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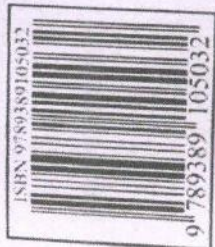
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Sankara and Advaitavedanta - Kerala's Contribution to Indian Thought

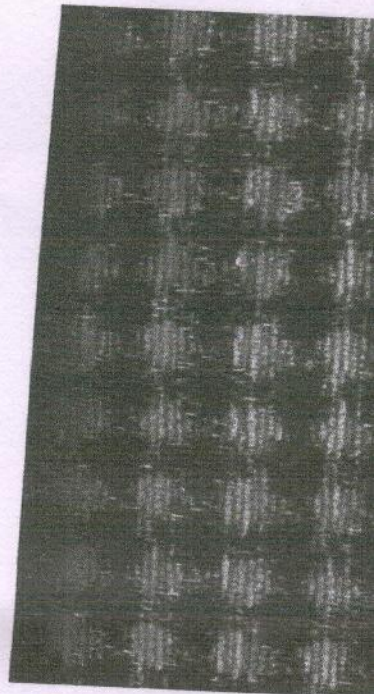
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Advaitavedanta is perhaps one of the Indian knowledge systems that can claim to have generated the most diverse readings and interpretations. For a contemporary researcher working within that diverse tradition, trying to develop a method to delineate the essence of that philosophy, the first task will be about how to approach that philosophical system. Should it be done solely by employing the established theories of that system? But such an approach may not bear fruits in developing a comprehensive understanding about it. The methodologies adopted, the basic approaches followed and the relations between different complimentary concepts, etc. are also to be considered in analysing a system rather than limit oneself to its established theories. Sankara being the most powerful exponent of this system has laid a strong logical foundation for this philosophy so that Advaitavedanta is associated with the name of Sankara first and foremost. First and continually in the ages to come.

According to biographical sources, Sankara left his native place Kerala in an early age to embrace sanyasa and spent the rest of his life mostly in several parts of North India. (Sripadaswami A., 1972: 54) It is also said that Sankara, as an Advaitin faced an unfriendly approach from ritual-centered society of Kerala during his own time. The instance of Sankara coming to perform the last rites of his mother and not getting support of the local Brahmin community for the reconsecration of sanyasa was unfit to perform such rites, is an example (Kripnaswami A., 1972: 89) This instance may be the reflection of the friction between the two branches of Vedic fold which emphasised karma and jnana respectively. Sankara's bhassya in Brahmasutra opens with and goes further again and again denouncing the two streams of karma or social environment influence him. Does his philosophical discourse contain anything that addresses Kerala particularly, or are there any elements in it which could be termed 'Keralan-specific'? Daya Krishna observes that the four *mazhis* established by Sankara in four corners of India must have assured a pan-Indian identity for his thoughts. (Daya Krishna, 2002: 28) Then arises the question about the ways and modes through which Advaito was assimilated and practised in Kerala. Later part of this paper tries to address this issue.

This paper is written on the assumption that Sankara's contribution to the philosophical tradition of India is basically intellectual - conceptual. Sankara is not the founder of Advaita vedanta. Sankara's dialogical refutations of other philosophical schools and his unique kind of



Sankara and Advaitavedanta - Kerala's Contribution to Indian Thought

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Advaitavedanta is perhaps one of the Indian knowledge systems that claim to have generated the most diverse readings and interpretations. For a contemporary post-secular working within this diverse tradition, trying to develop a unified or definite the essence of that philosophy, the first task will be about how to approach its philosophical system. Should it be done which by employing the established theories of that system? But such an approach may not lead him to develop a comprehensive understanding about it. The methods adopted, the basic principles followed and the relations between different constituent concepts etc are also to be considered in analysing a system rather than limit oneself to its established theories. Sankara being the most powerful exponent of this system has had a strong logical foundation for this philosophy so that Advaitavedanta is associated with the name of Sankara first and foremost. First part of this paper is an attempt to explore the essence of Sankara's analytical thoughts which had their continuity in the ages to come.

According to biographical sources, Sankara left his native place Kerala at an early age in either 5 or 6 and spent the rest of his life mostly in several parts of North India (Appayann A., 1972: 50). It is also said that Sankara, as an Advaitin faced an unfriendly approach from temple-centred society of Kerala during his own time. The instance of Sankara coming to perform the last rites of his mother and not getting support of the local Brahmins continues for the reason, a sanyasin was unfit to perform such rites, is an example (Appayann A., 1972: 89). This instance may be the reflection of the friction between the two branches of Ayra, fold which emphasised karma and jnana respectively. Sankara's bhavaya on Brahmananda's opinion with and goes further again and again denigrating the two streams of Karma and Jnana. He may tend to ask certain questions like how far did Kerala's particular cultural or social environment influence him. Does his philosophical discourse contain anything that addresses Kerala particularly, or are there any elements in it which could be termed 'Keralan-ness'. Daya Krishna observes that the four *maths* established by Sankara in four corners of India were not assumed a pan-Indian identity for his thoughts (Daya Krishna, 2002: 28). Then arises the question about the ways and modes through which Advaita was assimilated and practised in Kerala. For part of this paper tries to address this issue.

The paper is written on the assumption that Sankara's contribution to the philosophical thought of India is basically intellectual - conceptual. Sankara is not the founder of Advaita tradition, but not a *disruptor* of traditions of other philosophical schools and his unique kind of

