

ETHICAL CORRELATES OF INDIAN METAPHYSICS
(WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON SĀMKHYA, ADVAITA
AND VIŚIṢṬĀDVAITA)

BY

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Department of Philosophy and
Political Science, University of
Durban-Westville


[S.I. : S.n.] , 1988

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November 1988

DECLARATION

This dissertation has not been submitted
for a degree at any other University.


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H.G. Dewa



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To
My Parents
in love and gratitude

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to thank his supervisor, Professor F. Zangenberg, for his kind help and patience throughout the preparation of this work. The many insights that he has offered during discussions has enriched the writer's perspectives in many ways. His assistance in making available to the writer some of the original Sanskrit source material, otherwise unavailable, is gratefully acknowledged.

The interest shown in the work by several colleagues has been a source of inspiration and encouragement.

The writer also thanks the library staff whose helpfulness and efficiency added to the pleasure of the project.

Special thanks are due to the members of the writer's family for their patience and understanding during the writing up of the project, and especially to Damayanti, Kṛpāvati and Kapilrāy, who together executed the typing and proof-reading.

SYNOPSIS

The work undertakes an examination of Indian metaphysical theories and their relationship to ethical ideas and moral conduct, as these operate in Indian thought. Special account is taken of the sāṃkhya, advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita systems, the metaphysical conceptions presupposed in these systems, and the ethical theories proposed by them.

The peculiarities characteristic of each system in terms of both metaphysics and ethics are set out and examined in terms of the vital concepts of dharma, karma and mokṣa. It is demonstrated that, in the case of each system the original classical formulations, as supported by a relatively consistent dialectic through the centuries down to modern times, in fact accentuate and harden the distinctions among the systems so that the three systems appear to be supporting distinctly differing patterns of ethical behaviours.

The sāṃkhya is seen to be supporting a somewhat simplistic model of life-denying ethics as flowing from its metaphysical premises, while the viśiṣṭādvaita, with its clear accent on theism, gives the impression of a more positive attitude in ethical thought and practice. Its ethical concerns, however, are seen to be markedly individualistic in character and operation.

The advaita system, with its singular peculiarity of a split-level theoretic orientation, is seen to vacillate between a negative withdrawal from life, and a more positive concern towards life in the world. The complex character of advaita metaphysical constructs, in their relation to the more practical aspects of life, are seen to be related to the operation of some stresses and tensions reflected at the individual and social levels.

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the end notes that are appended to each chapter:

AU	Aitareya Upaniṣad
BG	Bhagavad Gītā
BS	Brahma Sūtra
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
DAS HIP	History of Indian Philosophy by Dasgupta, followed by a Roman numeral indicating the volume
HIR OIP	Outlines of Indian Philosophy by Hiriyanā
HIR ICV	Indian Conception of Values by Hiriyanā
Isa	Īsā Upaniṣad
Kena	Kena Upaniṣad
KU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
MaU	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
MU	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad
MK	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad with Gauḍapāda's Kārikā and Śāṅkara's commentary tr. by Sw. Nikhīlananda
RAD IP	Indian Philosophy by Radhakrishnan, followed by a Roman numeral indicating the volume
RAD PU	The Principal Upaniṣads by Radhakrishnan
RAD RS	Religion and Society by Radhakrishnan
RAD BG	The Bhagavadgītā by Radhakrishnan
RAD BS	The Brahma Sūtra by Radhakrishnan
RAD ERWT	Eastern Religions and Western Thought by Radhakrishnan
RAD IVL	Idealist View of Life by Radhakrishnan
RBSVA	Rāmānuja's commentary on the Brahma Sūtra tr. by Swami Vireswarananda and Swami Adidevananda
SBGS	The Bhagavad Gītā with the commentary of Śāṅkara tr. by A.M. Sastry
SBSG	The Brahma Sūtra with the commentary of Śāṅkara tr. by Swami Gambhīrananda
SK	Sāṅkhya Kārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa
SBUM	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad with Śāṅkara's commentary tr. by Swami Mādhavānanda
SSS	Sāṅkhya of Īśvarakṛṣṇa tr. by S.S.Sastri
SU	Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad
TK	Tattvakaumudī of Vācaspati Miśra tr. by G. Jha
TU	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
ZAE H	Hinduism by R.C.Zaehner
ZAE BG	The Bhagavad-Gītā by R.C.Zaehner

General Contents

Ch. 1.	Introduction	page 1
Ch. 2.	The General Background	39
Ch. 3.	The Sāṃkhya System	104
Ch. 4.	The Metaphysics of Advaita	120
Ch. 5.	Metaphysics of Viśiṣṭādvaita	141
Ch. 6.	Ethical Ideas in Indian Thought	158
Ch. 7.	Dharma: Theory of Moral Obligations	179
Ch. 8.	Moral Effort: Ethical Dimensions of Karma	213
Ch. 9.	Mokṣa: Freedom and Ethical Striving	238
Ch. 10.	Conclusions	267

CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1.	Statement of the Problem	p.1.
1.2.	Aims of the Study	p.6.
1.3.	Some Relevant Features	p.10.
1.3.1.	Difficulties of Interpretation	p.10.
1.3.2.	The Cultural Roots	p.13.
1.3.3.	The Religious Milieu	p.18.
1.3.4.	The Philosophical Approach	p.22.
1.3.5.	The Dialectical Tradition	p.26.
1.3.6.	Vedānta and Indian Culture	p.30.
1.3.7.	Relationship Between Philosophy and Religion	p.34.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Metaphysical speculation and ethical concerns are two broad and overlapping areas in Indian culture, with a long and varied history behind them. Each of these fields developed many internally divergent forms and modes over the centuries. While in the west these two developed into distinct and relatively specialised disciplines, in India, because of its strong religious colouring, ethics remained as closely bound to metaphysics as word is to thought. Indeed, it is often difficult to distinguish in the literature whether the central concern of a writer is an ethical one or a metaphysical one.¹ This close interaction and virtual crossbreeding between ethics and metaphysics, as a feature of Indian culture, suggested, in comparison to western philosophy, the necessity for developing a tradition of pure metaphysics in Indian philosophy.

The generally felt lack of systematic distinction between metaphysics and ethics in classical Indian thought has largely been sought to be corrected by Indian scholars themselves, beginning with Radhakrishnan, from the first quarter of this century.² Yet, in the field of ethics, the fundamental principles that operate as the motive springs of behaviour have not been as systematically isolated from their metaphysical backgrounds.

The Indian classical philosophical world is characterised by a large variety of metaphysical systems (and sub-systems) that clearly compete for domination of the mind of man. There are relatively few studies undertaken with the clear purpose of isolating the ethical concomitants of the varying metaphysical doctrines. As the present study seriously addresses this problem, it may be classified as a study in "differential ethics".

In the nature of the case, this study is also a serious philosophical enquiry into the principles that govern human behaviour, at least with respect to the three selected systems of thought. The writer repudiates the contention that the different schools of Indian philosophy are merely complementary aspects of a single overall philosophical position. It is accepted that the schools belong to a single general tradition, so general that complementariness must be precluded for the purpose of considering them as part of any systematically organised, meaningful whole.³ It is accepted that the various schools do belong together, but they so belong more as a result of a commonly accepted methodology, and a certain commonness of metaphysical outlook which gives them the unity of a tradition-bound conglomerate, than as the result of any commitment to a set of specific philosophical ideas.

At any rate, the present work is designed to be presented in the true philosophical traditions of classical Indian thought, in that it accepts the different schools as interpreted by those recognised by a successive line of experts to be the chief expositors of the respective schools. This entails the assumption of a dialectical confrontation among the various schools, which is consistent, relatively uniform, and meaningful within the terms of the postulates adopted by the proponents. The writer is also of the conviction that such vital differences in metaphysical standpoints must necessarily be correlated with equally vital differences in ethical theory. Thus, this study is not much concerned with descriptive ethics or norms of social behaviour, (i.e with what Indians do), though it is admitted that these features of Indian social behaviour do tend to blur the distinctions we are attempting to reveal.

Any dialectical method must be based on objectivity, and this is demonstrated in Indian thought with regard to the most cherished social conventions and values. And it is this feature of the acceptance of a common method based on objectivity, that gives it philosophical validity, and commands our attention, and admiration, even from this distance in time.

Should the tradition of dialectic in classical Indian thought be weak, the aims of the present study might be rendered largely futile in terms of the referents.

Alternatively, from a more general philosophical point of view, the aim would become merely academic. The real position is, however, that the dialectics among the schools run deep and strong, and often attain impassioned levels, as even a cursory view of the Śatadūṣanī or the Khandana-Khaṇḍa-Khādyā reveals. A study in differential ethics is, therefore, very much to the point, and it may be seen as an extension of the grand thought-traditions of classical India.

This is one reason for the validity of the present work. The writer is also of the opinion that, in any field of behaviour, a knowledge of the precise nature of human motivation adds to the meaning of human action. Understanding the meaning of human action is not, and should not be, a merely superficial inquiry. There should be a concerned endeavour to uncover the patterns of thought underlying overt action. The more these patterns are understood, the more does human nature and the meaning of human behaviour become revealed to us. Therefore, from the perspective of intrinsic validity also, the study is in the true tradition of high culture, and it must add to our sense of the stature of man.

Again, it is worthwhile for the development of Indian Philosophy to prosecute research that necessarily emphasises the role and importance of pure metaphysics. In

pleading for a greater development of this field, several modern Indian scholars envisage an alignment of Indian Philosophy with Western Philosophy. The writer is of the opinion that such an ambition, if realised, would be untrue to the Indian tradition (as will become evident in later sections of this research), for it will necessitate the excision of material that give to Indian Philosophy much of its peculiarity. For example, the manner in which we are constrained to deal with the notion of "free will" (as a consequence of the theory of Karma) is decidedly and uniquely Indian in character. The present study entails to a significant extent, a serious treatment of metaphysical presuppositions after the fashion of "pure metaphysics," and it will be readily conceded on all sides that this is of value in itself.

In the ethical field too, several problems will be addressed, conjointly with the related metaphysical standpoints. For example, the proliferation of heterogeneous metaphysical viewpoints that form part of the Indian cultural canvas, and the competing demands they make upon the allegiance of man, inevitably result in perceived tensions in several areas of ethical concern. With characteristic perspicacity, Prof. Zaehner gives us an account of some of these problems with reference to major ethical notions.⁴ By isolating the major ethical concomitants from their metaphysical ground, this study advances our understanding of the nature

of these tensions, and suggests possible directions for their resolution.

1.2 AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study aims at deepening our understanding of the relationship between metaphysical theory and ethical conduct, against the background of Indian philosophical and religious systems. The world of Indian thought and practice is a vast one, being made up of several heterogeneous traditions which, by identifying with core clusters of thought, have developed their distinctive ideologies over several centuries.

Indian philosophical systems are in various ways deeply connected with the religious consciousness, and while it is relatively easy to speak of distinctive metaphysical concepts, the ethical correlates of these concepts are lost in a maze of interrelationships in the total development of the cultural traditions over many centuries. This study aims at clarifying these interrelationships to our perception and evaluating the relative influence of the metaphysical and ethical concepts.

Indian philosophy, ancient, classical, medieval and modern, and their attendant cultural and religious actualities have been the subject of indological-style research for about the last hundred and fifty years. In relatively recent times, however, Indian culture, generally going under the

names of Vedānta and Hinduism, has increasingly become a relevant factor in the cultural actuality of the western world. If the production of new literature is anything to go by, this is a continuing trend.

In South Africa, by virtue of a settled, and significant Indian population component, the reality of Indian culture is a demonstrated fact. In addition, academic studies concerning Indian culture are being prosecuted apace at several South African universities.

All culture everywhere is dynamic, never static. But this is more so with Indian culture, as it has rather loosely operating ethical modes that impart to it the quality of a growing way of life more than a fixed pattern of thought and practice. One of the aims of this study is to isolate and consider the nexus between the characteristic thought of Indian culture and the dynamic modes of practice that arise from it.

The advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita are prevailing metaphysical systems that form the core and undoubted substratum of present day Indian culture. Whether we look upon this as Vedānta in philosophical wise, or as Hinduism in terms of practical actuality, their relevance to the cultural situation is overwhelming. Their vital connection to present-day thought and practice can be discerned in use of language and turn of phrase in the cultural circles of the day.

The modern neo-Hinduistic movements are thus intimately related to these systems. Movements such as the Rama-krishna Mission, Divine Life Society, Chinmaya Mission, Hare Krishna Movement, etc. are regularly producing literature whose terms of reference lie largely in those systems scrutinised in this study.

The Sāṃkhya system of philosophy stands to Hindu culture today but a small step removed from the Vedāntic school, and many of its suppositions and metaphysical concepts have been incorporated into the Vedāntic schools. What it retains in point of ideological difference has been richly exploited in the dialectical confrontations of the late classical and medieval periods of Indian culture. It offers a fruitful area for comparisons and makes for keener appreciation and evaluation of the relevant metaphysical presuppositions and ethical practices.

METHOD

The method to be adopted in fulfilment of the aims of the study will be that of an objective philosophical research, involving a clear, factual examination and analysis of the metaphysics of the systems concerned, together with their related ethical formulations, followed by an objective, logical evaluation of the interrelations between them.

1. First, an account is offered of the general background of thought and practice as reflected in the primary scriptural texts and traditions. Close attention will be given to the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahma Sūtra, as these are not only the texts in which later developments are rooted, but they are also variously interpreted in the systems. Since the systems of Vedānta take their immediate inspiration and direction from these texts, the texts themselves have to be noted as being in a vital and living contact with the Vedāntic systems under examination, and their derivations.

2. A close examination is undertaken of the metaphysical systems of Sāṃkhya, advaita, and viśiṣṭādvaita as these have given varied readings and interpretations of the traditional texts.

3. An objective study is undertaken of the primary ethical institutions relevant to the three systems, and as these are interpreted and operated in the ethico-religious actuality of the Indian tradition.

4. Finally, a discussion is undertaken of the major issues that arise from the aforementioned investigations, during which some of the traditional interpretations and tacit assumptions regarding the interrelationships among metaphysics, ethics and the religious consciousness are

systematically challenged. In this discussion due emphasis is laid on the concepts of God and ultimate reality, the soteriological concept of spiritual freedom,^{and} concepts relating to moral effort and ethical striving.

It is obvious from the foregoing that the subject of study has many religious overtones and invites an approach based on sentiments. The study is therefore undertaken in a scientific spirit, and interpretations will be restricted to the results of an examination based on objective criteria and what the facts reveal.

1. 3 SOME RELEVANT FEATURES

1.3.1 DIFFICULTIES OF INTERPRETATION

The Indian tradition, which is the product of more than four thousand years of development, represents a rich and complex fabric of many diverse elements which could be classified and categorised according to several different patterns arbitrarily chosen by the authors. The predilections of the researcher can easily dictate the type of mould into which he wishes to press the wealth of brimming data connected with Indian thought and culture.⁵

To some thinkers the whole development of this culture has high and serious meaning of a unitary nature,⁶ while to others it represents an amalgam of incoherent beliefs and practices, intermixed with elements of literary and intellectual achievements, which, within their own parameters, represent relatively isolated and unrelated cultural modes. In this latter formulation, the whole tradition can in no way be considered a well-structured complex giving evidence of design or homogeneity.

Since Indian culture has had a beginning in a remote antiquity; since the earliest literary records are presented in a somewhat archaic form of Sanskrit, such that competent scholars are not in any easy agreement about the precise thoughts represented therein;⁷ since these records themselves, that is, the Vedic Samhitās as a whole, appear to disclose to us several stratified layers of thought pertaining to several generations of thinkers⁸, it is difficult to present the complex whole in any systematic manner and detail, without the treatment reflecting a significant degree of bias on the part of the interpreter.

Yet, in fairness to the Vedic texts, it must be stated that the Samhitās show remarkable evidence of high culture and literary achievement. We may not always feel inclined to ascribe to these compositions the quality of true religious revelation, as in the following view:

"They are not, then, the spiritual outpourings of the heart of primitive man at the dawn of history, as has sometimes been suggested; (yet) they are the achievement of highly developed religious system", 9

and still feel constrained to admit their remarkably high degree of "literary craftsmanship".

Nevertheless it cannot be denied that many of the hymns are clearly inspired by a deep sense of the Divine, and cannot fail to inspire in turn the sensitive thinker even today. Their high and lofty purpose, supported often by an obvious but archaic symbolism, has led the noted scholar Śrī Aurobindo to the conclusion that the period of Vedic poetical compositions represented the acme of Indian civilization, and that the most precious thoughts of that civilization are the secret and mystical doctrines of highly evolved seers bequeathed to us in the clothing and deceptive appearance of common language.¹⁰ The language used is certainly meaningful at the physical level, but there is discernible a deeper strata of meaning in which mystic doctrines lie hidden.¹¹ Most Indological researchers, however, decline to follow the formulations of Aurobindo. Consistent with the naturalistic and developmental thesis of interpretation, Radhakrishnan, commenting on Aurobindo's interpretation, says:

"It is not likely that the whole progress of Indian thought has been

a steady falling away from the highest spiritual truths of the Vedic hymns." 12

1.3.2. THE CULTURAL ROOTS

We have already noted that Indian civilization has been the result of several varying and heterogeneous elements being thrown together and which became worked up into some form of unity in spite of their differences. We therefore cannot say that all the chief features of this civilization owe their origin to the Vedic literature. This also asserts that all the chief features of the Vedic Aryans have not come down into classical Indian tradition in the form in which they are reflected in the ancient texts.

Nevertheless, the ancient Vedic literature itself is vast, and the Indian tradition that developed thereafter is immense as it is varied. And it has to be noted that it was the ancient Aryans who, through their Vedic literature, "imposed a distinctive order and character upon the Vedic Age".¹³ This distinctive order has been maintained more or less in unbroken fashion down the ages. And, although we are certainly justified in saying that Dravidian and other elements entered, and even the coloured later tradition, these elements have no distinctive historical records, and whatever of myths and legends they possessed

by way of oral tradition, are unstable, inchoate and indefinite. It was therefore left to the vast and precisely defined Aryan tradition, as reflected in the Vedic literature, to impose form, order, organisation and unity, not only upon the culture of the Vedic Age, but upon the succeeding generations in India and "which has served to undergird every aspect of the civilization."¹⁴

Although Indian culture is of a heterogeneous nature with varied beliefs and practices, we are constrained to maintain that, in the main, in so many details of daily life, thought and practice, and in many aspects of the larger measures of philosophical system-building, we have to acknowledge the Vedas as the source of them.¹⁵ Seen in this light, the Vedas must be reckoned, even as a body of literature, "one of the most magnificent achievements of the human spirit in any place or time. Collectively referred to as the Veda, it is these writings that provided the roots for the later growth of the Hindu tradition".¹⁶

It must become apparent therefore, that the larger world-views and philosophical systems are also traceable to the Vedic Samhitās.¹⁷ This should not commit us to any definite account of the ancient Veda, which, as already noted, due to its great antiquity cannot reasonably be construed to represent philosophical thought anywhere near the degree of speculative sophistication of later times. "Whatever we may

think of them, half-formed myths or crude allegories, obscure gropings or immature compositions, still they are the source of the later practices and philosophies of the Indo-Aryans."¹⁸

It is probably the case that the common masses of Indians have never been at any time in history in actual contact with the Vedas as their scriptures, let alone have any clear knowledge of their contents.¹⁹ Conceivably, even the Brāhmin priests who perform the rituals to the accompaniment of the chanting of the mantras are on the whole unaware of the actual contents and ethical teachings of these texts. Yet the thoroughness with which the intellectuals and cultural leaders of every age have been imbued with the sense of values attributed to the Vedas, must be seen as the prime factor through whose agency an unbroken continuity of culture and tradition have been passed down the centuries. In this sense, in every age, Indian civilization reflects a form of Vedic culture.

The Vedic texts are extant in four distinct groups, known as R̥g Veda, Sāma Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. Of these, Indologists affirm the first three to be the original triad, with the last gaining acceptance at a later time, though it appears to contain much material reflecting non-Aryan influences.²⁰ The term "Veda" signifies Divine Knowledge, and, from the religious point of view, it is

affirmed that this Knowledge is eternal and uncreated, "nitya" and "apauruṣeya". It is also styled "śruti", that which is heard by the ancient seers, the Rsis, who are said to have received the revelation in some form of mystic meditation. It is from this eternally existing Vedic Knowledge, as the seed, that the universe is created.²¹

All the four Vedic texts are further subdivided into four sections - Samhitās, Brāhmanas, Āranyakas and Upaniṣads, of which the Samhitās (or Mantras) are the oldest, being the collection of chants of the earliest seers of the tradition. The Brāhmanas, as the name implies, are the texts specially pertaining to the priests, and they supply the detailed minutae of sacrifices and ceremonies, leaving little room for the exercise of personal devotion reflected in the earlier Samhitās. The Āranyakas or forest treatises are mainly a transitional literature to the period of the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣads, meaning secret doctrine, are the teachings and meditations of the philosopher seers. The different Brāhmana, Āranyaka and Upaniṣad texts are traditionally attached to one or other of the four Samhitā texts.

The Samhitās are themselves vast, comprising about 20 000 verses altogether. However, the Rg Veda Samhitā is the most ancient as well as the most important, for it supplies much of the material of the other collections. The Rg Veda Samhitā consists of over 10 000 verses or mantras arranged in over 1000 hymns or sūktas. Many of these hymns are

remarkable for the philosophical and moral insights they display, and "..... it is only right and proper to think that the Aryans had attained a pretty high degree of civilization"²² as reflected in these hymns. Max Muller sees in the hymns of the Rg Veda two distinct historical periods, one reflecting the free and spontaneous outpouring of emotion in songs, and the other a period of mechanical systematisation and sacrifices.²³ Other researchers discern further periods, and the consensus is that "the hymns of the Rg Veda are neither the productions of a single hand nor do they belong to a single age. They were composed probably at different periods by different sages, and it is not improbable that some of them were composed before the Aryan people entered the plains of India".²⁴ The materials of the collection are only incidental to the main characteristic, which is offering prayer and praise to a number of gods or devas, conceived in the fashion of natural phenomena. Radhakrishnan observes:

"When the Aryans entered India they found that, as at present, their prosperity was a mere gamble in rain. The rain-god naturally became the native god of the Indo-Aryans." ²⁵

There is a good deal of "freshness and simplicity and an inexplicable charm as of the breath of the spring or the flower of the morning about the first efforts of the human mind to comprehend and express the mystery of the world",²⁶ yet there are grades of quality in the seriousness of sense and significance of thought that they display. Even the early Indologists clearly perceived that the whole Rg Veda Samhitā "presents to us the development of religious conceptions from the earliest beginnings to the deepest

apprehension of the godhead and its relation to man".²⁷ The variety of subject-matter of the hymns, and the different levels of sense and significance they reflect are interpreted by most scholars as the clear evidence of an evolution in the philosophical capacities of the poets. The religious tradition, however, affirms that it is the Providential God that gives to man, at different stages of his growth, that teaching that corresponds to his spiritual capacity, and the different levels of spiritual development reflected in the hymns are not due to artifice and skill in creating the hymns.²⁸

1.3.3 THE RELIGIOUS MILIEU

The importance of the comprehensive religious milieu in all discussions concerning Indian tradition and culture as a whole is evident in the rich and complex philosophical speculations and their close interweaving with religious thought and practice. Both present an appearance of unity in spite of their many-sidedness.²⁹ While philosophy and religion often appear as two distinct streams running parallel to each other, they also appear frequently to commingle in a unitary pattern of activity, each indistinguishable from the other.³⁰

To say that religion is the "master passion" of the Indian mind is to utter a half-truth, and the complementary lies certainly in the field of philosophy. These two vital

areas of culture, religion and philosophy, "have been so deeply ingrained in the minds and lives of the Indian people that not even virtual slavery, politically and economically, could prevail against them."³¹ And such has been their commingle that both disciplines issue in a way of life in terms of their respective morality and ethics.³² Since the practical life of ethical behaviour is a characterising feature of religious culture, although the motives that underlie such behaviours are often traceable to philosophical issues, it has to be admitted that religious modes of behaviour constitute the operational media for the philosophic endeavour. Indian philosophy is, on the whole, conduct-oriented, and "classical Indian philosophy may be characterized as philosophies of life".³³

A peculiar feature of this whole tradition, religious and philosophical, is that it looks to no single founder.³⁴ Further, research appears to support the contention that it may look to no single group of founders even, for it is more the agglomerative and cumulative result of the contributions of several cultural strains, and of several distinguishable layers of thought, each one building upon the previous one, and in its turn reshaping the received tradition. It is now an established consensus among Indologists that the chief feature of classical Indian culture is largely the result of the amalgam between the Aryan or purely Vedic tradition, and the pre-Aryan or indigenous Dravidian culture.³⁵

This is stated to be clearly demonstrated in "the worship of the ithyphallic symbol of Lord Shiva and the worship of the Mother-Goddess in later Hindu religious thought, although these do not figure in the Vedic religion".³⁶ And Vedic texts are often cited as being antagonistic to some of these practices.³⁷

The religious milieu within whose elastic parameters successive and variant systems of thought have been thrown together is the very ground which has rendered the Indian cultural tradition volatile and unstable across the centuries, and has endowed it with those tensions in its ethical beliefs and practices which this study seeks to elucidate. How this tradition, which is more an amalgam and a patchwork of contending interests, "a huge, uncoordinated, and enormously complex corpus of beliefs and practices",³⁸ has managed to survive the stresses of time and succeeded in presenting the appearance of some form of cultural unity, which is the more remarkable considering the historical, political, and social upheavals suffered by this culture throughout the classical period and after, may be understood in terms of both the religious and the philosophical elements. This culture is "even today, after nearly four thousand years, still in the melting pot. It is a vast collection of unorganised beliefs which criss-cross throughout its course of development".³⁹

Along the religious dimension it is to be noted that the unity of Indian culture has been maintained over long centuries through the perpetuation of the myth that the diverse, and even the contradictory and conflicting elements of Indian culture, have their source in the texts of the Vedas.⁴⁰ Both historians and philosophers have recognised mutually contradictory elements in Indian culture,⁴¹ and have shown the inappropriateness of many features of classical Indian religious beliefs to the notions presented in the Vedas and the Upanisads.⁴² Yet the most seemingly opposed beliefs and practices have been accommodated to the purely theoretical notion of being covered by Vedic sanction. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to discern in this circumstance the operation of a genuine cultural need, evidenced early in the history of India, for the expression of some form of religious unity which was invariably filled by extending to the Vedas a comprehensive sanctioning authority in all religious matters.

In the distinctive area of philosophy, classical Indian culture shows a development as diverse as may be discerned in the whole of the western philosophical tradition. Not only is the Indian philosophical tradition a complex one, but it harbours systems of thought that have been dialectical combatants for long centuries. This has been so not only within the Hindu religious traditions, but also extends to the important Buddhist systems, all of which legitimately

fall within the pale of Indian philosophy. As these schools have been embroiled in wordy warfare and debates through many generations of scholars, and as the utilisation of a more or less common store of vocabulary cannot by itself account for genuine unity, as the terms are invariably understood in special senses in conformity with the specific scholastics of the schools, it has been convincingly argued that Indian philosophy is endowed with a genuine unity by virtue of the development and acceptance of a common methodology.⁴³ The centrifugal forces working for the disruption and disintegration of the relatively unstable ground of the classical philosophical tradition, have been successfully controlled and held in check by the universal acceptance of a general methodological framework. The unity lies not in content, but in method. This process of methodological unity has been hardened by tradition with the passage of time, and, due to the interweaving of philosophical with religious beliefs, is in turn reinforced by the religious or semi-religious milieu in which the tradition operates.

1.3.4. THE PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

The rise of philosophical enquiry appears to us to have had peculiar yet rational grounds, so far as the earliest literary records are concerned. While tradition-oriented thinkers hold to the view of "the primary plenary spiritual

experiences of India's sages and seers,"⁴⁴ those of more independent thought assert that the Vedas offer us the products of human thought about the ultimate questions of life.⁴⁵

It seems to us that the ancient thinkers felt somehow that it was not possible to arrive at metaphysical truth through the process of reasoning. Truths can only be intuited or mystically realised in the silent depths of the heart. The ancient seers speak with conviction because of their mystic realizations. But even they often speak in halting language and faltering accents when they are giving an account of the great mystery of Ultimate Reality. Between the experience itself and the expression of it there lies a huge gulf, and the Rsis of the Vedas were compelled to countenance this fact in many ways.

But the matter of importance in this, for our purposes here, is the doubts this situation raised in the minds of the seers about the construction or expression, even in metaphysical terms, of any thought system that could truly represent the Ultimate Truth.

It is not only the inadequacy of language, it is the very inadequacy of human thought to penetrate the barrier, that created the tormenting situation of doubt and despair. "The fact that the Vedas contain a good deal of puzzlement over

the nature of truth and that some of the hymns even despair of the possibility of man and even God, ever solving the mystery of divine reality makes it impossible to believe that the poets are claiming that anything was disclosed to them by an act of revelation from above."⁴⁶

The anguished cry of the poet who wants to know the truth of things is clearly expressed in the following:

"Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it?
Whence was it born, and whence came this creation?
The gods were born after the world's creation,
Then who can know from whence it has arisen?
None knoweth whence creation has arisen
and whether he has or has not produced it.
He who surveys it in the highest heaven
He only knows, and haply, he may not know!"⁴⁷

This is genuine metaphysical doubt. It is not the fancy of naive minds, but the concerned expression of philosophical doubt about matters high and serious, matters that affected the daily beliefs and activities of large numbers of devoted souls. That it forms part of daily activities may be discerned in the beautiful refrain:

"Which God shall we worship with our oblation"⁴⁸

Paradoxically, the feeling of futility concerning human thought unravelling the deepest mysteries, the doubts concerning the ability of philosophy to penetrate through to the metaphysical truth, constituted the very ground which gave rise to further philosophising, and on which were later erected some of the most stupendous metaphysical constructions of ultimate reality the world has seen, "resulting unquestion-

ably from the innate intellectual curiosity of the Indian mind",⁴⁹ and whose foundations can be seen laid in the earliest literature.⁵⁰

Whatever view one takes of the meaning of Veda, therefore, its support and inspiration for the development of thought is undeniable.⁵¹ The great importance that individual thought and independent opinion was accorded in the ancient traditions of India are reflected in the concept of "manana," which has been raised to the level of an article of faith, as it were.⁵² The process of philosophical and religious development of the individual is regarded as following the steps of "śravanam," "mananam" and "nidhidhyāsanam" - hearing, reflection, and realization. Even in the religious tradition, therefore, the student is under no obligation to accept the pronouncements of the teacher unquestioningly,⁵³ indicating the value attached to a true philosophical approach.

Every Indian philosophical tradition is aware of the need to approach the problems of thought with keen objectivity. The general term for philosophy that has become not only hallowed in the tradition, but also operates in a comprehensive fashion covering the most primitive perceptions of things to the deepest spiritual intuitions is "darsana".⁵⁴ It is an insight into reality, and this may refer equally to a spiritual intuition or the validity of a metaphysical thought-system. All the Indian systems are traditionally referred to as "darsanas,"⁵⁵

Another term of ancient usage is "ānvīkṣikī", denoting a close re-examination of the propositions under scrutiny, as also "mīmāṃsā", reasoning, and "nyāya" logical discussion, all underscoring the thoroughness and seriousness of the philosophical approach in Indian tradition.

1.3.5 THE DIALECTICAL TRADITION

It has been pointed out that the development of the philosophical approach has not arisen merely as a result of the early Indians' need to come to terms with their environment, but rather as the result of the perception of metaphysical problems. Further, these experiences of genuine metaphysical doubt which were expressed through the free exercise of reason, were closely related to religious and cultural concerns regarding the nature of Ultimate Reality and man's relations with it.⁵⁶

In the nature of the case, therefore, the methods of resolving these doubts, the speculative adventures undertaken in respect of them, and the types of answers that became current during the classical period, were as complex and varied as the subjective ideals and inclinations of the thinkers could allow. The sense of freedom with which the ancient Aryan thinkers were imbued in all their interpersonal relationships and cultural ways, as reflected in the Rg Vedic poetry, appears to have survived at least

with respect to the freedom of mind so richly manifested in later India's philosophical traditions.⁵⁷ Therefore a modern western writer could say: "The Indian mind is made up of more varieties of religion, more philosophies and a greater complex of cultural practices than most any other major civilization in the world".⁵⁸ And the same writer, quoting Hiriyanna as saying: "A striking characteristic of Indian thought is its richness and variety. There is practically no shade of speculation which it does not include,"⁵⁹ supports it with the remark: "The longer one studies Indian philosophy, the more one realises the accuracy of that observation".⁶⁰

Such a rich and complex array of diverse points of view could not develop without some guiding principles that could bring about order and method among the different viewpoints. From relatively early times there arose the "vāda" tradition, the tradition of the art of philosophical disputation, and this art crystallised in the development of the Nyāya or logic school of thought.⁶¹ Although this school, like others that developed alongside of it over the centuries, put forward specific perspectives in ontology and ethics, its special and unique status is due to the elaboration of the vāda tradition, in which it developed no less than 16 categories concerned with debate and argument.

The rise of a school such as the Nyāya, specifically concerned with the rules of debate and argument, immediately point to the contemporaneous rise and existence of many contending schools of thought, whose very existence must have created the conditions necessary for a school of logic. The many and varied perspectives, contending against each other on matters of theology, ontology, belief and practice, continued to co-exist in an atmosphere of tension and relative stability, in which only the accepted rules of debate and validation could provide the medium of survival. This is the great dialectical tradition of India, whose literature is witness to the fact of almost endless vigorous and spirited argumentation among the various schools and sub-schools across several centuries.⁶²

As the debates progressed and the philosophical positions of the schools matured and settled down in terms of vital propositions, the broad outlines of the larger traditions appeared naturally to mark out a kind of graded scheme, so far as the orthodox schools were concerned.⁶³ Thus the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, the Sāṃkhya-Yoga and the Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta were paired and arranged in that order, suggesting a gradual sophistication in terms of acceptance of a supreme divine principle.

Sometimes it has been suggested that the orthodox systems reach their culmination in Advaita Vedānta⁶⁴ but it must be

stated that this position is maintained by all the schools in respect of their individual superiority and is therefore untenable from a historical point of view:

"Such an attempt goes against the individuality of the philosophical systems. Each system claims a certain autonomy and finality, and to look upon them as steps to Vedanta is not a satisfactory reflection." 65

On the other hand, several Indian thinkers have been betrayed into a position of "misty vagueness, lazy acceptance and cheap eclecticism," as Radhakrishnan puts it.⁶⁶ Eclecticism is the view that the differences of detail and approach are of secondary importance.

The eclectic view sometimes bases itself on the doctrine of "adhikāra-bheda," differences suited to the capacities of men.⁶⁷ But this view is tantamount to making one or other of the systems the final and culminating one, and again cannot be accepted on the grounds of historical objectivity. Further, such a view would tend to destroy the rationale of dialectics as it would shift focus from purely doctrinal opposition to the consideration of an assessment of the relative position of a doctrine on a scale of values. But the history of the dialectical tradition shows keen and long-drawn out contests about individual metaphysical issues and their exegetical validity on the basis of accepted texts. The most that can be allowed for the "adhikāra-bheda" view is that it becomes just another issue to be dialectically contested. At any rate, it must

be pointed out that the doctrine of "adhikāra-bheda" would require the demonstration of a great deal of commonness among the systems, and quite the opposite is in fact the case:

"As regards the views held by the various schools of philosophy in India about the ontological status of the world and the self, they are so bewilderingly diverse that it would amount to the most objectionable oversimplification to hold, as has often been held by writers on Indian philosophy, that there is a fundamental agreement among them." 68

Ninian Smart refers to Indian eclecticism as the "eirenic" doctrine, and he maintains that it is part of the holistic approach that became fashionable in Indian philosophical circles. He writes:

"Another reason for the holistic approach is that among the orthodox, that is, the Hindu schools, it became fashionable to hold the eirenic doctrine that they represented different emphases in the delineation of the same underlying truth. There were religious reasons for this pacific and in some respects very unphilosophical view. the eirenic doctrine is neither justifiable nor characteristic of Indian philosophy during its most argumentative and flourishing period". 69

1.3.6 VEDANTA AND INDIAN CULTURE

It is pertinent to advise a corrective with regard to the general and sweeping manner in which many accounts of Indian philosophy and culture tend to colour their

treatment with somewhat subjective views. On the one hand, they presume that the history of Indian philosophy is largely the history of the Vedānta aspect of it. On the other hand within the Vedānta tradition, they give pride of place to the Śāṅkara school of Vedānta, often maintaining the underlying presumption that it is the pinnacle of the philosophical development of Indian thought, and tending to reduce the value, importance and historical role of the non-Śāṅkara schools.

Regarding the former view, it may well be accepted that after the popularisation of Vedānta by Śāṅkara, the Vedānta tradition assumed an overwhelming importance both among philosophical circles as well as in society as a whole⁷⁰; but prior to Śāṅkara it is almost certainly the case that the great school of Pūrva Mimāṃsā, with its fixed pattern of relationships between men, priests and gods, such as impose order and regularity on man's behaviour, and judging from the immense breadth of the Brāhmaṇa literature and the rather patent and characteristic protest it suffered in the Upaniṣads, must have had a decisive hold on men's minds and the thinkers of the period. It is almost certain that the Sāṅkhya categories and presuppositions, together with Buddhist epistemology and metaphysics, must have ruled the day prior to Śāṅkara.



Hiriyana says:

"The ascendancy at one stage belonged conspicuously to Buddhism, and it seemed it had once for all gained the upper hand."⁷¹

If we accept as evidence, and there is no reason not to, Śamkara's most consistent dialectics against these two schools of Sāṃkhya and Buddhism, we have to presume that they represented formidable contenders against Vedānta both prior to, and during the time of Śamkara. Speaking about the relative importance of the entire Vedāntic tradition, including its sources, Charles A. Moore emphasises:

"The Vedas, the Upanisads and the Bhagavat Gita, along with one extreme Vedantin, Śamkara, have dominated the Western 'picture' of Indian Philosophy, but they do not constitute anything like the whole or the essence or even, as often contended, the basic spirit of the almost infinite variety of philosophical concepts, methods and attitudes that make up the Indian philosophical tradition".⁷²

This is hard criticism indeed, and if our judgement is too much clouded by the dominant position of Vedānta over the last ten centuries, we might tend to reject his claim. Yet the facts speak clearly, and we are looking in this matter at the pre-Śamkara situation.

But when we turn our attention to the post-Śamkara picture of the Indian philosophical scene, we are again in danger of making an easy and oversimplified judgement. There is no doubt that advaita Vedānta has been the most dominant

school of this age, but certainly it would be wrong to identify it with the whole of Vedānta.⁷³

If we offer some respect to history, and note that, within a few centuries after Śaṅkara, Islam was becoming a dominant political force, we shall not be too hasty in minimising its influence in social and religious thought, and in the philosophical tendencies that underly them. Islam's severe theism, and even monotheism, in all probability spurred on the already existing theistic elements to fuller and more significant expression among the thinkers of the day. As Radhakrishnan puts it, the philosophic expression of a people cannot be seen apart from the historical and social context in which it has its origin and development.⁷⁴ And indeed, the burgeoning Saiva and Vaiṣṇava theistic trends, often reaching severe and dogmatic levels of expression, beginning just after the time of Rāmānuja and continuing into the time of the Madhva and Vallabha schools, may not be without their historical and social inspiration. We can therefore agree with Moore again when he says that, while the Vedāntic tradition as a whole was the dominant school of philosophy and religion, we must also concede the fact of:

"....the very much greater emphasis on theism rather than Absolutism in the spiritual tradition as a whole."⁷⁵

1.3.7. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION

In the Indian tradition as it has developed since the hymns of the Vedas, philosophy and religion appear to have been demarcated as two relatively independent, yet closely related disciplines.

