I. THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ŚAṆKARA

There are many works which profess to be biographies of Śaṅkara. The most famous of all is the Śaṅkaradigvijaya, written by Vidyāraṇya in the fourteenth century. All these biographies were composed hundreds of years after Śaṅkara’s death and are filled with legendary stories and incredible anecdotes, some of which are mutually contradictory. Today there are no extant materials from which to reconstruct his life with certainty.

Setting the date of Śaṅkara’s birth is probably one of the most controversial problems in the history of Indian philosophy, not only because he is one of the greatest Indian philosophers but also because a solution is inseparable from the correct understanding of one of the most important and critical periods of the history of Indian thought. It has been customary to adopt the birth and death dates asserted by K. B. Pathak in 1882, 788 and 820, but these dates have no firm basis. After reviewing and criticizing all the conflicting opinions, Hajime Nakamura proposed in 1950 that the dates should be shifted to 700–750. This view has been accepted by such scholars as L. Renou and D. H. H. Ingalls.

During the fifth and sixth centuries the Huns invaded India from the central Asian steppes, and the political system of the Gupta empire, under which India had enjoyed her golden age of classical culture, was completely broken up in the sixth century. In the seventh century King Harṣa restored peace in North India, but after his death India fell into chaos again. Thus Śaṅkara was active in composing his works and propagating his teachings dur-
ing an era of political division and social unrest in India; Buddhism was on the wane and Hinduism on the rise.

Tradition says that Śaṅkara was born into a pious Nambūdirī Brahmin family in a quiet village called Kālaḍī on the banks of the Cūṟṟā (or Pūṟṇā, Periyāṟu) River in Kerala, South India. He is said to have lost his father, Śīvaguru, early in his life. Śaṅkara renounced the world and became a samnyāsin (ascetic) against his mother’s will, and went to Govinda (670–720) to receive instruction. No reliable information about Govinda is available, but he is traditionally said to have been a pupil of Gauḍapāda (640–690). Gauḍapāda is notable as the author of an important Vedānta work, Gauḍapādayākārikā, in which the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism is evident and, especially in its last chapter, even dominant.

It is said that Śiva, one of the principal gods in Hinduism, was Śaṅkara’s family deity and also that he was, by birth, a Śākta, or worshipper of Śakti, the consort of Śiva and female personification of divine energy. Later he came to be regarded as a worshipper of Śiva and even as an incarnation of Śiva himself. But his doctrine is very far removed from Śaivism and Śāktism. It can be ascertained from his works that he had some faith in, or was favorable to, Vaiṣṇavism. It is likely that he was familiar with Yoga, since he is the author of the Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇa, the exposition of Vyāsa’s commentary on the Yogasūtra, a basic text of the Yoga school. A recent study, though not fully acceptable, has suggested that he was first an adherent of Yoga and later became an Advaitin.

Biographers narrate that Śaṅkara first went to Kāśi (Vārāṇasi), a city celebrated for learning and spirituality, and then travelled all over India, holding discussions with philosophers of different creeds. His heated debate with Maṇḍanamiśra, a philosopher of the Mīmāṃśā school, whose wife served as an arbiter, is perhaps the most interesting of the episodes reported in his biography and may reflect a historical fact: keen conflict between Śaṅkara, who regarded the knowledge of Brahman as the only means to final release, and the Mīmāṃśā school, which emphasized the performance of ordained duty and the Vedic rituals, and to which belonged eminent philosophers such as Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, Prabhākara, and Maṇḍanamiśra. It is traditionally believed that Kumārila was Śaṅkara’s senior contemporary and that Prabhākara was
Kumārila’s pupil, though he later established the Prabhākara school in opposition to his teacher. Maṇḍanamiśra was another contemporary who held Advaitic views different from Śaṅkara’s. It has been remarked that “during the age of Śaṅkara and for some centuries following it, Maṇḍana’s authority on questions relating to Advaita was recognized to be at least as high and important as that of Śaṅkara himself.”

