Chapter 2

The JĪVA:

LAUNCHING ITS SPIRITUAL VOYAGE
The aim of mankind of any civilization is to lead a better life, here or yonder. All his efforts to lead a contended life are leading man to realise his inability to achieve it all by himself. Through the ages man runs after the material blessings which are though necessary for worldly life forgetting his spiritual nature. The mad rush to acquire things to lead a life of leisure gathered its momentum after the renaissance for since then the humanity has been making great scientific advancements ever dreamt of by man. The new discoveries and inventions of ever progressing science influenced man’s way of living and consequently it occupies an important place in the spectrum of knowledge. However with all its progress and advancement, science could not unveil the secret of the birth, death and sufferings in general. The conflicting ideologies of religion, philosophy and science have generated or reopened the questions about the nature and destiny of mankind. So, generation after generation, mankind repeatedly demands answers to the questions relating to his life on this earth, its significance and purpose. These questions haunted man through the ages. As time passes, the necessity to know more about oneself becomes pressing, almost a torturing urge. The life which was once promising with the materialistic outlook or blessings be-
comes a matter of painful perplexity and an object of weary search. In its efforts to understand, mankind is like Mithya, one of the brothers in The Brothers of Karamazov, who does not want millions of dollars but an answer to the question of life: “We want to seize the value and significance of passing things and so to pull ourselves up out of the maelstorm of daily circumstances.”

Man in his efforts to understand life and its destiny embarks upon a quest of soul, its nature, and destiny. The quest was compared to a journey by the ancient Indian seers. Man is journeying from time immemorial. There are untold number of births and deaths in succession though we are not aware of it. Man, to justify his being, should know the ultimate goal of his life, the way to reach it and the necessary means which will enable him to go by that way to reach the goal. It is said in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*: “Instead the man who has right understanding for his charioteer who holds the reins of the mind firmly, reaches the end of the road (the journey of life) and that is the supreme position of Viṣṇu (the all pervading Being).”¹ If man’s life is considered to be a journey towards a goal, it is necessary to know clearly when does it start and where does it start from. And
where does it end? Why does the soul take up a journey? In the following chapter answers are attempted for some of these questions from the stand point of Vedānta philosophy. This orthodox Indian philosophical system provides answers to the most difficult problems of life and death, and it directs the man who is yearning for the truth to the abode of eternal truth.

2.1 The Creation

The theory of creation that Śrī Rāmānuja subscribes to clearly shows that man starts his journey from Brahman. The finite self exists before creation in a form so extremely subtle that it hardly deserves to be called something separate from Brahman. In this state the jīva cannot be called as jīva because of the absence of any determining factors such as names and forms. In the periods of pre-creation jīva exists in a latent form and in creation it comes to exist in a patent form. These two stages are known as kāraṇāvasthā (causal state) and kāryāvasthā (effect state) respectively. So creation means only a transition to actualization of that which is potential. What exists as a real possibility in a causal state is actualized in the effect state in creation. This sṛṣṭi and the subsequent
dissolution are cyclical processes. This idea of creation as the subsequent dissolution according to Rāmānuja was derived from the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*. In *Gītā* it is stated clearly: “All beings, O Arjuna! enter into my *Prakṛti* at the end of a cycle of time. Again I send these forth at the beginning of a cycle of time.”

In creating the *jīva* Brahman is both the material as well as the efficient cause. Rāmānuja quotes from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* where the emanation of the world out of Brahman is described by the analogy of the sparks which proceed from fire, or the threads which are emitted by the spider. Many other passages also declare that Brahman alone is the material cause as well as efficient cause of the world, or for that matter *jīva*. For e.g. “Brahman was the wood, Brahman the tree from which they shaped the heaven and earth,” and as for the question of efficient cause they declare that “Brahman is the instrument.”

If Brahman is the cause of both form and matter of the *jīva*, it follows that the Brahman, who is perfect, must be the cause of a perfect *jīva*. But in reality it is not so. Rāmānuja answers that cause and effect cannot have
complete sameness of all attributes because in that case the causal relations, which require some difference, cannot be established. But at the same time, there should be at least some similarities between them and Rāmānuja points out that both of them have in common the attribute of 'existence'. Rāmānuja argues that things of different nature can stand to each other in a causal relationship as in the case of spider which is a sentient one emits non-sentient thread. In the scriptures this truth is analogically illustrated as follows: The relation between Brahman and jīva, cause and effect may be compared to the light radiating from a luminous body. The light, no doubt, radiates from the tejas but it is different from it like the quality of a substance or the body of a soul.

