10 Hindu theology and philosophy

From the earliest times, alongside systems of ritual and soteriologies using yoga and meditation, elaborate and often highly sophisticated doctrinal schemes and metaphysical speculation developed within Hinduism. The term 'philosophy' has often been used to describe these systems. While there are undoubted similarities between traditional Hindu thinking and modern western philosophy, what traditional Hindu thinkers do would only be partially recognized in contemporary departments of philosophy in western universities. Alternatively, while the term 'theology' conveys not only the systematic and transcendent aspects of Hindu thought, but also emphasizes its exegetical nature, some schools are atheistic and not concerned with a 'theos'. Both terms will be used in the following exposition as appropriate. The Sanskrit terms generally translated as 'philosophy' or 'theology' are *darśana*, a system of thought expressed through a tradition of commentaries upon fundamental texts, and *ānvīkṣikī*, analysis or 'investigative science' within the field of vedic knowledge, particularly used with reference to logic (*nyāya*).[1] The term *darśana*, derived from a verb root *dṛś*, 'to see', has the implication of 'view' or even 'vision' of the world and is used not only to refer to orthodox (*āstika*) systems of Hindu belief, systems acknowledging the Veda as revelation, but also to the heterodox (*nāstika*) views of Jainism, Buddhism and Materialism (Lokāyata). The term *darśana* is also used in a quite different sense to refer to the religious act of gazing upon a temple icon or a living saint.

The orthodox *darśanas* have codified their teachings into aphorisms called *sūtras* ('threads') which are often too condensed to be understood

without the use of a commentary (*bhāṣya*). These commentaries form the exegetical expression of the tradition and in turn have sub-commentaries and glosses written on them. It is in the commentarial literature that refined debates and technical refutations of rival schools are to be found. These debates have often been sharp and intellectually rigorous and resist some modern Hindu attempts to collapse the real differences between the various *darśanas*, or to see them as complementary aspects of a single system. General features of orthodox Hindu *darśanas* can be summarized as follows. They:

- assume the revelation of the Veda;
- claim to have liberation (*mokṣa*) as their purpose;
- are exegetical in nature, being expressed primarily through commentaries and sub-commentaries on revelation (the Upaniṣads) and on primary texts called Sūtras, which form the scriptural source of philosophical/theological schools;
- assume a transcendent reality beyond the contingencies of the human condition;
- offer systematic explanations and interpretations;
- are concerned with ideas about the structure of the body, the nature of matter and the functioning of consciousness.

These general features can be seen in relation to the central questions and concerns of Hindu thought, particularly ontology or the nature of being, and epistemology, the theory of knowledge. Questions of ontology have been intimately connected with the philosophy or theology of language, particularly the relation between language, consciousness and being, while epistemological questions have been concerned with valid means of cognition and methods of logic and inference. In debating these issues the *darśanas* develop a common terminology, particularly regarding the six means or methods of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*): namely perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), verbal authority (*śabda*), analogy (*upamāna*), presumption (*arthāpatti*), and non-apprehension (*abhāva*). The different *darśanas* accepted all or some of these means of knowledge.

While the flowering of Hindu philosophy and theology occurs between the seventh and seventeenth centuries CE, the origins of philosophical speculation go back to the Veda. Following Frauwallner and Halbfass, the history of Indian philosophy can be broken down into the following broad periods:

- presystematic thought in the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Epics and early Buddhist texts;
- the classical systems of speculation in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism;
- the theologies of the theistic schools of the Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas, which become important during the second millennium CE;
- modern Indian philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which responds to western philosophy.[2]

Early, presystematic speculation

One of the earliest texts which demonstrates a sense of metaphysical speculation is a hymn in the *Ṛg Veda* which asks a series of questions about the origin of things, particularly about whether in the beginning there was existence (*sat*) or non-existence (*asat*). Although the terms *sat* and *asat* may not have had a technical, philosophical meaning in these early texts, the hymn displays a remarkable sense of wonder and intellectual sophistication in considering a state prior to existence or non-existence and beyond death or immortality. The text concludes with some irony: 'Whence this creation has arisen – perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not – the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows – or perhaps he does not know.'[3] More systematic speculation begins with the Upaniṣads. Of particular note is chapter 6 of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* in which the teacher Uddālaka Āruṇi, one of the earliest theologians, instructs his son who has returned home, conceited, after studying the Veda for twelve years. Uddālaka tells him that existence (*sat*) is identified with *brahman* as the foundation of the cosmos and the essence of all beings.[4]

Of particular importance are vedic speculations about the nature of language, which prefigure a theme and school of thought which develops at a later period. The *Ṛg Veda* contains hymns to the power of speech (*vāc*) which is treated as a goddess who makes men wise.[5] Through speech, which is the prime medium of the vedic seers, truth is revealed and the truth of speech is a power. In the Upaniṣads speech is identified with the absolute *brahman* from which appearances, names and their forms, are manifested. The relation between the unmanifest *brahman* and the world of multiplicity is through the cosmic sound of the mantra *aum*.[6] The text says that as all leaves are held together by a stalk, so all sound is held together by *aum*.[7]

Language and Hindu theology

Any understanding of Hindu theology has to begin with language and communication. Revelation is a communication to humanity through the seers, expressed in language, specifically the 'perfected' language of Sanskrit. The injunctions of the Veda are in language, and the theological commentarial traditions are expressed through language. Language, for the vedic Hindu, inspires, clarifies, and reveals truth and meaning and so is the starting point of theological investigation (*brahmajijñāsā*). Language is a fundamental concern of Hindu theology and assumes and uses a long tradition of linguistic analysis. This tradition can be traced back to the 'limbs of the Veda' or Vedāṅgas, the auxiliary sciences in which Brahmans would be trained, which ensure the correct transmission of the Veda through time and the correct performance of rituals. Of the six Vedāṅgas (listed on p. 53), grammar (*vyākaraṇa*) and etymology (*nirukta*) are directly concerned with language as an abstract system, while pronunciation (*śikṣā*) and prosody (*chandas*) are concerned with its expression. The science of grammar (*vyākaraṇa*) developed into an independent tradition, itself regarded as a *darśana*, and provided the inspiration and analytical precision for schools more directly concerned with theological topics.

THE GRAMMARIANS

A highly sophisticated science of language developed astonishingly early in India, from at least the fifth century BCE, and provided the inspiration for modern linguistics through the study of Sanskrit and the translation into European languages of some of its key texts during the nineteenth century.

The earliest Hindu linguist we have record of, Pāṇini (*c.* fifth century BCE), in his 'Eight Chapters' (*Aṣṭadhyāyi*) produced a descriptive analytical grammar of Sanskrit, covering the analysis of phonemes, suffixes, sentences, the rules of word combination (*sandhi*), and the formation of verbal roots. This work has yet to be surpassed and a deeper understanding of it has only occurred with the development of modern linguistics in the West. Although there is little of direct theological concern in the 4,000 Sūtras of the text, it is the standard reference work against which later language is measured and which is the reference point for later interpretations of the vedic texts. It also provides the basis for the grammatical school which did have theological, as well as more strictly philosophical, concerns.

