Madhva was born probably in the year 1238 of Christian era\(^1\) and died in 1317. Pajaka, eight miles south-east of Udipi in South Kanara, is claimed to be the place of his birth. Already at the age of sixteen he accepted sannyasa at the hands of Acyutapreksa, a renowned Advaita teacher. Madhva also received the name of Purnaprajña, and later on, when the master promoted him as the head of the establishment, a new name of Ānandatīrtha. However, from the beginning of his studies Madhva seems to have opposed Śāṅkara's monistic tenets and interpretations of the sacred texts. It was not long before he broke away from the old system altogether and started his own school in defiance.

With a view to popularizing his new doctrine Madhva undertook extensive tours both of south and north India, challenging his opponents for public disputation and worsting them in the process. He won several disciples, stars until then in the galaxy of the other schools—such as Svāmi Śāstrin and Śobhana Bhatta who adopted the new names of Narahari Tīrtha and Padmanābha Tīrtha respectively when they were admitted to a new ascetical order. Madhva also succeeded in winning over his teacher Acyutapreksa himself—no small achievement for a disciple. One of his greatest conquests was, however, Trivikrama Pandita, the foremost authority at the time on the Advaita philosophy and court poet to the ruler of Kumbla.

In the great tradition of the Bhāṣyakāras of the Vedānta, Madhva wrote extensively—thirty-seven books in all—which deal

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\(^1\) The other plausible date is 1198. For detailed discussions see B. N. K. Sharma's History of Dvaita School of Vedanta and Its Literature, Vol.I; also D. N. Introd.
with a variety of topics. (1) First we have the commentaries on the Prasthanatraya—the Gītā, the Upanisads and the Brahma-sūtras. (2) Then there are the ten classified writings on the monistic positions (e.g. Upādhi-khaṇḍana, Mithyāvāda Khaṇḍana), or positively explain his own doctrine on Ontology (e.g. Viśnu-tattva-vinirnaya), Logic or theory of knowledge (e.g. Pramāṇa-laksana) and general metaphysics (e.g. Tattva-saṅkhya). (3) Karma-nirṇaya and Rgāḥṣya—spiritualistic interpretation of portions from the Mantras and the Brāhmanas. (4) A commentary on the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa and his Epitome of the Mahābhārata—in both the works theism is vindicated and new rules for exegesis are proposed and followed. (5) Anu-vyākhyāna—Madhva's magnum opus, a companion in metrical form to his commentary on the Brahma-sūtras. It is more philosophical, critical and comprehensive than any of his other works. It takes special cognizance of rival schools of thought even in details. Madhva has also given us a résumé of the Adhikaranas of the Brahma-sūtras in his Nyāya-vivaraṇa and a synopsis of the Gītā in the Gītā-tātparya. And finally six of his minor works deal with devotional subjects in poems, stotras etc.

Madhva characterizes his system as tattva-vāda—the doctrine of the real or realism, as opposed to the māyāvāda of Śāṅkara. The points he strives to make in the course of his system bear out his contention. He is a firm believer in the objective validity of human experience which, he claims, is manifest in the pramāṇas. Pramāṇas themselves are self-valid by nature whether we take them as means of knowledge (sad-pramāṇas) or knowledge itself (kevala-pramāṇa). The definition, too, which Madhva gives of pramāṇa (yathārtham pramāṇam) positively and negatively brings out the realism of his position, and at the same time harmonizes with the etymological positions of earlier realistic schools. His sense of realism, however, does not make Madhva equate all the means of knowledge as though they were something amorphously one. He admits a
hierarchy, each of the pramāṇas enjoying an importance in its own sphere and lending support to one another. In general Madhva argues for three means of knowledge—pratyakṣa, anumāṇa and Āgama, which in his view comprise all others. We may add also his insistence on memory as a distinct pramāṇa which cannot be reduced either to pratyakṣa or to anumāṇa.

Although at first sight Madhva's emphasis on the absolute self-validity of Āgama and its aparūpa-svarūpa may look irrational and consequently unrealistic, it is in truth his anxiety to safeguard the objective nature of supra-sensible realities that prompts him to such postulates. In this he finds his allies among the thinkers of the Mīmāṃsaka school. But he differs from them in explaining the function of language. The primary function of language is not injunction but information, which depends on words signifying their proper objects in a related fashion. This leads us to his theory on validity of language in particular and of knowledge in general. Again with the Mīmāṃsakas he argues for intrinsic validity of all knowledge, while error, he believes, is validated only extrinsically. However, he steals a march over the Mīmāṃsakas by establishing his theory on a securer foundation, namely that of Śākṣin.

