

I. The argument and the objectives of the research

A comprehensive study of the entire section of Indian philosophy and religion is impossible within the limits of a doctoral dissertation. The complexity of beliefs and philosophical thought lines that make up the structure of what we call *Hinduism* makes the assignment to a systematic research of each item virtually impossible. For these methodological reasons, we limited our research to Advaita Vedanta, one of the six Darshans, respectively *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga*, *Mimāṃsā*, *Vedānta*, the most widely-spread in the Indian space. To be more precise, our attention will be *Advaita* as it was indicated by Śaṅkara on the basis of the Hindu scriptures.

The motivation for choosing this research topic lies primarily in the tendency to clarify, in the philosophical-theological Romanian space, the proper reception of the Vedantic principles of non-dualism, which, in different situations, has been only partially presented by *the new religious movements* of Eastern orientation or had been totally absent. Let us note that, although we have witnessed that in the last 20 years a number of translations into Romanian of various Upanishads and of some of the most important works attributed to some important Advaita researchers, so far we have not had a translation of a sankarian bhāṣya (comment) to the Upanishads *Brahma-Sūtra*. Further, we do not find in the Romanian Indian studies a systematic research paper on the doctrine of Advaita as “orthodox” hermeneutics of the Hindu scripts. For this reason, our work will be a pioneering one and we shall accept the supplements or additions of those who study the *Advaita Vedānta*.

Secondly, our research has also approached the mechanism of the comparison and evaluation of the sankarian *Advaita Vedānta* from the perspective of the Orthodox Christian theology, seeking to highlight, in the context of inter-religious dialogue, the convergences, the parallels as well as the differences on which a possible dialogue can develop. The Christian theologian need not live in isolation for he is mandated to make the Gospel of Christ known, to share its unique values with the other who, in his turn, displays his own values. Living in isolation in the current context of religious pluralism and increasingly aggressive secularization is a risk that the Church should not take. Moreover, through accurate and complete understanding of the elements of non-Christian religions, the Church will articulate a mature response that would be able to complete what any other non-Christian religion lacks: the affirmation of a personal God who engages, within the historical framework, in a personal dialogue and communion with man. Therefore, our research should not be regarded reluctantly and suspiciously, in that it would violate basic principles of the Christian religion value as the only one which guarantees salvation. We have reached the point where the discourse of the Church in the society should address both its faithful and those of other religions. Christ is not a particular God; He is the creative and saving Logos of all mankind.

This research paper has apriori set out to investigate valences and meaning of the Vedantic non-dualism in philosophical-religious horizon of the Indian culture. We are interested in investigating the metaphysical and religious foundations of the teachings of Advaita Vedanta, on which our research will focus on, trying to offer a detailed and comprehensive approach to each point: (1) the *Brahman* absolute is *nirguṇa*, the only *Reality* is *ekam-eva-adviṭīyam* („One-without-the-second”), transcendental and wholly presented in negative terms: *niravayava* (infinite and indivisible), *nirdharmaka* (uncharacterized), *asaṅga* (independent, without connection), *avikārī* (unchanging), *avyabhicārī* (immutable), *akriyā* (without activity), *ahrasva*, *adīrgha* (not short, not long), *nirākāra* (shapeless), *aṇoraṇiyān* (sizeless), *avināśī* the advaita teachings (indestructible), *avyakta* (unmanifested), *avyakṛita* (undifferentiated), *niṣprapañcha* (acosmic), *anirvachanīa* (indeterminate); (2) What is the connection between the phenomenal universe with *Brahman nirguṇa*, universe endowed with

a certain degree of degree of relative reality; (3) Knowledge (*jñāna*, *vidyā*) is the premise of the subject-object non-dualism and the only accepted method from the perspective of ignorance (*avidyā*) disposal, as factor of the samsaric existence; (4) The valences of the *brahmanubhava* experience as liberation (*mokṣa*).

II. The relevance of the topic in the context of the current research

Advaita Vedānta became fundamental in the comparative study of the academic research in the West, as evidenced by the number of publications in the field, which confirms the time relevance and the increasing interest in the philosophical-religious culture of India. Basically, there is an interest from both parties, as we record a series of works by Vedantic thinkers that parallel elements of Western religious philosophy with advaitine ones: we mention here J. Grimes, Francis X. Clooney, Vensus A. George, Bosco Correya. We must also mention the fact that up to now, we have not found any doctoral thesis that provides a comparative perspective of *Advaita* elements and Orthodox Christian theology.

