CHAPTER III

Prasthāna-traya

The Upanīṣads, the BrahmaSūtras and the Bhagawad Gītā are called the Prasthānatraya or the triple texts of Vedānta, on which almost every great Achārya has commented. The different schools of Vedānta also derive their doctrines from these triple texts. These texts are not merely bound up with the glorious historical past of religious tradition but have on them a highly significant message for all ages. Before going into a detailed study of the Advaita Vedānta, it is but essential that we have a concise and clear account of this Prasthānatraya.

The Upanīṣads

The Upanīṣads constitute the concluding portion of the revealed Vēdās and are rightly called as the Vedānta. They not only contain in themselves the very essence of the Vēdic teachings but also embody the metaphysical doctrines and spiritual visions of the ancient seers and sages of India.

Etymologically, the term Upanīṣad means the knowledge received by a student 'sitting close to' to the teacher. Śankara in his commentary on Kaṭhā Upanīṣad says that those who seek liberation, being endowed with the spirit of dispassion towards all sense objects and approaching this knowledge indicated by the term 'Upanīṣad' devote themselves to it with one pointed determination, of such people this knowledge removes or destroys
ignorance or avidyā, which is the seed of all relative existence or worldliness. Thus by these etymological connexions, Upaniṣads is also said to mean knowledge.

According to Maxmuller, 'Upaniṣads are a system in which human speculation seems to have reached its acme.' Swāmi Vivākānānda speaking about the Upaniṣads declared: "Let me tell you, we want strength and the Upaniṣads are a great source of strength. Therein lies the power to invigorate the whole world. They call with trumpet voice, upon the weak, the miserable, the down trodden of all races, all creeds and sects, to stand on their feet and be free; freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upaniṣads. The truth of the Upaniṣads are before you, take them up, live upto them and the salvation of India will be at hand." 1

The Upaniṣads reveal an age, characterised by a remarkable ferment, intellectual and spiritual. It is one of those rare ages in human history which have registered a distinct breakthrough in man's quest for truth and meaning and which have held far reaching consequences for all subsequent ages. The mental climate of Upaniṣads is saturated with passion for truth and a similar passion for human happiness and welfare.

Hypothesis are advanced and rejected on the touch stone of experience and reason and not on the dictate of any creed. Thus

1. Swāmi Rangānāthānanda: The Message of the Upaniṣads (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1970), P.41
the flow of thought forges ahead to unravel the mystery of man and the Universe in which he finds himself. This onward march of being, carried along in its current, to the one ocean of Truth, Beauty and Bliss and realise our oneness with the One behind the many.

"Just as rivers, as they flow merge in the ocean giving up their separate and forms, so also the knowing one, freed from the seperateness of name and form attains the luminous Supreme Self which is beyond even the other supreme - namely the nature in its unmanifested state."

By sheer speculation on the meaning of the facts of the external world, the Vedic thinkers had earlier arrived at a unitary conception of the Universe, at a materialistic monism, through their concepts of 'avyakta' or indeterminate nature or 'prāna' - cosmic energy. But the culminating point of their discoveries was the spiritual unification of all experience in the Ātman or Brahman.

"Brahma maivedam visvamidam Varṣṭāṁ"

'All this manifested universe is verily the Brahman the Supreme'.

1. Ṣaṁkṣepāya Upaniṣad, III, 2, 8.
Vedānta, unlike other philosophies is a living philosophy and from the time it was first expounded, in that dim antiquity, down to our own times, it has been the spiritual inspiration behind the vast and varied Indian cultural experience.

The number of Upanīṣads are many. The Muktikopaniṣad gives the number of Upanīṣads as 108 but then, all of them are not authentic. Only ten to eleven Upanīṣads are accepted as authentative and have been commented upon by Śri Sāṅkara- Chārya. They are Īśā, Kēna, Kaṭhā, Praśna, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkyya, Taittrīya, Altareya, Chāndogya and Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Śvetāsvara. All these Upanīṣads are not alike, for they differ in their methods of exposition. But there lies an essential unity of purpose in them - they emphasize the same fundamental doctrine of monistic idealism.

Brahman

The Upanīṣadic thinkers recognised the Eternal Unity of Existence, a unity which was the unchanging Reality the Universe or in other words the Brahman. The word Brahman - derived from the root 'bṛh' means 'to expand' - which denotes the Entity whose greatness or magnitude cannot be limited or measured.

According to the Upanīṣads Brahman is the Ultimate Reality and Existence itself. It is the subtle essence and substratum of all things in the Universe. It is by him that the world has a
beginning, an end and its sustenance "That from which these beings are born, that in which when born they live and that into which they enter at their death is Brahman".

Brahman is ever acting and ever resting. These are intellectual facets which mere perceptual consciousness does not take into account. Brahman is knowledge. It is self consciousness which is the directing power behind everything. It is beyond mind and intellect. It is the essence of the whole world of change. It is the ultimate cause of this Universe although it itself is uncaused. Brahman is infinite, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient and pure consciousness. But to call Brahman infinite does not imply that He is unknowable, for the very aim of the Upaniṣads is the realisation of Brahman. Brahman cannot be known through the senses, mind or intellect but yet Brahman is the object of direct experience. This brahman, as the Supreme Reality, transcends all. Yet at the same time it underlies all as their essence. Brahman pervades them all. It is the immanent inner controller (Añtaryāmin) and the self of all (sarva-bhūtāntarātmā) "Just as all spokes are contained in the axle and wheel, so all beings, all gods, all worlds are contained in the Universal self, "The Brahman".

