The Greatness of India and Its Culture

7. The Greatness of Indian Literature – 5

The Philosophy of the Upanishads

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Contents

The Philosophy of the Upanishads 3

Discovery of the Absolute Brahman 10

Nature of the Absolute Brahman 19

Parabrahman 29

Maya: the Principle of Phenomenal Existence 33

Vedanta's Final Answer ..... Back Cover

The Philosophy of the Upanishads

"The philosophy of the Upanishads* is the basis of all Indian religion and morals and to a considerable extent of Hindu politics, legislation and society. Its practical importance to [our] race is therefore immense. But it has also profoundly [affected] the thought of the West in many of the most critical stages of [its] development; at first through Pythagoras and other Greek philosophers, then through Buddhism working into Essene, Gnostic and Roman Christianity and once again in our own times through German metaphysics, Theosophy, and a hundred strange and irregular channels. One can open few books now at all in the latest stream of thought without seeing the old Vedantism busy at its work of moulding and broadening the European mind, sometimes by direct and conscious impact as a force, more often by an unacknowledged and impalpable pressure as an atmosphere. This potent influence [in] modern times of a way of thinking many thousands of years old, is due to [a] singular parallelism between the fundamental positions arrived [at by] ancient Vedantism and modern Science. Science in its [researches] amid matter has stumbled on the basal fact of the [Unity] of all things; the Unity of all things is the rock on which the Upanishads have been built. Evolution has been discovered and [analyzed] by Science; Evolution of a kind is implied at every turn by the Vedanta. Vedantism like Science, [but] after its own fashion, [is] severely conscientious in its logical processes and rigorously experimental; [Vedantism] has mastered physical and psychical laws which Science [is] now beginning to handle.

"The Word Upanishad means to enter into a secret place." – Bengali Writings, p. 59

But the parallelism is no more than a parallelism, [there is] no real point of contact; for the Hindu or Southern Asiatic mind differs fundamentally in its processes from either [the] Teutonic or the Mediterranean. The former is diffuse and comprehensive; the latter compact and precise. The Asiatic acquires a [deeper] and truer view of things in their totality, the European a more accurate and practically serviceable conception of their parts. [The] European seizes on an aspect and takes it for the whole; he is [a] fanatic of single ideas and the preacher of the finite: the Asiatic passes at once to the whole and slurs rapidly over the aspects; he [is] eclectic, inveterately flexible and large-minded, the priest of [the Infinite]. The European is an analytical reasoner proceeding from observations, the Asiatic a synthetic diviner, leaping to intuitions. Even [when] both analyze, the European prefers to dissect his observations, [the] Asiatic to distinguish his experiences: or when both [synthetize, the] European generalises and classifies what he has [observed,] the Asiatic masses into broad single truths what he [has seen] within. The one deals as a master with facts, but halts over [ideas and] having mastered an idea works round it in a circle; the other [masters ideas] unerringly [.....] but stumbles among facts and applications. The mind of the European is an Iliad or an Odyssey, fighting rudely but heroically forward, or, full of a rich curiosity, wandering as an accurate and vigorous observer in landlocked seas of thought; the mind of the Asiatic is a Ramayan or a Mahabharat, a gleaming infinity of splendid and inspiring imaginations and idealisms or else an universe of wide moral aspiration and ever varying and newly-grouped masses of thought. The mind of the Westerner is a Mediterranean full of small and fertile islands, studded with ports to which the owner, a private merchant, eagerly flees

with his merchandise after a little dashing among the billows, and eagerly he disembarks and kisses his dear mother earth; the mind of the Eastern man is an Ocean, and its voyager an adventurer and discoverer, a Columbus sailing for months over an illimitable Ocean out of reach of land, and his ports of visit are few and far between, nor does he carry in his bottoms much merchandise you can traffic in; yet he opens for the trader new horizons, new worlds with new markets. By his intuitions and divinations he helps to widen the circles the European is always obstinately tracing. The European is essentially scientific, artistic and commercial; the Asiatic is essentially a moralist, pietist and philosopher. Of course the distinction is not rigid or absolute; there is much that is Asiatic in numbers of Europeans, and in particular races, notably the South Germans, the Celt and the Slav; there is much that is European in numbers of Asiatics, and in particular nations, notably the Arabs and the Japanese. But the fundamental divergence in speculative habits is very noticeable, for in the things of the mind the South imposes its law on the whole Continent.

We shall therefore expect to find, as we do find, that Vedantic Evolution and Monism are very different things from Evolution and Monism as European Science understands them. European thought seizes on Evolution as manifested in the outward facts of our little earth and follows it into its details with marvellous minuteness, accuracy and care. The Vedanta slurs over this part of the scheme with a brief acknowledgement, but divines the whole course of Evolution in the Universe and lays down with confident insight its larger aspects in the inward facts of the soul. In its Monism also Vedanta is far more profound and searching than the European scientific observer, for while the latter is aware only

of this gross material world and resolves everything into the monism of gross Matter, the Vedanta, which is perfectly aware that gross matter can all be resolved into a single principle, does not pause at this discovery; it has pursued its investigations into two other worlds which surround & interpenetrate ours like two concentric but larger circles, the psychic or dream world of subtle Matter and the spiritual or sleep world of causal Matter, each with its own monistic unity; these three parallel monisms it resolves into a Supreme, Absolute and Transcendent Unity which is alone real and eternal. To the Indian consciousness at least these are no mere speculations; they are conclusions based on the actual experiences and observations of investigators who had themselves entered into these inner and yet wider worlds. The good faith of their observations cannot seriously be doubted and their accuracy can only be impugned when Science itself consents to explore the same fields of being whether by the methods hitherto practised in the East or by any other adequate means of its own invention.

We need not expect in the Upanishads a full statement of the facts on which its more grandiose statements of religious and philosophic truth are built, nor should we hope to find in them complete or reasoned treatises marshalling in a comprehensive and orderly manner the whole scheme of Vedantic philosophy. That is seldom the way in which the true Asiatic goes to work. He is a poet and a divine in the real sense of the word. His peculiar faculty is apparent in the very form of his philosophic books. The Aphorisms, that peculiarly Indian instrument of thought, by which our philosophers later on packed tons of speculation into an inch of space, give only the fundamental illuminations on which their philosophy depends. The Exegeses (*Karikas*) of Gaudapada and others

are often a connected and logical array of concise and pregnant thoughts each carrying its burden of endless suggestion, each starting its own reverberating echo of wider and wider thought; but they are not comprehensive treatises. Nor can such a term be applied to the Commentaries (Bhashyas) of Shankara, Ramanuja and other powerful and original minds; they are, rather, forceful excursions into terse and strenuous logic, basing, strengthening, building up, adding a wing here and a story there to the cunning and multiform, yet harmonic structure of Indian thought. Nowhere will you find an exhaustive and systematic statement of a whole philosophy interpreting every part of the universe in the terms of a single line of thought. This habit of suggestiveness & reserve in thought leaves the old philosophies still as inspiring and full of intention and potential development as when the glowing divinations and massive spiritual experiences stored in the Upanishads were first annealed & hammered into philosophic form. It is the reason of the Vedanta's surprising vitality, of the extent to which it enters and the potency with which it governs Indian life, in a way that no European philosophy except recently the Evolutionary has entered into or governed the life of the West. The European metaphysician has something in him of the pedagogue, something indeed of the mechanic, at least of the geometrician; his philosophies are masterpieces of consistent logic, admirable constructions of a rigid symmetry. But their very perfection militates against the vitality of the truth they set forth; for Life is not built on the lines of consistent logic, Nature does not proceed on the principle of a rigid symmetry: even where she seems most formal she loves to assert herself in even the slightest, just perceptible, perhaps hardly perceptible deflection from a strict correspondence. Nothing indeed can live permanently

which has not in itself the potentiality of an unending Evolution; nothing – nothing finite at least – is completely true which is not incomplete. The moment a poem or work of art becomes incapable of fresh interpretation, or a philosophy of fruitful expansion or a species of change & variety, it ceases from that moment to be essential to existence and is therefore doomed, sooner or later, to extinction. The logical intellect may rebel against this law and insist passionately on finality in truth*, but it rebels vainly; for this is the law of all life and all truth.

