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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

If one attempts to provide an introduction to the study of ‘Upanishads’, one must begin at the very beginning. And so we begin with Sanatana Dharma, two Sanskrit words with meanings as follows: Sanatana means ‘eternal’ and Dharma means ‘righteousness’, ‘law’, ‘faith’, ‘right and proper’, ‘fair and correct’ and so on. Sanatana Dharma therefore means ‘eternal righteous living’ or ‘eternal faith’ or ‘eternal right and proper conduct and living’. Such ‘dharma’ was practiced by the people living in the Southern and Eastern parts of the river ‘Sindhu’, which river ‘Sindhu’ was called as ‘River Indus’ by Persians and Greeks. River Sindhu (or river Indus) flows on the northern side of the area known as Bharat but which was named, again by Persians and Greeks, as India (due to nearness to ‘Indus’) and the practices of Sanatana Dharma by the people of Bharat (or India) came to be known as ‘Hindu’ religion or ‘Hinduism’ – all deriving from the ‘Indus’ name assigned to the ‘Sindhu’ river by Persians and Greeks.

The ‘foreign influence’ in the South Asian region, in the identification of its peoples and practices, in the words used locally like Sindhu and Sanatana Dharma really started from the earliest days of Western contacts with the area. From that time onwards, the Sanskrit words Sindhu, Bharat and Sanatana Dharma are replaced by the ‘western’ or ‘anglicised’ names like ‘Indus’, ‘India’, ‘Hindu Religion’ (or ‘Hinduism’), respectively.

SANATANA DHARMA (HINDU RELIGION)

Sanatana Dharma or ‘Eternal Righteous Living’ is a way of life practiced by people of Bharat from time immemorial. The Westerners called it as the ‘religion’ of the people of Bharat even though it is ONLY a way of life. There is no ‘religion’ *per se* in the ‘eternal dharmic’ way of life practised by these inhabitants but the Westerners described it as a ‘religion’ anyway. The general criteria adopted to define religions like dogmas (associated with the religion) or rules of association are simply absent in the practice of Sanatana Dharma. Satyam (Truth) and Dharma (Right and proper conduct) are the pillars of the way of life practiced therein (or in Sanatana Dharma or Hindu Religion). ***Sathyam vada*** (Tell the truth) and ***dharmam chara*** (Follow right and proper conduct) are the essentials of that way of life and may be said to be the twin pillars of Sanatana Dharma.

While ‘sathyam vada (tell the truth)’ does not require much further explanations, ‘dharmam chara (adopt right and proper conduct)’ may require further embellishments. In its essence, it means that fair conduct must be followed at all times. Suggestions of fair and noble and right conduct are provided, for example, *Ahimsa*, a Sanskrit word that means ‘do not harm or hurt’, is one of the most important dharmas to be followed. In fact, the saying is:

ahimsa paramo dharmah (Non-violence, or not hurting anybody, is the greatest duty)

Ahimsa requires non-violence, or not hurting anybody, in one’s mind, word and deed. In other words, not hurting others by deeds alone is not enough, one must not think thoughts in one’s mind about hurting others or one must not speak hurtful words to others. Thus ***ahimsa*** implies lot more than non-violence; ahimsa encompasses courtesy, kindness and love to all.

Upakarah paramo dharmah is another similar commandment; upakarah means helping others, doing good to others, doing service to fellow mankind, thus ‘service to fellow human beings and mankind’ is the greatest duty or dharma.

From these statements, it can be seen that the way of life known as ‘sanatana dharma’ is a framework for living life with the highest ideals of truth, non-injury and service towards fellow human beings, with high moral values; yet a very advanced and excellent way of life that contributed to the peace and satisfaction of leading a purposeful life.

Hinduism is, thus, a way of life. Hinduism believes in one God – a timeless, formless, omni-present entity – expressed in different forms with name and shape. The timeless, omni-present, one God is the ‘Nirguna Brahman’ (the Brahman without any attributes) and the name-and-form many Gods are the ‘Saguna Brahman’ (the Brahman with name, form and attributes).

ekam sad, viprAh bahudAh vadanthy
God is one, men call It by many names.

SCRIPTURES OF sanAtana dharma

The authoritative texts of ‘sanAtana dharma’ or ‘Hindu Religion as it is also called’ are undoubtedly the **VEDAS** (from the root ‘Vid’ meaning to know, implying that Vedas contain all that one need to know to lead one’s life including attainment of one’s life’s goal). Vedas are called ‘*sruthi*’ or ‘Heard’ because the Vedas contain the ‘divine’ revelations ‘heard’ by Seers or Sages in their ‘superconscious’ state or when they were spiritually in an advanced state. Such ‘divine revelations’ were then coded by these seers into what have come to be known as Vedas. It is said that these Vedas originated tens of thousands years ago or even earlier; no one is able to precisely set the date of origination of Vedas. Of course, there is no unanimity in these matters and one can find authors establishing the date of Vedas to be fifty, twenty, ten, seven or five thousand years or even more recent than that to about three thousand years ago or so. It seems to be fairly well accepted that the Vedas were ‘heard’ by Rishis or Seers or Sages in their ‘superconscious’ state and many seers have so heard the Vedas and who, in turn, taught it by word of mouth to their disciples. The ‘word of mouth’ by ‘Sound’ form of transmitting such knowledge (*gurumukha* – hearing directly from the face of the teacher) through generations is still prevalent today. These Rishis or Seers or Sages did not ‘write’ these Vedas and hence there is no ‘authorship’ for Vedas. These Rishis ‘heard’ or the text was ‘revealed’ to them when they were in a superconscious state. Unlike religious books in other religions, the VEDAS are considered to be ‘*Apourusheyam* – Not written by any author’, ‘*Anadi* – neither a beginning nor end’ but to have existed ALWAYS. ‘*Yasya Nishwasitham Vedah*’ meaning ‘Whose (God Almighty’s) Breath the VEDAS’. Since God Almighty – Para Brahman or Supreme Purusha – breathing occurred always, VEDAS existed always, from time immemorial.

Vedic knowledge is complete because they are revealed texts, revealed to rishis when they were in their superconscious state. It is above all doubts and mistakes.

CLASSIFICATION OF VEDAS

The body of knowledge known as ‘Vedas’ is so vast that they are further classified as follows:

- the main part of the Vedas (also known as Vedas),
- limbs of Vedas (also known as Vedangaas),
- Adjuncts to Vedas (also known as Upangaas), and,
- Appendices to Vedas (also known as Upavedas).

Sage Veda Vyasa codified the main part of the *Vedas* into four Vedas:

- ***RigVeda***,
- ***YajurVeda***,
- ***SamaVeda*** and
- ***AtharvaVeda***

There are six *Vedaangas* or limbs (or auxiliaries) of the Vedas and these are:

- ‘***Siksha***’ meaning euphony and pronunciation;
- ‘***Vyakarana***’ meaning grammar;
- ‘***Chandas***’ or metre;
- ‘***Niruktha***’ or etymology;
- ‘***Jyothisha***’ or astrology; and
- ‘***Kalpa***’ meaning procedure.

