

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO REALITY IN INDIAN THOUGHT

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Abstract: Right from the dawn of civilization the reflective human mind has been grappling with attempts to comprehend Reality with wonder, curiosity and inquisitiveness. The Reality in its 'proto' and 'manifested' forms has always eluded human grasp resulting in alternative conceptions and at times conflicting accounts. There has been no unanimity or agreement in this regard. But human mind admits of no rest or finality in this enterprise. The exposure of Indian thought so far has been piecemeal and not complete and all-round. It is primarily based on interpretations of western Indologists of 18th and 19th centuries whom Prof. Radhakrishnan, Prof. S. N. Dasgupta, Prof. Hiriyanna etc. followed 80 years back in nineteen thirties under western influence. Thereafter new discoveries have been made and newer interpretations have been put forth. So there is a need to revisit Indian thought without being prejudiced by earlier interpreters. For theoretical analysis some Jain works provide good model. For applied dimension of Indian thought Charaka Saṃhitā is the best guide. A comparative study of such endeavors is helpful to enrich mutual understanding and may also open up newer vistas of approaching the rich and multi-faceted nature of Reality for universal well-being.

I

Traditionally there have been advocacy of nihilism, agnosticism, positivism and so forth. In terms of quantity there have been theories of monism, dualism and pluralism. Some have professed materialism, some idealism, some dualism of both matter and mind/spirit and some neutralism. Within these again there has been variety of views. No two minds may fully agree in all details and there need not be any regimentation in this regard. It seems that the wide and variegated nature of Reality can best be apprehended in a 'perspectival' approach which is holistic and integral. It can be named as 'Organicism' (*śārīrakavāda*). In this paper this approach which is characteristic of Indian culture has been adopted exemplifying it with the help of classical Indian thought. It is hoped that it may offer more profound understanding of the manifold nature of Reality in its diverse forms and facets, and multiple functions, at empirical and transcendental levels. As the subject is very vast, here conceptual and doctrinal analysis of some seminal ideas and views are presented exemplifying them by referring to different schools and systems of Indian philosophical thought.

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II

Any approach to Reality has to spring from experience; it is embedded in experience and gets its culmination in experience. It thus begins from experience and ends in experience. It is rooted in experience and is tied down to experience. To be meaningful and useful it has to confine itself to the arena of experiences alone. Experience is the only gateway to Reality, its knowledge, life-values and their realization. They are apprehended in experience and there is no other way or means to have access to them. They are amenable to experience and genuine experience must pertain to them. To experience is to experience the real. An unreal is never experienced but only imagined or hypostatized and superimposed. Human mind has this capacity of abstraction, computation and superimposition. Ratiocinative mind can also discriminate between the real and unreal, the experienced and the mentally construed. Of course, the construed also has its significance, value and utility. It is given status of knowledge in a different capacity and in a different context (known as *ūha* in Indian thought). It is sometimes called speculation. A speculative enterprise begins from experience but it gets entangled in the labyrinth of imagination and becomes removed from Reality. It has importance but its role is ancillary and subservient to experience. So long as it helps experience in revealing the depths and subtlety of Reality it has meaning, value and utility.

III

The experienced Reality is a synthesis of unity and multiplicity. Both unity and multiplicity are given to us in our veridical experiences. Our experience vouchsafes that the multiplicity originates from, is situated and embedded in, and is sustained by one all-inclusive Reality. It is an organic unity, like that of a seed containing implicitly the whole tree, a multiplicity-in-unity, not unity brought about in, or superimposed on, multiplicity. Multiplicity issues forth from unity, is accommodated in an orderly way in unity and that is why the Ultimate Reality is a cosmos and not a chaos. (Of course we the human beings disturb that order). It is a universe and not multi-verse. It is universe in the sense that it houses 'many' in 'one' as parts of an organic whole. This is how the ontological issue of 'One' and 'Many' is to be resolved. Both 'one' and 'many' are inevitable facts of our experiences. In a satisfactory ontological view both are to be recognized and accommodated in a holistic and integrated system, in a synthesis in which the two are not posed as opposites but as complimentary. This is the '*organismic*' approach we have resorted in this paper, which fulfills this task by postulating a primordial unity that expresses itself in and through the multiplicity of diverse forms, facets and functions. There are two levels of experiencing Reality, in its transcendental form which is non-manifest whole and in its empirical form which is manifest as its multiple parts. Both are equally real and meaningful in their own spheres. No incompatibility or schism is to be envisaged between the two. The cosmic process represents its manifest form. This

process constitutes the ontogenetic matrix of the individual subjective world of finite selves (*saṃsāra*) and the objective world (*jagat*).

The richness and complexity of Reality cannot be apprehended in terms of exclusive 'either-or'. Dichotomous or exclusivist approach is not conducive to comprehend its diversity and dynamism, openness and infinite expansion, perfect and yet ever-growing nature. It requires an approach which is all-inclusive and all-comprehending, which is not closed but open-ended, not static but dynamic. This approach regards all opposites as distinct. It is not negative and therefore it defies the logic of dichotomies. It accepts the logic of self-awareness at the transcendental level and a relational logic of complex interactions at the empirical level. One is depth level and the other is surface level. One is the level of the whole and the other is the level of parts within the whole. Such an approach can provide a synthetic coordination between 'substantive' and 'non-substantive' viewpoints. The Reality is basically unitary in nature and the entire multiplicity is situated in it as its creative transformation or manifestation. One becomes many and the many is the creative play of one. So the one is in many and the many is in one. As Hua-yen Buddhism following the Indrajālasūtra of the Avatamsakasūtra puts it, "In one is all, in many is one. One is identical to all, many is identical to one." In this *organismic* view one has *ontic* or existential priority over many but it does not in any way imply its superiority in terms of value. The basic idea is that one and many are not incompatible but mutually reinforcing as they are two facets of the same Reality. With help of several analogies this dual nature of Reality can be illustrated. The most apt analogy is that of living organism given to us in our concrete experience which is basically a unity accommodating a multiplicity of organs all inhering, coexisting and cooperating in an intimate, inseparable, interdependent and harmonious existence. This analogy is best suited to explain this nature of Reality which is also an organism writ large. A living organism is neither an assemblage of scattered and unrelated multiple parts, nor is it a barren unity or an abstraction that is bereft of the multiplicity of its organs. It is a concrete unity that realizes itself in and through multiplicity. Just as part is not intelligible except through the whole of which it is a part and just as whole is also not conceivable without any reference to its constituent parts, in the like manner the organs are not understandable except as inhering in the organism and the organism also is not conceivable without its organs. Thus *organicism* regards 'one' and 'many' as members of an organic whole each is having a being of its own but a being that implies a relation to the other. The analogy of sea and its infinite waves may also enable us to understand the nature of Reality. The sea represents a unity in the bosom of which arise an infinite number of waves all having their origination, sustenance and absorption in the same vast sea. There is tranquility at the bottom but turbulence at the surface. Both are real and both are natural. The sea cannot be just tranquility or just turbulence. The multiple waves coexist, cooperate, collide and vanish. But their essence is not destroyed. They merge back in their source which is their original self. The sea is at once ever changing many and never changing one. The analogy of space can also be resorted to bring home this fact. The space is one indivisible whole but we

may put artificial barriers and feel it multiplied and divided by houses and other confinements. The *Upaniṣads* give a host of such analogies.

This is the holistic approach based on the principles of interrelation and interdependence, mutuality and cooperation, reciprocity and coordination, mutual appreciation and mutual enhancement.