As noted earlier, the perception of doubt regarding metaphysical reality, and the subsequent speculative adventure towards the resolution of the doubt-situation is what gives to philosophy its distinctive quality. In considering the notion of lack of conviction in philosophical knowledge, Saxena asks:

"Is it because of the object of philosophical knowledge or because of the method of philosophical knowledge or because of both? To a certain extent it can be said that, since philosophical knowledge concerns itself with the ultimate origin and end of the whole of reality, and wants to grasp it, with man's finite mind, an ultimate skepticism about it is involved in the very nature of the rational situation." 76

This precisely defines the nature of philosophy. The metaphysical system - building that a philosopher feels compelled to engage in, and the ethical directions that he derives from his constructions of reality, are still true functions of philosophy, in as much as they are dictated by a rational and logical approach to the perceived problems. The Indian philosophical tradition has remained consistently true to this pattern, in spite of the fact that philosophy operated on the theological concepts

provided by religion. We may note the words of Radhakrishnan in this connection:

"Though philosophy in India has not as a rule completely freed itself from the fascinations of religious speculation, yet the philosophical discussions have not been hampered by religious forms. The two were not confused." 77

While religious insights provided, so to speak, the stock-in-trade of both philosophy and religion, and while this fact in turn imparted to Indian Philosophy an intensely practical concern, the Indian philosophical systems developed highly elaborate epistemologies which acted as the logical bases for their respective metaphysics and ethics. And this created the necessary conditions for the tradition of dialectical debates that characterises much of classical thought.

We must note that although religious interests were often obviously the centre of interest in debates, the form and method were distinctly philosophical. Philosophy as a whole, itself became goal-oriented, and its goals, variously given as "mokṣa" or "śreyas" coalesced and merged with the accepted goals of religion. As philosophical thinking was inspired by the perception of metaphysical doubt, philosophical conceptions of Ultimate Reality were continuously adapted to the religious requirement, and religion had the happy advantage in India of a philosophical corrective for

its excesses. Radhakrishnan says:

"The common criticism that Indian thought, by its emphasis on intellect, puts philosophy in the place of religion, brings out the rational character of religion in India".⁷⁸

In concluding this section, we may say that philosophy and religion share a commonness between them that is a unique feature of Indian thought; yet the divisions between the two areas cannot be blurred. While the concepts operated upon are often the same, and while the origin and the goals of the two disciplines may be expressed in similar terms, it is philosophy alone that applies a distinctive method for the resolution of perceived problems, while religion must be seen as the pursuit of ethical norms. Our study of the three selected systems will reveal that even in the case of the advaita tradition, our definition of religion holds true. We should consider that, if highly elaborate dialectical systems arose and were sustained over long periods of time, they must have been seen to have important practical bearing on life and its problems. Hence it is understandable that Indian philosophy is pragmatically oriented. It means that it is close to life.

End Notes : Chapter One

1. Singh, B. The Conceptual Framework of Indian Philosophy, p.5.
2. Raju, P.T. Idealistic Thought of India, p.14.
3. Banerjee, N.V. The Spirit of Indian Philosophy, pp.17/8.
4. Zaehner, R.C. Hinduism
5. Chennakesavan, S. A Critical Study of Hinduism, p.14.
6. Rao, P.N. Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy, p.19.
7. HIR OIP, p.29.
8. RAD IP I, p.69.
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11. Aurobindo, Sri. Hymns to the Mystic Fire, pp.ix/xiv.
12. RAD IP I, p.70.
13. Embree, A. op.cit., p.4.
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17. HIR OIP, p.13.
18. RAD IP I, p.66.
19. Bowes, P. The Hindu Religious Tradition, p.23.
20. RAD IP I, p.65.
21. Prabhavananda, S. Spiritual Heritage of India, p.25.
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Chapter Two: The General Background

In this chapter the general background of Indian thought and culture is presented with special reference to the major texts of the tradition, viz., the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahma Sūtra. The ideas embodied in these texts are presented objectively, without assuming any necessary connection between them and the classical systems of philosophy.

CONTENTS

Chapter Two: The General Background

2.1.	The Main Texts	p.41.
2.2.	The Upaniṣads	p.47.
2.2.1.	Relation to Tradition	p.49.
2.2.2.	Mystical Orientations	p.51.
2.2.3.	Diversity of Views	p.55.
2.2.4.	Reason and Speculation	p.56.
2.2.5.	Two Kinds of Knowledge	p.59.
2.2.6.	Creation and the Status of the World	p.63.
2.2.7.	Ultimate Reality and the Individual	p.67.
2.2.8.	Theistic Outlook	p.70.
2.2.9.	Ethics	p.73.
2.2.10.	Karma, Rebirth and Emancipation	p.75.
2.3.0.	The Bhagavad Gītā	p.78.
2.3.1.	Metaphysical Ideas	p.80.
2.3.2.	The Individual Self	p.81.
2.3.3.	Material Reality	p.83.
2.3.4.	The Doctrine of Works	p.84.
2.3.5.	God and Ultimate Reality	p.86.
2.3.6.	Devotion and Yoga	p.88.
2.3.7.	Freedom and Salvation	p.90.
2.4.0.	The Brahma Sūtra	p.91.
2.4.1.	Some Important Teachings	p.94.
2.5.	The Sāṃkhya Kārikā	p.96.

2.1. THE MAJOR TEXTS

Many and varied are the streams of thought that have flowed out from the ancient texts of the Vedas and Upaniṣads. And many have been the systems of thought that have sought to demonstrate their logical and philosophical consistency with the thought of the ancient Veda.

We have already noted above that the roots of almost all later traditions of thought are to be traced to the most ancient Veda, that is, to the Samhitā or Mantra sections of it. In a philosophical undertaking such as the present project, it is important not only to maintain a general objectivity but also to take as much care with words and phrases as with ideas, so as not to transgress the evidence or contradict the experts, without a reasonable show of authority or philosophical consistency.

In this connection it is important to note at this juncture, that the orthodox Indian or Hindu view of the ancient texts is that they are a revelation from God in every detail, and a large band of orthodox opinion holds that the term "apauruṣeya" signifies, not that the Vedas are independent of God Himself, but that they transcend every form of human origin. On the other hand, it is the opinion of representative scholars, both Indian and Western that an undeniable

development of ideas i.e. the actual process of such development, can be traced in the earlier Vedas and in the Upaniṣads.

The savant Max Muller says that in the ancient Veda:

"...in many cases the development of names and concepts, their transition from the natural to the supernatural, from the individual to the general, is still going on....."¹

He further states that this process can be clearly seen also with respect to one of the most important terms, "deva", whose original meaning was simply brightness. In this sense, it became the general term of reference for all those phenomena that displayed obvious brightness, such as the day, the dawn, the spring, etc. Soon it came to refer to the quality common among all the referents, and eventually, some kind of power that is immortal and transcends these various manifestations.²

Similarly in the texts of the Upaniṣads also, we have to notice this tendency of development.³ The all important concept of deva runs through the Upaniṣads and splits itself into two most prominent concepts - Brahman and Ātma. In both cases, taking the Upaniṣads as a whole, we are struck by such varying approaches to these two ideas that several scholars have concluded that over several centuries, the sages of the Upaniṣads were earnestly seeking a solution to the questions regarding these key concepts. Dasgupta says:

"The Upaniṣads present to us the history of this quest and the results that were achieved".⁴

Since the Upaniṣads base themselves on spiritual experience and not on the conventional constructions of philosophy, they become "a repository of diverse currents of thought"⁵ about fundamental questions of life.

While there is much that is contradictory both in theme and treatment between the Upaniṣads and the immediately preceding period of the Brāhmaṇas,⁶ yet it must be accepted as the more remarkable that the Upaniṣads are in so many important ways the direct inheritors of the older Veda, for the quasi-speculative thoughts of the Rg Veda, after riding through the barren formalism of the Brāhmaṇas, reach majestic heights of daring and challenge in the Upaniṣads. So much so that, in spite of its lack of system with regard to its own major ideas,⁷ and lack of systematic treatment of modern Western categories of philosophy as an academic discipline, we may yet be justified in declaring them "the fountain-head of all Indian Philosophy,⁸ "the source of all philosophy that arose in the world of Hindu thought".⁹

The concern of the present study, is a consideration of the three major schools of Sāṃkhya, Advaita Vedānta and Viśiṣṭādvaita in relation to the ethical models they advance. The term "Vedānta" primarily refers to the Upaniṣads, considered as the conclusion and as the climax of the

Upaniṣadic teachings.¹⁰ The Vedāntic canon consists of three texts or the PRASTHANA-TRAYA, made up of the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā and Brahma Sūtra.¹¹

The Bhagavad Gītā and the Brahma Sūtra are often regarded, in relation to the Upaniṣads, as works that take up the task of setting forth the Upaniṣadic doctrine in a systematic way.¹² While this ordering of the thoughts of the Upaniṣads is considered the primary interest of the Brahma Sūtra, the Bhagavad Gītā has received ambivalent treatment in terms of Śruti status or status as revealed scripture.

The Brahma Sūtra is firmly entrenched in the Vedāntic tradition as the "Nyāya Prasthāna" or the scripture representing the logical views not only of Bādarāyana, but of the entire list of the classical Upaniṣads.¹³

The Bhagavad Gītā is accepted as the text representing the Smṛti literature¹⁴ or secondary sources, since it is fixed in the body of the Mahābhārata, itself a Smṛti text, and accepted as the best of the Smṛti texts by most non-dualist teachers. It has to be noted that the Bhagavad Gītā has constructively enjoyed the status of a primary religious text, both as a member of the triple canon of Vedānta, as well as in its own right.¹⁵ So far as the theistic thinkers are concerned the Gītā has been regarded as divine revelation and therefore as a Śruti text. It is easy to see that

the three texts of the Upaniṣads, Gītā and Brahma Sūtra must supply at least the framework for the metaphysical formulations pertaining to the schools of Vedānta.¹⁶

When we come to the Sāṃkhya school of thought, in relation to a consideration of its authoritative texts, we have to give primacy of place to the Sāṃkhya Kārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, as the text that stands at the very head of this entire development. Yet, and perhaps of great value, is the consideration of some aspects of the Upaniṣadic teaching as they might be related to Sāṃkhya doctrines.¹⁷ We may take the lead from Dasgupta when he says:

"There are also passages in Śvetāśvatara and particularly in Maitrāyaṇi from which it appears that the Sāṃkhya line of thought had considerably developed, and many of its technical terms were considerably in use."¹⁸

And this line of thought is firmly supported by Nakamura when he says:

"Again, we see in the works of later centuries of the Sāṃkhya school that, insofar as it tries to demonstrate that its own theories are based upon the Vedas, it frequently quotes passages from the Upaniṣads. And it seems that such a tendency existed in the Sāṃkhya school from fairly ancient time."¹⁹

Though most commentators are agreed that pure Sāṃkhya conclusions are not the order of Upaniṣadic thought, it cannot be denied that some of the principal Upaniṣads like the Kaṭha²⁰ and the Mundaka²¹ suggest links with the Sāṃkhya.

Radhakrishnan says:

"The Upanisads do not support the theory of a plurality of purusas, though a natural process of criticism and development of one side of the doctrine leads to it."²²

And the same judgement may be made with regard to the Bhagavad Gītā also.²³ Although the Gītā does not clearly support the Sāmkhya doctrines as a whole, it cannot be denied that many of its verses can be made to appear in direct line with Sāmkhya conceptions, both of puruṣa and prakṛti.²⁴ These features suggest strongly that, long before the philosophical formulations of the classical period had become established, perhaps earlier than the time of the fixing of the Upaniṣadic texts, Sāmkhya had been a strong contender in the field of metaphysical doctrines.

We can clearly see, therefore, that the general philosophical background and the major doctrinal directions for the Sāmkhya and the Vedānta schools had been fixed very early in the history of Indian thought, much earlier than the time of Śankara. The metaphysical presuppositions seen in the sophisticated formulation of the Vedānta find their precursors in the texts of the Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā and Brahma Sūtra, while the authentic Sāmkhya thought may be traced through the Sāmkhya Kārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, with strong echoes in some portions of the Upaniṣads, such as the "Being" doctrine of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad when realistically interpreted. We shall turn to a consideration

of these texts and attempt to trace out the essentials of their metaphysical thought unfettered by the later classical formulations. A reasonable acquaintance with these basic texts is essential for a proper appreciation of the specialised doctrines into whose services they were later pressed.

2.2. THE UPANIṢADS

In the Indian tradition the Upaniṣads are generally referred to as the Vedānta. Taken in its literal sense, the word Vedānta means that which comes at the end of the Vedas. And the Upaniṣads, which form the end-portions of the Vedas, are thus taken to be the Vedānta. In this sense Buddhism or Sāṃkhya may be said to have a Vedantic colouring since their doctrines can partly be traced to the Upaniṣads.²⁵

In an important sense, not opposed to the above, the Upaniṣads are called the Vedānta because a broad band of traditional thought ascribes to them the essential wisdom of the Vedas as a whole. Insofar as any system of thought draws significant inspiration from the Upaniṣads, it has often been regarded as part of the larger Vedāntic tradition. Bloomfield has observed:

"There is no important form of Hindu thought, heterodox Buddhism included, which is not rooted in the Upaniṣads."²⁶

The importance of the study of the Upaniṣads for almost all varieties of Hindu thought, therefore, is an unchallengable

truism.

Indological researchers have not been quite in agreement about the relative chronology of the different Upaniṣads. Indian tradition, as given in the Muktika Upaniṣad, gives the number of them as 108.²⁷ Most of them belong to comparatively recent times and are obviously not genuine. In the later Indian tradition, those which have been commented upon by the founders of the schools are generally considered the important ones, and these are known as the classical Upaniṣads.²⁸

We may thus enumerate thirteen principal Upaniṣads, which have vitally affected the course of the development of Indian philosophy and ethics. These are Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Aitareya, Kauṣītaki, Taittirīya, Kena, Īśā, Kaṭha, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya, Maitrī, Praśna and Śvetāśvatara. After taking a detailed account of the classification of the Indological researchers in this field, Nakamura²⁹ concludes by placing the first seven of this list in a relatively early period (pre-Buddhistic), while the latter six are considered post-Buddhistic. This scheme is largely similar to the one arrived at by Radhakrishnan in his earlier work,³⁰ but who shifts the Kaṭha into the pre-Buddhistic period in his later work.³¹ Radhakrishnan suggests that the development of the principal Upaniṣads occurred over about 700 years, from 1000 B.C. to 300 B.C.

2.2.1. RELATION TO TRADITION

Indian tradition holds that the Upaniṣads maintain a continuity with the older sections of the Vedas. Modern scholarship has tried to show that there has been a marked divergence in several important respects between the older and the classical tradition as given in the Upaniṣads.

Radhakrishnan says:

"We find in the Upaniṣads an advance on the Samhitā mythology, Brāhmaṇa hair-splitting, and even Āraṇyaka theology The authors of the Upaniṣads transform the past they handle, and the changes they effect in the Vedic religion indicates the boldness of the heart that beats only for freedom."³²

The central tendencies of the Upaniṣads are stated to be an indifference to the plural divinities of the Samhitās in favour of a more unified conception of God, and a much greater emphasis on the importance of the individual.³³ On the whole it seems that such views reflect much truth, but they also tend to become exaggerated, for the Upaniṣadic expressions are often impressive and arresting. As Dasgupta says:

"These are not reasoned statements, but utterances of truth intuitively perceived or felt as unquestionably real and indubitable and carrying great force, vigour and persuasiveness with them."³⁴

The passion and enthusiasm evident in the Upaniṣads tends to give the impression that they are giving us a new message

of salvation. And because this message is conveyed in rationally satisfying language and convincing analogy, its appeal is more immediate and intimate. Yet it should not be forgotten that the Upanisads are embedded in a tradition of which they are still very much a part. Radhakrishnan says that the two oldest, longest and most important Upanisads, Chāndogya and Brhadāraṇyaka, largely belong to the earlier Brāhmanas.³⁵ Dasgupta avers that the bulk of the Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka and Upanisad material "gradually grew up in one process of development and were probably regarded as parts of one literature."³⁶ It can therefore be appreciated that the Upaniṣadic teachings cannot be radically different from the earlier tradition. Mainkar says:

"It can be perhaps granted that the Upaniṣadic thinkers seem to make an impression on our minds of being taller than their Vedic predecessors, but this is because they stand on their shoulders."³⁷

This states the case very nicely. And Aguilar has shown rather convincingly also that the ancient Veda reveals a metaphysic not different in essence from that of the Upaniṣads, if once we understand the symbolism of the myths.³⁸

It may well be that the Samhitās represent the same spirituality as the Upaniṣads, though we are unable to penetrate it fully for its lack of rational language. If it is so, then the real break with tradition comes with the

Brāhmanas and their "soulless mechanism of idle rites and pedantic ceremonialism".³⁹ In many ways, therefore, the Upaniṣads represent a return to the spirit of the most ancient Veda. But it is a reform with some significant shifts of emphasis.

2.2.2. MYSTICAL ORIENTATIONS

The Upaniṣads present in eloquent language teachings about the hidden, unseen Reality. Their purpose is not to explain the mechanical workings of the universe or a scientific explanation of things, though their keen search for spiritual reality disallows them from following unscientific lines of thought in a dogmatic way. Although Upaniṣadic thought is often referred to as philosophy, it is philosophy only in a loose sense of the term. The sages of the Upaniṣads speak out of the depths of their spiritual experiences, and these experiences are necessarily of things transcendent and not mundane. They strive to present spiritual truths in rationally understandable language, and because such attempts are more or less consistent throughout the classical Upaniṣads, they give evidence of a unity of purpose and a vivid sense of spiritual reality. Even if it be accepted that the earliest sections of the Veda use mystical language to convey spiritual truth, the kind of language employed and the myth and symbol used operate an effective bar against the rational understanding. The

Upaniṣads, on the other hand, consciously operate in rational terms to convey the truths imbibed in spiritual experiences. Spiritual truths are beyond the reach of thought which is an activity of the mind; yet it is the rational approach that gives satisfaction to our longing to understand. In this regard Radhakrishnan says of the Upaniṣads:

"They reveal to us the wealth of the reflective mind of the times. In the domain of intuitive philosophy their achievement is a considerable one. Nothing that went before them, for compass or power, for suggestiveness and satisfaction can stand comparison with them. Their philosophy and religion have satisfied some of the greatest thinkers and intensely spiritual souls." 40

The impossibility of giving a rational account of the spiritual experience leads the Upaniṣads to deep mystical learnings. What we are given are spiritual insights or illuminations in quasi-rational terms. In order to get to the actual experiences, or as near to them as possible, we have to follow the leads and suggestions more with our feelings than our thoughts. The Upaniṣads themselves teach that thought can take us to the gates of truth, but cannot secure entry. From the point of view of an academic approach therefore, our approach to the teachings of the Upaniṣads has to be in terms of rational reflections upon the suggestions given, and reasoned metaphysical constructions as these are supported by the texts themselves.

The later systems of philosophy attempt to do just this.

Mystical orientations are seen in the very word "Upaniṣad". A compound of three terms upa(near) ni(down) sad(sit), it means that pupils are expected to be in close proximity to their preceptors to hear the teachings. But it also refers to a spiritual proximity, a closeness and intimacy such that the teachings thus imparted could only have meaning for those who are spiritually initiated, who are fit to receive the teachings.⁴¹

In the Upaniṣads themselves the term is taken to mean a form of secret teaching, and Hiriyana thinks that this is the original meaning of the term.⁴² Others think that the meaning of secret teaching developed later in the further development of the tradition.⁴³ The Chāndogya Upaniṣad refers to the teachings imparted by the teacher as "guhya ādeśa", secret doctrine⁴⁴; the Kaṭha refers to the teachings as "vedānta paramam guhyam," the highest secret of Vedānta.⁴⁵

The Chāndogya has the story of Indra approaching Prajāpati for instruction, and he is asked to remain serving the teacher for 3 periods of 32 years, and, after a further period of five years Prajāpati delivers to him the highest knowledge of the Self.⁴⁶ The exacting standards thus imposed are indicative of the requirement of fitness on the part of the student as well as subtlety of the teaching.

The Upaniṣad further says that the teachings regarding the Highest Reality may be imparted by a father to his son or to a trusted pupil, and not to anyone else, even if great treasure were offered in payment.⁴⁷ The Śvetāśvatara warns against teaching the doctrine to an unworthy person.⁴⁸ The Bṛhadāraṇyaka gives the precise example of Yājñavalkya taking his pupil by the hand and leading him aside in order to impart to him the secret doctrine.⁴⁹

In consonance with these mystical orientations, the Upaniṣads promote their doctrines through symbols and formulae. One of the most ancient symbol is the monosyllable Aum, which stands mostly for the highest ineffable truth. The Chāndogya says that Prajāpati, through a strenuous process of meditation, brought forth the syllable Aum, which is identified with all existence.⁵⁰ The Prasna identifies it with both the lower and the higher aspects of Brahman.⁵¹ The Katha⁵² declares Aum to be best and highest support of man's striving, as well as the imperishable goal of all spiritual effort. The Mundaka calls it the great weapon of the Upaniṣads (aupanisadam mahā astram) and, comparing it to a bow, teaches that the Ātma should be mounted on it as an arrow, which can then attain to Brahman as the mark.⁵³ The Māṇḍūkya gives the most elaborate treatment of this mystic symbol and identifies it with the very highest state of Transcendent Reality. This syllable is presented in the Upaniṣads both as the goal of religious

striving as well as the most efficacious means of securing such a goal.⁵⁴ In the Indian tradition it has been the unbroken belief that the syllable Aum is unmatched by any other holy formula for sacred potency and for efficacy.⁵⁵

Another well-known formula is "tajjalān" which stands as a symbol for Ultimate Reality seen as the source, sustenance and goal of the world.⁵⁶ The Chāndogya also has the famous formula "tattvamasi," identifying the empirical self of man with that "subtle essence" which is the basis of the physical universe.⁵⁷ In later literature this formula is revered as one of the "mahā vākyas", great sayings.

2.2.3. DIVERSITY OF VIEWS

Symbols and formulae, like myths, are not stable units of thought. They cannot operate like mathematical formulae do, in a fixed and predictable manner. The symbols and formulae, and the mythological anecdotes of which the Upaniṣads are so full, naturally affect the apprehensions of truth at different times and under differing conditions. The Upaniṣads themselves therefore exhibit a state of fluidity with regard to their conceptions, and which has provided the grounds for varied theological developments of later times.⁵⁸

The Taittirīya tells us that "Brahman is Truth, Knowledge and Infinity" in one place,⁵⁹ and then identifies Brahman

progressively with food, vital breath, mind, intelligence and bliss. More strikingly, the Taittirīya ascribes creation to Non-Being,⁶⁰ while the Chāndogya, after considering the view asserts that "In the beginning, Being alone existed, one only, without a second".⁶¹ Mainkar says that we have to accept such contradictory views as a feature of the Upaniṣadic texts.⁶² And when we consider that the authors of these texts are spread over several generations, "one feels that the conflict of ideas was inevitable".⁶³

2.2.4. REASON AND SPECULATION

The very diversity of thought that we meet with in the Upaniṣads indicates the spirit of free inquiry that they upheld. Speculative reflection is given full rein, and there is no region of sanctity where human reason cannot penetrate. While in the Samhitās we see the beginnings of the expression of doubt and uncertainty, in the Upaniṣads the tradition is sustained and prominent. There is no philosophical systematization of the nature of argument,⁶⁴ yet the earnest search for truth based on the reasoning powers of the human mind reaches great heights of speculative daring. This is clearly evident in the keen pursuit of a thesis logically argued out as found in the discussion between Uddālaka Āruṇi and his son Śvetaketu.⁶⁵

Even the hallowed conceptions of the gods of earlier tradition are not immune from the penetrating searchlight of reason. Thus Yājñavalkya, in answer to a student's query, jocularly reduces all the gods to "one and half" and finally to one.⁶⁶ Not only do the Upaniṣads refashion the old conceptions, but they also feel themselves free enough to take liberties with those conceptions.

The gods are further reduced to mere subserviance and powerlessness before the great Brahman, against whose power, as residing even in a blade of grass, the traditional gods could not prevail.⁶⁷ The Aitareya, makes the gods mere bodily functions, and, at best, different aspects of the self of man. The conception of a variety of gods was certainly firmly rooted in the earlier tradition, and, although the Upaniṣads do not annihilate them, they succeed in transforming them out of all significance in the interests of a true spiritual monism.⁶⁸

Indian tradition is strong that the Upaniṣads are part of the Veda, being a continuous line of development with the most ancient texts. It therefore holds that these two sections teach more or less the same doctrines.⁶⁹ This holds true in spite of the traditional divisions into karma-kāṇḍa and jñāna-kāṇḍa. It also holds true in the sense that every traditional school maintains this unity of interpretation, so far as its own dogmatic stand is concerned.

Thus several different schools derive differing interpretations although they work on the same textual materials. These wide differences in interpretations are due to the nature and content of the Upaniṣads themselves, which not only encourages human reasoning on spiritual matters, but themselves engage in speculation of various kinds. Noting that despite ^{the} traditional view that "the Upaniṣads as Revealed Texts teach the same doctrine," and that varied interpretations have been given of them, C. Sharma further states:

"The problems discussed in them as well as their unique style make them liable to many interpretations. All their teachings are not equally prominent. Some are mere flashes of thought; some are only hinted at; some are slightly developed; some are mentioned by the way; while some are often repeated, emphasised and thoroughly dealt with."⁷⁰

The rich variety of interpretations of the Upaniṣads are therefore directly related to the contents of these texts themselves.⁷¹ This study is concerned with two major Vedāntic schools of thought, the Advaita and the Viśiṣṭadvaita, and the Sāṃkhya, all of them closely related to the Upaniṣads yet featuring widely opposed doctrines.

In spite of the fact that "germs of diverse kinds of thoughts are found scattered over the Upaniṣads which are not worked out in a systematic manner,"⁷² it is fair to point out that most Indian and Western scholars over the

last one hundred years or so have been enamoured more with the advaita system of Śāṅkara and which has been erroneously regarded as the chief or true system of Vedānta. Since Vedānta by definition is not only the concluding portions of the Veda, but also the conclusions of them, that is, their aim and essence, and therefore covers the entire range of Vedic literature, it can by no means be taken for granted that the advaita, with its emphasis on māyā and rejection of the doctrine of works, can be counted as the representative Vedāntic system. It is common sense wisdom to heed the words of Dasgupta in this connection:

"Under these circumstances it is necessary that a modern interpreter of the Upaniṣads should turn a deaf ear to the absolute claims of these exponents, and look upon the Upaniṣads not as a systematic treatise, but as a repository of diverse currents of thought."⁷³

2.2.5. TWO KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE

The Upaniṣads as a whole clearly represent a search, conducted in various different ways, after an Ultimate Reality which is itself represented in several different ways. However this Ultimate Reality is spoken of, whether in terms of the Divine Self of man or in terms of the objective world, it always represents a type of knowledge or cognition that is fundamentally different from all other types of knowledge or cognitions. Thus the Mundaka distinguishes between "lower knowledge" and "higher

knowledge." The lower knowledge is that which is derived from the Vedas and related studies, while the higher knowledge is that through which the indestructible Brahman is known.⁷⁴

The Chāndogya also places all objective learning, even learning about Vedic lore, on a lower plane. Approaching Sanatkumāra for holy teaching, the renowned Nārada confesses that he has learnt all the Vedas, related scriptures and many diverse subjects, yet he was in a state of grief; he was "only a knower of verbal texts, not a knower of Ātman".⁷⁵ The knowledge of the Ātma is spiritual knowledge, not mere learning, and it is stated to be different from all other forms of knowledge.⁷⁶ Knowledge of both the secular and the sacred, so long as it is attained through ordinary modes of perception, fails to give spiritual insight; only the knowledge of the Ātma, realised in intuition, can take one "beyond grief".

The general Upaniṣadic condemnation and strictures against Vedic knowledge is to be taken as largely referring to the Brāhmanic interpretation of it. The grossly ritualistic view of the Veda is that activities should be undertaken for the sake of accumulating heavenly merits. The immediately preceding Brāhmanic period weighed heavily upon the Upaniṣadic sages as the period that significantly distorted the spirit of the mantras by insisting upon the formalistic institution of sacrifices motivated by a desire for heavenly

rewards. It is this sacrificial Vedic knowledge that the sages of the Upaniṣads protest against. The Mundaka makes this quite clear:

"Verily, these sacrifices are frail rafts The fools who acclaim this as the highest good certainly fall again and again into the domain of old age and death." 77

The higher knowledge, parā vidyā, is generally stated to be the knowledge of the Ātman or the Brahman. While the aparā vidyā may be enumerated and spoken about directly through the medium of language, the parā vidyā cannot be so communicated. In relating it through normal verbal methods and understanding it through perceptual modes, its saving character is lost, although a satisfying mental construction might be made of it.⁷⁸ Therefore the Upaniṣads are more or less agreed that **this** knowledge is inexpressible, as the actual experience is ineffable. The Kena directly admits its non-teachability:

"The eye cannot approach It, neither speech nor mind. We do not therefore know It, nor can we teach It. It is different from what is unknown". 79

The text relegates all knowable entities to the realm of the finite, while the higher knowledge, the knowledge of the Ātman, is beyond all empirical categories, and hence unteachable. Hiriyana refers to an example from Śaṅkara's commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, of a student who repeatedly enquired of his unresponding teacher about the nature of Brahman. Finally the teacher answers: "Upasanto 'yam Ātma,"

the Self is silence.⁸⁰ The higher knowledge cannot be brought within the sphere of words and language because it is not a knowledge of things; it is not a knowledge of any type of existence which can be an object of thought. As Radhakrishnan puts it, it is a knowledge of that which is "beyond the sphere of prediction."⁸¹ Inexpressibility, however, does not mean absolute unknowability, for it is the very purpose of the Upaniṣads to make it known.⁸² Just as the lower knowledge is different from the higher knowledge, so also is there a difference in attaining to the two types of knowledge. Empirical knowledge is gained through operating the sensory modes of perception that are directed outwards from the self as subject. The intuitive mode of perception on the other hand, which is based on spiritual training, is alone appropriate to a knowledge of the Transcendental Self. The Kaṭha says:

"The self-existent Lord created the senses defective, with an outward disposition, and so man sees outwardly and not the inner Self. Some wise man desiring immortality, turns his gaze inward, and beholds the inner Ātman".⁸³

The Upaniṣadic seers operate on the presumption that genuine spiritual knowledge is different from rational reflection about it and that the capacity for attaining to it is shared by all men.⁸⁴

2.2.6 CREATION AND THE STATUS OF THE WORLD

With regard to the created universe and the manifold world of experience presented to the senses, we may say that the Upaniṣads generally set forth the view of "fundamental realism", as opposed to "radical realism". Fundamental realism is a neutral position between the kind of realism expressed by a common sense view of the world, and the idealistic view that says that the world of experience is a mere appearance that somehow arises on absolute Godhead as its ground and basis.

Fundamental realism implies that the world of objects are real, but they do not exhaust reality. Reality is imparted to them by that which, in the nature of the case, cannot be disclosed to the senses nor to the finite mind of man. Though reality is reflected in the worldly things, it is immeasurably greater in every way. Fundamental realism neither rejects nor accepts different orders of reality. It is a plain statement of Upaniṣadic teachings that God is the fundamental reality in all things. Paul Deussen has elaborated the thesis that the Upaniṣads teach that the world is an illusion superimposed on Brahman, the Absolute Reality.⁸⁵ Radhakrishnan in countering this view, advocates that the Upaniṣads teach the relative reality of the world; that the multiplicity of the sensible world, though real in itself, is not the highest reality. Dasgupta feels that it is doubtful if the sages

of the Upaniṣads had any conscious purpose of promoting the idea of relative reality of the world: He says:

".....the sages had not probably any conscious purpose of according a reality to the phenomenal world but in spite of regarding Brahman as the highest reality they could not ignore the claims of the exterior world, and had to accord a reality to it." 86

The diverse approaches of the Upaniṣads, their apparent diversity of doctrines, the different contextual senses in the use of the term 'sat' and 'asat',⁸⁷ and the several different terms that are used to stand for ultimate reality, all these are due to the characteristic unsystematic nature of the Upaniṣadic teachings.

The Upaniṣads generally ascribe positive reality to all things by characterising them as invested with the stuff of spiritual reality. Thus the Chāndogya Upaniṣad says: "Sarvam khalvidam brahma," "All this is indeed Brahman".⁸⁸ Spiritual reality is all pervasive, just as the self, once dissolved in the water, may be experienced in every part of the water.⁸⁹ Spiritual reality is also the seed and source of all things, as the imperceptible subtle essence that grows into and manifests the huge banyan tree.⁹⁰

The Upaniṣads generally give direct support to the emanation theory of creation, which states that the world is produced out of the being of Brahma, has its support in Brahma, and will ultimately be reabsorbed into Brahma.⁹¹ The Mundaka

states it in the most unambiguous and dramatic way:

"Just as a spider puts forth and draws back its web; just as the herbs sprout on the earth; just as the hair grows on a man's body - so also from that Imperishable Being this universe springs forth".⁹²

The Mundaka also gives the analogy of the fire and sparks asserting that the manifold beings return to their source in the Imperishable Brahman.⁹³ This is the cosmic view of creation, in which the greater emphasis is laid on the manifold character of the universe and an unmistakeable tendency towards some form of realism.

The other significant tendency in the Upaniṣads is represented by those passages that discourage the perception of plurality and emphasise the transcendent unity of ultimate reality.⁹⁴ The Brhadāranyaka says:

"Here there is no diversity whatever; he who sees diversity, as it were, goes from death to death."⁹⁵

Similarly also the Chāndogya deprecates all finite things and declares that happiness lies in the infinite alone. It further asserts that all finite objects are but mere names, their basis (spiritual reality) alone being real.⁹⁶ The Brhadāranyaka declares all finitude to be merely "nāma-rūpa," name and form, the Self alone being worthy of attainment.⁹⁷ These passages are interpreted as tending to the idealistic view, in that they emphasise the relative insignificance of

the phenomenal world. This defines the acosmic view of creation, and for some authors implies the extreme idealistic doctrine of illusion.⁹⁸ Radhakrishnan asserts that the Upaniṣads do not support the doctrine of world illusion.⁹⁹ We should note that the doctrine of illusion together with the related idea of orders of reality, do not necessarily follow from the Upaniṣadic passages.

The Upaniṣads clearly presuppose some kind of evolution doctrine regarding the production of the manifold universe and various life forms, though it cannot be said that they are interested in a precise scientific presentation of the facts. While all things are ultimately derived from Brahman in the fashion of a process, as implied in terms such as "srjate" (projects), "sambhavate" (grows), "prabhavate" (issues forth), "prajāyante" (are produced), such created things are categorised into the organic and the inorganic.¹⁰⁰ The earliest account of inorganic matter is given as fire, water and earth,¹⁰¹ which is finally settled as the five primordial elements of ether, air, fire, water and earth, which, according to the Taittirīya¹⁰² finally gives rise to man through herbs, food and seed. The order of the appearance of the elements suggests the production of the gross from the subtle, implying that Brahman is the source of all.¹⁰³

The Chāndogya¹⁰⁴ divides life forms into three classes -

anḍaja (born from egg), jīvajā (born alive), and udbhijja (bursting through the soil), while the Aitareya adds a fourth category, śvedaja (born from sweat).¹⁰⁵

In general, we may say that this scheme of the categories of real things is presupposed by all the classical Upaniṣads, and in this sense we are justified in speaking of the Upaniṣads as a single body of literature. It is as if the sages draw from a traditional fund of common lore those ideas which are best suited to a statement of their views.¹⁰⁶

2.2.7. ULTIMATE REALITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The general Upaniṣadic conception of the individual personality is that it is an agent (kartā) and an enjoyer (bhoktā) whose essential nature is that of a psychic entity or soul. The individual's biological or involuntary activities are controlled by the breath factor (prāna), while the conscious life is controlled through the mind (manas). Mind is a broad enough term to include the unconscious activities of dream and sleep, but it generally operates at the conceptual level (buddhi or vijñāna), and at the sensory and motor levels through the organs of knowledge and action (jñānendriyas and karmendriyas).

The pure psychic entity, that is, the soul-in-itself, is generally termed Ātma, while the individual personality or

living entity is known as jīva. The term jīva defines the five-fold encumbrance of material trappings, from the grossest to the subtlest, which, in its total operation, finitises the Ātma and gives it its jīva identity. This is the doctrine of the sheaths or kośas elaborated in the Taittirīya.¹⁰⁷ The outermost sheath is the food sheath made up of the aforementioned five basic elements of all things; within that is the breath sheath, the mind sheath, the intelligence sheath, and the bliss sheath is the innermost one. Operating at the level of the three lower or outer sheaths invests the jīva with a distinct material personality, while operating at the level of the two inner ones gives it a more spiritual orientation.

Transcending even the innermost sheath establishes the jīva in its essential spiritual nature as the Ātman. Sometimes the term 'Puruṣa' is used to stand for Ātma. In defining the Ultimate Reality the Taittirīya says:

"That from which these beings are born,
that in which they live, and that into
which they enter at their death, that
is Brahman".¹⁰⁸

The cosmic or objective view of reality is what Brahman stands for, while Ātman signifies the inner, psychological principal of being within man and within all things.¹⁰⁹

Therefore, it is stated: "Brahman is Ātman".¹¹⁰ The entire fabric of the manifold universe has originated from Brahman as the ultimate reality, and yet the soul, the inner essence

of all things is itself Brahman, the antaryāmī or inner controller.¹¹¹ The objective and the subjective sides of creation reflect the transcendence and immanence of God. The texts emphasise the diversity and plurality of the world as well as its unity without attempting a reconciliation.¹¹² The definition of ultimate reality as "satyam jñānam anantam Brahma"¹¹³ brings out the comprehensive character of the Brahman-Ātman synthesis. Satyam refers to the truth-value of the equation, jñānam to its immediate certainty in man's consciousness, and ananta is its infinity in space and time. Ultimate reality is neither Brahman viewed as the objectively apprehended plurality of the phenomenal world, nor the vitalizing principle by itself, neither the transcendent nor the immanent, but that which comprehends both in a higher and total unity, which is yet expressed as the inner essence. Hiriyana says:

"The enunciation of this doctrine marked the most important advance in the whole history of India's thought."¹¹⁴

The fundamental realism of the Upaniṣads may thus be stated as expressing the non-dual essence which is the Brahma-Ātman equation. The famous expression 'satyasya satyam', the real of the real, indicates the deeper ontological realism in all things and in the human individual.¹¹⁵ There is no denial of the plural universe, though there is a definite heightened awareness of man as a psychologically operating, conscious entity, for it is only in the deeper, ontological

levels of man's being that the reality of Brahman can be experienced.¹¹⁶ The Upaniṣads further assert that the actual experience is not a negative psychological condition, but a positive condition of supreme bliss.¹¹⁷ The Taittirīya explains the highest spiritual experience in terms of the idea of ānandam, bliss or transcendental joy.¹¹⁸ Man's deepest aspirations are not cut off in Brahman, but find their expression and fulfilment in it. The tone of this line of thought is that the human personality as we know it has some form of ultimate significance. Radhakrishnan holds that even if we consider ānanda to be the highest conception of spiritual experience available to logical thought, it must be conceded that the term ananda is also used in the Upaniṣads "as a synonym for final reality".¹¹⁹

2.2.8 THEISTIC OUTLOOK

Theism as the belief in a wholly transcendent God who excludes the world from His being and who stands over and against it as the other, must be conceded, upon pressure of facts, to be wholly absent in the Upaniṣads. The philosophy of fundamental realism, of a belief in a transcendent power that is at the same time "the real in all reals," the inner essence that is the controlling and directing factor, necessarily precludes a strict form of theism.

