
UNIT 1 VEDANTA: AN INTRODUCTION

Structure

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1.1 OBJECTIVES

Vedanta Philosophy deserves great attention today for many reasons: in the first place for its philosophical value and secondly and more importantly because it is closely bound up with the religion of India and is much more alive in the Indian subcontinent than any other system of thought. Vedanta determines, in one or the other of its forms, the world view of the Hindu thinkers of the present time.

The Unit apparently has two parts:

- The first part intends to make the students familiar with a general study of Vedanta focussing mainly on its meaning, philosophical background and teachings;
- The second part, in turn, will take up the major Vedanta Philosophers who have immensely contributed to the development of the various schools within Vedanta system; and
- Such a study, though brief, will help the students to identity those streams of thought that have continued to have impact on the later thought in India, particularly during the neo-Vedantic times.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

The literal meaning of the term Vedanta is “the end of the Vedas, the concluding parts of the Vedas, the culmination of the Vedic teaching and wisdom”. Thus the term is originally referred to the Upanishads, the last literary products of the Vedic period. The views of the Upanishads also constitute the final aim of the Veda, or the essence of the Vedas. However, Vedanta has subsequently come to include the various elaborations and interpretations of the Upanishads. They are the concluding parts of the Vedas and are the culmination of the Vedic knowledge and wisdom. The Upanishads are not philosophical treatises, though their style

is direct, forceful, often didactic and dialogic. The Upanishads are not philosophical systems but are only narratives of experiences of sages and their insights into reality. Consequently, it would be fruitless to look in the Upanishads for a systematic, coherent, logical development of ideas. One should be prepared to encounter apparent inconsistencies, undue emphasis on one idea here and another there, and sometimes even wholly unconnected digressions in the articulation of a given idea or theme. Further, the *Upanishads* are sometimes repetitious. The same idea may be dealt with in several places in more or less the same fashion. How do we account for this peculiar character of the style and texture of the *Upanishads*? One answer is that they are not the work of a single author, but the accumulation of the insights of different men over a long period of time. Another explanation for the non-systematic character of the *Upanishads* is that their authors were concerned not so much with minutiae as with providing a comprehensive picture of their vision and insights. In short, their attention was not upon parts but on the whole. Thus the *Upanishads* abound in terse and aphoristic statements replete with inspiring meanings. Scintillating significance and dynamic intuition are packed into such short and powerful utterances. Precisely for these reasons the *Upanishads* give rise to diverse interpretations. In course of time, there emerged different schools of Vedanta, the prominent ones being Advaita (non-dualism) of Sankara, Visistadvaita (Qualified Non-dualism) of Ramanuja and Dvaita (Dualism) of Madhva.

1.3 VEDANTA SUTRAS

The Vedanta Sutra is perhaps the most available and significant source for the study of Vedanta. It is an exposition of the doctrine of Brahman and therefore it is also called Brahma S^utra. It also deals with the embodiment of the unconditioned self, hence it has also the name Sariraka Sutra. The authorship of this text is attributed to Badarayana who is, according to Indian tradition, identified with Vyasa. Indian scholars are of the opinion that the Sutra was composed in the period from 500 to 200 B.C. The work, however, was not composed in isolation. We find references to Jaimini's Mimamsa, orthodox systems of Samkhya, Yoga, and Vaiseshika, several schools of Buddhism, the Lokayata and Bhagavata doctrines. The author of the Sutra is considerably influenced by the theism of the Bhagavadgita and the Bhagavatas.

The Vedanta Sutra has four chapters. The first chapter deals with the theory of Brahman as the central reality. Its purpose is reconciliation (samanvaya) of the different Vedic statements on this subject. It is an account of the nature of Brahman, its relation to the world and the individual soul. The second chapter meets objections brought against this view and criticizes rival theories. It also gives an account of the nature of the dependence of the world on God and the gradual evolution from and re-absorption into him. It also contains interesting psychological discussions about the nature of the soul, its attributes, its relation to God, body and its own deeds. The third chapter discusses ways and means (sadhana) of attaining brahma-vidya. It also presents an account of rebirth along with other psychological and theological discussions. The final chapter deals with the fruits (phala) of Brahma-vidya. It also describes in some detail the theory of the departure of the soul after death along the two paths of the gods and the fathers and the nature of the release from which there is no return.

