CHAPTER V

THE NATURE AND THE DESTINY OF THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

(PSYCHOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY)
Metaphysics is a consideration of what is involved in the facts of experience. One of the most striking phenomena revealed in experience is the existence of individual spiritual entities named as finite selves. Though we know that the self is, we do not know what its nature is. Its nature has been an occasion of much scepticism. Here we are led to such questions as: What is the status of the individual selves within the system of the universe? Are they real individuals existing in their own rights; or they are real modes of a single absolute Reality having finite but inalienable individuality; or they are mere figments of imagination or the vanishing appearances of the Absolute, the only true individual there is or can be?

All these questions were discussed at length by the Vedánta and the Pāñcarātra thinkers. In the Ālvārs, however, we do not find any psychological speculations mainly because their interest is too all-absorbingly centred round the Deity to spare them to trouble about other matters. They were cut and cut devotees rather than philosophers, and therefore, psychology, as also cosmology, had no interest for them. Little interested as they are in psychological speculations, they remained satisfied with the thought that the individual soul is a wonderful entity indescribable, eternal and essentially characterised by intelligence. Nammālvār declare, that the individual soul is a mode of God. It is different from body, vital breaths, senses etc. It is very subtle. In its essential nature it is beyond good and bad. From the way in which they describe their rela-
tion to the Deity it appears that they regarded the souls as bride or beloved of God.²

The Advaitic view of the individual self

According to the Advaita Brahman alone is the Supreme Reality. It is the only Reality there is or can be. Therefore all the finite selves are nothing but the appearances of Brahman. The relation between the individual self and Brahman can, therefore, be that of absolute identity. Strictly speaking we cannot talk about any such relation, because in reality they are not different. All the individual selves are one and the same indivisible Brahman, but owing to the particular adjuncts caused by avidyā the one unitary Brahman appears, as it were, to be broken up into a multiplicity of individual selves. That is real in each self is the universal Brahman. The whole aggregate of individualising bodily organs and mental functions, which in our ordinary experience separate and distinguish one self from the other, is the offspring of māyā, and as such is unreal.

The individual self which is manifestly in bondage state, is unable to look through and beyond māyā, which, like a veil, hides from it its true nature. Instead of recognising itself to be Brahman, it blindly identifies itself with its adjuncts, which are the fictitious offsprings of māyā. The self, which in reality is pure intelligence, non-active, infinite etc., thus becomes, as it were, limited in extent, knowledge and power. It further becomes an agent and an enjoyer. It is only when the adjuncts are removed by the right knowledge of its true nature, which consists of the fact that it is in no way different from the Highest Self, that final emancipation takes place. Then it shines in its original nature, which, in other
words, amounts to annihilation of its finite existence and finite nature.

Rāmānuja's refutation of the Advaitic view

Rāmānuja wages a severe polemic against this Advaitic view,\(^3\) and declares that the individual self is the most palpable and concrete entity. Its reality is given in the facts of consciousness, for consciousness, which is ever-changing, requires a substrate. It is also given in the facts of memory and recognition, for recognition implies a conscious subject persisting from the earlier to the later moment.\(^4\) It is also implied in inference, for it presupposes the ascertaintment and remembrance of general propositions.\(^5\)

Rāmānuja supplements these empiricall arguments by the testimony of the scriptures. He quotes Bṛhadāraṇyaka III.7.22, Śvetāsvatara IV.6, I.9, I.6, VI.9, VI.16, VI.13 etc. in all of which the plurality of self is explicitly recognised and taught.\(^6\) He further derives support from the Gītā (II.12) in which the Lord Kṛṣṇa clearly teaches the reality of the individual self and its eternal distinction from Brahman.

It is said that the texts like 'Thou are that' teach the absolute identity of the individual and the Supreme.\(^7\) Rāmānuja replies that these texts are not meant to convey the idea of the absolute unity of a non-differentiated substance. On the contrary, they denote a Brahman distinguished by difference. The word 'that' refers to Brahman, omniscient etc., the word 'thou' which stands in coordination to 'that' conveys the idea of Brahman in so far as having for its body the individual selves.
Kāmānuja’s view of the Individual self

In the philosophy of Rāmānuja the absoluteness of God is so qualified as to admit the existence of real finite selves within His concrete unity. From the fundamental ontological position of Rāmānuja, viz., the Ultimate Reality is a unity inclusive of infinite determinations, there logically follows the existence of real finite selves, which are individual centres of thought and action. They are entities in themselves, though they derive their substantiality and entire being from God. Being the eternal differentiations of God, they are called His modes, parts, body etc., yet they have their own individual nature and features. Rāmānuja thus advocates the modal dependence of Spinoza as well as the monadic individuality of Leibnitz. Rāmānuja is quite emphatic and insistent in holding that the individual selves, being eternal differentiations of God, are as real as God Himself. They are real entities, and cannot be dismissed as illusory, or false and fictitious beings due to some innate nescience associated with the nature of God. Therefore, he wages a vigorous and telling polemic against those who regard individual selves as ‘Vain variations of the self-same Absolute’.

The nature of the individual self as a knower

According to Rāmānuja each finite self is a real self-identical being. It is a spiritual being different from the material elements like mind, body, vital breathes, senses etc. Rāmānuja holds that the essential nature of the individual self is to be knowing subject. It is not pure consciousness as the advaitin maintains, but it is the substrate of consciousness. It is not mere knowledge but an individual who possesses knowledge as his essential characteristic. That the self is a conscious principle and not mere consciousness, is emphasised
by Rāmānuja in order to safeguard the individuality of the self against the advaitic tendency of overlooking all distinctions between the finite self and Brahman. 8

The individual self as a doer

Rāmānuja further maintains that the individual self is not only a knower, but also a doer and is thus true self characterized by thought and activity. He declares that the agency of the self is implied in the Upaniṣadic doctrine of Karma according to which each soul reaps the fruits of its deeds. The agency of the self was denied by the Advaita and the Sāṃkhya. In the scripture also at places agency is denied to the self. 9 There it is maintained as though the self were inactive, all activity being due to the gunas of the body. Rāmānuja explains this circumstance by saying that the self is an agent by virtue of its being associated with Kārmic body, in the embodied state. But, however, it is the self only which is an agent and not the gunas. 10 Though the self is thus an agent, this does not mean that it is always active. Though provided with the capacity to act, it may act or may not act, as it pleases. 11

The individual self as atomic

Rāmānuja further declares that the individual self is atomic. It is not all-pervading because the Scripture speaks of it as passing out of the body, going and returning, all which movement on the part of the self would clearly be meaningless if it were omnipresent. 12 Rāmānuja bases this view on Śvetāśvatara V.3-9, and Mundaka III.1.9.

The logical basis for Rāmānuja's rejection of the omnipresence of the self is that if it were so there would be
everywhere and at all times simultaneously consciousness and non-consciousness, but this never is the case. On our view, on the other hand, the actually perceived distribution of consciousness and non-consciousness explains itself, since we hold the self to abide within bodies only, so that naturally consciousness takes place there only, not anywhere else. Moreover, he points out against the Vaiśeṣikas that if the self were omnipresent all the selves would be in permanent conjunction with all organs, and besides, the adṛṣṭas due to the actions of the different bodies would be entirely confused, for all selves would then be in contact with all bodies.

