

# Advaita Vedanta

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**Advaita Vedanta** (IAST, *Advaita Vedānta*; Sanskrit: अद्वैत वेदान्त, literally, *not-two*), originally known as **Puruṣavāda**,<sup>[1][note 1]</sup> is a school of Hindu philosophy and religious practice, and one of the classic Indian paths to spiritual realization.<sup>[2]</sup> The term *Advaita* refers to its idea that the soul (true Self, *Atman*) is the same as the highest metaphysical Reality (*Brahman*). The followers of this school are known as *Advaita Vedantins*, or just *Advaitins*,<sup>[3]</sup> and they seek spiritual liberation through acquiring *vidyā* (knowledge)<sup>[4]</sup> of one's true identity as *Atman*, and the identity of *Atman* and *Brahman*.<sup>[5][6][7]</sup>

Advaita Vedanta traces its roots in the oldest *Upanishads*. It relies on three textual sources called the *Prasthanatrayi*. It gives "a unifying interpretation of the whole body of Upanishads",<sup>[8]</sup> the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*.<sup>[9][10]</sup> Advaita Vedanta is the oldest extant sub-school of *Vedanta*,<sup>[note 2]</sup> which is one of the six *orthodox* (*āstika*) Hindu philosophies (*darśana*). Although its roots trace back to the 1st millennium BCE, the most prominent exponent of the Advaita Vedanta is considered by the tradition to be 8th century scholar *Adi Shankara*.<sup>[11][12][13]</sup>

Advaita Vedanta emphasizes *Jivanmukti*, the idea that *moksha* (freedom, liberation) is achievable in this life in contrast to Indian philosophies that emphasize *videhamukti*, or *moksha* after death.<sup>[14][15]</sup> The school uses concepts such as *Brahman*, *Atman*, *Maya*, *Avidya*, *meditation* and others that are found in major Indian religious traditions,<sup>[10][16][17]</sup> but interprets them in its own way for its theories of *moksha*.<sup>[18][19]</sup> Advaita Vedanta is one of the most studied and most influential schools of classical Indian thought.<sup>[20][21][22]</sup> Many scholars describe it as a form of *monism*,<sup>[23][24][25]</sup> others describe the *Advaita* philosophy as *non-dualistic*.<sup>[26][27]</sup>

Advaita influenced and was influenced by various traditions and texts of Hindu philosophies such as *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, other sub-schools of *Vedanta*, *Vaishnavism*, *Shaivism*, the *Puranas*, the *Agamas*, other sub-schools of *Vedanta*, as well as social movements such as the *Bhakti movement*.<sup>[28][29][30]</sup> Beyond Hinduism, Advaita Vedanta interacted and developed with the other traditions of India such as *Jainism* and *Buddhism*.<sup>[31]</sup> Advaita Vedanta texts espouse a spectrum of views from idealism, including illusionism, to realist or nearly realist positions expressed in the early works of Shankara.<sup>[32]</sup> In modern times, its views appear in various *Neo-Vedanta* movements.<sup>[33]</sup> It has been termed as the paradigmatic example of Hindu spirituality.<sup>[34][35]</sup>

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# Etymology and nomenclature

The Advaita Vedanta school has been historically referred to by various names, such as *Advaita-vada* (speaker of Advaita), *Abhedadarshana* (view of non-difference), *Dvaita-vada-pratisedha* (denial of dual distinctions), and *Kevala-dvaita* (non-dualism of the isolated).<sup>[36]</sup>

According to Richard King, a professor of Buddhist and Asian studies, the term *Advaita* first occurs in a recognizably Vedantic context in the prose of *Mandukya Upanishad*.<sup>[36]</sup> In contrast, according to Frits Staal, a professor of Philosophy specializing in Sanskrit and Vedic studies, the word *Advaita* is from the Vedic era, and the Vedic sage *Yajnavalkya* (8th or 7th-century BCE<sup>[37][38]</sup>) is credited to be the one who coined it.<sup>[39]</sup> Stephen Phillips, a professor of philosophy and Asian studies, translates the *Advaita* containing verse excerpt in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as follows:

सलिले एकस् द्रष्टा अद्वैतस् भवति एष  
ब्रह्मलोकस्  
सम्राट् ति ह एनम् उवाच अनुशशास  
याज्ञवल्क्यस्  
एषा अस्य परमा गतिस् एषास्य परमा  
सम्पद्

—*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*  
4.3.32<sup>[40]</sup>

An ocean, a single seer **without duality** becomes he whose world is Brahman,  
O King, Yajnavalkya instructed  
This is his supreme way This is his supreme achievement.

—Transl: Stephen Phillips<sup>[41][note 3]</sup>

## Darśana (philosophy) - central concerns

Advaita is a subschool of Vedanta, the latter being one of the six classical Hindu *darśanas*. It, like nearly all these philosophies,<sup>[note 4]</sup> has an integrated body of textual interpretations and religious practices for what Hinduism considers four proper aims of life: virtue (*dharma*), material prosperity (*artha*), desire (*kama*) and the fourth and final aim being *moksha*, the spiritual liberation or release from cycles of rebirth (*samsara*).<sup>[43][44]</sup> Traditional Advaita Vedanta centers on the study of the *sruti* especially the Principal Upanishads, along with the *Brahma Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.<sup>[45][46]</sup>

Within the Vedanta tradition of Hinduism are many sub-schools, of which Advaita is one. Unlike Buddhism, but like Jainism, all Vedanta schools consider the existence of Atman (real self, soul) as self-evident.<sup>[47][48]</sup> The Vedanta tradition also posits the concept of *Brahman* as the eternal, unchanging metaphysical reality. The sub-schools of Vedanta disagree on the relation between *Atman* and *Brahman*. The Advaita *darsana* considers them to be identical.<sup>[49][5][6]</sup>

Advaita Vedanta believes that the knowledge of one's true self or Atman is liberating.<sup>[50]</sup> Along with self-knowledge,<sup>[51]</sup> it teaches that *moksha* can be achieved by the correct understanding of one's true identity as *Ātman*, the dispassionate and unmoveable observer, and the identity of *Ātman* and *Brahman*.<sup>[52]</sup>

The process of acquiring this knowledge entails realising that one's True Self, the Atman, is essentially the same as Brahman. This is achieved through what Sankara refers to as *anubhava*, immediate intuition. Sankara contends that this direct awareness is construction-free, and not construction-filled. Self-knowledge is, therefore, not seen as an awareness of *Brahman*, but instead an awareness that *is Brahman*, since one will transcend any form of duality in this state of consciousness.<sup>[53]</sup>

Correct knowledge, which destroys *avidya*, psychological and perceptual errors related to Atman and Brahman,<sup>[54]</sup> is obtained through three stages of practice, *sravana* (hearing), *manana* (thinking) and *nididhyasana* (meditation).<sup>[55]</sup>

The Vedanta tradition of Hinduism rejects the dualism of Samkhya. The Samkhya school of Hindu thought proposes two metaphysical realities, namely Purusha (spirit) and Prakriti (inert primal matter), then states that Purusha is the efficient cause of all existence while Prakriti is its material cause.<sup>[56]</sup> Advaita, like all Vedanta schools, states that Brahman is both the efficient and the material cause, "that from which the origination, subsistence, and dissolution of this universe proceed." What created all existence is also present in and reflected in all beings and inert matter, the creative principle was and is everywhere, always.<sup>[57]</sup> This Brahman it postulates is *sat-cit-ananda* (truth-consciousness-bliss). By accepting this postulation, various theoretical difficulties arise which Advaita and other Vedanta traditions offer different answers for:<sup>[58]</sup> first, how did *sat* Brahman without any distinction become manifold universe? second, how did *cit* Brahman create material world? third, if *ananda* Brahman is pure bliss, why did the empirical world of sufferings arise? These are the questions that Advaita Vedanta thinkers have historically attempted to answer, as did the non-Advaita schools of Hinduism.<sup>[58]</sup>

Advaita establishes its truths, in part, from the oldest Principal Upanishads (*sruti*), the Brahma Sutras, the Bhagavad Gita and numerous other Hindu texts.<sup>[10]</sup> Reason is used to support revelation, the *sruti*, the ultimate source of truth.<sup>[59]</sup> Reason clarifies the truth and removes objections, according to the Advaita school, however it believes that pure logic cannot lead to philosophical truths and only experience and meditative insights do. The *Sruti*, it believes is a collection of experience and meditative insights about liberating knowledge.<sup>[60]</sup> The Advaita literature also provide a criticism of opposing systems, including the dualistic school of Hinduism, as well as non-Hindu philosophies such as Buddhism.<sup>[61]</sup>

## Ideas and aims

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### Atman

Ātman (IAST: ātman, Sanskrit: आत्मन्) is a central idea in Hindu philosophy and a foundational premise of Advaita Vedanta. It is a Sanskrit word that means "real self" of the individual,<sup>[62][63]</sup> "essence",<sup>[web 1]</sup> and soul.<sup>[62][64]</sup>

Ātman is the first principle in Advaita Vedanta, along with its concept of Brahman, with Atman being the perceptible personal particular and Brahman the inferred unlimited universal, both synonymous and interchangeable.<sup>[65]</sup> It is, to an Advaitin, the unchanging, enduring, eternal absolute.<sup>[66][67]</sup> It is the "true self" of an individual, a consciousness, states Sthaneshwar Timalsina, that is "self-revealed, self-evident and self-aware (*svaparakashata*)".<sup>[68]</sup> Atman, states Eliot Deutsch, is the "pure, undifferentiated, supreme power of awareness", it is more than thought, it is a state of being, that which is conscious and transcends subject-object divisions and momentariness.<sup>[69]</sup>

Advaita Vedanta philosophy considers Atman as self-existent awareness, limitless and non-dual.<sup>[70]</sup> It asserts that there is "spirit, soul, self" (Atman) within each living entity, which are same as each other and identical to the universal eternal Brahman.<sup>[71]</sup> It is an experience of "oneness" which unifies all beings, in which there is the divine in every being, in which all existence is a single Reality, and in which there is no "divine" distinct from the individual Atman.<sup>[72][73][74]</sup>

Atman is not the constantly changing body, not the desires, not the emotions, not the ego, nor the dualistic mind in Advaita Vedanta.<sup>[75][76][77]</sup> It is the introspective, inwardly self-conscious "on-looker" (*saksi*).<sup>[78]</sup> To Advaitins, human beings, in a state of unawareness and ignorance, see their "I-ness" as different than the being in others, then act out of impulse, fears, cravings, malice, division, confusion, anxiety passions, and a sense of distinctiveness.<sup>[79][80][81]</sup>

### Brahman

According to Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is the highest Reality,<sup>[82][83][84]</sup> That which is unborn and unchanging,<sup>[83][85]</sup> and "not sublatale",<sup>[82]</sup> and cannot be superseded by a still higher reality.<sup>[86][note 5][note 6]</sup> Other than *Brahman*, everything else, including the universe, material objects and individuals, are ever-changing and therefore maya. Brahman is *Paramarthika Satyam*, "Absolute Truth",<sup>[101]</sup> and

the true Self, pure consciousness ... the only Reality (*sat*), since It is untinged by difference, the mark of ignorance, and since It is the one thing that is not sublatale<sup>[82]</sup>

In Advaita, Brahman is the substrate and cause of all changes.<sup>[102][85]</sup> Brahman is considered to be the material cause<sup>[note 7]</sup> and the efficient cause<sup>[note 8]</sup> of all that exists.<sup>[84][103][104]</sup> Brahman is the "primordial reality that creates, maintains and withdraws within it the universe."<sup>[92]</sup> It is the "creative principle which lies realized in the whole world"<sup>[105]</sup>

Advaita's Upanishadic roots state Brahman's qualities<sup>[note 9]</sup> to be *Sat-cit-ānanda* (being-consciousness-bliss)<sup>[106][107]</sup> It means "true being-consciousness-bliss,"<sup>[108][109]</sup> or "Eternal Bliss Consciousness!"<sup>[110]</sup> Adi Shankara held that *satcitananda* is identical with Brahman and Atman.<sup>[108]</sup> The Advaitin scholar Madhusudana Sarasvati explained Brahman as the Reality that is simultaneously an absence of falsity (*sat*), absence of ignorance (*cit*), and absence of sorrow/self-limitation (*ananda*).<sup>[108]</sup> According to Adi Shankara, the knowledge of Brahman that Shruti provides cannot be obtained in any other means besides self inquiry<sup>[111]</sup>

## Puruṣārtha - the four goals of human life

Advaita, like other schools, accepts Puruṣārtha - the four goals of human life as natural and proper.<sup>[112]</sup>

- Dharma: the right way to life, the "duties and obligations of the individual toward himself and the society as well as those of the society toward the individual"<sup>[113]</sup>
- Artha: the means to support and sustain one's life;
- Kāma: pleasure and enjoyment;
- Mokṣa: liberation, release.

Of these, much of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy focuses on the last, gaining liberation in one's current life.<sup>[114]</sup> The first three are discussed and encouraged by Advaitins, but usually in the context of knowing Brahman and Self-realization.<sup>[115]</sup>

## Moksha - liberation

The soteriological goal, in Advaita, is to gain self-knowledge and complete understanding of the identity of Atman and Brahman. Correct knowledge of Atman and Brahman leads dissolution of all dualistic tendencies and to liberation.<sup>[note 10]</sup> Moksha is attained by realizing one's true identity as Ātman, and the identity of Atman and Brahman, the complete understanding of one's real nature as Brahman in this life.<sup>[5]</sup> This is stated by Shankara as follows:

I am other than name, form and action.  
My nature is ever free!  
I am Self, the supreme unconditioned Brahman.  
I am pure Awareness, always non-dual.

— Adi Shankara, Upadesasahasri 11.7, <sup>[5]</sup>

According to Advaita Vedanta, liberation can be achieved while living, and is called Jivanmukti.<sup>[116]</sup> The Atman-knowledge, that is the knowledge of true Self and its relationship to Brahman is central to this liberation in Advaita thought.<sup>[note 11]</sup> Atman-knowledge, to Advaitins, is that state of full awareness, liberation and freedom which overcomes dualities at all levels, realizing the divine within oneself, the divine in others and all beings, the non-dual Oneness, that Brahman is in everything, and everything is Brahman.<sup>[70][71][117]</sup>

According to Rambachan, in Advaita, this state of liberating self-knowledge includes and leads to the understanding that "the self is the self of all, the knower of self sees the self in all beings and all beings in the self."<sup>[74]</sup>

## Jivanmukta

In Advaita Vedanta, the interest is not in liberation in after life, but in one's current life.<sup>[118]</sup> This school holds that liberation can be achieved while living, and a person who achieves this is called divanmukta.<sup>[116][119]</sup>

The concept of *Jivanmukti* of Advaita Vedanta contrasts with *Videhamukti* (moksha from samsara after death) in theistic sub-schools of Vedanta.<sup>[120]</sup> Jivanmukti is a state that transforms the nature, attributes and behaviors of an individual, after which the liberated individual shows attributes such as:<sup>[121]</sup>

- he is not bothered by disrespect and endures cruel words, treats others with respect regardless of how others treat him;
- when confronted by an angry person he does not return anger; instead replies with soft and kind words;
- even if tortured, he speaks and trusts the truth;
- he does not crave for blessings or expect praise from others;
- he never injures or harms any life or being (ahimsa), he is intent in the welfare of all beings;
- he is as comfortable being alone as in the presence of others;
- he is as comfortable with a bowl, at the foot of a tree in tattered robe without help, as when he is in a mithuna (union of mendicants), grama (village) and nagara (city);
- he doesn't care about or wear sikha (tuft of hair on the back of head for religious reasons), nor the holy thread across his body. To him, knowledge is sikha, knowledge is the holy thread, knowledge alone is supreme. Outer appearances and rituals do not matter to him, only knowledge matters;
- for him there is no invocation nor dismissal of deities, no mantra nor non-mantra, no prostrations nor worship of gods, goddess or ancestors, nothing other than knowledge of Self;
- he is humble, high spirited, of clear and steady mind, straightforward, compassionate, patient, intelligent, courageous, speaks firmly and with sweet words.

