THE BRAHMANAIC SYSTEMS OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

As it is customary with us in the East to begin a subject like this with an invocatory verse, let me open the lecture with a few lines from a Western poet (John Langhorne), whose pious sentiments deserve to be echoed by all nations in the world:—

Light of the World! Immortal Mind!
Father of all the human kind!
Whose boundless eye, that knows no rest,
Intent on Nature's ample breast,
Explores the space of earth and skies,
And sees eternal incense rise!
To Thee, my humble voice I raise;
Forgive, while I presume to praise.

These lines, as rendered into Sanskrit in my Parivritti-ratnamala, run thus:—

कौषिकभासो! परमात्मायमन्! विमहासो वं जनको नागापै।
दिश्य बद्रीं न्याय विवेर्तित रूपेयार्थेऽऽर्थितं भवेद्वाच।
सर्वेऽवृहल्ल परमेवऽर्थितं पञ्चमिते ते सप्ताप्य।
स्तों भक्तं मम वाकशीता दत्तायमेत्तद्वृह साधस्ये मे।

1 To treat of Religion separately from Philosophy is, from the Hindu point of view, an impossible task, as in India especially we see the two mixed up so closely that we cannot think of the one apart from the other. (Vide my Paper on 'Kālidāsa's Religion and Philosophy'—contributed to the Indian Antiquary, 1910.)
Oh, may I still Thy favour prove
Still grant me gratitude and love,
Let truth and virtue guard my heart;
Nor peace, nor hope, nor joy depart:
But yet, whate'er my life may be
My heart shall still repose on Thee!
To Thee, my humble voice I raise;
Forgive, while I presume to praise.

Which again reads in Sanskrit thus:—

देव प्रसादं तब कामयेः संयतं मा ग्राहस्य कृतं च।
भर्मस्वस्वलो संयतं मदीये क्षणेऽनुण्यात: क्षमया मुद्रा च।
ह्यं मम स्यादिः कीर्तिः ब्र चिरं त सत्तम त्यति स्यात्।
स्तोत्रं महतं मम वास्तवेऽहारं भूत्यमेतद्वह साहसे मे।

The Executive Council of the Mythic Society have done me a great honour by allowing me the opportunity of addressing this learned audience. I shall deem myself very fortunate if what I am going to say to-night should be found acceptable to this audience as giving a fairly correct idea of the Brähmanaic systems of Religion and Philosophy.

Much has been written, no doubt, and by eminent scholars, on the Vēdānta Philosophy. But so far, the Vēdānta Philosophy has come to mean the Advaita Philosophy as taught by the followers of Śankarāchārya. Very little was known of the Dvaita and the Viśishtādva systems till very recently. The English translations of a few works of the Great Reformers—Sri-Rāmānujaḥārya and Madhvaḥārya—have been made available to the public only within recent times; but the bulk of the religious and philosophical literature relating to these systems remains as yet untranslated. Thus the precious sentiments of the Śrī-Vaishnava Saints and Sages, for example, which are preserved mostly in the Tamil language, are still a sealed book to Western scholars. Dr. Grierson, the well-known orientalist, bears testimony to the treasure of pious thoughts contained in the Dravidian Religious Literature, and has recently published the translations of some valuable works in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of London.¹ A comprehensive study of the religious or philosophical systems of India may not be quite possible to foreign scholars, who have not made a personal investigation of the creeds and beliefs of the people, as professed in the present day.² This defect has

¹ Vide, for instance, Translation of Artha-Paścaka, by A. Gôvindâchārya of Mysore (J.R.A.S., July, 1910).
been noticed of late by orientalists, and it is a matter of great pleasure to all that attempts are now being made to study the 'life of the man upon the soil'.

Dr. Grierson, in his Introduction to the Artha-Pañchaka, translated by A. Govindaśārya, says (J.R.A.S. for July, 1910):—'I have also left out a few quotations from European writers on the Bhāgavata doctrines whose views are familiar in this country, and, however valuable, do not possess the authority of an Indian Professor of the religion'. It would, therefore, be very profitable if Indian scholars are invited to co-operate with European scholars in the attempt to trace and collect the secret treasures contained in the religious and philosophical systems of India. The labours of orientalists in this field of literature, till now, have no doubt been very laudable; but their conclusions, we are sorry to observe, have become mostly one-sided. Even the latest among them have wrongly identified the Vēdānta, as a whole, with only one of its several aspects; and have given it the most misleading title of Indian Pantheism. Very few of them have earnestly studied the religious beliefs and philosophical views now current among the peoples of South India. It is a well-known fact that South India was the cradle of Brāhmaṇa revival. The great reformers, Śankarāchārya, Rāmānujaśārya, Madhvaśārya, all belong to South India; and it is from the teachings of these that a few northern reformers imbibed their spiritual knowledge in later times. Even to-day the Pandits of South India are held in great esteem and veneration by the North Indian scholars and are considered authorities in matters relating to Religion and Philosophy,—as being the custodians of the teachings of the great Acharyas of old.

It is here in the South of India that the renowned Drāviḍa Saints (the authors of the 4,000 Divya Prabandha works) and the great Sages who wrote their precious commentaries on them, lived and worked for the elevation of the masses, irrespective of caste or creed.¹

The three great Brāhmaṇaic communities—the Smārtas, the Śrī Vaishnavas and the Madhvas—have their representative Mathas established by the great Reformers in the South, and the Gurus of these Mathas command pre-eminence even to-day, throughout India—the majority of the northern devotees being their disciples.

Thus we see that South India is the proper place where the Brāhmaṇaic religions can be best studied.

It may be observed that all the Brāhmaṇaic systems of religion in India can be comprised within the three well-known original systems based on the Vēdānta, viz.: (1) the Advaita, (2) the Dvaita, and (3) the Viśiṣṭādvaita; all other schools founded on the Vēdānta, are each of

¹ See my Introduction to the Upādēśa-rah nahāli, Ananda Press, Madras.
them seen to be, an off-shoot from, or a sub-division of, one or the other of these three main systems.

My duty to-night will, therefore, be to lay before you a brief sketch of these three systems of Brāhmaṇaic Religion and Philosophy. It is hardly necessary for me to say that, in the short space of an hour, I cannot be expected to do full justice to these great systems. All that I can hope to do is to mention a few leading points in the doctrines of the respective systems; and by comparing them briefly, to draw some inference as to the nature of the tenets common to all the Vedāntic schools of thought.

Let us first note briefly what the terms Advaita, Dvaita and Viśishtādvaita mean.

The Advaita system recognizes only one entity called Brahmān or Ātman and holds the world to be unreal. Hence the name Advaita (Non-Dualism or Monism). This system is generally represented by the Smārta community among the Brāhmans.

The Dvaita system recognizes all the three entities—matter, soul and God; and holds that they are entirely distinct from one another, and that no two of them can be identified. Hence it is called the Dvaita (Dualism). This system is represented by the Mādhyva community of the Brāhmans.