Unlike the Sānyāsins, for whom prakṛti and puruṣa exist independent of each other, for Rāmānuja they form one organic whole, holding together by the relation of inseparable unity within Brahman. From this it is clear that Brahman's causality does mean that He created man out of nothing. There is no absolute origination. What exists in the state of latency emerges into potency through the process of evolution. When the time for creation ripens, Brahman, who has the world with its
distinction of matter and soul within Him in a form so extremely subtle, formed the samkalpa (Divine will) to create the world or to become many. This process of creation was more elaborately spelled out by Rāmānuja in his commentary on the Brahma Sūtra 1.1.13: “that which is the cause of all, free from all shadows of imperfection &c., resolved ‘to be many’ it thereupon sent forth the entire world, consisting of fire, water&c.; introduced in this world so sent forth, the whole mass of individual souls into different bodies, divine, human,&c., corresponding to the desert of each soul - the souls thus constituting the self of the bodies; and finally, itself entering according to the wish into these souls so as to constitute their inner self - evolved in all these aggregates, names and forms, i.e., rendered each aggregate something substantial (vastu ) and capable of being denoted by a word.” The process of ensoulment visualised by Rāmānuja seems to be as follows: First, the universe is created; then the ‘individual souls’ are made to enter it with bodies befitting their karma and then Brahman enters those souls as their inner self.
2.2 The Theory of *Karma*

The doctrine of *karma* is an important postulation in Viśiṣṭādvaita, as in the other Indian philosophical systems. It is postulated to account for the diversity of creatures, the existence of evil and the plight of *samsāra*. *Karma* is strictly volitional. It is not an instinctive action which is unintentional or a reflex action or the involuntary functions such as respiration and digestion. It includes all voluntary bodily activities, sensory experience and mental operations. Whatever we do with the body, i.e. with the five motor and sensory organs or with mind knowingly, intentionally, or deliberately is *karma*. It only decides whether a man is good or bad, for Śruti declares: “man becomes good by good work, bad by bad works.” So *karma* determines the character and it persists in the round of births and deaths. The present existence of *jīva* is but a link in a continuous chain of life marked by a succession of births and deaths. This chain is forged by *karma* as an eternal tendency (*anādi-karma-phala-vāsanā*).

The idea of *karma* is rooted in causality and implicates the *jīva* in endless *samsāra*. The present is determined by the past and it (present) determines the future. Like
creation, *karma* also has no absolute origination. As P.N. Srinivasachari writes, 'the story or the evolution of *karma* has no beginning, in the sense that it cannot be logically or temporally explained.' In the cyclical processes of *śrṣṭi* and *pralaya* the body of the new creature is determined by the residual *karma* or the power of the former deeds of the *jīva* about to enter into a new creature. When *pralaya* arises the new world merges into the body of Brahman and the *karma* remains as the potency and at the time of *śrṣṭi*, according to the *sankalpa*, the *jīvas* obtain bodies.

### 2.3 The Purpose of Creation

All the schools of Indian philosophy believe in the theory of beginningless creation. That is every creation is necessarily proceeded by another. In the writings of Rāmānuja at least two reasons are given as to why creation takes place. They are a) the *līlā* theory and b) the one according to which the finite self is enabled to reach its destiny. In defining the purpose of the creation Rāmānuja postulates a *tertium quid*, the theory of *līlā* or creative spontaneity, to escape the dilemma of ‘motivated’ or ‘unmotivated’. The purpose which “prompts
Brahman - whose all wishes are fulfilled and who is perfect in himself - to creation of a world comprising all kinds of sentient and non-sentient beings dependent on his volition is nothing but sport or play." Ramānuja illustrates this point by an analogy of a king. A great king who have conquered the whole earth and most powerful man plays a game for no other motive then to amuse himself. This anthropomorphic notion of līlā, as drawn from our mundane experience, is greatly different from the divine līlā. Accordingly divine līlā is not the fulfilment of any purpose or end, external or internal and also it is marked by the absence of causation or determination from within or without.