IV

Philosophy, as *Darśana* in Indian context, is a systematic reflection (*ānvīkṣīkī*) by a thoughtful human mind upon lived experiences in order to be benefitted by it for realization of material prosperity (*abhyudaya*) and spiritual enhancement (*niḥśreyasa*) which are also known respectively as *preyasa* and *śreyasa* in Indian thought.¹ Right from the dawn of civilization the Indian mind has been given to philosophical reflections. It has been intuitive and argumentative, descriptive of the nature of Reality and prescriptive of the ideals of life, a life of perfection, wellness and bliss. So in our account which follows we shall take into account both the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of Reality. The philosophical thought in India has mainly oscillated between ‘substantialist’ (*ātmavāda*) and ‘non-substantialist’ (*anātmavāda*) view points, sometimes going beyond the two as in the Nāsadīya Sūkta of the Rgveda or synthesizing the two as in Jainism. The concepts of ‘Brahman’ or ‘*Puruṣa*’ represent the Reality as ‘Being’ and the concepts of ‘*Buddhabhāva*’ or ‘*Buddhakṣetra*’ express Reality as ‘Becoming’. The basic idea bifurcating the two tendencies is the issue of ontological status of ‘permanence’ and ‘change’, both of which are given to us in our veridical and concrete experience and therefore both claim the status of truth. Accordingly the two approaches need not be viewed as mutually incompatible but as complimenting, each pertaining to one facet of Reality. So in the vast canvas of Indian thought we witness ‘substantialist’ position, ‘non-substantialist turn’ and ‘substantialist about-turn’ constantly recurring, sometimes leading to a symbiotic synthesis of the two in a reconciliatory attempt which can be named as ‘*organicism*’. This is the approach adopted in this paper.

V

As discussed earlier, the Reality is experienced in its two-fold forms, namely ‘proto’ and ‘manifested’. All systems of Indian thought in one way or other uphold this position, highlight this bipartite distinction and apply it to the levels of knowledge and values. The ‘proto Reality’ is variously named as *Tattva*, *Sat*, *Padārtha*, *Paramārtha*, Brahman, etc. In itself Reality is pure existence, homogeneous, difference-less, boundless, infinite, pure illumination and pure bliss. It is tranquil wholeness. This form is experienced in intimate vision and intuitive realization, for example, in Yogic state of *Samādhi* where there is unity of existence and experience. The Māndūkya Upaniṣad describes it as ‘*turiya*’. It is not amenable to empirical senses, discursive

¹See, Vaiśeṣikasūtra, 1/1/2.

intellect and linguistic expression. When activated the 'proto' Reality gets differentiated and manifested. Then it is in the state of 'Let be many' intending and resolving to get bifurcated and differentiated. The Puruṣa Sūkta of the Rgveda and the Upaniṣads describe this phenomenon picturesquely.² The manifested Reality is given to us in our day to day experiences and we have to reckon with it in multiple ways. It is wondrous and variegated, bewitching and engrossing, bewildering and entangling. It is experienced in manifold forms and relations and subsequently described in numerous ways. The Jain traditions avers, Anantadharmātmakamsat³ (The Reality has infinite qualities and modes). The Vedic sages state that the Reality is unitary but it is conceived (*bahudhā kalpayanti*) and expressed in multiple ways (*bahudhā vādanti*). So there can be multiple alternative approaches to reality. This can be named as 'Bahuvīdhavāda'. Though there is fundamental unity of all existences that unity expresses itself in multiple forms and becomes multi-faceted. Therefore there can be multiple ways of approaching and describing this multi-faceted Reality. In view of this rich diversity there should not be any insistence on uniformity or unanimity in our modes of thinking and ways of living. There cannot be any regimentation in this respect. Therefore it would be improper and unjust to insist that there can be only one way of approaching Reality and only one particular mode of philosophizing that has to be universally acceptable. Genuine philosophical activity has to stem from concretely lived experiences that are culturally conditioned and situated in specific spatio-temporal-causal locations and therefore 'democracy in ideas has to be the guiding point. There should always be scope for healthy philosophical disagreement. The thoughtful and creative minds need not always agree or think along a fixed path. There has to be room for debate and discussion, mutual exchanges, give and take, to arrive at truth. "Vāde vāde jāyate tattvabodhaḥ" goes an Indian saying to bring home this fact. But this enterprise has to be rational, logical and methodical. Then only it is reasonable and acceptable. For this purpose the Nyāya, Buddhist, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta thinkers have developed elaborate systems of debate and theorizing known as 'Vādaśāstri' and 'Tantrayukti' and there are many good works in this area.

No school of thought originated in cultural vacuum and none developed in isolation or in closed compartments. It has been enjoined that truth can be approached, understood and expressed in diverse ways and therefore the game of philosophizing can be played by mutual supplementations and complementarities. The development of philosophical thought in each school has not been in exclusion but in intimate interactions so much so that one cannot understand much less appreciate the schools of Indian thought without at the same time well versed and steeped in the prevailing systems. There have been mutual borrowings and

²The problem of many-ness from one is discussed in almost all the Upaniṣads. See, particularly Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad, Chapter 1, Brāhmaṇa 1-4.

³Anyayogavyavahārachedikā, p.22.

corrections. There have been agreements to disagree. But there has not been mutual ignoring or overlooking. Buddhism has not been an exception to this rule of the game. There have been sharp and brilliant philosophical responses by and to Buddhism. Buddhist thinkers undertook close encounters with the then prevalent ideas, theories and viewpoints and ably defended Buddhist position. Not only there are ample evidences of lively exchanges and resultant literature, there are scores of treatises pertaining to *Vādaividhi*, art of debate and discussion so that exchanges are meaningful and fruitful. The Buddhist thinkers even developed and perfected the mode of debate. The point to be noted is that all strands are complementary in character. They belong to the same genus and differ only as species. These differences are significant and of great worth since they provide variety and richness and therefore they are to be valued. But they should not be exaggerated. There is mutual opposition but this is not to be taken as hostility.

VI

The manifested Reality is experienced in three-fold forms, viz. the Supreme Reality above, the manifold world outside and the innumerable individual selves within. In technical language we call these three experiences as *Urdhvamukhī* (Upward), *Bahirmukhī* (Outward) and *Antarmukhī* (Inward). In Indian philosophical thought we find elaborate accounts of these experiences in multiple forms and all of them represent different facets of the same Reality. There is basic unity among all of them but in details they differ widely. In his work, ‘Six Systems of Indian Philosophy’ Maxmuller rightly refers to this point. Reflections on the existence and nature of Supreme Self or God, world and individual self may seem to be pointless to those who are engrossed in mundane matters or who are deeply entangled in the strife and struggles of worldly life or who are striving to manage for their food, clothing and shelter. To some extent this is true. But there are moments in their lives as well when they are led to some vague thinking about these supra-mundane matters. On the other hand, there are some persons who by their very nature indulge or made to indulge in pondering over the inner and outer dimensions of Reality given in experience and arrive at the tacit acceptance of a self within and a Supreme Self permeating and overseeing the entire universe. Only inquisitive persons get interested in problematic issues concerning the individual self, the world and the Supreme Self. However, in times of calamity or at an advance stage in life people tend to accept the reality of these entities and look for their locus in empirical experiences. In this entire exercise the role of culture they are environed with is tremendous and unmitigated. There cannot be any final say on these matters but some tentative and provisional conclusions may be of psychological satisfaction.

VII

Metaphysics is consideration of what is involved in the facts of experience. One of the most striking at the same time most controversial experiences about the veracity

of which there are doubts and denials is the acceptance of the Supreme Self or God over and above the individual self. There are people who are staunch believers in the existence of such an entity which is higher than the individual self and which is divine in nature. They believe so on the basis of immediate apprehensions and tacit faith. For them the Ultimate Reality is *Paramātman* or God who is perfect, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite, kind and merciful. There are others who are willing to offer rational arguments to prove the existence of such a Self. Whether it is hangover of the cultural tradition or compulsion of the circumstances there are moments in our life when we do realize our finitude, our imperfection, our limitations, our helplessness etc. and feel that there is something beyond, something higher and something more powerful than our limited self which supervises and controls the cosmic process. We feel that we are helpless in this evanescent mundane existence. At the same time we also feel assured that there is some Supreme Power which is kind and merciful and who can provide succor and solace in trials and tribulations. In the strife and struggles of worldly life such feelings are universal, inevitable and natural. Consciously or sub-consciously we tend to believe in the existence of the Supreme Self. It seems that there is an innate necessity in us caused by our finitude and imperfection that we posit or accept that there is a Supra-human Power who can be approached for help. We do aspire for some help from such a Being with a strong will and wish that such a help could be and would be forthcoming. Thus the experience of such a Self is a matter of direct experience, whether spontaneous or *per force*. Sometimes we go by the experiences of persons whom we regard as 'realized souls' and in every society at every time there has been an array of such realized souls. In Indian traditions they are called *ṛṣi-muni* (saints, sages, mystics). We may call them by any name but such gifted and realized souls are regarded to have visions and intuitive apprehensions of the Ultimate Reality or God. In fact they themselves are deified and treated at par with God or even as replacement or substitute of God. In every religious tradition there are scriptures or *śrutis* which deal with God. Their understanding of the nature of God may be different. These scriptures are records of the experiences of the realized souls. It is also said that given a particular type of *sādhana* each one of us can reach to that state of supra-human existence or have that experience. First of all we have to be truly human and then cultivate divinity in us. In the Indian traditions we are told that we are progenies of the Divine or inherently divine and therefore we have innate capacity to reach to the divine state of existence or be Divine.