There are four ‘***Upangas***’ or ‘Adjuncts to these texts’ and these are:

- ‘***Meemamsa***’ meaning ‘critical interpretation of vedic texts’ (*Poorvameemamsa or Karmameemamsa* interpreting the ‘samhita and brahmana’ portions and the *Uttarameemamsa or Jnanameemamsa* interpreting the ‘aranyaka and upanishad’ portions of the Vedas);
- ‘***Nyaya***’ or logic;
- ‘***Purana***’ or ‘mythology’ (consisting of two ‘ithihasa puranas’, the *Ramayana and the Mahabharatha* and eighteen Puranas, six each for *Brahma, Vishnu and Siva*); and
- ‘***Dharma Saastraas***’ or ‘the codes of conduct’.

Knowledge and Wisdom on, and about, the ‘Sanatana Dharma’ or ‘the Hindu Religion’ is contained in these ‘fourteen’ texts; these fourteen texts are therefore known as “***Chathurdasa Vidyasthanas*** or Fourteen Centers of Knowledge”.

An overview of ‘*Chathurdasa Vidyasthanam*’ is given in Table 1 through 5

Table 1:

VEDAS	VEDA	VEDASAKHA	SAMHITA	BRAHMANA	ARANYAKA	UPANISHAD
	RIGVEDA	SAKALA SANKHAYANA	AITAREYA KAUSITAKI	AITAREYA KAUSITAKI	AITAREYA KAUSITAKI	AITAREYA KAUSITAKI
	YAJURVEDA	TAITIRIYA MAITRAYANIYA KANVA MADHVANDINA	TAITIRIYA SATAPATHA	TAITIRIYA SATAPATHA	TAITIRIYA BRIHADARANYAKA	TAITIRIYA, SVETASVATARA – KATHA BRIHADARANYAKA - ISAVASYA
	SAMAVEDA	RANAYANIYA JAIMINIYA	PANCAVIMSA, ARSEYA, TALAVAKARA DAIVATA, JAIMINIYA, UPANISHAD, SADVIMSA	PANCAVIMSA, ARSEYA, TALAVAKARA DAIVATA, JAIMINIYA, UPANISHAD, SADVIMSA		KENA CHANDOGYA
	ATHARVAVEDA	SAUNAKA – PIPPALADA -	GOPATHA	GOPATHA		MUNDAKA, MANDUKYA, PRASNA

Table 2:

VEDANGA	VEDANGA	TEXTS
	SIKSA	YAJNAVALKYA SIKSA, SIKSASANGRAHA & OTHER TEXTS
	VYAKARANA	PANINI'S VYAKARANASUTRA & OTHER TEXTS
	CHANDAS	CHANDAS SUTRAS OF PINGALA AND OTHER TEXTS
	NIRUKTA	YASKA'S NIRUKTA AND OTHER TEXTS
	JYOTISA	TEXT BOOKS ON GANITHAM, JATAKAM, MUHURTHAM, ETC
	KALPA	COLLECTION OF BOOKS ON SHAUTA SUTRA, DHARMA SUTRA ETC.

Table 3:

U	UPANGAS	DIVISIONS	DETAILS
P A N G A	MIMAMSA	PURVA MIMAMSA UTTARA MIMAMSA	
	NYAYA	NYAYA VAISESIKA SANKHYA	
	PURANA	18 MAHAPURANAS	6 PURANAS EACH UNDER BRAHMA PURANAS, VISHNU PURANAS & SIVA PURANAS
		18 UPAPURANAS ITHIHASA PURANAS	THERE ARE 2 ITHIHASA PURANAS – THEY ARE (1) RAMAYANA & (2) MAHABHARATHA
	DHARMA - SHAASTRA	SMRITIS DHARMASUTRAS	

Table 4:

U P A V E D A	AYURVEDA
	ARTHASHAASTRA
	DHANURVEDA
	GANDHARVAVEDA

Table 5:

J N A N A	PRASHTANATRAYI - THE ORTHODOX HINDU TEXTS ON TATTVA JNANA OR METAPHYSICS
	THERE ARE THREE CATEGORY OF JNANA TEXTS AS FOLLOWS
	BHAGAVAD GITA
	UPANISHADS
	BRAHMA SUTRAS

To these fourteen, four *Upavedas* or appendices to the Vedas are also sometimes added; these four are:

- *Ayurveda* or the science (or knowledge) of ‘*Ayus*’ or ‘Life’;
- *Arthasastra* or the science of wealth;
- *Dhanur Veda* or the science (or knowledge) of weaponry, missiles and warfare;
and
- *Gaandharva Veda* or the science (or knowledge) of the fine arts like music, dance, drama etc.

The Hindu Religion thus sometimes will be said to contain ‘Eighteen’ texts (the *Chathurdasa Vidyasthana* plus the four *Upavedas*); all of them collectively will also be referred to by the single name ‘Vedas’.

ORGANIZATION OF VEDAS

Human life divided into four stages (or AshramAs): brahmacharyam (education, study and celibacy), grihastham (family life), vAnaprastha (finished all his responsibilities of worldly duties and retiring into solitude and meditation), and sannyAsa (renounced life of a mendicant or monk). During each stage (or Ashrama), each section of the veda is to be studied. During brahmacharyam, study of mantra-samhitaas; during grihastham, study of brAhmanAs; during vAnaprastha, study of AranyakAs; and during sannyAsam, study of Upanishads are prescribed.

Each Veda consists of four parts to suit the four stages in a man's life- Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. The Vedas are organized into four divisions as follows: Mantra Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. These four divisions are meant to be studied in the respective stages of human being's life considered as organized into: Mantra-Samhitas during Brahmacharya (celibate life devoted to studies, particularly studies of religion and Vedas), Brahmanas during Gruhastha (married and family life, bring up children, support the community, provide charity etc.), Aranyaka texts during vanaprastha (withdrawal from family life to life of meditation and contemplation) and Upanishads during sannyasa (renunciation, contemplation, meditation).

Mantra-Samhitas:

Samhita: (also known as *Mantra-samhitaas*) that describes the basic text

These are hymns in praise of the Vedic God for acquiring material prosperity and happiness. They are poems comprising prayers, hymns and incantations addressed to various deities. This portion also contains information about the creative process, the universal laws, about the creation and the universe in detail. It is useful to Brahmacharins.

Brahmanas:

describe the ritualistic aspects and the manner of conducting the rituals

The Brahmanas are explanations of Mantras or rituals, which give guidance to people as to how; the sacrificial rites are to be performed. They are explanations of the method of using the Mantras in Yajnas or other rites. Details for various ceremonies like birth, naming, study, marriage, death are in this portion. The Brahmana portion is suitable for householders (Grihastashram).

