Chapter II

The Upaniṣads

It is the accepted doctrine of the Upaniṣads that there is a certain entity in each individual which is unaffected by the circumstances of birth and death. This is the Self (Atman) who, during the life-time of the individual, lives in the body even like the drop of water on the lotus leaf (bindur iva puskara). He is the dwarf who is seated in the middle of the body (madhye vamanam ēśinam) and whom all the gods reverence. Sun-like in appearance, he is of the measure of a thumb (āṅgustha-mātrah) when coupled with conception (sāṅkalpa) and egoism (ahaṅkara); but, with only the qualities of intellect and of self, he appears to be of the size only of the point of an awl (ārāgramāṭraḥ). According to another

1. Maitri Up., III. 2  2. Katha Up., V. 3
measurement, the Soul is known to be 'a part of the hundredth part of the point of a hair sub-divided a hundredfold.' Taken as such, this changeless entity is neither female nor male, nor even neuter; but it becomes connected with whatever body it takes up:

\[ \text{mugsthamatro rauitulyarupah} \]
\[ \text{sahkalpahanarkarasamanvito yah} / \]

Buddher guhenaatmagunena caiva

\[ \text{arahramatro'py aparopi drsta} / \]

Valagrasatabhagasya

\[ \text{satadh kalpitasya ca} / \]

Bhago jiva sa vijnayah

\[ \text{sa canantyaya kalpyate} / \]

Naiva stri na pumam esa

\[ \text{na caivaya napumsakah} / \]

Yad yac chariram adatte

tena tana sa yujyate /

3. \text{Svet. Up., V.8-10; cf. Katha Up., IV. 12 ff.}
Concerning the relation of the Soul or Self with the body it inhabits, it is said that the Soul is the passenger who rides in the chariot of the body. Among the other metaphors used in this respect are those which compare the Soul to a wheel with a single felly and to a river of five streams.

When, at death, the body is dissolved, the imperishable (avinaśi) Soul is released, and it continues to exist even after the destruction of its habitation. One life, thus, does not at all mark the end of the existence of the individual. Death destroys only the body while the individuality continues to exist.

Out of the body that is dead and destroyed, the

8. Katha Up., V. 4
eternal principle, Soul, does not seem to be the only element to go away. It has certain appendages attached to it by reason of its association with the body it discarded. The Br. Up. (III. 2. 13) gives a story where Artaṅgaja is said to have asked Yājñavalkya as to what remains in the individual after his various senses like the optical, the olfactory and the auditory, are destroyed at death. Yājñavalkya's reply is that the question could not be discussed in a crowd. Thereafter the two had their conversation in a secret place, and they are reported to have decided that 9 Karma is that which remains, the support resting on which the individual takes the body and organs. The same idea is put more graphically by the Kaitī Up. (IV. 2) which likens the individual Soul to a lame

9. This theory is perhaps anticipated in the Rgvedic conception (X.14.8) of Iṣṭapūrta which is believed to reach Yama's heaven earlier than its author and with which the latter is reported to meet in that world; cf. Keith, R.P.V.U., p. 573 n.

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man bound with the fetters of the result of good and bad (sadasatphalamayaih peseiṣaḥ paṅgur iva baddham).

The Kauṣ. Up. (I. 2) and the Katha Up. (V. 7) appear to posit the survival of yet another element besides karma (deed), namely knowledge (vidyā, śruta). But the Br. Up. (IV. 4. 2 ff.) would have that it is only through the operation of all the three elements, karma, vidyā and Purvaprajñā, that the individual takes up a new form like unto that "of the fathers, or of the gandharvas, or of the gods, or of Prajapati, or of Brahma, or of other beings." The Soul is likened to a goldsmith and, even as the latter brings the same lump of gold into various forms, so does the Soul crush the five elements again and again to form new bodies. Once the new body is ready, the old body and all its ignorance is shaken off by the Soul. In this the Soul is even like a caterpillar which, having

10. I adopt here the rendering of R.E. Hume, op. cit., p. 303.
come to the end of one blade of grass, draws itself together before getting hold of another.

Man is thus the doer; as he desires, so he resolves; as he resolves, so he acts; and as he acts, as he conducts himself, so he will be born again (sa yathā kāmo bhavati tat kratur bhavati yat kratur bhavati tat karma kurute yat karma kurute tad abhisampadyate). One who does good will have a good birth and he who does evil will have an evil birth; he becomes good by doing good deeds, bad by bad (punyāḥ punyena karmāṇāḥ bhavati 12 pāpāḥ pāpena).

Of the actual process of Transmigration also, the Upaniṣads give quite an elaborate description. The text which is generally regarded as the locus classicus of the doctrine of Transmigration is available in a two-fold recension. The Br. Up. gives probably the earlier

11. Br. Up., IV. 4. 3-4
12. Ibid., IV. 4. 5
13. VI. 2. 9 ff.
version of the two, and might have been the source of the more elaborate account given in the Ch. Up.

