AN INVESTIGATION OF THE NOTION OF AVATARA

IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS OF

SHANKARA

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DECLARATION

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FOREWORD

At a time when I was unsure about a theme for my research Prof Pratap Kumar from the University of KwaZulu Natal was at hand to offer me advice. He suggested that I embark on a study of Shankara and his notion of Avatara in Advaita Vedanta. I therefore wish to thank Prof Kumar for his sound advice.

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Suminthra Sukdaven and in honour of my late father, Rev Surajlall Sukdaven, who passed away on the 16 Sep 2011.

MANIRAJ SUKDAVEN

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AU	..	Aitareya Upanishad with commentary by Shankara
BG	..	Bhagavad Gita
BGS	..	Bhagvad Gita with commentary of Shankara
BS	..	Brahmasutra Upanishad
BSB	..	Brahmasutra Upanishad with commentary of Shankara
BU	..	Brhadaranyaka Upanishad with commentary of Shankara
CU	..	Chandogya Upanishad with commentary of Shankara
CHU	..	Chandogya Upanishad
GK	..	Gaudapada Karikas
IS	..	Isa Upanishad with commentary of Shankara
KU	..	Katha Upanishad with commentary of Shankara
MHB	..	Mahabarata
MU	..	Mundaka Upanishad with commentary of Shankara
MUS	..	Mandukya Upanishad with commentary of Shankara
Rg	..	Rig Veda
SBH	..	Shribhasya of Ramanuja, SBE XLVIII, George Thibaut
Sv	..	Svetasvatara Upanishad
TU	..	Taitiriya Upanishad with commentary of Shankara
Vs	..	Vedanta Sutra
VS	..	Vedantasutra with Sharirakabhaysa of Shankara

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CHAPTER 1
SETTING THE SCENE: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate and clarify the notion of *Avatara* in the philosophical systems of Shankara (788-820 CE)[1] who is regarded as an influential Hindu philosopher that attracted a following. The candidate, in this thesis, due to the nature of the subject matter, has seen it necessary to delineate Hinduism as religion, outlining its history, nature and scriptures, before the rationale of this research is argued in the next chapter.

The intention of the first chapter is to provide a basic and general understanding of the history and nature of Hinduism. Cognisance should however be taken of the fact that there is still much speculation surrounding the historical development of Hinduism. The objective therefore is not to offer a critical analysis of the historical development of Hinduism as reflected in its theology and philosophy. The approach is more empirical where trends and trajectories are presented based on the consensus of current scholarship in order to set the scene for the enquiry into the concept of *Avatara* in the philosophy of Shankara.

The study embarks on clarifying the terms Hindu and Hinduism, generally used in academic and popular discourses. This is addressed in the first paragraph. The second part of the chapter pays particular attention to the nature and development of Hinduism.

1.2 THE TERM HINDU AND HINDUISM

Gavin Flood (2005:5), in asking "What is Hinduism", suggests that a simple answer might be that it is a term which refers to the majority of people living in India and Nepal as well as to those on other continents of the world who regard themselves as "Hindus". In providing such a basic and simplistic answer, Flood (2005:5) is however fully aware that Hinduism as an indication of the religion of Hindus is much more complicated and difficult to define as it has a long and vast

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[1] This date is commonly accepted by most scholars although there are other theories that are suggested.

history. In light of this it becomes important to trace the historical development of the terms Hindu and Hinduism.

1.2.1 ORIGIN OF THE TERM HINDU

Lipner (1994:7-8) is of the opinion that the term 'Hindu' is derived from what is known today as the Indus River. This Indus River flows from the Himalaya Mountains in Tibet, through Pakistan and into the Arabian Sea (Rodrigues 2006:4).

In this great river valley, the Indus Valley Civilisation flourished between 2500-1500 BCE. Not much is known of its inception and rise. There is however undeniable evidence of social and religious structures and practises prevalent.

According to Shattuck (1999:18-20) between 2000 and 1500 BCE, people from central Asia began to migrate to and settle in western and northern Europe, south and east Iran and India. The group that migrated to India settled in the Indus River Valley. They called themselves Aryans. Over time they became the dominant force in northwest India and their culture and belief systems amalgamated with that of the original inhabitants. When the Aryans settled in India, they brought with them the sacred Sanskrit language.