LANGUAGE, CONSCIOUSNESS AND BEING

With Bhartṛhari (fifth century CE), the leading thinker of the Grammarian school, grammar is transformed in the service of theology. Bhartṛhari sees grammar as being fundamentally concerned with the nature of existence and, ultimately, about the quest for liberation. The analysis of language becomes not merely a task in itself, or a task to ensure the correct transmission of the Veda, but a path or door leading to liberation, a means of release from transmigration: the immortal *brahman* becomes known through the purification of the word which occurs through the study of grammar.[8] The study and use of 'correct' forms of language produce a force of success or fortune which moves the student away from impure (i.e. incorrect) speech tendencies, towards the pure goal of the vision of the absolute. Through language, and specifically through its precise and deep understanding, humans are saved.

This is to elevate language to a very high status indeed. Bhartṛhari identifies absolute reality with purified language and relates the impure world of human transaction to the pure, timeless absolute through the medium of language. Absolute being does not stand outside or beyond language, but its essence is language. Language is the link between being as timeless, unitary, impersonal stasis and being as contingent, time-bound and particularized experience. The term Bhartṛhari uses for the absolute identified with language is the 'sound absolute' or 'word absolute' (*śabdabrahman*), an ontology which cannot be apprehended due to ignorance (*avidyā*). Ignorance clouds our vision of the sound absolute, though this ignorance itself is a manifestation of that absolute, created by the power of time. From a pure, non-sequential, unmanifested state which Bhartṛhari calls 'the seeing' (*paśyantī*), the sound absolute manifests in a subtle mode in which the power of time begins to function, creating space, sequence, and apprehended by humans as thought. This mental level is the 'middle' realm (*madhyamā*), characterized by the powers of time (which is primary) and space. In the final phase of *vaikharī*, the sound absolute is fully extended and the power of time manifests diversity and causal relationships: time is the force which constrains all events in the universe and is expressed in the sequence of ordinary human language.[9] Language, in its manifested modes of mental (*madhyamā*) and gross (*vaikharī*) speech, is driven and differentiated by time, but its source is the timeless, transcendent and purified 'language' as pure being.

This tripartite division of language and existence is furthermore related by Bhartṛhari to the important 'disclosure theory' of meaning (*sphoṭa*). The level of *vaikharī vāc* is the level of the uttered sentence, which is understood in a flash of comprehension or intuition (*pratibhā*): meaning is apprehended as a sudden gestalt. This flash of understanding is the disclosure (*sphoṭa*) of the meaning of the sentence as a complete integral unit. Those ignorant of a particular language break a sentence up into words and phonemes, but for a native speaker understanding occurs in a direct unitary way, as a person perceives a painting as a whole and not as a collection of lines and colours.[10] *Sphoṭa* is the bursting forth of the meaning of a sentence, or book, or poem; a revelation, as it were, from a more subtle level which has its primary ground in the sound absolute. This absolute, knowledge of which is an 'intuition' (*pratibhā*), is the ultimate goal, as well as source, of language.

Theories about language are also theories about consciousness to which it is intimately connected. Various terms for consciousness – *cit*, *citta*, *caitanya*, *saṃvit* – are the focal point of a number of Indian philosophical and theological systems, most notably the consciousness-only (Vijñānavāda) school of Buddhism and the Recognition (Pratyabhijñā) school of Kashmir Śaivism. Yet the question of consciousness is present in all Indian philosophical systems to some degree, particularly its relation to language and its relation to being. Indeed many schools, notably Kashmir Śaivism and Advaita Vedānta, identify purified or absolute consciousness with being. This purified consciousness is sometimes thought to be beyond language, while everyday communicative language, which expresses desire, prevents consciousness from realizing its true ineffable nature. For the Grammarians language is the distinguishing feature of human consciousness which, at its deepest level, is identical with being. While not agreeing with the Grammarians, all schools of Indian thought respond in some way to the Grammarian school, participating in the debate about language, its relation to consciousness and being, and using a shared philosophical terminology.

The one and the many

Apart from a concern with language and its relation to being, Hindu theologies have been interested in the relation of 'the one' to 'the many'. That is, Hindu revelation and yogic experience refer to an absolute reality which is unitary and without second, yet experience of the world tells us

that existence is manifold and diverse. What is the relation between this unique one and the diversified many? Some Hindu theologies maintain that the relation is one of identity, the absolute is ultimately identical with the many and difference is merely illusory; some say that the relation is of difference and that the one and the many are quite ontologically distinct; while others maintain that both identity and difference are true of the relation between the one and the many.[11] Hindu theologies arrive at different positions with regard to this fundamental question.

The question of being is related to the epistemological question of causation. Hindu theories of causation can be broadly categorized into two. One theory, the *satkāryavāda* theory, maintains that the effect is pre-existent in the cause, as a pot (the effect) pre-exists in the clay (the material cause) – the other, the *asatkāryavāda* theory, that the effect does not pre-exist in the cause. The *satkāryavāda* theory can itself be divided into a theory which maintained that the effect is a real transformation (*pariṇāma*) of the cause, and a theory which maintains that the effect is not a transformation, but a mere appearance of the cause (*vivarta*) in a certain way, as a man sees silver coins in the sand but discovers that they are shells. That is, the shells are the cause of the effect (the perception of silver) but the effect is not a real transformation of substance. The Buddhists maintain that the effect is not pre-existent in the cause (and ultimately deconstruct the idea of causation), while the Sāṃkhya school holds that effects are real transformations of substance. The Advaita tradition rejects these views; for them there can only be an apparent transformation of substance, there being in reality only the single substance of *brahman*.

The commentarial tradition

The most notable feature of Indian theology and philosophy is that it is expressed primarily through commentaries and sub-commentaries on sacred texts. Although there are some independent philosophical texts – apart from the terse Sūtra literature which stands at the beginning of a commentarial tradition – the traditions are primarily exegetical. Sūtras are short condensed aphorisms which summarize the teachings of a school. Indeed, the aim of writing commentaries is to bring out the meaning of these aphorisms, to reveal what is already there in the earlier text, to illuminate its truth and not to say something new or original (though, of course, the commentaries inevitably do). A commentary (*bhāṣya*) is an explanation – often extensive – of the Sūtras, while there are also shorter

explanations or glosses (*vṛtti*) and further explanations of commentaries (*vārttika*). An author might also compose an auto-commentary on verses which he himself has composed. The commentaries reveal a vibrant and living tradition with creative reading and interpretation at its heart; commentaries are, in the words of Francis Clooney, 'not signs of decay or decline of the original genius of a tradition, its reduction to words, mere scholasticism; they are the blossoming and fruition of that original genius'.[12]