In both the recensions of the text, it is easy to see the existence of two distinct parts giving two different views; in the one which speaks of the "Five Fires"(Pañcāgni), the burning of the body is compared to the offering of a sacrifice. And just as the libation of the sacrifice goes up to the gods, so also what survives in man after the loss of his body reaches Heaven. This immortal part is described after the analogy of the sacrificial fluid as "water"(āpas), and later on as "faith"(sraddhā). What this figurative expression actually means is probably that "the soul of the work(karman) that ascends as the sacrificial vapour (āpas) is the faith(sraddhā) with which it is offered."

This faith (sraddha) travels through the five transitory stations of heaven, atmosphere, earth, man and woman. During this journey, it undergoes a successive transformation into some, rain, food, seed and embryo, and in the end comes into a fresh existence. It thus appears that, according to this theory, the Soul travels only to regain a fresh body, and that, beyond this world, it has no other destination at all. We also read of one long and continuous journey without any break at any intermediate station. It is a non-stop travel that the Soul makes for sometime before it comes back to the place wherefrom it started.

The remaining portion of the text gives the other school of opinion concerning the fate of man after death. People are classified into three divisions here, and we are told of three different destinations to them after they die. Those that either know the "Five Fires"
or meditate with faith upon Satya form a group by them-
selves, while those that perform philanthropic acts like
sacrifice (yajña), bounty (dana) and penance (tapas) form
another. Those that belong to neither of these classes
go to make the third group. People belonging to the
first of these classes live for ever in the world of
Brahmanta to which they go after death, and never again re-
turn to earth, in direct contrast with the tenets of the
previous theory according to which Sraddhā seems to be
primarily responsible for the Soul's return to earth!
These travel by the northward course of the Sun, through
the way of the gods (devayāna) "which leads them to the
gods or to the Absolute Brahman; when, at death, their
body is burnt on the pyre, the Soul enters the flame,
then the day, the bright-half of the month, the six
months when the Sun moves northward," the world of the

20. H.G.Narahari, Atman, p.90
21. Ibid., p.91
gods, the Sun and the lightning fire. "A person consisting of the mind (purusq manasaḥ) enters these regions of lightning, and conducts the Soul to the world of Brahma (brahma-loka) where it stays for ever."

For those of the second variety, there is not at all any permanent destiny. After they die they go to the Moon from which they have to return some time or other. They travel by the way of the fathers (pitrāṇā); the Souls of those that travel by this path "first enter the smoke of pyre, then the night, the dark-half of the month, the six months when the Sun moves southward, the world of the fathers (pitrāloka)," and finally the Moon on reaching which they become the food of the gods and are eaten by them, a figurative expression perhaps to signify that their arrival fills

22. Ibid., p. 91 n.
23. Ibid., p. 92
24. Keith, op. cit., p. 576
up the Moon. This state lasts for some time at the end of which the Soul begins its return journey to earth. It first enters Ether, then Wind, Rain and the Earth. At this moment it is turned into food which is eaten and later transmitted into the womb in the form of seed. Re-birth follows and the cycle goes on again and again. In the language of the Katha Up., man is even like a grain which ripens only to be born again (sasya iva martyah pacyate sasya ivajayate punah). It will be seen that, in this theory, unlike the previous, provision is made for some recompense in the other world. Though the Souls do return from the Moon, they do not do so immediately after they reach that world. There they stay as long as their merit lasts, and start on their return journey only when their time is up.

About the way by which those of the third variety, who do not know either of these two paths, travel we know nothing. All that is stated is that they are reborn

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either as a worm(किता) or a locust(पताङ्ग) or as a biting fly(दंदसुका).

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Beyond a few verbal changes and some other variations which are almost of no consequence, the Ch. Up. has little that is worthwhile to add to the account of the doctrine of the "Five Fires" given by the Br. Up. The deviations of this Upanisad from the Br. Up. in describing the doctrine of the "Two Ways" are more significant. There are, of course, even here, a few verbal variations which are of minor value as in the previous case. It may, however, deserve notice that, according to the Ch. Up., from the six months when the Sun moves northward the Soul goes to the year, but not to the world of the gods(देवलोक) and thenceforward as the