In support of this theory, an examination of Sanskrit reveals a close relationship with the Indo-European languages. Burnett (1992:33) confirms that in 1786 Sir William Jones observed that the Sanskrit languages were closely related to the languages of Greece, Rome, the Celts and Germans. Shattuck (1999:19) suggests that this relationship is attributed to the ancient connections of these immigrants and that therefore Sanskrit, Persian and the Latin languages are all related and stem from the Indo-European language family.

The worldview of the Aryan people was vested in a vast body of sacred utterances called the Vedas. According to Lipner (1994:7), in the oldest portion of the Vedas, the Rig Veda, there are references to a river called the Sindhu. From the Vedic Indians, it is known that rivers receive their numinous power from a transcendent force. The legitimate question therefore is whether Sindhu was not perhaps the name of some great and important river that exhibited some form of mystical

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properties from one of the areas that the Aryans came from. It would be "easy to imagine them investing these powerful waters (*the Indus River)* with the mystical properties attributed to rivers in their folk memory and calling them the 'Sindhu'" (Lipner 1994:8). (Italics added – MS).

Lipner (1994:8) observes that in later Sanskrit literature the word Sindhu was used to refer to people in the Indus area and that the Persians, under Darius I (549 BC – 486 BC), towards the middle of the first millennium BCE used the word 'Hindu' to refer to the inhabitants of the Indus territory. Subsequently to this, according to Lipner (2004:10), other immigrants and invaders from beyond the northwest such as the Greeks (4th BCE) and the Muslims (8th – 9th BCE) used the element 'ind' from Sindhu to describe the people to the east of the Indus River. The Greeks used the word Indikoi ('Indians') and the Muslims used the word 'al-Hind'. From this it is not difficult to deduce that the word 'Hindu' referred to people that populated the area around and beyond the 'Sindhu'.

Now that the origin of the term Hindu has been clarified, the attention must be shifted to the term 'Hinduism' as a concept that was much later introduced.

1.2.2 THE TERM HINDUISM

The introduction of the term Hinduism is, broadly speaking, related to the British colonial occupation of India. According to Flood (2005:3) the British used the term 'Hindustan' to differentiate between those who were not Muslim, Sikh, Christian or Jain and who occupied the area northwest of India. The 'ism' was thus added to the term 'Hindu' in the early 19th century. Hinduism therefore became the blanket term applied by the British for the religion of the people of Hindustan (Rodrigues 2006:4). The term Hinduism is about 200 years old and is "obliquely derived from the Sanskrit term '*Sindhu*'" (Lipner 2004:13).

If Hinduism is expressed as the religion of India which excludes religions of an identifiable designation, then one has to raise the obvious question at this point as to what constitutes Hinduism.

1.3   HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND NATURE OF HINDUISM

In discussing the history and development of the nature of Hinduism, the chronological division (historical outline) used by Kinsley (1993:11-39) is of great help for the purposes of this paragraph. Although the accuracy of the chronology may not be entirely acceptable to all scholars, it does provide a good basis to explain Hinduism as a religious development and to elucidate its history.

An attempt to understand the nature and development of Hinduism will therefore be discussed under the following chronological divisions: The Formative Period (2500-800 BCE); The Speculative Period (800-400 BCE); The Epic and Classical Period (400 BCE–600 CE); The Medieval Period (600–1800 CE); The Modern Period (1800–Present). The identification of the last two periods (Medieval and Modern) is however not directly related to sources and developments within the religion itself. 'Medieval' and 'Modern' are postulations of a European concept of history. Nevertheless, due to practical reasons, the terminology Medieval and Modern, as suggested by Kingsley, is followed.

1.3.1   THE FORMATIVE PERIOD (2500-800 BCE)

When the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' were discussed above, reference was made as to the difficulty of determining the history of Hinduism as it has a long and complicated history which is not easy to fathom. Rosen (2006:1) even suggests that since Hinduism as religion predates recorded history, very little is known about its foundation.

