

## **Shankaracharya**



*Amala-kamalaadhivasini*

*maanaso vaimalyadaayini manoine i*

*sundara-gatri susheelee*

*tava charanaambhoruham*

*narnaami sadaa ii*

(O Goddess, You live in the lotus of purity, you make the mind pure, and you are known by the inner mind. You are beautiful as well as virtuous. I offer my salutation at your lotus feet at all times.)

This hymn on Goddess Saraswati, so well known and familiar in India, was composed by Sri Shankaracharya. "It is not possible to describe His form in any specific way. But great is His Glory."

This statement is made about God. It occurs in Vedas. The same thing may be said of sages, seers and philosophers-the most glorious personages who were responsible for the growth and development of our national culture. They did not want to fill the pages of Indian history with physical and material information such as dates, place, birth, period of life, etc. This is the characteristic of our culture. Their vital spirit is still present all around us. Their works alone testify to their spiritual,

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intellectual and creative powers. These great men will appear to us as God-men, when we understand their works. Their actions appear as superhuman. As they are beyond our ability to understand, we tend to think of them as miracles. But these extraordinary men are far above those miracles also. Leaving aside these miracles, if we just take their life story, even that would be wonderful and interesting. The lives of such persons with their pristine purity, reveal the very heart of Indian culture. Sri Adi Shankaracharya belongs to the galaxy of such men. The history of Indian culture, in fact, is the stream of lives of such great souls. In order to recover from the crises the religious, moral, that crop up ideological or political in the society from time to time, the country anxiously awaits the help of inspiring and glorious personalities. It may be said that Sri Shankaracharya's birth took place in the same way, as a result of India's spiritual longing for redressal of its all-round suffering. It is the opinion of scholars that he belonged to the period between 788 and 820 A.D.

It is stated that Sri Shankaracharya was born of God's Grace to his parents. Kalati is a beautiful village Kerala. Even today this fine village may be seen on the bank of river Poornaa. There lived a couple named Shivaguru and Aryamba. Theirs was an orthodox Namboodri Brahmin family. Though rich, they led simple life. Both the husband a wife were well educated. More than that, they were devoted to God. They were worried only about not having any children even after long time. They made vows and appeals to all gods. At last, suggested by close friends, they went to Trichtir for rendering devotional service to God Vrishaachaleshwara. The divinely graceful idol of the God attracted them. They spent many days there with a feeling that serving Him is the

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only way known to them. One night Vrishaachaleshwara appeared to them in their dream. It was a wonder experience. God posed a question to them. I am pleased with your steadfast devotion. I shall- grant your prayer. But there is one question, does it suffice if you are given only one son of short life who will be a great teacher of the whole world, or do you want many children of long life but dull wits?"

Would the God who is not easily accessible put an easy question? The couple who had such boundless faith in God found completely a different way out. They left everything to his decision only. Then the Lord said, "Your son, born as an aspect of Shiva, will become a universal teacher." So, saying, He disappeared. Shivaguru and Aryamba felt very happy and stayed there for several more days offering their worship and service to god Ishwara. Afterwards they returned home.

A son was born to Aryamba by the full Grace of Ishwara. The baby was named Shankara. Calculating according to solar calendar, the auspicious day has been said to be the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Vaishakha. The devotees celebrate - "Shankara Jayanti On that- day every year.

Shankara, being a divine incarnation grew up right from his childhood as a prodigy in every respect. It is said that at the age of eight he had understood the four Vedas. By the time he was twelve years of age, he had understood all branches of knowledge. And by sixteen he had written commentaries on those Vedanta which are considered to be his major works. Sharp as his intellect was, so was his heart very broad. Even at a young age Shankara, had become proficient in Prakrit Magadhi and Sanskrit languages. At the first year of his age he had

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learnt both Malayali, his mother tongue, and Sanskrit, the language of the Vedas. During his second year he was able to read and write in these languages. During his third year he was able to read and explain epics and mythology. Thus is it stated in some books written about him. Considered from an ordinary standpoint, one might feel that much of this may be an exaggeration. But instances of child prodigies endowed with a divine gift of brilliance are not uncommon.

At the age of five Shankara's Upanayana was performed. By that time his father Shivaguru was dead. Only the mother had to bear the responsibility of bringing up the child pupil. Shankara was sent to the nearby Gurukula on the banks of river Poornaa. Under the guidance of Guru he studied the Vedas and its branches and also all other subjects. His brilliance brought credit to the entire Gurukula. From an incident that happened during his stay at the Gurukula one can understand his deep concern for the poor and distressed persons.