Śaṅkara would not teach his doctrine to city dwellers. In cities the power of Buddhism was still strong, though already declining, and Jainism prevailed among the merchants and manufacturers. Popular Hinduism occupied the minds of ordinary people while city dwellers pursued ease and pleasure. There were also hedonists in cities, and it was difficult for Śaṅkara to communicate Vedānta philosophy to these people. Consequently he propagated his teachings chiefly among samnyāsins, who had renounced the world, and intellectuals in the villages, and he gradually won the respect of Brahmins and feudal lords. He made enthusiastic efforts to restore the orthodox Brahmanical tradition, without paying attention to the bhakti (devotional) movement, which had made a deep impression on ordinary Hindus in his age.

It is very likely that Śaṅkara had many pupils, but we know only four from their writings: Padmapāda, Sureśvara, Toṭaka (or Troṭaka), and Hastāmalaka. Padmapāda wrote a commentary on Śaṅkara’s commentary on the first four sūtras (aphorisms) of the Brahmasūtra, called Pañcapādi, on which in the middle of the tenth century A.D. Prakāśatman composed a commentary entitled Pañcapādiśavivarana. The Vivaraṇa school which Padmapāda started was the most influential among the later Advaitins until it was overshadowed by the Bhāmatī school. Sureśvara is known as the commentator on Śaṅkara’s commentaries on the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad and the Taittirīya Upaniṣad. His independent work Naiśkarmyāsiddhi is “intended to reiterate the views embodied in the Upaniṣads” of Śaṅkara. Toṭaka and Hastāmalaka are the authors of the Śrutisārasamuddharana and the Hastāmalakasālokā, respectively, but their influence upon the development of the Advaita Vedānta seems to be negligible.

It is also traditionally believed that Śaṅkara founded four monasteries (māṭha), at Śrīgeri (Śrīgerimaṭha, South), Puri
(Govardhanamaṭha, East), Dvārakā (Śaradāmaṭha, West), and Badarinātha (Jyotirmāṭha, North). The most important of the four is the one at Śrīneri in Mysore Province. In founding monasteries he was probably inspired by the Buddhist vihāra (monastery) system.\textsuperscript{24} In any case, the monasteries must have played a significant role in the development of his teachings into the leading philosophy of India.

More than three hundred works—commentaries, expositions, and poetry—are attributed to him.\textsuperscript{25} Most of them are not accepted as authentic.\textsuperscript{26} His masterpiece is the Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, the commentary on the Brahmasūtra, which is the fundamental text of the Vedānta school. In fact, we should define Śaṅkara as the author of the Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, and use it as the yardstick against which to measure the authenticity of other works ascribed to him.\textsuperscript{27} Śaṅkara also wrote commentaries on the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Kena,\textsuperscript{28} Īsā, Kaṭha, Mundaka, Praśna, and Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad.\textsuperscript{29} Those commentaries are probably all genuine, but the commentary on the Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad, which is traditionally ascribed to him, may be spurious.\textsuperscript{30} The commentaries on the Gauḍapādiyakārikā and the Adhyātmāmapaṭala of Āpastamba-Dharmasūtra seem to have been written by Śaṅkara himself.\textsuperscript{31} As I have already mentioned, he is probably the author of the Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇa.\textsuperscript{32} These works are all commentaries on one or another text. The Upadeśasāhasrī, which is translated here, is the only non-commentarial work whose authenticity has been conclusively demonstrated.\textsuperscript{33}