In an attempt to approach and construct the development of Hinduism, Shattuck (1999:18) refers to two foundational historical events which contributed to the formative and initial development of the religious tradition that became Hinduism. The first was the establishment and growth of the Indus Valley Civilisation, with its typical social and religious structures. The second was the Aryan expansion into the Indus River Valley. The famous Vedas characterised and expressed their religion. On both these foundational influences Rosen (2006:1-16) and Lipner (2004:10-12) agree with Shattuck. Lipner (2004:12) even expands these foundational influences further into three categories: linguistic, anthropological and archaeological. He does concede though that 'evidence' is fragmentary and is

being constantly added to, revisited and reinterpreted. Rosen (2006:11) also admits that the scholarly world is still divided and is exploring the impact and influences of both events on the formation of Hinduism as religion from various points of view. The result of these difficulties causes Lipner (2004:13) to admit that although there are several fruitful approaches to profile the inception of Hinduism historically, there are also many hard features such as "particular beliefs, practices, myths, symbols, artefacts, etcetera", that hamper such a venture.

In appreciating the difficulty of accurately determining the development of Hinduism, the two foundational influences mentioned above, which is widely accepted, will be considered. According to Rosen (2006:5) scholars thus trace the Hindu complex of religions to a "merger of beliefs, especially those of the Aryans, the Dravidians, and the Harappans, ancient peoples who found their home in the Indian subcontinent." Flood (2005:23) refers to this as the traditional view.

This traditional view contends that the origins of Hinduism lie in two ancient cultural complexes: the Indus Valley Civilisation discovered by archaeologists and the Aryan Culture, an Indo-European people originating in the Caucasus region who migrated into South Asia, which merged with the Indus Valley Civilisation and developed the new culture (cf. 1.3.1.2).

1.3.1.1   INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION

Sir John Marshall and his colleagues began excavations along the eastern banks of the River Ravi in the Punjab Province in early 1920 (Burnett 1992:21-22). The discovery of vast quantities of bricks in the area and indecipherable seals found near the mounds initiated these excavations. The first site was at a place called Harappa and the second site, the city of Mohenjodaro, was discovered near the bank of the Indus where the ruins of a great civilisation surfaced.

Younger and Younger (1978:14), indicated that this civilisation seemed to have been highly sophisticated and remarkably well organised. According to Kinsley (1993:11), it undertook extensive trade with cities of the Ancient Near East, that its economy was based on agriculture and that it had a complex, hierarchical social structure.

With regards to its religious practices, Kinsley's (1993:11) opinion is that it is difficult to discern anything definite. Rodrigues (2006:10-11) supports this view by claiming that the archaeological record is sufficient only for "reasoned speculations" and that most ideas are debatable.

Many female figurines were found, which probably indicates that goddesses were worshipped in connection with the fertility of the crops (Kinsley 1993:11). Burnett (1992:25) suggests that due to the large number of figurines found, they must have been kept in almost every home. Other speculations are that the bulls depicted on seals discovered as well as the scenes displayed in the art and a variety of stone objects implied a proto-type of later Hindu religion.

There were also male figures discovered. One of the most renowned seals is known as the 'Proto-Siva Seal'. It depicts a figure sitting in a yoga posture where his legs are drawn close to his body and his heels are touching each other (Burnett 1992:26). This posture is believed to be emblematic of divinity. Some scholars believe this presumed deity to be the prototype of the god Siva, because of its ithyphallic resemblance. In later Hinduism the phallus became a symbol of Siva.

Burnett (1992:28) alludes to other evidence for the association of the figure to Siva. A common image on many of the seals is that of a bull. In later Hinduism the bull is regarded as the mount on which Siva rides. The figure half-tiger, half-woman, has been regarded as a prototype of Siva's consort Durga. Burnett (1992:29) is of the opinion that many symbols of present day Hinduism draw inspiration from past images of the Indus Valley or Harappan Civilisation.

These archaeological findings are significant, but as Kinsley (1993:11-12) underlines, this ancient culture will remain unknown until the scripts could be deciphered. He also assumes that the Indus Valley Civilisation came to an abrupt halt around 1500 BCE.

