UNIT 3  DVAITA VEDANTA

Contents

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Madhvacarya: Life and Works
3.3 Dvaita: its Notion and Meaning
3.4 General Philosophy of Madhva
3.5 Metaphysics of Dvaita Vedanta
3.6 Epistemology
3.7 Bondage and Liberation
3.8 General Estimate of Dvaita Vedanta
3.9 Let us sum up
3.10 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit has an objective of introducing the dualistic school of Vedanta developed by Madhva.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

*Dvaita* is one of the living systems of *Vedantic* thought in India, having its own well-defined community of followers, religious institutions and extensive philosophical literature in Sanskrit, and a substantial body of devotional literature in Kannada. *Dvaita* system has been the chief rival in thought to the *Advaita* of Sankara, in the history of Indian Philosophy. It stood up for realism in Indian thought against all forces of idealism and acosmism. The followers of Madhva, especially Jayatirtha and Vyasatirtha, present the logical skill and depth of acute dialectic thinking almost unrivalled in the whole range of Indian thought.

Madhva derives his philosophical tenets from the three authoritative *prasthanas* (the *upanisads*, *the Bhagavadgita*, and the *Brahma sutras*), from the *puranas* and *Mahabharata*. The quintessence of Maduva’s philosophy is that Visnu (*Hari*) is the supreme God; the world is real and the difference between God and soul does actually exist. All the living beings are dependent upon Visnu, and they are divided into higher and lower classes; liberation consists in the enjoyment of bliss that is inherent in oneself; pure devotion is the means of attaining it.

3.2 MADHVACARYA: LIFE AND WORKS

Madhvacarya of 12th Century AD is the founder of the Dvaita Vedanta. Traditionally he is also known as Anandatirtha and Purnaprajna. His birthplace is said to be the village of Pajaka near Udupi in Karnataka. Madhva proclaims himself as the third incarnation of Vayu after Hanuman and Bhima. Madhva was a many-sided personality. He had a stupendous memory and he was a splendid debater. Although he accepted *Sannyasa* at the hands of Acyutapreksacarya, a
renowned Advaita teacher he opposed sankara's monistic tenets and interpretations. He was convinced that the sacred texts don't propagate the mayavada, but the realistic theism. Madhvacarya installed the idol of Lord Krsna at Udupi which has become a centre of the Dvaita Vedanta with the tradition of ashtamaths, with his eight disciples.

Madhva is a prolific writer in Sanskrit both in prose and in verse. He quotes profusely from Vedic, Buddhist, Jaina and other systems of philosophy and religion of India. In short he was scholar, saint, philosopher and mystic. The works of Madhva are thirty-seven in number. Some of his major works are his commentaries on Prasthanatraya (Gita, Brahmasutra and Upanishads), commentaries on Vedas, Epics and puranas, and his Ten prakarnas (other writings). In his tradition, there have been commentaries (tikkas) on Madhva’s works written by Jayatirtha and Vyasaahirtha.

3.3 DVAITA: ITS NOTION AND MEANING

The term ‘Dvaita,’ meaning dualism, posits more than one fundamental metaphysical principle to explain the universe or a fundamental distinction between the human souls and the Supreme Being. Dualism is a theory which admits of two independent and mutually irreducible substances. In it a fundamental twofold distinction is drawn. In Western philosophy dualism is clearly seen in Plato’s any fundamental twofold distinction between the intelligible and the sensible; in Descartes’ distinction between two substances, mind and matter; and Fichte’s distinction between ego and the non-ego, may be described as dualistic. Among the classical Indian tradition, Samkhya propagates dualism with its two fundamental eternal categories constitutive of reality namely, Purusa and Prakrti, spirit and matter.

