

## **Vedanta Philosophy**

What is Vedanta?

- Vedanta is a philosophy taught by the Vedas, the most ancient scriptures of India.
- Its basic teaching is that our real nature is divine. God, or Brahman as it is called, exists in every living being.
- Religion is a search for self-knowledge, a search for the divine within ourselves.
- Vedanta acknowledges that there are many different approaches to God, and all are valid. Any kind of spiritual practice will lead to the same state of self-realization.
- Vedanta teaches respect for all religions

Main Principles of Vedanta

- God is absolute and indivisible.
- Human destiny is governed by the law of cause and effect – analogy: Milk and curd.
- We are born on earth repeatedly to finish the unfinished work of realizing our divinity-Moksha
- There are many ways to achieve union with God, through the intellect, emotions, actions, and the will. A specific path or a combination should be followed to realize the aim and objectives of life.

Yogas

- Vedanta stresses the idea of self effort.
- Every individual can realize God within them by the practice of certain methods, called Yogas
- We should channel the tendencies we already possess and lead us to God.
- There are four yogas
  - BhaktiYoga  
Cultivation of a devotional relationship with God through prayer, ritual and worship to search for God within.
  - JnanaYoga  
Approach to God through discrimination and reason. We can get rid of miseries in life by seeing God everywhere.

– KarmaYoga

The path to God is through selfless service to others i.e. worship God within each person.

– RajaYoga

The yoga of meditation. The emphasis here is on attuning the mind to God and truth through concentration and meditation.

### Advaita

- Means non-dualism i.e Brahman and Atman are not separate they are one
- The proponent of this philosophy was Adi Shankaracharya in the 8<sup>th</sup> century
- The philosophy is derived from the vedas, upanishads and Bhagwad Gita
- The Universe is full of illusion or Maya and we are all bound by Maya-snake and rope
- *Jnana* (knowledge) of man's true nature is liberation. Bondage arises from ignorance (*avidya*) of man's true nature, and therefore removal of ignorance roots out this bondage.
- Liberation is man knowing his true nature or man knowing that Atman and Brahman are same.
- Mere bookish knowledge is not enough, the realization has to come through his own experience

### Vishisht Advaita

- Means Advaita with unique qualifications
- Believes that there is only one Supreme God-Vishnu. This belief is called monism.
- Soul and Universe are a part of God and the three together form one inseparable unit-similar to non-dualism or Advaita
- The proponent of this philosophy was Ramanuj in the 11<sup>th</sup> century
- The philosophy is derived from the vedas, upanishads and Bhagwad Gita
- Also believes in liberation through one's Karmas (actions) in accordance with the Vedas, the Varna (caste or class) system and the four Ashramas (stages of life), along with intense devotion to Vishnu.
- Individual Souls retain their separate identities even after moksha. They live in Fellowship with God either serving Him or meditating on Him.

### Dvaita

- Means dualism- God and Soul are different from each other
- Believes that there is only one Supreme God-Vishnu.
- The proponent of this philosophy was Madhavacharya in the 13<sup>th</sup> century
- The philosophy is derived from the vedas, upanishads and Bhagwad Gita
- Acknowledges five differences:
  - Between God and Soul
  - Between two Souls
  - Between God and Matter
  - Between Soul and Matter
  - Between Matter
- Souls are divided into three classes, one class which qualify for liberation, Mukti-yogyas, another subject to eternal rebirth or eternally transmigrating due to samsara, Nitya-samsarins, and significantly, a class that is eventually condemned to eternal hell or Andhatamas, known as Tamo-yogyas.
- We can attain Moksha through Bhakti or selfless devotion to God and by grace of God