1. Taittiriya Upaniṣad. III - 1
2. Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. II 5.15
Brahman holds in it both that is self and not self, all of which are his own manifestations and yet in its nature Brahman transcends both. The Upaniṣads say, "That is the self luminous Brahman, the immortal, the support of all the worlds and no one goes beyond it".

All definitions of Brahman fall short of exactly defining Brahman, because Brahman is anIrvacchhanīya or indescribable. Brahman is far too great to be described in the limited vocabulary of man. Again, to describe Brahman in definite terms would be to put limitations upon the Absolute which is beyond all limitations. Brahman has been described in two ways in the Upaniṣads - The Cosmic or Apara Brahman and the Acosmic or Para Brahman. The Cosmic or Saguṇa Brahman is all comprehensive, conditioned and full of good qualities - Saprapaṇcha, Saguṇa and Savishēga. This Brahman is described through 'Iti-Iti'. Cosmic Brahman is considered to be the cause of production, maintenance and destruction of this Universe. "All beings arise from Him, live in Him and are absorbed in Him." God is not only the soul of nature, but he is also the soul of souls, He is the Universal Soul.

The Acosmic Brahman is also called Nirguṇa Brahman and is the transcendental Absolute Principle. This Brahman is all

1. Kaṭhā Upaniṣad II 6.1
2. Chāndogya Upaniṣad III 14.1
exclusive, qualitiless and indeterminate. He is Nirprapancha, Nirguna and Nirvisesha and above all Anirvachaniya or indescribable. It is that principle which holds in transcental unit both the subjective, as well as the objective world. It is Sat-Cit-Ananda - Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. It is the Witness, Knower and Seer. It is self proved and this Absolute is best described as Niti-Neti (Not this-not this). "The Eternal knower, the self-luminous Real shines forth by itself". Thus nothing can be predicated of this Brahman because all attributes would go counter to the very absoluteness and unity of the Supreme Reality. The fact to be realised is that, "The Absolute is the Existence of all existences, the Truth of all truths, the Reality of all realities. Hence, Nirguna Brahman focuses the essence, the origin, the life and the ultimate goal of all beings.

Atman

The term Atman is derived from the root "An" which means "To breath", thus in the Rig-Veda, Atman is aptly defined as the breath of life. It is the expression of the soul of a living being. Commenting upon the concept of Atman in the Upanisads, Dr. Radhakrishnan, says, "As Brahman is the eternal, quiet underneath, the divine and activity of the Universe, so also Atman is the foundational reality underlying the conscious powers of the individual, the inward ground of human soul". Atman

1. Brhadaranyaka Upanishad. IV, 3.23
3. Ibid P.41
in its real nature is self shining, pure consciousness and self proved. It is called the Ultimate Witness or Sākṣi, which is one with the Absolute. This Ātman survives the destruction of the body as it is unborn and eternal. It knows no change, birth or death. "Ātman means that which pervades all, which is subject and which knows, experiences and illuminates the objects and which remains immortal and always the same". Ātman has no antecedent cause, beyond itself. It is all in all. It is the 'Ekam Sat' or one reality which realises itself in all variety of existence. It is that simple truth which nothing can destroy.

The essential nature of Ātman has been brought out very explicitly by Prajāpathi who says, "The body is not the self, though it exists for the self, the dream experiences are not the self, the self is not an abstract formal principle of deep sleep too. The eye, the body, mental status, the stream of consciousness are all mere objects and instruments of the self. The self is the ground of waking, dream and sleep states and yet it transcends them all". Thus Ātman is the ultimate subject that pervades all creation and which persists throughout all changes.

1. Kaṭha Upaniṣhad. II 1.1
2. Chāndogya Upaniṣad. VIII 3.12
The Upanīṣadic Seers believed that Ātman is most subtle as well as all pervading. It cannot be conceived through our mind which has its own limitations and this makes it an entity beyond comprehension. The Upanīṣads say, "It is unseen, transcendent, inapprehensible, uninferrable, unthinkable, indescribable, the sole essence of the consciousness of self, the ever peaceful and blissful, the one unit - this indeed is the Ātman."

According to the Upanīṣads, the self has an empirical status as Jīva, but Jīvas has not been granted any antological reality. This self is the coupling of the real and unreal but its essence is none but the light of the Absolute Ātman. Ātman is pure consciousness and Bliss, but when the body-mind complex or avidhya obscures it, it becomes Jīva, which is the knower, enjoyer and doer. But Ātman is the soul of all souls. It is not a datum of experience, not an object, though all objects are for it. It is not a thing seen but is the principle of all seeing, the Upaniṣads say, "When then He sees not, yet is He seeing, although he sees not, since for the seer there is no interruption of seeing because He is imperishable, but there is no second beside Him, for Him to see". Thus it can be said that the self is a complete whole. It is the Universal object. Thus Ātman is not space-time continuum, in fact the Ākāśa concept was used by he Vedic thinkers as the best symbol for it due to its infinite, indestructible and all pervading character.

1. Praṣna Upaniṣad 1.7
2. Brāhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad IV 3.23
It is that what remains when everything that is not self is eliminated. It is that fundamental reality underlying the conscious powers of the individual. Thus this fundamental identity which is the presupposition of both self and not self: is the Ātman.

**Brahman and Ātman**

The Ultimate reality called Brahman is nothing different from the Supreme self or Ātman. A salient feature of Indian Idealism as brought out in the Upanīṣads is a type of Abolutism, which maintains the identity of the Self within and Brahman without. Brahman is the Ultimate source on the outer world while that of Ātman is the inner self of man. But it is the same one Reality which from the subjective side is called Ātman and from the objective side as Brahman. The Absolute of the Upanīṣads manifests itself as the subject as well as the object and transcends them both. The identity of the Ātman - Brahman is the subject-objectless Consciousness, Reality and Bliss.

