
UNIT 4 EASTERN PHILOSOPHY (VEDANTA, BHAKTI MOVEMENT- KABIR, TULASIDAS, VAISHNAVISM, ANASAKTI YOGA)

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Hindu thought-form has maintained an unbroken link from its past to the present day. Many ancient civilisations, with their characteristic thought, have vanished and their thought forms remained only as a fossil, to be studied by historians. But Hindu thought lived through the ages, and has evolved over the years. Even though a value judgement is neither possible nor desirable, its continuity from ancient times to the present day, from Indus valley to the independent India cannot be denied.

Gandhi was born into a traditional Hindu family in a small town. His parents were devout Hindus who followed all the traditions of Hinduism. This had a deep impression on Gandhi's life, which was carried through all his life. After his early western education, as he started facing crisis after crisis in his political life, he turned to religion for solace. Hinduism was deeply enshrined in his mind, and with the conviction and courage developed through it, he had no hesitation to explore the tenets of other religions, and find for himself, that the same spirit, truth, non-violence, compassion, sense of equity, and concern for all living creatures ran through all of them. It made his faith in Hinduism all the more stronger. He says, "I have read Bible, Zend Avesta, Qur'an, and all the great books of the world, and it has helped me to understand Gita". Even with such conviction, Gandhi could say that one should reject that part of the scripture which is not in the broad interest of humankind. He says that it must have come to the scripture in a peculiar circumstance, or it must have been extrapolated. A deep conviction in religion gave him the courage to question the fundamentals of the religion.

Aims and objectives

After studying this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- The nature of Vedanta philosophy
- Bhakti movement and its effect on the people of India.
- Influence and contribution of Kabir and Tulasidas.
- Vaishnavism as the religion of love.
- Anasakti Yoga and the Gita according to Gandhi.

4.2 VEDANTA

The time of Vedic literature has always been a matter of debate between Eastern and Western scholars. Generally it is accepted that the time may be around second millennium B.C. This literature, consisting of four Vedas, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, deal with hymns in praise of the Gods, the rituals that have to be followed and their methods, musical rendition, and the material science, respectively. From this literature, grew the various philosophical and theological speculations, which provided the material for various thought forms that ultimately came to be known as Hinduism, or ‘Sanatana Dharma’.

The later stage of Vedic literature came to be known as ‘Upanishad’ or ‘Vedanta’, which means ‘at the end of Vedas’, which literally and physically occurs at the end of the Vedas. The Vedas were handed down from generation to generation by the word of the mouth, and they are described as “Apourusheya”, meaning that they were not composed by any person, but heard, from Divine source. Hence they are called ‘Shruti’ meaning ‘heard’ literature, as against ‘Smruti’, the ‘remembered’ literature. Therefore, Shruti’s authenticity could not be in dispute, but can be interpreted differently, as sometimes clear meaning could not be rendered, and remained ambiguous. Different schools interpreted the Upanishads in their own way.

One of the six schools of philosophy is “Mimamsa”, the exegetics of Vedic literature, which lays down the rules as to how to interpret them. This literature is divided into ‘Purva Mimamsa’, which deals with interpretation of the older Vedanta literature, and the ‘Uttara Mimamsa’ which deals with the interpretation of the ‘later’ Vedanta literature. These two schools differ in the emphasis they place on various injunctive and ritual aspects, as opposed to the portions that are beyond sensory organs. This has given rise to various treatises interpreting scriptures.

Major portion of the Vedanta literature is composed of ‘Sutra’, which are aphorisms. A ‘Sutra’ is a short statement which is capable of being remembered, in the oral tradition. The brevity of the Sutra, while making it easy to remember, provides the commentator opportunity to comment on that and draw his own interpretation. The Sutras of Purva Mimamsa have been composed by Jaimini, and have been commented upon by various commentators like Shabara, Kumarila Bhatta, and Prabhakara. The commentaries are called as “Bhashya”, and commentators ‘Bhashyakara’. Many a time, the commentator composed his own verses, for easy memorisation, and provided his own commentary on the verse he has composed.

Vedanta literature has *three major works*, which are considered to be authorities and reference works for Vedanta literature. They are Upanishads, Brahmasutras, and Bhagavad

Gita, which is a part of the epic, Mahabharata. The author of the two works apart from Upanishads is said to be Badarayana Vyasa, a sage whose time is unknown. The commentators of all the three systems of Indian philosophy- Adwaita, Vishishtadwaita, and Dwaita have commented on all the three works, which are called 'Prasthanatrayee' meaning the three authorities. However, some commentators have commented on works, which may not constitute the authorities, like the Vishishtadwaita commentators have commented on "Pancharatna" treatises.

