CHAPTER II

DIVINE PERSONALITY IN THE VEDAS, BRĀHMAṆAS, UPANIṢADS AND IN THE BHAGAVADGĪṬĀ

In order to discuss fully the concept of God as the divine person, we shall do well to begin our investigation from the oldest period, the period of the Ṛgveda, and consider in their chronological order, as far as possible, the views expressed in the Upaniṣads, Bhagavadgīṭā, Purāṇas and different philosophical systems. A clear theistic conception was developed during the Vedic period, especially when Varuṇa was regarded as the Lord of the Universe and the custodian of the law of righteousness called Īta. In the Ṛgveda he is conceived as the most magnificent and majestic of the gods. Epithets denoting power and majesty are applied to him, and he performs great cosmic deeds. Moral elevation and sanctity are the principal attributes of Varuṇa. Varuṇa stands out as the god of justice, watching the conduct of all people setting his spies everywhere for the purpose. He controls the destinies of mankind, and beholds all the secret things, that have been and will be done.¹ He seizes and punishes transgressors with his bonds and mooses; he is a barrier against the irreligious and wicked; sinful mortals can hardly expect to escape him.² He watches or witnesses the truth and falsehood of people:

¹ RV. i. 25-11
² RV. vii. 75.3
Satyārytē avapaṣyant janānām. The hymn vii. 8.6 is a typical one, for it depicts Varūṇa as a guardian of the moral order, angry at the misdeeds of men. He is the King of all that exists, a universal monarch; a self-dependent ruler. Power, material strength and sovereign authority are also spoken of as belonging to Varūṇa. He is called asura (mighty) māyin possessed of mystic or miraculous power. As King he ordains all that happens on the earth, and as legislator he lays down the laws. Consequently he is called ātasya gopa, 'guardian of law', or order and ātavat 'observer of order'. The Maruts receive their impulse from Indra, but their instructions from Varūṇa. The poet wonders whither the stars go in the daytime, and his explanation is that "Varūṇa's laws are inviolable; the moon wonders shining through the night". Mitra-Varūṇa have ordained the succession of years, months and days. Indra is mentioned as the soldier who punishes offenders against Varūṇa's laws. The laws are in Vedic language 'Vrataṇi'. The Vrataṇi of Varūṇa are his royal ordinances. The criterion of excellence in a good law-given and judge is the firmness and impartiality of his decisions. That he has once determined must remain as a rule to bind all subsequent decisions. Hence we are continually told of Varūṇa that his vrataṇi stand fast, are unalterable (dhātavrata). They are the fixed ordinances according to which the sun travels through heaven, the stream flows into the ocean, and the actions of men are ruled. The other gods follow the vrataṇi of Varūṇa and Varūṇa follows the Vrata which he has himself made, as a just King follows his own precedents. Thus Varūṇa

1 HV. vii. 49.3
2 RV. vii. 87.6
3 RV. vii. 28.4
4 AV. i. 24.10
5 RV. vii. 66.11; i. 25.8
6 HV. x. 13.5
7 RV. AV. ii. 28.8; cf. 65.8; viii. 41.1; i. 24.10; x. 12.5
8 RV. iv. 13.2; v. 67.3.
occupies a position corresponding as nearly as possible to that of rta, of which he may almost be considered the personification. But he differs from rta in that he is an agent and not a mere regulative principle. He also differs from other Vedic deities such as Vāya, Rudra, Pusān, Parjanya etc. in that he is no more a productive agent in nature, his creative function is an inference from his presidential capacity.

The theism of later Indian philosophical systems with its emphasis on devotion and grace is traced to the Vedic conception of Varuṇa. Professor Macdonell rightly observes that "Varuṇa's character resembles that of the divine ruler in a monotheistic belief of an exalted type".1

The idea of the creator and ruler of the universe as we find in the concept of Varuṇa was further developed in three remarkable hymns of the RgVeda.2 In the Hymn of Hiranyagarbha3 we are told that Hiranyagarbha arose in the beginning from the primeval waters that pervaded the entire universe. He evolved the beautiful world from the shapeless chaos which was all that existed. But how did the chaos produce Hiranyagarbha? What is that unknown force or law of development which brought Him into existence? Who is the author of the primeval waters? The Supreme Being, the Omnipotent God was the author of the chaos. He created it by His will, and deposited a seed in it which became the golden germ in which He Himself was born as the Creator. Thus two eternal substances evolved out of the One.

