

Chapter I

Vedanta and its Aspects

The term 'Vedānta' has no singular denotation. We have already noted this before. The term is applied collectively to a vast and diverse literature. Thinkers belonging to the tradition, and even those of our own times, have chosen this or that text as the most representative of the Vedānta doctrine. Philosophy-wise 'Vedānta' centres around Vyāsa's *Brahma Sūtra*¹, and the celebrated commentaries on the text. But the story is not that simple. Are the *Vedas Vedānta*? *Veda*, *Vedānta* and *Vedānga* are mentioned as distinct subjects of study or *Vidyāsthāna*. The thinkers whose ideas we have decided to discuss in the present context, none except Rammohun Roy and Radhakrishnan have directly dwelt upon the *Brahma Sūtra* as a text of inquiry. Rammohun published *Vedānta Grantha*, a commentary on *Vedānta Sūtra* as early as 1815, and an abridged and easier version called *Vedānta Sāra* in the same year. And Radhakrishnan's the *Brahma Sūtra* subtitled "The Philosophy of Spiritual Life", a translation of Vyāsa's *Sūtras*, with an introduction and notes, came out in 1960. It may be recalled that *Brahma Sūtra* of Vyāsa is the *locus classicus* of Vedānta literature, and any Vedantic line of thought centres around commentarial work on the text besides the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad*

Gītā. The three texts provide the three *prasthānas* of Vedantic ideology and thinking.

However, the *sine qua non* of Vedantic thought is *Brahmajīgñāsā*, and it is with the aphorism *athato brahmajīgñāsā* that the *Brahma Sūtra* opens. There is the well-known distinction between the *Jñāna* and the *Karma Kāndas* or divisions of the *Vedas*. To the *Karma Kānda* belong the famous hymns and the rituals of *Brāhmanas*. Those books which treat of spiritual matters apart from ceremonials are called *Upaniṣads*. These belong to the *jñānakānda* or the treatises dealing with knowledge *per excellence*. It is not that all the *Upaniṣads* were composed as a separate portion of the *Vedas*. Some are interspersed among the rituals, and at least one is in the *Samhitā* or the portion comprising hymns. Sometimes the term 'Upanisad' is applied to books which are not included in the *Vedas*, e.g., the *Gītā*; but as a rule it is applied to the philosophical treatises scattered through the *Vedas*. These are called the *Vedānta*. The term *S'ruti*, meaning 'that which has been heard', though including the whole of the Vedic literature, is chiefly applied by the commentators to the *Upaniṣads*.

The *Upaniṣads* are said to be one hundred and eight in number, but those commented upon by Samkara are regarded as authoritative. Rammohun translated the *Īs'a*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Māndukya* and *Mudaka Upaniṣads* based upon Samkara's commentaries. Among the thinkers under our discussion Sri Aurobindo translated quite a number of *Upaniṣads* along with his commentary; and Radhakrishnan translated ten principal

Upaniṣads with introduction and notes. His interpretation is inclined towards Samkara's commentary, while taking care of what other commentators have had to say on the issue. Sri Aurobindo's commentaries are marked by his own philosophical intuitions and the discovery of the "real" or "original" Vedānta as distinguished from what Samkara had identified and elaborated as Vedānta. There is another notable feature of our thinkers' response and espousal of Vedānta. They are arguably free from the schoolmen's controversy between the *Avacchedavāda* and *Prativimbavāda* theses on the *ābhāsa eva ca* (II. 3.50) of the *Brahma Sūtra*. It should be noted that Rammohun published the *Vajrasūchi* along with the Bengali translation which is a Mahāyāna Buddhist work. Of all the *Upaniṣads*, the *Māndukya* occupies a unique place, because Samkara commenting on the *Māndukya - Kārikā* gives its author *Gaudapāda* the credit for developing the true meaning of *Māndukya Upaniṣad*. *Gaudapāda* holds that all appearances (dharma) are like the vacuous sky, *gaganopama*. There is no such thing as coming into being. This is *ajātivāda*. Duality is a distinction imposed on the non-dual (advaita) reality by *māyā*. The real does not suffer any change. Whatever has a beginning and an end is unreal. Causality is a false idea. When the notion ceases there is no *samsāra*. All things are produced from a relative point of view. They are produced only apparently, not in reality. Dependent existence is not real existence. All this is starkly Mahāyāna dialectic made familiar by Nagarjuna.



