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Conquest of the Four Quarters

TRADITIONAL ACCOUNTS OF THE LIFE OF ŚAṆKARA

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of The Australian National University

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With the exception of the sources acknowledged in the thesis, this work is wholly my own.

Jonathan Bader
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work.
Abstract

Some seven hundred years after Śaṅkara wrote the learned commentaries that established his reputation as one of the foremost interpreters of Vedānta, a series of hagiographies began to emerge which glorified him as an incarnation of Śiva. Although they were composed exclusively in Sanskrit, these works eventually secured him a place in popular culture. One text in particular stands out from the rest, the Śaṅkaradīgvījaya of Mādhava. This work, composed between 1650 and 1800, skilfully brought together materials from several earlier hagiographies. Its popularity grew to such an extent that it came to eclipse the other works, which have languished in relative obscurity ever since. These hagiographies, along with the Śaṅkaradīgvījaya, have been virtually ignored by critical scholars because they are of little historical value. Yet, the authors of these works had no intention of writing history. They sought to deify Śaṅkara and, to this end, mythography was a far more potent medium than biography. In this study historiographical concerns are largely left aside in focusing on the hagiographies composed prior to and including the Śaṅkaradīgvījaya, i.e., eight texts in all.

My primary aim is to consider how Śaṅkara has been received in India, and in particular to examine the conceptual models upon which his life story is constructed. The thesis is organized along the lines of the features that stand out most prominently in the hagiographies. Firstly, there are the mythic structures which provide not only the peaks but also the foundation of the narrative. The Śaṅkara story is cast firmly within the framework of Śaiva mythology: the protagonist is, above all, an avatāra of Śiva. Secondly, I have attached considerable importance to the sense of place. Śaṅkara's grand tour of the sacred sites lends cohesion and continuity to the narrative. Ultimately his journey proves to be a quest for the throne of omniscience. Thirdly, there are the great debates which culminate in a digvijaya. Śaṅkara's conquest of the four quarters, along with his ascension to the throne of omniscience, highlights the complementarity of royal and ascetic values in traditional India. It is through the digvijaya that Śaṅkara fulfills his mission of restoring harmony to a divided land, and so becomes a national hero. Finally, I have paid much attention to the legacy of Śaṅkara as well as the continuity of the Advaita sampradāya, in order to emphasize that theirs is a living tradition.
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Abbreviations

ALB  Adyar Library Bulletin
AŚV  Śaṅkara-vijaya of Anantānanda-giri
BrŚV  Brihat-Śaṅkara-vijaya
CŚV  Śaṅkara-vijaya-vilāsa by Cidvilāsa-muni
GVK  Guru-varṇaśa-kāvyam by Kāśi Lakṣmaṇa-Śāstrī
GŚC  Śaṅkara-cārya-caritan by Govindanātha
IJ  Indo-Iranian Journal
JAOS  Journal of the American Oriental Society
JIP  Journal of Indian Philosophy
JUB  Journal of the University of Bombay
Mbh  Mahābhārata
PC  Patañjali-carita by Rāmabhadra-Dīkṣita
PEW  Philosophy East and West
PrŚV  Prācīna Śaṅkara-vijaya
RŚA  Śaṅkarābhyudayam by Rājacūḍāmaṇi-Dīkṣita
ŚDV  Śaṅkaradīgvijaya by Mādhava
TŚA  Śaṅkarābhyudayamaḥākāvyam by Tirumala-Dīkṣita
VŚV  Śaṅkara-vijaya by Vyāsācala
WZKS  Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens
Introduction

On the fifth day of the bright half of the month of Vaiśākha, April 21, 1988, a select crowd gathered in the rarified atmosphere of the Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi. They had come to pay tribute, long due, to a national hero. The President of India, the Prime Minister and various other dignitaries stood on the podium before the freshly garlanded figure of a young sāmnyāsī clad in ochre robes. This was no Hindu militant, but an apostle of unity. He was, in the words of President R. Venkataraman, a unique personality who gave to Bharat its identity. The Vishnu Purana describes the country south of the Himalayas and north of the ocean as Bharat. This puranic ideal of a unified country has remained with us from time immemorial. The architect who gave practical shape to this ideal and achieved the cultural unity of the country was none other than Śaṅkara Bhagavat Pada.¹

In this august gathering, the name of Śaṅkara was finally entered into the ledger of national history. The seal of approval came in the form of a year-long festival, the "Rāṣṭriya Śaṅkara Jayantī Mahotsav", proclaimed by the Government of India in commemoration of the twelve hundredth anniversary of his birth.

