The Upanisads are the treasures in the history of Indian literature and philosophy. They are pregnant with the discussions of metaphysical problems and their solutions. Real philosophical teachings began in India only with the Upanisads though germs of philosophical thinking can also be traced in the Vedas. Robert Ernest Hume in this context says that the Upanisads are the first recorded attempts of the Hindus at systematic philosophizing. ¹ They may be said to constitute the real basis of all the orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. Of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy the Mīmāmsā and the Vedānta philosophy directly flow from the Vedas while the four other orthodox systems—viz., the Nyāya, the Vaiśeṣika, the Sāṃkhya and the Yoga believe in their authority. But the Vedānta philosophy in addition to the Vedas or the Upanisads has its two other sources, viz., the Bhāgavadgītā and the Brahma-sūtra. These three sources of Vedānta philosophy are known as prasthān-traya.²

1. R.E. Hume (trans.), The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads, p. 2

2. Traditionally the Upaniṣads are known as the Śruti-prasthāna or the Vedic portion of the Vedānta philosophy, the other divisions of the Vedānta being the Śruti-prasthāna (i.e., the Bhāgavad-Gītā) and the Nyāya-prasthān (i.e., the Brahma-sūtra of Bādarāyaṇa).
Not to speak of the Indian scholars but even the scholars of the West have said much in praise of the Upaniṣads. The theosophist Mead looks upon this group of texts "as a world scripture, that is to say, a scripture appealing to the lovers of religion and truth in all races and at all times, without distinction."³ Again Arthur Schopenhauer speaks very highly of Anquetil Duperron's book 'Ouponekhat' a Latin translation of the Persian rendering of the Upaniṣads. He says - "From every sentence deep, original, and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit ....... In the whole world, there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the 'Ouponekhat'. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death."⁴ According to Maxmuller, the Upaniṣads are the remote sources of Vedānta philosophy. For him the Vedānta philosophy is a system in which human speculation seems to have reached its highest acme.⁵

The spiritual experiences of the sages of ancient India found their expression in and through the Upaniṣads.

³ Mead and Chattopadhyaya, The Upanishads, p. 5

⁴ A. Schopenhauer, Parerga, 2, §, 185 (Werke, 6, 427)

⁵ Maxmuller, In his preface to 'The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy', p. v
The Upaniṣads are called Vedānta for two obvious reasons: (1) they are the concluding portions of the Vedas, and (ii) the teachings of the Vedānta constitute the end (anta) or aim which "the whole Vedic philosophy had in view." The Upaniṣads made bold attempts to arrive at the truth and to know the reality. But the Upaniṣadic thinkers failed to present a consistent system of Philosophy. There are different philosophical doctrines and even apparently contradictory statements in the Upaniṣads and hence it is difficult or rather impossible to form a single consistent system of philosophy out of them. Macdonell in this context says: "It must not of course be supposed that the Upaniṣads, either as a whole or individually, offer a complete and consistent conception of the world logically developed. They are rather a mixture of half-poetical, half-philosophical fancies, of dialogues and disputations, dealing tentatively with metaphysical questions. Their speculations were only reduced to a system in the Vedānta philosophy."  

The highest conception reached in the Upaniṣads is the conception of the Brahman. But we must not think that

6. A.K. Lad, A Comparative Study of the Concept of Liberation in Indian Philosophy, p. 14
7. R.E. Hume, op.cit., p. 70
the Upaniṣads did at once arrive at this conception. Through a long course of evolution of thought, passing through many centuries, the Upaniṣadic thinkers arrived at this conception. It is also equally true that the Upaniṣads presented diverse, and at times inconsistent views regarding the origin and ultimate ground of the universe. The process may very briefly be described thus. It passes from the first realistic materialism to the final speculative idealism of Atman-Brahman identity. Hume has characterised the philosophy of the Upaniṣads as monism. He says - "... monism is their most prevalent type and the one which has constituted their chief heritage." But he maintains that the monism of the Upaniṣads is identical neither with the monism of the West nor with the monism which is based on science. Rather he asserts that it has affinity with the monism of the early Greek philosopher Xenophanes.

The word Brahman is used to mean prayer in the Rg-Veda but subsequently in the Upaniṣads it is used to mean the ultimate Reality which is the object of prayer. In other words, Brahman is one to whom the prayer is offered. The word Brahman is derived from a root 'brih' which means

9. Ibid., p. 71
10. Ibid.
'to grow' or 'to burst forth'. So Brahman is that from which everything has evolved. According to Radhakrishnan "Brahman means reality which grows, breathes or swells."  

Brahman is here described in two different ways - either as Saguṇa or qualified or as Nirguṇa or unqualified Brahman. If we characterize Brahman as possessing this or that quality or either as concrete or abstract etc., then it is Saguṇa Brahman; but Nirguṇa Brahman is indescribable or indefinable. It is by interpreting them in two ways that we can reconcile these two apparently contradictory views. In so far as our intellect can conceive of, the conception of Saguṇa Brahman is the highest type of conception. As regards Nirguṇa Brahman, we cannot form any idea of it by our intellect; but it can be realized by some sort of spiritual intuition only.

