

SURVEY

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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF LIBERATION IN HINDUISM

Introduction

The idea of liberation in Indian spiritual tradition is a very vast subject. All Indian philosophy is designed to show man a way to release him from his present state of existence. Even the Indian materialist, *Chārvāka*, spoke of *moksha* which naturally meant for him physical death. There is a logic behind this conception of the materialist. Whatever else release may mean, all Indian philosophical systems affirm that release is a state in which there is no pain or suffering. *Chārvāka*, materialist in metaphysics and hedonist in ethics, believed pleasure to be the goal of life which implied avoidance of pain. But, unfortunately, as long as man is physically alive, he cannot avoid pain altogether. So not to be alive is the one sure way of being completely free from pain. Of course, the materialist says that one should not refrain from pursuing pleasure because it can never be free from pain. For, who would refuse to pluck a rose because its thorn might prick his finger?

Apart from this negative common element, namely freedom from pain, there are vast differences among the different concepts of spiritual release with regard to number of issues. Is there a positive content of *mukti*? Does the released soul have knowledge, enjoyment, action? What is its relation to the supreme Self, if such a reality be admitted? Is it a state of isolation without a relation to anything? Can there be release while the soul is still alive in the world, or to use the Sanskrit term, is there *jivanukti*? Can the released soul be active in the world? What are the relations of a released soul to the world and men in that world? Does the released soul have a new kind of body?

These are some of the questions which are necessarily implied by the concept of spiritual release. In this brief survey, it will not be possible to touch upon all these points. We will attempt to state the essential idea of spiritual emancipation and touch upon the more important points as mere guidelines to further study.¹

The Vedic Quest for Immortality

It is normally thought that the *Sambhita* portion of the Vedas is entirely concerned with ritualistic sacrifices which are believed to be capable of delivering to the sacrificer various kinds of goods, material and celestial. The complementary idea is widely current even among Vedic scholars that there is not in the *mantra* portion of the Vedas any genuinely spiritual vision or thought. This is not the place where we can present a new interpretation of the Vedas. But for the purpose of this article we will just state, briefly, that there is hidden behind a naturalistic garb of the Vedas a splendid body luminous mystical and spiritual truth. The natural phenomena and the material things which occupy such a prominent place in the Vedic hymns are symbols of psychological faculties and functions and, in the last analysis, powers and states of the soul, which also have cosmic counterparts—the gods and goddesses. But a close study shows these deities are both objective and subjective, physical and psychological.

Looked at from this point of view, the hymns present the idea of an intense quest by the seers of nothing short of immortality. They seek deliverance from sin, crookedness, darkness that is ignorance, and at the same time birth into a new world of light, self-existing and all-revealing. The Sun of Truth is a goal of the journey of which the external sacrifice is a symbol. *Rig Veda* VIII. 67.18 is a prayer to Aditi and the Adityas, the supreme Conscious Force, the Mother of gods and of children: "Give us that new thing which liberates us completely as men who are bound by so many bondages." R.V. VIII 18.12 is an invocation of the Adityas to whom the earnest prayer goes up: "Give us that refuge and shelter (beatitude), O generous donors, which liber-

1. We may essay a more detailed treatment of this topic in an exposition of the concept of man in Indian Philosophy in a later number of this Journal.

ates us, even the greatest sinner, from the sin which is caused by and leads to crookedness."

We will quote a few hymns to show the Vedic seer's concern with deliverance from sin, attaining to the highest Light and achieving immortality. RV. VI. 166.8 is a prayer of Agastya to the Maruts for the protection given to the man they love so that he may be saved not only from ruin but also from sin. Maruts are gods of energy, of power of thought. "Beholding the loftier light that springs up above the Darkness we have come to the Sun, the God among Gods, the most excellent (loftiest) light", RV. I. 50.10. Even Sāyana, who gives an overall ritualistic interpretation of the Rig Veda, says that here the reference is to a spiritual Sun and that Darkness is sin. Of course, Darkness can also mean Ignorance. RV. X. 85.3 says: "One thinks, when they have brayed the plant, that he hath drunk the *soma's* juice; of him whom brahmans truly know as *soma* no one ever tastes." What then is *soma*? RV. VIII. 48.3 makes it clear. The Seer says, "We have drunk the *soma*, we have become the immortals; we have attained the Light, we have discovered the gods."