The transcendent and otherness aspect of Godhead, even when seen as the Ātman, in the sense that it does not strictly stand for the plurality of things, is not the general Upaniṣadic position.¹²⁰ On the other hand, the pantheistic conception that Brahman has manifested itself into the world of phenomenal reality is equally untrue to the Upaniṣads, in the sense that phenomenal creation does not affect God's integrity, it does not exhaust Him, it does not bring about a change in His being. Radhakrishnan says:

"In the Upaniṣads we come across passages which declare that the nature of reality is not exhausted by the world process God is greater than the universe, which is His work." 121

According to Dasgupta there are three distinct currents in Upaniṣadic thought. One is that the Ātman or Brahman is the sole reality; the second is the pantheistic creed that identifies the universe with Brahman. And the third current is that of theism which looks upon Brahman as the Lord controlling the world." 122

A characteristic of the theistic outlook is that the supreme is infinitely greater than man as he is, as he finds himself in the phenomenal world, making it possible for him to worship and admire that Supreme. The Taittirīya establishes that even the bliss of Brahman is majestic and utterly superior to human bliss, though the fact of the comparison gives hope to man and restores confidence in

the eternal bond between man and God, an essential of the Upaniṣadic theistic position.

The Upaniṣads use the concept of a 'personal' God just as frequently as that of the 'impersonal' absolute. On the whole, the sages do not seem to particularly show any preference in their use, but depend on the theme they are pursuing.¹²³ The Upaniṣads are replete with connotations of personality applied to Brahman, such as "In the beginning this world was the Self in the shape of a person";¹²⁴ "He desired, let me become many, let me be born; He performed auterities";¹²⁵ "Beyond the manifest is the Person, all-pervading and without any mark whatsoever."¹²⁶ The idea of personality is used in a translogical sense, but it cannot be denied that, within the presuppositions of fundamental realism, it provides some basis for Upaniṣadic theism. Bowes is firmly convinced that in the matter of the ultimate relationship between God and the individual, the Upaniṣads are indifferent to the phraseology of "identity-experience" and "union-experience".¹²⁷ She insists that it is a mere dogmatic reading of the texts to insist exclusively upon one or the other. The Upaniṣads generally give us the bare spiritual experiences, but no dogmatic system. Dasgupta says that the later Vedāntic thinkers could erect their variant philosophies on the Upaniṣadic declarations because "these ideas were still in the melting pot, in which none of them were systematically worked out."¹²⁸

2.2.9 ETHICS

Though there is no radical break with the past, the Upaniṣads undoubtedly reflect an opposition to the religious practices advocated in the Brāhmaṇas and the ideas underlying them. The pervasive conception of Brahman-Ātman as the inner essence of all things and whose realisation is to be effected in man's consciousness, is in distinct opposition to the gods propitiated in the Brāhmanic sacrifices. The Kena shows that the gods are powerless against the supreme principle of Brahman¹²⁹ The Brhadāranyaka shows that the gods have no real existence apart from what man wishes to accord to them.¹³⁰

The rituals associated with propitiating the gods for a happy earthly life and heavenly rewards are openly condemned in the Chāndogya, where the priests are compared to dogs in a procession holding each others' tails and chanting "Aum, Let us eat" etc. On the whole, however, the Upaniṣads interpret the rituals symbolically and give them an inward bearing.¹³¹

Although it is true that Upaniṣadic ethics largely operate in terms of man's subjective life, quite a significant emphasis is placed on ethical actions and the world of diversity. The second verse of the Īśā directly advocates wholesome activity in the world, and subsequent verses positively deprecate withdrawal from the world. Personal

subjective demands must be brought into a harmony with the divine presence in the world around. Failure to do this is evil and leads to spiritual regression and sorrow.¹³² While individual effort is important, it should not be opposed to the total harmony. The good life is understood subjectively, but it can only be practised and realised in a community with other selves and things. Radhakrishnan says:

"The sense of otherness and multiplicity essential to ethical life is allowed for by the Upaniṣads."¹³³

The Taittirīya gives a traditional list of ethically significant activities, which includes righteous conduct, truthfulness, study, penence, self-restraint, sacrifice, welfare of others and raising of a family.¹³⁴ Another gives the subjective side of ethical training as hearing of the sacred texts (śravana), thinking over their meanings (manana) and realising their truth in one's being (midhidhyāsa), and asserts the realisation of the Self as the goal of all ethical striving. The emphasis on study and the control of the passions suggests that the essence of all ethical action lies in transcending the biological basis and instinctive actions in which man's life is set.¹³⁵ The illustration in the Chāndogya of Indra and Virocana going up to Prajāpati for instruction, and the incidence of Indra's prolonged stay with the teacher stress the importance of ethical preparation for the religious quest.¹³⁶

While personal discipline is important, so far as the Upaniṣads are concerned, it is not equivalent to severe asceticism. Otherwise social virtues and family life would become meaningless. Radhakrishnan says:

"The false asceticism which regards life as a dream and the world as an illusion..... is foreign to the prevailing tone of the Upaniṣads".¹³⁷

The Īśā says that man should continue to perform works and live for a hundred years.¹³⁸

The Upaniṣadic sages teach against the background of the prevailing system of social castes which had probably rigidified during the Brāhmanic period. The Upaniṣads significantly undermine such class distinctions and positively preach against the idea of caste privileges as the story of Satyakāma in the Chāndogya shows.¹³⁹

Radhakrishnan says in this regard:

"Brāhminhood does not depend on birth but on character"¹⁴⁰

2.2.10. KARMA; REBIRTH AND EMANCIPATION

The notion of karma which probably originated in the conception of ṛta of the Ṛg Veda, is transformed in the Upaniṣads into a dynamic metaphysical principle in terms of which man's ethical life operates. From the cosmic notion of karma in the Samhitās, through the largely ritualistic usage in the Brāhmanas, it becomes in the Upaniṣads the

principle of subjective spiritual evolution. The law of karma states that the circumstances that attend an individual in any lifetime are dependent upon his actions, desires and tendencies in previous lives. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka says, "man becomes good by good deeds and bad by bad deeds".¹⁴¹ While the Brāhmaṇas fostered the idea that sin and error could be corrected by sacrificing to the gods, the Upaniṣads teach the principle of individual responsibility through the karma doctrine.¹⁴² Karma is not a juridical theory of rewards and punishments, but focuses on the importance of the human will and the purity of motives in terms of which men act.¹⁴³ It is thus the principle of causality on the moral plane, though it does not mean mere mechanical necessity.

The hypothesis of rebirth is taken over from the Brāhmaṇas, where rewards and retribution in heaven are its chief features, and made by the Upaniṣads into a corollary of karma and a means of spiritual advancement in this world.¹⁴⁴

The world of mortality to which the soul returns through repeated births and deaths is rebirth or saṁsāra. The Kātha says: "Like corn the mortal decays and like corn he is born again".¹⁴⁵ The persistence or continuity of the soul or psychic principle is clearly stated in the Chāndogya by comparing it with "A caterpillar that, coming to the end of a blade of grass, catches another blade and draws itself

onto it".¹⁴⁶ The Upaniṣadic doctrine of transmigration does not discountenance the passage of a human soul to animal bodies in a future birth.¹⁴⁷ The general terms of the Upaniṣads, however, are that of a progressive evolution of souls through the development of character, culminating in spiritual freedom.

The fate of the soul in final emancipation or mokṣa is said to be subtle and extremely difficult to understand.¹⁴⁸ True to this declaration of Yama, the Upaniṣads do not resolve the question of the nature of final liberation. We come up against two accounts of it - one of complete identity with ultimate reality or God, and the other of union with Him. Radhakrishnan is of the firm opinion that the Upaniṣads support only the doctrine of identity, of the total merging of the jīva with the Brahman.¹⁴⁹ Such a view is suggested in the Muṇḍaka¹⁵⁰ and the Praśna,¹⁵¹ upon the analogy of rivers losing their identity in the waters of the ocean. ~~The Bṛhadāraṇyaka says that the jīva loses its identity "as a lump of salt thrown into the water dissolves and cannot be drawn out again."~~¹⁵²

Such an identity relationship is logical to the impersonal view of Brahman or Ātman, and it may also accord with the personalist view of ultimate reality.

The Muṇḍaka uses the bow and arrow analogy and says that the

individual soul becomes one with Brahman "as the arrow in the mark".¹⁵³ The doctrine of union with God seems to be suggested here. In the Mundaka¹⁵⁴ the idea of companionship with God is asserted. It is impossible for logical thought to construct the reality of final emancipation and the Upaniṣads do not attempt a systematic account of it. According to Radhakrishnan several different views are to be found in the Upaniṣads.¹⁵⁵

2.3. THE BHAGAVAD GITA

The Bhagavad Gītā or Song of God is one of the sources of the Indian tradition, and the second member of the triple canon of Vedānta. Its popularity as a scriptural text is second to none in the tradition.¹⁵⁶ It apparently grew to this status with great suddenness, ever since Śankara wrote his commentary on it. This poem of 700 verses has caught the imagination and fancy of a host of scholars and public figures right down to modern times. Its popularity appears to be on the increase, both in the East and the West. The reason for this is that it is the one text that, within its small and manageable compass, sets forth the ancient and varied traditions of India. Among its points of appeal must be counted the simplicity of its message, the lilting musical cadence of its Sanskrit verses, its attractive ethical doctrines and its uncompromising theism.

Many types of surgical operations have been attempted to be performed on the Gītā by Indological scholars. The early researchers fancied the existence of an original "ur" Gītā.¹⁵⁷ Some have seen it as the refashioned version of an Upaniṣadic poem, while many have seen it as the synthetic amalgam of diverse and mutually opposed doctrines.¹⁵⁸ We cannot say for sure that all these approaches are baseless.

One of the chief features of the Gītā is its presentation of a unified global view of the ideas that were current at the time of its composition.¹⁵⁹ Tradition regards the Gītā as a "bouquet of Upaniṣadic flowers".¹⁶⁰ Śankara regarded it as "the collected essence of the teachings of the Vedas".¹⁶¹ Madhusūdana considered it "the nectar-like milk of the Upaniṣads".¹⁶² The strength of this tradition should engender in us a scholarly caution, rather than blind acceptance, for the Upaniṣads are many, contain a variety of doctrines, and their production spans several centuries, while the Gītā is a single text.¹⁶³ It thus seems unlikely that the Gītā should faithfully represent the thought of the Upaniṣads.

In point of fact, it is necessary to stress that the Gītā appears to reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, the thoughts of the ancient Bhāgavata cult, the philosophical tendencies of the Upaniṣads, the teachings of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, the Mīmāṃsā view of fixed duties, and Buddhist-style

disdain for worldly goods.¹⁶⁴ But the Gītā has its own special character that sets it apart from all these currents of thought.

2.3.1 METAPHYSICAL IDEAS

The setting and background against which the Gītā occurs betrays its teachings as being more ethics than metaphysics and the two are shown to be closely interrelated.¹⁶⁵ It is a message delivered on a battle field, where a vital course of action is being considered. It is not a teaching given in a sylvan glade or a hermitage where deep reflection upon philosophical issues would be appropriate. Although it is a summons to action,¹⁶⁶ the ground and basis for such action is well and truly laid in the rich and fertile metaphysical traditions of the times.¹⁶⁷ The metaphysics of the Gītā is therefore largely presumed; and what of it is given is loosely presented. We cannot say that there is no pattern in its metaphysics or unity of philosophical outlook.¹⁶⁸ The chief metaphysical ideas incorporated into the Gītā are concerned with the individual self and the workings of the human psyche, the nature and operations of material reality, the nature of spiritual reality, the doctrine of works, nature of Ultimate Reality, and the concept of freedom.

2.3.2 THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

The issues discussed in the Gītā arise out of a pressing moral problem, although the Gītā does not carry out a protracted philosophical investigation of these issues.¹⁶⁹ Its arguments therefore are full of presumptions which are easily traceable to the Upaniṣads and to the Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition.

Bearing directly upon the moral situation in which the Gītā is set, early in the dialogue the immortality of the individual self is established.¹⁷⁰ Regarded in one sense as a "timeless monad",¹⁷¹ the self is both immortal in its own right, as well as a personality complex that persists through the rounds of births and deaths, acting out its destiny. In this sense, the human personality carries within itself the sense of its own immortality, though fettered by the circumstances of the world in which it is placed.¹⁷² In a categorical declaration the self is said never to have been born nor to suffer death; it is "unborn, eternal, everlasting and primeval".¹⁷³

The Gītā maintains the Upaniṣadic legacy in attempting to be metaphysically precise about the nature of the immortal self. Immortality of the self, because it is a spiritual immortality is related to a basic property of changelessness, a property that is due to its relationship to the Supreme Brahman.¹⁷⁴ In truth, therefore, the individual self is a mere spectator in the world; it is a non-doer, akartr.¹⁷⁵

The characteristic feeling of the self as an agent or doer operating in the world is due to the defining characteristic of the world itself, which is material nature or Prakṛti. As such it is made up of the three gunas, the qualities of sattva (purity), rajas (activity) and tamas (dullness).

These qualities operate in man in so far as he is a self-conscious agent with a sense of doership. The essence of the human psyche or jīva is the buddhi or the soul, the highest faculty in man's psychosomatic make-up. As composed of prakṛtic constituents, the soul is perishable or disintegrateable. Yet it bears within it the transcendent quality of will, that operates as a bridge to the true divine self or Ātma.¹⁷⁶ Besides the buddhi, the individual self consists of mind, ego, senses and the physical body which are parts of material nature, and changeful. These are the instruments through which the inner immortal principle works in the world,¹⁷⁷ according as the prakṛtic qualities are organized at different levels of the personality.

The divine essence in man, the timeless immortal, is the Ātman, the inner divinity that is utterly transcendent to the jīva, though the two terms are also used interchangeably. The spiritual self is sometimes implied to be identical with God, in an Upaniṣadic sense, and sometimes to be a part of Him.

2.3.3. MATERIAL REALITY

Material reality is generally termed prakṛti, intense activity, but it is certainly not the same as the prakṛti of Śāṅkhya.¹⁷⁸ All this reality is made up of the three gunas or constituents,¹⁷⁹ to which all activity in the world, and in man, is to be traced.¹⁸⁰

Like Upaniṣadic thought, the Gītā does not countenance a creation ex nihilo.¹⁸¹ Among the reasons for the Gītā's popularity is its eloquent declaration of this principle as it applies both to spiritual and material reality. We read in the second chapter:

"Of what is not, there is no being;
of what is, there is no ceasing to
be."¹⁸²

Thus "the Gītā explicitly formulates the principle of sat-kārya-vāda, that what exists cannot be destroyed and that what does not exist cannot come into being."¹⁸³

The chief characteristic of the eternal reality of nature is activity, brought about by the action of the three gunas which together comprise the totality of it.

Prakṛti is regarded in two senses, as a power of God and as a category from which all things have come into being.¹⁸⁴

The becoming of the world and its passing away is cyclic in character, being repeated endlessly.¹⁸⁵ Because all becoming is from God, the Gītā speaks of eight separate

forms of prakṛti as belonging to God - earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and ego.¹⁸⁶ The operation of the gunas, operating through these modes of prakṛti, is what binds the individual selves and gets them mounted onto the revolving wheel of life.

Both the material cosmic reality and the material bodies of selves, including all psychological functions, are born of prakṛti.

2.3.4. DOCTRINE OF WORKS

The idea of karma, work or activity, is associated in pre-Upaniṣadic literature with the concepts of rta and dharma, and with the performance of rituals for heavenly rewards. In the Upaniṣadic period it developed metaphysical connotations of a continuing psychological bond between one life and another, by which the jīva could evolve spiritually or devolve into brutish characters. The Gītā takes over this concept of karma and refashions it with great skill into a truly spiritual doctrine that has a direct bearing on man's salvation.

The Gītā holds that it is impossible for man to withdraw from work.¹⁸⁷ The older ideas hold that works in the world bind the jīva to a transmigratory existence.¹⁸⁸ Reflection upon spiritual truth was recognised as an effective antidote

to the binding effects of karma. The Gītā references reflect the view of samnyāsa as withdrawal from work.¹⁸⁹

The Gita's doctrine of works or karma-yoga, on the other hand, insists upon the performance of work in such a manner that the binding effects of it would turn impotent. Whereas the old idea of karma carried with it the bondage of reward or punishment, brought about by specific desires, the Gītā preaches a doctrine of desireless work, niškāma karma, by which the consequences of karma are rendered ineffective.

Radhakrishnan says:

"The Bhagavat Gītā gives us a religion by which the rules of karma, the natural order of the deed and consequence, can be transcended." 190

Many writers have been overly enamoured of the Gītā as a statement of the secret of spiritual work. Tilak considers it the entire secret of the Gita's teachings, Gītā Rahasya. Gandhi gave to the book the alternative name of anāsakti yoga, yoga of non-attachment. It cannot be denied that the Gītā's doctrine of works is a unique contribution to our ideas of spiritual discipline, and its beneficial effects must be felt by all religious souls; still, it cannot be said to be the whole message of the Gītā.

It should be noted that the gospel of selfless action is not a doctrine of individual salvation alone but is related to the concept of lokasaṅgraha, in-gathering of people,

welfare of the world. That this ideal is equally related to the path of devotion and, in the Gītā specifically, to the path of knowledge also, points significantly to the unitary purpose of the text.

2.3.5 GOD AND ULTIMATE REALITY

The Upaniṣadic pantheistic absolutism regarded Brahman as the ground, substratum and substance of the entire creation, of selves and material nature alike. Their doctrine of an inner non-dual essence leavened all distinctions into a somewhat distinctionless absolute. The theistic elements in them arise more out of the logic of relating individual selves than out of the drift of its several metaphysics.

In the Gītā, the highest Brahman of Upaniṣadic thought is mostly identical with Kṛṣṇa as God, and is also seen to be dependent on Him.¹⁹¹ The concept of Brahman in the Gītā has the meanings of prakṛti, Vedas and God's essence.¹⁹² Chapter thirteen clearly makes out that Brahman is the essence of God in all things as well as God Himself.

The Gītā is primarily a theistic text. It takes up the metaphysically precise notions of the Upaniṣads and Sāṃkhya-Yoga type ideas as they might be related to a possible conception of ultimate reality, and works them up into a unitary conception of Godhead who is at the

same time the Supreme Person.¹⁹³ As such God is the principle that upholds even non-dual Brahman.¹⁹⁴

The universal form of the Lord in the eleventh chapter is really an eccentric demonstration of the inconceivable infinity of God, His limitless glory. The clear statements about His otherness, His immanence and His power are dramatically revealed through the overpowering vision which only His grace can reveal. Such a conception that is a culmination of philosophical reflection and religious yearning is said to be the Puruṣottama, the Supreme Lord of the Gītā, the Highest Person, on a fraction of whose being the entire universe rests. Radhakrishnan feels that the principle of such reconciliation is already given in the Upaniṣads.

The concept of God in the Gītā is an expression of Upaniṣadic immanentism. Thus 'other gods' are tolerated and brought within the compass of one all-pervading divinity.¹⁹⁵

A conception advanced by the Gītā and which sets it apart from the Upaniṣads, is that of avatāra, incarnation. Kṛṣṇa declares that whenever righteousness declines and evil is in the ascendant, then, for the protection of the good and the destruction of the wicked, He bodies Himself forth in age after age.¹⁹⁶ In this doctrine the Gītā continues and

culminates a trend begun in the Samhitās, where Indra is declared to come down from his heavenly pedestal and participate in the affairs of his devotees with concern.

It is important to note that the Gītā does not speak of any other incarnations, at least for the duration of a whole age, and in any case all avatāras are His, making Him, as Kṛṣṇa, the origin, support and ground of all. So far as the text of the Gītā is concerned, Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Saviour of all. Thus, even the mythological concept of Śiva is made an aspect of Kṛṣṇa,¹⁹⁷ as also the concept of Viṣṇu.¹⁹⁸ Any manifestation of power and glory is seen as an infinitesimal part of God.¹⁹⁹ We see in this the logical corollaries of the immanentist doctrine, common to the Gītā and to the Upaniṣads.

2.3.6. DEVOTION AND YOGA

The Gītā makes out that there are two types of bhakti or devotion.²⁰⁰ One is the lower, which ranges from conventional piety to the attainment of the realisation of Brahman as the essence of all things. To this form is related the practises of yoga and the spiritual liberation they lead to. The higher bhakti is the realisation that the individual soul, though he may be freed from the fetters of the world, yet realises the supremacy and utter transcendence of God and relates to Him as absolute Person or Puruṣottama.²⁰¹

It is true that "the metaphysical idealism of the Upaniṣads is transformed in the Gītā into a theistic religion",²⁰² and there is some evidence of identity doctrine in the Gītā in phrases like brahma-bhūta, brahman-become and brahma-nirvānam. Yet, from the beginning of the text, which features rather austere descriptions of the soul, and its relation to God, there is a mounting sense of the glory of Kṛṣṇa as the Transcendent, culminating in the theophany of the eleventh chapter. Still, God is not totally the other, for there is a common inner essence between man and God.

Yoga practice is considered in the Gītā as an integration of the outer man with his deeper self, though the term yoga itself is also used in the sense of subserving devotion.²⁰³ Even the man of knowledge is considered a devotee, since he turns his face towards God.²⁰⁴

The essence of devotion is pure love of God which also means total surrender to Him as creature to creator. The devotee surrenders his mind to God, prostrates to Him in loving service, and strives only after Him.²⁰⁵ Devotion is both loyalty and love. In the Gītā it becomes the highest value since it directly leads to participation in God's nature towards which state all other values converge. Kṛṣṇa says that only through love, and not through any other method, can the devotee know Him and "enter into Him."²⁰⁶

2.3.7. FREEDOM AND SALVATION

The Gītā may be referred to as a mokṣa-śāstra, a treatise conferring emancipation.²⁰⁷ In his famous meditation verses Madhusūdana eulogises the Gita as the "destroyer of rebirth." In the text itself there are many direct references to the theory of samsāra (rebirth) and the means of deliverance therefrom.

The Gītā places high value on the concept of freedom. The very conditions of the created world entrap man within the gunas of prakṛti, and the only solution to his difficulties lies in overcoming the world. One way to freedom is thus overcoming the gunas of prakṛti, which is also freedom from rebirth and the attainment of nirvāṇa.²⁰⁸

The general transcendentalist-immanentist background of the Upaniṣads encourages a simple view of ultimate freedom as the release of the soul from the trammels of flesh. In the Gītā this is unity with the supreme self or God.²⁰⁹

Coupled with the concept of God as standing over and above all creation, even in essence,²¹⁰ there is the unmistakable sense that there is a higher estate among the freed souls. Those that are true bhaktas, who surrender to God in total loyalty and love, attain to salvation in a more richly intimate form of "entry" into God, attaining to His "Supreme Abode".²¹¹ The offer of salvation²¹² and the repeated overtures of endearment as "My devotee is dear to Me",²¹³ must

have the meaning of what the words directly say. There is the clear feeling of qualitative difference between those who follow yogic contemplation or the path of knowledge exclusively, and those who offer Him all - surrendering love. Even Radhakrishnan says, in connection with the nature of freedom:

"..... some have been led to think that jñāna as a path is superior to the other methods of approach, and that cognition alone persists, while the other elements of emotion and will fall out in the supreme state of freedom. There does not seem to be any justification for such an opinion" 214

Again he says:

"The Gita is not clear on the point whether there is any basis of individuality in the ultimate state." 215

If we take into account the Gītā's fundamental-realist metaphysics, and the account of God as the Supreme Person, it will not be difficult to concede a condition of special salvation within the premises of the text.

2.4. THE BRAHMA SŪTRA

The sūtra literature pertaining to all the schools of classical thought aimed at preserving the peculiar thought of each school through terse and laconic statements which could easily be held in the memory. The word sūtra means thread, and this shows that all the statements should foster a connected whole, whose meaning should not suffer distortion. In the case of the Brahma Sūtras, especially, this style is

presented to a fault, and the brevity of the statements makes it extremely difficult to interpret the meanings. Nakamura says that "the Vedānta philosophy from the beginning had esoteric tendencies, and in order to prevent outsiders from having access to its teachings a brief and enigmatic style of writing was deliberately used. It is difficult to understand even a single sūtra without a commentary."²¹⁶

The Brahma Sūtra is so called because its prime purpose is to set forth in a systematic way the teachings concerning Brahma and related topics. It is also called Vedānta Sūtra because the Upaniṣads are the chief texts that give the teachings covering Brahman, and the Upaniṣads are traditionally regarded as the Vedānta. As the Upaniṣadic teachings are varied and conflicting in nature, the Brahma Sūtra became the standard text in its field. P. N. Rao says:

"The importance of the Brahma Sūtras is enormous, and without them we would not have been able to unify the definitive message of the apparently conflicting passages in the Upaniṣads which form the basis of Vedānta."²¹⁷

The Sūtra represents a purely theological interpretation or a scriptural exegesis of the Upaniṣadic texts.²¹⁸ But, since averaging out the apparant contradictions of Upaniṣadic passages involves some subjective judgement and personal preferance, we have to accept that the author's views do come through in some measure.²¹⁹

The author of the Sūtra is a sage known as Bādarāyaṇa, whom

Indian tradition identifies with Vyāsa.²²⁰ Dr. S. K.

Belwalkar's theory of a multiple authorship of the Sūtra is rejected by Mainkar on the grounds of precision of form and content.²²¹

The work comprises a total of 555 sūtras divided into four chapters, of four sections each, with a number of topics under each section.

The first chapter is called samanvaya adhyāya, the chapter on harmony of texts. It attempts exegetical correlation to show that Brahman or ultimate reality is the major purport of the Upaniṣadic texts as a whole, though presented in many different ways.

The second chapter is called avirodha adhyāya, the chapter on non-conflict. In this chapter the argument of the first chapter is reinforced systematically by countering purely logical questions that could be raised against the first argument, and, importantly, by a direct refutation of the metaphysical tenets of the mīmāṃsā, sāṅkhya, vaiśeṣika and Bauddha schools of thought.

The third chapter deals with various upasanās and other disciplines for attaining release, and is called Sādhana Adhyāya, the chapter on discipline.

The fourth and last chapter, called phala adhyāya, the

chapter on fruition (of the disciplines), explains the goal of all striving as mokṣa, spiritual freedom, and considers its nature in terms of unalloyed bliss, together with the states of individual souls in the state of release.²²²

2.4.1 SOME IMPORTANT TEACHINGS

Ultimate Reality

The Brahman of the Upaniṣads is regarded as the ultimate reality, as the material and efficient cause of the world,²²³ and it is said to be of the nature of bliss or unalloyed spiritual joy.²²⁴ Brahman is also considered from the point of view of form and formlessness,²²⁵ and these ideas being clearly supported by Upaniṣadic passages, the Sūtra also shows that Brahman cannot be restricted in its nature.²²⁶

The World

The Sūtra states in its very second statement that Brahman is the "source, etc." of all things,²²⁷ thus reiterating the general Upaniṣadic position that Brahman is the origin, sustenance and final goal of all things.²²⁸ The text appears to uphold the transformation or evolution theory of the world known as sat-kārya-vāda and even uses the term "pariṇāma", transformation.²²⁹ The world process is due to mere sport, līlā, on the part of Brahman, without reference to any purpose.²³⁰ The concept of sport appears to be original with Bādarāyaṇa, and though it plays down the

idea of desire on the part of Brahman as the creator, it still endows Him with a positive volition, and Brahman must be regarded in terms of a "personal principle",²³¹ which creates the universe out of its own material like curds out of milk.²³²

The Individual Self

The individual self is an agent or kartā.²³³ He is an aṃśa or part of Brahman,²³⁴ an intelligent principle (jñā), whose distinction from Brahman is suggested.²³⁵

Liberation

Liberation is the goal of every individual soul. It is not clear whether the Sūtra supports the concept of jīvanmukti or liberation in life. Both devotional and meditative practices are considered appropriate. Even the devotee and the yogi, however, need to perform the duties prescribed in terms of dharma, that is yajña, sacrifice, brahmacarya, āśrama-dharma, etc. for these are preparations to liberation.²³⁶

Liberated souls do not attain to identity with God, for He is the Highest,²³⁷ and the individual self is said to be itara, other, than the Highest Self.²³⁸ Finally, however, it is not easy to say whether union of the individual with God is "of the nature of identity or communion and fellowship".²³⁹

The Brahma Sūtra is heavily influenced by the teachings of

The Chāndogya Upanisad.²⁴⁰ It is possible that its strong realistic suggestions can be traced to this influence. The theism of the Bhagavad Gītā and the Bhāgavatas has probably influenced the author.²⁴¹

Tradition requires that an exegesis be conducted in terms of six marks of authenticity, the tātparyalingas, which are "the accepted criteria for determining the final import of passages".²⁴² This has probably helped the great commentators in arriving at consensus, though often they have given us variant readings, turning the pithy aphorisms into the service of their preconceived metaphysical systems. Sometimes the commentators appear to confound the sense of the sūtras rather than clarify them.²⁴³

Among the most important commentators of the Brahma Sūtra have been Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva and Vallabha.

2.5. THE SĀMKHYA KARĪKA

The sāmkhya system is supposed by some to be coeval with the oldest Upaniṣads,²⁴⁴ and indeed we do find many leading concepts of the sāmkhya in these treatises.²⁴⁵ Yet we cannot from these identifications conclude that the sāmkhya was systematised at that time. Genuine sāmkhya concepts are identifiable only in the Śvetāsvatara and the Maitrī, both of which are relatively later period Upaniṣads, and even here the doctrines are pressed into a theistic mould.²⁴⁶

Tradition ascribes the sāṃkhya to the legendary sage Kapila. Although it is probable that such a sage did exist,²⁴⁷ the original sūtras are no longer extant, and the Sāṃkhya Kārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa is "the earliest book of authority on classical sāṃkhya",²⁴⁸ the word "kārikā" meaning a verse commentary. The Sāṃkhya Kārikā, dated 300 AD or a little after, is taken to be a faithful representation of the original sūtras of the sāṃkhya school, and the polemics for and against this school have been conducted in terms of the doctrines of the Sāṃkhya Kārikā. Vācaspati's Sāṃkhyatattva-kaumudī (light of the truth of sāṃkhya) of the 9th century AD is an important gloss on the Kārikā. In the sixty-nine verses that are extant out of a total of seventy, Īśvarakṛṣṇa outlines the philosophical position of the sāṃkhya school as an uncompromising doctrine of realistic dualism. Unlike the Bhagavad Gītā, the Kārikā shows no ambiguity or ambivalence in doctrinal teachings, and we do not have any significant differences among commentators regarding the meaning of them. We shall therefore present the metaphysics of this school directly in the next chapter.

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47. CU 3.2.5.
48. SU 6.22.
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Chapter Three: The Sāṃkhya System

In this chapter the basic elements of the ancient system of sāmkhya thought are briefly presented. Its basic postulate of a radical dualism between the spirit and matter principles is clearly discerned.

CONTENTS

Chapter Three: The Sāṃkhya System

- 3.1. The Doctrine of Puruṣap.104.
- 3.2. The Principle of Causalityp.106.
- 3.3. Prakṛtip.108.
- 3.4. The Theory of the Guṇasp.110.
- 3.5. Evolution of Prakṛtip.112.
- 3.6. The Empirical Individual and Liberation ...p.115.

Chapter 3 THE SĀMKHYA SYSTEM

Among the systems that arose in the sūtra period, the oldest is reckoned to be the sāmkhya, whose oral tradition is surmised to reach back into deep antiquity. It is quite possible that its oral tradition was relatively well-formulated, more or less parallel to the Upaniṣadic tradition, which, like the original sūtras themselves, is largely lost to us.¹ What we have of it in the Sāmkhya Kārikā is therefore to be taken as the bare outline of its fundamental position.

The two fundamental propositions of the sāmkhya system, spiritual reality and material reality, lie embedded in its name, which refers to a studied discrimination between these two realities,² and at the same time to a precise enumeration of fundamental categories into which the material world can be organised. The fixed total of 25 categories is of great importance to the system, as is apparent from Pañcaśikha's declaration that only a clear understanding of the enumeration can lead to true or final deliverance,³ and from this we may note that the fact of precise enumeration is most likely the true burden of the term 'sāmkhya'.⁴

3.1. THE DOCTRINE OF PURUṢA

The classical sāmkhya doctrine of the puruṣa or spirit principle is set forth with great precision,⁵ and affirms the utter transcendence of this principle over the material

world. The world of aggregates is in fact in the position of an instrument that subserves the purposes of the spirit. Material entities may conceivably be supposed to serve the purposes of other material entities, but this would lead to an infinite regress, for the system holds that material collocations, being differentiated in themselves, have to serve the purposes of an entity that is not so constituted.⁶ Since material nature is by definition regarded as non-conscious, its existence would be inexplicable if it were not experienced or "enjoyed" by another. This other must be of the nature of spirit which alone can be the principle of consciousness and therefore the coordinator of the manifold experiences of the empirical personality.⁷ Then there is the yearning in the human heart for the peace of kaivalya, aloofness from material things, of spirit dwelling by itself. Peace is not the product of man's relation with things material, and it has to be attained by a total rift with all nature. Pure spiritual being, or purusa, therefore stands vindicated as a vital and necessary category of existents.

The existence of the category of purusa is determined through inference, since it is not and cannot be an object of perception. In the sāṃkhya scheme all the faculties of mind as well as body are constituted of basically the same material nature. None of the faculties, therefore, not even the mind or the higher discriminative intellect, can be posited as pure spirit.⁸ Yet it is universal experience that every person asserts his own consciousness of objects.

These experiences are veridical both psychologically and objectively. This fact of universal individual experiences leads sāṃkhya thought to an important conclusion regarding the concept of puruṣa. There must be a plurality of spirits, puruṣa bahutvam, for if there were only a single puruṣa, there would be no variation in the experiences of different individuals, and with the birth of one individual, all would be born, with the death of one all would die.⁹

Puruṣa is pure spirit and utterly opposed to all materiality. It is neither all pleasure nor even bliss. It is devoid of any and every characteristic, but its nature is absolute pure consciousness.¹⁰ It is also said to be of the nature of unfailing changeless light, sadāprakāśasvarūpa,¹¹ for it is through the light of puruṣa that objects in the mind get illumined. Dasgupta says:

"The special characteristic of self is that it is like a light, without which all knowledge would be blind.the presence of this principle in all our forms of knowledge is distinctly indicated by inference."¹²

Being pure spiritual consciousness, the puruṣa is devoid of all material attributes such as motion, size and mutability. As spiritual reality, puruṣa, is set over against the principle of material reality.

3.2. THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSALITY

The principle of causality is of central importance to the sāṃkhya system, as on it rests its entire argument concerning material nature. The Kārikā says that an effect is

non-different from its cause, since what is non-existent cannot be brought into existence by the operation of any set of causal factors.¹³ The emphasis here is not on the fact that effects exist, for this is patent to our perception, but on their existence prior to the causal operation.¹⁴

The doctrine maintains that a cause is that which already carries its effect potentially within it; that a cause is specific to a particular effect. The Kārikā itself says: "the potent cause effects only that of which it is capable." Thus it is milk that turns into curds and not plain water. Causal efficiency is a specific power, otherwise anything will be capable of producing anything, and there will be no necessary relation subsisting between cause and effect.

Vācaspati shows that the effect cannot be a mere property of a pre-existing cause. A jar is non-existent (as an effect) before its transformation from the original clay (as the cause). If the jar were a property of the cause, it would be non-existent, and a non-existent entity cannot be brought into existence.¹⁵

A cause is therefore the prior condition of an effect, while the effect is the unfolding of the cause in which it lay in a latent condition. Because non-existence cannot be produced from existence and vice-versa, the system does not countenance creation ex nihilo nor any true destruction. Creation is in fact production or manifestation, evolution

or development, while annihilation is disappearance of the effect into the cause, a resolution into its own prior state. For the effect is non-different from its cause, as the cloth from its threads. Yet cause and effect are not confused with each other¹⁶ because they are different states of the same substance. Although one in essence, they serve different practical purposes.¹⁷ The sāmkhya principle of causality is known as satkāryavāda, the doctrine that the effect (kārya) is a pre-existent entity (sat) made manifest in a different state.¹⁸

3.3. PRAKṚTI

The sāmkhya divides all existence, all reality whatsoever, into two fundamentally opposed categories of puruṣa or spiritual reality, and prakṛti or material reality. Apart from the pure spiritual consciousness of puruṣa, all that exists in the entire universe is traced to prakṛti and its evolutes. Besides puruṣa and prakṛti, nothing else exists. Both these concepts arise out of human experience and both formulations are designed to satisfy the demands of experience in metaphysical terms. Says Hiriyanna:

"Both Prakṛti and Puruṣa alike are thus deduced from an investigation of the nature of common things; the only difference is that while the one is the result of arguing from those things to their source or first cause, the other is the result of arguing from them to their aim or final cause."¹⁹

The sāmkhya argues to the existence of prakṛti from our

perception of the real world, on the basis of the principle of causality. The world of flux and change together with the multiform entities that are patent to our vision, represents a multitude of effects, each one specific to its own cause in a prior unmanifested condition. Yet the more antecedent causes participate in higher generalisations of nature until all specificity of casual conditions is resolved into a single ultimate entity that bears within it the potentiality for evolving new forms.²⁰ Prakṛti is the great matrix of the world, the seed and womb of all creation, the final merger of all physical entities. The cognate Latin term mater procreatrix brings out the meaning of prakṛti as the creative womb and mother of all things.

Prakṛti is the very root of all existence, the one antecedent ultimate cause of all things. But it is also the rootless root, the causeless cause.²¹ It would be illogical to conceive of a cause beyond prakṛti, as that would lead to an infinite regress. The sāṃkhya conceives prakṛti as that entity which possesses the necessary characteristics that would be attaching to the highest and most general possible conception of an unmanifested or unevolved entity, the avyakta, which yet bears within itself the infinite potentiality for change and evolution.²²

There is no such thing as creation of prakṛti. Since all material existences that have evolved from prakṛti are indestructible and uncreated, only their causal states being

referred to antecedent conditions, prakṛti, the most anterior of all antecedents, is itself uncaused and eternal.²³ It is the reverse of the limitations attaching to all created things.²⁴ Thus it is one and infinite, unmoving and imperceptible. In tracing the world of disparate forms of evolved things to an ultimate source which is totally material yet potential; in tracing the heterogeneity of fragile and partible substances of common experience to a most anterior principle that is indestructible and partless, the sāṃkhya is demonstrating its sustained concern for a rational metaphysic.²⁵ The system takes care not to confuse the material with the spiritual,²⁶ while ensuring that the world of changing forms is not reduced to an illogical absurdity.

3.4. THE THEORY OF THE GUNAS

The primary substance of creation, prakṛti, though one, is not homogeneous. If it were, the manifold heterogeneity of the world of created things would be a patent absurdity, for that which is non-existent cannot be brought into existence.

