



---

## Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba and the Metaphysics of Difference: A Study of Dwaita and Advaita Intersections & the concept of Jivatma as a part of the Paramatma

**Dr. Aparajita Modak**

(Associate Professor at Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba Mission College)

**Animesh Nath**

(Assistant Professor at Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba Mission College)

---

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16880003>

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

**Research Paper**

**Accepted:** 29-07-2025

**Published:** 10-08-2025

---

**Keywords:**

*Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba, Dwaita, Advaita, Vedanta, Bhakti, Metaphysics, Difference, Vishnu-tattva, Nimbarka Vaishnav tradition, Bengali Vaishnavism, Jivatma, Paramatma*

---

### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the intricate philosophical interplay between Dwaita (dualism) and Advaita (non-dualism) through the spiritual and metaphysical teachings of Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba, a revered figure in the Bengali Vaishnava tradition. Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba is also a prominent figure in the Nimbarka Vaishnava tradition, who accentuated the importance of spiritual growth for both individuals and society. He stressed the significance of total surrender to the Guru as the path to salvation and highlighted the Guru's unique knowledge of Sat-Chit-Ananda (existence, consciousness, bliss). His teachings also focused on the practical application of spiritual principles in daily life, advocating for character development and the transformation of negative tendencies into positive virtues. While the classical Vedantic schools of thought often portray Dwaita and Advaita as mutually exclusive, this paper argues that Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba, through his lived philosophy, embodied a unique synthesis—an epistemological bridge between the dual and non-dual states of being. Drawing from primary sources, hagiographical records, and philosophical commentaries, this study investigates how Kathia Baba navigated the metaphysical



tension between the Jivatma–Paramatma binary and the underlying unity of Brahman. The analysis is framed around the concept of "metaphysics of difference," which underscores the coexistence of dualism and non-dualism not as contradictions, but as stages in the seeker's evolving realization of truth. In Nimbarka's Dvaitadvaita (dualistic monism) philosophy, both the world and Brahman are considered real. The world is a part of Brahman, emphasizing their relationship and interdependence. This approach acknowledges the distinctiveness of the individual soul (Jivatma) and the Supreme Soul (Paramatma) while also affirming their inherent connection. Paramatma is infinite and independent, while Jivatma is finite and dependent. Furthermore, this paper situates Kathia Baba's teachings within the broader Bhakti tradition, revealing how his spiritual praxis retained the devotional fervor of dualistic worship while advancing toward the ontological unity characteristic of Advaita. Ultimately, the study not only revisits classical Vedantic categories but also presents Kathia Baba's thought through the Nimbarka tradition that deserves renewed attention in modern comparative philosophy.

---

## Introduction

Swami Dhananjay Das Kathia Baba, a pivotal figure in 19th–20th century Bengali spiritual history, is often remembered for his uncompromising devotion, his deep grounding in scriptures, and his ability to bridge complex philosophical discourses with lived spiritual experience. While most scholarly assessments of Vedanta tend to dichotomize Dvaita and Advaita, this paper posits that Kathia Baba's teachings stand at a productive threshold—a liminal space where metaphysical difference is not opposition but dynamic co-existence.

The significance of this exploration is twofold. First, it introduces Kathia Baba as a philosopher in his own right, not just a spiritual guru. Second, it reframes the Dvaita–Advaita divides through the lens of spiritual evolution rather than rigid doctrinal adherence. In doing so, it aligns with the lived traditions of Indian philosophy, which often resist categorical boundaries in favor of experiential depth. Kathia Baba navigated this metaphysical tension stating that Nimbarka philosophy views the Jivatma (individual



soul) as a part or aspect of the Paramatma (Supreme Soul/Brahman). We can imagine it like a spark from a fire – the spark has the same essence as the fire but exists separately. Nimbarka philosophy strongly emphasizes Bhakti, or devotion, as the primary path to spiritual realization. Through intense devotion and surrender to the Supreme Lord (often identified with Krishna), the Jivatma can overcome the illusion of separation (maya) and realize its inherent connection to the Paramatma.

The central inquiry of this paper is: How does Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba interpret and embody the philosophical tension between Dwaita and Advaita & by what means Jivatma can be considered as a spark of Paramatma. Through these questions, we aim to explore the metaphysics of difference as a mode of spiritual becoming rather than static being. This study proceeds through several stages like, a contextual overview of Dwaita and Advaita Vedanta, a biographical and doctrinal portrait of Kathia Baba, how Jiva (individual soul) and Brahman (the Universal Soul) are distinct entities, yet also intimately connected, a comparative philosophical analysis and a reflection on the implications of this metaphysical synthesis in today's spiritual and philosophical discourse.