Many more hymns could be quoted which clearly depict the ideal of ascent to Light and Immortality. But we refrain from doing so here for lack of space because it would require an examination of the Vedic language and an explanation of its symbols.

Self-Liberation in Upanishads

Liberation is to be achieved, according to the Upanishads, from various things. The sacrificer is liberated first from death and reaches beyond death (*Br. Up.* 3.1.5). The *Ka. Up.* says that one who discerns what is soundless, colourless, etc. is liberated from the mouth of death. Sometimes the same idea is expressed in a slightly different way. Liberation is from the womb, which obviously means rebirth (*Svet. Up.* 1.7). The same idea is also expressed by saying, "of those who know the reality there is no return, that is to another embodiment; naturally, therefore, there is liberation from death also." The same Upanishad in 1.11, refers to cessation of birth and death and in 6.15 to passing over death. Here one thing is significant. Liberation is freedom from death, because, as the *Cb. Up.* 8.12.1 says, "Self is deathless." So it is by knowing by direct experience the deathless self that one becomes liberated from the jaws of death, and this implies freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

Liberation is also sought from name and form which phrase means phenomenal being, ephemeral things of the world (*Mund. Up.* 3.2.5). Since the self is deathless and thus eternal, attachment to the things of time which are subject to change, is the cause of bondage. This idea is connected with that of liberation from knots of the heart, (*Mund. Up.* 3.2.8), and from fetters (*Svet. Up.* 6.13). It is to be noted that *Mund. Up.* 3.2.9 says that as the liberated soul crosses over sorrow and sin it becomes immortal. Along with crossing over sin, the liberated soul transcends the good also. The opposition of good and bad, virtue and vice belongs to the world of duality, to phenomenal existence. For the liberated soul becomes united with the self which is One beyond all dualities and, therefore, all opposites. This idea had created great difficulties to western scholars and led them to criticize the Upanishadic thought as unethical. We would not want to discuss this question at length here. But we would submit to the reader the problem whether God is subject to the opposition of good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, and further, whether, if it is possible for the liberated soul to achieve intimate union with the Divine, to become like him free from the tension of virtue and vice. Whatever be the solution of this problem the Upanishad's unequivocal view is that the liberated soul is not subject to the moral struggle.

Man seeks liberation from the unreal. As the famous passage in *Br. Up.* 1.3.28 has it:

Lead me from the unreal to the Real,
Lead me from the darkness to the Light,
Lead me from mortality to Immortality.

The Upanishad goes on to explain that the unreal is really death, and so is darkness, and that the Real and Light indicate immortality. Ignorance of the true nature of Reality and of one's own true being gives birth to fetters of the heart, desire, attachment, etc., which lead on to wrong doing, and sin from which result, sorrow. These are all intimately connected and to be free from sorrow and sin and the fetters of the heart, man has to strike at the very root of their cause, namely, Ignorance. That is why the spiritual aspirant prays to be led from the Darkness to the Light, that is, from the Ignorance to the Knowledge. It is to be noted that the Upanishads believe in rebirth.

Physical death, therefore, does not give true freedom. As long as the seeker has not achieved self-knowledge, he is subject to birth and death. Thus to be free is to know that one's true

self is beyond the cycle of birth and death, truly free in its nature from change. To attain to the knowledge of that which is truly immortal is to achieve immortality. The self-existence, *Svayambhū*, is immortal. In the final analysis, therefore, liberation is from the Ignorance of the nature of one's true self by removing which, by knowledge of the self, one achieves Being—One, Non-dual and Immortal. To be free from its progeny means to be left loose from the fetters and knots of the heart, sin and sorrow and repeated rebirth.

The reality or the spiritual individuality is a topic which must be dealt with, even if briefly. The Upanishads present two points of view with regard to this question. First, individuality does not persist in the state of liberation—the doll of salt dissolves in the ocean of Brahman-Being; just as rivers lose their separate identity when they enter into the ocean, individual souls lose their individuality when they become one with Brahman. Secondly, individual souls are luminous sparks from the Divine Fire and thus themselves particles of flame, having the same nature as that of God; nevertheless they are sparks not the fire.