As for Saguṇa Brahman, what we can say is that it is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world. He is the moral governor, the inner controller of the world and the individual souls.  

He is also called lower (apara) Brahman being endowed with attributes. This lower Brahman is a personal God. He is immanent in the universe. He is also the controller of the law of Karma. The individual souls bear a resemblance with him and they are said to be its parts.

According to the Chāndogya Upanishad the whole world is Brahman. It describes Brahman as Tajjalān which signifies one from which the world evolves, into which the world returns and by which it is supported. The etymological meaning of the word 'Tajjalān' may be analysed thus - 'Tat' means 'that', 'Ja' means one which gives birth to the world, 'li' means to absorb ('la' means one into which the world returns) and 'An' means one by which it is supported.

The Mṛdaṇka Upanishad describes Brahman as all-knowing and all-wise. Knowledge is said to be His austerity. From Him are produced the Brahma here (namely) name and form, and food. As from a well-blazing fire thousands of sparks of like forms issue forth, so also the varieties of beings emanate from the Imperishable God. It requires no help from any other agency in creating the Universe. It creates the world out of itself, just as a spider weaves a net

13. Chānd. Up., III.14.1
sarvam khalvidam brahma
tajjalān iti śānta upāsita.

14. Mṛdaṇ. Up., i.1.9
yah sarvajñah sarvavid
yasya jñānamayah tapah
tasmād etad 'brahma nāma'
rūpam annaṇa jāyate.

15. Mṛdaṇ. Up., ii.1.1
without the help of external agencies. Thus Brahman is not only the material cause but also the efficient cause of the Universe.

The world is said to be the manifestation of God. As the opening line of the Īsopaniṣad says, "Whatever there is in this world is transient and pervaded by the Lord." The Chāndogya Upaniṣad says - "All creatures have Being as their root, have Being as their refuge and have Being as their support." Īśvara is the inner controller of the whole world and of the individual souls. The Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad says - "He who resides in the earth and yet who is different from the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within. He is your Soul, the Inner controller, the Immortal. Further it says - "He who dwells in all creatures, yet who is different from all creatures, whom all creatures do not know, whose body all creatures are, who controls all

16. Īśa. Up., I
Īśā vāsyamidām sarvaṁ
yat kinča jagatyāṁ jagat.

17. Chānd. Up., vi.8.4
sanmūlāṁ imāṁ sarvāṁ praṇāṁ
sadāyatanāṁ śat pratisthāṁ.

18. Brh. Up., iii.7.3
creatures from within - He is your Soul, the Inner controller, the Immortal."

God is omnipresent and all-pervasive. God's omnipresence can be understood from many passages of the Upaniṣads. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad says - "He (God) is below, He is above. He is to the West. He is to the East. He is to the South. He is to the North. He indeed is all This." The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad gives a similar description of Brahman.

\[\text{This immortal Brahman is in front, Brahman is at back, Brahman is to the South and to the North. He is stretched forth below and above, Brahman, indeed, is this whole world, this widest extent.}\]

Brahman has the characteristics of both immanence and transcendance. The Īśa Upaniṣad describes Brahman thus - "He is moving, He is not moving, He is far, He is near, He is within all this, He is outside all this."

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19. Ibid., iii.7.15
20. Chānd. Up., vii.25.1

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sa evādhaṣṭāt sa upariṣṭāt} \\
\text{sa pāścāt sa purāṣṭāt} \\
\text{sa dākṣiṇātah sa uttaratah} \\
\text{sa evēdaṁ sarvaṁiti.}
\end{align*}
\]


\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Brahmaive damaiḥ puras tad} \\
\text{Brahma paścāt Brahma} \\
\text{dākṣiṇātā scottareṇa} \\
\text{adhaścordaṁca prasṛtām} \\
\text{Brahmaivedam visvāmīṁm variṣṭham.}
\end{align*}
\]

22. Īśa Up., 5

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tad ejati tannaijati tad dūre tadvantike} \\
\text{tadantarasya sarvasya tadu sarvasyāsyā varāhyataḥ.}
\end{align*}
\]
The Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad also says, "Brahman is infinite, the universe is also infinite. From the infinite Brahman has come out this infinite universe, yet the infinite Brahman still remains infinite."\(^{23}\) As God is infinite and eternal so He transcends the spatial and temporal world.

Puruṣa has four quarters. All beings constitute only one-fourth of Him. Three-fourths of Him remain immortal in heaven. The Universe is the expression of Puruṣa or God; but He is greater than His expression.\(^{24}\) All the worlds have Ātman or Puruṣa as their refuge; but none can go beyond it.\(^{25}\) "He who sees all creatures in His self and the self in all creatures and it is for this reason, He does not desire to conceal Himself."\(^{26}\) Brahman is the abode of all. The world being founded on Him shines radiantly.\(^{27}\)

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23. Brh. Up., v.1.1

24. Chand. Up., iii.12.6

\[ \text{tāvān asya mahimā tato} \\
\text{Jayāṃ śca puruṣaḥ} \\
\text{padośya sarvā bhūtāni} \\
\text{tripādasya mritam divīti.} \]

25. Katha Up., ii.2.8

\[ \text{tasmilokāḥ śrītāḥ sarye} \\
\text{taṇunātyeti kaścan.} \]

