

## THE METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLE IN THE *BHAGAVADGĪTĀ* 2.16

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*Abstract: A metaphysical principle is stated in Bhagavadgītā 2.16. Examining modern scholarly discussion of the two pairs of dichotomies, sat/asat and bhāva/abhāva involved in the principle, the original sources, and some of the traditional commentaries, the essay intends to show that in this principle, bhāva and abhāva are two mutually exclusive ontological categories, while sat and asat are neither mutually exclusive nor jointly exhaustive nor purely ontological categories. The correct translation of the verse appears to be as follows: "Neither being (bhāva) of non-ethical-non-eternal-non-actual (asataḥ) is found, nor non-being (abhāva) of ethical-eternal-actual (sataḥ) is found; the conclusion (antaḥ) of both of these [two] has been seen (dṛṣṭaḥ) verily by the seers of that-ness (tattvadarśibhiḥ)."*

### 1. Introduction

The primary aim of the present essay is to interpret the metaphysical principle stated in Bhagavadgītā 2.16: *nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ / ubhayor api dṛṣṭo 'ntas tv anayos tattvadarśibhiḥ //*

The semantic syntax of the verse is as follows: *na* (indeclinable particle); *asataḥ* (genitive singular noun *asat*); *vidyate* (3rd singular present indicative passive  $\sqrt{2}$  *vid*); *bhāvaḥ* (masculine nominative singular *bhāva*); *vidyate* (3rd singular present indicative passive  $\sqrt{2}$  *vid*); *sataḥ* (neuter genitive singular *sat*); *ubhayor* (masculine genitive dual *ubhaya*); *api* (indeclinable particle); *dṛṣṭaḥ* (neuter nominative singular *dṛṣṭa*); *antaḥ* (masculine nominative singular *anta*); *tu* (indeclinable particle); *anayor* (masculine genitive dual *ana*); *tattva* (noun without declension, part of *tatpuruṣa samāsa*); *darśibhiḥ* (masculine instrumental plural *darśi* part of *tatpuruṣa samāsa*). The *Bhagavadgītā* is presenting the subject matter of the *śruti* tradition, and its ideas are dependent on this tradition. Our conjecture regarding the two different distinctions *sat-asat* and *bhāva-abhāva* as employed in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16, which are derived from the *śruti* tradition, is that *bhāva* and *abhāva* are two mutually exclusive ontological categories, while *sat* and *asat* are neither mutually exclusive nor purely ontological categories, but ethico-ontological categories. So, the secondary aim is to provide textual support for our conjecture. The existing scholarly findings regarding the two distinctions do not appear to help in understanding *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16. The existing scholarly understanding of the verse, therefore, appears not to be adequate. Hence, the verse requires further interpretation.

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## 2. Halbfass' Discussion of Being in *Śruti* and Its Context

Our starting point is Halbfass's famous study of traditional Indian conception of Being, presented in a summary form in his essay entitled "On Being and What There Is: Indian Perspective on the Question of Being." This essay contains his observations on the idea of being and non-being as found in the *śruti* tradition. However, the question arises whether his understanding of Being and non-being can help of in interpreting *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16. He translates *sat* and *asat* as "being" and "non-being" (Halbfass 2017: 98-99) and also *bhāva* and *abhāva* as "being" (Ibid. 101) and "non-being" (Ibid: 106) respectively.

Whatever his characterization of being and non-being in Indian tradition (which he finds different from both Aristotelian and Heideggerian characterization, and also different from Quinian characterization), in his understanding, it appears that *sat-asat* and *bhāva-abhāva* are not two different distinctions but a single distinction with two designations, i.e., "being" has designations "*sat*" and "*bhava*" and "non-being" has designations "*asat*" and "*abhāva*." However, *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16 is using two different distinctions. The first line is not saying that being of the non-being is not found; non-being of the being is not found, as that would not be a significant metaphysical principle but only a tautology. Furthermore, Halbfass recommends translation of *sattā* as 'beingness,' "*beingness*, though an awkward expression, might be worth considering as a translation of *sattā*." (Ibid: 102) He also lumps *sattā* and *bhāva* together and translates them as "being." (Ibid: 101) This kind of translation will violate the Indian *Vyākaraṇa* tradition, which accepts Yāska's claim in Nirukta 1.1.1.1: "Verb has a predominance of being (*bhāva*); nouns have a predominance of *sat-ness* (*sattva*)."<sup>1</sup> This claim is clearly based on the distinction between *bhāva* and *sattva*, the latter deriving from *sat*, and hence *sattva* means 'sat-ness' whatever *sat* may mean.

### 2.1. Halbfass' First Finding: Absence of Ontology in Indian Tradition

Halbfass is primarily interested in distinguishing the discussion of being and non-being in Indian tradition from the discussion of these two ideas as "ontology" in the Western tradition, especially in Aristotle, Heidegger, and Quine. His finding is multifold.

Firstly, he finds, "the question of being, as an explicit theme, assigned to a specific philosophical discipline, is a symptomatically Western phenomenon." (Ibid. 98) This claim implies that there is no ontology in Indian tradition, "even though being (*sat*) is thematic in the oldest documents of Indian thought, in the Vedic and Upaniṣadic text...and it remains an important and recurrent topic in later traditions." (Ibid. 98) The reason for absence of ontology in Vedic tradition is that this discussion is "different from that kind of disciplinary tradition which we call ontology" in the West. (Ibid. 98) But this difference of Indian discussion from disciplinary discussions in the West is observed not only with respect to Western ontology but also Ethics and

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<sup>1</sup> bhāvapradhānamākhyātam / sattvapradhānāni nāmāni /

Epistemology too. The Indian tradition of discussion did not create such disciplinary boundaries even when it discussed good and bad conduct or issues of knowledge or perception; rather, the so-called ontological, epistemological, ethical issues are discussed intermingled with each other without separating into distinct disciplines. It has a hermeneutic implication, which is not realized by Western scholars of Classical Indian texts in general and by Halbfass in particular, which has created many misunderstandings as to how the various issues and concepts were discussed and shaped in Vedic tradition. The difference in the Western and Indian discussion is that the former adopted an analytic approach, while the latter adopted a synthetic, holistic approach. Unless one sees the Classical Indian discussion of any topic in its totality, one is likely to miss the concepts which are being shaped through the discussion even without using any term for it as it is yet to be formed fully to be named and yet in the totality of discussion it is visible that a concept is being shaped, which received a designation later in the literature. To anticipate, the idea of 'bhāva' was being shaped in R̥gveda 10.129 without using the terms, though using terms like 'sat' and 'asat,' which were available.

## 2.2. Halbfass' Second Finding: 'Being' not Thematized in the R̥gveda

Halbfass, having noticed the difference in the discussion of issues of being in Western and Indian tradition, says, "It would be out of place here to attempt any thorough clarification of the earliest, especially R̥gvedic usage of *sat* and *asat*, as we find them in the famous hymn X.129, or in X.72." (*Ibid*: 98). Then he states his second conclusion from his studies, "At any rate, it is obvious that *sat*, and *asat* in the R̥gveda does not mean 'being' versus 'nothing,' or 'existence' and 'non-existence' in any abstract sense." (*Ibid*: 98) On the face of it, what he is stating is correct, but its implication that 'being' is not thematized in 10.129 is not correct. He is following the western analytic approach and focusing only on the usage of *sat* and *asat* as it is present in 10.129 and other R̥gvedic mantras, but, it appears, he is unable to discern what the sūкта 10.129 as a whole is saying.

For the required discernment, one needs the synthetic, holistic thought, which the Vedic ṛṣis in their terminology called the *dhīh*, having which one becomes *dhīra* and one grasps the corresponding actuality *dhītih*. When we think holistically, then it becomes clear that some *being* is thematized in R̥gveda 10.129, which is termed *tadekaṃ* which is neither *sat* nor *asat*, and it is not *nothing* but *being*. Even though *tadekaṃ* is functioning as a name and hence according to the Indian *Vyākaraṇa* tradition, it is *sattvapradhāna*, but here *sattva* is abstracted away, by denying both *sat* as well as *asat*. That is to say, the ṛṣi is trying to conceptualize 'being', which is different from both *sat* and *asat*. This is also confirmed as an activity is ascribed to it using the verb *ānīt* (third-person singular present imperfect class 2 *parasmaipada* √an) in mantra (10.129.2). In the grammatical tradition adding *upasarga pra* to the verb, one expresses the same activity in its excellent form or manifest form. Hence verb *prānīt* designates the excellent or manifest form of activity, which is designated by the verb *ānīt*. That is to say, the being that is referred

to by *tadekam* is breathing without air (*ānīt avātaṃ*), the same activity in its excellent manifest form will become breathing with air (*prāṇīt vātaṃ*). Since a verb is applied to *tadekam*, as per the *Vyākaraṇa* tradition verb is *bhāvapradhāna*, it clearly confirms that what the ṛṣi in 10.129 is trying to conceptualize is *bhāva* ‘being’ distinct from *sat* and *asat*. The classical Indian tradition of interpretation of 10.129 clearly recognized that the *devatā* of the *Nāsadīya Sūkta* (10.129) is *bhāvavṛttaṃ* ‘rolling or revolving of being’<sup>2</sup> to which the *Vyākaraṇa* tradition conforms. Halbfass, it appears, has not been able to maintain the distinction between *sat* and *bhāva* as it was available in Ṛgveda 10.129.

Had Halbfass maintained the distinction between *sat* and *bhāva* he would have noticed that although it is true that *sat* and *asat* do not mean ‘being’ versus ‘nothing,’ that does not mean that the later distinction is not there in the classical Indian texts. In fact, it will become clear that *bhāva* and *abhāva* correspond to ‘being’ versus ‘nothing.’ There is one more distinction, which we will show in the passage below, i.e., the distinction of *asti* from both *sat* and *bhāva*. Had Halbfass maintained the distinction of *asti* from *sat* and *bhāva* he would have noticed that even though it is true that *sat* and *asat* do not mean ‘existence’ and ‘non-existence’, that does not mean that the later distinction is not there in the classical Indian texts. It will become clear that *asti* and *nāsti* correspond to ‘is (exists)’ and ‘is not (does not exist)’ and correspondingly *astitva* and lack of *astitva* correspond to ‘existence’ non-existence’ respectively. The failure to distinguish between *sat*, *bhāva*, and *asti* (*/astitva*) has prevented scholars from understanding much of the classical Indian literature.

### 2.3. Halbfass’ Third Finding: Reading of *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12-13

Thirdly, Halbfass finds, “The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* states that there is nothing else to be said or thought about *brahman* than the pure *is* (*asti*) alone (VI.12-13). In this and similar functions, ‘being’ is not merely, not even primarily, a theoretical and speculative notion.” (Halbfass 2017: 98). There appears to be a failure of understanding *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12-13<sup>3</sup> on the part of Halbfass when he made the above statement. Hume translates *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12-13 as: “Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can He be apprehended. How can he be comprehended Otherwise than by one’s saying ‘He is’? He can indeed be comprehended by the thought ‘He is’ (*asti*) and by [admitting] the real nature of both [his comprehensibility and

<sup>2</sup> *Brhaddevatā*, 2.120. Some of the hymns of the Ṛgveda, e.g., 10.129, are *bhāva vṛttāni*, cf. *Brhaddevatā*, 2.86, 7.123, 8.46 and 91; in 8.56 Ṛgveda 10.145 is called an *aupaniṣad bhāva vṛtta* hymn. *Vṛtta* also implies ‘circle’, ‘cycle’, ‘transformation,’ ‘appearance,’ ‘eventuality,’ ‘activity,’ etc. is from root √*vṛt* meaning ‘to move,’ ‘to revolve,’ ‘to roll,’ ‘to proceed’ etc., which root is present in *vartana*, *cakravartin* (one who sets rolling the [world-]wheel), and in *pravṛtti*, *nivṛtti*, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṃ śakyo na cakṣuṣā / astīti bruvato 'nyatra katham tad upalabhyate // astīty evopalabdavyas tattvabhāvena cobhayoḥ / astīty evopalabdhasya tattvabhāvaḥ prasīdati //*

incomprehensibility]. When he has been comprehended by the thought ‘, He is’ His real nature manifests itself.” (Hume 1921: 360) Olivelles translates it as: “Not by speech, not by the mind, not by sight can he be grasped. How else can that be perceived, other than by saying, “He is!” In just two ways can he be perceived: by saying that “He is.” By affirming he’s the real. To one who perceives him as “He is.” it becomes clear that he is real.” (Ollivelle 1998: 403) S. Sitarama Sastri translates as follows: “Not by speech, not by mind, not by the eye, can he be attained; except, in his case who says ‘He is,’ how can that be known. He should be known to exist and also as he really is. Of these two, to him who knows him to exist, his real nature becomes revealed.” (Sastri 1929: 95-96) The fundamental error appears in these translations because all the translations turn *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12-13 into a contradiction. Each one of the three translations says that he (*brahman*) cannot be apprehended/grasped/attained, and yet they have no hesitation in translating *astīti* (*asti iti*) as ‘He is’ which is the same as apprehending/grasping/attaining *him* (*brahman*) by speech and thought. It is significant that the agent (*kartṛ*) of the verb *asti* is not mentioned in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12-13. No doubt interpretation and translation have to supply the implied agent, but that agent cannot be *brahman*, and hence *he cannot be referred here by he/it, etc.*, in the translation. After it has been declared that *brahman* cannot be apprehended/grasped/attained by speech, mind, and eyes in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12ab, what the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12 bc is saying is that how can he be comprehended otherwise than by one’s saying ‘[something] is’ or ‘[something] exists’, where something can be anything in the world.

The implication is that by directly referring to *brahman* *one cannot say* that he exists, but he is comprehended when one says of anything in the world that it exists because *brahman* is in everything and everything is in *brahman*. This circular ontological structure of *brahman/puruṣa/ātman* is a well-known doctrine of Upaniṣads.<sup>4</sup> Hence, when we faithfully keep in mind faithfully the semantic syntax of

<sup>4</sup> *Īsopaniṣad* (*Kāṇva*) 6: *yas tu sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmany evānupaśyati | sarvabhūteṣu cātmanaṃ tato na vijugupsate ||* “Who however sees all existents in the self and the self in all existents – thereupon from him it (the One) does not strive to hide itself (= to him it makes itself available or makes itself self-evident).” *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.14.4: *sarvakarmā sarvakāmaḥ sarvagandhaḥ sarvarasaḥ sarvam idam abhyatto vākyanādarah | eṣa ma ātmā antarahṛdaye | etad brahma | etam itaḥ pretyābhisambhavitā asmīti yasya syād addhā na vicikitsā asti | iti ha smāha śāṅḍilyaḥ ||* “Having all actions, having all desires, having all odours, having all tastes, pervading all this, without speech, without confusion, – this myself within the heart, is that *Brahman*. I shall attain it, on departing from the world. Verily, for one who has this faith, there exists no doubt. Thus, said *Śāṅḍilya* – *yea Śāṅḍilya*.” The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (*Mādhyandina*) 4.4.18: *yadaitam anupaśyaty atmānaṃ devam anjasā / īśānaṃ bhūtabhavyasya na tadā vicikitsati ||* “When a man directly realizes this effulgent Self, the Sovereign Lord of all that has been and will be, then he does not doubt.” The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (*Kāṇva*) 4.4.23; *Mādhyandina* 4.4.28): *tasmād evaṃvid...ātmany evātmānaṃ paśyati / sarvam ātmānaṃ paśyati ... avicikitsa brāhmaṇo bhavati /* “Therefore, one who knows thus...sees the self in his self, and sees the self as all...becomes one, who does not doubt *Brahman*.” Following

the Sanskrit in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12-13, it becomes clear that when we say of anything in the world that it is or that it exists, then being of that-ness of both the thing spoken of and *brahman* appears. Here one must keep in mind that in *Vyākaraṇa* tradition, *asti* is a *bhāvavikāra* ‘mode of being’ not *bhāva* ‘being.’<sup>5</sup> It is precise because *asti* is a *bhāvavikāra* that both *bhāva* and *vikāra* appear together, never one without the other and hence *bhāva* indicates *brahman*, while *vikāra* indicates the specific form of *brahman* as that thing whose existence is asserted. So Halbfass and other scholars have failed to grasp the subtle distinction that is introduced in the Vedic ethico-ontology between *sat* and *bhāva*, and *bhāva* (being) and *bhāvavikāra* (mode of being) [*asti* ‘is’ or ‘exists’]. Hence the claim of Halbfass that it can be said about *brahman* that it ‘exists’ or it ‘is’, cannot be taken as correct.

#### 2.4. Halbfass’ Fourth Finding: *Being* as a Soteriological Goal

Fourthly, Halbfass claims, “... ‘being’ is not merely, not even primarily, a theoretical and speculative notion. It always designates a soteriological goal; it designates the goal of self-realization: to know being means to coincide with being, which is always present as one’s true potential.” (Halbfass 2017: 98-99) He quotes *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.3.28: “From non-being [*asat*] lead me to being [*sat*]; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to immortality.”<sup>6</sup> He adds the comment, “the text itself goes on to tell us that ‘being’ in this context is the same as ‘light’ and ‘immortality.’” (Halbfass 2017: 99) However, the gloss on *sat* given *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.3.28 is to be utilized cautiously. The passage makes three prayers; the first is a prayer for ethical progress from *asat* to *sat*, the

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*Upaniṣads* *Bhagavadgītā* 6.29-30 states: *sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṃ sarvabhūtāni cātmani / īkṣate yogayuktātmā sarvatra samadarśanaḥ // yo māṃ paśyati sarvatra sarvaṃ ca mayi paśyati / tasyāhaṃ na praṇaśyāmi sa ca me na praṇaśyati //* “The Self-abiding in all existents, and all existents (abiding) in the Self, sees he whose self has been harnessed by Yoga, who sees the same everywhere. He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, for him I do not get destroyed, nor for Me does he get destroyed.”

