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**PART 3: THEMES OF  
SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA HINDU THEOLOGY**

**8) JĪVA**

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## 8) JĪVA

This is a good juncture to briefly pause and consult our roadmap, to look back on where we have come from and how far we have left to travel in our introductory exposition of the major themes of Svāminārāyaṇa Hindu theology.

At the opening of this Part, we had been introduced to the five eternal metaphysical entities of Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta: Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, māyā, īśvara, and jīva. As an initial overview, we learned that the entities were contrasted in their natures by virtue of their sentiency; the first two and last two are sentient, spiritual entities, whereas māyā is essentially insentient and material. Another way of categorising them, we observed, was that Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman transcend and are free of māyā, whereas jīvas and īśvaras are bound by māyā.

Having completed extensive expositions of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman, the two highest entities, we now move on in the subsequent, smaller chapters to expounding upon the remaining three entities – jīva, īśvara and māyā – ending finally with some elucidation on the topic of mukti (liberation).

A brief explanation of my choice of sequence will be helpful as we go forward. After Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman, both of which are sentient and beyond māyā, we shall firstly be moving on to expounding upon jīva and īśvara, which are also sentient but within māyā. This will mean that we will be covering all four of the spiritual entities first, before progressing on to the material māyā. Of the

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two – jīvas and īśvaras – ontologically, īśvaras transcend jīvas. However, with īśvaras being so similar to jīvas, and with more to say about jīvas, it makes sense to cover the finer souls first before looking at the distinguishing features of īśvaras thereafter. My reason for dealing with these sentient entities first and holding back on expounding upon māyā is that the chapter on māyā will contain discussions about creation (how jīvas receive their bodies and the role of īśvaras in each brahmāṇḍa, for which a primary understanding of jīvas and īśvaras will be necessary) and ignorance (which forms the bondage of jīvas and īśvaras, therefore also serving as a better link to the final chapter on mukti, i.e. liberation from that māyic bondage).

And so we proceed, firstly, with the exposition of the nature of the jīva.

### 8.1) Nature of Jīva

Every living being (human, animal, insect, plant, fungus, etc.) is ensouled by – indeed, *is* – a spiritual entity.<sup>376</sup> Svāminārāyaṇa calls it the ‘jīva’ – from the Sanskrit verb-root ‘jiv’, to breath or to live – sometimes also referring to it as the ‘ātman’ or ‘jīvātman’.

When once asked in an assembly by a devotee,

Mahārāja, what is the nature of the jīva? Please reveal it to me as it is,

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<sup>376</sup> We shall see in the following chapter how īśvaras may also embody a human form on earth in order to secure their liberation.

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his reply was a succinct exposition which provides for us a useful introductory overview before we subsequently enter into the specifics. Svāminārāyaṇa explained:

The jīva is uncuttable, unpierceable, immortal, consciousness, and the size of an atom. You may also ask, 'Where does the jīva reside?' Well, it resides within the space of the heart, and while staying there, it performs different functions. From there, when it wants to see, it does so through the eyes; when it wants to hear sounds, it does so through the ears; it smells all types of smells through the nose; it tastes through the tongue; and through the skin, it experiences the pleasures of all sensations. In addition, it thinks through the mind, contemplates through the citta, and forms convictions through the intelligence. In this manner, through the ten senses and the four inner faculties, it experiences all of the sense-objects. It pervades the entire body from head to toe, yet is distinct from it. Such is the nature of the jīva (Vac. Jet.2).

In what follows, we look more closely at each of these aspects.

### **8.1.1) Distinct from the Body, Senses & Inner Faculties**

A good place to start in expounding upon the jīva is where Svāminārāyaṇa ends in the summary above, to discount what the jīva is *not*. In being the conscious spirit which is the actual subject of a person's 'I' – the very being of one's self; indeed, the "self" itself – it is largely misidentified with the somatic body and its associated elements, the senses, mind, intellect, etc. Svāminārāyaṇa therefore repeatedly and firmly instructs spiritual aspirants to realise their true self to be the soul within, not the external body [Vac. Gaḍh. I.16, Gaḍh. I.21, Gaḍh. I.38, Gaḍh. I.44, Gaḍh. I.61, Gaḍh. I.72, Gaḍh. I.73, Sār.1, Sār.4, Sār.9, Sār.10, Sār.12, Loyā.17, Pan.3, Gaḍh. II.1, Gaḍh. II.2, Gaḍh. II.6, Gaḍh. II.33, Gaḍh. II.57, Var.8, Gaḍh. III.19, Gaḍh. III.24, Gaḍh. III.26, Gaḍh. III.33, Jet.3]. As an example,

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Svāminārāyaṇa urges and describes a correct self-understanding in Vac. Gaḍh.

II.2 thus:

In this body resides the jīva, and the senses and inner faculties have attached themselves to that jīva. They have also attached themselves externally to the sense-objects. However, out of ignorance, the jīva believes those senses and the inner faculties to be its own form, whereas in actual fact, it is distinct from them.... One should think, 'I am the ātman, and the senses and inner faculties are absolutely unrelated to me.'

In attempting to emphasise the complete disassociation between the jīva and the physical body, Svāminārāyaṇa often juxtaposes both, highlighting their sharply contrary qualities.

One should realise the ātman as follows: 'I am sentient, while the body is insentient. I am pure, whereas the body is full of naraka [i.e. hellish defilement]. I am imperishable, while the body is perishable. I am blissful, whereas the body is full of misery' (Vac. Sār.1).

Svāminārāyaṇa reiterates in a later sermon:

One should clearly understand, 'I am the ātman, and not a single one of my characteristics can be found in the body. Moreover, not one of the characteristics of the body – which is insentient, full of misery, and perishable – can be found in me since I am sentient' (Vac. Sār.4).

In yet another sermon, in response to the question,

How should one think of one's ātman?

Svāminārāyaṇa similarly replies:

One should ascribe the attributes of the body unto the body and the attributes of the seer [soul] – the conscious spirit– unto the spirit. Also, childhood, youth, old age, stoutness, thinness, birth and death are all aspects of the body; they should never be thought of as belonging to the ātman. On the other hand, being uncuttable, unpierceable, unaging, immortal, formed of jñāna, blissful, and

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characterised by eternal existence are all aspects of the ātman; they should in no way be considered to belong to the body. Instead, those attributes should be understood to belong to the ātman (Vac. Sār.12).<sup>377</sup>

The differentiation emphasised here by Svāminārāyaṇa is one of mutual exclusion, where not only are the jīva's desirable qualities not to be found in and attributed to the body, but, equally, neither should the body's flaws and deficiencies be ascribed to or found in the jīva. In addition to providing a correct spiritual self-understanding, what Svāminārāyaṇa seems to be guarding against is an unhealthy preoccupation with the physical body which would inevitably detract one from spiritual praxis.

Along the same line, Svāminārāyaṇa adds that an inevitable corollary of a false understanding of the self as the body is a false and detracting attachment to whatever is associated with that body, such as the body's biological parents or its place of birth and social rank, and also its wealth and possessions in general. For example, he explains:

The jīva has a misconception in that it does not believe itself to be the jivātman, i.e. distinct from the body. Instead, it believes itself to be the body. To illustrate how the body clings to the jivātman, consider a person who wears a shirt after having it sewn by a tailor. That person then begins to believe, 'The tailor is my father and the tailor's wife is my mother.' Such a person would be considered a fool. In the same manner, the jivātman is given a shirt in the form of this body<sup>378</sup>, which is born sometimes to a Brāhmaṇa couple, sometimes to a couple of a lower social order, or in any of the 8.4 million life-forms (Vac. Gaḍh. I.44).

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<sup>377</sup> See also Vac. Gaḍh. I.72.

<sup>378</sup> The analogy of a shirt as a body for the soul closely resembles that used at BG 2.22. Here, Svāminārāyaṇa extends it to relate the tailor of the shirt to a person's parents.

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In Vac. Gaḍh. I.21, Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates on the jīva's previous lives and why such a sense of "'I'-ness [ahaṃtā]" for the body and "'my'-ness [mamatā]" for its relatives and belongings is so utterly foolish.

This body should not be believed to be one's true self. Nor should one's bodily relations be regarded as one's true relations. This is because the jīva has previously assumed 8.4 million bodies. In fact, the jīva has taken birth in the wombs of all females in this world; it has also taken birth numerous times in the wombs of all dogs, cats, monkeys, and all other types of life-forms in the cycle of 8.4 million life-forms. Moreover, of all the different types of females in this world, which has it not previously made its wife? All have been its wife at one time or another. Similarly, assuming numerous female bodies, that jīva has also made all of the different forms of males its husband. Hence, just as one does not believe the relations of those previous 8.4 million life-forms to be one's true relations, and just as one does not believe the bodies of those 8.4 million life-forms to be one's true body, similarly, one should not believe this present body to be one's true self, nor should one believe the relations of this body to be one's true relations. Why? Because just as no relationship remains with bodies from the previous 8.4 million life-forms, similarly, the relationship with this body will not remain either.

Therefore, Svāminārāyaṇa adds:

That ātman is neither a Brāhmaṇa, nor a Kṣatriya, nor a Kaṇbi<sup>379</sup>. It is no one's son and no one's father. It is of no social order and no community (Vac. Gaḍh. III.39).

Furthermore:

The body – be it male or female – is material and perishable, but the jivātman, the worshipper, is neither male nor female. It is characterised by pure existence and consciousness (Vac. Gaḍh. III.22).

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<sup>379</sup> A sub-division of the Vaiśya order of communities, traditionally engaged in trade and commerce.

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This important doctrine clearly has wide-reaching implications in a number of critical ways, least not socially and politically, and in fields such as medical ethics, human rights, gender studies, etc. It also raises important questions about how such a spiritual understanding of the self can, for example, be reconciled with maintaining one's physical health, or how such an understanding of one's relatives can accommodate a healthy family life or meaningful relationships with anyone. While it will not be possible to explore the full gamut of all these topics and questions in this introductory theological study, we shall, however, touch upon some of them at their proper points over the course of our discussions in subsequent chapters.

Here, we can briefly consider one aspect of such a self-realisation on how a person views him or herself and how one sees and behaves with others. For example, Svāminārāyaṇa instructs in Vac. Gaḍh. III.12:

One who desires one's own liberation should not harbour any form of vanity – such as, 'I have been born in an upper-class family,' or 'I am wealthy,' or 'I am handsome,' or 'I am a scholar.' One should not keep any of these types of beliefs. In fact, even with a meek member of the fellowship, one should behave as a servant of servants.

The conceited beliefs that Svāminārāyaṇa advises against are the same aspects of the physical self mentioned above that he argues is not one's true identity. Thus, a correct understanding of one's self as the ātman guards one from such mistakes. Svāminārāyaṇa's mention here of how to humbly behave with a meek and otherwise modest fellow devotee – who may not be of the same social rank

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and as wealthy, attractive or intelligent – is also instructive and borne of the same spiritual understanding.

Equally important, it must be noted, is that this knowledge is applicable not only to counter arrogance and egotism in times of praise and success, but also the opposite; to provide stability in the face of censure and failure, and prevent self-deprecation against such supposed shortcomings as physical unattractiveness, unintelligence, lower social standing, etc. If the attractive should not be vainglorious of their physical attractiveness, nor should the unattractive despise themselves for their unattractiveness. While geniuses should be accorded the appropriate respect and admiration, those of lesser talent and intelligence should not be derided. On a spiritual plane, it clears the playing field of all material, worldly factors. Of course, Svāminārāyaṇa is not suggesting that beauty and ugliness, wealth and poverty, intelligence and vacuousness, and high and low status are in and of themselves bad or good; it is the conceit and disesteem brought on from them which he is warning against. What matters most spiritually, Svāminārāyaṇa explains, is one's complete and undisturbed relationship with God, for which, as we shall see further on, such a spiritual self-awareness is essential.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> See section 8.2.1.

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### 8.1.1.1) The Three Bodies of the Jīva

In distinguishing the jīva from all that is not the self, it is apparent from Svāminārāyaṇa's statements above that he not only means the visible somatic body but also the non-visible senses and psychological self. Svāminārāyaṇa often refers to the non-self collectively as the jīva's "three bodies" [Vac. Gaḍh. I.7, Vac. Gaḍh. I.12, Gaḍh. I.23, Gaḍh. I.46, Gaḍh. I.56, Gaḍh. I.78, Sār.10, Pan.3, Gaḍh. II.32, Gaḍh. II.66, Var.2, Var.8]. These are as follows:

1. **sthūla deha:** the 'gross body' composed of the five material elements, i.e. pṛthvī ('earth'), jala ('water'), tejas ('light'), vāyu ('wind'), and ākāśa ('space'). This provides the physical support system for the senses, mind, etc. of the subtle body to function [Vac. Gaḍh. I.12, Sār.14].
2. **sukṣma deha:** the 'subtle body' (referred to by some as the 'astral body') comprising of the following 19 elements:
  - five jñānendriya (cognitive senses), i.e. cakṣus (sight), śrotra (hearing), tvak (touch), rasanā or jihvā (taste), and ghrāṇa (smell). These should not be confused with their corresponding sense organs, which are parts of the gross body and by which the subtle senses inextricably operate, i.e. sight allows the eyes to see, hearing allows the ears to hear, etc.
  - five karmendriya (conative senses), i.e. vāk (speech), pāṇi (dexterity), pāda (locomotion), pāyu (excretion), and upastha (generation). These, too, are subtle powers, operating through

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- their respective external organs, viz. the mouth, hands, feet, anus, and genitals.
- five tanmātrā (quintessential elements), i.e. śabda (sound), sparśa (touch), rūpa (sight), rasa (taste), and gandha (smell). These are extremely subtle elements related to the five material elements mentioned above, which we shall cover in a little more detail in the chapter on māyā and creation.
  - four antaḥkaraṇa (inner faculties), i.e. manas, buddhi, citta, and ahamkāra, by which a person can think, reason, contemplate, and affirm identity [Vac. Gaḍh. I.12, Sār.14]. These are sometimes collectively referred to as the 'manas', or mind – the 'eleventh sense' – which is one but functions in four ways, hence the four names.

Together, these 24 elements – all products of māyā – create the psychosomatic body of the jīva. Svāminārāyaṇa explains in Vac. Gaḍh. II.34:

Those 24 elements are produced from māyā, they are forms of māyā, and are insentient. They appear differently in the form of the body, senses, and inner faculties. For example, there is one earth that assumes the five forms of the skin, flesh, marrow, bones and muscles.... In the same way, that māyā, by the will of God, appears in different forms – the body, the senses, etc.

3. **kāraṇa deha:** the 'causal body' which stores the jīva's karmas and is the form of ignorance, therefore the 'cause' of rebirth [Vac. Sār.11, Kār.12, Gaḍh. II.66, Var.6].

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Svāminārāyaṇa provides more information about the causal body and the inter-relationship between all three in Vac. Kār.12.

The causal body is the māyā of the jīva. That same causal body evolves into the gross and subtle bodies. Thus, all three – the gross, subtle and causal bodies – can be said to be the māyā of the jīva.

We shall be exploring māyā as ignorance in a subsequent chapter, seeing also the causal body's determinant role in assigning the jīva its gross and subtle bodies. It should be noted, however, that all three bodies – including the subtle and causal – are considered a part of the material order, with the 24 elements from which the gross and subtle bodies are composed especially constitutive of each brahmāṇḍa, which will also be made apparent in that chapter.<sup>381</sup>

Here, we can add that Svāminārāyaṇa explains in reference to these three bodies that when falsely identified with them (Vac. Gaḍh. I.7), thereby assuming their joys and sufferings (Vac. Gaḍh. I.78) – including birth and death (Vac. Sār.5) – as its own, the jīva is said to be known to be in its 'anvaya' (concomitant) form.

Conversely, when it realises itself as distinct from the three bodies, as purely consciousness (Vac. Gaḍh. I.7), separate from the bodies' joys and sufferings (Vac. Gaḍh. I.78), as uncuttable, impierceable, indestructible, etc. (Vac. Sār.5), that is the 'vyatireka' (distinct) form of the jīva. In other words, the anvaya form is the jīva in its state of ajñāna (ignorance or false self-understanding), whereas the vyatireka form is the jīva in its state of jñāna (enlightenment or correct self-realisation).

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<sup>381</sup> See sections 10.1.7 and 10.2.3.

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But while the jīva is not the body, mind and senses, what relationship do they hold with the jīva?

One way in which this relationship has been described is like that of a king (the jīva) ruling over the subjects (the mind and senses) living within his kingdom (the body). Svāminārāyaṇa presents this analogy in Vac. Gaḍh. II.12, precluding with a narration of how one should think about the self:

‘Just as the four inner faculties, the ten senses, and the five vital breaths reside in this body, similarly, I am the jivātman, and I also reside in this body. However, I am greater than all of them, and I am their controller.’

To explain the potential consequences of not controlling the mind and senses, he then goes on to extensively develop and carefully relate the analogy.

For example, if a king were to possess little or no intelligence, then even the members of his own family would not obey his orders. When the people in the village hear about this, no one in the village would obey his orders. Further, when the people throughout the kingdom hear about this, no one in the kingdom would obey his orders. As a result, the king would become depressed and powerless. He would sit idly and would not attempt to enforce his rule over anyone.

In this analogy, the king represents the jīva, the members of the household represent the inner faculties, and the people of the village and kingdom represent the senses. So, if the jīva becomes discouraged and relaxes its authority, then when it wishes to exercise its sovereignty over the inner faculties and orient them towards God, the inner faculties will not follow. Also, if it wishes to control the senses, even the senses will not comply. Then, even though the jīva is the king of the kingdom in the form of this body, it becomes helpless like a pauper. When a king becomes discouraged, his subjects who live in his kingdom assume power and do not allow him to exercise his authority at all. Likewise, in the kingdom of the jīva, represented by this body, lust, anger and other vicious natures – who are not the king – assume the kingship. Then, they do not allow the jīva to exercise control.

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Svāminārāyaṇa concludes the analogy by teaching “the art of ruling” whereby “no one can overthrow [the soul’s] authority in the kingdom which is its body.”

We find a clue to another understanding of the body-soul’s integral relationship in the term “karaṇa”, meaning ‘instrument’. In opposition to the senses and mind (the inner faculties, or antaḥkaraṇa), the physical body is often called the ‘bāhyakaraṇa’, or outer faculty. Instructively, this tells us they are all *instruments* of the self, which the jīva can wield to know, act, and enjoy (as we shall soon see). They could be described as mere instruments, for what can an axe do without a carpenter? But the opposite is also true. No matter how humanly strong a carpenter may be, he requires an axe to accomplish his task. Similarly, as sentient as the jīva is, without the physical body, senses and mind, it cannot perceive the sensory world around it nor make sense of it. Notably, both the gross and subtle bodies are necessary for this; the physical body alone cannot perceive or cognise while the senses and mind cannot survive outside of the bodily substratum.

Svāminārāyaṇa describes the intricate interdependence at play here using the following analogy:

Just as a flame cannot remain aloft in space on its own without the combination of oil, a wick-holder and a wick, similarly, without associating with the disc of flesh [in the body] – which is a transformation of the five material elements – the jīva cannot remain alone (Vac. Gaḍh. III.4).

More importantly, as we shall see further in the chapters on māyā and mukti, the body, senses and mind are all essential, invaluable and powerfully efficacious instruments, provided by God not just for personal enjoyment, but for

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performing the necessary religious endeavours to secure ultimate liberation. This is not fully possible outside of human embodiment. The paradox worth noting here is that while the bodies are not the true self, to realise this – that is, to progress from a state of ignorance to a state of enlightenment – they are indispensably necessary. This being so, the physical body is not intrinsically evil and certainly warrants care. One should therefore endeavour to keep it as healthy and functioning as possible to optimally facilitate religious praxis. Properly understood, then, a deeply spiritual life and a healthy physical lifestyle are not contradictory but in fact finely compatible, if not also complementary.

#### **8.1.1.2) The Three States of the Jīva**

Alongside the three bodies, Svāminārāyaṇa also refers to the three “states” (avasthā) that the jīva experiences but in actual fact is also distinct from (Vac. Gaḍh. I.23, Gaḍh. I.65, Gaḍh. I.77, Pan.3, Gaḍh. II.31, Gaḍh. II.51, Amd.2, Jet.3), and within which it enjoys the fruits of its karmas (Vac. Gaḍh. I.56, Sār.6). The three states are:

- jāgrata avasthā: the ‘waking state’, in which the body, senses and mind are all alert and active
- svapna avasthā: the ‘dream state’, in which the body and senses are dormant and inactive; only the mind is alert and active
- suṣupti avasthā: the ‘deep or dreamless sleep state’, in which even the mind is dormant; it is characterised by total inertness and self-unawareness/unconsciousness

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These three states are borne of māyā, with each state predominantly the cause of one of the three māyic qualities: sattvaguna, rajoguna, and tamoguna.

Furthermore, while in each state, the jīva is said to be more aware of and functioning in one of the three bodies than the others, lending it a specific technical title in that state: Viśva, Taijasa, and Prājña.<sup>382</sup>

A collation of this information can be succinctly tabulated as below:

State of Jīva	Predominant Māyic Quality	Predominant Awareness	Title of Jīva
Waking	Sattvaguna	Gross Body	Viśva
Dream	Rajoguna	Subtle Body	Taijasa
Deep Sleep	Tamoguna	Causal Body	Prājña

### 8.1.2) Sat-Cit-Ānanda and Pure

If the jīva is not to be identified with the somatic body made of material elements or the senses and mind made of similarly subtle elements, what is it composed of? What constitutes the jīva most fundamentally and essentially?

Svāminārāyaṇa answers this question in Vac. Gaḍh. I.73, again, juxtaposing the soul with that which it is not. He explains:

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<sup>382</sup> See also MāU 2.1-3 for more on these three states and three titles for the jīva.

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After developing knowledge of the ātman and the thorough knowledge of God's nature, one should think, 'I am the ātman, characterised by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss, whereas the body and the brahmāṇḍa are māyic and perishable. How can they compare to me?'

Svāminārāyaṇa also iterates the jīva as being 'sat', 'cit' and 'ānanda' by using these terms (and their synonyms) separately:

- "satya" and "sattārūpa": Vac. Gaḍh. I.7, Gaḍh. I.14, Gaḍh. I.16, Gaḍh. I.47, Loyā.17, Gaḍh. II.57, Gaḍh. II.66, Gaḍh. III.3, Gaḍh. III.22, Gaḍh. III.33, Gaḍh. III.39
- "caityana" and "caitanyarūpa": Vac. Gaḍh. I.23, Sār.1, Sār.4, Sār.10, Sār.12, Loyā.7, Loyā.18, Pan.3, Gaḍh. II.2, Gaḍh. II.17, Gaḍh. II.20, Gaḍh. II.22, Gaḍh. II.55, Gaḍh. II.60, Gaḍh. II.66, Var.4, Gaḍh. III.2, Gaḍh. III.3, Gaḍh. III.19, Gaḍh. III.22, Gaḍh. III.27, Jet.2, Jet.3
- "ānandarūpa" and "sukharūpa": Vac. Sār.1, Sār.12, Kār.3, Loyā.10

As is evident, Svāminārāyaṇa especially emphasises the pure consciousness of the jīva, often calling it "sattāmātra" as well. He does this by situating it as being distinct from and different to māyā which is wholly material. For example, in Vac. Gaḍh. II.57, Svāminārāyaṇa asks rhetorically,

What is that ātman like which is of the form of consciousness?

He goes on to answer:

Within it there are no hindrances [literally, 'barriers'] either of māyā or the entities evolved from māyā, i.e. the three guṇas, the body, the senses, and the inner faculties. Whatever hindrances do seem to be in the ātman are, in fact, due to ignorance.

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Similarly, in sharing his vision to free all devotees of “any trace of any of māyā’s three guṇas, ten senses, ten vital breaths, four inner faculties, five material elements, five sense-objects, and the devatās presiding over the 14 faculties”, he adds in Vac. Gaḍh. II.45:

Instead, I wish to make all of you such that you offer devotion to God realising your true form to be the ātman, which is characterised by eternal existence and is free from all of these māyic adjuncts.

What these many descriptions about the conscious nature of the jīva also lead to is an understanding of it, in its most pristine form, as being devoid of māyic flaws and impurities. Indeed, an important and striking characteristic of the jīva is that, in its very essence, it is pure. Svāminārāyaṇa thus calls the jīva “śuddha” in several sermons (Vac. Sār.1, Kār.8, Loyā.10), using “atīśuddha” (‘extremely pure’) in Vac. Pan.3. Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates on this spiritual purity more emphatically in Vac. Gaḍh. II.12, where he calls believing anything to the contrary nothing less than foolishness.

The jīva, which resides in the body, feels, ‘Lust, anger and other vicious natures are attached to my jīva.’ In this manner, depending on which of the vicious natures, i.e. lust, anger, avarice, etc. is predominant in a person, he believes his jīva to be full of that nature due to his association with it. But, in fact, not a single one of these vicious natures lies within the jīva; the jīva has merely believed itself to possess them out of its own foolishness.

As true as this is, though, the jīva’s false or perverse knowledge (viparīta jñāna) and lack of true knowledge (yathārtha jñāna) are equally real and problematic, propelling the jīva through the incessant cycle of births and deaths (saṃsāra), and hence the need for it to be enlightened and liberated.

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Nonetheless, what is striking here are the clear points of similitude between the nature of the jīva (and īśvara) and the nature of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman. While much is often made of their differences, we should also note that jīvas – characterised as they are by sat-cit-ānanda as well – share in the infinite nature of God and Guru, if only to an infinitesimally minute extent. That is, by nature, jīvas are qualitatively similar to Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman yet metaphysically distinct from and infinitely inferior to them.

### 8.1.3) Knower

The jīva is not just formed of or *is* consciousness (caitanya), Svāminārāyaṇa adds, but also *has* consciousness as a quality. He thus calls it “cetana” (having the quality of caitanya) in Vac. Loyā.10 and Vac. Pan.3. What this means is that it allows the jīva to also be a ‘knower’ (jñātā). This is essential if it is to be aware of (and be able to choose) its own actions and perceive the sensory world, including its own body, while also being able to acquire the necessary theological knowledge to secure its liberation.

Svāminārāyaṇa often presents the jīva as the ‘knower’, again, usually in relation to the body and world around it, which are the ‘knowable’ or objects of knowledge (jñeya). For example, in Vac. Gaḍh. I.16, Svāminārāyaṇa explains that a “wise devotee”

accepts whatever teachings God and the Sant offer as the highest truth but does not doubt their words.

What are these teachings?

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'You are distinct from the mind, body, senses, and vital breaths.  
You are real. You are the knower of the body, senses, and vital  
breaths, which are all non-real.'

Svāminārāyaṇa similarly describes in Vac. Gaḍh. I.61 how one should reinforce  
one's true, spiritual identity:

'I am not the body. I am the ātman, distinct from the body, and the  
knower of all [the body, senses, mind, etc].'

In calling "the three bodies – gross, subtle and causal – and the three states –  
waking, dream and deep sleep" the 'field' or "kṣetra", he goes on in Vac. Pan.3 to  
say:

[A jñānin] realises his ātman to be distinct from the 'field', and  
believes, "They can never be a part of me. I am their knower...",

thus calling the jīva "kṣetrajña", or the 'knower of the field', in other sermons also  
(Vac. Gaḍh. I.57, Kār.12, Gaḍh. II.1, Gaḍh. II.17).

In Vac. Sār.12, he similarly makes the distinction between the soul as "draṣṭā"  
(the seer) and the body and world as "dṛṣya" (the visible), while elsewhere  
referring to the jīva alone as the "seer" (Vac. Gaḍh. I.20, Gaḍh. I.64, Gaḍh. II.6,  
Gaḍh. II.20, Gaḍh. II.63).

This topic forms the subject of the Jñādhikaraṇa at BS 2.3.19-32, in which the  
opening sūtra straightforwardly confirms on the basis of śāstric revelation that  
the jīva (and īśvara) is not only "of the form of knowledge [jñānamātram]" but a  
"knower also [jñātā'pi]". The Bhāṣyakāra also makes the important clarification  
here that this quality of knowledge is an intrinsic and natural, therefore

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consistent, attribute of the jīva, but not adscititiously arising in the intellect or outside of the jīva, as is asserted by some schools.<sup>383</sup>

As the adhikaraṇa proceeds beyond this relatively brief first sūtra, the focus of the debate shifts to the size of the jīva, because this will affect how much the jīva can know and how. We can therefore continue this discussion in the following two sections, where we firstly see what Svāminārāyaṇa has to say about the size of the jīva and how he resolves the epistemological difficulty that arises from it, and thereafter as we discuss the jīva as the continuing subject of actions and experiences.

#### **8.1.4) Atomicity**

Three sizes of the individual soul have traditionally been propounded and defended by various schools of Vedānta. It can either be extremely minute, 'like an atom' (aṇu-parimāṇa), or assume the size of the body it inhabits (madhyama-parimāṇa, literally 'mid-sized'), or be spatially limitless and all-pervading (vibhu).

Svāminārāyaṇa is unequivocal that the jīva is "atomic in size [aṇu-mātra]" (Vac. Jet.2), describing it analogously in Vac. Kār.1 "as fine as the tip of a spear". In both cases, he is referring to its extreme subtlety.

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<sup>383</sup> BS-SB 2.3.19, pp. 232-33.

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The Upaniṣads are similarly definitive in their descriptions. For example, the

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad states:

Know by thought this atomic ātman, in which the vital breath enters fivefold (MuU 3.1.9).

And like Svāminārāyaṇa in Vac. Kār.2, the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad analogises:

It is as fine as the tip of a goad (SU 5.8).

Before citing these statements at BS 2.3.23, the Bhāṣyakāra is quick to point out according to the immediately prior sūtra that other Upaniṣadic mentions of the “ātman” being all-pervading should not be facilely assumed to refer to the individual soul. Upon examining the proper semantic contexts, he observes, it is obvious those references refer to either Parabrahman or Akṣarabrahman, who, pervading the whole cosmos as its inner soul, can also rightly be called “ātman”.<sup>384</sup>

This being so, Svāminārāyaṇa adds that the eminently subtle soul resides primarily within the heart of the physical body (Vac. Kār.12, Gaḍh. II.34, Gaḍh. III.4, Loyā.15), as also described by the Upaniṣads:

This ātman resides within the heart (PU 3.6).

That [ātman] is full of consciousness within the vital breaths<sup>385</sup> and is the inner light within the heart (BU 4.3.7).

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<sup>384</sup> BS-SB 2.3.22, pp. 234-35.

<sup>385</sup> By extension, the Bhāṣyakāra takes the plural term for ‘prāṇa’ here to include all of the senses and faculties. See BU-SB 4.3.7, p. 241.

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But this then leads at once to the question of how there can be sentiency throughout the body if the jīva is limited in size and located only within the heart. It is in fact a question that Svāminārāyaṇa himself asks his audience in Vac. Gaḍh. III.4.

Please describe how the jīva, which resides within the body, is present in one location and how it pervades the entire body.

The Vacanāmṛut notes that members of the audience answered according to their understanding, but none to Svāminārāyaṇa's full satisfaction. He thereupon answered his own question with the following analogy:

If an oil lamp is placed at one location in a mandira, its flame predominantly pervades the wick, and secondarily, it also pervades the entire building. In the same manner, the jivātman also predominantly resides in and pervades the disc of flesh [in the heart] that is a product of the five material elements; and secondarily, it resides in and pervades the entire body. This is how the jīva resides within the body.

Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa makes clear,

the jīva actually resides in the disc of flesh [in the heart], and by its consciousness pervades the entire body. Therefore, regardless of where pain is felt in the body, it is the jīva itself that feels the pain (Vac. Gaḍh. III.4).

What this tells us about the jīva as consciousness in its very form and also having consciousness as an inherent quality is that, like the flame and its light, while both are self-illuminating (i.e. they do not require another source of consciousness to make them known), both differ somewhat in their form and function of illuminating others. The jīva, like the flame, is limited in its form and place, thereby unable to make known anything apart from itself, whereas its

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consciousness, the light, can radiate out to illuminate other objects within its vicinity.

The Sūtrakāra offers the very same flame-light analogy at BS 2.3.26, and yet another analogy – of sandalwood ointment and its diffusive fragrance – at BS 2.3.24, before going on to confirm with support from various Upaniṣadic and Bhagavad-Gītā statements that the jīva and its consciousness are indeed distinct even if inseparable, as are the odorous and its odour (BS 2.3.27-28). We shall be able to better appreciate the significance of this further on.

The Jñādhikaraṇa which we began in the previous section thus concludes at BS 2.3.32, arguing that if the soul were hypothetically considered to be all-pervasive (rather than atomic) and merely formed of consciousness (but not having consciousness as a quality), then the perverse result would be that every soul would be continuously experiencing either all things or nothing, which is impossible and contrary to general perception. Therefore, the soul must be atomic in size and have the inherent quality of consciousness, which pervades its body even while the jīva resides in the heart, allowing it to be the consistent subject of its personal experiences, i.e. ‘the knower’.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> See BS-SB 2.3.19-32, pp. 232-39.

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### 8.1.5) Agent & Enjoyer

A direct corollary of the jīva as jñātā (knower) is the jīva as kartā (doer) and bhoktā (enjoyer, or one who experiences). This is no less evidenced in the Brahmasūtras, where the Jñādhikaraṇa is immediately followed by the Kartrādhikaraṇa (BS 2.3.33-40).

In his comment on the opening sūtra of this adhikaraṇa, the Bhāṣyakāra boldly states that only the knower can be the agent, for knowership is to 'do' knowledge, i.e. to act out the process of knowledge, and such action is only possible for that which is cetana, i.e. has consciousness as an inherent quality. In a subsequent sūtra, 2.3.38, the Bhāṣyakāra extends this reasoning to experience as well; to enjoy is to 'do' enjoyment, i.e. acting out the process of enjoyment. Therefore, only the intelligent agent can also be the enjoyer.

