INTRODUCTION

Amongst all the Indian philosophical systems the system of *Vedānta* has an exceptionally long and colourful history of development. It's root as a living philosophy lies embedded in the hymns of the *Vedas*. The *Upaniṣads*, the *Sūtras* of Badarayana and the *Bhagavadgītā* jointly represent the advanced phase of the development of this thought. The contribution of Sankara to the development of *Vedānta* is indeed considerable and is the main cause of its popularity which holds on the Indian mind.

The term *Vedānta* as popularly understood does not refer to any single school of philosophical thought. It rather refers to a group of schools of philosophical thought which believe in such divergent views like absolute unity, absolute identity, unity as well as diversity and absolute duality. All these schools call themselves as *Vedānta* because all of them rely basically on the *Upaniṣads* and derive support from the *sūtras* of
Badarayana and the Bhagavadgītā, the three jointly known as Prasthānatraya. It was Gaudapada who founded the school of Advaita. Sri Sankara developed the Advaita school of philosophy as a full-fledged system. He has influenced directly or indirectly all later schools of Indian philosophy. The word Advaita is generally associated with the celebrated system of Sankara. Advaita is invariably taken to mean the doctrine which established the oneness of the Supreme Reality or Brahman by denying the reality of the world. Sankara established his system mainly based on the Prasthānatraya. He wrote Bhāṣyas on them. Sankara's Bhāṣyas serve as a guide in unfolding to the people the vast treasure of wisdom contained in the scriptures.

The Bhagavadgītā represents a unique stage in the development of Indian culture. A large number of commentaries have been written on it by adherents of different schools of thought. The Gītā has been relied on by people mainly as a perennial source of inspiration. Even today, it stands as a great book of inspiration
not only in India but also in the world as a whole.

Many philosophers have written commentaries on Sankara's *Gītābhāṣya*. Madhusudanasarasvati's commentary on Sankara's *Gītābhāṣya* is named *Bhagavadgītā- Gūḍhārthadīpikā*. It is his greatest work on religious philosophy. He was an able defender of Advaita, who saved it from the stake caused by the Dvaitins. His effort was to synthesize Jñāna and Bhakti. This can be well seen in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*. *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is a very extensive work and Madhusudana gives expression to his own views in this work though it is in the nature of a commentary on Sankara's *Gītābhāṣya*.

There is a general feeling that a commentary is no original composition. There is an element of truth in this. However, the vast commentary literature in Sanskrit is an exception. In fact, the whole tradition of Indian literature, whether it be purely literary or philosophical or pertaining to any branch of knowledge, is much indebted to commentaries. The commentary lit-
erature of Sanskrit has certain unique features. The first and the foremost is its originality. Several new theories and philosophies have originated through the commentaries in Sanskrit. Madhusudana's *Gitāgūḍhārthadīpika* retains the general character of originality of the Sanskrit commentary literature.

The *Bhagavadgītā* itself, being an epitome of the essentials of the whole *Vedas*, especially their final portions known as the *Upaniṣads*, is in the nature of a commentary. This is evident from the discrimination of the *Smṛtiprasthāna* to which the *Gītā* belongs, from the *Srutiprasthāna* to which the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads* belong. Sankara's *bhāṣya* is the earliest extent commentary on the *Gītā*. Madhusudana's *Gitāgūḍhārthadīpika* being a commentary on the commentary of Sankara is a sub-commentary. However, going through the *Gitāgūḍhārthadīpika*, one often forgets about this very fact. That is the nature of the *Gitāgūḍhārthadīpika* which will be elucidated in the present study.