1 Vedic Mythology, p.3.
3 R.V. X. 121.
In the famous Puruṣasūkta of the Rg Veda we find a more positive conception of the Supreme Being. The Supreme reality is conceived as Puruṣa or the divine Person who has "a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet". "Puruṣa himself is the whole (universe), whatever has been, and whatever shall be. He is also the lord of immortality". Such is His greatness, and Puruṣa is even higher than this: "All existing things are a quarter of Him, and that which is immortal in the sky is three quarters of Him". The entire cosmos from Prakṛti to the gross world and all its creatures make up only a fraction of the Almighty Lord, while the major portion of His being is transcendent. And when we say so we do not minimize His infinite nature; we try to depict His infinite greatness in contrast to imperfections and finiteness of the empirical world. We are told that "from Him Virāt was born, and from Virāt Puruṣa". Puruṣa is thus the begetter as well as the begotten. He is the Absolute as well as the self-conscious 'I'. As a tree supports its branches, leaves, flowers and fruits so does Puruṣa, the Lord uphold the entire universe. "The Brāhmaṇa was his mouth; the Rājanya became his arms; the Vaiśya was his thighs; the Śūdra sprang from his feet". "The moon was produced from his mind; the sun from his eye; Indra and Agni from his mouth; and Vāyu from his breath". "From his navel came the atmosphere; from his head arose the sky; from his feet came the earth; from his ear the four quarters". Thus the whole universe has been treated as the self-direcution of the Supreme Reality and the imagination of the Vedic poet brings out the greatness of his God by giving him huge dimensions.

1 R.V. I.90 2 R.V. I.90.1 3 R.V. I.90.2
4 R.V. I.90.3 5 R.V. I.90.5 6 R.V. I.90.12
7 R.V. I.90.13 8 R.V. I. 90.14
In the Nasadiya Sukta, the idea of the Supreme Being is further developed and elaborated. The one primordial principle is here conceived as the Creator and Superintendent (Adhyakṣa) of the universe, and by implication the Supreme Person. The hymn begins with the description of a state previous to all existence. "Nothing that is, and then", the poet says, and he adds with a boldness matched only by the Eleatic thinkers of Greece or by Hegel's philosophy, "even what is not, did not exist then". There was God alone, who breathed, without wind, of his own power. Breathing without air implies what mystic literature describes as motion without movement, intense activity without any external manifestation. What breathes is conscious. The implication of saying that God breathes is that He is conscious. God is not pure knowledge, pure consciousness like Brahman of Advaita Vedanta. He is the subject of Knowledge, a Knower. In the absence of anything else, He is also the object of His own knowledge. He Knows Himself and Knows that He knows Himself. The self-existent creator exists in His own right and this power is referred to as Svadhā. The word Svadhā points to the self of the creator as a substance by which creation takes place. The next step in the creative process is the appearance of desire in the mind of the creator. Desire or Kāma is a mysterious power which vitalises the whole consciousness.

It is nature's technique to perpetuate life on the plane of manifestation. According to Aristotle, God moves as the object of desire. It denotes intellectual stir, the sense of deficiency as well as active effort. It is the link between non-existent (asat) and existent (sat). But why should this desire have arisen in the All-perfect Being? The reply is that He wanted to see Himself and therefore assumed many forms.

1 R.V. X. 129  
2 R.V. X. 129.1  
3 R.V. X. 129.2  
4 R.V. X. 129.4  
5 R.V. X.
The whole burden of this sūkta is to trace the creation to its source in a transcendent being who is here called Adhyakṣa. The word Brahman has not been used in this hymn, but there is hardly any doubt that the same is suggested by an overwhelming force of symbolical words. He is referred to as Ekam, the one and as Paratpara, the Reality beyond which nothing else existed. The word 'Adhyakṣa' in this context is very significant. It literally means 'above the eyes'. Taking 'eye' to be a generic term for all instruments of knowledge, that which is above the eye would be beyond the reach of the instruments of knowledge. In this sense the expression stands for Brahman, the Lord of the universe. The last verse declares that the ruler of the universe knows, or that he does not know from what material cause this visible universe came into existence and whether that material cause existed in any definite form or not. Such a confession of ignorance is rooted in deep knowledge. In the words of Maurice Matelinck: "Is it possible to find in our human annals, words more majestic, more full of solemn anguish, more august in tone, more devout, more terrible? Where could we find at the very foundation of life a completer and more irreducible confession of ignorance? Where, from the depths of our agnosticism, which thousands of years have augmented, can we point to a wider horizon? At the very outset it passes all that has been said, and goes farther than we shall even dare to go, lest we fall into despair, for it does not fear to ask itself whether the Supreme Being knows what He has done - Knows whether He is or is not the creator and questions whether He has become conscious of Himself."

The spirit of the Nasadiya Sūkta is not an expression of scepticism, but it forms a sound ontological statement about the existence of the Ultimate Reality. The hymn is the source and authority for a great deal of later philosophical speculation.
Thus we find that the poets of the Ṛgveda arrived at the conception of the Supreme Being as the divine Person. Much the same idea pervades the Brāhmaṇas.

