

**Hermeneutics as a Methodology in the Inter-Cultural Dimension of
Philosophy of Consciousness with Reference to Buddhism and
Vedanta**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

Submitted by

Rekhamoni Devi

Roll No: 146141017



**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Guwahati - 781039, Assam (India)**

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*Dedicated to
My Father*

*Umaram Nath, who left for his heavenly abode
During my Doctoral Program...*



Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Guwahati-781039

(Assam), India

Declaration

I do hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Hermeneutics as a Methodology in the Inter-Cultural Dimension of Philosophy of Consciousness with Reference to Buddhism and Vedanta**” is a research work carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Prof. Archana Barua, for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

No part of this thesis has been submitted to any University or Research Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

June 2020
IIT Guwahati

Rekhamoni Devi
Research Scholar
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Guwahati- 781039, Assam, India



Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Guwahati-781039

(Assam), India

Phone: +91-361-2582552

Fax: +91-361-269072

E-mail: archana@iitg.ac.in

Dr. Archana Barua

Professor

Certificate

This is to certify that Rekhamoni Devi has prepared the thesis entitled “**Hermeneutics as a Methodology in the Inter-Cultural Dimension of Philosophy of Consciousness with Reference to Buddhism and Vedanta,**” under my supervision for the award of the degree of Doctor of philosophy. The thesis is the result of her own investigations during the period she worked here as a Research Scholar in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose.

The present thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted to any other University or Research Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

All assistance received by the researcher has been duly acknowledged.

June 2020

IIT Guwahati

Prof. Archana Barua

Supervisor

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Abstract

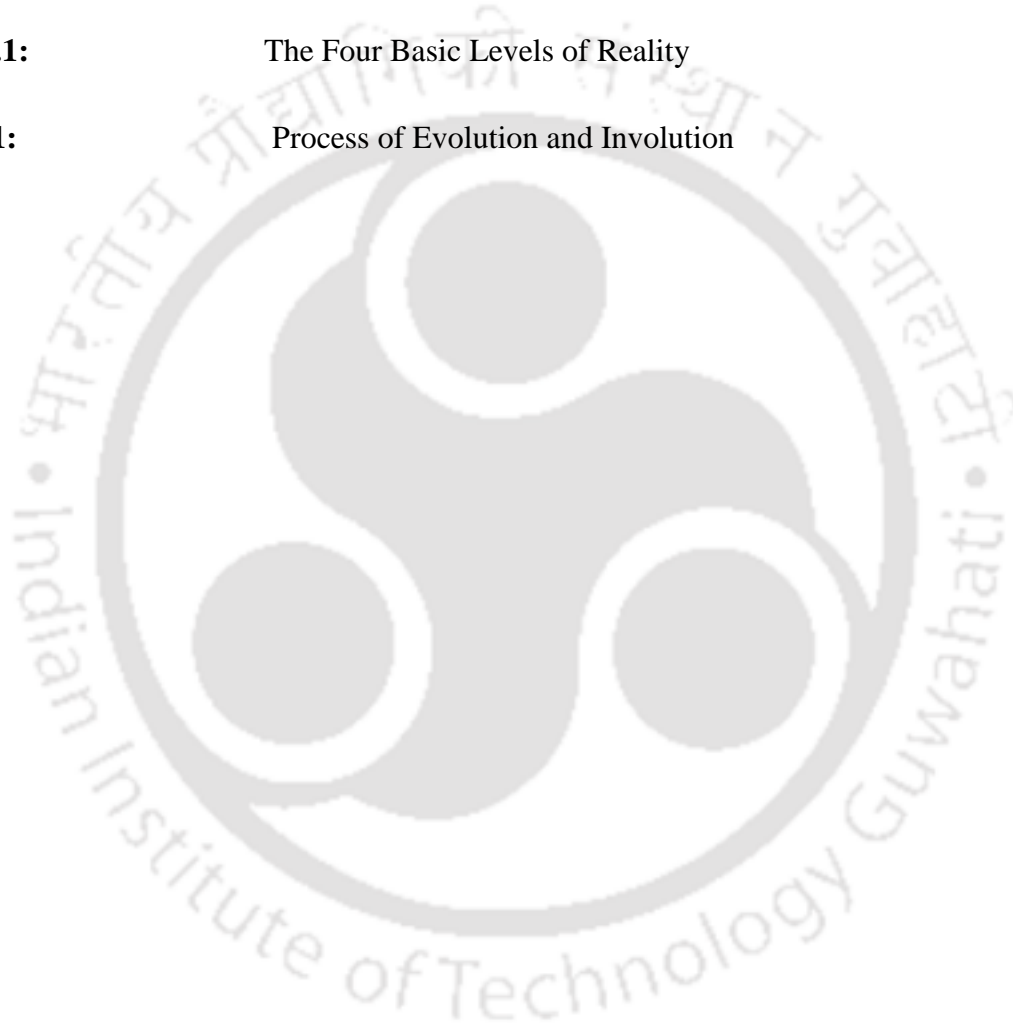
The thesis examines the application of the hermeneutical methodology in the intercultural dimension of the philosophy of consciousness. The theories of textual meaning that are evolving from the hermeneutical movement more appropriately applied in various fields of academic disciplines, such as postmodernist reading, feminist studies, psychoanalysis, ecology, and many others. However, its methodological application in cross-cultural dialogue is yet to emerge. Keeping that in mind, the present research identifies an area of possible cross-cultural discourse.

The thesis explains the hermeneutical understanding in two ways- first hermeneutics as a methodology to understand the cross-cultural discourse, and secondly, tracing the hermeneutical roots in the Indian tradition. From the Indian tradition, the study explores the Advaita Vedanta concept of consciousness. Vedanta, for example, keeps room for hermeneutical disclosure of layers of meaning behind the smooth visible surface. However, the most distinctive feature of Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara is that it not only introduces its non-dualist position, but it also has a unique way of interpreting the Upanishads and revealed the scriptures. In order to better approximate, this study explores some modernist positions and their translation of traditional Indian philosophical concepts into the terminology of the modern western world and their aspirations toward universalization and pluralism. They tried to interpret the Advaita Vedanta philosophy in a way that is acceptable to all. The neo-Vedantic philosophers give it a different turn by making some fusion with other cultures. Among them, some tried to merge it with Buddhism while some other with the western philosophical tradition. Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan all attempted to blend Advaita Vedanta with other cultures. However, their method of interpretation comes very close to the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer. As Heidegger regarded Being as the ultimate reality, similarly in the Advaita Vedanta philosophy also by keeping Brahman in the highest position, they tried to make a fusion of horizon, like Gadamer. Keeping this view in mind, the scope of the study widens to include the Heideggerian hermeneutics with some comparative notes with Vedanta and Buddhism.

The overall objective of the thesis is to throw light on ‘hermeneutical understanding,’ which keeps room for an ontological dimension in hermeneutics, which freeing ourselves from the methodologism. It ensures the fact that understanding became a transaction between the creative consciousness of the author and the purely reproductive consciousness of the interpreter.

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Chapter I

General Introduction: Hermeneutics as a Research Methodology for Cross-Cultural Discourse on Understanding Interpretive layers of Consciousness

To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we are.

Hans-George Gadamer

1.1. Introduction

It is a fact that different people have different perspectives regarding the same reality. Naturally, we perceive the same thing, but with different eyes, we interpret them in different ways. Our outlook on seeing a thing keeps changes, as Heraclitus said, 'we cannot step into the same river twice.'! Thus, the incentive of the present work comes from my curiosity to know people's different attitudes towards life and the universe. However, the perspective of seeing a thing in different ways is not only limited to particular individuals, almost all over the world going through such types of perspective based experiences. The change from traditional to modern, from non-technical to technological worldviews, is an ongoing process. This kind of practice of interpretation or understanding termed as 'hermeneutics' in the western world. In general, all forms of human communication could become the object of hermeneutical reflection. The hermeneutical problem arises when we evoke a particular idea or read a book for the second time. Such a recalling or re-reading often opens up a new reception of the text. The re-reading of the same book may discover something new, or we may perceive the book with different eyes.

However, a living tradition, according to J.N. Mohanty, challenges the thinker. Quoting Gadamer, R. S. Panneerselvam puts that, "Hermeneutical Reading of Indian Philosophy is an inescapable facticity. Every-telling of it is a renewal of the tradition" (Panneerselvam, 2008). Thus, the thesis tries to explore the evolution of thought, particularly in the Advaita Vedanta school of Indian Philosophy, through hermeneutical understanding and to grasp the details of the different contexts of application of the hermeneutical methodology. However, any efforts to

understand the hermeneutical development remains itself a hermeneutical venture. Despite certain limitations, the present study is an attempt to highlight the essential dimensions of hermeneutics, its context-wise variations, as well as its impact on the overall developments of hermeneutical and philosophical thinking.

1.2. Background of the Research Problem

The word 'Hermeneutics' comes from the Greek word 'Herms,' who is known as the messenger God of the Greeks. He had the task of conveying the messages of gods, which were beyond human understanding, in a form that man could understand. He plays the role of a mediator between gods and human beings. Before conveying the divine messages to human beings, Hermes has to be aware of the sayings of gods as well as individuals. Although hermeneutics as the art and methodology of textual interpretation is ever-present in human history, hermeneutics, as a modern philosophical category, was introduced by the German protestant theologian and philosopher Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Schleiermacher defines hermeneutics as "the art of understanding... the discourse of another person correctly, and dialectic as the presentation of 'the principles of the art of philosophizing,' or the foundations for the artistic carrying out of dialogue in the domain of pure thought" (Bowie, 1998). Schleiermacher argued that all forms of understanding arise from the shared human ability to generate meaning. According to him, it is a psychological function. So one can interpret a text from two standpoints:

- a. Grammatical, which deals with the implications of the language itself. And
- b. Psychological, which relates to the mindset of the authors.

After Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey very effectively handled this constructive tradition and carried this project further, which slowly developed as the methodological foundation of the human sciences. In higher methodical understanding, not only does self-reflection play an essential role; on the contrary, we also reconstruct and re-live that which is alien and past. A significant part of Dilthey's contribution is that "though he recognized the role of historicity and subjectivity, he does not ignore the question of intersubjectivity and objectivity. He claims that even though the primary aim of interpretation is to understand objects and events as expressions of the lives of human beings, the point to be borne in mind is that we

are not mere atomic individuals; we are interrelated in the living community. We share a collective life, and by this, we transcend our own narrow spheres and the horizon of universal history that gradually becomes a hermeneutic field.” (Rita D. Sherma, 2008)

Dilthey's contribution influenced the sociology of his time. Even before Dilthey, it was Marx who had pointed out that the correct interpretation of history is to be collected from a sociological perspective. He believed that we could not achieve the objective understanding only theoretically or conceptually. Moreover, for the method of fruitful and objective understanding, we have to remove all false conceptions or ideologies and should include practical or social action or practice. The Marxian view is distinct from Dilthey, for the reason that Marx highlights the practical and socio-economic conditions rather than on any psychological or epistemological factor.

Heidegger changes the Diltheyan concept of understanding as a category of life into an ontological existential category. However, it is undeniable that such a transformation has taken place for the influence of the phenomenological ideas, developed by Edmund Husserl. Even though Heidegger's *Being and Time* discusses hermeneutic, such ideologies are initiated by Husserl, which may be termed as 'proto-hermeneutic'.¹ While Husserl is interested in the explanation of Consciousness, Heidegger is concerned with the interpretation of Dasein.

In the history of hermeneutics, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* makes a significant turn. It is only Heidegger who gives it a philosophical form by giving hermeneutics an ontological turn. So Heidegger's contribution makes hermeneutics something more constructive and different. According to him, hermeneutics is not just the methodology of human science. Other than that, it is also an explanation of the ontological ground, upon which all these sciences are founded. Heidegger concentrates primarily on hermeneutics in his study of existence by presenting that interpretation is not an isolated activity of some human beings but the basic structure of our existence of life.

Heidegger, in his book '*Being and Time*,' differentiates between two kinds of interpretations, firstly, which arises out of a direct, pre-reflective, immediate, and yet interpretive

¹ Krishna Roy, *Hermeneutics East and West*, (Allied Publishers Limited, 1993), p-33.

communication with the world and secondly, the one which only points to something through making a proposition². “Heidegger wants to interpret the meaning of being within the horizon of time. According to him, ‘being’ is not mere presence or presence at hand but presencing as well. This presencing is ‘letting-presence,’ bringing out into openness, it is unconcealment or deconcealment. The Greek name for such unconcealment is Aletheia, which is the other name for truth. For Heidegger, the mystery of Being and time lies in truth as Aletheia, in the notion of concealment and unconcealment³.” (Heidegger, 1962, p.228)

According to Heidegger, to understand poetry, we have to listen beyond the spoken. Moreover, the unspoken can be communicated only by maintaining some silence. “The significance of this view of language, poetry, and the truth is that it gives poetry an ontological meaning. Moreover, it makes language, not the unproblematical medium in which a thing already understood is conveyed to another person who will understand it because he already has perceived it in some universally same way, but rather the projective ‘saying structure’ that presents things to us in a particular light, a clearing” (Palmer, 1979). The root of this Heideggerian hermeneutics is not to be found in subjectivity but in the facticity of the world and historicity of understanding.

The primary intention of Heidegger’s hermeneutics is self-understanding, to unveil the meaning of Being. Heidegger holds that man’s being is essentially temporal, his lived-environment comprises of past and present, but all his strategies are towards the future. Understanding reveals all the possibilities or plans of man. “understanding is the existential being of Dasein’s own potentialities-for-being and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of” (Heidegger, 1962). Besides these, Heidegger also mentions about the importance of language. Heidegger thinks that “it is the language that tells us about the nature of a thing, provided that we respect language’s own nature... man acts as though he were

² R.E Palmer, ‘The post Modernity of Heidegger’ in Martin Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature: Toward a Postmodern Literary Hermeneutics, Edited by W.V. Spanos, (Indian University Press, Bloomington, 1979), p.77.

³ See also, Krishna Roy, Hermeneutics East and West, (Allied Publishers Limited, 1993), op.cit., p-35

the shaper and master of language, while in fact, language remains the master of man.” (Rita D. Sherma, 2008)

Like Hegel, for Heidegger, also the technological civilization of modernism is one possible expression of Being. Heidegger claims an intimate relationship between technology on the one hand and Being, metaphysics, and philosophy on the other. According to him, the present world is in the grip of the *Ge-stell*, which is a necessary unfolding of the history of Being. However, for Heidegger, philosophy as conceptual clarification cannot give us the final position on the question of transcendental realm of meaning, either of Being or Consciousness. Poetic and metaphorical thinking should come in dialogue with truth as *Alethia* (unveiling) for giving us a glimpse of the light of Being.

Similar to Heidegger, Gadamer also maintains that hermeneutics is not merely methodological. Instead, it is an attribute of our very human existence. In Gadamer, we find a perfect fusion of constructivism and historicism. History and tradition do not, in any way, hold back the possibility of creative understanding. Gadamer maintains that when we engage in a historical object, we move into its horizons, while we bring ours with us. In this movement of one horizon into another, a fusion of horizons occurs. The understanding that develops in a fusion of horizons is a living interpretation. (Rita D. Sherma, 2008)

The hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer may be considered as ‘constructive,’ for they realize that it is not sufficient to describe the inner structure and coherence of a given text, neither the mere repetition of what the author says is the real understanding. One has to bring the author's message back to life again, which the text speaks. However, to reconstruct the tradition is not to represent it as it is, it has to transform it and experience it from our own context. Hence, perfect interpretation is not merely reproductive- it is creative, transformative, and performative as well. (Roy, 1993)

Paul Ricœur proposes a hermeneutic phenomenology with original thinking and innovative method because it marks the world of life and seeks the polysemic truth of the phenomenon on the levels where understanding occurs. Ricoeur seeks, with his hermeneutics, to understand human existence from the discovery of the meaning of discourse. He searches for the meaning behind the words so that what is real is perceived in its totality. According to him,

hermeneutics is required, not for every single linguistic occurrence, but those events where there may be a remainder of meaning. (Ricoeur, 2005)

1.3 Hermeneutics in the Asian Context

Since the thesis objective is a comparative cultural study that adapts the hermeneutical methodology; therefore, some justification needs to offer about the use of hermeneutics in Indian and Asian traditions. The Thesis is an attempt at exploring some aspects of this intercultural dialogue with particular reference to the hermeneutics of intercultural and inter-philosophical discourse. The proposed integration of philosophical hermeneutics with Eastern philosophy and practices differs in spirit, from a kind of comparative philosophy that usually takes a Hegelian turn, with its focus on bureaucratic or instrumental rationality as its prime focus. This kind of comparison runs the risk of reducing all visions to the view of “one single philosophy” or meta-philosophy. Here we note the difference; that is, there is a hermeneutical methodology that the thesis uses.

Interestingly Indian tradition offers many possibilities for interpretation, and there is a need to investigate more in-depth into the tradition and to explore the rich contribution of the Indian scholars in the realm. Such exploration into this rich ancient tradition is an unending journey. In this present work, it is only an attempt to show how the hermeneutic movement developed in the west and whether a similar line of interpretativeness can be found in the Indian tradition as well.

1.4. Hermeneutics in Indian Philosophy: from the Vedas to the Vedanta

Although the word ‘hermeneutics’ is not an Eastern term, Hermeneutic outlook is not only peculiar to the western country. Such a trend also can be seen in all other countries and all other cultures. In other words, we can say that this interpretative tendency is rooted in the very human nature. In comparison to the more recent movement in Western thought, Eastern country, especially Indian-thinking, never overlooked that the core of thought is human Consciousness, a Consciousness that is connected with life and not theory predetermined (Klostermaier, 2008). Hermeneutics continue to exist as center directed and did not become a sheer surface movement as western academic hermeneutics did. There is always a lot of difference and dialogue to keep

alive an awareness of the need to re-examine articulations of the central institutions and not to move with logic alone on the surface of texts.

The Indian sub-continent is well known for its different languages, religions, and cultures, yet there is always a fundamental unity between them. Similarly, this type of unity can be seen in Indian philosophical development. Without losing their common spiritual core, different philosophical interpretations unveil different reflections and attitudes towards life, truth, and reality. The various philosophical systems and intellectual developments in India, both ancient and modern, may be regarded as the product of creative interpretations of the classical Indian texts. Therefore, the Indian tradition also may be described as 'hermeneutic' in nature. For example- Vedas are regarded as the basis of Indian philosophy. The Vedas and the Upanishads form the basic principles which most of the Indian philosophers receive and therefore have a certain degree of authoritativeness. However, this no way denies the possibility of new visions and ideals. Instead, if we look into Vedas, we will get that, Vedas itself is moved from polytheism to monotheism and then monotheism to philosophical monism. That indicates the openness of the Vedic seers, who recognized the possibility of rethinking their interpretations differently over the period.

As we say above that hermeneutics is not an Eastern term, but now we can get the application of this term in the context of Eastern traditions as well as in Western. In fact, in Indian culture, there is a broad scope of hermeneutical approach. In Hindu thought, we have not only what we have to call bhāṣya but also tikā, tippani, vārttika, which are more specific forms of interpretation. It spread from epistemology to ontology (Roy, 1993). Hermeneutics as 'understanding,' in terms of broadest implication of the word, we will find certain common points in Hindu thought.

Sri Aurobindo thinks that the Vedas are filled with suggestions of secret doctrines and mystic philosophies, which the later thinkers sought to make clear, explain, and interpret from their own perspectives. These various interpretations of the Vedic hymns and also of the Upanishadic thought turn into the foundation of unending and significant creative ideas culmination subsequently into different philosophical systems or darsana. Interestingly enough, in this regard, too, we see how epistemic tools get modified when a paradigm shift is sought to

be made. For example, for unveiling the deeper spiritual layers of meaning of a Text, or a tradition, Sri Aurobindo stresses on meditative reflection than an apparent logical one. In the Vedantic tradition, also we find Sri Aurobindo made and attempted using meditative practice (Yogic approach) to unveil the mystery of super Consciousness. His “Savitri” divinely illumines poetic and an ecstatic encounter with Atman and Brahman.

So the truth is that, much before the western hermeneuticians started the task of interpreting the Bible and the other interpretation of texts differently from different perspectives, the Indian thinkers, even quite a few centuries before the birth of Christ, were involved in similar acts of interpreting the essential ideas of the Vedic and the Upanishadic statements and writings. This tradition of interpreting and admitting the possibility of multiple interpretations, from various perspectives for formulating certain general principles of interpretation, characterize the Indian culture from the time of its beginning and an unending process of interpretation and reinterpretation is going on all the time till date. The interesting part of all āstika tradition is that all pronounce verbal loyalty to the Vedic tradition but what the Vedas mean remain hermeneutical. The same Vedic reference keeps room for both Āstika and Nāstika meaning in it.

The Āstika traditions assert that the Vedic literature is their authoritative source, and this finally gave rise to many streams of thought and practice that we now identify as the Āstika tradition. From the earliest, there is a focus on understanding; it is the center of an inquiry on the prime purpose of existence. With the emergence of the Upanishads, the character of understanding was specified with more clarity. It is focused as the experiential apprehension of the nature of Being. Both the Vedic Dharmasastras, that describe ethical laws and the epic Mahabharata was written from 300 to 200 BCE, in part as a response to the Nāstika systems.

After the Vedic period Epic period started, where we get the compilation of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These two epics are the interpretations of lived experience and also intended to deliver the message of the heroic and the godly to us. Both these epics, through various interpretations and translations, remain alive until the present age and are continuously being reviewed and re-assessed from different socio-political, moral, and religious points of view. Next appears the sutra period. The sutras are not only connected the basic teachings or central principles but also generates a large number of interpretative commentaries that continue

from the past to present and possibly shall continue from present to future. It is also a method of transmitting doctrine and philosophy that is uniquely Indian. Unique compilations of the Sutras present the framework of a system of thought, but Sutras are too concise to be fully understood without explanations. So, explanations by way of commentaries are increasing in number throughout the centuries. In this way, Bhāsyas or commentaries came into existence. The primary aim of a Bhāsyā is to explain and elucidate the contents of the Sutra concerned. Bhāsyā or commentary is the combination of both literal exposition and constructive interpretation.

So we can say that interpretation or reinterpretation of the classical Indian texts is an ongoing process. Two of the most influential of the sutras of the second century BCE are The Mīmāṃsāsūtra of Jaimini and The Vedāntasūtra of Badarayana (also known as Brahmasūtra). These two aphoristic frameworks gave rise to the divergence in the Mimamsa system between the Purvamīmāṃsa and the Uttaramīmāṃsa, better known as the Vedānta. (Rita D. Sherma, 2008)

By the end of the Upanishadic period, there emerged several philosophical positions that showed skepticism about the Vedic world view. These include Buddhism, Jainism, and Carvaka (Roy, 1993). These schools, too, had various reinterpretations, especially in the sects of Buddhism, namely Mahāyāna, and Hinayāna, and their various schools, for example, Sunyavāda, and Vijñānavāda. There was also hermeneutical receptivity of the meaning of Buddhism in various South Asian and North Asian schools that we finally get multiple interpretations of Buddhism in the Asian context.

On the whole, we can say that the circumstances of the Indian culture are not entirely distinct from something that has been happening in the west. Commentaries and footnotes on Plato and Aristotle are yet to come to an end. Interpretation is universal, and as such, it is present in all Eastern cultures as well. The presence of this interpretativeness in Indian tradition can lead to the dialogue with the western counterpart.

1.5. Comparative Philosophy as a Hermeneutics of Discourse on Consciousness

All these diverse observations on the historical background of the academic endeavors justify our selection of hermeneutical methodology in the Indian and Asian contexts that help us

unveiling deeper layers of meaning in traditions and texts. Parallel arguments can be found in the writings of the Spanish-Indian scholar Raimundo Panikkar. In an informative essay titled “What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?” (Deutsch, 1988), Panikkar urged a new “planetary thinking,” which, though nurtured by local cultural idioms, would transcend hostile parochialisms through dialogical engagement. The dialogical comparison thus involves a continuous border crossing or negotiation of boundaries. Proper method to be pursued in these border crossings, in Panikkar’s view, is a “dialogical hermeneutics,” that is, a distinctive mode of interpretation is required when the difference is to be negotiated so that “the distance between two (or more) cultures which have independently developed in different spaces (topoi) their forms of philosophizing and ways of reaching intelligibility” (Panikkar, 1988). Husserl stated that “it is a mistake for someone brought up in the scientific modes of thought initiated in Greece and progressively developed in modern times to speak of Indian and Chinese philosophy (astronomy, mathematics) and thus to interpret India, Babylonia, and China in a European way” (Husserl, 1965).

On the whole, the thesis aims at the hermeneutical interpretation of the meaning of Consciousness in terms of interpreting and reinterpreting a text from Vedanta to Neo-Vedanta, from Advaita Vedanta to Visistadvaita Vedanta, from Vedanta to Buddhism, as these variations are to be seen as different interpretations of one common theme that is the realm of transcendental consciousness. Since similar variations in interpretation are also found in certain other traditions, both Asian and European, the scope of the study widens to include the hermeneutical comparison between Vedanta and Buddhism on the one hand and Vedanta with hermeneutical phenomenology of Heidegger and Gadamer on the other. That will take note of commonalities as well as differences between the two apparently diverse traditions at times.

1.6. Review of Literature

The origin and development of the hermeneutic philosophy, as a kind of methodology of intercultural and inter philosophical discourse, has been discussed by different philosophers in a very different shade. The thesis tried to cover all the possible literature, the primary as well as secondary, which helps giving direction to prepare the objectives of the work methodically. Based on the available sources, the literature review is classified into different sections. The

following is a summary of select literary presentations that helped in addressing various aspects of the proposed research:

- a. Hermeneutics in Indian philosophy especially in Advaita Vedanta philosophy
- b. Hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer
- c. The hermeneutical discourse between Heidegger and the East
- d. Review of some other related works

a. Hermeneutics in Indian Philosophy Especially in Advaita Vedanta Philosophy

Jan Gonda, in his book “*A History of Indian Literature: The Ritual Sutras (1977)*”, stated that in the Indian philosophical system after the Vedic period, the scholarly literature transformed from poetic to prose style, which is known as Sutra. Tracing it deeper, S. Radhakrishnan, in *Indian Philosophy, Vol. I (1929)*, asserts that, in fact, in the Vedic period, also, if we go through the Vedas, from the oldest to the newest one, we feel a changing vibe. According to him, the former is more fresh and simple, and the later Vedas are a little artificial. Analyzing the changing attitude S. Radhakrishnan, in his later work “*A Source Book in Indian Philosophy (1957)*,” makes clear that even though in the process of hermeneutics, some specific doctrine may alter or may transform but the fundamental concept and spirit remain the same from age to age. Thus from this, we can say that the interpretation of the eminent texts remains a continuous process for centuries. Similarly, the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara is also derived from specific interpretations of the Upanishads. F. Whaling pointed out that Sankara was a ‘crypto Buddhist’ that he uses the ‘Maya-vāda’ concept of Mahayana Buddhism (Whaling, 1979). However, these statements interestingly open up a framework to think about the changing attitude of Indian culture.

Such thought has been further made stronger by the view of J. N. Mohanty. Mohanty, in his article “*Recollections and Response (1991)*,” holds that “Sruti texts are amenable to even new interpretation, and our task is to interpret them from our place, in the light of our problems. Orthodoxy consists of the claim to have gotten hold of the meaning, whereas there is no such meaning. Meanings of texts are correlates of acts of interpretation by interpreters. One important insight in the idea of apauruseyatva is that since the author’s intention is irrelevant not merely because no one can claim to have entered into the author’s mind but for the deeper reason that

the author himself is an interpreter of his own text, the idea of authorship is extraneous to a text's eminence. The text stands on its own, inviting us to interpret it, converse with it, and make it efficacious in shaping our thoughts" (Mohanty, 1991). By believing in conformity with contemporary hermeneutical thinking, Mohanty asserts that interpretation is a historical process by which the effectiveness and the success of an eminent text grow. He also believes that in the process of interpretation, sabda plays a significant role.

In this regard, Bina Gupta, in her book "*An Introduction to Indian Philosophy (2012)*," maintains that the Sanskrit commentary "Vedartha Prakasha" of Sayana, which was translated into English by Max Muller, is found slightly modified in Radhakrishnan book 'Indian Philosophy.' According to Bina Gupta, Radhakrishnan accommodates the western ritualistic interpretation to a certain extent and merges it with the traditional interpretation of Sayana. For example, when he said about the Vedic hymns, Radhakrishnan maintains that there is a transition from 'polytheism through henotheism to a spiritualistic monism.' By incorporating the western ideas, Radhakrishnan tried to bridge the gap between East and west. Thus his interpretation cannot be regarded as an accurate representation of a Vedic worldview. Again in the Vedas, devas are worshipped, but the devas were not regarded as 'God.' The word 'deva' is related in some respect with the Latin word devus. The origin of the word 'deva' is 'div,' which means 'a place of shining radiance.' So, it is not appropriate to call 'devas' as gods. She also affirms that 'Isvara,' a fully personalized concept, is not found in the Vedas. Bina Gupta also maintains that we don't need to look upon the Upanishads as a movement of thought beyond the Vedic religion, but we should look upon the Upanishads as the very oldest commentary of the Vedas which provides a very different interpretation of the Vedic hymns.

In this regard, Ram Pratap Singh, in his article "*Radhakrishnan's Substantial Reconstruction of the Vedānta of Śaṅkara (1966)*," asserts that Radhakrishnan has been giving a new direction to the Vedanta. According to him, by looking at the past, Radhakrishnan recreates it for the people of that generation. Radhakrishnan gives a new turn to the tradition by developing the Vedanta, not only as a philosophy of personal salvation but also as the foundation for the solidarity of the human race. In this manner, we find different occasions, such as the need for bridging the gap between east-west dialogue in the philosophy that makes scholars like Radhakrishnan apply hermeneutics in understanding the meaning of a text or a tradition.

b. Hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer

In “*Being and Time (1962)*,” Heidegger, by criticizing Descartes, pointed out that although Descartes tried to set up a new and secure foundation for the philosophy, he was not able to establish the meaning of being of the ‘sum.’ Heidegger also submits that for a reason Kant neglects the ontology of Dasein, he also could never realize the awareness of the problem of temporality.

Thus we see that the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger gives a new turn in the history of western philosophy. The post-Husserlian phenomenologist significantly differs from the philosophical perspective of Husserl. According to Husserl phenomenology, there is no relation between knowledge and lived experience. On the other hand, Heidegger emphasizes that ‘the ontology of being as opposed to the epistemological question of knowing.’ According to Heidegger, there is a difference between Being and being. Moreover, the meaning of Being can be understood through the method of hermeneutics. So, he considered hermeneutic as a fundamental concept for transcendental inquiry.

In this regard, Gadamer, in his book “*Truth and Method (1975)*,” maintains that, rather than methodological, philosophical hermeneutics is ontological. According to Gadamer, hermeneutics is necessary to bridge the gap between the known world and the strange or the alien, because the gap opposes the integration into the horizons of our world (Gadamer, 1976). He also maintains that the phenomenon of understanding pervades all human relations to the world.

c. Hermeneutical Discourse between Heidegger and the East

Analyzing, Goethe and Max Muller P.T. Raju verify his claim that ‘Our knowledge cannot be said to be so complete and adequate unless it is critically compared with that of others.’ “Goethe said that he who knows only his own language knows none. This is a paradox, but significantly true. Similarly, Max Muller maintained that he who knows only his own religion knows none and pleaded for comparative religion. We may say that he who knows only his own philosophy knows none. Within any one tradition, the general conceptual framework is the same. The significance of that framework concerning reality cannot be grasped unless it is

compared and criticized with other frameworks” (Raju, 1986). He believes that only through critical analysis, we can reveal the importance of our own philosophy.

Larson (1988) and others have indicated the patterns in which comparative philosophy can play a significant role in bridging the gap across cultures. Arnold H. Kamiat Submits, “With the transcendence of the line separating Eastern and Western philosophies, the very terms Eastern and Western become irrelevant. The truth is neither Eastern nor Western. The truth is universal” (Kamiat, 1952).

Hajime Nakamura, in his book “*The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India-China-Tibet-Japan (1964)*,” states that, In India, "The various religions refer to the sage and to the religious aspirant as 'Muni,' which means he who maintains silence. They believe that truth is equivalent to silence." Suzuki asserts that the experience of enlightenment in the East occurs at the height of insight where words no longer apply. In the "Dialogue," which was previously mentioned and to which we return now, Heidegger claims the same about the primordial speech: "... Who is able to be silent about silence? This would be a true speech (Hirsch, 1970).

Regarding this, Heidegger also maintains that to obtain the knowledge of inner truth, the concept of understanding is essential. According to Heidegger, understanding is the essential factor of human beings. Every act of understanding helps to develop our own self-knowledge. In addition to that, Heidegger claims that all understanding is also interpretive. For him, the ontological meaning of language lies in its primacy over understanding.

d. Review of Some Other Related Works

According to the renowned religious scholar Huston Smith, East and West are meeting in such an “understatement” (Smith, 1991). On the contrary, the well-known pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty argued that: “the East and West did not meet” at all. For Smith, the East-West encounter in the present age is not made possible only by the introduction of technology or ambition by the curious minds of impatient intellectual curiosity. For Rorty, there is a lack of “a common option,” among the East-West comparative philosophers, to discuss what are “the most immediate, forced, and lived issues.” (Zhang, 2006)

J. J. Clarke in his book, *Oriental Enlightenment: "The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought (1997),"* by quoting the first line of Rudyard Kipling's poem "Oh East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" (J.J.Clarke, 1997) tries to show that Kipling also disagreed with the meeting. On the other hand, Goethe claimed: "He who knows himself and others will also recognize that East and West cannot be separated" (J.J.Clarke, 1997).

