CHAPTER II

CONCEPT OF SELF

In the beginning there was this Self (Ātman) which was the only one, declares the Aitareya Upaniṣad. Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad says that the Ātman is to be seen (understood), thought of and continuously meditated upon. Kaṭhopaniṣad has lengthy discussion on the nature of this Self which is the central point in all the major Upaniṣads.

1. AU .II .i .1.1
2. BU . II .iv .5
Self: Transcendental Reality

In response to the offer of a third boon by the Lord of Death (Mṛtyu), Naciketas demanded to be instructed by him about that which remains after death. The demand was prompted by the existence of two mutually opposed views: one, even after a man is dead, he remains, and two, he does not exist after death. Clarifying the first view, Śaṅkara says that some accept the Self which is different from the body, mind and intellect and which gets attached to another body. This Self

3. K U. I . i . 20
4. KUSB . I . i . 20
which transcends all objects and death is not directly perceived and is difficult to be inferred. But the final pursuit of life, viz., liberation (Mokṣa) is dependent on its realisation⁵. The Lord of Death requested Naciketas to give up the question about the Self in favour of some of the best worldly and divine objects of pleasures⁶ because the Self is too small and is not easy to be understood⁷. Even the gods had doubted it in the past without being able to get a clear idea about it. When it is beyond the grasp of the gods, how can it be understood by ordinary human beings?⁸.

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⁵ KUSB I.i.20
⁶ Vide KU I.i. 23-25
⁷ KU I. i.21
⁸ KUSB I .i .21
Self : Beyond Perception

The Self is described as *durdarśa* (very difficult to see) since it is hidden (*gūḍha*), placed in a cave (*guhāhita*) and dwelling in an abyss (*gahvareṣṭha*)\(^9\). It is ancient (*purāṇa*). According to Śaṅkara, its description as *durdarśa* is due to its being the minutest principle (*atisūkṣma*)\(^10\). It is hidden since it is covered 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*)\(^11\). As the intellect is felt in the brain, the cave

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9. KU I.ii.12.
10. KUSB I.ii.12
11. Ibid.
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.

Swami Chinmayananda explains that the statement of Lord Death clearly indicates that there is an Eternal Truth far subtler than the Total Mind and that a seeker can discover it and realise it as “This I am” (ayam aham asmi) in an intimate personal experience. The various descriptive phrases used indicate this Truth – factor which is the real essence and the real entity behind the I-sense (Ahaṅkāra, i.e., ego) in each embodied soul.

12. KUSB I.ii.12
13. Chinmayananda, Discourses on Kathopaniṣad, p.75.
The Truth - factor is the Pure Consciousness which controls the material envelopment constituted by the body, mind and intellect. It is ancient because it was never born and it will never die. It is an ever continuing principle manifested as life in the most ancient living organism as well as in the most modern creation - man. It is difficult for the eye to see (Durdarśa) the presiding intelligence that lends life to the dead and inert coatings of matter which apparently envelop it\(^\text{14}\). The only means to know the Self is meditation on itself (adhyātmayoga).

Self Transcends Merits, Sins etc.

The Self is subtle and its understanding

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causes the greatest joy in us. Actually the Self in our body is the absolute reality called Brahmā. Naciketas is very much aware that it is beyond Dharma (virtue) and Adharma (vice). In Indian tradition the concepts of Dharma and Adharma have wide-ranging meaning. That on which existence of the whole world depends is called Dharma. It denotes the good activities undertaken by a person and the merit he attains by it. Whatever is opposed to Dharma is Adharma. By this, are meant all bad deeds and the sin accruing from them. In the usual belief, the Self (i.e. the soul) draws the merits (puṇya) and the sins (pāpa) and depending on their quantity takes the cycle of births and deaths. This view has been handed down traditionally. The Upaniṣad has added a new

15.KU I.ii.1
dimension to the popular belief when it says that Self is beyond Dharma (merit) and Adharma (sin)\textsuperscript{16}. Though a person does a number of good and bad deeds, the Self does not get attached to it, according to the Vedāntic doctrine. The Kaivalya Upaniṣad means the very same thing when it says “na puṇya-pāpe”\textsuperscript{17}. Here, one can think that there is contradiction between the popular belief and the Upaniṣadic principle. In the course of the development of the Vedānta philosophy this problem has been resolved by drawing a distinction between the soul which carries with him the merits and sins, and the Self. The soul which carries with it merits and sins is the Self

\textsuperscript{16} KU I.ii.14

\textsuperscript{17} Kaivalya Upaniṣad, v.22
limited by the subtle body\textsuperscript{18} (Sūkṣmaśarīra) with which the soul is subjected to transmigration. This soul with the cosmic body is “Vyāvaharika Jīva”.

