

**THE UPANISHADIC APPROACH  
TO  
REALITY**

*By*

**SWAMI SATCHIDANANDENDRA SARASWATI**

**ADHYATMA PRAKASHA KARYALAYA**

Holenarsipur - 573 211.

(HASSAN DISTRICT, KARNATAKA, INDIA)

**1997**

# Books You Ought To Read

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Although many books are very popular probably because their authorship has been ascribed to the great Śaṅkara, they contain tenets in conflict with one another and the various doctrines contained in the three groups of works collectively called the 'Prasthāna Trayī', indisputably ascribed to Śaṅkara. As it is not easy for beginners to consolidate and discriminate for themselves the genuine Vedāntic doctrines, an attempt is made by the Swāmiji to solve this problem.

**Pages : 110**

## **Intuition of Reality**

Another masterpiece from the pen of Shri Swāmi Satchidānandendra Saraswati, who has very ably illustrated as to how the Vedāntic Knowledge is not mere subtle intellectualism, but it is an 'Intuition' of the Ultimate Reality arising through Divine Grace. The writer has incidentally refuted the oft-repeated assertion that Śaṅkara's philosophy is an out-and-out rationalistic system and that he has provided no place for Īśwara in his Advaita Philosophy.

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## **Śaṅkara's Clarification of Certain Vedāntic Concepts**

The Upanishads contain two sets of teaching regarding Brahman or Reality, addressed to two different levels of the mind. To the highest grade of the aspirants belongs the disciple who has attained the mental equipment necessary for entering upon the course of study, either in this birth or who possesses an introvert mind as a result of disciplines undergone in his previous lives - qualifying him to grasp the teaching imparted in the Śruti. This class of seekers comprises two grades. The first needs only reminding of the true nature of one's Self by the Śruti through an experienced adept who has himself experienced the truths of Vedānta, while the second requires guidance for the contemplation of the spiritual steps through which one has ultimately to reach that same Self. It is to this class of both the grades that this book is expected to be of some assistance in the study of Vedānta.

**Pages : 90**

Adhyatma Granthavali

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

### SECOND EDITION

This is the substance of the series of lectures delivered by Sri Swāmīji at Mysore during Śaṅkara-Jayanti Saptāha (from 17-5-72 to 23-5-72). It is expected to be complimentary to the lectures delivered by Swāmīji at Bangalore during the same year. The first edition of the book which was published in 1974 was out of stock.

As there was an increasing demand for this enlightening work, of Swāmīji, of revered memory, we have pleasure in bringing out this second edition.

Holenarsipur  
11.5.97

Chairman  
A.P. Kāryālaya

## PREFACE

There is very little to add to what I have written in the preface to the 'Intuition of Reality' already published by the Kāryālaya.

The art of interpreting the Upanishads so as to convince the reader that there is really a unique method adopted in these holy revelations, has been preserved by Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara, whose works are fortunately still available.

I hope that this small book contains in a nut-shell the most important principles involved in the method adopted by the Upanishads in presenting Reality and Truth.

The last lecture contains the most important innovations and revolutionary doctrines introduced by Post-Śaṅkara-Advaitins in the guise of sub-commentaries. The reader who is interested in the subject, is referred to my Sanskrit work 'The Vedānta-Prakriyā-Pratyabhijñā' and the English Introduction to that publication.

Bangalore  
30.1.74

Author

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## ABBREVIATIONS

N.B. - The name of each Upanishad or other work, has been contracted into the initial letter or letters and the Bhāshya thereon has been indicated by the symbol 'Bh'. Thus G-Gītā ; GBh.- Gītā Bhāshya.

अ.पा.	Intro.	Introduction to Sūtra-Bhāshya.
इ.सि.	Isi.	Iṣṭa-Siddhi of Āchārya Vimuktātma.
ई.	Īśā.	Īśāvāsyōpanishad.
का.	Kā.	Kāthakōpanishad.
के.	Ke.	Kenōpanishad.
गी.	G.	The Bhagavadgītā.
गी.पा.	GBh.	The Bhāshya on Bhagavadgītā.
गौ.का.	G.K.	Gauḍapāda's Kārikā on the Māṇḍūkya.
गौ.का.पा.	G.KBh.	Bhāshya on Gauḍapāda's Kārikās.
छां.	Ch.	Chāndōgyōpanishad.
तै.	Tai.	Taittirīyōpanishad.
तै.पा.	Tai. Bhā.	Bhāshya on the Taittirīyōpanishad.
पं.पा.	Pa.	Pañchapādikā, a Sub-commentary by Sri Padmapādāchārya on the Sūtra-Bhāshya.
पं.वि.	PV.	Pañchapādikā-Vivarāṇa, a Sub-commentary by Prakāśātmayati on the Pañchapādikā.
पा.	P.	Page.
ब्र.सि.	Br.Si.	Brahma-Siddhi of Āchārya Maṇḍana-Miśra.
बृ.	Br.	Bṛhadāraṇyakōpanishad.
भा.	Bhā.	Bhāmatī, a Sub-Commentary by Āchārya Vāchaspati-Miśra on the Sūtra-Bhāshya.
मां.	Ma.	Māṇḍūkyaōpanishad.
मुं.	Mu.	Muṇḍakōpanishad.
वे.सू.	VS.	Vedānta Sūtras of Bādarāyaṇa.
सू.पा.	SBh.	Śaṅkara's Bhāshya on the Vedānta Sūtras.
श्वे.	Sve.	Śvetāśvaturopanishad.

# The Upanishadic Approach to Reality

## I

### THE WISDOM OF THE UPANISHADS.

#### 1. Three Varieties of approach to Vedānta

There are three original sources in Sanskrit, which a student of Vedānta, has to consult for getting basic information about the reflections of ancient seers and sages of India on Vedānta. These are generally known by the collective name of *Prasthāna-Trayī*, the triad of the methods of approach to Vedānta.

The *Upanishads* are the main springs of Vedāntic Truth. It is from these founts, that several soul-stirring rivulets of *Smṛitis* and *Purāṇas* gush forth and flow in various directions. Their way of approach to truth, has been called the *Śruti-Prasthāna* or the method of approach through listening, because it is the one method that has been handed down to us by an unbroken succession of masters and disciples. The second is the *Bhagavad Gītā* composed by Bhagavān Kṛishṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa in seven hundred verses called 'the *Gītās*'. It is a neat and compact compendium of Vedāntic teachings. It is *Smṛiti* ascribed to an author (in contrast with Śruti which the orthodox people consider to be eternal), and may be also called the *Sādhana-Prasthāna* inasmuch as it chiefly deals with the courses of discipline necessary to train the mind to understand the Vedāntic truths. And the third is the *Vedānta-Mīmāṃsā* of Bādarāyaṇa, which has been called

the *Nyāya-Prasthāna*, because the aphorisms of which it is composed, present us with the principles of exegesis of the two other *Prasthānas*.

In the following pages, it is proposed to give a glimpse of the broad outlines of the matter and method of the principal Upanishadic revelations as understood by Śāṅkarāchārya, the earliest commentator, whose writings are yet extant.

## 2. References to *Vidyā* and *Avidyā* in the Upanishads

There are two texts in the Upanishads themselves wherein *Vidyā* (wisdom) and *Avidyā* (nescience) are referred to in general terms :

(१) दूरमेते विपरीते विषूची अविद्या या च विद्येति ज्ञाता ।  
विद्याभीप्सिनं नचिकेतसं मन्ये न त्वा कामा बहवोऽलोलुपन्त ॥

का. २-४.

“Wide apart are these two, mutually contradictory, ways moving in opposite directions - to wit, *Avidyā* (nescience) and that which is known as *Vidyā* (wisdom). I regard thee, Nachiketas, as one longing for *Vidyā* ; for the very many objects of pleasure, have not enticed thee.”

Kā. 2-4.

Here, *Mṛityu*, the God of death, is referring to wisdom as the means to the Good (श्रेयः) in contrast to Nescience which leads to attachment to the pleasant (प्रेयः).

(२) तान् होवाचैतावदेवाहम् एतत् परं ब्रह्म वेद । नातः परमस्तीति ॥  
ते तमर्चयन्तस्त्वं हि नः पिता योऽस्माकमविद्यायाः परं पारं तारयसीति ॥

प्र. ६-७, ८.

“He said to them : ‘This much alone I know (regarding) this

Higher Brahman ; There is nothing beyond this'. They worshipfully replied 'Thou art indeed our father, for thou hast taken us across nescience to the other shore'. Pr. 6-7, 8.

Here Sukeśa and the other disciples, already conversant with the knowledge (the art of meditation) of the Lower Brahman, express their gratitude to Pippalāda, who has now initiated them into the wisdom of the Higher Brahman, which abolishes nescience for good.

### 3. Brahma-Vidyā

The Upanishads are never tired of extolling this wisdom as the culmination of all knowledge vouchsafed to seekers. Here are some texts of this type :-

(१) ब्रह्मा देवानां प्रथमः संबभूव विश्वस्य कर्ता भुवनस्य गोप्ता ।  
स ब्रह्मविद्यां सर्वविद्याप्रतिष्ठामथर्वाय ज्येष्ठपुत्राय प्राह ॥ मुं. १-१-१.

"Brahman was born as the first of the *Devas*, the producer of the universe, and protector of the world. He communicated the Brahma-Vidyā, the foundation (or the goal) of all branches of knowledge, to Atharva, his eldest son." Mu. 1-1-1.

In the above-cited text, we are told that the knowledge of Brahman is the foundation of all branches of learning. The latter are useful only in so far as they lead the seeker to this ultimate wisdom.

(२) शौनको ह वै महाशालोऽङ्गिरसं विधिवदुपसन्नः पप्रच्छ ।  
कस्मिन्नु भगवो विज्ञाते सर्वमिदं विज्ञातं भवतीति ॥ तस्मै स होवाच - द्वे  
विद्ये वेदितव्ये इति ह स्म यद्ब्रह्मविदो वदन्ति परा चैवापरा च ॥ तत्रापरा  
ऋग्वेदो यजुर्वेदः सामवेदोऽथर्ववेदः शिक्षा कल्पो व्याकरणं निरुक्तं छन्दो  
ज्योतिषमिति । अथ परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते ॥ यत्तदद्रेश्यमग्राह्य-

मगोत्रमवर्णमचक्षुःश्रोत्रं तदपाणिपादम् । नित्यं विभुं सर्वगतं सुसूक्ष्मं  
तदव्ययं यद्भूतयोनिं परिपश्यन्ति धीराः ॥ मुं. १-१-३, ४, ५, ६.

“Śaunaka, the famous great house-holder approached Aṅgiras in accordance with the direction of the Śāstra, and enquired ‘What is that, O revered sir, which being known, all this becomes known ?’

To him, Aṅgiras said : ‘There are two *Vidyās* to be known as the knowers of Brahman say ; to wit, the *Para* (Higher) and the *Apara* (Lower). Of these, the lower (*Vidyā*) consists of the *Rigveda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Sāmaveda*, and the *Atharvaveda*; the *Śikshā* (Orthography), the *Kalpa* (the code of rituals), *Vyākaraṇa* (Grammar), *Niruktam* (Etymology) *Chandas* (Prosody), and *Jyōtishas* (Astronomy). And now for the *Para* (Higher *Vidyā*). It is that by which the *Akshara* (the imperishable Reality) is known. (The *Akshara* which is) unperceivable, ungraspable, without any source or origin, without properties, without the organ of sight or of hearing, without hands or feet, eternal, diverse, all-pervading, extremely subtle and undecaying; that which, discerning persons, see everywhere, as the cause of all beings.” Mu. 1-1-3, 4, 5, 6.

We learn from this text that the Higher knowledge or Supreme Wisdom of Reality which is absolutely devoid of all specific features and yet the source of all beings, knowing which one would have known the essence of everything else.

(३) उत तमादेशमप्राक्ष्यो येनाश्रुतं श्रुतं भवत्यमतं मतमविज्ञातं  
विज्ञातम् ॥ छां. ६-१-३.

“Have you enquired after that teaching by the attainment of which, all that is not listened about or studied becomes studied ; that is not reflected upon, becomes reflected upon, and all that is not understood becomes understood ?” Ch. 6-1-3.

Here also we are told that knowing the Pure Being or Brahman would result in the knowledge of the essence of everything.

#### 4. Relevance of Vedāntic Knowledge to Practical Life

It is this Brahma-Vidyā that the Upanishads are mainly concerned with. In the following pages, we are going to make an attempt to consider how, according to Śaṅkara, the Upanishads are to be interpreted in order to ascertain the nature of this Vidyā, its means and the effect on the life of those who have succeeded in attaining it.

In the meanwhile, it would be of interest to ponder over the relevance of Vedāntic knowledge to the practical life of mankind in our own times. Some of us may be apt to think that, in view of the rapid march of civilization hand in hand with the progress of discoveries and inventions of physical science, catering to the needs and comforts of people, the modern man is none the worse for the lack of acquaintance with the antiquated Upanishadic thought. But even a superficial study of the human situation at present, would reveal that our civilization which is so much boasted of, is no matter for pride. The Upanishads loudly proclaim :-

असुर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसाऽऽवृताः ।

ताँस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चाऽऽत्महनो जनाः ॥ ई. ३.

“Births fit for *Asuras*, enveloped in blinding darkness - to these (births) verily they repair after departing, whosoever slay the Ātman.”

Īśa 3.

Owing to the fault of not knowing the real Ātman, man is constantly resorting to the round of births and deaths; but modern mankind would appear to have reached the stage of developing a number of races of *Asuras* or

selfish human beings who are afflicted with internecine and international wars, and groups consisting of individuals jealous and hypocritical, engaged in covertly exploiting one another and at the same time claiming to help and co-operate with their neighbours. Desire and greed of man have now risen to such a pitch, that 'the Great Powers' so called, have competitively piled up an appalling quantity of nuclear weapons, which may incite any one of the numerous international powers to unleash a new world-war which could wipe off the whole of humanity on the surface of the earth ! What is all this but slaying not only the real universal Ātman, but also the assumed Ātmans that we pretend to be in empirical life ?

The *Smṛiti* says :-

चोऽन्यथा सन्तमात्मानमन्यथा प्रतिपद्यते ।

किं तेन न कृतं पापं चोरेणाऽऽत्मापहारिणा ॥

"He who takes himself or pretends to be, what he is really not, what sins has such thief not committed seeing that he has stolen his own real self ?"

But this is just what most of the modern human beings have been doing, making a show of what they are really not even to themselves. In family life, education of the young, in social life, or in the production of food and other necessities of life, in economic and political transactions, education, - nay, in every walk of life, man is pretending to behave in a way never fitting in with his real nature and deceiving himself no less than his associates !

This stealth and slaughter of one's individual self, so

rampant in the modern world, is the abnormal outcome of human selfishness due to an innate ignorance and misconception of Brahman, the genuine Self of all.

### 5. Qualification necessary for attaining Vidyā

The reader will have seen by now that Brahma-Vidyā taught in the Upanishads is neither the result of some idle speculation, nor something of mere antiquarian interest. It is of immense practical use in shaping human character, and no one who has undergone the rigorous course of discipline recommended in the Upanishads, can ever hope to attain this wisdom. The following extracts should suffice to convince any one of the earnestness with which this indispensable preparation has been stressed in these writings :-

(१) नाविरतो दुश्चरितान्नाशान्तो नासमाहितः ।

नाशान्तमानसो वापि प्रज्ञानेनैनमाप्नुयात् ॥ का. २-२४.

“No one who has not desisted from bad conduct, no one who has no self-control and no one whose mind is not steady and unruffled, can attain this (Ātman) through (this) wisdom.”

Kā. 2-24.

(२) परीक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणो

निर्वेदमायान्नास्त्यकृतः कृतेन ।

तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्

समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्मनिष्ठम् ॥ मुं. १-२-१२.

