

English Language Teaching **PERSPECTIVES**  
(A peer reviewed Open Access Research Journal)

ISSN: 2594-312 x

Vol. VII Issue (1-2) August 2022, pp. 12-23

eJournal site: <http://ejournals.pncampus.edu.np/ejournals/eltp/>

## Adi Shankara's *Saundarya Lahari*: A Quest of Spirituality in Devotion and Physical Body

Dr. Sabindra Raj Bhandari

### Abstract

*Saundarya Lahari (Waves of Beauty) by Adi Shankara glorifies the Devi Shakti (power of goddess) and her physical beauty. He projects that the perfect integration of the corporal and the physical aspects lead to the zenith of spiritual realm. Therefore, Bhakti (devotion) divulges the deep veneration of Devi Shakti through Sringeric (amorous) expressions in Saundarya Lahari. It proclaims that inner evolution and the feeling of sublime in the physical beauty of Devi Shakti radiate the sublimity of the spirituality as well. As a profound poetic creation in Sanskrit, it is distinct from the established belief and religious practices, and establishes the truth that physical beauty of Shakti is also the beauty of the spiritual. To explore these dynamics of Saundarya Lahari, this article applies the qualitative approach to research and the interpretive method. It also sheds light on how the genial gravity of bhakti and physical beauty in their totality leads to the better application of critical spiritual pedagogy in teaching*

**Keywords:** Bhakti, body, sringara, the absolute, the physical, the spiritual

### Introduction

This article explores the two aspects of *Bhakti* (devotion) namely the spiritual and physical. These two aspects go side by side for the spiritual evolution. Adi Shankara's *Saundarya Lahari* observes the physical and spiritual beauty, existing in integrated form in *Shakti*. *Shakti* epitomizes cosmic energy also in the form of goddesses Parvati, Durga, and Kali. A way of worshipping the physical beauty also adores the spiritual beauty. All paths of devotion lead to the same goal of spiritual height. *Bhakti*, as a religious practice performed both in India and Nepal, is ensued to achieve a perception of peace and transcendence and the feeling of oneness with divine essence. It has a connection to the quest of spirituality. The spiritual side of life signifies transcendental experience – the individual Self and

#### Article History:

Submitted 17 Dec 2021

Reviewed 25 Feb 2022

Accepted 21 July 2022

#### Corresponding Author:

Dr. Sabindra Raj Bhandari

#### Email:

[bhandarisabindra@gmail.com](mailto:bhandarisabindra@gmail.com)

#### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/eltp.v7i1-2.47402>

#### Copyright information:

Copyright 2022 Author/s and Department

of English Education, FoE, P.N. Campus

This work is licensed under a Creative

Commons Attribution- Non Commercial 4.0

International License



Publisher

Department of English Education

Faculty of Education, P. N. Campus, Nepal

Email: [enged@pncampus.edu.np](mailto:enged@pncampus.edu.np)

URL: [www.pncampus.edu.np](http://www.pncampus.edu.np)

supreme Self, higher world and the spiritual world. *Bhakti* is linked with these higher levels of abstract previews. It has the connection to the heart and emotion of human beings rather than the thinking and reasoning level. It is to be realized. However, a clear separation of mind from emotion is hard to make. It means the mind and heart are linked. *Saundarya Lahari* (waves of Beauty) incorporates two aspects of *Bhakti* and *Sringara* that need to be explored and interpreted.

Adi Shankara, born in a Brahmin family of Kaladi Village, Kerala, India, is a philosopher, theologian and exponent of the philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta*. As a member of a Hindu cultural family worshipping Shiva as the central God, he is a *Shakta* (devotee to divine power), the venerator of Shiva and female personification of divine energy. He has studied under the acharya Govindapada and has become the follower of acharya Gaudapada. He has visited different places of India in his mission to revive Hinduism. He has travelled many places of India and Nepal in order to establish *Shaktipeethas* (temples) and to disseminate his knowledge. In the same process, as a *Shakta*, he has followed the path of *Bhakti* (devotion) to Shiva, the male embodiment of the divine, and Parvati, female embodiment of the divine. He has further realized the *Advaita* essence, the unity of the both male and female embodiments as the supreme power of creation. The prime objective of his mission was to achieve the sense of oneness with the supreme power; Adi Shankara has adopted two modes of veneration of *Shakti* (divine power) at a time. They are *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Sringara* (erotic). They represent two poles of human experiences like *Bhakti* to the extreme of the spiritual and *Sringara* to the extreme of the physical.