The Brahman is the uncaused cause of the Universe, an Absolute Reality that transcends all particular things. But ultimately, it is pointed out that the core of man and the supra-personal ground of the cosmos are one and the same. This reality is not bound in any way. To quote Duessen, "It was here that for the first time the original thinkers of the Upanīṣads recognised
our Ātman, our innermost individual being, as the Brahman, the inmost being of universal nature and of all her phenomena.  

This conception of reality establishing an identity between Brahman and Ātman is delineated in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, which says, "What is without is also within, what is within is also without. He who sees difference between what is within and without goes ever move from death to death."

The great sayings found in the Upaniṣads 'Tattvam Asī' or That Thou, 'Aham Brahma'śmi' (I am Brahman) and again 'Ayam Ātma Brahma' - These self is Brahman, all point out to the unity of identity of Ātman-Brahman.

Hence the true destiny of the self lies in the realisation of its relationship of identity with Brahman. The realisation of the Brahman or Ātman in its true light is the sole pursuit of Upaniṣadic thought.

Māyā and World

The world according to the Upaniṣads, is the manifestation of Brahman. It originates in Him, is sustained through Him and culminates into Him. Brahman is the cause of the external world, but he himself is uncaused. This Brahman or ultimate cause though immutable appears to suffer change as the manifold, external world.

1. Deussen, Paul : The System of Vedānta (Karan Publications, Delhi, 1987) P.
2. Kaṭha Upaniṣad. - II 2.7
The Brahman manifests through three forms, the experiences, the phenomenal world and the God which guides both and creates the worldly experiences in the Jīva. The God creates the world through his power of Māyā. But the reality lies in that, that everything in the world is in essence the Ultimate Reality itself.

"All shine after Him who shines. By His radiance is all this illuminated".

Brahman is the beginning as well as the end of this world. He is considered as the cause and as the effect as well. "That created itself by itself". The world is a mere Ābhāsa or appearance of Brahman. The external world is not separate existing by Brahman. On the other hand, the ultimate ground of being, the empirical state of being and the world are not different, for the whole world of plurality is nothing apart from the everlasting one Brahman the single unity into which merges all plurality.

Bondage and liberation.

Bondage is due to the wrong identification of the self with the extraneous elements of the external world. It refers to the inner contradictions involved in our experience of the world and our knowledge of it. This is due to ignorance and will remain, so long as we don't take into account the real nature of Ātman, which is one behind the many.

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1. Mundaka Upanīṣad. II 2.10
2. Ibid, I. 1.7
It is the annihilation of the ego through knowledge and the realisation of the real nature of Brahman that will free man from the web of bondage.

Liberation is not to be conceived as consisting in the attainment of a state of perfection lying outside the individual self, because what is actually implied is the removal of the obscuring veil of ignorance which conceals the true nature of the self. Mokṣa or liberation in the Upaniṣads is that state of infiniteness that man attains when he realizes his own self and thus becomes one with the Absolute Brahman. The Upaniṣads say of this state, "Having attained Him, the seers content with their knowledge, their purpose accomplished free from all desire, and with full composure, having attained the all pervading Ātman on all sides, ever concentrating their minds, enter into everything".

Hence, when man comes to know the highest truth about himself, that he is the highest essence and principle of the Universe the immortal and infinite, he ceases to have desires and begins to realize the ultimate truth about himself. Self realisation is the ultimate end according to the Upaniṣads because self is real essence of man. Self is in all and self is Brahman.

The doctrine of Vīdēhamuktī (liberation on dissolution of body) is the logical outcome of the eschatological doctrines of the Vēdas, whereas the conception of Jīvamuktī (liberation in

1. Ṣvādāka Upaniṣad, III 2.5

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life itself) is the logical out come of the Upanīṣadic teaching. That is, liberation consists in the knowledge and realization of Brahman which can be attained even while embodied. There are many passages in the Upanīṣads clearly supporting the view that liberation is possible here in this life and is not incompatible with the presence of the body. It is said, "When all desires occupying the heart fall off entirely, then indeed does the mortal become immortal and realize Brahman even here". Again "All his doubts are cut off and the knots of his heart are loosened. And he who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. He crosses over all sorrows, all sins". Thus he who attains liberation has no rebirth.

Liberation is not an end to be attained but a fact to be realized by each one. It is a fact which is existing since eternity. It is not attainment, but awareness and realization through knowledge. To quote the words of Deussen "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 to".

Hence the aim of the spiritual aspirant or Jivatman is to get himself educated in the school nature and then to renounce it

1. Brāhadāraṇyaka Upanīṣad IV 4.14
2. Muṇḍaka Upanīṣad II 2.8
3. Deussen, Paul: The Philosophy of Upanīṣads, (Karan Publications, Delhi, 1978), P.345
so that he may fulfil himself by union with the Supreme Brahman. This is the acme of renunciation. That self-surrender and true self-discovery is the eternal message of pure religion, the final consummation of man's long spiritual quest and evolutionary struggle.
The Bhagavad Gīta

Bhagavad Gīta means literally "The Lord's Song". It forms the divine discourses of Lord Krishna to Arjuna. It is regarded as a Śṛ̥ṣṭi or a tradition and is the most popular and sacred book of the Hindus.