Penetrating insight, analytical skill, and lucid style characterize Śaṅkara’s works. He cannot be called a particularly original philosopher,\textsuperscript{34} but it has to be remembered that in India it is not originality but fidelity to tradition which is the great virtue. He was an excellent exegete, with an approach to truth which was psychological and religious rather than philosophical.\textsuperscript{35} He was really not so much a philosopher as a pre-eminent religious leader and a most successful religious teacher. His works show him to have been not only versed in the orthodox Brahmanical traditions but also well acquainted with Mahāyāna Buddhism, so much so that he was often criticized as a “crypto-Buddhist” (pracchannabuddha) by his opponents because of the similarity between his doctrine and Buddhism. Against this criticism, it
should be noted that he made full use of his knowledge of Buddhism to attack Buddhist doctrines vigorously, or to assimilate them into his own Vedāntic nondualism, and he made great exertions to “revedanticize” the Vedānta philosophy, which had been made extremely Buddhistic by his predecessors. The basic structure of his philosophy is nearer to Śaṅkhya, a philosophic system of nontheistic dualism, and to the Yoga school, than to Buddhism.

It is said that Śaṅkara died at Kedārnātha in the Himalayas. The Advaita Vedānta school he founded has always been preeminent in the learned circles of India. His doctrine has been the source from which the main currents of modern Indian thought are derived.

Notes to Introduction, I

1 For example, (1) Anantānandagiri, Guruvijaya; (2) Ānandagiri, Śaṅkaravijaya [ed. by Jayanārāyaṇa Tarkapaṅcānanā. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1868; ed. by Pandit Jibananda Vidyasagara. Calcutta: Sarasudhandi Press, 1881]; (3) Govindanātha, Śaṅkaracāryacarita [Trichur: The Kerala Publishing House, 1926]; (4) Cit-sukhācārya, Bhūṭaśaṅkaravijaya; (5) Cidvilāsā, Śaṅkaravijayavilāsā; (6) Parameśvara, Ācāryavijayacampū; (7) Rājacūḍāmanidikṣita, Śaṅkarābhivyudaya; (8) Vallisahāya, Śaṅkaravijaya; (9) Vidyāśaṅkara, Śaṅkaravijaya; (10) Vidyadālakāśilaḷaṃkṣmaṇa Śāstri, Guruvamīśākāya [Srirangam: Śrī Vāṇi Vilās Press, n.d.]; (11) Vyāsācāla, Śaṅkaravijaya; (12) Sadānanda, Śaṅkaravijayasārā; (13) Sadāśivabrahmendra, Gururatanamālā; and (14) Sarvajñā Śadāśivavobodha, Puryālokaṁkāñjari, and its Parītiṣṭa by Ātmbodha.