## Vidya, Svādhyāya and Anubhava

*Sruti* (scriptures), proper reasoning and meditation are the main sources of knowledge (*vidya*) for the Advaita Vedanta tradition.<sup>[122][123][55]</sup> It teaches that correct knowledge of Atman and Brahman is achievable by svādhyāya,<sup>[124]</sup> study of the self and of the Vedic texts, and three stages of practices: *sravana* (perception, hearing), *manana* (thinking) and *nididhyāsana* (meditation),<sup>[55]</sup> a three-step methodology that is rooted in the teachings of chapter 4 of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.<sup>[125][126]</sup>

*Sravana* literally means hearing, and broadly refers to perception and observations typically aided by a counsellor or teacher (*guru*),<sup>[127]</sup> wherein the Advaitin listens and discusses the ideas, concepts, questions and answers.<sup>[55][125]</sup> *Manana* refers to thinking on these discussions and contemplating over the various ideas based on *svādhyāya* and *sravana*.<sup>[125][127][128]</sup> *Nididhyāsana* refers to meditation, realization and consequent conviction of the truths, non-duality and a state where there is a fusion of thought and action, knowing and being.<sup>[129][125]</sup> Bilimoria states that these three stages of Advaita practice can be viewed as *sadhana* practice that unifies Yoga and Karma ideas, and was most likely derived from these older traditions.<sup>[130][127]</sup>

Adi Shankara uses *anubhava* interchangeably with *pratipatta*, "understanding".<sup>[131]</sup> Dalal and others state that *anubhava* does not center around some sort of "mystical experience," but around the correct knowledge of Brahman.<sup>[123][132]</sup> Nikhalananda states that (knowledge of) *Atman* and *Brahman* can only be reached by *buddhi*, "reason,"<sup>[133]</sup> stating that mysticism is a kind of intuitive knowledge, while *buddhi* is the highest means of attaining knowledge.<sup>[134]</sup>

## Mahavakya – The Great Sentences

Several *Mahavakyas*, or "the great sentences", have Advaitic theme, that is "the inner immortal self and the great cosmic power are one and the same".<sup>[135]</sup>

Sr. No.	Vakya	Meaning	Upanishad	Veda
1	प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म (pragñānam brahma)	<i>Prajñānam</i> <sup>[note 12]</sup> is <i>Brahman</i> <sup>[note 13]</sup>	<u>Aitareya V.3</u>	<u>Rgveda</u>
2.	अहं ब्रह्मास्मि (aham	<i>I am Brahman, or I am</i>	<u>Brhadāranyaka</u>	<u>Shukla</u>

	brahmāsmi)	Divine <sup>[138]</sup>	I.4.10	Yajurveda
3.	तत्त्वमसि (tat tvam asi)	That thou art	Chandogya VI.8.7	Samaveda
4.	अयमात्मा ब्रह्म (ayamātmā brahma)	This Atman is Brahman	Mandukya II	Atharvaveda

## Stages and practices

Advaita Vedanta entails more than self-inquiry or bare insight into one's real nature,<sup>[note 14]</sup> but also includes self-restraint, textual studies and ethical perfection. It is described in classical Advaita books like Shankara's Upadesasahasrī<sup>[140]</sup> and the Vivekachudamani, which is also attributed to Shankara.

### Jnana Yoga – path of practice

Classical Advaita Vedanta emphasises the path of Jnana Yoga, a progression of study and training to attain moksha.<sup>[141][142]</sup> It consists of fourfold qualities,<sup>[143]</sup> or behavioral qualifications (śamanyasa, Sampattis, sādhana-catustaya).<sup>[144][145][146][note 15]</sup>

- Nityānitya vastu viveka(नित्यानित्य वस्तु विवेकम्) — The ability (viveka) to correctly discriminate between the real and eternal (nitya) and the substance that is apparently real, aging, changing and transitory (nitya).<sup>[144][146]</sup>
- Ihāmutrārtha phala bhoga virāga(इहाऽमुत्रार्थ फल भोगविरागम्) — The renunciation (virāga) of petty desires that distract the mind (ārtha phala bhoga), willing to give up everything that is an obstacle to the pursuit of truth and self-knowledge.<sup>[146][147]</sup>
- Śamādi ṣatka sampatti(शमादि षट्क सम्पत्ति) — the sixfold virtues or qualities,
  - Śama (mental tranquility, ability to focus the mind)<sup>[146][147]</sup>
  - Dama (self-restraint,<sup>[note 16]</sup> the virtue of temperance)<sup>[146][147]</sup>
  - Uparati (dispassion, ability to be quiet and disassociated from everything,<sup>[146]</sup> "discontinuation of religious ceremonies"<sup>[147]</sup>)
  - Titikṣa (endurance, perseverance, ability to be patient during demanding circumstances).<sup>[146][147]</sup>
  - Śraddhā (the faith in teacher and Sruti texts).<sup>[146]</sup>
  - Samādhāna (attention, intentness of mind).<sup>[146][147]</sup>
- Mumukṣutva (मुमुक्षुत्वम्) — A positive longing for freedom and wisdom, driven to the quest of knowledge and understanding!<sup>[146][143]</sup>

Correct knowledge, which destroys avidya, psychological and perceptual errors related to Atman and Brahman,<sup>[54]</sup> is obtained in jnanayoga through three stages of practice,<sup>[145]</sup> śravaṇa (hearing), manana (thinking) and nididhyāsana (meditation).<sup>[55]</sup> This three-step methodology is rooted in the teachings of chapter 4 of the Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad.<sup>[125][126]</sup>

- Śravaṇa, listening to the teachings of the sages on the Upanishads and Advaita Vedanta, studying the Vedantic texts, such as the Brahma Sūtra, and discussions with the guru (teacher, counsellor).<sup>[144][127][55]</sup>
- Manana, refers to thinking on these discussions and contemplating over the various ideas based on śvaḍhyaya and śravaṇa.<sup>[125]</sup> It is the stage of reflection on the teachings.<sup>[125][127]</sup>
- Nididhyāsana, the stage of meditation and introspection.<sup>[146][web 3]</sup> This stage of practice aims at realization and consequent conviction of the truths, non-duality and a state where there is a fusion of thought and action, knowing and being.<sup>[129][125]</sup>

### Samadhi

While Shankara emphasized śravaṇa ("hearing"), manana ("reflection") and nididhyāsana ("repeated meditation"), later texts like the Drg-Dr̥śya-Viveka (14th century) and Vedantasara (of Sadananda) (15th century) added samadhi as a means to liberation, a theme that was also emphasized by Swami Vivekananda.

## Guru

Advaita Vedanta school has traditionally had a high reverence for Guru (teacher), and recommends that a competent Guru be sought in one's pursuit of spirituality. However, the Guru is not mandatory in Advaita school, states Clooney, but reading of Vedic literature and followed by reflection is.<sup>[151]</sup> Adi Shankara, states Comans, regularly employed compound words "such as *Sastracaryopadesa* (instruction by way of the scriptures and the teacher) and *Vedantacaryopadesa* (instruction by way of the Upanishads and the teacher) to emphasize the importance of Guru".<sup>[151]</sup> This reflects the Advaita tradition which holds a competent teacher as important and essential to gaining correct knowledge, freeing oneself from false knowledge, and to self-realization.<sup>[152]</sup>

A guru is someone more than a teacher, traditionally a reverential figure to the student, with the *guru* serving as a "counselor, who helps mold values, shares experiential knowledge as much as literal knowledge, an exemplar in life, an inspirational source and who helps in the spiritual evolution of a student."<sup>[153]</sup> The guru, states Joel Mlecko, is more than someone who teaches specific type of knowledge, and includes in its scope someone who is also a "counselor, a sort of parent of mind and soul, who helps mold values and experiential knowledge as much as specific knowledge, an exemplar in life, an inspirational source and who reveals the meaning of life."<sup>[153]</sup>

## Ontology - the nature of Being

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### Levels of Reality Truths

The classical Advaita Vedanta explains all reality and everything in the experienced world to be same as the Brahman.<sup>[10]</sup> To Advaitins, there is a unity in multiplicity, and there is no dual hierarchy of a Creator and the created universe.<sup>[10][154]</sup> All objects, all experiences, all matter, all consciousness, all awareness, in Advaita philosophy is not the property but the very nature of this one fundamental reality Brahman.<sup>[10]</sup> With this premise, the Advaita school states that any ontological effort must presuppose a knowing self, and this effort needs to explain all empirical experiences such as the projected reality while one dreams during sleep, and the observed multiplicity of living beings. This Advaita does by positing its theory of three levels of reality,<sup>[155]</sup> the theory of two truths,<sup>[156]</sup> and by developing and integrating these ideas with its theory of errors (*nirvacaniya khyati*).<sup>[157][10]</sup>

Shankara proposes three levels of reality, using sublation as the ontological criterion.<sup>[158][155][159]</sup>

- *Pāramārthika* (*paramartha*, absolute), the Reality that is metaphysically true and ontologically accurate. It is the state of experiencing that "which is absolutely real and into which both other reality levels can be resolved". This reality is the highest, it can't be sublated (assimilated) by any other.<sup>[158][160]</sup>
- *Vyāvahārika* (*vyavahara*), or *samvriti-saya*,<sup>[161]</sup> consisting of the empirical or pragmatismal reality. It is ever changing over time, thus empirically true at a given time and context but not metaphysically true. It is "our world of experience, the phenomenal world that we handle every day when we are awake". It is the level in which both *jīva* (living creatures or individual souls) and *śvara* are true; here, the material world is also true but this is incomplete reality and is sublatable.<sup>[160][162]</sup>
- *Prāthibhāsika* (*pratibhasika*, apparent reality, unreality), "reality based on imagination alone". It is the level of experience in which the mind constructs its own reality. Well-known examples of *pratibhasika* is the imaginary reality such as the "roaring of a lion" fabricated in dreams during one's sleep, and the perception of a rope in the dark as being a snake.<sup>[160][163][164]</sup>

Advaita Vedanta acknowledges and admits that from the empirical perspective there are numerous distinctions.<sup>[165]</sup> It states that everything and each reality has multiple perspectives, both absolute and relative. All these are valid and true in their respective contexts, states Advaita, but only from their respective particular perspectives. This "absolute and relative truths" explanation, Advaitins call as the "two truths" doctrine.<sup>[156][165][166]</sup> John Grimes, a professor of Indian Religions specializing on Vedanta, explains this Advaita doctrine with the example of light and darkness.<sup>[165]</sup> From sun's perspective, it neither rises nor sets, there is no



The swan is an important motif in Advaita. It symbolises two things: first, the swan is called *hamsah* in Sanskrit (which becomes *hamso* if the first letter in the next word is /h/). Upon repeating this *hamso* indefinitely, it becomes *so-aham*, meaning, "I am That". Second, just as a swan lives in a lake but its feathers are not soiled by water similarly a liberated Advaitin lives in this world but is not soiled by its *maya*.

darkness, and "all is light". From the perspective of a person on earth, sun does rise and set, there is both light and darkness, not "all is light", there are relative shades of light and darkness. Both are valid realities and truths, given their perspectives. Yet, they are contradictory. What is true from one point of view, states Grimes, is not from another. To Advaita Vedanta, this does not mean there are two truths and two realities, but it only means that the same one Reality and one Truth is explained or experienced from two different perspectives.<sup>[165][167]</sup>

As they developed these theories, Advaita Vedanta scholars were influenced by some ideas from the Nyaya, Samkhya and Yoga schools of Hindu philosophy.<sup>[168][159]</sup> These theories have not enjoyed universal consensus among Advaitins, and various competing ontological interpretations have flowered within the Advaita tradition.<sup>[10][169][170]</sup>

## Three states of consciousness and Turiya

Advaita posits three states of consciousness, namely waking (jagrat), dreaming (svapna), deep sleep (suṣupti), which are empirically experienced by human beings,<sup>[171][172]</sup> and correspond to the Three Bodies Doctrine.<sup>[173]</sup>

1. The first state is the waking state, in which we are aware of our daily world.<sup>[174]</sup> This is the gross body
2. The second state is the dreaming mind. This is the subtle body.<sup>[174]</sup>
3. The third state is the state of deep sleep. This is the causal body.<sup>[174]</sup>

Advaita also posits the fourth state of Turiya, which some describe as pure consciousness, the background that underlies and transcends these three common states of consciousness.<sup>[web 4][web 5]</sup> Turiya is the state of liberation, where states Advaita school, one experiences the infinite (*ananta*) and non-different (*advaita/abhedā*), that is free from the dualistic experience, the state in which ajativada, non-origination, is apprehended.<sup>[175]</sup> According to Candradhara Sarma, Turiya state is where the foundational Self is realized, it is measureless, neither cause nor effect, all pervading, without suffering, blissful, changeless, self-luminous, real, immanent in all things and transcendent.<sup>[176]</sup> Those who have experienced the Turiya stage of self-consciousness have reached the pure awareness of their own non-dual Self as one with everyone and everything, for them the knowledge, the knower, the known becomes one, they are the *Jivanmukta*.<sup>[177][178][179]</sup>

Advaita traces the foundation of this ontological theory in more ancient Sanskrit texts.<sup>[180]</sup> For example, chapters 8.7 through 8.12 of Chandogya Upanishad discuss the "four states of consciousness" as awake, dream-filled sleep, deep sleep, and beyond deep sleep.<sup>[180][181]</sup> One of the earliest mentions of *Turiya*, in the Hindu scriptures, occurs in verse 5.14.3 of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.<sup>[182]</sup> The idea is also discussed in other early Upanishads.<sup>[183]</sup>

## Identity of Atman and Brahman

According to Advaita Vedanta, Atman is identical to Brahman.<sup>[184][185]</sup> This is expressed in the *mahavakya* "tat tvam asi", "thou are that." There is "a common ground, viz. consciousness, to the individual and Brahman."<sup>[185]</sup> Each soul, in Advaita view, is non-different from the infinite.<sup>[186]</sup> According to Shankara, Atman and Brahman seem different at the empirical level of reality, but this difference is unreal, and at the highest level of reality they are really identical.<sup>[187]</sup>

Moksha is attained by realizing the identity of Atman and Brahman, the complete understanding of one's real nature as Brahman in this life.<sup>[5]</sup> This is frequently stated by Advaita scholars, such as Shankara, as:

I am other than name, form and action.  
My nature is ever free!  
I am Self, the supreme unconditioned Brahman.  
I am pure Awareness, always non-dual.