The Viśishtādvaita also recognizes all the three entities—matter, soul and God; but holds that, although they are by nature distinct from one another, God or the Supreme Soul is often identified (in the Upanishads) in a figurative sense with the Universe of matter and souls—which is (as it were) His body. Matter and souls being the inseparable attributes of God at all times—in a subtle or sūkṣma stage before creation, and in a gross or sthūla stage after creation, this system lays stress on the Identity of God in both these stages. Hence it is called the Viśishtādvaita (Qualified Monism). This system is represented by the Śrī-Vaishnava community of the Brāhmans.

With this preliminary idea about the three terms, let us now proceed to examine the origin of these three systems.

It may be observed at the outset that the Brāhmaṇaic religious or philosophical system presents itself in three phases from the earliest times known to history or literature. To say that there was only one religion throughout India at some remote age is to ignore the contents of the Upanishads and other philosophical texts on which the Brāhmaṇaic religious systems are based. The Upanishads contain clear references to three schools of thought current in India from time immemorial. There are three distinct classes of passages in the Upanishads—

(i) अनेकानूतन: (Non-Dualistic Texts)—or passages that apparently declare the existence of only one Reality (Ātman or Brahmān), and speak of all differences as unreal.
(ii) भेदभूतय: (Dualistic Texts) or passages that openly declare the distinctions between matter, souls and God (i.e. distinctions between every two individuals among them)—all the three being treated as real entities.

(iii) चकुक्षुतय: (Reconciling Texts) or passages that reconcile the above two apparently contradictory classes of texts—by proving diversity in unity.

A few examples will make this division of the Vedantic texts obvious.—

(i) Non-Dualistic Texts (अभेदभूतय:)

(1) ‘There is nothing here that is many and varied. He who sees this world as though it is varied, obtains death from death.’
   (Brih. Up., iv. 4.)

(2) ‘But where there is duality, as it were, there one sees another; but where to one all this becomes Atman, there who shall see whom; (shall see) by what; and who shall know, which, and by what?’
   (Brih. Up., ii. 4-4.)

(3) ‘That which is all this is this Atman.’
   (Brih. Up., iv. 5-7.)

(4) ‘For whenever he perceives in Him even the smallest distinction, then indeed there is fear for him.’
   (Taitt. Up., ii. 7-1.)

(5) ‘He who knows the Brahman becomes the Brahman alone.’
   (Mund. Up., ii. 3-9.)

(6) ‘He is not all this. Let him worship Him as Atman Himself.’
   (Brih. Up., i. 4-7.)

(7) ‘Existence alone, my dear child, this was at the beginning;—one only, without a second.’
   (Chhänd. Up., vi. 2-1.)

(8) ‘That thou art.’
   (Chhänd. Up., vi. 8-7.)

(9) ‘One alone, Nārāyaṇa, was (at the beginning).’
   (Mahop., i. 1.)

(10) ‘All this was at first one alone, the Atman.’
    (Aitarėya Up., i. 1-1.)

(ii) Dualistic Texts (भेदभूतय:)

(a) (Soul and God clinging to matter) ‘Two birds, which possess similar attributes and are inseparable friends, cling to the same tree; one of them eats the sweet fruits of the Pippala tree, while the other shines in splendour without eating at all.’
   (Mund. Up., iii. 1-1.)

(b) (God and the Universe) ‘The two un-born, the intelligent and the non-intelligent, are the Lord and the non-Lord.’
   (Śvet. Up., i. 9.)

(c) (Characteristics of the soul as distinguished from matter and God.) ‘Then whoever feels “I smell this,” that is the soul.’
   (Chhänd. Up., viii. 12-4.)
'Who is the soul? He is that person who is luminous in the
proximity to the Prāṇas in the heart and wholly consists of
knowledge.' (Bṛh. Up., iv. 3-7.)

'He is indeed, the seer, the hearer, the taster, the sniffer, the
thinker, the knower, the doer, and is the person who is made
up of intelligence.' (Praśna. Up., iv. 9.)

'Having known the soul (Ātman) and (God) the Prime-mover
(Prārūtra) as separate from one another.' (Śvet. Up., i. 6.)

'He, the cause, is the Lord of (souls) the lords of the senses.'
(Śvet. Up., vi. 9.)

The Lord of matter (Pradhana) and souls (Kṣetrajñās), the Master
of the qualities.
(Śvet. Up., vi. 16.)

From this, the Māyin (God) creates, this Universe; and in that
is another (the soul) fettered by Māyā. (Śvet. Up., iv. 9.)

'Having learnt that, and being freed from name (nāma) and form
(rūpa), attains the Divine Person, who is the most Supreme.'
(Mund. Up., iii. 2-8.)

(iii) Reconciling Texts (चटकाण्यः)

1. 'May I become manifold and be born.' (Chhand. Up., vi. 2-3.)
2. 'He thought—May I create the worlds.' (Ait. Up., i. 1-1.)
3. 'The eternal among the eternals, the intelligent among the intelli-
gents, who, though One, fulfils the desires of the many.'
(Katha. Up., v. 13, and Śvet. Up., vi. 13.)
4. 'He who has entered within is the ruler of all things that are
born and is the Soul of all.' (Yajur-Āranyaka, iii. 20.)
5. 'He whose body is the soul.' (Bṛh. Up., v. 7-22.)
6. 'He whose body is the earth.' (Bṛh. Up., v. 7-3.)
7. 'What exists within that small space inside the heart, that is to
be sought after.' (Chhand. Up., viii. 1-1.)
8. 'Of whatever nature a man's worship is in this world, of that
same nature that man becomes after death.'
(Chhand. Up., iii. 14-1.)
9. 'From whom all these things are born, in whom when born they
live, and whom they enter when they perish, do thou desire
to know that well; that is the Brahman.'
(Taitt. Bhṛgu, i. 1.)
10. 'He who understands and knows all.' (Mund. Up., i. 1-9.)

It is to be observed that of these classes of texts, (1) the Advaita
system recognizes the authority of the Non-Dualistic Texts alone, and
rejects the rest as referring to the vyāvahārika (the apparent and not
the real) side of knowledge; (2) the Dvaita system attaches importance
to the Dualistic Texts only and tries to explain away the rest; (3) whereas the Viśishtādvaita system reconciles the Non-Dualistic and the Dualistic Texts by the application of the remaining class of texts (वदनश्रृतयः)—thus recognizing the authority of all the Upanishadic passages.¹

We thus see that the Upanishads present to us three different stages of thought, although they are to be construed together so as to give us a consistent idea. Hence it is that all the three systems—the Advaita, the Dvaita and the Viśishtādvaita trace their doctrines to the common source—the Upanishads. It is true that these three systems have, for their common authorities, several later treatises also, such as the Brahma-Sūtras, the Bhagavad-Gītā, the Smritis, the Itihāsas and the Purāṇas. But it is a gross mistake to suppose that the Advaita system had its origin in Śankarāchārya, the Dvaita system in Madhvāchārya and the Viśishtādvaita in Rāmānujāchārya. These Great Reformers only renovated the three systems that had been already formulated by their predecessors;² and, by writing their valuable commentaries (Bhāṣyas), came to be known as the Bhāṣyakārās of the respective systems.

