
**CONTRIBUTIONS AND INFLUENCES OF ADISHANKARACHARYA ON
SANATANA DHARMA AND INDIAN CULTURE**

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DOI: 10.5958/2249-7315.2021.00193.3

ABSTRACT

AdiShankaracharya is widely regarded as a religious reformer, the formulator and codifier of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, the non-dualistic doctrine based on the Upanishads, and one of the most prominent philosophers and religious leaders in Indian history and the Hindu Sanatan religion. In the year 788 A.D., he was born into a poor Brahmin family in the village of Kaladi, six miles east of Alwaye, Kerala. "He was a Nambudiri Brahmin", says the narrator. Shankara is the most brilliant mind and the most powerful soul that Mother India has created. AdiShankara's arrival represents a watershed moment in Indian philosophy and religion, as well as in everyone's personal spiritual development. Shankara is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers and theologians in India's Vedic literature. Shankara's scholarly erudition and masterful presentation of complex philosophical problems has attracted the respect of all philosophical schools around the world at this time.

KEYWORDS: *AdiShankaracharya, Advaita, Brahman, Philosophy, Upanishads, Vedanta.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Rajasekhara, a wealthy landowner, constructed a Siva temple in Kaladi and established an Agrahara for the shrine's Brahmin servants. In the temple, Vidyadhiraja was performing Puja (worship). He only has one son, Sivaguru. Sivaguru completed his studies in the Shastras and married at the appropriate age. He didn't have a child. Lord Siva was asked to bless him and his wife Aryamba with a son. In the vasantaritu, or spring season, a son was born to them at midday, in the auspicious Abhijit Muhurtai, and beneath the constellation Ardhra (nakshatra). Shankara was the name of this son". "It is reported that Lord Shiva himself told his mother Aryamba in a vision that he would incarnate in the guise of her first-born kid. He has a passion for spiritual understanding since he was a child. During his early years at Gurukul, he could readily recite the Puranas and Epics and had mastered the Vedas. Later on, his disciples embraced AdiShankara's ideas wholeheartedly". The actual date of AdiShankara's birth has been disputed throughout history.

"According to Theosophy, he was born 2,500 years ago, in the year 510 B.C., barely '51 years and 2 months' after the Buddha's death. According to Theosophist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the Masters, Shankaracharya was in a strange sense the first reincarnation of Gautama Buddha after that lifetime, as evidenced by the following comments. The Kanchi Mutt, along with four other hermitages in Dwarka, Sringeri, Puri, and Badri, insist that AdiShankara was born in 509 BC, not 788 AD, according to JayendraSaraswati, leader of the Kancheepuram Mutt in Tamil Nadu. "He focused on two important evidences supporting the pre-Christian era theory the first being that all four mutts have had more than 70 pontiffs, and the second being that a scientific carbon dating of the river Kaladi in Kerala demonstrated that it flowed just approximately 2,500 years ago"[1].

Shankara is the most brilliant mind and the most powerful soul that Mother India has created. He

was the Advaita philosopher's exponent. Shankara was a massive metaphysician, a practical philosopher, an impeccable logician, a charismatic figure, and a tremendous moral and spiritual force. His grasping and clarifying abilities were limitless. He was an accomplished Yogi, Jnani, and Bhakta. He was a Karma Yogi of the highest caliber. He drew people to him like a magnet. His contributions to India are significant[2].

2. PHILOSOPHICAL & LITERARY CONTRIBUTION

AdiShankara's arrival represents a watershed moment in Indian philosophy and religion, as well as in everyone's personal spiritual development. To the honest seeker, his teachings disclose the Supreme Brahman's reality. His contribution is immeasurable; some of his contributions, in the form of comments, are priceless in the Hindu Sanatana religious system. Vivekachudamani, AtmaBodha, Aparokshanubhuti, Ananda Lahari, Atma-AnatmaVivek, Drig-DrishyaViveka, and UpadesaSahasri are some of the names. He is credited with around 300 works in Sanskrit, including commentaries, expository works, and poetical compositions. However, the majority of them cannot be considered genuine. The Brahma-sutra-bhashya, a commentary on the Brahma-sutra, which is a foundational scripture of the Vedanta school, is his masterpiece. With the probable exception of the commentary on the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, all of Shankara's commentaries on the major Upanishads are unquestionably genuine. Shankara's commentary on the Mandukya-karika was also written by him. He is most likely the author of the Yoga-sutra-bhashya-vivarana, a presentation of Vyasa's commentary on the Yoga-sutra, a key text in the Yoga system [3].