It will not be incorrect to state that the Gīta occupies a place on a par with the Upaniṣads the reasons for this being that the essence of all the Upaniṣads is found contained in the Bhagavad Gīta. Further, it is stated that "in respect of the four-fold values of life, artha, kāma, dharma and mokṣa, what is here is also dealt with elsewhere, and what is not here cannot be found elsewhere".

Life both in its secular, and sacred aspects gets abundantly enriched by the application of the tenets of Gīta. Radha-

Krishnan says about Gīta, "It sets forth as a tradition that which has emerged from the life of mankind. It is articulated by a profound seer who sees truth in its many sidedness and believes in its saving power. It represents not any sect of Hinduism, but Hinduism as a whole, not merely Hinduism but religion as such". Thus its message stands universal in scope. It calls upon mankind to dedicate itself, body, mind and soul, to pure duty and not become mere mental voluptuaries at the mercy of chance, desires and indisciplined impulses.

The ideal of the Gīta is compressed in Karma-Yoga and the ideal man of the Gīta is the Yōgin and the method described is Yoga. All the eighteen chapters in the Gīta are each designated as a type of Yoga, and the purpose of Yoga is to discipline and train the body and mind. All the eighteen Yogas are in the Gīta reduced to four, the Karma-Yoga, the Rāja-Yoga, the Bhakti-Yoga and the Jhāna-Yoga and all the four Yogas are necessary for they together stimulate life with spirituality.

Hence the Bhagavad-Gīta is a system of speculation as well as a code of life, an intellectual search for truth as well as an endeavour to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. Thus, it is rightly termed as the "Gospel of Humanity".

Ultimate Reality

The fundamental metaphysical teaching of the Gīta is that: "Of the unreal there is no being, and of the real there is no 1 non-being". The Gīta describes Brahman as the ultimate object of knowledge which is beginning less, and cannot be said to be either existent or non-existent.

Brahman, in His absolute state is beyond the reach of mind and speech. He is indefinable and beyond all categories of qualities (Nirguna). But when He is immanent in the Universe, He is denoted as Sat-Cit-Ānanda; Existence - Knowledge - Bliss.

At all times and places without being identified Brahman actuates everything movable and immovable. The universe has thus been called His feet, because everything is contained at the same time in Him. His light reaches everywhere as He sees everything like the Sun which has neither eyes nor limbs. He has been called the head of the Universe (Viṣvamurdha) and like the fire which has its mount in its body and which consumes everything as He envelopes everything. Thus he is all pervading in character. Brahman is one and all descriptions are merely to indicate that whatever is differentiated into two is in reality one.

According to the Gīta there are two beings in the world, the

1. Gīta II, 16
2. Dyanchwar Maharaj: Gīta explained, (Daily Mail Press, Bombay 1932.)
destructible kṣara (Prakrīti) and the indestructible, aksara (Atman). The unchanging one is the aksara and beyond these both is Puruṣottama or Supreme Reality. The Gīta proclaims that, "The Supreme Being is another called the highest self, Paramātman who as the inexhaustible Lord pervading the three worlds a supports them". He acquires the name Brahmadēva, as supporter he gets the name Vishnu and a destroyer He gets the name of Shiva but again the fact is that behind these three fold qualities he remains nirguna or qualitiless. The Gīta says "This Supreme Spirit is the true immortal, the abode of the eternal". Brahman is Kūtasthasattā while the world is only timeless, endless, existence, that is anādipravāhasattā. The eternal spirit dwells in all beings and thus the Gīta holds the view that the reality of an infinite being underlies all finite existence.

The presence of this reality of Brahman in each individual body is called Adhyātma for it is that principle that graces all bodies as their essential self.

Although Gīta believes in pantheism yet more than the philosophical aspect, the practical aspect of the Divine has been emphasized. Gīta brings forth the theistic view that God is the absolute but he is also the Supreme Person. Being not only the object of knowledge, He is also, the object of devotion. This devotion concept quite naturally involves self surrender, the more complete the self surrender the closer man is to God.

2. Bhagavad-Gīta XV 17.
The Bhagavad-Gīta features another very important concept and that is the concept of incarnation. Although God is eternal, infinite and transcendent, He limits his infinity through the power of Māyā and becomes embodied. Lord Krishna says, "Though I am unborn, imperishable and the Lord of beings, yet subjugating my Prakriti, I came into being by my own Māyā" Again "Whenever there is a decline of righteousness I bring myself forth. For the protection of the worthiest, for the destruction of the evil powers and for the establishment of Dharma, I am born 1 age after age". But then the Lord who is not bound by Karmas is not bound by human form also, for it is that which is externally pure, free and infinite.

Thus Brahman explained in the Gīta has neither name nor form, nor correlation, nor species, nor action nor differentiation. He is One and there is nothing beyond him. He is the source of the Universe.

Ātman

The Real according to the Gīta is, that which exists at all times defying all changes and modifications that something which is in us and, remains as it were, unchanged all through the changes and yet giving us the experience of a synchronised whole or life is nothing other than the self in us, the Pure awareness which gives us the experience of consciousness. It is this one changeless factor, the enternal spiritual entity that is termed

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1. Bhagavad-Gīta, IV 6.7.8
as Ātman. The soul is indestructible (Avināshi), eternal (nityā) unborn (ajā), undiminishing (avyāyā), all pervasive (sarva-gāta), immovable (achalā), ancient (sānāthana), un-manifest (avyaktā), 1 unthinkable, (achintya) and immutable (avikārya). It is the physical forms that are perishable but the indwelling self is eternal, changeless, indestructible and incomprehensive. This self or Ātman being immutable, it is neither slain nor it is slayer the Gītā says "He is not born, nor does He ever die, after having been, He again ceases not to be, unborn, eternal, changeless and ancient, He is not slain when the body is slain" 2.