Madhva has put more depth into the meaning of the term ‘Dvaita’ as it is applied to his thought. The dualism of Madhva admits two mutually irreducible principles as constituting reality as a whole. Yet God is regarded as the only independent (svatantra) and the other as dependent (paratantra). The Supreme Being is the one and only independent principle. All finite reality comprising of the Prakrti, Purusas, Kala, Karma, Svabhava, etc is dependent. For dvaita Vedanta these dependent categories are reals and also eternal. Madhva advocates pluralistic theism. To maintain the unity, sovereignty and independence of the Supreme Being, dualism of Madhva upholds that the dependent reals are not in spite of the Lord, but because of Him. Therefore, for dvaita Vedanta, although there are two principles, yet one of them (finite) dependent completely on the other for its being and becoming. There is another aspect of dualism of Madhva. It is its ‘realistic’ attitude to the experiences of life. Our finite experiences of embodied existence and our efforts to achieve liberation from bondage have both a real value and validity of their own and are not mere illusion created by avidya as held by Advaitins. Again, in Dvaita Vedanta since ‘Bheda’ or difference is the very nature of being, along with Brahman, the principles like Jiva and Prakrti are co-eternal and uncreated, but they are dependent on God.

3.4 GENERAL PHILOSOPHY OF MADHVA
Philosophy of Madhva is contained in his commentaries on sacred texts. Specially, he shares the prominent place along with Sankara and Ramanuja as one of the systematizers of Vedantic thought. His commentary on *Brahma Sutras* as established his unique system of dualistic vedanta. As Sankaracarya, Ramanujacarya developed their own theory and interpretations on the Upanishadic teachings and the teachings of the *Brahma sutras*, and called their systems Advaita and visistadvaita, Madhvacarya’s system is called *Dvaita Vedanta*. The basic issue dealt in all these three systems is regarding the relationship between Brahman, the individual soul (*Jiva*) and the world (*jagat*). Madhvacarya refuted the *mayavada* theory of Sankara in his system of advaita. He upheld the world is not bundle of illusory objects created out of maya and avidya. For him the world is real but of course dependent on the Brahman. In the same way, Madhva differed from Sankara who said that the individual self is not different from the supreme self. The identity of the *Jiva* and *Brahman* is somehow established in advaita vedanta. In dvaita vedanta, for Madhva, *Jiva* (soul) is different from Brahman and not identical with Him. In the same way, Madhva also rejected the claims of qualified monism. Without reconciling with the *Visistadvaita* of Ramanuja the philosophy of Madhva held that that *cīt* (spirit) and *acīt* (matter) are different realities from Brahman and donot form His body (*sarīra*). For, in qualified monism we find that Ramanuja considered the world and the souls are part of the whole reality, the Brahman. We shall elaborately see these distinctive teaching in the following sections, how Madhva different from the other schools of vedanta. The speciality of the philosophy of Madhva lies in his advocacy of various differences. He spoke of the reality of five-fold differences between – soul and God, soul and soul, soul and matter, God and matter, one material thing and another. Thus the concept of difference (*bheda*) is central to the philosophical system of Madhva. That is the reason one can call his philosophy as pluralistic. Since he speaks of the reality of the external world and of the souls, we consider the dvaita vedanta as realistic. In his concept of God, we find Madhva propagating theistic principles and worship. Therefore one can call the philosophy of Madhva as theistic. It accepts a personal God who is the only independent (*svatantra*) reality, the other real beings entirely dependent on Him.

### 3.5 METAPHYSICS OF DVAITA VEDANTA

#### Concept of God

As we have seen earlier, Madhva recognizes two kinds of reality, independent (*svatantra*) and dependent (*paratantra*). God is the independent reality. Individual souls and the world are dependent realities. He speaks of God as a personal God. God is the supreme person called *Isvara*. He is completely independent, perfect, absolute and pure consciousness. He is *savisesa*. He possesses infinite qualities. He assumes various manifestations. The supreme Lord is *Visnu*. Laksmi, the consort of *Visnu*, is eternally blessed and absolutely accomplished. She eternally contemplates *Visnu*. Laksmi is dependent on *Visnu*. She is intelligent *Prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* is the material cause of the world. The Lord enters into *Prakṛti* and makes himself into many. The Lord’s will is *Prakṛti*.

