How the Madhusūdana Sarvatī adopted the vyūha theory: In comparison with Śaṅkara's doctrine

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In this paper, I deal with the works of Madhusūdana Sarvatī, a scholar of the Advaita Vedānta school who flourished around the 16th century. The followers of this school thought that they could accomplish liberation by means of realizing the identity of brahman and ātman based on the scripture. Therefore, its doctrines did not necessarily require a supreme god. But in the era of Madhusūdana, faith in a supreme god flourished over all India, probably under the invasion of Islam. Therefore, in his work he also tried to harmonize traditional Advaita doctrine with faith in a supreme god, especially Vaiṣṇavism.

At that time, Madhusūdana, in his work Paramahamsapriyā (PP), re-examined the vyūha theory, a unique doctrine of the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātrika sect. The vyūha theory had been criticized by Śaṅkara (ca. 700-750), the founder of the Advaita school, in his Brahmasūtrabhāṣya (BSBh). However, Śaṅkara did not completely reject the vyūha theory and tolerated certain parts of this theory. On the other hand, the PP negatively described the vyūha theory of the Pāñcarātrika. Thus, it is thought that, while Madhusūdana denied this theory, he also incorporated it as long as it did not conflict with the Advaita doctrine as Śaṅkara had permitted.

From the above sources, I reveal which points of the vyūha theory Madhusūdana rejected and which points he accepted in his interpretation. By comparing his writings with Śaṅkara's BSBh, I examine his criticisms of this theory as well as aspects he approvingly adopted.