

CANTO 8

CONTROVERSY WITH MANDANA¹

Towards Mahishmati to meet Mandana

(1-13) Bhagavan Sankara now left Prayaga, and travelling through the skies, reached the splendid city of Mahishmati which had gained great reputation as the residence of Mandana. Admiring the beauty and splendour of the numerous buildings of the city, he descended from the skies even like the sun at the close of the day, in a lovely wooded park of that place. There his physical exhaustion was assuaged by a gentle breeze coming through palm groves, carrying the cool water particles from the extensive sheets of lotus-flowers that covered its lakes. Finishing his morning rites and after resting a while, he started for Mandana's place along the road, before it was noon. On the way he met a number of maidservants going to fetch water in pots for use at Mandana's house. When he asked them for directions to find out Mandana's house, these women, wonder-struck at the sight of the imposing personality of Sankara, replied very respectfully: "You will find nearby a house at whose gate there are a number of parrots in cages, discussing topics like this: 'Has the Veda self-validity, or does it depend on some external authority for its 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 the strange phenomenon of caged parrots discussing such abstruse philosophical problems, know

¹ Mandana Misra is known by several names. He is known also as Oomveka, and as Viswarupa, besides as Sureswara after he became a Sannyasin under Sankara's influence. Probably Mandana Misra was the name by which he was known among scholars, while Viswarupa was the name given to him by his parents, and Oomveka, a pet name. His early history has already been described in Canto 3. It is to be noted that there is a well-known Vedantic text by name *Brahmasiddhi*, attributed to Mandana Misra. Whether this Mandana is the same as the ritualistic philosopher whom Sankara had to confront, is a matter of controversy, because the views of the author of *Brahmasiddhi* are mostly Vedantic and not of the ritualistic philosophy. It may be that the work is by the same Mandana after he came under the influence of Sankara, but that for some unknown reason his old name came to be attached to the work. But the greater possibility is that the ritualist Mandana

that to be the gate of Mandana's house." Sankara with his disciples spotted the house, but found its gates closed. So he dropped into the compound from the sky. There he had a total view of the famous scholar's residence which, with its mansions and gardens, resembled the heavenly abode of Indra himself. Entering a towering mansion, he got into the hall where Mandana was seated—Mandana famous for his learning and noble qualities, and imposing in appearance like Brahma himself. He saw the scholar washing the feet of the great sages Vyasa and Jaimini, whom he had brought there by the power of his Tapas to grace the occasion of a Sraddha ceremony he was performing that day. On seeing the two great sages, Sankara greeted them, and they, too, wished him in turn.

In Confrontation with Mandana

(14-31) Mandana, who was a confirmed follower of Vedic ritualism, was terribly annoyed to note that the newcomer without Sikah (tuft of hair) and Upavita (sacred thread) was a Sannyasin. As that great householder's wrath increased, Sankara's amusement also grew. In a desperate fit of anger Mandana burst out into a series of abusive interrogations. "Whence have you come, you shaven-headed fellow?" asked Mandana discourteously, meaning, by what way he came in, when the gates were closed. Taking the question to mean 'How far are you shaven?' Sankara replied, "Up to the neck". "That is not what I asked," said Mandana, "I asked (about) your way?" To this Sankara quipped, "Did you ask the 'way'? Then what did the 'way' reply?" Annoyed terribly, Mandana ejaculated: "It replied that your mother is a widow and that you are a widow's son." Unconcerned, Sankara humorously remarked: "Indeed! Did the 'way' tell you that 'you' are a widow's son? Then it must surely be so. For, it was you and not myself

who became Sureswara, under Sankara's influence, is a different person from the author of *Brahmasiddhi* and that the personalities of the two have got mixed up.

The place where Mandana, the ritualist, lived is another controversial matter. He was a resident of Mahishmati according to Madhava-Vidyaranya. But the text is not, however, clear about the situation of this place. In verse 28 in Canto 3, however, Mandana's paternal home is stated to be situated in the capital of Kashmir. Chidvilasa also seems to speak of him as a resident of Kashmir. Vyasachala speaks of him as a resident of Mahishmati in Vidarbha. According to Anantanandagiri

who questioned the 'way', and in the answer you received, the 'you' must surely refer to yourself." Further exasperated, Mandana exclaimed: "Have you drunk (*pitam*) toddy?" Quibbling on the meaning of the word '*pitam*', which means 'drunk' when used as a verb and 'yellow' when used as an adjective, Sankara took the question to mean "Is toddy yellow?" and gave an impertinent answer to that impertinent question. "Oh no! Toddy is not yellow but white." At this Mandana remarked with a mischievous insinuation, "I see, you are, therefore, well acquainted with its colour!" "And you with its taste!" promptly retorted Sankara. Again Mandana said: "You who indulge in such impertinent talk must be under the intoxication produced by eating poisoned (rotten) flesh." Interpreting the statement of Mandana differently (for the statement '*matto jātaḥ kalañjāśī*' can also mean 'the one born of me, i.e., my son, is an eater of poisoned flesh'), Sankara said: "You are right. As the father, so the son. If your son eats poisoned flesh, he must have learnt it only from you." Mandana, defeated on that front, raised another abusive issue and asked: "O vicious fellow! Is it that you have abandoned your Yajnopavita and your tuft, because they are too much of a burden to you? But having abandoned them, you seem to have burdened yourself with a bundle of rags too heavy even for asses." Sankara replied: "Even your father would not bear this load of a Sannyasin's rags that I am carrying. Instead, he continued to bear like an ass the burden of a wife (householder's life) till the end, in spite of getting kicks from her. For the life of the householder, characterised by Sikha and Yajnopavita, is, in the eyes of the Sruti, a mere burden for a man full of the spirit of renunciation. O fool of a fellow! You who cannot grasp this, must be a man of little understanding." At this Mandana said again: "The world knows what

he lived in Bijlabindu near Hastinapura. To identify these ancient names with their modern counterparts is difficult.