Teachings of the Vedanta Sutras

According to Badarayana the Veda is eternal and the sastra is the great authority. No amount of reflection logical argumentation can lead to the discovery of metaphysical truth. Sutra admits two sources of knowledge: pratyaksham (perception) and anumanam (inference). The revealed sruti is self-evident and is called pratyaksham. By Sruti, Badarayana means the Upanishads, and by smriti he means the Bhagavadgita, the Mahabharata and the Code of Manu. In any theory of knowledge, inference is based on perception; so also smriti is based on Sruti. Badarayana makes a distinction between two spheres of existence: the thinkable and the unthinkable. The thinkable consists of the region of prakrti with the elements, the mind, intellect, and egoity, whereas the unthinkable is Brahman. With regard to the knowledge of the latter the only means is the sastras. Any reasoning which is not in conformity with the Veda is useless for Badarayana. Reasoning proceeds from characteristic marks. But of Brahman we cannot say that it is characterized by this or that to the exclusion of other attributes. Reasoning, therefore is subordinate to intuitional knowledge, which can be obtained by devotion and meditation.

It is worth noting here that from a historical standpoint one speaks of the Purva Mimamsa (the earlier schools) and the Uttara Mimamsa (the later schools), subsequently referred to simply as Mimamsa and Vedanta respectively. Mimamsa is generally understood as being concerned with the ritualistic side (*karmakanda*) of the Vedic teachings, and Vedanta with the philosophical, speculative (*janakanda*) aspects. In the light of this distinction, the three schools of Vedanta listed above and other theistic Vedantic schools (such as Suddhadvaita, Svabhavika Bhedabheda, Acintya Bhedabheda) come under Uttara Mimamsa. However, one must proceed with caution in making this distinction. Though the prime concern of Purva Mimamsa is with ritualism, it also contains speculative aspects: the very term 'mimamsa' means "solution of problems by reflection and critical examination. Accordingly, the Mimamsa looked upon its task as twofold: to provide a method by which the complex and seemingly conflicting ritualistic injunctions of the Vedas may be harmoniously interpreted and practiced; and to provide a philosophical justification of Vedic ritualism. The realization of this twofold objective necessarily involved Mimamsa in serious philosophical questions, both methodological and substantive. The philosophical investigations of the Mimamsa schools are considerable, and their results important. Particularly noteworthy is their treatment of knowledge, truth and error. The Vedanta schools are indebted to the Mimamsa schools in that they not only recognize the pramanas (means of valid knowledge) as formulated by the Mimamsa but incorporate and employ them in their own systems.

The background of Vedantic Thought

The Vedas and the Upanishads form the background of the Vedanta. They are called the Sruti. The Hindus implicitly believe in their authority. They are believed to be revelations of truths to the seers (rishis). They embody their intuitions. The Vedic religion traverses the whole gamut of polytheism, organized polytheism, henotheism, monotheism and monism.

The different gods for the Vedic man were the personifications of the different powers of nature. He was not a worshipper of nature. He worshipped supernatural and superhuman deities pervading the whole or considerable part of nature and

beyond and endowed with some qualities of the supreme god-head. Among the multitude of nature-gods any one is treated as the supreme god for the time being when he worshipped. All gods were inspired by the same power. Their great divinity is one. There is unity and order in the phenomena of nature. Thus all the diverse phenomena of nature are the works of gods who are endowed with the same divine power. The order in nature paved the way for monotheism.

The idea permeating the Rg Veda is that nature in all its diversity and multiplicity is not a chaos but is governed by a basic cosmic law (Rita). To this law are subject not only all natural phenomena, such as the movement of the planets and the generation, decay and death of organisms, but also truth and justice. The conception of rita further harmonized the gods with one another, and paved way for monotheism. Rita is the physical order. Everything in the world has its own sphere. The gods follow the laws of rita. They acquired divinity and immortality by serving rita rightly. This rita is an impersonal order which upholds the gods and the world. The conception of rita paved the way for monotheism.

Hiranyagarbha arose in the beginning. He alone was the lord of all that is. He established the earth and the heaven. He gives breath and strength; his commands are followed by other gods. His shadow is death and immortality. He alone is God above all gods. He came to be identified as prajapati, the lord of all creatures, and claimed the rank of Supreme God. Further the Vedic reflection proceeded to posit Visvakarma as the creator of the entire universe. He is the seer of all. His eyes are everywhere, his face is everywhere, and he is of all hands and all feet. He is the world-architect.