Brahmasutra of Vyasa is one of the three authoritative works, and all the schools of Vedanta have commentaries written on this text. The date of this work is not known; generally it is placed one or two centuries before Christ. All the three schools claim that the aphorisms of Brahmasutra expound their tradition, as the small aphorisms, having a few words in each, can be interpreted to the commentators' point of view. There are various commentators, who are known as 'Vrittikaras' even before these three schools came into existence. Shankara refers to one such commentator by name, Upavarsa. Generally the commentators do not refer to the other commentators by name, and their view is indicated by saying, "it is said".

The three schools of Vedanta have contributed to the debate on the nature of 'Brahman', and the 'atman', and have engaged themselves in endless debate. Many a time, these debates are held only with the intention of subduing the opponent, and to score a victory over them. Nevertheless, they have enriched the philosophical tradition in India.

Adwaita Vedanta

Over the years, the Vedanta has come to be identified with Adwaita Vedanta, even though there are two other prominent schools of Vedanta. Also, Adwaita Vedanta is identified with Shankara's work. The seeds of Adwaita Vedanta are found in treatises earlier to Shankara. The proponents of all the three schools claim that all the earlier thinkers like Yajnavalkya, Vyasa and Uddalaka Aruni, belong to their school. Since aphorisms render themselves to different interpretations, each of them is able to make out their case. Since Adwaita was the earliest school, and it came in the wake of Buddhism, it occupies prime position in Vedanta philosophy. Summary of the **Adwaita philosophy** is given below.

1. The purpose of philosophy is to help Jeeva (the human being) to liberate himself (moksha) from the bondage (Samsara) of births and death.
2. The bondage is the result of 'Avidya', or ignorance. But the self (atman) is not bound, and is eternally liberated.
3. Bondage is eternal, and continues as long as the ignorance persists.
4. Since bondage exists because of ignorance, the only way to overcome the bondage is to acquire 'vidya', that is the knowledge.
5. The ignorance exists because it creates apparent distinctions (bheda) where none exist.
6. Therefore, knowledge is acquired by knowing that the distinctions are false, especially the distinction between the knower and the known.
7. The awareness, which is the real knowledge, is free from subject-object distinctions, and is pure consciousness (chit, anubhava)

8. The true self is itself just that pure consciousness, without the distinction between the subject and the object, and the cause and the effect.
9. The same true self, is not different from the ultimate universal principle, the Brahman. If the 'Brahman' was conceived as an object of self-awareness, then it would involve a subject-object relation, which is at the base of "avidya", that is ignorance.
10. The real is that which is not set aside as false. The real is not affected (badha).
11. By the above criteria, "Brahman" is the only ultimate reality, since it is not affected by ignorance, and it is one thing not sublatale, since sublation depends on consciousness.
12. Pure consciousness is experienced during deep sleep. Since we awake refreshed, it is inferred that the true consciousness is also ultimate bliss.

These are major Advaita tenets. The other two schools, Vishishtadwaita, and Dwaita, have also their own tenets on the relation between the 'Jeevatman' (individual self) and 'Paramatman' (the ultimate reality).

The Theory of Vishishtadwaita

Shankara's theory of Advaita has been refuted by Ramanuja, the chief proponent of the Vishishtadwaita School. His main arguments are:

There are three sources of knowledge- Scriptures, perception and inference. All the three sources should have character, in order to establish a proof.

1. He refutes the basic tenet of Advaita, that Supreme reality is unqualified (Nirvishesha). This cannot be proved, as all proofs are based on the assumption of qualified character. Scriptures do not speak about the unqualified character of the supreme reality.
2. The Advaita School holds that the unqualified nature of the absolute reality can be experienced directly. Even in direct experience, some traits of Supreme reality have to be qualified, for experiencing.
3. Regarding perception, it is held that any perception, if it is to manifest, has to have character (Savikalpa pratyakhya). Hence, Ramanuja holds that perception without character is not possible.
4. Inference is based on perception and hence it has also revealed a thing with certain characteristics. Hence, it cannot remain unqualified.
5. Shankara's assertion is that perception relates to pure beings and pure beings alone. If that were to be true, then characteristic differences are necessary to distinguish one from the other, like saying, 'this is a jug' and 'this is a cloth'. If all objects are perceived to be false, there can be no differences between the objects.
6. Shankara states that the world looks like a manifold entity due to 'dosha', or 'Avidya' (defect). Ramanuja states that Avidya needs support, and cannot exist by itself. It cannot exist in individual souls, as they themselves are results of 'Avidya'.
7. Ramanuja holds that all knowledge is real. He gives the example of conch shell and silver. If an illusion has to appear, it has to be like another reality. A conch shell cannot appear like imaginary silver.

