

**Adi Shankaracharya, Madhvacharya and Ramanuja  
Pioneers of Vedantic Thought in Hinduism**

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The highly secular and all-encompassing philosophy of Hinduism is ever-evolving. Adopting religious views of innumerable schools of thought and adapting rapidly to the changing times, it is known to be one of the dynamic systems of philosophy and religions in the world. Hence, Hinduism is not merely a religion or a philosophy - it is veritably a way of life. Its teachings are relevant then, now and forever.

Hinduism discusses all aspects of life and living, giving followers practical and workable tips on living a peaceful, joyful and prosperous life, without putting in too much effort into it all. According to the philosophy, self-realization is the key to understanding the secrets of life and, ultimately, living a life full of peace and joy.

This concept of self-realization; the understanding of reality and decoding the "I" factor, gave rise to three main streams of philosophy, which now make up the entire fabric of Hindu thought as a whole. These three sub-schools of Vedanta or Vedantic thought constitute Advaita, Dvaita and Visishtadvaita. Simply put; the basic difference between the three Vedantas lies in the way they define the concept of reality and nature.

All Vedantic philosophies are based on Prasthaanatrayi, or the three axioms of Vedanta, as follows:

1. The **Upanishads**, known as Upadesha Prasthanana and the Sruti Prasthanana
2. The **Brahma Sutras**, also known as Nyasa Prasthanana or Yukti Prasthanana
3. The **Bhagavad Gita**, also known as Sadhana Prasthanana and the Smriti Prasthanana

All the three Vedantas rely on these Prasthananas. The scriptures deal in detail with the relationship between Brahma (the Ultimate Reality), Atman (the Individual Soul) and Jagat (the World). They also advise the follower on the path to be taken in order to attain moksha (salvation) from Samsara (bondage from this material world). The main difference between these schools of thought arises because the Prasthanatrayi talks about both the Brahman with attributes (Saguna) and the Brahman without attributes (Nirguna).

Three great Hindu saints and seers were primarily responsible for propagating these schools of

Vedanta. They were as follows:

- Adi Shankaracharya for Advaita
- Madhvacharya for Dvaita
- Ramanujacharya for Visishtadvaita

In this post, we bring you the lives and times of the above-mentioned saints, also discussing each of their philosophies.

## **Adi Shankaracharya - Advaita Vedanta**

Adi Shankara was an early 8th century philosopher and theologian, who propagated the Vedanta of Advaita. Shankara was a great seer, who was responsible for unifying and establishing the main tenets of Hinduism.

### **Birth**

One can find several biographies charting out the life of Adi Shankara. Some were written many centuries to a thousand years after Shankara's Samadhi. Available in both Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit languages, they are filled with legends and tales; many, which contradict each other.

Sringeri records mention that Shankara was born in the 14th year of the reign of Vikramaditya. However, it is unclear as to exactly which king this record refers to. Some scholars aver that it was mostly Vikramaditya II. The most popularly accepted date is from the first half of the 18th century. Shankara was born at Kalady, a town located in Angamaly, Kerala. He was born to Namboodiri Brahmin parents.

### **Life**

Shankara's father expired while he was very young. Hence, the boy's Upanayanam (thread ceremony) had to be delayed and was later performed by his mother. Shankara was attracted to the life of a Sannyasa (hermit) from a very young age. His mother, though, disapproved of this inclination of her son.

According to legend, at the age of eight, Shankara and his mother went to River Sivataraka to bathe. When he went into the water, he was caught by a crocodile. He called out to his mother to give him permission to become a Sannyasin. He said the crocodile would end up killing him otherwise. The mother had no choice except to give in. The boy then left home to pursue his education.

Traveling for some time, he reached a Saivite sanctuary, situated along the banks of a river. There, he met a teacher named Govinda Bhagavatpada and became his disciple. Some accounts suggest that the school was located by the Narmada in Omkareshwar. Others narrate that the place was along the Ganges in Kashi as well as Badrinath in the Himalayas. Most

biographies relate that Shankara studied the Vedas, Upanishads and Brahmasutras under his Guru. He also had the opportunity to meet several scholars of the Mimamsa school of Hinduism, such as Kumarila and Prabhakara, as well as several Buddhists.