The understanding of God in dvaita vedanta is theistic. It is his ‘theology’ so to say. This is described as uncompromising theism. For Madhva, *Visnu* is the Supreme God. The purpose and goal of all the scriptures (*sadagamas*) is revealing and making that Supreme known to people. That is to say the prime import (*mahatatparya*) of the sacred texts is *Vishnu*. Not only the
scriptures, even Madhva asserts that every word in the language primarily signifies Visnu and refers only secondarily to other objects. The language of people is only to signify God.

With regard to the attributes and qualities of the Supreme God, Visnu, Madhva is a great theologian. Visnu possesses all auspicious, blessed, infinite and eternal attributes. The relation between God and His attributes is governed by the principle of *vīsesa*, by virtue of which a thing is distinguished from its permanent attributes though they are identical in essence. There is no fundamental distinction between God and His attributes. He is the Supreme Reality possessing all excellences like infinite knowledge, bliss, power, etc. He manifests in various forms, incarnates as *avataras* and is present in the Sacred images. He is apprehensible through the Vedas (*sruti*) though not fully comprehensible. (Dominic Vas, 2010)

As any theistic understanding would go the Supreme God is everything in relation to the world. For him, Visnu is the efficient cause (*nimitta-karana*) of the universe. He is the cause of creation (*srsti*), preservation (*sthithi*) and destruction (*pralaya*). In His relation to the souls, He is the liberator. As He himself is the primary cause of, the bondage of *samsara* (chain of existence) for the soul. The so called apparent causes of bondage such as ignorance (*avidya*), action (*karma*) and the subtle body (*linga-sarira*) are only the secondary causes of the chain of existence. Ultimately God’s grace is needed for removal of bondage though the efforts are fruitful initially from the part of the *jīva*. For Madhva, it is Vishnu’s grace (*prasada*) alone which can give salvation (*mukti*).

**Concept of Jīva**

*Jīva* by essence is spiritual consciousness that is partless. This *Jīva* possesses knowledge and bliss. In this possession *Jīva* is similar to God but is dependent on God. For Madhva, God is the perfect *Jīva*, and the individual *Jīvas* are only images of God. Madhva defended the distinction and plurality among the *jīvas*. (We shall later speak of various other differences Madhva’s philosophy has.) This becomes also a feature of his realism. He classifies *Jīvas*. Some are not liable to pain, some are liable to pain as they are on their way to purification. Yet some others are eternally punished. These are the evil souls who become so weighed down by karma that they are not able to rise. Accordingly, each *jīva* is distinct and unique because of its *Yogāta*. Each *Jīva* resembles and reflects God. It becomes a *pratibimba*, reflection of the *bimba*, Visnu in accordance with its *svārūpa*. This distinction (*taratamya*) of the *Jīvas* remains a foundation for his theory of gradation among the *Jīvas*, starting from *Lakṣmi* and coming down to those bound for hell. In agreement to each one’s *svārūpa*, according to Madhva, there are three kinds of *Jīvas*. The first kind of *jīvas* are those who are fit for liberation (*muktiyogyas*). The second ones are those that are caught in the cycle of birth and rebirth (*nīthyasamsarins*) and travel endlessly in their journey. In the third category, there are souls that are eternally condemned to hell (*tamoyogya*). By making such a distinction, *taratamya* among the *Jīvas* Madhva tries to give an original solution to the problem of evil, and to lift God (*Visnu*) above all blame for evil in the world. (Dominic Vas, 2010)

**Concept of World**

The world is *Prakṛti* and is not created by God as it has eternal existence. The external world is affirmed to be ultimately real (*satya*) and continues to exist at all times. The world process is
beginningless and eternal (anadi and nitya). All the material products originate from prakrti or primal matter. Sattva, rajas and tamas are its three gunas. The Dvaita conception of causation differs from the well-known views of Advaita and Visistadvaita. It is known as Sad-asat-karya vada, i.e. the effect is considered as neither existent only nor non-existent. It exists as the cause, but not as the effect.