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Swami Vivekananda is usually taken to have broadcast the message of Vedānta across the world. He did not write any tract on Vedānta in the manner of *bhāṣya* or *tīkā*. He spoke and wrote on the essentials of Vedānta, taking up key-concepts and explaining them in as much modern terms as possible. In what does the essentials of Vedānta consist? In the lectures developed before the Graduate Philosophical Society of Harvard University on March 25, 1896, he said that Vedānta in its *advaita* form is a reductionist thesis, it *generalises* “the whole universe into one”. Advaita Vedānta then is a unity view of Existence; the whole universe is one. It is one Being manifesting itself in myriad forms².

In 1896 Sister Nivedita heard Vivekananda’s lectures on *Māyā*, which as she repeats, Vivekananda considered his greatest achievement. Obviously Nivedita refers to Vivekananda’s lectures compiled in *Jñāna Yoga*, and she notes that, “Throughout the chapters in question we feel that we are in presence of a *struggle* to express an idea which is clearly apprehended in a language which is not a fit vehicle for it”³. But even a casual reader of Vivekananda would notice that he was less interested in conceptual exegesis, and always inclined towards founding ethics on the ontology of one all-pervading *ātman*, and giving a practical turn to Vedānta. For this purpose he looked back to the *Upanisads*. The deeply arousing words of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* : *uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpyā varān nibodhatah* never failed for him in appeal. He found a “man-making”

message in it. For Vivekananda, the *Upaniṣads* makes lion of a coward, and the central message was fearlessness : *abhi*. The different schools of Vedānta such as the uncompromising monism of Samkara, the qualified non-dualism of Rāmānuja etc. were not antagonistic, rather denoted various stages of achievement, the highest of course is the *advaita*. Theoretical debate was not of any interest to him. His concern and interest lay in putting the message of unity to be realised on the plane of practice, and thereby bringing about a new order of society and a plan of life. Vedānta was significant for Vivekananda in view of pointing towards (a) the potential divinity of man; (b) possibility of universal brotherhood of mankind based upon the divine unity of one *ātman* in all; and (c) working out an ethics of love and service as a form of religion. In all this the *Upaniṣad* was his basic text of Vedānta .

In founding ethics on the divine unity Vivekananda had given a lead to Radhakrishnan, who began his philosophical career by writing on the possibility of ethics in Vedānta . The possibility of ethics in Vedānta is denied by the Christian critics, who bring in the charge of “other-worldliness” to the Vedantic point of view. Radhakrishnan outlines the history of Indian philosophy which to him culminates in the philosophy of Samkara. Samkara’s system is to him a combination of religion, metaphysics and ethics. Vedānta ethics does not mean a passionless life but one in which passion is transcended. The individual has to develop a character out of the lines laid down by his nature and ordained by

circumstances. To realise the oneness of the self with the Absolute is the goal of Vedanta ethics. Radhakrishnan's early work, *The Ethics of Vedanta and Its Metaphysical Presuppositions* (1908) had set his trend of thinking in later years to follow. To Radhakrishnan the Vedānta stands for practical mysticism, 'a synthetic idealism' which, while not avoiding the temporal and the finite, still has a hold on the Eternal Spirit. In *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* (1920)⁴ Radhakrishnan has examined current schools of Western thought and found them inferior to the *Upaniṣads*. True philosophy, he argued, would result in true religion and to him this was the Vedanta. This was the only philosophical religion which could be justified by logical seriousness and not just by soft thinking, emotional fervour or moral earnestness. It was justified by reason and supported by philosophy. The religion of spirit alone has a base in logic.