<sup>5</sup> Yāska’s *Nirukta* 1.2: *ṣaḍbhāvavikārā bhavantīti vārṣyāyaṇiḥ / jāyate’sti vipariṇamate vardhate’pakṣyate vinaśyātīti /* “According to *Vārṣyāyaṇi*, there are six modifications of being: takes birth, exists, transforms, grows, decays, and gets destroyed.” Saunaka’s *Bṛhaddevatā* ii.121: *bhāvapradhānamākhyātaṃ ṣaḍvikārā bhavanti te / janmāstīti vaṃ parīṇāmo vṛddhirhānaṃ vināśanam //* “The verb-root (*ākhyāta*) has been (*bhāva*) as predominant (*pradhāna*). There are these six modifications (*vikārā*): genesis (*janma*), existence (*astīti vaṃ*), transformation (*parīṇāmaḥ*), growth (*vṛddhiḥ*), decline (*hānaṃ*), destruction (*vināśanam*).” Patañjali in his *Mahābhāṣya* in the context of commenting on Pāṇini Sūtra: *bhūvādayo dhātavaḥ // Aṣṭādhyāyī* 1.3.1 // writes: *ṣaṭ bhāvavikārāḥ iti ha sma āha bhagavān vārṣyāyaṇiḥ: jāyate asti vipariṇamate vardhate apakṣyate vinaśyati iti /* “The revered *Vārṣyāyaṇi* said, ‘Six are the modifications of being (*bhāvavikārāḥ*): ‘is born, exists, transforms, grows, decays, and gets destroyed’.”

<sup>6</sup> *asato mā sad gamaya, tamaso mā jyotir gamaya, mṛtyor māmṛtaṃ gamaya /*



second is an epistemological prayer for progress from darkness to light (i.e., it is a prayer for enlightenment), and the third is an ontological prayer for progress from the world of mortality to the world of immortality. After making the three distinct prayers, the gloss merely says that these three signs of progress are united as single progress, inseparable, even though distinguishable from each other. The note of Halbfass here refers to Ṛgveda 10.129.2: “neither death (*mṛtyu*) nor immortal alive [or immortal] (*amṛta*) existed”<sup>7</sup>. As argued above, Halbfass, it appears, has failed to notice that in Ṛgveda 10.129 *bhāva*, without naming it, is being distinguished from *sat* and also from *amṛta* (not-dead/alive/ immortal) as both *mṛtyu* ‘death’ and *amṛta* do not characterize being (*bhāva*) [*tadekam*]. That is to say there is no *abhāva* even if neither *sat* nor *asat*, neither *mṛtyu* nor *amṛta* characterize it, neither any temporality in the form of distinction and division of time like day and night characterizes it, and not even if neither deities nor dust nor space existed. So, the translation of Halbfass appears to be misleading as he uses the term ‘being’, which represents *bhāva* rather than *sat*. The prayer of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.3.28 is that one be led from *asat* to *sat*, from darkness to light, from mortality to immortality. However, it is not a prayer that one be led from *abhāva* (non-being) to *bhāva* (being), because all movement and activity can take place with *bhāva* and not with *abhāva*, and that is the significance of the claim: “being predominates in the verb.” (*bhāvapradhānamākhyātam*) So being is not a soteriological goal or telos, as it is the very presupposition of any movement towards goal or without goal, but it is *sat* distinct from *bhāva* (being) that is the soteriological goal. Hence the comment of Halbfass that “Connotations of truth, purity, and goodness quite naturally accompany such understanding of being,” is erroneous with respect to *bhāva* (being), which is not a goal, but it is true with respect to *sat*, which is an ethico-ontological category different from the purely ontological category *bhāva* “being.”

#### 2.5. Halbfass’ Fifth Finding: Absence of Systematic Terminology of Being

Lastly, Halbfass complains, “There is no systematically developed terminology of being in the Upaniṣads, and the applicability of *sat* to *brahman* and the absolute in its primeval unity often remains ambiguous and is sometimes explicitly disputed, in accordance with the transontological language of Ṛgveda X.129 and with an old dispute over the priority of *sat* over *asat* which was mentioned earlier. It is obvious that in these and similar discussions, the question of unity takes precedence over the question of being.” (Halbfass 2017: 99) In these remarks, he reveals not only his state of understanding of the Śruti literature but also the state of understanding of the same of most of modern Indian and Western scholars.

This state of understanding can be expressed in words borrowed from Berkeley: They “have first raised a dust, and then complain, we cannot see.” (Berkeley 1949: 26)

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<sup>7</sup> na mṛtyur āsīd amṛtaṃ na...

The inability to see clearly the systematic terminology of *bhāva / abhāva*, *sat / asat*, and *asti / nāsti*, the three pairs of distinctions being different from each other, is because the modern scholars have raised dust storm for themselves of their own discussion. Now with dust in their eyes, they cannot see the multiple distinctions made in the Śruti literature and complain of the absence of developed and systematic terminology to discuss ontological issues. This dust storm will clear later in this essay.

### 3. Functioning of Binaries in the Vedic Thinking

However, modern thought fails to understand the vocabulary of Vedic literature because of multiple reasons. One of the most important reasons has to do with the difference in the functioning of the binaries in Vedic thinking and Modern thought. All thinking is in binaries. Whether it is Vedic thinking or modern thought, both require binaries. Nevertheless, the binaries emerge and function differently in Vedic thinking and modern thought.

The emergent binaries in the classical Indian thinking are guided by *svātantrya śakti* defined by Abhinavagupta in *Īśvara Pratyabhijñā Vimarśinī* 1.1.2: “and the power of own thread/warp of it [of the self] is separating the non-separate and undoing by inner connection the separation of what is separated....”<sup>8</sup> Or to put differently, “and its [i.e., of the self] *svātantrya* [power of own thread/warp] is: bringing separation in the non-separate [which at the same time remains fundamentally non-separate] and undoing by inner connection the separation of what is separated [which in a sense appears separated].” What it means is that binaries emerge in the thread of thinking of the self because the thread of thinking to be extended has to distinguish itself from itself, i.e., binaries emerge, but it cannot be broken as it is one thread that is extended and hence the distinguished items, i.e., the binaries, are internally connected or un-separated. It implies that none of the two distinguished items of any of the emergent binaries is to be discarded; rather, both remain united in thinking as it is required for the expression of self in the form of the thread of thinking, which of course further gets distinguished and kept united as the thread of action and thread of speech. Some of the most important binaries are *sat-asat*, *hava-abhāva*, *vidyā-avidyā*, *para-apara*, *parā-aparā* and *vidvān-avidvān*, etc.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, in modern thought, the binaries are created in thought guided by a desire to prefer one item over the other of each binary, or to discard one item in favor of the other in each of the binaries, and examples of some of the most important binaries of modern thought are true/false, real/unreal, good/bad, and right/wrong, etc.

The unconscious or un-thought habit of modern thought makes us think that the binaries function in the same way in the classical Indian thinking as they do in modern thought. So, when we see the distinction of *sat* and *asat* in classical Indian

<sup>8</sup> *svātantryam ca asya [ātmano] bhede bhedanam bhedite ca antaranusamdhānena abhedanam /*

<sup>9</sup> The triadic distinctions, made in the Śruti tradition also have to be understood as based on binaries.



thinking, we jump to the conclusion that *sat* is preferred over *asat*. That is modern thought, but that is not how Vedic thinking treated the binaries.

The indication of how the binaries is to function was given in the *Ṛgveda* itself when in Nāsadiya Sūkta (*Ṛgveda* 10.129.4): “The sages by their seminal thought searching in their heart found the relation of the *sat* with the *asat*.”<sup>10</sup> If we examine the function of this distinction in the Vedic literature, it becomes clear that *sat* and *asat* are related such that *sat* manifests only through *asat* and *asat* has no being without manifesting *sat*. Similarly, *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.3.6 says regarding the binary *satyam-anṛtam*: “Therefore he should give just at the proper time, and at other times he should not give. This way he unites the *satya* and *anṛta*. From their union he thrives and increases.”<sup>11</sup> Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavadgītā* 9.19: ‘and I am *sat* and *asat*’.<sup>12</sup> The quoted statements from the classical Indian literature are very significant statements, but these appear to be stating contradictions to a modern mind.

The binaries constitute the self (*ātmā*), which is the collective self, which is the thinker in all, at *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.5. The passage presents self (*ātmā*) as – “made of light and lightless, made of desire and the desire-less, made of anger and anger-less, made of *dharma* and *adharmā*, made of everything.”<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, to take another example, the Vedic thought does not favor *vidyā* over *avidyā* to advocate only the former and advocate the latter’s abandonment. The issue of how *vidyā* and *avidyā* were to function was discussed extensively in the *Īśa Upaniṣad*. The discussion begins with the claim of *Īśopaniṣad Kāṇva* 9; *Mādhyandina* 12: “Into blind darkness do enter who worship *avidyā*, into an even greater darkness than this [do enter] who are engrossed in *vidyā*.”<sup>14</sup> What it means is if only one of the two – *vidyā* and *avidyā* – is preferred, then one is groping in the dark. This claim was so important that it occurs verbatim in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (*Kāṇva* 4.4.10). The argument is elaborated in *Īśopaniṣad Kāṇva* 10; *Mādhyandina* 13: “[They] speak by indeed other than the *vidyā*, [they] speak by other than *avidyā*. Thus, we heard from men of holistic vision who spoke to us about this.”<sup>15</sup> What the *ṛṣi* is telling is that some speak by that which is other than *vidyā*, i.e., they prefer *avidyā*. While others speak by that which is other than *avidyā*, i.e., they prefer *vidyā*. The *ṛṣis* have heard from their predecessors, who had the holistic vision, about both kinds of speakers. Moreover, the conclusion is stated in *Īśopaniṣad Kāṇva* 11; *Mādhyandina* 14: “*vidyā* and *avidyā* – who has feelingly knowledgeable resolved both these as [belonging] together, having crossed

<sup>10</sup> sato bandhum asati nir avindan hṛdi pratīṣyā kavayo manīṣā //

<sup>11</sup> tasmāt kāla eva dadyāt kāle na dadyāt tat satyānrte mithunīkaroti tayor mithunāt prajāyate bhūyān bhavati

<sup>12</sup> sad asac cāham

<sup>13</sup> tejomayo 'tejomayaḥ kāmamayo 'kāmamayaḥ krodhamayo 'krodhamayo dharmamayo 'dharmamayaḥ sarvamayaḥ

<sup>14</sup> andhaṃ tamaḥ praviśanti ye 'vidyām upāsate / tato bhūya iva te tamo ya uvidyāyām ratāḥ //

<sup>15</sup> anyad evāhur vidyāyānyad āhur avidyāyā | iti śūsruma dhīrāṇām ye nas tad vicacakṣire //

death by *avidyā*, he enjoys life (or immortality) by *vidyā*.<sup>16</sup> The conclusion of *ṛṣi* was that both functions together in tandem, and none can be discarded or preferred over the other. *Maitri Upaniṣad* 7.9 also agrees with it: “*vidyā and avidyā* – who has feelingly knowledgeable resolved both these as [belonging] together, having crossed death by *avidyā*, he enjoys life (or immortality) by *vidyā*. Those who dwell enwrapped in the midst of *avidyā*, but fancy themselves as wise and learned, go round and round, hurrying hither and thither deluded, like the blind led by the blind.”<sup>17</sup> So, even the binary of *vidyā* and *avidyā* was accepted in the Vedic literature as belonging together; we find that the advocacy was not of preference of one over the other, rather the advocacy was that of acceptance of both as both functions together in tandem. However, all modern commentators think that the Vedas prefer *vidyā* over *avidyā* and translate the two words respectively as knowledge and ignorance (or nescience), implying their misunderstood status vis a vis each other. *Bhagavadgītā* was following the *Upaniṣads* and *Īśa Upaniṣad* more closely.

One may object that I am relating the unrelated texts, i.e., relating *Īśa Upaniṣad* to the *Bhagavadgītā* and interpreting the latter by the former. The reply is that it is well known that *Īśa Upaniṣad* and the *Bhagavadgītā* are related texts. There are multiple points of contact between the two texts.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *vidyām cāvidyām ca yas tad vedobhayam saha | avidyayā mrtyum tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute ||*

<sup>17</sup> *vidyām cāvidyām ca yas tad vedobhayam saha | avidyayā mrtyum tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam aśnute||avidyāyāmantare veṣṭyamānāḥ svayam dhīraḥ paṇḍitaḥ manyamānāḥ/dandramyamānāḥ pariyaṅti mūḍhā andhenaiva nīyamānā yathāndhāḥ //*

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Agarwala (2016a). However, let the author mention just one point of contact between the two texts. *Īśa Upaniṣad* 7 says: *yasmin sarvāṇi bhūtāny ātmaivābhūd vijānataḥ | tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka ekatvam anupaśyataḥ ||* “One who has knowledgeable resolve of action, in whom all existents have verily become the self: one who constantly beholds oneness, what delusion, what sorrow can be there?” In the third quarter of the mantra: *Tatra ko mohaḥ kaḥ śoka* “there what delusion/infatuation, what sorrow can be?” is a rhetorical question that contains its own answer that there can be no delusion/infatuation or sorrow. The reasoning is as follows: The man in whom all existents have verily become the self necessarily constantly beholds oneness, which implies through indubitability and self-evidence of being of the institution as a person that he has the knowledgeable resolve of action, i.e., institutional action. From this follows logically that he is not deluded by the particular multiplicity inherent in the manifestation of the One Institutional Self, who has appeared for the time being with the garment of a specific multiplicity. He cannot accept the priority of this garment of One Institutional Self over another garment with a different multiplicity. He gives priority to the oneness or unity of the Institutional Self over his changing garments. The man under consideration also on the same presuppositions is not infatuated by the specific element or elements in the robe of the One Institutional Self, for he is already knowledgeable resolved for institutional action, the action required by the institutional self, and the infatuation for the specific item or items on the robe of the Institutional Self cannot motivate him to act. So, even if the institutional action he is resolved to perform may lead to the elimination of some element or elements from the present garment of the Institutional Self, he does not grieve for these, nor

#### 4. A Problematic Hermeneutics

The systematic relationship between two pairs of distinctions, i.e., *sat/asat* and *bhāva/abhāva*, which was accepted but not stated explicitly in the Śruti literature, was clearly stated for the first time explicitly in Bhagavadgita 2.16. Earlier, the scholars have raised a dust storm to have dust in the eyes to complain about lack of clarity regarding the binaries in classical Indian thought. Let the author illustrate the point of how the dust is raised. Halbfass, while claiming that being is satoriological goal as to know being means to coincide with being, refers to Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.6.1.<sup>19</sup> Halbfass has not given his translation of this passage. So let us examine Hume's translation as an example of Western Understanding of this passage: "Non-existent (*a-sat*) himself does one become, if he knows that Brahma is non-existent. If one knows that Brahma exists, such a one people thereby know as existent." (Hume 1921: 286) That this is the Western understanding is also confirmed by Olivele's translation of the passage: "If a man thinks '*Brahman* is the nonexistent,' he becomes himself nonexistent! If a man thinks '*Brahman* is the existent,'" people then know him to be existent." (Ollivelle 1998: 305) The kind of understanding that is exhibited in both translations turns what is said in Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.6.1 into a blatant falsehood. No one can become existent or nonexistent by simply believing *brahman* to be existent or nonexistent respectively. It may be noted that *brahman* is neither existent nor nonexistent in Śruti literature as it was made clear in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12-13, because neither one can say of it *asti* nor *nāsti*, because both *asti* and *nāsti* are *bhāva vikāras*, while *brahman* has *bhāva* and there is no *abhāva* of it. But the Śruti literature recognizes two forms of *brahman*, i.e., *sat* and *asat* in words of Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.6.3<sup>20</sup> where it is clear that *satyaṃ* and *anṛtaṃ* are ethico-ontological categories. In the words of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 2.3.1<sup>21</sup> they are referred to as *martya* and *amṛta*, which when read together with Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.3.28<sup>22</sup>, clearly indicate *asat* and *sat* form of *Brahman*, which again indicates two different ethico-ontological forms of *Brahman*. So, the misunderstanding leading to mistranslation has

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can he have sorrow for impending removal of these from the garment of the Institutional Self. Since the reasoning is correct, the mantra in reverse implies that if a man suffers from *moha* "delusion/infatuation" and *śoka* "grief/sorrow," as was the case with Arjuna at the beginning of the Great War, then neither in him, all existents have verily become the Institutional Self nor does he constantly behold the unity and oneness of the Institutional Self. Hence, Arjuna has imparted the knowledgeable resolve of the Unity and Oneness of the Institutional Person, which is Viṣṇu- Nārāyaṇa, by Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā*. That is to say, the entire argument of the *Bhagavadgītā* is structured based on *Īśa Upaniṣad* 7.

<sup>19</sup> asanneva sa bhavati, asat brahmeti veda cet <sup>[SEP]</sup> asti brahmeti ced veda, santam enaṃ tato viduḥ | quoted without translation by Halbfass. p.108 fn. 11.

<sup>20</sup> satyaṃ ca anṛtaṃ [=asatyaṃ] ca

<sup>21</sup> martyaṃ cāmṛtaṃ ca

<sup>22</sup> asato mā sad gamaya... mṛtyor māmṛtaṃ gamaya

prevented modern scholars from seeing the systematic use of categories like *sat*, *bhāva*, and *asti* (*astitva*). Hence what Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.6.1 is saying is that in whatever ethical form one conceives *Brahman* to be, he acquires that ethical form in his being.

The hermeneutics employed in the discussion of modern scholars is problematic. The tradition of exegesis has not accepted any contradiction or absence of unity of thought developed in the Śruti literature despite seeming contradictory positions being held in different parts of the Śruti literature. The seeing of contradictory positions in the disputations presented in Śruti literature is a modern phenomenon. But according to the classical rhetoric, even when the classical disputants did explicitly reject one in favor of the other, both the ideas were allowed to stand, both have to be accepted as Śruti and the hermeneutic requirement is that both be harmonized in the holistic thought without giving more weight to one over the other. Hence in Śruti all three positions with respect to origin are allowed to stand with equal footing: R̥gveda 10.129.1, where the origin is from neither *sat* nor *asat*; Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.6.1 along with R̥gveda 10.72.2-3 where the origin is from *asat*, and Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.2.1-2 where the origin is from *sat*.