In his metaphysical thought the unique contribution of Madhva is the notion of 'bheda' and 'vīsesa'. Madhva accepts five fold difference or bheda in reality, namely, the difference between God and soul (Īsvara and Jīva), between soul and soul (Jīva and Jīva), between God and matter, between soul and matter, and between different material objects. Difference doesn’t mean Independence. God (Vishnu) alone is independent reality (svatantra-tattva), and all other beings are dependent on God (Paratantra-tattva). The system of Madva accepts ten categories: Substance (Dravya), attribute (guna), action (karma), universals (samanya), speciality (vīsesa), the specified (vīsista), the whole (amsin), potency (sakti), similarity (sadrsya) and non existence (abhava). Substances are twenty in number. Of these, Brahman, and souls are sentient (acetana). The rest are insentient (acetana). The twenty substances are: Brahman, Lakṣmi, Jīvas, space (akasa), Time (kala), primal matter (Prakṛti), and its eight evolutes, the cosmic egg (Brahmanda), ignorance (avidya), speech sounds (varna), Darkness (timira), mental impressions (vasana) and reflection (pratibimba). (Dominic Vas, 2010)

3.6 EPISTEMOLOGY

Foundation of Madhva’s metaphysics of differences among realities of God, soul and the world lies in his epistemology. For Madhva, the world of objects and things exist independently of human mind. It is a realistic perspective of dvaita as opposed to the doctrine of mayavada of Sankara. This doctrine of realism is characterised by the epistemological position that the mind perceives the objects and knows them. Humans experience the object and the objectivity of the human knowledge is manifested in different pramanas. The means of knowledge (pramanas) are perception, inference and verbal testimony (revealed scripture). For him to perceive is to become aware of something 1) as unique, 2) as being different from the other thing, 3) as being different from the perceiving self. Hence knowledge is the articulation of these perceived differences. Perceptual knowledge is direct and immediate knowledge. Knowledge is intrinsically valid. If we deny perception there is no knowledge. For Madhva the pramanas are means of knowledge (anu-pramanas) or knowledge itself (kevala-pramanas). Each of the pramanas is therefore self-valid, true and objective knowledge. Eventhough they are all valid knowledge they are not equal. Madhva says that there is a hierarchy among them, each having one’s own importance in its sphere and supports the other pramanas. Perception is valid and important in its own sphere and is useful for the later inference, and so on.

The sense-organs, manas and Saksin constitute the instruments of knowledge. The notion of Saksin as a sense-organ is unique in Madhva’s system. Etymologically, the word Saksin means a witness, a seer or one endowed with vision. Madhva defines it as Sākṣad iksate iti Saksi. Thus the Saksi is the name of the spiritual sense organ of the self or its caitanya-indriya (essential sense organ partaking of the nature of consciousness) through which it intuits its experiences. But it is not different from the self. It is the self itself. Saksin is the ultimate and unassailable
basis for the intrinsic validity of knowledge. For self-validity is the nature of Saksin itself. Saksin is the source of all knowledge in the individual, and ever-vigilant witness of one’s own validity. This is so true that there can be no error where the knowledge of Saksin is concerned. Saksin jnana is infallible. For nothing can come in between the witnessing self and its light. All error, therefore, is due to the malfunctioning of manas and the other senses. Error or illusion consists in the mis-perception of the non-existent as existent and of the existent as non-existent. A distinction is made by Madhva in agama as paruseya and aparuseya. The latter constitutes the vedas (sruti) whose validity is infallible. Madhva’s doctrine gives great importance to vedas (sruti) as a means for the true knowledge of Supreme Reality since perception and inference are confined to the facts of ordinary experience only. (Dominic Vas, 2010)

3.7 BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

Madhva accepts the reality of human misery and bondage. Maya causes the individual to be unaware of the relationship of the soul with God. Ultimately it is God who makes maya cause bondage. Hence, he alone brings liberation through his grace although there is self-effort on the part of the soul. The devotee, on his part, must prove himself worthy of it by good works (karma), acquisition of right knowledge (Jnana-yoga) and single-minded devotion (bhakti-yoga). The adikarins should work out his salvation by an ascetical striving – through the hearing of the scriptures (sravana), reflection (manana) and contemplation (nididhyasana) under the guidance of a guru. This will lead the person to bimbopasana, and further to the immediate cognition (aparoksa-Jnana) of Visnu, and to mukti.

