

The PRASTHĀNATRAYA

An Introduction

PREFACE

Among the six systems of Hindu philosophy- generally called the Śaḍdarśanas the Vedānta system is certainly the crest-jewel. With a balanced combination of great respect for the Vedas and incontrovertible logic that demolishes the non-Vedic systems, it has earned for itself an unenviable place among the well-known philosophies of the world.

The Vedānta system is built primarily on the Prasthānatraya, the three foundational works that take one to the final goal of life (= prasthāna). They are: the Śrutiprasthāna (Upaniṣads); the Smṛti-prasthāna (the *Bhagavadgītā*) and the Nyāya-prasthāna (the *Brahmasūtras*).

Of these three, the Upaniṣads being the Śruti, the cardinal scripture of Hinduism, are of utmost importance.

The *Brahmasūtras*, being a systematisation of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads, helps in building up the metaphysical frame of Vedānta.

The *Bhagavadgītā*, being an extremely popular and highly venerated work, *had* to be admitted into the prasthāna group due to four reasons:

1. It was taught by Śrīkṛṣṇa, looked upon as the best of incarnations of God.
2. It is a part and parcel of the *Mahābhārata*, considered as the *Pañcama Veda* (the fifth Veda).
3. The author of the *Mahābhārata* and of the *Brahmasūtras* was according to the orthodox Hindu traditions, the same-Bādarāyaṇa/Vyāsa.
4. The philosophy of the *Bhagavadgītā* is extremely similar to that of the Upaniṣads, so much so that it has been described as the 'milk' of the 'cows' of the Upaniṣads.

The present work is not new. All the three sections included here had been published earlier as independent booklets.

Thinking that bringing these three booklets together, under the general title of Prasthānatraya may help the students of Vedānta to comprehend the subject better, this bigger treatise has been brought out.

We can only hope that this new venture will not go in Vain.

Swami Harshananda

CONTENTS

The Bhagavadgītā

1. Introduction
2. Date and Author
3. A Résumé of the Contents
4. Philosophy of the Bhagavadgītā
5. Special Contribution of the Gītā to Indian Philosophical Thought
6. Commentaries
7. Conclusion

The Upaniṣads

1. General Introduction
2. Meaning of the Word 'Upaniṣad'
3. Date of Composition
4. Nature of Composition
5. Number and Classification
6. Sanskrit Commentaries
7. Philosophy of the Upaniṣads
 - a. Brahman
 - b. ātman
 - c. Creation
 - d. Bondage and Liberation
 - e. Eschatology
 - f. Vidyās or Upāsanās
8. Civilisation and Culture during the Age of the Upaniṣads
9. Literary Grace
10. Stories
11. Ṛṣis or Sages of the Upaniṣads
12. A Résumé of the Principal Upaniṣads
 - i. AITAREYA UPANIṢAD
 - ii. BRHADĀRANYAKA UPANIṢAD
 - iii. CHĀNDOGYA UPANIṢAD
 - iv. TĪŚVĀSYA UPANIṢAD
 - v. JĀBĀLA UPANIṢAD
 - vi. KAIVALYA UPANIṢAD
 - vii. KAṬHA UPANIṢAD
 - viii. KAUṢĪTAKI UPANIṢAD
 - ix. KENA UPANIṢAD
 - x. MAHĀNĀRĀYAṆA UPANIṢAD
 - xi. MĀṆÚKYA UPANIṢAD
 - xii. MUṆÚKA UPANIṢAD
 - xiii. PRAŚNA UPANIṢAD
 - xiv. ŚVETĀŚVATARA UPANIṢAD
 - xv. TAITTIRĪYA UPANIṢAD
 - xvi. VAJRASŪCIKĀ UPANIṢAD
13. Conclusion

The Brahmasūtras

1. Preamble-Sūtras
2. Vedānta Darśana
3. Prasthāna-traya
4. The Upaniṣads
5. The Brahmasūtras
6. Bādarāyaṇa, the Author
7. About the Work
8. A Brief Synopsis
 - i. First Chapter
 - ii. Second Chapter
 - iii. Third Chapter
 - iv. Fourth Chapter
9. The Philosophy of Bādarāyaṇa
10. The Commentators and their Works
 - i. Śaṅkara
 - ii. Rāmānuja
 - iii. Madhva
 - iv. Bhāskara
 - v. Nimbārka
 - vi. Vallabha
 - vii. Baladeva
11. The Brahmasūtra Literature
12. Conclusion

Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation – sounds like

अ, a-o in son,	ठ ṭh-th in ant-hill
आ , ā-a in master,	ड ḍ-d in den
इ i-i in if,	ढ ḍh-dh in godhood
ई ī-ee in feel,	ण ṇ-n in under
उ u-u in full,	त t-t in French
ऊ ū-oo in boot,	थ th-th in thumb
ऋ ṛ-somewhat between r and ri,	द d-th in then
	ध dh-the in breathe
ए e-ay in May,	न n-n in not
ऐ ai-y in my,	प p-p in pen
ओ o-o in oh,	फ ph-ph in loop-hole
औ au-ow in now,	ब b-b in bag
क k-k in keen,	भ bh-bh in abhor
ख kh-ckh in blockhead,	म m-m in mother
ग g-g (hard) in go,	य y-y in yard
घ gh-gh in log-hut,	र r-r in run
ङ ṅ-ng in singer,	ल l-l in luck
च c-ch in chain,	व v-v in avert
छ ch-chh in catch him,	श ś-sh in reich (German)
ज j-j in judge,	ष ṣ-sh in show
झ jh-dgeh in hedgehog,	स s-in sun
ञ ñ-n (somewhat) as in French,,	ह h-in hot
ट ṭ-t in ten,	
• ṁ-m in sum,	:ḥ-h in half

The Bhagavadgītā

Daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayāmāmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṃ taranti

My divine Māyā (power) constituted of the three guṇas is difficult to overcome. Whoever takes refuge in Me alone, in utter devotion, overcomes it.

Sarvadharmān parityajya māmekaṃ śaraṇaṃ vrajaahaṃ tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ

Abandoning dependence on all dharmas (or on human efforts at moral and spiritual upliftment), come to Me as the only Refuge. Grieve not; I will deliver you from all sins.

Gītā (7.14; 18.66)

Introduction

The *Bhagavadgītā*, popularly known as the *Gītā*, is one of the outstanding religious classics of the world. Hindus, irrespective of their sects and denominations, cherish great reverence for this book. A ceremonial reading of the book, or even a part thereof, is believed to confer great religious merit.

The book itself, comprising eighteen chapters, forms an integral part of a much bigger work, the great epic, *Mahābhārata* (*vide Bhīṣmaparva*, Chapters 25 to 42). It is a poetical work in the form of a dialogue between Śrīkrṣṇa and Arjuna, on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. The setting of the battlefield contributes a dramatic element to the book and relates religion to the realities of life.

The greatness and the popularity of the *Gītā* can be attributed to several factors. It is a part and parcel of the epic *Mahābhārata* which itself has been highly venerated as the fifth Veda (Pañcama-Veda). The teacher of the *Gītā* is Śrīkrṣṇa, who is regarded by the Hindus as an avatāra or incarnation of God Himself. An ideal friend, a great statesman, an invincible warrior, a wise preceptor and a yogi par excellence, he harmonizes in his life the various conflicting activities of life. It is precisely this that makes him the fittest person to preach such a religio-spiritual classic. Arjuna, the recipient of the teaching, though himself a great warrior, is a typical representative of the humans, liable to be upset or confused during periods of crisis. Hence, his predicament, very much represents ours, in a similar situation. The questions, doubts and misgivings he raises and the solutions that Śrīkrṣṇa offers are not only relevant but also valid even today.

There is an additional reason too. The Hindu Vedāntic tradition has always regarded the Prasthānatraya (the three foundational works) as its basis; and the *Gītā* is one of them, the other two being the Upaniṣads and the Brahmasūtras. That is why Śaṅkara (A.D. 788-820) and other ancient teachers have chosen to write commentaries on it.

Date and Author

Since the *Gītā* is an integral part of the epic *Mahābhārata*, its date and authorship are obviously those of the epic itself. Krṣṇa Dvaipāyana, better known as Vedavyāsa, is reputed to be its author. As per the Hindu oral traditions based on their notion of time as the yuga-system, the Kurukṣetra war must have taken place during 3139 B.C. The dates given however by the modern historians (mostly of the West) vary from 1424 B.C. to 575 B.C. At the present stage of the research, it may be difficult to clinch the issue on such chronological matters.

A Résumé of the Contents

The widely accepted present text of the Gītā is based on the one chosen by Śaṅkara, the earliest of the traditional commentators. It consists of 700 ślokaś or verses spread over 18 chapters. The following is a brief summary of the book arranged chapterwise:

Chapter 1 (Arjuna-viṣāda-yoga, 47 verses):

Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king (father of the Kauravas) asks Sañjaya, his companion who had been endowed with divine sight to see and describe the war, to tell him as to what happened on the battle field. Sañjaya starts by telling how Duryodhana approaches Droṇācārya, the preceptor and describes the various warriors on both the sides. Just then, Bhīṣma, the grandsire and commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army blows his conch to indicate the commencement of the day's battle. This is followed by all the others including the Pāṇḍavas, blowing their respective conches. At the request of Arjuna, the Pāṇḍava hero, Śrīkṛṣṇa, his charioteer, brings his chariot and stations it in between the two armies, but right in front of Bhīṣma and Droṇa! Seeing them and observing all the others assembled there for the war, Arjuna sinks in horror and sorrow. He describes his pitiable condition to Śrīkṛṣṇa, argues against this fratricidal war by portraying its various evil consequences which will ultimately result in the total collapse of the socio-political system and sits down in the chariot abandoning his weapons.

Chapter 2 (Sāṅkhya-yoga, 72 verses):

Śrīkṛṣṇa at first tries to rouse Arjuna from this stupor by strongly admonishing him for his psychological collapse at a critical moment, his un-āryan and unmanly behaviour which does not befit a great warrior like him and urges him to bestir himself to action. Even such strong words fail to awaken him. He continues to sermonize on the evils of the war that involves the slaughter of even the respected ones, conveys his decision to retire, but in all humility, seeks his guidance. Then realizing that Arjuna's confusion and delusion have gone too deep to be dispelled by cursory replies, Śrīkṛṣṇa starts his immortal spiritual discourse aimed at curing his malady from the root itself by giving him a correct perspective of the whole picture, in fact, an entire philosophy of life. Arjuna is really sorrowing for those who should not be sorrowed for. All the people including those assembled on the battlefield are, in reality, immortal souls. Death or deterioration belongs only to the body and not to the soul or the spirit. Even supposing it is accepted that one is born with the body and dies with its death, there is no use lamenting it, since it is inevitable. Being a kṣātriya warrior on whose shoulders is cast the responsibility of defending dharma or righteousness, it is his sacred duty to fight and win, or, die for the cause on the battlefield. For a man like him, celebrated for valour, death is preferable to ignominy which will surely accrue to him if he withdraws from the battle now.

It is action motivated by selfishness that binds a man whereas when the same is performed without an eye to its fruits and with equanimity, it liberates. This is the 'buddhi' or 'yoga' or 'buddhi-yoga'. Then at Arjuna's request, Śrīkṛṣṇa describes the characteristics of the sthitaprajña or the man of steady spiritual wisdom as a model for Arjuna's emulation. The sthitaprajña has abandoned all desires, and is ever contented in his own Self. He is unmoved by pleasure and pain. He is free from attachment, fear or anger. He has absolute mastery over his senses. He is ever awake to the Highest Truth and is indifferent towards the world. He is well-established in the state of Brahman, even at the last moment of his life.

Chapter 3 (Karma-yoga, 43 verses):

Arjuna is confused about the relative importance of knowledge (buddhi or jñāna) and work (karma). Śrīkṛṣṇa clears the same by telling him of the existence of two royal paths since the days of yore: jñānayoga (the path of knowledge) and karmayoga (the path of action). Though the former needs renunciation of all action, very few are really capable of it. For most of the people, performance of one's duties with a controlled mind, for the good of the world, is the easier and the better path. The world-cycle as set in motion by the Creator needs everyone to do his allotted duties, so that it works smoothly. The path of work is in no way inferior since many great persons like Janaka in the ancient days, attained perfection through it alone. Leaders of society (like Arjuna) are expected to show the way to the less enlightened ones by doing their duties perfectly. By cultivating the right attitude towards work and by offering it to him (i.e., Śrīkṛṣṇa, who is God Himself) one is not tainted by it even while working. Doing one's own duty, however imperfect it may appear to be, is far better than the performance of others' duties, relinquishing one's own. What normally spoils one's work and even impels one to evil ways of life, is selfish desire as also anger. These two have to be conquered by subduing the senses and raising the mind to the level of ātman or the soul.

Chapter 4 (Jñānayoga,* 42 verses):

Śrīkṛṣṇa reminisces how he had given this yoga (Karmayoga) in ancient days to Vivasvān and he to Manu and Manu to Ikṣvāku, and how this tradition got lost over the years. Here Arjuna raises a doubt as to how Śrīkṛṣṇa of the present times could have taught it to most ancient teachers like Manu. Then Śrīkṛṣṇa tells Arjuna how both he and himself have taken many births, the only difference being that he knows all his past births whereas Arjuna does not. It is here that Śrīkṛṣṇa reveals that he is God Himself and how he incarnates himself whenever dharma (righteousness) declines and adharma (unrighteousness) gets the upper hand, in order to restore the balance. Anyone who understands the secret of his avatāra or incarnation will attain liberation. Being God Himself, He responds to his devotees as per their attitudes and prayers if they approach Him through knowledge and devotion. Incidentally Śrīkṛṣṇa reveals how he has divided the society into four varṇas or groups based upon the nature and vocation of the people. Then he further elucidates Karmayoga. As a part of the same, he describes the various types of yajñas or sacrifices thereby expanding the scope of the term. He avers that jñānayajña or knowledge-sacrifice is far superior to dravyamaya- yajña or sacrifices done with material objects. He then extols jñāna or spiritual wisdom and exhorts Arjuna to get it by approaching the great teachers, because works done with this background of jñāna will never bind.

Chapter 5 (Karma-saṁnyāsa-yoga,* 29 verses):

Arjuna, apparently confused, once again asks Śrīkṛṣṇa, which of the two- Karmasaṁnyāsa or Karmayoga-is better for him. Śrīkṛṣṇa says that though both will ultimately lead to niśśreyasa or beatitude, Karmayoga is to be preferred. It is only the ignorant that consider these two paths as different. The path of Karmasaṁnyāsa is difficult to practise without the aid of Karmayoga. One who works in the true spirit of Karmayoga is never tainted by those actions. The secret is equanimity born out of being established in God. Self-control is a great help in this.

Chapter 6 (Dhyānayoga, 47 verses):**

Śrīkṛṣṇa continues the exposition of the doctrines of saṁnyāsa and yoga, broached in the last chapter. One who discharges his ordained duties without being prompted by their fruits is a saṁnyāsi and a yogi. In fact, both saṁnyāsa and yoga are identical in the sense that renunciation of the fruits of action is common to both. Karma done in the right spirit leads to yoga or concentration which is further improved by renunciation of actions. Here, Śrīkṛṣṇa enunciates the great principle of self-help, since our mind can be our friend or our foe depending upon whether it is pure or impure. Then he describes the process of meditation. The yogi should sit in a clean place, keeping the body erect and steady. Controlling and gathering the forces of the mind, he should direct it towards Śrīkṛṣṇa (who is God Himself). Thus he will attain peace. Such yoga is possible only for a person who leads a balanced life, avoiding all extremes. Such a yogi will be able to see all beings in God and God in all beings. He of an equanimous mind is the best of yogis. Here Arjuna raises two questions: How to control this fickle mind? What will happen to a yogi who fails to attain the goal? Śrīkṛṣṇa replies that though it is difficult to control the mind, it is not impossible. It can be achieved by vairāgya (renunciation) and abhyāsa (practice). As regards the yogi who has slipped from the ideal, he will be born once again in the family of yogis and, getting a conducive atmosphere, strives even harder, ultimately attaining the goal. A yogi, he concludes, is superior to men of austerity or knowledge or works; and exhorts Arjuna to become one.

Chapter 7 (Jñāna-vijñāna-yoga, 30 verses):

How can one devoted to him (i.e., Śrīkṛṣṇa) and practising yoga, know him well? This is described now. Not all persons that attempt to attain perfection can get it. Only one in a million can really know him. This world is created by him out of his twofold prakṛti or nature: aparā-prakṛti or lower nature which is eightfold; and parā-prakṛti or the higher nature which is the jīva or individual soul. He holds all beings and objects of the created world from within like a thread holding the beads. He is in fact the best and the essence in all beings and things. His māyā, comprising the three guṇas (sattva, rajas and tamas) (which, incidentally is his aparā-prakṛti) can delude all and is difficult to overcome. Only those that totally surrender themselves to him can transcend it. The foolish and the evil ones do not surrender to him and hence will not attain him. As for his devotees, they are of four types: ārta (one afflicted), arthārthi (one desirous of worldly gains), jijñāsu (one interested in knowing him) and the jñāni (the knower). The last one is the best among them. People generally take recourse to different deities to fulfil their numerous desires. However, it is he (Śrīkṛṣṇa, the Supreme Lord) that grants their desires, through those forms. He the Supreme Lord, being enveloped by his own yogamāyā is not revealed to all. Only those who have performed good deeds and are sinless are devoted to him to get liberation.

Chapter 8 (Akṣarabrahmayoga,* 28 verses):

After explaining a few technical terms like brahma, adhyātma and karma, at the instance of Arjuna, Śrīkṛṣṇa describes how a person remembering him while passing out of the body will attain him. In fact, whatever be the deity that a dying person remembers at the last moment, he will attain to it. Hence Arjuna is advised to remember the Lord always and fight his battles of life. Then he describes abhyāsayoga or yoga of repeated practice of thinking of the Lord. The yogi who practises it, especially at the last moment of his life, will reach the Supreme Lord. The repetition of the syllable Om at this juncture is a great help. If a person departs from the body in this way, he will not come back to this mundane existence. Attaining other worlds through

meritorious deeds will be of no use since one has to return to this earth once again. Here Śrīkṛṣṇa mentions about the two well-known paths-Arcirādimārga (path of light) and Dhūmādimārga (path of smoke)-mentioned in the earlier works like the Upaniṣads. The former leads to Brahmāloka (the world of Brahmā) from which there is no return, whereas the latter leads to Piṭṛloka (the world of manes) from which one returns once again to the mortal world. A yogi who knows about these paths is never again deluded.

