CHAPTER 1

1. THE HUMAN CONDITION

Śaṅkara states in the very second verse of the Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi that it is hard for any living creature to achieve a human birth. In the following verse, he goes on to describe this as a rare advantage obtained only through God’s grace. Man at the pinnacle of the evolutionary ladder, is set apart from the other living creatures and organisms in that he has the conception of duty and is capable of acquiring knowledge. The human being is a paradigm case. He knows what has to be done and he also knows how to acquire the appropriate knowledge to do it. It is this twofold eligibility—in the words of Śaṅkara, in his commentary on the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, ‘his competence for karma and knowledge’\(^1\)—which gives the human being the unique privilege of realising his true nature. The precious human birth is again spoken of in another scriptural text, where it is said, ‘In man alone is the Self most manifest, for he is the best endowed with intelligence. He speaks what he knows; he knows what will happen tomorrow; he knows the higher and lower worlds; he aspires to achieve immortality through mortal things. He is thus endowed (with discrimination), while other beings have consciousness of hunger and thirst only.’\(^2\)

Indeed, it is this jñāna-karma-adhikāra or the eligibility of pursuing knowledge and the performance of duty, which gives credence to the popular saying, ‘Man is the crown and glory of God’s creation.’ This chapter, which focuses on the human condition, on the condition of the jīva or the individual soul in empirical existence will form the starting point of the thesis.

Our existence in this world as individuals can be fully described in the three roles, which we play; as an agent of actions, as a subject of knowledge and as an

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\(^1\) Śaṅkara’s commentary on Taittirīya Upaniṣad (hereafter TUB), 2.1.1.
\(^2\) Aitareya Āranyaka, 11.3.2-5.
enjoyer of the consequences of actions. In Vedāntic terminology, a human being is a kartā, a jñātā and a bhoktā. We can say that these are the modes of human existence. Indeed, one cannot think of human existence beyond these three roles.

It is when the jīva becomes the subject of knowledge or the knower (pramāṇa) that the question arises, ‘How does the jīva know?’ It is to answer this question and also to have a better understanding of the nature of doership and enjoyership in our lives that we need to begin our inquiry with an analysis of what are known as the components or constituents, which make up the jīva. We may also call these the equipment of the jīva. In other words, we have to find out how the jīva is equipped to function in the world as a kartā, jñātā and bhoktā.

We have used the term ‘jīva’ and its English equivalent, the individual soul. Who or what really is this ‘jīva’? The jīva is a complex entity. It is complex in the sense that it is made up of two parts or two components, namely, the Self (Ātman) or pure conscious-ness and the not-Self (anātman). The jīva is therefore, one part pure consciousness and sentience, and the other, material and insentience. Various other terms have also been used to describe or define the jīva, such as Self-in-the-body; Self-in-the-world; the individuated Self or mind-sense-body complex plus Self.

For our purpose, I would like to base the discussion on the Self and not-Self definition. Of the two components, we shall first examine the not-Self and leave the discussion of the Self to the next chapter. The importance and relevance of the not-Self is often overlooked. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that without the not-Self, the pure consciousness (svārūpa-caitanya) has no function. For the Self to do anything, a physical medium is required. It is similar to electricity. By itself electricity has no practical consequence. A physical medium is required for electricity to manifest its effect. It is common knowledge that light is produced only when electricity passes through and heats up the tungsten element of a lamp. Of course, the reverse is also true. The physical medium by itself is of no
use. Without electricity, the lamp is just another object. Similarly, a human being without consciousness is a mere body. It is not a jīva.

The not-Self or the material entity, which in normal parlance we call the body, is really made up of three structures, technically called ‘the three bodies’. These are: the external gross body (sthūla-śarīra), the subtle body (sūkṣma-śarīra), and the causal body (kāraṇa-śarīra). These bodies are made from what are known as the sheaths (kośas), which do not have any independent reality. There are five such sheaths and these are: the physical sheath (annamaya-kośa), the vital-air sheath (prāṇāmāya-kośa), the mental sheath (manomaya-kośa), the intellectual or consciousness sheath (vijñānamaya-kośa) and the blissful sheath (ānandamaya-kośa).