There is a convention that the pupils in a Gurukula should get their food by begging. Accordingly the boy Shankara went round to beg. He stood at the door of a house and shouted, "Mother, please give alms. He repeated the appeal twice. There was no reply. He repeated it several times. Then a woman came out and stood with a sad face. There was nothing in the house to offer to this boy. Hence that piteous look. Tears welled up in her eyes.

Shankara understood the situation. "Mother, I shall be content with whatever you give me. Thereby may there be no scarcity in your house," he said. But how to give anything when there was nothing? What is there to give? At last she remembered the gooseberries grown in the backyard. She brought some gooseberries and gave them to

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Shankara. Shankara then prayed to Shreedevi, the Goddess of Wealth, to show her mercy on this humble and virtuous woman. Then, as Written in the books, there was a shower of golden gooseberries in the house. This means that as a result of Shankara's prayer to the Goddess, that family became rich and Prosperous.

Shankara stayed in the Gurukula for eight years. By then he made such a thorough study of all the subjects that he had them at his fingertips. More than any other subject, he was greatly interested in the Vedanta, the most advanced part of the Vedas, which is said to be the very came of spiritual truth. This is the highest and the culminating point of all knowledge. "By knowing which everything will be known, and that is what the Vedanta aims at," say the learned. Even at such a tender age Shankara was attracted towards that goal. This shows the greatness of his personality.

Many instances that reveal the divine spirit of great men are available at every stage of their lives. It was so in the case of Shankara also. After completing his education in the Gurukula, it was the time when Shankara was at home rendering service to his mother and also teaching some pupils. Aryamba had fallen ill. But still she insisted on having her daily bath in the river Poornaa. Though the river-bed was in front of her house, it had dried up because of summer, and the slender flow of water was far away. Aryamba had to cross the vast sand bed to reach the water. One day she managed to finish her bath and was returning home. While crossing that sand-bed, not being able to withstand the sun and strain, she fainted and fell down on the way. Shankara got the news and rushed to the spot. He attended to her. When she recovered a little, he brought her home.

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The summer might be unbearable and the water might be flowing at a distance across a broad bed of sand. But Aryamba would never agree to change her routine. So the next day, would she not go again to the river for bath? this worried Shankara. He folded his hands in salutation to the river goddess, Poornaa Devi. He prayed to her to flow in full, extending her waters up to their house, in order to facilitate his mother's ritualistic bath. Maybe in answer to his prayer, or maybe by a seasonal phenomenon or due to both, there was a continuous downpour of rain throughout the night. The next morning river Poornaa was found flowing fully over the breadth of her sands in all her grace and majesty. This is as good a miracle as having brought the distant river very near. Whether spirituality has or has not the power to awaken the static power latent in Nature and make it dynamic is a matter for thought. All the people of Kalati joined the ailing Aryamba in praising and blessing Shankara.

Who is not astonished at the routine of an eight year old boy being engaged in Vedic studies, contemplation on Vedantic thoughts and teaching the same to others? In addition to this he had to attend on his aged mother.

As days were passing like this, one day two Brahmin's who were both old in years and in wisdom came to Shankara's house. Aryamba and Shankara received them with respect and treated them hospitably. The guests found the atmosphere of the house extraordinary. They were enchanted by Shankara's brilliance, modesty and godly qualities. They felt that only to work for the welfare of the world God must have endowed this boy at such a tender age with all those abilities and achievements. While departing, those old men told Shankara's mother:

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"May your son live long. May he become a stalwart in establishing the Vedic tradition firmly and gloriously in Bharat which is now passing through a crisis, and may he thereby accomplish the welfare of the world."

The mother's heart was also yearning for the same. She prayed to Ishwara to grant her son a long life and to make the blessings of those Magis come true. But how is it that God Ishwara Himself appearing in the dream told, "Your son may have a short life but he will be the teacher of the world"? Then what does the blessing of these old Magis mean? Aryamba was puzzled. But she consoled herself saying, "May it be as He wills it."

The son seems to have understood her anxiety. He tried to comfort her by saying, "Mother, don't you see that incidents of everyday life point only to the transitory nature of life? If we make use of all the time at our disposal in the service of God, is there a better fortune than that?"

There is not the slightest doubt about an unseen hand shaping the life of Shankara. As if to confirm this, there happened an incident.