How does one reconcile these two viewpoints, or are they essentially contradictory? The answer to this question really depends on the view we take of the nature of the reality of the Upanishads. Is the Reality so indivisibly one that it is incapable of manifesting itself as a spiritual multiplicity or manifesting individual souls in and out of it? Are there or are there not sparks of the fire? There is no doubt that there is a negative approach to the absolute which is described as being devoid of all characters, features, qualities, actions, events and circumstance. There is equally the view of the Absolute as the All, positively described as full of all qualities, dynamic, filling the whole universe and everything in it and seated in the hearts of all creatures. Needless to say that according to the first view of the Absolute the reality of the individual cannot be maintained while the second idea of the reality is perfectly consistent with the truth of a multiplicity of spiritual souls. Logical academic philosophy cannot understandably reconcile these two. But the logic of the dynamics of spiritual experience can hold these two views in fine balance. There are passages in the Upanishads which speak of the liberated soul as emerging in its true essential form after attaining the supreme Light. The egoistic empirical personality is discarded, the true spiritual individual is realized as well as its relationship of distinction in unity with Brahman. But it is perfectly possible for the

individual spiritual soul to merge itself in the transcendent Absolute and thus dissolve its individuality.

The view that accepts the reality of the individual soul also asserts that the liberated self knows and acts and enjoys. It knows as fully as possible all the aspects of the reality, its manifestation in the world, enjoys God in the universe after having renounced all desire for specific, transient values. Realising its unity with all creatures through realising its dynamic identity in the Lord of all, the liberated soul enjoys the banquet the Divine has spread out in the universe.

Liberation as Brahmanirvāna in Gita

The *Bhagavad Gita* also mentions deliverance from rebirth. For example, in 13.24 and 13.26 it says that the knowledge of the almighty Lord and the supreme Self which is also the supreme Soul seated in this body carries man beyond death to immortality and the lord Krishna gives the promise of saving Arjuna from the battle of death, the mortal existence. Of course the idea of freedom from ignorance is present throughout this scripture. Liberation has been described in various ways here; *kai-valya*, aloneness, *brahmi-sthiti*, existence in Brahman, union with the supreme Self, freedom, dissolution in Brahman, *Brahmanirvāna*, freedom from bondage, freedom from the fetters of *karma* and *naishkarmya*, and the state of actionlessness which does not mean inactivity but a certain superiority to the need to act which is a sign of bondage.

This Sāmkya idea of the separation of the Purusha, the conscious soul from *Prakriti*, the unconscious Nature, is found in the Gita. Even for the practice of *karma-yoga* this separation is necessary. But the content of the idea of liberation is much more comprehensive. Here again one has to take into account the Gita's concept of the Ultimate Reality. The static Brahman or the immutable *Purusha* detached from the works of the lower nature is not the total reality. The Gita envisages the reality as having three aspects: the mutable Person, the immutable Person, and the highest Person. The first is Nature, all mutable existence, in fact the Spirit in the movements of Nature; the second is the unmoving Spirit unrelated to the movements of *Prakriti*; the third is the same reality transcendent of the first, superior to the second, foundation of Brahman, and therefore called the Person Supreme. Containing as it does the static and the dynamic aspects of the truth of its own being, it is not only free from

all movements of *Prakriti* but also free in them. The original impulse to creation comes from a supreme will inherent in its higher or supreme nature, *para-prakriti*. It is also that which by its nature becomes the *jiva*, the individual soul which is an eternal portion, i.e., a partial manifestation of the Divine.

Jiva becomes entangled in the principles of lower unconscious nature in the movements of which it appears as separate ego, *ahamkāra*. Liberation at its minimum would mean the individual soul's non-identification with *Prakriti* and her principles, the attainment of the status of the immutable *Purusha*, of a peace that surpasses understanding, freedom from all desire, attachment, seeds of *karma*.