1. Physical Body (sthūla-śarīra).

A detailed analysis of the five sheaths is found in the Upaniṣads (principally the Taîttrīya Upaniṣad) and other texts, such as, the Pañcadaśi by Vidyāraṇya and the Vedānta-sāra (Essence of Vedānta) by Sadānanda Yogindra. The purpose of the analysis is to enable the spiritual aspirant to go beyond the five sheaths after knowing their nature and realise the ultimate reality (i.e. the Self or Ātman) within. Being the object of the various senses, the gross body is obvious to everyone. It is therefore, an ideal starting point for the purpose of discussing one’s true nature. The rationale is to establish what is not known through what is known. In the words of Sureśvara, ‘Just as a person is made to see the moon through the edge of a branch of a tree alone, so too he is made to see Brahman, which is identical with the inward Self and which is devoid of sheaths through the knowledge of the sheaths alone.\(^3\) The physical sheath, which makes up the body, is made from the combination of the sperm and ovum (dvāndva-yoni). These in turn are the products of the essence of food. In short, the gross body is made from

\(^3\) Taîttrīya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya Vārtika (hereafter TUBV), 2.232.
food or *anna* and sustained by food. *Annamaya* means the transformation of food. The body is therefore, material and *tamasic* in nature. Consequently, it is subject to the six kinds of change (*vikāras*), namely, existence, birth, growth, change, decay and death. The physical sheath is the most gross and dense of the five sheaths. Given its presentation to touch and cognition, it is also the easiest to identify.

2. **Subtle Body** (*sūkṣma-śarīra*).

Of special importance to the understanding of the human condition is the subtle body. Unlike the physical body, the subtle body is not an object of the senses. It is an aggregate of nineteen subtle principles, which manifest the personality of an individual. The subtle principles are: the ten senses (*indriyas*), comprising, the five senses of knowledge (*jñānendriyas*), namely, seeing (eye), hearing (ear), smelling (nose), tasting (tongue) and feeling (skin) and the five organs of action (*karmendriyas*), namely, talking (voice), grasping (hands), walking (feet), generating (genitals) and excreting (anus); the five vital airs (*pañcaprānas*), namely, *prāṇa*, *apāṇa*, *vyāna*, *sāmāṇa* and *udāna*; the intellect (*buddhi*), the memory stuff (*citta*), the ‘I’ (*ahāṅkāra*) and the mind (*manas*). The last four being the functional components, which make up what is called the internal organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*). The subtle body is also known as the *liṅga-śarīra*. It is called *liṅga-śarīra* because it is a symbol or mark (*liṅga* means symbol or mark) pointing at one’s individuality beyond the gross body. It is pertinent to point out here that for the purpose of analysis, the memory stuff and the ‘I’ are regarded as the functional aspects of the internal organ itself and not merely subordinate functions of the intellect and mind respectively, which is the view of some of the traditional Indian thinkers. Being subtle, the existence of the subtle body can only be inferred from the effects produced by the nineteen principles constituting it. In particular, it is the

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4 The ten senses or *indriyas* are the powers or capacities of the physical organs, which they are associated with. They should not be confused with the physical organs.
function and interaction of the internal organ with the five senses of knowledge and the five organs of action, which make human life possible. The ten senses originate from their respective physical organs located in the body, which are also known as the external organs (bahi̇karanāṇāni). The subtle body therefore, does not exist in isolation but is closely connected with the physical body.

2.1 Five Vital Airs (pañca-prāṇas).

Our examination of the subtle body complex begins with the five vital airs (pañca-prāṇas). It is important to note that in reality there is only one prāṇa, the chief prāṇa or mukhya-prāṇa, which is responsible for the physiological functioning of the gross body. It is this prāṇa, which becomes functionally differentiated into the five vital airs (pañca-prāṇas) and the five subsidiary vital airs (upā-prāṇas). As the latter have only supportive functions\(^5\), our discussion will only focus on the pañca-prāṇas.

