

## Vedānta: A Comparative Analysis of Diverse Schools

Prem Pahlajrai

Asian Languages and Literature

University of Washington

### Introduction

To the average person familiar with Hinduism, Vedānta is simply the last of the six *darśanas* or systems of Hindu philosophy, based on the speculative inquiry into being found in the Upaniṣads constituting the end, the *anta*, of the Vedic corpus. Some scholars are prone to use Vedānta to refer to Advaita Vedānta alone, strict non-duality, of which Śāṅkara is the most famous exponent. However, there are other Vedāntas, the better known of which are Rāmānuja's *viśiṣṭādvaita* or qualified non-duality and Madhva's *dvaita*, strict duality. In this paper I present the salient features of these schools along with those of seven lesser known schools. Together with the aforementioned three, Nimbārka's *svābhāvīkabhedābheda* or natural difference and non-difference, Vallabha's *śuddhādvaita* or pure non-duality, constitute the *pañca-vedānta-sampradāya*, the five Vedānta traditions. The next five schools examined are lesser known but nonetheless interesting interpretations: Bhāskara's *aupādhikabhedābheda* or adventitious difference and non-difference, Śrīkaṅṭha's *viśiṣṭaśivādvaita* or qualified non-duality with Śiva as the basis, Śrīpati's *viśeṣādvaita* or special non-duality, Vijñānabhikṣu's *avibhāgādvaita* or non-duality of non-separateness, and Baladeva's *acintyabhedābheda* or inexplicable duality and non-duality. Every one of these schools accepts the testimony of the Upaniṣads as authoritative yet chooses to interpret them in different ways to support their particular positions. I will briefly overview the standpoints of all these schools individually. This will then facilitate comparison across several broad aspects and permit us to make certain observations.

### Brahmasūtrabhāṣya Methodology

It is almost a requisite for proponents of any alternative views of Vedānta to give credence to their views by providing a commentary of the Brahmasūtras of Bādarāyaṇa, thus attempting to demonstrate that their philosophy is the "true" interpretation of the Vedānta (the Upaniṣads) as summarized in the Brahmasūtra<sup>1</sup>. The Brahmasūtra is also referred to as the Vedāntasūtras or the Śārirakamīmāṃsā sūtras and has a total of 560 *sūtras* or aphorisms intended as a systematized synthesis of the Upaniṣads. It may date as far back as late second century or early first century BCE.<sup>2</sup> The text is divided into four *adhyāyas*, chapters. Each *adhyāya* is divided into four quarters, *pādas*. The first *adhyāya*, the *Samanvayādhyāya* establishes that Brahman, the impersonal Absolute, is the sole subject of the scriptures, the source of creation and the goal of one's life. The first four sūtras of this chapter are commonly known as the Catuṣsūtrī. The second chapter, the *Avirodhādhyāya* "deals with the consistency of the ideas relating to Brahman and *ātman*

<sup>1</sup> The Brahmasūtras, the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā together constitute the *prasthānatrayī*, the threefold authoritative foundation of Vedānta. The Upaniṣads are considered the *śrutiprasthāna*, the Brahmasūtras the *nyāyaprasthāna* and the Gīta the *smṛtiprasthāna*. (Sastri, p.ii, Deutsch, p.3)

<sup>2</sup> Dasgupta, p. 421. Ayyangar (1979) claims that "occidental writers" picked this date in order to "show to the world that the Indians copied everything from Greek literature." He suggests that Bādarāyaṇa was none other than Vyāsa and lived "about 3101 B.C. i.e. the beginning of the Kali age." (p.x)

drawn from the Upaniṣads"<sup>3</sup> and refutes "the rival views of Sāṃkhya-yoga, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Buddhism, Jainism, Śaivism and Śaktism or Vaiṣṇavism".<sup>4</sup> These two chapters together constitute the philosophical portion of the text. Chapter three, *Sādhanādhyāya* is about the means for attaining *mokṣa*, and chapter four, *Phalādhyāya*, is about the successive stages of *mokṣa* culminating in a final merging with Brahman.

The work is also divided into several sections, *adhikaraṇas*, with each section having six parts: 1. *viśaya*, subject. 2. *saṃśaya*, doubt. 3. *pūrvapakṣa*, *prima facie* view. 4. *uttarapakṣa*, opposite view. 5. *siddhānta*, conclusion and 6. *saṅgati*, consistency with other parts of the work. *Saṅgati* is intended to demonstrate that there is no conflict with the rest of the work at the pāda, adhyāya and scriptural level, as well as between sections by way consistency of *ākṣepa*, objection; *drṣṭānta*, illustration; *pratidrṣṭānta* counter-illustration; *prasaṅga*, incidental illustration; *utpatti*, introduction and *apavāda*, exception.<sup>5</sup>

The Brahmasūtras are rather terse and a commentary is needed for it to be understood. The first known commentary is thought to have been by either the grammarian Bhartṛhari<sup>6</sup> in the fifth century CE about which not much is known or by Baudhāyana<sup>7</sup> who is referred to in Rāmānuja's introduction to his commentary on the Brahmasūtra. Baudhāyana's commentary is not extant. Within the Vedānta system, Śaṅkara's is the earliest extant commentary though, and it is the one that everyone else who follows takes great pains to refute. It is believed that the monistic views of Śaṅkara were inspired by Gauḍapāda's commentary of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad rather than by the original Brahmasūtra.<sup>8</sup> Dasgupta, for example, believes that the Brahmasūtra was probably more of an authoritative theist, dualist work.<sup>9</sup>

The schools of Vedānta considered in the following are those where the founders have written a commentary on the Brahmasūtras for the sake of demonstrating the conformity of their views to the *śruti*, revealed scriptures. First let us consider the dates of these individuals and a brief synopsis of their distinctive philosophies and views on liberation, to set the stage to enable a meaningful comparison. What follows has been greatly informed by Chaudhuri (1973, 1975, 1981), Dasgupta (1922) and Sastri (1995).

## 1. Kevaladvaita

When Vedānta is mentioned without any qualifications, most people tend to think of *kevalādvaita* or absolute monism. Śaṅkara is the most famous proponent of this school. The typical dates for him are 788-820 CE<sup>10</sup>. But Paul Hacker suggests a time before or about 700 A.D. based on Śaṅkara's quoting Dharmakīrti in *Upadeśasāhasrī*,

<sup>3</sup> Brockington, pp. 106-7

<sup>4</sup> Sastri, p. ii.

<sup>5</sup> Sastri, p. iii.

<sup>6</sup> Brockington, p. 107

<sup>7</sup> Dasgupta, v.1, pp. 70, 433

<sup>8</sup> Brockington, p. 107 and Dasgupta, v.1, pp. 422-3. Gauḍapāda was Govinda's teacher, who in turn was Śaṅkara's teacher.

<sup>9</sup> Dasgupta, p. 432. Also confirmed by Thibaut, quoted in Apte, p. xxi. It appears that Thibaut was the originator of this view, presented in the introduction to his translation of Śaṅkara's Brahmasūtrabhāṣya. However, Apte strenuously objects to this view (pp. xxi-iii).