Aranyakas:

describe ideas and thoughts to be reflected upon to gain an understanding of the Vedas

The **Aranyakas** are the forest books, the texts that give philosophical interpretations of the rituals. After a man has finished all his worldly duties (taking care of parents, marrying off children etc.) he proceeds to the forest to spend the rest of his days in solitude and meditation. The Aranyakas are intended for such people, hence the name. It explains the different kinds of rituals to be performed in forest by people, who go for Vanaprastha.

Upanishads:

describe the Jnana (knowledge) aspects of the Vedas. Describe the philosophical aspects, universal soul, individual soul, relationship between them (which contributes to the various philosophical systems like Advaita, Vishishta Advaita, Dwaita) etc.

The Upanishads are the essence of Vedic teaching. They are called Vedantas meaning the concluding portion of the Vedas as well as the ultimate conclusions of Vedic wisdom. Upanishads happen to be the foremost authorities of the Vedanta system of philosophy that developed in later times in different forms.

They reveal the most subtle and deep spiritual truths and are meant for Sanyasins. The collection of teachings generated by the ascetics who meditated on the mysteries of human existence came to be known as the Upanishads, which literally means "sitting close to" the teacher thereby indicating that the knowledge that it imparts is esoteric. Many, many Upanishads existed ages ago; a lot of them have been lost in the dark backward abyss of time. Only one hundred and eight have been preserved so far some in prose, some in verse.

Another grouping of the four parts into which the Vedas are organized are: The Samhitas and Brahmanas together are considered as the 'Karma Kanda' or the 'path of Karma or Action' and the Aranyakas and Upanishads together are considered as the 'Jnana Kanda' or the 'path of Jnana or Knowledge'.

Brief discussions of the four Vedas (*Rig, Yajur, Sama & Atharva*) and the four sections in each of these Vedas (samhitaas, braahmanas, aaranyakaas and upansihads) are given in the following paragraphs.

Rig-Veda

Rig-veda, so called due to the Rig-veda samhita being in the form of verses or Riks (that are known in later times as 'sloka' or 'stanzas of poetry'), hymns in praise of different Devatas, is the grandest and oldest book of the Hindus. Each Rik is a mantra; a number of Riks constitute a 'sookta'. Its immortal mantras embody the greatest truths of existence. Verses singing the praise of Agni (Fire God), Vayu (Air God), Surya (the Sun God - provider of heat and light to the universe), Chandra (the Moon God – providing nourishment to the soul and moonlight), Ushas (Dawn), Rudra (the powerful God that wreaks havoc occasionally) and so on demonstrate the poetical elegance and the mystical truths of the ancient Rishis as they learnt and heard (*sruti*) in their superconscious state.

The Rig-veda contains 10,170 verses divided into 64 chapters. It has twentyone vedasaakhaas.

Yajur-Veda

Its name is derived from the root word 'yaj' meaning worship. It primarily deals with the procedural details for performing different yajnas. The chief purpose of Yajur Veda is to give the mantras of Rig Veda appearing in the form of hymns a practical shape in the form of Yajna or worship. Whereas Rig Veda helps in chanting the praise using hymns, Yajur Veda helps in the actual performance of yajnas using these hymns and mantras.

There are two distinct Yajur Veda Samhitas, the **Shukla Yajur Veda or Vajasaneyi Samhita** and the **Krishna Yajur Veda or Taittireya Samhita**. The Krishna or the Taittireya is the older book and the Sukla or the Vajasaneyi is a later revelation to sage Yajnavalkya from the resplendent Sun God. About half of the Yajur-Veda is composed of verses taken from the Rig-Veda. They are arranged according to their importance in various rituals. The remaining part (mainly prose) deals with the formulae for performing the yajna, external as well as internal. The Yajur-Veda contains 1875 verses. It has one hundred and nine vedasaakhaas, 15 in Sukla Yajur Veda and 94 in Krishna Yajur Veda.

The procedural detail of 'yajnas' like the Darsa Poornamasa, Somayaaga, Vajapeya Yaaga, Rajasooya Yaaga, Aswamedha Yaaga and many others are made known to us by the Taittareeya Samhita in Krishna Yajur Veda. Some hymns of praise not found in Rig Veda are also found in Yajur Veda, for example, the famous Rudra hymns belong to the Krishna Yajur Veda, even though five sookthas known as 'pancha rudram' is found in Rig Veda; Sri Rudram refers only to that in Krishna Yajur Veda. Purusha Sooktha, which appears in Rig Veda, also appears with some changes in Yajur Veda; when people refer to Purusha Sooktha, the Yajur veda version is generally referred to.

Sama-Veda

The Sama-Veda Samhita is essentially the same as Rig-vedic Samhita. The main emphasis in Sama Veda is that the verses of Rig-Veda Samhita are set to the 'music'. The Udgatri, the Sama-vedic priest, chants Sama Veda hymns in yajnas and sacrifices. 'Sama' means to bring 'shaanthy' or peace to the minds. Accordingly this Veda contains chants to bring peace to the mind. Of the four methods of tackling an enemy, saama, dhaana, bheda, danda, the first is 'saama', that of conquering enemy by love, conciliatory words and bringing peace or 'shanthi' to him, hence 'sama' is the first of four such attempts suggested to conquer an enemy. Many of the hymns of the Rig-Veda are set to musical notes in Sama Veda. Instead of the 'udaatha', 'swaritha' and 'anudaatha' used in Rig Veda and Yajur Veda, Sama Veda uses many elongated notes and thus can be stated to be the basis for the seven notes (Sapta Swaras), fundamental to Indian classical music. The listening of the musical chants gives one a sense of universality, solace and peace - 'shanthi or sama' - to the mind and a mingling with the divine. The 'udgaata' or beginning ceremony before a yajna is actually a chanting of hymns from Sama Veda to ensure the grace of all the Devas. The Sama-Veda has one thousand branches (vedasaakhas) and contains approximately 2000 verses.

Atharva-Veda

Named after the rishi by name 'Atharvan', this Veda takes on the meaning of the word 'Atharva' meaning Purohit and is basically a book of magic spells to ward off evil and suffering and to destroy one's enemies. It deals more with the things here and now, than the hereafter, and describes the sacrifices that are the means to the attainment of the things desired here and now. The mantras are in prose as well as verse. There are also hymns addressed to devas other than the ones mentioned in the other three Vedas as well as hymns dealing with creation. Brahma is the representative of Atharva Veda. The Atharva Veda gives a useful insight into the rich landscape of India at the time of its composition. The Atharva Veda has fifty Vedashaakhas and contains 5987 verses.

In all, the four Vedas have got One thousand one hundred and eighty (1180) branches.