This is the secret of the Upanishads and their undying fruitfulness. They are, to begin with, inspired poems, – not less so when they are couched in prose form than when they are poured into solemn and far-sounding verse, – grand and rhythmic intuitions where the speakers seem to be conveyors only of informing ideas cast out from a full and complete vision in the eternal guardian Mind of the race. The style in which they are couched is wonderfully grave, penetrating and mighty, suffused with strange light as if from another world, its rhythms unequalled for fathomless depth of sound and the rolling sea of solemn echoes they leave behind them. Here only in literature have philosophy and poetry at their highest met together and mingled their beings in the unison of a perfect love and understanding. For the Upanishads stand, as poetry, with the greatest productions of creative force and

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* *"Observe for instance the phenomenon of Theosophy. The Western intellect seizes upon the profound researches of the East into the things behind the veil, the hings of the soul & spirit – researches admirably firm in the outline of their results but incomplete in detail – and lo and behold! everything is arranged, classified, manualized, vulgarized, all gaps filled in, finality insisted on and the infinite future with its infinite possibilities and uncertainties audaciously barred out of its heritage."*

harmonic beauty. As philosophy, they have borne the weight of three millenniums of thought and may well suffice for an equal period of future speculation. But exhaustive and balanced exposition is not to be expected; you must piece together their glowing jewels of thought if you would arrive at the forced symmetry of a system; and perhaps to the end of the world different minds will construct from them a different mosaic. To the systematic intellect this inevitably detracts from their philosophic value, but to the Indian mind, flexible, illimitable, unwilling to recognize any finality in philosophy or religion, it enhances their claim to reverence as Scriptures for the whole world and for all time to come."[1]

Discovery of the Absolute Brahman

"The idea of transcendental Unity, Oneness & Stability behind all the flux and variety of phenomenal life is the basal idea of the Upanishads: this is the pivot of all Indian metaphysics, the sum and goal of our spiritual experience. To the phenomenal world around us stability and singleness seem at first to be utterly alien; nothing but passes and changes, nothing but has its counterparts, contrasts, harmonised and dissident parts; and all are perpetually shifting and rearranging their relative positions and affections. Yet if one thing is certain, it is that the sum of all this change and motion is absolutely stable, fixed and unvarying; that all this heterogeneous multitude of animate & inanimate things are fundamentally homogeneous and one. Otherwise nothing could endure, nor could there be any certainty in existence. And this unity, stability, unvarying fixity which reason demands & ordinary experience points to, is being ascertained slowly but surely by the investigations of Science. We can no longer escape from the growing conviction that however the parts may change and shift and appear to perish, yet the sum and whole remains unchanged, undiminished and imperishable; however multitudinous, mutable and mutually irreconcilable forms and compounds may be, yet the grand substratum is one, simple and enduring; death itself is not a reality but a seeming, for what appears to be destruction, is merely transformation and a preparation for rebirth. Science may not have appreciated the full import of her own discoveries; she may shrink from an unflinching acceptance of the logical results to which they lead; and certainly she is as yet far from advancing towards the great converse truths which they for the present conceal, – for instance the wonderful fact that not

only is death a seeming, but life itself is a seeming, and beyond life and death there lies a condition which is truer and therefore more permanent than either. But though Science dreams not as yet of her goal, her feet are on the road from which there is no turning back, – the road which Vedanta on a different plane has already trod before it.

Here then is a great fundamental fact which demands from philosophy an adequate explanation of itself; – that all variations resolve themselves into an unity; that within the flux of things and concealed by it is an indefinable, immutable Something, at once the substratum and sum of all, which Time cannot touch, motion perturb, nor variation increase or diminish; and that this substratum and sum has been from all eternity and will be for all eternity. A fundamental fact to which all Thought moves, and yet is it not, when narrowly considered, an acute paradox? For how can the sum of infinite variations be a sempiternally fixed amount which has never augmented or decreased and can never augment or decrease? How can that whole be fixed and eternal of which every smallest part is eternally varying and perishing? Given a bewildering whirl of motion, how does the result come to be not merely now or as a result, but from beginning to end a perfect fixity? Impossible, unless either there be a guiding Power, for which at first sight there seems to be no room in the sempiternal chain of causation; or unless that sum and substratum be the one reality, imperishable because not conditioned by Time, indivisible because not conditioned by Space, immutable because not conditioned by Causality, – in a word absolute & transcendent and *therefore* eternal, unalterable and undecaying. Motion and change and death and division would then be merely transitory phenomena, masks and seemings of the One and Absolute, the as yet

undefined and perhaps indefinable It which alone *is*.

To such a conclusion Indian speculation had turned at a very early period of its conscious strivings – uncertainly at first and with many gropings and blunders. The existence of some Oneness which gives order and stability to the multitudinous stir of the visible world, the Aryan thinkers were from the first disposed to envisage and they sought painfully to arrive at the knowledge of that Oneness in its nature or its essentiality. The living Forces of the Cosmos which they had long worshipped, yet always with a floating but persistent perception of an Unity in their multitude, melted on closer analysis into a single concept, a single Force or Presence, one and universal. The question then arose, Was that Force or Presence intelligent or non-intelligent? God or Nature? "He alone" hazarded the Rigveda "knoweth, or perhaps He knoweth not." Or might it not be that the Oneness which ties together and governs phenomena and rolls out the evolution of the worlds, is really the thing we call *Time*, since of the three original conditions of phenomenal existence, Time, Space and Causality, Time is a necessary part of the conception of Causality and can hardly be abstracted from the conception of Space, but neither Space nor Causality seems necessary to the conception of Time? Or if it be not Time, might it not be *Swabhava*, the essential Nature of Things taking various conditions and forms? Or perhaps *Chance*, some blind principle working out an unity and law in things by infinite experiment, – this too might be possible. Or since from eternal uncertainty eternal certainty cannot come, might it not be *Fate*, a fixed and unalterable law in things in subjection to which this world evolves itself in a preordained procession of phenomena from which it cannot deviate? Or perhaps in the original atomic fountain of things certain *Elements* might

be discovered which by perpetual and infinite combinations and permutations keep the universe to its workings? But if so, these elements must themselves proceed from something which imposes on them the law of their being, and what could that be but the *Womb*, the matrix of original and indestructible Matter, the plasm which moulds the universe and out of which it is moulded? And yet in whatever scheme of things the mind might ultimately rest, some room surely must be made for these conscious, thinking and knowing *Egos* of living beings, of whom knowledge and thought seem to be the essential selves and without whom this world of perceivable and knowable things could not be perceived and known; – and if not perceived and known, might it not be that without them it could not even exist?

