

## SANKARA AND THE SRINGERI MUTT

[ His Holiness SWAMI SIVANANDA ]

The operative presence of the Vedic Dharma in India of today, is attributable to the genius of Adi Sankaracharya. The forces opposed to Vedic religion were more numerous and powerful at the time of Sankara than they are today. Still, single-handed, and within a very short time. He overpowered them all the restored Vedic Dharma and Advaita to the preistine purity in the land.

The weapon employed by the Avatara of Sankaracharya was pure knowledge and spirituality. The previous Avatars, like rama and Krishna, used physical force because the obstacles to Dharma in those days arose from physical obstruction and molestation from Asuras. The menace to Dharma in the Kali age arose from obstacles that were more internal than external, more mental than physical. The seeds of Adharma were then working in the minds of almost every one. Hence the evil had to be combated purely by the weapon of knowledge and self-purification.

It was in order to forge this weapon and wield it with efficacy that Sankara was born in the Brahmin Varna and entered the Sanyasa order early in life. The previous Avatars like Rama and Krishna took birth in the Kshatriya Varna because they had to wield military weapons in the restoration of Dharma in their days.

Many are aware of they very important position assigned to Sankaracharya in the history of Indian philosophy.

It can be affirmed, without any fear of contradiction, that Bharatavarsha would have ceased to be Bharavarsha several centuries ago and would never have survived the fatal sword, the devastating fire and the religious intolerance of the successive invaders, if

Sankara had not lived the life he lived, and taught the lessons which he taught and they are still pulsating in every cell and in the protoplasm of a true aspirant and a true Hindu.

Sankara was the foremost among the master-minds and the giant souls which Mother India has produced. He was a gaint metaphysician who expounded systemtically the Advaita Philiosophy. He was a practical philiosopher, an infalliable logician, a dynamic personality and a stupendous moral and spiritual force. His grasping and elucidating powers knew no bounds. A fully developed Yogi, a Jnani, and a Bhakta, he belonged as a Karma Yogi to the highest order and was a powerful magnet.

There is not one branch of knowledge which he has left unexplored and which has not received the tough, polish and finish of the superhuman intellect. For Sankara and his works we have a very high reverence. The loftiness, calmness and firmness of his mind, the impartiality with which he deals with various questions, his clearness of expression—all these makes us revere the philosopher more and more. His teaching will continue to live as long as the Sun shines, and the moon wanes and waxes.

The vast scholarly eruditions, the masterly way of exposition of intricate philosophical problems that Sankara commanded, have won the admiration of all the existent philosophical schools of the world. He is an intellectual genius profound philosopher, able propagandist, matchless preacher, gifted poet and a great religious reformer. This would be the verdict of every age Time would unroll. Perhaps, never in the history of any literature, a stupendous writer like him has been found. Even the Western

Scholars of the present day pay their homage and respects to him. Of all the ancient systems, that of Sancharacharya will be found to be the most cogent and the most easy to acceptance to the modern mind.

Sankara's philosophical conquests are unique in the world. He has his triumphant tour all over India, and met the leaders of different schools of thought, and convinced them by arguments and established the supremacy and truth of the religion that he expounded in his commentaries. He went to all the celebrated seats of learning, challenged the learned men to discussion, argued with them and converted them to his opinions and views. He defeated Bhatta Bhaskara and condemned his Bhashya on the Vedanta Sutras. He then met Dhandi and Mayura and taught them his philosophy, and defeated in argument. Harsha the author of Khandana Khandana Khadya, Abhinavagupta, Murari Misra, Udayanacharya, Dharmagupta, Kumarila and Prabhakara.

Sankara then proceeded to Mahishmati. Mandana Misra was the chief Pundit of the court of Mahishmati. Mandana was brought up in the Karma Mimamsa faith and so he had intense hatred for sanyasins. As he was performing a Sraddha Ceremony. Sankara somehow dropped down in their midst. Immediately Mandana Misra became very furious, and entered into an ugly conversation, when the Brahmins that were present there for the ceremony and dinner, interposed and pacified him.

Then, Sankara challenged Mandana for religious controversy, to which Mandana agreed, and Bharati, wife of Mandana, who possessed scholarly erudition, was appointed as the umpire. It was agreed that Sankara, if defeated, would become a householder and marry; Mandana, if defeated, would become a Sanyasin and receive the role of a Sanyasin from the hands of the own

wife. The controversy began in right earnest and continued for days without any interruption. Bharati did not sit and listen to their controversy. She threw two garlands one over the shoulders of each of the disputants and said: He whose garland begins to fade first should consider himself defeated." She left the place and was attending to her household duties. The controversy went to for seventeen days. The garland of Mandana Misra began to fade first Mandana Misra accepted his defeat and offered to become a Sannyasin and follow Sankam.