Vedānta is *Brahma jijñāsā*. The *Brahma Sūtra* begins with the *Sūtra* (1.1.1) *athāto brahma jijñāsā*, and closes with the *sūtra anāvṛttih s'abdāt* (IV. 4. 22). The *Brahma Mīmāṃsā*⁵ is regarded by Samkara, Ānandatīrtha (Madhva), Vallabha and Vijñānabhikṣu as distinct from and independent of the *Karma Mīmāṃsā*, or *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* of Jaimini. The word *atha* has been interpreted differently. Some have taken it to mean or indicate the beginning of the subject. Others have taken the particle to signify the auspicious. Samkara considers that *atha* means 'after acquiring the former *sādhana*s or requisites which are indispensable for beginning the study.' According to the schools of S'rikantha, Bhāskara and Rāmānuja, the

two *mīmāṃsās* are one. The *Uttara Mīmāṃsā* must be considered to be only a continuation of the *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā*, and so the word *atha* implies the antecedent inquiry into *Karma*. The point of difference is that the *jñāna – Karma -Samuccaya-Vāda* (the doctrine of synthesis, of *jñāna* and *Karma*), adopted by Bhāskara is not followed by S'rikantha and Rāmānuja, who are of the opinion that *Karma* has an instrumental value in the inquiry into *Brahman* as generating knowledge. Samkara also recognizes the instrumental significance of *Karma*. But he considers that it is not an invariable rule that the inquiry into *Karma* should precede the inquiry into *Brahman* in the present life.

The subject to be inquired into is held to be the same for all the schools. It is *Brahman*, though conceived under different names and forms. All, except Samkara, hold that the egoity of the pure individual self, *S'uddhapratyagatmān* remains and persists even in the state of *mokṣa*. They hold that liberation does not mean the destruction of this egoity. Samkara, however, insists that 'I' does not mean the real self, but the self mixed with the non-self. The individual self is beyond the three states of waking, dream, and sleep, and is absolute consciousness which is also the nature of *Brahman*. Hence *Jiva* is really one with *Brahman*. Samkara, further holds that egoity is destroyed in the state of *mokṣa*, but the self survives. Philosophers other than Samkara think that none will desire *mokṣa*, if in that state the ego becomes non-existent. But according to Samkara, what is destroyed is not the essence of the ego which is the self, but the ego-

consciousness as something distinct from *Brahman*. While others believe that the realization of the truth of the *mahāvākya* 'aham brahmāsmi' will have no meaning if 'I' does not persist as such, in *moksa*. Samkara holds that *aham* here refers, not to the 'I' persisting in its distinction from *Brahman* in the state of *moksa*, but to what was distinct from *Brahman* prior to realization. In this view, the ego-sense is a bondage, which one should struggle to break.

The knowledge connoted by *jijñāsā*, according to Samkara, includes and extends upto realisation, i.e., the direct experience of *Brahman*, which is the fruit of the inquiry. Others hold that the knowledge in question is the same as that denoted by words such as meditation etc., or in other words, the knowledge is equivalent to a vision and is of the nature of devotion. Samkara holds that the word *draṣṭavya* (to be seen) in the *S'ruti* denotes the result, while other systems hold that it is indicative of *dhyāna*. But all the commentators agree that *ātma vā are draṣṭavyah* and *tad vijijñāsasva tad brahma* are equivalent texts and constitute the subject of the *jijñāsā*.

All the systems hold that the *sūtra* (1. 1. 2) '*Janmādyasya yatah*' defines *Brahman*. *Prakṛti* of Sāṃkhya cannot be the efficient cause of the universe and does not constitute the purport of Vedānta. Hence all hold that the *sūtra* rejects the theistic (*Hiraṇyagarbha*) and atheistic views. Vijñānabhikṣu and Anandatirtha take the *sutra* to mean that *Brahman* is merely the efficient cause of the universe, while the other commentators

hold that *Brahman* is both the material (*upādāna*) and the efficient (*nimitta*) cause.