But this is only a stage in the *jiva's* journey to total liberation. For in the *Gita's* idea it must yet find its relationship with the *Purushottama*, the highest person or the supreme Divine. And this can be done by devotion to the Lord and the surrender of all one's whole being and nature to the Master of our being and the Lord of our hearts. And this presupposes the dedication of all our deeds as sacrifice to him who is "Enjoyer of all sacrifices." Thus the *Gita* gives us a picture of liberation of our soul and mind and will and heart. The message of *Gita* is summarised by Sri Aurobindo as follows:

The last or highest emergence is a liberated man who has realised the Self and Spirit within him, entered into the cosmic consciousness, passed into union with the Eternal and, so far as he still accepts life and action, acts by the light and energy of the power within him working through his human instruments of nature. The largest formulation of this spiritual change and achievement is a total liberation of soul, mind, heart and action, a casting of them all into the sense of the cosmic Self and the Divine Reality.²

Tāntric Jivanmukti

Tantra is the general name for many different systems of metaphysics, psychology and spiritual disciplines. What is common among these various views is that the Ultimate reality disig-

2. Sri. Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* (New York: 1947), p. 784. In a footnote he adds: "This is the essence of the spiritual ideal and realization held before us by the *Gita*."

nated as Siva (apart from being the changeless ground of the world) is Conscious Force and, as such, is the principle and process of becoming. Siva is *Sakti*. Other common points are the world is real, and, the individual soul is also real. The differences are mainly with regard to the relation among these three, namely, the reality, the world and the individual soul.

The soul is, in its essential nature, similar to Siva, that is, it is also truly a conscious being though it forgets it and falsely identifies itself with principles of existence which are not itself. Thus *mukti* or release here also means the recovery of the true state of the soul's being by self-knowledge. One thing has to be noted in this connection: *Chit-Sakti* manner. In the system of *Trika*, for example, there are four *andas* or eggs namely *Sakti*, *Māya*, *Prakriti* and *Prithvi*. In each of these world's Siva takes a certain stance. The *Sakti anda* or egg is that which is the uneviled nature of Siva, by his own free will suppressed, and the potential universe in him is hidden from his own view. It is in this void projected from the fullness of being that the creation takes place. In *Māya*, *Prakriti*, and *Prithvi*, Siva is *anu* or atomic, limited, ignorant of his own true reality. It is not necessary in this brief survey to give descriptions of these various worlds. Suffice it to say that the individual soul must transcend *Prithvi*, *Prakriti*, *Māya* one after the other in order to attain spiritual release. *Māya* is the level of consciousness which creates the sense of division and duality but before the individual soul falls into the world of division, it already loses the fullness of its being and consciousness and force. This loss is due to a movement of self-limitation which is one of the functions of *Sakti* and which is one with *Siva*. In fact it is one of the five functions of Siva himself, the others being the creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe and, lastly, conferring of Grace on his own self-limited form as the individual soul.

It is possible for the soul to correct the sense of division and see the world as one whole. On the one hand the bound soul learns not to identify itself with what it is not and also not to ascribe selfhood to objects. This double function is the result of the atomicity of the soul. The non-identification of the soul with objects—it should be noted that “objects” here do not mean things of the world but principles like matter, body, senses, mind, etc.—is essential. But the separation of the soul from these categories, however, is not enough for true and complete self-knowledge. From the sphere of *Māya* the soul rises to that of

Mahāmāya. Here the soul has a living sense of Reality on the one hand, and of the universe as one whole on the other. Yet it is not yet able to integrate the two, namely, Siva and its manifestation, the world. In order to be able to do that the soul has to enter a still higher sphere where there are five stages of its journey towards its full recognition of itself as Siva. Before this journey starts there is on the atomic soul *Sakti-pāta*, dissent of Force, for which another name in this philosophy is Grace. The five steps of the journey represent progressive stages of integration of the world into the being and consciousness of the soul. The end of the journey is reached when the individual soul recognizes itself as Siva—Siva who is at the same time transcendent and immanent in the universe. This recognition includes the realization of identity of the soul with everything. The soul which now recognizes itself as Siva sees the universe as an expansion of its own inherent Sakti, or of itself as Sakti. The *Trika* idea of the goal of life is only release, *mukti*, but also enjoyment, *bhakti*. The soul which has realized itself as Siva by recognizing its true nature, enjoys that state even while it is alive here in the world. The state of its inner Freedom is reflected in its spiritually illumined intelligence. This is *jivanmukti* which is enjoyed.

Saiva Siddhānta Sāyujya

The *tantras* represent the monistic, qualified monistic or monistic-cum-dualistic, and dualistic standpoints. The *Trika* is a system of realistic monism as distinguished from Sankara's illusionist monism or non-dualism. We shall now take a brief look at a great dualistic *tāntric* system namely, the *Saiva Siddhānta*. We must immediately point out that the system declares itself as *advaita* which, as is well known, means the doctrine of non-dualism or monism. *Saiva-Siddhānta*, however, explains the term as meaning not non-difference but non-separativeness. *The relation between the Ultimate Reality, Siva, and the individual soul is not one of identity but of union, of unity in duality*. Thus it will not be wrong to call *Saiva-Siddhānta* a dualistic system.

Essentially, souls are pervasive omniscient. But in the state of bondage which is brought about by the fetters of *Anava*, *Karma* and *Māya*, the soul becomes finite and ignorant, the latter term, however, not signifying complete absence of knowledge but only incomplete apprehension. Due to *Karma*, the soul is bound to the cycle of birth and re-birth, and *Māya* provides him with the physical body. The soul assumes the nature with whatever

entity it is associated with. Once the soul has become atomic or *anu*, and starts feeling desires for all kinds of transient values and is endowed by *Māya* by the instruments or works, the soul becomes *Māyic*, that is, as if made entirely of *Māya*. But when the proper conditions are available and there is the descent of Siva's Grace—Power on the bound soul—it begins on its journey towards self-realization, which includes the knowledge of its relationship of dependence on God. The question of the conditions referred to above is a complex one: whether it is the maturity of the impurities—atomicity, *Karma* and *Māya*, in fact, primarily of atomicity; or whether it is the sheer free will of Siva; or whether they function jointly. We need not therefore, go into that question here. What is important to note is that the atomicity of the individual soul in bondage can be shaken off and the soul can progressively realize its essential nature.

There are four means by which the soul attains liberation, namely, *charya*, *kriya*, *yoga* and *jñāna*, respectively observances, rites, concentration and knowledge. The first indicates service of God, like cleaning temples etc., and here the soul is like a servant of the Lord and attains by this means *sālokya*, the same plane of existence as that of God. Next, the soul is like a good son to the Lord and achieves *sāmipya* or nearness to Him.

But here also the acts are rather external. By concentration, the soul becomes like a friend of the Lord and attains *sārūpya*, similar form or nature as that of *Siva*. But when it achieves knowledge of its true being, it attains union, *sāyujya*, with the *Pati*, the Lord. Here devotion becomes a natural stage of the soul, a spontaneous flow of love and service to *Siva*. The individual soul does not lose its identity but achieves close union with the Reality. It does not become capable, like *Siva*, of performing the five functions of self-limitation, creation, maintenance, disillusion and grace.

One interesting point that *Saiva-Siddhānta* makes is worth mentioning. In the state of bondage the soul has *pāsa-jñāna*, knowledge through the fetters. But when liberated, the soul has *pati-jñāna*, knowledge through the Lord. What it knows—and it knows all—it knows through the knowledge that the Lord has of everything.

The Kaivalya of Sāmkhya-Yoga

The *Sāmkhya* philosophy explains existence by the twin

principles of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, Conscious Soul and Unconscious Evolutive Force. They are disparate realities, the first being conscious and static, the latter being unconscious or dynamic. In actual experience we find that these two are mixed together, and to this fusion *Sāmkhya* traces all human misery—ignorance and its consequences, desire, attachment, bondage to results of work and rebirth. To know the *Purusha*, to be completely separate from and other than *Prakriti*, is the means to liberation which is the state of *kaivalya*, aloneness, isolation.

The *Purusha* is pure consciousness but not a conscious knower, agent and enjoyer. It is only when it is fused with *Prakriti* that *Purusha* falsely thinks of the activities of *buddhi* or understanding which is the first evolute of *Prakriti*—as its own. In the state of liberation, therefore, the *Sāmkhya* logically concludes that there is no conscious action or enjoyment. The *Sāmkhya* does not accept God because it finds acceptance of the idea unnecessary and also because there is no valid source of knowledge and proof of the existence of God. So there is no question of union with God in the *Sāmkhya* concept of spiritual release. There is a multiplicity of *Purushas* according to *Sāmkhya* whose isolation in the state of liberation is so complete that one soul does not know the existence of other souls.

The yoga philosophy ascribed to Patanjali is a twin system of the *Sāmkhya*. Though it has some minor philosophical variations from its companion system, its basic standpoint is the same as that of *Sāmkhya*. It furnishes a highly practical system of psychological discipline by the successful carrying out of which the Soul can be separated from Nature. In the state of liberation says Patanjali the soul remains established in its own inherent nature aloof from all connection with the evolutive Force-substance of the universe.

It is a noteworthy point that the yoga philosophy brings in the idea of *Ishwara*, which literally means the Lord. However, the word does not signify what it normally means. *Ishwara* is not the creator or maintainer or dissolver of the universe, nor the giver of rewards and punishments for merit and demerit, nor does he confer salvation on man. He is a unique *Purusha* in this that he never comes in contact with *Prakriti* and hence has no ignorance, *karma*, imperfection, re-birth, etc., and he is ever the *Guru*, the eternal Teacher, because he is not limited by Time. *Liberation, however, does not include the idea of union with this Ishwara, though contemplating on him is one of the more*

potent means of entering into the state of *samādhi* in which the mind ceases to function completely and *Purusha* shines in its own self-existent light.

The Vedantic Schools on Liberation

The schools of Vedanta can be divided into two groups from the point of view of the liberation of the individual soul. Basically, the question boils down to whether individuality is real. *Sankara* categorically says that individuality is unreal. There is an appearance of individuality in the world but it is a false appearance of Brahman in *avidya*, the lower phase of *Māya* which is the power of creating illusions. Naturally, liberation is a state in which individuality cannot and does not reside. Indeed, *Sankara* does speak of having great knowledge of Brahman in attaining liberation. But this is because the world and the individual soul appear to have some existence and *Sankara* feels that they have to be explained and in so far as an explanation is to be given, their truth has to be shown in relation to Brahman, the reality. The well known summary of the teaching of *Sankara's* Vedanta declares that the Brahman alone is real, the world is false, and the *Jiva*, the individual, is nothing but the Brahman. The statement about the *Jiva* does not mean that there are two entities, *Jiva* and Brahman, and that they are the same, identical reality. Its real significance is that there is in truth no such thing as individuality, and what appears as such is nothing but the Absolute under inexplicable disguise. Indeed, *Sankara* says that there is none bound, none liberated—no liberation in the sense of attaining freedom from bondage. There is liberation, but only in the sense that it is the very nature of Brahman.

All the other great Vedantic masters accept the reality of the individual. *Ramanuja* says that the *Jiva*, the individual soul, is both consciousness and conscious knower, doer, and enjoyer. Its ground of being is the Brahman of which it is a part and of which, considered as a substantive, it is an adjectival quality. Though a distinct reality, the *Jiva*, the individual soul, is nevertheless dependent on Brahman and has no existence apart from him. In the state of bondage the soul falsely identifies itself with the body, the senses, the mind, intellect and ego. In the state of liberation this identification comes to an end and the soul emerges in its true nature as consciousness. However, the soul's self-knowledge necessarily includes the apprehension that it is dependent on and a servant of God. In fact, the highest fulfilment of

the soul consists in willing and loving servitude of the Lord. Ramanuja does say that though the soul does not attain identity with Brahman it nevertheless achieves similarity of essence, knowledge, and delight with Brahman. He does not accept a possibility of attaining liberation while the *Jiva* is embodied because the body is a product of Ignorance, *Māya*.

Nimbarka, like Ramanuja, expresses the view that the individual soul is both consciousness and a conscious knower, doer and enjoyer, eternal and many. Liberation is the attainment of the nature of Brahman and of the true self of the soul. Attaining the essence of Brahman, however, does not mean achieving identity with Brahman. The relation of the soul with Brahman is one of both unity and difference, and this character of the relationship is not abrogated even in the state of liberation which is a full manifestation of the soul's inherent nature of consciousness. The soul becomes like Brahman omniscient, all-powerful, and full of delight though it does not possess the capacity of creation, and it is always subject to Brahman. Like Ramanuja, Nimbarka does not accept the possibility of attaining liberation while alive in the world.

Madhwa's conception of the individual soul is essentially the same as that of Ramanuja and Nimbarka. What he stresses is the distinctness of the soul from Brahman, very much more than these two vedantic masters. In fact the soul, according to him, is always separate from Brahman. Brahman is the controller, the soul is the controlled and essentially subject to control; Brahman is the worshipped, the soul is the worshipper and as such they must necessarily be separate. Liberated souls are also separate from Brahman and from each other. There is, needless to say, no disintegration of individuality but a complete flowering of it in the state of liberation. Liberation, however, does not mean in any way attaining union with the essence of Brahman though the *jiva* achieves partial similarity with Brahman because it attains the delight aspect of the Lord. The liberated soul is ever the servitor and worshipper of Brahman to whom he is subject. Madhwa, alone among Vedantic masters, declares that there are souls who are eternally in bondage and there is eternal hell. It has been suggested that these ideas of Madhwa may be due to the influence of Christianity. But no historical evidence has been furnished in favour of this supposition.

Vallabha, another Vaishnava Vedantic master, is of the view

that the individual soul, like Brahman, is consciousness and pure, a conscious knower, doer and enjoyer. The soul is a becoming or an effect of Brahman and distinct from him. In the state of bondage it is not or does not have delight though—like Brahman—it is being and consciousness. The liberated soul achieves unity with Brahman and its essence is delight. Even then such a soul is a servant of the Lord. Vallabha says that to the liberated soul who is unified with Brahman, the world appears as a pure *Sat-Cit-Ananda*. He also does not accept the doctrine of *liberation-in-life*.

Liberation in Bengal Vaishnavism

In the school of Bengal Vaishnavism, the *jiva* or individual soul is both identical with and distinct from the Supreme Reality. *Jiva* is eternal consciousness and conscious agent, knower and enjoyer. It is the becoming of one aspect of the Supreme Conscious Force which can be completely manifest, partly manifest, or unmanifest. In accordance with the degree of the manifestation of the Conscious Force, the Ultimate Reality is realized in three different aspect: In the first degree the inherent Conscious Force is completely manifest as *Bhagavan*. In this aspect the Force does not create the world, it is the self-power of the Supreme for enjoying a love of his devotees and, in return, of loving them. When the Force is partly manifest it becomes *Māya*, the power of ignorance, which creates the world. Corresponding to this aspect of the Force, the Reality is designated *Paramātma*, the Supreme Self, who is creator of the world. Lastly, Brahman is the aspect of the Reality in which the Force is not at all manifest. Brahman is static and impersonal.

This school of Vaishnavism asserts that the individual soul can by knowledge merge itself into Brahman and lose its individuality. This will mean liberation from ignorance and thus the cessation of re-birth and all its attendant limitations. But the school does not consider this a very desirable spiritual value. This does not mean that it wants the *jiva* to be in bondage; it means that a much greater destiny awaits the soul if it travels along the path of devotion. The *jiva* can also find its union with the creative *Paramatma* but this union is like that of a master and servant. The true and highest union, however, between *jiva* and *Bhagavan* is like that of a lover and the beloved. Needless to say that the *jiva* cannot be in bondage and also attain to this union with *Bhagavan*. It must know its true self and discover

its relationship with the Supreme which is not pure identity nor that of the servant and the master but that of distinction and unity through love. *Bhakti* or devotion matures into *Prema*, love, the essence of which is the utter giving of the soul to *Bhagavan*.

A most important point must be noted in this connection. Though all the Vaishnava Vedantic masters emphasise the distinctness from Brahman of the individual soul, they also stress the similarity or even the sameness of their essential nature. Both Brahman and the soul are Consciousness, *Cit*, and are eternal and immortal. They are distinct entities and they share the same essential nature. The *jiva* falsely identifies itself with principles of existence other than consciousness but in the state of liberation this false identification ceases. Brahman is subject to ignorance and thus has never the need to attain liberation. He is endowed with the powers of creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe while the *jiva* is not soul even in the state of liberation. Nevertheless, they are in essence, both non-physical, non-vital, non-mental, non-intellectual and free from the separative ego. The failure to appreciate this point has created a good deal of misunderstanding of Hinduism which can be easily removed by an unbiased and objective reading of its doctrine of the individual soul.