Chapter 9 (Rājavidyā-rājaguhya-yoga, 34 verses):

Promising to teach that esoteric wisdom which is easy to practise and by which Arjuna will attain liberation, Śrīkṛṣṇa continues the discourse. He as the unmanifest-power has pervaded the whole world. At the end of a cycle of creation, all beings enter into his prakṛti and are re-manifested at the beginning of the next cycle. This creation is done by his prakṛti under his supervision. Evil and foolish people look down upon him, who has come in the human form, not knowing his higher nature. The good and the noble ones, however, worship him with single-minded devotion. He is all-the various items of a sacrifice, the father, mother and sustainer of the universe, the goal and the Lord, the place of origin and dissolution. He is the sun that shines, the rain that pours. He is immortality as well as death. It is he who is propitiated through sacrifices. If people worship him only, are eternally devoted to him, then he will take over the responsibility of taking care of them. Those who worship other deities reach them, whereas those who worship him, come to him. However he is the Self of all these deities also. What really matters in worshipping him is devotion. He accepts even a leaf or a flower or water if offered with devotion and faith. He has no enemies nor friends. Even the worst sinner, once he realizes his mistakes and worships Śrīkṛṣṇa with devotion, becomes transformed into a righteous soul. Śrīkṛṣṇa solemnly declares that his devotee never perishes and advises Arjuna to be deeply devoted to him.

Chapter 10 (Vibhūtiyoga, 42 verses):

Śrīkṛṣṇa devotes this chapter almost entirely to the delineation of his divine manifestations. None -not even the various gods nor the sages-knows his greatness. All the great virtues have come out of him. The seven sages and the four Manus (progenitors of mankind) have originated from him. Men of wisdom worship him as the origin and energizer of the whole universe. Such devoted persons take pleasure in mutually conversing about him. To such persons, the Lord gives buddhiyoga or spiritual wisdom by which they attain him.

At this point Arjuna praises Śrīkṛṣṇa as Parabrahman, supreme light and purity. Recognizing his divinity Arjuna prays to him to enlighten him about his various manifestations in detail. Śrīkṛṣṇa in reply says that he is the Self in the hearts of all beings. He is Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Marīci and Candra. He is the Sāmaveda among the Vedas, Indra among the gods and consciousness in the living beings. He is Rudra, Kubera and Agni. He is Bṛhaspati, Bhṛgu, Oṅkāra and jāpayajña. He is Meru and Himālayas. He is Nārada, Ananta, Varuṇa, Yama as also Prahlāda and Rāma. He is spiritual knowledge and all-devouring death. He is Arjuna among the Pāṇḍavas. In fact he is the essence of all that is good or great and the whole universe, has been supported by a part of his glory.

Chapter 11 (Viśvarūpadarśana-yoga, 55 verses):

Arjuna's curiosity being roused by this, he requests Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa to show to him his divine form. The Lord endows him with a divine sight and reveals his Viśvarūpa or universal divine form. It is an extraordinary form with myriads of faces, ornaments and weapons. Decorated with divine garlands and garments, the wondrous cosmic form is more brilliant than a million suns. The whole world of variegated forms, constitutes only a small part of his being. Excited by wonder and joy, Arjuna starts praying to that Divinity. This beautiful prayer hymn of 17 verses gives a nice description of the Viśvarūpa or the cosmic form. All beings-divine, human and subhuman-are being seen in Him. He has several arms, bellies and faces. He is extraordinarily brilliant. He has pervaded the whole space. All beings like gods and sages, are praising Him with folded hands. The various heroes arrayed on the battle field are entering into Him and getting destroyed like moths in the fire. Gripped with fear and wonder, Arjuna prays to Him to reveal who He is. The Lord replies that He is Time, the eternal destroyer, come to annihilate the warriors in the enemy armies. Since this task will be achieved by Him even without Arjuna's involvement, the Lord advises Arjuna to fight, get victory and fame, and enjoy the kingdom. Arjuna once again prays to the Lord praising Him, and asking for forgiveness for having treated Him lightly during moments of intimate friendship. He then requests Him to withdraw the cosmic form and reappear in his usual human form. After doing so, Śrīkṛṣṇa tells him that his cosmic form cannot be seen by the study of the Vedas or performance of sacrifices or even austerity, but only by single-minded devotion.

Chapter 12 (Bhaktiyoga, 20 verses):

Arjuna now questions Śrīkṛṣṇa: 'Between those who for ever worship you with work and devotion, and those that contemplate the Unmanifest Reality, who are better?' Śrīkṛṣṇa replies that those who worship him with faith and devotion keeping their mind centered only in him are better. However, even those that control their senses and contemplate on the Unmanifest Reality, will ultimately reach him alone. Only, their path is more difficult and troublesome. Those who offer all their actions unto him and meditate on him with a concentrated mind, will cross over the ocean of saṃsāra (or transmigration) beset with death. He then advises Arjuna to establish his mind and intellect in him. Then he will live in him. If he cannot do it he should try to reach him through repeated practice, failing which he can try doing work for his sake. Even this will lead him to him. If even this becomes impossible he can just practise self-control and offer the fruits of all his actions unto him. Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa then describes the characteristics of a bhakta or an ideal devotee. He does not hate anyone. He is friendly to all. He is compassionate and free from egoism as also possessiveness. He is equanimous in pleasure and pain, ever forgiving and ever contented. Having mastered his passions he has dedicated his mind unto the Lord. He is never the cause of unrest for the world, nor can the world upset him. He is free from joy and anger, fear and anxiety. He is beyond pleasure and hatred, sorrow and desires, and has abandoned all actions, good or bad. He has devotion and looks upon friend and foe with an equal eye and is equanimous in honour and dishonour. Ever contented, having no particular place to lay his head, he has steadiness of mind. Such a devotee is ever dear to him. Such devotees who follow this immortal good with faith considering him as the Supreme goal of life are exceedingly dear to him.

Chapter 13 (Kṣetra-kṣetrajña-yoga,* 34 verses):

Continuing the spiritual discourse, Śrīkṛṣṇa now describes the kṣetra (the field) and the kṣetrajña (the knower of the field) the terms being used in a philosophic sense. The body is the kṣetra or the field and the Self or the soul is the kṣetrajña or the knower of the field. Details of the two have been described by the sages in several works. In the ultimate analysis, Śrīkṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord is the kṣetrajña in all the kṣetras. The five elements, ego-sense, intellect, sense-organs, mind, objects of senses, pleasure and pain-all these belong to the kṣetra. Jñāna or knowledge consists in cultivating certain virtues like humility, simplicity, nonviolence, uprightness, service to the preceptor, purity, self-control, detachment, absence of egoism, equanimity and devotion to Śrīkṛṣṇa, the Lord. Resorting to lonely places, shunning crowds, steady devotion to spiritual wisdom-these also help in getting jñāna or knowledge.

Then follows a description of the jñeya, that which is to be known, viz., Brahman, by knowing which one gets immortality. It is without beginning and cannot be defined as either existence or non-existence. It has its hands, feet, eyes, ears and faces everywhere. It pervades everything. Though it reveals itself through the functions of the senses, it is without sense-organs. It is inside and outside of all beings. It is the light of lights; it is knowledge as well as the known and is established in the hearts of all.

Prakṛti (nature, the kṣetra) and puruṣa (the being, kṣetrajña) are both beginningless. Puruṣa, being stationed in prakṛti experiences pleasure and pain born out of the guṇas. It is attachment to the guṇas that causes transmigration in good or bad births. One who knows the puruṣa and the prakṛti thus will transcend rebirth. Those who realize the ātman (the puruṣa) through the pure mind or through Jñānayoga or Karmayoga will transcend death. All objects in this world have been created out of the conjunction of kṣetra and kṣetrajña. Parameśvara, the Supreme Lord, exists in all without distinction. One who realizes this fact attains the final goal of life. It is prakṛti or nature that acts whereas the Self, though stationed in the body, never acts nor gets tainted, even as the sky. The kṣetrajña (the knower, the Self) illumines the kṣetra (the body) with consciousness like the sun illumining the whole world. Those who can intuit the difference between the two -the kṣetra and the kṣetrajña-will attain Brahman.

Chapter 14 (Guṇatrāya-vibhāga-yoga, 27 verses):

Śrīkṛṣṇa now promises to expound para-jñāna or the highest knowledge by attaining which the sages got perfection. Creation proceeds as a result of the placing of the seed by Him (the Lord) in the mahat-prakṛti or nature. He is the father of all beings and mahat prakṛti is the mother. This prakṛti gives rise to the three guṇas-sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva is pure and bright, produces pleasure and knowledge, and binds the soul through them. Rajas is of the nature of passion, produces desire and attachment and binds the embodied soul through action. Tamas, born out of ignorance, deludes beings through inadvertence, sloth and sleep. Sattva creates attachment for happiness, rajas for actions and tamas, covering knowledge, binds one to inadvertence. The three guṇas are constantly acting on one another. The rise of sattva can be inferred by the rise of jñāna or knowledge, of rajas by the rise of greed and activity and of tamas by the rise of inadvertence and delusion. Death at the time when sattva is on the ascendant takes one to the pure realms. Ascendance of rajas and tamas at the time of death leads one to birth in the families of those addicted to actions and in subhuman bodies. Anyone who realizes that it is the guṇas that act and knows the Self untouched by them, attains to my being.

At this point Arjuna desires to know the characteristics of the guṇātīta, or one who has transcended the guṇas. Śrīkṛṣṇa replies that one who is unmoved by the effects of the three guṇas (like knowledge or action or delusion) is a guṇātīta. He is indifferent to the activities of the guṇas. He is equanimous in sorrow or happiness, looks upon a clod of earth or stone or gold as of equal worth, is unmoved by the pleasant and the unpleasant or by praise or blame. He is the same to enemies and friends. He abandons all undertakings. He serves me (the Lord) with undeviating love. Such a one is a guṇātīta and becomes fit to attain Brahman.

Chapter 15 (Puruṣottama-yoga, 20 verses):

Śrīkṛṣṇa now describes saṁsāra or the created world, comparing it to an inverted tree. Its root which is above is Brahman, the Absolute. The three guṇas are its branches, the Vedas its leaves and the Vedic rituals are its subsidiary roots. They have spread out below. However, it is not seen as such. Neither its origin, nor its end, nor its middle can be discerned. One has to cut this tree by the weapon of detachment and search for that by reaching which, there is no return to mundane existence. One has to take refuge in that Primeval person from which this tree of saṁsāra has emanated. Only those bereft of egoism, delusion and attachment, who are free from desires and pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain, who are devoted to the Lord, can attain that eternal abode. Neither the sun nor the moon nor the fire can light up that abode. After reaching it, there is no return. Now, coming to the jīva or the individual soul: He is a small part of the Supreme Lord and eternal. While being born here, he attracts to himself the mind and the five organs of knowledge. While leaving the body, he takes them away with him even as wind carries away smell. The jīva enjoys the sense objects through these sense-organs and the mind. He is too subtle to be perceived by the ignorant whereas the wise do perceive him. The yogis striving for perfection succeed in seeing him.

Then Śrīkṛṣṇa adds: "I am the Lord, the light of lights. It is I that supports the earth and I that sustains vegetation through the moon. It is again I that is responsible for the digestive process in the body, as the Vaiśvānara fire. I am the spirit established in the hearts of all. I am the one sought by the Vedas. I am the creator of the Vedānta.

"In this world there are two puruṣas or beings, the kṣara (the perishable) and the akṣara (the imperishable). But I am the Paramātmān, (the Supreme Self), the Puruṣottama (the Being par excellence), different and distinct from them and pervading all the three worlds. Whoever realizes me as such, he becomes omniscient and worships me in all respects."

Chapter 16 (Daivāsura-sampad-vibhāga-yoga, 24 verses):

Śrīkṛṣṇa now proceeds to delineate those traits of character that make a person divine or demoniac, since the former leads to liberation whereas the latter leads to bondage. The list of daivī-sampat (divine traits) comprises 26 qualities, the chief ones being: fearlessness, purity of mind, self-control, Vedic studies, austerity, non-violence, truth, spirit of renunciation, compassion, forgiveness and absence of pride. The other list, of the āsurī-sampat (demoniac traits) consists of six vices: hypocrisy, vainglory, egoism, anger, harsh speech and ignorance of higher values.

Then proceeds a long but interesting description of the demoniac or evil persons and their way of life. They know neither the performance of good works nor the need to withdraw from the evil ones. They have neither purity nor truth. They consider kāma or lust as the sole

cause of creation. Being addicted to it, they out of delusion, try to get unholy things. They boast about their wealth or works and exult in destroying their enemies. They dislike the Lord who is the Self of all beings. Such persons are thrown by me (i.e., Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa) into abominable births.

The gateway to hell that ultimately causes self- destruction is threefold: lust, anger and greed. One who is free from these attains the highest abode. For this, one needs to act according to the Vedas and the śāstras (holy books) but with śraddhā or faith.

Chapter 17 (Śraddhātraya-vibhāga-yoga, 28 verses):

Arjuna now raises an interesting question: Whether the śraddhā (faith) of the people who worship the various deities, but without following the injunctions of the śāstras (holy books), is sāt̥tvik, rājasik or tāmasik. Śrīkṛṣṇa replies that such śraddhā can be anyone of these three, depending upon the nature of such persons, their mental make-up. The sāt̥tvik persons worship gods, the rājasik ones worship the demigods like yakṣas and rākṣasas, whereas the tāmasik ones try to appease the bhūtas or the lower spirits.

Like śraddhā or faith, āhāra or food also is of three types; so also yajña (sacrifice), tapas (austerity) and dāna (gifts). Food conducive to health, strength and purity of mind, and is pleasant is sāt̥tvika. Foods that are very bitter, sour or saltish, pungent and produce diseases are rājasik. Old and stale food, food that has lost its taste and flavour, petrified, spoiled and impure is tāmasik.

Yajña (sacrifice) done as a duty and according to the injunctions of the śāstras or scriptures is sāt̥tvik. If done with show and pomp, and for the fruits thereof, it is rājasik. The tāmasik one is bereft of all the prescribed rules, is done without śraddhā or faith and lacks in respect of mantras (Vedic chants) and dakṣiṇā (gifts).

Tapas or austerity is of three types-śārīra, vāñmaya and mānasa (pertaining to the body, speech and mind respectively). Worship of gods, brāhmaṇas and preceptors as also observing purity and continence, is tapas of the body. Truthful and unoffensive speech as also the study of one's branch of the Vedas is tapas of the speech. Peace of mind, control of thoughts and speech, and a pleasant demeanor is tapas of the mind. When this threefold tapas is performed with faith and without the desire for its fruits, it is sāt̥tvik. If it is done in an ostentatious manner for name and fame, it is rājasik. If done without regard to one's capacity and for harming others it is tāmasik.

Dāna or gifts given as a matter of duty to persons of the right type and in the right manner belong to the sāt̥tvik type. If given with the desire for future rewards and not very willingly, it becomes rājasik. Gifts given in disdain to unworthy persons transgressing the rules, are tāmasik.

Then Śrīkṛṣṇa declares that the three words `Om tat sat' which form a threefold designation for Brahman, act like a magic formula if uttered during yajña (sacrifices), tapas (austerities) and dāna (giving gifts), correcting all the deficiencies if any.

Chapter 18 (*Mokṣa-saṁnyāsa-yoga*, 78 verses):

This is the last and the longest chapter dealing with miscellaneous topics and concluding the whole discourse.

Arjuna expresses a desire to know the truth about saṁnyāsa and tyāga. In reply, Śrīkṛṣṇa says that according to some, saṁnyāsa is renunciation of all desire-motivated actions; whereas tyāga is the renunciation of the fruits of all actions. While some feel that karma or action must be given up since all karmas are defective, others feel that karmas like yajña (sacrifice), dāna (gifts) and tapas (austerity) must not be abandoned. My own view, Śrīkṛṣṇa avers, is that tyāga is of three types, and that yajña (sacrifice), dāna (gifts) and tapas (austerity) must not be abandoned. They are purificatory rites and must be performed without attachment and desire for their fruits. It is not proper to give up ordained actions, out of delusion or because they are troublesome to perform. It is not possible for an embodied being to give up actions entirely. He alone is a tyāgi who has renounced the desire for the fruits of actions. Results of karma, good or bad or mixed, will not affect the saṁnyāsins (men of renunciation).

Every action has five causes like the body and speech; and it is foolish to consider the ātman (the self) as the doer. One who does actions without the sense of doership and with an untainted mind is never bound by them.

Then Śrīkṛṣṇa proceeds to describe jñāna (knowledge), karma (action) and kartā (the doer) as per the three guṇas. Sāttvik jñāna enables one to see the same ātman (Self) in all. Sāttvik karma is that prescribed by the holy books and done without attachment and aversion. Sāttvik kartā is he who is free from egoism and attachment, is endowed with enthusiasm and is unaffected by success or failure.

Rājasik jñāna makes a person see multiplicity of souls. Rājasik karma is performed with egoism and an eye on the fruits. Rājasik kartā is full of greed, attachment, impurity and violence.

Tāmasik jñāna forces a person to be deeply attached to one work, that too which is trivial, out of ignorance. Tāmasik karma entails a lot of violence, involves loss of energy and wealth, and is undertaken without proper reflection about the future results. Tāmasik kartā has no mental balance or culture, is vain and deceitful, lazy and melancholic.

Buddhi (intellect) and dhṛti (fortitude) are also of three varieties. Sāttvik buddhi is aware of bondage and liberation. Rājasik buddhi is that which is unable to understand dharma (righteousness) and adharma (unrighteousness) properly. Tāmasik buddhi understands everything in the wrong way. Sāttvik dhṛti helps in self-control. Rājasik dhṛti makes one to be selfishly attached to things. Tāmasik dhṛti impels one towards sleep, fear and vanity.

Then comes sukha or happiness, of three kinds. That which appears unpleasant in the beginning but gives happiness at the end, after a long practice leading to the mind being established in the ātman (Self) is sāttvik. Happiness got by sense-contact with sense-objects, which appears pleasant in the beginning but ends up in disaster, is rājasik. Tāmasik happiness causes delusion and induces laziness.

There is nothing in the three worlds that is not free from the effect of these guṇas.

Then follows a description of the four varṇas or groups into which the society is divided: brāhmaṇas, kṣātriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras. The brāhmaṇas are devoted to austerity and selfcontrol, and acquisition of spiritual wisdom. The kṣātriyas are valorous, steadfast and expert in work. They are heroes in war and efficient rulers in peace. The vaiśyas take to agriculture and commerce, whereas the śūdras live by service to others. All of them have taken to these karmas or vocations in accordance with their svabhāva or inborn nature. All of them, by worshiping the Lord through the devoted performance of their duties, can attain spiritual perfection. That is why one should never forsake one's duties even if they appear to be imperfect or defective.

