CHAPTER - III

PHILOSOPHICAL

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When man is faced with intense pain and suffering, especially the fear of imminent death, he begins to ask philosophical questions, like “Who am I?” “Is death the end of my existence, or, do I continue to live after death in some other form, in some other world?” “What is that which continues to be after death?” etc. These seem to be, among others, the most important questions which an early Indian philosopher asked.

Curiosity about death and speculation about survival seems to be prevalent even among the primitive cultures. Any theory of survival must presuppose a distinction between the physical body which is subject to birth, growth, disease, old age and death and some immaterial substance, which is variously referred to by different cultures, as spirit, soul, prāṇa, etc. Anthropologists are of the opinion that the primitive man inferred the existence of this immaterial something from two kinds of premises – cessation of breathing at the time of death and dreams. (a) When he noticed that death meant cessation of breathing, he concluded that something which was present in the body hitherto has departed to some other place. This he called prāṇa (breath). (b.1.) When he dreamt of his dead elders, he concluded that since his elders’ bodies were already buried or burnt, what visited him must be something other than the body. That something is immaterial. (b.2.) When he dreamt that he visited a different place and on waking realized that his body was still in the place where he slept, he
inferred that what went to the other place must be something different from the body. That something is immaterial.

This does not mean, however, that the primitive man had developed a sophisticated soul-theory. Perhaps he was not in a position to have an abstract idea of soul as existing independently of the physical body. Nor was the soul he conceived wholly spiritual, for it still had hazy material form and he could recognize a soul as the soul of his friend or father. His intellectual ability was limited to the thought that the soul was of different nature than the body.

That the soul is formless, conscious, changeless, immortal substance is the idea of a much later civilization, solely due to abstract philosophical thinking. Plato and Aristotle in ancient times and Descartes in the modern times have tried to offer philosophical proof for the existence of a spiritual substance which is immortal.

However, the ancient Indian philosophers’ approach to the problem of soul is neither like the primitive man’s, nor like the Western philosophers’ Soul is what the yogis realized in their mystic intuition. They were never doubtful about its existence, its spirituality or its immortality.

The highest goal of an Indian religious man’s life is to realize his soul, though, in fact, the realization has been interpreted variously by different systems of Indian philosophy. According to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
Originally this (universe) was only the ātman in the form of a person. He looked around and saw nothing beside himself. First he uttered, "I am".¹

Realization of the self is the realization of reality, not only because self (identified with Brahman) is reality, but also because the Yogi who realizes this does not distinguish between the self (the subject, including mind, intellect and ego) and the objective world.

The interpretation of the self-realization itself depends on the conception of the self. Let us consider a few important Indian conceptions of the self.

1. UPANIŚADIC CONCEPT:

By the time of the Upaniṣads, the concept of soul has already left behind the old reference to prāṇa (breathing)² it is said that our breath is ātman.) and manas.³ Though in some Upaniṣads prāṇa is identified with the all-pervading consciousness, the word ātman has acquired the definitive connotation, which neither “prāṇa” nor “manas” has. So, obviously, the question, “What is the nature of the self which is identical to Brahman, the world-soul?” gains more importance. [However, for the sake of clarity let us reserve the term “ātman” to refer to the individual soul (also called in the Indian religious and philosophical parlance “Jīva"),] and use the term “Brahman” to refer to the universal soul.]

Ātman is essentially consciousness, and therefore, is clearly distinct from body, senses and manas with which it is temporarily associated. In the
Chāndogya Upaniṣad it is said that Prajāpati tells both Indra (leader of the gods) and Virocana (leader of the demons) that the soul is body. But Indra is not convinced of this. He is later told that soul is that which moves happily in dreams. But again he discards this theory, on the ground that the soul in dream is occasionally unhappy, angry, tortured and perturbed. Nor is soul a composite of mental states, which continuously change. He is ultimately instructed that the soul is neither the subject which is waking, dreaming or sleeping, nor the object of any perception.