Otto Poggeler, in his article "*West-East Dialogue: Heidegger and Lao-tzu (1990),"* claims that Heidegger was able to introduce impulses from the East Asian tradition and considered the dialogue between Europe and East to be necessary.

J.L. Mehta, in his article "*Heidegger and Vedanta (1978),"* pointed out that Heidegger wanted to bring about something universal and unshakable for the entire world. Through his search for the sense of Being, Heidegger tried to show everything under the aspect of Being. Mehta also pointed out that, Heidegger thought that there are lots of essential things which are remaining implicit and still not formed in the thought of his forerunners. So in most of his work, Heidegger tried to disclose, through phenomenological interpretation, the depth of the unsaid and unthought-of his earlier philosopher. Following Heidegger, Mehta also maintains that "Should it not be possible to attempt the same with these Indian thinkers, "looking beyond the language which these philosophers employ to what they intended to say," in the words of Kant, or "wresting from the actual words that which these words 'intended to say,'" as Heidegger puts it?" (Mehta, 1978)

Thus, the examination of the literature of the great philosophers leads us to rethink and, if necessary, revise our position, and it leaves immense scope for further study.

1.7. Literature-Gap and Need for Readdressing

In the literature review that is made in related areas, it is found that though vast literature is available in each one of the sections mentioned above, not much is seen on the Hermeneutical dimension of comparative philosophy. This justifies why this rather ambitious project of a hermeneutic interpretation of the cross-cultural dimension needs to be explored. Hermeneutical interpretation of texts and traditions keeps room for paradigm shifts from pre-modernist to a modernist one or from Bhakti and mysticism to Jñāna and reason centric

distinctive interpretations of texts. Thus not only some schools of Vedanta or Buddhism can be revisited, but it is also equally applicable to a Heideggerian perspective and some of its overall limitations despite its ability to overcome many others. Accordingly, the literature gap keeps room for further exploration of the possibility of application of the hermeneutic method in Indian tradition. As hermeneutics is not an Eastern term, the thesis explores what kind of hermeneutic method comes close to the interpretation of the eminent texts of India.

1.8. Statement of the Problem in Light of the Thesis Objective

The challenge is to understand the fundamental non-conceptual, nondual, and paradoxical nature of Consciousness, both in the Eastern and Western traditions in particular. Unconditional or pure Consciousness cannot be understood through a method, yet without a method, it will continue to remain obscure. Our purpose is not to solve or remove this paradox, but rather the thesis objective is to inform the usage of research methodology/methods that attempted to interpret the more profound understanding of the nature of such transcendental realm of Consciousness. It is undeniable that both Vedanta and Buddhism center round authoritative Texts that needs to be interpreted and reinterpreted time and again. Hermeneutics, as a philosophical discipline of rational interpretation of a traditional canon of sacred scriptures, remains authoritative for a religious community, and it provides a suitable platform for interpreting the meaningful text. Although hermeneutic is usually considered peculiar to the west when people wrongly define eastern thought as mystical and non-rational. Now, this misconception is removed as there are hermeneutical interpretations of Buddhism and Vedanta in many ways.

Hermeneutical understanding differs from general understanding. According to Crotty, ‘the purposes of hermeneutics are pragmatic understanding’ (Crotty, 1998). It appears that human self-understanding is always hermeneutical. There are various forms of hermeneutics, as formulated by Gadamer to Paul Ricoeur. What is common to these different orientations is certain dissatisfaction with modern Western metaphysics, especially its pronounced egocentrism (stylized in Descartes’ *ego cogito*) and its corollary of Eurocentrism. This similar concern is also shared by pragmatism and postmodern “deconstruction.” We have seen that philosophy either in

the east or in the west defines Consciousness not only as a phenomenon but also as a noumenon, the fundamental reality that it is difficult to define using empirical terms.

Historically, hermeneutics has been a means of interpreting theories and philosophies (Crotty, 1998). Moreover, most forms of hermeneutics such as Biblical hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998), hermeneutics in law (Mueller-Vollmer, 2002), philosophical hermeneutics (Palmer, 1969), historical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1996), are underpinned by the dualistic philosophies and world views. Hence, for our particular objective of understanding the meaning of Consciousness in the traditional text, we found phenomenological hermeneutics of Heidegger and also of Gadamer is more suitable for studying eastern philosophies and practices. Accordingly, the statement of the research problem is a hermeneutical understanding of the transcendental dimension of Consciousness from an intercultural perspective.

In this present study, selected Eastern philosophies are also discussed in terms of their capacity to inform hermeneutic research that unearths layers of interpretations of texts and subtexts of some apparently shared dimensions of meaning. This pattern of understanding in terms of hermeneutical disclosure of meaning is also evident in the Neo Vedantic interpretations of the Vedantic texts that are adequately discussed in the subsequent chapter. The method also describes the development by which the hermeneutic interpretation evolved and fused to illuminate a deeper understanding of the nature of Consciousness.

The hermeneutical understanding also leads us to a meaningful dialogue between Sankara and Buddhism in the East and Heidegger in the West. Although there are vast areas of disagreement between Sankara and Heidegger, it is surprising to note that they share some basic thoughts. Heidegger has made his position clear that as a philosopher, he is not concerned with religious problems, while Sankara is typical of many Indian thinkers; hence he does not separate in his mind, religious, and strictly philosophical speculations. Speaking in a religious context, Sankara calls Brahman the "Lord of the Universe" and states that "knowing" Brahman leads to the bliss and moksha. In an ontological perspective, on the other hand, Brahman stands for true Reality (Being). Brahman, as "true Being," makes the truth of the "world" possible, but once the whole truth (Brahman) is known as the "world," it is extinguished. Like the dream world which contains its truth until we awake from the dream, the truth of the world, Sankara argues, lasts

until man realizes in his heart the true Self (Atman), which is identical with the one Reality, Brahman.

Like Buddha's world as a place of sorrow, Sankara's concept of the world as an illusion has nothing to do with the sense of "world" in Heidegger's philosophy.

However, as the thesis title suggests, the present work attempts drawing a picture of hermeneutical discourse on Consciousness and Being. The chapters begin by describing philosophical hermeneutics and providing a rationale for its use in exploring an in-depth study of Consciousness in general in the context of Vedanta and Buddhism in particular.

1.9. Research Questions

Accordingly, the literature gaps and the statements of the problem keep room for raising a few research questions that are now sought to be incorporated in the present work.

1. What is meant by hermeneutics as a methodology and also as a kind of philosophy in general?
2. In what manner hermeneutics remains an equally powerful methodology in the context of certain philosophical traditions in the East? Can there be a distinctively Asian or an Indian philosophy as different from the Occident or Western?
3. Can there be a hermeneutic receptivity of Advaitic position on Consciousness and Being from some Neo-Vedantic variations of the post-Sankara phase of revisiting Advaita Vedanta also with a modernist framework than a pre-modernist one?
4. How is Consciousness revealed in Buddhism (particularly in Mādhyamika/ Yogā-cara Buddhism) that leads to the idea of Consciousness as nothingness? In that context, what kind of dialogue could be considered in which a creative dialogue could take place between Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta of Sankara?
5. How does Heidegger provide a hermeneutical phenomenological methodology for a comparative philosophy between East and West? Can there be a distinctively Heideggerian

approach to Asian philosophical traditions with particular reference to the Advaita Vedanta of Samkara?

6. What kind of dialogue is expected to take place between Heidegger and Buddhism or with Advaita Vedanta of Sankara? Finally, can there be a hermeneutical phenomenological summing up of these findings with reference to some Asian commonalities across differences that also pave the way for a creative and a dialogical discourse across cultures, East or West, Asian or European?

1.10. Methodology

The proposed work is about the hermeneutic study of the intercultural discourse of philosophy; therefore, the thesis uses the method of hermeneutic phenomenology, as this method of hermeneutic is regarded as the fundamental method for transcendental analysis. Furthermore, the in-depth study of the present work also builds-up based on a thorough examination of the primary as well as secondary sources of related areas. The primary sources are the original books and writings of the concerned philosophers, and the secondary sources are research and journal articles and other related study material relevant to the study area. No other data collection or sampling comes within the scope of the study.

1.11. The Layout of the Chapters

Chapter –I: Introduction

The first chapter begins with a general discussion of hermeneutics as a kind of philosophy and a methodology for understanding the hidden and unexplored meaning of Consciousness. It discusses how the hermeneutical movement developed from theology to philosophy and how it also applicable to Indian philosophy as well. In Indian philosophy, from the Upanishad to Brahmasutra, there is one kind of hermeneutics, and later within Vedanta, there will be further hermeneutical variations.

Chapter – II: Tracing the History of Consciousness in the Schools of Vedanta: A Hermeneutical Interpretation

After the general introduction and literature review made in the first chapter, in the second chapter, we are attempting to understand the hermeneutical interpretation of Consciousness in Indian philosophy, its history, and its development from pre-Vedic and Vedic to the contemporary period. There also exist very different concepts of Consciousness; however, here, the study primarily concentrates on how the concepts of Consciousness developed in the schools of Vedanta and how it keeps room for hermeneutical disclosure of layers of meaning behind the smooth visible surface.

Chapter –III: Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism: Hermeneutical Discourse across Traditions

Occasionally it is said that Sankara borrowed some ideas from Buddhism and later presented that in his own way. However, Sankara's interpretation was charged later, by other Vedantins, for drastically leaning toward the 'No-Self' doctrines, propounded by some schools of Buddhism. For his fellow Vedantins, Sankara acted as a 'Buddhist in disguise.' So in this chapter, our primary focus will be on the possible hermeneutical discourse across Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta. We are attempting to understand the hermeneutical development of the Buddhist concept of Consciousness, especially of Mādhyamika and Yogācāra school of Buddhism, and how it very nearly goes with the Sankara's concept of Consciousness.

Chapter- IV: Hermeneutical Receptivity of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara and its Neo-Vedantic Reconstructions

The most distinctive feature of Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara is that it not only introduces its non-dualist position, but it also has a unique way of interpreting the Upanishads. The primary purpose of Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara is its devotion to using specific hermeneutical approaches to disclose the meaning of the scriptures. So, this chapter is devoted to a new way of addressing the study of Advaita Vedanta, with a focus on post-Sankara Vedanta. Moreover, within the broad level of Advaita Vedanta, how it will be reinterpreted under the heading of Neo-Vedanta is another point of concern. It also discusses how the Neo-Vedantin philosopher tries to give a homogeneous interpretation of both Advaita

Vedanta and Buddhism, taking away their real differences and considering Buddhism too as a sub-sect of Vedanta.

Chapter- V: Heidegger, Buddhism, and Vedanta: Hermeneutical Dimension in East-West Dialogue

One of the prime objects of this chapter is to relate Heidegger's philosophy to some significant aspects of the philosophical traditions in the East. The primary reason is that, among the contemporary philosophers, Heidegger is one of the most discussed philosophers in Asian culture, and also, his thinking is somewhat similar to the Asian philosophical thinking. Similar to Vedanta and Buddhism, in Heidegger's philosophy, also we can find a sudden experience that opens the door to a transcendental reality or to the Being of beings. That keeps room for a comparative study of what is meant by this transcendental experience in East and the West, especially in Heidegger and the Asian thought or within Asian thought itself, for example, between Vedanta or some Asian variations of Buddhism. At this juncture, the thesis will make brief references to specific points of commonalities as well as difference between, Heidegger and his hermeneutical interpretation of Being and the Being of other cultures such as China, Japan, and India. The chapter further incorporates an attempt to draw some commonalities between Heidegger, Buddhism, and Advaita Vedanta.

Chapter –VI: Conclusion

This chapter mainly takes into account the summary of the primary findings of the previous chapters, including a critical evaluation of the assigned subjects with some future possibilities.

Chapter II

Tracing the History of Consciousness in the Schools of Vedanta: A Hermeneutical Interpretation

“The present is only ever understandable through the past, with which it forms a living continuity; and the past is always grasped from our own partial viewpoint within the present. The event of understanding comes about when our own ‘horizon’ of historical meanings and assumptions ‘fuses’ with the ‘horizon’ within which the work itself is placed” _____ (Gadamer, 1989)

2.1. Introduction

We know that philosophy differs from religion, first and foremost, in its cognitive function. Though philosophy is also linked with ideology, in this particular work, we are focusing primarily on Consciousness study as one of the ideologies, which may be studied from different positions. Accordingly, the schools of Vedanta, under one common heading of the Vedantic philosophy of Consciousness, will take flexible positions in light of the basic divisions. This chapter primarily attempts to explore if, in its earlier history, was there scope for various positions for various philosophers, or was there a parallel reformist position along with one conservative interpreted position? Bearing that in mind, the hermeneutical disclosure of layers of Consciousness in Vedanta seeks to examine different positions concerning similar debates and discussions.

Vedanta philosophy developed based on the *Prasthānatraya*, which includes Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Brahma-Sutras. Since Vedanta means the end of the Veda, this chapter seeks to explore the Vedantic tradition that kept room for hermeneutical layers of interpretation of the text. This chapter remains a gradual search for hermeneutical understanding of consciousness that begins right from Vedic toward Upanisadic and Brahmasutra. Starting from the Vedas, we can trace the hermeneutic development during different periods, which can be classified as, Vedic Period, Epic / Purana Period, Sutra period. However, one primary objective of the research is to be familiar with the hermeneutical growth in the Indian tradition itself. So the present work begins introducing and exploring various philosophical schools of

Indian thought, right from the Vedic era till the Sutra period of Badarayana's Brahma Sutra and some of its prime schools in the hermeneutical interpretation of Texts and traditions. The Vedic-Upanishadic man, embedded in the macrocosmic-microcosmic world around him, can very well be considered as an anticipation of the 'existential-hermeneutical' trend of viewing man in his complexity⁴.

2.2. Tracing the Roots of Consciousness

The Indian civilization is the outcome of the epoch of victory, shaped by hundreds of generations of different cultures and has gradually developed the sophisticated, multistranded culture into a synthetic as well as multiculturally comprises common culture. Every generation bestowed high praise on this tradition and created a bridge in this un-homogenized diversity. The main strength of this tradition is that it has no single owner. There are various communities, and all communities contributed to this culture, which provides an ideal framework, and all people blissfully accept it.

The fundamental object that distinguishes the Indian Philosophical system is their beliefs on the *Mahāvākyas* like *Sarvam Khalu Idam Brahman* that is "all of this is Brahman", or "The Brahman is all-pervading," *Tat Tvam Asi* and the rest. The Advaita of Sankara emphasizes the transcendental non-dual nature of Reality, and stated that the phenomenal world of plurality and diversity is not ultimately real; it is only appearance. Understanding the essence of this, Swami Vivekananda used the term Hinduism in a very broad sense, "Hinduism as a religion is neither rituals nor a dogma. It is only realization" (Vivekananda 1915).

In order to proceed hermeneutically, we must admit the fact that we may begin with some deep-rooted belief systems, hidden motives, or already constructed paradigm which may color our philosophical lenses. These aspects are not very easily recognizable. They work so secretly and unconsciously that we only become aware of them after a thorough self-analysis. These might involve value systems, religious beliefs, aspects of food, and dress. The most

⁴ Cf. K. Roy, "Hermeneutics and Indian Philosophy", in D. P. Chattopadhyaya & L. Embree & J. Mohanty (Ed.), *Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy* (Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi and Center of Advanced Research in Phenomenology: Boca Raton, 1992), pp. 290-301.

important fact is that people remain mostly ignorant about these influences. However, they remain stereotypes; these are important determinants of our cultural expressions and behavior.

On the other hand, the reformation of Hinduism began in the nineteenth century that makes an attempt at providing a new identity, named later as global Hinduism. In the revolution, from traditional to modernity, there is and always has been anxiety between continuity and change. In this sense, cultural identities have always been dynamic, uncertain, and indefinable. So at any given historical moment, it is not very easy to define precisely something that can never wholly be defined, namely, to define a particular culture entirely and accurately. However, time and situation wise expression of civilization, culture, philosophies, and ideas are varied. We see phase-wise development of Indian philosophical thought in many ways. The phase-wise development helps us to see how a gradual shift is finally made towards consciousness study and the inner dimension of reflection and meditation. The following is an attempt at tracing this journey towards consciousness right from the Vedic periods, the periods of the Smiriti, and then to Upanishads and the Sutra periods.

2.3. An Exploration in the Vedas: A Brief note

The Vedas are the root of integral enlightenment. They are not only identified as scriptures but also as the source of Indian culture and human civilization. However, if we look into the Vedas, we feel a change in the ambiance when we pass from the Rig-Veda to the Yajur and the Sama Vedas and the Brahmanas. The coldness and artificiality of the latter replaces to the freshness and simplicity of the former. As Radhakrishnan said, “The change that occurred because of the spirit of religion is in the background. During its forms, it assumes great importance. Instead of the oral tradition, the need for prayer and books is felt⁵.” Moreover, in this way, the rituals or religious ceremonies are developed. According to Radhakrishnan:

The hymns are taken out of the Rig-Veda and prepared to suit sacrificial necessities. The priest becomes the lord. The Yajur-Veda gives the special formulas to be uttered when the altar is to be erected, and the Saman describes the songs to be chanted at the sacrifice. These Vedas may be

⁵ S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, George Allen & Unwin, 1929, pp-123

discussed along with the Brahmanas since they all describe the sacrificial religious ceremony. (Radhakrishnan, 1929)

In the time of the Yajurveda, the importance and respect for priests are turned out to be the most important part of human life. People believed that priests are blessed with divine and magical power, and they are the significant mediator between gods and human beings. As a result, every religious ceremony or ritual required the intervention of a priest. “A crowd of priests conducts a vast and complicated system of external ceremonies to which symbolical significance is attached” (Radhakrishnan, 1923). ‘Prayer,’ which is performed and also is an indication of faith in the almighty or to the supreme power now comes to mean the muttering of mantras *or* the utterance of sacred formulas. The mantras take the place of the purely formal religion of the Brahmanas and diminish the significance of the poetic fire and the heartiness of the Vedic hymns.⁶

As a result, the real spirits of religion could not be carried out thoroughly in this kind of suppressive atmosphere of rituals. The lack of the Consciousness of guilt, the admiration of the ideal, comes into view all over the place. Every prayer is attached to a particular ritual and aims at securing some material advantage. The formulas of the Yajur-Veda are full of monotonous repetitions of unimportant requests for the goods of life⁷.

The second part of the Vedas is called as the Brahmanas, which are the ritual textbooks projected to guide the priests through the complicated details of sacrificial rites. The chief of them is the Aitareya and the Satapatha. Later it gets much interpretation, and as a result, dissimilarities of detail in interpretation led to the growth of several schools of the Brahmanas. So this is undoubtedly true that this is the period that brings vital changes in the religious evolution, which has permanently affected its future history. This is the age when ashrama

⁶S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy Vol-I, George Allen & Unwin, 1929. Radhakrishnana argues that, in the period of Brahman the soundness of the Vedic hymns are changes into muttering of mantras or the utterance of sacred formulas. Because the priest thought that loud petitions were necessary to rouse God to action.

⁷ Ibid., pp123-124

dharma was introduced or formulated. In the Vedic period, four stages are recognized in the life of human being:

- (1) The Brahmachari or student life,
- (2) The Grahastha or the householder,
- (3) The Vanaprastha or the solitary life,
- (4) The Sannyasin or the ascetic life.

It is a belief that it is the Āshrama dharma, which led to the growth of the caste system in the period of Brahmana. “The tradition of caste is not the invention of an unprincipled or unethical priesthood, but a natural evolution conditioned by the times. It was merged in the period of the Brahmanas. The Purusa Sukta, although a part of the R̥g-Veda, really belongs to the age of the Brahmanas. It is clear that there were the inter-marriages between the Aryans and the Dasyus” (Radhakrishnan, 1923). Although caste discrimination has emerged all over India, initially, castes performed different functions in different parts of the country. Later the caste-based differentiation defined the social status of people. This complicated caste system of India influenced the life of people to a great extent. However, the hermeneutical interest here is the need for opening up of the tradition. Because, when a mixture of various cultural and religious belief systems took place, that lead to initial confrontation and then gradual accommodation and the creative dialogue across such groups leading to a harmonious Aryan, a non-Aryan synthesis that enriched the tradition.

2.4. Post-Vedic Reflection: Hermeneutical Reception and Confrontation

In the post-Vedic period, it appears that there was a necessity of a change or a revolutionary kind of paradigm shift as the traditional interpretations also pay attention to other views. These revolutionary movements shake the eastern part of the country. At the same time, unconsciously and unintentionally, a significant change was taking place in the west. Thus the Vedic periods now open up to accommodate other philosophical positions as well. “The Aryans, when came to India, tried to Aryanise the people, their main intention was to expand and restore their religion. However, after the revolution, different new communities formed. The new

communities started to perform certain strange and unfamiliar beliefs, which mostly took the Aryan fold. Thus the old Vedic culture also had to transform in support of the new culture. The Vedic culture had to agree to the new groups, which were destroying the country” (Radhakrishnan, 1929). In this transformation, the Brahmin tried to interpret or represent the myth and symbol, the tale, and unauthenticated traditional stories to please the new tribes. To keep the Vedic culture alive, the Brahmins accepted this transformation and also acknowledged the worship of the tribal gods, and attempted to reconcile them all with Vedic culture. Some of the later Upanishads describe the efforts to build a Vedic religion on non-Aryan symbolism. “The Pasupata, the Bhagavata, and the Tantrik developments belong to this period of social turmoil through which the aryanisation of vast multitudes in pre-Buddhist India proceeded. They were so molded and developed under the Aryan influence that it is today difficult to maintain that they had not their origin in the early Upanishads and the Vedas. The epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata speak to us of the growth of the Vedic religion during the period of the Aryan expansion in India” (Radhakrishnan, 1929). During that period, we find the Smṛti, the epics, and their folk-based popular dimension of narration, storytelling, and the moral lessons that one may learn from the tragic sense of life - the fight between virtue and vice, good and evil, and the lessons learned from them.

The Mahabharata developed as a national epic, with stories collected from different parts of the country and formed into a single unit. It includes all from Bengal, South India, Punjab, or the Deccan. The Mahabharata intended to satisfy the popular mind, and it could do so only by acquiring the famous stories. It preserves all the ancient beliefs and traditions of the civilization, in a collected form. It is very comprehensive in its scope. There is a famous saying, which is not in the Mahabharata is not to be found in the land of the Bharatas. By uniting all the social and the religious ideas of the different peoples of different places assembled on the soil of India, it aimed to fascinate the minds of people the fundamental unity of the Bharatavarsa. Sister Nivedita writes: "The foreign reader, taking it up as sympathetic reader only and not as a scholar, is at once struck by two features: in the first place, its unity in complexity; and in the second, its constant effort to impress on its hearers the idea of a single centralized India, with a heroic tradition of her own as formative and uniting impulse" (Nivedita, 1915).

However, the existing Mahabharata is an enlarged edition of an earlier tradition called the Bharata. According to the beginning chapter of the Mahabharata, the Bharata Samhita, as initially composed by Vyasa, contained 24,000 verses, although Vyasa expanded it into a work of 6,000,000 verses, of which only 100,000 now exists (Radhakrishnan, 1929). However, this Bharata developed based on folk songs and stories, and established traditions of the events of the war. Poetry and songs are recording the brave and persistent deeds of great heroes, singing the devotions of the great heroes, the beauty of queens, the glory of the court that could have been composed only when the echoes of the war were in men's ears. These are not a kind of fixed songs, since they were orally transmitted, and should have to go through modification in each period. Brahmanism had to figure out with these traditions, thoughts, and purposes, some of which were not their own usual ones. The Bharata first attempted making an interchange between the culture of the Aryans and the mass of fact and fiction, history, and mythology which it encountered. Soon new material accumulated, and the task of assimilation became practically impossible. Nevertheless, it was an attempt, and the Mahabharata is the result. It bears on its face the unsatisfactory combination between the folksongs and the superstition of the new communities and the religious spirit of the Aryans⁸. As a result of this flexibility, the tradition showed and also imbibed more tolerance for women and the voice as in the Mahabharata, very strong women characters emerge.

Women in those days have great freedom and also occupied a privileged position in society. Caste was not rigorous. There was no element of religious discrimination; no philosophy of the Atman or theory of the avatara appears as a historical character. What was originally a heroic poem become a Brahmanical work, and transformed into a theistic treatise in which Siva is eminent to the rank of the Supreme. The Bhagavad-Gita, perhaps, belongs to this stage, though, as a rule, the philosophical portions of the Mahabharata should be assigned to the last stage⁹. When Brahmanism stopped to be the religion of a few, by assimilating the indigenous beliefs and religious practices of its surroundings, a philosophic interpretation of the ancient wisdom became necessary. Though there is no genuine principle of reconciliation, many efforts

⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, George Allen & Unwin, 1929, pp-479-480.

⁹ S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, George Allen & Unwin, 1929, pp. 480-481.

were made to combine the absolutism of the Upanishads and the theistic beliefs of the people in a synthetic whole¹⁰.

Thus through the Bhagavad Gita with right thoughtful insight and synthetic power, it begins a new philosophical and religious fusion, which in a later day becomes the background of the theistic systems. The Mahabharata has become a mixed kind of encyclopedia of history and mythology, politics, law, theology, and philosophy¹¹.

Ramayana is also an epic work. For purposes of philosophy and religion, the Ramayana is not as essential as the Mahabharata, though it reflects more truly the customs and beliefs of the times. It is sometimes looked upon as a protest against Buddhist monasticism since it glorifies the domestic virtues and makes out that there is no need to give up home life for the sake of freedom. (Radhakrishnan, 1923)

On the whole, we find here layers of interpretation in the texts until it reaches the Upanishadic and the Sutra period. This needed scope for meditative calmness of the stage that keeps room for deep reflection and insight, which we see in the Āraṇyaka period. That will further lead to Upanishadic emphasis on deep reflection on the true nature of consciousness in various phases. In the following, the study covers some outlines from the Āraṇyaka to the Upanishadic culmination, in the Sutra, and in Vedanta.

2.4.1. Āraṇyaka Period

After the Brahmanas, the next portion of the Vedas is the Āraṇyakas or forest treatises. Āraṇyaka part is composed of spiritual thinking and knowledge about the reality of the universe. It is said that this part of the Vedas shaped for the older men. Because after their retirement into the forest, it became very difficult for them to perform the complicated and sophisticated rituals of sacrifices, which required a massive amount of decoration and exaggeration, which was not possible to get in the forests. In this process, certain new exercises were introduced that started to get importance, and these exercises gradually began to replace the rituals of sacrifices that were prevalent as superior. Instead of rituals and sacrifices, these people started to discuss the nature

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

of reality or the nature of truth. They started to realize themselves and established that self-knowledge and philosophical meditation should be the highest goal of life. And thus, philosophical thought and philosophical discussion gradually developed and replaced the ritualistic ideas. Above the performances of the most complicated rituals of sacrifice, this is certainly a significant development in a new form. For instance, in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad, there is an explicit instruction for replacing the actual performances of horse sacrifices. There are different directions for meditation. Like, 'in the process of meditation, meditating the morning or the sunrise as the head of the horse, the sun as the eye of the horse, the air as its life, and so on' (Krishnananda, The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1977). So this is the period, people tried to withdraw themselves from the age-old restriction of certain rituals. "It was thus that the Āraṇyakas could pave the way for the Upanishads, revitalize the germs of philosophic believe in the Vedas, and develop them in a way which made the Upanishads the root of all philosophy that originated in the world of Hindu thought" (Dasgupta, 1922). Thus, we have seen how a gradual transformation toward the inner realm of consciousness has happened. In this journey from Vedic toward the Vedantic realm of philosophical discussions through in-between stages of Aranyakas –Upanishads, after the Brahmanical phases, and ritualistic details, noted down in Brahmana periods.

2.4.2. Upanishadic Period

However, it is challenging to understand the teaching of the Upanishads. Many scholars of the Upanishads interpreted the Upanishads in their own ways, which are quite different from one another, and we can read only the hermeneutic editions of the Upanishads. However, through the knowledge of the Upanishads, one can able to explore the depths of the inner world. This enables us to identify the internal dimensions of Consciousness in "self-centric" subjectivity that differs from the cosmogony of the Vedas. In the external focus of the Vedas, the vast order and movement of nature engage its attention. The gods represented cosmic forces. In the Upanishads, we return to explore spiritual insight. "The self-existent entered the openings of the senses so that they turn outwards; therefore, the man looks outward, not inward into himself; some wise man, however, with his eyes closed and wishing for immortality, saw the self behind. From the outward physical fact, attention shifts to the inner immortal self-situated at the back of

the mind, as it were. We need to look to the sky for the bright light; the glorious fire is within the soul” (Radhakrishnan, 1929).

2.4.2.1. The Philosophical turn to the Inner-Self Quest and the Context of Consciousness Study

Now, what is this inner self, or what is this Consciousness? Consciousness is the fundamental concept of the Upanishads. According to the Upanishads, the foundational reality of the individual self is atman and the Brahman. The first principle is discovered within the atman, which is the root of all existence. Upanishads use various concepts to characterize the atman or Consciousness, such as -Seer (drashta or Vijñāna), Self-light, or self-shining (Ātma-Jyoti), Inner-controller (antaryāmi), Self-luminous (svayamjyoti). However, “Consciousness, as a subject of study, has had a roller-coaster history. There is no other phenomenon in the history of philosophy or science for which the pendulum of recognition has swung to such extremes as it has for consciousness.” (Gupta, 2003)

The discussions of Consciousness in the Upanishads arise, in the context of explaining the real nature of the atman or the self. Although the theme of Consciousness has been central to the Indian philosophical tradition since the time of Upanishads, it became a focal point of discussion, especially in the Vedantic tradition. Sankara, in his commentaries, states that “the true self is not the body which is exposed to all suffering and imperfections, which is a material phenomenon. The body is only an instrument used by Consciousness, while Consciousness is not the product of the body” (Gupta, 2003). Sankara considered this ‘Consciousness as Brahman.’ This Consciousness is transcendental, which is different from empirical Consciousness or objective Consciousness. “Empirical consciousness is the consciousness of something, always relates to something objective, and this is limited. On the other hand, transcendental Consciousness regards consciousness as without circumstances. It does not depend on any condition and an object. It is not at all concerned with the probability of the appearance of anything” (Gupta, 2003). The bodiless self is untouched by all the likes and dislikes. The bodiless self is unchangeable, which is the essence of the empirical self, the ‘I’ Consciousness, it is immortal. It is the highest light, the light of light.

In the Katha Upanishad¹², there is a well-known story of a Chariot which is compared to the human life and represents the complexity and inner hierarchy of human nature. The true self (ātman) is compared to the owner of a chariot (rathin), the body is the chariot (Ratha), intellect (buddhi) is the driver (sarathi), the horses are said to be the senses (indriya), mind or the inner sense (manas) is the reins (pragraha) by which the intellect controls the senses.

The study of Consciousness is also the subject matter of the Mandukya Upanishad. This Upanishad considered that the study of Consciousness is the same as the study of the Absolute or Brahman because Brahman is Consciousness. Prājñānam Brahma: Brahman is prājñāna or Consciousness¹³. The Mandukya Upanishad states that the self is four-footed, that is there are four states of Consciousness-

- 1) Visva- waking Consciousness
- 2) Taijasa- dreaming Consciousness
- 3) Prajna- dreamless sleep
- 4) Turiya

The first state of Consciousness is waking Consciousness. Waking Consciousness is the Consciousness of the external world or the objective world. It is the Consciousness of an object. Therefore, it is not simply an investigation of the self; it is also a combination of the subjective world and the objective world.

The second state of Consciousness is dreaming Consciousness. This Consciousness is different from waking Consciousness. Dream Consciousness is regarded as psychological rather than physical since, in the dream state, we can come only in contact with the imaginary object. The feeling of joy, happiness, and pain all are imaginary and the creation of our mind. Mandukya Upanishad stated that the one who can make this kind of comparison is not restricted to each of

¹² Swami Krishnananda, Commentary on the Katha Upanishad, The Divine Life Society Sivananda Ashram, 2011.

¹³ Swami Krishnananda, The Mandukya Upanishad: An Exposition, The Divine Life Society, 1997.

the states. “We seem to be capable of being a witness of both the states. We are primary, a third element altogether, something independent of waking and dream” (Krishnananda, 1997).

The third state of Consciousness is the state of deep sleep. This state is quite mysterious than the others. In this state of Consciousness, all experiences, the *samskāras*, *vāsanās*, are coming into one particular form, which is called *ekībhūtaḥ*. It becomes a mass of Consciousness, which is not projected outside; - *prājñāna-ghanah*. “There is no modification of the mind, and so there is no external Consciousness. We are not aware of the external world in the state of sleep because of the absence of *vṛttis*, or psychoses, of the mind” (Krishnananda, 1997).

The last state of Consciousness is *turiya*. *Turiya* is the transcendental state in which all *kleshās* (sorrow) end, all bondages of *Purusha* fall apart, *avidyā* (ignorance) disappears, and only happiness prevails. With the disappearance of desires (for possession), anxiety vanishes, and the mind becomes carefree. He is (happy and contented as) a king emperor, who does not need anything. In the *Mandukya Upanishad*, Sankara states ‘that *Turiya* is nothing but pure Consciousness. *Turiya* Consciousness is, as the sun, shines as ever luminous. It is the seer of everything. This is not an object and is beyond space and time, and thus, it is unthinkable’¹⁴. *Turiya* is described as a state of consciousness that transcends the subject-object distinction. These are the four basic levels of reality reflected in both the macrocosm and microcosm. The following figure is an illustration of four basic levels of reality:

¹⁴ Swami Krishnananda, *The Mandukya Upanishad: An Exposition*, The Divine Life Society, 1997.

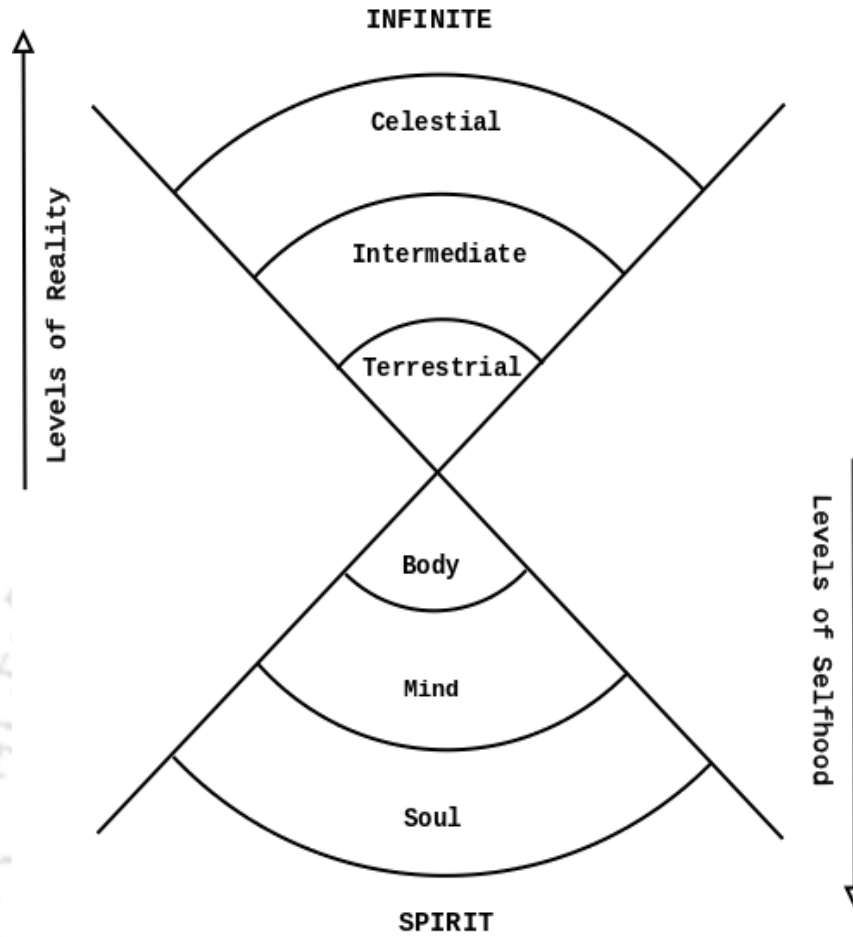


Figure 2.1: The picture indicates that there are four basic levels of reality reflected in both the macrocosm and microcosm. This also supports the individual sense of self.

The Kena Upanishad says, “It is not known to those who know it; it is known to those who do not know it” (Aurobindo, 2001). If someone claims of knowing it, he does not know it, and if someone knows it, he does not think about it. Knowledge is not expression but Being. It is not becoming or a process. According to *Mandukya Upanishad*:

It is called *sattā-sāmānya*, in the language of the Yoga Vāsiṣṭha, the General Existence of all things, as distinguished from the particular existences of bodies, minds, and individuals. It is the Transcendent Being, which cannot be called either as this or that. It is neither *sat* (existence) nor *asat* (non-existence) in the ordinary sense of the term. It is not *sat* or existence in the sense of some object being there. It is not *asat* or non-

existence, also. We say that something is because we see it; we can think of it; we can hear it; we can catch it with our hands. And Reality is not such a type of existence. However, we cannot say that it is non-existence. It is beyond sat (existence) and asat (non-existence). (Krishnananda, 1997)

From this, we can say that understanding and experience can exist as mere Consciousness, even without the senses and the mind, and it is different from this objective part of the world. The remaining non-objective part, which continues to exist after cutting off all that, is not Consciousness. The material body, the senses are not Consciousness. After keeping apart all these, there finally remains something: “This, verily, is that. This is another method of *neti-neti*’: ‘I see something; I am not that something, because the Seer cannot be seen.’ Similarly, ‘I think something and I cannot be that which is thought, because the thinker cannot be thought.’ Again, ‘I understand something, and I cannot be that which I understand, because the understander cannot be the same as the understood” (Krishnananda, 2011, p. 99). This whole world is a misapprehension of *Maya*. The scriptures find this analysis due to this significant truth. We have identified Consciousness with objects, and whatever value or meaning we perceive in things is the Atman. However, after isolating the Atman from this world, the world does not exist. When the Atman is extended, He is seen as this world by the senses. When He is withdrawn, the world does not exist. Therefore, it is *Maya*¹⁵. Here the hermeneutical approach to a realm of transcendental consciousness needs more introspective and meditative kind of deeper subjective layer to be unveiled. It is also a process to make a shift from the seen, the *Dṛśya* to the seer, the *drastā*.

Just as the clay exists in the form of a pot and occupied space and time, which has shaped and which we can see but we cannot directly say ‘the pot is clay, or the pot is not the clay.’ So the existence of clay in the form of a pot is a kind of mystery, which name as *Maya*. Similarly, the Ātman or Consciousness is also independent of space and time. The only existing thing is our bodies. We can realize this Consciousness through our bodies. Through this Consciousness, we can experience the other three states which are beyond them.

¹⁵ Swami Krishnananda, Commentary on the Katha Upanishad, The Divine Life Society Sivananda Ashram, 2011.

When we are in a dream, we the same person become the subject as well as the object. In this state, we able to experiences the dream content. At the same time, we become the knower and the doer. Likewise, *Ishvara* is present objectively in the cosmos, and subjectively in human beings. So, there need not be any worry concerning the process of come close to the Universal Being who is far. “He who was born of old from austerity, from the waters—He is in your own heart, as the bottom of your being. By diving deep within, you can operate the whole universe. This inaccessible Reality is the most secret Being in your own being” (Krishnananda, 2011).

Although the Upanishads use different concepts to characterize the Ātman or Consciousness, they explain the same point in different ways; that which lies beyond the plurality of names and forms, that is, the self, is not accessible through the empirical modes of knowing, it is different from objects known.

2.5. Sutra Period and its Interpretations

After that, the sutra period started. The word sutra literally means thread, yarn, or sting, which runs through and holds together different ideas and links up diverse interpretations within one tradition. The sutras are not only connected the basic teachings or central principles but also generates a large number of interpretative commentaries which continue from the past to present and possibly shall continue from present to future. However, the unique compilations of the Sutras present the framework of a system of thought, but Sutras are too concise to be fully understood without explanations. Then to explain the Sutras, people feel the necessity of some scholars or some intellectual persons who can make the sutras comprehensible and thus starts the Scholastic period.

2.6. Scholastic Period and the Development of Vedanta Philosophy

The scholars of that time epitomized the intellectual life of the second century A.D. They aimed to interpret the sutras, which are very concise to understand in a way that could be easily understood by others. The era of Scholastic Period exits in the second century A.D, although we cannot draw a fixed and definite line between this and the previous one. However, this is the period when the great names of Kumarila, Sankara, Sridhara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vacaspati Mishra, Udayana, Bhaskara, Jayanta, belong. As soon as great scholars start to

interpret the sutras, the literature almost immediately becomes exceptionally critical. These scholastic people more often debate with each other; at times, they almost appeared like a kind of noisy fighters, indulging in over-subtle theories, argued continuously over the nature of logical universals. Rather than deep insight, they mostly involved in an excessively logical argument¹⁶. However, scholars like Sankara and Ramanuja represent the old doctrine in a very new way, which is more transparent and influential. Their interpretation is just as precious as spiritual innovation.

Thus in the scholastic period, based on their perspective and their interpretation, the ancient Indian philosophy underwent a broad division. However, in the time, Sankara's different and opposite beliefs and opinions are assembled in one whole. Despite differences, it has developed through the polytheism of the Vedas, the monism of the Upanishads, the dualism of the Sāṃkhya, the deism of the Yoga, the monotheism of the Bhagavatas, the Pasupatas and the Saktas. But they all are uniting with some common themes. As according to Radhakrishnan,

A familiar way in which the six orthodox systems are reconciled is to say that just as a mother in pointing out the moon to the baby speaks of it as the shining circle at the top of the tree, which is quite intelligible to the child, without mentioning the immense distance separating the earth from the moon which would have bewildered it, even so, are different views given to suit the varying weakness of human understanding. The Prabodhacandrodaya, a philosophic drama, states that the six systems of Hindu philosophy are not mutually exclusive, but establish from various points of view the glory of the same uncreated God. They together form the living focus of the scattered rays that the many-faceted humanity reflects from the splendid sun. (Radhakrishnan, 1929)

So it is a systematic and well-defined stage of development. As T.R.V. Murti says, "A seer or a great man of insight gives utterance to his intimate vision of reality, this is the Mula mantra, the original inspiration, which initiates a new path and is the basis of a new philosophy. The second stage consists of systematizing, defining, and the suggestions in the aphoristic form:

¹⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, George Allen & Unwin, 1929, pp. 59-60.

a philosophical system gets formulated. There is further elaboration, drawing of implications, application to details of experience, and removing of discrepancies. A further stage is attained when the systems indulge in criticism and refutation of other systems to strengthen their own position. Only the third and fourth stages can be called scholastic, and this too is not undesirable or valueless.” (Murti, 1996)

Throughout all these phases, the Vedantic culmination in the Brahmasutra provided a shared platform to look for unity over diversity and differences. Every system of Indian philosophy came to establish absolutism through their constant effort. According to Samkara, the Highest Brahman is pure Consciousness (*cit*) or awareness (*jñāna*), the Witness (*sāksin*), which is not itself an object of thought. Brahman is self-luminous; indeed, it is the sole source of Consciousness. Through its light, everything else shines, that is, is known to awareness. Absolutism also rejects the reality of duality, particularly by negating the appearances. However, with the help of a systematic interpretation, the older Vedanta carried on monism. That did not outright reject the reality of the world. This kind of monism of the Brahmasutras was compatible with difference and change.

2.7. Hermeneutical Discourse in the Early Vedanta Philosophy

The Āstika and the Nāstika schools of Indian Philosophy comprise both Idealism and Materialism. Although philosophers such as Dr. Radhakrishnan, S.N. Dasgupta, M. Hiriyana, S. Chatterjee and D. Dutta, and many others highlight the idealist tradition as the dominant position in Indian philosophical tradition that mostly focuses on consciousness study with the centrality of the question of Ātman Brahman, ‘know thyself’ as the key theme. In this regard, most of these scholars identify Vedanta as the culmination of all other earlier reflections from the Vedas to a later time. While D. M. Datta comments that “the main trends of Indian thought are mostly characteristic of the Vedanta philosophy” (Datta, 1948). Others speak on behalf of Vedantism and its idealist tradition as well. This thesis, however, unveils hermeneutical layers of various interpretations within Vedanta itself. The study mainly focuses on how various layers of interpretation remain decisive for a particular period rather than what the content is in its entirety.

The specific name of the school, in a literal sense, means the end of the Veda, 'Veda-anta.' It is known as Vedanta because its primary source is the last portion of the Vedas that is the Upanishads. The philosophical thoughts of early Vedanta schools are based on the Brahmasutra. The Brahmasutra has become the basis upon which we learn the philosophical thought of early Vedanta school, which we can also call the 'Treatise for investigating Brahman' (Nakamura, 1983). According to Hajime Nakamura, before the composition of the Brahmasutra, almost nothing is known about the Vedanta philosophy. He stated that two writings of Pre Sankara period, which is known to scholars, are *Vākyapadīya* written by Bhartṛhari and the *Māndukya-kārika* written by Gauḍapāda. Nakamura stated that there must have been an enormous number of writings of the pre-Sankara period, but all of them may be scattered or lost and have not come down to us today (Nakamura, 1983). Nakamura also stated that, although Sankara is often considered to be the founder of the Advaita Vedanta school, the comparison between pre-Sankara and Sankara's thought shows that someone before Sankara advocated most of the characteristics of Sankara's philosophy.

However, Advaita Vedanta, associated with the name of the great Sankaracharya, is rightly regarded as logically the most consistent and spiritually the most advanced philosophy of India. He synthesized the Advaitavāda, which had previously existed before him. In this synthesis, he reconstructs and protects the ancient learning. He was the only person, due to whose effort and contributions Advaita Vedanta philosophy is known as the most effective and dominant philosophical tradition in India. Although, all the schools of Vedanta claim to be based on the Upanishads, but the claim is fully justified only in the case of Advaita Vedanta. Though the Upanishads are not logico-philosophical treatises in the strict sense of the term, yet undoubtedly they have been acclaimed as predominantly philosophical, and as such, they do have a central philosophy of their own. Sankara has very clearly and logically proved that this central philosophy is Advaita. The teachers of other schools of Vedanta, mainly theistic, have fathered their particular views on the Upanishads to claim the sanction of the Revealed Text. Despite differences in the meaning of a particular term, all the schools of Vedanta allowed space for positions (*pakṣa*) and counter positions (*pratipakṣa*) in a respectable manner. Nevertheless, there may be dissimilarity between Sankara and the other schools of Vedanta, but it is undeniable that his interpretation appears accurate than the others and is close to the central teaching of the Upanisadic philosophy.

Another most influential philosopher of Vedanta, the great theologian, and hierarch of the Sri Vaishnava community, Ramanuja, composed a commentary, the Sri Bhasya, on the Brahmasutra, and a commentary on the Gita, to refute the monism of Sankara. He also composes a short independent work, the Vedanta Samgraha. In these works, he argues strongly against Sankara's monistic reading of sacred scripture, expressing himself forcefully and asserting that the Advaita position is against reason, against the firm understanding of the meaning of language, and goes against the scriptures. Ramanuja (11th century) fixes his attention on the world, self, and God. For him, all these are real, but the world and the selves depend on God. Ramanuja believes in the continued individual existence of the released selves. While Brahman is eternally free from all imperfections, the matter is unconscious, and the individual selves are subject to ignorance and suffering before release. They (God, selves, and the world) form a unity, as matter and selves have existed only as of the body of Brahman. Brahman is the self and the controlling power of the body, which includes the world and the selves. Apart from Brahman, they are nothing. The individual self and inanimate natures are fundamentally different from God, though they have no existence or purpose to serve apart from him or his service. Ramanuja's theory, therefore, is a non-dualism with a difference, namely, that the one Brahman has two forms: selves and matter. Ramanuja rejects the doctrine of the phenomenality of the world, admits the inalienable individuality of selves, and holds that the Supreme Brahman is personal.

For him, there can be no such thing as undifferentiated *Brahman*. Knowledge is always the determinant. Though Samkara did not mean by theoretical knowledge learning, there was a tendency among his followers to emphasize it. Ramanuja stresses on devotion (*bhakti*). Salvation, according to Ramanuja, is not the disappearance of the self but its release from limiting barriers. The self cannot be dissolved into God. One substance cannot be dissolved into another. However, a man may rise high; but there will always be God superior to him, whom he should reverence, worship, and adore. The released self has a permanent intuition of God. In the state of bondage, its essential nature is unclear because of ignorance and passion, which become apparent in the state of release.

What is of philosophical and hermeneutical interest here is that there was scope for various interpretations even on agreed-upon common features of the Vedanta. For example,

the *Brahmasutra* is also called *Sārirakasutra*. Etymologically the name ‘Sāriraka’ means that which has a body or the self within the body. In the *Brahmasutra*, the word *sāra* means the individual self, which is used to refer to Brahman. However, according to Sankara, the name *sāriraka* is given because it is the objective of the *Brahmasutra*. Ramanuja, another disciple of Vedanta philosophy, did not agree with this and stated that “that which has a body’ means the highest Brahman, and the *Brahmasutra* discusses it, and therefore it is called *Sārirakasutra*” (Nakamura, 1983). In the ‘Vedantic Approaches to God’ Eric Lott wrote that:

It was inevitable that a reaction to Sankara’s radically monistic transcendentalism would come from the theistic side. Ramanuja was the first to produce a notable counter-system, by taking the self’s relational character as the determining feature by which to interpret the Upanishadic self-model. His argument was that just as each finite self is in an inseparable relationship with a particular body, so by analogy the supreme self is inseparably related to the universe of spiritual and material beings. Without contradicting the ancient Vedantic thesis that all beings participate in the one Being, he defined that oneness in terms of its constituent relationships. Hence the name of his system, *Viśiṣṭa-Advaita*, that is, Non-duality distinctions. (Lott, 1980)

Another development in the Vedanta exegetical tradition came in the thirteenth century with the south Indian Vaishnava theologian Madhva, who wrote commentaries on many Upanishads, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Brahmasutra*, and the *Bhagavad Purana*, as well as an independent treatise summarizing the teachings of the *Brahmasutra*, the *Aṅuvyākhyāna*. In these writings, he establishes a new interpretation of Vedanta, that of dualism.

It is interesting to see that, in contrast to the complete non-dualism or monism of Sankara, Madhva maintains that the correct interpretation of sacred scripture is dualistic, that scripture maintains an eternal distinction between the individual self and the lord. Madhva, the supporter of the Dvaita school of Vedanta and his follower Jaya-tīrtha have sharply criticized the Advaitins. Moreover, they have been responded to by the latter with redoubled vigor. Vyāsatīrtha, in his *Nyāyāmṛta* and Ramacharya in his *Tarangini* commentary on it, undertakes a

detailed refutation of Advaita and tries to prove the reality of the world of difference by criticizing Vachaspati, Prakashatma, Shriharsa, and Chitsukha. Madhusudana Sarasvati, in his *Advaita-siddhi*, has refuted the charges of Vyāsatīrtha, and the controversy between these two great dialecticians has become classic. Madhva (1197-1276) holds that God, selves, and the world exist permanently, but the latter two are subordinate to God and dependent on Him. *Brahman* or God possesses all perfection. The Supreme directs the world. He is endowed with a spiritual body and is transcendent to the world as well as immanent in it since he is the inner ruler of all selves. Madhva's concept of the Vedanta system differs from other schools of Vedanta. It is well-known for its five fundamental differences:

- (1) The difference between God and the individual self;
- (2) The difference between God and matter;
- (3) The difference between individual selves;
- (4) The difference between selves and matter; and
- (5) The difference between individual and material substances.

According to Madhva, everything that exists on the earth is a living being. We cannot regard the self as the absolute because of its limited power, and it is dependent on God.

It is by nature blissful, though it is subject to pain and suffering on account of its connection with a material body due to its past *karma*. So long as it is not freed from impurities, it wanders about in changing forms of existence. No two selves are alike. God cannot be approached directly, Vayu, whose ancestry can be traced to the Vedic air, being in Madhva's system, the mediator. The divine will be supreme. It sets men free or casts them into bondage. Salvation, for Madhva, consists in the perpetuation of the individual self in the condition of release, where the self takes delight in adoration and worship of God. (Nehemiah, 1911)

There are also many commentaries on the Brahmasutra, which significantly differ from each other. However, the validity or invalidity of these commentaries is not very easy to judge. As V. Brodov comments, "the fact is that within Vedantism itself, throughout the whole history

of its existence, an unending struggle continues, now overt and at other times covert, between the progressive (that is, inclined towards democracy and materialism) and reactionary (essentially anti-democratic and inclined towards idealism and mysticism) trends or tendencies” (Brody, 1984). However, the commentator of the contemporary period was experienced very well in the literature of their time. So, there is some difference in their interpretations of the ‘Vedantic Texts’ as we find variations of meaning in Neo Vedanta than that of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara. The texts of which the later comes remain subtexts. Already we have seen as per Bhakti centric or Jñāna centric interpretations of the Brahmasutra we had the divisions within it such as the Advaita Vedanta, *Visistadvaita*, *Dvaita*, and some others. However, despite some differences, the subjects shared some common ground.

2.8. Shared Commonalities and Some Differences

We may see that even agreeing upon some commonalities, the interpretations may differ as to the true essence of some such basic sutras. While the *Brahmasutra* asserts that “the Brahman is that from which the origin, subsistence, and dissolution of this world proceed,” it categorically states: “This Brahman, being the only cause for the origination of the world, is compared to the womb, and is called the womb of the universe” (Nkamura, 1983). That way, the word Brahman which comes from the root *brh* means ‘to grow,’ to procure. As per the perspective, the context interpretations differ in some ways. According to Sankara, “Brahman, as the world cause, is clearly distinguished from Brahman itself that is the highest Brahman. Whereas the composer of the *sutras* did not distinguish between the two Brahman, that is the highest Brahman and the lower Brahman, Sankara defines this to be the essential interpretation of the *Sutra* that the two realms drastically differ” (Nkamura, 1983). He further offers his creative interpretation of the word *Maya*, which corresponds with Sāṃkhya- *Prakṛti* in the realist schools of the Text. The use of the word *Maya* found in the *Sutra* is reinterpreted identifying it with *avaiḍyā*, which was unique in the Advaitic interpretation of Sankara that also drew him closer to the Buddhist interpretation of *avidyā*. What is of hermeneutical interest here is that there were occasions and scope for a transformative reinterpretation of a text that keeps raising the question for meaning, whether it is a break with the traditional interpretation or continuity with the earlier position.

Scholars observe that the commentaries differ from one another in various ways. Regarding Madhva's dualistic interpretations, Nakamura states that "It is easy to understand that his dualism (or rather pluralism) is very distant from the ideas of the Upanishads and the sutras. Madhva's commentary, therefore, may be disregarded in analyzing the underlying meaning of the Brahmasutra, although it is the most important text for studying the philosophy and history of Madhva's own school (Nakamura, 1983). Ramanuja's commentary contains quotations from later Upanishads along with a significant number of quotations from the Purana literature, particularly the Vaishnavite one. Although Sankara's and Bhaskara's commentary are close to each other, they have different philosophical standpoints. Sankara believes in *Advaitavāda*, and Bhaskara stands for *Bhedābheda* theory. While for Sankara, the phenomenal world is nothing but *maya* or illusion, Bhaskara frequently rejects this point that the phenomenal world is only an illusion or *mayamātra*. However, it appears that for many scholars, Sankara's interpretation stands unique in terms of logic and reason, though other scholars also offer logical justification in support of their position.

2.8.1. Shared Commonalities among the Vedantic Schools

Despite these differences among the schools of Vedanta, we find certain agreements on specific key themes. For instance, as *Prasthānatraya* is the foundation of Advaita Vedanta, it is also the foundation of all the different schools of Vedanta, which includes Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Brahma-Sutras. However, it is undeniable that each one used a distinct hermeneutical procedure. Secondly, all the Vedantic schools accepted the same *pramānas* or the way of knowing, that is, perception, inference, and testimony (scriptural testimony). All the Vedantins stated that only the scriptural statements have a fully reliable authority for our knowledge of the Supreme Being. Thirdly, we can say that all the Vedantic schools have the desire to know Brahman. They are also concerned with how Brahman knowledge relates to the ritual action preceding it. The Vedanta philosophy demands that the knowledge of Brahman alone leads the soul into the transcendent realm, which implies that Brahman ultimately is both the goal of existence and the means by which to attain it.

Again they also believe in four *purusārthas*. Indian philosophy talked about four aims of life, which are called together *purusārthas*. These are dharma, artha, kāma,

and moksha. Moksha is the ultimate liberation from all such attachment. Nevertheless, there are some conflicts between the moksha or the proximate goal or the ultimate goal, which transcends all the lesser aims of life. It is, however, undeniable that even in the acceptance of these common key paths, there remains scope for further hermeneutical variations.

Thus we see that there is a common mis-conception that the entire philosophy of Vedanta is just one single system within which there is no significant difference either in the method or in conceptual content. However, if we look into Vedanta, we will find that Vedantic school surprisingly differs from each other. They seem to follow the views of one or the other of the ancient traditions mentioned by Badarayana in his Brahmasutra, but each of them includes different types of teachings. When Vedantic texts open for a hermeneutical interpretation that takes account of some common grounds of all the different schools within it, yet look for some differences that add variety and richness to the overall outcome of Vedantic positions on knowledge. For example, Sankara establishes spiritual absolutism or non-dualism as the primary teaching of the Upanishads. According to him, Jñāna or wisdom as the direct means to moksha or freedom, in which logical categories are not applicable. The experience is intimate, and the self alone is witness to it, but he denies that the self can ever really engage in action because for activity implies impermanence and change, which is preceded by desire and results in misery. It consists in the realization that one is the self of pure Consciousness free from all pain because pain is the result of alienation from reality. Sankara states that when one realizes the identity between the self and Brahman, one discovers the pure Consciousness, the illusory distinction between the self and Brahman disappears. We also find that it is not acceptable to some other Vedantins like Ramanuja and Madhva. On the ground that, what is knowledge in one school may differ from another one that is Bhakti oriented or so on.

As already referred to the earlier discussion, one can say that although the foundation for all the schools of Vedanta is Transcendental Consciousness, what is meant by Self or Consciousness differs and also the means of attaining it are different. Moreover, although the foundation is the same, it interpreted differently. Sankara interpreted it from Jñāna perspective. So, according to him, if one can control his emotion, intellect, and will and begin to study the Vedanta, then he will attain liberation. However, Ramanuja's interpretation is different from Sankara. Ramanuja interpreted it from the Bhakti perspective. He is a Bhaktivadin and an

advocate of bhakti as the essential means for liberation. According to him, the study of the Vedanta produces only book-learning and does not bring about liberation. So, according to him, bhakti is necessary. Consciousness is central to the Advaitic thought. We can say that the Vedanta philosophy in general and the Vedanta theory of Consciousness, in particular, derives from a specific interpretation and understanding of the Upanishads, which constitute a variety of texts capable of being interpreted in a variety of ways. In the Upanishads, the discussion of Consciousness arises in the context of explaining the real nature of the *Ātman* or the Self.

Ramanuja gives a new turn to philosophy by his synthetic philosophy of divine love and bhakti. Ramanuja states that, although liberation is indeed brought about by knowledge (as the Upanishads say), but that real knowledge is not a verbal knowledge of the scriptures; for then, everyone who reads them at once would be liberated. Real knowledge is a steady, constant remembrance of God, which can be described in a very different way as meditation (*dhyāna*), prayer (*upāsana*), and devotion (*bhakti*). Constant meditation on God and continuous practice, along with the performance of the obligatory rituals, will remove the obstacles to knowledge. Practiced of Devotion to God or worship, thus ultimately evolves into an immediate knowledge of God, which is the final means to liberation. The practice of worship brings about the destruction of all ignorance and karmas by which the body is caused.

Thus when the commentators differ about their interpretations, one cannot stand silently by without offering some judgment on the conflicting views. As a result, the fifteenth and sixteenth century witnessed radical shifts in the ideas and methodologies of India's traditions of philosophy.

However, Upanishads has incredibly rich and diverse spiritual content; it allows flexibility in matters of choice and emphasis to a certain extent. The primary and the essential teachings of the Upanishads are exceptionally strong to be overlooked or misapprehended unless by potential distortion of language. Even though various exponents propounded various sub-schools within the Vedanta system, it was only Acharya Sankara who has remarked on the entire principal eleven Upanishads. He was the most primitive one to speak about Upanishads. Sankara, in his Advaita Vedanta, has given a very coherent and systematic philosophy of the Upanishads. His version of the Upanishads is true to the spirit of the Upanishads. However, like the Advaita

Vedanta philosophy of Sankara, other schools of Vedanta also try to interpret the source and the final authority of Vedanta that is the Upanishads. Different schools of Vedanta try to interpret them in their own way. They attempt to go well with the doctrines even through twisting the language of the text. However, nobody can disagree with the fact that Sankara's translation is more reliable than others. Even George Thibaut, who believes that Ramanuja is a more faithful interpreter of the *Brahma-sutra* than Sankara, has to admit that Sankara's teaching is in agreement with the Upanishads¹⁷.

2.9. Conclusion

A historical root of Vedanta was traced in the context of the theistic ritualism of the Vedas. Although it sought to transcend the ritualistic perspective of the Vedic age, the culmination of the Vedic ritualistic era in its Brahmanical period and the Smṛti finally led to the Āraṇyaka and Upanishadic era of deeper introspective and meditative speculations. The chapter thus traced the Vedantic root in its earlier philosophies that finally culminates in the Sutra period, also keeping variation of different schools of Vedanta, that is, knowledge-oriented or Bhakti oriented quest for Atman Brahman realization. Vedantic approach to 'Consciousness and Self' thus made a significant transition from being content with offering sacrifices to seeking deep within the inner self for the solution to the mystery of the universe. All the schools of Vedanta also accept that "knower of Brahman becomes Brahman" that, the quest for Atman, Brahman, or larger domain of consciousness, gradually identifying oneself with the larger transcendental domain of Brahman. It is not just a disinterested philosophical quest, as seen in other academic pursuits of a philosopher "knowing for the sake of knowledge only." Here knowledge remains moksha oriented, and it has a stereological touch.

The Upanishadic tradition looked for intimate sharing between the teacher and the learner. 'Sitting near the guru' also indicates the posture of an initiate, who needs to be eligible, spiritually qualified to receive the instruction as well. We have seen that Vedanta shares that "know thyself" here is not just a formal intellectual pursuit. It concerns an object of inquiry that is "wonderfully beheld, wonderfully spoken, and wonderfully heard." (Das, 1937)

¹⁷ Candradhara Śarmā, *The Advaita Tradition in Indian Philosophy: A Study of Advaita in Buddhism, Vedānta and Kāshmīra Shaivism*, Pp-120-121.

Equally important is the revelation of Scriptures, as knowledge of Atman is dependent upon some such Maha-vakyas that all the schools of Vedanta accept. Although the schools differed, whether it is a bhakti oriented or jñāna oriented one, the common acceptance of Sruti keeps room for personal, experiential dimension of verifying the truth that logic and reason lead to the justification of “Brahmavid Brahmaiva Bhavati” position. For Sankara too, despite his focus on critical thinking and logical stand, “reason is only recognized by us in so far as it is ancillary to revelation¹⁸.”

However, Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, which is consistently changing; it is said that in its development Sankara borrowed some ideas from Buddhism and later presented that in his own way. Furthermore, Sankara's interpretation was charged later by other Vedantins for drastically leaning toward the ‘No-Self’ doctrines as propounded in some schools of Buddhism. Whether Sankara’s own interpretation leaned heavily toward Sunyavāda of Buddhism as it was more in line with his guru’s guru Gauḍapāda and the latter’s distinctive Buddhist inclinations, is yet to be explored further. However, for his fellow Vedantins, Sankara acted as a ‘Buddhist in disguise’. On the note, the chapter proceeds to explore some such areas in its explication of cross-cultural hermeneutical discourse across Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta.

¹⁸ Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya of Sankara (1.1.4) as cited by Eric Lott, Vedantic Approaches to God, (The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980), pp-8.

Chapter III

Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism: Hermeneutical Discourse across Traditions

3. 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have found that how the layers of interpretation continue to enrich the Indian tradition in diverse ways. It revealed that instead of many differences, there is at least one universal unifying fundamental principle that runs through all the schools of Vedanta tacitly. To illustrate, Vedānta as a whole, being a School, consists of three major systems of Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Dvaita, these three systems have logical continuity. Once we trace the postulated logical continuity, we realize that they do not negate the ‘logical space’ of each other with regard to their highest principles. Negation pertains only to their (Highest Principle’s) modes of presentation. All of them believes in the existence of one single reality, that is Atman or Brahman. However, in Indian tradition, there are two different positions regarding the existence and non-existence of the self or atman. In the Chandogya Upanishad, Uddalaka, to his son, Svetaketu, clearly shows the difference between these two positions. According to Uddalaka, some beliefs that, ‘in the beginning, there was non-existence only, and that out of that the universe was born.’ (Prabhavananda, 1957). By rejecting the position of the ‘some’, Uddalaka said to his son, Svetaketu in the following way:

In the beginning there was Existence alone—One only, without a second. He, the One, thought to himself: Let me be many, let me grow forth. Thus out of himself he projected the universe; and having projected out of himself the universe, he entered into every being and everything. All that is has its self in him alone. He is the subtle essence of all. He is the truth. He is the Self. And that, Svetaketu, THAT ART THOU. (Prabhavananda, 1957 pp. 109–110)

The Advaita Vedanta of Samkara, like the other schools of Vedanta, beliefs in the Upanishadic doctrine of Ātmavāda: “aitad ātmyaṁ idaṁ sarvaṁ” (all this is of the nature of

ātman) which may be taken as its foundation which is followed by "ātmānām viddhi" (know the ātmān). Contrary to this, Buddhism is believed to be the supporter of Anātmavāda, as "sarvam anātmam." However, some schools of Vedanta claimed that Advaita Vedanta of Sankara interpretation of Atman more inclined to anatmavāda doctrine of Buddhism. In this background, this chapter aims at exploring in what sense the Self-centric Vedantic doctrine almost looks similar to the No-self doctrine of Buddhism.

3.2. A Brief Historical Background of Buddhism

Buddhism, which was the most influential religion of India, plays a significant role in the development of Indian philosophy. The teaching of Buddhism covers a considerable part. It has a significant contribution in making the rich culture of India. Various schools and sub-schools came into existence under the influence of Buddhism. It is sometimes said that the Brāhmanical and the Jaina system was developed under the direct influence of Buddhism. It is a mixture of philosophical, religious, epistemological, and ethical principles. Buddha's teaching was more often concerned with the ethical principle rather than the metaphysical and intellectual knowledge. Buddha observed that since metaphysical questions are always intellectually unsure and doubtful, so metaphysical questions are not a kind of ethical question. The Buddha was entirely reluctant for metaphysical discussion, and whenever some metaphysical question was put to him, he remained silent. Instead of that, Buddha always tried to make clear to persons on the essential questions of sorrow, the roots of sorrowfulness, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation. He was a believer of Jivanmukti. According to him, one can achieve the 'jivanmukti' by practicing ethical principles. The Buddha was concerned with the practical problem of the removal of suffering. In trying to do so, Buddha discovered four noble truths. However, the four noble truths that he discussed had important metaphysical implications, and hence they form the foundation of the entire corpus of the Buddhist philosophy. The four noble truths of Buddhism are the following-

- a. There is suffering
- b. There is a cause of suffering
- c. There is a cessation of suffering and
- d. There is a way leading to the cessation of suffering

These four simple, noble truths contained the most profound philosophical truth for Buddhism.

3.3. Divisions of Buddhism

On the basis of the question concerning the reality, and on the basis of the epistemological question or questions concerning the ‘knowing of reality’ (Chatterjee, 1984) Buddhism divided into two major branches, Therāvāda or Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, in which various institutional and doctrinal differences are existed from ancient time up to the present. The root cause of the differences is in their respective practices and the nature of their path towards deliverance. “Fa Hsien (C. 400 A.D), a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, states that he found four Buddhist philosophical systems fully developed in India. Two of these, the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra represented the Mahāyāna, while the others Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika- were of the older Hīnayāna school” (Zimmer, 1951).

After two centuries, Hsuan Tsang (629-640), the second Chinese pilgrim, states that “the two schools were then still in combat with each other. Relations between Hinduism and Buddhism were peaceful, but between the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna scholastic debate and mutual abuse, on the verbal level, were at such a pitch that the Buddha himself, had he returned, must certainly have been compelled to cry out piteously, as eleven centuries before; “The order is divided, the order is divided” (Zimmer, 1951). The difference between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism is based on the conception, that is, the “original and developed Buddhism” (Stcherbatsky, 1975). This difference is based on the belief that Hīnayāna was the original Buddhism, and the Mahāyāna Buddhism was gradually developed based on the principle of Hīnayāna Buddhism, which is regarded as the original. However, this was not accepted by the Mahayanist Buddhist. As per the sources of Buddhism, Hīnayāna school was a follower of the original teaching of Buddha. Hīnayāna school emphasized individual salvation through self-discipline and meditation. Hīnayāna Buddhists consider that the Buddha was a Human rather than a God, who found a way to Nirvana. In contrast to Hīnayāna school, the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism regarded Buddha as a god. According to the Mahayanist, Buddha came down to earth to help out people to cross the journey of life. This group believes in the eternal and divineness of Buddha and worship Buddha as a god.

According to Hīnayāna (Sautrāntika & Vaibhāṣika) school of reasoning, the collections of experience, whether external or internal, are transient (fleeting) yet real. On the other hand, in the Mahāyāna, they are not even real. A metaphysical substratum of all phenomenality is admitted, but the entire sphere of phenomenality itself is regarded as without substance. The philosophers of the Mahāyāna compare the universe to a magical display, a mirage, a flash of lightning, or the current of waves on the sea. For example, the waves of the sea may be high or low, but the water itself neither increases nor decreases. Thus, it is that though all things are born to die-whether as long-lived individuals, or as minute (extremely small) momentary particles- the quintessence of them all remains unchanged.

Mahāyāna Buddhism is a logical development of the original Buddhism. Although it is a branch of Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism went beyond the teaching of the historical Buddha. Unlike original Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism did not seem much concerned with the liberation from reincarnation. However, Liberation from reincarnation is not their key aspiration. Instead of that, they developed the idea of compassion. The idea of compassion was quite exceptionally developed in it, and it became beyond your understanding of how the Buddha could let the man be preoccupied merely with his salvation and not also with that of the universe.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Buddha's idea of compassion reaches its full development. How profound in the saying, "as long as living creatures suffer, there is no possibility of joy for those who are full of compassion" (Schweitzer, 1936). This is the period, the rise of compassion results in the thought of humankind and the world view of the people. However, this strong idea of compassion could not much spread out and naturally put into effect. Like the original Buddhism, the thought of Mahāyāna Buddhism also is restricted in the world and life negation. So the idea of compassion of Mahāyāna Buddhism could not expand in just a similar way as were those of the Buddha himself. It is almost similar to the Buddha's idea of compassion that the Buddha made as a duty for his monks. But the only difference is that Mahāyāna's compassion is raised over and above all the bounds of original Buddhism. However, in the period of the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, despite different circumstances, the idea of compassion, surprisingly draw people's attention. On top of that, people also exclusively dominated by feelings of compassion.

In this chapter, our primary focus will be on the possible hermeneutical discourse across Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta. Even though there are two branches, the present work discusses only the Mahāyāna part of Buddhism because the Mahāyāna part is closely connected with the Advaita Vedanta. Nevertheless, the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism is composed of two essential sub-schools, that is, the Mādhyamika School of Sunyavāda and the Yogācāra or the Vijñānavāda school of Buddhism.

3.3.1. Mādhyamika School

Nāgārjuna, the greatest mastermind of Buddhism, flourished in the second century A.D. and developed and perfected the Madhyamaka system. Kumārajīva, a Buddhist monk, translated the biography of Nāgārjuna, into Chinese (about 405 A.D.) (Murti, 1980). According to this biography, Nāgārjuna was born in a Brahmin family in Southern India and studied the Vedas and other necessary branches of Brāhmanical learning. He was later converted to Buddhism.

Early Buddhism was not a religion. It was an order of monks held together by specific rules of discipline and reverence for the human teacher. It enjoined a very austere moral code, primarily for the ordained (Murti, 1980). However, there was no element of worship, no religious fervor, and no devotion to a transcendent being. No cosmic, meaning, and function were assigned to Buddha; he was just a glorious person and no more. His existence after parinirvana was a matter of doubt; this was one of the inexpressible¹⁹. It was after the rise of the Mādhyamika system, Buddhism rises as a religion. Unlike Hīnayāna school, the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism did not regard Buddha as a historical person. According to them, Buddha is the essence of all Being; he has a glorious divine form and assumes at will various forms to deliver beings from delusion and to propagate to dharma. The essential unity of all beings became an integral part of spiritual life. Worship of Buddha's and Bodhisattvas was introduced, possibly because of influence from the south²⁰.

¹⁹ As cited by T. R. V. Murti, in his book *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System*, pp-6.

²⁰ As cited by T. R. V. Murti, in his book *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System*, pp-6.

The Mādhyamika system is a hermeneutic form of the doctrine of dependent origination or the pratityasamutpada theory. “It corresponds with Sunyata- the empirical validity of entities and their ultimate unreality. Nāgārjuna says that Sunyavāda is also called the middle path because it implies the theory of dependent origination.” (Chatterjee D. D., 1984) “The middle path is the non-acceptance of the two extremes- the affirmative and the negative” (Murti, 1980). The middle path does not accept the sat as well as asat. It rejects them both. It is said that the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism was developed as a criticism of the Abhidharmika School, and the Abhidharmika School was developed by rejecting the Brāhmanical doctrine of ātmavāda. So the Mādhyamika system is the criticism of both the doctrine, that is, ātmavāda and the anātmavāda. Mādhyamika school is in between the two extremes, “but the middle between the ātma and nairatmya views is inexpressible.....it is the reflective review of things (dharmanam bhuta-pratyaveksa)” (Murti, 1980). By rejecting the ātma doctrine, Buddha regarded the doctrine of ‘eternal self’ as the doctrine of the fool (Murti, 1980). So it is not only Mādhyamika School, but all the schools of Buddhism tried to prove the Nairatmyavāda doctrine of Buddhism.

All the Buddhist systems indeed represent the teachings of Buddha, but it is the Mādhyamika system that signifies the real heart of Buddhism. Scherbatsky says that “The Mādhyamika is the turning point of Buddhism. It is the central system of Buddhism. Like Kant in modern European philosophy, the Mādhyamika system brought about a veritable revolution in Buddhist thought. But it has never been fully realized” (Stcherbatsky T. , 1927). The concept of emptiness, the void, has been employed in the Mādhyamika teaching as a well-planned and effective intellectual medium to bring the mind beyond the sense of duality. The concept of sunyata or void of the Mādhyamika system does not accept all the systems in which the absolute and the world of relativity are described in contrasting or antagonistic terms.

Thus the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism is that which created a revolution in Buddhism and not only in Buddhism but also in the whole range of Indian philosophy. It has a remarkable influence on the entire Buddhist thought. And gradually, the whole Buddhist thought turned on the sunyata doctrine of the Mādhyamika. It is also clearly stated that the Yogācāra or Vijñānavāda idealism also accepts the sunyata of the Mādhyamika and gives it an idealistic turn. To quote T.R.V Murti:

In metaphysics, it was a revolution from a radical pluralism to radical absolutism. The change was from a plurality of discrete ultimate entities to the essential unity underlying them. Epistemologically, the revolution was from empiricism and dogmatism to dialectical criticism. Ethically, the revolution was from the ideal of private egoistic salvation to that of a universal, unconditional deliverance of all beings. Not mere freedom from rebirth and pain, but the attainment of perfect Buddhahood by the removal of ignorance covering the real is now the goal. The change was from the ideal of the Arhat to that of the Bodhisattva. (Murti, 1980)

The Buddha used to illustrate his teaching as Madhyamapratipada (the middle path). When Nāgārjuna developed his philosophy; he was cautious about this significant word and called his philosophy Madhyamaka (Madhyamaiva Madhyamakam) or Madhyamaka Sastra. The followers of this system came to be known as Mādhyamika. The correct name for the system is Madhyamaka, not Mādhyamika. The word Mādhyamika stands for the believer in or follower of the Madhyamaka School.

The Madhyamaka school of Buddhism was developed based on the doctrines of the Mahāsāṃghikas, and the Sutras of Mahāyāna Buddhism are known as Prajñāpāramitā sutras (Stcherbatsky T. , 1975). However, it is also true that almost all the essential doctrines of the Madhyamaka philosophy were already presented in the Mahāsāṃghika system and Prajñāpāramitā literature. Nāgārjuna only developed them. Nevertheless, Nāgārjuna's original contribution was the dialectic that he developed. He undoubtedly threw new light on the various doctrines of Mahāyāna foreshadowed in the Mahāsāṃghika thought and Prajñāpāramitā works and provided a more in-depth and more critical explanation of those doctrines, but his most original contribution was the dialectic.

3.3.2. Yogācāra School

Another school of Mahāyāna Buddhism is Yogācāra School. The name of this school indicates that it mainly used to 'practice yoga' to realize the reality of the mind. The main focus of this school is the psychological aspects of the human mind. It is also called Vijñānavāda or Idealism. According to this school, there is only one reality, and that is Consciousness (Vijñāna).

Yogācāra School acknowledges only the sole existence of Consciousness. Although both the school of Mahāyāna Buddhism is based on idealism, Mādhyamika school of Buddhism regards everything as unreal, including ‘mind’. However, according to Yogācāra school of Buddhism, “if we consider the mind as unreal, then all analysis and ways of thinking would be false, and the Mādhyamikas could not even establish that their own arguments, that is, the concept of void, were correct” (Satischandra Chatterjee D. D., 1984).

There is no confusion that it was the Mādhyamika dialectic that paved the way for the other Absolutism. But the Yogācāra criticizes the Mādhyamika for denying the reality of Vijñāna. His most compelling argument against the Mādhyamika is that everything may be dialectically analyzed away as illusory, but the illusion itself implies the ground on which the illusory construction can take place. Accepting the sunyata of the Prajñāpāramitā and even protesting that they interpret it correctly, they modify the sunyatā of the Mādhyamika, and they give substance to the sunya by identifying it with pure Consciousness that is devoid of duality. The Yogācāra, though it severely criticized the Mādhyamika conception of Sunyata, was yet directly and immediately influenced by the Mādhyamika.

Regarding the concept of Consciousness, the Yogācāra or the Vijñānavāda School is different from the other schools of Indian philosophy. According to Indian philosophical schools like Sāṅkhya, Nyaya, Mimamsa, and Vedanta, Consciousness is formless. They accept Consciousness as self-shining; it cannot have any form; it is *nirākara*. However, according to the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, Consciousness has a form. It is Sākara. Yogācāra Buddhism states that what we see in front of us is not different from the subjective mind. The perceiving object is only a collection of our sense data. We perceive all that whatever in our minds. As stated by the Yogācāra Buddhism, the objective world cannot have any mind-independent existence. Dharmakīrti emphasizes, “The blue color and the Consciousness of the blue color are identical because they are never perceived to exist separately” (Satischandra Chatterjee, 1984). “They are not what is in the Vedantic discourse called *sudhacaitanya* (pure Consciousness), which is merely a principle of manifestation without any content to it. The Buddhist Consciousness, on the other hand, has a specific form with all its sensuous content as though built into it, but with its own arising and perishing. In doing all this, naturalism and empiricism are fused with the resulting theory of Consciousness in a remarkable way” (Gupta, 2003).

The schools of Indian philosophy except for the Advaita Vedanta, accept that the phenomenal world and Consciousness are different. However, according to Advaita Vedanta, Consciousness is the foundation of the world. There is no difference between the two.

3.4. Buddhist Theory of Consciousness

The Buddhist theory of Consciousness itself developed through stages. In the absence of belief in an external world, Consciousness-always hyletic- was given the power to objectify its inner representations which themselves arise byway of awakened traces and under the influence of a beginningless ignorance and the consequent 'desire' and 'craving.' In the course of developing this theory, Yogācāra Buddhism discovered the unconscious depository of past traces (*Alaya*). The Buddhists argued that freedom from desire leads to the dissolution of traces, leading to knowing things in their 'suchness,' independently of all concepts and linguistic constructions. (Gupta, 2003)

In the process of dependent origination (*pratitya-samutapada*), Consciousness (*vijñāna*) is the third aspect of the twelve link chain of the second noble truth of Buddhism. It is also one of the five *skandhas* (aggregates). The five skandhas are forms, sensations, perceptions, mental activity or formation, and Consciousness, which gave rise to a sense of personality that creates the false notion of 'I' or an ego. According to Buddha, the 'I' or the human personality comprised of these five factors.

The Buddha points out that there is a reciprocal connection between Consciousness and other sense organs. Consciousness, responses based on these sense organs, namely, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the *manas* or the mind. In the Buddha's words:

O priests, Consciousness is named from that in dependence on which it comes into being. The Consciousness which comes into being in respect of forms in dependence on the eye is called Eye-Consciousness. The Consciousness which comes into being in respect of sounds independence on the ear is called Ear-Consciousness. The Consciousness which comes

into being in respect of odors in dependence on the nose is called Nose-Consciousness. The Consciousness which comes into being in respect of tastes in dependence on the tongue is called Tongue-Consciousness. The Consciousness which comes into being in respect of things tangible in dependence on the body is called body Consciousness. The Consciousness which comes into being in respect of ideas in dependence on the mind is called mind-Consciousness²¹. (Warren, 2005)

So, in this framework, Consciousness (*Vijñāna*), is just an awareness or understanding of the existence of an object. Buddha states that Consciousness is dependent on certain conditions. Consciousness emerges when certain conditions are fulfilled and disappear when these conditions coming to an end. As Henry Clarke Warren wrote in his book that, for example, “fire is specified from that in dependence on which it burns. The fire, which burns with the help of logs of wood, is called a log-fire. The fire which burns with the help of chips is called a chip-fire. The fire which burns with the help of grass is called a grass-fire. It is exactly in a similar way; Consciousness is named on the basis of which it comes into being” (Weimer, 2019). Thus, the Buddha repeatedly affirms that Consciousness arises depending on certain conditions and that there is no arising of it in the absence of those conditions.

3. 5. Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism

Buddha continued to exist within the realm of India’s traditional philosophy and attempted to discuss its classic problem of moksha or salvation from a new perspective. His curiosity to know about moksha is almost similar to that of the contemporary Brāhmanical thinkers. Their ideas of moksha, their problems, and their ways are more or less identical. Although both of them have a different idol of worship or divine gurus, their method of worship

²¹For details see the page no- 182 of ‘Buddhism in Translations’ published by Cosimo Classic. The book ‘Buddhism in Translations’ is translated by Henry Clarke Warren, from the original *Pali* language to English. The book contains passages selected from the Buddhist sacred texts. It was first published in 1896 as the Harvard Oriental Series, Volume III, edited by Charles Rockwell Lanman. Christopher M. Weimer, in February 2002, makes it available in electronic source and reduced this text to HTML.

For electronic version see: <https://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/bits/bits028.htm>

was practically identical. In other words, there is no fundamental distinction between Vedanta and Buddhism (Zimmer, 1951). Thus we can say that the common belief that Buddha's faith is an alien one and opposed to the Vedas is a misinterpretation of Indian's religious history. In reality, Buddha boosted various analyses of the Upanishads. Even the Vedantin philosopher Gauḍapāda appears to us as the Brāhmanical thinker, boldly reformulating the Upanishadic ideal in the light of the Buddhist school like Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda dialectic. So, Buddhism plays a vital role in the evolution of Indian philosophy.

3. 6. Hermeneutical Discourse across Advaita Vedanta and Mādhyamika School

The foundation of the two schools, Vedanta and Buddhism, is different. Vedanta philosophy believes in the Ātman doctrine of the Upanishads, and Buddhism believes in the anātma doctrine. So their way of perceiving reality is different. Advaita Vedanta acknowledges the Ātman as the inner core in things. Advaita Vedanta rejected the material and transient being and regarded them as false. According to Advaita Vedanta, there is only one single reality, and that is the Ātman or the Brahman, and this is the real 'Being'.

On the other hand, Buddhism rejects the doctrine of Ātman. According to Buddhism, there is no inner and permanent central part of things. Everything is momentary. Everything lasts only for a moment. If we can say only the permanent thing to be as the self or Ātman, then there is no self on the earth, the reality is only 'Becoming'. Buddhism states that what we called as permanent or the universal and the identical substance are illusory. Everything is *anattā* or not-self. "All are impermanent, body, sensation, perception, and Consciousness; all these are sorrow. They are all not-self." (Radhakrishnan, 1923)

Buddhism accepted the view that nothing can be permanent is philosophical doctrine. It is called Anityavāda. According to Buddhism, the soul is nothing but an abbreviation for five changing states, these are, form, feeling, perception, including understanding and naming, predispositions, or tendencies generated by past experience and Consciousness. All these five elements are changing taken connectively; they are referred to as man. So, Buddhism does not understand the man in terms of a static and permanent entity called the soul. Man is an aggregate of these five states.

Buddhism denies the idea of a permanent self, but it does not deny the continuity of the stream of successive states. What we call a soul cannot be anything other than a series. This series may be called the life series. In the place of the idea of the permanent soul the Buddha introduced the idea of a stream of Consciousness, which is unbroken and continuous. Thus, the idea of a permanent soul is, according to Buddhism, an illusion. The origin of this illusion can partly be traced to our linguistic habit.

Hence Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism differ from one another. However, Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism are coming out from two different sources. On the other hand, although they are coming out from two different sources, their philosophical position remarkably close to each other in a different manner. As maintained by Chandradhar Sharma, “Buddhism and Vedanta do not need to consider two different systems. They are not opposed to each other. But they are only different phases in the development of the one core thought which starts with the Upanishads, finds its indirect support in Buddha, its elaboration in Mahāyāna Buddhism, its open revival in Gauḍapāda, which reaches its Zenith in Sankara and culminates in the post Sankarites” (Śarmā, 1996)

There are some possible influences of the Mādhyamika School on the development of Advaita Vedanta. Here it is said as “possible” because we are not very sure about the position of Mādhyamika School in the development of Vedanta school and the influence of the Mādhyamika on Vedanta. “It is a kind of belief and presumption whether they are borrowing concepts from Mādhyamika or Vijñānavāda and if they are borrowing to what extent” (Murti, 1980). At this juncture, the work trying to focus on some illustrations through which we can be able to see the closeness between the two.

The Brahman of Hindu philosophy and the sunyata or void of Buddhism is generally believed to be completely different conceptions. Brahman means fullness of being, plenitude, or abundance, whereas Sunyata means emptiness. From our general perspective, we can say that there is no contact between fullness and emptiness. If one looks into it very carefully, it will be found that the difference is more apparent than real and that it is a distinction in emphasis only. Brahman is the unity of supra cosmic silence and cosmic creativity (nirguna and saguna), the unity of absolute freedom, and universal law (anantam and rtam). The void, adequately

understood, is the same as nirguna Brahman. In the void of Buddhism, both being and non-being are denied. Being as well as non-being may be granted 'dependent reality' and 'secondary truth', but the void transcends them all. According to the philosophy of the Upanishads, Brahman, in its aspect of supra-cosmic silence (nirguna) is beyond both being and non-being in so far as it completely transcends all categories of the human mind. But, in its mode of existence as cosmic creativity (saguna) Brahman sustains the world process as the interplay of being and non-being. The supra-cosmic and the cosmic, freedom, and creativity are equally real aspects of Brahman, even though the former may be logically more fundamental than the latter.

Again "the Mādhyamika says that Nirvana does not mean a change in the objective order, the change is only subjective. It is not the world that we have to change, but only ourselves. If the Kleshas (defilements) and the Sanskrit dharmas (conditioned existence) were ultimately real, no power on earth could change them. The change is in our outlook; it is a psychological transformation, not an ontological one" (Stcherbatsky T. , 1927). Nirvana or Absolute Reality is not something produced or achieved. Nirvana only means the disappearance of the productions of discursive thought. "Phenomena serve as the 'ascribed mark' of reality. Phenomena are like an envelope that contains within it an invitation from reality. The superimposed character of phenomena veils the noumena, that superimposed character is uncovered, when the veil is removed, it only reveals reality. Thus, the philosophy of sunyata intends to help uncover 'the veil'." (Stcherbatsky T., 1975).

Advayavāda Buddhism is a secular, non-dual, and life-affirming philosophy and way of life derived from Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika or philosophy of the middle way. 'There is a distinction between Advayavāda and Advaitavāda. Advaya is knowledge free from the extremes duality of the 'IS' and 'IS NOT', Being and becoming, it is knowledge freed of conceptual distinctions' (Murti, 1980). Advaita is knowledge of a difference less entity- Brahman (Pure Being) or Vijñāna (pure Consciousness). 'Advaya' is purely an epistemological approach; the 'Advaita' is ontological. The sole concern of the Mādhyamika advayavāda is the purification of the ability of knowing.

On the ontological standpoint of the Advaita Vedanta, the emphasis is on the thing known. When that is universal and devoid of difference, the knowing ability too gets concentrated and lost in it. Brahma experience is non-dual.

Nāgārjuna states that “there is no entity that is not dependent. An Absolute non-relational entity does not, therefore, exist” (Murti, 1980). Relativity or dependence is an invariable mark of the unreal. The real is absolute, self-conceived, and self-existent. Equally, the dependent is an appearance. Thus Pratityasamutpada is equated with Sunyata, unreality.

From this, we can see that how Vedanta refutes the Mādhyamika system and the Mādhyamika refutes the Vijñānavāda. If we see from the general point of view, then we will find that there is no real difference between the absolutes, but still, the different concepts of Absolutisms are regarded as a very critical and unsolved problem.

3. 7. Sankara as a Buddhist in Disguise

It is said that there were lively interchanges between the Buddhist and the Brāhmanical logicians for centuries. As the oldest religion, Buddhism occupied a strong position in India. People also strongly believed in Buddhism. At that time, Hinduism makes every effort for evolution. This was the most crucial and significant period in the history of Hinduism. Because people at that time were not at all interested to believe in a new doctrine. Their mind was fixed with the Buddhist ethical principle. By taking that opportunity, Buddhists also fling some doubt to the well-regarded belief system, which is regarded as the cause of people’s disinterest. However, it was challenging for Hindu thinkers to make the expansion of the Hindu nation. So they tried to find a lavish who could influence the people with new doctrine without shattering the past. “One who could expase the old patterns without breaking them and synthesize the opposing sects on a general basis of truth, which would have scope for all men of all grades of intelligence and culture. Sankara “set to music” the tune which had been haunting millions of ears, and announced his Advaita Vedanta as offering a frequent basis for religious unity” (Radhakrishnan, 1927). Sankara attempted to overcome the philosophical tradition of his age, and according to the needs of his time, he illuminated it.

Sankara claimed that the belief system which he is propounding is already there in the Vedas. He assumes that what he is asserting is a constant process of evolving, and he is expressing only an important age-old tradition that we are getting as a gift from our ancestors. However, it is challenging to decide whether Sankara's philosophy is a continuation or reinterpretation of, or addition to, the old teaching. We cannot distinguish the old from the new, for in the living, the old is new, and new is old. Natalie Isayeva says, "even such an astute Buddhologist as Rozenberg was of the opinion that a precise differentiation between Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism is impossible to draw." (Isayeva, 1992)

Many present-day scholars maintain that Advaita was formed through the decisive influence of earlier teachings and that its main notions were intentionally or unintentionally borrowed from earlier and contemporary systems, some of them even from heterodox ones. S. Radhakrishnan, asserts that "there is no doubt that Samkara develops his whole system from the Upanishads and the *Vedanta sutra* without reference to Buddhism, says as follows: "we need not say that the Mādhyamika doctrine has very much influenced the Advaita Vedanta philosophy... the Nirguna Brahman of Samkara and Nāgārjuna's *sunya* have much in common." (Radhakrishnan, 1929)

It is well known that one of Sankara's closest teachers was Gauḍapāda, whose main work, *Māndukya-kārika*, was undoubtedly composed under the direct impact of Buddhist ideas. Sankara wrote a deferential commentary on the *Kārikā*; it was owing to the intermediary position of Gauḍapāda, in Sankara's work, there appeared the notion of different levels of reality, the concept of higher and lower truth, and even the idea of *maya*, which was not clearly elaborated in the Upanishads. Although the word *maya* occurs in Bhagavad-Gita, scholars argue that Shankara's theory of *maya* is nowhere to be found in Vedas or Upanishads. Surendrnath Dasgupta argues: "Much of the dialectics of the reasoning of Shankara and of his followers and the whole doctrine of *maya* and the fourfold classification of existence, and the theory of Brahman as the ultimate reality and ground, were anticipated by the idealist Buddhist, and looked at from that point of view there would be very little which could be regarded as original in Shankara" (Dasgupta, 1969). For this very reason, Ramanuja, the founder of the Visistadvaita Vedanta School and other orthodox Hindu schools, went so far as to describe Shankara as a *pracchanna bauddha*, "crypto Buddhist." On the other hand, Mudgal says, "The doctrine of *maya*

as understood by Shankara was first introduced in the Vedanta by Gauḍapāḍakarika”. (Isayeva, 1992)

However, the theory of Maya forms one of the pillars upon which the Vedanta rests. The oldest idea of Maya that we find in Vedic literature is the sense of delusion. Before the word, Maya means something like magic. Nevertheless, the word Maya has been used in various manners, much later on, in one of the latest Upanishads, we find the word Maya reappearing, but this time, a transformation has attached itself to the word. In the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, it is stated that “Know Prakṛti (nature) is Maya, and the great Lord the Mayin (maker) (or know nature to be Maya and the Ruler of this Maya is the Lord Himself)” (Muller, 1884).

The Buddhist also used the doctrine of Maya. However, when the Buddhists used this doctrine, it turns out to be mostly like idealism. Now Maya is perceived in that way. But the concept of Maya that the Advaita Vedanta brings into the light is not similar to the Buddhist uses. It is neither Idealism nor Realism. It is not even a theory. It is a simple statement of facts. It is a fact of what we are and what we see around us.

According to Sankara, the phenomenal world nothing but Maya, which he regards as an illusion. The world is real when we perceived it apart from its basis in the ultimate or Brahman. When we observed the world in its relation to Brahman, we will find that it is nothing but the Brahman. Which is called in Upanishads as ‘sarvam khalu idam Brahma’ that is, all this is Brahman. Sankara sometimes says that the world does not exist in reality, and its manifestation disappears when the reality is known. He regarded the world’s appearance as Maya.

According to Sankara, all objects of the world are the products of Brahman and Maya. Maya controls all relations and order of the universe. In connection with the intelligence of Brahman, Maya acts as an intelligent power. Maya is also responsible for the systematization of all things and their interrelations. The jiva is the phenomenal self that feels, suffers, and is affected by the experiences of the world. The individual self is an appearance while the truth is Brahman; the world is the play of Brahman, his vilasa, his Maya. Radhakrishnan, in his book *The Brahma Sūtra: The philosophy of spiritual life* wrote that:

Badyaranya compares the world's appearance to a painting, where the white canvas stands for the pure Brahman, the white poster for the inner controller, antaryamin, the dark colour for the dispenser of the crude elements and the coloration for the dispenser of the concrete elemental world, Virat and the figures that are manifested there are the living beings and other objects of the world. Brahman reflected through Maya assumes various forms and characters. (Radhakrishnan, 1960)

In the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara, Brahman is the vivarta cause, where the effect is nothing but an illusion. In contrast to that, Maya is the parinama cause, where Maya is the power or shakti of Brahman. The Shakti and its transformation or the effect of the parinama cause is not an illusion. It looks like the real transformation, till the possessor of shakti is perceive as real and absolute.

According to Sankara, the world is an appearance. The existence of the material world is real only due to ignorance. It is nothing but an illusion. The physical world is as illusory as the appearance of a snake in a rope. We can say that an illusion is nonexistent. Something perceived though it is misapprehended. The rope, which is the perception of the snake, disappears. But the world does not disappear. The Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara asserts that the world is real or sat because it exists for a time; it is unreal, or asat for it does not exist for all time. It is almost like the Buddhist concept of momentariness. However, it is a contradicted statement. A thing is said to be valid only in the condition of if it is not contradicted. In Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara, the appearance of the world is found to be non-existing at the rise of the right knowledge, so it is not valid. Maya is neither sat nor asat, or it is neither being nor non-being. It is the indefinable cause due to which this world of different individual existence arises.

The intellectual thinkers suggest us to liberate ourselves from Maya. Liberation from Maya signifies free from bondage. It is the bondage of the theoretical values which are dominating us. However, free from bondage does not mean to treat life as an illusion or be indifferent and unconcern to the world's welfare. It just means that liberation from the illusion which holds us back from getting the real knowledge and prevents us from seeing the actual cause. The Maya or illusion makes us run after the material satisfaction and produce self-

interested as the highest end. However, a life of solitude, prayers, and worship is not easy to apprehend. It is turning exceptionally challenging in our age. A never-ending fight is going on between personal insight and human creation. We tend to do what others do, believe what others believe, and always overlook and neglect to think, feel, and act with insight and conviction. We tend to lose ourselves in the obscurity and namelessness of the human crowd. Life becomes more complicated than before. We are inclined to destroy our existence, whatever is human, creative, and spiritual in us.

However, there is also controversy regarding the concept of Mayavāda. Some scholar asserts that the Sankara's doctrine of *maya* or *avidyā* is not found in the Upanishads and it is borrowed by Sankara from Buddhism. For example, Sankara's junior contemporary, Bhaskara, thought that Sankara's notion of *maya* is derived from Buddhism. Regarding the similarities between Maya theory of Sankara and the Maya of Buddhism Bhaskara, stated that the proponent of Maya is "men who rely upon Buddhist theories." Again, it has also been said that the non-dualistic theory is an idea, which precisely of Buddhism (particularly of Mahāyāna Buddhism). Bhaskara says Maya-vāda as groundless and stated that "Expatriating on the contradictory and groundless Maya-vāda, propagated by the Buddhist, they have misled the world" (Nakamura, 1983).

