

Other Schools of Vedaanta

Prof. K. S. Arjunwadkar

Sources of other schools

The Brahmasuutra of Baadaraayana is the first work on the Vedaanta attempting to cull a unified system from the Upanishads which contain scattered thoughts on aspects of philosophical issues. Divided into 4 adhyaayas, each being subdivided into 4 quarters, the Brahmasuutra contains 511 suutras in all. This work records divergent views of ancient scholars like Aashmarathya, Audulomi, Kaashakritsna etc. on certain issues like the relation of the individual soul with the universal one. These scholars may be considered the forerunners of the later divergent schools of Vedaanta, of which the major ones are:

- 1 *Vishishta-advaita* (non-dualism of the differenced) of Raamaanuja (1140 AD),
(Com. Shrii-bhaashya)
- 2 *Dvaita* (dualism) of Madhva (1238 AD, Com. Anu-bhaashya),
- 3 *Shuddha-advaita* (pure monism) of Vallabha (1479-1544 AD) and
- 4 *Dvaita-advaita* (dualism-cum-non-dualism) of Nimbaarka (13th c. AD),
as against
- 5 *Kevala-advaita* (plain/unqualified monism) of Shankara (8th-9th c. AD,
Com. Shaariiraka-bhaashya).

All these have found it necessary to draw on the authority of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-giitaa and the Brahma-suutra of Baadaraayana, the fundamental triad of the Vedaanta, *Prasthaana-trayii*, as texts supporting their specific views which are in fact poles apart. This they did by writing their own commentaries on these texts, in consideration of the sanctity traditionally accorded to the first two and the authority of the third as the first work consolidating in a systematic form the doctrines contained in them. Their commentaries on the Brahma-suutra are supposed to have been based on earlier ones referred to by them, implicitly or explicitly. Apart from the sectarian commentaries stated above, there is also a commentary of Shriikantha on the Brahma-suutra written from a Shaivite point of view.

Devotional sects rather than philosophical schools

Despite their commentatorial acrobatics, the schools that arose after Shankara share some common features. They are avowed devotional sects which have a firm belief in personal God as the creator and sole controller of the world distinct

from and superior to the individual souls who can achieve beatitude only through His grace through total devotion to him. For them, it is a blasphemy to talk of the identity of the soul with God; liberation of souls is, for them, only their proximity to God as worshippers. Their mutual differences lie in such sectarian points as whether or not Raadhaa is to be worshipped along with Krishna or the latter alone has this privilege. Naturally, they have little to do with rationalism which is the most outstanding feature of Shankara's exposition of Vedaanta. Their major adversary is Shankara who holds that the world is unreal, a creation of *Maayaa*, deceptive power, -- a view which they believe is a Buddhist heritage and are in total disagreement with it. This disagreement leads them at times to criticise Shankara in an indecent manner. Divorced from rationalism, they are left with the only task of exhibiting commentatorial skill in the interpretation of the ultimate sources of Vedaanta as texts authenticating their views. This they have done by hook or by crook, even by twisting Upanishadic statements, at times by splitting words in total opposition to the context, or taking them in a secondary sense. They feel relieved when they turn to the Bhaagavata Puraana as the successive source of their doctrines.

Evaluation

Apart from their value as philosophical schools, these devotional sects have no doubt played an important role in consolidating the major part of the Indian society under the banner of devotion. Indeed, the common man has neither an urge nor an ability to go into academic subtleties. He is inclined to have faith in some deity, person or school and is satisfied with following some do-s and don't-s. Philosophical conflicts are beyond his capacity to understand or resolve.

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