<sup>10</sup> For example, Brockington, 1996, p. 109.

who lived mid-seventh century.<sup>11</sup> Karl Potter argues for late seventh-early eighth century.<sup>12</sup> Sureśvara, Padmapāda and Toṭaka were his direct students and other notable *advaitins* in this school are Vācaspati Miśra (840 CE), Vidyāraṇya (1350 CE) to name but a couple. To Śaṅkara, all diversity is unreal, *mithyā* and only Brahman is real, *sat*. This reality is eternal, perfect, causeless, without change and all-pervading, the substratum of everything. The individual self, *jīva* and the world, *jagat* appear as real due to ignorance, *avidyā*. It is an illusion, *vivarta*, which has Brahman as its substratum. The word *māyā* is also sometimes used to describe the creation. It (*māyā*) is considered neither real nor unreal, but yet it is not ultimate. Epistemologically, *māyā* is *avidyā*. From a metaphysical standpoint, *māyā* may be considered as the mysterious power of Brahman that “deludes us into taking the empirical world as reality”<sup>13</sup> though Śaṅkara takes pains to not establish a connection between Brahman and *māyā*. The means to liberation, *mokṣa* is the removal of *avidyā* and the means for this is knowledge, *jñāna* alone. *Mokṣa* is not an attainment but simply a recognition of ones true nature as Brahman. Though this school is typically described as monism, Śaṅkara actually called it “non-dualism,” *advaita*.

## 2. Viśiṣṭādvaita

Rāmānuja, the founder of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* or qualified monism doctrine is held to have lived from 1017 to 1137 CE, a prodigious lifespan of a hundred and twenty years!<sup>14</sup> His birth date most likely was brought forward to permit him to be a successor of Yāmuna, who died in 1038.<sup>15</sup> His doctrine attempted to synthesize Vaiṣṇavism with Vedānta by emphasizing the theistic aspects of the Upaniṣads and the Brahmasūtras. Whereas Śaṅkara maintained that Brahman, *jīva* and *jagat* are identical, for Rāmānuja, *jīva* and *jagat* are real and distinct from Brahman but they exist based on Brahman alone. Though there is plurality among *jīvas* and *jagat*, the Brahman embodied in them is singular. As Hiriyanna puts it, “it is the *qualified* or the *embodied* that is one, while the factors qualifying or embodying it are quite distinct, though inseparable, from it.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, the plurality of the *jīvas* and *jagat* is the qualification of the non-dual Brahman, and hence the name of this system. Rather than Brahman, Rāmānuja prefers to use the term Īśvara, who is none other than Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa. Īśvara exists in all of us *jīvas* as the inner controller, the *antaryāmī*. He is omniscient and moves us all to action, fulfilling our desires according to our *karma*. Our free will is given to us by Īśvara. He has created this world out of spontaneity and in play, *līlā*. Liberation is the attainment of the world of Nārāyaṇa and the enjoyment of freedom and bliss there. This can be achieved by *prapatti*, absolute self-surrender to Nārāyaṇa and *bhakti*, which for Rāmānuja means not faith-based devotion but rather meditation based upon the highest knowledge “which seeks to ignore everything that is not done for the sake of the dearest”,<sup>17</sup> i.e. Īśvara.

<sup>11</sup> In Halbfass, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Potter, Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, v. 3, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Deutsch, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Karmarkar, pp. xiii, xv and Dasgupta, pp. 100, 104. However Sastri, p. iv has 1140 A.D.

<sup>15</sup> Brockington, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> M. Hiriyanna, p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> Dasgupta, v. 3, p. 161.

### 3. Dvaita

Madhva is considered the principal exponent of the doctrine of duality (or plurality), *dvaita*. Like Viśiṣṭādvaita it is theistic and has Nārāyaṇa as its principal deity and its followers too consider this to be as old as the Upaniṣads and Madhva was merely a great exponent of this truth in later times. Madhva himself went by the name of Ānandatīrtha and claimed that he received his revelations directly from Vedavyāsa himself. There is some uncertainty over his dates – Dasgupta gives 1197-1276 CE, Brockington merely suggests he flourished in the thirteenth century,<sup>18</sup> and Sastri provides 1238-1317 CE.<sup>19</sup> Madhva opposes the identity of Brahman and the *jīva* and posits a fivefold *bheda* or difference in reality: between Brahman and *jīvas*, Brahman and *jagat*, *jīvas* and *jagat*, between individual *jīvas*, and within *jagat* in its various forms. He claims this view is supported by common sense. Upaniṣad statements such as “*Sarvam khalvidam Brahma*, all this is indeed Brahman,” are explained from the standpoint of teleology – despite the differences, Brahman, i.e. Viṣṇu, is immanent in the entire creation and is its controller. And these differences persist, even past liberation, *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* is attained through our recognition of our own and Viṣṇu’s true natures and our utter dependence on him. Knowledge of our own and Viṣṇu’s true natures may be achieved through study of the scriptures, but it is only mediate. Through devotion, *bhakti*, one realizes Viṣṇu’s greatness and goodness, which leads to Viṣṇu’s grace, which alone can cause *mokṣa*. To develop this philosophy, Madhva dismisses monistic passages in the Upaniṣads as merely figurative and instead accepts the authority of the entire Vedas and the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas as well. Another unique characteristic of this doctrine is that it divides *jīvas* in to three kinds: “those chosen for eventual liberation, those doomed to eternal damnation and those destined to perpetual rebirth”<sup>20</sup> and some argue for Christian influences on his work.<sup>21</sup>

### 4. Svābhāvika**bheda**

Once again, there is uncertainty and debate regarding the dates of the founder of this doctrine, Nimbārka. His *bhāṣya* appears to reflect Rāmānuja’s style and thus he is assumed to have lived after him. But there is some controversy whether he lived even after Madhva.<sup>22</sup> He is commonly held to be extant before Madhva around either mid-twelfth century CE<sup>23</sup> or the mid-thirteenth century. However Malkovsky reports on the “radical proposal” of Joseph Satyanand who holds Nimbārka to predate Śaṅkara at about 475-525 CE.<sup>24</sup> Nimbārka’s *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* is relatively brief and does not contain any refutation, *siddhānta* of opposing views, *pūrvapakṣas*. His doctrine is considered to be an adaptation of Bhāskara’s *bhedābheda* doctrine which we shall discuss shortly. Similar to Rāmānuja, he holds that *jīva* and *jagat* are distinct from Brahman as regards

<sup>18</sup> Brockington, p. 148.

<sup>19</sup> These (Sastri, p. iv) are the dates I provide in the table below for Madhva, somewhat arbitrarily.

<sup>20</sup> Brockington, p. 150.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Torwesten, p.162.

<sup>22</sup> Dasgupta, v. 3, pp. 399-400.

<sup>23</sup> Tapasyānanda, p. 85 presents 1162 CE as the year of Nimbārka’s death.