## Shankara Returns Home

As per some accounts, Adi Shankara was returning from Kashi, when he came to know that his mother had taken seriously ill. He came back home to look after her in her last days. By way of his divine powers, he gave her a vision of Lord Shiva. She, however, became fearful looking at the Lord. Then Shankara prayed to Lord Narayana to grant her moksha. Seeing Vishnu's form, the old lady calmed down, prayed to him and peacefully breathed her last.



Mahavishnu - Poster

Shankara wanted to perform his mother's last rites as he had promised her earlier. However, the locals opposed this, saying that a Sannyasi should not perform last rites. They further refused to offer him firewood for cremating her. Shankara then laid her on the fresh bark of plantain trees that he procured from their own backyard, lighted it and prayed to Lord Agni (God of Fire) to consume her. Agni obliged Shankara and consumed the plantain bark, which is usually non-combustible.

Overwhelmed by the incidents, Adi Shankara instantly composed the Maatru-Panchakam, a set of 5 verses, glorifying the greatness of motherhood. He thus defied all customs, stating that nothing and no one could ever be greater than a mother.

Legends relate that thereafter, Shankara undertook many pilgrimages, took part in public debates and installed several lingas and even founded monastic centers all over India.

## Tours and Travels

Over the next years, Adi Shankara traveled widely within India. It is believed that ten monasteries were founded by him, each following the principles of Advaita Vedanta, which he actively propagated. Out of these, four still continue with this tradition. They include Bharati (Sringeri), Saraswati (Kanchi) and Tirtha and Asramin (Dwaraka). He had a number of disciples,

including Padmapada (also called Sanandana), Sureshwara, Tothaka, Citsukha, Brahmendra and many more. Some of the most prominent disciples authored works on Shankara and Advaita.

Shankaracharya's detailed works in Sanskrit discuss the united nature of the Atman and the Nirguna Brahman. He shunned all types of ritualistic philosophies, also highlighting the key differences between Hinduism and Buddhism. He firmly stated that, in Hinduism, the Atman existed, whereas, in Buddhism, there was no concept of Self or Soul.

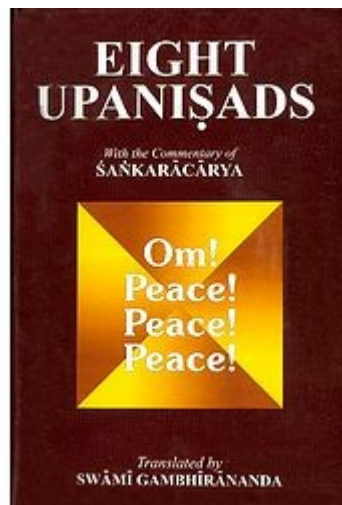
He further talked about the importance of monastic life and tirelessly worked to spread his unique philosophy of Advaita, thus being known as the greatest revivalist. He soon came to be famous as Adi Shankaracharya, Shankara Bhagavadpada and Shankara Bhagavadpadacharya.

## Death

Adi Shankara is believed to have attained Samadhi at the age of 32, at Kedarnath in Uttarakhand, which is an important pilgrimage site for Hindus. According to texts, his students last saw him walking on the mountains of the Himalayas. Suddenly, he disappeared and could not be traced. Some texts relate that he shed his mortal coil in locales such as Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu and somewhere in the state of Kerala.

## Philosophical Works

Shankara is most known for his Bhashyas (systematic reviews and commentaries) on ancient Indian treatises. The Brahmasutrabhashya was his foremost work and went on to become a fundamental text of the Vedanta school of Hinduism. His commentaries on ten Mukhya Upanishads are also considered to be important. Other works include commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita and his Vivarana on the commentary by Vedavyasa on Yogasutras and the Apasthamba-Dharma sutras.



