

## ANCIENT INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

### SHANKARACHARYA

Adi Shankara or Shankara, was an early 8th century Indian philosopher and theologian who consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta. He is credited with unifying and establishing the main currents of thought in Hinduism.

Born: 788 AD, Kalady

Died: 820 AD, Kedarnath

Guru: Govinda Bhagavatpada

Shankaracharya's philosophy is called Advaita. Some of the simple differences between Advaita and other religious views are:

- **There is no difference between Jeevatma and Paramatma, it is only Avidhya (ignorance) or Maya (illusion) that stops us from realizing this.** In short, everything is God. We just have to realize this.
- **Advaita holds all the Gods are various forms of the same supreme being. hence we may choose any god we like to worship.** Shankara, merged the different schools of worship (Shaurya, Skanda, Shakta, Vaishnava, Shaiva & Ganapatya) into one, and established a composite system of worship. Hence he is called Shan mata Stapakacharya (the teacher who established 6 religions).
- According to Advaita to receive salvation, you have to only **shed ignorance** and realize that the world is Maya.

According to Shankara nothing really exists but the Supreme Spirit known as Brahman. Brahman is pure Existence, Consciousness and Bliss (Sat-cit-aananda). He is Absolute, impersonal, changeless, eternal and all-pervading. What is commonly called Nature (animate and inanimate) is but an illusion (Maya) and a dream caused by the ignorance (avidya) which surrounds the Supreme Spirit and hides it. This has been summed up in the words '**Brahma Sathya, Jagan Mithya**'. Phenomena appear real for the same reason that things seen in a dream are real so long as the dream lasts. The aim of life is therefore to cast off the gross sheaths that surround the Spirit within us and to realize its identity with the Supreme Spirit.

#### Shankara's works

- Shankara wrote commentaries on the eleven principal Upanishads like the Chandogya, the Brihadaranyaka, the Taittiriya, the Aitareya, the Svetasvatara, the Kena, the Katha, the Isa, the Prasna, the Mandukya and Mundaka.
- He also wrote commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutra.
- His other important works Atmabodha , Aptavajrasuchi, Dasasloki, Aparoksanubhuti, Upadesasahasri, Prabuddha Sudhakara and Viveka Chudamani. His religious hymns are contained in works like Dakshinamurthy Stotra, Ananda Lahari and Soundaraya Lahari.

#### Shankara's contributions

- For the benefit of theists Shankara instituted the Panchayatana puja or worship of the five aspects of the deity – Shiva, Vishnu, Devi, Aditya and Ganesha.
- He united various religious sects by popularizing the collective worship of Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Ganesha, Kumara and Shakti; for which he came to be known as Shanmata Sthapanacharya.
- Shankara established four monasteries, at Dwaraka (**Kalikapeeta** with Padmapada in charge) in the east, Badri (**Jyotirmatha** with Totaka in charge) in the north, Puri (**Govardhanapeeta** with Hastamalaka in charge) in the east and Sringeri (Sri **Sharadhapeeta** with Sureshvara in charge) in the south.
- He is said to have brought five Lingas from Kailasa and consecrated them at Kedara, Nilakanta Kshetra in Nepal, Chidambaram, Sringeri and Kanchi.
- Shankara organized the numerous wandering monks all over the country into ten definite orders of sanyasis under the name Dasnamis. The Dasnamis add at the end of their names any one of the following suffixes, namely Saraswathi, Bharathi, Puri, Giri, Tirtha, Vana, Sagara, Aranya, Parvata and Asrama.

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- The message of Shankara was that for a follower of Advaita it is absurdity to practice discrimination between humans and that one should view all as One and the same.

### Salvation in Shankara's philosophy

- **Shankara prescribes Jnanamarga for self-realization.** But a mere intellectual apprehension of the advaitic truth is of no avail. Only through a systematic approach can this is achieved through Shravana (**formal study**), Manana (**reflection**) and Nididhyaasana (**meditation**), i.e. to transform into direct experience the mediate knowledge of Ultimate Reality acquired by the study of Upanishad and by reflection upon their teaching.
- **In Advaita, moksha is not something which has to be attained hereafter.** The essential nature of every jiva is already Brahman and only the wheel of ignorance has concealed its real nature and therefore the jiva undergoes pains of samsara until it realizes its inherent divinity. Therefore the jiva does not lose its individuality in moksha but the limitations of that individuality are overcome by knowledge and immediately here and now it attains universal Brahman.

