CHAPTER-II

CONCEPT OF ABSOLUTE IN TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHY, UPANISHADS, BHAGAVADGITA AND INDIAN SYSTEMS

2.1 Introduction

When we cast a glance at the development of Indian Idealism we are confronted by an idea of highest reality beyond all forms of characterization, which is Brahman. The discussion about the nature of Brahman is time immemorial. Not only Greek or Indian philosophy but science and religion are also concerned with the nature of Ultimate Reality.

In the Rgveda and Purusasukta hymn for the first time we come across the concept of a universal being as a creator and sustainer of this world. According to one hymn of Atharvaveda all is God, but God is above all. The Vedic vision of reality is that of a cosmological God. The forces of nature are personified by the Vedic sages. Later on these forces are treated as real god as a form of personal Purusa who is immanent and transcendent of the world. The Upanishads developed this Purusa. The Upanishadic sages affirm that in the light of this highest Purusa all our actions must be judged. It is because of the work of divine principle that the systematic development is possible. The Upanishadic idea of highest Reality is more clearly preserved in the Vedantic system than in Buddhism.

Brahman is derived from the root brh, which means to burst forth, to expand. So etymologically it means that world is a manifestation of Brahman. Due to the limitation of mind we are unable to know that object of knowledge is nothing but Brahman. All this is Brahman (Sarvam khalu idam Brahman). This is the true significance of life, as because man’s perfection lies in the discovery of Ultimate Reality.

Aurobindo was born and brought up in this type of idealistic atmosphere, so necessarily was influenced by this concept. By considering the traditional idea about absolute and with the help of his mystic vision he gives a new concept of Absolute which is able to fulfill the demand of time.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to depict a brief description of various Indian idealistic views on the concept of Brahman and to discuss whether
Aurobindo was really successful in attempting to describe the concept of Absolute scientifically over the traditional Indian philosophical concepts or not.

2.2 Upanishadic concept of Brahman

The Upanishads carry with it the germ of the Vedas and stand as a highest point of Vedas and are therefore called, Vedanta. Etymologically the term, Upanishads mean to ‘sit’ (sad) ‘close by’ (upa) ‘devotedly’ (ni). The word therefore means the sitting down of the disciple near his teacher in a devote manner to receive instruction about Absolute which loosens all doubts and destroys all ignorance of the disciple. So the Upanishads indicates that the sacred and secret knowledge about the highest reality is attainable through an intimate relation between teacher and the pupil. Aurobindo says, the idea of transcendental Unity, behind all the change and variety of phenomenal life is the basic idea of the Upanishads which is the pivot of all Indian metaphysics, the sum and goal of our spiritual experience. The Vedic attempt was significant, in so far as it underlined the need to explain the apparent diversity, by seeking to ground it in the unity of an ultimate spiritual principle. The Vedic philosophers personified the terrible and destructive aspects of nature and began to worship them. This naturalistic and anthropomorphic polytheism gradually yielded place to monotheism and the latter to monism. The transitional stage from polytheism to monotheism is called as henotheism by Max Muller. As Max Muller says,

“To identify Indra, Agni and Varuna is one thing, it is syncretism, to address either Indra or Agni or Varuna, as for the time being the only god in existence with an entire forgetfulness of all other gods, is quite another, and it was this phase, so fully developed in the hymns of the veda, which I wished to mark definitely by a name of its own, calling it Henotheism.”

But this henotheism can be considered as outcome more of the play of poetic imagination than philosophic insight. But henotheism cannot be considered as a key note of vedic philosophy. What is given by our senses is a mere multiplicity but the aim of philosophy is to arrive at a transcendent spiritual principle, which is but one, the sages call that one in many ways, they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan. So in the later vedic period the omnipotence, a characteristic of all gods, becomes personified as the Highest under the name of visvakarman. He is the maker of all things, the great
architect of the universe. That Upanishadic Absolute is not only the ultimate ground of all being and beings, but also the ultimate truth of one’s inmost being.

“These are but the chief forms of the Supreme, the immortal, the bodiless Brahman. To whichever one each man is devoted here, in his world he rejoices. For it has been said, ‘Verily this whole world is Brahman’ Verily, these, which are its chief forms one meditates upon, worships and discards. For with this one moves higher and higher in the worlds. And when all things perish (in universal dissolution), he attains unity of (with) the person, yea, of the person.”

The Vedic conception of reality as - that one – is sought to be replaced in the Upanishads by the absolute unity of – only the one without the other.

The Ultimate Reality may be viewed from two aspects. From the subjective side this ultimate reality is called Atman and viewed from the objective aspect, it is Brahman. Atman and Brahman are identical. Absolute manifests itself as subject and object and transcends both.

2.2.1. Atman

The individual self is different in nature from the body, the senses, the mind and intellect. The soul, the Atman is not born, nor dies. Atman is unborn, eternal, and primeval. The soul is not slain when the body is slain. The self is the knower and enjoyer. The self is without beginning and end. It is self – proved. The self is by essence different from senses, mind, intellect, feeling and will. The self is the ultimate source of the outer world and the inner self of man. Though entirely different in their original connotation and though occasionally bearing it still in prevailingly used as synonymous – each signifying alike the eternal source of the universe including nature as well as man.

The word ‘Atman’ originally meant life-breath and then gradually acquired the meaning of soul or self. We find a progressive development of the concept of the true self in a dialogue between Prajapati and Indra, narrated in the Chandogya Upanishad through the four stages of (1) the waking or bodily self, (2) Dreaming or the empirical self, (3) dreamless sleeping or the transcendental self, (4) Turiya or the Absolute self, Prajapati starts the instruction concerning the nature of true self by stating the general
characteristics of it. According to him the true self is that which is free from evil, old age, death, grief, hunger and thirst, and whose desire and thought are the real. He who has found out and understood the self, he obtains all worlds and all desires. Indra and Virocana from among the gods and demons respectively went forth to Prajapati to learn the teaching about the self. Then Indra and Virocana observed Brahmaarya for thirty two years as instructed by Prajapati and after that came to him. Prajapati taught them that, the person who is seen in the eye, who is perceived in water and in a mirror, he is the self. Though Virocana was satisfied, Indra remained dissatisfied and began to think. If the body is well-ornamented, well-dressed the self is also well-ornamented and well-dressed. If the body is blind or lame or maimed, the self also is blind, lame or maimed. The soul perishes immediately when the body perishes. So there is no good in this. Indra came near to Prajapati and told his discontentment. Then Prajapati told him that he who moves about happy in a dream, he is the self, he is immortal, the fearless. Indra again distrusted. Though the self does not suffer defect through the defect of body yet it appears as if this self is not free from fear. There is no good in this also. Indra approached Prajapati and expressed his doubts. Then Prajapati taught him that when one is having sound sleep, composed, serene, and knows no dreams – that is self. But Indra was again dissatisfied because in truth this self does not know himself that I am he, nor indeed the things here. He becomes one who has gone to destruction. So there is nothing enjoyable in this. Again he approached to Prajapati. Then Prajapati narrated him the real nature of self. The body, dream-experiences, dreamless sleeps are not the self, though they have meaning only for the self. The body, the changing mental states are all objects of the self. The self is the common ground of waking, dream, sleep, death, rebirth and final rescuer. The self is immortal as it is eternal, permanent, universal and both immanent and transcendent. The self is all inclusive. It is the final subject, which cannot be reduced to an object and which is fundamental principle of all knowledge. It is not the bundle of qualities called the “me”, but the ‘I’ which remains beyond and behind inspecting all these qualities.

During our waking hours we find that there is a continuous change in the conscious experiences – thinking, feeling and willing. The bodily or waking self identifies itself with body, so it perishes immediately when the body perishes. But the subject cannot be reduced to the object since all objects presuppose the existence of
the subject, nor it can be regarded as a mere product of matter. Dreams have been chosen by Prajapati as self, as it is immortal and fearless. There is no objective basis of perceptions in the dream state. The imagination occurs during dream state with all the vividness and liveliness of perception. Dream is a form of constructive imagination, because in it the images are combined in a new way to form a new experience. Dream, thus, may be said to be a form of creative imagination. So dream is a state of perception without sensation. But the self in waking as well as in dream state is changing at every moment. But the real self remains the same and lies behind the fleeting mental phenomena. Indra not being able to find anything enjoyable in bodily and dream self, anticipates Greek philosopher Heraclitus, empiricist Hume, Locke, subjective idealist Berkeley, Pragmatist William James and also some of the Buddhists and Bergson. According to Buddha, everything is impermanent and subject to the inexorable law of becoming or dependent origination. We cannot step twice into the same river according to Greek thinker Heraclitus. Locke also maintains that mind at birth is a tabula rasa upon which experiences writes. Mind is like a clean slate in the beginning. Hume says,

“When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception”

William James takes mind as a stream of consciousness which is interrelated. All these philosophers assume various changing perception that constitute the ‘bundle’ which we call self. Indra also admitted that the self in waking and in dreams is constantly changing. So it is impermanent and is subject to suffering. There is no permanent soul, what we get here is only an impermanent series of impermanent qualities with no personal identity. So Bradley rightly says that the self must be something beyond present time, and it cannot contain a sequence of contradictory variations. Indra thinks that in the deep sleep the self becomes an abstract entity as there are no objects of which we are conscious. Subject and object are always related. Kant’s famous saying “The understanding makes nature” has brought a Copernican revolution in philosophy. Percepts without concepts are blind and devoid of any significance; concepts without percepts are empty and devoid of any content. The discrete sensations supplied by experience are reduced to a unity by the synthetic
activity of the self. The celebrated contribution of Hegel is that, as he says the self is a single abiding subject manifesting in a plurality of states and activities and in and through these states realizes itself as a self-conscious and self-determining spirit. The self is neither a changeless substance, nor an aggregate of mental states, nor is it an abstract noumenal principle of unity above and beyond the mental phenomena. The self, apart from its manifestations in particular mental states, is meaningless. Equally meaningless is the aggregate of mental states apart from the unity of the self. The mind’s unity must express and realize itself in and through the changing conscious states and processes so that the unity along with the plurality of experience is the concrete mind or self. In fact the actual founder of this true Idealism was Prajapati. The true self is both immanent as well as transcendent for him. There is nothing outside it. It contains all consciousness of objects implicitly. The self is all inclusive. The subject is more than the world which is only imperfect manifestation of self. The self is the universal ground, the basic principle of all creation, and all other things of the world revolve round this universal akasa from which these all proceed. Without the self the other things also ceases to exist.

It is said in the Mandukya Upanishads that all this is, verily, Brahman. This self is Brahman. This same self has four quarters. The four states of self are waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep and Turiya. In the waking stage the individual self enjoys the objects of this world and in this stage it is called ‘Vishva’. In dreaming stage there is no external object of knowledge. It only knows the subtle internal objects and enjoys them through mind and it is called ‘Taijasa’. The third stage is the deep dreamless sleep, and is called Prajna. In this stage the self is devoid of any object or subject. It is one, uniform, conscious, bliss and transcends the subject – object duality. The forth stage is the Turiya. It is the stage which is without an element, neither conscious nor unconscious, with which there can be no dealing. It is one, without a second, non dual universal consciousness. This is the true self, which is the fundamental postulate of all existence and knowledge, self luminous, indescribable and intuition is the only way to realize Atman. It is symbolized by the Aumkara, with its parts ‘A-U-M, the waking, the dreaming and the sleeping states. Atman is the common ground of these three states and manifests itself through these, yet transcends them all. Waking, dreaming and deep-sleep states are unreal but not non-existent. All things exist within this Atman which is positive bliss.
2.2.2. Brahman

From the objective point of view the Ultimate Reality is called Brahman. The term Brahman has been derived from the root word Brh meaning to grow, to develop, to expand, to evolve. Originally the word used to denote sacrifices, then prayers and thereafter the Ultimate Reality that evolves the world from itself.

The essence and substratum of all things in the world, according to Upanishads is Brahman, Chandogya Upanishads describes Brahman as tajjalan.

"Sarvam khalu idam Brahman, tajjalan iti-verily, this whole world is Brahman, from which he comes forth, without which he will be dissolved and in which he breathes."⁴

In Taittiriya Upanishads the father Varuna teaches his son Bhrgu that matter, life, sight, hearing, mind speech all these are Brahman. Further he says that when beings are born, that by which when beings are born, that by which when born they live, that into which on deceasing they enter is Brahman. The real theory of evolution is given in the Taittiriya Upanishads which describes the course of evolution from the primal Atman through the five elements to the human person. The lowest level of evolution is that of body or matter (annamaya). The body and the sense-organs constitute the bodily sheath which is sustained by food. Brahman cannot rest content with matter, as matter is unconscious and dead. So the bodily sheath must be transformed into vital sheath (Pranamaya). The vital forces animate the body and vegetable life emerges. Breath is the life of all-beings. But the meaning of life is fulfilled only when mind is evolved. Volitions directed to selfish ends and the self is identified with consciousness. Consciousness is a common quality for all animals. But it is in an intra-relational stage. Instinct and reflex actions play strong role in this lower level. So higher consciousness has to be evolved which is self-conscious reason (Vijnanamaya). The intellectual sheath depends on the intellect and its functions, in it there is discriminative knowledge, dualistic relations prevails between knower and known, subject and object. The self is identified with the intellect in this stage. The relational, discriminative, dualistic intellect points to something higher and that is fifth, the highest state of evolution, the non-dual bliss (Anandamaya). In this stage the
self is full of bliss and without distinction of subject and object. Bliss is the essence of self. Bliss is Brahman, Brahman is the inner core of the empirical self, yet transcends all. The matter, life, mind, reason are not lost in this stage but they are simply transformed in the higher. All the things of the world -- whether animate or inanimate are born of bliss, are maintained by bliss and ultimately return to bliss. Matter and individual souls are its body and it is their soul. According to the Upanishads this self, is the lord of all beings and all others like beings, gods, worlds, all breathing creatures, are held together in this self.