This was a historic occasion and a celebration of history. In his address at the inaugural function, Professor K. Satchidananda Murty reminded the audience of the great esteem in which Śaṅkara was held by the leaders of modern India, from Rammohan Roy right up to Indira Gandhi; and "her greatest historical hero, she stated, was Shankaracharya".² Yet the weight of history had been long denied to this cultural hero. For more than a hundred years controversy had raged over the dates of Śaṅkara. The voluminous and tiresome literature this debate has generated, seems to suggest that there is no personality in the absence of a precise chronology. In the end it was the government which rescued Śaṅkara from the uncharted waters of history. This was achieved by steering clear of the treacherous snares, on the one side, set by the opposing forces in the debate on Śaṅkara's chronology,³ and on the other, the

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¹ The speeches of President Venkataraman (in English) and Karan Singh (in Hindi) were published in Sanskriti Bharati, vol. 1.1 (1988), a quarterly journal of the Department of Culture, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, pp. 7-9; 35-36.
² K. Satchidananda Murty, Inauguration address, printed as a separate booklet by the Rāṣṭriya Śaṅkara Jayanthi Mahotsav Committee, New Delhi, p. 4.
³ The academic participants in the debate were lightweights in comparison to the traditional scholars who appealed to the sense of national pride. These nationalists argued that Indian culture goes back far earlier than that of the trash Europeans who were temporarily in the ascendant. According to one such
powerful pull of the bureaucratic imperative for recording essential statistics. The Rāṣṭriya Śaṅkara Jayanti Mahotsav Committee, headed by Rajiv Gandhi, saw to it that the figure of Śaṅkara was clearly cast as a national monument, but that no dates were to be inscribed on the pedestal. President Venkataraman explained just why Śaṅkara cannot be dated:

Adi Śaṅkara lives in time; but is timeless. He was born in Bharatavarṣa; but his vision is universal, all-encompassing. And so India, which treats history not in terms of centuries or even millennia but in yugas, prefers to think of Adi Śaṅkara not as one who moved from event to event in life but as one who gave us a vision that transcended all limitations of time. Chronologies lose their significance with one like Śaṅkara.

This was truly a historic occasion: the meeting of time and the timeless.

The official addresses at the inaugural function stressed that the festival was more than a national affair. Śaṅkara's teachings were universal. Perhaps they even held the key to world peace: "Nations armed to the teeth with weapons of annihilation...may well turn to Śaṅkara for enlightenment". While it is questionable whether his profile extends into the sphere of international politics, there is no doubt that Śaṅkara has secured a place in the global academic culture. The proliferation of scholarly studies inspired by Śaṅkara's thought are ample testimony of this. Indeed his emergence as an international figure derives from an unusual cultural collaboration. Both the early spokesmen of Indian nationalism and some of the orientalists who were patronized by Imperial Britain found in Śaṅkara the epitome of the true Indian psyche. The outstanding figures in this coalition were Swāmī Vivekananda and F. Max Müller. They sought to establish Śaṅkara at the apex of a "Brāhmaṇism" which partook of the essence of Indo-European culture and thus stood apart from what both the nationalists and the imperialists saw as the garish idolatry of "later Hinduism".


The three inaugural addresses skilfully avoided any mention of chronology. Nevertheless, the labours of the many scholars who had sought to establish the dates of Śaṅkara were not without some reward. The year 788-820, which had been widely (but by no means unanimously) accepted for some time were tacitly approved by the government.


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6 An international seminar on Śaṅkara was held in the same venue on 9-12 January 1989.