One who has controlled his body, speech and mind, lives in a secluded place and practises meditation on the Self, will become fit to attain the state of Brahman. Such a one, able to see the same Lord in all, obtains intense devotion to me (i.e., Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa). Through such devotion he understands me truly and enters into me.

Now Śrīkṛṣṇa assures Arjuna that by doing all actions and offering them unto him he will attain the eternal abode, after having crossed over all difficulties. In case he does not listen to this advice, he will perish. It is egoism that is prompting Arjuna to say, 'I will not fight!' However, his very nature as a kṣātriya will force him to fight, falsifying his resolve.

Īśvara or the Supreme Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings. You better take refuge in him, says Śrīkṛṣṇa, by all means, and you will get infinite peace and the highest abode.

After giving this esoteric wisdom, Śrīkṛṣṇa now declares: 'You do as you please!' Then again, he urges him to be totally devoted and dedicated to him by renouncing all dharmas (merits and demerits or penances). He (the Supreme Lord) will free him from all sorrows and will take over his responsibility.

The discourse ends with the usual advice that this esoteric and sacred knowledge should not be given to unworthy persons bereft of austerity and devotion, but to those endowed with devotion to the Lord. Even a study of this discourse endears one to Him.

Now Arjuna declares that his doubts and delusion are gone and that he will implement Śrīkṛṣṇa's command.

Saṅjaya confesses his great joy for having been lucky enough to hear this wondrous discourse and for having seen the cosmic form. He declares that wherever Śrīkṛṣṇa, the yogeśvara (Lord of Yoga) and Arjuna, the dhanurdhāri (wielder of the bow) are, there success, wealth and eternal good will accrue.

Philosophy of the Bhagavadgītā

The Indian philosophical systems, known as 'darśanas,' generally treat their subject under four major headings:

1. The cause of the universe.
2. Creation or evolution of the universe.
3. Nature of the individual.
4. Goal of human life and the means of achieving it.

Though the *Bhagavadgītā* is not a systematic treatise on philosophy, it is possible to deal with its subject matter under these headings. It may not be out of place to mention here that the colophon

given at the end of each chapter of the *Gītā* viz., Upaniṣad, Brahmavidyā and Yogaśāstra, reflects its contents very well. It is an 'Upaniṣad' or esoteric wisdom given by the teacher to a disciple on request. It is 'Brahmavidyā,' since it deals with Brahman, the Absolute. It is also 'Yogaśāstra,' since it delineates yoga or the practical disciplines that help an aspirant to attain spiritual wisdom, the goal of life.

Śrīkṛṣṇa has been venerated and worshiped as God Himself, come down as a human being, to save mankind and re-direct it in the path of dharma or righteousness. In the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata*, as also here in the *Gītā* itself, Śrīkṛṣṇa often identifies himself with God and speaks with indisputable authority. While studying the philosophy of the *Gītā*, it is necessary to keep this fact in mind.

The *Gītā* compares the created universe to an inverted tree with its roots above, established in God (15.1-4). The more popular view of the mythological lore that Brahmā (the four-faced Creator) creates the world during his 'day' and withdraws it into himself during his 'night' is also referred to (8.17-19). The various terms used to indicate the Supreme or God are: Parabrahma (13.12), Paramātmā (13.22, 31), Uttamapuruṣa or Puruṣottama (15.17-19), Īśvara (15.17; 18.61), Kṣetrajña (13.2), and Parameśvara (13.27).

God has a twofold prakṛti or nature. The aparā or the lower one is insentient and comprises these eight: the five elements like earth and water, manas(mind), buddhi (intellect) and ahaṅkāra (egoism). The parā or the higher one consists of the innumerable jīvas or souls. Creation proceeds out of the combination of these two. It is under his direction that prakṛti gives birth to all beings and things. He is the sole origin and place of dissolution of this universe (7.4-6; 9.7). The whole universe is supported by him even as the beads of a necklace are supported by the string on which they are strung (7.7). As Avyakta or the unmanifest, he has pervaded the whole universe (9.4). That is why he is the essence of all, in this creation (10.41).

God is not only transcendent and immanent (18.61), he can also incarnate himself as a human being, whenever dharma or righteousness declines, in order to restore its balance. He does it out of his own free will. By his māyā-power, and subjugating his prakṛti, he creates a body for himself (4.6-8).

As incarnation, the personal aspect of the Impersonal, God is more easily approachable through devotion (9.26). He responds in whatever way people approach him (4.11; 7.21-23). His devotee never gets perished (9.31). Those who surrender to him will easily cross over māyā (the delusive power of God), which is otherwise impossible to cross (7.14). He takes over their entire responsibility even here in this world (9.22). That is why he constantly urges Arjuna to cultivate devotion to him and surrender to him (9.34; 11.55; 18.65, 66).

The jīva or the individual soul is an important aspect of this creation. He is a part of God (15.7). He is the higher aspect of his nature, parāprakṛti (7.5). He is essentially unborn, indestructible and eternal (2.17-25). He takes on bodies like garments and then discards them, to take new ones (2.22). While doing so, he draws to himself the five sense organs and the mind from the aparā-prakṛti or the lower prakṛti (*vide* 7.4, 5) and transmigrates with them. He is deluded by ajñāna or ignorance which covers jñāna or knowledge (5.15).

The goal of life is to reach the Lord's Abode from which there is no return to this mundane existence (8.16; 5.17; 15.6). This state has been variously called as brahmanirvāṇa (dissolution into Brahman-2.72; 5.24), brāhmīsthiti (being established in Brahman-2.72), saṁsiddhi (perfection-8.15; 18.45), parāgati (highest state,-6.45; 8.13, 21; 9.32; 13.28; 16.22) and attaining Śrīkṛṣṇa Himself (4.9, 10;

5.29; 7.3, 18, 23, 30; 8.5, 7, 14, 15, 16; 9.28, 34; 10.10; 11.55; 12.4, 9; 18.55). The ancient Upaniṣadic idea of the jīva reaching Brahmāloka by the Arcirādi-mārga or the path of light, has also been mentioned by the *Gītā* (8.24-26). Since it is ajñāna or ignorance that is responsible for transmigration, it can be erased only by jñāna or spiritual wisdom which alone can accomplish it (4.35-39; 5.16-17).

Acquisition of this jñāna has to be preceded by spiritual disciplines that help in purifying the mind. Indriyanigraha or control of the sense-organs is one of the most important disciplines often referred to (2.58, 60, 61, 64, 68; 3.34, 41; 5.22, 23; 6.4, 24; 12.4). Tapas or austerity (16.1; 17.14-16; 18.5), ekāgratā or concentration (6.12), temperance (6.16,17) and other disciplines including the performance of one's duties with the right attitude have also been recommended. But devotion to the Lord and surrendering to him have been highly extolled (7.21; 8.10, 22; 9.14, 26, 29, 31; 11.54; 12.17, 20; 13.10; 14.26; 18.55).

There are three beautiful descriptions of the perfect being, who has reached the final goal of life: the sthitaprajña or the man of steady wisdom (2.55-72), the bhakta or the devotee (12.13-20) and the guṇātīta or one who has transcended the three guṇas (14.22-27).

The sthitaprajña (man of steady wisdom) is bereft of all desires. He is unmoved by the pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain, attachment and aversion. He is capable of withdrawing his sense-organs from the sense-objects effortlessly. He is the supreme master of himself. He can wield his sense-organs among the sense-objects without being affected by them. He is ever awake to the ātman, the Reality, within himself. He is free from egoism and possessiveness, and hence ever filled with peace. This state is called 'brāhmīsthiti,' the state of being established in Brahman.

The bhakta or the ideal devotee who is ever dear to God, is free from inimical thoughts towards all beings. He has nothing but friendliness and compassion for them. He has neither egoism nor attachment. He is ever equanimous and contented. Having controlled the senses and the mind, he has totally dedicated them to God, out of devotion. He is never upset by the people nor are they agitated by him. Bereft of desires, pure to the core and expert in the field of work, he has yet renounced all selfish works. Deeply devoted to God, indifferent to praise and blame, unaffected by the vagaries of the weather and having no fixed place of dwelling, the bhakta is extremely dear to the Lord.

The guṇātīta (one beyond the three guṇas) is ever unaffected by the experiences brought about by the three guṇas, like knowledge or happiness or delusion. He knows that the guṇas as senses act upon the guṇas as objects and that he as the Self is beyond them. He looks upon happiness and misery, wealth and worthless objects, praise and blame, with equipoise. He never undertakes desire-motivated actions, but ever serves God through devotion.

Special Contribution of the *Gītā* to Indian Philosophical Thought

Though the *Gītā* has been reputed to contain the essence of the teachings of the Upaniṣads* and is considered to be one of the three basic scriptures of Vedānta (prasthānatraya) there is no gainsaying the fact that it has charted new avenues in the Indian philosophical literature, previously unknown or unexpressed. The work presents us with three original doctrines: A. The doctrine of niṣkāma-karma-yoga (or the yoga of desireless action), with the allied concepts of svadharma and lokasaṅgraha; B. The doctrine of integral yoga as a comprehensive mode of sādhanā (or spiritual discipline); and, C. The doctrine of avatāra (descent of God into the human form or the theory of incarnation of God).

a. The Doctrine of Niṣkāmakarmayoga:

At the time of Śrīkṛṣṇa, two major streams of thought, resulting in two different views and ways of life existed. On one side was the philosophy of abhyudaya or worldly well-being with its inordinate emphasis on yajñas and yāgas, sacrificial rites and rituals, by which one could get everything in life, here and hereafter. Since this involved a lot of time, energy and money, and since the results were considered too petty, the reaction came in the form of the doctrine of niśśreyasa or the highest good, put forward by the sages of the Upaniṣads, who advocated a life of renunciation of all actions except those needed for the bare sustenance of life, coupled with mendicancy and contemplation on the ātman (the Self) within.

By their very nature, these two views and ways were restricted to the brāhmaṇa-kṣattriya combine, at least, to the more affluent and the more rigorous amongst them. As a result, the majority of the people were left in the lurch, though imbued with higher spiritual aspirations. It is here that Śrīkṛṣṇa's doctrine of niṣkāma-karma-yoga becomes relevant and extremely useful.

Being a wise and sensible leader, Śrīkṛṣṇa accepts the tradition of sacrifices as it existed then, but shows the way to transform it or even transcend it. Since Prajāpati created the system of yajña or sacrifice as a link between human beings and gods, they are expected to prosper only by mutual help and co-operation (3.10, 11). But a yajña or sacrifice need not be only that done in a duly consecrated fire. Any act of an individual involving sacrifice of selfishness and done for the public good can also be a yajña (*vide* 4.25-30).

After defining samnyāsa as the renunciation of all kāmya-karmas or desire-motivated actions, and tyāga as the abandonment of sarvakarma-phala or the fruits of actions (18.2), Śrīkṛṣṇa rules out the renunciation of actions like yajña (sacrificial rites), dāna (giving gifts) and tapas (austerity) since they purify the mind (18.5). Even they are to be performed without attachment and the desire for the fruits, as a matter of duty. What really binds one is not work itself, but the selfish desire for its fruits thereof (*vide* 9.20, 21). Since work is inevitable for an embodied being (3.5, 8; 18.11) it is better to accept the fact gracefully and perform it with self-control (3.7), as a yajña or sacrifice (3.9) and giving up the desire for fruits thereof (3.19; 12.11). One who performs actions thus is both a samnyāsi and a yogi (6.1). Alternatively, one can perform actions for the sake of God and offer the fruits also to him (12.6, 10, 11; 11.55; 5.10-12). It is necessary to perform actions even from the standpoint of lokasaṅgraha or guiding the people on the right path (3.20, 25) which is the bounden duty of the leaders of the society.

Work done in the right spirit, thus, can also lead to mokṣa (liberation) or perfection. It is in no way less effective than jñāna or knowledge. Many a great one in the past, like Janaka, attained perfection through the path of action alone (3.19.20; 4.15, 23,41; 5.5, 6, 12; 8.7; 9.27, 28; 12.12; 18.45, 46, 56). Not only that, such persons, including Śrīkṛṣṇa himself, continued to live in the society and work, to set an example to the unenlightened ones, as to perfection in work, which also will lead to beatitude (3.21-26).

Arjuna was a sincere seeker after spiritual wisdom. He was not interested in sakāma karma or desire-motivated actions. However, he was not qualified to tread the path of jñāna (knowledge) which entails renunciation of all actions. That is why Śrīkṛṣṇa declares that Arjuna has the competence only to work; and not to renouncing it; but he should do so without reference to the fruits thereof (2.47).

Closely associated with this, is the idea of `svadharma,' `dharma' or duties that are `sva' or one's own, accruing to one by one's nature and nurture, and, ordained by the scriptures. It goes without saying that `svadharma' must be `dharma' (righteous) first! Such svadharma should never be abandoned. If performed, it brings in great good; if abandoned, sin (2.31-33). However imperfect it may appear, it is far better to die performing it than to do paradharma or someone else's dharma which is unsuitable (3.35). One who acts according to svadharma will never be tainted by its effects (18.47). There is no doubt that the performance of svadharma in the right spirit will lead to perfection (18.45, 46).

b. The Doctrine of Integral Yoga:

As already stated, the colophon of the *Gītā* calls it as a `yoga-śāstra.' `Yoga' is a technical term which means union with God as also the spiritual discipline that leads to such union.

Though yoga is one, taking into consideration the different types of human minds-the active, the philosophical, the emotional and the psychic-it has branched off into four paths: Karmayoga, the path of work, for the active; Jñānayoga, the path of knowledge, for the philosophical; Bhaktiyoga, the path of devotion, for the emotional and Rājayoga, the path of psychic control, for the psychic. Each of these yogas opens upon the infinite horizon of Truth and effects union with God. The *Gītā* describes them all.

Śrīkṛṣṇa has used the word `yoga' in several senses. For instance, it is Karmayoga that is meant in 2.48,50 and 6.2. However, in 6.12 and 15 it is Rājayoga that is indicated. In 5.8 the word `yukta' has been used to signify the jñānayogi. Again, it is the bhaktiyogi that is implied by the word `nityayukta' in 8.14.

Keeping in mind the fact that Śrīkṛṣṇa has taught all the four yogas to one and the same person, Arjuna, urging him to follow them, it can be safely concluded that the yoga of the *Gītā* is a comprehensive spiritual discipline integrating into itself all the four aspects. However, since Arjuna's svabhāva or nature was such that Karmayoga was better suited to him, Śrīkṛṣṇa relentlessly urges him to fight (2.18; 3.30; 11.34).

The inference is obvious: The *Gītā* urges an aspirant to practise a balanced combination of all the four yogas, keeping that yoga which suits one's nature better, as the main discipline and adding the others too in the right proportion. Since no human being has only one of the four faculties mentioned earlier, but all the four, though in varying proportions, this deduction is reasonable.

c. The Doctrine of Avatāra:

The doctrine of avatāra or incarnation of God is another, original, contribution of the *Gītā* to Indian philosophical and religious literature. The avatāra concept is, perhaps, suggested in the *Rgveda* (3.53.8; 6.47.18) itself. Some of the avatāras mentioned in the purāṇas in the lists of daśāvatāras (ten incarnations of Viṣṇu) are met with in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.8.1.1-6; 1.2.5.1). However, it is only here, in the *Gītā*, that the concept is more definite and clear.

When Śrīkṛṣṇa mentions that the yoga which he taught to Vivasvān (Sun-god) and transmitted by him to Manu was lost in course of time, Arjuna naturally questions him out of

unbelief how a contemporary person like him could have taught a person who lived in hoary antiquity (4.1-4). It is then that Śrīkr̥ṣṇa reveals the truth of both of them passing through many births.

Whereas Arjuna underwent those births helplessly due to prārabdhā-karma (residual karma, responsible for rebirth) and did not know about them, Śrīkr̥ṣṇa being the Supreme Lord Himself, voluntarily and willingly accepted these births for a higher purpose.

It is dharma or righteousness that is the principle regulating the smooth working of the created world. Since the created world is a product of the three guṇas-sattva, rajas and tamas-which are constantly in a state of flux, it is but natural that each one of them gets the upper hand periodically. Whenever sattva goes down and rajas or tamas comes up, dharma declines and adharma (evil) gets the upper hand. At such critical periods of human history, the Supreme Lord decides to incarnate himself in a human frame to restore the balance. Though he is unborn, eternal and the Lord of all beings, he can and does 'come down' (avataraṇa = coming down) by taking recourse to his māyā-power (also called prakṛti or nature) (4.6, 7). The primary purpose of the avatāra is dharma-saṁsthāpana or establishing dharma on a firm foundation. In the process, if need be, he will destroy or chastise the wicked and thereby protect the good (4.8).

This descent of the Divine into the human frame can take place anywhere and anytime, the sole condition being the decline of dharma and the ascent of adharma (4.7) to the extent of rendering the good people absolutely helpless, and at the mercy of the evil ones.

There is an added assurance given by Śrīkr̥ṣṇa that one who is able to understand the significance of his birth and work as an avatāra, will attain liberation (4.9).

Of course, in a number of places, he urges Arjuna to cultivate devotion to him, to meditate upon him and to work for him (9.34; 11.55; 18.65), the finale being the command to surrender totally unto him, with the pledge to free him from all sins (18.66).

Commentaries

Being a part of the prasthānatraya and thus accorded a very high place in the religio-philosophical tradition of India, the *Gītā* has attracted the attention of several ancient and medieval teachers who have written commentaries and glosses on it in Sanskrit. In the Advaita Vedānta tradition, Śaṅkara (A.D. 788-820) comes first. In fact, his is the earliest of the extant commentaries. Rāmānuja (A.D. 1017-1137), Madhva (A.D. 1197-1276), Nimbārka (12th century A.D.) and Vallabha (A.D. 1473-1531) are the other great ācāryas or teachers who have written commentaries on the *Gītā*. ānandagiri (A.D. 1200), Vedānta Deśika (A.D. 1268-1370) and Jayatīrtha (13th cent. A.D.) have written glosses on the commentaries of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva respectively. Mention may also be made of the commentaries of Śrīdhara (15th cent. A.D.), Madhusūdana (A.D. 1500), Nīlakaṇṭha (16th cent. A.D.) and Rāghavendra (A.D. 1598-1671) who have made some original contributions to the *Gītā* literature.