Rāmānuja further maintains that though the individual self is atomic and dwells in one part of the body only, it is conscious of the sensations taking place in any part of the body. Thus it extends through the whole body by means of its quality, namely, consciousness. When the scripture describes the self as all-pervasive it refers to its consciousness only. It, however, may be referred to as all-pervasive in the sense that being infinitely small it can penetrate all unconscious material substances. It has uniqueness like a monad, but is not exclusive and window-less because of its all-pervasive consciousness. So although the self is atomic it has knowledge as its invariable accompaniment, which can stream forth to any distance and is able to comprehend things, even though they are far off.

This concept of the self as atomic, indicates the eagerness of Rāmānuja to emphasise the individuality of the finite self, as against the advaitic tendency of all-pervasiveness which virtually would imply a denial of individuality. Further Rāmānuja's insistence that each individual has his own distinctive centre of experience avoids the confusion between one self and another.
Rāmānuja further maintains that the individual self is eternal and immutable in the sense that it is sui generis and has its own intrinsic value. It is unborn and immortal. It is real, and real, as the Gītā declares, never ceases to be. Therefore no dissipation of the individuality of the self can be admitted, then the scripture speaks of origination and destruction of the self, it only points out the association with and dissociation from the body of the embodied self. But in all these births and deaths and rebirths which continue up to final release, there is no addition to or diminution of its essence and existence. Those texts which deny origination mean to say that the self does not undergo changes of essential nature.

In the Gītā Bhāṣya Rāmānuja gives three arguments to prove the eternity and immortality of the self. The first argument is on the authority of God Himself who declares in unequivocal terms that the soul is immortal in no way less than God Himself. The second argument is that the self is a spiritual being and pervades the non-spiritual entity which is different from it. From this it follows that it is subtler than all non-spiritual entities which necessarily must be grosser if the self is to pervade them. Now the thing that destroys is subtler than which is the thing destroyed, for it can only destroy by pervading a thing and thereby decomposing it. Nothing, however, is subtle enough to pervade the self, so the self is indestructible. To put it syllogistically,

The atman is indestructible
Because it is subtler and cannot be pervaded.
Hammers can only destroy objects by pervading them.
Whatever is subtler cannot be destroyed by whatever grosser
Therefore the atman is indestructible.
Lastly, the atman is not destructible because it is a unity by itself, and as such cannot increase or decrease.¹

The relation of God to the individual self

The real nature of the individual self cannot be known apart from that of God, since the two are inseparably united and indissolubly related to each other. Regarding the relation of the individual self to the Supreme, Rāmānuja repudiates various views which hold that (i) the individual self is absolutely different from Brahman, or (ii) it is nothing else but Brahman under a delusion, or, (iii) it is Brahman determined by a limiting adjunct. Against all these he holds that the individual self is a part of Brahman.¹² For this he finds support in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad III.12.6. He also quotes the Gītā (XV.7) in which the Lord declares, 'An eternal part of myself becomes the individual self in the world of life.'

Then the individual self is said to be a part of Brahman it does not mean that it constitutes a part of the extension of Brahman, since Brahman is partless. Further it would also imply that all the imperfections of the individual self would belong to Brahman. The word 'part' should be understood in its qualitative sense only. That is, it is a part of Brahman in the sense that it is a mode or an attribute of Brahman.

Though Rāmānuja regards the individual self as an attribute or mode of Brahman this does not mean that it has a mere adjectival existence with no individuality of its own. As we have seen before, according to Rāmānuja the substance-attribute relationship holds not only in case of objects and their generic qualities, but also in case of two different objects, one of which may be an attribute of the other. Accordingly the
individual self may be an attribute of Brahman and at the same time may have an individuality of its own. The individual self is an attribute of Brahman only in the sense that it belongs to It and is completely dependent on It. In this way it has a substantive as well as an adjectival existence.

The individual in relation to Brahman prior to world creation.

The Ultimate Reality in Ramanuja's is a triune unity consisting of God, Matter and the Individual selves. The latter two, which are the constituent elements of the world exist in Brahman, as its eternal part in a subtle form before it makes the world manifest. In that state of perfect homogeneity the individual selves with their intelligence in a contracted form exist in Brahman in a latent state. But this state does not involve complete suppression of their essential nature.

Though the self exists in Brahman in a latent state or in a state of intimate union amounting to homogeneity, nevertheless it is not a state of coalescence. It does retain its separate existence and distinct individuality. Not only this, its past karmas are also preserved and at the start of creation Brahman makes it to be connected with the kind of body merited by its karmas.

The individual in relation to Brahman in worldly existence.

The self, prior to world creation, exists in a state of intimate union with Brahman, but when creation begins, it becomes differentiated from Brahman. Now it acquires a particular body in accordance with its karmas so that it may be requited for what it has done. This, however, should not mean that the sole purpose of creation is mere retribution or stern adherence to the moral law. It is more for the ultimate good or final
release of the individual self. 21

When the individual self thus acquires its body, Brahman enters into it, and remains within it as its Inner Self. This concept of Brahman as Inner Self is inherited by Ramanuja from the philosophers of the Upaniṣads. This is clearly stated in the Brhadāraṇyaka III.7.3-22; and the Tattvārthā II.6. But unlike the philosophers of the Upaniṣads, Ramanuja is quite clear and consistent in maintaining that this 'entering into' of Brahman in the individual self and abiding there as the Inner Self does not tell upon the perfect nature of Brahman; on the one hand and ity of the finite individual/self on the other. In the Upaniṣads the abiding of Brahman in the individual self is very often taught, but at many places they have used such an ambiguous language that they tended often to mean that Brahman itself is the self in the body. Therefore, Ramanuja is very much eager to point out that Brahman exists there only as an Inner Self and not as the individual self. 22

Brahman thus stands to the individual self in the same relation as the self stands to the body. Ramanuja's definition of a body in relation to the self is as follows, 'Any substance which a sentient self is capable of completely controlling and supporting for its own purposes, and which stands to the self in an entirely subordinate relation, is the body of that self!. 23

Thus in the state of worldly existence of the individual self Brahman abides within it as its Self, not as one who robes away its individuality, but as one who supports and rules over it, without in any way being involved into it.
The individual in relation to Brahman in the state of release

The fundamental thesis of Rāmānuja, as we have repeatedly seen, is to uphold the supreme and perfect personality of God and the inalienable individuality of the finite selves. Both these tenets Rāmānuja tries to maintain in his account of the relation in which the Deity stands related to the finite self in the state of release. There are clear and abundant traces in the Upaniṣads of the view that the individual self continues to exist in release, enjoys perfection and bliss, and becomes like Brahman. But the advaitin maintains that in release the finite self merges in or becomes unified without difference with Brahman, a view quite opposed to Rāmānuja's basic position. He, therefore, sets himself in sharp opposition to the advaita view and argues that if release meant 'a mere return into the substance of Brahman', it would not be anything beneficial or desirable to man, for to be refunded into Brahman means nothing but complete annihilation, which none would like.24

He confronts the advaitin with dilemma and declares that the advaitins' view 'cannot stand the test of being submitted to definite alternatives. Is the soul's not being such, i.e., not being Brahman previously to its departure from the body, due to its own essential nature or to a limiting adjunct, and is it in the latter case real or unreal? In the first case the soul can never become one with Brahman, for if its separation from Brahman is due to its own essential nature, that separation can never vanish as long as the essential nature persists. And should it be said that its essential nature come to an end together with its distinction from Brahman, we reply that in that case it perishes utterly and does not, therefore, become Brahman. The latter view, moreover, precludes itself as
in no way beneficial to man, and so on. If, in the next place, the difference of the soul from Brahman depends on the presence of real limiting adjuncts, the soul is Brahman even before its departure from the body, and we, therefore, cannot reasonably accept the distinction implied in saying that the soul becomes Brahman only when it departs. For on this view there exists nothing but Brahman, and its limiting adjuncts, and as these adjuncts cannot introduce difference into Brahman which is without parts and hence incapable of difference, the difference resides altogether in the adjuncts, and hence the soul is Brahman even before its departure from the body. If, on the other hand, the difference due to adjuncts is not real, we ask, what is it then that becomes Brahman on the departure of the soul? Brahman itself whose nature had previously been obscured by nescience, its limiting adjunct! Not so, we reply. Of Brahman whose true nature consists in eternal, free, self-luminous intelligence, cannot possibly be hidden by nescience.