However, the soul in its embodied State is associated with ten senses (five of knowledge and five of action) and the internal organs (antāḥkaraṇa). The sense organs like eyes, ears, etc. are capable of seeing, hearing, etc.; the motor organs like hands, legs, etc. are capable of holding, walking, etc.; the internal organs like buddhi, are capable of thinking, feeling and willing. But without their relation to a soul, they cannot manifest their capacity. If the legs and hands of a dead man do not move, it is simply because they are not related to the soul of that man, which has already left his body. It is not the senses and motor organs that do their respective activities, but it is the soul. As the Praśna Upaniṣad says⁴ the soul is “the seer, the toucher, the hearer, the smeller, the taster, the perceiver, the knower, the doer, the thinking self (Vijñānātmā)”. This suggests, according to the Upaniṣadic thinkers, that soul is the essence of a person, or the real person. Taken in this sense, atman is the foundational reality; and sense and motor organs, and internal organs serve its mental, physical and biological purposes.
Sometimes the Upaniṣadic thinkers speak of the embodied soul, Puruṣa [i.e. one who lies (śaya) in the citadel (pura) of body] or jīva ('one who breathes') as encased in five sheaths (Koṣas), namely Annamaya-kośa, Prāṇamaya-kośa, Manomaya-kośa, Viṣṇūnāmaya-kośa and Ānandamaya-kośa. The concept of Kośa means that the physical body which is made up of food we eat is the outermost cover; in it is the kośa of prāṇa, this covers the mind, mind covers the self-consciousness and this covers the pure soul which is sheer bliss (ānanda). Broadly speaking there are two kinds of activities - unconscious and the conscious. The former, like breathing (prāṇa), digesting food (anna) is performed by the first two sheaths; and mental activities, self-awareness are activities of manomaya-kośa and viṣṇūnāmaya-kośa, respectively. As noted earlier, the pure soul - ānanda - is the owner of the four sheaths.

From this it follows, the soul is not only the knower (Jñātā) but also agent (Kartā) and experient (bhoktā). While the terms bhoktā and kartā signify the psychological or conscious side of the soul, the term prāṇa which is also an adjunct of the soul signifies its unconscious side.

To these comparatively permanent adjuncts of it should be added the material body, which alone is replaced at every birth. These three together - the body, prāṇa and manas, form a sort of 'empirical home' for the soul. The conscious side of the soul's activity is carried on by the manas with the aid of ten indriyas - five of knowledge, viz. cakṣus, śrottra, tvak, ghrāṇa and rasanā, which are respectively the organs of...
sight, hearing, touch, smell, and flavour; and five of action — vāk, pāṇi, pāda, pāyu, and upaṣṭha, which are respectively the organs of speech, holding, moving, excretion and generation.6

The functions of ten indriyas are controlled and directed by manas, according to the Upaniṣads. As the central organ of consciousness, “It co-ordinates the impressions received from outside through the former (five senses of knowledge) and also resolves, when necessary upon acting with the aid of one or other of the five organs of action.”7

Just because the soul is said to be agent and experient it does not follow, that it is subject to changes as is body or mind. According to the Upaniṣads, happiness and unhappiness, peace and anger, love and hatred and other limitations are only temporary adjuncts of the soul, and, while they cannot be escaped, as they are the results of our karma, they can ultimately be terminated by living a proper spiritual life. In other words, as the Chāndogya Upaniṣad says, the real soul is “free from evil, old age, death, grief, hunger and thirst ...”8

This soul is real, not only because it persists in all the four states, waking, dream, deep sleep and turīya (yogic intuition), but also because, being free from changes, it is immortal.9

The Vedāntins, especially Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva, have developed two distinct theories of self out of the Upaniṣads. According to Śaṅkara the Brahman realized in yogic intuition alone is real and plurality of
souls, therefore, is a myth; whereas according to both Rāmānuja and Madhva, the innumerable souls, which are independent of each other and from Brahman, are all real.

2. THE CĀRVĀKA CONCEPT:

The Cārvāka school seems to be very old, for it has been refuted by all other schools of Indian philosophy. The Indian tradition is in dark so far as the question whether Cārvāka is the name of a school or the name of the founder of the school, is concerned. No independent work of the Cārvāka school has come down to us, but many sūtras attributed traditionally to Brhaspati which are quoted by all opponent schools, only in order to refute them are believed to represent the philosophy of the Cārvākas. Therefore, our knowledge of the Cārvāka philosophy of the soul is a construct out of the opponents’ quotations.

The Upaniṣads conceive of a soul which is an eternal spiritual substance, capable of existing independently of the body, as, for example, in the state of mokṣa. As a spiritual substance, not only it is free from all the changes like birth, growth and decay which body is heir to, but also from death. The Cārvākas reject the substantival view of a spiritual entity on the ground that “there is no evidence for any soul distinct from the body”.¹⁰ What they mean is that there is neither any perceptual evidence, in which alone they have trust, nor the evidence provided by inference (anumāna), nor verbal testimony (śabda), in which they have no trust.
The Indian dualists, like Sāṅkhya, the Jainas, and theists, like Rāmānuja and Madhva and western dualists like Descartes, make a distinction between the conscious souls and the unconscious matter. But the material monists like Cārvākas wipe out this line of distinction and reduce all psychology to physiology. For them all things in the universe including vijñāna (intelligence or consciousness) are compounds of the same four material elements, namely, earth, water, fire and air. To the probable question raised by others as to how inorganic and unconscious matter produces consciousness, their reply is that “from these (four elements) alone, when transformed into the body, intelligence is produced, just as the inebriating power (mada-śakti) is developed from the mixing of certain ingredients”, such as kīrṇa and others, or just as red colour is produced out of the combination of betel leaf, areca nut and lime. The ingredients that go into the making of body or stone are the same that go into the making of consciousness. Just as, taken separately lime or betel leaf cannot produce red colour, so also taken separately none of the elements can produce intelligence or a body or a stone. But when brought together fortuitously, i.e. without anybody’s conscious exertion, they manifest their power. Therefore, consciousness or soul is not a self-existing reality, but an attribute, a function, arising out of the association and dissociation of the four material elements.