26. Īśa Up., 6

\[ \text{yastu sarvāmi bhūtāni} \\
\text{ātmānyeka anupasyati} \\
\text{sarva bhūteṣu cātmānaṁ} \\
\text{tato na vijugupsate.} \]

27. Mund. Up., iii.2.1
the light-bringer (bhāmani) for He shines in all the worlds. According to the Aitareya Upaniṣad all is guided by consciousness, all is founded in consciousness; consciousness is the basis of all, consciousness is Brahman. The Upaniṣads thus give an idealistic interpretation of the universe and this may be said to be the basic concept of all the schools of Vedānta philosophy. The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad declares that transcendental, infinite and boundless Brahman is "a solid man of knowledge" (vijñānaghana eva), i.e., a man of homogeneous, pure consciousness. Thus consciousness is the ontological principle of unity in the universe.

From the foregoing remarks it is evident that Śacuṇa Brahman has been shown to be the cause of origination, maintenance and destruction of the universe. We find a description of Brahman in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad. This Upaniṣad by way of explaining what Brahman is proceeds from a very imperfect conception to a very perfect and adequate conception of it.

28. Chand. Up., iv.15.4
esa u eva bhāmanīreṣa hi sarbe su lokēsu bhāti sarvesu lokēsu bhāti ya evam veda.

29. Ait. Up., iii.1.3
In the first Anuvāka of the 3rd chapter of this Upanisad, it is shown that Bhṛgu approached his father Varuṇa and requested him to impart instruction on Brahman. Varuṇa replied, "That verily, whence beings here are born, that by which when born they live, that into which on deceasing they enter - that be desirous of understanding. That is Brahman." As to what is Brahman, Bhṛgu tried food (ānā), breath (prāṇa), mind (manas), consciousness (vijñāna) and bliss (ānanda), which, according to him fulfilled all the conditions. But Varuṇa disapproved all but the last. Thus the Taittirīya Upanisad identifies Brahman with bliss or ānanda. One who knows this becomes established in Brahman. He becomes great in the splendour of sacred knowledge and in fame. The highest state of bliss or ānanda which the Upanisadic thinkers considered to be the ultimate Reality can be realized not by intellect or discursive knowledge; but by spiritual intuition (Anubhava). It is Brahmanubhava which gives the highest insight into Brahman.

31. Taitt. Up., iii.1

yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante
yena jātāni jīvanti,
yat prayantyābhi saṃvisanti
tadvijñānāsāsva tad brahmeta.
(R.E. Hume's translation.)

32. Ibid., iii.6
According to the Upanisadic thinkers, the Reality can be reached in the turīya state of highest immediacy—a state in which the individual coincides with the central reality.\(^{33}\) It is a state of positive bliss. Ānanda or bliss is the highest sort of enjoyment, where we find no distinction among the knower, the known and the knowledge. With the reaching of the state of Ānanda, the philosophical enquiry also comes to an end and it means thereby that there is nothing higher than Ānanda. "This Ānanda is active enjoyment or unimpeded exercise of capacity. It is not sinking into nothingness, but the perfection of being."\(^{34}\)

Nirguṇa Brahman is called para (higher) Brahman which is the transcendent ground of the empirical world. It is unqualified or devoid of attributes and hence it is called Nirguṇa. Whatever we can speak of Nirguṇa Brahman, we can speak of It negatively only. It cannot be described positively. So it is said that Nirguṇa Brahman is indeterminate, incomprehensible, and indefinable. The negative descriptions, indicated by the expressions 'not this', 'not

\(^{33}\) Turīya is the final level of consciousness, radically distinct in nature from the previous three states, viz., waking, dream and deep sleep. It is non-dual, non-non-sublatable, autonomous and certain consciousness. See Māṇḍ. Up., i.7

\(^{34}\) S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 168
this' do not imply that Brahman is absolutely unknowable. "All that it signifies is that the Absolute cannot be known as an 'object of knowledge', because it has none of the characteristics which must necessarily belong to the knowable objects."35 Though we have described Brahman as Saguna and Nirguna, it is to be remembered that Saguna and Nirguna Brahman are not two distinct and separate realities. They are at bottom one. Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman are only the two aspects of one and the same reality. In its transcendental aspect it is Nirguna or unqualified whom we cannot ascribe with any empirical attributes. But Brahman in its relation to the world and the individual souls, when he is conceived as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world is called Saguna Brahman, being endowed with attributes. Hence we may say that Brahman is both indeterminate and determinate. Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja of course differ in their interpretation of Brahman. Śaṅkara regards Nirguna Brahman as the ontological reality while Rāmānuja considers the determinate and qualified Brahman as the ontological reality. For Śaṅkara, the determinate and the qualified Brahman or Īśvara, the individual souls and the world are mere appearances. But for Rāmānuja, the conscious souls and the unconscious world are attributes, modes or

35. A.C. Mukerji, The Nature of Self, p. 377
accessories of God. Both these views may be reconciled. The temporal, and the eternal, the determinate and the indeterminate, the grounded and the ungrounded, the transcendent and the immanent are two aspects of Brahman from two different standpoints, viz., the standpoints of one in bondage and of one liberated. Thus Saguna Brahman is the self-same Brahman at the relational level of experience which at the supra-relational level of experience is the Nirguna Brahman, i.e., Brahman described via negation.