Again later, Ramanuja was to call Sankara a crypto Buddhist (*pracchanna-bauddha*). According to some scholars, Sankara adopts the Buddhist concepts of monasteries or *sangha*. and when he travelled all over India, he established four *mathas* (monasteries) in order to bring harmony among the diverse thought currents that were prevalent in the Indian Society. By doing this, he just wants to restore the Brāhmanism, when divergent trends are struggling for supremacy. Thus Advaita succeeded in absorbing and reshaping some major concepts that originated within the Buddhist frame of thought. However, Mayavāda was strongly criticized by other sects on the point that its thought is similar to Buddhist theories. The most ancient use of this example at present exists in Padma Purana. In the Padma Purana, Mayavāda is criticized as being incorrect teaching. According to Padma Purana, Mayavāda is not based on the Vedas. It is a theory of crypto Buddhist, and this view has been inherited by the later centuries²². In the

²² See A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy, By Hajime Nakamura, pp-120-121

Padma Purana, Isvara is said to have declared to Parvati: “the theory of Maya is a false doctrine, a disguised form of Buddhism, I myself, o goddess, propounded this theory in the kaliyuga in the form of a Brahmin²³.” The words of Siva in the Padma Purana, later in the same chapter, are to the effect that “that great system, the Maya theory, is not supported by the Veda, though it contains the truth of the Veda²⁴.”

Vijñānabhikṣu also often discussed this matter and stated that this thought actually is not a Vedānta theory, and the exponent of this theory are crypto Buddhists, and apparently, they are those who call themselves Vedāntists. Vijñānabhikṣu, commenting on the Sāṅkhya system, observes, “There is not a single Brahmasūtra in which our bondage is revealed to be due to mere ignorance. As it is to the original theory of Maya propounded by persons calling themselves Vedāntists, it is only a kind of the subjective idealism of the Buddhist. The Maya theory is not an ideology of the Vedānta.” (Nakamura, 1983)

But the point is that Sankara himself never claim Mayavāda as his own theory. Moreover, none of the thinkers prior to him had ever proclaimed it as their own theory. Mayavāda may be said to be the idea that only the Brahman is real, and everything else is false. But this term is not applicable to Sankara's philosophical theories.

There is also disagreement regarding the Maya-theory within the schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism, namely Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda. Vallabha called the proponents of Maya, the incarnations of Mādhyamika school. Vijñānabhikṣu, on the other hand, says that one should regard the proponent of Maya as “a section of the Vijñānavādins” (Nakamura, 1983). The Yamuna also says that the Mayavāda and Vijñānavāda are essentially one and the same²⁵. Ramanuja stated that the theory, that of Sankara and others, who are known as crypto Buddhist, and the Vijñānavādins, particularly of Dignāga, who claim to be the advocator of the Mayavāda,

²³ For details see S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol-II, op.cit., pp-471.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ See Hajime Nakamura's *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*, (1983), pp-120-121. Yamuna says that Vijñānavāda, particularly of Dignāga and Mayavāda are identical. The only difference is that Vijñānavāda of Dignāga is an open Buddhist and the propounder of Mayavāda is a Crypto Buddhist.

seems indistinguishable. Although there is a correspondence between them, both are making common theoretical mistakes²⁶.

But other philosophers like Sriharsa, who stated that although there is a resemblance between the non-dualistic monistic school and Buddhist theory, there is also a difference between the two. For example, while Buddhism asserts the falsity of the infinite existence, the Vedanta school teaches the 'non-difference' of the infinite existence, and so they are different on this point.

It is held that in an attempt to preserve the continuity of thought, he attempted to combine logically incompatible ideas. However, this may be admirable to the elasticity of Sankara's mind or his spirit of genuine consideration, it cannot but affect the logical consistency of his thought, and the theory of Maya works as a screen to cover the innermost phrase of his system. However, that be, there is no doubt that Sankara develops his whole system from the Upanishads and the Vedanta sutra without reference to Buddhism.

Interestingly although there are lots of differences, Sankara's interpretation keeps much scope for two-way dialogue with Buddhism as it is considered as a love-hate kind of relation between them. On the one hand, Sankara was criticized for being a 'Buddhist as a disguise,' on the other, as between the *Āstika* and the *Nāstika* systems. He is the one who is responsible for restoring the supremacy of the *Āstika* tradition and Brāhmanical Hinduism. He is against the rising supremacy of Buddhism and is opposed to the *Anātmavadi* doctrines, which is a growing threat of nihilism. According to F. Whaling,

Part of the story of Sankara's own development is his own reaction against the undue Buddhist influence he felt he had received from Gauḍapāda. Sankara applied Gauḍapāda's key to his interpretations, but the fact is that Sankara's canvas was so much wider, and his task more varied, meant that he could not follow Gauḍapāda in every detail (Whaling, 1979).

There are some differences between pre-Sankara Vedanta and Sankara's standpoint. For example, pre-Sankara Vedanta did not talk about the theory of appearance or vivartavāda, "no

²⁶ Ibid, pp-121

need was felt to draw any distinction between the paramartha and the vyavaharika or of the text into para and apara. Pre-Sankara Vedanta is best described as ekatvavāda, monism, it is not Advaita- Absolutism. Advaitism is the conscious rejection of duality and difference as illusory. Brahman is established, not positively, but by the denial of duality” (Murti, 1980). Another important point is that the word ‘Advaita’ existed before Sankara because it is evident that the Buddhist Vijñānavadins called themselves Advaitavadinah (Nakamura, 1983). The term Advaita as the name of a school came first to be employed in the later centuries. Sankara himself did not reveal it.

Another most essential point is, as we find that pre- Gauḍapāda or pre-Sankara Vedanta was monistic, not Advaitic, but it abruptly takes an absolutistic turn. It is a kind of enigma. We can speculate that either Advaita Vedanta borrowed some concept from the absolutism and dialectic which is already well-established in the Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda system or due to its inner dynamism the Upanishadic tradition too was heading towards absolutism. (Murti, 1980)

If we carefully examine their perspective, we would find that all of them agree concerning the logical form of the absolute, as free of empirical determinations and as the essence of phenomena and also as realized in an intuitive experience. However, they hold opposing views concerning the nature of the absolute and the mode of their approach. It can only make for confusion to ignore the difference. What is real for one, the same thing is the appearance for another. Though this hypothesis of developing absolutism without external help cannot be rejected completely, it is, however, a fact that absolutism had already been developed in the anatma tradition. Moreover, there were lively interchanges between the Buddhist and the Brahmanical logicians for centuries.

3. 8. Establishment of Brāhmanism over Buddhism

Acharya Sankara, one of the most radiant characters in the history of Indian thought, was born and lived in an era when Buddhism had a strong predominance. In the words of Isayeva:

When the Buddhist monasteries became rich centers of vested interests and their disciples became lax, and magic and superstition crept into the popular

forms of worship. He felt it necessary to formulate a philosophy which was not only a direct interpretation of Upanishadic texts but also different from Buddhism. Sankara is one of such a philosopher, who had a firm grasp of the real significance as well as the limitations of Buddhist thought, tactfully interpreted the concepts of Upanishads, and gradually replaced the blind forces by conscious and rational foundations and offered the prevailing ethical practices a new direction. (Isayeva, 1954)

So, Sankara was the one who understands the pulse of the situation and inclines to introduce it in a new way. It is said that “Brāhmanism killed Buddhism by a fraternal embrace” (Radhakrishnan, 1929). Mudgal (a Brahmin Rishi) says that “Sankara adopted practically all dialectic (of the Buddhist), their methodology, their arguments and analysis, their concepts, their terminologies and even their philosophy of the absolute, gave all of them a Vedantic appearance, and demolished Buddhism” (Isayeva, 1954). It was the time when Buddhism became a fundamental strength in the life of the country. Brāhmanism believed Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu. Although they never revealed, knowingly or unknowingly, Brāhmanism, incorporated many Buddhist rituals and practices. They assimilated most of the principles of the Buddhist faith without reference to Buddhism (Choudhury, 1959).

The truth; that Buddha advocated, has remained only for 500 years. Then there must need a fresh revelation of renovation. Five hundred years after the Buddha’s death, that is to say, about the beginning of our era, his doctrine was approaching the height of its flowering season. Indeed, it was no longer quite the same as he addressed it; it had gone on developing.

So later, it became a religion, mostly in the period of development of Tantric Buddhism, which denies the Buddha’s doctrine entirely and initiates to improve the worship of gods in general. Although Buddhism developed into popular religion, it moves away from the doctrine of historical Buddha, which stated that liberation from rebirth or reincarnation could only be attained by the monastic life and renunciation of the world.

3. 9. Sanskritization of Buddhism

Although Buddhism remains one of the most influential religions of India, it is not so easy to say whether ancient India was Hindu or Buddhist. Ancient paintings, constructions, the structural design gives the evidence of strong Buddhist predominance and that "it was overwhelmingly Buddhist for over a millennium" (Omvedt, 2003). "The earliest religious architecture exists such as Buddhist— vihara, stupas, caves including chaitya halls monasteries and statues. Until the time of the Guptas, there is no Hindu temple, and whatever was there, those were small. Even the construction of most magnificent architecture, the stupa, sculptures, and monument at Sanchi, which began earlier, but completed during the period of the Guptas, which is considered to be the classical Hindu kings" (Omvedt, 2003). Likewise, the corresponding assertion also can be made for literature. The literature of that period, for example, the Tamil Sangam period, Kavya period was mostly influenced by the Buddhist literature. "Brahmanic religious literature like the Upanishads, the Dharmasashtras, the *Arthasāshtra*, and others of its type is available only from the Gupta period. Even the great epics *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* took their final form in the 1st century CE." (Omvedt, 2003)

By the 1st century onwards, the Prakrit-Pali had become an elite language. The early Buddhism or the original Buddhism that has existed before its various sub-sects mainly advocates the Pali language. It was the sacred language of Theravāda Buddhism. The texts of Theravāda Buddhism were preserved in the Pali language. However, "Pali could not be able to continue to exist as 'language of the country' when the other new languages developed throughout India" (Omvedt, 2003). By that time, the Sanskrit language developed, and it developed as a complex and challenging elite language. Although Sanskrit was a difficult language, it emerged as the only one that could help to connect the different parts of the country. Consequently, for an extended period, Sanskrit becomes a general and widespread language. Many Buddhist monks also had to conduct their education and research in Sanskrit. Mahāyāna Buddhism mostly uses the Sanskrit language. The monks who came from outside to learn Mahāyāna Buddhism, first they need to become skilled at Sanskrit. "The Chinese and Tibetan monks, who came to India, studied and preserved Mahāyāna texts only in Sanskrit and translated from that" (Omvedt, 2003). Thus Sanskrit distinctly became the most privileged and scholarly language. Scherbatsky, in his book 'The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana' wrote that "the

Mahāyāna Buddhism reached its full development in north-east India, perhaps for the period of the two first centuries of our era. Its sacred writings are not in the Pali language but in Sanskrit and mix Sanskrit, and also its principles are not similar to those of the older Buddhism.” (Stcherbatsky T., 1975).

3. 10. Buddhism in Assam

However, Buddhism prevalent in North East India, especially in Assam, was Vajrayāna, or tantric Buddhism. As a further expansion of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vajrayāna or Sahajayāna Buddhism developed in Assam. ‘The effectiveness of Dharani (Buddhist chant or protective spell), which constitutes a large and important part of Mahāyāna texts, appears more prominent in North East India than the ethical and philosophical beliefs.’ (Nakamura, 1987).

From early Mahāyāna Buddhist work like *Aryamanjusrimulakalpa* and *History of Buddhism in India* of Taranatha, we can speculate the nature of Buddhism that existed in early Kamrupa. According to the writings of Taranatha, in early Kamarupa, Buddhism was widely spread and promoted by one Dhitika. From the illustration of Taranath, the teachings spread by the Dhitika, was similar to Mahāyāna Buddhism²⁷. When Mahāyāna Buddhism had not fully developed as a separate identity, a group of Buddhists entered the region and associated with the cultic centers of non-Aryan or pre-Vedic People.²⁸ The common believers, who did not confine to the monasteries, expressed their faith and devotion by constructing numerous stupas. It may be presumed that this group of Buddhists constructed the stupas of the Suryapahar area. Taranatha has mentioned that Dhitika, using magic or some kind of black arts, came closer to the existing place of the Sun worship by a Brahmin that is also known as Siddha for the propagation of Buddhism in the region²⁹. Sun worship has been prevailing in Assam from a very early period.

²⁷ See Taranatha’s *History of Buddhism in India*, Edited by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, pp-46-47

²⁸ See Joseph Walser’s *Nāgārjuna in Context: Mahāyāna Buddhism and Early Indian Culture*, pp-13-36

²⁹ See Taranatha’s *History of Buddhism in India*, Edited by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, pp-47

Sankhayāna Grihyasamgraha refers to the prevalence of the worship of Sun in ancient Assam, which is of Alpine–Iranian origin.”³⁰

One of the most significant evidence of tantric practices found in the stupa complex of the Surya Pahar is that there are some Siva lingas along with Yunipitha, which symbolizes the shiva and Shakti. Shiva and Shakti are regarded as the basis of tantric cosmology³¹. Another place is the Nilachala hills³². The image and sculpture of Nilachala hills indicate that it was also a major Buddhist shrine in the past, which leads to the belief that at that time, these places became the central place of tantric practices. Another remarkable point is that in this region, *Buddha* statues depicted with the *Bhumisparsha* mudra. Buddha in *Bhumisparsha* mudra signifies the tantric Buddha, which is different from the image of the original Buddha that is depicted in the pali or Mahāyāna Texts.

In Nilachala hills, Buddhist tantrism evolved with female deity Sweta Tara and Vajrayogini. However, at the same time, with the Buddhist tantric deities, Hinduism also starts a form of tantrism with the female deity Mahagauri. However, later goddess Kameswari Devi or goddess Kamakhya takes the place of goddess Mahagauri³³. ‘Pranab Jyoti Deka in his book *Nilacala Kamakhya* discussed thoroughly how the goddess Kamakhya or Kameswari has evolved through the intermixing of the Buddha cult of Chinnamasta-Vajravarahi and Hindu Kameswari cult. Kamakhya or Kameswari was conceptualized from the synthesizing Hindu Sakti Tantra and Buddha Annuttara tantra. Buddhism in Asia, the seed of incarnation of the tantra for the goddess Kamakhya, addressed to Vajra-Yogini, VajraVarahi, and Vajra-Vairocini, which became closely associated in the form of Chinnamasta and Buddha Chinnachamunda in the 9th century. This Chinnachamunda, with time, was modified to the Kamakhya or Kameswari

³⁰ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D*, pp-434. See also Taranatha’s *History of Buddhism in India*, Edited by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, pp-47

³¹ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D*, pp-442

³² Archana Barua, *Elements of Magic, Esotericism, and Religion in Shaktism and Tantrism in Light of the Shakti Pitha Kāmākhyā*, published in *The Pomegranate*, pp-51-70

³³ P.C. Choudhary, *The History of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D*, pp-445-450

cult³⁴. Thus, the deity Kamakhya, which seems to appear as a new deity in the early-medieval Brāhmanical literature of Assam, was contributed by both the Buddhist tantrism and new Brāhmanical religion. Nevertheless, Kamakhya is a Hindu goddess, but her roots lie in the BuddhaVajrayāna Tantricism'. Similarly, it is assumed that Mahacina Tara, another Buddhist tantric goddess, entered into Hindu fold as Ugra Tara³⁵.

Thus Buddhism in Assam emerged in the form of Vajrayana, mainly based on *the mahasukhavād* principle. Later it split into Sahajjan, Kalacakrajan, Mantrajan, Bhadrayan, and Tantrajan. To quote Bhattacharya: "We have evidence to show that these systems gained ground in Assam, which was noted for the esoteric doctrines of Tantric Shaktism. Both the Indian and Tibetan sources provide us with materials regarding the prevalence of later Buddhism in the form of Vajrayana in Assam." Again it is mentioned in the "Sankara Digvijaya³⁶" that when the great reformer Shankaracharya came to Kamarupa in the early part of the ninth century AD in order to defeat Abhinava Gupta, the noted Buddhist scholar in controversy, he took recourse to Black magic practices to defeat Sankara.

Thus when Buddhism came to Assam or Northeast India, it took a different shape and identity. However, the language problem and the insufficient sources from vernacular literature have created a vast gap in evidence and information about the widely accepted religion and the way in which large sections of people of the time reacted to the Buddha's teachings. The influence of Buddhism in India slowly became weaker, and by the second millennium C.E., the widely practiced religion vanished from the land of its birth. Thus it becomes evident that in the post-Buddhist period, Buddhism itself gets several interpretations. The hermeneutical revisions of Buddhism transform it and change it in various ways.

3. 11. Concluding Remarks

Thus we have found that there appeared many critics against Sankara, even within the Schools of Vedanta itself. Bhaskara (750-800) is probably one of the earliest critics against

³⁴ For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya, op.cit.*, pp. 45-46.

³⁵ For details, see Pranav Jyoti Deka, *Nilacala Kamakhya, op.cit.*, pp. 45-46.

³⁶ Antarkar, W.R. "Sanksepa Sahkara Jaya of Sri Madhvacharya or Sankara Digvijaya of Sri Vidyanaramuni." *Journal of the University of Bombay*. November 1972, vol. 61, no. 77.

Sankara. After that, Yamuna (918-1038), Ramanuja (1017-1037), Madhva (1197-1276), Vallabha (1473-1531). Then in the latter part of the sixteenth century, Vijñānabhikṣu of the Sāṅkhya school shows in his *Sāṅkhyapravacanasūtra* that the mayavāda of Vedāntins is of the same standpoint as that of Vijñānavādins and criticizes the Vedānta school as a whole. In justifying his criticism, he quotes a verse from the Padmaputarana, which states that mayavāda is an incorrect theory and is a Buddhist doctrine.

However, it also becomes apparent that despite leaning heavily on the illusoriness of avidya and Anatman doctrine of Buddhism, Acarya Sankara keeps a margin. Sankara retained some basic Upanishadic positions of Atmavāda, in his own distinctive way that at times also made his position different from Gauḍapāda with whom he otherwise agreed on many other points. For instance, Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevvan also has recorded his conviction that both Gauḍapāda and Śankara are advocates of the same kind of Advaita³⁷. “Gauḍapāda is mainly interested in delineating the nature of the real and, therefore, consistently with it, shows little concern for the life of man in the world. Śankara, on the other hand, develops a system of thought whose immense sweep and flexible structure provide for the development of all enlightened human interests.” (Warrier, 1968)

Thus, Advaita Vedānta philosophy has been interpreting and re-interpreting itself over the ages, as there are various scopes for a new interpretation of the text. Moreover, it takes a new turn in the history of the Neo-Vedāntic movement. The contemporary Indian philosophers or the Neo-Vedāntic philosophers interpret Vedānta in their own way. They acknowledge various religions as different paths to the same goal and diversity in practice. Thus, Neo-Vedānta opens new panoramas of spiritual wisdom and makes the tenets of Advaita in its new form universal. So, the subsequent chapter will throw light on the hermeneutical variation of Advaita Vedāntic interpretation by the Neo-vedāntins in various forms, and the new way of engaging Vedānta philosophy, which was influenced by humanistic globalism, the importance of egalitarian social ethics, and a focus on the psychological experience.

³⁷ Sri Satchidanandendra Sarasvati, the author of the *Mandukya rahasyavritti*, Mysore, 1958, advances arguments to show that the author of the BSB and GPKB are one; pp.6ff.

Chapter IV

Hermeneutical Receptivity of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara and its Neo-Vedantic Reconstructions

4. 1. Introduction

Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara is one of the most renowned and significant schools in Asia. It is the hermeneutic version of the Sutras, which later developed into philosophical thought. It is a religious and philosophical school founded by one of the most prominent and distinguished individuals in the history of Indian thought, Acharya Sankara. The most distinctive feature of Advaita Vedanta philosophy is its unique way of interpreting the Upanishads and revealed the scriptures, as well as its devotion to using specific hermeneutical approaches to disclose meaning.

As discussed in the earlier chapter, according to Advaita Vedanta, there is only one eternal reality, and that is Brahman. Brahman is the source of everything. Everything coming out of Brahman, and again, everything returned to Brahman. The phenomenal world or the objective world which we perceive, according to Sankara, is a kind of illusion that occurred through Maya. It is only the eternal power of Brahman, which makes it appear. Ultimate reality is the Brahman. Just as the familiar example of the perception of a rope as a snake. Sankara states that ignorance is the primary cause of these kinds of illusion. Moreover, through true knowledge, one can get rid of this cosmic illusion.

As shown in the previous chapter, philosophical developments significantly diverge within the Vedanta school as well. “Starting with Sankara's monistic school, passing through the system of Rāmānujā, where the world and souls are considered to be parts or attributes of eternal Brahman, and winding up in the theistic dualism of Madhva, where Brahman is opposed to nature and living beings” (Isaeva, 1992).

However, Advaita Vedanta has been interpreting and re-interpreting itself throughout the ages. Again in the Neo-Vedantin movement, Advaita Vedanta's philosophy of Sankara takes

a new turn, which marks it as a philosophy of culture. Distinguishing between “classical” Advaita Vedanta and “Advaita in the Vernaculars,” R. Balasubramanian, for example, notes that “it is wrong to think that the development of Advaita has stopped by the sixteenth century A.D. One should read the writings of the mystic-philosophers of the different regions to see the evolution of Advaitic thought, to understand the new applications of Advaitic principles, and to appreciate the liberalization of Advaitic discipline” (Balasubramanian, 2000).

Thus, this chapter is devoted to new ways of approaching the study of Advaita Vedanta, with a focus on post-Sankara Vedanta. What distinguishes Advaita Vedanta, as a knowledge system, is neither its propounding of a nondualist position nor its investment in some general manner in Upanishadic exegesis, but rather its commitment to using specific hermeneutical strategies to unlock the meaning, extent, and purpose of revealed scripture.

4. 2. Modernity in Advaita Vedanta or Neo Vedanta

Indian philosophy has primarily been influenced by Advaita Vedanta and continues to develop under this influence. But in modern Indian thought, the Advaita theory of Consciousness has undergone various transformations in the shape of neo-Vedanta. Indeed, people always search for new ones. So, for living an old religious tradition or culture in the modern world, has to develop and change over time. In the same way, the followers of Vedanta philosophy interpreted it, developed it, and changed it as per the circumstances. Hence, Vedanta philosophy, which exists only as a theory, also has to change in the form of neo-Vedanta. It is considered as ‘neo’ or ‘new’ because it is continuously in the process of self-rejuvenation and dialectical integration. Of course, it is not only Vedanta, which is consistently changing but all religions of the world are encountering a continuous process of change. Nevertheless, one of the essential features of the process of development of Vedanta and other Indian religions, in general, is that they don’t want to build up by destroying other faiths and cultures but by integrating their best elements. As Hegelian dialectic, they tried to make the integration between the old and the new. Harmony is the fundamental principle of the neo-Vedantic kind of hermeneutics. Swami Bhajanananda in his article *Alienation and Neo-Vedanta* (2000), states that, the neo-Vedanta advocates’ four types of harmony-

1. Harmony among the different schools of Vedanta

2. Harmony of Vedanta and science
3. Harmony of world religions and
4. Harmony of the individual and society. (Bhajananda, 2000)

Neo-Vedanta is a process of renewal and is meant nothing but traditional Vedanta interpreted in terms of modern thought. The neo-vedantins are mostly influenced by western principles and categories, which include humanistic globalism, the importance of classless social ethics, and a focus on the subjective experience. And they often seem as much in dialogue with western ideas and writers as with the classical Advaita tradition. If we say positively, their writings and lives can be seen as models for the interaction and integration of traditional Hinduism with the western humanistic tradition. That is almost like the 'Pizza effect.' As Agehānanda Bhārati said,

The original pizza was a hot baked bread that was exported to America from Italy, embellished, and returned to Italy, where it became a national dish. Similarly, elements of Hindu culture such as yoga bhakti gurus, some Hindu teachings, dance, and music, have been exported to the west, due mainly to the Hindu renaissance where they have gained great popularity and then gained popularity among urban Hindus in India as a consequence. (Flood, 1996)

The leading advocates of the Neo-Vedantic movement were Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, and Radhakrishnan, and here the thesis also incorporates Gandhi. However, the new chapter in the development of Advaita Vedanta was first brought into light by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. They took the initiative to revolutionize Advaita Vedanta in a very significant way and introduced several important changes in the understanding of Advaita Vedanta. They tried to make it more relevant to the needs and conditions of the modern world and also wanted to apply it in practical life. Another most significant transformation that took place between Advaita Vedanta and neo-Vedanta is that the Advaita Vedanta gave greater importance to the transcendent aspect of Brahman. In contrast, the Neo-Vedanta gives more significance to the immanent aspect of Brahman.

4. 2. 1. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda's interpretation of Advaita Vedanta

Swami Vivekananda, the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and also the founder of Ramakrishna math and mission, which is also known as Ramakrishna movement, “has been described as an architect of neo-Hinduism. He is the formulator of a style of neo-Vedanta that has provided the philosophical rationale for the practice of sevā. Vivekananda's reworking of Vedanta was made possible through his willingness to reinterpret traditional Hindu concepts, including karma-yoga and seva, in a highly flexible manner” (Beckerlegge, 2007). Vivekananda found that through Advaita Vedanta, we can solve our daily problems. He exhibited various practical utilities of Advaita Vedanta. He stated that “Advaitic knowledge can provide the groundwork of morality. It can be the beginning of inner strength and courage and also serve as the source for social justice and equality as well” (Bhajananda, 2010). Swami Vivekananda realizes that although Vedanta originated in a particular country and time and culture, the truth, it embodied were eternal and universal. They belong not to any specific people or race but are the common heritage of the whole of humanity. Swami Vivekananda indeed used the term ‘Vedanta’ when he spoke of unity. But by Vedanta, he meant not mere theory but practice, ‘not talk but the realization,’ to quote his own words. That is to say, Vedanta is yoga, the transformation of life. (Vivekananda, 1962)

The most significant thing that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda did was to improve ‘the integral vision of the ultimate Reality, the holistic outlook on life, and the pluralistic acceptance of social realities that India had lost’ (Bhajananda, 2013). One of the most important contributions of Sri Ramakrishna in the modern world is that he is the first spiritualist thinker who believes in religious pluralism. Through religious pluralism, he tried to establish peace and harmony among all religions. However, “the pluralism that Sri Ramakrishna advocated was not like the Western analytical model, but it was a kind of the Indian holistic model. What Sri Ramakrishna did was to re-establish the ancient Indian view of religious harmony by adapting it to the needs of modern society.” (Bhajananda, 2013)

As a spiritualist and as a supporter of religious pluralism, Ramakrishna realized the truth of inner spirit through devotion to goddesses. He very clearly understood that all religions ultimately teach the same thing and that the Gods of the different religions are the same being.

Just their act of referring is different. Some refer to him as Allah, others Brahman, Kali, or Rama, Buddha. Just as different names by different people call the same substance. The declarations of 'Exclusivist' religious thinkers like 'my religion is the truth, and all others are false' cannot be accurate. According to Ramakrishna, all religions are just like different ways towards the same goal-god. Philosophy compares the People who claim that only their religion is right with the blind man. Just like the blind men arguing about the appearance of the elephant, as in the well-known parable:

Four blind men went to see an elephant, one touched a leg of the elephant and said, 'the elephant is like a pillar,' the second touched the trunk and said, 'the elephant is like a thick club.' The third touched the belly and said, 'the elephant is like a huge jar.' The fourth touched the ears and said, 'the elephant is like a big winnowing basket.' (Chande, 2000)

So Ramakrishna pointed out that religious conflict between different religions was meaningless and very harmful. While Sankara's Advaita supports the identity of being and Consciousness that appeared too abstract to Ramakrishna. He could not accept Advaita's hypothesis that the visible world and the individual souls are only illusory. He recognizes the reality of the material world. For Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Advaita was just one path through which realization can get, neither it was only one, nor was it the ultimate one. On the other hand, according to Vivekananda, Advaitavāda is the highest attitude of spiritual life, and Vishistadvaitavāda, Dvaitavād, and Dvaitadvaitavād are only steps towards it. According to him, Vishistadvaitavād, Dvaitavād, and Dvaitadvaitavād are hermeneutics of the former. And they "have been progressive, beginning with dualistic or the Dvaita and ending with the non-dualistic or Advaita" (Vivekananda, 1962). He never made any distinction between the two. Here we can see a little difference between Vivekananda and Ramakrishna. In other words, we can say there is an interesting subtle hermeneutical variation even among upholders of the same school as by nature Ramakrishna was more mystic and a devotee than Vivekananda, who was more logical and rational.

Another difference put forward between the two is about their outlook on the value of Advaita relative to the Bhakti paths. There is no doubt that Ramakrishna is seen to praise Bhakti

Yoga in Ramakrishna Kathamrita (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna), while Vivekananda talked mostly about Advaita in the West. It is also undoubtedly true that Vivekananda believes in Advaita, while Ramakrishna believes in the Bhakti path. On the other hand, both Vivekananda and Ramakrishna not agreed with Sankara while he gave importance to Jñānamarga than the Bhakti Marga. Sankara claimed that one could attain moksha only through Jñāna and Bhakti, and all others are only the initial path to moksha. In contrast to Sankara, both Vivekananda and Ramakrishna claimed that all paths, including Bhakti, could lead a person to the Advaita experience, which both regarded as the ultimate experience.

Thus, Neo-Vedantin likes Swami Vivekananda contributing to a new understanding of the Vedanta tradition. In modern times, Swami Vivekananda popularized the message of the Vedanta in the West, with particular emphasis upon its universality of outlook and its ability to harmonize the different historical religions of the world. While Sri Ramakrishna emphasized God-realization as the supreme goal of all living beings, for Vivekananda, the primary expression of India's "eternal tradition" was the Vedanta, in particular, *Advaita Vedanta*. For Vivekananda, although Vedanta had been “a theory only for several thousand years and never came into practice.” (Beckerlegge, 2007) Ramakrishna was “one who was able to carry theory into practice” (Beckerlegge, 2007). It was only Vivekananda who saw in Ramakrishna’s teaching that “the Vedanta of the forest can be brought to human habitation and that it can be applied in practice to the work-a-day world” (Beckerlegge, 2007). Swami Vivekananda was also very concerned with the contemporary interpretation of the Caste system and untouchability. Through Ramakrishna Mission, he tried to reduce all these distinctions. In the book “History of Philosophy: Eastern and Western” Radhakrishnan stated that,

Vivekananda felt more strongly than many others that the true Hindu religion could not be lost if a *sudra* read the *Vedas*, if a widow remarried if an untouchable was touched, if a non-Hindu was converted to Hinduism or if a Hindu married a non-Hindu. Hence he taught that all reforms could be made within the Hindu fold itself, without starting new societies, which tended to become new divisions and castes within Hinduism, thereby endangering its solidarity. It should be said to the credit of the Ramakrishna Mission that it has been trying systematically not only to avoid all caste,

creed and race distinctions but also as close to associate and even identify itself with the main Hindu tradition as it is possible for it to do without reintroducing these distinctions. And it may be added that it has accomplished this task admirably well. (Radhakrishnan, 1952)

Vivekananda remains a great admirer and follower of the Buddha and his ideals. Among all other Maha Puruṣas, Buddha remains his great role model and his fascination to the extent that he often considered Buddha to be his god. Vivekananda asserts that there is not much difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. The principal doctrines of Buddhism are old Hindu doctrines adapted to a new system as old wine put in new bottles. Vivekananda's famous Chicago lecture shares this idea that Buddhadev did not initiate a different religion, but he came to give full shape to what was contained in Hinduism. He says that the westerners wrongly assume that Hinduism and Buddhism are separate religions. Vivekananda affirmed that it was the same Brahman that manifested in different forms and powers. He observed, "May he who is the Brahman of Hindus, the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in heaven of the Christians, give strength to you. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his law of growth³⁸." (Vivekananda, 1962). Vivekananda strongly criticized fanaticism, priest-craft, and exclusive tendencies in religions.

Describing religion, Vivekananda says that the Vedanta is the rationale of all religions. Without the Vedanta, every religion is superstition; with it, everything becomes religion. Vivekananda's aim was to re-Vedantise India. He said his consciousness was as motionless as the bottom of the sea, and that he was a witness to the deviations of Indian history. "Thus be thou calm, Sannyasi bold; say 'om tat sat om'" (Naravane, 1978). For Vivekananda, history is a collective memory of past events. To witness its mutations is the function of renunciative consciousness, and the consciousness has become one with Being³⁹. "I am," the Swami said, "the

³⁸ See also, Romain Rolland, *Prophets of the new India* (1930), pp-261

³⁹ See also, Yadav, Bibhuti S., "Mispredicated Identity and Postcolonial Discourse." In *Postcolonial Philosophy of Religion*, Edited by Andrew B. Irvine Purushottama Bilimoria, (USA: Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), pp-75-105.

greatest God that there was or shall be. Christ and the Buddhas are just the waves of the boundless ocean that I am. The historical premises of the happenings of Buddhas and Christ are bubbles, and they merely have come to pass on Vedantic consciousness.” (Naravane, 1978)

The western thought greatly influenced Vivekananda, and he had a keen interest to accept European thought. Because in the eyes of Vivekananda, European thought was entirely rational. It has the capacity to make scientific discoveries that were rather attractive for Vivekananda. Vivekananda wants ‘to revolutionize the world’ with the eternal verities which are in possession of India. He has brought about the reconciliation of Advaita Vedanta with modern science” (Schweitzer, 1936). Furthermore, Vivekananda also tries to show that the Vedanta philosophy itself is a science- the science of Consciousness. “According to a saying of Aurobindo Ghose, India holds in its hand the key to the progress of humanity” (Schweitzer, 1936). They inevitably use western terminology and categories, and which clearly indicate that the intended audience is western or Indians educated in western-style schools.