Conclusion

The *Bhagavadgītā* is one of the most translated religious classics of the world. The beauty and the sublimity of the work, its eternal relevance to the problem of human life and its universal approach that helps us view the whole of creation as one, may have prompted the scholars to undertake the task of translating it as a labour of love or admiration.

Though part of the great epic *Mahābhārata*, it can as well stand on its own as an independent work. Though taught on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, urging Arjuna to fight, it has nothing to do with wars or battles or bloodshed, but only with the discharging of one's sacred duties of life, however unpleasant they may be. Though given by Śrīkṛṣṇa to Pārtha or Arjuna in the days of yore, its declarations like, 'Remember Me and fight!' (8.7) can help and inspire anyone of us, beleaguered with serious problems in life, even now. Though recognizing multiplicity here, its principle of unity in diversity as signified by the *Viśvarūpa* or the cosmic form (11.9-13) and the underlying divinity as taught in 7.7, help us to cultivate a holistic approach to the whole universe of which the much talked of ecological balance too is only a small aspect.

If the *Mahābhārata* can claim to be an encyclopaedia of Hindu religion and culture, the *Bhagavadgītā* can as well claim to be its quintessence. That is why Hindu tradition compares the *Mahābhārata* to a lamp and the *Gītā* to the light in it.

The Upaniṣads

om īśā vāsyamidagaṃ sarvaṃ yatkiñca jagatyaṃ jagatetena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā grdhaḥ kasyasviddhanam

All this-whatsoever moves on the earth-should be covered by the Lord. Protect (your Self) through that detachment. Do not covet anybody's wealth. (Or-Do not covet, for whose is wealth?)

Īsopaniṣad (1)

yathā nadyaḥ syandamānāḥ samudre' staṃ gacchanti nāmarūpe vihāyaetathā vidvānnāmarūpādvimuktaḥ parātparam puruṣamupaiti divyam

As rivers, flowing down, become indistinguishable on reaching the sea by giving up their names and forms, so also the illumined soul, having become freed from name and form, reaches the self-effulgent *Puruṣa* that is higher than the higher (*māyā*).

Muṇḍakopaniṣad (3.2.8)

General Introduction

If there is one mass of scriptures that has inspired and sustained the Hindus over the millennia, it is the Upaniṣads. By advocating the ultimate triumph of the spirit over matter, of man over nature, the Upaniṣads have created, strengthened and preserved a great tradition of spirituality. This they have done, not only by a fearless spirit of inquiry to its logical conclusions, but also by intuitive mystical experiences beyond the ken of the intellect, these experiences almost always converging to a unitive principle. No school of thought, no religious movement, of the subsequent periods in the history of India has remained untouched by their influence, if not pervaded by them. In fact, many of these schools and movements could gain respectability or acceptance only because they tread the path lighted up by the Upaniṣads.

Research scholars of Indian thought have discovered the influence of the Upaniṣads on the religio-cultural life of other nations far beyond the boundaries of India, whether it is Japan, China and Korea in the East or Central Asia in the West.

Hindu religious tradition has always accorded the Upaniṣads the status of the highest authority since it has unquestioningly been accepted as Śruti, the Revealed Word.

Meaning of the Word `Upaniṣad'

The word `Upaniṣad' is derived from the verbal root *sad* which has several meanings: loosening, movement and annihilation. Putting all these three senses together, the word `Upaniṣad' refers to that divine knowledge or wisdom which loosens the bonds of saṁsāra (transmigratory existence) of a being, annihilates his ajñāna or ignorance of his real nature and leads him to Brahman or God, the Absolute. The book or the scriptural work that teaches this wisdom is also called `Upaniṣad'.

The word may also mean `sitting devotedly near'. Hence it represents the `secret teaching, of spiritual wisdom' imparted in private to worthy pupils, but jealously guarded from the unworthy ones.

Date of Composition

The orthodox view is that the Upaniṣads are Revealed Word. They are revealed by God himself at the commencement of each cycle of creation to the worthy few. Hence they are eternal.

However, treating them as books of spiritual wisdom, can we assign any date or period, in relation to human history as known till now? Attempts in this direction have rather been frustrating, thanks to that peculiar trait of the Hindu mind which accords much greater importance to the principle than to the person or the period.

The Upaniṣads have been an integral part of the Vedas. Hence, a date assigned to them can as well hold good for the Upaniṣads also. The date of the *Ṛgveda* has varied from 4500 B. C. (B. G. Tilak) and 2400 B. C. (Hang) to 1200 B. C. (Max Muller). Modern European scholars assign the period 700 B.C. -600 B. C. to the Upaniṣads assuming a gradual evolution of the philosophical ideas from the period of the Vedic hymns to that of the āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads. B. G. Tilak, on the basis of an astronomical data provided in the *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad*, has however, assigned 1900 B. C. as the date of that Upaniṣad.

Hence, according to him and the scholars that concur with him, the Upaniṣads belong to the period 2500 B. C. -2000 B. C.

Nature of Composition

From among the extant Upaniṣads, only ten to fifteen are considered to be the older ones. They are the basic sources of ancient Hindu philosophy.

However, do all these Upaniṣads teach a single system of philosophy? Or, do they contain several, mutually conflicting, systems?

The orthodox Hindu tradition has always considered the entire body of the Upaniṣadic literature as one unit (`Śruti') and hence teaching one philosophy. Though this philosophy may contain several aspects, they always form a homogeneous unit.

A look at the different and divergent teachings of these Upaniṣads does not easily convince us about the soundness of the orthodox standpoint. The traditional commentators have, however, solved

this problem by sticking to one view as *the* teaching of the Upaniṣads and explaining (explaining away?) the others in a way that suits their interpretation.

Could it be that, over the centuries, many vital links have been lost and what we now have, are only fragments of the original works leading to this dichotomy of views? Though this is a plausible explanation, there is no clinching evidence to prove it.

Or, can we say that the various sages that we come across in the Upaniṣads-like Gautama āruṇi, Yājñavalkya, Śvetaketu or Raikva-were great thinkers and mystics in their own right, who have given independent views, based on their own logic and experience? The Truth, Brahman (the Infinite, the Absolute), is too great to be known exhaustively by anyone. One can get only a glimpse of the same, like the six blind men touching the same elephant. Hence, could it not be that the views of these sages, though apparently different, reflect the several facets of the same Brahman?

At the most, these are all intelligent guesses and may continue to remain so for quite some time!

Number and Classification

The number of works that go by the name 'Upaniṣad' and available in print today exceeds 200. The *Muktikopaniṣad* gives a list of 108 Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara (A. D. 788-820), the earliest commentator, has chosen only ten Upaniṣads to expound. He refers to a few more in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*. Rāmānuja (A. D. 1017-1137) has chosen, in addition, two more. Considering the ones chosen by them as more ancient and authoritative we can now list them (in the alphabetical order) as follows:

Aitareya Upaniṣad *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad*
Jābāla Upaniṣad *Kaivalya Upaniṣad* *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* *Kena Upaniṣad*
Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* *Praśna Upaniṣad*
Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* *Vajrasūcikā Upaniṣad*

As regards the classification, different scholars have adopted different methods. Some have grouped them in the chronological order, considering the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, the *Chāndogya* and the *Taittirīya* as more ancient than the *Kaṭha* or the *Śvetāśvatara*. Others have classified them according to the style of language, as Upaniṣads in prose or in poetry. Such methods of classification do not help us much in studying them.

Most of the Upaniṣads, outside the list given above, belong to a much later period in our history and were written to propagate specific cults and sects. The nomenclature 'Upaniṣad' was conveniently added to them to gain respectability, acceptance and authority in the orthodox circles or among the followers.

However, it must be conceded that these Upaniṣads also, though sectarian in character, have contributed quite a lot to the propagation of popular religion and ethics as also to the maintenance of the Vedāntic spirit among the people.

These minor Upaniṣads are sometimes grouped as follows:

- a) Vedānta Upaniṣads
- b) Śaiva Upaniṣads
- c) Śākta Upaniṣads

- d) Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads
- e) Yoga Upaniṣads
- f) Saṁnyāsa Upaniṣads

The Vedānta Upaniṣads follow the beaten track of the major Upaniṣads as far as the general principles are concerned. The Śaiva, the Śākta and the Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads deal with the respective cults of Śiva, Devī and Viṣṇu. The Yoga Upaniṣads supply a lot of information about Haṭhayoga and Rājayoga based on the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali and other works. The Saṁnyāsa Upaniṣads deal exclusively with monasticism, its ideals and practices.

Sanskrit Commentaries

By its very definition, an Upaniṣad is an esoteric work, recondite in nature and spirit. The language is archaic. Many of the concepts, being closely allied to the sacrificial religion of the Saṁhitās and the Brāhmaṇas, are unintelligible to us, removed as we are, by millennia, from those rituals or ideas. Hence it is impossible to understand them, much less, get a consistent view of them, without an authoritative and reliable commentary. Śaṅkara is the earliest and the first to comment upon them. His bhāṣyas or commentaries, further elucidated by the ṭīkāś or glosses of ānandagiri (13th century) are invaluable source books to unlock the wisdom of the Upaniṣads.

Rāmānuja has not commented upon any of the Upaniṣads though he has tried to amplify some of their concepts in his *Vedārthasaṅgraha*. Raṅga-rāmānuja (circa A. D. 1600) has completed the work by commenting on all the major Upaniṣads. Madhva (A. D. 1197-1276) has written brief commentaries on all the ten ancient Upaniṣads upon which some like Rāghavendra Tīrtha (A. D. 1595-1671) have written glosses.

Some commentators have chosen to write only on certain Upaniṣads. The *Īśāvāsyaopaniṣad* has attracted the attention of many scholars like Brahmānanda Sarasvatī, Śaṅkarānanda (14th cent.), Uvaṭārya (11th cent.) as also Vedāntadeśika (A. D. 1268-1370) who have not chosen to comment on the other Upaniṣads. Rāghavendra Tīrtha has commented on the *Īśa*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Praśna*, *Muṇḍaka* and *Māṇḍūkya* following Madhva's line of interpretation. A later writer, Upaniṣad Brahma Yogindra, has done remarkable work by commenting on most of the minor Upaniṣads.

Philosophy of the Upaniṣads

The thought current of the Upaniṣads is, in a way, a continuation of that in the Brāhmaṇas and the āraṇyakas. However, the trend is definitely against ritualism and strongly favours upāsanā (meditation) and jñāna (knowledge).

In the more philosophical portions of the Upaniṣads, the discussions generally centre round the fundamental cause of the world, if there is one, and its nature as also its evolution into this world. This cause is usually called 'Brahman.'

As against this, there is a parallel mode of enquiry, into the existence or otherwise, of a permanent subjective entity behind the body-mind complex. This is called 'ātman' (the Self or the soul).

Is this ātman one or many? Is it finite in size or infinite? Is it identical with Brahman or different? Though the Upaniṣads discuss these questions, there does not appear to be a single answer. Different

viewpoints seem to exist. However, the orthodox Vedāntic schools struggle to present only one view as the right view to the exclusion of the others.

Destiny of the living beings here and hereafter, including some eschatological questions, form another topic of the Upaniṣads.

Ignorance of one's real nature as the cause of bondage and its eradication through the practice of certain virtues like self-control and speaking the truth are also touched upon.

A brief summary of these teachings may now be given.

BRAHMAN

The basic cause of the universe, the cause of all causes, is called 'Brahman' by the Upaniṣads. ātman, Sat, Akṣara. ākāśa and Bhūmā are the other appellations used for this Brahman. The world rises out of him, is supported by him and gets dissolved back into him. He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. He is greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest and is also the inmost Self of all. He is immanent in this world even as salt is, in saline water. He is beyond all wants and limitations. He is the lord as well as the substratum of the whole creation. He sees, hears and knows although none can see or hear or know him. He is the very personification of all the great virtues to their perfection. It is he who responds to the prayers of his votaries and grants them whatever they seek. He is the ultimate goal of all.

To facilitate meditation upon him, the Upaniṣads sometimes describe him as a Puruṣa (the divine being in the human form), bright and brilliant, of golden hue, with all parts of his body of golden colour and his eyes resembling a fully bloomed red lotus. Fire is his head, the sun and the moon are his eyes, the quarters are his ears, the Vedas are his speech and the earth is his feet. Sometimes he is also described as having thousand heads, thousand eyes and thousand feet, thereby stressing his omnipresent cosmic form. This form recommended for meditation is the Aupaniṣada-Puruṣa (the Being described in the Upaniṣads).

ATMAN

When a person dies, is there anything in him that survives and continues to live on? What is that, impelled by which, the senses and the mind of a living person are active? Such inquiries by the sages of the Upaniṣads have led to the establishment of the ātman, the soul or the Self, as the abiding spirit behind the body and the mind of every living being.

This ātman is neither born nor does he die with the birth and the death of the body. He is unborn and eternal. He is different from the body, the senses, the vital airs, the mind and the ego-sense and is ever free. All of them are enlivened by him, made to work by him, for him. The defects and the infirmities in them, or even their loss, can never affect him.

However, it is also a fact of experience that this ātman has been encased and bound in this corporeal frame and has lost much of his freedom. In this state, he is called 'jīvātman' or simply as the 'jīva'. The answer to the question as to why and how

he has come to such a pass is 'karma,' the inexorable consequence of his past actions. For the question, how and when the very first karma started this chain of bondage, there is no answer, since the Upaniṣads accept creation as an eternal cyclic process, without beginning or end.

His involvement in the cycle of birth and death, and consequent suffering, has been called 'saṁsāra.' Mokṣa or liberation from this bondage of saṁsāra has been presented before him as the goal of his life. And, this can be achieved by jñāna, or knowledge and, bhakti or devotion, which includes upāsanā or meditation. Karma or action as prescribed in the scriptures is an aid to this mokṣa.

CREATION

Though Brahman is the permanent substratum of this world and ātman is our essential nature, we cannot ignore this world in which we live and move and have our being as it were. For all practical purposes it is very real to us. And, even our struggles or attempts for mokṣa have to take place only in this world. Hence, it is necessary to know about it, how it came into being, how it is sustained now and its ultimate destiny.

In the beginning, Brahman alone-also called 'ātman' or 'Sat'-existed, as the one without a second. He decided to become many. He then created out of himself, ākāśa (sky or space or ether), vāyu (air), agni or tejas (fire), ap (water) and pṛthvī (earth).

Apermutation and combination of these five elements, with Brahman associated at every stage, has resulted in this world. Later, Brahman entered into this creation as the antaryāmin or the inner controlling spirit.

According to other descriptions, the original substances created were only three (tejas, ap and anna or earth) or even two, rayi (moon or anna or matter) and prāṇa (sun or fire or energy or spirit). By a combination of these, in different proportions, this world came into being. It is ever under his control. Nay, it is non-different from him.

Even after being created out of, or, emerging out of, Brahman, this world continues to be in him. It will merge back in him at the time of pralaya or dissolution.

With regard to the relationship between Brahman and the world, two views seem to exist in the Upaniṣads. According to one view-known as Saprapañcavāda-since the world is an evolute of Brahman, it is also Brahman. The other view-called Niṣprapañcavāda-denies the world an existence of its own and asserts the existence of Brahman alone.

BONDAGE AND LIBERATION

Some Upaniṣads picture the jīvātman and the Paramātman (the Supreme Self, Brahman as the indwelling spirit) as two birds perching on the same tree (the body). The former eats the fruits of the tree (results of karma)-some sweet and some bitter-and experiences joy and sorrow. The latter is sitting majestically, ever calm and collected, never touching those fruits. When the jīvātman realises the greatness of the Paramātman, he becomes free from all sorrow and suffering.

Though the question, how the ever free ātman became the jīva, has not been answered by the Upaniṣads, they have given several modes of sādhanā or spiritual exercises by which the jīva can recover his original state.

A sādhanā or a spiritual aspirant should first cultivate certain moral and ethical virtues as the first step. Through discrimination he should understand that the Vedic rituals can never lead him to the eternal Truth and hence renounce them. He must be ever ready to reject the preyas (the pleasant) and choose the śreyas (the good). By eschewing evil conduct and by practising self-control, he should turn back his mind from outside, into himself, the region of the heart, the seat of the ātman, and meditate on it. He should show compassion to all the living beings. He should try to give them what they need and should never be greedy. He must be vigilant forever and should always speak the truth and act according to dharma or righteousness, by following the scriptural injunctions. Study of the Upaniṣads, performing austerities and observing brahmacharya or celibacy are also invaluable aids in his sādhanā.

He should approach a competent guru or spiritual teacher in all humility and learn the truth about the ātman from him, through proper questioning and sevā or service to him.

The Upaniṣads make it incumbent on the guru to teach spiritual wisdom to a worthy disciple, after testing him if necessary.

The disciple should then practise manana (reflection) and nididhyāsana (meditation) on the ātman which will result in anubhūti or realisation.

What is the nature of the spiritual experience that an aspirant gets when he realises the ātman? He sees all beings in himself and himself in all. Hence he feels neither special attraction nor repulsion for others. Behind every thought of his, he is able to feel the power of the ātman, the pure consciousness. He clearly perceives that all the bonds of his heart which had him tied down to this mundane existence, have broken down. He experiences great joy and bliss within himself. When he directs his attention outside, there too he sees the same spirit, the ātman, the Brahman.

The bliss he experiences is incomparably superior to any other happiness one can get in this world. And he will never have any type of regret for anything in life. He may even roam about the world in a joyous state, declaring his experiences for the benefit of others.

When such a one, the jīvanmukta (one who is liberated even while living here in this body), gives up his body, what happens to him?

According to one view, his physical body and the subtle body disintegrate at death and get absorbed into the five elements. And, he gets merged in Brahman, like a river entering into the ocean. Losing his separate identity, he attains complete and perfect unity with Brahman.

However, a large body of the Upaniṣadic lore propounds the theory of the liberated soul travelling by the Arcirādimārga or the Bright Path (also called Devayāna

and Uttarāyaṇa) to the Brahmaloḥa (also known as Satyaloḥa) and reside there permanently in infinite peace and bliss. The various stations on the path, are fire, day, bright fortnight, the six months of the northern solstice, the year, the sun, the moon and the lightning. All these actually represent the guardian deities of these stations. From the last station, the vidyut or lightning, an `amānava puruṣa,' a non-human (divine) being, leads the liberated soul to the Brahmaloḥa.

Is the Brahmaloḥa a state of inner experience or an actual world to which the liberated soul repairs? Most of the Upaniṣads contain practically no or very scanty details. The *Chāndogya* (8.5.3) describes it as a world, third from this earth, wherein there are two huge lakes called Ara and Ṇya. There is also a smaller reservoir of food-juice known as Airammadiya.