The Cārvākas do recognize the difference between bodily activities (e.g. walking) and mental activities (e.g. thinking), but insist that they are not performed by two different entities, body and soul. The same organism
resulting from the combination of four elements, which performs such functions as breathing, walking, talking, etc., also performs such functions as thinking, feeling and willing. Mind is what matter does.

The Cārvākas further insist that decomposition of the material elements of the organism results in its death, whereupon its functions like breathing, walking, thinking, also cease. If consciousness results from the combination in certain proportion of material elements, decomposition of the body must mean destruction of consciousness. Therefore, the Cārvākas' rejection of the substantial view of the soul must logically imply rejection of hell, heaven and re-birth.

Now we may note the special features of the Cārvāka conception of soul that distinguish it from other conceptions. Firstly, for the dualists and the theists, soul is anādi (beginningless) and indestructible while for the Cārvākas it begins when the material element compose and is destroyed when the material elements decompose. Secondly, while for the former soul and matter are irreducibly different, for the Cārvākas soul is reducible to matter.

From this, it follows the Cārvākas conception of soul is far removed from spiritual or yogic life.

3. THE EARLY BUDDHIST CONCEPT:

By 'Early Buddhists' we mean the followers of three schools, namely, the Theravādins (or Sthaviravādins), the Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrāntikas, who are together called Abhidharma-followers and who are confirmed
realists. They reduce the whole world including human personality to seventy-five dharmas (elements of existence), of which seventy-two, interacting among themselves as causes and conditions, produce the varieties of physical objects and mental states. The Abhidharma schools have classified these dharmas in many ways, the simplest being, after the Jaina and the Sāṅkhya model, to classify them into nāma (mental) and rūpa (physical). But the Pāli texts generally classify them into five skandhas (aggregates), namely, (1) Rūpa-skandha, (2) Vedanā-skandha, (3) Sanjñā-skandha, (4) Vijñāna-skandha and (5) Saṃskāra-skandha. This classification answers to the two-fold classification, in the sense that, while rūpa-skandha stands for rūpa, the other four skandhas are divisions of nāma.

The skandha view may be briefly stated as follows:

1. Rūpa-skandha is the physical body, an aggregate of material elements of four kinds, earth, water, fire and air. The decomposition of the elements is death, whereupon the remaining aggregates move in a group to the next life where they get another rūpa-skandha (aggregate of material elements) in accordance with the karma of the individual.

2. Vedanā-skandha is an aggregate of innumerable feelings, some of which are happy ones, some unhappy ones, the rest being neither.

3. Sanjñā-skandha is a bundle of innumerable perceptions, which are classifiable into six types, perceptions of colour, those of sound, those of taste, those of smell, those of touch and those of mental entities, such as ideas, thoughts, images, etc.
4. **Vijñāna-skandha** is an aggregate of consciousness (vijñāna). Our consciousness is never found without an awareness of this or that object. It is in continuous process and is continuously changing in accordance with its changing perception. When it is not perceiving sound or smell or form, it is analyzing or recollecting earlier experiences.

5. **Saṃskāra-skandha** is an aggregate of our desires, wishes, urges, instincts, decisions, etc. which are directly or indirectly responsible for the formation (saṃskāra) of our personality. The group contains, according to Buddhists, not merely the present mental states of which we are conscious, but also the impressions of the past, including previous life or lives of which we are not directly conscious. The seeds of karma acquired in the previous life which fructify in this life are also included in this bundle, for they also unconsciously form our personality.

   After death, i.e. decomposition of rūpa-skandha, it is the vijñāna-skandha, which carries the other three skandhas to the next life, where, according to the karma, it gets a new rūpa-skandha.

   In order to understand fully the bundle theory of self we have to know in broad outlines at least two more Buddhist theories, which cohere with it, namely, Pratītya-samutpāda-vāda and kṣaṇika-vāda.

