

SRI SANKARA AND THE SRINGERI PITHA

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The culture of the people, its deepest urges and its highest aspirations flow in a continuous stream through time, time and again. It finds expression in the life and teachings of representative matters.

In the history of the race as a whole, never has degradation crossed the limit of recovery, never has the Spirit been lost beyond redemption. The advent of Sri Ramachandra and Sri Krishna, Buddha and Christ Confucius and Mohammed, and in recent history of India, of masters like Ramakrishna, Dayanand, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Ramana, testifies to the promise of Sri Krishna that He would appear whenever there was need to restore the supremacy of the Spirit. And whenever He takes form, He speaks the language and shows the way appropriate to the needs of the people among whom He is born in the context of the time – spirit.

Sri Sankara was the embodiment of the Collective Unconscious of the Indian people of his time which he rescued, on the one hand, from those who had seceded from it and, on the other, from those who had perverted it. In a large perspective, he was the expression not merely of the Indian Culture but of the eternal quest of the spirit which rules the human heart in all times, of **Sanatana Dharma**.

During his short of life on earth, Sri Sankara achieved a three-fold purpose. When he began his mission, the Upanishadic inspirations had all but died up in India; ritualism had deflected it from its mission of leading men to self-fulfilment. He restored the urge to seek the knowledge of the Self as the only way to escape the “torment in the hell-fires of life.”

The belief in the reality of the Spirit had been rudely shaken in his time by the rebel school of thought, which, in its aversion to ceremonialism, had swung to a denial of both God and soul, Sri Sankara liquidated this danger to religion and philosophy.

Warring creeds and dubious practices again enmeshed the mind without ennobling

it. Sri Sankara destroyed these pseudo-religious thoughts and practices by his devastating logic and paved the way for other religious teachers who came after him, to restore fresh vitality to Sanatana Dharma.

Sri Sankara was perhaps the greatest intellect known to history. His Advaita Vedanta was grounded on **Sastra** (Authority), guided by **yukti** (inference) and guaranteed by **anubhava** (experience).

But unlike other great philosophers of the world, Sri Sankara was not a mere metaphysician. His philosophy was reared on the foundation of a truly religious life based on self-discipline.

Sri Sankara postulated the reality of the world as the theatre of the drama of life oriented to a spiritual purpose. To the man Diving in the word, he affirmed its factual nature. But he made a distinction between a **fact** and **reality**. According to him, when the drama was over and fulfilled itself in realization, when the curtain was run down, and the audience had melted away, the actors lose their finite separateness and lapse into the Infinite. Truly understood, Sankara's Vedanta is not a worldnegating philosophy.

Sri Sankara established the sovereignty of reason in the quest of the Spirit. He accepted the ancillary role of **Karma** (action) and **Bhakti** (devotion) in this enterprise. He affirmed the possibility of complete self-fulfilment or liberations (**moksha**) in this very life by appropriate self-discipline.

The body of philosophic and bhakti literature which he composed is amazing in volume, variety and depth. It provides alike for the lisping baby in metric recreation as for the meditating **mauni** losing himself in the contemplation of the Supreme.

Sri Sankara's devotional literature ranged from the lyric of **Bhaja Govindam** to the mystic poetry of **Saundarya Lahari**. To him, all religious practices, all forms of devotional worship, have meaning and value only in so far as they are for the aspirant, the expressions of the underlying unity.

Sri Sankara did not merely teach and

inspire; he established several seats of the spiritual order in order to maintain the vitality of the Sanatana Dharma as re-established by him. They have been functioning down the centuries through unbroken succession of occupants, among them, the Sringeri **pitha** is the earliest and foremost.

There has been a **guru parampara**, an unbroken chain of teachers, associated with this **pitha** from Sri Sureshwara, the ritualist turned Vedantin, whom the Master established on this **pitha**, through the versatile Vidyaranya, who stabilized the life-work of the Master, Sri Nrishma Bharati, who relcimed the birthplace of Sri Sankara, down to the saintly Chandrasekara Bharati,

and now to Sri Ahinava Vidyathirtha, who reverently preserves the great tradition.

It is this **guru parampara** of the different **pithas** which have given organized form to Sanatana Dharma and led to the continued functioning of the order of ascetics, **Dashnami Sampradaya**, which has maintained the vitality of Hinduism through the ages. And if Hinduism lives to day in spite of the vicissitudes through which it had passed and has been passing, it is due to the creative genius of the Master and the noble tradition which his successive disciples have maintained by learning and self-discipline in the best traditions of India.

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A single individual, whose only companion was his vast intellect and deep sympathy, going the length and breadth of India and conquering its mind and heart is something unique in history—even in Indian history. He captured both the intellects and the hearts of men. He established an empire of the spirit, of love and of lofty spiritual idealism. From the example of Sankara we can picture the greatness of a person who sways the world in this manner. It is such type of leaders that India, nay, the world, needs badly today.

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We have in Shankara a great intellectual and at the same time one who commanded the emotional allegiance of the masses. Today in Hindusthan if there is one teacher of the historic period who commands the allegiance of both the intellectuals and the masses it is Shankara.

(Extracts from Swami Ranganathananda's –Eternal Values for a Changing Society)