



# Shankaracharyas

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## Why in News?

The decision of the **four Shankaracharyas** to abstain from attending the inauguration of the **Ram Temple in Ayodhya** has stirred considerable interest.

## Who are the Shankaracharyas?

- **About: Shankaracharya** (teacher of the way of Shankara), is a **religious title** used by the heads of the **four cardinal mathas or peeths** believed to have been established by **Adi Shankara (c 788 CE-820 CE)**.
  - According to tradition, they are religious teachers who belong to a **line of teachers** going back all the way to Adi Shankara himself, however, **historical evidence regarding the same is scarce** before the 14th century CE.
- **Mathas:** The four mathas are in **Dwarka (Gujarat), Joshimath (Uttarakhand), Puri (Odisha), and Sringeri (Karnataka)**.
  - They serve as **religious shrines, temples, libraries, and residences**. They play a crucial role in preserving and propagating Shankara's tradition.
  - There is little historical evidence for the existence of these mathas prior to the **14<sup>th</sup> century CE**, when the [Vijayanagara kingdom](#) began to patronise the Sringeri matha.

## Who was Adi Shankara?

- **About: Adi Shankara or Adi Shankaracharya** was an **8<sup>th</sup>-century Indian philosopher and theologian**, considered one of the most influential figures in the history of Hinduism
  - He is believed to be born in **Kalady village in Kerala**.
  - Initiated into studies by **Govindacharya**, Shankara travelled extensively, challenging philosophical traditions, and **establishing mathas**.
- **Key Contributions:**
  - **Systematized Advaita Vedanta:** Provided a framework for understanding the **non-dualistic nature of reality**.
  - **Illuminating Hindu Scripture:** Authored 116 works, including commentaries on **Upanishads, Brahmasutra, and the Bhagavad Gita**.
  - **Promoted Bhakti movement:** Emphasised the importance of **devotion and surrender to God**, paving the way for later devotional movements.
- **Major Works/Commentaries:**
  - **Bhashya Granthas:**
    - Brahma Sutras
    - Isavasya Upanishad
    - Kena Upanishad
    - Katha Upanishad
    - Prasna Upanishad
    - Mundaka Upanishad
    - Mandukya Upanishad
    - Mandukya Karika

- Bhagavad Gita
- **Prakarana Granthas:**
  - Vivekachudamani
  - Aparokshanubhuti
  - Upadesasahasri
  - Swatma Nirupanam
  - Atma bodha
  - Sarva Vedanta Sara Samgraha
  - Advaita Anubhuti
  - Brahma anuchintanam
  - Sadachara anusandhanam
- **Hymns and Meditation Verses:**
  - Sri Ganesa Pancharatnam
  - Ganesa Bhujangam
  - Subrahmanya Bhujangam

## Note

However, the authorship of many works attributed to Shankara remains disputed. But Shankara's legacy extends beyond metaphysics and theology, incorporating a near-nationalistic interpretation of **faith, philosophy, and geography**.

### • Core Tenets of Advaita Vedanta:

- **Advaita Vedanta** posits an **ontological position of radical nondualism**.
- **It asserts that perceived reality is ultimately illusory (maya)**, and brahman is the only true reality, transcending empirical plurality.
- Focuses on the **unity of atman (individual consciousness) and brahman (ultimate reality)**.

## Note

A '**Statue of Oneness**' dedicated to **Adi Shankaracharya**, standing at a height of 108 feet, has been unveiled on **Mandhata mountain in the Khandwa district of Madhya Pradesh**.

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