The Brāhmaṇas are almost entirely concerned with sacrifice. "The sacrifice is regarded as the means for obtaining power over this and the other world, over visible as well as invisible beings,animate as well as inanimate creatures". Still the dignity of God as the Supreme Person and Lord of the world was not depreciated by those who held such an exaggerated notion about the importance of sacrifice. The priests being occupied with sacrifice and the symbolical interpretation of the rites and ceremonies came to conceive the whole universe as a sacrifice. And this conception led them to posit a First Cause of the Universe. We find different sages of the Brāhmaṇas described this primordial principle differently. They called him Viśvakarman, 'the All-Worker', or Hiranyagarbha, 'the Golden Embryo', or Puruṣa, 'Person', or Prajāpati, 'the Lord of Creatures', or Brahmanaspati, 'the Lord of devotion or prayers'. Amongst these and other names by which the Supreme Being is thus designated, the name of Prajāpati, the Lord of Creation plays a very important part in the Brāhmaṇas. The prominent place which Prajāpati occupies in the Brāhmaṇas appears in great measure to be due to two reasons. Firstly, because he was identified with sacrifice, and secondly he came to be identified with Brahman. Thus he obtained a place in the ritual and ritualistic expositions, as well as in philosophical discourses. The unambiguous meaning of his name again made him a good mythological figure, especially as a creator. Prajāpati, the all-embracing personality is described as the supreme spirit, the author

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1 Martin Haig, Altaretva Brahmana, Bombay, 1863, p. 73.
of all generation and creation. He is the god of all other gods; he is
the three worlds as well as the fourth world beyond them. He is some-
times described (in the same way as Brahma in other places) as having
alone existed in the beginning, as the source out of which the creation
was evolved. In the Pañcavimśa Brāhmaṇa he is identified with the
entire universe. In other texts of the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, however,
Prajāpati is not represented as the source of creation, but only as one
of the subsequent and subordinate agents, created by the gods, or as
springing out of an egg generated by the primeval waters. He is else-
where said to have offered sacrifice in order to produce the creation.
In another place again Prajāpati is identified with sacrifice itself and
is described as the food of gods. Prajāpati is sometimes identified with
Soma, the drink of immortality. He is also identified with the Moon and
the Sun. More familiar, however, to the authors of the Brāhmaṇas, as it is
more in keeping with the mystic origin of Prajāpati, is the identification
of the latter, not with the solar orb itself, but with the Puruṣa in the
Sun, the real shedder of light and life. This conception plays an important
part in the speculations of Agnirahasya, where he is represented as
identical with Puruṣa in the (right) eye—the individualised Puruṣa, as
it were. As the personified totality of all being, Prajāpati, however, not
only represents the phenomena as aspects of space, but also those of time.
He is called the Father Time. Since in the material process of building up
of Fire-altar, the infinite dimensions of space require to be reduced to
portions, so, in regard to time, the year as the lowest complete revolution

1 Sat. Br. iv. 6. 1. 4.  2 Sat. Br. ii. 2.4.1; vii. 5.2.6; xi.5.8.1.
3 xx. 14.2  4 Sat. Br. vi. 1.1.5.
5 Sat. Br. xl. 1.6.1 ff.  6 Sat. Br. ii. 4. 4. 1.
7 Sat. Br. v. 1.1.2.  8 Sat. Br. vi. 2.2.16; x. 4.2.1.
9 Sat. Br. x. 5.2.1.
of time, is taken to represent the Lord of Creation: Prajāpati is the Father Year. Since time works its havoc on all material existence, and carries off generation after generation, the Supreme Lord of generation, Father Time, as he is the giver of all life, so he is likewise that destroyer of all things - Death. And lastly, the Supreme Lord of the universe is conceived as the pure intellectuality, pure spirituality being called the Mind.

Prajāpati may thus be said to have two characters which, however, are not kept distinct in the Brahmānas. On the one hand, he is the result of one of the efforts of the Indian intellect to conceive and express the idea of the deity not in abstract but in the concrete, as the divine Person, the Great First Cause of all things and beings; while on the other hand, he is sometimes described as only a secondary and subordinate divinity and even treated as only one of the thirty-three deities.