These intellectual traditions become codified, by the medieval period, into a standard list of six orthodox systems, the *ṣaddarśanas*, though there are important schools, notably the Jains and Buddhists, outside of this scheme. In his 'Compendium of All Philosophies', the *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha*, Mādhava (*c.* 1340 CE) does not refer to the term 'six *darśanas*' but discusses the ideas of sixteen philosophical schools, including the important theological schools of monistic, or Kashmir, and dualistic, or Siddhānta, Śaivism. It must be remembered that the system of the six *darśanas* is a codification and an attempt to make coherent, within the sphere of vedic orthodoxy, traditions of rigorous philosophical debate which have marked differences between them, yet which share a common terminology and a common commentarial style. While the authors within some of the schools share many views in common, it should not be taken for granted that all thinkers within a *darśana* share the same opinions. Indeed the school of Vedānta, for example, covers a wide range of divergent views, though by the late medieval period there is a tendency, within Vedānta, to synthesize views and integrate divergent opinions into a hierarchical scheme with Vedānta at the apex. The six orthodox systems are:

- Sāṃkhya, the 'enumeration' school which posited a dualism between matter (*prakṛti*) and the self (*puruṣa*), both of which are real, though ontologically distinct;
- Yoga, the school of Patañjali which assumes the metaphysics of Sāṃkhya;
- Mīmāṃsā, the tradition of vedic exegesis which assumes the reality of the many;
- Vedānta, the tradition which develops from the Upaniṣads and which argues for the reality of the one and, in one of its forms, denies the reality of the many;
- Nyāya, the school of logic;

– Vaiśeṣika, the atomist school, associated with Nyāya, which assumes the reality of the many; the constituents of existence do not arise from a shared source – rather, each phenomenon is distinct and separate.

These are often coupled together into three groups, namely Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, and Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta, for both historical and conceptual reasons: Sāṃkhya is the theoretical substrate of Classical Yoga; Vedānta is a continuation of Mīmāṃsā; and Nyāya, logic, is used in the metaphysical speculations of Vaiśeṣika. I will here describe the Sāṃkhya and Vedānta schools as these are the most important with regard to the wider religious traditions, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika being schools of a more technical nature, concerned with categories of being, language and logic.

Sāṃkhya

The Sāṃkhya system is the oldest systematic philosophy to have emerged in the Hindu tradition and is enormously influential on later theological schools, especially tantric Śaivism and the Pāñcarātra. Indeed, other schools of Indian thought, such as Nyāya and Vedānta, developed during the early centuries of the common era partly due to polemical reactions to Sāṃkhya philosophy. The term *sāṃkhya*, which means 'enumeration' or 'calculation', has two senses: one a general sense used in renouncer traditions, including Jainism and Buddhism, to denote the enumeration and categorization of elements which comprise the cosmos; the other a more specific sense to refer to the Sāṃkhya philosophical system which developed a tradition of commentaries upon its key texts and is the backdrop to Patañjali's Yoga. These uses are chronological: the earlier, general tendency to categorize the cosmos and human psychology, which might be called Proto-Sāṃkhya, occurs very early in renouncer traditions, from at least the ninth to the third centuries BCE, while the systematic philosophy, Kārikā Sāṃkhya, develops fairly late from about the fourth century CE.[13]

PROTO-SĀṂKHYA

In the general sense of the enumeration of the elements or constituents of the cosmos, Sāṃkhya-like speculations are found in early Jain, Buddhist and Hindu texts. However, rather than seeing Sāṃkhyan speculations arising out of Jain and Buddhist contexts, it is probably more accurate to see the Jain, Buddhist and early brahmanical speculations, including medical speculation, arising out of a common ideological context in which Sāṃkhya-like enumeration of the categories of experience is central.

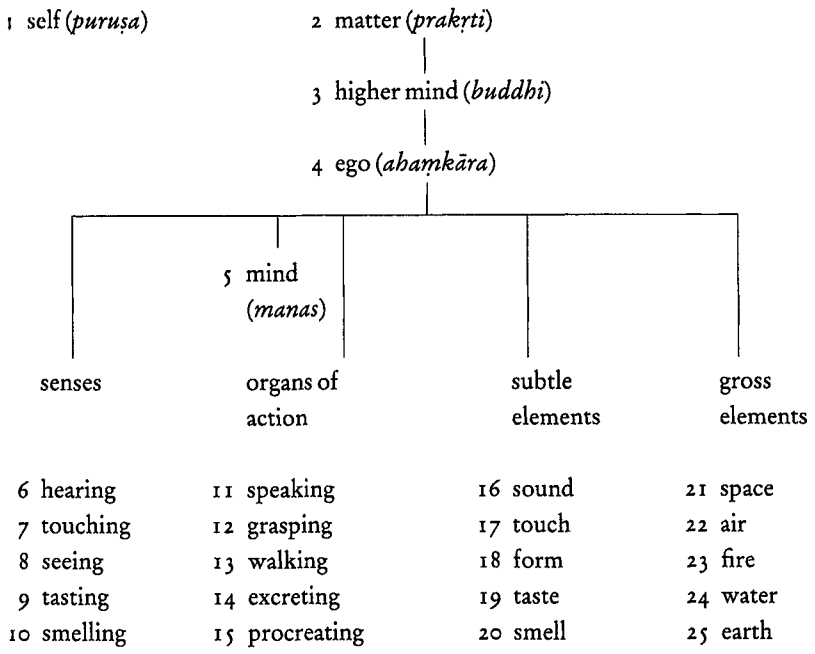

Figure 8 The twenty-five Sāṃkhya *tattvas*

There are striking parallels between the later Sāṃkhya philosophy, medical systems or Ayurveda, and Buddhist systems, particularly the Abhidharma and Yogācāra Buddhism. Indeed, Īśvarakṛṣṇa, an exponent of the philosophical tradition, begins his treatise on Sāṃkhya with the idea of life as suffering (*duḥkha*), a theme very important in Buddhism. Rather than one system borrowing from the other, they may well develop from a common heritage. The earliest enumeration of cosmic principles in the brahmanical tradition comes with the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* which posits a single (*eka*) being or truth (*sat*) which produces fire, which in turn produces water, which in turn becomes food. The text refers to the sense of self-identity similar to the Sāṃkhyan idea of the ego (*ahaṃkāra*) and also identifies the colours red, white and black with fire, water and earth, reminiscent of the later classification of matter (*prakṛti*) into three qualities (*guṇa*).[14] The enumeration of categories is also found in other Upaniṣads, notably the *Kaṭha* and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads*. Presystematic listings of elements of experience and world are found in the *Mahābhārata*,

particularly in the section known as the *Mokṣadharma* and in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. For example, the *Gītā* describes Kṛṣṇa's nature as eightfold, comprising earth, water, fire, wind, ether, mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*) and ego (*ahaṃkāra*),[15] which are categories enumerated in later Sāṃkhya literature.