Now what is the relation between the Ātman and the Brahman or are they two distinct realities? The answer should be in the negative. We have already pointed out they are not distinct realities, rather they are at bottom one and the same. Whom we call Brahman from the objective point of view is the Ātman from the subjective point of view. The word ātman was used in the Rgveda to mean on the one hand the ultimate essence of the universe and to mean the vital breath in man on the other. But in the Upaniṣads, the use of the word 'ātman' was restricted to denote only the inmost essence in man, while the word Brahman was used to mean the ultimate essence of the Universe. Yet the Upaniṣadic thinkers found no difference between the Ātman and the Brahman and hence they were much more emphatic to declare the two to be one and the same. "Ayam Ātmā Brahma" 36 (This soul is Brahman) -

36. Brh. Up., iv.4.5
this mahāvākyya or grand statement implies that the soul in life on earth seems to be a separate entity but is really Brahman all along and merges in Brahman as soon as it is disembodied in death. The relation between them is explained by some of the Upaniṣads on the basis of analogy. The Brahmavindu Upaniṣad, for example, explains this relation on the analogy of a 'ghatākāśa' and the 'Mahākāśa'; ghatākāśa implying the space within a jar and mahākāśa implying the space outside the jar. 37 Similar is the case with the Ātman and the Brahman. As the space within the jar appears to be different from the space outside the jar due to the adjunct jar, so also the Ātman appears different from the Brahman due to its limiting adjuncts like body, mind, senses etc.

Mūndaka Upaniṣad again compares the jivātman and the Brahman with two birds that remain sitting on the same tree, the former of which taking the taste of sweet fruits and the latter remaining simply a passive observer towards it. The Ātman so long as it does not know Brahman remains in bondage; but as soon as it knows Brahman with its greatness, it soon becomes free from suffering. 38 The Chāndogya Upaniṣad teaches Śveta Ketu that he is none other than Brahman—That thou art (tat tvamasi). 39 It is taught

37. Brahmavindu Up., 10-15
38. Mūnd. Up., iii.1 & 2
39. Chānd. Up., vi.9.4
here that Brahman is the ultimate essence of the world. As by knowing a lump of clay, we may know everything that is made of clay or as by knowing an ingot of black iron, we may know everything that is made of black iron, so also we can know everything when we know this Atman, the Brahman.

If Atman and Brahman be identical, then why does the Atman suffer? Why does it remain in bondage? The Upaniṣads say that the self remains in bondage as it lacks in knowledge about itself. The self that sees difference between it and the Brahman goes round the cycle of birth and death. So long as the self fails to recognise its identity with the Brahman, it remains in bondage. Hence it is due to ignorance (avidyā) ornescience, that we are to suffer in this life. Ignorance then is the root cause of bondage and transmigration while real knowledge enables us to attain liberation.

What is avidyā or ignorance? Ignorance is the non-distinction between the eternal and the non-eternal or it is a knowledge that fails to discriminate between the two. Knowledge on the other hand is the distinction between the eternal and the non-eternal. "True knowledge is the intuition of identity. It is above intellectual knowledge and

40. Chānd. Up., vi.1.4-6
not determined by time, space and causality." True knowledge is the knowledge of identity between the Ätman and the Brahman.

It is due to ignorance that we see distinction, manyness and individuality. It is intellectual knowledge which involves distinction between the subject and the object. It is the knowledge of things limited by time and space and determined by causality. Knowledge relating to Brahman is the higher knowledge. Higher knowledge is the spiritual experience in which the Ätman and the Brahman are seen as non-different from each other. The lower knowledge is the intellectual knowledge derived from other branches of knowledge. It involves the trinity of knowledge, knower and known while in spiritual experience this trinity disappears. This spiritual experience is a kind of light which reveals everything as non-different from Brahman. One having lower knowledge is called a mantravid, the knower of names while one having the higher knowledge is called an Ātmavid, the knower of Brahman. The Munḍaka Upaniṣad says - "The

41. J.N. Sinha, Outlines of Indian Philosophy, p. 37
42. Munḍ. Up., i.1.5
    atha parā - yayā tadaksaramadhī gamyate.
43. Chānd. Up., vii.1.3
Avidyā or ignorance is the cause of individuality. When the individual soul wrongly identifies itself with the body, the sense organs, the manas and the buddhi, it becomes entangled in bondage. It becomes liberated only when it realizes its identity with Brahman. According to the Upaniṣads the principal means to liberation is knowledge. This knowledge is the knowledge of identity between the Ātman and the Brahman. There are certain pre-requisites or certain preliminary steps for acquiring right knowledge. These are performance of allotted duties, concentration, purity of mind etc.

