

## CHAPTER I

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### Introduction

The history of mankind can boast not only of its times of fame and glory but also of quieter times with a different kind of heroism. People cherish not only the names of great warriors and politicians but also the memory of sages, poets and spiritual teachers. Some of them died in oblivion, only to become absolutely indispensable at some crucial turning point in the development of cultural or religious life. (One remembers how, half a century after his death, Sören Kierkegaard, the eccentric Protestant mystic was posthumously recognized as a founder of existentialist trends in religious and philosophic thought.) Others were luckier: they came to this world so opportunely that their teachings were destined to influence their surroundings, enthral thousands of followers and stamp the epoch with their own image. Such were the founders of the world religions and also such figures as Francis d'Assisi and Martin Luther.

According to the religious tradition of India, a happy correspondence between the efforts of a sage or reformer and the response of his followers is explained rather simply: when the world once again becomes steeped in sin or ignorance and deviates too far from the true path of knowledge, the higher God—Viṣṇu or Śiva—is embodied again and enters the world to restore its moral order. We have heard of ten principle *avatāras*<sup>1</sup> of Viṣṇu, among

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1. *Avatāra* (from Sanskrit root *ava-tṛ* or go down, descend, be manifested) means descent or manifestation of a God in a lower form, accessible to perception.

whom one may note Kṛṣṇa, who took part in the famous battle between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas on the field of Kuru as a charioteer and spiritual guide of the hero Arjuna. Many orthodox Hindus still believe that one of *the avatāras* of Śiva was Śaṅkara, the philosopher and religious figure of the early mediaeval period.

Śaṅkara is an amazing figure and, to my mind, the most brilliant personality in the history of Indian thought. An outstanding religious philosopher and mystical poet, an orthodox theologian and a shrewd reformer, a founder of monasteries, an errant preacher and a brilliant polemist—this is not even a full enumeration of his achievements, known to contemporaries and, more than a thousand years later, to us as well. He is believed to have died at the age of 32, approximately the age of Christ, but during his lifetime he managed to compose more than 400 works of various genres and to travel throughout nearly all of South India, edifying disciples and disputing opponents. It is Śaṅkara's preaching and philosophic activity that, in the eyes of orthodox tradition, accounts for the ultimate ousting of Buddhism from India in about the eighth century AD, and the revival of Brahmanism. But what matters most is not even the scale of the task set before the philosopher. The teaching of Śaṅkara is an example of extreme, perhaps unprecedented intellectual courage: starting with the orthodox idea of the unity of all being, he did not shy away from tracing all its consequences.

Vedānta, a religious and philosophical school founded by Śaṅkara, was shaped later than other *darśanas*: it happened after India had passed through Buddhist temptation and was moving back towards the womb of Brahmanist religion. The very name of this system (*veda-anta*, literally, end of the Vedas) is interpreted either as a systematic summary of their main points or as a school having its immediate source in the final portions of the Vedas, that is, in the Upaniṣads.

According to the venerable tradition of coupling orthodox philosophical schools, Vedānta is usually grouped

with *Mīmāṃsā*; hence its other name—*Uttara-Mīmāṃsā*, or later *Mīmāṃsā*. In contrast to *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā*, or first *Mīmāṃsā*, which also declared its close connection with sacred scripture, Vedānta teaches not about ritual rules and laws, based primarily on the literal interpretation of Vedic texts, but about the integral sense of revelation. Philosophic trends within Vedānta vary greatly: starting with Śaṅkara's monistic school, passing through the system of Rāmānuja, where the world and souls are considered to be parts or attributes of eternal Brahman, and winding up in the theistic dualism of Madhva, where Brahman is opposed to nature and living beings.

The system of Śaṅkara is called *Advaita-Vedānta*, that is, non-dual Vedānta; its task is to teach about eternal Brahman as the higher and only reality. Here Brahman is not simply one from the standpoint of higher knowledge (*pāramārthikam*), nothing ever happened to it; all the multiplicity of the phenomenal world is unfolded through *māyā*, its own creative power. *Māyā* is a kind of screen or magic illusion but, at the same time, it is the reverse side of Brahman itself. Just as a rope in the hands of a juggler seems to turn into a snake, or just as a piece of shell can be taken for silver from a distance, the qualities of the universe, according to *Advaita-Vedānta*, are only temporarily superimposed on the unchanging foundation of being. Liberation from this cosmic illusion (*mokṣa*) is achieved only through the return to Brahman as true knowledge.