SĀṂKHYA OF THE SĀṂKHYA-KĀRIKĀS

While these Proto-Sāṃkhya speculations can be located in early texts, a systematic philosophy does not emerge until quite late. The scheme which becomes identified with the philosophical school of Sāṃkhya is articulated by Īśvarakṛṣṇa in his 'Verses on Sāṃkhya', the *Sāṃkhya Kārikās* (350–450 CE), which is a summary of topics taught within an ongoing Sāṃkhya tradition. This text posits a radical dualism between the self or pure consciousness (*puruṣa*) and matter (*prakṛti*), with which it appears to be entangled.[16] Liberation (*kaivalya*) is the discriminative knowledge that pure consciousness is eternally distinct from primordial matter; there is only a proximity between them, the realization of which results in the cessation of suffering and reincarnation.[17] Discrimination allows consciousness to distinguish the self from what is not the self, and so to perceive that the self was never actually bound to matter. This self is transcendent, the silent witness behind the embodied subject of first-person predicates. This empirical self, the self of 'I' statements, is due to the evolution of matter from a primordial state, but is not itself the true subject. Whereas in western philosophical dualism there is distinction made between the mind and the body, in the Sāṃkhya system the dualism is between the self (*puruṣa*) and matter which embraces what in traditional western philosophy has been called 'mind'. The subject of first-person predicates is within the realm of *prakṛti*, the true self is beyond.

Prakṛti, a wider concept than the western category 'matter', which includes the western idea of the 'mind', evolves or transforms from an unmanifested state into a manifested state, through a series of stages or levels in which different categories appear. These categories, or *tattvas* (literally, 'that-ness') comprise the universe of experience. This evolution or transformation (*pariṇāma*) is governed, or kept in balance, by three qualities (*guṇa*), namely the qualities of light (*sattva*), of passion or energy (*rajas*) and of darkness or inertia (*tamas*). These qualities are very important in Hindu thought and later become the basis for a number of associations and classifications. For example the top three classes are associated

with the *guṇas*, as are categories of food into 'cool' (*sattva*), 'hot' (*rajas*) and 'dulling' (*tamas*). While the self (*puruṣa*) appears to be entangled in matter and appears to transmigrate in a subtle body, it is only the empirical self under the sway of the *guṇas* which does this.

What is interesting about the Sāṃkhya enumeration of the principles of experience into twenty-five categories is that the structure refers both to individual psycho-physiology and to cosmological categories. The evolution of matter is both a cosmic and an individual process; both physiological functions and the constituents of the physical world emerge from the sense of ego. The first transformation from matter is translated as the 'intellect' or 'higher mind' (*buddhi*), also called 'the great one' (*mahat*), and refers to both an individual's psychological functioning and to a higher level in a hierarchical cosmology. From *buddhi* the sense of 'I' or ego (*ahaṃkāra*) develops, from which emerges the mind (*manas*), the five senses and their objects, the five organs of action or motor functioning, five subtle, and five gross elements (see fig. 8).

SĀṂKHYA AND YOGA

Sāṃkhya develops in a context in which renunciation and the practice of yoga are common. Patañjali's yoga system, which was described in chapter 2, adopts the Sāṃkhyan dualistic metaphysics and frames liberation within these boundaries. Īśvarakṛṣṇa's general scheme is assumed by Patañjali, though with some differences. *Buddhi*, ego and mind are subsumed under the general category of 'consciousness' (*citta*) and, whereas Sāṃkhya is concerned with ontology, establishing the existence of the self and enumerating existents in the world, yoga is concerned with the transformation of consciousness and the mapping of various inner states of consciousness. Sāṃkhya is also an atheistic system, whereas the yoga *darśana* admits of the idea of God or the Lord (Īśvara) as a special kind of self (*puruṣa*) which has never been entangled in *prakṛti*, and which can be the focus of meditation. These theistic tendencies are developed in the later tradition and the sixteenth-century theologian Vijñānabhikṣu, while acknowledging that the system does not need it, argues that the idea of a Lord is not irreconcilable with the earlier Sāṃkhya view.

Vijñānabhikṣu represents a tendency to synthesize the views of Sāṃkhya yoga and Vedānta, while also drawing on the wider popular traditions of the Epics and Purāṇas. Through his commentaries he attempts to reconcile the pluralism and atheism of Sāṃkhya with the monism of

some forms of Vedānta. The innumerable selves of Sāṃkhya which are ontologically distinct from each other and from matter (*prakṛti*) are nevertheless related to the absolute (*brahman*) and share in its being, as sparks share in the being of fire or a son is related to his father. At liberation these selves rest in their consciousness, purified of entanglement in matter. While acknowledging the independence of souls, matter and absolute, he tries to establish, through the creative reading of texts and commentaries, that *brahman* is transcendent, changeless, pure consciousness, yet is also the efficient and material cause of the universe.[18]

Mīmāṃsā

The Upaniṣads are referred to as the Vedānta, the 'end of the Veda', a term which is also used for the theological tradition developing from them. This immensely rich tradition is so influential that, at a popular level in the West, 'Vedānta' is taken to be Indian philosophy *par excellence*. The Vedānta tradition is, however, divided into two main developments which are both referred to as schools of exegesis or enquiry (*mīmāṃsā*). These are the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, sometimes simply called Mīmāṃsā, and the Uttara Mīmāṃsā, sometimes simply called Vedānta. While the former is concerned with correct action in accordance with *dharma*, the latter is concerned with correct knowledge (*jñāna*) of *brahman*. It is significant that even the later school is referred to as Mīmāṃsā, a term which emphasizes that we are dealing with an exegetical tradition of commentary and sub-commentary upon sacred texts. For the purposes of clarity, I shall here refer to Pūrva Mīmāṃsā simply as 'Mīmāṃsā' and Uttara Mīmāṃsā as 'Vedānta', but would wish to stress, as Francis Clooney has shown, the exegetical continuity between them.[19]

The Mīmāṃsā traces its origin to the *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* of Jaimini (*c.* 200 BCE) with its commentary, the *Bhāṣya* by Śabara (second–fourth centuries CE), though the origins of Mīmāṃsā must also be sought in the auxiliary sciences (Vedāṅga) particularly the Kalpa Sūtras. Śabara's commentary in turn has sub-commentaries written on it, most notably by Prabhākara and Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (seventh century CE), which represent two distinct interpretations of Mīmāṃsā.[20] Indeed the tradition is split into the Prabhākara and Kumārila branches which differ over the concept of the effects of ritual action (*apūrva*) and the nature of error, though the Kumārila school is the most important representative of the tradition.[21]

The enterprise upon which Jaimini is embarked in his text is stated in

the opening verse: 'Now is the investigation into *dharma*' (*athāto dharma-jijñāsā*). *Dharma*, the order of the universe, is revealed in the Veda and the investigation into it shows that the Veda is primarily a series of injunctions (*vidhi*) about ritual action. Ritual action, specifically sacrifice, can be traced to the Veda, and the Mīmāṃsā is rational reflection on its purposes. According to Jaimini, the correct performance of sacrifice produces a transcendent power, called *apūrva*, which produces the result of the sacrifice, particularly the reward of heaven (*svarga*) after death. *Apūrva* is the force postulated which accounts for how the result of a sacrifice can follow its performance, even though there may be a temporal gap between the action and its result. Each part of a ritual, once completed, creates its own *apūrva* which accumulates until the ritual sequence is completed, the results of which will be experienced by the sacrificial patron (*yajamāna*) in heaven. Heaven rather than liberation (*mokṣa*) is the result of sacrifice.