Coming to the Upaniṣads we find two different conceptions of the Supreme Being. Some Upaniṣads describe Brahman as Immutable and Unknowable and consequently indeterminate and impersonal while others depict the Ultimate Reality as the divine Person and the Lord of the universe.¹ In the Isa Upaniṣad, for example, God as the divine Person is the main category and the emphasis is laid upon the immanence of God in the world. Thus in the opening verse of the said Upaniṣad we read: "All this — whatever exists in this changing universe is enveloped by the Lord... Protect the self by renunciation. Lust not after any man's wealth". In

¹ Dr. A. C. Das, A Modern Incarnation of God, p. 254.
another verse of the same Upanishad we are told that the Isa, the Lord is inmanent in all that moves in the world: "One unmoving that is swifter than mind. The senses do not reach it as it is ever ahead of them. Though itself standing still it outstrips those who run. In it the all-pervading air supports the activities of being."\(^1\)

The Kena Upanishad accepts the conception of Brahman as the Supreme Creadiner found in the Isa Upanisad. It further asserts that the Ultimate Reality is immanent as well as transcendent in the world. Brahman is conceived as the ear of ear, the mind of mind, the speech of speech, the breath of breath, the eye of eye.\(^2\) Not there the eye goes, nor speech, nor mind.\(^3\) It is other than the known and beyond the unknown.\(^4\) Brahman is further described as that which is not expressed by words, but through which words are expressed;\(^5\) that which is not thought by the mind, but by which the mind is thought;\(^6\) that which is not seen by the eye, but by which eyes are seen;\(^7\) that which is not heard by the ear but by which ears are heard;\(^8\) that which is not breathed by prāṇa but through which prāṇa breaths.\(^9\) Such is the nature of Brahman proclaimed by the sages of the Kena Upanishad.

In the Katha Upanishad, though a psychological approach to Reality is made through an analysis of the nature of the individual self, still Brahman as undifferentiated, indeterminate and impersonal is not the main theme of this Upanisad. "Beyond the Unmanifest", it declares, "is the

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1 Isa Up. i.4.  
2 Kena Up. i.2.  
3 Ibid. i.3.  
4 Ibid. i.4.  
5 Ibid. i.5.  
6 Ibid. i.6.  
7 Ibid. i.7.  
8 Ibid. i.8.  
9 Ibid. i.9.
Person, all-pervading and imperceptible. Having realised Him, the embodied self becomes liberated and attains Immortality.¹ We are told in another place that the Supreme Self cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing; He is to be attained through His own self-revelation to the man whom He chooses.² This view looks upon the Supreme Self as personal God and teaches a doctrine of divine grace. Again in another place we read: "The objects of sense are higher than the senses; and higher than the objects of sense is the mind; and higher than the mind is the faculty of knowledge; and higher than that is the great self. And higher than the great self is the unmanifest (avyakta) and higher than the unmanifest is the Puruṣa; than the Puruṣa there is none higher".³ The term 'Puruṣa' referred to here goes back to the Puruṣa Sūkta of the RgVeda and is distinctly personal in significance.

In the text just quoted we find a hierarchy of principles or being. We are asked to pass from outward nature to the one world-ground, avyakta, and from it to the spirit behind. Between the two, Puruṣa and Prakṛti, priority is given to Puruṣa, the Supreme Person. The concept of Puruṣa in the Kaṭha Upanisad is different from that of the classical Sāṅkhya. The Puruṣa of the dualistic Sāṅkhya is not beyond the avyakta, but is a co-ordinate principle. Here the Upanisad gives certain Sāṅkhya ideas in a theistic setting.

The Mundaka Upanisad, like some other Upaniṣads, gives its instruction in the form of a dialogue between a disciple and his preceptor. The disciple, Saṁnaka, fully qualified for Brahmavidyā, asks Angiras, the

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¹ Kaṭha Up. ii. 38.
² Kaṭha Up. i. 2.23.
³ Ibid. i. 3.10,11.
teacher: "Reverred Sir, what is that by the knowing of which all this becomes known?" The teacher replies that there are two kinds of knowledge, the lower and the higher. The seeker of truth should acquire them both. The lower knowledge includes the teaching of all the Vedas (the sections dealing with rituals and sacrifices) and their auxiliaries. In endows a man with knowledge of the unmanifested universe and enables him to enjoy material prosperity on earth and happiness in heaven. By means of the Higher Knowledge one realises the Imperishable Truth. Brahman the goal of Higher Knowledge, is the Supreme Person, the cause of the universe and the ultimate goal of all living beings. "He is the self-luminous and formless Purusa, uncreated and existing both within and without." In another context the same Upanishad speaks of two birds perched on one tree, one of whom eats the fruits and the other eats not but watches, the silent witness withdrawn from enjoyment. The two birds signify the Personal God and Impersonal Absolute.