Telang, however, points out that Mahishmati is mentioned in *Raghuvamsa* (VI-43) as situated on the Narmada. In the *Magha* (II.64) it is represented as the capital of Sisupala. Dr. Garret's dictionary identifies it with Chuli Maheshvar. Thus all these three, the capital of Kashmir, Bijlabindu somewhere north of Delhi, and the banks of the Narmada—all these places divided by vast distances claim to have been the residence of Mandana. It is a very strange situation indeed!

your much-vaunted Brahma-nishtha (devotion to knowledge of Brahman) is—it is loafing about with a bundle of books and a brood of disciples owing to one's incapacity to feed one's wife and look after her." Sankara retorted: "And pray, what is your Karma-nishtha (adherence to the life of Vedic ritualism)? It means, to become the servant of a woman after abandoning the service of the teacher owing to your incapacity to continue for long as a celibate Brahmacharin." Thereupon Mandana continued: "O fool! You were born of a woman. It was again a woman that brought you up. And still you are so ungrateful as to hate woman." Sankara retorted: "Having been born of a woman's womb, and fed at her breast, still how can you, O prince among brutes, bring yourself to seek sensuous enjoyments in her company like an animal?" "One who fails to tend the sacred fires (Garhapatya, Ahavaniya, and Dakshina) commits the sin of Virahatya (murder of one's son)", said Mandana, criticising the Sannyasins' practice of abandoning these sacred fires that a follower of the Vedas should maintain. Sankara retorted: "You who have failed to know the Self have committed Atmahatya (suicide)." "You are a thief," replied Mandana, "for you have come into my house stealthily like a thief, avoiding the notice of my gate-keeper." At this, Sankara observed: "You are the real thief; for, you eat your food without giving to Sannyasins and Brahmacharins their share as laid down in the scriptures." Now at his wit's end, Mandana attempted to beat a retreat, saying, "I should not be talking like this to a brutish fellow like you during the time I am engaged in ritualistic performances." Referring to a mistake in articulation in Mandana's speech (*sambhāshyā aham* instead of *Sambhāshyoham*), Sankara said mocking, "From your committing *Yati-bhanga* (inappropriate pause), you are, indeed, giving an exhibition of your scholarship." Quibbling on the meaning of the word *Yati-bhanga* (which also means 'attacking and defeating a Yati or monk'), Mandana remarked: "When I am concerned with the defeat of a Yati (*Yati-bhanga*), what harm is there if I commit a *Yati-bhanga* (inappropriate pause)?" To this Sankara replied with another quibble: "Your presumption will be true, if you say 'defeat by a Yati' in place of 'defeat of a Yati'. For, the former is what is now happening." Continuing his abuse, Mandana said: "Where is Sannyasa in Kali-yuga, and where is Brahman

for a brutish fellow like you? You have put on the garb of a Sannyasin only as a means to get good food without any work." Sankara retorted: "Where is Agnihotra in Kali-yuga? And how can heaven be attained through all the foul actions involved in ritualism? Your garb of a ritualist is only a means to secure the licence for living with women."

Decision to Hold Debate

(32-38) Thus continued the war of words and wits between the two—Mandana proud and angry all the while, and Sankara calm and humorous. At this juncture the two sages present, Jaimini and Vyasa, intervened. While Jaimini looked at Mandana with a smile on his lips, Vyasa addressed him as follows: "Dear one, this behaviour of yours towards a Sannyasin, who is a knower of Brahman and who has abandoned all worldly desires, is quite improper. You have to see Mahavishnu in such an honoured guest and invite him for Bhiksha (food offering to a Sannyasin)." Thus admonished by sage Vyasa, Mandana immediately calmed down, and after doing Achamana, invited the Sannyasin for Bhiksha. To this Sankara replied: "I came here for *Vāda bhiksha* (an offering of philosophic disputation) and not a Bhiksha of edibles. And the wager in the disputation should be that the defeated one should become the disciple of the victor. My only objective in life is to spread the teachings of the Vedanta everywhere as the true gospel for men to follow for the attainment of salvation. I have not got the least interest in anything else. The Vedanta is the only panacea for man's ills in Samsara. It is a veritable moon for those suffering from the heat of worldly existence. Abandoning it, you are revelling in the cult of sacrifices. My mission in life is to establish the truth of the Vedanta by defeating in debate all who hold an opposite view. So, either accept the truth of Vedanta forthwith, or come for a debate and accept the Vedanta after defeat in debate."

(39-51) To Mandana, proud of his learning and his reputation, the bold and uncompromising challenge of the Sannyasin came as a fresh shocking experience. But without getting excited he replied as follows in a dignified manner: "Even if Adishesha, who marks the summit of learning, challenges me with his thousand tongues, I shall not hesitate to accept the challenge fearing defeat."

