

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303408886>

Adi Shankaracharya: Contributions and Influences on Sanatana Dharma and Indian Culture

Article · May 2016

CITATIONS
0

READS
3,447

1 author:



[Dr Surendra Pathak](#)
Institute of Advance Studies in Education
221 PUBLICATIONS **6,465** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Deciphering Physiological, Biochemical, and Molecular Mechanisms of Abiotic Stress-Tolerance and Nutrient-Use -Efficiency of Crop Plants [View project](#)



Exploring heat-stable RuBisCo activase from wheat or maize for augmenting the activity of RuBisCo under the heat stress [View project](#)

Adi Shankaracharya: Contributions and Influences on Sanatana Dharma and Indian Culture

Dr. Surendra Pathak,
Professor and Head Value Education,
IASE deemed University, Sardarshahr, Rajasthan,
Pathak06@gmail.com, +919414086007

Adi Shankaracharya, one of the most important philosophers and religious leaders in Indian history and the Hindu Sanatan religion, is widely revered as a religious reformer, the formulator and codifier of the *Advaita Vedanta* philosophy, the non-dualistic system based upon the Upanishads. He was born in a very poor *brahmin* family in the year 788 A.D. in a village named Kaladi, six miles to the east of Alwaye, Kerala. “He was a Nambudiri Brahmin.

Rajasekhara, a rich landlord, built a Siva temple in Kaladi and formed an Agrahara for brahmins who were in the service of the temple. Vidyadhiraja was doing Puja (worship) in the temple. He had only a son named Sivaguru. Sivaguru studied the Shastras and married at the proper age. He had no child. He and his wife Aryamba prayed to Lord Siva to bless them with a son. A son was born to them in the *vasanta ritu* or the spring season at noon, in the auspicious *Abhijit Muhurta*¹ and under the constellation *Ardhra (nakshatra)*. This son was Shankara.”¹ “It is said that his mother Aryamba had a vision that Lord Shiva himself told her that he would incarnate in the form of her first-born child. Right from childhood he showed a penchant towards spiritual knowledge. He could easily recite the Puranas and the Epics and mastered the Vedas during his early years in Gurukul. Adi Shankara's teachings were thoroughly adopted by his disciples later on.”² Historically, there are conflicting views about the exact date of birth of Adi Shankara. “Theosophy teaches that he was born 2,500 years ago, specifically in 510 B.C., only ‘51 years and 2 months’ after the death of the Buddha. As will be seen from the quotes which follow, Theosophist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the Masters maintain that Shankaracharya was in a certain mysterious sense the first reincarnation of Gautama Buddha after that lifetime.”³ Jayendra Saraswati, head of the Kancheepuram Mutt in Tamil Nadu, also said the Kanchi Mutt and four other hermitages at Dwarka, Sringeri, Puri and Badri insist that Adi Shankara was born in 509 BC and not 788 AD. “He elaborated on two major evidences supporting the pre-Christian era theory — one that all the four mutts have had more than 70 pontiffs and, second, a scientific carbon dating of the river Kaladi in Kerala proved that it flowed just around 2,500 years ago.”⁴

Shankara is the foremost among the master-minds and the giant souls which Mother India has produced. He was the expounder of the Advaita philosophy. Shankara was a giant metaphysician, a practical philosopher, an infallible logician, a dynamic personality and a

1. www.hindupedia.com/en/Adi_Shankaracharya

2. www.culturalindia.net/indian-religions/shankaracharya.html

3. H.P. Blavatsky, “The Secret Doctrine” Vol. 1, p. Xliv

4. THE HINDU, (NATIONAL, MUMBAI), November 23, 2015

stupendous moral and spiritual force. His grasping and elucidating powers knew no bounds. He was a fully developed *Yogi*, *Jnani* and *Bhakta*. He was a *Karma Yogi* of no mean order. He was a powerful magnet.⁵ His contributions are enormous for the India.