Halbfass quotes (Halbfass 2017: 98) Hume’s translation of Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.2.1-2.<sup>23</sup> Hume’s translation is as follows: “In the beginning, my dear, this world was just Being (*sat*), one only, without a second. To be sure, some people say: “In the beginning this world was just Non-being (*a-sat*), one only, without a second; from that Non-being Being was produced.” But verily, my dear, whence could this be?... How from Non-being could Being be produced? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this world was just Being, one only, without a second.” (Hume 1921: 241) Halbfass comments on the passage: “The text itself indicates that it is preceded by earlier discussions and speculations about being and non-being. Moreover, the theory of the origination of being from non-being, to which it explicitly refers, is, in fact, found not only in Upaniṣads, but also in the Brāhmaṇa, and even in the R̥gveda itself.” The earlier discussion he is referring to is in Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.19.1, Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7.1, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.2.1, Satapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.1.1.1, and R̥gveda 10.72.2-3. (*Ibid*: 108 fn. 8)

However, in the essay of his under consideration, Halbfass fails to throw much light on the supposed opposition between Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.2.1-2 and the so-called earlier discussion. It is doubtful if all the discussion he refers to as earlier to Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.19.1 is actually earlier. For Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7.1 one cannot say with certainty that it is earlier to Chāndogya Upaniṣad. Stephen Phillips suggests that Taittirīya Upaniṣad was likely to be one of the early Upaniṣads, composed in the 1st half of 1st millennium BCE, after Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya,

<sup>23</sup> sadeva somyedamagra āsīdekamevādvitīyam/taddhaika āhurasadevedamagra āsīdekamevādvitīyam tasmādasataḥ sajjāyata//kutastu khalu somyevam syātīti hovāca kathamasataḥ sajjāyeteti / sattveva somyedamagra āsīdekamevādvitīyam //

and Īśa, but before Aitareya, Kauṣītaka, Kena, Kaṭha, Māṇḍūkya, Praśna, Śvetāśvatara, and Maitri Upaniṣads, as well as before the earliest Buddhist Pali and Jaina canons. (Phillips 2009: Chapter 1) Ranade shares the view of Phillips in chronologically sequencing Taittirīya Upaniṣad with respect to other Upaniṣads. (Ranade 1926: 13-18) Paul Deussen (Deussen 1908: 22-26) and Winternitz, (Winternitz 2010) hold a similar view as that of Phillips but place Taittirīya before Īśa Upaniṣad, but after Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad and Chāndogya Upaniṣad. So, one can say that the question of priority between *sat* and *asat* continued to be discussed even after Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.2.1-2 and both views, i.e., the priority of *asat* over *sat* and also the priority of *sat* over *asat*, are now part of the Śruti without any contradiction, even though the former view continued to be accepted more often from Ṛgveda to Taittirīya Upaniṣad. Halbfass, in his essay under consideration, did not examine this discussion to determine the relation of the two *sat* and *asat*. But we must investigate this discussion for determining the relation of *sat* and *asat* as conceived in the Śruti, as it has developed a very systematic understanding of the distinction between *sat* and *asat*.

##### 5. *Sat* and *Asat* in the Śruti

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.1.1.1 said: “Verily, in the beginning there was here the *asat*. As to this they say, ‘What was that *asat*?’ The *ṛṣis*, assuredly, it is they that were the *asat*. As to this they say, ‘who were these *ṛṣis*?’ Certainly, life breaths were the *ṛṣis*. First of all, by desire (*icchā*), labour (*śrama*) and intensification (*tapa*) they moved, hence, they were called the *ṛṣis*.”<sup>24</sup> In this passage *asat* is an ethico-ontological category without any pejorative sense. Not only the non-pejorative use of *asat*, but also non-exclusivity of both *sat*, and *asat* is accepted when in Ṛgveda 10.72.3 it is said ‘in the first age of deities *sat* was born of *asat*’<sup>25</sup>. What is stated in Ṛgveda 10.72.3 repeats the point stated in Ṛgveda 10.72.2: “in an earlier age of deities, *sat* was born of *asat*.”<sup>26</sup> So it is emphasized that neither *asat* is a pejorative category nor *sat* and *asat* are mutually exclusive categories.

Now we must reconcile Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.2.1-2, which is quoted earlier, with Ṛgveda 10.72.2-3, but also Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3.19.1: “In the beginning this world was merely non-being. It was existent,”<sup>27</sup> and also with Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7: “In the beginning, verily, this [world] was non-existent. Therefrom, verily, Being (*sat*) was produced.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> asadvā idamagra āsīt | tadāhuḥ kiṃ tadasadāsīdityṛṣayo vāva te gre sadāsīttadāhuḥ ke ta ṛṣaya itī prāṇā vā ta ṛṣayaste yatpurāsmātsarvasmādidamicchantāḥ śrameṇa tapasārīṣamstasmādrṣayah

<sup>25</sup> devānām yuge prathame’sataḥ sad ajāyata

<sup>26</sup> devānām pūrve yuge ’sataḥ sad ajāyata

<sup>27</sup> asad evedam agra āsīt / tat sad āsīt / translated by Hume: p.214.

<sup>28</sup> asadvā idamagra āsītato vā sadjāyata/ translated by Hume: p. 287.

### 5.1. *Sat* Cognized through *Asat* and *Asat* Ontologically Grounded on *Sat*

The claim, ‘*Sat* was born of *asat*,’ is just like ‘*Dakṣa* was born of *Aditi*, and afterwards *Aditi* was born of *Dakṣa*’<sup>29</sup> in Ṛgveda 10.72.4, which indicates mutual or reciprocal logical distinction but not any temporal birth of one from another. This is the import of Ṛgveda 10.129.1 that the beginning is when the distinction of *sat* and *asat* was not there, and in 10.129.4 when the poets searched their heart with fecund thought, they spotted *sat* and *asat* with their mutual distinction and relation, i.e., spotted the distinction between the two without separation of the two from each other. In this mutual and reciprocal distinction of *sat* and *asat* from each other, the two are still related with each other in two ways: one indicated by Ṛgveda 10.72.2-3, etc. and the other indicated by *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI.2.1-2.

In Ṛgveda 10.72.2 -3 etc. the emergence of *sat* from *asat* indicates epistemic relation, i.e., *asat* is the *ratio cognoscendi* of *sat* in the sense that *sat* is grasped through the reason of cognition of *asat*, while *asat* is cognized independently of *sat*. In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI.2.1-2 priority of *sat* over *asat* is ontological, i.e., the *ratio essendi* of *asat* is *sat* in the sense that *asat* independently has no being and therefore, *asat* is essentially grounded on *sat*, while *sat* independently has being.

The epistemic dependency of *sat* on *asat* and ontological dependency of *asat* on *sat* indicates that in manifestation although *sat* and *asat* are distinguished, *sat* and *asat* always remain related together as claimed in Ṛgveda10.129.4 “the *sat* [is] in kinship with *asat*,”<sup>30</sup> but when there is no manifestation as in Ṛgveda10.129.1-2 *sat* and *asat* are not distinguished just as day and night were not distinguished in 10.129.2 and hence neither *sat* nor *asat* was manifested. Similarly, Aitareya Āraṇyaka 2.3.6 says regarding the binary *satyam-anṛtam [=asatyam]*: “Therefore he should give just at the proper time, and at other times he should not give. This way he unites the *satya* and *anṛta*. From their union he thrives and increases.”<sup>31</sup> In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.1.1, life breaths are declared to be *asat* because *sat* is that in which life breaths are established, and life breaths are not established in life breaths. In general, *asat* is that which is not established/grounded/founded in itself ontologically. *Sat* is that which in itself establishes / grounds / founds *asat* ontologically. However, the significance of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.1.1 in making *asat prāṇa* stand at the beginning is making an epistemological statement that *ṛṣi prāṇa* were the first to make an epistemic move to become *mantra dṛṣṭā*. That is the reason at the end of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.1.1 the following words are present: ‘he is thought of: by his power [of senses] (*indriya*), since he kindled (*indh*), he is the kindler (*indhā*): the kindler indeed,’<sup>32</sup> and 6.1.1.2 states: “This same vital air in the midst doubtless is Indra. He,

<sup>29</sup> aditer dakṣo ajāyata dakṣād v aditiḥ pari

<sup>30</sup> sato bandhum asati

<sup>31</sup> *tasmāt kāla eva dadyāt kāle na dadyāt tat satyānṛte mithunīkaroti tayor mithunāt prajāyate bhūyān bhavati*

<sup>32</sup> dhyata indriyenainddha yadainddha tasmāindha indho ha vai tam //



by his power (*indriya*), kindled those (other) vital airs from the midst; and inasmuch as he kindled (*indh*), he is the kindler (*indhā*): the kindler indeed,--him they call 'Indra' mystically (secretly), for the gods love the mystic (secret). They (the vital airs), being kindled, created seven separate persons (*puruṣa*)."<sup>33</sup> So, the context in which *asat* is, in the beginning, is epistemico-ontic context and not a purely ontic context. It also can be stated that when the context is ontic, then *sat* is in the beginning.

### 5.2. Ethical Epistemology and Ontology of Śruti

In Śruti, both epistemology and ontology are ethical as testified by the prayer in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.3.28 and as Halbfass discerned the soteriological value of *sat*. So, both *sat*, and *asat* are two aspects of the same ethical *actuality*, which is not an ethically neutral reality. The Śruti tradition does not admit the modern conception of ethically neutral reality consisting of substances investigated by modern science. For the present essay, the distinction between 'actuality' and 'reality' is important. Actuality is not a substance but something with the power of action and can play various roles in action. However, reality consists of things or matter (Latin *res*). When Nirukta declares '*Sattva* predominates in names'<sup>34</sup> it is saying that in names, *sattva* (*sat*-ness) is predominant, it means name can play various *kāraka* roles in the action or the main thing in names is their capacity to participate as various *karakas* in the completion of the action. So, names in classical Indian tradition do not designate something 'real' as understood in Western thought but that which is *actual*, as explained above. So *sat* in the classical Indian tradition means 'ethical-actual' and *asat* means 'non-ethical-non-actual'. However, there is one more aspect to *sat* which cannot be dealt with in this essay, which became prominent in later Indian writings, and that aspect is eternity or timelessness. *Sat* is eternal, while *asat* is temporal in the sense that it is temporary or ephemeral. So, the full meaning of *sat* is "ethical-actual-eternal (timeless)," and *asat* is "non-ethical-non-actual-non-eternal (temporal)." In *sat* and *asat* the respective triad of conceptions is rolled into one conception.

6. *Bhāva* and *Abhāva* in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad  
Now having analyzed the meaning of *sat* and *asat*, let us study *bhāva* and *abhāva* in the Śruti literature. The expressions *bhāva* and *abhāva* do not occur in any of the *saṃhitās* even though the two ideas were the information of the early part of the history of Śruti. These two expressions, to the best of the author's knowledge, appear together for the first time in Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 5.14.<sup>35</sup>

Hume's translation of the passage is as follows: "Him who is to be apprehended in existence, who is called 'incorporeal', the maker of existence (*bhāva*) and non-

<sup>33</sup> sa yo yam madhye prāṇaḥ / eṣa evendrastāneṣa prāṇānmaindra ityācakṣate paro 'kṣam paro 'kṣakāmā hi devāta iddhāḥ sapta nānā puruṣānasrjanta //

<sup>34</sup> sattvapradhānāni nāmāni

<sup>35</sup> bhāvagrāhyam anīdākhyam bhāvābhāvakaram śivaṃ / kalāsargakaram devaṃ ye vidus te jahus tanum //

existence, the kindly one (*śiva*), God (*deva*), the maker of the creation and its parts – They who know Him, have left the body behind.” (Hume 1921: 408) Olivelle translates it: “Who is to be grasped with one’s heart, who is called ”Without-a-Lord,” who brings about existence and nonexistence, who is the Benign One, and who produces both the creation and its constituent parts—those who know him as God have cast aside their bodies.” (Olivelle 1998: 429) Both the translations appear to be erroneous as *anīḍa* is neither “incorporeal” nor “without a Lord” but “nest-less” or “without a nest” as it is *khaga* (bird, literally the one who moves in or through *kha* “void”). Similarly, *bhāvagrāhyam* means neither “who is to be apprehended in existence” (if so the one who is spoken of will be graspable in its *bhāvavikāra* and not in *bhāva*) nor “who is to be grasped with one’s heart” (if so, *bhāva* becomes ‘seat of the feelings or affection,’ which could be not only heart, but also mind, and hence becomes equivalent to *bhāvavikāra* and ceases to be *bhāva*). If the expression *bhāvābhāvakaram* means ‘the maker of existence... and non-existence’ or ‘who brings about existence and nonexistence’ then the one spoken of ceases to be *bhāvābhāvakara* but becomes one who brings about *bhāvavikāras*, as both existence and non-existence are *bhāvavikāras*. So, the expression *bhāvābhāvakaram* cannot mean ‘the maker of existence... and non-existence’ or ‘who brings about existence and nonexistence’. Lastly *kalāsargakaram* means neither ‘the maker of the creation and its parts’ nor ‘who produces both the creation and its constituent parts’, rather it means ‘the doer of relinquishment of portions,’ as *√sṛj* means ‘to relinquish, to send forth, to void’ etc., and it does not mean ‘to create’ in the modern sense. It appears that modern scholars had difficulty in grasping the metaphysics of Śruti.

The two expressions *bhāva* and *abhāva*, to the best of the author's knowledge, appear together for the second time in Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.4.<sup>36</sup> Hume’s translation: “He begins his works which are connected with qualities (*guṇa*), and distributes all existences (*bhāva*). In the absence of these (qualities) there is a disappearance of the work that has been done. [Yet] in the destruction of the work he continues essentially other [than it].” (Hume 1921: 408) Olivelle’s translation: “and after undertaking the works endowed with the qualities; *he* who would apportion all the modes of existence—when they are no more, the work he has produced is destroyed—*he* carries on, when the work is dissolved, as someone other than those realities.” These translations reflect a poor understanding of what is going on in the *bhāvavṛttam* of Ṛgveda 10.129 (in the words of Śvetāśvatara: *brahmacakram* in 6.1d), whose presentation began in 6.2 and continues in 6.4. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain in detail the errors in understanding. Suffice to say here that when *devasyaiṣa* (the sovereign lord of the deities: 6.1) makes the wheel of *brahman* go round, then it is said in 6.4 that he, having begun the actions weaving<sup>37</sup> with strands (*guṇas*), and uses all *beings* (*bhāvāṃś*), which is not to be

<sup>36</sup> ārabhya karmāṇi guṇān vitāni bhāvāṃś ca sarvān viniyojayed yaḥ / teṣāṃ abhāve kṛtakarmanāśaḥ karmakṣaye yāti sa tattvato ‘nyaḥ //

<sup>37</sup> Grammarians like Pāṇini and Patañjali recognized that agent is a weaver, for Pāṇini Sūtra

understood as *existents*).<sup>38</sup> In the nonbeing (inactions) of these (beings), there is the disappearance of the done deed (of the sovereign Lord of the deities); in loss of actions, he obtains in that-ness (*tattva*) another (that-ness).<sup>39</sup> If there is any doubt about our interpretation, it should be dispelled by Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.10-11: “The one deity who covers himself, like a spider, with threads born from *pradhāna* according to own-being, may he bestow us obtaining of *Brahman*! The one deity was hidden in all existents, all-pervading, the inner soul of all existents, the *overseer of actions*<sup>40</sup> dwelling in all existents, the witness, the sole thinker, and devoid of strands (*nirguṇa*).”<sup>41</sup>

What was stated in Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.1d and 6.4ab was fully accepted in the Bhagavadgītā in 3.14d-16a and 3.27ab when read together. Bhagavadgītā in 3.14d-16a says: “...*yajña* is born of action; penetratively know that action comes from *Brahman*, and that *Brahman* comes from the Imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading *Brahman* is ever established in *yajña*. The wheel thus set in motion....”<sup>42</sup>

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1.4.54 declares: ‘*svatantraḥ kartā* ‘The one who has his own loom is agent’, i.e., agent is a weaver. Patañjali commenting on this sutra writes in his Mahābhāṣya: *kiṃ yasya tantram sa svatantraḥ? kiṃ cātaḥ? tantuvāye prāpnoti*. “Is a *svatantra* a person who has his own thread/warp/loom (*sva-tantra*, where the expression *tantra* has the ambiguity of all the three meanings)? And what follows from that? It would result that [*svatantra* means] ‘weaver.’” It is interesting to note that Patañjali is taking *svatantra* as a compound *sva+tantra*. That is why Patañjali has introduced a reference to *tantuvāya* ‘weaver’, meaning clearly that *svatantraḥ* is he who has his own (*sva*) thread/warp/loom (*tantra*). Cf. Agarwala (2017): pp.41-64.

<sup>38</sup> It appears that Nirukta 1.1.1.1. *bhāvapradhānamākhyātam* “being (*bhāva*) predominates in verbs’ is in conformity to Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.4.

