Chapter 1

THE AUTHOR, HIS DATE, LIFE AND WORKS.

It is usually said that chronology is the weakest point in the history of Indian literature. This is more true about the most ancient phase of the history of Indian literature. The difficulty is much reduced in the case of the medieval and modern periods by scholars who, though not willingly, presented particulars regarding themselves in their works. Madhusudanasarasvati is but not one among them. The result is that his whereabouts are shrouded in mystery.

Author.

Madhusudanasarasvati's authorship of Gitagudhathadipika is not a matter of dispute. In one of the concluding verses of the work, the author has mentioned his
authorship by name. As usual, he has called himself Madhusudanamuni. And he pays homage to Lord Vyasa and Sankara for having enunciated the song-celestial and for having commented on the same respectively. The author Madhusudana also clarifies the object of his writing a commentary of this kind on the Bhagavadgītā. It is for the betterment and purification of his own knowledge. As Madhusudana himself claims, clarity is the best quality of Gitāgūḍhārthadīpikā. Scholars usually count Gitāgūḍhārthadīpikā as one among the works of which the authorship of Madhusudana is certain. Therefore, it can be definitely concluded that Madhusudana is the author of Gitāgūḍhārthadīpikā.

Date.

It is very difficult to prove the actual date of Madhusudana. Sri Rajendraghose in his elaborate preface to Advaitasiddhi has fixed the date of Madhusudana to be somewhere around 1525-30 A.D... He has sometimes made a mixture of historical evidences and legends; he has supplied many reliable materials to fix up the date. Mr. Gopinatha Kaviraj has also discussed the date and has reached the conclusion that
the 16th c. A.D. is the date of Madhusudana. This is in substantial agreement with Sri Rajendraghose's and Pt. Ramajna Sarmapandeya's opinions. Another scholar is Sri P.C. Divanji who has dealt with the subject in his introduction to Madhusudana's *Siddhāntabindu*. In that article Divanji has mentioned and criticised the views of other scholars, thereby furnishing a continuous history of attempts made to discover the actual date of Madhusudana. According to Sri Divanji too, the date of Madhusudana is the 16th c. A.D. All these scholars are unanimous that Madhusudana flourished in the 16th c. A.D. Visvanatha Nyaya Pancanana's *Bhedasiddhi* is considered to be a challenge to Advaitasiddhi. In his *Goutamanajnatāvṛtti* Visvanatha states Madhusudana's date as Saka 1556, i.e., 1634 A.D. Again, there was a disciple of Madhusudana, Sesa Govinda, the son of Sesapandita, the preceptor of Bhattojidiksita. This evidence proves that the date of Madhusudana is the 16th c. A.D. Bhattojidiksita, Jagannathapandita and Emperor Jahangir were contemporaries. The time of Jahangir was from the end of the 16th c. to the earlier part of the 17th c. A.D. Hence Madhusudana's date comes up to the 16th c. A.D., he being a senior contemporary
of Jahangir.

Prof. Dinesh Bhattacarya in an article has pointed out that there is a list of learned men of Akbar's time in *Ain-I Akbari*. They are divided into several groups according to the different faculties in which they showed their competence. Among these, the first group consists of the names of, as ascribed by Abul Fazl, philosophers and ascetics. In the list of this group, there are nine Hindu names. The very first name is Madhusarasvari. Prof. Bhattacarya says that the name spelt in the original Persian text clearly shows that it is Madhusudanasarasvati. The name which immediately follows is Madhusudana. Prof. Bhattacarya holds that this name indicates none other than the famous scholar Madhusudana of Benaras. The other relevant names found in that group are Narayanamisra, Ramatirtha, Nrsimhasrama and Krsnapandita. All of them flourished in the 16th c. A.D. Abul Fazl wrote *Ain-I Akbari* in 1597. A.D. Prof Bhattacharya notes that most of the Mohammedan scholars listed here, flourished early during the reign of Akbar From this evidence one can arrive at the conclusion that Madhusudana lived in the middle of the 16th c.
A.D.

Madhusudana, at the beginning of his *Advaitasiddhi*, mentions Madhava as his preceptor and Brahmanandasarasvati, in his *tika* introduces Madhava as Madhusudana's Vidyaguru. In an article published in the *Indian Antiquary* there is a statement that one Ramesvara Bhatta of Deccan while going to Dvaraka became the father of Narayana Bhatta in the year 1453 Saka or 1514 A.D. This Ramesvara Bhatta had a disciple named Madhusudana, a resident of Benares. This Madhusudana, therefore, flourished in the middle of the 16th c. A.D. and most probably he can be identical with the preceptor of Madhusudana whose Paramaguru also bore the name of Rama.

