



## Jiva, Jagat, Brahma-An Innovative Approach

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**Abstract:** The Traditional Knowledge System of India has its base in *Vedas* in which the main discussion is about *Brahman*, *Jiva* and *Jagat*. In the pre-colonial times when India had the most established Universities and it was one of the leading economies of the world, students were required to master Grammar, Math and Sciences before they could even attempt the *Vedantic* studies which is unfortunately equated to Philosophy and Theosophy by the colonials. If it was truly Philosophy in the modern sense why would it necessitate subjects like Math and Science which are quite the contrary of Philosophy if we go by modern definitions. Further, why would Grammar be so necessary? Obviously because there has been some misinterpretation along the way which has been propagated for several generations to the extent that we ourselves need to reexamine it. This system is quite unique as it has no dichotomy of the observer and the observed.

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### What does this dichotomy mean?

The Science of the west is based on the fundamental principle that the world is like an object and so are all the phenomena we observe while we the observers who are the subjects have absolutely no role in influencing the phenomena of the world.

This is true in common examples like - if we watch a car drive by or the moon going around the sun, irrespective of our observation, the laws that govern the motion of either the car or the sun and moon remain unaltered and hence their motion too.

But there are certain other phenomena in nature, for example in the field of Quantum Mechanics which deals with the subatomic particles, Physics is baffled by the fact that the outcomes of experiments vary based on the act of observation by an observer.

In the field of neuroscience as well as medicine they are encountering more more instances where the subjective role of an individual seems to break the general laws of science, for example : In the famous "The Nun study" (Iacono et al) it was discovered that some people who had brain structures similar to those suffering from Alzheimer disease in reality did not suffer from the disease and the reason was found to be a different life style they had chosen. The study was made on Nuns by dissecting their brains post their death and some of the Nuns who had all their life used elaborate language in their communication and other such changes they had deliberately made somehow ensured that they did not suffer from any symptoms of Alzheimer disease even though their brains were identical to those who suffered from the same disease. Likewise there are several documented cases of back pain - spinal cord correlation and so on.

If the observer or the subject or the individual who is called "*Jiva*" had no role in the rules of nature then why would such changes occur in the physical objective quantum world or even the biological inner mechanism.

Science is at a crisis point unable to explain the role of an observer and hence the *Vedantic* system can be very resourceful in bringing in new perspectives.

*Jagat* is the objective world in Science while *Jīva* is close to what is called the “Consciousness” and not identical because the basic definition of consciousness is yet evolving in Science. The scientists are still trying to find a physical location of consciousness in the brain as well as for the “mind”.

*Jīva* can be said to be a combination of both *Manas* and *Ātma* as these are the two main factors that contribute to who exactly an observer is.

In the field of Physics every observer is the same while in neuroscience the subjective experiences are being considered seriously and hence every subject can be different.

“Mind has not been clearly defined in psychology. The definitions given often are more descriptions of its functioning aspects and do not describe what it actually means. Mind is often considered as the software and the brain its hardware. Is it matter, energy or a field or an emotional state? In most of the scientific literature, particularly conventional psychology, mind is considered an epiphenomenon on the body (particularly the brain)-a mass of matter. Brain is considered the seat of mind. The neurobiological approach tries to explain the mind as a byproduct of physicochemical processes involving the billions of neurons in the human brain and its various components are the thought process, emotions, intelligence and awareness.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines mind as follows: “The collective conscious and unconscious processes in a sentient organism that direct and influence mental and physical behavior.” This definition attributes mind to sentient organisms and identifies it with processes that control behavior. The word ‘Consciousness’ refers to one’s awareness of his unique thoughts, memories, feelings, sensations and environment.

Consciousness and mind are often considered synonymous. The neurobiological approach of elucidating the consciousness suffers from certain flaws in that it only defines and quantifies the consciousness by way of certain parameters like levels of awareness and discusses consciousness in terms of its mechanisms like a cerebral state characterized by electrochemical flow in the certain group of nerve cells like reticular activating system (RAS). It fails to explain the experiential aspect or the subjective state of being oneself or the ‘I’ experience which everyone experiences in day to day life.

Despite the voluminous information already available and being added every day, the question, whether we are nearing identification of neural mechanism underlying consciousness, leave alone mind remains unanswered” (Prabhu and Bhat #).