Philosophical & Literary Contribution

The advent of Adi Shankara is a landmark event in the history of Indian philosophy and religion and in the personal spiritual evolution of every individual. His teachings reveal the truth of the Supreme Brahman to the sincere seeker. His contribution is beyond imagination; a few of these contributions in the form of commentaries which are treasures to Hindu *Sanatana* belief. These are *Vivekachudamani*, *Atma Bodha*, *Aparoksh anubhuti*, *Ananda Lahari*, *Atma-Anatma Vivek*, *Drig-Drishya Viveka* and *Upadesa Sahasri*. “More than 300 works—commentative, expository, and poetical—written in the Sanskrit language, are attributed to him. Most of them, however, cannot be regarded as authentic. His masterpiece is the *Brahma-sutra-bhashya*, the commentary on the *Brahma-sutra*, which is a fundamental text of the Vedanta school. The commentaries on the principal Upanishads that are attributed to Shankara are certainly all genuine, with the possible exception of the commentary on the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*.ⁱⁱ The commentary on the *Mandukya-karika* was also composed by Shankara himself. It is very probable that he is the author of the *Yoga-sutra-bhashya-vivarana*, the exposition of Vyasa’s commentary on the *Yoga-sutra*, a fundamental text of the Yoga school. The *Upadeshasahasri*, which is a good introduction to Shankara’s philosophy, is the only noncommentative work that is certainly authentic.”⁶ Sri R. Krishnamurthy wrote in an article in *The Hindu* that “Adi Shankara sought to relieve mankind from all the miseries that affect one and all. There are three kinds of miseries that human beings have to suffer in this world. In spiritual parlance these are described as *Adyatmika*, *Adi Daivika* and *Adi Bhoutika*. *Adyatmika* refers to the relation between the individual self and the Supreme Self. It is based on the truth that the individual self is a manifestation of the Supreme spirit. *Adi Daivika* refers to the miseries caused by fate and *Adi Bhoutika* to those sorrows caused by the material world and body. Adi Shankara’s effort is a cut above for; this acharya destroyed the *Rakshasa Avidya* that is the root cause of all sorrows. Removal of ignorance results in self realisation which is the ultimate goal of the Jiva.”⁷ H.P. Blavatsky said about his contribution “The followers of one of the greatest minds that ever appeared on Earth, the *Adwaita Vedantins* are called *Atheists*, because they regard all save Parabrahm, the *secondless*, or Absolute Reality – as an illusion. Yet the wisest initiates came from their ranks, as also the greatest yogis.”⁸ Even though he lived a very short life and renounced his body at thirty-two years, his impact on India and on *Hindu Sanatana Dharma* is extremely striking. He re-introduced a finer form of Vedic thought. His traditions and teachings form the basis of the *Smartis* and have influenced *Sant* and *Mutt* lineages.

H.P. Blavatsky wrote about his contribution to Indian literature “Sri Shankaracharya, the greatest initiate living in the historical ages, wrote many a *Bhashya* on the *Upanishads*. But

5. <http://www.esotericonline.net/profiles/blogs/adi-shankaracharya-s-poetry>

6. www.britannica.com/biography/Shankara

7. THE HINDU, (FRIDAY REVIEW, FAITH) April 20, 2015

8. “The Secret Doctrine” Vol. 1, p. 522

his original treatises, as there are reasons to suppose, have not yet fallen into the hands of the Philistines, for they are too jealously preserved in his *maths* (monasteries, *mathams*). And there are still weightier reasons to believe that the priceless *Bhashyas* (Commentaries) on the esoteric doctrine of the Brahmins, by their greatest expounder, will remain for ages yet a dead letter to most of the Hindus, **except the Smartava Brahmins**.ⁱⁱⁱ This sect, founded by Shankaracharya, (which is still very powerful in Southern India) is now almost the only one to produce students who have preserved sufficient knowledge to comprehend the dead letter of the *Bhashyas*. The reason of this is that they alone, I am informed, have occasionally real Initiates at their head in their *mathams* (mutts), as for instance, in the “Sringa-giri,” in the Western Ghauts of Mysore. On the other hand, there is no sect in that desperately exclusive caste of the Brahmins, more exclusive than is the Smartava; and the reticence of its followers to say what they may know of the Occult Sciences and the esoteric doctrine, is only equalled by their pride and learning.”⁹

