



**From Cosmos to Microcosm**  
**A Comprehensive Journey**  
**Through the Science**

**Dr. Santosh Kumar**

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## Consciousness in Mandukya Karika

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### Abstract:

*There is a myth about philosophy that it contains only a dead stuff of knowledge and has no relation with contemporary life and society. It has always been misunderstood that all the philosophical speculations are nothing but daydreaming of certain scholars and also that they have laid down more emphasis on life beyond death than present life. However, it is very far from truth, in as much as, Indian philosophy contains substantial components of eternal truth, and it has universal applications, which are capable of conducting the man to the gateway of the good through the shady avenue of beautiful self. The modern technological advancement has disconnected us from spiritual advancement and it has resulted the loss of mental peace. The rapid technological advancement and scientific investigations have blessed us with comforts and luxuries but at the same time there has been a starvation of the spirit and sickening of the soul resulting in unbalanced growth of human personality. Here comes the importance of philosophical teachings. There has been awakening in regard to the spirit, and necessity for all round development of the man's spiritual personality. It is precisely at this point that Indian philosophy comes to the rescue of the modern creature by projecting before him through employment of which he can expand the boundaries of the ego, as also by opening before him the lock gates of the perennial stream of spirituality.*

*Here in this essay, I would try to unlock the magic of the theory of Consciousness which has been discussed by the great sage GAUDAPADA in his Mandukya Karika. My main focus will be to elucidate the whole complex process of attaining ultimate consciousness in order to delve into the ultimate reality. At the end of the essay, we will see how theory of consciousness owns the answers to all the riddles of a self-enquirer. We will also discuss the non-dualistic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta with the karika.*

**Keywords:** *Indian Philosophy, Mandukya karika, Mandukya Upanishad, Gaudapada, consciousness, Advaita Vedanta.*

### **Introduction:**

As normal human beings, we all are busy in chasing dreams, struggling for happiness, or grieving over life's inscrutable experiences, we all know that everything belongs to us and somewhere or the other we (ourselves) are working as the main operator. Most of the time we feel that there is a fight between mind and the body, between consciousness and sub-consciousness, we try to contemplate on things but it results in boredom or exhaustion and we give up. This whole process is called self-enquiry. We all are aware of three states of consciousness, viz. waking state, dream sleep and deep sleep. In Mandukya Karika, Gaudapada explains all these three states of consciousness and tells that how these three states of consciousness lies in the fourth state which is the state of non-duality (turiya). All these states are so much a part and parcel of our lives, but so much taken for granted or ignored, we can hardly imagine the treasure concealed by these three states. Only a true enquirer can discover the treasure and attain the fourth state of consciousness. Here one can ask that why one should discover and attain the fourth state of consciousness? The only answer to these questions is that to get rid of all sufferings and attain the ultimate bliss. The main purpose of self-enquiry is to overcome from sufferings and know the ultimate reality. The main purpose of this essay is to explain that how the different level of consciousness works in our life and how it has been explained in Mandukya Karika by Gaudapada. In this essay I would delve into the highest peak of Advaita philosophy of non-duality because it reveals something absolutely unbelievable: it states that in the absolute sense, the world

these kinds of situations we need to understand the process through which we can perform all our actions consciously. My main objective in this essay are as follows;

1) To give a lucid explanation of the theory of consciousness in Mandukya Karika.

2) To explain how the different states lead us to the ultimate reality.

3) To explore and explain the relation between the Karika and the advaita Philosophy.

4) To answer the questions related to "I" in different states of consciousness.

5) To provide an easy way to understand the whole Karika and how one can practice it.

### Hypothesis:

In order to know the ultimate reality, one needs to understand that the real "I" which we are assuming ourselves to be – the waker is not the case. Because it is not present in two of the three states. Reality can never cease to existence like when one gets up, he never feels like he is different from the one who slept and who dreamt. One's sense of being is continuous. There is no one who is responsible for my continuous sense of being. So, it must be something which exists in all the three states. What is it? Is it consciousness? Which is the ultimate experiencer, which persists even in the deep sleep state. This is our real self "I".