7 President R. Venkataraman, op. cit., p. 7.
The corridors of power in New Delhi were not to be the only venue for a Śaṅkara festival. An organization was formed in Kerala which envisaged the whole of India as the setting for a celebration. This was in the hope that "commemorating the Vijaya Yātra of Ādi Śaṅkara [which took place] 1200 years ago will further kindle the spirit of national integration, cultural unity and spiritual renaissance". The reenactment of Śaṅkara's tour of victory began in Kāli, Kerala, which is believed to be his birthplace. It was to end in Kedāra in the Himalayas, the place of his mahāsāmādhi, according to some accounts of his life. Despite the traditional backgrounds of the convenors, they too were subject to conditions which are virtually universal in the latter part of the 20th century. There is no longer time for walking. The yātra would proceed via a motorized chariot, bearing the items for ritual worship. Nevertheless, this was a project which would touch the lives of many as the chariot made its stops in the cities and pilgrimage places en route to its destination.

The great interest shown in recreating his journey to the four quarters of the subcontinent demonstrates that Śaṅkara still holds a place in the thoughts of many individuals as well as in the country's intellectual history. Although they are largely restricted to educated Hindus, his teachings have directly affected people's lives. Perhaps Śaṅkara's presence makes itself most strongly felt when old age approaches, and people find it difficult to avoid the fact of their own mortality. At this time the atavistic call of the forest rṣis is more easily heard, and there is impetus for reflection on the ancient ascetic values which Śaṅkara represents.

There are many images which the name Śaṅkara brings to mind. He may appear in the guise of an exegete, a metaphysician, a guru, a wandering mendicant, or an incarnation of the great god whose name he bears. These are but a few of the portraits to be found in the substantial body of literature devoted to Śaṅkara's life. There are some twenty Sanskrit accounts which were composed prior to 1900, and several more have been written in the 20th century. One text stands out from the rest, the Śaṅkaradīgviṇjaya of Mādha, composed between 1650 and 1800. This work skilfully brought together materials from several of the earlier hagiographies. The result was a single coherent version of the Śaṅkara story which gained almost universal acceptance, eventually eclipsing the other Sanskrit texts. In this century there have been many renderings and adaptations of the Śaṅkaradīgviṇjaya, in various vernaculars and in English. However, I have been unable to find any vernacular accounts of his life which are more than a hundred years old. This suggests the extent

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8 Letter distributed by the Ādi Śaṅkara Jyoti Dīgviṇjaya Yātra Committee, Kāli, Kerala, dated 9 November 1988.
9 The sources are described in Chapter One. A list of the printed editions of these texts is provided separately in the Bibliography. There is also a list of 20th century compositions.
to which Śaṅkara was limited to the sphere of Sanskritic culture prior to the nationalist period. Once he became a national hero his portfolio was considerably expanded. Since 1947 the Śaṅkara story has been still more widely disseminated through school textbooks, a comic book and a feature film.\textsuperscript{10}

In contrast to the enormous body of literature devoted to Śaṅkara's work, there has been very little scholarly interest in his life story.\textsuperscript{11} This is largely because the Śaṅkara hagiographies, written more than seven hundred years after his death, cannot be treated as historical records of his life. But we cannot afford to dismiss popular religious texts solely on historical grounds. It is not just the Śaṅkara story which has been neglected on this account. The vast body of hagiological literature extant in India is only just beginning to attract serious attention. Since 1983 Phyllis Granoff has led the way into this largely unexplored territory through a series of important studies, primarily devoted to the life stories of classical Indian philosophers.\textsuperscript{12} In this thesis I hope to bring to light some of the rich materials that the Śaṅkara hagiographies have to offer for anyone interested in the study of Indian culture. I have chosen to focus on the Sanskrit accounts of Śaṅkara's life composed prior to (and including) the Śaṅkaradigvijaya, i.e., eight texts in all.\textsuperscript{13} Until the Śaṅkaradigvijaya assumed its preeminent place, there were fewer boundaries within which the narrative of his life had to be sketched. This diversity promises the greatest potential for exploration. Since seven of these hagiographies have not as yet been translated into English,\textsuperscript{14} I have included my own translations of numerous passages from the texts in the thesis.