One day Shankara was bathing in the river Poornaa. A crocodile caught his leg and began to pull him into the river. However strong one might be one can't fight with a crocodile in water and succeed. What could the plight of boy Shankara be then? He felt that his life had come to an end. He loudly called out to his mother. She came running. He told her, "Death is approaching, mother, as I have been caught by a crocodile. I am unable to free myself from its grip. I see only one way out. I must take sannyasa before I die. Please permit me to take 'instant sannyasa'. (Taking sannyasa in essence means to give up one life' and

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get a new one. So by the decision to take sannyasa he would get over the death caused by the crocodile. Either way he would attain an exalted state. If he survived he would have a new life. If he should die, even then he would have a new life after casting away his body.) The son's plight and his pathetic appeal moved the heart of the mother. She was confused. If he could live at least by becoming a monk, may it be so. She only wanted him to live. So, with a firm faith in Ishwara she gave her consent saying, "My child, may it be according to His will."

Probably it was the will of God that Shankara should be freed from worldly life. The crocodile left Shankara unhurt and swam away in the water! And Shankara crossed over the sorrow and misery of worldly life. By mere resolution of the mind, he became a Sannyasi and attained a new life.

Mother was grieved about his becoming an ascetic. A few days after this incident, the boy-monk told her about his life's mission.

He requested her to permit her to leave Kalati.

He was her only son. And was a gift of God to her.

But when she realized that he was born only to render service both to God and to humanity, she blessed him and bade him farewell saying, "Attain great fame, my dear son."

Shankara requested the elders and his dear friends of neighborhood to have good care about his mother and then he got ready to leave. Mother could not control her grief "Shankara," she said, "will I see yet again once at least before I die? Shankara, having understood his mother, heart, assured her, "Mother, remember me at the time death. I will come to you wherever I may be. I am praying to

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God to grant me the 'good fortune of serving my mother during her last days." This was a reply of one who had supreme faith in God. To divert his mother's attention towards God, he installed at home an idol of Sri Krishna. Leaving his mother to his gracious care, Shankara left Kalati.

After visiting many pilgrim centers of this holy land of Bharat, Sri Shankara came to Kashi. His object was to have darshan of God Vishweshwara on the banks of sacred Ganges. His march of religious conquest was to start in Kashi.

Shankara in Kashi felt that his first and foremost duty was to have darshan of Sri Annapurna, the presiding deity of the city of Kashi, that she should give him the first alms. But the alms that Shankara begged of her was unusual:

*Jnaana-vairaagya-siddhyartham*

*bhikshaam dehi cha Parvati*

"O Mother Parvati, give me alms such as will enable me to attain wisdom and austerity." The humility and the intense feeling with which he was appealing to the mother of the universe, the radiance which far exceeded the tender age of that handsome boy-monk surprised everybody. If some thronged around him to listen to the ecstatic songs dominated by a note of devotion which Shankara sang in his divine voice, many others came to listen to his enlightening discourses on Vedanta. Still many more experienced peace in his company under a spiritual influence. In this way, before long the boy-ascetic won a place in the hearts of the people.

During Shankara's stay in the city of Kashi an incident happened to test his inner development.

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The day was about to dawn. Shankara was on his way to the river for bathing. A man whom people called pariah (of a low caste) came across the road. Shankara, it seems, shouted at him, "O, untouchable, keep away." The answer the other man gave was startling. "To which are you referring as untouchable, this body or the Self? Is not this body also made of dust in the same way as your body? Does the Self ever get polluted? And how can the Self which is present everywhere keep itself at a distance? Is there any difference between you and me the way it has pervaded?" It is a situation in which any one might get confounded. But Shankara's reaction was entirely different. Throwing away all his pride, he fell prostrating at the feet of that man. "This is not an ordinary man. One who has 'described the nature of the Self in such a simple and lucid language is really not ordinary: He is no other than God Himself. Is not this inner enlightenment a form of Vishweshwara's Grace?" he said to himself and felt happy. Shankara even after experiencing the Advaita doctrine was caught for a moment in the illusion of high and low. He offered his salutation to that God in human form who had dispelled his illusion.

One Vishnu Sharma at Kashi prayed with great devotion. "I wish to be freed from the bondage of worldly life, please show me the way, Sir." He became the first disciple of Shankara. It is this person who later became known as 'Padmapadacharya'.