Such were the gurges of endless speculation in which the old Aryan thinkers, tossed and perplexed, sought for some firm standing-ground, some definite clue which might save them from being beaten about like stumbling blind men led by a guide as blind. They sought at first to liberate themselves from the tyranny of appearances by the method which Kapila, the ancient prehistoric Master of Thought, had laid down for mankind, the method called Sankhya or the law of Enumeration. The method of Kapila consisted in guidance by pure discriminative reason and it took its name from one of its principal rules, the law of enumeration and generalisation. They enumerated first the immediate Truths-in-Things which they could distinguish or deduce from things obviously phenomenal, and from these by generalisation they arrived at a much smaller number of ulterior Truths-in-Things of which the immediate were merely aspects. And then having enumerated these ulterior Truths-in-Things, they were able by generalisation to reduce them to a very small number of

ultimate Truths-in-Things, the Tattwas (literally Thenesses) of the developed Sankhya philosophy. And these Tattwas once enumerated with some approach to certainty, was it not possible to generalise yet one step farther? The Sankhya did so generalise and by this supreme and final generalisation arrived at the very last step on which, in its own unaided strength, it could take safe footing. This was the great principle of Prakriti, the single eternal indestructible principle and origin of Matter which by perpetual evolution rolls out through aeons and aeons the unending panorama of things.* And for whose benefit? Surely for those conscious knowing and perceiving Egos, the army of witnesses, who, each in his private space of reasoning and perceiving Mind partitioned off by an enveloping medium of gross matter, sit for ever as spectators in the theatre of the Universe! For ever, thought the Sankhyas, since the Egos, though their partitions are being continually broken down and built anew and the spaces occupied never remain permanently identical, yet seem themselves to be no less eternal and indestructible than Prakriti.

This then was the wide fixed lake of ascertained philosophical knowledge into which the method of Sankhya, pure intellectual reasoning on definite principles, led in the mind of ancient India. Branchings off, artificial canals from the reservoir were not, indeed, wanting. Some by resolving that army of witnesses into a single Witness, arrived at the dual conception of God and Nature, Purusha & Prakriti,

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**"Note that Matter here not only includes gross matter with which Western Science is mainly concerned, but subtle matter, the material in which thought & feeling work, and causal matter in which the fundamental operations of the Will-to-live are conducted."*

Spirit and Matter, Ego and Nonego. Others, more radical, perceived Prakriti as the creation, shadow or aspect of Purusha, so that God alone remained, the spiritual or ideal factor eliminating by inclusion the material or real. Solutions were also attempted on the opposite side; for some eliminated the conscious Egos themselves as mere seemings; not a few seem to have thought that each ego is only a series of successive shocks of consciousness and the persistent sense of identity no more than an illusion due to the unbroken continuity of the shocks. If these shocks of consciousness are borne in on the brain from the changes of Prakriti in the multitudinous stir of evolution, then is consciousness one out of the many terms of Prakriti itself, so that Prakriti alone remains as the one reality, the material or real factor eliminating by inclusion the spiritual or ideal. But if we deny, as many did, that Prakriti is an ultimate reality apart from the perceptions of Purushas and yet apply the theory of a false notion of identity created by successive waves of sensation, we arrive at the impossible & sophistic position of the old Indian Nihilists whose reason by a singular suicide landed itself in Nothingness as the cradle & bourne, nay, the very stuff and reality of all existence. And there was a third direction in which thought tended and which led it to the very threshold of Vedanta; for this also was a possible speculation that Prakriti & Purusha might both be quite real & yet not ultimately different aspects or sides of each other and so, after all, of a Oneness higher than either. But these speculations, plausible or imperfect, logical or sophistic, were yet mere speculations; they had no basis either in observed fact or in reliable experience. Two certainties seemed to have been arrived at, Prakriti was testified to by a close analysis of phenomenal existence; it was the basis of the phenomenal world which

without a substratum of original matter could not be accounted for and without a fundamental oneness and indestructibility in that substratum could not be, what observation showed it to be, subject, namely, to fixed laws & evidently invariable in its sum and substance. On the other hand Purushas were testified to by the eternal persistence of the sense of individuality and identity whether during life or after death* and by the necessity of a perceiving cause for the activity of Prakriti; they were the receptive and contemplative Egos within the sphere of whose consciousness Prakriti, stirred to creative activity by their presence, performed her long drama of phenomenal Evolution.

But meanwhile the seers of ancient India had, in their experiments and efforts at spiritual training and the conquest of the body, perfected a discovery which in its importance to the future of human knowledge dwarfs the divinations of Newton and Galileo; even the discovery of the inductive and experimental method in Science was not more momentous; for they discovered down to its ultimate processes the method of Yoga and by the method of Yoga they rose to three crowning realisations. They realised first as a fact the existence under the flux and multitudinousness of things of that supreme Unity and immutable Stability which had hitherto been posited only as a necessary theory, an inevitable generalisation. They came to know that It is the one reality and all phenomena merely its seemings and appearances, that It is the true Self

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**"Survival of the human personality after death has always been held in India to be a proved fact beyond all dispute; the Charvaka denial of it was contemned as mere irrational & wilful folly. Note however that survival after death does not necessarily to the Indian mind imply immortality, but only raises a presumption in its favour."*

of all things and phenomena are merely its clothes and trappings. They learned that It is absolute and transcendent and, because absolute and transcendent, therefore eternal, immutable, imminuable and indivisible. And looking back on the past progress of speculation they perceived that this also was the goal to which pure intellectual reasoning would have led them. For that which is in Time must be born and perish; but the Unity and Stability of things is eternal and must therefore transcend Time. That which is in Space must increase & diminish, have parts & relations, but the Unity and Stability of things is imminuable, not augmentable, independent of the changefulness of its parts and untouched by the shifting of their relations, and must therefore transcend Space; – and if it transcends Space, cannot really have parts, since Space is the condition of material divisibility; divisibility therefore must be, like death, a seeming and not a reality. Finally that which is subject to Causality, is necessarily subject to Change; but the Unity and Stability of things is immutable, the same now as it was aeons ago and will be aeons hereafter, and must therefore transcend Causality.

This then was the first realisation through Yoga, NITYO 'NITYÂNÂM, the One Eternal in many transient.

At the same time they realised one truth more, – a surprising truth; they found that the transcendent absolute Self of things was also the Self of living beings, the Self too of man, that highest of the beings living in the material plane on earth. The Purusha or conscious Ego in man which had perplexed and baffled the Sankhyas, turned out to be precisely the same in his ultimate being as Prakriti the apparently non-conscious source of things; the non-consciousness of Prakriti, like so much else, was proved a seeming and no reality, since behind the inanimate form a conscious Intelligence at work is

to the eyes of the Yogin luminously self-evident.

This then was the second realisation through Yoga, CHÉTANAṢ CHÉTANÂNÂM, the One Consciousness in many Consciousnesses.

Finally at the base of these two realisations was a third, the most important of all to our race, – that the Transcendent Self in individual man is as complete *because identically the same* as the Transcendent Self in the Universe; for the Transcendent is indivisible and the sense of separate individuality is only one of the fundamental seemings on which the manifestation of phenomenal existence perpetually depends. In this way the Absolute which would otherwise be beyond knowledge, becomes knowable; and the man who knows his whole Self knows the whole Universe. This stupendous truth is enshrined to us in the two famous formulae of Vedanta, SO 'HAM, He am I, and AHAM BRAHM' ÂSMI, I am Brahman the Eternal.