In dvaita Vedanta understanding, liberation is achieved through the knowledge of the greatness of God. Liberation is possible by devotion to God by sravana, manana and nididhyasana. Through bhakti combined with meditation one can dispose oneself to the experience of God. Visnu’s favour and grace (prasada) a human being can be liberated from them and attain moksa or liberation. Hence, finally it is God’s grace that removes maya and liberates the soul.

Liberation consists in the realization of soul’s innate bliss. Then according to his Yogyata he will attain bliss and occupy a place reserved for him in the galaxy of the elect. He will not be absorbed in the Absolute to the extent of losing his self-identity. And yet he will be united with the Lord in knowledge and love, and with other emancipated Jivas in a family of intimacy.

3.8 GENERAL ESTIMATE OF DVAITA VEDANTA

Madhva through his system, has made a great impact in Indian philosophical tradition. He classified reality into "Svatantra" and "Paratntara". He rationalised the conception of substance and attributes with the doctrine of "Visesas" in terms of an identity-in-difference. The concept of "saksi" as an apriori principle of knowledge is his contribution in Indian epistemology. By his commentaries he brought in the reconciliation of the existence of "eternal substances" (nitya - padarthas) like Jivas, Akasa, Prakrti etc., with that of the acceptance of the universal causation of Brahman. He achieved it by his doctrine of creation defined as "Paradhina-Visesapti." He brought in a realistic notion of reality. His understanding of god and soul, metaphysical notion in general, and his ethical concepts and practices are well supported by his defence of means of
knowledge. One could say, thus, his metaphysics and ethics are fruits of his well-worked out epistemological theories.

Dvaita Vedanta is called as theistic, dualistic (pluralistic) and realistic, from different perspectives. Madhva was convinced that we can have knowledge of other realities, and thus man can really reach truth. This truth has objectivity, or correspondence of our knowing mind with the object of knowledge. He believed in a personal God and essential difference between God and man. Again, he believed in the Saguna Brahman who can be reached through bhakti (devotion), emphasising self-surrender and God’s grace. These two concepts make Dvaita vedanta different from the other Indian systems. For him, all jivas are destined by God to attain bliss after a life of samsara, or to continue to remain in it or to go into the hell of eternal darkness. The doctrines of souls that are liberated (mukta) and those eternally damned has a parallel in Jaina religious thought also. Jains distinguish two groups of souls. They are those who are redeemed (bhavya) and those which cannot be redeemed (abhavya).

His vedantic interpretations of the Brahmasyatra, brought in a unique system of philosophy as his counterparts like Sankara and Ramanuja. He has written many learned commentaries on the basic texts of Vedanta – the Vedanta sutras of Badarayana, the Upanisads and Bhagavad Gita. While all the other Acaryas have attempted in their Bhasya only to establish a samanvaya (harmony) of the various terms and doctrines found in the Upanisads, Madhva has established the samanvaya of the upanisadic thought with the Puranas and Itihasas as well. (Dominic Vas, 2010)

3.9 LET US SUM UP

Madhva’s philosophy is one of dualism. The thinkers of Dvaita School have made many outstanding contributions to the problems of Philosophy. The views propounded by Madhva on the nature of Sakshi, Visesa, Bheda, substance and attributes, the universal, space and time are very much ahead of his times and remarkably suggestive. The devotional movement of the Haridasas of Karnataka was a spontaneous expression of Madhva’s religious thought in the regional language of the majority of its adherents and its appeal reached the common people. Dvaita literature is very extensive; much of it still remains unpublished and unexplored. Plurality of the reals is the basic doctrine of dvaita. According to Madhva, difference is the very nature of things. He identifies five eternal levels of difference: Difference between God and the individual soul, God and matter, one individual soul and another, individual soul and matter, and one material thing and another. He looks upon the world as real. For Dvaita God is the highest Being, the most perfect Being, the only free Being, the ultimate goal and destiny of humans; He is the giver of salvation / liberation through grace (prasada). The path of bondage and liberation is also realistic.

3.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