<sup>24</sup> Satyanand, Joseph (1994) *Nimbārka: A Pre-Śaṅkara Vedāntin and His Philosophy*, Christnagar-Varanasi: Vishwa Jyoti Gurukul. Satyanand’s arguments are summarized in Malkovsky, pp.116-127. Regrettably, I have only very recently come across this and beyond mentioning this fact, I am unable to incorporate it any greater detail at this point.

their forms, attributes and functions, i.e. their *guṇas*, yet by nature, *svarūpa* they are identical. Where Rāmānuja emphasized the identity of nature, Nimbārka holds that the difference, *bheda* and identity, *abheda* are both equally important. The seeming contradiction of identity and difference coexists in harmony in Brahman as an organic whole and this is just inherent to Brahman's nature, i.e. it is *svābhāvika*. "Brahman is non-different from the *jīvas* and *jagat* because they depend on Him for their being or their very existence, but He is different from them as He is self-dependent and possesses the unique qualities of omniscience, omnipotence and the like which the latter do not possess."<sup>25</sup> Nimbārka doesn't consider *jīva-jagat* as qualities or attributes of Brahman since to do so differentiates the possessor of the attribute from the attribute. *Jīvas* are liberated only by Īśvara's grace. This liberation is achieved either through *jñānayoga*, the path of knowledge or through *bhaktiyoga*, devotion. Performance of one's duties without personal desire prepares the way for passionate devotion of Īśvara and for self-surrender to him. Liberation is achieved only on death and is of four grades, ranging from proximity to Īśvara to merger with him without losing ones individual nature. In other words the difference and identity persists throughout.

## 5. Śuddhādvaita

The system of Vallabha (1479-1531 CE)<sup>26</sup> puts forth the pure, *śuddha* non-duality of Brahman, untouched by *māyā*. *Jīva-jagat* are nothing but manifestations of Brahman, which is Kṛṣṇa. *Māyā* is the power of Kṛṣṇa, which causes the misunderstanding of the *jagat*. It is only the non-difference, *abheda* that is real, while the perception of all seeming difference, *bheda* exists for the sake of Kṛṣṇa's sport, *līlā*. While Brahman can be attained via action and knowledge, this is the lower or *akṣara* Brahman with limited bliss. The *bhakti mārga* is superior and easy to follow, resulting in participation in the *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa. Liberation of the *jīva* is dependent on Kṛṣṇa's grace. Vallabha's philosophy may be felt to lack the intellectual arguments and debate that characterizes Śāṅkara's work. Brahman is to be known "not intellectually, but intuitively."<sup>27</sup> *Jīvas* are to Brahman like sparks to a fire, they are parts of Brahman which lack the divine qualities owing to suppression, *tirobhāva*, of Brahman's bliss. There are a multiplicity of types of *jīvas*, including *jīvan-muktas*, *puṣṭi jīvas* and *pravāha jīvas* among others.<sup>28</sup> *Puṣṭi mārga* or the path of grace is the path of complete self-surrender and innate faith in Kṛṣṇa, that his grace will certainly save the follower on this path. This has implications of pre-destination and denial of free will, total dependence on Kṛṣṇa's grace. But for a *puṣṭi jīva*, devotion is the means and the end, service of Kṛṣṇa leads to the highest bliss. Bhakti results in a three-fold fruit: Kṛṣṇa subordinates himself to the devotee, the devotee attains association with the divine and ultimately a supernatural body is attained whereby the devotee can participate in the divine sports of Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>25</sup> Tapasyānanda, pp. 89-90.

<sup>26</sup> This (1479-1531 CE) is the date in Marfatia, p. 8, Reddington, p. 1 and Brockington, p. 165. Sastri, p. iv has 1479-1544. But Shah, pp. 4,52 suggests 1473/9-1532, Tapasyānanda, p. 201 gives 1473-1531 and Dasgupta, v.4, p.371 has 1481-1533.

<sup>27</sup> Shah, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed treatment, see Marfatia, p. 24.

## 6. Aupādhikabhedābheda

This version of the *bhedābheda* or identity in diversity doctrine was formulated by Bhāskara and is considered a precursor to Nimbārka's doctrine. Bhāskara is known to be definitely after Śaṅkara and before Rāmānuja, who refutes his views in his *bhāṣya*.<sup>29</sup> Hajime Nakamura dates him to 750-800 CE.<sup>30</sup> Bhāskara also is critical of Śaṅkara's doctrine's dependence on *māyā* – he believes that Śaṅkara ignored the Upaniṣadic passages which describe Brahman as possessed of attributes. For Bhāskara, Brahman manifests itself in various forms and effects, as *jīva-jagat*, by taking on *upādhis*, limiting adjuncts. These *upādhis* are real and due to Brahman's power, they cause the bondage of *jīvas*. His sense of *upādhi* here is different from that of Śaṅkara, who holds that *upādhis* are ultimately unreal, *mithyā*. Liberation or *mokṣa* is a state of fullest bliss, *ānanda* and it is not ever present and eternal – it has to be attained through both *karma* and *jñāna* and is achieved only after the fall of the physical body. In other words, *jīvan-mukti* is not possible. By performance of one's duties prescribed by the Vedas without any attachment to the fruits, as well as by meditation on Brahman and the *jīva*'s oneness with it, one can release oneself from the bondage of the *upādhis*. Interestingly, there is no *bhakti* involved in this process. Bhāskara's doctrine is considered “a forgotten system in Indian philosophy.”<sup>31</sup> Though he is critical of Śaṅkara's view, his alternate system is hobbled by the logical inconsistencies of his unique *upādhi* doctrine.

## 7. Viśiṣṭaśivādvaita

The date of 1270 CE that I have for the founder of this school, Śrīkaṇṭha, occurs only in one source<sup>32</sup> and is not substantiated elsewhere. The only thing known for certain is that he came after Śaṅkara, aspects of whose doctrine he refutes<sup>33</sup> and before the sixteenth century, from when we have a commentary on his Brahmasūtra *bhāṣya*.<sup>34</sup> The philosophy of this doctrine is coupled with the theism where Śiva is the highest deity and is equated to Brahman. Brahman is different in nature from the *jīva-jagat*, yet these are pervaded by Brahman and hence non-different too. However, Śrīkaṇṭha doesn't support absolute monism, absolute dualism or identity-in-difference, *bhedābheda*. The relation is one of cause and effect – the effect is not separate from the cause, yet they are not identical either, since the cause transcends the effect, despite being immanent in the effect. Brahman, Śiva is qualified, *viśiṣṭa* by *jīva-jagat* and together they form an organic whole, *advaita*, hence the name of the doctrine, *viśiṣṭaśivādvaita*. Individuals achieve liberation through knowledge, for which one prepares by performing karmas in accordance with dharma. And it is the knowledge of Śiva-nature, *śivatva* which is achieved through meditation on the nature of Śiva as being non-different from one's own. In fact it is only through Śiva's grace that karma has efficacy and can allow for the possibility of liberation.<sup>35</sup> Liberation is possible both while still living (*jīvan-mukti*), as

<sup>29</sup> See Chaudhuri (1981), pp.3-5 where the evidence presented can put Bhāskara anywhere in the 8th to 10th century CE, coming after Śaṅkara, but before Vācaspati Miśra, 841-2 CE and Rāmānuja 1016-17 CE. Hacker, on the other hand, held Vācaspati to the tenth century. (Halbfass, p.100, n.44).

<sup>30</sup> In *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*, pp. 66-7, cited in Malkovsky, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Tapasyānanda, p. 87.

<sup>32</sup> Sastri, p. iv. I did later find a date of “13<sup>th</sup> century AD” ascribed to him in Khanna, p. 470.

<sup>33</sup> Chaudhuri (1962), pp. 5-7.

<sup>34</sup> Appaya Dīkṣita's *Śivārka-Mani-Dīpikā* c.1550 AD.

