CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND REBIRTH IN VEDAS, UPANISADS AND BHAGAVAT GITA

1.1 Vedic Contribution

The Vedas, the sacred books of India, are generally believed to be the earliest literary record of the Indo-European race. It is indeed difficult to say when the earliest portions of these compositions came into existence. Even more than the other scriptures of the world, the Vedas make a special claim to be Divine in their origin. Where as the Bible, the Koran and other revelations of the word of God owe their sacred authority either to Divine inspiration or to delivery of the sacred messages through an angel or other special method for God unto certain chosen persons. The Vedas are said to be simply Divine in their origin. They are themselves authority, being the knowledge of God. So the attempt to discover the date of the origin of the Vedas is like trying to discover the origin of the knowledge of God or of God himself. The search for the beginning of the vedic literature is also similar to the search for the origin of the universe. While it is true that the universe has undergone an evolution from primitive forms through successive stages to its present stage of development, the Vedas are themselves complete in development.
With the important exceptions of Buddhism and Jainism, all schools of Indian philosophy and all sects of Indian religion recognise in the Vedas their origin and final authority. This is true even of all those sects and schools which have arisen in modern times. Even today, all the obligatory duties of the Hindus at birth, marriage, death, etc. are performed according to the old vedic rituals. In the words of Prof. Das Gupta 'The Laws which regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs and rites of the Hindus even to the present day are said to be but mere systematised memories of old vedic teachings, and are held to be obligatory on their authority'.

It is true that we can discover in the Vedas, ideas apparently primitive by the side of these, others that are indicative of the highest spiritual inspiration. That is because these scriptures represent the intellectual groping of primitive men as well as the conceptions of the deity and spiritual life held by men of the highest intellectual and spiritual advancements. There are present in the vedic literature both higher and lower forms of thought. In short, the Vedas reveal both genuine inspiration on the part of a few divinely gifted men and women, and a slow fumbling search for spiritual consolation on the part of a great many others.

However, Indian philosophers differ in but minor details as to what the Vedas teach. We may safely say that they give the knowledge of Brahman, and

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lay down work as a means to that knowledge. When through work i.e., sacrificial rites as well as self less labour, our hearts are purified, we become fit to inquire into the highest knowledge of Brahman.

If we roughly classify the huge vedic literature from the point of view of subject matter and language, we can point out four different types, namely the Samhitās or collection of verses, Brahmaṇas, Aranyakas or forest treatises and the Upaniṣads. There are four collections of Samhitās, namely Rg veda, Sama veda, Yagur veda and Atharva veda and of these, the Rg veda is probably the earliest and also important among them.

When we try to find out the origin of the doctrine of karma and rebirth in Indian thought, it is in the vedic concept of Rta, the rudiments of karma theory lies. In the early vedic period, the performance of sacrifices had assumed a religious significance. Sacrifices constituted an elaborate process of rituals where oblations were offered to fire. The sacrifices and rituals were performed with a view to secure the blessings of the gods and to win their favour. The seers of the vedic period believed that the performance of the rituals and sacrifies invariably produce certain mystic or magical results by virtue of which the object desired by the sacrifies was fulfilled in due course. Hence sacrifice is regarded as possessing a mystical potency superior even to the gods and the basis of the universe, and the unalterable law was that these mystical ceremonies for good or for bad were
destined to produce their results. When ritual grew in importance Rta became a synonym for yajna or sacrificial ceremony\(^2\) and it is the anticipation of the law of karma.\(^3\)

According to vedic seers, the Law of which Varuṇa is the custodian is called the Rta and Rta literally means the "course of things"\(^4\). The principle of Rta is responsible for the order and the regularity of the universe. It is said in the Rg veda that the whole universe is founded on Rta and moves on it\(^5\) and the sun and the dawn follow the path of Rta.\(^6\) Heaven and earth are what they are by reason of the Rta.\(^7\) Perhaps it was the unchanging regularity of the natural phenomenon observed by the ancients, which suggested to the mind of the Vedic seers that there exists an eternal order in the universe, i.e., the uniformity of nature, which we find in the ordered course of things, which is indicated by the alleviations of day and night, the change in seasons, and the regularity of the movements of the sun, moon, and stars etc., are all considered to be due to Rta. This concept of order or law-governance could not be restricted to the external nature, but was extended to the moral and spiritual realms also. Thus Dr. Radhakrishnan points out that we can find "in the concept of Rta, a development

\(^3\) Ibid., p.109.
\(^4\) C f: Rg veda:141.9.
\(^5\) Rg veda IV.23.9.
\(^6\) Rg veda I: 24.8.
\(^7\) Rg veda X: 121.1.
from the physical to the divine. *Rta* originally meant the established route of the world, of the sun, moon, and stars, morning and evening, day and night. Gradually it became the path of morality to be followed by men and the law of righteousness observed even by gods.”  