I shall not abandon the obvious teaching of the Vedas and follow the fanciful interpretation of it by you. To me who am ever awaiting the arrival of a competent scholar to enter into a debate, your arrival is a welcome and coveted opportunity for a resounding victory. Let us now hasten for the debate, and let the long watered plant of scriptural study come to fruition. This is a golden opportunity—a treasure-trove that has come to me unsought. I am not the man to abandon it. O good-looking youth! Remember that even Siva, the destroyer of Death himself, is sure to meet with defeat before me. But I am none the less eager to hear the sweet swan-song of your arguments. I am, indeed, an axe that extirpates the forest of an opponent's pride of learning. Pray, has not my resounding reputation for scholarship in all branches of learning reached your ears? How silly it is for you to say, I want *Vāda-bhiksha*! No prayer is required for that. It is ever ready. I have been long waiting with this offer, but I have not seen till now any opponent coming forward to accept it. I shall certainly enter into debate with you. I have not the least hesitation. But, a debate is not a mere wordy wrangle ending in parched throats. Its purpose is victory. In a debate, there should be two parties meeting in argument, and we two are those parties. There must be a proposition for which, or against which, the arguments are directed. Next it has to be fixed how success or defeat is to be determined, and what the consequence of such success or defeat should be. Then there is the question, who is to be the umpire. I am a leading householder. You are a learned Sannyasin. We must fix a wager beforehand, and then we can start our debate in the best of spirits, with a smile on our faces. This, indeed, is a very good day in my life, as I have got this day a demand for debate from a very worthy person like you. We shall start the debate tomorrow. Now the day is far advanced. It is already noon, and I have got to perform my mid-day rites." With a smile on his face, Sankara agreed to this proposal. Mandana requested Vyasa and Jaimini to be the umpires at the debate. But they said, "No. Let your learned wife Ubhaya-bharati take the position of the umpire." For, they knew about the learning of the lady and her real identity with Goddess Saraswati.

(52-56) In deference to the words of the sages, Mandana made a decision on his immediate course of action. He extended a very

warm and ceremonious welcome to the three great personages who had arrived at his house, as if they were the three fires of the householder (Garhapatya, Ahavaniya and Dakshina). After the sages had taken their mid-day meal, they rested for a while and two young disciples of Mandana stood there fanning them with a white chowry. While the three sat there resting, they had among themselves some private conversation, after which they came out of Mandana's house. The two of them, Jaimini and Vyasa, soon went their way, while Sankara fixed his abode at a temple on a river bank amidst a grove of palms. Being highly pleased with the providential meeting he had with the two great sages, Sankara conversed with his disciples for sometime on his meeting and talks with Mandana and spent the night in the cool and pleasant atmosphere of the temple on the river bank.

The Great Debate with Mandana

(57-62) At dawn, when the infant sun had begun to redden the eastern horizon with his fresh radiance, Sankara, the wisest among men and the best among knowers of Brahman, completed his morning duties, and accompanied by his disciples, proceeded, ready for debate, to Mandana's house, where several learned scholars had already assembled to attend that intellectual contest. As previously fixed, Mandana's learned wife, Ubhaya-bharati, who was none other than Saraswati embodied in a human form, was to be the president and umpire at that learned assembly, where Mandana presented himself for debate with Sankara. The devoted wife that she was, Ubhaya-bharati, who was as handsome as she was learned, accepted the proposal conveyed to her through her husband to be the arbiter in the intellectual contest between himself and the Sannyasin Sankara, and she adorned the presidential seat like the real goddess Saraswati herself. In the midst of that enthusiasm of debate prevailing in the assembly, Sankara, the great Sannyasin and the most learned of men, came forward first to announce his proposition of the unity of all existence as follows: "Brahman the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute is the one ultimate Truth. It is He who appears as the entire world of multiplicity owing to dense ignorance, just as a shell appears as a piece of silver. Just as, when the illusion is dispelled the silver is sublated by, and dissolved into, its substratum, the shell, so also, when

ignorance is erased, the whole world is sublated and dissolved into its substratum, Brahman, which is the same as one's own Atman. This is supreme knowledge as also Moksha (liberation), and it brings about the cessation of future births. The Upanishads, which form the crown of the Vedas, are the authority in support of this proposition. I am sure to prove this and be victorious in the debate. If, however, I am defeated, I shall cease to be a Sannyasin, abandon my ochre robe, and assume the white dress. Let Ubhaya-bharati be the umpire to determine success or failure."

(63-65) When Sankara had finished making his declaration, Mandana, the great householder, made his, emphasising the teachings of his faith, as follows: "The Vedantas or the Upanishads cannot be a proof of a subject-objectless Pure Consciousness, unoriginated and infinite. For, words can reveal only objects which are originated entities, but never a pure subject-objectless Consciousness, which does not form an effect. Therefore the non-Vedantic part of the Veda, dealing with such effects produced by works, is the real Sabda-Pramana (verbal testimony). In the light of it, actions alone constitute the steps leading to Moksha, and embodied beings have to perform action (Karma) till the end of their lives. If I happen to be defeated in argument, I shall take to the life of Sannyasa. As requested by you, let my wife Ubhaya-bharati, who is learned enough for the work, be the judge in this contest."

(66-73) Thus solemnly undertaking that the defeated party should adopt the Ashrama (mode of life) of the victor, and making the learned lady the umpire in the contest, they started the debate with their hearts firmly set on victory. As these two learned savants began to debate with great avidity after finishing their respective daily rites, Ubhaya-bharati, who took her post as the umpire, came forward and put two wreaths on the necks of both the contestants and declared: "That person is to be considered defeated whose wreath is seen to fade." Having so arranged, she went to the inner apartments of the house for completing her household duties as also to cook the Bhiksha (or food offering) for the Sannyasin and meals for the master of the house. As the debate started, Brahma and the Devas, who were eager to attend it, assembled in the sky above that house. Quoting authority after authority from the Veda and supporting the same with weighty

arguments they conducted the debate in a highly dignified manner, each contending party showing due respect to the other. As days passed, the debate became keener and keener and larger and larger numbers of scholars swelled the audience. It was remarkable that though both of them were vitally interested in victory, the two disputants did not evince any bitterness or enmity towards each other. Five or six days passed in this way in debate, Ubhaya-bharati appearing every day at noon to inform her husband that food was ready and to invite the Sannyasin for his Bhiksha. As they sat firm in their seats, refuting each other's learned arguments, there was not the slightest excitement in their behaviour, nor any angry word in their speech, even when confronted with confounding situations. On the other hand, a sweet smile played on their shining faces all through the debate.