<sup>35</sup> Dasgupta, v.5, pp. 86-7.

well as after death (*videha-mukti*). Yet, the liberated individual, though all-pervading, *vibhū* still lacks Śiva's powers of creation and destruction and is not quite united with Śiva – a slight difference still persists.

## 8. Viśeṣādvaita

This doctrine is followed by the Vīraśaiva or Liṅgāyat sect and its founder, Śrīpati is dated approximately to fourteenth century CE, with the usual uncertainties.<sup>36</sup> Here, Brahman is Śiva, and is *saguṇa* and *saviśeṣa*, i.e. possessed of qualities and differences. Creation is a sport, *līlā* on the part of Śiva, in order that *jīvas* can work out their karma. The relation between Brahman and *jīva-jagat* is that of *bhedābheda*, identity in difference as seen in other doctrines also, with *abheda*, identity dominant. But he also asserts that *bheda* and *abheda* don't coexist at the same time. The *bheda* is during bondage and the *abheda* during liberation. He provides two explanations for the term *viśeṣādvaita*: *viśeṣa* denotes the *bheda*, difference and *advaita* the *abheda* between Brahman and *jīva*. Alternately, *viśeṣa* can be interpreted as "special" to denote that this is a special kind of *advaita*. This term is deliberately chosen to differentiate this doctrine from Rāmānuja's *viśiṣṭādvaita* which he refutes in his *bhāṣya* along with those of Śaṅkara and Madhva. Liberation is similar to that of Viśiṣṭādvaita, the *jīva* takes on the nature of Brahman but remains subservient to Śiva. But *jīvan-mukti* is not possible according to this system. The means for liberation are similar too, with the added stipulation that the seeker should apply the outer marks of Śiva on one's body. In fact, merely doing so may be adequate to achieve liberation.<sup>37</sup>

## 9. Avibhāgādvaita

Vijñānabhikṣu, the formulator of this doctrine, is more famous for his commentary on the Sāṃkhyasūtras and is assigned to either the sixteenth century or the mid-seventeenth century CE.<sup>38</sup> His philosophy is theistic monism grafted onto the classical Sāṃkhya dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Brahman holds within itself *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* and manifests itself in diverse forms. It is the basis for the universe, it holds it together and it exists in the universe, undivided and indistinguishable. There is no duality as the universe cannot be conceived of apart from Brahman which forms its basis yet remains unchanged in its transcendental reality. *Jīvas* are derived from Brahman like sparks from a fire. They are the nature of pure consciousness, like Brahman, yet they retain their individuality. *Prakṛti* and *puruṣa* together form the conditioning factors, *upādhis* for the *jīvas* which cause them to appear limited and finite, distinct from Brahman. True knowledge of Brahman cannot be found through the intellect, *buddhi*, since it continually reaffirms the tendency for separation. Brahman thus can only be realized by *bhakti* as love. The process of listening to Īśvara's name, adoring him, describing his virtues, and meditation ultimately lead to true knowledge and a state of non-difference with ultimate consciousness, Brahman.

<sup>36</sup> Rao, p. 31: "between 1300 and 1400 A.D." Dasgupta, p. 173: "latter half of the fourteenth century." Chaudhuri (1981) p. 187: "probably during the 14<sup>th</sup> Cent. A.D." Sastri, p. iv. "1400 A.D."

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the differences between Śrīpati, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Śrīkaṇṭha and an overall evaluation of Śrīpati's doctrine, see Rao, pp. 698-704 and Chaudhuri (1981), pp. 229-40.

<sup>38</sup> Dasgupta, v.1, pp. 212, 221: sixteenth century. Rao, p. 153: mid-seventeenth century. Sastri, p. v: 1600 A.D.

### 10. Acintyabhedābheda

There is some degree of agreement that Baladeva, the spokesman of this school of inexplicable, *acintya* identity in difference, duality and nonduality, can be located in the mid-to-latter half of the eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> He was a Vaiṣṇava follower of the Caitanya sect and the Bengali Gauḍīya school and he also traced his lineage back to the Madhva school.<sup>40</sup> Brahman is the same as Īśvara who is also Kṛṣṇa. He possesses all the differences and yet is without difference. This inconsistency is resolved by a novel conception of *viśeṣa*, peculiarity, which allows affirmation of the qualities of Brahman even though there is no difference between Brahman and its qualities. Thus there is *bheda* and *abheda* between Brahman and *jīva-jagat*. Baladeva resolves this inconsistency uniquely by claiming that it is inexplicable, *acintya* from the human perspective, it is the play, *līlā* of Viṣṇu. Liberation, *mukti* is only possible without a body, i.e. it is *videha*, and has five grades, ranging from attaining the form of Īśvara to being in the closest possible relation with him. Still, even at the highest grade of *mukti*, the *jīva* is different from Brahman. Karma performed unselfishly (*niṣkāma*) helps purify the heart in preparation for *mokṣa*. Knowledge, *jñāna* is the only means to liberation, but *bhakti* is also considered a form of knowledge and involves worship of and self-surrender to Īśvara. Ultimately, liberation requires Īśvara's grace.

Having now overviewed these schools individually, we can proceed to compare them with each other. To facilitate this, I've laid out their characteristic aspects in tabular form.

---

<sup>39</sup> Chaudhuri (1981), p. 241: "flourished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D." Dasgupta, v.4, p. 438, locates one of his works to 1764 CE and Sastri, p. v, dates him to 1725 A.D. The only dissenting opinion is from Rao, p. 181, with two sets of almost similar dates: 1486-1534 and 1485-1533.

<sup>40</sup> Chaudhuri (1981), pp. 241-4, 249-51.