8 Upanishadas - with Commentary of Sankaracharya

Book Set of 2 Volumes

In the Stotra (poetic works) category, Adi Shankara is attributed as the author of Dakshinamurti Stotra, the Bhajagovinda Stotra, the Sivanandalahari, the Carpata-panjarika, the Visnu-satpadi, the Harimide, the Dasa-shloki, and the Krishnashtaka. Shankaracharya also authored Upadesasahasri, which is his most important work. Other than the original Prakaranas, seventy six works were attributed to the Acharya.

Shankara's stotras include hymns dedicated to both Krishna (Vaishnavism) and Shiva (Shaivism). These two are usually considered as two entirely different sects within Hinduism. However, the Advaitic nature of his philosophy tried to propagate a universal, unified view of Vedanta.

## **Advaita Vedanta**

- Adi Shankara systematized the works of his predecessors. His Advaita (non-dualism) philosophy postulates that the Atman is but one with the Brahman. According to him, the Atman is unchanging, while other changing realities are not absolute. Advaita Vedanta is based on shastra (scriptures), yukti (reasoning) and anubhava (experience). Shankaracharya's thinking was that a Jivanmukta (one liberated during the course of his lifetime) would be self-realized and would be aware of Oneness of Self and the Universal Spirit.
- The Acharya averred that, while the practice of Yoga would be helpful, it would not be able to gaining moksha. The follower would have to deeply study the Upanishads and delve into their real meaning. To Shankara, the study of the Upanishads was the necessary and sufficient means to attain moksha. He also stressed on the presence of the Guru to impart the necessary knowledge.
- The world, though not unreal, is illusory once the perception of the highest Brahman is attained. This knowledge can be attained by following the four-fold path of Viveka (discrimination); Vairagya (detachment); Sama, Dama and Shraddha (calmness, self-control and patience) and Mumukshutva (constant yearning to attain liberation).
- Bhakti or Devotion is only one step to attain the grace of God. This would be the first step to understand the non-dualistic nature of the Jeevatma and the Paramatma.

While Shankara's Vedanta is similar to Mahayana Buddhism, the main difference is that Hinduism believes in the existence of Atman - something that is completely absent in the latter.

## **Influence on Hinduism**

Shankara's philosophy and teachings form the basis of Smartism and have influence Sant Mat lineages. He introduced the Panchayatana path of worship - the worship of five deities, namely, Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Shiva and Devi. He explained that all these deities were but forms of the One Eternal Brahman. Though many seers had tried to propagate Advaita earlier, it was only after Adi Shankaracharya that it became the systematized Vedanta that it is today.

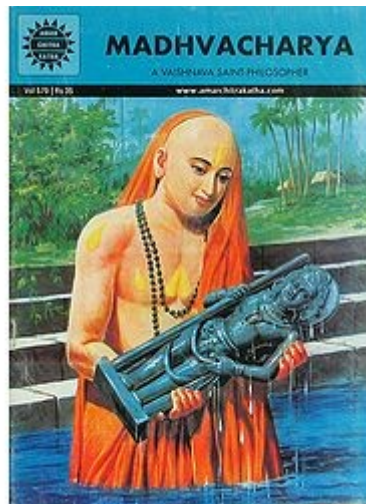
Shankaracharya reformed Smartas and revived the tradition. He not only fought to wipe out

the orthodoxy and the varnasrama dharma theory they had followed till then; but he also encouraged them to follow the practice of panchayatana puja, in order to unify the entire system as a whole.

Adi Shankaracharya's teachings have shaped much of the Hindu psyche and continue to be as relevant even in today's modern world.

## Madhvacharya - Dvaita Vedanta

Madhvacharya, also known as Purnaprajna and Ananda Teertha, was the main proponent of the Dvaita (dualism) school of Vedanta. He referred to his philosophy as Tatvavaada, meaning, "arguments from a realistic point of view".



Madhvacharya

### Birth

Madhva was born in Karnataka, in the 13th century. Right from his young years, he was attracted towards spirituality. He entered Sannyasa when he became a teenager. Joining Brahma-sampradaya guru Achyutapreksha of the Ekadandi order, he studied the Principal Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras (Prasthanatrayi). He then commented on these, also penning thirty-seven works in Sanskrit.