It came to be believed that just as the violation of the law of nature would lead to natural calamities, the violation of moral law would bring about the corresponding consequences for the individual with regard to his moral and spiritual life. Thus the *Rg veda* regards sin as the result of the violation of *Rta* in the moral realm. *Rta* furnishes us with a standard of morality. The good are those who follow the path of *Rta*, the true and the ordered.

A.B. Keith remarks that long before the period of the *Rg veda*, it is clear that the Indian had realised the difference between life and death and formulated in his imagination the two elements of man, his body and his spirit. But the distinction must have been vague in the extreme. Of these, to the first was what we would regard as physical and the spirit which is described as ‘*Ašu’* 10, which seems clearly to have based on the conception of the breath of the man which is the visible sign of life and intellect. There is however, at least one passage in *Rg veda* where there is a reference passing from the vital breath (*Ašu*) to the blood,

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10 *Rg Veda* I: 113.16.
and the thence to *Ațman, as the inmost self of the world. From this it is assumed that in the vedic literature *Ațman probably first used to denote vital breath in man, then the self of the world, and then the self in man.

R.D. Ranade points out that in the major part of the *Rig veda, the idea of transmigration seems conspicuous by its absence. The cheerful and joyous attitude of the Indian Aryans made it impossible for them to think too much of the life after death. They believed in the world of gods, and in the world of fathers, and they did not care to believe in anything else. Even though the idea of transmigration is not very conspicuous in the greater portion of the *Rig veda, it remains at the same time equally true that, in certain other places, an approach is being made to the idea of transmigration in a vague manner. It is stated in the 16th hymn of the 10th *Mandala of *Rig veda that the eye of the dead man has been asked by the seer to move back to the sun, the anima to the wind, which is its analogue, and the animus has been directed to go to the heaven or to the earth according to its *dharma or qualities or else to move even to the waters or the plants if it so suited it.

According to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the vedic Aryans had no special doctrines about life after death, though some vague conceptions about heaven

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11 *Rg veda* I:164.4.
13 *Rg veda* X:16.3.
and hell could not be avoided by reflective minds. Rebirth is still at a distance.\textsuperscript{14}

The most dominant view is that of immortality in heaven, the abode of the gods.\textsuperscript{15}

The Vedic Aryans were convinced that death was not the end of things. After night, the day; after death, life. Beings, who once had been, could never cease to be.

There is doubt among the scholars that the idea of transmigration is an un-Aryan idea, that Indians borrowed it from abroad. To this Dr. S. Radhakrishnan remarked that the \textit{Brahmanas} contain all the suggestions\textsuperscript{16} necessary for the development of the Doctrine of Rebirth. They are, however, only suggestions, while individual immortality is a main tendency. The three chief moments in the idea of transmigration namely, the passage of the soul from the body, its habitation in other forms of existence like the plants and even its return to the human form, are all implicitly found even so far back as the times of \textit{Rg Veda}, and even these are coupled with the incipient idea of the quality of action (\textit{dharma}), which determines a future existence.\textsuperscript{17} In this sense, there is no reason in saying that the idea of transmigration is an un-Aryan idea, that the Indians borrowed it form the non-Aryan aborigines of India, and in some

\textsuperscript{14} S. Radhakrishnan, \textit{Indian Philosophy}, Vol.1, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.133.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.135.
inexplicable way, the idea found entrance in other countries and cults beyond India.

According to Rgvedic Sarphitās future existence, at least of a blessed character is assumed to a man only through the correct performance of sacrifices.\(^{18}\)

In many of the hymns, there is a belief in the existence of another world, where the highest material joys are attained as a result of the performance of the sacrifices and also in a hell of darkness underneath, where the evil doer must be punished. Though we do not find in Rgveda any trace of the Doctrine of transmigration in a developed form, a description to the entry of heaven and hell, analogues to future existence appeared. It is also said that, every one is born again after death, is weighed in a balance, and receives reward or punishment according as his works are good or bad. It is easy to see that the scattered ideas like these with regard to the destiny soul of man, according to the sacrifice that he performs or other good or bad deeds, form the first rudiments of the later doctrine of metempsychosis.\(^{19}\)

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The aim of the sacrifice is the world of heaven. The chief place of the dead in the conception of *Rg veda*\(^{20}\) is unquestionably heaven and the heaven is also called the home,\(^{21}\) but the idea can hardly be pressed to the view that going to heaven is a returning home. It is rather that the man reaches in the highest heaven, a new and abiding abode. The nature of the heaven which is attained by the spirits is described in many hymns of *Rg veda*\(^{22}\). There is light, the sun for the highest waters, every form of happiness, which is at once the food of the spirits,\(^{23}\) and the power which they win by it, their self-determination. In *Rg veda* it is maintained that the soul of the dead is carried aloft by the fire God, *Agni*, who consumes the material body at cremation, to the heavenly world where it dissolves itself with the Gods in perfect careful bliss.\(^{24}\) This reward of immortality should not be taken in the sense that man should seek by an early death to obtain the world to comes. On the contrary in that world his place will be the better, the longer he lives. It is the aim of the man not merely to achieve immortality, as eternal life here after, but also the full age of a hundred years, which is the allotted span of man. The other side of the belief in heaven is the belief in hell. Of the pains of the hell, the *Rg veda* says little.\(^{25}\)

\(^{20}\) *Rg veda* IX: 113.7ff.