We have thus shown that the germs of these three systems are found in the Upanishads themselves; and the chronological order of the three great Reformers above named has therefore nothing to do with the order of treatment that I have herein adopted, to facilitate comparison—viz. (first) the Advaita system, (secondly) the Dvaita system and (thirdly) the Viśishtādvaita system.

THE ADVAITA SYSTEM

Taking the Upanishadic passage—‘Tat-tvam-asī’—‘That thou art’, one can see that the word ‘That’ represents the Supreme Being (or Para-Brahman), the word ‘thou’ represents any individual being or soul (jīvātman) that is addressed, and the verb ‘art’ shows the identity of the two beings (represented by That and thou).

The whole philosophy of the Advaita system is based on the meaning of passages similar to the above.

There is only one entity according to this school—called Ātman or Brahman. The term Advaita means non-dualism or monism. To identify it with Pantheism, as some scholars have done, is not correct, as the Advaitin holds that the Universe is unreal.

¹ Every Vedantic scholar should admit that the Upanishads are, as a whole, a consistent embodiment of philosophical thought; and any interpretation given of them can be considered sound, only if such interpretation is capable of elucidating all the passages in the Upanishads, as giving a consistent idea throughout.

² Refer to the lists of Āchāryas that preceded these Reformers and to their valuable works among the Guru-paramparas of the three sects.
The Ātman (or Brahman) is one only and supreme, and all the worlds that seem to have been created by the Supreme Being are in the manner of dreams. These are the creations of avidyā or nescience which belongs to the Supreme Being Itself. This avidyā is anādi or without a beginning and is the cause of the various illusory manifestations in the world.

Śankarāchārya maintains that the knowledge of self is the constant basis of all other kinds of knowledge. That is, the primary and self-evident intuition of self is the basis of all other kinds of knowledge, whether perceptive or inferential, direct or indirect, present, past or future. As we cannot know the external objects without knowing the self as its knower, we may infer that we cannot think of any object without thinking of the same self as its knower. Thus the Universe exists only relative to knowledge.  

From this relativity of the world to knowledge, it would appear that there are two distinct entities, viz.—

(1) the self or soul as the subject of knowledge and
(2) the world as the object of knowledge.

But this distinction is apparent (व्याबहारिक) and not real (पारमार्थिक). The essence of the self or soul is knowledge. Every object that presents itself before this self or soul is found to be pervaded by knowledge; therefore no object can be distinct from self, which in its essence is knowledge. It follows therefore that in every act of knowledge, there is only one undivided entity—call it self or soul or knowledge—which is both subject and object, because it knows only itself and nothing else. There is in fact no knower or agent (ज्ञात), and nothing knowable (ज्ञय); there is only knowledge (ज्ञान). And this knowledge is called Ātman or Brahman. The whole world which is full of manifestations in the form of knowers (or souls) and knowables (objects) is unreal; whereas Knowledge alone, called Ātman or Brahman, is real. This is what constitutes the Advaita or monistic theory.

‘Our knowledge of space and time cannot disprove this theory; for the world of time and space, the objective world, has no independent existence, but is comprehended in the self. The belief in its independent or real existence is the result of avidyā (nescience or ignorance)—which can be destroyed only by a true knowledge of Self or Ātman. With the merging of time and space in the self, the idea of a plurality of souls becomes groundless; and when the souls or agencies that introduce finitude into reality are shown to be unreal, finitude also disappears, and the Infinite alone remains.’

1 I am indebted to Pañcit Śtānātha Tattva-bhūshan for some of the ideas and passages quoted here.
Thus our own self or soul, the soul in each of us, which seems to be finite, is really nothing but Brahman—generally represented by the words सत्य, ज्ञान, अनन्त—which do not stand as attributes to Brahman, but only go to prove the Reality or Existence of only one entity, Brahman. Brahman is similarly identified with Bliss or Ananda. All these terms should be taken to negative the reality of objects other than Brahman thus:—

सत्यं (अत्यांश्च) other than Un-Truth.

ज्ञानं (अत्यांश्च) ,, Ignorance.

अनन्तं ,, Finitude.

अनन्तद्: ,, Non-Bliss.

Thus we see that Brahman, according to the Advaitin, is निर्माण or without attributes; for no qualifying epithets or attributes to Brahman can be admitted as real, as such admission would disprove the non-dualistic theory. No differentiating attributes (विशेषाः) can be found in Brahman which is one undivided and infinite mass of knowledge—spoken of as अक्षण्ड-सच्चिदानन्दा.

This निर्माणान्, again, is based on the interpretation of some Upanishadic passages, and has been fully expounded by Śankarāchārya in his works. The following stanzas from his Aparokshaṇubhāti contain the essence of the foregoing theory:—

ब्रह्मदर्शं समस्तशान्तसचिदानन्दलक्षण: ।

नाहं देहोशस्त्रूपो ज्ञानमिलातयते बुधे: ।

निर्विकारो निर्दिकारो निरविकारो इत्यदां: ।

नाहं देहोशस्त्रूपो ज्ञानमिलातयते बुधे: ॥

निरम्बीयो निरम्बीयस्तो निर्बिकारो इत्यदां: ।

नाहं देहोशस्त्रूपो ज्ञानमिलातयते बुधे: ।

निर्गुणो निर्यक्ष्यो निन्यो नियमत्त्वो इत्यदां: ।

नाहं देहोशस्त्रूपो ज्ञानमिलातयते बुधे: ॥

निर्मले निर्भूष्टान्तत्शान्तो इत्यदां: ।

नाहं देहोशस्त्रूपो ज्ञानमिलातयते बुधे: ॥

So far, we have been considering the Advaita doctrine from the ideal or प्रारम्भिक standpoint. But from the practical or व्यावहारिक
standpoint, the Advaitins admit the whole universe to be real; and just like the other schools of the Vedanta, hold that the world has been created, is preserved and destroyed by Īśvara. Brahman, from the भवाहारिक standpoint, is called इश्वर, and is supposed to contain all the good attributes that may be conceived of—as all-knowing, all-powerful, merciful, just, holy and as the friend and saviour of finite souls. This practical Brahman is, therefore, called सूर्यभ्रम (or Brahman with attributes), as distinguished from the ideal Brahman, which is named निर्गृणभ्रम (or Brahman without attributes). The ideal Brahman which is the only Reality, appears to itself through the effect of Avidyā (Nescience) or Māyā, as practical Brahman, and when subject to this illusion of Māyā, sees diversity in unity. This Avidyā or Māyā is without a beginning; but it has an end. It is the ultimate cause of this संसारकङ्क or worldly bondage, which appears to us to be due to Karma. When Brahman realizes its true nature and attains its ideal or परमार्थिक stage, Avidyā or Māyā vanishes, and there is Mōksha or freedom from bondage.