In this study I refer to the Sanskrit sources for the Śaṅkara story as hagiographies instead of using terms such as 'religious biographies'. This is to emphasize that the authors of these texts had little interest in presenting what we would regard as a "true" account of a life. In contrast to the positivist approach which seeks an ineffable truth value in empirically verifiable facts, the hagiographers take the Śaṅkara story as true in itself. For the hagiographers what is sacred is true. Thus their concern is primarily with locating Śaṅkara in the realm of the sacred (hagios). By inserting him into mythic narrative structures Śaṅkara is best placed for attaining identity with the forces of the divine. Moreover, mythography was (and probably remains) a far more potent force

\textsuperscript{10} These are discussed in Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{11} See Chapter One, notes 7, 8 and 10 for details of the research which has been done.
\textsuperscript{12} See the Bibliography for details of the nine articles she has contributed on the subject. She is also the co-editor (along with Koichi Shinohara) of Monks and magicians: religious biographies in Asia (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1988).
\textsuperscript{13} Details of the eight texts are listed at the beginning of the Bibliography.
\textsuperscript{14} The only translation in a European language is Paul Deussen's German rendering of the first chapter of Mādhava's Śaṅkaradigvijaya. For details see note 73 in Chapter One. There are two rather free translations of the Śaṅkaradigvijaya in English, see the the first page of the Bibliography for details.
than biography in establishing the reputation of a religious leader in India. For this reason, the mythographic perspective from which the Śaṅkara story emerges cannot be ignored. Yet its study poses a serious problem for critical scholars. Since the time of the Enlightenment, European thought has been so thoroughly dominated by a humanistic orientation that it is difficult for contemporary critics to grant an equal place to a perspective in which man is not the object of study. Indeed, my own reading of the hagiographies has not been able to escape some of the positivist perspectives which stubbornly persist in the present day. The narrative structures I examine here are conditioned by a world view in which truth is discovered through the perception of the equivalences that are written into the very nature of things. It is therefore inevitable that my own project will be in some tension with that of the hagiographers.

My primary aim in this study is to consider the ways in which Śaṅkara has been received in India. However, I do not pretend to occupy an objective place, outside the discourse of my own analysis. It is with this in mind that I intentionally speak in the first person. While the texts are necessarily mediated by my own perceptions, I have endeavoured to at least ensure that the primary Sanskrit sources—and what I believe to be their concerns—maintain a constant presence throughout this study. The diversity in the eight hagiographies, which are the focal point of the thesis, makes it possible to measure the texts against each other. While some consideration is given to the evolution of the Śaṅkara story, I have tried to limit the introduction of truth values from outside the texts. For this reason I have, for the most part, refrained from addressing historical questions concerning Śaṅkara's life. Similarly, I do not intend to argue that one text is inherently better than another. Although I have my own aesthetic preferences, I have sought to treat all eight texts as equally valuable examples of the ways in which Śaṅkara has been represented.

This study is organized along the lines of the features which stand out most prominently in the hagiographies. In the first place are the mythic structures which provide not only the peaks but also the foundation of the narrative. Secondly, I have attached much importance to the sense of place and to Śaṅkara's great journey which lends continuity and cohesion to the story. Thirdly, there are the debates through which the wanderings characteristic to a renouncer are transformed into a digvijaya, a conquest of the four quarters. It is through the digvijaya that Śaṅkara accomplishes his mission of restoring unity to the land. Finally, I have paid special attention to the legacy of Śaṅkara and the continuity of the Advaita tradition (sampradāya), particularly with a view to emphasize that this is a living tradition. To this end, I have also included the texts of personal interviews with the current Śaṅkarācāryas. These appear in Appendix A.
In drawing the boundaries of this project, I have had to exclude several important considerations. The sheer volume of the hagiological literature of India—and the fact that it is largely uncharted—posed great difficulties for my research. To define the Śaṅkara hagiographies alone has required much in the way of time and resources. For this reason, I have not attempted comparisons with other hagiographies, even those which called out most loudly for attention, namely the stories of Rāmānuja and Madhva. Similarly, I have decided to leave aside questions in literary criticism. Now Daniel Ingalls has pointed out the imperative to examine the methods and concerns of Sanskrit literary criticism prior to introducing concepts alien to their own cultural milieu. It does appear that the Śaṅkara hagiographers worked within the framework of traditional literary conventions; some of the writers even identify their compositions as kāvyas. But it is not at all clear what indigenous critics expected of a hagiography, if it was seen to constitute a recognizable genre at all.