\(^{21}\) *Rg veda* X: 14.8.

\(^{22}\) *Rg veda* I: 107.7, X: 27.21, X: 107.2.

\(^{23}\) *Rg veda* IV: 26.4.


\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 57.
In *Rg Vedic* hymns the ethical considerations enter, but sparingly in the attainment and constitution of future existence. It is said that man’s deeds are weighed in a balance and receives punishments according as his works are good or bad.\(^{26}\) At places sin is declared and obstacle to heaven but it is believed that the defect could be remedied through sacrificial agencies. In other words, sacrificial fire burns all one’s sins and hence bestows prosperity and renounce here, a meritorious world here after.\(^{27}\)

Thus in the Vedic period, though there is no clear and definite proof on the Doctrine of karma and rebirth, a careful examination of all those passages occurring in this work, bearing on after life reveals the following details. Firstly, the growth of sacrifice has helped to establish the unalterable nature of the law by which the sacrificial action produced their effects themselves. Secondly, the soul of man is described as being separable from his body, and it is subject to suffering and enjoyment in another world according to his good or bad deeds. The idea that the soul of man could go to the plant or that could again be reborn on earth is also hinted in certain passages may be regarded as sowing the first seeds, though in vague notions, of the later Doctrine of Transmigration. In the *Upanisad* we have a more advanced and a clear theory on Karma and Rebirth.

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\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 58.  
1.2 The Upaniṣads

The Upaniṣads are the free and the bold attempts to find out the truth and to know the Reality. But the sages had not the least idea of forming a particular system. This appears to be clear from the fact that in one and same section of an Upaniṣad apparently contradictory statements are made. Though it is very difficult to form a consistent system of philosophy from the varying and apparently conflicting statements of the Upaniṣads, yet in one sentence the whole philosophy of Upaniṣads is rightly summed up, i.e., the universe is the Brahman, but the Brahman is the Ātman. In this sense the Ātman cannot be said to be a creation of Brahman. As sparks come out of a blazing fire so the Ātman comes out of Brahman. The Ātman is described as the minute than the minute, greater than the greatest. In Mūḍāka Upaniṣad, the relation of Ātman and Brahman has been shown as the two birds sitting on a tree: the former of which eats the sweet and bitter fruits, while the latter passively observes it. But when the former knows the latter, the Lord or Brahman, with His greatness, it becomes free from sufferings. Brahman is the governor of the world, the sun, the moon and the earth are kept in their places by His commands.

The Upaniṣads are the later part of the Vedas, mainly dealt with

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29 Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad III:8.9.
metaphysical problems. It does not mean that there is no difference between the philosophical teachings of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. Although there is an agreement on some fundamental principles, yet there is a remarkable deviation from vedic point of view in the philosophical thinking with that of the Upanishads. The difference is mainly on the realization of the highest good. The Śamhitās, Āraṇyakas, and Brāhmaṇas mainly contain various forms of Upasana for getting higher powers, while in the Upaniṣads, the devotee is directed towards the realization of the Highest power within one’s own self, and communion with the God, is looked upon as an ordinary achievement.

In the Upaniṣadic period, we find that the thinkers resorted to forests, where they found time to think about the problems concerning human life and the world. They began to hold that happiness does not lie in the performance of ceremonial sacrifices or rites, as in the vedic period, but in the bliss of inward meditation which could be carried on in the solitude of forests. The previous idea that death leads to permanent bliss in heaven, was opposed and, instead, death came to be known as transition into other births.

The perplexing anomalies and imperfections present in the world are held to be the result of actions. As a problem, how the effects of actions can be annihilated, the Upaniṣads investigate into nature of actions, reveal that ultimately it is the desire, which makes man fail to recognize the true nature of
things and cause rebirth. The man is full of desires. As he desires, so he wills, as he wills he so works, as his work is done so it happens. According to *Mundaka Upanisad*, he who cherishing objects desires them, is born again here and led by these desires, and he who has no desires, who has freed himself from all desires, is satisfied in his desires and in himself. Desire is the root cause, which determines the patterns of life. When the self continuous to desire, and act, it reaps the fruit, and comes again to this world for performing acts. The desires that are in the heart of man if put to an end, the mortal becomes immortal, and attains Brahman here and thereby gives a passive support to the idea that it is the desire that should be at the root of life on earth and not karma. Karma, however, doesn’t become irrelevant altogether on that account. It still remains as the connecting link between desire and rebirth, since the fact is that human actions have their roots in will, and will in desire.