His style of writing was clear and precise, without any ambiguity. The Anuvyakhyana, a supplement to his Bhashya on the Brahma Sutras, is considered to be his greatest ever work. This is composed in poetic form and structure.

Over the years, he toured India several times, visiting Hindu centers of learning and engaging

in philosophical debates. He established the Krishna Mutt at Udupi, installing a murti (idol) that he procured from Dwaraka in Gujarat in 1285 CE.

## **Self-Proclamation as Vayu**

In many of his works, he refers to himself as an avatara of Vayu, the Wind God and the Son of Lord Vishnu. He thus compared himself to Hanuman and Bhima, the strongest of the Pandava Princes in the Mahabharata. In one of his Bhashyas on the Brahma Sutra, he states that his experience comes from an actual encounter he had with Lord Vishnu himself.

## **Life**

As in Shankaracharya's case, the biography of Madhvacharya, too, is unclear. Some sources date him to the period between 1238 and 1317. Some others say he lived around 1199 to 1278.

Madhva was born in Pajaka near Udupi, a coastal district in present-day Karnataka. It is believed that he was the son of Naddantillaya and Vedavati, who were Tulu-speaking Vaishnavite Brahmins. He was named Vasudeva at birth. He was conferred with the name Purnaprajna after his initiation into sannyasa. When he became the head of his monastery, he was given the name Ananda Teertha. The names Madhva and Madhvacharya can be mostly found in Dvaita Vedanta related works or in modern literature on him.

Madhva began his schooling at the age of seven, after his Upanayana (sacred thread ceremony). Though he studied Advaita Vedanta, he was not convinced by the theory of non-dualism and had frequent debates on this issue with his Guru. He then left the monastery and began his own Dvaita movement, based on the principle of dualism. After that, he never referred to Achyutrapreksha as his guru and also never spoke or wrote about his monastic lineage.

Several biographies have been written by Madhva's disciples. Of these, the most popular one is the sixteenth cantos Sanskrit Madhvavijaya, penned by Narayana Panditacharya, son of Trivikrama Pandita.

## **Philosophy**

Madhva was a severe critic of Adi Shankara's Advaita Vedanta (based on non-dualism) and Ramanuja's Vishishtadvaita Vedanta (based on qualified non-dualism). His teachings are based on the premise that there is a fundamental difference between the Atman and the Brahman. According to him, the two are different unchanging realities, which can never be identical. The individual soul, he stated, was dependent on the Brahman. Moksha could be attained only and only by the grace of God. Madhva's Dvaita Vedanta influenced Vaishnavism and the Bhakti movement in medieval India.

## Literary Works

Madhva is credited with the creation of thirty seven Dvaita texts. Of these, thirteen are Bhashyas on the Principal Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, the Bhagavad Gita, a commentary on forty hymns of the Rigveda, a review of the Mahabharata in poetic style and a commentary called Bhagavata-tatparya-nirnaya, on the Bhagavata Purana. Madhvacharya restricted outsiders, who were not from the Dvaita school, from accessing any of his work.

