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A Study on Philosophical Debate of Mandana Misra Vs. Shri Adi Shankaracharya

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ABSTRACT: Mandana Mishra (8th century CE) was a Hindu philosopher who wrote on the Mīmāṃsā and Advaita systems of thought. He was a follower of the Karma Mimamsa school of philosophy and a staunch defender of the holistic sphota doctrine of language. He was a contemporary of Adi Shankara, and while it is said that he became a disciple of Adi Sankara, he may actually have been the most prominent Advaitin of the two until the 10th century CE. He is often identified with Sureśvara, though the authenticity of this is doubtful. Still, the official Sringeri documents recognises Mandana Mishra as Sureśvara. Maṇḍana Miśhra's influence and status can also be discerned in a popular legend about his debate with Adi Shankara. According to legend, described in biographies of Shankara, Adi Shankara debated with Maṇḍana Miśhra. The vanquished would become a disciple of the victor and accept his school of thought. According to this legend, Sankara defeated Maṇḍana Miśhra, and as agreed, Maṇḍana became a disciple of Sankara and assumed the name Suresvaracharya. According to the Advaita Vedanta tradition, Maṇḍana Miśhra along with Hastamalaka, Padmapāda, and Totakacharya was one of the four main disciples of Sankara and was the first head of Sringeri Mutt, one of the four mathas that Shankara later established. This legend reflects the influence of Maṇḍana Miśhra, and the attempts of the later Advaita tradition to subjugate him to the position Shankara acquired in later times.

KEYWORDS: Mandana Mishra, Adi Shankara, Advaita, Vedanta, tradition and influence.

I.INTRODUCTION

Mandana Mishra (8th century CE) was a Hindu philosopher who wrote on the Mīmāṃsā and Advaita systems of thought. He was a follower of the Karma Mimamsa school of philosophy and a staunch defender of the holistic sphota doctrine of language. He was a contemporary of Adi Shankara, and while it is said that he became a disciple of Adi Sankara, he may actually have been the most prominent Advaitin of the two until the 10th century CE. He is often identified with Sureśvara, though the authenticity of this is doubtful. Still, the official Sringeri documents recognises Mandana Mishra as Sureśvara. Maṇḍana Miśhra, who was a contemporary of Shankara, is known to be a student of the Mimamsa scholar Kumarila Bhatta. He wrote several treatises on *Mimamsa*, but also a work on Advaita, the *Brahma-siddhi*. Maṇḍana Miśhra probably was more influential in the Advaita Vedanta tradition than is usually acknowledged. According to Richard E. King,Although it is common to find Western scholars and Hindus arguing that Sankaracarya was the most influential and important figure in the history of Hindu intellectual thought, this does not seem to be justified by the historical evidence. According to King and Roodurmun, until the 10th century Sankara was overshadowed by his older contemporary Maṇḍana Miśhra. In the centuries after Sankara it was Maṇḍana Miśhra who was considered to be the most important representative of Vedanta. His influence was such, that some regard this work to have "set forth a non-Sankaran brand of Advaita." The "theory of error" set forth in the *Brahma-siddhi* became the normative Advaita Vedanta theory of error. According to Maṇḍana Miśhra, errors are opportunities because they "lead to truth", and full correct knowledge requires that not only should one understand the truth but also examine and understand errors as well as what is not truth.

His student Vachaspati Miśhra, who is believed to have been an incarnation of Shankara to popularize the Advaita view, wrote the *Bhamati*, a commentary on Shankara's *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, and the *Brahmatattva-samiksa*, a commentary on Mandana Mishra's *Brahma-siddhi*. His thought was mainly inspired by Mandana Miśhra, and harmonises Shankara's thought with that of Mandana Miśhra. According to Advaita tradition, Shankara reincarnated as Vachaspati Miśhra "to popularise the Advaita System through his Bhamati."Maṇḍana Miśhra's influence and status can also be discerned in a popular legend about his debate with Adi Shankara. According to legend, described in biographies of Shankara, Adi Shankara debated with Maṇḍana Miśhra. The vanquished would become a disciple of the victor and accept his school of thought. According to this legend, Sankara defeated Maṇḍana Miśhra, and as agreed, Maṇḍana became a disciple of Sankara and assumed the name Suresvaracharya. According to the Advaita Vedanta tradition, Maṇḍana Miśhra along with Hastamalaka, Padmapāda, and Totakacharya was one of the four main disciples