The European public became acquainted with the ideas of *Advaita* as early as the first part of the nineteenth century;<sup>2</sup> however, a solid base for research into Śaṅkara's

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2. One might remember in this respect a Latin treatise written by F. H. Windischmann (*Sancara sive de theologumenis Vedanticorum*, Bonn, 1833); a monograph by G. C. Haughton (*The Exposition of the Vedānta Philosophy*, London, 1835); and a somewhat later critical work by T. Foulkes (*The Elements of the Vedāntic Philosophy*, Madras, 1860). There is also an interesting work by J. R. Ballantyne (*Christianity Contrasted with Hindu Philosophy*, Madras, 1860) in which Śaṅkara's teaching is seen in relation to the ideas of G. Berkeley.

system was not supplied until nearly the end of the century. In 1883, Paul Deussen, an outstanding German scholar (who was, incidentally, also a friend and biographer of Nietzsche), published a monograph in which the teaching of the Indian philosopher was investigated mainly in the light of classical German philosophy, primarily the system of Kant.<sup>3</sup> Four years later, he published a full German translation of Śaṅkara's principal work, his Commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*.<sup>4</sup> After this, works dealing with Śaṅkara and his teaching started to appear by the dozen. By now their number has grown so vast that it would be senseless to suggest even a tentative review of the main ideas put forward by different scholars. One can take into account only some of the works which are still relevant for present-day Indology.

The exploration of Vedānta by the German historian of philosophy F. Max Müller followed more or less along the lines drafted by Deussen, but he was mainly looking for analogies between the systems of Śaṅkara and Plato (discussed in one of his most popular books *Three Lectures of Vedānta Philosophy*). A monograph on early Vedānta written by Max von Walleser dealt with the teaching of Śaṅkara and some of his predecessors.<sup>5</sup> In 1926 an interesting book appeared by a German historian of religion, Rudolf Otto, who compared the notions of Śaṅkara and Meister Eckhart, while describing peculiarities of the mystical traditions of East and West.<sup>6</sup> By that time Vedānta,

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3. P. Deussen, *Das System des Vedānta*, Leipzig, 1883.

4. P. Deussen, *Die Sūtra's des Vedānta, nebst dem vollständigen Kommentare des Śaṅkara*, Leipzig, 1887.

5. M. von Walleser, *Der ältere Vedānta, Geschichte, Kritik and Lehre*, Heidelberg, 1910.

6. R. Otto, *West-östliche Mystik, Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesendeutung*, Gotha, 1926. Later I will be considering some of the ideas of this book, as well as its critical review published by Paul Hacker in connection with its new edition (1971).

presented chiefly by Śaṅkara's Advaita, became (along with Buddhism) a popular subject not only for scholarly research but also for fiction.<sup>7</sup>