### Review of Literature

*Saundarya Lahari* is a specific text and hence has attracted a multitude of responses from the reviewers, critics, and commentators. Krishnaswamy(2009) views *Saundarya Lahari* as an enchanting lyric because it integrates the multitude insights of religion, spirituality, literary, philosophy, music, and history. This foregrounds that the poem is a combination of different aspects that demand a systematic exploration. In this regard, this study becomes justifiable. Sastri and Ayyanger (1948) opine that this poem provides the unmeasurable flood of blissful sublimity. It projects that *paratmana*(divinity) is attainable through spiritual devotion. *Yoga* and *samadhi* also lead to that stage. Besides, this poem expounds the Upanishadic idea of *atman* (soul) and *Brahman*( the cosmic soul).This consolidates the esoteric value of the poem that demands a systematic exploration.

If one just devotedly reads *Saundarya Lahari*, one realizes the divinity. Rao(n.d.) highlights that the oceans of beauty delineated in *Saundarya Lahari* resounds the voice of God. One can get blissful stage when one feels the form of divinity in the poem. This idea also projects the combination of love and beauty in the poem that demand a quest.

Having a serious focus on the physical life and the world, *sringara* follows the principle of love and beauty. *Bhakti* practice ignores the physical value of life, as the physical side of life refers to the body, brain and physical world. This study aims to connect two opposite domains of human experiences such as *Bhakti* and beauty in *Saundarya Lahari* by answering the following questions: a) what is the significance of *sringaric* expression in *Saundarya Lahari*? How does the poem relate the body and beauty in the practice of *Bhakti*? This study aims to explore the dichotomy and the integration of the physical and devotional aspects in the poem *Saundarya Lahari*.

### Methodology

This study centers on two dimensions of *Saundarya Lahari: Bhakti and Sringara*. So, it applies the qualitative approach to research because this approach focuses to bring the obscure and hitherto marginalized issues at the centre. According to Kumar (2014), this approach is flexible and intends to explore the diverse issues and themes. The concepts of *Bhakti* and *Sringara* are integrated in *Saundarya Lahari*. Content analysis method has been applied to unravel these issues. *Saundarya Lahari* becomes the source of primary concepts, and its reviews, criticisms, and online sources have been considered as the secondary sources for this study.

### Reviews and Discussion

In this section, the text Adi Shankara's *Saundarya Lahari* is reviewed and discussed in five different aspects; Spirituality through *Bhakti* and *Sringara*, *Devi Shakti* in *Saundarya Lahari*, *Shakti* and *Maya*, The Essence of Beauty: Physical to Spiritual and Adi Shankara's Quest for Spirituality as Divine.

#### Spirituality through *Bhakti* (Devotion) and *Sringara* (eroticism)

Spirituality has firm belief that there is something greater than the physical life. It is the realization beyond human sensory experiences. It is a perception of the divine within, and identification that we are part of cosmic or divine in nature. It is the state of consciousness that our lives have significance in a context, beyond a mundane everyday existence. It denotes to the understanding of the fact that we are a substantial part of a persistent unfolding of creation in our universe. Wisdom, truth and continuity of soul even after death are some universally accepted concepts in spirituality. Knowing the truth of life and the world and knowing the essence of the divine in the worldly things are the point of spirituality. It is further believed that spirituality in life is possible through constant practice. Saints or enlightened individuals can achieve this state through regular practice. This practice is the practice of *Bhakti*.

*Bhakti* denotes the mode of praise, worship or admiration. In its literal sense, it is an expression of affection and devotion to divine power. The mode of *Bhakti* can be in different patterns. *Bhakti* is the outcome of *Bhaktirasa*, "a synthesis of devotional *Bhakti* and aesthetic *rasa*" (Kiyokazu, 2017, p. 1066). It depends on an individual's personal choice and interest. One can sing the hymns to worship or praise mainly gods or goddesses. The most creative person can compose poems or hymns so that not only s/he sings them, but also many other people can do the same. Adi Shankara has composed *Saundarya Lahari*.

The root word of *Bhakti* is '*bhaj*' (pray) connected to divine power, gods and goddesses. *Bhakti* is mainly linked with religious purpose and interest. It looks like a deep desire, both mental and psychological desire. It is more concerned with the psychological and mental aspect of our life. It regards emotion or love as the central medium of controlling mind for meditation. The Hindu religious practice supposes *Bhakti* as one of the important means of making human (individual) soul attached to the divine soul or the universal soul. So, Ramanuja takes it as a "constant and unfailling recollection and meditation of the supreme Lord" (as cited in Brahma, 2007, p.215). A *Bhakta* (person of devotion) is *jnani* (person of wisdom) and vice versa. *Bhaktimarga* (devotional path) is regarded as a powerful step to reach to attain the knowledge of absolute.

If someone is physically and spiritually attached to someone, we suppose that it is love. Similarly, if someone is spiritually and religiously attached with the ideas of sages, we regard it as

*Bhakti*. In this sense, *Bhakti* is a love to divinity with spiritual and religious essence. Having no touch with the physical and material world, it has less to do with the worldly and material aspect of life; however, human beings exist physically and they connect spirituality with the notions and features of physicality and therefore there is close connection between physical love and spiritual devotion.