“Having examined (the transient nature of) worlds attainable by the performance of (the various) karmas, a Brāhmana should become dispassionate, seeing that the unartificial cannot be produced by some means (undertaken). For a direct intuition of That, he should

respectfully approach with *Samid* (Sacrificial fuel) in hand, a preceptor who is versed in the lore of Śrutis and devotedly staying in Brahman. Mu. 1-2-12.

(३) नाप्रशान्ताय दातव्यं नापुत्रायाशिष्याय वा पुनः ॥

यस्य देवे परा भक्तिर्यथा देवे तथा गुरौ ।

तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥ श्वे. ६-२२, २३.

“(This wisdom) is not to be transmitted to one who has not controlled his mind, nor to any one other than a son or a genuine disciple.

These truths that have been narrated here, reveal themselves to that high-minded one who has developed supreme love for God, and as much love for the preceptor as for God.” Sve. 6-22, 23.

(४) तस्यै तपो दमः कर्मेति प्रतिष्ठा

वेदाः सर्वाङ्गाणि सत्यमायतनम् ॥

के. ४-८.

“Of this wisdom concentration, self-control, and Vedic Karma, are the foothold ; so are the Vedas and their subsidiary branches of learning. Truth is its abode.” Ke. 4-8.

(५) सत्येन लभ्यस्तपसा ह्येष आत्मा

सम्यग्ज्ञानेन ब्रह्मचर्येण नित्यम् ।

मुं. ३-१-५.

“This Ātman is to be attained through constant truthfulness, by concentration, by sound knowledge and by (a vow of) *Brahmacharya* (Abstinence from sensual pleasure).” Mu. 3-1-5.

## 6. Fruits of Brahma-Vidyā

And now for the immediate fruits of this Vidyā : The following two verses declare that the attainment of intrinsic immortal nature, is the foremost of such results :-

(१) यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः ।

अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुते ॥

यदा सर्वे प्रभिद्यन्ते हृदयस्येह ग्रन्थयः ।

अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्येतावद्ध्वयनुशासनम् ॥ का. ६-१४, १५.

“When all the desires seated in the heart drop off, the mortal being becomes immortal and attains Brahman here and now. When the knots of the heart are untied here, then and there, the mortal being becomes immortal. Only thus much is all the teaching.”

Kā. 6-14, 15.

That is to say, when all misconceptions due to want of discrimination, have been removed for good, there would be no room for any proneness to good or bad deeds entailing successive births and deaths. The moment Avidyā is wiped off by Vidyā, one comes to know that one has been always the one inmost Ātman without a second.

(२) भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिश्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः ।

क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन् दृष्टे परावरे ॥ मुं. २-२-८.

“The knot of the heart, is untied, all doubts are solved, and all Karmas of this (seeker) waste away, when that which is both higher and lower has been intuited.”

Mu. 2-2-8.

When Brahman which has manifested Itself as both the cause and the effect, is recognized as one's own Self, all one's nescience, desire and Karmas (the cause of repeated re-incarnation) vanish altogether.

(३) तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥

ई. ७.

“What delusion, what lamentation could there be to one who has recognized the Absolute Unity ?”

Īśa. 7.

(४) तस्मै मृदितकषायाय तमसः पारं दर्शयति भगवान् सनत्कुमारः ॥

छां. ७-२६-२.

“To that (Nārada) whose passion for (outward objects) had been completely washed off, the revered Sanatkumāra, now pointed out the other shore of darkness (of ignorance).” Ch. 7-26-2.

All ignorance and outward proclivities of the mind, disappear the moment one intuits Brahman as one's own self.

(५) एतगं ह वाव न तपति । किमहगं साधु नाकरवम् । किमहं पापमकरवमिति । स य एवं विद्वानेते आत्मानगं स्पृणुते । उभे ह्येवैष एते आत्मानगं स्पृणुते । य एवं वेद ॥

तै. २-९.

“This one, indeed, the remorse ‘Why did I not do a good deed ?, Why did I commit sin ?’ does not afflict at all, (this one) who knows Brahman ; He knows thus, regards both of these as Ātman. Aye, this one verily regards both of these as Ātman, (this one) who knows Brahman thus.” Tai. 2-9.

(६) स वा एष महानज आत्माऽजरोऽमरोऽमृतोऽभयो ब्रह्म ।

अभयं वै ब्रह्माभयं हि वै ब्रह्म भवति य एवं वेद ॥

बृ. ४-४-२५.

“This (Vijñānātman), indeed, is really the great, unborn, Ātman, never aging, undying, immortal Brahman. Brahman is well known to be fearless ; he who knows this, becomes verily the fearless Brahman.” Br. 4-4-25.

(७) तदक्षरं वेदयते यस्तु सोम्य स सर्वज्ञः सर्वमेवाविवेशेति ॥

प्र. ४-११.

“He who knows that Imperishable (Brahman), O my dear

young man, that omniscient person, enters verily into the All.”  
Pra. 4-11.

(८) स यो ह वै तत्परमं ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति । नास्याब्रह्मवित्  
कुले भवति । तरति शोकं तरति पाप्मानं गुहाग्रन्थिभ्यो विमुक्तोऽमृतो  
भवति ॥ मुं. ३-२-९.

“He who knows that Supreme Brahman, indeed becomes that very Brahman. No one who does not know Brahman, would be born in his line. He crosses over grief, he crosses over all sin ; becoming free from all knots of the heart, he becomes immortal.”

Mu. 3-2-9.

(९) संविशत्यात्मनाऽऽत्मानं य एवं वेद ॥ मां. १२.

“He enters into Ātman as Ātman, whosoever knows this.”

Ma. 12.

## II

### PRACTICAL LIFE CONFINED TO THE SPHERE OF AVIDYĀ

#### 1. Brahman, the Cause of the Universe

The Upanishads make use of the concept of cause as generally recognized in common life, and making it a device for teaching the sole reality of Ātman, they lead the enquirer to the intuition of Ātman, the one metaphysical Entity without a second. Thus in the Chāndōgya, Uddālaka starts with a question addressed to his son, who

has just returned from his teacher's academy, proud of his learning after having undergone a course of instruction for twelve years :-

श्वेतकेतो यन्न सोम्येदं महामना अनुचानमानी स्तब्धोऽस्युत  
तमादेशमप्राक्ष्यो येनाश्रुतं श्रुतं भवत्यमतं मतमविज्ञातं विज्ञातमिति । कथं नु  
भगवः स आदेशो भवतीति ॥ छां. ६-१-३.

“O Śvetaketu, my dear boy, now that you are thus proud and conceited, considering thyself well-read, you have probably enquired about that teaching, by virtue of which even the unstudied becomes studied, even what is not reflected upon becomes reflected upon, and even that which is not ascertained becomes ascertained ? And Śvetaketu, asks with surprise : ‘What possibly, sir, could that teaching be like ?’”  
Ch. 6-1-3.

Uddālaka, now explains the nature of that teaching by means of some illustrations. The following is a specimen :-

यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मृन्मयं विज्ञातगं स्याद्वाचारम्पणं  
विकारो नामधेयं मृत्तिकेत्येव सत्यम् ॥ छां. ६-१-४.

“Just as, my dear boy, everything made of clay, becomes known by the knowledge of a single lump of clay, - all effect being mere play of words and only a name, and what is called clay, is the only real thing...”  
Ch. 6-1-4.

Similar illustrations of an ingot of gold and a pair of nail-cutting scissors, are also adduced to show how in each case, the so-called effects are in their essence the material cause only, and consequently the cause is the only reality underlying all effects.

## 2. Causality employed as a device to teach Reality

This device of teaching that Brahman is the material

cause of all the universe, has been used in most of the Upanishads merely to show that while the effects in empirical life, are treated to be real in the sense that they possess some causal efficiency, causality from the transcendental view, is really the outcome of ignorance, and that the ultimate cause Brahman or Ātman alone is the only Reality. It is for this reason that Bādarāyaṇa defines Brahman as 'जन्माद्यस्य यतः' (वे. सू. १-१-२) 'That which is the cause of the origin, sustentation and dissolution of the universe', and finally abrogates all causality in the aphorism :

तदनन्यत्वभारम्भणशब्दादिभ्यः ॥ वे. सू. २-१-१४.

"They are not different, because of the Śruti teaching the effect as a mere play of words and for other reasons." (S. 2 1-14.)

Śaṅkara explains this as follows : "As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as what is called the effect. For, it is unreal, being a mere play of words, a mere name .... Here the other reasons referred to by the word आदिभ्यः, should be explained by quoting the type of texts teaching the unity of Ātman, such as 'All this has for its essence this Pure Being. That alone is real, That is really the real Ātman, That thou art' (Ch. 6-8-7), 'All this is really this Ātman' (Br. 2-4-6), 'All this is Brahman alone' (Mu. 2-2-11), 'All this is exclusively Ātman' (Ch. 7-25-2), 'There is no difference here whatsoever' (Br. 4-4-19).

### 3. No Practical Life when the Unity of Ātman has been intuited

There is a text in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad in which it is declared that all our practical life involving functions of the organs of sense, as well as activities

involving the functions of the organs of activity, is possible only in the field of duality due to ignorance :-

यत्र हि द्वैतमिव भवति तदितर इतरं पश्यति तदितर इतरं जिघ्रति तदितर इतरं रसयते तदितर इतरमभिवदति तदितर इतरं श्रुणोति तदितर इतरं मनुते तदितर इतरं स्पृशति तदितर इतरं विजानाति ; यत्र त्वस्य सर्वमात्मैवामूत् तत्केन कं पश्येत्तत्केन कं जिघ्रेत् तत्केन कं रसयेत्तत्केन कमभिवदेत्तत्केन कं श्रुणुयात्तत्केन कं मन्वीत तत्केन कं स्पृषेत्तत्केन कं विजानीयाद्येनेदं सर्वं विजानाति तं केन विजानीयात् ॥ बृ. ४-५-१५.

“Where there is duality, as it were, there one sees another, there one smells another, there one tastes another, there one speaks to another, there one listens to another, there one thinks on another, there one touches another, there one understands another. Where, however, everything has become Ātman alone, there who can possibly see another and with what ? There who can smell whom and with what ? There who can taste another and with what ? There who can speak to whom and with what ? There who can listen to whom and with what ? There who can think on whom and with what ? There who can touch whom and with what ? There who can understand whom and with what ? Him with whose consciousness one understands all this, with what can one understand Him ?”

Br. 4-5-15.

We are all familiar with the first step of this reasoning, for every one is familiar with practical life permeated by duality. The universe before us is pluralistic, and as Śaṅkara describes it, it is differentiated into names and forms, and is the field of a number of agents of this action, who are experiencers of the fruits of actions. (अस्य जगतः नामरूपाभ्यां व्याकृतस्य, अनेककर्तृभोक्तृसंयुक्तस्य), and is the scene of actions whose fruits are produced and invariably determined by place, time and regulated by causes

(प्रतिनियतदेशकालनिमित्तक्रियाफलाश्रयस्य). But how do we know that where there is Ātman alone, there is no room for practical life involving the relation of subject and object, that there is a state wherein there is no knower, no means of knowledge or any knowable object ? The Bṛhadāraṇyaka refers us to a state which is universally experienced. This is the state of deep sleep where one has no desires, and sees no dream (यत्र सुप्तो न कञ्चन कामं कामयते न कञ्चन स्वप्नं पश्यति ॥ बृ. ४-३-१९). The text showers the highest encomiums on this state in the following lines :-

तद्वा अस्यैतदतिच्छन्दा अपहतपाप्माऽभय रूपम् । तद्यथा प्रियया  
स्त्रिया सम्परिष्वक्तो न बाह्यं किञ्चन वेद नान्तरमेवमेवायं पुरुषः  
प्राज्ञेनाऽत्मना सम्परिष्वक्तो न बाह्यं किञ्चन वेद नान्तरं तद्वा  
अस्यैतदाप्तकाममात्मकाममकामं रूपं शोकान्तरम् ॥ बृ. ४-३-२१.

“Now this nature of the person is beyond all desire, where sin is done away with and where it is free from fear. Just as one embraced by one’s spouse, is aware of neither outside nor inside, this *Purusha* (man) is aware of neither outside nor inside, being firmly embraced by the intrinsically conscious Ātman. This form of his, is one where all desires have been fulfilled, where Ātman alone is all desires, and which is absolutely free from all desires, free from all grief.”

Bṛ. 4-3-21.

But, one might naturally ask, how is this a state where everything has become Ātman ? How do we know that the knower, (knowing self) is present there ? Whoever knew anything at all in deep sleep ? To this the Śruti replies :

यद्वै तन्न विजानाति विजानन् वै तन्न विजानाति न हि  
विज्ञातुर्विज्ञातेर्विपरिलोपो विद्यतेऽविनाशित्वान्न तु तद्वितीयमस्ति

ततोऽन्यद्विभक्तं यद्विजानीयात् ॥

बृ. ४-३-३०.

“That one does not know (anything) there as is well known, means that being certainly a knower, he does not know; for there can be no destruction of the knowing (nature) of the knower, for it is indestructible; only there is no second thing distinct from him which he could know.”

Br. 4-3-30.

#### 4. Grief and Delusion are sure to be experienced wherever there is duality.

On the other hand, we have examples to certify that there are sure to be effects of *Avidyā* (ignorance) wherever there is even a semblance of duality. A text thus describes such effects of *Avidyā* experienced in a dream :

स्वप्नान्त उच्चावचमीयमानो रूपाणि देवः कुरुते बहूनि ।

उतेव स्त्रीभिः सह मोदमानो जक्षदुतेवापि भयानि पश्यन् ॥ बृ. ४-३-१३.

“In the dream state, this *Deva* (the shining one), is confronted with ups and downs, assumes a number of forms. He feels as though he were (actually) delighting in the company of women, or as though he were laughing, and even as though he were confronted with frightful things.”

Br. 4-3-13.

Another text says :-

घ्नन्ति त्वेषैनं विच्छदयन्तीवाभ्रियवेत्तेव भवत्यपि रोदित्वा ॥

छां. ८-१०-२.

“They do kill him, as it were, chase him, as it were, (he) becomes experiencer of something unpleasant, as it were, and he even weeps, as it were.”

Ch. 8-10-2.

Evidently, even seeming duality leads to experiences of the effects of *Avidyā*.

## 5. Reasoning adopted in the Upanishads

It will be observed that the Upanishads do not resort to mere speculation or syllogistic reasoning in convincing the enquirer of the Unity of Ātman. They merely appeal to the several states of consciousness and show how we do have insight of states where there is Ātman by Himself free from all duality and where we are identical with that non-dual Ātman free from all the ills of mundane life. The argument pursued in this chapter, may be best summed up by quoting an extract from Śaṅkara's Sūtra-Bhāshya :

श्रुत्यनुगृहीत एव ह्यत्र तर्कोऽनुभववाङ्मत्वेनाऽऽश्रीयते -  
 स्वप्नान्तबुद्धान्तयोरुभयोरितरेतरव्यभिचारात् आत्मनोऽनन्वागतत्वम्,  
 संप्रसादे च प्रपञ्चपरित्यागेन सदात्मना संपत्तेः निष्प्रपञ्चसदात्मत्वम् ।  
 प्रपञ्चस्य ब्रह्मप्रभवत्वात् कार्यकारणानन्यत्वन्यायेन ब्रह्माव्यतिरेकः -  
 इत्येवञ्जातीयकः ॥ सू. भा. २-१-६, पा. १८८, १८९.

"For it is the reason offered by Śruti itself that is resorted to here, as being subservient to intuition, reasoning of the following type for instance: (1) Dream and waking lose their identity, each of them when the other appears and so Ātman is not followed up by the defects of either, and inasmuch as the individual self is freed from all multiplicity and becomes one with the Ātman as Pure Being, he is really of the Nature of Pure Being devoid of all multiplicity. (2) The manifold world being born from Brahman, is really not other than Brahman according to the principle of the non-difference of the effect from the cause."

S. Bh. 2-1-6, pp. 188, 189

### III

## THE NATURE OF VIDYĀ AND AVIDYĀ

### 1. Unjustifiable clinging to the not-self, is Avidyā

The word 'Avidyā' in Sanskrit, literally means not knowing a thing correctly and wrongly taking a thing to be what it is not. Naturally, doubt also has to be included in what we understand to be 'not knowing', for the moment we know a thing correctly, all doubts about it disappear for good. In Vedānta, as understood by Śaṅkara, however, it is chiefly misconception that is understood to be signified by the word Avidyā ; for, that is the direct source of the evils of mundane life. Accordingly, the Śruti describes the unjustifiable clinging to the not-self on the part of those that do not know the truth of their Self, as follows :

स वा अयमात्मा ब्रह्म विज्ञानमयो मनोमयः प्राणमयश्चक्षुर्मयः  
श्रोत्रमयः पृथिवीमयः आपोमयो वायुमय आकाशमयस्तेजोमयोऽतेजोमयः  
काममयोऽकाममयः क्रोधमयोऽक्रोधमयो धर्ममयोऽधर्ममयः सर्वमय-  
स्तद्यदेतदिदम्मयोऽदोमय इति यथाकारी यथाचारी तथा भवति साधुकारी  
साधुर्भवति पापकारी पापो भवति पुण्यः पुण्येन कर्मणा भवति पापः  
पापेन । अथो खल्व्वाहुः काममय एवायं पुरुष इति स द्यथाकामो भवति  
तत्कृतुर्भवति यत्कृतुर्भवति तत्कर्म कुरुते यत्कर्म कुरुते तदभिसंपद्यते ॥

बृ. ४-४-५, पा. ११३.

'Now, this Ātman who is verily Brahman, is imbued with the intellect, imbued with thought, imbued with the vital force, imbued

with the organ of sight, imbued with the organ of hearing, imbued with the elemental earth, imbued with the elemental water, imbued with the elemental air, imbued with the elemental ether, imbued with the elemental light, imbued with desires, imbued with desirelessness, imbued with wrath, imbued with absence of wrath, imbued with virtue and imbued with vice, imbued with everything - that is to say, imbued with this or imbued with that. As he does, and as he behaves, so he becomes. Doing a good deed, he becomes good ; and doing an evil deed he becomes vicious. He becomes good through virtuous act and sinful through vice. And others say : 'This Purusha is imbued exclusively with desire. With whatever desire he is beset, he wills according to it ; whatever be his will, he engages himself in accordance with that, and attains the result accordingly.'

Br. 4-4-5, p. 913

The passage cited above sets forth vividly the details of the results of one's Avidyā, or identification with this not-self, and the inevitable consequence thereof. This error of wrong identification, enslaves a man, and overpowered by desire, he inclines to act, and falls into the pit of repeatedly experiencing pleasure or pain accordingly.

## 2. The Result of Kāma, or hankering after Objects :

Here is a Mantra describing the effects of desire :

तदेष श्लोको भवति । तदेव सक्तः सह कर्मणैति लिङ्गं मनो यत्र  
निषक्तमस्य । प्राप्यान्तं कर्मणस्तस्य यत्किञ्चेह करोत्ययम् । तस्माल्लोकात्  
पुनरैत्यस्मै लोकाय कर्मण इति नु कामयमानः ॥

बृ. ४-४-६, पा. ९१६.

"To this effect is this Mantra : That surely he arrives at, to which the *Liṅga* (the subtle body), the mind of his has been attached. Having exhausted the result of whatever karma he has done here, he comes back from that world to this world for doing further work. So much for one who is given to desire." Br. 4-4-6, p. 916

### 3. Freedom from desire is the only path to attain Brahman

Avidyā or identification with the not-self leads to Kāma (desire) and Karma. And conversely, when wisdom dawns, and desirelessness ensues, one naturally rests in one's own nature as Brahman, and as a result, all transmigratory life comes to an end. We shall now quote some texts which declare this truth. First of all the sequel of the Bṛihadāraṇyaka text quoted in the previous paragraph deserves citation here :

(१) अथाकामयमानो योऽकामो निष्काम आप्तकाम आत्मकामो  
न तस्य प्राणा उत्क्रामन्ति ब्रह्मैव सन् ब्रह्माप्येति ॥

बृ. ४-४-६, पा. ९१६.

“And now for a person who does not desire (external objects). He has no desire, free from all desires, has attained all desires, and to him, Ātman is all the desired objects. His Prāṇas (organs) do not depart. Being Brahman Itself, he is merged in Brahman.”

Bṛ. 4-4-6, p. 916

Transmigration from body to body, takes place only in the case of one who on account of ignorance, is subject to desire and karma. But one who has intuited one's eternal Brāhmic nature has no cause to be moved by desires or to act which (desire or act) is the only reason why one transmigrates.

(२) यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः ।

अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुत इति ॥

बृ. ४-४-७, पा. ९२०.

“When all the desires that stick to his heart are released, then

immediately the mortal (man) becomes immortal, and he attains Brahman in this very life.”  
Br. 4-4-7, p. 920

Evidently, it is only the desires of the mind that make a person bound to the aggregate of body and senses which are subject of pleasure and pain. But when he is detached from the body on account of Wisdom (Vidya) :-

(३) तद्यथाऽहिनिर्ल्वयनी वल्मीके मृता प्रत्यस्ता शयीतैवमेवेदं  
शरीरं शेतेऽथायमशरीरोऽमृतः प्राणो ब्रह्मैव तेज एव ॥

बृ. ४-४-७, पा. ९२०.

“Just as the lifeless slough of a snake which is cast off would lie in an ant-hill, so does this body lie. Henceforth this (knower) is bodiless, immortal, Prāṇa, Brahman alone, Light alone.”

Br. 4-4-7, p. 920.

A person is embodied merely because of his ignorance, but the moment he realizes his Brahmic nature, he comes to see that he has been always the Real Brahman which never had a body.

(४) अशरीरं शरीरिष्वनवस्येष्ववस्थितम् ।

महान्तं विष्णुमात्मानं मत्वा धीरो न शोचति ॥ का. २-२२.

“Having intuited the unembodied Ātman within the bodies, the same changeless One within (the bodies which are) ever-changing, having intuited Him as the Great and Pervading One, the wise one never grieves.”  
Kā. 2-22.

(५) अप्राणो ह्यमनाः शुभ्रो ह्यक्षरात्परतः परः ॥ मुं. २-१-२ं.

“Without Prāṇas (organs), without mind, pure, beyond the Akshara (undifferentiated seed of the universe) the Highest.”

Mu. 2-1-2.

The Absolute Ātman has no body or organs, though ignorant people suppose that they are beings with body, mind and senses.

#### 4. Avidyā defined by Śaṅkara

Sri Śaṅkara defines what exactly is meant by Avidyā and Vidyā in the following sentences and brings it home to us how Avidyā is the only source of all evils of mundane life and how Vidyā leads to the attainment of Brahman :-

(१) तमेतमेवंलक्षणमध्यासं पण्डिता अविद्येति मन्यन्ते । तद्विवेकेन  
च वस्तुस्वरूपावधारणं विद्यामाहुः ॥ अध्या. भा.

“Now this superimposition (of the self and the not-self on each other), the wise consider to be Avidyā. And the ascertainment of the true nature of Reality as It is, they call Vidyā.” Intro. SBh.

(२) देहादिष्वनात्मसु ‘अहमस्मि’ इत्यात्मबुद्धिरविद्या ;  
ततस्तत्पूजनादौ रागः, तत्परिभवादौ द्वेषः, तदुच्छेददर्शनाद् भयम्, मोहश्च -  
इत्येवमयमनन्तभेदोऽनर्थव्रातः संततः सर्वेषां नः प्रत्यक्षः । तद्विपर्ययेण  
अविद्यारागद्वेषादिदोषमुक्तैरुपसृत्यं गम्यमेतत् इति ह्युष्वाद्यायतनं प्रकृत्य  
व्यपदेशो भवति ॥ सू. भा. १-३-२, पा. ९५.

“Avidyā is the idea of self-identification with not-selves such as body, thinking ‘I am verily this’. From this (Avidyā), results one’s attachment for the respect to be shown to these, and dislike for their being disrespected or otherwise disregarded.

When one becomes aware of the destruction of the body, fear and delusion rear up ; this series of evils with its infinite varieties, is so well known to all of us. It is stated in this context that ‘this Support of heaven and earth is to be reached by those who are free from these evils such as Avidyā.’ SBh. 1-3-2, p. 95.

(३) अस्यानर्थहितोः प्रहाणायार्त्मैकत्वविद्याप्रतिपत्तये सर्वे वेदान्ता  
आरभ्यन्ते ॥ अघ्यासभाष्यम्.

“All the Vedāntas (Upanishads) are begun to show how the Wisdom of the Unity of Ātman is to be attained for getting rid of this source of all evils.”  
Intro. SBh.

### 5. How man transcends embodiedness ?

एष संप्रसादोऽस्माच्छरीरात् समुत्थाय परंज्योतिरूपसम्पद्य स्वेन  
रूपेणाभिनिष्पद्यते, स उत्तमपुरुषः ॥ छां. ८-१२-३.

“This ‘*Samprasāda*’ (Jiva), rising above this body, comes into being in his own nature, that is the Supreme Person (Uttama Purusha).”  
Ch. 8-12-3.

This is a text from the Chāndōgya, which relates how a person is in a foreign guise as long as he has identified himself with the body, and how, transcending it, he reattains his own nature as Brahman, the Supreme Light. Śāṅkara says ‘विवेकाविवेकमात्रेण आत्मनोऽशरीरत्वं सशरीरत्वं च ।’ It is only through discrimination and want of discrimination that Ātman is ‘without a body’ or ‘has a body’. In the very introduction to his Sūtra-Bhāshya, that Āchārya writes :-

तमेतमविद्याख्यमात्मानामनोरितरेतराध्यासं पुरस्कृत्य सर्वे प्रमाण-  
प्रमेयव्यवहार लौकिका वैदिकाश्च प्रवृत्ताः, सर्वाणि च शास्त्राणि  
विधिप्रतिषेधमोक्षपराणि ॥ अघ्यासभाष्यम् पा. २.

“Now, it is this mutual superimposition of the Self and not-Self, called *Avidyā*, that all conventions of means of right-knowledge and their objects, secular or Vedic, obtain in life ; and so do the śāstras devoted to the treatment of injunction, and prohibition as also to Final Freedom.”  
Intro. SBh. p. 2.

In answer to a question as to how all conventions of *Pramāṇas* presuppose this *Avidyā* of the nature of this mutual superimposition, Śaṅkara writes :-

देहेन्द्रियादिषु अहंममाभिमानरहितस्य प्रमातृत्वानुपपत्तौ प्रमाण-  
प्रवृत्त्यनुपपत्तेः ॥ अ. भा.

“This is so because *Pramāṭṛtva* (or being a cognizer who undertakes to know something) is impossible for one who does not treat the body as ‘*me*’ and the senses and other instruments as ‘*mine*’ and in the absence of *Pramāṭṛtva* the *Pramāṇas* (or valid means of right-knowledge) cannot function at all.” Intro. SBh.

Looking upon oneself as embodied through ignorance, then is, according to the Upanishads, the very foundation of all practical life, secular or Vedic.

## IV

### THE LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF THE UPANISHADS

#### INTRODUCTION

Those who would try to ascertain the teaching of the Upanishads, have to equip themselves not only with the principles of exegetics relating to textual criticism and of the principles of the method adopted, but also make themselves familiar with the language and style adopted there.

## 1. Introductory Narratives

Frequently, truths concerning meditation and knowledge are introduced through certain narratives in the shape of conversations, discussions or debates or instructions by spiritual teachers to their disciples or dear relatives who are interested in the subject.

The bearing of these introductory narratives on the subject matter to be discussed will have to be understood for the right understanding of the subject matter in each case. The dialogue between Bālāki and Ajātashatru (Br. 2-1), the conversation among the three experts in the Udgitha - doctrine (Ch. 1-8), the debate between each of the learned Brāhmaṇas and Yājñavalkya in Janaka's sacrifice (Br. chapter three), the questions by the six disciples answered by Pippalāda in the Prashna, Yājñavalkya's initiation of Maitreyi in the Bṛihadāraṇyaka, and Varuṇa's teaching to his dear son Bhṛigu in the Taittirīya, are some of such narratives.

## 2. The word Upanishad

First of all, the student should note that the word '*Upanishad*' itself is used in four different senses. In the first place (1) it may denote a doctrine :-

असुराणां ह्येषोपनिषत् प्रेतस्य शरीरं भिक्षया वसनेनालङ्कारेणेति  
संस्कुर्वन्त्येतेन ह्यमुं लोकं जेष्यन्तो मन्यन्ते ॥ छां. ८-८-५.

"This is the Upanishad (lustive faith or doctrine) of the Asuras, that they embellish the corpse of a departed person with food, clothes and ornamentation etc. and by this means they believe they are going to gain that other world." Ch. 8-8-5.

(2) Another meaning of the word is 'name', a significant name :-

तस्योपनिषत् सत्यस्य सत्यमिति प्राणा वै सत्यं तेषामेष सत्यम् ॥

बृ. २-१-२०.

“His (Upanishad) name is *Satyasya Satyam* (the real of the real). The Prānas are well-known to be *Satya* (real). He is the Real of that real.”

Br. 2-1-20.

(3) Secret is another signification of the word, as for example in :-

इत्युपनिषत् ॥

तै. २-९, ३-१०.

“Such is the secret (teaching).”

Tai. 2-9, 3-10.

(4) This word, however, mainly signifies the wisdom concerning Brahman. As Śaṅkara explains in his Bhāshya on the Kāthaka Upanishad :-

ये मुमुक्षवो दृष्टानुश्रविकविषयवितृष्णाः सन्त उपनिषच्छब्दवाच्यां  
वक्ष्यमाणलक्षणां विद्याम् उपसद्य उपगम्य, तन्निष्ठतया निश्चयेन शीलयन्ति,  
तेषामविद्यादेः संसारबीजस्य विशरणात्, हिंसनात्, विनाशनात् -  
इत्यनेनार्थयोगेन विद्या उपनिषत् इत्युच्यते । .....

(२) पूर्वोक्तविशेषणान् वा मुमुक्षून् परं ब्रह्म गमयतीति च ब्रह्म  
गमयितृत्वेन योगाद् ब्रह्मविद्या उपनिषदुच्यते ॥ अव. काठक, पा. ५७.

“Wisdom is called ‘*Upanishad*’, because the derivative meaning of the word is, that it *shatters*, kills or *destroys* the seed of Saṃsāra such as Avidyā (ignorance) pertaining to those seekers of final release, who devoid of thirst for enjoying objects seen (in this world) and heard of (as being in the other world), approach the wisdom to be hereinafter explained, and persevering to contemplate on it with continued devotion to it. ...or (2) it is called ‘*Upanishad*’, because of its derivative meaning that it leads the seekers to the Highest Brahman by taking them to Brahman.”

Kā. Bh. Intro.

The Bhāshya on the Muṇḍaka also explains the word Upanishad as applied to Brahma-vidyā very much like the above-cited passage. As for the treatise dealing with this subject, Śaṅkara says :-

ग्रन्थस्यापि तादर्थ्येन तच्छब्दत्वोपपत्तेः 'आयुर्वै घृतम्' इत्यादिवत् ॥

का. भा. अव., पा. ५८.

"The work dealing with it also, may be called by that name (Upanishad), because it is meant for teaching that wisdom. The usage of the word in such a secondary meaning is justified by such statements as 'Ghee is verily life'." Kā. Bh. Intro. p. 58.

### 3. The Use of Illustrations

There are a number of examples taken from common life to illustrate the truth relating to transcendental Reality. Of course, it goes without saying that these examples are adduced just to make the student convinced of the truth only in so far as some point of comparison, is concerned. For example :-

(१) यथा विलीनमेवाङ्गास्यान्तादाचामेति कथमिति लवणमिति मध्यादाचामेति कथमिति लवणमित्यन्तादाचामेति कथमिति लवणमिति ॥

छां. ६-१३-२.

In this example, Uddālaka illustrates how salt dissolved in water, can neither be perceived with the eye, nor felt by touch and yet by sipping it with the tongue, one can very well be convinced that it is there in every drop of it. The point of comparison intended, is of course that Ātman as Pure Being can be intuited directly even while He is not perceivable by the senses. The example of a lump of salt, is given in the Bṛihadāraṇyaka in another

context to illustrate the nature of Ātman :-

(२) स यथा सैन्धवखिल्य उदके प्रास्त उदकमेवानुविलीयेत न हास्योद्ग्रहणायेव स्यात् । यतो यतस्त्वाददीत लवणमेवैवं वा अर इदं महद्भूतमनन्तमपारं विज्ञानघन एव । एतेभ्यो भूतेभ्यः समुत्थाय तान्येवानुविनश्यति न प्रेत्य संज्ञास्तीत्यरे ब्रवीमीति होवाच याज्ञवल्क्यः ॥

बृ. २-४-१२.

“As a lump of salt dropped into water dissolves becoming like unto water itself, and no one could actually pick it up, but whence so ever one takes it, it would (taste) salt alone, even so, my dear, this Supreme Being, infinite and having no shore beyond, is Pure Consciousness throughout. Coming out of those elements as an individual, the notion of individuality is destroyed along with them. After departing (from and transcending them), there is no more (this finite) consciousness.”

Br. 2-4-12.

The above-cited example is to illustrate how Pure Consciousness itself pervades throughout, it being unlike finite consciousness of some object ; for, the latter is finite, being born at some point of time and then disappears. There is no distinction of knower, knowable and knowledge in Pure Consciousness.

Here is another example :-

(३) स यथा दुन्दुभेर्हन्यमानस्य न बाह्याब्शब्दाब्शक्नुयाद्ग्रहणाय दुन्दुभेस्तु ग्रहणेन दुन्दुभ्याघातस्य वा शब्दो गृहीतः ॥ बृ. २-४-७.

“As for example, while a drum is being beaten one cannot conceive the sounds in themselves, but seeing them as pertaining to the drum, or to the beating of the drum, the sound is conceived. ....”

Br. 2-4-7.

In this and the two subsequent examples, Yājñavalkya

tries to illustrate how every phenomenon in waking or dream is perceived or conceived only as dependent on Ātman, but not apart from Ātman as having an existence of its own. As for the various sounds heard while a drum is being beaten or while a conch is being blown, or while a lute is being played on, the individual notes arising in each case, can never be heard as distinct and existing for themselves, but are uniformly heard and distinguished to be notes pertaining to the particular instrument which is being operated upon. Similarly every phenomenon has to be known only as depending on Ātman's consciousness which uniformly reveals it.

#### 4. Parables

And frequently we come across some parables to typify spiritual truths. They also must, of course, be understood to illustrate the truth with reference to a particular point of comparison: This may be clarified by one or two citations :-

(१) यथा सोम्य पुरुषं गन्धारेष्वोऽभिनद्धाक्षमानीय तं ततोऽतिजने  
 विसृजेत् स यथा तत्र प्राङ् वा उदङ् वा अघराङ् वा प्रत्यङ् वा  
 प्रध्मायीताभिनद्धाक्ष आनीतोऽभिनद्धाक्षो विसृष्टः ॥ तस्य यथाऽभिनहनं  
 प्रमुच्य प्रब्रूयादेतां दिशं गन्धारा एतां दिशं व्रजेति स ग्रामाद्ग्रामं पृच्छन्  
 पण्डितो मेधावी गन्धारनेवोपसंपद्येतेवमेवेहाचार्यवान् पुरुषो वेद तस्य  
 तावदेव चिरं यावन्न विमोक्ष्येऽथ संपत्स्य इति ॥ छां. ६-१४-१, २.

“Just as, my dear boy, some one, would bring a person with blind-folded eyes from the *Gandhāras* and leave him in a place where there are no human beings, and as that person would start towards the east or towards the north or towards the west, saying ‘O ! I have been brought here with blind-folded eyes and left with

blind-folded eyes !'. And as some one would untie his bandage and tell him 'The country of Gāndharas, is in this direction. Go this way !' and he being shrewd and well-informed, would enquire his way, and at last reach the country of Gāndharas itself ; so also, here, a person who has an (adept) teacher, would know the truth. And for him, the delay is only so long as he is not released, and immediately he will become one with Reality." Ch. 6-14-1, 2.

This parable aptly explains how an ignorant person feels himself left in the lurch so long as he suffers from the evils of mundane life without a teacher who would guide him on the way to attain Ātman, and how when a real guide has shown him the way to the Truth, his eyes are opened and by dint of self-effort, he attains oneness with his real Ātman.

We may refer the reader to another parable in the Bṛihadāraṇyaka which relates how Prajāpati taught the Devas, men and Asuras by pronouncing a single syllable 'da' and each of the three groups of disciples understood this single syllable as an exhortation to exercise self-control (*Dāmyata*), to be charitable (*Datta*), and to be merciful (*Dayadhvam*) respectively. The Śruti concludes :

तदेतदेवैष दैवी वागनुवदति स्तनयित्पुर्द द द इति दाम्यत दत्त  
दयध्वमिति तदेतत् त्रयं शिक्षेत् दमं दानं दयामिति ॥ बृ. ५-२-३.

"This divine voice, thunder, repeats this very thing when it says 'Da, Da, Da' (that is), *Dāmyata* (control yourselves), *Datta* (give), *Dayadhvam* (be merciful). Therefore one should learn this triad - self-control, charity and mercy." Br. 5-2-3.

## 5. Epigrams and Paradoxes

And then there are certain epigrams crisp and paradoxical texts in the Upanishads, out of which the reader can make little or nothing unless he has had

initiation in the traditional way of interpretation. For instance :-

(१) सर्वतः पाणिपादं तत्सर्वतोऽक्षिशिरोमुखम् ।

सर्वतः श्रुतिमल्लोके सर्वमावृत्य तिष्ठति ॥

सर्वेन्द्रियगुणाभासं सर्वेन्द्रियविवर्जितम् ।

सर्वस्य प्रभुमीशानं सर्वस्य शरणं सुहृत् ॥ श्वे. ३-१६, १७.

“It has hands and feet everywhere. It has eyes and faces everywhere. It has ears everywhere in the world, and stays enveloping everything. It displays the functions of all the senses, but is devoid of all senses. It is the Lord and Ruler of all. It is the refuge and well-wisher of everyone.”  
Śve. 3-16, 17.

These verses teach how devoid of all characteristic features, Brahman is the nearest and dearest Self of each one of us.

(२) स होवाचैतद्वै तदक्षरं गार्गी ब्राह्मणा अभिवदन्त्यस्थूल-  
मनण्वह्वस्वमदीर्घमलोहितभस्नेहमच्छायमतमोऽवाय्वानाकाशमसङ्गम-  
रसमगन्धमक्षुष्कमश्रोत्रमवागमनोऽतेजस्कमप्राणममुखममात्रमनन्तरमबाह्यं  
न तदश्नाति किञ्चन न तदश्नाति कश्चन ॥ बृ. ३-८-८.

“And he said : ‘O Gārgi, this is indeed that Aksharam the Brahmanas say ‘It is neither gross nor subtle, neither short nor long; neither red nor oily, neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor ether, untainted, has neither taste nor odour, without eyes and without ears, without vocal organ and without mind, without light, without vital forces and without mouth, without measure, without interior and without exterior. It does not eat anything, nor is It eaten by any one.’”  
Br. 3-8-8.

Evidently, the Śruti wants to negate all conceivable characteristics and features. In fact, there is an oft recurring text which denies every feature ascribed to Reality and

says 'स एष नेतिनेत्यात्मा' 'Now this One is the Ātman, who has been described as *Neti Neti* (not such, not such).'

## 6. Texts with the same Refrain

There are certain texts which repeatedly draw our attention to some particular nature of Brahman. For instance, in the Kena Upanishad :

यद्वाचाऽनभ्युदितं येन वागभ्युद्यते ।  
 तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥  
 यन्मनसा न मनुते येनाहुर्मनो मतम् ।  
 तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥  
 यच्चक्षुषा न पश्यति येन चक्षुषि पश्यति ।  
 तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥  
 यच्छ्रोत्रेण न शृणोति येन श्रोत्रमिदं श्रुतम् ।  
 तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥  
 यत्प्राणेन न प्राणिति येन प्राणः प्रणीयते ।  
 तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥      के १-५तः ९.

Here each of the verses ends with the refrain 'नेदं यदिदमुपासते' (Not this which they meditate upon as 'this') to emphasize the fact that, just as Brahman or the Real Self of all, is no object of the act of knowing, it is no object of meditation in Its own nature as Consciousness whose light alone is the eternal subject of speech, and the function of the mind and of the several organs of sense.

Similarly, 'एतद् वै तत्' (का. ४-३) 'This is verily that' is a

refrain which recurs in a number of verses in the Kāṭhaka Upanishad while describing the nature of the Truth about which Nachiketa asked the God of Death, which even the Gods do not know, which is beyond the sphere of religious virtue and vice, beyond casuality, and beyond the past and future, that Truth regarding the Highest Heaven of Vishṇu beyond which there is nothing else to be known or attained.

### 7. Metaphors

And then there are a number of metaphors, which are interspersed in these revelations to make some particular Vedāntic truth more intelligible. We give here some texts which may serve as a specimen :-

(१) आत्मानं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव तु ।

बुद्धिं तु सारथिं विद्धि मनः प्रग्रहमेव च ॥

इन्द्रियाणि हयानाहुर्विषयांस्तेषु गोचरान् ।

आत्मेन्द्रियमनोयुक्तं भोक्तेत्याहुर्मनीषिणः ॥ का. ३-३, ४.

“Know Ātman to be the master of the chariot, and the body to be, verily, the chariot; know the *Buddhi* (intellect) to be the charioteer, and *Manas* (the mind which takes note of things) to be the reins verily. The sense-organs, they say, are the horses, and the sense-objects are the routes for them. And the one who is joined to the body, senses and the mind, the wise say, is the experiencer.”

Ka. 3-3, 4.

Here a human-being is represented as a traveller who has to reach his destination.

(२) अजामेकां लोहितशुक्लकृष्णां

बह्वीः प्रजाः सृजमानां सरूपाम् ॥

अजो ह्येको जुषमाणोऽनुशेते

जहात्येनां भुक्तभोगामजोऽन्यः ॥

श्वे. ४-५.

“(There is) a she-goat (of a variegated colour) - red, white and black - bearing kids similar in form. A he-goat lies by the side of her enjoying her company, while another goat discards her because of her having been enjoyed.”  
Śve. 4-5.

This is an imagery used to describe how unwise Jīvas enjoy the Prakṛiti, and as a result of this combination, beings movable and immovable are produced while a wise man gives up all attachment to that Prakṛiti.

(३) अथ य आत्मा स सेतुविधृतिः ।

छां. ८-४-१.

“Nor for this Ātman, This is the embankment the sustainer.”  
Ch. 8-4-1.

अमृतस्यैष सेतुः ॥

मुं. २-२-५.

“This (Ātman) is the dam leading across to immortality.”  
Mu. 2-2-5.

## 8. Symbols and Fanciful Derivations

There are certain symbols such as the syllable ‘*Om*’ and the Vyāhṛtis *Bhūḥ*, *Bhuvah*, *Suvah*, which are used for meditation and teaching Vedāntic truths, and therefore it is necessary to understand their real significance for those who wish to practice meditation as prescribed or to intuit the truths indicated by these symbols.

(१) प्रजापतिलोकानभ्यतपत्तेभ्योऽभितप्तेभ्यस्त्रयीविद्या संप्रास्रवत्  
तामभ्यतपत्तस्या अभितप्ताया एतान्यक्षराणि संप्रास्रवन्त, भूर्भुवः स्वरिति ॥

(२) तान्यभ्यतपत्तेभ्योऽभितप्तेभ्य ओङ्कारः संप्रास्रवत् तद्यथा शङ्कुना

सर्वाणि पर्णानि सन्तृण्णान्येवमोङ्कारेण सर्वा वाक् संतृण्णोङ्कार एवेदं  
सर्वमोङ्कार एवेदं सर्वम् ॥ छां. २-२३-२, ३.

“Prajapāti contemplated upon the worlds, and from them (thus) contemplated upon, the *Trayī Vidyā* (the wisdom of the Triad of Vedas) issued forth. He contemplated upon it, and from that thus contemplated upon, these three syllables issued forth, to wit, ‘*Bhūh*’, ‘*Bhuvah*’ and ‘*Swah*’. He contemplated upon them and from them thus contemplated upon, issued ‘*Ōmkāra*’. Just as all leaves are pierced by a stalk, so also is all speech pierced by ‘*Ōm*’. All this is the syllable ‘*Ōm*’ alone, Yea, all this is ‘*Ōm*’ alone.”

Ch. 2-23-2, 3.

[This one syllable *Ōm* and *Vyahrtis* - ‘*Bhūh*’ etc., are again referred to for meditation in other Upanishads like the *Taittirīya*.]

(२) अमात्रश्चतुर्थोऽव्यवहार्यः प्रपञ्चोपशमः शिवोऽद्वैत एव-  
मोङ्कार आत्मैव संविशत्यात्मनाऽऽत्मानं य एवं वेद य एवं वेद ॥ मां. १२.

“In this mantra, Reality Absolute, is suggested as ‘*Ōmkara*’ (the syllable *Ōm*) which should be intuited as beyond all speech and thought (*Vyavahāra*) without all distinctions and differences, the Good, non-dual. One who intuits It as such has entered wholly the Absolute *Ātman* as *Ātman*. Those who cannot rise to the level of this eternal Intuition, have often fallen into the error of imagining that this is the ‘Fourth mystic *Mātra*’ of *Ōm*, just like those that credulously imagine that *Turiya* is a mystic state beyond waking, dream and sleep.”

## 9. Fanciful Derivations

There are some fanciful derivations of words intended to serve as mnemonic symbols for denoting spiritual truths. For instance :

(१) स वा एष आत्मा हृदि तस्यैतदेव निरुक्तं हृद्यमिति तस्माद्  
हृदयमहरहर्वा एवंवित्स्वर्ग लोकमेति ॥ छां. ८-३-३.

“This Ātman, indeed, is in the heart. This is, verily, his etymological name, to wit, ‘हृदयम्’ (This one is in the heart) ; therefore this is *Hṛidayam*. Whoever meditates upon him as such, he verily goes to Swargalōka (the world of Bliss or Brahmālōka) day by day.”  
Ch.8-3-3.

Here the practice of meditating on Ātman as residing in the human heart (or mind) as the Witness thereof, is eulogised. The very word *Hṛidaya* denoting the mind, is a mnemonic. By splitting it into *Hṛudī* (in the heart or mind), *Ayam* (this one) the text says that this meditator, really goes to the Brahmālōka full of bliss during deep sleep, unlike other persons who do not practise this meditation.

(१) यत्रैतत्पुरुषः स्वपिति नाम सता सोम्य तदा संपन्नो भवति  
स्वमपीतो भवति तस्मादेनं स्वपितीत्याचक्षते । स्वं ह्यपीतो भवति ॥

छां. ६-८-१.

“When a person is spoken of as ‘*Swapiti*’ (he sleeps), then, my dear boy, he is merged in Being, that is, dissolved into his own Self. So, they call *Swapiti* (he sleeps), for he is then verily dissolved into his own Self.”  
Ch. 6-8-1.

This derivation of the Sanskrit name ‘*Swapiti*’ (sleeps) is a mnemonic, which, borne in mind, would keep on reminding us of the spiritual truth that every creature drops its egoity and is actually one with Pure Being (or Brahman) in dreamless sleep.

## 10. Recapitulation

Before concluding this section, we wish to draw the

attention of the reader to the most important peculiar ways of teaching adopted in the Upanishads. These are mostly necessitated by the nature of Reality to be taught here.

(1) Foremost of all, there is the *Negative Method* of teaching Reality. Reality being devoid of all specific feature, has to be described mainly by negating the characteristics that may be imputed to It. This accounts for the frequent way of describing It as the नेतिनेत्यात्मा. 'The Ātman who is neither this, nor that'.

(2) We have already noticed the *mnemonic derivations*. Here is one more example :

सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म तज्जलानिति शान्त उपासीत ॥ छां. ३-१४-१.

"All this is verily Brahman ; for it is 'Tajjalan' (= तज्जम्, तल्लम्, तदनम्) born out of It, is dissolved in It, and moves about in It. Therefore one should meditate upon It in peace." Ch. 3-14-1.

(3) *Applying empirical epithets to Reality in metaphysical senses :-*

सत्यम् (Real), ज्ञानम् (Consciousness), आनन्दः (Bliss) used in the Taittiriya, are some instances of this type.

(4) *Using empirical illustrations with extension of meaning :-*

यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मृन्मयं विज्ञातं स्याद्वाचारम्भणं विकारो नामधेयं मृत्तिकेत्येव सत्यम् ॥ छा. ६-१-४.

"Just as, my dear boy, by a lump of clay (known) all (effect) made of clay, would become known, the effect being a mere play of words, a mere name, clay is the only (thing) real.....

(Ch. 6-1-4.

While a pot or a pitcher (in empirical life) is also considered to be real inasmuch as it possesses causal efficiency, the Śruti has declared it to be unreal from the Paramarthic stand-point since what we call a pot or some other effect, is essentially none other than clay. The illustration is then made use of to bring out to the seeker of the truth that the universe being an effect (a mere superimposition on Brahman), is really no other than the Cause (or substrate), to wit, Brahman as Pure Being.

(5) *Clothing some universal truth in Past Tense :*

(a) ब्रह्म वा इदमग्र आसीत्तदात्मानमेवावेत् । अहं ब्रह्मास्मीति

तस्मात् तत्सर्वमभवत् ॥

बृ. १-४-१०.

“This was verily Brahman in the beginning. It knew Itself ‘I am Brahman’, then It became the all.” Br. 1-4-10.

(b) सदेव सोम्येदमग्र आसीदेकमेवाद्वितीयम् ॥ छां. ६-२-१.

“This was Being alone in the beginning, my boy, One only without a second.” Ch. 6-2-1.

Here the truth that Brahman or Pure Being is the All, has been clothed in the past tense so that the seeker may not mix it with the empirical truth of multiplicity.

We shall take up the peculiar method of exposition uniformly employed by the Upanishads later on.

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## V

VEDĀNTA-ŚĀSTRA AS THE ONLY  
MEANS OF RIGHT-KNOWLEDGE

## 1. Validity of Pramāṇas, Secular and Śāstraic

Indian Schools of Philosophy, insist that nothing can be established in a discussion without the aid of Pramāṇas or canons of evidence. The Mādhyamika alone is an exception, for he has no particular doctrine to defend.

The Mīmāṃsakas hold that the Vedas being eternal, are the only Pramāṇa with regard to results of good and bad deeds to be enjoyed in another birth or in another world where pleasure or pain has to be experienced as a consequence of one's deeds in this world, these effects being wholly beyond the ken of perception and other Pramāṇas. The Vedāntas also acquiesce in this view of the eternity of the Vedas from the empirical stand-point. That is why Bādarāyaṇa confirms Jaimini's view in this respect, in his aphorism 'अत एव च नित्यत्वम्' (वे. सू. १-३-२९) "And hence, it is that eternity of the Vedas has to be accepted" (V.S. 1-3-29). Śāṅkara explains this as follows :-

"The eternity of the Vedas, established by reasons such as the absence of any śruti naming any original author etc., is confirmed by this Sūtra."

So from the Vyavahāric point of view, we may suppose that this teacher also upholds the doctrine of this eternity.

## 2. The Purpose of the Śāstras

The Vedas as a Śāstra, however, have two distinct purposes to serve. As Śāṅkara rightly says :-

(१) अभ्युदयफलं धर्मज्ञानम्, तच्चानुष्ठानापेक्षम् ; निःश्रेयसफलं  
तु ब्रह्मविज्ञानम्, न चानुष्ठानान्तरापेक्षम् ॥ सू. भा. १-१-१.

“The knowledge of Dharma (taught in the Karma-Kāṇḍa) has Abhyudaya, prosperity, for its fruit, and it is dependent on the performance (of a religious duty). The Vijnāna (knowledge) of Brahman, however, has the Highest Good (Final Release) for its fruit, and does not demand any performance.” SBh. 1-1-1.

Moreover, the functions of the texts teaching Dharma and Brahman are quite different. As Śāṅkara says :-

(२) या हि चोदना धर्मस्य लक्षणं सा स्वविषये नियुञ्जानैव  
पुरुषमवबोधयति । ब्रह्मचोदना तु पुरुषमवबोधयत्येव केवलम्, अवबोधस्य  
चोदनाजन्यत्वात्, न पुरुषोऽवबोधे नियुज्यते ; यथा अक्षार्थसन्निकर्षेण  
अर्थावबीधे तद्वत् ॥ सू. भा. १-१-१.

“As for the text, which is the Pramāṇa (means of knowledge) concerning Dharma, it enlightens a person simultaneously urging him (to engage in the duty) which is its object of teaching ; the text concerning Brahman, however, merely enlightens a person (about It). The enlightenment having been born, the person is not urged to engage in that enlightenment, since that is born (of its own accord) by the text (itself) in the same way as a person (is not urged to engage in the knowledge) arising from the contact of the sense-organ and its object.” SBh. 1-1-1.

### 3. The distinct nature of the Subject-matter of the two Mīmāṃsas

There are two different exegetical works on the two entities which serve as the subject-matter of the two sets of texts referred to above. The Pūrva-Mīmāṃsa of Jaimini deals exclusively with the knowledge of Dharma, which as already remarked demands something to be done. The

Vedānta-Mīmāṃsā of Bādarāyaṇa, treats of the knowledge of texts teaching Brahman. The striking difference between these two entities (Dharma and Brahman) which constitute the subject-matter of the two Mīmāṃsās, should be vigilantly borne in mind by the student who aspires to appreciate the exact nature of the Prāmāṇya (validity) of the Vedānta-Śāstra according to Śāṅkara.

In the first place, while Dharma and Brahman, are both super-sensuous, the former cannot be directly experienced in this life, while the latter can.

(१) भव्यश्च धर्मो जिज्ञास्यो न ज्ञानकालेऽस्ति, पुरुषव्यापारतन्त्रत्वात् ; इह तु भूतं ब्रह्म जिज्ञास्यम्, नित्यत्वात् न पुरुषव्यापारतन्त्रम् ॥

सू. भा. १-१-१.

“Dharma, the subject-matter of the former enquiry, has to come about in future, and so is not present at the time of its knowledge. But here Brahman to be enquired into, is an already existent entity and being eternal, does not depend upon the will of a person.”

SBh. 1-1-1.

And in the second place, while both Dharma and Brahman are necessarily to be known with the help of the Śāstra, the knowledge of Brahman demands direct intuition and its accessories also.

(२) न धर्मजिज्ञासायामिव श्रुत्यादय एव प्रमाणं ब्रह्मजिज्ञासायाम् ; किं तु श्रुत्यादयोऽनुभवादयश्च यथासंभवमिह प्रमाणम् । अनुभवावसानत्वात्, भूतवस्तुविषयत्वाच्च ब्रह्मज्ञानस्य ॥ सू. भा. १-१-२.

“Śrutis and other (holy works) are not the only means of knowledge in the enquiry into Brahman, as they exclusively are in the case of enquiry into Dharma, but Śrutis etc. and intuition and the like, are also the means of knowledge here according to the

context. For the knowledge of Brahman has to culminate in (final) Intuition and treats of an already existent entity.” SBh. 1-1-2.

#### 4. Why Brahman is not accessible to the Secular Pramāṇas

It might be objected by some one that while ‘Dharma’ is something to be produced in due course at some distant time, and hence the claim that Śāstra alone is the valid means of knowledge in its case, there is no reason why Brahman, an existent entity, should not be known with the help of other secular means like perception or inference. Here is Śaṅkara’s reply to this :-

(१) ननु भूतवस्तुत्वे ब्रह्मणः प्रमाणान्तरविषयत्वमेव - इति वेदान्तवाक्यविचारणा अनर्थिकैव प्राप्ता । न ; इन्द्रियाविषयत्वेन संबन्धाग्रहणात् ॥ सू. भा. १-१-२.

“(Objection :-) If Brahman be an already existent entity, it necessarily follows that It is an object of the other means alone, and so the enquiry about the purport of the Vedānta-texts becomes altogether useless.

(Answer :-) No, for Brahman being no object of sense-organs, the relation (between Brahman and the Universe) cannot be grasped.”

SBh. 1-1-2.

The objection here mainly aims at showing that Brahman may as well be inferred as the cause of the Universe, and so, trying to understand It by ascertaining the meaning of the Upanishads, is futile. The answer is there is no scope for syllogistic inference here, since the latter demands an invariable relation between what is to be proved and the means of its proof as in the case of ‘fire and smoke’ in the common world. This is another

express-denial of the possibility of Brahman being the object of secular Pramāṇas :-

(२) यत्तूक्तं परिनिष्पन्नत्वात् ब्रह्मणि प्रमाणान्तराणि संप्रवेयुरिति, तदपि मनोरथमात्रम् ; रूपाद्यभावाद् हि नायमर्थः प्रत्यक्षस्य गोचरः, लिङ्गाद्यभावाच्च नानुमानादीनाम् ; आगममात्रसमधिगम्य एव तु अयमर्थो धर्मवत् । तथा च श्रुतिः - 'नैषा तर्केण मतिरापनेया प्रोक्तान्येनैव सुज्ञानाय प्रेष्ठ' (का. २-९), 'को अद्वा वेद क इह प्रवोचत् ..... इयं विसृष्टिर्यत् आबभूव' (ऋ. १०-१२९-६) इति चैते ऋचौ सिद्धानामपीश्वराणां दुर्बोधतां जगत्कारणस्य दर्शयतः ॥ सू. भा. २-१-६, पा. १८८.

“As for what was said (by the opponent) that Brahman being an already existent entity, Pramāṇas other (than Vedānta texts) may apply to It, that is only a fancy. For having no form and the like (qualities), and being devoid of a Liṅga (sign indicating something connected with it) etc., It is no object of inference and other Pramāṇas. It is to be known exclusively through Āgama (Śāstra) like Dharma. So says the Śruti: ‘This knowledge is not to be got (or refuted) through speculation ; it leads to right intuition, my dear boy, when taught by a person, quite other than the speculator’ (Ka. 2-9), ‘Who knows clearly, and who can express it by words, from whence this variety of creation has issued forth ?’ (Rig. 10-129-6). These two Riks show how the cause of the Universe is difficult to conceive even for perfect men.” SBh. 2-1-6, p. 188.

Of course, ‘आगममात्रसमधिगम्यः’ (to be attained through Āgama alone) is obviously intended not only to exclude the empirical Pramāṇas, but also to presume that ‘अनुभवः’ (intuition etc.) expressly mentioned in the quotation cited in the previous paragraph are to be accepted. The special feature of the Vedānta-Śāstra as a means emphatically is that it invariably demands intuition. That is why Śaṅkara proclaims with assurance :-

(३) आत्मविज्ञानस्य फलपर्यन्तत्वात् न तद्विषयस्य शास्त्रस्य प्रामाण्यं शक्यं प्रत्याख्यातुम् ॥ सू. भा. १-१-४, पा. १२.

“Seeing that the knowledge of Brahman (actually) culminates in its effect (Mōksha), the validity of the Śāstra dealing with that (Jñāna) cannot be denied.” SBh. 1-1-4, p. 12.

(४) नासौ नास्ति नाधिगम्यते इति वा शक्यं वदितुम् । ‘स एष नेतिनेत्यात्मा’ (बृ. ३-९-२६) इत्यात्मशब्दात् । आत्मनश्च प्रत्याख्यातुम् अशक्यत्वात्, य एव निराकर्ता तस्यैवात्मत्वात् ॥

सू. भा. १-१-४, पा. १९, २०.

“It is not possible to say that this (Purusha) does not exist, or that He cannot be known (through the Śāstra), for the word ‘Ātman’ (Self) is used (in the text) ‘Now this is the Ātman described as not this, not this’ (Br. 3-9-26); and because the Self is undeniable, and whoever would be the denier is himself that Ātman.”

SBh. 1-1-4, p. 19, 20.

## VI

### THE METHOD OF SUPERIMPOSITION AND RESCISSION

#### 1. The Nature of Brahman

Brahman or Absolute Reality being devoid of all specific features, can neither be expressed by words nor thought of by the mind, like an object. In fact, all distinctions concerning

subject and object relation (ग्राह्यग्राहकभाव) and those of all action, factors of action, and the result (क्रियाकारकफलभाव) are essentially the One Ātman. As a text frequently quoted by Śāṅkara, says :-

यत्र त्वस्य सर्वमाल्मैवाभूत् तत्केन कं पश्येत्तत्केन कं जिघ्रेत्तत्केन कं  
रसयेत्तत्केन कमभिवदेत्तत्केन कं श्रुणुयात्तत्केन कं मन्वीत् .तत्केन कं  
स्पृशेत्तत्केन कं विजानीयात् ॥

बृ. ४-५-१५.

“When to this knower of Ātman, everything has become Ātman alone, then what could one see and with what, then what could one smell and with what, then what could one taste and with what, then what could one hear and with what, then what could one think and with what, then what could one touch and with what, then what could one understand and with what ?”

Br. 4-5-15.

It is evident that, from this transcendental level, there could be no world of multiplicity and not even the distinction of Śāstra and teaching. Accordingly Sri Gauḍapāda says :-

प्रपञ्चो यदि विद्येत निवर्तेत न संशयः ।

मायामात्रमिदं द्वैतमद्वैतं परमार्थतः ॥

विकल्पो विनिवर्तेत कल्पितो यदि केनचित् ।

उपदेशादयं वादो ज्ञाते द्वैतं न विद्यते ॥ गौ. का. १-१७. १८.

“If the manifold universe were actually there, it would have to be banished before attaining Advaita. This duality is only a magical appearance ; in truth, there is Non-duality alone. The distinction (of Śāstra etc.) would have to actually disappear, if it were a real thought-construct of some one person. This doctrine of distinctions is only a device for the purpose of teaching, and when the Reality is known, there is no duality whatever.”

(IK. 1-17, 18.

## 2. The method of teaching devised by the Upanishads

This nature of non-dualistic Ātman, therefore, has necessitated a particular device to make the Absolute truth intelligible to seekers. This device is to deliberately impute to Reality some empirical characteristic, and when the truth has been brought home, to rescind the imputed characteristic. Sri Gauḍapāda illustrates this device by citing an example in the following verse:-

(१) स एष नेतिनेतीति व्याख्यातं निह्नुते यतः ।

सर्वमग्राह्यभावेन हेतुनाऽजं प्रकाशते ॥ गौ. का. ३-२६.

Here Gauḍapādāchārya refers to the Bṛihadāraṇyaka which first teaches Brahman (in Br. 2-3-6) by the text 'अथात आदेशो नेति नेति' 'Now, therefore, this is the teaching not this, not that', and subsequently in the same Upanishad, several ways of assuming and negating the ascriptions occur (in 3-9-26, 4.2.4 and 4-4-22) in different contexts. In each of these texts there is this refrain :-

(२) स एष नेतिनेत्यात्माऽगृह्यो न हि गृह्यतेऽशीर्यो न हि शीर्यतेऽसङ्गो न हि सज्यतेऽसितो न व्यथते न रिष्यति ॥ बृ. ३-९-२६.

"This is the Ātman described as 'Not this, not this', He is unobjectifiable, for He is never objectified ; undecaying, for He never decays ; untaintable, for He is never tainted ; unfettered, for He is never pained and is never injured." Br. 3-9-26.

Gauḍapādāchārya says that by this device of repeated negation of the description, because of the Reality being unobjectifiable, the Unborn reveals of Its own accord.

Śāṅkarāchārya refers to this device as belonging to a hoary tradition.

In His commentary on the *Gītā* verse (13-13), which is itself almost a verbatim repetition of (Sve. 3-16), the *Āchārya* writes :-

(३) उपाधिकृतं मिथ्यारूपमपि अस्तित्वाधिगमाय ज्ञेयधर्मवत् परिकल्प्य उच्यते 'सर्वतःपाणिपादम् । इत्यादि ; तथा हि संप्रदायविदां वचनम् 'अध्यारोपापवादाभ्यां निष्प्रपञ्चं प्रपञ्च्यते' - इति ॥

गी. भा. १३-१३.

"Even the false form due to the conditioning associate, has been treated as though it were the real property of the Knowable (*Ātman*) so that Its being may become intelligible in the *Ślōka* beginning with 'Having hands and feet everywhere'. This is in accordance with what those conversant with tradition say : 'By deliberate superimposition and rescission, that which is devoid of specific features, is to be explained." GBh. 13-13.

### 3. Some Examples of the Method

It should not be supposed that this *Adhyārōpa* so-called is altogether unreal and is merely an assumption for convenience' sake. Empirically, it is real enough. But it may be used even as it is to make some spiritual truth more intelligible.

(a) We have already cited the example of the causal relation between clay and its effects, wherein the *Upanishad* shows how the so-called effect in the empirical life, is really not other than the cause. This example has been given in illustration of the metaphysical causal relation between *Brahman* and the Universe.

(b) Similarly, the empirical states of consciousness, and the empirical body, vital force, mind etc. have been also used to reveal the really real nature of the *Ātman* of *Vedānta*.

(c) The Māṇḍūkya Upanishad, for instance, mentions the Waking State as the conditioning associate of Ātman, and says that the true Ātman is the Witness of the whole universe covered by that state. The ego of outward-consciousness, all the senses and other factors that are included in the ego-complex no less than the objective phenomena there, - the whole of this panorama constitutes the conditioning associate of the Witness called Vaiśvānara by the Śruti. Similarly the whole of the dream state is the conditioning associate of the same Witness who has been styled Taijasa, while the same Witness with the conditioning associate of deep sleep, has been called Prajña by the Śruti. This same Witness in and for Himself - for the associates change their self-identity while the Witness is constant - has been called the Fourth (चतुर्थ) relatively to the three relative Ātmans. Thus by successive Adhyārōpa or superimposition of the states and Apavāda or negation - we arrive at the Real secondless Ātman. Of course, each of the states, depending as it does on the real Ātman, is unreal from the stand-point of Paramārtha (really Real).

(d) The same is the case with regard to the five Kōśas (sheaths) taught in the Taittirīya Upanishad. Says Gauḍapāda :-

रसादयो हि ये कोशा व्याख्यातास्तैत्तिरीयके ।

तेषामात्मा परो जीवः खं यथा संप्रकाशितः ॥ गौ. का. ३-११.

“Beyond the (five) Kōśas beginning with the अन्नरसमय (made up of the juice of food), which have been explained (successively as ‘Ātman’) in the Taittirīya - beyond these there is their Jīva, their living Self, who has been revealed by us through the illustration of the ether.

GK. 3-11.

Gauḍapāda has already explained in his previous verses how Jīva is really the one Paramātmān, though He appears to be manifold owing to the conditioning associates the body, life-force etc. He has cited there how one and the same ether (ākāśa) appears to be many and various owing to the different conditioning associates such as jars and pitchers, the latter themselves being really all products of ether itself. He says here that the Annamaya (made up of food), Prāṇamaya (made up of life-force), Manōmaya (made up of mind), Vijñānamaya (made up of intellect), and Ānandamaya (made up of pleasure) - each successively called Ātman (self) just to cancel the notion of self-hood superimposed on the previous sheath, - as merely sheaths tentatively treated as the self, just to lead the seeker to the intuition of the Real Ātman beyond them all. The idea of individuality of Jīva is finally overpassed, so that he is now seen to be really the Supreme Self.

#### 4. Recognition of the method in the Sūtras

That the author of the Vedānta-Sūtras did recognize this method, may be inferred from the way in which he presents the exegesis of the Upanishads. For example, (1) he defines Brahman as the cause of the birth, sustentation, and dissolution of the Universe (in VS. 1-1-2). (2) And he proceeds to say that the Brahman is not only the efficient cause of the Universe, but also the Material Cause.

प्रकृतिश्च प्रतिज्ञादृष्टान्तानुपरोधात् ॥

वे. सू. १-४-२३.

“(Brahman is to be regarded) as the Material Cause also, so that the (initial) enunciation and the illustration in the Śruti, may not be contradicted.”

VS. 1-4-23.

[This Sūtra says that Śāstraic enunciation of teaching about Brahman viz. that knowing Brahman one would have known everything, would be in the fitness of things, only if Brahman is taken to be the material cause also. And illustrations like that about clay, a nugget of gold or a nail-cutter would also be apt in this case alone.]

And finally (3) he rejects the reality of the effect as such in the Sūtra,

तदनन्यत्वमारम्भणशब्दादिभ्यः ॥

वे. सू. २-१-१४.

“The effect is not other than its cause, because of texts like those declaring it to be only a play of words.” VS. 2-1-14.

[This Sūtra negates all causality, for it points to the text, which says the effect is only a play of words, as also the texts which declare that all the universe is really Brahman.]

Again (4) he actually refers to the method in the Sūtra :-

हेयत्वावचनाच्च ॥

वे. सू. १-१-८.

“(Pradhāna is not the cause) also because there is no text teaching its rejection.” VS. 1-1-8.

[This Sūtra says that the Śruti declaring ‘The Sat (Being) is the Ātman’, (the Self) and ‘That thou art’ (Ch. 6-8-7) does not subsequently abrogate it lest it be taken seriously. Therefore this Sat is not Pradhāna.]

Śaṅkara explains the spirit of the Sūtra thus :

यद्यनात्मैव प्रधानं सच्छब्दवाच्यं ‘स आत्मा तत्त्वमसि’ (छां. ६-८-७)  
इतीहोपदिष्टं स्यात्, स तदुपदेशश्रवणात् अनात्मज्ञतया तन्निष्ठो मा भूत् इति  
मुख्यमात्मानमुपदिदिक्षुः तस्य हेयत्वं ब्रूयात् । यथा अरुन्धती दिदर्शयिषुः

तत्समीपस्थां स्थूलां ताराममुख्यां प्रथममरुन्धती - इति ग्राहयित्वा तां  
 प्रत्याख्याय पश्चात् अरुन्धतीमेव ग्राहयति, तद्वत् 'नायमात्मा' इति ब्रूयात् ; न  
 चैवमवोचत् ॥ सू. भा. १-१-८, पा. ३१.

“If the Pradhāna, which is not the self at all, were what is denoted by the word Sat (Being), and if that alone had been taught by the text ‘That is the Self, that thou art’, then (the father) intending to teach the Ātman in the primary sense, would have said (something implying) its rejection, lest the son being ignorant of the real Ātman, should stick to it after hearing it taught. (This is to be expected) as for instance (in the illustration) where some one going to point out the Arundhati star, would first point to a (secondary) bigger star near it calling it Arundhati, and then negate it and then show the real primary Arundhati. Similarly here also the teacher should have said ‘this is not your Self’; but he has not said so.”

SBh. 1-1-8, p. 31.

[Evidently, Bādarāyaṇa according to Śaṅkara, expects that the usual procedure of śruti in teaching the subtle Ātman, is to point out something grosser as the Ātman and then by negating it to lead the seeker to the real Ātman.]

This is with reference to Brahman treated as the cause by Adhyārōpa, to be abrogated later on. We shall cite another example where this method seems to have been recognized by Bādarāyaṇa :-

न स्थानतोऽपि परस्योभयलिङ्गं सर्वत्र हि ॥ वे. सू. ३-२-११.

“Not even on account of the circumscribing situation, can there be a two-fold characteristic, for everywhere (It is taught to be without specific features).” VS. 3-2-11.

This aphorism categorically denies that Brahman can be conceived as happening to be endowed with specific features also owing to some conditioning association.

Śaṅkara says :-

न ह्युपाधियोगादपि अन्यादृशस्य वस्तुनो अन्यादृशः स्वभावः  
संभवति । सू. भा. ३-२-११. पा. ३५६.

“Not even owing to some conditioning associate, can the nature of a thing, happen to have some other nature.”

SBh. 3-2-11, p. 356.

न हि स्वच्छः सन् स्फटिकः अलक्तकाद्युपाधियोगात्, अस्वच्छो  
भवति ; भ्रममात्रत्वात् अस्वच्छताभिनिवेशस्य ॥

सू. भा. ३-२-११. पा. ३५६.

“A crystal while perfectly clear, cannot be sullied, even because of an associate like red lead etc. For the perverse notion that it is unclear, is a mere misconception.” SBh. 3-2-11, p. 356.

Here an objection has got to be met : ‘If as the traditional method of interpretation is to be strictly maintained, how are we to reconcile ourselves to the fact that, in the case of the various meditations enjoined by the Śruti, different forms of Brahman, are taught ? There is, for instance, ‘the Brahman with four quarters’ (Ch. 3-18-2) taught in one context, ‘the Brahman with sixteen digits’ (Pr.) in another, ‘the Brahman characterized as Vāmani’ (Ch. 4-15-3), Brahman called Vaiśvānara, with the three worlds as its body (Ch. 5-18-2) and so on. How could it be that Brahman is altogether different from characteristics even when conditioned by associates ? Bādarāyaṇa replies :-

न भेदादिति चेन्न प्रत्येकमतद्वचनात् ॥ वे. सू. ३-२-१२.

If it be objected that this cannot be on account of

difference of forms taught, we say no, for in each case of a conditioning associate, the Śāstra teaches non-difference alone. As for example :

यश्चायमस्यां पृथिव्यां तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः पुरुषो यश्चायमध्यात्मं  
शारिरस्तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः पुरुषोऽयमेव सः ॥                      बृ. २-५-१.

“He, the person who is in the earth, effluent through and through, immortal through and through, and he who is within the embodied person, effluent through and through, and immortal through and through, he is verily this same who is the Ātman.”

Br. 2-5-1

अपि चैवमेके ॥                      वे. सू. ३-२-१३.

“Moreover, so say the followers of certain Śākhās.”

VS. 3-2-13.

Here Śāṅkara explains how (in the Kāthaka) the Śruti disparages the person that sees difference and how the Śvetāśvatara (Śve. 1-12) recites a text which teaches that the experiencing self, the object to be experienced and the inspiring Īśvara, are all Brahman in one. The most important Sūtras in this Adhikaraṇa (topic for discussion) are :-

(a) अरूपवदेव हि तत्प्रधानत्वात् ॥                      वे. सू. ३-२-१४.

“Brahman is really without any feature whatever; for (the texts) teaching it, have that as their main purport.”

VS. 3-2-14.

(b) आह च तन्मात्रम् ॥                      वे. सू. ३-२-१६.

“(The Śruti) also says that It is purely of the nature of that (Pure Consciousness.)”

VS. 3-2-16.

The Śruti referred to according to Śāṅkara is कृत्स्नः

प्रज्ञानघन एव (He is conscious entirely throughout - Br. 4-5-13).

(c) दर्शयति चाथो अपि स्मर्यते ॥

वे. सू. ३-२-१७.

“The Śruti describes (by merely negating the foreign form Br. 2-3-6.....), and so is It described in the Smṛiti (G. 13-12).” VS. 3-2-17.

Śaṅkara refers to the Vedāntic parable-how Bādhva taught Bāshkali by perfect silence, and refers to the narrative in the Mahābhārata, where after showing His Unviers-form, Nārāyaṇa warned Nārada not to think that He had actually a form.

The reader must have been convinced by now that Bādarāyaṇa seriously believed that the Upanishads do use this same method of Adhyārōpa-Apavāda throughout to teach the real nature of Brahman without characteristics.

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## VII

### INNOVATIONS OF SUB-COMMENTARIES

#### INTRODUCTION

The student of Vedānta who has gone through the pages of this booklet, must have been convinced by now that the Upanishads uniformly aim at teaching that Brahman or the one Reality without a second, is the real Self of

every creature in the universe. Whatever be the gradation of Jīvas with regard to their knowledge, will-power, capacity to work, and the pleasure and pain they have inevitably to feel in their transmigratory life from the empirical stand-point, they are all really one with the Absolute Reality.

In order to guide the earnest seekers of absolute Truth, the Upanishads, according to Bādarāyaṇa as interpreted by Śaṅkara, employ empirical facts and step by step, they direct the aspirants to this inner life, and appealing to universal intuition, and reasoning in harmony with that intuition, they point to the innermost Self, as the Witness in all beings, and reveal how this real Self of each one of them, is really that very same Brahman whom tentatively they have treated as an object of enquiry. The one method employed is to use a series of Adhyārōpas or deliberate superimpositions for the purpose of teaching, and to reveal gradually how all means are really (1) the object of the notion 'me' and as such quite distinct from the outward superimposed selves, such as one's son or wife, are not one's self. (2) Then by taking the seeker inward they show how the body, the senses and the mind with all its functions are really not their self. And (3) as the third step to reveal how even the ego is not their real self inasmuch as there is a distinct Witnessing Self, the innermost Self of all. The last step is to show how all the Universe is really a superimposition on this Witness which is really the One Reality without a second.

### 1. Vidyā, Avidyā and Māyā

It is clear that this method is employed to disperse the ignorance involved in the empirical view and to induce the enquirer to see eye to eye with the sages who

have been already enlightened about the Truth. The Śrutis frequently use the terms Avidyā and Vidyā in contrast to each other. As for instance in the Kāthaka Upanishad,

दूरमेते विपरीते विषूची अविद्या या च विद्येति ज्ञाता ।

विद्याभीप्सिनं नचिकेतसं मन्ये न त्वा कामा बहवोऽलोलुपन्त ॥

का. २-४.

Here the words 'Avidyā' (ignorance) and 'Vidyā' (wisdom) are used in connection with one who does not know the truth with reference to death and who desires to know it. Nachiketa wants to know the exact nature of Reality beyond death, and Yama praises his desire to know the secret of death. We have no information as to what exactly the forerunners of Śāṅkara's tradition meant by this word 'Avidyā'.

The only predecessor whom Śāṅkara expressly styles as conversant with the Vedāntartha Sampradāya, is Sri Gauḍapāda. That teacher writes in his Kārikās :-

अन्यथा गृह्णतः स्वप्नो निद्रा तत्त्वमजानतः ।

विपर्यासे तयोः क्षीणे तुरीयं पदमश्नुते ॥

अनादिमायया सुप्तो यदा जीवः प्रबुध्यते ।

अजमनिद्रमस्वप्नमद्वैतं बुध्यते तदा ॥

गौ. का. १-१५, १६.

"Dream is for him who sees things as other than what they are, and deep sleep is for him who knows not this truth. When the misconception in these two cases is removed, one attains the Fourth."

