



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 **14th century CE**, when the [Vijayanagara kingdom](#) began to patronise the Sringeri matha.

Who was Adi Shankara?

- **About: Adi Shankara or Adi Shankaracharya** was an **8th-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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