Then we have the concept of a Cosmic person (parama purusha), whose body is the whole universe. He, with his thousand hands, thousand feet, thousand eyes, pervades the whole terrestrial space and transcends it. The inner nature of the Parama Purusha is transcendental, though he is immanent in the whole universe. He is the immanent and transcendent. However, this kind of a theistic thinking of God and universe gave way to a new concept of monism, according to which Reality is conceived as one but manifested in diverse ways. That 'One' (tad Ekam) is not personal; it is neither male nor female; it is neuter. It is an impersonal principle which breathed by itself without breath. The celebrated upanishadic hymn known as Purusha'sukta clearly brings out the pure monism of the Rg Veda. (RV. X. 129. 1-4, 7.)

Thousand-headed was the Purusha (person or man personified) thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. He embraced the earth on all sides, and stood beyond the breadth of ten fingers.

The Purusha is this all, that which was and which shall be. He is Lord of immortality, which he grows beyond through (sacrificial) food.

Such is his greatness, and still greater than that is the Purusha. One fourth of him is all beings. The three fourths of him is the immortal in Heaven.

Three fourths on high rose the Purusha. One fourth of him arose here (on the earth). Thence in all directions he spread abroad, as that which eats and that which eats not." (Rgveda X.90.1-4)

The theme of this hymn is the unity of all existence, inorganic and organic. Such unity is expressed by the Vedic seers, in their grand visual imagery, in the form of what they call 'the purusha'. According to this hymn, the purusha is not to be equated with the universe, for not only does he pervade the universe but he is also beyond it. In philosophical terms, the supreme reality is both immanent and transcendent – immanent because it pervades all existence, thereby rendering it a unity; transcendent, because it is not exhausted by existence but goes beyond it. In theological terms, God, while pervading the universe, is also more than the universe. In other words, the Vedic conception of God is not pantheistic, but panentheistic which may be expressed by saying that the totality of existence is in God but not equal to God.

The Rg Veda refers to the supreme reality underlying and unifying all existence by the term 'the purusha'. However, the Upanishads firmly rule out that this kind of conception is in any way anthropomorphic. The famous Vedic hymn of creation, Nasadiya Sukta, unequivocally declares that ultimate reality (the purusha) is not only impersonal but beyond all names and forms, and hence is inexpressible and indescribable:

*Non-being then existed not nor being:
There was no air, nor sky that is beyond it.
What was concealed? Wherein? In whose protection?
And was there deep unfathomable water?*

*Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it?
Whence was it born, and whence came this creation?
The gods were born after this world's creation:
Then who can know from whence it has arisen?*

*None knoweth whence creation has arisen;
And whether he has or has not produced it:
He who surveys it in the highest heaven,
He only knows, or haply he may know not.” (Rg Veda X. 129, 1,6,7.)*

It is clear that according to this hymn all existence is the manifestation of a single ultimate reality, which being beyond thoughts and words, is indescribable, indeterminate, and absolute. To be sure, this grand conception of ultimate reality is not in discursive, philosophical speculation but in the loftiest of poetic, mystical, intuitive insights. This is pure spiritualistic monism. That One (*Tad Ekam*) was later identified with Brahman or Atman. Such a vision is the inspiration of all the Upanishads as well as all the subsequent philosophical speculations of the Vedantic schools.

Spiritualistic Monism of the Upanishads: Brahman

The Rg Veda spoke of One Reality (*ekam sat*) which is spoken of in various ways by the sages. It spoke of That One (*tad ekam*) that created the world. The Upanishads called it Brahman. Brahman is Atman. It is the Reality of the reality. It is the cause of all created things, and it is their ultimate ground and essence. It is one devoid of plurality and is beyond many. This Supreme Principle is called

Brahman because it is the ubiquitous cosmic principle. It is called Atman because it is one eternal homogenous consciousness. All gods and the rita itself subsist in Brahman. Thus the Upanishads explicitly advocated spiritualistic monism or absolute Idealism. This is the bedrock of Hindu religion and philosophy.

Aims and characteristics of Vedanta

The philosophy of Vedanta, like all other systems of thought, is an attempt to clearly understand and offer an explanation of the world as it appears to us in our knowledge. It is an attempt to determine the nature of the Ultimate Reality and to understand how it presents before us a world of manifoldness, in order to make out clearly the place and destiny of man in the world system. Vedanta philosophy considers two very important questions: the theoretical determination of the nature of substance or reality underlying experience and of the origin of knowledge, and the ethical problem of duty and the ultimate ideal of human life. Both these questions are thoroughly discussed and solutions are offered in the system.