Ramanuja favours 'Anyatha Khyati' theory of illusion, that is, a real thing should appear to be like the illusion of another real thing, like the conch shell appearing like silver. He also defends the school of his seniors, 'Yathartha Khyati', saying that the difference between his school and the school of his seniors is only 'ontological' (Ontology: The science or study of being; that part of metaphysics which relates to the nature or essence of being).

The Theory of Dwaita (Dualism)

Madhwa, the chief proponent of Dwaita School, also refutes the concept of 'Maya' or 'Avidya' of Shankara, but his arguments are different from those of Ramanuja. His main arguments on tenets of dualism are:

1. As against the totally unqualified nature of Supreme reality in Adwaita, Madhwa holds that the supreme reality, that is Brahman, is full of qualities and characteristics. His concept of Brahman is 'Gunapurna Brahman'.
2. His concept of the world is that it is real, not an illusion, as is found in Adwaita. Adwaita holds that the world is "Mithya" (not real), while Dwaita holds that it is 'Satya' (real).
3. Dwaita holds that there is ultimate difference among the Supreme reality, souls and matter, but Adwaita holds that there is only "Vyavaharika", or illusory difference between them, and does not recognise the existence of souls and matter.
4. The Dwaita philosophy is termed as "Tattwawada", as is mentioned in Dwaita works, and the Adwaita is termed as 'Mayavada'. This indicates the basic difference between the two Schools.

4.3 BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The Bhakti movement that started around eighth century in India, has been a religion of love. The concept of monotheistic God, all purveying, all powerful, capable of punishing the wicked, gradually gave way to the concept of love, both in Christianity and Islam, and at the same time, started flourishing in India too. The Sufism, which reached its height in tenth century A.D, preached the love of the Lord. Before that, Alwars of the Srivaishnava School established the Bhakti movement in the eighth century. The eleventh century belonged to Ramanuja (1016-1137) and Yamunacharya. After this, in the twelfth and thirteenth century, Madhwacharya, and subsequently, the Goudiya Vaishnavism inspired by him, also spread the cult of Bhakti. The movement flowered almost at the same time in all regions of India.

Popular and in local language: The movement gave a boost to the regional languages all over India. Earlier, the divine literature was written in Sanskrit and its sister languages. The concepts of theology could be understood in a limited way, as the concepts and language was a barrier. Bhakti movement simplified the concepts by explaining difficult concepts with examples from day to day life, with parables, songs, and folk literature. For example, Kabir and Tulasidas adopted the concept of 'Nirgun' (propertyless), and their Rama was formless. The Vedanta concepts of 'Nirgun' and 'Nirakar', meaning propertyless and formless 'Brahman', was carried to the masses by these two stalwarts of the Bhakti movement.

Kinds of Bhakti: Once the Bhakti movement made the Supreme Godhead near to the devotee, various kinds of devotion came to be practised. Ramanuja said that in order to attain Moksha, the surrender to Lord, 'Prapatti' is absolutely essential. Hence, there was 'Dasya rasa', the sentiment of servitude; 'Madhura rasa'(relation of love), as was between Krishna and Gopis; 'Shanta rasa', a relation of being in absolute peace with the Lord; 'Sakhya rasa' , the friendship with Lord, with absence of difference between the friends; and 'Vatsalya rasa', the love of the parent to the offspring, are some main categories.

Bhakti Movement and Vaishnavism: Though there is a direct relation between Vaishnavism and Bhakti movement, there are examples of Bhakti in Saivite School also. Akka Mahadevi, the poetess and saint of Karnataka, in the middle of twelfth century, considered Shiva in the form of 'Channamallikarjuna' to be her husband, even though a prince offered to marry her. Another great saint poet, Basava, considers Shiva to be a great trader, who does not incur a loss, nor does he incur a profit, and conducts the world with even hand.

Vaishnava devotion is more profuse and varied. Ramanuja has awe and reverence for the God, and therefore, it is called the 'Aiswarya pradhana bhakti,' and is more intellectual in character than the Bhakti of Nimbarka School, who worship Krishna the cowherd, accompanied by Radha. There is not much of awe and servitude, but only love for the cowherd, and hence it is called 'Madhurya pradhana' (love for God). For Madhwacharya, the bhakti was deep love of God, inspired by an adequate knowledge, with a firm and unshakable love of God. He draws up a hierarchy of love towards Krishna. Gopis come lowest, next come queens of Krishna, next is Yashoda, above her are Devaki, Vasudeva and Balarama, and highest in the scale is Brahma. The Bengal school of Vaishnavism, of Vallabha, though inspired by the Madhwa school, has difference of opinion on this subject.

