

'Sankaravatara' Mystery Resolved, Whereas...



Dr. ZACHARIAS THUNDY

SANKARAVATARA MYSTERY RESOLVED, WHEREAS . . .

(Nazrani Brahmins Volume Three)

“The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experiences of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity.”

--Einstein

"One religion and One God for all humanity."

--Sri Narayana Guru Swamy

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Dedicated in Memory of my Late Brother Gheechan Thundiyl
Husband of Dr. Grace and father of Dr. Josef and Dr. Tomas

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3. Saint Shankara: An Introduction

We should know that Sankara was born and raised till he was about twelve in the predominantly Nazrani Brahmin community of Kaladi on the bank of Periyar in the eighth century. Very probably he continued his education both in Kerala and abroad until Govinda Bhagavatpada entered his life and took him to North India to complete his education. The great scholar and ascetic Shankara carried about the ecumenical nature of Kerala culture during his pilgrimage to north India though with mixed results. His literary works show that there is some truth in the accusation that he was also an “anonymous Buddhist” because he incorporated the best features of Mahayana Buddhism in his teachings just as Jesus is called a “crypto-Buddhist” because he too had incorporated many wonderful Buddhist teachings as

evidenced by the Christian Gospels. Though many partisan followers of Shankara and Jesus may not like me to refer to them as “Buddhists in disguise,” the masters themselves would be proud to acknowledge their indebtedness to their own masters by humbly admitting that they are only dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants.

In popular hagiographic perception, Jesus is viewed as the avatar of the second person of the triune God just as Shankara is seen as an avatar of Lord Shiva, the third person of the Trimurti, in the Indian religious tradition. It means also that the saintly person of Shankara may even have a Nazrani connection in Kerala and that his teachings also paved the road to the ecumenical shrine of Sabarimala, the favorite shrine of all Malayalees regardless of religious divisions.

26. Roots of the Ecumenism of Shankara

What is very striking about the Advaita philosophy of Shankara is that both in Shankara's days in Kerala and in our days Shankara's Advaita doctrine is quite at home with most of schools of Indian philosophy, Mahayana Buddhism, and Christian theology. Indeed, Shankara's Advaitic

“ecumenism,” understood as “a movement that promotes worldwide unity among all religions through greater cooperation,” was and is at its best in Kerala with its Sabarimala cult, as I shall show volume four of this book on Nazranis; that volume is titled Sabarimala Mystery Solved.

Central to this aperception of Advaita as an acceptable doctrine is the tenet that the core of religion is the anubhava or experience of reality in its fundamental unity and that all religions are equal paths to liberation (emancipation or

enlightenment). While in modern Neo-vedanta anubhava or experience is central, in Shankara's Advaita Vedanta, the sacred scriptures or sruti becomes the starting point and then takes the central role. However, Shankara would not and did not limit his search for truth to one vedic book or one Darshana tradition like Mimamsa. Like his own father, the brilliant Shankara would not and did not live in the purvamimasic and Saivite Namboodiri cocoon of Kaladi. That is why he sought his education under Nazrani gurus as well. I am inclined to say that (ascribed by me to Apostle Thomas), The Gospel According to Thomas, and the romance of Acta Thomae, which deals with Apostle Thomas's missionary work in India.¹ Importantly, the different gnostic writers emphasized personal spiritual knowledge (gnosis) over orthodox teachings, traditions,



Gospel of Thomas Discovered at Nag Hammadi

or esoteric insight. More specifically, we may define Gnosticism as

A collective name for a large number of greatly-varying and pantheistic-idealistic sects, which flourished from some time before the Christian Era down to the fifth century, and which, while borrowing the phraseology and some of the tenets of the chief religions of the day, and especially of Christianity, held matter to be a deterioration of spirit, and the whole universe a depravation of the Deity, and taught the ultimate end of all being to be the overcoming of the grossness of matter and the

50. Conclusion: *Bhande* Shankaracharya: *Nandi te!*

There is no record about any hostility that existed between Shankara of the Nambootiri clan and Nazrani Brahmins; they had every reason to live in peaceful harmony as I have tried to show in this book. I think I have established that as a fact by providing convincing arguments from familial, cultural, and religious perspectives done never before.