1. **Pratītya-samutpāda-vāda** is the theory that everything is an aggregate and that it has no independent existence. Events happen solely because causes and conditions come together. There is nothing which is not produced out of causes and conditions. Therefore, each thing depends directly or
indirectly, on other things. This is same as saying that things do not have own (sva) existence (bhāva).

2. Kṣapika-vāda (theory of momentariness) is the theory that everything is continuously changing. Rather, everything exists for a moment (kṣaṇa) only and ceases to be, and in the next moment another thing comes out of it. The flame of a lamp appears to be one, but in reality, it is a series of many successive flames, creating in us the illusion of a unity. Heraclitus would have said “Nobody can step into the same river twice”.

What is shocking is the Buddhists’ insistence that even the vijñāna (consciousness) continuously changes.

A combination of these three views implies

(1) that neither any single skandha, nor an aggregate of two or all corresponds to the soul conceived in the Upaniṣads;

(2) that the vijñāna, which perceives, etc.,is also continuously changing or being destroyed each moment;

(3) that, the vijñāna is not a self-existing entity, but a combination.

This conception of soul is very effectively brought out in a conversation between Nāgasena, a Buddhist learned monk and Menander, a Greek who ruled the Indus region and Gangetic valley between circa 125-95 B.C. recorded in the Milinda-panha (The Questions of Menander). Nāgasena, comparing human personality to a chariot, emphasizes the point that just as the yoke or seat or flagpost or wheel or axle is not chariot, so
also none of the skandhas is soul; just as the name “chariot” does not refer to a self-existing object, but is only a name representing the group of parts like wheels, yoke, flagpost, axle, so also the name “soul” does not refer to a self-exciting spiritual substance, but is only a name which refers to a group of five groups (skandhas).

It is worth noting that though the Buddhists do not believe in a permanent spiritual substance, they do believe in karma and rebirth. Their belief in human personality as an aggregate of momentary aggregates is still coherent with karma and rebirth.

4. THE JAINA CONCEPT:

The Jainas, like the Sāṅkhyaśas, divide the entire existence into two broad classes, namely, Jīva (soul) and Ajīva [non-spirit, namely, pudgala (matter), dharma (medium of motion), adharma (medium of rest), ākāśa (space) and kāla (time)] They attribute existence (astitva), functionality (vastutva), changeability (dravyatva), individuality (aguru-laghutva) and pradeśatva (spatiality) to both spiritual and non-spiritual entities alike. Unconsciousness and concreteness (mūrtatva) are the special features of material entities, while consciousness (upayoga) is the special feature of jīva alone.

The Jainas think that nothing new is created and whatever exists has been existing from the beginningless past. Things, including souls, have permanent existence, but undergo changes. Only in this sense can we speak
of birth and death of man and animals, and creation of objects like pot (out of clay), chair (out of wood), and etc.

Soul (jīva), according to the Jainas, is an uncreated spiritual substance and as such is distinguished on the one hand, from the soul of the Cārvākas which is composed out of material atoms, and, on the other, from the Buddhist soul which is a composite of both material aggregates (rūpa-skandha) and non-material aggregates (the remaining four skandhas). Consciousness cannot be separated from jīva and in this sense the Jaina view is opposed to the Naiyāyika view that consciousness is an adventitious attribute of the soul.

Jainism believes in plurality of jīvas, all of which are more or less similar. They differ only on account of their association with body, senses, etc., and the karmas. However, pure souls, which are similar to each other, cannot be encountered in the empirical life, just as we cannot come across an isolated atom; and just as an isolated atom is not a myth, a pure jīva is not a myth. The concept of a pure jīva is logically not at all incoherent. The souls we come across are all empirical or bound.

Vādideva, a noted Jaina author, describes the empirical soul in the following words:

The soul which is proved by direct experience (pratyakṣa), etc., is the knower (pramātā). It is essentially conscious, changing, agent (kartā), direct enjoyer (bhoktā), equal in extent to its own body, different in each body, and possessor of material karmas.
The term “possessor of material karmas” (Karma - pudgala) implies that the body in which a soul is housed is made up of karma, which again implies matter (pudgala) gathered due to karma. All souls are bound to bodies which are made up of karma-matter (karma - pudgala).

Since the soul is an agent (kartā), whenever it does an act, it gathers karma-pudgala, which remains with it till it fructifies. On fructification, the karma particles leave it, and since by then the soul has already done various acts, there will be a new influx of karma matter. This goes on, until it is stopped by means of a spiritual life.

Another peculiar theory of the Jainas is that the embodied souls have extension (size and shape) in proportion to the bodies in which they reside.