### INTRODUCTION TO KARIKA;

"Bracelet is an illusory appearance of gold; only when the gold is forgotten does one see a bracelet. Even so, are the illusory notions of a nation or the world and also that of repeated births. When the false notion of the bracelet is rejected, the truth of the gold is revealed; and when the false notion of the subject-object is rejected, there is no ignorance to create a division. Thought alone creates all these divisions and illusions. When it ceases, creation ceases too, then you realize that all the waves constitute one ocean, dolls are wood, pots are clay and the three worlds are absolute Brahman".

– Yoga Vasishtha

The very famous statement "Brahma Satyam jagat mithya - Brahman is the only reality and all the others are mithya or illusory, an unending dream" is the crux of the whole non-dualistic philosophy of Adi Sankara and his teacher's teacher Gaudapada. But most of the time our rational mind compels us to argue that how can it be possible that this everlasting universe perceived by every one of us in our day today life is a dream state or Maya or illusion? One can find the response to this question in the great MANDUKYA UPANISHAD and its explanatory or auxiliary treatise Mandukya Karika by Acharya Gaudapada. Gaudapada's Karika on the MANDUKYA UPANISHAD has been considered as the first systematic exposition of Advaita Vedanta which has come down to us from Pre-Sankara days. The mantras of the UPANISHAD give us clues by enunciating the truth while the karika systematically reveals to us a line of enquiry and thinking with logic and reason to find out that truth.

Most of us say that let the universe be real or dream, in what way we are concerned? What will be the use of these intellectual exercise as most of us are overburdened with the problems and challenges of our day today life? We consider it as a sheer waste of time to indulge in these enquiries. All the replies to these and other similar issues can be found in this UPANISHAD itself. By contemplating on these problems and analysing them with the instruments given by the UPANISHAD and the Karika we can certainly come to the conclusion that the ultimate reality is the BRAHMAN only.

Gaudapada's Karika on the UPANISHAD has been considered to be the basis for the emergence of the Advaita Vedanta or the philosophy of monism, according to which Brahman alone is real and rest is an illusion. Gaudapada's Karika contains some two hundred and fifty verses explaining the UANISHAD. The UPANISHAD gives us a framework through which we can understand the four states of consciousness and the truth which is underlying beneath the apparent reality. The Mandukya Upanishad presents a non-dualistic view of Advaita Vedanta. It does not contain any prescriptions for any rituals, prayers or sacrifices but only gives succinct discussion of the ultimate reality.

The UPANISHAD deals with the symbolic significance of the sacred syllable AUM and its correlation with the four states of consciousness, dream state, the state of deep sleep or dreamless sleep, and the state of transcendental consciousness in which all divisions and duality disappears and the self alone exists in its pure state, all by itself. The symbol of AUM has been used significantly because the conception of ultimate reality is beyond space, time and causation. To help make it easier to be comprehended to the general man a symbol was used. The Karika by Gaudapada is been divided into four chapters or prakaranas;

- 1) *Agama - Scriptures*
- 2) *Vaitathya - illusoriness of self-experiences*
- 3) *Advaita - Non-duality*
- 4) *Alatsanti- Quenching of fire-brand*

*The Upanishad is an exposition of the principal of AUM as consisting of three elements, A, U, M, which symbolically refers to the three states of wakefulness, dream and dreamless sleep. This supreme reality AUM is very self. The Upanishad by itself, it is said, is enough to lead one to liberation by establishing the self in the symbolic state of dreamless sleep all the time. Here I would like to discuss some of the important verses of the Upanishad;*

1) *Everything is AUM. All that is the past, the present and the future, all this is only AUM. And whatever else there is beyond the threefold time, that too is only AUM. (The syllable AUM that is the symbol of Brahman, stands for the manifested world, the past, the present and the future, as well as the un-manifested absolute.) - verse -1*

2) *All this is Brahman and Brahman is the self. - Verse-2*

3) *It is the lord of all, it knows all beings and it is the inner controller; it is the beginning and end of all beings. - verse-6*

4) *It is the self which is the nature of syllable AUM. it is the deepest essence of all beings. Verse-8*

5) *Vaisvanara, whose sphere of activity is the state of wakefulness is the letter 'A' the first element. He who knows this, obtains all desires; also, he becomes first. (It is called*