## **Dwaita and Advaita: A Philosophical Context**

### **Dwaita Vedanta**

The Dwaita (dualist) tradition, chiefly formulated by Madhvacharya in the 13th century, posits a strict ontological difference between the Jiva (individual soul) and Ishwara (Supreme God). Dvaita Vedanta acknowledges the significance of righteous action (karma) and adherence to moral and social duties (dharma). These aspects are considered integral to spiritual growth and the ultimate quest for liberation. In this view, the soul, though dependent on God for liberation, retains a permanent identity separate from the divine. Bhakti (devotion) is central, and moksha is conceived as eternal service to God. This liberation (moksha) involves eternal association with the divine and a perpetual state of bliss in the divine abode.

Madhvacharya's philosophy is often referred to as Tattvavada, emphasizing the pursuit of understanding reality (tattva) in its truest form. This involves a comprehensive exploration of the ultimate truths governing existence and the nature of the self. Dvaita Vedanta offers its unique interpretation of the Brahma Sutras, a foundational text in Vedanta. Madhvacharya's interpretation serves as a robust defense of dualism, countering alternative monistic readings prevalent in his time. Central to Dvaita Vedanta is unwavering devotion to Lord Vishnu as the supreme, personal God. Madhvacharya identifies Vishnu as the ultimate reality responsible for the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe.



## Advaita Vedanta

Madhvacharya critically evaluates the Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankaracharya. He vehemently opposes the monistic view that posits Brahman as the sole reality and considers the world an illusion (maya). Instead, Madhvacharya upholds the reality of the world and asserts the distinct existence of individual souls. Advaita, systematized by Adi Shankaracharya, asserts the absolute non-duality of Brahman. The world of multiplicity, including the distinction between self and God, is an illusion (maya). Liberation (moksha) comes from the realization that Atman is Brahman—that the soul and the Supreme are not two, but one. At the pinnacle of the hierarchy stands Para Brahman, the ultimate and transcendental reality. This is the supreme, unchanging, and eternal essence from which everything emanates.

### Para Brahman:

It is considered as transcending form and formlessness, pervading everything in the universe and beyond. It is the self-enduring, eternal, and self-sufficient cause of all causes. Para Brahman is the source of both spiritual and material worlds and everything emanates from it.

- Advaita Vedanta: Identifies Para Brahman as Nirguna Brahman, the attribute-less absolute, transcending all conceptualization, including emptiness and infiniteness. It emphasizes the non-dualistic realization of the self (Atman) as identical with Brahman.
- Dvaita Vedanta and Vishishtadvaita Vedanta: Define Para Brahman as Saguna Brahman, the absolute with attributes. These schools identify Para Brahman with specific deities like Vishnu, Shiva, or Adi Shakti, depending on the tradition.

Vishnu, especially in his form of Mahavishnu, is considered Parabrahman and is also depicted as the Paramatman (Supreme Self) according to the Narayana Sukta in the Yajurveda. The Mahabharata identifies Vishnu with both Purusha and Prakriti, further associating him with the ultimate reality. The Bhagavata Purana also describes Narayana as Para Brahman.

### Vishnu-tattva:

This Sanskrit term generally means "principle," "truth," or "reality". Vishnu literally means "all-pervading" or "one who enters everywhere." Therefore, Vishnu-tattva fundamentally points to the all-pervasive principle of Vishnu, emphasizing his divine nature, manifestations, and philosophical



significance within the Vaishnava tradition. Vishnu-tattva encompasses Vishnu and his expansions or incarnations known as avatars. These include figures like Rama, Krishna, Narasimha, and others. According to Vaishnavism, all other living entities (jivas) originate from Vishnu-tattva, highlighting its role as the foundational essence from which the divine emerges and manifests.

### **The Apparent Paradox**

At a doctrinal level, these two philosophies seem irreconcilable. Dvaita affirms difference as real and eternal; Advaita denies all difference as illusion. Dvaita Vedanta believes that individual souls are eternally distinct from God and other souls, and a hierarchical cosmic order exists. Whereas, Advaita Vedanta believes that the individual soul (Atman) is ultimately identical to Brahman, and liberation is achieved through realizing this identity.

