach them the message of the Vedas properly. In the case of the intelligent, interest in karma (ritualistic worship) should be encouraged. But in the case of the innocent people, it is enough if loving contact is maintained.”

“In the case of conversions done by Muslims, there is cruelty, and not deceit. How should we counteract it?”

“There are two aspects of this problem. First, the cruelty has to be countered. This has to be done directly and mainly by the rulers. The role of the common people is

only secondary. But it is the duty of the *brahmana* to guide the rulers in performing their duties. If there is no king to counteract this cruelty, the *brahmana* who is capable may pick up arms and take the lead. Pushyamitra is an example of such action. When he became the unchallenged emperor of this country, we hear that Patanjali, the authority on yoga, made him perform *Ashwamedha* sacrifice. But a *brahmana* should take up arms only in exceptional situations which call for exceptional solutions.”

“What is the other part of this problem?”

“We have to reconvert those who have been subjected to cruelty by conversion. Even the tyrannical *mllecha* king will become weak eventually as he is also subject to the law of nature and cannot survive forever. We must look for a suitable opportunity and bring back those converted under the threat of cruelty. But even though those victims express a desire to come back to our fold, traditionalists and orthodox people oppose it. This is a very complicated problem. Therefore, those who prescribe a way out of this problem should be scholars of very high order having an exemplary character. They should be of such high caliber that nobody would be bold enough to oppose them. They should make a suitable arrangement of expiation for those converts and bring them back to the society. While devising such a program of expiation, they should give due consideration to the nature of violation of the rules of conduct. For which violation what is the expiation and how much? Up to how many generations under conversions, re-conversion can be done? Whether the one to be re-converted is born to a *mllecha* or to another convert? – these are the questions which need deep consideration in this context. Though a person be endowed with sharp intellect, such questions cannot be answered only through worldly considerations.”

“What points should we consider for those converted as in the case of Kerala Christians?”

“Whatever has been explained above applies to them also. In addition, they should be introduced to some knowledge of *Shastra*, depending on their ability to understand. *Shastras* explain the nature and magnitude of the sin, the circumstances under which the sin was committed and other connected matters. They should be made to know that a sin committed due to deception is very little. This gives them an assurance that they are not irretrievably fallen people. Prithvidhara, in this connection remember

Devala of Saurashtra. Do you remember the subjects discussed with him that day? See that he progresses further in his knowledge. There are possibilities that he may achieve great things.”

Another day Totaka had fallen asleep. Talking to Prithvidhara, Shankara said, “Prithvidhara, you have a great responsibility. There are a number of disciples of the venerable Govinda Bhagavatpada and disciples of such disciples. You must seek their cooperation in bringing all the *sannyasis* together in a unified order and give them guidance. At present the four centers established in four directions will carry on their programs in their respective areas. As this country is vast, these four *Jagadgurus* may not be able to meet periodically to confabulate. Therefore, you must utilize the occasion of the *Kumbha Mela* for this purpose. The *sanyasis*, in keeping with their abilities, should visit forests, hilly areas, river banks, sea shores, towns and villages and try to revive the tradition of the Vedas in the whole country. Different sections of the population have different abilities. Hence each section needs to be taught different aspects of the same tradition. The method of teaching them also differs. Therefore, *sanyasis* with appropriate knowledge should be positioned in different places. Whenever there is a congregation of *sanyasis* during the *Kumbha Mela*, there should be discourses on *Purva Mimamsa*, *Sharirika Mimamsa*, *Puranas*, *Itihasa* and *Smritis*. There should also be discourses on the contemporary situation of dharma. Guidance should be given to the masses during these congregations in such a way as to perpetuate the foundation of the tradition of the Vedas. It should remain intact even though with the changing circumstances different problems arise. Do you understand what I say? Have you anything to ask?”

“*Bhagawan*, I see only darkness all around. Can we expect to succeed in this endeavour?”