A man is to perform his prescribed duties throughout his life. He is also to perform his duties by being conscious of the fact that God pervades the whole universe. It is a fact that the eternal cannot be attained by something which is non-eternal. Actions as well as their fruits are non-eternal. Hence by performing prescribed duties one cannot attain the eternal Brahman. It helps only in the

44. Maṇḍ. Up., iii.2.9
Brahmavid Brahmaiva bhavati.

45. Katha Up., i.2.10
adhruvaih dhruvam tat na prāpyate.
attainment of heaven which is also non-eternal. One who knows the non-eternal nature of the fruits of actions acquires the habit of detachment and seeks the knowledge of the eternal Ātman.⁴⁶

Desires prompt one to actions and happiness comes from the fulfilment of desires. The Upaniṣads make a distinction between the pleasanter (Preyas) and the better (Sreyas). Of these two it is all the more good for a man to choose the 'better' (Sreyas).⁴⁷ The wise man chooses the better rather than the pleasanter while the stupid man chooses the pleasanter.⁴⁸ Earthly and heavenly happiness is agreeable (Preyas). But realization of the Ātman is the highest good which can be achieved by extinguishing desires.

By being free from desires one can attain true happiness. Mind is the cause of bondage and liberation. An impure mind is the cause of bondage while a pure mind is the cause of liberation. A mind having desires for pleasure is impure, while a mind having no such desire is pure. A mind attached with objects of enjoyment is the cause of bondage

⁴⁷ Katha Up., i.2.1
⁴⁸ Ibid., i.2.2
and a mind detached from such objects of enjoyment produces liberation. It is seen that purity of mind is needed for attaining liberation. Selfishness is bondage and selflessness is liberation.\textsuperscript{49}

The mind attains purity by discipline of both body and mind and by the practice of Yoga and then only it becomes fit for acquiring knowledge of the Ātman. It is said that penances (tapas) also generate purity of mind.\textsuperscript{50} Muniśaka Upaniśad again says that it is by the application of renunciation that the ascetics can purify their hearts.\textsuperscript{51}

For intuitive realization of the Ātman within the individual self there are certain other pre-requisites, viz., sense control (sama), mind control (dama), withdrawal of the senses from their objects (uparati), endurance of physical hardships (titikṣā) and trance due to meditation (smādhi).\textsuperscript{52}

One of the means to realizing the soul is devotion according to the Upaniśads. The soul cannot be realised by the study of the Vedas nor by intellect nor by listening to the many scriptures. It can be obtained only by one whom He

\textsuperscript{49} Painḍala Up., iv.19; Varāha Up., ii.4.3
\textsuperscript{50} Maitreyī Up., i.2; Kaivalya Up., i.4
\textsuperscript{51} Muniś. Up., iii.2.6
\textsuperscript{52} Subāla Up., 9
(the Ātman) chooses, and to whom He reveals his own person.\textsuperscript{53}

"They who, being without desire,
Worship the Person (Purusha)
And are wise, pass beyond the
Seed (of rebirth) here."\textsuperscript{54}

Whatever has been taught or declared in the Upaniṣads becomes manifest to one who has the supreme devotion to God as well as to his spiritual preceptor even as to God.\textsuperscript{55}

Though the Upaniṣads have prescribed devotion also as a means to liberation, they seem to lay greater emphasis on the path of knowledge. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad says that by knowing God one becomes released of all fetters.\textsuperscript{56}

One who is devoid of desires (a-kratu) beholds the soul that is set in the heart of a creature and by beholding Him, he becomes freed from sorrow.\textsuperscript{57} The wise man ceases to lament when he recognises the soul.\textsuperscript{58} The Taittirīya Upaniṣad also

\textsuperscript{53} Mund. Up., iii.2.3; Kaṭha Up., i.2.23
\textsuperscript{54} Mund. Up., iii.2.1
\textsuperscript{55} Śveta.Up., vi.23
\textsuperscript{56} Śveta. Up., vi.13
\textsuperscript{57} Kaṭha Up., i.2.20
\textsuperscript{58} Ibld., i.2.22
says that he who knows Brahman attains the highest. Brahman is Ātman. We are to meditate on the soul so that we can succeed in crossing to the farther shore beyond darkness. This Ātman is to be seen, heard, reflected and meditated on. With the seeing of, with the hearing of, with the thinking of, and with the understanding of the Soul, this whole world is known. "He who stands firm in Brahman attains immortality." Liberation or realisation of Brahman is the main concern of the Upaniṣadic thought. But what is the nature of mokṣa according to the Upaniṣads? If we want to give a general description of the state of liberation, we may describe it negatively thus : mokṣa is freedom from bondage. As stated earlier, it is vidyā by which we arrive at the state of liberation. It is intuitive knowledge of one infinite, eternal, universal spirit.

Attaining mokṣa means becoming Brahman. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad says, "He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman itself."

59. Tait. Up., ii.1.2
60. Muṇḍ. Up., ii.2.6
61. Brh. Up., ii.4.5; iv.5.6
62. Chānd. Up., ii.23.1
63. Muṇḍ. Up., iii.2.9
It is a state in which there is complete freedom from sin and sufferings. As Chandogya Upanishad says, "The knower of the Self transcends grief." Libration means becoming immortal. It also means freedom from all fetters. It is a state of identity of the individual self with the supreme self. S.N. Dasgupta explains liberation thus - "Emancipation or Mukti means in the Upanishads the state of infiniteness that a man attains when he knows his own self and thus becomes Brahman." It is also the vision of all beings in one's own self and also the vision of one's self in all beings. It is a state of the self becoming all creatures. It is a state devoid of delusion and sorrow. It is a state of eternal happiness and peace. The happiness attained in the state of liberation is indescribable.