7. Vedantic themes, taking their origin in the ideas of the Upaniṣads, appear in the works of the American Transcendentalists—Emerson and Thoreau. Fiction writers of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century derived their image of Vedanta mainly from the first volume of Arthur Schopenhauer's famous work *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819), in which the German philosopher bases his research not on Buddhist sources but clearly on the Upaniṣads. Most susceptible to the ideas of Vedanta among all the literary currents proved to be the poetry of Symbolism. One is reminded, for example, of the Russian Symbolists with their frequent image of *māyā*. A poem by Konstantin Balmont "Māyā" was written in 1899 and included in the poetical cycle *Indian Herbs*. Its epigraph is composed by one of the 'great sayings' of the Upaniṣads—*Tat tvam asi* (Thou art that), as well as a saying "who knows the essence transcends grief," attributed by the poet to Śrī-Śaṅkarācārya. One remembers the lines of Vyacheslav Ivanov: "O Transparency! make a smiling fairy tale / Of the visions of life / Make lucid the veil of *māyā*!" (1904). And there is a quatrain of Maximilian Voloshin: "Sadly I accept / Lingering of ancient snakes: / A slow *Māyā* / Of hastening days." (1905). Playing with the name of his correspondent, Voloshin writes to M. Kudashova (future wife of R. Rollan) "I am accepting you so: / Earth's midday mirage, / An illusion, a deception—a *māyā*." And in the threefold poem of an Akmeist poet Nickolay Gumilev "Soul and body", which is part of his collection of verses *Fiery column*, one encounters a threefold division of human nature: it is composed of soul, body and some "demanding subject", embracing all the universe. Though at first glance this poem is devoid of Indian notions and terms, this third entity invisibly present in every human being is evidently correlated with the idea of *ātman*: "When from the height the word of God / Blazed like a Polar Star, / Asking: "Who are you, the Demander? / The soul appeared before Me, and the body." And here is the answer given by the Self "I'm He who dreams, and depth is covering / His ineffable name, / While you are only a weak glimpse of a dream / That is unfolding at the bottom of His consciousness!" (1919). It is fairly clear that Vedantic images are assuming here the traits of a widely shared metaphor, almost a platitude; they should be considered essentially a tribute to an accepted cultural tradition. A deeper acquaintance with Indian philosophy is more characteristic of prose writers of the next generation—H. Hesse, T. Mann, R. Rollan, A. Huxley. But it should be admitted that in their writings as well as in those of our contemporaries J. Kerouac and J. Salinger, Vedantic notions cannot be practically separated from Buddhist or Indian motifs in general.

Starting from the first decades of this century, the Western public became acquainted with the works of Indian scholars who received their education not only in traditional Indian centers of learning but also in Western universities. These scholars interpreted the religious and philosophical systems of India in the context of world (primarily European) history of philosophy. One should mention here the fundamental many-volumed works by S. Dasgupta and S. Radhakrishnan, in which Vedānta occupies the most extensive as well as the most prominent place.<sup>8</sup> A more concise exposition of Indian philosophy can be found in the well-known monograph by M. Hiriyanna.<sup>9</sup>

Indian and Western historians of philosophy laid a foundation for the comparative analysis of Vedānta and other religious and philosophical schools of India. A fruitful comparison and investigation of the main notions of Śaṅkara's Advaita and Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭa-Advaita can be found in the works of D.N. Srinivasacari,<sup>10</sup> O. Lacombe,<sup>11</sup> P.N. Srinivasachari<sup>12</sup> and other scholars. The problems of historical borrowings and typological affinities between Vedānta and Buddhism were raised in the works of H. von Glasenapp.<sup>13</sup> The orthodox Indian scholar T.M.P. Mahadevan published several books on Advaita and a work dealing with the ideas of Śaṅkara's prede-

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8. S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vols. 1-4, Cambridge, 1921-22; vol. 5, Cambridge, 1955. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, New York, 1951.

9. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Bombay, 1976.

10. D. N. Srinivasacari, *Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja*, Madras, 1913.

11. O. Lacombe, *L'absolu selon le Vedānta*, Paris, 1937.

12. P. N. Srinivasachari, *Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita*, Bombay, 1961.

13. H. von Glasenapp, *Der Stufenweg zum Göttliche, Śaṅkaras Philosophie der All-Einheit*, Baden-Baden, 1948. H. von Glasenapp, *Vedānta und Buddhismus*, Wiesbaden, 1950.

cessor, Gauḍapāda; he also translated into English some works of Śaṅkara and other Advaitists.<sup>14</sup>

Probably the most noticeable trait, and one of the major shortcomings, of the first scholarly works on Śaṅkara is their enthusiastic superficiality of investigation. In the words of Paul Hacker, taken from his review of I. Vecchiotti's book on present-day Indian thinkers, "ist es gewiss ... Gewohnheit, Probleme, statt sie zu lösen, in schwebender Formulierung literarisch zu stilisieren" ("It is certainly ... the usual practice instead of solving the problems to stylize them literarily in misty formulae.")<sup>15</sup> Though this scathing remark applies mainly to the peculiarities of Radhakrishnan's literature style, which differs considerably from the more sombre and sober style of Śaṅkara, it also pertains to quite a number of critical essays on Advaita.