In India with a few exceptions there is a tacit belief in the existence of Supra-human Being or beings. All those who subscribe to spirituality adhere to this belief. It is believed that in the universe there is an immanent order or teleology (*Rta*) and therefore spiritual power does operate. There are disorders in the universe no doubt but they are due to human conduct. The human has the prerogative of freewill and may act in a way which is conducive or detrimental to the order. Human being is prone to err, to be corrupt and to distort. In fact evil is alluring like gold and distracts human mind. With proper knowledge and *sādhana* (methodical training) human mind can be put on the right track. According to some thinkers both *anubhava*

(experience) and *śruti* (codification of experience) can be supported by *tarka* or *yukti* (reasoning) and can be put forth in a logical, coherent, cogent and systematic manner. Human being has the prerogative to use reasoning. Reasoning can be employed for abstract brooding. It can also be used to negate, to deny and to refute. Such an exercise is named as *śuṣka* and *pratīkāla*, and it is not favored. What is needed is *anukūla-tarka* (corroborative reasoning). Nature has gifted us with this wonderful power of reasoning and it depends upon us how to use it and for what purpose. However, there are some thinkers who do not accept this subordination of reasoning and want to give autonomy to it. The history of humankind has witnessed several naturalistic thinkers who are agnostics, or skeptics or nihilists. They doubt or deny the existence of any Supra-human or Supernatural power or Being. But it has been found that they also do not find any satisfaction or solace in their negative or vacillating stance.

By and large belief in the existence of a Supra-human Being is either a matter of experience or on the basis of *śruti* and *yukti*. For the availability of this experience there are some prerequisites. For this *śruti* and *yukti* can offer only indirect help. Their role is corroborative and supportive and not primary. Only through *sādhanā* one can have that make-up which makes it a fit receptacle of that experience. This is what Vedas, Upaniṣads, Puranas etc. declare. But there are some schools and thinkers who relish in giving rational proofs for the existence of Supreme Being, particularly for a God who is Creator and Moral Governor of the universe. The Nyāya- Vaiśeṣika system is prominent among them and therefore deserves special mention.

Barring the Cārvakas, who are staunch materialists, all other schools of philosophical thought believe in some conception of *Paramātman*. In Buddhism Lord Buddha and incarnations of Buddha as also *bodhisattvas* are *Paramātman* in one sense. But they are not to be equated with the idea of a Creator God. They are not ordinary worldly mortals. They are addressed as *Bhagavāna* or *Īśvara*, and are regarded as worshipable. They help the suffering humans to get liberation. In Jainism also such divine beings are accepted but they do not come to help. They are only to be worshipped and emulated. In both the schools there are mythologies and theologies surrounding them. There is a plurality of gods and goddesses. All of them can be regarded as *Paramātman*. They are believed to have supra-human and supernatural attributes and powers. They are free from all evil and imperfection. They are holy beings to be emulated. The Yoga system also believes in God who is morally perfect but helpful in realizing release from worldly bondage. Similar is the view of theistic Sāṃkhya. In the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system and there is belief in a Creator God who is also Moral Governor. God is regarded only as efficient cause but in Vedānta God is believed to be both efficient and material cause. Here God is also believed to shower His grace on the devotees and therefore devotion to God plays a significant role in their life.

VIII

One of the perennial problems for a thoughtful mind is, "How the world has come to exist?" The earliest philosophical view with regard to Ultimate Reality appears to

have arisen out of an attempt to answer the questions “Whence this universe and who caused it?” All cosmological thinking stems from these questions. The Vedic thinkers grappled with these issues and came out with the idea of one Ultimate Reality manifesting itself in this world of manifoldness out of its dynamic power inherent in it and this is due to its creative urge. Some of them even voice skepticism as human mind is incapable of knowing the truth. Later Indian thinkers elaborated this idea in different ways. Some thinkers like Cārvāka did not accept this view and advocated ‘accidentalism’ that the world is an outcome of chance occurrence due to combination of four material elements of earth, water, fire and air which are atomic in nature. The world is a complex of such happenings which may come to an end any time. However, this view did not find favor of Indian mind and alternative views were propagated. The cosmological views can be divided into two groups. Cārvakas, Buddhists and Sāmkhya-Yoga thinkers advocate theory of evolution (*sarga*), stating that the world evolves from primordial matter or material elements whether atomic or non-atomic. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Jaina and Vedāntic thinkers believe in the theory of creation (*śr̥ṣṭi*). Whereas the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Vedāntic thinkers bring in the role of God, the Jaina thinkers take help of the principle of Karma.

Whatever be the explanation the general opinion of Indian mind is that the universe is an undivided whole with an immanent order which the Vedic seers named as ‘ṛta’. There is an organic interrelation, interdependence, cooperative partnership, and supportive mutualism in corporate existence and community living. There is reciprocity between living beings and inanimate object and events. All living beings have to co-exist in the universe along with the inanimate things but for universal wellness it has to be regulated co-existence just like a nest (*niḍa*) of a bird wherein the young ones co-exist in a regulated way. The bird parents while tending them operate in just and equitable manner without favor and frown. They feed them with the spirit of distributive justice and self-less sacrifice. The young ones also respond with mutual cooperation and co-sharing. Due to hunger they do cry for food but do not quarrel with one another. The parents see to it that their needs are satisfied but they do not feed their greed. The little put before us an ideal of co-existence to be emulated. So the guiding principles of communitarian life laid down in an *Upaniṣadic* prayer are *sahavāsa* (corporate living), *sahakāra* (cooperative functioning) and *sahabhoga* (communitarian partaking with mutual care and share⁴). This is how the inmates in *aśramas* or *gurukulas* used to exist in good old days. The entire cosmic existence is corporate coexistence and therefore human progress and well-being coincides with cosmic progress and well-being. There has to be inclusive pluralism with mutual cooperation and supportive partaking.

The world we live in is highly complex and complicated an inter-netting of several layers and relations bound by space, time and causality. Therefore it is

⁴The śāntiṣaṭha in the beginning of Kathopaniṣad, Tattir̥yopaniṣad, Brahmānanda valli and several places in all the Upaniṣads we find the passages regarding this collective consciousness.

bewildering and puzzle-some. This is *māyā* a term used both in technical sense by Vedānta and in loose sense by common Indian. We feel aghast at its essence-lessness. We look for meaning and value of life, we strive for this but we find that something is missing, lacking and wanting. Things and relations of the world are evanescent and deceptive. Sooner or later we have this realization. But they are alluring and inviting and we get attached to them. We want to leave this world and yet we want to live in the world. This is the paradoxical state we are beset with. In the midst of suffering and agony we search for real happiness but we do not know what real happiness is and how to get it. However, in Indian thought the reality and phenomenal nature of the world is recognized and given its proximate value. The world is valuable to us as it provides the base and substratum for our existence. It has instrumental value. So we have to live in this world with good health, adequate prosperity and sufficient satisfaction. The doctrine of *puruṣārtha* has been put forth to regulate this requirement. This is a part of respect for Nature and the five material elements along with their regulating powers or forces are paramount in Indian conception of Reality. Ecological considerations, worship of natural objects and also of other living beings, and expression of gratitude and repayment of our indebtedness for their bounty and help are characteristic of Indian approach to reality.

IX

Nature has endowed human beings with the unique capacity of undergoing experiences and to reflect upon them. One of the most striking phenomena revealed in experience is the existence of individual spiritual entities. At least the existence of one's own self is immediately experienced, directly felt and intuitively realized. Though we have direct apprehension of our own self we are not aware of its nature. We do not and perhaps cannot know its nature empirically. We try to do this but we fail. That is why in the history of human thought its nature has been an occasion of much speculation and sometimes skepticism bordering on nihilism. From a metaphysical point of view there may be several questions about its existence and nature. It can be asked if there is anything 'Real' experienced as self, or is it only wishful thinking or a mind imposition. It is experienced as conscious, but is consciousness its essence or its property. If it is a property, is it essential or adventitious? We are further led to such questions as what is the status and role of self within the system of reality and the scheme of the universe. Are individual selves ultimately many or get merged into one Ultimate? Are they real individuals existing in their own right and having an inalienable individuality or they are only transient modes of the Absolute which alone is real? In fact the question of destiny of the self is vital to a thinking mind as we feel concerned with our future. There are four basic issues which appear as corollary to the problem of self in the Indian mode of thinking. They are concerning karma, *samsāra*, rebirth and *mokṣa*. All of them demand philosophical inquiry. In Indian literature there are many words which are used for individual self as synonyms of or interchangeable with one another. Though strictly speaking they do not mean the same thing and there are subtle nuances of meaning

associated with each one of them yet in a loose expression no precise distinction is drawn. Such words are *ātman*, *jīva*, *puruṣa*, *cit*, *cetanā*, *manas*, *bhūta*, *prāṇa*, *puṅgava*, *sattva*, etc. We shall first deal with the issue of the existence of the individual self and then turn to the issue of its nature. As this is very significant self-relating issue for a human being we discuss it in detail.

Existence of self: The individual self normally exists as self-identical being with self-awareness. Generally it is addressed as ‘I’ in a personal reference. It is a reference to one’s own self and therefore we say “I am” in individual context and “We are” in a collective sense. As stated earlier, our own self is most intimately given to us. We have its direct apprehension. The existence of other selves is known indirectly and inferentially. Likewise the surrounding inanimate world is also given to us indirectly and inferentially. We may doubt or deny the independent existence of the other selves and the external world and on the analogy of dream experience we may tend to evaluate them as illusory. It has been argued that just as dream objects are not independently real on that very logic the world of waking experience is also not independently real. But this is only a stray line of thinking. Further, it is not clear what exactly is meant by ‘real’ here. In Advaita Vedānta the word, ‘*mithyā*’ is used for describing the status of the empirical world in which the individual self has its role to play but about its meaning also there are differences of opinion. In the *Advaitasiddhi*, for example, five definitions of *mithyātva* are discussed. But one thing is certain that what is denied is the independent and autonomous existence of the individual self and not its existence as such. We do not say we do not exist, or we do not undergo experiences, or we have not experienced dreams. Likewise we do not deny worldly objects and worldly relations experienced by us. So far as one’s own self is concerned there is no scope or possibility of its denial. As Sri Śankarācārya has very aptly said that whosoever denies its existence, he or she is himself or herself the evidence of its existence.⁵ Further, one cannot ask for the mode of knowing its existence because as the Upaniṣads have rightly stated that the self is itself the knower and therefore cannot be turned into a known object.⁶ It makes the instruments of knowing animated. If the self is not there the mind cannot function, nor can the senses and the body. This is the thrust of the *Kenopaniṣad*. The *Kaṭha*, *Muṇḍaka* and *śvetāśvatara* also aver the same. The self is to be intuitively experienced. Its existence is self-evident. Nobody can say “I am not” as it is self-contradictory. When we say “I am” it is perfectly intelligible and meaningful. Of course one may not be sure of or one may be mistaken about its exact reference and connotation. Some may identify the self with the body (*Dehātmavāda*), some with the senses (*Indriyātmavāda*), some with the vital breaths (*Prāṇātmavāda*), some with the mind (*Manātmavāda*) and so forth. In the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* we have its reference in the *Prajāpati-Indra-Virocana- samvāda*. It could be that there were Cārvāka, Ājīvaka, Lokāyata and the

⁵*Ya eva hi asya nirākartā tadeva tasya svarūpam* . Brahmasūtrabhāṣya, II.3.7)

⁶*Vijñātāram are kena vijñīyāt*, Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 4/5/19.

like who thought that way. We have references to their views in the Pali Buddhist literature.

The fact remains that the existence of the self is undeniable. It is not only given in experience, it is also supported by our logic and inherited by us through cultural traditions and racial subconscious. Our thinking has been so conditioned by our culture that right from the childhood we are told about our individual self. The mode of our thinking, the language that we use with 'I' and 'we' as self-referential words and our entire behavior is self-oriented contrasting ourselves with all that is not-self. All this can be taken as an evidence but real evidence, if at all evidence is required, comes from self-experience. Thus existence of self is to be regarded as a hard, incontrovertible and undeniable fact of our experience. And as Vacaspati has said, "*Samvidevabhagavati vastupagame no śaraṇam*" we have to rely upon experience only and the verdict of experience is in favor of unquestionable acceptance of the existence of the self. For some thinkers the existence of self is self-evident as they regard it to be self-luminous. Those who do not regard self as self-luminous and self-evident some of them may maintain that it is known in direct internal perception or in supra-normal yogic perception. For them it is an introspected datum of experience. Some others may hold that the existence of self is to be inferred as substratum of mental qualities, i.e., as the subject of volition, desire etc. or as the epistemological ground of consciousness and cognitive phenomena or on the moral ground as the agent of *karma* and the enjoyer of *karmaphala*. Some others may believe in the existence of the self on the basis of scriptural authority. Thus there can be many grounds if one looks for them.

Nature of self: Though it is not logically possible to deny the existence of self, its nature may be viewed differently from different metaphysical and ontological perspectives. However, there seems to be unanimity in regarding the self as a living being meaning thereby as having consciousness. It is not inert or unconscious like matter. It is life-giving and animating element which enlivens matter in the form of live body etc. It may be spiritual and immaterial for some and psycho-physical for others. On this point there is a wide divergence of views. It seems that there cannot be any unanimity in this regard. From a logical point of view, all the schools of philosophical thought in India can be classified under two heads, viz., those which regard self as simple and therefore indestructible and immortal and those which regard it as composite or a conglomeration to be disintegrated. The Cārvāka or Lokāyata or Ājīvaka and Buddhism come under the latter group, and the rest of the schools fall under the former.

Materialist views: The Cārvāka or Lokāyata or Ājīvaka schools are materialists. They assert that matter is the only ultimate reality. It is the fulcrum of all existence and therefore the self is nothing but an epiphenomenon of matter. It is a by-product of material elements of earth, water, fire and air. It is a temporal event that has evanescent being. The notion of a permanent self that is eternal and immortal is only a figment of imagination or wishful thinking. The self is destroyed with the death of body. Consciousness is the property of body. It arises in the body due to a particular combination of the four types of material elements. Consciousness is not found in the

four types of material elements individually that constitute the body. Only when there is a combination or conglomeration of the four elements, self emerges and consciousness erupts. The self is a body-mind complex having emergence of consciousness. Since it is a by-product of matter it is perishable. It gets destroyed with the death of the body and therefore it is not eternal and immortal. There is no life after death. In a sense this view can be regarded as *anātmavāda* in so far as it does not believe in a permanent self, though traditionally this nomenclature has been reserved for the Buddhist view.