*Sringara Rasa* (erotic aesthetic), is one of nine Rasas as discussed in Sanskrit literary theory and it is regarded as the most important one so leveled as *Rasa Raj*(king of aesthetic). It is about love and possession of something desired, loved, worshipped and admired. As the prominent aspect of love, *Sringara* rasa towers over all the other sentiments at the high physical and emotional level. It represents an important part of human sentiment, especially a desire to possess physical beauty. It leads to a sense of physical love. Similar to the essence of love as the feature of the human mind, it expresses a desire to have affection a love to the thing or to the loved one appears in different expressions such as a feeling of closeness, affection, respect, admiration and bhakti at its ultimate point of love. Bhakti begins from the sense of closeness or love, physical or spiritual. Being involved in different activities such as physical and psychological, a human' inevitable quality is love or affection, as no human is without love.

Love is the pivotal feeling in *Bhakti* that unites the devotee with the esteemed god or goddess. *Sringara rasa* is purely the result of love and *Bhakti* is also the result of love. *Bhakti* begins with love and love takes the form of *Bhakti*. What happens in affection or love or *Bhakti* is that one feels completely affectionate to someone or something, human, divine, or nonhuman. It is the feeling of comfort even to think and expect someone to meet someone physically or mentally. Very often physical and spiritual love differs as physical love may have a direct connection with the body; however, the spiritual is through the mental image or picture. So, *Bhakti* necessarily has to go through the physical in the form of image, picture, symbol or concept. In this regard, *Bhakti* and *Sringara* are closely linked. This mode of love between almighty and devotee takes the form of *Bhakti*. It is love, affection, sentiment and feeling. So through love, you meditate on that divine power having universal force. Bharata Muni, in his *Natya Shastra* (book of performance), has divided *Sringara Rasa* into two types: *Samyoga sringara* (comic) and *Viyoga sringara* (tragic). *Samyoga*, as its name refers to, is the mode of union and comic attachment between the lover and the loved one, the devoted and devotee in *Bhakti*. *Viyoga* refers to a possible part of separation. In both of the conditions, love plays vital role.

In both cases, *Sringara* and *Bhakti*, love plays an important role. One has love to the physical and the other has love to the spiritual. The physical can be a human being with the human attributes of body, beauty and sensuality, and the other can be quite spiritual with a realization, feeling and sense. But at the same time, love to the physical can be only the surest form to transform the physical life to the mode of the spiritual realization that is possible through the practice of *Bhakti*.

### ***Devi Shakti***

*Saundarya Lahari* is divided into two parts; the first part (verse 1-41) is named as *Ananda Lahari* (Waves of Happiness) and the second part (Verse 42-100) is named as *Saundarya Lahari* (Waves of Beauty). *Saundarya Lahari* reflects Adi Shankaracharya's poetic excellence. As per the name, the first part describes the mode of pleasure expression and the second part primarily concerns the mode of beauty of *Devi Parvati*. All hundred verses are devoted to the essence of power, the cosmic principles, Shiva and *Shakti* and their interrelationship. Most of the verses establish the supremacy of the goddess

as *Shakti*. The verses highlight both the physical and spiritual beauty and the power of Goddess *Parvati* as a source of creation. She is addressed as the most beautiful of female entity with the attributes of immense kindness and she blesses her votaries with both spiritual and material benefits.

The whole text, both parts: *Aananda Lahari* and *Saundarya Lahari*, talks about the beauty and pleasure in the relation of *Shiva* and *Shakti*. The beauty part is associated with *Shakti* or *Devi* and her physicality. Her physicality gives a picture of the erotic part, which enhances love and desire and the process of creation. Her diverse expressions show her different attributes, priorities and even her varying forms and appearances. Adi Shankara imagines her beauty as:

*śive śaṅgārādrā taditarajane kutsanaparā  
saroṣā gaṅgāyām giriśacarite vismayavatī |  
harāhibhyo bhītā sarasiruha saubhāgya-jananī  
sakhīṣu smerā te mayi janani dṛṣṭiḥ sakaruṇā || 51 |*

[Mother of all universe, the look from your eyes, is kind and filled with love, when looking at your Lord, is filled with hatred at all other men, is filled with anger when looking at Ganga, the other wife of your Lord, is filled with wonder, when hearing the stories of your Lord, is filled with fear, when seeing the snakes worn by your Lord, is filled with red colour of valour of the pretty lotus fine, is filled with jollity, when seeing your friends, and filled with mercy when seeing me] (SL 51; Ramachander trans, n.d., p. 22)

The *Parvati Shakti* has a variety of expressions at different levels and with different agents of divine and common life forms. Sometimes, she appears in a physical life form and sometimes in a divine image of spirituality. *Shakti* has different forms of expression and emotional experiences, which show that she is also guided by the power of the physical. The sense perceptions and experiences have led her to her physicality, but at the same time all this difference has justified her as having no specific attributes or not adorned with a single *Guna* ("trait"): tender and soft love with *Shiva*, seriousness with other than *Shiva*, anger to *Ganga* at the top of *Shiva's* head, amazed at *Shiva's* adventurous acts, fear with *Shiva's* snakes, sports a smile with friends, showers her grace to devotee. These varying attributes establish her as with *guna* or with physical qualities. At the same time, she does not have any specific quality. She can be in different forms as per the situation demands. It is her spirituality.