The second event that impacted on the development of Hinduism, as mentioned above, was the Aryan migration. People from central Asia began a great migration towards the west and the southeast. Of these, some settled in India (Shattuck

1999:18). According to Burnett (1992:33) it seems that the Aryan migration into India coincided with the end of the Harappan Civilisation.

1.3.1.2 ARYAN EXPANSION

Rodrigues (2006:12) refers to two theories of who these Aryans were. The one theory is the 'Indo-European (Aryan) Migration Thesis' and the other is the 'Cultural Diffusion Hypothesis'. The prevailing theory, the 'Indo-European Migration Thesis', which is accepted by a majority of scholars, is that the Aryans originated from central Asia near the Caucasus Mountains. They migrated westwards into Europe and south and eastwards into the Indian subcontinent.

The second theory, which according to Rodrigues (2006:12), is the minority view bolstered by orthodox Hindu political ideologies, is that the Aryans originated in or close to the Indus Valley. In support of this view the 'Cultural Diffusion' theorists make reference to the Vedas. These theorists infer from the Vedas that the many references to the ocean could not have been composed in a landlocked area as central Asia nor could references to astronomical phenomena, such as the position of particular constellations be of Aryan origin which also suggests that the Vedas were composed far earlier than the Indo-Aryan Migration thesis would suggest (Rodrigues 2006:14).

According to Flood (2005:34) there is a modified Aryan migration theory that is supported by the renowned Sindhologist Asko Parpola. This theory suggests that at the beginning of the second millennium BCE, Aryan nomads entered the Indian subcontinent. Being a minority group in the Indus Valley, they lived and developed alongside the Indus Valley inhabitants and absorbed elements of this culture.

Such theories prompt Flood (2005:34) and Rodrigues (2006:12) to admit that these theses will continue to be debated until the Indus Valley scripts are successfully deciphered and new evidence can be provided.

This left Flood (2006:35), as well as many other scholars, to conclude that "wherever the Aryans originated, whether their culture was a development of indigenous cultures or whether they migrated from elsewhere, our knowledge of their social structure, their mythologies and, above all, their ritual comes from their

self-representation in their Sanskrit text, the Veda." Lipner (1994:29) suggests that the Vedas had a religious outlook which centred on sacrificial rituals in which various deities (*devas* (masculine) and *devis* (feminine)) were invoked.

It is the Vedas that Kinsley (1993:12) says "… have been acknowledged for thousands of years to embody the primordial truths upon which Hinduism bases itself." According to Witzel (2003:68) Veda means "(sacred) knowledge" (cf. Greek *(w)oida*, English *wit*, witness, German *wissen*).

It would be appropriate to consider the Vedas as the primary Hindu scriptures and its influence on the religious development of Hinduism as a religion.

1.3.1.3   PRIMARY HINDU SCRIPTURES: THE VEDAS (SHRUTI)

The Hindu scriptures can be divided into primary and secondary scriptures also known as *shruti and smriti* respectively. *Shruti* means 'what is heard' and reference here is made to the revealed scriptures usually identified with the Vedas which was heard by the "primordial" sages (the Rishis). By contrast, *smriti* means "what is remembered" or "something learnt by heart." Reference here is made to the texts written on the basis of the Vedas, mainly dealing with religious practices, domestic rites and social law, composed by human beings (Morgan 1953:415-416; Witzel 2003:68).

The Vedas are regarded by some Hindus as a 'timeless revelation' which does not constitute any human interventions (Flood 2005:35). These Vedic texts were orally composed and transmitted in an unbroken line of communication from teacher to student. According to Witzel (2003:69) the Vedas were written down only during the second millennium BCE. This is also contentious as Rosen (2006:53) suggests that the Vedas were put into written form by the sage, Vyasadeva, some 3000 years BCE[2].