(74-130) Now, finding Mandana capable of taking mighty intellectual punches, Sankara directed an all-out offensive at his thesis, whereupon Mandana found it difficult to maintain his position or give proper answers to the objections raised by his opponent. Thereupon, abandoning the defence of his own thesis, Mandana now launched on an elaborate criticism of the Advaita doctrine expounded by the Upanishads. The objections and replies were in the following strain:

The Identity of Atman-Brahman

[The following discussion will be better understood by the reader if he bears in mind the fundamental difference the disputants have regarding the Veda, which both Mandana and Sankara accept as the revelation standing for the ultimate good of man. Mandana's school (Purva Mimamsa) holds that the only purpose of the Veda is to prompt man to actions (i.e., rituals of Vedic sanction), by the performance of which man attains heavenly felicity of long duration, at the end of which he returns to the earth—again to acquire more merits by performing Karmas. So the real Veda is of the nature of commandments to action of a ritualistic nature. If there are purely descriptive passages in it, these are purely descriptions of certain aids to Karma like its ingredients, agents required, etc. There may be also many passages which are by way of eulogy of the rituals or their agents. None of these have any independent status and are to be understood only in subordination to the com-

mandments instituting rituals. Thus, the whole of the Veda is of the nature of commandments for the performance of rituals, and if this is not accepted, Veda becomes a mere trash, a purposeless literature.

Contrary to this view of the Purva-Mimamsakas is the contention of Uttara-Mimamsakas (Vedantins) that the above is only a half-truth and not the full truth; and a half-truth is sometimes worse than a full lie. The Uttara-Mimamsakas contend that the Veda has two sections—the Karma-kanda or ritualistic section and the Jnana-kanda or the philosophic (Knowledge) section. The latter is the crown of the Veda. In Vedic exegesis what the Purva-mimamsakas say is true only of the Karma-kanda and not of the Veda as a whole. The Jnana-kanda of the Vedas, also known as Vedanta or the crown of the Veda, is constituted of the Upanishads which reveal the real or ultimate meaning of the Veda, and the Karma-kanda portions are merely preparatory to this. Therefore, to extend the philosophy of ritualism to the understanding of Upanishads is a great blasphemy. The statements of the Upanishads are not commandments to action, but revelations of the nature of the Ultimate Reality and man's relation to it. They are an end in themselves, and not aids to the performance of any ritual. The understanding conveyed by them releases man from the false sense of duality and establishes him in the experience of the Unity of all existence, thus releasing him for ever from the repetitive process of births and deaths (Samsara) by rousing in him the sense of oneness with Eternal Bliss.

To put it briefly, for Mandana and his school, the Veda is a revelation, teaching and prompting man to efficacious rituals by performance of which perishable felicities can be got, whereas for Sankara it is a philosophy, an understanding of which establishes him in Eternal Bliss, the Unity of all existence.]

MANDANA: O Supreme Sannyasin! You categorically maintain that the Jiva and Brahman are identical in their real nature. I find no valid proof for this.

SANKARA: In the Upanishads, in the teachings of great sages like Uddalaka and others to worthy disciples like Svetaketu, there are passages asserting this unity. For example: *tat tvam asi; abhayam vai Janaka praptosi, tad atmānam eva vedāham brahmā-*

smṛti; tasmāt sarvam abhavat; tatra ko mohah kaḥ soka ekatvam-anupasyataḥ, etc.

MANDANA: Statements like *tat tvam asi* convey no special meaning. They are, at the most, meaningless words like *hum phat vashat* etc., which are not meant to convey any sense but only to be used in Japa for eradication of sins. (Mandana is here speaking from the presumption of his philosophy.) Vedic sentences are meant directly or indirectly to prompt men to action. There is no place for mere statements giving information about the nature of anything that is not connected with a Vedic ritual. In the Vedic context, therefore, *hum phat vashat* etc., meaningless in themselves, are significant when used in activities like Japa.

SANKARA: It is true that *hum phat* etc. have no meaning and are, therefore, useful only for Japa. But, when there is actually a meaning conveyed by a word or sentence, as in *tat tvam asi* etc., how can you say that they are meaningless word combinations to be used for Japa only?

Alternative Interpretation of Tat Tvam Asi

MANDANA: Granted they convey some meaning, that meaning cannot be a declaration of unity of Brahman and Atman, although it may apparently look so. All Vedic sentences are injunctions prompting man to actions, and those which are not so apparently, are allied to actions and have to be interpreted that way. For, there are no Vedic sentences purely descriptive of an already existent entity like Brahman having no connection with action. Wherever they are found to occur, they have to be interpreted in the light of the principles stated. *Tat tvam asi* and such other Vedic passages are Vidhi-seshas—they occur after the portions containing injunctions to actions like Yagas and Yajnas, and are, therefore, not injunctions in themselves, but only allied to them in a subsequent sense. Here in the case of *tat tvam asi*, it is only a praise of the performer of a Vedic sacrificial ritual for his highly meritorious deed, calling him Iswara Himself.

SANKARA: Such an interpretation is fanciful. What are called Vidhi-seshas occur only in the earlier, i.e., the Karma-kanda portion of the Vedas, as they are closely connected with Karmas.