The theory of *apūrva* bears some resemblance to the theory of karma. However, unlike karma, which is a store of action built up over long periods producing results in successive lifetimes, *apūrva* is accumulated only through ritual action during the present lifetime for a post-mortem reward. Indeed there is even a sense in the Mīmāṃsā that ritual action is to be done, not because it produces rewards in heaven, but because it is a vedic injunction (*vidhi*). Sacrifice, according to this view, is action for its own sake, because it is enjoined in vedic revelation, and any future, human reward is secondary. Human desires and purposes are really irrelevant to the performance of vedic ritual; there is what Clooney calls a 'decentering' of the human. It is for this reason that certain classes of people, namely lower castes, women and the deformed, are forbidden from participating in the sacrifice. The ritual performer is not defined by changing personal qualities or knowledge of ritual procedures, since even a Śūdra can acquire this. Rather, the ritual performer is defined by his suitability, according to the Veda, which excludes certain classes; the Śūdra is simply not included within the structures of vedic ritual prescribed by the texts,[22] though this exclusion in itself tells us something about the 'exclusive' nature of vedic brahmanical society.

The early literature of the Mīmāṃsā is interested exclusively in *dharma* and the interpretation of vedic texts, tracing action back to texts and establishing the relevance of texts in ritual. Because of the emphasis on interpretation in order to establish correct meanings, the Mīmāṃsā developed a

theory of language which is close to that of the Grammarians. Through the analysis of sentences they try to show how the syntactic unity of a sentence occurs through sentence contiguity, consistency and expectancy of the reader.[23] The Mīmāṃsā concern with language is accompanied by a concern with knowledge. The Mīmāṃsā is realist and pluralist, accepting the reality of the many and rejecting any form of idealism, such as Yogācāra Buddhism, which maintains the primacy of consciousness. The Mīmāṃsā accepts all six means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) as valid. These methods establish the reality of the objects of knowledge, namely substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*), action (*karma*), and non-existence (*abhāva*), and their sub-categories, which recapitulate those of the Vaiśeṣika school.

Vedānta

The most influential school of theology in India has been the Vedānta, exerting enormous influence on all religious traditions and becoming the central ideology of the Hindu Renaissance in the nineteenth century. It has become the philosophical paradigm of Hinduism *par excellence*. Yet, while there are continuities in Vedānta stretching back to the Upaniṣads, the Vedānta is immensely rich, containing within it a wide variety of theological and philosophical positions. The ambiguity over assigning the terms 'theology' or 'philosophy' to Vedānta stems from its clearly philosophical interests in epistemology, ontology and argument, yet also its exegetical nature which is regarded as a 'theological' enterprise. Contemporary scholarly understandings of Vedānta tend to locate it within a theological system of commentary which stresses the continuities with the earlier tradition of Mīmāṃsā.[24] There are also strong continuities with the Vaiṣṇava tradition and it can be argued that Vedānta is essentially a Vaiṣṇava theological articulation. Indeed even Śaṅkara, who is traditionally regarded as a Śaiva, may have been a Vaiṣṇava, according to some scholars.

As has been noted, the term 'Vedānta' refers to the Upaniṣads and their teachings as well as to the traditions inspired by them, which follow from them. At the head of these traditions are Sūtras, intended for memorization, which summarize the teachings of the Veda and Upaniṣads. While Jaimini's *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* is the foundation text of the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, the source text of the Uttara Mīmāṃsā or Vedānta is Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahma Sūtra*, also called the *Vedānta Sūtra* and *Uttara*

Mīmāṃsā Sūtra. This text was composed around the same time as Jaimini's text (*c.* 200 BCE) and, indeed, the two texts refer to each other's authors. Yet, whereas the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* is an investigation into *dharma*, the *Brahma Sūtra* is an investigation into *brahman*. Indeed, it begins in a similar fashion: 'Now is the investigation into the absolute' (*athāto brahma-jijñāsā*). These two texts articulate the two major realms of interest within Hindu traditions, the realm of *dharma*, the concern of the Brahman householder, and the realm of *brahman*, the concern of the renouncer seeking liberation.

A number of schools develop within the Vedānta tradition, whose founders and chief exponents write commentaries on the *Brahma Sūtra*, thereby establishing an independent school (*sampradāya*) of interpretation. Other texts were also the subject of exegetical commentary, most notably the early Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. This group of texts – the *Brahma Sūtra*, the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā* – forms the 'triple basis' of Vedānta commentarial tradition. The most important Vedānta traditions are Advaita ('Non-Dualist') Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita ('Qualified Non-Dualist') Vedānta and Dvaita ('Dualist') Vedānta.

Advaita Vedānta

Advaita Vedānta is the most famous Indian philosophy and is often, mistakenly, taken to be the only representative of vedantic thought.[25] The term *advaita* means 'Non-Dual' and refers to the tradition's absolute monism which, put simply, maintains the reality of the one over that of the many. The most famous Advaita thinker, and the most famous Indian philosopher ever to have lived, is Śaṅkara or Śaṅkarācārya.

ŚAṄKARA

The dates of Śaṅkara cannot be firmly established but some scholars date him between 788 and 820 CE. He certainly cannot have lived before the middle of the seventh century as he refers to the Mīmāṃsāka theologian Kumārila and the Buddhist Dharmakīrti who can be dated to that century. There are a number of traditional biographies, the *Śaṅkaravijayas*, written by his followers. These texts agree that he was born in Kaladi, a small village in Kerala, which is probably true as there would be no ideological reason for locating his birthplace there; it is not a royal centre or place of religious significance (other than that it is Śaṅkara's birthplace). His father died when he was young and he was brought up by his mother.

As a young Nambudri Brahman boy of about eight, Śaṅkara is said to have vowed to become a renouncer but his mother would not let him. There is a story that one day whilst bathing in a river a crocodile grabbed his leg. He shouted out and his mother came to the river bank. The only hope was to take renunciation there and then, so his mother agreed, upon which the crocodile let him go. He became a renouncer but promised his mother that he would be with her during her last days and perform her funeral rites, which he did. Śaṅkara left home and found a guru, Govinda, by the Narmadā river, whom he eventually left, then travelled north to Varanasi. Here he taught and gathered disciples. He went on a pilgrimage to the source of the Ganges and stayed at Badrinath for four years, where he composed his major works. He returned to Varanasi and continued to teach and debate with other thinkers, including the Mīmāṃsāka Mandanamiśra who converted to Advaita. There is a story that Mandana's wife, Bhāratī, challenged Śaṅkara to a debate about the art of love, about which, being a renouncer, he was woefully ignorant. So Śaṅkara entered into the body of a king for a short period to experience the art of love and returned to defeat Bhāratī in debate. Both she and her husband then became Advaitins. Not only did Śaṅkara compose commentaries, but also established a monastic order, the Daśanāmis, with four centres at Śṛṅgeri, Dwarka, Badrinath and Puri, and Kanchi as a possible fifth. He died aged thirty-two in the Himalayas.