What looks like a purposeless activity or sport from the standpoint of Brahman turns out to be a help from the standpoint of the finite self. The spontaneous creative activity of Brahman is really an expression of His love towards creation. The Lord out of his mercy created the individual souls which are in Brahman in a latent form: "In the beginning during the creation, He, the Lord of beings, saw all beings helpless by their conjunction with the beginningsless non-conscient matter, bereft of the distinctions of name and form, and submerged in Himself. They
were incapable of attaining the major ends of human existence, being almost one with non-conscious matter. He, the supremely compassionate, with a desire to resuscitate them, created them..."\(^{10}\). He not only creates the individual self but also provides them with the necessary means to attain the major ends. Rāmānuja writes about this necessary means as "it is a non-intelligent principle, the causal substance of the entire material universe, and constituting, the means for the experience of pleasure and pain, and for the final release of all intelligent souls which are connected with it from all eternity."\(^{11}\)

### 2.4 The Characteristics of \(jīva\)

According to Rāmānuja there are some attributes common to both Brahman and the \(jīva\). These common features do not lead to identification. The distinction does not amount to the separation of the two also. The common characteristics are \(pratyaktva\) (self conscious or inwardness), \(cetanatva\) (sentiency), \(ātmatva\) (self or soul nature), and \( kartṛtva\) (agency). All these characters are common to \(jīva\) regardless of its status: infinite or finite.
Any jīva is said to be a pratyak that reveals itself for its own sake (pratyaktvam nāma svayameva svasmai bhāsamānatvam). The capacity to reveal itself, i.e., self-luminosity, is common to all jīvas. Just as a pramāṇa reveals itself and an object, jīva also reveals itself and other objects. Jīva has two kinds of attributes, namely, dharmi-jñāna and dharma-bhūta-jñāna. Dharmi-jñāna may be described as intrinsic consciousness of the subject revealing itself and dharma-bhūta-jñāna as attributive consciousness which reveals external objects to the subject. In bondage the attributive consciousness of the finite self is contracted or very limited in the scope of functioning.

The second common nature of jīva is that it is the substratum or the locus of knowledge (cetanatvam jñānāśrayatvam). Rāmānuja considers the soul as the knowing subject and a unique centre of experience. The self is essentially a knower is a truth supported by scriptural texts also. The jñāna known in the system as dharma-bhūta-jñāna is a peculiar attribute. It has a reference always and known as somebody’s knowledge only.
The third common feature is that jīva has a relation to a body (ātmatvam śarīra-prātisambaditvam). What it means to say, ‘jīva is an ātman’, and that the ‘I sense’ or the ego is ensouled in a body. The body, the prakṛta-śarīra passes through six stages of origin, growth, maturity, decline, decay, and destruction.

The self is that which is characterised as the locus of wisdom and determination (kartṛtvam sankalpa jñānā śrayatvam). This is the fourth common characteristic feature. When the causal nexus of human action - constituted by cognition-desire-volition (jñāyate-icchati-prava-ṛtate) - completed overt action takes place. So the moral responsibility accrues only to the finite self. In his commentary on the sūtra, “karta sāstrārthavatvāt” which means “(the soul is) an agent on account of scripture (thus) having a purport, ‘Rāmānuja writes ‘an intelligent self alone can have desires and not inert prakṛti, and the scriptural injunctions can influence only a sentient being to action and not inert prakṛti. So the individual self is an agent.”

All these four characteristics are common to every self.
The differentia of the finite self are its atomic nature (anūtva) and the plurality of the jīvas (naṁ-ātmanavāda). The parimāṇa of the finite self being monadic in size (anūtve sati cetanatvam) differentiates it from the infinite self, who is vibhu. This monadic size of the jīvas is accepted in order to explain the departure of the soul from one body to another at the time of death. Even though the size of the jīva is atomic it has got dharmabhūta-jñāna which is capable of contraction and expansion. As the luminosity of the light spreads over the knowledge of the finite self spreads over the body.\(^{14}\)

Ātman per se is plural. The plurality of the jīva is due to the avidyā-karma of the jīvas. Avidyā-karma of each self differs from one another, though they are all alike in so far they have intelligence for their essential nature. The other special characteristics of jīva, on its account of dependence are Āsastva (subservience), paratantratva and the quality of being supported (vidheya) and controlled (ādheyatva).