Nyāya-Vaisesika Liberation

Of the philosophies which accept the authority of the Veda, *Nyāya* and *Vaisesika* are unique in this that they do not believe the individual soul to be essentially consciousness or conscious. While the soul is separate from body, mind, intellect and ego, its quality of consciousness is generated in it by its contact with the mind. In the state of liberation the soul is separated from body and has no consciousness. Thus the liberated soul has no knowledge, will, or enjoyment. It is merely total absence of pain and has no positive content. It has been said that this idea of liberation reduces the individual soul to a piece of stone. The *Nyāya-Vaisesika* answer would be that the piece of stone is a material substance which the soul is not and that there is no point in saying the stone becomes eternally free from all suffering because it never feels any. But the liberation of the soul signifies utter freedom from re-birth and, therefore, from all possibility of pain and misery. All the other philosophies also take liberation as complete freedom from suffering though some of them admit that it also means the attainment of delight.

The Integral Yoga

In the *integral advaita* of Sri Aurobindo the destiny of man is extremely complex. Let us point out at the outset that being a Vedantin, Sri Aurobindo affirms the Upanishadic idea that the individual soul is, in essence, of the same nature as the Divine, that is consciousness, uncreated, immortal and perfect. Its relation with Brahman is not a simple thing to determine because Brahman in this philosophy has many aspects. First, it is *Atman* or the Self which is primarily static and aloof from the creation though it supports it by its sheer presence. Secondly, it is *Puruṣa*, or the Soul, the giver of the sanction of the creative process and the enjoyer of the result of that process but not actively manifesting itself as the universe. Thirdly, it is *Ishwara* who is the Lord who actively manifests the universe and controls and guides it. *Ishwara* is the harmony of *Atman* and *Puruṣa* and it is the support, the sanctioner and the master of the creation. The relations of the individual soul to the Self is identity, that with the *Puruṣa* is one of the source and its effect, and that with *Ishwara* one of part and the whole. The *jīva* is an individual manifestation of *Ishwara*. The direct realization by the soul of any of these relationship presupposes freedom from Ignorance about its true being. Here we have to mention a difficult point. According to Sri Aurobindo, the Reality is both static and dynamic, personal and impersonal, transcendent of and immanent in the universe. As Conscious Force the Reality arranges itself in a hierarchy of levels of consciousness and existence. The kind and quality and completeness of the knowledge of the Brahman that the soul of man attain depends on the medium by which he obtains it. It is not enough to say that the soul realizes the Reality. A great deal depends on the level of consciousness where the soul is and from which it is experiencing Brahman.

The one level of Consciousness where the knowledge of Brahman is integral is called by Sri Aurobindo, the "Supermind". Below this level, there are other levels of consciousness on any one of which the soul can be and which are also means of knowing the Brahman. Of course, these levels are still above mental *Māya* which is a mother of division and separation. A living sense of unity of all things begins to dawn upon the consciousness of the soul which it lifts itself up, above *Māya*. But this does not mean that the soul is on the supramental level of consciousness and existence. Thus the soul may realize the Brahman as merely trans-

centent, static, uncreative and as one to which all multiplicity, even of a spiritual variety, is foreign. It can, on the other hand, know the Brahman as dynamic that which has become the universe and is present in it as One which has become the Many. If, however, the soul knows the Brahman by the Supermind it will realize the supreme and integral Reality in all its aspects, which are primarily transcendent, universal and individual insofar as it is Being; it is considered also Supermind, mind and the individual soul in the evolution of the psychic being, life and matter insofar as it is Becoming.

Consciousness in this philosophy is also Conscious Force. And the Supermind is a conception of the Conscious Force as Knowledge-Will; thus the Supramental Knowledge gives effective power of radically changing all its manifestations in the universe. It should be pointed out here for the sake of clarity that the Divine manifests as and in the universe through the instrumentality of the Supermind. Thus the Supermind is, to all intents and purposes, the effective source of the universe and the goal of its evolution.

The Will in the Supermind functioning in the soul which has attained the Supramental consciousness is the power of transformation of its mental, vital and physical nature. These three are formation of Consciousness, however contrary they may appear to be. They are not just the intended instruments of the unveiled manifestation of the Conscious Being. The physical consciousness—instead of being obscure and inert and constantly refusing the light—will itself be transformed as fully conscious, luminously energetic and receptive of Divine knowledge, peace, power and delight. Thus dumb, obscure nature will become full of consciousness and force, and discover the Divine in it. The "Integral advaita" aims not only at the complete liberation of the soul from *Māya* but also at the emancipation of *Māya* herself.