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According to Sharma, Hiriyanna and Kuppuswami Sastra have pointed out that Sureśvara and Maṇḍana Miśra had different views on various doctrinal points:

- The locus of *avidya*: according to Maṇḍana Miśhra, the individual *jiva* is the locus of *avidya*, whereas Suresvara contents that *avidya* regarding Brahman is located in Brahman. These two different stances are also reflected in the opposing positions of the Bhamati school and the Vivarana school.
- Liberation: according to Maṇḍana Miśhra, the knowledge which arises from the Mahavakya is insufficient for liberation. Only the direct realisation of Brahma is liberating, which can only be attained by meditation. According to Suresvara, this knowledge is directly liberating, while meditation is at best a useful aid. R. Balasubramanian disagrees with the arguments of Kuppuswami Sastri and others, arguing that there is no conclusive evidence available to prove that Maṇḍana, the author of the *Brahmasiddhi*, is different from Sureśvara, the author of the *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* and the *Vārtikas*.

During the time of Shankaracharya, the school of Purvamimamsa, which believed in the strict and theoretical observance of rituals, reigned supreme. Shankara realized that unless he was able to win over this powerful rival, his goal of spiritually re-unifying India would remain difficult to fulfill. The foremost proponent of this sect was the great scholar Kumarila Bhatta, who lived in Prayaga itself. When Shankara reached Kumarila's place he saw a strange and horrific sight. Placed in a courtyard was a huge pyre lighted with slow burning rice-husk. At the center of the flames could be discerned the head of a radiant figure, draped in white. This was none other than the great philosopher Kumarila Bhatta himself.

Kumarila Bhatta, in order to equip himself with the nuances of Buddhist philosophy, so that he could better counter its onslaught against the Vedic ethos, had once studied at a monastery pretending to be a Buddhist. He was committing self-immolation as an expiation for his sins, which included the pretension of being a Buddhist and learning their doctrines at the feet of a guru, and then, the impropriety of all improprieties, challenging his own guru to debate and defeating him (guru-droha). These unworthy acts not befitting one who 'practiced what he preached,' an ocean of guilt overwhelmed Kumarila, and to atone for his sins resorted to this fatal, drastic step. Shankara's appeal to step down from the flames proved to be of no avail. Before succumbing however, Kumarila advised him to go and meet his disciple Mandana Mishra, who was the most renowned protagonist of the Purvamimamsa School.

II.REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Potter (2012) At the same time, he left several open questions and ambiguities in his writing, in part due to the different source texts of his commentaries and the voluminous amount of his work. This has led to different interpretations and several intra-Advaitin philosophical disputes in the post-Śaṅkara tradition .

Suthren Hirst (2005) Furthermore, the world is a pedagogical necessity as the instrumental means to discover nonduality .

Rambachan(2006) His goal is not to negate the axiological value of the world and intersubjective life .

Satchidanandendra(1964) Later Advaitins developed cosmogonic defenses to neutralize philosophical rivals, including theories of *māyā* as a creative material cause equated with beginningless ignorance.

Fost (1998) Whether or not we can accurately read such theories into Śaṅkara is contested by academic and traditional scholars.The world is thus independent of mind and not wholly unreal. One may therefore argue that he contradicts himself or falls into an excluded middle .

Ram-Prasad(2002) In this way, even though Śaṅkara assumes realism at the empirical level in terms of veridical cognition, he negates it metaphysically from the absolute level. This leads him to a position of non-realism.

Albahari (2019) Śaṅkara's view of the universe at the empirical level, with its universal mind and fundamental nature as consciousness, parallels some contemporary iterations of panentheism and panpsychism, particularly top-down cosmopsychism; however, his ultimate view of nondual *brahman* collapses any questions about the individual derivation or instantiation of nondual consciousness.

III.METHODOLOGY

The method used in this paper is descriptive-evaluative method. The study is mainly review based. It is purely supported by secondary source of data, i.e. books, journals, papers and articles and internet.