Several positions may be ascribed to the materialist standpoint. In the tradition they have been described in different ways as *dehātmavādin*, *indriyātmavādin*, *prāṇātmavādin*, *manātmavādin*, etc. depending upon their identification of the self with body, senses, vital breaths, mind etc. respectively. We are not sure whether historically the upholders of these positions existed or not but philosophically this is immaterial as we are here concerned only with their metaphysical stances. The non-materialists do not agree with this position on logical, psychological and moral grounds. Life and consciousness cannot be reduced to a blind play of inert matter. The laws of matter cannot explain the phenomena of life and consciousness. Matter cannot have the properties of consciousness. It cannot initiate motion by itself. It does not have the capacity of self-animation. If the self is equated with the body then consciousness must be present all over the body but in case of paralysis, for example, consciousness is absent in that part of the body that is affected by paralysis. If it is argued that consciousness resides not in the body as a whole but in the constituents parts of the body, then there will be the predicament of there being many consciousnesses. But our experience is that consciousness is unified and therefore we say "I am conscious" and not that "My hand is conscious". Further, if the body be the substratum of consciousness, then the phenomenon of memory will remain inexplicable. The body keeps on changing but the identity of self continues. It may be argued that when we say "I am fat" etc., it is an evidence of body being the self. The reply given is that this is only a mistaken view caused by faulty use of language. The correct expression should be "My body is fat".

Meaning of Buddhist Anātmavāda: The Buddhist approach to the problem of self seems to be psychological. Within Buddhism we find various differing views about the self. The utterances of Lord Buddha on this issue have been interpreted differently by different schools of Buddhist thought. Theodore Stcherbatsky in his work, "Soul Theory of The Buddhists" (which is a translation of one portion of the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu) refers in the introduction to various such views in the light of Kaṭhavatthu. The translation part particularly deals with the views of Vatsīputriyas who admitted some unifying element as soul over and above the five conglomerated elements. However, the general Buddhist position is that the self is a continuous flow of the conglomeration of the series of five psycho-physical elements known as *pañcaskandhas*. There are two key Buddhist terms, viz, *samghāta* and *santāna* which explain the Buddhist notion of self. The five elements are *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *samskāra*, *vijñāna* and *nāma*. Of these the first alone is physical and the rest are psychical. These five constitute a conglomeration (*samghāta*) which is in constant

flux in which the preceding gives rise to the succeeding (*santāna*). This process does not stop with the death of the body and continues in the next births till attainment of *nirvāṇa*. Rebirth is explainable in terms of a karmic link known as *patisandhi* which provides for the transition of *saṃskāras* from one birth to another. The entire effectuation follows the law of *pratītyasamutpāda*. There is nothing which endures. The real is non-eternal and momentary. Further, the Buddhists deny the reality of substance-attribute relation. So there is no substance called self which is a substratum of qualities. In this respect they differ from the materialists. *Milinda Panha*, a Pali Buddhist text, provides a classical exposition of the notion of self in early Buddhism in the well-known *Milinda-Nagasena samvāda* wherein, giving the analogy of a chariot which is a conglomeration of various parts, the self is also explained as a conglomeration of five elements which are always in flux.

The Buddhist saying, “*śabbe dhamma anattā*” has been misunderstood as advocating no-soul theory. What it purports is not denial of self but denial of substance-hood of self. The Buddha exhorted us to get rid of the idea of ‘mine’ (*mamatva*). This gives rise to *tanhā* (volition) and *dukkha* (suffering). This coincides with the idea of *parigraha* (possessiveness). It is a practical ethics to give up attachment rather than a philosophical negation of *ātman* as Professor Hajime Nakamura in his works on Buddhism, particularly in “Buddhism in Comparative Light”, is at pains to explain. He examines such expressions as “*attanam gavesati*”, i.e., investigates into the nature of self (*attanarakkhita*⁷), i.e., self-guarded, *atpiya*, i.e., self-loving, *attanam hiṃsam*, i.e., hurting the self (*hanti attanam*⁸) i.e., kills the self by desires etc., and he points out that all these underline the importance of the self as a moral agent. He concludes that this idea of *anātman* is almost identical with views in the old Upaniṣads, Jainism and in the philosophy of Ājīvakas. The point to be noted is that it is not the rejection of the existence of self but of the idea of self as an eternal entity known as *satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*. In fact it is not just the rejection of an eternal entity called the *ātman* but is a comprehensive theory of the non-essentiality (*niṣsvabhāvatā*) and contingent character (*sūnyatā*) of the universe.

There is a particular Buddhist view that evolved later which needs a special mention. That is the view of Vijñānavāda or Yogacara School according to which *vijñāna* alone is really real. The self is *vijñāna santāna* (a series of ideas). Each self is one distinct series assuming oneness or unity among its conglomerates. As stated earlier, the Buddhists deny substance-attribute distinction in reality as it is not logically tenable and is not given to us in experience. All the attributes like cognition, pleasure, pain, volition etc. are not proved to be attributes necessitating postulation of a substratum for them in the form of an enduring self. In all these phenomena what we experience is a series of ideas coming into existence and ceasing to exist independently of a substance called self. All these experiences are nothing but forms

⁷Vinaya Pitaka, Mahāvagga, I.13,P.25.

⁸Suttanipāta, 583.

of vijñāna s. Vijñāna s alone are real and they appear as external objects and internal sensations. There is oneness of a particular series which provides individual identity and continuity to that series. This is how memory, recollection, recognition etc. are possible. However, all the Buddhist formulations howsoever well-argued have not found favour with other schools of thought.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika conception of self: The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system differentiates between pure self and self in embodied state. The pure self is a simple, permanent, ubiquitous, spiritual substance which exists by itself. Only in embodied state it acquires qualities like consciousness etc. There are fourteen qualities, nine unique and five common, which the self acquires. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika texts deal with them in detail. The self is potentially knower (*jñātā*), doer (*kartā*) and enjoyer (*bhoktā*). This is possible when the self is in contact (*sannikarṣa*) with mind, senses and body which are different from the self. The texts give elaborate arguments to prove that the self is different from these. That it is different from the body is proved by the fact that the self remains the same in spite of the changes in the body and we feel no diminution of self even if parts of body such as legs or arms are cut off. Moreover, awareness like 'my body' or 'my hand' proves their separateness. The self is not identical with the senses, and this is proved by the fact that the deprivation in any sense-organ does not injure the self. Further, the multiplicity of senses would imply multiplicity of selves in the same body, and also multiplicity of experiences would not result in identity of consciousness. The self is different from the mind also because mind, being atomic, is incapable of simultaneously apprehending many objects.

Each individual self is a unique centre of experience having an inalienable existence. All experiences belong to the self and inhere in it. Body, senses and mind cannot function without the self. It is their controlling, guiding and animating principle. It is the substratum of properties like pleasure, the possessor of generated knowledge and the subject of bondage and liberation. The existence of self is a matter of immediate experience and therefore some Naiyāyikas maintain that the self is perceived through *mānasa pratyakṣa* (mental perception) as the 'I' in cognition like 'I am happy'. But it is perceived only as related to some perceptible attribute like cognition and pleasure. Vatsyayana distinctly states that the pure self, which is unrelated to a body or to attributes like consciousness, can never be perceived in a normal way, although it can be perceived in a supra-normal (*yogaja*) way. Even though it may be admitted that one's own self can be perceived through mental or internal perception, the existence of other selves can only be inferred from their bodily actions. The self is to be inferred, for instance, as an animating principle of the sense-organs, and as an agent of knowledge. It is the self which imparts sentiency to sense-organs and body. The body has no sentiency, for it is not found in dead bodies. The sense-organs also do not have it, otherwise recollection, for example, could not have taken place when there is loss of organs. The mind too does not have it, as it is atomic and cannot have experience of composite objects.

This system believes in multiplicity of selves, each self having its own body, mind and other individualizing elements. Because of multiplicity social life is possible and there can be arrangement in the form of separation of the subjects of

knowledge, volitions, feelings and other forms of consciousness. This makes the operation of the law of karma possible. The individual selves are innumerable because of the fact that they are experienced to be so on account of the multiplicity of bodies with inalienably distinct experiences. However, the same individual self gets associated with different bodies in different births. This belief in transmigration and rebirth is based on the ground that there are certain impressions and habits which are derived from our experiences in previous births. From this phenomenon of transmigration it follows that the individual self is eternal and immutable, for otherwise it cannot pass through several births without losing its identity. The ultimate destiny of the self is to attain *mokṣa* by acquiring true knowledge of reality and by performing right actions (*dharma*).

