

## **An Institution Building of Cultural India by Aadi Shankaracharya – A Psycho-Social Perspective**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Aadi Shankaracharya is a greatest seer, litterateur, hermit and exponent of Advait Vedant in Indian Philosophy. He has authored numerous philosophical books, Suktas, Stotras and superb commentaries on Upanishadas too. His was born in a middle class Nambudri family in the State of Kerala. His inclination towards the philosophy from childhood was nurtured by his parents. In a life span of just 32 years, he visited many places in India through its width and breadth and propounded the Advait Vedant, which has its roots in the Upanishadas, undoubtedly. His contribution in Sanskrit literature is immense. His philosophical revolution, restructuring and rejuvenating the Sanatan Hindu Dharma is unparalleled in the Indian history. His outstanding contribution to Sanatan Hindu Dharma and Indian Philosophy is exemplary and beyond any measurement. His urge and initiative to reform restructure and rejuvenate Sanatan Hindu Dharma and its philosophy by introducing the new revolutionary concept of Advait Darshan (Siddhant) theory is very much important from the Psycho-Social Perspective.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sanatan Hindu Dharma, Indian Philosophy, Shad Darshanas, Advait Darshan / Siddhant, Matthas, Monasteries, Chaturvana, Caste System, Buddhism, Jainism, Institution Building, Values, Mission, Organization Structure.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

Globally, Aadi Shankaracharya is known as an astute, learned, intelligent seer, hermit and philosopher. He has authored great treatise and stotras. His commentaries are great and superb. They are par excellence. Many people, till date have penned hundreds of volumes about his contribution in Sanskrit literature and philosophy. The primary purpose of this paper is to discuss about his outstanding role in institutionalizing the oldest philosophy of the world, Sanskrit and his role in ‘Institution Building, carving out the ‘Mission’ and Vision’ for future generations for the propagation, preaching and practicing of ‘Advait Vedant (Darshan)’. This is the reason even after almost 1400 years, the reverence for Advait Vedant, its adoption and important has not receded.

### **II. METHODOLOGY**

The subject being a mix of history, political science, sociology and psychology the primary methodology adopted is referring, studying and comparing various aspects from the perspective of influence and impact of the role played by Aadi Shankaracharya, in institutionalization.

### III. DISCUSSION

In this paper, the points discussed are (a) Political environment prevailing in India and more specifically Southern India (b) rise of Jainism and Buddhism and its residuary impact on Indian society, (c) Excessive drifts from social needs and values, (e) Buddha's misrepresented philosophy, (d) Re-interpretation of Vedic philosophy and Upanishads, (e) Re-phrasing the Upanishads, (f) Institutionalization, re-structuring the systems for spreading 'Advait Vedant'.

**Panoramic view of historical chronology prior to arrival of Jagadguru Aadi Shankaracharya.** This chronology is of immense important to appreciate the contribution of a greatest Sanyāsi, Seer, Author, Philosopher Aadi Shankaracharya. In fact, it can throw better light on the subject, if we go back to 2000–3000 years before Aadi Shankaracharya. However, considering the primary subjects and its focus, we restrict ourselves to the time of rise of Jainism.

**Ritualistic Approach:** Change in ideologies does not take place independent of the prevailing events in the society. So, there must have been something in the social structure dominant in the Pre-6<sup>th</sup> Century BC Era that compelled people to rebel and create independent sects. Therefore, rise of sects is closely related with the system of 'Jati' (Castes) and 'Varna' system. Indian Sub-continent in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC was in a state of continuous change. This continuous change was not only limited to the political structure and systems of governance, but also affected the socio-religious ideologies of the people living in the sub-continent. In the sphere of socio-religious ideologies, it led to creation of number of sects, two of which later became independent religions, namely Jainism and Buddhism.<sup>1</sup>

Bhagwan Mahavir, the 24<sup>th</sup> Tirthankar of Jains, took birth in 599 BCE and left for heavenly abode in the year 527 BCE. He was followed by Lord Gautam Buddha, who took birth in the year 563 BCE and his Mahaparinirvan occurred in the year 483 BCE. It means, Gautam Buddha born after 36 years of Mahavir Jain, and Aadi Shankaracharya took birth almost 1315 years after the departure of Mahavir Jain and 1271 years after the demise of Gautam Buddha.

It means that during the intervening period of almost 1000 years, the society was largely impacted by the philosophy of Jainism and Buddhism, which are 'Atheist'. Both these philosophies do not accept 'Vedas' at all. Their non-allegiance to Vedas distinguishes them from other 'षड दर्शन (Shad Darshanas)'.