But a careful examination shows that there are two conflicting accounts of the state of liberation running

64. Chānd. Up., vii.7.3
65. Śvet. Up., vi.13
66. Muṇḍ. Up., iii.1.3
68. Īśa Up., 6
   yastu sarvāni bhūtāni ātmānyeva anupaśyati
   sarva bhutesā bhūtāni tato na vijugupsate.
69. Ibid., 7
70. Katha Up., ii.2.12-14
throughout the Upaniṣads. According to one view, it is a state of likeness to God and according to the other, it is a state of oneness with God. That the state of liberation is a state of oneness with God can be understood from many passages of the Upaniṣads. Mṇḍaka Upaniṣad says that he who knows that supreme Brahman becomes very Brahman. Another verse of the same Upaniṣad explains the relation between the Ātman and the Brahman thus—"The praṇava is the bow, the Ātman is the arrow, and Brahman is said to be its mark. It should be hit by one who is self-collected and that which hits becomes like the arrow, one with the mark, that is Brahman." Praśna Upaniṣad says—"He becomes established in the supreme undecaying Ātman." He who recognises the Imperishable arrives at the Imperishable itself. He becomes omniscient and all. It is also said that the knower of the imperishable enters into all. Even, the seers attaining Him remain content with their knowledge, they feel that their purpose is accomplished, they become

71. S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 238
72. Mṇḍ. Up., iii.2.9
73. Ibid., ii.2.9;
74. Praśna Up., iv.9
    sa pare'ksaṁ ātmanī saṃpratiṣṭhate.
75. Ibid., iv.10
    sa sarvajñāḥ; sarvo bhavati.
76. Ibid., iv.11
free from all desires, and attaining the all pervading Ātman on all sides and with concentration of their minds, they enter into all things. Thus from the various descriptions given by the Upaniṣads it may be said that the Ātman becomes one with the highest immortal Brahman.

From the foregoing remarks it is clear that liberation means the individual soul becoming one with the supreme God. And from this point of view we may say that liberation is the highest state of religious realization. But we should at the same time remember that it is not mere entering into or being absorbed into nothingness. Explaining the Upaniṣadic view in this regard Radhakrishnan says - "The Upaniṣad view is that there is in the highest condition a disintegration of individuality, a giving up of selfish isolation, but it is not a mere nothing or death."78

The Upaniṣads while explaining the highest condition as merger of the individual self with the highest Brahman, liken this merger to the merger of the flowing rivers in the sea. The Mṛḍaka Upaniṣad says -

"As the flowing rivers in the ocean
Disappear, quitting name and form

77. Mṛḍ. Up., iii.2.5
78. S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 236
So the knower, being liberated from
name and form,
Goes into the Heavenly Person,
higher than the high."\(^{79}\)

But it is a fact that the Upaniṣads do not look
upon the ultimate Brahman as mere abstraction. If the
ultimate Brahman is looked upon as mere abstraction, then
the goal of man will be annihilation. The Upaniṣads do not readily accept such a conclusion. Hence, we may say that
the highest condition of attaining Brahman is not mere entering into or absorption into nothingness. Of course, this is also true that the Upaniṣads do not recognise the ultimate reality of the narrow individual self. But if personal immortality be sought for, then the ultimateness of the individual must be recognised. Those who hold such a view insist upon the maintenance of the individual beyond the world. Radhakrishnan observes, "The real in finite life, what is best in individual's nature, is the infinite, and that persists beyond the limits of physical existence."\(^{80}\)
It has not the least degradation in value. The spiritual value that we seek after here can only be attained imperfectly, while in the highest condition we can have them

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79. Mānd. Up., iii.2.8; Praśna Up., vi. 5 (R.E. Hume's translation).
perfectly, completely and absolutely. Whatever the bliss we have in the world is only a shadow of the Divine Bliss, a feeble specimen of it. Though our life's journey is a sorrowful one, yet it does not end in sorrow. Explaining the highest condition, Radhakrishnan says, "After all our troubles in the sea of life we do not reach a desert shore where we are obliged to die of hunger." In this state the self gets its fullest expression. The highest state is a state of extreme delight or it is a state in which our joys know no bounds. It is a state of eternal bliss, "where the creature as creature is abolished but becomes one with the creator, or more accurately realises his oneness with Him." This state cannot adequately be described. It can be described only with the help of symbols and metaphors.