They are meant to eulogise the various entities forming parts of the ritual. Examples of this are 'Aditya is Yūpa (sacrificial post)', 'The sacrificer is Prastara', etc. Here, 'Yūpa', 'sacrificer', etc., who form vital parts of a sacrifice, are eulogised through identification, and so these passages occur in proximity with the injunctions regarding sacrifice. But how can *Tat tvam asi* and such passages, coming outside the Karma-kanda and having nothing to do with rituals, become Vidhi-sesha, or appendages to Vidhi (injunction)? Look at such Upanishadic passages of a similar nature: 'The Real alone existed in the beginning', 'Atman alone existed at first', 'Brahman is immutable'. How can any person say that they are all meant for praising the virtues of a sacrificer?

The Question of it being an Instruction for Meditation

MANDANA: If such sentences as *Tat tvam asi* are not meant for praise, they are meant for meditation which would enhance the efficacy of a ritual. When a sacrificer meditates, 'I am That' and superimposes Iswarahood on himself, his power is thereby enhanced, and through that, the fruitfulness, too, of the ritual he performs. Further, Vedas say, "Whatever is done with understanding, faith and determination, their potency is enhanced." The saying *Tat tvam asi* is parallel to sayings such as, 'Meditate on Aditya as Brahman', 'Meditate on mind as Brahman', etc., when Brahman is superimposed on Aditya, mind, etc., through meditation. In *Tat tvam asi*, Iswarahood is superimposed on the Jiva and, thereby, the power of the Jiva performing sacrifice is enhanced. Interpreting the Upanishads in this way, they can be brought within the scheme of Vedic injunctions and thus made meaningful as a revelation. For, all Vedic passages are connected with action, and no passage unconnected with action (rituals) can have a place in it.

SANKARA: O Learned Sir, in passages like 'Meditate on mind as Brahman', the verb is in the imperative and, therefore, the sentence is a commandment, an inducement to action. But *Tat tvam asi* is a mere statement, the verb being in the simple indicative mood. In the face of this obvious fact, how can you assert that it is an inducement to action?

MANDANA: O Great Yogin! If they are mere descriptions and

not inducements to action, the Vedantic sentences will become a mere jumble of purposeless words in place of being the Sastra (Veda). A Sastra must induce a man to act for something desirable, or to desist from something undesirable. Now the Vedantic passages can be given the force of a Sastra only if they are interpreted as commandments urging man to attain to the fruit of Moksha (Jnana-vidhi), and not by taking them as mere descriptions of a state that serves no human purpose. This is what is done with Vedic passages of a descriptive nature such as: 'Those who perform Rātri-satra are established in the state of greatness.' This, in effect, is only a commandment, meaning: 'If you want to attain to the state of greatness, perform Atirātra.' Just like that, 'That Thou art' means, 'If you want the fruit of Mukti, become Brahman through meditation concerning Brahman and Atman.' Many Vedanta passages are couched exactly in this form as commandments. For example: 'This Atman should be seen, heard, thought of and meditated upon,' 'This Atman which is free from all stain, deserves to be sought after and striven to be known.' Thus the Vedanta passages on non-duality are not mere descriptions but commandments, with the fruit of Mukti in view.

SANKARA: But by such an interpretation, Moksha will become an effect of an action. For, meditation is a mental action, and like any action, it can be done, or not done, or done in a contrary fashion. The implication of making Moksha an effect is to make it impermanent like Swarga and all attainments generated by human activity. This is the very negation of Moksha. In meditation you impose one entity on another by an assertion of the will and generate a new effect which did not exist before. Brahma Vidya (knowledge of Brahma) is not an activity like that of converting Atman, which was not Brahman before, into Brahman by mental assertion. Brahma Vidya is knowledge and not meditation. Knowledge is a mental mode of 'being what one has always been' and not of 'becoming into something that was not before.' The text 'That Thou art' declares the eternal nature of things. Whatever passages look like commandments in the Upanishads as 'This Atman should be heard of, meditated upon, etc.', are only for removing the obstacles or coverings. Jnana or knowledge, if you call it an action at all, is only of the nature of removal of

obstacles, and not of bringing about a new condition or effect. When the obstacles are removed, the truth that 'the Atman has always been Brahman,' stands revealed. This is not an effect but what is in the nature of things.

Why not an Assertion of Similarity ?

MANDANA: (Now, giving up his thesis that the Vedantic sentences are injunctions for meditation, Mandana adopts a new position and argues:) Let us give up the contention that '*Tat tvam asi*' is an injunction for meditation. What harm is there in understanding it as an assertion of similarity between Brahman and Atman and interpreting it as '*You are a spirit similar to Brahman*', and not that you are the same as that?

SANKARA: What is this similarity asserted of? Is it of merely being a spirit, or of having the distinctive features of Brahman as the soul of all, omniscience, omnipotence, etc.? The first of the alternatives is already accepted. The second cannot be, because it goes against the plain meaning of the Vedantic sentence that the Atman and Brahman are one. That they are one cannot mean that they are two similar but different entities.

MANDANA: Let it be maintained that similarity is asserted only of their both being eternally conscious entities, while in respect of qualities like 'being the soul of all' etc., let us say they are there but are covered by Avidya (ignorance) and only look as if they are absent. By accepting this meaning, the basic oneness remains, while for all practical purposes the difference also is asserted. Can't we get over the difficulty suggested by you this way?

SANKARA: If you are prepared to go so far, why do you hesitate to say openly that they are one? For, this is what it amounts to, when you admit that the difference perceived is not real but only apparent, being caused by Avidya.

MANDANA (Changing his position a little): But, don't you think that the doctrine of similarity helps to repudiate materialism? For, by comparison with yourself, it helps you to understand what is meant by speaking of the cause of the world as intelligence. The only self-conscious intelligent entity you understand is yourself,

and the intelligent nature of another entity can be understood only by observing and accepting similarity. And once the cause of the world is accepted as pure intelligence, i.e., that the world has come out of intelligence, then all these quasi-materialistic doctrines like those of Samkhyas and Kanadas are repudiated.