Vedanta philosophy is based both upon revelation or Sruti as well as thinking, argument and logical justification. There is in the system a full form of philosophy developed upon a dialectic and logical basis. The first problem which the Vedantin seeks to solve is the ontological problem of Reality, the second, the problem of Cosmology, the third, the problem of Psychology and fourth is the problem of striving after the ideal and its attainment – the final liberation.

Brahman

The Upanishads speak of higher (para) Brahman and lower (apara) Brahman. The former is formless, unmanifest, immortal, abiding and transcendental, while the latter is formed, manifest, mortal, fleeting, and empirical. The para Brahman is devoid of all attributes and determinations; it is unqualified, indeterminate, and unconditioned. It is the Absolute. The apara Brahman is qualified, determinate, conditioned; it is personal God. However, the Upanishads declare that they are not two Brahman. One Brahman viewed from the transcendental standpoint is indeterminate, and viewed from the empirical standpoint is determinate. The indeterminate Brahman is sometimes conceived to be real, and the determinate Brahman is conceived to be unreal.

Brahman conceived as qualified (Saguna) is God (Isvara). The Absolute in relation to the empirical world is God. The cosmic Brahman is the creator, preserver, and destroyer of the world. All creatures spring out of Brahman. They live in Brahman and are re-absorbed in Brahman. He is the support of all and is the refuge of all and can be realized by His grace.

The Atman

While Brahman is the cosmic principle, atman is the psychic principle. It is the inner self in man. Brahman is atman. Therefore, the cosmic principle is the psychic principle. The universal spirit is the self in man. It is the immanent spirit in him. It is the inner guide (antaryamin). Brahman is the soul of all. It is the knower, but is not known. It is the foundational consciousness which is the ground of the universe. It is the ground of our empirical consciousness. The eternal, universal light of consciousness resides in our heart and illumines all objects of our knowledge. There are texts in the Upanishads which identify this atman with the

Brahman. The identity of the individual soul with the universal soul is emphasized by Sankara, whereas Ramanuja recognized the individual soul to a real mode of the universal soul.

Bondage and Liberation

Higher knowledge of Brahman as pure identity devoid of difference is intuition (vidya). Lower intellectual knowledge of the empirical world of plurality of individual objects and selves is ignorance. Intuition brings about release, while intellect ties the individual self to the empirical life of birth and death. Vidya is moksha and avidya is samsara. Vidya is knowledge of pure identity. Duality of subject and object is apparent. Atman is the ontological reality. The individual soul's individuality is due to avidya. Avidya is the cause of individuality. It produces the body, the sense-organs, manas, buddhi and ahamkara which constitute its individuality. However, the embodied life is no bar to its realization. When the unconditioned universal self reveals itself to the individual self, all plurality is overcome, and the mortal becomes immortal. It realizes its Brahmanhood even in its embodied life. When all knots of the heart are broken, the mortal embodied self becomes immortal. It does not transmigrate to any other sphere of life.

Cosmology

Regarding Cosmology, the Vedanta Philosophy seems to have taken the different theories as propounded by the Upanishads. We shall have a look at one of such theories. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says: "As a spider ejects its thread from its body, and as fire emits sparks, so all lives. All beings, all creatures spring from this Atman." (ii.1.20). This is the doctrine of emanation. The world emanates from the fullness of the imperishable Brahman, again returns to it. It implies that creation is self-expression and self-communication of God to the creatures. Creation is a moral act of willing and self-sacrifice. Further in the same Upanishad we read: "The universe was not unfolded in the beginning; it was unfolded in name and form (namarupa). Atman entered into it up to the finger-tips, as a knife is hidden in a sheath." This text suggests that creation is a passage from an undifferentiated condition to a differentiated condition. If differentiation is real, the process is evolution. If it is not real, creation is a mere appearance. Creation is unfoldment. Dissolution is enfoldment. It is either evolution (parinama) or appearance (vivarta).

Ethics

Vedanta accepts the distinction made by the Kathopanishad between happiness (preyas) and the highest good (sreyas). He who seeks happiness is deprived of the highest Good, whereas he who seeks the highest Good attains his real well-being. The highest Good is the realization of the eternal universal self in man. Vidya or supra-intellectual intuition leads to self-realization. Intuition of the self depends on moral purity and self-renunciation. Atman can be realized by one who does practice self-control, desirelessness, and concentration of mind. Moral purity is the indispensable pre-requisite of knowledge of atman. Karma is not excluded from moral life. Prescribed actions should be performed without any desire or motive. Nishkama karma purifies the mind; however it is only a preliminary step to self-knowledge.