On the basis of the above reasons Ramanuja rejects the view of the individual self as becoming merged in Brahman on attaining release. On the other hand, he urges that since the soul is by its very nature a distinct individual, it must persist as a self-conscious being in the state of release. The released soul, instead of forfeiting its individuality, rather attains its essential nature. It does not cease to be, but deepens its selfhood and effaces all stains of sins. The essential nature of the soul obscured so far by avidyā becomes manifested, even as a mirror stained by dust shines brilliantly when it has been cleansed. Ramanuja derives this view from the Chandogya Upanisad (VIII.12.3,) which declares, 'Thus does that serene being, having risen from the body and having approached
the highest Light, manifests itself in its own form. This 'cleansing' means freedom from karma and the consequent imperfection.

Further Rāmānuja writes that the released soul obtains whatever it wishes and even meets its relatives by its mere will. It enters as many bodies as it pleases, not impelled by karma, but entirely by its own will. It enjoys all the worlds eternally. It finds itself on an equality with all other freed souls for all distinctions of rank, caste, and the like are entirely due to the body. And, more than all this, it enjoys that beatific vision of the Deity for which it longed in the worldly life. This intuition of Brahman is possible only when the individual realises its natural state. Therefore, Rāmānuja writes, 'The highest Brahman which is free from all change and of an absolutely perfect and blessed nature—this, together with the manifestations of Its glory, is what forms the object of consciousness for the released soul! Thus the released soul attains its natural character. It reclaims all its attributes like knowledge which become manifest only when it attains release.

Though the individual soul persists as a self-conscious being in the state of release and perfects its individuality, this does not in any way annul the supremacy of Brahman and reduce It to one among a number of equally independent selves. The released soul becomes like Brahman in nature in that it is characterised by uncontracted intelligence, and in that it is free from all evil. Nevertheless it always remains only a mode of Brahman and never an independent substance like Brahman. The exalted qualities of the soul no doubt belong to its essential nature but they depend upon Brahman only. Therefore, the individual self can never usurp the place of Brahman.
The released soul differs from Brahman in two important respects. Firstly, the individual souls are atomic and hence strictly finite, while Brahman is universal and all-pervading. Secondly, they do not have creative and ruling powers over the worlds, this belongs exclusively to Brahman.

The individual souls, then, we may conclude, are real and eternal entities having knowledge, bliss and freedom from evil as their essential nature. Though they are similar in nature with Brahman there is no conflict between the individuality of the finite selves and the universality and the supremacy of Brahman, because the finite selves for the body are mode of Brahman, while Brahman is their inner Self, on whom they completely depend.

Introduction to the Pāñcarātra view of the individual self

The Pāñcarātra school, because of its predominantly religious character, concentrated much of its thought on the theological considerations like the nature of Brahman, emanation of the world out of Brahman and the means of attaining release from bondage. It was very little interested in psychological speculations irrelevant to its theological purposes. Therefore it seldom took into consideration the problem of the nature of the individual self. It was satisfied with this much thought that the individual self owes its existence to the highest Self. It considers in detail, though not clearly and consistently, the relation of the individual self to the Supreme Self.

The Nārāyanīya account of the individual self

The Nārāyanīya regards the individual self as dependent on the Supreme Self. At times the selfhood of the individual as distinct from the Supreme does not gain recognition, but sometimes
the individuality of the self and its difference from the Supreme are clearly discerned. Of the three states of existence in which the individual self can be conceived to exist, the Narayanlya says nothing about its state of existence prior to embodied state. About the embodied state there are very few and scattered references. But the state of released is described in full detail.

**The individual self in the embodied state**

In the embodied state the individual selves are pervaded by the Supreme Self, who is their soul. The immanence of God in the individual self is so much emphasised that at times He seems to usurp the place of the individual self. Nevertheless the two are not identified. The individual self, regarded as suffering from imperfections, but the Deity is saved from being affected by these imperfections. In relation to the evil He is merely a spectator but His relation to the embodied soul is that of active love and interest. He takes repeated incarnations out of love and righteousness for doing good to the world.43

**The individual self in the state of release**

The topic of the relation of the individual soul to the Deity in the state of emancipation is not dealt with in a manner free from ambiguity. At times the oneness of the individual and the Deity is so much emphasised that this explicitly amounts to 'cessation of existence'.44 Under the Advaitic influence the Narayanlya declares, 'the cessation of separate conscious existence by identification with the Supreme is the highest condition for a living being to attain'.45 To enter into Brahman and become merged in Him is more to be desired than all other ends. The emancipated ones are said to enter the Supreme Being.
While the Nārāyaṇīya at times tends to blur all distinctions between the Deity and the individual, at other times this extreme view seems somewhat modified. For example, while describing the process in which the individual self becomes liberated we are told that the individual loses gradually all its material qualities till it is completely free from everything, and enters the Supreme Soul. It gives a pictorial representation of the entering of the soul into the Deity. The assumption underlying such description seems to be that, though the soul becomes practically identical with the Deity, making it impossible for us to distinguish it from the Deity, it is not entirely identical with Him. This is confirmed by the earlier part of this chapter which reads, 'the divine Sūrya is the refuge of innumerable wonders. Innumerable munis crowned with ascetic success, together with all the deities, reside in the rays of the Sun like birds perching on the branches of the tree.' Along with this the description of the emancipated beings found in the Śīlāī island suggests that though souls released from the world are very similar to the Deity in their effulgence, glory and freedom from material qualities, they are quite distinct from Him, and are engaged in devout worship and adoration of Him. They are said to be divested of senses. They do not subsist on any kind of food. They are devoted to Him with their whole souls.

From the presence of the above two sharply distinct tendencies we may get at this conclusion that the idea of final entrance into the Deity and to be merged with Him was not clear before the Pāñcarātra thinkers of the Nārāyaṇīya. Or, it may be that on this problem, which is said to relate to a deep mystery, the Pāñcarātra school was divided into two camps, one leaning towards the advaitic and the other towards the non-advaitic
view. Or, it may be that the two different kinds of individual souls, namely, released and ever-free, have two different sorts of relation to the Deity. The ever-free souls continue in existence and do not aspire for the absorption into the Deity, or, for the annihilation of the conscious existence, which is the highest end. Instead of the religion of emancipation, they have adopted the religion of Pravṛtti, which leads to conscious existence. It is said that these eternally free beings are created by the Deity for certain functions that they have to perform. But the released souls attain the highest end of cessation of conscious existence. From the above it becomes clear that it is wrong to say that since the Nārāyanīya assumes the existence of eternally free beings, it must also believe in the continued separate existence of the released souls.

The Samhitā account of the individual self

In consonance with the advaitic tendency of the school the Pāṇcarātra Samhitās describe the nature and destiny of the individual self in an advaitic manner. When they think in terms of concepts borrowed from the Advaita selfhood of the individual as distinct from the Supreme does not get recognition; but when they are guided by the religious feelings, they appear to recognise a self - distinct from the Supreme. More often they do so only when they consider the individual self in its embodied state. This will become clear when we consider the relation of the Deity to the individual self in its three states of existence, i.e., before embodied state, in embodied state and after embodied state.