<sup>39</sup> The focus is on activities and not on who is performing the activities. From the very beginning, *yajña* was conceived as an oven fabric woven out of activities as stated in Ṛgveda 10.130.1: *yo yajño viśvatas tantubhis tata ekaśataṃ devakarmebhir āyataḥ / ime vayanti pitaro ya āyayuh pra vayāpa vayety āsate tate* // “The *yajña* (karma) drawn out with threads on every side, stretched by a hundred and one actions of deities, this (*yajña* karma) do these progenitors weave, they sit beside the warp and cry: weave forwards, weave backwards.” Īśa Upaniṣad 1: *īśā vāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ yat kiñca jagatyāṃ jagat | tena tyaktena bhūñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasya sviddhanam* // “All this, whatsoever movement is in the world of movement, is for habitation [i.e., to be worn as garment] by the Sovereign Lord. You enjoy that by renouncing; do not covet; [inquire] whose is fruit [that is] born?” Hence grammarians like Pāṇini and Patañjali recognized that agent is a weaver. Cf. fn.30 above. The verse Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.4 is saying effectively that in the loss of woven garment, he obtains another. It also explains from where the analogy of *bodies* (*śarīrāṇi*) and *garments* (*vāsāṃsi*) in Bhagavadgītā 2.22 is coming from. One is struck by the fact that *vāsāṃsi* of Bhagavadgītā 2.22 and *vāsyam* of Īśa Upaniṣad 1 are coming from the same semantic field.

<sup>40</sup> emphasis added by the present author

<sup>41</sup> *yas tantu-nābha iva tantubhiḥ pradhānajaiḥ svabhāvataḥ / deva ekaḥ svam āvṛnoti sa no dadhātu brahmāpyayam // eko devaḥ sarva-bhūteṣu gūḍhaḥ sarva-vyāpī sarvabhūtāntarātmā / karmādhyakṣaḥ sarva-bhūtādhivāsaḥ sākṣī cetā kevalo nirguṇaś ca //*

<sup>42</sup> ...*yajñāḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ // karma brahmodbhavaṃ viddhi brahmākṣarasamudbhavam /*

Bhagavadgītā 3.27ab also says: “All actions are being done with the strands of *prakṛti*.”<sup>43</sup> In the verses of Śvetāśvatara *bhāva* (being, which is not to be conflated with existent) and *abhāva* (non-being, i.e., nothing, not to be conflated with non-existent) are mutually exclusive ontological categories. *Bhāva* ‘being’ can be unethical as well as ethical. Bhagavadgītā 7.15 speaks of *āsuram bhāvam* (demonic being, which is un-ethical being). In contrast, there is unmentioned *daivam bhāvam* (divine being, which is an ethical being).

#### 6. *Bhāva* in Relation to *Sat* and *Asat* in the Vedic Tradition

These two, i.e., *sat* and *asat*, being two aspects of the same eternal-ethical-actual manifestation, are neither mutually exclusive nor jointly exhaustive. There can be *bhāva* of that which is neither *sat* nor *asat* as in Ṛgveda10.129.1-2. Even *Bhagavadgītā* XIII.12 declares: “Beginningless is the Supreme Brahman. It is neither said to be ‘*sat*’ nor ‘*asat*’.”<sup>44</sup> So *bhāva* (being) of Brahman is admitted in *Bhagavadgītā* XIII.12 even when Brahman can be called neither *sat* nor *asat*. There can be *bhāva* (being) of that which is both *sat* and *asat*. Hence it is stated in Ṛgveda10.129.4: “Poets (Sages) who searched in their heart by seminal thought discovered the *sat*in kinship with *asat*.”<sup>45</sup> So, according to Ṛgveda 10.129.4 that which is *sat* and *asat* has *bhāva* (being), which can be spotted. So also, according to Ṛgveda 10.5.7: “*Asat*, and *sat* in the highest heaven, in Aditi’s bosom and in Dakṣa’s birthplace, is Agni, our first-born of Temporal Order, the Milch-cow and the Bull in life’s beginning.”<sup>46</sup> Hence in *Mahābhārata* I.1.22 it is claimed that *Viṣṇu* is the primeval *puruṣa*, and as such he is also the eternal and omnipresent *Brahman*, *sat* and *asat*, and above *sat* and *asat*.<sup>47</sup> Even Kṛṣṇa, the *puruṣa*, who has *bhāva* says in Bhagavadgītā 9.19: “I am *sat* and *asat*”<sup>48</sup>. Even Anugītā says: (*Mahābhārata* 14.24.18) “That which is *sat* and that which is *asat* are a pair, between them is the fire. That is the excellent form<sup>[सर्व]</sup> of the Udāna as understood by Brāhmaṇas.”<sup>49</sup>

#### 7. Zaehner on *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16: An Erroneous Exegesis

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tasmāt sarvagataṃ brahma nityaṃ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam // evaṃ pravartitaṃ cakram...

<sup>43</sup> prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ /

<sup>44</sup> anādīmat paraṃ brahma na sat tan nāsad ucyate

<sup>45</sup> sato bandhum asati nir avindan hṛdi pratīṣyā kavayo manīṣā

<sup>46</sup> asac ca sac ca parame vyoman dakṣasya janmann aditer upasthe / agnir ha naḥ prathamajā r̥tasya pūrva āyuni vṛṣabhaś ca dhenuḥ //

<sup>47</sup> ādyaṃ puruṣam īśānam ... brahma ... sanātanam // asac ca sac caiva yad viśvam sadasataḥ param /... viṣṇum (*Mahābhārata* 13.135.4 ff.; cf. also 12.323.29)

<sup>48</sup> sad asac cāham

<sup>49</sup> sac cāsac caiva tad dvamdvaṃ tayor madhye hutāśanaḥ / etad rūpam udānasya paramaṃ brāhmaṇā viduḥ //

Having clarified the two pairs of distinctions in the Śruti: *sat/asat* and *bhāva/abhāva*, it is now time to examine how the two pairs of distinctions were systematized and interlinked with each other in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16. Whether this systematization was understood by Western scholars commenting on the *Bhagavadgītā* can be examined by studying the famous translation and commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* by R. C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gītā: with a Commentary Based on the Original Source*

### 7.1. Zaehner's Translation of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16

Zaehner translates *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16: "Of what is not there is no becoming; of what is there is no ceasing to be: for the boundary-line between these two is seen by men who see things as they really are." (Zaehner 1969: 127) The translation appears to be erroneous as he is translating *bhāva* as "becoming" turning *bhāva* into *bhāvavikāra*. Similarly, he is translating *abhāva* as 'ceasing to be,' which is also a *bhāvavikāra*. So, *abhāva* is turned into a *bhāvavikāra*. Similarly, translation of *sat* and *asat* as "what is" and "what is not" respectively turns the *ehico-ontological* categories into pure ontological categories.

Probably Zaehner is aware of the erroneous nature of the translation, for he writes, "The translation is not absolutely certain here." (*Ibid*: 127) He writes, "The word *bhāva* normally means 'nature, mode of existence, state of being' or simply 'creature' (cf. *sva-bhāva*)..." (*Ibid*: 127) this seems to be completely against *Bhagavadgītā*'s understanding of *bhāva* and *sva-bhāva*. The *Bhagavadgītā* itself defines *sva-bhāva* in 8.3: "The Imperishable (*Akṣaram*) Supreme (*paramam*) Brahman is *svabhāva*, which is said to be the indwelling Self (*Adhyātma*)."<sup>50</sup> So *svabhāva* cannot be equated with creature or nature. Since existence is *bhāvavikāra*, *bhāva* is not a mode of existence, rather existence is a mode of *bhāva*. The proper translation of *bhāva* is 'being' used as a noun. Zaehner claims, "In the *Gītā* itself *bhāva* is always used in the sense of 'nature'..." (Zaehner 1969: 127) But this appears to be erroneous in light of 8.3 where *svabhāva*' own being' is equated with *Brahman*. His citation (*Ibid*: 127-28) of 7.12 *sāttvikā bhāvā*; 7.13 *guṇamayair bhāvair*; 8.4 *kṣaro bhāvaḥ*; 8.6 *yaṃ yaṃ...smaran bhāvaṃ*; 8.20 *paras tasmāt tu bhāvo 'nyo* do not prove that *bhāva* means 'nature.' The *sāttvikā bhāvā* do not designate nature but beings under the control of *guṇa*, which here is *satva guṇa*. Similarly, *guṇamayair bhāvair* is being woven with *guṇas*, which is no more natural than *saguṇa Brahman* is nature. The *saguṇa Brahman* remains *Brahman* albeit a qualified one. His explanation of *yaṃ yaṃ...smaran bhāvaṃ* 'whatever state of being a man may bear in mind' (*Ibid*: 127-28) appears to be erroneous as *bhāvaṃ* is not 'state of being' but simply 'being'. Similarly, his explanation of *paras tasmāt tu bhāvo 'nyo* as 'but beyond that, there is another mode of being' also appears to be erroneous. The entire verse states: "But distinct from that unmanifest (*avyakta*) there is another eternal Unmanifest Being, He does not perish when all existents perish."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> akṣaram brahma paramam svabhāvo 'dhyātmam ucyate /

<sup>51</sup> paras tasmāt tu bhāvo 'nyo 'vyakto 'vyaktāt sanātanaḥ / yaḥ sa sarveṣu bhūteṣu naśyatsu na

Zaehner's explanation turns two beings involved here into two *modes* of being, forgetting that *Bhagavadgītā*, as his citation has shown, uses the plural of *bhāva*, i.e., *bhāvā* many times and also there are multiple *puruṣas* in *Bhagavadgītā* 15.16-17 corresponding to multiple *brahmans* in Śruti, all of which are *bhāvā* too. So, in his explanation, Zaehner appears to be turning 'being' (*bhāva*) into 'mode of being' (*bhāvavikāra*) erroneously.

### 7.2. Zaehner on *Buddhi* as *Bhāva*

In his further comments on *bhāvas* (*bhāvā*), Zaehner writes, "In 10.5 the *bhāvas* of contingent beings are enumerated: these consist of *buddhi*, various virtues, and some vices including, strangely enough, *bhava* and *abhāva* ('becoming' and 'the lack of *bhāva*')! Here the word is probably best translated as 'characteristic'." (Zaehner 1969: 128) It clearly indicates that Zaehner does not appear to have a proper hermeneutic principle to discern the meaning of the *Bhagavadgītā*. The text of the *Bhagavadgītā* itself states not less than nine times that its teaching is *guhya* (secret: 9.2; 10.38; 11.1; 15.20; 18.63; 64; 68; 75) and *rahasya* (secret: 4.3). So, the meaning is not on the surface of the words. The text must be *nirmathya* 'churned' to take its hidden meaning out like one takes hidden butter out of curd/milk, or one takes the hidden fire out of fire sticks (made of wood) by churning (*nirmathya*).<sup>52</sup> It may be noted that in *Bhagavadgītā* 7.4, *buddhi* is listed as one of the eight divisions of *aparā prakṛti*, but again in 7.10 it is listed as *parā prakṛti* but 7.12 the list was declared to be a list of *sāttvikā bhāvā* and also talks of *bhāvā rājasāstāmasāśca*. Again, *buddhi* is listed as one of the *bhāvā bhūtānām*. So, there is a complexity in the *Bhagavadgītā* which is not available merely on the surface of words, and hence such classifications appear strange and may appear meaningless to some, but it is not so. *Buddhi* as one of the eight divisions of *aparā prakṛti* belongs to all living beings, but *buddhi* listed as *parā prakṛti* but called *sāttvikā bhāvā* belongs only to *buddhimatām* among living beings. Moreover, lastly, *buddhi* as one of the *bhāvā bhūtānām* is what is mentioned in 10.10 cd: "[I] give them *buddhi yoga* by which they obtain me."<sup>53</sup> So it is the *puruṣādhiṣṭhitā buddhi*, and it is *bhāvā bhūtānām* because it represents

vinaśyati //

<sup>52</sup> *dharmākhyāneṣu sarveṣu satyākhyāneṣu yad Vasu daśedam ṛk-sahsrāni nirmathyāmṛtam uddhṛtam* (Mahābhārata 12.238.14) "All narratives on dharma, all narratives on *Satya* as well as ten thousand hymns of the Ṛgveda have been churned to extract this nectar." The distinction between the object of discussion of the text and the discussion of the object of the text is common to classical Indian hermeneutics and Western hermeneutics. For this distinction in Indian hermeneutics also cf. *Mahābhārata* 12.293.22-25. For this distinction in Western hermeneutics cf. Kant's CPR: A 834/ B 862; A 836/ B 864; A 836/ B 864; A 836f/ B 864f; Fichte, *Werke* VI, p.337; Stenthal (1881); Heidegger (1982): p. 111; Gadamer (2004): pp.169-71; and also Bollnow (1949).

<sup>53</sup> *dadāmi buddhiyogaṃ taṃ yena mām upayānti te //* The Kasmir recension of this line is more clear: *dadāmi buddhiyogaṃ taṃ yena mām prāpayānti te //*



the *puruṣabhāva*. In *Mahābhārata*, it is stated: “The *buddhi*, seated by the *puruṣa*, exists in three evolved forms of *bhāva*; characterized as it is by these three forms it goes beyond them, just as the billowy ocean, lord of the rivers, goes beyond the waves of the current. Though really beyond any (evolved) form of *bhāva*, the *buddhi* comes to exist in the form of being *manas*: when the *buddhi* modifies its form of *bhāva*, then it becomes the *manas*.”<sup>54</sup> Hence, *buddhi* listed as *parā prakṛti* but called *sātvikā bhāvā* refers to the *puruṣādhiṣṭhitā buddhi* where *puruṣabhāva* is under the control of *sattva guṇa*. *Buddhi* as one of the eight divisions of *prakṛti* refers to *buddhi* without referring to the *puruṣa adhiṣṭhita* in it. So, there is no strangeness in *buddhi* finding a place in *three* different lists.

### 7.3. *Bhava- bhāva* and *Abhāva-bhāva*

According to *Bhagavadgītā* 13.14 *puruṣa* is: “Shining by the *guṇas* (strands of *prakṛti*) of all the senses, (yet) without the senses; unattached, yet supporting all; devoid of *guṇas* but enjoyer of *guṇas*.”<sup>55</sup> And in 13.21ab it is clarified: “*Puruṣa*, when seated in *Prakṛti*, enjoys the strands born of *Prakṛti*.”<sup>56</sup> If we keep in mind the above and that *puruṣa* is *bhāva* and depending on which *guṇa* is predominant with which *puruṣa* is associated, it manifests as different *bhāvas* like *bhava-bhāva* (manifesting *being*) and *abhāva-bhāva* (being afflicted with lack). This was the import of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.7a, which makes Arjuna say regarding his own being: ‘my being contaminated by the taint of miserliness’ (*kārpaṇyadoṣopahatasvabhāvaḥ*). A miser is one who wants more and uses little of what he has. The miser wants more because his being is contaminated with *abhāva*, i.e., he has *bhāva* afflicted with lack which manifests as a desire for objects of senses, the desire is, of course, the operation of *guṇas*, predominantly *rajas guṇa*.<sup>57</sup> So, *abhāva-bhāva* is (*sva*)*bhāva* under the influence of desires. So, there is no strangeness in *bhava-bhāva* (manifesting *being*) and *abhāva-bhāva* (afflicted with lack). It is strange for Zaehner because he lacks the proper hermeneutic principles for understanding *Bhagavadgītā* in particular and the classical Indian literature in general.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Māhābhārata* 12.187.21-24: *puruṣādhiṣṭhitā buddhis triṣu bhāveṣu vartate / seyaṃ bhāvātmikā bhāvāṃs trīn etān ativartate // saritāṃ sāgaro bhartā mahavelām ivormimān / atibhāvagatā buddhir bhāve mānasi vartate //*

<sup>55</sup> *sarvendriyaguṇābhāsaṃ sarvendriyavivarjitam / asaktaṃ sarvabhṛc caiva nirguṇaṃ guṇabhokṛ ca //*

<sup>56</sup> *puruṣaḥ prakṛtistho hi bhūṅkte prakṛtjān guṇān //*

<sup>57</sup> *Bhagavadgītā* 3.37ab: *kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ / “It is desire, it is wrath, born of the strand of Rajas”*

<sup>58</sup> So, one can talk meaningfully in Sanskrit of *kātarabhāva*, *kiṃkarabhāva*, etc. and even the *bhāvas* in Indian aesthetics also have to be understood in the same way: *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, *vyabhīcāribhāva*, etc. which are a manifestation of *rasa*, which is *puruṣa* (*bhāva*, being) as *Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka* 1, 23, 3-4: *yo rasaḥ | so’pām | antarataḥ kūrmaṃ bhūtam sarpaṅtam | tamabravīt | mama vaitvanmānsā | samabhūt || netyabravīt |*

#### 7.4. Zaehner on *Nāhaṃkṛto Bhāva*

Zaehner writes, “In 18.17 we have *yasya nāhaṃkṛto bhāvo*, ‘whose nature is not egoized’, and in 18.20 *ekaṃ bhāvam avyayam*, ‘the one mode of existence which is not transient’. Upaniṣadic usage is similar and in MuU.2.1.1 and ŚU. 6.4 the word means ‘mode of being’ or simply ‘creature’.” (Zaehner 1969: 128) Zaehner appears to have erred here too. In the metaphysics of the Bhagavadgītā there is no possibility of nature (*prakṛti*) that is not egoized. For 7.4 *ahaṃkāra* is one of the eight divisions of *aparā prakṛti* (lower nature) (*Ibid*: 245) and hence there it is impossible that nature is not egoized. In Bhagavadgītā 13.5 *ahaṃkāra* is a component of *kṣetram* ‘clearing’ [=śarīram ‘body’:13.1], which is also nothing but *prakṛti* ‘nature’ and hence to there can be no nature, which is not egoized. The problem with Zaehner appears to be that he is indiscriminately translating both *prakṛti* and *bhāva* as ‘nature’, indicating that he has probably not grasped the distinction between *prakṛti* and *bhāva*. Besides, he is indiscriminately using ‘mode of existence’ and ‘mode of being’ and ‘creature’, for translating *bhāva*, which indicates that he probably has not understood what *bhāva* means. The author has already shown what Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.4 means above, which also appears to confirm erroneous understanding of it by Zaehner. Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.1.1 says: “As from a well-stoked fire thousands of sparks of it’s same form emerge, so, from the imperishable originate diverse beings, and into it, O my dear, they return.”<sup>59</sup> Here, since *bhāvā* have the same form as imperishable due to the analogy of fire and sparks, the *bhāvā* cannot refer to perishable things or existents, but to beings, which emerge and go back to it. This Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 2.1.1 is reworked imagery given in Ṛgveda 4.58.1: “From the ocean sprang forth the wave of honey in secret brought together deathlessness (immortality, life), whatever the hidden name of the sprinkled, the tongue of the deities is the navel of the deathless (alive, immortal).”<sup>60</sup>

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*pūrvamevāhamihāsamiti | tatpuruṣasya puruṣatvam |* “His *rasa* became the tortoise swimming in the water. He said –you have originated from my skin and flesh. The tortoise said, “No. I was there from prior.” From being prior *puruṣa* has *puruṣatva*.” Similarly, ontologically *rasa/puruṣa* is prior to everything, but things together as structured make this a priori *rasa/puruṣa* manifest epistemologically. Hence in *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.7.1 / *Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka* 5.14.7 it is said: *asadvā idamagra āsittato vā sadjāyata / tadātmānam svaymakuruta tasmāttatsukṛtamucyate // iti// yadvai tatsukṛtam / raso vai saḥ, rasaṃ hy evāyaṃ labdhvānandī bhavati* / “In the beginning was verily this *asat*. From that was generated the *sat*. That made for itself a self; therefore, it is called ‘well-done.’ Precisely because it is well done, it is the essence (*raso vai saḥ*), for only when one has grasped that essence (*rasa*) does one attain bliss.”