This variety of appearance and expression of *Shakti* shows her *nirguna* ("without traits") quality. She does not have any fixed quality or appearance. The *nirguna* and *nirakaara* ("formless") quality is the one in which the quality, size, shape and expression changes and there is no defined expression at all. *Shakti* has got eight types of normal human emotions, which are inherent in the human mind with the message that these emotions have to be transcended to attain her. At the same time, she has lively quality of love, anger, fear, hatred, jealousy, etc. She has the power to transcend all the physicality in the combined form of *Shiva-Shakti*, the mode of the absolute.

### ***Shakti* (Power) and *Maya* (Illusion)**

As one of the interpreters of Vedanta philosophy and the proponent of *Advaita Vedanta*, Adi Shankara believes in the absolute, but he has not completely discarded the physicality. His belief is that body is nature; body is the cause of *Karma* ("action"), cause and result of *Maya* ("illusion") and body is the means to attain the knowledge of the absolute as Krishna has answered Arjuna in *Bhagavadgita*:

This body is called the field, and one who knows this body is called the knower of the field. (The

Bhagavadgita 13: 2; Prabhupada trans. 2014, p.564)

The field is the body form; it is the material world; and “the field refers to everything that can be perceived, in the widest sense of perception, in short, it is everything that is knowable” (Hodgkinson, 2006, p. 17). The matters that are perceived are the body forms also known as the forms of life.

The body performs *Karma* means an action. It can be purposive and purposeless. It can also be for the body and for the beyond. In the Bhagavadgita, Krishna talks about the *Karma* beyond the corporal while we live with our *Karma* for the body and bodily desires guided by the senses, “From the world of senses, Arjuna, comes heat and comes cold, and pleasure and pain. They come and they go: they are transient. Arise above them, strong soul” (The Bhagavadgita 2:14; Mascaro trans., p. 49). The knowledge is knowing of and about something, the body and it is also knowledge knowing the knower of the field; then, who is the knower, he/ she is formless absolute, body-less absolute, but the problem or the dilemma is always in the point who the knower is and what is knowable.

Adi Shankara has duly answered these questions through *Saundarya Lahari*, knowing the knower is through knowing the form of *Shakti* and understanding the part of the absolute in the form. He has presented Parvati as the beauty of nature that is the beauty of the body or field. He sees the ultimate essence of the absolute in the combined force of Shiva and *Shakti*, as *Shaiva Vedantists* suppose the absolute that reveals itself as Shiva, and as *Shaktiya Vedantists* suppose the absolute that reveals itself as the universal mother or *Shakti*. He “accepts the impersonal as the highest reality” (Sinha, 2020, p. 5). Shiva is the embodiment of male divine and *Shakti* is the embodiment of female divine. Both combined the absolute. Realizing the absolute in the unity of Shiva and *Shakti*, Adi Shankara has established different *Shaktipeethas*, conducting discourses and discussions on Hinduism and Vedic philosophy. This level of veneration of *Shiva-Shakti* through poetics is another holy aspect of *Bhakti* as he has exposed himself in favour of the principle of *Shakti* as the absolute. He is also understood as an incarnation of Lord Shiva by his followers, he must have presented the power of Shiva and *Shakti* in *Saundarya Lahari*.

*Saundarya Lahari* is originally the creation of Lord Shiva himself and the praise of Parvati. Shankaryacharya had the realization of Lord Shiva while composing these verses in which he has seen Parvati as the combination of *Maya* and the highest power, in which “*maya* is said to be the [creative] power belonging to the Lord Himself and hidden in its *gunas*. *Maya* begins to merge with *Prakriti*” (Torwesten, 1965, p. 122). At the same time, “*maya* plays a pivotal role in Shankara's philosophical system, so much so that it is often called *Maya-vada* (“*maya*-teaching”)” (Torwesten, 1985, p. 121). This *Maya* can be both positively and negatively perceived. As presented in Gita, negatively conceived, “*maya* is what blinds man and, for instance, prevents Arjuna from realizing that Krishna although incarnated in human form, is in reality the Lord of the Universe” (ibid, p. 124) and granted with a positive attitude, “*maya* is the magic power that enables Krishna to become incarnate and still reveal himself to Arjuna as the cosmic Lord” (ibid). So, *maya* is neither existence nor nonexistence at a time in which if one is guided by *maya*, he/she neither knows the field nor becomes the knower of the field. Adi Shankara’s interest in depicting the image of Parvati clearly examines his intensive idea on “the two kinds of knowledge, a higher and a lower” (Hodgkinson, 2006, p. 19) in which the higher level of knower is the one who knows oneself and the knower of the field and the lower level is the one who only knows the field. A person who just realizes a sense of bodily beauty of Parvati is the knower

of the field; and the one, very few in numbers, who can feel the absolute in her/ *Shakti* is the knower of the field and the self. For this, the beauty of her face, hair, hair-parting and her eyes just depict the beauty of nature. The ignorant is the one who is blind with these modes of beauties, and the knower is the one who identifies the essence of creation in them. In this sense, Parvati's picture is only *Sringaric* for the ignorant one who is blinded by *Maya*.