The very thrust of the first sūtra's argument is that if the jīva is not accepted as the intelligent agent (and enjoyer), all teachings and injunctions of the scriptures will be rendered meaningless, for to whom would they otherwise be addressed?

It is implausible to claim such calls to action as

Always performing works here, one should wish to live a hundred years (IU 2)

and

With inner tranquillity, one should offer upāsanā (CU 3.14.1)

are made to an inert, insentient entity which is incapable of any action or even conceiving of it. Since the words of the scriptures are always meaningful, and

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they enjoin action on only that which is able to act and enjoy the fruits of that action (i.e. reap its consequences), it therefore follows that that which is addressed is the sentient agent and enjoyer.

This also has much significance to the free will of the jīva, as debated in the final sūtra of the Kartrādhikaraṇa, which we shall examine towards the end of this chapter when discussing the jīva's relationship with Parabrahman.<sup>387</sup> Here, let us briefly restate the above with some of our earlier points.

The body, composed of gross matter, is inherently inert. It cannot in and of itself know or act or experience. It must be vivified by a sentient entity, which is thus the true agent of all actions and the real subject of all experiences, even though it is by means of the body, the senses and other faculties that it can be so. As in the axe and carpenter example upon which we drew earlier, the axe is necessary for a carpenter to create his furniture or toy, but on its own, the axe being inert is utterly ineffective. In the hands of an expert carpenter, though, it is as if the axe springs to life, cutting through wood with consummate ease. Going further, since it is the carpenter who chooses how to use the axe and when to use it (or not use it), it is he who deservedly receives the payment for his labours – not the axe. Similarly, as the intelligent agent, it is the soul that is held accountable for its actions, good and bad, and to whom the deserts are accordingly conferred, not to the body.

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<sup>387</sup> See section 8.2.2.

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As we saw in the introductory overview, Svāminārāyaṇa confirms that it is the jīva – using its bodily instruments – which knows, acts and enjoys.

[The jīva] resides within the space of the heart, and while staying there, performs different functions. From there, when it wants to see, it does so through the eyes; when it wants to hear sounds, it does so through the ears; it smells all types of smells through the nose; it tastes through the tongue; and through the skin, it experiences the pleasures of all sensations. In addition, it thinks through the mind, contemplates through the citta, and forms convictions through the intelligence. In this manner, through the ten senses and the four inner faculties, it experiences [literally, 'enjoys' or 'indulges in'] all of the sense-objects (Vac. Jet.2).

Notably, Svāminārāyaṇa frames the knowing and experiencing here as “functions” – the *act* of seeing, hearing, tasting... even thinking – confirming the coherency and unity of the jīva as jñatā, kartā and bhoktā. This statement also closely resonates with the following Chāndogya Upaniṣad passage:

Now, when this sight here gazes into the sky, that is the seeing self; the faculty of sight allows it to see. That which knows 'Let me smell this', is the ātman; the faculty of smell allows it to smell. That which knows 'Let me say this', is the ātman; the faculty of speech allows it to speak. That which knows 'Let me hear this', is the ātman; the faculty of hearing allows it to hear. That which knows 'Let me think about this', is the ātman; the mind is its divine faculty of [inner] sight (CU 8.12.4-5).

In another sermon, one of Svāminārāyaṇa's strongest admonishments against a false self-understanding, he emphasises the jīva's role as the actual enjoyer and knower as opposed to the senses and mind, also touching upon the spiritual self, within which dwells God, as the real source of all joy. The sermon begins with the striking question:

Who is the most ignorant of all ignorant people?

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Svāminārāyaṇa answers:

The jīva, which resides within the body, observes both the attractive and the unattractive. It witnesses childhood, youth and old age, as well as a countless number of other things. However, the observer fails to observe its own self. The jīva looks at objects externally; but it does not look at its own self. Therefore, it is the most ignorant of the ignorant.

Furthermore, just as the jīva enjoys a countless variety of sights with the eyes, it similarly enjoys and knows the pleasures of the other sense-objects with the ears, skin, tongue and nose, but it does not enjoy the bliss of its own self, nor does it know its own nature. For this reason, it is the most ignorant of the ignorant, the most senseless of the senseless, the most foolish of fools, and the vilest of the vile.

The Praśna Upaniṣad also states:

This intelligent self,... is verily the one that sees, feels, hears, smells, tastes, thinks, understands and acts (PU 4.9).

An important clarification that needs to be made here is that the jīva's (and Īśvara's) ability to act and experience is not wholly independent. As the 'body' of Parabrahman (and Akṣarabrahman), it is supported, empowered and also governed by them. This is debated in the very next adhikaraṇa of the Brahmasūtras, which, too, we shall discuss in the section about the jīva's relationship with Parabrahman, attempting, as aforementioned, to also resolve how this doctrine can accommodate the jīva's freedom of will.

#### **8.1.6) Imperishability, Eternality, Individuality and Immutability**

A number of characteristics of the jīva were already mentioned in the opening section of this chapter as we looked to see how the jīva differs from the body. A

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few of these characteristics deserve further elucidation, and can be treated together.

One point that Svāminārāyaṇa makes repeatedly, for example in Vac. Sār.12, is that it is the body that undergoes “birth and death” passing through phases such as “childhood, youth [and] old age”, whereas the jīva is “uncuttable, unpierceable, unaging, immortal”. Thus, the jīva is described as aja (unborn), ajara (unaging), and amara (undying). It is imperishable and immutable. It is eternal.

Svāminārāyaṇa iterates the jīva’s imperishability by making an interesting point in Vac. Gaḍh. III.39. He explains:

The ātman has passed through countless life-forms. In fact, it is said that a person has drunk as much milk from his mothers as there is water in the ocean. In those lives, the ātman has experienced death in countless ways, yet it has not perished. It has remained as it is. So, if it did not perish in that state of ignorance when it regarded itself as the body, how shall it perish now that we have knowledge of it?

The jīva’s insusceptibility to death and deterioration is thus a matter of fact.

Whether one knows this or not is immaterial to the reality.

Continuing the analogy of the oil lamp’s flame from Vac. Gaḍh. III.4,

Svāminārāyaṇa further explains:

Just as fire – which is distinct from the container, the oil and the wick – cannot be destroyed by breaking just the container, in the same way, the jīva, even though it pervades the disc of flesh [in the heart] and the body, does not die with the death of the body (Vac. Gaḍh. III.4).

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Those familiar with Vedāntic texts will be aware of numerous statements in the Upaniṣads and Bhagavad-Gītā supporting this point. As one example, a popular phrase found identically in the Bhagavad-Gītā and Kaṭha Upaniṣad proclaims:

This [soul] is unborn and eternal, everlasting and primeval. It is not slain by the slaying of the body (KaU 2.18 & BG 2.20).

As in the verse, Svāminārāyaṇa also iterates the beginninglessness of the jīva, tracing it back to the very origin of each brahmāṇḍa. Using another analogy, Svāminārāyaṇa explains in Vac. Gaḍh. III.10 that even during the state of primeval dormancy, the jīvas continue to exist within māyā. So,

just as seeds in the soil sprout by the association of rainwater, similarly, the jīvas, which are eternal, arise from within māyā; but new jīvas are not created. Therefore,... the jīvas residing in māyā are also eternal, and they are not components of God; they are always jīvas.

Svāminārāyaṇa adds here an important point at the end, clarifying that the jīvas do not have an 'aṃśa-aṃśin' or component-composite relationship with Parabrahman. This predictably becomes the topic of discussion in the Aṃśādhikaraṇa between BS 2.3.43 and 2.3.53, where the Sūtrakāra argues that to believe sentient beings to be fragmented parts of God contradicts śāstric texts revealing Parabrahman to be indivisible (akhaṇḍa), non-fragmentary (niraṃśa), and without parts (niravayava). Those texts which do mention the jīvas as being the 'aṃśa' of Parabrahman should be understood as describing them as devotees of God, inseparable from him by virtue of their intense love and total dependency on him, as they are, of course, a 'part' of his body which is the entire universe. This is indeed the exegesis Svāminārāyaṇa provides for BG 15.7 –

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Mamaiva'mśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ |

My 'amśa' alone in this living realm, of the form of the eternal jīva...

– when he cites the verse in Vac. Gaḍh. II.8.<sup>388</sup>

During the pre-origination stage of each brahmāṇḍa that Svāminārāyaṇa mentions above in Vac. Gaḍh. III.10, it should be noted that each jīva is dormant within māyā with only its causal body. When, by the will of Parabrahman, the creative process is initiated, each jīva receives its gross+subtle body according to the karmas encoded within its individual causal sheath. During the sustenance stage of the brahmāṇḍa, each jīva will continue to transmigrate – until securing final liberation – from one gross+subtle body to another as and when the lifetime of each body expires, again, always according to the jīva's own karmic blueprint which continues to evolve and be transferred from one life to another. To reiterate, the birth, development, decay and eventual death is of the body only; the jīva is distinct from the body and unaffected by its corporeal deterioration and death. Finally, at the time of that particular brahmāṇḍa's dissolution, the jīva discards its gross+subtle body and returns with its remaining causal body to a state of dormancy within māyā... until the next cycle of creation. This continues for the jīva until it can eradicate its causal body, i.e. māyā in the form of ignorance, and become brahmarūpa by acquiring the qualities of Akṣarabrahman making it eligible for eternal communion with Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāma.

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<sup>388</sup> See BS-SB 2.3.43-53, pp. 246-53 and BG-SB 15.7, p. 310.

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All throughout this time – while in a state of bondage within māyā and even when liberated from it in Akṣaradhāma; and during the origination, sustenance and dissolution stages of the world – the jīvas exist *as* jīvas, and each jīva retains its distinct individuality; it neither merges into māyā (during dissolution), nor into Parabrahman (upon liberation).

Some of these points are also clarified in the single-sūtra Ātmādhikaraṇa at BS 2.3.18. In the continuing debate about the omnicausality of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman (BS 1.1.2), and therefore whether they can be the subject of the desire to know 'Brahman' (BS 1.1.1), the contention raised by the objector is that jīvas (and īśvaras) are unborn and therefore outside of the purview of 'creation'. Hence, the sentient beings should not be said to have Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman as their cause. In support of his case, the objector cites verses describing them as 'aja', i.e. KaU 2.18 and SU 1.9. In response, the Bhāṣyakāra goes on to cite other verses proclaiming the 'creation' of all beings. For example:

That from which these beings are born... (TU 3.1.1).

From that all these being are born... (PU 1.14).

That which the wise perceive as the source of all beings... (MuU 1.1.6).

But how should these verses and others like it be reconciled with those proclaiming sentient beings as unborn and eternal? For example:

This [soul] is never born nor does it ever die (KaU 2.18 & BG 2.20).

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This soul within the body is eternal and cannot be killed (BG 2.30).

He [Akṣarabrahman] is the one eternal soul among many eternal souls... (SU 6.13).

The Bhāṣyakāra explains that the 'creation' of souls should be understood as a figurative description; it refers to the new body a jīva receives in every new life-event. Similarly, 'death' is simply the falling of that body, not of the jīva itself. In this way, the jīva is eternal, and yet its bodies are created, allowing it to still be a part of the universal effect caused by Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.

Furthermore, the Bhāṣyakāra adds, since there is no alteration in the essential form of the jīva (svarūpā'nyathābhāva) at any time throughout this process, it can still be said to be immutable. Nevertheless, it may undergo other forms of change, such as the ceaseless contraction and expansion of its knowledge on account of it pervading its changing bodies.<sup>389</sup> Since, as we learned earlier, this knowledge or consciousness is an inherent but distinct quality of the jīva ('the light of the flame' in Svāminārāyaṇa's analogy at Vac. Gaḍh. III.4), this does not result in any distortion in the essential form of the jīva ('the flame' itself).

This brings us to an important clarification which needs to be made about the immutability of jīvas. If it can be recalled, we had opened this Part by introducing the five eternal metaphysical entities of the Svāminārāyaṇa School. As a part of that introduction, we also learned that there are three types of eternity or permanence (nityatā) in Hindu metaphysics. Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman,

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<sup>389</sup> BS-SB 2.3.18, pp. 231-32.

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īśvaras and jīvas all have 'kūṭastha nityatā' (immutable permanence), that is, they exist eternally and never undergo any modifications in their essential form. Even so, the immutability of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman differs to that of the īśvaras and jīvas. As we have learned in the previous two chapters, Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman forever transcend māyā and are absolutely untouched by it. In contrast, while jīvas (and īśvaras) are immune to senescent degeneration and survive physical death, they are still bound by māyā and therefore fall under its influence in the form of ignorance, causing their incessant passage through saṃsāra until they finally realise brahmavidyā and can offer perfect worship (upāsanā) to God.

### 8.1.7) Multiplicity

A small but nonetheless important point about the nature of the jīva remains to be made, related to its individuality mentioned above.

Even while all jīvas are ontologically the same, they are not one. The multiplicity of jīvas (and īśvaras) is shown by the plural nouns and pronouns used in verses such as

He [Akṣarabrahman] is the one eternal soul among many eternal souls... (SU 6.13);

That from which these beings are born... (TU 3.1.1);

From that all these being are born... (PU 1.14);

and

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... whereas all beings are 'kṣara' (BG 15.16).

Svāminārāyaṇa also refers to the jīvas in the plural (Vac. Var.6, Gaḍh. III.10, Gaḍh. III.39), sometimes even adding such telling qualifiers as "all" and "each". For example:

In addition, when all of those brahmāṇḍas are destroyed, all other jīvas lie dormant within māyā... (Vac. Gaḍh. I.12).

That [God]... resides as the antaryāmin in all jīvas and grants each jīva a body according to its past karmas (Vac. Gaḍh. I.13).

God dwells within all jīvas, but his form is different from the jīvas (Vac. Gaḍh. III.37).

Svāminārāyaṇa also talks of "countless millions of liberated souls" (Vac. Gaḍh. I.21, Gaḍh. I.63, Loyā.14).

Because the jīvas' individuality is preserved at all times – while in a state of bondage within māyā, when liberated from it in Akṣaradhāma, and during the origination, sustenance and dissolution stages of the world – so is their multiplicity. Just as jīvas do not merge into māyā or Parabrahman, nor do they ever merge into themselves to form one 'super-jīva'; the inter-differentiation between them is real and eternal. Nor, as we saw, are the many jīvas fragments of one super-being, for, like Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman, the jīvas (and īśvaras) are indivisible, non-fragmental, and without parts.

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This multiplicity is also evidenced by the many differing personal experiences jīvas have simultaneously. While one may feel happy, another will feel sad. While one may be in a state of bondage, another will be liberated. And while all jīvas are identical in essence and form, each bound jīva differs from another by its own individual code of karma leading to differences in bodies and circumstances for each of them. All this would be untenable were it not for multiple jīvas.

So how many jīvas are there? “Ananta” is the answer we are met with, explaining that while countless souls have been liberated, countless more remain to be liberated, thus ensuring the continuous flow of transmigration in the countless brahmāṇḍas – from the beginningless beginning to the endless end.

## **8.2) Relationship with Parabrahman**

A consistent feature of Svāminārāyaṇa Hindu theology, as probably with all theological systems, is that every discussion has God at its centre and as its ultimate goal. We saw this during the extensive chapter on Akṣarabrahman, and it remains true for the jīva. In what follows, we shall look at two ways this is so: firstly, learning how a correct spiritual self-understanding is essential for a correct theological understanding of and fuller relationship with God; and secondly, what this relationship entails, reconciling both the jīva’s dependency on God and its own freedom of will and action.

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### 8.2.1) Understanding the Self to Understand and Relate to God

As emphatically and repeatedly as Svāminārāyaṇa talks about the nature of the ātman and realising it as one's true identity, it is not, he explains, to bask in a sense of self-exaltation unfettered by material limitations. No, the real purpose is to properly understand God and relate to him. He clearly explains this both affirmatively and negatively in Vac. Gaḍh. II.57. After having begun the sermon with a succinct exposition of the nature of the self, he goes on to say:

To behave as the ātman does not mean to believe one's self to be Brahman and act waywardly. Rather, the purpose of behaving as the ātman is to realise, 'I am the ātman, and there are no hindrances of māyā within me. If that is so, how can there be even the slightest trace of māyā in Paramātman Nārāyaṇa Vāsudeva, who transcends the ātman?' For this reason, then, one should firmly realise the ātman so as not to perceive fault in God in any way.

In another sermon, Svāminārāyaṇa emphasises the same concept while drawing upon an example from the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa's tenth canto in which Śukadeva narrates to Parīkṣita the episode of Kṛṣṇa dancing amorously with the gopis of Vṛndāvana.

If a devotee of God has not developed this elevated spiritual state [of ātman-realisation], he will perceive worldly attributes even in God. King Parīkṣita, for example, was not such a[n elevated] devotee, and so he raised doubts about the divinity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Bhagavān after hearing of the rāsa episode<sup>390</sup>. On the other hand, because Śukajī was such an elevated devotee, he had no doubts whatsoever. Such a devotee firmly realises, 'If no flaws can affect me or bind me in any way, how can there possibly be any māyic flaws in God, by worshipping whom I have become [unaffected] like this?' (Vac. Gaḍh. I.23).

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<sup>390</sup> BP 10.29-33. These five cantos narrate the account of the devotional dance the gopis enjoyed all night with Kṛṣṇa having run away from their homes and husbands.

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Svāminārāyaṇa interestingly adds in Vac. Sār.17 the progressive nature of this self-understanding and understanding of God.

As the vision of a person who worships God becomes increasingly subtle, he realises the unlimited nature of God, and he increasingly realises the greatness of God. When that devotee identifies himself with the body, he sees God as the witness of his waking, dream and deep sleep states. Later, when he realises himself as transcending the waking, dream and deep sleep states, he realises God as transcending them too. Then, as his vision becomes increasingly subtle, he realises God as being far beyond himself and understands the greatness of God even more. Then, as he becomes more and more lovingly attached to God, his upāsana of God becomes even more firmly established.

Here, as Svāminārāyaṇa reveals the fascinating interplay between a correct spiritual understanding of the self and a fuller understanding of God, he includes its natural consequence – a deeper, richer loving relationship with God. In fact, in the Vac. Gaḍh. II.57 statement cited above, Svāminārāyaṇa begins the sermon with,

If one wants to love God, one should love him while believing oneself to be the ātman, which is characterised by pure existence,

before rhetorically asking,

What is that ātman like?

and then launching into his exposition:

Well, within it, there are no hindrances of māyā or the entities evolved of māyā... (Vac. Gaḍh. II.57).

One finds, indeed, that whenever Svāminārāyaṇa talks about the nature of the jīva or ātman, he invariably frames it in the context of a relationship with God.

For example, after his detailed explanation in Vac. Gaḍh. III.4 about the relationship of the jīva with the body and its pervading consciousness, using the

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flame-light analogy we repeatedly saw earlier, he ends the sermon with the clear and simple conclusion:

This is how the jīva resides within the body. Moreover, God resides within the jīva as a witness (Vac. Gaḍh. III.4).

Similarly in Vac. Gaḍh. I.73, after describing the jīva thus:

After developing knowledge of the ātman and the thorough knowledge of God's nature, one should think, 'I am the ātman, characterised by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss, whereas the body and the brahmāṇḍa are māyic and perishable. How can they compare to me?

Svāminārāyaṇa immediately goes on to complete how one should think with the following:

Moreover, my Īṣṭadeva is Puruṣottama Bhagavān, who transcends even Akṣara – the supporter of countless millions of brahmāṇḍas. I have the firm refuge of that God' (Vac. Gaḍh. I.73).

In other sermons also, Svāminārāyaṇa explicitly places knowledge of the self and knowledge of God alongside each other (e.g. Vac. Gaḍh. I.25, Vad.11, Gaḍh. II.65, Gaḍh. III.39).<sup>391</sup>

Many of the statements we have used throughout this chapter are similarly formulated in that they go on to clarify self-realisation as not an end in and of itself, but as a means – part of a larger body of theological praxis, as we shall note in our final chapter in this Part – ultimately leading to God and liberation.

After making such a distinction [between the ātman and the body] and becoming totally free of worldly desires, one should realise

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<sup>391</sup> To this, Svāminārāyaṇa sometimes also adds a third knowledge, of the perishable nature of the world, e.g. Vac. Gaḍh. II.60.

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oneself to be the conscious spirit and contemplate upon  
Puruṣottama Bhagavān (Vac. Sār.4).

One should think, 'I am the ātman, and the senses and inner  
faculties are absolutely unrelated to me.' With such resolute  
thinking, by beholding God's form in that consciousness... one  
should remain fulfilled (Vac. Gaḍh. II.2).

As another example, in Vac. Gaḍh. I.21 Svāminārāyaṇa begins:

This body should not be believed to be one's true self. Nor should  
one's bodily relations be regarded as one's true relatives. This is  
because the jīva has previously taken birth in each of the 8.4  
million life-forms....

Then, after developing his reasoning at length, Svāminārāyaṇa concludes:

Therefore, having realised the body, all possessions and all objects  
to be false [i.e. impermanent], and having realised one's own self to  
be distinct from the body, senses and inner faculties, and while  
observing one's own dharma, one should offer devotion to God  
which is devoid of all desires for its fruits (Vac. Gaḍh. I.21).

Statements such as these help us to appreciate now that Svāminārāyaṇa's intent  
on freeing oneself of all material limitations and distractions is actually to allow  
for a direct, complete and undisturbed relationship with God. The problem lies  
not in one's body or possessions or relatives – to be clear, they are not to be seen  
as evil – but in the *attachment* one has for them borne of māyic ignorance.

In Vac. Gaḍh. I.72, Svāminārāyaṇa makes an important addition.

The best devotee believes himself to be the ātman, distinct from  
his body.... He sees the jivātman residing in his body as well as  
Paramātman dwelling within his ātman. Not only that, he sees the  
ātman residing in the bodies of others as well.

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Svāminārāyaṇa extends here the usual inclusion of one's relatives to the more general "others", explaining the spiritual perspective with which one is to see them and thus behave with them. They are the pure self, within whom resides the highest Self. Svāminārāyaṇa is indicating here how all relationships are to be mediated with the presence of God, answering our earlier question of how a devoutly spiritual person can possibly have a meaningful relationship with others.

Still, there is another danger that Svāminārāyaṇa feels could still impede one's relationship with God. It is the conceit that could result from the very realisation of the self. He therefore continues in Vac. Gaḍh. I.72:

Yet, despite having become so capable [of seeing the ātman and God in one's self and others], he realises God and the Sant of God to be superior to ātman-realisation and harbours not even the slightest conceit of the realisation he has attained. A person with such characteristics is said to be the best devotee.

In all, Svāminārāyaṇa seems to be preaching against a preoccupation with anything that would hinder or diminish a complete, loving relationship with God – whether it be the body, wealth, possessions and unmediated relationships, or even conceit of one's spirituality. After all, in Svāminārāyaṇa's mind, the very objective of one's spiritual understanding is to better understand God and freely and fully relate to him.

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### 8.2.2) Dependent And Free

If the objective of realising the self is to better relate to God, what form does this relationship actually take? We turn our attention to answering this question with recourse to some critical theological questions and reflection.

In an earlier chapter, we made an effort to understand Parabrahman's overall supremacy by looking at his relationship with other entities. We learned there that Parabrahman is the King of all kings (Rājādhirāj) and the Lord of all lords (īśvarnā paṇ īśvar), ruling over his dominion which has jīvas and īśvaras as his subjects. His reign is eminently right and appropriate, for God has not usurped his vast realm from any other rival lord; he is the one without second, and its very creator and cause. That is why he is also the owner of the entire cosmos, giving him an especially personal interest in his subjects; the jīvas rightfully *belong* to him. For the jīvas' part, they find their greatest joy and fulfilment in being so owned and ruled by him, feeling privileged and exalted to have been accepted as such. They thus devoutly serve their master in joyful duty, because God reigns not by coercion or tyranny, but by loving providence.

In this sense, Parabrahman is also the 'Pati' of the world, like the lord of an estate or head of a household, providing for and protecting his extensive family who are eminently grateful and indebted to him, as adoring children to their doting father whom they worship.

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We also learned that Parabrahman is the śarīrin (embodied soul), who has as his śarīra (body) the spiritual world comprising all jīvas, īśvaras and Akṣarabrahman, as well as the material world of māyā and all things evolved from it. As the Soul of all souls, he supports them, empowers them, and controls them from within (Vac. Gaḍh. I.64, Vac. Kār.8, et al). To paraphrase from that section, he is their very life-source – the cause for their existence and the ontic ground (ādhāra) upon which they can function. Just as a physical body perishes once separated from its soul, so, too, the jīvas (and īśvaras) cannot survive even momentarily without Parabrahman. Even if alive, the body is wholly incapable of doing anything without the will, knowledge and strength of the inner self. In the same way, the entire body of jīvas (and īśvaras) is totally and radically dependent on Parabrahman to inspire them and bring them to action.

Svāminārāyaṇa explains in Vac. Gaḍh. I.65:

When a jīva enters the state of deep sleep, it becomes inert like a slab of stone and retains no type of consciousness.... When a jīva enters such a state, God awakens it from unconsciousness through his 'jnānaśakti' and makes it aware of its actions. This is known as 'jnānaśakti', the faculty of cognition. Furthermore, whatever action a jīva engages in, it does so with the support of what is known as God's 'kriyāśakti', the faculty of conation. Finally, whatever object a jīva desires, it acquires with the help of what is known as God's 'icchāśakti', the faculty of volition (Vac. Gaḍh. I.65).