Thus in the *Upanisads*, karma only comes as a connecting link between desire and rebirth. Whatever a man desires he wills, and whatever he wills he acts. It is only in the *Upanisads* that the terms *papa* and *punya* are used to describe the unethical and ethical acts respectively. In Vedic *Sanhitās*, the

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31 *Mundaka Upanisad*.III:2.2.
32 *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*.IV:4.7.
34 Y. Krishnan, *The Doctrine of Karma and its Postulates*, in K.K. Mittal (Ed.), Perspectives on Karma and Rebirth, p.33
word papa means diseases, witchcraft, suffering and distress. But none of the complexities of the karma doctrine which we find later on in more recent developments of Hindu thought can be found in the Upanishads. The whole scheme is worked out on the principle of desire, and the actual effects desired and willed by the person.

In the Upaniṣadic period, it is held that, the Karma Doctrine had to face the competition of conflicting and doubtless other views, which could never be brought into real coincidence. Kausitaki Upaniṣad 35 says that how the man who attains the Brahman after passing by the river of immortality casts away his good and evil deeds, which his friends and enemies duly share. There is no reference of reaping of the fruits of actions here. In the periods of Upaniṣads when the Doctrine of Karma was far from being a fixed dogma, it is not surprising that many traces of conceptions, inconsistent with the karma belief should appear. Of these, the most obvious is the belief in the power of the Ātman by special grace to manifest itself which is found in the Kaṭha and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads, but equally important is the doctrine that, in the son the father is continued is being in such a manner that the son takes over all that his father has, including his karmas.36

This idea clearly declares that in the son the father is born again, an idea

35 Kausitaki Upaniṣad 1.4.
36 Kausitaki Upaniṣad 11.15.
which is in itself not strictly reconcilable with the view that the soul transmigrates on death. It seems that there is nothing more, which could transmigrate at death. Thus, in fact, we have three diverse ideas more or less blended, that is, the birth of the father in the production of a son, the handing over by the father on death to the son of his whole personality and migration of the father’s soul into some new existence. And also the references of passing over of the sins of father to the child, apart from the action of the child in previous births, and saving grace of God avail to break the chain of karma.

There may be some actual reasons for the prevalence of conflicting views which are in consistent with law of karma in the Upanisadic period. It is held that the law of karma would be decidedly disadvantageous to the sacrificial priests. They might have thought that if the moral quality of an action solely and irrevocably determines the future, man becomes the captain of his destiny and then the priest and sacrifice cease to be indispensable. Again with the aid of sacrifice one hoped to win the Divine favour, but if the acts of a man were omnipotent, where indeed, would Divine favour would be? There would be anxious thought which the theory of karma must have raised in the minds of more thoughtful priests like Yâjñavalkhya. They feared that the goals tended to become no more than the souls born in certain station and even subject to the

37 Katha Upaniṣad II.15.
dominion of karma. The opposition of karman and Divine freedom of grace revived at a higher level when the conception of supreme deity became important. The solution they found was to deny the ultimacy of the freedom of the human being and to state that the ultimate source of all karma is God himself.  

The belief in rebirth has persisted, at any rate, from the time of the Upanishads, it is a natural development from the views of the Vedas and Brahmaṇas receive articulate expressions in the Upanishads. However, in the Upanishads there is an advance recognition on the Vedic and the Brahmanical conceptions of future life or rebirth, though, there is not yet any consistent theory about it. A.B. Keith is of the opinion that the references to transmigration which have been in the Rg veda are all of the most improbable character. It remains at the same time, equally true that in certain other places, an approach is being made to the idea of transmigration. The Brahmaṇas assume births and deaths only in the next world. But in the Upanishads, the belief is transformed into the doctrine of rebirth in this world. However there are evidences that the belief in rebirth was only being matured in the time of Upanishads since some passages of the Upanishads are not familiar with it.