A further problem arises in determining the circumstances surrounding the composition of the Śaṅkara hagiographies. Some seven hundred years elapsed between the death of Śaṅkara and the first appearance of our Sanskrit sources. There must surely have been oral traditions which provided the raw materials for the texts. Comparisons between the hagiographies reveal certain absences which point to the existence of such oral materials. Moreover, there are stories told today which are not found in the existing hagiographies. What was it, then, that prompted a shift from an oral transmission to a written one? This is a question I can only tentatively address. The shape of oral traditions is notoriously difficult to define. The haziness of the frontiers which mark off the earliest hagiographies leaves much uncertainty about the emergence of the written texts as well. Little is known about the authors of what appear to be our oldest sources, the Śaṅkaravijayas of Anantānandagiri and Vyāsācāla, nor can their dates be specified.

Ancient India provides ample evidence of the power which attaches to oral traditions. Indeed in Hindu culture writing tended to be looked down upon—at least where sacred traditions were concerned—until well after the beginning of the Common Era. It is beyond the scope of this work to explore the larger question of how the book eventually secured a place of respect in many streams of Hinduism. But

16 The Paramācārya of Kāñchipuram relates, for example, the story of how Śaṅkara learned a mantra from the toddy tappers which would make a coconut palm bend down. This was how he entered the locked compound of Māndaṇamiśra (Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī, Adi Śaṅkara: his life and times, tr. T.M.P. Mahadevan (1980). Reprinted, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidyā Bhavan, 1988), p. 159.
17 For a survey of the discussion on the subject see C. Mackenzie Brown, "Pūrāṇa as scripture: from sound to image of the holy word in the Hindu tradition", History of Religions 26 (1986), pp. 68-86.
I will briefly touch upon the fact that this shift is especially conspicuous in the Purāṇas, and that there is a strong connection between the (Śaiva) Purāṇas and the Śaṅkara hagiographies, in terms of content, mood and sometimes even style. I would suggest that the relationship between the Purāṇas and the hagiographies was a bilateral one. If Śaṅkara was to be admitted to the realm of the sacred, there was no better way than via the open-ended traditions of the Purāṇas. On the other hand, the Purāṇas were probably a major factor in encouraging the composition of the Śaṅkara hagiographies.

The nexus of this relationship derived primarily from the bhakti traditions, and to a lesser extent from the notion of the book. It is in the Purāṇas that the (ritually pure) bhakti cults found their legitimacy, as well as their medium of propagation. So pervasive were the currents of bhakti that even the Advaita sampradāya could not but imbibe some of this devotional fervour. Theirs was an ascetic tradition. While Viṣṇu was not necessarily excluded, Śiva, the lord of ascetics, was the more likely focus of devotion. The great teacher in the Advaita sampradāya who bore the name of Śaṅkara was a logical link between the divine and mortal realms. In this way he became a figure of devotion. Still more equivalences came into play. The hagiographies devote much attention to establishing the connection between Śaṅkara and Vyāsa. The two actually meet on one or more occasions in all versions of the narrative. According to the Advaita tradition, Vyāsa composed the Brahmajātra. In the hagiographies it is he who must approve Śaṅkara’s authoritative commentary on the work. As the figure of Vyāsa is indistinguishable from the sacred texts he is believed to have written, so too, the person of Śaṅkara is identified, and eventually merges with the sacred texts on which he has commented. Vyāsa is of course traditionally regarded as the author of the great Purāṇas. Although the hagiographies do not emphasize this aspect in demonstrating his connection with Śaṅkara, the association implicitly brings Śaṅkara further within the ambit of the Purāṇas.