The Upadeshasahasri, which serves as an excellent introduction to Shankara's philosophy, is the only noncommentary book that may be trusted". "AdiShankara aimed to cure mankind from all the afflictions that impact one and all", Sri R. Krishnamurthy said in an article for The Hindu. Human people in our world are subjected to three types of suffering. These are known as Adyatmika, AdiDaivika, and AdiBhoutika in spiritual terms. The relationship between the individual self and the Supreme Self is referred to as adyatmika. It is founded on the understanding that the individual self is a manifestation of the Supreme spirit. AdiDaivika refers to misfortunes brought on by fate, while AdiBhoutika refers to sufferings brought on by the material world and body. AdiShankara's endeavor is exceptional; he eliminated the Rakshasa Avidya, which is the source of all sorrows. The removal of ignorance leads to self-realization, which is the Jiva's ultimate goal". About his contribution, H.P. Blavatsky said "Atheists are followers of AdvaitaVedantins, one of the finest brains to ever come on Earth, since they regard everything save parabrahm, the second less, or Absolute Reality – as an illusion. The wisest initiates, as well as the best yogis, came from their ranks"[4].

Despite the fact that he had a brief life and renounced his body at the age of thirty-two, he had a profound impact on India and Hindu Sanatana Dharma. He reintroduced a refined version of Vedic philosophy. His beliefs and traditions are the Smartis' foundation, and they have inspired the Sant and Mutt lineages. "Sri Shankaracharya, the greatest initiate living in the historical periods, composed many a Bhashya on the Upanishads", H.P. Blavatsky remarked regarding his contribution to Indian literature. However, there are reasons to believe that his original treatises have not yet fallen into the hands of the Philistines, as they are too jealously maintained in his school (monasteries). And there are still more compelling grounds to suppose that the magnificent Commentaries on the Brahmins' esoteric philosophy, written by their greatest expounder, will remain a dead letter to most Hindus, with the exception of the Smartava Brahmins, for a long time. This sect (which is still extremely powerful in Southern India) was formed by Shankaracharya and is now almost the only one to generate pupils who have retained sufficient information to comprehend the Bhashyas' dead letter.

The reason for this, I'm told, is that they're the only ones who have true Initiates at their helm in

their mutts, like at the "Sringa-giri" in Mysore's Western Ghauts. On the other hand, no sect in the hopelessly closed caste of the Brahmins is more exclusive than the Smartava; and the shyness of its adherents to divulge what they may know of the Occult Sciences and esoteric teaching is only equaled by their pride and learning". "Unlike other schools, which placed a strong emphasis on ritualistic Brahmanas or literature written by its founders, the Vedanta school places a strong emphasis on the Upanishads (which are themselves termed Vedanta, the apex of the Vedas)". Shankara's Brahman was without qualities, without Gunas, formless, and Akarta, according to legend. This implies that he was above all desires and needs. When it came to meditation, Shankara immediately dismissed the Yoga system and its numerous disciplines as a direct path to moksha. According to Shankara, moksha can be obtained only via mental concentration". He also attempted to unite Hindus who were battling over the gods Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesh, Surya, and Shakti. Shankara created renowned shlokas for each of the groupings and brought them all into the fold. This contributed to the unification of Hinduism's factions and rituals[5].

3. INFLUENCE ON SANATANA DHARMA

AdiShankaracharya is without a doubt one of the biggest stalwarts of the Hindu Sanatana religion (Dharma). He possessed immense power to persuade and organize individuals and institutions. He has made a significant contribution to the resuscitation and purification of the ancient Hindu culture. He served as a unifying factor, uniting Hindus under a single code of devotion. "In the Advaita Vedanta tradition, he has an unrivalled position. He travelled all over India to aid in the restoration of Vedic studies". "His teachings and tradition have inspired Santa Mat lineages and formed the foundation of Smartism". He popularized Pancayatana worship, which involves simultaneously worshipping five gods: Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi. All deities, Shankara said, were just diverse manifestations of the one Brahman, the unseen Supreme Being. Shankara established the nondualist interpretation of the Upanishads as the touchstone of a revived Smarta tradition, according to Alf Hiltebeitel, Columbian Professor of Religion, History, and Human Sciences: "Practically, Shankara fostered a rapprochement between Advaita and Smarta orthodoxy, which by his time had not only continued to defend the Varnasramadharma theory as defining the path. As a result, as one's chosen deity, one could worship any of the five deities".