Although many philosophical texts and devotional hymns are attributed to Śaṅkara, scholars are agreed that by 'Śaṅkara' we mean the author of the commentary (*bhaṣya*) on the *Brahma Sūtra*. Apart from this text, three others are positively accepted as being of his authorship: the commentaries on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Taittirīya Upaniṣads* and the independent work, the 'Thousand Teachings' (*Upadeśasāhasrī*).[26] He probably also wrote the commentary on Gauḍapāda's *Kārikā* to the *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* and the commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, though there is not universal agreement on this. Gauḍapāda is Śaṅkara's guru's guru whom Śaṅkara calls his supreme teacher (*paramaguru*). Gauḍapāda was influenced by Buddhism and his *Kārikās* are even quoted by the Buddhist philosopher Bhāvaviveka. Generally, however, the Advaita tradition is very opposed to Buddhism and Śaṅkara is vehement in his attack on Buddhist 'heresy' which rejects the Veda. Apart from the theological commentaries, Śaṅkara is attributed by the Advaita and Śrī Vidyā traditions with the authorship of a famous hymn to the Goddess, the

Saundaryalaharī. Śaṅkara's authorship of some of this text is accepted by its translator Norman Brown, and it is certainly possible for a Hindu theologian to have composed both erudite commentaries and a devotional literature, as Bharati has pointed out.[27]

ŚAṄKARA'S THEOLOGY

In his commentaries Śaṅkara develops a theology in which he tries to establish that spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) or illusion (*māyā*) is caused by the superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of what is not the self onto the self. All knowledge is distorted by superimposition or projection, which prevents us from seeing our true nature as the self's (*ātman*'s) pure subjectivity, ontologically identical with the absolute (*brahman*). In order to realize the truth of the identity of the self with the absolute, a person must develop discrimination. Discrimination allows for a person to distinguish the self from what is not the self, true being from objects, and knowledge (*vidyā, jñāna*) from ignorance (*avidyā*). This is the withdrawal or dissolving of projection, as when a man walking on a beach sees silver coins but then discovers that they are shells, or sees a snake in the corner of a house, but then, upon inspection, finds it to be a rope. Śaṅkara opens his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra* with the following:

> It is a matter of fact that the object and subject, whose respective spheres are the notion of the 'you' and the 'I', and which are opposed to each other as much as darkness and light, cannot be identified, and nor can their respective attributes. Hence it follows that it is wrong to superimpose upon the subject, whose nature is awareness (*cit*) and which has for its sphere the notion of 'I', the object and its attributes whose sphere is the notion of the 'not-I'. And vice-versa [it is wrong to] superimpose the subject and its attributes on the object.[28]

This opening passage sums up a central point of Śaṅkara's thought and gives a flavour of his terse commentarial style. Superimposition of the self on what is not the self, and what is not the self on the self, is the natural propensity of ignorant consciousness. The removal of superimposition is the removal of ignorance and the realization of the self (*ātman*) as the witnessing subject identical with *brahman*. Such knowledge is liberation (*mokṣa*).

Śaṅkara's enterprise is to show how his *advaita* interpretation of sacred scriptures is correct. It is a method of reading the texts and so gaining knowledge of revelation's truth: the process is one of hearing (*śravaṇa*),

thinking (*manana*) and reflecting or meditating (*nidhidhyāsana*). While the idea of mystical experience (*anubhava*), which has been stressed in recent times in the West, is important for Śaṅkara as the goal to which revelation leads, he is primarily concerned with the correct interpretation of scripture and the refutation of what he regards as false views. There is no reference in his works to any personal religious experience nor to the experience of the ancient sages. The Veda, of course, is not thought to be of human authorship so personal experience is here irrelevant.[29]

The sacred scriptures can be divided into sections dealing with action (*karmakāṇḍa*) and sections about knowledge (*jñānakāṇḍa*). The Mīmāṃsā maintains that sections about action, that is ritual action, are of primary importance because injunctions to perform *dharma* are the central purpose of the Veda. Śaṅkara, on the other hand, maintains that the knowledge sections are of greater importance, for liberation is the Veda's central message, and only knowledge leads to liberation. No action can discriminate the self from what is not the self, only knowledge can achieve this, as silver is suddenly seen to be shell. This liberating knowledge is referred to in the 'great sayings' (*mahāvākya*) of the Upaniṣads, namely: 'I am the absolute' (*aham brahmāsmi*); 'this self is the absolute' (*ayam ātmā brahma*); 'everything is indeed the absolute' (*sarvam khalu idam brahma*); and 'you are that' (*tattvamasi*). To realize the existential force of these claims is to be liberated and to distinguish between pure being and worldly phenomena. This is not like the heaven of the Mīmāṃsākas, for liberation is not a future state or goal which can be achieved; it can only be woken up to.

Having said this, Śaṅkara does make concessions to the idea of devotion (*bhakti*) to a personal Lord (Īśvara) as a lower level of knowledge. *Brahman*, in its timeless essence as identical with the self, is beyond all predicates and qualities (*nirguṇa*), but in its temporal mode as the Lord it has attributes (*saguṇa*), and so can be approached through devotion as an object of consciousness. To see the absolute as the Lord is to maintain a distinction between self and absolute, which is to retain a vestige of ignorance which must finally be transcended. If reality is one, all distinctions must be illusory.

LATER ADVAITA

After Śaṅkara there are a number of important Advaita theologians who composed texts in the commentarial tradition, working out theological and philosophical problems incipient in earlier Advaita texts, and responding to opponents in other schools. Mandanamiśra, mentioned above, is an older contemporary of Śaṅkara who is a Mīmāṃsā theologian who converted to Advaita. He may or may not be the same as the Advaitin Sureśvara. Vācaspatimiśra (tenth century) wrote commentaries on Advaita texts as well as on other *darśanas*, and Śrī Harśa (*c.* 1150 CE) developed a form of *reductio ad absurdum* argument to show the inherent contradictions in all propositions about the world (particularly Nyāya propositions). Through this method of argument he brings out the undesirable consequences of his opponents' positions. This system of argumentation is essentially the same as that of the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna.[30]

Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta

With the development of theism in the great tradition of Vaiṣṇavism, the monistic reading of sacred scripture is resisted. The great theologian and hierarch of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community, Rāmānuja (see pp. 136–7), composes a commentary, the *Śrī Bhaṣya*, on the *Brahma Sūtra*, and a commentary on the *Gītā*, to refute the monism of Śaṅkara. He also composes a brief independent work, the *Vedānta Saṃgraha*.[31] In these works he argues vehemently against Śaṅkara's monistic reading of sacred scripture, expressing himself forcefully and asserting that the Advaita position is against reason, against the firm understanding of the meaning of language, and goes against the scriptures. The Advaitins, to hold such groundless opinions, must be plagued by the impressions of beginningless sin (*pāpa*)![32] Rāmānuja's interpretation of Vedānta is called 'Qualified Non-Dualism' (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) and articulates a form of Vaiṣṇava theology which came from Rāmānuja's grand-teacher Nāthamuni to his own teacher Yāmuna: a theology which draws upon the wide textual resources of the Epics, Purāṇas and even Pāñcarātra literature.