In the *Vedantic* world each *Jīva* is indeed different based on how they cultivate their *Manas* and *Ātma*. The answer to both the Quantum problem as well as subjectivity problem is the “*Brahman*” - it is the most fundamental reality of the universe from which the entire universe originates, hence it is also called the primordial energy.

Obviously something so profound is not so easy to comprehend and the three *Ācāryas* have discussed these 3 realities of *Jīva*, *Jagat* and *Brahman* in three different ways. The fundamental realities remain the same among all the three *ācāryas*, and all of them discuss how an individual or *jīva* can experience the ultimate reality of the universe which is *Brahman*. That is the central theme of the *Vedas*, the steps required for such an experience as it is subjective, the significance of the objective world which is *jagat*, and are there other ways of experiencing *Brahman* besides the study of *Vedas* and *Vedāngas*, that is where the essential difference lies in the three systems.

The three *ācāryas* - *Śaṅkarācārya*, *Madhvācārya*, *Rāmānujācārya* are dealing with the central learning of *Vedantic* system which is non-perceptual by nature as it is experiential and hence by default is unavailable for the experimental measures or evidences of Science which are empirical in nature.

The *Manas* and *Ātma* which constitute *Jīva* are already of the subtle non-perceptual nature even in something like *Vaiśeṣika Darśana* which deals with matter, motion, gravitation which falls under the general purview of Physics. Therefore it is tradition of the *Vedantic* System to

recognize both the objective world which is the *Jagat* as well as the subtle non-perceptible composites of *Jīva* and then explore the relationship between both of them and the *Brahman*.

It is aptly stated by Swami Vivekananda as follows:

“The body is just the external crust of the mind. They are not two different things; they are just as the oyster and its shell, they are but two aspects of one thing; the internal substance of the oyster takes up matter from outside, and manufactures the shell. In the same way, the internal fine forces which are called mind take up gross matter from outside, and from that manufacture this external shell, the body-We shall find how intimately the mind is connected with the body. When the mind is disturbed, the body also becomes disturbed. Just as a physicist, when he pushes his knowledge to its limits, finds it melting away into metaphysics, so a metaphysicist will find that what he calls mind and matter are but apparent distinctions, the reality being one.” (Prabhu and Bhat)

## The Advaita Tradition of Śaṅkarācārya

One of the quintessence quotes from this tradition is:

*Brahma-Satyam Jagan-Mithyā Jīvo Brahmaiva Nāparaḥ*

There are some key terms here, *Brahman* of course refers to the absolute reality from which originates the entire fabric of the universe. *Jagat* is the objective world or the world of matter, space time, motion which is the centre of Science.

*Jīva* as discussed earlier is much more than the human body as defined in science as a product of matter.

What does *Satya* mean? In this special context.

*Satya* (सत्य) refers to the “truth (of the self)”, according to the *Māṇḍūkyaopaniṣatkārikā*

3.31-32.—Accordingly, while discussing duality and mental activity: “All this duality which is [comprising of] whatever is moving and motionless is [just] a visible object of the mind. For when [the state of] no-mind of mind [arises], duality is not perceived. [Why is this?] When the mind does not conceptualize because [one has] realized the truth (*satya*) of the self, then, it goes to the state of no mind. Therefore, in the absence of perceivable objects, there is no perception [of duality]”.

Here the reference from the *Upaniṣad* clearly explains that the kind of “*Satya*” being mentioned is not a simple translation of “truth”, but it is a special case of experiencing the non-dual nature of the world or in other words being able to experience the entire universe as originating from one reality. This is only possible when one realizes one self - the *Jīva*. This is not possible by ordinary means as this is beyond perception of the sensory organs. The second line *Jīvo Brahmaiva Nāparaḥ* can be taken to mean that the duality or distinction between the *Jīva* and *Brahman* does not exist as they are the same.

The terms *Jagan-Mithyā* is always translated as - *Jagat* is *Mithyā* which is false. *Mithyā* is actually “contrary” to *Satya* and from the above definition of *Satya*, it makes sense that the *Jagat* is contrary to the non-dualistic experience because *Jagat* is indeed seen as something separate from *Brahman* under normal conditions. It is the objective manifested world.

