

## Document Citation

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Later, when Shetty is named in the dying statement of a murder victim, Welankar thinks his quarry is pinned. But to his mortal chagrin, Shetty evades arrest with just one well-placed phone call to a senior police official. As Shetty prospers – he stands for election and becomes a local political entity – Welankar's fortunes plummet. He turns to drink, thereby threatening his gently blossoming romance with a hesitantly friendly college lecturer (Smita Patil). Finally, when he is unjustly deprived of a well-earned promotion, he vents his rage on a scrawny little petty thief in police custody and inadvertently beats him to death.

A practical fellow officer counsels that his only course is to crawl to the now-powerful Shetty. Welankar meets him, smug and sleek, in his posh new apartment. Shetty's terms are simple: if Welankar becomes his stooge, his career may be saved. But Welankar can sink no further. With bare hands and clinical determination, he strangles Shetty.

This murder ends the film on a dark triumphant note. Welankar has no future, the System remains unscathed; but one man's small, insignificant soul achieves catharsis. This superbly controlled and finely detailed film is Nihalani's third. Far from being just another depressing tale of moral squalor in the developing world; it is filmed with the quiet malevolent power of a predator stalking the city's night.

MANJULA PADMANABHAN

## ADI SHANKARACHARYA (The Philosopher)

Script and Direction: G.V. Iyer. Photography: Madhu Ambat. Editing: V.R.K. Prasad. Music: M. Balamurali Krishna. Players: S.D. Banerjee, M.V. Narayana Rao, Manjunath Bhat, Leena Narayana Rao, L.V. Sharda. Produced by NFDC, 13-16 Regent Chambers, 208 Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021.

*Adi Shankaracharya* pays tribute to the ideas and teachings of Shankaracharya, the celibate mendicant who as a saint-philosopher is numbered among the world's greats. He was born over a



STILL FROM *THE PHILOSOPHER*

thousand years ago. This is the first feature film to be made in one of the oldest languages of the world, Sanskrit.

In recalling for us Shankara's life and philosophy, veteran director G.V. Iyer (the "Barefoot Director" of Kannada cinema) avoids the miracles which later Brahmins embellished his biography with, but rather weaves into his script the symbols of the Vedic texts themselves.

Child Shankara's life is given direction when his father dies: *I am departing, son/Where are you going?/To eternity/Where is that?/Within oneself.* Shankara befriends Death and Wisdom, who are given human forms in this film. To find the real truth that lies beyond worldly existence, the adolescent Shankara decides to become a *sanyasi* (mendicant).

*Adi Shankaracharya*, Iyer's *magnum opus*, was seven years in the making. Narrating the life of Shankara and interspersing in its flow sequences using symbols, shooting on the actual idyllic locations where Shankara lived and travelled, Iyer brings great visual charm to the film. A very real stumbling block – the danger of verbosity – is avoided by the creative mingling of changing and singing of Vedic hymns on the sound track.

As Shankara traverses the sub-continent, he grows to manhood: he is initiated into the Vedic

scriptures; he engages in skilful debate with experts; he collects disciples around him; he experiences misery, superstition, ritualism, man's inhumanity to man. He fights these evils wherever he goes; he preaches his Advaitist philosophy (non-dualism), writes his illuminating commentaries on the Hindu religious books, and expertly brings together the then fraying, straying strands of Hinduism.

At the age of 32, in his continuing quest for higher knowledge, and to merge his Inner Self (atman) with the Universal Self (brahman), Shankara renounces the world. He bids goodbye to Death and Wisdom (or transcends them) and retires to the Himalayas. His teachings remain.

SUBHASH DAY