Bhakti Movement and Social Reform: The Bhakti movement also brought out many poets, saints, composers, social reformers, and revolutionary thinkers all over India in all the regions. It would be difficult to list all of them, but a few prominent among them are Kulasekhara, one of the Alvars of Srivaishnava sect; Tulasidas and Kabir whose influence on Hindi region needs no explanation; Purundara Dasa of Karnataka, considered to be the grand patriarch of Karnataka music; and also a social reformer, Rahim, who composed beautiful couplets praising Krishna; Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh Panth; Baba Sheik Farid, who brought about Hindu-Muslim unity; Narasimha Mehta of Gujarat, whose poem, "Vaishnavajana" influenced Gandhi immensely; Jnanadeva, Tukaram and Namdev of Maharashtra; Shankaradev and Aniruddhadev of Assam; Chaitanya and his successors of Goudiya Vaishnavism, to name a few. Bhakti movement has thus enriched the social and cultural life of our country.

4.4 KABIR AND THE SUFI SECT

The name Kabir evokes in the mind the meaning of the name "the great". It is one of the ninety nine names of Allah in Arabic theology, mentioned six times in Qur'an. Kabir lived up to his name and his influence in Hindi speaking area is all pervasive. He is quoted at every step, and has relentlessly campaigned against both Hindu and Muslim orthodoxy.

His influence over his contemporaries has been important and has been written about. It is stated that Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion came under the influence of

Kabir when he was twenty seven years old. Nanak mentions Kabir in his work, *Janam Sakhi* (Evidence on the story of Birth) and states that he is a 'Bhagat' (devotee) equal in merit to Nanak himself, and other Bhagats are exhorted to follow his example. On many occasions, Nanak quotes the verses attributed to Kabir. *Adi Granth*, the sacred book of the Sikh Panth, gives information regarding the life of Kabir and his teachings. The interest that Guru Nanak took in Kabir is reflected in the works of Kabir being included in the *Adi Granth*, and it is stated that both had good rapport.

Other religious teachers have also been influenced by Kabir. They are Dadu of Ahmedabad, who founded the sect that bears his name, and Jag Iswar Das from Oundh (1760), who is the founder of Satnami Sect and many other then contemporary religious teachers, like Bribhan, founder of the Sadh Sect (1658), Baba Lal of Malwa and Shiva Narain of Gazipur. Even though Kabir is not a founder of any cult, many claim that they belong to his cult, which is called 'Kabir Panth' and the followers of this sect are called 'Kabir Panthis'. In the census of 1901, about eight lakh and forty three thousand people registered themselves as belonging to this sect in the four states of North India. His pithy and stark words are quoted in day to day conversation, and wandering minstrels sing his songs, taking them to millions of people.

The information about the year of his birth and other information is scanty, and historically not proven. According to Benares Gazetteer, Kabir was born in Belhara, a village in Azamgad district. According to Kabir Panthis, he was born in 1398 and died in 1518. The date of birth might be a matter of conjecture, as there was a need to make him the contemporary of Ramanand, the founder of the Bhakti movement in North India. A pamphlet was published by the Kabir Panthis in Mumbai in 1885. It is said to have been produced with information from books as well as tradition. Much of the legend relating to Kabir has been sourced from this pamphlet.

Kabir's foster parents are said to be Niru, a Muslim weaver, and his wife, Nima. There are two versions of his birth. A Brahmin widow was unknowingly blessed by an ascetic, for begetting a child. Realising his mistake Ramanand tried to make amends. He said that the child would be born out of the palm of the mother, and accordingly the child was born. The mother kept it in a lotus flower, in the tank, and was picked up by Nima, his foster mother. There are other interpretations but it was said that Kabir was found somewhere by Niru and Nima, and that they are his foster parents.

Kabir followed the profession of his foster parents, and became a weaver, a "julaha" in Hindi. Kabir was said to have become the disciple of Ramanand, and got initiation from him to be the devotee of Rama. *Adi Granth* says of Kabir: "By caste weaver and of mind, utters Kabir with natural ease the excellencies of Ram". True to his profession, Kabir compares the cycle of life and death to the shuttle that travels in the loom.

Kabir and the Sufi Sect

It has been a matter of debate as to whether Kabir belonged to the Sufi sect or not. No doubt, he was vehemently against both orthodox Islam and Hinduism. For this reason, he incurred the wrath of the orthodox sections in both the communities. Nabhaji, who has written "Bhakta Mala" in 18th century, makes the following statement:

"Kabir refused to acknowledge caste distinctions or to recognise the authority of the six schools of Hindu philosophy, nor did he set any store by the four divisions of

life (ashrama) prescribed by the Brahmins. He held that the religion without Bhakti was no religion at all, and all the asceticism, fasting and almsgiving had no value if unaccompanied by worship (bhajan and Hymn singing). By means of *Ramainis*, (a short exposition of religious truth) *Shabd* (a word or saying, relating to God), and *Sakhis* (evidencing the Lord's glory) he imparted religious instructions to Hindus and Muhammadans alike. He had no preference for either religion, but gave teaching that was appreciated by the followers of both. He spoke out his mind fearlessly and never made it his object merely to please his hearers”.