There are four Vedas, namely the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and the Atharva Veda. Laurie Patton (2004:38) refers to the Rig Veda as knowledge of the verses, the Sama Veda as knowledge of the chants, the Yajur Veda as knowledge

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[2] Although the dating of the written form of the Vedas is contentious, it is not the focus of this research to elaborate on this position. Suffice though for the purpose of confirmation is that the oral traditions of the Vedas were committed to a written form.

of ritual directions, and the Atharva Veda as knowledge of the *atharvanas,* the procedures for everyday life (also called 'magical' formulae).

The Rig Veda is the oldest Vedic text and is composed in archaic, highly stylised poetic Sanskrit. The Rig Veda contains the names of many divine manifestations who were worshipped. Some of the more important and powerful gods, although there were initially no clear demarcation between one Vedic deity and another (Sarma 1953:28), are:

- Indra – the popular god of weather and war.
- Varuna – the upholder of cosmic and moral order who can forgive those who are repentant and liberate people from moral sin.
- Agni – the god of fire. As fire Agni officiates at every sacrifice. He acts as a mediator.
- Soma – the divinisation of the soma plant.

Many other deities are mentioned in the Rig Veda as well but were not of the same importance as the above four. Sacrifices to the gods returned blessings and benefits such as health, long life, happiness, offspring, etc.

According to Lipner (1994:31) the Rig Veda seemed to have been compiled to act only as a record of sacred hymns. He also suggests that the way these hymns were used in sacrificial rituals gave rise to two further Vedas, the Sama and Yajur Vedas.

The Sama Veda has two divisions: the one consists of hymns from the Rig Veda and the second consists of notated chants to which these hymns were set.

The Yajur Veda also contains hymns found in the Rig Veda but had prose and verse formulas which were muttered by the priests during the performance of a ritual.

The Artharva Veda is separate from the other three and may be as old as the Rig Veda. Although it makes many references to the *devas* and *devis* of the Rig Veda, it is mainly about good and contains hymns of homage to gods.

Witzel (2003:69) explains that these four Vedas are each in turn divided into four levels: the Samhitas (Mantra collections); Brahmanas (theological/ritual commentary); Aranyakas (wilderness texts); Upanishads (secret philosophical texts). Thus each Veda has its corresponding Samhita, Brahamana, Aranyaka and Upanishadic portions.

The Samhitas were hymns in praise of various deities. Sarma (1953:30) believes that these collected hymns were succeeded by the age of the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas were liturgical texts (for sacrificial purposes) dealing with the meaning and technicalities of Vedic rituals. It contained detailed instructions on how rituals should be performed (Burnett 1992:54).

The third and fourth levels are the Aranyakas and Upanishads. Kinsley (1993:13) places these commentaries within the Speculative Period (800-400 BCE) because of their nature. Shattuck (1999:27) says that this period is a reflection of the sacred knowledge associated with the sacrifice which became internalised, where physical actions were replaced by mental performance, where sages thought that is was knowledge that was primary and not the external traditions.

1.3.2 THE SPECULATIVE PERIOD (800-400 BCE)

Traditionally the Aranyakas have been distinguished from the Brahmanas through the characterization that they contain information on secret rites to be carried out only by certain persons. While it is true that the Aranyakas are given over to explanations of the symbolic and allegorical meanings of Vedic ritual, this does not markedly separate them either from the earlier Brahmanas or from the Upanishads, of many which were composed later.

Rodrigues (2006:33) aptly explains the positioning of the Aranyakas within Vedic religion by stating that it bridges "the concerns of the Brahmanas and those of the Upanishads."

Rosen (2006:52) indicates that the word *aranya* means 'forest'. Here the original idea, according to Rosen (2006:52) was that the Vedas were best understood by going off into the forest, in seclusion, and immersing oneself in the study of the Veda and that it was for this purpose that the Aranyakas were composed.

Coupled with the Aranyakas are the Upanishads which constitute the fourth level. Rodrigues (2006:34) denotes that '*Vedanta*' is often used when referring to the Upanishads and its teachings because the word *'Vedanta'* means 'the end or concluding sections (*anta*) of the revealed Vedas'. He also mentions that the common derivation of the term 'Upanishads' seems to stem from an image of a student sitting *(shad)* down *(ni)* beside *(upa)* a guru. According to Rosen (2006:52) the Upanishads thus form the final portions of the Aranyakas.