The very word "prakṛti" means intense activity, and we get a true picture of it by inverting the first term and saying activity 'in tension'. It would be metaphysically inaccurate to hold that a plurality of reals proceeds forth from homogeneous unity. In its concern for precision sāṃkhya thought asserts that, even in the condition of

non-manifestation, avyakta, the unified basis of the world of becoming is in fact "the symbol of the never-resting, active world stress".²⁷

Prakṛti in fact is a unified composite of three substances called guṇas.²⁸ We cannot say that these guṇas are qualities, though often translated as such; they are the very substance and constitutive stuff of primal nature.²⁹

In all its creative aspects prakṛti is known by and evidenced through the action of the guṇas, for these constituents, though contrary in their natures, do cooperate in the actual process. They are said to be of the nature of pleasure, pain and indifference, and they serve to illumine, actuate and restrain the activities and objects of man and the world.³⁰ They are known as sattva, which is buoyant and illuminating, rajas, which is stimulating and mobile, and tamas, which is heavy and enveloping.³¹ It is clear that their nature is mutually opposed, yet the text indicates their cooperation by the analogy of a lamp in which the flame, wick and oil cooperate towards a common goal.³²

Again, sattva is goodness, happiness, pleasure, while rajas is activity, excitement, movement, and tamas is darkness, sluggishness, slothfulness.³³ Sattva, being illumination, leads to knowledge, truth and freedom, while tamas, being darkness, leads to ignorance, delusion and bondage. These constituents always operate in close relationship, so that

prakṛti and its evolutes are always seen as simple wholes. Since the guṇas are nothing but prakṛti, all things are traced to the guṇas and their operations. By action and reaction on each other, by their relative preponderance and different combinations, the infinite variety of the world is explained, both psychological phenomena as well as the grosser manifestations of things.

3.5. EVOLUTION OF PRAKṚTI

The process of world becoming is directly dependent upon prakṛti, which is to say, upon the guṇas. In the condition of relative quiescence or non-manifestation, the avyakta condition, the activity of the guṇas is extremely fine and held in tension. Vācaspati says :

"Modified condition forms a part of the nature of the guṇas; and as such they can never, for a moment remain inert." 34

At the time of dissolution the constituents are in a condition of relative quiescence, whereas in the actual mode of becoming they burst out into creative differentiating activity when different properties latent within prakṛti begin to become manifest due to the action of the guṇas. The process of world manifestation is also dependent upon puruṣa or the spiritual principle of consciousness, but only indirectly, for puruṣa is not the substance out of which the world proceeds. While in the state of non-

manifestation the three constituents are in a state of perfect equilibrium or balance, this equilibrium is somehow disturbed by its association, saṁyoga, with the puruṣa. As a result of this association "a process of unequal aggregation of the guṇas"³⁵ takes place determining and differentiating into the manifold world.

Neither Īśvarakṛṣṇa nor Vācaspati, nor even later Sāṁkhya writers, could explain this association between prakṛti and puruṣa with any logical precision. On the basis of the very premises of the system it leaves a huge metaphysical gap in the rationale of the system. "How or rather why prakṛti should be disturbed is the most knotty point in Sāṁkhya."³⁶

The system proposes a teleological association on the part of prakṛti, such that the guṇas begin to operate for the sake of innumerable puruṣas who go through pleasures and pains and finally attain release.³⁷ Since prakṛti is totally unconscious, the association is compared to that between a lame man who climbs upon the shoulders of one who is blind, and in which the former gives intelligent direction and the latter provides the means of transport.³⁸

Whatever the demerits of this scheme, the conjunction of puruṣa and prakṛti "is the necessary presupposition of all experience".³⁹ It is an attempt to secure the independence of puruṣa and prakṛti, and thus to preserve the integrity

of the basic presuppositions of the Sāṃkhya metaphysics. If puruṣa were to be dependent upon prakṛti through a real connection it would lose its spiritual supremacy;⁴⁰ if prakṛti were dependent on puruṣa the plurality of puruṣas would evaporate and a theistic relation would become apparent; the majestic sway and dominance of the guṇas in the natural and mechanical arrangement of the world would suffer diminution.⁴¹

Prakṛtic evolution has a clear psychological orientation, though non-psychological reality is also sought to be covered. The first category to evolve is the buddhi or intelligence-stuff, which is characterised by a preponderance of the sattva guṇa. This is also known as mahat or great one, a term which suggests its cosmic significance as well as its fundamental importance as the ground and substance of the empirical individual. Thus it is also buddhitattva, a state which "comprehends within it the buddhis of all individuals".⁴² A general differentiation of the constituents leads to the rise of the individuation principle, ego or aḥmākāra. From this a parallel development takes place. From the sāttvika aḥmākāra proceeds the development of mind, the five organs of perception (jñānedriyas) and the five organs of action (karmendriyas), while from the tāmasika aḥmākāra develop the five fine elements or tanmātras, which in turn give rise to the five gross elements or bhūtas.⁴³ The five organs of knowledge are hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling, while the organs of action are speech, hands, feet, reproductive organ and excretory organ. Thus,

from prakṛti downwards, are counted 23 evolutes, which together with prakṛti and puruṣa make up the 25 categories of sāṃkhya metaphysics.

3.6 THE EMPIRICAL INDIVIDUAL AND LIBERATION

The sāṃkhya metaphysics formally declare the utterly transcendent nature of puruṣa and the fundamentally material character of the human personality. Seen this way the empirical individual can really have no connection with spiritual reality. Yet the system disallows the concept of the individual apart from some sort of contact or influence, however vaguely defined, of puruṣa upon prakṛti. It is only through association with puruṣa that prakṛti transforms itself into buddhi, self-sense, and mind. The basis of these three which together are known as the antaḥkarana or inner organ, is the influence of puruṣa, without which they are nothing but prakṛti; with it they are something vitally more.⁴⁴ The system appears to have anticipated the problem in some measure. Dasgupta says:

".... one class of the guṇas called sattva is such that it resembles the purity and intelligence of the puruṣa to a very high degree, so much so that it can reflect the intelligence of the puruṣa, and thus render its non-intelligent transformations to appear as if they were intelligent." 45

The sattva constituents are in great preponderance in the buddhi or intellect, and being of nature light and buoyant, they reflect puruṣa, who then attributes to himself selfhood as an empirical ego, and the notion of agency.⁴⁶ The idea of reflection strongly indicates the otherness of puruṣa

from prakṛti, and yet confers a limited form of consciousness on the individual; and it is just this limited nature of his consciousness that defines the chief feature of the empirical individual. Radhakrishnan says on this point:

"The ego is the seeming unity of buddhi and puruṣa. The relation between puruṣa and prakṛti associated with it is such that whatever mental phenomena happen in the mind are interpreted as the experiences of the puruṣa." 47

The conception of the reflection of spiritual reality in the buddhi endows the empirical individual with a true reflective consciousness and genuine will. Within the parameters of the sāṃkhya it is the buddhi alone, operating as the soul of man, that can itself see through the variety and spiritually voided character of the world by discriminating the subtle difference between itself and the true puruṣa. 48

So long as, even through the aid of the buddhi, the puruṣa fails to make a clear distinction between itself as the transcendent spirit and the buddhi as a material vehicle it will remain entrapped in prakṛti. Lack of discrimination is itself a mode of operation of buddhi, a continuation of the confusion between spirit and matter, which is avidya and "the root of all experience and misery".⁴⁹ When the individual overcomes the confusion between spirit and matter through right knowledge and discrimination, he wins final liberation from the meshes of matter.⁵⁰ The system maintains a metaphysical consistency in its doctrine by holding that,

since confusion and incorrect knowledge lead to bondage,
only correct knowledge of the distinction between spirit
and matter can confer emancipation.

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End Notes : Chapter Three

1. Frauwallner, E. History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, p.221.
2. Mahadevan, T.M.P. Invitation to Indian Philosophy, p.204.
3. Frauwallner, E. op.cit., p.247.
4. ibid., p.247.
5. SK 17.
6. SSS p.47.
7. TK 17.
8. TK 5.
9. SK 18.
10. DAS HIP I, p.238.
11. RAD IP II, p.281.
12. DAS HIP I, p.240.
13. SK 9.
14. SSS p.28.
15. TK 9.
16. SK 15.
17. RAD IP II, p.257.
18. DAS HIP I, p.257.
19. Hiriyanna, M. Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. III, p.44.
20. SK 16.
21. Jha, G. Tattvakaumudi of Vacaspati Misra, pp.xix/xx.
22. SK 16.
23. TK 10, p.37.
24. SK 10, 11.
25. RAD IP II, p.261.
26. SK 3.
27. RAD IP II, p.262.
28. SK 11.
29. SSS p.37.
30. SK 12.
31. SK 13.
32. SK 13.
33. TK 13.
34. TK 16, p.51.
35. DAS HIP I, p.245.
36. ibid., p.247.
37. SK 56.
38. SK 21.
39. Hiriyanna, M. op.cit., p.45.
40. RAD IP II, p.293.
41. ibid., p.288.
42. DAS HIP I, p.249.
43. SK 22.
44. RAD IP II, p.295.
45. DAS HIP I, p.260.
46. SK 20.
47. RAD IP II, p.292.
48. SK 37.
49. DAS HIP I, p.260.
50. SK 61, 68.

Chapter Four: The Metaphysics of Advaita

This chapter outlines the fundamental doctrines of the advaita system of thought. It is shown that, in terms of the metaphysical structure of the system, it tends to undervalue the world, and consequently the status of the individual. Yet the system institutes certain checks against this tendency, through which it strives to give meaning to the world of common experience.

CONTENTS

Chapter Four: The Metaphysics of Advaita 120

4.1.	Authority and Reasoning	121.
4.2.	The Doctrine of Causation	122.
4.3.	Ultimate Reality	125.
4.4.	Saguna Brahman or Īśvara	127.
4.5.	Māyā and Avidyā	128.
4.6.	Status of the World	130.
4.7.	Status of the Individual	132.
4.8.	Liberation	135.

Chapter 4 METAPHYSICS OF ADVAITA

It is the contention among scholars that the tradition of advaita is to be traced to the Upaniṣads while those who belong to the tradition insist that advaita is the central teaching of those texts.

The first systematic statement of the advaita metaphysics is given by Gauḍapāda in his commentary on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad.¹ In this work he establishes not only that the supreme reality is of a non-dual character (advaita), but also the doctrine of ajātivāda, that "nothing is ever born,"² nor is it possible for anything to come into birth,³ and that those who think that the mind or the objects perceived by it are ever born are under a severe delusion.⁴ Gauḍapāda asserts that the world of plurality is an illusion because it lands us in the muddle of causality.⁵ Śaṅkara, however, who laid out the groundwork and the details of the general advaitic position is not always as austere as Gauḍapāda though he is much influenced by him.⁶ The term advaita signifies that the plurality of the world may be explained in terms of the single concept of Brahman.⁷ As non-dualism, it asserts the transcendence of all numerical quantification altogether, rejecting also "any position that views reality as a single order of objective being."⁸ Although other schools such as those of Rāmānuja and Vallabha are also considered varieties of advaita, the term has a special affinity to Śaṅkara's system and should be seen as germane to it.

4.1. AUTHORITY AND REASONING

Śamkara firmly held that the authority for all things supersensuous and man's spiritual destiny lay in the dual realm of scripture and mystic experience, while the authority for an analysis of the physical world and the relations obtaining among objects lay in the realm of logical thought and human reasoning.⁹ If scripture were required to provide a knowledge of matters pertaining to ordinary perception, human thought would become redundant and scripture reduced to a mundane level. Scripture or śruti, which for Śamkara denoted mainly the Upaniṣads and secondarily the Bhagavad Gītā, gives us knowledge of transempirical reality, which is not available to ordinary modes of perception.

The śruti represents the anubhava or direct experiences of perfect sages. Śamkara accepts the traditional account that the Vedas are apauruṣeya, without authorship, and which do not need to stand on any authority apart from itself.¹⁰ But this authority is not so far removed from man that he merely has to obey it as a servant obeys his master. The scripture is a traditional guide and inspiration that should lead each one to the realization of its teaching in personal mystic experience. Dasgupta says:

"From his own position Śamkara was not thus bound to vindicate the position of the Vedānta as a thoroughly rational system of metaphysics. For its truth did not depend on its rationality but on the authority of the Upaniṣads." 11

Scripture teaches the transcendental truth of the true self of man, to which empirical modes of investigation are irrelevant.¹² Yet Śamkara himself engaged in protracted

dialectics against all opponents, for he held that by reasoning and logical demonstration the truth of scripture can be appreciated and faith deepened.¹³ While scripture taught a single lesson, the existence of diverse interpretations presented a dilemma to any student, and he must resort to philosophy in order to choose from among them.¹⁴ It is true that for Śamkara philosophy carried no ultimate value.

Radhakrishnan says:

"Śamkara's philosophical undertaking is intended to disillusion us with systematic philosophy and make out that logic by itself leads to scepticism."¹⁵

Śamkara's very practical religious interest is deeply underscored when he says: "Disease is not cured by saying 'medicine', but by actually taking it."¹⁶ Still, it can be safely said that, apart from and above all considerations of purely exegetical interest, the advaitic tradition justifies itself as a technical philosophy invoking metaphysical subtlety of a higher order.¹⁷

4.2. THE DOCTRINE OF CAUSATION

Advaita dialectics advanced the cause of an unrelenting idealist metaphysics by founding itself firmly upon the doctrine of causation, the relation between cause and effect. The realist schools of the nyāya and the sāṃkhya had based themselves on commonsense views of the world of things, whereas Śamkara was heavily influenced by the mystical teachings of the Upaniṣads and the views of Gauḍapāda. The basis of his philosophical theories is the intuitive

conviction that logical thought falls short of reality because it is forced to set up a relational connection between the known and the unknown.¹⁸ The mind operates within the confines of a dualistic framework, and it is not proper to let the natural constitution of things affect our perception of the truth. Śāṅkara says that the highest truth is "the negation of all differences - the conclusion arrived at by reasoning and supported by the scriptures."¹⁹

Śāṅkara's metaphysics takes the world of experience as operating within parameters that are specific to it. Experience is bound by a sense of time, space and causation, whereas reality is transcendent to these conditions.²⁰ As the world of objects is taken to be precisely interconnected through cause and effect relationships that is the very ground and assumption of metaphysics, Śāṅkara argues against the concept of causality on logical grounds.²¹

The satkāryavāda view of causal relationship is accepted in advaita. This view maintains that the effect pre-exists in the cause, on the grounds that an entity cannot be produced out of non-entity. If the effect were not already present in some way, it could not logically manifest, just as oil cannot be pressed out of mere sand.²²

The theory in its realist framework is also known as pariṇāmavāda or transformation, and this designation clarifies the naturalistic motive of an evolutionary

continuance of the prior condition. The state of an entity as cause changes itself into an effect condition by a natural rearrangement of its substance, and without violating its integrity as an existent.²³

Śaṅkara holds that an essential identity obtains between the effect and its cause, since nothing new can be freshly produced. He holds that a thing which does not exist in identity with something, does not even originate from that entity.²⁴ Outward appearances thus do not affect the inner essence that persists. The same phenomenon that we call effect is earlier known as cause. Such an explanation appears to hold well at the level of physical reality, where a series of prior causes as an indefinite series may be tolerated. When a metaphysical presupposition such as a first cause is posited, Śaṅkara holds that the causal relationship must be found inadequate. The sāṅkhya view that the manifested universe of forms is to be traced to prakṛti or avyakta as its first cause is illogical, since there is no reasonable ground for terminating the series of causes at the level of avyakta which, on the theory, must be continuous with the later effects. And logic demands that we ask for a further prior cause. But this would lead to an infinite regression, because there is no reason to suppose that the empirical and mechanical relationship is transcended.²⁵

Śaṅkara takes his stand on scripture and declares that cause

and effect are non-different; the world is an effect of Brahman which is the changeless reality. Since this changeless reality cannot be logically conceived to actually transform itself into the world, empirical existence is said to be "conjured up by nescience."²⁶ Śaṅkara asserts the logical validity of Brahman as the first cause of things by pointing out the scriptural declarations of changelessness with regard to Brahman, thus reconstructing the notion of the world-effect on a lower ontological plane as a mere appearance.²⁷ The advaitic theory is known as vivarta-vāda, the world-effect is an apparent transformation of Brahman as distinguished from the idea of a real or factual transformation or parināma-vāda.

4.3. ULTIMATE REALITY

Creation is characterised in advaita as mere name and form, nāma-rūpa, while Brahman is different from it.²⁸ Empirical usage is a characteristic of all language, which imposes marks on things. Differentiation and linguistic functions go together, says the advaitin. The manifold cannot reveal the truth of Brahman, which is yet the basis of it. Though Brahman is entirely different from the existence of the world, yet it remains as the basis of the negation of the world. Śaṅkara says: "The statement that Brahman is beyond speech and mind is not meant to imply that Brahman is non-existent".²⁹ The utter transcendence of Brahman is a necessary corollary to the finitude of man, for if Brahman

were cognizable then it would be rendered finite.³⁰

The notion of ultimate reality as nirguna or attributeless is seen as a necessary corollary of the empirical character of language. Therefore, the negation of all distinctions in the text that says "neti neti" (not this not this),³¹ is taken to represent the truth of ultimate reality accurately. Śaṅkara asserts: "Words denote things....but Brahman has no distinguishing marks".³² Śaṅkara, however, does not adopt a totally austere position in this matter on the showing of scripture which uses positive descriptions, such as "satyam jñānam anantam brahma" (Brahman is truth, knowledge and infinity),³³ "prajñānam brahma" (Brahman is supreme consciousness),³⁴ etc. All positive descriptions, however, insofar as they apply to Brahman, are to be taken as negating their opposite characteristics. Since the absolute Brahman is the indeterminate beyond every characterisation; since, truly speaking, there cannot be a symbol of Brahman, neither in the world of objects, nor in the world of thought, all predication must necessarily refer to a negation of its opposite. The concept of the nirguna Brahman denotes that ultimate reality is transcendent to all objects and thoughts; it cannot be understood as any form of personality as this is always connected with a binding ego. Nirguna Brahman is therefore trans-empirical.³⁵

4.4. SAGUNA BRAHMAN OR ĪSVARA

Śaṅkara is loathe to make the impersonal nirguna Brahman the direct cause of the world; it is important for the premises of his metaphysics that no vestige of changeful phenomena is seen to attach to the category of the trans-empirical, the category of pure being. His dictum "brahma satyam jagan-mithyā," (Brahman is the truth, the world is false) makes ultimate reality totally transcendent to the world.

Yet the world is very much a part of experience and cannot be wished away into nothingness. It has at least the semblance of being, even as an appearance. And since nothing exists apart from Brahman, and since even scripture speaks of the world-effect and our activities in it, in advaita metaphysics the concept of saguna Brahman or Īśvara is posited as the reconciling principle between the changeless absolute impersonal Brahman and the world-effect. Radhakrishnan says that the concept of Īśvara "is not a self-evident axiom, is not a logical truth, but an empirical postulate which is practically useful."³⁶ Śaṅkara asserts that we cannot say that the world is related to Brahman as one object to another, for Brahman is trans-empirical reality; yet the origin of the world must somehow be related to "a cause that is by nature eternal, pure and free, and intrinsically omniscient."³⁷ Īśvara is the concept of Brahman modified to suit our needs of apprehending this world in a logical fashion. As objects in this world always exist in some relation to each other, the world is seen as

related to Īśvara as effect is to cause. Īśvara is the creator, sustainer and dissolver of the world. It is the concept that stands for the God of religion, the object of devotion and worship. It is that concept of the absolute as modified to stand over against the world as the great Ruler and Controller, controlling all things from within as the antaryāmi, the Inner Ruler. ³⁸

The nirguṇa Brahman is seen as the sole ultimate reality in advaita. So Īśvara is said to be Brahman in association with māyā, the medium of world appearance. As Brahman is the ontological principle of unity pertaining to the world and to man, it is proper to speak of Īśvara only in terms of the world^{cf} empirical reality. Yet we cannot say that the advaitic concept of Īśvara is irrelevant. Within the advaitic premises, it answers to all the practical religious requirements until identity experience is achieved.³⁹ Its reality is said to be the same as the reality of nirguṇa Brahman conceived in terms of the world. The question of the objective reality of Īśvara cannot arise, because it would raise the very question of the reality of the world.⁴⁰ The concept is an integral part of advaita metaphysics which must be taken as a whole.

4.5. MĀYĀ AND AVIDYĀ

As pure being free of all qualities, the absolute is indescribable. Known in this way it is said to be svarūpa-lakṣana, characterised by its own essence. Since it is asserted that the absolute alone exists, and nothing else

besides it, the manifold world is also a certain view of the absolute, but a view that depends upon accidental characteristics, tatastha-lakṣana.

The reality of Brahman, for the advaitin, is translogical, as it is trans-empirical. As such, it can only be ascertained through mystic experience. The paradox of the changeless undifferentiated consciousness which is the absolute, and the simultaneous existence of the manifold world rests upon a mystical intuition.⁴¹ Since śruti declares that non-duality is the highest reality,⁴² the advaitin feels that the perception of multiplicity must be due to the operation of some error. Śaṅkara posits the metaphysical construct of māyā or avidyā or ajñāna, to account for this error of judgement.⁴³ Because it covers the entire existence of name and form, that is, all material reality, he also designates it as prakṛti, so that māyā is not only the power of illusion, but also the illusion itself. Just as Brahman is not different from Brahman-experience, the world is non-different from the experience of it; the world is what is experienced as such (bhāvarūpa).

Brahman, which is changeless spiritual essence, cannot properly be characterised as operating through māyā. Therefore advaita adopts the stand that māyā is that power of creation through which Īśvara puts forth the entire world of phenomena. Since the act of creation is in a sense a lapse from the pure changelessness of Brahman, māyā is stated to be an upādhi, limited adjunct, a condition that arises inexplicably. Again to maintain the conceptual

purity of Brahman, māyā, and therefore the world, including all individual selves, are assigned the status of sadasad-vilakṣana, neither real nor unreal.⁴⁴

The concept of māyā seems to work on the basis of an epistemic - phenomenological circularity. The world is the product of māyā because Brahman is in essence changeless being. Yet we as individuals are unable to perceive that Brahman is the sole reality and that the world is only an appearance because of the operation of māyā as avidyā or ignorance. Radhakrishnan says:

"Avidyā is the fall from intuition, the mental deformity of the finite self that disintegrates the divine into a thousand different fragments.... (it is) the twist of the mind which makes it impossible for it to see things except through the texture of the space-time cause." 45

The advaitin maintains, however, that avidyā is only another aspect of māyā seen from the level of individual perception, and the world-effect is coeval with the production of selves. The two standpoints do not constitute argumentative hedging, but are complementary versions of the same argument.⁴⁶ The problem is at the same ontological level for the world and for man; therefore what is māyā for the former is avidyā for the latter. From the perspective of the transcendent Brahman, there is no creation and no problem of māyā.⁴⁷

4.6. STATUS OF THE WORLD

The fundamental position of advaita with regard to the status of the world is that Brahman is its basis, ground

and support. In advaita metaphysics it could not be otherwise, since Brahman alone exists, and nothing else besides it.⁴⁸ Since the world is perceived to exist, there are only two alternatives: it is either a transformation (pariṇāma) of Brahman or a misapprehension of its reality. The former view, adopted by the sāṃkhya is rejected by the advaitin on account of its violation of the immutability of Brahman, "Brahman that is beyond all phenomenal processes".⁴⁹ We are then left with the second alternative, that the world as we experience it is a misapprehension of its underlying reality which is the changeless Brahman. In the introduction to his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, Śaṅkara urges the view that "there is nothing impossible in superimposing the non-self on the self that is opposed to it."⁵⁰

Advaitins argue that the world is an apparent transformation, a vivarta of Brahman, and that therefore the world is not a baseless appearance. All misapprehensions, even within human experience, are made on some factual basis. Śaṅkara asserts that "even phenomena like mirages are not without their ground."⁵¹ The world is neither totally unreal nor pure illusion, like the "son of a barren woman." It is the superimposition (adhyāsa) of a false view upon the only true reality which is Brahman. Such a view renders the universe false or mithyā but not totally unreal.⁵² While Brahman is transcendent being, the world of appearances belongs to the empirical category. As such there can be no causal relation between the two, as necessarily exists between two empirical objects.⁵³

Śaṅkara maintains that the world is dependent upon God (as Īśvara), or indirectly upon Brahman, even as the snake illusion depends upon the rope.⁵⁴ In this sense of being dependent on a real ground, a genuine relation is affirmed between Brahman and the world, though this relation is declared to be inexplicable, anirvacanīya.

In metaphysical terms, the advaitin does not say that the world is real, but it stands between the real and the unreal. It is not real because reality belongs to Brahman alone; it is not unreal because it is grounded in Brahman.⁵⁵

In Śaṅkara's view, the precise relation of the world with Brahman is, in the nature of the case, an insoluble riddle.⁵⁶ The world has phenomenal reality, because it is experienced as real. While only Brahman can be accorded the highest reality or pāramārthika sattā, the world is accorded vyāvahārika sattā, empirical reality. Thus advaita metaphysics extends a practical and pragmatic validity to the world of common experience. To the purely illusory category of prātibhāsika sattā belong events such as dreams and hallucinations, skyflowers and sons of barren women.

4.7. STATUS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The status of the individual is an area of some misconceptions, partly due to terminology and partly due to the nature of advaita metaphysics. Taking into consideration the second half of Śaṅkara's dictum "jīvo brahmaiva nā parah,"

the jīva is non-different Brahman, does not help to clarify the issue, unless we take jīva to mean "essence of the jīva", as in the Upaniṣadic statement regarding the world "sarvam khalvidam brahma", all this (world) is indeed Brahman.⁵⁷ Obviously here what is meant is not the world as perceived through the senses, but the essential reality or essence of it, which is Brahman.

Advaita teachers from Śaṅkara downwards have always understood, in spite of the terminological difficulties, that "the individual soul is essentially an agent".⁵⁸ The entire advaita metaphysics, as concerning the individual, hinges upon the doership or agency characteristic of the soul. The Ātman-Brahman equation is the very ground of the advaita system, and "ayamātma brahma"⁵⁹ is accepted as a great saying mahā-vākya. The empirical individual is therefore not Ātman.⁶⁰

Man is an agent who consciously directs his activities and enjoys the fruits of his actions.⁶¹ As in the sāṅkhya system, in advaita also, consciousness belongs to the pure spirit alone, while activity belongs to the non-self. The buddhi as a part of the material psychic apparatus is not itself endowed with consciousness,⁶² yet it appears to be conscious as a result of the reflection of the Ātman in it.⁶³ Śaṅkara holds that the relation of the individual self to the pure spirit cannot be logically demonstrated. The reflection theory (bimbapratibimbavāda) is one way of

looking at it. Another way of appreciating the connection is suggested by considering individuals as jars whose delimited space within is compared to the delimitation superimposed on the pure spirit by the upādhis. This is the limitation theory or avacchedavāda.⁶⁴

In any case, the Ātman comes to conceive itself as an active agent through misapprehension.⁶⁵ Through the operation of avidyā or nescience the qualities of the material psychic apparatus (the upādhis or limiting adjuncts) become superimposed upon the pure Ātma.⁶⁶ Advaita thus posits the empirical individual as the jīva, which is the individuated pure spirit. Operating with a limited consciousness, the jīva is an empirically real self-conscious individual, capable of subject-object relations. Deutsch says:

"The individual human person, the jīva, is a combination of reality and appearance. It is "reality" so far as the Ātma is its ground; it is "appearance" so far as it is identified as finite, conditioned, relative".⁶⁷

In association with and conditioned by the buddhi (intellect), ahamkāra (ego-sense), manas (mind) and indriyas (senses), the pure spirit operates as a doer and enjoyer in the world. Advaita emphasises that agency always belongs to the limiting conditions of mind, intellect, etc., and never to the spirit. Advaita demonstrates an obsessional attachment to the principle of changelessness of Ātman or Brahman,⁶⁸ an obsession that runs through its entire metaphysics, an

obsession that is never compromised. The status of the individual, therefore, as a jīva, as an actively operating agent in the world of relationships, the individual as we understand him in interpersonal relationships, is that of a passing phase. The jīva is in reality none other than Brahman.⁶⁹

In relation to the jīva, the Ātman is spoken of as the sākṣin or the unchanging witness self. Though based on Upaniṣadic references it is a metaphysical construct set up in later advaita tradition, and, though it is variously described in the literature,⁷⁰ it appears to function chiefly as a reinforcer of the immutability of the true spiritual consciousness, as against the changing consciousness of the individual jīva.

4.8. LIBERATION

As the individual is thrown into a mode of ignorance, the process of liberation in advaita is a highly individual metaphysic of self-awareness. The lost estate of Brahmanhood has to be recovered through the practice of introspection and discrimination. The goal of advaita is the re-establishment of ontological unity or identity between the individual soul and the nirguṇa Brahman.

The highest value in advaita, therefore, is the nirguṇa Brahman. No liberation is true until the nirguṇa Brahman is

realised. Although mokṣa or freedom is the attainment of Brahman, it is not a process along which the aspirant travels. Strictly speaking, it is not even any attainment; it is the Brahman-experience itself.⁷¹

It has been seen that the individual soul exists as a unified, organised, personality-principle at the empirical level. Through the operation of avidyā the sense of personality is superimposed upon it. In reality, the jīva is the Ātman or Brahman in empirical dress. And its defining feature as a jīva is the buddhi or intellect, which stands, so far as the individual is concerned, for the individualisation of pure spirit specific to that individual. Since through some pervasive error the pure spirit has misapprehended the finite personality-apparatus as itself, advaita specifies a corrective on the cognitive-spiritual level to effect mokṣa.

The buddhi-mind apparatus as the connection between pure spirit and the empiric being of man is important for advaita,⁷² as it identifies the malady for which a specific cure can be diagnosed. The buddhi, by harbouring a semblance of pure spirit, even in the form of a pratibimba (reflection) or avaccheda (limitation), keeps open the gateway for its own salvation. Śaṅkara says:

"....we say that it is not possible for the soul to have natural agentship, for that would lead to a negation of liberation. If agentship be the very nature of the Self,

there can be no freedom from it, as fire can have no freedom from heat. Moreover, for one who has not got rid of agentship, there can be no achievement of the highest human goal (liberation). For agentship is a sort of misery".⁷³

Since it is a kind of cognitive error that identifies the Ātman with the upādhis, simultaneously bringing about the lapse from the transcendental level to the empirical plane of consciousness, it must require a cognitive shift in reverse order to effect liberation. Advaita metaphysics teach that, since the reality of Brahman is non-different from the experience of it,⁷⁴ and since Brahman pervades the individual, mokṣa is always near at hand. All that is required is the appropriate type of cognitive shift or realization of it as such.⁷⁵

The buddhi-manas personality complex is bound to samsāra or the transmigratory rounds of births and deaths in accordance with its karmas. These metaphysical principles of karma and rebirth, the advaitic system holds in common with all other Indian systems except the materialistic ones. The jīva continues under the bondage of karma until final liberation. Śaṅkara holds that all karmas, both righteous and unrighteous, create bondage, and that knowledge alone is a prerequisite for liberation.⁷⁶

In the state of liberation the individual self becomes Brahman, (Brahmaiva bhavati).⁷⁷ The advaitin accepts this literally, yet maintains that the powers of cosmic creation

and destruction are denied to the liberated. In the condition of liberation, which is a trans-conceptual state of mystical intuition, aparokṣānubhūti or non-mediated experience, the entire world of plurality disappears for that individual.⁷⁸ When limiting adjuncts, intellect, mind, etc. are transcended in Brahman-experience which is liberation, the jīva is totally merged into Brahman as in an identity-relationship.⁷⁹

The advaitic view of liberation differs from other systems in that it is maintained that liberation is possible of attainment during life, (jīvanmukti). In this state of "embodied freedom" the liberated soul, with its consciousness merged into pure spirit, is said to be above the sense of limitation and egoity. Though free in spirit, the physical body continues until death under the impetus of past karmas.⁸⁰

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Chapter Five: Metaphysics of Viśiṣṭādvaita

In this chapter the chief doctrines of the Viśiṣṭādvaita are presented and shown to operate in terms of a uni-dimensional view of reality. The system is seen to be strong in its realism, in which the individual finds meaning through aspiring to achieve a specific type of relationship with God.

CONTENTS

Chapter Five: Metaphysics of Viśiṣṭādvaita

5.1.	Historical Antecedents	141.
5.2.	Theistic-Monistic Realism	142.
5.3.	The Genesis of Knowledge	144.
5.4.	God as Supreme Reality	147.
5.5.	Status of the World	150.
5.6.	Status of the Individual	152.
5.7.	Liberation	153.

Chapter 5 METAPHYSICS OF VIŚIṢṬĀDVAITA

5.1. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

The viśiṣṭādvaita school of thought is recognised as the leading school of theism, "the earliest and most outstanding form of theistic absolutism"¹ to have arisen on the soil of India. Although the systematization of this brand of metaphysics, religion and philosophy was effected by Rāmānuja at the turn of the 11th century A.D., its roots go back much earlier. On the metaphysical side we can easily trace it to the Upaniṣads, whose saprapaṅca or cosmic view of creation is made explicit by Rāmānuja.² On the religious side there is the undoubted influence of the ancient Pāncarātra sect.³ But the most important direct influence on Rāmānuja's theology has been the devotional poetry of the Ālvārs, a group of twelve mystic visionaries who gave out their deepest feelings for God in song. Dasgupta says of them:

"The works of the Ālvārs are full of intense and devoted love for Viṣṇu. This love is the foundation for the later systematic doctrine of prapatti."⁴

Among the many antecedents that go into the making of the viśiṣṭādvaita religion and philosophy must be counted, apart from the Prasthāna Traya and the hymns of the Ālvārs, the Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Vaiṣṇava Āgamas.⁵

Rāmānuja's chief aim was "to proclaim the doctrine of salvation through bhakti, and make it out to be the central teaching of the Upaniṣads, the Gītā and the Brahma Sūtra."⁶

Since bhakti or devotional love necessarily requires a unitive view of God as the Beloved, Rāmānuja was under an obligation to work out a sound metaphysical basis for a monotheistic faith. His attempt in this regard, says A.B. Keith, "in substantial merit and completeness far out-did any previous effort to find in the Brahma Sūtra a basis for monotheism."⁷

From the above it becomes clear that the system of viśiṣṭādvaita has complex antecedents, and in a sense, is not a single system. As Śrīvaiṣṇavism, which is its alternate name, the tradition itself recognises the equal authority of the Tamil devotional hymns of the Āḷvārs, an authority that stands side by side with the Sanskrit sources. Therefore the system is also known as Ubhaya Vedānta, the Vedānta based on a double source.⁸

5.2. THEISTIC-MONISTIC REALISM

An outstanding feature of Rāmānuja's system is that it is a realistic metaphysics that is both theistic and monistic. The term viśiṣṭādvaita emphasises the advaita or non-dualist or monistic orientation, while the adjectival term viśiṣṭa, meaning special peculiarity, qualifies it in a secondary sense.⁹ The usual idea of monism is that of an absolutism of the Śāṅkara-advaita type, which brooks no qualification whatever. Viśiṣṭādvaita, on the other hand, is essentially theistic, without compromising its own type of absolutism. And we have seen that it is referred to as a theistic absolutism, which is another term for theistic monism. At

the same time it is to be noted that as the terms of the system are realist in every way, we may say that the reality of all things is absolute.¹⁰

All the three major elements of theism, monism and realism may be seen in Rāmānuja's doctrine of tattva-traya, which is the inseparable ontological unity of three factors, cit, acit and Īsvara (soul, matter and God).¹¹ God is the independent reality, while souls and matter are dependent upon Him. Yet souls and matter are as real as God, and they are subordinate in the sense that He is the Controller. Even as real ontological unity, this doctrine should not be viewed as a weak version of Śaṅkara's advaita, for Rāmānuja sees its philosophical basis in the Prasthāna Traya as a whole, and the spiritual experiences of the Tamil Ālvār mystics.¹² The relations between God and soul, and God and matter are not dissolvable or changeful, but are inherent and unchangeable. The substance, viśeṣya and its quality viśeṣaṇa, are connected by an internal relation of inseparability known as aprthaksiddhi.¹³ Souls and all prakṛtic evolutes are linked to God in terms of this ultimately indefinable principle, which is the foundation of Rāmānuja's ontological metaphysical realism. It can be appreciated that it is this principle of inseparability of the substance from its attribute that underscores the advaitic or non-dual character of Rāmānuja's metaphysics. We have to note, however, that

"Rāmānuja's concept of unity is not unity but union; for from a logical point of view it is only union and not unity that can be thought

of as being constituted of ultimately distinct and separate parts." ¹⁴

In the opinion of Hiriyanna aprthaksiddhi is neither identity nor difference, but a "logically unsatisfactory" modification of Upaniṣadic metaphysics to suit the requirements of theism. ¹⁵

5.3. THE GENESIS OF KNOWLEDGE

The viśiṣṭādvaita system accepts three main sources of knowledge as valid - perception, inference and scripture. Scripture is incontrovertible because it gives us knowledge of transcendental reality as revelation from God. ¹⁶ The authority for a knowledge of Brahman is scripture and scripture alone. ¹⁷

So far as objects of the world are concerned, there is no such thing as their apprehension in a purely undifferentiated form. Knowledge is always qualified by some specific quality. Rāmānuja says that "experience is only of objects qualified by some characteristic difference". ¹⁸ The very nature of the soul's consciousness is such that it must discriminate objects in terms of special features pertaining to it. Our knowledge of the world is a knowledge of distinct reals.

For Rāmānuja, knowledge without distinctions is a psychological myth. The nirvikalpaka or indeterminate perception

that is the first stage of the perceptual process is not totally indistinct, but gives us an apprehension of a class character, such as a "cow" as distinct from another class of animals. As the apprehension of distinctions is the very nature of the mind, almost along with such an indeterminate perception there immediately follows the savikalpaka or determinate perception, which, in our example of the cow, establishes the particular cow that is perceived as distinct from others of its own class.¹⁹

In explicating his ontological and epistemological position, Rāmaṇuja shows a passionate concern for the preservation of the concept of person, both in terms of God as well as man. In all the Indian schools, ontological metaphysics and epistemological formulation are closely related, and we are justified in asserting that epistemology is an extension of the metaphysics of a system.²⁰

Knowledge always implies a subject and an object. The knowing subject is the soul, and while it is constituted of knowledge, it operates in the world through its attributive knowledge, dharmabhūta-jñāna. It is a unique adjunct of the soul, in that it has the characteristics of material objects as well as spirit. It is characterised by inertness (jaḍatva) as well as consciousness (caitanya). Due to this dual characteristic it operates as the link between the soul and the objects of the world. Through its operation the revealing knowledge of the soul goes out through the various

senses and manifests the reality of objects. Thus it has the characteristic of expansion and contraction, but it becomes all-pervasive only when the soul attains salvation.²¹ In its commerce with the objects of the world, the dharmabhūta-jñāna operates as attributive knowledge of the Self; however, it expresses its substantive aspect when it reveals the Self.²²

Rāmānuja does not precisely define the soul as being totally of the nature of knowledge. Knowledge itself is self-luminous, svayamprakāśa, yet it is stated as if distinct from the Self upon which it is dependent. The soul is "a knower both in the state of bondage and freedom".²³

Hiriyanna suggests that Rāmānuja may be here expressing a desire to bring the concept of soul into harmony with the idea of changelessness.²⁴ It would be truer to say that Rāmānuja leaves the concept ultimately in the region of mystery, just as he does the concept of God, though both are endowed with the essence of personality.