The doctrine of Śākṣin, as explained by him, is peculiar to Madhva alone. He tries to prove it in several ways—by the reality of space and time, for instance. It lends itself as the ultimate and unassailable basis for the intrinsic validity of knowledge in that self-validity is the nature of Śākṣin itself which is the source of all knowledge in the individual, and ever-vigilant witness of one's own validity. This is so true that there can be no error where the knowledge of śākṣin is in question. For nothing can come in between the witnessing self and its light. All error, therefore, which is a human fact, is due to the mal-functioning of manas and the other senses. Error or illusion consists in the mis-perception of the non-existent as existent and of the existent as non-existent.
Hence even an error is such only with reference to what is extramental.

What has been said of Madhva's epistemology is even more valid of his metaphysics. Thus the body and the world are as objective as the reality of the jīva himself. The illusionists who deny it make strange bedmates with the materialist Cārvākas. Human experience as seen in our everyday language is a clear indication of the reality of the body and of its real distinction from the self. Who, for instance, is beset by a doubt like 'Am I myself or not'? The body is, then, real. Its senses, too, internal as well as external are real. They moreover form a link between the body and soul, being both material and immaterial in their make-up and significance. But all of them, finally, depend on and derive their meaning from sāksin alone. Manas, however, must be assigned a unique role not only in that it is the chief instrument of bondage, it is, moreover, a valuable means in rupturing that bond.

The reality of the body has its correspondence in the objectivity of the world. Most of the Indian systems affirm it beyond doubt. It is only the sūnyavadins and vijñānavādins among the Buddhists and the Advaitins that cultivate doubts on the matter. They may propose many and specious arguments to deny expressly what they implicitly affirm, but every one of those arguments ends in a theoretical or practical contradiction from which the adversary can hardly extricate himself. The external world, then, is real, and this is positively shown by the evidence of sāksin, too. Sāksin tells us, for instance, how space and time, the constituents of the external world, are objectively real. We may distinguish varieties in each of them, but whatever be the distinctions the reality of space and time cannot be restricted to mind alone.

And yet distinction is a human need whether we see it in our language or apply it to reality. All the philosophers
admit its existence in the former. But some deny its validity when it is applied to reality. Madhva, however, cannot permit such a denial without ceasing to be a realist. With a double theory of viśeṣa and bheda he strives to justify the use in our language when applied to the variety within the reality itself or with regard to other realities. Objections are foreseen and answered. The famed samavāya of the Naiyāyikas is rejected as pitifully inadequate. The attempts from the Advaitins' camp to prove bheda as self-contradictory are themselves shown to be lacking in substance. When we grasp a reality we grasp it as distinct from all others. How can we deny our own experience? It is because the viśeṣas and bheda are really constituents of beings that real causation, too, is possible. Hence the defective theories of old, emphasizing now the reality of cause alone, now of effect alone are rejected and Madhva's own explanation of sad-asat-kāryavāda is vindicated.

Another indication of Madhva's realism is his defence of the distinction and plurality among the jīvas. No amount of mystification on the part of the monist can make the countless jīvas one between themselves or one with God. The theory of māyā is hollow and pernicious. Each soul is unique and distinct thanks to his yogyatā. The way he reflects and resembles the divine—bimba-pratibimba-rūpa—confirms the same view. This distinction of the jīvas leads us to another corollary—a harmonious hierarchy among the jīvas, starting from Śrī and coming down to those bound for hell. And yet we should be seeking in vain an adequate explanation of the hierarchy of souls in the hierarchy itself. That explanation we must seek in God, not as the Naiyāyikas do—for reason is too weak to sustain the burden—but through the Veda. God is transcendent, and yet He can be known through Āgama. The immanent and attributeless Brahman of the Advaitin is his own creation. But the true God is one who is proclaimed by the Vedas even through each of its syllables. Still, the Vedas depend on Him,
the only svatantra. He is the creator of the world and of everything in it. Even the eternal jivas have in Him their cause of being and activity. He sustains them through His favour. No ingenious objection proposed by adversaries can really go counter to creation since creation is a fact.