## Dvaita Vedanta

- Madhva's epistemology, which he referred to as Anupramana, accepts three paths to achieve the right type of knowledge. They are as follows:
  - a. **Pratyaksha** - Meaning "perception", it is of two types, namely, external and internal. External perception arises from the interaction with the outer world and the five senses; whereas, internal perception is attained from the inner sense, the mind.
  - b. **Anumana** - This means "inference". It implies reaching a new conclusion and truth from one or multiple observations and previous truths, by applying practicality and reasoning. For example, if one sees smoke, one can infer there is a fire. This Anumana comprises three parts, namely, pratijna (hypothesis), hetu (reason) and drishtanta (examples).
  - c. **Shabda** - Meaning "word", this relies on the testimony of past or present experts. As per the Dvaita tradition, it is also known as Agama and incorporates all the Vedas. According to this principle, a human being needs to know innumerable facts. Using the limited time and energy available to him, he can learn only a fraction of these facts and truths.
- According to Madhva, the kevala-pramana or the "knowledge of an object as it is" is separate from the Anupramana, mentioned above.
- Madhva's Dvaita Vedanta states that Vishnu is the Supreme Lord. He can be attained only through proper samanvaya (connection) and pramana. Vishnu is not the one who created the Vedas, but he is the preceptor of the same. As stated by the Mimamsa school of Hindu philosophy, Madhvacharya too believed that the Vedas are authorless and they hold the ultimate truth in all their parts.
- Knowledge is the key to all, according to this philosophy. Moreover, both the karma-kanda (ritual part) and the jnana-kanda (the knowledge part) in the Vedas are equally important and are also interconnected.
- Madhva talked about the existence of two primary tattvas or categories of reality, namely, svatantra tattva (independent reality) and asvatantra tattva (dependent reality). According to the Acharya, Ishwara (or the Lord) is the cause of the universe and is the only independent reality. The universe thus created is the dependent reality. This consists of Jiva (individual souls) and Jada (material things). Jiva and Jada are all



distinct realities. They are also all different from one another. No two souls and things are alike - each one is unique. All are full and complete in themselves, yet, the completeness is different in each case.

- Madhva further elaborated on the difference between the two tattvas as a panchabheda or five-fold division, which are as follows:
  - a. Between material things
  - b. Between material things and the soul
  - c. Between material things and God
  - d. Between souls
  - e. Between souls and God
- Dvaita Vedanta states that the Brahman always enjoyed His own bliss, while the entire creation was constantly evolving through a process of chaos. The Brahman manifests once in a while, in order to help this process of evolution. He takes the forms of Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Sankarsana - these forms are responsible for redemption, creation, sustenance and destruction, respectively. All manifestations are equal and is made up of the same infinite matter.
- In a major departure from the popular Hindu philosophy of "Tat tvam asi" (Thou art That), Madhva's Dvaita school reinterpreted it, parsing the text as "Atat tvam asi" (Thou art not That). In this way too, he severely denied that the Jivatma and the Paramatma were the same.
- According to Madhva, Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga were insufficient to attain mukthi. The element of Bhakti (devotion) and total surrender alone could help the devotee win the grace of the Lord, thus granting him mukthi.
- Evil and suffering in this world, according to Dvaita Vedanta, originates only in man. Every Jiva has the right to free will, but is ultimately influenced by his sthaya (nature), inclinations and past karma. He has the ability to choose between right and wrong and so, he will take on the responsibility for it.

## **Views on Other Schools**

Madhva severely criticized all other schools of Vedanta, such as Buddhism and Jainism. He came down fiercely on Adi Shankaracharya's Advaita school, accusing them of being "deceitful demons"; teaching Buddhism under the name of Vedanta. He said that Advaita was a version of Mahayana Buddhism, which he considered as nihilistic.

Such a severe critic was he that he wrote four major texts, including Upadhikhandana and Tattvadyota, mainly aiming to undermine Advaita Vedanta. Madhvacharya also strongly disagreed with Ramanuja's Visishtadvaita Vedanta.

## Influence on Hinduism

- Madhvacharya's influence led to the formation of the Haridasa sect of Vaishnavism in Karnataka, which is also referred to as Vyasakuta, Dasakuta or Dasa Dasapantha. They made a great contribution to the Bhakti movement, with their beautiful and meaningful devotional songs.
- The Acharya's influence is most prominently seen on the Chaitanya school of Bengal Vaishnavism and in Assam as well.
- A subsect of Gaudiya Vaishnavas from Orissa and West Bengal proclaim themselves to be followers of Madhvacharya.
- The Acharya established eight Mutts in Udupi. They are called the Madhva Mutts or Udupi Ashta Mutts. They are laid out in a rectangle and surround the Anantheshwara Krishna temple. Incidentally, the monks' studies and their course of succession (Paryaya system) were also established by Madhva.
- There are twenty four other Madhva Mutts set up all over India. All of them follow the procedures as stipulated by the Acharya in his Tantrasara.