In order to explain the origin of the universe the concept of *Saguṇa brahman* is involved and it is stated that the creative energies of *Saguṇa brahman* is an adjunct of the *nirguṇa brahman*. The Vivarana school holds that both *Brahman* and *Prakṛti* are material causes, though the former is the *vivartopādāna* (i.e., material of apparent or illusory transformation) while the latter is *parināmopādāna* (material of real transformation). *Prakṛti* is transformed as cosmos, and *Brahman* only apparently manifests Itself as the cosmos. But Vacaspati Misra (*Bhāmati*) thinks that *Brahman* is *upādānakāraṇa* (*vivartopādāna*), *Prakṛti* being only the *nimittakāraṇa*. In this view there is no *parināma* or transformation, but only a *vivarta* of *Brahman* or appearance brought about by *avidya*. Rāmānuja refers to this view in his commentary on the *sūtra* 1. 4. 23. But Saṅkara is of the opinion that *Brahman* is the direct material cause and appears to transform Itself because the cosmos is superimposed on *Brahman*. He also holds the view that the cosmos cannot exist apart from and without *Brahman*. In his system, therefore, *Brahman* alone is real, and the cosmos is an appearance of *Brahman* as Its affect. In the phenomenal stage, *Brahman* appears as appearances : but upon the dawn of realization the appearances disappear in *Brahman*, and *abheda* (distinctionlessness) of *Brahman* means the unreality or non-existence of an *other*.

In all the schools, the *Śāstra* is accepted as the final authority. And recent Indian thinkers too are no exception to that. The *sūtra Śāstrayonitvāt* (1. 1. 3) states that the *Śāstra* is the means of right knowledge. Some commentators regard this *sūtra* as the concluding part of the earlier one. Vallabha adopts the view that the *sūtras* up to 1. 1. 4, that is, '*Tat tu Samanvayāt*' constitute three *sūtras*. Others hold that there are four *sūtras*. These *sūtras* are regarded by all schools as summing up the whole essence of the *Brahma mīmāṃsā*.

According to Anandatirtha, the word *Śāstra* means the *Vedas*; and the *Pancarātra* and the other *Āgama Śāstras* have no authority. Rāmānuja also agrees with this view. Vallabha holds that the *Vedas*, the *Bhāgavata* and the *Gītā* alone possess primary authority. Almost all commentators are unanimous in the view that the meaning of the *samanvaya sūtra* is that *Brahman* is the main purport of all Vedantic texts. Vallabha alone considers the meaning of this *sūtra* to be that *Brahman* is the cause on account of Its all-pervasive nature.

The first chapter of the *Brahma Sūtra* is known as the *Samanvaya* chapter, all it deals with the inquiry into Brahman as that to be known or meditated upon, as also with the refutation of the Sāṃkhya view of *Prakṛti* being the sole cause.

Non-difference between cause and effect is the main thesis of Vedānta. In the theory of Bhāskara and Vallabha the effect is a

transformation of *Brahman* itself. S'rikantha and Ramanuja consider that it is the transformation of the body of *Brahman*. Vijñānabhikṣu says that *Prakṛti* as located in *Brahman* is transformed. The theory of cause varies in the two wings of Advaita. One is identical with that of Vijñānabhikṣu in holding that *Prakṛti* is located in *Brahman*, and it is that which undergoes transformation and becomes the *upādāna Kāraṇa*. The followers of Vacaspati Misra and others regard *Īś'vara* as only a *nimittakāraṇa* and not as the *upādāna Kāraṇa*. However, all the schools affirm that the ultimate cause, *Īś'vara* or *Brahman*, however called, is the controller (*niyāmaka*) of the effect.

The Advaita is distinguished from other systems in holding that *Brahman* without attributes is the supreme Reality and is non-different from the individual soul. All other systems have it that *Brahman* with attributes is the supreme Reality and is different from the *Jīva*. According to the Dvaita system, *Brahman* being merely the efficient cause, the *Jīva* is totally different from *Brahman* and *jīvas* are themselves different from one another. S'rikantha holds that though *jīvas* are different from one another, they form the body of, and are inseparable from, *Brahman*. According to *Bhāskara* and Vallabha, the *Jīva* and *Brahman* are one and at the same time different and non-different from each other, while according to the Advaita, they are completely one as absolute consciousness, apparent difference in the phenomenal order being due to superimposition.

According to dualism, the knowledge that is conducive to *moksa* is the knowledge of the five fold difference, namely, the difference between (1) one *jīva* and another, (2) *jīva* and *Brahman*, (3) one insentient and another, (4) insentients and *jīva*s, and (5) insentients and *Brahman*. The *jīva*, atomic in size and dependent on God for his action, is essentially knowledge and the substratum of knowledge. Though all *jīva*s are similar in the state of liberation (*mukti*), in respect of their relation to the supreme Self, there is inequality in bliss amongst them. The *avatāras* are parts of the essential nature of *Brahman*.

