

On a Legendary Biography of Śaṅkara

—especially in regard to the date
of Mādhava's *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*—

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There are the more than ten legendary accounts of Śaṅkara's life. Among them, Mādhava's *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* (hereafter abbreviated *ŚDV*) is the sole biography regarded as authoritative by the Śṛṅgeri Maṭha, which is greatly influential not only in the Śaṅkaran Vedānta tradition, but also in South India.¹⁾ The legend of Śaṅkara described in the *ŚDV* contains such mythical motifs as the accounts of his miraculous actions, which are hardly believed. Nowadays, inside the *pravacanamandiram* hall at Śṛṅgeri Maṭha, thirty pictures, through which Śaṅkara's life can be known, hang. Brief written explanations in Kannaḍa and English accompany them to facilitate their comprehension by pilgrims and adherents in that religious tradition. They are almost the same as the contents of the *ŚDV*.

Although the description of the *ŚDV* in regard to Śaṅkara's life is not accurate, there is no doubt that the faith and custom in the period when the *ŚDV* was written may be to some extent implied in it. Thus, the point with which I am concerned here is not the truth or falsehood of the account of Śaṅkara's life, but the religious meanings of a legendary biography for adherents in Śaṅkaran Vedānta tradition. Through the contents of the *ŚDV*, we can obtain some aspects of their faith and custom in that tradition. From such a viewpoint, this paper will examine the date of the *ŚDV*.

I

In the Śṛṅgeri tradition, Mādhava is identified with Vidyāraṇya, the twelfth *jagadguru* (lit. "a teacher of the world," a head of Śṛṅgeri Maṭha), who is said to have taken *saṃnyāsa* (world-renunciation) in 1331 C. E. and to have attained

videhamukti (bodiless emancipation) in 1386 C. E. Mādhava is regarded as the pre-ordination name of Vidyāraṇya. The traditionally cited evidence for this identification is found in the first verse of the *ŚDV*, in which Mādhava pays obeisance to his *guru* Vidyāśaṅkaratīrtha or Vidyātīrtha, who is traditionally regarded as the tenth *jagadguru* (1228-1333):

By me, having made obeisance before the highest soul in the form of Śrī Vidyātīrtha, a summary of the conquest of the Śaṅkara of old is compiled in a clear manner²).

praṇamya param ātmānaṃ śrīvidyātīrtharūpiṇam /
prācīnaśaṅkarajaye sāraḥ saṃgrhyate sphuṭam //

Although Vidyāśaṅkaratīrtha was succeeded by Bhāratīkṛṣṇatīrtha, who reigned from 1333 until his *videhamukti* in 1380, Mādhava is regarded as having been initiated into *saṃnyāsa* by Vidyāśaṅkaratīrtha. Thus, the Śrīṅgeri tradition ascribes composition of the *ŚDV* to Mādhava or Vidyāraṇya in the fourteenth century C. E.

The correctness of this ascription is challenged, however, by H. R. Rangaswami Iyengar, a former superintendent of the Oriental Research Institute in Mysore and by R. Chakravarthi, a former assistant of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Mysore:

Though this book [the *ŚDV*] is ascribed to the celebrated Mādhava Vidyāraṇya (probably on account of the complete colophon at the end of every chapter), it has perhaps no connection with the great Vidyāraṇya. This work is evidently the composition of one Vyāsāchala, a later poet, who is totally different from Mādhava (though the commentator on the work, has unsuccessfully attempted to twist the word Vyāsāchala so as to form an epithet of Mādhava). Scholars like late Prof. Hiriyanṇa and Mr. K. T. Telang have after careful study arrived at the conclusion that the above work could not be that of Mādhava³).

