

SRI SANKARA (SANKARACHARYA)

Sri Sankara, the greatest philosopher of all times and the greatest Hindu of his time, is generally supposed to have been born at Kaladi in Kerala on the Wet Coast of the Indian peninsula in A.D. 788.

Even as a boy he attended the Vedic school. His sharp brain went prying into the soul of the sacred Vedic Lore and formulated, with astute genius, accurate definitions and exact analysis, a synthetic philosophy. He renounced the world before his mind could be contaminated by its viles, and embraced monotheism, dedicating his life to *Ishwara*-realization and, also, to bringing back the world to its pristine purity.

Assuring his mother that he would be at her bedside at her last moment, this passion-less recluse went in search of a teacher, who could formally initiate him into the mysteries of *Sannyasa* and show the way to the Supreme. At Omkarnath, on the river Narmada, Sankara found his guru in Govinda Bhagavatapada. He stayed with him exploring every facet of the supreme truth, and humbling himself in the modesty of wisdom.

In fulfilment of the mandate from his Guru to establish Adyaita Vedanta (One God Theory) as the meeting ground of all monistic and dualistic views, contradictory though they might appear to be, the young genius went to Varanasi, the ancient seat of Vedic religion and culture, and started spreading the gospel of 'One God' i.e. *Ishwara*. He held disputations with the learned leaders of various schools of thought, and, by uncovering false assumptions and questioning, assumed certainties, established the supremacy of his system of thought. Here the first four disciples of Sanandana, later known as Padmapada, joined him.

From Varanasi, the spiritual colossus journeyed on to Badrinath with his disciples, spreading the message of his synthetic philosophy. He visited many holy places such as Prayag, Hardwar, Hrishikesh, Srinagar, Rudraprayag, Nandaprayag, Kamarupa and Gomukhi, worshipped the Deities on the way, and thus demonstrated that a knower of *Nirguna Brahma* i.e. *Ishwara*, loose nothing by paying homage to the statues of *Devatas* (Idols of messiahs). Sankara wrote commentaries on the ten

Upanisads, the Bhagavad Gita, Brahma Sutra and established his doctrine on a firm foundation.

Then he wandered about from place to place engaging himself in discussions with leaders of diverse creeds and sects, and, by his superb dialectic skill, he went on denouncing false dogmas and puncturing erroneous presumptions.

Sankara travelled all over, the length and breadth of the vast sub-continent four times, established four principal monasteries at the four cardinal points of India, the Sringeri *Math* on the Sringeri hills in the South, the Sarada *Math* at Dwaraka in the West, the Jyotirmath at Badrik-ashrama in the North, and the Govardhana *Math* at Puri in the East and appointed his four chief disciples as pontiffs of these *Maths* (Temples) to promote the spiritual well-being of the monks and the people connected with the *Math*. He also assigned to each *Math* (Temple) one Veda. Thus, Rig Veda went to Govardhana *Math*, Yajur Veda to Sringeri *Math*, Sama Veda to Sarada *Math* and Atharva Veda to Jyotir *Math*.

Many obnoxious cults had vitiated the Indian society then, and temples were in the hands of a coterie of corrupt priests dabbling in hideous forms of worship and animal sacrifice. Sankara, with the help of scriptural evidence and his dialectic skill, proved that these militated against the very spirit of the Vedas. He reformed these corrupt practices by infusing into them the noble principles of worship of One *Ishwara*. He demonstrated that ideas of image worship is only to pay respect to messiahs but best result is obtained by praying to *Ishwara*.

His deep affection for his mother triumphed over the rules governing the order of sannyasins, and on her passing away, he performed the funeral rites of his mother in the face of stiff opposition from his relatives. During these days Sannyasins were not allowed to do last rights of parents.

He passed away in Kedarnath on the Himalayas, at the age of thirty-two.