The dominant view among the thinkers of this view is that the self gets rid of all qualities in the state of *mukti* and therefore does not experience pain, pleasure etc. There is no consciousness and volition in the state of liberation. It is a state of pure existence. In the early Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition it is taken to be devoid of consciousness in the original form but acquires consciousness as its adventitious property. Bhāsarvajña has however differed from this line of thinking and in the Nyāya tradition, particularly according to Raghunatha (AD 1475-1550), self is conscious and self-conscious essentially and remains so even in the state of *mokṣa*.

Pūrva Mīmāṃsā conception of self: The Mīmāṃsakas seem to be in broad agreement with the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers regarding the nature of the self. They generally use the term *puruṣa* for it. According to them it is a spiritual substance which is eternal, omnipresent and simple without parts. It is imperishable and everlasting. It is knower, doer and enjoyer. Like the Naiyāyikas they put forth similar arguments for omnipresence, plurality and eternity of self. However Kumārila's account of the destiny of self is different from that of Prabhākara and it is in line with Bhāsarvajña. For them in the state of liberation the self experiences pleasure. The Mīmāṃsakas differ from the Naiyāyikas, and also among themselves, with regard to the knowledge of the self. For Prabhākara self is self-luminous whereas for Kumārila it is revealed when it is known by the mind as an introspected datum of experience.

Jaina conception of self: The Jaina system presents a syncretic view of self in so far as it has some commonality with all other systems. The self is essentially a sentient being. Life and consciousness are its essential attributes. In itself it is non-corporeal, living, eternal and everlasting substance. It has been described from the aspects of *dravya* (substance), *guṇa* or *bhāva* (quality), *kāla* (time) and *kṣetra* (locus) in the Jaina literature. Therefore different views about self can be coordinated in a harmonious system. This is the peculiarity of the Jain view and also its strength. It is in accordance with its theories of *anekāntavāda*, *navavāda* and *syadvāda* and with tripartite distinction of real as *dravya*, *guṇa* and *pariyāya*. The self is different from the body etc. but it is intimately associated with it. It is infinite in number and it is different from one another on account of the difference of body. The selves differ on the basis of number of sense organs as numbering from one to five. Selves are in different bodies of different dimensions in their mundane state, but each has the capacity of expanding or contracting depending upon the size of the body. So it is said

to be of *madhyama parimāṇa* (of middle size). This is because it is coextensive with the body. So in a sense and in a context it is both incorporeal and corporeal. The decrease and increase does not affect its essential nature which consists in life and consciousness. There is an interesting position of the Jainas that selves exist everywhere in the universe. There is no space where there is no self, subtle or gross. This view borders on *panpsychism* with this difference that according to it everything is not self but everywhere there is self. The self has the capacity of knowing, doing and experiencing. Consciousness (*upayoga*) is its essence. Though different from the body only in association with the body it can realize its capacities. The inherent capacity of every self is alike but in their manifestations there is a difference depending upon its *puruṣārtha* (efforts) and other factors. Not only selves are mutually dependent (*upagraha*), self and matter are also mutually dependent. The self is eternal, immortal and impenetrable. Its original nature is pure and simple but due to its association with matter it acquires impurity. Its properties are without limits but in embodied state they get limited. So the destiny of self is to restore its pristine purity.

Sāṃkhya conception self: The Sāṃkhya view of self is radically different from all the preceding views. The Sāṃkhya system does not accept substance-attribute distinction. This apart it is uncompromisingly dualistic. It maintains that reality is two-fold. It is consciousness named as *puruṣa* and matter named as *prakṛti*. Both are independent and unassociated substances. The self is unborn, eternal, immutable and immortal substance. It is a unitary and self-identical being. It is a subject of all experiences in the sense that it makes experiences possible, but it transcends all experiences. It is the *adhiṣṭhātā* (supervisor) of experiences. With the instrumentality of the evolutes of *prakṛti* experiences take place. It is inactive and therefore not a doer or agent of action. It is different from ego, a product of matter, which individualizes consciousness. In the *Sāṃkhya kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa we find a very illuminating account of the Sāṃkhya view, though it represents one of the varied Sāṃkhya traditions. There is a controversy whether the Sāṃkhya system believes in one self or in many selves. The popular view is that it maintains pluralism of *puruṣas*. There is also a tradition, though not well known, which maintains plurality of *pradhānas*, each individual self having its own *pradhāna*⁹.

Vedāntic conception of self: The Vedāntic conception is generally accepted by the masses and is the dominant view in Indian culture. It may be due to the influences of Ramāyāṇa, Mahabharata, Puranas and Dharmasāstras. The Vedāntic view is based upon the Upaniṣads, the Brahmasūtras and the Bhagavadgītā recognized as *praśṭhānatraya*. But there have been varied interpretations of these texts and therefore there are many strands of Vedāntic thought both classical and modern. Two most prominent and philosophically significant views can be considered here pertaining to Śankara's Advaita and Ramanuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita which present a vivid contrast. In

⁹Satdarśanasamuccaya, Guṇaratnaṭīka, Kārikā 36.

Advaita absolutistic monism is advocated whereas in Viśiṣṭādvaita a sort of theistic monism is propounded.

Advaitic view: According to Advaita Vedānta the individual self is the same as the Absolute in the ultimate analysis. Only due to *avidyā* (limiting conditioning) it appears to be individuated and differentiated. Then it is experienced as *jīva*, having psycho-physical conditionings. In itself it is pure consciousness, a witnessing consciousness (*sākṣī*) having superimposed adjuncts like *antaḥkāraṇa* (which is four-fold as *mana*, *buddhi*, *ahamkāra* and *citta*), body etc. It is pure subject which cannot be objectified. It is self-luminous pure consciousness which is trans-empirical. It is infinite, *sui generis*, formless and quality-less existence. It is unalloyed bliss. It is eternal, immutable, immortal and eternally free. In this sense it is one with Brahman. In the form of *jīva* it is embodied having mind, senses and different forms of body like gross, subtle and causal. *Jīva* stands for *anupraveśa* of consciousness in the limiting adjuncts. It is then finite. Otherwise *jīva* is the same as Brahman. The difference is due to *upādhis* (superimposed conditions) and with the dissipation of *upādhis* non-difference is experienced. The followers of Śankara are split in three groups with regard to understanding Brahman vis-vis *jīva*. They are either *ābhāsavādī*, or *pratibimbavādī* or *avacchedavādī*. These are well known positions and therefore their treatment is not needed. As *jīva* the individual self is *jñātā* (knower), *kartā* (doer) and *bhoktā* (enjoyer). It leads a sense-bound empirical life and it is subject to pleasure and pain. It fabricates its own *samsāra* and is enmeshed in the series of life and death. In the process of transmigration it is repeatedly born and it dies again and again under the force of *karmas* and this process comes to end when there is *mukti*. An embodied self is atomic in size but it is really infinite. Likewise empirical selves are many but the real self is one only. Empirically speaking again the self has five *kośas*, viz., *annamāya*, *prāṇamāya*, *manomāya*, *viññānamāya* and *ānandamāya*, and it has three states of existence, viz., *jāgrata*, *svapna* and *suṣupta*. The real self is *ānanda* and *turīya* or *turīyātīta*. Thus in Advaita Vedānta the real self is regarded as eternal, infinite, indivisible, self-luminous, undifferentiated and unitary *saccidānanda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). In mundane state only it has different nature which is superimposed on it but which does not affect it in real sense.