Madhusudana's theory of *Bhakti* closely resembles that of Rupagosvamin, Jivagosvamin etc. The dates of these renowned teachers of the Bengal school of Vaisnavism are 1554-55 (Rupagosvamin) and 1578-79 (Jivagosvamin). It may be said that Madhusudana as well as Rupa and Jiva Gosvamin formulated their theories from the common matrix of thought.
brought about by Sri Caitanya in the 13th c. A. D. Though Madhusudana's theory of Bhakti, in many respects, resembles that of the Bengal school of Vaisnavism, yet Madhusudana's treatment of Bhakti stands quite independent of the Bengal school as he lays more emphasis on its epistemological and metaphysical aspects. So one may say that Rupa Gosvamin and Madhusudana were almost contemporaries, and hence there was no chance for any one of them being influenced by the other.

A tradition current among the Indian orthodox scholars also indicate the 16th c. A. D to be the date of Madhusudana. There is a belief that Madhusudana visited Gadadhara, the great Naiyayika of Navadvipa in his old age. Again there is a tradition that Madhusudana was a friend of poet Tulasidasa and wrote a verse in appreciation of Tulasidasa on his demise in 1623 A.D. Madhusudana had also written on the composition of Tulasidasa's Rāmacaritamānasā, in 1574 A.D. More over, there is another tradition that Madhusudana visited the court of Emperor Akbar and was a friend of king Todarmal. These also confirm the view that Madhusudana flourished in
the 16th c. A.D. There is no harm in reaching the conclusion that Madhusudana lived during the second half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th c. A.D.¹⁰

**Life**

As in the case of many other Sanskrit authors, in the case of Madhusudana also biographical details are lacking. None of his works gives any information regarding his life. S.K. Gupta gives a biographical sketch of Madhusudana, in his work *Madhusudana on the Bhagavadgītā*.¹¹ He says that Madhusudana was born in a *Brahmin* family of Bengal. In his childhood he read *Nyaya* texts under the great contemporary masters. The floodgates of Sri Caitanya's cult of love and devotion had just been opened and the entire country was submerged by the torrent. At that time he came under the effective influence of this religious fervour. He intended to put that cult on a firm metaphysical basis. Sankara's monism had held sway over all philosophical thinking in the country. But the cult of *Bhakti* presupposed a pluralism of the three separate principles of *Jiva* (the individual), *Jagat* (the world) and *Īśvara* (God).¹² To combine both monism and the *Bhakti* cult was a
hazardous task which Madhusudana could execute successfully.

The next phase of Madhusudana's life opens at Varanasi where he studied Advaitavedānta under Acarya Ramatirtha. He mastered its philosophy and was soon convinced of the truth of the Vedānta teaching of identification of the individual self with the Ultimate Reality. Vyasarayatirtha's treatise Nyāyāmṛta had at that time undermined, to a large extent, the monistic philosophy of Sankara. Madhusudana took up the challenge, and wrote Advaitasiddhi a master-piece on monistic metaphysics and rehabilitated Sankara in the intellectual world.

Madhusudana's preceptor Ramatirtha advised him to renounce the world and take to ascetic life. Accordingly he went to the great Sannyasi Visvesvarasarasvati and prayed for initiation into ascetic life. As a test of his mental make-up, the preceptor asked him to write a commentary on the Gītā and if that proved worthy, he would initiate him to sannyasa. Thus, Madhusudana had a specific purpose in writing his brilliant
commentary Gūḍhārthadīpikā on the Gita. Herein he has succeeded in integrating work, worship and wisdom on the basis of a monistic philosophy. Later, the Sannyasin became a great personage in contemporary national life. Akbar the great held him in high esteem and often convened meetings of Sadhus and Mullahs under the guidance of Madhusudana in which discussions were held on the two religions of Hinduism and Islam.

Works.

A number of books have been ascribed to Madhusudanasarasvati. But it is very difficult to confirm the works of Madhusudana. Mr. Aufrecht has listed twenty two books under the name of Madhusudana. 13 They are:-

1. Advaitabrahmasiddhi.

2. Advaitaratnanaraksana.

3. Ātmabodhatīkā.

