

JIVA, BRAHMAN, AND JAGAT RELATIONSHIP IN ADVAITA AND DVAITA VEDANTA: A COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Vedanta philosophy addresses the question of the relationship between the individual soul (jiva) and the supreme soul (Brahman), a question that is commonly put forth through the concepts of oneness and difference. Although all the Vedantic schools share a common scripture, the Vedanta Sutras, the philosophical interpretation of each school of thought is different, which results in different metaphysical frameworks. While there are many previous studies done on the comparison of these different philosophies, they remain largely descriptive in nature. Unlike others, the present study aims to adopt a problem-based comparative approach, which examines how these two different Vedantic schools, Advaita and Dvaita, answer the central concern of the Vedanta Sutras, which is the idea of oneness and difference.

Keywords: Jiva, Brahman, Jagat, Advaita, Dvaita, Vedanta.

INTRODUCTION

The word "Veda" means "knowledge," and "anta" means "the end," or "conclusion." The Vedas are divided into 4 parts, the last one of which is the Upanishads, also called Vedanta. So, the word "Vedanta" literally translates as the concluding part of the Vedas, the ultimate reality of this world. The three main concepts viz. Jiva, Brahman and Jagat are the central part of the Upanishads because the entire reality of the world and how to rise above it revolve around these three concepts. Now there are many different religious traditions within the Vedanta that offer different descriptions of these facts. The two schools discussed herein, namely the Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankara and the Dvaita Vedanta of Madhvacharya, are two such schools whose doctrines, despite having the same base as the Vedanta Sutras, are totally contradictory.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- (1) To analyze the similarities and difference among the concept of Jiva (the living entity) in Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta
- (2) To analyze the similarities and difference among the concept of Brahman (the Supreme absolute truth) in Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta
- (3) To analyze the similarities and difference among the concept of Jagat (material nature) in Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta

DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

The present work is based on primary and secondary data collected from different sources, like scriptures (Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali Yoga Sutras, the major Upanishads), various books (including commentary on the above-mentioned scriptures), journals, contemporary records, etc. Mainly a descriptive and analytical method is adopted. The study employs a problem-based comparative framework, analyzing how Advaita and Dvaita Vedanta each resolve the Vedanta Sutras' central tension between oneness (Abheda) and difference (Bheda) with respect to the triad Jiva-Brahman-Jagat, thereby moving beyond mere doctrinal description to critical evaluation of their metaphysical coherence and soteriological implications.

THE CONCEPT OF JIVA

• Jiva in Advaita Vedanta

The word Advaita, clearly suggests the non-dualism principle. This philosophy of Shankara states that there exists no

individuality of the living entity and that it is the same as Brahman. According to Advaita Vedanta, there is no actual difference between the living entity and the cause of the creation, the Brahman. The only difference that appears to be is because of Avidya (illusion). According to this doctrine, the living entity appears to be in this material world only because of Maya, or illusion, and knowledge is the only means to liberate oneself from this condition. This knowledge is called "Atma-jnana," or the knowledge of the self, which transcends the difference between the knower and the known, i.e., Brahman and Atman. When a living entity realizes this knowledge, one sees not the outer coverings of Maya but perceives only the universal undivided consciousness in all that is.

• **Jiva in Dvaita Vedanta**

The philosophy of Dvaita, as the name suggests, is of dualism. As such, it states a completely opposite philosophy from the philosophy of Advaitavada, establishing the eternal individuality of the Atman and Brahman. This philosophy was propounded by Srila Madhvacharya (1238-1317). According to the principles of Dvaita Vedanta, the individual souls are neither identical to the Supreme Brahman nor identical to each other. Each living entity is a separate individual self and possesses unique qualities that are present in only that particular soul. According to this philosophy, some souls are eternally liberated, some are eligible for liberation, while others are compelled to be eternally bound by the modes of material nature. This depends on one's innate qualities and one's inclination to surrender towards the Supreme Lord.

• **Jiva in other spiritual texts**

Jiva tattva, as mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita as the eternal soul, has 4 main characteristics:

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचि-न्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः । अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ २० ॥

(Bhagavad Gita As It Is, Chapter 2, Verse 20)

For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, and primeval. He (the eternal soul) is never slain even when the material body is slain.

छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः । न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ २३ ॥

(Bhagavad Gita as It Is, Chapter 2, Verse 23)

The soul can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind.

अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरेण । अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद्युध्यस्व भारत ॥ १८ ॥

(Bhagavad Gita as It Is, Chapter 2, Verse 18)

The material body of the indestructible, immeasurable, and eternal living entity is sure to come to an end; therefore, fight, O descendant of Bharata.

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा-न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ २२ ॥

(Bhagavad Gita as It Is, Chapter 2, Verse 22)

As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones. The Śvetāśvatara Upanishad (5.9) states:

बालाग्रशतभागस्य शतधा कल्पितस्य चाभागो जीवः स विज्ञेयः स चानन्त्याय कल्पते॥

(Śvetāśvatara Upanishad, Chapter 5, Verse 9)

“When the upper point of a hair is divided into one hundred parts and again each of such parts is further divided into one hundred parts, each such part is the measurement of the dimension of the spirit soul.”

CONCEPT OF BRAHMAN

• **Brahman in Advaita Vedanta**

The Vedanta Darshana describes Brahman as the ultimate cause for existence and the ultimate reality of all that is. This is identical for both Advaita and Dvaita schools of philosophy, as well as all the other schools that exist apart from these two. As far as this doctrine is concerned, the true nature of Brahman is that it is impersonal and ever-liberated. The Upanishads describe the Brahman as truth, knowledge, and bliss (sat, chit, and Ananda). Advaita says that Brahman is infinite consciousness and is Nirguna, without any attributes. Saguna Brahma seems to exist only because of the association of Nirguna Brahman with the material nature. It does not have any separate or individual existence. The living entity identifies with the maya and appears to be in the material world, but the Brahman is absolute and above maya. When the jiva becomes enlightened by knowledge and realizes its true form, it becomes one with the Brahman and achieves liberation, Mukti. The word “Advaita” itself implies that the Brahman is non-dual to the jiva, the living

entity. It implies that when the Atman does not identify with anything, it is the true nature of Brahman. But when the Atman identifies with the mind, body, and intellect, it becomes Jiva, a suffering living entity in the material world. Upon liberation, this identification would disappear, and it would no longer remain distinct. In other words, the living entity would merge with the Brahman and become one with it, losing its individual existence.

- **Brahman in Dvaita Vedanta**

The doctrines of Dvaita philosophy accept the Supreme Lord to be all-cognizant, omniscient, and having a form, as the Lord Narayana or Vishnu. Lord Narayana is the original creator of this universe; it works under his direction and is destroyed by his supreme will. He is the cause of all causes, and none other can be directed as Brahman except Lord Vishnu. Unlike the Advaita, this philosophy accepts the Supreme Lord with attributes, i.e., Saguna Brahman. Although the Supreme Lord is full of attributes, he does not possess a material body. His senses are transcendental, and he is beyond the law of karma or the cycle of birth and death. He is non-different from his unlimited names, forms, and potencies. As the Supreme Lord, he is never influenced by the material modes of nature or the threefold miseries that are found in the material world because he is the creator of it all. The root words of Brahman and Vishnu mean the same: "the all-pervading" or "the supreme being." The Dvaita system is said to be Vishnu-sarvottama, which means the highest attribute is the Supreme Lord Vishnu, and he is independent of all the creation he has manifested.

- **Brahman in other spiritual texts**

The Patanjali Yoga Sutras state about the nature of the Supreme as a special living entity who is above the Karmashaya, never affected by the Kleshas and the sound representation of that is Pranava (Omkaara).

क्लेशकर्मविपाकाशयैरपरामृष्टः पुरुषविशेष ईश्वरः |

(Patanjali Yoga Sutras, Samadhi Pada, Sutra 24)

Isvara is the Supreme Purusha, unaffected by misery, actions, fruits of action, or desires.

Unlike the Vedanta Darshan where the Brahman is said to be omnipresent and omniscient, in the Yoga Darshan of Patanjali, the Supreme Brahman is said to be the special Purusha with above mentioned attributes. The reference quoted here is just to understand the difference of the same concept of Brahman in two different darshans.

The Bhagavad Gita confirms the personality to be Lord Krishna himself, where he states that he himself, being the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is situated above the material nature and his birth and activities are transcendental, above the material modes of nature.

