

Sri Madhvacharya (Madhva)

Sri Madhvacharya (Madhva) was born in approximately 1238 CE. During his lifetime, he influenced various philosophical aspects of Hinduism, through diverse means. Beyond being a Vedantic Acharya [Acharya is the last name of some Brahmins, meaning teacher] (Acharya, 2009), mountain climber, great debater, and large supporter and follower of Vaishnava Hinduism, Madhva began the Dvaita School of Vedanta and the Brahma Vaishnava Sampradaya. His devotion to Hindu philosophy began at a young age (Armstrong 2). According to tradition, as a prodigious boy, he already thoroughly understood the Vedanta. Furthermore, by 7 years of age, Madhva meticulously memorized the Vedic texts. At that time, the expectation was to begin learning about the texts with his peers, at the prominent Totanillaya in India, rather than already fully understanding them. In addition to being very intelligent, he also had supernormal powers (siddhi), as per stated in tradition. Madhva made numerous intellectual advancements throughout his life, and possessed powerful inner strengths, which caused him to contribute his philosophical insights to the Hindu community (Armstrong 3).

Madhva's accomplishments continued past his childhood years. As a young man, with great insight towards his true inner self (Atman), the world, and divinity, he entered into Samnyasin (renunciation stage) at the age of 16. This was a very early age to enter into the typical final stage of life, according to traditional Hindu practices. Samnyasin is also a stage in which few actually ever experience. Typically, the average 16-year-old Hindu boy would be in the midst of his Brahmacharya (student) stage, although Madhva was not a typical 16-year-old boy. Because of that characteristic, Madhva became an Acharya and Sannyasin renouncer in the Ekadandi Order (Armstrong 5-7).

Like Madhva, Ramanuja and Sankara were also great Acharyas, with conflicting views (Sharma 345-354). During his teenage years, Madhva began his on-going debates with Sankara institutions about Atman, in addition to various other ideologies that Sankara possessed. First, Madhva believed that it was essential to understand the *Rg Veda* in order to grasp the Brahman concept. Beyond the *Rg Veda*, Madhva stressed the importance of thoroughly understanding scriptures as a part of religious devotion and practice. He also expressed that he did not favor Sankara's idea that "the ultimate reality of Brahman is nirguna" (Stoker 31). Many of Madhva's arguments with Sankara were supported in his belief of Visnu's supremacy, which Sankara did not adhere to (Stoker 47-77). He also contrasted with Ramanuja, who was also a monotheist and a supporter of Vaisnava Hinduism. Madhva believed that there was only one agent whereas Ramanuja believed that God and human were both agents. The on-going debates with the other Acharyas led to greater public awareness pertaining to the different philosophies within Hinduism (Yandell 544-561).

Madhva also spread his values and beliefs through various pieces of literature. He wrote approximately 37 books in his lifetime, including the *Tattvodyota* and the *Laksna Granthas* (Sangha 25), as well as commented on various types of Hindu literature including the *Karmanirnaya* and the *Chandogya Upanishad Bhasya* (Sangha 24). His main literary goals were to contest monism, which was extensively promoted by other sages, such as Ramanuja (Yandell 544-561). Madhva also believed that theism should be taught through experiencing, reasoning, and thoroughly understanding Hindu literature. This was expressed through his 4 main beliefs in his writings, which included "a determination to remain true to experience above all, in the spirit of science, a commitment to sound reasoning, a fervent devotion to a personal God [Ista-Devata] that drove all of his actions, and a fearless tenacity in expounding his vision in the most hostile

environments” (Varghese 121). Madhva believed that research and experience were important aspects within spirituality (Varghese 118-131).

Many of Madhva’s opinions and teachings were depicted in his commentary on various Hindu scriptures. Specifically, he added insight to the *Paramopanishad* as per the following (see Varghese: 119):

The difference between the jîva (soul) and Îshvara (Creator), and the difference between jada (insentient things, e.g., matter) and Îshvara; and the difference between various jîvas, and the difference between jada and jîva; and the difference between various jadas, these five differences make up the universe.