Keith observes that the earliest notice of the doctrine of transmigration presented for us is to be traced in the *Brahdaranyaka Upanishad* in the section ascribed to *Yajñavalkhya*.\(^{41}\) Does the soul survive bodily death?, *Yajñavalkhya*, if after death of the man, his spirit goes into fire breath into wind, eyes in to the sun, his mind into the moon, his ear into the directions of space, his body into earth, his self into the ether, the hair of his body into plants, the hair of his head into trees, the blood and semen into water—what then becomes of the man?—is the question put by Artabhaga to *Yajñavalkhya*.\(^{42}\) On this *Yajñavalkhya* confers with him in secret and what they conversed about was work, and what they recommended that was work.\(^{43}\) In fact man becomes good by good works, bad by bad works. The matter is further explained in such a manner that, on death, like a caterpillar or grass leach proceeding from one leaf to another, the soul having shaken off the body and freed itself from ignorance, makes a beginning on another body.\(^{44}\) The same is also explained with an another example, that is, as a goldsmith, after taking a piece of gold, gives it another newer and more beautiful form, similarly does the self, after having thrown off this body and dispelled ignorance take an another, newer and a more beautiful shape whether

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\(^{42}\) *Brahdaranyaka Upanishad* .III.2.13.  
it of one of the Manes or Demi-gods, or Gods, or of Prajāpāti or Brahman or of any other beings.\textsuperscript{45}

The soul, in brief, when reached the end of the present life, itself destroyed the body and built up a newer and fairer frame by its own activity. At the time of death, the self collected within itself all senses, and faculties and after death all its previous knowledge, work and experience accompanied him. In short, the self that undergoes rebirth is a unity not only of moral and psychological tendencies, but also of all the elements which compose the physical world.\textsuperscript{46}

It is believed in the \textit{Upaniṣads} that the departing soul does not pass on to another body as it is often assumed. At that time of the passing out of the body, the soul assumes a minute physical vesture that contains the potentialities of next gross body. The kind of the physical body the departing soul assumes depends on the nature of the thoughts and deeds that prevail within him at the time of death. It is said in the \textit{Katha Upaniṣad} that some souls enter in to the wombs for acquiring bodies, others enter in to stationary life in accordance with their deeds and with their knowledge.\textsuperscript{47} But sooner or later every bound soul must come back to the human plain, where alone there is scope for the fulfillment of its

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad} IV:4.2-6.
\textsuperscript{46} S.N.Das Gupta, \textit{A History of Indian Philosophy}, Vol I, p.56.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Katha Upaniṣad} I: 5.7.
highest destiny. There is no access to eternal life, but through the human birth.

When a bound soul is ready for rebirth on human plane the impressions of his karma lead him to the parents from whom he can secure the materials for his gross body. The fine physical vesture that the soul wears has the potency to acquire the necessary material elements. Being associated with food, he enters to the body of the male parent suitable for his purpose. There he gets in to the requisite sperm, which turns in to a potent seed for his development as an individual. This potent seed being united with the requisite ovum in the female parent turns in to the zygote and becomes ready for germination. As stated in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad that, ‘reaching the earth while coming down from the celestial sphere, the souls of those who perform sacrificial rites and righteous deeds in order to go to the higher region for self fulfillment, become food. Then they are again offered in the fire of men, thence in the fire of women, whence they are born, with a view to going to other worlds. Thus they rotate until they gain knowledge, which frees them from the cycle of repeated births and rebirths.\(^{48}\)

According to the Upanisads it is the male parent that sows the seed of the offspring in the soil of the female parent. It is said in the Chândogya Upanisad that

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\(^{48}\) Brhadaranyaka Upanisad VI.2.16.
women indeed is the fire, O Gautama. In to this fire offer the libation of semen. Out of this offering arises the foetus'.

The Upanisads refer the two prime ways, the way of the fathers or Pitṛyāna and the way of Gods or Devayana by which a departed soul proceeds to enjoy the fruits of its actions done in its lifetime on earth. Pitṛyāna or the way of fathers is a lot of those who performed charitable deeds or public work or those who has bent on sacrifice, works of piety and it is one in which, the soul after death, enter first into smoke then into night, dark half of the month, the dark half of the year, etc. and at last reaches the moon. The duration of the soul's residence there ends only when the merits of the soul is finished and it descends again through ether, wind, smoke, mist, cloud, rain, plants, food, seed and through the assimilation of food by man, he enters the womb of the mother, which results in rebirth.

Devayana or the way of Gods is meant for those who cultivate worship, faith and asceticism. On the burning of the body, the soul enters the flame, then the day, the bright half of the month, bright half of the year, the son, the moon, the lightning and finally, in to the world of Brahman. He who goes to Devayana does not come back to this world. The Devayana and Pitṛyāna corresponds to the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness or anjana, which involves us in

49 Chandogya Upanishad V:8.2.
50 Brhadaranyak Upanishad VI:2.15-16.
In addition to this, the lot of the wicked appears to have been the third place, which led to the birth again as animals, of the lower insects orders, warms, or flies. In the Chandāgya Upaniṣad, the position is more clear by the division of the classes of souls, which go to the moon, into those of God and those of abominable conduct. Thus the reference of the degradations of man into lower levels can be seen in the Upaniṣads.