The individual self before embodied state

Regarding the existence of the individual self before
the embodied state the Sanhitās maintain that the Supreme Being as Himself appears in the numerous finite selves and exists in the body in their form, there being no other finite selves in the body beyond Him. The Narada Pāñcarātra writes, 'therefore Parabrahman is the Eternal Being. He alone is the Eternal Individual Self. He is the Inner Self of all and is present in every self.' The Parama Sanhitā writes, 'the self-same glorious bright One, the Supreme, the Highest Self, manifests Himself in different forms in various classes of beings, devatās and others.' The same is reiterated in the Viṣṇu Sanhitā in a more forceful manner. It writes, 'the seers of truth declare that one and the same Self is existent in the many. He alone is the individual self, the Inner Self and the Supreme Self.' The Padma Sanhitā declares, 'the ātman of the Para and the kṣetrajña are one. The limitation of the kṣetrajña is known to be due to the difference of bodies, as one may image is differentiated into many, in many images.'

'As the ākāśa in a pot moves when the pot is moved, truly there is no difference between the Para and the jīva.' The same we find in the Jayākhya Sanhitā as well. This clearly suggests the advaita doctrine of avacchādavāda. The Narada Pāñcarātra explicitly supports the other advaitic doctrine of bimbapratibimbavāda. It declares that the individual self is nothing but a reflection of the Supreme. It gives the illustration of the reflection of the sun in the water and in the mirror. The illustration of the reflection of the sun in the mirror is found in the Viṣṇu Sanhitā as well.

The Sanhitās further describe the individual self as a part of the Bhūti Sakti, or as a contraction of Lekṣmī. In the Lekṣmī Tantra it is declared that all the individual selves are established in Lekṣmī.
Though the Samhitās thus tend to blur all distinction between the Deity and the individual, at some places they quite inconsistently maintain the difference between the two. In the Viṣṇu Tilak this distinction is expressed in clear terms: 'there is a triad here: Brahman, Jīva and Jagat; Brahman is a mass of light, Jagat a mass of elements and Jīva a mass of knowledge.'

In spite of the presence of such passages in which the advaitic tendency is set aside, the predominating tendency of the Samhitās is advaitic only. The relation of the Deity to the individual is described in a language so thoroughly advaitic that an influence from that quarter is indeed beyond question. On the basis of the presence of some non-advaitic passages one cannot explain away this predominating advaitic tendency as 'intrusion into the Pāñcarātra of certain foreign elements.'

The individual self in the embodied state

With regard to the embodied state of the individual self the Samhitās maintain that it is perfused by the Supreme as its soul or principle of consciousness. 'He is the Ātma of all beings, their Ego called Hari.' So much is the Deity regarded as the Soul of the embodied individuals that He seems at times to usurp their place. For example, the Parama Samhitā writes, '....in the same way the Supreme Puruṣa though one Himself assumes in this world of ours, different forms according to the ingredient qualities, and thus becomes the bound ones and the released.'

Though the Deity is thus identified with the individual self, yet a distinction is maintained between the two. The two are said to differ with regard to their form, power and knowledge. The individual self, which originally being one with the Supreme is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient, becomes atomized, in
impotent and ignorant due to the three taints or fetters of karma. It is only because of this difference that the individual self in its embodied form is derived from the Supreme after a long series of emanations, during which it gradually acquires the properties of matter, and thus becomes further and further removed from the nature of the Supreme. It is also because of this that the immanent Deity in order to be the Inner Master has to take a special descent into the lotus of the heart through a special incarnation.

The individual self in the state of release

In consonance with the advaitic tendency of the school the state of emancipation of the individual self is described in a language so thoroughly advaitic, using the advaitic terms 'sāmyāpatti' 'ekābhavati' etc. that an influence from that quarter is indeed beyond question. The state of emancipation is described as 'becoming Brahman', 'entering into Brahman' 'merging with Brahman' and the like. Further it is described as the true knowledge of the Supreme and this can be attained only by identity-consciousness. The Parama Saṃhitā explicitly maintains that in the release there is complete coalescence of the individual self with Brahman. It declares, 'They (individual souls) become myself alone, there is no difference whatsoever between the two'. In the Pādma Tantra it is asked 'What is the difference, Highest Spirit, between thee and the liberated soul?' and it is replied, 'They (the liberated souls) become I, there is no difference whatever. As I live just so live the liberated souls.' Here it must be made clear that this verse does not suggest that the liberated souls continue to exist along with Brahman, as Schrader has wrongly interpreted.
What it means is that the individual souls live only in so far as the Deity lives, that is, only in His living and not with any distinct existence of their own. The Jayakhya Sāṁhitā illustrates the state of release in the following way: 'Just as logs of wood enter into the fire and are lost in it, and just as rivers lose themselves in the ocean, so do the yogins enter into the essence of Brahman.' The Ahirbudhnya Sāṁhitā describes the released souls with attributes like savages, sarvabṛtas, etc., which can only be applied to it when it is identical with the Supreme.

But sometimes the Sāṁhitās quite inconsistently modify this advaitic tendency. The Pādma Tantra, for example, describes three types of release, viz., of difference, of identity and of a mixed nature. It is the release of identity which is regarded as the highest. The Viṣṇu Tilaka writes that the union with God means only to be attached to His gem. The Ahirbudhnya Sāṁhitā teaches that the mode of life in the liberated state depends upon his devotional inclinations in the embodied state.

The distinction between the Deity and the individual is further apparent from the fact that most of the Sāṁhitās admit the existence of the ever-free souls who are described as atomic, of the size of a mote. They are referred to as coadjutors of the Lord.

From the above it is quite clear that the predominating note of the Pāñcarātra school with regard to the nature and the destiny of the individual soul is thoroughly advaitic, though non-advaitic elements also sometimes find their appearance. Perhaps it may be that there was a minor section of the Pāñcarātrins who did not believe in advaitism. But on this basis one cannot explain away the advaitic passages which occur so frequently,
as 'merely a formal borrowing' from the advaita, or as 'intrusions of foreign elements' Schrader, who has tried to do so, starts with the presumption that 'the general trend of the Pāñcarātra is clearly non-advaitic'. On this presumption he maintains that the view that 'the soul ever actually becomes one with the Lord, is excluded by the premises of the system'. But one can also establish on the contrary that the advaitism is the view towards which the Samhitās incline. Further, the advaitic tendency need not be regarded as foreign intrusion, because the idea of attaining unity with, and becoming lost in, the Deity is not alien to the fervent mystic temperament of the followers of this cult.

The advaitic nature of the Pāñcarātra is further evinced from the various accounts of the Pāñcarātra thought in other ancient works. Śankara, for example, in his Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya informs that the Pāñcarātra school regards the individual self as an emanation from the Supreme destined to be reabsorbed in Him, but constituting during the intermediate period beings at once real and distinct from the Supreme. The same is reiterated by the Bhāmatikāra (I.4.21) who quotes the Parama Samhitā (XII.66) which in the most clear language declares that the difference between the individual and the Supreme persists during the embodied state only, but when the release is obtained there remains no difference, since that which causes difference ceases to exist. Kṣemarāja in the Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya describes the Pāñcarātra school as teaching the identity of God and nature (i.e., pantheism), and as regarding the individual selves to be the fulgurations arising out of God. P.T.S. Aiengar writes, 'the relation between the individual soul ... and the Paramātmā, is much nearer the advaitic position than would be palatable to the modern viśiṣṭādvaitin...
The Advaita school and Rāmānuja-A Study in Contrast

Having discussed the views of the Advaitin, Rāmānuja and the Pāñcarātra thinkers regarding the nature of the individual self and its relation to the Supreme, we may now turn to their comparative and critical analysis.