The elements associated with theism, Personal God and devotion to Him, which are met in other Upanishads become prominent in the Svetasvatara Upanishad. The emphasis is not on Brahman the Absolute, whose complete perfection does not admit of any change or evolution but on the personal Isvara, omniscient and omnipotent, who is the manifested Brahman. The Svetasvatara Upanishad contains a large number of passages depicting Brahman as the divine Person, and names like Isa, Hara, Rudra, Siva, Bhagavan, Deva, Agni, Aditya, Vayu etc. which frequently occur in this Upanishad, are

1 Mund. Up. i, 1.3
2 Ibid. ii. 1.2.
3 Ibid. iii. 1.1-3.
generally used as epithets of the Personal God. Thus in one place we read that "The Lord Isā, supports all this which has been joined together: the perishable and the imperishable, the manifest and the unmanifest." In another place we are told that "Prakṛti is perishable. Hara, the Lord is immortal and imperishable, the manifest and the unmanifest." Still in another passage it is stated that "Rudra is truly one. He alone rules all the worlds by his powers. He dwells as the inner self of every living being. After having created all the worlds, He, their protector, takes them back into Himself at the end of time." Rudra referred to in the text signifies Śiva, who is the personification of Brahman in its destructive aspect. In another context of the same Upanisad, the Supreme Being is described as "the all-pervading Bhagavān". The word Bhagavān is an epithet of the Lord who is endowed with six supernatural powers, namely, total power, dharma, glory, effluence, knowledge and renunciation. Again in another context the Supreme Self is conceived as assuming various forms: "That is Agni (Fire); It is Āditya (Sun); It is Vāyu (Wind); It is Candramā (Moon). That Self is luminous stars; It is Hiranyagarbha; It is water; It is Virāt." In several other places of the same Upanisad, Puruṣa, the divine Person is described as the Ultimate Reality, the source and support of the universe. Thus we read as follows: "The whole universe is filled by the Puruṣa, to whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing either smaller or greater; who stands alone, motionless as trees, established in His own glory." Moreover, in another place Puruṣa is conceived as the Lord who is "the Ruler and the Light that is imperishable".

1 Svet Up. i.8. 2 Ibid. i.10. 3 Ibid. iii.2. 4 Ibid. iii.11. 5 Ibid. iv.2. 6 Ibid. iii.9. 7 Ibid. iii.12.
Thus we find that the Svetasvatara Upanisad ends with the conception of Brahman as the Supreme Person, omniscient and omnipotent, and not with the conception of an undifferentiated, impersonal and attributeless Reality. The word Puruṣa in the Svetasvatara Upanisad is an epithet of Brahman either because He dwells in the body (pūra) or because He fills (pūrṇatvāt) the whole universe.

There are, however, some Upanisads which conceive Brahman as strictly indeterminate, impersonal and attributeless. The Brhadāranyaka Upanisad, for example, speaks of Brahman as transcendent, indefinable reality. In the famous dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Gārgī we are told that Brahman is "neither gross, nor fine, neither short nor long, neither glowing red (like fire) nor adhesive (like water); neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, unattached, without taste, without smell, without eyes, without ears, without voice, without mind, without radiance, without breath, without a mouth, without measure, having no within and no without."¹ Brahman as Pure Intelligence is beyond all finite thought and intellect. Thus it is said in one place of the same Upanisad: "You cannot see the seer of seeing, you cannot hear the hearer of hearing, you cannot think of the thinker of thinking, you cannot know the knower of knowledge."² Again in a well-known conversation between Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī the homogeneous, non-dual nature of Brahman is emphasised. Yājñavalkya, the greatest idealist of the age said to Maitreyī: "when there is duality, as it were, then one smells something, one sees something, one hears something, one speaks something, one thinks something, one knows something. (But) when to the knower of Brahman everything has become the Self, then

¹ Brhad Up. iv. 4.22.
² Ibid. iii. 4.1.
what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should one That owing to which all this is known — through what should one know the Knower? 1

In another context of the same Upanishad two modes of Brahman are described namely, gross and subtle, mortal and immortal, limited and unlimited, defined and undefined. 2 The gross or visible form is found in three elements of earth, water and fire. It is gross because it consists of well-defined parts; mortal, since it is subject to destruction; limited, being related to some other object; defined having noticeable peculiarities of its own. The subtle or invisible form, on the other hand, is in air and ether. It is immortal, unlimited and undefined. But Brahman in its essence is unlike anything of this world in the sense of being wholly indeterminate. So the best way to describe Brahman is by negative terms.

In describing the impersonal Brahman the Upanishads employ usually the technique of negation. 'Indefinable', 'inconceivable' mere negative statements are all that can be asserted of this pure being, which ex hypothesi is incapable of qualification and determination and diversity implied in descriptive attribution. This is emphatically asserted by the words 'Neti Neti' - 'Not this, not this'. 3 But how through these two terms is it sought to describe Brahman, the Truth of truth? (Satyasya Satyam)? By the elimination of all difference due to limiting adjuncts,