PRESERVATION OF VEDAS

Error-free Methods of Chanting

Without resort to writing, our fore-fathers have preserved the Vedas without errors creeping into it. The full benefit from Veda Mantras can result only if no word is changed; no unauthorized upward or downward drift in the note occurs during recitation.

A fool-proof method is used to chant various mantras in various patterns and combinations like Vaakya Patha, Pada Patha, Krama Patha, Jata Patha, Mala Patha, Sikha Patha, Krama Patha, Ghana Patha and so on were devised and implemented.

Vaakya Patha (or Samhita Patha) is the study of the samhita-mantras as stated in the samhitas in a sentence as stated in the samhita.

Pada Patha is the study of the samhita-mantras Pada by Pada or word by word. In other words, the compound words will be split into its component single words and the study of the samhitas word by word is accomplished in Pada Patha study.

Krama Patha is the study with words in combinations of two (2), the first word with the second, the second word with the third, the third word with the fourth and so on.

Jatha Patha also combines two words together but after combining the first word with the second, they are then chanted in reverse order and then again in the original order. Whereas in Krama Patha, they are recited as 1-2; 2-3; 3-4; and so on, in Jatha Patha, they are recited as 1-2-2-1-1-2, 2-3-3-2-2-3, 3-4-4-3-3-4, and so on.

The Ghana Patha is even more difficult than the above. The words are chanted in the combinations of words as follows: 1-2-2-1-1-2-3-3-2-1-1-2-3; 2-3-3-2-2-3-4-4-3-2-2-3-4; 3-4-4-3-3-4-5-5-4-3-3-4-5; 4-5-5-4-4-5-6-6-5-4-4-5-6; and so on. Each word thus is chanted thirteen (13) times. One who has studied the Ghana form of chanting is known as Ghanapaathi.

It must be remembered that, while chanting words forwards and backwards, the *swaraas* of each have to be properly preserved.

There are additional types of chanting which, or whose word combinations, are not explained here.

From all these, it can be seen that great care, one would say utmost care, has been used by the ancients to preserve the veda mantras without suffering even 'minute' change and without resorting to writing. The above system of complicated recitations was devised in very early times in order to preserve the purity of the word, sound, intonation, pronunciation, accent and sound combinations of the Vedas. They are followed even to this date.

PRASHTHANA THRAYI – TATTVA JNANA - METAPHYSICAL TEXTS UPANISHADS, BHAGAVAD GITA AND BRAHMASUTRA

There are 3 texts of ‘Tattva Jnana’ or Metaphysical aspects of the religion that are contained in the Vedas. These are:

The Upanishads,
The Bhagavad Gita (or Song of the God)
The Brahma Sutras

These texts are the ‘Jnana or Knowledge’ or ‘Tattva or Principles’ contained in the Vedas - the Upanishads are part of Vedas, the Brahma Sutras are a properly arranged text of the ideas randomly placed and discussed in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita is part of the Bishma Parva of the Mahabharatha, the itihasa purana. Thus, the Upanishads & Brahma Sutra are considered part of ‘*Sruti*’ whereas Bhagavad Gita is considered as part of ‘*Smriti*’ (see, for example, reference 11, page 62). In that sense, these three texts are part of the ‘eighteen texts’ that describe the Vedas. The reason to separately identify these three texts is that these three texts look at the ‘metaphysical and philosophical aspects’ (or the ‘Jnana or Knowledge’ aspects) of the Sanatana Dharma or Hindu Religion.

The Upanishads are also known as ‘Vedanta’ (literally meaning the ‘antha or end’ of Vedas, BOTH because they are arranged at the end of the Vedas and also because they contain Jnana aspects which occur towards the end of the study). The Upanishads contain the experiences of, and the revelations obtained by, the great Sages or Rishis when they were in superconscious states. These are not texts developed by these Sages or Rishis; these do not contain their opinions or ideas but the Divine revelations received by them. The subject matter of the Upanishads are therefore not organized properly; whenever they receive revelations, these Rishis recorded them. In that sense, it is difficult to discern any consistent system of thought, though the various Upanishads address various topics related to Jnana or Knowledge – topics like definitions and meanings of Para-Brahman, Atman, Maya, Soul in its state of release etc.

Characteristic of Upanishads is their homogeneity. While many apparently differing concepts are found in them, such concepts are found in all of them. It is not like some of these concepts are found in some of the Upanishads while the rest is found in some other Upanishads. All these concepts are found in all of them. One Upanishad may emphasize one concept more than the rest while another may explain some other concept more etc. but all of the concepts are found in all Upanishads. In that sense, we can consider that all the 108 or more Upanishads together form one Upanishad.

Another characteristic is the form of the Upanishads. The concepts and ideas are stated as the revelations that occurred to the seers. The discussion is more in whole concepts and not as much in detailing parts. There is no formal introduction, main theme and conclusion etc. as seen in any work of humans. This aspect of Upanishads not being

properly ordered but scattered with ideas throughout as divine revelation reached these rishis in their superconscious state gave way to Badarayana's work on Brahma Sutras where the concepts found scattered all over are organized in a proper manner in four chapters with each chapter having four sections.

The Bhagavad Gita is the dialogue between Lord Krishna and his disciple-friend-relative Arjuna during the war between the Kauravas and Pandavas (known as the MahaBharatha war) in the Kurushetra battlefield. When Arjuna felt despondent and dejected while facing his teachers, uncles, cousins and friends who were arrayed with his cousins Kauravas in war and resolved not to fight, Lord Krishna explained to him the essence of duty, justice and the entire secret knowledge of life itself. For sheer simplicity and lucidity of answers to the most vexing questions faced by human beings provided therein, there are no philosophical works that can compare with Bhagavad Gita. It is, in fact, known as knowledge required for daily living and is widely read by almost all persons in search of meaning of life and the secret knowledge thereof irrespective of person's religious faith.

The Brahma Sutra systematizes the thought of the Upanishads. This work is attributed to Sage Badarayana (some say that this Badarayana is the same as another Badarayana who is also called Sage Veda Vyasa). The philosophic thought developed in India was so vast that at one time there were over 60 to 62 philosophical systems; though many of these were the outcome of Upanishadic thought, these large number of philosophical systems became so unwieldy that a regular systematization was necessary; this gave rise to Sutra literature. Sutra or short aphorisms are clues to the ideas expounded by them and were considered as memory aids of long discussions on various topics. These Sutras were extremely concise which helped students commit them to memory; other aids like printing were not available and preservation of large volumes of information was not easy. There was no other way to preserve these other than by developing extremely condensed, even to the point of being cryptic, Sutras. Thus, it became necessary to have 'great scholars and saints' like Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhwa, Nimbarka, Vallabha and others provide commentaries or Bhashyas so that the meaning of these 'concise' and 'cryptic' Sutras were made intelligible to later persons. Undoubtedly, such commentaries were developed using the philosophical systems of these authors and thus we get the various Vedantic systems of thought (see, for example, later discussion under 'Uttara Meemamsa').