Passages stating the oneness of the individual soul with God seem to imply that there is no sense of individuality in the highest state of liberation and hence the question of performing duties also does not arise here in this state. This state may be compared to a state of sleep where even dreams are not dreamt or it is a kind of peace

81. Tait. Up., ii.8; Brh. Up., iv.3.33
82. S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 237
83. Ibid.
where consciousness is lacking. Radhakrishnan observes, "It seems to be a survival without consciousness, where body is dissolved and mind extinguished and all is lost in a boundless darkness."\textsuperscript{84} Yājnavalkya explaining this state to Maitreyī says that there is no consciousness after death.\textsuperscript{85}

From such descriptions of the Upaniṣads it is clear that the state of liberation is a state devoid of any activity, perception, thought or consciousness. These are all peculiar to a dualistic vision. It also signifies the merger of the Ātman with Brahm and after its merger, the self can no longer be singled out.\textsuperscript{86} In other words, the sense of duality disappears here. The sense of duality certainly gives rise to all sorts of perceptions and activities. There is activity where there is opposition between subject and object. Only in the absolute world, all plurality disappears with the resulting activities of perception and action. To quote Radhakrishnan again - "It is then the everlasting, unchangeable itself, in whose perfection all movement is stilled, all colours pale and

\textsuperscript{84} S. Radhakrishnan, \textit{Indian Philosophy}, vol. I, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{85} Brh. Up., ii.4.12
\textit{na pretya samjña 'sti.}
\textsuperscript{86} Brh. Up., ii.4.12
all sounds pass away." This may be said to be the negative aspect of freedom.

There are, on the contrary, some such passages in the Upanisads which narrate the highest condition as the individual becoming like God or the individual attaining the state equal to God. Such descriptions of the Upanisads also imply that the individual soul in this state has an active existence. This may also be said to be its positive aspect. Let us examine some such passages of the Upanisads. Mūndaka Upaniṣad, for example, says, "When the seer sees the brilliant creator, Lord, person, the Brahma-source, then being a knower, shaking off good and evil, stainless, he attains supreme equality (samyam) (with Him)." Another verse of the same Upaniṣad says that the ascetics by being purified in heart by the application of renunciation arrive at the Brahma-world and thereby become companions of God. The liberated soul is again said to traverse the worlds of self

87. S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 240
88. Mūnd. Up., iii.1.3
yadā paśyāḥ paśyate rukmavarman
ditā viddhūya nirañjanah
parāmaṁ sāmyamupaiti.
89. Ibid., iii.2.6
which consists of food, breath, mind, understanding and bliss and it is further said that by traversing these worlds, having the food of his liking, taking the form he likes, he sits singing songs.\textsuperscript{90}

Passages like the ones as mentioned above, certainly indicate that the freed soul has yet an active and conscious existence. There may be differences of explanation of the highest state, yet it may be said that this state is a state of activity, full of freedom and perfection. The liberated in this state has also the feeling of oneness with God. According to the Ch\'andogya Upani\'sad immortality itself lifts one to the region of deity.\textsuperscript{91} Actually it is difficult to explain this state but if a description is urged upon, we describe it to be a state of divine life. Just as the rays of the Sun are lost in the Sun, the wave of the sea in the ocean, the notes of music in the one harmony, so also the self loses itself in the all-embracing Brahman, but here it does not mean annihilation or death of the soul. The positive descriptions given of this state are suggestive of the sense of individuality, though this individuality is not founded on any selfish interest. This is also to be remembered that

\textsuperscript{90} Tait. Up., iii.10.5
\textsuperscript{91} Ch\'and. Up., ii.22.2
such individualisation of life has a need for fulfilling the joy of the one supreme.\textsuperscript{92}

It may be the case that there should have been this sense of individuality even for the purpose of self-expression, yet it is a fact that the soul is conscious of its glory and greatness of immortality. The self is aware of the fact that God is in the making of the cosmic drama "where the divine consciousness plays and acts."\textsuperscript{93} The liberated individual also plays its role in the same drama being fully in the know of the truth. Everything now comes under his sway. It will be quite obvious from our foregoing accounts that we find conflicting statements in the Upaniṣads and such statements had its reconciliation only at a later time.

There is certain vagueness in the Upaniṣads and this has resulted in the formation of different theories even from the same texts. Some Buddhists have equated the state of mokṣa to a state of entire loss while some Vedāntins hold that it is 'self-immersion' of the individual self in the supreme. There is another group of thinkers who hold that the self exists eternally even engaging itself in the thought, love and enjoyment of the supreme. It does not in any way

\textsuperscript{92} S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 241

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
mean annihilation. The religious philosophers of Vaisnavism and Śaivism are the upholders of this view.

Though we notice such diversity of views in this respect, yet it can safely be concluded that mokṣa in Indian philosophy primarily means release from birth and death which appears to be the view of the majority of Indian thinkers. Union with God is another name for becoming eternal.

Both the conceptions of Videhamukti and Jivan-mukti, which have been later developed by philosophical schools are found in the Upaniṣads. According to the former liberation can be attained only after death while according to the latter, liberation can be attained even when embodied. We can arrive at the conception of Videhamukti by following logically the escatological doctrines of the Vedas and we can arrive at the other conception by following logically the Upaniṣadic teaching that liberation is nothing other than higher knowledge of Brahman, which is attainable here in this life. 94 There are many passages in the Upaniṣads which clearly indicate that emancipation is possible even here in this life. Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad says, "Those who know It