Among the historical works on Śaṅkara's teaching which resisted the temptation of too sweeping generalizations, one should note two books and numerous articles by P. Hacker,<sup>16</sup> as well as a precise and serious work by K. Satchidananda Murty.<sup>17</sup> In my opinion, they not only ensure the right direction of analysis but also substantiate the examination by a thorough analysis of original San-

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14. T.M.P. Mahadevan, *The Philosophy of Advaita*, London, 1938. T.M.P. Mahadevan, *The Study of Advaita*, London, 1957. T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Gauḍapāda: A Study in Early Advaita*, Madras, 1952. T.M.P. Mahadevan, *The Hymns of Śaṅkara*, Madras, 1970.

15. P. Hacker, Review of Icilio Vecchiotti's *Pensatori dell'India contemporanea*, Roma, 1959, in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, no. 111, 1961, p. 373.

16. P. Hacker, "Untersuchungen über Texte des frühen Advaitavāda." I. *Die Schüler Śaṅkaras*, Mainz-Wiesbaden, 1951. P. Hacker, *Vivarta, Studien zur Geschichte der illusionistische Kosmologie und Erkenntnistheorie der Inder*, Mainz-Wiesbaden, 1953. P. Hacker, "Eigentümlichkeiten der Lehre und Terminologie Śaṅkaras: Avidyā, Nāmarūpa, Māyā, Īśvara," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, no. 100, 1950, pp. 246-86, etc.

17. K. Satchidananda Murty, *Revelation and Reason in Advaita-Vedanta*, London, 1959.

skrit texts and their categorical structure. I will often make use of these works in my own investigation of Advaita that follows.

Recently a new period of Vedantic studies has developed which is characterized by philological methods and specific textological devices. Many works have appeared dealing with the technical terms and notions of this religious school of thought, as well as with some of the actual texts. This trend looks most promising and may well become highly significant in the historical and philosophical analysis of Advaita. A close interweaving of philology and philosophy is characteristic of recent publications by Lambert Schmithausen,<sup>18</sup> Klaus Rüping,<sup>19</sup> Tillmann Vetter,<sup>20</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass<sup>21</sup> and other German and Austrian Indologists. New critical editions of Śaṅkara's works have appeared,<sup>22</sup> as well as numerous new translations.<sup>23</sup>

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18. Lambert Schmithausen, "Maṇḍanamīśra's Vibhramavivekaḥ", *Mit einer Studie zur Entwicklung der Indischen Irrtumslehre*, Wien, 1965.

19. Klaus Rüping, *Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Vedanta-Philosophie, Part 1. Philologische Untersuchungen zu den Brahmasūtra-Kommentaren des Śaṅkara und des Bhāskara*, Wiesbaden, 1977.

20. Tillmann Vetter, *Studien zur Lehre und Entwicklung Śaṅkaras*, Wien, 1979.

21. Wilhelm Halbfass, *Studies in Kumārila and Śaṅkara*, Reinbek, 1983.

22. One of the most active scholars in this field is a professor of Indian philosophy from Tokyo University, Sengaku Mayeda, who recently published a new annotated edition of Śaṅkara's treatise (*Upadeśasāhasri, Śaṅkara's Upadeśasāhasri*. Critically edited with introduction and indices by Sengaku Mayeda, Tokyo, 1973.)

23. Among more recent translations of Śaṅkara's Commentary on *Brahmasūtra* one should mention an English translation of Swami Gambhīrānanda, closer to the original text than a famous classical version by G. Thibaut, *Brahma-Sūtras with Śaṅkara's Commentary*, translated by Swami Gambhīrānanda, New Delhi, 1968. Another fairly exact rendering is that of V.H. Date, though sometimes it seems too literal. V.H. Date, *Vedanta Explained, Śaṅkara's Commentary on the Brahmasūtra*, vols. I-II, New Delhi, 1973.

The Italian scholar Mario Piantelli wrote a biography of Śaṅkara in which he brought together the material of hagiographical sources and also analyzed extensive literary, historical and archaeological data on Śaṅkara's life.<sup>24</sup>

Even in Russia some recent work seems to be pointing in this direction. V. S. Kostyuchenko published *Classic Vedanta and Neo-Vedantism*, part of which is devoted to the analysis of the main notions of various schools of Vedanta.<sup>25</sup> V. G. Lysenko's work on Indian atomism includes a chapter on Śaṅkara's polemics with the Vaiśeṣikas.<sup>26</sup> The first excerpts from Śaṅkara's original texts were published in Russian by E. Zilberman and later, after his emigration, by myself.