All schools accept *Māyā vā da* in one form or another. According to Samkara, *Māyā*, which is alled *Prakṛti*, possesses the two fold power of concealing *Brahman* (*āvaranas'akti*) and manifesting the universe as *Prakṛti* (*vikṣepas'akti*). Others deny the *āvaranas'akti* of *Māyā* and assert that it has only the *vikṣepas'akti*. The theory of the unreality of the world, seen in the Advaita, is a logical consequence of attributing the *āvarana s'akti* of *Māyā*, by which the *prapañca* (phenomenal order) is to be traced to superimposition on *Brahman* caused by the *Māyā*. Upon the dawn of the knowledge of reality (*tattva jñāna*) *ajñāna* disappears, and with it the *āvarana* and *vikṣepa s'akti*s of *Māyā*, together with phenomenal appearance, disappear; and *Brahman* alone remains as the sole reality. But for others who maintain that *Māyā* has *vikṣepa s'akti* only, *Prakṛti* will abide even at the end and so will not disappear even when *tattvajñāna* arises.

In systems like Viśiṣṭadvaita, the views are very similar to dualism. But there is a peculiarity. Viśiṣṭadvaita does not accept the difference between *jīva* and *Brahman*, and the insentient and *Brahman*; for being inseparable, they are non-different. Hence only three differences are admitted : (a) amongst *jīvas* themselves ; (b) amongst insentients themselves, and (c) between *jīvas* and insentients. They are all real. Advaita also speaks of the three kinds of difference, but they are not real, they are only empirical, *vyāvahārika*. The reference to *bheda* in the *sūtras* in different contexts is, according to Samkara, to be understood in the empirical sense only, when the *jīva* is associated with the sense of egoity. But, according to others, it is ultimate and ultimately true. The five fold difference of the dualists is not accepted by the Viśiṣṭadvaitins. In the state of liberation there is merging in *Brahman*. There is neither inequality in bliss nor complete identity with *Brahman*, as is maintained by pure non-dualism. There is another difference too, namely that they admit *Brahman* to be the material cause, directly or indirectly.

In all systems, except Advaita and Dvaita, knowledge is an essential attribute of the self, being its inseparable concomitant, *apṛthak – siddhi – vis'eṣaṇam*. And it is eternal, it only contracts or expands.

In dealing with *sādhana*, the views of allied systems are similar. The commentators all agree in holding that the ascent and descent of the *Jīva* is considered to sub-serve the practice of the *vairāgya* or non-attachment.

We have outlined the basic tenets of Vedānta in the light of the *catuhsūtri*, the first four *sūtra*s of the *Brahma Sūtra*, noting in the context the similarities and differences amongst the commentators, and thereby attempted to bring out for appreciating the rich and variegated aspects of the philosophical outlook.

It will have been seen that Vedānta is knowledge that has for its aim the solution of the mystery of all existence. What the Vedantic does is to make a systematic inquiry possible. Vedānta attempts to sum up the whole human knowledge. It considers every kind of human knowledge. It considers every kind of human experience to be a step on the ladder. At one stage it is religion, at another it is mysticism. It recognizes even atheism or agnosticism as a step. The end or goal of Vedānta is thus described. It is that which being known, everything becomes known and which being attained nothing else remains to be attained. *Mokṣa* is thus regarded as the highest *puruṣārtha*.

Vedānta studies all experience by first analysing it into two factors, the knowing agency (*Kṣetrajñā*) and the known or knowable field (*kṣetra*). Vedānta recognises two classes of objects, mental and physical, i.e., internal and external. The witness (knower) is separated from what is witnessed (known), i.e., the entire phenomena of the physical and mental worlds. The two factors belong to distinct categories. The seen or known is inconstant, whereas the witness only sees the changes and is as such constant.