The practical or भवाहारिक stage of Brahman is compared to our dreamy condition, and the world is compared to the things we see in our dreams. The world is also compared to the image that we see in the mirror, and is, therefore, said to have no real existence. When the ideal or परमार्थिक stage is attained by Brahman, there will be an end of Māyā; and the world vanishes. Brahman will then realize its own undivided nature. This is compared to our condition when awake from a dream. The whole of this theory is summed up by Śankarāchārya in the following introductory verse of the Dakshinā-mūrti-stōtra:—

विश्वं दर्पणस्ययमानविग्रहलघ्नं विज्ञानतरं
पद्यज्ञातमि मायया बहिरिवोद्वृत्य यथा निद्रया ।
वशस्यास्तु धुते प्रतीतस्य मायामेवाश्चद्ययं
तस्मै श्रवणमालैः नम ईश्वरं श्रद्धिधिशयां ॥

We have now seen that Śankarāchārya speaks of two kinds of Brahman—one real or ideal (परमार्थिक), and the other unreal or practical (भवाहारिक). The unreal Brahman or इश्वर is placed at the head of all created beings and is called Apara-Brahma or कार्यंभ्रम—i.e. the Lower Brahman or the Effect-God; whereas the real Brahman is called
परमाः or कारणाः—i.e. the Higher Brahman or the Cause-God. We have seen that the former is called सुगुणाः and the latter as निगुणाः.

Şankarāchārya is a devout worshipper of सुगुणाः (in the form of Vishṇu or Śiva) although he says that such a Being has no real existence from a philosophical point of view. The various stōtras composed by him are full of devotion to this सुगुणाः; and one or two characteristic verses from his हरिमीलोकस्तील may be quoted as illustrating his pious sentiments:—

सर्बकास्योऽयं हि सर्वस्वकास्योऽयं
द्वारानादोपनन्त्वयो गुणवामा
द्वाराध्यको व्यक्तस्मातस्तथा सदा:
तं संसारस्वान्तविनाशं हरिमीलोको

सर्वात्स्नोऽसर्वस्त्रीरि न च सर्वस्मानः
सर्व वेष्येवेव न यथा बैत्तिः च सर्वस्मानः

सर्वसत्त्वं वित्ततेऽव्ययं यमापवः सामः
तं संसारान्तविनाशं हरिमीलोको

Şankarāchārya is equally devoted to Vishṇu and Śiva; and he regards them as identical in spirit with the Supreme Being. Even the followers of Şankarāchārya, the Smārtas, are all worshipping Vishṇu as well as Śiva in their houses and temples. In fact, the Advaita doctrine regards every living being in the Universe as identical with Brahman; and this accounts for Şankarāchārya’s identifying his own Preceptor नौकन्‌गुरु with God (Gōvinda or Vishṇu) in most of his stōtras.

Moksha or liberation from the worldly bondage is also of two kinds, according to Şankarāchārya. Those who are devoted to the Lower Brahman (सुगुणाः) will attain Brahma-lōka, which is described in the Śruti as the Abode of Brahman. Attainment of this Brahma-lōka is called आपेक्षिको मुक्तिः: or relative liberation. There will be no return from this Brahma-lōka to the earth, for the liberated souls live there for ages in close proximity to the Lower Brahman; and when this Brahman is merged in the Higher Brahman at the end of the cycle (कशः), all the souls in the Brahma-lōka will share in his happy fate.

The higher kind of Moksha known as भूमोक्ष or absolute liberation is attained by the knowledge of one’s perfect identity with Para-Brahman
(or Higher Brahman). The soul that attains this kind of liberation is called a जीवन्मुक्त (one that has attained liberation during this life on earth).

To attain this kind of liberation, no Karma (or fulfilment of duties) can serve as the direct means. Jñāna or Knowledge of Reality alone leads to this absolute liberation. Karma, in the form of the spiritual exercises enjoined in the Śastra, can only purify and prepare the mind for the Path of Knowledge (श्रावण). There are four kinds of spiritual exercises (known as the साधनचतुष्पय) recognized by the Advaitins:—

1. नियामकाय स्वरूपम् — or discrimination between eternal and transitory things;
2. इद्वाचप्रमोगविराग: — or non-attachment to the rewards of actions in this as well as in the other world;
3. शमदमादिसाधनानुप्रयत् — or the securing of the various means, such as the control of the mind and the control of the external senses; and
4. ममात्मबध् — or desire for the final emancipation of the soul.

As regards Bhakti or Love of God, Śankarāchārya admits¹ that it is the most perfect means of attaining Moksha; but he identifies the highest form of Bhakti with Jñāna, as, according to him, Bhakti can secure Moksha only through the Path of Knowledge (श्रावण).

THE DVAITAS SYSTEM

We have already seen that this system is so called because it recognizes द्वैत or difference among the three categories—Matter, Souls and God. The word Dvaita strictly means dualism, and so it is used to denote difference (or bheda).

According to this school, Padarthā or Reality (Category) is of two kinds:—

(I) Independent (खतन्त्र) and
(II) Dependent (परतन्त्र).

(I) Independent Reality or God is the glorious Vishnu, also called Para-Brahman, who is all-powerful and omniscient, and endowed with all auspicious attributes.

¹ Cf. 'भोजकरणामयं भक्तिरेव गरीयसी' — (Vivēka-chudāmani).
(II) **Dependent Reality** is of two kinds:—

(i) *positive* (भाव) and

(ii) *negative* (अभाव).

Among the positive again, there are two classes:—

(1) sentient (चेतन) or the souls and

(2) non-sentient (अचेतन)—including matter, time, etc.

The sentient beings are of various kinds, the chief of them being:—

(1) The Eternally Free (निवय)—Goddess Lakshmi.

(2) The Released Souls (मुक्त:)—such as the Devas, Rishis, Pitris, Men, etc.

(3) The Fettered (बद्ध:) of whom there are two divisions:—

   (a) those that are eligible for release or *moksha* and

   (b) those that are not eligible for release.