Formless Supreme Being (Nirguna)

Kabir is also a proponent of Nirguna, the Supreme Being without form and properties. This concept, which came into philosophy with the Advaita School, caught the imagination of Kabir as well as Tulasidas. Kabir's strong opposition to idolatry stems from this philosophy. He says, “If worshipping a stone idol gets Hari then I will worship a mountain. Better is the grinding stone, which grinds and feeds the world.”

Kabir's works are contained in two books. One is *Bijak*, and another is *Adi Granth*. During the lifetime of Kabir, his sayings were not documented, and the process of writing them down started at least fifty years after his death.

Sayings and Poetry of Kabir: Kabir's sayings are pithy, and many a time, sound like riddles, but the meaning is conveyed clearly. To illustrate the point, a few selected couplets of Kabir are given here.

“Fire does not burn it, the wind does not carry it away, no thief comes near it; collect the wealth of name of Ram, that wealth is never lost”.

“What is muttering, what austerity, what vows and worship to him whose heart there is another love?”

“Pearls are scattered on the road; the blind draw near and depart; without the light of the Lord, the world passes them by”.

“Sandal, restrain thy fragrance; on thy account, the wood is cut down; the living slay the living and regard only the dead”.

4.5 TULASIDAS: SOCIAL CONCERN AND FORMLESS RAMA

No work of literature in Hindi language is more read, followed, quoted, revered, and worshipped than *Ramcharita Manas*, “The Lake of Deeds of Rama”, composed by Saint Goswami Tulasidas. Tulasidas was born in Rajpur, in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh in the year 1589 AD. He died at the age of ninety one. Even though he was a great Sanskrit scholar, he is known for his works in Hindi, especially *Ramcharita Manas*. This work is known as the Bible of North India: many of its verses are recited everyday as part of ritual, many sentences are used as proverbs, many incidents from the book are used as exemplary anecdotes, and many phrases have passed into the common parlance, even without the speakers being aware of the origin. His doctrine, even today, has a powerful influence on the present day Hinduism. Even though he founded no cult or school, he is universally accepted as a poet and saint, an authority to guide everyday life. His composition, *Hanuman Chalisa*, a part of *Ramcharita Manas*, a forty stanza praise of Lord Hanuman, is recited by all Hindi speaking people.

Sources and Manuscripts

A manuscript of the Ayodhya Kand, said to be written in poet's own hand, exists in Rajpur in Banda, in his birthplace. Another manuscript, dated Samvat 1661, is in Ayodhya, and it is said to have been corrected in poet's own hand, nineteen years before his death. An excellent translation into English has been made by F.S.Growse, of the Indian Civil Service. An introduction to the grammar of Ramcharita Manas has been written by Edwin Greaves titled *Notes on the grammar of Ramayan of Tulsidas* (1895).

His magnum opus is written in a dialect of Hindi, known as 'Awadhi' which is spoken around Ayodhya in UP. Even though Tulasidas uses the Valmiki Ramayana as the source and acknowledges it, he definitely makes a departure from other poets who have narrated the epic before him.

The narration follows the pattern given by the poet, around the mythological reservoir, which is called 'Manasa'(consciousness); four banks have four pairs of speaker and listener, who are narrating the various episodes of Rama's life. The four pairs are

1. Yajnavalkya and Bharadwaja
2. Shiva and Parvati
3. Kakabhusundi and Garuda
4. Tulsi and assembly of saints.

Tulasidas, in course of his work, writes about all sections of the society, irrespective of caste, creed, and sect, and analyses their behaviour, emotions, and their opinions. His narration reflected the contemporary society, and good values are juxtaposed with the bad values. The ideal or desirable behaviour is advised and exemplified in it.

Tulasidas clearly states that his work is based on Valmiki's Ramayana, and derives its inspiration from Vedas and Puranas, Nigamas and Agamas. By this, he recognises the authority of the ancient texts, which is necessary for acceptance of any classical work on mythology.

Tulasidas has spoken about nine kinds of spirituality leading to Bhakti, the devotion to Godhead. Rama, in the course of Discourse to Shabari, speaks of the nine kinds of devotion (Navavidha Bhakti).

1. Cultivation of the company of Sadhus, or the people seeking devotion.
2. Deep interest in the 'lila' or life of the Lord.
3. Service at the feet of the guru.
4. Singing of the praise of the Lord, without any blemish.
5. Chanting the name of the Lord, with firm belief.
6. Practising self-control, self-renunciation, and craving for a virtuous life.
7. To regard the whole world as permeated by God and respecting the saint more than God.
8. Contentment with whatever one gets, and not craving.
9. Dependence on the Lord, simplicity, freedom from wile, no elation or depression.