The notion that a Purāṇa is a sacred substance, in the form of a book, may well have been an impetus for the mythographers to give substance to the Śaṅkara story. Several Purāṇas proclaim the merit which accrues from both the copying and making

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18 Ibid., p. 71.
19 This is discussed in conjunction with the examination of the eight individual hagiographies in Chapter One.
20 This is because they are classed as smṛti and as such must remain subservient to the śruti, which is Śaṅkara’s primary concern. The Brahmajātra constitutes a rather special case. Although it too is a smṛti work, it gains a greater place in that it is a concordance of the Upaniṣads. Nevertheless, the hagiographers seek to establish Śaṅkara as an authority figure in the Purāṇa tradition by portraying his reorganization of the devotional cults. This is discussed in Chapter Six.
a gift of the text. These are not only pious actions but an expression of devotion towards the deity who is glorified in the text. By analogy, one who writes, recites or copies the text of the Śaṅkara story performs the worship of Śiva/Śaṅkara. In this way, the text became a means of spiritual practice. Since Śaṅkara was seen to be an embodiment of Śiva, the composition of the text which would tell his story was the equivalent of sculpting a holy image. (But with the brahmin orientation of the Advaita tradition, the writer's tools were the more viable medium of expression). Some of the hagiographies are structured in a manner which is conducive to a daily reading. One of the texts makes it explicit that the recitation of its contents, preferably as a daily practice, helped to remove the perception of duality. The identification of Śaṅkara with the substance of the sacred texts is apparent in the way later Advaitins tend to refer to him as simply the bhāṣya-kāra, the author of the commentary (on the Brahmaṣūtra). Moreover, his exegetical efforts required the medium of the book. The commentaries were far too complex for an exclusively oral composition and transmission. Śaṅkara is a writer of texts. Therefore, his is a life which should be written.

Thus far I have spoken only of some of the religious conceptions which were fundamental to the writing of Śaṅkara's life. The texts were also the product of powerful political influences. The emergence of the hagiographies seems to correspond directly to the rise of the Śaṅkara institutions. The most prominent of these was the monastic centre (matha) at Sringerī, which was patronized by, and closely allied to the Vijayanagara kings. But not enough is known about the early history of Sringerī—and still less about the other Śaṅkara mathas—to provide precise definitions of the relationship between the institutions and the texts. One thing is certain however. The stories which glorified Śaṅkara would well serve the interests of the mathas. The institutions could only stand to benefit from the prestige accruing to

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21 C. Mackenzie Brown, "Pūrṇa as scripture", p. 77-78.
22 It is not clear when this first happened. Paul Hacker has described the striking Vaiṣṇava characteristics prevalent in the earliest period of the Śaṅkara tradition, "Relations of early Advaitins to Vaiṣṇavism", Wiener Zeitsschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens 9 (1965), pp. 147-154. But the obvious connection between Śiva and Śaṅkara has been made since the time in which Padmapāda's Pañcapādiṅa was composed. In the third introductory verse of the Pañcapādiṅa, Śaṅkara is praised in an elaborate figure of speech, a virudda-sleṣa, which suggests that he is and yet is not Śiva himself: "I salute the incomparable Śaṅkara who is not possessed of serpent coverings, who is bereft of ashes, who does not have a body half of which is [comprised of] Umā, who is not terrible, whose dark blue marking is erased and who is not together with Vināyaka", namāmy abhōgi-parivāra-sampaḍaṁ nirasta-bhūtin anumārdha-vigrahaṁ / anugram unmrdaṁ-kāla-lātchanaṁ vināvināyakam apurva-śaṅkaram //.
24 This is discussed in detail in Chapters Six and Seven.
the deified figure of the man who was perhaps the outstanding teacher and writer in their ascetic lineage. It would be better still if the stories were embodied in written form. The written text surpasses the oral one as a medium for the edicts of an institution. The text would also take its place along with the costly ritual objects which were a sign of the power inherent in the *māṭha*. Once the institutions made him an object of adoration, the name Šaṅkara began to resound in the air. The learned ones outside the *māṭhas* would soon hear the call, and the poet would find in him the stuff of a mythic drama.

There was possibly an even more urgent need for the Šaṅkara story to be written, in the face of attacks from the Madhva sect which had broken away from the fold of Advaita. There are two hagiographies of Madhva, whose colophons state that they were composed by the son of his direct disciple. These texts require careful examination to determine their precise position in their own tradition and *vis à vis* the Advaita *sampradāya*. But I must leave this task for a separate study. Suffice it to say that the Madhva hagiographies make a vicious attack on Šaṅkara's reputation, as well as that of a later Advaitin, whom they refer to as Padmatūrtha. The proximity of Uḍupi, the centre of the Madhva cult, to the Advaita stronghold at Sringerī, made it almost inevitable that conflict between the two would arise.