26. For Br. Up. "asau vai loko", we have "asau vāva loko" in the Ch. Up.

27. Where Br. Up. reads, for instance,"disco'ngarah," the Ch. Up. has "candramā angrahāh."

28. For a full account according to this Upanisad, see H.G. Narahari, op. cit., pp. 88 ff.

29. Ibid., p. 91.
Br. Up. would have. From the year it passes on to the Sun, then the Moon, "the lightning, and finally, led by a superhuman person (amanavah purusah), Brahman, never more to return to earth." So also from the world of the fathers (pitrloka) the Soul does not pass directly, according to this Upanisad, into the Moon, as/Br. Up. would like us to understand, but instead it has to pass through Ether (akasa). The absence of the third class of people who go neither by the Devayana nor by the Pitryana is conspicuous in the Ch. Up. But by far the most significant divergence that we see in the Ch. Up., as compared with the account in the Br. Up., is the distinction that this Upanisad posits between the Souls that return from the Moon. The quality of birth of the returning Soul depends on the nature of its conduct in the previous existence; "those of good conduct are reborn as a brahmin, or as a ksatriya, or as a vaisya, as the

30. Ibid.
degree of the virtue allows, and those of stinking conduct are reborn as a dog, or a hog, or as an outcast (candala)."

The insertion of a third place, namely the Moon, besides the two ways for the departing Soul, as the Ch. Up. does, seems to appear superfluous to the Kaum. Up. (I. 2) which, as though to obviate the necessity of a third place, makes all who die go, without exception, to the Moon. There the Souls are judged and, according to the result, they go either by the Devayāna which leads to Brahman without return or take up a new birth in consonance with their past deeds. "Neither as a worm, or as a moth, or as a fish, or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a wild boar, or as a snake, or as a tiger, or as a person, or as some other in this or that condition," the man is reborn, as his deeds demand (yathākarma) or according to the dictates of his knowledge (yathāvidyam).

In a summarized form, the Katha Up. (V. 7) repeats the same view. The same can be said of the Svet. Up. (V. 7.11 ff.) and the Bhairavi Up. (III. 1. 3).

Accounts of the doctrine given in the later minor Upanisads do not add much of value to what has already been said. In general these Upanisads may be said to be a mere echo of their classical predecessors. The Garbha Up. (3 ff.) tells us that, in the ninth month as a foetus in the body of the mother, the Soul remembers its past existence and its deeds of old, both good and bad. But once the individual sets foot on earth and terrestrial breeze touches him, all recollections of the past, of births as well as of deeds, escape his memory. The Nir. Up. gives a sort of summary of the doctrine of Transmigration as propounded in the Br. Up., and repeats the Soul's remem-

32. The Np. Up. (I. 1) is only an echo of Br. Up. (IV. 4, 5), and the Mv. Up. (VIII. 2) is, word to word, a repetition of Taitt. Ar. (X. 9).

33. This is identical with Perisista II in the extant editions of the Nirukta of Yaska.

34. Keith (op.cit., p. 575) would call this a "corrupt version" of the account in the Br. Up.
brances of its past experiences as elaborated in the Garbha Upanisad. The passage in question runs:

Atha ye hiṁsām āsritya vidyām utsṛjya mahat tapas teṣāṃ cireṇa vedoktāni va karmanī kurvanti te dhūman abhisambhavanti dhūmad rātrīṃ rātrer ā-paksiyamānapaksam apaksiyamānapaksad daksīṇayanam daksīṇayanam pītrlokam pītrlokaṃ candraṃasam candra-
maso vāyum vāyor vṛṣṭim vṛṣṭer osadhayās caidad bhūtvā tasya samśaya punar evamām lokam prati-
padyate //

Atha ye hiṁsām utsṛjya vidyām āsritya mahat tapas teṣāṃ jñānoktāni va karmanī kurvanti te: rcir abhisambhavanti arcīśoḥhar ahna āpūryamāna-
paksam āpūryamānapaksad uḍagayanam uḍagayanad deva-
lokam devalokād ādityam ādityād vaidyutam vaidyutam manasam manasaḥ puruṣo bhūtvā brahma-lokam abhisam-

35. For an elaborate study of this passage, see H.G. Narahari, I.HQ., 1945, pp. 118 ff.
bhavanti. Te na punar āvantante //

śiṣṭa dandasāka yeta idām na jāvantā tasmād
idām veditasyaam //

"There are some passages in the Upaniṣads which, at
first sight, appear to modify or contradict the estab-
lished doctrine of Karma. The Br. Up., for instance,
speaks of good deeds like sacrifice(yāga) and asceti-
cism(tapam) which either bring no reward at all or
bring a prize which is only finite in value. Such ut-
terances are, no doubt, hyperbolical meant mainly to
emphasize the importance of the knowledge of Brahman.

The idea also prevails elsewhere in this Upaniṣad
and in one passage of the Kaus. Up. that the son can
free the father from the wrongs(akṣama) perpetrated by
him. Ideas like this should only be looked upon as one
of the many "beliefs of a day when Karma was already re-
cognised," and relief from it was sought in diverse
ways.

36. I.4.15;III.8.10.  37. I.5.17.  38. II.11.7