Indeed, Shankaracharya deserves our respect and gratitude for his many scholarly accomplishments, the least of which is his academic debates with Buddhist monks. It is hard to think of Shankara, a crypto-Buddhist himself, as banishing Buddhists from India. Shankara's handlers used the "naïve" monk-professor for their financial benefits against Shankara's own moral

convictions. Though Shankara engaged in academic disputes with Buddhist scholars, he could not and did not banish Buddhists from India because he did not have an army of cutthroats to do that dirty terrible job. It was primarily Saivite kings, egged on by Brahmin leaders, who started the destruction of Buddhist *viharas* and schools all over India. Poetic justice seems to have followed; that is, they themselves had their comeuppance when Muslim forces arrived soon after and completed their own ignominious acts of destroying the noble religion Buddhism.

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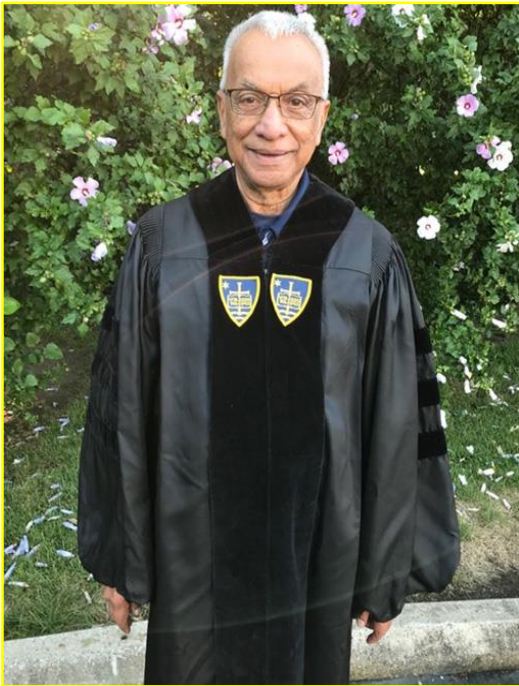
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Dr. Prof. Zacharias P. Thundy

It is indeed an honor to introduce Dr. Zacharias Thundy to the audience of the Aramaic Project. I have known Dr. Trundy for a long time as a friend and a scholar; whenever I had questions about Aramaic language, he is the one who would answer my questions and translate Aramaic passages for me. The Encyclopedia of Syriac Chants of the Syro Malabar Church contains much material that Dr. Trundy provided. See one example of Dr. Trundy's erudite and informed comments on the Christological hymn, Sagdinan Mar . Dr. Trundy is much more than an Aramaic scholar. He is a linguist, philosopher, theologian, medievalist, anthropologist, and a literary scholar. He has written and published more than thirty books and numerous articles and lectured in many parts of the world. He retired in 2001 from Northern Michigan University and resides in South Bend, Indiana, near the University of Notre Dame from where he had received his Ph. D. in 1969. Currently, he publishes books on social issues like the abortion question in the Bible, moral issues of contraception, same-sex marriage controversy, Gospel writers' use of Buddhist sources. His rationale for discussing controversial topics is this: "Dying dudes don't tell lies because soon, as Mark Twain says, they have to meet their maker (or destiny) and be accountable for all their deeds. So be it for now by telling truths."

For the last twenty years Dr. Thundy has been studying the problem of the literary indebtedness of the New Testament to the vast collection of the pre-Christian Buddhist Scriptures (see, The Stupa and the Cross; Gospel Narratives of the Passion and Death of Christ and Their Buddhist Source, Kindle Book, 2014)). For years, he had the hunch that there must be Buddhist parallels to the gospel narratives of the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus.