Chapter II

THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND REBIRTH IN HINDUISM

II. 1. The Doctrine of Soul in Hinduism

II. 1. 1. The Doctrine of Brahman

Hinduism is the predominant and indigenous religious tradition of India, is one of the oldest religious customs in the world. Hinduism attempts to accommodate a variety of complex views span folk and Vedic Hinduism to bhakti tradition. Among other practices and philosophies, Hinduism includes a wide spectrum of laws and prescriptions of ‘daily morality’ based on the notion of karma, dharma, and societal norms such as Hindu marriage customs. Hinduism grants a great degree of freedom of belief and worship. Hinduism is often called the ‘oldest living religion’ or the ‘oldest living major religion’ in the world.

A large body of texts of this religion is divided into revealed and remembered texts. These texts discuss theology, philosophy and mythology, and provide information on the practice of dharma (religious living). Among these texts, the Vedās are the foremost in authority, importance and antiquity. Other major scriptures include the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, Dharmaśāstras and the epics like Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. The Bhagavad Gītā, a syncretistic treatise from the Mahābhārata, is of special importance.
Hinduism refers to a religious mainstream which evolved organically and spread over a large territory marked by significant ethnic and cultural diversity. This mainstream evolved both by innovation from within, and by assimilation of external traditions or cults into the Hindu fold. The result is an enormous variety of religious traditions, ranging from innumerable small, unsophisticated cults to major religious movements with millions of adherents spread over the entire subcontinent. The identification of Hinduism as an independent religion separate from Buddhism or Jainism consequently hinges on the affirmation of its adherents that it is such. Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include dharma (ethics or duties), saṁsāra (The continuing cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth), karma (action and subsequent reaction), mokṣa (liberation from saṁsāra), and the various yogas (paths or practices).

There are many ways to classify this religion into different schools. However, in the modern era it has become standard practice to identify the six schools as ‘Hindu’ which exhibits some allegiance to Hindu Brahmanical culture and lifestyle, in particular an acceptance of the Vedās as authoritative. Following this scheme the six schools are Nyāya (the School of Logic), Vaiśeṣika (the School of Atomism), Saṃkhya (the School of dualistic Discrimination), Yoga (the School of Classical Yoga), Mīmāṃsa (the School of Vedic Exegesis) and Vedānta (the School based upon the end of the Vedās). The schools are usually grouped into couples according to their perceived affinities. Thus, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika represent the ‘empirico-logical’ strand of Hindu culture; Saṃkhya and Yoga share an interest in attaining liberation (mokṣa) through the isolation of pure consciousness from matter, while Mīmāṃsa and Vedānta
exemplify an approach to philosophy grounded in the exegesis of the sacred *Vedas*. This understanding of the ‘six schools’ has become dominant in modern accounts of Indian philosophy and conveniently ignores the diversity of doxographical accounts offered before the modern era. The designation of these schools as ‘Hindu’ and therefore the legitimate representatives of Indian philosophical culture of course also succeed in silencing the role played by Buddhist, Jaina and Cārvāka schools in the history of Indian philosophy.\(^\text{15}\)

In Hinduism, the concept of *brahman* is well known. It is mentioned in many texts such as *Vedās, Upaniṣad, Vedāntasūtra* ect... It is the one supreme, Universal Spirit (also known as *brahmajyoti* for impersonalists of *Advaita Vedānta* School) that is the origin and support of the phenomenal universe\(^\text{16}\). *Brahman* is sometimes referred to as the Absolute or Godhead which is the divine ground of all beings. *Brahman* is conceived as personal (with qualities), impersonal (without qualities) and supreme depending on the philosophical school. Different schools try to establish supremacy of the personal or impersonal (or equality) nature of *brahman*, thus there are such schools as *Advaita* which considers impersonal *brahman* as superior to *brahman* or *viṣṇu* as Person, and *Dvaita* accepts *brahman* to be *Viṣṇu* Himself, thus *brahman* is supreme person or personal. There is still another special school of thought like *Māyāvāda* which tries to establish neither the impersonal nor personal nature of *brahman*, but tries to prove that *brahman* is *māyā* of matter.

In the early Vedic religion, *brahman* was the name given to the

\(^{15}\) Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Washington: Georgetown University Press), 47.

power that made the sacrifice effective, namely the spiritual power of the sacred utterances pronounced by the vedic priests who were by virtue of this known as brahmins. Connected with the ritual of pre-Vedantic Hinduism, brahman signified the power to grow, the expansive and self-altering process of ritual and sacrifice, often visually realized in the sputtering of flames as they received the all important ghee (clarified butter) and rose in concert with the mantra of the Vedās.

Professor Keith chose the term ‘holy power’ to render brahman in his translation of old Vedic charm. Power, the supreme aim and instrument of magic, was in fact the great and determinative element in all Vedic priest craft. He who knows and can avail himself of highest power in the universe is all-powerful himself. The power is to be found everywhere and assumes many forms, many manifestations. It abides with man—not in the outermost stratifications of his nature, but at the very core, in the inner most sanctum of his life. From there it wells up. It increases floods into man’s body and brain. And it can be made to grow that it takes form and bursts into the mind as a vision, or the tongue in the lasting form of the powerful magic spell, potent stanza. The word brahman in the Vedic hymns, in many cases, simply means, ‘this stanza, this verse, this line.’ For example: “By this stanza (anena brahmaṇā) I make you free from disease.”

Brahman as the charm, or sacred magic formula, is the crystallized, frozen form (the convenient, handy form, as it were) the highest divine energy. This energy is perennially latent in man, dormant, yet capable of

17 Heinrich Zimmer, Philosophies of India (New York: Routledge, 2008), 78.
being stirred to creative wakefulness through concentration. By brooding upon it, hatching it, the wizard priest makes it available to his mind and purpose, bringing it to crystallization in the charm. Not yet so crystallized, in its non-precipitated, liquid or ethereal state, it is the powerful urge and surge that rises from man’s unconscious being. Brahman, in other words, is that through which we live and act, the fundamental spontaneity of our nature. Like Proteus myth, it is capable of assuming the form of any specific emotion, vision, impulse, or thought. It moves our conscious personality premonitions, flashes of advice, and bursts of desire, but its source is hidden in the depth, outside the pale of sense-experience and the mind-process. Brahman transcends these, hence is ‘transcendental’ (what in modern psychology we term unconscious). Brahman properly is that which lies beyond the here and reach of intellectual consciousness, in the dark, great, unmeasured zone of height beyond height, depth beyond depth.

Brahman, then, the highest, deepest, final, transcendental power inhabiting the visible, tangible levels of our nature, transcends both the so-called ‘gross body’ (sthūla-śarīra) and the inner world of forms and experiences like the notions, ideas, thoughts, emotions, visions, fantasies, etc. of the ‘subtle body’ (sūkṣma-śarīra). As the power that turns into and animates everything in the microcosm as well as in the outer world, it is divine inmate of the mortal coil and is identical with the self (ātman) or the so-called ‘soul’ in Western style.

The later Vedic religion produced a series of profound philosophical reflections in which brahman is now considered to be the one absolute reality behind changing appearances; the universal substrate
from which material things originate and to which they return after their
dissolution. The doctrine of brahman constitutes the central theme of the
Upaniṣads. Almost every Upaniṣad deals with this subject. The sages of the
Upaniṣads made their pronouncements on the basis of personal experience
(revelation or śruti) as an essential component of their philosophical
reflection. The earlier Upaniṣads were written during a time of intensely
fertile philosophical and religious revival in which the old dogmas were
being questioned and individual personal experiential knowledge was
increasingly emphasized over uncritical acceptance of the old myths. The
polytheism that characterizes the Vedic hymns gives way increasingly to a
search for what is common in the diverse forms of nature. The unitive
concepts that arise from this tendency are those of dharma and brahman.

The Upaniṣads recount the teachings of gurus to celibate pupils
(brahmacaryas) who are seeking knowledge of brahman, the absolute,
the origin of things, whose knowledge brings peace. This knowledge of
brahman is not mere epistemic knowledge (knowing about something)
but a direct, unambiguous knowing that is liberating in its experience.
This culture of acquiring personal knowledge and its concomitant
liberation is now referred to as sramanic culture and has constituted an
important influence on the development of mainstream Hinduism. The
sages of the Upaniṣads teach that brahman is the ultimate essence of
material phenomena (including the original identity of the human self)
that cannot be seen or heard but whose nature can be known through the
doctrine of self-knowledge (atma jnana)\(^\text{19}\). According to Advaita, a
liberated human being (jīvanmukta) has realised brahmans his or her own

true self. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad mentions that Auṃ - That supreme brahman is infinite, and this conditioned brahman is infinite; the infinite proceeds from infinite. If one subtracts the infinite from the infinite, the infinite remains alone.

The Sanskrit term brahman is derived from a root verb ṛḥ which means ‘to grow, to increase, to expand, to swell’ (ṛhati) and causes to grow (ṛhayati). Atharvaśiras Upaniṣad states ‘ṛhati,ṛhayati tasmād ucyate pant brahma’ (That is called brahman because it grows and causes to grow). According to this etymological meaning, the term brahman denotes an ontological entity which is infinitely great both in respect of its nature (svarūpa) and attributes (guṇas). This meaning is accepted by Rāmānuja. Whilst Śaṅkara adopts the root meaning of ṛhati and explains the term brahman as that which is infinite and Madhva adopts the meaning of ṛhanti and interprets the term brahman as that in which all attributes dwell in abundance.

The Taittirīya Upaniṣad provides an unambiguous definition of the term brahman. In conversation between Bṛgu and Varuṇa (his father), in response to the request made by his son about brahman, he offers the following definition, “Yatō vā imāni bhūtāni jājantē. Yēna jātāni jīvanti. Yat prayantya abhiśambiśanti. Tad vijijñāsasya. Tad brahmēti.” (That from which beings are born; being born, they live; into which they enter when on-seek to know that as Brahman). According to the Upaniṣad,

---

21 S.M.Srinivasa Chari, The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlaal Publisher, 2002), 221.
22 Acharya Narasimha, Five Principal Upanishads (Delhi: Penman Publishers, 2004), 344.
brahman is the primary cause of the primary cosmic functions which are origination (srṣṭi), sustenance (sthiti) and dissolution (pralaya) of the universe. Brahman, the ultimate Principle, is defined in the Vedānta Sūtra as follows: “He, from whom proceeds the creation, preservation, and reconstruction of the universe, is brahman.”

The brahman (Ultimate Principle) is the creator, maintainer, and destroyer of everything in the universe, from the smallest microscopic germ to the largest celestial body. As such, it is the instrument and material cause of all manifest phenomena. In its transcendental aspect, it has two conditions, one in which it is at rest and in the other in which it is active, but at no time is it ever non-existent. Its passive condition is called in sanskrit Asat, ‘non-being’. This is the subtle condition of nature when the infinite variety of forms has become submerged into the eternal source from which they came. This is not a state of non-existence any more than there is a nonexistence of clay when the various forms into which it has been cast have been destroyed. The clay still exists, but there is no being or manifestation of the forms which it is capable of assuming. This condition is called Pralaya, the time of universal dissolution, re-absorption, destruction, or annihilation of all manifest phenomena which takes place at the end of each world-cycle. Its active condition is called sat, ‘being’. During this period, it has three attributes, universal being, consciousness, and bliss, called sat-cit-ānanda. Here it exists as pure light and serves as the support of everything in the universe. Its transcendental aspect can never be comprehended by the human mind; it can be understood only as a logical necessity, for there must be a support for

24 Vedāntasūtra, i,1,2.
manifest existence; and in order to evade the logical fallacy of regressus and infinitutn, no support can be postulated for the Ultimate Principle. For the same reason, it is the uncaused cause.

The nature of brahman is also a main theme which is discussed in Upaniṣads. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad describes brahman as real, knowledge and infinite ‘satyaṁ jñānamanantam brahma’25 (Brahman is Truth (The Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe), Omiscient and Illimitable (not limited by time, space or causality).26 Whether these three terms denote the essential nature of brahman (svarūpa) or they refer to the distinguishing characteristics of brahman (svarūpa-nirūpakā dharma) which is still a disputed issue among the commentators. If this text is taken as a statement offering the definition of brahman, which seems to be the intention of the Upaniṣad, the terms convey the three essential characteristics of brahman. However, the fuller implications of these terms, as explained by the Upaniṣads, reveal that they denote both the svarūpa and attributes of Brahman.

First nature of Brahman is satyam (reality or truth). The word satya is often employed by the Upaniṣads in the sense of truth as opposed to falsehood (satyameva jayate)27 and as an ethical virtue to be cultivated as part of the spiritual discipline to be adopted for realization of brahman. But in the context of brahman, satyam denotes the svarūpa of brahman and also its distinguishing attribute.

The Brhadāranyaka, one of the oldest Upaniṣads, designates

26 Ibid.
27 Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, III.1.6.
brahman as satyam (Reality). In connection with the description of the state of deep sleep (suṣupti), the Upaniṣad states: “Tasyopaniṣat, satyasya satyam iti prāṇā vai satyam, teṣām eṣa satyam”\(^{28}\) (Its inner meaning (Upaniṣad) is ‘the truth of the truth’: the breaths are the truth, and it is the truth of them)\(^{29}\). The same Upaniṣad in a later passage narrating the mūrta and amūrta forms of brahman, mentions explicitly that satyasya satyam is the name (nāmadheya) of brahman and explains it in the same way\(^{30}\). It is obvious from these statements that the word satya stands for the svarūpa of brahman in the sense of unchanging reality. Prāṇā taken in the sense of either vital breaths or as jīvas, are subject to some change, whereas brahman remains ever unchanging. In other words, brahman is satya since it is never subject to any kind of modification (nirvikāra).

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad also mentions that satyam is the name of Brahman.\(^{31}\) However, while explaining the meaning of the word, it points out that this term consists of three syllables which are sat, ti and yaṃ. ‘Sat’ is immortal, ‘ti’ is mortal and ‘yaṃ’ is that which holds the two together (yamayati)\(^{32}\). This implies that brahman is satya since it holds together or controls both the sentient souls (sat) and non-sentient entities (ti). Satyam here stands for the dharma of brahman.