जन्म कर्म च मे दिव्यमेवं यो वेति तत्त्वतः । त्यक्त्वा देहं पुनर्जन्म नैति मामेति सोऽर्जुन ॥ ९ ॥

(Bhagavad Gita as It Is, Chapter 4, Verse 9)

One who knows the transcendental nature of My appearance and activities does not, upon leaving the body, take his birth again in this material world but attains My eternal abode, O Arjuna.

CONCEPT OF JAGAT

- **Jagat in Advaita**

Being the theology of oneness, the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta denies the existence of Jagat at once. The Jagat is described as maya, which makes the living entity bewildered and appear to be real. Maya is that illusory force that hides the true nature of the living entity and deludes it to accept the identity of that of body, mind, and intellect. According to Advaita, the world seems to appear only because of the imposition of nama (names) and Rupa (forms) on the ultimate reality. For example, when a rope is mistakenly considered a snake in a dark room, it is because of the absence of light. Similarly, this material world is perceived as reality only because of ignorance. For the one who is in knowledge, there is only one reality, and that is Brahman. Maya is described as the magical power of the God, which performs two tasks: Avarana and Vikshepa. "Avarana" means the concealment of the real nature of Brahman, and "Vikshepa" means the misrepresentation of the real nature of things. In simpler words, Maya is that energy force of the Lord which makes it appear that the world is real, which actually it is not; and makes it appear that Brahman is unreal, which actually is real.

- **Jagat in Dvaita**

Unlike Advaita Vedanta, this philosophy does not term the material world as illusion; rather, it states it as one of the energies of the Supreme Lord Vishnu. Madhvacharya states that the material nature is known and experienced, and it exists in a particular time and space. The main thing about the material world is that it does not have a permanent nature. It is created by the will of the Supreme Lord; it works under his direction and is destroyed in due course of time by his will only. The world is real, but temporary. The pains and pleasures of which the material world consists are all real because one does have a tangible experience of these things. But the fact that they are temporary makes it not very important to be affected by it. As soon as the living entity comes to the realization of its spiritual nature, the activities of the material world become of less significance.

In a Hermeneutical Investigation of Super-Primary meaning in the Dvaita Vedanta of Madhva, it is stated that Jada Prakriti is the matter, and Laxmi Devi, also known as Chetana Prakriti, is the ruling deity of the material world. The creation is born when the Supreme Lord awakens the Jada Prakriti.

Jagat in other spiritual texts

The material world, or Jagat, in the Bhagavad Gita is similar to the opinion of Madhvacharya, wherein in Chapter 7, verse 4 of the text, Lord Krishna states that the material nature that comprises 5 gross and 3 subtle elements is my creation. The five gross elements are air, water, fire, earth, and ether, while the three subtle elements are mind, intelligence, and ego. All these are the manifestations of the Supreme Lord's energy.

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च । अहङ्कार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥ ४ ॥ (Bhagavad Gita As It Is, Chapter 7, Verse 4)

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intelligence and false ego—all together these eight constitute My separated material energies. Another reference from the same scripture states that this external energy called maya works under the direction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead only.

मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यान्मायिनं च महेश्वरमातस्यावयवभूतेस्तु व्यासं सर्वमिदं जगत् ॥

(Śvetāśvatara Upanishad Chapter 4, Verse 10)

“Although maya [illusion] is false or temporary, the background of maya is the supreme magician, the Personality of Godhead, who is Maheśvara, the supreme controller.”

THE CONCEPT OF ONENESS AND DIFFERENCE

• Oneness and difference in Advaita Vedanta

In order to understand the nature of it all, the Advaita philosophy divides it into three different categories: Paramarthika (real or transcendental), Vyavaharika (practical or sensible), and Pratibhashika (apparent or illusory). Brahman is the only reality; therefore, it is called "Paramarthika" or "transcendental." The living entity who is bewildered in this material existence due to ignorance is called Vyavaharika, or sensible reality. And because of the illusory nature of this material world, it is called Pratibhashika, or apparent reality. It is a well-established notion of this doctrine, “Brahman Satya Jagat Mithya,” which means that Brahman, or the supreme consciousness, is the only reality and the Jagat, or this material world, is an illusion. Just like a mirage, which makes one believe the presence of water in the Desert, which actually is not present, but appears to be so just because of the reaction sunlight and the eyesight, similarly the material world appears to be real only because of ignorance (Avidya). Illusion has put us in this material condition and breaking that illusion by the sword of knowledge is the only way out of this world.