SANKARA: Why follow all these tortuous methods of misinterpreting the Mahavakya, only for securing the refutation of materialism? That is already done directly by passages such as 'That thought, let Me become many' etc. The intelligent nature of the cause of the world is established directly by such passages. Moreover, to get the meaning, you have to distort a statement like 'That thou art (*Tat tvam asi*)' into 'That is like you' (*Tat tvatsadṛṣo'sti, or Tadasti tvamiva*). Where is the justification for all this distortion, if the object is only to secure that intelligence is the source of the world?

Doctrine of Unity Contradicts Perception

MANDANA: (Mandana now takes up an entirely new line of objection and says:) The doctrine of the unity of Brahman and Jiva contradicts the evidence of perception. For, we see only their difference and not unity. So sentences like '*Aham Brahmāsmi, Tat tvam asi, etc.*', which seemingly assert unity, are meant only for Japa (silent repetition) by Yogis. They have not got the force of Vedic sentences.

SANKARA: It has to be established, and not merely presumed, as you do, that perception of the difference between Iswara and Jiva is actually experienced by the eye. Then only is the nonperception of the unity between Iswara and Jiva of any significance, and the situation of identity passages in the Upanishads being contradicted by perception, arises. But actually, perception cannot at all reveal the difference between Iswara and Jiva, because no kind of relation can be established between the organ eye and the kind of difference you speak of. Actual contact of the organ and an object is necessary for perception to function. Here there is no such contact between the eye and this difference.

MANDANA: O learned one! We have actually got a *feeling*

that we are different from Iswara. Leaving aside the question of actual contact, let us take this feeling of difference as an attribute of the Jiva, and interpret it as revealing the difference between the Jiva and Iswara.

SANKARA: Now, to say that an attribute like difference alone is perceived and not the object it qualifies, is an irrelevant and senseless proposition. When you say that the non-existence of a pot on a table is perceived, the table, which the 'non-existence' is supposed to qualify, should also be seen. In this case, the Atman, which is the object supposed to be qualified by difference, is not seen. How can you then contend that 'difference', which is one of its attributes, alone is seen?

MANDANA: Both the Atman and the mind are Dravyas or substances. One substance can contact another substance and rest on it. So your contention that the mind does not and cannot contact the Atman is not correct.

SANKARA: In your way of thought, the Atman must be either Anu (atomic) or Vibhu (all-pervasive). In either case, it is a partless entity. In this world, we find that only entities with parts can have mutual relation. (So if you contend that mind contacts the Atman, you will have to admit that the Atman has parts, which will destroy the very conception of the Atman as a partless and indestructible whole.) All these arguments are vitiated by the presumption that mind is a sense organ which directly contacts objects. But this is not a fact. It is only an aid to the senses for perceiving their respective objects, just as light is. It is not a sense organ.

Does Intuitive Feeling Contradict the Doctrine of Unity?

MANDANA: Let the contention that the sense of difference between the Jiva and Iswara is born of perception, be given up. Let us say that the difference is an inborn intuitive feeling in us (Sakshi). Can't one say that this intuitive feeling contradicts the Vedic sentences propounding the unity of the Jiva and Iswara?

SANKARA: What the intuitive feeling certifies is the difference between the Jiva as qualified by Avidya (ignorance) and Iswara as qualified by Maya (creative power). The unity which the Vedic

sentences certify is the inherent unity realised on the elimination of the above qualifying adjuncts of both. The sphere of intuitive feeling and Vedic sentences here being different, the question of conflict between them does not arise. Besides, even in case a conflict is seen, it is resolved by the law that in two successive experiences or statements, the succeeding one is the stronger one and can abrogate the earlier, according to the doctrine of Apachcheda.

Does Inference contradict Unity ?

MANDANA: Then let the evidence of perception in any form be given up. Let us take the position that inference contradicts the doctrine of unity of the Jiva and Iswara. The Jiva is an entity with little knowledge. Iswara is an all-knowing entity. The Jiva is, therefore, different from Iswara, just as a pot is different from Him. This conclusion contradicts Vedic passages declaring the unity of these two.

SANKARA: Say whether the difference between Iswara and the Jiva is actual or merely apparent. If you say it is actual, then the example you have shown to prove it is inappropriate and invalid. The instance shown must be one having knowledge or sentiency in order to have resemblance with the entities involved, namely the Jiva and Iswara. You must show another conscious entity to illustrate your point. The pot is an insentient object. So your argument falls due to insufficiency of illustration.

MANDANA: My view is that self-knowledge does not annul the difference between the Jiva (oneself) and Iswara any more than it eliminates the difference between oneself and a pot. Self-knowledge means knowledge of oneself only and not of the pot or of Iswara. It need not abolish these differences. Your view, on the other hand, is that it annuls all differences, including that between the Jiva and Iswara. As I hold Iswara, the pot and all other objects on a par in comparison with self-knowledge, my argument is free from the fallacy of inappropriateness of illustration.

SANKARA: Now, the entity you indicate by the word 'self', of which knowledge is predicated—is it unaffected by all dualities like pleasure and pain, or is it the same individuality that is subject to all these? In the latter case, I have no difference with you that

the knowledge of a 'physical self' will not annul differences. But what do you gain by thus establishing a materialistic doctrine that the body is the self. If, on the other hand, the knowledge is of the 'unaffected and un-affectable' spiritual Self, that knowledge effaces Avidya, which is the cause of all differences, including that between the self and the pot. Hence, since all illustrations to show difference can be drawn only from the realm of Avidya, they become inappropriate as illustrations for comparison with that uncontaminated 'spiritual Self.'

