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# Vedanta and Tawhid: Convergences in the Conception of Godhead

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**Adil Rasheed\***

## Abstract

*This paper seeks to explore the principal theistic doctrines of the Hindu schools of Vedantism – mainly Advaitavad and Dvaitavad – and the two conceptual approaches towards understanding Islamic concept of Tawhid, namely Wahdatul Wujood and Wahdatul Shuhood. It would then bring out several salient aspects of ideological convergences and differences between the two sets of religious thought – the parallels and divergences between Advaitavad and Wahdatul Wujood as well as between their antithetical positions in both traditions, namely, Dvaitavad and Wahdatul Shuhood.*



The theological tenets of both Hinduism and Islam, particularly their foundational concepts of godhead, reveal a remarkable degree of ideological convergence and conceptual correspondence. Be it the monistic (non-dualistic) ideals of *Advaitavad* and *Wahdatul Wujood* or their countervailing monotheistic dualism of *Dvaitavad* and *Wahdatul Shuhood*, they show a remarkable degree of similarities that have had

a profound impact on Indian history and its composite socio-cultural ethos.

It is also noteworthy that the Sufi concept of *Wahdatul Wujood* did not originate in India, it has remarkable ideational affinity with the 'Advaita' school, just as the antithetical concept of *Wahdatul Shuhood* (now championed by the Ahle-Hadeeth-Salafi schools) shows similarity with *Dvaitavad* of Madhavacharya. Undoubtedly, many of the ideational

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and behavioural manifestations of these theological approaches have had a significant impact on India's socio-cultural and political traditions.

There are several schools of Vedanta philosophy, but this paper focuses on its three most prominent schools of *Advaitavad* (non-dualism), *Vahsihstha Advaitavad* (qualified non-dualism) and *Dvaitavad* (transcendental dualism between the creator and the created) and compares them to the corresponding Islamic ontological schools of *Wahdatul Wujood* and *Wahdatul Shuhood*.

### **Vedanta**

*Vedanta* constitutes one of the six systems of Hindu philosophy (*darshanas*) that emerged in ancient India (along with *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika* and *Mimamsa*).

Although *Vedanta* literally means the 'end of the Vedas or culmination of wisdom' (contained in the Vedas, the oldest and most revered scriptures of Hinduism), it specifically refers to the spiritual and philosophical insights contained in the final exegesis of Vedic literature, the *Upanishads* and their exegeses found in three canonical texts called the '*Prasthanatrayi*' (literally "the three sources"). These three canons constituting Vedantist thought are the

Principal or *Mukhya Upanishad* (mainly 12 or 13 major texts, out of a total of 108), the *Bhagvad Gita* (which covers chapters 23–40 of the 6<sup>th</sup> book of the epic Mahabharata) and the *Brahma Sutras* (which systematize the insights of the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Gita).

The spiritual truths contained in the '*Prasthanatrayi*', have been philosophically discussed and elucidated by Vedanta scholars and spiritual leaders of several Vedanta schools. Their works are preserved in the '*bhashya*' texts, which cover a wide range of ontological thought on the nature of God (known as Brahman). The diversity in the ontological understanding of the Brahman ranges from the '*Dvaita*' (dualism – 'the separation of God from creation') to the '*Advaita*' (non-dualism – 'the oneness of Godhead and creation'). Enlightened by his '*paramguru*' (highest teacher) Gaudapadacharya (writer of *Karika*), Adi Shankaracharya is considered the founder of '*Advaitavad*'.

A light variation from the purist *advaitavad*, known as '*Keval Advaitavad*' of Adi Shakaracharya is the school of '*Vishishtha Advaitava*' (qualified non-dualism) propounded by Shri Ramanujacharya (along with Nathamuni and Yamuna), while Shri Madhavacharya is known as the principal proponent of '*Dvaitavad*' philosophy.

In addition to these three main philosophical schools of Vedanta, there are four other schools, viz. the *Bhedabheda* (whose *Dvaitadvaita* sub-school was founded by Nimbarka and Upadhika, combining both monism and dualism), *Achintya Bheda Abheda* (propounded by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) and the *Shuddhadvaita*, founded by Vallabhacharya (1479-1531 CE).

This diversity of thought among the different schools of Vedanta paradoxically do not contradict each other as they are considered by classical Hindu scholarship as varying stages of enlightenment on the path of communing with the divine. Thus, there is a spiritual ascension from *Dvaita* to *Bheda Abheda*, then to *Vishishtha Advaita*, *Shuddhadvaita* and ultimately to *Kaival Advaita*. Thus in expounding the tenets of *Kaival Advaita* Adi Shankaracharya also expressed views that might be considered close to *Vishishtha Advaita*.

a) **Kaival Advaitavad – Absolute Non-Dualism/ Monism (Shankara)**

ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः

(Transliteration: 'Brahma Satyam Jagan Mithya, Jivo Brahmaiva Na Aparah')-Brahma Jnanavali mala- 20

(Translation "Brahman is the real, the universe is false, the Atman is Brahman. Nothing else.")<sup>1</sup>

One of the most studied and influential schools of classical Indian thought, *Advaita Vedantism* has been described as 'non-dualist' by some scholars and 'monist' by others. In its most quintessential form, *Advaita* philosophy found in the Upanishads is fully expounded in the *Kaival Advaitavad* of Adi Shankaracharya. The five important facets of the *Kaival Advaita* are discussed below:

i) ***Brahman: The One Reality Without a Second***

In its essence, Advaita philosophy posits the existence of only One Transcendental Reality "apart from which there is no second reality at all." This in itself is the godhead or 'Brahman'. The idea is fully conceptualized in the term '*Ekam Evadvitiam*' – or 'One Without a Second'. This absolute non-dual reality of 'Brahman' (The Absolute Truth) is all pervasive and immanent in all beings.

According to Advaitavad, there is no duality in the Absolute Reality, either within it or outside of it. Again, there is nothing other than it and is same in it.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the nature of this one indivisible, non-dual reality is expounded as:

सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म

(Transliterated as: sarvam khalv idam brahman) *Chhandogya Upanishad Ch. 3 Section 14 Verse*

An attempted English translation of the verse might read **“All that is here is indeed Brahma”**.