Hence Ātman is what was before this mortal body and is what will remain after it. It is beyond the mind, intellect and senses. It is also beyond the three Guṇas and their modifications. Time gains no access to Ātman and it is, for this reason held to be everlasting. The Gītā says "This inexhaustible Supreme Self being without beginning and without qualities does not act and is not tainted though stationed in the body" 3. Ātman is actionless and the knower of Ātman is free from egoism, Karmas do not taint him who knows his own self.

Thus on realising that Ātman is Brahman itself the essential divinity of the self is realised, and the one who experiences this self realisation is touched neither by pleasure nor pain and becomes a mere detached witness and ever enjoys the eternal bliss of being a liberated one.

1. Sharma, Chandrahari: Indian Philosophy, (Nand Kishore and Bros, Banaras, 1952) P.30
2. Bhagavad Gītā II, 20
3. Ibid XIII, 31
Māyā and world

The Prakṛti or nature made up of the three Guṇas is nothing but the Yōga-Māyā of Īśvara. As Māyā has no existence apart from Īśvara, it is held to be in Yōga or association with Him and it is due to its veiling capacity that it is termed as Māyā.

Īśvara is the Lord of Māyā and keeps complete control over it. The appearance, existence and dissolution of all sentient beings is a result a Māyā. The personal Īśvara is said to combine within Himself Sat and Asat, the immutability of Brahman as well as the mutation of becoming. Māyā is the power which enables him to produce mutable nature. It is the sākty or ātmavibhūti, the power of self becoming.

Lord Krishna says "I am not manifest to all (in My Real Nature) veiled by Divine Māyā. This deluded world knows not me, I the Unborn, the Imperishable".

Divine Māyā is the Divine illusion that forms a cloak enclosing the Lord himself. It serves as His body. He is Mahā Māyēh an expert in creating illusion.

The reality of Brahman is hidden in the grab of Nature. Brahman thus screened off by this Universe of names and forms which is nothing but an apparent projection of the Supreme Self itself, the frail sense organs, mind and intellect fail to

1. Bhagavad-Gītā, VII. 25
percieve It. But then all the same he designs to disclose himself to those who take refuge in Him. Once the reality of unity in Brahman is known, the assumed garb of Māyā vanishes and the Supreme Reality shines forth in all its glory and purity.

According to Gīta, the Lord produces the Universe by means of two elements of His being, Prakriti and Puruṣa or in other words matter and consciousness and these are said to be the para or higher or apara or lower Māyā of God. Apara or lower Prakriti includes life, water, air, ether, mind and intellect which are the material causes of the physical, vital and psychological world. The para-prakriti or higher nature creates and sustains the limited embodied souls according to their merits and demerits. In this way, ultimately God is both the material as well as the efficient cause of the Universe. Both Prakriti and Puruṣa are eternal and imperishable, being the powers of God.

Prakriti or Nature is constituted of the three Guṇas, Sattvā, Rajas and Tamas. Prakriti is ever in the state of flux and this is due to Karma which is inherent in nature. In contrast to the actionless self, nature is wholly action ridden. The Gīta says: "None can ever remain actionless even for a moment for everyone is helplessly driven to action by the Guṇas, born of Prakriti".

It is impossible for sentient beings to give up Karma while being entangled in Prakriti. The egoistic man thinks of himself as the doer, while actually he is not, and this is due to his

1. Bhagawad Gīta.- III. 5
ignorance or egoism which tends to identify the actionless self with non self or Prakriti.

Praṅkriti and Puruṣa do not form two essentially different entities because it is the same Reality which enjoys two phases, one that of self assertion and the other that of self expression. The former phase is Praṅkriti and the latter Puruṣa. But then as the Praṅkriti has a definite magnitude, duration and Vibration, the Puruṣa also so acquires a definite extent and reach of consciousness. It is in these two, in their interplay, that they project creation, continue to preserve it and also dissolve the Universe created by them. Thus the play of matter and Spirit is the cause for Samsāra. But then just as the Lord is Eternal, it is but natural that His nature which again is Praṅkriti and Puruṣa (Matter and Spirit) should also be Eternal and beginning less and both have for their substratum the Supreme Lord. Hence, the world is considered to be a real emanation from the Supreme Puruṣottama for when one transcends the level of Māyā, the world does not disappear or cease to be, but it only changes its meaning and stands forth as that Reality which is Sudhha-Chaitanya or Pure consciousness which is beyond all modifications and is even itself.

Jīva and Mokṣa:

The individual Jīvas, deluded by the modifications of the three Guṇas, became blind to the divinity within themselves and
begin to live a life by merely identifying themselves with the matter or non-self. Thus identifying itself with the products of Māyā, the self comes to play the tragic role of the ego and as a result of this sort of identification of itself with the 'external world of objects', the self finds itself incapable of knowing its own true nature.

Sri Krishna says "This deluded world knows me not, the Unborn and the Immortal because their own illusion, born out of the three gunas veils me". The ego-centric-mortal or Jīva viewing the Universe through the sheath of avidya and his limited mind and intellect, fails to see the spiritual centre of the Universe of endless plurality. What it needs to understand is the statement of Sri Krishna "All this is strung in Me, as rows of gems on a string".

All beings are in bondage until they transcend the three Guṇas. The continuity of births and deaths is inevitable to them when they are in the fetters of Prakriti. For such individuals who are sense bound all earthly things and pleasures are real and they remain immersed in them.