“Prithvidhara remember, a person who takes up a mission must have self-confidence. He cannot succeed without it. Let your enthusiasm not abate. Do not worry that there are no people to assist us. *Kriyasiddhihi sattve bhavati mahatma nopakarane* – here *sattva* is nothing but enthusiasm. One who has enthusiasm can achieve even the impossible. By merely watching your enthusiasm, others also become enthusiastic. Above all, one who works with the expectation of its fruit is only a miser. The fruit of an

action is not within the control of the doer. It is under *Ishwara*'s control. It depends on time, place and a trigger. Therefore, to work with enthusiasm alone should be your aim. If we desire the fruit of our karma, we will have to take another birth to enjoy its fruit. Hence, one who does not want the births to repeat, should not have desire for fruit. A *tapas* performed will never go in vain. Though the fruit of such *tapas* may not be attained within the present life span of the *tapasvi*, it is bound to be attained. Let it take its own time. At any rate, dharma will not be destroyed. It may have its ups and downs. But it has remained alive from times immemorial. From what we know, it is evident that dharma has survived the cruel invasions of the Greeks, Huns, Kushans and Arabs. Hence it is not proper for us to arrogate to ourselves the title of protectors of dharma. It will survive even in future. But our *tapas* should be to continue the study of the *Shastras* and giving discourses. To have been born under these circumstances, when Dharma is under attack, should be considered as a great boon and you should gird up your loins to become the torch bearer in this holy endeavour.”

“*Bhagawan*, let your blessings and guidance be with me always. I will carry out the task assigned by you.”

“My blessings are always there with you. As for guidance, it comes from *Ishwara* from time to time. Be faithful to Him and carry out your task as an offering to Him. May God bless you with success. Now you may go and sleep” said Shankara. Prithvidhara prostrated to him and Shankara placed his right palm on his head for quite sometime.

Though Prithvidhara went to bed late that night, he woke up very early in the morning. The sound woke up Totaka also. They were returning after bathing in the river. There was still sometime for sunrise.

On the way Prithvidhara said, “Totaka, I am feeling scared.”

“What are you talking *Acharya*! How could you ever be scared? What makes you scared?” asked Thotaka.

“It seems that our good fortune of being with the Guruji is only for a very short while more” said the frightened Prithvidhara.

“Oh! My God! Please tell me clearly. What is your apprehension?” said Totaka, in anticipation of some disaster.

“On hearing what he spoke last night, I am scared. As if it was a coincidence I saw a dream last night in which Guruji was going up a distant mountain. We both followed him running. The next moment, he disappeared. Disturbed by that dream, I woke up.”

“Perhaps that made you scream and that awakened me.”

“Now we must not lose sight of him even for a moment. It is time for him to wake up. Come, let us go.”

Both quickly proceeded towards the Guru’s place of rest. But they could not find him there. Sudden fear overtook them and their hearts started beating wildly. Both ran towards the stream and repeatedly shouted, ‘Guruji, Guruji’, searching everywhere. But they could not find him. They went to the house of the temple priest and awakened him. He, in turn, awakened another. Thus the whole town was alerted. But no one could find Guruji. Prithvidhara and Totaka became almost mad with this unbearable loss. There were only two beaten paths leading to the village. One was from Kashmir and another was in the opposite direction. They took that path and started running. How far could they run on that hilly track? They soon slowed down and then walked. All along the way they made enquiries whether a thirty-two year old *sanyasi* was sighted anywhere around. Nobody had seen any such person. By and by the track branched off in many directions. Not knowing which way to proceed, they would take some path or the other. Thus they continued walking for several days. At last they reached a hot water spring and Prithvidhara, recognizing it, said,

“This is Gauri Kund. Totaka, what should we do now? Which way should we proceed?”

“*Acharya*, let us proceed towards Kedar with a firm mind. If Guruji is not found there, I can no more live. I will jump from some peak there and commit suicide” said Totaka.

“Totaka, you must not talk like that. Remember, you are entrusted with a responsibility” said Prithvidhara.

Totaka wept like a child. After sometime he regained his composure and both made their way towards Kedar. On the way they found a man grazing cattle. They asked him,

“Did you see a thirty-two year old *sanyasi* passing this way?”

“Last night someone had taken rest in our village and proceeded on his journey in the morning,” replied the man.

They further queried, “Can you describe how he looked?”

“He seemed to be about thirty years old. How can I describe how he appeared! He was a God-like person” added the man.