There is no room for plurality or multiplicity in this strictly singular existence of Reality:

नेह नानास्ति किञ्चन  
मृत्योः स मृत्युमाप्नोति य इह नानेव पश्यतः।

(Transliteration: “Neha naanaasti kinchana, mrtyoh sa mrtyum apnoti ya iha nana iva pashyat”) *Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad* (Chapter 4, Section 4, Verse 19)

**“There exists no many-ness here. He who sees many-ness goes from death to death”**.

This is a repeated refrain in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad and in Katha Upanishad (4, 11). This non-dualist Brahman is ‘*Nirakar*’ (without form), ‘*Nirguna*’ (without quality) and *Nirvishesha* (without characteristics). Describing the immanence of the Self or the Atman in the Brahman, it is noted:

“As a mass of salt has  
Neither inside nor outside,  
but is altogether a mass of taste,  
Thus indeed the Self has neither  
inside nor outside,  
But is altogether a mass of  
knowledge”

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV, 5, 13)

Brahma is also defined as being beyond the three gunas (त्रिगुणातीत) of time, space, and Maya (माया)—an illusion created by the five senses.

“I am other than name, form and action.

My nature is ever free!

I am Self, the supreme unconditioned Brahma.

I am pure Awareness, always non-dual.”

- *Adi Shankara, Upadeshsahasri 11.7*

## ii) *Atman: The Inner Self, the Conscious Witness of Brahman*

The Atman refers to the inner self or soul found in every individual being. According to *Advaitavad*, to achieve liberation (*moksha*) a human being must acquire self-knowledge (*atma-jnana*), after which a person’s inner self recognises that the (Atman/Jivatma) is identical with the transcendental Brahman.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the Advaita school does not accept any duality, no separate or individual souls, nor any unlimited cosmic soul.

All souls and existence across space and time are considered to be the same oneness

स वा अयमात्मा ब्रह्म

(Transliteration: Sa Va Ayamatra Brahma)

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(Translation: The Atman is indeed the Brahma)-*Brihadaranyika Upanishad*, Chapter 4. Section 4. Verse 5.

The more celebrated verse highlighting the spiritual insight that the soul is itself the Brahman, is enshrined in the Sankrit '*Mahakavya*' (Grand Pronouncement:

तत्त्वमसि (Transliteration: Tat Tvam Asi) (Translation 'You are That') *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.8.7

The meaning of the above phrase is that one does not need to find Brahman outside of oneself, because the quintessential self in and of itself is Brahman (i.e. You are That). In other words, in its original, pure and primordial state, the inner self or Atman is wholly or partially identifiable or identical with the Ultimate Reality that is the ground and origin of all phenomena.

One of the characteristics of *Atman* is that it is a *Sakshi* (witness, observer, Supreme Being) that lends its shine – "*Chitchhaya*"- to the body. Thus, there is a difference between the false sense of self attached to the body in the world of maya and the liberated life force or *Atman*. The salvation of any person lies in understanding this difference and being able to revert to the Atman/Brahman reality, which is the transcendental witness and the only existence among us all:

एको देवः सर्वभूतेषु गूढः सर्वव्यापी सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा |  
कर्माध्यक्षः सर्वभूताधिवासः साक्षी चेता केवलो निर्गुणश्च ||

The same Deity remains hidden in all beings, and is all-pervasive and the indwelling Self of all beings. He is the supervisor of actions, lives in all beings, (He is) the Witness (*Sakshi*), the bestower of intelligence, the Absolute and devoid of the (three) *Gunas* (of time, space and maya of five senses)." (*Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, Chapter 1. Section 6, Verse 1)

*Atman* is thus the witness of an idea which perceives every thought in a person, including the 'I' thought. The witness lies awake both in a body's waking state and in dreams. It is this witness that was never born, does not go sick and does not die. It is the inner soul, the '*Ekam Atman*' or the *Brahman* of the non-dual Reality. One eventually forgoes one's ego (*Ahamkriti*) but not the witness (*Atman*).

**iii) *The Parallel of Avidya (Ignorance) and Maya (Illusion)***

After Brahman and Atman, the third important concept of Advaita philosophy, as enshrined in the Upanishads and the exponents of the school is the concept of '*Avidya*'. In early Vedic literature, *Avidya* simply refers to ignorance, but in later Vedic texts it is further explained as any



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“positive hindrance” to spiritual knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

In its essence, *Avidya* stands for that state of delusion which obfuscates the essential unity (or the state of *Advaita*, non-duality) of the ‘non-dual reality’ and presents a world of separate entities as subjects and objects and as doers and performers of actions and deeds. Thus, *Avidya* refers to the comprehension of plurality within the mind. It refers to the cloud of plurality over human perception that covers the sun of truth that is *advaita* (non-dualism).

This ignorance - “the ignorance veiling our true self and the truth of the world”<sup>5</sup> when manifested in the illusion of the outer world has been termed as *Maya*. In effect, ‘*Avidya*’ is not different from the illusory nature of the outer world or ‘*Maya*’, for whereas ‘*Avidya*’ relates to the individual Self (*Atman*), *Maya* is the outer veil of the cosmic Self (*Brahman*).

In his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, *Adi Shankaracharya* writes: “Owing to an absence of discrimination, there continues a natural human behaviour in the form of ‘I am this’ or ‘This is mine’: This is *avidya*”.

It is a superimposition of the attributes of one thing on another. The ascertainment of the nature of the real entity by separating the

superimposed thing from it is *vidya* (knowledge, illumination)”.

“The Vedas cannot show you *Brahman*, you are ‘That’ already. They can only help to take away the veil that hides truth from our eyes. The cessation of ignorance can only come when I know that God and I are one; in other words, identify yourself with *Atman*, not with human limitations. The idea that we are bound is only an illusion [*Maya*]. Freedom is inseparable from the nature of the *Atman*. This is ever pure, ever perfect, ever unchangeable.” (*Adi Shankara’s* commentary on *Fourth Vyasa Sutra*, *Swami Vivekananda*).<sup>6</sup>

#### iv) *Satchitananda*

In *Advaita Vedanta*, *Satchitananda* refers to the sublimely blissful experience of boundless, pure consciousness and represents the unity of spiritual essence of ultimate reality.<sup>7</sup> It is an epithet for *Brahman*, which is ineffable, singular, ultimate, unchanging reality. The term is a compound of three Sanskrit words— ‘*sat*’, ‘*chit*’ and ‘*ananda*’, which are considered inseparable from the nature of ultimate reality.<sup>8</sup>