According to the Praśna Upaniṣad, the function of the chief prāṇa is similar to that of an emperor who allots and deputises his commanders to oversee the management of different villages. Like the emperor, the chief prāṇa allots the functioning of the different parts of the body to the five vital airs.\(^6\) The five vital airs, namely, prāṇa, apāna, samāna, vyāna and udāna are therefore, the five functional manifestations of the chief prāṇa. Prāṇa is the vital air, which operates in the region of the eye, ear, tongue and nose. It is therefore, responsible for the proper functioning of the senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and most importantly, breathing. Apāna is the vital air, which regulates the functions of the organs below the navel, such as, the kidneys, the intestines and the reproductive

\(^5\) For instance, naga, one of the upa-prāṇas, supports the apāna in relieving the pressure on the abdomen through belching. The other four upa-prāṇas are: kārma, krkala, devadatta and dhananājaya.

\(^6\) Praśna Upaniṣad 3.4- 'As a sovereign commands his affairs, saying, "you superintend such and such villages," even so do this life (main prāṇa) allots the other vital breaths to their respective places.'
organs. In other words, *apāna* is responsible for urination, excretion and seminal discharges. Digestion is controlled by *samāna*. This vital air is responsible for the absorption of the active principle in the food and drink, which are consumed. It also plays a role in maintaining the balance between *prāṇa* and *apāna*. *Vyāna* is the vital air, which is diffused all over the body through what are technically called the *nādis* (channels or tubes). These *nādis*, which number several tens of thousands, are found in the sheath of vital airs (*prāṇāmāya-kośa*). *Vyāna* is primarily responsible for the flow of impulses in the nervous system. It is therefore, involved in muscular control and movement. *Udāna* is the vital air, which moves upwards. Besides being responsible for bodily functions in the upward direction, such as, vomiting, peristalsis, etc., *udāna* is also the carrier of the subtle and causal body at the time of death. Depending on whether the person had lived a life of virtue or sin, the *udāna* would deliver its ‘cargo’ to heaven or hell respectively. However, for those who had lived a life where there had been a balance between the good and the bad, such people would take birth in the world again. Finally, it is important to point out that it is the five vital airs together with the five organs of action, which constitute the sheath of vital airs (*prāṇāmāya-kośa*). The *pañca-prāṇas* and the five organs of action, which are characterised by activity, are produced from the active or *rājasic* aspect of the five rudimentary elements or *tanmatras*. It is the sheath of vital airs, by virtue of its proximity to the physical body, which animates and vitalises it. The sheath of vital airs is essentially a flow of dynamic energy similar to the ‘*Chi*’ (life-force) of the Taoist system.

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7 *Tanmatras*, a Sānkhyā concept, which is generally accepted by the other traditions including Advaita, has been loosely translated as rudimentary elements or subtle elements. The exact meaning is difficult to determine. According to S. Dasgupta, these are subtle ‘potentials’, which produce the gross elements. The five *tanmatras* are: sound (*śabda*), touch (*sparśa*), form (*rūpa*), taste (*rasa*), and smell (*gandha*). These give rise to the five gross elements, namely, space or ether (*ākāśa*), wind (*vāyu*), fire (*agni*), water (*ap*), and earth (*prthivi*) respectively. Please see: Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1991), Vol.1, p.74. Also see *Vedānta-sūtra* (hereafter VS), 2.59.
2.2. Internal–Organ (antahkarana).

Going beyond the physical sheath and the vital-air sheath brings us to what could perhaps be described as the more important principles of the subtle body, namely, the internal organ and the capacities or the psychical aspects of the external organs. The external organs are distinguished by the two characteristics of location (sthana) and specific function (vrata). The external organs of the five senses of knowledge, namely, the eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin are located in the gross body. Each one of these has a structure as well as a specific function. The structure or organ is located in a particular part of the human body and discharges a specific function. The eye, for example, can only see but cannot hear. Vrata means doing a thing meticulously in a limited way. Associated with the physical eye is the sense of sight. The sense of sight is the capacity or power of the eye, which although originating from the physical organ, resides in and forms part of the subtle body. Like the sense of sight, the capacities or powers of the other outer organs, namely, the sense of smell, touch, hearing and taste and the five motor senses belong to the subtle body.