Shankara, a scholar of tremendous capacity, had one important task to do. The Upanishads, BhagavadGita and Brahmasutras are sacred scriptures of the Hindus; but it is not easy to understand them. Shankaracharya decided to write commentaries on these texts. He wrote first on the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. They became

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very popular. He was to write the commentary on BrahmaSutras. Hindus believe that Bhagavan Vyasa is still alive in Badari, the pilgrim centre. This centre is located at the foot of the Himalayas, at an altitude of 12,000 feet. Travelling was not easy in those days, about 1200 years ago. But Shankaracharya went to Badari itself to write his commentary on the BrahmaSutras.

Dedicating himself to the service of Ishwara and Bhagavan Vyasa, he launched upon his work. The writing of commentary went on smoothly. It is said that Vyasa himself gave darshan to Shankara and blessed him. As it happened, according to his expectation Shankara continued his work with a new vigor. This doubled his life-span as it were. Mainly this new vigor-call it longevity - was needed for the fulfillment of Shankara's project. The heavy task of spreading the meaning of these great texts was also waiting. Shankara's mission in life would not be completed without doing this. So in order to carry out this responsibility, a new vigor in the form of God's Grace and Guru's blessings was needed. Shankara, having got this, devoted the rest of his life to carry out his mission. This, as may be called, was the period of Shankara's conquests.

As the first step of his conquests Shankara came to the city of Ruddha. There he was to encounter one Kumarila Bhatta in argument and win over him. Kumarila said, "If you want to debate on Vedanta you should go to Mandana Mishra; and if you win over him in an argument, then surely you can expect victory for Vedanta everywhere."

Mandana Mishra was an outstanding scholar. Even the most learned men would feel nervous to argue with him. He lived in a town

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called Mahishmati. Shankaracharya went there. Mandana Mishra agreed for a debate.

What is the stake?

The loser should become the winner's disciple.

Both were stupendous scholars. Who should be the judge competent to decide as to who had won and who had lost?

The wife of Mandana Mishra was Ubhaya Bharat. She too had astounding scholarship. She was regarded as the incarnation of Saraswati (the Goddess of learning). She was made the judge.

The debate with thundering argument and counter-argument on for several days.

Mandana Mishra at last accepted his defeat. As per the agreement he became a sannyasi and disciple of Shankaracharya.

This victory of Shankara was of tremendous consequence, we should say. It was the triumph of Shankara Charya's teaching. Besides, he got a brilliant person like Mandana Mishra as his disciple. It was this disciple who rendered memorable service to Vedanta and became known as 'Sureshwaracharya.'

After this event Shankara went to the sacred Srishalila. His intention was mainly to defeat Ugra Bhairava who was notorious in Tantric field such as witchcraft and black magic. That Kaapaalika could not win over Shankara's pious and spiritual Vedic doctrines. He with his black art even attempted to kill Shankara, but fell himself a prey to it. From Srishaila, Shankara went to Gokarna, another famous pilgrim-centre. And then he proceeded along the Sahyadri range to the Mookambika Temple at the foot of Sahyadri hills.

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Now Shankara's main aim was to search for a Guru. His intense desire was to have as his Guru only a person who had realised Brahman. If this is the expectation of a disciple, is not that Guru most fortunate? Shankara went towards North. He came to the banks of river Narmada after passing through many hermitages. There he found the hermitage of a Mahayogi. And this was Govinda Bhagavatpada. Seeing him in a state of deep samadhi, Shankara's heart was filled with satisfaction. His expectation had been fulfilled. What did Govinda Guru see when he woke to his conscious state? A boy-ascetic with a bright and radiant face, standing there with folded hands. The inner spiritual development was writ large on his face. After prostrating before the Guru, Shankara introduced himself. He requested that he may be accepted as a disciple. Govinda Yogi felt happy at the very first meeting as he had found the very type of person - the fittest disciple – for whom he had been waiting. Let alone teaching the pupil the mysterious secrets of the Vedanta, was it not a great pleasure for the Guru to find there a disciple who had not only digested the very philosophy of Vedanta but looked every inch the embodiment of that philosophy? Taking initiation from the Guru in a regular way to ascetic life, Shankara carried on his studies with all devotion.

For the boy Shankara who had obtained a marvelous success in comprehending the Advaita philosophy, "The spiritual Yoga" was very necessary. A person who at his will could forget himself and the world and enter the indescribable state of supreme peace! Such was the Guru. And the disciple was one who was qualified to attain that state. This was a preparatory step of Shankara in getting dynamic power which would facilitate the great work he was to do in future.