## Ramanujacharya - Visishtadvaita Vedanta

Ramanujacharya was yet another important exponent of the tradition of Vaishnavism. He was born into a Tamil Brahmin family in the village of Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. His philosophy highly influenced the Bhakti movement. He is also known by names such as Sri Ramanujacharya, Udaiyavar, Ethirajar, Bhashyakarar, Godaagrajar, Thiruppavai Jeeyar, Emberumaanaar and Lakshmana Muni.

Ramanuja's most important contribution to Hinduism was his establishment of the Visishtadvaita (qualified monism) Vedanta. According to this school of philosophy, there exists plurality and distinction between Atman and Brahman. However, he also asserted that there is a unity of all souls and that each individual soul has the potential to become one with the Supreme Brahman.



Ramanuja - Papier Mache Statue

## Life

The complete details of Ramanuja's birth are unknown. However, some records indicate that he was born between 1017-1137 CE, to Kanthimathi and Asuri Kesava Somayaji. He is believed to have been born in the month of Chitra, under the Nakshatra (star) Thirvathirai. Yet other sources suggest that Ramanuja may have lived between 1077-1157 CE. His followers wrote hagiographies - some, several centuries after his Samadhi. Followers of this sect believe them to be true.

One such hagiography suggests that Ramanuja learned the Vedas when he was merely eight days old. He is then believed to have communicated with God as an adult and even won philosophical debates with Buddhists, Advaitins and such. He is said to have turned himself to his "divine self", the Seshanaga, to defeat Buddhists. While his ardent followers completely believe these legends, modern scholars and skeptics question the reliability of such works. With no historical or other basis to justify these claims, it would be impossible to accept them, they say.



Vishnu and Lakshmi with Sheshnaga - Brass Statue

When he came of age, Ramanuja married and moved to Kanchipuram to study Advaita Vedanta under his Guru, Yadava Prakasa. They both frequently disagreed in interpreting texts, especially the Upanishads. After a while, Ramanuja separated from his Guru and proceeded to study on his own. He preferred to follow in the footsteps of the Alvar tradition and the famed scholars, Nathamuni and Yamunacharya.

According to a legend, Ramanuja tried to meet Yamunacharya, but the latter attained Samadhi just before that and so, they never met. However, it is believed that the corpse of Yamunacharya miraculously rose and named Ramanuja the new leader of the Vaishnava sect, which was, till then, led by him. Some accounts suggest that after that, Ramanuja renounced his married life and became a Sannyasi. However, there are no official records to prove this theory.

Ramanuja then became a priest at the Varadharaja Perumal temple at Kanchipuram, where he also began to conduct spiritual discourses. He began to teach that moksha was to be achieved not through the nirguna Brahman, but with the help of one's personal God, the saguna Vishnu.

Ramanuja grew up during the rule of the Chola dynasty. This period witnessed the existence of pluralistic beliefs, where Saivism, Vaishnavism, Smartism, Buddhism and Jainism thrived together. Advaita Vedanta was the most prevalent philosophy at the time. The Vaishnava Sampradaya was already well-established and the concept of bhakti was gaining rapid momentum in South India.

In this milieu, Ramanuja gained popularity because he was the first thinker who challenged Shankara's Advaitism and offered an alternative interpretation of the Upanishads. Ramanuja and his disciples then lived in the largely non-sectarian environment offered by the Chola Empire, till its decline in the late 12th and 13th centuries. The Acharya also severely revolted against the caste system and went as far as converting untouchables into priests.

## **Writings**

The Sri Vaishnava tradition attributes nine Sanskrit works to Ramanuja. They include the Vedarthasangraha (a summary of the Vedas), Sri Bhashya (a commentary on the Brahma Sutras), Bhagavad Gita Bhāshya (a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita), and minor works titled Vedāntapida, Vedāntasāra, Gadya Trayam (a compilation of three texts called the Saranagati Gadyam, Sriranga Gadyam and Srivaikunta Gadyam) and Nitya Grantham. Some scholars have questioned the validity of the author of these works.