Pivotal to the understanding of the jiva’s roles in the empirical world is the internal organ. Unlike the external organs, the internal organ does not have any location. Indeed, the term ‘internal organ’ may be a misnomer as the antahkarana is not an organ in the usual sense. Instead, it pervades the whole body and its processes or modifications (vrttis) are non-specific. The internal organ is an aggregate comprising four functional aspects, namely, the mind (manas), memory stuff (citta), the ‘I’/ego (ahankara) and intellect (buddhi). It is the product of the sattva component of the five basic elements. It should be underscored that in reality the four aspects of the internal organ cannot be identified individually and given any specific location. Instead, the aspects have been described as the strands of a rope (guna-rashi), which are woven together. The four aspects can therefore be seen as four different processes coming together and working together. This working
together of the mind, memory stuff, ‘I’ and intellect is called the processes or modifications (vr̥tti) of the internal organ. We shall now examine each of the four aspects in greater details.

2.2a. Mind (manas).

The mind is the ‘outermost layer’ of the internal organ in the sense that it is in contact with the external world. Involved with the external organs as well as with the internal organ, the mind is the bridge between the two. It is the mind, which gives meaning to sensory data. The data received from the sense organs are interpreted by the mind, which is concerned with the present or the contemporaneous data that one gets. In the mind, the impressions of the sense organs will occur as processes or modifications (vr̥tti). Where the vr̥tti occur, there the subtle body really begins, as distinct from the gross body.

2.2b. Memory Stuff (citta).

The memory stuff is both memory and organisation. It is the storehouse of all previous experiences and impressions. The memory stuff will determine what the present interpretation (by the mind) is. It makes the past functions in the present. The root word ‘citi’ means heaping or gathering. All the past impressions are gathered and in this gathering, organisation is involved. This is what is called saṁskāra-vāsanās. The memory stuff is therefore concerned with not only the past but is also a principle of organisation. It may be pertinent to point out here that there has been some confusion in the literature, particularly those published in the English language, regarding the term ‘citta’. This has been in no small part due to the use of this term in the Yoga school to mean the mind. The internal organ in the Yoga system is said to be made up of two divisions, namely, prāṇa (responsible for the vital physiological functions) and citta (responsible for the psychological processes). As a result, we come across in the Yoga system, concepts, such as, the
five *citta-vṛttis* or mind processes, namely, *mūḍha* (dull mind), *kṣipta* (restless mind), *vikṣipta* (restless but at times tranquil), *ekāgra* (one-pointed mind) and *niruddha* (empty mind). The use of *prāṇāyāma* or breath control is prescribed to control the *citta*, which is suppressing not only the memory but also the entire mind. Memory in the Yoga system is called *smṛti*.

2.2c. Ego (*ahaṅkāra*).

The *ahaṅkāra* or ‘I’ or ego is said to be the representative of the *jīva*. It operates as the organising factor of the internal organ. ‘*Aham*’ means ‘I’ and ‘*kara*’ is ‘to make’. *Ahaṅkāra* is therefore, technically known as the maker of ‘I’. As the organising factor, the ‘I’ or ego ties up the past, the present, and the future to give the *jīva* a perspective for action or otherwise. One may ask, ‘Where is the ‘I’ located?’ The ‘I’ has no location but is made everytime when one has an experience; as when one says, ‘I come’ or ‘I go’ or ‘I do this or that’. In deep sleep (*suṣupti*) or when one is engrossed with some activity, like reading a book or painting, the ‘I’ is not there. Therefore, the *ahaṅkāra* is the identification of the individual in all the processes. It is the ‘I’, which makes the distinction between the experiencer and the experienced. The genesis of the dual notion of *yuṣmad* and *asmad* or the object and the subject stems from this ‘I’. ‘I’ is therefore, a creation for transaction (*vyapara*). It has relevance only in a transactional or phenomenological framework. In other words, the ‘I’ is only present in the waking and dream states. To the Advaitins, especially *Śaṅkara*, the ‘I’ is a creation of ignorance. The Mīmāṁsā school, in contrast, sees the Self (*Ātman*) as the object of the notion of ‘I’. Therefore, when one uses the term ‘I’, it refers to the Self. *Śaṅkara*, however refutes such an interpretation. According to the Advaitin, the Self, which is of the nature of pure consciousness, is all pervasive. Therefore, if indeed the ‘I’ is representative of the Self, then it should be present in all the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. However, from experience, we find that the ‘I’ is absent in
deep sleep. The person in deep sleep does not say, 'I am sleeping'. Indeed, as we shall see in the following chapter, the state of deep sleep level is characterised by the absence of any cognition. The Advaitin therefore concludes from the analysis of the deep-sleep state that the Self is not the object of the 'I'. In reality, the Self only appears to be what is denoted by the ego. It is important to point out here that the 'I', as an aspect of the internal organ, is a bridge (setu), which connects the causal body and the subtle body.

