UPANIŚADIC CONCEPTION OF REALITY
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CONTENTS

The metaphysical viewpoint of Jīva Gosvāmin is directly based on the Bhāgavat Purāṇa and also supported by the Upaniṣads. According to Jīva Gosvāmin, the Bhāgavata is the original commentary of the Brahma-sūtras which represent the earliest attempt at the systematisation of the teachings of the Upaniṣads. Since, in his opinion the Vedas and the Upaniṣads are not complete in themselves, our learning also remains incomplete without the knowledge of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa which completes the meaning of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Extending the denotation of Śrutī-pramāṇa to Itiḥāsa and Purāṇa, Jīva Gosvāmin has treated the Bhāgavata as the most authentic part of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Like the seers of the Upaniṣads, he freely accepts the nirguṇa and the sagūṇa aspects of the Ultimate Reality. He agrees with the seers of the Upaniṣads in holding that the Ultimate Reality is one and indivisible. His method of approach to Reality is characteristically upaniṣadic. For, like the seers of the Upaniṣads he starts the metaphysical enquiry from the self within, and ultimately reaches the conception of the all-comprehensive Supreme Self which is identified with non-dual consciousness Advaya-jñāna. It is well known that the Ultimate Reality is spoken of as Brahman in the Upaniṣads. Jīva Gosvāmin does not stop with the upaniṣadic concept of attributeless Brahman only, but describes the Ultimate Reality according to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa which looks upon it as Brahman, Paramātman, and Bhagavat. He holds that the same Ultimate Reality in its transcendent nature is called Brahman, in its immanent nature —
Paramātman, and its supreme transcendent-immanent nature — Bhagavat. What the Upaniṣads describe as nirviśeṣa Brahman is but an imperfect or incomplete manifestation of Bhagavat who is the Ultimate Reality in its highest and most perfect form. An attempt has been made in this chapter to explain the upaniṣadic conception of the Ultimate Reality, since a clear understanding and a true appreciation of Jīva Gosvamin’s concept of the Ultimate Reality depends on a fair knowledge about the upaniṣadic theory of Brahman.

According to the Vedantins the teachings of the Upaniṣads are based on revelations, and with regard to matters spiritual they are absolutely authoritative. In the Upaniṣads the Ultimate Reality has been named both as Atman and Brahman, and it has been pointed out that It is both immanent and transcendent. The seers of the Upaniṣads have attributed the creation of the world to Brahman. Although the teachings of the Upaniṣads are not presented as a system throughout by any philosopher, yet there are references in them of the problems such as of the nature of the individual soul, the nature of the Ultimate Reality, and the relation between the individual soul and the Ultimate Reality. There are some texts which definitely declare the identity of the individual self (Jīva) with the Ultimate Reality (Brahman). But there is no dearth of texts indicating also the difference between them. While the reality of the world has been denied in some of the texts, creation of the world has been accepted as a fact in others. As the creator, sustainer and dissolver of the world Brahman is qualified or saguna, while
again as the sole transcendent reality admitting of no difference Brahman is unqualified or nirguna.

The Śvetāsvatara-Upaniṣad (1) begins its enquiry by asking — "What is the cause? Whence are we born? Whereby do we live? On what are we established? And by whom supervised do we experience our pains and pleasures?" After raising the query, the same Upaniṣad states that no material principle like time, nature, fate, chance, the Elements, the Womb (the female), or the male can serve as the first cause. In the course of the discussion, it is stated in the same Upaniṣad that it is the supreme power of God, hidden by its own qualities which is the first and primary cause; and these material principles are only the secondary causes because they are governed by the supreme power of God. It will be found that the query into the first cause, and the way of approach to its solution have been made in various ways in the different Upaniṣads. At some place as in the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Gārgī in Brhadāraṇyaka, the first cause has been brought in as the Imperishable (Aksara) which is the final support of everything — even of space, in which space is warp and woof (ākāśa otaśca protaśca) (2).

Again, in Chāndogya the supreme Being has been presented not only as the final support or abode of everything, but also as the primal root of all sprouts or effects. (2A).

(1) Śvetāsvatara-Up. 1. i. 3.
(2) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. III, VI, VII. 3. 6. 7.
(2A) Chāndogya-Up. 6. 8. 6.
The most common and significant word used for the root cause of the world is Brahman (3) though there are other words such as 'Ātman', 'Ākṣara', 'Sat', etc. This shows also that the root cause is distinctively different from all the material principles. The word Brahman is derived from the root 'Brh' which means "to sustain" or "to extend". Therefore, the word 'Brahman' means "the all-prevading sustainer of the universe". Some prefer another meaning of the root Brh which means "to burst forth", whereby it is indicated that the 'Source' or the 'Cause' has burst forth into the form of the universe.