“The Vedanta school stresses mostly on the *Upanishads* (which are themselves called *Vedanta*, the apogee of the *Vedas*), unlike the other schools that gave tremendous stress on ritualistic *Brahmanas*, or to texts authored by their founders. It is known that Shankara’s Brahman was **Nirvishesha** (without attributes), **Nirguna** (without the Gunas), **Nirakara** (formless), and **Akarta** (non-agent). This means he was above all needs and desires. Regarding meditation, Shankara straightaway refuted the system of Yoga and its various disciplines as a direct means of attaining *moksha*.^{iv} As per Shankara, *moksha* could be attained solely through concentration of the mind.”¹⁰ He also sought to unify the different groups of Hindus fighting over the gods of *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, *Ganesh*, *Surya* and *Shakti*. Shankara made legendary *shlokas* for each group and brought all these groups into the common fold. This helped to unify the sects and their rituals of Hinduism.

Aattributes of Philosophy

Shankara has been one of the great magnitudes of philosophical and theological history of India Vedic literature. He has been called one of the great metaphysical tendencies in the history of human thought – we may say that not just Indian thought, but the history of human thought. “He has been called India's greatest philosopher and the pinnacle of India's philosophical contribution to the world scholars will call him one steeped in darkness who doesn't know how to utter a true statement. But Shankara is widely regarded as a great philosopher and represents the Platonic tendency in Eastern thought.”¹¹

It is usually said, "For learning logic and metaphysics, go to Shankara's commentaries; for gaining practical knowledge, which unfolds and strengthens devotion, go to his works such as *Viveka Chudamani*, *Atma Bodha*, *Aparoksha Anubhuti*, *Ananda Lahari*, *Atma-Anatma Viveka*, *Drik-Drishya Viveka* and *Upadesa Sahasri* ".¹² Shankara wrote innumerable original works in verses which are matchless in sweetness, melody and thought. He deals with the

9. “The Secret Doctrine” Vol. 1, p. 271-272

10. www.indianscriptures.com/gurus/acharyas/adi-shankaracharya

11. <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/philosophical-theology-sankara-ramanuja/introduction-to-hinduism/timothy-tennent>

12. <http://www.dlshq.org/saints/sankara.htm>

whole quality of *Brahman* issue by focusing on the *nirguna/saguna* distinction which is absolutely critical to the whole Advaitic position. Shankara follows a very rigorous monism – or rigorous non-dualism – in the sense that he's not going to accept any statements that show qualities or attributes of Brahman. Shankara's supreme Brahman is *Nirguna* (without the Gunas), *Nirakara* (formless), *Nirvisesha* (without attributes) and *Akarta* (non-agent) as stated before. He is above all needs and desires. He uses his text, one of the texts that we quoted in *Svetasvatara Upanishad* in our great *Mahavakya* passages.

Shankara says, "This Atman is self-evident. This *Atman* or Self is not established by proofs of the existence of the Self. It is not possible to deny this *Atman*, for it is the very essence of he who denies it. The *Atman* is the basis of all kinds of knowledge. The Self is within, the Self is without, the Self is before and the Self is behind. The Self is on the right hand, the Self is on the left, the Self is above and the Self is below".

The word "Advaita" essentially refers to the identity of the Self (Atman) and the Whole (Brahman). He wrote, "*Ekameva Adviteeyam Brahma*" (The absolute is one alone, not two). There is no second, but there is the appearance of an enormous multiplicity. There may be many stalks of sugarcane, but the juice from all of them has the same sweetness. Beings are many, but their breath is the same. Nations are many, but the Earth is one. In this manner, Shankara proclaimed to the world that it is unity that underlines the apparent diversity.