<sup>59</sup> *yathā sudīptātpāvākādvisphulingāḥ sahasraśaḥ prabhavante sarūpāḥ / tathākṣarādvividhāḥ somya bhāvāḥ prajāyante tatra caivāpiyanti //*

<sup>60</sup> *samudrād ūrmir madhumāḥ ud ārad upāṃsunā sam amṛtatvam ānaḥ / ghṛtasya nāma guhyam yad asti jihvā devānām amṛtasya nābhīḥ //*

The ocean is *akṣara* ‘imperishable.’ As the waves come up, they sprinkle droplets of life/immortality as the ocean is alive/immortal. The same holds good for the *bhāvā* that emerge from the imperishable. The *bhāvā* in Muṇḍaka Upanisad 2.1.1 is also of the form of *akṣara* and hence imperishable, and these are not *bhūtāni* ‘existents’ or ‘things’ which are perishable. Hence, Zaehner’s understanding of *bhāvā* in Muṇḍaka Upanisad 2.1.1 equally appears to be erroneous. 8.5. A Strange Hermeneutics to Understand *Abhāva*

Zaehner’s understanding of *abhāva* as ‘unbecoming’ that is ‘ceasing to be’ as a phenomenal or contingent being’ (Zaehner 1969: 128) appears equally to be erroneous as it turns *abhāva* into a process which is one of the *bhāvavikāra*. He, no doubt, is aware that *abhāva* ‘Normally ... means simply ‘absence.’” (*Ibid*: 128) So, he is aware that he is interpreting *abhāva* as a process of unbecoming, which is erroneous, as ‘absence’ is not a process of unbecoming. Zaehner appears to espouse a strange and erroneous hermeneutic principle. He says, “It is not so easy to see what is meant by *asat* in this passage.” (*Ibid*: 128) If a passage in a text is difficult to interpret, then obviously, one looks to other passages in the text to elucidate the troublesome word or concept. However, Zaehner says, “in our present passage, however, it seems that parallel passages in the Gītā itself cannot explain the use of the word *asat* because it is expressly stated that *asat* has no *bhāva*: it does not become or develop nor has it any ‘nature’ of its own. We must, then look outside the Gītā to the Upaniṣads and beyond.” (*Ibid*: 129)

There appears to be an error in Zaehner’s hermeneutics. He wants to interpret verses in isolation, while the basic hermeneutic principle is that the meaning of the whole text must harmonize with the meaning of the parts of the text. The meaning of parts of the text must harmonize with the unity of meaning of the whole text, as this is required in the metaphor of churning (*nirmathya*) the text to find what the text is discussing, which is distinct from the discussion of it in the text. He appears to violate this principle of the hermeneutic circle in his textual exegesis. Hermeneutics to churn the entire text to get at its topic as indicated above is also advocated in Brahma-Sūtra, a text whose authority is accepted by the *Bhagavadgītā* in verse 13.4. Brahma-Sūtra 1.1.3-4 states: “from the text being the womb [of Brahman], but [to grasp Brahman] harmonize that.”<sup>61</sup>

## 8. Zaehner’s Failure in Harmonization of the *Bhagavadgītā*

### 8.1. Harmonization of a Text by *Sudarśana Cakra*

How does one harmonize a text? Here a circular thought process is required. The *Bhagavadgītā* describes Kṛṣṇa as *cakriṇaṃ* ‘one with a circle’ in 11.17 and as *cakrahastam* ‘one with circle in hand’ in 11.46. The significance of this *cakra* can be understood from a series of epithets of Viṣṇu in *Tripādvibhūtim Upaniṣad* 7,

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<sup>61</sup> śāstrayonitvāt / tat tu samanyāt /

42: *Om sucakrāya svāhā / Om dhīcakrāya svāhā*// “hail for who is possessed of circle of holistic insight (vision), hail for who is possessed of well-undertaken circle.” According to Nṛsiṃha-pūrva-tāpinī Upaniṣad 5.2, “The *cakra* of Viṣṇu is *sudarśana*.” When we put the three ideas together, we have the idea of *dhīcakra* or circle of holistic insight (or vision), which is *sucakra* or well-undertaken circle, and it is the *sudarśana* or good vision. According to Kullūka and Rāghavānanda *sāstrāditatvajñānam*, i.e., “knowledge of the true meaning of the authoritative works” is *dhiḥ*. So, the significance of the circle attributed to Kṛṣṇa is that it is the circular thought process involved in understanding, i.e., disclosing what is to be understood.<sup>62</sup> One may object that we are speculating here. The reply is that *sudarśana cakra* is generally presented as a *śāstra* wielded by Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. However, *śāstra* in Vedic literature also means the Ṛgveda mantras (*ṛcā*) recited by *hotṛ* at the soma libation. So *sudarśana cakra* is not only the mythological weapon of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, but also the circular structure of holistic thought involved when the sages saw the mantras. The *śāstra* as weapon to cut or injure is the *bandhu* (bond of correlation) of the *śāstra* as *ṛg*-verses recited in soma libation, as by drinking soma Indra killed *Vṛtra*, the covering darkness of ignorance, which has implication of both killing the demon involving *śāstra* as weapon as well as destroying the ignorance involving *śāstra* as *ṛg*-verses.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> The role of the circular thought process in disclosing or uncovering the subject matter was recognized from the beginning of philosophy. Parmenides in the proem to his poem speaks of ‘the tremorless heart of well-rounded uncovering’ (ἡμὲν Ἀληθείης εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμῆς ἦτορ)(Fr.1 line 29). Regarding original philosophical endeavors Kant remarks, “But these human endeavors turn in a constant circle, arriving again at a point where they have already been. Thereupon material now lying-in dust can perhaps be processed into a magnificent structure.” Kants *Antwort an Garve, Prolegomena*, Vorländer (ed.), p.194. Continental thinkers rediscovered the role of the hermeneutic circle in the disclosure of the subject matter of a text. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 153, and Gadamer (2004), pp. 189f, 268-273, 291-294.

<sup>63</sup> (GBr 1,2.16.1) *vṛṣabho roravīty eṣa ha vai vṛṣabha eṣa tad roravīti yad yajñeṣu śāstrāṇi śamsaty* “The bull roars, indeed, he is the bull (and ) he roars when in the sacrifices recites the *śāstras*.” (GBr 1,4.20.i) *tayo stotrāṇi ca śāstrāṇi ca saṃcāreyat* “Let him make their stotras and *śāstras* run together.” (GBr 1,5.10.b) *teṣāṃ pañca śatāni saṃvatsarāṇāṃ paryupetāny āsann athedaṃ sarva śāsrāma ye stomā yāni pṛṣṭhāni yāni śāstrāṇi* “When five hundred years of those years (of a sacrificial session) had passed, everything here was exhausted - namely *stomas*, *pṛṣṭhas*, and *śāstras*.” (GBr 1,5.10k) *te hy eva stomā bhavanti tāni pṛṣṭhāni tāni śāstrāṇi* “(In that) there are identical *stomas*, *pṛṣṭhas*, and *śāstras*.” This line is repeated four more times in (GBr 1,5.10.r), (GBr 1,5.10.v), (GBr 1,5.10.cc) and (GBr 1,5.10gg). (GBr 1,5.23f) *kati svid rātrayaḥ katy ahāni kati stotrāṇi kati śāstrāṇy asya | kati svid savanāḥ saṃvatsarasya stotriyāḥ padāksarāṇi katy asya ||* “How many nights, how many days, how many *stotras* and *śāstras*, how many pressings, how many Stotriyas, how many words and how many syllables are there in sacrificial session lasting for one year?” (GBr 2,2.6.r) <*gharmaṃ tapāmi [Atharva Veda Pippalāda School 5.16.2, sakala at Vaitāna Śrauta Sūtra 14.1]*> <*brahma jajñānam [Atharva Veda Pippalāda School 5.2.2, Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra 4.1.1,*

The well-undertaken circle of holistic insight or vision is the completed circle of movement of thought from the whole text to its parts and from the part to the whole until all the parts are integrated to unify the meaning of that which is to be grasped.<sup>64</sup> It appears that Zaehner's failure to utilize the hermeneutic procedure, which can harmonize the whole text synthesizing the whole of its meaning, prevented him from understanding the actual meaning of the text.

## 8.2. Zaehner's Failure

Zaehner is aware that the meaning he has attributed to *bhāva* as 'nature' or 'mode of being' 'mode of existence', 'creature' etc., prevents him from understanding the other parallel passages in the Bhagavadgītā. He writes, "Both Ś [Śaṅkarācārya] and R. [Rāmānujācārya] take it to mean the body, that is, by extension, the whole of material Nature elsewhere called *prakṛti* in accordance with Sāṃkhya usage. This they presumably infer from verse 18: 'Finite, they say, are these [our] bodies [indwelt] by an embodied [self].' However, it is the very nature of bodies as of all the phenomenal world to 'become' or 'develop' or 'have an essence', which, however we translate *bhāva* here, is denied to *asat*." (Zaehner 1969: 128) Clearly it is his understanding of *bhāva* that appears to be preventing him from going along with Śaṅkarācārya or Rāmānujācārya. They were only interpreters, and they might have

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*Vaitāna Śrauta Sūtra 14.1*] > < *iyam pitryā rāṣṭry etv agre [Atharva Veda Pippalāda School 5.2.1, Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra 4.1.2, Vaitāna Śrauta Sūtra 14.1]* > *iti gharmaṃ tāpyamānam upāsīta śāstravad ardharaśa āhāvapratigaravarjaṃ rūpasamṛddhābhiḥ* / "I heat the gharma", 'the brahman born', 'let this queen of fathers (go) in the beginning', he (the Brahman) should honour the Gharma being heated with verses perfect in form, he should recite them like *śāstra* in half verses, but omitting the *āhāvas* and *pratigaras*." (GBr\_2,3.11.q and r) *śuddhaḥ praṇavaḥ syāt śāstrānuvacanayor madhya iti ha smāha kauṣītakis* / "The *Praṇava* should be pure during the recitation of *śāstras* and other recitations, thus said Kauṣītaki." (GBr\_2,4.10.q and r) *evaṃ śamsed yadi vāca īśīta vāg ghi śāstram* / "So should he recite if he be lord of speech, for the *śāstra* is speech." (GBr 2,4.18k) *apratibhūtam iva hi prātaḥsavane marutvatīye tṛtīyasavane ca hotrakānām śāstram* / "The *śāstra* of the hotrakas at the morning-pressing, at the *Marutvatīya* (-*śāstra*) and at the third pressing is not uniform, as it were." (GBr\_2,4.19a and b) *tad āhuḥ kiṃ ṣoḍaśinaḥ ṣoḍaśitvam ṣoḍaśa stotrāṇi ṣoḍaśa śāstrāṇi ṣoḍaśabhir akṣarair ādatte* / "As to this they say, 'why has the *ṣoḍaśin* its so-called name?' It consists of sixteen *stotras* and sixteen *śāstras*; with sixteen syllables, he commences." (GBr 2,5.3ee) *tad āhur atha kasmād uttamāt pratīhārād āhūya sāmṇā śāstram upasaṃtanvantīti* || "Then they say, 'Why after the final *pratīhāra* do they utter the *āhūya* and link the *śāstra* with the *sāmṇa*?' (GBr 2,5.4aa) *atha yad dhotā sāmṇā śāstram upasaṃtanoti vāg vai hotā vācam eva tat prāṇaiḥ saṃdadhāti* / "In that the *hotṛ* joins the *śāstra* with the *sāmṇa*; the *hotṛ* is speech; thus indeed, he unites speech with the breaths." (GBr\_2,6.9l and m) *tad dha tathā śasyamāne gośla ājagama sa hovāca hotaḥ kathā te śāstram vicakram plavata iti* / "Now Gośla came when it (the *śāstra*) was being recited thus; he said, 'O *hotṛ*, how is that your *śāstra* is moving without a wheel?'"

<sup>64</sup> For further details of the hermeneutics appropriate to the Bhagavadgītā cf. Agarwala (2016b): pp. 407 – 431.

made an error in interpretation. So, Zaehner is under no obligation to harmonize his meaning of the text with their meaning of the text. But is he not under hermeneutic obligation to harmonize his own meaning with the text itself, which he is interpreting? Can he overlook the part of the text, which goes against the meaning he has assigned to a word without valid reason? Is it valid hermeneutics? If one is free to overlook portions of text to retain one's assigned meaning, then the binding of the text is gone. The so-called interpreter is no more interpreting the text but indulging in reading one's own meaning into the text. Then, of course, everybody is free to read his or her meaning by overlooking whatever part of the text is inconsistent with that meaning. This is what Zaehner did when he wrote, "In the two or three passages in the Gītā where the words *sat* and *asat* are contrasted *sat* would appear to refer to eternal Being beyond space and time, that is, Ātman-Brahman, *asat* to nature or the phenomenal world. Thus in 9.19, Krishna says: 'Deathlessness am I and death, what IS and what is not (*sad-asat*)' implying that 'what is not' is equivalent to death and 'what IS' to deathless or immortality as in BU.1.3.28 ('by *asat* [he means] death, by *sat* immortality'). So too, in the Gītā, 'death' is equivalent to the ever-dying world of material Nature and 'immortality' to the changeless category of Ātman-Brahman. In 11.37 Arjuna goes beyond this and confesses to Krishna: 'You are the Imperishable, what IS and what is not and what surpasses both.' In other words, He is both the phenomenal and the eternal world and at the same time transcends both." (Zaehner 1969: 128) Since Zaehner has interpreted *bhāva* as 'nature' and *sat* has no *abhāva*, and *asat* has no *bhāva*. If *Kṛṣṇa* is both *sat* and *asat* then as he has interpreted *abhāva* as 'unbecoming' or 'ceasing to be as phenomenal or contingent being' then he has a problem as *Kṛṣṇa* as *sat* has no 'unbecoming or no 'phenomenal being' and as *asat* has no *bhāva*, i.e., has no 'nature' or has no *prakṛti* or has no creatures or 'becoming' then 11.37 appears to become meaningless. In fact, the entire showing of Viśvarūpa appears to become meaningless.

### 8.3. Vanishing of Phenomenal World in Zaehner's Interpretation

Taking help of texts other than the Bhagavadgītā, i.e., Ṛgveda 10.129.1, Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7 and Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.2. 1-2 he comes up with the translation of *sat* as 'Being' and *asat* as 'Not-Being' with the help of Ṛgveda 10.129.1 but without interpretation, as he found this hymn to be 'most profoundly obscure.' (*Ibid*: 129) To explain what is obscure with another obscure does not appear to be good hermeneutics. So, with the help of Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7, he interprets *asat* 'Not-being' as 'the primal matter, as with most Greek philosophers, can scarcely be said to exist'. (*Ibid*: 129) But with Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.2.1-2, the meaning changes, "*Asat* here is plainly not primal matter but what does not exist absolutely—nothing" and he goes on to claim, "this must surely be the idea that the Gītā is taking up here." (*Ibid*: 129) Now he tries to interpret *nāsato vidyate bhāvo* by saying, "From 'nothing' there can be no becoming or development: what does not exist cannot have an essence since existence necessarily precedes essence as in Aristotle." (*Ibid*: 129) So, *nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ* can be interpreted as what IS there is



no ‘unbecoming’ or ‘ceasing to be’ and hence ‘what IS’ is not a phenomenal or contingent being.’ If Kṛṣṇa is both *sat* and *asat* and hence there is no ceasing to be or unbecoming in Kṛṣṇa, and also there is no ‘becoming’ or ‘growth’ in him, then the phenomenal world vanishes together with the cosmic epiphany of Kṛṣṇa. So, the interpretation of *sat* and *asat* together with an interpretation of *bhāva* and *abhāva* turn 2.16 into a strange metaphysical principle which makes the phenomenal world vanish altogether from the ontology of the *Bhagavadgītā*, making Kṛṣṇa’s teaching and injunction meaningless. So, the interpretation of Zaehner appears to be problematic. Although Zaehner defends his interpretation by saying that “This accord fully with 17.23-27, in which *tat sat*, ‘That which IS,’ is synonymous with *Brahman*, and with KaU.6.12-13 in which the supreme Self ... cannot ‘be understood unless we say – HE IS.’ This is the position that the *Gītā* seems to be taking up here.” (*Ibid*: 129) We have already seen before while examining the views of Halbfass on ‘being’ in Śruti that this reading of KaU.6.12-13 is erroneous. Similarly, the rendering of *tat sat*, ‘That which IS,’ is equally problematic. *Bhagavadgītā* 17.13ab says, “Om, Tat, Sat,” this has been taught to be the triple designation of Brahman.”<sup>65</sup> Here *om tat sad* are triple pointers or indicators of Brahman and are not describing requiring a verb as Brahman cannot be described, and one cannot even say that “He IS” or that, “That which is” [=that which exists]. This was the import of Kaṭha Upaniṣad 6.12-13, as argued before. So, Zaehner’s interpretation appears to get support neither from *Bhagavadgītā* 17.23 nor from Kaṭha Upaniṣad 6.12-13.

