CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ADVAITA VEDÂNTA

1 Vedas and Upaniṣads
2 Bhagavad-gītā and Brahma-sūtra
3 Pre Śāṅkara
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The Philosophy of Advaita centres around the doctrine of मन्य्य-मात्य-धर्म. The distinguishing features of this school are the principles (1) that the material world is an illusion or an appearance, (2) that the individual soul is essentially or numerically one with Reality (Brahman), (3) That Reality is free from all differences and is unqualified and One, and (4) that to realize this truth through knowledge is the goal of man.

The ultimate reality is one. Though with out a second and is attributeless, it appears as God, the soul and the world, owing to the power of मन्य्य-मात्य-धर्म of nescience. The world is not real; it is suriated by the knowledge of Brahman. God is a complex of Brahman-Infinite consciousness and मन्य्य-मात्य-धर्म or अविद्या. The soul is a complex of the same Infinite consciousness - मन्य्य-मात्य-धर्म and its product, mind. God is always aware of His identity with Brahman and is therefore ever released. The soul on the contrary, falsely identifies itself with mind-body complex, loses sight of its identity with Brahman and undergoes transmigration. The realization of its oneness with Brahman and remaining in that nature of its own is the ultimate goal, i.e., liberation and this is possible only by transcending nescience (अविद्या). अविद्या has Brahman as its content and so
It could be removed only by the direct experience of Brahman. It is therefore clear that the knowledge of Brahman is a direct means to liberation. The world is the transfiguration (rūpam) of Brahman. It is an appearance that is neither real nor unreal. It appears only so long as the ignorance of the truth continues. It is thus removable by right knowledge. It is indeterminate appearance, since it is neither real like Brahman for all time nor unreal like the nothingness which is inexperiencable even as an appearance. The root of this indeterminate appearance is however in Brahman.

The important concepts of Advaita which find full expression in the Upaniṣads are foreshadowed in the Vedas, the earliest literary documents of India. The Veda consists of three parts viz., mantras, brāhmaṇa and upaniṣads. In the mantra portion we come across several prayers addressed to godhead behind the various powers of nature. Man realises his complete dependence upon the various powers of nature, discerns the divine as their foundation and offers worship to it, for securing its favour. The gods thus worshipped are many; inspite of the apparent polytheism of the mantras there is in them a suggestion of an underlying unity among all gods. This tendency to see unity of Godhead gradually lead to what is known as monotheism. It is the outcome of this tendency that we find expressed in the passage “what is but one are wise people call it by different names as brahman, isvara and aitarieswā”.
This tendency to see unity in Godhead i.e., to reduce many Gods to one who is above and apart from the world further developed into monism which traces the whole world including the Gods to a single source. The 4th Veda recognizing the principle of causality traces the whole universe to a single source which is designated as "That One" (That evam). The hymn is as follows: "Before the creation of this world there existed neither the Lord of death, nor the nectar of the divine beings. The sun and the moon - the cars of day and night respectively did not exist then. There existed "That One", which is free from any activity and which is associated with avidya, (avidya) and nothing existed apart from it".

The view that attributeless non-dual self itself exists in the form of the world-past, present and future-is set forth in the passage, "This world is only the puruṣa".

The doctrine of avidya finds full expression in the 4th Yada, in the passage: darkness, i.e., nescience rooted in the reality existed at the time of dissolution. The entire world remained in the latent form in it. It is from this darkness or nescience that the world is manifested. The world which is present in the time of dissolution cannot be discerned just as we cannot distinguish the milk from the water with which it has been mixed up.

The world although it is concealed by nescience which is inertia, yet it comes into existence or is manifested by the
To the question as to how does there arise reflection in the part of Brahman associated with avidyā it is said that the merit and the demerit of the individual souls, when are ripe enough to reap their results, are responsible for the reflection as "I shall create the world".

The doctrine that difference between the soul and Brahman is caused by avidyā and avidyā conceals the true nature of the soul till there arises the knowledge of reality and when the concealing factor vis., avidyā is removed, the reality as such is manifest is mentioned in the Ṛg Vedic passage which is as follows: "Between jīva and Brahman, Brahman is suprasensational, jīva although identical with Brahman has lost sight of its identity with Brahman and undergoes transmigration. Then by the knowledge of one's essential nature vis., Brahman the so-called jīva perceives everything as Brahman. Then avidyā leaves him out and he also leaves it out".