The Sāṅkhyaśas, in order to safeguard the purity of the soul (Puruṣa), advance the theory that soul is neither agent not experient (bhokta). This implies that it does not change. But since the Jainas argue for the soul’s agency and enjoyership they have to conclude that the soul changes. Moreover, if it is extended, it must change, whenever the extension of the body changes.

The Jaina theory of extended soul means that it is present in every part of the body. Therefore, they reject the traditional theory that soul is in head or heart. If the soul is in heart or head or in any other particular part of the body, they ask, how can it feel pain in the remaining parts of the body?

The Jainas, like the Upaniṣadic thinkers, Buddhists and the Sāṅkhyaśas, propose that the bondage of the soul to its body is beginningless, but not
endless. Because by removing the existing karma-pudgala and stopping the influx of the new ones, by living a proper spiritual life, one can terminate the bondage and attain nirvāṇa (liberation).

The soul in its pure state is believed to possess four infinites (ananta-catuṣṭaya), namely, ananta jñāna (infinite knowledge), ananta darśana (infinite perception), ananta vīrya (infinite power) and ananta sukha (infinite bliss). However, these are obscured, not destroyed, in its worldly state. On the attainment of nirvāṇa, the soul regains them.

The Jainas are of the opinion that not only man and animals, but also plants have soul. They distinguish the souls on the basis of the number of senses they have. Plants have only one sense (touch); worms have two senses, touch and taste; ants, etc. have three senses, touch, taste and smell; bees and the like have vision in addition to these three; and vertebrates have all the five senses.

5. SĀṆKHYA-YOGA CONCEPT:

Admitting that Yoga for much of its metaphysics depends on the classical Sāṅkhya, expounded by Īśvara Kṛṣṇa, Vijñāna Bhikṣu and others, we can safely say that the Yoga view of the self is more or less the same as the Sāṅkhya view. Sāṅkhya-Yoga, like Jainism, is a dualist system, for it recognizes two entities, Prakṛti (matter) and Puruṣa (spirit), which exist eternally and independently of each other. The system, perhaps in order to oppose the Cārvākas, have advanced a fivefold argument for the existence of the Puruṣa (soul) which is spiritual, uncreated, simple, and immortal.
The first argument, called Saṅghātapaṁśatvat, is that since all compounds – senses, antahkaraṇa, the material body, the subtle body, Prakṛti- suggest that they are for others, i.e., Puruṣas (selves). The second called trigunādīviparyayat, states that existence of the three guṇas (sattva, rajas, tamas) suggests that there must be a Puruṣa which is above them (nistraigunya). The third argument called adhiṣṭhānāt is that all experience (knowledge) presupposes a substratum (adhiṣṭhāna), which the Puruṣa is. Without adhiṣṭhāna, the different experiences of an individual would be without unity and belongingness, and would fall apart. Soul is the co-ordinator of different experiences. The fourth argument, called bhoktrtvat, means that since the Prakṛti is meant for being experienced there must be an experient (bhoktā). The Prakṛti, though unconscious, can produce in us the feelings of happiness, unhappiness; and bewilderment, which have any meaning only if there is Puruṣa, which has these feelings. The fifth argument is that people desire for liberation (kaivalya), therefore, there must be Puruṣa who requires liberation. Īśvara Kṛṣṇa defines Puruṣa as witness, free from misery (kaivalyam), neutral (mādhyaastham), subject (draṣṭāra) and non-agent (akartā). (Saṅkhyā Kārikā –19) 18

The Puruṣa in itself is beyond the three guṇas. The senses and the antahkaraṇas help it have knowledge, but that which thinks is buddhi, that which decides is manas; etc. However, since they are in nature unconscious, they cannot produce any psychological activity (thinking, deciding, etc.) unless they are related to Puruṣa, the conscious principle. Just as a glass of milk appears red when a red stone is immersed in it, so also in its
association with the Puruṣa, the ego mistakes itself to be Puruṣa. In actuality puruṣa is a silent witness (sākṣi). "Being a disinterested bystander, as it were, it is a witness like the arbitrator called upon to decide a dispute".  

The human personality is constituted of three guṇas which by their very nature produce pleasure, pain and indifference. But since Puruṣa is not a product of Prakṛti (or triguṇas) it is free from these feelings. It is kevala and mādhyastha. Pleasure and pain belong to buddhi. If pleasure or bliss (ānanda) is the constituent of Puruṣa, bondage is impossible, or at least, liberation is not necessary; if pain is the constituent of Puruṣa, liberation would be impossible.