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Understanding the truth is different from experiencing it. Govinda Bhagavatpada enabled Shankara to attain this state of glorious experience. The wise who have attained this state call it the experience of the Infinite. This experience gave rich nourishment to Shankara's personality. The entire world appeared to be full of Brahman to him. After this the only thing that remained to be done was to communicate the bliss he had known and experienced to one and all through Vedanta. This work was assigned also to him by his Guru Govinda Bhagavatpada. He was asked to write, in the light of truth he had realized, commentaries on the three basic texts, namely the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras which are the spiritual treasure troves of Bharat. The Guru blessed him saying, "Whatever you wish, it shall be fulfilled by the power you have acquired from yogic practices." The next period of Shankara's life was devoted to the propagation of Vedanta.

Here he was to get one more great disciple. Prabhakara was a Brahmin. He had a son who was a dumb boy. He appeared to be dull. But Shankara felt that he was a yogi. Instead of asking the parents who had brought the boy 'Why is the boy like this? since when?' he asked the boy straightaway : "Who are you, my boy?" What else could be so sacred a place as the one where the divine master was standing for the yogi to break his silence? One who was dumb poked in answer, "I am the eternal self and not dead matter." This was the simplest form of expressing the nature of the self. By the grace of the master, the dull and the silent son of that couple revealed himself to be a great and wise sage. The master felt happy and taking him as disciple, named him 'Hastamalaka'.

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The next important event in Shankara's life was his coming to Shringeri. This place is situated on the bank of river Tunga in Karnataka. It is the loveliest of spots. Long, long ago, great sages like Vibhandaka, Rishyashringa and such others had carried on their penance there. Since then it had been a very sacred place. Enchanted with the tranquility of that place, Shankara established his first Vedanta Jnana Peetha. He installed there the idol of Sri Sharada, the Goddess of Learning, and placed Sureshwara as the Head of that Sharada Peetha.

In Acharya Shankara's view the entire Bharat was a holy land. Its welfare and unification was to be based on Dharma only. In connection with this unification, Acharya's plan was to establish four centers in four corners of Bharat for spreading Vedanta and for guiding persons practicing Vedanta. The founding of Sharada Peetha was the first step in this project. This was meant to provide guidance for South India. He established the Govardhana Peetha in Jagannath for the East, the Kalika Peetha in Dwaraka for the West, and the Jyotih Peetha in Badarikashrama for the North. These Peethas are called 'Amnaya Peethas.'

How at Shringeri during his stay Shankara showered his blessings on a disciple called Giri is very interesting. The co-students used to look down upon Giri thinking that Vedanta for him was a hard nut to crack. Once Shankara at the time of his lecture said, "Let us wait for Giri." The other pupils said, "Why should we wait for him, Sir? A wall is much better than that dullard."

Shankara felt pained when such a student as was devoted to the service of his master was jeered at. "What do you know about his nature and spiritual achievements? His ability will reveal itself shortly," said the

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Master. "Isn't it enough if Master knows my merit? Should it be made known to others also? Let me not have such conceit" - so Giri used to feel within himself and was serving his master silently. On that day as usual he came late and did obeisance to Acharya. Acharya said with a smile, "Look Giri, We want you to give a discourse on the Self and its nature. We have been waiting for you."

It was the master's command as well as blessing. The so-called dullard Giri, in a very modest way and full of devotion expressed in his eyes, presented the very gist of Vedanta in Trotaka Vritta, a highly complicated metrical form, but very enlighteningly as if he was making with all reverence as offering to the Master. The other students felt ashamed of their folly. They apologized to both Acharya and Giri. Shankara, thus revealing the literary ability latent in Giri, called him "Trotakacharya" to make this incident remembered for a long time.

Among the disciples of Shankara the most prominent are four Padmapada, Sureshwara, Hastamalaka and Trotaka. Shankara nominated them as the chiefs of the four Vedanta centres he had established: Sureshwara for Shringeri the South zone center, Padmapada for Kalika Peetha in Dwaraka for the West, Trotaka for Jyotih' peetha in Badarikashrama for the North, and Hastamalaka for Govardhana Peetha in Jagannath for the East. He told that at their lives should be dedicated to re-organise ancient Hindu Dharma.

Meanwhile Shankara felt that the end of his old mother Aryamba was nearing. Accordingly he returned to Kalati. When Shankara came to know that she was to die shortly, he offered 'Shiva Bhujanga Stotra' and 'Vishnu Stotra' which have a power to save the soul, and prayed that she might die peacefully and attain heavenly abode.