But so long as man is given to worldly desires he will not have peace of mind. It is the feeling of 'I' and 'Mine' which lead man into the bondage of Karma, for in this way the ego

1. Bhagawad-Gīta VII 25
2. Ibid VII, 7
makes man feel he is the separate entity, the doer and enjoyer.

The Gita says, "That man attains peace who lives devoid of longing, freed from all desires and without the feeling of 'I' and 'mine'". Desire is sinful because it tends to make us live a lower devolutionary life. Hence it is with the cessation of desire that the ego disappears and what ultimately remains is the unmodified Super Consciousness bathed in bliss.

The Gita's concept of liberation lies in the unique synthesis of Knowledge (Jñāna), Action (Karma) and Devotion (Bhakti). Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "The Absolute reveals itself to those seeking for knowledge as the eternal light, clear and radiant as the Sun at Noon day, to those struggling for virtue as the eternal right-sousness, steadfast and impartial and to those emotionally deluded as eternal love and Beauty and Holiness".

What hides truth from one's vision is ajñāna or spiritual blindness and to overcome this the mind should be purged from all ignorance so that it assures and assumes competency to grasp the Divine knowledge, embellishes the personality and aids one to discern between the self and non-self and thus leads man to enlightenment with the dawn of which all diversities disappear. "To know the Truth is to lift up our hearts, to the Supreme, touch him and adore him".

1. Bhagawad-Gita. II, 71
Thus having attained knowledge one soon embraces peace. But again no embodied being can renounce actions. To antidote this Gita puts forth its unique doctrine of Niṣkāma-Karma which teaches that desireless action is the sure means to reach the state of actionless. The Gītā says, "Seek to perform your duty, but lay not claim to its fruits, be you not the producer of the fruits of Karma, neither shall you lean towards in-action". So also devotion when regulated in the right way leads to the perception of the Supreme. It is a way which is open to all alike. Shri Krishna says "For those who take refuge in Me, though they be of inferior birth, Women, Vaiṣya and Śūdras - even they attain the Supreme Goal". "He who gives himself up in complete faith (śraddha) and love to God and falls at His feet finds the gate of eternity open. For God declares "This is My word of promise, that he who Loveth Me shall not perish". Again He says, "Merge thy mind in Me, be devoted to Me, prostrate thyself before Me, thou shalt come even Unto me. I pledge thee my truth, thou art dear to me. Abandoning all dharmas, come unto Me alone for shelter, sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins".

Thus Brahma-nirvāṇam is the highest state of existence and is also called Aparokșha anubhūti. It transcends the mind and intellect, and an individual whose mind is in a state of

1. Bhagavad-Gītā: - II 27
2. Ibid IX - 32
3. Ibid IX - 31
4. Ibid XVIII - 64-66
equanimity or Sthithaprajñā on attaining this illumination, or Brahma-Sthithī is called Jīvatman and when this is achieved in the embodied state itself he becomes a Jīvanmuktā - one liberated in life itself. Just as all rivers re-enter the ocean and become one with it, so also all Jīvas re-enter Brahman and get identified with that Absolute state of consciousness. This liberation is the goal of all spiritual and ethical life.

Hence the eternal significance and universal nature of the message of Gīta is for all in all times and is consistent with reason and the demands of humanity. It is the gospel that teaches the way to perfect one's self and realize the divine potential in Man.
Sarīraka-Sūtras or Brahma-Sūtras of Bādarāyana Constitute one of the texts of the Prastānatraya and claim to be the aphoristic summary of the Upaniṣads. The sūtra literature is a very ancient literary mode and is common to all systems of Indian Philosophy. The Systematic treatises were reduced to the form of aphorisms and were meant as memory aids to long discussions. These sūtras presented in a precise manner, the philosophical tenets of a system found scattered in a number of works.

These Sūtras are extremely terse to the point of unintelligibility, for the thought in them is very condensed and much is taken for granted. This gnomic nature of the Sūtras renders them un-understandable except with the aid of clear and elaborate commentaries. To get a clear idea, of the thought connoted by a Sūtra, Śrī Mādavachārya quotes from the Padma-Purāṇa, a definition of the Sūtra. "People learned in Sūtra literature, say that a Sūtra should be concise and ambiguous, give the essence of the arguments on a topic but at the same time deal with all aspects of the question, be free from repetition and fault-less". Due to the extreme brevity of the Sūtras and because they were of so ambiguous a nature that they gave rise to divergent systems of interpretation. Again due to its dialectical approach Brahma-Sūtras represents the intellectual

1. Thibaut George. Sūtras with Shankarachārya's commentary (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1890) P.5
efforts spread over generations and is the starting point of intense reflection.

Bādarāyanā, to whom the authorship of the Brahma-Sūtras is ascribed can be aptly described as the systematizer of the thoughts developed in the Upanīṣads. About the author Bādarāyanā itself very little is known, but tradition, however identifies him with one of the incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu, namely sage Bhagvan - Veda-Vyāsa, the celebrated author of Mahābhāratha and the eighteen Purāṇas.