The title of the current thesis, while having a certain high degree of generality, - *The vedāntin non-dualism. Metaphysics and mystics in Sankara's thinking* - anticipates the working method that we shall follow and places *Advaita Vedānta* both in the field of metaphysics and mystics, which cause outrage at first sight from the perspective of the Western thinker. In defending the title, we must consider the fact that in India *religion* and *philosophy* are not two separate segments, two separate typologies of human thought. It is unfortunate that the West has lost this integrating dimension of the unity between philosophy and religion while the Orthodox theology preserved it. For these reasons two distinct directions were outlined in the research *Advaita Vedānta*: 1) First, we find a course that examines the *Advaita* philosophy exclusively from a metaphysical perspective and 2) another way that corrects the previous position, in that *Advaita* must be observed simultaneously as philosophy and as a way to spiritual achievement. We note in this regard Deutsch Eliot's remark: "Advaita Vedānta is a religion as much as a technical philosophy, it is a way of spiritual fulfilment as much as a system of thought. However, the fact that the Vedāntei mainly focuses on spiritual perfection does not lessen its seeming of technical philosophy." "For the same E. Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta* answers the four questions that confirms its philosophical-religious profile: (1) *metaphysical*: what is Brahman? What is the world? Which is the relationship between Brahman and the world?, (2) *meta-psychological*: what is the status of the Self in relation to Brahman? (3) *epistemological*: How to know Brahman? (4) *axiological*: How can a man obtain salvation?

However, one must state the inadequacy of the Western terms that operate in defining *Advaita Vedānta*: *philosophy*, *metaphysics*, *mysticism*. It should be noted that both *metaphysics* and *mysticism* are terms belonging to Western linguistics. For these reasons their application in defining *Advaita Vedānta* can be contested. Certainly, a brief overview of the definition of the *metaphysics* will reveal that there is nothing wrong in considering the *Advaita* metaphysical: "Metaphysics is a broad field of philosophy, marked by two types of research. The first aims at being the most general possible investigation into the nature of *reality*: are there principles that apply to all that is real in everything?; If we disregard the particular nature of the existing things that we distinguish from each other, what can we know about them only by virtue of the fact that they exist? The second type of research aims at discovering what is ultimately real, often providing answers in stark contrast to the everyday experience of the world. Understood in terms of these two answers, metaphysics is very closely related to ontology, which involves both «what is existence (being)» and «what kind of things (fundamentally distinct) exist»."

We also quote R. Balasubramanian that resizes the concept of *metaphysics* in particular notes when applied to *Advaita Vedānta*: “Metaphysics is research into the nature of reality that should analyze the data of our experience in order to discover the real in it, which means that the reality which is immanent in our experience remains hidden in it. What prevents us from seeing the real is the falseness, the real remains obscured by what is not real. Metaphysics, therefore, aims at real discovery by removing the tide set by what is false. This means that what is real cannot be found unless we are able to identify the false and remove it through research. The discrimination between the non-real and real can be based on the criterion of the real and the false. Also, the criterion itself must be grounded transcendently if it is to be accepted.”

The semantic field of these terms must be extended if we use them in researching the *Advaitai*. In this context, Joseph Milne is very blunt in criticizing the Western research on the issue in question: the correct meaning of the non-dualism (i.e. *advaita*) has often been misinterpreted, especially by Western philosophers. Its essential meaning has often only partially been understood, quite often simplified and frequently distorted. These disagreements are reflected in the use of terms such as “absolutely impersonal”, “non-theist” and “monism”, when referring to the Śaṅkara teaching. We can notice these misunderstandings by identifying two main reasons: (1) first, the non-duality is considered to be a doctrine or belief of Śaṅkara and (2) secondly, the *advaita* is approached as a metaphysical or philosophical theory of reality. In both cases, the *advaita* is removed from its original religious context, where it has a soteriological function. These different ways of addressing the non-duality arose mainly from the methodologies of the Western researchers of comparative religion, methodologies in which the focus has been on classifying and comparing “the systems of thought and belief” of the world religions, which tends to be reductive. For Śaṅkara, *Advaita* should neither be taken as faith nor as philosophical system that is demonstrated, proved or justified by rational arguments.