II

A further argument may be adduced to cast doubt on the ascription of the *ŚDV* to a fourteenth-century Mādhava or Vidyāraṇya. In locating the site of Śaṅkara's final disappearance, the *ŚDV* differs from Lakṣmaṇaśāstri's *Guruva-*

ṁśakāvya (hereafter abbreviated *GVK*), an eighteenth-century Sanskrit work which treats the history of successive *jagadgurus* (world teachers) of Śrīṅgeri Maṭha handed down from Śaṅkara to the twenty-seventh *jagadguru* Saccidānandabhārati II, who reigned from 1706 to 1741⁴). Although its legendary accounts of Śaṅkara can hardly be relied upon, the historicity of its description of later *jagadgurus* seems to be in part confirmed by available epigraphic data. The *GVK* was composed in verse at the command of Saccidānandabhārati II. Venkataraman, a *bhakta* (devotee) of the thirty-fourth *jagadguru* Candraśekharaabhārati, dates the *GVK* to the period 1706–1739 (during the reigns of Saccidānandabhārati II [1706–1741] and Somaśekharaṇāyaka II [1714–1739] of Kālaṭi) and most probably to 1735⁵). While the *ŚDV* states that the place of Śaṅkara's final disappearance was Kedāra (from which he proceeded to Kailāsa), the *GVK* states that it was the *āśrama* of the sage Dattātreyā⁶). If the *ŚDV* had been known to Lakṣmaṇaśāstrī, and if it was then regarded as authoritative in Śrīṅgeri Maṭha, he would surely have followed its account with regard to the place of Śaṅkara's disappearance from the world. If this is so, we must conclude that in the time of Lakṣmaṇaśāstrī the *ŚDV* had clearly not attained its present canonical position in Śrīṅgeri and possibly did not yet exist in its present form.

W. R. Antarkar of Khalsa College, Bombay, has demonstrated that the *ŚDV* is “no independent composition of one single author but is merely a collection of stanzas from four or even more earlier works, put together to form this work⁷).” Out of the total of 1843 verses in the *ŚDV*, 1084 verses are found to be common to one or another of four other works, viz., Vyāsācala's *Śaṅkaraviṇaya*, Tirumala Dikṣita's *Śaṅkarābhyudaya*, Rājacūḍāmaṇi Dikṣita's *Śaṅkarābhyudaya* and Rāmabhadrasūri's *Patañjalīcārīta*⁸). Antarkar's comprehensive study has convincingly shown that the current text of the *ŚDV* is “not older than 2 centuries” and can by no means be attributed to the Vidyāraṇya of the fourteenth century; “it must have been written sometime between 1630 A. D. and 1800 A. D.” He suggests that it was written by some “Nava-Kālīdāsa” and that one Bhaṭṭaśrī Nārāyaṇa Śāstrī introduced many changes into it with the help of Kokkoṇḍa Venkataratnam and Subramanya Śāstrī from Ban-

galore⁹).

III

The *ŚDV* has been dated to even more recent times by T. S. Nārāyaṇa Śāstrī in a book published in 1916 :

We know from very reliable sources that this *Madhaviya-Śaṅkara-Vijaya* was compiled by a well-known Sanskrit scholar who passed away from this world just about eight years ago, under the pseudonym of 'Mādhava' a synonym for 'Narayana' — specially to extol the greatness of the Śringeri Math,¹⁰

Nārāyaṇa Śāstrī relates that in about 1900, a certain scholar "had the acquaintance of the late Bhattasri Narayana Sastri who wrote the *Śaṅkara Vijaya* published in the name of Mādhava, i. e., Vidyāraṇya," and that "four others helped him in this publication."¹¹

Nārāyaṇa Śāstrī's dating of the *ŚDV*, however, cannot be accepted. Its date of composition or compilation can be no later than that of the Dhanapati's *Ḍiṇḍima* commentary which was, according to its colophon, completed in 1799 C. E. As first printed in Aufrecht's *Catalogi Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae Pars Octava, Codices Sanscriticos* of 1864¹² and later reprinted in the Ānandāśrama edition in 1891, his colophon reads :

In the auspicious year numerated by the moon (1), serpents (8), arrows (5) and *pāṇḍavas* (5) [i. e., in *saṃvat* 1855 = 1799 C. E.], this [work] was completed on Thursday the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *śrāvaṇa*, in [the *rāśi* (a sign of the Zodiac)] *siṃha*.