GK. 1-15, 16.

It is clear that Gauḍapāda treats both ignorance and seeing things quite the other way as misconceptions. He

says that one should awake from this two-fold long magical dream before one sees Non-duality. It was left to Śaṅkara, as his one pre-eminent representative to state precisely what this Viparyāsa (misconception) consists in. As we have already seen, he defined Avidyā as the mutual superimposition of the Self and the not-self and the mistaken transference of their properties to each other. Gauḍapāda also used the word Māyā to denote some unreal appearance such as that of what is produced by a magician or the appearance of some dream phenomena. Śaṅkara alone, clearly defined the undifferentiated seed of differentiated names and forms of the universe as Māyā or Prakṛiti. (SBh. 2-1-14, p. 201)

## 2. Avidyā and Māyā confounded

It is a tragic travesty of Śaṅkara's teaching, introduced by the earliest sub-commentator on Śaṅkara's Sūtra-Bhāṣya, who makes Avidyā and Māyā identical in the following extract :-

येयं श्रुतिस्मृतीतिहासपुराणेषु 'नामरूपम्', 'अव्याकृतम्', 'अविद्या',  
 'माया', 'प्रकृतिः', 'अग्रहणाम्', 'अव्यक्तम्', 'तमः', 'कारणम्', 'लयः',  
 'शक्तिः', 'महासुप्तिः', 'निद्रा', 'अक्षरम्', 'आकाशम्' - इति च तत्र तत्र  
 बहुधा गीयते, चैतन्यस्य स्वत एवावस्थित ब्रह्मस्वरूपतावभासं प्रतिबध्य  
 जीवत्वापादिका विद्याकर्मपूर्वप्रज्ञा संस्कारचित्रपिप्तिः सुषुप्तौ  
 प्रकाशाच्छादनविक्षेपसंस्कारमात्ररूपस्थितिः अनादिरविद्या ....

पं. पा. २०.

In this description of Avidyā, the postulated ignorance is not only identified with Māyā or Prakṛiti, but is

said to cover up the Brahmic nature of Reality and transform It into a transmigratory Jīva. A residue of it, is said to remain in sleep. All these three doctrines have been foisted upon Śaṅkara, without a shred of evidence in the Bhāshya.

### 3. Avidyā as the Material Cause

To add to this woeful twisting and torturing the Bhāshya, this very sub-commentator popularly believed to be Padmapāda, the direct disciple of Śaṅkara - is responsible for importing another doctrine and ascribing it to the fair name of Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara has not only defined Adhyāsa (which he says is the essence of Avidyā), as परत्र पूर्वदृष्टावभासः (the knowledge of a previously seen thing in relation to something else), but also reiterates what he means by this definition when he writes अध्यासो नाम अतस्मिस्तदुद्भित्यवोचाम (We have said that what is called 'Adhyāsa' is mistaking something for what it is not). It is crystal-clear that according to that teacher, Adhyāsa is a species of wrong knowledge. Yet this sub-commentator twists Śaṅkara's statement to mean what it really cannot. The Bhāshya says :-

मिथ्याज्ञाननिमित्तः सत्यानृते मिथुनीकृत्य 'अहमिदम्', 'ममेदम्' -  
इति नैसर्गिकोऽयं लोकव्यवहारः ॥ अध्यासभाष्यम्.

"It is natural for human beings to believe (think and say) 'this is me', 'this is mine', mixing up the real and the unreal owing to a misconception."  
Intro. SBh.

Ignoring this straightforward interpretation of Śaṅkara's statement, the sub-commentator writes :-

मिथ्या च तदज्ञानं च मिथ्याज्ञानम् । मिथ्या इत्यनिर्वचनीयता उच्यते,

अज्ञानम् इति च जडात्मिका अविद्याशक्तिः ज्ञानपर्युदासेन उच्यते । तन्निमित्तः  
तदुपादान इत्यर्थः ॥ पं. पा. ४.

‘Mithyājñāna’ is to be resolved into ‘Mithyā-ajñāna’. Here by the word ‘Mithyā’ is meant undefinability and by ‘Ajñāna’ is meant the inert Avidyā-potentiality as opposed to consciousness. ‘Vyavahāra’ has this (Avidyā-potentiality) for its ‘Nimitta’ or material cause !

Here every word in the original sentence, has been twisted to mean something other than what it actually does.

(1) Vyavahāra (procedure in practical life) has been turned into Adhyāsa (the superimposed thing), (2) Ajñāna (ignorance) - has been twisted to mean some inert potentiality. (3) Mithyā (wrong knowledge) has been forced to mean undefinable either as being or non-being. And (4) Nimitta निमित्त (reason) has been tortured and made to signify the material cause. The interpreter would compel the reader to understand just what Achārya Śaṅkara does not mean : ‘All wrong appearance is a transformation of a material cause, the Avidyāśakti. And this Ajñāna is neither being nor non-being’. If Śaṅkara were present at the time of this interpretation, he would certainly cry ‘Oh ! save me from this friend !’.

#### 4. The Locus of Avidyā

The earliest importer of the Avidyā-doctrine, postulated Avidyā not only as attached to Jīvas but also as attached to inert things in the external world. For, according to him, this Avidyā-Śakti alone can give birth to unreal appearance. Only in the case of external things, this Avidyā has a single purpose to serve, viz., that of giving

rise to false appearance. With regard to sentient beings, however, it has a double function to perform, viz. it covers up the Brahmic nature of Jīvas, and causes them to look like transmigratory beings.

We shall not enter into a consideration of the controversy about whether or not the Avidyā which is supposed to pertain to insentient beings, is quite a different species of Avidyā or whether it is only a modification of the original Avidyā. We may also ignore the controversy as to whether this Avidyā resides in the Jīva or in Brahman, or even as a third alternative, where it resides in Pure Consciousness without any distinction. It is enough to note that all this is, according to Śāṅkara, a wild-goose chase since this Avidyā is, according to the first promulgator of the novel doctrine, only a postulate assumed to account for unreal appearances. The theory that the unreal appearance itself, is an undefinable thing born out of Avidyā, may also be dismissed as an attempt to build a castle in the air. The last wild theory to be dismissed in this connection, is the number of Avidyās, whether it is only one or as the number of Jīvas !

Let us only remind ourselves that, according to Śāṅkara, there is Avidyā or mutual superimposition of the Self and the not-self, only in the empirical field. What has Śāṅkara to say about the locus of this Avidyā, may be clearly seen in the following extract from his commentary on the Sūtras :-

कस्य पुनरयमप्रबोधः ? - इति चेत्, यस्त्वं पृच्छसि, तस्य त इति वदामः । नन्वहम् ईश्वर एवोक्तः श्रुत्या ! यद्येवं प्रतिबुद्धोऽसि, नास्ति कस्यचिदप्रबोधः ॥

सू. भा. ४-१-३, ४६५.

“If it be asked ‘To whom does this non-enlightenment pertain ?’, we reply, ‘To you, who ask this question’.

(Objection :-) ‘But the Śruti says that I am verily Īśvara Himself !’

(Reply :-) If you are thus enlightened, then we say ‘There is no ignorance, belonging to any one.’

SBh. 4-1-3, p. 465.

[Śaṅkara here proclaims that there is no nescience at the transcendental level at all.]

## 5. Brahman and Īśvara

Inasmuch as the controversy about the object of Avidyā is closely connected with that about its locus, we need not enter into details about it any more. We may be quite satisfied with Śaṅkara’s remark that Brahman, as the real Self of the seeker, is the very object of enquiry here at the empirical level of thought. When Brahman is intuited as one’s own Self, the question does not arise at all.

We may now pass on to the question of the difference between Brahman and Īśvara. Śaṅkara says in his commentary on the second Sūtra :-

अस्य जगतः .... जन्मस्थितिभङ्गं यतः सर्वज्ञात् सर्वशक्तेः कारणाद् भवति, ‘तद्ब्रह्म’ इति वाक्यशेषः । .... न यथोक्तविशेषणस्य जगतः, यथोक्तविशेषणम् ईश्वरं मुक्त्वा अन्यतः - प्रधानात् अचेतनात्, अणुभ्यः, अभावात्, संसारिणो वा - उत्पत्यादि संभावयितुं शक्यम् ॥

सू. भा. १-१-२, पा. ७.

Here the Achārya first defines Brahman as the cause of the birth, sustentation and dissolution of the universe. He also says in the same breath, that, it is not possible

to conceive that the cause can be anything other than this Brahman or Īśvara omniscient and omnipotent. He repeatedly uses terms like Īśvara, Parameśvara and Maheśvara for the non-dual Brahman throughout his discussion about the cause of the universe.

This word Īśvara, has been a stumbling block for some followers of the sub-commentators, who have tacitly assumed that the epithet Īśvara is uniformly reserved for the Saguneśvara (Brahman with qualities presented for meditation by the Śrutis). While it is true that the Brahman to be known as the enquirer's Self is not different from Brahman to be meditated upon, it is not right to say that Brahman is always qualified by attributes. Śaṅkara's statements are crystal clear on this point :-

(१) तत्राविद्याकस्यायां ब्रह्मणः उपास्योपासकादिलक्षणः सर्वे

व्यवहारः ॥

सू. भा. १-१-१२, पा. ३५.

"New, conventions like distinction of the meditated and the meditator, are all at the level of Avidyā." SBh. 1-1-12, p. 35

(२) रूपाद्याकाररहितमेव हि ब्रह्म अवधारयितव्यम्, न रूपादिमत् ।

'अस्थूलम्' इत्यादीनि वाक्यानि निष्पन्नब्रह्मात्मतत्त्वप्रधानानि नार्थान्तरप्रधानानि .... इतराणि तु आकारवद्ब्रह्मविषयाणि वाक्यानि न तत्प्रधानानि । उपासनाविधिप्रधानानि हि तानि ॥

सू. भा. ३-२-१४, पा. ३५७.

We are told here that texts teaching Brahman without specific features, mainly purport to reveal the nature of Brahman, whereas texts describing Brahman with qualities, have not that very description as their main purport, for, the real aim of the latter set of texts, is to enjoin meditation.

So, it is not whether or not there is the word *Īśvara* in a text that settles the question, but whether a particular text prescribes meditation or not.

## 6. Brahman, the Omniscient and the Omnipotent Being

Similarly, some interpreters of texts, are likely to be misled by the epithets *Sarvajña* (Omniscient) and *Sarvaśaktimat* (Omnipotent) in connection with Brahman the first cause *Mūlakāraṇam*. But the Śrutis according to Śaṅkara, are not very particular even about these epithets. As that Achārya writes :-

एवमविद्याकृतनामरूपोपाद्यनुरोधी ईश्वरो भवति, व्योमेव घटकर  
काद्युपाद्यनुरोधि । स च स्वात्मभूतानेव घटाकाशस्थानीयानविद्याप्रत्युपस्था  
पितनामरूपकृतकार्यकरणसंघातानुरोधि नो जीवाख्यान् विज्ञानात्मनः प्रति  
ईष्टे व्यवहारविषये । तदेवमविद्यात्मकोपाधिपरिच्छेदापेक्षमेव ईश्वरस्य  
ईश्वरत्वम्, सर्वज्ञत्वम्, सर्वशक्तित्वं च ; न परमार्थतो विद्यया अपास्त  
सर्वोपाधिस्वरूपे आत्मनि ईशिप्रीशितव्यसर्वज्ञत्वादिव्यवहारः उपपद्यते ॥

सू. भा. २-१-१४, पा. २०१.

"In this way, He becomes the *Īśvara*, (only) in conformity with the conditioning associate of name and form created by ignorance, in the same way as ether conforms to conditioning associates like pots, jars etc. And He rules over the *Vijñānātmanas* called *Jīvas*, who correspond to the pot-ethers etc. of the illustration in so far as they are limited by the associates of aggregates of body and senses, which essentially are of the nature of *Avidyā*, but in reality are His own self. *This Īśvara-nature of Omniscience and Omnipotence, is only relative to the conditioning associate which is of the essence of Avidyā, but there can be no consistent talk of the relation of the Ruler and the ruled or Omniscience etc. from the transcendental stand-point.*"

SBh. 2-1-14, p. 201

## 7. Īśvara as the Omnipotent Cause

That Brahman is the 'cause' of the birth etc. of the universe, and as such owns 'a variety of powers', is therefore only within the domain of Vyavahāra. This will be obvious from the following two extracts from the Sūtra-Bhāshya.

(१) सर्वशक्तियुक्ता च परा देवता इत्यभ्युपगन्तव्यम्, कुंतः ? तद्दर्शनात् । तथा हि दर्शयति श्रुतिः सर्वशक्तियोगं परस्या देवतायाः ॥

सू. भा. २-१-३०, पा. २१५.

"It should be taken for granted that the Supreme Deity is possessed of all powers. Why ? For it is revealed so. The Śruti reveals that it is so, that the Supreme Deity is possessed of all powers."  
SBh. 2-1-30, p. 215.

This is from the Vedāntic convention of teaching that Brahman is the cause. But, at the higher level of teaching, what is the Paramarthic Truth ? Here is Śaṅkara's dictum :-

(१) जगदुत्पत्तिस्थितिप्रलयहेतुत्वश्रुतेः, अनेकशक्तित्वं ब्रह्मणः इति चेत्, न ; विशेषनिराकरणश्रुतीनाम् अनन्यार्थत्वात् । उत्पत्त्यादिश्रुतीनामपि समानमनन्यार्थत्वम् इति चेत् । न ; तासामेकत्वप्रतिपादनपरत्वात् । मृदादिदृष्टान्तैर्हि सतो ब्रह्मण एकस्य सत्यत्वम्, विकारस्य चानृतत्वं प्रतिपादयत् शास्त्रं नोत्पत्त्यादिपरं भवितुमर्हति ॥

सू. भा. ४-३-१४, पा. ४९८.

"(Objection :-) Because of the Śruti teaching that the Universe is born from, sustained by and dissolved in Brahman, we have to conclude that Brahman has a number of powers.

(Reply :-) No, because the Śrutis negating specific features (of Brahman) do not aim at teaching anything else.

(Objection :-) This having no other purport, is common to Śrutis teaching origin etc. (of the Universe) also.

(Reply :-) No, for they have the purport of teaching Unity. (To explain :-) By means of illustrations like that of clay, the Śāstra teaches that Being or Brahman is real and every effect is unreal, and as such, cannot reasonably be said to have origin etc. for its (main) import.”  
SBh. 4-3-14, p. 498.

[Here it is expressly stated that the Śruti is not aiming at teaching the origin etc. as such ; this teaching is only to lead us to the conclusion that all effect is really one with Brahman.]

Here is another reason to show that causality is not taught for its own sake :-

(२) कस्मात् पुनरुत्पत्त्यादिश्रुतीनां विशेषनिराकरणश्रुतिशेषत्वम्, न पुनरितरशेषत्वमितरासामिति ? उच्यते - विशेषनिराकरणश्रुतीनां निराकाङ्क्षत्वात् । न ह्यात्मन एकत्वनित्यत्वशुद्धत्वाद्यवगतौ सत्यां भूयः काचिदाकाङ्क्षा उपजायते ; पुरुषार्थसमाप्तिबुद्ध्युपपत्तेः .... । नैव-मुत्पत्त्यादिश्रुतीनां निराकाङ्क्षार्थप्रतिपादनसामर्थ्यमस्ति ॥..... (विदुषां तथैव दृष्टयनुभवदर्शनात् ) सू. भा. ४-३-१४, पा. ४९८.

“(Objection :-) Why again, should the texts teaching origin etc. (of the universe) be regarded as subservient to the texts which negate all characteristics (to Brahman), rather than take the other texts themselves as subservient to these texts ?

