

SANKARA, THE BRILLIANT LEADER

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Adi Sankara was a man of wisdom (*Tattvajnani*), but he was also a great expert in managing worldly affairs. His special qualities of patience, getting along amicably with one and all, and always acting with fortitude pinpoint him as a brilliant leader among men.

Sankara's patience in dealing with people is seen on many occasion. When he visited Mandana Misra, he was treated with lack of respect. Ubhaya Bharati questioned him on matters opposed to his *sannyasa ashrama*. Ugra Bhairava even asked for his head for his *Yagna*. In all cases, Sankara answered them with understanding and patience.

Adi Sankara also solved admirably a misunderstanding that had crept among his own disciples. When Suresvara wanted to write a commentary on *Sutra Bhashya*, the other disciples did not agree to it. Sankara then asked Suresvara to elaborate on the *bhashyas* on *Taittiriya* and *Brahadarany upanishads* and this reconciled all of them. Even when his mother was opposed to his taking *sannyasa*, Sankara promised to return to her at the time of her death and thus obtained her permission. He also showed mercy in this act.

Sankara's compassion for his disciples was boundless. One of them, Giri, was serving him with great devotion and respect, but the others called him a dunce. Sankara blessed him with instant knowledge of all *sastras*. Such was his loftiness and broad mindedness. In the case of his disciple Hastamalaka, Sankara himself wrote a commentary on the 12 slokas Hastamalaka had composed concerning knowledge of the Self.

Of course, Sankara had full authority over his disciples, but he was not a dictator. When Padmapada wanted to set out on a pilgrimage, Sankara explained the difficulties on the path, but since Padmapada was determined, he did not stop him. But when Padmapada returned from his *yatra* and wailed over the loss of his writings on the *Bhashyas*, Sankara did not get upset, but very kindly retold the passages from memory.

Sankara's brilliant leadership in national integration is revealed in the way he established the four mathas. Two of them in the east and west were set up on the seashore while the mathas in the north and south were set up in the mountainous regions. Suresvara who hailed from the north was placed in charge of the matha in the south, while Totaka from the south was sent to Badri in the north.

What is more, he made it mandatory that the Namboodiris from Kerala should perform puja at Badri while the brahmins from Karnataka were assigned for Nepal. Likewise, he ordained Maharashtra brahmins to do pujas at Rameshwar. This shows what a broadmind he had when it came to leadership in matters of national interest.