2.2d. Intellect (buddhi).

The buddhi is generally translated as 'intelllect'. A more accurate meaning perhaps is 'to be aware'. The buddhi, made from the sattva aspect of the subtle elements, is the faculty, which enables us to know. It is the instrument of knowledge. By itself, the intellect is inert. However, when the light of the Self falls on it, the intellect becomes creative. As an aspect of the internal organ, the intellect is basic to the mind, 'I' and memory stuff. Citsukha, an early 13th-century Advaitin in his work Tattvapradīpakā or Citsukhī, calls the intellect 'bhitti-sthāniya'8. 'Bhitti' means wall. The intellect is therefore seen as a wall, which serves as the ground for the other aspects of the internal organ. Being inherently pure, the buddhi functions like a crystal wherein the pure consciousness (Ātman) is reflected. In fact, it has been described as the nature of consciousness, pure and undifferentiated that we have in deep sleep and absorption or deep meditation (samādhi). However, the medium between the intellect and the mind is clouded by the latent impressions and tendencies inherent in the memory stuff. Unlike the mind, 'I' and memory stuff, which are oriented outwards the intellect can face either the object i.e. outwards, or the subject Self i.e. inwards. It is the latter feature, which makes the intellect the medium of Self-realisation. It is therefore,

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8 Citsukha borrowed this term from Abhinavagupta, a literary critic and Kashmerian philosopher, who lived in the 9th century. Abhinavagupta had used this term in his Lochana, a commentary on a literary work, the Dhvanyāloka.
necessary to harness the intellect for the insight into one’s true nature. In empirical life, when an external object is presented to the jīva, the intellect becomes outwardly oriented. This activates the ‘I’, which in turns prompts the mind. The mind in turn takes the help of the memory stuff, which enables the evaluation of the pros and cons, resulting in a process, which eventually leads the jīva to act or not to act. Later Advaitins, like Appayya Dīkṣita, have used the analogy of water being drawn from the river into canals (for irrigation) to show how the intellect, as a mode of consciousness, operates in the jīva’s empirical existence.

It is necessary to point out at this juncture that depending on the predominance of any one particular functional aspect at a given moment, the internal organ is called the mind (manas), memory (citta), ego (ahāṅkāra) or intellect (buddhi). One should there-fore, not be confused when these terms are sometimes used inter-changeably. There is a contextual basis for this. However, in most writings, the terms ‘mind’ and ‘internal organ’ are often used synonymously.

It is the intellect, when in collaboration with the five senses of knowledge that is called the intellectual or consciousness sheath (vijñānamaya-kośa). The jīva’s role as an agent arises when the attributes of this sheath are falsely ascribed to the Self. This results in the claims of doership and action in statements, such as, ‘I am the writer of this thesis’, ‘I have done this or that’, etc. Similarly, when the attributes of the Self are erroneously superimposed on the intellectual or consciousness sheath, the jīva makes claims to consciousness, intelligence and knowledge, as when it says, ‘I am conscious’, ‘I know this or that’, etc.