But the starting point of all Indian philosophy is the fact of human misery and bondage. Whatever be the arguments and counter-arguments on the supra-sensible level, the fact of our limitations cannot be denied. Yet the monist tries to explain it away. Madhva, however, admits the fact and finds the ultimate explanation in God's will. If this is so, liberation, too, must be due to that will. Hence the need of God's favour and grace. The adhikārin on his part must prove himself worthy of it by good works, acquisition of right knowledge and Bhakti. To achieve this it must be admitted that he is a free agent. Else what significance could the Vedic injunctions have for him? Man may be a puppet in God's hands, but as our experience tells us, he is a free agent, too.

Vedic injunctions, then, do have a meaning. The adhikārin should work out his salvation by an ascetical striving—through śravana, manana and nididhyāsana. All this, however, becomes impractical without the aid and favour of a guru. It is he who should direct the adhikārin's spiritual life. With his help alone the adhikārin will advance in meditation—even up to bimbopāsana. Let him, however, guard himself against the perils of pratikopāsana alluring as it is. Only if he follows these prescriptions scrupulously he will reach mukti either already in this life or at any rate in life to come. According to his yogyatā he will occupy a place reserved for him in the galaxy of the elect. He will not be absorbed in the Absolute to the extent of losing his self-identity. And yet he will be united with the Lord in knowledge and love, and with other emancipated jīvas in a family intimacy.
There is a notion current among the 'learned' circles that Madhva's realism is no more than the result of the Nyāya and Sānkhya pluralism with a few pietistic thoughts thrown in between. How erroneous is such a notion will be seen almost in every chapter of this thesis. It can be safely said that Madhva has more in common with Śāṅkara than any of the older classical systems. Just a few salient points may be in order. Madhva draws heavily upon the Nyāya in his treatment of epistemology. But so do other Hindu systems. And yet unlike the Naiyāyikas he restricts the number of pramāṇas to three, defending in addition the validity of memory. His love and worship of āgama and suspicion of anumāna contrasts sharply with the Nyāya belief. In the doctrine of apaurusēyatva and intrinsic validity of knowledge he aligns himself with the Mīmāṃsā against the Nyāya. But he does not hesitate to develop his own distinctive theory where the function of language is concerned.

Madhva's doctrine on Śaṅkṣīn is not traceable either to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika or to the Śāṅkhyā-Yoga. Knowledge, he believes, belongs to the jīva by essence, whereas for the Naiyāyika it does not. As against the Sānkhyas, Madhva attributes all activity to the jīva alone. His theory of viśesa and bheda has nothing in common with the other systems. His attacks on 'samavāya are not less fierce than those of Śāṅkara. In causality, too, Madhva's sad-asat-kāryavāda differs widely from the asat-kāryavāda of the Nyāya and yet more from the sat-kāryavāda of the Sānkhya.

2. We except, of course, the other Vedāntin—Rāmānujācārya. Though both were heirs to similar trends, Rāmānuja seems to have had little influence on Madhva's thought.

3. Nevertheless note: In this great work (Tarka-Tändava) Vyāsa-tīrtha has challenged almost every logical definition that appears in the Tarka-Cintāmani of Gangeśa, which forms the bed-rock of the new school of Nyāya logic.  
   --Dasg. IV, Preface viii.
The difference is more marked in their teaching on God. The Sāṅkhya has no place for God. For the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika He is only the best of the jīvas—the vyavasthāpaka. His existence and nature could be known by reason. Madhva's God is the creator of the universe, unique and the only svatantra. He is so great in His transcendence that the Veda alone can speak authoritatively about Him. The jīva depends on Him for his existence, activity, knowledge, bliss and salvation. But for His grace no salvific work is possible. Liberation in this life and in life to come is the result of man's love for God and God's grace to him. By contrast how sterile the Sāṅkhya ethics looks with its puruṣa-prakṛti duality! The Nyāya, too, has scarcely anything better to offer us.

The realism of Madhva, then, is refreshingly original, as much as it is robust. If Indian philosophy has been accused of world-negating tendency it certainly cannot be said of Madhva's views in general. He does not regard this world as the ultimate home, to be sure. But he does not look upon it with an unhealthy suspicion, either.