— Adi Shankara, Upadesasahasri 11.7, <sup>[5]</sup>

## Empirical reality - illusion and ignorance

According to Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is the sole reality. The status of the phenomenal world is an important question in Advaita Vedanta, and different solutions have been proposed. The perception of the phenomenal world as real is explained by *maya* (constantly changing reality) and *avidya* ("ignorance"). Other than *Brahman*, everything else, including the universe, material objects and individuals, are ever-changing and therefore *maya*. Brahman is *Paramarthika Satyam* "Absolute Truth",<sup>[101]</sup> and "the true Self, pure consciousness, the only Reality (*sat*), since It is untinged by difference, the mark of ignorance, and since It is the one thing that is not sublatable".<sup>[82]</sup>

## Causality

All schools of Vedanta subscribe to the theory of *Satkāryavāda*,<sup>[web 6]</sup> which means that the effect is pre-existent in the cause. But there are different views on the causal relationship and the nature of the empirical world from the perspective of metaphysical Brahman. The *Brahma Sutras*, the ancient Vedantins, most sub-schools of Vedanta,<sup>[188][web 6]</sup> as well as Samkhya school of Hindu philosophy,<sup>[web 6]</sup> support *Parinamavada*, the idea that the world is a real transformation (*parinama*) of Brahman.<sup>[188]</sup>

Scholars disagree on the whether Adi Shankara and his Advaita system explained causality through *vivarta*.<sup>[web 6][188][189]</sup> According to Andrew Nicholson, instead of *parinama-vada*, the competing causality theory is *Vivartavada*, which says "the world, is merely an unreal manifestation (*vivarta*) of Brahman. Vivartavada states that although Brahman appears to undergo a transformation, in fact no real change takes place. The myriad of beings are unreal manifestation, as the only real being is Brahman, that ultimate reality which is unborn, unchanging, and entirely without parts". The advocates of this illusive, unreal transformation based causality theory, states Nicholson, have been the Advaitins, the followers of Shankara.<sup>[188]</sup> "Although the world can be described as conventionally real", adds Nicholson, "the Advaitins claim that all of Brahman's effects must ultimately be acknowledged as unreal before the individual self can be liberated".<sup>[web 6]</sup>

However, other scholars such as Hajime Nakamura and Paul Hacker disagree. Hacker and others state that Adi Shankara did not advocate *Vivartavada*, and his explanations are "remote from any connotation of illusion". According to these scholars, it was the 13th century scholar Prakasatman who gave a definition to *vivarta*, and it is Prakasatman's theory that is sometimes misunderstood as Adi Shankara's position.<sup>[189][note 17]</sup> Andrew Nicholson concurs with Hacker and other scholars, adding that the *vivarta-vada* isn't Shankara's theory, that Shankara's ideas appear closer to *parinama-vada*, and the *vivarta* explanation likely emerged gradually in Advaita subschool later.<sup>[web 6]</sup>

According to Eliot Deutsch, Advaita Vedanta states that from "the standpoint of Brahman-experience and Brahman itself, there is no creation" in the absolute sense, all empirically observed creation is relative and mere transformation of one state into another, all states are provisional and a cause-effect driven modification.<sup>[192]</sup>

## Māyā (illusion)

The doctrine of Maya is used to explain the empirical reality in Advaita.<sup>[193][note 18]</sup> Jiva, when conditioned by the human mind, is subjected to experiences of a subjective nature, states Vedanta school, which leads it to misunderstand Maya and interpret it as the sole and final reality. Advaitins assert that the perceived world, including people and other existence, is not what it appears to be.<sup>[195]</sup> It is Māyā, they assert, which manifests and perpetuates a sense of false duality or divisional plurality.<sup>[196]</sup> The empirical manifestation is real but changing, but it obfuscates the true nature of metaphysical Reality which is never changing. Advaita school holds that liberation is the unfettered realization and understanding of the unchanging Reality and truths – the Self, that the Self (Soul) in oneself is same as the Self in another and the Self in everything (Brahman).<sup>[197]</sup>

In Advaita Vedanta philosophy, there are two realities: *Vyavaharika* (empirical reality) and *Paramarthika* (absolute, spiritual Reality).<sup>[198]</sup> Māyā is the empirical reality that entangles consciousness. Māyā has the power to create a bondage to the empirical world, preventing the unveiling of the true, unitary Self—the Cosmic Spirit also known as *Brahman*. This theory of māyā was expounded and explained by *Adi Shankara*. Competing theistic Dvaita scholars contested Shankara's theory,<sup>[199]</sup> and stated that Shankara did not offer a theory of the relationship between Brahman and Māyā.<sup>[200]</sup> A later Advaita scholar Prakasatman addressed this, by explaining, "Maya and Brahman together constitute the entire universe, just like two kinds of interwoven threads create a fabric. Maya is the manifestation of the world, whereas Brahman, which supports Maya, is the cause of the world".<sup>[201]</sup>

Brahman is the sole metaphysical truth in Advaita Vedanta, Māyā is true in epistemological and empirical sense; however, Māyā is not the metaphysical and spiritual truth. The spiritual truth is the truth forever, while what is empirical truth is only true for now. Complete knowledge of true Reality includes knowing both *Vyavaharika* (empirical) and *Paramarthika* (spiritual), the Māyā and the Brahman. The goal of spiritual enlightenment, state Advaitins, is to realize Brahman, realize the unity and Oneness of all reality.<sup>[198][202][117]</sup>

### **Avidya (ignorance)**

Due to ignorance (avidyā), Brahman is perceived as the material world and its objects (nama rupa vikara). According to Shankara, Brahman is in reality attributeless and formless. Brahman, the highest truth and all (Reality), does not really change; it is only our ignorance that gives the appearance of change. Also due to avidyā, the true identity is forgotten, and material reality, which manifests at various levels, is mistaken as the only and true reality

The notion of avidyā and its relationship to Brahman creates a crucial philosophical issue within Advaita Vedanta thought: how can avidyā appear in Brahman, since Brahman is pure consciousness?<sup>[203]</sup> Sengaku Mayeda writes, in his commentary and translation of Adi Shankarā's Upadesasahasri:

Certainly the most crucial problem which Sankara left for his followers is that of avidyā. If the concept is logically analysed, it would lead the Vedanta philosophy toward dualism or nihilism and uproot its fundamental position.<sup>[204]</sup>

To Advaitins, human beings, in a state of unawareness and ignorance of this Universal Self, see their "I-ness" as different than the being in others, then act out of impulse, fears, cravings, malice, division, confusion, anxiety, passions, and a sense of distinctiveness.<sup>[81][205]</sup>

Subsequent Advaitins gave somewhat various explanations, from which various Advaita schools arose.

## **Epistemology - ways of knowing**

The ancient and medieval texts of Advaita Vedanta and other schools of Hindu philosophy discuss *Pramana* (epistemology). The theory of Pramana discusses questions like how correct knowledge can be acquired; how one knows, how one doesn't; and to what extent knowledge pertinent about someone or something can be acquired.<sup>[206][207]</sup> Advaita Vedānta,<sup>[208]</sup> accepts the following six kinds of pramāṇas:<sup>[209][210]</sup>

1. *Pratyakṣa* (प्रत्यक्षाय) - perception
2. *Anumāṇa* (अनुमान) - inference
3. *Upamāṇa* (उपमान) - comparison, analogy
4. *Arthāpatti* (अर्थापत्ति) - postulation, derivation from circumstances<sup>[207][211]</sup>
5. *Anupalabdi* (अनुपलब्धि) - non-perception, negative/cognitive proof<sup>[212]</sup>
6. *Śabda* (शब्द) - relying on word, testimony of past or present reliable experts<sup>[207][212]</sup>

### **Pratyakṣa (perception)**

*Pratyakṣa* (प्रत्यक्षाय), perception, is of two types: external - that arising from the interaction of five senses and worldly objects, and internal - perception of inner sense, the mind.<sup>[213]</sup> Advaita postulates four pre-requisites for correct perception: 1) *Indriyarthasannikarsa* (direct experience by one's sensory organ(s) with the object, whatever is being studied), 2) *Avyapadesya* (non-verbal; correct perception is not through hearsay, according to ancient Indian scholars, where one's sensory organ relies on accepting or rejecting someone else's perception), 3) *Ayabhicara* (does not wander; correct perception does not change, nor is it the result of deception because one's sensory organ or means of observation is drifting, defective, suspect) and 4) *Vyavasayatmaka* (definite; correct perception excludes judgments of doubt, either because of one's failure to observe all the details, or because one is mixing

inference with observation and observing what one wants to observe, or not observing what one does not want to observe).[214] The internal perception concepts included *pratibha* (intuition), *samanyalaksanapratyaksa* (a form of induction from perceived specifics to a universal), and *jnanalaksanapratyaksa* (a form of perception of prior processes and previous states of a 'topic of study' by observing its current state).[215]

## **Anumāna (inference)**

*Anumāna* (अनुमान), inference, is defined as applying reason to reach a new conclusion about truth from one or more observations and previous understanding of truths.[216] Observing smoke and inferring fire is an example of *Anumana*. This epistemological method for gaining knowledge consists of three parts: 1) *Pratijna* (hypothesis), 2) *Hetu* (a reason), and 3) *drshtanta* (examples).[217] The hypothesis must further be broken down into two parts: 1) *Sadhya* (that idea which needs to be proven or disproven) and 2) *Paksha* (the object on which the *Sadhya* is predicated). The inference is conditionally true if *Sapaksha* (positive examples as evidence) are present, and if *Vipaksha* (negative examples as counter-evidence) are absent. For rigor, the Indian philosophies further demand *Vyapti* - the requirement that the *hetu* (reason) must necessarily and separately account for the inference in "all" cases, in both *sapaksha* and *vipaksha*. [217][218] A conditionally proven hypothesis is called *anigamana* (conclusion).[219]

## **Upamāna (comparison, analogy)**

*Upamāna* (उपमान), comparison, analogy [207][211] Some Hindu schools consider it as a proper means of knowledge.[220] *Upamana*, states Lochtefeld,[221] may be explained with the example of a traveler who has never visited lands or islands with endemic population of wildlife. He or she is told, by someone who has been there, that in those lands you see an animal that sort of looks like a cow, grazes like cow but is different from a cow in such and such way. Such use of analogy and comparison is, state the Indian epistemologists, a valid means of conditional knowledge, as it helps the traveller identify the new animal later.[221] The subject of comparison is formally called *upameyam*, the object of comparison is called *upamanam*, while the attribute(s) are identified as *samanya*. [222]

## **Arthāpatti (postulation)**

*Arthāpatti* (अर्थापत्ति), postulation, derivation from circumstances.[207][211] In contemporary logic, this *pramana* is similar to circumstantial implication.[223] As example, if a person left in a boat on river earlier, and the time is now past the expected time of arrival, then the circumstances support the truth postulate that the person has arrived. Many Indian scholars considered this *Pramana* as invalid or at best weak, because the boat may have gotten delayed or diverted.[224] However, in cases such as deriving the time of a future sunrise or sunset, this method was asserted by the proponents to be reliable.

## **Anupalabdi (non-perception, negative/cognitive proof)**

*Anupalabdi* (अनुपलब्धि), non-perception, negative/cognitive proof.[212] *Anupalabdi pramanas* suggests that knowing a negative, such as "there is no jug in this room" is a form of valid knowledge. If something can be observed or inferred or proven as non-existent or impossible, then one knows more than what one did without such means.[225] In Advaita school of Hindu philosophy, a valid conclusion is either *sadrupa* (positive) or *asadrupa* (negative) relation - both correct and valuable. Like other *pramana*, Indian scholars refined *Anupalabdi* to four types: non-perception of the cause, non-perception of the effect, non-perception of object, and non-perception of contradiction. Only two schools of Hinduism accepted and developed the concept "non-perception" as a *pramana*. Advaita considers this method as valid and useful when the other five *pramanas* fail in one's pursuit of knowledge and truth.[210][226] A variation of *Anupalabdi*, called *Abhava* (अभाव) has also been posited as an epistemic method. It means non-existence. Some scholars consider *Anupalabdi* to be same as *Abhava*, [207] while others consider *Anupalabdi* and *Abhava* as different.[226][227] *Abhava-pramana* has been discussed in Advaita in the context of *Padartha* (पदार्थ, referent of a term). A *Padartha* is defined as that which is simultaneously *Astitva* (existent), *Jneyatva* (knowable) and *Abhidheyatva* (nameable).[228] *Abhava* was further refined in four types, by the schools of Hinduism that accepted it as a useful method of epistemology: *dhvamsa* (termination of what existed), *atyanta-abhava* (impossibility, absolute non-existence, contradiction), *anyonya-abhava* (mutual negation, reciprocal absence) and *pragavasa* (prior, antecedent non-existence).[210][228][229]

## Sabda (relying on testimony)

*Sabda* (शब्द), relying on word, testimony of past or present reliable experts.<sup>[207][212]</sup> Hiriyanna explains *Sabda-pramana* as a concept which means reliable expert testimony. The schools of Hinduism which consider it epistemically valid suggest that a human being needs to know numerous facts, and with the limited time and energy available, he can learn only a fraction of those facts and truths directly.<sup>[230]</sup> He must rely on others, his parent, family friends, teachers, ancestors and kindred members of society to rapidly acquire and share knowledge and thereby enrich each other's lives. This means of gaining proper knowledge is either spoken or written, but through *Sabda* (words).<sup>[230]</sup> The reliability of the source is important, and legitimate knowledge can only come from the *Sabda* of reliable sources.<sup>[212][230]</sup> The disagreement between Advaita and other schools of Hinduism has been on how to establish reliability.<sup>[231]</sup>

## Ethics

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Some claim, states Deutsch, "that Advaita turns its back on all theoretical and practical considerations of morality and, if not unethical, is at least 'a-ethical' in character".<sup>[232]</sup> However, adds Deutsch, ethics *does* have a firm place in this philosophy. Its ideology is permeated with ethics and value questions enter into every metaphysical and epistemological analysis, and it considers "an independent, separate treatment of ethics are unnecessary".<sup>[232][233]</sup> According to Advaita Vedanta, states Deutsch, there cannot be "any absolute moral laws, principles or duties", instead in its axiological view Atman is "beyond good and evil", and all values result from self-knowledge of the reality of "distinctionless Oneness" of one's real self, every other being and all manifestations of Brahman.<sup>[234]</sup> Advaitin ethics includes lack of craving, lack of dual distinctions between one's own soul and another being's, good and just Karma.<sup>[235]</sup>

The values and ethics in Advaita Vedanta emanate from what it views as inherent in the state of liberating self-knowledge. This state, according to Rambachan, includes and leads to the understanding that "the self is the self of all, the knower of self sees the self in all beings and all beings in the self."<sup>[74]</sup> Such knowledge and understanding of the indivisibility of one's and other's Atman, Advaitins believe leads to "a deeper identity and affinity with all". It does not alienate or separate an Advaitin from his or her community, rather awakens "the truth of life's unity and interrelatedness".<sup>[74]</sup> These ideas are exemplified in the *Isha Upanishad* – a *sruti* for Advaita, as follows:

One who sees all beings in the self alone, and the self of all beings,  
feels no hatred by virtue of that understanding.  
For the seer of oneness, who knows all beings to be the self,  
where is delusion and sorrow?

— *Isha Upanishad* 6-7, Translated by A Rambachan<sup>[236]</sup>

Adi Shankara, a leading proponent of Advaita, in verse 1.25 to 1.26 of his *Upadeśasāhasrī* asserts that the Self-knowledge is understood and realized when one's mind is purified by the observation of Yamas (ethical precepts) such as Ahimsa (non-violence, abstinence from injuring others in bodymind and thoughts), Satya (truth, abstinence from falsehood), Asteya (abstinence from theft), Aparigraha (abstinence from possessiveness and craving) and a simple life of meditation and reflection.<sup>[237]</sup> Rituals and rites can help focus and prepare the mind for the journey to Self-knowledge,<sup>[238]</sup> however, Shankara discourages ritual worship and oblations to Deva (God), because that assumes the Self within is different than Brahman. The "doctrine of difference" is wrong, asserts Shankara, because, "he who knows the Brahman is one and he is another does not know Brahman".<sup>[239]</sup>

Elsewhere, in verses 1.26-1.28, the Advaita text *Upadesasahasri* states the ethical premise of equality of all beings. Any *Bheda* (discrimination), states Shankara, based on class or caste or parentage is a mark of inner error and lack of liberating knowledge.<sup>[240]</sup> This text states that the fully liberated person understands and practices the ethics of non-difference.<sup>[240]</sup>

One, who is eager to realize this highest truth spoken of in the Sruti, should rise above the fivefold form of desire: for a son, for wealth, for this world and the next, and are the outcome of a false reference to the Self of Varna (castes, colors, classes) and orders of life. These references are contradictory to right knowledge, and reasons are given by the

Srutis regarding the prohibition of the acceptance of difference. For when the knowledge that the one non-dual Atman (Self) is beyond phenomenal existence is generated by the scriptures and reasoning, there cannot exist a knowledge side by side that is contradictory or contrary to it.