In the like manner, when the mind is in association with the five senses of knowledge, it is regarded as the mental sheath (manomaya-kośa). Again, it is the mutual superimposition (itarētara-adhyāsa) of the characteristics of the sheath and the Self on each other, which gives rise to the pains and pleasures the jīva experiences in its worldly life.
We have thus far examined all the nineteen principles of the subtle body and four of the five sheaths, namely, the physical sheath and the three sheaths (intellectual or consciousness, mental and vital), which make up the subtle body. It is perhaps logical to leave the analysis of the causal body to the last because as is evident by its name, the causal body is the cause of the other bodies. The nature of the causal body is pure nescience (avidyā).


In the causal body, the sattva-guṇa is completely subordinated to the tamas. The causal body is therefore, dull and inert. However, once it gets associated with the pure consciousness or the Self, we get the spontaneous rising of the last of the five sheaths, namely, the blissful sheath. It should be pointed out here that it is this combination of ignorance and bliss that the jīva experiences in the state of deep sleep. By virtue of being the innermost sheath and the fact that it is in proximity to the Self, which is of the nature of bliss, the blissful sheath has been viewed by some as the inward Self (Ātman). Such a view is, however, erroneous. The blissful sheath or ānandamaya-kośa, like the other sheaths, has the suffix ‘mayat’, which indicates its status as an evolved principle. It was stated earlier that the food sheath or annamaya-kośa is the sheath transformed or modified from food. The suffix ‘mayat’ therefore, implies transformation or modification. Similarly, in the case of the blissful sheath, the sheath is only a modification of bliss and not bliss itself. Pure consciousness or the Self or Brahman is the uncaused cause of all things. The bliss of the blissful sheath, on the other hand, is only a derivative, an effect of the reflection of the bliss, which is the Self. It is quite clear therefore, that the blissful sheath is not and cannot be the Self.

It is pertinent to point out here that it is the causal body, which is made up of three components, namely, avidyā (ignorance), kāma (desire) and karma (resultant action), together with the subtle body that is responsible for the
transmigration of ‘he jīva after physical death. After death, the body dies and with it all the physiological and psychological functions cease leaving behind the samskāras or latent impressions in the memory stuff of the subtle body. The causal body is also described as kāryotpādaka, which means that which results in the next body as an effect. Upādaka is bringing into being. It is this ‘loaded’ complex, which transmigrates from existence to existence. For a clearer understanding of the various concepts presented, I have arranged them in a diagrammatic form and this can be found in annexe A.

The jīva, as we have seen, is adequately equipped to carry out its functions as a knower, an agent of actions and as enjoyer. ‘Somehow’ through the interplay of the Self and ignorance (avidyā), which is the nature of the not-Self, we ‘become’. This becoming is called jīva-bhāva or the mode of the jīva. The mode of the jīva marks the phenomenal involvement of the Self. We have said that the jīva is technically defined as pure consciousness or the Self associated with the physical body, the senses and the mind. These constitute its limiting adjuncts or upādhis. However, since the jīva is manifested distinctly as ‘I’ in the mind only, it is usually said that the mind constitutes its limiting adjunct. The jīva is thus pure consciousness or the Self conditioned by the mind or antahkaraṇa-viṣīṣṭa-caitanya.

Most of the time, the jīva in its empirical existence only functions at three levels; the mental, the sensory and the physical. These correspond to the not-Self components of the mind, senses and body. The Self, which remains shrouded by the sheaths, eludes the jīva. Arising from the mutual superimposition of the Self on the not-Self and vice-versa, the jīva is condemned to its existential predicament of desire, likes and dislikes. However, the human story is not all doom and gloom. There is yet hope. The very equipment, which caused the yoke of man’s empirical bondage can be used to overcome it. The sages of yore had left behind a rich and valuable legacy for those who are ready to break the veil of ignorance to realise their true nature. To do this, we need to ‘de-construct’ the web of relationships
built around our lives. The relationships, which we have not just with the animates but also with the inanimates. These relationships, born out of attachments and aversions, are in the ultimate analysis transitory and unreal. What we really need to do is to go inwards, beyond the five sheaths to 'dis-cover' the real and timeless Self, which is the very essence of our worldly life.