Taittirīya-Upaniṣad (4) states - "that is Brahman from which all these creatures (or elements) are born, by which the born creatures are sustained, and in which they enter (are dissolved), when they are destroyed, Chāndogya also states - "All this verily, is Brahman - born in It, living in It, and dissolving into It; let one be tranquil by meditating on It as such" (5).

But the Upaniṣads hold that Brahman is not an extraneous creator of the world; It is also immanent in Its creation in the form of different creatures and entities. "The swan in the clear sky, the Vasu in the atmosphere, the priest in the altar, the guest in the house, in man, in broad space, in the right (ṛta),

(3) Śvetāsvatara-Up. 1. 1.
(4) Taittirīya-Up. 3. 1.
(5) Chāndogya-Up. 3. 14. 1
in the sky, born in water, born in cattle, born in rock, is Right, the Great" (6).

Brahman is immanent in Its creation not only in the form of different souls and creatures, but also as the stuff, or the material cause of the universe. This has been described in the Upaniṣads, in an eulogising way, stating that one who realises Brahman becomes omniscient. One who knows the substance knows all effects as well. "............. did you also ask for that teaching (Ādesa) whereby what has not been heard, becomes heard of, what has not been known becomes known?" (7). The teaching (instruction) was however imparted as - "just as, my dear, by knowing one piece of clay, everything made of clay is known, the modifications being merely verbal distinctions, or names, and the reality or the substance being only the clay, even so is that teaching"(8).

The significance of the illustration in the instruction is that by knowing the substance or the substratum, all effects or modifications of the substance are known, because, the substance is the reality in all effects or modifications. Thus, Brahman is not only the creator—the efficient cause of the world, but it is also the stuff or the material cause. This is more pointedly shown when it is stated - "Just as a spider projects and withdraws (the cobweb), even so, this universe comes out of the supreme Being.(9).

(6) Kaṭha-Up. 2. 2. 2.
(7) "Utaṭam ādesamaprākṣa, yenaśrutaṁ śrutaṁ bhavatī avijñātaṁ vijnātaṁ iti". Chāndogya-Up. 6. 1. 2, 3.
(8) Ibid - 6. 1. 4 – 6.
(9) Muṇḍaka-Up. 1. 1. 7.
Brahman as the governing agent is emphasized in the Brhadāraṇyaka text (10) like - "Verily, O Gārgī, at the command of the Imperishable the earth and the heaven stand held (vidhṛta), etc. Another important aspect of Brahman extolled in the Upanishads is that it is the world=soul - soul of everything. "Aitadātmyam idaṁ sarvam"- all these have Brahman as their self (11).

Again, Brahman who is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world is not an insentient blind power; It is consciousness - the ultimate illumining principle ..... "That which is not revealed by mind, but by which the mind is revealed, know that to be Brahman" (12).

The Kaṭha also declares - "Nor there does the sun shine, nor the moon and the stars; nor do these lightnings shine, much less this fire. After Him, as He shines, does everything shine; by His lustre the whole world is illumined" (13).

Brahman is not only the independent basic existence as the ultimate substance, or, It is not only the self-luminous illumining principle as pure consciousness, but It is unexcellable bliss as well. Bhṛgu, the disciple of Varuṇa realised Brahman as supreme bliss - "ānando Brahmeti vyajāṇāt".

"Verily He is Bliss; attaining this bliss one becomes happy".

"Who would make efforts, who would live, if this Brahman would not..."
have been of the nature of bliss"? (14). In the Brhadāraṇyaka and the Taittirīya Upaniṣads a calculus of bliss has been stated taking the highest human bliss as an unit. The Bliss i.e. Brahman is more than all calculated multiplied bliss - the highest grade of which is conceived in the Hīranyagarbha in Brahma-loka (15). Chāndogya states that it is this Bliss which is to be realised. But this Bliss is defined there as the infinite (Bhūman) which admits of no dualism like the knower and the known, etc. There is no bliss in the finite - "nālpe sukhamaest bhūmaiva sukham". (16).