Satyam-Jnanam-Anantam-Anandam^v are not separate attributes. They form the very essence of Brahman. Brahman cannot be described, because description implies distinction. Brahman cannot be distinguished from any other than He. The objective world-the world of names and forms-has no independent existence. The Atman alone has real existence. The world is only *Vyavaharika* or phenomenal.

Shankara was the exponent of the *Kevala Advaita*^{vi} philosophy. His teachings can be summed up in the following words: "*Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithya, Jeevo Brahmaiva Na Aparah*"^{vii,13} Brahman alone is real, this world is unreal; the *Jiva* is identical with Brahman. *Brahma satyam* ("Brahman is the Reality"): In Vedanta, the word "Satyam" (Reality) is very clearly defined and it has a specific significance. It means, "that which exists in all the three periods of time (past, present and future) without undergoing any change; and also in all the three states of consciousness (waking state, dream state and deep-sleep state)." This is therefore the absolute Reality — birthless, deathless and changeless — referred to in the Upanishads as "Brahman." *Jagan mithya* (the world is an illusion): The world appears "real" only in the "waking state;" but it is negated (it disappears) in the dream and deep-sleep states. Hence, it is not real, according to the definition above. Therefore, the world is said to be *mithya* by the Acharya. However, many scholars seem disagree to the word, "*mithya*," when it is used to refer to the perceptible world. For this reason, perhaps, the Acharya, in his later works, like *Brahmasutra Bhashya*, calls it "*vyavaharika satta*" (relative reality) or "*pratibhasika satta*" (apparent reality), as if to accommodate them.¹⁴

13. John Grimes(2004), *The Vivekacudamani of Sankaracarya Bhagavatpada: An Introduction and Translation*, ISBN 978-0754633952

14. <http://archives.amritapuri.org/matruvani/vol-02/sep02/02mv09reality.php>

Shankara preached **Vivarta Vada**.^{viii} Just as the snake is superimposed on the rope, this world and this body are superimposed on *Brahman* or the Supreme Self. If you get knowledge of the rope, the illusion of the snake will vanish. Even so, if you get knowledge of Brahman, the illusion of the body and the world will vanish.

There is not one branch of knowledge which Shankara has left unexplored and which has not received the touch, polish and finish of his superhuman intellect. The loftiness, calmness and firmness of his mind, the impartiality with which he deals with various questions, his clearness of expression—all these make us revere the philosopher more and more. We may say that his teachings will continue to live as long as the sun shines.

Shankara's scholarly erudition and his masterly way of exposition of intricate philosophical problems have won the admiration of all the philosophical schools of the world at the present moment. Shankara was an intellectual genius, a profound philosopher, an able propagandist, a matchless preacher, a gifted poet and a great religious reformer. Perhaps, never in the history of any literature, a stupendous writer like him has been found. Even the Western scholars of the present day pay their homage and respects to him. Of all the ancient systems, that of Shankaracharya will be found to be the most congenial and the most easy of acceptance to the modern mind.¹⁵

Influence on Sanatana Dharma

There is no denying the fact that Adi Shankaracharya is one of the greatest stalwarts in the Hindu Sanatana religion (Dharma). He had the enormous capacity to influence and organize the people and the institutions. He has contributed immensely to the revival and purgation of the old Hindu tradition. He was a unifying force to bring all the Hindus under one code of worship. “He has an unparalleled status in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. He travelled all over India to help restore the study of the Vedas.”¹⁶ “His teachings and tradition form the basis of Smartism and have influenced *Sant Mat* lineages.”¹⁷

He introduced the **Pancayatana** 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.¹⁸ According to Alf Hiltebeitel, Columbian Professor of Religion, History, and Human Sciences, “Shankara established the nondualist interpretation of the Upanishads as the touchstone of a revived *Smarta* tradition: practically, Shankara fostered a rapprochement between Advaita and *Smarta* orthodoxy, which by his time had not only continued to defend the *Varnasramadharma*^{ix} 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

15. http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Adi_Shankaracharya

16. Per Durst-Andersen and Elsebeth F. Lange (2010), *Mentality and Thought: North, South, East and West*, CBS Press, ISBN 978-87-630-0231-8, page 68

17. Ron Geaves (2002). "From Totapuri to Maharaji: Reflections on a Lineage (Parampara)". 27th Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions, Oxford.