Mandana Misra gave all his property, as a gift to Sri Sankara and Mandana was made a gift to Sri Sankara and Mandana was made to distribute it to the poor and the deserving. He then became a disciple of Sankara. Sankara initiated him into the holy order of Sanyasa and gave him the name of **Sureshwaracharya. Sureshwaracharya was the first Sanyasi who took charge of the Sringeri Mutt.**

Sankara ascended the throne of omniscience after inviting Vedic scholars from all parts of India and answering their numerous questions. Sankara, by vanquishing all the religious opponents of his day – who belonged to no less than seventy two different schools – and establishing the superiority of the Vedic Dharma, had become the Jagatguru of all.

Sankara's success over the other religious sects was so complete that none of them have since been able to raise their head in the land. Most of them have disappeared altogether. After Sankara's time, although a new Acharayas have appeared, none of them have been able to vanquish those who differed from them as Sankara did not establish unquestioned supremacy.

Sankara went out on a tour through the eastern coast with a large number of followers. He preached his Adwaita philosophy wherever he went, and established at Puri the Govardhana

Mutt. He went to Conjeevaranam, encountered Shaktas, purified the temples, and won over to his side the kings of Chola and Pandya kingdoms. He went to Ujjain, put down the atrocities of the Bhairavas who were shedding human blood, and then proceeding to Dwaraka and established a Mutt there. He then traveled along the course of the Ganga and held religious controversies with great personages.

In the north-west of the State of Mysore, nesting in the beautiful foot-hills of the Western Ghats, surrounded by virgin forests, lies the village of Sringeri and here Sankara established his first Mutt. The river Tunga runs through the valley closely touching the walls of the temple and its pure and limpid waters are as famous for drinking purposes as the waters of the Ganga for bath: *Ganga Snanam Tunga Panam*

Sringeri is a place of great sanctity and its beauty has to be seen to be appreciated. The Mutt is 'still going strong' as the phrase goes. The homage paid to his Sringeri Mutt by countless aspirants and devotees is as much due to the greatness of the illustrious men like Vidyaranaya who have been at its head ever since its foundation, as to the renown of Sankara, the founder himself.

It may not be out of place to mention here that it took thirty years for the well-known Sanskrit professor Max Muller to translate the commentaries of Rig Veda, written by Sayana. The learned professor in his preface says that no a single day passed in the thirty years without his devoting at least ten minutes on the translation. There is also a little interesting incident that when the original was found to be illegible in some places he got an authorized transcription from the first original still preserved in the Sringeri Mutt through the influence of the then Maharaja of Mysore.

The famous holy shrine of Sri Sarada is an equal source of attraction to the devotees. Many are the Mutts and

monasteries in India where holy men or the successors sit, and where Hindus from all parts of India gather, but *none so great or so famous as Sringeri the original seat of Adi Sankaracharya*

The Sringeri Peetha is one of the oldest monasteries of the world flourishing for over twelve centuries now. It is the first of the four seats of learning established by Sankaracharya, the other three being Puri Dwaraka, and Joshi Mutt, each one of them representing one of the four Vedas of the Hindus.

Sankara placed his four eminent disciples, Sureswaracharya, Padmapada, Hastamalaka and Totakacharya, in charge of the Sringeri Mutt, Jagannath Mutt, Dwarka Mutt and Joshi Mutt, respectively. The most famous Sanyasi in the succession of Gurus of the Sringeri Mutt was, of course, Vidyaranya, the father of the dynasty of Vijayanagar. He became a Sannyasi about 1331 A.D. The eleven Sanyasins before Vidyaranya were Sankaracharya, Sureswaracharya, Nityabodhaghana, Gyanaghana, Gyanottama, Gyana Giri, Simha Giriswara, Ishwara Tirtha, Nrishimha Tirtha, Vidya Sankara Tirtha, and Bharati Krishna Tirtha.

H. H. Sri Sachidananda Sivabhinava Narasimha Bharati Maha Swamigal, who occupied, prior to Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati mahasannidhanam, the historic and sacred pontifical throne of this Sringeri Mutt known as Vyakhyana Simhasana or a Seat of Learning was a reputed Raja Yogi. Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati, the Predecessor of the present Guru Sri Abhinava Vidyatirtha Maha sannidhanam, was renowned for his exceptional Holiness, tapas and unrivalled scholarship.

It would be certainly regarded as an epochal event in the growth of the establishment at Sringeri Mutt, when we deeply admire the tour of the present Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidyatirtha, and

the efforts he has made to raise, with the collections received on the tour, a magnificent temple in granite over the Adhithanam of his illustrious predecessor Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati Mahasannidhanam, and a Shila Gopuram at the Entrance of the temple of Sri Sharadamba.

Tradition has it that this seat, this pontifical and sacred throne of Sringeri Mutt, was given to the great Adi

Sankaracharya by Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning, in appreciation of the philosopher's vast scholarly erudition. Thirty-four Acharyas have sat on the pontifical throne before His present Holiness, in regular and uninterrupted succession. Glory to Sri Adi Sankaracharya! Glory to the present Holiness Jagadguru Sri Abhinava Vidya Tirtha mahasannidhanam

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