AdiShankaracharya is best known for bringing India together through his relentless efforts to build temples in strategic locations around the country. Shankara is the originator of Hindu monasticism's DasanamiSampradaya and the Smarta tradition's amata. He brought the theistic factions together under the Shanmata system. Advaita Vedanta is primarily known as a philosophical system, at least in the west. However, it is also a renunciation custom. Renunciation and philosophy are inextricably linked. The majority of the Advaita tradition's important authors were sannyasas, and both sides of the tradition share the same values, attitudes, and philosophies. Shankara, who was regarded an incarnation of Shiva, founded the DashanamiSampradaya, which brought together a number of Ekdandi monks under a ten-name banner. "A number of other Hindu monastic and Ekdandi lineages remained unaffiliated with the Dasanamis". Under the Dasanmi tradition, any Hindu, regardless of caste, age, or gender, can pursue sannysa as an Ekdandi monk.

We might infer that he was more than a philosopher; he was India's greatest and most illustrious religious leader. However, according to certain historians, these Mathas were originally ashrams founded by Vibhandaka and his son Rsyasrnga, not by Shankara himself. Shankara inherited the ashrams of Dvaraka and Sringeri, and relocated the ashrams of Srngaverapura and Angadesa to Badarikasrama and JagannthaPuri, respectively. AdiShankara grouped the Hindu monks of these 10 sects or names into four Mahas (monasteries), with headquarters in Dvaraka, JagannathaPuri, Sringeri, and Badrikashrama in the west, east, and south, respectively. Each math was led by one of his four principal disciples, each of whom is responsible for carrying on the Vedanta

Sampradaya. The beliefs and practices of the monks of these ten orders differ in part, and a segment of them is not believed to be limited to Shankara's precise alterations. While the dasanamis linked with the Shankara maths follow AdiShankara's processes, some of these orders remained partly or completely independent in their beliefs and practices, and outside the Shankara maths' official oversight[6].

“AdiShankara for uniting two seemingly distinct intellectual ideas in Hinduism, namely Atman and Brahman”, Benedict Ashley has properly praised. According to Isaeva, Shankara's effect includes reforming Hinduism, creating monasteries, educating disciples, arguing opponents, and engaging in philosophic activity that helped revive "the orthodox idea of the unity of all beings" and Vedanta thinking in the eyes of Indian tradition. Similar viewpoints existed, but they were not fully addressed by a major SanatanaDharama luminary in India. In the following words, Hajime Nakamura has appropriately taken into account Shankara's contributions. “Prior to Shankara, similar viewpoints existed within Vedanta, but they did not hold a dominating position. According to Nakamura, the early Vedanta academics were from the upper crust of society and were well-versed in traditional culture. They formed a social elite that was "clearly separated from Hinduism's general practitioners and theologians". Their lessons were "distributed to a select group of intellectuals". There are no references to Vishnu or Shiva in the early Vedanta schools' works. "Theologians of the various sects of Hinduism utilized Vedanta philosophy to a greater or lesser extent to develop the basis of their doctrines" was not until after Shankara that "theologians of the various sects of Hinduism utilized Vedanta philosophy to form the basis of their doctrines". George Feuerstein agrees with Shankara's involvement in establishing the Nath-tradition, stating that "its theoretical impact upon the entire Indian culture became final and conclusive". The SoundaryaLahari is a classic Tantric literary work written in Sanskrit and attributed to sages Pushpadanta and AdiShankara. 31 Some think Ganesha engraved the initial section of Ananda Lahari atop Mount Meru (or by Pushpadanta)[7].

4. DISCUSSION

Shankara is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers and theologians in India's Vedic literature. He has been described as one of the major metaphysical tendencies in the history of human thought not just Indian thought, but human mind in general. “Though he has been dubbed India's greatest philosopher and the apex of the country's philosophical contribution to the world, scholars would dismiss him as a man buried in darkness who lacks the ability to make a true assertion. Shankara, on the other hand, is usually recognized as a great philosopher who epitomizes the Platonic trend in Eastern thought”. "Read Shankara's commentaries for logic and metaphysics; read his works such as VivekaChudamani, AtmaBodha, AparokshaAnubhuti, Ananda Lahari, Atma-AnatmaViveka, Drik-DrishyaViveka, and UpadesaSahasri for practical knowledge that reveals and strengthens devotion".Shankara created a plethora of creative verses that are unrivaled in terms of sweetness, melody, and philosophy. He addresses the entire issue of Brahman quality by emphasizing on the nirguna/saguna dichotomy, which is crucial to the Advaitic perspective [8].