In Sanskrit, ‘*Sat*’ means ‘being, existing’, ‘living, lasting, enduring’, ‘real, actual’, ‘true’, ‘good’ and ‘right’. ‘*Chita*’ refers “to perceive, fix mind on”, “to understand, comprehend,

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know”, “to form an idea in the mind, be conscious of, think, reflect upon”. ‘*Ananda*’ signifies happiness, joy, enjoyment, sensual pleasure. *Satchitananda* is therefore translated as “Truth, Consciousness, Bliss”.<sup>9</sup>

*I am of the nature of consciousness.*

*I am made of consciousness and bliss.*

*I am nondual, pure in form, absolute knowledge, absolute love.*

*I am changeless, devoid of desire or anger, I am detached.*

*I am One Essence, unlimitedness, utter consciousness.*

*I am boundless Bliss, existence and transcendent Bliss.*

*I am the Atman that revels in itself.*

*I am the Sacchidananda that is eternal, enlightened and pure.*

— *Tejobindu Upanishad*, 3.1-3.12

According to *Advaita Vedanta*, the understanding of true self gives freedom and bliss (*Satchitananda*). It emphasizes *Jivanmukti*, wherein *moksha* (freedom, liberation) is achievable through the bliss of *Satchitananda* even during life in contrast to other Indian philosophies that emphasize *Videhamukti*, or the attainment of *moksha* after death.

#### v) *Ishvara*

Although *Advaita Vedanta* speaks of the Cosmic Spirit Brahman, its

exponents like *Adi Shankaracharya*, also refer to *Ishvara* (literally the Lord), who is more of a conscious and living God, as in the case of Hebraic religions.

According to *Advaita Vedanta*, when man tries to know god with his mind, under the influence of *Maya*, Brahman appears in the form of *Ishvara* (divine, yet conscious person). Thus, Brahman is perceived as *Ishvara* in the world of *Maya*. *Adi Shankara* uses a metaphor to explain this and states when the “reflection” of the Cosmic Spirit falls upon the mirror of *Maya*, it appears as the *Ishvara* or Supreme Lord. The *Ishvara* is true only in the pragmatic level. God’s actual form in the transcendental level is the cosmic spirit.

*Ishvara* can be described as *Saguna Brahman* (Brahman with attributes) that may be regarded to have a personality with human and godly attributes. This concept of *Ishvara* is also used to visualize and worship in the form of anthropomorphic deities such as *Shiva*, *Vishnu* or *Devi*.

However, in the ultimate sense, *Ishvara* is the “false” image of Brahman which flashes upon the curtain of *Maya*. However, as described earlier, just as the phenomenal world appears real at the pragmatic level, similarly,

*Ishvara* is also phenomenally speaking real.

Thus, in Shankara's interpretation of Advaita philosophy there is a seamless harmonization of the phenomenal reality of the everyday world (*Vyahvarika Satya*) and the transcendental reality of Brahman (*paramarthik satya*).

As the great Indologist, A. L. Basham succinctly puts it: "On the everyday level of truth, the world was created by Brahma, and went through an evolutionary process just as discussed in the Samkhya school, from which Shankara took the doctrine of the three gunas. But on the highest level of truth, the whole phenomenal universe, including the Gods themselves (even *Ishvara*), was unreal — the world was *Maya*, an illusion... Ultimately the only reality was Brahman, the impersonal world soul of the Upanishads with which the Atman was identical."<sup>10</sup>

This idea of a non-dualist Advaita Brahman, is beautifully surmised in the following verses of the Bhagvad Gita:

सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टो  
मत्तः स्मृतिर्ज्ञानमपोहनं च |  
वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यो  
वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम्

**Transliteration:**

*sarvasya chhaham hridi sannivishhto  
mattah smitir jñnam apohanam cha  
vedaish cha sarvair aham eva vedyo  
vedanta-krid veda-vid eva chaham*

**Translation:**

I am seated in the hearts  
Of all living beings,  
And from me come memory,  
Knowledge, as well as forgetfulness.  
I alone am to be known by all the  
Vedas  
Am the author of the Vednt,  
And the knower of the  
Meaning of the Vedas.

(*Bhagvata Gita*, 15:15)

**Vishishta Advaitavad -  
Qualified Non-Duality  
(Ramanuja)**

While both Kaival Advaitavad and Vishishta Advaitavad essentially teach non-duality or monism, the Advaita taught by Shankaracharya is rigorous and absolute in its approach, while Sri Ramanuja's doctrine of **Vishishta Advaitavad** is defined as "qualified non-duality, non-duality with a difference".<sup>11</sup>

According to Kaival Advaitavad (as studied above) everything is Brahman and so Sri Shankara posits that Brahman has to be absolutely homogenous. Therefore, all semblance of duality and plurality is illusory.

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On the other hand, Ramanujacharya (11<sup>th</sup> century, 1017-1100c), who was also an exponent of Advaita school but differed with Shankara in that he argued that everything being one with Brahman does not necessarily imply that Brahman is homogenous. To Sri Ramanuja, Brahman contains within itself elements of plurality. He also posited that individual souls and material forms of existence were not constituents of unreal Maya, "but a part of Brahman's nature, the body investing the universal Self."<sup>12</sup>

It is a philosophy that in all diversity of the universe there is an underlying unity.

**i) *Ishvara in Vishishta advaitavad***

Again, there is a subtle difference over the concept of Ishvara between these two great proponents of Advaita philosophy.

"The Brahman of Sankara is in itself impersonal, a homogeneous mass of objectless thought, transcending all attributes; a personal God it becomes only through its association with the unreal principle of Maya so that strictly speaking Sankara's personal God, his Isvara, is himself something unreal, Ramanuja's Brahman, on the other hand, is essentially a Personal God, the all-powerful and all-wise ruler of

a real world permeated and animated by his spirit. There is thus no room for the distinction between Parama Nirguna and an Aparama Saguna Brahman, between Brahman and Isvara."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Ramanuja does not comprehend Brahman as one without attributes (Nirguna). He provides three reasons for staking the claim that **Brahman is has attributes (Saguna):**

**Shruti Pramana:** The theologian points out that all Vedanta 'shrutis' (revelations) denoting Brahman always list either attributes inherent to Brahman or not inherent to Brahman. In fact, the shrutis only seek to deny Brahman from possessing impure and defective qualities which affect the world of beings, such as 'tri-gunas' (referred above).