Like Śaṅkara and the Mīmāṃsākas, Rāmānuja is concerned with exegesis, the careful reading of scripture in order to arrive at an understanding of God and his relation to the plural world. Śaṅkara had maintained that in reading a sacred text there are two levels of truth in operation, one concerned with the higher truth of the unity of *brahman*, the other lower level representing *brahman* as a personal Lord. Rāmānuja rejects this distinction, arguing that all passages of sacred scripture must be taken as equal with each other; it is not methodologically sound to divide up scripture in

this way. If we reject this two-levels-of-truth theory with regard to sacred texts, then we see, argues Rāmānuja, that scripture testifies to a supreme soul, the *brahman*, as the essence of the universe and the inner soul of all finite souls, who is yet also a personal being.

Apart from the problem of how to interpret scripture, the main theological concerns of Rāmānuja are the nature of the absolute, or God, and the relations between the absolute, the finite self and the world.[33] With Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja agrees that *brahman* is the one perfect reality which in itself is unchanging. However, he rejects Śaṅkara's idea that the world of manifold experience is illusion (*māyā*) caused through ignorance, and he rejects the idea that the Lord as a personal being is a lower level of truth than the impersonal absolute. Rather, both the one and the many are real; the many being the one's manifold mode of expression. God for Rāmānuja has two aspects or sides. One is the supreme aspect of God in his inner nature or essence (*svarūpa*), the other is his outer nature or accessibility (*saulabhya*). The essence of God has five attributes – of truth (*satya*), knowledge (*jñāna*), infinity, joy and purity – while the accessibility of God is shown in the modes of mercy and love, generosity, affection and parental love. The Lord also has beauty (*saundarya*) in both his essence and in his worldly incarnations, the *avatāras*. Humans come into contact with God's nature through the accessibility of his love – a theology with western parallels in Gregory Palamas' distinction between God's essence and his energy.

The individual self (*jīva*) is distinct from God yet participates in God who is its essence and inner controller (*antaryāmin*) and without whom it would not exist. The relationship between the self and God is one of inseparability, the self is wholly dependent upon God for its being. Both the self and the world participate in God's existence, yet are distinct from, while wholly depending on, him. The relationship between God and the self and the world is expressed in a famous analogy that the universe, comprising conscious selves (*cit*) and unconscious matter (*acit*), is the Lord's body. As the self is related to the body, so the Lord is related to the self and world. The universe of sentient and insentient matter as the body of God is therefore not illusory for Rāmānuja, but expresses his power and is called the realm of glory (*vibhuti*). Through apprehending the glory of the Lord in the world, the devotee can understand the *brahman* to be the supreme Person.[34] A deep understanding of the Lord's nature is the experience of liberation from the beginningless cycle of reincarnation. This is not the

removal of ignorance in the Advaita sense of realizing the self's identity with the absolute. Indeed such a notion is nonsensical for Rāmānuja. Ignorance, he says, needs to have a basis or rest on a support. This support cannot be the self, for the idea of the self is the product of ignorance, yet nor can it be *brahman*, for *brahman* is self-luminous consciousness, by definition without ignorance.[35] Rāmānuja here astutely recognizes the Advaita problem concerning the nature of ignorance and to whom it belongs. For Rāmānuja there is real separation of a distinct self from the Lord until such a time as that self is liberated. This liberation is the removal of past karma, not the removal of ignorance. Indeed, even once karma is removed, beings are still individuated by their very natures and not because of extrinsic factors. Some selves are still going through the cycle of reincarnation, some have been liberated, while yet others, such as Viṣṇu's mount, the magnificent bird Garuḍa, were never bound.

The Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition continued after Rāmānuja's death with significant exegetes such as Piḷḷān who wrote a commentary on the Tamil Veda; Vedāntadeśika, the main theologian of the northern school (the Vaṭakalai); and Lokācārya Piḷḷai, the main theologian of the southern school (Teṅkalai). A number of digests have also been composed summarizing the tenets of the Viśiṣṭādvaita theology.

Dvaita Vedānta

Yet another development in the Vedānta exegetical tradition came in the thirteenth century with the south Indian Vaiṣṇava theologian Madhva, who wrote commentaries on a number of Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Brahma Sūtra*, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as well as an independent treatise summarizing the teachings of the *Brahma Sūtra*, the *Aṇuvyākhyāna*.[36] In these writings he establishes a new interpretation of Vedānta, that of dualism (*dvaita*). Madhva was born near the South Kanarese village of Udipi, became a renouncer as a young man, and entered a Vaiṣṇava order of a monastic renouncer tradition, called the Ekānti Vaiṣṇavas, where his guru, Acyuta Prekṣa, was very impressed by Madhva's skill in interpreting the sacred scriptures. Madhva went on a tour of south India with his preceptor and then on a pilgrimage to the source of the Ganges in the north, disputing with Buddhists, Jains and Advaitins along the way. There is even a story that he strongly advised a south Indian king to have thousands of Jain heretics impaled on stakes! Madhva eventually became the hierarch of his monastic community and

established a reputation with his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtra*. He established a monastic centre at his birth-place, Udipi, which continues to this day, and installed there a famous icon of Kṛṣṇa.[37]

In complete contrast to the *advaita* of Śaṅkara, Madhva maintains that the correct interpretation of sacred scripture is dualistic: that scripture maintains an eternal distinction between the individual self and the Lord. Whereas the Advaita tradition emphasizes the non-difference (*abheda*) between the self and the absolute, Madhva insists on their complete distinction. Difference or *bheda* is a cornerstone of his theology and scriptural interpretation. Each thing in the universe is itself and unique and cannot be reduced to something else (an idea which is not dissimilar to Wittgenstein's contention that a thing is what it is and not another thing). Each phenomenon in the universe is uniquely itself, made unique by the power of particularity (*viśeṣa*). While each thing is unique, there are nevertheless five categories of difference (*bheda*): between the Lord and the self (*jīvātman*); between innumerable selves; between the Lord and matter (*prakṛti*); between the self and matter; and between phenomena within matter. Yet while there are these distinctions and phenomena exist independently of each other, nothing can exist outside of the Lord's will. As the body depends upon the self, so all beings and matter depend upon the Lord who is their support.