Jainism is teaching a path to spiritual purity and enlightenment through disciplined non-violence (Ahimsa, literally "non-injury") to all living creatures. It is still in existence and is an integral part of South Asian religious belief and practice. The name *Jainism* derives from the Sanskrit verb (Dhatu) 'ji' which means "to conquer". It refers to the ascetic battle that, it is believed, Jain monks and nuns must fight against the passions and bodily senses to

gain enlightenment (अनुभूती), or omniscience (ब्रह्मज्ञान) and purity of soul. The most illustrious of those few individuals, who have achieved enlightenment are called “Jina” (Literally Conqueror) and adherence to a tradition’s monastic are called “Jain” (Followers of the Conqueror) or Jaina. It originated in the 7<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE in the Ganges basin of Eastern India. It opposed the ritualistic Brahmanic schools, whose prestige derived from their claim of purity and their ability to perform the traditional rituals and sacrifices and to interpret their meaning. These religious perspectives promoted ‘Asceticism’, the abandonment of rituals domestic and social action, and the attainment of spiritual illumination in an attempt to win, through one’s own efforts, freedom from repeated rebirths. Although traditionally dated 599 to 527 BCE, Mahavir must be regarded as close contemporary of the Buddha (traditionally believed to have lived between 563 – 483 BCE. Mahavir had rejected the claim of the ‘Caste System’ that privileged Brahmin authority on the basis of innate purity, a formalized caste system nonetheless gradually appeared among the Digamabara in the South India.<sup>2</sup>

**Buddhism:** It is religion and philosophy that developed from the teachings of the Buddha (Sanskrit: “Awakened One”), a teacher who lived in Northern India between the mid-6<sup>th</sup> and mid-4<sup>th</sup> Centuries BCE. It expanded from India to Central and South Asia, China, Korea and Japan. Buddhism has played a central role in the spiritual, cultural and social life of Asia. Buddhism arose in north eastern India, when the great social change and intense religious activities were taking place. At the time of arrival of Buddha, there was much discontent with Brahmanic (Hindu High-Caste) sacrifices and ritual. In North-Western India there were ascetics, who tried to create a more personal and spiritual religious experience than that found in the Vedas (Hindu sacred scriptures).<sup>3</sup>

**Conditions instrumental to Rise of Jainism and Buddhism:** It will be beneficial to summarize the conditions which gave rise to emergence of Jainism & Buddhism. There are (a) Reaction against Ritualism, (b) Corruption in Religion, (c) Rigid Caste-System, (d) Difficult Language, (e) Political Situation and (f) Agricultural Economy. Jainism and Buddhism are indebted to Vedic philosophy. Both these religions have accepted three concepts of Vedic philosophy, namely, (i) Emancipation takes place in human soul, (ii) Disinclination, Intentness, Renunciation and Transcendental Wisdom and (iii) Fetters of world is a culmination of cycle of birth and deeds.<sup>4</sup>

**Period before the Birth of Aadi Shankaracharya:** The period between 750 AD and 1200 AD is referred to as an early medieval period of Indian history. It was earlier treated by historians as a ‘Dark Phase’. It was so because during this time, the whole country was divided into numerous regional states, which were busy in fighting with each other. However, the recent studies have indicated that though politically divided, India witnessed a growth of new and rich cultural activities in the fields of art, literature and language during the period 750 AD and 1000 AD. There was growth of three important political powers in India. They were Gurjara Pratiharas in North India, Palas in Eastern India and Rashtrakutas in South India. These powers were constantly fighting with each other with an aim to set up their control

over Gangetic region in Northern India. However, economically, this period is believed to be one of decline.<sup>5</sup>

**Social, Cultural & Religious Environment:** The social, cultural and religious environment before the birth of Jagadguru Aadi Shankaracharya was totally charged with negativism towards the Vedas. The main cause being over emphasis and importance attached to rituals by the then priest community, known as Brahmins. However, the impact and importance of Jainism and Buddhism had already started waning but was still prevalent in the society. As mentioned before, Aadi Shankaracharya was born after 1315 years from the demise of Bhagwan Mahavir and 1271 years from the Mahaparinirvan of Gautam Buddha. The period of 1000 years is not at all a small period in national life. The prevalence of Jainism and Buddhism for 1000 years had definitely ingrained on the public mind and misconstrued belief of non-utility of Hindu Dharma. And therefore, the task of revival of Hinduism in the form of 'Advait Vedant' was a herculean one. To shoulder such challenging task required a huge courage, determination and conviction in the thoughts adopted. Shankaracharya possessed an extraordinary intelligence, wisdom and ability to see beyond the present.

Aadi Shankaracharya was Indian Vedic Scholar, whose work presents a harmonizing of the Shastras, with liberating knowledge of the self at its core, synthesizing the Advait Vedanta teachings of his time.