Bhakti can be achieved by following any one of these steps, but the most important requirement is the company of the devotees. First, the devotee, by his constant love and devotion, becomes dear to the Lord. When the Lord sees the devotion of the devotee, he would take interest in him, and liberate him from the Karma, cycle of births and death. The Bhakta or the devotee, becomes free from lust, anger, greed, pride, and achieves a level-headed state, the Stoical state.

Another important component of Bhakti is Rama nama Japa, repetition of the name of Rama. Tulasidas says that the name of Rama is greater than Rama himself. It is said that Hanuman attained control over Rama by 'Rama nama Japa'. Even Gandhi got inspired by Tulasidas's words, and found solace in repeating the name of Rama.

Attitude towards Knowledge

Tulasidas thinks that seeking knowledge is a fruitless exercise, and one should become a devotee. He says, that out of millions of 'Jnanis' (knowledgeable person), one 'Vijnani' (enlightened person) is born, but a 'Bhakta'(a devotee) is rarer than a 'Vijnani'. He says that knowledge is difficult to express, difficult to understand and difficult to practise rationally.

Social Concern

He propounded two principles which brought about immense social integration and general acceptability of his works. The first principle was the social equality. He said that Rama will accept only the relationship of devotion. "He accepts the bonds of devotion only". "A high birth without devotion is like cloud without vapours". He said, "None will question your caste or creed, you devote yourself to God and you belong to Him". Thus he attacked the root of the caste system.

The second principle was his equality between Saiva (the devotees of Shiva) and Vaishnava (the devotees of Vishnu) cults. During that time, when the differences between the two schools of worship were becoming sharper, Tulasidas refused to see the difference. He showed great reverence to both Shiva and Rama. He pointed out that service to Shiva will beget perpetual devotion to Rama. He made no distinction between the two deities. In Ramcharita Manas, Rama says that he does not like the critics of Shiva. Rama says, "If Shiva's critic is called a follower of mine, to me he does not appeal even in dream".

Formless Rama

Tulasidas also adopted the conceptual symbol of Monoism (Adwaita) which says the Supreme reality is formless and propertyless. He adopted the concept of Rama, without body, as per the principle of Monoism. This concept was very dear to Gandhi. He says, "Tulasidas too has described Rama as without a body. This one without form pervades all forms. Him we worship. I am a worshipper of this Rama. How can I ever worship Ravana? You may kill me, spit me in my face, but I shall go on repeating Rama Rahim, Krishna Karim till my last breath. And even at the moment you shower blows on me I shall not blame you. Nor shall I complain to God. I am his devotee'.

4.6 VAISHNAVISM

The earliest occurrence of the word, "Vishnu" is in Rig Veda (1.22.20). This hymn of Rig Veda has been translated by the eminent scholar, R.G. Bhandarkar as follows: 'The wise

see the highest place of Vishnu (Paramam padam) as it were an eye fixed in heaven'. The hymn indicates that Vishnu had a high position in Vedic pantheon, though not the highest. Also, the Taittiriya Samhita mentions Vishnu, by saying, "Yajna vai Vishnu" thereby meaning, "Vishnu is sacrifice". It is clear from the above two references that the name of Vishnu occurs in Vedic and early literature.

"Vaishnava" means 'that relating to Vishnu', and it is generally used as an adjective, and to indicate a sect, by adding 'ism' with it. There are four schools of Vaishnavism, whose main principle is that Vishnu is the Supreme deity, and others are subordinate to him. They hold that Shiva is subservient to him, and a Vaishnava himself.

Four Schools of Vaishnavism

There are *four Schools of Vaishnavism*. They are:

1. Vishishtadwaita (Qualified non- dualism), a school founded by Ramanuja, whose sect is known as the Srivaishnava sect.
2. Dwaita (Dualism), a school founded by Madhwa, whose sect is known as the Madhwa Vaishnava sect.
3. Shuddhadwaita, a school founded by Vallabha, and others.
4. Kumara Sampradaya, a school founded by Nimbarka.

1. **Vishishtadwaita:** The important feature of Ramanuja's Vaishnava philosophy is 'Sharanagati' or 'Prapatti', which is surrender to the Supreme deity, Vishnu. Earlier to Ramanuja, the Alvars, a tradition of Vaishnava saints, had composed *prabandhas*, compositions in praise of Vishnu. Ramanuja in his work, *Gadyatraya*, declares that Bhakti (devotion) is the surest way to salvation, but 'Prapatti' is the direct route to salvation.