In the Upaniṣads, the prevailing view is monistic and absolutistic, that is, to say they teach the ultimate reality to be one and only one. This ultimate reality is termed Brahman or Atman. In some Upaniṣadic passages this reality is represented as cosmic or all-exclusive. Some other passages present it as cosmic or all-comprehensive in nature.
The distinction between the acosmic and cosmic idea is only apparent and it is due to the difference in the standpoint from which the absolute is looked at, cosmic from empirical standpoint and acosmic from transcendental. The cosmic form necessarily involves the notion of māyā-avidyā, it being understood as the principle which shows Brahman which is acosmic as cosmic. The term māyā and its equivalent avidyā are to be found in the Śvetāvatara Upanisad and the Keśopanisad respectively. Closely allied with the doctrine of māyā-avidyā is the status of the phenomenal world. The Upanisadic text "where there is duality one sees another", clearly points to existence in the Upaniṣads of the idea that the world is an appearance. This is mandrā-vivāda-vāda of the doctrine which maintains that Brahman does not change into, but merely appears as the world.

Brahman which is cosmic is termed satkāra as it is possessed of all attributes owing to avidyā. Saguna Brahman, however, is devoid of any form and when personified it becomes śiva - the God of religion. The Chāndogya text "He the mūrṇa that is seen in the sun is golden in colour, his beard is golden", etc. refers to the personified form of Saguna Brahman and the Naitikāvya Upanisad refers to the three-fold conception of God (Śiva) as Brahman, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. God thus is a complex of acosmic Brahman and avidyā and it is the source of the universe.
Soul is identical with Brahman. The Upanishadic text - "The Ātma does not suffer annihilation", states that the soul is eternal and the Upanishadic text - "Brahman has entered these bodies up to the tip of the nails" says that Brahman itself has attained to the state of the soul and the Upanishadic text "Thou art that" affirms the non-distinction between Brahman and the soul. This non-distinction is concealed by avyā and when avyā is removed this non-distinction is manifested and the so-called soul remains as Brahman and it is liberation. Avidrā is removed by the direct knowledge of Brahman. In order to render the acquisition of such knowledge possible, the Upanishads prescribe as a preliminary, ātman-yoga and then dhāraṇa-yoga as the proximate means.

It follows from the above discussion that the Upanishads speak of Brahman which is attributeless as the substrate of all things and of God and the soul as Brahman conditioned through nānā or avyā, liberation is attained through the direct knowledge of Brahman.

The doctrines of Advaita are set forth in The Bhagavad-gītā too. The Bhagavad-gītā brings together the doctrine of identity of the individual soul and the supreme self and the popular theism centred in Viṣṇu and his incarnations Kṛṣṇa. Thus it harmonises the claim of theism and the supra-theism of Advaita. In fact this work popularises the monistic
teachings of the Upaniṣad by means of the doctrine of the personal God.

This text consists of eighteen chapters and it has been divided into three parts, each one consisting of six chapters. Madhusūdāna Sarasvatī says that the first six is devoted to the exposition of the karmayoga and the second one to bhaktiyoga, and the third one to jñāna-yoga.

The ultimate reality is said to be beginningless, attributeless and also changeless. It is said to be supra-relational and the substratum of everything. Following the Upaniṣadic teaching that the Self alone is fit to be realised, the Gītā says that the realization of Brahma one becomes immortal. It is stated that Brahma transcends both speech and mind.

Brahma of this nature is concealed by aśvayā and attains to the status of the soul. māyā and aśvayā are identical and the Gītā clearly affirms such an identity. The passage "The absolute reality which is existence, consciousness, and bliss is veiled by aśvayā and so the individual souls experience phenomenal existence" shows that aśvayā veils the true nature of Brahma. Another passage "Being veiled by māyā which is under the control of Iśvara, the true nature of brahman is not manifest to all" states that māyā veils the true nature of Brahma. Thus māyā and aśvayā have the common characteristic of veiling the true nature of Brahma. In the same way another
text "Avidyā is removed by the direct realization of Brahman-Atman." Yet another passage "Those who realize by true
knowledge of their own nature (Brahman) transcend this Maya, Avidyā, and Avidyā have removed, thus one more common characteristic viz., that both are removable by intuitive knowledge of Brahman. It would be clear from this that Maya and Avidyā are identical. Therefore both have the same characteristics of veiling, Brahman and being removable by the knowledge of Brahman. It may be pointed out here that the aspect of veiling that is present in Avidyā suggests that Avidyā is not absence of knowledge but a positive entity. Non-existence never veils an object. Since Maya veils Brahman, it cannot be absence of knowledge but a positive entity.