Dharma is interpreted by Śaṅkara as duties enjoined by the religious texts (Śāstriya dharma)\textsuperscript{19}. It is Yāga\textsuperscript{20}, etc., prescribed by Vedic passages like “Yajeta svargakāmaḥ” (one desirous of reaching heaven should perform sacrifice). It is the Mīmāṁsā (to be pious, the Pūrva-mīmāṁsā) system of philosophy that upholds such Dharma. The Upaniṣadic doctrine pushes the Mīmāṁsā’s cardinal principle to the background.

\textsuperscript{18}Vide \textit{Vedántasāra}, p.65  
\textsuperscript{19}KUSB. I.ii.14  
\textsuperscript{20}Vedapratipādyah prayojanavadartho dharmaḥ sa ca yāgādiḥ. \textit{Arthasaṅgraha}, p.1
The "adrśta" or "apūrva" which springs from the performance of such Vedic rites like Yāga as taught by Mīmāṃsā does not get attached to the Self, according to Vedānta.

The Self is different from the effect (kṛta) and its cause (akṛta). Śaṅkara's interpretation\(^\text{21}\) of "kṛta" as "karya" (effect) and "akṛta" as "kāraṇa" (cause) is to dispel a probable misunderstanding that the microcosm (śūkṣmaprapaṇca) or the macrocosm (sthūlaprapaṇca) is the Self. The universe is not created as is described by other systems of philosophy but is only a manifestation of the Self due to ignorance, according to Advaita Vedānta.

\[21\text{K.U.I.ii.14}\]
Though Naciketas is not aware of the exact nature of the Self, he has no doubt that it is not confined to any division of time. So it is said as being different from “bhūta” (past) and “bhavya” (future). By denying its limitation by the past and the future, its limitation by the present is also denied. It is unlimited by 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 (trikālābādhyā). The Self alone is real and eternal in this sense.

**Om: Symbol Of Self**

The Lord of Death told Naciketas that all Vedas pronounce one “pada”, all austerities

22.KU.I.ii.14
practices find their greatest challenge in the development of technology. This change is manifested in the fields of economic activities and social relations such as agricultural operation, attitude towards sickness, disease and death, divination and the supernatural approach to medicine, political and social leadership.

It is to be accepted that technological systems tend to develop their own rituals. Thus the distinction between ritual in the traditional sense and ritual in the modern sense arises. This is elaborately explained by Sitakant Mahapatra (1986:109). Ritual in the traditional sense implies a host of symbolic functions which are kept outside rationality or logic. But technology demands the logical analysis of every human action. Thus the ritual based approach to life and reality is in direct conflict with the new technological value-systems and attitudes which are very well applicable to art too.

2.4.0 Ritual and myth

The English word "myth" is from the Greek 'muthos' which just meant a tale, or something one uttered, in wide range of senses, a statement, a story, the plot of a play. All myths are usually founded upon stories about God or man.

"A myth is an expression of the sacred in words, it rapports realities and events from the origin of the world that remain valid for the basis and purpose of
that the sound (akṣara) Om is the symbol of both forms of Brahman. Swami Chinmayananda explains that Om, besides indicating the supreme Goal (Brahman) through its significance, also provides the meditator with a symbol or form of the Supreme Reality.

Ātman: Brahman

Kathopanisad has identified Om with Brahman in its two forms. The word Ātman 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

25. Tāyorhi pratikametadaksaram KUSB.I. ii.16.
26. Chinmayananda, op. cit., p.90
27. KU.I.ii.16.
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 *Brahman* (from the root Brh = to grow). Thus *Ātman* is verily *Brahman*. Since the word *Ātman* came to indicate both the individual Self and the Universal Self, the meaning of the word in a text should be determined by the context. *Brahman* is without any attributes. The whole world is only a manifestation of it. So *Brahman* is the cause of the world. Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad brings forth the idea thus: *sarvam hyetad brahma, ayam ātmā brahma* (all this – universe – is *Brahman*, this *Ātman* is *Brahman*).

28.BSSB. I.i.2

29.MU. Verse2.
Parabrahman and Aparabrahman

Brahman which is the substratum of everything is explained in Upaniṣads in different words to make us understand the concept of Brahman which is beyond our perception and very difficult to comprehend. Brhadāraṇyaka says: ākāśavat sarvagataśca nityaḥ, yat sāksādaparokṣād brahma.30 Chāndogya Upaniṣad states: ātmaivedam sarvam31. Mundaka Upaniṣad tells us: brahmaivedam viśvamidam varisṭham.32 Brhadāraṇyaka again elaborates:

30.BU.III.iv.1
31.CU.VII.xxv.2
32.Mundaka Upaniṣad, II. ii. 11
asthūlamanāṇvahrasvamadīrgham\textsuperscript{33}. Svetāśvatara clarifies: nīśkalam nīṣkriyam śāntam niravadyam nirāṇjanam\textsuperscript{34}. When the word Brahman is used with a prefix “Para” also, it denotes the same attributeless, all-pervading, entity, which is the only reality in the Advaita philosophy.