#### 8.4. Shifting Meaning of *Sat* in Zaehner’s Interpretation

While interpreting *Bhagavadgītā* 9.19, Zaehner changes the meaning of *sat* and *asat*. Instead of *sat* being ‘What IS’ and *asat* being ‘what is not,’ i.e., absolutely-nothing, he changes the meaning. He writes, “*sad asac ca*, ‘what IS and what is not’: in this passage *sat*, ‘what is,’ and *asat*, ‘what is not’ almost certainly means immortality and death.” (Zaehner 1969: 281) The reason why he is forced to change meaning is that the first prayer in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.3.28, which he quotes and translates, ‘From what is not lead me to what is’ in earlier interpretation became meaningless as *asat* being ‘absolutely nothing where there is no *bhāva* ‘becoming’ then the becoming from *asat* to *sat* on the part of man is impossible. However, in his new interpretation of *sat* and *asat* there is another problem. The problem is that the three prayers in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.3.28, which in his translation are: “From what is not lead me to what is! From darkness lead me to the light! From the death lead me to deathlessness’ reduces to just last two prayers. He argues, “Here the Upaniṣad glosses: ‘By “what is not” [he means] death, by “what IS” deathlessness.’ But there is further gloss in the same passage: ‘By “darkness” [he means] death, by “light” deathlessness.’ Then with Zaehner’s kind of hermeneutics one can give equally valid gloss: by *asat* [he means] darkness,

<sup>65</sup> om tat sad iti nirdeśo brahmaṇas trividhaḥ smṛtaḥ /

by *sat* light,' which will be too difficult for him to handle hermeneutically and hence unlike Halbfass, decide to remain totally silent on the second gloss. The gloss he is utilizing is valid in the context of the Upaniṣadic prayer, as we have discussed it above to explain it, but it cannot be utilized to interpret *Bhagavadgītā* 9.19 selectively and not be used for 2.16. Even though Zaehner is using the prayer of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.3.28, he appears to be failing to see that there is ethics involved here and *sat* and *asat* cannot be taken as merely ontological categories and but need to be understood as ehico-ontological categories.

Zaehner further changes the meaning of *sat* and *asat* while interpreting *na sat tan nāsad* in *Bhagavadgītā* 13.12. He writes, "By "Being" and "Not-Being" we should presumably understand unconditioned, eternal Being, on the one hand, being in time, that is becoming, on the other." (*Ibid*: 339) He appears to have made the distinction between *asat* 'becoming' and *bhāva* 'becoming' as interpreted earlier in 2.16 collapse.

#### 8.5. Lacunas in Zaehner's Interpretation

From our examination of Zaehner's interpretation of *sat* and *asat* on the one hand, *bhāva* and *abhāva* on the other, we conclude that he appears to have no firm understanding of what these two pairs of distinctions are and how they are related in spite of the clear statement of the *Bhagavadgītā* in 2.16.

The most important lacuna in Zaehner's interpretation appears to be that he gives no gloss on the second line except translating it: "for the boundary-line between these two is seen by men who see things as they really are." It is not clear how *ubhayor api dr̥ṣṭo 'ntas tv anayos tattvadarśibhiḥ* can be translated as he has done. His translation makes the second line ambiguous, for, in his translation, ambiguity regarding the boundary line remains. Is it between *sat* and *asat*? Or is it between *bhāva* and *abhāva*? However, the unambiguous natural reading is that the seers see the conclusion (*antas*) of both these [two statements made in the first line] of that-ness. This is an important point missed by most commentators, including *Zaehner*.

Referring to Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7 where *asat* is primary and *sat* originates from it, Zaehner writes, "This position is specifically attacked in CU. [Chāndogya Upaniṣad] 6.2.1-2 where the possibility of anything being born from Not-Being is roundly denied." (Zaehner 1969: 129) This kind of presentation of Śruti appears to be erroneous. Despite disputations, the tradition without any contradiction and embarrassment accepts the three originating principles as equally valid, i.e., firstly Ṛgveda 10.129.1 where the originating principle is neither *sat* nor *asat*, secondly Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.7 along with Ṛgveda 10.72.2-3, where the originating principle is *asat*, and thirdly Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.2.1-2 where the originating principle is *sat*, what these three positions in their unity amount to we have explained in an earlier section.

The fundamental error, which appears to have been made by Zaehner, was in

interpreting Brahman in relation to action in Bhagavadgita 3.15.<sup>66</sup> He appears to have missed the role of *Brahman* in the origination of action vis-a-vis the role of *guṇas* of Prakṛti as stated in Bhagavadgita 3.27.<sup>67</sup> Hence he turned *Brahman* into *Prakṛti*. He wrote commenting on 3.15, “the word *Brahman*, besides meaning the Absolute, can also mean the Veda or ...material Nature...depending on which way one takes the previous line, this means either that the Veda depends on the sacrifice...or that material Nature depends for its continued existence on the sacrifice...” (Zaehner 1969: 167) It appears that Zaehner has no clue as to the role of *Brahman* vis-à-vis *Prakṛti* in action. Hence, he cannot properly interpret *bhāva*, as *Brahman* is *bhāva*. We explained above in the previous section the distinct role played by *Brahman* (*bhāva*) and Prakṛti in action with the help of *Śvetāśvatara Upanisad* 6.4. 10. The Traditional Indian Interpretation of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16

Not only modern Western interpreters but also traditional Indian interpreters of the *Bhagavadgītā* have erred in interpreting the metaphysical principle announced in *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16. We will examine the commentaries on *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16 from the five most important traditional Indian commentators: Śāṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Bhāskara, and Abhinavagupta.

#### 9. Śāṅkarācārya

Śāṅkarācārya in his commentary on *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16 appears to have turned the metaphysical principle into a tautology. He wrote: “In this way of both – self [and] not-self and *sat* [and] *asat* – this final judgment is seen to be obtained by the seers of that-ness that *sat* is *sat* and *asat* is *asat*.”<sup>68</sup> It appears that the two pairs of distinctions *sat-asat* and *bhāva-abhāva* were not properly understood by Śāṅkarācārya. So, when faced with the claim of Kṛṣṇa in *Bhagavadgītā* 9.19: ‘I am *sat* and *asat*’<sup>69</sup>, Śāṅkarācārya appears to have failed to explain in what sense *asat* is used as he remained silent on it. He commenting on this claim of Kṛṣṇa writes: “Again the Bhagavān can never be altogether *asat*; nor (can it be said) that the effect is *sat* and the cause is *asat*.”<sup>70</sup> Here Śāṅkarācārya probably fails to explain the sense of *asat* but merely tells what it does not mean. Śāṅkarācārya appears to have failed to grasp that *sat* and *asat* as distinct from *bhāva* and *abhāva* respectively. Hence, when commenting on *Bhagavadgītā* 13.12 where it is said regarding *Brahman*: “it is not said to be ‘*sat*’ or ‘*asat*’”<sup>71</sup>, Śāṅkarācārya turns it into a thesis that Brahman is unspeakable. He writes regarding Brahman commenting on it: “It can be said that it

<sup>66</sup> karma brahmodbhavaṃ viddhi... brahma nityaṃ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam

<sup>67</sup> prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ

<sup>68</sup> evam ātmānātmanoḥ sadasatoḥ ubhayoḥ api dṛṣṭa upalabdhaḥ anto nirṇayaḥ sat sad eva asat asat eva iti tu anayoḥ yathoktayoḥ tatvadarśibhiḥ /

<sup>69</sup> sad asac cāham,

<sup>70</sup> na punaḥ atyantam eva asat bhagavān svayam / kāryakāraṇe vā sadasatī /

<sup>71</sup> na sat tan nāsad ucyate

cannot be spoken of in any word; ‘from which the speech returns’ etc. is also by *śruti*.”<sup>72</sup> However, even when quoting from *śruti*, he appears to be going against *śruti* by misunderstanding ‘*yato vāco nivartante*’, indicating a prohibition of speech where Brahman can be grasped indicates Brahman as the limit of speech as speech cannot go beyond it but returns from it. As quoted above, R̥gveda10.129.1-2 says: “Then was not *asat* nor *sat* ... That One, breathless, breathed by its own ethos, apart from it was nothing whatsoever.”<sup>73</sup> Here the Brahman is grasped in speech as it is not a linguistic thesis of prohibition of speech in which Brahman can be grasped. Śāṅkarācārya’s theory that Brahman is *anirvacanīya* is based on his presupposition of philosophy of Advaita Vedānta rather than grounded in the text of the Bhagavadgītā. As explained in the context of discussion of Kāṭha Upaniṣad 6.12-13, there is a way of grasping *Brahman* in speech indirectly by speaking of the existence of anything.

### 9.1. Rāmānujācārya

Rāmānujācārya also appears to have failed to understand the pairs of distinctions *sat-asat* and *bhāva-abhāva* correctly. In his commentary on Bhagavadgītā 2.16, he writes: “*asattvam* is due to perishable own being and *sattvam* is due to own imperishable being.”<sup>74</sup> So, in his view, both *asat* has *bhāva*, and also *sat* has *bhāva*. However, it is clearly against the metaphysical principle that *asat* has no *bhāva*. When confronted with the claim of Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā 9.19: ‘I am *sat* and *asat*’<sup>75</sup> Rāmānujācārya changes the meaning of *sat* and *asat*. He writes in his Bhāṣya: “*Sat* is that which is in the present time. *Asat* is that which was in the past and that which (may be in the future, but) has not come into the present time.”<sup>76</sup> This new explanation of *sat* and *asat* is different from how it was explained before. Rāmānujācārya further shifts the meaning of *sat* and *asat* while explaining the claim in Bhagavadgītā 13.12 regarding *Brahman*: “not said to be ‘*sat*’ or ‘*asat*’.”<sup>77</sup> He writes: “The terms *sat* and *asat* cannot express the essential nature of the self because the self [in its essential nature] is free from both the states of effect and cause.”<sup>78</sup> The explanation of the two terms he gives here: “However, it is said to be *sat* when it is distinguished in the forms of gods, humans, and animals, etc. Then unfit for those (names and forms) in the condition of cause it is said to be *asat*. So also, is *śruti* --- ‘In the beginning was verily this *asat*. From that was generated the *sat* (Tait. Up. 2.7.1); ‘this was then undifferentiated. It differentiated only into name and form’

<sup>72</sup> na kenacit śabdena ucyate iti yuktam ‘yato vāco nivartante’ (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.4.9) ityādi śrutibhyaḥ ca /

<sup>73</sup> nāsad āsīn no sad āsīt tadānīm ... ānīd avātaṁ svadhayā tad ekaṁ tasmād dhānyan na paraḥ kiṁ canāsa //

<sup>74</sup> vināśasvabhāve hi asattvam, avināśasvabhāvaśca sattvam /

<sup>75</sup> sad asac cāham

<sup>76</sup> sad yad vartate, asad yad atītam anāgataṁ ca...

<sup>77</sup> na sat nāsad ucyate

<sup>78</sup> kāryakāraṇarūpāvasthādvayarahitatayā sadasacchabdābhyām ātmasvarūpaṁ na ucyate/

(Br.Up.1.4.7).<sup>79</sup> Rāmānujācārya gives the reason now why Brahman cannot be said to be *sat* and *asat*: “The appearance of the self in the states of cause and effect occurs due to the covering by ignorance in the form of action, not because of its own form. So then, the terms *sat* and *asat* do not describe the true nature of the self.”<sup>80</sup> So, in the hands of Rāmānujācārya the terms *sat* and *asat* receive different meanings in different occasions of use in the *Bhagavadgītā*.

## 9.2. Madhvācārya

Madhvācārya also appears to have erred in his understanding of the pairs of distinctions *sat-asat* and *bhāva-abhāva*. In his *Bhāṣya* he writes: “It has been said [in the verse] *nāsata* etc. There is no annihilation of *Asataḥ Prakṛti* the cause or *sat Brahman*, because it is declared in Viṣṇupurāṇa, ‘Prakṛti, Puruṣa and Time are eternal’. Because the word *vidyate* has been separately used [in relation to *sat* and *asat*] and also because it has been said in *Śrībhāgavata Purāṇa* that there is causality of *asat* and due to *sat* of the *asat* form and due to the one devoid of *guṇa* being everywhere being full of *guṇas*. Besides, *asat* is manifestation of *sat*, the unmanifest. According to traditional understanding also, it is so established - for both of them. *Anta* is judgment.”<sup>81</sup> In this explanation, Madhvācārya, misconstruing the syntax of the verse, appears to be misinterpreting it. He appears to have failed to understand in verse the claim that *nāsato vidyate bhāvo* ‘there is no *bhāva* of *asat*’, a universal ontological claim. He has put all the ontological load on the expression *vidyate*, which comes out clearly in what he writes elsewhere.

Madhvācārya, commenting on the same verse again in his *Tātparyā Nirṇaya*, writes: “The sorrow is not because the war leads to misery in the other world. Even as from *asat* (evil) deeds there can be no *bhāva* (happiness) even so from *sat* (good) deeds there can be no *abhāva* (unhappiness), this is from the rule. Therefore, the words which indicate *sadbhāva*, all refer to happiness; the words which indicate *abhāva*, all refer to unhappiness, thus in Śabda Nirṇaya. *Sadbhāva* in the sense of straight *bhāva* and *sat* etc. thus it is properly used. For commended deeds the word *sat* is widely used. From being said here after the one who thinks, ‘He becomes ‘a-sat’, ‘asat brahmeti’ for him Brahman becomes ‘a-sat’, consequently he becomes sorrowful. *Anta* is judgment.”<sup>82</sup> Even though Madhvācārya correctly recognizes the

<sup>79</sup> kāryāvasthāyām hi devādināmarūpabhāktvena sad iti ucyate, tadanarhatayā kāraṇāvasthāyām asad iti ucyate/ tathā ca śrutiḥ ---‘asadvā idamagra āsīt / tato vai sadjāyata/’ (Tai. U. 2.7.1), ‘taddhedam tarhyavyākr̥tamāsīt tannāmarūpābhyāmeva vyākriyate’ (Br. U. 1.4.7) ityādikā /

<sup>80</sup> kāyakāraṇāvasthādvyānvayaḥ tu ātmanaḥ karmarūpāvidyāveṣṭanakṛtaḥ, na svarūpataḥ, iti sadasacchbdābhyām ātmarūpaṃ na ucyate/

<sup>81</sup> iti āha – nāsata iti / asataḥ kāraṇasya, sato brahmaṇasca, abhāvo na vidyate – prakṛtiḥ puruṣacaiva nityo kālaśca sattama iti vacanācchrīviṣṇupurāṇe // pṛthak vidyate ityādarāthaḥ / asataḥ kāraṇatvaṃ ca – sadasadrūpayā cāsau guṇamyā’ guṇo vibhuḥ / iti śrībhāgavate // asadaḥ sadajāyata iti ca / avyaktesca / samradāyataścaitat ityāha – ubhayorpi iti anto nirṇayaḥ //

<sup>82</sup> na ca yuddhātparalokaduḥkham iti śokaḥ /asatkarmaṇaḥ sakāśāt bhāvo nāsti satkarmaṇaḥ

sense of ‘ethical’ in the word *sat* and ‘unethical’ in *asat*, he, instead of retaining them as ethico-ontological categories, turns them into mere ethical categories, which do not appear to be correct. Similarly, when *bhāva* and *abhāva* are presented as meaning ‘happiness’ and ‘unhappiness’ respectively, Madhvācārya appears to be making a semantic error, as these categories are purely ontological categories.

While commenting on the claim of Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā 9.19: ‘I am *sat* and *asat*’<sup>83</sup> Madhvācārya writes in his Bhāṣya: “*sat* is work (effect) and *asat* is the cause (action). Because of the *sat* manifest form, the wise call it works (effect). Because of *asat* unmanifest form, it is also worded cause. Thus, it has been explained. This all, as is made up verily of both *asat* and *sat*, is above both *sat* and *asat*.”<sup>84</sup> In this explanation, Madhvācārya has simply changed the meaning of *sat* and *asat* and gives a different meaning than what he had explained earlier. Commenting on the same expression from Bhagavadgītā 9.19 in Tātparya Nirṇaya, he writes: “Since he is *sat* full of auspicious qualities, there is nothing else with more qualities than Him. As it is so, then Viṣṇu, known as the highest step, is said *asat* as well. Thus, according to Śabda Nirṇaya.”<sup>85</sup> In this explanation there is further shift in meaning of *sat* and *asat*.