4. Ṛgvedajatādyāstavikṛtīvivaraṇa
5. Ānandamandākini

6. Kṛṣṇakutūhalaṇātaka

7. Prasthānabheda

8. Bhaktisāmānyanirūpaṇa

9. Bhagavadgītāgūḍhārthadīpikā

10. Bhagavadbhaktirasāyana


12. Mahimnastotraṭikā

13. Rajñāṁpratibodha

14. Vedastutiṭikā

15. Vedāntakalpalatikā

16. Śaṅdīlyasūtraṭikā
17. 'Sāstrasiddhāntaleśatīkā

18. Samkṣepaśārirakasārasaṁgraha

19. Sarvasiddhāntavarṇana

20. Siddhāntatattvabindu

21. Harilīlāvyākhyā

22. Bhāgavatapurāṇādyāslokatrayavyākhyā.

It is difficult to ascribe to Madhusudana the authorship of all the above mentioned books. But Advaitasiddhi is the most outstanding work of Madhusudana. His greatest work on religious philosophy is his commentary on the Gītā. It is a very extensive work and Madhusudana here gives expression to his own views in this respect. Bhaktirasāyana is another work on religious philosophy. Gūḍhārthadīpīka states that the topic at hand is further developed by the author in his Bhaktirasāyana. Hence, it is definitely a work of Madhusudana, the author of Advaitasiddhi.
BhāgavatapurāṇaprathamālokaMahākhyā is another theological work ascribed to Madhusudana. Aufrecht claims that Madhusudana wrote a commentary on Siddhāntalēśasaingraḥa. In the rest of the list there are some books the authorship of which are quite doubtful and the others can safely be discarded from the list of Madhusudana’s works.

Among his devotional works excepting the Mahimnastotra-ṭīkā, Bhaktirasāyana comes first in the chronological order because both Gūḍhārtha-dīpikā and the commentary on the first verse of the Bhāgavata mention Bhaktirasāyana. Therefore, in the light of evidences available in the works by the author himself, the works of Madhusudana may be arranged chronologically in the following way:

1. Samkṣepaśāṅkārasarāsaingraḥa

2. Vedānta- Praśūjaśāstra

3. Siddhāntabindu

4. Advaitasiddhi
5. Advaitaratnarakṣana.

The chronology of devotional works is as follows:

1. Mahimnastotraṭikā.

2. Bhaktirasāyana

3. Gitāgūḍhārthadīpikā

4. Bhāgavata commentary.

Scholars have generally accepted the authorship of Madhusudana in the case of ten works. When they come to the question of which works they are, there arises difference of opinion. From the sure list presented by Divanji, Karl Potter drops the following three works:¹⁴

1. Bhaktirasāyana

2. Bhāgavatapurāṇapurathamaślokavyākhyā

3. Mahimnastotraṭikā
Instead, Potter adds the following three works:

1. *Atmabodhaṭīkā*

2. *Padyatrayīvyākhyā*

3. *Siddhāntalēsa Saṅgrahaṭīkā*.

The works of Madhusudana reveal that *Advaita* is of the supreme concern for him. His regard for *Bhakti* also ranks much the same. Some of his works deal predominantly with *Advaita* while some other deal similarly with *Bhakti*. In fact, the works of Madhusudana combine *Advaita* with *Bhakti*. *Jñāna* and *Bhakti* form two sides of one and the same coin in the works of Madhusudana.

The works of Madhusudana can be ascertained only after a thorough study of all the works that go in the name of Madhusudana. But without going to that extent one thing can be ascertained: *Gūḍhārthadipikā* is a work of Madhusudana. He throws a new light on the *Gītā* through his commentary *Gītāgūḍhārthadipikā*. And for the same reason it stands apart
among the different commentaries and sub-commentaries originated so far on the Bhagavadgita.

Notes and references

1. Vyākyātam bhagavatpadaiḥ pratipadāṁ śrīsahkarākhyaiḥ punah 
   vispaṭam madhusūdananena muninā svajñānāsudhyāikṛtam 
   G.G.D,18,v.3

2. Maheswaran Nair, Dr.K., Advaitasiddhi-A critical study, Delhi, 1990, p.5.


4. Ibid.

5. Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol.XIII,193,p.31.

6. Ibid.

7. Gupta, Dr.S., op.cit

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.
10. Maheswaran Nair, Dr., K., op. cit. p. 6


12. Gupta, Dr. S., op. cit p. 6

13. Maheswaran Nair, Dr. K., op. cit. p. 8

14. Maheswaran Nair, Dr. K., op. cit. p. 10

15. Ibid.