Śaṅkara is not a philosopher in the Western sense of the word, proposing a metaphysical system in which *reality* is interpreted or explained; nor does he propose a scientific theory of the nature of *reality*. *Non-duality* is neither an objective description of the phenomenal existence nor a rejection of such objective descriptions. *Non-dual* knowledge is that which transcends rational understanding, and therefore the ultimate support of the *non-duality* is not reason, but the authority of the Scriptures, especially the *Upanishads* as well as direct, intuitive experience, the *anubhava*. The non-dual knowledge is absolute knowledge (*brahma-jñāna*) is not *knowledge of* or *knowledge about*, like the rational knowledge that involves the knower and known polarity

It is important to understand that Śaṅkara’s approach is, first of all, to a primarily experiential problem. We mention the most important researchers who presented in a mystical note Śaṅkara, on whose line of thinking we also structure our presentation: Bernard Barzel, Olivier Lacombe, Rudolf Otto, A. Ramamurti, G. Sundara Ramaiah.

III. A short framework of the paper

This doctoral dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Respecting the methodological order, the first chapter - *Śaṅkara* and the religious philosophy of the non-dualism in *Vedānta* - I initially placed *Advaita Vedānta* in Indian religious philosophical landscape, emphasizing that it has the greatest reception in Hinduism (I.1). The object of our research is the thought of Śaṅkara (788-820); therefor, we have briefly outlined his biography and his works (I.2). We could not have moved on without specifying the conceptual valences of the term *Advaita* (I.3), translated in the Western philosophical field by *non-dualism* or *non-duality*. Next, we pointed out, relying on a research by D. Loy, the fact that the *non-dualism* that has echoes in the

Mahāyāna Buddhism negation as denying the dualistic thinking as well (I.4.1), in Daoism as the non-plurality of the world (I.4.2). The particularity of the the non-dualism type of in *Advaita Vedānta* is maintained by overcoming the *subject-object* polarity in the cognitive act (I.4.3). In the last part of this chapter (I.5) we have tried to correct the reception of the advaitine teaching in Western philosophical thought in that we cannot equate *monism* with *Advaita*.

Chapter II - *Brahman ekam-eva-advitīyam* – Śāṅkara’s metaphysical perspective of “One-without-the-second” - begins with etymological explanations of the terms *Brahman* and *Ātman* (II.1.1). Given that *Advaita* is an interpretation of the *Upanishads* and Badārāyana’s *Brahma-Sūtra*, we have briefly highlighted the antinomy of *Brahman* in *Prasthānatrayī (Upaniṣade, Bagavad-Gītā ṣi Brahma-Sūtra)* (II.1.2) in order to observe what was reported and what Śāṅkara emphasized in his hermeneutics profile. In this context, the specification of the identity of *Ātman-Brahman*, fundamental in the *Upanishads*, could not be overlooked (II.1.3). We could not omit the fact that the profile in which *Brahman - the ultimate Reality* - is presented in *Advaita* as relying on two criteria: first, on the two aspects *Nirguṇa* and *Saguṇa*, Śāṅkara emphasizes the unqualified, undifferentiated *ultimate Reality*; secondly, in the debate of the Vedantin with *Sāṃkhya*, the school of thought that promotes the *puruṣa-prakṛti* dualism and that excludes *Brahman* from the equation of the origins of the universe, proposing *pradhāna* as the material cause of the universe (II.1.4).

The last two parts of this chapter (II.2 and II.3) are reserved to Śāṅkara’s perspective on *Brahman* as *ekam-eva-advitīyam* and its transcendence and proposes a paradoxical dialectics of the *One* and the *multiplicity* (the phenomenal world of *names* and *forms*) . As „One-without-the-second”, *Brahman* is the only undifferentiated *Reality*, meaning that it cancels any relation to an *other*. *Brahman* is *ekam-eva-advitīyam* (One-without-the-second), undifferentiated, non-relational, the full Existence and the Being, the transcendental *other*. The three words written in the compound *ekam-eva-advitīyam* involves the criticism of the three differences: *sajātīya-bheda*, *vi-jātīya-bheda* and *svagata-bheda*, i.e. the homogeneous difference, the heterogeneous difference and the inner difference.