The other nature of brahman is jñāna. There are several Upaniṣadic statements which describe brahman as jñāna. While the Taīttriya defines brahman as vijñāna, the Brhadāranyaka states that

\(^{28}\) Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, II.1.20.
\(^{30}\) Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, II.3.6.
\(^{31}\) Chāndogya Upaniṣad, III.3.4
\(^{32}\) *Ibid*, III.3.5.
brahman is only vijñāna-ghana (vijñāna-ghana eva)\textsuperscript{33}, implying that it is constituted of consciousness only. The same Upaniṣad states: “vijñānam ānandam brahma”\textsuperscript{34}(Brahman is knowledge, joy)\textsuperscript{35}. The Aitareya emphatically asserts that brahman is prajñāna (prajñānam brahma) and all that exists in the universe, both sentient beings and non-sentient entities, are rooted in prajñāna (prajñāne pratiṣṭhitam)\textsuperscript{36}. All these descriptions convey the idea that brahman is essentially constituted of pure consciousness, implying its spiritual character. In view of this, the terms jñānam, vijñānam, and prajñāna denote the svarūpa or essential nature of brahman.

The Upaniṣads also speak of brahman as endowed with knowledge. The word jñānam in the Taittirīya text signifies that brahman possesses knowledge as an attribute. The very fact that brahman wills to become the manifold universe implies that it is sentient being endowed with knowledge. The Upaniṣads explicitly state that brahman is sarvajñah.\textsuperscript{37} The Brhadāranyaka uses the expression vijñātṛ for brahman (vijñātāram are kena vijānīyat)\textsuperscript{38}. The word vijñātā like jñātā means a knower, that is, a subject who knows through knowledge. Brahman is conceived as having several functions such as the creation of the universe, entry into the created objects, controllership of all, capacity to support the earth, heaven, etc., power to command all. All these functions would be

\textsuperscript{33} Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, II.4.12.  
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, III.9.28.  
\textsuperscript{35} Valerie J. Roebuck, The Upaniṣads (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), 70.  
\textsuperscript{36} Aitareya Upaniṣad, III.1.3.  
\textsuperscript{37} Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, II.2.7.  
\textsuperscript{38} Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, II.4.14.
applicable to a brahman which is endowed with jñāna and śakti and not to a brahman devoid of all attributes.

The next nature of brahman is ananta. It is the third important term employed by the Taittirīya to define brahman. As in the case of satya and jñāna, it also denotes both the essential nature (svarūpa) and the distinguishing characteristic of brahman. As explained by the commentators, the term implies that brahman is not conditioned by space, time and any other entity. In other words, brahman is infinite because it is omnipresent, it exists all the time and it pervades all the objects in the universe. There are several other Upaniṣadic texts which support these three concepts. The Muṇḍaka states that brahman is eternal (nitya), all-pervasive (vibhu) and omnipresent (sarvagata).39 The Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad describes brahman as imperishable (aṅkṣara). The Īśa Upaniṣad states that the entire universe is pervaded by the Supreme Lord and that the Lord abides within all that exists and also outside them. The Kaṭha teaches that brahman is both smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest. The same fact is brought out vividly by the Chāndogya when it points out that brahman which abides within one’s heart as the Inner Self is smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a barley corn, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a grain of millet or kernel of a grain of a millet and that it is also greater than all the worlds.40 All these statements convey that brahman described as ananta is infinite both in respect of its svarūpa and dharma.

---

39 Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, I.1.6.
40 Chāndogya Upaniṣad, III.14.3
Other nature of *brahman* is bliss (ānanda). Besides the three distinguishing attributes, the *Taittirīya* mentions ānanda as an essential characteristic of *brahman*. The manner in constitutes both the nature of *brahman* and also its distinguishing attribute. The *Upaniṣad* conceives *brahman* in five concrete forms for the purpose of easy comprehension in an ascending order as consisting of food (annamaya), as consisting of mind (manomaya), as consisting of vital breath (prāṇamaya), as consisting of consciousness (vijñānamaya), and lastly as constituted of bliss (ānandamaya). It then points out that what is described as ānandamaya, willed to become many and created everything\(^1\). The ānandamaya ātmā is therefore regarded as *brahman*. Further the *Upaniṣad* also describes the ānanda of *brahman* by comparing it with the quantum of ānanda enjoyed by different grades of individuals in an ascending order starting from human beings and culminating in brahma. The intention of this passage is to convey the fact that the ānanda of *brahman* is infinite as compared to the ānanda of the highest celestial deity such as prajāpati. From these descriptions it is obvious that *brahman* is one which is endowed with infinite bliss. The *Upaniṣad* also describes *brahman* as ānanda. Thus the same *Taittirīya* states: “ānando brahmeti vyjānāt”\(^2\). The *Brhadāraṇyaka* also states that *brahman* is vijñāna and ānanda (vijñānam ānandam brahma)\(^3\). From these statements it is evident that the term ānanda denotes the very svarūpa of *brahman*.

One other important characteristic of *brahman* dominantly presented in several *Upaniṣads* is that *brahman* is the Inner Controller

---

\(^1\) *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, II.6.1.
\(^2\) *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, III.6.1.
\(^3\) *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, III.9.28.
(antaryāmī) of all sentient beings and the non-sentient entities in this universe. The Antaryāmī Brāhmaṇa of the Brhadāranyaka specifically deals with this subject. In reply to the question raised by Uddālaka, the son of Aruṇa, to tell him about the Inner Controller (antaryāmī) who controls from within, this world as well as the next and all beings, Yājñavalkya narrates in a specific way: “He who dwells within the earth, who is within the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within, He is your Self, the Inner Controller, the Immortal”\textsuperscript{44}. In the same strain, he repeats the statement twenty times covering in each statement other entities viz., water, fire, sky, air, heaven, the sun ...etc.

The same truth is conveyed by Yājñavalkya to Uṣāsta and Kahola when he imparts to them the nature of ātman (brahman) in the significant statement: “eṣa ta ātmā sarvāntarah” \textsuperscript{45} which means this is your Self (Inner Self) which is within all. The Chāndogya also reiterates the same truth when it describes the nature of brahman as “eṣa ma ātmā antar-hrdaye”\textsuperscript{46} (He, who is my Self within the heart). The words ‘ma ātmā’ mean the Inner Self of one’s individual soul. The Kaṭha says that the Divine Being which is difficult to be seen, is deeply hidden in the cave of the heart and it dwells in the soul. It also describes brahman as sarva-bhūta-antarātmā.\textsuperscript{47}

The Aitareya which describes brahman as prajnāna asserts emphatically that all entities in the universe (both sentient and non-

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., III.7.1. 
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., III.4.1. 
\textsuperscript{46} Chāndogya Upaniṣad, III.14.3. 
\textsuperscript{47} Kaṭha Upaniṣad, I.2.12 and II.2.12.
sentient) are guided by prajñāna (sarvam tat prajñāna-netram), which conveys the idea of inner controllership. The Taittirīya and Chāndogya, while describing the process of creation of the universe point out that brahman enters into all the created objects along with the jīvātma (anena jīvenatmanā anupraviśya) in order to give them name and form. According to Taittirīya Āranyaka, the more important purpose of anupraviśya is to rule or guide all beings. The text clearly states: “antaḥ praviśṭah śāstā janānam sarvātmā”.48 It means that brahman, the self of all, rules all beings by entering into them. This explains the significance of the antaryāmitva character of brahman. Besides defining the nature of brahman in terms of its distinguishing characteristics such as satya, jñāna, ananta, ānanda and antaryāmī, Upaniṣads also mention the nature of brahman as the source of the universe (bhūtayoni), the support of the universe (ādhāra), the supreme ruler (īśvara), and the supreme personal god (puruṣa).

II. 1. 2. The Doctrine of Ātman

II. 1. 2. 1. The Definition of Ātman

In the Hindu philosophy, the concept of ātman refers to the doctrine of an eternal self that is said to be the life-force found within all beings including the cosmos itself. Comparable (although not equivalent) to the Western notion of the soul, the concept of ātman occupies a major place in Hindu philosophical and theological reflection. It is deemed to be the very foundation of one’s spiritual nature and identity. In some schools of Hinduism, such as Advaita Vedanta, it is held that the ātman is fully

48 Taittirīya Āranyaka, III.2.1.
identical with Brahman, the supreme monistic principle of the universe. Other Hindu philosophical schools, however, disagree with this claim. Moreover, Buddhism repudiated the concept of an eternal soul with its doctrine of an ātman claiming that the Hindu concept of ātman is an illusion.

The ātman doctrine of Hinduism, nevertheless, has had a tremendous impact on Hindu philosophical and ethical thinking. Since many Hindus claim the ātman is found in all living things, this doctrine helped make Hinduism more amenable to embracing ahimsā (non-violence) as an ethical precept, as well as cultivating an awareness of the interrelatedness of all life, in which the “Self is seen as other” and “Other is seen as the self.” Hinduism in some forms teaches that mokṣa (spiritual liberation) is attained through knowledge of the ātman. This view of salvation is known as Ātmavidyā (self-knowledge/realization) by which it is meant introspective knowledge of humanity’s innate divinity.

Brahman is the ultimate, unifying essence of the universe; ātman is the inmost essence and unifying principle in man. Both are in the last analysis to be identified in the equation ātman “Mama iti. Tad Brahma. Sa Ātmā.”49 (That mahah is Brahman, the Ātman).50

While the early Vedic texts are centered on celebratory ritual re-enactment of cosmic sacrifice (yajna), the later Hindu texts known as the Upaniṣads turned their focus inward. The Upaniṣads contain detailed discussions of the nature of the self and its relationship to brahman, the ground of being. Since the Upaniṣads themselves are heterogeneous

49 Taittirīya Upaniṣad, I.5.
50 Acharya Narasimha, Five Principal Upanishads (Delhi: Penman Publishers, 2004), 286.
texts, they include a variety of perspectives of ātman, describing it in a number of ways such as “will”, “consciousness”, “breath”, and the “fire-soul” (the warmth of life, usually related to the sun, by which the ‘food’ constituting life is cooked), among other things. Perhaps most profoundly, the ātman is described as the eternal self that is never born and never dies, lasting throughout eternity. Thus, the notion of ātman is transformed into an abstract, cosmic principle equivalent to the ground of being itself. Ātman is the true, radiant self, which is not born, nor dies. This one has not come from anywhere. Furthermore, it is unborn, constant, eternal, primeval, this one is not slain when the body is slain, “Na jāyate mriyatē vā vipaścit nāyam kutaścin na babhūva kaścit, Ajō nityah sāśwatō’ham purāṇō na hanyatē hanyamānē śarīre.”\(^{51}\) (The wise one [the embodied self] is not born, nor does it die. It is not from anywhere, nor was it anyone. Unborn, everlasting, eternal, primeval; it is not slain when the body is slain).\(^{52}\)

With the profession of the eternal nature of the soul came the introduction of the idea that ātman is trapped within a cycle of rebirth, known as saṃsāra. Kaṭha Upaniṣad explains:

“Yastu avijñānavān bhavati amanaskah sadāśucih
Na sa tatpadamāpnōti saṃsāram cādhigaccati.”\(^{53}\)

(The one without understanding, unmindful and ever impure

Does not reach that place but goes on to saṃsāra (reincarnation).\(^{54}\)

\(^{51}\) Kaṭha Upaniṣad, II.18.


\(^{53}\) Kaṭha Upaniṣad, III.7.

This idea, which may have been in currency in the earlier Indus Valley Civilization, was merged with the idea of *karma* to create the idea that thoughts and actions within and individual’s present life could determine the condition of their soul’s future existences. The motivation of religious and moral activity, then, is to accumulate good *karma* in order to free oneself from the baneful material world and thereby liberate the soul from the cycle of rebirth. As the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* explains:

“One must seek for and want to know the self which is free from evil, ageless, deathless and sorrowless, without hunger, without thirst, of true desire, of true resolve. The one who has found and knows the self attains all worlds and desires. He who has searched out that self and understands it, obtains all worlds and desires.”

II. 1. 2. 2 The Ātman in The *Upaniṣads*

The *Upaniṣads* admit the existence of *jīvātman* or the individual self as a real ontological spiritual entity as distinct from *brahman* or the Universal Self. Though Śaṃkara considers the *jīva* and *brahman* as essentially non-different, the *Upaniṣadic* seers including Yājñavalkya of Bṛhadāranyaka who is claimed by the Advaitins to uphold ātmādvaita, are clear in their mind about the real difference that exists between these two ontological entities.

The term *jīva* means that which lives or sustains life (*jīvati iti jīvah*). The other term, which is more often used in the Upanisads is ātmā. But the word ātmā denotes both *brahman* and *jīvātman*. All the *Upaniṣads* admit *jīva* and *brahman* as two distinct entities. To make the

distinction clear, when the word ātmā denotes jīva, it is termed as jīvātman and when it is employed to refer to brahman, it is termed as Paramātman. The term ātmā is derived from the root verb which means “to obtain”, “to eat” or “to enjoy” or “pervade all”(āpnoter atter, atatervā)\(^{56}\). This meaning is applicable to both jīvas and brahman. jīva pervades the entire body (āpnoti), whereas Paramātmā (brahman) pervades the entire universe. The correct import of the word ātmā is therefore to be determined with reference to the context in which it is employed in the Upaniṣadic statement.

One other term which is used for jīva is puruṣa. This word also denotes both jīvātman and brahman. Etymologically puruṣa means that which dwells in the citadel of heart. This description is applicable to both jīva and brahman. The Upaniṣads also use the words sārīrātmā and cetana or cit to denote jīvātman. Sārīrātmā signifies that jīva is encased in the physical body. Cetana or cit implies that jīva is constituted of consciousness. This term is applicable to both jīva and brahman, since both are constituted of consciousness, “nityo nityānām cetanaḥ cetanānām.”\(^{57}\)

The natures of jīvātman are many. According to the Upaniṣads, jīva is different from the physical body, the sense organs, the mind, the vital breath and intellect or knowledge. The passage in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad deals with the instruction of Prajapati to Indra and Virocana about the nature of ātman in three consecutive stages with different conceptions. Prajapati stresses the fact that ātman is different from the

\(^{56}\) Aitareya Upaniṣad, I.1.

\(^{57}\) Kaṭha Upaniṣad, II.13.
physical body. Thus he says: “The body is mortal. It has been taken by death. But it is the support of the self, which is immortal and bodiless. The embodied has been taken by the pleasant and the unpleasant. For the embodied, there is no escaping the pleasant and the unpleasant. But that which is bodiless and the pleasant and the unpleasant do not touch.”

Similarly, prāṇa, manas and the indriyas are not jīva because they are brought into existence by brahman, whereas jīva is eternal. The Praśna specifically mentions that prāṇa is born of ātman (Brahman) and that it comes into the body along with manas. It also points out that prāṇa is different from jīva and it is connected with jīva.

Unlike other material entities, jīvatman is essentially spiritual in character. The Upaniṣads describe it as vijñānamayaḥ which means that it is constituted of knowledge (jñāna-svarūpa). In the Jyotir Brähmaṇa of the Brhadāraṇyaka, Janaka asks Yajñavalkya: What is the Self? In reply, he says: “yo’yam vijñānamayaḥ prāṇeṣu hṛdy antarjyotiḥ puruṣah” (The Puruṣa who consists of knowledge is in the midst of the senses and he is the light within the heart). Whether the term puruṣa refers to the brahman or the jīvatman proper, is a matter of interpretation based on the metaphysical stand of the commentators. But in the context of the waking and dream experience of the Puruṣa to which the passage refers, it is obvious that puruṣa here denotes the individual self. Its description as vijñānamaya therefore signifies that jīva is of the nature of knowledge

59 Mundaka Upaniṣad, II.1.2.
60 Praśna Upaniṣad, III.3.
61 Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, IV.3.7.
and that it also possesses knowledge as implied by the affix māyat. Otherwise a non-sentient entity such as mind cannot experience either the external objects or the internal states. Jīva is located in the inner recess of the heart (hṛdi). There are many other Upanisadic statements which refer to the location of both jīva and Paramātman in the inner recess of one’s heart.

Jīvātman is not only of the nature of jñāna but it is also the subject of jñāna. The Praśna Upaniṣad says that Jīvātman is knower, besides describing it as vijñānātma which means that it is of the nature of knowledge. The Chāndogya, while describing the activities of the liberated soul in the state of mokṣa, states that he who knows that he smells, is the self, “atha yo veda idam jighrāni iti, sa ātmā”. It also points out that even in the state of mokṣa, jīva can function. The Upaniṣads employ the term vijñātā or vijñātāra in respect of both Jīvātman and Paramātman and this affirms that Jīvātman is not merely constituted of knowledge but it is also the subject of knowledge. The Vedāntasūtra reading as ‘jño’ata eva’, as properly interpreted, acknowledges knowership of jīva.

The knowledge of jīva, according to the Upaniṣadic teaching, constitutes its essential attribute. The Brhadāraṇyaka in a significant statement mentions that the knowledge jīvātman is imperishable, “na hi vijñātuh viparilopo vidyate”. Though this text is interpreted differently by both Śaṅkara and Madha, the fact that the Upaniṣad mentions the two

---

62 Praśna Upaniṣad, IV.9.
63 Chāndogya Upaniṣad, VIII.12.4.
64 Vedāntasūtra of Bādarāyaṇa, II.3.28.
65 Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, IV.3.30.
terms viṁṣṭā and viṁśti in the same statement denotes two separate ideas viz., the first one applicable to jīvātman which is the knower and the second to its knowledge. As the two are inseparably related, similar to the substance and its essential attribute, the knowledge of jīva is not obliterated even in the state of deep sleep. At this time it is dormant due to the absence of objects to be experienced.

Like paramātman, the jīvātman is eternal. The śvetāśvatara mentions that both jīva and paramātman are unborn, “jñā-jñāu dvāu ajāu”66. Kaṭha explicitly states: “na jāyate mriyate vā vipaścit”67. (The self is neither born nor does it die). It has not sprung from anything; nothing has sprung from it. It is unborn, eternal, everlasting and primeval. It is not killed when the body is killed68. The śvetāśvatara describes jīva as eternal and many. It also describes jīva as imperishable and immortal, as contrasted to primordial cosmic matter which is perishable.

A large number of Upaniṣads teach explicitly that jīvātman is different from brahman. There are also a few texts which speak of non-difference between them. The śvetāśvatara is explicit in drawing the distinction between the jīvātman and paramātman. It states: “There are two unborn ones, the omniscient and the ignorant, the one all-powerful, the other powerless”69. It also describes brahman as the controller of all, whereas the jīva is the one who experiences pleasure and pain.

More importantly, the Antaryāmī Brāhmaṇa of Bṛhadāraṇyaka teaches that Brahman abides in all sentient and non-sentient entities in the

66 Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, 1.9.
67 Kaṭha Upaniṣad, II.18.
69 Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, 1.9,10 and 12.
universe as their Inner Controller (antaryāmin). Among the twenty-one entities enumerated as illustrative of the entire universe, the passage specifically mentions that brahman also abides in the jīvātman as its Inner Controller. Thus it says: “ya ātmani tiṣṭhan ātmanaḥ antaraḥ, yam ātmā na veda, yasya ātmā śarīram, yo ātmānam antaro yamayati sa ta (tava) ātmā antaryāmī amṛtaḥ”70 (He who dwells in the atman (individual self) yet is within the self, whom the self does not know, whose body is the self, who controls the self from within, he is your self, the inner controller, the immortal). In this statement, as admitted by all commentators, the indwelling paramātman (brahman) in the ātman (individual self) as its antaryāmin, clearly implies that paramātman is distinct from jīvātman, as otherwise brahman abiding in the jīva is not conceivable.

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad also while describing the nature of Brahman enjoined for meditation, states that Brahman is myself (eṣa ma ātmā) within the heart, smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest71. In this passage also the words eṣa ma ātmā convey the same meaning as in the passage of Antaryāmī Brāhmaṇa. viz., brahman (eṣa) is the inner controller of the jīva (tava ātmā) and thereby indicates the difference between the two. In the context of the meditation on brahman by an individual, the two have to be distinct. This meaning becomes evident from the fact that in the same passage, it states: “etam itah pretya abhisambhavitāsmi.”72 This implies that the jīva (upāsaka) and brahman as the object of attainment are to be different. Bādarāyaṇa confirms this

70 Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, III.7.22.
71 Chāndogya Upaniṣad, II.14.3.
72 Ibid., III.14.4.
in the sūtra reading as “karma kartṛ bheda vyapadesācca”\textsuperscript{73}. It means that the two are different because they are designated as the agent of action (kartā) and object of attainment (karma). In a similar way the statement in Munḍaka, “tatastu taṁ paśyate niṣkalam dhyāyamānah”\textsuperscript{74} indicates the difference between jīva as upāsaka and brahman as the object of attainment.

\textit{Upaniśads} also mention that jīva and brahman are essentially non-different but they are different on account of limiting adjuncts (upādhis) in the case of the same, one all-pervasive ether becoming different when conditioned by receptacles of different sizes. The \textit{Upaniśads} mention a few analogies which appear to support the theory of bhedābheda. The one common illustration often mentioned is that of the flowing rivers which bear different names, lose their name and form when merged with the ocean. Another illustration which is cited in Munḍaka is the emanation of sparks from the blazing fire which appear as many when the fire is ablaze and which one with the fire becomes when it is not ablaze. Though these illustrations may be construed in favor of the theory of bhedābheda relation between Brahman and jīva, it is not clear whether it is the intention of the \textit{Upaniśads} to support this theory in view of the fact that they categorically teach difference between the two ontological entities. Even Bādarāyaṇa does not seem to have taken cognizance of these statements containing the illustration since these are not reflected in any of the sūtra.

\textsuperscript{73} Vedāntasūtra of Bādarāyaṇa, I.2.4.
\textsuperscript{74} Munḍaka Upaniṣad, III.1.8.
II. 1. 3. Doctrine of Soul of the Nyāya School

According to Nyāya, the soul is a real substantive being, including desire, aversion, volition, pleasure, pain and cognition. All these modes of consciousness are transitory, and so are not themselves to be identified with substances. They are viewed as qualities of the substance called the soul.

The Naiyāyika proves the existence of the self by means of inference, though scriptural evidence is adduced in confirmation. The recognition of the different cognitions as mine proves the continued persistence of the soul. For example, when a person has a desire to know or understand a certain thing, at first, she reflects as to what this may be and comes to know it “this is so- and - so”. This knowledge becomes an indication of the presence of the common agent in the shape of the soul. We remember things which we previously cognized. When a man perceives an object, is attracted by it, struggles to obtain it, it is one soul that is the basis of these different activities.

According to this school, the soul is unique in each individual. There are an infinite number of souls; if not, then everybody would be conscious of the feelings and thoughts of everybody else. If one soul were present in all bodies, then one experiences pleasure or pain, all should possess the same experiences, which is not the case. Consciousness is not an essential property of the soul because the soul which is the substratum

75 S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. II (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 127
76 Nyāya Sūtra, i.1.10
77 Nyāya Bhāṣya, i.1.10
78 Ibid
79 Ekakartkatvaṁ jñānecchāprarttināṁ samānāśrayatvam (N.B., iii.2.34)
80 N.B., iii.1.14; N.V.T.T., I,1
81 N.B., iii.2.3
of consciousness need not always be conscious. Consciousness cannot exist apart from self but the soul itself necessarily conscious. It is regarded as a quality of the soul produced in the waking state by the conjunction of the soul with manas. It is an intermittent quality of the self.\textsuperscript{82}

The soul is an eternal entity which is from time to time connected with a body suitable to its desert. The body has its source in the acts done by the person, and is the basis of pleasure and pain.\textsuperscript{83} The body is formed under the influence of the unseen force of desnity,\textsuperscript{84} and is the result of the persistence of the effect of the previus act.\textsuperscript{85} Each person becomes endowed with a body fit for being the medium of the experiences which he has to undergo. The rebirth of a being is not a mere physiological process.

**II. 1. 4. Doctrine of Soul of the Vaiśeṣika School**

The *Vaiśeṣika* system takes its name from *viśeṣa*, or particularity. It insists that it is in the particulars of the world, pre-eminently in the particular imperceptible souls and atoms that true individuality is to be found.\textsuperscript{86} Earth, water, light, air, ākāśā, time, space, soul and manas are the nine substances intended to comprise all corporeal and incorporeal things.\textsuperscript{87} This school is not materialism, though a realistic scheme, since it admits non- material substances likes souls, and regards as real not gross material substances but their minima. Of the nine substances, earth,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[82]{Ibid., i.1.10}
\footnotetext[83]{Ibid., iii.2.27}
\footnotetext[84]{Ibid., 2.60-72}
\footnotetext[85]{Pārvakṛṣṭaphalāṇubandhāt ( N.B., iii.2.60)}
\footnotetext[87]{*Vaiṣeṣika Sūtra*, v.2.19-20}
\end{footnotes}
water, light, air, soul and manas have many individuals. These, with the exception of soul, are extended, have relations of distance and proximity, are capable of action and possess speed.

The Vaiśeṣika theory of the soul is practically identical with that of the Nyāya, though a direct perception of the self where the self is both the perceiver and the perceived is not admitted. The existence of the self is inferred from the fact that consciousness cannot be a property of the body, sense-organs or the manas. Consciousness is sustained by the ātman, though it is not an essential characteristic of it. By means of manas the soul knows not only external things but also its own qualities. Though the soul is present everywhere, its life of knowing, feeling and activity resides only where the body is.

The plurality of souls is inferred from differences in status, and in the variety of condition. The scriptural injunctions assume the distinctness of souls. Each soul undergoes the consequences of its own deeds. It remains one throughout the series of its experiences. There would be no risk of the absolute diddolusion of the world by the emancipation of the souls from it, since their number is infinite. The pluralistic bias of the Vaiśeṣika leads its followers to look upon plurality as ultimate. The free souls are conceived as eternally existing with specific differences. Though each soul is supposed to be distinguished by a peculiarity (viśeṣa), it is impossible for us to know what it is the differences

---

88 Anekatvam pratyekaṁ vyaktibhedah. (Nyāyakandalī)
89 Ibid., iii.2.6
90 Ibid., iii.1.19
91 Vyavasthāto nānā (V.S., iii.2.20)
92 Śāstrasāmarthyāt (V.S., iii.2.21)
93 Ibid., vi.1.5
among souls are due to their connections with bodies. Even in rebirth the manas accompanies the soul and gives it individually. For all practical purposes the distinctiveness of the soul is determined by the distinctiveness of manas, which accompanies it throughout its career. The soul throughout its career, there is the possibility of the continuity as well as the survival of character.\textsuperscript{94} A distinction is made between the individual soul and the supreme soul, jīva and īśvsra. The two are similar but not identical.

\section*{II. 1. 5. Doctrine of Puruṣa of the Sāṃkhya School}

The Sāṃkhya system represents a notable departure in thought from what may called the formalistic habit of mind. By tis emphasis on the principle of continuity, it marks, in some degree, the abandonment of the tendency to view the universe as tied up in neat parcels. Its rejection of the rigid categories of the Nyāya and the Vaiśeṣika as inadequate instruments for describing the complex and fluid universe makes it a real advance on the theory of atomistic pluralism. It undermines the foundations of supernatural religion by substituting evolution for creation. The world is not the act of a creator God, but is the product of the interaction between the infinite number of spirits and the ever-active prakṛti or the potentiality of nature\textsuperscript{95}.

This school assumes the reality of puruṣas and prakṛti from the fact of knowledge with its distinction between the subject and the object. No explanation of experience is possible if we do not assume the reality of a knowing self and an object known. It endeavours to give an intelligible account of all experience, why we have it and how we acquire it.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., vii.2.21; iii.2.22
\textsuperscript{95} S. Radhakrishnan, \textit{Indian Philosophy}, Vol. II (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 226
According to Sāṃkhya School, all organic being have a principle of self- determination, to which the name of ‘soul’ is generally given. In the strict sense of the word, ‘soul’ belongs to every being that has life in it, and the different souls are fundamentally identical in nature. The differences are due to the physical organizations that obscure and contravene the life of the soul. The nature of the bodies in which the souls are incorporated accounts for their various degrees of obscuration. The souls cannot be referred to the same principle from which physical organizations spring. So the Sāṃkhya asserts the existence of puruṣa freed from all the accidents of finite life and lifted above time and change. The Sāṃkhya regards the knower as puruṣa and the known as prakṛti.

The Sāṃkhya view of puruṣa is determined by the conception of tman in the Upaniṣads. It is without beginning or end, without qualities, subtle and omnipresent, an eternal seer, beyond the senses, beyond the mind, beyond the sweep of intellect, beyond the range of time, space and causality, which form the warp and woof of the mosaic of the empirical world. It is unproduced and unproducing. Its eternity is not merely everlastingness, but immutability and perfection. It is of the form of consciousness, though it does not know all things in the empirical sense, for empirical cognition is possible only through the limitations of body when the self is set free from these limits, it has no cognition of modifications, but remains in its own nature. Puruṣa is unrelated to prakṛti. It is mere witness, a solitary, indifferent, passive spectator. The

---

96 Ibid., 256
97 Bṛh. Up., iv.3.16
98 Ibid., iv.3.15
99 S.K., 19
characteristics of puruṣa and prakṛti are opposed in nature. Prakṛti is non-consciousness while puruṣa is consciousness. Prakṛti is active and ever-revolving, while puruṣa is inactive. Puruṣa is unalterably constant, while prakṛti is so alterably.

II. 1. 6. Doctrine of Soul of the Mīmaṃsā School

Mīmaṃsā thinkers regard the self as distinct from the body, the senses and the understanding. The self is present when buddhi is absent, as in sleep. Even if buddhi were concomitant with the self, we could not say that the one is identical with the other. The self is not the senses, since it persists even when the sense-organs are injured or destroyed. There is some entity which synthesizes the different sense-data. The body is material, and in all cognitions we are aware of the cogniser as distinct from the body. The elements of the body are not intelligent, and a combination of them cannot give rise to consciousness. The body is means to an end beyond itself, and so is said to serve the soul which directs it. The facts of memory prove the reality of self. It is admitted that the soul suffers change, but through all the changes the soul endures. Cognition, which is an activity, belongs to the substance called soul. It is no argument against the eternal character of the soul that it undergoes modifications.

According to Mīmaṃsā, the soul is different from the body, eternal and omnipresent. The ātman is consciousness itself, though the souls are many. Since all souls are of the nature of consciousness, the Upaniṣads speak of them as one. The ātman is consciousness as well as the substrate

---

100 Ślokavārttika., ātmavāda
101 Ibid., 22 and 23
102 Ibid., 74-75
103 Tantravārttika, ii.1,5
of cognition, which is a product of the ātman. The self is manifested by itself, though imperceptible to others. The self is an object of cognition, since it is directly perceived as the jar is. It is the object of mental perception (mānasa-pratyakṣa). The self is both the object and the subject of knowledge, and this is no contradiction, since we distinguish in the self a substantial (dravya) element, which is the object of cognition, and an element of consciousness (bodha), which is the subject of cognition.

II. 1. 7. Doctrine of Soul of the Vedānta School.

Different schools of Hinduism have different ideas about the nature of ātman (soul). Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualistic) Vedānta refers to the Hindu philosophical school, popularized by Ramanuja (1017-1137 C.E.), which claimed that individual ātmans are distinct from brahman but utterly dependent on brahman as their inner-controller.

According to this school, brahman is both ‘non-dual’ and ‘qualified’ by souls and matter. Yet, while the ātman maintains its own will, it is ultimately dependent upon brahman for its creation and preservation. Ramanuja’s conception of brahman allowed for the worship of God in personal form and conceived of mokṣa not as a merging of ātman and brahman into impersonal oneness but as a union of their distinct identities. For Ramanuja, a soul's union with brahman and liberation from the world is attained through intense personal devotion to God, or bhakti, rather than Śnāṅkara’s prescribed realization of equivalence. Liberation entails the experience of the divine power of brahman, though the individual self is not dissolved into brahman as in Śnāṅkara’s determination.

104 Ślokavārttika., ātmavāda,142-3
In *Vedānta*, the soul is *jña*, which Śamkara and Vallabha explains as intelligence, while Rāmānuja takes it as an intelligent knower but Keśava thinks that the soul is both intelligence and knower.\(^{105}\) The individual soul is an agent (*kartā*).\(^ {106}\) Birth and death refer to the body and not the soul,\(^ {107}\) which has no beginning.\(^ {108}\) It is eternal. Bādarāyaṇa holds that *brahman* is in the individual soul, though the nature of *brahman* is not touched by the character of the soul.

Contrast to *Viśiṣṭadvaita Vedānta*, *Advaita* (non-dualistic) *Vedānta* denied any dualism between ātman and *brahman*. This school is founded by Shankara (788-820 C.E.), the famous Hindu philosopher who interpreted the *Upaniṣadic* connection between *brahman* and ātman to be one of non-dualism (essential oneness). The ātman or self, he claimed, is indistinguishable from the supreme reality from which it derives. For Shankara, the entirety of the universe except for the highest, indescribable form of *brahman*, is an illusion (*maya*). Perceived differences between *brahman* and the individual soul are created by the erroneous perception of particulars in the physical world. Once an individual eschews all distinctions of the illusory particular things, Shankara believed they could then come to realize that ātman is *brahman*. Only then can they escape māyā and merge into oneness with *brahman*.

*Dvaita* (dualistic) *Vedānta*, on the other hand, denies any equivalence between *brahman* and ātman. Rather, *brahman* (which is almost always perceived in the form of a personalized god, rather than

---

\(^{105}\) Bādarāyaṇa, ii,3.18
\(^{106}\) Ibid., ii.3.33-39
\(^{107}\) Ibid.,ii, 3.16
\(^{108}\) Ibid., ii,3.18
the impersonal form) is totally separate from and superior to the physical universe and the souls within it. Founder Madhva (1238-1317), denied the Advaita teaching that all human beings are essentially divine, instead construing the divine as completely separate from humanity and the physical world. Like Ramanuja, Madhva claimed that souls are real entities, existing independently not only from each other but also from God, albeit God is responsible for each soul’s existence and continuity. Ātman is not the same in Madhva’s estimation, much as reflections of the sun are like the sun itself. Madhva also prescribes bhakti as the means by which to attain salvation, though the physical world and the distinction between all souls within it remains even after salvation has been reached.

II. 2. The Doctrine of Karma in Hinduism

II. 2. 1. The Origin and Definition of the Karma Theory

The association between karma and rebirth is not at all clear in the earliest texts and discourses on Indic religions. There are virtually no references to rebirth or to an ethical notion of karma in the Vedās or in the Brāhmaṇas, the oldest texts belonging to the Hindu tradition\textsuperscript{109}. The first significant references appear in an early Upaniṣad, the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, probably composed sometime before the sixth century B.C.E., followed by the Chāndogya and the Kauśītaki\textsuperscript{110}. A hundred years or more later these theories appear in full bloom in the so-called heterodox religions, particularly in Buddhism and Jainism which have karma and rebirth at the

\textsuperscript{109} Henrike W.Bondewitz, The Hindu Doctrine of Transmigration: Its origin and Background (Totino, 1997), 23-24.

\textsuperscript{110} S. Radhakrishman, Beginnings of Indian Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 123.
center of their eschatological thinking. Soon afterward these ideas surface in mainstream Hinduism itself and become an intrinsic part of the eschatological premises of virtually all Indic religions.

The *karma* theory of rebirth is not a linear development from Vedic and *Upaniṣadic* period, but a composite structure. In Hinduism, *karma* is a concept which explains causality through a system where beneficial effects are derived from past beneficial actions and harmful effects from past harmful actions, creating a system of actions and reactions throughout a soul’s reincarnated lives\(^{111}\) forming a cycle of rebirth. The causality is said to be applicable not only to the material world but also to our thoughts, words, actions and actions that others do under our instructions\(^{112}\). When the cycle of rebirth comes to an end, a person is said to have attained *mokṣa*, or salvation from *samsāra*.\(^{113}\) Not all incarnations are human. The cycle of birth and death on earth is said to be formed from 8.4 million forms is an exit from this cycle possible.\(^{114}\)

*Karma* literally means ‘deed’ or ‘act’, and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction, which Hindus believe governs all consciousness\(^{115}\). *Karma* refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determine our future. The conquest of *karma* lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. Not all *karmas* rebound immediately. Some accumulate and return unexpectedly in this or other lifetimes.

\(^{112}\) Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda, *The hidden power in humans* (Ibera Verlag, 2004), 23.
\(^{115}\) Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, *Dancing with Siva*
Human beings are said to produce *karma* in four ways through thoughts, through words, through actions that we perform ourselves, and through actions others perform under our instructions.

In the Vedic period, the *Vedic* sacrifice was called ‘*karma*’ and the word retains that meaning in the Upaniṣads and even later, but with additional, superseding connotations. The *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* says that *karma* is what determines one’s good or evil rebirth, *karma* surely designating action including but not limited to sacrifice. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad begins with a discussion of the various causes for man’s birth time, inherent nature, necessity, chance, and so forth not including the word ‘*karma*’, which may be implicit in the others.

The word *karma* is found as ‘ritual practice’ in the early Vedic traditions. This early idea of *karma* continues into later, post-Buddhist, Upaniṣadic texts dealing with Hindu doctrines of renunciation. Buddhists, as well as some early Upaniṣadic thinkers, took the word from the preexisting tradition and gave it a new and sometimes opposed meaning. Bodewitz, in The Hindu Doctrine of Transmigration, says: “So the term *karman* has a Vedic previous history, but ritual *karman* (the Vedic ideal) hardly suits the doctrine of transmigration which disqualifies the sacrifices. Ethical *karman* is barely found in the Vedic texts before the Upanisads.”

---

variety of texts might indicate continuity of an idea. On the other hand it might not, and ethical thinkers in the Buddhist tradition have poured into the term a new set of ideas that break with previous traditions.

J. C. Heesterman, a scholar of early Hinduism, affirms the unitary nature of the *Vedic* tradition. He says that outside influences have caused no break in the development of ritual thought. “They seem rather to have fitted themselves into the orthogenetic, internal development of *Vedic* thought.” Nevertheless, one can also view that tradition from a different perspective as a composite of diverging ideational systems, each of which exhibits continuity of debates and arguments on religious matters with others located in the same broad tradition.

Ideologists have suggested that the first shift in the *Vedic* idea of *karma* as ritual ‘action’ to that of ethical action in relation to rebirth appears in the *Bṛhadāranya Upaniṣad* which describes a conversation between Yājñavalkya and Arthabhāga, two *Upaniṣadic* sages, on the nature of the senses. Arthabhāga asks Yājñavalkya that when a man dies, what it is that does not leave him. Yājñavalkya replied that it is his name. A name is without limit, and the All-gods are without limit. Limitless also is the world he wins by it. And he further asks Yājñavalkya that when a man has died, and his speech disappears into fire, his breath into the wind, his sight into the sun, his mind into the moon, his hearing into the quarters, his physical body into the earth, his self (*ātman*) into space, the hair of his body into plants, the hair of his head into trees, and his blood and semen into water, what then happens to that person? Yājñavalkya tells him:

---

“atha ha yat praśaṁsatuḥ karma haiva tat praśaṁsatuḥ |
punyo vai punyena karmanā bhavati pāpaḥ pāpeneti”\textsuperscript{121}  
(One becomes good by good action, evil by evil action).\textsuperscript{122}

Most eminent scholars such as Hermann Oldenberg, Paul Deussen, and Surendranath Dasgupta have seen this passage as proof of the entry into the Vedic tradition of the novel ideas of karma and rebirth.\textsuperscript{123} This is correct; although the text itself does not warrant the idea that karma here means ‘ethical action’. As for rebirth it is at least implicit. One argument is that this text is still rooted in the Vedic tradition, clearly indicated by the description of the fate of the dead person. Thus, it is said that the good and bad karma mentioned here refers to the correct and incorrect performance of the sacrifice in the orthodox tradition of the Brādhmaṇas rather than the classic karma doctrine that “relates the fact of rebirth to the moral efficacy of an individual’s deeds.”\textsuperscript{124} Yet this also is not clear from the text; and one must reserve judgment. The text implies that Yājñavalkya is postulating a new idea, perhaps the doctrine of rebirth, including the notion that the name does not perish at death, a conception found in other rebirth eschatology outside the Indic orbit. However, Herman Tull, Heesterman, Gonda, and others, argue that the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad interiorizes the idea of the sacrifice, such that, parallel with the old idea that the efficacy of the sacrifice lies in the correct performance of the ritual, there is another idea that the sacrifice is something within one’s own self. They say that there is a passage in the

\textsuperscript{121} Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, III.2.12-13.  
\textsuperscript{122} Valerie J. Roebuck, The Upaniṣads (Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000), 53.  
same *Upaniṣad* which is also ambiguous, as far as *karma* and rebirth are concerned, and shows its affinity with the preexisting Vedic tradition. There Yājñavalkya tells King Janaka what happens to the unliberated soul after death, employing the metaphor of the caterpillar or leech:

“As a caterpillar, reaching the end of a blade of grass and taking the next step, draws itself together, so the self, dropping the body, letting go of ignorance and taking the next step, draws itself together.

As a weaver, unpicking a pattern from her weaving, fashions another, newer and more beautiful shape, so the self, dropping the body and letting go of ignorance, creates another, newer and more beautiful shape, either of the ancestors, or of the gandharvas, or of the gods, or of Prajapati, or of Brahma, or of some other beings.”

This text is clearer than the one previously quoted. It says that the ‘spirit’, or ‘self’, can be reborn in various spheres, and it highlights ‘good rebirths’ but recognizes the possibility of being born ‘as some other being’; another recession of this *Upaniṣad* states that the spirit could also be reborn as a man or some other creature. Yājñavalkya adds that this self, or spirit, is conditioned by good, and bad actions, or *karma*. What a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and how he conducts himself. If his actions are good, he will turn into something good. If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad. On this point, there is the following verse:

“*Tad eva saktaḥ saha karmaṇaiti liṅgaṃ mano yatra niṣaktam*”

---

“He, with his action, is attached
To that same mark to which his mind is bound.
When he reaches the end
Of the action he did here
He comes back from that world
To this one, to act again.”

Yājñavalkya’s view here indicates that good and bad action, or karma, results in rebirth; the cause of rebirth is karma, which is conditioned by desire. By contrast, for the person who is without desire, his vital functions do not depart. Brahman he is, and to brahman he goes, “when all desires that dwell in one’s heart are let go; mortal becomes immortal; one reaches Brahma here”\(^\text{128}\) (yadā sarve pramucyante kāmā ye 'syā hṛdi śrītāḥ; atha martyo 'mrto bhavaty atra brahma samaśnuta iti)\(^\text{129}\). Thus there are two crucial karmic trajectories: those without desire who go to brahman, which is the goal of the Upaniṣadic quest, and those (presumably the majority) who, caught up in desire, continue to be reborn in different forms. The former are wise men, knowers of brahman, the doers of good, the men of light, who go to the heavenly world and then to brahman. And the latter who worship ignorance will enter into the blind

---

\(^\text{126}\) Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, IV.4.6.
\(^\text{128}\) Ibid.,86
\(^\text{129}\) Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, IV.4.7
darkness after death.

“Andham tamāḥ praviśanti ye “vidyām upāsate tato bhūya iva te tamo ya u vidyāyāṁ ratāḥ.”

“They who worship ignorance enter blind darkness;
They who delight in knowledge enter darkness, as it was, yet deeper.”

Different scholars have different ways to explain formulations of theory of karma. However, the general consensus that there are two main formulations of a theory of rebirth based on the moral quality of previous lives was further refined by A. K. Ramanujan and Charles Keyes. They agree that there are the three essential constituents of a karma theory. According to A. K. Ramanujan, the three essential constituents of a karma theory are causality (ethical or non-ethical, involving one life or several lives), ethicization (the belief that good and bad acts lead to certain results in one life or several lives), and rebirth while Charles Keyes affirms that the three essential constituents of a karma theory are explanation of present circumstances with reference to previous actions, including (possibly) actions prior to birth, orientation of present actions toward future ends, including (possibly) those occurring after death, and moral basis on which action past and present is predicated.

Generally, different schools have various views about karma. In some earlier historical traditions of Hinduism, followers of an atheistic division of the Sāṃkhya School do not accept the idea of a supreme god.

130 Ibid., IV.4.10.
According to this school, a supreme god does not exist but lesser highly evolved beings assist in delivering the fruits of *karma*; thus, they consider devas or spirits as playing some kind of role. These beings can help to deliver well-being in the temporal world and the after cycles of birth and death, and salvation as well. However, earlier historical traditions of Hinduism such as *Mīmasākas*, reject any such notions of divinity being responsible and see *karma* as acting independently, considering the natural laws of causation sufficient to explain the effects of *karma*.\(^\text{132}\) According to their view, neither supreme god nor does lesser divinities exist; rituals alone yield the fruits of *karma*; thus, they believe that the *karmas* (rituals) themselves yield the results, and there is no Supreme God or Ishvara or even lesser divinities dispensing the results. On the other hand, Followers of *Vedānta*, a leading practicing school of Hinduism in existence today, consider Ishvara, a personal supreme god, as playing that role. According to the Vedanta view, a supreme god is ultimately the enforcer of *karma* but humans have the free will to choose good or evil.

In these theistic schools, *karma* is not seen merely as a law of cause and effect, a view espoused by Buddhism or Jainism, for example, but dependent on the will of a personal supreme god. Examples of a personal supreme god include Shiva in Shaivism or Vishnu in Vaishnavism. A good summary of this theistic view of *karma* is expressed by the following: “God does not make one suffer for no reason nor does He make one happy for no reason. God is very fair and gives

---

you exactly what you deserve”. Thus, the theistic schools emphasize that *karma* is one explanation for the problem of human suffering; a soul reincarnates into an appropriate body, which is dependent on *karma* and this is said to explain why some persons never get to see the fruits of their actions in their lives and why some children die when they have committed no sin. Thus, one must reap the fruits of one’s personal *karma* and one may need to undergo multiple births, incarnating variously as plant, animal, or human. Such fruits of *karma* may be analogized to a bank (i.e., god) not letting a person be released from karma's effects until the bank account is settled.

These differing views are explicitly noted in a series of passages in the *Brahma Sūtras* commentaries (III.2.38-40), an important text in *Vedānta*, which endorse the concept of Ishvara i.e., a personal supreme God, as the source of fruits of *karma*, but note opposing views in order to refute them. For example, Swami Sivananda’s commentary on verse III.2.38 from the *Brahma Sūtras* refers to the role of Ishvara (the Lord) as the dispenser of the fruits of *karma*. A commentary by Swami Vireswarananda on the same verse says that the purpose of this verse is specifically to refute the views of the Mīmaṃsākas, who say that *karma* (work) and not Ishvara, gives the fruits of one’s actions. According to the *Mīmaṃsākas* it is useless to set up an Ishvara for that purpose, since *karma* itself can give the result at a future time.

In short, the “law of *karma*” is central in Indian religions. All living creatures are responsible for their *karma* (their actions and the effects of their actions) and for their release from *saṃsāra*. The concept can be traced back to the early *Upaniṣads*. *Karma* is considered to be a
spatially originated law. Many Hindus see God’s direct involvement in this process, while others consider the natural laws of causation sufficient to explain the effects of karma. **Karma** is not punishment or retribution, but simply an extended expression or consequences, of natural acts. The effects experienced are also able to be mitigated by actions and are not necessarily fated. That is to say, a particular action now is not binding to some particular, pre-determined future experience or reaction; it is not a simple, one-to-one correspondence of reward or punishment.

### II. 2. 2. The Classification and Nature of Karma in Hinduism

Human beings are said to produce **karma** in four ways: through thoughts, through words, through actions that we perform ourselves, and through actions others perform under our instructions. Everything that we have ever thought, spoken, done or caused is **karma**, as is also that which we think, speak or do this very moment. Hindu scriptures divide **karma** into three kinds.

1. **Sanchita** is the accumulated **karma**. It would be impossible to experience and endure all **karmas** in one lifetime. From this stock of **sanchita karma**, a handful is taken out to serve one lifetime and this handful of actions, which has begun to bear fruit and which will be exhausted only on their fruit being enjoyed and not otherwise, is known as **prārabdha karma**.

2. **Prārabdha** (fruit-bearing) **karma** is the portion of accumulated **karma** that has ‘ripened’ and appears as a particular problem in the present life.

---

3. *Kriyamāṇa* is everything that we produce in the current life. All *kriyamāṇa karmas* flow in to *sanchita karma* and consequently shape our future. Only in human life we can change our future destiny.

After death we lose ability to act and do *karma* until we are born again in another human body. Actions performed consciously are weighted more heavily than those done unconsciously. On this basis some believe that only human beings who can distinguish right from wrong can do (*kriyamāṇa*) *karma*.\(^{134}\) Therefore animals and young children are considered incapable of creating new *karma* and thus cannot affect their future destinies as they are incapable of discriminating between right and wrong. This view is explained by the concepts of an action body (*karma-deha*) and a completion body (*bhoga-deha*). The *bhoga-deha* refers to a material body that can only expend *karma*. The soul in a *bhoga-deha* body enjoys or suffers the consequences of previous acts, i.e. expends *karma*. So the *bhoga-deha* is considered any non-human body; a plant, animal, insect etc. This body is solely meant for burning off *karma*. An animal, being under the complete control of nature (*prakriti*) and its influences and energy, is therefore regarded as being unable to create new (*kriyamāṇa*) *karma*. The *karma-deha* refers to the human body. It is in the human body that we can, and do, create *karma*. It is in the human body that we are held responsible for our actions owing to the fact that we can exercise choice based on developed intelligence. The only way to break the cycle of material existence is through the human form, the *karma-deha*, but it is in the human form that we are most likely to create negative *karma*, thus

\(^{134}\) Paramhams Swami Maheshwarananda, *The hidden power in humans*, (Ibera Verlag, 2004), 22.
throwing us back into a *bhoga-deha* body and keeping us bound in *Samsāra*.

However, all sentient beings can feel the effects of *karma*, which are experienced as pleasure and pain. And just as poison affects us even if taken unknowingly, suffering caused unintentionally will also create an appropriate *karmic* effect.

Tulsidas, a Hindu saint, said: “Our destiny was shaped long before the body came into being.”

As long as the stock of *sanchita karma* lasts, a part of it continues to be taken out as *prarabdha karma* for being enjoyed in one lifetime, leading to the cycle of birth and death. A *jīva* cannot attain *mokṣa* (liberation) from the cycle of birth and death, until the accumulated *sanchita karmas* are completely exhausted.

The cycle of birth and death on earth is formed from 8.4 million forms of life, only one of which is human. Only as humans are we in position to do something about our destiny by doing the right thing at the right time. Through positive actions, pure thoughts, prayer, mantras and meditation, we can resolve the influence of *karma* in the present life and turn our destiny for the better. A spiritual master knowing the sequence in which our *karma* will bear fruit can help us. As humans we have the opportunity to speed up our spiritual progress with the practice of good *karma*. We produce negative *karma* because we lack knowledge and clarity.

Unkindness yields spoiled fruits, called *pāpa*, and good deeds bring forth sweet fruits, called *pāpa*. As one acts, so does one become: one becomes virtuous by virtuous action, and evil by evil action.

---

One of the most important natures of *karma* in Hinduism is that *karma* can be transferred. The *karma* doctrine is put to a significant use as an expression of the identity of spirit and matter or code and substance\(^\text{139}\). *Karma* is a metaphor for the effects that human beings have upon one another, in this life and even across the barrier of death. This function is based on the idea of merit transfer. The concept of transferred merit in its broadest sense may be traced back even behind the *śrāddha* ritual. The idea of transfer (originally of food, but soon after of a combination of food and merit, a code-substance, in Marriott’s terminology) must have been introduced in some *Vedic* texts, when rebirth in heaven was no longer a process that the individual could accomplish alone. For the descendants gave their ancestors part of their own religious merit (including the merit of having performed the *śrāddha*) along with the ball of seed-rice; this enabled the *preta* to move up out of limbo, to the mutual benefit of the *preta* (who could now get on with the task of rebirth) and the living descendant (would could no longer be haunted by the *preta*). Thus the *śrāddha* represents an exchange of food and merit flowing in both directions: food to the *preta* (in the form of *piṇḍa*) and to the unborn descendant (in the form of embryonic substance), as well as merit to the *preta* (accruing from the ritual) and to the descendant (from the same ritual). The first assistants that the dead man required were his male children; only later was it believed that his parents also played a role in his rebirth. Thus the primacy of the *Vedic* model explains another puzzling

aspect of the *karma* doctrine, the de-emphasis on the role of the parents.

Although the transfer takes place between any two animate creatures (so that one may be polluted by contact with a total stranger or even an animal), it is particularly likely to arise in relation to transactions involving food and sex, the two bases of Hindu social activity and caste interactions. Thus good *karma* accrues to anyone who feeds guests, particularly Brahmins, and bad *karma* to one who does not. Brahmin says, “One must never mistreat a guest, for the guest then takes the good *karma* of the host and leaves his own bad *karma* behind.”

The feeding of a Brahmin guest is, as we have seen, a highly recommended way to get rid of one's bad *karma*.

The concept of the transfer of good and evil occurs throughout Indian texts on various levels of religious experience. In one view, all evil on earth is regarded as a transfer of bad *karma* from the Creator to mankind; in particular, Indra and Siva wipe off their moral dirt on us. In the war between the gods and demons, the good qualities and virtues of one group are constantly being transferred to the other, and back again. Other qualities like ascetic power and spiritual energy (*tapas* and *tejas*) are also transferred on the *karma* analogy: Pārvatī transfers her *tapas* to Śiva.

The most significant transfers take place within the family, between husbands and wives, siblings, and parents and children. The wife’s chastity is an integral part of her husband’s *karma*; the chaste wife can release her husband from his sin. Like all *karma* transactions, this

141 *Brahma Purāṇa*, 35.31-60.
142 Matsya *Purāṇa*, 52.23-25.
has a negative side as well: to destroy a man, destroy his wife’s chastity. Śiva Purāṇa describes the story of Śiva and the demon Śaṅkhacūḍa that Śiva knew that he could not kill the demon Śaṅkhacūḍa as long as the demon’s wife remained faithful. He commanded Viṣṇu to take the form of Śaṅkhacūḍa and seduce her, who he did; when the good woman realized what had happened, she said, “By breaking my virtue, you have killed my husband”\textsuperscript{143}.

The substantive nature of this interaction is clear from a similar myth in which Śiva destroys the chastity of the wife of the demon Jalandhara: when the demon and his wife died, the spiritual energy (tejas) of the wife emerged from her body and entered Pārvatī, and the spiritual energy of Jalandhara entered Śiva.\textsuperscript{144} Alf Hiltebeitel has pointed out many similar instances in the Mahābhārata, in myths in which a conqueror takes to himself some virtue or power of the man he conquers, as well as in the entire corpus of myths in which Śrī (the goddess of prosperity) often regarded as a wife of the victorious king and the incarnation of his virtues and powers is transferred in the course of battle.\textsuperscript{145}

Various forces that act very much like karma are transferred between sexual partners in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad. ‘Good deeds’ are said to be taken from a man by his female partner if he has intercourse without knowing the proper mantra, and he is encouraged to speak a verse guaranteed to “take away” the breath, sons, cattle, sacrifices, and good deeds of his wife's lover, so that the man will die

\textsuperscript{143} Śiva Purāṇa (Bombay, 1884), 2.5.40-50.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 2.5.23-24.
“impotent and without merit.” Surely this is the beginning of the idea of transfer of *karma* through sexual contact; though the word for good deeds and merit here is *sukṛtam*, not *karma*, the unity of context clearly implies that the man will transfer to himself the lover’s good deeds even as a woman may take his own good deeds from him. Between these two passages occurs a third in which seed is transferred from the woman to the man; again a reversal of the natural order, and again an instance in which seed functions like *karma*, as the code-substance that transfers power (with which the semen is explicitly equated in this text) from a man to a woman or from a woman to a man. An even earlier, though more problematic, reference to a similar transfer may be seen in the *Rg Vedic* verse in which the goddess of dawn, *Uṣas*, described as a seductive dancing-girl, is said to cause the mortal to age, wearing away his life-span as a cunning gambler carries off the stakes. A kind of merit transfer occurs in the *Atharva Veda* ritual involving food in the form of *ucchiṣṭa*, a ritual which may be the source of the *śrāddha* offering.

As *karma*’s primary function and innovation is in the realm of rebirth, it is not surprising that the most significant transfers take place between parents and children. The strange silence of the classical texts regarding the role of parents in rebirth is, as we have seen, partially explained by the post-*Vedic* rejection of the model which took the *śrāddha* ritual as the basis of the birth theory, a ritual in which the child ‘makes’ the parents, and partially explained by the inversion of the birth process implicit in that very model. In the classical system, the

---

146 Hari Ragunath Bhagavan (ed.), *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* (Poona, 1927), 6.4.3 and 6.4.12.
147 *Rg veda* with the commentery of Śāyaṇa, 4 vols. (London, 1890-92), 1.92.10.
transmigration theory bypasses the parents altogether. But Purānic texts tend to combine these two views. Indeed, the various types of karma, according to some systems, correspond precisely to the distinction between the parents’ contribution and what we would regard as our own contribution to the karma bank.

In some of the philosophical texts just as Vaiśeṣika and Caraka texts, and perhaps even some texts of the Advaita do tell something about transferring karma between parents and children; but the parents seem to play primarily a physical role, giving the stuff (blood and semen) into which the unborn child’s karma is to be infused. The Buddhists, however, suggest a primal scene that the unborn child, witnessing his parents in intercourse, interacts in classically oedipal fashion with them and is born. In this model, social interaction with one’s future parents precedes the birth process. We find numerous examples in which the karma of the parents is transferred to the child even as the karma of the child is transferred to the parent in the śrāddha ceremony. Numerous examples of karmic interaction between parent and child occur in the Mahābhārata. One example for that is a myth about the King Somaka. The King had only one son, Jantu; he worried that this child might die. His priest advised him to sacrifice the child and let his one hundred wives inhale the smoke, so that they would conceive sons. Somaka did so, despite the protest of the wives, and after ten months they all had sons; Jantu was reborn as the eldest, by his original mother. When Somaka and the priest died, Somaka saw the priest boiling in a terrible hell, and asked him why. ‘I caused you to sacrifice, 0 King,’ said the priest, ‘and this is

148 Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmakośa, 3.15.
the fruit of that *karma.*” The king said, “I will enter this (hell); let my priest be released. For him, who is being cooked by the fire of hell for my sake.’ But *dharma* objected, ‘No one ever experiences the fruit of another's action. You see here your own fruits.’ When the king continued to protest that his *karma* was the same as the priest’s, *dharma* conceded, “If you wish this, experience the same fruit with him, for an equal length of time, and then afterwards you will both reach heaven.” And so it happened. Many conflicting attitudes to *karma* appear in this tale. The “virtue” of the single son is somehow transferred (by personal sacrifice, the most primitive form of transfer, and by the ingestion of substance significantly, *funeral smoke*) to a hundred others but he is reborn among them, so that he is not truly sacrificed at all; in this first episode, the text seems to emphasize that no actual exchange need take place at all, that nothing need be lost by the one who ‘gives’ merit, that *karma* is inexhaustible. This view is reinforced by *dharma*’s objection to the king’s wish to sacrifice his good *karma* to get the priest out of hell just as *dharma* objects, in the Māhabhārata, to Yudhiṣṭhira’s wish to get his brothers out of hell. The solution in this case, however, is the inverse of the solution to the sacrifice of the son: whereas, in that episode, no one lost anything by the transfer, so in this second episode. In this way, the doctrine of *karma* is satisfied without any merit transfer and yet ultimately everyone escapes to heaven, as they do in the Yudhiṣṭhira episode. That the suggested transfers are to take place in the form of a human sacrifice and in the transfer of merit between a king and his priest

---

are indications of the antiquity of this myth possibly composed at a period when the concept of merit transfer was still being developed.

In the Mahābhārata, and in the Purāṇas, we find myths illustrative of the *karma* flow in both directions: from living children to dead ancestors as in the tale of a sage’s ancestors hanging by their fingertips in a great pit\(^\text{150}\) and less often, from parents to children. A series of karmic transfers from children to parents takes place between King Yayāti and his sons and grandsons.\(^\text{151}\) In the myth of Vena, *karma* flows in from both directions: the evil of Vena himself is the result of the direct transfer of negative *karma* from his evil mother who is evil because of the *karma* inherited from her father, death;\(^\text{152}\) but when Vena dies, and is reborn as a leper, his good son Prthu saves him by going to a shrine, performing a ritual, and transferring that merit to his father, for his father is so impure that he would transfer his own bad *karma* to the shrine and thus defile it only the devotional sacrifice of the son can save him.\(^\text{153}\) In other texts, Vena is saved simply by the birth of his good son\(^\text{154}\) or by the birth of an evil son, who draws the evil out of Vena in a direct transfer\(^\text{155}\) as the evil demon drew the evil nature out of the brahmin’s wife. Here, then, is the turning point in the chain of *karma*: evil *karma* is transferred from parent to child in a direct, homeopathic line, explaining the existence of evil in the present; but good *karma* is transferred backwards into the past and into the future, through the heteropathic devotion of the good child to

\(^{150}\) Mahābhārata, 3.94-97.

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 1.76-91; 5.118-120.

\(^{152}\) Padma Purāṇa 2.29-33; Bhagavata Purāṇa 4.13; Vāmana Purāṇa, S. 26.

\(^{153}\) Skanda Purāṇa 7.1.336.95-253; Gṛuḍha Purāṇa 6.4-8.

\(^{154}\) Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, 2.36.127-227; Skanda Purāṇa, 7.1.337.72-175; Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 1.13.7-41.

\(^{155}\) Bṛgavata Purāṇa, 4.13-15; Padma Purāṇa 2.27.19-46.
the evil parent (the ritual model of the śraddha offering) translated into bhakti mythology.

Another important karmic transfer takes place between brothers. In the Mahābhārata, Yudhiṣṭhira refuses to go to heaven and wishes to remain in hell in order to give comfort to his brothers suffering there, by means of the cool breeze which his body gives off because of his virtue; at length, dharma tells him that the scene in hell was a mere illusion produced in order to test him and to serve as a moral instruction; his brothers are in heaven, where he too goes at last.\footnote{Mahābhārata, 18.2.} The merit transfer in this episode is minimal: Yudhiṣṭhira’s virtue proves useful to his brothers, and he is willing to lose something in return. But the Puranic expansion of this scene is far more explicit and complex.

During a brief visit to hell, to expiate one brief lapse, the virtuous king Vipaścit noticed that the air from his body was relieving the suffering of the sinners there. He therefore wished to remain there to help them, saying, “Not in heaven nor in the world of Brahma do men find such joy as arises from giving release (nirvāṇa) to suffering creatures. When Indra insisted on leading him to heaven, the king said, “Men are tortured by the thousands in hell. They cry out to me, ‘Save me!’ and so I will not go away.” Indra said, “These men of very evil karma have reached hell because of their karma; and you must go to heaven because of your own good karma. Go and enjoy your deserts in the world of the immortals, and let them wear away the consequences of their own karma by means of this hell.” The king said, “How can other men find delight in associating with me if these men do not become elevated in my presence? Therefore, let
these sinners who are undergoing punishment be freed from hell by means of whatever good deeds I have done.” Indra said, “By this you have achieved a higher place, and now you may see how these people, despite their evil *karma*, are released from hell.” Then a rain of flowers fell upon that king, and Indra placed him in a celestial chariot and led him to heaven. And those who were there in hell were released from their punishments and entered other wombs, as determined by the fruits of their own *karma*.  

II. 3. The Doctrine of Rebirth in Hinduism

II. 3. 1. The Origin and Definition of Rebirth in Hinduism

Reincarnation best describes the concept where the soul or spirit, after the death of the body, is believed to return to live in a new human body, or, in some traditions, either as a human being, animal or plant. This doctrine is a central tenet within the majority of Indian religious traditions, such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism; the Buddhist concept of rebirth is also often referred to as reincarnation. The idea was also fundamental to some Greek philosophers as well as other religions, such as Druidism, and later on, Spiritism, Theosophy, and Eckankar. It is also found in many small-scale societies around the world, in places such as Siberia, West Africa, North America, and Australia.

The word ‘reincarnation’ derives from Latin, literally meaning, “entering the flesh again”. The Greek equivalent *metempsychosis* roughly corresponds to the common English phrase ‘transmigration of the soul’ and also usually connotes reincarnation after death, as either human or

---

animal, though emphasizing the continuity of the soul, not the flesh. The term has been used by modern philosophers such as Kurt Gödel and has entered the English language. Another Greek term sometimes used synonymously is *palingenesis* (being born again).

There is no word corresponding exactly to the English terms ‘rebirth’, ‘metempsychosis’, ‘transmigration’ or ‘reincarnation’ in the traditional languages of *Pāli* and Sanskrit. The entire universal process that gives rise to the cycle of death and rebirth, governed by *karma*, is referred to as *samsāra*\(^{159}\) while the state one is born into, the individual process of being born or coming into the world in any way, is referred to simply as ‘birth’ (*jāti*). *Devas* (gods) may also die and live again. Here the term ‘reincarnation’ is not strictly applicable, yet Hindu gods are said to have reincarnated. Lord Vishnu is known for his ten incarnations, the *Dashavatars*. Celtic religion seems to have had reincarnating gods also. Many Christians regard Jesus as a divine incarnation. Some Christians and Muslims believe he and some prophets may incarnate again. Most Christians, however, believe that Jesus will come again in the Second Coming at the end of the world, although this is not a reincarnation. Some ghulat Shia Muslim sects also regard their founders as in some special sense divine incarnations (*hulul*).

Philosophical and religious beliefs regarding the existence or non-existence of an unchanging ‘self’ have a direct bearing on how reincarnation is viewed within a given tradition. The Buddha lived at a time of great philosophical creativity in India when many conceptions of

---

the nature of life and death were proposed. Some were materialist, holding that there was no existence and that the self is annihilated upon death. Others believed in a form of cyclic existence, where a being is born, lives, dies and then is re-born, but in the context of a type of determinism or fatalism in which *karma* played no role. Others were “eternalists”, postulating an eternally existent self or soul comparable to that in Judaic monotheism: the *ātman* survives death and reincarnates as another living being, based on its *karmic* inheritance. This is the idea that has become dominant (with certain modifications). The Buddhist concept of reincarnation differs from others in that there is no eternal soul, spirit or self but only a stream of consciousness that links life with life. The actual process of change from one life to the next is called *punarbhava* (Sanskrit) or *punabbhava* (*Pāli*), literally ‘becoming again’, or more briefly *bhāva*, ‘becoming’, and some English-speaking Buddhists prefer the term ‘rebirth’ or ‘re-becoming’ to render this term as they take ‘reincarnation’ to imply a fixed entity that is reborn. Popular Jain cosmology and Buddhist cosmology as well as a number of schools of Hinduism posit rebirth in many worlds and in varied forms. In Buddhist tradition the process occurs across five or six realms of existence, including the human, any kind of animal and several types of supernatural being. It is said in Tibetan Buddhism that it is very rare for a person to be reborn in the immediate next life as a human.

The doctrine of rebirth known also with other terms like, rebirth, transmigration of the soul or passage from one body to another concerns the rebirth of the soul or self in a series of physical or preternatural
embodiments, which are customarily human or animal in nature but are in some instances divine, angelic, demonic, vegetative, or astrological.\(^{160}\) The belief in rebirth in one form or another existed and is still found in tribal or non-literate cultures all over the world, which go to prove that this belief arouse contemporaneously with the origins of human culture per se.\(^{161}\) However it is in India and Greece that the doctrine of rebirth has been most elaborately developed. This belief is shared by all the other major religions of India, Hinduism, Buddhism, Gains, Sikhs and Sufis. All the diverse religious groups and philosophical schools of Hinduism, except that of Carvaka, totally materialistic, believe in reincarnation. However, it should be noted that belief in reincarnation is not the basic teaching or the end of their religious cult and practices. Instead, it is deliverance from the chain of reincarnation (karma-samšāra) and reaching mokṣa, the unique and final goal of every Hindu religious belief, cult and practices.

