# GAUḌAPĀDA

History, it has been said with unconscious chauvinism, is the lengthened shadow of a man. The history of India's most celebrated system of religious philosophy may seem to confirm this, for it could be seen as the long shadow cast by a single and singular person: Gauḍapāda.

Other philosophies are more influential in the lives of India's masses, no doubt, but Advaita Vedānta has usually been honored, in recent centuries, as that country's supreme intellectual and spiritual achievement. It teaches that reality is not the confusing multiplicity we normally seem to see but, at root, a single One. It is, thus, non-dualist. And that One is not material but is ultimately a profound and perfect Consciousness. Armed with these ideas, the eminent Śaṅkara is said to have driven Buddhism from the fields of philosophical debate and to have established Advaita Vedānta as the most respected interpretation of the ancient wisdom of the Vedas, or scriptures, of India. *Advaita* means non-dualist and *vedānta* means the end or consummation of the *veda*, the inspired scriptures.

Śaṅkara's triumph is not in dispute, but to say that it was he who founded the Advaita philosophy in Hinduism is to go too far. He himself acknowledged his dependence on Gauḍapāda, whom he called his "*paramaguru*"—the teacher of his own *guru*, Govinda. Gauḍapāda, he said, had rescued the non-dualism (or monism) of the most important Upaniṣads (those richest of all Hindu scriptures) and had brought it to light again after dualist interpreters had buried it beneath their specious reasoning.

To study living Indian philosophy is inevitably to

study Advaita Vedānta, and to come to terms with this, to wrestle with its power and come to know what may be its weaknesses, it is to Gauḍapāda we should go first of all.

About Gauḍapāda the man we know, alas, almost nothing—perhaps nothing at all, since what we "know" may be wrong. To begin, even his name is an enigma for it is evidently not a real, personal name at all but a sort of nickname meaning something like "the worthy gentleman from Gauḍa." Gauḍa, or Gauḍadeśa (the Gauḍa region) lay in northern Bengal, and someone from there might be called Gauḍa. *Pāda*, although it means foot, was used sometimes as a title of respect, so some have speculated that our philosopher was a *sannyāsin*, one who had renounced the security of ordinary, secular life, given up his name and family, and devoted himself to spiritual perfection. This theory has it, then, that this scholar-saint became so respected that his disciples, not knowing his name, had to invent one for him and devised "Gauḍapāda" on the basis of the place he was known to have come from.

Of his life, we know little more. Ānandagiri, who wrote a commentary on the Gauḍapādan text we shall be examining, tells us something. Gauḍapāda lived and did penance (*tapasyā*) at a place named Badarikāśrama and there developed, or received by revelation, the Advaita philosophy.[1]

This "information" is so vague and impersonal that Max Walleser, among others, has even wondered whether such a person ever existed.[2] Perhaps "Gauḍapāda" refers not to an individual but to a school (as people in the United States might talk about "the Chicago School" in philosophy or Canadians about "the Group of Seven" in art). Or perhaps *pāda* is not an honorific suffix here but means a "step" or section in a book, so that "Gauḍapāda" really refers to the four chapters or segments of the work we shall examine and implies that it is a product of a school of thought centered in Gauḍadeśa.

The more we probe, the more Gauḍapāda imitates the Cheshire Cat—dissolving before our eyes with only an enchanted smile remaining, perhaps of derision. But when

all the data are considered it seems most likely that Gauḍapāda was a real person. Śaṅkara's reference to him, and Ānandagiri's, certainly support this view, and the writings we can most surely believe to be his do not seem to be the work of a committee. They convey the warmth of a strong personality and a vigorous single mind. But when did he live?

The cat smiles again! If Śaṅkara lived in the eighth century, probably near its beginning as many recent studies suggest, and if Gauḍapāda was *guru* to Govinda who taught Śaṅkara, we must place him somewhere in or very near the seventh century. This may well be correct, but there is a problem.

It is clear that Gauḍapāda lived after the major Buddhist writers, especially Vasubandhu, whose work he clearly reflects; but in an early sixth-century work by Bhāvaviveka there seem to be direct quotations from Gauḍapāda, and if so we must place our man no later than the fifth century.

Is it possible that Śaṅkara did not mean that Gauḍapāda was literally his *paramaguru* but only that he was the most important influence on Govinda and through him on Śaṅkara himself (as one might say "I studied philosophy with Professor X, and, as you know, Hegel was his master")? Yes. Quite possible. Then we may consign Gauḍapāda to the fifth century.

Or perhaps not! It is also possible that Bhāvaviveka is not quoting Gauḍapāda at all, but that both of them made use of a common source which is now lost to us.

From all this we can rescue only this much: Gauḍapāda seems to have been an actual individual who lived between the fifth and eighth centuries and powerfully influenced Śaṅkara, changing the course of Indian philosophy. At least we may dismiss the most absurd suggestions about him, including one that he flourished as early as 3000 B.C.E.

Gauḍapāda did not leave us much writing. Several works are traditionally attributed to him, but after careful scrutiny only three remain serious possibilities. There is a

*bhāṣya* on Iśvarakṛṣṇa's *Sāṁkhyakārikās*, a commentary on the *Uttaragītā*, and a *kārikā* on the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*.

To explore Gauḍapāda's fertile mind, then, we shall examine the Fourth Section of his *kārikā* on the *Māṇḍūkya*.

A *kārikā* may be a metrical interpretation and extension of a text, and Gauḍapāda's first section in his *Māṇḍūkyakārikā* is precisely this. It quotes the Upaniṣad and selectively develops it. But the remaining sections leave the Upaniṣad behind and pursue their own themes, although at first these are themes that emerge from the scripture. The fourth section is the most independent of all. As we shall see, this has aroused controversy because this final section seems to stand alone and some have argued that it is an independent work that has somehow become attached to the others. Moreover, in this section Gauḍapāda makes more use of Buddhist terms than he does elsewhere—so much so that some scholars think he may have been a crypto-Buddhist who merely made convenient use of a Upaniṣad. These are matters we shall discuss in more detail; it is enough for us now to note that it is the final segment of Gauḍapāda's so-called *Māṇḍūkyopaniṣad Kārikā* that we shall study, drawing on the earlier chapters as and if they are useful for clarification. By this means we shall confront all the major ideas with which Gauḍapāda equipped Śaṅkara.

First, however, we must take note of some of the questions that scholarship has raised or settled about Gauḍapāda and we shall try to outline his principal ideas. Then we shall present a translation of the fourth section (*prakaraṇa*), which is entitled *"Alātaśānti"* ("Peace to the Firebrand" or "Extinguishing the Firebrand"). Finally, we shall offer a brief commentary on parts of the translated text.

There are several English renderings of the *kārikā* (or *kārikās*: one may use a plural or treat the word as a collective noun), so that a new one probably needs justification. This is easily given. The others have now so far receded from view that something should be done to attract attention once more to Gauḍapāda. Again, earlier translations,

however solidly founded on good scholarship, tended to reflect a bias toward one or other of the rival answers to critical questions; for instance, they make Gauḍapāda a blatant Buddhist or they virtually conceal his use of Buddhist terms. Some translations are so painstakingly literal that the result can scarcely be called English; others work so hard to make a meaning clear that Gauḍapāda's text is left far behind.

The present aim, therefore, is to take all former translations into consideration, to offer a work that is faithful to the most likely *meaning* in Gauḍapāda's mind, and yet to achieve reasonable clarity in English.