Ramanujacharya's disciples included greats such as Kidāmbi Aachan, Nadadhur Azhwan, Thirukurugai Piran Pillan, Muraliyandan, Koorathazhwan and so on. Many of them are considered to be the authors of texts such as the Shatyayaniya Upanishad.

## **Visishtadvaita Vedanta**

Ramanuja established the Visishtadvaita Vedanta school of philosophical thought; the foundation of which, was qualified monism.

He accepted that Vedas are a reliable source of knowledge and critiqued the other two schools of Vedanta, namely, Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta, as having misinterpreted the Vedic texts. He strongly stated that the purvapaksin (previous schools) only selectively support the Upanishadic passages and ignore those that support the concept of pluralism.

He said that the scriptures should always be considered in their totality and not in parts. According to Ramanujacharya, the Vedas mention both oneness and plurality and so, the

truth must incorporate both monism and pluralism. He called this qualified monism or Visishtadvaita Vedanta.

## **Similarities and Dissimilarities with the Other Vedantas**

- Ramanuja's Visishtadvaita agrees with the theistic devotional aspect of Madhvacharya's Dvaita Vedanta. Both schools state that Jiva and Brahman are totally different from each other and that this difference can never be transcended. Both schools are of the view that Vishnu alone is the independent reality and that all other Gods and beings are dependent on him.
- In contrast to Dvaita Vedanta, though, Ramanuja's "qualified non-dualism" states that souls share the same essential nature of the Brahman; that all souls are the same; and that it is possible for every soul to reach the bliss state of the Brahman himself. In sharp contrast, Madhvacharya believed that souls would never ever be able to reach the state of the Brahman.
- Visishtadvaita and Advaita schools both believe in non-dualism. Both systems state that all souls can hope to achieve the blissful state of the Brahman. Advaita posits that only the Brahman is the unchanging reality, while everything else is relative, illusory and ever-changing. Shankara states that the Atman can attain the Brahman once it comprehends the truth and its actual nature of oneness with the Universal Power.
- In contrast, Ramanuja states that both Brahman and the material world are two different absolutes, both metaphysically real. According to him, neither is false or illusory. All of the world matter constitutes God's form and the path to the nirguna Brahman is through devotion and maintaining constant love towards the personal God; the saguna Brahman; no other than Vishnu Himself.

## **Influence on Hinduism**

- Ramanujacharya was highly influential, as he developed a different approach to Vedanta by giving the concept of bhakti an intellectual basis. His Visishtadvaita Vedanta made bhakti the central aspect of Hindu philosophy.
- Ramanuja undertook major tours and travels around India and tirelessly propagated his philosophy, thereby far extending the reach of his organization. He not only developed theories, but also published philosophical texts and set up centers for the study of Vedanta, during the time between the 11th and 12th centuries.
- The Acharya reformed the Ranganathaswamy Temple complex at Srirangam and also organized a network of temples dedicated to Vishnu-Lakshmi worship. His philosophy influenced several generations of poet saints to further the Bhakti movement.
- The birthplace of Ramanujacharya houses a temple and an active Visishtadvaita school as well. His monastery and temple traditions are still followed the same way in the largest and most important Vaishnava centers, namely, the Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam and the Venkateswara Temple in Tirumala, Tirupati.

# Common Features of All Schools of Vedanta

In spite of the obvious differences that exist between all the schools of Vedanta, there are fundamental similarities and common features between them. They are as follows:

- Brahman is the eternal, unchanging reality and the cause of the material world.
- The Upanishads are a reliable source of knowledge. Vedanta is the pursuit of that knowledge, in order to understand Brahman.
- Rebirth is a fact and being steeped in Vedanta is a way to attain jivan mukthi.
- The Atman is responsible for its own acts and has to experience karma as a result of these acts.
- The Advaita, Dvaita and Visishtadvaita schools of Vedanta rejected Buddhism, Jainism and many other Vedantic schools as well.

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