The proper and methodical study of one or more of these metaphysical texts – Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutras – will guide the seeker in his/her journey towards Self-Realization.

SMRITIS

‘Smriti’s, also known as ‘Dharmashastras’, are the texts of Hindu Law. The purpose of ‘smrithis’ is to lay down the laws that should guide individuals and communities in their daily conduct and to apply the truths laid down in Vedas in their daily lives. The smrithis deal with three broad categories – Acara or custom or code of conduct for all classes of people; Vyavahara – civil, criminal and religious laws; Prayaschitta, expiation for sins committed (or for violations of laws). The ‘Manusmriti’ or ‘Manavadharmashastra’ is the earliest ‘smriti’ that governed the code of conduct and laws from the earliest days. Naradasmriti, Yajnavalkyasmriti and Paraasaramriti are other smritis that governed the laws for thousands of years. These smrithis were laid down during 400 B.C to 500 A. D.

EPICS AND PURANAS

Ramayana and Mahabharatha are the two 'epic's. These epics are sometimes also known as 'Itihasa Puranas' – 'Purana' meaning 'ancient' and 'Itihasa' meaning '*Iti Ha Asam* - It happened thus, certainly'. These epics have profoundly affected life of the people. There are eighteen (18) puranas, six each addressed to Vishnu, Brahma and Siva, the trinity of Hindu Gods. These are mythological stories depicting devas (Gods), asuras (demons), quarrels between them ending in warfare along with lives of many people that help to define and clarify doctrines enshrined in the Vedas. The epics and puranas are translated into many native languages and are simpler and easier to follow so that the common man is able to understand and follow the doctrines much more easily and readily than would be possible by the more difficult study of Vedas and Upanishads. These contain much valuable and useful information from ethical, moral and religious viewpoints.

The eighteen Puranas and the eighteen Upa-Puranas are discussed in Appendix E. All of these Puranas and Upa-Puranas extoll the glories of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are considered equally useful to the devotee and worshipper and practitioner of Sanatan Dharma to learn about, understand and absorb the teachings contained in the Vedas and Vedanta in an easy to follow and understand format. The 'MahaBhagavatha Purana' (no.5 in the list of 18 Puranas mentioned in Appendix E), however, has a great and important role among these Puranas and is considered by many as an excellent book to develop bhakthi and jnana. This MahaBhagavatha Purana contains the glory of Lord Krishna from his birth till his 'swargarohana' and is read widely with discourses on this Purana a routine and regular feature in most parts of India, even to the present day. A story connected with this Purana is worth mentioning in this context. King Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna, the Warrior amongst the Pandavas, was given a curse by the son of a revered 'muni' (a well-read jnani, sannyasin and possessing satvic attributes) that the king will die in seven-day's time by snake-bite for having committed the sin of putting a dead snake around the neck of his father. Knowing of this curse, King Parikshit, convened his 'spiritual advisors' and inquired how best to spend the remaining 7 days' of his time. At that time, the great 'taponidhi' (embodiment of 'tapas' and 'jnana' and the son of Veda Vyasa) Suka Maharshi stated that there is no better way of spending the 7 days' remaining time available than listening to the lifetime and story of Lord Krishna and started the narration of this 'MahaBhagavatha Purana' to King Parikshit. The story told in the format of 7 days acquired enormous significance and 'punya' and is continued even to this day (from the 'original first time narration by Suka') in various parts of India. This form of reading, and study, of MahaBhagavatha Purana is known as "Sapthangam" (literally means in seven parts, referring to the completion of the reading and study in seven days); the author recalls, with vivid details and memory, his listening to many Sapthangam discourses conducted by 'eminent scholars of MahaBhagavatha Purana' since his school days, along with his mother and his brothers and sisters, in Tripunithura in the State of Kerala in India.

AGAMAS – Manuals describing the methods of worship

To aid the common man in the performance of rituals enjoined in the Brahmanas of the Vedas, the early thinkers developed full manuals known as Agamas (pronounced as “aagamaas”) that describe in detail the methods of worship. There are three kinds of Agamas – Vaishnava, Saiva & Saktha. Vaishnava Agamas consider Vishnu as Supreme God, Saiva Agamas consider Siva as Supreme God and Saktha Agamas consider Shakthi or Mother Goddess as the Supreme Deity. The Agamas prescribe the mode of worshipping deities and the ways to lead a life in conformity with the nature of that worship. Popular Hinduism is influenced by the Agamas. Even some of the Indian Philosophical systems base their authority on the Agamas. This short paragraph on Agamas is included here only for completeness of the vast books on Sanatana Dharma.

Vaisnava Agamas are called “Paancharaathra” agamas or Samhitas (to denote their connection to the Vedas) these Agamas deal mainly with idolatory, rules of temple architecture, worship of Tulasi (basil plant) and lay emphasis on path of devotion (which suits all people). Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi sre the main deities of these Agamas. These Agamas are called ‘paancharaatra’ because it is believed that these texts are revealed by the Supreme Lord Narayana or Vishnu himself in five days. Another belief is that the Agama literature deals with the fivefold duties of routine life in a day, such as ‘abhigamana’ (going to the temple of God and concentrating mind, speech and actions on Him), ‘upaadaana’ (collecting material for worship of God), ‘ijyaa’ (actual worship), ‘svaadhyaya’ (self-study of scriptures), and ‘yoga’ (meditation on God).

Saiva Agamas are a treasurehouse of information concerning philosophical doctrine, liturgy, religious practice, architecture of Saiva temples, sculpture of the images and art in general. Siva is looked upon as the Supreme Lord in these Agamas. Siva is called Pasupati which means ‘lord of all beings’ (Pasu – literally means ‘a beast’ but refers o all ‘living beings and Pati means Lord). Pasu is a word derives from Pasa (attachment or bond or fetters) – ‘*Paasabaddho Pasuh*’.

Saakta Agamas, also known as Tantras, is in the form of a dailogie between Lord Siva and his consort Goddess Parvati. There are three subschools within Saakta Agamas – the Kaula, Mishra and Samaya. The first two schools emphasize external worship and their methods are mostly used to acquire material power and prosperity. Samayaacara is supposed to be efficient method of worship of the great goddess.Saundaryalahari is one of the important works of this school and also the Sakti worship known as ‘SriVidya Upasana’.

The discussion on Agamas provided in this section is a condensed form of the Chapter on Agamas from the book “Foundations of Hinduism” By Prof. Yajneswar Sastri (Reference 17). Readers interested to obtain additional information on Agamas are refereed to consult this reference.

PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS OF HINDU RELIGION – SHAD DARSHANAAS

The Indian philosophical systems are classified into two broad categories, the Orthodox (*Aasthika*) and the Heterodox (*Naasthika*).