Based on these four grand truths, NITYO 'NITYÂNÂM, CHÉTANA CHÉTANÂNÂM, SO 'HAM, AHAM BRAHM' ÂSMI, as upon four mighty pillars the lofty philosophy of the Upanishads raises its front among the distant stars."[2]

Nature of the Absolute Brahman

"Viewed in the light of these four great illuminations the utterances of the Upanishads arrange themselves and fall into a perfect harmony. European scholars like Max Muller have seen in these Scriptures a mass of heterogeneous ideas where the sublime jostles the childish, the grandiose walks arm-in-arm with the grotesque, the most petty trivialities feel at home with the rarest and most solemn philosophical intuitions, and they have accordingly declared them to be the babblings of a child humanity; inspired children, idiots endowed with genius, such to the Western view are the great Rishis of the Aranyaka. But the view is suspect from its very nature. It is not likely that men who handle the ultimate and most difficult intellectual problems with such mastery, precision and insight, would babble mere folly in matters which require the use of much lower faculties. Their utterances in this less exalted sphere may be true or they may be erroneous, but, it may fairly be assumed, they gave them forth with a perfectly clear idea of their bearing and signification. To an understanding totally unacquainted with the methods by which they are arrived at, many of the established conclusions of modern Science would seem unutterably grotesque and childish, – the babblings if not of a child humanity, at least of humanity in its dotage; yet only a little accurate knowledge is needed to show that these grotesque trivialities are well-ascertained and irrefragable truths.

In real truth the Upanishads are in all their parts, allowing for imaginative language and an occasional element of symbolism, quite rational, consistent and homogeneous. They are not concerned indeed to create an artificial impression of consistency by ignoring the various aspects of this manifold

Universe and reducing all things to a single denomination; for they are not metaphysical treatises aiming at mathematical abstractness or geometrical precision and consistency. They are a great store of observations and spiritual experiences with conclusions and generalizations from those observations and experiences, set down without any thought of controversial caution or any anxiety to avoid logical contradictions. Yet they have the consistency of all truthful observation and honest experience; they arrange themselves naturally and without set purpose under one grand universal truth developed into a certain number of wide general laws within whose general agreement there is room for infinite particular variations and even anomalies. They have in other words a scientific rather than a logical consistency.

To the rigorous logician bound in his narrow prison of verbal reasoning, the Upanishads seem indeed to base themselves on an initial and fundamental inconsistency. There are a number of passages in these Scriptures which dwell with striking emphasis on the unknowableness of the Absolute Brahman. It is distinctly stated that neither mind nor senses can reach the Brahman and that words return baffled from the attempt to describe It; more, – that we do not discern the Absolute and Transcendent in Its reality, nor can we discriminate the right way or perhaps any way of teaching the reality of It to others; and it is even held, that It can only be properly characterised in negative language and that to every challenge for definition the only true answer is NÉTI NÉTI, *It is not this, It is not that*. Brahman is not definable, not describable, not intellectually knowable. And yet in spite of these passages the Upanishads constantly declare that Brahman is the one true object of knowledge and the whole Scripture is in fact an attempt not perhaps to define, but at least in some

sort to characterise and present an idea, and even a detailed idea, of the Brahman.

The inconsistency is more apparent than real. The Brahman in Its ultimate reality is transcendent, absolute, infinite; but the senses and the intellect, which the senses supply with its material, are finite; speech also is limited by the deficiencies of the intellect; Brahman must therefore in Its very nature be unknowable to the intellect and beyond the power of speech to describe, – yet only in Its ultimate reality, not in Its aspects or manifestations. The Agnostic Scientist also believes that there must be some great ultimate Reality unknown and probably unknowable to man (ignoramus et ignorabimus) from which this Universe proceeds and on which all phenomena depend, but his admission of Unknowableness is confined to the ultimate Nature of this supreme Ens and not to its expression or manifestation in the Universe. The Upanishad, proceeding by a profounder method than material analysis, casts the net of knowledge wider than the modern Agnostic, yet in the end its attitude is much the same; it differs only in this important respect that it asserts even the ultimate Brahman to be although inexpressible in the terms of finite knowledge, yet realisable and attainable.

The first great step to the realisation of the Brahman is by the knowledge of Him as manifested in the phenomenal Universe; for if there is no reality but Brahman, the phenomenal Universe which is obviously a manifestation of *something* permanent and eternal, must be a manifestation of Brahman and of nothing else, and if we know it completely, we do to a certain extent and in a certain way, know Him, not as an Absolute Existence, but under the conditions of phenomenal manifestation. While, however, European Science seeks only to know the phenomena of gross matter, the Yogin

goes farther. He asserts that he has discovered an universe of subtle matter penetrating and surrounding the gross; this universe to which the spirit withdraws partially and for a brief time in sleep but more entirely and for a longer time through the gates of death, is the source whence all psychic processes draw their origin; and the link which connects this universe with the gross material world is to be found in the phenomena of life and mind. His assertion is perfectly positive and the Upanishad proceeds on it as on an ascertained and indisputable fact quite beyond the limits of mere guesswork, inference or speculation. But he goes yet farther and declares that there is yet a third universe of causal matter penetrating and surrounding both the subtle and the gross, and that this universe to which the spirit withdraws in the deepest and most abysmal states of sleep and trance and also in a remote condition beyond the state of man after death, is the source whence all phenomena take their rise. If we are to understand the Upanishads we must accept these to us astounding statements, temporarily at least; for on them the whole scheme of Vedanta is built. Now Brahman manifests Himself in each of these Universes, in the Universe of Causal Matter as the Cause, Self and Inspirer, poetically styled Prajna the Wise One; in the universe of subtle matter as the Creator, Self and Container, styled Hiranyagarbha the Golden Embryo of life and form, and in the universe of gross matter as the Ruler, Guide, Self and Helper, styled Virat the Shining and Mighty One. And in each of these manifestations He can be known and realised by the spirit of Man.

Granted the truth of these remarkable assertions, what then is the relation between the Supreme Self and man? The position has already been quite definitely taken that the transcendent Self in man is identically the same as the

transcendent Self in the Universe and that this identity is the one great key to the knowledge of the Absolute Brahman. Does not this position rule out of court any such differences between the Absolute and the human Self as is implied in the character of the triple manifestation of Brahman? On the one hand completest identity of the Supreme Self and the human is asserted as an ascertained & experienced fact, on the other hand widest difference is asserted as an equally well-ascertained and experienced fact; there can be no reconciliation between these incompatible statements. Yet are they both facts, answers Vedanta; identity *is* a fact in the reality of things; difference *is* a fact in the appearance of things, the world of phenomena; for phenomena are in their essence nothing but seemings and the difference between the individual Self and the Universal Self is the fundamental seeming which makes all the rest possible. This difference grows as the manifestation of Brahman proceeds. In the world of gross matter, it is complete; the difference is so acute, that it is impossible for the material sensual being to conceive of the Supreme Soul as having any point of contact with his own soul and it is only by a long process of evolution that he arrives at the illumination in which some kind of identity becomes to him conceivable. The basal conception for Mind as conditioned by gross matter is Dualistic; the knower here must be different from the Known and his whole intellectual development consists in the discovery, development and perfected use of ever new media and methods of knowledge. Undoubtedly the ultimate knowledge he arrives at brings him to the fundamental truth of identity between himself and the Supreme Self, but in the sphere of gross phenomena this identity can never be more than an intellectual conception, it can never be verified by personal realisation. On the other