Equally important point of Shankara's depiction of Parvati as a physically and essentially perfect form of *Shakti* is that he intends to extend the idea of *Shakti* as the absolute because the absolute is beyond any particular identity, who possesses the quality of greatness and the essential quality of nature. As accepted *Shakti* as the absolute, ultimate Brahma in the mode of creation, the absolute "is the material cause as well as the efficient cause" (Potter, 1981, p. 142), and Adi Shankara has seen both material cause and efficient cause in *Shakti*; the self and the world are but manifestations of the *Shakti* of the absolute. Adi Shankara, as a *Bhakta* ("devotee"), holds the idea that the absolute is essentially endowed with form and quality both, form as the beauty of the physical and quality as the essential absolute, the highest reality or the ultimate source of the universe-living and non-living beings. All living and non-living beings are in body forms, and the absolute is something beyond the body form. So, the beauty image of Parvati reflects the body symbol of *Prakriti*, the entire nature and her power, her essence of creation with Shiva as the conscious or the absolute. Her beauty of her body is the beauty of the spiritual and the beauty of the creation.

### The Essence of Beauty: Physical to Spiritual

Religious philosophy, both in the East and the West, does not easily validate the physical beauty as the spiritual beauty. Both domains do have distinct qualities; however, both the physical and spiritual aspects are looked with equal importance in the Hindu philosophical practice as Hinduism though a greater focus is on the spiritual quest. It does not negate the physical quality at the time "western philosophical and theological schools generally have explained the human body as inferior in contradistinction to the superior soul, spirit, or mind" (Knaster, 2006, p. 48). Adi Shankara has observed both the physical and the spiritual beauty existing together in *Shakti* and prefers the worshipping of the beauty of the body as a means to worship the beauty of the spiritual.

*Shakti* is physically beautiful and her physical beauty has a connection to her spiritual essence as the supreme power related to the entire process of creation, protection and destruction. Adi Shankara praises her beauty as:

*jagatsūte dhātā hariravati rudrah kṣapayate*  
*tiraskurva-nnetat svamapi vapu-rīśa-stirayati |*  
*sadā pūrvaḥ sarvaṃ tadida manuḡrḥṇāti ca śiva*  
*stavājñā malambya kṣaṇacalitayo rbhrūlatikayoḥ || 24 ||*

[Brahma creates the world. Vishnu looks after it. Shiva destroys it. Easwara makes them disappear, and also disappears himself, and Sadashiva blesses them all by your order given to him by a momentary move of your eyebrows] (SL 24; Ramachander, n.d., p. 11).

The beauty of her physicality resembles the spiritual essence and the purpose because "intimate physical activities also can serve spiritual purposes" (Knaster, 2006, p. 49). The physical entity offers a supreme chance to participate in spiritual unfolding as Buddhism defines it as 'precious human birth' for the quest of the spiritual. *Shakti*'s beauty of the body generates and opens the spiritual beauty of

the supreme being in the way “all the senses and body parts participate in spiritual practice” (ibid). Her body is not merely the body; rather it is the totality of the universal essence,

*ahaḥ sūte savya tava nayana-markātmakatayā  
triyāmām vāmaṃ te srjati rajanīnāyakatayā |  
trītyā te dṛṣṭi-rdaradalita-hemāmbuja-ruciḥ  
samādhate sandhyāṃ divasar-nīśayo-rantaracarīm || 48 |*

[Right eye of yours is like the sun, and makes the day, left eye of yours is like the moon, and creates the night, thine middle eye, which is like the golden lotus bud, slightly opened into a flower, makes the dawn and the dusk] (SL 48; Ramachander,n.d. p. 21)

Her body suggests for the day, night, dawn and dusk, life and lifeless. Her body reflects the time domain of all time zones, seasons, nature and non-nature, life and non-life, matter and the beyond matter, and ultimately unites both the physical and the spiritual together because “spirit that needs the body” (Praagh,2014, p. 2). The body needs the spirit to exist and the spirit needs to take the life form. Despite the difference as the form and essence, the body image of *Shakti* is a means of journey to transformation from the physical to the spiritual.