However, **Brahma possesses an infinite number of transcendental attributes**, the evidence of which is given in vakhyas like

सत्यं ज्ञानं अनन्तं ब्रह्म

"Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma"

(*Taittiriya Upanishad*, Chapter 2, Verse 1).

**Pratyaksha Pramana:** He also avers that cognition must necessarily

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involve knowing Brahman through the attributes of Brahman.<sup>14</sup>

**Anumana Pramana:** The theologian argues here that “*Nirgunatva*” (being without attribute) itself becomes an attribute of Brahman on account of the uniqueness of no other entity being *Nirguna*.

The ontology in *Vishishta Advaita* views the personal **Ishvara**, not the impersonal Brahman, as the Universal Soul, which maintains complete control over the universe and all the sentient beings.

The ‘*Anatarvyapi*’ refers to that facet of the Ishvara which dwells within all beings, and is also known as the *Paramatman*, or the innermost self of the being.

योऽप्सु तिष्ठन्नद्भ्योऽन्तरः,  
यमापो न विदुः, यस्यापः शरीरम्,  
योऽपोऽन्तरो यमयति,  
एष त आत्माऽन्तर्याम्यमृतः ॥ ४ ॥

yo’psu tisthannadbhyo’ntarah,  
yamapo na viduh, yasyapah  
shariram, yo’po’ntaro yamayati,  
esa ta atma’ntaryamyamrutah  
|| 4 ||

He who inhabits water but is within it, whom water does not know, whose body is water, and who controls water from within, is

the Internal Ruler, your own immortal self.-Brihadarnyaka Upanishas 3.7.4-14

When Ishvara is conceived of as all-encompassing (*Bahuvyapi*), and residing in all beings and that all beings reside in Ishvara, he is referred to as the ‘*Paramapurusha*’:

Ramanuja also qualified the oneness between the Brahma and the Atman. According to him, though the Atman is integral part of Brahma, it still has an independent existence. Thus, the *Jivatma* understands *Paramatma*, but even in liberation does not merge in *Paramatma*. Vishishtadvaita is based on the principle of *sharira (body)-atma (soul)-bhava (being)*.

Thus, the Atman/Brahma (*Paramatma*) thinks, but the Ishvara as well as the ‘*chit*’ (conscious) and ‘*achit*’ (non-conscious) entities of the Universe execute it.

## ii) *Key Principles of Vishishtha Advaitavad*

According to Vishishtha Advaita three key principles of Advaita are important to understand.

First of these principles relate to *Tattva* (Constituents) – which are ‘*Jiva*’ (sentient and living souls), ‘*ajiva*’ (the insentient souls) and

'*Ishvara*' (Vishnu-Narayana or Parmatma, who controls the world).

The second principle is *Hita*, which pertains to the realization of the universe through bhakti (devotion) and self-surrender. Thus unlike, pure meditation of *Keval Advaitavad*, the emphasis is on Bhakti here.

The third principle here is '*Purushartha*', the goal to be attained, as moksha or liberation from bondage of the self.

In sum, the basic premise of Vishashta Advaita, in its response to the Kaival Advaita movement of Shankara's Shaivite beliefs, is that Brahman here has attributes (Sauna) and is a personal God (called Ishvara or Vishnu/Narayan.) It also posits that the relation between Brahman and Atman, the Ishvara and the universe is between the soul and the body, which are one and still separate.

It claims that God had two modes of being as cause and effect. As cause he is only qualified by his perfections, as product he has the body, the phenomenal universe and individual souls. The souls remain separate from God even in state of moksha (spiritual communion), which may not necessarily happen only after death but in life itself.

### **Dvaitavad (Dualism or Duality) - Madhavacharya**

Though a school of Vedanta, it is in many ways an antithesis to Advaita philosophy. Sri Madhavacharya of the Vaishnava theological order in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, became the exponent of *Dvaitavad*. Vishnu is the supreme God, in a manner similar to monotheistic God in other major religions.<sup>15</sup>

Here impersonal Brahman was not only replaced by personal Vishnu with attributes, it also postulated that both God and creation exist as independent realities, and these are distinct. However, the latter is dependent on the former for sustenance.

Madhavacharya found separation and dualism in these five categories:

- Between individual soul (*jivatma*) and God (*Brhamatma-vihnu* or Vishnu)
- Between matter (inanimate, insentient and God)
- Among individual souls
- Between matter and *jiva*
- Among various kinds of matter

He also believed in the torments of Hell and eternal damnation.

He divides souls into three categories – those who achieve salvation (*Mukti Yogyas*), second are

those subjected to eternal rebirth (*Nitya samsarin*) and third condemned to eternal Hell (*Tamo-yogyas*).

Madhavacharya contended that God is the efficient cause of the universe and not its material cause. God cannot have created the world by splitting himself, since that would contradict the Vedic concept that He is unalterable. It is also blasphemous to state that a perfect God can change himself into an imperfect world.

Countless souls are like atoms. They exist by the Grace of God. It is God who allows some freedom of action or life to his creation. Ignorance can be removed by means of devotion (or *bhakti*).

Although people think that advaita philosophy is more popular, majority of Hindus actually follow the Dvaita philosophy. They feel that God is the controller of their lives, God is different from them, each *jiva* is separate from the other and there is hierarchy among the *jivas* too. Only a minority of Hindus practices the Kevala Advaita philosophy.

To understand Islamic conception of godhead within the Vedantic framework, it appears to be 'nirakar' as advaita spiritualism understands it, but has both guna (attributes) and personality, is transcendental and

distinct from creation and in that aspect akin to the *dvaitavad* conception. The following section explores this aspect in greater detail:

### **Tawhid (Oneness of God)**

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ  
اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ  
لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ  
وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

Say: God is One; The One God Eternal; He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him. (*Quran*, Surah Ikhlas – 112)

Like Vedantist thought, Islamic scripture and commentaries have extensively dwelt on the ontological question of Godhead and Being for over the last one-and-a-half millennia. In fact, the singular supremacy of God, as envisaged in Vedantist literature, finds remarkable parallels in Islamic theological literature — be it of the monistic variety similar to Advaita in the idea of *Wahdatul Wujood* or the monotheistic *Dvaitvad*, as enshrined in *Wahdatul Shuhood*.