hand it can be *felt* by the supreme sympathy of love and faith, either through love of humanity and of all other fellow-beings or directly through love of God. This feeling of identity is very strong in religions based largely on the sentiment of Love and Faith. I and my Father are One, cried the Founder of Christianity; I and my brother man & my brother beast are One, says Buddhism; St Francis spoke of Air as his brother and Water as his sister; and the Hindu devotee when he sees a bullock lashed falls down in pain with the mark of the whip on his own body. But the feeling of Oneness remaining only a feeling does not extend into knowledge and therefore these religions while emotionally pervaded with the sense of identity, tend in the sphere of intellect to a militant Dualism or to any other but always unMonistic standpoint. Dualism is therefore no mere delusion; it is a truth, but a phenomenal truth and not the ultimate reality of things.

As it proceeds in the work of discovering and perfecting methods of knowledge, the individual self finds an entry into the universe of subtle phenomena. Here the difference that divides it from the Supreme Self is less acute; for the bonds of matter are lightened and the great agents of division and disparity, Time and Space, diminish in the insistency of their pressure. The individual here comes to realise a certain unity with the great Whole; he is enlarged and aggrandized into a part of the Universal Self, but the sense of identity is not complete and cannot be complete. The basal conception for Mind in this subtle Universe is Dualo-Monistic; the knower is not quite different from the known; he is like and of the same substance but inferior, smaller and dependent; his sense of oneness may amount to similarity and consubstantiality but not to coincidence and perfect identity.

From the subtle Universe the individual self rises in its

evolution until it is able to enter the universe of Causal matter, where it stands near to the fountain-head. In this universe media and methods of knowledge begin to disappear, Mind comes into almost direct relations with its source and the difference between the individual and the Supreme Self is greatly attenuated. Nevertheless there is here too a wall of difference, even though it wears eventually thin as the thinnest paper. The knower is aware that he is coeval and coexistent with the Supreme Self, he is aware in a sense of omnipresence, for wherever the Supreme Self is, there also he is; he is, moreover, on the other side of phenomena and can see the Universe at will without him or within him; but he has still not necessarily realised the Supreme as utterly himself, although the perfect realisation is now for the first time in his grasp. The basal perception for Mind in this Universe is Monism with a difference, but the crowning perception of Monism becomes here possible.

And when it is no longer only possible but grasped? Then the individual Self entering into full realisation, ceases in any sense to be the individual Self, but merges into & becomes again the eternal and absolute Brahman, without parts, unbeginning, undecaying, unchanging. He has passed beyond causality and phenomena and is no longer under the bondage of that which is only by seeming. This is the *laya* or utter absorption of Hinduism, the highest *nirvana* or extinction from phenomena of the Upanishads and of Buddhist metaphysics. It is obviously a state which words fail to describe, since words which are created to express relations and have no meaning except when they express relations, cannot deal successfully with a state which is perfectly pure, absolute and unrelated; nor is it a condition which the bounded & finite intellect of man on this plane can for a moment envisage. This

unintelligibility of the supreme state is naturally a great stumblingblock to the undisciplined imagination of our present-day humanity which, being sensuous, emotional and intellectual, inevitably recoils from a bliss in which neither the senses, emotions nor intellect have any place. Surely, we cry, the extinction or quietude of all these sources & means of sensation and pleasure implies not supreme bliss but absolute nothingness, blank annihilation. "An error", answers the Vedanta, 'a pitiful, grovelling error! Why is it that the senses cease in that supreme condition? Because the senses were evolved in order to sense external being and where externality ceases, they having no action cease to exist. The emotions too are directed outwards and need another for their joy, they can only survive so long as we are incomplete. The intellect similarly is and works only so long as there is something external to it and ungrasped. But to the Most High there is nothing ungrasped, the Most High depends on none for His joy. He has therefore neither emotions nor intellect, nor can he either who merges in and becomes the Most High, possess them for a moment after that high consummation. The deprivation of the limited senses in His boundlessness is not a loss or an extinction, but must be a fulfillment, a development into Being which rejoices in its own infinity. The disappearance of our broken & transient emotions in His completeness must bring us not into a cold void but rather into illimitable bliss. The culmination of knowledge by the supersession of our divided & fallible intellect must lead not to utter darkness and blank vacuity but to the luminous ecstasy of an infinite Consciousness. Not the annihilation of Being, but utter fullness of Being is our Nirvana.' And when this ecstatic language is brought to the touchstone of reason, it must surely be declared just and even unanswerable. For the final absolution of the

intellect can only be at a point where the Knower, Knowledge and the Known become one, Knowledge being there infinite, direct and without media. And where there is this infinite and flawless knowledge, there must be, one thinks, infinite and flawless existence and bliss. But by the very conditions of this state, we can only say of it that it is, we cannot define it in words, precisely because we cannot realize it with the intellect. The Self can be realized only with the Self; there is no other instrument of realization.

Granted, it may be said, that such a state is conceivably possible, – as certainly it is, starting from your premises, the only and inevitable conclusion, – but what proof have we that it exists as a reality? what proof can even your Yoga bring to us that it exists? For when the individual Self becomes identified with the Supreme, its evolution is over and it does not return into phenomena to tell its experiences. The question is a difficult one to handle, partly because language, if it attempts to deal with it at all precisely, must become so abstract and delicate as to be unintelligible, partly because the experiences it involves are so far off from our present general evolution and attained so rarely that dogmatism or even definite statement appears almost unpardonable. Nevertheless with the use of metaphorical language, or, in St Paul's words, speaking as a fool, one may venture to outline what there is at all to be said on the subject. The truth then seems to be that there are even in this last or fourth state of the Self, stages and degrees, as to the number of which experience varies; but for practical purposes we may speak of three, the first when we stand at the entrance of the porch and look within; the second when we stand at the inner extremity of the porch and are really face to face with the Eternal; the third when we enter into the Holy of Holies. Be

it remembered that the language I am using is the language of metaphor and must not be pressed with a savage literalness. Well then, the first stage is well within the possible experience of man and from it man returns to be a Jivanmukta, one who lives & is yet released in his inner self from the bondage of phenomenal existence; the second stage once reached, man does not ordinarily return, unless he is a supreme Buddha, – or perhaps as a world Avatar; from the third stage none returns nor is it attainable in the body. Brahman as realized by the Jivanmukta, seen from the entrance of the porch, is that which we usually term Parabrahman, the Supreme Eternal and the subject of the most exalted descriptions of the Vedanta. There are therefore five conditions of Brahman. Brahman Virat, Master of the Waking Universe; Brahman Hiranyagarbha, of the Dream Universe; Brahman Prajna or Avyakta of the Trance Universe of Unmanifestation; Parabrahman, the Highest; and that which is higher than the highest, the Unknowable. Now of the Unknowable it is not profitable to speak, but something of Parabrahman can be made intelligible to the human understanding because – always if the liberal use of loose metaphors is not denied, – it can be partially brought within the domain of speech."[3]

Parabrahman

"So far the great Transcendent Reality has been viewed from the standpoint of the human spirit as it travels on the upward curve of evolution to culminate in the Supreme. It will now be more convenient to view the Absolute from the other end of the cycle of manifestation where, in a sense, evolution begins and the great Cause of phenomena stands with His face towards the Universe He will soon create. At first of course there is the Absolute, unconditioned, unmanifested, unimaginable, of Whom nothing can be predicated except negatives. But as the first step towards manifestation the Absolute – produces, shall we say? let the word serve for want of a better! – produces in Itself a luminous Shadow of Its infinite inconceivable Being, – the image is trivial and absurd, but one can find none adequate, – which is Parabrahman or if we like so to call Him, God, the Eternal, the Supreme Spirit, the Seer, Witness, Wisdom, Source, Creator, Ancient of Days. Of Him Vedanta itself can only speak in two great trilogies, subjective and objective, Sacchidanandam, Existence, Consciousness, Bliss; Satyam Jnanam Anantam, Truth, Knowledge, Infinity.

