Siva Advaita
Category : March 1994
Published by Anonymous on Mar. 01, 1994

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Siva Advaita is the philosophy of Shrikantha as expounded in his Brahma Sutra Bhashya, a Saivite commentary on the Brahma Sutras (ca 500-200 bce). The Brahma Sutras are 550 terse verses by Badarayana summarizing the Upanishads. The Brahma Sutras, the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads are the three central scriptures of the various interpretations of Vedanta philosophy. Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva wrote commentaries on these books deriving three quite different philosophies-nondualism, qualified nondualism and dualism, respectively-from the same texts. Each claimed his to be the true interpretation of the Vedas and vigorously refuted all other interpretations. Shankara was a monist and accorded worship of the personal God a lesser status. Ramanuja and Madhva, on the other hand, developed theistic philosophies in which devotion to Vishnu was the highest path. There was as yet no school of Vedanta elevating devotion to Siva to similar heights. Shrikantha sought to fill this gap. The resulting philosophy is termed Siva Vishishtadvaita and is not unlike Ramanuja's qualified nondualism. In the process of his commentary, Shrikantha put Saiva philosophy into Vedantic terminology. Shrikantha lived in the eleventh century. Of his personal life virtually nothing is historically known, so the man remains a mystery. Nor did he catalyze a social movement that would vie with Vira Saivism or Saiva Siddhanta. But from his writings it is clear that Shrikantha was a masterful expositor and a devout lover of God Siva. His influence was largely due to Appaya Dikshita, who wrote a compelling

commentary on Shrikantha's work in the sixteenth century as part of a successful multi-pronged attempt to defend Saivism against the inroads of Vaishnava proselytization in South India. According to Shrikantha, Siva created the world for no purpose except out of play or sport. Siva is the efficient cause of creation. As His Shakti, He is also the material cause. Siva assumes the form of the universe, transforms Himself into it, not directly but through His Shakti. Yet, He is transcendent, greater than and unaffected and unlimited by His creation. Siva has a spiritual body and lives in a heaven more luminous than millions of suns, which liberated souls eventually can attain. Shrikantha in his Brahma Sutra Bhashya said, "At the time of creation, preceded by the first vibrations of His energies-solely through an impulse of will, independently of any material cause, and out of His own substance-He creates, that is, manifests, the totality of conscious and unconscious things." Purification, devotion and meditation upon Siva as the Self-the akasha within the heart-define the path. Meditation is directed to the Self, Siva, the One Existence that evolved into all form. Release comes only after certain preliminary attainments, including tranquility, faith and nonattachment. Bonds which fetter the soul can be shattered in the torrent of continuous contemplation on and identification with the Supreme, Siva. Liberation depends on grace, not deeds. Upon death, the liberated soul goes to Siva along the path of the Gods, without return to earthly existence. The individual soul continues to exist in the spiritual plane, enjoying the bliss of knowing all as Siva, enjoying all experiences and powers, except that of creation of the universe. Ultimately, the soul does not become perfectly one with Brahman (or Siva), but shares with Brahman all excellent qualities. Man is responsible, free to act as he wills to, for Siva only fulfills needs according to the soul's karma. Shrikantha wrote in Brahma Sutra Bhashya, "Siva associates Himself with the triple

energies [knowledge, will and action], enters into the total agglomerate of effects, and emerges as the universe, comprising the triad of Deities [Vishnu, Brahma and Rudra]. Who can comprehend the greatness of Siva, the All-Powerful and the All-Knowing?"  Appaya Dikshita (1554-1626) is a most unusual person in Hindu history.  His commentaries on various schools of philosophy were so insightful that they are revered by those schools, even though he did not adhere to their philosophies.  An ardent devotee of Lord Siva, he compiled manuals on puja worship which are used to the present day by Saivite priests.  Additionally, he was an excellent devotional poet.  Philosophically he adhered throughout his life to the advaita school of Adi Shankara.  In his battles to reestablish the worship of Siva against the Vaishnavism of the day, his life came under threat numerous times.  Saivism was suffering setbacks in South India in the sixteenth century due largely to the patronage of Vaishnavism by Ramaraja, king of Vijayanagara, whose territory encompassed an area as large as modern Tamil Nadu.  When Ramaraja was killed at the fall of Vijayanagara in 1565, his successors ruling from other cities continued the patronage of Vaishnavism.  Appaya succeeded at this crucial juncture in gaining the patronage of King Chinna Bomman of Vellore, who ruled from 1559 to 1579. Bomman had once been subject to the king of Vijayanagara, but after the city fell, he declared his own independence.  Appaya Dikshita set out to compose commentaries on the various philosophies of his day, including that of Shrikantha.  Appaya's commentaries on the writings of the dualist Madhva are revered to this day by Madhva's adherents.  Through his 104 books, Appaya created more harmonious relations with the other systems of thought, promoted Saivism from several philosophical approaches at once and contributed to the basic devotional worship of Siva.  The patronage of King Chinna Bomma assured the wide spread of Appaya's ideas through

specially convened conferences of up to 500 scholars and extensive travel for both Appaya and the trained scholars who served as Saiva missionaries. Appaya wrote in one text, "Since the summer heat of the evil-minded critics of Lord Siva and His worship are awaiting in order to burn out and destroy the sprouts of Siva bhakti or devotion that arise in the minds of the devotees, for which the seed is their accumulated merit in their previous births, this work, Sivakarnamrita, with its verses made, as it were, of nectar, is written to help rejuvenate those sprouts." Appaya Dikshita concluded that the philosophies of Shrikantha and those of other dualists or modified dualists were necessary steps to recognizing the truth of monism, advaita. He argued that Shrikantha's emphasis on Saguna Brahman (God with qualities) rather than Nirguna Brahman (God without qualities) was meant to create, for the moment, faith and devotion in fellow Saivites, for such devotion is a necessary prerequisite to the discipline needed to know the Transcendent Absolute, Parasiva, Nirguna Brahman. Appaya Dikshita said in Sivarkamani Dipika, "Although advaita was the religion accepted and impressed by the great teachers of old like Shri Shankara [and the various scriptures], still an inclination for advaita is produced only by the grace of Lord Siva and by that alone." Siva Advaita apparently has no community of followers or formal membership today, but may be understood as a highly insightful reconciliation of Vedanta and Siddhanta. Its importance is in its promotion by Appaya Dikshita to revive Saivism in the sixteenth century.