Check Your Progress I

Note:

a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1)

What is the source for the study of Vedanta?

2)

How does Rig Veda contribute to the growth of the Vedanta system?

1.4 MAJOR SCHOOLS OF VEDANTA

It is to our advantage that we take a glimpse at the prominent schools of Vedanta, which will be studied in detail in other units. They can be broadly classified into two groups: Absolutistic Vedanta system of Sankara and the Theistic Vedanta systems expounded by Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallbha, and others. We shall begin with Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta.

1.5 SANKARA AND ADVAITAVADA

Sankara (788-820 A.D.) is one of the greatest philosophers among the Indian thinkers in intellectual eminence. Through his works (such as commentaries on the principal Upanishads, the Brhma-Sutras, and the Bhagavadgita) he exposed his own system of Absolute idealism (Advaita-vada). He emphasized the monistic tendency on the Upanishads and developed it into a systematic Advaitavada. He emphasized the reality of the unconditioned and unqualified (nirguna) Brahman and regarded God (Isvara), the individual souls and the world (jagat) as appearances due to and indefinable principle called maya. This maya is neither real nor unreal, nor both, nor neither. Maya conditions Brahman and then it is Isvara. Maya is his power or energy (sakti). It is the source of the names and forms which are modified into the phenomena of the world. The world appears to be born owing to maya. It is an imaginary construction of maya. Maya is not an independent principle; it is dependent on Isvara.

1.6 RAMANUJA AND VISISTADVAITA

In the line of Alvars (the Tamil saints) Ramanuja is the greatest acharya. He was, according to the tradition, born in 1017 at Sriperumbudur, some 30 miles south west of Chennai of today's Tamil Nadu. In his celebrated commentary on the Vedanta-Sutras, which is today known as Srihashya, he has expounded the Visistadvaita philosophy. In propounding a new philosophy his aim was to champion the need for a personal theism, in harmony with Vedic and Upanishadic teaching. He wanted to systematize the vaishnava tenets with a rational basis. Thereby he offered to the people a simple religion based on faith, easy means for God-realization through bhakti.

Ramanuja was the chief propounder of the doctrine of qualified non-dualism (visistadvaita). He criticized Sankara's absolutism or non-dualism (advaita) and established the ontological reality of God, the individual souls and the world. He regarded the souls and world as attributes or modes of God. The germs of theistic Vedanta are found in the theistic Upanishads, the Narayaniya section of the Mahabharata, the Bhagavadgita, and the Pancaratra Agamas.

1.7 MADHVA (1199 – 1278 A.D) AND DVAITA VEDANTA

Madhva has called his system Dvaita because the concept of difference is foundational to it. The basic doctrine of Dvaita is that there is plurality of reals. Difference is of the very nature of things. There is difference between God and soul, between God and matter, between soul and soul, between soul and matter, and between one material thing and another. These five-fold differences permit all kinds of extrinsic relationships between the diverse beings; but leave no room for a really intrinsic continuity in beings (as we affirm between creator and creatures). Therefore God is not the creator of souls and the world: souls are eternal, world arises out of prakrti.

God is Isvara, completely independent being, absolutely perfect. In his deepest essence, He is pure consciousness. Prakrti exists eternally. Therefore does not owe its existence to God, but its nature is to be a mere instrument totally docile to his pleasure. The soul is by essence spiritual consciousness, i.e., partless. In its divisible identity it possesses knowledge, activity and bliss. Therefore it is essentially similar to God, yet dependent on him. The Lord is the perfect model of which the soul is an image (abhasa), a reflection (pratibhasa). The ultimate cause of bondage from the soul strives to escape is Brahman, who causes jiva to be ignorant of its true relation to God. Therefore God alone can give release. That aspect of God that causes release is called prasada (grace). Union with God (sayujya) is the highest form of liberation.

1.8 VALLABHA (1473-1531) AND SUDDHADVAITA

Vallabha thinks that Sankara's advaita is impure, as the latter thought that the world was illusory. But for Vallabha world is real, ultimately world and God are same and real. According to him, it is the same reality of God that assumes the forms of world and the individual souls. To explain this, Vallabha adopts the

avikrta parinama-vada (theory of change without modification). He makes a distinction between essence and power to cause: these are not the same. If they were same, all things would be causing all the time. In God both of them are there: the latter (power to cause) changes while the former (the essence) remains the same. Vallabha recommends three means of liberation: karma-marga, jnana-marga, and bhakti marga – depending on the spiritual disposition and nature of the individual souls.