In fact, the *sine qua non* of Islamic thought lies in the doctrine of Tawhid or the affirmation of God's Oneness and Unity and the belief that there is no god other than one Supreme God (Allah), who is Unique, the Creator and Lord of Judgement. Although some Islamic scholars believe that the

name Allah is sacrosanct and should not be parsed, a considerable religious scholarship accepts the word as a contraction of 'Al' and 'Ilah', which makes its meaning 'The (or One) God'. According to most Islamic philosophers and mystics, "God is a being, "necessary and perfect, supreme intelligence and supreme love, producing the world by the mode of necessary and deliberate emanation".<sup>16</sup>

Just as is the case between various schools of Vedanta, there has been a debate in Islamic metaphysical tradition on the relationship between the creator and creation, in other words between the non-dualism of '*Wahdatul Wujood*' and the dualism of '*Wahdatul Shuhud*'.

Islamic metaphysics has had differing views and approaches over the understanding of *wahdah* meaning 'unity' of God's being. The two most prominent schools are — the non-dualist school of '*Wahdatul Wujood*' (which has been translated as Unity of Existence) as opposed to the dualist '*Wahdatul Shuhud*' (Unity of Witness). Whereas, '*Wahdatul Wujood*' comes close to the ideal of Advaita Vedanta finding only one non-dualist existence pervading the universe, '*Wahdatul Shuhud*', meaning 'Apparentism' or 'Unity of Witness', holds that God and his creation are entirely separate.

Although the concept of *Wahdatul Wujood* originated out of India, it is curious that the more conservative and dualistic philosophy of '*Wahdatul Shuhud*', which is being supported by the more conservative Deobandi and partly even by some sections of the Ahle-Hadeeth is of Indian origin, ironically propounded by the Sufi saint Ahmad Sirhindi (1564 – 1624/1625).

### **Wahdatul Wujood (Non-Dualistic Oneness of God) From Ibn Arabi, Rumi to Bulle Shah**

هُوَ الْوَلُّ وَالْأَخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْإِطْنُ

God is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden -

Quran, Surah Hadid (57:3)

سمع يا حبيبي  
انا العين المقصودة في الكون  
انا نقطة الدائرة ومحيطها ،  
انا مركبها وبسيطها  
انا الامر المنزل بين السماء والارض و السماء  
ما خلفت لك الادراكات الا لتدركني بها  
فاذا ادركتني ادركت نفسك  
لا تطمع ان تدركني بادراكك نفسك  
بعيني تراني ونفسك  
لابعين نفسك تراني

Listen, O dearly beloved!  
I am the reality of the world, the  
centre of the circumference,  
I am the parts and the whole.



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I am the will established between  
Heaven and Earth,  
I have created perception in you  
only in order to be the object of My  
Perception.

If then you perceive Me, you  
perceive yourself.

But you cannot perceive Me through  
yourself.

It is through My Eyes that you see  
Me and see yourself,

Through your eyes you cannot see  
Me.

-The Beloved from *munjt* (Intimate  
Discourses) by Ibn 'Arabi

Some Islamic scholars aver that the  
concept of Wahdatul Wujood  
وحدة الوجود : 'Unity of Existence')  
was first propounded by the  
grandson of the Prophet Husayn ibn  
Ali himself in his book *Mirat-ul-  
Arifeen*, but it is difficult to ascertain  
the authenticity of the available text.

It has also been claimed that the  
great Sufi of the ultra-conservative  
Hanbali school Abu Saeed Mubarak  
Makhzoomi discussed the concept in  
detail in his book *Tohfa Mursala*,  
while others attribute its origins to the  
Spanish Sufi saint Ibn Sabin.

However, the most celebrated  
exponent of the concept of Wahdatul  
Wujood, even though he never used  
the term in any his writings, is the  
Spanish Sufi of the 12<sup>th</sup> century **Ibn  
Arabi**. According to him, the  
Absolute Being is inseparable from

the Absolute Existent and is the  
ultimate source of all existence.<sup>17</sup>

Louis Massignon has defined the  
concept as "existential monism".

Much like Advaita, the term  
Wahdatul Wujood (Unity of  
Existence) posits that there is  
essentially only one transcendental  
reality One Being and the physical  
universe is a superficial  
manifestation of that One Being.

"Oh my God: My non-existence in  
you is my very existence"

(Verse 60: The Seven Days of the  
Heart: Ibn Arabi)

The entire concept has been  
explained by Ibn Arabi under three  
heads

i) There is in reality only One Being  
ii) The One Being has no parts, all is  
one

iii) The One Being is neither more here  
or there (It is homogenous).

Of the 99 names of Allah, '*Al  
Hayyu*' (the Living) and '*Al  
Qayyum*' (the Self-Subsisting) are  
considered as among of the most  
powerful. Thus, He is the only being  
whose existence depends on his own  
existence.

Therefore, theologians like Ibn  
Arabi aver that as existence belongs  
only to God, He cannot not exist. In  
addition, the philosophy of *Wahdatul  
Wujood* posits that this existence

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accepts neither multiplicity nor division, nor transformation. "Having no form or limit, the Existence, at this stage, is so pure and absolute that it is not delimited even by the concept of non-delimitation".<sup>18</sup> They contend that human reason cannot fully comprehend the reality of this existence. These Islamic mystics and philosophers also posited that the outward phenomenal reality of the universe is the manifestation of divine which lies within human consciousness, as man is the culmination of the divine existence '*Insan-e- Kamil*'.

"You are not a drop in the ocean, you are the entire ocean in a drop."-  
Mawlana Jalal-al-Din Rumi

The exponents of *Wahdatul Wujood* often explain the relationship between the transcendental and the phenomenal reality, like a mirror wherein truth manifests itself in respect of God's attributes or names, not in respect of His Essence, in every form and individual.