The Lord in his essence is unknowable, yet he pervades the self as its inner witness and pervades matter as the inner controller. There is a graded hierarchy of selves which exist at different levels of the hierarchical cosmos, the purer selves being higher than the impure. These selves are distinguished into three broad categories: those who are liberated such as gods and sages; those not yet liberated, though capable of liberation; and those incapable of liberation, including selves which are eternally transmigrant, the damned in hell, and various classes of demons. Liberation is the self's enjoyment of its innate being, consciousness and bliss (*saccidānanda*), which is a participation in the bliss of the Lord, attained through devotion (*bhakti*) to an icon and the Lord's grace.[38]

Śaiva theology

Although Śaṅkara is reputed to have been a Śaiva, the Vedānta tradition is a discourse broadly within the parameters of Vaiṣṇavism. A Śaiva understanding of Vedānta does develop in the thirteenth century with the teachings of Śrī Kaṇṭha's Śivādvaita, but, apart from this, Śaiva theology

develops outside Vedānta, drawing not so much on vedic resources as on its own Śaiva revelation in the Tantras and Āgamas. It is significant that Śaiva theologies are excluded from the orthodox (*āstika*) list of six *darśanas*, showing that from a strictly vedic perspective they are on the edges of orthodoxy. Yet they are included in Mādhava's *Sarvadarśana Saṃgraha*, showing that they are still within the sphere of orthodox discourse and disputation. While all Śaiva traditions have a theology, even if only implicit, the two most significant developments for the history of Indian theology are the dualistic and monistic schools of Śaivism: the Śaiva Siddhānta and Kashmir Śaivism or the Recognition school (Pratyabhijñā).[39]

The developments of the Śaiva traditions have been outlined (chapter 7); it remains here to summarize the essential points of Śaiva theology. As we have seen, there is a dualistic Śaiva Siddhānta which developed in the north and then in the south where it incorporated Tamil *bhakti*, and a monistic school known as Kashmir Śaivism, though this tradition also existed in the south. The dualists maintain that the Lord (*pati*) is distinct from the soul (*paśu*) and world (*paśa*), whereas the monists proclaim self, world and Lord to be essentially one reality: consciousness purified of content. The ontological status of the self became the central focus of theological debate – dualists such as Sadyojoti (eighth century CE), Bhojadeva (eleventh century) and Aghoraśiva (twelfth century) arguing, in their commentaries on tantric texts such as the *Mṛgendrāgama* and in independent treatises (most notably Sadyojoti's *Naranareśvaraprakāśa* and Bhojadeva's *Tattvaprakāśa*), that the self is distinct from Śiva, but is ultimately equal with him (*Śivatulya*). The theologians of the monistic school, called the Recognition school or Pratyabhijñā – most notably Somānanda (*c.* 900–50), Utpala (*c.* 925–75), Abhinavagupta (*c.* 975–1025) and Kṣemarāja (*c.* 1000–50) – argued that the self, characterized by consciousness, is identical with Śiva who is the being whose consciousness is total.

With the Pratyabhijñā tradition, two conceptually distinct metaphysical positions are maintained simultaneously. On the one hand is a pure monism which holds that the one, defined as pure consciousness, is real and the many is false. In this view there can be no distinctions in ultimate reality and so no impurity: the self has to wake up to the realization of its identity with pure consciousness. Kṣemarāja says that, because of the ontological identity of consciousness and its object, there is nothing

which is impure (*aśuci*). On the other hand the Pratyabhijñā maintains a cosmological doctrine of emanation, that the cosmos emanates from the one. Another way of saying this is that consciousness manifests itself through its vibration (*spanda*) as subjects and objects of knowledge in a hierarchical sequence: the purer forms being at the 'top' of the hierarchy, the forms polluted by the impurities of action (*karma-mala*), illusion (*māyīya-mala*) and egoity or individuality (*āṇava-mala*) being at the bottom.[40] The Pratyabhijñā, particularly the work of Abhinavagupta, also develops a theological aesthetics in which different aesthetic emotions (*rasa*) are seen as akin to religious emotions and the ultimate aesthetic experience of tranquillity (*śāntarasa*) is identified with the religious or mystical experience of union with Śiva.[41]

Modern developments

While the flowering of Hindu theology – the period during which the most influential theologians flourished – is over, issues within traditional Hindu theology and philosophy have continued to be debated into the modern period. Commentaries and independent treatises within the *darśanas*, upon sacred scriptures and their commentaries, continue to be composed. The Sāṃkhya, Advaita, Grammarian and Nyāya traditions are not simply the subjects of scholarly study, but are living intellectual traditions, outside the secular university system.

Although Hindu theology and philosophy continues in a fairly traditional way, since colonialism the Hindu systems have been exposed to outside influences, and dialogue between western and Indian philosophy has occurred. This dialogue has mainly confined itself to the English-speaking, and 'English-educated', Indian world, which has responded to Orientalism and attempted to show the equality (or even superiority) of Indian thought to western. Since the nineteenth century and the revitalizing work of Swami Vivekānanda, the intellectual climate within Indian university departments of philosophy has been that of Advaita Vedānta, and there has been keen interest in western metaphysics which can be assimilated to Advaita. Although European phenomenology and existentialism have had a strong influence on the work of twentieth-century Indian philosophers such as K. C. Bhattacharya and J. L. Mehta, respectively, analytical philosophy, as taught in British and American universities, has also had an important impact.[42] One of India's most erudite scholars to engage with western and Indian philosophy is the one-time

president of India, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. In his numerous books, such as *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* – a grand survey of western and Indian ideas – he seeks to reconcile western rationalism with Hinduism, presenting Hinduism as an essentially rationalistic and humanistic religious experience.[43] This approach ignores the Hindu traditions of region and village – the pragmatic Hinduism of everyday ritual – or relegates such religious expressions to an 'irrational' past. However, the emphasizing of Hinduism as a rational discourse which is also in touch with the 'spirit' has been highly relevant and important in forming contemporary Hindu identity. It is to the formation of this contemporary sense of identity and some of its nationalistic expressions that we turn next.

Summary

In this survey of Hindu theological and philosophical traditions we have seen how wide-ranging they are. Although Advaita Vedānta has become extremely popular as the philosophy of Hinduism *par excellence*, there is nevertheless a variety of irreducible metaphysical positions and a long history of rigorous philosophical debate. The rigorous nature of philosophical argument – within the given parameters of revelation, the rhetoric of liberation, and assumptions about the nature of knowledge – has not been part of the West's recent perception of Hinduism. This has been partly due to the romantic construction of India as 'mystical', and partly due to the erosion of these traditions in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. There is no single orthodox Hindu view with regard to theology, but Hindu theological/philosophical traditions have shared a common terminology and concern about common issues. Two areas which have been important in Indian metaphysics have been highlighted. The first concerns language, the nature of revelation, and the relation between language and being, and the second concerns ontology, the relation of the one to the many. The concern with language has stemmed partly from Sanskrit, the language of the gods (*devavāṇī*), being perceived as sacred. The concern with ontology has stemmed from reconciling the plurality of experience with the 'one' absolute revealed by revelation and experienced in yoga. These issues are still alive in Hindu philosophical debate, though now widened to incorporate traditional concerns of western philosophy.