It is, therefore, that the Taittirīya defines Brahman as Reality, Consciousness, and as Infinite (Satyam, Jñānam, Anantam Brahman) (17) which is regarded as the essential definition (śvarūpa-lakṣaṇa) of Brahman by all the schools of Vedantists though interpreted in their own ways. By adding the essential nature of bliss as stated in other texts referred to, the essential definition of Brahman stands as pure Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss - "Sat, Cit, Ānanda" as is often cited by the Vedāntists.

But, though defined as Existence (Reality), Consciousness and Bliss, this consciousness or bliss is so basic and fundamental, so much unlimited (anantam) that no positive term was regarded sufficient to express the true nature of the ultimate Reality.

"That supreme bliss is indescribable" declares the Kaṭha (18).

(14) Taittirīya-Up. 2. 7.
(15) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 43. 33. Taittirīya-Up. 2. 8.
(16) Chāndogya-Up. 7. 23.
(17) Taittirīya-Up. 2. 1. (18) Kaṭha-Up. 2. 2. 4.
"It cannot be attained either by the eyes or by speech or mind; how else can It be known than saying (realising) that - It is." (19)

Again, Kenopaniṣad states - "that which mind cannot reveal, but by which the mind is revealed, know that to be Brahman and not what is worshipped as 'this'." (20) "One becomes fearless by knowing that Bliss as Brahman which is beyond speech and mind (21)."

Finally, being unable as it were to describe Brahman by any positive description the Upaniṣad resorted to negative descriptions of the supreme Being as 'neither gross nor subtle', etc. (22) or as 'soundless and touchless', etc. (23) and ultimately as 'Not this', 'Not this' (neti, neti) (24). These negative descriptions and the Kena texts like - "if one thinks that one knows Brahman one does not know Him" (25) and many other such texts describing Brahman as unknowable seem to lead us to the threshold of agnosticism. But, as there are innumerable texts enjoining our knowledge of Brahman, e.g. "Manasaivānudraṣṭavyam" (26) "Drśyate tvagrāyā buddhyā" (27), etc.; the texts declaring its unknowability are only to indicate the non-object transcendental nature of Brahman, and not Its unknowability.

Moreover, the seers of the Upaniṣads further realised that the knowledge of such a transcendental Brahman whose nature is

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(19) Ibid 2. 3. 12.  
(20) Kena-Up. 1. 5.  
(21) Taittirīya-Up. 2. 9.  
(22) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 3. 8. 8.  
(23) Kaṭha-Up. 1. 3. 15.  
(24) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 2. 3. 6; 4. 5. 19.  
(25) Kena-Up. 2. 2. 3.  
(26) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 4. 4. 19.  
(27) Kaṭha-Up. 1. 3. 12.
indescribable by common words, and incomprehensible by common process of mind—a reality very distant and out of reach (parokṣa), cannot serve any purpose if it is in no way related to our individual self around which all problems of good and evil, freedom and bondage revolve, and which self is the object of our immediate consciousness.

So, the Upaniṣads have found out the solution of this difficulty by enquiring into the real nature of an individual person, and finding out the inner essence of man and its relation to that transcendental world-soul Brahman. This query and its solution is graphically depicted in the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Maitreyī in Brhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad where Yājñavalkya draws the attention of Maitreyī from all external objects including even the Gods and the Vedas to the most important item—'the self' in connection with which all our valuation and love are determined.

Yājñavalkya affirms at last that—"All things and persons are loved not for their own sake, but they are loved for the sake of the self," and, therefore, it is the self which is to be perceived—"Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyah". (28). Our love differs according to the difference of our valuation of things, and our valuation differs in accordance with the difference of contribution which the things render to the self. So, the self is the most important or central item to realise.

But, our common idea of the self is so much associated with

(28) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 4. 5. 6.
the body and sense-organs that it is very difficult to realise the self as something different from those non-self objects with which our notion of 'I' is so much mingled. The discovery of the self as distinct from all kinds of bodies, gross, subtle and causal is elaborately narrated in the story of Indra-Virocana in the Chāndogya-Upaniṣad.

Rejecting the notions of the self in the gross body in the waking state, and in the subtle body in the dreaming state, and also in the casual body in deep sleep, Prajāpati finally said to Indra that though the body which is the seat of the self is mortal, the self itself is immortal. So long one is embodied (falsely identified with one's own bodies), one can never be free from pleasure and pain. Only the disembodied (freed from the identification) self is not affected by pleasure and pain. And when a person is reposed in deep sleep, rises up from this body and attains to the supreme light then he appears in his true nature; then He is the Supreme person; (He is the Self) (30). This indicates that the real self is also beyond the casual body perceived in deep sleep. Again, this inmost self is also discovered to be of both immanent and transcendent nature. "He who breathes in with your breathing (prāṇa) is the soul of yours, which is in all things; ............ ......... It is your soul which is in all things" (31).