Somasavana, a peepul tree and a city called Aparājitā, containing a golden hall are also there. The *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇopaniṣad* (1. 3, 4 and 5) gives a more picturesque description which adds a river Virajā, two doorkeepers (Indra and Prajāpati), a throne called Vicakṣaṇa and a couch by name Amitaujas. Five hundred celestial nymphs greet the liberated soul and adorn him. The fragrance and flavour of Brahmā enters him at the appropriate state of his entrance.

Anyone reaching Brahmaloḥa will not return to mundane existence.

ESCHATOLOGY

What happens to a person who dies without realising the ātman/Brahman? This question too has been discussed in the Upaniṣads.

Those who have performed sakāma-karmas (desire-motivated actions) or practised lower kinds of upāsanās get their desires fulfilled. Some of them go to svargaloka* (heaven) from where they will return to this world after exhausting the results of their good deeds. Sometimes, this movement is described as through the Dhūmādimārga (the path of smoke) (also called Dakṣiṇāyana) wherein the soul is led to the Candraloḥa (the world of moon) after passing through smoke, night, the dark fortnight and the six months of the southern solstice. After exhausting the result of meritorious deeds he returns again to this earth, through the sky, rain, vegetation and living beings.

Those who know neither of these two paths, return again and again and may even be reborn at the subhuman levels, as animals and worms.

As related to this topic, ideas about karma and rebirth are also found in the Upaniṣads here and there. A doer of puṇyakarma or good deeds attains good results and a doer of pāpakarma or sinful deeds gets bad results. Hence human beings are advised not to harm anyone.

VIDYĀS OR UPĀSANĀS

An important aspect of sādhanā as enunciated in the Upaniṣads is `vidyā' or upāsanā. A man deeply devoted to-or even addicted to-the religion of yajñas or Vedic sacrifices, has got to be led gradually, first to contemplation and then to jñāna

(knowledge or direct experience) of the ātman in course of time, because that is the ultimate goal of life. And, that is the only way to mokṣa.

These upāsanās have taken two forms. In the first group, the sādḥaka is advised to imagine the various parts of a ritual and then superimpose certain ideas on them. For instance, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* advises one to meditate upon the horse, to be offered in the Aśvamedha sacrifice, by thinking that it is Prajāpati, the Lord of beings. This upāsanā, which can be practised even by those who are not competent to perform the Aśvamedha sacrifice, gives the same fruits as the real Aśvamedha itself.

In the second group of upāsanās certain known objects like nāma (name), vāk (speech), bala (strength) or manas (mind) are recommended to be meditated upon as Brahman, by imagining or discovering some similarity between that object and Brahman. Such upāsanās gradually help the aspirant's mind to be raised to the highest level, Brahman, and give him the much needed spiritual experience.

The number of such vidyās or upāsanās which are spread out throughout the Upaniṣads is quite large and may be considered as 32.

The following list gives a few of the more important ones and the Upaniṣads in which they occur.

Vidyā	Upaniṣad
Akṣipuruṣa Vidyā	Chāndogya 4.15.1.
Antarāditya Vidyā	Bṛhadāraṇyaka 5.52.
Bhūma Vidyā	Chāndogya 7.23, 24, 25.
Dahara Vidyā	Chāndogya 8.1.
Gāyatrī Vidyā	Chāndogya 3.12.
Madhu Vidyā	Chāndogya 3.1 to 11.
Pañcāgni Vidyā	Chāndogya 5.3 to 10, Bṛhadāraṇyaka 6.2
Paryaṅka Vidyā	Kauṣītaki 1.
Prāṇāgnihotra Vidyā	Bṛhadāraṇyaka 5.9.
Pratardana Vidyā	Kauṣītaki 3.
Puruṣa Vidyā	Chāndogya 3.16, 17.
Sad Vidyā	Chāndogya 6.2.1, 2.
Samvarga Vidyā	Chāndogya 4.3.
Śāṅḍilya Vidyā	Chāndogya 3.14.
Udgītha Vidyā	Bṛhadāraṇyaka 5.8.1.
Upakosala Vidyā	Chāndogya 4.10 to 15.
Vaiśvānara Vidyā	Chāndogya 5.11 to 17.

These vidyās were taught privately to deserving candidates after testing them for their competence. That is why the information available either in the Upaniṣads or in their commentaries regarding them is very meagre. It is likely that they provided the basic materials for the later schools of various kinds of yoga.

Civilisation and Culture during the Age of the Upaniṣads

Gleaning through the various Upaniṣads it is possible to have a fairly good idea of the type of society that existed during the period of the Upaniṣads.

The country extended upto Gāndhāra (Afghanistan) in the north-west, and included several kingdoms like Madra (Sailkot), Kuru (Delhi), Kekaya (Punjab), Pāñcāla (Bareilly, Kanauj in Uttar Pradesh), Kosala (Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh), Videha (Tirhut in Bihar), Kauśāmbi (Kosam, in Uttar Pradesh) and Kāśī. The kings who ruled over these countries were all kṣattriyas who were experts in warfare and administration, as also in the Vedic lore. In fact, they were the traditional custodians of some types of esoteric sciences. They not only sheltered learned brāhmaṇas and sages but also strove to propagate the Vedic dharma. They were ruthless in enforcing the highest standards of satya (truth) and dharma (righteousness). The varṇa system was very much in vogue. As for the āśrama system, brahmacharya, gārhasthya and vānaprastha were more common, though there is enough reason to believe that saṁnyāsa was also being practised. Great stress was laid on the purity and integrity of personal life, irrespective of a person's station in life.

Apart from religion, ethics and philosophy, a number of secular sciences like grammar, music, dance, archery, astrology, exorcising the evil spirits, preparing of perfumes, toxicology and so on, were also well-known.

Vedic sacrifices were very common. If they provided an occasion for the kings to earn merit and show their generosity, it was also an opportunity to the scholars to display their knowledge and earn name and fame, as also some wealth.

On the whole, people seemed to be contented with whatever they could earn by right means. They believed that their sorrows and misfortunes were caused by their own karma in their previous lives and hence did not hold others responsible for the same.

Literary Grace

The language of the Upaniṣads is closely allied to that of the Vedas. Hence it is not only archaic but also abounds in Vedic phraseology and symbolism.

Most of the Upaniṣads are in verses composed in standard Vedic metres. Some like the *Māṇḍūkya*, the *Taittirīya* and the *Aitareya* are completely in prose. Some have a mixture of both.

One of the striking features of the Upaniṣadic literature is its use of beautiful similes and examples. The simile of two birds (the jīvātman and the Paramātman) perching on the same tree (the human body) occurs in several Upaniṣads: *Kaṭha* (1.3.1.); *Śvetāśvatara* (4.6.) and *Muṇḍaka* (3.1.1.). The *Muṇḍaka* gives the simile of the bow and the arrow (2.2.3, 4) to explain meditation on the ātman. The *Kaṭha* compares the world to an inverted tree (6.1) and the human body to a city of eleven gates (5.1). The *Īśāvāsyā* compares the orb of the sun to a golden disc hiding the face of the Lord (15). The *Kaṭha* compares the body to a chariot, the senses to horses, the mind to reins, the intellect to the charioteer and the ātman to the owner of the chariot (3. 3 and 4). The *Muṇḍaka* compares the evolution of the world from Brahman to a spider weaving the web and hairs growing on the body or vegetation appearing on earth (1.1.7). It also compares the Vedic sacrifices to a leaky raft since they are unable to give liberation (1.2.7). Rivers flowing into the ocean and becoming one with it is another simile given to illustrate the union of the ātman with Brahman (3.2.8). The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* abounds in many similes:

The Vedas have come out of Brahman even as smoke comes out of burning wet wood (2.4.10). Just as spokes are fixed on the rim of a wheel, similarly all beings find their support in Paramātman (2.5.15). The jīvātman travels from the waking state to the dream state like a big fish swimming in water from one shore to the opposite shore (4.3.18). While dying, the jīva catches hold of the next subtle body even as a grasshopper catches hold of the leaf of the next nearby plant, before leaving the former support (4.4.3). A liberated soul casts off the body like a snake casting off its slough (4.4.7). The pitiable condition of an ordinary mortal leaving his body is compared to travelling in a heavily laden, but weak, cart (4.3.35).

The style of prose in the Upaniṣads is not only simple and elegant but also quite powerful.

Stories

Strangely enough, the Upaniṣads, though teaching recondite philosophy, also give us some interesting stories. The *Kena* describes how the gods in heaven, under the leadership of Indra, were taught a lesson by Brahman in the guise of a yakṣa or demigod (3.1 to 11). Major part of the *Kaṭha* is devoted to the story of Naciketas and Yama. The *Chāndogya* contains the following stories: Dogs singing the udgītha (1.12); the king Jānaśruti learning from the sage Raikva (4.1 to 3); the story of Satyakāma Jābāla approaching Hāridrumata for knowledge (4.4 to 9); the story of Satyakāma and his disciple Upakosala (4.10 to 15); Śvetaketu the proud boy, his humble father Gautama and the king Pravāhaṇa Jaivali (5.3 to 10); Sanatkumāra teaching Nārada (7.1 to 26); Indra and Virocana approaching Prajāpati for the knowledge of the ātman (8.7 to 12).

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* too is not lagging behind. Its stories and legends are: the struggle between the devas (gods) and asuras (demons) to supersede each other (1.3); the proud Bālāki and the wise king Ajātāśatru (2.1); Maitreyī seeking spiritual wisdom from her husband Yājñavalkya (2.4 and 4.5); king Janaka and the great sage Yājñavalkya (chapters 3 and 4).

Rṣis or Sages of the Upaniṣads

We come across a good number of rṣis or sages in the Upaniṣads. Some like Yājñavalkya are extraordinarily great geniuses. Others like Gautama āruṇi are excellent teachers. A few others like Śvetaketu are hard task-masters. Sacrifices conducted by rich and powerful-but noble-kings provided opportunities to these sages not only to exhibit their skills but also earn wealth and fame.

A selected list of sages that occur in the major Upaniṣads may now be given just for the sake of information:

Aṅgiras, Bhṛgu, Gārgī, Ghora āṅgirasa, Hāridrumata, Mahidāsa Aitareya, Nārada, Pippalāda, Raikva, Sanatkumāra, Śāṅḍilya, Satyakāma Jābāla, Uddālaka āruṇi, Vāmadeva and Varuṇa.

Yama, the god of death, Prajāpati, the creator, great kings like Janaka, Ajātāśatru and Pravāhaṇa Jaivali also appear in the role of teachers.

One thing that strikes us is that these teachers were revered for their knowledge and excellence, irrespective of their birth, caste or sex.

A Résumé of the Principal Upaniṣads

A brief summary of the more ancient and important Upaniṣads can now be given here. For the sake of convenience and ready reference, they have been arranged in the English alphabetical order. The details of the Veda to which they belong, the number of chapters, sections and mantras are given in brackets to facilitate better understanding.

Aitareya Upaniṣad (*R̥gveda*; 4 chapters; 6 sections; 33 mantras)

One of the more enigmatic of the Upaniṣads, this small work gets its name from ahidāsa Aitareya, the son of Itarā. He is the ṛṣi of the *Aitareya āraṇyaka* of which, this Upaniṣad is a part.

ātman or Paramātman, the supreme Lord, alone existed in the beginning. He desired to create the world and did it without the aid of any other thing, by himself, out of himself. He also entered into that creation. This is the gist of the first chapter.

The second chapter describes the birth, the metamorphosis, the death and the rebirth of the jīvātman in order to awaken vairāgya or detachment in our minds. It is only by realising our real nature as ātman that we become free from the shackles of saṃsāra or transmigration. The sage Vāmadeva succeeded in getting that spiritual wisdom even while in the womb of his mother and became free.

The last section of the Upaniṣad distinguishes manas or the mind from prajñāna or pure consciousness and declares that it is this prajñāna that is the real ātman or Brahman, by realising which Vāmadeva became free.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (*Śuklayajurveda*; 6 chapters; 47 sections; 435 mantras)

Considered to be an integral part of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* of the *Śuklayajurveda*, this Upaniṣad is the biggest (as its very name suggests) and is quite ancient. It is in prose and contains quotations from other ancient sources which are all in verses.

The first two chapters aim at describing the ātman who is beyond the various Vedic deities. He is the inmost Self of all and is nearest and dearest. A living body is able to function only because of his presence inside. To realise him one has to give up worldly desires, take to the life of a monk or a mendicant and practise meditation on his true nature. Realising him is the same as realising Brahman, the cosmic Spirit.

In the third and the fourth chapters we find Yājñavalkya, the genius of a sage, at his best. He not only vanquishes all his opponents but also establishes the fundamental teachings of Vedānta very effectively. A very brief summary of these teachings is as follows: The life of a being here and hereafter is determined by the karma he has done, good karma producing good results and bad karma, bad ones. Even ritualistic karmas, in spite of their being coupled with upāsanaṅs, cannot give mokṣa or freedom. Only the realisation of the ātman, who is really Brahman, who transcends the body-mind complex, can give freedom from transmigratory existence. To realise this ātman, the wise brāhmaṇas renounce their family, wealth and the desire for heaven, and take to the life of a mendicant.

Yājñavalkya describes that, which has pervaded everything in creation, has also transcended it and is also its antaryāmin or the inner-controller, as Akṣara (the Indestructible).

He gives a long list of its characteristics which appear to be rather self-contradictory or confusing since it is an attempt to describe the indescribable.

He also establishes the true nature of the ātman, by an analysis of the three states of consciousness, as the ever free blissful Self.

A description of the jīva suffering at the time of his death and his transmigration also find a place in these teachings, to induce vairāgya.

The last two chapters contain a number of upāsanās, as on the praṇava or Om̐, the need to cultivate the virtues like self-control, compassion and giving gifts to the needy, the *Pañcāgnividyā* (the doctrine of five fires) and some rituals connected with the birth of a son.

The Upaniṣad ends with a long list of the line of the Vedic teachers.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad (*Sāmaveda*; 8 chapters; 154 sections; 628 mantras)

Considered to be the oldest of the Upaniṣads, the *Chāndogya* begins with the upāsanā on Om̐ as the udgītha, the part of the *Sāmaveda* sung by the udgātṛ priest. Meditation on Om̐ as prāṇa (the life-force) and as the person in the sun are the other topics dealt with in the first chapter.

There are various types of sāmans (mantras of the *Sāmaveda*). The second chapter recommends several upāsanās on sāmans. There is also a reference to the four āśramas (stages of life) and to the fact that one who is established in Brahman attains immortality.

The third chapter starts with the *Madhuvidyā*, meditation on the sun as madhu or honey since he gives joy to the gods. Meditation on Brahman through the Gāyatrī mantra is also mentioned here.

The famous *Śāṅḍilyavidyā* is also a part of this chapter. It consists of meditating on the ātman as the creator and sustainer of the universe, in one's own heart. How a human being can live long is also described by considering one's life as a long yajña. The example of Mahidāsa Aitareya is quoted as the model for such a meditation.

The next chapter starts with the story of the king Jānaśruti Pautrāyaṇa and his attaining wisdom, from the sage Raikva. Upāsanā on the vāyu (air) outside and the prāṇa (vital air) inside as the power that absorbs everything into itself is his teaching. It has been called *Samvargavidyā*.

A description of the jīva travelling by the Arcirādimārga to the Brahmaloḳa as a result of meditation on the akṣipuruṣa or the 'person in the eye', who is Brahman, also finds a place here.

The fifth chapter delineates the process by which the dead return to this world again. This, as taught by the king Pravāhaṇa Jaivali to Gautama, is known as *Pañcāgnividyā*. Meditation on the supreme ātman, living inside the body as Vaiśvānarātman, makes one the enjoyer of all food through all beings. This is the next teaching, given by the king Aśvapati to the five sages who had approached him for knowledge.

The sixth chapter is, by far, the most interesting and instructive. Finding that his son Śvetaketu was puffed up with egoism even after his education at the guru's house, Uddālaka

āruṇi questions him about that by knowing which everything else becomes known. Since Śvetaketu was ignorant in this regard, āruṇi starts teaching him in various ways. Before its creation, this world was one with Sat (the self-existent Truth). This Sat willed to become many. The world was created out of it in stages. Sat also entered into this world as the jīvātman. āruṇi traces the true nature of the Self through an analysis of the three states of consciousness. His final teaching is that Śvetaketu in his essential nature is that Sat itself.

The next chapter is in the form of a long dialogue between Sanatkumāra and his disciple Nārada. Though Nārada had mastered several sciences and arts, he had no peace of mind since he had not known the ātman. Sanatkumāra takes him step by step through several modes of upāsana, finally to Bhūman or Brahman.

The last chapter starts with the *Daharavidyā*, meditation on the Self within the small ākāśa of the heart. Major part of this chapter is devoted to the teaching of Prajāpati to Indra, the king of gods, about the ātman, the true Self within. The Upaniṣad concludes with the statement of a liberated soul about his being free from all sins and attaining the world of Brahman.

Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad (*Śukla-yajurveda*; 18 verses)

Though the smallest of the ten major Upaniṣads, the *Īśāvāsya* has attracted the attention of several savants who have chosen to comment upon it. Some of its terms like vidyā and avidyā, as also sambhūti and asambhūti, have proved to be elusive or vague, thus giving rise several conflicting interpretations.

It teaches that the whole world is pervaded by Īśa or God. It advocates the performance of karma or one's duties and encourages human beings to desire to live the full span of life, viz., one hundred years. After describing the nature of the ātman, it declares that one who has realised this ātman in himself and sees the same in others, transcends sorrow and delusion. It advises the practice of a balanced combination of vidyā (meditation) and avidyā (karma, sanctioned by the scriptures and helpful to meditation) as also sambhūti (meditation on Brahman) and asambhūti (duties to be performed in the world). There is also a beautiful description of Paramātman and a prayer for God-vision by the sage at the time of his death.

Jābāla Upaniṣad (*Atharva-veda*; 6 chapters; 6 passages)

This is a small Upaniṣad in prose. All the six chapters contain long passages. A description of Vārāṇasī (the famous place of pilgrimage) and upāsana on the space between the eyebrows as Vārāṇasī is the first teaching given in this Upaniṣad. The japa of the *Śatarudrīya*-mantra also finds a place in this upāsana.

This is followed by a discourse on saṁnyāsa (monkhood) by Yājñavalkya in reply to a query by the king Janaka. It includes some details of the procedure also. It concludes with a beautiful description of the way of life of some great men of realisation like Saṁvartaka, āruṇi, Ṛbhu, Jaḍa-bharata, Dattātreya and others.