Within the 5 principles, Madhva highlighted 3 main areas. The 3 main areas were based around the following concepts: “How We Know,” “God and the World,” and “Matter and Spirit” (Varghese 119-120). The first, “How We Know” ideology, was explained as achieved through “experience, reason and divine revelation.” The second ideology of “God and the World” was based around the thought that the entire world relies on God, and that He has no imperfections, and controls everything (prasada). Moreover, the third ideology, “Matter and Spirit,” focused on the reasoning that the world is composed of things that are concrete, such as material goods, while still maintaining/balancing one’s spiritual side. The third ideology took a critical look at the connection between both the spirit and material items (see Varghese: 118-120). Furthermore, Madhva continually incorporated his idea that beings “cannot infer anything without the evidence of [their senses]” (Armstrong 45). That is, the highest sense being Sakshin, and using Sakshin to become more self-conscious. Madhva went beyond ancient Hindu literature to gain further insight and express new ways of interpretation and thinking with not only his students, but the Hindu community as a whole (Armstrong 45).

As Madhva aged, he began to spread his knowledge further. His intellectual abilities, along with his *siddhi*, led him to attain *moksa* (liberation), and to also expand his theories regarding the achievement of *moksa*. In contrast to leading Hindu philosophies, Madhva believed that some members of society would never achieve *moksa* (Krishnananda 9). Madhva's expressions of his differing ideologies were crucial components of his teachings, while travelling. In addition to sharing his beliefs, he travelled extensively through India and surrounding countries to further his knowledge on the Vedanta, which led to Madhva creating his own Vedantic philosophy—the Dvaita (binary) Vedanta. He also completed pilgrimages that connected him with Vyasa, at Uttara Badri, to further his understanding of Hindu literature, which led Madhva to special religious insights. At that point, he had a few loyal followers and disciples who accompanied him and assisted in spreading his philosophies (see Armstrong: 38-53).

From few to many, Madhva's philosophies became very popular among the Hindu community. This was especially apparent after the philosophical convention, in Rajamahendri, which occurred in approximately 1270CE. While travelling, Madhva partook in the convention. There, he shared his philosophical ideologies, which led to him winning a debate over Puri Swami Shastri, who was a famous Sanskrit scholar (Armstrong 48). The following summarizes Madhva's 9 major philosophies, which were developed throughout his lifetime, as summarized in the *Prameya Shloka* by Sri Vyasa Tirtha (1460-1539), as follows:

1. Hari (Visnu) is Supreme.
2. The world is real.
3. The differences are real.
4. The various classes of jivas are cohorts of Visnu.
5. They reach different states (lower or superior) ultimately.
6. Mukti, liberation, is an experience of one's own nature.
7. Mukti is achieved by pure devotion.
8. The triad of perception, inference and testimony are the sources of valid knowledge.

9. It is Hari alone who is praised in the Vedas.

These philosophies were the guiding principles behind Madhva's arguments and teachings. They were primarily taught in his schools, which were included in the 5 schools of Vaishnavism. The exceptional schools were highly influential in the northeast provinces in India, including Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. The philosophies have since expanded geographically and continue to be practiced throughout Hinduism (Armstrong 44).

Madhva contributed greatly to Hindu philosophy, and education systems. He left the physical world approximately in 1317 CE (or Kali Yuga 4418), at the age of 79. The last known existence of Madhva was high up in the mountains of the Himalayas—a place where he learned, then developed many of his philosophies (Armstrong 44, 53). Madhva left Hindu scholars and worshippers new insight regarding the presence of God, Sanskrit writings, Vedic knowledge, and spiritual insight. In addition to philosophical contributions, Madhva's established temple, the *Udipi Sri Krsna*, not only stands as a devotional area for those who worship Krsna, but also now serves to commemorate Madhva's contributions to Hinduism. Many of Madhva's ideas, written works, commentaries, and religious structures have greatly influenced to Hinduism today.

References and Further Recommended Readings

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Madhvacharya

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/index.shtml>

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