

# Sankaracharya : The Classic Teacher and Interpreter of The Polity of 'Advaita'

## Abstract

Sankaracharya, an outstanding thinker, had "appeared at a time when his presence was urgently required to put new life into Brahmanism and Hinduism as well as to counter act the influence of Buddhism, Jainism and other heterodox systems on the one hand and the Mimamsakas on the other" 94 He wrote commentaries of Badarayana's Brahma sutra, the principal Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita and expounded a new idealistic system of thought known as Advaita-Vedanta. Ottosays, "Sankara is the classic teacher and the interpreter of 'Advaita' in its most strict and subtle form. 'Advaita' means non-duality or secondlessness."<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Nirguna, Brahman, Sankaracharya.

## Introduction

All Schools of Vedanta claim to be based upon the Upanishads. The Teaching of Upanishads are mainly monistic, though it is difficult to determine which form of monoism is taught in them. The particular type of monoism taught by Shankara is to old, though in its final form it owes a great deal to his contribution. Its most distinguishing feature on the theoretical side is its conception of nirguna Brahman.

Sankaracharya holds that Atman or Brahman<sup>2</sup> is "infinite, limitless and absolute reality which is irrelative, Independent and trans-empirical existence". It is one, nondual, attributeless and an Indeterminate being.<sup>3</sup> According to him, Brahman is self-luminous, or an eternal light of consciousness that cannot be the object of any other consciousness. It is a transcendent reality as it excludes all relations and remains outside and beyond the grasp of thought and the senses.<sup>4</sup> But the transcendence of Brahman does not, "Lead us to regard the doctrine as agnostic. It, no doubt, rules out all discursive thought as inapplicable to reality, but it does not represent it as extra empirical as some things wholly outside the world of experience."<sup>5</sup> Brahman is nirguna and nirvishesa. It is devoid of all adjuncts and determinations, but, in case of its association with maya, it appears as saguna Brahman or isvara who creates the phenomenal world and remains immanent in all.

Nirguna Brahman, conditioned by maya. Its potency is isvara who is the ground and undation of all existence.<sup>6</sup> Shankara affirms through his commentary on the Brahma sutras that this Nirguna Brahman or Isvara is the cause of origination, subsistence and dissolution of the world which is extended in names and form.<sup>7</sup> Isvara is immanent in all existences but he has no reality of his own apart from the reality of Nirguna Brahman which is his transcendental essence. Isvara, says Hiriyanna, "is Brahman in an empirico-dress. The absolute as it appears to us, and not as it is in itself".<sup>8</sup> Hence, Isvara is both immanent as well as transcendent, Isvara is transcendent when he is one with the undifferentiated Brahman immanent when. He produces the empirical world and is determiner of maya. Desgupta say, "He Himself, though remaining immanent in the world through His power, transcends it at the same time."<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

Furthermore, Brahman, the eternal light of consciousness, is devoid of all 'adjuncts and determinations.'<sup>10</sup> It transcends all the categories of thought and the duality of subject and object, but it is not altogether unknown and unknowable. Intellect utterly fails to grasp it fully, but one can realize it directly by intuition. "Intellectual knowledge involves the distinction of subject and object. Brahman is one and non-dual. It is known by perfect intuition. Intuition is the knowledge of identity or unity. It annuls the intellectual knowledge of identity or unity. It annuls the intellectual knowledge of duality", and Brahman, the pure and eternal consciousness, "reveals itself to intuitional consciousness, which is immediate and indeterminate."<sup>11</sup>

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In short, Brahman is the trans-empirical reality and it is transcendent in the sense that it cannot be grasped by our finite thought but only be realized through perfect intuition.

**References**

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2. otto, Rodoif, Mysticism East and west, P.3.
3. "Atman or Brahman", says Radhakrishnan, "have the same characteristics of being, consciousness, all pervedingness and bliss. Atman is Bahman. "The vedanta, P.103.
4. Sinha, J.N., A History of Indian, Vol. II, P.497.
5. "Brahman, by Himself, we cannot speak of; He is beyond speech and even mind;.... nothing can be predicated of Him." Jha, Ganganath, Sankara Vedanta, Lecture III, P.81.

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6. Hiriyan, M., Outlines of Indian Philosophy, P.376.
7. "The doctrine of Sankara", says Ghate, "though of great merit from the metaphysicla point of view, was rather too elevate and too impersonal for the ordinary people, who sankara in order to accommodate such peole admitted of a personal God;... but a god was after all of an illusory and second-rate importance in his system. "The Vedanta, P. 19.
8. Radhakrishna, S., Brahma sutra-The philosophy of Spiritual life, I.1.2..
9. Hariyan, M., outlines of Indian Philosophy, P.375.
10. Dasgupta, S.N., A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, P.P. 42-43.
11. "It has no positive attributes by which it can be defined." Aiyar, K.S., Vadantasara of Sadanand, Intro., P. XXXII.
12. Sinha, J.N., A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, P. 556