The individual soul who is known as an agent, etc., is not really an agent. It is identical with the suprême Self. Agency etc., are superimposed upon the ultimate reality and the Samkhya-Alāpa states that it is mind that is active and the Self is actionless but because of the identification between the two, activity that is present in the mind seems to be present in the soul. He who directly knows that Self is free from any action and that mind alone is active, should be considered as one who has attained the fruit of the performance of duties as an offering to God.
The chief aim of man is to attain the knowledge of the self which leads to the supreme bliss viz., liberation. There is nothing holier than the knowledge of the self. Just as the fire reduces the fuel to ashes, in the same way the fire in the form of knowledge reduces all the karma excepting the fructified one to ashes. The basis for the attainment of knowledge is performance of karma as an offering to God.

One who has attained the knowledge of Brahman remains in the form of jiva-sukta till his fructified deeds are exhausted. When the fructified deeds are exhausted, the jiva-sukta is disassociated from the psycho-physical organism and remains as Brahman.

Thus the knowledge of attributeless reality is prescribed as the means of attaining liberation. The realisation of Brahman as free from all characteristics is not possible to many of an average intellect. The worship of Saguna Brahman or God is intended for them. Those who worship God reach the world of Niraya-gartha and there they attain the knowledge of Brahman by the grace of God. Thus the important concepts of avaita are found in the bhagava-adhikya.

Sankara in his commentary on Bhagava-sutram states vis., that the word "avaita" is significant as the flowers namely, the truths contained in the Upanishads are gathered together therein.
The Čāndogya text states that one who has attained the knowledge of Brahman manifests as Brahman. This text is discussed in the Brahma-sūtra-saṁvedyavārttikā avam śabdāt. The meaning of the sūtra is, the essential nature of the soul which is concealed by avidyā during the state of transmigratory existence is manifested through the removal of avidyā by the knowledge of the Self and it is this manifestation of the true nature of the soul that is liberation.

The essential nature of the soul viz., Brahman which manifests itself when avidyā is removed is unitary consciousness devoid of any duality whatsoever. This view is affirmed in the Upaniṣads as: "there is no duality which the released one could perceive". The Brahma-sūtra-avibhāṣanadṛṣṭatvāt which discusses this Upaniṣadic text states that Brahman which is manifested is non-distinct from the so called soul, for there is the realization of unitary consciousness only.

The Chāṇḍogya text, "pot etc., are mere names only, there is no reality whatsoever in respect of them, what is real is only the causal element viz., the lump of clay", speaks of the illusoriness of effects and the reality of their cause. Extending this line of explanations to the cause of the world viz., Brahman everything including the lump of clay is an effect and hence non-real. The result of this teaching is that world does not have any independent existence or reality
apart from the cause viz., Brahman. This Upanisadic text is discussed in the apohrism adhanyatvāt-ārādhana-jātādīnāmbhāt.

The Upanisadic texts, convey Brahman as attributeless and also as endowed with attributes. The question arises as to how we are to conclude that Brahman is attributeless only. The author of the āṁśa discusses this in the apohrism na ethātātviu caiva bhavatīti ca caiva vā. The meaning of this apohrism is that Brahman by itself cannot have these two contradictories as it is opposed to experience. It may be said that Brahman by itself is free from all attributes but by its association with limiting adjuncts, it acquires qualities and forms which are real. This contention is not correct, for the true nature of a thing cannot change because of its association with some limiting adjuncts. Redness in a crystal which is colourless is caused by the redness of a flower placed by its side and it is not real. Similarly the qualities and forms in Brahman which is pure consciousness are caused by adhyāt and hence they are not real.

The Upanisads teach that Brahman is both the material and efficient cause of the world. It sets forth the thesis as follows: “Have you ever asked for that instruction by which that which is not heard becomes heard; that which is not reflected upon becomes reflected, that which is not known, known? Now the knowledge of everything is possible only through the
cognition of the material cause, since the effect is not different from the material cause. The illustrative example, also is set forth in the Upanishads as follows. "O, gentle one, just as by one clot of clay all that is made up of clay becomes known, the modification is only a name, arising for speech, while the truth is that it is just clay". These and other similar texts are to be viewed as proving that Brahman is the material cause of the world.