“Was he holding a staff and *kamandal*?” they eagerly asked.

“Oh, he must be somebody else. He was not holding anything” said the man.

“Was he short or tall?”

“He was not very tall. But he was tall for certain.”

“Was he fair or dark?”

“He was fair like Lord Shiva Himself.”

“Totaka, let us hurry up now. His description indicates that he must be Guruji.”

“But he says that there was no staff and *kamandal*.”

“He might have abandoned them somewhere. The Lord, having accomplished His mission, does not need them anymore. Come on, let us go.”

They proceeded towards the temple of Kedareshwar. It was nearing sunset. They sighted someone at a distance ascending the mountain. They walked faster. It was a steep hill. As they riveted their eyes on that person, rays of the setting sun fell on him. They could clearly see that it was Guruji. But the person was beyond hailing distance. They ran after him shouting ‘Guruji, Guruji’. Perhaps Guruji did not hear their frantic shouts. He left the beaten track and started ascending a peak. Both ran, panting for breath. The distance decreased. They again shouted ‘*Bhagwan, Bhagwan*’. Shankara reached the pinnacle of the peak. The rays of setting sun fell on him. Now they could see distinctly the venerable Shankara. Being unable to take even a step further they collapsed uttering, ‘*Bhagwan, Bhagwan*.’ After falling, they stretched their hands and legs, which resulted in a *namaskara*. With great effort they stood up. The Lord lifted his right hand and, waving the palm back and forth, gave his blessings. The sun disappeared behind the mountain. Within a few moments darkness spread everywhere. A million flashes of lightning lit up Shankara’s figure. Both were blinded by the brilliance of that spectacle. With much effort they opened their eyes, only to perceive that there remained



only the brilliance, but Shankara's body had vanished. That light was never extinguished and still persists. Whether the body of the Guru descended the mountain and went away to the other side or whether the celestial beings took it away to the astral region, nobody knows. That was twelfth day of the bright half of the month *Jyeshtha*.

## CHAPTER 17

### SHANKARA'S MESSAGE

The *Kumbha Mela*, which took place after the departure of Shankara witnessed an unprecedented congregation of *sannyasis*, as a result of the efforts of Prithvidhara. Padmapadacharya, Hastamalakacharya and Thotakacharya participated in the *Kumbha Mela*. But Sureshwaracharya could not come because of old age. Earlier these four venerable *Acharyas* had met and after a detailed discussion decided that the message of Shankara should be conveyed to the *sannyasis*. This responsibility was entrusted to Prithvidhara. The next day a congregation of the *sannyasis* was held. The purpose of the meeting had been earlier conveyed and this had created a great enthusiasm among the *sannyasis*. The program began with the chanting of the *Anandavalli* which begins with *Brahmavidapnoti param tadeshabhyukta*. This had an electrifying effect on the participants. Then Prithvidhara stood up and addressed them.

“At the outset I offer my *namaskara* to Shankara Bhagawatpada, the omniscient Lord, who is our greatest source of inspiration and veneration. I also offer my *namaskara* to the venerable Padmapada, Hastamalaka and Totaka, who have been nominated by our most venerable Guru as the heads of the four centers established by him in the four corners of the country. I also offer my *namaskara* to the venerable Sureshwaracharya, who because of old age has not been able to attend this *Kumbha Mela*. I also offer my respects to all of you, the masters of the knowledge of Brahman. I know that all of you are eager to hear about the last days of the Venerable Bhagawatpada.

Therefore it is my duty to narrate it first.” With these introductory remarks he described the final journey of Shankara. All through this narration he was moved to tears and quite often so overwhelmed that he could hardly articulate the details of the incident. Even the audience were equally moved. Prithvidhara then controlled his feelings and continued.