Rāmānuja places himself under obligation, in terms of his metaphysical theory of a plurality of reals, to develop a theory of knowledge to correspond with it. And we see the logical extension of his metaphysical trends in his theory of error.²⁵ Error, says Rāmānuja, is not due to any kind of illusion, but occurs because of the exaggerated perception of a true element, such that the psychological perception is disproportionate to the actual empirical

context. Through his doctrine of pañcīkaraṇa or quintuplication, Rāmānuja maintains that, since a certain proportion of the five elements is always present in every real object, an erroneous perception simply magnifies one element at the expense of others. On this view, the mirage is not truly illusory, for particles of water are present in the air and in the desert sand, which are magnified into a pool. Thus it is a case of apprehension of the true, yathārtha-khyāti or sat-khyāti,²⁶ but it is abnormal and serves no useful purpose.

5.4. GOD AS SUPREME REALITY

Radhakrishnan makes the telling remark that, in Rāmānuja's eyes, Śaṅkara's conception of the nirguṇa Brahman would be like "the famous mare of Orlando, which had every perfection except the one small defect of being dead".²⁷ And true to such projection, Rāmānuja displays an uncommon passion for a conception of God to whom human beings could relate in a real fellowship of spirit. This is not to say that Rāmānuja constructs his concept of God in order to match it with man's psychological and human needs, but he develops the theistic elements of the Upaniṣads, in relation to ideas of the Viṣṇu and Bhāgavata Purāṇas.²⁸ As Dasgupta points out, Rāmānuja firmly believed that "the nature and existence of God can be known only through the testimony of scriptures and not through inference."²⁹ "The scriptures alone are the authority with respect to Brahman," says Rāmānuja.³⁰

In viśiṣṭādvaita, God is the Supreme Reality other than which nothing exists, in the sense that all individual existents are contained within Him as a whole.³¹ All individual souls and material entities are parts of God who is the all-comprehensive reality. Yet God is the inner soul of all things. Rāmānuja says:

"Brahman has for its body the world of sentient and insentient beings and Brahman is its Self."³²

God is the Śarīrin, the soul and Inner Ruler (Antaryāmin) of all things, while all other existents make up His body or śarīra. Thus in every way God is unity, but not a distinctionless unity.

Three types of distinctions or bheda are asserted within the totality of God. Vijātiya-bheda or the distinction of heterogeneity as exists between different classes of things such as cows and horses, birds and fishes, etc. Sajātiya-bheda is the distinction obtaining within a homogeneous class such as the difference between one cow and another cow from within the common class of cows. Svagata-bheda is an internal distinction between the parts of the self-same individual, as between the horns and tail of a bull.³³

These categories clarify the idea that Brahman in viśiṣṭādvaita is a synthetic whole with no external distinctions whatever, but bearing within itself only the svagata-bheda category of distinctions, in that individual souls and entities are integral parts of His Being.³⁴ Although the whole universe of sentient and insentient beings are parts

of His nature, God is free of all dośas or imperfections.³⁵

Brahman in the viśiṣṭādvaita theology is called variously as Viṣṇu (the all-pervader), Nārāyaṇa (the dweller in man) and Bhagavān (the Great), though Īśvara, Supreme Lord, is most favoured. It is obvious that Brahman is not nirguṇa (qualityless) as affirmed in the advaita of Śaṅkara.³⁶

Rāmānuja says that Brahman cannot be pure undifferentiated consciousness because consciousness always involves the cognition of difference".³⁷ Hence Śaṅkara's distinction between nirguṇa and saguna aspects of Brahman are rejected by Rāmānuja on the grounds that such distinctions are contrary to experience and logic, and are unsupported by scripture.³⁸

The crucial point of Rāmānuja's theism is two-fold. One is the affirmation of the personality of God, as "unconditioned personality",³⁹ which also suggests the trans-logical or eccentric nature of the concept. The other point is the ananyatva or "otherness" of the soul from God, so that the two are neither identified nor completely separated.⁴⁰

Although God is connected with all the forms of the world, as he is the Supreme Personality endowed with an infinity of benign attributes,⁴¹ He may yet be considered to be "by itself altogether formless",⁴² showing that the notion of God's personality is really a trans-empirical concept.

The relationship of souls and matter to God is also stated to be like that of the mode (prakāra) to its bearer (prakāri),

part (śeṣa) to the whole (śeṣin), and the controlled (niyāmya) to the controller (niyantā).⁴³ In every way Rāmānuja relegates all entities to a subsidiary position and shows the supremacy of God. Metaphysically, he establishes that souls and matter are not discontinuous with the highest spiritual reality. All existence is a harmonious interaction of reals, where matter, souls and God exist on a single plane of reality.⁴⁴

5.5. STATUS OF THE WORLD

Rāmānuja skillfully weaves his fundamental concept of God as ādhāra into his theory of causation of the world, to illustrate that "God is the ontic ground of finite being, as well as the cause (both material and efficient) of its periodic transformations of state".⁴⁵ Rāmānuja adopts the sat-kārya-vāda theory of creation in which both matter and souls evolve into the world as modes (prakāras) of God. In the causal condition (kāraṇāvasthā), matter and souls remain latent within Brahman, and, as an expression of God's will they undergo a transformation (pariṇāma) and manifest as the effect condition (kāryāvasthā).⁴⁶ Since souls and matter in their essence are considered unchanged, Rāmānuja considers the effect to be non-different from the cause.⁴⁷ Logically, this is a difficult position to uphold, since finite attributes are also made a necessary part of the infinite in this system.⁴⁸

The physical universe evolves out of prakṛti, which in the causal condition remains latent within God in a subtle (sūkṣma) state. Through God's will this subtle matter becomes differentiated into three subtle elements of fire, water and earth, which manifest the three qualities of sattva, rajas and tamas. By a continuous process of further differentiation, the perceptible universe of objects arises. Rāmānuja holds that the world of becoming is a real transformation of real substances.⁴⁹

The advaitic concept of the phenomenality of the world is therefore totally rejected by Rāmānuja. The scriptures are to be taken literally in the matter of creation. Just because an entity changes does not make it unreal. The advaita theory of identity between God and the world, making the world out to be false is illogical, for identity can only be stated of two distinctly existing things.⁵⁰

Rāmānuja and later followers of his school, Vedānta Deśika in particular, direct a sustained polemic against Śaṅkara's theory of māyā and avidyā. Māyā is considered a purely fictitious idea because it cannot be shown to have a locus. If Brahman is its seat, then His perfection is compromised. It cannot be said to exist in the jīva because, on advaita theory, jīvas are themselves the products of avidyā. It cannot conceal Brahman because it would detract from Brahman's self-luminosity. It cannot be stated to be something apart from and next to Brahman, as that would place a limitation on His infinity. To say that it is

anirvacanīya, indescribable, is to be absurd and illogical.⁵¹

5.6. STATUS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The soul or jīva in the viśistādvaita is described as a spiritual essence, with knowledge and bliss its eternal qualities. It is characterised by both change and changelessness. As constitutive knowledge the jīva is an unchanging spiritual principle, but it also possesses knowledge as an attribute, and this is the element of change in it.⁵²

The soul is the permanent knower behind the changing states of knowledge, which inhere in it.⁵³ It is atomic in size but due to its attributive consciousness which is capable of contraction and expansion it can become aware of distant objects just as the tiny flame of a lamp can illumine many objects.⁵⁴

The soul is different from the mind, the senses and the buddhi. It is the agent (kartā) and the enjoyer (bhoktā) that operates in this world through these psychological instruments.⁵⁵ The soul is bound to the world of birth and rebirth in terms of its karmas. In the state of release from samsāra the soul attains to infinite knowledge and happiness. Even in the state of release the soul maintains its status as an aṁśa (part) or mode (prakāra) of God in a relation of inseparability from Him, aprthak-siddha-viśeṣana.⁵⁶

In terms of this principle of aprthaksiddhi, souls are considered eternal and inseparable attributes of Brahman or Īśvara who is their substance.⁵⁷ Rāmānuja tries to avoid the problem of change by asserting that Īśvara in Himself does not change so much as the entities which are His inseparable parts. In a sense therefore, Īśvara retains something of the Upaniṣadic changeless absolute, the viśeṣya element of the totality, whereas, as participating in the changeful viśeṣanas as their antaryāmin (indweller), Īśvara must be considered to be suffering some sort of change inasmuch as the viśeṣanas are His own eternal and inseparable parts.⁵⁸

5.7. LIBERATION

The soul is bound to the cycle of samsāra (recurring births and deaths) as long as it has not worked out its past karmas. Its embodied state is thus due to the sum total of its past actions. Karma is a form of ignorance or avidyā,⁵⁹ because it leads the soul away from the full realisation of its connection with God.⁶⁰

Though God as ādhāra is the ruler and support of the soul, the soul as a real agent (kartā) enjoys and exercises its own free will. As souls in samsāra are under the bondage of their past selfish actions, they have to operate their wills in accordance with God's design in order to free themselves from this bondage. The soul continues to be weighed down under the burden of sin, until it realises its

total dependence on God who is its only support. Liberation then becomes possible for the soul.⁶¹

Liberation from samsāra is achieved through bhakti (devotional love towards God) in combination with prapatti, total surrender to Him. Meditation is a devotional attitude of constant remembrance of God, which is pleasing to God and which helps to overcome the sinful results of action.⁶²

Jñāna and karma by themselves cannot lead to release except as aids to the development of devotion and the attitude of total surrender. Bhakti in the viśiṣṭādvaita system has a wide range of meanings concerning the devotional attitude, for it is that process through which the soul becomes "more and more vividly conscious of its relation to God, until at last it surrenders itself to God."⁶³

In spite of the great importance of the concept of prapatti, Rāmānuja accepts social divisions based on caste, as these pertain to the embodied state. Only the three higher orders may prosecute jñāna and karma, as these involve study of the Vedas and sacrificial duties prescribed therein.⁶⁴ But bhakti and prapatti as the final means of liberation, are open to all irrespective of social distinctions.⁶⁵

In the state of release, the soul necessarily transcends selfish attachments or egoity, but retains its sense of individuality. Rāmānuja preserves his metaphysical stand by saying that mokṣa is dependent upon "the intuition of Brahman as the inner Self different from souls and matter."⁶⁶

In the state of release the soul attains only to a likeness of God (brahmaṇo bhavati) but not total identity with Him (na tu svarūpaikyam).⁶⁷

The concept of jīvanmuktī proposed by Śaṅkara is denied by Rāmānuja. Since embodied existence is the consequence and badge of karmic bondage, final liberation is secured only after the body is shaken off, since bodily existence symbolises at least the vestige of unfulfilled karmas.⁶⁸

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Chapter Six: Ethical Ideas in Indian Thought

This chapter gives an account of the basic ethical doctrines in their most general features, and as they are acceptable to the classical systems.

CONTENTS

Chapter Six: Ethical Ideas in Indian Thought

6.1.	Metaphysics, Ethics and Soteriology	158.
6.2.	The Primary Ethical Institutions	167.
6.2.1.	Ethical Discipline	168.
6.2.1.1.	Varṇa Dharma	170.
6.2.1.2.	Āśrama-Dharma	171.
6.2.1.3.	The Saṃskāras	172.
6.2.1.4.	The Puruṣārthas	172.
6.2.1.5.	Yoga	174.

Chapter 6 ETHICAL IDEAS IN INDIAN THOUGHT

6.1. METAPHYSICS, ETHICS AND SOTERIOLOGY

Our study so far of the three systems of the sāṅkhya, advaita and viśistādvaita has shown clearly that the chief concern of the schools has been the realization of a transcendental or spiritual aim. In prosecuting such a soteriological aim it sometimes appears that Indian thought is quite indifferent to the ethical concerns of the individual and to the problems of morality.¹ In point of fact, most of the problems that concern man, as pertaining to his individual self as a whole, have received the attention of Indian thinkers from the classical period at least. We may even say further that, during the classical period, when the metaphysical systems under review were formulated, large and wide-ranging ethical notions appear to be presumed by the philosophers. On the basis of the Mānava Dharma Śāstra we are obliged to accept that well-formed ethical rules were in operation. However, the evidence before us suggests that gains in the direction of the formation of a systematic theory of ethics were accretionary and cumulative, born more out of a growing tradition than any form of fixed and systematic preservation. Indian ideas concerning ethics are therefore largely evolutionary.²

Early Indian thought does not provide a specific or clear enunciation of a moral philosophy, except in the most general terms pertaining to a soteriological aim in life.

As we have seen, in the period of the systems, a general heightening of moral tone is inescapable. The brimming thought about moral and ethical issues does not get fixed as a system in its own right, but trails behind in the wake of metaphysical debating that is the central concern of the philosophers.³

The Dharma Śāstras contain a great deal of material regarding moral conduct and ethical principles and are in fact codifications of social law which goes down to great depth and detail. The philosophers take these codes for granted and a few speak in terms of them in their discussions. Ethical concerns therefore form the background of all discussions of objective morality,⁴ and we have to give due consideration to them in the context of the metaphysical systems.

The Upaniṣads, which provide the main inspiration of the later systems, and which, as we have already seen, are mystically orientated, are so heavily inundated with metaphysical speculations, that they leave ample scope for reading variant ethical views into them.⁵

Considering the ethical implications of the monistic interpretation of the Upaniṣads, Thakur observes that while Deussen "finds in this philosophy a complete explanation of the ethics of love",^{6a} McKenzie comes to the very opposite conclusion that the advaitic allied systems "leave no room for ethics."^{6b}

By way of explanation for his point of view McKenzie supplies the example of a Hindu holy man who discounted an Englishman's humanitarian services to fellow men as being "the very bottom-most step of the ladder" in the scale of spiritual values, declaring that "meditation" and "contemplation" constituted the highest rungs.⁷ We cannot, of course, say with McKenzie that the Indian systems as represented by the Hindu holy man do not constitute ethics of a sort, and may even be considered worthwhile for men of a certain persuasion, but we shall leave the proper discussion of such ethical anomalies for later discussion.

Indian metaphysics and ontological doctrines have invariably developed differential epistemologies that serve to stabilise and support peculiar and varying metaphysical positions. Indian metaphysics have also developed along an axiological dimension, only the axiological considerations, which we may say constitutes the pure ethics or moral philosophy proper, have tended to remain in metaphysical dress. We have to agree with Raju when he says:

"Social ethics and political thought were not regarded as important by the classical philosophers. This indeed has to be admitted and may be traced to the classical philosophers' deep interest in the inward reality than in the outward." 8

This means that an ethical philosophy as such has not developed in Indian thought, except as referring back and getting fused with the metaphysical concepts. The writer is not saying that this is a failing in Indian thought, though Indian thought has not escaped this

criticism either, as we have already seen in the case of McKenzie.

Axiological considerations have tended to place values in a scale of gradation as in a simple way we noticed in McKenzie's example of the Hindu holy man. Indian philosophy which is committed to an axiological dimension, is generally regarded as a philosophy of values, in which "the idea of gradation is basic to the conception".⁹ What men desire, or ought to desire, is placed in a scale of values. And the most pervasive term for value is "puruṣārtha", what is worthy of attainment by man, or what ought to be desired by him in fulfilment of the moral life.¹⁰ Metaphysical speculation from R̥gvedic times through to the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā has undergone significant changes. As values are not far removed from their metaphysical base, "the conception of value also has undergone important changes in the course of time".¹¹

The classical systems state in their own ways what they consider to be the essential features of thought of the canonical texts, and develop them further. They suggest and emphasise specific aspects of ethical behaviour such as are thought to comport with the peculiarities of their several doctrines. From the metaphysical point of view we may say that in the classical systems, we have Indian metaphysical and ethical ideas in a relatively arrested state, in the sense that they have been recognised as standard interpretations whose influence has had a

continuous history well into the modern period.

Not only is this true for the post-classical, medieval and modern periods, but the implications are also reflected backward in time, inasmuch as the classical systems are adamant that it is their interpretation and theirs alone, as against every rival view, that has been in fact promulgated in the ancient texts. This backward reflection implicit in the systems brings within the field of relevance all the post-Upanisadic literature, the law-books, epics, and mythologies, whose ethical doctrines are taken up and given emphasis in special ways to bring out the metaphysical peculiarities of the schools.¹²

Though ethical considerations are tied down to metaphysical doctrines, the flexibility of interpretation along the axiological dimension has been a feature of Indian thought and this is not the less so as a result of the peculiarities and differences of the metaphysical constructs. It cannot be denied that the "highest good" is to be seen in terms of the teaching regarding Brahman. Mahadevan says:

"The metaphysical basis for the Indian theory of values is to be found in the Upanisadic conception Brahman".¹³

This conception is regarded in itself as both the good and the real, since it fulfils all those things that man ought to strive for. It is the emphasis on Brahman as the goal to be striven for that confers on it immense ethical value. In terms of sāṅkhya formulations mokṣa is purely individual salvation as pure consciousness. In advaita metaphysics mokṣa is the goal of human striving as transcendental

bliss. Brahman is itself the state of mokṣa or total freedom from becoming, according to Śaṅkara. For Rāmānuja, however, Brahman is that Ultimate Reality which includes within itself all finite forms in a very real sense. It is the supremely Real, the repository of every form of blessedness, that is the goal of all human endeavour.¹⁴ Regarding the ethical value of these two general approaches, one characterised by the sāṅkhya and advaita type of impersonal mokṣa on the one hand, and the other characterised by the viśiṣṭādvaita concept of inclusion within a personal God, on the other, Balbir Singh says:

".....every Indian system strives, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, to transcend the sphere of the intellect, in its search for an Ultimate, believed either to be the all-inclusive Spirit, or a supreme state - that of mokṣa." 15

The Indian systems accept on faith that the correlation between ethical value and spiritual value as understood and as represented in the concepts of Brahman or mokṣa, and God, is an intrinsic one, that it is already set in the ideal as a practically realizable one. Regarding the interweaving of the ideas of the good and the spiritual in these two approaches, Balbir Singh says further:

"....in both these cases it is tacitly assumed that, unless the good is an intrinsic part of the real, the real cannot provide a basis for both ethics and religion." 16

We cannot have a clearer statement than this of the spiritual basis of ethical actions as it covers Indian thought in its generality. The emphasis on the good as being but another and vital aspect of the real, even as

being a definition of the real, is an important feature of both advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita, and in a somewhat negative way it is certainly applicable to the sāṃkhya as well. The importance of striving for a transcendent goal which represents the highest value is reflected with great force in the inspirational text:

"Lead me from the unreal to the Real,
Lead me from darkness unto Light,
Lead me from death unto Immortality".¹⁷

The general Indian approach to the problem of ethics is that it points to a transcendental realm, conceived either in personal or impersonal terms. At the same time, it must be noted that ethical ideas are not merely the subjective responses of different individuals to the pressures of the world. If ethics were confined to an individual's inner world, it would either lead to nihilism or place the spiritual ideal (Brahman or mokṣa) totally out of reach of living individuals. Such an attitude is precluded in the Indian approach. All three systems of the sāṃkhya, advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita labour in important ways to demonstrate the vital connection between the metaphysical conception of Brahman or mokṣa on the one hand, and the individual jīva on the other, in and through the world of things. It is thus that Brahman or mokṣa becomes the highest ethical value. The world of plurality is not totally discontinuous with ultimate reality. Such a metaphysic is seen to impart significance to moral striving. In this connection Y.K. Menon says:

".....there is no hope of arriving at moral principles that are not downright absurd

unless one starts from some metaphysical conception of the world - some assumption as to what the world is and what each one of us as an individual is in it for" 18

Thus the Indian view of ethics sets for itself a transcendent or absolute standard, variously conceived. It is not subjective because the goal of ethical striving is really attainable, and attainable through the world; and its attainment is the summum bonum of human life. Indian ethics is intuitionist in a spiritual sense because it is referred to the inner meaning of life and not to outward marks. The value of an ethical act "resides ultimately in its effect on the doer"¹⁹ in the sense of revealing to him the standard in terms of which he ought to act.

Since ethical actions in the Indian view must refer to the inner meaning of life, they cannot have as their standard any item in the external world. Any external standard is invariably tied up with a scientific or analytic view of contingent reality, and this is irrelevant to a spiritual view of life.²⁰

For the same reasons, hedonism and utilitarian ethics have been rejected. The cārvāka or lokāyata school is well-known in Indian tradition as a heterodox school that simply rejects all transcendental values, and confines the good life within the bounds of ordinary perceptual modes. This view is rejected "both on grounds of spiritual authority, and on grounds of inherent absurdity".²¹ It is accepted as an axiomatic truth that a value that is not abiding,

but which changes with changing external circumstances or the psychological dispositions of individuals, cannot give true or lasting happiness.²² A śruti text expresses the idea succinctly in the words of the spiritual aspirant Naciketas, who rejects the sensual temptations arrayed before him:

"Transient and ephemeral are all these;
they wear out the happiness of such sense
powers as a mortal has Keep for
yourself the chariots, and the song, and
the dance."²³

All that we have said so far underlines the deep soteriological view prominent in Indian philosophy. As a philosophy of values, Indian thought tries to express, through its metaphysical constructions, not only that Brahman or mokṣa is the highest reality, but it is also the goal that all men should strive towards. Indian thought is persistent that "the final fruit of philosophy is the experience of value."²⁴

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad portrays the learned sage Nārada as approaching his preceptor and ruefully declaring that he had mastered the long list of arts and sciences, but had remained only at the level of a mantravit, knower of the sacred verses, not an ātmavit, knower of the spiritual Self. Nārada says that he was in a state of grief, for he was aware that "a knower of the ātman goes beyond grief".²⁵ This episode in the śruti is a forceful declaration of the need on the part of man to attain a direct realization of spiritual reality, whereby alone salvation is won.

Every Indian system, except the materialistic ones, designate a state beyond grief as the highest and most desirable value. "The attainment of sorrowlessness is the common goal of Indian philosophy".²⁶

While this way of stating the goal of Indian thought might not be amenable to the devotional schools of Vedānta, it may be accepted in the general sense of stating the soteriological aim of all Indian thought. A more personalistic ethic is emphasised in the following affirmation of spiritual attainment:

"I have known that Great Being, bright as the sun and beyond all darkness; by knowing Him alone can man overcome death; there is no other way."²⁷

6.2. THE PRIMARY ETHICAL INSTITUTIONS

Ethical activity seeks to prise the individual out of the physical environment and mundane setting in which he finds himself fixed by nature. As man in Indian thought is seen to be continuous with subhuman species, removed only by virtue of the blessings of karmic spiritual development, hedonistic values associated with hunger, thirst, sex and material attachments are a constant threat to his spiritual development. In this regard a vitally important ethical idea developed in Indian thought is that of śreyas, the good. This concept is contrasted with its opposite, preyas, or the pleasant. The Kaṭha Upaniṣad says:

"That which is good is one thing, that which

is pleasant is quite another. Both of them bind the Self, but to different objects. Of these, well-being comes to him who chooses the good; he who chooses the pleasant fails to attain the goal." 28

In the depths of his nature man transcends his outer animal self, although he might confuse himself at times with that which is less than his true self.²⁹ By virtue of reason or discrimination or faith, man is capable of aspiring to a long-range goal for which sreyas stands, by abjuring the call of base appetites. The Indian systems are in general agreement that ethical striving means restraint of passion. This means operating the rational faculty as part of moral activities. Since the goal of philosophy is the transcendent reality, it is necessary to discriminate keenly with regard to what activities one may undertake. Only by being rational can those moral qualities develop that provide the foundation for attaining the spiritual goal.³⁰

6.2.1. ETHICAL DISCIPLINE

The central concept of Indian thought, with regard to ethical discipline and morality, is dharma. Radhakrishnan calls it "a word of protean significance".³¹ Crawford says of dharma in regard to the whole development of Indian culture, that "in the depths of this single word lies an entire civilization".³² Derived from the sanskrit root dhr, the word dharma connotes that which sustains, nourishes, integrates or holds together. "It is the norm which sustains the universe, the principle of a thing in virtue of

which it is."³³ These definitions, which are based on grammatical meaning and consistency of usage, show up the high importance of the concept in the ethical sense, and brings it very close in meaning to the idea of the highest value. It gives a strong indication of the dominant soteriological dimension in Indian ethical thought. As bearing an ontological commonness with the concepts of Brahman and mokṣa, dharma is, in this sense, in the highest axiological category, and it "occupies a pivotal position in any scale of value".³⁴ On the basis of its meaning of "that which holds together" it has a broad dimension of meaning and application, and covers all types of moral activity that is intended to harmonise the individual with the central spiritual purpose of life.

The Manu Smṛti or Mānava Dharma Śāstra gives the detailed applications of the rules of dharma pertaining to different life-situations. It states that the sources of our knowledge of dharma are the śruti (Vedas), the smṛti (secondary tradition), the conduct of virtuous men, and the light of individual conscience.³⁵ Manu goes to great lengths in describing moral rules down to the minutiae of duties affecting man at different levels of social organisation and in different stages of life. The clear impression is given that these rules for the most part are fixed and irreversible, and therefore, for the development of ethical ideas, the last two sources of dharma, the conduct of virtuous men and individual conscience, appears to assume great importance in

matters of social change.³⁶

6.2.1.1. VARNA DHARMA

The ethical organisation of society goes back to a remote antiquity, and refers to the division of ancient Aryan society into four divisions or varṇas. Varna dharma refers to the duties pertaining to each of the four classes, which were conceived to be appropriate to their natural endowment, character and functions.³⁷

The four classes are first referred to in the Puruṣa-Sūkta hymn of the Rg Veda, which states that the brāhmana (teacher), the ksatriya (soldier), the vaiśya (trader) and the śūdra (serf) issued respectively from the head, arms, thighs and feet of the primordial Divine Being,³⁸ from whom issued also all things else in the world. The division of society into the four varṇas or classes is then made out to be a functional division based on occupational types.³⁹

Though in a later day these classes degenerated into rigid, endogamous castes, thus stratifying society in a rather fixed pattern, the original idea almost certainly appears to have been pragmatically inspired as a result of the developing complexity of society. Radhakrishnan says:

"The original Aryans all belonged to one class, everyone being priest and soldier, trader and tiller of the soil. There was no privileged order of priests. The complexity of life led to a division of classes among the Aryans."⁴⁰

Basing their ideas on the accounts as generally given in Manu and other smṛti literature, Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja take the varṇa system for granted as a system of hereditary castes with no significant vertical or inter-caste mobility. The differentiation of individuals into caste divisions based on birth is understood as due to the individuals' past karmas, and as dependent upon guṇas, natural tendencies, innate dispositions and character.

6.2.1.2. ĀŚRAMA-DHARMA

The term āśrama denotes effort or endeavour and refers to the four stages of life during each of which an individual is expected to perform the duties pertaining to his station in life. Āśrama-dharma is the collective set of ethical activities that are obligatory upon the individual at each stage of his development.⁴¹

In this conception, the assumed life span of one hundred years is conveniently divided into four periods of twenty-five years each. The four stages are those of brahmacarya (studenthood), grhastha (householder), vānaprastha (forest-dweller or retirement) and sannyāsa (renunciation or monastic stage).

The aim and end of the four stages are stated to be the progressive spiritual development of the individual. In the last stage of sannyāsa the individual is not bound to the ordinances pertaining to caste.⁴²

6.2.1.3. THE SĀMSKĀRAS

These are the Hindu religious sacraments, many of which have their origin in the samhitās. The early simplicity of these ceremonials grow in complexity in smṛti literature, which also places many caste restrictions on their performance.⁴³

Panday shows that a large number of the sacraments are reflected in the more ancient texts, but that in the classical period, a process of selectivity reduced their number to a standard sixteen.⁴⁴ The spiritual and soteriological character of the sacraments is quite prominent, and they are interwoven with the four stages of life. The sacraments are seen as nodal points along a social-spiritual dimension of development, marking out important points in the individual's history. The most important sāmskāras are those connected with birth, initiation, marriage, and death ceremonies.

6.2.1.4. THE PURUṢĀRTHAS

This term refers to the four ends or aims of life, both in the sense of what is actually desired by man, as well as in the sense of what ought to be desired.⁴⁵ They comprise dharma or duties, artha or economic activities, kāma or hedonistic values, and mokṣa or liberation. As a value, dharma is higher than and holds sway over artha and kama. Dharma has a controlling function while the other two can become dissipatory. However, all three belong to the empirical level, while only mokṣa truly represents the

transcendent or ultimate soteriological value. Manu therefore refers to dharma, artha and kāma as belonging together, as the trivarga, the triune group of values.⁴⁶ We cannot say that this is strictly true, though it may be accepted on pragmatic grounds. As said earlier, dharma is a comprehensive term, and includes in its meaning the idea of transcendence as much as mokṣa does.⁴⁷

As one of the puruṣārthas, dharma refers to every shade of moral obligation attaching to man as a contingent being. These include his duty as an individual, as a member of a family, clan and caste, and as operating at any one of the asrama stages. Manu lays great stress on it as moral behaviour befitting one's caste and stage of life, through which alone life's goal could be achieved.⁴⁸

Artha and kāma do not refer to unchecked indulgence in wealth and pleasure, but are in the scheme designed to be turned into the service of the supreme transcendent goal of mokṣa, which, from the religious side, is also seen as a service to God.⁴⁹ In a philosophical sense, we are not told exactly how dharma in its primary meaning is related to the other puruṣārthas, and its controlling position may be taken on faith. Nevertheless, it stands for the correlation of the temporal and spiritual aspects of life,⁵⁰ by insisting upon moral training. The Kaṭha Upanisad says:

"Those who have not refrained from wickedness, nor those who are unrestrained and unmeditative, nor yet those whose minds are not tranquil - they cannot attain this (ātman) even through knowledge".⁵¹

Mokṣa states the supreme end of all life, and underlines, in terms of the puruṣārtha scheme, the basic soteriological direction of all ethical endeavour.

6.2.1.5. YOGA

Yoga means union with God, or yoking the mind and holding it in check. From a religious perspective it refers to the entire range of disciplines that enhance man's relationship to spiritual reality. It has a distinct theistic connotation in its application to the Vedāntic systems, while it also refers to the specifically mental and psychological disciplines by which the mind is stilled.⁵²

Yoga takes into account the many-sided nature of the individual and imposes on him an aim that transcends his empirical significance. It encompasses the sub-disciplines of jñāna (knowledge), karma (action), dhyāna (meditation) and bhakti (devotion), which are all taken up in the service of the soteriological aim of freedom from earthly trammels. The different schools of Indian thought press it into the service of their specific metaphysical and ontological framework.⁵³

Looked at from any point of view, yoga explicates an interiorised discipline that yet enhances man's significance and action on the empirical plane. While in itself the term does not deny the significance of the world of becoming, it emphasises the attitude of inwardness that is important for

an integrated spiritual life. It is an inwardness that does not deny or negate the outward. In this connection, P. T. Raju says:

"The contribution of Indian religious thought, then, is the recognition and the explication of the inwardness of man, of its freedom, dignity, sacredness, and importance."⁵⁴

From our account of the ethical presuppositions as they operate in Indian thought, we have seen that they are an extension along the axiological dimension of the metaphysical constructions pertaining to the different systems. The soteriological aim of Indian philosophy is itself a metaphysical construct in the sense that it purports to show a continuity between empirical reality and the transcendental truth. To a significant extent some features of the ethical formulations refuse to blend harmoniously, but there is no denying the fact that, the conscious design and notion of ultimate value represents a notable attempt at presenting a holistic view of life.⁵⁵

End Notes : Chapter Six

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Chapter Seven: Dharma: Theory of Moral Obligations

This chapter presents the concept of dharma as a peculiarly Indian concept that operates at two levels of meaning. In its relation to the advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita systems, it is shown that this concept has engendered some forms of tensions and ambivalent attitudes, which have been a recurring feature of Indian life.

CONTENTS

Chapter Seven: DHARMA: Theory of Moral Obligations

P. 179

7.1. Varnāśrama Dharma 191.

Chapter 7. DHARMA: THEORY OF MORAL OBLIGATIONS

With the exception of the radical dualism of sāṃkhya thought, the metaphysics of the advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita schools show, each in their own way, a certain passion for a holistic view of the world. In the advaita, the world (jagat) is false (mithyā), that is to say, ultimately and transcendently negated, leaving Brahman as the only reality. The world that exists at least phenomenally, which is both the product and the process of māyā, though negated ultimately, is not admitted to be other than Brahman. There is between the two an ineluctable harmony, since the world is based on Brahman and resolves itself back into Brahman, as the mirage into the desert and the snake into the rope.

In the case of Rāmānuja's theory, also, although both Brahman and the world are posited to exist not on different levels of reality, but on a single plane, the infinite variety of the world is not admitted as divorced from the wholeness of God, but is a necessary part of God's divine unity. The dialectics of this school, thus, would not admit to a discontinuity between the actuality of this world and the ultimate reality.

The changing face of Indian conceptions of ethics from ancient times has been asserted by many researchers in the field. We may take it that, in keeping with the

evolutionary principle, notions of ethics which were obviously objective and customary, slowly developed more subjective and reflective forms that took into account the soteriological pattern of the metaphysical theories. Thus the lower ideas of objective morality became in the course of time integrated into higher level ethical thought, "marked by the emergence of the most highly developed consciousness of the ethico-spiritual ideal of mokṣa or any one of its equivalents, attended with the most earnest feeling of the need for its realization".¹ We can say with confidence, therefore, that the ontological unity conceived between the individual as an entity in the objective world and its spiritual source, passes over from objective metaphysical speculation about it to subjective psychological "realization" conceived as the fruit of ethical striving. In this view, a continuity and a harmony is established between pure being (regarded as the source of the world and of the individual) and the processes of becoming (regarded as the world of actuality and the empirical reality of the world).

When we thus consider ideas relating to the concept of dharma, that is, ideas of the good in thought and deed, both individual and social, and see it in terms of its origin and growth, we in fact harken back to the R̥g Vedic concept of ṛta.² This conception originally referred to the sense of orderliness, pattern and consistency that is the mark of the cosmos, which was somehow felt to be good

and right because it demonstrated the harmony of recurrent activity without jarring aberrations. The harmony of the objective natural world was assumed to be continuous with subjective moral conduct in the individual and society. What is orderly is also true simply because it is orderly, both for the world and for man. In this connection Gupta says:

"The metaphysical bond between the ontological and axiological characterizations of ṛta lies in truth (satyam) which is not only a synonym of ṛta, but also significant in the cosmic as well as moral spheres. The concept of dharma preserves the two implications of ṛta in yet another unique manner, characteristic of Indian thought, in which it is used not only as an ontological reality, such as in Buddhism, but also in legal, social, political and moral senses in Hinduism". 3

This precisely states the dual function of the concept of dharma, which, in the understanding in which it was taken, has in a sense, bedevilled the course of Indian social life for long centuries and has produced the confusions and tensions that have characterised it along the ethico-religious dimension. While these conceptions of ṛta and dharma had their origins in the sāṃhitās, the later Upaniṣads did little to reduce the identification of the two concepts, for the clear reason that they were themselves bent upon the Ātma-Brahman identification, which in a sense, supported and enhanced the idea of the inherent relationship between ṛta and dharma. Hence we see this theme as well-developed and attaining rigid levels all through classical Indian thought to modern times. While a conceptual harmony is established between the natural and the moral spheres,

this harmony, as we shall see, was bought at a heavy price. We may discern that the idea of dharma is split up into two distinct streams of the higher and the lower dharmas.⁴ The higher conception stands for the universal dharma akin to the older concept of the cosmic ṛta while the lower conception of it accomodates the vagrant and vicissitudinal nature of the individual to the requirements of the higher as consisting of order, harmony and perfection. Between the two there is presumed to exist a genuine connection and continuity, for the two are at bottom one, the lower being a manifestation of the higher. The connection is mysterious, imperceptible, "subtle" and very difficult to know. Zaehner says of it:

"Indeed it is the very ambivalence of this key concept that both gives Hinduism its distinctive flavor and sets up within it a tension that is never wholly resolved."⁵

The perceived patterns of order, harmony and perfection of the higher dharma were passed over into, and somehow expected to be reflected in, the lower dharma of moral life and ethical behaviour. The cosmic ṛta, standing for the most ultimate value of mokṣa through an ontological identification is the subtle truth that must be embodied in man's life of moral action. Mokṣa is parama puruṣārtha, the supreme end of life, and the means to it is dharma.⁶ Radhakrishnan further says:

"The principles which we have to observe in our daily life and social relations are constituted by what is called dharma. It is truth's embodiment in life, and power to refashion our nature."⁷

The overpowering and most pervasive idea of dharma—as given

in the dharma-sāstras has been the insistence on it as a supreme regulating principle, which, though necessarily working from within, is yet seen in every detail of human action and social relationship. It's prototype is not only the order perceived in the actual world, but also the mechanical rigour of the yajña (sacrifice) and the agnihotra (ceremony of the fire priest). Human life, both at the inner psychological levels of passion, desire and motivation, as well as the outer levels of individual behaviour and social inter-relationships, is the inheritor of the form, the pattern, and the necessity inherent and visible in all nature. If nature is the macrocosm, man is the microcosm, and the two must be seen to be harmonious.

So far as the inner idea and motivation in this view of man and nature is concerned at it's profoundest level, it is to be observed that it is a noble attempt at maintaining the integrity of Indian ontological ideas. But the formulators of the dharma-sāstras, the codifiers of Hindu law, failed to see that dharma, so interpreted, is yet only an interpretation that tries to accommodate the realities of life to the ontological metaphysical premises. They could not see that while external nature is rigid, fixed and repetitive, life itself, if it is to reflect a spiritual reality, must be free, spontaneous and outgoing. It cannot wear the habit of external nature or be subjected to the rigidity of mechanical law.

The problems inherent in the Indian system of ethics, as it applies to social life and moral behaviour, are thus seen at three levels. The first is the problem of defining the inner dharma, which is subtle and "difficult to know", but which is nevertheless largely accomplished in the metaphysics of the several systems. The second is establishing a complete set of behaviours in terms of which the lower dharma or duties may be promulgated. And the third is the relationship between the two, which is, in fact, established in an illogical and arbitrary way, and is the weakest link in the ethical system. Regarding these problems, McKenzie says:

"There are in a way two standards, and their bearing on practical life presents problems that are full of difficulties. The duties of social life cannot be deduced from the ultimate goal of attainment as the orthodox understand it, nor can they be shown to stand in any vital relation to it. Dharma is imposed by authority, and that is the end of it."⁸

In the manner in which tradition has been handed down in Indian culture, it is fairly accurate to say that "dharma is imposed by authority." The basic reasoning behind it has already been indicated above. But authority that is arbitrary and not based on a sound and acceptable interpretation of metaphysical premises is always tension-producing. Ostensibly, all morality is based on the Veda. The Manu Smṛti itself says:

"The sources of dharma are the Veda, the tradition and practice of those that know it, the conduct of virtuous men, and the individual conscience."⁹

From this important reference we get the clear idea that dharma is highly pertinent to morality. The direct

reference to matters of conscience and virtuous conduct, and to practical matters, give the clear impression that dharma has to do with individual and social morality. And, in pursuance of this idea, the smṛti and dharma-śāstra literature generally elaborate a complicated web of social rules and regulations to an amazing level of detail and complexity.