Type: Aspect	Kevalādvaita <sup>41</sup>	Viśiṣṭādvaita	Svābhāvika- bhedābheda <sup>42</sup>	Dvaita <sup>43</sup>	Śuddhādvaita <sup>44</sup>	Aupādhika- bhedābheda <sup>45</sup>	Viśiṣṭa- śivādvaita	Viśeṣādvaita <sup>46</sup>	Avibhāgādvaita	Acintya- bhedābheda
Translation	Absolute monism	Qualified monism	Natural difference and non-difference	Difference or Plurality	Pure monism	Adventitious difference and non-difference	Qualified monism with Śiva being central	Special monism	Non-duality of non-separateness	Inexplicable duality and non-duality
Proponent	Śāṅkara	Rāmānuja	Nimbārka	Madhva	Vallabha	Bhāskara	Śrīkaṇṭha	Śrīpati	Vijñānabhikṣu	Baladeva
Dates <sup>47</sup>	Late 7 <sup>th</sup> /early 8 <sup>th</sup> century CE	1017-1137 CE	Mid 12 <sup>th</sup> /mid 13 <sup>th</sup> century CE <sup>48</sup>	1238-1317 CE	1479-1531 CE	750-800 CE	1270 CE	14 <sup>th</sup> century CE	16 <sup>th</sup> /mid 17 <sup>th</sup> century CE	Mid or late 18 <sup>th</sup> century CE
Brahmasūtra Commentary	Śārirakamīmāṃsābhāṣya a.k.a. Śāṅkara-bhāṣya	Śrībhāṣya	Vedāntapārijātasaurabha	Pūrṇaprajñabhāṣya <sup>49</sup>	Aṇubhāṣya	Bhāskara-bhāṣya a.k.a. Śārirakamīmāṃsābhāṣya	Śaivabhāṣya, a.k.a. Brahmanmīmāṃsābhāṣya	Śrīkarabhāṣya, a.k.a. Vīraśaiva-bhāṣya	Vijñānāmṛtabhāṣya	Govinda-bhāṣya
Type of Doctrine	Monism, "illusionism"	Monotheism	Monotheism	Monotheism	Monotheism	Non-theistic monism	Monotheism	Monotheism	Monotheism	Monotheism
Viśeṣatva of Brahman (particularity)	<i>Nirviśeṣa</i> , devoid of internal differences	<i>Saviśeṣa</i> , possessed of <i>svagata-bhedas</i> , internal differences	<i>Saviśeṣa</i> , possessed of <i>svagata-bhedas</i>	<i>Nirviśeṣa</i>	<i>Nirviśeṣa</i>	<i>Nirviśeṣa</i> as <i>kāraṇa</i> , cause; <i>saviśeṣa</i> as <i>kārya</i> , effect	<i>Saviśeṣa</i> , abode of all supremely auspicious qualities	<i>Saviśeṣa</i>	<i>Nirviśeṣa</i>	<i>Nirviśeṣa</i>
Ekatva of Brahman (oneness)	" <i>Ekamev-ādviṭyam</i> " Chānd.U. 6.2.1 uncompromising	<i>Eka</i> , <i>jīva</i> & <i>jaḡat</i> are attributes of Brahman	<i>Eka</i> , <i>jīva</i> & <i>jaḡat</i> are attributes of Brahman	<i>Eka</i> , <i>jīva</i> & <i>jaḡat</i> are <i>pratibimbās</i> , reflections of Brahman	<i>Eka</i> , but only regarding cause and effect. <i>Jīvas</i> differ from Brahman in <i>guṇa</i> and <i>śakti</i>	<i>Eka</i> in <i>kāraṇa-rūpa</i> , but <i>nānātva</i> as <i>kārya-rūpa</i>	<i>Eka</i>	<i>Eka</i>	<i>Eka</i> , with <i>jīvas</i> as parts which are not identical yet non-separate with Brahman	<i>Eka</i> , ever separate from <i>jīva</i> even if <i>mukta</i> .

<sup>41</sup> Also termed *nirviśeṣādvaita*

<sup>42</sup> Also referred to as *dvaitādvaita* with or without the *svābhāvika* qualifier.

<sup>43</sup> Also known as *bhedavāda*

<sup>44</sup> There is also the *śuddhādvaita* of Viṣṇusvāmin, which may be a precursor but there is not much directly known about this school

<sup>45</sup> This is also often referred to as simply *bhedābheda*, or *dvaitādvaita*

<sup>46</sup> Also variously referred to as *seśvarādvaita*, *śivādvaita*, *vīraśaiva-viśiṣṭādvaita*, *sarvaśrutisāramata*, and confusingly also as *bhedābheda* or *dvaitādvaita*

<sup>47</sup> Controversies regarding dates are footnoted where relevant and also in the sections above on the respective schools.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Satyanand however places Nimbārka at 475-525 CE. See s.v. and footnote 24 above.

<sup>49</sup> This is also often referred to as simply *Śrīmad Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*. Madhva also wrote a summary of his views in the *Anuvyākhyāna*

Type:	Kevalādvaita <sup>41</sup>	Viśiṣṭādvaita	Svābhāvika-bhedābheda <sup>42</sup>	Dvaita <sup>43</sup>	Śuddhādvaita <sup>44</sup>	Aupādhika-bhedābheda <sup>45</sup>	Viśiṣṭa-śivādvaita	Viśeṣādvaita <sup>46</sup>	Avibhāgādvaita	Acintya-bhedābheda
<b>Aspect</b>										
<b>Guṇatva of Brahman</b> (Possession of qualities)	<i>Nirguṇa</i>	<i>Saguna</i> , possessing only auspicious attributes.	<i>Saguna</i> , possessing only auspicious attributes.	<i>Saguna</i>	<i>Saguna</i> and <i>nirguṇa</i> <sup>50,51</sup>	<i>Saguna</i>	<i>Saguna</i>	<i>Saguna</i> (nirguṇa references in the scriptures are to <i>amūrta</i> forms of Brahman)	<i>Nirguṇa</i>	<i>Saguna</i>
<b>Kriyatva, agency of Brahman</b>	<i>Niṣkriyā</i>	<i>Sakriyā</i>	<i>Sakriyā</i>	<i>Sakriyā</i>	<i>Sakriyā</i>	<i>Niṣkriyā</i>	<i>Sakriyā</i>	<i>Sakriyā</i>	<i>Sakriyā</i>	<i>Sakriyā</i>
<b>Vikāratva, transformation of Brahman</b>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>	<i>Nirvikāra</i>
<b>Theory of Causation</b>	<i>Vivartavāda</i> , apparent manifestation	<i>Pariṇāmavāda</i> , real manifestation	<i>Pariṇāmavāda</i> , real manifestation	<i>Pariṇāmavāda</i> , real manifestation. All things depend on Brahman which is all-pervasive. But Brahman is <i>nimitta kāraṇa</i> only, efficient cause and not the <i>upādāna kāraṇa</i> , material cause.	2 kinds. <i>Pariṇāmavāda</i> , real manifestation and <i>avikṛta pariṇāmavāda</i> , unchanged transformation. In former: <i>jīva</i> and <i>jagat</i> come from Brahman and are a part of it. But due to the latter Brahman remains unchanged.	<i>Śakti vikṣepa pariṇāmavāda</i> , transformation via projection of Brahman's powers. All things depend on Brahman which is all-pervasive. Brahman is <i>nimitta kāraṇa</i> , efficient cause as well as the <i>upādāna kāraṇa</i> , material cause. The cause and effect are identical as well as different: <i>bhinnābhinna</i>	<i>Pariṇāmavāda</i> . Brahman is both, the <i>nimitta</i> and <i>upādāna kāraṇa</i> , efficient and material cause. The effect is a transformation of the unchangeable Brahman brought about through <i>līlā</i> , play as an expression of Śiva's <i>śakti</i>	<i>Pariṇāmavāda</i> . Like viśiṣṭaśivādvaita, here too the creation is Īśvara's <i>līlā</i> , but it takes place in accordance with the <i>jīvas'</i> karmas and Īśvara is only the <i>sākṣī</i>	Brahman is the <i>adhiṣṭhāna kāraṇa</i> , the basis or container for the universe. The effect is <i>avibhāga</i> , indistinguishable from Brahman — the relation between the universe and Brahman is only a transcendental one. Brahman is not modified, it is the <i>sākṣī</i> .	<i>Pariṇāmavāda</i> . Brahman is both the <i>nimitta</i> and <i>upādāna kāraṇa</i> , efficient and material cause. The effect is a transformation of the unchangeable Brahman brought about through <i>līlā</i> , play as an expression of Viṣṇu's <i>śakti</i>
<b>Phenomenal Existence</b>	<i>Mithyā</i> due to <i>māyā</i> , which is indefinable, and due to <i>avidyā</i>	<i>Satya</i>	<i>Satya</i>	<i>Satya</i>	<i>Satya</i> . <i>Māyā</i> is not <i>avidyā</i> but Brahman's <i>acintya śakti</i>	<i>Satya</i> , because the <i>upādhi</i> <sup>52</sup> is real, though <i>anitya</i>	<i>Satya</i>	<i>Satya</i>	<i>Satya</i> , but of a different order than Brahman	<i>Satya</i>