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Shankara's mother died. Her body was to be cremated. But none of Shankara's relatives came forward to help. A monk cannot perform the funeral rites of anyone, not even of his parents. Still Shankaracharya felt, is it not a sacred duty to perform the funeral rites of the dead when required to? Shankara had to carry" the body himself with great difficulty to the burning place and light up the pyre. By doing this last service to his mother, he felt gratified.

Shankaracharya paid a visit to Sharada Nilaya in Kashmir known as Sarvajna Peetha (the seat of the all knowing). Those who are not all-knowing are not entitled to sit on it; no one could claim to be an expert in any religion or philosophy without sitting on it. Shankara did not wish to show himself off as Sarvajna. He felt that Sri Sharada Nilaya with Sarvajna Peetha was by itself a place worthy of visit by all devotees. Besides, Kashmir is the crown of Bharat. So he resolved to go there, lest the ancient Hindu religion should perish there.

There are four gates in four directions for entering Sharada Nilaya. Eminent scholars and philosophers had entered it from various directions and had established their scholarly merit but no one so far had adorned this chair of Sarvajna. And also till their no one had even attempted to enter the temple through the Southern gate May be this gate was waiting for Acharya Shankara. Only who was from the South! Scholars of many group and communities were waiting for him in 'the premises of Sir Sharada Nilaya All were filled with a feeling of reverence to see him who was learned in both Jnana and Vijnana, yet the scholars in religious philosophies of Jaina, Bouddha, Samkhya, Yoga, Nays and Vaisheshika confronted him at the time of his entry to the temple,

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Shankara defeated all of them in philosophical debate and then entered the temple through the Southern gate.

Acharya went to ascend Sarvajna Peetha. Sri Sharada, the presiding deity of all learning, herself set a test for him. Shankara passed this test also. After this the Goddess Herself blessed him, proclaiming his omniscience. So say the 'Shankara Vijayas'.

We can take this to be an allegory of all the struggles Shankara had to face in his life. Ascending the seat of Sarvajna situated in Kashmir of the North is a symbol. The meaning of it is that Shankara reached the peak of spirituality. We can get an idea of his greatness from the fact that a person of just thirty had ascended the throne of all knowledge.

By that time the Acharya had probably gone round the whole of Bharat two times. He had travelled from Rameshwara and Kanyakumari of the South to Kashmir of the North, from Jagannath of the East to Dwaraka of the West, and had visited many places of pilgrimage. He got many temples renovated and inspired many to a righteous living.

Sri Shankaracharya showed examples of how a man should live. The life should shine forth with pious qualities like knowledge, devotion and asceticism. He preached the way Advaita. That means everything in the world is Brahman and all are one. The world is constantly changing. These changes are neither important nor real. The reality that lies behind all these things and activities Brahman. One should develop an eye to see God everywhere and in everything. People who have that vie, take the whole world for the motherland, and treat all human beings as their brothers.

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Shankara wrote philosophical book to help the people understand Hindi Dharma. Alongside he wrote, hymns that nourish devotional feelings in people. The hymn 'Bhaja Gowindam composed by him has been a very popular song all over Bharat . "If you want to get rid of the miseries of life and fear of death, pray to Govinda."

It cannot be said definitely where the Acharya spent his last days. It is common and natural for people everywhere to take pride in saying that such and such a Mahatma was born in their own town or visited their town and sanctified that place by walking on it, or that he entered eternal peace in their place.

People claim the signs of Shankara's Mahasamadhi in the holy towns of Kanchi, Trichur and Kedar. There is nothing surprising in this. The Acharya was in all such sacred places and he had gone beyond them. If the samadhi of the Southern Acharya is in Kedar of the North, it only signifies that his personality had extended over the whole of Bharat.

Acharya Shankara, at the early age of 32, cut asunder all bonds of relation with the 'world and attained the state of Brahman. Ordinary people will have to spend 32 years even for being able ask "What is the meaning of life?" But the Acharya during his brief life-time had brought about a great religious renaissance all over Bharat. By his memorable works on religion and philosophy he had pointed out the unique feature of our ancient religion. He found fulfillment of his life by consolidating the history of Bharat from the point of view of culture. He gave a concrete form to the truth that the whole of India was one by establishing spiritual centers in various zones.

May the divine life of such great men be a guiding light to us.

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