1 Ibid. ii. 4.14.  
2 Ibid. ii. 3.1  
3 Ibid. ii. 3.6.  
4 Ibid.  
5 Ibid. iii. 9.28.
the words refer to something that has no distinguishing mark such as name,
or forms, or action, or heterogeneity, or species, or qualities. Words
denote things through one or other of these. But Brahman has none of these
distinguishing marks. Hence it cannot be described as "It is such and such"
(it iti). Brahman is described by means of name, form and action super-
posed on it, in such terms as 'Knowledge' (Vijñāna), 'Bliss' (ānandam)
and 'Pure Intelligence' (Vijñānānanda). When, however, we wish to
describe its true nature, free from all difference due to
limiting adjuncts, then it is an utter impossibility. Then there is only
one way left, viz. to describe it as 'Not this, not this', by eliminating
all specifications of it that have been known. These two negative particles
are meant for conveying all-inclusiveness through repetition so as to
eliminate every specification whatsoever that may occur to us. If, on the
other hand, the two negative particles merely eliminated just the two
aspects of Brahman already described (viz. gross and subtle), then its
other aspects than these two would not be described and there would still
be a room for doubt as to what exactly Brahman is like. So that description
of Brahman would be useless, for it would not satisfy one's desire to know
it. But when through the elimination of all limiting adjuncts the desire
to know about space, time and everything else (that is not Brahman) is
removed, one realises one's identity with Brahman, the Truth of truth, which
is homogeneous like a lump of salt and which is Pure Intelligence without
interior or exterior, his desire to know is completely satisfied, and his
intellect is centred in the Self (atman) alone. Therefore, the two
negative particles in 'Not this, not this' are used in an all-inclusive sense.

1 Ibid. iii. 9. 28  2 Ibid. iii. 9. 28
3 Ibid. ii. 4. 12  4 Ibid. iv. 5. 13
If it is asked, 'is it fair to describe Brahman thus?', the answer is 'Yes'; there is no other and more appropriate description of Brahman than this. Therefore, this is the only description of Brahman. The particles 'iti' repeated twice, covers all possible predications that are to be eliminated by the two negative particles. This is exactly the same conclusion which Spinoza, one of the greatest monistic thinkers of Europe arrived at in his famous dictum: 'Every determination is negation'.

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad depicts Brahman as Reality (Satyam), Knowledge (Jñānam), and Infinite (Anantam). These three words are the qualifying adjuncts of substratum Brahman and they are independent of one another. That is to say, Brahman is Satyam, Brahman is Jñānam, and Brahman is Anantam. A thing is called real if it always remains the same and never deviates from what has been proved to be its true nature. The real is the opposite of the unreal, for it does not possess an unchanging nature. Brahman, being the cause, must be real. If Brahman is the cause of the world it may be contended that, it is also the agent. Further, being a substance, like clay, it may be material in nature. In order to remove this misapprehension, Brahman is called Jñānam. It is not the knower or the agent of knowing, but Knowledge itself. The above position is further strengthened by the qualifying word Anantam. A knower is limited by the object of knowledge and the act of knowing. That is called Infinite which is not limited by anything else. Thus the word Satyam negates all changes and modifications in Brahman, the word Jñānam negates the idea of agency, and the word Anantam negates the idea of limitation.

Similar positive epithets are applied to Brahman in other Upanisadic texts. In the Chandogya Upanisad, for example, Brahman is conceived as the Supreme Light. There are, however, various kinds of light in the gross universe. But they by themselves are nothing; they shine only by the light of Brahman. In another place of the same Upanisad Brahman is conceived as Bhūmā. The term is used to signify that Brahman is the self-luminous principle which shines in all worlds. Further, the Chandogya Upanisad in a dialogue between Nārada and Śanat Kumāra used the word Bhūmā (infinite) to designate Brahman. Now what is Brahman? This is what is described in the following passage: "Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else - that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, understands something else - that is the finite. The Infinite is immortal, the finite mortal." If it is asked "on what is the Infinite established?", the answer is simply this, "On its own greatness or not even on its greatness." This means that the Infinite is rooted in its own greatness while things which are in the region of the finite, alpa, are rooted not in themselves but in others. If the question is taken in an ultimate sense, we cannot even say this, for the Infinite cannot be established in anything else, not even on its own greatness, for it is apratiṣṭha and anāśrita. Thus the Chandogya Upanisad arrives at the conception of a Being which is absolutely indeterminate, impersonal and transcendent.

According to the Aitareya Upanisad Brahman is the Absolute, not God the divine Person. When conditioned by mayā the attributeless Brahman becomes the omniscient Lord (Īśvara), the cause of the manifestation

1 Chand. Up. iii. 7.7 2 Ibid iv. 15.4
3 Ibid vii. 23. 4 Ibid vii. 24.1
of the universe. As the inner controller of all, it is called Antaryāna.

Being associated with cosmic intelligence, which is the seed of tangible universe, it is known as Hiranyagarbha. Being conditioned by the totality of all bodies and born from the Cosmic Egg, it is known as Virāt. Being associated with the names of fire, speech, etc, it becomes the devas.