“Now I have to inform you his message. In the cave of Badarinath, the venerable Vyasa, the knower of the past, present and future, had given him *darshan* and had told that the chaotic conditions in *Bharata Varsha* will continue for four more *Deva Varsha*. Dharma will rapidly decline. The main reason for this is Buddha. But there are no reliable sources to decide what Buddha actually preached. Whether he actually founded Buddhism or not is not also certain. There are many splinter groups amongst his followers, each claiming to preach his original doctrine. They have all written their own version of that doctrine. You are also aware of the refutation of all those versions by the *Bhashyakara* Shankara Bhagawatpada. But this much is certain – Buddha opposed Vedas and the *varnashrama dharma*, which constitute the very breath of this nation. He preached that the production of arms and sale of meat should be prohibited<sup>44</sup>. He founded the *Sangha* to propagate his dharma which was opposed to Vedas. In course of time, by adopting the slogan ‘*Buddham sharanam gachchami, sangham sharanam gachchami*’, he made himself, his dharma and *sangha* as the refuge for his followers. Buddha made a law that the kings who were his followers should support the *sangha*<sup>45</sup>. As a result of it, the kings forcibly converted people to Buddhism. Animal sacrifice came to an end<sup>46</sup>. Killing of wild animals like tigers and lions, was also stopped. As a consequence of this a large number of cattle perished<sup>47</sup>. Hunting was totally prohibited<sup>48</sup>. The inscriptions and rock edicts of Buddhists, no doubt, say ‘Let all religions be treated equally and let there be tolerance between different views<sup>49</sup>. But that is only a declaration more honored in its breach. In fact, Buddhists tried to destroy Vedic religion by collaborating with foreign invaders. Young men and women in Buddhist *Viharas* led a dissolute life and became missionaries to spread Buddhism and thus made the life of

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<sup>44</sup> Sangha Rakshita: Survey of Buddhism.

<sup>45</sup> Dirgha Nikaya 17, Mehasundassana suttanika

<sup>46</sup> First Rock Edict – Romilla Thapar: Asoka & The decline of Mauryas. London (1960) p.150

<sup>47</sup> K.A. Nilakantha Sastri: The Age of Nandas and Mauryas p.239

<sup>48</sup> Vincent Smith: Early History of India p.117, p.185

<sup>49</sup> Pillar Edict of Asoka

their parents miserable. Chanakya promulgated certain restrictions to bring them under control, such as ‘Girls are not allowed to become Buddhist missionaries without the permission of their parents, men are not allowed to become Buddhist *Bhikshus* unless they made provision for the livelihood of their dependents’<sup>50</sup>. But Ashoka threw these restrictions to the wind and allowed men and women to become Buddhist missionaries and provided them with government grants for a luxurious life<sup>51</sup>. As a result Buddhists continued their anti-national activities shamelessly.

“This perfidy was practiced even from the beginning. It was not a later development. They welcomed Alexander who invaded our country 1000 years ago<sup>52</sup>. Inhabitants of a town rebelled against Alexander and fought with him under the leadership of *Brahmanas*. Alexander could not subdue them in spite of all his efforts. Then he occupied the fort with the help of his army and slaughtered those unarmed *Brahmanas*. Nearly 80000 people were massacred by him. Even more people were imprisoned and sold as slaves<sup>53</sup>. Buddhists helped Kushans who invaded our country subsequent to the Greek invasion<sup>54</sup>. The treachery committed by the Buddhists recently ninety years ago, when Muslims invaded Sindh, is really horrible. Because of this treachery, Muslims were able to kill Raja Dahir and carry away his two daughters and other innumerable women. The invading muslims set fire to towns and converted our people forcibly and cruelly. At last they decimated even those Buddhists who had helped them<sup>55</sup>. Still those Buddhists, who were after all our own people, did not learn any lessons. Do not forget that Muslim religion also, like Buddhism, is single-individual oriented.

“Now I will describe the modus operandi of another group engaged in religious conversion. In the land of Kerala where *Bhagwan* Shankaracharya took birth, there are some migrants from western countries who call themselves Christians. They came there about seven centuries ago. These people have been converting our simple-minded folk to

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<sup>50</sup> Mukherji: Chandragupta and his time (1957) p.296

<sup>51</sup> H.G. Wells: New Revised Outline of History (1931) p.404

<sup>52</sup> W.W. Tarn: Greeks in Bactria p.175; Nehru: Discovery of India p.43; Vincent Smith: Early History of India p.299

<sup>53</sup> W.W. Tarn: Alexander the Great-II (1950) p.53

<sup>54</sup> Majumdar, Roychoudhary, Kalikumaradatta: Advanced History of India (1950) p.122

<sup>55</sup> Majumdar: Arab Invasions of India p.26; Al Biduri: Elliot History of India I p.122; Chachanama: Elliot History of India I p.161

their religion through deceit and have been extorting money from them. Their religion is also a cult with allegiance to a single person.