What do we mean by saying that Vedānta studies the whole of life or experience? This is the central issue with Vedānta. Philosophy in the West is primarily based upon the data of the waking state, in other words, of a fraction of experience. Vedānta takes all the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep, or the whole of experience into consideration. Vedānta does not take the waking data as the standard of reality, and nor does it with this standard evaluate the experience of dream and deep sleep. Vedānta places all the three states on the same level and inquires into their worth as reality. The study of the three states leads the Vedantin first to the fact that the entire world of the waking state is as much a creation of the mind as the world of dreams. And as both the worlds disappear in deep sleep into the mind, the entire objective world of waking and dream states is technically “unreal”. They *appear* to be real for the time being. Vedānta is neither realism nor idealism in the Western senses of the terms. It is the philosophy of *Ātmā* as the substance in itself is concerned. Shall we call it *ātmāism*? The whole world of mental creation emanates from and returns to the mind. The knowledge that everything is *Ātman* cannot be attained unless one rises above the mere thought and concept of *Ātman*, and lives or has one’s being identified with everything, the All.

While explaining the whole of life or experiences in its entirety, Vedānta at the same time helps the realization of universal good in actual life. These are not two separate questions, but are the obverse and the converse, so to say, of the same issue. Generally people tend to view the

highest good as the supreme bliss taking the individual standpoint. This is religion or mysticism. As religion Vedānta starts with the welfare of the individual, yet it does not stop till the whole of mankind, nay, the whole world of life, is embraced in its conception of the highest good. Man's good and the good of other creatures are interdependent. The good of even the plant world involves the good of man. Man, said Tagore, is the centre of a circle whose circumference is ever expanding. Or when he says : "To live the life of goodness is to live the life of all".⁶ Tagore is putting forth the Vedantic point of view. Individuality cannot be defined as a permanent feature. Whatever exists permanently is the universal. Individuality is a notion, which when inquired into, lands us in the universal, the all. The firm conviction that the One is the all, attained by constant and deep inquiry into the meaning of life in all its aspects, is the goal of Vedānta. This attainment is impossible unless one constantly looks into one's own life and actually sees in it the All.

We may now round-off our discussion concerning the aspects of Vedānta under two heads : first, by making some remarks about the Vedānta ontology of subjectivity, and then by offering some points on the issues of ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics and mysticism.

A. Since the three states exhaust all life and experience, reality is that which invariably accompanies the states and persists in the midst of and in spite of the varying contexts. It is thus seen to be pure consciousness which pervades all life, whose nature is such as to make even an idea of its

non-existence unthinkable. In defining reality as that whose non-existence cannot be conceived or imagined, Samkara identifies it with pure consciousness or witness, not subject to change. For the witness of change cannot change. Pure consciousness is not merely reality, but the All. Its remaining single and secondless in sleep, its indivisibility, and its ubiquity through the passing show of life implies that it is the radical principle on which hang the wholes, waking and dreaming. It includes its manifestations, it is all-inclusive. This knowledge of the eternal subject is the truest, the highest that we can or need possess. Truth and knowledge, said Bradley rightly, merge in reality.

In studying the inner life, we rise above its manifestations, and get at the very root from which the ego and the non-ego of the states branch out. Reality does not develop by a process in time into waking and dreaming, but seems directly to manifest itself as the latter. There are no intermediate stages. Reality does not bring into being what was *non est*, but apparently becomes its own 'other', for even while appearing as the objective world, it remains an undiminished whole. Vedantic analysis discloses reality no less than our identity with it. It is our self that coordinates the states. Placed beyond time and generating the time flow of each state, it is immortal, and by immediate experience we know it to be perfect bliss. This is the highest being which the *Upaniṣads* call *Brahman*.

This reality as the eternal witness cannot be treated as an object, and number and quality which apply to objects cannot be predicated of it.

Being an immediacy, it allows of no doubt, hypothesis or predication concerning its nature. It is not transcendent but transcendental.

The question how the world arose is not admissible. Causality works only in time, and the waking world must find its cause in waking which circumscribes the sphere of causation. Neither can we ask 'why we wake and dream', for we intuit states ; and those intuitions, being the *prius* of our mental and bodily activities, are primary and so beyond the pale of time and causation. Waking limits the sphere of causation. Pure consciousness being the all, waking and dreaming can only be its expressions, no less than the worlds which they bring into view. Their fugitiveness and contingency mark them as realities of the second or subordinate degree.