The aim of this book is to examine the main notions of Śaṅkara's Advaita: his concept of the identity of *ātman* and Brahman, his unusual understanding of causality, his idea of *māyā*, etc. It goes without saying that at some points this goal presupposed an explicit interpretation of the inner logical connections inherent in Advaita. Such an interpretation unavoidably requires a certain arbitrariness: these inner connections and logical links are usually anything but self-evident, and Śaṅkara himself probably did not consciously lay them down in the foundation of his system. Indeed, the Advaitist regarded his own school of thought basically as a true reflection of the original teachings of the Vedas, where each notion was equally important, that is, theoretically independent. In my opinion, logical correspondences, outlined in this work, were brought about mostly by the needs of inner structure and the balanced architectonics of Advaita itself.

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24. M. Piantelli, *Śaṅkara e la rinascita del brāhmanesimo*, Fossano, 1974.

25. V. S. Kostyuchenko, *Klassicheskaya Vedanta i neovadantizm*, Moskva, 1983.

26. V. G. Lysenko, *Indiyskaya filosofiya prirody; Atomizm shkoly vaisheshika*, Moskva, 1986.

All of this does not mean, however, that the historical development of Vedānta as well as its immediate roots and sources will be ignored. Some historical material is to be found mainly in the first two chapters of the book. The problem of historical analysis of Advaita is not as simple as it might seem at first sight. It compels the researcher to assume a definite attitude towards the problem of the influence of Buddhism and other religious and philosophical schools on Śaṅkara's teaching.

It is well known that one of Śaṅkara's closest teachers was Gauḍapāda, whose main work, *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, was undoubtedly composed under the direct impact of Buddhist ideas. Śaṅkara wrote a deferential commentary on the *Kārikā*; it was owing to the intermediary position of Gauḍapāda that there appeared in Śaṅkara's works the notion of different levels of reality, the concept of higher and lower truth, and even the idea of *māyā*, which was not clearly elaborated in the Upaniṣads. Many present-day scholars maintain that Advaita was formed through the decisive influence of earlier teachings and that its main notions were intentionally or unintentionally borrowed from earlier and contemporary systems, some of them even from heterodox ones.

It goes without saying that historically Advaita could not have taken its distinctive shape without the contribution and experience of its numerous predecessors. Śaṅkara was quite ready to acknowledge the connections of his own teaching with Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā, especially as regards its relations to the Vedas or to *pramāṇas*. Quite evident also is the conceptual affinity between Advaita, on the one hand, and Sāṃkhya and Yoga, on the other. And of course, Śaṅkara owes much of his inclination towards logical argumentation, as well as his interest in epistemological problems not only to the orthodox systems but primarily to Buddhism and Jainism.

Nevertheless, an attempt to understand Advaita's connections with other systems seems rather futile when it is made not to clarify historical influences but to single out 'borrowed' elements from this solid and complete system.

Polemizing against other teachings and defending his own school of thought, Śaṅkara often assimilated and integrated religious and philosophical concepts of his predecessors and opponents; but he bore full responsibility for the specific way in which these blocks were fitted into the balanced structure of Advaita, as well as for the part they were forced to play to maintain its new equilibrium. His task was to try to curb the activity of 'heretics', to put an end to mental instability in general and what was of no less importance—to set limits on ritual trends within a former Brahmanist unity, submitting it to a new kind of spiritual order. He became the author of a precise and internally consistent system, which later proved to be sufficiently tolerant to interpretations at the level of ordinary life, which marked the beginning of numerous trends and new schools—but which still played its part in the gradual restoring of a Brahmanic unity.

In this context an essential issue, as well as a particularly delicate one is Śaṅkara's relationship with Buddhism. Judging by the crucial position of Gauḍapāda, who presented a sort of intermediary between Mahāyāna and Vedānta, this problem cannot be solved by determining, so to speak, Buddhist fragments inside Advaita teaching.