18. Klaus Klostermaier (2007), *A Survey of Hinduism*, Third Edition, State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-0-7914-7082-4, page 40

practices. Thus one could worship any one of five deities, as one's *Istadevata* (deity of choice)".¹⁹

Adi Shankaracharya is basically known for integrating the whole India through his concerted efforts by building temples at the strategic points of India. Shankara is regarded as the founder of the *Dasanami Sampradaya* of Hindu monasticism and *Śaṅmata* of *Smarta* tradition. He unified the theistic sects into a common framework of *Shanmata system*.²⁰ Advaita Vedanta is, at least in the west, primarily known as a philosophical system. But it is also a tradition of renunciation. Philosophy and renunciation are closely related. 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. Shankara, himself considered to be an incarnation of Shiva, established the *Dashanami Sampradaya*, organizing a section of the *Ekadandi* monks under an umbrella grouping of ten names. "Several other Hindu monastic and *Ekadandi* traditions remained outside the organisation of the *Dasanamis*."²¹ & ²² Any Hindu, irrespective of class, caste, age or gender can seek sannyāsa as an *Ekadandi* monk under the *Dasanāmi* tradition. We may conclude that he is not mere a philosopher but he was a great and unparallel religious leader of India.

Yet, according to some historian, these Mathas were not established by Shankara himself, but were originally ashrams established by *Vibhandaka* and his son *Rsyasrnga*.²³ Shankara inherited the ashrams at *Dvaraka* and *Sringeri*, and shifted the ashram at *Srngaverapura* to *Badarikasrama*, and the ashram at *Angadesa* to *Jagannātha Puri*. Adi Shankara organised the Hindu monks of these ten sects or names under four *Maṭhas* (monasteries), with the headquarters at *Dvaraka* in the West, *Jagannatha Puri* in the East, *Sringeri* in the South and *Badrikashrama* in the North. Each math was headed by one of his four main disciples, who each continues the *Vedanta Sampradaya*. 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 *dasanamis* associated with the Shankara 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 Shankara maths.

Benedict Ashley has rightly appreciated "Adi Shankara for unifying two seemingly disparate philosophical doctrines in Hinduism, namely *Atman* and *Brahman*."²⁴ Isaeva states Shankara's influence included reforming Hinduism, founding monasteries, edifying disciples, disputing opponents and engaging in philosophic activity that, in the eyes of Indian tradition, help

19. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alf_Hiltebeitel#cite_ref-1

20. Various Papers: Śaṅkarācārya, Conference on Sankara and Shanmata (1969), Madras, OCLC 644426018, Reprinted by HathiTrust Digital Library

21. Karigoudar Ishwaran, *Ascetic Culture*

22. Wendy Sinclair-Brull, *Female Ascetics*

23. Pandey, S.L. (2000). "Pre-Sankara Advaita. In: Chattopadhyana (gen.ed.), "History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization. Volume II p. 4–5.