Shankaracharya's masterpiece of commentary is the *Brahmasutrabhashya* (Commentary on Brahma Sutras). The Brahma Sutra is a fundamental text of the Vedanta School. His commentaries on 10 principal Upanishads are considered authentic by scholars. Those *Bhashyas* (commentaries) are Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Kena, Isha, Katha, Mundaka, Prashna and Mandukya Upanishadas. His other contributions are commentaries on Bhagwad Gita, Yogasutras etc.

**Epoch Maker:** Aadi Shankaracharya, whose, Advait Vedanta was the philosophically robust response to that era of confusion, integrating diverse thoughts and Hindu practices into a philosophy based on the Vedic dictum of 'एक सत विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति' (One Truth, Many Expositions). Advait is only one---and arguably the last of the six schools known as the 'Six Systems' (Shad Darshanas) of main stream Hindu philosophy, but it has proved the most enduring. Shankara emphasized the importance of *Pramanas* or methods of *Reasoning*, tempered by *Anubhava* or intuitive experience.<sup>6</sup> Shankara, is the foremost amongst the master-minds and the giant souls which Mother India has produced. He was a greatest metaphysician, a practical philosopher, an infallible logician, a dynamic personality and a stupendous moral and spiritual force to be reckoned. His grasping and elucidating powers knew no bounds. He has a fully developed *Yogi, Jnani and Bhakta*. He was *Karmyogi* and powerful magnet.<sup>7</sup> The famous Shankara preached his Advait Vedant, which stipulates that nothing really existed excepting 'One Universal Spirit', and there was, therefore, no

scope for love or devotion, as that obviously requires two distinct entities, ‘the lover’ and the ‘beloved’.<sup>8</sup>

**Spiritually and Philosophically Challenging Task:** At the time of the birth of Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya, Hinduism had become paralyzed by its own inflexible practices of orthodoxy, ritualism and formality and in retreat before the rise of reform movements challenging it, notably those following the ascetic Mahavir Jaina (BCE 599–527 BCE) and the other-worldly Gautama Buddha (563 BCE–483 BCE), whose followers branched out into new religions distinct from the Mimamsa Brahminism, practiced by mainstream Hindus. Both the new faiths flourished for several centuries, as Hinduism descended into esoteric disputes over Sankhya dualism and Charvak materialism. It was then, in the late eighth century CE that this youthful south Indian sage rose to heal and rejuvenate a divided religion. Vivekachudamani reviews the entire range of Hindu philosophical thoughts and argument, from the Upanishadas to Bhagwad Gita.<sup>9</sup> Respected Shri Jayendra Sarasvati, Head of the Kanchipuram Mutt in Tamil Nadu, also said that Kanchi Mutt and four other hermitages at Dwarika, Sringeri, Puri and Badri insist that Adi Shankaracharya was born in 509 BCE **and NOT IN 788 AD**. He elaborated on two major evidences supporting the Pre-Christian era theory.....First 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*.<sup>10</sup>

**Institution Builder:** Institution building involves the organization internalizing the set of values, norms, policy framework, and systems and structures that give it long-term strength and resilience, so that even in the absence of transformational leader, the organization would continue to excel. It is when good practices and good norms and systems seep into the core of the organization that institution building may be said to have been taken place. Most transformational leaders attempted institution building in two distinct ways: by introducing or reinforcing ‘healthy’ values; and by introducing or strengthening appropriate management systems. Without such institution building, the organization relapses into its earlier rut once the transformational leader departs.<sup>11</sup>

Adi Shankaracharya’s extraordinary travels began when he was just eight years old and continued till his demise at the age of 32 years. He wandered to every corner of the country, from Rameshwaram in the extreme South to Srinagar in the Kashmir Valley in the extreme North, from Dwarka in the West to Kamarupa in Assam in the North-East, and various points in between. He established temples almost everywhere he halted, all of which have remained in continuous use since, and left behind Five Major Mutths headed by successors of Shankaracharya to this day: Jyotimath near Badrinath (Uttarakhand), Govardhan Mutth in Puri (Odisha), Kalika Mutths in Dwarika (Gujarat), and two in the South, the Sarada Peetham in Sringeri (Karnataka) and the Kanchi Kamkoti Peetham in Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu). In addition to these ‘*Pontifical*’ seats, Adi Shankaracharya is

credited with the creation and organization of the Order of Dasanami Sannyasis, *Wandering Monk*, who took the message of the faith across the country.<sup>12</sup>

In order to ensure its sustenance well past his lifetime, Adi Shankaracharya established institution which would carry forward his legacy. He established monastic institutions in all four corners of India. And perhaps, he is the first ever person to unify our whole country through a structural and institutional set-up, well before the British. He created elaborate mechanisms for selection of spiritual leaders into these pontifical seats and also codified their roles and responsibilities, which have also set up institutions and have ensured their sustenance without political or military patronage. This is probably the most unique achievement of Shankara.<sup>13</sup>