There is the concept of a creator of the Universe in our tradition. Lord Brahman is said to be the creator and Lord Vishnu 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.

\textsuperscript{33}BU.III.viii.8
\textsuperscript{34}SU.VI.19
Hiranyagarbha, attributed with all qualities, is this God\textsuperscript{35}. He is referred as Aparabrahman. Thus the word Aparabrahman can denote all forms of God worshipped by devotees.

\textbf{Akaśara}

Having pronounced \textit{Om}, the Lord of Death added: this very same \textit{Akaśara} is \textit{Brahman}. The word \textit{Akaśara} is used in three meanings. One meaning is syllable which rightly suits \textit{Om}. \textit{Om} is the verbal symbol for \textit{Brahman} which is unseen and indefinable. A symbol and an object symbolized by it are identified. For example, \textit{linga} is the symbol of Lord Śiva and the devotees of Śiva worship linga as Śiva Himself\textsuperscript{36}.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} CUSB.III.xiv.2
\item \textsuperscript{36} Vide Chinmayananda, op.cit.p.90.
\end{itemize}
Another meaning of the word *Akṣara* is imperishable: *na kṣarati ityakṣaram* (that which does not perish is *Akṣara*). As *Brahman* does not perish but remains for ever, it is *Akṣara*. A third meaning of the word is all-pervading: *aṣmute ityakṣaram* (that which pervades – spreads – is *Akṣara*). *Brahman* is the only reality which is everywhere and in everything. So it is *Akṣara*\(^{37}\).

Identifying the syllable *Om* with *Brahman* and relying on the above said meanings of the word *Akṣara*, *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* proclaims: All this is the syllable *Om*; whatever there was, there is and there will be are all *Oṅkāra*; and also whatever is beyond the three periods is *Oṅkāra*\(^{38}\).

37. Vide BSSB I.iii.10

38. MU. Verse 1.
Self, the Eternal

A thing which has a beginning will have several changes. The first of them is origin and the last, destruction. But in the case of the Self these two are denied by saying "na jāyate mriyate vā vipāścit". The intelligent (vīpaścit) is not born nor does it die. The Ātman is here denoted by the word vīpaścit because its original nature is unsullied consciousness. It did not come from any other cause. Nor in truth it is not a transformation of itself. A thing having an origin has as end. But the Self being unborn and unending is eternal. It does not wane also. It was the same as it is now. The Upaniṣad uses the word Purāṇa to qualify the Self. Śaṅkara

39.KU. I.ii.18
40.KUSB.I.ii.18
interprets that word as purāpi nava⁴¹ (even earlier, new). An object created of something else (the cause) is a new thing when it takes its shape. This cannot be said about the Ātman for it always exists as new, without growth. Even when the body is killed by a weapon the Self is not killed. Like the space (Ākasa) in a body is not affected by the death of a creature, the Self in the body of the creature is also without any impact⁴². The idea explained here from the Katha Upaniṣad is described by a verse with only a slight variation in the Bhagvad Gītā⁴³. Chinmayananda clarifies the example of pot and space thus: The pot-maker did not make a pot and then pour “some space” into the pot; the pot-maker worked

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⁴¹.KUSB.I.ii.18.
⁴².Cf. Aksaramambarāntadhṛteḥ BS III.iii.10
⁴³.BG II.20
in space and as he moulded the pot he could mould it only with space already inside. Similarly, the body is born in Ātman, with Ātman and this Truth Principle is ever the presiding deity within, and it is without the body during the physical body’s birth, growth, decay, disease and death

If the murderer thinks that he shall kill and if the slain thinks that he is killed, then both of them do not know well. The Self does not kill nor is killed. A verse in the Bhagavad Gītā with a little variation in the words in the first half expresses the same idea. If a murderer feels that by wounding the body, the Ātman is killed or the murdered comes to despair at his death-bed that

44. Chinmayananda, op. cit., p.97.
45. KU.I.ii.19
46. BG.II.19
his Ātman is dying, both of them are under a delusory conception that the body is the Soul. The stupidity of such thinking becomes more poignantly apparent to us if we were to say that we have broken the space in the cup when we throw the cup down⁴⁷.