Sometimes scholars seek a satisfactory solution by dividing Śaṅkara's work into several stages. Early Śaṅkara is virtually identified with Gauḍapāda and Buddhism, while his mature works, to their mind, testify to the growing of more traditional and objective or even realistic elements. This attitude is characteristic of S. Dasgupta and P. Hacker; the latter singles out yet another stage in the development of Śaṅkara's thought—his alleged attraction to Yoga, preceding even the Buddhist period.<sup>27</sup> This opin-

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27. Cf. P. Hacker, "Śaṅkara der Yogin und Śaṅkara der Advaitin, Einige Beobachtungen." *Beiträge zur Gelstesgeschichte Indiens. Festschrift für Eric Frauwallner*, Wien, 1968, pp. 119-48. In the work dealing specially with Śaṅkara's commentary on *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* of Gauḍapāda, P. Hacker writes, "The only possible explanation of the inconsistency and confusion of Śaṅkara's argumentation is the hy-

ion became more or less prevalent among Western Indologists. In the words of F. Whaling, "Part of the story of Śaṅkara's own development is his own reaction against the undue Buddhist influence he felt he had received from Gauḍapāda ... While Śaṅkara applied Gauḍapāda's key to his interpretations, the very fact that his canvas was so much wider, and his task more varied, meant that he could not follow Gauḍapāda in every detail."<sup>28</sup>

In my opinion, this division of Śaṅkara's—rather brief, incidentally—activity into periods seems a bit strained. Differences in the contents (as well as style) of his works are not that great; his divergencies from Gauḍapāda and the Buddhists look far more significant. Finally, the notion of the gradual development of Śaṅkara's views from Buddhist inclinations towards conventional orthodoxy leaves without any satisfactory explanation the fact that all his life was devoted to a fierce struggle against the Buddhists and other heterodox opponents.

In general, the problem of the essence of Advaita and the scope of Buddhist influence on its formation continues to draw the attention of scholars interested in Śaṅkara's system. Though a wide variety of opinions has been presented, their very approach to the problem suggests a common presupposition to which I feel bound to raise an objection.

According to T.M.P. Mahadevan, an apparent similarity between Advaita and Buddhist Śūnyavāda was simply a tactical device of Śaṅkara, his means of overcoming an opponent, while pretending to take his side. He is speak-

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pothesis that he tried his level best, but failed, to unite into a consistent whole elements of different traditions and some ideas of his own .... In his other commentaries the same confusion does not appear again. P. Hacker, "Notes on *Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣad* and Śaṅkara's *Āgamaśāstravivarāṇa*", *India Maior*, Congratulation volume presented to J. Gonda, ed. J. Ensink and P. Gaeffke, Leiden, 1972, p. 129.

28. F. Whaling, "Śaṅkara and Buddhism", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Dordrecht, vol. 7, no. 1, March 1979, p. 23.

ing about Gauḍapāda but his words are meant to embrace the attitude of Gauḍapāda's disciple: "[T]he main aim of the teacher is to expound the philosophy of the Upaniṣads, and ... he does not deviate from his purpose even when he adopts the arguments of the Bauddha Idealists and dresses his thought in Buddhist terminology."<sup>29</sup> Summing up similar statements, characteristic of traditionally minded Indian scholars, S. Mudgal says that according to them, Śaṅkara "adopted practically all ... dialectic (of the Buddhists), their methodology, their arguments and analysis, their concepts, their terminologies and even their philosophy of the Absolute, gave all of them a Vedantic appearance, and demolished Buddhism ... Śaṅkara embraced Buddhism, but it was a fatal embrace."<sup>30</sup>

There is great support for the diametrically opposed point of view according to which Mahāyāna Buddhism and Advaita of Śaṅkara absolutely coincide in their main tenets. In the opinion of S. Radhakrishnan, C. Sharma and many other scholars, any differences found between these schools concern barely perceptible academic (that is, scholastic) matters and do not touch the core of the problem. In the words of Chandradhar Sharma, "Buddhism and Vedānta should not be viewed as two opposed systems but only as different stages in the development of the same central thought which starts with the Upaniṣads, finds its indirect support in Buddha, its elaboration in Mahāyāna Buddhism, its open revival in Gauḍapāda, which reaches its zenith in Śaṅkara and culminates in the Post-Śaṅkarites."<sup>31</sup>

On closer deliberation, the roots of similar statements can be found in the views of those passionate advocates of

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29. T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Gauḍapāda: A Study in Early Advaita*, p. 219.