The distinction between the Devayana and Pitryana doctrines of Upaniṣads made to think that those who are faithful and perform sraddha had a distinctly different type of goal from those who performed ordinary virtues and this distinction attains its fullest development in the doctrine of emancipation. In the Upaniṣads emancipation or mukti means the state of infiniteness that a man attains when he knows his own self and thus becomes Brahman. The endless cycle of rebirth is only for those who are ignorant.

The root cause of bondage according to the Upaniṣad is the ignorance of the self about its own nature, that it is not different from Brahman. He who sees difference here goes to death after death. The only way to remove the ignorance is through the knowledge of Brahman. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad says that the

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51 S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol 1, p.253.
52 Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad IV.11.
53 Chandogya Upaniṣad V.10.
54 Katha Upaniṣad II.1.10.
knower of the Brahman becomes Brahman Himself.\textsuperscript{55} The real knowledge is only that which liberates us\textsuperscript{56}. It is to be remembered that the liberation is not the result of the higher knowledge, the higher knowledge itself is liberation. Thus the knowledge is the only means of liberation according to Upani\textit{s}ads.

He who is liberated has no rebirth. The root cause of rebirth is the unfulfilled desires for worldly enjoyments. But when all his desires are fulfilled, what ever things he desires, by his mere inception he gets it. As \textit{Mundaka Upani\textit{s}ad} says as the flowing rivers loose their names in the sea and becomes one with the sea, so also the liberated loose their names and forms in the Brahman and become one with the Brahman.\textsuperscript{57} It is also said in the \textit{Śvetāsvatara Upani\textit{s}ads} that in this vast wheel of Brahman, the migratory soul turns round and round, thinking that the self in him and the Mover of the wheel are different. When the blessed, with a knowledge of his unity with the mover, then he attains immortality.\textsuperscript{58}

In the Upani\textit{s}ads we find all the conceptions of liberation found in the later vedanta. We have here the conceptions of \textit{Videhamukti} and \textit{Jivanmukti}. According to the \textit{Videhamukti} liberation is attainable only after death and according to the latter, it can be attainable here in this life. It is held that the

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Mundaka Upani\textit{s}ad} III:2.9.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Bharadvāja Upani\textit{s}ad} II:4.3.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Mundaka Upani\textit{s}ad} III:2.8.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Śvetāsvatara Upani\textit{s}ad} I:6.
Doctrine of Jivanmukti is the logical outcome of the eschatological doctrines of Vedas, whereas the conception of Jivanmukti is the logical outcome of the Upanishadic teaching that the liberation consists in the knowledge of Brahman which can be attained even while embodied.

1.3 The Bhagavat Gita

The Gita is the most popular literary composition of Sanskrit literature conveying lessons of philosophy, religion and ethics. The date of this great document is arranged by scholars to a time somewhere between the 5th and the 2nd centuries before Christ. Its influence upon the minds of prophets, reformers, and ascetics and upon the laity—indeed upon the whole of Hindu life and thought through counter generations and is recognised by all students of Indian culture. Gita may be said to be the first flowering wisdom, pure and applied which is sublime and precise at once. Its growing popularity through the centuries and even in modern times is sufficiently explained, not so much by its cherished position among the religious textbook because it highly deserves, by its universal appeal and by the high hope it holds out of all mankind, a permanent place among works reforming to preventional and contemplative wisdom which can know no barriers of race, religious or tradition. When we read through the Gita, we clearly find that its backings are addressed to all humanity - to all man, women who are struggling to realise the higher expressions of their soul. This
ideal is emphasized in the nature of dialogue between Krishna who is Narayana or God and Arjuna, who represents Nara or man, which is the characteristic of the Gita.

The Gita is divided into eighteen chapters, which can again be classified into three sections, each comprising six chapters. The first of these three divisions deals with karma yoga, the path of work. Here the insistence is upon action. The second section devoted to an exposition of jnana yoga, the path of knowledge and the insistence is upon knowledge of the self. In this section, the subject of karma is not entirely dismissed but is harmonised with the path of knowledge. The last section deals with bhakti yoga, the path of love and devotion, and the insistence here is on worship and love of one Supreme Lord. Here again, jnana and karma do not disappear, but are both harmonised with devotion.

In the Gita, Krishna openly declares himself to be the Brahman, the Infinite Self, and urges Arjuna to attain ‘my being’. Freed from attachment and anger, taking refuge in Him, purified by the fire of knowledge, many have attained His being.\(^ {59} \) In Bhagavat Gita the stress is laid not on Krishna as an

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individual personality, but on Krishna in his transcendental aspect, as the Soul of all souls.