Kaivalya Upaniṣad (*Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda*; 2 chapters,; 24 mantras)

This small work is in the form of a dialogue between the sage āśvalāyana (the disciple) and the creator Brahmā (the teacher). It stresses the importance of tyāga or renunciation in the path of knowing Brahman. Some details of meditation on Brahman in one's own heart, sitting in a clean and secluded place, are given. This meditation is compared to the production of fire by the mutual rubbing of the two pieces of araṇi (wood), normally used to generate fire in Vedic sacrifices. This is then followed by the usual description of Brahman (as given in other Upaniṣads) and the state of realisation of ātman-Brahman attained by the aspirant.

Kaṭha Upaniṣad (*Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda*; 6 chapters; 119 mantras)

Also known as *Kāṭhaka Upaniṣad*, it is an extremely readable and interesting work. It starts with the story of the sage Vājaśravas performing a sacrifice. Seeing the famished and useless cows kept apart by him to be gifted away during the sacrifice, Naciketas, his young son, tries to draw his attention to this lacuna. Vājaśravas gets annoyed, and in a fit of anger, curses his son, 'I give you to Death!' Naciketas goes straight to the world of Yama, the god of death. Finding him absent, he patiently awaits his return, for three days, not touching food or water. When Yama returns, he feels great remorse for having kept a guest outside the house denying even elementary comforts.

Of the three boons he grants to Naciketas as atonement, the third is utilised by Naciketas for seeking ātmajñāna or knowledge of the Self. After thoroughly testing the boy with many a tempting offer, Yama finally teaches him spiritual wisdom.

Two choices offer themselves before every human being-preyas (the pleasant) and śreyas (the good). Ordinary mortals choose the former and get into endless trouble leading to bondage. The wise ones however, forsake preyas, the immediately pleasant, for śreyas, the path of spiritual good, which alone can give permanent happiness, peace and bliss.

Realising the ātman is the highest aspect of śreyas. Though the nature of the ātman, the true Self of man, is too subtle to be grasped, it can be properly understood when taught by a competent guru or preceptor. Self-control on the one hand, and grace of God on the other, are aids in realising this ātman. Yama describes the ātman or the jīva as the master of the chariot, the chariot being the body itself. Just as the master sitting in a good chariot drawn by good horses and an expert driver reaches his destination, so also the jīva reaches the abode of Viṣṇu if the body and the senses are in good condition and controlled by a wise intellect.

Drawn by the attraction of the senses, a person lets his mind go outwards. However, if he can withdraw it from the outward objects and direct it within himself, he can realise his ātman.

Yama also declares that the destiny of a being, after his death, is determined by his karma or actions done in this life. He compares the created world to an inverted tree, Brahman being the root that sustains it. If taught by a competent teacher and through the conquest of desires, one can know this Brahman.

Comparing the jīvātman to a person of the size of the thumb and that the exit through the crown of the head at the time of death leads to the abode of Brahman, as also comparing the jīvātman and Paramātman to two birds perching on the same tree (the body) are the other special aspects of the teaching of this Upaniṣad.

Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad (*Rgveda*; 4 chapters; 51 mantras)

Also called *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇopaniṣad*, it is a fairly long Upaniṣad and is entirely in prose.

The first chapter deals with the two well-known paths-Devayāna and Pitṛyāna. There is a fairly detailed description of not only the journey to the world of Brahmā, by the Arcirādimārga or Devayāna, but also of the Brahmāloka itself (See pages 64 & 65).

The second chapter gives a detailed account of *Prāṇavidyā*, upāsanā of prāṇa as Brahman. There is also a rite recommended to be performed by anyone coveting 'ekadhana,' interpreted as the 'highest wealth'.

The third chapter contains a long discourse by Indra (who has realised the Supreme Being and hence identified with him) to the King Pratardana, the son of Divodāsa. Indra advises Pratardana to meditate on him as prāṇa. Prāṇa is also identified with prajñā (consciousness).

The last chapter which is in the form of a dialogue between the king Ajātaśatru and the learned Gārgya Bālāki is almost a repetition of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.1.).

Kena Upaniṣad (*Sāmaveda*; 4 chapters; 35 mantras)

Also known as *Talavakāra Upaniṣad*, this small work gets its name by its very first word 'kena' ('by what'). The first half is in verses and the second half in prose.

The Upaniṣad begins with a description of the ātman in the body as the spirit behind the sense-organs and the mind. It has been identified with Brahman. Though it cannot be known as an object, since it is the subject, its presence is felt in and through every thought. When this real seer is realised, a person becomes immortal.

The second section gives the parable of the gods in heaven. Under the leadership of Indra they had met to celebrate their victory over the asuras or demons forgetting that it was due to the grace and power of Brahman and not to their own valour.

Brahman appeared on the scene as a yakṣa (a demi-god) and taught them a lesson after humiliating them. Then Umā Haimavatī (the personification of Brahmavidyā) came on the scene and taught Indra, spiritual wisdom.

The Upaniṣad specially mentions that tapas (austerity), dama (self-control) and karma (actions ordained by the scriptures) are the basic disciplines needed to attain the knowledge of Brahman. It concludes with a eulogy of this knowledge.

Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad (*Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda*; 80 sections; 259 mantras)

The *Taittirīya āraṇyaka* of the *Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda* contains two well-known Upaniṣads: the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* and the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*. The latter is also known as the *Nārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* and as the *Yājñīkī Upaniṣad*.

Two recensions are available now: the *āndhrapāṭha* and the *Drāviḍapāṭha*, the former being the longer one.

This Upaniṣad seems to be a composition of many varied subjects, almost like an appendix or an addenda to some other work. There is no systematic treatment of any major doctrine. Each section seems to be an independent unit. It deals with all the three aspects of Vedic religion viz., karma (rituals), jñāna (knowledge) and upāsanā (meditation).

Some of the most popular of the Vedic sūktas which are chanted even now during religious ceremonies-like the *Nārāyaṇasūkta*, the *Durgāsūkta* and the *Medhāsūkta*-find a place here.

The mantras commonly used during the sandhyā rituals, mantras used during saṁnyāsadīkṣā (taking to the monastic order), several gāyatrī hymns on different deities and some famous mantras like the trisuparṇamantras also find a prominent place.

Various aspects of spiritual life like satya (truth), tapas (austerity), dama (sense-control), dāna (giving gifts), dharma (righteous living) and śama (mental peace) have been greatly stressed.

A beautiful description of the Cosmic Person in the orb of the sun, contemplation on the various parts of a yajña or sacrifice in a symbolical way and the journey to the Brahmaloaka are also included among the topics dealt with by this Upaniṣad.

Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad (*Atharva-veda*; 12 mantras)

Comprising only 12 mantras-all in prose-this small Upaniṣad delves straight-away into the philosophy of praṇava (Om̐), ātman and Brahman. Praṇava is the best symbol of the eternal truth, Brahman. The ātman inside this body-whose existence and real nature are established by this Upaniṣad through the analysis of the three states of consciousness, viz., jāgrat (waking state), svapna (dream state) and suṣupti (deep sleep state)-and Brahman, the Cosmic Truth are, in the ultimate analysis, one and the same. He is called as the Turīya (the Fourth, beyond the three states described). It is impossible to describe his nature since he is acintya (beyond thought) and alakṣaṇa (beyond characteristics). He alone has to be known. Meditation on the praṇava (Om̐), especially its last part, results in the realisation of the ātman.

A long commentary called Kārikā (in verses) attributed to Gauḍapāda (circa A. D. 700), generally goes with it and is studied deeply by the students of Vedānta.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (*Atharva-veda*; 3 chapters; 6 sections; 64 mantras)

The word `muṇḍa' means a shaven head. This Upaniṣad might have derived its name from the fact that the spiritual wisdom contained in it can shave off all the illusions and delusions of one who studies it and understands it. Or, it could be that it was specially meant for the saṁnyāsins with shaven heads.

Cast in excellent poetry, this Upaniṣad is a delight to read and enjoy.

It divides all knowledge into two groups-the parā (higher) and the aparā (the lower). Except the knowledge of the Akṣara, the indestructible Brahman, all other branches of

knowledge-including the Vedas themselves-are only aparāvidyā, lower or inferior knowledge! Then comes a nice description of this Akṣara-Brahman and the creation of the world out of it.

Though Vedic rituals were considered as necessary and sacred, this Upaniṣad points out their limitations and advises the aspirant after spiritual wisdom to eschew them like leaky rafters, take to a life of renunciation and approach a competent guru for brahmavidyā or knowledge of Brahman. The method of meditation on Brahman with the help of praṇava (Om) is picturesquely described with the simile of a bow and arrow. This ends in the realisation of the ātman-Brahman inside oneself, thereby resulting in the destruction of all the knots of ignorance that bind one's heart or being.

The work compares the jīvātman and the Paramātman to two birds perching on the same tree, which is this body. The former is bound whereas the latter is ever free. However, when he realises this Paramātman, he goes beyond good and evil and attains union with him.

The famous declaration that Truth alone triumphs and not falsehood, belongs to this Upaniṣad.

This ātman can be realised only when taught by an enlightened preceptor and never by merely listening to discourses or intellectualism. However, grace of God plays a very important part in this realisation.

Both types of liberation-the gradual one by going to the Brahmaloaka and the instantaneous one, at the fall of the body-have been mentioned towards the end of this Upaniṣad.

Praśna Upaniṣad (*Atharva-veda*; 6 chapters; 67 mantras)

Since the Upaniṣad is in the form of praśnas or questions and their answers, it has been named as *Praśnopaniṣad*.

Six sages like Kabandhi Kātyāyana, Bhārgava Vaidarbhi and others, come to the great teacher Pippalāda with their questions. After they undergo the disciplines of student-hood for one year-as per his command-they approach him again, with six questions. The answers provided by Pippalāda form the main body of this work.

The first section deals with the question: What is the origin of all the beings? Pippalāda describes it as Prajāpati (God, as the Lord of all beings), who creates the universe through the combination of rayi (Soma or matter) and prāṇa (Agni or āditya or Spirit). There is also a mention of the two paths: Uttarāyana (the Northern Path) and Dakṣiṇāyana (the Southern Path).

The second section describes the mukhyaprāṇa (the main life-force) as the sole support of the body and the sense-organs.

The third section says that this mukhyaprāṇa emerges out of the Paramapuruṣa or the Cosmic Person (God). He works inside this body in five forms. At the time of death, the udānavāyu (one of the five forms of mukhya-prāṇa) carries the jīva through one of the nāḍīs (a tabular path for the flow of prāṇic energy) originating in the heart, to heaven or hell or this world of human beings, depending upon his karma.

The fourth section gives an account of the deep-sleep state of a being. In that state, the jīva is merged in Paramātman or the Supreme Self.

The next section delineates the method of meditation on the praṇava (Om) and the results one obtains from it. Highest meditation leads to the attainment of Brahmaloaka.

The last section, the sixth, deals with the ṣoḍaśakalapuruṣa, 'the person with sixteen parts'. He is the jīvātman. When these so-called parts get destroyed, the jīvātman becomes immortal.

Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (*Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda*; 6 chapters; 113 mantras)

This Upaniṣad starts with a discussion by some sages on the jagatkāraṇa or the ultimate cause of this world, and comes to the conclusion, in the very first chapter, that the Devātmaśakti or the Paramātman (God) with his inherent power, is that cause.

This truth is discovered by them through dhyānayoga or meditation. This is followed by a description of jīvātman and Paramātman through various elegant phrases.

The second chapter deals with the yoga of meditation, various aids to meditation like control and concentration of the mind, the right posture, prāṇāyāma or regulation of the prāṇic energy through breath-control and some results of the practice of yoga.

The third chapter contains several mantras found in other Vedic sections like the *Rudrādhyāya* and the *Puruṣasūkta*. The descriptions, again, centre round the jīvātman and the Paramātman.

Continuing the same subject, the next chapter declares that those who realise the Truth, Brahman, will attain immortality.

The fifth chapter deals with the emergence of Hiraṇyagarbha (the Golden-egg or the Cosmic Person) (called 'Kapila' here) from Parameśvara, the Supreme Lord. Descriptions of several aspects of creation are also there. That the ātman (Brahman) can be known through the secret parts of the Veda and that the knowers of the same, attain immortality is again repeated here.

The sixth and the last chapter declares Parameśvara or the Supreme Lord as the lord of the karmas of the individual souls and also his greatness. The teachings of such Upaniṣads as this are revealed only to those who have devotion not only to Parameśvara but also to the guru or spiritual teacher-is another important declaration of this Upaniṣad.

Taittirīya Upaniṣad (*Kṛṣṇa-yajurveda*; 3 chapters; 31 mantras)

The three chapters of this Upaniṣad are respectively called *Śikṣāvallī*, *Bhṛguvallī* and *Brahmā- nandavallī*, based on the first words used in them.

The first chapter starts with the science of śikṣā or phonetics. This is then followed by certain meditations on such subjects as jyotis or light and a few homas (ceremonial oblations into fire) meant for persons desirous of wealth and intelligence.

Meditation on Brahman within oneself, through the vyāhṛtis like bhū etc., is also touched upon. The last part gives the parting message of the Vedic teacher to his student who is about to leave the institution.

The second chapter describes the five kośas or sheaths that cover the ātman, like the annamaya (the sheath of food, viz., the body), the prāṇamaya (the sheath of sense-organs) and so on. There is also an interesting attempt to show that the bliss of realising Brahman is infinitely superior to the pleasures one gets at the lower levels (in this world or in heaven) by taking the ideal human happiness as the basic unit.

The last chapter extols tapas or austerity as the means of realising Brahman and also describes some upāsanās on anna or food. That one should not despise food in any way, that one should honour guests with food and shelter, is another idea prominently taught here. The Upaniṣad ends with the declaration that one who transcends the five sheaths and realises the ātman, who is also in the sun, attains eternal joy.

Vajrasūcikā Upaniṣad (*Sāmaveda*; 9 mantras)

This is a small Upaniṣad in prose, except for the first mantra. It asks the question, 'Who is a brāhmaṇa?' and answers it.

The body, the individual soul, birth, knowledge, work, religious duties—none of these makes one a brāhmaṇa. It is character that makes a person a real brāhmaṇa.

One who has realised the Self, the one without a second, who is therefore free from all faults and defects, is a real brāhmaṇa. Peace of mind, absence of desire, jealousy and delusion, as also egoism, are his characteristics.

The text closes with the exhortation to one and all to become a true brāhmaṇa by realising Brahman.

Conclusion

The Upaniṣads contain the quintessence of Vedic religion and philosophy. The Śaḍdarśanas or the six systems of Indian Philosophy derive their strength and inspiration from them. The Vedānta systems are entirely an outcome of their study. The idea of mokṣa as the primary goal of life, which has permeated the Indian religions and culture of the succeeding centuries, owes its origin entirely to the Upaniṣads. And, they are the basis of the *prasthānatraya* (the three foundational scriptures), the other two being the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahmasūtras*.

The depth as well as the catholicity of their thought has attracted the attention of the savants of other religions and societies also, resulting in their being translated into other languages too.

An earnest study of the Upaniṣads, without preconceived notions and prejudices, is bound to inspire one to aspire for the life of the spirit.

The Brahmasūtras

athāto brahmajijñāsā

Hence (is to be undertaken) thereafter a deliberation on Brahman.

janmādyasya yataḥ

That (is Brahman) from which (are derived) the birth etc. of this (universe).

śāstrayonitvātf

(Brahman is omniscient) because of (Its) being the source of the scriptures.

tattu samanvayāt

But that Brahman (is known from the Upaniṣads), (It) being the object of their fullest import.

anāvṛtṭiḥ śabdādanāvṛtṭiḥ śabdātf

There is no return for the released souls on the strength of the Upaniṣadic declaration; there is no return for the released souls on the strength of the Upaniṣadic declaration.

Brahmasūtras (1.1.1-4; 4.4.22)

Preamble-Sūtras

The system of education in ancient India required the students to live in the campus of a forest academy along with the teachers. The teaching imparted was, almost always, in the form of sūtras or aphorisms, followed by explanations and discussions. At a time when committing things to memory was considered supremely important, this method suited admirably.

The sūtra literature is a class by itself. As per the norms set for a sūtra, it should be 'alpākṣara' (consisting of minimum number of letters), 'asandigdha' (without doubt as regards the meaning), 'sāravat' (must contain the essence of the subject) and yet 'viśvatomukha' (reflect all aspects of the same).

However, in their anxiety to economise the words, the composers of the sūtra-works seem to have so overdone it that bhāṣyas or explanatory commentaries by later writers became necessary.

The śrauta, the gr̥hya and the dharma sūtras form the earliest bunch of sūtra-literature. The darśanas or the philosophical systems which are of a later period, followed this sūtra-model since it served their purpose well.

Vedānta Darśana

Out of the six darśanas or systems of philosophy which accept the authority of the Vedas (the basic scriptures of Hinduism), the last two-the Mīmāṃsā and the Vedānta systems-are directly connected with them. Whereas the former tries to reconcile the various Vedic texts that seem to give

different directions with regard to the same ritual system, the latter attempts to make out a coherent philosophy of Brahman (God, the Absolute) from the apparently conflicting statements in the Upaniṣads.

Prasthāna-traya

The Vedānta system, as its very name implies, deals with the Upaniṣads which are the end-ports (anta = end) of the Vedas and also contain the essence (anta = core or essence) of the same. The system itself is based on three canonical works: the Upaniṣads, the *Brahmasūtras* and the *Bhagavadgītā*. The Upaniṣads are called 'śrutiprasthāna,' the *Brahmasūtras*, 'nyāya-prasthāna' and the *Bhagavad-gītā*, 'smṛti-prasthāna,' the three together being termed 'prasthānatraya'. 'Prasthāna' means a school of philosophy or religion.

The Upaniṣads

Though a very large number of works going by the name 'Upaniṣad' are available in print today, orthodox tradition accepts only a handful of them- twelve to fourteen-as ancient and authoritative. The entire edifice of the Vedānta system of philosophy depends upon these few Upaniṣads.

The teachings of these Upaniṣads may, broadly speaking, be classified as follows: Brahman as the ultimate cause of this world, nature of Brahman, evolution of this world and its character, nature of the living beings as individual souls, their relationship with Brahman, their involvement in this world as well as their transmigration, the final goal of life, the disciplines that help in reaching that goal and the nature of attainment of that final goal.

It is a fact that the Upaniṣads, as extant today, do not give a coherent picture of these various subjects discussed in them. Since tradition and orthodoxy deem the entire body of the Upaniṣads as one canonical scripture- the Śruti- it became necessary to reinterpret and reorganise their teachings so as to give them a more coherent look. It was exactly this that Bādarāyaṇa attempted and the result was the *Brahmasūtras*.

