CHAPTER I

PADMAPADA - HIS LIFE, DATE AND WORKS

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Works - Pañcapadika - Atmabodhavyakhyā - Prapañca-saravivarana - Nrsimhastaka - Vijnanadipika
Padmapāda, the author of the Pañcapādikā, one of the favourite disciples of Śrī Śaṅkara, is universally reputed to be his first direct disciple.¹ His earlier name was Viṣṇuśarma. He was the son of Somaśarma who belonged to Vemannillām near Trkkantiyūr in Vetṭathunādu. Tradition credits him with the founding of the Thekkemathom in Trissur.²

Life

Padmapāda was very intelligent in his younger days. An ardent devotee of Narasimha, he himself is believed to have been an incarnation of Viṣṇu³ and an answer to Somaśarma’s prayers to Narasimha.⁴ Poverty

3. N. Kriḥhnamūrti, Śaṅkarācāryaswāmikal, p.20.
drove Padmapāda to follow the ways of the Vaiśyas and as a trader he amassed much wealth. But during one of his business trips he was waylaid and deprived of his entire wealth. Disheartened and depressed, he set out for Kāśi as a pilgrim. There he met Śaṅkara and became his disciple. Śaṅkara rechristened him Sanandana. In his life of Śanyāsa he was known by the same name.

Sanandana Got The Name Padmapāda

Among the disciples of Śaṅkara, Sanandana attained great prominence because of his innate attributes. His austere life, his devotion to study and his capacity to assimilate the subtleties of philosophic thought earned for him the respect of the wise men of the day. Moved by deep affection for his devoted disciple, Śaṅkara taught Sanandana his commentaries three times, revealing the highest truth of the Vedas. This made the other disciples rather jealous of him. So, in order to

convince them of his inherent superiority, Śaṅkara one day called Sanandana, who was then standing on the opposite bank of the Gaṅga, to come to him immediately. And he stepped into the Gaṅga with the unflinching conviction that devotion to the feet of the Guru, which had enabled him to go across the ocean of Samsāra, would surely not fail him in crossing the river. The holy Gaṅga brought out lotuses to support him whereever he placed his feet on her waters. He was not aware of this miraculous sprouting of lotuses beneath his feet, because his mind was fully centred on the Ācārya. The other disciples looked on with wonder at this incredible phenomenon. When at last he reached his Guru Śaṅkara Christened him Padmapāda-the lotus feeted one. Śaṅkara appointed Padmapāda to be the first Ācārya of the Śrīnegeri Math. According to Venkitasubramonia Iyer, Padmapāda was the first adhipati of the Math at Badari founded by Śaṅkara.
Pilgrimage of Padmapāda

Once Padmapāda approached the Ācārya and sought his permission to go for a pilgrimage to holy places. The Ācārya thereupon said to him that real pilgrimage was to be near one's own guru. It is better to be with the guru, serving him, than to go about from place to place. The wanderer would have time only to think of his food, shelter and safety. To this Padmapāda replied: "It is not proper to question the Guru's words still, I have a word to say. Though the Guru's proximity is equal to residence in a holy place, I feel a mental dissatisfaction for not having visited the different holy places. True, difficulties like want of food and facilities of accommodation will face one. But pray, will living with all conveniences of life enhance one's spiritual stature? Diseases are the result of one's sins of the past. If this be true, they will visit one irrespective of whether one stays in one place or wanders about from place to place. When a man's allotted time is
up the god of death will not leave him, whether he stays here or in a distant land. The feeling that one has been saved from death, or has succumbed to it, because of being in a particular place, is a mere illusion. Location has nothing to do with it". 9

Then the Ācārya says that "If you are so intensely desirous of undertaking a pilgrimage, I do not want to discourage you. I was only testing your determination. I bless that you spend many days in pilgrimage without any ordeals or difficulties. There are many ways leading to holy places, temples and cities. Always go along the safe and frequented paths, and never along the secret pathways used by thieves and robbers. You can stay on the way with holy men here and there for some days, or you can, according to your preference, go straight to your destination. Contact with good men and discussions with them on Vedāntic teachings are always very enlightening, it gives relief to the weary, protection to the suffering, courage to the timid, and joy to

the ear and the heart of the participants".  

After having listened to the words of his guru with great attention Padmapāda started on his pilgrimage.