2.2.3. Brahman and Atman

The Ultimate Reality is called Atman and Brahman viewed from the subjective and objective aspects respectively. The Brahman and Atman are identical. Absolute manifests itself as subject and object and transcends both. The Upanishadic teaching identifies the subject and object, the self and not-self, object and subject by saying that, - ‘That thou art’ (tat tvam asī), ‘I am that’, ‘I am non-dual bliss’ etc. The Absolute manifests itself as subject and object, self and not-self and overcomes and transcends the opposition between them and comprehends them. The different stages of Atman correspond to the different conceptions of Brahman. In subject we find the waking, dreaming, dreamless sleeping as lower stage and the fourth the turiya or Ananda is the highest state. This Atman is known as Brahman which is a non-dual universal consciousness, where subject and object become one. In the dreamless stage the Atman identifies itself with the self-conscious individual. The subject here is an abstract entity devoid of object. Brahman is viewed as self-conscious Ishvara. When the Atman is identified with the subtle internal objects and mind, Brahman is reduced to the Hiranyagarbha. The Hiranyagarbha is related to the world in the same way as the individual soul is related to its body. Brahman is reduced to cosmos or the virat, when we identify the Atman with our body. Virat is the all-inclusive whole. The whole scheme can be described as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject (Atman)</th>
<th>Object (Brahman)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The bodily Self (Visva)</td>
<td>1. Cosmos (Virat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The vital self (Taijasa)</td>
<td>2. The soul of the world (Hiranyagarbha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The intellectual self (Prajna)</td>
<td>3. Self-Consciousness (Ishvara)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Brahman is the essence of all existence. In the beginning Brahman was all alone without a second. Then it thought to become many and ultimately Brahman evolved itself in this world. Brahman manifests itself as both self and not-self, subject and object yet transcends them all. So Ultimate Reality is both transcendent and immanent of the world.

The Upanishads describe Brahman as having two aspects — one devoid of qualifying characters — acosmic Brahman or Brahman without any attribute and other with characteristics-cosmic Brahman or Brahman endowed with attributes.

(I) Brahman as cosmic (Saprapanca): → as a cosmic, Brahman is Saguna, all comprehensive, full of good qualities. Brahman as the cosmic is attributed with name and form and is immanent in the world. Cosmic Brahman is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. Brahman is that from which the things of the world come into existence, by which they are supported and into which they are reabsorbed. So Brahman is described here as the cause of production, maintenance and destruction of this universe. The world with all things is the body of God who is their soul. God is not only the soul of nature but He is also the soul of souls. The souls are souls in relation to their bodies, but in relation to God they become His body and He is their soul. This concept of Upanishads highly influenced the philosophy of Ramanuja. So Brahman is not only the ground and sustainer of the world but also the inmost essence of one's higher self.

In the cosmic aspect, the Upanishadic thinkers try to show that Brahman is an all inclusive unity of the matter and spirit. Brahman is the base of the physical universe; on the other hand it is the essence of the spirit. The apparent dualism of the matter and spirit is resolved in the transcendent unity of Brahman.

(II) Brahman as acosmic: → the acosmic Brahman is the Turiya, or Fourth, indeterminate, indescribable and anirvachaniya. It has no limiting adjuncts. It is beyond space, time, and causality. It is a complete unity of subject and object. This self-luminous Brahman is the presupposition of all affirmations and denials. Brahman is without beginning and end, eternal, permanent, and is not affected by any change. It is existence, knowledge and bliss. Existence, knowledge and bliss are not the
attributes of Brahman, but these are the essence of Brahman. But the nature of this Brahman is not attainable by our intellect. It is not the subject of our consciousness. So Yajnavalkya describes it in a negative way

"That, O Gargi, the knowers of Brahman, call the Imperishable. It is neither gross nor fine, neither short nor long, neither glowing red (like fire) nor adhesive (like water). (It is) neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, unattached, without taste, without smell, without eyes, without ears, without voice, without mind, without radiance, without breath, without a mouth, without measure, having no within and no without. It eats nothing and no one eats it."5

Lest this description should be mistaken as pure nothing, Yajnavalkya adds immediately that, there is nothing outside of Ultimate Reality which it may see, and the assumption of ultimate as non-entity lead to the impossibility of the world of appearance so, whatever is, owes its being to this transcendental reality.

It must be admitted that the acosmic and cosmic Brahman are not two different entities; they are only two aspects of the same reality. The saprapanca conception must be understood negatively as that the world is not outside of Brahman and the nisprapanca conception positively as that Brahman is more than the world. Acosmic Brahman is the basis of the cosmic Brahman. Cosmic Brahman is immanent in the world and is conditioned by Maya, the inscrutable power by which Brahman conceals its real nature. The cosmic Brahman is both immanent and transcendent to the world. Man encased in his body and attached to passions, cannot mediate upon Impersonal Brahman. Upanishads have provided also for a personal Brahman. He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. Only by knowing Brahman does one can pass over death. There is no other path for going there.

The Ultimate Reality is not an abstract entity, it is concrete. The Absolute is the fullest Reality, which is all-inclusive, ‘AUM’, the syllable, truly, is Brahman. It also used to represent the whole world. So ‘AUM’ brings out the complete and concrete nature of Brahman. The Brahma (creator) Vishnu (preserver) and Shiva (destroyer) are the three personal form of the Ultimate Reality. And ‘A’, ‘U’, ‘M’, stand for ‘Brahma’, ‘Vishnu’ and ‘Shiva’ respectively. Brahman is the identity in difference. Absolute is the ground of all finites. The world is the external form of the Absolute,
so the external world and individual are real. The Absolute is neither the infinite nor
the finite, but is the real including and transcending the self and its realization, life
and its expression.

2.2.4. Brahman and World

The world, according to the Upanishads, is the manifestation of Brahman. The
world originates in Brahman, is sustained through Him and culminates into Him.
Brahman is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. Nothing can be the cause
of the world except Brahman. Physical world is the differentiation of names and
forms which is emerged from Brahman. Brahman is all-pervading. The universe
arises here from the imperishable, as the hair grows on the head, as herbs grow on the
earth. Breath, mind, space, all the senses, earth, fire, moon, rain, all creatures are
produced from Him. The seas, mountains, rivers, everything in the world originate
from Him. Just as the spider creates the web and then takes it back inside it, similarly
Brahman creates the world and then takes it back inside Him. Brahman is the sole
reality, and both material and efficient cause of the world. Brahman has not created
the world out of any pre-existent matter. The matter with which the creation starts is
itself a god. The one and universal was self-existent and nothing existed before the
self.

"He (the supreme soul) desired. Let me become many, let me be born. He
performed austerity. Having performed austerity he created all this,
whatever is here. Having created it, into it, indeed, he entered. Having
entered it, he became both the actual and the beyond, the defined and the
undefined, both the founded and the non-founded, the intelligent and the
non-intelligent, the true and the untrue."6

He created everything in this world. Ether was born out of self, the air originated in
ether, fire came out of air, the water was born in fire, the earth originated in water,
and finally from the earth came out the plants etc. Thus the world was in the Brahman
in the unmanifested form. He manifested and created the distinction of names and
forms. So namarupas are not real apart from Brahman. But this creation does not
affect Brahman. This gives the justification for that the individual and the world as it
is an appearance of Brahman.
Brahman is both immanent and transcendent of the world. In Svetasvatara Upanishad Brahman has been called Lord. He is also called Rudra. Rudra is the ruler of all, He is the source and origin of the gods, Brahman is that in whom this whole world comes together and dissolves, Brahman is seated in the heart of all creatures, who is the ultimate cause of living beings and material things. So Brhadaraṇyaka Upanishad says,

“The Brahma does not ignore one who knows him as different from the self. The Ksatriya ignores one who knows him as different from the self. The worlds ignore one who knows them as different from the self. The gods ignore one who knows them as different from the self. The beings ignore one who knows them as different from the self. This Brahmana, this Ksatriya, these worlds, these gods, these beings and this all are this Self.”

The world is not separate from Brahman. There is a relation of tadatmya between Brahman and the world. The world has no different existence apart from Brahman, Brahman and world are one.

2.2.5. Brahman and Maya

It is not right to maintain that the doctrine of Maya is unknown to the Upanishads. The seed of the illusion is already there, but all the features of it exhibit in Sankara’s Advaita. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad says that, Indra by his magic power (Maya) goes about in many forms; and his form corresponds with every form. In Prasna Upanishads it has been said that

“To them is that stainless Brahman-World, In whom there is no crookedness and falsehood, nor trickery.”

The Svetasvatara Upanishad said that

“What is perishable is the pradhana, (primary matter). What is immortal and imperishable is Hara (the Lord). Over both the perishable and the soul the one God rules. By meditating on Him, by uniting with Him, by reflecting on His being more and more, there is complete cessation from the illusion of the world”
On the strength of statements like these, some thinkers conclude that the Upanishads contain the seed of illusion theory. Though the Upanishads carry with it the reference of the illusion theory but the Upanishads do not support an abstract conception of the Ultimate Reality like advaitism. Deussen subscribes to the view that the Upanishads support the theory of illusion. He says that there are four different theories of creation in the Upanishads. They are (1) that matter exists from eternity and is independent of God, world is not a creation but only God fashions this world. (2) God creates the world out of nothing and the world is independent of Him (3) World is a transformation of God (4) God alone is real and there is no such thing as creation. According to Deussen, this last view is the fundamental view of Upanishads. The world is unreal, an appearance, and an illusion. We know God, by rejecting the world of appearances.

Dr. Radhakrishnan refutes the view of Deussen by saying that

"The Upanishads nowhere say that the infinite excludes the finite. Wherever they assert that Brahman is the sole reality they are careful enough to add that the world is rooted in Brahman, and as such has a share of reality"10

Radhakrishnan says that Deussen comes to this conclusion for his belief that the essence of true religion is the repudiation of the reality of the world. Having come to that conclusion on independent ground, he is trying to find support for his conclusion and then he interprets the Upanishads as supporting the theory of illusion. Deussen admits that the prevailing doctrine of the Upanishads is pantheism while the fundamental doctrine is the theory of illusion. Radhakrishnan also admits that Brahman is the sole reality. One who knows Brahman, everything is known. There is nothing outside it. Everything is included in Brahman. So we cannot deny the reality of manifold world. But Deussen has misinterpreted the term "infinite", as meaning only non-finite. Various sayings of the Upanishads assert that this world is the manifestation of Brahman. The same Reality runs through all worldly things. Though the world is not an independent reality, it does not imply that the world is unreal.

The meaning of the Upanishad's pantheism is different from the western philosophy. Pantheism says that God is wholly immanent in the world. All is God and God is all. But there are passages in the Upanishads where it has been clearly said that
God is both immanent and transcendent of the world. As Radhakrishnan says the Upanishads support the doctrine of Maya only in the sense that there is an underlying reality containing all elements. So Radhakrishnan rightly says that the Upanishads are not pantheistic in the bad sense of the term, where it is an abstract monism that eulogizes the one at the cost of many.

2.2.6. Aurobindo and the Upanishads

The Indian thinkers conceived that the Vedas and the Upanishads are the highest and so vast that there is absolutely no scope for Indian philosophy to grow in an independent manner. All important Indian philosophies are rooted in the Upanishads. The Upanishads are regarded as the real revelation in essence of the message and teaching of the Vedanta philosophy. The Upanishads make us aware of the nature of Reality and the world. Different thinkers of different ages take aspirations from it and interpret it according to their own ways and method.

Aurobindo, one of the foremost mystic philosophers gives an integral view of reality following the true spirit of scriptural teaching according to the need. In essence Aurobindo’s concept of Absolute is not different from the Upanishads, though his way of interpretation is different.

Upanishads conceive Brahman as both immanent and transcendent of the world. Brahman is transcendent of ‘names and forms (namarupa), that is transcendent of finite individuality and on the other hand Brahman is the essence of finest part of everything. We encounter two distinct aspects of reality in the Upanishads, namely, the cosmic and the acosmic. The cosmic and acosmic Brahman emphasize the immanence and transcendence of Brahman, the phenomenal \( \text{jagat} \), the Heraclitean flux, and the transcendent, timeless sphere, both of these are symbolised and present as OM. These two spheres are identical. Aurobindo's assertion that the Ultimate Reality is static and dynamic, changeless and changing, passive and active brings him so close to the Upanishads. Aurobindo conceives Brahman as Sachchidananda and says that the indeterminate or impersonal and the determinate or personal are only the two poises of one Brahman. The dual distinctive description of Brahman does not mean that there are two Brahmans.
Brahman is identical with Atman, according to the Upanishads. ‘Tat tvam asi’ blends the subject with the object. The development of the concept of the true self has four stages. The fourth stage is the Turiya. In the Turiya stage the jiva is known as Atman which is one, non-dual universal consciousness. This self is known as Brahman. ‘Brahman’ is the ultimate source of the empirical world while ‘Atman is the inner self of man. In this respect we find that Aurobindo’s philosophy is quite close to the Upanishadic concept. Aurobindo assumes that man has double soul – the psychic being or the Atman and the central being or the jivatman. The jivatman is Sachchidananda itself and is our inmost self. jivatman is eternal, pure being and perfect reality. jivatman is Sachchidananda, which is seated in us. jivatman is the spark, a particle of Sachchidananda and transcends the individuality of the soul and the universe. jivatman is our inmost being so we are one with Sachchidananda but we have also the individuality in us. The psychic being represents our individuality.

Out of imperishable, the Upanishads say that the universe emerges here. Brahman is both material as well as efficient cause of the world. Mundaka Upanishad says

“This is the truth;
Just as out of the blazing fire,
The sparks, alike in essence, arise a thousand fold,
So also, O dear one, out of the imperishable
The manifold beings arise forth
And they again enter or merge in the same.”

Again the same Upanishads in 11.1.3 states that the breath, the mind, all the senses, ether, wind, fire, water and the earth are originated out of it. The self and not-self are equally manifestations of Brahman. Brahman evolved itself into this manifold world. The individual selves and the world of matter are the manifestation of the same Ultimate Reality and are at bottom one. There is therefore no break either between self and not-self or between them and Absolute. Before the selves and world of matter came out of the Brahman, they were in an unmanifest indeterminate state, when they manifested it assumed of determinate forms. Aurobindo also conceives the world as
an act of the self-expression of Brahman. The world is as real as Brahman, as it is made out of Divine existence. Matter and cosmos is Divine as these realities are limited manifestations of the Absolute. Matter is the lower form of Sachchidananda.

"The world is a masked form of Sachchidananda, and the nature of the consciousness of Sachchidananda and therefore the thing in which His force must always find and achieve itself is divine Bliss, an omnipresent self-delight."\(^{12}\)

The Upanishads describe Brahman as having two aspects – one devoid of any attributes, Nirguna Brahman and other Saguna Brahman endowed with attributes. Saguna Brahman is immanent in the world and is attributed with name and form. Saguna Brahman is the personal God and is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. God is the soul of nature as well as the soul of souls. Aurobindo also conceives that the Absolute has two aspects-static and dynamic. In its transcendent aspect Brahman is static, impersonal, changeless and pure being. In its immanent aspect, it is dynamic. Changing Supermind is the personal aspect of the Absolute; Supermind is the creator of the universe and manifests itself in the cosmos. The one is all.