Shankara adheres to a strict monism or severe non-dualism in that he refuses to accept any claims that demonstrate Brahman's traits or attributes. As previously established, Shankara's highest Brahman is no Gunas, formless, no qualities, and non-agent. He is above and above all desires and needs. He refers to his text, which is one of the texts we cited from the Svetasvatara Upanishad in our Mahavakya sections. According to Shankara, "It is self-evident that this Atman exists. The presence of the Atman or Self is not demonstrated by demonstrations of its existence. It is impossible to deny this Atman, for anyone who does so denies himself. The Atman is the foundation of all knowledge. The Self exists within, without, ahead of, and behind others. The Self is on the right hand, the Self is on the left hand, and the Self is above and below the ground ". The word "Advaita" fundamentally refers to the Self (Atman) and the Whole's identity (Brahman).

"EkamevaAdviteeyam Brahma", he wrote (The absolute is one alone, not two). Although there is no second, there appears to be a huge multiplicity. Even though there are a lot of sugarcane stalks, the juice from each one is the same sweetness. Although there are many different kinds of beings, they all share the same breath. Nations may be numerous, but the Earth is a single entity. Shankara declared to the world in this way that it is oneness that underpins apparent multiplicity. The characteristics Satyam-Jnanam-Anantam-Anandam are not distinct. They are the purest manifestation of Brahman. Because description involves distinction, Brahman cannot be described. Brahman is indistinguishable from anything else. The objective world the world of names and forms does not exist on its own. The Atman is the only thing that exists. The world is only phenomenal, or Vyavaharika[9].

Shankara was a follower of the KevalaAdvaitavi school of thought. His teachings can be summarized as "Brahma Satyam JagatMithya, JeevoBrahmaiva Na Aparahvii" (Brahma Satyam JagatMithya, JeevoBrahmaiva Na Aparahvii). This universe is illusory, and only Brahman is real; the Jiva is equal to Brahman. "Brahman is the Reality", says Brahma satyam. The word "Satyam" (Reality) in Vedanta is very well defined and has a distinct meaning. It is defined as "something which exists without change in all three eras of time (past, present, and future), as well as in all three states of consciousness (waking state, dream state, and deep-sleep state)". As a result, the absolute Reality birthless, deathless, and changeless is referred to as "Brahman" in the Upanishads. The world is an illusion: Only in the "waking state" does the world look "real", but in the dream and deep-sleep states, it is denied (it vanishes). As a result, according to the definition above, it is not real. As a result, the Acharya declares the world to be mithya. Many scholars, however, appear to disagree with the term "mithya" when it refers to the visible world. Perhaps for this reason, the Acharya refers to it as "vyavaharikasatta" (relative reality) or "pratibhasikasatta" (appearing reality) in subsequent works like BrahmasutraBhashya, as if to accommodate them[10].

5. CONCLUSION

Shankara's search for the Truth was so intense that he accepted sannyasa at the age of eight. By the age of 16, he had learned the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, and other important Vedic books, as well as written commentaries on them. Bhashyas, or comments, are considered the apex of Indian intellectual writing. People had begun to believe incorrect conceptions of philosophy, religion, logic, and spirituality, and he enlightened the nation with his analytical analyses and logic. Shankara established mathas, or monasteries, in all four corners of India to spread the Vedic learning. AdiShankaracharya's logical and rational articulation of Upanishad philosophy laid the foundation for the sturdy superstructure of Indian civilization. He preached Vedanta's eternal principles so that everyone may grasp and live them. His contribution to Indian philosophy, and perhaps humanity, has been so pervasive that all subsequent thinkers have sought to reject or elaborate on his views. The Vedanta, on which AdiShankaracharya remarked, has become synonymous with Indian philosophy. He is the personification of India's famous rishi culture, of which he was the best exponent.

The message of AdiShankaracharya is one of hope, truth, and love. Shankara set an example for us to follow by living by the Truth throughout his life. One cannot imagine that Hindu philosophy, as we know it today, was adequately expressed in the manner in which it is today. So this kind of crystal clear nirguna/saguna and all of that 'tattwamasi' interpretation along these lines will take a long time. Shankaracharyas today have a greater effect in Saiva communities than in Vaisnava communities. The gurus of the advaita tradition have had the greatest influence among followers of the Smartha Tradition, who combine domestic Vedic ritual with devotional components of Sanatana Dharma. Sri Shankaracharya was a genius in both the intellectual and spiritual realms. He, like the Upanishadic seers, could experience that magnificent, transcendental state. As a result, the great Acharya was able to confirm and encapsulate the vision of the ancient seers of Sanatana Dharma the reality of Advaitain a compelling manner. By his masterful commentary on the

prasthanatraya, he had firmly established this philosophy before his tragic death (the three basic texts on Vedanta, viz., Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras).

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