24. Benedict Ashley, O.P. *The Way toward Wisdom*. p. 395. ISBN 0-268-02028-0. OCLC 609421317.

revive "the orthodox idea of the unity of all beings" and Vedanta thought.²⁵ There were similar views in existence but they were not properly highlighted by a great luminary of India's Sanatana Dharama. Nakamura, Hajime has aptly taken into account the contributions of Shankara in the following words "Prior to Shankara, views similar to his already existed, but did not occupy a dominant position within the Vedanta."²⁶ Nakamura states that the early Vedanta scholars were from the upper classes of society, well-educated in traditional culture. They formed social elite, "sharply distinguished from the general practitioners and theologians of Hinduism." Their teachings were "transmitted among a small number of selected intellectuals".²⁷ Works of the early Vedanta schools do not contain references to Vishnu or Shiva.²⁸ It was only after Shankara that "the theologians of the various sects of Hinduism utilized Vedanta philosophy to a greater or lesser degree to form the basis of their doctrines."²⁹ Feuerstein, George also agrees with the role of Shankara that while the Nath-tradition established by him, led "its theoretical influence upon the whole of Indian society became final and definitive."³⁰ The *Soundarya Lahari* is a famous literary work of Tantric tradition in Sanskrit believed to be written by sage Pushpadanta and Adi Shankara.³¹ Some believe the first part *Ananda Lahari* was etched on mount Meru by Ganesha himself (or by Pushpadanta).³²

According to Nakamura, these mathas have contributed to the influence of Shankara, which was due to institutional factors. The mathas which he built exist till 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". Several scholars suggest that the historical fame and cultural influence of Shankara grew centuries later, particularly during the era of Muslim invasions and consequent devastation of India.^{33&34} Many of Shankara's biographies were created and published in and after 14th century, such as the widely cited Vidyaranya's Shankara-vijaya. Vidyaranya, also known as Madhava, who was the 12th Jagadguru of the Sringeri Sarada Pitham from 1380 to 1386,³⁵ inspired the re-creation of the Hindu Vijayanagara Empire of South India in response to the devastation caused by the Islamic

25. N. V. Isaeva (1992). Shankara and Indian Philosophy. State University of New York Press. p. 2. ISBN 978-0-7914-1281-7. OCLC 24953669.

26. Nakamura, Hajime (2004). "A History of Early Vedanta Philosophy. Part Two". Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited. p. 690.

27. Ibid, p. 693.

28. Ibid, p. 692.

29. Ibid, p. 691.

30. Feuerstein, George (1978). Handboek voor Yoga (Textbook of Yoga). Ankh-Hermes.

31. Dr. N., Nagaswamy. "Soundrya Lahari in Tamil". Tamil Arts Academy. Retrieved (2012).

32. P. R., Ramachander. "Soundrya Lahari".

33. Paul Hacker, Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta (Editor: Wilhelm Halbfass), State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-0-7914-2582-4, pages 29–30

34. Blake Michael (1992), The Origins of Vīraśaiva Sects, Motilal Banarsidass, ISBN 978-81-208-0776-1, pages 60–62 with notes 6, 7 and 8

35. Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Mādhava Āchārya". Encyclopædia Britannica.

Delhi Sultanate.^{32&36} He and his brothers, suggest Paul Hacker and other scholars,³¹ wrote about Shankara as well as extensive Advaitic commentaries on Vedas and Dharma. Vidyaranya was a minister in Vijayanagara Empire and enjoyed royal support,³⁴ and his sponsorship and methodical efforts helped establish Shankara as a rallying symbol of values, and helped spread historical and cultural influence of Shankara's Vedanta philosophies. Vidyaranya also helped establish monasteries (mathas) to expand the cultural influence of Shankara.³¹ It may be these circumstances, suggest scholars,³⁷ that grew and credited Adi Shankara for various Hindu festive traditions such as the Kumbh Mela – one of the world's largest periodic religious pilgrimages.³⁸ A common conception, advocated by the *akharas*,^x is that Adi Shankara started the Kumbh Mela at Prayag in 8th century, to facilitate meeting of holy men from different regions. However, academics doubt the authenticity of this claim.³⁹

Conclusion:

So great was Shankara's quest for the Truth that he embraced *sannyasa* when he was eight years old. By age 16, he had not only mastered but also written commentaries on the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita and other prominent Vedic texts. These commentaries known as *bhashyas* stand at the pinnacle of Indian philosophical writing. He dispelled the false notions of Philosophy, religion, Logic and spirituality that people had begun to believe and enlightened the nation with his insightful analyses and logic. Shankara founded mathas, monasteries, in the four corners of India to extend the wisdom of the Vedas. Adi Shankaracharya paved the way for solid edifice of Indian culture by his scientific and rational exposition of Upanishad philosophy. He propounded the timeless truths of Vedanta so that everyone would understand and live. His contribution to Indian philosophy, in fact humanity, is so perpetual that all the later philosophers have only tried to refute or elaborate his ideas. Indian philosophy has come to be identified with the Vedanta that Adi Shankaracharya commented upon. He is the embodiment of great *rishi*-culture, prevalent in India, whose foremost exponent he was.