— Adi Shankara, *Upadesha Sahasri* 1.44, [241][242]

## Texts

The *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Brahma Sutras* are the central texts of the Advaita Vedanta tradition, providing the truths about the identity of *Atman* and *Brahman* and their changeless nature.<sup>[243][244]</sup>

Adi Shankara gave a nondualist interpretation of these texts in his commentaries. *Adi Shankara's Bhashya* (commentaries) have become central texts in the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, but are one among many ancient and medieval manuscripts available or accepted in this tradition.<sup>[13]</sup> The subsequent Advaita tradition has further elaborated on these sruti and commentaries.

## Prasthanatrayi

The *Vedanta* tradition provides exegeses of the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavadgita*, collectively called the *Prasthanatrayi*, literally, *three sources*.<sup>[9][243][244]</sup>

1. **The *Upanishads*,<sup>[note 19]</sup> or *Śruti prasthāna***, considered the *Śruti* (Vedic scriptures) foundation of *Vedanta*.<sup>[note 20][247][248][249]</sup> Most scholars, states Eliot Deutsch, are convinced that the *Śruti* in general, and the *Upanishads* in particular express "a very rich diversity" of ideas, with the early *Upanishads* such as *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* and *Chandogya Upanishad* being more readily amenable to *Advaita Vedanta* school's interpretation than the middle or later *Upanishads*.<sup>[250][251]</sup> In addition to the oldest *Upanishads*, states Williams, the *Sannyasa Upanishads* group composed in pre-Shankara times "express a decidedly *Advaita* outlook".<sup>[252]</sup>
2. **The *Brahma Sutras*, or *Nyaya prasthanal Yukti prasthana***, considered the reason-based foundation of *Vedanta*. The *Brahma Sutras* attempted to synthesize the teachings of the *Upanishads*. The diversity in the teachings of the *Upanishads* necessitated the systematization of these teachings. The only extant version of this synthesis is the *Brahma Sutras* of *Badarayana*. Like the *Upanishads*, *Brahma Sutras* is also an aphoristic text, and can be interpreted as a non-theistic *Advaita Vedanta* text or as a theistic *Dvaita Vedanta* text. This has led, states Stephen Phillips, to its varying interpretations by scholars of various sub-schools of *Vedanta*.<sup>[253]</sup> The *Brahmasutra* is considered by the Advaita school as the *Nyaya Prasthana* (canonical base for reasoning).<sup>[254]</sup>
3. **The *Bhagavad Gita*, or *Smriti prasthāna***, considered the *Smriti* (remembered tradition) foundation of *Vedanta*.<sup>[254]</sup> It has been widely studied by *Advaita* scholars, including a commentary by *Adi Shankara*.<sup>[255][256]</sup>

## Textual authority

The identity of *Atman* and *Brahman*, and their unchanging, eternal nature,<sup>[257]</sup> are basic truths in Advaita Vedanta. The school considers the knowledge claims in the Vedas to be the crucial part of the Vedas, not its *karma-kanda* (ritual injunctions).<sup>[243]</sup> The knowledge claims about self being identical to the nature of *Atman* and *Brahman* are found in the *Upanishads*, which Advaita Vedanta has regarded as "errorless revealed truth."<sup>[243]</sup> Nevertheless, states Koller, Advaita Vedantins did not entirely rely on revelation, but critically examined their teachings using reason and experience, and this led them to investigate and critique competing theories.<sup>[243]</sup>

Advaita Vedanta, like all orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, accepts as an epistemic premise that *Śruti* (Vedic literature) is a reliable source of knowledge.<sup>[258][259][260]</sup> The *Śruti* includes the four Vedas including its four layers of embedded texts - the *Samhitas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas* and the early *Upanishads*.<sup>[261]</sup> Of these, the *Upanishads* are the most referred to texts in the Advaita school.

The possibility of different interpretations of the Vedic literature, states Arvind Sharma, was recognized by ancient Indian scholars.<sup>[262][263]</sup> The *Brahmasutra* (also called *Vedanta Sutra*, composed in 1st millennium BCE) accepted this in verse 1.1.4 and asserts the need for the *Upanishadic* teachings to be understood not in piecemeal cherry-picked basis, rather in a unified way wherein

the ideas in the Vedic texts are harmonized with other means of knowledge such as perception, inference and remaining pramanas.<sup>[262][254]</sup> This theme has been central to the Advaita school, making the Brahmasutra as a common reference and a consolidated textual authority for Advaita.<sup>[262][264]</sup>

The Bhagavad Gita, similarly in parts can be interpreted to be a monist Advaita text, and in other parts as theistic Dvaita text. It too has been widely studied by Advaita scholars, including a commentary by Adi Shankara.<sup>[265][263]</sup>

## History of Advaita Vedanta

Advaita Vedanta existed prior to Adi Shankara but found in him its most influential expounder.<sup>[266]</sup>

### Pre-Shankara Advaita Vedanta

Of the Vedanta-school before the composition of the Brahma Sutras (400–450 CE<sup>[267]</sup>), wrote Nakamura in 1950, almost nothing is known.<sup>[267]</sup> The two Advaita writings of pre-Shankara period, known to scholars such as Nakamura in the first half of 20th-century, were the Vākyapadīya, written by Bharṭṛhari (second half 5th century<sup>[268]</sup>), and the Māndūkya-kārikā written by Gaudapada (7th century CE).<sup>[267]</sup>

Scholarship after 1950 suggests that almost all Sannyasa Upanishads have a strong Advaita Vedanta outlook.<sup>[269][270][271]</sup> Six of these Sannyasa Upanishads – Aruni, Kundika, Kathashruti, Paramahansa, Jabala and Brahma – were composed before the 3rd-century CE, likely in the centuries before or after the start of the common era, states Sprockhoff; the Asrama Upanishad is dated to the 3rd-century.<sup>[272][273]</sup>

The strong Advaita Vedanta views in these ancient texts may be, states Patrick Olivelle, because major Hindu monasteries of this period (early 1st millennium CE) belonged to the Advaita Vedanta tradition.<sup>[269]</sup>

### Earliest Vedanta - Upanishads and Brahma Sutras

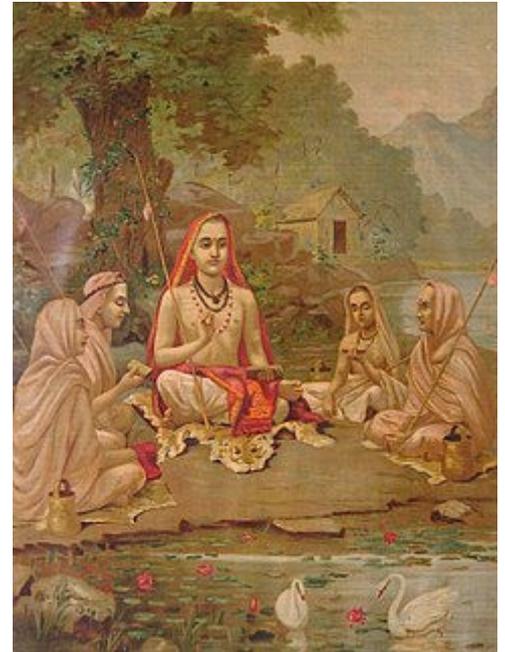
The Upanishads form the basic texts, of which Vedanta gives an interpretation.<sup>[274]</sup> The Upanishads do not contain "a rigorous philosophical inquiry identifying the doctrines and formulating the supporting arguments".<sup>[275][note 21]</sup> This philosophical inquiry was performed by the Upanishads, the various philosophical schools.<sup>[277][note 22]</sup>

### Bādarāyana's Brahma Sutras

The Brahma Sutras of Bādarāyana, also called the Vedanta Sutra,<sup>[279]</sup> were compiled in its present form around 400–450 CE,<sup>[280]</sup> but "the great part of the *Sutra* must have been in existence much earlier than that".<sup>[280]</sup> Estimates of the date of Bādarāyana's lifetime differ between 200 BCE and 200 CE.<sup>[281]</sup>

The Brahma Sutra is a critical study of the teachings of the Upanishads. It was and is a guide-book for the great teachers of the Vedantic systems.<sup>[279]</sup> Bādarāyana was not the first person to systematise the teachings of the Upanishads.<sup>[282]</sup> He refers to seven Vedantic teachers before him.<sup>[282]</sup>

From the way in which Bādarāyana cites the views of others it is obvious that the teachings of the Upanishads must have been analyzed and interpreted by quite a few before him and that his systematization of them in 555 sutras arranged in four chapters must have been the last attempt, most probably the best.<sup>[282]</sup>



*Adi Shankara with Disciples*, by Raja Ravi Varma (1904)

## Between Brahma Sutras and Shankara

According to Nakamura, "there must have been an enormous number of other writings turned out in this period, but unfortunately all of them have been scattered or lost and have not come down to us today".<sup>[267]</sup> In his commentaries, Shankara mentions 99 different predecessors of his Sampradaya.<sup>[283]</sup> In the beginning of his commentary on the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad Shankara salutes the teachers of the Brahmadvidya Sampradaya.<sup>[web 7]</sup> Pre-Shankara doctrines and sayings can be traced in the works of the later schools, which does give insight into the development of early Vedanta philosophy.<sup>[267]</sup>

The names of various important early Vedanta thinkers have been listed in the *Siddhitraya* by Yamunācārya (c.1050), the *Vedārthasamgraha* by Rāmānuja (c.1050–1157), and the *Yatīndramatadīpikā* by Śrīnivāsa-dāsa.<sup>[267]</sup> Combined together,<sup>[267]</sup> at least fourteen thinkers are known to have existed between the composition of the Brahma Sutras and Shankara's lifetime.<sup>[267][note 23]</sup>

Although Shankara is often considered to be the founder of the Advaita Vedanta school, according to Nakamura, comparison of the known teachings of these early Vedantins and Shankara's thought shows that most of the characteristics of Shankara's thought "were advocated by someone before Śankara".<sup>[284]</sup> Shankara "was the person who synthesized the *Advaita-vāda* which had previously existed before him".<sup>[284]</sup> In this synthesis, he was the rejuvenator and defender of ancient learning.<sup>[285]</sup> He was an unequalled commentator;<sup>[285]</sup> due to whose efforts and contributions the Advaita Vedanta assumed a dominant position within Indian philosophy.<sup>[285]</sup>

## Gaudapada and Māṇḍukya Kārikā

Gaudapada (6th century)<sup>[286]</sup> was the teacher of Govinda Bhagavatpada and the grandteacher of Shankara. Gaudapada uses the concepts of Ajativada and Maya<sup>[287]</sup> to establish "that from the level of ultimate truth the world is a cosmic illusion,"<sup>[288]</sup> and "suggests that the whole of our waking experience is exactly the same as an illusory and insubstantial dream."<sup>[289]</sup> In contrast, Adi Shankara insists upon a distinction between waking experience and dream.<sup>[289]</sup>

### Mandukya Karika

Gaudapada wrote or compiled<sup>[290]</sup> the *Māṇḍukya Kārikā*, also known as the *Gauḍapāda Kārikā* or the *Āgama Śāstra*.<sup>[291]</sup> The *Māṇḍukya Kārikā* is a commentary in verse form on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, one of the shortest Upanishads consisting of just 13 prose sentences. Of the ancient literature related to Advaita Vedanta, the oldest surviving complete text is the *Māṇḍukya Kārikā*.<sup>[292]</sup> Many other texts with same type of teachings and which were older than *Māṇḍukya Kārikā* existed and this is unquestionable because other scholars and their views are cited by Gaudapada, Shankara and Anandagiri, according to Hajime Nakamura.<sup>[293]</sup> Gaudapada relied particularly on *Mandukya Upanishad* as well as *Brihadaranyaka* and *Chandogya Upanishads*.<sup>[292]</sup>

The *Mandukya Upanishad* was considered to be a Śruti before the era of Adi Shankara, but not treated as particularly important.<sup>[291]</sup> In later post-Shankara period its value became far more important, and regarded as expressing the essence of the Upanishad philosophy. The entire *Karika* became a key text for the Advaita school in this later era.<sup>[294][note 24]</sup>

### Shri Gaudapadacharya Math

Around 740 AD Gaudapada founded Shri Gaudapadacharya Math<sup>[note 25]</sup>, also known as Kavalē maṭha. It is located in Kavale, Ponda, Goa,<sup>[web 8]</sup> and is the oldest matha of the South Indian Saraswat Brahmins<sup>[297][web 9]</sup>

## Adi Shankara



Statue of Gaudapada

Adi Shankara (788–820), also known as Śaṅkara Bhagavatpādācārya and Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, represents a turning point in the development of Vedānta.<sup>[298]</sup> After the growing influence of Buddhism on Vedānta, culminating in the works of Gaudapada, Adi Shankara gave a Vedantic character to the Buddhist elements in these works,<sup>[298]</sup> synthesising and rejuvenating the doctrine of Advaita.<sup>[285]</sup> Using ideas in ancient Indian texts, Shankara systematized the foundation for Advaita Vedānta in the 8th century CE, though the school was founded many centuries earlier by Badarayana.<sup>[299]</sup> His thematic focus extended beyond metaphysics and soteriology, and he laid a strong emphasis on Pramanas, that is epistemology or "means to gain knowledge, reasoning methods that empower one to gain reliable knowledge". Rambachan, for example, summarizes the widely held view on one aspect of Shankara's epistemology before critiquing it as follows,

According to these [widely represented contemporary] studies, Shankara only accorded a provisional validity to the knowledge gained by inquiry into the words of the Śruti (Vedas) and did not see the latter as the unique source (*pramana*) of *Brahmajnana*. The affirmations of the Śruti, it is argued, need to be verified and confirmed by the knowledge gained through direct experience (*anubhava*) and the authority of the Śruti, therefore, is only secondary.<sup>[265]</sup>

Sengaku Mayeda concurs, adding Shankara maintained the need for objectivity in the process of gaining knowledge (*vastutantra*), and considered subjective opinions (*purushatantra*) and injunctions in Śruti (*codanatantra*) as secondary.<sup>[300]</sup> Mayeda cites Shankara's explicit statements emphasizing epistemology (*pramana-janya*) in section 1.18.133 of *Upadesasahasri* and section 1.1.4 of *Brahmasutra-bhasya*.<sup>[300][301]</sup>

Adi Shankara cautioned against cherry-picking a phrase or verse out of context from Vedic literature, and remarked that the *Anvaya* (theme or purport) of any treatise can only be correctly understood if one attends to the *Samanvayat Tatparya Linga*, that is six characteristics of the text under consideration:

1. The common in *Upakrama* (introductory statement) and *Upasamhara* (conclusions)
2. *Abhyasa* (message repeated)
3. *Apurvata* (unique proposition or novelty)
4. *Phala* (fruit or result derived)
5. *Arthavada* (explained meaning, praised point)
6. *Yukti* (verifiable reasoning)<sup>[302][303]</sup>