SACCHIDANANDAM. The Supreme is Pure Being, Absolute Existence, SAT. He is Existence because He alone *Is*, there being nothing else which has any ultimate reality or any being independent of His self-manifestation. And He is *Absolute* Existence because since He alone is and nothing else exists in reality, He must necessarily exist by Himself, in Himself and to Himself. There can be no cause for His existence, nor object to His existence; nor can there be any increase or diminution in Him, since increase can only come by addition from something external and diminution by loss

to something external, and there is nothing external to Brahman. He cannot change in any way, for then He would be subject to Time and Causality; nor have parts, for then He would be subject to the law of Space. He is beyond the conceptions of Space, Time and Causality which He creates phenomenally as the conditions of manifestation but which cannot condition their Source. Parabrahman, then, is Absolute Existence."[4]

"The Supreme is also Pure Awareness, Absolute Consciousness, CHIT….. The Upanishads tell us that Brahman is not a blind universal Force working by its very nature mechanically, nor even an unconscious Cause of Force; He is conscious or rather is Himself Consciousness, CHIT, as well as SAT. It necessarily follows that SAT and CHIT are really the same; Existence is Consciousness and cannot be separated from Consciousness.... Brahman, then, is Consciousness, and this once conceded, it follows that He must be in His transcendental reality Absolute Consciousness. His Consciousness is from itself and of itself like His existence, because there is nothing separate and other than Him; not only so but it does not consist in the knowledge of one part of Himself by another, or of His parts by His whole, since His transcendental existence is one and simple, without parts. His consciousness therefore does not proceed by the same laws as our consciousness, does not proceed by differentiating subject from object, knower from known, but simply *is*, by its own right of pure and unqualified existence, eternally and illimitably, in a way impure and qualified existences cannot conceive.

The Supreme is, finally, Pure Ecstasy, Absolute Bliss, ÂNANDA. Now just as SAT and CHIT are the same, so are SAT and CHIT not different from ÂNANDA; just as

Existence is Consciousness and cannot be separated from Consciousness, so Conscious Existence is Bliss and cannot be separated from Bliss. I think we feel this even in the very finite existence and cramped consciousness of life on the material plane. Conscious existence at least cannot endure without pleasure; even in the most miserable sentient being there must be pleasure in existence though it appear small as a grain of mustard seed; blank absolute misery entails suicide and annihilation as its necessary and immediate consequence. The will to live, – the desire of conscious existence and the instinct of self-preservation, – is no mere teleological arrangement of Nature with a particular end before it, but is fundamental and independent of end or object; it is merely a body and form to that pleasure of existence which is essential and eternal; and it cannot be forced to give way to anything but that will to live *more* fully and widely which is the source on one side of all personal ambition and aspiration, on the other of all love, self-sacrifice and self-conquest."[5]

"This then is the Trinity of the Upanishads, Absolute Existence; which is *therefore* Absolute Consciousness; which is therefore Absolute Bliss.

And then the second Trinity SATYAM JNANAM ANANTAM. This Trinity is not different from the first but merely its objective expression. Brahman is *Satyam*, Truth or Reality because Truth or Reality is merely the subjective idea of existence viewed objectively. Only that which fundamentally exists is real and true, and Brahman being absolute existence is also absolute truth and reality. All other things are only relatively real, not indeed false in every sense since they are appearances of a Reality, but impermanent and therefore not in themselves ultimately true."[6]

"Brahman is also JNÂNAM, Knowledge; for Knowledge

is merely the subjective idea of consciousness viewed objectively. The word *Jnâna* as a philosophic term has an especial connotation. It is distinguished from *samjnâna* which is awareness by contact; from *âjnâna* which is perception by receptive and central Will and implies a command from the brain; from *prajnâna* which is Wisdom, teleological will or knowledge with a purpose; and from *vijnâna* or knowledge by discrimination. *Jnâna* is knowledge direct and without the use of a medium. Brahman is absolute *Jnâna*, direct & self-existent, without beginning, middle or end, in which the Knower is also the Knowledge and the Known."[7]

"Finally, Brahman is ANANTAM, Endlessness, including all kinds of Infinity. His Infinity is of course involved in His absolute existence and consciousness, but it arises directly from His absolute bliss, since bliss, as we have seen, consists objectively in the absence of limitation. Infinity therefore is merely the subjective idea of bliss viewed objectively. It may be otherwise expressed by the word Freedom or by the word Immortality. All phenomenal things are bound by laws and limitations imposed by the triple idea of Time, Space and Causality; in Brahman alone there is absolute Freedom; for He has no beginning, middle or end in Time or Space nor, being immutable, in Causality. Regarded from the point of view of Time, Brahman is Eternity or Immortality, regarded from the point of view of Space He is Infinity or Universality, regarded from the point of view of Causality He is absolute Freedom. In one word He is ANANTAM, Endlessness, Absence of Limitation."[8]

Maya: the Principle of Phenomenal Existence

"Brahman then, let us suppose, has projected in Itself this luminous Shadow of Itself and has in the act (speaking always in the language of finite beings with its perpetual taint of Time, Space & Causality) begun to envisage Itself and consider Its essentialities in the light of attributes. He who is Existence, Consciousness, Bliss envisages Himself as existent, conscious, blissful. From that moment phenomenal manifestation becomes inevitable; the Unqualified chooses to regard Himself as qualified. Once this fundamental condition is granted, everything else follows by the rigorous logic of evolution; it is the one postulate which Vedanta demands. For this postulate once granted, we can see how the Absolute when it projects in itself this luminous Shadow called the Parabrahman, prepares the way for and as it were necessitates the evolution of this manifest world, – by bringing into play the great fundamental principle of Maya or Illusion. Under the play of that one principle translating itself into motion, the great transformation spoken of by the Upanishad becomes possible, – the One becomes the Many.