That Brahman is at the same time the efficient cause of the world, we have to conclude, from the text "Brahman was one without a second prior to creation" which states that there is no other cause on which the material cause could depend. Brahman thus is the efficient cause because there is no other guiding principle and it is the material cause because there is no other substance from which the world could originate.

The above view is set forth in the aphorism prakrti sam pratiṣṭhāpyaṁsthitamparoḥiḥ.  

The Upanishadic text "The one self appears to be many in different bodies like the one moon which appears to be many in water (filled up in several vessels)", and which "when a pot is moved the pot alone is moved, not the other enclosed in the pot, so too the analogy of jiva with the other", use the analogy of the reflection and that of pot
Brahmadatta is the upholder of the doctrine of śhrim-ārma-sānumehaya i.e., the doctrine of assimilation of both knowledge and work. He believes in the doctrine of yid-ā-muktī i.e., liberation after dissolution of the material body and rejects śīvamuktī.

Gaudapāda, the preceptor of Govindapāda who was the spiritual teacher of Śāṅkara, was the first promulgator of the systematic thought on Advaita Vedanta before the advent of Śāṅkara. Gaudapāda has composed karikas on the Māndūkya-Upaniṣad. The fundamental doctrine of Gaudapāda is śāntivāda or doctrine of co-origination, which proves that world as creation never evolves, but it appears as created or evolved owing to the influence of māyā.

Śāṅkara systematically expounds the philosophy of Advaita on the basis of the teachings of the Upaniṣads, the Āraṇṇa-sūtra and the Brahma-sūtra. The successive teachers after Śāṅkara considering the fact that the tastes of people differ, formulated different doctrinal interpretations and arguments by keeping in view the central doctrine of Advaita that Brahman is non-dual and real, the soul in its essential nature is non-difference from Brahman and the world of plurality is illusory.

Of the four direct disciples of Śāṅkara, viz., Padmapāda, Bureśvara, Hastāmalaka, and Tāṭaka, Padmapāda wrote Padmapādika which is a commentary of Śāṅkara’s commentary on the first four
aphorisms of the *brahma-sūtra*. *Paṇcarādikā* was commented upon by Prakāśātman (A.D. 1200) in his *Paṇcarādikā-vyākhyā*. The latter was further commented upon by Citsukha (A.D. 1220) in his *Tā parva-dīkā* and by Akhandananda (A.D. 1350) in his *Tattvadīkā*. Śrīsimhārāma (A.D. 1500) wrote his *vyākhyā* *Śānti-prakāśā* on it. Vidyārāgya (A.D. 1350) wrote his famous work *Vivaramā-prakāśa-saṅgraha* in elaborating the ideas of the *dīkā-vyākhyā*.

Suresvāra, another disciple of Śaṅkara wrote the *Naiṣkarmya-siddhi* which is probably the earliest independent treatise on Śaṅkara's philosophy expounded in his *bhāṣya*. It has been commented upon by Śāntottam. Suresvāra wrote commentaries in verse form on Śaṅkara's *bhāṣya* on the *Tattvānusārakopāniseda* and the *Tatttviriveṇanī*. Of these two, the former was summarized by Vidyārāgya in the work *Vārtikasāra*. Suresvāra, before he became a sannyāsin-disciple of Śaṅkara was known as Nāṇḍana and he wrote the treatise entitled *Ābraha-mīdhi*.

Sarvajñātāna, a disciple of Suresvāra, wrote the *Saṃsāra-sāranya* wherein he sets forth, in verses, the views of Śaṅkara as expounded in his *bhāṣya* on the *brahma-sūtra*. Śrīsimhārāma (A.D. 1500) wrote a commentary *Tattvabodha* on it. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī and Nāsatīrthaka who flourished in the middle of the 16th century wrote commentaries entitled *Sarasangraha* and *Āsāṃvīrtha-prakāśikā* respectively on it. Sarvajñātāna wrote
another work called "Aksamprakrīya" wherein he explains the logical significance of the major texts of the Upaniṣads. Sarvaśetraman refers to a particular view on the nature of avidyā-nivāśita, and it has been identified by his commentators as that of Viṣṇukūṭa-śāstra who is the author of the work Isa-siddhi.