This is not a given just because *Śaṅkarācārya* states it or it is mentioned in any text. He explains different kinds of valid measures called *Pramāṇas* through which his entire *Advaita* system can be verified by every student. There are six such *Pramāṇas*;

1. *Pratyakṣa* (perception), the knowledge gained by means of the senses; This is similar to all the experimental results of science where everything is witnessed and recorded.
2. *Anumāna* (inference), the knowledge gained by means of inference;
3. *Śabda* (verbal testimony), the knowledge gained by verbal testimony;
4. *Upamāna* (comparison), the knowledge gained by means of analogy
5. *Arthāpatti* (postulation), the knowledge gained by superimposing the known knowledge on an appearing knowledge that does not concur with the known knowledge;
6. *Anupalabdi* (non-cognition), non-apprehension and skepticism in the face of non-apprehension.

*Śabda* is the only *pramāṇa* which can help an observer or individual or *Jīva* connect with both the worldly as well as the imperceptible realities and *Śruti* is the only source of revelation regarding the knowledge of non-dual *Brahman*.

Ethical standard is given by Purification of the mind (*citta* (or) *sattva Śuddhi*), by which moral judgements are effected. In modern neuroscience it is well documented that the biases affect the decisions and it is important to remove the biases which are inherent in every mind. This is nothing but *citta Śuddhi*. It is explained that with every good act a *samskāra* which is like a momentum for more good acts is produced. In modern Psychology it is proven that positive emotions increase life satisfaction and resilience and in turn increase the tendency of the individual to perform more positive acts.

Advaita Vedānta maintains that *Brahman*, the eternal objective Self, is synonymous with

*ātman*, the inner subjective Self of man. The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* states that

“This *ātman* is *Brahman*”. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* states “I am *Brahman*”. The *Cāndogya Upaniṣad* 13 states “Thou art That” (Tat Tvam Asi). Thus, *Advaita* advocates the complete identity of *Brahman-ātman* (“The Philosophical Base of Advaita Vedānta and its Relevance to Present Day Students”, pp 77).

In this system there are some differences as the term *Dvaita* indicates, this proclaims a constant duality between the *Jīva* and *Brahman* called *svatantra tattva*. That is to say that an individual is never the same as the ultimate reality even though the *ātma* is a manifested accessible form of the foundational reality *Brahman* and the *ātma* co-exist independently.

Here it is possible to personify the *Brahman* and by certain specific methods of praying which involve processes related to mental focus, concentration, etc it is possible to experience the *Brahman*.

Since the foundational reality of the universe is not objective but experiential, it is not a surprise that the subtle composites of an observer like *manas* must be strengthened. Further in this system there is a clear difference between each individual called *tāaratamya* and it is not a universal experience for every observer. This too makes sense since each observer has different skill sets it is not possible to universalise the experience.

Here *Jīva* and *Jagat* are *cit* and *acit* respectively and they are different from *Brahman*.

### The Viśiṣṭādvaita Tradition of Rāmānujācārya

As the term *Viśiṣṭa advaita* implies, the duality too exists as well as under special circumstances there is unity. This would be like accepting a particle as well as the wave nature of the wave function and then accepting that the two are one and the same finally.

In this system, there is the objective matter world - *Jagat* which is distinguished from the *Jīva* as it has *ātma* in it. Then there is *Brahman*, all three are equally real and yet very different from each other. *Jīva* is capable of self awareness while *Jagat* is not, but *Brahman* is the most aware although awareness in the case of *Brahman* is probably not the same as that in the case of the *Jīva*. *Brahman* is the reality present in everything. Every *ātma* is equally capable of experiencing the *Brahman* and it is possible through their deliberate choices. This would be the same as stating that every individual has the same potential and based on their own deliberate choices they build their life. This will fit in exactly with the laws of Science as a fatalistic argument has no space in the tenets of Science.

	Viśiṣṭādvaita	Advaita	dvaita
Brahman is the foundational reality of universe	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brahman is in Jīva	Always	Always	Never
Brahman is in Jagat	Always	Always	Never
Every Jīva can experience Brahman	Yes	Yes	No

### Conclusion

All the three systems describe that the way to building a happy state of mind is by understanding the true nature of the reality of the Universe which is called *Brahman*. The difference lies in the details of how to achieve this and anyone interested can choose the path that is most suitable to them. This would be akin to choosing a different major and career path in life believing it will give us happiness. Since different kinds of people have different frames of mind, it is good for people to be able to choose the method that suits them best.

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