Two types of surrenders are illustrated in Vishishtadwaita. One is the "*Marjala Kishore Nyaya*", where the individual surrenders like a kitten to the mother cat. The kitten makes no effort, but its complete surrender to the mother ensures its welfare. Similarly, complete surrender by the man to God ensures his salvation.

The second one is the "*Markat Kishore Nyaya*", where the relation is like between a baby monkey and its mother. Even though the mother is making all efforts to protect the baby, the baby also has to make efforts to cling to the mother. Similarly, man should make some efforts to seek the God.

2. **Dwaita (Dualism):** This school was founded by Madhwa (1238 to 1317 AD). As the name suggests, it holds that the soul (jeeva) and Supreme soul (paramatma) are different, and hence the duality between them, unlike in Advaita philosophy, the God is of full of virtues (gunapurna) and flawless (nirdosha). Brahman of Vedanta philosophy and Vishnu of Dwaita philosophy are one and the same, and Vishnu is the Supreme Godhead in Dwaita. Hence the Bhakti cult developed in this philosophy, as the devotees could sing and praise the attributes of Godhead. The Vaishnavism in Dwaita is the revival of the Pancharatra School, considered to be authoritative; the Pancharatra literature has two branches, Brahma Sampradaya, and the Sri Sampradaya. Sri Sampradaya has been adopted by the Vishishtadwaita, and the Brahmasampradaya has been adopted by the Dwaita School of Vedanta. Both are Vaishnava traditions.

3. **Shuddhadwaita:** Vallabha's philosophy is known as 'Shuddhadwaita', or Pushti Marga which translates as 'the way of grace'. Bhakti of any kind depends on His grace. Krishna is the supreme deity according to this school, and he is 'Para Brahman', 'Sachidananda' or the Supreme Bliss. The devotion that results from common grace is known as the 'Maryada Bhakti' and that which results due to His special grace is known as Pushti Bhakti. In this kind of Bhakti, God becomes the only object of desire, and in this state, even Moksha or the salvation becomes secondary. Vallabha lists *four kinds of Pushti Bhakti*.

- **Pravaha Pushti Bhakti:** Here the devotee's ego, 'I' and 'mine' are retained, and the devotee is inclined to do the deeds that are dear to the Lord (Pravaha-flow).
- **Maryada Pushti Bhakti:** All desires disappear, and the devotee is on the path of renunciation. He wants to listen to the scriptures.
- **Pushti-Pushti-Bhakti:** In this state the devotee receives the special grace of the Lord, and becomes omniscient. He possesses the knowledge about the Lord, and his Lila (play).
- **Shuddha Pushti Bhakti:** This is the ultimate state of mind where the devotee has nothing but love for the Lord. This state is supposed to be extremely rare.

4. **Kumara Sampradaya or Nimbarka School of Vaishnavism:** The start of the philosophical school is claimed to have a hoary tradition. In R.GBhandarkar's Report of the Search for Sanskrit Manuscripts, 1882-83, it is stated that the first teacher of the Nimbarka School was Hamsa, and his pupil was Kumara, of the form of 'four Vyuhas'. Kumara's pupil was Narada, who preached '*prema-bhakti*' in Treta Yuga. It is said that Nimbarka was the pupil of Narada, and an incarnation of the 'Sudarshana Chakra' of Vishnu. Nimbarka's time is said to be immediately after Ramanuja, as he refers to Ramanuja in his works. This school specialises in the worship of Radha and Krishna, the divine couple, and devotion towards them.

According to Nimbarka, there are three kinds of 'Jivas' or souls. Those that are eternally free, others who have gained freedom from bondage, and those who are bound by the cycles of birth and death. In the Free State, the individual soul can enjoy Brahman. The God is the only subject of enquiry, for those who want salvation (Mumukshu).

Vaishnavism and Bhakti Movement: Vaishnavism inspired the Bhakti movement, as Vishnu, or his incarnations, Rama and Krishna, become the personal Gods of the devotees, due to their history and character, and endeared themselves to the worshippers. The people could find all the qualities they sought in Gods in these two Godheads, and they could become ideals to emulate, strong characters to seek protection, and could be father, son, or brother, as the devotee desired. Narasimha Mehta, Gujarati poet composed the song, 'Vaishnavajana', which had immense influence on Gandhi. Gandhi hoped that all the good qualities which Narasimha Mehta expects in a Vaishnava are in him, and that he always made efforts to fulfil Mehta's description of a true Vaishnava. This song became the part of Ashram prayer.