Thus, Ibn Arabi writes: "The One reveals Himself in the many ... as an object is revealed in different mirrors, each mirror reflecting an image determined by its nature and its capacity as a recipient... The eternal drama of existence is nothing but this ever-renewed creation (*al khalq al-jadid*) which is, in fact, a perpetual process of self-revelation."<sup>19</sup>

In the latter respect, all creatures become like a mirror wherein God discloses Himself, without losing His absoluteness and undergoing neither transformation nor transmutation.<sup>20</sup>

سُتْرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي  
أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَّبِعُونَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ  
أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ  
أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ فِي مَرِئَةٍ مِّنْ لِّقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ  
أَلَّا يَأْتِيَهُمْ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُّحِيطٌ

We will show them our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?-Quran, Surah Fussilat (41:53-54)

If we witness Him we witness ourselves, and when He sees us He looks on Himself

- (The Bezels of Wisdom) Ibn 'Arabi

In his celebrated philosophical treatise '*Fusus Al-Hikam*' (The Seals of Wisdom), Ibn al-'Arabi states is that it is the duty of man to be the mirror, or the tool, for God's perception. He writes: "The [divine] Command required [by its very nature] the reflective characteristic of the mirror of the Cosmos, and Adam was the very principle of reflection for that mirror and the spirit of that form [...]."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, man's role is to perceive aspects of God, which are embodied in His names – Beauty,

Majesty, Mercy, Truth, Forgiveness, Patience, etc.

### **The Concept of 'Ta'yyun' and the Mystery of Plurality**

As stated above, the proponents of *Wahdatul Wujood* do not disdain the phenomenal reality, but regard it as an emanating from the One Being. According to Ibn Arabi, the One Being has the knowledge to create plurality from his unity and calls this form of creation as 'Ta'yyun' (determination).<sup>22</sup> Thus, physical forms and manifestations occur through this agency of *Ta'yyun*. This does not imply that the Being is divisible. However, the Sufis believe that the manifestations of the One Being in whichever form they appear are the representation of the One Being in its entirety.

Thus, when Ibn Arabi, Mawlana Rumi and other exponents of *Wahdatul Wujood* said that existence belongs merely to God and other beings have no existence in an actual sense, they attempted to explain the undeniable presence of phenomenal reality by a scheme of seven-stage hierarchy known as *Al-martib al-Sab'a*.

### **Tawhid for Wahdatul Wujood (The Influence of Monism)**

The proponents of *Wahdatul Wujood* believe that by invoking God by any one of his multiple names

while performing *zikr* or *dhikr* (remembrance), one can purify their respective souls (*tazkiyat-i-ruh*) and thereby work out their effacement (*fana*) in God and achieve salvation (*baqa*) in Him.

To them, *Tawhid* (Oneness of God) as used in the Sufis literature has four facets

- *First*, Tawhid implies faith and belief in the unity of God
- *Second*, it refers to the disciplining of internal and external life in light of faith;
- *Third*, it is the experience of union and oneness with God
- *Fourth*, it is a philosophical conception of reality through mystical experience.

Although, Muslims accept the first two aspects of Tawhid, the third and fourth are followed by the practitioners of *Wahdatul Wujood* Sufism. For the Sufis *Tawhid* in the third sense is to have the perception (*Shuhud*) of One Being through the mystical experience. It is the highest experience of the unity of God. In the fourth sense, both the terms *tawhid Wujoodi* and *Wahdat al-Wujood* are in common use.

### **Tashkik (Phenomenal World lower gradation of the Transcendent)**

According to this system of gradation (Tashkik), defined by the great Persian philosopher and mystic

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badr ad-Din Mu%ammad Shirazi (c. 1571/2 – 1640), reality and existence are identical which means existence is one but graded in intensity. These stages can be outlined as follows:<sup>23</sup>

1. (First Stage) The Absolute Existence or the Stage of Non-Determination – ‘*Alam-e- HaHoot*’ or ‘*Ahadiyah*’: In this stage, the Existence is in the mode of Pure Essence and far away from any name, attribute, quality, and action. It is so unconditioned that it is far away even from the restriction of non-delimitation. It is a realm of pre-existence and a level of non-creation.<sup>24</sup> This stage is also called *Martabah-e-L Ta’ayyun* or *Ghaibul Ghaib*.
2. First Determination or the Stage of Unity – (*Alam-i-Yahoot* or *Wahdah*): This stage is called thus because the Essence self-manifests in Himself by Himself and for Himself. This self-manifestation is caused by the necessity of the Essence. In this stage, the Essence knows His names and attributes in a universal way. This stage is also known as the Stage of Outline - *Martabah-e-Ijmali* or Reality of Muhammad - *Haqiqat-e-Muhammadiyah* (The Emanation of Muhammad’s Reality).
3. Second Determination – (*Alam-e-Lahoot, Wahidiyah*): In this stage, the ‘Real’ is said to become cognizant of its Essence. The Sufis explain the second and third stage by the seed analogy. A seed is the origin of a tree. This stage is called *Martabah-e-Tafseel* and also called *Haqiqat-e-Insan*.
4. The Domain of Spirits – (*Alam-e-Jabrut*, also called *Alam-e-Arwah*): In this stage, the archetypes of the divine knowledge appear as simple substances, which have neither shape nor colour, nor are limited by time or space as the qualities of temporality and spatiality are features of corporeal things. In this stage, each spirit knows itself, its similarity to its God on the stage of Lordship.<sup>25</sup>
5. The Domain of Imagination or Similarity – (*Alam-e-Mitsal* or *Alam-i-Malakut*): This stage is situated between the stage of spirits and corporeal bodies. The Sufis term this stage as the domain of imagination because man can perceive this domain through his faculty of imagination. This stage is about reality of all spheres and also called state of composition.
6. The World of the Visible or The Domain of the Corporeal – *Alam-e-Ajsan*: This domain is composed of dense, cosmic, and compound bodies which accept particularization and division. In this stage, the Absolute Being self-manifests outwardly in the forms of matter and corporeal things.

7. The Stage of the Man – *Al-Insan-al-Kamil (Alam-i-Nasut)*: This is the last stage of the existential. We can summarize the views of Sufis about the doctrine of the Perfect Man. The human being is the reason for the creation of the cosmos and the most perfect being among all other creatures. The task of man is to purify the soul which was veiled by seven veils during its descent to the physical world by traversing back through the spiritual stages.

The knowledge of these realities according to Sufis belonging to Wahdatul Wujood school is based on mystical experiences and not the result of philosophical approaches.

Like the devotion or bhakti of the Vishishtha Adavaita, much of the Sufi attempts at communion with the divine is done through 'zikr' (repeating the names of Allah) through the 'force of love', God intoxication or 'ishq'.

*"Everything in the universe is within you. Ask all from yourself."*-Mawlana Jalal-al-Din Rumi

This love makes the Sufi abjure the physical and the love of worldly pleasures, in order to focus and win the love of the divine, which it is believed also pines for its lover.