While this methodology has roots in the theoretical works of Nyaya school of Hinduism, Shankara consolidated and applied it with his unique exegetical method called *Anvaya-Vyatireka*, which states that for proper understanding one must "accept only meanings that are compatible with all characteristics" and "exclude meanings that are incompatible with any".<sup>[304][305]</sup>

Hacker and Phillips note that this insight into rules of reasoning and hierarchical emphasis on epistemic steps is "doubtlessly the suggestion" of Shankara in *Brahma-sutra*, an insight that flowers in the works of his companion and disciple Padmapada.<sup>[306]</sup> Merrell-Wolff states that Shankara accepts Vedas and Upanishads as a source of knowledge as he develops his philosophical theses, yet he never rests his case on the ancient texts, rather proves each thesis, point by point using *pranamas* (epistemology), reason and experience.<sup>[307][308]</sup>

## Historical context

Shankara lived in the time of the so-called "Late classical Hinduism",<sup>[309]</sup> which lasted from 650 to 1100 CE.<sup>[309]</sup> This era was one of political instability that followed Gupta dynasty and King Harsha of the 7th century CE.<sup>[310]</sup> It was a time of social and cultural change as the ideas of Buddhism, Jainism, and various traditions within Hinduism were competing for members.<sup>[311][312]</sup> Buddhism in particular influenced India's spiritual traditions in the first 700 years of the 1st millennium CE.<sup>[310][313]</sup> Shankara and his contemporaries made a significant contribution in understanding Buddhism and the ancient Vedic traditions; they then transformed the extant ideas, particularly reforming the Vedānta tradition of Hinduism, making it India's most important tradition for more than a thousand years.<sup>[310]</sup>

## Writings

Adi Shankara is best known for his systematic reviews and commentaries (*Bhasyas*) on ancient Indian texts. Shankara's masterpiece of commentary is the *Brahmasutrabhasya* (literally, commentary on *Brahma Sutra*), a fundamental text of the Vedanta school of Hinduism.<sup>[314]</sup> His commentaries on ten *Mukhya* (principal) Upanishads are also considered authentic by scholars.<sup>[314][315]</sup> Other authentic works of Shankara include commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita* (part of the *Brahsthana Trayi Bhasya*).<sup>[265]</sup>

Shankara's *Vivarana* (tertiary notes) on the commentary by Vedavyasa on *Yogasutras* as well as those on Apastamba Dharma-sūtras (*Adhyatama-patala-bhasya*) are accepted by scholars as authentic works of Adi Shankara.<sup>[316][317]</sup> Among the *Stotra* (poetic works), the Daksinamurti Stotra, Bhajagovinda Stotra, Sivanandalahari, Carpata-panjarika, Visnu-satpadi, Harimide, Dasa-shloki, and Krishna-staka are likely to be authentic.<sup>[316][318]</sup> He also authored *Upadesasahasri*, his most important original philosophical work.<sup>[299][317]</sup> Of other original *Prakaranas* (प्रकरण, monographs, treatise), 76 works are attributed to Adi Shankara. Modern era Indian scholars Belvalkar and Upadhyaya accept five and thirty nine works, respectively as authentic.<sup>[319]</sup>

Several commentaries on Nrisimha-Purvatatapaniya and Shveshvata Upanishads have been attributed to Adi Shankara, but their authenticity is highly doubtful.<sup>[315][320]</sup> Similarly, commentaries on several early and later Upanishads attributed to Shankara are rejected by scholars<sup>[321]</sup> as his works, and are likely works of later Advaita Vedanta scholars; these include the Kaushitaki Upanishad, Maitri Upanishad, Kaivalya Upanishad, Paramahansa Upanishad, Sakatayana Upanishad, Mandala Brahmana Upanishad, Maha Narayana Upanishad, and Gopalatapaniya Upanishad.<sup>[320]</sup>

The authenticity of Shankara being the author of *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*<sup>[322]</sup> has been questioned, but scholars generally credit it to him.<sup>[323]</sup> The authorship of Shankara of his *Mandukya Upanishad Bhasya* and his supplementary commentary on Gaudapada's *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* has been disputed by Nakamura.<sup>[324]</sup> However, other scholars state that the commentary on Mandukya, which is actually a commentary on Madukya-Karikas by Gaudapada, may be authentic.<sup>[316][320]</sup>

## Influence of Shankara

Shankara's status in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta is unparalleled. He travelled all over India to help restore the study of the Vedas.<sup>[325]</sup> His teachings and tradition form the basis of *Smartism* and have influenced *Sant Mat* lineages.<sup>[326]</sup> He introduced the *Pañcāyatana* form of *worship*, the simultaneous worship of five deities – Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi. Shankara explained that all deities were but different forms of the one *Brahman*, the invisible Supreme Being.<sup>[327]</sup>

Benedict Ashley credits Adi Shankara for unifying two seemingly disparate philosophical doctrines in Hinduism, namely *Atman* and *Brahman*.<sup>[328]</sup> Isaeva states that Shankara's influence extended to reforming Hinduism, founding monasteries, edifying disciples, disputing opponents, and engaging in philosophic activity that, in the eyes of Indian tradition, helped revive "the orthodox idea of the unity of all beings" and Vedanta thought.<sup>[329]</sup>

Some scholars doubt Shankara's early influence in India.<sup>[330]</sup> According to King and Roodurmun, until the 10th century Shankara was overshadowed by his older contemporary *Mandana-Misra*, who was considered to be the major representative of Advaita.<sup>[331][332]</sup> Other scholars state that the historical records for this period are unclear, and little reliable information is known about the various contemporaries and disciples of Shankara.<sup>[333]</sup>

Several scholars suggest that the historical fame and cultural influence of Shankara grew centuries later, particularly during the era of the Muslim invasions and consequent devastation of India.<sup>[330][334]</sup> Many of Shankara's biographies were created and published in and after the 14th century, such as the widely cited Vidyaranya's *Śankara-vijaya*. *Vidyaranya*, also known as Madhava, who was the 12th Jagadguru of the Śringeri Śarada Pītham from 1380 to 1386,<sup>[335]</sup> inspired the re-creation of the Hindu *Vijayanagara Empire* of South India in response to the devastation caused by the Islamic *Delhi Sultanate*.<sup>[334][336]</sup> He and his brothers, suggest Paul Hacker and other scholars,<sup>[330][334]</sup> wrote about Śankara as well as extensive Advaitic commentaries on the Vedas and Dharma. Vidyaranya was a minister in the Vijayanagara Empire and enjoyed royal support,<sup>[336]</sup> and his sponsorship and methodical efforts helped establish Shankara as a rallying symbol of values, spread historical and cultural influence of Shankara's Vedanta philosophies, and establish monasteries (*nathas*) to expand the cultural influence of Shankara and Advaita Vedanta.<sup>[330]</sup>

## Sureśvara and Maṇḍana Miśra

Sureśvara (fl. 800-900 CE)<sup>[337]</sup> and Maṇḍana Miśra were contemporaries of Shankara, Sureśvara often (incorrectly) being identified with Maṇḍana Miśra.<sup>[338]</sup> Both explained Sankara "on the basis of their personal convictions".<sup>[338]</sup> Sureśvara has also been credited as the founder of a pre-Shankara branch of Advaita Vedānta.<sup>[337]</sup>

Maṇḍana Miśra was a Mimamsa scholar and a follower of Kumarila, but also wrote a seminal text on Advaita that has survived into the modern era, the *Brahma-siddhi*.<sup>[339][340]</sup> According to tradition, Maṇḍana Miśra and his wife were defeated by Shankara in a debate, after which he became a follower of Shankara.<sup>[339]</sup> Yet, his attitude toward Shankara was that of a "self-confident rival teacher of Advaita";<sup>[341]</sup> and his influence was such that some regard the *Brahma-siddhi* to have "set forth a non-Shankaran brand of Advaita".<sup>[339]</sup> The "theory of error" set forth in this work became the normative Advaita Vedānta theory of error.<sup>[342]</sup> It was Vachaspati Misra's commentary on this work that linked it to Shankara's teaching.<sup>[343]</sup> His influential thesis in the Advaita tradition has been that errors are opportunities because they "lead to truth", and full correct knowledge requires that not only should one understand the truth but also examine and understand errors as well as what is not truth.<sup>[344]</sup>

Hiriyanna and Kuppuswami Sastra have pointed out that Sureśvara and Maṇḍana Miśra had different views on various doctrinal points.<sup>[345]</sup>

- The locus of *avidya*:<sup>[345]</sup> according to Maṇḍana Miśra, the individual *jiva* is the locus of *avidya*, whereas Suresvara contends that the *avidya* regarding Brahman is located in Brahman.<sup>[345]</sup> These two different stances are also reflected in the opposing positions of the Bhamati school and the Vvarana school.<sup>[345]</sup>
- Liberation: according to Maṇḍana Miśra, the knowledge that arises from the Mahavakya is insufficient for liberation. Only the direct realization of Brahma is liberating, which can only be attained by meditation.<sup>[346]</sup> According to Suresvara, this knowledge is directly liberating, while meditation is at best a useful aid.<sup>[341][note 26]</sup>

## Advaita Vedānta sub-schools

After Shankara's death, several sub-schools developed. Two of them still exist today, the Bhāmātī and the Vivarana.<sup>[web 10][283]</sup> Two defunct schools are the *Pancapadika* and *Istasiddhi*, which were replaced by Prakasatman's Vvarana school.<sup>[348]</sup>

These schools worked out the logical implications of various Advaita doctrines. Two of the problems they encountered were the further interpretations of the concepts of māyā and avidya.<sup>[web 10]</sup>

### Padmapada - Pancapadika school

Padmapada (c. 800 CE)<sup>[349]</sup> was a direct disciple of Shankara who wrote the *Pancapadika*, a commentary on the *Sankara-bhaya*.<sup>[349]</sup> Padmapada diverged from Shankara in his description of *avidya*, designating *prakṛti* as *avidya* or *ajñana*.<sup>[350]</sup>

### Vachaspati Misra – Bhamati school

Vachaspati Misra (800–900 CE)<sup>[351]</sup> wrote the *Brahmatattva-samikṣā* a commentary on Maṇḍana Miśra's *Brahma-siddhi*, which provides the link between Mandana Misra and Shankara.<sup>[343]</sup> and attempts to harmonise Shankara's thought with that of Mandana Misra.<sup>[web 10]</sup> According to Advaita tradition, Shankara reincarnated as Vachaspati Misra "to popularise the Advaita System through his Bhamati".<sup>[351]</sup> Only two works are known of Vachaspati Misra, the *Brahmatattva-samikṣā* on Maṇḍana Miśra's *Brahma-siddhi*, and his *Bhamati* on the *Sankara-bhāṣya*, Shankara's commentary on the Brahma-sūtras.<sup>[343]</sup> The name of the Bhamati sub-school is derived from this *Bhamati*.<sup>[web 10]</sup>

The Bhamati school takes an ontological approach. It sees the Jiva as the source of *avidya*.<sup>[web 10]</sup> It sees meditation as the main factor in the acquirement of liberation, while the study of the śūtras and reflection are additional factors.<sup>[352]</sup>

### Prakasatman - Vvarana school

Prakasatman (c. 1200–1300)<sup>[348]</sup> wrote the *Pancapadika-Vivarana*, a commentary on the *Pancapadika* by Padmapadacharya<sup>[348]</sup> The *Vivarana* lends its name to the subsequent school. According to Roodurmum, "[H]is line of thought [...] became the leitmotif of all subsequent developments in the evolution of the Advaita tradition!<sup>[348]</sup>

The Vivarana school takes an epistemological approach. Prakasatman was the first to propound the theory of *mulavidya* or *maya* as being of "positive beginningless nature",<sup>[353]</sup> and sees Brahman as the source of avidya. Critics object that Brahman is pure consciousness, so it cannot be the source of avidya. Another problem is that contradictory qualities, namely knowledge and ignorance, are attributed to Brahman.<sup>[web 10]</sup>

### Vimuktatman - Ista-Siddhi

Vimuktatman (c. 1200 CE)<sup>[354]</sup> wrote the *Ista-siddhi*.<sup>[354]</sup> It is one of the four traditional *siddhi*, together with Mandana's *Brahma-siddhi*, Suresvara's *Naiskarmya-siddhi*, and Madusudana's *Advaita-siddhi*.<sup>[355]</sup> According to Vimuktatman, absolute Reality is "pure intuitive consciousness".<sup>[356]</sup> His school of thought was eventually replaced by Prakasatman's *Vivarana* school.<sup>[348]</sup>

## Later Advaita Vedanta tradition

According to Sangeetha Menon, prominent names in the later Advaita tradition are.<sup>[web 11]</sup>

- Prakāsātman, Vimuktātman, Sarvajñātman (10th century),
- Śrī Harṣa, Citsukha (12th century),
- ānandagiri, Amalānandā (13th century),
- Vidyāraṇya, Śaṅkarānandā (14th century),
- Sadānandā (15th century),
- Prakāṣānanda, Nṛsimhāśrama (16th century),
- Madhusūdhana Sarasvatī, Dharmarāja Advarindra, Appaya Dīkṣita (17th century),
- Sadaśiva Brahmendra (18th century),
- Candraśekhara Bhārati, Chandrasekharendra Sarasvatī Swamiḡa, Sacchidānandendra Sarasvatī (20th century).

Contemporary teachers are the orthodox Jagadguru of Sringeri Sharada Peetham; the more traditional teachers Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963), Chinmayananda Saraswati<sup>[web 12]</sup> and Dayananda Saraswati (Arsha Vidya),<sup>[web 12]</sup> and less traditional teachers such as Narayana Guru<sup>[web 12]</sup>

## Sampradaya

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### Monastic order: Advaita Mathas

Advaita Vedanta is not just a philosophical system, but also a tradition of renunciation. Philosophy and renunciation are closely related.<sup>[web 13]</sup>

Most of the notable authors in the advaita tradition were members of the sannyasa tradition, and both sides of the tradition share the same values, attitudes and metaphysics.<sup>[web 13]</sup>

Shankara organized monks under 10 names and established mathas for them. These mathas contributed to the influence of Shankara, which was "due to institutional factors". The mathas which he built exist until today, and preserve the teachings and influence of Shankara, "while the writings of other scholars before him came to be forgotten with the passage of time".<sup>[357]</sup>



(Vidyashankara temple) at Sringeri Sharada Peetham, Shringeri

### Shri Gaudapadacharya Math

Around 740 CE, Gaudapada founded Shri Gaudapadacharya Math<sup>[note 27]</sup>, also known as Kavalē maṭha. It is located in Kavale, Ponda, Goa,<sup>[web 14]</sup> and is the oldest matha of the South Indian Saraswat Brahmins<sup>[297][web 15]</sup>

## Shankara's monastic tradition

Shankara, himself considered to be an incarnation of Shiva,<sup>[web 13]</sup> established the Dashanami Sampradaya, organizing a section of the Ekadandi monks under an umbrella grouping of ten names.<sup>[web 13]</sup> Several Hindu monastic and Ekadandi traditions, however, remained outside the organisation of the Dasanāmis.<sup>[358][359][360]</sup>

Sankara organised the Hindu monks of these ten sects or names under four Maṭhas (Sanskrit: मठ) (monasteries), called the *Amnaya Mathas*, with the headquarters at Dvārakā in the West, Jagannatha Puri in the East, Sringeri in the South and Badrikashrama in the North.<sup>[web 13]</sup> Each math was first headed by one of his four main disciples, and the tradition continues since then.<sup>[note 28]</sup> According to another tradition in Kerala, after Sankara's samadhi at Vadakkunnathan Temple, his disciples founded four mathas in Thrissur, namely Naduvil Madhom, Thekke Madhom, Idayil Madhom and Īdakke Madhom.