The physical existence of *Shakti* as seen by Lord Shiva and her *Bhaktas* resembles in such a way as she *avidyānā-manta-stimira-mihira dvīpanagar jaḍānām* “is like the city of the rising sun that removes all darkness, unfortunate, from the mind of the poor ignorant one” (SL 3; Ramachander trans., n. d., p. 3). Her physicality and spirituality represent the “multi-faceted picture of reality, the elements of which gradually begin to cohere together in a mutually reinforcing way” (Cottingham, 2005, p. 102) in which the body foreshadows the spiritual perfection. The beauty of her body has the expression in a range of figurative images to understand and appreciate in the religious dimension for the correlate ones who perceive as purely divine power and devote themselves through the deepest level of *Bhakti*. She is also understood, from human and non-human aspects as her body “operates not through bald statements one-to-one with the facts they purport to describe, but rather through an intricate process of layering, where our understanding is constantly enriched by the interplay of conscious and unconscious resonances and allusions” (Cottingham, 2005, p. 102). Her body exposes the beauty of the material as the unconscious domain and her knowledge enlightens the spiritual with her combined existence of beauty of both body and spiritual.

### **Adi Shankara’s Quest for Spirituality as Divine**

Is knowledge or understanding linked with the physical body or is it purely spiritual or divine? What is the relation between the physical body and spirituality? These questions always occur in the discussion on religio-philosophy. Seeing spirituality in the divine image has long been a religious practice, and seeing the body just as the matter of science. Based on the Hindu cultural myth of *Shiva-Shakti*, Adi Shankara has observed the body of *Shakti* as the physical beauty as well as the essence of life, knowledge and divinity:

*samaṃ devi skanda dvīpivadana pītaṃ stanayugaṃ  
tavedaṃ naḥ khedaṃ haratu satataṃ prasnuta-mukham |  
yadālokyāśāṅkākulita hṛdayo hāsajanakah  
svakumbhau herambaḥ parimṛṣati hastena jhaḍiti || 72 ||*

[Our Goddess Devi, let your two cool breasts, which have faces that always, give out milk, and

are simultaneously drunk deeply. By Skanda and the elephant-faced Ganesha, destroy all our sorrows. Seeing them and getting confused, the Herambha feels for his two frontal globes, to see whether they are there, making you both laugh](SL 72; Ramachander trans., n.d., p. 31)

Usually, 'breast' has a symbolic connection with the erotic expression of beauty and love and milk has a connection with life and essence. Comparing the relationship between the physical and the spiritual with breast and milk symbolically, *Shakti* possesses both virtues at a time. Outer beauty with cool breasts ever lures Shiva as cool breasts are *Sringaric* symbols. She is attractive bodily, with previous contexts of body, appearance, face, hair and breasts. But *Shakti*'s reference to her breasts, here, has an equal connection with the milk. Breast is the body; milk is the essence, and so has the connection between the body and spirit. The praise of her breast comes with the praise of the power of her milk, which makes Ganesh such a powerful, intelligent god capable enough to destroy all human sorrows. *Shakti* has the power to balance, to be beautiful and loving for Shiva and the life giver, knowledge provider and the source of intellect to Ganesh as he has a love of milk. The culture begins to offer milk to him as the best. The reference of her breast and Lord Ganesh, in this context, has a deliberate meaning of the unity of erotic (breast and its beauty) and creation (the birth of Ganesh). This very idea nurtures the ideation about search of spirituality through the body.

With imagined creativity, her breasts are not only breasts, but they have innately possessed wealth like pearls with glittering quality. This glittering quality reflects the redness in her lips. Breasts having milk and the pearls inside adorned with the inner beauty through the red lips. At its surface level, this description appears to be very erotic, but it provides a deeper sense of the power, life and the essence. The milk that follows from her breast does not only nourish Lord Ganesh and Kumara at the level of divine spirituality, but as it is further elaborated, also it has the link with goddess Saraswati, the symbol of knowledge. Deeper into the physical existence of her breast and milk with the source of knowledge, *Shakti* is worth for *Bhakti*, "devout and emotional worship, and intimate adoration of a personal deity in a spirit of love and deep affection for him/her" (Gonda, 1977, p. 11) through physicality:

*tava stanyam manye dharaṇidharakanye hṛdayataḥ  
payah pārāvārah parivahati sārasvatamiva |  
dayāvatyā dattaṃ draviḍaśiṣu-rāsvādya tava yat  
kavīnām prauḍhānā majani kamanīyaḥ kavayitā || 75 ||*

[Oh daughter of the king of mountains, I feel in my mind that the milk that flows from your breast is the goddess of learning, Sarswati, in the form of a tidal wave of nectar. For, milk given by you, who is full of mercy, made the child of Dravida, the king among those great poets, whose works stole one's mind](SL 75; Ramachander trans., p. 31)