Advaita Vedanta emphasizes that liberation is the realization of one's identity with Brahman, attained through knowledge and self-realization. On the other hand, Dvaita Vedanta focuses on devotion and surrender to God (Bhakti Yoga) as the primary means to attain liberation. Advaita Vedanta considers Maya as the illusory power that conceals the true nature of Brahman, leading to the perception of diversity. But Dvaita Vedanta regards the world as real and does not embrace the concept of Maya in the same way, as God's creation is considered distinct and purposeful.

Yet Indian spiritual traditions often evolve in paradoxical layers—practicing Bhakti (dualism) while moving toward realization of Advaita (non-dualism). Advaita emphasizes the ultimate oneness of reality, while Dvaita stresses the eternal duality between God and the individual soul. The two schools offer differing paths to spiritual attainment, with Advaita favoring knowledge and self-realization and Dvaita advocating devotion and surrender. This paper proposes that Swami Kathia Baba lived and taught precisely this paradox.

### **Swami Dhananjoy Das Kathia Baba: Life and Teachings:**

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Born in Bengal, Kathia Baba was initiated into the Nimbarka Sampradaya, a lineage that itself attempts a reconciliation between dualism and non-dualism. His early life was marked by intense asceticism, scriptural mastery, and profound spiritual experiences.



## **Philosophical Orientation**

While deeply rooted in Bhakti, Kathia Baba's teachings often hinted at an inner Advaitic realization. He taught that the devotee must begin with surrender and dualistic love, but ultimately must transcend the ego-self and merge in the non-dual awareness of God.

## **Key Teachings**

**Bhakti as a Means, Not an End:** Devotion purifies the mind but is ultimately transcended.

**Difference as a Pedagogical Illusion:** The dualism between God and devotee exists to aid spiritual development, not as an absolute metaphysical truth.

**Silence and Non-Assertion:** Kathia Baba often taught through silence or paradox, allowing disciples to experience rather than intellectually grasp the truth.

## **The Metaphysics of Difference:**

### **Kathia Baba's Middle Path**

#### **A Layered Ontology**

Kathia Baba's metaphysics does not reject either Dwaita or Advaita. Instead, he offers a layered approach where dualism is the first step in spiritual growth, and non-dualism is the realization that follows. This is akin to the Buddhist concept of Upaya (skillful means).

#### **Illustrative Sayings and Dialogues**

Drawing from oral traditions and recorded sayings, this section will analyze a few key anecdotes or verses attributed to Kathia Baba that illustrate his dialectical style—where he affirms God's otherness in one breath, and non-duality in the next.

#### **Difference as Devotion**

Even within his apparent dualism, the "difference" Kathia Baba advocates is not conflictual but devotional. The "metaphysics of difference" here refers to a sacred distance that fuels love, not separation that fuels ego.



## **Advaita Beyond Philosophy**

Kathia Baba's Advaita is not Shankara's cold monism. It is warm, devotional, and rooted in experience. He does not "argue" Advaita; he lives it through Bhakti.

### **Jivatma as a part of the Paramatma in the teachings of Swami Dhananjay Das Kathia Baba:**

Swami Dhananjay Das Kathia Baba, belonging to the Nimbarka Vaishnava tradition (Dvaitadvaita Vedanta), views the relationship between Jiva (individual soul) and Brahman (the Universal Soul) as both distinct and intimately connected.

- **Distinctness:** The Jiva, as an individual soul, retains its unique identity and experiences, even in the process of spiritual evolution. It is considered atomic in size (anu) and possesses limited knowledge and power, differentiating it from the omniscient and all-pervasive Brahman.
- **Connection:** However, despite the distinction, the Jiva is also eternally and intimately connected to Brahman. This relationship is often described as one of dependence, like a body is dependent on the soul, or as Jiva being a part of the Paramatma (Supreme Soul/Brahman).

### **Jivatma-Paramatma relationship:**

1. **Origin and return:** All individual souls (Jivatmas) are believed to originate from the universal soul (Paramatma) and eventually merge back into it after death.
2. **Shared qualities:** Though seemingly different, Jivatma and Paramatma share the same fundamental qualities of Sat (existence), Chit (consciousness), and Ananda (bliss). The difference lies in their manifestation and realization.
3. **The journey of realization:** The spiritual path aims to dispel the illusion of separation and realize the inherent unity of Jivatma with Paramatma. Practices like meditation, self-inquiry, and studying scriptures are crucial for this realization.

This intricate relationship can be further analysed as:

- **Drop and ocean:** Jivatma is like to a drop of water, part of the ocean (Paramatma) yet retaining a distinct form.