For a being there are six modifications called Bhāvavikāras⁴⁸. They are: birth (janman), becoming (sthiti), growth (vrddhi), transformation (vaparināma), decay (apaksaya) and destruction (nāśa). All changes that happen to a living or non-living thing can be included in these items of classification. When origin and destruction are negated in the case of Ātman, all other changes are

⁴⁷.Chinmayananda, op.cit, p.98
⁴⁸.Vide Nirukta I.i.
negated. The eternity of Ātman described in the Kathopanisad is made clearer by the Bhagavad Gītā by adding a few more verses\(^49\) to the verses borrowed from the Upanisad and modified.

All things like the body, the senses, the mind, the objects of enjoyment, etc., come under the modern connotation “matter”. All these are pervaded by the supreme reality (Ātman). None can destroy this indestructible entity (Avyaya)\(^50\). The seers of the truth have realized: the real (sat) has no non-existence and the unreal (asat) has no existence\(^51\). All bodies which are pervaded by the imperishable, indefinable and Eternal Self are

\(^49\)BG II.16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 24.
\(^50\)B.G.II.17.
\(^51\)B.G.II.16.
perishable. Just as the bodies and the world in a dream appear without any corresponding reality, even so all these bodies seen in the waking state appear as real through ignorance. They have no real existence and their destruction is inevitable. 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.

**Size of Ātman**

The Self is said to be subtler than “Āyu”. Āyu in the philosophic context, especially in

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52. B.G. II. 18
53. B.G. II. 22
54. KU. II. 20
Nyāya – Vaiśeṣika terminology, is the atom of the elements. It is too small to see. In the ordinary speech Āṇu is anything subtle. The Upaniṣad expresses the idea that Ātman is smaller than the smallest thing. Immediately, the Upaniṣad continues that it is greater than the great meaning that the greatest thing in the world is smaller than the Self. 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. It manifested in great objects is great. Thus the Self appearing limited in beings then may have the size of those beings. According to the Jaina philosophy, the Ātman of every creature has the size of that creature. The Jains believe that even after death of a creature, its Ātman remains of the same size. But, in Advaita Vedānta, the Self has the size of a creature only as long as it lives. After death, the Self with the
Sūksmaśarīra moves to some other body. In the meantime, its size is the minutest. When liberated, the Self released from the subtle body merges in Brahman (Universal Self) thus assuming the greatest shape. 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 (Sūksma).

The Upaniṣad speaks of the thumb-sized Self in the body. There can be a doubt as to how the Self acquires the size of a thumb. Śaṅkara explains that the Self having the limiting adjunct of the inner sense organ which exists in the heart (hrdayapūndarīka) is thumb-sized.

55.KU.II.i.12
because the measurement of the heart is that of a thumb. Another explanation given by Śaṅkara is that Ātman in the heart is like the space in the cavity of a bamboo between two joints (parvan). The part of a bamboo between two joints is somewhat similar to a thumb. When the Upaniṣad says that the Self of the size of a thumb stands in the middle of the body, we may read it together with a later statement in the same Upaniṣad that “the Puruṣa who remains awake even when others are asleep, that verily is Sukra, that is Brahman”.

Here the reference is clearly to the organ of procreation as the seat of Ātman since the continuity of Ātman in next generation is caused by it. It is absurd to speak of a seat of

56. KUSB.II.i.12
57. KU.II.i.12
58. KU.II.i.8
unlimited Self, i.e. *Brahman*, because it is all-pervading. But depending on the part of the body where the conscious nature of the Self is experienced, the *Upaniṣad* points out heart (*ḥṛdaya*), middle part of the body, etc., as the seat of the Ātman. Heart (*ḥṛdaya*) is often not the blood-pumping organ, but it is brain.

**Apparent Contradictions**

The Self, though sitting, goes far; lying down, it goes everywhere. It rejoices and it does not rejoice\(^5\). The Self has actually no actions. But in the body it is with the mind and sense organs and through them it reaches even distant places. Ātman has no joy or sorrow. But we see human

\(^5\)KU.I.ii.21.
beings rejoicing and sorrowing. Though the Self has no feelings of pleasure, pain, etc., it seems to have all these in the body.

_Atman_ is seated in perishable bodies, though it is bodiless\(^60\). It is eternal whereas the body, objects of sense organs, etc., are transitory.

_Self – realisation for Peace_

Only one who has gained control over his mind and senses through a sincere discipline can realize the Self. Once it is properly understood, a person will identify himself not with the perishable body, but with the eternal Self. Then he

\(^{60}\text{I.i.22.}\)
will have no pain, no sorrow, and 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).