The three guṇas by their permutations and combinations produce various things. But since Puruṣa is not a product of triguṇas he cannot produce anything. That is, he is not kartā (agent). “Actual agency belongs to antaḥkaraṇa, or the inner organ, which is lighted up by Puruṣa. The unconscious antaḥkaraṇa cannot by itself be the agent, but it is invested with consciousness. This investment or illumination of antaḥkaraṇa consists in a particular conjunction of it with consciousness, which is eternally shining; consciousness does not pass into the antaḥkaraṇa, but is only reflected in it. This conjunction of Puruṣa with Prakṛti is of course not a permanent one”.

It is because of the Puruṣa’s nature of eternal illumination (sadāprakāśasvarūpa), we perceive objects. In the absence of Puruṣa objects are not illumined (known).
Like Jainas, but unlike the Advaitins, the Sāṅkhya-Yoga philosophers uphold the plurality of souls.

If there were only one spirit, birth and death should be one for the whole universe. So too, if one person be blind or deaf, all others should be blind or deaf, and when one engages in activity, all others should engage in the same activity at the same time. We do see, however, that people are born and die at different times, are variously endowed and vary in their modes of activity. Hence, there must be a plurality of spirits. It must be noted that by birth and death we do not mean the coming into being or the destruction of spirit itself, for that, being non-composite, is not subject to change. Birth is the association of spirits with bodies, death is their dissociation. It may be suggested that spirit is one and that bodily changes alone constitute birth and death. This, however, will not hold water; for, then, we should have to say of a person who lost his hand that he is dead or of a girl physically maturing into womanhood that she is then born, as we have a loss of a physical form in the former case and the creation of one in the latter. Hence, birth and death consist in association with and dissociation from spirit. Since they occur at different times in different places, there must be a plurality of spirits.\textsuperscript{22}
Similarly, if there were only one self, bondage of one would mean bondage of all (such that no body is liberated) and liberation of one would mean liberation of all (such that nobody is bound). Moreover, different peoples’ experiences of different feelings- of happiness, unhappiness, etc.- also prove the reality of plurality of selves.

The Śaṅkhya-Yoga upholds qualitative monism which is not opposed to quantitative pluralism. In other words, the souls are many because of their vaidharmya (individuality) and there is no relation of akhaṇḍatā (oneness) among them.

6. THE ADVAINA CONCEPT :

The Upaniṣadic practice of using the word “ātman” to refer to both the individual self and to Brahmān is extended into Vedānta also, especially Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara and Śaṅkarites actually use the word ātman ambiguously for two reasons. (1) The word is a synonym of “Brahman”. (2) Ātman is itself identified with Brahmān at a certain level of experience. The two reasons are in fact mutually related, in the sense that ātman is essentially identical to Brahmān, and so the two words are used synonymously. However let us reserve the word “ātman” to refer to the individual self or jīvātman and “Brahman” to refer to the world-soul (Viśvātma).

Śaṅkara’s basic presupposition is that there is only one reality, Brahmān, who is “one without a second” (ekamevādvitiyaṃ). This Brahmān is featureless (nirguṇa) and infinite (ananta), consciousness.
This stand of Śaṅkara obviously gives rise to two questions (1) “Does Śaṅkara admit the existence of a material world?” and (2) “Does he at least admit the existence of spiritual substances similar to Brahman?”.

Śaṅkara is of the opinion that there is no world apart from Brahman, because if it existed it would be a second reality and such a position would contradict his Advaita (non-dualism). If at all the world exists, as is proved by sense experience it does so only till we attain jñāna, where-upon we realize that only Brahman exists and appears as world to the avidyā infected mind. Just as dream objects are regarded as real as long as dream lasts so also the world is regarded as real as long as avidyā lasts; just as coming to the waking state we realize the unreality of the dream objects so also on attaining knowledge (parā vidyā), we realize the illusoriness of the world.

Ātman: The individual souls or jīvātmans are, according to Śaṅkara, neither distinct entities from Brahman nor something similar to him. For him ātman is in essence Brahman but as jīvātman it is not Brahman because the jīvātman, also sometimes called Vijnānatman,, is subject to change, whereas, paramātman (Brahman) does not undergo any change. Ātman’s essential identity with Brahman is upheld by the Upaniṣadic maxims (mahāvākyas), such as “Aham Brahmasmi”, “Tattvamasi”, etc.

Jīvātma is Brahman conditioned by adjuncts like ignorance (avidyā), body, senses etc. Jīva is associated with (1) gross body made up of five gross elements, (2) subtle body (sūkṣma śārīra) made up of 17 ingredients, namely, five sense organs, five motor organs, five vital organs (prāṇas), intellect and mind and (3) causal body (kāraṇa śārīra) which carries the
seeds of karma and beginningless avidyā. Karana śarira is more permanent than sūkṣma-śarīra, for the latter changes from life to life, whereas the carrier of karma and avidyā is the same always. The gross body is still less permanent than the sūkṣma-śarīra.