Gita sees human beings as subject to maya or delusion, lost themselves in appearances. As long as man is blind to the truth, he remains subject to the world of sufferings, and his liberation and consequent overcoming of his limitations and imperfections would be possible only when he transcends maya or delusion and reaches his true nature and status. Man realises his true nature not by any kind of creation, but by actions performed in complete detachment, with regard to their consequences. In such a life of action, man comes to resemble with God who is ever-engaged in selfless activity. The true self is impressive and immutable. As Gita declares, “This is neither born or does die, nor having once come in to being cease to become anymore. Unborn, perpetual, eternal is this ancient one. It is not killed on the killing of the body.”

The Gita points out that as long as man is in the world, he is bound to act for the purpose of maintaining the order to existence. His future depends upon his present actions, though they are also to some extent determined by his own nature. The bondage of man is due to the three gunas or qualities of prakrti, which is the material out of which his finite personality is formed. The gunas are the conditions, which imposes limitations upon the soul. It is this bondage which

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60 Ibid., II:20
causes the soul to take a distorted view of things. In this state, it can perceive only the plurality and separating or things, rather than their essential unity in God. As Lord Krishna says “The pure clear (Sattva) the affective – active (rajas), and the inert-dark (tamas), these nature – necessity – born modalities (guna) bind, O, Mighty-armed (Arjuna) the imperishable embodied one.”

_Sattva guna_ is the principle intelligence and light, Rajas is the principle of activity, and Tamas is the principle of dullness and darkness. This three fold bondage of man is due to these qualities of nature is called _janmabandha_. Gita speaks also of another kind of bond of which one is subjected. They are the results of the individuals own deeds and are therefore known as _karmabandha_. _Karmabandha_ is responsible for one’s congenital tendencies, disposition impulses, and the physical and social environment in which he finds himself. An individual’s character is the result of _karmabandha_, for one’s character is nothing but the sum total of all the past impressions resulted from his past actions by word, deed and thought.

As a necessary corollary of the Doctrine of Karma, Bhágavat Gita accepts the Doctrine of Rebirth too. As are childhood, youth, and old age in this body to the embodied soul, so also is the attaining of another body, says Gita. In the

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61 Ibid., XIV-5, p. 577.

62 Ibid., II:13.
cycle of births and deaths, the soul occupies one after another. Just like a man lays down his worn out clothes and puts a new one. The kind of birth depends on the character we have developed. As we develop character in which *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas* predominate, we are born in celestial regions, or as men on earth, or in the animal world. Gita advocates a gradual progress of all towards perfection. Thus rebirth is looked upon as a means by which we can progressively realise his ultimate goal. Rebirth continues till the goal is reached. It is a discipline by which we can perfect ourselves. The subtle body, consisting of senses, and mind, survives after death, and is the bearer of character. Hence, character of the individual is carried on from one life to another.

A verse in Chapter IV, 5, clearly affirms Gita’s firm belief in Rebirth. As Sri Krishna declares “Many are the lives that I have gone part for one as also for you, Arjuna. I am conscious of them all, you are not conscious of them”. The soul incarnates only so long as it remains ignorant of its real nature and therefore of God. As Krishna says, reaching the highest perfection, and having attained him, the great souled ones are no more subject to rebirth. All the worlds including the realm of Brahman are subject to return, but after attaining him,

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63 Ibid., II:22.
64 Ibid., VI, 44-45
65 Ibid., VII, 19
66 Ibid., XV.
67 Ibid., IV,5, p.218.
there is no rebirth.\textsuperscript{68} The moment one attains to knowledge, of the true self, the law of karma no longer operates for him, for he overcomes all karma and rebirth. Thus as blazing fire reduces fuel to ashes, so does the fire of knowledge reduce all karma to ashes.\textsuperscript{69}

The predominant concern expressed in Gita being practical, it devotes itself an elaborate discussion on the ways and means of overcoming all the bonds of the soul, both universal and individual [Janmabandha and karmabandha respectively]. While the Upanisads lay almost exclusive emphasises on \textit{jnana}, Gita lays almost emphasis upon karma (action), \textit{jnana} (knowledge) and \textit{Bhakti} (devotion).

\textit{Karma Yoga or the Path of Action}

Karma Yoga is the path of attaining liberation through the performance of one’s own duty as service to God. Karma, in the context of the principle of the law of karma is an act by word, deed or thought, which determines an individual’s future. In this sense, it is said to be beginningless. At the end a creation whole world is said to lice in the form of a subtle karma seed ready to sprout again at the beginning of next creation.\textsuperscript{70} In this sense, God is the Lord of Karma. According to Gita, it is activity, which keeps up the world process. Every

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., VIII: 15-16.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., IV:37.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., VIII:18,19.
individual should therefore do his best to keep it going, through the performance of his own duty.