3 Indian Antiquary, XI (1882), pp. 174–175.


7 The Nambūdiris are the only original Brahmins of Kerala, whose origins cannot be traced back outside Kerala. Even today they form a unique community among the many kinds of Brahmins in India, preserving some of the ancient Vedic and early
post-Vedic traditions and rites which are extinct elsewhere. It is of interest to note that insofar as they adhered to any philosophical system at all, it was to the Bhāṭṭa school of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, which Śaṅkara severely attacked in his works. It is said that Advaita was adopted by many Nambūdiris only after having become quite popular in other parts of India. See J. F. Staal, “Notes on Some Brahmin Communities of South India,” *Art and Letters, India, Pakistan, Ceylon*, vol. XXXII (1958), no. 1, pp. 1–7.  
8 At present there is a walled enclosure overlooking the ghat in Kālādji which contains sites known traditionally as Śaṅkara’s birthplace, the place where his house stood, and the place on which the remains of his mother were cremated. This compound also contains two shrines, the Śrādā and the Śaṅkara, and a pāṭhaśālā which offers instruction in *Veda* and *Vedānta* in a traditional way.  
9 Nakamura III, p. 244.  
10 Tradition has it that Govinda was the author of the commentaries on the Chānd. Up., *Devatākāṇḍa*, and BS, though they are not extant. He is also reported to have written the *Togatārāvali*, which is unpublished. See M. Raṅgācārya, *The Sarva-Siddhiṁ-a-Saṅgha of Śaṅkarācārya* (Madras: Government Press, 1909), p. viii; Nakamura III, pp. 244–247.  
13 See Nakamura III, p. 531; P. Hacker, “Relations of Early Advaitins to Vaiṣṇavism”, *WZKSO*, vol. IX (1965), pp. 147–154. This may be related to the fact that Śaṅkara pays the highest regard to the BhG among the non-Vedic texts (see S. Mayeda, “The Authenticity of the Upadeśasāhasrī Ascribed to Śaṅkara,” *JAOS*, vol. 85, No. 2, 1965, pp. 187–188; Mayeda Upad, p. 44). It should be noted here that a large percentage of the present Nambūdiris (see note 7) have Nārāyaṇan for their individual name, that the name Nārāyaṇa is very sacred to them, and that the most famous temple of Kerala is the Guruvāyur temple where Kṛṣṇa is worshipped and whose priests are drawn only from particular Nambūdiri families. Cf. J. F. Staal, *Art and Letters, India, Pakistan*, vol. XXXII (1958), no. 1, p. 5.  
16 Mādhava, *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* VIII. Cf. T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Homage to Śaṅkara* (Jayanti Series no. 4. Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1959), pp. 18–23. Tradition says that Maṅḍanāmisra, converted to the Vedānta, was named Suresvara by Śaṅkara. This tradition seems to be baseless, though the question may have not yet been settled. See M. Hiriyanam, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1923), pp. 259–263; (1924), pp. 96–97; M. Hiriyanam, *The Nāṭikarṇya-Siddhi of Suresvarācārya with the Candrikā of Jñānottama* (Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series no. XXXVIII. Bom-


20 See Upad II,1,2 and its notes 3 and 6.

21 P. Hacker, Unters.


26 In India it has been a common practice to lend a book authenticity by attributing it to a famous author. Besides, all the heads (*Jagadguru*) of the Śrīgerimātha have had the title Śaṅkarācārya, and any literary or philosophical work written by any of these heads could be legitimately called a work of Śaṅkarācārya. Cf. K. K. Raja, *Adyar Library Bulletin* (vol. XXIV, pts. 3–4), pp. 127–128. It is thus not easy to decide which works were really written by our Śaṅkara. P. Hacker pointed out that Śaṅkara’s contemporaries had styled him Bhagavat, Bhagavatpāda, and Bhagavatpūjyapāda and that the BSBh is invariably ascribed to Śaṅkara-Bhagavat, -Bhagavatpāda, or -Bhagavatpūjyapāda in the colophons. From this fact he concluded that “we are entitled to regard provisionally as genuine those works that are described in their colophons as productions of the Bhagavat, whereas all the works that are usually attributed to Śaṅkara-Ācārya in the colophons are suspicious of being spurious” (P. Hacker, “Śaṅkarācārya and Śaṅkarabhadbhagavatpāda,” *New Indian Antiquary*, vol. IX, 1947, pp. 182–183). He applied this method and concluded that all the commentaries on the *Prasthānātmya* are genuine. But he denied the authenticity of the *Śvetāsvarataropanisadbhāṣya* in its present form. Cf. P. Hacker, WZKSO, vol. XII–XIII (1968/1969), p. 147.

27 Cf. Mayeda Upad, p. 22.

28 There are two commentaries on the *Kenopaniṣad* which are ascribed to one and the same author, Śaṅkara; one is entitled *Padvibhāṣya* and the other *Vākyabhāṣya*. Both of them seem to be genuine. See S. Mayeda, “On Śaṅkara’s Authorship of the *Kenopaniṣadbhaṣya*,” *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. X (1967), no. 1, pp. 33–55.
INTRODUCTION


34 Nakamura IV, pp. 420–437. Taking up ideas which have generally been regarded as characteristic of Śaṅkara’s teachings, Nakamura has shown that each of those had already been expressed by some of his predecessors and that Śaṅkara himself was not the originator.