The Bhāṣyakāra cites the above passage in his comment of KeU 1.2 which describes Parabrahman as

the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the tongue of the tongue,  
the vital breath of the vital breath, the eye of the eye.

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The ears can only hear because it is God who has empowered them with the ability of hearing. The mind can only think and perceive because God has infused it with the power of thinking and perception. The body is enlivened not by the breath alone, but by God who breathes life into that vital breath. In all, the Bhāṣyakāra explains, Parabrahman is “the provider of the power by which the inner and outer faculties can engage in all their respective functions... making them instruments for the jīva” by which to know, enjoy, act and live.<sup>392</sup>

The Aitareya Upaniṣad also states explicitly that it is by Parabrahman, the Self (ātman) of the jīvas, that they can see, hear, smell, speak, or taste (3.1).

So, even as the jīva is the knower, doer and enjoyer, it does not know, do or enjoy independently. It is always enabled by God. “Indeed,” Svāminārāyaṇa emphatically states,

God is the very life of all jīvas. Without him, those jīvas are incapable of doing anything or enjoying anything (Vac. Gaḍh. III.37).

This leads us to the natural and necessary question: Is the jīva, then, simply an automaton or puppet in the hands of an almighty God, absolutely dictated by *his* will but with no freedom of its own to act and enjoy? Without this free will, all that the jīva does is rendered inauthentic, meaningless – including its so-called devotion and obedience to God. So how can one make sense of the jīva as

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<sup>392</sup> KeU-SB 1.2, pp. 33-35.

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knower, agent and enjoyer as well as God's omniscience, omniagency and omnicausality?

For this, we must turn to the Paratantrādhikaraṇa of BS 2.3.41-42.

Having established the sentiency and agency of the jīva (and īśvara) in the preceding Jñādhikaraṇa (BS 2.3.19-32) and Kartrādhikaraṇa (BS 2.3.33-40), respectively, the Sūtrakāra immediately moves to qualify both in this two-sūtra debate.

The first sūtra is precluded by the Bhāṣyakāra with the following prima facie view.

At that, there is a doubt. Is the agency of the ātman exclusively self-supported [svamātrādhīna], or is it dependent on anything else [paratantra]? What is appropriate? Self-supported is [appropriate]. Why? Because otherwise, if the dependent view is taken, that would undermine [literally, 'damage'] [the ātman's] independence, which would in turn fail to confirm its agency.

To this, the Sūtrakāra retorts that no, the jīva is indeed dependent [tantra] "on the highest" [para], "because that is what the śrutis proclaim" (BS 2.3.41). In support, the Bhāṣyakāra cites statements from the Upaniṣads and Bhagavad-Gītā confirming, firstly, Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman as the "highest" [para<sup>393</sup>] –

He... attains Puruṣa, the highest of the high (MuU 3.2.8);

O Son of Pṛthā [Arjuna], that Puruṣa is the highest (BG 8.22);

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<sup>393</sup> The Bhāṣyakāra is clear here that the 'para' within the compounded word 'paratantra' should be taken to mean not just 'other', but 'higher'. While both translations are correct lexically, the latter ascribes the jīvas' (and īśvaras') dependency not generally, on any or all others, but specifically on Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.

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That Akṣara is verily the highest (KaU 2.16);

Akṣara, that is Brahman, is the highest (BG 8.3)

– and then how they both support and control the jīvas (and īśvaras), for example:

[Parabrahman,] the soul of all, having entered within, is the controller of all beings (Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 1.3.21).

Within the governance of this Akṣara, O Gārgi, do recipient men praise donors, deities [praise] the patron, and forefathers [praise] the ancestral offering (BU 3.8.9).

But if the jīva is not considered independent, the fictive objector contends, the moral injunctions of the śāstras – enjoining humans to do some things and prohibiting them from doing others – and the extolled fruits of observing such injunctions would all be rendered meaningless, for they would be addressing those which are incapable of acting or enjoying freely. This being so, it would disarray the whole system of praxis and moral deserts. Moreover, if God is deemed the sole agent of all actions, then he will have to be held accountable for all the wrongdoings in the world. How can this apparent conflict be resolved?

The Bhāṣyakāra explains, in effect, that there is no conflict to resolve as soon as one appreciates that dependency and free will are not incompatible. The jīvas (and īśvaras) are indeed free to decide what to desire, what to know and what to do. But since this freedom has been lovingly and graciously granted – permitted – by Parabrahman, and it is he who empowers them with the ability to desire, know and do (as seen above), they are still very much dependent on him.

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To elucidate, he extends a familiar analogy. Just as a sovereign king<sup>394</sup> bestows upon a subject from his realm some powers of authority and gives him or her the permission to exercise that authority in whatever tasks he or she sees fit, saying, 'Here, use this as you wish,' in the same way, Parabrahman gives his assent [anumati] to the jīvas and īśvaras to endeavour [prayatna] as they wish. The Bhāṣyakāra clarifies that this endeavour can take the form of both dharmic and non-dharmic acts.

At BG 13.22 also, when Parabrahman is described as the "anumantā" or 'permitter', the Bhāṣyakāra explains it in reference to allowing jīvas and īśvaras the freedom to perform their own actions, of which Parabrahman is the "upadraṣṭā" (close witness) dwelling within their bodies.<sup>395</sup>

Continuing the analogy at BS 2.3.42, the Bhāṣyakāra adds that as the authorised subject exercises his or her sovereign-granted powers in various tasks, the king observes those tasks, rewarding him or her when pleased by good accomplishments and penalising when displeased with bad accomplishments. So it is with the endeavours of the jīvas and īśvaras. Parabrahman is pleased with those endeavours which are dharmic (in accordance to scriptural prescriptions) and displeased with those which are adharmic (contrary to scriptural prescriptions), administering the fruits of those endeavours accordingly. To be

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<sup>394</sup> The Bhāṣyakāra appropriately includes in the analogy the "king's secretary" who, by royal decree, can also bestow, permit and pay or penalise the authorised subject. This refers to Akṣarabrahman, upon whom the jīvas and īśvaras are also dependent.

<sup>395</sup> BG-SB 13.22, p. 286.

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clear, while the fruits of the jīvas' karmas are dispensed by God as an expression of his pleasure and displeasure, it is strictly according to the karmas freely accrued by the jīvas themselves.<sup>396</sup> In this way, the Bhāṣyakāra concludes, the meaningfulness of scriptural injunctions is preserved and God is acquitted of any charge of partiality and cruelty, even while confirming both the jīva's dependency on God and its own free will.<sup>397</sup>

On this point, we should also refer to the final sūtra of the Kartrādhikaraṇa (immediately preceding the Paratantrādhikaraṇa) which likewise relates to the free will of the jīva to act. The objection there is that if the jīva is the conscious agent, and consciousness is its intrinsic, inseparable quality, why is it that the jīva is not continuously acting? The Sūtrakāra replies analogously, that, "like the carpenter", it can do "both" – act as well as not act. Just because a carpenter has tools at his disposal does not mean that he is enforced to always be at work. He works and rests as he pleases. In the same way, while the jīva has the body and its senses, etc. – its tools for cognition, action and enjoyment – they do not compel him to always act. The jīva will act when it wishes to act and not act when it does not wish to.<sup>398</sup>

Crucially, then, the jīva has the option to *not* act, making its actions all the more meaningful. There is now choice, and, to make that choice, the intelligent being

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<sup>396</sup> More on the Hindu doctrine of karma and God as karmaphalaprādātā will be explored in section 10.2.2, in relation to the diversity found within creation.

<sup>397</sup> BS-SB 2.3.41-42, pp. 244-46.

<sup>398</sup> BS-SB 2.3.40, pp. 243-44.

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can weigh up the consequences for both acting and not acting, so, howsoever it eventually does choose to act, it is the jīva which is exclusively responsible for those actions, making also their consequences fully deserved for the jīva.

This free choice is also precisely why, as is so obviously evident, that all souls are *not* engrossed in joyful devotion to God nor totally subservient and obedient to him. Some do exercise their God-given freedom to not only disobey and disrespect him, but to outrightly reject him. Only then do the devotion and obedience of the faithful carry such force and value.

In this way, the apparent tension between ascribing all actions to God at the expense of the freedom and responsibility of individual souls, and compromising the omniagency of God by allowing some autonomy to human activity, is relieved. Both are respected and kept intact. The jīva is not totally independent though not enslaved either. And while God is still the omnipotent, omniscient cause and agent of all, he has, out of his loving grace, granted and empowered the jīvas with the tools, options and judgement to act freely.