The one Brahman, according to Upanishads manifests as many through Maya. The world manifestation is a play of concealment of Brahman. Brahman hides himself by drawing a veil over His face. Brahman’s pure absolute nature is concealed by the created world of multiplicity. Brahman by his Maya creates the universe. Again it states that therefore the universe is created under the influence of Maya and only with ‘Maya.’, one has pride, ego, ignorance, raga, affection etc and their removal is possible on attaining knowledge. Same conception we find in Aurobindo’s philosophy also. Aurobindo says that Maya is a special power of Sachchidananda by which the Absolute manifests itself into the world of becoming or the world of mutable forms. This Maya mediates between the infinite and the finites, Pure Reality and phenomenon, Being and becoming. The Absolute has infinite possibilities, so in action infinite consciousness can produce infinite action. Therefore selective special power is needed to settle upon a fixed Truth and build a world in conformity with that which is fixed. Maya is that which measures the immeasurable. Maya is

"A self-determining power in universal consciousness, a capacity in self-awareness of infinite existence to perceive a certain Truth in itself and
direct its force of creation along the line of that Truth, which has presided over the cosmic manifestation.”

Intellect cannot grasp the Ultimate Reality according to the Upanishads. Man’s intellectual capacities are not adequate for the knowledge of the subject. Intellect works with the categories of space, time, causality etc. But Brahman is independent of these categories. It is stated in the Munduka upanishad.1.1.6, that which is invisible, colourless, devoid of our sense organs, eternal, all – penetrating, omnipresent, unchangeable, viewed by the wise as the womb (source) of beings, is Brahman. So mystic intuition or divine insight is the only way to grasp this central spiritual reality. The seeker of the self has to become an introvert, disinterested absolutely in the pursuits of the world ,for the self is beyond the sphere of the senses and intellect and has to acquire the intuitive awareness (buddhi), which is the source of dreams and the phenomenal personality. The Divine is incomprehensible, according to Aurobindo. Finite and limited objects can only perceived by mind. Mind cannot know the thing-in-itself. Mind tries to understand the Absolute in terms of finite. But Ultimate Reality is not a totality of the finite realities. By the way of transformation only we can realize the infinite consciousness.

The Brahman is one. And its manifestations are many. So the reconciliation between these two creates difficulty. So Upanishads describe that the relation between the world and Brahman is inexplicable. The integral advaitism of Aurobindo conceives of no fundamental difference between Brahman and the cosmos. Aurobindo illustrates the relation between Brahman and the world through two processes of involution and evolution. The world is made out of Divine, and as real as Brahman. Creation and manifestation are, according to Aurobindo two Divine processes. Creation means the descent of the Divine into matter, involvement of spirit in the lower forms of realities. Evolution means manifestation of the higher, spiritual and supramental grades of realities. The one Brahman becomes many by the process of creation and many can become one by evolution. If Sachchidananda is transformed in matter, then the latter must become transformed into Sachchidananda again at the end.

2.3 Concept of Brahman in the Bhagavad Gita
The understanding of Brahman as God, as the creator and sustainer of the universe, God as both immanent and transcendent of the world, as there is nothing other than God, as everything in this world, even the non-living are only his parts, all these concepts are developed in the theistic teaching of Bhagavad-Gita. The Bhagavad- Gita, literally means “The Lords Song”, it is a part of the great epic, Mahabharata, which might have been composed and was perhaps only a heroic balled about 1100 B.C. It is the greatest Sanskrit epic. In the Gita, the Upanishadic concept of Absolutism is tinged with theism as Lord Krshna is a personal God. Lord Krshna is eternal, imperishable, and the creator and sustainer of the world. God takes birth in a human body for the establishment of righteousness and to destroy the vicious. But ultimately, theism culminates in absolutism; the world including the Atman is only a part of him, for Krshna transcends the world.

“The Bhagavad-Gita may be treated as a great synthesis of the ideas of the impersonal spiritual monism with personalistic monotheism, of the yoga of action with the yoga of the transcendence of action, and these again with yogas of devotion and knowledge.”

During the Upanishadic period Brahman had come to mean the Absolute one without a second, devoid of attributes and determinations. Brahman is the totality of all existence — phenomenal and transcendental. Brahman is ‘All’. But in Isa and Svetasvatara Upanishads a personal God appears and He is greater and ‘other’ than the ‘All’. So in Isa Upanishad we get (Isa 9-10)

“Into blinding darkness they enter
Who pay homage to the nescience
Into the still more blinding darkness enter those,
Who are satisfied with the knowledge?
Different it is to which knowledge leads,
And different it is to which ignorance or nescience leads!
Thus the teaching has been transmitted to us –
The doctrine by the ancient masters.”
This ‘Lord’, this ‘other’, encloses even the unmoving one which is swifter than the mind. The same concept we find in the Svetasvatara Upanishads (5.1)

“In the imperishable, infinite, supreme Brahman are two things,
For therein are knowledge and ignorance placed hidden.
Now ignorance is a thing perishable, but knowledge is a thing immortal.
And He who rules the ignorance and the knowledge is another.”

This, in the main seems to be the position of the Gita. Brahman is not only the self – luminous, trans-empirical spirit which is also the witness, the seer of the phenomenal world. Great Brahman is the womb into which the personal God plants his seed for the birth of all beings. God is the supreme person and foundation of eternal Brahman and eternal law.

The Ultimate Reality is analyzed in Bhagavad- Gita, like the Upanishads by the two ways – from the point of view of objective and subjective. Objective analysis of Gita makes a distinction between substance and shadow, the aksara and ksara, the perishable and imperishable, changing and unchanging. Ramanuja states that ksara and aksara stand for the principle of Prakrti and individual soul respectively and Supreme Reality above these all. The world is by nature transitoryness, limited and finite. So, there must be something in the background of all these, which is eternal. And that is the Supreme Reality who is the substratum of both perishable and imperishable things. So Gita believes in an Ultimate Reality who is eternal Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, the Lord of whole universe, the sustainer of the world, the master of everything, the witness, the shelter and the source of everything here and hereafter.

The true self always is the subject of knowledge. The body, mind, sense are the object of knowledge and is always changing and limited. The soul which remains constant behind all changes is the subject of knowledge. The soul is neither born nor destroyed nor limited by time and space. It is imperishable, immeasurable, unborn, immortal, infinite and external. The soul is not perceived but its embodied existence is perceived. The soul is the inner principle, the lord of embodied body. The Ultimate Reality is beyond the universe and yet he is present everywhere as self of all. He is
eternal, all pervading, unchanging and immovable. He is same for ever, He is said to be unmanifest, unthinkable and unchanging, and is not affected by fire, wind, water etc.

The Ultimate Reality has been called imperishable, omniscient, the ultimate source of universe, the eternal Purusa, the first God and beginningless. The supreme self is quality less, without action and does not undergo changes, though present in the body. The subject and object, self and not-self being necessarily related to each other and always found together. Subject is the basis of the object and no object can exist without being known by a subject, so subject is superior to the object. The body, mind, senses, the object of knowledge may change, the body is dust returning unto dust but the pure subject remains unchanged, unaffected and is not destroyed. The subject in all is same.

Gita identifies the Atman and Brahman like the Upanishads. Ultimate Reality manifests itself as both subject and object. Everything happens within the Brahman behind the objects of the world. The Gita establishes the doctrine of non-dualism as it states the oneness of Atman and paramatma. Supreme Reality is Atman at the level of individual being and Brahman at the universal level. So finite and infinite are not mutually excluded from each other. Any attempt to make a distinction between finite and infinite limit the infinite. There is only the infinite, and the finite is nothing more than the finitisisation of the infinite. The Ultimate Reality is immutable, self-luminous, indescribable and beyond any category of thought.

Gita says that Brahman is identical with Krishna. The Upanishadsic Brahman and Krishna of the Gita have the same attributes. Krishna is the concrete embodiment of Brahman and is distinct from all other selves as a highest self and as a highest person.

"Thou art the Supreme Brahman the Supreme Abode and the Supreme Purifier, the Eternal, Divine Person, the First of the gods, the Unborn, the All-pervading"17

Brahman is being and becoming, the 'All', and transcends both phenomenal and eternal, beyond both perishable and imperishable. God is the ground of empirical being and non-being. The finite selves and matter are eternal parts of God. The world
is real, not an illusion as because everything comes out of Ultimate Reality and
returns to the Being at the time of destruction. There is no utter destruction. God
unites the many in a coherent whole since the whole is his body and the body is an
organism in which all the parts are interdependent. There is an organic relation
between God and finite beings. All creatures are in God. Man’s ultimate end is to be
united to God, to ‘enter into’ Him.

The supreme has two kinds of Prakrti; Para or higher and Apara or lower
Prakrti. Apara Prakrti is the source of the material world while Para Prakrti is the
source of individual jivas or purusas. Prakrti evolves the world when it comes into
relation with Puruṣa. The evolution of the world starts with the contact between the
Puruṣa and Prakrti. The Apara Prakrti is unconscious and Para Prakrti is conscious.
Lower Prakrti is constituted of the three gunas, i.e., Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. These
three gunas separate themselves from one another. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas act and
react upon one another and produce the world of plurality. Para and Apara Prakrti
both are God’s power. Hence ultimately God is the material as well as efficient cause
of the world. God is not affected by the change of the world. But it is also true that
God is unknowable without the constitution of the world, because the world is a
portion of His endless glory. Krishna says to Arjuna that He seats in the heart of all
creatures, He is the beginning, the middle, and the very end of beings. The world of
moving and unmoving things is the manifested form of God. The imperishable,
immobile, unchanging, unmanifested spiritual being with energy, is one form of
Brahman and perishable, mobile, changing, manifold world is another aspect of the
same Ultimate Reality.

Gita believes in incarnation. The eternal, infinite, beginning less, transcendent
Brahman limits his infinity through his power of Maya and becomes embodied. The
incarnation means the descent of God on the human level. It does not mean the ascent
of the man to the level of God. As Sri Krshna says (Bhagavad Gita iv-6) though He is
unborn, and His self is imperishable, He is the lord of all creatures, and comes into
being through His power Maya. Evil-doers sometimes set the social process in a
wrong direction. The Lord then comes to protect the worthiest and to destroy the evil
power and by that establishes the process of right again.
Individual selves are also manifestation of God. But though the conscious beings are descent of God, they are shrouded in ignorance. Self-realisation is possible through the process of self-surrender. The soul is beyond gunas and modifications. By going beyond gunas due to self-realisation the man is not touched by pleasure and pain and becomes a mere detached witness. This is the Sthita-Prajna. By controlling senses through the mind, mind through the intellect and the intellect through the spirit, one can realize the self and ultimately the God.

2.3.1. The status of the world and the Absolute

Gita advocates the theory of Non-dualism. Everything is a part of its Am-ness. God is present everywhere in the universe in subtle form. God creates the world out of his own being. Creation does not mean the new creation of worldly objects, but only manifestation of God. In the pralaya state the whole world, including the individual selves was implicit and manifestation makes them explicit.

Prakrti is the material cause of the universe. God, the efficient cause guides the Prakrti. Prakrti has two aspects-Para and Apara. Apara or lower Prakrti has three gunus (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas) and they assume the forms of reason, ego, mind, the five senses, the five organs of action, and the five elements. The Para or higher Prakrti sustains the limited embodied soul. The creation is a process of the three gunas of the lower Prakrti and Para prakrti, matter and consciousness. God is the controller of this process. All beings have their birth in this. He is the origin of this entire world and its dissolution as well.

The world is not an illusion. Ultimate Reality is the basis of the world and world emanates from him. But the world is devoid of absolute reality, since it is changing at every moment. Again Gita believes that one can attain immortality in this world by self-surrender. At the state of Shita-Prajna, man can transcend himself from the modifications of gunas and becomes God.

The Supreme Reality is not affected by the changing world, Supreme Reality is pure, eternal, imperishable and world is mutable. The relation between these two is inexplicable. So Sankara says that the world is Maya; an illusion. But Gita repudiates this view and says that
“I give heat; I withhold and send forth the rain. I am immortality and also death, I am being as well as non-being, O Arjuna”\textsuperscript{18}

Maya is the power of God. It is Shakti or the energy which enables him to produce the world of becoming. Prakrti is the Maya of God. God creates the jivas through his Prakrti, according to their merits and demerits. Though the world is not an illusion its real nature is veiled by mutable nature. Divine Maya becomes avidyamaya for man and it creates trouble and suffering who fail to perceive divinity of the world.

“Veiled by My creative power (Yogamaya) I am not revealed to all. This bewildered world knows Me not, the unborn, the unchanging.”\textsuperscript{19}

But the individual who can realize that one ultimate Brahman is present in man as the form of self and governs the material as well as the Divine aspects, for him the world no longer remains an illusion; it is real as a limited manifestation of God.

2.3.2 Aurobindo and Bhagavad-Gita

The base of Aurobindo’s philosophical ideas is his mystic vision together with the influence of Vedas, Upanishads and Gita. Gita believes in pantheism, and consistently maintain theism. The world is God, but the God is not the world alone. God is present everywhere in the universe in subtle form and the existence of the world is a fraction of him. God is immanent as well as transcendent and beyond all. All existent beings endowed with glory, grace and vigour, have sprung from a fragment of His splendour. God is the absolute existence, consciousness, bliss, imperishable ultimate source of universe but also the supreme person. God is both personal and impersonal. The immutability of the absolute and mutable nature of Ishvara is both taken over in conception of Ultimate Reality. So P.T. Raju says that the Gita intends to say that God is not only transcendent, but also immanent. There is nothing other than God. Aurobindo conceives the Ultimate Reality as Sachchidananda. It is both being and becoming, changeless and changing. The Absolute has a creative power that is one with existence; Sachchidananda is both Shiva and Kali. Force is not alien thing which enters into Absolute from outside. So static and dynamic, mobile and immobile are two aspects of same Reality.

The individual soul is a portion of the lord. The Atman and Brahman are identical. The body of Jiva is limited in space, time causality etc. It borns and it dies.
The soul is unborn, immortal and beyond space and time. It is the eternal spirit which dwells in all beings. The soul assumes a new body after the dissolution of the present body. The soul is infinite, eternal, all pervading and cannot be extinct. The soul survives after the death of the body and assumes another body which is fit for enjoying the consequences of actions done in this life. The same soul continues through different births. The soul is the eternal part of Brahman. It is unchanging, actionless and beyond mind, intellect and senses. The indestructible life-monad (Purusa), which according to the Sankhya doctrine is the core and life-seed of each living individual, according to the Bhagavad-Gita is but a particle of the one supreme Divine Being with which it is in essence identical. Aurobindo's conception of jivatman or central being of man is same with the soul of the Gita. Jivatman is an eternal part of Sachchidananda. Jivatman is the supreme self, which is in us. Jivatman is eternal, pure being, perfect and untouched by the movements of nature. Aurobindo conceives double soul in man – an outer soul and an inner soul. The inner soul or jivatman is Sachchidananda itself. And the outer soul or psychic being is the representative of the jivatman. Jivatman is the spark and the psychic being is its flame. Jivatman is connected with Sachchidananda, and the Psychic being inhabits our mind, life and body; and participates in the daily activities of man. The psychic being transmigrates from one life to another for its complete manifestation. Rebirth is an absolutely necessary means for the working out of a spiritual evolution, for the manifestation of the divine in the material universe.