*Shakti* is the divine mother. Milk flowing from *Shakti*'s breast is not the milk alone; it is the divine waves of learning, knowledge, a wave of nectar, sap, *Rig Vedic* Soma and the elixir. The milk emerges into the form of knowledge, poetic creation, the body and mind. Her body does not remain only as body, breasts only as breasts of beauty, also her body transfers into the mode of knowledge. Her milk is Saraswati, the river of knowledge, Saraswati as the goddess of knowledge and wisdom. She is the source of creation like Dravida. The reference of Saraswati has to do with the river, purity and eternity. Adi Shankara has further explained this mode of *Shakti*'s connection with Ganga:

*sthiro gaṅgā vartaḥ stanamukula-romāvali-latā  
kalāvālaṃ kuṇḍaṃ kusumaśara tejo-hutabhujah |  
rate-rlīlāgāraṃ kimapi tava nābhiringirisute  
beladvāraṃ siddhe-rgiriśanayanānām vijayate || 78 ||*

[Oh daughter of the mountain, is your navel a whirlpool in river Ganga, which looks very stable! or is it the root of the climber, of the stream of your hairline, which has two breasts of yours as buds, or is it the Homa fire, where the fire is the light from cupid or is it the playhouse of Rati, the wife of God of love, or is it the opening to the cave, in which Shiva's tapas gets fulfilled, I am not able to make up my mind!] (SL 78; Ramachander trans, p. 33)

Again, *Shakti*'s physical beauty is compared with the strength, freshness of Ganga. Ganga is supposed to have begun from her navel. She begins from the hair, the matted hair of Shiva. She has the mythical reference of purifying king Bhagiratha and his ancestors sage Gautama from the sins and her relation with Lord Shiva.

Through this connection of Parvati *Shakti* with purifying Ganga, Adi Shankara's interest is to see the spiritual dimension of purifying all the evils of the body. Hence, the body is a means of getting transformed into the spiritual. She is Ganga; she is Saraswati and therefore she purifies and provides knowledge. Both aspects are the symbols of the divine essence, the spirituality.

### Conclusion

Adi Shankara has given importance to the *Sringaric* body image of Parvati. In addition, he has also given an abundant focus on the prominence of the essence; the erotic is not a free erotic expression, but always consciously linking the beauty of Parvati with the *Maya* of Shiva. The sense of *Maya* in *Saundarya Lahari* is not negatively conceived, but it has frequently addressed as a mode of *Shakti*, knowledge and the essence as her side-glance makes an old and fragile man strong and attractive in such a way that the damsels follow him forgetting their costume. This very reference sounds to be highly erotic, but the old man is powered with knowledge at her glance, and the females who follow him are the ignorant ones. In Krishna's view, the old man is the higher level of knower who knows the field and the self, and the damsels that follow him are the lower level of knowers who know the field and are pursuing the knowledge further. Parvati is the absolute power. The whole set of verses shifts the body truth into a potential interpretation of the body attachment towards the quest of the absolute, and therefore the praise to the *Sringaric* form of Parvati is the *Bhakti* to *Shakti*, and ultimately the absolute.

Another essential quest into *Saundarya Lahari* is the myth behind the creation of original *Saundarya Lahari*. It is Lord Shiva himself who has composed the praise to *Parvati*. Shiva has authority to look for Parvati from *Sringaric* eyes and also he has known the essence of her beauty and creation. As Adi Shankara has completed the missing part of the verse, he must have realized Shiva within himself and has composed the poem in the same spirit. It is his inner evolution of the absolute within him. It does not mean that the image of *Parvati* as *Sringaric* is the only purpose. No doubt, either as Shiva or Shankara, the realization of the absolute cause in the physical attraction of *Parvati* is the major concentration of the poem. *Shiva* and *Shakti* are ultimately one united whole. Seeing them separate is the physical difference, and seeing them as a unitary whole is the spiritual whole, the absolute and the power of the divine in mundane reality. Their eternal union is the ultimate bliss.

Hence, with the depiction of the beauty, *Shakti* has the erotic expression throughout the poem. At the same time, each of her beauty-element has a role in the universal wholeness, creation, knowledge and the sense of spirituality. The praise to her physical beauty is the *sringar* or erotic one. When one moves beyond the physical love to the love of the one beyond the physical existence and the essence of worldly power, *Bhakti* or spirituality flows unimpeded. *Devi Shakti*, in the South Asian Hindu practice, both in India and Nepal, is not the body form alone; she is the divine essence. She has the combination of all the qualities as the world perceives or grants, and she has also the power to transfer the world into the absolute, the form into formless. Adi Shankara, therefore, has revived Hinduism through *Saundarya Lahari* that begins with the form and ends with the formless, the absolute. The patterns of *karma* (action), *dharma* (righteousness), *bhakti* (devotion), and *jnana* (wisdom) in *Saundarya Lahari* invite an interpretation with the perspective of transcendental philosophy for the further research.