The self is also the indwelling ruler of all things. "He who

(30) Śvenarūpēṇaviniśpadaye sa uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ.
Chāndogya-Up. 8. 12. 3.
(31) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 3. 4. 1.
dwelling in all things, yet is other than all things, whom all things do not know, whose body all things are, who controls all things from within— he is your self, the inner-ruler, immortal" (32). It is also a self-luminous ultimate light within our person without which nothing is revealed to us. "When the sun has set, and the moon has set, and the fire has gone out, and the speech is hushed—the soul indeed is his light." (33). The self is evidently the only illuminating light in the state of dream—"atrāyaṃ puruṣaḥ svayaṃjyotiḥ" (34).

Though the self is immanent in our person and in all things, It is transcendent as well being the essence of unitary self-consciousness (Śkāṭma-pratyayasāram), and being of the nature of cessation of all creations (prāpacopaṃ) (35). "Here is your innermost self which transcends hunger and thirst, grief and bewilderment, which transcends old age and death." (36). But though the self is so much transcendental in nature, it occupies the central position in our life, relations and emotions.

The self should be meditated as the most beloved since "it is dearer than a son, dearer than wealth, dearer than everything else" (37). "One who speaks of anything other than the self (ātman) as beloved may be told that his beloved will perish or make him weep; but he who speaks of ātman as the beloved will not have to weep because his beloved (ātman) will never perish. Therefore, meditate upon ātman as the most beloved" (38).

(32) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 3. 7. 15. (35) Māṇḍukya-Up. 7.
(33) Ibid 4. 3. 6. (36) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 3. 5. 1.
(34) Ibid 4. 3. 9. (37) Ibid 1. 4. 8.
(38) Ibid 1. 4. 8.
This also proves that the self is of the nature of supreme bliss. It is for this reason that the self is loved above everything else. It is also the object of immediate consciousness, or rather, the immediate consciousness itself (sākṣādāparokṣāt).

But, in course of these investigations into the nature of the world-cause, and into the nature of the individual person, the Upaniṣads have spoken of some striking correspondence and realistic unities which exist between some features of the individual person and some features of the cosmos outside.

In the Vedas and in the Upaniṣads there are various statements showing this correspondence between the microcosm and macrocosm - a correspondence between some features of the individual person and some features of the cosmic world. The sun-god became the eyes in this person of man, the air-god became the vital principle, the fire-god became the organ of speech (39) and so on. Reversely, in the Ṛgveda we find these personal features and elements of the human body returning to their corresponding Gods, - their sources, in death (40). The Brhadāranyaka also states - "the speech of the dead person goes into the fire (fire-god), his life into the air, his eyes into the Sun, his mind into the moon", (41) and so on.

The Māṇḍukya-Upaniṣad speaking of four quarters of the self or Ātman, discovers some realistic unity as part and whole between the gross, subtle, and causal states of the individual self and

(39) Aitareya-Up. 2. 4. (41) Brhadāranyaka-Up. 1. 3. 11-16, 3. 2. 13
(40) Ṛgveda 10. 16. 3.
those of the cosmic being. The gross physical body of the individual person as found in the waking state which is called Visva, is equated with that of Virat, the gross cosmic being.

Again, Taijasa the subtle body of the individual being as is found in the dreaming state is equated with that of the subtle cosmic being Hiranyagarbha. Prajna - the causal body of the individual as in deep sleep has been identified with Isvara - the causal cosmic being. Thus, the three states or phases of the individual person - the gross, the subtle, and the causal, are identical with the corresponding three states or phases of the cosmic being. Of course, this identity is not an absolute identity but a unity of the part and the whole.

But absolute identity is discovered when the Upanishads come to the fourth (turlya) phase, which is declared at the very outset in Mandukya as "ayam atmam Brahma", and also at the end where the fourth is described not as a state but the reality - the real self which is devoid of all creation or projection (42). The realistic partial unity in the three grades of existence again find their ultimate unity in the so called fourth quarter (turlya) - the real atman.