The transcendental reality is pure, unchanging and immutable. Purusottama is immutable and active, personal and impersonal. Maya is the real energy of Ishvara. Ishvara manifests itself through Maya. Prakrti is the Maya of God. Maya is the power of self-becoming. God abides in the hearts of all beings, and causes them to turn round by His power as if they were mounted on a machine. The Prakrti of God has two aspects Para or higher and Apara or lower. Lower Prakrti is composed of earth, water, light, air, ether, manas and buddhi –which is the material cause of the physical, biological and psychical world. Higher Prakrti or Purusa sustains the finite embodied souls. Lower Prakrti and higher Prakrti are real powers of God.

"This divine māyā of Mine, consisting of the modes is hard to overcome. But those who take refuse in Me alone cross beyond it."20
Maya, for Aurobindo, is the power of Omnipresent Reality to measure the immeasurable. Maya is the power of Supreme Being which enables him to produce mutable nature out of static truth of pure existent. It is the play of all in each and each in all. But at first due to the lower Maya or the illusion of Maya we do not know it. But when we overpass the mental Maya then we can embrace the supramental play of each with all and all with each.

The Ultimate Reality is pure being, eternal and above all contradictions. It is existence and non-existence, beginning and end. Any category of thought is inadequate to comprehend the nature of Absolute. Mind according to Aurobindo is limited and finite principle of consciousness and power. To understand a thing the finite mind breaks an object into small parts, mind tries to understand the infinite in terms of finite. So it cannot know the eternal absolute, thing-in-itself. Intuition is the only way for Gita as well as for Aurobindo to realise the nature of Ultimate Reality.

The Bhagavad-Gita regards God as the supreme and perfect person, infinite and eternal Brahman. Ishvara is the concrete embodiment of Brahman and is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. He is the witness, the seer of the empirical world. The whole world is pervaded by him and sustained by him. So the world is not an illusion or appearance of Brahman. It is real. But Gita denied the absolute reality of the world. Though the world is a manifestation of Brahman, it is limited and changing. Transitoriness is the essence of worldly things. Moreover the world is an effect of God, and God is the cause of the world. The cause is more real than the effect, the world as effect is said to be less real than God as cause. This relative unreality of the world is confirmed by the self-contradictory nature of the process of becoming. There is a struggle of opposites in the world of experience and the real is above all opposites. Aurobindo conceives the world to be real as God. The world is Divine and made out of divine-existence. He demolishes the dualism between matter and spirit. For him matter is Brahman, matter is the lowest manifestation of Brahman.

The Gita accepts the Sankhya theory of evolution. Prakrti is the material cause of the universe and God is the efficient cause. Para or lower Prakrti and Apara or Purusa are two aspects of Prakrti. Lower Prakrti is unconscious and the Purusa is conscious. Prakrti evolves the world when it comes into relation with Purusa. Prakrti
evolves the world under the influence the Purusa. The world process, according to Aurobindo is two Divine processes - creation and manifestation. Creation means the descent of the Divine into matter and evolution means the manifestation of higher spiritual grades of realities. In creation spirit involves in Matter. Sachchidananda has infinite possibilities. The Supermind, selects from them and actualizes them in explicit manifestation. Supermind is the intermediary principle between Sachchidananda and the world.

2.4 Concept of Absolute in Madhyamaka system

Nagarjuna is the first systematic expounder of Sunyavada. The Upanishads explain the nature of Reality by neti – neti, because the transcendental Reality is indeterminable as both being and non-being. But ultimate Reality is presupposed as something positive in all our knowledge. Our thought determines the object of this world. The Madhyamikas agree with the Upanishads 'in this respect. But Madhyamikas disagree in stating that the source of 'non-determination' cannot be furnished by the self. The source must be adequate to remove the veil of appearance from the face of reality, and thus make ready the way to the knowledge of the nature of Reality.

The world of manifold is a combination of physical and spiritual beings. All are inter-related. Thought tries to know the world in terms of its own categories. Relations constitute the world. The world which is a mere complex of these relations has their reality, if thought is considered as the only mode of knowledge. There would have been nothing than the reality of physical world. But all the categories of thought are vitiated by self-contradiction. Matter and soul, space and time, cause and substance, motion and rest are all alike baseless and self contradictory. Reality must be consistent and intelligible. Things which are not consistent may be actual, but they are not real. Everything determinable by thought is unreal. So real must be indeterminate. The world is real to him for whom thought alone is mode of cognition. But the world is not the whole truth. It is our inner urge prajna which condemns intellect and finds world of objects as self-contradictory, relative and hence mere appearances. The Madhyamaka dialectic starts here.

“Conditionality, relativity, dependence, the fact of being composed, contingency, the absence of an own being or voidness (the proper term
used by the school) constitutes the true nature, the way of being of the empirical reality, and the form under which it appears before us is only an unreality, an illusion."

Thought and Prajna stand as thesis and antithesis. Dialectic is a spiritual movement and it requires at least two propositions, each opposed to each other. The Dialectic is a universal conflict affecting every sphere of things. Absolute is the result of dialectic which comes out through the gradual process of elimination of determinate.

There are four steps which constitute the foundation of the Madhyamaka dialectic. Among the four alternatives, the basic alternatives are – Being and Non-Being, Affirmation and Negation. From these, two others are derived by affirming or denying conjunctively both Being and Non-Being and neither Being nor Non-Being. The Madhyamaka, as the name implies, advocates a position midway between extreme affirmation and extreme denial of things. Sunyavada is the middle path. The existences of everything which are determinable by thought are subject to the law of dependent origination. When the doctrine of dependent origination is described as “this being, that is”, what is really meant is that things can only be indicated as mere appearance, one after another, for they have no essence or true nature. So the Madhyamikas have no alternative other than to declare that all that is, is determinable, and therefore unreal. The true meaning of Sunyavada is this, that there is no truth, no essence in all phenomena that appear. The void or saguna does not mean pure negation, for that is relative to some kind of position. It simply means that none of the appearances have any intrinsic nature of their own. So Radhakrishnan says that, Nagarjuna who is not the common conjurer who wishes to prove that the chair we sit on is not a chair. Existence is the only possible sense of continuous production of phenomena he admits, though he denies to it Absolute Reality.

Since all determinations, according to the Madhyamikas, are but forms of thought, reality as manifested by prajna must be absolutely indeterminable, and transcendent to thought.

"Two considerations stand out prominently in the Madhyamika notion; of the Absolute. Its utter indeterminateness and the consequent non-accessibility to Reason."
Nagaijuna admits the existence of a higher reality. Reality is not a form of thought, free from all relations and predicates. All possible modes of predication are classified under four heads, existence, non-existence, existence and non-existence, neither existence nor non-existence. The real nature of things cannot be described by any of these predicates taken singly or in combination. So Sunyata or Voidness is the name for this indeterminable nature of things. The Reality is unique, but uniqueness can be understood only with reference to the non-unique. So this concept of uniqueness is also not applicable to Reality. Buddhists teachings regarding dependent origination, impermanence etc, apply only to the phenomenal world. The transcendental reality is free from change, conditionality, and other phenomenal characters. Prajna manifests reality in its absolute perfection. The real should not depend on anything else for its existence and origination. All phenomena are determinable and depend on something for its origination, so subject to decay and death. Actually the source of determination lies in the subject, not in the object. The world in the light of complete reorientation of outlook comes to be viewed as just no other than the Absolute itself. The subject and object do not stand outside of the Absolute. On the contrary both are identical with Absolute. The distinction between the empirical and transcendental, relative and Absolute are disappear in the light of truth and remains only non-dual. Absolute which exists in and for itself is indeterminate as this or that (sunya). But ‘sunya’ is an antithesis of ‘asunya’. As such, possibility of relation and condition cannot be ignored totally in regard of sunya also. So, the later Madhyamikas express it as silence.

The literal meaning of ‘sunya’ is ‘void’, ‘nothing’, negation etc. Sunyavada has been condemned and bitterly criticized by non-Buddhist philosophers as nihilism which mean that the universe is totally void of any reality that everything is void or sunya,

“There is, however, hardly any justification for characterising the Madhyamika as a nihilist. No absolutism would, in that case, escape this charge, for every one of them has to negate all predicates of the absolute.”

Madhyamaka do not deny all reality. It only denies the apparent reality of the phenomenal world perceived by us. Sunyavada as nihilism has declared even God as
non-existent from the transcendental standpoint. Everything in this world is dependent on some condition. Hence it cannot be real. It can neither be unreal. An unreal thing like a sky-lotus, barren mother’s son can never come into existence. It cannot be both real and unreal as the very concept is contradictory. To say that it is neither real nor unreal would be unintelligible jargon. It is, therefore, described as sunya or void.

The Reality is absolute, non-dual and beyond the intellect. Reality is not describable by any category, mental or non-mental. About the Ultimate Reality we cannot say anything. The Absolute is neither existent, nor nor-existent, nor both, nor different from both existent and non-existent. The reality being devoid of phenomenal characters is called sunya. The real nature of things cannot be known through intellect. But it does not mean that it is a non-entity. The Absolute is cognized in a non-dual intuition-Prajna. It is that intuition itself. The transcendental truth is known, in which all the manyness is dissolved, which is attributeless, non-dual, homogenous and perfect. It requires Samadhi in the form of the concentration of Chitta. The practice of samadhi leads to the arousal of prajna and the aspirant has a balanced Chitta. This leads to the experience of the Ultimate Reality. In defence of the criticism of other philosophers Nagarjuna says,

“Sunyata, if wrongly understood in the sense of any category of intellect, will surely sound the philosophical death-knell of the person who misunderstands it, just as a snake, if carelessly caught, will bite the person who catches it and will kill him by its poison or just as wrong knowledge may create havoc or tantra, if wrongly practiced, will destroy the person who practices it.”

2.4.1 Degrees of Truth and Reality

All Madhyamaka treaties say that there are two truths, on which Buddha’s teaching of Dharma depends. One truth is empirical or samvrti meant for ordinary people, and the other is transcendental or absolutely true one or Paramartha. Those who do not know the distinction between these two kinds of truth cannot understand the mystery of Buddha’s teaching. Those are incapable of grasping the deep significance of the teaching of Buddha, who is unable to distinguish between the empirical and transcendental truth.
Paramartha satya is real, without any distinction. It is beyond the application of categories of thought. The absolute is indescribable, non-relational and empirical activity cannot be applied with Paramartha. So unthinkable, unreachable are the essential nature of the Paramartha.

Samvrti satya is the product of reason. It creates the phenomenal world. Candrakirti gives three definitions of samvrti. Etymologically it means a screen which keeps off the truth and makes them appear otherwise. It may also mean the relativity of things. In this sense it means phenomena. The third definition of samvrti is what is usually accepted by the common folk. Lokasamvrti is that object or phenomena which are arises out of some cause and through which all the activities of the worldly beings go on. Lokasamvrti is the truth in the world. In calling it ‘lokasamvrti,’ it is implied that there are phenomena which are born due to some cause, but which are not admitted to be true by all perceptions caused by defective sense-organs. Abnormal experiences, dream-objects are examples of mithya samvrti. This samvrti or practical truth becomes false in the light of Paramartha satya. Ultimately samvrti is a delusion; it is no truth at all. But then also we cannot deny the empirical truth at all. The empirical truth is the only means for the attainment of transcendental truth. We would be involved in absolute skepticism if we admit that there is no relation between samvrtisatya and Paramartha satya. According to Nagarjuna the transcendental truth cannot be known without the help of the empirical truth. Truth is known by untruth and Ultimate Reality by Maya. Similarly the knowledge of the empirical truth is necessary for the attainment of transcendental truth.

“Paramartha is the end or goal that we seek to attain, and samvrti is the means, it is the ladder or the jumping board which enables us to reach that objective. It is therefore stated that samvrti is the means (upayabhuta) and Paramartha is the end (upeyabhuta).”

The Madhyamika philosophers believe in the transcendental Reality, along with the physical world. All things of the world are relative. The dharmas of the worldly objects depend upon the other. Nothing has its own definite, absolute and independent nature. All these are empirical truths. The transcendental truth is exactly opposed to them. Its experience is absolute. It is attained only in nirvana. It is beyond the empirical objects, eternal, absolute and devoid of the ordinary worldly dharmas. It is
also called Sunyata, Tathata, and Dharma Dhatu etc. In fact the transcendental truth has no nature at all. In it there are no names and forms, subject and object. This truth cannot be explained through words. The knower experiences it through immediate experience. Ashwaghosha, in his Buddha Charita explains how the Buddha attained the Paramartha

“This is pain, this also is the origin of pain in the world of living beings; this also is the stopping of pain; this is that course which leads to its stopping. So having determined he knew all as it really was. Thus he, the holy one, sitting there on his seat of grass at the root of the tree, pondering by his own efforts attained at last perfect knowledge.”

Nagarjuna starts his ‘Madhyamika Karika,’ by saluting the great teacher Buddha who preached the doctrine of dependent origination and says that from the transcendent standpoint Pratityasamutpada is itself Nirvana, and all the multiplicity dwindles into it. From the transcendent standpoint there is neither negation, nor origination, nor annihilation, nor eternity. Ashwaghosha, another pioneer of Mahayana system describes the transformation of Siddhartha into the tathagata in this way.

“There has arisen the greatest of all beings, the Omniscient All wise Arhat, a lotus, unsoiled by the dust of passion,”

So the Samvrti satya is conditional and is contradicted by the Paramartha, which is transcendental and is beyond the intellect, but not vice-versa.

2.4.2. Absolute and Avidya

Madhyamikas hold that Absolute is the only reality, and it is one and nondual. It is pure identity, attributeless, non-dual indeterminate, changeless. It is beyond the categories of intellect, changes and conditions. Avidya is the cause of the world appearance. The world is unreal, false, and relative like the experience of snake in a rope but Nagarjuna admits that the world reflects the permanent substance, so we can attain Paramartha through samvrti.
Avidya is the non-apprehension of this Real and misapprehension of the Real as something else. It has two functions. In its one function it conceals (avarana) Reality and acts as a screen to hide it. In its another function it projects (asatkhyapana) the world of plurality on the Brahman-ground. Avidya covers Reality and gives a false view.