The table below gives an overview of the four *Amnaya Mathas* founded by Adi Shankara, and their details.<sup>[web 16]</sup>

<b>Shishya (lineage)</b>	<b>Direction</b>	<b>Maṭha</b>	<b>Mahāvākya</b>	<b>Veda</b>	<b>Sampradaya</b>
<u>Padmapāda</u>	<b>East</b>	<u>Govardhana Pīṭham</u>	Prajñānam brahma ( <i>Consciousness is Brahman</i> )	<u>Rig Veda</u>	Bhogavala
<u>Sureśvara</u>	<b>South</b>	<u>Sringeri Śārada Pīṭham</u>	Aham brahmāsmi ( <i>I am Brahman</i> )	<u>Yajur Veda</u>	Bhūrivala
<u>Hastāmalakācārya</u>	<b>West</b>	<u>Dvāraka Pīṭham</u>	Tattvamasi ( <i>That thou art</i> )	<u>Sama Veda</u>	Kitavala
<u>Toṭakācārya</u>	<b>North</b>	<u>Jyotirmaṭha Pīṭham</u>	Ayamātmā brahma ( <i>This Atman is Brahman</i> )	<u>Atharva Veda</u>	Nandavala

Monks of these ten orders differ in part in their beliefs and practices, and a section of them is not considered to be restricted to specific changes made by Shankara. While the dasanāmis associated with the Sankara maths follow the procedures enumerated by Adi Śankara, some of these orders remained partly or fully independent in their belief and practices; and outside the official control of the Sankara maths. The advaita sampradaya is not a Saiva sect,<sup>[web 13][363]</sup> despite the historical links with Shaivism.<sup>[note 29]</sup> Nevertheless, contemporary Sankaracaryas have more influence among Saiva communities than among Vaisnava communities.<sup>[web 13]</sup>

## Relationship with other forms of Vedanta

The Advaita Vedanta ideas, particularly of 8th century Adi Shankara, were challenged by theistic Vedanta philosophies that emerged centuries later, such as the 11th-century Vishishtadvaita (qualified nondualism) of Ramanuja, and the 14th-century Dvaita (theistic dualism) of Madhvacharya<sup>[364]</sup>

### Vishishtadvaita

Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita school and Shankara's Advaita school are both nondualism Vedanta schools,<sup>[365][366]</sup> both are premised on the assumption that all souls can hope for and achieve the state of blissful liberation; in contrast, Madhvacharya and his Dvaita subschool of Vedanta believed that some souls are eternally doomed and damned.<sup>[367][368]</sup> Shankara's theory posits that only Brahman and causes are metaphysical unchanging reality, while the empirical world (Maya) and observed effects are changing, illusive and of relative existence.<sup>[369][370]</sup> Spiritual liberation to Shankara is the full comprehension and realization of oneness of one's unchanging Atman (soul) as the same as Atman in everyone else as well as being identical to the *nirguna* Brahman.<sup>[366][371][372]</sup> In contrast, Ramanuja's theory posits both Brahman and the world of matter are two different absolutes, both metaphysically real, neither should be called false or illusive, and *saguna* Brahman with attributes is also real.<sup>[370]</sup> God, like man,

states Ramanuja, has both soul and body, and all of the world of matter is the glory of God's body.<sup>[365]</sup> The path to Brahman (Vishnu), asserted Ramanuja, is devotion to godliness and constant remembrance of the beauty and love of personal god (*saguna* Brahman, Vishnu), one which ultimately leads one to the oneness with *nirguna* Brahman.<sup>[365][369][370]</sup>

## Shuddhadvaita

Vallabhacharya (1479–1531 CE), the proponent of the philosophy of Shuddhadvaita Brahmavad enunciates that Ishvara has created the world without connection with any external agency such as Maya (which itself is his power) and manifests Himself through the world.<sup>[373]</sup> That is why shuddhadvaita is known as 'Unmodified transformation' or 'Avikṛta Pariṇāmavāda'. Brahman or Ishvara desired to become many, and he became the multitude of individual souls and the world. Vallabha recognises Brahman as the whole and the individual as a 'part' (but devoid of bliss).<sup>[374]</sup>

## Dvaita

Madhvacharya was also a critic of Advaita Vedanta. Advaita's nondualism asserted that Atman (soul) and Brahman are identical, there is interconnected oneness of all souls and Brahman, and there are no pluralities.<sup>[375][376]</sup> Madhva in contrast asserted that Atman (soul) and Brahman are different, only Vishnu is the Lord (Brahman), individual souls are also different and depend on Vishnu, and there are pluralities.<sup>[375][376]</sup> Madhvacharya stated that both Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism were a nihilistic school of thought.<sup>[377]</sup> Madhvacharya wrote four major texts, including *Upadhikhandana* and *Tattvadyota*, primarily dedicated to criticizing Advaita.<sup>[377]</sup>

## Historical influence

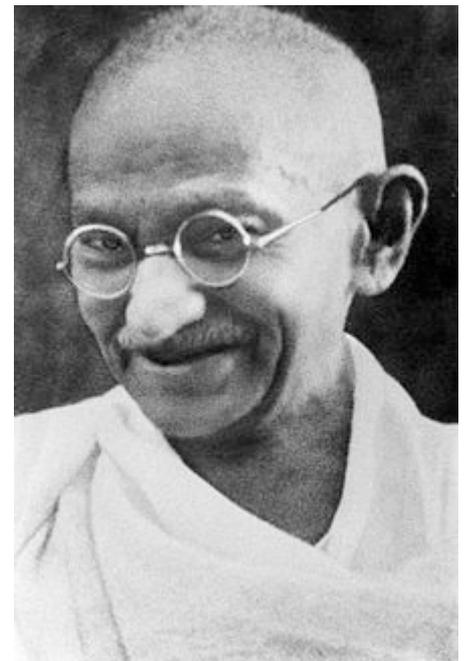
Scholars are divided on the historical influence of Advaita Vedanta. Some Indologists state that it is one of the most studied Hindu philosophy and the most influential schools of classical Indian thought.<sup>[380][21][381]</sup> Advaita Vedanta, states Eliot Deutsch, "has been and continues to be the most widely accepted system of thought among philosophers in India, and it is, we believe, one of the greatest philosophical achievements to be found in the East or the West".<sup>[382]</sup>

## Smarta Tradition

The Smarta tradition of Hinduism is an ancient tradition,<sup>[note 30]</sup> particularly found in south and west India, that reveres all Hindu divinities as a step in their spiritual pursuit.<sup>[384][385][386]</sup> Their worship practice is called *Panchayatana puja*.<sup>[387][384]</sup> The worship symbolically consists of five deities: Shiva, Vishnu, Devi or Durga, Surya and an Ishta Devata or any personal god of devotee's preference.<sup>[385][388]</sup>

In the Smarta tradition, Advaita Vedanta ideas combined with bhakti are its foundation. Adi Shankara is regarded as the greatest teacher<sup>[386]</sup> and reformer of the Smarta.<sup>[389]</sup> According to Alf Hiltebeitel, Shankara's Advaita Vedanta and practices became the doctrinal unifier of previously conflicting practices with the *smarta* tradition.<sup>[note 31]</sup>

Philosophically the Smarta tradition emphasizes that all images and statues (murti), or just five marks or any anicons on the ground, are visibly convenient icons of spirituality *saguna Brahman*.<sup>[391][387]</sup> The multiple icons are seen as multiple representations of the same idea, rather than as distinct beings. These serve as a step and means to realizing the abstract Ultimate Reality called *nirguna* Brahman. The ultimate goal in this practice is to transition past the use of icons, then follow a philosophical and meditative path to understanding the oneness of Atman (soul, self) and Brahman – as "That art Thou".<sup>[391][392]</sup>



Mahatma Gandhi stated "I am an advaitist".<sup>[378][379]</sup>

## Other Hindu traditions

Within the ancient and medieval texts of Hindu traditions, such as Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism, the ideas of Advaita Vedanta have had a major influence. Advaita Vedanta influenced Krishna Vaishnavism in the different parts of India.<sup>[393]</sup> One of its most popular text, the Bhagavata Purana, adopts and integrates in Advaita Vedanta philosophy.<sup>[394][395][396]</sup> The Bhagavata Purana is generally accepted by scholars to have been composed in the second half of 1st millennium CE.<sup>[397][398]</sup>

In the ancient and medieval literature of Shaivism, called the Āgamas, the influence of Advaita Vedanta is once again prominent.<sup>[399][400][401]</sup> Of the 92 Āgamas, ten are Dvaita texts, eighteen are Bhedabheda, and sixty-four are Advaita texts.<sup>[402][403]</sup> According to Natalia Isaeva, there is an evident and natural link between 6th-century Gaudapada's Advaita Vedanta ideas and Kashmir Shaivism.<sup>[404]</sup>

Shaktism, the Hindu tradition where a goddess is considered identical to Brahman, has similarly flowered from a syncretism of the monist premises of Advaita Vedanta and dualism premises of Samkhya–Yoga school of Hindu philosophy, sometimes referred to as Shaktadvaitavada (literally, the path of nondualistic Shakti).<sup>[405][406][407]</sup>

Other influential ancient and medieval classical texts of Hinduism such as the Yoga Yajnavalkya, Yoga Vashishta, Avadhuta Gita, Markandeya Purana and Sannyasa Upanishads predominantly incorporate premises and ideas of Advaita Vedanta.<sup>[408][409][410]</sup>

## Development of central position

Already in medieval times, Advaita Vedanta came to be regarded as the highest of the Indian religious philosophies,<sup>[411]</sup> a development which was reinforced in modern times due to western interest in Advaita Vedanta, and the subsequent influence on western perceptions on Indian perceptions of Hinduism.<sup>[33]</sup>

In contrast, King states that its present position was a response of Hindu intellectuals to centuries of Christian polemic aimed at establishing "Hindu inferiority complex" during the colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent.<sup>[412]</sup> The "humanistic, inclusivist" formulation, now called Neo-Vedanta, attempted to respond to this colonial stereotyping of "Indian culture was backward, superstitious and inferior to the West", states King. Advaita Vedanta was projected as the central philosophy of Hinduism, and Neo-Vedanta subsumed and incorporated Buddhist ideas thereby making the Buddha a part of the Vedanta tradition, all in an attempt to reposition the history of Indian culture. Thus, states King, neo-Vedanta developed as a reaction to western Orientalism and Perennialism.<sup>[413]</sup> With the efforts of Vivekananda, modern formulation of Advaita Vedanta has "become a dominant force in Indian intellectual thought", though Hindu beliefs and practices are diverse.<sup>[414]</sup>

## Unifying Hinduism

Advaita Vedanta came to occupy a central position in the classification of various Hindu traditions. To some scholars, it is with the arrival of Islamic rule, first in the form of Delhi Sultanate thereafter the Mughal Empire, and the subsequent persecution of Indian religions, Hindu scholars began a self-conscious attempts to define an identity and unity.<sup>[415][416]</sup> Between the twelfth and the fourteen century, according to Andrew Nicholson, this effort emerged with a classification of astika and nastika systems of Indian philosophies.<sup>[415]</sup> Certain thinkers, according to Nicholson thesis, began to retrospectively classify ancient thought into "six systems" (saddarsana) of mainstream Hindu philosophy.<sup>[417]</sup>

Other scholars, acknowledges Nicholson, present an alternate thesis. The scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, texts such as Dharmasutras and Puranas, and various ideas that are considered to be paradigmatic Hinduism are traceable to being thousands of years old. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism as a religion does not have a single founder, rather it is a fusion of diverse scholarship where a galaxy of thinkers openly challenged each other's teachings and offered their own ideas.<sup>[417]</sup> The term "Hindu" too, states Arvind Sharma, appears in much older texts such as those in Arabic that record the Islamic invasion or regional rule of Indian subcontinent. Some of these texts have been dated to between the 8th and the 11th century.<sup>[418]</sup> Within these doxologies and records, Advaita Vedanta was given the highest position, since it was regarded to be most inclusive system.<sup>[419]</sup>

## Hindu nationalism

According to King, along with the consolidation of the British imperialist rule came orientalism wherein the new rulers viewed Indians through "colonially crafted lenses". In response, emerged Hindu nationalism for collective action against the colonial rule, against the caricature by Christian and Muslim communities, and for socio-political independence.<sup>[420]</sup> In this colonial era search of identity, Vedanta came to be regarded as the essence of Hinduism, and Advaita Vedanta came to be regarded as "then paradigmatic example of the mystical nature of the Hindu religion" and umbrella of "inclusivism".<sup>[421]</sup> This umbrella of Advaita Vedanta, according to King, "provided an opportunity for the construction of a nationalist ideology that could unite Hindus in their struggle against colonial oppression".<sup>[422]</sup>

Among the colonial era intelligentsia, according to Anshuman Mondal, a professor of Literature specializing in post-colonial studies, the monistic Advaita Vedanta has been a major ideological force for Hindu nationalism. Mahatma Gandhi professed monism of Advaita Vedanta, though at times he also spoke with terms from mind-body dualism schools of Hinduism.<sup>[423]</sup> Other colonial era Indian thinkers, such as Vivekananda, presented Advaita Vedanta as an inclusive universal religion, a spirituality that in part helped organize a religiously infused identity, and the rise of Hindu nationalism as a counter weight to Islam-infused Muslim communitarian organizations such as the Muslim League, to Christianity-infused colonial orientalism and to religious persecution of those belonging to Indian religions.<sup>[424][416][425]</sup>

### Swami Vivekananda

A major proponent in the popularisation of this Universalist and Perennialist interpretation of Advaita Vedanta was Vivekananda,<sup>[426]</sup> who played a major role in the revival of Hinduism<sup>[427]</sup> and the spread of Advaita Vedanta to the west via the Ramakrishna Mission. His interpretation of Advaita Vedanta has been called "Neo-Vedanta". Vivekananda discerned a universal religion, regarding all the apparent differences between various traditions as various manifestations of one truth.<sup>[428]</sup> He presented karma, bhakti, jnana and raja yoga as equal means to attain moksha,<sup>[429]</sup> to present Vedanta as a liberal and universal religion, in contrast to the exclusivism of other religions.<sup>[429]</sup>

Vivekananda emphasised *nirvikalpa samadhi* as the spiritual goal of Vedanta, he equated it to the liberation in Yoga and encouraged Yoga practice he called *Raja yoga*.<sup>[430]</sup> This approach, however, is missing in historic Advaita texts.<sup>[431]</sup> In 1896, Vivekananda claimed that Advaita appeals to modern scientists:

I may make bold to say that the only religion which agrees with, and even goes a little further than modern researchers, both on physical and moral lines is the Advaita, and that is why it appeals to modern scientists so much. They find that the old dualistic theories are not enough for them, do not satisfy their necessities. A man must have not only faith, but intellectual faith too.<sup>[web 17]</sup>

According to Rambachan, Vivekananda interprets *anubhava* as to mean "personal experience", akin to religious experience, whereas Shankara used the term to denote liberating understanding of the *śruti*.<sup>[122][432][433]</sup>

Vivekananda's claims about spirituality as "science" and modern, according to David Miller, may be questioned by well informed scientists, but it drew attention for being very different than how Christianity and Islam were being viewed by scientists and sociologists of his era.<sup>[434]</sup>

### Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, first a professor at Oxford University and later a President of India, further popularized Advaita Vedanta, presenting it as the essence of Hinduism.<sup>[web 18]</sup> According to Michael Hawley, a professor of Religious Studies, Radhakrishnan saw other religions, as well as "what Radhakrishnan understands as lower forms of Hinduism," as interpretations of Advaita Vedanta, thereby "in a sense Hinduizing all religions".<sup>[web 18]</sup> To him, the world faces a religious problem, where there is unreflective dogmatism and exclusivism, creating a need for "experiential religion" and "inclusivism". Advaita Vedanta, claimed Radhakrishnan, best exemplifies a Hindu philosophical, theological, and literary tradition that fulfills this need.<sup>[web 18][435][436]</sup> Radhakrishnan did

not emphasize the differences between Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism versus Hinduism that he defined in terms of Advaita Vedanta, rather he tended to minimize their differences. This is apparent, for example, in his discussions of Buddhist "Madhyamika and Yogacara" traditions versus the Advaita Vedanta tradition.<sup>[436]</sup>

Radhakrishnan metaphysics was grounded in Advaita Vedanta, but he reinterpreted Advaita Vedanta for contemporary needs and context.<sup>[web 18]</sup> He acknowledged the reality and diversity of the world of experience, which he saw as grounded in and supported by the transcendent metaphysical absolute concept (*nirguna* Brahman).<sup>[web 18][note 32]</sup> Radhakrishnan also reinterpreted Shankara's notion of *maya*. According to Radhakrishnan, *maya* is not a strict absolute idealism, but "a subjective misperception of the world as ultimately real."<sup>[web 18][438]</sup>

## Mahatama Gandhi

Gandhi declared his allegiance to Advaita Vedanta, and was another popularizing force for its ideas.<sup>[439]</sup> According to Nicholas Gier this to Gandhi meant the unity of God and humans, that all beings have the same one soul and therefore equality, that *atman* exists and is same as everything in the universe, ahimsa (non-violence) is the very nature of this *atman*.<sup>[439]</sup> Gandhi called himself advaitist many times, including his letters, but he believed that others have a right to a viewpoint different than his own because they come from a different background and perspective.<sup>[378][379]</sup> According to Gier, Gandhi did not interpret *maya* as illusion, but accepted that "personal theism" leading to "impersonal monism" as two tiers of religiosity.<sup>[439]</sup>

## New religious movements

### Neo-Advaita

*Neo-Advaita* is a New Religious Movement based on a popularised, western interpretation of Advaita Vedanta and the teachings of Ramana Maharshi.<sup>[440]</sup> Neo-Advaita is being criticised<sup>[441][note 33][443][note 34][note 35]</sup> for discarding the traditional prerequisites of knowledge of the scriptures<sup>[445]</sup> and "renunciation as necessary preparation for the path of *jnana-yoga*".<sup>[445][446]</sup> Notable neo-advaita teachers are H. W. L. Poonja,<sup>[447][440]</sup> his students Gangaji,<sup>[448]</sup> Andrew Cohen<sup>[note 36]</sup>, and Eckhart Tolle.<sup>[440]</sup>

### Non-dualism

Advaita Vedanta has gained attention in western spirituality and New Age, where various traditions are seen as driven by the same non-dual experience.<sup>[450]</sup> Nonduality points to "a primordial, natural awareness without subject or object".<sup>[web 23]</sup> It is also used to refer to interconnectedness "the sense that all things are interconnected and not separate, while at the same time all things retain their individuality".<sup>[web 24]</sup>

## Relationship with Buddhism

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Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism share similarities and have differences,<sup>[451][452]</sup> their relationship a subject of dispute among scholars.<sup>[453]</sup> The similarities between Advaita and Buddhism have attracted Indian and Western scholars attention,<sup>[454]</sup> and have also been criticised by concurring schools. The similarities have been interpreted as Buddhist influences on Advaita Vedanta, while others deny such influences, or see them as variant expressions.<sup>[455]</sup> According to Daniel Ingalls, the Japanese Buddhist scholarship has argued that Adi Shankara did not understand Buddhism.<sup>[453]</sup>

Some Hindu scholars criticized Advaita for its *Maya* and non-theistic doctrinal similarities with Buddhism.<sup>[456][457]</sup> Ramanuja, the founder of Vishishtadvaita Vedanta, accused Adi Shankara of being a *Prachanna Bauddha*, that is, a "crypto-Buddhist",<sup>[454]</sup> and someone who was undermining theistic Bhakti devotionalism.<sup>[457]</sup> The non-Advaita scholar Bhaskara of the Bhedabhedha Vedanta tradition, similarly around 800 CE, accused Shankara's Advaita as "this despicable broken down Mayavada that has been chanted by the Mahayana Buddhists", and a school that is undermining the ritual duties set in Vedic orthodoxy.<sup>[457]</sup>

A few Buddhist scholars made the opposite criticism in the medieval era toward their Buddhist opponents. In the sixth century CE, for example, the Mahayana Buddhist scholar Bhaviveka redefined Vedantic concepts to show how they fit into Madhyamaka concepts,<sup>[458]</sup> and "equate[d] the Buddha's Dharma body with Brahman, the ultimate reality of the Upanishads."<sup>[459]</sup> In his *Madhyamakahrdayakārikāḥ*, Bhaviveka stages a Hinayana (Theravada) interlocutor, who accuses Mahayana Buddhists of being "crypto-Vedantins".<sup>[460][461][note 37]</sup> Medieval era Tibetan Gelugpa scholars accused the Jonang school of being "crypto-Vedantist".<sup>[462][463][note 38]</sup> Contemporary scholar David Kalupahana called the seventh century Buddhist scholar Chandrakirti a "crypto-Vedantist", a view rejected by scholars of Madhyamika Buddhism.<sup>[464]</sup>

The Advaita Vedanta tradition has historically rejected accusations of crypto-Buddhism highlighting their respective views on *Atman*, *Anatta* and *Brahman*.<sup>[452]</sup>

## Similarities with Buddhism

According to scholars, the influence of Mahayana Buddhism on Advaita Vedanta has been significant.<sup>[457][465]</sup> Advaita Vedanta and various other schools of Hindu philosophy share numerous terminology, doctrines and dialectical techniques with Buddhism.<sup>[466][467]</sup> According to a 1918 paper by the Buddhism scholar O. Rozenberg, "a precise differentiation between Brahmanism and Buddhism is impossible to draw"<sup>[466]</sup>

Both traditions hold that "the empirical world is transitory, a show of appearances",<sup>[468][469]</sup> and both admit "degrees of truth or existence".<sup>[470]</sup> Both traditions emphasize the human need for spiritual liberation (moksha, nirvana, kaivalya), however with different assumptions.<sup>[471][note 39]</sup> Adi Shankara, states Natalia Isaeva, incorporated "into his own system a Buddhist notion of maya which had not been minutely elaborated in the Upanishads".<sup>[466]</sup> Similarly, there are many points of contact between Buddhism's Vijnanavada and Shankara's Advaita.<sup>[473]</sup>

According to Frank Whaling, the similarities between Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism are not limited to the terminology and some doctrines, but also includes practice. The monastic practices and monk tradition in Advaita are similar to those found in Buddhism.<sup>[457]</sup>

Dasgupta and Mohanta suggest that Buddhism and Shankara's Advaita Vedanta represent "different phases of development of the same non-dualistic metaphysics from the Upanishadic period to the time of Sankara."<sup>[474][note 40]</sup> The influence of Mahayana Buddhism on other religions and philosophies was not limited to Vedanta. Kalupahana notes that the Visuddhimagga of Theravada Buddhism tradition contains "some metaphysical speculations, such as those of the Sarvastivadins, the Sautrantikas, and even the Yogacarins".<sup>[477]</sup> According to John Plott,

We must emphasize again that generally throughout the Gupta Dynasty, and even more so after its decline, there developed such a high degree of syncretism and such toleration of all points of view that Mahayana Buddhism had been Hinduized almost as much as Hinduism had been Buddhaized.<sup>[478]</sup>

## Gaudapada

The influence of Buddhist doctrines on Gaudapada has been a vexed question.<sup>[479][480]</sup>

One school of scholars, such as Bhattacharya and Raju, state that Gaudapada took over the Buddhist doctrines that ultimate reality is pure consciousness (vijñapti-mātra)<sup>[481][note 41]</sup> and "that the nature of the world is the four-cornered negation, which is the structure of Māyā".<sup>[481][484]</sup>

Of particular interest is Chapter Four of Gaudapada's text *Karika*, in which according to Bhattacharya, two karikas refer to the Buddha and the term *Asparsayoga* is borrowed from Buddhism.<sup>[479]</sup> According to Murti, "the conclusion is irresistible that Gaudapada, a Vedanta philosopher, is attempting an Advaitic interpretation of Vedanta in the light of the Madhyamika and Yogacara doctrines. He even freely quotes and appeals to them."<sup>[295]</sup> However, adds Murti, the doctrines are unlike Buddhism. Chapter One, Two and Three are entirely Vedantin and founded on the Upanishads, with little Buddhist flavor.<sup>[295]</sup> Further, state both Murti and

King, no Vedanta scholars who followed Gaudapada ever quoted from Chapter Four; they only quote from the first three.<sup>[295][296]</sup> According to Sarma, "to mistake him [Gaudapada] to be a hidden or open Buddhist is absurd".<sup>[485]</sup> The doctrines of Gaudapada and Buddhism are totally opposed, states Murti.<sup>[295]</sup>

We have been talking of borrowing, influence and relationship in rather general terms. It is necessary to define the possible nature of the borrowing, granting that it did take place. (...) The Vedantins stake everything on the Atman (Brahman) and accept the authority of the Upanishads. We have pointed out at length the Nairatmya standpoint of Buddhism and its total opposition to the Atman (soul, substance, the permanent and universal) in any form.

— TRV Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*<sup>[486]</sup>

Advaitins have traditionally challenged the Buddhist influence thesis.<sup>[479]</sup> Modern scholarship generally accepts that Gaudapada was influenced by Buddhism, at least in terms of using Buddhist terminology to explain his ideas, but adds that Gaudapada was a Vedantin and not a Buddhist.<sup>[479]</sup> Gaudapada adopted some Buddhist terminology and borrowed its doctrines to his Vedantic goals, much like early Buddhism adopted Upanishadic terminology and borrowed its doctrines to Buddhist goals; both used pre-existing concepts and ideas to convey new meanings.<sup>[478][451]</sup> While there is shared terminology, the Advaita doctrines of Gaudapada and Buddhism are fundamentally different.<sup>[295][487]</sup>

## Differences from Buddhism

### Atman and anatta

Advaita Vedanta holds the premise, "Soul exists, and Soul (or self, Atman) is a self evident truth". Buddhism, in contrast, holds the premise, "Atman does not exist, and An-atman (or Anatta, non-self)<sup>[488]</sup> is self evident"<sup>[47][489]</sup>

In Buddhism, Anatta (Pali, Sanskrit cognate An-atman) is the concept that in human beings and living creatures, there is no "eternal, essential and absolute something called a soul, self or atman".<sup>[48]</sup> Buddhist philosophy rejects the concept and all doctrines associated with atman, call atman as illusion (*maya*), asserting instead the theory of "no-self" and "no-soul".<sup>[47][490]</sup> Most schools of Buddhism, from its earliest days, have denied the existence of the "self, soul" in its core philosophical and ontological texts. In contrast to Advaita, which describes knowing one's own soul as identical with Brahman as the path to *nirvana*, in its soteriological themes Buddhism has defined nirvana as that blissful state when a person realizes that he or she has "no self, no soul".<sup>[48][491]</sup>

Some Buddhist texts chronologically placed in the 1st millennium of common era, such as the Mahayana tradition's *Tathāgatagarbha sūtras* suggest self-like concepts, variously called *Tathagatagarbha* or Buddha nature.<sup>[492][493]</sup> These have been controversial idea in Buddhism, and "eternal self" concepts have been generally rejected. In modern era studies, scholars such as Wayman and Wayman state that these "self-like" concepts are neither self nor sentient being, nor soul, nor personality.<sup>[494][495]</sup> Some scholars posit that the *Tathagatagarbha Sūtras* were written to promote Buddhism to non-Buddhists.<sup>[496][497][498]</sup>

### Epistemology

The epistemological foundations of Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta are different. Buddhism accepts two valid means to reliable and correct knowledge – perception and inference, while Advaita Vedanta accepts six (described elsewhere in this article).<sup>[209][226][499]</sup> However, some Buddhists in history, have argued that Buddhist scriptures are a reliable source of spiritual knowledge, corresponding to Advaita's Śabda pramana, however Buddhists have treated their scriptures as a form of inference method.<sup>[500]</sup>

### Ontology

Advaita Vedanta posits a substance ontology, an ontology which holds that underlying the change and impermanence of empirical reality is an unchanging and permanent absolute reality, like an eternal substance it calls Atman-Brahman.<sup>[501]</sup> In its substance ontology, as like other philosophies, there exist a universal, particulars and specific properties and it is the interaction of particulars that create events and processes.<sup>[502]</sup>

In contrast, Buddhism posits a process ontology, also called as "event ontology".<sup>[503][502]</sup> According to the Buddhist thought, particularly after the rise of ancient Mahayana Buddhism scholarship, there is neither empirical nor absolute permanent reality and ontology can be explained as a process.<sup>[503][504][note 42]</sup> There is a system of relations and interdependent phenomena (*pratitya samutpada*) in Buddhist ontology, but no stable persistent identities, no eternal universals nor particulars. Thought and memories are mental constructions and fluid processes without a real observer, personal agency or cognizer in Buddhism. In contrast, in Advaita Vedanta, like other schools of Hinduism, the concept of self (atman) is the real on-looker, personal agent and cognizer.<sup>[506]</sup>

The Pali Abhidhamma and Theravada Buddhism considered all existence as *dhamma*, and left the ontological questions about reality and the nature of *dhamma* unexplained.<sup>[503]</sup>

According to Renard, Advaita's theory of three levels of reality is built on the two levels of reality found in the Madhyamika.<sup>[507]</sup>

## Shankara on Buddhism

A central concern for Shankara, in his objections against Buddhism, is what he perceives as nihilism of the Buddhists.<sup>[508]</sup> Shankara states that there "must be something beyond cognition, namely a cognizer,"<sup>[509]</sup> which he asserts is the self-evident *Atman* or witness.<sup>[510]</sup> Buddhism, according to Shankara, denies the cognizer. He also considers the notion of Brahman as pure knowledge and "the quintessence of positive reality"<sup>[508]</sup>

The teachings in Brahma Sutras, states Shankara, differ from both the Buddhist realists and the Buddhist idealists. Shankara elaborates on these arguments against various schools of Buddhism, partly presenting refutations which were already standard in his time, and partly offering his own objections.<sup>[511]</sup> Shankara's original contribution in explaining the difference between Advaita and Buddhism was his "argument for identity" and the "argument for the witness".<sup>[512]</sup> In Shankara's view, the Buddhist are internally inconsistent in their theories, because "the reservoir-consciousness that [they] set up, being momentary, is no better than ordinary consciousness. Or, if [they] allow the reservoir-consciousness to be lasting, [they] destroy [their] theory of momentariness."<sup>[513]</sup> In response to the idealists, he notes that their *alaya-vijnana*, or store-house consciousness, runs counter to the Buddhist theory of momentariness.<sup>[508]</sup> With regard to the *Sunyavada* (*Madhyamaka*), Shankara states that "being contradictory to all valid means of knowledge, we have not thought worth while to refute" and "common sense (*loka-vyavahara*) cannot be denied without the discovery of some other truth".<sup>[514]</sup>