The Brahmasūtras

The work derives its name from the fact that it deals chiefly with Brahman (God, the Absolute) as described in the Upaniṣads, in all its aspects. It is also known by other names as follows:

- (a) The *Vedānta-sūtras*, since the subject matter is that of Vedānta or the Upaniṣads;
- (b) The *Śārīraka-sūtras*, since the ātman living in the śarīra or the body is dealt with in the work;
- (c) The *Uttara-mīmāṃsā-sūtras* (as opposed to the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā-sūtras*) since it does mīmāṃsā or enquiry into the uttara or latter part of the Vedas;
- (d) The *Bhikṣu-sūtras* since it is specially recommended for study by the bhikṣus or the saṃnyāsins.

Bādarāyaṇa, the Author

Nothing is known about Bādarāyaṇa, the author of this celebrated work. Traditionalists identify him with Vyāsa, the author of the *Mahābhārata* and the purāṇas. The work is generally assigned to the period 500 B.C. -200 B.C. by the Indian and some Western scholars. However, there are other scholars who consider the two to be different and assign Bādarāyaṇa to the period A.D. 200.

About the Work

The work *Brahmasūtras* is in four adhyāyas or chapters. Each adhyāya is divided into four pādas or quarters. The pādas comprise adhikaraṇas or topics, each composed of sūtras.

The total number of adhikaraṇas and the sūtras, according to Śaṅkara, the earliest commentator, is 191 and 555 respectively. However, variations are seen in this number as also in the readings themselves. Splitting one sūtra into two, fusing two sūtras into one or adding the last word of a sūtra to the beginning of the next are some of the reasons for such variations in the readings. Such alterations in the structure of the sūtras have contributed to divergent interpretations also. Not only that, divergent views have also arisen due to one school considering a particular sūtra as stating the pūrvapakṣa (the *prima facie* view, the objection or doubt) and another school accepting the same sūtra as the siddhānta (the theory propounded by the author of the work).

As already stated, each pāda of the various adhyāyas, comprises several adhikaraṇas or topics. An adhikaraṇa needs must have five parts connected in a graded manner. They are:

- (1) viśaya or topic; (2) viśaya or saṁśaya, doubt; (3) pūrvapakṣa or opponent's view; (4) siddhānta or established conclusion and (5) saṅgati or connection between the different sections.

The number of sūtras in any adhikaraṇa depends on the nature of the subject under discussion. Thanks to the ambiguity in the sūtras, the titles and the number of the adhikaraṇas vary from commentator to commentator.

While Nimbārka (13th cent. A.D.) has the minimum number of adhikaraṇas (151) Madhva (A.D. 1238-1317) has the maximum (223).

The purport of the sūtra itself is determined by the commentators as per the principle of ṣaḍvidha-liṅgas or six characteristic signs. They are: upakrama and upasaṁhāra (the beginning and the end), abhyāsa (repetition), apūrvatā (novelty), phala (objective), arthavāda (eulogy) and upapatti (logicality).

True to its name, the work *Brahmasūtras* deals primarily with Brahman as the highest Truth, the only independent truth, by realising which, a person transcends transmigratory existence. The one and only authority for the existence of Brahman as also for its true nature is the Śruti, the jñānakāṇḍa part (section dealing with the knowledge of Brahman/ātman) of the Vedas comprising the Upaniṣads. This knowledge of Brahman can never be obtained by logic and reasoning which depend upon the puny human intellect. Since the intellect depends upon the knowledge gained by the senses and since Brahman, the pure consciousness that he is, is beyond the ken of the senses, the Śruti as revealed to the ṛṣis is the only source for knowing him.

This takes us to the next point-the various Upaniṣadic statements that form the basis for the philosophy of the Brahmasūtras.

Since some of these statements appeared to contradict one another, Bādarāyaṇa had to undertake the unenviable task of collating them to weave out a homogeneous philosophy. While doing it, he naturally chose the most ancient of the Upaniṣads. Which are those Upaniṣads, the statements of which, Bādarāyaṇa has discussed in these sūtras? There is no direct indication in the sūtras themselves since they are too laconic. For this we have to depend almost entirely on the bhāṣyakāras or the commentators who fortunately for us, are more or less unanimous in deciphering the same.

In the first 31 adhikaraṇas (as per Śaṅkara) the major statements that form the viṣaya or viṣayavākya (subject-matter) are from the following Upaniṣads, with the number of such sentences noted against them:

Chāndogya (14), Brhadāraṇyaka (5), Kaṭha (4), Taittirīya (2), Muṇḍaka (3), Praśna(1) and Kauṣītaki(2).

Apart from these, sentences taken from the Śvetāśvatara, the Aitareya and the Jābāla Upaniṣads have also been discussed.

While analysing the purport of the various passages from the Upaniṣads, Bādarāyaṇa has quoted the opinions of other teachers also. They are:ātreya,āśmarathya, Auḍulomi, Kārṣṇājani, Kāśakṛtsna, Jaimini and Bādari. Almost all these names appear in the earlier works like the śrautasūtras and the grhyasūtras. It is likely that some preceeded Bādarāyaṇa and others like Jaimini might have been his contemporaries. Though he differed from them, he has not criticised their views, probably because they were also Vedāntins of repute, who had accepted the Upaniṣads as the primary authority and Brahman as the highest truth.

A Brief Synopsis

The contents of the work may now be summarised as follows:

FIRST CHAPTER

The First chapter comprising 134 sūtras in 39 adhikaraṇas has been called Samanvayādhyāya, since it attempts to harmonise (samanvaya = harmony) the principles dealt with in the various Upaniṣads.

The work starts with the famous sūtra athāto brahmajijñāsā ('Now, therefore, the desire to know Brahman'). Since the knowledge or experience of Brahman, leads to mokṣa or freedom from transmigration, it is very necessary to have a correct understanding of Brahman. Keeping this in view, the treatise deals with the various statements in the wellknown Upaniṣads concerning Brahman. Brahman is he from whom this world came into existence, in whom it inheres and to whom it returns at the end of a cycle of creation. The only source for the knowledge of this Brahman is the Śruti or the Upaniṣads.

It is Brahman alone who is the ultimate cause of this world and not prakṛti or pradhāna as the Sāṅkhyas aver, since it is insentient. An insentient cause can never think or willand produce such a perfectly designed universe.

This Brahman is ānandamaya, full of bliss. He is transcendent as well as immanent in this world, including the jīvātmas or the individual souls. The being of light that exists in āditya or the sun and our own eyes is also Brahman. He is also designated as ākāśa, prāṇa, bhūmā and akṣara. The being described as `aṅguṣṭhamātrapuruṣa' (the person of the size of the thumb) is also really Brahman and not the jīva, or the individual soul. So also does the wordātman refer to him.

Bādarāyaṇa quotes the opinions ofāśmarathya, Auḍulomi and Kāśakṛtsna in the fourth pāda of this chapter.āśmarathya thinks that the jīvātmas are both different and nondifferent from Brahman (or Paramātman) even as the sparks of fire are both identical with and different from fire. Auḍulomi opines that the jīvas are different from Brahman in the state of bondage but become one with him in the state of liberation. Kāśakṛtsna, however, considers the two to be identical, since it is Brahman that has become the jīva also.

Though the views of these teachers are stated, Bādarāyaṇa does not give his own opinion or preference.

The last part of this chapter asserts that Brahman is both the upādānakāraṇa (material cause) and the nimittakāraṇa (efficient cause) for this world.

SECOND CHAPTER

Designated as Avirodhādhyāya, this chapter with 157 sūtras distributed among 47adhikaraṇas applies itself to dispel any virodha or contradiction that may confront this philosophy of Vedānta.

Vedānta is not opposed to smṛti (secondary scriptures like the *Bhagavadgītā* and *āpastambadharmasūtras*) and tarka (logic and reasoning). The opposition of schools like that of the Sāṅkhya is fallible. There is no contradiction among the various statements in the Upaniṣads dealing with subjects like creation. This is the burden of the teaching of this chapter.

Out of the several non-Vedāntic systems of philosophy that existed during Bādarāyaṇa's time, the Sāṅkhya system was the most powerful. Hence it has been given special attention while refuting the other schools.

One of the important factors discussed here is the relationship between the kāraṇa (the cause) and the kārya (the effect). The Sāṅkhyan view known as `sat-kārya-vāda' states that the kārya or the effect pre-exists (sat = existing) in the kāraṇa or cause. In the process of creation it just gets manifested and is not newly produced, since something real can never be produced from the unreal. On the other hand the Vaiśeṣika school accepts the `asat-kārya-vāda,' according to which the previously non-existent (= asat) effect is newly produced. In the former case, the effect pre-exists in the upādāna-kāraṇa (the material cause) and in the latter, the nimitta-kāraṇa (the efficient cause) is constant. Bādarāyaṇa accepts these views partially and declares, on the basis of the Upaniṣads, that Brahman is `abhinna-nimitta-upādāna-kāraṇa,' both the material and the efficient cause for this world. Hence this world is nondifferent from Brahman. The objection that this world consists of insentient objects and hence cannot be the product of the sentient Brahman does not hold good, since the Śruti, the highest authority in such matters which are beyond the powers of the ordinary human intellect, declares it to be so.

Brahman has no selfish motive in creating this world, since he is self-contented. There is neither partiality nor cruelty in this creation since justice is meted out to the jīvas according to their karmas or

deserts. The very purpose of creation of this world is to help the jīvas to attain ānanda or bliss by getting established in Brahman, the Bliss-Absolute.

Apart from the Sāṅkhya school, the other schools like those of the Vaiśeṣikas, the Buddhists, the Jainas, the Pāśupatas and the Bhāgavatas like the Pāñcarātras have also been critically examined and dismissed.

THIRD CHAPTER

The third chapter is called *Sādhanādhyāya* and is the longest, with 186 sūtras spread over 67 adhikaraṇas. Though called thus, the topics discussed are diverse. They are : transmigration of the jīva into other bodies, dream-creations of the jīva, its experiencing the deserts of karma by the will of Īśvara or God, various vidyās or meditations mentioned in the Upaniṣads and clarifications regarding them, collating of a vidyā when described differently in different Upaniṣads, knowledge of theātman or Brahman as independent of karmas or rituals, certain clarifications regarding the rituals and duties prescribed for the various āśramas (stages of life like brahmacarya or saṁnyāsa) as also prāyaścittas (expiations) and so on.

FOURTH CHAPTER

Known as *Phalādhyāya* this chapter is the shortest with only 78 sūtras and 38 adhikaraṇas. The main topic discussed is the journey of the jīva after death to Brahmaloaka by the 'Arcirādimārga' or 'Devayāna', the path of light or of gods.

One who is interested in mokṣa or liberation has to practise śravaṇa (listening to the scriptures describing the nature ofātman/Brahman) and allied disciplines until realisation. The various upāsanās or meditations described in the Upaniṣads aid the jīva in the process of attaining mokṣa. On attaining brahmajñāna or knowledge of Brahman, sañcita-karma (karma accumulated over several lives) gets destroyed. āgāmī-karma, karma done after realisation, is rendered fruitless. The prārabdha-karma, the karma that has already started this body and yielding results has to be exhausted only by experiencing it.

The jīvas who have practised severe spiritual disciplines like tapas (austerity), śraddhā (devoted faith) and brahmacarya (celibacy), as also vidyās like meditation on Brahman will travel, after death, by the arcirādimārga or the path of light comprising light, day, bright-fortnight and so on, and reach the Brahmaloaka from which there is no return. There are divine guides called 'ātivāhikas' who take the jīva through the various stations of light to the Brahmaloaka.

Anomalies in the descriptions concerning the details of the Arcirādimārga have been set right through proper interpretations and arguments.

The work ends with the declaration, *anāvṛttiḥ śabdāt*, repeated twice for emphasis, ('There is no return, since the scriptures declare so.') meaning that the jīva reaching the Brahmaloaka will not return to this mundane existence. Descriptions of the nature of the muktapurūṣa, the liberated soul, are given at the appropriate places. The views of Jaimini, Auḍulomi and Bādari in this regard have also been cited.

The Philosophy of Bādarāyaṇa

Bādarāyaṇa wrote the *Brahmasūtras* to systematise the teachings of the Upaniṣads into a coherent philosophy. However, since the sūtras are short and terse, it becomes quite a job to find out what exactly is his own philosophy as revealed through this work. Even so, with the help of the sūtras which seem to be more unambiguous than the others, an attempt may now be made to portray the same.

The one and only pramāṇa (source of knowledge) that Bādarāyaṇa accepts while expounding the Vedānta system is the Śruti or the Vedas, especially the Jñānakāṇḍa part of it, viz., the Upaniṣads. He considers the words of the Vedas as nitya or eternal. Logic and reasoning, which can always be unsettled by superior ones, can never be relied upon in determining the transcendental truths like the ultimate cause of the world. Smṛtis or secondary scriptures like the *Manusmṛti* and the *Mahābhārata* including the *Bhagavadgītā* can also be depended upon, in so far as they do not contradict the Śruti.

The Śruti declares Brahman as the origin of this universe, the primary, nay, the only truth. In fact, the very definition (janmādyasya yataḥ, 1.1.2) makes him the uncaused cause, the ground of sustenance and involution of the world. He is both the material and the efficient cause for the world. He needs no external implements or assistance and can transform himself even as milk is transformed into its products.

He evolves himself into ākāśa (ether), vāyu (air) and other products by willing the same; and, he is associated with every stage of creation up to the last.

Since it is Brahman that has evolved into this world, this world is non-different from him, even as an unfolded cloth is nondifferent from the same which was earlier folded.

The activity of creation is a līlā or effortless sport for Brahman. But, since it is done as per the karmas of the unredeemed jīvas, one should not attribute partiality or cruelty to him, seeing the good and evil that exist here.

As regards the jīva or the individual soul, Bādarāyaṇa defines him as a 'jñā' or knower, a being endowed with consciousness. He has no birth or death. He is eternal and atomic in size. Whether the jīva is an aṁśa (part) of Brahman or his ābhāsa (reflection) has not been stated clearly though the views of other Vedāntins like āśmarathya, Auḍulomi and Kāśakṛtsna have been given.

The relationship between the jīva and Brahman has been likened to the snake and its coiled-up stator light and its source. Thus the question whether they are different or identical has been left unanswered.

By meditation onātman/Brahman leading to jñāna, or experience of the same, the jīva attains liberation. The Śrutis give equal importance to the performance of karma or prescribed actions and tyāga or renunciation of the same, though the performance of duties prescribed for the respective āśramas (stages of life) has been stressed even for the spiritual aspirant. The fruits of the various upāsānās or meditations practised by a jīva accrue to him by the grace of Īśvara (Brahman as the ruler of the created world).

On attaining the knowledge of Brahman all the sañcita-karma (accumulated past karma) of the jīva will be destroyed. He will live as long as the prārabdha-karma (karma already fructified) lasts. But, the karma done after attaining knowledge will not affect him.

The jīva who has reached the acme of meditation while living, will, after death, travel by the Arcirādi-mārga or Devayāna (the path of light or of the gods) and reach Brahmaloaka from which there is no return to this world. There, he will be one with Brahman, non-different from him. The various attributes predicated of Brahman get manifested in the liberated jīva.

Caitanya or consciousness, being his essential nature, is of course, always there.

In conclusion it can be affirmed that Bādarāyaṇa, in these sūtras, teaches a kind of advaita (Brahmā-dvaita?). He does not admit the existence of either the jīvas or the world, as independent of, or different from, Brahman. Since he has accepted the Upaniṣads as the supreme authority and since the other teachers like Bādari whom he has quoted, also did the same, he has not contradicted them. Both the views-that Brahman is nirviśeṣa-cinmātra-svarūpa (pure consciousness without any attributes) and saviśeṣa (withattributes)-seem to be acceptable to him. Obviously he has tried to reconcile the various, apparently conflicting, views expressed in the Upaniṣads and explain them rather than formulate his own philosophy.

The Commentators and their Works

The Vedas have been the foundation of Hindu religion and culture for millennia. The philosophy of Vedānta based on the Upaniṣads has held sway over the intelligentsia for centuries. Hence, it is but natural that the Brahmasūtras of Bādarāyaṇa has attracted the attention of the distinguished scholars over the years, who have enriched the Vedānta literature by their brilliant expositions. All these commentators have evinced great respect for Bādarāyaṇa and his monumental work. They have tried to critically examine all the other schools that were important during their days and to prove the superiority of the Vedānta over them. Of course, they were equally keen to establish their own school of Vedānta also.

Of the several bhāṣyas or commentaries available to us today, that of Śaṅkara is the earliest. There might have been quite a few bhāṣyas composed by the earlier writers. It can however be stated with certainty that Upavarṣa, to whom Śaṅkara refers in his commentary (1.3.28; 3.3.53) must have been one such. Bodhāyana, another commentator, referred to as 'Vṛttikāra' by Rāmānuja, is sometimes identified with this Upavarṣa though there is no unanimity regarding it.

The following list of commentators who have left bhāṣyas directly on the Brahmasūtras may be useful to the students of Vedānta philosophy:

Bhāṣyakāra	Period	School of Vedānta
1. Śaṅkara	A.D. 788-820	Advaita
2. Bhāskara	A.D. 996-1061	Bhedābheda
3. Yādavaprakāśa	A.D. 1000	Bhedābheda
4. Rāmānuja	A.D. 1017-1137	Viśiṣṭādvaita
5. Madhva	A.D. 1238-1317	Dvaita
6. Nimbārka	Latter half of 13th century	Dvaitādvaita
7. Śrīkaṇṭha	A.D. 1270	Śaiva-Viśiṣṭādvaita
8. Śrīpati	A.D. 1400	Bhedābheda-tmaka- viśiṣṭādvaita

9. Vallabha	A.D. 1479-1544	Śuddhādvaita
10. Śuka	A.D. 1550	Bhedavāda
11. Vijñānabhikṣu	A.D. 1550	Ītma-brahmaikya- bhedavāda
12. Baladeva	A.D. 1725	Acintya-bhedābheda

A brief summary of the more important of these schools may now be given. Since the schools propounded by Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva are more well-known and gained precedence over the others, they will be taken up first.

ŚAṅKARA

Śaṅkara's darśana or philosophy as revealed in his bhāṣyas on the Bhagavadgītā, the ten ancient Upaniṣads and the Brahma-sūtras is now well-known as Advaita Vedānta. The oft-quoted and famous verse 'brahma satyaṁ jagan mithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ' ('Brahman alone is real; this world is only an illusory appearance. The jīva is verily Brahman and is not different from him.') gives this philosophy in a nutshell.