What is to be noted is that, having stated at the outset that conscience and virtuous conduct are the guiding principles of the rules of dharma, except for allowing token and merely verbal consideration to these requirements, the treatises on morality go on to elaborate social rules and regulations in an arbitrary fashion without reference even to the Veda! Indeed, there is a problem to be encountered here, and that is the fact that the Vedas, including the Upaniṣads, barely touch upon the rules of morality. Regarding the sketchy manner in which they are dealt with in the Veda, Radhakrishnan says:

"The Vedas do not contain a systematic account of dharma. They indicate the ideals and mention certain practices. Rules and commands, as distinct from instances of conduct, are found in the Smṛtis and the dharma-śāstras."¹⁰

We can already see here the vicious circle in which the whole matter is caught up, and the tensions that must invariably develop even at the formal level of inquiry. Any rational enquiry into the sources of dharma is directed, by the smṛti itself, to the Veda, which, because of the indefinite account it contains, leads back to the self-same smṛti. Radhakrishnan quotes a classical commentator

who points out the doubtful character of the smṛti literature and the ambivalent attitude towards it, and says:

"In as much as these smṛtis have emanated from human authors, and are not eternal like the Veda their authority cannot be self-sufficient. The smṛtis of Manu and others are dependent upon the memory of the authors, and memory depends for its authority on the truthfulness of its source; consequently the authority of not a single smṛti can be held to be self-sufficient like that of the Veda, and yet, in as much as we find them accepted as authoritative by an unbroken line of respectable persons learned in the Veda, we cannot reject them as absolutely untrustworthy. Hence it is that there arises a feeling of uncertainty regarding their character." ¹¹

The rule that the ancient Veda has to be the source and final authority in all matters of social law cannot be gainsaid. It is recognised as the final arbiter in any dispute. "If śruti and smṛti conflict, the former is to be accepted." ¹²

Radhakrishnan, casting himself in the role of a modern commentator and reformer, is firm in his contention that the need for change is part of the ancient tradition. Emphasising the mutability and evolutionary character of social rules, he says:

"The Hindu dharma gives us a programme of rules and regulations and permits their constant change. The rules of dharma are the mortal flesh of immortal ideas, and so are mutable." ¹³

This is a clear statement of rational demand that reflects a tension between what ought to be and what actually is, in the realm of ethical theory and behaviour. The fact is, the smṛtis and dharma-śāstras have been with us for nearly two

thousand years, and not a word has been expunged nor a line erased, nor any new edition has been dared to be published by any ecclesiastical authority! Their moral rules have acquired a permanent, inviolable and rigid character. In the field of moral and ethical conduct the smrtis constructively enjoy the status of Veda, and their influence has succeeded in befuddling the minds of otherwise rational and virtuous men. Schweitzer mentions that Rammohan Roy, who engaged himself in much social reform and who "spoke openly against caste," yet "took precautions that, at the meetings for divine service (which he organised), the Vedic texts should not be recited in the presence of members of the lower castes":¹⁴

The dharma-śāstras, as the recognised authority on all matters of conventional morality, deal with a wide range of social activity. They "mix up topics of law, religion and ethics and claim to deal with the whole conduct of life by man."¹⁵ They are the sanctifying authority for moral behaviour pertaining to the individual as well as to society. Society is understood not only as comprising individual members for whose good it stands as a pragmatic concept, but as something over and above the totality of individuals, as a sort of metaphysical entity in itself. Dharma is the comprehensive term that upholds the value of this extra-social idea of society and at the same time regulates the activity of individual members comprising it. Dharma includes rules regarding ceremonial conduct (ācāra), legal procedures (vyavahāra), expiatory rites (prāyaścitta),

personal impurity (aśauca), and a variety of other topics such as moral criteria in different life situations, virtue and vice, rights and duties, etc.¹⁶

It must be noted that all these conceptions are not even presumed to be founded on any rational thought, but on the fiction of Vedic authority. Any moral precept "for which a Vedic source can be found becomes invested with the authority of the Veda".¹⁷ There need not be a direct link between the rules of dharma and the śruti; a bare mention or even a stretched interpretation suffices. In the absence of these circumstances, entirely original constructions are made to serve as dharma, on the presumption of accord with the spirit and injunction of the śruti.

The mechanical sacerdotalism of the brāhmaṇa texts were taken up and extended into the domain of law and morality by the school of the mīmāṃsā. In Indian ethico-religious tradition, the mīmāṃsaka is the theologian par excellence. The principles and maxims of interpretations adopted in the mīmāṃsā school, on the basis of its peculiar metaphysical presuppositions, have greatly influenced the concept of dharma as social morality, and rendered its dictates immune to rational correction.¹⁸

The presumed immutability of the rules of dharma allowed the dharma-śāstras, on the presumed basis of the Veda, to sweep aside its own stated concepts of "individual conscience", and the "conduct of virtuous men". The dharma-śāstras thus asserted their sole authority on the fictitious

basis of having Vedic sanction, when in fact the Veda knows nothing of its detailed complexities and extensions of simple moral ideals. It is thus clear, on antecedent historical grounds, "...why there have been no systematic treatises on the theory of ethics in Sanskrit literature, and why ethical discussions stop short with the texts of the Dharma Śāstras."¹⁹

Since both the advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita systems lay great emphasis on both the Vedic and the smṛti traditions, and since both seriously attempt to maintain, each in its own way, a holistic view of total reality, which includes the ultimate reality of Brahman and the empirical reality of the world, certain conflicts are inevitable as flowing from the presumptions underlying the larger concept of dharma. Our presentation thus far has shown that, quite apart from personal and subjective assessments, there are fundamental tensions inherent in the type of interpretation the dharma-śāstras have taken for granted concerning the primary term dharma. We have said that the concept of dharma as interpreted by the dharma-śāstras and generally accepted by the philosophical schools is only one type of interpretation. However, it is an interpretation that is made on the presumption of a metaphysical continuity between the ultimate goal of mokṣa or Brahman and the contingent reality of the world. It is mostly on this basis that the philosophical schools accept the scheme proposed in the traditional accounts of ethico-religious rules. For it is quite clear that even Manu works on the concept of dharma from an

axiological perspective in the fashion of consistency with Indian metaphysics, and "there is no doubt regarding the relation of moral values to the ultimate goal of human life".²⁰

When we say that the smṛti tradition provides only one type of interpretation, the implication is that other interpretations could have flowed from the śruti texts. This in turn implies that the śruti texts should be general enough and non-committal on important points of conduct. Radhakrishnan holds that the Veda is simple in its moral precepts and does not elaborate the rules of dharma.²¹ However, we cannot say for sure that the notions of the later dharma-śāstras were not in some ways operating presumptions in the social life of the early Vedic Aryans.²²

Keith held the view that although there is no proof that in the R̥gVedic period castes were hereditary, there is also no proof that they were not hereditary. He feels that there is some slight evidence of caste divisions as operating structures of society.²³

It must be stated that we do know, on textual evidence, that something very much akin to the later dharma system was already developed and in operation at least during the Upaniṣadic period.

It is important to understand, however, that in a significant way, the Indian ethico-religious consciousness accepted the world-view of the dharma-śāstras and its elaborations of the nature and duties of man and society as sufficiently

sacrosanct, and as not to require further inquiry into its validity. Therefore it can be said that "...the Hindu is satisfied with tracing the origin of rules to some text of scripture or some authoritative tradition and does not press home the question as to the rational basis of the rule."²⁴

7.1. VARNĀŚRAMA DHARMA

Having considered the principle of dharma in its most general form of an ethico-religious system, and its relation to the ontological metaphysics of the Indian schools, we now have to see this concept in terms of its most obvious manifestation in the life of the individual and society. This is the varnāśrama dharma, that is, the duties relating to castes and stages of life.²⁵

The ontological principle involved in the concept of dharma, that is, the most general idea of rta as cosmic harmony, is manifested conceptually in the term sādhāraṇa-dharma or general, universal righteousness. This has a bearing upon all men and, in the sense of rights as distinct from duties, even extend to animals.²⁶ As applying to all men equally, Manu gives a list of ten cardinal virtues, as perseverance, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from theft, cleanliness, wisdom, knowledge, non-indulgence, truthfulness and control over anger.²⁷ These constitute universal moral obligations to be practised by all men, and are regarded as the true essence of dharma because they are marks of the inner spiritual disposition of man.²⁸

The moral rules governing man are further divided into those that pertain to social and individual aspects of life. The former comprise the system of varna, which, according to Manu Smṛti, is the four-fold division of human society based on birth.²⁹ The four castes are the brāhmin (teacher or priest), kṣatriya (ruler or warrior), vaiśya (trader or agriculturalist), and sūdra (serf or menial worker).

The āśrama-dharma refers to the four-fold stages of life, those of studenthood (brahmacarya), householder (gārhasthya), retirement (vānaprastha), and renunciation (saṁnyāsa), and the duties pertaining to these stages. These two aspects of dharma roughly correspond to the social and individual aspects of life, and are together known as varṇāśrama-dharma. Indeed, they very much go together insofar as the rights, privileges and duties pertaining to the different castes are concerned. These rules and regulations are highly detailed, precise and systematic, and impose, no doubt, a certain grandeur and nobility upon the life-styles of the individuals belonging to the different orders, except perhaps the poor sūdra, who has nothing much to look forward to in life. The āśrama-dharma scheme, considering the antiquity of its formulation, certainly has great merit with respect to its graded discipline. It called forth the admiration of Deussen, who remarked that "the entire history of mankind does not produce much that approaches it in grandeur".³⁰

Of the varṇa-dharma, Hiriyanna avers that "social solidarity

is their essential aim," while of the āśrama-dharma he points to the soteriological aim, that it "serves as a spiritual ladder to enable man to gradually reach the final goal of life."³¹

In the Indian view in general, the ethical consciousness is divided along two dimensions. Morality is seen in terms of the classification of sādhāraṇa-dharma on the one hand, which constitutes the unconditional or universally applicable principles of morality, and varṇāśrama-dharma on the other hand, which constitutes the conditional or specific duties, that is, conditional upon one's caste and stage of life, and specific to that individual.³² And in terms of this classification, we may be able to appreciate the position of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja and their general ideas regarding ethico-religious morality.

The notion of the sādhāraṇa-dharma seems to indicate a type of universal ethics of humanity, which may conceivably be promoted without any emphasis upon the varṇāśrama-dharmas. Contrary to this expectation, Śaṅkara appears to have greatly stressed varṇāśrama-dharmas or specific duties, as the necessary bridge leading to a system of self-culture, which in time alone can lead to salvation. In this regard Banerjee says of Śaṅkara:

"According to him, the observance of the varṇāśrama dharmas constitutes the external discipline which is the necessary preliminary step towards the attainment of the ideal of human life, consisting in the realization of the identity of the individual self with the absolute self that is Brahman."

Such a view of Śaṅkara's position must not be misunderstood. Śaṅkara was indeed not any kind of caste chauvinist. It is rather his philosophical position that governs where the emphasis has to be placed in terms of the classification of moral duties. The specific duties of caste and stage of life are considered by him consistent with the disciplines of restraint and abjuration. Even with regard to āśrama-dharma, Śaṅkara's natural emphasis lay more upon saṁnyāsa or renunciation. The varṇāśrama-dharmas appeared to him to comport more with ethics of individual self-culture, while any type of exclusive emphasis on the universal ethics of humanity was seen to be inconsistent with his metaphysics.

Śaṅkara himself emphasised the ethics of individual self-culture in terms of viveka, discrimination of the real as distinct from the false sensory modes, vairāgya, the practice of dispassion towards worldly goods and relationships, sama (tranquility), dama (restraint), titikṣā (forbearance), uparati (renunciation), samādhi (inward concentration), śraddhā (faith in the real as being totally different from the actual) and mumukṣutvam (intense desire for liberation). These requirements constitute the sādhana-catuṣṭaya or four-fold discipline and are the pivot of advaita ethics.

We cannot say that Śaṅkara is opposed to an ethics of humanity. On the contrary, if he were to have been approached on the matter, he would have willingly concurred with such a position. In point of fact, there is a legend related

of him that once, on his travels, he found a caṇḍāla (outcaste) coming towards him. Following the customary prejudice born of varṇa-dharma, Śaṅkara requested the man to move away from his path, whereupon the poor man surprisingly requested to be directed as to who should move away, the Ātman or the body? Realizing his error in terms of his own metaphysics, Śaṅkara acknowledged the validity of the man's question and the irrationality of his own erroneous attitude based on conventional morality.³⁴

It is unlikely that the legend is true, though there is much truth in the matter of it. In spite of the fact that Śaṅkara grants the validity of empirical experience, empirical relations are not ends in themselves. No matter how emphatically an advaitin may argue about the reality of the empirical world, he ultimately has to admit that such reality must be transcended in order to attain salvation in the advaitic sense. The truth of ultimate reality is removed from empirical experience by an entire order of reality. Can we say that our general thesis of holistic harmony is thus violated in advaita? The advaitin would maintain that the continuity between the vyāvahārika (empirical) and pāramārthika (transcendent) levels of reality is secured by māyā or avidyā.

Advaita ethics, under the pressure of its metaphysical constructs, concerns itself almost exclusively with the nullification of avidyā. We have to repeat that it is not

directly opposed to a universal ethics of humanity; rather it is constrained to be largely indifferent to it. The concerned critic may have his own subjective judgement about indifference being equivalent to opposition, but that would be inaccurate. Advaita ethics is mainly concerned with the ethics of transcendence. It is not necessarily inimical to an ethics of humanity.

When it is claimed that advaitins themselves, especially Śāṅkara, vigorously promoted reforms and took some interest in the affairs of the world, it does not affect the position of advaita ethics in any formal or logical sense; it only shows that the demands of the world are too imposing and affect even advaitins. The real position is that advaita, not being directly opposed to an ethics of humanity, can quite legitimately allow such an ethics a secondary interest. Advaita is precluded from allowing it a primary interest without seriously denying the integrity of its own metaphysical formulations. The classical formulation of advaita by Śāṅkara and supported by a large tradition of post-Śāṅkara dialectics, clearly demonstrates the overwhelming concern for establishing the validity of the concepts of māyā and avidyā, of the nirguna Brahman against the saguna Brahman, of jñāna against karma. Banerjee is quite justified when he says:

"So as Śāṅkara may be said to have held, there can be no such thing as the universal ethics of humanity; there is only a religion instead - not the religion of God, but the religion of salvation"

This projection on the part of Banerjee, while it might be considered by counter-critics to have discounted the ecumenical comprehensiveness with which Śaṅkara was also concerned at the social level, underlines on the contrary the major thesis of modern criticism that a universal ethics, even on a thesis of advaita-style comprehensiveness, does not necessarily breach the "religion of God" from "the religion of salvation." Banerjee's thought on this point in fact supports the dialectic of the interpretational bias running right through Indian thought, combined with an anxiety to maintain metaphysical priority with regard to social structures. Substantially the same point is made by Hindery in a trenchant criticism of the inherent arbitrariness of the advaita in extrapolating from metaphysics to ethical formulations, when he says:

"Śaṅkara's split level ontology of ultimate and relative truth proposed non-egalitarian and double standards of ethics which were not thought to be discriminating for arbitrary reasons. In fact his commentary beckons the reader to the apparently incontestable fact that some individuals simply lack the capabilities of others." 36

The commentary referred to is Śaṅkara's Bhāṣya on the Brahma Sūtra and the underscoring in the above passage is ours, inserted in order to lay emphasis on the consideration, important in the present context, that an ethical derivative can be the result of personal, historical and social influences, as much as of purely metaphysical ones. Ethics may be seen, therefore, as the product of shaping factors generated by social evolution, as well as through a consideration of the logic of metaphysical postulates. Some

attention has already been drawn to this perspective in relation to ethical ideas in the dharma-śāstras and in the earlier tradition.

To continue the development of this argument, we may cite Deutsch's effective conclusion, arrived at upon the application of the pramānas or traditional methodology of knowledge, that the concept of karma in advaita is "a convenient fiction." Deutsch has applied the traditional proofs in a highly formal and restrictive fashion, but our interest lies in his conclusion.

"Karma, therefore, cannot be a content of spiritual experience. Karma is undemonstrated, and for Advaita Vedānta it is undemonstrateable; hence, logically, it has the status of a 'fiction'." 37

This conclusion must appear harsh in the Indian context, but it should be borne in mind that it is arrived at as a negative implication, for karma is not "a content of spiritual experience." From an advaitic viewpoint, the only admissible category of spiritual experience, again in a highly formal and restrictive sense, is the pure and absolute Brahman, which is qualityless and changeless. On an a priori basis, every other category would be discounted as it would fall within the purview of empirical experience. Deutsch himself asserts:

"For Advaita, then, which insists on the sole reality of a distinctionless Oneness, there cannot be any absolute moral laws, principles or duties." 38a

Deutsch appears to contend that advaitic teachers from the Upaniṣadic period onwards (and including Śaṅkara) utilized

the "fiction" of karma in relation to the traditional morality in a self-conscious though purposive way, in order to achieve advaita-orientated metaphysical goals,^{38b} but this lies outside the writer's field of consideration.

As a practical explication of its axiological imperative, advaita was led to justify moral acts on the basis of the simple criterion that the good consisted in promoting the attainment of Brahman-experience, and that which prevented such attainment was necessarily evil.³⁹ On this somewhat natural (if not logical) presumption the moral rules as traditionally enunciated under the conception of dharma are in fact not incumbent upon the advaitin, for the simple reason that "Brahman is incommensurable with the empirical world".⁴⁰ Relations pertaining to actions and sequences of the nature of past, present and future are irrelevant to the spiritual "life" and ultimacy of Brahman. In a true advaitic perspective, therefore, alternative modes of social structuring, would, on the face of it, be totally acceptable, as it has been in Buddhism, whose metaphysics, at least with regard to empirical concerns, is quite comparable to advaita's. Against such options, and the example of Buddhism, however, Śaṅkara himself held that the traditional morality in terms of varṇāśrama-dharma was a necessary discipline leading to mokṣa.⁴¹ In so opting for the traditional social order with its obvious restrictive measures against possibly half the population of the land, Śaṅkara was yet not, in one sense at least, violating the supremacy of the value of Brahman, but rather demonstrating it (paradoxically!). For,

as Deutsch says of advaita's acceptance of the traditional hierarchial complex of moral rules:

"Advaita does not proffer any unique or special justification for it, and qualifies its acceptance of it with the understanding that it has only a possible instrumental value for one who is seeking freedom (mokṣa) and that it has no meaning at all for one who has attained this freedom."⁴²

This observation is not a mere assuagement of the violation of our ethical sense, but is distinctly consistent with the view that sees the overwhelming importance, even urgency, of Brahman-experience in itself, as unrelated to empirical social concerns, and is therefore constrained to see morality as a mere means to the spiritual ideal.

However the advaitic position with regard to dharma may be sought to be justified, on any objective standard it must at least become clear that, by according such priority to metaphysics against social ethics, the advaita becomes a "religion of salvation" more truly than even Buddhism, so far as the matter of dharma is concerned. An objective critic, however sympathetic, cannot fail to be impressed by the clear social and moral implications of the advaita tradition in this regard, and with the great personality of Śaṅkara at the head of it. In his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra, Śaṅkara himself, after supporting the immoral prohibitions and unjust penalties heaped upon the disenfranchised sūdras, affirms:

"But the conclusion stands that the sūdra has no right to knowledge through the Veda."⁴³

Radhakrishnan quotes Rāmānuja as holding that according to the advaita theory of Brahman as indeterminate pure

consciousness, "restrictions imposed upon the śūdras cannot be justified".⁴⁴ Yet in his own commentary on the same sūtra Rāmānuja blandly states the traditional prohibition that "śūdras are debarred from hearing and studying the Vedas", and repeats the observation of the sūtrakāra, appearing non-committal in the matter.⁴⁵ But in his commentary on the previous sūtra concerning the competence of Satyakāma Jābāla for Vedic study, Rāmānuja, declaring that Satyakāma was in fact a brāhmin (by birth) and therefore could be considered competent, says in conclusion: "Hence śūdras do not have the necessary qualification for Brahma-vidya and are not entitled to it".⁴⁶ Both Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja cite two prohibitions from the Manu Smṛti against śūdras being qualified for Vedic learning.⁴⁷ It should be noted that in their commentaries on the four sūtras pertaining to prohibitions against the śūdras, neither Śaṅkara nor Rāmānuja avails himself of the opportunity to vindicate the śūdra's rights and declare any type of ethics of humanity.

Radhakrishnan's citation of Rāmānuja, though given in the original Sanskrit, does not give the textual source. Radhakrishnan himself, as an able commentator and an ācārya of considerable repute, says in support of a universal code of ethics:

"The restrictions with regard to Vedic study cannot be defended. Whatever be their caste or class, race or religion, sex or occupation, the methods for gaining release should be open to all." 48

Commenting on the sūtra concerning Satyakāma Jābāla, Radhakrishnan rightly points out that the sūtrakāra is non-committal. Referring to the original Chāndogya text (which itself does not show discrimination against the śūdra), Radhakrishnan clearly confirms its view:

"It is obvious from the Chāndogya episode that character and not birth was the test of Brāhminhood. Jābāla was given initiation because he did not deviate from truth."⁴⁹

It would be unduly naive to presume that the weight of tradition was too heavy and impossible to ignore. In point of fact, the tradition of both Śruti and smṛti (barring the dharma-śāstras), support a somewhat fluid social system. The tensions between castes, together with a clear teaching of at least the principle of equality of opportunity, is firmly embedded in the tradition at two levels. One is at the level of caste as such, as demonstrated in the legend of Viśvāmitra (a ksatriya) engaged in protracted feud with Vasiṣṭha (a brāhmin) and rising to the level of a brahmaṛṣi through an arduous process of self-discipline and devotion.⁵⁰ Tradition has it that Viśvāmitra, with generosity of heart and not without a sense of moral indignation, took under his personal protection a king who had been turned into a caṇḍāla (outcaste), for desiring to enter heaven bodily. Viśvāmitra attempted to send him up bodily to the highest heaven, thus expending a large part of his spiritual merit, which he had acquired through austerities for the sake of becoming a brahmaṛṣi. It is difficult to ignore this clear lesson of the sacrifice of comforts and endangering one's own highest ambitions in order to give

help to fellow-man, and virtually an outcaste at that.⁵¹ The tradition further states that, in the process of helping the stricken man, Viśvāmitra began creating a new cosmic order, with new gods and new heavens, and we may discern in this episode the enactment, in legendary form, of the desire for an entirely new social and moral order.

The episode in the Chāndogya concerning the status of Satyakāma Jābāla provides a clear lesson of equality of opportunity, and it is surprising that both Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja chose to place a stretched interpretation upon it just to uphold caste prejudices involved in traditional conceptions of dharma.

At a second significant level, the principle of equality of opportunity is patently enunciated in the legend of Indra (representative of the gods) and Virocana (representative of the demons), being equally instructed by the teacher Prajāpati (God himself).⁵² Another parable places gods, men and demons in a situation of receiving equal instruction, again from God. The instruction is interpreted according to their individual requirements and propensities, but the significance of equal teaching for all cannot be missed.⁵³ Yet another significant legend shows both gods and demons cooperating actively in a venture to procure the elixir of immortality, though each party wishes to secure it exclusively.⁵⁴ It is impossible to conceive that Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja could not see the analogical references to human types in these legends. That they chose to ignore

the more humane (and really logical) interpretation helped to perpetuate the biased views and unjust discrimination against the śūdras inherent in the traditional views of dharma. The dharma-śāstras discriminated against śūdras to the point of considering them slaves.⁵⁵

The sāṃkhya system, like Buddhism, repudiated caste, though it generally accepted the āśrama-dharma for practical reasons. "It does not exclude the śūdras from higher studies", and "the teacher is not necessarily a brāhmin."⁵⁶ The sāṃkhya's opposition to the debilitating effects of the caste system is attested to by Crawford, who is otherwise so favourably disposed towards advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita:

"A good teacher is one who is himself free; and it is not important whether he is a brāhmin or not. Finding such a guru is contingent on virtuous conduct in the past. And as another strike against caste, śūdras are not barred from receiving instruction in the highest knowledge."⁵⁷

In the sāṃkhya itself its own theory of the three guṇas is interpreted as applying equally to all men, irrespective of caste and past karmas.⁵⁸ While in the Hindu tradition this originally sāṃkhya theory of guṇas is applied with precision in the dharma scheme of differentiation among the castes, to the advantage of the brāhmin and the derogation of the śūdra⁵⁹

The tensions and stresses generated by the traditional interpretations of dharma, have continued throughout the centuries from Śaṅkara onwards, and have manifested at the intellectual level as well as at the level of practical ethical endeavours. A host of saints and reformers have

repudiated the system as reflected in their lives and works. The Ālvārs who preceded Śāṅkara by several centuries and who have attained canonical recognition as God-realized saints, feature several śūdras among their number.⁶⁰ In the lives and works of many later poet-saints also, such as Caitanya, Rāmānanda, Vallabha, Tukāram and Mīrābāī, varnāśrama-dharma becomes irrelevant.

In fairness, it must be emphasised that Rāmānuja's doctrine of prapatti potentially gives the edge to viśiṣṭādvaita against advaita doctrines. Hiriyanna says of this:

"The inclusion by Rāmānuja in his doctrine of a means of salvation which is accesible to all, explains the wide popularity it has always commanded; and the social uplift of the lower classes to which it has led is of great value in the history of India"⁶¹

The enthusiasm in the above lines appears a little forced, especially in connection with "social uplift of the lower classes", while it is probably justified with regard to Rāmānuja's conception of salvation as extending to all persons. But the definition of bhakti shows a tradition-bound ambivalence in Rāmānuja. On the one hand, "Rāmānuja preaches equality in worship and proclaims that bhakti transcends all caste distinctions,"⁶² and follows up his convictions by allowing outcastes into the temple. On the other hand, as Radhakrishnan says further:

"But it is by no means clear that he was prepared for a wholesale defiance of the accepted order. Out of deference to tradition he concedes that freedom is open only to the three upper classes, and others will have to work their way up and

wait for the next birth."⁶³

The metaphysical tentacles of the traditional dharma reach down and appear to place heavy constraints on genuine tendencies to actualise the ethics of the "religion of God", otherwise so promising in Rāmānuja's system. In the matter of varṇāśrama dharma and the morality flowing out of this conception we have to say with Radhakrishnan that Rāmānuja was not "in full sympathy with the logical implications of his (own) teachings".⁶⁴

A modern academic and follower of the viśiṣṭādvaita finds Radhakrishnan's remarks "strange", on the strength that Radhakrishnan recognises that Rāmānuja admitted outcastes into the Melkote temple. After affirming that "bhakti as a feeling of love is accepted to be present in all," the same respondent defends the discriminatory attitude with:

"But bhakti as a practical discipline involves certain restrictions governed by one's station in life, which cannot be violated."⁶⁵

This type of justification precisely presents the case of the traditional concept of dharma, and reveals clearly the metaphysical link between bhakti (or jñāna or karma for that matter), and its application in terms of social ethics. It is therefore the mere interpretation that is the "obstacle to genuine morality." It is to be noted that the reformer Rammohan Roy insisted that "moral doctrines be kept beyond the reach of 'metaphysical perversion' and within the reach of the understanding of all people."⁶⁶

Perhaps the alleged metaphysical constraints imposed upon

the actualisation of a wider ethics of humanity is, in the perception of Indian thinkers, dependent significantly upon the central role assigned to the notion of karma, a partiality towards which is understandable. To this dilemma the closely allied ethics of Buddhism cannot fail to provide the necessary corrective. A satisfactory metaphysical re-formulation, in a philosophical sense, has not come forth from Indian thinkers even of modern times, as a studied alternative to the traditional interpretation of dharma and its relation to karma. Yet, almost to a man, Indian leaders of the modern period have rejected the validity of its social implications in the traditional sense, including Dayānanda, Vivekānanda, Tagore and Aurobindo. The peculiar exception is Gāndhī, who seriously and persistently upheld that vocations fixed by birth is a principle of spiritual life because it is the foundation of a non-competitive society.⁶⁷ Perhaps in his over-concern for his programme of universal welfare, sarvodaya, Gāndhī failed to appreciate that if an altruistic attitude to life is to be truly spiritual, and therefore meaningful, it must issue from each individual as a self-willing unit of society; that the individual can only reflect the will of God if he is an artist (like Tagore?) creating out of his inner spontaneity; that when he splashes the colours of his dedication onto society he must necessarily see himself reflected as the divine aesthete and not as one bereft of will and individuality. This would have been more befitting to Gāndhī's own declared acceptance of a general advaitic

position unspoilt by traditional interpretations.

Gāndhī's peculiar personal-traditional stand on the dharma issue provoked the criticism that, in fact, "Gandhi was enslaving human conscience to duty as Gandhi saw it - disciplined blind obedience."⁶⁸

Gāndhī's own personality and fervour for a social-ethical life-style chosen voluntarily (since he was himself born in a trader family) notwithstanding, Hindery concludes that Hindu mysticism in its "Sāṅkarite and neo-Vedāntic versions (both indigenous and Western) necessarily slow down active empathy toward a social ethic of committed decisions and humanistic interaction."⁶⁹

In concluding this section it is perhaps necessary to remind ourselves of the global design of spiritual harmony into whose service the entire concept of dharma in all its ramifications was sought to be pressed. While the sāṅkhya avoided the larger propriety and declined to accept the traditional interpretation (though ultimately it was bodily drawn into the larger metaphysics of Vedānta), the advaita and the viśiṣṭādvaita systems, each in their own way, helped to extend the official doctrine into the ethical field of their influence. Neither system could fully realise that, in spite of some excellences of the ethico-metaphysical scheme of social morality that they promoted, it amounted to a splintered social conscience which showed itself in many phases of social and literary development down to modern times. We have also shown that the many confusions and

perversions manifested in social stratification as a result of metaphysical hegemony over the individual, are in fact a misapplication of the true, inner and most original meaning of dharma. In the case of the advaita this misapplication, in the sense of advaita's conformity to the official doctrine, is due to its anxiety to rationalise in social terms its clearly negative metaphysical interests. In the case of the viśiṣṭādvaita, this misapplication, again in the sense of upholding the official doctrine, is due to a failure to fulfil the promise of its own positive metaphysics.

End Notes : Chapter Seven

1. Banerjee, N.V. The Spirit of Indian Philosophy, p.245.
2. Gupta, S.N. The Indian Concept of Values, p.80.
3. *ibid.*, p.80.
4. ZAE H p.2.
5. *ibid.*, p.2.
6. RAD RS p.104.
7. *ibid.*, p.104.
8. McKenzi, J. Hindu Ethics, pp.209/10.
9. Manu Smrti 2.6.
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11. *ibid.*, p.109.
12. *ibid.*, p.109.
13. *ibid.*, p.108.
14. Schweitzer, A. Indian Thought and Its Development, p.211.
15. Aiyer, P.S.S. Evolution of Hindu Moral Ideals, p.6.
16. *ibid.*, pp.6/7.
17. RAD RS p.109.
18. Aiyer, P.S.S. *op.cit.*, pp.13/4.
19. *ibid.*, p.16.
20. Gupta, S.N. *op.cit.*, p.86.
21. RAD RS p.109.
22. Aiyer, P.S.S. pp.75/8.
23. *ibid.*, pp.73/4.
24. *ibid.*, p.7.
25. HIR ICV p.195.
26. *ibid.*, p.193.
27. Manu Smrti 6.92.
28. Gupta, S.N. pp.84/5.
29. Manu Smrti 1.87.
30. Cited in HIR ICV p.195.
31. *ibid.*, p.195.
32. Banerjee, N.V. *op.cit.*, p.250.
33. *ibid.*, p.251.
34. Cenknner, W. A Tradition of Teachers: Sankara, p.91.
35. Banerjee, N.V. *op.cit.*, p.251.
36. Hindery, R. Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions, p.183.
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- 38a *ibid.*, p.100.
- 38b *ibid.*, p.78.
39. *ibid.*, p.101.
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41. Hindery, R. *op.cit.*, p.185.
42. Deutsch, E. *op.cit.*, p.100.
43. SBSG 1.3.38. p.234.
44. RAD BS 1.3.38. p.308.
45. RBSVA 1.3.38. p.175.
46. *ibid.*, 1.3.37. p.174.

47. SBSG 1.3.36. p.232.
RBSVA 1.3.36. p.174.
48. RAD BS 1.3.38. p.309.
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51. *ibid.*, pp.794/5.
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54. Dowson, J. Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology,
pp.12/4.
55. ZAE H p.110.
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57. Crawford, S.C. The Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals,
p.151.
58. RAD IP II, pp.310/1.
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63. *ibid.*, p.709.
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66. Hindery, R. *op.cit.*, p.199.
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Chapter Eight: Moral Effort: Ethical Dimensions
of Karma

This chapter discusses the concept of karma as continuous with the holistic metaphysics of Indian thought, and emphasises its positive role in all moral striving, and its relation to the idea of freedom.

It is shown that the force of the positive aspect of karma is somewhat reduced in the advaita system with its rather severe emphasis on the path of knowledge. The ethical implications of this view are considered.

CONTENTS

Chapter Eight: MORAL EFFORT: Ethical Dimensions of Karma
p. 213

8.1.	Sāṃkhya	217.
8.2.	Causality and Karma	219.
8.3.	The Principle of Freedom	222.
8.4.	Jñāna and the Way of Karma	229.

Chapter 8 MORAL EFFORT: ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF KARMA

The idea of striving for that which is considered good, the idea of moral effort, takes its root in Indian tradition in the ancient conception of ṛta, "a conception that has far more importance than any other," says McKenzie, so far as the most ancient Indian views of morality are concerned.¹ As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the term ṛta stands for the most general and pervasive idea of the good or moral life, even in its most ancient application, though, because of the evolutionary character of Indian and Hindu ideas of ethics,² a fully-fledged system of ethics has not come down to us from antiquity. Early ideas therefore, have to be taken to be of "a very rudimentary sort."³ Regarding the early importance of this concept in the moral sphere, McKenzie says:

"It is clear enough that ṛita stands for moral order and is opposed to sin and unrighteousness, but we search in vain for clear indications as to forms that conduct in accordance with ṛita takes as against conduct that is sinful The conception of ṛita is so wide in its application that it loses correspondingly in depth."

4

For our purposes, in relation to Indian conceptions of morality, we have to see that it is this very fact of wide application that is so important for the evolutionary character of Indian ethics. McKenzie is quite right, at least from one point of view, when he says:

"..... in the history of Indian ethical thought it has not been upon the idea of an overruling

God, righteous in Himself, seeking righteousness of His people, and helping them in the attainment of it, that the moral life has been grounded."

5

And that point of view is the bifurcation of all reality into the being of God, as one realm of it, and all that which is not God, as the other realm of it. Apart from sāṃkhya ideas, there is about Indian ideas of morality a persistent sense of wholeness between God and man, between God and the universe. All existence is a single whole composed of individually functioning parts. "Gods, men, animals and insentient objects belong together in a universal cosmic order (ṛita), and so the relationships involved are organic."⁶ To take up McKenzie's thought, since moral life has to be grounded in that which is transcendent, great and overruling, it had to be grounded in the principle of ṛta, in the Indian context, which answers to the requirements of moral striving and imparts significance to it.

Hopkins is opposed to this view, in holding that the ancient Veda does in fact give us a true conception of a transcendent God to whom the supreme power of ṛta actually belongs.⁷ Yet he acknowledges the peculiar and characteristic interpretation of law in and through the various gods, which mark out a "divine harmony".⁸ Karma as moral effort that is expressive of the divine law, as moral striving that maintains a "harmony with the higher spiritual environment, which encompasses and controls the world," though far from

becoming fully formulated in the early Veda, is nevertheless rudimentarily conceived.⁹

That the concept of ṛta stood for cosmic order and harmony, which was at the same time also the supreme principle of moral conduct, is admitted on all sides. It stood for the principle of physical orderliness as well as moral righteousness.¹⁰

It was conceived at the same time as the ontological principle on which all things rest, and on which they depend for their continued existence.¹¹ It is only logical that such a principle, elevated to such a high plane, should not really be distinguished from the highly ethical notion of truth.¹² In the ethical consciousness of the early Indian, both the eternal cosmic order or ṛta and the morally true are together responsible for the creation of the world.¹³ As characterising the inner life of man it should be remembered that sat means not only that which is true, but also that which is good.¹⁴

In so far as man was thus considered an integral part of the moral order of the world, it was incumbent upon him to perpetuate the same order through the institution of yajña or sacrifice. The concepts of ṛta and yajña came to be closely bound together. What was generally considered as a universal pattern found in nature, came to be expressed in terms of human action that had to adapt itself, through the yajña, to the characteristics of objective nature, and

imposed upon it a mechanistic interpretation.¹⁵ The mechanical ordering of the constituent parts of nature are to be seen in the works of man. Indeed, it is to be brought to fulfilment in man's karmic actions, for such are the ancient ordinances and the dharma that all men are required to follow.¹⁶ As we had seen earlier, the concept of dharma is fundamental to the idea of action or karma. It is both metaphysical as well as ethical in its implications. In both senses it is ontologically united to the concept of ṛta.¹⁷ We are in a position to say that, to the development of the concept of yajña, we may trace the objective mechanistic notions in the concept of karma, while through its connection with the conception of dharma, karma has inherited its flavour of freedom. Karma is thus that which binds as well as that which frees. Seen in this way, the concept of karma exemplifies the overall holistic design at the level of ethical actions. Man is a participant in the natural order of the universe and is not entirely distinct from it, while at the same time he is a free agent for he manifests dharma as his inner spirit.¹⁸ Dharma is the expression of the eternal order of ṛta at the ontological level within man, while karma is its manifestation at the level of overt action.¹⁹

We cannot deny that such was the metaphysical formulation of the idea of the law of karma in the Upaniṣadic period with its pronounced holistic world view, and taken over into the various schools of Indian philosophy, with

specific adjustments. It should be noted that the view of the Vedic origin of the concept of dharma has been disputed; it is sometimes held that "Vedic Aryanism and the Upaniṣads are different genera altogether and the doctrine of karma as seen in the Upaniṣads, does not seem to have taken its origin in the Saṁhitās, but on the other hand it has grown independently in the Upaniṣads."²⁰

However this may be, the classical view of karma has been fixed along the dimension of ontological unity with basic elements in man and the universe, and in the peculiar relations this created with regard to the individual and social nature of Indian ethics, it also generated tensions and ambivalences that have been perpetuated down to modern times. It is therefore important to understand the notion of karma in the fashion in which it has been understood in the classical period.

8.1. SĀṂKHYA

An exception must be made in this understanding of the idea of karma in regard to the sāṁkhya system. For, as noted earlier, it is a system of dualistic realism, in which bifurcation between the world of spiritual reality or puruṣa, on the one hand, and the world of material reality or prakṛti on the other hand, is total and irreconcilable. It is not relevant to our purposes to undertake a criticism of this position except as it affects the ethics of the system.