Ramanuja's disagreement with Advaitic view: Ramanuja differs with this Advaitic view and declares that the individual self is the most palpable and concrete entity. Its reality is given in the facts of consciousness, for consciousness which is ever-changing requires a substratum. It is also given in the facts of memory and recognition, for recognition implies a conscious subject persisting from the earlier to the later moment. It is also implicit in inference, for it presupposes the ascertainment and remembrance of general propositions. Ramanuja supplements these empirical arguments by the testimony of the scriptures. In the first chapter of Śrībhāṣya he quotes Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad III. 7.22, Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad I.6, I.9, VI.9, VI.16, VI.13 etc. in all of which the plurality of self is explicitly recognized and taught. He further derives support from the Gītā (II.12) which clearly teaches the reality of individual self and its eternal distinction from Brahman.

Ramanuja's view of individual self: In the philosophy of Ramanuja the absoluteness of Brahman (God) is so qualified as to admit the existence of real finite selves within His concrete unity. From the fundamental ontological position of Ramanuja that God is a unity inclusive of infinite determinations, there logically follows the existence of real finite selves, which are individual centers of knowledge, will and action. They are entities in themselves, though they derive their substantiality and entire being from God. Being the eternal differentiations of God, they are called His modes, parts, body etc., yet they have their own individual nature and features. Ramanuja thus advocates the modal dependence of individual selves on the Supreme Self. He is quite emphatic and insistent in holding that the individual selves, being eternal differentiations of God, are as real as God Himself. They are real entities, and cannot be dismissed as illusory, or false and fictitious being due to some innate nescience associated with the nature of God. Therefore, he criticizes those who regard individual selves as 'vain variations of the self-same Absolute'.

Individual self as knower: According to Ramanuja each individual self is a real self-identical being. It is a spiritual being different from the material elements like mind, body, vital breathes, senses etc. He holds that the essential nature of the individual self is to be a knowing subject. It is not pure consciousness as the Advaitin maintains, but it is the substratum of consciousness. It is not mere knowledge but an individual who possesses knowledge as its essential characteristic. That the self is a conscious principle and not mere consciousness is emphasized by him in order to safeguard the individuality of the self against the Advaitic tendency of overlooking all distinctions between the finite self and Brahman.

Individual self as doer: Ramanuja further maintains that the individual self is not only a knower, but also a doer and is thus a true self characterized by thought and activity. He declares that the agency of the self is implied in the Upaniṣadic doctrine of karma according to which each self reaps the fruits of its deeds. The agency of the self is denied by the Advaita and the Sāṃkhya. In the scriptures also at places agency is denied to the self. There it is maintained as though the self is inactive all activity being due to the *guṇas* of the body. Ramanuja explains this circumstance by saying that the self is an agent by virtue of its being associated with the karmic body in an embodied state. But it is the self only which is an agent and not the *guṇas*. Though the self is an agent, this does not mean that it is always active. It is provided with the capacity to act but it may act or may not act, as it pleases.

Individual self as atomic: Ramanuja further declares that the individual self is atomic. It is not all-pervading because the scriptures speak of it as passing out of the body, going and returning, all these movements on the part of the self would clearly be meaningless if it were omnipresent¹⁰. The logical basis for Ramanuja's rejection of the omnipresence of the self is that if it were so there would be everywhere and at all times simultaneously consciousness and non-consciousness, but this never is the case. Moreover, he points out against the Vaiśeṣika s that if the self were omnipresent all

¹⁰Ramanuja bases this view on Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad V. 8-9, and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad III.1.9.

the selves would be in permanent conjunction with all organs, and besides, the *adr̥ṣṭas* due to the actions of the different bodies would be entirely confused, for all selves would then be in contact with all bodies. Ramanuja further maintains that though the individual self is atomic and dwells in one part of the body, it is conscious of the sensations taking place in any part of the body. Thus it extends through the whole body by means of its quality, namely, consciousness. When the scriptures describe the self as all-pervasive they refer to its consciousness only. It, however, may be referred to as all-pervasive in the sense that being infinitely small it can penetrate all unconscious material substances. It has uniqueness like a monad, but is not exclusive and windowless because of its all-pervasive consciousness. So although the self is atomic it has knowledge as its invariable accompaniment, which can stream forth to any distance and is able to comprehend things even though they are far off.

Individual self as eternal and immutable: Ramanuja further maintains that the individual self is eternal and immutable in the sense that it is *sui generis* and has its own intrinsic value. It is unborn and immortal. It is real, and the real, as the Gītā declares, never ceases to be. Therefore no dissipation of the individuality of the self can be admitted. When the scriptures speak of origination and destruction of the self they only point out the association with and dissociation from the body of the embodied self. But in all these births and deaths and rebirths, which continue up to release, there is no addition to or diminution of its essence and existence. Those texts which deny origination mean to say that the self does not undergo changes of essential nature.

Comparative analysis of different views: The Cārvāka and Buddhist thinkers share the view that the self is of composite character but differ with regard to the nature of the components. For the Cārvāka the constituent elements are only material but for the Buddhists they are psycho-physical. The Buddhist doctrine of flux and belief in karma, *samsāra* and rebirth further differentiate the two. But both agree that the self is not eternal and everlasting entity. For both of them the empirical ego is the self. In a sense both are *ātmavādī* in as much as they accept the self whatever be its nature. In another sense both are *anātmavādī* in so far as they do not admit any eternal and immortal self. That the self is composite and therefore not eternal is a good contrast with the views of rest of the systems of Indian thought which regard self as a simple substance, non-composite and therefore eternal. They associate composite character with the self only in a subsequent mundane state when the self is empirical ego, a state that is real for some and not real for others. For them the self in its pure form is *kūṭastha nitya* (unchangeable and eternal).

Among the rest of the schools on the basis of acceptance or rejection of *dharmadharmī-bheda* (substance-attribute relationship) Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta and Jainism fall under one group and Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedānta come under another group. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā systems postulate *dharmadharmī-sambandha* but regard that the *dharmā* is not essential property of *dharmī*. The self is pure substance to begin with and acquires properties in worldly existence. The Sāṃkhya and Advaita Vedānta reject *dharmadharmī-sambandha* which is regarded by them as false assumption due to *avidyā*. Jainism and

Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta accept *dharma-dharmī-sambandha* but unlike Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā regard that the properties are essential to self. However, Jainism differs from Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta in postulating *paryāya* implying changes both in the self and its properties. A corollary of the acceptance or non-acceptance of *dharma-dharmī-sambandha* is that those systems which accept it regard self as knower, doer and enjoyer whereas those which reject it regard the self as pure consciousness and therefore devoid of these properties. The latter argue that the *kūṭasthanityatā* of the self preclude any mutability in the self. But mutability is involved in knowing, doing and feeling. The former group of systems regards all mutations as secondary and they strictly speaking do not affect the essence of self.

X

The ratiocinative human mind draws a distinction between two facets of Reality as fact (*bhūtavastu*) and value (*bhāvya vastu*). Fact is already in existence in the present or in the past. Value is to be brought into existence through our efforts. Experience of fact enables us to postulate value and engages us in the pursuit of its realization. When value is realized it becomes fact. So fact-value dichotomy is only apparent and for practical purposes only. Further we distinguish between value and disvalue. Within values again we distinguish between intrinsic and instrumental values, ultimate and proximate values and so forth. Consciousness of values and their planned and systematic realization is a unique feature of human life. There is an innate and instinctive necessity and urge in human beings to participate in the process of value-realization. No doubt human being is the highest product of the process of evolution, he is not the best product that has emerged so far or must have evolved. He is always conditioned by the feeling that he is missing something, lacking something and wanting something. He has the painful realization of his finitude and imperfection (*alpatva*) and dependent existence (*ārtatva*). He is also aware of the need to transcend his finitude and circumscription. Further, he has the unique capacity and capability to devise appropriate means and modalities for this transcendence. Quest for excellence leading to good quality of life has been the perennial human concern. It is not only prolongation of existence but also betterment of living that prompts all beings to carry out their day- to- day activities. Consciously or unconsciously, overtly or covertly, intentionally or instinctively value-pursuits are built in living beings. In fact it can be maintained that there is a built in *telos* or immanent teleology in the cosmic process. It is reflected and expressed in human beings in a more pronounced and systematic way. All human endeavors and all pursuits of culture and civilizations have been prompted by and directed towards this existential concern. The cultivation of arts and humanities, the development of science and technology, the undertaking of material production and its trade and commerce, the organization of human conduct, both individual and societal, and all manifestations of human potentialities have been stimulated by and engineered in this direction.