Shankara was not an ivory tower philosopher. He was a political sage, engaging with and responding to the historical context of his time. Through philosophy, poetry and pilgrimage, he attempted to bind the subcontinent of India that was constantly referred to in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain texts as well as in the Vedic ritual of Sankalp as '*Jambu-dweep*', the continent of Jambu tree, and Bharatvarsha, the land of the Bharat kind.<sup>14</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Organizational Missions and Visions are amongst the most powerful integrators, attractors of talent, and sources of purposive human energy and will. When an organization has internalized a mission, vision of excellence and / or core values, it is charged with a passion for excellence. But there are many kinds of mission, vision and core values, and there are many kinds of organizational excellence. Organizational excellence is more likely to arise if there is a good fit between organizational passions and aimed at organizational excellence.<sup>15</sup> Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya, on the background of paralyzed socio-religious environment had an intimidating task to refuel the confidence, re-structure the administration of religious activities, re-define the doctrines of religion, re-shape the systems and re-think about the rituals, its importance and relevance.

He had wonderfully established the inter-connection and inter-linkages of Vedas, Upanishadas and Puranas for the first time. Undoubtedly, especially on the background of influence of Jainism and Buddhism on the society, it has challenged the Hindu Dharma and its Vedantic heritage. At the advent of these two faiths, the facts were twisted and destroyed mercilessly, and it was alleged that the Vedic Hindu 'Religious Karmas (Deeds)' are undesirable, because they impinge upon the basic rights of human beings and discriminate amongst the different people on the basis of their '*Varnas*' (Professions). In fact, those were not facts. Might be few selfish people, belonging to the Brahmin community might have emphasized and insisted upon the necessity and inevitability of religious rituals. Another, misnomer or incongruity was that the rituals were in Sanskrit language, which was not



accessible to common people in the society. This is absolutely untrue. In fact, there are ample references in historical documents to substantiate that Sanskrit language was being spoken by many people in the lowest strata of society, like ‘Shudras’.

Anyway, irrespective of the above allegations and distorted assertions, it is well documented that Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya had taken tremendous pains to travel throughout the length and breadth of the country. It is mentioned at many places that he travelled whole country at least four times in his lifetime. It was not only travel and visiting the places, but establishing four mutts at four corners of the country and entrusting the responsibility to four disciples to carry out the tenets of Advait Vedant, which are based on the Upanishadas’ principles, for all time to come. To establish these seats and the codification done to regulate the functioning of these mutts was nothing different and less than ‘Organization Development’, in today’s modern theory of Applied Behavioral Science (ABS).

The revival of Hinduism in the form of propagation of Advait Vedant was the ‘Mission’ set forth by Shankara. And for this, establishing pontifical seats was the ‘Vision’. It goes without saying that the inculcation of Vedic values was certain. Bharatiya values regarding human rights perhaps are the oldest. Rigveda, which is regarded as the oldest document declares that all human beings are equal and they are brothers. The Atharva Veda declared that all human beings have equal right over water and food (Natural Resources). The Vedas including Upanishads (Shruti) were the primordial sources of ‘Dharma’ which is a compendious term for all the human rights and duties, the observance of which was regarded as essential for securing peace and happiness to individuals and the society, as well. To be precise about what values Jagadguru Shankaracharya tried to establish is beautifully enunciated, propounded and well-illustrated in the 10<sup>th</sup> Mandala of World’s oldest literature Rigved is at 191<sup>st</sup> Sukta, called as ‘Sadnyan Sukta’. It is noteworthy that this is the last, final and concluding part of Rigved, a treasure of excellent knowledge. It says, “समानो मंत्रः सिमितिः समानी समानं मनः सह चित्तमेषाम्। All your prayer and desires be similar and for common good. All your get-together is without separatist feeling. All of you are united in thought, word and deed. समानी व आकूतिः समानानि हृदयानि वः। समानमस्तु वो मनो तथा वः सुसहासित ॥ Lest there be oneness in your resolutions, hearts and minds. Let the strength to live with mutual co-operation be firming you all.

It is noteworthy that the Honorable Supreme Court of India in **Maneka Gandhi Vs. Union of India–1978 (1) SCC 24** has mentioned that the *fundamental rights represent the basic values cherished by the people of this country since the Vedic times* and they are calculated to protect the dignity of the individual and create conditions in which every human being can develop his personality to the fullest extent”. Even the Article 14 of Indian Constitution, Right to Equality, is perfect inscription of the Vedic Philosophy strongly emphasized, advocated and propagated through the Advait Vedant. Thus, the outstanding

contribution by way of evolving the ‘Mission’, ‘Vision’ and ‘Values’ of the revived Hindu Dharm, with the help of redefining the Advait Vedant is a unparalleled and exquisite role of Jagadguru Aadi Shankaracharya.

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