To start with the advaitin and Rāmānuja, we find that they are poles apart on this topic. According to Śaṅkara the individual self is nothing but Brahman in so far as limited by the unreal adjuncts caused by māyā. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, maintains that it is an effect or part of Brahman, it has sprung from Brahman, and it is never outside Brahman, nevertheless it enjoys a separate personal existence and will, and remains an inalienable personality for ever.

For Śaṅkara, to whom non-duality is the Ultimate truth of philosophy, the true self is one only and cannot be many. The true self is not a separate and distinct entity from Brahman, but is identical with It. The plurality of self, thus, is unreal, caused by avidyā, and has no metaphysical import. Rāmānuja on the contrary, maintains that every individual self is an eternal spiritual entity and thus there are many such selves each with its own individuality.

Rāmānuja maintains that the individual self is the very 'ego' or the entity denoted by the notion of 'I' (ahamṛthā). Śaṅkara does not admit that the 'ego' has any metaphysical import, or the notion of 'I' is the true self, in so far as it is only a product of avidyā. The plurality of 'ego' has no metaphysical import, for it dissolves in the unity of Brahman, the only Being that is or can be. The ego has psychological or epistemological ideality but no metaphysical reality, a psychological continuity but no ontological unity. It is only a refle-
The issue as to whether the individual self is pure consciousness, or a conscious being has sharply divided Sankara and Ramanuja. Sankara insists that the self is consciousness only and not a knowing subject, because knowership, for him, involves change, while the true self must be immutable. Ramanuja refutes this theory taking his stand on experience and also on the ground that knowership does not involve change in the strict sense of the term. The Sutrakara has defined the nature of the individual self as 'jña' which Sankara interprets in the sense that knowledge does not, as the Vaisesika school teaches, constitute a mere attribute of the self which in itself is essentially non-intelligent, but is the very essence of the self. The self is not a knower but knowledge, not intelligent but intelligence. Ramanuja, on the other hand, explains 'jña' as 'jñātr', i.e., knower and regards this sūtra as directed not only against the Vaisesikas but also against those philosophers who like the Sāmkhyas and Vedāntins of Sankara's type maintain that the soul is not knowing agent but pure caitanya. The wording of the sūtra certainly seems to favour the interpretation of Ramanuja, because the most obvious meaning of the word 'jña' is jñātr and not jñānam.

Another point of difference between Sankara and Ramanuja is with regard to the agency of the individual self. Sankara maintains that the self is essentially non-active, and all actions belong to the world of Upādhis. The self is an agent only when it is connected with the instruments of action, viz., buddhi etc. and ceases to be so when dissociated from them. Thus when Bādarāyaṇa establishes Jivas' kartṛtva, he thereby does not mean jiva's svābhāvika kartṛtva, but only upādhinimitta. The
arguments that Sankara has put forth in support of his thesis are that (i) if jiva's kartrtva is natural then as fire cannot be free from heat, so jiva cannot be free from kartrtva, and consequently there is no possibility of getting release and secondly, (ii) all kartrtva is duhkha rupa (leading to misery). The first argument may be met by saying that though the jiva may be endowed with the capacity of kartrtva, it may or may not indulge in activity. To the second argument it can be replied that all actions do not lead to pain. The misery is not due to kartrtva, but to abhimana. One should perform disinterested actions as directed in the Gita. Ramanuja, whose interpretation of the sutras is more natural and satisfactory, maintains that activity is indeed an essential attribute of the self, but therefrom it does not follow that it is always actually active, just as a carpenter, even when furnished with requisite instruments may either work or may not work as he pleases. Thus Ramanuja holds that the kartrtva belongs to the self by nature as its inherent attribute, and is not attributed to it by superimposition. Here it must be mentioned in favour of Ramanuja that Badarayana in another sutra, viz. Parattu tascSruteh, in the same adhikaraṇa, declares that the self derives its kartrtva from Brahman. Now if it were the position that the self is not an agent at all and that its kartrtva is only superimposed on it, how could the question arise whether the self is an independent agent or a dependent one? Further, if the agency were due to the limiting adjuncts of nescience how could Badarayana have declared that this agency follows from Brahman. Undoubtedly, Sankara is right in rejecting dehâdhyâsa kartrtva (i.e., bodily activities superimposed on the self), but he is wrong in his absolute rejection of the jiva's kartrtva. This accounts how
dehadhyāsarahita sages like Vāśiṣṭha etc. performed actions without incurring their fruits. To them performance of action is neither bandharūpa (leading to bondage) nor duḥkharūpa (leading to maṃdūra) misery) nor āvidyāka (due to ignorance). To them it is Brahmapūpa. It is a manifestation of Brahma (karmasu Brahmabhīvyakti).

Another debatable point between Śankara and Rāmānuja is with regard to the size of the individual self. According to Śankara, the individual self, being in reality Brahman only, is omnipresent and all-pervading and not minute or atomic (anu). When scripture declares the self as atomic it refers to the self in the condition of the worldly existence. In the worldly existence the jīva consists essentially in its being limited by, and possessing the qualities of, the buddhi, and so the minute or atomic size of the buddhi is only metaphorically predicated to the jīva. This connection of the jīva with buddhi lasts as long as the jīva continues to exist in samsāra. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, regards the self as of atomic or minute size only. He argues that the individual self is atomic because gati and āgati etc. are ascribed to it. Vedic passages do teach and suggest atomicity of the self. The objection that the consciousness of the self, if it were atomic, cannot be pervading the whole body, does not stand because though seated in the heart it can spread its consciousness throughout the body on the analogy of sandal, lamp or diamond.

Śankara, in support of his doctrine of all-pervasiveness of the individual self, has put forth three arguments none of which, as a matter of fact, finds any direct support from the sūtras of Bādarāyaṇa. The three arguments are (i) Utpattyaśāvāvāpa (denial of origination), (ii) Parasy-
aiva Brahmanah pravesah (Brahman's entrance), and tadatmyopadesa (teaching of identity). The first argument used by Badarayana to establish the eternity of the human soul, does not conclusively prove that the human soul is Vibhu (all-pervasive). Sankara argues that since jiva's origination is denied, it is Brahman and hence Vibhu. But on the same basis it can also be argued that since avidya has no origination it is also Brahman. The second argument is based on Chandogya (VI) 'Anena jivena aatmanam ampra-viśya nāma rūpe vyākaravāni'. This passage teaches Para Brahman's entrance into the individual self and therefore Sankara holds that the individual self is the same as Brahman, i.e., all-pervasive. But according to the reasoning of Sankara there can be no Brahman-praveśa, because Brahman is all-pervasive. The third argument is stronger than the preceding arguments, but even here one cannot say that this tadatmyopadesa is in the sense of Sankara. Ramanuja gives an altogether different and more convincing interpretation of tadatmyopadesa by taking jiva as the amśa of Brahman.

We now turn to the question of the relation of the individual self to Brahman, which is one of the most crucial problems of metaphysics and on which Sankara and Ramanuja are sharply divided. According to Sankara the individual self is in reality identical with Brahman, and separated from Him, as it were, only by a false surmise, due to avidyā. Ramanuja, on the contrary, maintains that the individual self although springs from Brahman and constitutes elements of His nature, yet it enjoys a kind of individual existence apart from Him.