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IV.RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Mandana Mishra resided in the village of Mahishi. When Shankara reached the village and asked for directions from some maids on the way, he was told: "You will find nearby a house at whose gates there a number of parrots in cages, discussing topics like: 'Do the Vedas have self validity or do they depend on some external authority for their validity? Are karmas capable of yielding their fruits directly, or do they require the intervention of God to do so? Is the world eternal, or is it a mere appearance?' Where you find this strange phenomenon of caged parrots discussing such abstruse philosophical problems, know that to be the gate of Mandana's place."

Mandana Misra was a distinguished practioner of the mimamsa philosophy. The mimamsa philosophy is mainly derived from the karma kanda portion of the Vedas and emphasizes on the importance of rituals. In this school of thought, a particular ritual is done, and the results are achieved instantaneously. It displays a straightforward cause-effect relationship if practiced accurately. Mandana Misra was a perfect and adept ritualist who preached widely. The young and charming advaita vedantin, Adi Shankara, on his country wide tour was eager to debate with Mandana Misra, who was by then already very old. Mandana Misra reasoned that since he had spent more than half his life learning and preaching mimamsa, it would be unfair to debate with a youngster in his twenties who barely had any experience. Hence, with the intention of being fair on Sankara, Misra allowed Sankara to choose his own judge. Sankara had heard greatly about Misra's righteousness and appreciated him for his act of fairness. But he was quick to decide that none but Mandana Misra's wife herself can be the most appropriate judge for this debate. The debate between them commenced, and continued for six months nonstop. Thousands of scholars gathered everyday to watch and learn. Mandana Misra, at a ripe old age, still remained a man with very sharp intellect and a very solid grasp of logic, but he was slowly losing. Despite being such a young man, Shankara's realization of the ultimate Brahman and his knowledge of Maya, enabled him to win over Misra's arguments easily. Misra was a very accomplished ritualist, yet he seemed to lack some understanding of higher spiritual truths that Shankara seemed to have experienced already. At the end of this 6 months period, Mandana Misra was almost ready to accept defeat, when his wife, Bharathi, declared that in order to defeat a man in debate, the opponent should also defeat his wife.

The transformation of her husband into a sannayasi distressed Bharati to no end. Wise and prudent as she was, she kept her counsel and addressed Shankara thus: "You do know that the sacred texts enjoin that a wife forms one-half of a husband's body (ardhangini: ardha- half; angini – body). Therefore, by defeating my lord, you have but won over only half of him. Your victory can be complete only when you engage in debate with me also, and manage to prove yourself better." Bharathi was a learned scholar herself and a very clever one at that. Knowing very well that Shankara was a strict celibate, "how can a sanyasi, who has no experience as a citizen, and a householder, claim complete knowledge? She immediately started discussing relationships and marital obligations. Shankara confessed that he had absolutely no knowledge in this area, because he was a celibate. However, Bharathi felt that she should give Shankara some time to study about this topic before resuming the debate. Shankara immediately accepted the offer and left to start his studies. Through his yogic powers he came to know of a certain king who was about to die. He instructed his disciples to preserve his body, which he temporarily left to enter the dying king's body. The king happened to be a very evil man. Yet his wives were loyal to him and were in tears when the king was in his deathbed. Suddenly, when the king's body woke up, one of the wives noticed that the king had recovered under rather mysterious circumstances and appeared to have become a changed man. Sankara learnt from that woman, all that he needed to know about experiences and on his way out of the body, he blessed that lady who had taught him so much. Empowered with this new knowledge, Shankara returned to resume the debate with Bharathi. This time, he was clearly unbeatable. Bharathi and Mandana Misra bowed their heads in humility and accepted defeat and became followers of Adi Shankara and staunch vedantins.

V.CONCLUSION

This debate throws light on the healthy competition that existed in India among followers of different philosophies. Essentially they were travelling towards the same unknown estimation, yet they had the open mind and immense courage to test their faith, to question their beliefs, and to change their philosophies, if reason demanded the change. Similar to how different paths could still take one to the top of the same mountain, so too do all philosophies lead to the same goal of self realization. However, even though staunch belief in one's path is necessary to make spiritual progress, when one meets obstacles, one should remain accepting towards new concepts, experiments, or questionings because these can potentially unlock some deep doors in our mind.

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