<sup>50</sup> For Vallabha, Brahman has *svārūpa* and *svabhāva*, ie. *saguna*, but these are outward manifestations and are absolutely identical with Brahman which is ultimately *nirguṇa*

<sup>51</sup> The *guṇas* of brahman are *acintya* and *ananta*, inconceivable by us and therefore apparently contradictory

<sup>52</sup> For Śaṅkara however, the *upādhi*, limiting condition is *anitya* and *asatya*, *apāramārthika*

Type:	Kevalādvaita <sup>41</sup>	Viśiṣṭādvaita	Svābhāvika-bhedābheda <sup>42</sup>	Dvaita <sup>43</sup>	Śuddhādvaita <sup>44</sup>	Aupādhika-bhedābheda <sup>45</sup>	Viśiṣṭa-śivādvaita	Viśeṣādvaita <sup>46</sup>	Avibhāgādvaita	Acintya-bhedābheda
Aspect										
Relationship between Brahman, jīva and jagat	<i>Pāramārthika</i> (ultimate) identity, <i>vyavahārika</i> (empirical) reality & difference due to <i>māyā</i>	Identical ( <i>abheda</i> ) in <i>svarūpa</i> , essential nature, but different in <i>viśeṣa guṇa</i> - hence the name of this school. The <i>abheda</i> takes precedence. Brahman is the whole while <i>jīva-jagat</i> are the parts of which Brahman is the <i>antaryāmī</i> , the internal regulator.	Cause (Brahman) and effect ( <i>jīva-jagat</i> ) identical in <i>svarūpa</i> , but different in <i>guṇa</i> . The <i>abheda</i> and <i>bheda</i> are on par with each other	Absolute difference between Brahman, <i>jīva</i> and <i>jagat</i> .	Absolute identity. Brahman has <i>sat-cit-ānanda guṇas</i> , <i>jīva sat-cit</i> , and <i>jagat</i> only <i>sat</i> . Brahman is <i>vibhū</i> , <i>jīva</i> is <i>aṇu</i>	<i>Jīva-jagat</i> are <i>bhinnābhinna</i> from Brahman during its <i>kāryāvasthā</i> , <i>saṃsāra</i> , but non-different during its <i>kāraṇāvasthā</i> , during dissolution and liberation.	Brahman and <i>jīva-jagat</i> are neither absolutely different, nor absolutely identical, nor both different and non-different. The relation is that of cause and effect, one is impossible without the other. The cause transcends the effect though it is immanent in the effect.	Brahman and <i>jīva-jagat</i> are distinct during state of bondage but in <i>mokṣa</i> they are identical — <i>bhedābheda</i> . <i>Jīva</i> has no unknown eternal nature.	Brahman is the basis for <i>prakṛti</i> and <i>puruṣa</i>	There is <i>abheda</i> of <i>svarūpa</i> and <i>guṇa</i> between Brahman as the cause and <i>jīva-jagat</i> as effect. Yet there is <i>bheda</i> between them too regarding <i>svarūpa</i> and <i>guṇas</i> such as limitations of place, time, degree of perfection etc. This apparent contradiction is <i>acintya</i> , beyond human ken to explain. It is to be accepted on the basis of <i>śruti</i> .
Relationship between Brahman and Īśvara	Īśvara is <i>saguṇa</i> Brahman, the <i>māyā</i> reflected form of Brahman	Brahman is Īśvara, none other than Viṣṇu	Brahman is Īśvara, none other than Śrī Kṛṣṇa	Brahman is Īśvara, none other than Viṣṇu	Brahman is Īśvara, none other than Śrī Kṛṣṇa	Brahman is Īśvara, but non-theistic.	Brahman is Śiva	Brahman is Śiva	<i>Puruṣa</i> and <i>prakṛti</i> are the <i>upādhi</i> of Īśvara through which Brahman brings about creation.	Brahman is Īśvara, none other than Śrī Kṛṣṇa, also Viṣṇu

Type:	Kevalādvaita <sup>41</sup>	Viśiṣṭādvaita	Svābhāvika-bhedābheda <sup>42</sup>	Dvaita <sup>43</sup>	Śuddhādvaita <sup>44</sup>	Aupādhika-bhedābheda <sup>45</sup>	Viśiṣṭa-śivādvaita	Viśeṣādvaita <sup>46</sup>	Avibhāgādvaita	Acintya-bhedābheda
<b>Aspect</b> <b>Mokṣa, liberation</b>	Identity with Brahman already exists, but forgotten due to <i>ajñāna</i>	Realization of the <i>svarūpa</i> identity with Brahman; <i>guṇa</i> difference persists. <i>Jīvan-mukti</i> , liberation in the present existence is not possible.	Realization of the <i>svarūpa</i> identity with Brahman; <i>guṇa</i> difference persists. Even past death, a <i>mukta jīva</i> is separate from Brahman	Difference between Brahman and <i>jīva</i> persists post- <i>mokṣa</i> . <i>Jīva</i> is unlimited knowledge and bliss, but still dependent on Īśvara. <i>Jīvanmukti</i> is not possible.	Identity with Brahman already exists. <i>Jīva</i> is bound in <i>saṃsāra</i> due to <i>avidyā</i> . A <i>mukta jīva</i> still differs from Brahman remaining <i>aṇu</i> and lacking powers of <i>sr̥ṣṭi</i> , <i>sthiti</i> and <i>laya</i> . <i>Jīvan-mukti</i> is supported.	<i>Mokṣa</i> is not pure knowledge, but fullness of <i>ānanda</i> . <i>Jīva</i> is not <i>nitya mukta</i> . <i>Jīvan mukti</i> is not possible. <i>Mokṣa</i> is possible only after fall of the earthly body.	<i>Mokṣa</i> is the attainment of <i>śivatva</i> . But the <i>jīva</i> only becomes similar to, not identical with Śiva. The <i>mukta jīva</i> is <i>vibhū</i> , all-pervasive but lacks the power of <i>sr̥ṣṭi</i> , <i>sthiti</i> and <i>laya</i> . <i>Jīvan-mukti</i> and <i>videha-mukti</i> are supported. <i>Mukti</i> is <i>nitya</i> .	<i>Mokṣa</i> is the attainment of Śiva. This is <i>tādātmya</i> , identity with Śiva but still subservient to Śiva, lacking powers of <i>sr̥ṣṭi</i> , <i>sthiti</i> , <i>laya</i> . But the <i>jīva</i> is <i>vibhū</i> . This is a new state for the <i>jīva</i> , a becoming. <i>Mokṣa</i> is <i>anitya</i> , <i>videha</i> only.	Ultimate <i>mokṣa</i> is a state of non-difference with Brahman <sup>53</sup> with which no personal relation is possible. In <i>mokṣa</i> the <i>jīva</i> is devoid of knowledge and consciousness in merging with Brahman. Non-difference is not the same as identity.	<i>Mokṣa</i> is the attainment of Brahman's attributes except the <i>mukta jīva</i> remains <i>aṇu</i> and lacks the powers of <i>sr̥ṣṭi</i> , <i>sthiti</i> and <i>laya</i> . There is <i>abheda</i> in terms of <i>bhoga</i> alone, <i>bheda</i> everywhere else. The <i>mukta</i> doesn't return, taking refuge in Īśvara forever. There is <i>videha-mukti</i> only.
<b>Sādhana</b>	<i>Tattvajñāna</i> of <i>ātma</i> and Brahman	<i>Bhakti</i> , which is considered the mature form of <i>jñāna</i> . This involves rather than feeling, contemplation of the sterner, more distant aspects of Īśvara	Emotional <i>bhakti</i> , involving contemplation of the sweeter, more benign, closer aspects of Īśvara	<i>Jñāna</i> leads to <i>bhakti</i> , <i>bhakti</i> to <i>dhyāna</i> , meditation. The latter two are direct means to <i>mokṣa</i> . Ultimate cause though is Īśvara's grace	Through <i>jñāna</i> , the <i>akṣara</i> Brahman can be realized. <i>Bhakti</i> alone reveals the <i>ānanda</i> of Brahman. <i>Puṣṭi-bhakti</i> requires only Īśvara's grace	<i>Jñāna</i> along with karma is needed for <i>mokṣa</i> . Attachment to Brahman is required in the form of <i>bhakti</i> which rather than feeling-based is <i>dhyāna</i> on <i>nirguṇa</i> , <i>nirviśeṣa</i> , <i>nirākāra</i> Brahman.	<i>Jñāna</i> , not karma, is the means. <i>Jñāna</i> leads to <i>upāsana</i> or <i>dhyāna</i> on the <i>svarūpa</i> of Śiva being non-different from one's own nature. Divine grace then leads to <i>mokṣa</i>	Karma is for <i>citta-śuddhi</i> . <i>Jñāna</i> must lead to <i>upāsana</i> or <i>dhyāna</i> on the manifest and unmanifest form of Śiva. Seeker should place outer marks of Śiva on body. Ultimately divine grace leads to <i>mokṣa</i> .	<i>Bhakti</i> as love of Īśvara is the means to highest realization. Through <i>bhakti</i> one dissolves oneself and merges into Īśvara. This theistic relation is "mystical" and not philosophically possible.	Karma causes <i>citta-śuddhi</i> . <i>Satsaṅga</i> can be a direct means. <i>Jñāna</i> alone is the final means, <i>bhakti</i> is a spl. kind of <i>jñāna</i> , knowledge of Īśvara as eternal object of worship. <i>Mokṣa</i> is through Īśvara's grace alone finally.