**II. 3.2. Nature of Rebirth in Hinduism**

According to the Hindu religious and philosophical concepts, man is composed of two fundamental principles opposed to each other per nature: one spiritual, the soul (ātman), and the other material, the body (sarira). The ātman is eternal, immutable, not born, not created, indestructible; instead, the body is temporal, created, mutable, and destructible. The union between ātman and body is not essential, but is accidental. It is a type of imprisonment or a penalty which the ātman has

---


\(^{161}\) Ibid, 265-266.
to undergo due to *avidyā* and *karma*, to which it is associated from all eternity. *Avidyā* and *karma* are two basic presuppositions of Hinduism. They have no beginning because they did not have a beginning. It is therefore a truth that transcends every intellectual explanation. *Avidya* signifies ignorance, ignorance of the true nature of ātman or of the distorted vision in which the ātman identifies itself or confounds itself with the psycho-physical organism. Due to *avidyā*, the ātman which is eternal and non-temporal, is caught up in time; gets joined to physical body. Birth is the union of the eternal and spiritual ātman with the material and temporal body.

The nature of birth, that is, the condition of the body to which the ātman gets united, depends on *karma*. The word *karma* is based on the Sanskrit verbal root √kṛ (to do) and signifies action, every sort of action, whether good or bad, meritorious or non-meritorious, religious or worldly; here, however, *karma* signifies the moral debit of the actions which one has done. Every action inevitably produces its own fruit (*phala*), and the subject (actor) has necessarily to experience all the consequences of his own actions. A person’s behavior leads irrevocably to an appropriate reward or punishment commensurate with that behavior.\(^{162}\) It is the inevitable law of retribution or the law of *karma*. It is the law of cause and effect applied to the life of every individual, law according to which every one gathers the fruit of what one has sown or undergoes the effect of his actions.

---

The effects of all the actions which a person does cannot be experienced (lived) during one single existence, because while the subject (actor) experiences the fruit of some act, does other actions in the meantime, and therefore gains new fruits which have to be experienced. From this fact is deduced that the ātman (soul) has to be reborn repeatedly. So it is believed that the soul from all eternity is undergoing birth and rebirth due to this inviolable law of karma. Thus is born the doctrine of the transfiguration of the soul. It is a corollary of the doctrine of karma.

In order to explain how the effects of past actions of man are preserved in the ātman after the death of the body and how these effects produce their fruit in a future rebirth, the Hindu theologians make a distinction between two types of body: the gross body (sthūla-śarīra) and the subtle body (sūkṣma-śarīra or liṅga-śarīra). The gross body is that which is visible and tangible, consists of the eternal senses, of organs, etc. The subtle body, instead, is neither visible nor tangible, and is composed of subtle elements, like: buddhi (intelligence), manas (mind), ahamkāra (ego), etc. The subtle body encircles the ātman and serves as a connection between the soul and the gross body. Every action of man leaves its imprint (samskara) on the subtle body and remains as a seed which has to mature and produce in due time its proper fruit. While the gross body disintegrates at death, the spirit continues to be in contact with the subtle psychic body which it carries forward. The subtle body together with all the tendencies, merits or effects of karma is said to migrate with the soul (ātman) at death.

The parents also play an important role in the process of rebirth. According to Garuda Purāṇa, it is not the karma or the jīva alone that
determines birth and nature but the consciousness of the father at the time of impregnation. It says “Whatever a man has on his mind at the time of impregnation, a creature born of such a nature (svabhava) will enter the womb”\(^{163}\). This, naturally, brings up the question of the role of the karma of the parents in the process of rebirth. The Purānas state that the child’s birth is affected by the karma of the father and the mother (pitur matusca karmatah)\(^ {164}\). Similarly, the embryo’s physical makeup is contributed by both parents: the mother gives hair, nails, skin, flesh and the father gives bone, sinew, and marrow.\(^ {165}\) The actual mechanism of this karmic transfer during the process of birth is not explained in the Purānas, but the effect of it is certainly taken for granted; and the transfer of karma in the opposite direction (from child to parent) takes place often during life and after the death of the parent.

Fate is another factor impacting on the process of reincarnation. A child’s birth is affected not only by the karma of the jīva and of the parents, but also by other factors, among which fate plays an important role. Matsya Purāna mentions “By karma impelled by fate a creature is born in the body; taking refuge in a drop of the seed of a man he enters the belly of a woman”\(^ {166}\). Yet karma and fate are often said to work together, or even to be the same. In a myth found in the Lingua Purāṇa, a sage tries to dissuade Parasara from killing all the demons in order to avenge his father’s murder by them: “The demons did not hurt your father; it was fated to happen to him in this way. Who is killed by whom?”

\(^{163}\) Garuda Purāṇa, Uttara Khanda, 22.17.
\(^{164}\) Agni Purāṇa, 151. 18.
\(^{165}\) Agni Purāṇa, 369.31-32; 370.19-20.
\(^{166}\) Matsya Purāṇa, 30. 12.
experiences (the fruits of) his own deeds.”  

Again, in the Bhagavata Purāna, we find a similar myth, where a sage tries to dissuade Dhruva from killing all the Yaksas in order to avenge his brother’s murder by them. The Yaksas did not actually kill his brother, but it was fate that he should have got killed. The cause of man’s birth or death is fate.

“The Lord ordains the increase or decrease in the life span of a miserable creature. Some say this is karma; others that it is one's own nature; others that it is time; others that it is fate; and others that it is desire. The servants of Kubera, the Yaksas, were not the slayers of your brother; the cause of a man’s birth and death is fate.”

II. 3. 3. Process of Rebirth in Hinduism

Although transmigration is a fundamental teaching of Hinduism and has an extraordinarily firm hold on the mind of the people of India, seeking the origin of the doctrine of transmigration is one of the most difficult problems of Indian Philosophy. The theory of rebirth (reincarnation) does not appear in the Vedas. The seeming references to transmigration which have been seen in the Rig Veda are all of the most improbable character. The Vedic religion did not have this belief. Instead the theory of re-death appears at a very early stage in the Vedas. In fact the ideas about death predate and predetermine the theory of birth. Therefore, the

---

167 Linga Purāna, I. 64.109-111.
168 Bhagavata Purāna, 4. 1 1.21-25.
170 I bid, 570-571.
idea of *karma* present in the *Vedas* preceded the idea of rebirth. In this W. D. O’Flaherty is in agreement with David M. Knipe, who, analyzing the funeral rites of *sraddha* and *sapindikarana*, comes to the conclusion that the theory of *karma* (which includes the idea of merit transfer) preceded that of rebirth or reincarnation. Such rites were expressions of the desire of the *Vedic* and *pre-Vedic* man and performed to ‘prevent the dissolution of an after-life for the deceased’. The offering of ritual food for the deceased ancestors suggests the desire of the ritual performer to keep them there, in a place of happiness (heaven) or limbo, and the desire to prevent them from suffering (repeated death). All the *karma* texts begin with death and then proceed to describe birth.

The *Rig Veda* (1200BC.), the first book of the *Vedas*, speaks of death and immortality, rather than rebirth. The problem is the fear of death which is inevitable; something that has to be, therefore, avoided as long as possible. Speaking of the Creator, the poet says, “His shadow is immortality and death” and prays: “Deliver me from death, not from immortality”. *Rig Veda* offers various images of a vague but pleasant life after death. One funeral hymn addresses the dead man:

“Go forth; go forth on those ancient paths on which our ancient fathers passed beyond... Unite with the fathers, with Yama [king of the dead], with the rewards of your sacrifices and good deeds, in the highest heaven. Leaving behind all imperfections, go back home again; merge with a glorious body”.

\[172\] I bid
\[173\] *Rig Veda* 10.121.2.
\[174\] *Rig Veda* 7.59.12.
\[175\] *Rig Veda* 10.14.7-8.
Other hymns speak to the dead man, of the final dispersal of his old body that his eye may go to the sun, his life’s breath to the wind. Take root in the plants with his limbs.\textsuperscript{176} Another hymn addresses the dead: “Creep away to this broad, vast earth, the mother that is kind and gentle”.\textsuperscript{177} From these and other texts in \textit{Rig Veda} it can be concluded that in this primitive phase of religion (\textit{Vedism}) there are various and diverse ways of considering death and the fate of man after his death, which seem to represent some sort of rebirth, which consist in the “putting on” of a glorious body or getting a purified body made perfect by Agni and living happily with the ancestors in the reign of the death; or in the dispersion of the old body in cosmic elements or in returning to the loving womb of mother earth. However, none of these texts speak explicitly that the dead man has to be reborn on the earth in any form.

The texts of \textit{Brāhmaṇas} (900 BC) on the whole do not contain the doctrine of transmigration. In these texts, the ātman longs for the world of the fathers, for immortality, as in \textit{Rig Veda}. The problem here too is not that of reincarnation or rebirth, but that of death, which is far more explicitly feared: Death is evil, and the essence of evil is death. The central preoccupation of the \textit{Brāhmaṇas}, is therefore, the fear of death and the obsessive search for rituals that can overcome it.

Also the \textit{Upaniṣads} (composed from 700 BC) speak of renewed death much before they began speaking of rebirth. However, the problem that the authors of the \textit{Upaniṣads} confronted was self-realization, liberation or happiness (\textit{mokṣa}). The clear and explicit mention of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{176} \textit{Rig Veda} 10. 16.3.
\item \textsuperscript{177} \textit{Rig Veda} 10. 16.3.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
doctrine of transmigration is to be found in the *Upaniṣads*. The earliest mention is found in the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*. It says “A man becomes good by good works, evil by evil.”\(^{178}\) and on death, like a caterpillar or a grass leech proceeding from one leaf to another, the soul (ātman), having shaken off the body and freed itself from ignorance, presumably empirical life, makes a beginning on another body.

It says that the ‘spirit’, or ‘self’, can be reborn in various spheres, and it highlights ‘good rebirths’ but recognizes the possibility of being born as some other being, another recension of this *Upaniṣad* states that the spirit could also be reborn as a man or some other creature. *Yajñavalkya* adds that this self, or spirit, is conditioned by good, and bad actions, or *karma*.

A further development of the two paths is found in a later section of the same *Upaniṣad*. There is a fascinating dialogue between the king of the Pañcalas, Pravāhaṇa Jaivali, and Śvetaketu, the young Brahmin, and later with Śvetaketu’s father, Gautama, also known as Udālaka Āruṇi. These conversations deal with the process of rebirth in detail. In the conversation, the king expounds to Gautama his doctrine of rebirth. The central idea remains that of the two paths mentioned earlier. Those who know the truth of the fire doctrine will take the path of the gods. They pass from the flame into the day, from the day into fortnights of the waxing and the waning of the moon, and from there to the world of the gods. After an undetermined stay there, they enter the region of lightning. A person consisting of mind comes to the regions of lightning and leads him to the

\(^{178}\) *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, III.2.13.
worlds of *brahman*. These exalted people live in those worlds of *brahman* for the longest time. They do not return. However, those who take the second path win heavenly worlds, on the other hand, by offering sacrifices, by giving gifts, and by performing austerities they pass into the smoke, from the smoke into the night, from the night into the fortnight of the waning moon and then to the world of the fathers, and from the world of the fathers to the moon. Reaching the moon they become food. There the gods feed on them. When that ends, they pass into this very sky, from the sky into the wind, from the wind into the rain, from the rain into the earth. Reaching the earth they become food. They are again offered in the fire of man and then take birth in the fire of a woman. Rising up once again to the heavenly worlds, they circle around in the same way. And those who do not know these two paths, however, become worms, insects, or snakes.\textsuperscript{179}

The fascinating discourse on rebirth is also repeated with some modification in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.\textsuperscript{180} Here also Śvetaketu goes to the assembly of the *Pañcālas*, whose king is Pravāhaṇa Jaivali, and once again the king asks five questions about how people when they die go by different paths; how they return to this world; why the world beyond is not filled up although more and more people go there; when the oblation of water takes on a human voice and speaks; and what one must do to get to the path of the gods or the Fathers. The king replies as before but with an important qualification pertaining to knowledge as power in a very literal sense: “Gautama, let me tell you that before you this knowledge had never reached the Brahmins. As a result in all the worlds government

\textsuperscript{179} *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, VI.2.16.
\textsuperscript{180} *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, V.3-10.
has belonged exclusively to royalty (Ksatriya)\footnote{Chāndogya Upaniṣad. V.2.7.}. Jaivali then discourses with much greater clarity than in the Brhadāranyaka on the fate of the soul at death, expounding on what Eric Frauwallner has called the water-doctrine. The water-doctrine is simply a further development of the doctrine of the five fires: the previous text says in fact that the fire is the rain cloud that progressively produces lightning, thunder, hail, and rain.

The Chāndogya repeats the familiar distinction between the two paths. The noble path of the gods attracts a minority, the people here in the wildernesses who believe that austerity is faith, and implies recognition of both with withdrawal into the forest and asceticism. As before, the soul that follows the way of the gods goes into brahman after so journing in the realm of the gods. However, some interesting clarifications are found in respect to the second path, that is, the soul’s journey into the realm of the Fathers. The text refers to ‘villagers’ who believe that gift-giving is offerings to gods and to priests. At death the souls of these good folk take the same route as in the previous text, and having gone to the realm of the Fathers, they do not remain there. They take the same route back to earth as in the previous text, initially becoming the food of the gods and eventually coming down as rain or with the rain. “On earth they spring up as rice and barley, plants and trees, sesame and beans.”\footnote{Chāndogya Upaniṣad. V.10.3.} When someone eats that food and deposits the semen, from him one comes into being again. Having been reborn in this unusual fashion, people live good or bad lives, which in turn culminate in a good or bad rebirth. This is a very important ethical movement in the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[181] Chāndogya Upaniṣad. V.2.7.
\item[182] Chāndogya Upaniṣad. V.10.3.
\end{footnotes}
history of Indic rebirth because, unlike the previous text, this clearly says that those who have been reborn will do good and bad and that those ethical actions will condition their next reincarnation: “Now, people whose behavior is pleasant can expect to enter a pleasant womb, like that of the Brahmin, the Ksatriya or Vaiśya class. But people of foul behavior can expect to enter a foul womb, like that of a dog, a pig, or an outcaste woman.”