We found, in course of the enquiry into the nature of the world-soul, and into the nature of the individual soul as described in the Upanishads, that the two underlying principles are by nature almost alike. The world-soul Brahman - the source of everything else

(42)"Prapanchapashamam santam sivamadvaitam caturtham manyate, smatm sa vijnayah" - Mandukya-7
is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss. The real nature of the individual self is also found to be the eternally existing source of everything, and most beloved, being of the nature of bliss. It is also the essence of immediate self-consciousness.

The only difference which seem to prevail still is that Brahman the world-soul is known as a distant entity (parokṣa), while the essence of the individual self is the most immediate being, the essence and ground of the most immediate self-consciousness.

The little difference has also been emphatically denied by the Upaniṣads by declaring the unity of the individual self with Brahman. "Ayam ātmā Brahma", "Prajñānaṁ Brahma", "Ahaṁ Brahmasmi", "Tat tvam asi", which are said to be the mahāvākyas, or the great dictums of the Upaniṣads professing the unity of the world-soul and the individual soul.

By equating Brahman with ātman, the distantness (parokṣatā) of the world-soul Brahman is removed, while on the other hand, by equating 'ātman' with Brahman - the world-soul, the apparent limitedness (sadvitīyatā) of the individual soul is also removed.

The problems of evil and bondage are also solved by this realisation of the ātman as identical with Brahman, which is the Ultimate Reality.

The descriptions of the Māṇḍukya-Upaniṣad and many other texts indicate an acosmic pure unity not only of ātman and Brahman, but also of Brahman and universe, or self and non-self. "There is
 nothing like many here” (43), He who sees like many here, meets death after death” (44). "He obtains fear who observes even little difference” (45). These texts and many others lead us to assume that the Upaniṣads show a definite tendency towards pure monism which admits of no difference whatsoever between Brahman and Ātman, or between Brahman and universe, or between self and non-self.

This viewpoint was strongly caught hold of by Śaṅkara and his followers. But the theistic vedantins who do not admit such pure monism have found sufficient reason to interpret those texts in their own way to prove that those texts do not actually propound pure monism.

It is also evident that the Ultimate Reality - Brahman or Ātman has been described in the Upaniṣads in two different aspects - one as cosmic all-inclusive ground of the universe (saprapaṇca), and the other as acosmic - devoid of all attributes and projections (nisprapanea). When Brahman or Ātman is described as the cause of the world, or as projecting the world, or as the all-mighty Lord knowing and ruling this world, it is the saprapaṇca Brahman which is referred to. But when it is described that Brahman is of the nature of cessation of all creations, or It is devoid of all characteristics (nirguna), or devoid of all differences, or as the ground of all negations (neti, neti), it is nisprapanea Brahman which is indicated.

(43) Brhadāranyaka-Up. 4. 4.
(44) Ibid 4. 4. 19.
(45) Taittirīya-Up. 2. 7.
Of course, it has also been emphasised that these two Brahmanś are not separate principles but different aspects of the same princi­ple. The Akṣara Brahman in which the space (ākāśa) containing all that is past, present and future, is supported, has been finally described as an acosmic pure being by all negative terms. "That, O Gārgī, Brāhmaṇas call the imperishable (ākṣara). It is not coarse, not fine, not short, not long, not glowing, not adhesive, ........ odourless, tasteless, without eye, without ear, without voice, without breath ........ without inside and outside. It consumes nothing whatsoever, no one consumes It." (46).

In contrast with this description of nisprapaṇcaa Brahman, there is a striking description of saprapaṇcaa Brahman in Chāndogya-Upaniṣad. "Performer of all works, containing all desires, containing all odours, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, the unspeaking, the unconcerned, - this is the soul of mine within the heart, this is Brahman" (47).

The mention of these two aspects described in the Upaniṣads is very significant in as much as they form the foundation of two distinct and different trends of Indian philosophy developed later on. While Śaṅkara and his followers laid emphasis on the nisprapaṇcaa aspect to formulate their philosophy of pure monism, others like Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, and Śrī Jīva laid more emphasis on the saprapaṇcaa aspect to propound their philosophies of concrete monism each in his own way.

(46) Brāhadāraṇyaka-Up. 3. 8. 7-9.
(47) Chāndogya-Up. 3. 14. 4.
Sri Jiva, however, claims to be more faithful to the Upanisadic texts by accepting totally the two kinds of texts depicting saprañca and niṣprapañca Brahman. In his conception of the Ultimate Reality as Advaya-ñāna-tattva he has effected a synthesis of these texts in his own way, and also accommodated Śaṅkara's conceptions of indeterminate Brahman as one of the aspects in the three-fold manifestation of the Ultimate Reality.