### RAMANUJACHARYA

- Ramanujacharya (born c. 1017, Shriperumbudur, India—died 1137, Shrirangam)
- He organized temple worship and founded centres to disseminate his doctrine of devotion to the god Vishnu and his consort Shri (Lakshmi).
- **He provided an intellectual basis for the practice of bhakti** (devotional worship) in three major commentaries: the **Vedartha-samgraha** (on the Vedas, the earliest scriptures of Hinduism), the **Shri-bhashya** (on the Brahma-sutras), and the **Bhagavadgita-bhashya** (on the Bhagavadgita).
- **The phenomenal world is real** and provides real knowledge, and that the exigencies of daily life are not detrimental or even contrary to the life of the spirit. In this emphasis he is the antithesis of Shankara, of whom he was sharply critical and whose interpretation of the scriptures he disputed.
- Ramanuja's worldview accepts the ontological reality of three distinct orders: **matter, soul, and God.**
- Like Shankara and earlier Vedanta, **he admits that there is nonduality (advaita)**, an ultimate identity of the three orders, but this nonduality for him is asserted of God, who is modified (vishishta; literally "qualified") by the orders of matter and soul; hence, his doctrine is known as **Vishishtadvaita** ("qualified nonduality") as opposed to the unqualified nonduality of Shankara.
- Shankara considers Brahma to be without any attributes (i.e. Nirguna). Ramanuja's Brahma possesses attributes (Saguna).
- Shankara considers KNOWLEDGE or JNANA to be the chief means of salvation. Ramanuja's road to salvation lies in practising devotion/loving faith.

### MADHAVACHARYA 1238–1317

Madhvācārya was born in Pajaka near Udupi, a coastal district in the present day Indian state of Karnataka

The Dvaita or "dualist" school of Hindu Vedanta philosophy originated in 13th-century South India with Sri Madhavacharya (Madhva). Madhva, who considered himself an avatara of the wind-god Vayu, argued that a body of canonical texts called the "Vedanta" or "end of the Veda" taught the fundamental difference between the individual self or atman and the ultimate reality, brahman.

According to Madhva there are two orders of reality:

1. svatantra, independent reality, which consists of Brahman alone and
2. paratantra, dependent reality, which consists of jivas (souls) and jada (lifeless objects). Although dependent reality would not exist apart from brahman's will, this very dependence creates a fundamental distinction between brahman and all else, implying a dualist view.

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By interpreting the Vedanta materials (especially the Upanisads, the Bhagavadgita and the Brahmasutras) along these lines, Madhva deliberately challenged the non-dualist reading in which the atman was identified with brahman.

Madhva argued that the scriptures could not teach the identity of all beings because this would contradict ordinary perception, which tells us that we are different both from one another and from God. Madhva and his followers call their system tattvavada, "the realist viewpoint".

Madhvacharya's teachings are built on the premise that there is a fundamental difference between Atman (individual soul, self) and the Brahman (ultimate reality, God Vishnu), these are two different unchanging realities, with individual soul dependent on Brahman, never identical.

His school's theistic dualism teachings disagreed with the monist teachings of the other two most influential schools of Vedanta based on Advaita's nondualism and Vishishtadvaita's qualified nondualism.

**Liberation, asserted Madhva, is achievable only through the grace of God.**

The Dvaita school founded by Madhva influenced Vaishnavism, the Bhakti movement in medieval India, and has been one of the three influential Vedānta philosophies, along with Advaita Vedanta and Vishishtadvaita Vedanta.

**Evil and suffering in the world, according to Madhvacharya, originates in man, and not God.** Every Jiva (individual soul) is the agent of actions, not Jada (matter), and not Ishvara (God). While Madhva asserts each individual self is the Kartritva (real agency), the self is not an absolutely independent agent to him. This is because, states Madhva, the soul is influenced by sensory organs, one's physical body and such material things which he calls as gifts of God. Man has free will, but is influenced by his innate nature, inclinations and past karma.

Madhvacharya asserts that "one has the right to choose between right and wrong, a choice each individual makes out of his own responsibility and his own risk".

**Important elements of Madhvacharya's philosophy are:**

- 1. The material ethereal sky that is one of the five elements filling this universe is that which suffers destruction along with the universe.**
- 2. The atoms which are the micro-elements of physical matter are not at all ultimate and indivisible entities.** In every atom too there are innumerable subtle particles.
- 3. There is life movement in plants, herbs and creepers too.** That vegetation-life too can respond to the actions of man. There are plants that thrill to the melody of music and yield sprouts, flowers and fruits.
- 4. No matter is completely destroyed.** Destruction is another name for only a change in form. We say that the body is destroyed. But really speaking, the body is not destroyed, it has become ashes; that is all. Thus existence and non-existence are two sides of the same coin.
- 5. From the microcosm to the macrocosm, the entire universe is completely interfused.**