30. S. Mudgal, *Advaita of Śaṅkara: a Reappraisal, Impact of Buddhism and Sāṃkhya on Śaṅkara's Thought*, Delhi, 1975, p. 187.

31. C. Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, London, 1960, p. 318.

Vedantic tradition who suspected even Śaṅkara himself of hidden sympathies for Buddhism. These views go back to Śaṅkara's junior contemporary, the Vedantist Bhāskara, who thought that Śaṅkara's notion of *māyā*, derived from Buddhism, was undermining the authority of Vedic religion. Later Rāmānuja was to call Śaṅkara a 'crypto-Buddhist' (*pracchanna-bauddha*).<sup>32</sup> It is clear, however, that the matter boils down to a shift in emphasis. The aspects that aroused the indignation of strictly orthodox Vedantins are now extolled by their more liberally-minded successors. After a small cosmetic operation, after purifying Buddhism and Advaita of accidental or historically conditioned accretions, both systems can be safely regarded as an expression of one and the same eternal absolute truth. In the words of one of the leading historians of religion, "the differences between Śaṅkara and Mahāyāna doctrines are largely a matter of emphasis and background" rather than real essence.<sup>33</sup> The same notion prevails in the fundamental work of S. Radhakrishnan *Indian Philosophy*, the last chapter of which deals specifically with the unity of all systems.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, a modification of this thesis is presented by the notion of a deep and decisive influence of Buddhism upon renewed Brahmanism. When a scholar feels reluctant to deny the originality of Vedanta, he can find a solution, ascribing to Śaṅkara an attempt at reconciliation of two currents of thought: the Buddhist and the orthodox one (the latter starting with the Upaniṣads). According to S. Mudgal, for example, "the Advaita Vedanta seems to be an attempt on the part of Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara, to recon-

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32. The definition can be found in Rāmānuja's main work, his commentary on Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahmasūtra* (see *Śribhāṣya*, II.II. 27).

33. Ninian Smart, *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy*, London, 1964, p. 104.

34. See S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. 2, New York, 1951.

cile the two currents of thought, Buddhist and Upaniṣadic. The two currents thus developed separately and independently, are opposed to one another, as the orthodox and heterodox, the thesis and its antithesis, and a synthesis was attempted by the Advaitin Śaṅkararācārya, in his *Two Tier Philosophy*.<sup>35</sup>

According to the extreme version of these notions, one cannot even maintain the thesis of mutual enrichment of both teachings within the Advaita framework. Talking about Buddhist impact on Advaita, S. Dasgupta, incidentally, flatly denies Śaṅkara's system any originality: "I am led to think that Śaṅkara's philosophy is largely a compound of Vijñānavāda and Śūnyavāda Buddhism with the Upaniṣad notion of the permanence of self superimposed."<sup>36</sup> In other words, some scholars try to create the impression that the new ideas, dialectics and other intellectual achievements of Buddhism were extracted by the Advaitist from the 'heretical' teaching of his opponents and hastily disguised with the help of conventionally safe orthodox phraseology—just so that their explosive potential could be rendered harmless and adapted to the existing religious and social order. The same conclusion is drawn by C. Eliot in a fundamental work devoted to the problem of interrelations between Buddhism and orthodox religion: "The debt of Śaṅkara to Buddhism is an interesting question. He indited polemics against it and contributed materially to its downfall, but yet if the success of creeds is to be measured by the permanence of ideas, there is some reason for thinking that the vanquished led the conqueror captive."<sup>37</sup>

Irrespective of whether a scholar acknowledges or denies a certain independence in Śaṅkara's teaching, such statements subtly convey the idea of an obsolete tradition

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35. S. Mudgal, *Advaita of Śaṅkara: A Reappraisal*, p. 175.