(the Ātman) become immortal and others (not knowing It) go only to suffer." According to the Īśa Upaniṣad again the knower of Brahman sees the Ātman in all beings and all the beings in the Ātman. In this context Radhakrishnan says, "It is possible to eliminate the sense of egoism even in this life, and he who achieves perfection in this life is called a jīvan-mukta. His joy of immortality realises itself in the freedom of movement." One who knows Brahman rises above all doubts and suspicions, he ceases doing deeds and he becomes free from the knot of his heart. He is no more afflicted by sorrows and sufferings nor is he affected by sins and in his family no such member as will be ignorant of Brahman will come of. "Those wise persons having no unfulfilled desire, worship the person (Puruṣa) pass beyond the seed of (re-birth) here." Therefore, the Upaniṣadic view is that desire is the root cause of rebirth. But in case of a perfected soul whose desire has been satisfied, for him all desires vanish away

95. Bṛh. Up., iv.4.14
   ye tadviduḥ amritāste bhavantyathetare
dākhamevāpi yanti.
96. Īśa. Up., 6
98. Muṇḍ. Up., ii.2.8
99. Ibid., iii.2.9
100. Ibid., iii.2.1
even here in this life.\textsuperscript{101} In the state of liberation the distinction between 'this' and 'that' disappears. This state is described as the state of fearlessness by the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. The sense of otherness happens to be the cause of fear, suspicion and hatred. Fear cannot arise in the mind if there be no thought of a second. Hence fearlessness is a state of non-dualism (advaita) to be achieved by means of true knowledge of the self.

The emancipated person transcends morality. For him, there is no distinction between the 'Is' and 'ought'. He is in full grasp of the meaning of the term 'ought' as is used from the moral point of view. He takes no trouble by such thought as - "I have not done good" or "I have done evil" etc. But it will be quite wrong on our part to think that the liberated can do anything he likes. Rather his actions are such as will neither harm nor injure anyone else. In this context Radhakrishnan's observation is worth quoting - "As it is impossible for a civilized person to commit theft or murder far less it is possible for a liberated to do so."\textsuperscript{102} For him moral acts are as spontaneous as instinctive ones. In performing moral duties, we cannot but suppress our lower self, but in case of a liberated, he is

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Mund. Up., iii.2.2
\item \textsuperscript{102} S.\textsuperscript{1}Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. II, p. 621
\end{enumerate}
not to make any distinction between the lower and the higher self. To call the liberated immoral by the biased western critics is only a distortion and misinterpretation of facts. The liberated should be considered a super moral being. Prof. Mackenzie seems to realize this and hence he says that one who is delivered "will no longer follow after evil, for evil actions will have ceased to have any attraction for him."\textsuperscript{103} The body for the liberated is something like an old slough of a snake which he shakes off at appropriate time.\textsuperscript{104} The liberated becomes totally free from attachment. Though the liberated acts, he remains unattached. The Brhadāranyaka Upāniṣad has described the merging of the jīvātman with Brahman in the following words, "As a person while embracing his beloved forgets everything of outside and inside, so the jīvātman while embraced by the Lord forgets everything."\textsuperscript{105}

As regards liberation, what we should say further is that liberation is eternal. It is there eternally. It is not something which is produced afresh for us, because that which has a beginning must have also an end and in that case, it will not be something which is eternal. As S.N. Dasgupta

\textsuperscript{103} J.S. Mackenzie, Hindu Ethics, p. 78
\textsuperscript{104} Brh. Up., iv.4.7
\textsuperscript{105} Brh. Up., iv.3.21
observes, "Emancipation thus is not a new acquisition, product, an effect or result of any action, but it always exists as the Truth of our nature. We are always emancipated and always free."¹⁰⁶ Knowledge does not lead us to emancipation but is emancipation itself.¹⁰⁷ Deussen also says the same thing in this regard. He writes, "We are all emancipated . . . but just as he who does not know the place of a hidden treasure, fails to find it though he passes over it constantly; so all these creatures fail to find the world of Brahman though they daily in deep sleep enter into it."¹⁰⁸ It does not convey such meaning as becoming something rather it is merely realisation of the fact that it exists eternally. In the words of Radhakrishnan, "The nature of eternal life is a condition of ānanda or freedom, a state of joyous expansion of the soul, where heaven and earth are felt to flow together."¹⁰⁹

The state of liberation cannot adequately be described. Baron Von Hügel speaks of trance condition which appears to be timeless, i.e., non-successive, spontaneous or eternal. In his view though there is apparent God-likeness

¹⁰⁶ S.N. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 58
¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
¹⁰⁸ P. Deussen, The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads, p. 345
¹⁰⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, vol. I, p. 237
in other respects of the soul in this condition, the eternity of the soul is not the conclusion drawn here. Eternity, according to him is the centre of such experience and it is due to this that the self gets inducement to hold itself to be divine. For him the immortality of the soul cannot be experienced in advance of death, while its eternity can be experienced in trance-like conditions.  

In our concluding remarks, we may say that negatively liberation means the freedom from all kinds of suffering and it also means the cessation of the cycle of birth and death. But it is not merely this. It is knowing one's self to be non-different from Brahman. From the metaphysical principle of the divinity of the soul follows the axiological ideal of liberation. Swami Vivekananda rightly points out, "The goal of the soul among all the different sects in India seems to be the same. There is one idea with all, and that is liberation. Man is infinite, and this limitation in which he exists now is not his nature. But through these limitations he is struggling upward and forward until he reaches the infinite, the unlimited, his birth right, his nature."  

110. Baron Von Hügel, Eternal Life, p. 27