The traditional Indian concept of '*puruṣārtha*' is one of the prominent formulations of this concern for excellence and perfection. In the performance of

puruṣārtha there are three steps of knowledge of the goal (*sādhya* =achievable and desirable), of the adequate and conducive means (*sādhanā*) and of skillful employment of modalities (*itikartavyatā*). The basis of choice of goal is its appropriateness (*aucitya*). It is appropriate if it is conducive to individual and universal well-being (*artha* and not *anartha*), and it is realizable (not *asādhya*). The means has to be in accordance with the goal (*anukūla*). It should be available and accessible also (*upalabdha*). The modalities stand for proper knowledge and orderly and skillful employment of means (*upāyakauśala*) to realize the goal. Since the modalities have to be composite, it is necessary to know the different steps and their priority and posteriority (*paurvāparva*) while undertaking the performance. There is a quadruple principle underlying pursuit of *puruṣārtha*. It is *Jñāna-icchā-kriyā-phala* (knowledge-will-effort-result). All these four are to be properly harnessed in their symbiotic interrelationship. A *puruṣārtha* has to be collective and corporate enterprise. An isolated human individual never exists. He/she is a part and parcel of the total Reality and has no existence or meaning apart from this totality. There is reciprocal dependence, supportive co-existence, judicious cooperation and mutual caring and sharing. Of course, it is the individual who is the agent but this agency is possible only in a collectivity and therefore the motives and intentions of every act should be the well-being of the collectivity¹¹. Traditionally four *puruṣārthas* have been conceived in the Vedic tradition and they are by and large accepted in other traditions as well. They are *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. But logically there is no fixity about it. What is important is that a human person should lead a planned life with proper knowledge and pursuit of proximate and ultimate goals of life. For this there can be different patterns of theorizing but the four-fold traditional schema seems to be universally desirable. In the four-fold schema *dharma* is the foundation and guiding principle, *artha* and *kāma* are *preyas* (i.e. worldly goals for earthly well-being), and *mokṣa* is *niḥśreyas* (i.e. beyond the two). *Dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* are to be pursued in the empirical life, and they are therefore put under one head of *trivarga*. *Mokṣa* is both this worldly (*jīvanmukti*) and otherworldly and therefore it is distinguished as *apavarga*.

XI

Any meaningful consideration of value-realization has to be in the context of nature and essence of human existence. This is because human being is bestowed with the capacity of reflective awareness and ratiocinative discrimination. He alone can consciously pursue in a planned way the process of value-realization. He has the ability to transform himself and the surrounding nature to his advantage. So in this planning one has to understand and take into account human nature, human potentialities, human capabilities, human needs and aspirations. Moreover, its

¹¹The Gītā ideal of '*loka samgraha*' is the guiding spirit of all theorizing about *puruṣārtha*.

meaning and scope is to be understood both constitutively in terms of actual realization that is gradual and graded, and by evaluating in terms of positing the ideals and striving towards the realization of the same. Thus till its final realization perfection or mokṣā is not to be conceived as a position but as a normative process calling for constant evaluation; not as conquest but as a quest; not as one time endeavor but an ongoing enterprise until its complete fruition. The underlying idea is that life is meaningful in the pursuit of the ideal and not just in being satisfied with the actual. But this is not the denial of the actual for the pursuit of the ideal. It is, on the contrary, using the actual to realize the ideal. The ideal needs to be actualized and the actual should lead to the ideal.

There is another point that has to be emphasized in understanding meaning and scope of value-realization. It pertains to the human individual as well as the total cosmos. Since the two are intimately interrelated, interdependent and interpenetrating and thus constitute a single whole, one cannot attempt to realize it keeping in view an isolated individual, or society, or region, or age. It cannot be solitary or piecemeal. It has to be a global vision, a holistic approach, a corporate endeavor and a universal realization. This is the Vedic view which constitutes the foundation of Indian culture. In the course of history it has received various formulations, sometimes in a truncated and distorted form as well. There have been aberrations also and sages and saints have at all times cautioned and corrected us about it. Our awareness of values is always prescriptive. It is different from the descriptive awareness concerning facts. A description can be true or false or doubtful but the logic of prescription has another set of values. A prescription can be good or bad or indifferent. It may be conducive to well-being or harmful or of no effect. A description has to be local with the possibility of 'universalizability' but a prescription has to be global with the need of being applied to local situations. Accordingly the mode of knowing prescription cannot be the same as the mode of knowing the description. Of course both are to be grounded in experience but the nature of experience cannot be the same. The ideals are conceived in and spring from actual situation but their source is not sense experience.

Another point to be referred to is that norms are posited to be pursued (They are sādhyā and not asādhyā). In ideal situation they are to be practiced spontaneously as a matter of habit or by the force of conscience. That is why importance of value-education is accepted as it helps in cultivation of moral will. But more often than not because of moral infirmity built in human nature there is a need of external sanctions, social or political. That is why codes and laws are formulated. But this enforcement from outside is always feeble as moral weakness is ingrained in human nature. That is why there is greater need for moral education and constant vigilance. But it should not be overlooked that values are not to be taught but to be imbibed. There is always a gap between theory and practice and our endeavor should be to bridge it as far as possible. A moral norm may not be adhered to in its totality or fullness but this does not mean that it should be given up as impracticable or utopian. The distinction between *mahāvratā* and *aṇuvratā* in the Jaina tradition is a good guide in this regard. The mark of an ideal being actually perused is harmony between the inner and outer

reality of the agent, between inner feelings and outward behavior. But this cannot be a fool-proof criterion. Public vigilance helps in norm –following.

So far as the question of values in private life and public life is concerned, in a holistic and integral approach the public-private divide is not entertained. Values are to be posited and pursued for both the spheres and they are to be sought conjointly. Public life is more demonstrable and loss of values can be detected with greater ease. External sanctions can operate with greater force. But value-pursuit is a collective and corporate endeavor. It is not a single person enterprise. There has to be an all-round effort for this. It is physical-mental-spiritual exercise. It is a *yajña* to be performed by the collectivity and for the collectivity.¹² Quest for values, pursuit of values and realization of values have to be holistic and integral exercises. They have to pertain to different dimensions of human constitution, as for example, analyzed in the pañcakośa theory of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad.¹³ Each dimension of human existence is valuable and must be catered to in a balanced and graduated manner. This is the message of this Upaniṣad. There should not be lopsided endeavor, concentrating on one and excluding the rest. Similarly human existence is situated in multi-layered environment and all layers are to be catered. Human being exists in family, in social and natural surroundings. The Śāntipāṭha in the Upaniṣads refers to many such layers. Values pertain to each of these layers. The value schema should not be regarded as partite or divisible. All values in the schema are intertwined and possess inseparability. No one value can be realized without the rest. There is organic unity in the total Reality and this is reflected in value schema as well. In Classical Indian thought this organic understanding was built-in but now under the impact of western civilization we have neglected it. In our value considerations we have to go back to the classical thought if we are sincere and honest in our enterprise. We have talked a lot about values, particularly in the context of value-oriented education, without caring about the nature of Reality given to us in our concrete experience. The Reality we talk about is not the lived Reality but abstracted Reality, rationalized Reality and therefore we are far away from concrete Reality. It is high time that we shad away our bias against Classical thought, revisit Classical thought and do so in a positive and constructive frame of mind. The contemporary mind is looking for new intuitions, fresh insights and innovative thinking and Classical Indian Thought has the potentiality to provide the needed guidelines provided we understand it in its true spirits. The onus of responsibility for this guidance lies on young creative minds and it is hoped that they will prove to be worthy of this task.

¹²It is not ritual according to the Upaniṣads and the Gītā. It is performance of self-less action). This is the message of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. We have this cultural heritage available to us, and it is for us to look to it and be benefited by it.

¹³Taittirīyopaniṣad, Brahmānanda valli, Anuvāka 1-5.