The Gaudapadiya karika may very well represent the earliest available record of an uncompromising non-dualistic doctrine (advaita-vada) in the Vedanta school.¹ The text itself comprises of two hundred and fifteen verses traditionally divided into four prakaranas. The first prakarana is traditionally interspersed between the prose of the Mandukya Upanisad,² and is said to be an exposition of its main themes, although Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya has suggested that the Upanisad is actually later than the prakarana.³ Because of this association, the text is often called the Mandukya karika, or, as Bhattacharya preferred, the Agamastra. However, the remaining three prakaranas show little or no connection with the actual text of the Mandukya Upanisad, although there is a degree of doctrinal overlap. Nevertheless, each prakarana has evidence of Buddhist influence in its language and arguments. The propensity for Buddhist ideas reaches such a degree in the fourth prakarana, that some have suggested that it is actually a separate Buddhist work in its own right.⁴

I.1. THE IDENTITY AND DATE OF GAUDAPADA

According to the Vedantic tradition, Gaudapada is the teacher of Govinda, Shankara's own teacher. Shankara twice quotes the Gaudapadiya karika in his Brahmasutrabhadya (BSBh). In BSBh II.1.9 Shankara cites GK I.16, referring to its source as "the teacher(s?) who know the meaning of the Vedanta tradition" (atroktarn. Veddntarthasampradayavidbhiracaryaih). In BSBh I.4.14, GK III.15 is quoted and attributed to "those who know the tradition of the Vedanta" (tathā ca sampradāyavido vadanti). In his commentary on Chandogya Upanisad 8.12.1, Shankara also appears to refer to "the most revered follower of the school of Prajapati", whose views are to be found in the four prakaranas. Again in Upadesasahasri 2.18.2 Shankara pays homage to his 'teacher's teacher' (guror gariyase). Recently, however, Thomas Wood has cast doubt upon this evidence. He suggests that

"Guru" (as an adjective) also means "heavy," "important," "great," "venerable," "highly prized." "Guro-gariyas," therefore, can simply mean "extremely great teacher," "he who is greater than a (mere) guru," "he who is dearer than a guru," or simply "highly venerable guru."⁵

Wood argues that there is nothing in this section of the *Upadeśasāhasrī* which would link the reference in 2.18.2 either to Gauḍapāda or to the *Gauḍapādiyakārikā*. As for the evidence from the *Chāndogyopaniṣadbhāṣya*, he suggests that the phrase ‘prakaraṇa-catuṣṭaya’ is a reference to the four instructions given by Prajāpati to Indra regarding the nature of the self in CU 8.7—12 and not to the four prakaraṇas of the *Gauḍapādiyakārikā*. Nevertheless, it is equally likely that Śaṅkara is here referring to the author of the four prakaraṇas (of the GK) and stating that they conform to the “school of Prajāpati” insofar as they deal with the doctrine of the four states of the self outlined by Prajāpati in the text of CU 8.7—12. Enough doubt, however, has been cast on the import of these references to treat them with a fair degree of caution.

In the commentary on the *Gauḍapādiyakārikā*, which may or may not be by Śaṅkara, the author of the text is referred to as the bhāṣyakāra’s ‘grand (or supreme) teacher’ (*paramaguru*, GKBh IV.100.) The ambiguity of the term ‘paramaguru’ however should be noted. The term may be used to denote a ‘grand-teacher’ (that is the teacher of one’s own teacher) or may be used in a more figurative sense where it merely implies the primary source of one’s inspiration. In the latter sense the term does not imply membership of the same sampradāya or lineage of teachers. It is clear then that one cannot be certain that the traditional view that Gauḍapāda is the teacher of Śaṅkara’s teacher is in fact an accurate interpretation of the textual evidence available.

Whatever the precise relationship between the author(s) of the GK and Śaṅkara, one cannot doubt the esteem with which the kārikās and the author to whom they are ascribed were held. This much is clear from the references to the “knower(s) of the Vedānta tradition” when quoting GK III.15 and I.16 in BSBh 1.4.14 and II.1.9. Despite this we know little more about the figure of ‘Gauḍa’ or ‘Gauḍapāda’ other than a number of mythological legends accepted by the post-Śaṅkarite Vedānta tradition. Information about the life and precise identity of ‘Gauḍapāda’ is lost in the same hazy mists that shroud our knowledge of the early Vedānta school in India.

There has been a suggestion that the verses are the handbook of an early school of Vedānta, established in Bengal. This is based upon the fact that part of northern Bengal was once called Gaudadeśa. ‘Gauḍapāda’ then, would mean the “summary verses from Bengal,” and would not be the name of an individual at all. This of course, goes against all of the traditional interpretation of the evidence that we have before us in the works of Śaṅkara and his successors. On this point, however, it is interesting to note that Suresvara, one of Śaṅkara’s immediate disciples, quotes the