"It is the relation of ātman to the upādhis (adjuncts) of body, senses, mind and sense object that accounts for its phenomenal character"23 Because of ignorance jivātman has forgotten its original nature as identical to Brahman and has came to wrongly think that it is an individual soul separated from Brahman, bound to a body-mind complex and subject to bodily and mental suffering. According to Śaṅkara, not only such a soul is not real or pure soul but also the very conception of such a soul is wrong based on avidyā.

"Because of the ātman’s relation to antaḥkaraṇa, it thinks it is the knower (subject) but if we take Brahman as the essence of the individual soul, the soul is not the subject. In other words, for the Brahman to become sākṣin the antaḥkaraṇa is responsible.

The soul in itself is not an agent but because of its association with body, senses, antaḥkaraṇa’s and owing to avidyā, man wrongly thinks that his soul is an agent. “This activity of the soul depends only on the qualities of upādhis being ascribed to it and not to its own nature.”24

"Because the ātman is an agent it has to experience the results of its action” 25 “In each individual self we have, besides the cognitive, emotional and connative experience, the witness self or sākṣin.”26

In what sense is a jīva Brahman – Śaṅkara does not say the jīva, as jīva, is Brahman. He prefers to say that every jīva is a potential Brahman.
He does not say “that you become” rather he says “that you are”. This implies that a jīva does not undergo any process of becoming, it only realizes its potentiality. Śaṅkara in order to illustrate this point employs the analogy of space and its parts. Just because we see different sizes and shapes of space in different pots, jugs, etc. we cannot conclude that the spaces are really many. That plurality of space is a myth is shown by the fact that when pots, jugs etc. are broken, the space parts in them merge in the space at large, without undergoing any transformation. Similarly, the individual souls housed in different body-mind complexes are not real parts of Brahman, the individuals because of their ignorance wrongly resume that they are different from Brahman as well as from one another.

How does the individual soul come in contact with avidyā? An Advaitin would say that only an avidyā-infected mind would ask such a question because the question wrongly presupposes (1) that there was a time when the soul was pure, (2) that some external conditions imposed avidyā on Brahman as a result of which he became a jīva, (jñātā, kartā and bhoktā) and (3) that as a result of this it was caught in the cycle of births and deaths.

Avidyā according to Śaṅkara is anādi. Its beginninglessness may be explained in the following way. It is meaningless to ask, whether dream is earlier or appearance of dream objects, because dream and appearance of dream objects are simultaneous, such that one without the other is impossible. So also whenever an individual thinks that he is different from Brahman, that he is different from other souls, that he is limited by upādhīs, that he is a kartā and bhoktā, he is said to be governed by avidyā. It is not
that being affected by avidyā and wrongly thinking about Brahman are successive. In actuality avidyā is anādi (beginningless). It is related to or seated in buddhi (intellect) which endures perennially throughout the soul’s journey in samsāra until the relation is strained by knowledge or para vidyā leading to liberation.

So in the ultimate or metaphysical sense plurality of self is a myth, body and senses are a myth.

7. VIŚIŚṬĀDVAITA CONCEPT:

The Viśiśṭādvaita conception of soul is constructed out of three sources, (prasthānatraya), namely, the principal Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā and Bādarāyaṇa’s Brahma-Sūtras. The basic presupposition of Rāmānuja, the greatest exponent of Viśiśṭādvaita, is that Brahman is not featureless (nirguṇa), but has viāśeṣaṇās (attributes), namely, the jīvas (individual souls) which are cid-vastus (spiritual substances) and Prakṛti (matter), which is acit (unconscious). For this reason Brahman is described as cidacidviśiśṭa (qualified by spiritual and material entities). According to Rāmānuja, the individual souls (jīvas) can never become Brahman, but are always dependent on him like quality (Viśeṣaṇa) on a substance.

While the Cārvākas deny the existence of any other thing than the physical body, the Viśiśṭādvaitins argue that there is jīva, which is not only different from body, but also from the sense organs, the mind and prāṇa and intellect (buddhi). (Dehendriya-manaḥ-prañadhībyo anyaḥ) (Vedānta Deśika’s Ātmaseddhi. p.8.)27
In *Tattva-muktā-kalāpa*, it is argued that whenever what is seen is also touched, the individual remembers that the same object is both seen and touched. But awareness of the sameness of the object is not possible without the sameness (self-identity) of the self. Because the senses themselves cannot see or touch. Only ātman, with the help of the instruments like eyes, ears, etc. is able to perceive, combine the perceptions, etc. Nor is manas the jīva, because manas, being a product of Prakṛti, is unconscious (jaḍa). In fact, it is also an instrument (*karana*) for the self. “What is a *karana* for an agent cannot itself be the agent (*kartā*)”.