4. 2. 2. Sri Aurobindo’s Interpretation of Advaita Vedanta

Sri Aurobindo was an idealist philosopher and also known as a spiritual reformer. The most influential leader of modern India introduced his vision on spiritual evolution and his idea of integral Vedanta, which is somewhat different from the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara. Because at some point, Sri Aurobindo did not agree with Sankara’s version of Advaita Vedanta. The fundamental idea of Sri Aurobindo was the evolution of human life into the divine life. The fundamental idea upon which the whole structure of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy rests is that matter, as well as spirit, is to be looked upon as real. Sri Aurobindo proclaims, “The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base. unless we recognize not only eternal spirit as the inhabitant of the bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe but accept matter of which it is made as a fit and noble material out of which He constantly weaves His garbs, builds the unending series of His mansions recurrently.” (Aurobindo, 1949)

Aurobindo remained a critic of Sankara’s doctrine of Maya and its emphasis on the less reality of the world. So he developed his own metaphysical position, which is known as ‘Integral Advaita.’ “The metaphysical position of Sri Aurobindo considers Brahman as both transcendent

and immanent in the world. The divine reality also inherent in the finite individuals, so finite individual is the appearance of the Brahman. In his metaphysics, he endowed with a theory of emergent evolution, which presupposes a prior involution. According to Aurobindo, there are different stages of life. Matter evolves through these stages of life to spirit and then descended into the matter again. This is a type of classical *satkaryavāda* (that the effect pre-exists in the material cause) that allows for the emergence of new qualitative changes” (Gupta B., 2012). According to Sri Aurobindo, in the process of evolution, the world or the matter ascends to spirit, and similarly, the spirit must have to descent to the world. The matter is the last phase of the descending of the spirit and the first phase of evolution. Likewise, in the process of involution, the spirit descends into mind, and the mind must, therefore, move towards its source by ascending to something higher than itself-Supermind. In evolution, the ascending process continues until the Absolute Spirit or Sachchidananda is reached.

The evolution of matter is possible only because there has been an involution of the spirit into matter. We can present the process of evolution and involution in the following way---

The process of Involution	The process of Evolution
Existence Consciousness force Bliss Supermind Mind Psyche Life Matter	Matter Life Psyche Mind Supermind Bliss Consciousness force Existence

Table 4.1: Process of Evolution and Involution

Evolution, in other words, is the opposite action of involution. It is a conscious movement. Sri Aurobindo also holds that the evolutionary structure of the world process is due to the Consciousness force inherent in the Brahman.

The metaphysical foundation of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is Vedanta philosophy, but it is remarkable that Aurobindo's Vedantism has to be distinguished from the Advaita of Sankara. The significant divergence between Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and the Advaita philosophy of Sankara is that Sankara's philosophy believed that man's salvation is possible if he cut off all the attachment with the body, mind, and life and becoming merged in the Absolute or if he combined himself with the Absolute. However, according to Aurobindo, if salvation comes, it would come only to the individual man, to uplift into that of the superman or the divine man, nor the uplift of the whole universe, physical, vital, and mental. Nevertheless, it is precisely this transformation of man into divine man, the emergence of a race of Gnostic Beings, representing the culmination and fulfillment of human beings, which is the underlying message of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Sankara's Advaita Vedanta is based on the statement that 'Brahman Satyam Jagat Mithya.' For Sankara, the world is unreal. But for Aurobindo, the world is very much real. He does not believe in Sanyasa and running away from the realities of the world, which he says it as escapism.

Radhakrishnan, in his 'Source Book in Indian philosophy,' stated that "the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo constitutes a point of view which he considers to be original Vedanta but which stands in strong opposition to the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara on several basic issues" (Radhakrishnan S., 1957). Sri Aurobindo categorically rejects what he considers to be the illusionism of Sankara as untrue to Vedanta and as untrue to his own vision of reality. The most important doctrine, Aurobindo, does not agree with Sankara is, when Sankara's non-dual Vedanta accepts the doctrine of Maya and regards the world only as an illusion. While presenting his philosophy, Sri Aurobindo does not accept the doctrine of Maya. Aurobindo, in his book *The Life Divine*, states that 'All life is divine and no part of it can be dismissed as Maya or illusion. He wrote that "the real monism, the true Advaita, is that which admits all things as the one Brahman and does not seek to bisect its existence into two incompatible entities, an eternal truth and an eternal falsehood, Brahman and non-Brahman, self and non-self, a real self and an unreal and yet perpetual Maya" (Aurobindo, 1949). He thinks that if we recognize the world of Maya as

the world of divine Lila, we arrive at true Advaita, where everything is divine. Explaining this further, Radhakrishnan says, “The descent of the Absolute into the finite, which would be inexplicable based on Sankara’s negativistic interpretation, is necessitated in Sri Aurobindo’s view as the inevitable expression of the essential power of Brahman” (Radhakrishnan S., 1957)

Sri Aurobindo gives a new status to Maya by calling it ‘the Maya of Brahman.’ He also stated that we should ‘apply Vedanta to the fulfillment of life and not only to the escape from life’ (Aurobindo, 1949). Sri Aurobindo thinks that by rejecting Sankara’s doctrine of Maya, he is only saving Sankara Advaita Vedanta. According to him, in his monistic universe, there cannot be anything contaminated with unreality. Aurobindo wrote in his *Life Divine*, “The world is not unreal in the sense that it has no sort of existence, for even if it were only a dream of the self, still it would exist in it as a dream.” (Aurobindo, 1949)

Sri Aurobindo also believes in the Upanishadic statement like ‘Sarvam Khalu idam Brahma.’ According to him, ‘the fundamental doctrine of the Vedanta found in the Chandogya Upanishad is “sarvam khalu idam Brahma,” which means all this is Brahman. In Sri Aurobindo’s Vedanta, the many does not negate the one; it makes the one manifest. Aurobindo stated that the material world is not just an imperfection or a shade on the white radiance of eternity; it makes that eternity apparent. Here Sri Aurobindo appears to be a humanist in his Vedanta philosophy, in his thought ‘life in the eternally consummate Being and the realization of his divine nature in our human existence’ (Aurobindo, 1949). For Aurobindo, Vedanta is not just an intellectual understanding of a system of thought. For him, Vedantic thought must lead to a Vedantic act. The goal of that act is to assure the evolution of the mind to the level of the supermind. However, this supermind will not take man beyond the human universe. For him, the spiritual universe is a human universe where man attains his divinity without ceasing to be human.

Sri Aurobindo’s humanistic Vedanta gives the Vedanta philosophy a new dimension and a new depth. While he rejects Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, it becomes very close to Ramanuja’s Vedanta. Sri Aurobindo’s Vedanta is Advaitic or monistic in the sense that it affirms the oneness and unity of Brahma. But for Sri Aurobindo, the one manifests itself in the many without renouncing its oneness. Sri Aurobindo presents to us the process through which one can

reach the Vedantic ideal. That process is a form of Sadhana. He was a mystic philosopher. From his intuitive mystic vision, Aurobindo has gained his enlightenment concerning the ultimate truth. Furthermore, based on his spiritual vision, he eliminates the negativism and illusion of traditions. Thus Indian philosophy prepares for the Indian people a more positive way of life, which makes possible a mutual philosophical understanding of Indian and the west and eventually possibly a significant synthesis of eastern and western thought.

4. 2. 3. Tagore's Interpretation of Advaita Vedanta

Rabindranath Tagore played a very significant role in the history of Indian philosophical tradition. Although Tagore was Vedantist and 'the historians of Indian philosophy rightly refer to him as a Vedantist' (Brody, 1984), but like Vedantic philosopher, he did not place God in the solitude of a world beyond. Rabindranath Tagore very clearly conveys his view of the world in his book 'Sadhana.' Tagore made a great effort to make apparent 'Brāhmanical Mysticism' in the sense of the ethical world and positive aspects of life. He also did not agree with Sankara's thought that the phenomenal world is only an illusion. Perhaps Tagore wanted to say that if we negate the phenomenal world, then some ethical issues will occur. So, "For the sake of ethics, he decisively declares himself in favor of world and life-affirmation" (Schweitzer, 1936). Schweitzer, in his book '*Indian Thought and Its Development*,' says: "A process of development which has been going on for centuries reaches in him its natural conclusion."

Tagore calls it a peculiarity of oriental thought that though it is occupied only with the question of union with God, yet it does not permit man to reach a positive relationship to the world which proceeded from God. (Schweitzer, 1936)

According to Tagore, "of course it is obvious that the world serves us and fulfills our needs, but our relation to it does not end there. We were bound to it with a deeper and truer bond than that of necessity. Our soul is drawn to it; our love of life is our wish to continue our relationship with this great world. This relation is one kind of love." (Tagore, *Sadhana*, 1915) Tagore attempts to understand the world in a very positive way and maintains that it is governed by beauty, harmony, and order. According to Tagore, the world is not alien for us; in fact, we experience the world in ourselves. For that, we have to surrender ourselves to the world

completely. In a different sense, he regarded the world as the larger body, and our ego must expand into the world's ego. Tagore refers to the meaning of yoga that is to enable the achievement of this aim. The union of man with God owes its significance not from the attitude of the individual that wants 'to have' but of the one that searches for the best way 'to be.' To say that, man achieves the truth is to admit that man is separate from the truth, whereas 'to be true' is 'to become one with the truth' (Tagore, *The Religion of Man* 2015). Although Tagore strongly supports dualism, that is the transcendental and the phenomenal world, yet he criticizes the Europeans for not surrendering to God and for lost their inwardness. According to him, we should have both that man should belong to God with his soul and serve him actively in his world. From such observation, we can sum up that more than Sankara's impersonal Brahman Tagore's religious belief was theistic diversity of religion.

Rabindranath Tagore's thought on religion starts with the Upanishads, which he inherited. And then he becomes determined to finish with *The Religion of Man*. Tagore propagates the idea of the immanence of God reflected in the Upanishads. Brahman is the Supreme Reality which makes its appearance in and through the finite world. From Tagore's perspective, man is persistently developing, and the union with the divine is his ultimate goal. "Religion only finds itself when it touches the Brahman in man," Tagore observes in *The Religion of Man*, "Otherwise it has no reason to exist"⁴⁰. He also discovers the Supreme Being in and through nature. Tagore says, "The first stage of any realization was through my feeling of intimacy with nature" (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 1931). Tagore finally came to believe in what he called 'The Religion of Man', though he initially combined some elements of Brahmasamaj with some elements of orthodox Hinduism. Like Vivekananda, Tagore explicitly believed that religion could not be confined to any group or sect or tribe or nation. He said that man picked up that particular form of religion which suited him, but in the final analysis, religion transcends all such particular forms. The aim of true religion is the realization of one's kinship with everything.

Tagore is not drawn to impersonal philosophies as he believes in God, nature, and self to be inseparable aspects of reality. They are mostly the same. It is clear that to Tagore, religion is the breath of life. For him, there is no defined religion of any particular church or creed, but it

⁴⁰ Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, published in 1931.

is one that illumines all religions. It gives its divine light to show the real value of things, it is the source of human being's deepest longings and aspirations, and it makes life beautiful. His every thought is dominated by the Consciousness of God. Moreover, this Consciousness pervades his being, bringing his mind into a perpetual attitude of worship. He does not put aside other things from his life. His senses are renewed in a new form that appreciates all things that surround him. His religious sensitivity is charged with inner joy.

Tagore says, "If this universe is not the manifestation of a person, then it is a stupendous deception and perpetual insult to him" (Tagore, Essays, 2007). Hence, for Tagore, the world is not unreal or *Maya*. It is as real as the Reality or Brahman because it is the manifestation of the Brahman. Although Tagore heavily relies on the ancient Indian thought and introduces this concept more or less in the Vedantic method, Tagore's religious upbringing keeps room for religion in all aspects of life. For the Advaitavadin Sankaracharya, the phenomenal world is nothing but *Maya*, which is inadequately translated illusion. The world is unreal when viewed separately from its basis in the ultimate or Brahman. When observed in its relation to Brahman, we find that all this is Brahman: 'sarvam khalu idam Brahma' (Radhakrishnan S., 1960). Sankara sometimes says that the world does not exist in reality, and its occurrence disappears when the reality is known. The world's appearance is *Maya*. Like, Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore also stated that the universe is the *Leela* or 'divine sport' of Ishwara. In this regard, Rabindranath Tagore comes close to the spirit of Ramanuja's Vaishnavism then to Sankara.

Even though in the characterization of God, we find some occasional references to Vedanta's writings in Rabindranath Tagore, but Tagore remains a critique of the Vedantic concept of Brahman. Tagore stated that "the Brahman of the Vedanta is abstract, and beyond any real manifestation in the universe is difficult to accept" (Tagore, *Gītāñjali* 2000). Tagore says that "the infinite in India was not a thin nonentity, void of all content. We can know Him by realizing Him in each and all" (Tagore, 1915). From this, we can say that Rabindranath's God is not the impersonal Absolute like of the Vedanta. Rabindranath's God is like a person. His *Gitanjali* makes of God a person. "To Rabindranath, God is not a kind of being, seated high up in the heavens, but a spirit immanent in the whole universe of persons and things"

(Radhakrishnan S., 1919). Tagore finds it also meaningless to argue that the Vedantic Brahman is an absolute nothing as for Rabindranath, God is real.

In the great conversation of Tagore with Albert Einstein, the scientist asked Tagore if he believes in the Divine as secluded from the world. Tagore contended that there is not any Divinity that is secluded. According to him, the infinite personality of Man understands the Universe. There cannot be anything that cannot be comprehended by the human personality, and this demonstrates that the human truth is the truth of the Universe” (Ray, 1995). Einstein, at that point in his life, was a realist and told Tagore that he believes that there exists a ‘world as a reality independent of the human factor.’ Tagore responds by saying that “there can be no other conception of the world than the human one. ‘This world is a human world—the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man.’” (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 2015)

Tagore tries to give importance to both the physical and spiritual aspects of human beings. Tagore never degrades the status of the human being. To him, the human being is at the apex of creation. Tagore writes that ‘Man, as a creation, represents the Creator, and this is why of all creatures. So, it has been possible for him to comprehend this world in his knowledge, feeling, and imagination. To realize the union, his Spirit with the Spirit, that is everywhere’ (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, 2015). We can see two distinct sets of ideas whenever we discuss Rabindranath’s view regarding the relationship between absolute and finite individuals. Like Saṅkara, he sometimes highlighted the Absolute as it is in Saṅkara, but then the acceptance of the Absolute Reality nullifies with the claims of many finite individuals. On the other hand, he has also followed the path of Ramanuja and *Bhakti* Schools. It seems that he has tried to make a firm organic relation between the Absolute and the finite.

The connection between the two is considered as that between the lover and the beloved. For example, in the *Vrihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Yajnavalka says: “The wife loves her husband not because he is her husband, or the mother loves her son not because he is her son. This love blooms because the same self is immanent in all, only because the wife finds herself in

her husband and the mother in her son⁴¹”. It is only because of this sense of our oneness. As a particular expression, the same Soul makes no distinction between his interests and that of his beloved. Alternatively, a mother identifies her well-being with that of her son. It is this sense of identity that draws us closer to one another, establishes intimate bonds between us, promotes our care and concern for others, and inspires in us a positive ‘inner readiness’ to help others, to sacrifice our personal interests for the sake of others.

The prospect of converting human love into divine love held by Tagore must have been derived from Vaishnavism. Vaishnavism, taught Tagore, the message of the loving union between God and human being. Vaishnavites view the world as real with its various colors and combination. God is everything, and all actions of the human being should be dedicated to Him.

We should view the body as an aspect of the Infinite and not as independent of the Infinite. According to Tagore, our life is a constant search for the Infinite. Tagore calls this infinite aspect of the human being as *Jivan Devata*—the Lord of life, which is the element of divinity present in people. It is the Lord because it gives us the joy of existence. It is the element that makes them God-like. Thus, we see that physical nature is the finite side of human beings, and the infinite aspect in them is what is said to be the soul in common parlance.

The usual way for Rabindranath’s many predecessors was either impose Brāhmanical Hinduism on Buddha or to bridge the differences between the two by accepting Buddha as an avatar, particularly of Vishnu. Rabindranath differs in this regard from his predecessors as someone for whom truth-seeking is a natural tendency in man that needs to be substantiated with a historical perspective in addition to that we naturally look for the rational one. “Rabindranath has not taken avataravāda concept but for him, Buddhadeb, seen from a sheer historical perspective too, remains the greatest man ever born and this human greatness and divinity earned thereby is what is to be reverentially acknowledged. Overcoming usual Brāhmanical way of Brāhmanisation of Buddha and Buddhism, Rabindranath’s historical perspective on the greatness of Buddha enabled him for a balanced interpretation of Buddhism.” (S. B. Barua, 1967).

⁴¹ Kalyan Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, (Advaita Ashrama, 2005), op.cit., pp-09. See also, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The principal Upaniṣads* (Allen & Unwin, 1953), pp-251-252.

“Besides Rabindranath never claimed Buddhism to be a part of Hinduism. Herein lies the distinctive Tagorian way of understanding the great Buddha. Rabindranath believes that the avataravāda concept is a gift from Buddhism to Hinduism.” (S. B. Barua, 1967)

4. 2. 4. Mahatma Gandhi’s Interpretation of Advaita Vedanta

Mahatma Gandhi also was a great follower of Vedanta, and he is also known as an Advaitin. Like Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, too, sought to reinterpret Vedanta as non-violence and truth. However, although he was a follower of Advaitavāda, he was also a supporter of Dvaitavāda. Gandhi was quite unclear regarding the Advaitavāda and the Dvaitavāda. Even by doing this, he tried to say that the Advaitins should also believe in Dvaitism. He did not want to become hostile to anyone. When people question his inconsistency or variation of beliefs, Gandhi argued that the world has no permanent existence; it is changing every moment and is therefore unreal. Even though it is continuously changing, it has something about it which persists and is, therefore, to that extent real. Gandhi, therefore, called the world both that it is real and unreal and thus being called an Anekantavadi or a Syadvadi⁴². Gandhi added his own special variation to the nirguna bhakti. He combined it both with his own interpretation of the concept of yajñā in the Gita, his most favorite scripture, and with his basic ideal of service.

He had an unshakable faith in universal brotherhood⁴³. Gandhi’s understanding of his unique theory of non-violence demonstrates that he was influenced by both Indian religions and philosophical schools, especially Hinduism, Jainism, Sāṅkhya, as well as western religion like Christianity and personalities like Leo Tolstoy. He does not want to conflict with morality. For Gandhi, all man-made religions are not perfect. So, the question of superiority and inferiority does not arise at all. Each and every follower of Truth should regard all religions as equal.

A true Vaishnava is he Who is moved by others' sufferings; Who helps people in distress, and feels no pride for having done so. “Vaishnav Jana to tene kahiye je peer parai jaane

⁴² As cited by Rita D. Sherma and Arvind Sharma in their book *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons*. Pp-194

⁴³ The Hindu Monday, Sep 30, 2002

re.....” the unique Bhajan⁴⁴ wrote by Narsinh Mehta, which speaks about the ideals of a Vaishnava follower, influenced Gandhi very much. Gandhi wanted to live by the ideals articulated in the Bhajan. By which it is clearly understood how much supreme and phenomenal Gandhi’s Religion was. Gandhi believes in the religion of strong ethical commitment to social justice and truth, which he identified with God. His religion is not just limited to worshipping in the temple, church, or in Mosque, but is completely based on morality and humanity. According to Gandhi, religion was not something that concerned a man in his isolation from his fellow beings. Gandhi always worked hard for the social upliftment of the down-trodden like the shudras, untouchables, and the women. His whole social life was devoted to upliftment and welfare of those two classes, which were mostly neglected and suppressed (Jordens, 1998).

An interesting observation can be made that although most of the Neo Vedantins, mentioned here, considered them as Advaitins, what they meant by Advaita could either lead them to a theistic direction of God-man union of the two as Advaita, or bhakti as another. That we have seen, right from Ramkrishna’s bhakti for Goddess Kali, or deeper Vaishnavite and God-centric impact in Gandhi and Tagore, take them closer to Leela (sport), and bhakti. This interesting unveiling of hermeneutical layers that we have seen in this chapter is significantly relevant. The following section on Radhakrishnan as a synthesizer between the east and the west is also relevant when he takes his unique position on Advaita and Maya of Sankara, in a manner that it becomes more bhakti like than sheer jñāna and he explores the creative dialogue between the two in a harmonious way.

4. 2. 5. Radhakrishnan’s Interpretation of Advaita Vedanta

Radhakrishnan is one of the great influential thinkers and philosophers of India who was influenced by the writings of Rabindranath Tagore to a great extent. He is also one of the great interpreters of Indian philosophy. Among the neo-Vedantic philosophers, he is regarded as one of the great followers of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara. He had a significant contribution in giving a new direction to the Vedanta. He has enriched Vedanta philosophy into a very

⁴⁴ Mahatma Gandhi had a significant effect by the bhajan ‘Vaishnava Jana to’, which is written by the poet Narsinh Mehta in the 15th century. The poem expresses the life, ideals, and mentality of a follower of Vishnu.

prestigious level. “He is a philosopher of a new East-West cultural synthesis, and the Vedanta is the soil into which the roots of this synthesis are grounded. The history of the process of reconstruction has been the history of the Neo-Vedantic movement. In contemporary Indian philosophy, this movement was inaugurated by Vivekananda and which has culminated in Radhakrishnan. The Vedanta, which Radhakrishnan reconstructs and develops into world culture, is, of course, based on the Advaita Vedanta, which Sankara expounded” (Singh, 1966). His reinterpretation of the doctrine of Maya in the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara is his most enormous contribution. Radhakrishnan states that “Maya has not meant Indian philosophy, even to Sankara, that the world is an illusion. The world of everyday events and things is not the ultimate reality, to be sure, but neither is its unreality.” He also states that the basis of the reality of the empirical world is Absolute. (Radhakrishnan S., 1957)

Even though he is regarded as one of the great followers of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, but unlike Sankara, Radhakrishnan was a supporter of dualism. Radhakrishnan did not want to repeat the metaphysics of Sankara but tries to interpret Advaita for the present needs. Instead of negating the aspects concerning life and experience, he accepts the reality and the meaning of the many aspects and grades of experience. He holds the reality and diversity of the Prakṛti or phenomenal world and also at the same time, the transcendent Absolute. According to Radhakrishnan, the phenomenal world is subject to change and limited, whose origin is the Absolute, which is free from all limits and diversity. He states that the Vedantic concept of Saguna Brahman gives the idea of a concrete Absolute. If we accept only the Nirguna Brahman, then the Vedanta philosophy would have been somewhat abstract. Therefore, to vanish the abstractness, we have to accept both Saguna Brahman, which is ‘real from the cosmic standpoint’ and Nirguna Brahman, which is beyond all attributes.

Radhakrishnan was also greatly influenced by the Hegelian philosophy. He tries to apply the Hegelian thoughts while interpreting Advaita Vedanta. However, unlike Hegel, although Radhakrishnan was a rationalist philosopher, he did not give the highest position to ‘Reason.’ He put intuition on a higher position than reason. Although both the philosopher, Radhakrishnan, and Hegel, accept the reality of the phenomenal world and admits the finite things, they also accept that the existence of this material world is not independent. The reality of

this world is dependent on something, so it is dependently real. According to Radhakrishnan, the world as substance gives meaning to the absolute.

In the contemporary period when various cultural tendencies fought for the supremacy, and everyone claims the authority, Radhakrishnan played an astonishing role of “resolving the conflicting cultural tendencies and achieving a unified view of life and its meaning, not so much by driving away the rival tendencies of thought and culture as by achieving an integrated harmony” (Singh, 1966). Radhakrishnan is the leader, as well as the product of the Neo-Vedantic movement. That has been far more pervasive in its influence and much more potent in its working. Radhakrishnan has worked for the emergence of a new civilization, and a new culture, established “on the truths of the spiritual unity of mankind” (Dallmayr, 1996). In adopting the truths as fundamental to the new world- perspective Radhakrishnan undertakes to fulfill the oneness of Atman and the identity with all that Sankara attempted with the help of his doctrine. “Even as our political problem is to bring East-West together in a common brotherhood which transcends racial differences, so in the world of philosophy, we have to bring about a cross-fertilization idea” (Singh, 1966). This “free interchange of ideas” will, according to him, prepare the “world’s yet unborn soul (Singh, 1966). Thus the cultural conflicts among different groups force him to re-think the philosophical issues in a very new and wider context. Radhakrishnan made a great effort to synthesize between ‘man and man.’ He also “had the capability of synthesizing diverse trends of thought and promoting peace, harmony, and understanding in the world.” (Sharma, 1988)

Thus when the philosophers attempted to interpret the philosophical issues, they have to look at the past and have to recreate it for men of his generation. Even if they agree on fundamentals, their responses to their age and environment, and their re-creation of the past are different. They bear the stamp of their personality and their age (Singh, 1966). The interpreter always targets some audience, and he has to focus on the thinking of the audience of that specific period. The audience has some specific mindset, depending on how they want to see the subject; interpretation differs from generation to generation. At that time, when the above mentioned neo-Vedantic philosophers have emerged, we have seen that almost all neo-Vedantic philosophers, like Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, were greatly influenced by Buddhism. Moreover, most of their discussions on Buddhism take a familiar pattern of re-connecting it with

Brāhmanical Hinduism. Dr. Radhakrishnan says, “From one angle one can say that Buddhadev is the creator of modern Hinduism or in some sense what Vivekananda says, Buddhism is the fulfillment Hinduism” (Mukherjee, 2014). However, what remains the ideal is not what the actuality shows us it to be.

They were also greatly influenced by western cultures. They were very much influenced by the western hypothesis, which includes humanistic globalism, the importance of classless social ethics, and a focus on the subjective experience. Furthermore, they often seem as much in dialogue with western ideas and writers as with the classical Advaita tradition. If we say positively, their writings and lives can be seen as models for the interaction and assimilation of traditional Hinduism with the western humanistic tradition. So the neo-Vedantic philosophers have made a great effort to remove all the conflict of society and culture and tried to focus mainly on universalism or in the ‘one world’ concept.

4. 3. A Brief Summary of the Findings and its Scope in the Present Scenario

The method that the neo-Vedantic philosophers follow to re-interpret the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara is more or less similar to the western hermeneutic method. The western hermeneutic philosophers like Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur have considered understanding as to the fundamental stance of human life. “Gadamer and Ricoeur both regard *understanding* as to the basic attitude of human life. We engage in dialogue with others to allow their being to unfold. We try to allow the world around us to speak. Understanding is our primary means of participation in and belonging to the world. In the contemporary globalized environment where many people seem different from us, understanding renders the seemingly strange, more familiar. The primary task hermeneutics takes for itself is to think through the nature of human understanding⁴⁵” (Francis J. Mootz III, 2011). Similarly, the neo-Vedantic philosopher, based on understanding, also tries to re-create the awareness of

⁴⁵ For details see the introduction part of *Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics* edited by Francis J. Mootz III, George H. Taylor. Publish in 2011. Pp-1-2

oneself and the world. Based on understanding, they tried to interpret Vedanta philosophy in a way that is acceptable to all. They put much effort into preparing Vedanta, a world religion, and world culture.

The main reason behind bringing the neo-Vedantic philosophers is that all of them are interpreted the previously existed thought in a very new way. They were interpreting the texts and sub-texts in a precise method. However, all of their interpretations are stick to the same point, that is, 'the Brahman.' The hermeneutic tradition, which was started by Sankara in the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, is still in the process of transformation. The neo-Vedantic philosophers give it a different turn by making some fusion with other cultures. Some tried to merge with Buddhism, while some others with the western philosophical tradition.

Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan all made an attempt to blended Hinduism with other cultures. Their method of interpretation is similar to Heidegger and Gadamer. As Heidegger regarded his Being is the ultimate reality, similarly Advaita Vedanta philosophy, by keeping Brahman in the highest position, it tried to make a fusion of horizon, like Gadamer.

Most of the neo-Vedantic philosophers tried to make a bridge between Eastern and Western thought. That is somewhat similar to Gadamer's hermeneutical concept, or we can say it is more or less similar to Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizon. "Gadamer remains within the tradition, which he regards as an inescapable facticity, but he sees no need to think through the tradition to that which is at work, or play, in the tradition. He is concerned with what is given in the tradition with keeping it alive, with passing on the word and teaching us to listen but not with the giving process itself, the event of unconcealment itself which comes to pass in and as the tradition⁴⁶" (Caputo, 1987).

This fusion of horizons is not reality itself but is a socially constructed representation of reality. That will help each individual to gain a better but not perfect understanding of what

⁴⁶ John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*. Pp-114.

exists beyond their horizon. It is like the construction of understanding, as Gadamer said. The constructed understanding will continuously shift and change as every individual orbits the earth and understands their own perspective in new ways. It is the relationship between each individual, which creates a larger shared reality.

Translation always involves the reconstruction and creative transformation of the original term in the idiom of the new language. Hindu theology is, therefore, not just a re-statement of Vedanta using the terminology of process thought. It is something new and, in addition to the diversity of the already diverse Hindu tradition, a new Vedanta for a new age. It is also, simultaneously, a new process hermeneutics, a new application of process thought to a new context, and, ultimately, a new kind of process thought⁴⁷.
(Long, 2008)

From the above discussion, we have seen that how the hermeneutic movement developed in the Indian tradition, especially in the context of the various sub-schools of Vedanta and in Advaita Vedanta of Sankara in particular, that manifested a bold departure from the other Vedantins in certain areas. In that case, Sankara's hermeneutical trend will be closer to that of Heidegger that a reinterpreted text reemerges as a new text in its own term. If not, Sankara, too, will be doing what other sub-school of Vedanta did that is a fusion of horizons and a reinterpretation of the text from a particular perspective. On the other hand, traces of hermeneutical interpretations of Neo Vedanta schools at a later stage reflect more exploration in the direction of "fusion of horizons," as we find in Gadamer in particular. The Thesis will make a brief reference to this in the subsequent chapter.

However, the above discussion keeps room for a comparative study of what is meant by this transcendent experience in the East as well as in the West. Among the contemporary philosophers, Heidegger is one of the most discussed philosophers in Asian tradition, and also,

⁴⁷ See Jeffery D. Long, Truth, Diversity, and the Incomplete Project of Modern Hinduism, in the book *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons* edited by Rita Sherma, Arvind Sharma, (Springer Science & Business Media in 2008), pp- 179-210.

his thinking is somewhat similar to the Asian philosophical thinking. At this juncture, the Thesis will make an attempt to draw a hermeneutic discourse between Heidegger, Buddhism, and Advaita Vedanta.



Chapter V

Heidegger, Buddhism, and Vedanta: Hermeneutical Dimension in East-West Dialogue

5. 1. Introduction: Hermeneutics of Discourse paving the way for Meaningful Dialogue across Culture

The thesis attempt to focus on the method of hermeneutics that is being considered in the traditions, like Eastern, especially in Indian and Western thought. Eastern and Western cultures have their particular philosophical traditions, so we cannot understand one philosophical tradition with the concept and terminology of a different culture. They have their specific pattern of thought and understanding, and similarly, they have their own pattern of interpretation. The hermeneutical developments in both cultures are different. Hence, it will not be adequate to compare with each other, because both are unique. Nevertheless, if we try to bridge the gaps between other cultures through the hermeneutic process and if we try to understand the hermeneutic method of other cultures and to see the applicability of that method into our own culture, we have to expand the horizons of our understanding. We do not need to go beyond or leave behind our identity.

From the western traditions, the thesis attempted to uses the method of Hermeneutic Phenomenology with reference to Heidegger. Within this hermeneutical discourse, the thesis will focus on hermeneutical phenomenology, particularly associated with Martin Heidegger, also developed later by Gadamer because there are immense possibilities of similarity between the Indian hermeneutic method and with the hermeneutic method of Heidegger and Gadamer. In the previous discussion, we have seen how the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer comes close to the neo-Vedantic interpretation of Advaita Vedanta. Now we are moving to discuss how Heidegger's hermeneutics of Being is coming very close to Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara. This chapter explores more on the reason for bringing Heidegger and Gadamer in context to the Indian hermeneutical tradition. The following is an illustration in this regard in order to locate the distinctiveness of Heideggerian methodology for a meaningful dialogue across

culture. It also throws some light on consciousness as one of the key themes of the Thesis. This now needs to revisit hermeneutics again for locating Heideggerian hermeneutics and its ontological dimension as more relevant for the Thesis objective.