## Reception

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Advaita Vedanta is most often regarded as an idealist monism.<sup>[23][25]</sup> According to King, Advaita Vedanta developed "to its ultimate extreme" the monistic ideas already present in the Upanishads.<sup>[515]</sup> In contrast, states Milne, it is misleading to call Advaita Vedanta "monistic," since this confuses the "negation of difference" with "conflation into one."<sup>[516]</sup> *Advaita* is a negative term (a-dvaita), states Milne, which denotes the "negation of a difference," between subject and object, or between perceiver and perceived.<sup>[516]</sup>

According to Deutsch, Advaita Vedanta teaches monistic oneness, however without the multiplicity premise of alternate monism theories.<sup>[517]</sup> According to Jacqueline Hirst, Adi Shankara positively emphasizes "oneness" premise in his Brahma-sutra Bhasya 2.1.20, attributing it to all the Upanishads.<sup>[518]</sup>

Nicholson states Advaita Vedanta contains realistic strands of thought, both in its oldest origins and in Shankara's writings.<sup>[32]</sup>

## See also

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- Cause and effect in Advaita Vedanta
- Kashmir Shaivism
- Pandeism
- Pantheism

## Notes

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1. pg. 941 "...*Puruṣavāda* appears a preferred terminology in the early periods, before the time of Sankara."
2. Literally: *end or the goal of the Vedas*.
3. For an alternate English translation: Robert Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (<https://archive.org/stream/thirteenprincipa028442mbp#page/n159/mode/2up>) BU 4.3.32, Oxford University Press, page 138.
4. It is not a philosophy in the western meaning of the word, according to Milne.<sup>[42]</sup>
5. Bill Clinton: "The buck stops here."
6. Brahman is also defined as:
  - The unchanging, infinite, immanent, and transcendent reality which is all matter, energy, time, space, being, and everything beyond in this Universe; that is the one supreme, universal spirit without a second.<sup>[87][88]</sup>
  - The one supreme, all pervading Spirit that is the origin and support of the phenomenal universe.<sup>[89]</sup>
  - The supreme self. Puligandla states it as "the unchanging reality amidst and beyond the world",<sup>[90]</sup>
  - The Self-existent, the Absolute and the Imperishable. Brahman is indescribable.<sup>[91]</sup>
  - The "principle of the world",<sup>[92]</sup> the "absolute",<sup>[93]</sup> the "general, universal",<sup>[94]</sup> the "cosmic principle",<sup>[95]</sup> the "ultimate that is the cause of everything including all gods",<sup>[96]</sup> the "knowledge",<sup>[97]</sup> the "soul, sense of self of each human being that is fearless, luminous, exalted and blissful",<sup>[98]</sup> the "essence of liberation, of spiritual freedom",<sup>[99]</sup> the "universe within each living being and the universe outside",<sup>[98]</sup> the "essence and everything innate in all that exists inside, outside and everywhere".<sup>[100]</sup>
7. It provides the "stuff" from which everything is made
8. It sets everything into working, into existence
9. *Svarupalakṣhaṇa* qualities, definition based on essence
10. Indian philosophy emphasises that "every acceptable philosophy should aid man in realising the Purusarthas, the chief aims of human life".<sup>[112]</sup>
  - **Dharma**: the right way to life, the "duties and obligations of the individual toward himself and the society as well as those of the society toward the individual".<sup>[113]</sup>
  - **Artha**: the means to support and sustain one's life;
  - **Kāma**: pleasure and enjoyment;
  - **Mokṣa**: liberation, release.
11. The true Self is itself just that pure consciousness, without which nothing can be known in any way. And that same true Self, pure consciousness, is not different from the ultimate world Principle, Brahman (...). Brahman (=the true Self, pure consciousness) is the only Reality (*sat*), since It is untinged by difference, the mark of ignorance, and since It is the one thing that is not sublatable.<sup>[82]</sup>
12. "Consciousness",<sup>[136][web 2]</sup> "intelligence",<sup>[137][138]</sup> "wisdom"
13. "the Absolute",<sup>[136][web 2]</sup> "infinite",<sup>[web 2]</sup> "the Highest truth"<sup>[web 2]</sup>
14. Puligandla: "Any philosophy worthy of its title should not be a mere intellectual exercise but should have practical application in enabling man to live an enlightened life. A philosophy which makes no difference to the quality and style of our life is no philosophy but an empty intellectual construction."<sup>[139]</sup>
15. These characteristics and steps are described in various Advaita texts, such as by Shankara in Chapter 1.1 of *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*<sup>[146]</sup> and in the Bhagavad Gita Chapter 10
16. Example self-restraints mentioned in Hindu texts: one must refrain from any violence that causes injury to others, refrain from starting or propagating deceit and falsehood, refrain from theft of other's property, refrain from sexually cheating on one's partner and refrain from avarice.<sup>[148][149][150]</sup>
17. According to Hugh Nicholson, "the definitive study on the development of the concept of *vivarta* in Indian philosophy and in Advaita Vedānta in particular, remains Hacker's *Vivarta*".<sup>[190]</sup> To Shankara, the word *māyā* has hardly any terminological weight.<sup>[191]</sup>
18. and other sub-schools of Vedānta with the concept of *Māyā*.<sup>[194]</sup>
19. Many in number, the *Upanishads* developed in different schools at various times and places, some in the Vedic period and others in the medieval or modern era (the names of up to 112 *panishads* have been recorded).<sup>[245]</sup> All major commentators have considered the twelve to thirteen oldest of these texts as the principal *panishads* and as the foundation of Vedānta.

20. The Śruti includes the four Vēdas including its four layers of embedded texts – the *Samhitas*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas*, and the early *Upanishads*.<sup>[246]</sup>
21. Nevertheless, Balasubramanian argues that since the basic ideas of the Vedānta systems are derived from the Vedas, the Vedantic philosophy is as old as the Vedas.<sup>[276]</sup>
22. Deutsch and Dalvi point out that, in the Indian context, texts "are only part of a tradition which is preserved in its purest form in the oral transmission as it has been going on"<sup>[278]</sup>
23. Bhartṛhari (c.450–500), Upavarsa (c.450–500), Bodhāyana (c.500), āṅka (Brahmānandin) (c.500–550), Dravida (c.550), Bhartṛprapañca (c.550), Śabarasvāmin (c.550), Bhartṛmitra (c.550–600), Śrīvatsānka (c.600), Sundarapāndya (c.600), Brahmadata (c.600–700), Gaudapada (c.640–690), Govinda (c.670–720), Mandanamiśra (c.670–750).<sup>[267]</sup>
24. Nakamura notes that there are contradictions in doctrine between the four chapters.<sup>[290]</sup> According to Murti, the conclusion from *Mandukya Karika* is irresistible that Gaudapada is attempting an advaitic interpretation of Vedānta school of Hinduism in the light of the Madhyamika and Yogācāra doctrines of Buddhism.<sup>[295]</sup> However, adds Murti, the doctrines are unlike Buddhism. The first three chapters of the *Karika* are founded on the Upanishads, with little Buddhist flavor.<sup>[295]</sup> Chapter Four is unlike the first three, and shows Buddhist terms and influence.<sup>[296]</sup> Further, according to Murti, and Richard King, no Vedānta scholars who followed Gaudapada ever quoted from Chapter Four of *Karika*, they only quote from the first three.<sup>[295][296]</sup>
25. **Sanskrit** श्री संस्थान गौडपदाचार्य मठ, Śrī Sansthāna Gauḍapadācārya Maṭha
26. According to both Roodurum and Isaeva, Sureśvara stated that mere knowledge of the identity of Jiva and Brahman is not enough for liberation, which requires prolonged meditation on this identity.<sup>[337][347]</sup>
27. **Sanskrit** श्री संस्थान गौडपदाचार्य मठ, Śrī Sansthāna Gauḍapadācārya Maṭha
28. According to Pandey these Mathas were not established by Shankara himself, but were originally ashrams established by **Vibhāṅdaka** and his son **Rṣyaśṅga**.<sup>[361]</sup> Shankara inherited the ashrams at Dvārakā and Sringeri, and shifted the ashram at Śṅgaverapura to Badarikāśrama, and the ashram at Angadeśa to Jagannātha Pu.<sup>[362]</sup>
29. Sanskrit.org: "Advaitins are non-sectarian, and they advocate worship of Siva and Śhnu equally with that of the other deities of Hinduism, like Sakti, Ganapati and others."<sup>[web 13]</sup>
30. Archeological evidence suggest that the Smarta tradition in India dates back to at least 3rd-century CE.<sup>[383][384]</sup>
31. 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 of *karman*, but had developed the practice of *pancayatana puja* ("five-shrine worship") as a solution to varied and conflicting devotional practices. Thus one could worship any one of five deities (Śhnu, Siva, Durga, Surya, Ganesa) as one's *stadevata* ("deity of choice").<sup>[390]</sup>
32. Neo-Vedānta seems to be closer to **Bhedabheda-Vedānta** than to Shankara's Advaita Vedānta, with the acknowledgement of the reality of the world. Nicholas F. Gier: "Ramakṛṣṇa, Svami Vivekananda, and Aurobindo (I also include M.K. Gandhi) have been labeled "neo-Vedantists," a philosophy that rejects the Advaitins' claim that the world is illusory. Aurobindo, in his *The Life Divine*, declares that he has moved from Sankara's "universal illusionism" to his own "universal realism" (2005: 432), defined as metaphysical realism in the European philosophical sense of the term."<sup>[437]</sup>
33. Marek: "Wobei der Begriff Neo-Advaita darauf hinweist, dass sich die traditionelle Advaita von dieser Strömung zunehmend distanziert, da sie die Bedeutung der übenden Vorbereitung nach wie vor als unumgänglich ansieht. (The term Neo-Advaita indicating that the traditional Advaita increasingly distances itself from this movement, as they regard preparational practicing still as inevitable)<sup>[442]</sup>
34. Alan Jacobs: Many firm devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi now rightly term this western phenomenon as 'Neo-Advaita'. The term is carefully selected because 'neo' means 'a new or revived form'. And this new form is not the Classical Advaita which we understand to have been taught by both of the Great Self Realised Sages, Adi Shankara and Ramana Maharshi. It can even be termed 'pseudo' because, by presenting the teaching in a highly attenuated form, it might be described as purporting to be Advaita, but not in fact actually being so, in the fullest sense of the word. In this watering down of the essential truths in a palatable style made acceptable and attractive to the contemporary western mind, their teaching is misleading.<sup>[443]</sup>
35. See for other examples Conway<sup>[web 19]</sup> and Swartz<sup>[444]</sup>
36. Presently Cohen has distanced himself from Poonja, and calls his teachings "Evolutionary Enlightenment".<sup>[449]</sup> *What Is Enlightenment*, the magazine published by Choen's organisation, has been critical of neo-Advaita several times, as early as 2001. See:<sup>[web 20][web 21][web 22]</sup>

37. Nicholson: "a Hīnayāna interlocutor accuses the Mahāyāna Buddhist of being a crypto-Vedāntin, paralleling later Vedāntins who accuse the Advaita Vedānta of crypto-Buddhism."<sup>[460]</sup>
38. The Jonang school was influenced by Yōgachara and taught Shentong Buddhism, which sees the highest Truth as self-existent.<sup>[462][463]</sup>
39. Helmuth von Glasenapp writes: "The Buddhist Nirvana is, therefore, not the primordial ground, the eternal essence, which is at the basis of everything and from which the whole world has arisen (the Brahman of the Upanishads) but the reverse of all that we know something altogether different which must be characterized as a nothing in relation to the world, but which is experienced as highest bliss by those who have attained to it (Ānguttara Nikaya Navakānipata 34). Vedantists and Buddhists have been fully aware of the gulf between their doctrines, a gulf that cannot be bridged over. According to Majjhima Nikaya Sutta 22, a doctrine that proclaims "The same is the world and the self. This I shall be after death; imperishable, permanent, eternal!" (see Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad 4, 4, 13), was styled by the Buddha a perfectly foolish doctrine. On the other side, the Katha Upanishad (2, 1, 14) does not see a way to deliverance in the Buddhist theory of dharmas (impersonal processes): He who supposes a profusion of particulars gets lost like rain water on a mountain slope; the truly wise man, however, must realize that his Atman is at one with the Universal Atman, and that the former, if purified from dross, is being absorbed by the latter "just as clear water poured into clear water becomes one with it, indistinguishably"<sup>[472]</sup>
40. This development did not end with Advaita Vedānta, but continued in Tantrism and various schools of Shaivism. Non-dual Kashmir Shaivism for example, was influenced by and took over doctrines from, several orthodox and heterodox Indian religious and philosophical traditions.<sup>[475]</sup> These include Vedānta, Samkhya, Patanjali Yoga and Nyayas, and various Buddhist schools, including Yōgachara and Madhyamika,<sup>[475]</sup> but also Tantra and the Nath-tradition.<sup>[476]</sup>
41. It is often used interchangeably with the term *citta-mātra*, but they have different meanings. The standard translation of both terms is "consciousness-only" or "mind-only". Several modern researchers object this translation, and the accompanying label of "absolute idealism" or "idealistic monism".<sup>[482]</sup> A better translation for *vijñapti-mātra* is *representation-only*.<sup>[483]</sup>
42. Kalupahana describes how in Buddhism there is also a current which favours substance ontology. Kalupahana sees Madhyamaka and Yogacara as reactions against developments toward substance ontology in Buddhism.<sup>[505]</sup>

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18. Sharma 1995, p. 8-14, 31-34, 44-45, 176-178.
19. Fost 1998, p. 387-405.
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21. Fowler 2002, pp. 240-243.
22. Brannigan 2009, p. 19, Quote: "Advaita Vedānta is the most influential philosophical system in Hindu thought.".
23. Sangeetha Menon (2012). *Advaita Vedānta* (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/adv-veda/>) IEP; **Quote**: "The essential philosophy of Advaita is an idealist monism, and is considered to be presented first in the Upanishads and consolidated in the Brahma Sūtra by this tradition."
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28. Novetzke 2007, pp. 255-272.
29. Goodall 1996, p. xli.
30. Davis 2014, pp. 13, 167 with note 21.
31. Nakamura 1950, p. 691.
32. Nicholson 2010, p. 68.
33. King 2002, p. 119-133.
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44. Klostermaier 2007, p. 26.
45. Isaeva 1993, pp. 34-37, 211.
46. Dalal 2009, p. 16, 26-27.
47. John C. Plott et al. (2000), Global History of Philosophy: The Axial Age, Volume 1, Motilal Banarsidass, ISBN 978-8120801585, page 63, Quote: "The Buddhist schools reject any Ātman concept. As we have already observed, this is the basic and ineradicable distinction between Hinduism and Buddhism".

48. [a] **Anatta** (<http://www.britannica.com/topic/anatta>) Encyclopædia Britannica (2013), **Quote**: "Anatta in Buddhism, the doctrine that there is in humans no permanent, underlying soul. The concept of anatta, or anatman, is a departure from the Hindu belief in atman ("the self").";  
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- [b] Richard King (1995), *Early Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism*, State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-0791425138, page 64, **Quote:** "Atman as the innermost essence or soul of man, and Brahman as the innermost essence and support of the universe. (...) Thus we can see in the Upanishads, a tendency towards a convergence of microcosm and macrocosm, culminating in the equating of atman with Brahman".
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## External links

- [Bibliography of Advaita Vedānta Ancient to 9th-century literature](#)
- [Bibliography of Advaita Vedānta 9th-century to 20th-century literature](#)

- [Advaita Vedanta at Curlie](#) (based on [DMOZ](#))
  - [Vedanta Hub](#) - Resources to help with the Study and Practice of Advaita Vedanta
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