CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Early thoughts of Indian philosophical systems can be found in the Upaniṣads. As Vedānta philosophy is based on the Upaniṣads which are the concluding portions of the Vedic literature, its name is apt. Advaitic school of Vedānta advocates the oneness of the Self though it seems different as manifested in various creatures. This idea is clearly described in the Kaṭhopaniṣad, one of the oldest Upaniṣads. From early times man was baffled by the problem of death. Seeking a solution to this problem, the
Kathopanisad has adopted a wonderful style of narration to describe the nature of the Self which does not perish even when one dies. A dramatic situation is created in which the question of what happens after death is put in the mouth of a young boy, Naciketas, and the Lord of Death is compelled to answer his question. In the course of their conversation, Yama reveals to Naciketas the knowledge of the Self (Atman) and teaches him the means to attain Self-realization. We are told at the end of the Upanisad that Naciketas, having been so instructed by Death in this knowledge and in the whole process of Yoga, became free from all impurities and death, and attained Brahman. The Upanisad promises that any other person who knows the Inner-Self will also attain Brahman.
The Self which transcends all objects and even death is not directly perceived and is difficult to be inferred. But the final pursuit of life, viz., liberation is dependent on its realization. The *Upaniṣad* describes it as hidden (*gūḍha*), placed in a cave (*guhāhita*) and dwelling in an abyss (*gaхvareṣṭha*). It is the minutest principle. It is hidden since it is veiled by the experiences of the primitive as well as the so-called natural sentiments. It is placed in a cave because its existence is experienced in the intellect (*buddhi*). As the intellect is felt in the brain, the cave referred here can be practically identified with it. Since the Self is in the body, it is in the midst of innumerable hardships and so it is said to be dwelling in an abyss.
The Self is subtle and its understanding causes the greatest joy in us. Actually the Inner-Self in our body is the manifestation of the Absolute Reality called Brahman. It is beyond Dharma (merit) and Adharma (sin). The soul which carries with it merits and sins is the Self limited by the subtle body (sūksma śārīra) with which the soul is subjected to transmigration.

The Universe is not created but is only a manifestation of the Self due to ignorance. The Self is not confined to any division of time. Anything can be said to be real (sat) and eternal (nitya) only if it is not affected in all the three divisions of time (trikālābādhya). The Self alone is real and eternal in this sense.
The word Ātman (Self) was originally used to refer to the consciousness limited in a body, it seems. At a later stage when it was understood that the Ātman cognized in each body is not individualistic but only a part of an all pervading principle, the word was used in the meaning of the Universal Self. To express the all-pervading nature of this Universal Self, there came to be used the word Brahma. Thus Ātman is verily Brahma. Brahma is without any attributes. When the prefix “para” is added (i.e. Parabrahman), then also the word denotes the same attributeless, all-pervading entity, which is the only reality in Advaita philosophy.

There is the concept of a Creator of the Universe in our tradition. Lord Brahma is said to be the Creator, and Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva are
the sustainer and destroyer respectively of the world. These three are only different forms of one God. This concept of a God is also accepted in the Advaita philosophy at an illusory stage. Hiranyagarbha, attributed with all qualities is this God. He is referred as Aparabrahman. The word Aparabrahman can denote all forms of God worshipped by devotees.

Om is the verbal symbol of the Self. It is a mystic symbol which, can be chanted by anybody without any difficulty. Those who engage themselves in austerities pronounce the syllable Om. Brahman is Akṣara in three senses. One, it is denoted by the syllable (Akṣara) Om. Two, it is imperishable. And three, it is all-pervading.
The Self has no beginning and no end. It is eternal. No one can destroy this indestructible entity. All bodies which are pervaded by the indefinable, eternal Self are perishable. As a man gives up his worn out garments and takes other new ones, likewise the Self dwelling in a body casts off his worn out body and goes to a new one.

The Self is said to be subtler than ātu because it is too small to be seen. The Upaniṣad also says that it is greater than the great. All beings, from the smallest to the greatest, have their existence only because they are having Ātman. Ātman manifested in the small things is subtle. Manifested in great things it is great. An individual Self can be said to be of the size of the body it occupies, since it pervades even the smallest part of that body. However, as the Self in
any body, even in the largest body, is not perceived, the Vedāntin has no hesitation to say that the Self is subtle.

Once the Self is properly understood, a person will not identify himself with the body; he will identify himself with the eternal Self. Then he will experience peace of mind in spite of all vicissitudes in life. Then it can be said that there is bliss. The all-pervading Ātman is real (Sat) conscious (cit) and bliss (Ānanda).