“What is the implication of this? People who get converted to such cults descend to the level of becoming traitors to the country and our Dharma. This treachery has affected the places near our borders. It is true that Pushyamitra and other kings tried to wipe out this menace through political means. As a result of this the spread of Buddhism has been halted. But we cannot be complacent thinking that the problem has been finally solved. So long as common people remain ignorant of the Vedic Dharma, this menace will continue. Our enemies will prey on such people and use either deceit or violent means to snatch them away from us. Therefore, we have to find a suitable solution for this constantly recurring menace.

“*Bhagwan* Shankaracharya has suggested the study of scriptures and spreading the message of the Vedas as the only solution of this problem. It is our duty to travel constantly, mingling with common people with friendliness and sympathy and to acquaint them with the tenets of our dharma, and also to make them practice Dharma. No doubt even scholars who are householders carry out this mission. But there is a difference between such people and *sannyasis* like us. Householders cannot devote all their time to this mission. They do not have the opportunity of knowing the condition of the entire society because they do not travel much. Total fearlessness and renunciation cannot be expected from them. But we are not circumscribed by such limitations. We can do this work throughout the day. As we travel from village to village we come in contact with all people. As we have renounced all worldly desires we are free from any sense of insecurity or fear. While describing this I remember an incident that took place when Alexander invaded our country. Please listen, I will narrate it to you.

“Alexander came to know about a *Dandi Sannyasi* living in Takshashila. He was an aged man wearing only a loin cloth, but learned in all the *shastras*. He sent his messenger to the *sannyasi* with some gold and the message, ‘Alexander is the descendent of Sun God. He has conquered the whole world. He has sent these golden jewels to you so that you may not beg for your food hereafter. You accept these jewels and come and meet him in his royal court. If you do not agree to this, he will cut off your head.’ On hearing this message, the *Dandi Sannyasi* just laughed and said to the messenger, ‘Dear

messenger, please go and tell your king that he is not the only descendent of Sun God. I am also the descendent of Sun God. All human beings are descendents of Sun God. Did you say that he has conquered the whole world? Tell him that he has not yet crossed the river Vyas.<sup>56</sup> Beyond that is a region which is impossible to cross. Further beyond is Magadha. Only if he manages to cross that impenetrable region and then succeed in conquering Magadha, and still survive, can he claim to be the conqueror of the world. Then there is the gold that he has sent. I spit on that gold. I have no use for that gold. My motherland has given me all that I need. Lastly, you have threatened me with cutting off my head. What if my head is cut off! It just rolls on the ground and gets mingled with the earth from which it has emerged. The soul does not die. I am the soul who can neither be cut, killed nor burnt. I am eternal. Such threats may scare those who love gold, but not me. I have no lust for gold, nor am I afraid of death, nor do I care to visit his royal court. Get out of here.’ Alexander had not even dreamt that a mere scarcely clad man would treat him with such disdain<sup>57</sup>.

“Now, what remains to be conveyed are the instructions given by Sri Shankara Bhagavatpada for bringing about changes in the present condition of Dharma. The Bharatiya Vedic Society is the very personification of Almighty God who is otherwise invisible. He is the *Purusha* referred to in the Veda. *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra* belong to this Vedic tradition. These four divisions are the limbs of the Almighty. To prevent all attempts of the *mlechas* or our own people to break this tradition, shall be the service we render to the Almighty. This is our duty. We the *sannyasis* are looked after by the society which provides us with food, shelter and other needs. Therefore, we are indebted to the society. During the time of peace we can perform this duty by spreading the message of Vedanta. But during turbulence this may not be possible. These are days of such turbulence. Presently our duty is to protect dharma. When enemies invade our country, we may guide our kings, thus indirectly repaying our debt to the society. We cannot do much directly. But we can carry on the work of inspiring the common people to practice dharma at all times. At the present juncture, that is the only work we can do. While doing this, we must keep in mind the entire society. We cannot