The Real, according to Madhyamikas is indeterminate, so the absolute cannot have any attribute. To affirm any attribute to the Real is to limit it. So attributes like substance or mode, one or many, conditional or unconditional, changing or eternal etc are not applicable to the ultimate Real. These conceptual constructions are only due to avidya. The Real is neither one nor many, neither eternal nor momentary, neither Vijnana nor world of multiplicity. All these differences are avidya. Madhyamika admits that identity is also avidya. Nagarjuna says if the apprehension of the impermanent as permanent is illusion, why is the apprehension of the indeterminate as impermanent no illusion as well.

Avidya is not negative in character, as in that case projection of something would be impossible. In so far as avidya positively produces some illusory appearance, it is called positive ignorance. In so far as no beginning can be assigned to the world, avidya is also said to be beginningless. But it has an end. Avidya disappears at the attainment of intuition. All other forms of knowledge and phenomena are false and are lost with their appearance except nirvana. Nirvana is the only thing which is not lost.

Avidya is not unreal for the realist. Avidya projects the world of appearance. The act of world projection is not unreal according to Vijnanavada and spiritual life is impossible without avidya. Bondage is real, so freedom from suffering is possible. But the Madhyamaka view is that avidya is itself unreal. According to Nagarjuna the beginning, the middle, the end, birth, death etc, all are non-existent. The worldly objects have neither beginning, nor end. Avidya is unreal, so product from it does not arise. Though avidya has an epistemic status, it is not real as a fact.

2.4.3. Aurobindo and Sunyavada

The Ultimate Reality, according to Sunyavadins is Sunya. Nagarjuna holds that the Ultimate Reality is neither existent nor non-existent, neither both existent and
neither non-existent nor different from both, Ultimate Reality is attributeless and cannot be attained by speech, mind and eye. The real is transcendent to thought, devoid of every kind of determination, real is completely indeterminate. So,

“It may be asked how is it that the truth which sets one free and which is indescribable transcending all the categories of thought and language comes to be described as emptiness and the like and comes to be associated with a vast literature and methodology of instruction?"28

For Aurobindo, Sachchidananda is determinate and indeterminate, changing and eternal, personal and impersonal. Sachchidananda is the Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. Force is eternal and real power of God. Supermind the personal, determinate aspect of Sachchidananda is the creator of the universe and the one that evolves and manifests itself in the cosmos. Determinate and indeterminate, Saguna and Nirguna are the two poises of Brahman. The dual distinctive description of Brahman as Saguna and Nirguna, unqualified and qualified, dynamic and static does not mean that there are two Brahmans, but the differences signify only difference of thought, of concept. Indeterminate and determinate, transcendent and immanent, unmanifest and manifest are the one Brahman in two aspects, and each is necessary to the other.

Sunyavada denies the reality of the world. Nagarjuna admits that relations constitute the world. The world is a mere complex of these relations. But these relations themselves are unintelligible. Matter and soul, space and time, cause and effect, motion and rest are all alike baseless and self-contradictory. Reality must be consistent and intelligible. But the categories through which we construct our reality or experience are unintelligible and self-contradictory. The relations of experience do not possess intelligibility. Things which are not consistent may be actual, but they are not real. The world of experience, according to the Madhyamaka, is an illusion bred by relations. Tattva is the underlying ground of phenomena. But it is unintelligible for us that how Dharmata activates and illumines empirical things without immanating in it. The Madhyamika does not consider that the Absolute and the world of phenomena are two different sets of entities. The Absolute is transcendent of the world and there is no identical relation between these two.
For Aurobindo world is a self-expression of the Absolute. The world is as much real as the Brahman itself. Aurobindo conceives the Consciousness-Force as the principle of manifestation. Creation and manifestation are two divine processes. Creation means the descent of the spirit into matter. Evolution means the manifestation of higher spiritual and supramental grades of realities. So there is no fundamental opposition between matter and spirit. Spirit is matter in its latent and unmanifest condition. But Sunyavada cuts at the very root of cosmos and its evolution by giving them only empirical reality. Sunyavada does not admit the manifestation of the Absolute into the world and reconversion of the state of Absolute through knowledge. There has been no initial fall, and there is no need for re-transformation. But for Aurobindo the Brahman manifests, unveils itself on this earth.

According to Buddha, everything is impermanent. Buddha believes in the existence of a spontaneous and universal law of causation which conditions the appearance of all events. Everything that happens in the mental or physical world is the product of a causal series which has no beginning or end. The existence of everything is conditional, dependent on a cause. Madhyamaka system also accepts this dependent origination of Buddha's teaching. So there is no permanent soul. They could not conceive even empirical reality as they are all momentary. Aurobindo conceives the soul as a permanent thing, together with its salvation. Aurobindo tries to give an identical relation between individual beings and Brahman. When the Madhyamikas deny the concept of salvation, Aurobindo conceives it as a destiny of man. Salvation means perfection of all the elements of an individual and to become a superman or divine being.

Though the Madhyamikas concept of Brahman is different from the concept of Aurobindo in many respects, they agree in the point that intellect is unfit to give us knowledge of reality. Intellect gives us discrimination, dualism but not Reality. Mind cannot know the Ultimate Reality. Brahman is to be directly realized through spiritual experience. Absolute is cognized in a non-dual-intuition-Prajna.

2.5 Concept of Absolute in Vijnanavada

The Upanishads, Vijnanavada and Sankara all agree in the point that though the transcendent reality is indeterminable, all human knowledge presupposes something as positive. The first systematic expounder of Vijnanavada is
Maitreyanatha. But Vijnanavada gets the highest point of development in the works of Asanga and his brother Basubandhu who is named as “second Buddha”. Vijnanavadins emphasize the practice of yoga for the realization of absolute truth. So Vijnanavada is known as Yogacara also.

The representative theory of perception adopted by the Sautrantika paves the way for the subjectivism of the Yogacara. Our data in knowledge come to us, according to the Sautrantikas, from without, supplied by things which exist. But we do not know what these things are. The objects of our knowledge are only ideas in our mind, and as these ideas are not created by us we have to infer the existence of objects outside the mind as the causes of these ideas. So, the extramental objects or things are not directly perceivable. Sautrantikas maintain that we have ideas and through them we infer things outside. So if there were external objects we cannot know them. So Vijnanavadins urge us to drop all ideas of such an external existence and says that, the existence of an outer world is a fiction.

The Yogacara denies the reality of external objects and reduces them to subjective cognitions. According to the Yogacara there is no material substance independent of the consciousness. The so called matter is only an idea of our consciousness. Matter is an idea. Things are nothing more than sensations. The objects of knowledge are either idea actually imprinted on the sense, operations of the mind. Existence of objects independent of mind is not intelligible.

According to Yogacara the physical world has no existence apart from consciousness. Even if the existence of anything outside consciousness is admitted it cannot be known.

“External objects cannot be apprehended for they are either atoms or their groupings. Atoms are imperceptible and so are their groupings which cannot be different from the atoms which enter them.”

Thus there are many difficulties in accepting the existence of things external to the mind. So Vijnanavada admits that the external world is not real. If the things are not conceived apart from mental knowledge, according to Vijnanavadins, all these difficulties are removed. Hence Vijnanavadins believe that all things external to mind are mental modifications. The distinction of subject and object falls within Vijnana,
we read into the external nature what exists only in our own mind. If we ask for the explanation for the actual variety of ideas, the Yogacara refers us to the impressions left by previous ideas. Our dream experiences are full of ideas which arise from past mental impressions without any external objects. Even so is waking experience.

The Vijnanavadins agree with the Madhyamika in holding the unreality of the external object which is creation of thought.

"If for the school of Nagarjuna the empirical reality becomes the Great void, for the Yogacara school reality is only a Great illusion, created by the mind submerged in error."30

The concept of Ultimate Reality of Madhyamikas transcends the (prajna) pure consciousness also. The Madhyamika argues that even Vijnana is unreal, because we cannot have consciousness without an object of which we are conscious. Vijnanavadins main arguments against the Madhyamika is that if Vijnana is not real, illusory then everything turns out to be unreal, so the reality of the Vijnana should at least be admitted by Madhyamikas to establish their argument as correct. Since the Yogacara believes in the reality of Vijnana, so he is known as Vijnanavadin.

Like the Upanishads, Vijnanavadins also state that subject is the base of both reality and unreality. The world is a creation of the activity of thought. From the practical standpoint Vijnana manifests itself as a categories of thought on the one hand and as a names and forms of the objective world on the other hand, but Absolute is beyond these. We perceive the absolute as the world of conceptual forms due to avidya. The Alaya Vijnana which is pure consciousness, is the Absolute, is immanent in all beings and also permanent transcendent background of all phenomena. Alaya Vijnana is not subject to the origin, change and decay. The world of phenomena is neither identical with nor different from the Alaya Vijnana. If they were identical with the Alaya then their cessation would also mean the cessation of the Alaya, if they were different from the Alaya then they would not arises out of it. So long as we are controlled by the avidya, we cannot perceive Absolute truth. The phenomenal world which is by essence momentary does not even touch reality which is above all forms and names.
Asanga conceives three realms of reality, viz-parikalpita, paratantra and parinispanna. Parikalpita stage is an illusory stage. Thought is active and makes distinction between subject and the object. Everything is conditional, depends on some cause; so all are impermanent and relative. Existence of any permanent and unchanging reality is the product of thought. The movement of this world and the existence of it are only construction of thought. Thought creates the self – existent world under the influence of avidya and presents this as real. Parikalpita truth is only for the ordinary people. On the realization of parinispanna, thought ceases to be active and there remains only truth that is free from change, conditionality and other phenomenal characters.

"It is open to us to look upon parikalpitasatya as positive error, as when we mistake a rope for a snake; paratantrasatya as relative knowledge, as when we recognize a rope as a rope, and parinispannasatya as metaphysical insight, as when we recognise that rope is mere concept and has no being as a thing in itself."31

The Yogacaras recognize that the reality is one eternal pure consciousness which is variously known as Vijnana, Vijnaptimatra, Alaya Vijnana, etc. As a transcendental, Brahman is called non-dual, formless, sunya etc. As the ground of appearances, it is called dharmadhatu, bhutata, tathagatagarbha etc. Vasubandhu compares the modes of the Alayavijnana to the tide of the ocean which creates the mental properties of contact, feeling and the like under the disposition of good and bad karmas. All individual subject and objective phenomena spring out of Alayavijnana and merge into it. Avidya conceals the real nature of Absolute and serve as a root cause of multiplicity. So the attainment of reality in everywhere is possible by removing the veil of ignorance.

2.5.1 Vijnanavada and Aurobindo.

Vijnanavada and Aurobindo exhibit some common features. The Absolute is both transcendent and immanent in both of these systems. The Absolute is devoid of empirical determinations, but it is the reality of appearance also. Sachchidananda is
the transcendent reality, which are Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. Absolute as Supermind is the substance and reality of all things. For Aurobindo Sachchidananda and Supermind are not two realities but only two aspects of same Ultimate Reality.

"For the Madhyamika, and this is true of the Vedanta and Vijnanavada too, the Absolute is the reality of the appearances. Therefore the Absolute is at once transcendent and immanent."32

Almost all the absolutistic systems believe that intuition reveals the knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Intellect is finite and limited principle of knowledge. It cannot perceive the reality in itself. In intellectual knowledge, the distinction between the subject and the object remains always there. Intuition is the final and supreme knowledge. In this respect Vijnanavadins and Aurobindo find themselves quite close to each other. Aurobindo holds that intuition reveals the nature of reality, and denies that intellect gives us the knowledge of the truth. The Absolute Reality is indefinable and ineffable by our thought. It is self-existent and self-evident to itself. Mind cannot limit or define it.

But Aurobindo's standpoint differs from that of Vijnanavada on the question of the relation between the Absolute and the world. Vijnanavada holds that the world is unreal, though they admit the initial defilement and purification of Vijnana.

"Both Vedanta and Vijnanavada analyse illusion and show that the illusory appears on a real ground (adhisthana) but for which illusion itself would not be possible. The world- illusion too is thus a superimposition on Brahman or Vijnana."33

But Aurobindo is an integral advaitist, and conceives the world as Brahman. There is no fundamental difference between multiplicity of the world and Brahman. One Ultimate Reality manifests itself in this world. Matter is not unreal. Matter is Brahman in its lower form. The opposition between the Absolute and Cosmic world disappear in course of evolution. The evolution for Aurobindo is not the salvation of an individual but divinisation of the whole universe. An individual can become a divine being by possessing the divine consciousness, power, truth etc and Aurobindo conceives the union of nature with Sachchidananda.
2.6. Concept of Brahman in Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta:

The thoughts of the early Upanishads got a systematic form in the philosophy of the Vedanta. Almost all the important germs of the Upanishadic philosophy is contained in the Advaita system of Sankara. The struggle to go beyond the changing world of finite selves, says Sankara, indicates the existence of something larger than the finite. Limitation of the finites implies the unreality of the phenomenal world and the reality of the external self-existent, infinite and blissful absolute. It is above all the determinations and duality. The Absolute of Sankara is rigid, motionless and beyond any change. The existence of anything other than Brahman can condition it, and turns it to unreal. Brahman is pure identity, Brahman is only reality and it is one and non-dual and transcends all types of opposition. For Sankara Brahman is the only one Reality; nothing else is real. Brahman alone is everlasting. Brahman itself appears to our finite experience as the world of multiple and finite existences. Brahman is called Kutastha nitya, unchanging, self-sufficient, unconditional and perfect. Brahman is the noumenal background of the changing, phenomenal world. Brahman is incomprehensible by our thought, beyond the reach of mind and transcends all speech and language.

"The declaration (made by Indra about himself, viz that he is one with Brahman) (is possible) through intuition vouched for by scripture as in the case of Vamadeva."34

2.6.1 Self and Brahman

Sankara says that the relation between Brahman and self is identical. Brahman is the subject of all knowledge. So Brahman is unknowable, because it is the subject of knowledge, it can never be an object of knowledge. Brahman is self-proved. The principle of non-contradiction, according to Sankara is the test of truth. Knowledge which is not contradicted is truth. The self or Atman is uncontradicted in all the four states: waking, dream, deep sleep and turiya. There can be no experience of the non-existence of the soul. The self-proved Atman cannot be denied, can never be doubted, for the very idea of denial, doubt presuppose it, like the ‘cogito-ergo-sum’ of Descartes.