1.9 NIMBARKA AND SVABHAVIKA
BHEDABHEDA

In his Vedanta philosophy, Nimbarka holds that there is natural difference and non-difference between God and souls, between God and the material universe. There is the natural difference between God and the individual souls: God is the cause and is the ruler. The soul is not omnipotent. Soul is the effect and it attains the Brahman. Between God and the material universe, God is spiritual while the material universe is material. Here the difference is more explicit. On the other hand, there is the natural non-difference: Brahman pervades the universe (the effect) like clay in the jar. The souls and universe are dependent on God; they emanate from God (like snake and its coils). Such difference and non-difference are natural (svabhavika) and they are not added. Thus both difference and non-difference are comprehensible.

Check Your Progress II

Note:

a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1)

Describe in brief Sudhaadvaita of Vallabha

2)

Explain briefly Svabhavika Bhedabheda of Nimbarka

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1.10 KEY WORDS

- Brahman** : The Upanishads speak of higher (para) Brahman and lower (apara) Brahman. The former is formless, unmanifest, immortal, abiding and transcendental, while the latter is formed, manifest, mortal, fleeting, and empirical. The para Brahman is devoid of all attributes and determinations; it is unqualified, indeterminate, and unconditioned. It is the Absolute
- Visistadvaita** : the non-duality or oneness of Brahman, which is qualified by the animate and inanimate beings. They are inseparable associated with Brahman.

1.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) The Vedanta Sutras is perhaps the most available and significant source for the study of Vedanta. It is an exposition of the doctrine of Brahman and therefore it is also called Brahma S'tra. It also deals with the embodiment of the unconditioned self, hence it has also the name Sariraka Sutra. The authorship of this text is attributed to Badarayana who is, according to Indian tradition, identified with Vyasa.
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It also gives an account of the nature of the dependence of the world on God and the gradual evolution from and re-absorption into him. It also contains interesting psychological discussions about the nature of the soul, its attributes, its relation to God, body and its own deeds. The third chapter discusses ways and means (*sadhana*) of attaining *brahma-vidya*. It also presents an account of rebirth along with other psychological and theological discussions. The final chapter deals with the fruits (*phala*) of *Brahma-vidya*. It also describes in some detail the theory of the departure of the soul after death along the two paths of the gods and the fathers and the nature of the release from which there is no return.

- 2) The Rg Veda spoke of One Reality (*ekam sat*) which is spoken of in various ways by the sages. It spoke of That One (*tad ekam*) that created the world. The Upanishads called it Brahman. Brahman is Atman. It is the Reality of the reality. It is the cause of all created things, and it is their ultimate ground and essence. It is one devoid of plurality and is beyond many. This Supreme Principle is called Brahman because it is the ubiquitous cosmic principle. It is called Atman because it is one eternal homogenous consciousness. All gods and the *rita* itself subsist in Brahman. Thus the Upanishads explicitly advocated spiritualistic monism or absolute Idealism. This is the bedrock of Hindu religion and philosophy.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Vallabha thinks that Sankara's *advaita* is impure, as the latter thought that the world was illusory. But for Vallabha world is real, ultimately world and God are same and real. According to him, it is the same reality of God that assumes the forms of world and the individual souls. To explain this, Vallabha adopts the *avikrta parinama-vada* (theory of change without modification). He makes a distinction between essence and power to cause: these are not the same. If they were same, all things would be causing all the time. In God both of them are there: the latter (power to cause) changes while the former (the essence) remains the same. Vallabha recommends three means of liberation: *karma-marga*, *jnana-marga*, and *bhakti marga* – depending on the spiritual disposition and nature of the individual souls.
- 2) In his Vedanta philosophy, Nimbarka holds that there is natural difference and non-difference between God and souls, between God and the material universe. There is the natural difference between God and the individual souls: God is the cause and is the ruler. The soul is not omnipotent. Soul is the effect and it attains the Brahman. Between God and the material universe, God is spiritual while the material universe is material. Here the difference is more explicit. On the other hand, there is the natural non-difference: Brahman pervades the universe (the effect) like clay in the jar. The souls and universe are dependent on God; they emanate from God (like snake and its coils). Such difference and non-difference are natural (*svabhavika*) and they are not added. Thus both difference and non-difference are comprehensible.