MANDANA: Now you are not prepared to admit a self that is subject to pleasure and pain, different from Iswara. You say the cause of this sense of difference is Avidya and that when Avidya is removed, all the Upadhis or adjuncts born of Avidya and causing differences, are also eliminated. Now I do not admit such a theory of Avidya. Differences are inherent and not due to adjuncts that can be eliminated. There is inherent difference between Iswara and the Jiva. There is equally inherent difference between Iswara and the pot and between the Jiva and the pot. So, for illustrating the difference between the Jiva and Iswara, the example of the pot and Iswara is quite adequate. So, my example stands.

SANKARA: Your denial of the fact that differences are caused only by Upadhis which have their source solely in Avidya, is not valid. In the case of the pot, though it is not conscious of ignorance like the sentient Jiva, the whole existence of the pot is due to the basic Avidya, and insentiency is its Upadhi. On the other hand, the Jiva being pure sentiency, it cannot be separated from Brahman except by the Upadhi of Avidya. For, all sentiency is Brahman, and the different centres of sentiency in it can be conceived only on the assumption of Upadhis.

MANDANA: I maintain that Brahman, the spiritual Being, has got His own distinctiveness, which cannot be sublated by the Jiva knowing Brahman. You admit that the distinctiveness of a pot is in no way affected when you know it.

God and the Absolute

SANKARA: What is your contention—is it that even when self-knowledge dawns on all the Jivas, Brahman will still continue to

have His distinctiveness? Or is it that the self-knowledge of one Jiva alone, will still leave Brahman in His distinctiveness? If it is the latter, there is nothing at issue except that the fact is not as simple as that. For when the Jiva realises itself as Brahman, all differences in their totality vanish, and in that vanished totality of distinctions is included all the distinctions of individual Jivas and of inert objects like the pot. When Brahman is the sole existence, there is nothing left to show off this distinctiveness. O learned one! What have you in mind when you speak of the knowledge of the spiritual Being—have you in mind God, the Deity, who has attributes like omniscience, omnipotence, immortality, etc., or Nirguna Brahman, which is pure, attributeless, absolute Consciousness? If it is the former, I am in agreement with you in maintaining that difference exists between God and the world of limited beings. If your reference is to the latter, the attributeless Absolute, difficulty arises alike in speaking of knowing Him and not knowing Him. If you say you know Him, it contradicts the Vedas which declare the Absolute to be beyond all means of knowledge. If, on the other hand, you say that He cannot be known, then all attributes and all distinctions lose their basis and must come to naught.

Vedic Passages Teaching Difference: Their Correct Interpretation

MANDANA: (Not being able to show or establish the distinctiveness of Brahman and the Jiva by reasoning, Mandana again resorts to Sruti.) There is the following Upanishadic verse, 'There are two birds of beautiful plumage, unified in friendship through eternity, occupying the same tree. Of them, one eats the fruits of the tree, while the other merely looks on without eating.' Here, the two birds are the Jiva and Brahman, and the Sruti asserts their difference. By this the Sruti contradicts the idea of their unity which, you say, is asserted by other Vedic sentences.

SANKARA: There are many Srutis condemning the perception of diversity as: 'He who sees only diversity here, goes from death to death' etc. As against these, quoting a sentence pertaining to facts known even otherwise, through perception etc., will not weaken the Sruti passages that declare the unity of existence. They only describe the apparent nature, the wrong notions of

things, as seen in ignorance, say, like the silver in nacre. A Vedic sentence must give you some knowledge unattainable through other means like perception, or they must prompt you to some fruitful action. Others are mere Arthavadas, figures of speech and exaggerations, whose meaning is not what they purport to say. The passage you have quoted is only an Arthavada. There are many such passages in the Veda with dualistic import.

MANDANA: A sentence contained in a Smriti (texts attributed to great saints and seers, like the Gita, Puranas, etc.), if it is based on a Vedic text, is considered valid. For example, take the passage 'Kshetrajna is Myself' in the Gita. Even so, a truth given by perception, if it is supported by a Vedic text, has to be given the same validity. The difference between Iswara and the Jiva is given in our intuitive perception, and this is supported by the Vedic text I quoted. Its validity cannot be questioned.

SANKARA: What the Veda supports is not all the Smritis, but the meaning of a Smriti passage which is identical with it. 'Know the Kshetrajna to be Myself' is identical in meaning with '*Tat tvam asi*'. This unique meaning cannot be got through any other means of knowledge except the Vedic passage, and insofar as the Gita passage reiterates this unique meaning, it is relevant in the Vedic context. This is not the case with regard to the sentence you have quoted about 'the two birds, sitting on the self-same tree.' The knowledge of difference between Iswara and the Jiva is had even by the ignorant. No Veda is required for it. Only that is Veda which reveals new knowledge, unattainable otherwise. Its function is not to reiterate knowledge obtained in other ways. Besides, all that has been said by you till now is based on a misunderstanding about the meaning of the passage, 'Two birds of beautiful plumage' etc. When rightly interpreted, it will be seen that the passage is not meant to show the difference between Iswara and the Jiva, but to distinguish Iswara from the Sattva or the Buddhi (intellect). It is the Buddhi that undergoes the enjoyments and sufferings born of Karma, and the passage seeks to distinguish that Buddhi from Iswara and assert His freedom from Samsara.

MANDANA: If, as you say, the reference in this Mantra is to the Buddhi and Iswara, and not to the Jiva and Iswara, then the

passage will be ascribing 'enjoyership' to an inert substance like the Buddhi (for it is only a product of insentient Prakriti), and will thereby become untrustworthy as a means of valid knowledge, because it can be charged with indulging in obvious absurdities like the doctrine mentioned above.