36. S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. I, p. 494.

37. C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol. 2, New York, 1954, p. 211.

grafting on new tenets, whether original or derived. Hence all the bitter laments over the 'excessive' dependence of Advaita upon sacred texts and Vedantic orthodoxy. Hence all the endeavors to explain and excuse the Advaitin's 'narrow-mindedness', indicating that, after all, he was a son of his time, the limits of which he could not exceed, no matter how he tried. In the above-mentioned work by C. Eliot one finds the following argument about Śaṅkara: "But since his whole object was to revive the traditions of the past and suppress his originality by attempting to prove that his ideas are those of Bādarāyaṇa and the Upaniṣads, the magnitude of his contribution to Indian thought is often underrated."<sup>38</sup>

Of course, it goes without saying that renewing Brahmanism, the roots of which were nourished by Vedanta, was not a mere restoration of conceptual schemes prevalent before the rise of heterodox schools. But Advaita, which lent scope and significance to this process, was by no means just a chaotic mixture of Buddhism and Brahmanism with a handful of other ideas derived from various systems thrown in. If one assumed it to be this sort of mixture, one could only regard the traditional religion as some accidental and obsolete container for a new content.

I try to show in this book how Advaita succeeded in reshaping and assimilating some major notions that originated within the Buddhist frame of thought. But even more important for understanding Śaṅkara's teaching is the problem of Advaita's attitude towards sacred tradition, towards Vedic sayings. The sacred tradition here is not simply a bursting wineskin which cannot contain new wine: after audacious 'heretics'—the Buddhists and the Jainas—dared to doubt the infallibility of the Vedas, Śaṅkara had to rethink the role of sacred scripture, trying to tie it more strongly to the core of his own teaching. Finally, in spite of the obvious similarity between Śaṅkara's and the Mīmāṃsākas' attitude to the Vedas, Advaita's

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38. C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol. 2, p. 312.

belief in the eternity and absolute importance of scripture was not just an artless repetition of Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā dogmata. When concepts that look identical at first glance, fall within the gravitational fields of different premises, centripetal forces shape them in their own peculiar way.

In order to determine Śaṅkara's place in the history of Indian culture, it was essential to deliberate over the way the sacred texts, and sacred tradition in general, were refracted in his system. That is why I have presented Advaita first in its vehement opposition to 'heretical' schools and to Lokāyata, and subsequently in its comparison with Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā. In order to achieve a more vivid perception it seemed a good idea to trace an outline of the system against a strange background, and then check the accuracy of the contours by seeing it in relation to its closest yet still different orthodox counterpart. However, what was meant to be merely a formal method for organizing the material, produced unexpected results. This method revealed some important inner tenets of Advaita, precisely because attention was brought to the role of sacred scripture in Śaṅkara's teaching. It turned out that Vedic texts play a serious theoretical part in securing an inner intellectual balance to his system, valid for every specific problem arising in course of the polemics.

This method not only clarified the main direction of the work but also the concrete means of its accomplishment. Besides textual analysis and historical and philosophical deliberation, there was occasional need to resort to a more specific analysis of Śaṅkara's theological concepts. Though I tried as far as possible to avoid somewhat strained comparisons between Advaita and Christianity, certain notions of Christian hermeneutics (even in the absence of any direct references to it) helped bring to light Śaṅkara's attitude to revelation and, in a wider context, to his philosophy of language.

One can find many features in common between Advaita and Western religious and philosophical systems: similar points could be determined in the scholastic teachings of Thomas Aquinas and Bernard de Clairvaux, as well

as in the mystic Christianity of Meister Eckhart; indeed, they can be traced as far as some notions of German dialectical theology or Christian existentialism. It seems that in the history of philosophy the same problems keep surfacing with surprising regularity. They come up again and again but receive different interpretations—and different solutions—depending on the intellectual life of the time and predominant cultural dispositions. Finally, it is sometimes important to draw comparisons even between distant concepts and systems to clarify what is really dissimilar in them. In his review of a German edition of Mircea Eliade's famous book on Yoga, Paul Hacker underlines the necessity to approach the study of theological distinctions between religious and philosophical systems by way of philological or historico-philological investigation. He further specifies: "Das Unterscheiden ist hier doch wohl wichtiger als die Feststellung von Ähnlichkeiten, die, füz sich allein Betueben, allzu leicht zu einer falschen Gleichsetzung wizd" ("The difference here is much more important than any determination of similarities, since the latter being treated by themselves, lead only too easily towards a false concept of identity.")<sup>39</sup> I have tried to abide by this warning while working on this book.

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39. P. Hacker, Review of Mircea Eliade's *Yoga, Unsterblichkeit und Freiheit*, Zürich, 1960. In *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*, Münster, no. 46, 1962, p. 318.