Thus Brahma is known by different names and forms when associated with different upādiya or limiting adjuncts. But these limiting adjuncts are all superimposed and unreal. When all these limiting adjuncts are eliminated, the only reality that shines in its own glory is the non-dual, impersonal, indeterminate Absolute.

In the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad it is for the first time in the history of thought that the distinction between Absolute and God, Brahma and Īśvara, Turiya and Prajñā is elaborated. Prajñā is described as the state of deep sleep where the consciousness enjoys peace and has no perception of either external or internal objects. It is a state of knowledge, though the external and internal states are held in abeyance. Brahma becomes Īśvara or personal God with the quality of prajñā or pure wisdom. Turiya, on the other hand, is a state which cannot be positively described. It is "not that which cognizes the external (objects), not what cognizes both of them, not a mass of cognition, not cognitive, not non-cognitive. (It is) unseen, incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks, unthinkable, unnameable, the essence of the knowledge of the one self, that into which the world is resolved, the peaceful, the benign, the non-dual". Here we get to a reality which is beyond the distinction of subject and object. We cannot use here terms.

1 Māṇḍ. Up. 1.7.
like all-knowing, all-powerful. Brahman cannot be treated as having objects of knowledge or powers. It is pure being, impersonal and devoid of difference. In many Upaniṣadic passages Brahman is conceived as pure being beyond thought and language. It is birthless, free from sleep and dream, without name and form, ever fullgent, all thought; no form is necessary for it. The transitory character of sleep shows that prajñā is not the ultimate state. Though objective consciousness is absent in both the prajñā and turiya consciousness, the seed of it is present in the state of deep sleep, while it is absent in the state of transcendent consciousness. Empirical consciousness is present though in an unmanifested condition in the state of deep sleep, while the transcendent state is the non-empirical beyond the waking, dreaming and dreamless states and free from their interruptions and alternations. Turiya or Pure Consciousness is identical with the non-dual Ātman or Brahman. It is the Ultimate Reality - uncreated and free from causality. It does not produce any effect nor is it produced from a cause. It alone exists. One who sees creation or evolution, and the multiplicity that follows upon it, is subject to metaphysical ignorance, called māya or avidyā. From the standpoint of turiya māya is non-existent. In the experience of turiya there is neither subject nor object; neither the perception nor the idea of God. It does not reflect or explain away any other reality than itself. It is not a state in which objects are extrinsically opposed to one another. It is pure consciousness - the unfailling light (turiyā sarvadṛk sadā) without any duality.

1 Mandūkya Kārikā iii 36.
2 Ibid. i.12.
The psychological analysis of the state of turiya reveals the truth that Brahman which is identical with Atman is totally incomprehensible to the mind. No language can directly express it either by affirmation or by negation. But it is not therefore a void or utter non-existence; for one cannot imagine the illusory universe without a positive substratum. Brahman in its essence is devoid of all characteristics specific or generic, being one without a second.

Thus we see that the Upanisads speak with a double voice in describing the nature of the ultimate reality. They sometimes take it as the Absolute which cannot be characterized by any category. They sometimes, again, identify it with the Supreme Person whom we are to adore and worship. As a result of this, we have two views about the world. In some texts, the world is regarded as an accident of Brahman (the Absolute) and in others as organic to God. We perceive these two tendencies running through the Upanisads, one which regards the Absolute as pure being and makes the empirical world an accidental appearance (vivarta) of Brahman, and the other which looks upon the Absolute as a concrete Person of which the world is the necessary expression. Sankara, leader of the Advaita Vedanta, affirms that the Upanisads establish the impersonal, attributeless Brahman as the ultimate reality. Ramanuja who is the chief exponent of the Visistadvaita school of Vedanta, on the other hand, maintains that the scriptures represent the ultimate reality as the divine Person. Both schools of thought are partial and defective. They misrepresent the teaching of the Upanisads considered as a whole. We cannot select some texts and reject the rest. We must accept both if we regard the Upanisads as authoritative. The Bhagavadgita reconciles these two opposite views.