The immediate political issues which encouraged the writing of the Šaṅkara story were, in the hands of the hagiographers, the base metals to be transmuted into the purer form of myth. Therefore, the hero would appear as a divine *avatāra* and his quest would take the shape of a *digvijaya*, through which the primordial unity of the golden age would be restored. From well before the time of Šaṅkara, the *avatāra* and the *digvijaya* were paradigms of royalty that were invoked to legitimize imperial rule. The fact that these conceptual structures are an integral part of the Šaṅkara story reflects the interrelationship of royal and ascetic models. These complementary values are also responsible for the rendering of Šaṅkara's figure in the mould of an austere, conquering hero. There is little place for tenderness or human warmth in such a narrative. Although the writing of the hagiographies is an expression of bhakti, it is an austere devotion. The rich emotional expression which is characteristic to the description of the Vaiṣṇava saints—even to the stories of the Šaiva Nāyaṅgārs—is largely absent from the Šaṅkara hagiographies.


26 Ronald Inden demonstrates the special importance of the *digvijaya* to the formation of imperial kingdoms in his *Imagining India*, (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 228-262. I have not been able to give further consideration to Inden's important discussion of rulership, or his critique of Indian studies, because the book has only just come to hand.
In the narrative structure within which the life of the royal hero was invariably set, the only leading female role was that of Rājyaśri, the personification of regal glory. V. S. Pathak has described two possible unfoldings of this narrative. In the one, the world conqueror (cakravartin) seizes the princess, who is actually the goddess of royal fortune, from a rival king. However, in the more common pattern it is the goddess herself who chooses the one who would be king. The writers of the Śaṅkara story embraced both possibilities. The goddess was cast not as Rājya-Lakṣmī but as Sarasvatī. This modification was essential because Śaṅkara's quest was for the throne of omniscience, and this could be obtained only through winning over the goddess of learning. While Śaṅkara does not overtly seize the goddess, he does defeat his leading rival, Maṇḍanamiśra, who is her husband. True to the terms of the contest, Maṇḍanamiśra must abandon his wife to become an ascetic follower of Śaṅkara. The extent that she now belongs to Śaṅkara is shown by those hagiographers who relate how he bids her to follow him to Sringerī, where he instals her as the presiding deity of the temple. The motif of the bride's choice is developed in the incident in which Sarasvatī herself tests Śaṅkara's intellectual strength in debate. It is only upon her acknowledgement of his superiority that Śaṅkara is permitted to ascend to the throne of omniscience.

Although she is kept hidden from the public gaze, within the temple's inner sanctum, the goddess exerts a powerful force upon the Śaṅkara tradition. She is worshipped by the Śaṅkarācāryas today as Śāradā, Kāmākṣī and Rājarājeśvarī. The metaphysics of the Advaita sampradāya remain non-dualistic; the ritual practice still conforms to Vedic norms. But in this exclusively male ascetic order there is a place for tantric worship, albeit very chaste, and the mystic union of the sexes. The hagiographies provide intriguing glimpses of the private sphere, wherein the Devi resides. A remarkable, little known incident related in the Guruvamśakāvyā, tells of Śaṅkara's visit to the goddess Siddhesvarī in Nepal. Hers was a living presence which welcomed him immediately he arrived:

Sitting the muni on her lap, she touched him, as though he was Skanda, with words which were like nectar. The group of siddhas [living there], who looked on with jealousy, showered stones upon them. The efforts of the siddhas were in vain. The yogi stopped their shower, warding off the stones which surrounded them. Even now she appears there in splendour. Then, being thirsty, he begged Siddhesvarī sweetly for buttermilk (takra), as though she was his mother. She

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28 Ibid., pp. 74-74.
29 In the course of personal interviews, I questioned the Śaṅkarācāryas about this, and the special place of the Devī in the Advaita tradition. Their answers appear in Appendix A.
produced a river of buttermilk, which burst forth from her thigh. That [river] is famous even now as the Tukrā.30

I leave this episode without comment as an example of the wealth of materials the hagiographies have to offer, and as an open invitation for further exploration of the Śaṅkara story.