The six (6) systems in the Orthodox (*Aasthika*) category are:

- Nyaya – authored by Gautama
- Vaiseshika – authored by Kanada
- Saankhya – authored by Kapila
- Yoga – authored by Patanjali
- Purva Meemamsa – authored by Jaimini
- Uttara Meemamsa – authored by Baadaraayana

These six systems accept the authority of Vedas and hence called *Aasthika* or *orthodox*. These are also known as ‘Shad-Darshanas’ – Shad meaning six, Darshana meaning ‘directly perceived or seen’ implying that these philosophical systems promote the direct spiritual perception of that which gives the ‘right knowledge’. In India, philosophy is simply not meant as an academic exercise but a way of life, an integral part of religion and a means to an end – the ways and means of reaching or attaining the ‘goal’ of life. The goal of life, according to Sanatana Dharma (or Hindu religion), is ‘self-realization’ – literally realizing one’s ‘self’ or ‘soul’ or ‘Atman’ – that leads one to liberation (or ‘moksha’) – liberation from the cycle of ‘birth and death’ - by uniting with the Supreme Reality or Para Brahman. Thus, these philosophical systems all point out ‘practical’ methods of attaining the goal – not some mere ‘theoretical exercise leading to acquisition of academic degrees’ or leading one to indulge in ‘abstract argumentation skills’ – but practical methods to achieve one’s goal of life, the goal for which one has taken the human birth.

The fact that these six systems accept the authority of the Vedas does not mean that the above systems ‘blindly’ accept all that is contained in the Vedas. The first four systems – Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Saankhya and Yoga systems developed their own ‘independent’ systems of thought, even while their singular emphasis on ‘realization of truth’ is derived from ‘vedas’ and ‘upanishads’. The Purva Meemasa contains thoughts and ideas expressed in the ‘samhita’ and ‘brahmana’ portions of the ‘vedas’ whereas the Uttara Meemamsa contains those from the ‘aranyaka’ and ‘upanishad’ part of the ‘vedas’; these are therefore sometimes referred to as ‘*karmameemamsa*’ and ‘*jnanameemamsa*’ respectively. The doctrines of all these systems are known as ‘Sutras’ (aphorisms) and hence these systems are sometimes referred to as Nyaya Sutra, Vaiseshika Sutra, Saankhya Sutra, Yoga Sutra, Purva Meemamsa Sutra or Uttara Meemamsa Sutra.

Nyaya Darsana

Nyaya means the science of logic and expediency. It is also known as Tarka Shastra. Nyaya Darshana treatises were composed by Sage Gautama.

Nyaya system is a logical realism and contains passages, which establish by means of disputation that God is the creator of this universe. It establishes the existence of God by means of inference.

Nyaya is studied for sharpening intellect, logical thinking and cultivating critical outlook in life.

Vaiseshika Darsana

Vaiseshika, philosophy of specialised logic, maintains that the combination of atoms is the cause of the cosmic manifestation. It was composed by Maharshi Kanada. He was the first philosopher who formulated ideas about the atom in a systematic manner.

The physical world is considered as consisting of things, which can be reduced to a number of atoms. It believes that *Dharma* is the means to obtain both material prosperity and ultimate realization, *moksha*.

Nyaya and Vaiseshika deal mainly with physics, chemistry and other material sciences and include reasoning or logic. Metaphysical studies or search for knowledge of God, however, formed the ultimate aim of the study of these sastras also.

Sankhya Darsana

Sankhya, philosophy of analytical study, maintains that the material nature is the cause of the cosmic manifestation. Sage Kapila composed it.

The word 'Sankhya', meaning number or right knowledge, is a system of realism, dualism and pluralism.

Realism – it accepts the reality of the world independent of spirit.

Dualism – two fundamental realities distinct from each other (matter and spirit)

Pluralism – recognizes plurality of souls.

The special features of Sankhya systems are the conception of Purusha (Soul) and Prakriti (Matter) as two 'independent eternal realities'.

Purusha is conscious but inactive.

Prakriti is active but unconscious. It has three gunas – Sattva, Rajas & Tamas.

Yoga Darsana

Yoga philosophy maintains that universal consciousness is the cause of the cosmic manifestation and is composed by Patanjali Maharshi. He is the first systematiser of the Yoga school. This system is therefore also known as the Yoga Sutra of Patanjali:

The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali is also known as the 'Ashtanga yoga of Patanjali' because it describes the eight steps ('Ashta' means 'eight' and 'anga' means 'limbs' or 'steps') for self-realization; these eight steps are:

- Yama - Restraint
- Niyama - Observances
- Asana – Postures

- Pranayama – Control of breath
- Prathyahara – Withdrawal of senses
- Dharana – Concentration
- Dhyana – Meditation
- Samadhi – Intense Absorption

Both for convenience and for purposes of functional grouping, it is customary to group the above eight steps into ‘three’ groups:

- Group 1 consisting of steps 1 and 2 (that are the ONLY steps needed to lead a perfect moral and religious life);
- Group 2 consisting of steps 3, 4 and 5 (that are intended to discipline the body) and
- Group 3 consisting of steps 6, 7 and 8 (that are the intense stages of concentration and meditation and form the ‘yoga’ proper).

Any student of yoga who wishes to adopt the ‘ashtaanga yoga of Patanjali’ should proceed in a step-by-step manner, only after ‘mastering’ step 1’ must one attempt to go to step 2 and so on. Under no circumstance, one must attempt the steps of Group 3 until the steps of Groups 1 and 2 are thoroughly mastered, not in an academic or intellectual sense but in the sense of ‘practical’ implementation and sadhana in one’s daily life.

Step 1, Yama: consists of five (5) great vows: Ahimsa (non-violence), Sathya (truthfulness), Aastheya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (sexual restraint - celibacy) and Aparigraha (non-possession).

Step 2, Niyama: consists of five (5) regulations: Saucha (purity), Santhosha (contentment), Tapa (austerity), Swadhyaya (self-study) and Iswarapranidhana (surrender to God).

In fact, if these two steps of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra – the Yama and Niyama steps – are practiced faithfully, that’s all one will require to lead a completely pure and perfect moral and religious life. Conversely, one can say that without a full, complete, honest and sincere attempt of mastering these first two steps of the Ashtanga Yoga, disciples must not proceed to the remaining (higher) steps of the eight-step process. Mere academic understanding is easy to achieve and that is not the goal; leading a practical life with these steps built-in requires considerable ‘sadhana’ or practice and dedication.

Step 3, Asana or posture is intended for the ‘seeker’ to adopt comfortable posture to sit that will allow the person to concentrate and meditate.

Step 4, Pranayama is the control of breathing – the in-breath, the out-breath and its retention.

Step 5, Pratyahara is the withdrawal of senses from their objects.

These three steps, Steps 3, 4 and 5, Asana, Pranayama and Pratyahara are meant to discipline the body, vital force (or Prana) and the senses and are intended to gain control of the mind.