SANKARA: There is no occasion for such a doubt. *Pañgya-rahasya Brāhmana* gives its meaning clearly as follows: The Buddhi 'enjoys' while the Jiva (Kshetrajna) witnesses the enjoyment.

MANDANA: In my view this is not correct. In this Brahmana, the Sattva (Buddhi) is equated with the Sāriri (the embodied being). The embodied being is clearly the Jivatma. The 'other' who is spoken of as Kshetrajna (the knower of the field) is Iswara who merely witnesses.

SANKARA: Such a view cannot stand, as the Sruti clearly declares the meaning of the word Sattva to be Buddhi, and of Kshetrajna to be the Jiva. "That by which dream is experienced is the Sattva; He who is the over-seer in the body is the Kshetrajna, i.e., the Jiva."

MANDANA: No; by the words 'by whom' in the text, the Jiva alone is mentioned as the seer of the dream. Kshetrajna is Iswara, the witness.

SANKARA: It cannot be construed so grammatically. As the word 'drashta' is used in the sense of 'Karta' (doer), and as it is preceded by the expression 'the embodied being', the Jiva alone is referred to as the seer. It cannot be Iswara. What is mentioned as two in the Sruti are the Buddhi and the Jiva, and not the Jiva and Iswara.

MANDANA: (Not being able to establish that 'Sattva means Jiva', Mandana tries now to contend that the epithet Sārira or 'the embodied' can be applied to Iswara.) As Iswara is also connected with the bodies of all individuals as the all-pervading indweller, what is wrong in applying the word 'Sārira' or 'embodied being' to Iswara?

SANKARA: Iswara pervades everything—not merely the Sarira or body. Under the circumstances, it is misleading to specify

Him as 'Sāriri' or 'the embodied one'. Akasa is also pervading everything, including this body. Nobody will, on that account, apply the name 'Sāriri' to Akasa.

The Uniqueness of the Vedic Authority on Unity of Existence

MANDANA: (Abandoning the position that the reference is to the Jiva and Iswara, and pointing out the absurdity in maintaining it to be the Buddhi and the Jiva:) A Vedic statement to such an effect would make the Veda support an absurdity (namely, that an inert substance like the Buddhi can be the Bhokta or the enjoyer), and thereby invalidate its status as a means of valid knowledge.

SANKARA: Naturally iron is not hot. But when heat pervades, it, it becomes hot and burning. So also, the inert Buddhi, when pervaded by the Chit, the intelligent principle, can function as the Bhokta or the enjoyer.

MANDANA: In the Kathopanishad, there is the verse: 'Enjoying the fruits of actions, they reside in the cavity of the heart. They are related as light and shade. So say the knowers of Brahman'. In this statement of the Kathopanishad, it is stated that Iswara and the Jiva are residing in the cavity of the heart, and that there is absolute and fundamental difference between them as between light and shade. Is this not contradictory to the doctrine of non-duality?

SANKARA: The Vedic passages that assert the unity of existence are not in any way affected by other passages relating to the divisions and distinctions of relative existence (i.e., life as understood and experienced by man in ignorance). For, what the non-dualistic passages do, is to give a piece of knowledge which cannot be had by any other means, unlike the dualistic passages that teach difference which can be known through other means of knowledge also. So the position of these non-dualistic passages is unique and is quite unaffected by pointing to this passage and that passage teaching difference.

MANDANA: The Vedic passage speaking of difference gets only greater strength and validity from the support it gets from another means of valid knowledge like Pratyaksha (sense experience). It is not thereby weakened, as you say, because of sense knowledge

confirming it. Therefore these dualistic passages surely affect the validity of non-dualistic passages, which are without the support or confirmation of any other means of knowledge.

SANKARA: O Learned one! The strength of a Vedic passage is not affected, because no other means of knowledge can confirm it. If your contention is conceded, the Veda ceases to be a means of valid knowledge, self-validating in itself. This is the uniqueness of the position of the Veda among the means of right knowledge — namely, that it gives knowledge that cannot be derived through any other means. If your position is accepted, Sruti becomes merely a means for confirming knowledge that can be got through other means also. It becomes very weak and purposeless thereby.

Verdict of Ubhaya-bharati: Defeat of Mandana announced

(131-136) Now, Ubhaya-bharati (who was none but Goddess Saraswati herself) accepted that the cogent arguments of Sankara had overcome the contentions of Mandana, thereby subjecting him to the humility of defeat. Like a shower of sweet-smelling flowers, came her words giving a verdict, which in effect was a directive to her husband to adopt the life of Sannyasa, abandoning home and herself. As she thus gave her verdict in favour of the distinguished Sannyasin, the flower wreath which she had put at the start round her husband's neck was found to fade. And, unlike on ordinary days, she now invited them both, Sankara and Mandana, for their Bhiksha in the noon; for, from now onwards Mandana was no longer a householder but a Sannyasin, according to the wager agreed upon in the beginning. At the same time, addressing Sankara, she said: "It was due to the curse of angry Durvasas that I, Goddess Saraswati, was born on earth. With your victory, the effect of that curse is over. Let me now go back to my heavenly residence." With these words she was making haste to depart, but Sankara stopped her with the power of Vanadurga Mantra, in order that he might defeat her also in argument. This act of his was not so much to get the reputation of an 'all-knowing scholar', but to establish the doctrine on secure foundations by converting all scholars to it. He said to her: "You are the wife of Brahma and the sister of God Siva. It is you who have

assumed the forms of various Goddesses like Lakshmi. You assume, O Mother, different forms for the protection of the worlds. Only when I, your great devotee, permit you, should you go to your heavenly abode." The Devi accepted his request. Sankara then wanted to know what Mandana thought about the future.