The preceding desirable and undesirable states are for those whose conduct has been pleasant and foul respectively. But there is another group of people who do not proceed in either of these two paths: “they become the tiny creatures revolving here ceaselessly. ‘Be born! Die!’ - that is the third state.” Here again is an intriguing third class of people who presumably are insects incapable of achieving a human rebirth.

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad speaks of the intimate relation that exists between conduct or action and the condition of rebirth. Human destinies are assigned to two divergent pathways: the pathway of the gods (devas) and the pathway of the fathers or ancestors (pitrs). Those who meditate and practice asceticism follow the pathway of the gods, which leads them (ātman) to liberation, to union with brahman. They are freed forever from the chain of karma-samsāra; they will not be reborn. Instead those who walk the normal worldly pursuits follow the pathway of the ancestors, which leads them to rebirth, after having resided in the postmortem realm which lasts as long as the effects of their previous actions have been consumed. If one's good karma predominates over his

183 Chāndogya Upaniṣad, V.10.7.
184 Chāndogya Upaniṣad, V.10.7.
bad *karma*, then the soul goes first to hell (place of suffering and purification) for a short period to pay (expiate) his bad *karma* and then goes to heaven for a longer period, where he enjoys the fruits of his good *karma*. If, instead, the bad *karma* predominates, then the soul goes first for a short period to heaven to enjoy the fruits of his good *karma* and then goes to hell for a longer period, in order to expiate his bad *karma*. In both the cases, once the two types of *karma* are consumed, the soul reincarnates in a place of life determined by the original equilibrium between good *karma* and bad *karma*.

From the beginning, however, the idea of transmigration was immediately followed by two other ideas: that it was possible for some to be freed of it, and that it was desirable for some to be freed of it. But at the same time, according to some texts of the *Upaniṣhads*, there was the possibility that some do not want to get out of the chain of transmigration: when the soul of the dead reaches the moon, it can choose to continue in the process of rebirth or be freed of it completely (*mokṣa*), and the text affirms that some choose to be reborn.¹⁸⁵ These two possible options give rise to discussion as to whether it is good or bad to be in the wheel of transmigration.

The *Purāṇas* written down about 500-1000 AD discuss in more details about reincarnation. They contain a series of myths (narratives) regarding reincarnation. One series of myths pits death against withdrawal from life altogether. Thus, for example, Śiva (the god of ascetics and yogis) on being asked by the Creator to create living creatures refuses to create since living creatures would be subject to re-

death. Śiva, instead, wants to create immortals, which the Creator refuses. The sages asked Vyāsa about who is the companion of a dying man, his father or mother or son or teacher, his crowd of friends and relations; when he leaves the body that has been his house as if it were a house of wood or mud, and goes into the world beyond, who follows him. The sage Vyāsa replied:

“Alone he is born, and alone he dies; alone he crosses the dangerous thresholds, without the companionship of father, mother, brother, son or teacher, without his crowd of friends and relations. When he leaves the dead body, for a brief moment he weeps, and then he turns his face away and departs. When he leaves the body, dharma alone follows him; if he has dharma he goes to heaven, but if he has adharma he goes to hell. Earth, wind, space, water, light, mind, intelligence, and the self (ātman) - these are the witnesses that watch constantly over the dharma of creatures that breath on earth; together with them, dharma follows the jīva. Skin, bone, flesh, semen and blood leave the body when it is lifeless; but the jīva that has dharma prospers happily in this world and the world beyond.”\(^{186}\)

Another version of this text is rendered as follows: “his relatives turn away and depart, but dharma follows him...The body is burnt by fire, but the karma he has done goes with him.”\(^{187}\) If dharma is one’s karma, then the jīva (subtle body) goes to heaven and

\(^{186}\) Brahma Purāṇa, 217. 1-16.  
\(^{187}\) Garuda Purāṇa, Uttara Khanda, 2. 22-25.
realizes to be ātman. If, instead, his karma is a dharma, then he goes to hell.

At death the ātman takes on the subtle body (jīva) in order to experience the fruits of karma. Jīva is the carrier of the karmic deposit; it does not get destroyed in the blazing fire of hell nor does it get destroyed by any created instrument or by the elements of nature. Jīva is at times identified with the liṅga-śarīra and is also called the ātivāhika body, the body “swifter than wind”. However, the ātivāhika body is impure and eats on the pinda offered by his relatives, after which the jīva abandons the ātivāhika body and assumes a preta body. Then after the sapindikarana rite has been performed, the jīva abandons his preta body and gets an experience body (hhoga-deha). The experience body has two forms: one good, which experience the fruit of its good acts and the other bad, which experiences the evil fruit accumulated according to his karma and then he transmigrates.

The Purāṇas then discuss the process of rebirth. The process of birth is determined by one’s karma. In the early texts the process of birth is merely described, and not explained. They mention that when a person has suffered through all the hells, the sinner, through the ripening of his own karma that he committed even while inside another body enters the animal creation, among insects, and birds; among wild animals, mosquitoes, and so forth; among elephants, trees, cattle, and horses, and other evil and harmful creatures. Then he is born as a man, a contemptible one like a hunchback or a dwarf; among Cāṇḍalas, Pullkasas, and so

188 Brahmandaivarta Purāṇa, 2. 32.27-32.
189 Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa , 116. 1-12; 2. 113-114; Markandeya Purāṇa , 10. 48b-50.
190 Agni Purāṇa,369.15-19; Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, 2.113.1-25.
forth. And then, accompanied by his remaining sins and merits, he enters the classes in ascending order, Sudra, Vaisya, king, and so forth and then he becomes a Brahmin, a god, and an Indra. But sometimes he does it in descending order, and evil-doers fall down into hell.\textsuperscript{191} Jīva (the subtle body which is attached to ātman) is born as man, when a woman gets impregnated by a man. Impregnation of a woman by a man takes place when the seed is placed in her blood; as soon as it is discharged from heaven or hell, it sets out.... The embryo remembers its much transmigration, and it is distressed because of this one and that one, and therefore it becomes depressed.\textsuperscript{192} At the time of the falling of the seed of the man, a portion of the jīva grows in the pregnant womb, by means of blood. From the entry of the man’s jīva into the womb, flesh accrues. Here it is apparent that the jīva is given by the man and nourished by the woman, a view upheld in most of the medical and legal texts. Other Purānas indicate a more equal division of responsibility between man and woman: “... In the union of a woman and a man he is born.”\textsuperscript{193} 

In the womb of the mother, the jīva remembers all its past lives and his karmas, both good and bad, the joys and sorrows of his previous actions, but at birth it is deluded by the force of maya and he forgets his former lives. Thus the newborn child is unaware of his accumulated karma, but is predetermined by his karma: “By his own karmas a creature becomes a god, man, animal, bird, or immovable thing”\textsuperscript{194} and “By good deeds one becomes a god; by bad deeds a creature is born

\textsuperscript{191} Markandeya Purāṇa, 10.88-92
\textsuperscript{192} Markandeya Purāṇa, 10.88-92
\textsuperscript{193} Linga Purāṇa, 88.47-48.
\textsuperscript{194} Padma Purāṇa, 2. 94.12.
among animals and by mixed deeds, a mortal”.\textsuperscript{195} Consciousness (\textit{caitanya}), desire, thought are inherent in the \textit{jīva} which takes a material form in the womb of a woman.

In short, the doctrine of rebirth came in unilinear fashion from the \textit{Vedas} down to the Upaniṣads and into the later Gangetic religions like Buddhism must confront a difficult and, I think, unresolvable paradox. It assumes that the extant texts accurately represented the empirical reality of the religious situation in ancient India. This assumption is not correct because the texts that we have for ancient India are those that happened to be preserved in an oral tradition committed to memory by special religious virtuosos. It is an accident of history that these traditions and not others were preserved. Practically all the religions speak of an intermediary existence, of a sort of purgatory, a place and a time to expiate one's sins, between the earthly existence and the final one of absolute happiness (salvation, liberation, \textit{mukti}, \textit{mokṣa}, \textit{nirvāṇa}, and beatific vision of God or union with God, the Absolute). The rebirth of the soul is one way of explaining or representing this intermediary existence. The doctrine of reincarnation is considered to be fundamentally evil; it is like the doctrine of original sin (for Christians), which remains a mystery of faith and evades every sort of rational explanation.

At the same time all the religions propose ways and means to overcome or to escape from this intermediary state of existence so as to reach the ultimate scope of human existence, viz., eternal happiness or union with God. The fundamental preoccupation of any religion, including Hinduism, is not so much to propose or to give solutions to the

\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Bhavisya Purāṇa}, 4.4.6-8.
problem of this intermediary existence (including reincarnation) as such, but to bring all to final salvation (heaven, mokṣa, nirvāṇa), by proposing ways and means to arrive at the final goal, which for Hinduism includes also the definitive liberation from the karma-saṃsāra or the chain of rebirth.

II. 3. 4. Concept of Liberation in Hinduism

Liberation is the mokṣa of the soul from bondage or union with the absolute. It also means attainment of the state of brahman and release from the life cycle which is bondage due to karma. It is also called mukti or kaivalya. The process of the passing of the soul from one body to another body after death is call transmigration. According to Hindu doctrines, after death the soul takes on a fresh body that is physiologically best fitted for further psychological development. Bhagavad-Gītā says: “Just as a man leaves the worn-out clothes and takes new ones, the embodied soul also casts off the worn-out bodies and enters new bodies”.¹⁹⁶

Liberation is the true Knowledge while ignorance is bondage. Liberation is the experience of all beings in the self (ātman) and the experience of self in all beings. At the time of liberation, the components of the psychic body undergo an evolution and one after the other evolve into prāṇna, which merges in the self-aspect of god or creator and then in the absolute aspect called brahman. This means the spiritual experience in the consciousness becomes so subtle that it pervades everywhere and becomes more expansive. The discriminating man should merge the

¹⁹⁶ Bhagavad- Gītā, V.2
speech into mind; he should merge the intelligent self into the great soul and the great soul mokṣa into the peaceful self.¹⁹⁷

To attain liberation (mokṣa) is the end of human life. One can attain the end of human life, simply through prayer or meditation only upon the objective that is the self.

Lead me from evil to good,
Lead me from darkness to light,
Lead me from death to Immortality.
Immortality is liberation, mokṣa.¹⁹⁸

Liberation (mokṣa) means freedom from death, sorrow, karma, desire, fear, change, ignorance, finitude and evil. Liberated from the womb that is from rebirth itself, affirmed a rṣi.¹⁹⁹ By knowing god (deva) there is a falling off of all fetters; with distress destroyed, there is cessation of birth and death.²⁰⁰ The knower of brahman cuts the cords of death;²⁰¹ he is liberated beyond death.²⁰² The state of no-return of liberation from the whole cycle of birth and death is the happy note upon which the Chāndogya Upaniṣad ends: “He who according to rule has learned the Veda from the family of a teacher in time left over from doing work for the teacher, he who after having come back again, in a home of his own continues Veda study in a clean place and produces sons and pupils; he who has concentrated all his senses upon the soul (ātman); he who harmless toward all thing elsewhere than at holy places; he, indeed

¹⁹⁷ Katha Upaniṣad, 13.13.
¹⁹⁸ Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, 1.3.28.
¹⁹⁹ Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad 1.7
²⁰⁰ Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad 1.1
²⁰¹ Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad 4.15
²⁰² Mundaka Upaniṣad 3.2.6
who lives thus throughout his length of life, reaches the brahman world and does not return hither again, he does not return hither again.”

By the time of the formation of the Bhāgavad-Gītā the term nirvāṇa was used to designate the state of transcendence of both birth and death.

Liberation is the release from bondage to the cycle of rebirth by rendering the kamic process inoperative. Liberation (mokṣa) is also freedom from all causal factors whether they are thought of as karma, retribution, law, fate, or even the gods themselves. Thought man acquires and enjoys the material life to his satisfaction, he still feels dissatisfied and he fails to understand the reason. This is because he is in need of peace and real happiness. He takes this as a major suffering in his life. Man suffers, because he identifies his soul with the conglomeration of body and mind. He wants a sort of freedom that he is unable himself. This state of freedom from the sense of bondage is liberation (mokṣa). It is obtained when this identification ceases and consciousness too cease with it. Through devotion, the hook that binds the soul to the created world with its modes is released and the bondage does not reappear. Man finds his ultimate joy through this liberation.

The stage of liberation is the highest spiritual development of man in his transcendental evolution. It is the climax of his knowledge and existence. The scriptures say that liberation is the stage of final release. It is achieved through the cessation of ignorance. They need the path of action (karma-yoga) in the beginning to harness the mind. The desire for liberation attained through karma makes man tranquil in mind, with the senses restrained. “Having given up desires, resigned, patient and absorbed

[^203]: Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 8.15
in abstract meditation, let the man see the self in the self.” These qualities release him from bondage. This form of abstract meditation is devotion. Liberation is achieved through devotion. To a liberated person “that world attained by karma indeed comes to an end.”

Liberation, the final release, is the only solution for man’s sufferings. Because “just as the world obtained by works perishes her, so also there (in the world as said in scriptures) the world obtained by merit perishes.”

Liberation is termed as spiritual freedom. It is self manifested and is not dependent on any action. It is the stage of eternal consciousness that changes when it is caught up in the world of karma, but returns to its natural state in Liberation, when it is free from the sense of bondage. This is the feeling of freedom from the sense of bondage.

Liberation, the highest perfection in the process of man’s evolution, depends upon the scale of mental advancement and intensity of practice of the person concerned. There will lead to spiritual maturity. This means that changes have to be brought about in one’s mind, character and way of living through the long process of practices in the prescribed way. This change is fundamental and one must be completely prepared to continue his efforts until the goal of absorption or liberation is attained. One should be conscious of this spiritual freedom. Liberation is the stage of self-realization. And it is total and incomparable bliss.

\[\text{\cite{204}}\text{Brha āranyaka Upaniśad, IV.4.23.}\]
\[\text{\cite{205}}\text{Brha āranyaka Upaniśad, III.8.10.}\]
\[\text{\cite{206}}\text{Chāndogya Upaniśad, VIII.7.1.}\]

95