Is the Reality concrete or abstract? If it is abstract or empty of all contents, it cannot give rise to the states or to their worlds. On the contrary, if it is concrete, it already contains in solution all the elements that afterwards crystallize into creation, in which case the unity is not an undiluted absolute, but a real complexity in a subtle condition, and non-dualism is a mere web of fancy, and so also are the various degrees of reality. A Hegel would have brought such a charge against Vedānta from a misconception. The pure consciousness of Vedānta is neither an idea nor an object. It is the witness, *sākṣicaitanya*, which converts everything else into an object, and is known to us more immediately as our self than any object can possibly be. It cannot be classed in any of the categories of thought as

these are products of thought, and no category can precede consciousness which it presupposes. So the dilemma whether pure consciousness is an abstract or concrete idea is meaningless. Pure consciousness is more real than any other, because it is our own self whose reality is primary datum with us, a truth we start from, before we ascertain the reality of other things. To question its reality is to question whether we live. Vedānta does not trace the world to the Absolute either directly or indirectly. Its truth is based on facts of experience. In deep sleep we find pure consciousness without a second, and in waking and dreaming the worlds unroll themselves before us, in addition to pure consciousness. Since this view exhausts all reality, the second element in the states, i.e., the world, is but the original pure consciousness appearing without loss of integrity as the object itself. As there is no change in it, the second element appearing as an alien must root non-real. It is not alien. Vedānta does not derive waking or dreaming from sleep. All three are independent of one another, and the temporal relation of posterior or anterior is the creation of our own time-ridden mind. There is no time to connect them. Only a comparative survey of states enables us to assess their metaphysical value.

To reinforce the thesis of Vedānta a further consideration may be offered: (a) we cannot conceive two 'I's, two subjects or two consciousnesses, unless these are turned into objects. This radical fact no pluralism can explain. Again, why we believe even illusions to be real at the time they occur baffles all psychology. Perhaps since we are real ourselves

we can never experience unreality, neither perceive nor conceive it. We transfer in every instance our reality to the object of knowledge. Both the 'I' and the world bear on them the sure proofs of their origin in pure consciousness. The 'I' cannot be pluralized and the world is out there only for a cognising consciousness. This concomitance of the world with consciousness must point to a common source of both in which they have their kinship.

B. Ethics is the eldest born of Vedānta. The ends of morality are ensured by the recognition of the same self in others. We have earlier noted Vivekananda's enthusiastically taking up the issue that Vedānta is the greatest support to morality. It fixes the standard of right and wrong and explains the context embedded in us in the form of categorical imperative. Even Gandhi had appealed to a sort of *advaita* as the basis of his non-violence.

C. The sense of the beautiful is due to a temporary suspension of ego-sense or individuality and objectivity and an unconscious realisation of oneness. The aesthetic philosophy of *rasavāda* as propounded by Anandabardhana and Abhinavagupta presupposes a universal self beyond all particularisation. Aesthetic communication would be impossible in terms of a pluralistic framework. Culture, training, and personal taste could only be contributory factors. But the effect, namely annihilation of 'otherness' would be impossible if the 'other' were absolutely real. The aesthetic

delight is a metaphysical experience, bringing to light the essentially blissful nature of spirit. For beauty is externalised bliss.

Now a word or two about *māyā* and *avidyā*. In no strict system of truth *māyā* and *avidyā* can have any room. *Māyā* is the power with which *Brahman* is regarded as invested in order to account for the phenomenal life. The term is also used to indicate the phenomena. In truth, Brahman neither creates nor destroys. It is above change and time and is beauty itself. The *Bhagavad Gītā* refers to the transcendental, and the empirical views, the absolute and the relative phases of the same reality. “Without any of the sense, shining with all sense faculties; unattached, supporting everything; and free from qualities, enjoying them”⁷.

The question of a cause never arises with regard to *māyā* or *avidyā*. *Māyā* is a theoretical concession for those who crave for an explanation of the world, and *avidyā* in all cases is to be traced to the absence of inquiry. *Avidyā* is ignorance of all the truth.

In contemplating life we seem to be spectators of a strange drama, a play of shadows in the shape of the states enacted before us. The actors and the scenes are ourselves transmuted, without the least loss of our integrity. When we remember that it is but shadow and that reality can cast no shadow, the play deceives us no more, and the states rolling and unrolling themselves before us fool us no longer. This is the catharsis that Vedānta, properly apprehended, is capable of bringing about.