4.7 ANASAKTI YOGA

'Anasakti Yoga' is the name given by Gandhi to the spirit of Bhagavad Gita. The word, 'Anasakti Yoga' is not to be found in any ancient text on Yoga, one of the eight schools

of philosophy. Patanjali is held to be the authority of the ancient school, and he does not use this word anywhere. Gandhi held *the Gita* in high esteem, and it inspired his thought and work throughout his life. He wanted the message of *the Gita* to reach the common man and resultantly he published “Anasakti Yoga”, which was mainly meant for the Gujarati readers. Gandhi, while writing this book, deliberately kept out the complex technical terms, and did not delve on the subjects, which would not interest the ordinary reader. He did not mention the word, “Upanishad” anywhere, in his notes, or even in the introduction to his work, even though *the Gita* is said to be the essence of Upanishads.

Gujarati Translation:

When Gandhi was imprisoned, he could read Tilak’s book on *the Gita*, in its Gujarati translation. He says that this work whetted his appetite, and he began to read more works on *the Gita*. His first acquaintance with this work was when he read Edwin Arnold’s *Song Celestial*. Later, he read the Gujarati translation, and says that reading all the possible works on *the Gita* could not get him enough courage to do his own translation, as he felt, “My knowledge of Sanskrit is limited, and my knowledge of Gujarati too is no way scholarly.”

The driving force behind his translation into Gujarati was to give this great work for the benefit of the ordinary people like women, commercial class, and the downtrodden sections of the Gujarati population. He was a staunch practitioner of this work, and says that whatever knowledge he possessed, he wanted to pass on to the ordinary people of Gujarat. He was assisted in this work by his fellow workers like Vinoba, Kaka Kalelkar, Mahadev Desai, and Kishorilal Mashruwala.

English Translation:

Gandhi took Swami Anand’s suggestion to translate the Gita into English seriously. During his prison term in Yerwada, he undertook this task and the translation appeared in the column of *Young India*, on 6.8.1931.

He later entrusted the work to his trusted secretary Mahadev Desai who diligently translated it according to Gandhi’s expectations. Mahadev Desai, gave the title to the book, *The Gospel of Selfless action*, or *The Gita according to Gandhi* and was first published in August, 1946. Gandhi vouched for the accuracy of the translation.

Many principles which were dear to Gandhi got corroborated, underlined, and emphasised in the work. The concepts of Ahimsa, bread labour, and above all, selfless action are the main principles. Gandhi makes it clear that selfless action does not mean the ‘absence of purpose’. He said that there should be selfless purpose behind our action. To be detached from the fruits of action is not to be ignorant of them or to disregard or disown them. To be detached is never to abandon action, because the contemplated result may not follow. On the contrary, he said, it is the proof of the immovable faith in the certainty of the contemplated result following in due course (*Young India*, 15.3.28). Gandhi states with emphasis, that even at the risk of repetition, he would like to point out that “the matchless remedy is renunciation of fruits of labour”.

In his commentary, Gandhi also brings out his argument that the main message of Gita is Ahimsa, or non-violence. He says that if one understands the central teaching of the Gita, one is bound to follow truth and Ahimsa. When there is no desire for the fruit, there is no temptation for the untruth or himsa (violence); untruth and violence will be found at

the back of the desire to attain the cherished end. He opined that a strong desire to achieve the fruit in itself involves violence, and the only way to achieve non-violence is to get into a situation where the violence is not needed, that is liberating oneself from the desire to get the fruit of action. Gandhi's translation is unique, as it upholds his philosophy, and gives strength to him, and millions of other people who follow him.

4.8 SUMMARY

Post-Buddhist period in India generated a debate as to what constitutes the essence of Vedic thinking. This led to the development of Vedanta literature, which discussed the relation between the Supreme Reality and the individual. Three schools emerged Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita that have been dealt at length. Bhakti movement also emerged between eighth and fifteenth century, which took the devotion to God from an intellectual and dialectical level to a relation of love. This movement reached the common man through the great leaders of this movement like Kabir, Tulasidas, Nanak, Alvars in Tamil Nadu, poet saints of Maharashtra, Dasa movement in Karnataka, Chaitanya's Gaudiya Vaishnavism and similar movements all over the country. Vaishnavism is closely related to the Bhakti movement, as most of it came out in Vaishnava tradition, with some examples from Saiva tradition. Anasakti Yoga is Gandhi's work on **Bhagavad Gita**, which had the greatest influence on him. Gandhi gave his own interpretation, and he held that the central message of this work is to forego the fruits of labour or selfless action. Undoubtedly Gandhi drew enormous strength from these philosophical sources in order to emerge as a true Satyagrahi.

4.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Examine the debate about 'Brahman' and 'Atman' in three schools of Vedanta.
2. Discuss the conceptualisation of 'Ultimate reality' in Vedanta.
3. Bring out the contribution of Bhakti movement.
4. What is Vaishnavism? Discuss the tenets of four schools of Vaishnavism.
5. Critically examine Gandhi's Anasakti Yoga.
6. Discuss the efforts of Tulasidas to bring about harmony in society.

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