The Vedānta-Sūtras are five hundred and fifty five in number according to the calculations of Śrī.Śaṅkara who is the propounder of Advaita. While Śrī.Ramānuja puts it at five hundred and forty five, Shri Mādhavā holds the view that the number is five hundred and sixty four. The Vedānta- Sūtras mark the Second stage in the development of Vedāntic thought. The First stage is the intuition of the ancient seers set forth in the Upanīṣads. Upanīṣads form the basis of the Vedānta- Sūtras otherwise known as the BrahmaSūtras. The conflicting statements of the various Upanīṣads are properly unified and adjudged systematically. Upanīṣads critically examine the cause of the world creation. This is a tantalising analysis of reasoning, a thorough research of the material world, knowledge, the

1. Svami Gambhirananda : BrahmaSūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkarāchārya, (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta 1983), P.V.
2. Ibid. P.VI
Panchabhuṭas (Jalā, Vāyu, Prithvi, Ākāśa and Agnī) their creation, sustenance and destruction, an indepth study of the Absolute or the eternal Brahman his form and nature, relationship between the nature and the living beings, the form and nature of the soul before and after liberation, the singular or pluralistic concepts of the soul, whether it is eternal or perishable, is there any link between the Absolute of the soul, whether the soul and the Absolute are different or one and the same. Bādarāyaṇa has discussed all these aspects with customary genius and infallible reasoning.

In the Pūrvamīśa-Karmakanda, the first stage comprises of the rules of interpretation governing the acts prescribed in Vēdas, and the application of the Rules to Vēdic Texts is to find out the true import of them for the purpose of observing the Vēdic karmas intended to be for the attainment of merit to the individual performing them. These acts of karmas result in temporary happiness rather than eternal bliss.

The Second stage i.e., the stage of systematisation of the Upanīṣhads in Brahmaśūtras co-ordinate the several passages into a passage of primary importance. This is why they are also called an Nirnāyaka-Śāstra.

The Third stage in the development of Vedāntic thought is the writing of the commentaries on the sūtras by the different system builders. The sūtras have been commented on by different Ācharyas. Prominent among the commentaries which are available
are those of Śankara, Bhāskara, Yādavaprakāśa, Ramānuja, Keshava, Nīlakanṭa, Mādhava, Baladēva, Vāllabha, and Vīgānabhikṣu. The oldest of the commentaries available is that of Shri Shankara which is otherwise known as Śankara Bhāshya.

The experience of eternal bliss which is transcendental and flawless in nature is termed as Muktī or liberation from bondage. This is also referred to as Brahmānubhāva. As liberation from bondage leads to bliss, likewise is the freedom from the bonds of nature. There are two schools of thought in this regard, one which propounds that the absolute or Brahman is non-dual and the other which differentiates between the Absolute and the one which is liberated or the soul. Two distinct trends of interpretation of the Brahma-Sūtras are clearly discernible, the absolutistic interpretation and the theistic one. The former is represented by Śankara, and the later by Ramānuja and Mādhva.

The Vedānta-Sūtras are divided into four chapters. The first deals with the harmonisation of the purport of the different Vedic and secular words in respect of Brahman i.e., the Samānvaya-Adhyāya. The Second chapter refutes other Pramāṇas that contradict the central purport and examines the arguments of the different systems that are opposed to Vedānta i.e., "Avirodha Adhyāya". The third chapter relates to the way of attaining the Brahman. Hence it is called "Sādhana Adhyāya". The Fourth deals with the nature of bliss i.e., realisation of Brahman which is called as Phalā Adhyāya. The Sūtras in each chapter are classified into "Adhikāraṇās". Every topic is termed
an Adhikāraṇā, which may contain one or many Sūtras. Each Adhikāraṇā refers to a particular, scriptural passage which is called Viṣaya Vākya.

In the first chapter Samānvaya, which is an harmony, Bādarāyanā teaches that the Vedāntic texts taken as a whole have for their purport Brahman the non-dual reality. The first four sūtras of Bādarāyanā give us in brief the outlines of the Vedānta Philosophy. In the first sūtra which states "Athātobrahma Jignāsa", the spiritual aspirant is extrorted to inquire into the nature of Brahman or "Seek to know Brahman". The knowledge of Brahman results immediately in realisation. "Brahma-Vit Brahmaiva Bhavati". The desire to know Brahman has for its antecedent conditions, the possession of the qualities of discrimination of things eternal and non-eternal, non-attachment to the enjoyment of fruit here or here after, possession in abundance of the qualities of calmness, equaminity and other such means, and desire for release from bondage. When we know that the self alone is eternal and all others non-eternal and contemplate the impermanence, impurity and painful character of the Prapancha (World), non-attachment arises. Then what is essential for the spiritual aspirant is only sama, (Calmness), dama (Control), titikṣa, (indifference to objects) Uparāti (turning away from them) and Śraddha, (faith in truth). The word

1. Brahma-Sūtra I 1.1
'atha' indicates that the desire to know Brahman arises subsequent to the fulfilment of these above conditions.

The knowledge of Brahman is not a matter of faith but the result of enquiry. "Brahma Jignāsa" is a discussion about Brahman which goes on till the realisation of Brahman is attained. The realisation of Brahman is the end of an individual since it destroys all evils, avidya or nescience and all the seeds of rebirth. Therefore Brahman is what is to be desired to be known. Bādarāyanā means that the goal of all Vedānta is attainment of the knowledge of the oneness of the self, which is not mere intellectual knowledge but intuitive realisation.

The Second Sūtra which states that "Janmady asya Yotah" defines Brahman as the originator, sustainer and destroyer of this Universe. If Brahman is to be known, he can only be known through his attributes. This Sūtra gives us what is called natural theology. The temporal world taken as a whole suggests a cosmic meaning and admits of a consistent interpretation.

Hence the first sūtra refers to Brahman; and the second refers to the same Brahman in another aspect. The first is Absolute being, awareness and freedom; the second is the creative side of the Absolute.

1. Brahma-Sūtras, I 1.2
Nescience or Avidya has to be destroyed through Brahman. Experience of Brahma-Jñāna and scripture is the ultimate authority in respect of 'Brahman'. This third sūtra which states that 'Sāstra Yonitvat' defines that Brahman is the cause of the "Sacred Scripture" or is the Source of the 'Vēda'. Such great wisdom as the Vēdas contain could not have originated from any individual who is not omniscient. That is the reason they are called 'Apaurus'eyas' which means "not created by the mortal ones" or which is independent of human origin.