"Sankara says that Brahman is known for Brahman is one’s own self. ‘ayam atma brahman’. No one thinks that he does not exist. Each one cognises the existence of himself"35
Atman is one without a second. There is no other reality than Brahman. If there is any other reality, Brahman would not be one. Hence Sankara holds that the Brahman alone is real, and the world and empirical individuals are mere illusions.

Brahman is pure identity. It is absolutely indifference, homogeneous and internal. Though Brahman is undifferentiated, it is the infinite richness of spiritual being. But Sankara neither advocates the individual knowing self nor the plurality of selves. Atman is the Absolute self, which is opposed to an object. The Atman is eternal and cannot be extinct. It does not fall within the category of object and constitutes the inward self of all. That soul, as Sankara boldly expresses it, ‘becomes Brahman by being Brahman,’ that is, by knowing what he is. Removal of ignorance brings light and in that lights the human self and the Divine Self shine forth in their eternal oneness.

Brahman is in essence pure self. It is self-luminous and an unqualified Brahman. It transcends all the categories of intellect. All the great thinkers of the world deny conceptual designation to the Absolute. Sankara, like Kant admits that the nature of self-proved Brahman cannot be ascertained by intellect. Brahman is true knower. But human knowledge proceeds by taking anything as object; hence intellect fails to give a true picture of Brahman, because Brahman can never be known as an object. It does not mean that Brahman is a mere nought. Though the Brahman is indefinable and unknowable by intellect, there are two definitions of Brahman in the Upanishads as Saccidananda and as God. The God, Saguna, determinate Brahman with the help of Maya creates, sustains and destroys the world. But from the standpoint of the liberated soul Brahman is Saccidananda, Nirguna and indeterminate.

2.6.2 Nirguna Brahman

Sankara’s conception of Nirguna Brahman (unqualified Brahman) as the ultimate reality is based on the scriptural texts. The unqualified Brahman is devoid of all qualities. The Upanishads employ the technique of negation to describe the attributeless Brahman. The impossibility of knowing Brahman either by speech, or mind or eye has been emphatically expressed in Brhadaranyaka Upanishads. Sankara also interprets the Upanishadic formula “neti-neti”, Sankara declares in his commentary on Brahma Sutra that
"Bhava, questioned about Brahman by Vaḍkalin, explained it to him by silence.

‘He said to him, learn Brahman, O friend’ and become silent. Then on a second and a third question he replied, ‘I am teaching you, indeed, but you do not understand. Silent is the self’.

Brahman is devoid of all conceivable differences – Sajatiya bheda, Vijatiya bheda and Svagata bheda. It is devoid of homogeneous difference, as it is one and without a second. It is devoid of heterogeneous difference, as there is no other reality dissimilar to it. Brahman has no internal variety, as Brahman does not admit of parts'. The worldly things are made up of parts and admit of differences. So the pure identity of Brahman cannot be explained in terms of empirical description. Brahman is neither a quality, nor a substance, neither a cause nor an effect and is without beginning and end.

Though Brahman is described in a negative term by the scripture, it has been described in positive terms also. When Brahman is described as ‘Nirguna’ it does not mean that Brahman is devoid of any character. Nirguna technically means that a thing that is phenomenal does not belong constitutively to Brahman. Positively Brahman has been described as Saccidananda (Existence consciousness- bliss). Brahman is the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss. These are not the attributes of Brahman. Brahman is sat, meaning that it is not asat, Brahman is cit, meaning that Brahman is not acit. Brahman is ananda, meaning that it is not of the nature of pain. Existence, consciousness and bliss are identical with each other. Though they are not synonymous but united and identical with Brahman.

2.6.3 Saguna Brahman or Ishvara

Brahman is a transcendental reality a pure being. Brahman is devoid of activity because activity makes Him non-eternal. Brahman is unchangeable and eternal and so it cannot be active. But how can we explain the creation of the world by an inactive and changeless Brahman. Sankara solves this puzzle by saying that world is not a creation of attributeless Brahman. Brahman conditioned by Maya is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world. The universe has its roots in being, which transcends all distinctions of subject and object as the creator and governor of the universe, Brahman is said to be the personal God, Ishvara. Brahman (transcendental) and Ishvara (empirical) are both valid forms of reality. God is the
cause of the world. The same idea that the world comes forth from Brahman and into Him the world will be dissolved and in it the world breathes which has been expressed in the Chandogya Upanishads also. Here the Brahman is described as tajjal. In the Taittiriya Upanishad it is said that when beings here are born that, by which when born they live, that into which on deceasing they enter, that is Brahman. Sankara describes the world as a mere appearance and it is due to ignorance. Description of Brahman as the creator of the world is true only from the empirical point of view, so long as the world-appearance is regarded as real. From the transcendental standpoint, there is neither any real world, nor any creator. So the creatorship of the world is not Brahman’s essence. It is the description of what is merely accidental, and does not touch in any way the essence of Brahman. Sankara believes that the question of God’s existence is an absurd one. Existence of God reduces it to the level of the finite, making him distinct from other objects or merging him in the totality of existence in a pantheism which will be practically indistinguishable from atheism.

Sankara tries to explain the world of objects with the concept of Brahman. Brahman is, according to Sankara is both material as well as efficient cause of the world. The Advaita Vedanta holds that the Ultimate Reality is non-dual and Brahman does not undergo any transformation. Sankara holds the theory of Vivartavada. World is an appearance of Brahman. Brahman is not only the cause of the world; it is also the sustainer and destroyer of the world.

The concept of Saguna Brahman is more or less an empirical postulate which is practically useful. Ishvara is not metaphysically real. He creates the manifold world through His power, which is called Maya. A magician produces various things and deludes the ignorant people into believing that the magical products are real. Similarly, ignorant people believe that the world is real and that, therefore, Brahman is really qualified by Maya. Those who know the mystery of magic are never deluded. To them the magician produces nothing, nor has he any magical power. Saguna Brahman is a phenomenal appearance, the apparent aspects of Nirguna Brahman and is conditioned by Maya. Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman are not two realities. As long as avidya lasts there is the God. Therefore, when the avidya is destroyed, all duality vanishes and there remains only non-dual Ultimate Reality. So, according to Sankara unqualified Brahman is the only reality, is one without a second. Brahman in itself cannot be both qualified and unqualified. Sankara makes this point clear with an
example that as a crystal which in itself is white remains clear, even though it is printed with red colour. That crystal appears as red, which is only illusory. Similar is the case with Brahman also.

Qualified Brahman is unreal because Brahman is devoid of all qualities. Regarding the unqualified Brahman Prof. Paul Deussen says,

“In any case the name Brahman in the work (Vedanta Sutra) indicates something impersonal only in the sense, however, that its being is raised far above all personality”. 37

2.6.4. Brahman and Maya

Brahman is the only ontological reality, according to Sankara. Brahman is unqualified inactive and changeless. If Brahman is the only reality, then the world of multiplicity becomes difficult to explain. Sankara borrows the word ‘Maya, from the Upanishads and with this concept of Maya he explains the world. Maya is a magical power of God. As Upanishads (Svetasvatara-iv-1) says, Maya is that power of Brahman with the help of which the colourless one Brahman distributes many colours. Maya is the origin of the world of name and form. Maya absolutely depends on him and cannot exist separately. As the burning power of the fire is indistinguishable from fire, Maya is indistinguishable from God. The relation of Maya and Brahman is unique and is called tadatmya. The world is merely a play or Lila of Ishvara. It is due to Avidya or Maya that one God is seen in many forms. So Sankara says that all human experiences are appearances of the Absolute, as name and form manifestation, of Brahman. This name–and–form manifestation is another name for Maya.

Maya is of the nature of Adhyasa. Just as the snake is imposed on rope, similarly the jivas engrossed by Maya see the attribute less Brahman as the world of many names and forms. Maya is something positive, though not real. Maya has two functions of concealment of the real and the projection of the unreal. Maya conceals reality and acts as a screen to hide it.

“Language conceals reality, but language as the measuring principle is the act of predication. But there is no way out of language except through self-submission to it. He who self-submits to the word (aum) will find the word as reality itself, will become reality itself.” 38

62
Maya in its positive aspects projects the world of plurality on the Brahman-ground. So it is non-apprehension as well as misapprehension. Concealment of the real and the distortion of it into something else are the two functions of illusion producing ignorance.

Maya is the substratum and object of Brahman. Maya does neither affect Brahman nor deceive Him. Just as the imposition of the blue colour on the colourless sky does not affect the sky itself or just as the magician is not influenced by his magic, similarly, the Brahman is not influenced by Maya. Sankara argues that the multiplicity of the world are mere appearances due to ignorance and so do not affect the cause (Brahman) in any way either during dissolution or subsistence of the world in Brahman, as a person is not affected by the illusions of his dream. The self who is the eternal witness of the three states of the world is not affected by any one of them.

Maya is indescribable and indefinable for it is neither real nor unreal nor both. It is non-existent, because apart from God it has no existence. It is not unreal since it is existent in the state of ignorance. It is not real since it disappears with the dawn of knowledge, and does not limit Brahman. And it is not both real and unreal because these are mutually contradictory. It is said to be indescribable.

Avidya and Maya are subjective and objective forms of the same phenomenon. What is avidya from the subjective standpoint is Maya from the objective standpoint. When one perceives a snake in a rope, it is due to avidya; and the rope appears as snake due to Maya.

"Either the consequence of the entire (Brahman undergoing change) has to be accepted or else a violation of the texts declaring Brahman to be without parts."39

This Maya is destructible through knowledge. As the knowledge dawns, Maya disappears. As the rope is known the snake disappears, similarly, as the real nature of the self is known the world of name and form i.e., Maya ceases to have any existence.

Every object of this world is indefinable. We cannot say that the object is real, nor can we say that it is unreal. Real is what is eternal and free from contradiction. The object of the world is subject to change. What is subject to change cannot be eternal. Hence the worldly objects are not real. But they are not wholly unreal. If they were unreal, they could not appear to us. Therefore the worldly objects are neither real nor unreal. They are indefinable. What is indefinable can neither be produced by an existent nor by a non-existent thing. Its cause must be something which is indefinable.
Now, if the indefinable cause of the world has its origin or beginning, then it will also be produced by another indefinable cause, and so on leading to infinite regress. It is, therefore logical to accept the indefinable and beginning less Maya as the cause of the indefinable world. But Brahman is the reality and the world which is the appearance of it. So, both are one. The finite is the infinite but hidden from our view due to our limitation. If Brahman is known, all questions of the world disappear. If we know the nature of the Absolute we know that world is Brahman. The world is Maya, since it is not the essential truth of the infinite reality of Brahman.

2.6.5 Brahman and the individual

The whole of the Vedanta philosophy can be summarized in a line, ‘Brahman is true, the world is false and the Jiva and Brahman are not different.’ According to Sankara, Brahman is the perfect and only truth. Sankara does not admit any dualism between individual self and the Brahman. Individual self is itself Brahman. Sankara successfully has solved the crux of monism, i.e. the relation between the finite and the infinite.

Upanishads assert the identity of the Brahman and the individual soul. The Brhadarayaka Upanishad in 1,-4,-10 says that in the beginning there was Brahman and knew itself only as ‘I am Brahman’. Therefore it became all. Whoever among the gods, the seers, and men became awakened to this, he, indeed, became that. The ‘that’ and ‘thou’ are not contradictory. There is an identical relation between ultimate reality and individual soul. Sankara accepts this identity and refutes the rival theories advocated by Ramanuja, Madhva and Vallabha. Ramanuja’s Absolute is an organic unity, an identity which is qualified by matter and souls. Matter and souls are called attributes, parts of God, while God is their substance. Sankara rejects the view of Ramanuja, because as Sankara holds that Brahman is without parts and beyond space and time. Madhva believes in God. Souls and matter is eternal and absolutely real entities. But Madhva does not regard the universe of matter and souls as the body of God. Matter and souls are different from each other and from God. Sankara holds that soul cannot be different from Brahman, Brahman is non-dual. The difference between the individual soul and the Absolute self cannot be regarded as imaginary according to the Brahma Sutra (1.1.17), though Sankara holds that there is no difference in reality between the individual soul and Brahman. Brahman according to Vallabah is the independent reality. Souls and matter are His real manifestations. Sankara refutes
the Vallabha’s concept and holds that Brahman is changeless and does not undergo modification.

“If the individual soul were different from the Highest Self, then the knowledge of the latter will not involve the knowledge of the former and thus the statement that through the knowledge of one thing everything will be known would not be fulfilled. If the implications of this statement are to be realized, then the individual soul and the Highest self are non different.”

So individual itself is Brahman. The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman, one with Brahman.

In reality there is nothing else besides Brahman alone. But the Jiva, through ignorance projects the empirical world on Brahman. The one Brahman appears as the individual selves on the one hand and as the world on the other. The world is attributed to Brahman as the snake to the rope. Ontologically jiva is Brahman itself. Brahman appears as individual self through the limiting adjuncts, Avidya or Maya generates the psycho-physical organism, which limits the universal consciousness, and makes it appear as the individual or empirical self. It is the individual self, which through ignorance attributes the qualities of the body, the senses, mind etc, to the non-material self and thus undergoes sorrow and suffering. So phenomenally the individual self is the product of Maya. Jiva or the individual is non-different from Brahman, from the ontological point of view. The Supreme Brahman is all-pervading and the inner self of all.

Two examples are given in order to explain the relation of Brahman and the jiva. They are that of sun and the space. The former is called the reflection theory-pratibimbavada and the latter the limitation theory-avaccheda vada. Just as the space limited by the jar is non-different from the infinite space, so the empirical self is non-different from Brahman. The difference is due to limiting adjuncts. If a copper pitcher and an earthen pitcher filled with sea-water are merged in the sea, then the water contained in the two pitchers would appear to be different from each other. But with the destruction of the pitchers the water contained in them would merge with the sea-water and be indistinguishable. In a like manner, one individual self appears as distinct from another and from Brahman due to limiting adjuncts. On breaking the illusory adjuncts like the body, the senses etc. the jiva is found to be nothing other than Brahman.
Sankara points out that the difference is not to be considered as real and that it is due to our ignorance. When we acquire knowledge, we will be able to realize the truth that there is only one universal self and this brings an end of bondage and gets release. The theory of reflection also shows the identical relation between Brahman and individual selves. Just as the moon causes many reflections in different pools of water and the reflections differ in their cleanliness according to the degree of cleanliness of the water and also appear to be stable or moving if the water is stable or moving, similarly due to nature of avidya, the jivas, the reflections of the infinite, appear to have different forms and types.