### 9.3. Bhāskara

The verse 2.16 of vulgate recension of Bhagavadgītā occurs as verse 2.17 in the recension of Bhagavadgītā commented upon by Bhāskara. Commenting upon the verse Bhāskara writes: “Of the dharma of happiness and unhappiness character, [which is] absent from the self, there is no being – being in the sense of existence and coming into existence – like [there is no being of] sesamum-oil in the sand. It is constantly said that in the very process of coming into existence [of mind], is born the mode of fastening of cold and hot characterized by happiness and unhappiness. Not at all, from being non-conscious there does not arise feeling in the internal organ, from being conscious *kṣetrajña* appears, as if, conjoined with these modes. As the *vaiśeṣikas* say --- and not even as seated in the inner organ the same individual-self feels these. Just as the form etc. established in pot etc., neither these – desire, hatred, happiness, unhappiness – speak of dharma of *kṣetrajña*. Even if *kṣetrajña* has conjunction with happiness and unhappiness, even then the own form of that is not transformed, like the own form of crystal. Like the blue and yellow etc. conjoined

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sakāśāt abhāvo nāsti / iti niyatvāt // sadbhāvavācīnaḥ śabdāḥ sarve te sukhavācākāḥ / abhāvavācīnaḥ śabdāḥ sarve te duḥkhavācākāḥ // iti śabda nirṇaye // sadbhāva sādhubhāve ca sādityetat prayujyate / praśaste karmaṇi tathā sacchabdaḥ pārtha yujyate // iti vakṣyamāṇatvāt / eka asanneva sa bhavati asadbrahmeti ve cet ityādeśca / anto nirṇayaḥ //

<sup>83</sup> sad asac cāham

<sup>84</sup> sat kāryam / asat kāraṇam – sadabhivyaktarūpatvāt kāryamityuccyate budhaiḥ / asadvyaktarūptvāt kāraṇam ca cāpi śūbditam // iti hyabhidhānāt // asacca saccaivath ca yad viśvaṃ sadasataḥ param /

<sup>85</sup> sat sād huguṇapūrṇatvāds mānānyo guṇādhikāḥ/ yato'to'saditi proktaṃ viśnavākhyam param padam // iti śabdanirṇaye //



with the crystal have mutually opposed transformations. Indeed, transformation is name of annihilation, destruction. In the same way non-being, annihilation of self is not present. Eternal self that I am – it is recognized from the demonstration of perpetuity and absence of demonstration of transience. ‘Indestructible indeed is this self’- is heard in śruti. Both *sat* and *asat* is seen and judged. End is limit, just like the end point. The word ‘anta’ is expression of limit here just as the end of the village. What is *sat* that is *sat* indeed. What is *asat* is *asat* indeed. Whoso making ascertainment of this said it is seer of that-ness. The being of that is tat-ness. ‘That’ by name of all indicates whatever amounts to referent of word.”<sup>86</sup>

One can clearly see that Bhāskara, like Śāṅkarācārya, appears to be taking *sat* and *asat* as mutually exclusive categories, and equating the two with *bhāva* and *abhāva* respectively. Hence while commenting on the claim of Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā 9.19: ‘I am *sat* and *asat*’<sup>87</sup> Bhāskara changes the meaning of *sat* and *asat*. He writes: “‘*sat*’ indicates fit for use gross things, ‘*asat*’ indicates subtle unmanifest unusable (things).”<sup>88</sup> This is nothing but appears to be sheer distortion of the meaning of the text to read one’s own presuppositions in the text. Bhāskara’s commentary ends with the ninth chapter of Bhagavadgītā, and hence there is no commentary by him on the claim in Bhagavadgītā 13.12 regarding *Brahman*: “not said to be ‘*sat*’ or ‘*asat*’.”<sup>89</sup>

#### 9.4. Abhinavagupta

The verse 2.16 of vulgate recension of Bhagavadgītā also occurs as verse 2.17 in the recension of the Bhagavadgītā commented upon by Abhinavagupta. He writes: “And then, also following the common worldly practice [the Lord] says this: There is no *bhāva* of what is *asat*, i.e., body [etc.], that is continuously perishing; for it is changing incessantly by stages. Again, never there is destruction for the ever-*sat*

<sup>86</sup> ātmany avidyamānasya sukhaduḥkhalakṣaṇasya dharmasya na kadācid vidyate bhāvaḥ / bhavanaṃ bhūtir utpattir ity arthaḥ / sikaṭāsv iva tailasya / utpadyamānasyaiva hi (mānaṣaḥ) sukhaduḥkhalakṣaṇo vikāraḥ śītoṣṇādinibandhano jāyata ity anantaram uktam / nanv acetanatvād antaḥkaraṇasya samvedanaṃ nopapadyate / cetanatvāt kṣetrañjasamavetyaivāyamaṃ vikāraḥ / yathā vaiśeṣikāḥ prāhuḥ --- naitad evam antaḥkaraṇastho 'py asau jīvātmā samvedyate / yathā ca rūpādayo ghaṭādisthāḥ (iti) / nāyamaṃ kṣetrañjadharma iti ca vakṣyati --- icchā dveṣaḥ sukhaṃ duḥkham --- iti / yady api kṣetrañjasamavāyitvaṃ sukhaduḥkhaḥ tathāpi tatsvarūpasya na vikriyā maṇisvarūpavat / nīlapitādīnām eva maṇisamavāyīnāṃ parasparavirodhād vikriyā / vikriyā hi nāma vināśa upamardāḥ / tathātmāna iti / nābhāvo vināśo vidyate / sata ātmanaḥ so 'ham iti pratyabhijñānān nityatvopapatter anityahetoś cābhāvāt / avināśī vā are 'yam ātmā iti śruteḥ / ubhayoḥ sadasator dṛṣṭo nirṃīto 'nto maryādā antyāvastheti yāvat / antaśabdō maryādāvacaṇo 'tra grāmānta iti yathā / yat sat tat sad eva / yad asat tad asad eveti / kair ayaṃ nīscayaḥ kṛta ity āha --- tattvadarśibhiḥ / tadbhāvas tattvam / tad iti sarvanāmnā padārthamātraṃ vyapadiśyate / vastuyāthātmyavedibhir ity arthaḥ /

<sup>87</sup> sad asac cāham

<sup>88</sup> sad iti sthūlaṃ vyavahārayogyam vastu vyapadiśyate / asad iti sūkṣmam avyaktam a(vyavahārya)m /

<sup>89</sup> na sat nāsad ucyate

Supreme Self because of its unchanging nature. So says the Veda too: ‘Lo! This Self is decay-less or possessing the dharma of being indestructible’ (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 4.5.14). *Of these two – of sat and asat – the end is the point of the boundary where they come to rest.*”<sup>90</sup> Abhinavagupta is also taking *sat* and *asat* equivalent to *bhāva* and *abhāva* respectively, and interpreting both the pairs of opposed concepts as mutually exclusive. Abhinavagupta provides no gloss on the claim of Kṛṣṇa in Bhagavadgītā 9.19 (in the recension commented upon by him numbered 9.20): ‘I am *sat* and *asat*’<sup>91</sup> and also on the claim in Bhagavadgītā 13.12 (in the recension commented upon by him numbered 13.13 and occurred with slight variation, i.e., dropping the word *tān*) regarding *Brahman*: “not said to be ‘*sat*’ or ‘*asat*’.”<sup>92</sup>

So, the conclusion from the above examination of the five most important traditional Indian commentators – the first three recognized as ācāryas and the last two belonging to kāmīr - is that they probably could not fully grasp the two pairs of distinctions – *sat-asat* and *bhāva-abhāva* – and the interrelationship of the four concepts and changed the meaning of these distinctions with the change of place of use of these concepts.

## 10. Meaning of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16

### 10.1. The Translation

The proper translation of Bhagavadgītā 2.16 appears to be as follows: “Neither being (*bhāva*) of non-ethical-non-eternal-non-actual (*asataḥ*) is found, nor non-being (*abhāva*) of ethical-eternal-actual (*sataḥ*) is found; the conclusion (*antaḥ*) of both of these [two] has been seen (*dr̥ṣṭaḥ*) verily by the seers of that-ness (*tattvadarśibhiḥ*).”

### 10.2. The Explanation of the Metaphysical Principle

The thinking involved in the *Bhagavadgītā* is based on the metaphysical principle stated in 2.16. In the metaphysical principle stated in the first line *bhāva-abhāva* (being-non-being) distinction is not to be equated with existence-nonexistence [*asti (astiva) - nāsti* (lack of *astiva*)] distinction. The later distinction is only a distinction within the *vikāras* of *bhāva* (modes of being) and hence is not to be confused with being-non-being (= nothing). Something like *ātman* or *Brahman* or *puruṣa* can have *bhāva* (*being*) without existence as well as without non-existence, i.e., they have been beyond existence and non-existence. So, the thinking involved in the *Bhagavadgītā* depends on the idea of ‘being’ remaining distinct from the idea of ‘existence’. What exists can go out of existence, as both

<sup>90</sup> atha ca lokavṛttenedamāha – asato – nityavināśinaḥ śarīrasya na bhāvaḥ --- anavaratamavasthābhiḥ pariṇāmitvāt / nityasataśca –paramātmano nāsti kadācivinaśo’pariṇāmadharmatvāt / tathā ca vedaḥ-‘avināśi vā are’yamātmānucchittidharmā iti/’ (bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad 4.5.14) anayoḥ sadasatorantaḥ -pratiṣṭāpadam yatrānayoṣvīśrāntiḥ //

<sup>91</sup> sad asac cāham

<sup>92</sup> na sat nāsad ucyate

existence and non-existence are *vikāras* of *bhāva*. However, that which has *bhāva* (being) does not admit of *abhāva* (non-being) and vice versa. For example, number two, to explain with a familiar and mundane example of the distinction, consider any number. The number two has *bhāva* (being), it does not admit of *abhāva* (non-being), but it is not existent which can go out of existence. Number two cannot pass into non-being or nothing. But in contrast, a particular pair, e.g., two bulls, is existent and can go out of existence, but number two, as has being, does not admit of non-being even here.

Similarly, in the metaphysical principle, as we have explained, *sat-asat* distinction is not to be confused with any of the following distinctions: *bhāva-abhāva* (being-non-being), existence-nonexistence [*asti (astiva)-nāsti* (lack of *astiva*)]. *Sat-asat* distinction makes neither *sat* and *asat* mutually exclusive nor jointly exhaustive, as we have already explained earlier in section 7.

The metaphysical principle stated in the first line of Bhagavadgītā 2.16 has two parts. The first part says that that which is non-ethical-non-eternal-non-actual (*asataḥ*) by itself alone cannot have being (*bhāva*). That means that one cannot combine *asat* alone with *bhāva* without combining the former first with *sat*. The second part says that ethical-eternal-actual (*sataḥ*) cannot have non-being (*abhāva*) at all under any circumstance, e.g., with or without combining with *asat*. That means that one cannot combine *sat* with *abhāva* under any condition. The two parts together create an asymmetry between the scope of *bhāva* and *abhāva*. Within the scope of *bhāva* is included that which is *sat* alone by itself, *sat* and *asat* together, and that which is neither *sat* nor *asat*. But within the scope of *abhāva* fall only that which is *asat* alone by itself.

### 10.3. The Clue to the Significance of the Metaphysical Principle

The clue to the significance of the metaphysical principle of the first line of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16 is contained in the second line, whose words are very significant. The conclusion is referred to by the word *antaḥ*, whose another meaning is 'inside.' The use of *antaḥ* for conclusion indicates that the conclusion is inside the two statements (*vākya*) in the first line of 2.16 like a fire is inside the two fire sticks. So, the conclusion is not to be understood in the modern sense of conclusion of linear deductive or inductive argument, but in the sense of what is disclosed or revealed or uncovered by a hermeneutic holistic circular thought process which is like churning (*nirmathay*) as explained above, which is *sudarśanacakra* or *su-dhīcakra* 'well-undertaken circle of insight or vision'. The expressions *dr̥ṣṭaḥ* 'what has been seen' and *tattvadarśibhiḥ* 'by the seers of that-ness' also confirm this reading. How to the *tattvadarśi* 'the seers of that-ness' the *antaḥ* 'conclusion, inside' becomes *dr̥ṣṭaḥ* 'what has been seen' is described in various Upaniṣads.

### 10.4. The Process of *Darśana*

*Īśa Upaniṣad* (*Kāṇva*) 15 says: "The face of the eternal-ethical-actual is hidden

by a golden pot. *Pūṣanna* that you uncover to put sight on whose dharma is eternal-ethical-actual.”<sup>93</sup> The same verse occurs with some modification as *mantra* 17 in the *Mādhyandina* recension of *Īśa Upaniṣad*.<sup>94</sup> The *Īsopaniṣad* (*Kāṇva*) 15 occurs verbatim in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.15.1. This mantra also occurs with modification (*viṣṇave* substituted for *dr̥ṣṭaye*) in the *Maitrāyaṇi Upaniṣad* 6. 35.<sup>95</sup>

What is being told in these various formulations of the same idea is that the face of the *satya*, that which is *sat*, where *sat* means ‘ethical (good)-eternal (or timeless) - actual (pertaining to action)’ all the three together rolled into one concept, is covered by the golden pot. The golden pot here is the sun, which covers the face of the *satya*, in the sense that the garment of the *Īśa* that covers the face of *satya* is made of things empirical visible in sunlight to the eye, which represents all the sense organs. So, when *Pūṣanna* ‘the nourisher’ is asked to uncover the golden pot, it means that one has to take away the attention focused on empirical things, then only one will be able to put his insight on that which is characterized as eternal-ethical-actual, which is abstract and a priori. That is to say, the that-ness of the inner institution as a person, even though manifest through the movement of the empirical things, is abstract and a priori. Here one is putting the insight on the that-ness of the inner institution as a person is simultaneously the institution as a person putting his sight on one. Moreover, as *Maitrāyaṇi Upaniṣad* 6, 35 uses the expression *viṣṇave* in place of *dr̥ṣṭaye*, the institution as the person putting his sight on one is the pervading of one by the institution as a person.

The removal of the light of Sun to uncover and to put one’s sight on the that-ness of the institution as a person, in the present context of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.16 translates into the removal of the words to uncover and to put one’s sight on what is covered by the words. For light, here is the light of words. In *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3 it is explained that the light (*javāḥ*) – “speech, indeed, is his light for the speech, indeed, as the light, one sits, moves about, does one’s work and returns.”<sup>96</sup> – when speech has

<sup>93</sup> *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukham / tat tvam pūṣann apāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dr̥ṣṭaye //*

<sup>94</sup> *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukham / yo’sāvāditye puruṣaḥ so’sāvaham / aum khambrahma //*

<sup>95</sup> *hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukham / tat tvam pūṣann apāvṛṇu satyadharmāya viṣṇave / yo’sā āditye puruṣaḥ so’sā aham / eṣa ha vai satyadharmo yadādityasya āditvam tacchuklam puruṣam alīṅgam nabhaso’ntargatasya /*

<sup>96</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.3.5: *astamīta āditye yājñavalkya candramasy astamīte śānte ’gnau kimjyotir evāyaṃ puruṣa iti / vāg evāsya jyotir bhavātīti / vācaivāyaṃ jyotiṣāste palyate karma kurute vipalyeti / tasmād vai samrāḍ api yatra svaḥ pāñir na vinirjñāyate ’tha yatra vāg uccaraty upaiva tatra nyetīti / evam evaitad yājñavalkya //* “But when both the sun and the moon have set, Yājñavalkya, and the fire has died out, what then is the source of light for a person here?” The speech is then his source of light. It is by the light of the speech that a person sits down, goes about, does his work, and returns. Therefore, O Emperor, when someone cannot make out even his own hand, he goes straightway toward the spot from where he hears a speech uttered.’ ‘Quite right, Yājñavalkya.’”

stopped, the self is his light (*ātmaivāsya jyotir bhavati*).

The two ideas of removal of light and speech as light harmonizes with *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12-13 where when one speaks of something that it exists then as *brahman* is hidden in it, one grasps *brahman* indirectly in speaking of something that it exists. So, one can put his sight on *brahman* by removing the cover of light of words that hides it, which is consistent with the hermeneutics of churning to uncover what is hidden in words.

#### 10.5. Bhagavadgītā's Sāṃkhya Thinking

One should not forget that thinking in the Bhagavadgītā is Sāṃkhya thinking. First of all, Sāṃkhya thinking is the knowing of the that-ness of the soul or the self as testified by quotation of a śloka from the *Vyāsa-smṛti* by Śaṅkarācārya in his *Viṣṇu-sahasra-nāma*.<sup>97</sup> This is the first etymological meaning of Sāṃkhya from *saṃ* (right) + *khyā* (knowledge). Grammatically the term is derived from *saṃkhyā* which means (2.2.24.2, under *Vārtika* 8 of Kātyāyana)<sup>98</sup> of Patañjali and also (under Kātyāyana's *Vārtika* 9).<sup>99</sup> If the two meanings are put together, then it not only indicates that the knowledge of pure that-ness of self is like the knowledge of number, as the self has the pure ideal being like the pure ideal being of the number. However, Sāṃkhya as derived from *saṃkhyā* (number) also indicates something else, i.e., counting involved in the number. We all know that Kapila's *Sāṃkhya* gives importance to counting the categories; in fact, in the history of Indian philosophical speculation, *Sāṃkhya* was the first system to count its different categories. However, we do not realize the importance of this element of counting involved in *Sāṃkhya* thinking. Counting gives the sum number. This is to indicate that Sāṃkhya categories are like sum numbers and not like the genus. The difference in the sum number and genus is that the property of the sum number cannot be attributed to the constituent numbers whose sum it is, while the genus can be attributed to each particular subsumed under it. Consider the sum number two arrived at by counting two ones. The attribute of two cannot be attributed to one, and the sum number two is unity (one number) while two are two numbers. It is the mystery of number that one and one together are two without either of the units, which are each one, being two, and without the two being one. However, in the case of genus say 'red' and things subsumed under it, red can be attributed to the latter, as they are red things. Similarly, if the red is bright, one can attribute brightness to the things subsumed under genus 'red.' Sāṃkhya conceives its categories as sum number and not like a genus. It has a further implication, which is captured by another meaning of *Sāṃkhyāb*. In the Sulabhā-Janaka episode of the *Mahābhārata* 12. 320, *Sāṃkhya* is mentioned as one of the essential requisites of a sentence, and Sulabhā defines it as the principle that properly measures the defect and

<sup>97</sup> śuddhātmatattvavijñānaṃ sāmkyamityabhighīyate, iti vyāsaśruteḥ /

<sup>98</sup> laingāḥ sāmkyāyaḥ vidhayo ca na siddhyanti /

<sup>99</sup> sāmkyeṣu api uktam karmādīnām anuktāḥ ekatvādayaḥ iti kṛtvā sāmkyāḥ bhaviṣyanti /

merits of a particular aspect in a sentence.<sup>100</sup>

This relates *Sāṃkhya* to speaking and *vāk*. Amara, in his lexicon, states that the term *saṃkhyā* is used in the sense of discussion and investigation.<sup>101</sup> What this indicates is the *arithmos* or arithmetic sum number structure of logos or *vāk*. Unity of discourse has a determinate property not found in its parts (letters, syllables, words). Discourse is comparable to that form of being in common, which sum number has, and it does not have that form of being common that genus has. Discourse has the structure of the sum number of things, which precisely as that thing which all of them together have in common cannot be attributed to any of them individually. And indeed, the sum of what has been counted is not something, which could be predicted of each thing counted. This common unity of what is said and meant in logos or *vāk* is the unity of an insight. That is why Patañjali uses the term *Prasṃkhyāna* in his *Yoga-sūtra* 4.29 in the sense of supreme insight. In the *Yoga-sūtra-bhāṣya* 1.5 and 2.2 also we find the same term used in the same sense.