5. 2. Revisiting a Brief Survey of Hermeneutical Dimension in East-West Dialogue

Initially, hermeneutical methodology evolved as a different field of inquiry that aimed to interpret the religious texts, especially the Bible. In other words, hermeneutical understanding primarily concerns with theology. The incomprehensible meaning of the sacred texts required an interpretative effort. Hence the encounter with the Biblical texts was regarded as the main factor in developing the hermeneutical investigation. Schleiermacher, the founder of the modern hermeneutical concept, points out that misinterpretation and misapprehension emerge naturally in the period which separates the author from the interpreter. In this time gap, the authors' concepts and words might change their meanings. Because of historical events or for the changing traditions, people's perspectives or conception of the world, one's positions in relation to each other and so forth might have changed. As a consequence, it creates a kind of alienation from the original meaning. In this regard, hermeneutic plays the role of a mediator and is helpful bridging the gap between the known world in which we stand and the unknown meaning that hold out against fusion and assimilation into the horizons of our world and that have to be taken into account by any adequate interpretation. And thus, only a deep, philosophical, and methodologically intense examination can disclose the meaning of a text. As Schleiermacher, pointed out that, "the original meaning of the texts and its appearances may differ" (Gadamer, 1976). Sometime, the interpreter may not be able to grasp what the author actually wanted to say. So, a disciplined reconstruction of the historical situation or circumstances in which it originated must have to be retrieved its meaning. Only through a critical and methodologically controlled interpretation can disclose the author's intention to us. Thus the method was apparent for making all proper understanding of the product of discipline.

However, it was Friedrich Schleiermacher who gave a particular interest in bridging scriptural and philological interpretive principles. As a consequence, during the period of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,' the scope of hermeneutics significantly becomes wider. Afterward, it exists not merely as a methodological doctrine, but it has also developed and

integrated the fundamental thought and manifestations of human beings through which one could lead a practical life. Gadamer named it as a philosophical hermeneutics. Rather than concern with methodological questions, the philosophical hermeneutics make inquiries about the fundamental conditions that bring about the phenomenon of understanding in all its modes. Thus the task of philosophical hermeneutics is mainly ontological.

However, to a certain extent, the task of hermeneutics or the art of interpretation is influenced, knowingly, or unknowingly by one's social surroundings or social conditions. Moreover, when one starts to interpret something, he always goes with that influence. As Krishna Roy holds

Though hermeneutics first arose as a theological movement, its major applications are in the realms of literature, jurisprudence, and the arts. Philosophers since the Renaissance and social scientists of the contemporary period are trying to develop a proper methodology from these various cases of interpretation. Hermeneutics, as a theory of interpretation, thus grew out of the various interpretations of various objects, e.g., the Christian religion, the Roman law, the literary and the exegetical texts. Since then, the scholars have started looking back at the old things in new ways, with new questions in view and to elicit new meanings hidden therein. Meanings are partly there and partly constituted by the interpreter. (Roy, 1992)

Nevertheless, when the interpreter interprets something (s)he has to provide something from his own and has to reconstruct or re-composes or more appropriately, we can say innovate it to a certain extent the already existing thing. There is also the possibility of multiple understanding and interpretations (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 1975). The same thing interprets by a different interpreter for several times. All interpretations are open for further examination. No interpretative text can declare to be final. The most significant point is that, according to Schleiermacher, in the process of hermeneutics except the practice of interpretation and to investigate a particular meaning of a text, we also have to explore the other feasible ways of understanding and its approaches of interpretation (Schleiermacher, 1977). He wants to bring

hermeneutics from the level of grammar and philology to philosophy proper. For him, hermeneutics is the art of communication. It is a communication of thought by words and understanding to each other. For that, the interpreter must have to know the language and certain linguistic principles. One cannot understand something spoken without having the most general knowledge of the language, and at the same time, language is also necessary for an understanding of what is personally intended and uniquely expressed.

Martin Heidegger, the twentieth-century philosopher, also has a significant contribution in making the rich tradition of hermeneutic. In his magnum opus "*Being and Time*," Heidegger regarded "philosophy as the universal phenomenological ontology that takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein. By examining the meaning of being, it has made an attempt for all philosophical investigation at the point where it arises and to which it returns" (Heidegger, 1996). Furthermore, the statement 'hermeneutic of Dasein' demonstrates how understanding and hermeneutics play a very significant role in his early thought. This is the period when the earlier concept of hermeneutics as a 'science of interpretation' is transformed into the process of interpretation or the understanding of being, which is regarded as a fundamental characteristic of Dasein. The main objective of Heidegger's hermeneutics is to unveil the meaning of Being and also to unveil the meaning of Being, self-understanding is necessary.

Heidegger realizes that human existence incorporates in its ontic constitution the pre-ontological understanding of both self and world, and the objective of his *Being and Time* is to reveal this pre-understanding which Dasein possesses. Dasein cannot realize itself, still less the world, without understanding itself and its projects- the search for something new and creative. Heidegger holds that man's being is essentially temporal; his lived-milieu includes past and present, but all his projects are towards the future. Understanding discloses all the possibilities or projects of man. 'Understanding is existential being of Dasein's own potentialities-for-being, and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses in itself what its Being is capable of.' (Roy, 1992)

Thus, Heidegger's discovery of the ontological significance of understanding is the most important turning point in the history of hermeneutics. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger puts emphasis on the historicity and temporality, which means that Dasein's grasp of being is not the result of the unbiased, undecided activity of self-Consciousness. He stated that all the conscious interpretation occurs based on Dasein's historicity, specifically, on the basis of earlier understanding of being from within an actual situation that has inner relation to the interpreter's past and future. According to Heidegger, every interpretation starts with some advance knowledge (or on the basis of knowledge that is assumed beforehand). That is, every interpreter must proceed based on some preconception, whether even it is scientific or unscientific. Besides these, Heidegger also talked about the importance of language. It occupies a very central place in the writings of Heidegger. As Heidegger stated that, apart from communication and conveying himself, a man also uses vocabulary to understand the area under discussion that comes to him through writings or language (Gadamer, 1976). The words and concepts of a particular language disclose an idea of being: the expression of time is not so much chosen by the persons who use it since it is their historical outcome- the way being has revealed itself to and concealed itself from them as their starting point" (Gadamer, 1976). In his later part of his life, Heidegger pays more attention to language. The main reason for his growing interest in language is the influence of a German poet, name, Friedrich Holderlin, who is mostly connected with the artistic movement, poetic theory, and philosophical matters. Holderlin's poetry had a remarkable impact on Heidegger. It is undeniable that Heidegger's primary task was the study of Being. In 'Being and Time' Heidegger clearly stated that his primary concern is to disclose the meaning of Being. But in his later philosophy, Heidegger makes a change in his thinking and mainly lays stress on language. Later he points up that language is that through which the question of Being can be explored and unfolded. Heidegger regarded the language of poetry as the original language, through which one can explore the 'unspoken meaning in the spoken word.' Heidegger believes that to understand the original meaning of poetry and go into its depth, we have to listen beyond the spoken, and also, we can understand the unspoken by maintaining the silence. "The significance of this view of language, poetry and truth is that it gives poetry an ontological function, and it makes language, not the unproblematical medium in which a thing already understood is conveyed to another person who will understand it because he already has

perceived it in some universally same way, but rather the projective 'saying- structure' that presents things to us in a certain light, a clearing." (Palmer, 1976)

However, language turns out to be the central theme in the contemporary philosophical tradition, especially in the practice of philosophical hermeneutics. In the contemporary tradition, language is the primary guide for visualizing a hermeneutic ontology. Hans-Georg Gadamer, the disciple of Heidegger, starts these thoughts by arguing that the hermeneutic object the execution and fulfillment of hermeneutic event of understanding are determined by linguistically (Schmidt, 2000). Gadamer, in his writings, gives an in-depth analysis of historicity, constructivism, and linguisticity. In other words, the concepts that Heidegger design and attempted to develop blossom fully in the writings of Gadamer. Similar to Heidegger, Gadamer also maintains that hermeneutics is not merely methodological. It is a fundamental characteristic of our very human nature. According to Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is not something which we actually do or ought to do; it is something that happens beyond our willing and doing. Gadamer does not have any intention to provide any new rule of interpretation through his hermeneutic method, nor did he want to make changes in the hermeneutical practices through any new way of understanding. Instead, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics tries to illustrate and find out the possible means of what we always do or what happens in every event of understanding.

Like Heidegger, Gadamer also accepts that historicity and temporality are the fundamental aspects of hermeneutics. Unlike Schleiermacher and Dilthey, Gadamer states that an interpreter can never go beyond his historicity. Schleiermacher and Dilthey state that the knower's circumstances or the knower's historicity can have only a negative value. According to them, our present situation is the source of prejudice, and that can mislead us to get a correct understanding. In contrast to them, Gadamer points up that historical knowledge cannot stop us from the possibility of creative understanding; in fact, it helps us to overcome the prejudices. Thus in the writings of Gadamer, we can uncover an ideal combination of historicity and constructivism. Again he regarded interpretation as mediation more than reconstruction. According to him, the human being plays the rule of a mediator between past into the present. He stated that "except historical horizons, there can never exist any horizon of the present that is beyond reach. Instead, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons" (Gadamer, 1975).

Gadamer asserted that there is exists just a little horizon of the present in itself. Understanding is a way of synthesizing these horizons. “We can get a perfect picture of the fusion of horizons in every transmission of meaning through the concept of understanding. Gadamer maintains that by revising our present horizons, we can change our view of the past because without encountering the past, we cannot figure out the present. Both develop together and fused with future horizons. Thus instead of a passive object of investigation, the past may appear as the infinite source of possibilities” (Gadamer, 1976). Gadamer’s Fusion of horizons is like a conversation. When the standpoint of other horizons discovered and becomes intelligible without agreeing or not agreeing, the person who thinks historically comes to understand the meaning of what has been handed down.

Philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer is an interpretation but not a reproduction; it is a conversation on the universally shared dimension of meaning of a Text. The fusion of horizon demands the expansion of man’s horizons. Gadamer, in his hermeneutic method, shifts the focus of discussion from the technique and method of hermeneutic to the clarification of understanding. He did not want to reduce understanding to a single rule-bound method. He feels that the inner fusion of understanding and interpretation inevitably leads to application. To Gadamer, Interpretation, and application, both are unified. Understanding is a process of applying something universal to a particular situation. His notion of application owes much to the Aristotelian conception of *Phronesis* or practical wisdom. It is not concerned with something universal and eternally the same but with something particular and changeable.

Like Heidegger, Gadamer also considered language as a significant aspect of understanding. According to Gadamer, language is the universal aspect of hermeneutics, which has a universal ontological significance because man’s relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally verbal. He states that for all kinds of understanding and interpretation, language is an essential factor through which one can set up a connection between the subject and the world, between the past and the present. This is the universal medium through which we can expand our horizons. However, Gadamer’s usage of language is somewhat different from his predecessors. He did not make any difference between understanding and interpretation. He mainly put emphasis on the unity of language. According to him, “it contains a distinction between its being

and the way in which it presents itself, but that is a distinction that is really not a distinction at all” (Gadamer, 1975).

Heidegger’s hermeneutic philosophy is moved from the interpretation of the text to the understanding of the existence of being. “For Heidegger, hermeneutics is not about the theory of the art of interpretation. Instead of that, it is an attempt to define the nature of interpretation on hermeneutic grounds” (*Being and Time*). Heidegger hermeneutic turn is more radical than earlier philosophy. He did not accept the traditional hermeneutical concept. The traditional philosophy regarded humans as the subject or knower, and what it is to be known was regarded as the object. Heidegger, in his hermeneutic philosophy, rejected the subject-object distinction. He stated that the subject-object model might be the possible starting point for philosophy and that where Dasein and world coexist in understanding. However, the way of interpretation of the Heidegger hermeneutical method and traditional hermeneutic method is different. The same word or texts interpret by the traditional interpreters by asking what a word means, and Heidegger interprets it by asking how a word means.

Heidegger, in his *Being and Time*, begins his radicalization of the hermeneutic turn. His concept of understanding is different from other’s conception of understanding. For example, others may consider understanding as to the one possible way of knowing, among others, like explaining. It may be taken as an existential derivative of that primary understanding. However, Heidegger’s conception of understanding is not just one form of cognition, among others. His ‘understanding’ is much deeper than this. His version of interpretation that arises from understanding is quite different from others.

Before Heidegger, hermeneutics might seem to be simply one branch of philosophy, the one that analyzes the phenomenon of understanding in contrast to other human activities such as knowledge or language. The method that Heidegger chooses in his *Being and Time* was the method of “hermeneutical phenomenology,” that is, as an interpretive study of the Being of being. This hermeneutical phenomenological method is also relevant in Indian philosophy. There is thus some justification why a hermeneutical method is much suitable here. As Asiatic tradition itself is open for layers of interpretation in various forms. We have Buddhism, as interpreted in Japan, China, India, which are open for layers of interpretation. Again it is also suitable in the

study of Consciousness or Being in Vedanta and Buddhism, as well as in Heideggerian phenomenology and ontology. Although this kind of methodology depends mostly on the translation of a text into another language and the problems associated with it, following Heidegger's ontologisation of hermeneutics, we may look for a correct understanding of Being in one tradition as well as Sat or Brahman/Atman as *parāvidya* in another tradition as the necessary prerequisites for cross-cultural comparative philosophy.

5. 3. Beyond Monologue: Introducing an Asiatic perspective for an East-west Dialogue

Among the contemporary philosophers, Heidegger appears to be the most discussed philosopher in Asian tradition. Furthermore, anyone who had studied Heidegger's philosophy and also who has a fundamental understanding of Asian philosophy will find him remarkably very close to Asian way of existential focus on human thinking. That can be regarded as the 'pre-established harmony' between Heidegger's philosophy and Asian ideas. Most of the scholars want to say that Heidegger's 'new turn' in his philosophical thinking came from non-western sources, which leads him to go beyond already established western metaphysics. It is also said that "Heidegger was also familiar with the German translations of some of the central texts of the Chinese Daoist and Japanese Zen tradition. Moreover, the Ideas of these East Asian philosophical traditions have tremendously influenced in his thinking, about which he never acknowledged and maintained complete silence" (May, 2005). Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, one of the very close friends of Heidegger, in his book *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger* wrote about the familiarity of Heidegger with East Asian thinking. In chapter seven of the book *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger*, Petzet wrote about the conversation of Heidegger with a Buddhist monk who came from Bangkok to meet Heidegger. In between their conversations, Heidegger asked the Buddhist monk, 'what does meditation mean for Eastern humanity?'

The monk's response is quite simple: meditation means 'to gather oneself.' The more humanity succeeds in gathering itself and concentrations, without the exertion of the will, the more it lets go of itself. The 'I' dissolves, until in the end, only one thing remains; the Nothing. But this nothing is not nothing: it is just the Opposite-Fullness. No one can name this. But it is

nothing and everything-fullness. Heidegger understands this and says, this is what I have been saying throughout my whole life. (Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, 1993)

According to Heidegger, the Being of beings is Nothing. Heidegger states that ‘Nothing is the characteristics of Being,’ or, even more clearly ‘Being and Nothing are the same’ (May, 2005). For him, the history of western philosophy as rooted in a ‘forgetting of Being’ and western philosophers for centuries considered Being as an empty concept. So he mainly focuses on inquiry of the meaning of ‘Being,’ because he thinks that it remains to be answered.

However, from this kind of resemblance between Being and Nothingness, one can easily speculate the East Asian ways of thinking of Heidegger. Even though Heidegger emphasizes that his foundation of philosophy came from the western sources, but it is surprising to see that his former thinkers and philosophers about whom he discussed broadly in his writings have a great interest in East Asian thinking. The philosophers Heidegger mostly discussed are Leibniz, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche, Goethe, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, who repeatedly engaged in philosophical discussion of East Asian culture. Nevertheless, it is challenging to give any evidence, and also it is not our intention to give any final and exact result regarding the similarity between Heidegger and Asian thought, but through this discussion, we can get a glimpse of a new direction for further investigation.

Regardless of Heidegger, Plato and his predecessors also influenced by the teachings of the Upanishads. Plato’s famous story *allegory of the cave* has a resemblance to Sankara’s concept of Maya or illusion. “There is a correspondence between Pythagoras and Plato’s believed with the Indian thinking of the immortality of the soul (atman) and reincarnation of being. Plato’s student and teacher of Alexander, Aristotle, also whispered some similar thoughts. Max Muller, when first translated the Upanishads, was surprised to see the similarities of Plato’s writings and the Upanishads” (Sinha, 2014). So it seems that Plato and his predecessors already influenced by Upanishadic thinking. Furthermore, before the translation of the Upanishads and other significant texts of India into European languages, Europeans got to experience the Indian classical teachings.

Schopenhauer also emphasizes that his conception of philosophy is generally based on the Upanishadic principles. He wrote,

The Upanishads are the production of the highest human wisdom, and I consider them almost superhuman in conception. The study of the Upanishads has been a source of great inspiration and means of comfort to my soul. From every sentence of the Upanishads deep, original and sublime, thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit. In the whole world, there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. The Upanishads have been the solace of my life and will be the solace of my death. (Sinha, 2014)

Max Muller, in his lecture "What can India teach us?" said that:

If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power, and beauty that nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant—I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact, more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India. (Muller, 1883)

The deeper philosophical reasons for identifying or rather looking for some common patterns in the philosophical thought style, as Asiatic or its cultural other and with the non-Asiatic, are there in some manner in order to draw a meaningful dialogue. Heidegger's relation with Asian philosophy displays elements that keep room for both admiration and expectation.

There are a large number of shreds of evidence of Heidegger's interest in Asian thought, not precisely it is homogeneous other but as in some manner different yet not exclusively so. For example, Heidegger was influenced by Eastern philosophies and religions, like Chinese Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Among Asiatic thought, Heidegger has expressed a particular interest in Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism is a branch of Buddhism and has its roots in the teachings of Buddha. He was also inspired by the other Eastern philosophies and religions like Hinduism and especially the Advaita Vedanta, and he expressed keen interest in knowing what will be the Sanskrit equivalent to Being in Indian tradition. Heidegger has demonstrated a significant interest in Eastern thinking, especially since 1940. Although Eastern thinking influenced Heidegger's thinking, in the *Der Spiegel* interview in 1966, he clearly stated that "a revolution or a change is necessary for the western thinking and for that; we cannot choose to take up any Eastern thinking. He claims that the change of the Western tradition cannot occur "by any adoption of Zen Buddhism or any other Eastern experiences of the world,"⁴⁸ and that "thinking itself can be transformed only by thinking which has the same origin and calling"⁴⁹ From Heidegger's reference of the Zen Buddhism or any other Eastern experience, we can visualize the profound and far-reaching thought of Eastern culture in the west. For both Heidegger and Hegel, philosophy should go for a dialogue with its tradition; therefore, with the history of philosophy or the historical philosophers whose thought has meaning for philosophy. While for Hegel, unpacking of tradition requires an evolutionary framework in which the latter in evolution is more explicit and rational than the earlier, and therefore we proceed from meet superstition, history to philosophy, which is abstract thinking. On the other hand, for Heidegger, the original and the traditions remain the source of all thinking. It cannot replace with a more logical and rational version of it.

However, for Heidegger, philosophy as conceptual clarification cannot give us the final position on the question of Being as Being. Reason can thus come in dialogue with truth as

⁴⁸ It appeared in the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* which is popularly known as "*The Spiegel Interview with Martin Heidegger in 1966*". Later this was published under the title "only a God can save us: The Spiegel Interview." See also:
<https://ia800706.us.archive.org/35/items/MartinHeidegger-DerSpiegelInterviewenglishTranslationonlyAGodCan/Heidegger-derSpiegelInterview1966.pdf>

⁴⁹ Ibid

Aletheia (unveiling) for giving us a glimpse of the light of Being. Because all our thinking is founded upon the ultimate question, “what it is to be,” anything that is an expression of one’s being, remains the source of philosophical inspiration and philosophy itself is but an expression of this being quest that itself can be expressed in many different ways and across many different cultures. Heidegger thus keeps room for poetic and metaphorical thinking that can very well accommodate within the broader frame of *philosophical thinking* that transcends the limitations of instrumental rationality. In the Vedantic tradition itself, we can compare the attempt made by Sri Aurobindo for the Yogic approach to the inside of the mystery of Consciousness to unveil the super Consciousness in Consciousness. His *Savitri* divinely illumines poetic an ecstasy encounter with Atman, Brahaman, and light of Being. That keeps room for a comparative study of the transcendent experience in the East and the West. Especially in Heidegger and the Asian thought or within Asian thought itself, for example, between Vedanta or Japanese and Asian Buddhism and the like.

5. 4. Quest for a Dialogue between Heidegger and Advaita Vedanta

Heidegger equates knowledge with the understanding of Being. Since the question about this foundational Being can be asked in many ways but how it is asked or what it means is understandable only from a shared background, and that is how this question remains meaningful only to a being that unlike Descartes’ *cogito* is an embodied, and an embodied being in the world. Heidegger, in his philosophy, regarded human existence as ‘being in the world,’ which is different from Cartesian metaphysics. Unlike Descartes, Heidegger introduces the “thinking ego” immediately into a world-context composed of societies’ fellow-beings, and nature. A *Dasein*, a being in the world, is one who shares his existence with others with whom he shares language, culture, and tradition. Therefore, knowledge means destiny, which again is an interpretation that comes from a *Dasein* addressed to fellow *Dasein*. As Heidegger has remarked, “however and whatever we attempt to think, we can only think within the bound sketched out by tradition. Its presence reigns when it frees us from thinking back to thinking ahead, which is no longer planning.” (Mehta, 1990)

However, Heidegger was also impressed by Indian philosophical tradition, but he was reluctant to accept it and to say anything about Indian philosophical tradition. For a very few

times, he comments on Indian philosophy in his writings, “but only to point out that it is not ‘philosophy.’” (Mehta, 1990). His hesitation regarding Indian philosophy is quite surprising, because, the people surrounding him often discussed Indian philosophy. Philosophers like Paul Deussen, Max Muller, and Schopenhauer, who was very close to Nietzsche, did a scholarly work and spread the knowledge of the philosophy of the Upanishads and the system of Vedanta to the west. “Nietzsche, about whom Heidegger discussed more than on any other thinker, had made frequent reference to ideas from Indian philosophy and religion” (May, 2005). So there are lots of possibilities of incorporating Indian or East-Asian ideas into his work in a more or less encoded manner (ibid, p-9), and we cannot say that he did not know about Indian philosophy. However, in his later philosophy Heidegger in his book “On the Way to Language,” wrote a chapter named ‘Dialogue on Language between Japanese and an Inquirer’ based on his meeting with a Japanese scholar, Tezuka Tomio. There he admits that-

As far as I am able to follow what you are saying, I sense a deeply concealed kinship with our thinking, precisely because your path of thinking and its language are so wholly other. (Heidegger, 1971)

Thus, although Heidegger understood the shared characteristics of his ideas and East Asian thinking he never wanted to explain in detail about the connections.

Regardless of that, the hermeneutic task is a continuous process in both the traditions, Eastern and Western. The pioneers of contemporary India, such as Tagore, Vivekananda, Gandhi, Aurobindo, had a significant contribution in making the rich culture of India. They re-interpreted the traditional Indian spiritualism to widen their horizons. They were also conscious about the growing impact of western tradition and so they tried to use some western ideas in the Indian context. They thought that to be an active part of the contemporary world, India must move with time. So, they, in their own unique way, try to harmonize the ideas of the Eastern and Western traditions. Thus, “there is no presupposition less, prejudice-free interpretation, for, while the interpreter may alienate from this or that situation, he cannot free himself from his own facticity, from the ontological condition of always already having a finite, temporal situation as the horizon. That leads to subjectivism, which all existentialists do conform, and regard that the lived world becomes meaningful and valuable only with respect to man. The world is being

measured by man, interpreted by man, and becomes significant by and for man. It is the man, who always interprets, and it is man's being-in-the-world that always becomes interpreted; this leads to the inevitable circularity of hermeneutics, keeping a man in both the ends" (Roy, 1992).

However, concentrating on the need for using the hermeneutical methodology in Indian philosophy, the Thesis follows the guidelines from hermeneutical phenomenological expertise of some such philosophers as J.N. Mohanty, Balasubramiam, particularly J.L. Mehta and his Heideggerian guideline. In this background, this chapter makes the following explorations across culture, others' or one's own so that one be in creative dialogue with oneself and also with others.

5. 5. Heidegger, Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta: A Hermeneutical Kinship

In the modern world, there is a deep understanding and admiration for all cultures. The growing inter-cultural dimension mainly focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms and the developments of deep relationships. The thinking itself turns out to be intercultural. As a consequence, everyone is learning from one another and growing together. The endeavor to integrate other's thinking and cultural norm into one's own philosophical thinking promotes an intercultural perspective. In this intercultural perspective, hermeneutics plays a significant rule, and it becomes more and more significant in the realm of thinking. Hermeneutics creates the possibilities of philosophical thinking, exchange of ideas, and communications. Through the method of hermeneutics, one can go beyond the cultural obstructions and can explore a deeper level of understanding. In the western philosophical tradition, Martin Heidegger's 'Being and Time' marks a significant turn in the history of hermeneutics. Heidegger is the one who gives it a philosophical structure. He shifted the practices of hermeneutics from methodological to ontological. According to him, interpretation is the fundamental activity of all human beings. He emphasizes that knowledge is not separate from lived experience but is a combination of historicity and temporality, which also generates the future possibilities.

The word 'Being' is the basic concept in Heidegger's philosophy. For Heidegger, the history of philosophy is the history of the interpretations of the Being question. He thinks, all philosophy in the west, is ultimately metaphysical in nature. The concept of Being has been the

subject of every metaphysical explanation of beings from Plato to Nietzsche. Heidegger points out that pre-Socratic philosophers alone dealt with this problem in the correct perspective. Since then, hardly any attention was focused directly on the fundamental mystery of life. ‘The fact is that there actually is a world and a universe rather than nothing.’ (Watts, 2011)

“Consequently, Heidegger saw the history of Western philosophy as rooted in a “forgetting of Being” that has resulted in a continuing breakdown of values, insatiable consumerism, and technological domination of the earth. He thus took it as his mission in life to awaken a new sense of this unfathomable mystery” (Watts, 2011). Heidegger says that the history of philosophy from Plato and Aristotle until Nietzsche committed a significant error. The error was that at that time, Being was understood in terms of substantial beings, which is a material or physical being. Most probably, they have made this error under the overdose of the Christian concept of a personal God within the framework of logic and reason. Consequently, the ultimate Being was transformed into an abstract term and an empty concept. That means Being of beings was pushed away into nothingness. Nevertheless, Heidegger was somewhat different from them. He argues that Being is the most real, and we possess at least a fundamental awareness of it. Therefore, Heidegger wants to open a new possibility to think of Being.

Heidegger’s metaphysical position in *Being and Time* was a significant turn in the history of western philosophy. It has revolutionized the ways of thinking. It was an initiative for an exclusive new way of thinking, which is radically different from all previous systems of ontological thinking. The pre- Heideggerian approaches to ontology attempt to question Being “ontically,” which was concerned with the real existence of a thing. “They study what kind of things exists and how to characterize them and thus ask questions such as Does God exists? Does freedom exist? Are body and mind separate or unified? How can we prove the existence of the outside world?” (Watts, 2011). Even though such questions may be highly significant, according to Heidegger, “they fail to ask *directly* about Being itself: what “Being” actually is. Heidegger calls his approach a “fundamental ontology” because it focuses its investigation primarily and directly on this question of Being, by attempting to answer the most fundamental of all questions” (Watts, 2011). Those are:

- a) What is Being?

b) What is Being of entities?

c) What is the meaning of Being?

Heidegger investigates the meaning of Being by an analysis of human existence. He does not keep apart the study of Being from the study of humanity. Hence, the *Being and Time* of Heidegger is an investigation of our way of Being, and at the same time, it is a search for the question of the exploration for the meaning of Being. Heidegger's understanding of the meaning of Being is beyond the horizons of space and time. Being is beyond the limits of our horizon of knowledge. Being cannot define as eternal or non-eternal; Being is neither something nor nothing. On the other hand, Wilhelm Halbfass emphasizes that the conception of Being, which is the fundamental concept of the philosophy of Heidegger, also plays a very significant role in Indian thought, whether it is called Brahman or Sat. (Halbfass 1993)

Heidegger understands Being as 'one' and the 'same' and to be this whole pervasive 'one' and the 'same' means, to comprise the 'nihil' and 'something.' Subsequently, it goes beyond the fundamental dividing norms of negation and affirmation. That is, the categorization; this is the 'belonging together' of Being and the thinking, which is implicit in the western tradition since Parmenides. Hence, Heidegger asserts the 'belonging together' of Being and human beings, which goes beyond any hierarchy or categorization. In terms of hermeneutic of intercultural ontological thinking, it is the same 'belonging together,' that Sankara assertively proclaims as the 'A-dvaitam,' that is, the 'Non-duality' of Brahman and Atman. (Vallooran, 2015)

Although the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara or any other philosophical system of India never used the word "Being" to refer to something eternal, in a literal sense, but one can understand the existence of the phenomenon of Being inherent in the word "Brahman." In the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara, Brahman is regarded to be the ultimate reality. According to Sankara, the reality is that which cannot be transcended, contradicted, or overcome. Brahman is that reality which cannot be transcended by any other experience. It is beyond all

distinctions. In Sankara's philosophy, Brahman is identified with atman. Brahman is the highest reality, and Atman is the most profound subjective truth. According to Sankara, Brahman is non-empirical. It is beyond ordinary experience and also beyond intellectual knowledge. Brahman is also beyond the distinction between the knower and the known. It can only be cognized by intuitive experience.

Brahman is also beyond language. Therefore, language is incapable of representing the real nature of Brahman. No positive account of something which is beyond language can be given. It can be described only negatively. It is noted by Sankara that Brahman is non-phenomenal, non-spatial, non-temporal, and non-sensible. It is not to be understood as a substance if, by substance, we mean that which has attributes and modes. It is not too regarded as a cause, but it explains everything. It is not spatial, but it is present in every point of space. It is beyond our intelligence and not possible for a finite being to understand the nature of Brahman.

Brahman has no internal differentiation. It is beyond all attributes, and hence it appears to be unqualified (nirguna). According to Sankara, three-term can be applied to Brahman, that is, Sat, Cit, Anand. Sankara stated that although it is imperfect to describe Brahman by these terms, this is the point to which the human mind at most can go. According to Sankara, because of cosmic illusion or Maya, the real nature of Brahman remains hidden from us, and the empirical world is projected upon Brahman. Through the right knowledge, this spell of ignorance is removed, and then we realize that Brahman is the ultimate ground of everything.

Heidegger's concept of Being is almost identical to Sankara's concept of Nirguna Brahman. Like Heidegger's concept of Being, Sankara's concept of Nirguna Brahman is also neither eternal nor non-eternal. It cannot be described by any qualities which relate to the world. It is the supreme reality without any form, and it is transcendental. "Sankara says that Brahman, in this transcendent aspect, cannot be described at all, and therefore, it is called indeterminate or characterless or nirguna" (Satischandra Chatterjee, 1968). Because any description of nirguna Brahman with some attributes means is a sort of limitation imposed on it. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishads uses the phrase "neti neti" that stands for, 'not this, not this' to define Brahman, which signify that after eliminating everything remains nothing but the ultimate truth which is unthinkable.

On the other hand, the doctrine of Sunya-vāda of Mādhyamika school of Buddhism is also identical with the Heidegger's concept of Being and with the Sankara's concept of Brahman. According to the doctrine of Sunyavāda, the universe is totally devoid of reality; that is, it has no phenomenal existence, and therefore, everything is sunya or void. Buddhism stated that the objective world is only a mere appearance. Every object of the world stands for something else; hence, the existence of the object is dependent or relative to that condition. The doctrine of Sunyavāda developed from or presupposed the doctrine of dependent origination, which is known as Pratityasamutpada. According to Buddhism, all existence is characterized by becoming. The becoming that characterizes all existence follows a specific law. This law is the law of dependent origination.

All further developments of Buddhism take this as a foundation for building up further philosophical ideas. This doctrine means that production or origination takes place when certain external conditions are fulfilled. The usual example given is that of the flame series. The flame will continue to exist so long as the condition that is necessary for its origination, such as the wick, oil, air, continue to exist. The flame goes on and on till one of the condition either is withdrawn or ceases to exist. Just as a flame comes into being only when certain conditions are fulfilled, similar conditions are applied in other things also. To be precise, every effect must have a cause, and every cause is an effect of a previous cause, and this is the central point of pratityasamutpada. Therefore, according to the sunyavāda theory, the phenomenal object of the world does not have any independent existence of its own, and the description of the phenomenon cannot be said to be unconditionally valid.

However, Nāgārjuna uses the term Sunya to consider the fundamental reality of the world. "The real is neither one nor many, neither permanent nor momentary, neither substance nor quality nor relation; it is free from all the construction of thought categories and can be realized in non-dual knowledge." (Śarmā, 1996)

Another most significant point is that Heidegger, in his 'Being and Time' explains the togetherness of 'Being' and 'Dasein.' Heidegger regarded Dasein as a being or a worldly being of the empirical human person, which has an existence of some sort who involved and plays the different role of the Samsara. On the contrary, by the word 'Being,' Heidegger speaks about to

that entity, which determines beings as Beings. He regarded Being as the primordial condition, based on which all other things come into existence. However, both 'Being' and 'being' have a different meaning, but both are inseparable. One cannot make sense without the other. As there can be no beings without Being and no Being without beings. For example, we can say about light and vision. The human vision would be impossible without light. Again, we cannot even perceive light, only the objects we perceive as a result of the light. 'Being' also is of a similar kind. Being cannot be seen in reality, only the beings (the empirical human being) that exist as a consequence of Being. Thus the process of understanding Being is quite different from the other fundamental observation. According to Heidegger, we can understand the meaning of Being through the analysis of Being of beings. Since both 'Being' and 'being' are inseparable, Heidegger stated that we should first begin by investigating our own way of Being, and that will pave the way to the hierarchy.