The metaphysics of the sāṃkhya has many features in common with the Vedāntic system, but from an ethical point of view, it bears stronger resemblances to a Buddhistic outlook. Banerjee says in this regard:

"In the scheme of life thus conceived, there is, according to the Sāṃkhya, no room for the performance of duties, whether conditional (kāmya), or unconditional (akāmya), secular or religious (enjoined by the scriptures)." 21

As the classical sāṃkhya is plainly atheistic, it does not countenance devotional practices or religious austerities designed to appease any deity. Its chief ethical interest lies in overcoming the three types of pains, intrinsic, extrinsic and supernatural. It blandly admits that the world is full of misery and sorrows due to the everchanging forms of matter. Both joys and pains are alike products of ignorance and bind the soul (puruṣa), to mundane existence (sāṃsāra), and the most meaningful ethic to be undertaken is that which counteracts directly the effects of avidyā or ignorance which is the "root of all experience and all misery,"²² So far as the classical formulation of the sāṃkhya is concerned, in spite of the fact that it accords to the world the full status of reality, and although it accepts in a general fashion the whole system of sāṃsāra including the traditional ideas of gods and heavens, it is constrained to confine moral effort to the way of knowledge only, which must lead to a total transcendence of the three guṇas or material constituents of prakṛti.²³

8.2. CAUSALITY AND KARMA

Since Indian thought sees the world somehow in terms of unity, man is considered an integral part of the world, both at the physical and spiritual levels. Both physical reality and spiritual reality are seen as part of a single movement whose centre is man himself. Many important texts in Indian tradition assert the central value ascribed to man in the scheme of life.²⁴

The principle of causality that is the most pervasive and characteristic feature of the physical world is extended to cover the life of man as well. Man is as much a part of the physical world as he is of the spiritual. The cosmic principle of rta imposes its rule of orderliness and rhythm in the life of man at the moral level, which is seen as the operation of his inner dharma. In this connection Crawford says:

"The doctrine is very ancient and is to be seminally found in the Vedic concept of Rta. It postulates a universe governed by law. The same immutable law which charts the course of the sun and the moon across the sky operates in the rational and ethical realms with equal exactitude."²⁵

Physical causality is precise in its antecedents and unerring in its effects. Indian thought attempts to maintain the holistic model by extending the external material principle of a cause and effect relationship to the spiritual aspects of life. From this point of view the essential feature of karma is an invariable connection with the past and an undeniable one with the future.²⁶ The

precision of the natural world is thus brought over into man's psychological life and made a feature of his spiritual dimension.

The necessary connection with the past and the future refers, quite naturally in the context of Indian thought, to the theory of rebirth or samsāra. The empirical ego or the jīva, trapped in this world as a result of its lapse from its pristine perfection (in the view of sāṃkhya and the advaita) or as a result of its lapse from correct relationship of love and utter dependence upon God (as in viśiṣṭādvaita), is born repeatedly in accordance with its own karmas. Sometimes the soul advances towards its soteriological goal of mokṣa through the performance of good deeds, at other times it may regress through the performance of evil deeds. All the systems follow the Upaniṣadic conception of the dynamic interrelationship between karma and the samsāric vicissitudes that befall the soul. Says the Brhadāraṇyaka in this regard:

"As is his desire, so is his will; as is his will, so is the deed he does; and whatever deed he does, that he attains."²⁷

The operative principle in the causality of karma is thus conceived to be desire or motive. This is itself to be taken in the form of a principle, and does not refer to stray wishes and unconnected fancies that overtake the mind in casual moments. As a principle the rule of desire is affected through the change that is wrought in the

entire character of the individual through the overlaying of saṃskāras (deep-rooted tendencies). Through a generalised accumulation or building up of saṃskāras, which take possession of the soul and impel it into appropriate birth circumstances such as may be said to give expression to those desires,²⁸ further karmas are sown, and reaped in turn.

Causality thus imposes its own constraints, both in a retrospective and in a prospective sense. If the past is fixed and unalterable, the future must at least have a definite shape. Otherwise the principle of causality must fall away. A strict inference of the causal principle may mean that man is not free to create his own future. Hiriyanna says: "As every event in the physical world is determined by its antecedents, so everything that happens in the moral realm is preordained it may be asked whether the doctrine does not become fatalistic and therefore leave no room for exercise of freedom."²⁹

Another problem is raised at the level of the guṇas, which constitute not only man's physical body, but also his mental make-up. In sāṃkhya and the Vedāntic systems the buddhi (intellect) itself is basically constituted of the guṇas which are material prakṛtic elements, and the principle of causation must issue in a rigid determinism in respect of human behaviour. The constraints, and limitations, insofar as they can only operate through the

guṇas of prakṛti, must appear to seriously curtail any notion of true freedom.³⁰

The overpowering influence of the constituents of nature and man's inherited tendencies have to be accounted for, and related to the possibility of genuine ethical action. The heavy weight that nature places on the struggling soul is clearly pointed out in the Gītā.³¹

It is clear that, whether karma is seen as the operation of generalized desire, or the operation of the guṇas (which in any case is another way of speaking about psychological functions), karma does seem to operate in a deterministic way. The constraints and limitations of the past appear to forge a causal chain that cannot logically be broken, for karmas performed in the present life are really dictated by past karmas. And the causality will likewise be carried into future lives. Even the performance of good acts, by the same token as the performance of bad acts, binds the soul to mundane existence. In its formal aspects karma appears to be a self-perpetuating principle of bondage rather than of liberation. The classical mīmāṃsakas, as the karmists par excellence had this idea in mind, when they denied the possibility of any type of final liberation.

8.3. THE PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM

The notion of freedom is a peculiarly elusive one. It is important to understand that it is primarily a metaphysical

concept. From a purely formal and logical point of view, the notion of absolute freedom is as impossible as it is inconceivable. The very idea of freedom presupposes a background of constraints against which freedom becomes possible and significant. Freedom without some type of constraints would be chaotic lawlessness. At the physical level, even, we cannot conceive of a world without the operation of law in some sense.

If we try to take our minds back to a most primeval condition of matter, then too, utter chaos cannot be rationally conceived. The concept of *mūla prakṛti* (original or root matter) is itself not without constraining conditions. There must be some imposition of form upon material particles through the operation of a principle of law.³²

When the idea of absolute freedom is sought to be transferred to man's psychological life, it becomes impossible of conception. We may say in fact that such an attempt results in a non-concept; for even the bearing of a concept in the mind entails some sort of discipline. If the idea of absolute freedom is pressed further with regard to human individuality and mental life, the result is necessarily the total annihilation of the psychological ego. Therefore, any consideration of freedom can never be a consideration of absolute freedom. Freedom of the individual has to be conceived with necessary constraints; it has to be viewed

within those circumstances that set up the constraints. It is only within such a frame of reference that we can speak meaningfully of freedom of the soul or freedom of the individual self. In its idea of karma Indian thought assumes as much.

In its moral application in the Indian systems karma refers to free acts performed by a freely willing self. It is self-determination in the sense that the self does not feel itself bound to act in any pre-determined way as a result of either external or internal constraints. Freedom is mainly the sense of **being free**, the feeling of not being determined by factors that violate the integrity of the self. Hiriyanna says :

"Freedom should be regarded as consisting not in unrestricted licence, but in being determined by oneself. When therefore we ask whether belief in karma does not result in fatalism all that we mean is whether it does or does not preclude self-determination."³³

Some scholars have succumbed to the heavy mechanistic element in the causal explanation of karma, and have declared it to be a doctrine of fatalism.³⁴ We cannot say that some thinkers in the Indian tradition even have been immune from this line of thinking.³⁵ The tensions associated with the karma doctrine have been sought to be overcome in various ways within the tradition itself.

Fatalism in its undiluted sense would certainly be inimical to any type of moral effort on the part of the individual.

As society is a collection of individuals it would tend to make relations among men more mechanical and reduce the urge to create new social institutions to meet challenging situations. Insofar as karma means the inheritance of psychic patterns at the individual level and institutional patterns (to which individuals are born) at the social level, the tensions arising from this difficulty inherent in the concept itself will always remain.

A major direction for the interpretation of karma is given in the etymology of the word itself. Coming from the root kr, which means "to do" or "to make", the term karma really stands for positive action that is creative or forward-looking at both the individual and the social levels. At a simple level karma is a corollary of human freedom.³⁶ Each individual has the power to regulate his present actions and so mould for himself a suitable future. He can either rise morally and materially or fall, depending largely upon his exertions.³⁷

No individual and no physical object, can completely break with the past. Causality is implicit in all things. Karma is to be seen more as a process that comprehends the whole life of man, than as isolated events of life. Individual events are also karma, but they are not to be regarded as isolated events discontinuous with each other. The shaping influence of past action asserts itself in the present and fixes the parameters within which the individual has to

operate. We can no more jump out of our own skins than break with the past. What is history for the nation is karma for the individual. It provides the framework within which the present has to be worked out. Freedom lies in the fact that man can initiate new action from the depths of his being and alter the circumstances of the present. It is the ontological unity with the divine principle within man that confers on the individual this freedom to operate in an autonomous way.

Whether the karma doctrine is necessarily related to the Ātman doctrine from which is derived its spiritual autonomy, has been called into question.³⁸ Yet it cannot be denied that it is not necessarily a species of determinism, in that the conditions that bind the individual to samsāra as well as those that liberate him are both generated within his own being. Banerjee says that the karma doctrine, as has been formulated in the Indian tradition, is neither fatalism nor a doctrine of pre-destination. He says of it that:

"..... it is a form of self-determinism instead of necessitarianism in so far as it holds that the determining factors are not extraneous to man, but are only the potencies left behind by his own actions." 39

The karmic potencies are what make for continuity with the past and provide the conditions within which the human spirit is to be moulded by the exercise of mind. If strict, inviolable determinism prevailed in nature, we would not even have the phenomenon of the rise of mind and the values it entails. Indian thought holds that a materialistic

interpretation of causality is not true to the facts of life. The human spirit as represented by the mind shows us the possibilities of value and removes it from a rigid involvement with matter.⁴⁰ Ultimate values cannot be demonstrated by a reference to the external world, but only in terms of man's inner being.⁴¹ Not man as an isolated product of nature, however advanced he may be, but in terms of his ontological unity with some Divine Source that is higher than all the parts of the world put together.⁴² The disciplines of asceticism, the strivings of religion, as well as the labours of the scholar, all point to a free spirit in man, a spirit that transcends the merely material, though it works within the material.⁴³

The Indian systems accept the freedom of the will as a given datum proceeding from the reality of the divine spirit. Physical causality is linked to morality as an available form of explanation by analogy. Yet we cannot say that this line of reasoning has not been a carrier of some form of intellectual tensions. A causal explanation that looks to antecedent causes does not explain the root of the problem, which requires an explanation of the conditions that initiated the causal series. Since the soul in its true nature is ever-free, the question of how it came into bondage is at least a perplexing one, and brings the theory of karma into question. For purporting to explain a present situation by reference to a past one leads to infinite regress only, without providing a solution.

This problem must loom especially large for the sāṃkhya thinker and the advaitin, for it directly affects the integrity of their notion of puruṣa or Ātman, which is the source of individual freedom. Bowes remarks of the regress hypothesis (taken as a sufficient explanation) :

"This answer seems unsatisfactory to me for it is not entirely clear who or what is reborn and where in this account of being born again the concept of an eternal soul fits in". 44

The endless regression of lives and karmic deeds has inherent in it a deep sense of the depravity and wickedness of man. And reflection upon the doctrine in this way must cause a great deal of anxiety to sensitive souls. However, Indian theism like viśiṣṭādvaita has a built-in salve for this problem because the created world is considered as līlā or divine sport. God has put forth souls into the world so that they might experience the supreme bliss of seeking Him amidst the temptations of the world. To a great extent the tensions of heart and mind are assuaged by actually acknowledging the immense loading of guilt and evil in the discipline of demeanment before the might and glory of God. The bhakta or devotee considers himself unworthy of the presence of God, and in his lowly and fallen condition he is thankful for the blessedness of being able to even remember the Lord, which is itself a saving mercy.

8.4. JÑĀNA AND THE WAY OF KARMA

The mīmāṃsā school of thought represents the ritualistic path of works in the Indian tradition. A significant legend is related of Śaṅkara, of how he, as a renunciant monk and follower of the way of knowledge (jñāna mārga) in an exclusive sense, engages in debate Maṇḍana Miśra, a renowned follower of the ritualistic doctrine. The debate, said to have lasted seventeen days, ends in victory for Śaṅkara, whereupon the defeated Maṇḍana converts himself to Śaṅkara's lifestyle and dons the robes of a sannyāsī.⁴⁵ The legend is celebrated in advaita tradition not only as a clear demonstration of the superior dialectics of the Śaṅkara school, but also of the ethical primacy of the way of knowledge. Firstly, we have to note that, since mīmāṃsā represents Vedic authority at its highest point of orthodoxy, Śaṅkara's victory for the way of knowledge is to be seen as firmly based on the śruti or revealed texts, and therefore binding upon all followers of the general Hindu tradition. Secondly, it needs to be emphasised that Śaṅkara's victory is taken not in the narrow sense of a victory against the soulless mechanical ritualism of the mīmāṃsā (which any general logic of reform could achieve anyway), but a victory against the principle of the spiritual significance and efficacy of all karmas, all works, performed in the mundane empirical world for the purpose of achieving spiritual freedom. Moral effort is significant only if it is accompanied by a spirit of renunciation, if it eschews the world and has a desire to transcend it.

Mittal is substantially correct when he says :

"It is not unnatural, therefore, if it seems, at least in some of its interpretations, that the Vedānta has a thoroughly negative attitude towards matter and the material world."⁴⁶

Our interest in the matter is to clearly show that the Indian systems embody ambivalent and differential approaches in matters pertaining to ethics and morality. It is not possible to ignore or explain away this ambivalence as it has high relevance to practical matters. Within the same general tradition we can see the operation of differential ethical approaches, each one claiming primacy for the attainment of the self-same goal. Although mīmāṃsā is not interested in mokṣa as such, the advaitin's interest is also not so much the refutation of mere ceremonialism, but the refutation of the entire basis of the performance of karma.

Thus, Deutsch also quite rightly urges with regard to the advaitic view :

"The advaitic concept of freedom (mokṣa or mukti) likewise is cast initially in negative terms, as freedom from karma, from actions that bind one to the world, and from the ceaseless round of births and deaths in the world (samsāra)."⁴⁷

The system, in one sense at least, takes up every form of human activity, be it of the individualistic ethical variety, or of the type of outgoing love that places high value on service to fellow-men, and tends to relegate all these forms to the category of bondage-producing karmas. Apart from any consideration of the merit or demerit of such an ethic, it

cannot be denied that it thus urges an approach that is quite opposed to man's natural inclinations, and must therefore set up tremendous tensions in the soul of man.

The tradition of the differentiation between the attitude of knowledge and the attitude of works is mentioned in the Gītā, wherein Kṛṣṇa says :

"Of old did I proclaim the twofold law in this world, - for men of theory the spiritual exercise of wisdom, for men of action the spiritual exercise through works."⁴⁸

The term for "wisdom" used in the text is "sāṁkhya", but it refers generally to the way of knowledge, and, as Zaehner quite rightly shows, it means "detachment from all that is transient and attachment of the immortal self to God," an attitude that does not negate all activity in the world but only negates attachment to the world as against attachment to God.⁴⁹ In his commentary on the same passage Śaṅkara says that "devotion to knowledge and devotion to action are mutually opposed."⁵⁰ Again, Śaṅkara says that Arjuna reacted against "action which caused bondage"⁵¹ whereas Arjuna, certainly not afraid of death, showed a deep and natural concern for the fate of friend and foe alike in the general conflagration that was to follow. He was not concerned about any type of "bondage" based on an individualistic ethic. Śaṅkara's primary interest lies with relinquishing all karmic bondage by a disengagement from action. According to him, those only are true yogins who,

"having renounced all action, are eversteady in their knowledge of the identity of the self with Brahman." ⁵²

Moral effort, then, in one part of the Indian tradition, is characterised by the negative approach to life as represented by sāṃkhya and advaita ethics, in that all actions, good or bad, create bondage to samsāra and must therefore be transcended. But we have to concede that advaita makes some allowances to accommodate the common understanding which feels itself bound to the performance of various types of duties. This is merely a concession and is not a necessary condition for the attainment of spiritual freedom. Banerjee sums it up well when he says :

"Thus, according to Śaṅkara, action in the form of performance of duties, though useful in some cases, is not a necessary condition of the realization of the ideal life..... On the contrary, he is of the view that morality is not the inescapable gateway through which one must have to pass in order to be initiated into liberated life, and that some may have the prerogative to live this life without ever having to bear the burden of morality." ⁵³

This touches the crux of the problem with regard to the advaita tradition. Advaita has structured within itself a valuational approach that militates against the natural tendencies of man. This is in contradistinction to sāṃkhya of the classical variety. Banerjee says that Śaṅkara "differs from the Sāṃkhya in not excluding action altogether from the planning of the ideal life and holding, on the contrary, that the performance of the various kinds of duties contributes to the purification of the mind

(cittaśuddhi) which is essential to successful practice of contemplation".⁵⁴

Now, we are not concerned here with the merits or demerits of advaita, sāṃkhya or viśiṣṭādvaita conceptions of ultimate reality in terms of their philosophical truth-value, but more importantly in terms of their ethical implications and the kinds of demands they make upon the heart and mind of the individual. The difficulties that stand in the way of satisfying these demands are dependent not so much upon the fact that the tradition envisages multiple ends of human life, but more especially upon the fact that in important ways these ends, and the demands that they make, tend to split up the unity of the individual as a psychologically operating unit. As a relatively dominant tradition the advaita's attraction is undeniably in terms of its value of Brahman and the way of knowledge appropriate to it. Insofar as it tries to accommodate the demands of society involving strenuous moral effort (though still individualistic in nature), it does so as a condescension to "lesser faiths" and to "the frailties of human nature."⁵⁵

The doubts and suspicions that govern the outlook of individual schools with regard to other views⁵⁶ are precisely the factors that have contributed to the dialectical confrontations that in turn lead to further fixing of the distinctions among the varying schools. On the other hand, it is a peculiarity of the general Indian philosophy

of religion, that, despite the existence of irreconcilable differences at the level of epistemological and metaphysical thought, there operates a hazy and blurred sense of ethico-religious unity in the tradition. It is important to understand that even metaphysical niceties impart to ethics a peculiarity of interpretation that reveals itself at least at the level of psychological attitudes, if not at the level of overt practice. A tradition that insists upon splitting metaphysical speculation into tight compartments on the basis of precision of thought and subtlety of logic, as profoundly and seriously as does Indian tradition, and yet appears to foster a general and unified system of ethico-religious behaviours, cannot stave off the development of some types of tensions. Disunity at the metaphysical level cannot give rise to unity at the ethical level. Moral effort in Indian tradition therefore, in spite of a certain commonness of interpretation of the concept of karma as an ethical principle, is characterised by some unavoidable tensions.

End Notes : Chapter Eight

1. McKenzie, J. Hindu Ethics, p.5.
2. Aiyer, P.S.S. Evolution of Hindu Moral Ideals, p.158.
3. McKenzie, J. op.cit., p.7.
4. ibid., p.8.
5. ibid., p.7.
6. Bowes, P. The Hindu Religious System, p.112.
7. Hopkins, E.W. Ethics of India, p.41.
8. ibid., pp.35\7.
9. ibid., pp.43/4.
10. Anand, K.K. Indian Philosophy, pp.18/9.
11. Rg Veda 4.23.9.
12. ibid., 10.85.1.
13. ibid., 10.190.1/3.
14. Hiriyanna, M. Essentials of Indian Philosophy, p.51.
15. Anand, K.K. op.cit., p.20.
16. Rg. Veda 10.90.16.
17. Thakur, S.C. Christian and Hindu Ethics, pp.54/5.
18. ibid., p.57.
19. Devadoss, T.S. Hindu Dharma: Radhakrishnan's View, in Indian Philosophical Annual, Vol. 12, p.159.
20. Anand, K.K. op.cit., p.28.
21. Banerjee, N.V. The Spirit of Indian Philosophy, p.352.
22. DAS HIP I, p.260.
23. Crawford, S.C. Hindu Ethical Ideals, pp.150/2.
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25. Crawford, S.C. op.cit., 225..
26. RAD IVL p.274.
27. BU 4.4.5.
28. Bowes, P. op.cit., p.57.
29. Hiriyanna, M. op.cit., pp.46/7.
30. Dewa, H.G. Philosophical Foundations of Hindu Ethics, J.Univ.Durban-Westville,New Series 2, p.186.
31. BG 3.29.
32. RAD IVL p.279.
33. Hiriyanna, M. op.cit., p.47.
34. A.B. Keith, as reported in Aiyer, op.cit., p.141.
35. Aiyer, P.S.S. op.cit., p.143.
36. ibid., p.142.
37. ibid., p.139
38. Banerjee, N.V. op.cit., p.19.
39. ibid., p.19.
40. Radhakrishnan, S. Recovery of Faith, p.76.
41. ibid., pp.78/9.
42. ibid., p.84.
43. ibid., p.166.
44. Bowes, P. op.cit., p.58.
45. * Menon, Y.K. The Mind of Adi Shankara, p.114.
46. Mittal, K.K. Materialism in Indian Thought, p.267.
47. Deutsch, E. Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Recon-
struction, p.103.

48. BG 3.3.
49. ZAE BG p.162.
50. SBGS 3.3. p.93.
51. *ibid.*, p.93.
52. *ibid.* p.144.
53. Banerjee, N.V. *op.cit.*, p.353.
54. *ibid.*, p.353.
55. Menon, Y.K. *op.cit.*, p.112.
56. *ibid.*, p.117.

Chapter Nine: Mokṣa: Freedom and Ethical Striving

In this chapter the general soteriological dimension of moral striving is considered with special reference to the systems of sāṃkhya, advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita, in terms of their distinctive metaphysics. It is shown that advaita has close affinities to both sāṃkhya and viśiṣṭ-ādvaita, but along differential dimensions, which invariably give rise to some types of tensions.

CONTENTS

Chapter Nine: MOKṢA: Freedom and Ethical Striving

p. 238

- 9.1. Sāṃkhya and the Ethics of Freedom 239.
9.2. Advaita and the Ethics of Freedom 246.
9.3. Viśiṣṭādvaita and the Ethics of Freedom 255.

Chapter 9. MOKṢA : Freedom and ethical striving

We may take it as a truism of the Indian tradition that the fundamental postulate in any spiritual attitude to life, in any spiritual metaphysics, is the idea of freedom or mokṣa. While the concept of "freedom to act" (which was discussed in the last chapter) pertains to the idea of karma at the individual level, "freedom of the soul" pertains to the idea of ultimate freedom in the soteriological sense. While "freedom to act" supplies the metaphysical ground and basis of moral striving, "freedom of the soul" furnishes the reason and aim of all such striving. We aim to show that such an aim in the Indian tradition is not a single aim, and that ethical striving is distracted and split up along at least three different conceptual dimensions. Ethical conceptions are functions of metaphysical postulates and presumptions. Metaphysical thought has built into it certain precise modes of thought with regard to the attainment of the ideal it proposes. An outstanding characteristic of Indian thought lies in the "recognition of the all-importance of the ethico-spiritual ideal of mukti, mokṣa, kaivalya, or nirvāṇa in human life and the attempt to determine the way to the realisation of this ideal".¹

Inasmuch as the Indian systems uphold the primacy of the soteriological ideal, it is upon this ideal that the ethics and rules of moral conduct are systematically built. To the extent that this ideal is held to be important, to that extent also, the specific moral determinations peculiar to that ideal are set forth with emphatic forcefulness, in the

case of each system.

9.1. SĀMKHYA and the ethics of freedom

As noted earlier, the type of patterns of cosmic harmony maintained at the individual, social and universal levels, in the Vedāntic systems, is conspicuously absent in the sāmkhya, which pursues the line of total and irreconcilable differentiation between the spiritual and material principles. Somehow, however, the spirit-principle (puruṣa) becomes entangled with the matter-principle (prakṛti), and this entanglement of the self with a material body and material objects, is what "plays a determining role in its degradation or bondage".² While the sāmkhya shares this view of defilement of the spirit with other Indian views generally, it is also seen to be unique in this respect on account of its "uncompromising dualism of spirit and matter".³

A universal characteristic of Indian view is also that the self's association with the body and material objects, however brought about, is invariably characterised by pain and suffering.⁴ And this feature certainly enhances the soteriological values inherent in the tradition as a whole. In the case of the sāmkhya, however, it is just the very bifurcation of all reality into two totally separate areas, puruṣa on the one hand and prakṛti on the other, that appears to overcome the negative aspects of the teaching, at least in one sense. The sāmkhya took it upon itself to explain the details of the material world, both in its

physical and psychological aspects, which it did with such admirable precision, considering old-world limitations, that it imparted to the world a positive and life-affirming, almost 'scientific' appearance. These overtones, born out of its metaphysical structure, are well attested in the popular words of Garbe:

"In Kapila's doctrine, for the first time in the history of the world, the complete independence and freedom of the human mind, its full confidence and its own powers, were exhibited."

5

The frank atheism of sāṃkhya lends credibility to this view. Even the name 'sāṃkhya' has nothing of abstract metaphysics in it; rather it is suggestive of a positive world-affirming ethic.

The sāṃkhya analysis of prakṛti into the three gunas engages man in an active interplay with dynamic aspects of his own being. The conception of prakṛti suggests that life, together with human individuals, must be a constantly renewing activity.⁶ So far as life in the world is concerned, sāṃkhya metaphysics, in this sense, focusses attention not on passivity but on activity. If we remember that the entire evolutionary process has but a single aim, that of serving the purposes of the enjoyment of puruṣa, and only through that enjoyment (even though it may be viewed as bondage) the purpose of liberation, we cannot fail to detect a "strong materialistic proclivity" in the teaching.⁷ The Sāṃkhya Kārikā itself uses similes and metaphors that are sensually presented with direct reference to the soul's involvement in matter, and together with the

characteristic of enjoyer or bhoktā, one cannot miss a rather strong tendency towards a positive affirmation of the world.

Whatever may be the reason for the sāṃkhya's persistent plea for an overriding soteriological value in life, and it may be a desire to be counted as a 'spiritual' system given its pronounced atheism, and so be seen to be consistent within the framework of Indian thought, its strong material leanings do possess the seeds of a divided ethic and an ambivalent attitude to life. Apart from any consideration of internal metaphysical inconsistencies, the ethical problem inherent in the sāṃkhya may be simply expressed thus:

"The evolution of the material world is meant for the enjoyment as well as liberation for the soul, though enjoyment of the material world means bondage for the soul."⁸

It is a characteristic feature of the Indian systems, whether sāṃkhya, advaita or viśistādvaita, or any other, that its ethical leanings depend upon the way in which it presents and resolves the embattled opposition between the spiritual and the material. Although, as a philosophy of realism, the sāṃkhya is bound to acknowledge and accept the value of the natural world without explaining it away (a strong tendency in advaita), in the interpretation of most commentators the sāṃkhya represents an extreme form of life-denying philosophy.

This interpretation is enforced by the nature of the spirit principle of puruṣa, which really holds the centre of the stage in sāṃkhya metaphysics and ethics. The puruṣa is absolutely "devoid of attributes and modifications" and "no activity can be ascribed to it".⁹ The puruṣa is "freed from all accidents of finite life and lifted above time and change".¹⁰ It is "mere sentience" and "entirely passive, all activity being restricted to prakṛti".¹¹

This strong insistence upon the total transcendence of puruṣa from any connection whatever with the material world is reflected clearly in the sāṃkhya conception of prakṛti and the three guṇas.¹² All variability and change, including psychological change, belong to the activities of the guṇas and not to puruṣa, who, being inactive, cannot be considered an agent (kartā). Though paradoxically the puruṣa is stated to be an enjoyer (bhoktā) it is in reality "a merely neutral witness,"¹³ "a solitary, indifferent and passive spectator".¹⁴ In every way the spirit principle is the reverse of prakṛtic nature, exhibiting none of the characteristics of the natural world. In its concern to portray the puruṣa as utterly other than the material world in any of its modifications, the possibility of bliss is denied of the puruṣa, for bliss, being a variety of joy and happiness, can only be brought about by the action of the guṇas; and puruṣa is totally other than the guṇas. It is mere sentience, mere consciousness and is by its nature free of any involvement in the world of matter. Aside from any logical inconsistency here, we have to see

that what is emphasised is the utter aloofness, the utter otherness of the puruṣa from all material modifications. This is kaivalya or solitariness, and defines the conception of mokṣa in the sāṃkhya. The life-denying urge is manifest in this ideal, towards which all moral striving is directed. Hiriyanna supports this contention with the words:

"The ideal is kaivalya or aloofness from prakṛti and all its transformations, which is quite in consonance with the pessimistic attitude of the doctrine"¹⁵

It is thus clear that while the sāṃkhya does possess some elements of a world-affirming ethics, and its uncompromising realism is an asset in this direction, the insistence on purely philosophical precision in its concept of puruṣa precluded the development of a wholesome and positive outlook on life. Puruṣa being the ever-free, immobile and immutable pure consciousness is conceived somehow, through a mysterious and overpowering ignorance, to become entangled in the web of material relationships and to think of itself an agent or kartā. Since it is ignorance that is the root of the soul's bondage and the cause of its pains and sufferings,¹⁶ it is only knowledge, and knowledge of the type appropriate to release, that can cancel the bondage and sever the link with pain and suffering. Moral striving in the sāṃkhya, therefore, primarily takes the form of discrimination (viveka) between the eternal, unchanging puruṣa, on the one hand, and the transient material objects of the world on the other. The highest value of mokṣa is the realization of the total aloofness of the puruṣa from all prakṛtic forms,¹⁷ the realization that it is not even the

bhoktā, since both joy and suffering are the results of the operation of the gunas and so belong to the changing world. The world is a deceptive spell cast over the purusa as pure consciousness, as the ever-free. Sāṃkhya in its classical form is clear about discrimination as the simple, direct and only effective means of deliverance,¹⁸ which is appropriate to the burden of pain and suffering of all contingent beings.¹⁹ And although it incorporates the full range of heavens and hells of popular mythology in its metaphysical scheme,¹⁹ which must raise expectations of some form of world affirmation, these are not brought to fruition because of the atheism of the system and because of the overpowering negative influence of mokṣa as kaivalya, total isolation of the soul.

Apart from virtuous conduct as part of the system of social morality which it shares in common with other systems, and which do not show up any differentiability of ethics with regard to mokṣa, the sāṃkhya does not elaborate any specific method or discipline apart from that of discrimination as already observed. But in the larger tradition the sāṃkhya is considered related to the system of yoga which may be considered its sister system,²⁰ and whose disciplinary elaborations may be bodily taken to apply to the sāṃkhya except in one particular. The yoga system introduces the idea of God and is known in the tradition as seśvara sāṃkhya (sāṃkhya with God), while the original system is regarded as nirīśvara sāṃkhya (sāṃkhya without God).²¹ In this nomenclature we see the great importance of the role

of the classical sāṃkhya, whose metaphysics forms the background upon which the yoga develops its practical methods.²²

But the introduction of the idea of God is only nominal, standing for a worthy symbol of concentration. This is quite distinct from the wide and comprehensive meaning of God in Vedānta. Yoga is mostly a system of personal or individualistic body and mind culture, consisting of eight separate steps and therefore known as aṣṭāṅga yoga (yoga of eight limbs). These deal with yama (restraint), niyama (regularity), āsana (bodily posture), prāṇāyama (control of the life principle), pratyāhāra (withdrawing the senses from their objects), dhāraṇā (holding the mind steadily on the object of concentration), dhyāna (concentration) and samādhi (mystic meditation). The first two deal with the moral observations and prohibitions, the third and fourth with physical and physiological well-being, and the rest with the development of mental poise. The system is extremely popular in the general ethico-religious tradition, and is used as an auxiliary aid in the theistic and the idealistic systems. But as can be seen, it does not set up a goal of developing anything like a universal ethic of humanity (though this may be implied), but limits itself to personal self-culture. Even its reference to God in Īśvara praṇidhāna (surrender to God)²³ appears to contradict the sūtra which regards God as an aid for attaining sāṃkhya type kaivalya.

On the whole, then, so far as its relationship to sāṃkhya is concerned, the purpose of the yoga system is clearly "the

isolation of puruṣa from prakṛti, to be attained by the discrimination between the two,"²⁴ for the reason that "the round of rebirths, with its many pains, is that which is to be escaped from".²⁵ The system teaches that "by withdrawing the citta (mind) from its natural functions, we overcome the pain of the world and escape from samsāra."²⁶ The second and third verses of the yoga text say : "Yoga is stilling the modifications of the mind"²⁷ and "then the seer (soul) rests in its natural (pure spiritual) state",²⁸ which in point of motivation are not removed from the first verse of the Sāṃkhya Kārikā which urges the total removal of pains and sufferings of a personal nature. We see, then, that yoga, as a system of self-culture, lends significant support to the sāṃkhya concept of mokṣa as kaivalya, withdrawal and isolation from all contingent reality.

9.2. ADVAITA and the ethics of freedom

Unlike the sāṃkhya, in which all reality is bifurcated into two opposing divisions, the spiritual and the material, advaita maintains the larger and more general Indian tradition by insisting that the material world is not discontinuous with spiritual reality. Relying more heavily on the Upaniṣadic texts, advaita maintains with regard to the world, that "all this is indeed Brahman",²⁹ if once we realise the spiritual reality which is the source and ground of it. From a slightly different standpoint, advaita insists that Brahman is the only true reality, as nirguna or

indeterminate, while the world as commonly experienced is "false", and the individual soul or jīva is the Brahman itself.³⁰ It is not to be supposed that the world is a distinct reality separate from Brahman, for otherwise it would make no sense to claim that Brahman alone is real, which means that there cannot be two realities. While the metaphysics of advaita has already been treated earlier, we need only to look at the matter in terms of the bearing that the advaita concept of freedom has on man's ethical life. Since advaita presents the concept of Brahman as the sole reality, man and the world must either be pure illusions, or in some inscrutable sense identical with Brahman. Advaita takes the latter course and says that the manifold universe is not an illusion, but insofar as it is experienced as a diversity, it conceals the unitive, unchanging reality of Brahman. Mokṣa is the realisation of the non-dual reality of Brahman, which is the negation of all plurality. By the inscrutable power of māyā (that which is not) or avidyā (personal ignorance), the reality of Brahman is concealed and the world and individual jīvas are projected forth. As the centre of psychological activity, each jīva is capable of experiencing mokṣa which is the realisation of its own true nature, which is becoming Brahman as it were, Brahmaiva bhavati.³¹

Thus it is to be seen that the holistic design that is so deeply fixed in the general Indian tradition is carried by advaita into the transcendental level, in which all subject-object relationships melt away. For superimposition or

adhyāsa brings about only an apparent change, not a true change of the original ground which is Brahman. Striving for mokṣa, therefore, is striving to re-establish the ontological unity that is already there; it is not the creation of a new situation.

Since Śaṅkara's highest standard is the nirguṇa Brahman, true liberation consists in realising it as such, and not any qualified version of it. Nirguṇa Brahman is that conception of ultimate reality which is totally beyond qualities and relationships. The empirical world in which the individual jīva finds himself, on the other hand, is characterised by a myriad attributes and relationships. It is changeful and strife-bearing. Moral effort has to reckon with the opposites of good and evil, and transcend both, since it is the nirguṇa Brahman that is the true aim of realisation wherein complete freedom is attained. Moral conflicts which are experienced in the empirical arena are totally transcended in the highest Brahman-experience (brahmabhāva).

The individual jīva, the psycho-physical complex, holds the centre of the stage in Śaṅkara's ethical philosophy, so far as the striving for mokṣa is concerned. It is quite clear why this is so. Īśvara, which is the God of religion, and the creator, sustainer and dissolver of the world, is for Śaṅkara a concession to empirical reality. Īśvara operates in conjunction with māyā which is his upādhi or limiting adjunct, though he is said to be in full control of it. As

saguna Brahman, Īsvara is a step lower than the nirguna Brahman who transcends every type of differentiation, māyā and all. The true goal of all ethical striving is therefore the nirguna Brahman, the truly transcendent Godhead which is beyond all categories of thought.

While mokṣa in the sāṃkhya was seen as total isolation from matter and its modifications, the advaita position is that mokṣa is a state that does not negate the world or the individual, but takes up the empirical differences and unites them into an identity at the transcendental level. Mokṣa therefore, is only a denial of plurality and difference; it is an affirmation of unity and identity which is the culmination of all moral striving.

The radical life-denying ethics of the sāṃkhya appears somewhat compromised in advaita ethics. The emphasis on unity and identity (both ostensibly positive concepts) appear to suggest a non-denial of empirical values. Yet the true goal of ethical striving is the nirguna Brahman and not Īsvara. Moral effort that has before it the goal of Īsvara causes the soul to oscillate between human birth and brahma loka, the highest heaven, but mokṣa as standing for the highest Brahman value lies beyond the estate of Īsvara.

It is not at all surprising, given the structure of its metaphysics, that the advaitic conception of Brahman, and therefore of liberation, has been sought to be advanced along two distinct dimensions, which sometimes get confused with each other. The one is the strictly philosophical

conception of it which holds fast to the utter transcendence of mokṣa and to an uncompromising denial of empirically-orientated values. Such a view is based on śruti passages which indicate the total transcendence of Brahman. Iyer expresses this view when he says:

"Strictly speaking there is no transition from Nirguṇa Brahman to Saguṇa Brahman. Nirguṇa Brahman is immutable, it does not undergo the least change. It does not get transformed into Brahman with attributes." ³²

and again,

"From the transcendental standpoint Brahman remains immutable, quite unaffected by what we think about it. The descent of spirit is only apparent and not real. Thus both Īśvara and jīva are the outcome of nescience." ³³

The logical extension of this view is that liberating knowledge will lead to a total transcendence of the categories of this world which is regarded as a mere appearance, not a reality. The empirical world of relations is completely overcome in Brahman-experience because "the relation, as the relation, has no place in the Absolute." ³⁴ It is quite clear that for Śaṅkara the world of plurality disappears completely in mokṣa. Radhakrishnan cites Śaṅkara as holding that "the world experience with its distinctions of souls, things and Īśvara, disappears for him who recognises the oneness of Brahman and the Ātman." ³⁵ Classical advaita as a whole also adopted an austere interpretation of mokṣa, following Śaṅkara. Radhakrishnan quotes Sureśvara, a direct disciple of Śaṅkara :

"When the infinite Light is instinctively realised, all creatures from Brahmā down to the lowest plant melt into an illusion like unto a dream." ³⁶

Śaṅkara is quite convinced that "there is no metaphysical warrant" for introducing "plurality and empirical distinctions into the heart of the Absolute".³⁷ Radhekrishnan himself confesses that "it is Śaṅkara's excessive attachment to logical precision that leads him into somewhat misleading statements, to the effect that the world is nought."³⁸

Śaṅkara views liberation as not being causally related to any empirical category, such as time, place or action³⁹. It is therefore not a production out of anything nor is it a modification of anything, for neither can be truly eternal.⁴⁰ For Śaṅkara, therefore, mokṣa is not a state of Brahman or the Ātman, but "it is the self itself that is the absolute value, meaning that mokṣa or the self is the only value and that all other values are but partial aspects, if not distortions of it".⁴¹ To this basic position, which is obviously austere and impersonal, classical advaita does not fail to add the Upaniṣadic terms sat, cit and ānanda, which are held to be not attributive but substantive of the self, and which may be recognised as standing for "the highest theoretical and practical goal of life".⁴² While acknowledging the subtlety of the advaita logic generally, Banerjee objects to this inclusion of decidedly human values in a scheme of liberation that obliterates the human personality altogether:

"But, strictly speaking, this, far from giving any indication of what human liberation is or should be, amounts to a reiteration of Śaṅkara's conception of the Ultimate Reality as undifferentiated and non-individual Brahman

who usurps whatever is of fundamental value in the world of nature and the world of human beings and in whose abysmal depth both man and the world are eternally and absolutely lost". 43

This is a truly trenchant criticism of the austerity of the advaita value of freedom, made on behalf of the religious interest. It rightly draws attention to the fact that concepts of consciousness and bliss are really interpersonal values,⁴⁴ and questions their significance if "both man and the world are eternally and absolutely lost".