(But this one fundamental postulate is not easily conceded. The question which will at once spring up armed and gigantic in the European mind is the teleological objection, Why? All action implies a purpose; with what purpose did Brahman regard Himself as qualified? All Evolution is prompted by a desire, implies development, moves to an intelligible goal. What did Brahman who, being Absolute, is self-sufficing, desire, of what development did He stand in need or to what goal does He move? This is, from the

teleological standpoint, the great crux of any theory of the Universe which tries to start from an essential and original Unity; a gulf is left which the intellect finds it impossible to bridge. Certain philosophies do indeed attempt to bridge it by a teleological explanation. The Absolute One, it is argued, passes through the cycle of manifestation, because He then returns to His original unity *enriched* with a new store of experiences and impressions, richer in love, richer in knowledge, richer in deed. It is truly amazing that any minds should be found which can seriously flatter themselves with the serene illusion that this is philosophy. Anything more unphilosophical, more vicious in reasoning cannot be imagined. When the Veda, speaking not of the Absolute but of Brahman Hiranyagarbha, says that He was alone and grew afraid of His loneliness, it passes, as a daring poetical fancy; and this too might pass as a poetical fancy, but not as serious reasoning. It is no more than an unreasoning recoil from the European idea of absolute, impersonal Unity as a blank and empty Negation. To avoid this appalling conclusion, an Unity is imagined which can be at the same time, not phenomenally but in its ultimate reality, manifold, teeming with myriad memories. It is difficult to understand the precise argumentation of the idea, whether the One when He has reentered His unity, preserves His experiences in detail or in the mass, say, as a pulp or essence. But at any rate several radical incoherences are in its conception. The Absolute is imaged as a thing incomplete and awaking to a sense of Its incompleteness which It proceeds in a business-like way to remedy; subject therefore to Desire and subject also to Time in which It is now contained! As to the source whence these new impressions are derived which complete the incompleteness of Brahman, that is a still greater mystery. If

it was out of Himself, then it was latent in Him, already existing unknown to Himself. One therefore presumes He produced in Himself, since there was no other place to produce them from, things which had no existence previously but now are; that which was not, became; out of nothing, something arose. This is not philosophy but theology; not reasoning, but faith. As faith it might pass; that God is omnipotent and can therefore literally create something out of nothing, is a dogma which one is at liberty to believe or reject, but it is outside the sphere of reasoning.)

There seems at first to be a fatal objection to the concession of this postulate; it seems really to evade the fundamental question of the problem of Existence or merely carry the beginning of the problem two steps farther back. For the great crux of the Universe is precisely the difficulty of understanding How and Why the One became Many, and we do not get rid of the difficulty by saying that it proceeds from the Unqualified willing to regard Himself as qualified. Even if the question How were satisfactorily met by the theory of Maya, the Why of the whole process remains. The goal of Evolution may have been determined, – it is, let us concede, the return of the Infinite upon Itself through the cycle of manifestation; but the beginning of Evolution is not accounted for, its utility is not made manifest. Why did the Absolute turn His face towards Evolution? There seems to be no possible answer to this inquiry; it is impossible to suggest any teleological reason why the Unqualified should will to look on Himself as qualified and so set the wheel of Evolution rolling, – at any rate any reason which would not be hopelessly at variance with the essential meaning of Absoluteness; and it is only an unphilosophic or imperfectly philosophic mind which can imagine that it has succeeded in the attempt. But

the impossibility does not vitiate the theory of Maya; for the Vedantist parries this question of the Why with an unanswerable retort. The question itself, he says, as directed to the Brahman, is inadmissible and an impertinence. He, being Absolute, is in His very nature beyond Causality on which all ideas of need, utility, purpose depend, and to suppose purpose in Him is to question His transcendent and absolute nature: That which is beyond causality, has no need to act on a purpose. To catechize the Mighty Infinite as to why It chose to veil Its infinity in Maya, or to insist that the Universe shall choose between being utilitarian or not being at all, is absurd; it betrays a want of perfect intellectual lucidity. The question Why simply cannot arise.

But even when the question of utility is set aside, the intelligibility of the process is not established. The Unqualified willing to regard Himself as qualified is, you say, His Maya. But what is the nature of the process, intellectual or volitional, and how can an intellectual or volitional process be consistently attributed to the Absolute? – on this head at least one expects intellectual satisfaction. But the Vedantist strenuously denies the legitimacy of the expectation. If the "Will to regard" were put forward as a literal statement of a definable fact and its terms as philosophically precise, then the expectation would be justifiable. But the terms are avowedly poetical and therefore logically inadequate; they were merely intended to present the fact of Maya to the intellect in the imperfect and totally inadequate manner which is alone possible to finite speech and thought in dealing with the infinite. No intellectual or volitional process as we conceive will and intellect has really taken place. What then has happened? What is Maya? How came it into existence?

The Vedanta answers this question with its usual

uncompromising candour and imperturbable clearness of thought; – we cannot tell, it says, for we do not and cannot know; at least we cannot intelligibly define; and this for the simple reason that the birth of Maya, if it had any birth, took place on the other side of phenomena, before the origin of Time, Space and Causality; and is therefore not cognizable by the intellect which can only think in terms of Time, Space and Causality. A little reflection will show that the existence of Maya is necessarily involved even in the casting of the luminous shadow called Parabrahman. A thing so far removed in the dark backward and abysm before Time, a state, force or process (call it what we will) operating directly in the Absolute Who is but cannot be thought of, may be perceived as a fact, but cannot be explained or defined. We say therefore that Maya is a thing *anirdeshyam*, impossible to define, of which we cannot say that it is, – for it is Illusion, – and we cannot say that it is not, – for it is the Mother of the Universe; we can only infer that it is a something inherent in the being of Brahman and must therefore be not born but eternal, not in Time, but out of Time. So much arises from our premises; more it would be dishonest to pretend to know.

Still Maya is no mere assumption or its existence unprovable! Vedanta is prepared to prove that Maya is; prepared to show *what* it is, not ultimately but as involved in Parabrahman and manifested in the Universe; prepared to describe *how* it set about the work of Evolution, prepared to present Maya in terms of the intellect as a perfectly possible explanation of the entire order of the Universe; prepared even to contend that it is the only explanation perfectly consistent with the nature of being and the recognized bases of scientific and philosophical truth. It is only not prepared to represent the ultimate infinite nature and origin of Maya in

precise terms comprehensible to finite mind; for to attempt philosophical impossibilities constitutes an intellectual pastime in which the Vedantist is too much attached to clear thinking to indulge.

What then is Maya? It is, intellectually envisaged, a subjective necessity involved in the very nature of Parabrahman. We have seen that Parabrahman is visible to us in the form of three subjective conceptions with three corresponding objective conceptions, which are the essentialities of His being. But Parabrahman is the Brahman as envisaged by the individual self in the act of returning to its source; Brahman externalized by His own will in the form of Maya is looking at Himself with the curtains of Maya half-lifted but not yet quite thrown back. The forms of Maya have disappeared, but the essentiality stands behind the returning Self at the entrance of the porch, and it is only when he reaches the inner end of the porch that he passes utterly out of the control of Maya. And the essentiality of Maya is to resolve Existence, Consciousness and Bliss which are really one, into three, the Unity appearing as a Trinity and the single Essentiality immediately breaking up into manifold properties or attributes. The Absolute Brahman at the inner entrance is the bright triune Parabrahman, absolute also, but cognizable; at the threshold of the porch He is Parabrahman envisaging Maya, and the next step carries Him into Maya, where Duality begins, Purusha differentiates from Prakriti, Spirit from Matter, Force from Energy, Ego from Non-Ego; and as the descent into phenomena deepens, single Purusha differentiates itself into multitudinous receptacles, single Prakriti into innumerable forms. This is the law of Maya.