- Two birds in a tree: The Upanishads portray Jivatma and Paramatma as two birds sitting on the same tree (the body). One bird (Jivatma) eats the fruits (experiences joy and sorrow) while the other (Paramatma) observes as a witness.
- Body and its soul: Just as the soul (Jivatma) resides in the physical body, Paramatma is considered the soul of the Jivatma, highlighting a deep, inherent connection.

### **Jiva's journey to liberation:**

- Bondage: The Jiva experiences the material world and its limitations due to its identification with the body, mind, and intellect, a concept known as Jivatva-bhavana. This ignorance (avidya) leads to suffering and the cycle of birth and death (samsara).
- Realization: According to this philosophy, the Jiva can transcend this cycle by realizing its true nature through spiritual practices like devotion (bhakti), meditation, self-inquiry, and studying scriptures.
- Moksha: Liberation (moksha) is achieved when the Jiva recognizes its eternal relationship with Brahman and sheds the illusory attachments to the material world. This realization is not about dissolving or merging into Brahman, but rather understanding one's inherent connection and dependence on the Divine. The ultimate goal is to achieve a state of eternal loving service to Brahman.

Swami Dhananjay Das Kathia Baba's teachings, rooted in Dvaitadvaita Vedanta, emphasize that Jiva and Brahman are both distinct and eternally connected. The Jiva, though individual, is a part of Brahman and attains liberation through realizing this relationship through devotion and spiritual practices, ultimately leading to a state of eternal loving service to the Supreme.

### **Comparative Insights and Contemporary Relevance:**

This section will compare Kathia baba's integrative approach with other Indian mystics like Sri Ramakrishna (who said, "As many faiths, so many paths"), Kabir (who oscillated between Nirgun and Sagun), and Sri Aurobindo (who proposed a supramental synthesis).



## Implications for Inter religious and Inter philosophical Dialogue

- In a time when philosophical camps are often polarized, Kathia Baba's model of synthesis offers a powerful framework. Rather than choose one metaphysical stance over another, one can dwell in tension, in difference—until difference itself dissolves.
- The stories of Ramdas Kathia Baba demonstrate his emphasis on compassion and forgiveness, even towards those who harmed him. These ethical principles, central to many religious and philosophical systems, can serve as a foundation for constructing a shared framework for ethical action and social harmony, fostering common ground for interreligious cooperation.
- The context of scholarship between faith and reason, and traditional versus modern scholarship, within the Buddhist tradition suggests the possibility of similar discussions within the Nimbarka Vaishnav tradition and its interactions with other faith traditions

### Conclusion:

Swami Dhananjay Das Kathia Baba invites us into a spiritual vision where difference is not negation, but revelation. His teachings illustrate that the soul's journey from dualistic devotion to non-dual realization is not a betrayal of Bhakti, but its fulfillment. By holding Dwaita and Advaita together without forcing resolution, he offers a radically inclusive spiritual path—one that respects the experiential wisdom of both schools and points toward a non-duality infused with love, not aloofness. Instead of viewing them as contradictory, we can recognize Advaita and Dvaita as complementary perspectives on the same ultimate truth. This can be collateral for many individuals seeking a spiritual path that resonates with their lived experience. Advaita then offers a deeper understanding of the underlying unity and the transient nature of the world. This fosters a sense of detachment and inner peace even amidst life's challenges. On the other hand, the perception of Jivatma as part of Paramatma forms a cornerstone of Hindu philosophy, particularly within Advaita Vedanta. It underscores the ultimate unity of all existence and guides the individual soul on its journey of self-discovery and realization of its inherent oneness with the Supreme Reality. In reviving and interpreting his voice today, we uncover a profound philosophical challenge to reductive binaries in Vedanta and in our thinking at large. Yoga practices & meditation can enlighten the Jivatma to realize its true nature as part of the Paramatma, transcending the illusion of separation. This realization can lead to liberation and a blissful state.



## References

- Chatterjee, Margaret. *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*. University of Calcutta, 2001.
- Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. I–V*. Cambridge University Press, 1922–1955.
- De, Barindra Nath. *Kathiababa Parampara O Darshan*. Vrindavan Dham Trust, 1987.
- Ingalls, Daniel H. H. “The Study of Advaita in Western Scholarship.” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1954, pp. 323–342.
- Kathia Baba, Swami Dhananjoy Das. *Bhakti O Brahmatattva*. Compiled and Edited by Haripriya Das, Nimbarka Mission Publications, 1968.
- Matilal, Bimal Krishna. *Logic, Language and Reality: Indian Philosophy and Contemporary Issues*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1985.
- Murty, K. Satchidananda. *Studies in Indian Thought: Collected Papers*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1996.