Chapter III is reserved for the *Brahman nirguṇa - Saguṇa Brahman* polarity in order to highlight that Śāṅkara does not allow two *Brahmins*, two absolute Entities, but one and the same *ultimate Reality*, seen from the angle of the two truths: *pāramārthika* (absolute) and *vyāvahārika* (relative) (III.1). In the light of these specifications, we have turned to Śāṅkar terminology in the equation of “two Brahmins”, trying to offer an explanation what the terms *nirguṇa*, *saguṇa*, *parā-Brahman*, *aparā-Brahman*, *parameśvara*, *Īśvara* (III.4). In Śāṅkara’s thinking, *Brahman nirguṇa* has priority, the undifferentiated and non-relational *Reality*, combined with an absolute apophatism (*neti, neti*). *Nirguṇa Brahman* is beyond language and discursive thinking and, in this equation, it plays a decisive role: we deny everything is not *Brahman*, but it is incorrectly assigned, from the angle of ignorance (*avidyā*) attributes and characteristics (III.6). *Saguṇa Brahman* is the Absolute, qualified by the virtue of being creator, supporter of the universe and it is valid only in the sphere of its ignorance, as object of meditation and worship (III.7).

Chapter IV - *Brahman as Sat-Cit- Ānanda* - complements the previous chapter. Although completely indefinable, *Brahman* is indicated by the terms village, CIT (jnana) and Anand (Ananta). In this context, we have mentioned the function of the definition in Indian thought in two ways: *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa* - the accidental definition of *Brahman*, or *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa* – the essential definition of *Brahman*, while also mentioning that the terms *sat-jñānam-anantam* from *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* II.1.1 represent *svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*, with negative connotation: *sat* denies what is unreal, *jñānam* denies the empirical equation of knowledge in

the three factors - knower, knowledge, known - and *ānamtam* - everything that is finished (IV.1). The following sections contain a detailed analysis of each term (IV.2-IV.4).

The relation between the phenomenal universe and *Brahman* and specification of its ontological status is the subject of Chapter V: *The ontology of the real and the unreal in Śaṅkara's Advaita*. In this section, we have set out to analyze key terms of the *Advaita* metaphysics, namely *māyā* (V.1), *avidyā* (V.2), *adhyāsa* (V.2), *upādhi śi nāma-rūpa* (V.3). The universe is not an entity in itself, it only exists by way of relating it to *Brahman*, *upādāna kāraṇa* (the material cause) and *nimitta kāraṇa* (the efficient cause) of the universe. Defined as *māyā* (illusionary), the universe should not be reduced to non-existence, to the unreal or vacuum (V.3.8). This is explained by reference to the three levels of reality: *pāramārthika*, *vyāvahārika*, *prātibhāsika* (V.3.7), which helps us clarify the fact that the universe has a relative reality, until liberation is attained. To certify the intermediate ontological status of the world, we used the following equation: the universe is a stream between *real* and *unreal*, or between *to be* and *not to be* (V.3.4).

Our focus shifts from the ontological level to the cognitive one in Chapter VI: *Brahmānubhava* – the non-dual experience. Śaṅkara's paradigm from “knowing” to “being”. In this section, we have set out to highlight the liberation prerequisites (*mokṣa*) or in Śaṅkara's terms, the achievement of the *brahmanubhava* experience, the non-dual supreme experience. For a better presentation of this issue, we have divided the subject into six sections. Firstly, we argued that *Advaita Vedānta* cannot be approached from a reductionist perspective only as metaphysics. *Advaita* is, par excellence, is “a school of mystical knowledge” (VI.1). The possibility of mystical experience in *Advaita* is based on the following assumptions: the non-difference between *Ātman* and the plurality of *jīva* (the individual self), *Ātman* is *Brahman*, *Ātman* is *sākṣin* (the witnessing consciousness), *Ātman* is the consciousness that is unchanging during the *jāgrat*, *svapna* and *suṣṭi* experience (VI.2). At the foundation of all existences lies *Ātman*, the inner self, or *Ātman*'s achievement coincides with the process of knowledge discriminating between the *Self* and the non-*Self*, between the *Real* and the non-*Real*, by denying the empirical factors, the restrictive adding set up by *Ātman* through ignorance. The only way proposed by Śaṅkara in the liberation perspective is the knowledge (*jñānamarga*). Although having a secondary role, but still necessary in the process of the non-dual status, there is also the contemplative exercise - *mukhya-antaraṅga-sādhana* (VI.3). The aspiring one engaged in finding the true identity (*Ātman*) must follow the course of empirical knowledge (*vṛtti-jñāna*) the supreme knowledge (*vidyā*) (VI.4). The *advaitin* apophysis (VI.5) creates the prerequisites of the non-dual experience: although *Brahman* is *avācya* (unuttered) *anirukta* (inexpressible) *nirguṇa* (unqualified), it can be fully experienced in *brahmanubhava* (VI.6). To this end, we have tried to argue that *brahmanubhava* maintains the features of the mystical experience (VI.6.1). In this ineffable experience, occurs the seeing of the One in whom there “[...] is nothing else to be seen” (*Chāndogya-Upanishads* VII.24.1), in that “the knower of *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*” (*Muṇḍaka Upanishads*, III.2.9). This change should neither be translated as *mystic union* nor as change into being of the individual self. It's about identity (*tādmya*), not between the empirical self and *Brahman*, but between *Ātman* – the inner self that has got rid of limitative additions through knowledge - and *Brahman*. Not in the sense that *two* become *one*, but *one* is *one*: *tat tvam asi*.