(Reply :-) This is our answer :- It is so, because texts negating all characteristics, teach (something) which leaves no room for further enquiry. After the intuition of the unity, eternity, purity and the like (nature of Ātman), surely there can be no more room for any further enquiry, for (then) there is the idea of one's having ultimately

reached the Highest Goal of human life and because the enlightened ones are seen to have the feeling of contentment etc. (after such intuition). But the texts teaching origin etc. have no capacity to teach anything that leaves no room for further enquiry.”

SBh. 4-3-14, p. 498.

## 8. What is the Cause of the Universe ?

The definition of Brahman as the cause, being disposed of as a device to teach the Unity of Ātman, -the discussion of what exactly is the cause of the universe, loses its further importance according to Śaṅkara's interpretation of the Upanishads. We have already seen (para 2, p. 13) that, empirically speaking, Brahman has all the necessary powers for the creation, sustentation and dissolution of the world. This is further explained in another context by Śaṅkara himself, and his ultimate dictum in the matter is disclosed thus :-

अविद्याकल्पितेन च नामरूपलक्षणेन रूपभेदेन व्याकृताव्याकृतात्म-  
केन तत्त्वान्यत्वाभ्यामनिर्वचनीयेन ब्रह्म परिणामादिसर्वव्यवहारास्पदत्वं  
प्रतिपद्यते ; पारमार्थिकेन च रूपेण सर्वव्यवहारातीतम् अपरिणतम्  
अवतिष्ठते । वाचारम्भणमात्रत्वाच्च, अविद्याकल्पितस्य नामरूपभेदस्य इति  
न निरवयवत्वं ब्रह्मणः कुप्यति ॥ सू. भा. २-१-२७, पा. २१४.

“Brahman in its special aspect conjured up by Avidyā, viz. the aspect of name and form, undefinable either as quite its own nature or something quite distinct from it, (name and form) undefinable either as quite its own nature or something quite distinct from it, (name and form) both differentiated and not differentiated, (of Brahman in this special aspect) lends itself as subject to all conventions like evolution ; and, in its real nature, remains transcending all such conventions. This special aspect conjured up by Avidyā, being only a play of words, the fact that Brahman is indivisible, remains unaffected.”

SBh. 2-1-27, p. 214.

In the face of this unambiguous statement of Śaṅkara, Post-Śaṅkara Advaitins fell into the error of vain disputation as to whether Brahman is the sole cause or whether there are other causes too ! Thus writes the author of the Pañchapādika-Vivarāṇa :-

(१) तत्र बिम्बस्थानीयं ब्रह्म मायाशक्तिमत् कारणम्, जीवास्तु प्रत्येकमविद्यानुबद्धाः - इति केचित् । मायाविद्याप्रतिबिम्बितं ब्रह्म जगत्कारणं, विशुद्धम् (ब्रह्म) अमृतत्वालम्बनम् ; जीवाश्च अविद्याबद्धाः - इत्यन्ये । जीवा एव स्वाविद्यया प्रत्येकं प्रपञ्चाकारेण ब्रह्माविर्भावयन्ति । सादृश्याच्च प्रपञ्चैकतावभासः, अमेकैरवगतद्वितीयचन्द्रवत्, स्वरूपापेक्षया च ब्रह्म सर्वजगत्कारणम् इत्यपरे । ब्रह्मैकमेव स्वाविद्यया जगदाकारेण विवर्तते, स्वप्नादिवत् - इति मतान्तरम् ॥ पं.वि. २३२.

Here are a number of fanciful theories all based on the hypothetical Avidyā :-

(1) Brahman (the original of reflection), endowed with the power of Māyā.

(2) Brahman reflected in the Avidyā-Māyā.

(3) Jīvas themselves manifest a world cause through this Avidyā the unity of the world being illusion.

(4) Brahman itself appears as the world through Its Avidyā as one does in a dream. All these flights of fancy on the basis of the hypothetical Avidyā !

## 9. Mahāvākya, the source of Final Release

Śaṅkara in his Sūtra-Bhāṣhya again and again writes what sentences like Tat-tvam-asi mean :-

(१) नित्यशुद्धबुद्धमुक्तस्वभावे कूटस्थनित्ये एकस्मिन् असङ्गे परमात्मनि तद्विपरीतं जैवं रूपं - व्योम्नीव तलमलादि - परिकल्पितम् ॥

सू. भा. १-३-१९, पा. ११५.

(२) अस्यैव परमात्मनोऽनेनापि विज्ञानात्मभावेन अवस्थानात् उपपन्नमिदमभेदेनोपक्रमणम् इति काशकृत्स्न आचार्यो मन्यते ॥

सू. भा. १-४-२२, पा. १७१.

(३) आभास एवैष जीवः परमात्मनो जलसूर्यकादिवत् प्रतिपत्तव्यः । न स एव साक्षात्, नापि वस्त्वन्तरम् ॥ सू. भा. २-३-५०, पा. ३०२.

(४) अपि च तत्त्वमसि - इत्येतद्वाक्यं त्वंपदार्थस्य तत्पदार्थ भावमाचष्टे ॥

सू. भा. ४-१-२, पा. ४६२.

(५) संसारिणः संसारित्वापोहेन ईश्वरात्मत्वं प्रतिपिपादयिषितम् ॥

सू. भा. ४-१-३, पा. ४६४.

In all the above cases, whatever be the nature of the illustrations cited, Śaṅkara's contention is that sentences which teach the identity of the individual self with Brahman, invariably propose to remove the transmigratory nature of the individual self.

The later Vedāntins that follow the systems of sub-commentaries, however, have given the name of 'Mahāvākyas' to such texts and have insisted that in interpreting these sentences, the primary meanings of both the words Tat (Brahman) and Tvam (Jīva) have to be abandoned and what has been called the Jahadajahat

Lakshāṇa (giving up and retaining) or Bhāga Tyāga Lakshāṇa (giving up a part of the primary meaning) has to be resorted to as in the case of understanding the meaning of a sentence like 'सोऽयं देवदत्तः' 'This person is the same as that', where we give up all distinctive features such as time, place etc. and retain the only person meant by the statement. All this is quite foreign to Śāṅkara's way of interpretation as we have already explained.

Again, Śāṅkara has used illustrations like Ghaṭākāśa (Pot-ether) and Jala-Sūryaka (Reflection of the sun in water). Strangely enough, these later interpreters have taken sides with schools that insist that the Jīva is Avachhinna (limited) by conditioning associates like the mind or that the Jīva is an actual reflection of Brahman in Avidyā (Avidyā-Pratibimba-Vāda) !

Worse than all, is the belief of later Vedāntins, which has been handed down to our own times, that the so-called 'Mahāvākyas' are actually Mantras in which the disciples have to be initiated by an adept Guru. What is most ludicrous about it, is that even credited representatives of Śāṅkarāchārya, do continue to believe that Śāṅkara has founded four different Maṭhas or monasteries in the four cardinal points of Bhārata Desh, and the heads of each of such Maṭhas have been exhorted by him to propagate, in an unbroken traditional line of teachers and disciples, one of the four Mahāvākyas ; each of which stands for one Veda ! All this, in blissful ignorance of the fact that Śāṅkara had never called them Mahāvākyas ! Internal quarrels are not wanting among the followers of Maṭhas, and even among Maṭhādhipatis, about deciding the genuineness of Maṭhas, mainly on the basis of the

Mahāvākya that is being traditionally handed down by Gurus !

### 10. Differences about Śravaṇa and other means to knowledge

One of the strong pillars on which Śāṅkara's traditional school of interpretation stands unshaken, is that Brahman is not taught as subservient to any injunction. He proclaims at the top of his voice that words like द्रष्टव्यः, श्रोतव्यः though seeming to convey some injunction.

विधिच्छायानि वचनानि स्वाभाविकप्रवृत्तिविषयविमुखीकरणायानीति

ब्रूमः ॥

सू. भा. १-१-४, पा. १९.

“We say that they are for the purpose of turning one, back from the object towards which the mind naturally tends to proceed.  
SBh. 1-1-4, p. 19.

And in the face of this certain sections of sub-commentators persist in holding that these are really enjoined :-

द्रष्टव्यः - इत्यनूद्य तदर्थत्वेन मनननिदिध्यासनाभ्यां फलोपकार्य-  
ङ्गाभ्यां सह श्रवणं नामाङ्गि विधीयते इति । ..... तं च जिज्ञासुं  
पुरुषार्थकामम् उपलभमानो भगवान् बादरायणः साधनचतुष्टयसंपन्नस्य  
मोक्षसाधनब्रह्मज्ञानाथ वेदान्तवाक्यविचारं विदधतो विधेः, अपेक्षिता-  
धिकारिविषयफलानुबन्धत्रयमागमिकमपि न्यायेन निर्णेतुं सूत्रयामास  
'अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा' - इति ॥ पं. वि. अव.

The above excerpt clearly states that the very first Sūtra of Bādarāyaṇa, proposes to decide the subject-matter, the qualified student called to study, and the result

of such study of the *injunction of Śravaṇa*, even while the Bhāshya does not smell of it ! The author of Pañchapādika on which the above is a commentary, actually says that Śravaṇa and other means are recommended in this eulogistic statement !

Another sub-commentator sees in these means the steps leading to Samādhi (trance) as recommended by Patanjali :-

अत्र श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्य इति धारणोपदेशः, निदिध्यासितव्य इति ध्यानोपदेशः, द्रष्टव्यः - इति समाधेरूपदेशः ॥ भामती पा. ६१५.

How he managed to imagine reference to these items of Yōgic discipline, even while there is no inkling of any reference to them in the original Śruti, passes one's understanding !

We may ignore the internal quarrel among the sub-commentators concerning the question of the principal means to Jñāna, to which the other two are subservient. But we must not forget to note that Śāṅkara himself declares that Śravaṇa alone is quite sufficient to produce Jñāna in the case of the most highly qualified seekers :-

येषां पुनर्निपुणमतीनां नाज्ञानसंशयविपर्ययलक्षणः पदार्थविषयः प्रतिबन्धोऽस्ति, शक्नुवन्ति सकृदुक्तमेव तत्त्वमसिवाक्यार्थमनुभवितुम् ॥

सू. भा. ४-१-२, पा. ४६२.

Here we are told that the only obstacles to the intuition of one's identity with Brahman, are ignorance, doubt and misconception and no such thing as the hypothetical 'Avidyā-Śakti' surmised by the sub-commentary schools, is hinted at. Again, we are told by

Śaṅkara in so many words, that a single suggestion by the text 'That thou art' is quite sufficient to enlighten those that have no difficulty to overcome about the true meaning of the words 'That' and 'thou' used in the text. And there is no insistence of the practice of all the three means in the case of the highly qualified students. This unequivocal declaration has been ignored by the later Śaṅkarites.

### 11. Final Release

There is no ambiguity whatever with regard to Final Release, either in the Śrutis or in the Bhāshya. Śaṅkara quotes three texts and writes :-

(१) इति चैवमाद्याः श्रुतयो मोक्षप्रतिबन्धनिवृत्तिमात्रमेव आत्मज्ञानस्य फलं दर्शयन्ति ॥ सू. भा. १-१-४, पा. १५.

"These and other Śrutis teach that the effect of Ātmajñāna, is only the removal of (nescience) the obstacle to Release."

SBh. 1-1-4, p. 15.

[Release which is already there, manifests itself as soon as ignorance is removed. Knowledge does not create Release.]

(२) इदं तु पारमार्थिकं कूटस्थनित्यम्, व्योमवत् सर्वव्यापि, सर्वविक्रियारहितम्, नित्यतृप्तम्, निरवयवम्, स्वयञ्ज्योतिःस्वभावम् ; यत्र धर्माधर्मौ सह कार्येण कालत्रयं च नोपावर्तेते । तदेतद् अशरीरत्वं मोक्षाख्यम् ॥ सू. भा. १-१-४, पा. १४.

"This, however, is really real, unchangingly eternal, all-pervading like the ether, devoid of all modifications, ever-content, without parts, self-effulgent by nature. This is that unembodiedness called Release, wherein good and bad deeds together with their effects and

time, consisting of the three periods of time, never flourish.”  
SBh. 1-1-4, p. 14.

(३) अपि च विद्यासाधनं स्ववीर्यविशेषात् स्वफल एव विद्यायां कञ्चिदतिशयमासञ्जयेत् न विद्याफले मुक्तौ । तद्धि असाध्यं नित्यसिद्धस्वभावमेव विद्याया अधिगम्यत इत्यसकृदवोचाम । न च तस्यामप्युक्तर्षनिकर्षात्मकोऽतिशयः उपपद्यते, निकृष्टाया विद्यात्वाभावात् । उत्कृष्टैव हि विद्या भवति । तस्मात् तस्यां चिराचिरोत्पत्तिरूपोऽतिशयो भवन् भवेत्, न तु मुक्तौ कश्चिदतिशयसंभवोऽस्ति ॥

सू.भा. ३-४-५२, पा. ४५९.

Here Śaṅkara expressly declares that neither in the knowledge of Brahman, nor in the Final Release, can there be gradations. Strictly speaking, Mukti or Release is already there, for it is of the very nature of Brahman, which is ever-existing. And the knowledge of Brahman, being of the very stuff of intuition, is absolutely changeless being beyond time and no effect of any religious deed performed.

Nevertheless, followers of the sub-commentary schools have imagined gradations in the knowers of Brahman - *Brahmavid* (knower), *Brahmavidvara* (better knower), *Brahmavidvariya* (still better knower), and *Brahmavidvarishṭha* (the best of knowers) !

As for Mukti (Freedom), it is obvious that according to Śaṅkara, knowledge reveals Mukti instantly. Empirically speaking, however, he says that misconception even after sublation, may continue to appear like the knowledge of the double moon occurring to some one owing to cataract :-

बाधितमपि तु मिथ्याज्ञानं द्विचन्द्रज्ञानवत् संस्कारवशात् कञ्चित्कालम्  
अनुवर्तत एव ॥ सू. भा. ४-१-१५, पा. ४७५.

Unable to distinguish the two stand-points of view, empirical and transcendental, the Post-Śaṅkara Vedāntins have built up various theories in this respect.

(१) कारणविगमेऽपि कार्यशेषानुवृत्तिः संस्कारात् ; अतो  
लब्धवृत्तिकर्मसंस्कारात्, तद्विपाकसंस्काराद् वा विदुषोऽपि शरीरस्थितिः ॥  
ब्र. सि.पा. १३२.

Here the living-free knower of Brahman is said to continue to bear his body, because of the initial velocity of fructified Karma - according to Maṇḍana. Being a realistic Vedāntin, he could not appreciate Śaṅkara's discussion of 'the continuance of the misconception' though sublated by correct knowledge.

(२) अज्ञानलेशोऽस्त्येव विदुषोऽपि कश्चित्, कञ्चित् कालं  
शरीरस्थितेरिष्टत्वात् ॥ इ. सि., पा. ७४.

The author of Iṣṭa-Siddhi believes not merely in Saṃskāra, but also a little bit of it !

(३) अविद्यालेशो वा कर्मलेशवत् संस्कारशब्देनापिलप्यत इति  
निरवद्यम् ॥ पं. वि., पा. १०६.

The author of the Vivaraṇa admits Saṃskāra or, as an alternative, a bit of Avidyā !

How the undefinable Avidyā-Śakti happens to be a real material cause of something and how it persists affecting even a free knower, is really passing strange.

On the whole, the Post-Śāṅkara Advaitins may be said to lean towards the doctrine of Bharṭṛu-Prapañcha, who held that Mōksha was of two kinds, one being realization of Brahmic nature during this life, and the other merging in Brahman after the fall of the body. In any case, they have completely ignored Śāṅkara's teaching that Mōksha is self-established, and has only to be intuited by the wisdom of the secondless Ātman.

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**For Details contact :**

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or

**ADHYĀTMA PRAKĀSHA KĀRYĀLAYA**

Thyagarajanagar, Bangalore - 560 028.

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