One has to take some steps to realise the Self. The sages have outlined four means of attainment. The first is the discrimination between the real and the unreal. Then comes the necessity of aversion to the enjoyment of fruits of one's action in this world or in next world. The next
requirement is the possession of six attributes - calmness, self-control, withdrawal, forbearance, faith and concentration on Self. The last requirement is a desire for release. With these means one is eligible (Adhikārin) to acquire the knowledge of the Self. One can escape from all external and internal bondages by realizing one's true nature. In whom renunciation and yearning for Mukti are intense, he attains the true knowledge. Naciketas is depicted in such a way in the Upaniṣad that we are convinced of his possession of all requirements to be eligible to get the knowledge of the Self. Yama tried his best to divert his mind from sticking to the idea of the Self by offering him unlimited objects of pleasure, but he could not be moved.
There are two types of pursuits - one directed to *preyas* (pleasure) and the other directed to *śreyas* (the final good). Man is left between the two and a large number of people choose *preyas* and are left to suffer the worldly painful cycles of births and death. A few who think in the right way choose *śreyas*. When the two paths are in the control of man, the choice depends upon the state of his mind. The one who has a perfected mind through education or the company of good people will seek only the path which leads to the final good.

The nature of the self is to be understood from the *śrutis*. The *Upaniṣadic* words are heard and meditated upon. The reality, the Self in its pure form referred to as *Brahman*, is beyond our perception. It must be experienced. For this there
are certain methods taught by Yama. Withdrawing sense organs from their objects and concentrating one’s mind on the idea of the reality is a method advocated. Since Brahman has no form, it cannot be conceived. Here the Upaniṣad teaches a kind of Upāsanā. One is made to take “OM” as a symbol of Brahman. This verbal symbol enables the Śādhaka to meditate upon an attribute-less Self.

Though Brahman is without any attributes, it appears variously due to various adjuncts. The appearances of it as the inner Self (pratyagātman), God (Īśvara) etc. are ideas to be seriously learned. A person who has his mind in the final good is lucky if he gets an efficient teacher to guide him to realize the Self. In Kaṭhopaniṣad we see a model student of the
science of the Self, Naciketas, who is confronted with the greatest of temptations. He renounced all pleasures which were promised to him. All worldly pleasures are so temporary that they will not be there tomorrow. Indulgence in pleasures will weaken the sense organs. Even the life in this world is not permanent. Man is ageing and may at any moment be confronted by death. Knowing this very well, Naciketas was not prepared to prefer worldly pleasures to the knowledge of the Self. It is the duty of an able preceptor to give an inquisitive student proper guidance. The knowledge of the Self which transcends death is not easy to be grasped. It cannot be taught by a person of inferior quality of intellect. An ignorant person cannot learn it unless he is instructed by somebody else. Since Self is very subtle, it cannot be easily taught by argumentation. One cannot
explain it just out of his own reasoning. It is the duty of the teacher to verify whether the mind of the student is firmly fixed on what he has learned. Yama, who has all the qualities of a good teacher, finds that Naciketas is having his mind firmly fixed on the reality. He is desirous of having more and more students like Naciketas. A preceptor’s duty is to make manifest that Self knowledge which is hidden in the student.

The Self cannot be realized by mere attending to discourses by learned men. Intelligence equips a person with the capability of understanding and analysing information. A good student having received good instruction from the teacher makes his own analysis and thus differentiates the Self from the body. Neither study, nor memorizing, nor hearing to a good
teacher, nor debating can give a man a subjective experience of reality. He has to choose it for himself and to sincerely make efforts to gain it.

Our ancient texts are full of symbolic representation of ideas. In such representations metaphor plays an important role. The metaphor of the charioteer and the chariot makes a fine example. A charioteer is shown as a symbol of the inner Self; the body is the chariot; intellect (buddhi) is the driver of the chariot; mind its controlling device, and so on. The Upanishadic seers spare no effort to convince us of the different types of the Self due to its being understood in different situations. The soul is really unattached, though it is understood due to ignorance as the enjoyer of the objects.
The phenomenal world is not to be overlooked. In our quest for truth we have to tread the path in the world which we experience. *Kathopanishad* is not exclusively a metaphysical description. It envisages an empirical plane where we understand the reality with reference to what is perceived. Thus for example, the Ātman is said in the *Upanishad* to be of the size of a thumb – *aṅgustamātraḥ puruṣah*. This is a concept drawn from the *Rgveda*. Releasing of the Ātman from the body is similar to taking out the inner stalk from a reed-*muṇjādiveśīkām*.

Self realisation is actually the identification of the individual Soul with the Universal Soul. So it is a process in our life which, should be carried out very diligently. The best way advocated by the *Upanishad* is the Yoga, which receives a detailed
Patañjali's Yogasūtra advocates meditation as an ingredient of Yoga. The Upaniṣad has a stress on this meditation. Probably, the Yoga system developed from the ideas contained in the Upaniṣads.

A study of the Kaṭhopaniṣad makes us understand the evolution of the Vedānta system of philosophy by beautifully amalgamating different streams of thought. The Upaniṣadic Vedānta is not of a purely intellectual nature. It has to be practical too with physical and mental training. As such ideas are abundant in the Kaṭhopaniṣad, it has got a unique position among the Upaniṣads and it deserves the attention of all those who are interested in philosophy.