• Oneness and difference in Dvaita Vedanta

Presenting a view contradictory to Advaita, Madhvacharya states Panchabheda, or fivefold differences, which makes it distinct: 1. Difference between Jiva and Brahman (Soul and Supreme Soul): Jivas in the Lord's creation are eternally separated parts of the Supreme Lord himself. Upon realizing their true nature above the material world, they serve the Lord in the Vaikuntha planets eternally. 2. Difference between Brahman and Jagat (supreme and matter): Jagat—the material world is the external potency of the Supreme Lord, which is real but temporary; i.e., subject to creation and annihilation. 3. Difference amongst the Jivas (individual souls): Each soul possesses different characteristics and different relations towards the Supreme Lord. Hence, each individual soul is different from the other one. 4. Difference between Jiva and Jagat (individual souls and matter): The Jivas end up in the material world because of the forgetfulness of their own original, spiritual nature. Once realizing its true nature, the individual soul never returns to the material world. Hence, the existence of the Jiva and Jagat is distinct. 5. Difference between Jagat and Jagat (different forms of matter): There are innumerable universes created by the Supreme Lord, and each universe is different from the other. Hence, these are one energy but separated forms of the matter.

DISCUSSION

Table 6.1 Differences between Dvaita and Advaita Darshan

Points of difference	Advaita Vada	Dvaita Vada
Profounder	Adi Shankaracharya	Madhvacharya
Nature of reality	Only one reality, Brahman	Everything is real as the energy of Supreme Lord.
Nature of the Supreme	Impersonal Brahman, without any attributes	Brahman is full of attributes; Lord Narayana is the Supreme.
Nature of the World	Illusory like a mirage.	Real but temporary, like a dream.
Nature of the Soul (Jiva)	Exists only due to ignorance, upon realisation merges with impersonal	Exists because of forgetfulness of spiritual nature, upon realisation engages in the

	brahman.	service of the divine.
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Table 6.2 Similarities between Dvaita and Advaita Darshan

Points of Similarity	Advaita and Dvaita Vada
Base Scriptures	Vedanta Sutras and Upanishads
Goal of Human life	To rise above the material platform and realise the true self – Atman.

The above tables systematically show how the two different viewpoints of one single scripture signify and try to present the position of the living entity, the material world, and the eternal creator of all that is – the Supreme Person. While the Advaita states that everything is one and seems to appear different only because of illusion, Dvaita states that everything, including the living entity and the material world, is real and a separate energy of the Lord. Advaita believes that the existence of the soul is also because of illusion and that existence will come to an end when the jiva merges with the Brahman after his illusion is destroyed by the sword of knowledge. Dvaita states that the existence of the soul in this material world is because of the forgetfulness of the spiritual nature of the soul, which is to serve the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The existence of the soul is eternal, and once the jiva realizes his true nature, he goes back to the service of the Lord in the spiritual world, Vaikuntha. The world according to Advaita is a complete illusion, and the root cause of the living entity being in this material world is ignorance. The only way to cut out this ignorance is spiritual knowledge, Jnana. On the other hand, the Dvaita philosophy of Madhvacharya states that the world is not illusion but is real; it is the external potency of the Supreme Lord, Vishnu. It is called "maya" because of its nature of making temporary things look permanent and making insignificant things look of very much importance.

CONCLUSION

Several recent studies have already examined aspects of Advaita and Dvaita Vedanta. Bhanu (2024) shows that Advaita and Dvaita give opposite yet internally consistent accounts of the self—identity with Brahman in Advaita and eternal distinction in Dvaita. Kalita (2024) and Das (2019/2023) emphasize that, for Advaita, the world and difference are ultimately unreal, and liberation is the realization of non-difference. The present study agrees with these findings but goes further by comparing all three within a single framework of oneness and difference. It concludes that while Advaita presents the world and difference as illusion and focuses on the experience of unity with the Divine, Dvaita affirms real difference between the living entity, the material world, and the Supreme Person and establishes separate identities for all three, focusing on a relationship with Him. Thus, Advaita suits the seeker who seeks unity as oneness, while Dvaita suits the seeker who seeks a divine relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

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