### Implications of Spirituality and Physicality in Pedagogy

The truth and the quest of knowledge remain in integrative form. When students focus on either material or physical knowledge, it simply leads to delusion. Focusing on one side while overlooking the other fails to provide the truth beyond the mask of worldly affairs. Kestner (2004) clarifies:

Our young people today grapple with too much emptiness and too much fullness. They are too empty of the resources that sustain the human spirit—devoted love, a sense of meaning and purpose, a feeling of ongoing connection to something larger than themselves, . . . The result of both the spiritual void and this toxic overload that our culture promotes to fill that void is often numbness. (Kessler, 2004, p. 62)

Kessler's view consolidates that the students of our time should gain the knowledge of spirituality and physicality. Otherwise, there is no more than the numbness. Spiritual and physical aspects of knowledge are just two sides of a coin. One cannot exist without the other. In this regard, the knowledge of *Bhakti* and *Sringar* as perfectly used in *saundarya Lahari* remain to be transmitted to the students for their inner transformation.

Ryoo, Crawford, Moreno, & McLaren (2009) support critical spiritual pedagogy that has foundation on spirituality, humanity, and power. Similarly, Love & Talbot (2006) (cited in Cuyjet, 2006, p. 125) suggest that college and university curriculum need to focus on students' own spirituality. The education system must pay attention to spiritual development of students (as cited in Cuyjet, 2006, p. 125). The *Pedagogical Pluralism* also supports on the integrative forms of teaching. If all these dimensions of pedagogy support the spiritual part in the students' life, the knowledge of *Bhakti*, *Saundarya*, and *Sringara* provide very relevant knowledge. Students then attain the height of versatility, realizing that integration of the dialectic aspects in the learning system gives rise to the perpetual development. This is the natural process to attain the truth because all manifested antagonisms merge in the realm of truth. When *Bhakti* flows impeded, the dedication of students in learning goes beyond the zenith. One possesses a total human of knowledge. *Saundarya Lahari* expounds the multitude insights of religion, spiritualism, music, and philosophy that need to be incorporated in the pedagogical system.

## References

- Adi Shankara(1948). *Saundarya Lahari* ( S. Subrahmanya Sastri & S. Ayyanger trans.). The Theosophical Publishing.
- Brahma, N.K. (2007). *Philosophy of hindu sadhana*. Prentice-Hall of India.
- Cottingham, J. (2005) *The spiritual dimensions: Religion, philosophy and human value*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cuyjet, M.J. (2006). *African American men in college*. Jossey-Bass.
- Hodgkinson, B.(2006). *The essence of vedanta*. Eagle Editions.
- Gonda, J. (Ed.).(1977). *A history of Indian literature* (Vol. II). Harrassowitz.
- Kessler, R. (2004). Education for integrity: Connection, compassion, and character. In R. Eisler & R. Miller (Eds.), *Educating for a culture of peace* (pp. 57-79). Heinemann.
- Kiyokazu, O. (2017). From *rasa* to *bhaktirasa*: The development of a devotional aesthetic theory in early modern South Asia. *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, 65 (3),1066-1072.
- Knaster, M. (2006). Body. In E. M. Dowling & W. G. Scarlett(Eds.), *Encyclopedia of religion and spiritual development* (pp.48-49).Sage.
- Krishnaswamy, U. (2009). Introduction. In R. Venkataraman &U. Krishnaswamy (Eds.), *Saundarya lahari of Adi Sankara*(pp.1-4). N.P.
- Kumar, R. (2014). *Research methodology*. Sage.
- Mascaro, J.(1994). *The bhagavadgita*. Penguin.
- Potter, K. H. (Ed.) (1981). *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy: Advaita vedanta up to Samkara and his pupils*. Motilal Banarsidas.
- Praagh, J. V. (2014). *Adventures of the soul*. Hay House.
- Prabhupada, S. (Trans.).(2014). *Bhagavad-gita : As it is*. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust
- Ramachander, P. R. (Trans.) (n.d.). *Saundarya lahari*. Banglore.
- Rao, V.D.N. (n.d.). *Quintessence of Saundarya lahari*. N. P.
- Ryoo, J.J., Crawford, J., Moreno, D.,& McLaren, P. (2009).Critical spiritual pedagogy: Claiming humanity through a pedagogy of integrity,community, and love.*Journal of Power and Education*,1(1),132-246. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/power.2009.1.1.132>
- Sastri, S.S. & Ayyanger, T.R.S. (Trans.).(1948). *Saundarya lahari*.The Theosophical Publishing.
- Sinha, T. K. (2006). *The philosophies of Sankara and Sri Caitanya: A comparative study*. [A research report]. Department of Sanskrit, Assam University. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/95081>.
- Torwesten, H.(1985). *Vedanta: Heart of hinduism*. Grove Press.

**Asst. Prof. Sabindra Raj Bhandari**, PhD, works at the Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University, Pokhara. His areas of research include philosophy and literature. He has published numerous articles related to his areas of interest in national and international journals.