Adi Shankaracharya's message is a message of hope, truth and love. Through his life, Shankara presented an example before us to live by the Truth. One doesn't believe that the Hindu philosophy, as we know it today, was really properly articulated in the way that it is today. So it is a long time before we get this kind of crystal clear nirguna/saguna and all of that 'tattwamasi' interpretation along these lines. Contemporary Shankaracaryas exert more influence among Saiva communities than among Vaisnava communities. The greatest influence of the gurus of the advaita tradition has been among followers of the Smartha Tradition, who integrate the domestic Vedic ritual with devotional aspects of Sanatana

36. Cynthia Talbot (2001), *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19-513661-6, pages 185–187, 199–201

37. James G. Lochtefeld (2004), *The Construction of the Kumbha Mela*, South Asian Popular Culture, Volume 2, Issue 2, pages 103–126; doi:10.1080/1474668042000275707

38. Roshan Dalal (2011), *The Religions of India: A Concise Guide to Nine Major Faiths*, Penguin, ISBN 978-0-14-341517-6, see Kumbh Mela entry

39. Kama Maclean (28 August 2008). *Pilgrimage and Power: The Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, 1765-1954*. OUP USA. ISBN 978-0-19-533894-2.

Dharma. Sri Shankaracharya was an intellectual and spiritual prodigy. He could experience that sublime, transcendental state, just like the Upanishadic seers. In this way the great Acharya could confirm and commandingly summarise the vision of the ancient seers of Sanatana Dharma — the truth of Advaita. Before his untimely demise, he had firmly established this philosophy by his masterly commentaries on the *prasthanatraya* (the three basic texts on Vedanta, viz., Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras).

Notes:

i. Abhijit Muhura: ज्योतिष शास्त्र के अनुसार अभिजीत मुहूर्त दिन का सर्वाधिक शुभ मुहूर्त माना जाता है।

ii. Sanskrit: श्वेताश्वतरोपनिषद्

iii. The term also refers to Brahmins who specialize in the Smriti corpus of texts named the Grihya Sutras, in contrast to Shrauta Sutras. Smarta Brahmins with their focus on the Smriti corpus, contrast from Sruta Brahmins who specialize in the Sruti corpus of texts and follow fire rituals of the Brahmanas in the Vedas.

iv. Sanskrit: मोक्ष : In Indian religions and Indian philosophy, moksha also called vimoksha, vimukti and mukti, means emancipation, liberation or release.

v. ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम् । तदेष्टाभ्युक्ता । सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म । One who knows Brahman, reaches the highest.

Satya (reality, truth), *Jnana* (knowledge), *Ananta* (infinite) is Brahman. — *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2.1.1

vi. Sankara's Vedanta is known as Advaita or non-dualism, pure and simple. Hence it is sometimes referred to as Kevala-Advaita or unqualified monism

vii. Brahman is the only truth, the world is unreal, and there is ultimately no difference between Brahman and individual self

viii. Vivartavada is the Vedantic theory of causation; it is the method of asserting this doctrine.

ix. Varnasrama Dharma is one of the basic principles of Hinduism, it is peculiar to Hindus. The duties of the castes are Varna Dharma. The four castes are Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. The duties of the stages in life are Asrama Dharma. The four Asramas or orders of life are Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa.

x. The seven *Shastradhari* or monastic *Aakhara* founded by the 8th-century philosopher Adi Shankaracharya