Another aspect of this problem is the issue as to whether the individual self in the state of release becomes identical with Brahman or simply becomes united with Him
without losing its individuality. The former is the view held by Śākara and the latter one is held by Rāmānuja. Both agree that in liberation the sense of separateness is disparaged and the result is an infinite dimension of knowledge, being and bliss. Further both declare that it connotes transcendence from finitude, but while in Śākara it means identity, in Rāmānuja it means unitive consciousness. Śākara denies relativistic consciousness, Rāmānuja accepts its assimilation in unitive consciousness. According to Śākara the release from Samsāra means absolute merging of the so-called individual self in Brahman due to the dismissal of the erroneous notion that the self is distinct from Brahman. For Rāmānuja it means passing of the self from the troubles of earthly life into a kind of divine life where it will remain forever in undisturbed personal bliss. Śākara takes his stand on the scriptural texts like Brahmāvid Bhramaiva bhavati (Mundaka 3.1.2.). This text is interpreted to imply identity of individual self and Brahman. Rāmānuja on the contrary maintains that the text in question does not refer to identity (tādātmya) but to equality (sādharanya) as is taught in the same text in the statement 'Nirañjanaḥ paramam sāmyamupaiti'.

As a matter of fact in the Upaniṣads we find texts which entail the doctrines of Śākara as well as Rāmānuja. At many places the upaniṣadic sages tended to identify Brahman with the self in the body. Their monistic vision could not allow them to think of plurality of the self beyond the one Brahman. Accordingly they believed that Brahman though very different in nature from the embodied self, nevertheless it is He who is undergoing experiences in the body. Though the monistic bias thus led these thinkers to declare the final absolute identification of the individual self with Brahman, their realism also inclined them to
believe in the plurality of the individual selves and their eternal distinctness from Brahman. The monistic tendency is more dominant in the earlier Upaniṣads and the realistic tendency in the later ones.

In the Gītā as well as at some places the selfhood of the individual as distinct from the Absolute does not gain recognition, but at other places the individual self is clearly recognised as distinct from the Supreme Self. Although the Gītā often speaks as though the Supreme Being were one without difference with the individual self, its own distinctive position as indicated by its predominantly theistic character, is that, individual whom He pervades and controls.

Thus both Śankara and Rāmānuja could claim full support from the Upaniṣads and the Gītā for their respective viewpoints, but so far as the Brahma Sūtras are concerned they lend very little support to the views of Śankara. There is a very large number of Sūtras which distinctly affirm the difference between Brahman and the individual self. Śankara himself conscious of the difficulty of finding his view in the Sūtras thinks it necessary to add an explanation in several cases to the effect that all such Sūtras refer to the differences between Brahman and the individual self which are upādiṣṭa i.e., due to māyā, and that in such cases the Sūtrakāra has regard only to/the popular conception which is mentioned only to be refuted.

The Sūtras clearly declare that the Jīva is a part (amśa) of Brahman, a view which is expressed in the Vedic mantra 'Pāñca'śya sarva bhūtāni' and in the Gītā passage 'yamaivaṁśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaṁ sanātanaḥ'. Śankara altogether arbitrarily takes the world 'amśa' as 'amśa iva' and holds that the Sūtra propounds avacchedavāda, but for this there is no justification
is whatsoever. There are passages, it is true, which declare Brahman to be niskala and niravayava (without parts), but that does not justify one to reject all texts teaching amśatva of the individual self, because both are scriptural texts and hence equally authoritative. What is needed is not to reject the one or the other but to reconcile the two. Whenever there is an opposition like this between passages asserting difference and those asserting non-difference, Śankara always tries to escape by saying that the passages asserting non-difference declare the truth and are to be understood literally; whereas those asserting difference only refer to the popular notions which are to be rejected.

On the other hand, the sūtra goes very well with the doctrine of Rāmānuja. Both the classes of passages, those declaring difference and those declaring non-difference, must be understood to be true and to represent the reality; and for this it must be admitted that the jīva is a part of Brahman, i.e., it forms the body of Brahman and is dependent on it, at the same time being individually distinct in nature.

Undoubtedly there is a sūtra, viz., ābhāsa eva ca, which Śankara interprets as propounding the reflection theory (Pratibimbavāda) and apparently this interpretation seems to be quite natural and more convincing than Rāmānuja's interpretation, yet on the basis of the general drift and spirit of the work this much is quite evident that the Sutrakāra by no means favours reflection theory. Further, there are sūtras which describe the Supreme Self as adhika or itara, i.e., additional to, or different from, the individual self. Śankara's attempt to explain them as pointing out aupādikha bheda is quite unconvincing. Had Śankara's interpretation been true, it remains quite unintelligible why Sutrakāra should never hint at what Śankara is anxious
again and again to point out and why should the Sūtrakārā devote the greater part of the work for esoteric doctrine and very little for esoteric teaching, which may however mislead the mumukṣu if he does not keep in view the exact purport of the Sūtrakārā.

The above consideration has driven us to the conclusion that both Śankara and Rāmānuja, who differ widely in their view regarding the nature and destiny of the individual self, can claim support from the Upaniṣads and the Gītā; but so far as Brahma Sūtras of Bādarāyana are concerned, they lend no support to the views of Śankara. 'Brahmaiva avidyābhāntam jīvaḥ' is not the view of the Sūtrakārā, neither is the individual self a reflection (Pratibimba) or appearance (ābhāsa) of Brahman in Śankara's sense. According to the Sūtrakārā the self is a part (inseparable) (āmsa) of Brahman, it is amanyā with Brahman, as āmsa is with the āmsūn, still Brahman is adhika (greater) than the individual self.

If we consider these views of Śankara and Rāmānuja independent of the Prasthāna Trayī, we again find that Śankara's doctrine does not seem to be convincing. No one should deny the compactness and impressiveness of Śankara's doctrine and the subtle logicality with which he has worked out his case, yet one finds it too sweeping to retain individual existence and initiative, which a man of experience values the most. Such a theory which declares obliteration of the self as the ultimate goal of life, paralyses our energies at their very source. It provides no satisfactory status for the individuals who shrunk into the position of a helpless prey of māyā, rather than being an active cooperator with God in the spiritual enterprise. It is not only morally enervating and discouraging but also speculatively dissatisfying.
It is quite perplexing and unintelligible why should the absolute to which there is nothing unaccomplished, come under the sway of māyā and thereby results into a plurality of illusory finite existences. By bringing the doctrine of māyā into service, Śankara could explain with a remarkable success how the unity breaks up into multiplicity. Though he could explain the 'how' of it, he failed miserably to explain the 'why' of this problem. The more crucial part of this problem is why should the unity whole appear in the guise of multiplicity by creating the world appearance which is destined to be destroyed. Why should the Absolute or for that matter māyā, lavish its energy in evolving and maintaining the world-appearance which is not to last ultimately? If the multiplicity is nothing but vanishing appearance there is no good reason for spending in vain a stupendous amount of energy for its creation and maintenance. Further under this view all human and personal values are regarded as fragmentary experiences to be transcended. If these values do not have any place in the Ultimate Reality, why should human beings strive hard to attain and retain them. In a true system of philosophy instead of being annulled these values should be accepted as one of the available clues to the Ultimate Reality.