"What you seek is seeking you."  
Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

In fact, Sufis subscribing to Wahdatul Wujood consider love as the bridge between one's self and the apparent 'other'. Finally, illumination comes through renunciation and nobility through life's travails, for the Sufi proverb "The wound is the place where the Light enters you."

### **Wahdatul Shuhood (The Dualism between God and Creation)**

The concept of 'Wahdatul Wujood' may have originated out of India but it became increasingly popular among Indian Muslims during the Mughal rule of Akbar and Jahangir. The similarity between non-dualist Advaita philosophy and Wahdatul Wujood was instrumental in creating a syncretic Indian ethos, which many hard line Sunni scholars of the time found disturbing.

One of them was Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624), who along with Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddis of Delhi (1551-1642) is regarded an exponent of Sunni revivalism in the early Mughal period which culminated during the reign of Aurangzeb (1618-1707).

Sirhindi provided an ideological counter in the dualistic doctrine of

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Wahdat-al Shuhud, which he juxtaposed to non-dualism of Wahdatul Wujood' and deemed the latter as against the teachings of Islam.

Although he did not originate the doctrine of Wahdat-al Shuhud, Sirhindi developed it as a counter to Wahdat-ul Wujood. He asserted the claim that the similarity between Vedanta philosophy and Wahdatul Wujood was based on "immature Sufi experiences and observations in states within which a Sufi made no distinction between truth and falsehood".<sup>26</sup> In this heady state, the Sufi failed to see the distinction between the Creator and the Created. "The unity (wahdat) is principally in the perception (shuhud) of the Sufi, but not in any real existence (Wujood).<sup>27</sup>

The experience of "fana", says Sirhindi or the forgetting of the self by the Sufi in order to merge with the Divine is an imagined, not a real experience. It is therefore only 'fana shudhudi' or perceived annihilation and merging with the Divine. According to exponents of Wahdatul Wajud on the other hand, 'fana' is a real existential experience.

Sirhindi also asserts that Allah creates by the power of His words, not Ta'iyun (determination) as suggested by proponents of the doctrine of Wahdutul Wajud.

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

His command is only when He intends a thing that He says 'Be' and it is

-Quran (Surah Yasin , 36:82)

He therefore asserted that the world is not God but proceeds from God and there was a distinct dualism in the existence of the two. Thus, the existence of the world to Sirhindi is not illusory, but real as enunciated by Quran:

خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

(Transliteration: Khalaqal laahus samaawaati wal arda bilhaqq; inna fee zaalika la aayatal ilmu mineen)

(Translation: Allah created the heavens and the earth in truth. Indeed in that is a sign for the believers).-Quran (Surah Al Ankhaboot, 29:44)

*Wahdatul Shuhud* is not monistic like *Wahdatul Wujood*, but monotheistic. According to it, God and creation are not identical; rather, the latter is a shadow or reflection of the Divine's Name and Attributes when they are reflected in the mirrors of their opposite non-beings (a'dm al-mutaqbilah).<sup>28</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Shah Wali-Allah of Delhi (1703-1762) sought to bridge the gap between *Wahdatul Wujood* and *Wahdatul Shuhud*, calling the

differences the result of 'semantic controversies', which were the result of the ambiguity of language. Thus, he upheld the transcendent nature of divinity, as emphasized by *Wahadat Al Shuhud*, but also upheld divine immanence as extolled in *Wahdat al-Wujood*.

### **Comparison between schools of Vedanta and Tawhid**

As we discussed above, both Vedanta and Tawhid believe in the existence of one transcendental reality. Their discussion is based on the ontological questions of Creator, existence and creation.

The philosophies of *Advaitavad* and *Dvaitavad*, as well as *Wahdatul Wujood* and *Wahdatul Shuhud* are interpretations of the scriptures and constitute the dialectics of monism and monotheism, as enshrined in their religious texts.

### ***Keval Advaita and Wahdatul Wujood***

Both the Brahman of Keval Advaitavad is an impersonal non-dualist transcendental reality, which is homogenous and without attributes (Nirguna), which is similar to the 'first stage' of divinity in **Wahdatul Wujood known as the Stage of Non-Determination** 'Alam-e-HaHoot' or 'Ahadiyah'.

There is also the emphasis to look for God within oneself after clearing the veils of ego and unravelling the real universal self that lies within.

The concept of finds resonance among the exponents of Wahdatul Wujood.

"When you know yourself your 'I'-ness vanishes and you know that you and God are the same." - Ibn Arabi

"Do not feel lonely, the entire Universe is inside you." - Mawlana Jaluddin Rumi

The idea of Brahman being a **Sakshi** or Witness is replicated in the belief system of the Sufi, which finds an underlying divine consciousness witnessing its own effulgence through the perception of creation.

**"For the Ultimate Reality, Adam is as the pupil is for the eye through which the act of His seeing takes place."**

-Fusus-ul Hikam, Ibn Arabi

### ***Vishishtha Advaita and Wahdatul Wujood***

Both Visishtadvaita and Wahdatul Wujood are interpretations based on their respective religious scriptures. Whereas *Visisht Advaita* is an interpretation based on *Upanishads* and consolidated in the *Brahma Sutra*, and *Wahdatul-Wujoodis* is based on a selected ontological

perspectives and concepts from the Quran and Hadith literature.

When Keval Advaitavad expounds the concept of *Nirguna Brahman* (The God without attribute), it is a stage similar to that of *Ahadiyah* in *Wahdatul-Wujkd*, although there is no parallel for this in Islamic scriptures.

However, when Vishishtadvaitavad asserts belief in *Saguna Brahman* it finds parallel in the the stage of *Wahdah* expounded in Wahdatul Wujood as well as in the concept of God as enshrined in the Islamic scriptures.

The attributes and emanations of Brahman often take the form of deities in Hindu scripture, but the emanations of divinity in Wahdatul Wujood do not take on such a station.

Both *Visishtdvaita* and *Wahdatul-Wujood* agree on the concept of *Jiva* or Spirit in one way or the other. Both philosophies say that Spirit depends on the Being. In other words, *Visishtadvaita* says *Brahman* and *Jiva* are not one and same; *Wahdatul-Wujood* says they are different regarding delimited existence, but they are same in terms of the essence.

Both *Visishtdvaita* and *Wahdatul-Wujood* regard devotion (bhakti) and intense love (ishq) as a means to attaining communion with the transcendental treality.