Travelling in this way southwards, Padmapāda reached Kerala and met his uncle. On seeing his nephew after so many years, his uncle, who was himself a scholar, was delighted beyond measure. There Padmapāda happened to lose his Pañcapādikā in original. Once while he was in Śrīneri the Pañcapādikā had been read over to Śaṅkara and he had kept it in memory. Now, he began reciting and transcribing from memory the entire Pañcapādikā and soon finished the work.  

Padmapāda Became Nṛsīmha

One day Śaṅkara, the conqueror of all the passions and the resort of Rsis who had conquered their lower self, was resting at a solitary spot after he had delivered his discourses on the Bhaṣya. A fierce and

10. Ibid., pp.152-53.  
11. Ibid., p.165.
evil minded Kāpālika named Bhairava approached him with murderous intentions in the guise of an ascetic. He pleaded for the Ācārya's head. Then by mutual consultation they fixed a date and a secret meeting place for the Kāpālika to perform his nefarious deed. Satisfied immensely, the Kāpālika went home, while the Ācārya continued to stay at his āśrama without revealing to anyone what had transpired between him and the Kāpālika. On the appointed day, the Kāpālika arrived at the place in his ceremonial dress.

At a time when all his disciples had gone for their ablutions, the Ācārya withdrew from his āśrama to the appointed solitary spot, so that Padmapāda and other disciples might not get any inkling of what was taking place. Seeing the fierce looking Kāpālika in readiness, the Ācārya prepared himself to give up his life. The Kāpālika approached the Ācārya with his sword raised aloft to chop off his head, when the whole plot that was developing suddenly flashed on the mind of the
disciple Padmapāda. He had attained Siddhi from the Mantra of Nṛsīmha. The consciousness of Nṛsīmha took possession of him and he became the Nṛsīmha himself for the time being. His human consciousness gave way to that of Nṛsīmha and he became an embodiment of ferocity. As the whole of Nature got agitated Padmapāda caught hold of the Kapālika while he was aiming his trident at the Ācārya's head, and tore open his chest with his nails, as once the Nṛsīmha had done to Hiranya. Alarmed by the sound and commotion, the disciples who had gone away for their ablutions hurried back to the Abramāra, and saw the Ācārya in samadhi and the corpse of the Kapālika lying nearby.

After that the Ācārya with his disciples went to Haridwar. There they lived a life of absolute abstinence for twelve years. Heeding the advice of the Lord Viṣṇu, king Valsanandi summoned Padmapāda from Haridwar to Badari. On the request of the king, Padmapāda installed the idol of Viṣṇu at Badari, where Kerala Brahmins were appointed to perform the Pooja. Padmapāda caused
the sprouting of a holy spring thereby striking at the rocks with a stick. It is known as the Danāgāhāta tirtha. He lived at the newly founded Shrine for three years. Entrusting the performance of rituals at the temple to Kerala Brahmins, Padmapāda ended his life there in Paramasamadhi.\textsuperscript{12}

Date

Being the direct disciple of the great saint Šāṅkara, there is hardly any difficulty in fixing Padmapāda’s sojourn on earth. Šāṅkara according to tradition lived for thirty-two years from A.D. 788 to 820. Dr. Radhakrishnan says that Padmapāda belongs to the 8th century A.D.\textsuperscript{13} Karl H. Potter says that he belongs to the middle of the 8th century A.D.\textsuperscript{14} B.N. Krishnamurti Sarma\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} I.Kunjikkuttan Thampuran, Padmapadacārya, Mangalodayam, Trissur, 1085 ME, p.349.


\textsuperscript{14} Bibliography of Indian Philosophies, University of Minnesota, p.134.

and R. Thankaswami suggest the date as A.D. 800.

According to Kuppuswami Śaṅkara Padmapāda’s time was sometime between A.D. 625 and 705 A.D.17 L. Thomas O’Neil and Dr. Ramamurti Sarma18 suggest the date as A.D. 820. But Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer says that Padmapāda lived around 1300 A.D.20 But the other three disciples of Śaṅkara were the contemporaries of Padmapāda and there is clinching evidence to prove that they lived between A.D. 800 and 900. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that Padmapāda also was of that period, i.e. the beginning of the 9th century A.D.

Works

There are four works attributed to Padmapāda.

They are Pañcapādikā, Ātmabodhavyākhyā, Prapañcasāravivarana

17. Ibid., p.228.
1. **Pañcapādika**

Pañcapādika on which this present study is proposed is the famous commentary on the Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya of Śaṅkara. The available portion of it covers only up to the catūssūti portion of the Sūtra-bhāṣya. It is the most important of Padmapāda's works.