The main defect with Śankara's philosophy is that it starts with an Absolute, the empty form of totality arrived at by a 'via negativa', and ends by swamping all finite persons and things in the abyss of the Absolute. It is of course a sound principle that the individual can find its meaning within the context of the Absolute. It is the very aim of philosophy and religion to bring the individual life into tune with the infinite. But this does not mean depriving the individual of its uniqueness and permanent value. They are, on the contrary, the very condi-
tions on which the individual can attain fulness and abundance of life. The universe respects the individual life and lavishes its energy in its production and development. There is indeed a force in the universe working for an ever richer and more inclusive unity, integration coordination, in which all individuals shall become part of a harmonious whole; but side by side with that there is another tendency in the universe working for greater and greater individuation, shaping fuller and better personalities. The highest kind of unity is not the static unity of a solitary, self-centred, self-determined Absolute, but a dynamic unity of a society of souls realising their highest perfection in love and in mutually enriching fellowship. This is only possible where each has a unique inner life of his own and respects the individuality of others; but yet where each, not loses, but finds himself in others. God Himself is love and needs such a society (madbhaktah me priyaj). Such at least is the teaching of the Gita which declares the consummation of the divine purpose to be the establishment of such a divine society.

Accordingly the individuality is not a negligible feature of the world, but necessary to its very idea. There is a room in the system of reality for individual beings possessing a certain measure of autonomy and capable of entering into personal relationship with God. The God also is not the Absolute whose overwhelming omnipotence leaves no room for any will but His own. He, on the contrary, welcomes and inspires the free cooperation of the individuals in working out His plan. This God is not something away from the earth in a heaven, as Râmânuja is sometimes mistaken to think, but He exists in us all in the form of an ideal tendency. The relation between God and the finite spirits should not be stated in terms of the relation of one
finite being to another. To regard God as merely an individual, caring for likes, praises and offerings of the finite is to fall far short of the highest insight alike of religion and philosophy. God should not be treated as one of the members of the divine society, rather He is the very source and sustenance of that society. He Himself is the divine society. When the Upaniṣads speak of 'entering into Brahman' they perhaps suggest that the individuals become member of this divine society which is a perfect society, a spiritual community, the family of God. This is the vision which the Vedic and Upaniṣadic seers had when they declared 'Tvāvṛtakāh paremam padam sadā paśyanti sūreyah' (Rgveda 1.22.20; cf. Katha 1.3.9). This perfect commonwealth of consumption attainable through proper planning (jñāna) and singleminded devotion (bhakti) and concentrated effort (karma).

From the foregoing consideration we conclude that despite God's absolute unity, finite selves as individuals, preserve and attain their unique lives and meanings, and are not lost in the very life that sustains us, and that needs us as its expression. This life is real through us all, and we are real through our union with that life.

Rāmānuja and Pāñcarātra-A Study in Contrast

As against Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja is a staunch protagonist of the reality and inalienable existence of the individual self. His main target of polemic was all sorts of absolutism or singularism which was responsible for the denial of the reality and individuality of the finite self. The position of the Pāñcarātra school has very much come under the advaitic influence, and consequently we find that it is as far away as Śaṅkara from the position of Rāmānuja. The uncompromising realism of Rāmānuja,
his anxiety to refute the māyā doctrine and to fight for the reality, individuality and inalienability of the individual self, are altogether absent in the Pāñcarātra school.

Though the Pāñcarātra school is very much wedded to advaitism, its instinctive theism did not allow it to rest contented with advaitism and the result is that it vacillates between advaitic and non-advaitic positions. As a matter of fact no efforts have been made to synthesise these two opposite positions which are given place side by side. But the problem is, since both the advaitic and non-advaitic tendencies are met with simultaneously, which one is original to this school. From the fact that in its theology and cosmology this school is manifestly advaitic and that advaitic passages outnumber the non-advaitic ones, we may believe that with regard to the individual self also, its original and official view is advaitic only, and that the non-advaitic tendency is a later intrusion. The Pāñcarātra school, like many other systems of Indian thought, is not a product of one age or one generation, but has a long history whose major part is unknown to us. It may be that the Proto-Pāñcarātra school was thoroughly advaitic, but when the advaitic school came under the disfavour of the rank and file because of its māyāvādās, the Pāñcarātra school also modified its strictly advaitic position and made a compromise with the non-advaitic tendencies. But even though the Pāñcarātra reached a compromise with the non-advaitic (mainly viśiṣṭadvaitic) tendencies, it did not give up its original advaitic position. That is why we find that though Māmānūja whose position is viśiṣṭadvaitic has some points in common with the Pāñcarātra, he differs widely from the latter. From the few points of similarity one need not
be hurried to conclude that the positions of the Pāñcarātra and Rāmānuja are identical. The following comparative account of the two positions will substantiate our thesis.

The finite self in the Pāñcarātra school, unlike Rāmānuja, is not an independent existence. It is declared to be a part of Lākṣmī, which, like the māyā of the Advaita, is a principle of differentiation, and which ontologically has not independent status, as it is merely Brahman's will. The concept of Lākṣmī in the Pāñcarātra is more an assumption to explain the manifoldness than an existence. Phenomenally it is said to have a separate existence but transcendently speaking it is nothing but Brahman Itself. Just as in the Advaita the finite self is Brahman only conditioned by māyā, so in the Pāñcarātra it is none else but a fulguration of Brahman caused by Lākṣmī. It has, therefore, no independent existence of its own, nor has it got any ontological status. To explain as to how the finite selves come to exist, the Pāñcarātra school very often used three well-known advaitic similes, viz., the pot in air, the pot in water and one figure reflected in many mirrors.

The Pāñcarātra school, unlike Rāmānuja, further maintains that the finite self has no permanent existence. Since it has no independent existence of its own, but is merely a fulguration of Brahman, it is destined to be reabsorbed in It. The view that the finite self is not an imperishable entity, is a logical consequence of the pure monism of the Pāñcarātra thinkers according to whom the Supreme Being is the only reality, that is or can be. The Absolute of the Pāñcarātra thinkers, really speaking, is an Impersonal One for whom the individuals count for little. The natural consequence is that the thought that Brahman is the Supreme Real, easily led them to think that It
is the only Real. This is very often the position they adopted with regard to Brahman in relation to the finite self. It is undoubtedly true that to some of them the finite self was too sensibly real to be dismissed as unreal. Under the assumption of commonsense and perhaps also under the influence of the visi-ṣṭādvaita they did not carry their advaitic views to their logical consequences and admitted the eternal existence of the individual self. Nevertheless the dominant thought of the Pāñcarātra school is that the finite self is identical with the Supreme Self. It is only under this presumption that in the first chapter of the Ahirbudhnya Samhitā in Nārada’s hymn (as also in XXXV.81-91) Ahirbudhnya, a bound soul, is praised as the Absolute One (Svatantra), ever satisfied One (Nityatpyta), Creator and Destroyer of the universe etc.

Further, the relation between the individual self in the state of release and Brahman is described in the Pāñcarātra in a thoroughly advaitic language with a manifest tendency to regard the two as identical. The state of release is very often denoted by the words like ekābhavati, abhinam brahmani sthitam, viśeṣ param, Brahmabhāväpati, apunarbhavati etc. Again like the Advaita, the Pāñcarātra admits the concept of gradual liberation (krama mukti) in which the self finally loses its individuality, and the concept of Jīvam mukti. Both these concepts, on the contrary, have been severely criticised by Rāmānuja.

The Pāñcarātra school is advaitic not only in its description of the state of release, but also in its account of the means of emancipation. It declares that the knowledge of identity with Brahman leads one to liberation from bondage and the result is coalescence with Brahman. 'Brahmābhimāt tato jñānāt Brahman sāmyujyate param' (Jayākhya IV.50) Since the
the individual is nothing else but Brahman, what is necessary is to realise this fact, and that is why identity-consciousness is regarded as the means of emancipation. Besides knowledge, yogic discipline is also emphasised as a means of emancipation, only because it is helpful in annihilating the sense of individuality, and the Supreme Self.