Step 6, Dharana or concentration of the mind is fixing of the mind on some object or some spot like the tip of the nose (as stated in Bhagavadgita).

Step 7, Dhyana or meditation is the steady contemplation of the object without a break.

Step 8, Samadhi is intense absorption.

These last three steps are intense stages of concentration and meditation, are purely mental and constitute the yoga proper. However, these stages must not be attempted before mastering the preceding five steps. Herein lies the beauty of these eight (8) steps of Patanjali – one must not ascend to step two before mastering step one ‘completely’ – in all aspects and in every sense of the term – in mind, word and deed (*manasa, vacha, karmana*). Similarly, mastery of step two is required for entering step three and so on. This systematic technique of mind control taught by Patanjali is accepted by all systems of Hindu philosophy.

Purva Meemamsa Darsana

The Purva (former) Meemamsa (critical investigation) of the Samhitas and Brahmanas of the Vedas – also known as the *karmameemamsa* – critically examines and tests the truth of the postulates of Vedas and explains them with prescriptions and prohibitions as needed and justifies them.

Sage Jaimini composed the sutras for the Purvameemamsa, philosophy of actions and reactions, maintains that fruitive activities are the cause of the cosmic manifestation. This book consists of 12 chapters - 1000 Adhikaranas in all. In these Adhikaranas, selected Vedic verses are examined in details. In the 1000 Adhikaranas a thousand types of problems are taken up and various arguments against an apparent explanation are raised before coming to a conclusion.

Uththara Meemamsa Darsana

The Uttara (latter) Meemamsa (critical investigation) of the Aranyakas and Upanishads of the Vedas – also known as *JnanaMeemamsa* - provides the jnana path of Vedas. Since the Upanishads are also known as Vedanta, all these terms are sometimes used synonymously – Uttara Meemamsa, Upanishads, Vedanta. Maharshi Veda Vyasa composed Uththara Meemamsa.

The heterodox systems of philosophy:

The following three systems are known as ‘heterodox’ philosophical systems because they do not accept the authority of ‘vedas’; they are also known as ‘Naasthika’ for the same reason. These are:

- Jainism

- Buddhism
- Materialism (Caarvaaka)

Further discussion of these systems is beyond the scope of this 'introductory' write-up.

All these systems in their own independent ways provide the path to attain the goal of human life – self-realization leading to moksha - the essential 'union' of the 'individual self' with the 'Supreme Self or Para Brahman or the One without a Second'. In that sense, these systems are also known as 'yoga' – derived from the word 'yuj' to unite.

ADVAITA, VISHISHTHA-ADVAITA, DVAITA, SWABHAVIKA-BHEDABHEDA, SUDDHA-ADVAITA & OTHER PHILOSOPHIES

The Upanishadic texts, The Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras can be well understood only with the aid of 'baashyaas' or 'commentaries' on these texts written by Masters Adi Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhwa and others. As these masters explained these 'sutras or aphorisms' into simple, lucid, understandable commentaries, they also developed their 'own' theories that justified their providing of the commentary in their way of understanding of the precepts contained in the Prashtana Thrayi (Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutra). The greatness of these sages has also contributed to differing interpretations or theories of the Vedanta philosophy. Thus, we have the Advaita philosophy of Adi Sankara, Vishishta-Advaita philosophy of Ramanuja, Dvaita philosophy of Madhwa, Bhedabhedavada philosophy of Bhaskara, Dvaitadvaita philosophy of Nimbarka, Suddhadvaita philosophy of Vallabha and other theories. While there are differences in these commentaries, all these systems more or less agree on certain points like attacking anti-vedantic thought, agreeing that Brahman is the cause of this world, that Brahman can only be known through study of scriptures leading to direct perception and experiencing of the same and not by mere reasoning, knowledge of Brahman leads to final emancipation which is the goal to be attained etc. They differ amongst themselves as to the nature of Brahman, Its causality with respect to the world, the relationship of the individual soul to It and the condition of the soul in its release.

Brief discussions of the various theories are provided as follows:

Advaita (Monism or Unqualified Monism): According to Adi Sankara, ultimately there is only One Reality which is One without Second. It is Absolute Existence, Absolute Consciousness and Absolute Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda). It is 'All-Pervading Pure Consciousness' (Suddha Chaitanya). According to Advaita, the individual Self (Atman or Jivatma) after attaining moksha merges with the Universal Soul (Paramatma or Brahman) and acquires all the qualities of the paramatma and becomes indistinguishable. It is like water being added to milk and is called KSHEERA NEERA NYAAYA. Ksheera represents paramatma and Neera represents jivatma. Jivatma acquires all the qualities of the Paramatma in the same way as water acquires the qualities of milk when they mix.

As a thinker, as a philosopher, as a scholar, as a writer, as a poet and as a saint, Adi Sankara's greatness is simply superb. He interpreted the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras to show that 'pure and unqualified monism' (advaita) is taught therein. Adi Sankara is not the first teacher of Advaita, even though he is closely associated with the philosophy. Yajnavalkya, Uddalaka and Gaudapada have propagated Advaita. In fact, the Gaudapadarika on Mandukya Upanishad is the first available treatise on Advaita.

According to Adi Sankara, the ultimate goal of 'scriptural inquiry is experience (anubhava) of the Absolute'.

World of names and forms is not real ('real' is defined as that which never changes). World appears to be real due to Maya which is creative power of God, inseparable from Him but does not affect Him or deceive Him, just like magician is not fooled by his magic.

The soul is, in essence, the same as Brahman. The soul or spirit in man (jiva) is identical with the Supreme Soul (Brahman) as indicated by the Upanishadic statements: "**Tatvam Asi**" (That thou art) and "**Aham Brahmasmi**" (I am Brahman).

Purusha Sooktha states:

"prajApathisharathy garbhey anthah
ajAyamAno bahudhA vijAyathey"

(Prajapathy enters inside the womb – enters the womb as the soul of the child, it can be explained – the One who does NOT take any birth or who is unborn becomes MANY).

The above stanza can be used to indicate that the individual soul (jiva) is the same as The Supreme Soul (Brahman).

Bhagavad Gita (Chapter XIII – Kshetra-Kshetrajna Yoga), verses 1 and 2:

"idam sareeram kauntheya kshetram ityabhidheeyathey
etadyo veththi tam prahuh ksetrajna iti tadvidah

kshEtrajnam chApi mAm vidhdhi sarvaksEtrEshu bhAratha
kshEtraksEtrajnayOh jnanam yat tat jnanam matam mama"

(This body, O son of Kunti, is called Ksetra, and the one who knows it is called ksetrajna by those who know them.

Know Me also, O descendant of Bharata, to be the Ksetrajna in all the eksetras. The knowledge of Ksetra and Kshetrajna is considered by Me to be *the* knowledge.)