But the first step, speaking in the terms of pure intellect, is the envisaging of the Essentiality as possessing Its three

subjective and three objective properties, – Existence; Consciousness; Bliss: Truth; Knowledge; Infinity. The moment this happens, by inevitable necessity, the opposite attributes, Nothingness, Non-Sentience, Pain, present themselves as inseparable shadows of the three substances, and with them come the objective triad, Falsehood, Ignorance, Limitation; Limitation necessitates Divisibility, Divisibility necessitates Time and Space; Time and Space necessitate Causality; Causality, the source from which definite phenomena arise, necessitates Change. All the fundamental laws of Duality have sprung into being, necessitated in a moment by the appearance of Saguna Brahman, the Unqualified Infinite become Qualified. They do not really or ultimately exist, because they are inconsistent with the absolute nature of Parabrahman, for even in the sphere of phenomena we can rise to the truth that annihilation is an illusion and only form is destroyed; nothingness is an impossibility, and the Eternal cannot perish; nor can He become non-sentient in whose being sentience and non-sentience are one; nor can He feel pain who is infinite and without limitation. Yet these things, which we know cannot exist, must be conceived and therefore have phenomenally an existence and a reality in impermanence. For this is the paradox of Maya and her works that we cannot say they exist, because they are in reality impossible, and we cannot say they do not exist, because we must conceive them subjectively and, knowledge being now turned outward, envisage them objectively.

Surely this is to land ourselves in a metaphysical morass! But the key of the tangle is always in our hands; – it is to remember that Parabrahman is Himself only the aspect of the indefinable Absolute who is beyond Science and Nescience, Existence and Non-existence, Limitation and Infinity, and His

six fold attributes are not really six but one, not really attributes of Brahman, but in their unity Brahman Himself. It is only when we conceive of them as attributes that we are driven to regard Annihilation, Non-sentience and Limitation and their correspondings subjective or objective, as realities. But we are driven so to conceive them by something datelessly inherent in the infinite Will to live, in Brahman Himself. To leave for a moment the difficult language of metaphysics which on this dizzy verge of infinity, eludes and bewilders our giddy understanding and to use the trenchant symbolic style of the Upanishads, Parabrahman is the luminous shadow of the Absolute projected in Itself by Itself, and Maya is similarly the dark shadow projected by the Absolute in Parabrahman; both are real because eternal, but sheer reality is neither the light nor the darkness but the Thing in-itself which they not merely like phenomena represent, but which in an inexplicable way they are. This, then, is Maya in its subjective relation to Parabrahman.

In phenomena Maya becomes objectivised in a hundred elusive forms, amid whose complex variety we long strive vainly to find the one supreme clue. The old thinkers long followed various of the main threads, but none led them to the mysterious starting point of her motions. "Then" says the Svetasvatara "they followed after concentration of Yoga and saw the Might of the Spirit of the Lord hidden deep in the modes of working of its own nature;" *Devatmashakti*, the Energy of the Divine Self, Parabrahman, is Maya; and it is in another passage stated to have two sides, obverse & reverse, Vidya and Avidya, Science and Nescience. Nescience eternally tends to envelop Science, Science eternally tends to displace Nescience. Avidya or Nescience is Parabrahman's power of creating illusions or images, things which seem but are not in

themselves; Vidya or Science is His power of shaking off His own imaginations and returning upon His real and eternal Self. The action and reaction of these two great Energies doing work upon each other is the secret of Universal activity. The power of Nescience is evident on every plane of existence; for the whole Universe is a series of images. The sun rises up in the morning, mounts into the cusp of the blue Heavens and descends at evening trailing behind it clouds of glory as it disappears. Who could doubt this irrefragable, overwhelmingly evidenced fact? Every day, through myriads of years, the eyes of millions of men all over the world have borne concurrent and unvarying testimony to the truth of these splendid voyagings. Than such universal ocular testimony, what evidence can be more conclusive? Yet it all turns out to be an image created by Nescience in the field of vision. Science comes & undeterred by prison & the stake tells us that the sun never voyages through our heavens, is indeed millions of miles from our heavens, and it is we who move round the Sun, not the Sun round us. Nay those Heavens themselves, the blue firmament into which poetry and religion have read so much beauty and wonder, is itself only an *image*, in which Nescience represents our atmosphere to us in the field of vision. The light too which streams upon us from our Sun and seems to us to fill Space turns out to be no more than an image. Science now freely permitted to multiply her amazing paradoxes, forces us at last to believe that it is only motion of matter affecting us at a certain pitch of vibration with that particular impression on the brain. And so she goes on resolving all things into mere images of the great cosmic ether which alone is. Of such unsubstantialities is this marvellous fabric of visible things created! Nay, it would even appear that the more unsubstantial a thing seems, the nearer

it is to ultimate reality. This, which Science proves, says the Vedantist, is precisely what is meant by Maya.

Never dream, however, that Science will end here and that we have come to the last of her unveilings. She will yet go on and tell us that the cosmic ether itself is only an image, that this universe of sensible things and things inferable from sense is only a selection of translations from a far vaster universe of forms built out of subtler matter than our senses can either show or imply to us. And when she has entered into that subtler world with fit instruments of observation and analysis, that too she will relentlessly resolve into mere images of the subtler ether out of which it is born. Behind that subtler universe also there looms a profounder and vaster, but simpler state of existence where there is only the undetermined universality of things as yet involved in their causes. Here Science must come to her latest dealings with matter and show us that this indeterminate universality of things is after all only an image of something in our own self. Meanwhile with that very self she is busy, continually and potently trying to persuade us that all which we believe to be ourselves, all in which our Nescience would have us contentedly dwell, is mere imagery and form. The animal in us insists that this body is the real Self and the satisfaction of its needs our primal duty; but Science (of whom Prof. Haeckel's Riddle of the Universe is not the concluding utterance) bids us beware of identifying our Self with a mere mass of primitive animal forms associated together by an aggregating nucleus of vital impulses; this surely is not the reality of Shakespeare & Newton, Buddha & St Francis! Then in those vital impulses we seek the bedrock of our being. But these too Science resolves into a delusion or image created by Nescience; for in reality these vital impulses have no

existence by themselves but are merely the link established between that material aggregation of animal forms and something within us which we call Mind. Mind too she will not permit us long to mistake for anything more than an image created by the interaction of sensations and response to sensations between the material aggregation of the body and something that governs and informs the material system. This governing power in its action upon mind reveals itself in the discriminating, selecting, ordering and purposeful entity called by Vedanta the Buddhi, of which reason is only one aspect, intellect only one image. Buddhi also turns out eventually to be no entity, only an image, and Science must end by showing us that body, vitality, mind, buddhi are all images of what Philosophy calls Ananda, the pleasure of existence or Will to live; and she reveals to us at last that although this Will divides itself into innumerable forms which represent themselves as individual selves, yet all these are images of one great Cosmic Will to live, just as all material forms are merely images of one great undifferentiated Universality of cosmic matter, causal ether, if we so choose to describe it. That Will is Purusha, that Universality is Prakriti; and both are but images of Parabrahman."[9]

List of References:

1. *CWSA 18, pages 345-50*
2. *CWSA 18, pages 350-57*
3. *CWSA 18, pages 357-65*
4. *CWSA 18, pages 365-66*
5. *CWSA 18, pages 366-69*
6. *CWSA 18, page 371*
7. *CWSA 18, page 371*
8. *CWSA 18, pages 371-72*
9. *CWSA 18, pages 372-81*
10. *CWSA 18, page 337*
11. *CWSA 18, page 337*

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