<sup>53</sup> Dasgupta, v.3, pp.450-1 uses terms as "Ultimate Being," "Ultimate Principle" to be different from "great soul, *paramātmān*" - I can't tell which of these corresponds to Brahman

Aspect	Type:	Kevalādvaita <sup>41</sup>	Viśiṣṭādvaita	Svābhāvika-bhedābheda <sup>42</sup>	Dvaita <sup>43</sup>	Śuddhādvaita <sup>44</sup>	Aupādhika-bhedābheda <sup>45</sup>	Viśiṣṭa-śivādvaita	Viśeṣādvaita <sup>46</sup>	Avibhāgādvaita	Acintya-bhedābheda
Special Features			"what is <i>pāramārthika</i> to Rāmānuja is <i>vyavahārika</i> to Śāṅkara"		Eternal hell is possible. Vāyu, son of Viṣṇu mediates salvation through Viṣṇu - influence of Christianity?? Monistic passages of the Upaniṣads are dismissed as merely figurative.	Attempts to address weakness of <i>māyā</i> in Śāṅkara's doctrine.	Some consider Bhāskara to be a <i>pracchanna advaitin</i> , a disguised monist	<i>Māyā</i> as Umā is a <i>paraśakti</i> of Śiva. Śiva is love, and for an object of his fullest love, Umā appears as though different from Śiva, through <i>līlā</i>	" <i>viśeṣa</i> " used as qualifier to differentiate from Rāmānuja's " <i>viśiṣṭa</i> " — can be considered as " <i>bheda</i> " and " <i>advaita</i> " as " <i>abheda</i> ". But <i>bheda</i> and <i>abheda</i> do not coexist!	Non-separateness as different from identity is a creative answer to <i>bhedābheda</i> problems	Baladeva considered himself a disciple of Madhva, a <i>dvaitin</i> , yet propounded <i>advaita</i> .
Limitations, Obstacles (as perceived by those external to the system)		<i>Māyā</i> is hard to accept, there being no empirical evidence. The monistic doctrine is against all experience. It is very impersonal and <i>nirguṇa</i> Brahman is hard to relate to.	Fence-sitter — can't be both dual and nondual! The parts ( <i>jīva-jagat</i> ) can't be identical with Brahman in <i>svarūpa</i> and yet different in <i>guṇa</i> and <i>śakti</i> . <i>Mokṣa</i> 's dependence on Viṣṇu's grace is viewed as subverting the laws of karma.	The <i>jīva-jagat</i> are not identical with Brahman because then Brahman would suffer their imperfections. Coexistence of <i>bheda</i> and <i>abheda</i> is illogical. Doesn't bother with the refutation of rival theories.	Strict separation of Brahman, <i>jīva</i> and <i>jagat</i> is philosophically contradictory to <i>nirviśeṣatva</i> of Brahman — particularly if Brahman is all-pervasive through <i>jīva-jagat</i> . Also, eternal hell and grace do not fit with karma theory.	Contradiction of <i>ekatva</i> of Brahman with separation of <i>mukta jīvas</i> from Brahman. Dvaita still persists! Same with <i>saguṇatva</i> and <i>nirviśeṣatva</i> of Brahman. <i>Puṣṭi bhakti</i> implies predestination and lack of free will.	Unlike for Śāṅkara, Brahman is free from 3 of the 4 <i>vikāras</i> : creation, change, reform. It is however <i>āpya</i> , attainable — this seems to imply that <i>jīva jagat</i> are other than Brahman, a contradiction. Brahman as both <i>nirguṇa</i> and <i>saguṇa</i> is also illogical. Peculiar definition of <i>upādhi</i>	Similar issues as Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita.	Definition of <i>mokṣa</i> is logically inconsistent: Brahman cannot be a becoming and yet <i>nitya</i> . The <i>jīva</i> cannot achieve identity w. Brahman and still remain subservient and lesser. <i>Jīva</i> being different from Brahman undermines primacy and efficiency of Brahman	This is theistic monism grafted on to Sāṃkhya — the theism appears philosophically untenable. Also the problems of dualism inherent in Sāṃkhya are inherited.	Brahman as <i>saguṇa</i> but <i>nirviśeṣa</i> is a problem (as for Madhva and Vallabha). Philosophically, " <i>acintya</i> " is not satisfying.