Again those that are not eligible for release are—

(1) either fit for Tamas (Dark Hell) or

(2) eternally fettered (निवर्गसारिण:)  

Such being the classification of the categories according to the Dvaitins, they recognize five kinds of *difference* (मेद or ब्रैत)—

जीवेत्थरमिदा चैव जलेष्ठरमिदा तथा ।

जीवंभैऽर्थ नियम्यक्षेत्र जस्तीवरमिदा तथा ।

नियमश्च जलेष्ठैऽ य: प्रप्त्वमेदप्रकः ॥

—(परमाःशुति:)  

That is,

Difference (1) between God and the sentient beings or individual souls;

(2) between God and the non-sentient (matter, time, etc.);

(3) between every two among the sentient beings (or souls);

(4) between matter and souls; and

(5) between every two amongst the material things.

This system is directly opposed to the Advaitin's doctrine of Monism or the identity of soul with God. The Dvaitins declare that the soul is entirely distinct from God, and can never be identified with Him. The
term Brahman is applicable only to the All-powerful Vishnu, as there is no other being that is perfect in all the excellent qualities. It is derived from the root ब्रह्म which refers to the infinite nature of the Supreme Being—infinitely with respect to time, space and qualities; and shows that the Supreme Being is quite distinct from all limited existences, and individual souls. The Vedânta declares that there is only one Brahman, and that Brahman is infinite or unlimited in nature. The word Ātman, as applied to God or Brahman, cannot be taken to mean the individual soul (limited Ātman), since devotion to that Ātman is stated to be the means of final release (or moksha). It is totally inadmissible that the limited and the unlimited Ātman merge together. Nor is it admissible that the different parts of the Śruti declare different Brahmans, as the Advaitins hold.

The Supreme Being and his qualities are absolutely identical, and they can be still spoken of in different terms. The form seen during meditation by mere imagination is not Brahman or God, because He is non-manifest. It is by this non-manifest Para-Brahman (Supreme Being) or Vishnu (i.e. All-pervading) that the Universe is created, preserved, and destroyed; and all the changes in the Universe are subject to His Will. He is the sole dispenser of fruits to the deserving souls, according to their natural merits.

The mundane bondage (संवार) of the soul is a fact proved by the unmistakable evidence of perception; and freedom from this bondage can be attained only through the Grace of God. Karma-yoga or the discharge of pious duties enjoined in the Śāstras is only auxiliary to the attainment of knowledge or Jñāna. It is knowledge (of Brahman) or Jñāna-yoga that leads to final deliverance, by securing the Grace of God.

Study of the Vedânta (Śāstra) is the only means of knowing the Supreme Being. The power of words is quite capable of directly conveying the attributes of Brahman, who cannot be realized except by means of the Veda or Śruti (the Word). Devotion is the result of the knowledge of God's glory. Only those who possess devotion are fit to study the Śāstra.

All that desire for final deliverance or moksha cannot attain it; for it is only the eligible few possessing the virtuous qualities, that are entitled to study the Vedânta-Śāstra; and this eligibility cannot be earned, as it must be found in the natural essence of the soul. Each individual soul has got its own peculiar natural characteristics of eligibility or ineligibility; and these can never be altered even by the Supreme Being. In short, no soul can hope to attain deliverance (moksha), unless it possesses the
natural eligibility for such deliverance. Even among those who are eligible, no two souls can be found to possess the same degree of eligibility or qualifications. Hence it is that the fruits of deliverance will vary according to the degrees of eligibility of the souls. This is what is generally known as आनन्दतात्त्वम् or variety in Eternal Bliss. This doctrine is, it may be observed, peculiar to the Mādhvas, among the Vedāntins.

According to this school, Upāsana means an inquiry into Brahman or God, and this includes study, investigation, reasoning, contemplation and meditation. In the absence of any obstruction, Brahman is seen in the very birth in which a soul has completed the course of inquiry (or Upāsana). Final deliverance or mākṣha is certain in the case of those who have seen Brahman; but it can be actually realized only after the destruction of Prarabdha-Karma (or Karma the fruit of which is now being experienced); and this destruction of प्रारम्भक क त्र म may result (according to its intensity) either at the end of the very birth in which Brahman is seen, or in some later birth. Mākṣha cannot be attained by seeing any form of Brahman, but only after seeing the particular form which the Preceptor or Guru prescribes for the soul. When the Preceptor says the sight has been gained, the soul has succeeded in realizing the particular form, and this is what is called (by the Mādhvas) विभवदर्शन.

When this विभवदर्शन has been secured, the previous and subsequent Karma (the effects of deeds, past and future) will be destroyed, and the Prarabdha-Karma alone will remain to be experienced by the soul before deliverance is attained.

According to this school, Mākṣha or final deliverance from bondage involves four distinct stages—

(1) Destruction of Karma,
(2) Departure from the material body,
(3) The Path to be travelled by the released, and
(4) The attainment of Eternal Bliss.

After the final destruction of Karma, the eligible soul departs from the gross body and by means of the ethereal or subtle body (सुखशास्री) travels in the Archirādi-mārga (the Path of Archis, etc.) to the Abode of God.

The released having reached Brahman enjoy the eternal blessings and remain for ever with Him and under His guidance. They are graded according to their devotion; and the absence of equality does not affect their blessedness. Those who attain sāyujya-mākṣha, enjoy the blessings along with Brahman. Though they are divested of all material body,
still they can enjoy eternal blessings through the person of Brahman. All others (who attain sālokya, sāmīpya and sārūpya mōkshas) enjoy blessings by means of their spiritual body (which is purely composed of knowledge or jñāna). The released obtain all their desires by mere will; and they may assume, if they please, a body which is made of pure substance (शुद्धस्वरूप) and which is not the result of Karma. The Eternal Happiness enjoyed by the released does not become increased or diminished in the course of their enjoyment.¹

THE VIŚISHTĀDVAITA SYSTEM

It has been already observed that the term Viśishtādvaita signifies qualified monism. Viśishtā means qualified, i.e. having as attributes Chit (Souls) and Achit (Matter); and Viśishtādvaita may therefore be taken to signify One Reality—Para-Brahman (Viśnu) qualified by the attributes Chit and Achit. There are two stages for Chit and Achit—(1) the causal stage or कारणवस्त्र य and (2) the effectual stage or कार्यवस्त्र य. In the causal stage, i.e. before the evolution, they are said to be मूर्त्त (subtle); whereas in the effectual stage, after the evolution, they are said to be स्थूल (gross). In both these stages, Brahman or the Supreme Being is qualified by the attributes, Chit and Achit. The Supreme Being is thus inseparably united with Matter and Souls; and the Universe of Matter and Souls forms the body of the Supreme Being. Thus the Supreme Being is not only the Soul of all Matter, but is the Soul of all Souls and is therefore called Paramātman. This relation between Brahman and the Universe is clearly established by several Vedic texts, such as—"याद्वात्मा श्रीरेः, यस्य पूर्विः शरीरस्, निष्ठो नियमां चेतनशेषतनां॥"

It is an admitted fact that words referring to the body of a soul are often applied to the soul also, e.g. आह्माम (I am a Brahman), श्रीगोद्वार (He is a Kshattriya), शूलक्ष्य (You are white). We use the word अह्म (I) with reference to the body, when we say स्थूल (I am stout), शूल (I am lean); and 'I' denotes the soul in such examples as—'I think', 'I feel pain or pleasure', 'I know this fact'. In the expression 'my body', the first person clearly refers to the soul.