Gita insists that work is inevitable for all individuals at all conditions. Performance of action in the right spirit leads man to liberation of soul. But even liberation does not mean an end to activities. It makes man free so that he may continue to work in a perfect way, as instrument of God for the welfare of the world. The spiritual freedom enables him to realise his obligations to help others, and to discover the divine in them. For this one must do his duty as if he were doing nothing. Hence Gita recommends, “one who is able to see action in inaction, an inaction, he among men is intelligent, he is one of unitize attitude (yogr) which still engaged in every possible kind of work.\textsuperscript{71}

Throughout, the Gita insists on the performance of the duties of life with a heart free from attachment and thoughts of worldly gain, and devoted entirely to the adoration of God. Gita condemns the acceptance of monastic life of the spirit of renunciation is lacking in the heart, removing thereby the misconception that the ideal of renunciation can be practiced only away from society in lonely cave or with in the walls of monastery.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., IV: 18.
The failure to grasp the true spiritual outlook of Gita has led many in modern times to read the ideals of modern secularism into the pages of this ancient Indian Scripture. Instead of the ideas of renunciation they find in it only a condemnation of 'other worldliness and an insistence on living in the world for the performance of the world’s works. The ideas of knowledge, devotion, and non-attachment, are subservient to Karma, the central doctrine of the Gita, according to them. So the western ideals of humanitarian service, social uplift, have been identified with Karma Yoga of the Gita. All these ideals are, of course and the Gita does not condemn them, but it is also certain that it does not teach them as Karma yoga. Granting that, these ideals are recognised in the Gita, unless they themselves are spiritualised, they have no relation to karma yoga. According to Gita not karma or mere action, but karma yoga, union with God through action is the essence of the teaching of Gita and not sacrifice for humanity, but service to humanity in a disinterested way as a sacrifice into God, whose image we learn to see in man, in the true ideal. The main motto of Gita, thus, is do our duty according to our station in our life, without desiring the results of the actions.

The Gita, therefore, does not ask men to abandon his normal activities of life, but demands the suppression of all selfish desires. It is the philosophy of action, a synthesis of the positive elements of activism, and asceticism. It is a strong reflection of inactivity as well as self-indulgence. Gita combines action
with renunciation of selfish motives in order to prepare man to do all his duties in
a spirit of sacrificing the result actions. If a man learns to work in a spirit of
sacrifices, he would neither rejoice at victory nor regret for failure. A life of
equanimity and peace shall be the result. Thus the best way to self realization is a
life committed to the performance of all one's duties without the desire for
reward.

**Jnana Marga or Way of Knowledge**

Realization of the true knowledge of reality is the *jnana marga* prescribed
by Gita for the attainment of supreme good by man. Gita recognises two kinds of
knowledge, one which seeks to understand the phenomena of existence
extremely through intellect and the other attainable only by intuition. The second
kind of knowledge which grasps the ultimate reality behind all the changing,
passing phenomena. How ever these two kinds of knowledge are only different
sides of one pursuit, for all knowledge is knowledge of God.

Gita believes that for attaining the spiritual vision, the individual should
learn to discipline himself and fix his mind on the heights reality alone. For this
Gita accepts the yoga system, as a means of mental training to the knowledge of
the absolute reality. The realisation of the ultimate according to Gita is a spiritual
illumination attained in our atmosphere of joy. It binds one to discover his whole
life-aspiration one continuous adoration of the infinite.
Bhakti Marga or Way of Devotion

Just as a man of action can realise liberation through right performance of action, so also one can surrender himself fully to God, and attain his highest goal through absolute devotion to Him. The Bhakti marga is open to all: the weak and the strong, the illiterate and the educated all can follow this path. The great significance of which Gita attaches to this method of liberation is clearly evident. Gita says ‘Those who cast off all their works on Me, solely invent on Me, and mediate on Me in spiritual exercise, leaving no room for others do Me honour, these will I lift up an high out of the ocean of recurring death, and that right so on, for their thoughts are fixed on Me. On Me alone let your mind dwell, stir up your soul to enter Me; henceforth in very truth in Me, you will find your home’.  

If a man offers all he does as a sacrifice to God, he will be forced from all his bondages. God grants his devotees spiritual freedom so that they can come mean to Him and abide in Him even as God abides in them. It is obvious that those who absolutely depend an devotees as the final nature of spiritual life, would realize their supreme good not as an immersion in the eternal impersonal, but as a union with the Supreme Person. Gita recognises absolute surrender and attain devotion as the most superior attitudes to God when devotion is perfected.

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72 Ibid., XII : 6-8.
the devotee is led by the grace of God to the final realization that he is one with God himself.

The three ways of self-realization, according to Gita, are different only in the lower sense of the term. From a higher view they are all expressions of a single spiritual perfection. We are bound to do action, but it is necessary for us while doing action that our attitude must be one of a devotee i.e., we must surrender all over action to God and thus see in all activities that it is not I, but the God through me who is acting. Thus in the higher sense work, worship and wisdom all are one.