Similarly, this togetherness and hierarchy are almost similar to Advaita Vedanta concepts of togetherness of Atman or the individual self and the Brahman or the Absolute, where the individual self is merely the Absolute itself. The four *mahavakayas* of the Upanishads that are: *Tat tvam asi*, *aham brahmasmi*, *Ayam atma Brahman*, *prajñānam brahmna*, repeatedly emphasizes the oneness between the atman and Brahman. Here "atman is the foundational reality of the empirical individual" (Gupta, 2003). "Through an analysis of the nature of the self, an individual realizes that the Brahman and the atman, the objective and subjective, are one" (Gupta, 2003). The individual sense of self, by means of the four basic level of reality that are: *Visva-* (waking Consciousness), *Taijasa-* (dreaming Consciousness), *Prajñā-* (dreamless sleep) and *Turiya* can be realized the transcendental state in which all *kleshas*(sorrow) end, all bondages of *Purusha* fall apart, *avidyā* (ignorance) disappears, and only happiness prevails. Thus the understanding of Brahman pre-supposes the existence of the other levels of reality, and through the process of hierarchy, one can understand the highest Being.

However, in the process of hierarchy, more than togetherness, between 'Being' and 'Dasein' and 'Brahman' and 'Atman,' it is like a categorization between higher beings and lowers being. In this categorization, 'Being' or 'Brahman' will not be in the position of 'togetherness.' The highest Being is not supposed to be conditional. The highest Being, which cannot be expressed in words, is attributeless, which is beyond space and time is always goes

beyond any categorization. Heidegger named it as ‘ontological difference’ which is beyond our awareness or the scope of human knowledge.

What justifies this comparison between Heidegger and Sankara is, for both, beings cannot be equated with Being. As in Sankara verification through pramānas, logic, and all others are only sources of knowing facts, they cannot discover the ultimate reality. Heidegger also refers to a deeper layer of meditative thinking that unveils the truth, the Aletheia, which is the illumination or Prakasha.

Although the concept of Being, Brahman, and Sunya refers to something similar, there are some differences in conceptualizing. The context was also different. Heidegger’s idea of Being arose against the technological and industrial development; on the other hand, the Brahman or Sunya arose in the context of caste and authority. It is similar to the example of a cow and a cow-like thing. By reason, they might be the same, which can deceive us. Even though the characteristics of both the animal are similar, actually they may not be the same.

Again in the process of the hermeneutics of Being, Heidegger was not bound by his tradition. However, Sankara was bound to tradition. He did not want to go beyond the Badarayana’s Brahmasutra and other Vedic tradition.

However, we may find that, despite apparent differences, there are lots of similar ideas across cultures. Apart from the hermeneutical kinship between Heidegger and Vedanta and Buddhism of India, a similar understanding can also be found regarding other East Asian countries like China and Japan. Even though discussing the connection between Heidegger, China, and Japan is too vast to get into here, as well not so much fundamental to this inquiry, still, the thesis, in effect, seeks to highlight some points regarding this.

5. 6. Heidegger’s Encounter with China and Japan: A Few Remarks

Generally, under the phrase of Asian philosophy or Eastern thinking has come the philosophical traditions of India, China, and Japan. However, within each of these philosophical traditions, there is various differentiation of schools. So, it is almost impossible to provide an accurate and neat characterization of Eastern philosophy. For example, the same concept of “Nothingness” is different for different traditions. The Buddhist concept of the nothingness of

Nāgārjuna is not similar to the Japanese Zen Buddhist's nothing. Daoist nothing is also not the same as Buddhist nothing. Furthermore, within each tradition, there have always been adaptation and modifications. Similarly, it is not easy to unfold whether the Eastern concept of nothingness and Heidegger's concept of nothingness are the same.

Heidegger has a far more in-depth interest in East Asian thought. Some essential formulations of Heidegger's central ideas are found so much familiar with some core concepts of the Chinese and Japanese philosophical texts. Heidegger himself said that "there is a deeply hidden kinship between his own attempts at thinking and East Asian thinking" (May, 2005). Otto Pöggeler, in his essay "West-East Dialogue: Heidegger and Lao-tzu" wrote that...

Heidegger was able to introduce impulses from the East Asian tradition into his own attempts to awaken reflection. Over decades he observed how his Japanese students sought to recover their own traditions from the perspective of his thinking. He considered the dialogue between Europe and the Far East to be as necessary as it was difficult; he did not want to overlook the element of foreignness that remained in every encounter. There is a world of dissimilarity between the life-long dialogues with students and the brief interviews with visitors; nevertheless, a description of one such visit might give some idea as to why Heidegger sought such encounters at all, and how he saw the differences between the traditions but also the commonality in questioning. (Pöggeler, 1990)

Heidegger, when he engaged with the question of Being, he had always been thinking of something simple and binding. He thought that in the Western world, they have too much culture. As a consequence, in the European or western culture, they have no univocal, definite common, and simple relationship to reality and to themselves, which is a significant lack in the western world. Moreover, this is also the ground of chaotic opinions in various areas. Heidegger tried to find a single reality to unite the whole culture, and this might also be the reason for his turn towards Asia (Pöggeler, 1990). More than western 'I' centric philosophy, Heidegger tries to understand the Asian 'we' centric philosophy, and this can also be another reason that his

philosophy is different from the mainland philosophy of Europe. He had a significant interest in Chinese philosophy. Heidegger himself said that,

The reaction to the piece in Europe was: nihilism and enmity to "logic." In the far East, with the "nothing" properly understood, one found in it the word for being. (Heidegger, 2003)

However, what Heidegger said about Being is similar to Lao Tzu's description of Tao. Lao-tzu, in his religious text "Tao Te Ching" begins by saying that:

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.

The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth⁵⁰.

(Tzu, 1972)

Thus the Tao is the source of all things, which is the ultimate, eternal, and unconditional reality. We cannot describe the Tao by finite human language and rational thought. Heidegger has also portrayed the same picture of Being. "What finally could not be expressed by words for Heidegger was Being." (Stambaugh, 1990)

Heidegger also has a significant influence from the philosophy of Japan. After meeting Japanese thinkers like Nishida Kitaro, Miki Kiyoshi, Kuki Shuzo, Tetsuro Watsuji Heidegger's interests for East Asian philosophy get a new direction. When he read Suzuki's book on "Zen Buddhism," Heidegger commented that "If I understand this man right, this is what I have wanted to say." Conversely, as Petzet said, although one can speculate some kinship, there is no direct equation between Zen and Heidegger. (Ma, 2008)

However, as said by Nishida Kitaro, "Look/See by becoming the thing, work/do by becoming the thing" (Ching-yuen Cheung, 2017). Its meaning is that 'one should see from within the thing by going within the thing.' This means that, as opposed to the modern western looking at the world from the side of the self, Nishida's philosophy tries to look at the self from the side of the world, that is, for example, from the side of the thing. For that, first, we have to identify

⁵⁰ See also: <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Tao>

the “Being question” in every culture. Through the Being question, we can communicate with other cultures. Because “Being,” is fundamental for every culture. Thus, regardless of space, time, and language, through the Being question, we can look for some fundamental unity and also a hidden ontological possibility across culture. As Heidegger stated that in the original sense, the true dialogue is not actually a dialogue. Heidegger claims that “the unity of dialogue consists in the fact that in the essential word there is always manifest the one and the same on which we are unanimous.” The expression “one and the same thing on which we agree” denotes the same thing that the phrase “single source” in the dialogue does.

5. 7. Concluding Remarks

Debabrata Sinha submits: “In introducing a ‘comparative’ perspective in the interpretative understanding of a philosophical tradition, the accent has to be placed on the thematic interplay of the perspectives concerned within the parameter of some philosophic problems and issues” (Sinha D., 1983). Prioritizing a phenomenological approach in this regard, Sinha is cautious of meaningful relevance towards an attempted re-understanding of the philosophical tradition(s) of India. On the other hand, such relevance is also indicated towards thinking afresh the positions and problems arising in philosophic thought under the focus of the cross-cultural perspective derived from comparison. As a prelude to the task we are addressing ourselves to, it may be observed that ‘comparative philosophy’ need not be directed towards a mutual juxtaposition of the concepts or categories and theories in the respective traditions which are sought to be compared. Sinha continues: “what I have in view here could rather be stated as a dialogical confrontation, as it were, of the two perspectives brought to bear upon each other in a ‘hermeneutic’ situation.’ The latter would imply the participation of contemporary philosophic Consciousness in the thought tradition in question. Translating the thought in the philosophical (not literal) sense would thus take the form of putting questions, so to say, to the body of text this manner of understanding through interpretation, the present-day scholar-thinker could relate his/her reflections to those within the tradition sought to be understood in its authenticity.” (Sinha D., 1983)

The starting point of Comparative philosophy is metaphysical concepts. According to Heidegger, ‘metaphysical thinking’ means thinking about what truly is. It is the attainment of

“the place, in which the entire history of philosophy is assembled in its most extreme possibility.” Comparative philosophy is not just a translation of one’s thinking into the other. Because in translation, it will not be possible for the translator to understand adequately, that remains unsaid. Because, at the time of writing, sometimes, it is not possible to discuss everything explicitly. For it, either it has to merge with the other, or it has to protect and support its otherness. At the same time, language is also necessary for one to find the right answer. The use of an accurate or appropriate language is also an essential condition for the interpretation. Again the place also is an essential part of the interpretation. The Being of one place where Being itself gets its sense can find utterance. This region, as it finally comes into view in Heidegger’s thinking is “that domain of the event of appropriation, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature, achieve their real nature by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed them” (Mehta, 1990). Here, “language is the most fragile and thus the weakest and defenseless vibration holding everything within the suspended structure of the appropriation” (Mehta, 1990).

Hermeneutic, as Heidegger said, is the basic structure of our existence of life. More than, methodology, hermeneutic is the process of unfolding of the ontological ground upon which all these sciences are founded. In the process of unfolding, language is one of the ways for visualizing hermeneutic ontology. Language, thus, not merely reveals the nature and working of Consciousness; it explores and unfolds the very being which preceded Consciousness. In ‘*Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings*’ the importance of language is stated in a famous dictum that, “‘Language is the house of Being means where Being gets its meaning’ and ‘Language speaks’ ” (Heidegger, 1993). Gadamer also discusses the subject of language. The importance of language is reflected in Gadamer’s thought. According to Gadamer, “the human relationship to the world is absolutely and fundamentally linguistic” (Gadamer, 1975). He claims that “language is the universal medium in which understanding itself realizes itself. Its mode of realization is interpretation” (Gadamer, 1975). Language is the medium between human beings and the world. The human being is a being in language, as being in the world.

Thus language shows the way to self-inquiry. One can get all the possible ways to inquire into the self, for that first one has to engage with the question of self-transformation

within the realm of linguistic phenomena to properly understand the internal relationship between the reality of the self and language.

Self-transformation is a gradual process in which the normal relationship between language and reality transforms into silence, and through such silence, language rejuvenates and get new strength. Language presupposes our everyday selves. As an apparent presupposition of our everyday self, language always puts limits on our experience of the world. The intimate relationship between self and language is freshening up when the frameworks of everyday language transform and to allow silence to become manifest and generate a creative language. (Kotoh, 1990)

The silence is a characteristic of 'nihilism' or 'sunya' which Heidegger regarded as 'nothingness,' there is no place for rationality. One cannot express this reality through languages. In this situation, the world becomes isolated, standing apart from words and languages and floats by itself. "Our complete groundwork breaks and the earth open up into abysses or void" (Pascal, 2006). However, in this condition, there is no difference between the self and the world. There is nothing like a subject and an object. In Dogen's words, "one who drops down to the ground gets up with the help of it" (*Shōbōgenzō*). Dogen wrote that, if one throws them into the state of Buddhahood and stop thinking about the body and mind, and the world of birth and death leaves behind and lets things happen without attempting to use his mind, he becomes a Buddha (Kotoh, 1990). According to Zen, one who understands the 'Buddha-nature' of all things may be called "the true person who exists everywhere and nowhere. However, for the true self, silence is a vibration or a deep sound of true reality, and this state of silence has become a state where the true self creates a language to portray the world (Kotoh, 1990). The Mandukya Upanishad said that "*Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*," which means the knower of the Brahman, turns out to be the Brahman. He has the capability to overcome every good and evil.

Heidegger was very well aware of this connection, and this deep connection is fundamental to his thinking about language. More than reason or rational explanations, Heidegger mostly gives importance to this 'silence' which distinguishes him from the mainstream western tradition and brings him close to oriental thinking.

However, the primary task hermeneutics takes for itself is to think through the nature of human understanding. Hermeneutical tradition considers 'Understanding' as our primary means of participation in, and belonging to the world, that it is understanding alone that renders the seemingly strange, more familiar. Heidegger was concerned with technologization and globalization that takes away this sense of belonging to the earth and in community bonding with others, as being is essentially a Dasein, a being with others. In the name of science and reason, a mode of understanding arises in which the other is reduced and devalued through the practice of a "hermeneutics of suspicion," as Ricoeur calls it. Under the large historical phenomenon, characterized by Husserl as the 'Europeanization of the earth, Mehta recognizes the need for taking recourse to an alternate mode of thinking that remains non-objectifying and non-representational that Heidegger finds at the heart of Being. For Mehta, it is a return to the root of one's own tradition, the lifeworld in Husserl's words, that sustains and nurtures the very mode of one's being in the world.'

Mehta echoes this in very forceful language that this sense of being with others can also make sense to be at home in a foreign land or be a stranger in one's own home. What is needed is more than an artificial clubbing of one another in a mechanical way, one can essentially look forward to rediscovering oneself in a journey that keeps room for fellow travelers sharing a similar sense of homelessness and being lost thereby. For Vedanta and Indian philosophy, it was alienation from oneself that needs to be restored in a shared way, as '*Sarvam Khaluidam Brahman*'! Mehta writes: "Despite being trapped in Western history and the nihilism of its metaphysical tradition, "we in India ... might go back philosophically to the as yet latent, untapped resources in the beginning" of the Indian tradition" (Mehta, 1978).

This is what is aimed at in this exercise, and it is an indirect way of rediscovering one's own roots through a temporary entanglement, which is apparently different. However, it helps re-discovering similar positions and possibilities even in one's own traditions, though not exactly similar.

However, in the present day, a comparatively integrated world civilization is being built, which is intended to protect the survival of humanity, in this situation it is essential to have a dialogue between the various traditions. Heidegger has endowed with a significant

encouragement for such dialogue. Though, the task to which he applied himself has not been achieved but is being handed down to us as something open-ended.



Chapter VI

Conclusion

The present study makes an endeavor to understand hermeneutics as a kind of philosophy and a methodology in the intercultural dimension of the philosophy of Consciousness. The thesis begins with a general discussion of hermeneutics as a methodology for exploring an in-depth study of Consciousness in general and in the context of Vedanta and Buddhism. After analyzing the hermeneutical method developed by different philosophers, the study discusses the possibility of the presence of the hermeneutic method in the development of Indian tradition. The Indian tradition offers many prospects for interpretation, and so the study proceeds to the subsequent chapter that further explores the hermeneutical development of Consciousness in Indian philosophical tradition especially, in the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara. In India, particularly in Hinduism, during the process of reformation from the pre-Vedic and Vedic to the contemporary period, many changes have taken place. Even in the Vedanta philosophy, the trend has changed to a different level. From Vedic to Upanishads and Upanishads to Gauḍapāda, there is one trend. Sankara's trend is somewhat different from Gauḍapāda. Then again, the other vedantins like Ramanuja, Madhva, and others interpret it differently. Thus various thinkers and leaders create newness and intellectual innovation to the Indian tradition.

However, Advaita Vedanta philosophy is regarded as the most consistent and spiritually most advanced philosophy of India. But, Sankara's interpretation was charged later by other Vedantins because of its interpretive tendency. Other Vedantic philosopher claims that Sankara's Advaita Vedanta is a hermeneutic form of Buddhism. Sankara borrowed some ideas from Buddhism and later presented that in his own way. The third chapter explores some such areas in its explication of cross-cultural hermeneutical discourse across Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta.

Although Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism are coming out from two different sources, still their philosophical position remarkably close to each other. As maintain by Chandradhar Sharma, there is no need to consider Buddhism and Vedanta two different systems. They are not

opposed to each other. They are only different phases in the development of the one core thought. It is claimed that there is a similarity between the Maya theory of Sankara and of Buddhism. However, the point is that Sankara himself never claim Mayavāda as his own theory. Moreover, none of the thinkers prior to him had ever proclaimed it as their own theory. Mayavāda may be said to be the idea that only the Brahman is real, and everything else is false. But this term does not become applicable to Sankara's philosophical theories. Nevertheless, other philosophers like Sriharsa, who stated that although there is a resemblance between the non-dualistic monistic school and Buddhist theory, there is also a difference between the two. For example, while Buddhism asserts the falsity of the infinite existence, the Vedanta school teaches the 'non-difference' of the infinite existence, and so they are different on this point. On the other hand, there is also disagreement regarding the Maya theory within the schools of Buddhism, especially within Mādhyamika Vijñānavāda school. However, Buddhism itself is a hermeneutic form. It has also changed from generation to generation. Brahmanism, although they never revealed, it is evident that, knowingly or unknowingly, they incorporated many Buddhist rituals and practices. Brahmanism also believed Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu. Thus, Brahmanism assimilated most of the principles of the Buddhist faith without reference to Buddhism.

However, as time changes, Vedanta philosophy also gets several interpretations in the contemporary period, which is called neo-Vedanta philosophy. So the fourth chapter is devoted to a new way of approaching the study of Advaita Vedanta as well as its devotion to using specific hermeneutical approaches to disclose meaning. In the neo-Vedantic movement, traditional Vedanta interpreted in terms of modern thought. The leading advocator of the Neo-Vedantic movement was Sri Ramakrishna, Svami Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, and Radhakrishnan, and here the thesis also incorporates Gandhi. They tried to make a Vedantic position more relevant to the needs and conditions of the modern world and also wanted to apply it in practical life. Although they support the same Advaita Vedanta and agree with the concept of Brahman, their interpretations are different from one another. While Sankara believed in the Jñānamarga to attain liberation, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda believed in the Bhakti path to attain moksha. Sri Aurobindo also did not agree with Sankara's version of Advaita. The fundamental idea upon which the whole structure of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy rests is that matter, as well as spirit, is to be looked upon as real. He also refused to accept the

Sankara's edition of the doctrine of Maya and its emphasis on the falsity of the world, and Sri Aurobindo gives a new status to Maya by calling it 'the Maya of Brahman.' Sri Aurobindo's humanistic Vedanta gives the Vedanta philosophy a new dimension and a new depth. Rabindranath Tagore made a great effort to make apparent 'Brāhmanic Mysticism' in the sense of the ethical world and positive aspects of life. He also did not agree with Sankara's thought that the phenomenal world is only an illusion.

Tagore never degrades the status of the human being. To him, the human being is at the apex of creation. Tagore stated that "the Brahman of the Vedanta is abstract, and beyond any real manifestation in the universe is difficult to accept" (Tagore, *Gītāñjali* 2000). Mahatma Gandhi also was a great follower of Advaita Vedanta. Gandhi was quite unclear regarding the Advaitavāda and the Dvaitavāda. Even by doing this, he tried to say that the Advaitins should also believe in Dvaitism. He had an unshakable faith in universal brotherhood. The Vedanta, which Radhakrishnan reconstructs and develops into world culture, is based on the Advaita Vedanta. Even though he is regarded as one of the great followers of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, but unlike Sankara, Radhakrishnan was a supporter of dualism. Radhakrishnan did not want to repeat the metaphysics of Sankara but tries to interpret Advaita Vedanta for the present needs.

Moreover, based on understanding, they tried to interpret Vedanta philosophy in a way that is acceptable to all. They put much effort into preparing Vedanta, world religion, and world culture. The neo-Vedantic philosophers, by making some fusion with other cultures, give it a different turn. Some tried to merge it with Buddhism while some other with the western philosophical tradition. Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan all are made an attempt to blended Hinduism with other cultures.

Thus we have seen that the development of Indian tradition is all about interpretation. Based on one single reality, the Advaita Vedanta system interpreted different philosophers in a very different shed to make it acceptable to all. As an outcome, their method of interpretation comes very close to the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer. As Heidegger regarded Being as the ultimate reality, similarly in Advaita Vedanta philosophy also by keeping Brahman in the highest position, they tried to make a fusion of horizon, like Gadamer. Keeping this view in

mind, the scope of the study widens to include the Heideggerian hermeneutics in the fifth chapter with some comparative notes with Vedanta and Buddhism.

The fifth chapter keeps room for a comparative study of Heidegger and his hermeneutical interpretation of Being and the Being of other cultures, including Advaita Vedanta of Sankara and Mādhyamika school of Sunyavāda. There is a hermeneutical kinship between Advaita Vedanta of Sankara and Heidegger on the one hand, also with the Sunyavāda concept of Buddhism. Because what Heidegger means by Being is very similar to the nirguna Brahman of Sankara.

. Heidegger's hermeneutic philosophy is moved from the interpretation of the text to the understanding of the existence of being. Heidegger's discovery of the ontological significance of understanding is the most important turning point in the history of hermeneutics. Besides these, Heidegger also talked about the importance of language. The words and concepts of a particular language disclose an idea of being. The *Being and Time* of Heidegger is an investigation of our way of Being. At the same time, it is a search for the question of the exploration of the meaning of Being. Heidegger's understanding of the meaning of Being is beyond the horizons of space and time, as the Brahman of the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara. Being is beyond the limits of our horizon of knowledge. Being cannot define as eternal or non-eternal; Being is neither something nor nothing

Overall the thesis examined the interpretation and transformation of Advaita Vedantic concept of Consciousness and also tended to make a dialogue with Heidegger's understanding of Being, which is almost similar to the Advaitic concepts of Brahman.

However, the question that we began with, 'Can there be a distinctively Asian, or an Indian philosophy as different from the Occident and Western, European and Greek?', can be addressed differently as per changes in time, and thus the questions keep changes with the changes of the basic hermeneutical paradigm. With Heidegger, one can say that one needs to be earthbound, and a being in the world, and with others that too have a shared tradition, historicity, culture, and others. However, the quest continues toward *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, as for Gadamer, "the isolated individual needs to recover a sense of participation in a larger community" (Francis J. Mootz III 2011). He continues, "the individual moves from "I" to "we"

through participation in the community of those who understand" (Francis J. Mootz III 2011). Our understanding is shaped by the way we belong to the world. Our *belonging* to the world speaks to the way in which, through our languages, traditions, and cultures, we inhabit something beyond ourselves. Furthermore, language is not merely what is articulated; instead of that, it has an inner nature, which is the word-essence, known as the Sabda-Brahman, which is beginningless and endless.

The translation and further interpretation of religious or philosophical texts are one of the essential means of cross-cultural exchange, which has been practiced for the last many centuries. The translation and interpretation of the text in multiple languages is essential due to the popularity of its inherent ethical message rather than the ingrained religious symbolism. For example, the Bhagavad Gita has been translated and circulated the world under the banner of being a book based on an action-oriented philosophy rather than a book on regular religious practice. The inherent ethical message and practical adaptability are not only important in the realm of translation and interpretation but essential for the survival of religion and philosophy.

Through centuries the translation and interpretation of sacred texts have been done with great responsibility and have always been accompanied by challenges. However, a culture that is built upon respect for a sacred text can be expected to be sensitive to issues regarding the interpretation of texts and the ability of people to read a text written in an earlier period. Indeed, the problem of fundamentalism is situated just here. If the faithful reading of the sacred text means reading it in the same way in which it was read in earlier times, if the development of human life cannot raise new issues in the minds of the readers and enable the text to provide new insight to them, then faithfulness to the text means remaining immobile in a changing world. On the contrary, if faithfulness to the text means unfolding its meaning for each age so that the text is enabled by means of the readers to live through time, then the development of life can continually be informed by the prophetic word of Holy Scripture.

However, throughout the study, we have seen that hermeneutic is a way of revealing, which requires efforts to understand. Our strong aspiration to learn and our never-ending endeavor to grasp what is different from one's own society, religion, and environment encourages people to build a connection with cultures, religions, and philosophies of other than

one's own. In a broader sense, it is a way of understanding the other. In fact, in the process of hermeneutics, 'the other' is considered as absolutely necessary. Without the 'other,' there will be no meaning of hermeneutic. For Gadamer, "hermeneutic understanding is to understand the content of what is said. Understanding is not an executive project, but a finite event confined and conditioned by the historical and cultural situation in which it occurs. Tradition is not merely a precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves in as much as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves" (Gadamer, 1975). As Bruce Mazlish points out, "interpretation always occurs in a social matrix, it does not arise as an innate, individual, completely detached activity. It occurs in a cultural context and has meaning only in such a context." (Mazlish, 1998)

The new revolutions and discoveries required a new and different perspective to interpret and understand the other, not only in one's own term but also in the term of the other. This is because consciously and unconsciously, with the encounter of multiple cultures, religions, and ethnic groups, the other has become an integral part of our own being. The other is no longer a secluded alien, foreign or threatening, rather it has become part of our daily life, even though the other still challenges our own identity and makes us unbalanced. Thus such questions as to how to interpret the other, what is a proper way to understand the other, and how to treat the other have become important not only in the translation of text but especially in understanding other people, cultures, and religions in today's pluralistic world. The encounter of the other has become an unavoidable reality in our life. In fact, in our own thought and action, we experience such support and the supplement of others. We may say it a 'fusion' of the two cultures. For example, as an Indian, I inherit certain Indianness, which sustains my existence and identity. At the same time, I would not alienate myself from the impact of the western culture. I study western literary and philosophical treatises, experience the virtue and vices of western science, use the English language and western idioms for expressing and communicating my ideas. Many such factors, partly Eastern and partly Western, constitute my personality and environment. J.L Mehta holds that "there is no other way open to us but to go along with this Europeanization and to go through it. Only through the voyage into the foreign and the strange can we win back our own self-hood" (Mehta, 1978).

Regarding the interpretation of cultures, Clifford Geertz stated that Culture is essential “webs of significance,” which people establish and develop through generation after generation; it is not “an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.” (Geertz, 1973)

According to George F. McLean, culture is a pattern of social life guided by a set of virtues and values developed and exercised by people. Each culture is a way of cultivating the soul or way in which each people’s good or perfection can be pursued. It is an actual realization of being according to its own exercise of freedom which constitutes it as a unique culture. However, each culture is similar in Being on which each depends (Chibueze C. Udeani, 2008). On the other hand, the concepts of trust and faith, their significance in the process of translation and interpretation of the religious texts are an essential factor. It makes clear how ‘trust’ helps people in accepting the ability of the translator, and faith builds trust in the work as translated. Untimely that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy, and this is the link to the moral life of believers.

But in the post-metaphysical period, the loss of interest in metaphysics, the emergence and development of cultural imperialism, the urbanization process, mobility, and other phenomena that have occurred in the context of increased globalization. That brought new challenges for translators and hermeneutics of sacred texts, especially when it comes to multicultural or interreligious dialogue. It is argued that the main causes of the pressure that today’s humans must face are urbanization, the phenomenon of migration, and the increase in human mobility⁵¹. We translate or interpret all the time, but everything gets filtered through our own unique frame of reference. Given that language, and to a lesser extent, even non-verbal expression leaves lots of room for misunderstanding.

However, the transformation that takes place in society, we can call as epistemological transmutation. Foucault notes that “this epistemological mutation of history is not yet complete”

⁵¹ Foresight: Migration and Global Environmental Change (2011). Final Project Report. The Government Office for Science, London.

(Foucault, 2013). As we have found, in Indian philosophy, the understanding of reality or the Ontological understanding has been the most influential ground of knowledge for centuries. However, gradually it has changed in the post-metaphysical period. In the post-metaphysical period, a distance takes place between the fundamental doctrines of knowledge and metaphysics. Mansour Hashemi, in his paper *The Theory of Epistemological Transmutation of English Language*, said: “it is the conclusion of Metaphysics as a correction done to the understanding of understanding itself and the explication of language as a non-substantial phenomenon” (Hashemi, 2019). In India, this post-metaphysical period comes into being when the contemporary philosophers adopted the western concepts and language, which starts transmuted the metaphysical ground of knowledge to the linguistic ground. Roland Barthes, in his book “*Image Music Text*,” said that specific change had taken place with the new understanding of language.

The change is clearly connected with the modern development of linguistics, anthropology, Marxism, and Psychoanalysis. What is new and which affects the idea of the work comes not necessarily from the internal recasting of each of these disciplines, but rather from their encounter concerning an object which traditionally is the province of none of them. (Barthes, 1977)

Foucault's theories address "the relationship between power and knowledge and how they are used as a form of control through societal institutions"(Elden, 2007). Similarly, at this rise of the darkness of nihilism and virtual reality, the interpretive paradigm may change from wisdom and love, from inclusiveness and brotherhood to exclusiveness of knowledge, power, and dominion. A text or a tradition may have a fallen status that leads to nihilism and skepticism in all fronts. Despite all these lapses and possibilities, a journey continues, beginning with Rta, mind-body prana, and all in Vedic corpus in order to re-reach self, Consciousness. The paradigm that shaped its interpretation is mostly based on its own way of understanding a text from different angles such as language oral or verbal, the position of authority in interpretation, and many other concerns. The great teachers of the past did not claim any credit for themselves but maintained that they only transmitted the wisdom of the ancients, and throughout the thesis, it is sought to be explored how structure and mode of dialogue changes as per changing paradigms

for interpretation. They remained votaries of the immortal spirit of *sat-chit and ānanda* that half-veiled truth for all time, which still keeps inspiring a journey across cultures, and across all man-made differences on earth.

Summing up the discussion, we can conclude that hermeneutical understanding is a significant means of resolving the differences among cultures. It creates the possibility of meaningful dialogues across cultures. However, it is sometimes blamed that there is always missed something in the process of interpretation and translation. We might have the feeling that ‘something is lost in translation’ because of the polysemic inner nature of language, whose random (and perhaps imperfect) combinations of words, syntax, and morphology generate several ‘layers of meaning’ that always leave room for misunderstanding, even among native speakers, and particularly among different languages. However, this ‘imperfection’ does not represent a negative feature; in contrast, it represents the intrinsic value of human communication. However, we can say that nothing is lost in translation then: it is only through translation that we can realize the rich complexity of the levels constituting the codes of communication.

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Annexure I

Journal Publications:

1. Barua A. and Devi R. (2018), “Matrilineal Roots in some Early Materialist Tradition in India: Re-visiting Tantra from a Marxist perspective,” Lokayata- Journal of Positive philosophy, Vol-VIII, No-01, March 2018. (ISSN: 2249-8389).
2. Devi R., “Universalism in the Hermeneutical Development of the Vedanta Concept of Consciousness: An Advaita Vedantic perspective,” Published by Banaras Hindu university, faculty of education in the book entitled” Universal Religion and Education: Practitioners’ perspectives”, November 2018. (ISBN- 978-93-5346-044-0).
3. Devi R., “The Application of Hermeneutics to the Study of Hindu Tradition with Reference to Advaita Vedanta of Sankara,” Journal of Arts, Culture, Philosophy, Religion, Language and Literature, Volume-1, Issue-2, September-December, 2017 (e-ISSN: 2457-0346).
4. Devi R., “Ahimsa in Indian philosophy: A phenomenological Perspective,” Journal of Arts, culture, philosophy, Religion, Language and Literature, Vol-2, Issue 1, January-April. 2018 (ISSN: 2457-0346).

Conference Presentations:

1. Presented paper entitled, “Hermeneutic Nature of Buddhism and its Impact on Socio-Cultural Life of Asian People,” in the International conference “Translation and Interpretation of Buddhist and Christian Scriptures: Past and Present,” held at School of Philosophy, Wuhan University, Wuhan, P.R. China, 16th July to 17th July 2019.
2. Presented paper entitled, “Universalism in the Hermeneutical Development of the Vedanta Concept of Consciousness: An Advaita Vedantic Perspective,” in the International conference on universal religion and education held at Banaras Hindu University, 16th to 18th November 2018 (ICURE-2018).

3. Presented paper entitled, “Animal Ethics and Ahimsa: from the Lens of Gandhi,” in the national seminar on ‘Gandhian way of life for Human perfection’ held at the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, 22nd to 23rd October 2018.

4. Presented paper entitled, “Hermeneutical Development of Consciousness: An Advaita Vedantic Perspective,” in ICPR sponsored national conference of InSIS 2018 on Cultivating Unity Consciousness for Self Transformation held at the M S University Baroda, Vadodara, 25th to 26th October 2018 (InSIS 2018).