### Doctrines Not Considered

In the above analysis, I chose to leave out Viṣṇusvāmin's *Śuddhādvaita* which is treated as a separate school by Chaudhuri (1981). What little is known about him and his views is only through the writings and references of others, and does not seem to be any different from Vallabha's views. Some consider Viṣṇusvāmin to be a predecessor of Vallabha, but this view is not accepted by all.<sup>54</sup> Chaudhuri also presents Vivekananda's school as *mānavādvaita*, humanistic monism.<sup>55</sup> I didn't deem it to merit an independent column in the above analysis, since it is mainly monistic *advaita* combined with a theistic bhakti approach towards one's fellow humans, considered them as Brahman personified. As such, bhakti is added as a secondary *sādhana*.

A more significant omission from this comparative analysis might be that of neo-advaita. It may come down to be no different than Śaṅkara's advaita as presented in the above analysis, but mostly due to time constraints, I have chosen not to delve deeper at present.<sup>56</sup> I will simply present a token quote here to provide a sense: "[Neo-Vedānta] strives to find ever more adequate concepts for describing the Absolute [author's term for Brahman], not as a goal to be achieved (only *mokṣa* is the goal) but as progress in the interminable search for understanding. [...] Neo-Vedānta is not a doctrine to be accepted or rejected but a way of thinking capable of infinite development and variation, a lively shoot on the ancient stock of Vedānta philosophy."<sup>57</sup>

### Some Observations

What may not readily be apparent from this analysis is that all these different schools accept the "law" of karma and that one's highest purpose in life is to strive for *mokṣa*, liberation from the cycle of birth and suffering and death, *saṃsāra*. These schools may disagree about how *mokṣa* can be best achieved, what form it will take and whether it is attainable in the present life or beyond but none denies that freedom is *actually* possible.

I am reminded of the Buddhist references to *kuśala upāya*, expedient means to reconcile divergent and seemingly contradictory teachings ascribed to the Buddha himself. For Vedānta it is slightly different — rather than ascribing their opinions to a specific person like the Buddha, it is the *śruti* that the "founders" of the various schools invoke to support their views and their task is made harder by the fact that the words of the *śruti* are fixed, only the interpretations can vary and it is their burden to justify the correctness of their interpretation. I cannot but help see these diverse attempts as *upāyas* —as there are many different personalities, it is only fitting that there be many diverse ways of achieving the highest goal, *mokṣa*. I suspect that one cannot clinically and objectively determine the superiority of any one approach over the rest. One tends naturally to choose the approach that fits best within one's ideology and predilections, whether due to one's environment or one's past karma as the case may be. If one prefers to relate to "supreme perfection" personified, perhaps the approach via bhakti will seem "best" with as much or as little non-duality as one is willing to tolerate providing a reason

<sup>54</sup> See Dasgupta, pp.382-3, Chaudhuri (1981), pp. 54-6, and Brockington, pp.165-6 for historical background.

<sup>55</sup> Chaudhuri (1981), pp.366-417

<sup>56</sup> And, as far as I know, it conveniently does not match my original criterion of having a Brahmasūtra bhāṣya!

<sup>57</sup> George Bosworth Burch in his introduction to Bhattacharyya (1976), p.2.

for the variance from strict *dvaita* through *bhedābheda* to *advaita* qualified in one form or another. But if one is more partial to "pure" reason alone, unencumbered by emotion, then the uncompromising non-duality of Śaṅkara's *advaita* might appeal.

Ultimately though, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, or as a commentator on the works of Madhva, Vyāsatīrtha says:

*na hīkṣulehanenaiva jñāta iksuraso bhavet.*

*na cekṣudaṇḍam niṣpīḍya labdho nekṣuraso bhavet.*<sup>58</sup>

"By merely licking the outer surface of sugarcane, one can't taste and enjoy its sweetness; Without squeezing it between the teeth, one cannot enjoy the flavor of the sugarcane."

It is only through praxis, through applying these philosophies to one's own life, that one can determine if any of these schools deliver the goods on *mokṣa*. That there has been and continues to be healthy debate between the proponents of these various schools serves to indicate that each seeker is trying to test the efficacy of their avowed doctrine against others. That these debates continue to this date without any resoundingly conclusive victory on the part of any given school may suggest that in their own fashion these diverse schools are efficacious suited to the individual practitioners' propensities and predilections, and that there may be more than just one way to attaining *mokṣa*.

---

<sup>58</sup> Sharma, p.xi

## References

- Apte, Vasudeo Mahadeo (1960), *Brahma-Sūtra Shāṅkara-Bhāṣya*. Bombay: Popular Book Depot.
- Ayyangar, M.B.Narasimha, trans. (1979), *Vedāntasāra of Bhagvad Rāmānuja*. Adyar Library and Research Center.
- Bhattacharyya, Krishna Chandra (1975), *Search for the Absolute in Neo-Vedanta*. ed. George B. Burch. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Brockington, J. L. (1996), *The Sacred Thread: Hinduism in its Continuity and Diversity*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Chaudhuri, Roma (1962), *Doctrine of Srikantha (and other Monotheistic Schools of the Vedānta) Vol I*. Calcutta: Pracyavani.
- Chaudhuri, Roma (1972), *Ten Schools of the Vedānta: Part I (Five Schools)*. Calcutta: Rabindra Bharati University.
- Chaudhuri, Roma (1975), *Ten Schools of the Vedānta: Part II (Further reflections of the Five Schools of the Vedānta)*. Calcutta: Rabindra Bharati University.
- Chaudhuri, Roma (1981), *Ten Schools of the Vedānta: Part III (Five Remaining Schools, Together with the Unique School of Swami Vivekananda)*. Calcutta: Rabindra Bharati University.
- Dasguta, Surendranath (1922), *A History of Indian Philosophy*, v.1-5. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Deutsch, Elliot (1973), *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Hiriyanna, M. (1996), *Essentials of Indian Philosophy*. London: Diamond Books.
- Karmarkar, Raghunath Damodar, ed. (1959), *Śrībhāṣya of Rāmānuja, Part I: Catuḥsūtrī*. University of Poona.
- Khanna, A. B. (1998), *Bhāskarācārya (A Study with Special Reference to his Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya)*. Delhi: Amar Granth Publications.
- Malkovsky, Bradley J. (2001), *The Role of Divine Grace in the Soteriology of Śaṅkarācārya*. Leiden: Brill.
- Marfatia, Mrudula I. (1967), *The Philosophy of Vallabhācārya*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Potter, Karl H. (1981), *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, v.3: Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṅkara and His Pupils*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Potter, Karl H. (1999), *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Rao, C. Hayavadana, (1936) *The Śrīkara Bhāṣya being the Virāsaiva Commentary on the Vedānta-Sūtras by Srīpati. Vol. I Introduction*. Bangalore Press.
- Reddington, James D. (1983) *Vallabhācārya on The Love Games of Kṛṣṇa*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Sastri, Shri Anant Krishna (1995) *Brahmasūtra-Śāṅkarabhāṣyam with Nine Commentaries, v. I*. Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan.
- Shah, Jethalal G. (1969) *Shri Vallabhacharya: His Philosophy and Religion*. Nadiad: Pushtimargiya Pustakalaya.



- Sharma, B.N.K, (1971) *The Brahmasūtras and their Principle Commentaries (A Critical Exposition) Vol. I*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
- Tapasyānanda, Svāmi (1990) *Bhakti Schools of Vedānta (Lives and Philosophies of Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, Vallabha and Caitanya)*. Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math.
- Torwesten, Hans (1985) *Vedanta, Heart of Hinduism*. New York: Grove Press.