In the same way, we find the Supreme Being (the Soul of the Universe) often referred to in the Upanishads by words that are properly

¹ Some of the ideas and expressions in the section relating to the Dvaita system have been borrowed from Mr. S. Subba Rao's translations of the Dvaita works.
applicable to Matter or Souls comprised in the Universe, which is the
body of the Supreme Being. Hence arises the great confusion in the
interpretation of the Vedic texts. For instance, the word आत्मन (Atman)
is used to denote, in some places, the individual soul; and in other
places, the Supreme Being. In fact, all names are capable of ultimately
signifying the Supreme Being—in accordance with the Viśishtādvaītic
doctrine about the relation between God and the Universe (शरीरीयीसिनाब
or the relation between the body and its indweller, the soul), e.g. Indra
may refer to the Supreme Being, dwelling in the soul of Indra (इन्द्रान्ययां-
निन). Passages like ‘तू तमसि’ (That thou art) are also to be construed
in accordance with this relation between God and the individual souls—
each soul being recognized as a body of God. The passage तत्क्षमसि—
‘That thou art’ can only mean ‘God in thee is (the same as) that
Supreme Being’; and can never be taken to imply an identity of the
individual soul with God.

We thus see that the Viśishtādvaītic system, while asserting qualified
monism, does not ignore the natural differences between the three en-
tities—Matter, Soul and God. The attributes of God are as real as God
Himself; that is, the Universe, is not unreal.

According to this system—‘all knowledge is real’ (सर्व ज्ञान यथायथ). In refuting ‘certain analogies generally given (by the Advaitin) to show
that the scripture, which, being based upon avidyā or ignorance, is un-
real, may form the means for the attainment of the highest reality
known as the Brahmān’—the following arguments are set forth by the
Viśishtādvaītic school. ‘When auspicious and inauspicious dreams give
rise to good and bad results in life, the dreams are indeed as really
existent as the results they give rise to. When magic, medicinal herbs,
incantations, etc., give rise to illusions which cause fear, love, and other
emotions, the illusions are as real as the emotions themselves. Death may
result from a suspicion of snake-bite and of poisoning; here the sus-
picion is as real as the death. The reflected image of a thing is as real
as the thing itself. Dreams are real even in the absence of the reality
of the objects corresponding to them, inasmuch as what is required to
make anything the object and the basis of any cognition, is merely the
manifestation of that thing to consciousness in some manner or other.
Even in the case of the apprehension of the sounds of letters by means of
the corresponding written signs, there is no cognition of the real by
means of the unreal.’

1 Vide Prof. M. Rangacharyar’s Translation of the Śrī-Bhāṣya, p. xviii. (Introduction).
By these and other examples, the Viśisṭādvaitīn proves that the Advaita Doctrine of Māyā is untenable; and holds that the Vedāntic literature, as a whole, supports the reality of all the three entities—Matter, Souls and God. ‘The statement found in the Vishnu-Purāṇa (II. 14, 31), and often quoted in support of the Advaita Doctrine—‘to the effect that “Dualists see things wrongly”—is shown to negative only that kind of dualism which postulates a natural difference in essence between one individual soul and another; but not the real dualism which declares the natural distinction between the ultimate entities, known as God, Soul and Matter.’ We shall now proceed to speak of these three entities:

(I) God or Brahman is defined in this system as a Being, whose flame-like spiritual essence is itself infinite, wholly self-manifest and self-happy, and is the entire opposite of every kind of evil, and the unique seat of every kind of good; who is adorned with hosts of amiable attributes, such as, omniscient, miraculous, all-supporting, omnipotent, inexhaustible, and over-powering all; who is the gracious granter of all kinds of boons, and is possessed of an all-transcendent form; who is the evolver, the preserver and the destroyer of everything created; and who is the fit resort of all aspirants.’

The form of God is five-fold:

(1) Para—or the Transcendental Form (the Supreme Being) in the Vaikunṭha-loka or the Heavenly Abode of God;
(2) Vyūha—or the Operative Forms (viz. Vāsudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha) lying on the serpent Śōsā in the Milk Sea;
(3) Viṣṇu— or the Incarnate Form (the Avatāras, such as Varāha, Narasimha, Rāma, and Krishna);
(4) Antaryāmin—or the Pervasive Form (dwelling in the heart of every living being) realized by the Yogins through meditation;
(5) Archāvatāra—or the Image-Form (in temples and houses of worshippers) which God assumes in accordance with the wishes of his devotees.

As regards the Image-Form, Pillai-lōkāchārya, the great Viśisṭādvaitic teacher of the thirteenth century, says:

‘The Archā Form consists in the images of Bhagavān (God), which accommodate themselves to the various tastes of His creatures for their worship, having no fixed form, but that which the worshipper may choose and desire to have of Him; having no fixed name but that which the worshipper may choose and desire to call Him by; all-knowing but seeming as if not-knowing; all-powerful but seeming as if powerless; all-sufficient but seeming as if needy—thus seeming to exchange places, the
worshipped with the worshipper, and choosing to be ocularly manifest to him in temples and homes, in short at all places and at all times desired.' (Vide Artha-Pañchaka, translated by A. G.)

In this place I may say a few words regarding Image-worship, which is common to all the Brahmaanic systems. There is an interesting point in connexion with the number of categories recognized by the several philosophical schools in the world. If \( M = \) Matter,
\[ S = \text{Soul}, \]
\[ G = \text{God}; \]

then, the number of permutations of these three taken

\[ \text{one at a time is } 3 \]
\[ \text{two } \]
\[ \text{three } \]

making a total of 15. These fifteen varieties, exhaust almost all the philosophical schools in the world; and a complete analysis of these has been furnished by the late Śrī-Yogi-Pārtha-sārathi Aiyangar Svāmi of Madras, in his English Translation of the Tattva-traya. This great scholar has also written a pamphlet on the *Rationale of Image-Worship*, which is worth perusal. (Vide also pp. 43-45, A. Gōvindāchārya's *Vade Mecum of Vedanta*.)

As regards Image-worship, the Viśisṭādvaitic interpretation is, I believe, quite convincing. Adopting the above symbols, we may represent every living being by three concentric circles thus:—

Since every object in the Universe is pervaded by the All-pervading God (Viṣṇu), we see that in paying homage to any living being, we are not honouring merely the outer form or matter (M), nor even the inner (individual) soul (S) alone, but convey our respects, through the process of meditation, up to the innermost Supreme Soul or God (G). Thus, every living being that is honoured, symbolizes Viśisṭādvaita (God-qualified by the attributes—*Chit* and *Achit*).

Similarly, whenever we worship an image (of a Deity), that worship is carried, through meditation, up to the Supreme Being, who not only pervades the image (through His all-pervading power), but makes it His special abode (at our request) so as to be within our easy reach.

(II) *Chit* (the individual soul) is defined as a being, distinct from matter (i.e. the body and the senses), and as intelligent, immutable,
incomprehensible, indivisible, unmanifest, self-luminous, spiritually atomic, eternal and blissful. The souls are divided into five classes:—

1. The Ever-Free (Nitya), in the holy presence of the Supreme Being, who are ever untainted by worldly bondage. They are ever happy, being engaged in the eternal service of God.

2. The Liberated (Mukta)—who have been freed from worldly bondage by the grace of God: These are also living in the presence of God, and are supremely happy.

3. The Fettered (Baddha)—still subject to bondage, i.e. imprisoned in the material body. They mistake the body for the soul and imagine that the sole aim of life is worldly pleasure or gratification of the senses. They become, therefore, slaves to passion, and tighten the worldly bondage closer and closer around themselves.

4. The Isolate or Self-satisfied (Këvala)—who after experiencing the miseries of this world, realize the distinction between matter and soul; and succeeding in their attempt to free themselves from bondage, are content with self-enjoyment and do not aspire to know God. They live in a region called Kaivalya which is beyond the material world, and is yet outside the Abode of God. Those who attain this kind of Moksha have no chance of reaching the Divine Presence, as they are self-satisfied.

5. The Progressive or Salvation-seeking (Mumukshu)—who are yet living in this world, always leading a pious life; and are engaged in the pursuit of Salvation.

(III) Achit (or the non-sentient entity) is defined as that which is non-intelligent, subject to mutation, and enjoyable by souls. It is of three kinds:—

1. Pure-substance (Suddha-sattva)—which belongs to the Abode of God (नित्यविमृत्ति or the Eternal World).

2. Mixed-substance (Misra-sattva)—which is the seat of purity (sattva), turbidity (rajas), and darkness (tamas); and belongs to this world (लोकविमृत्ति or the Pastime-World).

3. Time—which is devoid of qualities.

N.B.—Achit cannot, therefore, be properly translated as Matter, if we exclude Time from Matter. Space is not treated as a separate division of Achit, as it comes under Akasa (Ether), etc. For details, see Sri-Yogi Parthasarathi Aiyangar's Translation of Tattva-traya (Srinivasa Varadachari & Co., Madras, 1900).

1 This world, which is full of joys and sorrows, serves as a play-ground to God and is, therefore, called the Pastime-World.
The Means of Attaining Salvation

The means of attaining moksha or salvation are also of five kinds:—

(1) Karma-Yoga—or the performance of duties enjoined in the Sāstras. This is the chief means of attaining Aīśvarya (worldly prosperity); and is accessory to the Jñāna-Yoga which leads to salvation.

(2) Jñāna-Yoga—or the process by which a Yogin realizes the Antaryāmi form of God by constant meditation. This Jñāna-Yoga is the fundamental means of Kaivalya-moksha, and is accessory to Bhakti-Yoga.

(3) Bhakti-Yoga—or the process by which the soul that has realized the form of God by constant meditation is enabled to make such realization matured into Love of God. This is the direct means of attaining the Abode of God, called Vaikuntha or Parama-pada.

(4) Prapatti—or ‘Self-surrender to God’. This is the simplest and at the same time the surest means of reaching the desired end. It is accessible to all, the weak as well as the strong, without distinction of caste, creed, or sex. It consists in resigning one’s self entirely to the Will of God, and performing one’s legitimate duties without attachment to the results thereof.

(5) Āchāryābhimāna—or Trust in the Preceptor, who serves as the Mediator between the aspirant soul and God. An individual, having no sufficient strength of mind for Self-surrender (Prapatti), has to place entire faith in a competent and compassionate Preceptor, who will adopt the necessary means of saving him (from worldly bondage), just as a loving mother swallows the necessary medicine to cure her suffering baby.

Thus the Viśishtādvaita system provides, for all mankind, the surest and at the same time the simplest means of salvation. The Dravidian Saints (the Ālvārs) laid much stress on Bhakti (Love of God) in their Tamil Sacred Poems—the (Four Thousand) Dieya Prabandha; and the later Preceptors (the Āchāryas)—of whom Šrī-Rāmānujāchārya stands the most prominent—freely taught the safest means of Prapatti (Self-surrender to God), making it open to all creeds and castes, irrespective of sex. The followers of Šrī-Rāmānujāchārya—among whom shine the great Pillai-Lokāchārya, Vēdānta Deśika, and Vara-vara-muni¹—revealed also the still easier and more convenient means of Āchāryābhimāna (Trust in the Mediator).

¹ It may be observed here that the Śrī-Vaishnāvas—the representatives of the Viśishtādvaita system—are divided into two communities:—(1) The Ten-kalais (the southern school)—the followers of Pillai-Lokāchārya and Varavara-muni; and (2) the Vaṣa-kalais (the northern
We may now direct our attention to a brief comparison of the three systems, with reference to the teachings of the great Reformers of the respective sects. Professor Hopkins, in speaking of Śankara and Rāmānuja, says:

‘Śankara’s Brahma is the one and only being, pure being, or pure thought. Thought is not an attribute of Brahma, it is Brahma. Opposed to this pure being (thought) stands māyā, illusion, the material cause of the seen world. It is neither being nor not being; it is the cause of the appearance of things, in that it is associated with Brahma, and in so far only is Brahma rightly the Lord. The infinite part of each individual is Brahma; the finite part is māyā. Thus Bādarāyaṇa (author of the Vēdānta Śūtras) says, that the individual is only illusion. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, teaches a Brahma that is not only universal, but is the universal personal Lord, a supreme, conscious and willing God. Far from being devoid of attributes, like Śankara’s Brahma, the Brahma of Rāmānuja has all attributes, chief of which is thought or intelligence. The Lord contains in himself the elements of that plurality which Śankara regards as illusion. As contrasted with the dualistic Śāṅkhyā philosophy, both of these systems inculcate monism. But according to Śankara all difference is illusion; while according to Rāmānuja Brahma is not homogeneous, but in the diversity of the world about us He is truly manifested. Śankara’s māyā is Rāmānuja’s body of (Brahma) the Lord. Śankara’s personal God exists only by collusion with illusion, and hence is illusory. The Brahma of Rāmānuja is a personal God, the omnipotent, omniscient, Lord of a real world. Moreover, from an eschatological point of view, Śankara explains salvation, the release from rebirth, samsāra, as complete union with this unqualified Brahma, consequently as loss of individuality as well as loss of happiness. But Rāmānuja defines salvation as the departure from earth for ever of the individual spirit, which enters a heaven, where it will enjoy perennial bliss. Rāmānuja’s doctrine inspires the sectarian pantheism of the present time. In this there is a metaphysical basis of conduct, a personal God to be loved or feared, the hope of bliss hereafter. In its essential features, it is a very old belief, far older than the philosophy which formulates it. Thus after the hard saying “fools desire heaven”, this desire re-asserted itself; and under Rāmānuja’s genial interpretation of the Vēdānta Śūtras, the pious man was enabled to build up his cheerful hope again, withal on the basis of a logic as difficult to controvert as was that of Śankara himself.’ (The Religions of India—pp. 496–8.)

school)—the followers of Vēdānta Dēśika. The doctrinal differences between the two schools have been fully discussed by Śrīmān A. Gēvindāchārya of Mysore in the J. R. A. S. (October, 1910).
The language used here seems to me rather strong. Western scholars appear to have not fully realized the true spirit of Śankara’s doctrine. Śankara’s practical (Saguna) Brahman is not very different from Rāmānuja’s Brahman; and as we have already seen, Śankara himself was a staunch devotee of Saguna-Brahman. He clearly admits, in the following passage from his Commentary on the Samatsujātiya (Mahā-Bhārata, Udyoga Parva) I. 18, that salvation can be secured by worshipping Saguna-Brahman:—

अथवा—‘एवं हि विद्वान् परियाति तत्’—इति पाठे सगुणं श्रद्धा विद्वान् तत्र भक्तोकासायपासनपदं परियाति प्राप्तोत्। तथा अर्थजातं च आस्य बदन्ति वेदा:। कीदन्तं बदन्ति। स नेह आयाति, ति विद्वान् इह अर्थम् लोके कामिनिक्षय्याति न जाते; कित्लं भक्तोपासनय अमर्वा विष्णूमार्गेन् निहत्त।। एवं तत्र गाय संसर्गेन वे मार्ग निहय पासा सन्त कालेन पर्र श्रद्धा प्राप्तित्वयः:।

If Śankara had doubted the virtue of meditating on Saguna-Brahman, an earnest philosopher of his eminence would never have wasted his precious moments in acts of piety towards such a Being, and in composing so many stōtras in praise thereof. Śankara’s practical life would, therefore, justify the conclusion that his Para-Mukti (Absolute Liberation) was put forth by him only as a philosophical ideal, and that he himself regarded it as impossible of attainment by frail mortals.

As regards the doctrine of Māyā, it may be observed that the word Māyā is taken to mean Prakriti (Matter) by the School of Rāmānuja, relying on such texts as—

(1) मायाः तु प्रकृति बिद्यामाधिचन्त तु महेश्वरः। (Śūt. Up., iv. 10.)

(2) अस्मान्यांशु सुखं बिद्यामधिकारं मायाम नविद्यतः।

(Śūt. Up., iv. 9.)

Śankarāchārya, himself, often makes Prakṛiti synonymous with Māyā. (Vide his Commentary on Gītā, vii. 4, xv. 17, etc.) Both Śankara and Rāmānuja hold that Brahman is the material cause (उपादानकारण) of the Universe, through the attribute (or property) Māyā or Prakṛiti.

The most important point to be noted in this connexion is that even Śankarāchārya regards Matter and Soul as properties of the Lord and as eternal with Him. (Vide Commentary on Gītā, xiii. 19.)

Even here, in India, there are serious misconceptions regarding the doctrine of Śankara. Some enthusiastic amateurs have even attempted to reconcile Śankara’s orthodox system and the heterodox Buddhism; and this is perhaps due to the few points of resemblance between Śankara’s school and the Yogāchāra School of Buddhism.
In the verse in question he takes the word अनादी to mean eternal (निय्य) as applied to Matter and Soul, and further on in the commentary, he himself refutes the theory of those who would understand the word अनादी (in the verse) as meaning न आदि, i.e. not existing at the beginning.

Further the term मिथ्या as applied to the Universe (cf. जग्निमिथ्या, etc.) is often used by शाकराचार्य in the sense of अनिव्य (non-eternal).

If these are the real views of शाकराचार्यa, as regards the points in question, we may venture to say that there would be practically little or no difference between his school and that of रामानुज; but these are points which require a careful examination by impartial scholars.

Next, comparing the school of रामानुजाचार्यa with that of मध्वाचार्यa, we find the following few points of difference:

1. रामानुज a holds that the individual souls are all similar in their natural essence (स्वप्रक्ष, whereas Madhva regards them as essentially different.

2. According to रामानुज a, the material cause of the Universe is God Himself, which the school of Madhva denies.

3. रामानुज a regards the Universe as the body of God—which relation is not recognized by Madhvāchārya.

4. According to रामानुज a, no soul is, by nature, disqualified for salvation, whereas Madhva holds that there is a class of souls totally ineligible by nature for salvation and therefore doomed to eternal perdition.

5. In the view of रामानुज a, there is no difference of any kind between one liberated soul and another in the enjoyment of Eternal Bliss in Heaven; but in Madhva’s view, differences in such enjoyment do exist, in degree and quality, proportionate to the differences in the natural essence of the souls.

I shall now refer to some of the common points of the three systems:

1 This is certainly conflicting with his own statements elsewhere. (Vide e.g. Viśeka-

2 Vide विन्देक्रेक्षावलिपि. (St. 20-22, etc.)
(1) All the three systems are based upon the authority of the Śrutis (the Upanishads), the Smṛitis, the Itihāsas and the Purāṇas.

(2) All believe that the beginningless kārma is the cause of worldly bondage, and that the soul will undergo birth after birth until the whole of kārma is exhausted.

(3) All recognize that the study of the Vēdānta is essential for the attainment of Jñāna (wisdom), which serves as a passport to the Heavenly Abode.

(4) Bhakti or Love of God is the most perfect means of salvation according to all the three systems.

(5) Image-Worship is an essential feature of all the Brāhmaṇaic systems; and Nārāyaṇa (Vīṣṇu), in various forms, is generally worshipped as the Supreme Being by all the three sects.

(6) The Spiritual Preceptor is the Mediator between the individual soul and God; and is revered as equal to God in several respects.

(7) Divine Grace alone can ultimately secure salvation, as human efforts by themselves will be fruitless.

(8) All recognize that salvation consists in the attainment of Brahman, which is Eternal Bliss.

Before concluding, it is my duty to acknowledge my indebtedness to those scholars, Indian and European, whose ideas and expressions I have borrowed in preparing this lecture.

Let us now conclude with a verse in praise of the Supreme Light shining throughout the Vēdānta:

“यन्नम्प्रकार जगतमुक्तिते जैविकपत्यम् पदानि यदाश्रययाणि।
कहांपे सरसित्कणमदिलीयं वेदान्तस्वस्मिनिद्ध्रथम् महसत।”

(Vaikunṭha-stava, st. 4.)