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<sup>56</sup> Presently called Biyas  
<sup>57</sup> M’Crindle: Megasthenes p.124-126

neglect any section of the society. Society consists of people with different traditions. There are devotees of Lord Vishnu. There are also devotees of Lord Shiva. There are devotees of other Gods. We must ensure that the faith of anybody is not shaken. On the other hand we must encourage every tradition and at the same time ensure that no mutual intolerance creeps in amongst different traditions. This has to be done by making people realize that different Gods are only varied manifestations of the same unified Supreme God. We must bring to their knowledge the Vedic pronouncement '*Sabrahma sashivassaharissendrassoksharah parama swarat*'. We must convince them that the Veda is the testimony for this doctrine. Keeping this in view, Shankara Bhagawatpada exhorted people worshipping different Gods like Vishnu, Surya, Shakti, Shiva, Ganapati and Kumara in different parts of the country to continue with their respective traditions of devotion and thus became known as the founder of the six faiths. To convince people of this unity, he established the tradition of *Panchayatana* worship. This message of Shankara must reach every individual of this country.

“I will now explain what things we should keep in mind while conveying this message to the people at large. People are from varied *samskaras* due to karma of previous births and also the present environment in which they are born. Therefore, even though the message to be conveyed is the same, the method of conveying it varies depending on the background of different people. We have witnessed how Shankara gave his discourses. While addressing learned *brahmanas* he dwelt upon profound philosophical ideas from the *shastras*. On the other hand while addressing laymen he conveyed his message through anecdotes from the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*. We must also follow the same method. Further, just as the ability to grasp differs from person to person, the ability to convey the message also differs from speaker to speaker. Therefore, we must proceed to different locations like forests, hilly regions, river banks, sea coasts or villages in keeping with our *samskara* and disseminate Vedic knowledge among the people and make them stand resolutely in the tradition of the Vedas. In view of this, the *sannyasis* affiliated to the Rigveda Govardhana Peetha of Jagannatha Puri under the Jagadguru Hastamalakacharya will have the surname *Vana* and *Aranya*. Those *sannyasis* affiliated to the Yajurveda Sharada Peetha of Shringeri under Sureshwaracharya will have the surnames *Saraswati*, *Bharati* and *Puri*. Those affiliated to the Samaveda Kalika

Peetha of Dwaraka under Padmapadacharya will have the surnames *Teertha* and *Ashrama*. Lastly, those affiliated to the Atharva Veda Jyotish Peetha under Totakacharya will have the surnames *Giri*, *Parvata* and *Sagara*. As already explained we must all spread out to different parts of the country and carry out this divine mission. Constant travel and giving regular discourses should become our second nature. For attaining self-realization, which all of us earnestly desire, there can be no greater *tapas* than this mission. Further, those among you who have already attained self-realization should follow the path of Sri Shankara, as Sri Shankara is our guiding star. He is our ideal. Let us lead our lives under his divine guidance. Just as he traveled untiringly, let us also do so. There is the guidance as well as the grace of *Bhagwan* Shankara for our mission. Why should we worry now! *Satyameva Jayate*.” With these words he concluded his address.

The *sannyasis* chanted in chorus the *shanti mantra*, ‘*Aa Brahman Brahmano Brahmavarchasi jayatam asmin rashterajanya ishavyah shuro maharatho jayatam dogdhri dhenurvodhanadva nashussaptih purandhiryosha jishnuu ratheshthassabhaynyuvasya yajamanasya veero jayatam nikame nikame nahparjanya varshatu pahalinyona oshadhayah pachyantam yogakshemo nah kalpatam*’.

The congregation ended and the work began with the dispersal of the meeting. The society got united. The anticipation of the enemies of this nation that this society would disintegrate proved to be false and those mean people were disappointed. This could be achieved only because of the tireless efforts and boundless sacrifice of innumerable brave people who toiled during twelve centuries prior to Shankara and twelve centuries after him. At last the nation has been liberated. The only thing to be done hereafter for the comprehensive development of this nation is to shove aside unworthy people who are now occupying the position of leadership and people of virtue and integrity should occupy those positions. This seems to be taking time. But there is no doubt that it will happen.