Jīva is the subject of knowledge (jñātā). While for the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas the soul is an insentient entity, having consciousness as its adventitious attribute, for the Viśiṣṭādvaitins the jīva is a spiritual substance which is of the nature of knowledge (jñānasvarūpa). Moreover, it also possesses jñāna as an essential attribute. That means that jīva, which is of the nature of knowledge (jñānasvarūpa) is the substrate (adhiśṭhāna) of knowledge. Or, jñāna is a dharma (attribute) of ātman and soul is the dharma (jñāṇāśraya). In other words, the soul is essentially a knower. The soul which is self-luminous also illumines objects.

Its self-luminosity (svayamprakāśatva) is revealed in statements like ‘I slept happily’. That is, even when the antahakaranas were inactive (sleeping) there was a self-awareness (svayamprakāśatva).

Against the Cārvākas the Viśiṣṭādvaitins advance the argument that the soul is eternal. When we speak of peoples’ birth and death, what should
be meant is, not that the souls are born and die, but that the souls get new bodies and shed old ones.

Vedānta Deśika speaking against the Buddhist theory of continuously changing (or dying) soul, argues that if an ātman continuously dies, then achievement of success is impossible, because by the time we come to the next stage of our effort, the earlier soul is destroyed and therefore, the one who enjoys the fruits must be different than the one who made efforts.

To avoid this difficulty we should assume the eternality of soul. Even after mokṣa, the soul does not become extinct. They do exist, though in a different world, and without gross body and selfishness.

The soul remains unchanged and retains its identity through the chain of innumerable births and deaths, what is destroyed is body-sense-mind complex and never its original nature as consciousness.

The individual self is not only jñātā, but also agent (kartā) and enjoyer (bhokta) of happiness and unhappiness. Since it does karma, it must experience the fruits of karma. However, neither any experience, nor any deed, nor any feeling of pain or pleasure is going to change the nature of the self. The self is in reality immutable. Vedānta Deśika argues that “As jīva is the āśraya for such states of experience it is regarded as bhokta or enjoyer of pleasure and pain. The change involved in such mental dispositions applies to the attributive knowledge and not to jīva”.31 It must be noted that if the jīvātman is a doer and experient, it is solely because it is endowed with instruments like senses and antahkaraṇas. Just as it sees through the eyes
(and eyes do not see) it holds, walks, etc. through the motor organs, so also it enjoys through buddhi (and buddhi does not enjoy).

In order to be faithful to the scriptural texts the Viśiṣṭādvaitins advocate the theory that the soul is āṇu (atomic), and it exists in the heart.

"In spite of the atomic size of the jīva, through its attributes of knowledge which expands and contracts, it is able to feel pleasure and pain all over the body, even as the flame of the lamp, though tiny in itself, illumines many things by means of its light, which is capable of contraction and expansion".32

Each soul is a place of God. But the indwelling God does not deprive the jīva of its freedom. However, "the mere effort of the individual soul is not enough for action. The cooperation of the supreme spirit is also necessary"33 This does not mean that for whatever man does – good or bad – God is responsible.

Can a bound soul be free? This question is very important philosophically. If the soul is bound according to its karma, how can it act violating the principles of bondage? If it acts in accordance with the principles of its bondage, how can it be free? The Viśiṣṭādvaitins come out with a solution to this paradox.

An individual as the primary agent of action (kartā) is free to act independently even though the past karma may have influence on him. He is free to overcome the good or bad effects of the karma by making a sincere effort in the right
direction with the exercise of the mental and physical powers given to him by God and guidance provided through the sacred texts.\textsuperscript{34}

Viśiṣṭādvaitins believe in the plurality of eternal jīvas, which are different not only from Brahman, but also from each other. Plurality of selves is proved by the fact that different people have different knowledge, memory, desire, pain and pleasure, different environments as results of karma. The fact that different people have different experiences also proves plurality of selves. Difference between experiences, between memories of past life, etc. cannot be adequately explained by either body or mind, because body and mind are both products of Prākṛti which is unconscious (jaḍa)\textsuperscript{35}

There are three kinds of souls – (1) nitya mukta (those that dwell in vaikunṭha, e.g. Lakṣmī), (2) the freed (mukta) and those who deserve mokṣa, (3) the baddha (bound) souls which wander in samsāra owing to their ignorance\textsuperscript{36}

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