### ***Dvaitavad and Wahdatul Shuhood***

Both Dvaitavad and Wahdatul Shuhood are antithesis of the non-dualist philosophies of Advaitavad and Wahdatul Wujood, and underline the fact that the Creator and creation are separate and independent entities.

Both philosophies contend that that the transcendent reality cannot be part of the imperfect world and both believe in the state of bliss as well as a place of damnation for evil doers after death.

### ***Differences between Hindu and Islamic philosophies***

In spite of significant similarities, there are major differences in the philosophical systems of Vedanta and Tawhid.

There is no place for the presence of deities in Islam, even though Advaita and Dvaitavad accepts their reality in the phenomenal reality. According godhead to any entity other than the One God (Allah) is considered blasphemous in all schools of Islam.

There is no concept equivalent of 'Maya', even though Wahdatul Wujood regards the phenomenal universe as an emanation and a reflection of the divine essence.



Vedanta philosophies believe in birth and rebirth in this world for many times, also called reincarnation, but Islamic philosophies does not.

### **Vedanta and Tawhid in India's Political and Strategic Culture**

The philosophical schools of Vedanta have had a profound impact on Indian political and strategic culture for many a millennia, which requires a highly focused and elaborate study in its own right.

#### *Indian Ideals of Unity in Diversity Inspired by Vedanta*

Many historians and philosophers have argued that India's ability to find unity in diversity, which has helped its society to reconcile and evolve with its myriad contradictions over millennia, is a direct lesson it has derived from Vedanta ideal of one transcendental reality unifying the seeming multiplicity of the universe. It is argued that Indian political and strategic culture which has been accommodative of seemingly divergent, pluralistic and foreign influences has given it a unique resilience to hold its own in spite of centuries of foreign political and ideological interventions and influences on its socio-cultural order.

#### *The Charge of Fatalism and an Insular Outlook*

On the flip side it has also been argued that the predominance of

Advaita philosophy has promoted a general attitude of passivity, niggardliness and fatalism in Indian socio-political and strategic thought, which was manifest in its self-absorbed and insular outlook and disinterest in spreading political power and influence in other regions of the world. This made India historically vulnerable to foreign invasions and the belief of having cracked the cosmic code made it averse to the spirit of innovation and scientific development.

However, this charge has been rightly contested by many experts, who point out that both Keval Advaita and Vishishthadvaita find space for even the temporal and the world of Maya in their cosmic order. The Bhagvat Gita, which is one of the 'Prasthanatrayi' (three sources of Vedanta philosophy) exhorts the devout to act and even go to war to establish the reign of Truth.

#### **Impact of Vedanta and Tawhid in medieval Indian politics**

*Wahdat ne har taraf tere jalwe dikha diye,  
parde ta'yyunat ke jo the utha diye*

(Translation: "The wonders of Oneness of Being has displayed Your splendour all round. The veils of discrimination have all been removed.") Urdu poet Mir (d. 1785)

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The philosophies emanating Vedanta and Tawhid concepts provided the basis for the religious synthesis and cultural amalgam that consolidated Mughal rule in India. The non-dualism of *Advaita* and *Wahdatul Wujood* created a cultural ethos conducive to greater interaction between different religions, sects and schools of thought.

There are unmistakable imprints of these spiritual doctrines in the writings of Abul Fazal,<sup>29</sup> the most noted ideologue and strategic thinker in Akbar's court. Emperor Akbar is himself reported to have organized a separate quarter for Advaita yogis, which was called Jogipura.<sup>30</sup> According to Badauni, Akbar used to visit the yogis, along with close companions, and acquaint himself with Hindu mysticism, their methods of '*muraqaba*' (meditation), '*mashaghils*' (spiritual practices). It is these interactions that were instrumental in developing Akbar's socio-political doctrine of *Sulh-i-kul* ('peace with all'), which obviously drew a lot from the non-dualist ideals of Hinduism and Islam.

The tradition passed on to Jahangir, who is said to hold many discussions on spiritual and religious matters with Hindu scholars particularly with Jadurup, a noted Vaishnavite scholar at Ujjain and Mathura. These

discussions are said to have convinced the emperor that the Vedantic philosophy and Sufi thought of Wahdatul Wujood were more or less identical.<sup>31</sup> Jahangir was also close to the noted saint Akam Nath, and their discussions focused on monism and monotheism.<sup>32</sup>

It is well known that Dara Shikoh's Sufi leaning brought him closer to Vedanta. He himself translated the Upanishads, which was titled *Sirr-i-Akbar*. His other work *Majma Al Bahrain* highlights the similarities between Islamic *tasawwuf* (Sufi spiritualism) and Hindu mysticism.

When it comes to *Wahdatul Shuhood*, it is clear that the more hard-line conservative approach it took against the universal ideas of *Wahdatul Wujood* in the time of Ahmad Shah Sirhindi, culminating into a full-scale Islamist backlash with the coming of Islamic puritanism under Aurangzeb. The school of *Wahdatul Shuhood* eventually influenced even Arab thinkers, and Abdul Hayat from Sindh who was the teacher of Muhammad Abdul Wahhab is said to have been a proponent of Wahdatul Shuhood.

Vedanta philosophy has had a profound impact on Hindu nationalism and India's freedom struggle. Among the main proponents of such modern interpretations of Vedantism are Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan, which

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to some extent also contributed to the emergence of Hindu nationalism in India. They have also made accessible to the world and interpreted in universal terms.

Most of these scholars focus more on principles of *Vishishthadavitavad*, as opposed to *Keval Advaitavad*, because of the former's more proactive outlook on socio-political matters.

In Nehru's view, India had several advantages, including its rich mystical and philosophical tradition, "which gave it a certain measure of wisdom and maturity". It has also had a distinct outlook on the world derived from its philosophical heritage,

especially the Advaita.<sup>33</sup> Many experts have studied the impact of Vedanta and Bhagvat Gita on Gandhi's philosophy and worldview and was even influential in the shaping of India's pacifist foreign policy, including the *Panchsheel* and the policies of non-alignment and 'strategic autonomy'.

Thus, Vedanta and Tawhid principles show a remarkable degree of similarities that have had a profound impact on Indian history and its composite socio-cultural ethos and underline an inherent homogeneity in spiritual and philosophical outlook towards life within and the world without. ■

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