The last chapter of this thesis (VII) is a general assessment from the perspective of Christian Orthodox theology the Vedantic non-dualism, through parallelism between the alleged resemblance of the two traditions: *Brahman ekamevādviṭyam* and the reality of the Christian universe (VII.2) *Brahman nirguṇa* as ultimate impersonal reality and *God* as personal Trinitarian reality (VII.3) *jīvātman* as a the pale shadow of *Brahman* - man as

community being and subject participating in a personal relationship with God (VII.4), 7.5. knowledge as a human act of participation in personal relationship with God (VII.5), the passage from ignorance (*avidyā*) to knowledge (*vidyā*) and the centrality of Christ as meaning of Christian life (VII.6), the *neti* apophatism, *neti* and Christian apophatism (VII.7), *Brahma-sākṣātkāra* - the intuitive vision of to non-duality and the vision of God in the light (VII.8) and *Brahmanubhava* and Christian deification (VII.9).

IV. Methods and approach

In developing our theme, we have pursued those Advaitin directions which are claimed by some researchers as the corresponding to elements of Orthodox Christian theology and spirituality. The topic was systematically developed in order to specify elements that conjugate the Vedantic *non-dualism* at the ontological level (*Brahman* is *Reality*, “One-without-the-second”, the universe has a relative existence), at the cognitive level (the identity knower -knowledge-known, *subject-object*) and at the mystical level (the *Ātman-Brahman* identity), but also comparatively, which will allow us a comparative analysis of the corresponding elements in the two traditions.

A real guiding factor in approaching the current topic was the explanations of R. Guénon, who criticized the improper manner in which many Western scholars specialized in the Far East have translated and addressed the elements of the Hindu teachings, i.e. from the perspective of the Eastern philosophical-religious terms and categories: “[...] the capital error of these scholars, leaving aside the question of method, is to see everything in terms of Western and their own mentality, while the first condition to a correct interpretation of any doctrine is, naturally, to make some effort to assimilate it and to adopt, as much as possible, the point of view of those who conceived it.”

Among the sources we have used in order to present the Advaitin teachings, we mention first of all, the *śruti* și *smṛti* texts, i.e. *The Upanishads* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Aitareya*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍūkya*, *Praśna*, *Īśa*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Taittirīya*), *Bhagavad-Gītā*, the English version. We have mostly focused on quoting Śaṅkara’s works whose authenticity was acknowledged for the comments on *The Upanishads*, *Brahma-Sūtra* and *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

Regarding the assessment of the Vedantic non-dualism from the perspective of the Orthodox Christian theology, we have primarily used the Holy Scripture (Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiunea al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1990) and the writings of the Holy Fathers (JP Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus*, Paris, 1844-1866). Regarding secondary critical works we have generally used the works of Vedantic philosophers, works written in English, but also works of Western researchers.

Last but not least, we mention that the interpretation of ancient texts written in Sanskrit will involve a linguistic analysis of key terms, which led us to lexicons, dictionaries and specialized encyclopedias. The script of Sanskrit texts was carried out by transliteration in Roman letters (*International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration- IAST*).