Śaṅkara categorises Brahman into two aspects: Para-brahman and Apra-brahman. Where the Upaniṣadic statements deny all limiting adjuncts like name and form, created by avidyā or ignorance of his essential nature to Brahman, he is Para, the higher, Brahman. On the other hand, where these statements describe him as endowed with name, form and several attributes, it is the Apra or the lower, Brahman that is referred to. It is the latter that is the cause for the creation of this world, its sustenance and its dissolution.

Really speaking, Brahman does not get transformed into this world. The multiplicity of names and forms is only a 'vivarta,' an appearance, due to avidyā or ignorance, even as a snake is perceived in a rope in insufficient light. This, he calls as 'adhyāsa' or 'adhyāropa' (superimposition). Through vidyā or discriminative knowledge, 'apavāda' or desuper- imposition takes place, giving the true knowledge of the reality.

Śaṅkara considers the jīvas as caitanya or pure consciousness, but, circumscribed by the antaḥkaraṇa (the 'inner organ' or mind). The jīva, though nitya (eternal), śuddha (pure), buddha (awakened), and mukta (free), appears as kartā (the doer) and bhoktā (the experiencer) due to the limitation imposed by the antaḥkaraṇa.

The Upaniṣadic sentences like 'tat tvam asi' teach the essential identity between the jīva and Brahman, as pure consciousness, after eliminating their adventitious qualities.

Śaṅkara does accept kramamukti or gradual liberation of the jīva after death, by travelling through the Devayāna, to Brahmāloka, as described in the Upaniṣads and the Brahma-sūtras. However, he is emphatic about sadyomukti or instant liberation, here and now, simultaneously with the rising of jñāna or knowledge. Such a mukti is also called jīvanmukti, liberation even while living.

RĀMĀNUJA

Rāmānuja's commentary on the Brahma-sūtras is known as Śrībhāṣya. Apart from this, he has also composed two more smaller works on the Brahma-sūtras, the Vedāntadīpa and the Vedāntasāra. The former, being a later work, contains some additional explanations.

Rāmānuja's Śrībhāṣya is stated to follow in the footsteps of the more detailed Bodhāyana-vṛtti as also the works of some earlier Vedāntins like Brahmanandī and Dramiḍācārya whose works are not available now.

Rāmānuja accepts Brahman as the highest and independent reality. However Brahman includes in himself cit (the sentient beings, the jīvas) and acit (the insentient prakṛti or nature). These two are also real, but under the absolute control of Brahman. Brahman-also called Īśvara by him-includes them, is immanent in them and also transcends them. Hence, Rāmānuja's system is called 'Viśiṣṭādvaita,' advaita or nonduality of Brahman, the Absolute, but 'viśiṣṭa' or qualified by cit and acit. It is similar to a tree with branches, leaves and fruits. Though the tree is 'one,' it has internal parts, each part being different from the other parts, the tree itself, however, always remaining as one.

To Rāmānuja, Brahman is the Supreme Person (sarveśvara) who is the ruler of all. He is antagonistic to all evil. He possesses infinite auspicious qualities. He is omniscient, and omnipotent. The creation, subsistence and re-absorption of this world proceed from him.

Rāmānuja considers the jīva or the individual soul as the spirit different from the body, atomic in size and endowed with jñāna or consciousness which contracts or expands. He has a free will. And, the jīvas are infinite in number. Some jīvas called 'nityas' are ever free. Others who are now 'baddha' or bound, can attain mukti through bhakti and prapatti (devotion and surrender) and the grace of God. All the liberated jīvas are similar in nature.

Spiritual life starts with the performance of the prescribed karmas in the right spirit leading to the purification of the mind. Such a pure jīva becomes fit to practise jñāna and experience his separateness from the body-mind complex. However, it is through bhakti (devotion) and prapatti (surrender) that he ultimately attains Brahman through the Devayāna and becomes free.

MADHVA

A thorough-going dualist, Madhva has composed 37 works which collectively go by the name Sarva-mūla. The short and terse bhāṣya on the Brahma-sūtras, the Aṅubhāṣya a brief treatise on the same in verses, Nyāyavivaraṇa and the Anuvyākhyāna are the four works on the sūtraprasthāna. His is a philosophy of realism and a monotheistic theology centering on devotion to Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa.

According to him Brahman, identified with Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) is the independent reality. Prakṛti or matter, and the jīvas or souls who are atomic and infinite in number, are coeval realities but entirely dependent on him. Brahman is essentially knowledge and bliss. Though his infinite personality is beyond our conception, out of grace for us, he can take forms which are neither material nor finite.

Madhva proclaims the theory of pañcabhedas or five eternal differences between Brahman and the jīvas, Brahman and prakṛti, jīvas and prakṛti, jīva and jīva and, various objects of prakṛti.

He categorises the jīvas into three groups: muktiyogyas, nityasamsārins and tamoyogyas. The first group is capable of attaining muktior liberation. The second group, being interested only in the crass pleasure of the world and not a whit in moral regeneration or spiritual elevation, eternally goes through the rounds of births and deaths. The third group of jīvas, the damned sinners that they are, degenerates into lower births and suffer in hell.

The jīvas get liberation through bhakti and the grace of God. In the state of liberation they are not only freed from suffering but also enjoy positive bliss. Differences among the jīvas, however, persist even in the state of liberation.

BHĀSKARA

Bhāskara is the trail-blazer for the post- Śāṅkara schools of Vedānta which did not agree with Śāṅkara's brand of advaita based on māyāvāda, the theory of the unreality of this world. He is a strict Vedāntin in the sense that he takes his stand on the Upaniṣads and the Brahmasūtras. His commentary on the latter expounds his philosophy.

Bhāskara advocates the acceptance of the direct meaning of all the passages of the Upaniṣads without any distinction. He presents a Brahman who has innumerable auspicious attributes, but, without any particular form. He has a twofold power-the bhokṭṛ-śakti (the power of the enjoyer) and the bhogyaśakti (the power of the enjoyed). Using these two powers he transforms himself into the acetana or insentient objects and the jīvas or the sentient souls. Though this transformation is real, it does not affect him in any way. The jīvas in their essential nature are one with Brahman, but get differentiated from him in the state of bondage due to the upādhis, or limiting adjuncts-the bodies and minds- which are real. These upādhis, though real, are not nitya or eternal. They are to be considered as real since they are actually experienced. But, in the state of liberation, they become one with Brahman even as the rivers flowing into the ocean become one with it.

Bhāskara considers this world as the kāryarūpa or effect, of Brahman and hence real.

As regards the sādhanā, Bhāskara recommends performance of scripture-ordained duties without any desire for their fruits and the practice of meditation on Brahman as also the jīva's oneness with him. Since he does not accept a Personal God, there is no place for divine grace in his system.

NIMBĀRKA

Nimbārka's Dvaitādvaita is very similar to the Bhedābheda of Bhāskara. However, being a firm believer in Brahman with form and attributes and the path of devotion, his philosophy is more akin to that of Rāmānuja.

Nimbārka's main work is Vedāntapārijāta-saurabha which is his commentary on the Brahmasūtras. It is rather brief but lucid, since he avoids the dialectical methods or a flowery style.

According to him there are three equally real and co-eternal tattvas or principles: Brahman, cit and acit. While Brahman is the controller or niyanṭṛ, cit (the sentient being, the jīva or the soul) is the enjoyer, bhokṭṛ, and acit (the insentient nature, prakṛti) is the enjoyed, bhogya.

Acit is of three kinds: prākṛta or what is derived from prakṛti or primal matter; aprākṛta or what is not derived from prakṛti, but derived from a non- material substance of which the world of Brahman is made and, kāla or time.

They are different from one another in their svarūpa or nature. But the cit and the acit are paratantra-tattvas, dependent realities.

Nimbārka adopts the view that the bheda (difference) and the abheda (non-difference) are both equally real. They coexist but do not contradict each other. It is something like the relationship between the sea and its waves or the sun and its rays. Cit and acit, the souls and the universe, exist in Brahman from all eternity and never get separated from him whether in the causal state or when manifested.

They retain their individuality even during salvation, or dissolution of the universe.

Brahman is personal, possesses a celestial body, full of exquisite beauty and grace. Nimbārka identifies him with Kṛṣṇa and posits Rādhā as his Śakti or consort even as Rāmānuja accepts Lakṣmī as the consort of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa.

Brahman is omniscient, the cause of the origin, sustenance and destruction of the universe. He is all-powerful and yet all-merciful. He is gracious to his devotees and helps them have a direct vision of himself.

The jīvas are atomic and infinite in number. Each of them is a distinctive agent, a jñātṛ (knower), kartṛ (doer) and bhoktṛ (enjoyer) of the karmas he does. They animate the body they live in, even as a small lamp kept in a room lights up the whole room.

There are three destinies for the jīvas-naraka or hell for the sinners, svarga or heaven for the virtuous and apavarga or release for the enlightened ones. Apavarga is attaining the world of Brahman from which there is no return.

Constant meditation on Brahman as the inmost Self of the jīva or the individual soul is the means of attaining Brahman in Brahmaloka. There he has brahma-svarūpa-lābha, becomes similar to him in nature, except for the power of creation.

The other sādhanās recommended are: scripture-ordained work, knowledge, devotion and surrender to God, as also strict obedience to the spiritual teacher.

VALLABHA

Vallabha's philosophy is known as Śuddhādvaita. He is said to have written two commentaries on the Brahmasūtras, the Bṛhadbhāṣya and the Aṅubhāṣya, of which the former is not available now. The latter is up to the 33rd sūtra of the second pāda of the third adhyāya (3.2.33) only. The book was completed by his son Viṭṭhalanātha. Apart from the prasthānatraya, he holds the Bhāgavata in very high esteem. He wrote a commentary on it also, called Subodhinī, which too remained incomplete.

For Vallabha, God the Absolute is Kṛṣṇa whom the Upaniṣads call 'Brahman'. He is one without a second and is sat-cit-ānanda, (being, awareness and bliss). He has three forms: Parabrahman, Puruṣottama or Kṛṣṇa; Antaryāmin, the indwelling spirit of all the living beings, and Akṣarabrahman which is the object of meditation and the abode of Kṛṣṇa. It is this Akṣara that appears as prakṛti (insentient nature, the matrix of all created objects) and puruṣa (sentient soul, the jīva), but is beyond both. While Puruṣottama is the highest, Akṣara is an expression of his.

This Akṣara, again, appears in three more forms: kāla (time), karma (action) and svabhāva (nature).

Kāla or time is suprasensible and is inferred from its effects. It is all-pervasive and the support of all beings. Karma or action is also universal. It manifests itself as different actions of different beings. Svabhāva or nature is that which produces pariṇāma or change.

God is both saṅguṇa and nirguṇa (with and without attributes). He cannot be known except through his own grace. Through his māyāśakti, he can become anything at any time. He is both the material and the efficient cause of this world. He creates the world through his own nature and hence the samavāyi-kāraṇa, the inherent cause. Though he exists everywhere in his tripartite nature as being, consciousness and bliss, their manifestation in the created universe differs. Matter reflects only the being aspect ('sat'), the souls reflect the consciousness aspect also ('cit') whereas as Brahman, he manifests all the three fully.

Though unmanifest and transcendent in his own nature, by creating the world through his will, he becomes manifest and an object of comprehension. Since this world is a manifestation of Brahman, it is never destroyed but is only withdrawn into him at his will.

The jīvas or individual souls come out of Akṣara-Brahman like sparks from fire. They are eternal parts of Brahman and are atomic in size. They are of three classes: puṣṭi, maryāda and pravāha. The first are the chosen ones enjoying the grace of God, and ardently devoted to him. The second study the scriptures, perform the rites prescribed as ordained duties and also cultivate devotion. They attain God in course of time. The last are interested only in the worldly life and hence transmigrate constantly. Some of them, due to satsaṅga or good company, may attain God later.

Vallabha considers bhakti or devotion as the only means of salvation. By that, the jīva is released from the cycle of birth and death and enjoys the bliss of God in all possible ways.

Vallabha holds that the knower of Brahman is absorbed in Akṣara-Brahman and not in Puruṣottama. It is only through bhakti that the latter, the highest aspect, can be attained.

He advocates two forms of bhakti: maryādā-bhakti and puṣṭi-bhakti. The former is formal devotion to be practised as described in the scriptures and has to be cultivated by self-effort. The latter is attained by the grace of God alone, without one's effort. 'Puṣṭi' refers, not to the physical nourishment, but to the spiritual nourishment got by the grace of God. Hence the name 'Puṣṭi-bhakti'. Consequently, Vallabha's system is also called 'Puṣṭi-mārga'. Emphasis on the worship of Bālakṛṣṇa, (child Kṛṣṇa) and sevā or service to him, find an important place in the mode of sādhanā taught by him.

BALADEVA

Baladeva is an important teacher of the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism developed by Śrīkṛṣṇa Caitanya (A.D. 1485-1533). The philosophy of this school is known as Acintyabhedābheda.

Govindabhāṣya is his commentary on the Brahmasūtras, Siddhāntaratna being another work that expounds this philosophy. This school, though deeply indebted to the Dvaita system of Madhva, also differs from it.

According to this school of thought, Brahman the highest reality is Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu or Hari. He is the Personal God possessed of infinite auspicious qualities, which are 'acintya' or beyond our comprehension. He is 'nirguṇa' only in the sense that he is beyond the three guṇas of sattva, rajas and tamas. The scriptures are the only authority to reveal him.

God has three powers: parāśakti (higher power), aparāśakti (lower power) and avidyāśakti (nescience-power). Through the first, he becomes the efficient cause, and, through the other two, the material cause. When the latter two powers are manifested in gross forms, the universe of souls and matter arises.

Creation of the world is a spontaneous act of the Lord. However, he does it as per the karmas of the individual souls.

The individual soul is eternal. It is both knowledge and knower, an enjoyer and an active agent, though not independent. It is atomic in size.

Bhakti is the sole and direct cause of salvation. Though dhyāna or upāsanā (meditation) is one form of bhakti, it is through premābhakti (intense devotion) that God can be realised.

Performance of duties purifies the mind. Study of the scriptures is an aid in the path of sādhanā.

However, it is ultimately by the grace of God alone that he can be realised and salvation attained. The freed soul resides in the same world as the lord and in his proximity, attains his nature and attributes.

However, it retains its separate identity.

Baladeva does not admit of jīvanmukti or liberation while living in the body here.

The Brahmasūtra Literature

Being the basic text of Vedānta, both in its metaphysical and in its dialectical aspect, the Brahmasūtras has attracted the attention of a host of elite scholars over the centuries. Apart from the direct bhāṣyas by the great ācāryas, several sub-commentaries and glosses over them have enriched the Brahmasūtra literature. In such literature now available to us, the maximum number of works belong to the Advaita school.

On the Śāṅkarabhāṣya, three ṭīkāś or subcommentaries are available in full: Bhāmatī of Vācaspati-miśra (A.D. 840), Nyāyanirṇaya of ānandagiri (A.D. 1260) and Ratnaprabhā of Rāmānanda (17th cent.)

The one by Padmapāda (A.D. 820), a direct disciple of Śāṅkara, called Pañcapādikā deals with the first four sūtras (1.1.1-4) only. This was commented upon by Prakāśātman (A.D. 1200) in his Pañcapādikā- vivaraṇam. There is a gloss on this called Tattva-dīpanam by Akhaṇḍānanda Muni (A.D. 1350). All these commentaries collectively, have created the Vivaraṇa-prasthāna, a special school of Advaita Vedānta, in the post-Śāṅkara period.

As opposed to this, the Bhāmatī-prasthāna was developed by Amalānanda (13th cent. A.D.) in his Kalpataru on the Bhāmatī and Appayya-dīkṣita (16th cent. A.D.) in his Parimalā, on this Kalpataru.

Mention may also be made of a few other works on the Brahmasūtras, considered to be more important than others:

Sanḥṣepa-sārīrakam of Sarvajñātma Muni (A.D. 900), Vivaraṇaprameya of Vidyāraṇya (A.D. 1350), Brahmasūtra-dīpikā of Śāṅkarānanda (14th cent. A.D.) and Brahmatattva-prakāśikā of Sadāśiva-brahmendra (18th cent. A.D.)

Comparatively speaking, the Brahmasūtra literature of the other schools of Vedānta, is not so voluminous though it is in no way inferior in its quality and erudition.

After creating his magnum opus, the Śrībhāṣya, Rāmānuja wrote two more treatises on the Brahma-sūtras entitled Vedāntadīpa and Vedāntasāra. The Śrībhāṣya has only one ancient commentary, the Śrutaparakāśikā of Sudarśana-sūri (13th cent. A.D.). On this, Vedānta-deśika (A.D. 1268-1369) wrote a gloss called Tattvaṭīkā.

Apart from his bhāṣya (generally called the Madhva-bhāṣya) on the Brahmasūtras, Madhva wrote the Aṅubhāṣya in verses, giving the gist of the various adhikaraṇas of the work. Rāghavendratīrtha (A.D. 1598-1671) has written an extensive commentary on this and has named it Tattvamañjarī.

Trivikrama Paṇḍita, a disciple of Madhva, has commented upon the bhāṣya of Madhva. It is called the Tattvadīpikā. Tattvaparakāśikā of Jayatīrtha (A.D. 1365-1388) and Tātparyacandrikā of Vyāsarāya (A.D. 1481) are the other commentaries on the same.

However, the most celebrated work of the Dvaita school of Madhva is the Nyāyasudhā of Jayatīrtha which is a highly dialectical and yet lucid commentary on Madhva's Anuvyākhyāna, a work elucidating his own commentary on the Brahmasūtras.

Nimbārka's commentary on the Brahmasūtras, known as the Vedānta-pārijāta-saurabha, has been expounded further by Srīnivāsa (13th cent. A.D.) in his Vedānta-kaustubha which again has been explained further by Keśava Kāśmīrin (15th cent. A.D.) in his Vedānta-kaustubha-prabhā.

The other commentaries which have drawn the attention of the Vedāntic scholars are the Vijñānāmṛta-bhāṣya of Vijñānabhikṣu (A.D. 1550) and the commentary Sūkṣma on Baladeva's Govindabhāṣya.

Apart from these works mentioned here, there are several other treatises and tracts on the various aspects of Vedānta as interpreted by the numerous schools.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Vedānta system based chiefly on the Brahmasūtras which itself is a systematic exposition of the philosophy of the Upaniṣads-has influenced all the important aspects of Hindu religion and culture, including the modern Hindu movements.