In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Arjuna's speech and reasoning lack the unity of insight. In his thinking, he cannot overcome the contradiction in which the testimonies of the senses involve him. He is unable to discriminate between the conflicting two (*sukha* and *duḥkha*) which one thing has. Many of the senses have only an impure form of the being of the eidos, while one eidos has only a pure being in itself. The reason is that the ideal becomes impure when it appears in the many. The ideal can only be many when something *other* than itself attaches to it. However, this "other" which is in the many is the Other of the One. Thus, there is more present than just the one eidos with nothing besides itself. Where one eidos is (like *dehin* 'embodied'), there must "be" some other (like *deha* 'body'), and not only must that One (One Self) "be" as the Many (like *dehin* 'embodied' in many bodies appearing as many), but also it must "be" as the determinations, which are mixed into the specific phenomena. Nevertheless, 'to be' means 'to be' idea like a number. Moreover, Arjuna cannot keep the being of one idea distinct from the many with which it is mixed in his thinking. That leads to his being overpowered by the emotion of grief and faulty sophistic reasoning in his speech. Once these two are taken care of by *Sāṃkhya*, he could receive the lesson in how to engage himself (*yoga*) in action so that his eidetic being as *dehin* does not get bonded with the cycle of *Prakṛti* and *deha* and hence does not get bonded with action to retain its *akartā* character even while there is participation in the practice of the institution.

#### 10.6. *Brahman* and Sanskrit *Vākya*

Now the question is how is the One *Brahman* with its *tattva* 'that-ness' hidden in the Sanskrit *vākya*? It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate this question in

<sup>100</sup> doṣāṇaṃ ca guṇānāṅca pramāṇaṃ pravibhāgataḥ / kañcidarnmabhiptetya sā saṅkhyetyupadhāryatām// (Mahābhārata 12.320.82)

<sup>101</sup> carcā saṅkhyā vicāraṇā – Amara, 1.5.2; cf. also vidvān ... saṅkhyāvān paṇḍitah...II.7. 5



its entirety.<sup>102</sup> Suffices it to say that it was known in the classical, traditional Vyākaraṇa. Further suffices to say here that when a vākya is uttered, not only the action (which also includes activities like existing, becoming, etc.) being performed by a thing is told, but also through the system of difference of nominal and verbal endings in the vākya the Self or the Brahman is being presented un-thematized, i.e., as hidden but present in what is said. This idea was expressed beautifully in the first introductory verse (in *Gīti* meter) of the little-known *Prakriyā-sarvasva*<sup>103</sup> by the brilliant and versatile author Nārāyaṇa-bhaṭṭa (17th Cenrury AD) of Melputtūr: “Bring to mind the charming form of Murāri (Kṛṣṇa =Brahman), rolling apart (*vilola*) in the playful (*vilāsa*) dance (*rāsa*, which also means uproar, din, sound in general and speech) unified, one by one, in each of the Gopīs, like the suffix (*prtyaya*) in the excellent works (*prakṛtiṣu*) [of words].”<sup>104</sup> The form of each word in a vākya consists of two elements, viz. inert or inactive *prakṛti* nominal or verbal base or nucleus) and that which gives dynamism to it, i.e., *pratyaya* (conjugational, derivational, or declensional suffix or termination). Only in association with *pratyaya*, the inner *prakṛti* of śabda becomes active *śabda-prakṛti*. According to the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali, *pratyaya* is compulsory, without which a word is not in a form usable in speech. Commenting on Pāṇini sutra 1.2.45<sup>105</sup> what Patañjali says in his *Mahābhāṣya*<sup>106</sup> The idea that Pratyaya represents the dynamic aspect of the well-formed word dominates over its *prakṛti*, which is inert by itself. *Prakṛti* of the word by itself is dormant like the Prakṛti of Sāṃkhya without saṃyoga with Puruṣa. As the Prakṛti of Sāṃkhya becomes active in the presence of Puruṣa, śabda-prakṛti also becomes active when a *pratyaya* is associated with it. It is the *pratyaya*, which makes the *prakṛti* of wordplay different roles in the speech. Hence, the Puruṣa or the Brahman or the Self-expresses itself in the unity of one system of differences of the verbal and nominal endings of words in a vākya. This unity of one system of differences of the verbal and nominal endings of words in a vākya has a structure of sum number different from each member of the sum.

<sup>102</sup> The author of this article has explained the idea in detail in his essay, “A *Śrauta / Smārta* Hermeneutic Interpretation of the First *Kārikā* of the *Brahma-kāṇḍa* of Bhartṛhari’s *Vākyapadīya*,” forthcoming.

<sup>103</sup> *Prakriyā-sarvasva* of Melputtūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, (a) ed. Trivandrum, Thiruvananthapuram, Oriental Research Institute & Manuscripts Library, 1931-1992; (b) synthetic volume (“compiled by”) K.P. Narayana Pisharoti, Guruvayur, Guruvayur Devaswom, 1998. The *Prakriyā-sarvasva* is a grammatical work and is an original recast of Pāṇini’s sūtras, divided into twenty sections with a lucid commentary explaining all the difficult points.

<sup>104</sup> rāsavilāsavilolaṃ smarata murārer manoramam rūpam / prakṛtiṣu yat pratyayavat pratyekam gopikāsu sammilitam //

<sup>105</sup> arthavad adhātur apratyayaḥ prātipadikam //

<sup>106</sup> na kevalena vṛkṣaśabdena arthaḥ gamyate / kena tarhi / sapratyayakena / na vā pratyayena nityasambandhāt kevalasya aprayogaḥ / na vā eṣaḥ doṣaḥ / kim kāraṇam / pratyayena nityasambandhāt / nityasambandhau etau arthau prakṛtiḥ pratyayaḥ iti / pratyayena nityasambandhāt kevalasya aprayogaḥ na bhaviṣyati /

In prakriyā in Vyākaraṇa not only the word is well formed, but also its semantico-syntactic place is determined at once as the semantic-syntax is included in the final form of the word. One may object that the author is relating the unrelated texts like Bhagavadgītā and the texts from Vyākaraṇa tradition. The reply is that earlier, what the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.12 bc is saying is how Brahman can be comprehended otherwise than by saying ‘[something] is’ or ‘[something] exists’ something can be anything in the world. The linguistic implication of this idea is that by directly referring to Brahman, *one cannot say* that he exists. However, it is being being comprehended when one says of anything in the world that it exists, because metaphysically *Brahman* is in everything and everything is in *Brahman*, but grammatically it implies that the *prakṛti* of the word that is used to say something is always with *pratyaya* and never merely *prakṛti* by itself. This grammatical point is related to metaphysics as the system of *pratyaya* represents being of *Brahman* without directly speaking of it that it exists. Only when one takes one’s attention off from the *prakṛti* of the words, that is when one takes one’s attention off from the thing whose activity is presented in the *vākya*; then one gets the knowledge of the that-ness of puruṣa/brahman/self-hidden in the *vākya* as the unified one system of differences of the verbal and nominal endings of words in a *vākya*. This is what the second line of the Bhagavadgītā 2.16 is trying to convey.

Moreover, to relate metaphysics of the Bhagavadgītā with Vyākaraṇa is not being speculative. In Bhagavadgītā 10.33 Kṛṣṇa says: “Of letters the letter ‘A’ am I, and dvandva of all compounds.”<sup>107</sup> This correlation of metaphysical being of Kṛṣṇa with a linguistic element like letter ‘A’ and grammatical constructions like dvandva compound clearly indicates that Bhagavadgītā’s metaphysics is not independent of linguistic and grammatical considerations. The Bhagavadgītā appears to be following *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*. According to *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.3.6: “The whole of speech is the sound a. Manifesting itself through the stops and sibilants, this (vāc) becomes abundant and multifarious. In a whisper, it is breath; out loud, it is the body. Therefore, that is hidden, so to speak—for the bodiless is hidden, and breath is bodiless. However, aloud it is the body. Thus perceptible—for the body is perceptible.”<sup>108</sup> Further, the sound also names that which is beyond naming and individuation, the transcendental holistic principle of brahman in *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.3.8: “Brahman is ‘a’, and ‘aham’ is contained therein.”<sup>109</sup>

#### 10. 7. What is the *Antaḥ* Seen by the Seers of That-ness

With the above explanations at hand, we are in a position to discern what was the conclusion (*antaḥ*) that has been seen (*dr̥ṣṭaḥ*) verily by the seers of that-ness

<sup>107</sup> akṣarāṇām akāro 'smi dvandvaḥ sāmāsikasya ca /

<sup>108</sup> akāro vai sarvāvāk saīśasparśoṣmabhir vyajyamānābhavī nānārūpābhavati / tasyai yad upāṃśu sa prāṇo 'tha yad uccais tac charīraṃ tasmāt tad tira iva tira iva hy aśarīraṃ aśarīro hi prāṇo 'tha yad uccais tac charīraṃ tasmāt tad āvīr āvīr hi śarīraṃ //

<sup>109</sup> a iti brahma tatrāgatam aham iti

(*tattvadarśibhiḥ*), from which emerges the significance of the metaphysical principle, which is explained throughout the *Bhagavadgītā*. The context in which the principle is announced in the context of the so-called discussion of the immortality of *ātman* (soul) or *puruṣa* (person), which is in all existents [Bhagavadgītā 2.12-13], followed by discussion of *mātrāsparśa* and how it gives rise to opposed dualities of feelings [Bhagavadgītā 2.14-15]. The announcement of the principle [Bhagavadgītā 2.16] is then followed by a declaration of the indestructibility of what pervades everything [Bhagavadgītā 2.17] and destructibility of the bodies [Bhagavadgītā 2.18]. Hence, what is taken as *eternal-actual-ethical* (*sat*) is the *ātman* (soul) or *puruṣa* (person) designated as *dehin* and *śarīriṇa*; and what is taken as non-eternal-non-actual-non-ethical (*asat*) is the various bodies, which are seen by the senses, which give rise to various opposed dualities of feelings. The larger context of this discussion is the refusal of Arjuna to fight [Bhagavadgītā 2.9], which gives rise to the discussion by Kṛṣṇa [Bhagavadgītā 2.10-11] to induce Arjuna to perform the action required of him. The conclusion of the two parts of the principle announced, which is discerned by the seers of that-ness (*tattvadarśibhiḥ*), is the *dharma* of *sat* as there is no *bhāva* of *asat* and there is no *abhāva* of *sat*.

Here it is of interest to note that Nirukta 1.20 declares: “Having immediately grasped *dharma* (at a distant time) seers came into being. Through instruction, they have handed over in entirety *mantras* to others (/inferiors) who had not immediately grasped *dharma*. The others (/inferiors) experiencing fatigue towards instruction, have set down for transmission this corpus (i.e., commentandum of the *Nirukta*, the *Naighaṇṭu*) and the Veda and the Veda ancillaries in order to grasp the [gradual or cumulative] representation. (The word) *bilma* ‘[gradual or cumulative] representation’ is (to be thought of as) or (as) *bhāsana* [illuminating or illustrating].”<sup>110</sup> *Dharma* is the *karma* one is required to perform. This follows from the Nirukta 1.20 read together with *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.1: “That here is eternal-actual-ethical: The actions that the wise poets saw in the *mantras*, are stretched in many ways across the three Vedas – Perform them always, you who long for the eternal-actual-ethical; that is your path to the world of those who well-perform the actions.”<sup>111</sup> What is stated in *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.1 has been accepted in the *Bhagavadgītā* 4.32: “Thus manifold *yajñas* are spread at the mouth of *Brahman*. Penetratively knowledgeably resolve them all as born of action. Thus, knowledgeably resolving, you will be liberated.”<sup>112</sup> The concern of Kṛṣṇa is to explain to Arjuna that which was discerned

<sup>110</sup> sāksāt-kṛta-dharmāṇa ṛṣayo babhūvuḥ / te `parebhyo {/avarebhyo} `sāksāt-kṛta-dharmabhya upadeśena mantrān samprāduḥ / upadeśāya glāyanto `pare {/avare} bilma-grahaṇāyemaṃ granthaṃ samāmnāsiṣur vedaṃ ca vedāṅgāni ca / bilmaṃ bhilmaṃ [bilvaṃ?] bhāsanam iti vā /

<sup>111</sup> tadetatsatyam / manreṣu karmāṇi kavayo yānyapaśyamstāni tretāyām bahudhā santatāni / tānyācaratha niyatam satyakāmaḥ eṣa vaḥ panthāḥ sukṛtasya loke //

<sup>112</sup> evaṃ bahuvīdhā yajñā vitatā brahmaṇo mukhe / karmajān vidhi tān sarvān evaṃ jñātvā vimokṣyase //

by the sages as the conclusion uncovered from the metaphysical principle having two parts.

There are two aspects to any *yajña* (institution), which are *sat* and *asat*. *Sat* is its eternal ethical actual aspect presented as abstract *yajña-puruṣa* (institution as a person). The other aspect is *asat*, which is the temporary non-ethical and non-actual aspect, which is the manifest form of *yajña* (institution) to give any institution a specific visible form manifest in time. This manifest form is the collective body (politic) of the *samaṣṭi puruṣa* or the *yajña puruṣa*. Since the former is eternal and the latter keeps changing in time, *karma* relates the two, as stated in Bhagavadgītā 3.14-15: “*yajña* is born of action; penetratively knowledgeably resolve that action comes from *Brahman*, and that *Brahman* comes from the Imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading *Brahman* ever rests in *yajña*.”<sup>113</sup>

### 11. Metaphysics of *Tattva* of *Samaṣṭi Puruṣa*

With the above clarification in mind, now let us understand the first line of Bhagavadgīta 2.16. There is no being (*bhāva*) of non-ethical-non-eternal-non-actual (*asat*) by itself, and hence, there is non-being (*abhāva*) of non-ethical-non-eternal-non-actual (*asat*) by itself, and it is nothing by itself. Similarly, there is no non-being (*abhāva*) of eternal-ethical-actual (*sat*), and hence, there is only being (*bhāva*) of eternal-ethical-actual (*sat*). *Bhāva* and *abhāva* are two mutually exclusive categories. However, *sat* and *asat* are neither mutually exclusive nor jointly exhaustive categories.

Since *bhāva* admits of *vikāras* like coming into existence, existence, and going out of existence, *bhāva* is more of ideation, which is ontological. However, *sat* and *asat* are ethico-ontological categories. From earliest times in Vedic thought, *sati* (the *śakti* of *sat*) is the consort of *śīva* (the good/ethical), indicating that *sat* is good/ethical and *asat* is non-good / non-ethical. Only two possibilities are ruled out in the metaphysical truth, i.e., *asat* by itself combined with *bhāva*, and *sat* combined with *abhāva*. These two kinds of combinations are not possible in Vedic thought, and the Bhagavadgītā also accepts this principle. But in Vedic thought, *bhāva* (being) can be combined with *sat* and *asat* when these two are together, as these are not mutually exclusive. Similarly, *bhāva* can be combined with neither *sat* nor *asat* as these are not jointly exhaustive.

That neither being (*bhāva*) of non-ethical-non-eternal-non-actual (*asataḥ*) is found, nor non-being (*abhāva*) of ethical-eternal-actual (*sataḥ*) is found – these two statements are the premises of the Vedic thought. The conclusion of these two premises was seen verily by the Vedic seers of that-ness (*tattva*), which is the that-ness of the collective institution as a person, which is not that-ness of substances or

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<sup>113</sup> *yajñāḥ ...karmasamudbhavaḥ // karma brahmodbhavaṃ vidधि brahmākṣarasamudbhavaṃ / tasmāt sarvagataṃ brahma nityaṃ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam //*

material things known to modern thought. Hence, the context of the metaphysical principle is the discussion of the collective institution as a person (*yajña puruṣa*). The metaphysical principle stated in the first line of Bhagavadgītā is needed as premises to discuss the that-ness (*tattva*) of the collective institution as a person. The metaphysical principle, which states the relation of two pairs of distinctions, is involved in all manifestations of the institution as a person, whether it is a manifestation of institutional thinking, a manifestation of institutional language [Sanskrit is a language of Institutions], the manifestation of institutional action, manifestation of institutional time, etc. in Vedic tradition of thinking. The ethico-ontological polarities of *sat* and *asat* with the respective meaning of ‘ethical-eternal-actual’ and ‘non-ethical-non-eternal-non-actual’ and the ontological polarities of *bhāva* and *abhāva* having the meaning of ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ and the interrelationship of two pairs of polarities as stated in Bhagavadgītā 2.16 are developed in Vedic thinking to think, discuss and belong to the collective institution as a person, which is an ethical-actuality, which does not admit of fact-value dichotomy and also does not admit of the is-ought gap. In Vedic thinking, the collective institution as a person is *sat* with *asat* manifest forms, which are ever-transforming. The categories of *sat* and *asat* are inapplicable in modern science, which deals with objective nature, which is the ethically neutral reality described in a vocabulary that admits both fact-value dichotomy and is-ought gap. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss in detail how the conclusion of the two statements made in the metaphysical principle of Bhagavadgītā 2.16 was discerned by the Vedic seers of the that-ness of the institution as a person more than what has been already explained in the essay.

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