2. **Ātmabodhavyākhyā**

Ātmabodhavyākhyā is the commentary on Śaṅkara's Ātmabodha. It is also called Vedantasāra.

3. **Prapāñcasāravivarana**

Prapāñcasāravivarana is the most important

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24. There is another book with the same name by Sadānanda.
commentary on Prapañcásara. Prapañcásara belongs to the Tantraśāstra. Tantraśāstra is a Sādhanaśāstra, the object of which is to reach the highest truth, the Brahman. It is divided into thirty-six Paṭalas. It deals with the worship of Devatas in the tantric way. Its tantric nature is reflected in the philosophical doctrine relating to sound creation, the general terminology, Devatas of worship and the ritual character of its contents from the sixth to the end of the work. It is cited as an authority in tantric works. It is not only frequently quoted, but has been the subject of several commentaries. The Prayogakramadīpīka is a gloss on Prapañcásāravivaraṇa. Apart from Prapañcásāravivaraṇa there are several other commentaries on the Prapañcásāra by various writers. They are Prapañcásārasambandhadīpīka, Prapañcásārasamgraha etc.

Nṛśimhāstaka

Nṛśimhāstaka is a stotrabhāva. It is in

25. Śrī Śankarācārya, Prapañcásara.

praise of Nṛsīṁha, the fourth incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu.

Besides these the following six books are also attributed to Padmapāda. 27

1. Vijñānadīpikā
2. Swarūpānubhavah
3. Atmanātmavivekavyākhyā
4. Kathopanisādbhāsyam
5. Tattvamātipañcakam and
6. Karmanirnayah

Among these the Vijñānadīpikā and Swarūpānubhavah are Prakaraṇagranthas. 28

Vijñānadīpikā

Vijñānadīpikā is an independent treatise


28. Śastraikadeśasambandham Śastraikaṁryāntare sthitam
śuh prakaraṇam nama granthabhedam vipāscitah
Ibid., p.114.
consisting of seventy-one couplets. It is a poem which describes the main doctrines of Vedānta. It shows the easy way of liberation to all the Samsārins or the worldly ones, through deeds without the desire for their fruits. The highest aim of life according to Vijnānadīpikā is to attain tattvajñāna which results only after the annihilation of karma, and transmigration which consists of a continuous cycle of deaths and births for reaping the results of one’s own actions. 29 Vijnānadīpikā discusses the action knowledge problem in detail. In it Padmapāda starts with the doctrine that bondage arises from karma; while the renunciation of it leads to true knowledge. Unless karma is destroyed and consequently punya and pāpa also destroyed, liberation is impossible. While good action destroys sin, how to get rid of virtuous karma and its benevolent results? He replies that if the antahkarana is purified and vairāgya generated, leading to the rise of jñāna, that would

destroy karma. He goes on to air some other views also.

Total abstinence from action, Padmapāda says, is impossible. So to destroy karma the only way possible is to perform it without desiring the fruits. Actions done without seeking their fruits are ineffective and do not produce any merit or demerit. Vairāgya combined with desireless action (Niskamakarma) destroys all karma other than the prārābdhakarma, for one is not then responsible for what one does, but still one continues to experience the fruits of prārābdhakarma.

To sum up, Niskamakarma purifies the antahkaranā then Vairāgya arises in it leading to the rising of jñāna, which destroys karma. Apart from this, Padmapāda says that those who achieve what he calls the seven higher planes, starting with īstājñāna and culminating atmasamya will also certainly get rid of karma.
While prarabdha-karma cannot be annihilated except through experiencing it, silence, the company of the good and Sadārtha-pratipatti will weaken it. The last means charity to the deserving or dedicating all actions to God or utilization of all one has in performing Vedic rites, etc. Padmapāda also says that repetition of mantras and worship of the symbols and images of God are the easiest means for purifying the antahkarana.

In the Vijñānādīpikā, Padmapāda enunciates a synthesis of desireless performance of Svadharma, cultivation of Vairāgya and devotion towards God. This will purify the antahkarana and enable one to have direct knowledge of Brahman. This destroys all karma. Of course the knowledge which Padmapāda speaks of as liberating and totally destroying karma is the direct awareness of the unity of the self and the supreme self.