Though Sankara admits the identical relation between Brahman and the individual selves, he emphasizes on the absence of difference between the two. Brahman is both immanent and transcendent of individual selves. The finite souls do not affect the Brahman in any way.

2.6.6. Sankara and Aurobindo

Being the foremost expounder of Adaita Vedanta, Sankara advanced cogent and powerful arguments in vindication of the existence of Nirguna Brahman. Brahman is transcendental, non-dual entity. The unqualified Brahman is devoid of all qualities. Brahman is incomprehensible, indeterminate, without beginning and end. It transcends past, present and future, which exist in the empirical world. World is a Maya and devoid of eternal essential existence. Brahman conditioned by Maya is the creator of the world. God is a phenomenal appearance. The world and the God are empirically real. They remain real for us until the intuitive knowledge of Brahman dawns upon us.

For Aurobindo, Sachchidananda is unqualified and qualified, changeless and changing, personal and impersonal. Sachchidananda is Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. Consciousness – Force is an eternal, real, creative power of Absolute, which creates the world. If the Absolute is pure being, changeless, it is passive and motionless. Supermind is the God aspect of Sachchidananda and Shakti or Force is the real power of Him. The world is not unreal. The world is a manifestation of the divine, and the creation takes place through the Supermind. Sachchidananda is Consciousness and Force, Shiva and Kali. Sankara separates Divine consciousness from force and conceives force as unreal. For Aurobindo force is inherent in
existence. Neither the Absolute is contentless nor are all the contents, attributes and relations unreal. Aurobindo says

"........ A conscious Force at work in the animal and the insect which is more intelligent more purposeful, more aware of its intention, its ends, its means, its conditions than the highest mentality yet manifested in any individual form on earth. And in the operations of inanimate Nature we find the same pervading characteristic of a supreme hidden intelligence, "hidden in the modes of its own workings."41

The main contention of Sankara is to show the illusory character of the world. The world is empirically real but transcendentally unreal. The world is merely a play or Lila of Ishvara. It is due to Avidya or Maya that one God is seen in many forms. Sankara regards Saccidananda as static consciousness. Sankara is unable to reconcile the manifold world with the unqualified Brahman, and declares the world as false, a mere product of Maya. For, Aurobindo world is a manifestation of Brahman. World is as much real as Brahman itself.

"There is the unmanifest and there is the manifestation, but a manifestation of the Real must itself be real; there is the Timeless and there is the process of things in Time, but nothing can appear in Time unless it has a basis in the timeless Reality. If my self and spirit are real, my thoughts, feelings, powers of all kinds which are its expressions, cannot be unreal, my body, which is the form it puts out in itself and which at the same time it inhabits cannot be a nothing or a mere unsubstantial shadow. The only reconciling explanation is that timeless eternity and time eternity are two aspects of the Eternal and Absolute and both are real........"42

The world is not an illusion. The world evolves and manifests the Brahman gradually in concrete existence.

Sankara boldly declares that Brahman alone is real, Ultimate Reality, one without a second. Sankara compares the creation to the snake-rope illusion. Jiva, through ignorance projects the empirical world on the Brahman. Sankara says that the world is attributed to Brahman as the snake to the rope. So this requires two things ‘rope’ and snake. Rope is as much real as that of ‘snake’. Maya is not an illusion and
real as Brahman. So Sankara cannot save his non-dual Brahman. Aurobindo adopts a synthethic approach to the interpretation of nature, God and Self. Aurobindo believes in integral nature of Reality. The real monism, the true Advaita refuses to recognize any basic duality between the world of experience and reality. The integral advaitism of Aurobindo admits all things as the one Brahman and do not seek to bisect its existence into two incompatible entities an eternal truth and an eternal falsehood. Aurobindo says we seek indeed a larger and complete affirmation., and we can read the great Vedantic formula,'one without a second', in the light of that other formula equally imperative, "All this is the Brahman". Aurobindo has emphasized his synthetic approach and says that matter is spirit and the world is Divine. Matter, life, mind etc. are the limited manifestation of Brahman. Aurobindo maintains that life evolves out of material elements or mind out of living form because life is already involved in matter and mind in life because in essence matter and life are form of veiled Divine Consciousness. So, all contradictions and oppositions to the Absolute disappear in course of evolution.

Thus we come to the point that Aurobindo’s manifestation theory certainly reveals the advantages over the appearance theory of Sankara World is a form of God. Divine consciousness is implicit in nature. Aurobindo presents an integral relation between Brahman and world, between spirit and matter, between temporal and eternal. In cosmic evolution the nature regains its Divine existence.

2.7 Concept of Brahman in Ramanuja’s Visistadvaita

Ramanuja is the exponent of the theistic school of Vedanta. He sets forth the doctrine of determinate and qualified Brahman, where God is identified with the Supreme Brahman. His doctrine of Saguna Brahman is completely opposed to that of Sankara’s doctrine of Nirguna Brahman. Sankara’s doctrine of unqualified Brahman, according to the Ramanuja leads him to a void, which Sankara tries to conceal by a futile play of concepts. Indeterminate Brahman of Sankara

"Is a blank, suggesting to us the famous mare of Orlando, which had every perfection except the one small defect of being dead." 43

Ramanuja’s Brahman is an organic whole qualified by diversity. God is the highest reality, though not the only reality. The two integral parts of Brahman, matter (acit) and finite spirits (cit) are equally real. The individual selves (jiva) evolve out of cit and the physical world out of acit. Matter and souls are integral parts of Brahman.
Brahman is devoid of heterogeneous and homogenous distinction, but Brahman is possessed of internal distinction (Svagatabheda). Individual souls (jiva) and world are the internal distinction of Brahman. The world and souls are the moments of God.

“Ramanuja emphasizes the creative aspect and makes it the highest reality. BrahmaSutra is not intended to give us knowledge of Brahman without differences (nirvisesa – Brahman)”.44

Matter and souls may be called either attributes or modes of Brahman. They are absolutely dependent on God and are inseparable from Him. They are His body and He is their soul. Body is that which is controlled, supported and utilized for its purposes by a soul.

Ramanuja’s doctrine is known as qualified non-dualism (visista- dvaitavada). Ramanuja’s theory is also advaita or non-dualism, though with a qualification (visesa), that it admits plurality. Since the supreme spirit subsists in a plurality of forms as souls and matter. Ramanuja concentrates his attention on the relation of the world to God. He argues that God is real and independent. The souls and matter are real but their reality is utterly dependent on the reality of God. Though the world of matter and the individual selves have a real existence of their own still neither of them is eternally free from imperfections, but matter is unconscious and the individual selves are subject to ignorance and suffering. Yet they all form a unity, because matter and souls have existence only within Brahman, apart from Brahman, they are nothing.

Brahman is determinate, since he is possessed of internal distinctions. For Ramanuja Brahman is Narayana. He is free from imperfections and possesses infinite qualities. He is the origin of the universe, preserver and destroyer of it. The highest reality is determinate and the world is a manifestation of his power, so it is real. Ramanuja holds against Sankara that neither perception, nor inference, nor the scriptures give us the knowledge of the indeterminate, perception presents object which are all determinate. Inference also does not present us with any indeterminate and attribute less object. In the inference when the mortality of Rama is asserted on the ground of his belonging to the class of man, the basis of this inference is the resemblance of Rama to other human beings. Resemblance is not identity. It is difference and non-difference both. Inference is therefore, a form of determinate knowledge. Testimony is also a determinate knowledge, since words, sentences etc. point to determinate things. So, from no source of knowledge can one derive the idea
of indeterminate Brahman. To say that Brahman is indeterminate or indifference is absurd.

Brahman is not attributeless. Brahman possesses innumerable good qualities. He is the omnipresent, omniscient, all-knowing. Brahman is free from all bad qualities. Brahman is defined as real, conscious and infinite. Brahman is both material and efficient cause of the world. Brahman really creates the individual selves out of cit and the physical world out of acit. The world of material bodies and individual selves are Brahman’s modification. They are the real effects. But Brahman is untouched by the imperfections of the world.

God is both the transcendent and the immanent ground of the world according to Ramanuja. God is a person, and not a mere totality of other persons. As an immanent inner controller God is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. God is changeless though his body undergoes modification. Matter and soul, the qualities of God are subject to change but God remains unchanged in the midst of all changes. God is also transcendent. God is the supreme person and the limitations or imperfections of the world cannot exhaust him.

Ramanuja is highly influenced by Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads. Brahman and God are non-different. Ramanuja’s Brahman is what is Ishvara(God) in Sankara. God has empirical reality but has no ontological reality. But to Ramanuja, God or Brahman is the Absolute or ontological reality. Ramanuja justifies his doctrine of Saguna Brahman from the extent formulation of Upanishadic verses. The Svetasvatasa Upanishad (1-9 and 1-12) says the individual soul, the personal God and Prakrti or nature are all contained in Brahman. The same Upanishad farther says, the individual soul, the object of enjoyment, Prakrti and the Supreme Lord Ishvara are all forms of Brahman.

The nature of Brahman is described in the same Upanishad (Svetasvatasa 111.1) in this way,

“The One who spreads the net, who rules with his ruling powers, who rules all the worlds with his ruling powers, who remains one (identical) while (things or works) arise and continue to exist, they who know That, become immortal.”

Thus God is the inner controller of all. He is the soul of souls. God is different from matter, though He is present in matter, Brahman is the supreme personality. Brahman is Existence-Consciousness and Bliss. The knowledge of Brahman is not
dependent on the organs of sense, because Brahman’s knowledge is immediate. Ramanuja supports his stand of determinate Brahman with the help of Gita. Gita says in XV 17-18,

"The Highest Spirit called the supreme self who as the undying Lord, enters the three worlds and sustains them" Again Gita says ‘I surpass the perishable and ‘am higher even than the imperishable, I am celebrated as the Supreme person in the world and in the Veda.’

Brahman has the qualities of knowledge, power and love. Brahman has created the world and established law and helps all the devotees to realize the Brahman out of His love.

2.7.1. Brahman and the World

The creation of the Universe is no more than the matter of sport of Ishvara. Ramanuja holds that Brahman creates the world of material objects and individual selves by a gracious act of will. Creation is as much real as Brahman; because the finite springs from the infinite Brahman and includes Himself the finite spirits (cit) and unconscious matter (acit). The cit is the source of the embodied souls (jivas) and acit is the source of the world of material objects. The acit, is called Prakrti, which is real and eternal. Prakrti is the unconscious element present in Ishvara. It exists in subtle seed form, and it is with this that Ishvara creates the universe.

Ramanuja subscribes the theory of Satkarya-vada, the pre-existence of effect in its cause. The all-powerful Ishvara creates the universe of diverse objects out of Himself of His independent volition. Both conscious and unconscious elements are present in Brahman.

"The qualities of Omniscience, etc. enable the Highest Brahman to create and from the indestructible Highest Brahman, the effect (karya) Brahman arises, distinguished by name and form and comprising all enjoying subjects and objects of enjoyment. The Highest Self constitutes the self of all things and has all things for its body, for its outward form and emits all things from itself."

In the absence of objects in the condition of dissolution, Brahman exists and is possessed of pure consciousness. This is “karana Brahman” or Brahman as cause. When creation takes place on account of the will of Brahman, the subtle matter becomes gross and the souls enter into connection with material bodies corresponding
to the merit or demerit acquired by them in previous forms of existence. Brahman, with souls and matter thus manifested, is said to be Brahman as the effect (karya Brahman). Ramanuja holds that cause and its effect are, in essence, identical. Brahman in the causal state is transformed into Brahman in the effect-state. The former is, generally called Brahman and the latter the world of objects and embodied souls. Thus world is the manifestation of Brahman.

Agreeing with Sankhya philosophy Ramanuja accepts Prakrti as an indestructible, eternal existence. But in contradiction of Sankhya, he believes Prakṛti to be a part of God and to be guided or motivated by him. Prakṛti is divided into three elements by the will of Ishvara- fire, water and earth. All gross objects emerge upon the gradual mixture of the three elements. Three elements are the invariable constituents of all the objects in the world.

Ramanuja holds that the created world is as real as its creator Brahman. Regarding the Upanishadic texts denying the multiplicity, Ramanuja says that what these statements deny is not the reality of multiplicity, but the independent existence of objects. For Ramanuja world and individual souls are merely the visible and tangible manifestation of Brahman. Before creation takes place it was in Brahman in a subtle and imperceptible condition. In all objects there is the same Brahman, on which all are dependent for their existence.

Ishvara has been described as a magician in the Upanishad. The inscrutable power by which Brahman creates the world is as wonderful as the magic of the magician. Ramanuja does not believe the creation and the created world as illusion.

“It cannot be said that the multiplicity is unreal, even as a mirage is, for the latter is unreal because our activity prompted by it is unsuccessful, but not so the activity based on the perception of the world.”

2.7.2 God and the Self

Ramanuja holds that the jiva is as real as Brahman. The identity between Brahman and the embodied self, as taught by the Upanishads, is not an unqualified one. It is absurd that finite individual selves are identical with Brahman in every respect. The individual self is an integral part of Brahman and is eternal, real and unique. Ramanuja states that the individual soul is a quality of the Highest self, stands in relation as part to whole. The Highest self is different from the individual soul in its nature. As the luminous body is not of the same nature of its light, so the Highest self
differs from the individual soul which is a part of it. As the attribute is different from its substance, both of them are not same, the soul and Brahman are also not identical.

Man is not different from God as God is all pervasive. Brahman and jiva are non-different from each other. Brahman is whole, jiva is part. Individual selves are related with Brahman as visesanas are related with substance, as body with soul. The part cannot exist apart from the whole, the modes from substance and the living body from the soul. The relation subsisting between the individual souls and Brahman is termed as by Ramanuja aprthak-siddhi, which means 'inseparability'.

"Since Ramanuja identifies the relation here involved with that between the body and the soul, his conception of the Absolute may be described as that of an organic unity in which, as in a living organism, one element predominates over and controls the rest. The subordinate elements are termed visesanas and the pre-dominant one, visesya. Because the visesanas cannot by hypothesis exist by themselves or separately, the complex whole (visista) in which they are included is described as a unity."49

The Upanishadic statement like ‘tat tvam asi’ means that individual souls and Brahman are inseparable, and not that they are identical.

Ramanuja’s conception of the relation between the self and God cannot be easily brought under any well-known logical category such as identity (abheda), difference (bheda) and identity-and-difference (bhedabheda). Ramanuja admits that identity cannot be asserted between two altogether different terms. But it is also meaningless to assert any identity between two exactly identical terms, as that would be a tautology. Identity has been asserted between two terms which are in some respects different and yet the same at bottom. Ramanuja states that even as it is impossible for objects to be identical with Brahman, so the individual soul cannot be identified with Brahman. Brahman is other than the embodied self. Again Ramanuja states the non-difference of cause and effect, Brahman and world (including the jivas).