In the Bhagavadgītā the problem of the ultimate reality is approached, as in the Upaniṣads, by an analysis of the subjective and of the objective. The objective analysis with which we are mainly concerned here proceeds on the distinction between kṣara and akṣara, perishable and imperishable, changing and changeless. It is said in one place of the Bhagavadgītā that there are two beings in the world, destructible and indestructible (akṣara).\(^1\) Everything finite is in time and subject to change and decay; it comes into being, grows and then withers away. But change presupposes the changeless, perishable posits the imperishable. The changeless which is indestructible and immutable must be Brahman, impersonal and attributeless as described in some Upaniṣadic texts. Now if Brahman is absolutely indeterminate and impersonal it cannot be regarded as the Lord of the Universe and consequently we cannot trace the world to it. But if it is the ultimate reality it must be the abiding ground of the world. The problem which baffles our intelligence is that kṣara and akṣara, mutable and immutable seem to be two irreconcilable opposites with no real bond of connection between them. The Bhagavadgītā finds the synthesis of these two opposites in the concept of Puruṣottama.\(^2\) We are told that the Divine is neither wholly kṣara, nor wholly akṣara. He is greater than the immutable and He is much greater than the mutable things. If He is capable of being both at once, it is because other than they, anyah, the Puruṣottama above the world and yet extended in the world and in cosmic experience. The Lord says, "Since I am beyond the perishable and superior to the imperishable, hence it is that I am known in the world as well as in the

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1 Bhagavadgītā xv. 16.
2 Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gītā, p. 488; Dr. A.C. Das, A Modern Incarnation of God, p. 260.
Veda as the Supreme Person. Thus the word 'God' in the Bhagavadgītā does not mean an extra-mundane deity, but the divine Person who though in His essence immutable and imperishable creates and sustains the gross and subtle worlds. He is the eternal Master of all manifested existence, Lord of worlds and their creatures. He is in all and all are in Him; He has become all and yet too He is above all and not limited by His creations. He is the transcendent Divine; He descends as avatāra, manifests by His power in the Vibhūti; He is Godhead secret in every human being. "The foolish mistake me, clad in human form, ignorant of my supreme nature, the Great Lord of all beings."

To know or rather to realise the Truth, we must know the whole of it; contradictions and controversies arise only when we take a partial view of the Truth. The Gītā lays emphasis upon the fact that neither of the two kinds of being Kṣara and aksara, represents the whole of the Truth; they are but two aspects of the same reality. They may be contradictory to each other, but contradictions may be reconciled in a higher being, which may absorb them both. The idea of the Puruṣottama represents an all-absorbing Whole, comprising within it all the diametrically opposite poles. As a matter of fact, in some of the Purāṇas and in later Vaiṣṇava philosophy (particularly of Bengal), the Puruṣottama has been defined as the Supreme divine Person who has the inherent power of absorbing all sorts of contradictions.

There is, however, a difference of opinion among philosophers in regard to the interpretation of Kṣara and aksara. Without going into the controversy we may turn our attention to the background against which the

1 Bhagavadgītā, xv. 18
2 Ibid. ix. 11.
concept of Puruṣottama is worked out. The Sāṅkhya philosophy presents a
dualism where Puruṣa or the conscious entity and Prakṛti or gross nature
of change and transformation are expounded as two mutually opposite
entities, both eternally self-existent. The Kṣara in the present context
means the blind Prakṛti of Sāṅkhya, whose nature is to change, and the
unqualified Puruṣa, as purely conscious principle, represents akṣara. They
may be taken to be independent principles in relation to each other —
the one excluding the other in its nature. This dualism of Puruṣa and
Prakṛti is, overcome in the Bhagavadgītā. According to the Gītā, these
two represent two aspects of the supreme Person, in whom both have their
ultimate support, and by whom both are controlled in their union as also
in their separation.

Sāṅkara in his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā interprets the
word 'akṣara' as signifying the inscrutable power of the Lord. But in doing
so he distorts the meaning of the text as a whole. Rāmānuja to suit his
own special theory, makes kṣara stand for the principle of Prakṛti and
akṣara for the individual soul, and regards Puruṣottama as superior to both
of them. The use of phrase 'Uttama Puruṣa' is found in the Chāndogya
Upaniṣad where it has been said that, when the soul with all satisfaction
emerges out of this body in its supreme luminous form, it is called the
Uttama Puruṣa. Here it seems from the context that the Uttama Puruṣa
refers to the individual soul, and not to Paramātman. There is no anti-
cipation of the idea of Puruṣottama in the Upaniṣads and the full conception
is found first in the Bhagavadgītā. The Gītā conception of Puruṣottama

1 "Chānd. Up. viii. 12.3."
was later accepted and amplified by the Purāṇas where we find a popular modification of the Sāṁkhya view and the Vedāntic view in the light of the idea of Puruṣottama. In the Purāṇas we seldom find Prakṛti and Puruṣa described independently of the highest Being, of whom the two have generally been explained as attributes. Again, Brahma and māyā of the Vedānta occupy the same position in the Purāṇas, with relation to the highest Being, as Puruṣa and Prakṛti of Sāṁkhya.

The idealism of the Upaniṣads is transformed in the Gītā into a theistic religion, providing room for love, faith, prayer and devotion. The Absolute as such has no significance for man. The Gītā gives us a God who satisfies the whole being of man, a real which transcends the abstract infinite and the abstract finite. It reconciles all opposites.