On account of Avidya (lack of knowledge or 'ignorance'), which is the individual counterpart of Maya, it identifies with a psycho-physical organism and is caught in the tract of 'samsara – cycle of life and death'. The sheaths of the body, life and mind that cover the soul are products of Maya; in consequence, these are mistaken for the self. When 'vidya' is dawned, (analogy of 'rope' and 'snake' is emphasized) identity of soul and Brahman occurs and liberation is the result. This liberation can occur in this birth itself.

Vishishta Advaita (Qualified Monism): Ramanuja, the chief exponent of Vaishnava school of philosophy, and whose influence on Vaishnava community (devotees of Vishnu) is very great, propounded the Vishishta Advaita. According to Ramanuja, Brahman is only One but Consciousness and Matter both exist in Him. 'Chid-Achid Vishishtam Brahma' (Brahman is qualified by Chid or Consciousness and Achid or Matter). According to Visishtadvaita, there are three realities (Tattva Traya), namely, God (Ishvara), soul (cit) and matter (acit). God alone is independent, in fact it is the 'independent reality', the other two are dependent on him. The relationship between God and the world of soul and matter is analogous to that between Sariri (soul) and Sarira

(body) of an individual. Ramnuja believes in a personal God. Vishistha Advaita is analogous to that of a wooden stick (kaashtam = kattai) is covered with lac (laakshaa = arakku). This is called LAAKSHAA KAASHTA NYAAYA. The lac is the jivatma and the stick the paramatma. Both retain their original qualities except that jivatma appears as part of paramatma (in fact, according to the theory, Jivatma can never be equal to Paramatma because nothing can equal Paramtam, God).

The main debate among Vedantins, after Sankara, was “whether Brahman is Nirguna (attributeless) or Saguna (with attributes)”. Many Acaryas believe that Brahman is Saguna. Foremost among these Acaryas was Ramanuja. According to Ramanuja, the relation between God and the world of soul and matter is analogous to that between soul and body. God is the soul of souls, and He is the soul of nature. Ramanuja believes in personal God, he is identified with Vishnu, Narayana. Ramanuja emphasizes intense love of God. The grace of God leads to liberation. Ramanuja talks about self-surrender (prapatti). God is pleased by devotion and release the devotee from bondage. The liberated soul becomes similar to God, BUT it does not become identical with the God, as the finite can never become the infinite. Unlike Advaita, there is no jivanmukti in Vishishta Advaita. Ramanuja was a bitter critic of Mayavada of Sankara.

Dvaita: According to Madhwa, Brahman and the Individual Self are different and separate, leading to Dvaita or Duality. The Dvaita system says that when the two join, they are still separate as when Thilam (sesame seed) joins Thandulam (Rice). This is called THILA THANDULA NYAAYA. Thila represents jivatma and thandula represents paramatma. They sit side by side and continue to have their inherent qualities.

Madhva’s dvaita believes in the reality of the external world. Individual souls are numberless and are atomic in size. Madhva is a critic of Sankara’s Mayavada and also Sankara’s Advaita. He is closer to Ramanuja in that he identifies God with Vishnu or Narayana and Lakshmi as His consort.

Swabhavika Bhedabhedavada (Theory of ‘Natural difference and non-difference’): According to Nimbarka, there is natural difference and non-difference between Brahman and Individual Self.

Suddha-Advaitavada: According to Vallabha, the material World and the Individual Self are the direct transformations of Brahman.

Like Ramanuja, all the Vaishnavite Acharyas like Madhva, Nimbarka, Chaitanya, Swami Narayana consider Vishnu or Narayana as the Ultimate God, that God’s grace will deliver moksha to devotee etc.

All the schools of thought agree that Brahman is the Ultimate Reality. It is only in the relationship of Brahman, the phenomenal World and the Individual Self that these theories seem to differ.

While these are the most important commentaries, this list is not exclusive and there are other commentators to have written Vakyas, Vrittis, Karikas and Bhashyas (all these can broadly be translated as 'commentaries'; the detail and elaborateness of such commentaries are used to classify them into one of the four preceding types).

Questions may be posed as to how the same work, namely the Vedanta or end of Vedas or Upanishads, can be commented upon using different systems or theories. The answer lies in the fact that the differences in these schools of thought may not impact substantial parts of the commentary but may only impact the higher and higher ends of these discussions relating to definitions of God, Universe, Individual Soul and their inter-relationship. Other reasons may include the Sutras or aphorisms, are statements in condensed form of long discussions; sometimes such clues are so condensed that it leaves room for different interpretations thus giving rise to these different systems. Also, words in Sanskrit are capable of interpreted differently and sometimes even conveying opposite meanings by the mere shifting of stops or by the splitting of the compound words. All these different systems and the authors agree that Brahman is the cause of this world and that knowledge of Brahman leads to final emancipation which is the goal to be attained; also that Brahman can only be known through a study of the scriptures and not by mere reasoning. But these commentators, and the systems of thought propounded by them, differ as to the nature of Brahman, Its causality with respect to this world, the relation of the individual soul to It, and the condition of the Soul in the state of release.

SUMMARY OF ‘CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION’

The texts of Sanatana Dharma, the Vedas, and the penchant for meditation, concentration and deep thinking displayed by the persons living in Bharat, have contributed to this vast literature. The Vedas are stated to be infinite (*anantham*), without a beginning (*anaadi*) and not written by man (*apourusheyam*). It is the belief of these early inhabitants that Vedas existed always and that it was heard (*sruthi*) by Rishis in their superconscious state. It has been handed down thru generations by word of mouth, the students learning from their teachers by directly hearing from them and not through any textbooks. Beginning with ‘*Sruthi*’, and continuing to the present day, the long line of thinkers beginning with the ancient, super-conscious *Rishis* to the modern day saints Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi and others have created vast philosophical treatises. This vast literature of manuals of worship, all items required to be learnt for leading a successful life like ayurveda (science of life), artha saasthra (science of wealth and economics), jyothisha (astrology and astronomy), sankhya (mathematics), study of soul (individual soul or Atman and universal soul or Brahman), philosophy – in short, all there is to be known – is contained in the Vedas. These texts and the way of living known as Sanatana Dharma have left a deep and abiding impression in all the later civilizations; as the forerunner of thought and ideas, the philosophical texts of Vedas – the Prashtana Thrayi (the three founding texts) of Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahma Sutra – have impressed and impacted almost all later religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaeism not to mention the off-shoots of Sanatana Dharma like Budhism, Jainism etc. Those pursuing the history of human thought have to acknowledge the deep impact Indian philosophical systems have made and that of Upanishadic thought in particular. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in his text, “The Principal Upanishads” (Ref. 1) quotes the German mytic of the nineteenth century, Mr. Schopenhauer, “From every sentence [of the Upanishads], deep original and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit. In the whole world ... there is no study ... so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. They are products of the highest wisdom. They are destined sooner or later to become the faith of the people.”