“For Ramanuja, the effect denotes nothing else than the casual substance which has passed over into a different condition. Gold which is the cause is perceived when the ear-ring is present. The fact that we do not recognize fire in smoke does not disprove this view. Fire is the operative cause of smoke and smoke originates from damp fuel joined with fire.”50
The individual souls are different, in essence and in character from Brahman. The individual souls are non different from Brahman in the sense that it abides in and is controlled by Brahman. The individual souls share omniscience and bliss with Brahman but it is different from God for it is an atomic mode of God. The individual souls are identical with as well as different from God, the relation between them is also that of identity and difference. Ramanuja cites Bhagavad Gita (X8, 10, 11, XVI.8-19) in support of the view of identity and difference. As Gita says, that God is the origin of all and from Him all (the whole creation) proceeds.

But Ramanuja's view receives a rude shock from his wholesale and vigorous attack on the conception of identity, difference and identity-and-difference. What Ramanuja tries to make out is that both identity and difference cannot be separated and equally real. It is contradictory to affirm identity and difference in the same thing or to maintain their co-existence. The concept of pure identity and pure difference are mere abstraction and unreal. For Ramanuja, Brahman is the principal thing and it is always qualified by the individual souls and world. The individual souls and the world have their existence in Brahman. They have dependent existence, and no existence is independent of Brahman. So Ramanuja advocates the view of visistadvaita or identity-as-qualified-by-difference. There is an organic relation between the individual souls and the Brahman. The individual souls and the world form the body of God and have no independent existence apart from Him. The relation between Jiva and Ishvara is that of the part to the whole. Jivas are one with God in essence but different from Him as modes. The relation between Ishvara and the Jiva is one of substance and quality, whole and part, controller and the controlled. In this way in Ramanuja's philosophy, the relation between the Jiva and Ishvara can be explained by calling it qualified monism.

2.7.3. Ramanuja and Aurobindo.

According to Ramanuja Brahman is an organic unity, an identity which is qualified by individual souls and matter. It is a whole which consists of two eternal elements cit (individual souls) and acit (matter). He is immanent inner controller, the supreme real who holds together in unity; the dependent matter and individual souls as his body who is their soul. Ramanuja holds the view of Saguna Brahman and refutes the position of unqualified and indeterminate Brahman of Sankara. The God of Ramanuja is identified with Absolute. God stands for the whole universe. Matter and
selves may be called either attributes or modes of God and absolutely dependent on God and there is an inseparable relation between them. God is the unchanging controller, perfect personality, infinite knowledge, bliss and possesses the qualities of existence, consciousness and bliss.

The Integral Non-dualism of Aurobindo resolves all disputes of unqualified and qualified, static and dynamic aspects of Brahman. The dual distinctive description of Brahman does not mean that there are two Brahmans, but the differences signify only differences of thought, of concept and of ideas, not of Brahman. Aurobindo conceives Saguna and Nirguna as two poises of one Brahman. Aurobindo says,

".....In reality, the silence of the Spirit and the dynamis of the Spirit are complementary truths and inseparable. The immutable silent Spirit may hold its infinite energy silent and immobile within it, for it is not bound by its own forces, is not their subject or instrument, but it does possess them, does release them, is capable of an eternal and infinite action, does not weary or need to stop, and yet all the time its silent immobility inherent in its action and movement is not for a moment shaken or disturbed or altered by its action and movement ; the witness silence of the Spirit is there in the very grain of all the voices and workings of Nature."

Ramanuja holds that the world is as real as Brahman. Ramanuja takes his stand on the Upanishadic dictum that “All is Brahman” (Sarvam khalu idam brahma). Ramanuja denies that creation is not a fact and that the created world is illusory. Ramanuja takes Maya to be Brahman's wonderful power of real creation. He also means by Maya the unconscious primal matter (Prakrti), which is in Brahman and which is really transformed into the world. Regarding the Upanishadic texts which deny multiplicity of objects, Ramanuja holds that these texts do not deny the multiplicity, but only teach that in all of them there is the same Brahman, on which all of them are dependent for existence.

Aurobindo also conceives the world to be real. The world is not an illusion, it is Divine itself. Ramanuja holds that the world is real but he has failed to express the relation between the universe and God. Matter, souls and God, according to Ramanuja are the three realities and all the three make up the Absolute. God is the underlying substratum of matter and souls which are said to be His attributes. Matter and souls are absolutely dependent on God, so they cannot be as real as God. Moreover
Ramanuja has stated that the universe is organically related to the Absolute, that matter and souls are body of God. Matter and souls are not external to God though they have a right to exist separately. God is all-inclusive, an identity qualified by diversity. God’s body is the material cause while His soul is the efficient cause of the universe. But the matter is unconscious and if the unconscious force forms an integral part of the Absolute then it surely affects the Absoluteness of Brahman.

Aurobindo does not consider the world as unconscious or acit. A Consciousness-Force is inherent in Existence, acts as the creator of all, the secret of Nature. According to Aurobindo, unconscious Prakrti is a form of Consciousness-Force. Consciousness-Force concentrates itself in order to manifest itself in the world of Prakrti. So there is no opposition between Brahman and Prakrti. Brahman is Existence-Consciousness-Force and Bliss. Prakrti, for him is merely external aspects of Consciousness-Force of Brahman manifest itself in the form of matter, life, mind and so on. So the universe is Brahman and made out of Divine Existence. In this regard we can say that undoubtedly Aurobindo has made an improvement on the system of Ramanuja.

According to Ramanuja both the conscious and the unconscious elements are the self-distinctions of Brahman. Agreeing with Sankhya philosophy, Ramanuja accepts Prakrti as an indestructible and eternal existence. But in contradiction to Sankhya, he believes Prakrti to be a part of God and to be guided and motivated by him. The entire universe, according to Ramanuja, consisting of matter and souls is the real body of God. But at the same time Ramanuja conceives matter as unconscious. So Ramanuja fails to give a high place to nature. For Aurobindo nature is a form of God. Nature is not unconscious but inconscient.

“In the infinite consciousness of a self-aware infinite Existence knowledge must be everywhere implicit or operative in the very grain of its action, but we see here at the beginning of things, apparent as the base or the nature of the creative world-energy, an Inconscience, a total Nescience. This is the stock with which the material universe commences: consciousness and knowledge emerge at first in obscure infinitesimal movements, at points, in little quanta which associate themselves together; there is a tardy and difficult evolution, a slowly increasing organization and ameliorated mechanism of the workings of consciousness, more and more gains are written on the blank state of the Nescience.”52
Brahman is implicit in nature. So Aurobindo accepts the conception of cosmic evolution. The world is rushing for its union with God. Cosmic evolution is the process of divinisation of the whole universe. In this process the entire cosmos unite with God, as nature is made of the Divine stuff, so it must regain its Divine Existence. In this respect, Aurobindo gives a very high place to nature compare to Ramanuja.

2.8. Conclusion

Aurobindo, one of the greatest philosophers of the modern era, expounds metaphysical doctrine concerning Ultimate Reality where we perceive mystic vision and dynamic creative synthesis. Aurobindo has given a new philosophy to India about the concept of Ultimate Reality by integrating various conflicts regarding its nature. All contradictory concept of Brahman are reconciled in His concept of Absolute.

Sankara conceives Brahman as pure being, static, passive, non-creative and immutable. Sankara’s Absolute reality is a non-dual entity, which is completely bereft of all possible qualities and dissociated from all determinations. In the system of Madhyamaka and Vijnanavada also the absolute is transcendent, totally devoid of empirical determinations. All these three systems consider the Absolute as the reality of appearance. All these systems believe that Brahman is both immanent and transcendent. For Sankara God is Brahman qualified by the power of Maya and it has empirical reality only. The Mahayana Buddhism holds that the immanent aspects of Brahman are a concession to human limitations. Vijnanavada comes closer to Sankara in the assertion that Absolute is pure consciousness and both agrees with Upanishads in maintaining that Absolute is the permanent background of all changing phenomena and transcends the trinity of knowledge, knower and known. Ramanuja and Gita on the other hand justify the stand of qualified and determinate Brahman. Though Brahman is both immanent and transcendent, He is not indeterminate. He is determinate personal God. Ramanuja’s Brahman is a perfect personality and possess of all good qualities. He is an identity qualified by diversity. For Sankara Brahman is of the nature of existence, consciousness and bliss. These are not the attributes of Brahman. But for Madhyamikas Absolute is devoid even of such as existence, consciousness and bliss. Because their method of dialectic shows that if Brahman is shown anything determinate, the source must lie in thought alone. But Madhyamikas admit that ultimate is non-dual, trans-empirical, beyond thought, trans-relational.
For Aurobindo these contradictory concepts of Brahman are only the figments of mind. These rival concepts do not represent the real nature of Brahman. Aurobindo says that Brahman is indeterminate as well as determinate, Saguna as well as Nirguna, one as well as many, static as well as dynamic, and yet all of them are transcendent by Brahman also. He says, the silent and active Brahman is not different, they are one Brahman in two aspects, positive and negative, and each is necessary to the other. Upanishads give two types of description of Reality, positive and negative. Strictly speaking, Reality is indescribable, so the only way to describe it as neti-neti. But positive description says that Reality is Saccidananda. The Saguna Brahman with the help of Maya creates the world and lords over the jivas and their karmas, but remains unaffected by the impurities of the world. Aurobindo also says that, this Divine being, is at once impersonal and personal it is an existence and the origin and foundation of all truths, it is the secret of all forces, powers, existence but it is also the one transcendent conscious being; for He is their highest self and universal indwelling presence. Again Aurobindo says,

"The Absolute is beyond personality and beyond impersonality and yet it is both the impersonal and the supreme personal and all persons. The Absolute is beyond the distinction of the unity and multiplicity and yet it is the one and in the innumerable many in all the universes. It is beyond all limitations by quality and yet it is not limited by a qualityless void but is too all infinite qualities." 53

Aurobindo contends that dual distinctive description of Brahman is a creation of our thought, on the other hand these opposing concept of Brahman only two poises of same one Absolute. Aurobindo says that Brahman is neither qualified nor unqualified, neither one nor many, neither personal nor impersonal, but Brahman is the combination of all these characteristics. This dual character does not mean that there are two distinct Brahman; these are two faces of same one Supreme Brahman. The nature of Brahman cannot be described either positively or negatively. Brahman is indeterminate, devoid of all qualities; He is himself beyond our entire positive and all our negative definitions.

Brahman is the Absolute, says Sankara in the sense that Brahman is not only different from the changing universe but also absolute negation of the physical universe. The meaning of this assertion is that Brahman is absolutely real and phenomenal world is absolutely unreal. This concept of Sankara, is shared by the
Madhyamikas and Vijnanavadins also. Relations are the constituent of the world and are unintelligible. So world of experience is an illusion bred by relations. Samvrti and Paramartha satya of Mahayana Buddhism correspond to Vyavahara and Paramartha of Vedanta. So the differences between Mahayanists and Sankara Vedanta are only different stages of the dialectic and nothing. The differences between Sankara and Mahayana doctrines are largely a matter of emphasis and background. The theistic teaching of Gita says that God tells everything and everything is his part but God is not in the world only. Ramanuja's contention here is that material world and the individual selves whether bound or released, form the ‘body’ of God. Upanishads also say that the world is the manifestation of Brahman. It originates in Brahman, is sustained through Him and culminates into Him. Brahman is the cause of the names and forms of the physical world. Space, time, nature etc., are the coverings of Brahman. Brahman is everywhere. Just as the plants are born in the earth, hairs come out of the body or web comes out of the body of the spider, similarly the world comes out of the perfection of Brahman and returns into it. In this respect of the relation between Brahman and world, Aurobindo’s assertion brings him close to Upanishads, Ramanuja and Gita that all these appear to have the same aim. Sachchidananda, Aurobindo says is static and dynamic, changeless and changing it is both being and becoming. Aurobindo, like the Upanishads accepts the manifestation theory. The integral world view of Aurobindo presents an integral relation between spirit and matter, one and many, eternal and temporal etc. There is no contradiction in between the so called contradictory entities because they are manifestation of the same Absolute Reality. He vehemently criticizes Sankara’s Mayavada or world-illusionism and in this regard his criticisms are mere repetitions of Ramanuja’s argument against Sankara’s world-view. Aurobindo conceives Shakti or Force as the real power of Sachchidananda. Consciousness-Force, takes the forms of matter in order to manifest itself in the world of Prakrti. It is the self-concealment of Brahman in nature. So there is no opposition between Brahman and matter. Matter is merely external aspects of Consciousness-Force. Matter is Brahman, because Prakrti is only a self-concentrated form of Consciousness Force of Brahman.

Sankara emphasizes on Nirguna Brahman and firmly says that Absolute must be positive. Brahman is pure being, static, passive, non-creative and immutable. Brahman can be known by direct intuition only. In this respect both of the school of Mahayana Buddhism are quite close with Upanishads and Sankara as both the
systems admit that knowledge of unconditional Brahman is accessible only through spiritual insight (prajna).

“........ The absolute is realized only in a non-empirical intuition called variously, prajnaparamita, lokottarajnana and aparokṣānubhuti. The nature of this experience is that it is non-discursive, immediate and unitary cognition; here essence and existence coincide.”54

Aurobindo also conceives that mind is a lower principle of consciousness and is inadequate to give the knowledge of Reality. Spiritual experience is the only way to realize the Ultimate Truth.

Aurobindo’s “Integral non-dualism” touches the true nature of Absolute where the duality and oppositions of mind and language disappear and the truth of reality shines through his mystic vision. For Him the reality is that, from which all begin, in that all consists, to that all return. All affirmations are denied to arrive at a wider affirmation of the same reality. All antinomies confront each other in order to recognize one truth. Brahman is the Alpha and Omega. Brahman is the one besides whom there is nothing else existent.

The above mentioned descriptions about the conception of the Ultimate Reality of Indian philosophy show that all these concepts give importance to only one aspect of reality. Sankara Madhyamaka and Vijnanavada emphasize on indeterminate nature of Brahman, which is a unity beyond all differences.

For Ramanuja Ultimate Reality is determinate and it is unity in difference. Inspired by the Upanishads and Gita, Aurobindo tries to fuse all these conceptions into one Ultimate Reality by saying that Saguna and Nirguna, determinate and indeterminate are only two poises of the same Ultimate Reality. The Brahman is at the same time omnipresent in all finites, it is the Absolute independent of all relatives and is the foundation of all, governs all, pervades all; there is nothing that is not the omnipresent reality.
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