Vāsanapati Kṣira who flourished about 841 A.D. wrote the commentary Dhāmati on Śankara's Pūrṇa on the Brahma-sūtra. Amalānanda-vyākhyāra (A.D. 1300) wrote his Ka padāra on it and Appayya Vīkṣita (A.D. 1550) wrote his Ka padāra-padāgala on the Kaśyapa-vāja. Jñanadhanapāda (A.D. 1600) wrote his Tattva-siddhi where in he explains the basic concepts of Advaita.

Ananābodha (A.D. 1100) wrote three works on Advaita, viz., Nyāya-saṅkarāṇya, Nyāya-dīrgha and Pramāṇa-pāla. Anubhūti-svarūpa (A.D. 1300) wrote commentaries on all the three works.

In the 12th century A.D. flourishes three preceptors of Advaita, viz., Śrīhara, Citsukha, and Anandānubhava. Śrīhara wrote his Kharānā-khāppa-khādya, Citsukha, his Tattvānād pañca and Anandānubhava, his Saṅkarā-nāya and Nyāya-nāya-dīrgha. All these works are mainly critique of the Nyāya-Vaiṣṇavīka categories. Pravāga-svarūpa (A.D. 1400) wrote a commentary Narayanaprāṇā on the Tattvānād pañca of Citsukha.
Anubhūtisvarūpa (A.D. 1300) wrote an independent commentary known as Pratāṭṭhānī-vāraṇa on Śaṅkara’s bhāṣya on the Bhāmaśāra. He wrote commentaries on the Lata-siddhi and on the Kāṇḍana-Kanda-bhāṣya of Śriharṣa. He also wrote commentaries on the three works of Ananda-bodha. Avalānanda (1300 A.D.) besides his commentary Kaṇṭatara wrote an independent work Śāna-rādāṇa explaining the tenets of Advaita-Vedānta as embodied in the Bhāmaśāra.

Vidyārāṇya (A.D. 1350) besides his works - Prārthana-sāṅkṣepa and Vārtikaśāra wrote Pañcadasi which is a very popular and illuminating treatise on Advaita Vedānta.

Ananda-giri (A.D. 1400) wrote commentaries on Śaṅkara’s bhāṣya on the Brahma-sūtra, the Upaniṣads and the Gītā following Viśvarūpa line of interpretation. Govindaśānta wrote another commentary Satnāmetraśā on Śaṅkara’s bhāṣya on the Brahma-sūtra.

Anandapurana-vidyāsayara (A.D. 1400) wrote his Vyāsāsandrika wherein he explains the concept of Advaita and critically examines the Vaiseshika categories.

Kāśyapa (A.D. 1400) wrote his Vedānta-Kaumudi which is celebrated for its merits in interpreting the concepts of Advaita.
Nyāsībārama (a.d. 1500) wrote many works such as *Advaita-dikā*, *Vedānta-dīrghadikā*, *Vedānta-tattva-vidyāka* and commentaries on the *Jaṭāgacchāśāsāra* and the *Jaṭāgacchā-vidyāraṇya*.

Prakūśananda (a.d. 1550) wrote his *Vedānta-siddhānta-suktāvalī* wherein he expounds one type of *ekā-bīja-vāda* which is known as *dṛṣṭi-saṅga-vāda*.

Sadānanda (a.d. 1550) wrote *Vedānta-sāra* which is an easy introduction to Advaita Vedānta.

Appayya Dīkṣita (a.d. 1550) a versatile scholar, is the author of many books of which *paramārtha-parimala* (a gloss on the commentary on *Bhāṭatī*), *Bṛhadāraṇyakāṇa* (an independent commentary on the first pāda of the *Bṛhadāraṇyakā*), and *Siddhānta-līla-sāraśāra* are held in high esteem.

Kṛttivaiśnavacarita Vasudeva (a.d. 1600) wrote a large number of works, the chief among them being *Advaita-sākiṇī*, *Advaita-saṃśrāna*, *Vedānta-kālakālīka*, besides his commentaries like *Siddhānta-bhāsa* and *Sārasaṅkara*. Brahmānanda wrote his commentary *Lakṣaṇacakṣura* on the *Advaita-sākiṇī*.

Apart from these preceptors, there flourished two noteworthy writers, viz., *Advaita-Vidyāśārya* and *Kavitorikā*.
sakravarti. Their views are known only from references to them in the later Śaṅkara-saṁśaya.

We shall discuss the concepts of Advaita with reference to Śaṅkara and post-Śaṅkara in detail in the next chapter.