This is to say that the source of knowledge is knowledge itself. The origin of the body of scripture possessing the quality of omniscience cannot be sought elsewhere but in omniscience itself. In spiritual experience which is registered in the sastras we have a sense of power, of release from bondage. It is not a subjective impression but cognition of an object. The knowledge of Brahman culminates in experience and has an existent object for its content. The knowledge of Brahman is not object of senses. Brahman is not perceived by the senses. It is either inferred from the world or learnt from the texts or experienced by the individual.

Thus the second and third sūtras demonstrate the intimate connection and continuity of reason and intuition.

1. Brahmāsūtra I., 1.3
The fourth sūtra which states 'Tat tu Samānvayāt' effects an harmonisation of all Vedic terms and Brahman. It declares that Brahman is the meaning of all scriptural passages and the differences are only apparent and can be reconciled. "That Brahman is without prior or posterior, without interior or exterior (i.e., homogeneous and without a second) This self the perciever of everything, is Brahman". This in other words states that the state of Nokṣa is absolute, immutable eternal, all pervasive like the other, devoid of all modifications, eternally contented, without parts, self-luminous by nature, which merit and demerit together with their fruit do not approach and is beyond the three times (past, present, and future). Thus, is the non-embodiment called final release.

Thus Bādarāyanā shows through his aphoristic statements that the Vedāntic texts harmoniously teach that Brahman is the only plenary reality. The world ground which is of the nature of Existence-Consciousness - Bliss, which is not only the supreme object of meditation but is also the only and final end to be realised.

In the second chapter which is Avirōdha or 'Non-Conflict', Bādarāyanā discusses the objections that may be raised against the metaphysics of Vedānta. The Sāmkhyā view of thought is shown

1. Brāhma-Sūtra I., 1.4
2. Brhadāraṇyaka Upanishad II V.19
to be the main objector and this is very significant because, it is one system which comes very close to Vedānta and if these objections of Sāṅkhya can be refuted successfully then it is easily shown by Bādarāyaṇa, that other views of objections which are more remote stand untenable. Specifying on this Bādarāyaṇa says 'Yatena Yōgaha Pratyuktaha'. Hereby is refuted Yōga. For although Sāṅkhya and Yōga are well recognised in the world as means for achievement of the highest human goal or liberation, their refutation centres around only this false claim that liberation can be attained through Sāṅkhya knowledge or the path of Yōga independently of the Vēdas. And the Upanīṣads reject the claim that there can be any thing apart from the Vēdic knowledge of the unity of the self that can bring about liberation. "By knowing him alone, One goes beyond death. There is no other path to proceed by. .. Again another argument is that, taking its stand on logic, Sāṅkhya argues that Prakriti is the cause of evolution. Employing the same logic Bādarāyaṇa refutes their claim giving the reasons that an inert Prakriti cannot have the existing design in the world, nor the will to create or not to create, being unintelligent as it is. In the like manner are the objections of Buddhist, Jain and other schools of thought made unacceptable.

1. Brahmadūtra.II 1.3
In the third chapter Bādarāyanā discusses Śādhana, the means to release the soul is non-different from Brahman, but because of neiscience it imagines that it is different Brahman is non dual pure, Consciousness. It appears as if many, even as the one sun gets reflected diversely in different vessels, containing water. When the neiscence is removed through knowledge, the soul realizes the truth of non-difference. The śādhaka or spiritual aspirant must begin with the practise of the vidyās or meditations on the Sagūṇa Brahman which will take him along the path of the gods and eventually secures release. But it is only the knower of Nirguṇa Brahman that does not go along any eschatological path, he attains Brahman here endowed with the cardinal virtues. He follows the path of knowledge and gains the goal which is release, mokṣa and in mokṣa itself there are no differences of kind, for what is referred to as the state of release is nothing but Brahman.

The last chapter of Brahmasūtras is "Phalā" or on "the Fruit". Here is given the discussion on the nature of the state of release. One who meditates on Sagūṇa Brahman, goes along the path of the gods, after physical death, carrying along with him the subtle body which lasts till release is gained. One who follows the path of knowledge gains release in this very life.

1. Ibid., III 11-18
2. Brahma-Sūtra III, IV. 1,52
His pṛāṇas do not depart and being released in this life itself, he is a Jīvan-muktā, whose body continues till his Prārabdha-karma lasts. Thus there is no return whatsoever for such a liberated soul.

Thus it is seen that Bādarāyanā was the first and foremost in describing the 'Para Brahma Swarupa' or the description of Brahman based on the very Upanīshad quotations and their imbibe meanings. His style of logic which he discusses and the aspects of other schools of Sāṅkhyā, Vyāsāshika, Mīmāṃsāka and Nyaya, in the critical background and light of Vedic literature is unique and unparalleled. A Jñāni or a person who has attained the ultimate knowledge of Brahman will react in the same friendly way even if there is any difference of opinion or has dialectically opposite ideas. In this regard, the opinion of Bādarāyanā is very clear.

"Tatvam Jignāsamananam Hetutri Sarva Tomukhai hi Jatvam - Eko Mahāyōgi Dhyeyo Narayana Prabhu hu"

'Whatever may be the conclusions of endless discussions on knowledge, the ultimate principle is only para Brahman. That is the Ultimate Being on whose realization breaks off the shackles of worldly misery and bondage for the good and eternal bliss.'