Another point of difference between Rāmānuja and the Pāñcarātra is that while the former insists that the individual self is necessarily atomic, the latter very often holds that essentially it is all-pervasive and only in the state of bondage it is reduced to atomic size by the Nīgraha power of the Lord. Rāmānuja urges that the individual self in all states is atomic only. This he does in order to safeguard the reality and inalienable individuality of the finite self. He wages a severe polemic against Saṅkara who regards the individual self as all-pervasive. The Pāñcarātra school, also like Saṅkara describes the finite self as all-pervasive, which again is a consequence of its advaitic tendency. The individual self in the state of yoga is described as sarvāga, sarvabhūta etc., which all indicate its all-pervasiveness.

The unique contribution of Rāmānuja to the Vedānta philosophy is his view that the individual self is an eternal part or body or attribute of Brahman. This is the central doctrine of Rāmānuja's philosophy and is based on the Upaniṣads and the Gītā. This central doctrine is altogether absent in the Pāñcarātra. As a matter of fact no attempt has been made in the Pāñcarātra to put forth a systematic theory about the relation of the individual self to Brahman.

In the Pāñcarātra school else we find a peculiar concept of Kuṭastha Puruṣa, an aggregate of souls, which is altogether absent in Rāmānuja. There is a mention of it in the Gītā
and if Rāmānuja were a Pāncarātrin he would have incorporated it without any fear of being sectarian, a fear which is attributed to Rāmānuja by Prof. Kumarappa. But the fact that this important Pāncarātra concept has remained unnoticed by Rāmānuja, testifies that Rāmānuja was not an advocate of the Pāncarātra school.

Further, the multiplicity of the finite selves is recognised by Rāmānuja as an ontological fact, but in the Pāncarātra this multiplicity comes into existence from the Kūṭastha Puruṣa long after in the process of creation at the lower secondary stage. Not only that, the distinctness of the finite selves from Brahman and their plurality seem to be purely verbal in the Pāncarātra, as is evident from the nature of release which consists in union with Brahman.

From the foregoing account it has become quite clear that Rāmānuja is as far away from the Pāncarātra as far he is from Śankara, and therefore it would be far from truth to say that Rāmānuja was influenced by the Pāncarātra school. Prof. Kumarappa, perhaps unmindful of the above fact, had tried to maintain that Rāmānuja has got his views on the nature of the individual self and its relation to the Supreme Self from the religious experiences of his sect, i.e., Pāncarātra and Śrīvaiṣṇavism. For maintaining the above position he has not put forth any argument or evidence in the support of it. He has simply argued that Rāmānuja was motivated to refute the advaitic view of the identity of Brahman and the individual self, in order to safeguard the intense religious experience of his sect. But he forgets that in the Pāncarātra school, on which the alleged sect of Rāmānuja is based, does not hesitate in maintaining the identity doctrine; rather it supports it. In that case how can it serve as an impetus for Rāmānuja to refute identity doctrine of Śankara.
Prof. Kumarappa, for whom Rāmānuja is a disguised Pāñcarātrin as it were, has further maintained that Rāmānuja has got all the material regarding the nature of the individual self and its relation to the Supreme Self from the religious experiences of his sect. But Kumarappa argues, Rāmānuja did not draw upon them directly, for that would have made his philosophy sectarian. But this argument is vitiated with many flaws. Firstly, we have doubted the very authenticity of the sectarian affiliation attributed to Rāmānuja. This saps the very root of this argument. Secondly, it is based on an unwarranted imputation of ungratefulness and hypocrisy on Rāmānuja. Lastly, this thesis could have been substantiated had there been no basis for Rāmānuja’s doctrines in the Pāñcarātra, or also, had there been an identity of thought in Rāmānuja and the Pāñcarātra. But, as we have seen, neither is the case, and therefore we may safely conclude that Rāmānuja was not influenced by the Pāñcarātra and that the Pāñcarātra school was very much influenced by the advaitism, a doctrine to which Rāmānuja was deadly against.
References and foot-notes:

1. Tiruvaymoli C.8.5.3.
2. Tiruvâruttam 16.
3. Śrī Bhāṣya II.1.15
4. Ibid I.1.1.
5. Ibid II.2.24
6. Ibid II.1.22

8. Rāmānuja derives support for this view from the Chād. Up. VIII. 12.4.5; 1.5; 12.3; Brh. Up. IV.5.15; See Śrī Bhāṣya II.3.19.

10. Śrī Bhāṣya II.3.34
11. Ibid II.3.39
12. Ibid II.3.20
13. Ibid II.3.22-23
14. Ibid II.3.32
15. Ibid II.3.26-27
17. Ibid II.18
18. Śrī Bhāṣya II.3.42-45
19. Ibid II.3.15
20. Ibid II.1.35
22. Śrī Bhāṣya I.1.13.
23. Ibid II.1.9
24. Ibid I.4.21
25. Ibid I.4.22
27. Ibid IV.4.1
29. Ibid IV.4.48
30. Ibid IV.4.15
31. Ibid IV.4.18
32. Ibid I.1.1; IV.4.22
33. Ibid I.3.7
34. Ibid I.2.12
35. Ibid IV.4.19
36. Ibid IV.4.1
37. Ibid IV.4.3
38. Ibid I.1.1; IV.4.4
39. Ibid IV.4.4
40. Ibid IV.4.20
41. Ibid IV.4.14
42. Ibid IV.4.22
43. Nārāyanīya 340.74-102
44. Ibid 341.8;11
45. Ibid 343.79
46. Ibid 335.42-43
47. Ibid 345.13-18
48. Ibid 363.16-18
49. Ibid 363.2-3
50. Ibid 337.32,33,35
51. Ibid 337.22
52. Ibid 337.27
53. Ibid 337.27
54. Ibid 340.20, 125; 341.8
55. Ibid 341.16
56. Ibid 341.11
57. Ibid 341.12
58. Ibid 341.54-76
60. Lakṣmi Tantra VI.36; VII.11; 18; Aḥirbudhnya VI.35
61. II.34-35
62. Lakṣmi Tantra II.12.
63. II.90.
64. ज्ञानं द्रष्यार्थसमायोग वर्तय विविधकुषर्वदा ।
   अस्वरुपं भायुह्संके श्वेताधिकं वर्णनस्ते ।

   Lakṣmi Tantra XIII.32.

cf. Aḥirbudhnya VI.35

65. 'भृगुभाष्यपतिः' 'भगवनसम्मृती मुनि' अर्थः च IV.34; विलुप्तिलकः च Q33
   'हर्षामुक्तिः' 'अन्तरायम्' प्र. 50
   'मेघस्वतः न द्वितीयतम्' अर्थः च Q41
   'भृगुभाष्यपति वर्त्यायाम् भृगुवानं भृगाश्च भृगसमु यज्ञस्य परम्' 'अन्तराय 5.41
   चिपुकः भृगभावतं स्त्रियेदिनं अध्यात्मिकविद्वानः ।
   I.4.14-15

66. अन्मेल्यं तद्भ्रमणे हत्वते ।
67. अस्वरूपं कालसंपत्तं न भद्रस्तं कर्त्तव्यं ।
68. I.4.14-15
69. P.91
70. सूक्ष्मसंध्याया तीनं संग्रहितं महादेवः ।
    अन्तरायमेत्येकं भेदं तयारदपृयति ।
    'अत्याहतम्' 'नन्दिनीं तथा' ।
    'अन्तराय IV.121.'