Our interest lies not so much in evaluating the logic and validity of metaphysical postulations, as in noting the necessarily different ethical approaches that the metaphysical systems give rise to. In this context it should be noted that many writers prefer not to directly impugn advaita metaphysics and ethics, but endeavour to inject into the system the flavour of empirical values.

Apologising for Śaṅkara Radhakrishnan says:

"In his anxiety to make out that the freed soul has no possibility of relapsing into the phenomenal world, Śaṅkara frequently suggests that freedom consists in an entire dissolution of all empirical categories and subject-object distinction."⁴⁵

But such dissolution of all distinctions in the state of mokṣa is necessary in Śaṅkara's advaita, in as much as it is a tautological affirmation of Brahman defined as being without distinctions either internally or externally.

Radhakrishna concedes that such a distinctionless state appears to be an empty concept:

"Even as Brahman seems from our empirical point of view a mere nothing, so the state of mokṣa

seems to be a dead loss, a fading into forgetfulness, a putting out the light and melting away into non-existence....." 46

Such a negative and life-denying ethic as flowing from a formal consideration of Brahman as the highest freedom-value is sought to be redirected within the advaita tradition itself by emphasising positive values, within the limits of the metaphysical presuppositions, so as to be more accomodating to the world and human aspirations.

Thus Radhakrishnan urges the view that "freedom is not the abolition of the self, but the realization of its infinity and absoluteness by the expansion and illumination of consciousness,"⁴⁷ and "mokṣa is not the dissolution of the world, but the disappearance of a false outlook."⁴⁸ Commenting on Joad's view that if one's individual personality is to be lost in mokṣa, striving for mokṣa becomes meaningless, Iyer says with confidence:

"All of us want to be rid of our limitations and live the larger life. To sink one's individuality in Brahman is not a loss but a great gain"⁴⁹

This is hardly a satisfying answer from the purely religious point of view. Although it is accepted by many that "mokṣa is a positive condition of bliss and not merely the negative condition of the absence of misery,"⁵⁰ the ordinary religious person would yet hug his "limited" personality if only to share its blessedness with the whole world. In terms of advaita metaphysics one may not go so far in laying claim to the human personality, but at the same time the metaphysically intrinsic logic enhancing the need to

undervalue the world and man is not universally accepted among advaitins "wishing to realise here and now the non-dual Brahman experience of being, consciousness and bliss".⁵¹

We need not labour this point any longer but we need to discern briefly the highly individualistic and soteriologically-directed nature of advaita ethics⁵² quite in consonance with the unavoidably negative characterisation of Brahman-experience or mokṣa in this tradition. Although mokṣa is in fact Brahman-experience at the highest level of abstraction, for the individual jīva, looking at the possibility of freedom from the empirical point of view, it is a question of the method to be adopted for establishing his identity with Brahman.⁵³ The jīva's empirical plight is that it has suffered a forgetfulness of its Brahman-nature through the operation of nescience (avidyā), and "the only means necessary for liberation is the removal of avidyā by vidyā Neither religion nor morality can serve as direct aids to mokṣa".⁵⁴ Like overcoming an illusion, all that is required is a correct angle of vision, in which the importance of karma or work is minimal, while the operation of cognition is of the greatest significance⁵⁵ Spiritual freedom in advaita means "the attaining of insight into oneself; it means self-knowledge and joy of being."⁵⁶

The śādhana catuṣṭaya or four-fold spiritual discipline prescribed by Śaṅkara has deep affinities with the sāṅkhya-yoga tradition, combining within itself a clearly soteriological ethics with a negative withdrawal from the world,

"yet reflecting the essentially practical nature of Indian thought".⁵⁷

The naturally passionate involvement in the objective world has to be severely and radically redirected towards a personal spiritual system of self-culture.⁵⁸ It has to be noted that "involvement in the objective world" includes not only anti-social undertakings, but good works as well, for mokṣa is a passive ideal and requires a quietist ethics. Even the exhortation of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna to engage in the duty of battle does not qualify for the path of mokṣa, except as a preliminary act of mental purification leading to the path of jñāna. Śaṅkara insists upon the ascetic order of sannyāsa as a "necessary prelude to mokṣa", for this order represents the total renunciation of works in the world and exclusive devotion to the path of knowledge.⁵⁹

9.3. VIŚIṢṬĀDVĀITA and the ethics of freedom

If the conception of liberation in sāṅkhya was a total isolation of the soul from all things material, and in advaita a total immersion of the soul in Brahman, then in Rāmānuja's system we see it as one of total involvement of the soul in the being of God. While in the advaita scheme of things, the ontological unity between jīva and Brahman is stated to be complete and unitary, the viśiṣṭādvaita, though it maintains ontological unity as the very essence of all things, yet proposes a pluralistic modification of it in the

interests of its realist metaphysics. Since the definition of mokṣa, except in the most general sense, must depend upon the prior definition of the terms involved in the liberation itself, this definition in Rāmānuja's system, being a realist system, depends equally upon the nature of God, matter and soul. In the advaita a simple equivalence was seen to exist between Brahman-value and mokṣa-value, for ontological continuity between Brahman and the world (including jīvas) was seen in terms of the parsimonious concept of māyā. But in a viśiṣṭādvaita-type realist system liberation has to be proposed in terms of an organic continuity, that is, in the fashion of correspondences among the reals, with their relationships fixed in terms of the metaphysical theory. Though being a realist system, the sāṃkhya dispensed with the notion of God, and ignored any type of meaningful relationship between puruṣa and prakṛti. Since viśiṣṭādvaita does neither, and being a truly theistic system, the ethical disciplines for the attainment of mokṣa proposed in this system are seen to carry over into the spiritual realm in the fashion of an organic continuity. This might appear too formal a statement, but its merit lies in the fact that a realist system must necessarily repudiate the idea of transcending the moral standard in the state of mokṣa as obtains in the idealist system of advaita. God is not only pure consciousness, but He is also good. When the redeemed soul participates in God's nature it participates in His goodness. Of the ethical implications of the soul's relation to God, Crawford says, in relation

to the viśiṣṭādvaita :

"The nature of goodness is inextricably bound up with the nature of godliness. To discover the former we must delve into the latter."⁶⁰

Moral striving in a theistic realism such as viśiṣṭādvaita means that the goodness of the soul is seen as continuous with God's goodness, whose realisation is the fruit of liberation.

The truth of this statement is clearly to be seen in a basic postulate of viśiṣṭādvaita, that the soul is an attribute of God. It is not sufficient unto itself but is an eternal portion of God and in an inseparable relation to Him. It is this necessary unity that gives spiritual meaning to the soul.⁶¹ The implications of mokṣa in viśiṣṭādvaita somewhat reduce the anthropomorphic nature of ethics, otherwise so prominent in Indian thought. The theistic concept of liberation is in several important ways antithetical to the advaita view.⁶²

While in the advaita the individual may be said to dominate the notion of liberation on account of the fact that the Ātman is considered equivalent to Brahman, in Rāmānuja's thought liberation has perforce to be considered in terms of both the individual and Brahman. Because the individual is a part of Brahman, this does not subdue or reduce the value of the human personality, but rather adds immense value to the individual in its every empirical act. Although the guṇas operating in nature provide the framework for

the individual to act in the world, in the viśiṣṭādvaita, it is really the individual who as the agent acts through the guṇas.⁶³ The individual is not a mere variation of the absolute Brahman, but a really existing finite self, a centre of thought and action.⁶⁴ The self possesses its own intrinsic value since its personality is eternal and is never dissipated. Vedānta Deśika, an early polemical exponent of viśiṣṭādvaita, makes out that not only does the self retain its individuality in the state of release, but it also enjoys the glory of God while yet maintaining its specific status.⁶⁵ Mokṣa is a state in which the spiritual and ontological union of the soul with God is positively demonstrated.

Since the reality of the soul is continuous with that of God, moral striving in viśiṣṭādvaita has a twin objective, realising the soul's intrinsic nature as well as realising the nature of God. "The real nature of the individual self cannot be known apart from that of God, since the two are inseparably united and indissolubly related to each other."⁶⁶

Liberation in viśiṣṭādvaita, in common with other schools, certainly implies freedom from the rounds of births and deaths, but in addition also implies the full realisation of the relationship of God to the soul as ādhāra and ādheya (supporter and supported), śarīrin and śarīra (soul and body), śeṣin and śeṣa (whole and part), etc., which indicate the total and unmitigated dependence of the soul upon God.⁶⁷ Every aspect of moral effort therefore, is directed to the

realisation of the supremacy of God with the soul as an eternal and intimate part of God's reality. Expounding the meaning of prapatti or surrender, Śrīnivasācāri says :

".....the jīva as the śarīra of Paramātman has its triple function of knowing, willing and feeling fulfilled organically in the life of the śarīrin. Prapatti is the religious conclusion of the philosophy of the śarīra-śarīrin relation and it affirms that the śarīrin is Himself the upāya and the upeya".⁶⁸

As upāya and upeya mean respectively 'means' and 'end', it shows that the individual should unreservedly be consumed with dedication to God both in the process of moral striving as well as (quite naturally) the goal of it. While in sāmkhya and advaita the individual self holds pride of place both in terms of means and end, in viśiṣṭādvaita on the other hand, though he is certainly the free and self-determining agent, his individuality is submerged in the specific moral attitude of directing his entire soul force towards appreciating, in so many ways, the incomparable glory and supremacy of God.

Rāmānuja accepts the traditional approaches leading to liberation, such as jñāna, karma, dhyāna and bhakti, but he reinterprets them to the requirements of the doctrine of love and surrender to God and holds bhakti to be the primary and necessary requisite.⁶⁹ Since the integrity of the self as possessing intrinsic value is important to the system, an "understanding of the true nature of the individuality of the self" as a "primary requirement of the realization of liberation"⁷⁰ must be accepted as important. But jñāna-yoga

as the direct link to liberation, as understood in advaita, and as violating the supremacy of bhakti, is rejected by Rāmānuja.

Jñāna is ingeniously defined as a form of bhakti, that is, as knowledge that is not mere understanding, but that which necessarily calls forth and becomes indistinguishable from the deepest adoration and love of God. Devotion itself is described as "a special kind of knowledge that fills the heart of the mumuksu with deep longing for Divine Communion and Divine Grace".⁷¹

Karma-yoga is considered by Rāmānuja to be important for the purification of the mind, thus preparing it for a true knowledge of the nature of God and the soul, and of the true relationship between them. Since for Rāmānuja "bhakti stands for the steady contemplation of the mind of God," it is in this sense equivalent to jñāna.⁷² It is "loving meditation of all his divine attributes and glories, so as to qualify for his grace".⁷³ Liberation is the "integral experience of Brahman that has infinite jñāna and ānanda and other perfections."⁷⁴ A knowledge of the soul's real nature together with its connection with God, and blissful participation in God's being is what constitutes mokṣa.⁷⁵

For Rāmānuja bhakti is "the most natural means for God-realization".⁷⁶ The viśiṣṭādvaita system incorporates the nine modes of bhakti prescribed in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, viz., listening to the Lord's names (śravaṇam), singing His

praises (kīrtanam), remembering Him always (smaraṇam), worshipping His Holy feet (pādasevanam), worshipping Him (arcanam), bowing down to Him (vandanam), serving Him (dāsyam), treating Him as the closest friend (sakhyam) and totally surrendering to Him (Ātma-nivedanam). In spite of this acceptance of a free type of bhakti, it is also held that "the bhakta has to worship the Lord in the way ordained by the scriptures".⁷⁷ This stricture, due to Rāmānuja's acceptance of the karma-kāṇḍa portion of the Veda,⁷⁸ leads to difficulties associated with social distinctions, as we have already seen in a previous chapter.

As a path of unsurpassed ethical striving, over and above the traditional approaches, Rāmānuja proposed the path of prapatti, which is "the unreserved, complete conscious surrender of our entire self to the Lord in order to be saved".⁷⁹ Prapatti implies taking refuge solely in God (śaraṇāgati) and relying upon Him to direct one's life. Personal effort loses some significance in the face of God's will, which directs the devotee as its instructor in the world. The natural corollary of prapatti is the doctrine of kṛpā or grace, which was developed in great depth in the system. It was taken up and promulgated by the Tenkalai (or southern) sect of Rāmānuja's later followers, while the opposing doctrine of puruṣārtha or human effort was championed by the Vaḍakalai (or northern) sect. The kṛpā doctrine is exemplified in the literature as mārjāra-nyāya,

reasoning according to the cat carrying its kitten, where the kitten is required to put forth no efforts of its own, except to merely surrender to its mother. The puruṣārtha doctrine, on the other hand, is exemplified as markaṭa nyāya, seen in the young of the monkey clinging to its mother by its own strength and with no external help. The issue being a highly metaphysical one, is difficult of resolution, and the polemics continue into our day. It appears that Rāmānuja himself favoured the puruṣārtha doctrine, which is closely allied to the doctrine of karma, and which he considered highly important as a preparation for the fructification of bhakti. Generally speaking, Rāmānuja considered bhakti as incorporating intellectualistic and meditative dimensions, though he defined it as intense love for God.

Certainly bhakti is not marked by undue emotional fervour or excessively overt demonstrations in Rāmānuja's thought, yet the entire process of ethical striving leading up to mokṣa, as well as the state of liberation itself, is described in terms that are more akin to bhakti as love of God and total surrender to Him.

As a consequence of this overriding bhakti attitude the system accepts five stages in the process of liberation, viz. living in God's world (sālokya), enjoying His glories (sārṣṭi), being close to Him (sāmīpya), enjoying likeness with Him (sārūpya), and being united with Him (sāyujya).⁸⁰ These indicate that liberation is gradatory and cumulative,

and finds fulfilment only after death. Viśiṣṭādvaita therefore rejects the doctrine of jīvanmukti (embodied liberation), and accepts only videhamukti (disembodied liberation).

Ethical striving in the viśiṣṭādvaita system is characterised by a consistency of attitude along a single dimension. This dimension is bhakti or loving surrender to God, which is closely correlated with the metaphysical speculations of the system. So far as the ideal of mokṣa is concerned, and in terms of its relation to metaphysics, we have seen that Rāmānuja's formulations clearly show that it is bhakti and bhakti alone that meets the ethical requirements for the attainment of the soteriological goal of life.

End Notes : Chapter Nine

1. Banerjee, N.V. The Spirit of Indian Philosophy, p.244.
2. ibid., p.335.
3. ibid., p.335.
4. ibid., p.338.
5. Quoted in RAD IP II, p.249.
6. RAD IP II, p.325.
7. Chattopadhyaya, S. What Is Living and What Is Dead In Indian Philosophy, p.593.
8. ibid., p.593.
9. Lad, A.K. The Concept of Liberation in Indian Philosophy, p.106.
10. RAD IP II, p.280.
11. HIR OIP p.279.
12. SK 10.
13. SK 19.
14. RAD IP II, p. 283.
15. HIR OIP p.293.
16. ibid., p.294.
17. ibid., p.293.
18. SK 64.
- 19a SK 55.
- 19b SK 53/4.
20. HIR OIP p.294.
21. RAD IP II, p.344.
22. ibid., p.342.
23. HIR OIP p.295.
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25. ibid., pp.343/4.
26. ibid., p.344.
27. Yoga Sutra 1.2.
28. ibid., 1.3.
29. CU 3.14.1.
30. Crawford, S.C. Hindu Ethical Ideals, p.169.
31. Mu 3.2.9.
32. Iyer, M.K.V. Advaita Vedanta, p.79.
33. ibid., p.33.
34. RAD IP II, pp.638/9.
35. ibid., p.638.
36. ibid., 638n.
37. ibid., p.639.
38. ibid., p.638.
39. Lad, A.K. op.cit., p.118.
40. ibid., p.117.
41. HIR ICV pp.262/3.
42. Banerjee, N.V. op.cit., p.345.
43. ibid., p.345.
44. ZAE H p.74.
45. RAD IP II, pp.637/8.

46. *ibid.*, p.641.
47. *ibid.*, pp.636/7.
48. *ibid.*, p.637.
49. Iyer, M.K.V., *op.cit.*, p.107.
50. *ibid.*, p.185.
51. Banerjee, N.V. *op.cit.*, pp.171/3.
52. Deutsch, E. *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, p.99.
53. Crawford, S.C. *op.cit.*, p.173.
54. *ibid.*, p.172.
55. Lad, A.K. *op.cit.*, p.115.
56. Deutsch, E. *op.cit.*, p.104.
57. Desai, J.G. *The Philosophical Conflict Between Swami Vivekananda and Swami Prabhupada in the Light of Vedanta Tradition*, p.50.
58. Deutsch, E. *op.cit.*, p.106.
59. Iyer, M.K.V. *op.cit.*, p.184.
60. Crawford, S.C. *op.cit.*, 187.
61. HIR OIP p.399.
62. Desai, J.G. *op.cit.*, p.56.
63. Bhatt, S.R. *Studies in Ramanuja Vedanta*, p.118.
64. *ibid.*, p.117.
65. Chari, S.M.S. *Advaita and Visistadvaita*, pp.172/3.
66. Bhatt, S.R. *op.cit.*, p.120.
67. Lad, A.K. *op.cit.*, p.135.
68. Srinivasachari, P.N. *The Philosophy of Visistadvaita*, pp.395/6.
69. Gupta, A.S. *A Critical Study of the Philosophy of Ramanuja*, p.139.
70. Banerjee, N.V. *op.cit.*, p.345.
71. Gupta, A.S. *op.cit.*, p.179.
72. Crawford, S.C. *op.cit.*, p.196.
73. Singh, B. *Atman and Moksha*, p.182.
74. Srinivasachari, P.N. *op.cit.*, p.481.
75. Vidyarthi, P.B. *Divine Personality and Human Life in Ramanuja*, pp.208/9.
76. Raju, P.T. *The Philosophical Traditions of India*, p.140.
77. *ibid.*, p.141.
78. Chari, S.M.S. *op.cit.*, pp.154/5.
79. Raju, P.T. *op.cit.*, p.143.
80. Lad, A.K. *op.cit.*, p.139.

Chapter Ten: Conclusions

In this chapter the major conclusions of the investigation are reviewed and set out systematically, with regard to the twin theses of the differentiability of ethical behaviours and the perception of tensions.

The conclusions are reinforced with some evidence in terms of socio-historical development down to modern times.

Chapter 10 CONCLUSIONS

The major investigation undertaken in this work has been the demonstration of a differential pattern in the ethical parameters as operating in classical Indian thought, and especially with respect to the sāṃkhya, advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita systems. The three systems, proposing among them specific and widely differing metaphysical standpoints, and operating within a highly generalised ethico-religious social milieu using a generalised cluster terminology, give the appearance of a unified tradition.

However, after specifying briefly the metaphysical doctrines and assumptions unique to each system, and considering each system in terms of the detailed analysis of vital ethical values proposed in Indian thought, viz. dharma, karma and mokṣa, it has been clearly seen that each system established itself along substantially divergent ethical dimensions. It has also been seen that the lines of divergence appeared to flow quite naturally from the metaphysical presuppositions as these have been stated and fixed in the classical period.

The view has also been allowed that both metaphysics and ethics arising in a socio-historical setting, can be subject to variations and revisions which must affect, in some ways, our assessment of the dynamics obtaining between them. With regard to the sāṃkhya system, this perspective has revealed that the Indian experience is partial to some type of

theistic orientation in metaphysics (advaita notwithstanding), and so largely absorbed and theicized the sāṃkhya, making it a part of the general religio-cultural milieu. Sāṃkhya dialectics are now largely confined to academic interests, and is valuable as a realist-mystical system offering grounds for pursuing a comparative interest with advaita and Buddhism particularly.

With regard to the advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita systems the processes of history and social change have rather accentuated the fundamental theses proposed by Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja respectively, though we have to qualify this assessment somewhat in the case of the advaita, which has shown distinct tendencies to develop along a limited theistic dimension. In the case of viśiṣṭādvaita, no noticeable tendency in the direction of idealism or impersonalism is revealed, except for the solitary case of Vallabha. On the contrary a pronounced entrenchment of theistic values is evident in the development of the Vadakalai and Tenkalai sects in the Rāmānujist tradition, reinforced by significant developments from the side of the Madhva or dvaitavāda schools.

This is not to say that there are no new developments in Indian philosophy. In fact fresh and innovative approaches to old problems are being experimented with in some philosophical circles. Of interest to us however, is that in the field of theology and ethics, the lines drawn in the

classical traditions of advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita still largely obtain, enabling us to declare a kind of persistent and innate morphology of the Vedāntic dialectic that survives the accidents of history and pressures of the environment.

The clearly divergent relationships of each system with the ethical imperatives that appear closely connected to their several metaphysical formulations, has also been seen along negative-positive dimensional approaches to the world of common experience. In the case of the sāṅkhya a clearly negative attitude to life was discerned which, in addition, was also seen to conform closely to the definition of spiritual reality as mere consciousness without a specifically ethical content such as "bliss".

The advaita formulation of the relationship was also seen to reflect a severely negative and life-denying ethic, and the more so as this attitude was considered to be logically implied in its primary metaphysical constructs of the sole reality of the nirguṇa Brahman and complete identity of the jīva with that reality. This advaitic position has been shown by us to be the basic and primary formulation true to Śaṅkara's major lines of thought. It has also been seen that the two-tier model of reality as transcendental and relative, pertaining to absolute spiritual reality and the empirical world of human relationships respectively, does not represent a true compromise of the major advaitic thesis,

so far as the classical theory is concerned, but reflects rather a concessionary, accomodatory overture to the "frailties" of human nature.

The nirguna Brahman, in the advaitic formulation, is not only the ultimate reality, but it is also conceived as the only true and proper goal of the ethics of liberation. As unchanging, homogeneous, distinctionless and beyond relations, Brahman cannot be conceived to be in any meaningful relation with human beings in the ultimate sense, and necessarily implies the negation of all human experience. The identity relationship between the individual and Brahman is therefore projected in terms of a mystical understanding or realisation of it as such, and ethical striving in terms of the path of jñāna or knowledge, in its exclusive sense, is conceived as the only path appropriate to Brahman-experience.

Samkara's own formulation of the four-fold path of ethical discipline was seen as a faithful exemplification of the negative evaluation of human experience.

The advaitic position, despite the austerity of its major metaphysical premises and the ethical behaviours projected as their logical consequence, was nevertheless not seen to be operating along a single ethical dimension. The two-tier model of reality appeared to validate, within the advaita tradition itself, the projection of a multiple ethical dimensionality confined within the parameters of human experience.

This pragmatic deployment of the system's ethical energies along variable lines gave rise to strong tensions of an essentially unresolvable nature, for the reason that it did not signal a relaxation of its essential premises but merely "tagged" the world of human experience, as a lower order of reality, onto the higher order reality of Brahman.

Despite the fact that ultimate reality in the advaitic view could not be truly understood through the human sentiment of devotion or works in the world (ritualistic or otherwise), within the advaita tradition itself arose men of distinction and great influence who declared the supremacy of bhakti, or at least its equality with jñāna. The earliest is probably Jñāneśvara "an enthusiastic bhakta" whose 20 000-line commentary on the Gītā is "advaitist in tone".¹ The Bhāgavatam ranks as the single most important text of devotion in the entire Indian tradition. Yet it was an advaitin, Śrīdhara Svāmī, the high priest of the Pūri monastery established by Śaṅkara and who, around 1400 A.D., wrote a commentary on it "which is by far the most famous exposition of the work."²

Śrīdhara also produced a commentary on the Gītā, in which "his learning and devotion as opposed to knowledge is so very marked that the orthodox section at first refused to accept his commentary as authoritative."³ Legend has it that the commentary was placed before the temple deity in Banares for the Lord's decision, which ultimately confirmed the advaitic acceptability of the work through a Sanskrit

couplet miraculously given by God.⁴ These events attest the development of conflicts and tensions of a serious ethical nature from quite early in the tradition.

One of the most ancient religious sects, the Bhāgavatas, were worshippers of Viṣṇu, but were also strongly predisposed to the monistic doctrines of Śaṅkara. The resulting ambiguities and ambivalences in belief and attitude are clearly discerned by Farquhar when he says :

"The Bhāgavatas, being both Smārtas and devotees of Viṣṇu, occupied from the first rather an unstable position between the orthodox and the sects, and their acceptance of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa deepened the difficulty for them. The results are visible in their history..... Occasionally individual Bhāgavatas pass over to the Śrī-Vaiṣṇava community..... All the other sects dependent on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa have experienced the same difficulty of maintaining the Vedic position, and most are in consequence now frankly sectarian."⁵

The volatile and unstable ethico-religious situation is thus seen not to depend on merely personal choice of deity, but on the more underlying doctrinal and metaphysical differences that separate the advaita from the viśiṣṭādvaita, not discounting the influence of the mīmāṃsā with its emphasis on a ritualistic life-style. The tensions that characterise the overt religious lives of individuals and whole communities, as they are seen to surface in the religious context, are really the end product of a spiral whose base lies in fundamental metaphysical structures of thought.

Among the relatively modern advaitic personalities, Svāmī Vivekānanda's thoughts and activities are outstanding because of their wide and continuing influence in both East and West. Inspired with the zeal for Indian national unity on the one hand, and the spread of the gospel of Vedānta on the other, he combined in his characteristic message the thesis that all the traditional ethical approaches, those of jñāna, karma, yoga and bhakti were essentially the same. He held that "the grandest idea in the religion of Vedānta is that we may reach the same goal by different paths".⁶ In his zeal Vivekānanda initiated the characteristic note of modern neo-Hinduistic eclecticism that all religions are equal as means to the attainment of the spiritual goal, a theme that recurs throughout his speeches and writings, and sometimes reaches high eloquence.

It is interesting to note, however, that this is a modern version of the samuccaya-vāda doctrine of the equality of means, and Vivekānanda simply equates the different religions to one or other of the traditional Indian ethical dimensions, by ignoring their metaphysical peculiarities. However, his espousal of the advaita doctrine of total identity between man and God runs strong and deep, and at times he explicitly denounces all dualistic doctrines (which we must presume to include non-Hindu religions as well).

To arrive at a fair estimate of Vivekānanda's differential emphasis on ethico-metaphysical topics strewn rather confusingly and unsystematically throughout his works, we have to say that his views clearly compromise classical advaita in that he seriously and faithfully espoused samuccayavāda, which was for him a major requirement for religious harmony in the world. This position of his was closely related to his outlook of wide sympathy and humanitarianism. His genuine feeling for the suffering of fellow-man, though it had its origin in the plight of the poverty-stricken millions of India, really extended to all mankind. And Vivekānanda looked upon every creature as a veritable manifestation of God, a form of the Divine,⁷ to whose service every true reformer should dedicate his every effort.

It cannot be denied that Vivekānanda saw a genuine need for the development of a universal ethics of humanity, especially in relation to the masses of India, though he did not discount its logical extension to all the world. In so setting a basis for a world-affirming ethics, Vivekānanda was certainly developing the great promise held in the advaitic doctrine of oneness. At the same time it also cannot be denied that Vivekānanda must have felt some difficulty and clash of interests in trying to infuse a sort of intrinsic value into the world, which by the standards of classical advaita, possessed only an instrumental value.

We have to contend for the validity of this criticism, which holds that there is a necessary gulf between a negatively derived ethical value and its positive application for pragmatic purposes. Human nature is highly pliable and through force of will and sentiment it is easily possible to sustain the practices of positive ethics. Vivekānanda's powerful personality imposed the stamp of his pragmatic social ethics upon the Ramakrishna movement that he founded. But he did not attempt to reformulate advaita doctrine at the metaphysical level. Rather he accepted the full tradition, as is so clearly evident in his moving Song of the Sannyāsin, which must have been composed in a patient and studied fashion. We may consider two revealing excerpts:

- (a) "Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
Of shining gold, or darker, baser ore;
Know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free."
- (b) "They know not truth who dream such vacant dreams
As father, mother, children, wife and friend."

8

There is unmistakable undervaluation of the world, together with the most basic human relationships, in these words, which are thus seen to be consistent with the classical advaita position. The confusion resulting from the split-level values, that is, the denial of worldly relationships reflected in the above lines, on the one hand, and their affirmation in the enactment of a humanistic ethics on the other hand, must affect an individual's peace of mind and unity of purpose. The excessively individualist ethical

flavour reflected in the poem is not consistent with Vivekānanda's declarations of humanitarian ethics. If the sentiments expressed in the poem be said to apply only to sannyāsins, it would be admitting to a split-level value system and to differential ethical ideals, attesting to some form of tensions in pursuing those ideals. While Vivekānanda's reconstruction of the advaita ethics along the lines of a humanitarian social dimension retained intact Śaṅkara's theoretical postulates of the utter transcendence of Brahman and the significance of māyā for the process of world-creation and society, the poet Rabindranath Tagore moved away from the strict advaita position as he felt that true religion should be centered in man in his operations in society. Though bred in the soil of Upaniṣadic and advaitic idealism, he felt the need to match more closely the historical reality of man in social evolution with the metaphysical constructions of religion and philosophy. He gave expression to the general advaitic basis of his faith, when, speaking of man in his highest moments, he said: "a man can transcend the utmost bounds of his humanity and find himself in a pure state of consciousness of his undivided unity with Brahman."⁹ Yet he held the concept of nirguna Brahman too cold an abstraction and too far removed from man and society to have much meaning. He accepted rather the testimony of those "who have felt a profound love, which is the intense feeling of union, for a Being who comprehends in himself all things that are human in knowledge, will and action."¹⁰

Tagore acknowledged the presence in Indian thought of the metaphysical conception of other-worldliness, but he did not promote a dialectic against it. He rather pursued the line of a "devotionalistic theism," holding that "God as truth is known through the insight of love rather than reason."¹¹

The need for the meaning of God and religion in terms of man and his relations with fellow-men is basic to his thought, which is clearly revealed when he says that "God is the Father, the Friend, the Lover, whose service must be realised through serving all mankind. For the God in man depends upon man's service and man's love for his own love's fulfilment".¹²

Our statement of Tagore's position highlights to a considerable degree the operation of genuine tensions at the individual and social levels, associated with the metaphysics of advaita. And this becomes the clearer when compared with the thought of Vivekānanda. For quite obviously both men were dealing with highly similar social situations against the same metaphysical background. It is immaterial to our thesis that Tagore opted for a theistic orientation. For him that was perhaps a personal resolution of an aspect of the conflict. But the fact of differential responses to a highly similar situation against a background of highly similar metaphysical presumptions, indicates at least, the existence of tensions as operating factors in their differential responses.

The fact that Vivekānanda responded to the situation with his reformulation, along a purely ethical dimension, of the advaitic metaphysic of oneness, may be seen as the fulfilment of what several writers see as the promise inherent in advaita. That such advaitic oneness, by itself, is very much with Tagore as well, calls for the isolation of the notion of "other-worldliness" or "mere instrumentality", as the factors in which the tensions are rooted. It is our contention that these factors are integral to classical advaita metaphysics.

Radhakrishnan's position in this matter is highly interesting as well as instructive. He certainly does not confess to a theistic position, though he is acutely aware of the problem of the nirguṇa Brahman both at the level of philosophy and at the level of ethics. His position is a reformulation of the advaitic concept of ultimate reality that expresses the sentiments of Vivekānanda in an eloquent way. Although Radhakrishnan is conscious that the theistic ways of speaking are justifiable on the ground of the advaitic doctrine of the vyāvahārika, he tends to give the impression that ultimate reality is organically bound up with the world.¹³ In a statement of personal philosophy he concedes that in some way the ultimate of philosophy must be seen to be continuous with the God of religion, when he affirms :

"God is the timeless spirit attempting to realise timeless values on the plane of

time..... The values which the cosmic process is attempting to achieve are only a few of the possibilities contained in the Absolute. God is the definitisation of the Absolute in reference to the values of the world." 14

In these words the distinction between the vyāvahārika and the pāramārthika becomes a little blurred. Radhakrishnan continues, referring to a theistic type of religious experience :

"On the other hand there are features of our religious experience which require us to look upon God as a self-determining principle manifested in a temporal development, with wisdom, love and goodness as His attributes. From this point of view God is a personal being with whom we can enter into personal relationship. Practical religion presupposes a God who looks into our hearts, knows our tribulations and helps us in our needs To leave the Absolute in abstract isolation dwelling in Epicurean felicity is to reduce it to an ornamental figurehead who lends an atmosphere to an essentially agnostic view of the cosmic process." 15

Radhakrishnan continues, further on in the text, to speak of the Absolute in true philosophic style, but in the above extract he admits that the Absolute should not be left "in abstract isolation." Whatever meaning the words "God who looks into our hearts, knows our tribulations and helps us in our needs" might have for the advaitin in terms of the split-level conception of reality, even Radhakrishnan must concede that they must mean infinitely more to the theist. This does not detract from Radhakrishnan as a committed advaitin, but it certainly serves to underline the peculiar

type of tension, and the conflict it must engender in men of lesser mettle, arising directly out of the structure of advaita metaphysics and with regard to the ethical disciplines appropriate to them. Radhakrishnan states the philosophical problem with his usual clarity when he says :

"But for philosophy of religion, the central problem is to reconcile the apparently conflicting views of the supreme as eternally complete and of the supreme as the self-determining principle manifesting in the temporal process."¹⁶

This means that juxtaposing God as timeless spirit (the advaitic Īśvara) does not really reduce the need to see the Absolute (the supreme) as the "self-determining principle" acting in the world. We might consider the critique that seeing the Absolute as "the self-determining principle manifesting in the temporal process" already reduces the status of the Absolute (as a philosophically precise category). We take Radhakrishnan to concur with this line of reasoning when he says :

"The question of immanence and transcendence does not arise with reference to the Absolute,"¹⁷

and this leaves the Absolute precisely where it belongs - "in abstract isolation." For the advaitin, then, the problems inherent in advaita metaphysics become tensions of the soul, as they are sought to be translated into the realm of religious practice and ethical action.

On the side of the ethics of social morality, our work has shown that, while the sāṃkhya parted company from the advaita

in disavowing a traditional interpretation of dharma, both the advaita and the viśistādvaita supported the strict division of human society into castes. This traditional hierarchical structure, being based on heredity, manifested a clearly disproportionate allotment of privileges and duties among the four general classes, and has been the source of continued tension and conflict throughout the history of Indian society. Because of the peculiar metaphysical interpretation in terms of which dharma served as the vehicle of a type of invariable mechanical precision in the social field, Śaṅkara's advaita felt bound to sanction it as a necessary part of smārta (smṛti-bound) tradition.

In the viśistādvaita the effects of the caste system appear to have been allayed, due to the reliance on bhakti as the chief means of religious endeavour. As this did not obtain in advaita, with its religious leaders upholding caste distinctions as inviolable, the problem is a continuing one. Insofar as the concept of dharma in its traditional interpretation is seen as tied up with advaita metaphysics, it has given rise to obvious tensions and conflicts over a wide spectrum of Indian society. We have argued that dharma in its peculiar metaphysical interpretation need not be a part of advaita, but in terms of the classical presentation, advaita thinkers have appeared to support it, at least by implication. In this connection Larson points out :

"That so many Indian intellectuals and academicians have adopted such an interpretive philosophy (two levels of truth) is surely one important reason why modern Indian philosophy has failed to develop a

significant tradition of social criticism."¹⁸ Tagore, giving credit to the spirit of the European civilization, hopes that it will give new life to Indians "still conditioned by our surrender to the fatalism of the almanac."¹⁹ Radhakrishnan has spoken continuously and eloquently for the principle of social change as an inherent part of Indian culture. He insists that "institutions and dogmas that lose their stuff of life must be scrapped."²⁰ He pleads for the urgent introduction of changes that would "make the content of Hindu dharma relevant to modern conditions".²¹ As an ācārya of immense authority, he has taken a most significant step towards a fairer and more humane interpretation of the concept of dharma, by including in his translation of the Upaniṣads, the short Vajrasūcika Upaniṣad, which is concerned almost wholly with the categorical rejection of hereditary castes and privileges. In the introductory paragraph Radhakrishnan gives us his motivation for the inclusion of the Vajrasūcika :

"The Upaniṣad is valuable in that it undermines caste distinctions based on birth."²²

In an atmosphere of apparently ubiquitous moral vacillation on the part of the academic community among Indians, the inclusion of the Vajrasūcika as a part of Radhakrishnan's selection, will hopefully help to reduce moral tensions associated with social ethics. In any event, it is certain to help correct the "metaphysical perversion" with which the concepts of dharma and karma have been injected since

ancient times, as our work has shown.

In our treatment of these vital ethical concepts we have argued that their ethico-metaphysical schema of relationships is already an arbitrary interpretation, especially with regard to the advaita and viśiṣṭādvaita systems.

Nevertheless, we have consistently shown that, in terms of these systems as formulated by Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja respectively, as well as in terms of the sāṅkhya, which in some ways was seen to be a unique category, the ethical corollaries flowed from their metaphysical backgrounds in a clearly differentiated pattern specific to the metaphysical presuppositions in each case. Further, we have demonstrated that the tensions and conflicts that become apparent at the level of ethical action are in fact traceable to the actual metaphysical formulations themselves. Our investigations in this respect have dealt largely with advaita metaphysics, which, in operating along the two dimensions of the absolute and the relative, give rise to those metaphysical intricacies with which the perceived tensions and conflicts are in fact related. The sāṅkhya and the viśiṣṭādvaita, being undimensional, are relatively free of tensions and conflicts, and promote relatively simplistic models of ethical behaviour.

As a concluding paragraph, we may be allowed the privilege of a quotation from Crawford, which, in our perception, holds out the hope that the tensions and conflicts that are

a real part of the ethico-metaphysical actuality of Indian life and religion may be somewhat reduced through a more sympathetic and accomodating interpretation of an ancient and hallowed concept :

"The basic message of Hindu ethics, rooted in the ancient idea of Rta, is that harmony is already here; that we do not have to create it - only discover it! Since Brahman and Nature are one, we must see the Supreme Being in the whole world and the whole world in Him!" 23

End Notes : Chapter Ten

1. Farquhar, J.N. Modern Religious Movements in India, pp.234/5.
2. *ibid.*, p.297.
3. Vireswarananda, Swami. Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita, p.ii.
4. *ibid.*, p.ii.
5. Farquhar, J.N. *op.cit.*, p.298.
6. Vivekananda, Svami. Selections from Svami Vivekananda, p.27.
7. Desai, J.G. The Philosophical Conflict Between Swami Vivekananda and Swami Prabhupada in the Light of the History of the Vedanta Tradition, pp.117/8.
8. Vivekananda, Svami, *op.cit.*, pp.613/4.
9. Tagore, R. The Religion of Man, p.128.
10. *ibid.*, p.128.
11. Hindery, R. Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions, p.192.
12. Tagore, R. *op.cit.*, p.44.
13. Sundaram, P.K. Radhakrishnan and the Concept of Maya, in Indian Philosophical Annual, Vol. 12, pp.259/60.
14. Radhakrishnan and Muirhead (Eds.), Contemporary Indian Philosophy, pp.496/7.
15. *ibid.*, p.497.
16. *ibid.*, p.497.
17. *ibid.*, p.501.
18. Hindery, R. *op.cit.*, p.199.
19. Tagore, R. Towards Universal Man, pp.242/3.
20. RAD RS p.114.
21. *ibid.*, p.115.
22. RAD PU p.934.
23. Crawford, S.C. Hindu Ethical Ideals, p.233.

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