Thus [concludes] the sixteenth chapter in the *Ḍiṇḍima* [commentary] on the *Śrīmat Śaṅkarācārya-vijaya* composed by Dhanapatīsūri, the son of Rāmakumāra, an adornment on the Datta lineage of the Sārasvata caste [*jāti*], who was a pupil of *Śrīmat Paramahansa-parivrājaka*cārya Bālagopālātīrtha Śrīpāda¹³).

pāṇḍaveṣvahiṭāreśapramite śubhavatsare /

śrāvaṇe sitapañcamyāṃ siṃhe siddho gurāvayaṃ //

iti śrīmatparamahāṃsaparivrājaka-cāryabālagopālātīrthaśrīpādaśiṣyasārasvata-jātyantargatadattavaṃśāvataṃsarāmakumārasūnudhanapatīsūriviracite

śrīmacchamkarācāryavijayaḍḍiṁṁe ṣoḍaṣaḥ sargaḥ

Conclusion

In the light of the above evidence, the *ŚDV* can be presumed to have been compiled prior to 1800 C. E. and probably within the eighteenth century C. E. Accordingly, the description of the *ŚDV* in regard to Śaṅkara's life and various aspects of faith and custom is thought to reflect the concrete religious phenomena in Śaṅkaran Vedānta tradition in about the seventeenth or eighteenth century C. E.

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- 1) At Kāñci Kāmakoti Maṭha, which has been gradually influential in South India together with Śringeri Maṭha, another important legendary biography of Śaṅkara, i. e., Anantānandagiri's *Śaṅkaravijaya*, is regarded as authoritative. Cf. Anantānandagiri, *Śrī Śaṅkaravijaya*, ed. N. Veezhinathan (Madras: University of Madras, 1971).

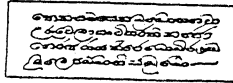
Anantānandagiri, according to Kāñci Kāmakoti tradition, is identified with Ānandagiri, the famous philosopher of the Advaita Vedānta school. W. R. Antarkar and S. Tapasyananda, however, assert that both of them are different. Cf. S. Tapasyananda, Introduction to his English translation, Mādhava's *Śaṅkara-digvijaya*, p. ix. W. R. Antarkar, "Śaṅkara-vijaya of Anantānandagiri," *Journal of the University of Bombay*, XXX (new series), part 2 (1961), p. 73. According to Antarkar, the date of this work is not earlier than the fourteenth century C. E.

- 2) *ŚDV*, Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, no. 22 (Poona: Ānandāśrama Press, 1891), I. i, p. 1.
- 3) H. R. Rangaswami Iyengar and R. Chakravarthi, *Śrī Śaṅkara Vijayam* (Madras: Ganesh & Company, second edition, 1976), p. 72.
- 4) Kāśi Lakṣmaṇaśāstri, *Guruvamśakāvya*, (Śrīrangam: Śrī Vani Vilas Press, 1966).
- 5) Venkataraman, "Guruvamśa Kavya (A Brief Review)," *Śringeri Vignettes* (Śrīrangam: Śrī Vani Vilas Press, 1968), p. 64.
- 6) *ŚDV*, XVI. 96, p. 597, XVI. 100, p. 598. *GVK*, III. 66-70, pp. 30-31. Dattatreya's *āśrama* is generally located in central India. See discussion in H. R. Iyengar and R. C. Chakravarthi, *Śrī Śaṅkara Vijayam*, pp. 59-63.
- 7) W. R. Antarkar, "Saṅkṣepa Śaṅkara Jaya of Mādhavācārya or Śaṅkara Digvijaya of Śrī Vidyāraṇyamuni," *Journal of the University of Bombay*, XLI (new series), no. 77 (1972): 5.
- 8) Antarkar traced 475 *ŚDV* verses to Vyāsācala, 475 to Tirumala Dikṣita, 125 to Rājacūḍamaṇi Dikṣita and 11 to Rāmabhadrasūri.
- 9) Antarkar, *JUB* (1972): 22.

- 10) T. S. Narayana Sastri, *The Age of Śaṅkara*, (1916), p. 158. Cf. Swami Tapasyananda's Introduction to his English translation of the *ŚDV* entitled *Śaṅkara-dig-vijaya* or the Traditional Life of Śrī Śaṅkaracharya (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, second edition, 1980), p. ix.
- 11) Narayana Sastri, *The Age of Śaṅkara*, p. 247. Cf. S. Tapasyananda's Introduction to his English translation of the *ŚDV*, p. xi.
- 12) Th. Aufrecht, *Catalogi Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Bodleianae Pars Octava, Codices Sanscriticos* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1864), pp. 252-260.
- 13) *ŚDV* (Dhanapati's *Diṇḍima* commentary), p. 603.

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