The Upanishads consist of 108 separate books which are deeply philosophical and the belief is that it explains the underlying truths of the Vedas. Rosen (2006:52) suggests that unlike the Vedas and their Brahmana and Aranyaka commentaries, the Upanishads focus on the metaphysics, mystical analyses and reflective expositions. This dimension, suggests Kinsley (1993:13), could be described as the search for redemptive knowledge. He highlights an important underlying reality amongst the diverse teachings found in the Upanishads which is a spiritual essence called Brahman. This religious search, contends Kinsley (1993:15), "involves realizing the fundamental identity of Brahman and Atman and realizing that one's essential self transcends individuality, limitation, decay, and death."

Patton (2004:48) addresses the questions as to what became of the Vedic deities. The answer, as suggested by Patton (2004:48) was that:

> ... the deities are still quite active and involved – such as Indra, who is engaged in much questioning and dialogue throughout most of both the earlier and later Upanishadic texts. However, while the activity of sacrifice is still presumed, the Upanishads use the deities themselves as aids to a certain kind of knowledge, a special kind of wisdom that only the mediator has access to. Thus the world of the gods is only one world that can be gained; the possibility of non-returning altogether is anew and quite intriguing prospect. The object of that knowledge is no longer gods per se but that new force called *brahman*.

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Later in this thesis *Brahman* will be discussed much more fully because most of Shankara's philosophy revolves around this concept. Suffice though it is conceivable to suggest that it is within the Upanishads that a shift is clearly seen from earlier Vedic texts. In the earlier Vedic texts the religious quest was associated with the vitality of the physical world, but with the Upanishads the association is with that which transcends or overcomes the world. Indeed the Upanishads reflect an era of intense philosophical speculation (Shattuck 1999:27).

Witzel (2004:86) suggests that the Vedic canon concludes with the late Vedic Sutras ("thread, guideline," or Kalpasutra "ritual guidelines") which form the *true* end of the Vedic period and its texts. According to him, "these sutras are descriptive and prescriptive texts that deal systematically, in the proper order of ritual procedure …"

The conclusion of the Vedic Period *(shruti* "that is revealed") and which is considered to be the primary scriptures, gave rise to the Epic and Classical Periods (400 BCE-600 CE) by which time, according to Kinsley (1993:15), an infusion of religions between the Aryans and the indigenous peoples of India became prominent. The scriptures prevalent at this time was known as *smriti* ("what is remembered") and regarded as secondary scriptures.

1.3.3 EPIC AND CLASSICAL PERIOD (400 BCE-600 CE)

Kinsley (1993:16) supports the idea that it was during this period of infusion of religions between the Aryans and the indigenous people of India that two great Hindu Epics were written, the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Rosen (2006:65) draws a continuation theory between the Vedas and the Epics. He suggests that whereas the Vedas concentrated on sacrifices with complicated fire rituals, the Epics promoted a 'sacrifice of battle' (war) as the preferred means of attaining the Supreme. In this he sees the goal to be the same which was to preserve the cosmic order (*dharma*). Contemporary to the Epics was a genre of literature concerned with the ideal nature and functioning of society. These were known as the *Dharmashastras* (Law Books, see 1.3.3.2).

1.3.3.1 THE EPICS

According to Rodrigues (2006:136-137) the Epics are "long narratives, which probably grew out of tales of heroic exploits of warriors, knitted together for courtly recitations to particularly receptive *ksatriya* (warrior caste) audiences."

Rosen (2006:65) confirms that it is in the Epics where re-enactments of the wars between good and evil, where gods fought with demons, as found in Vedic texts, take place. He even suggests that the "same personalities who manifested on the pages of the *Vedas* reappear in new incarnations" in the Epics. He is of the opinion that the Epics were to make the truths of the Vedas more accessible, more approachable to the masses. The two Epics can be very briefly summarised as follows:

1.3.3.1.1 THE RAMAYANA

This is a story of a great king, Rama, whose wife, Sita, is forcefully abducted by the demon king of Sri Lanka, Ravana. Sita is eventually rescued by Rama after he and his faithful ally Hanuman defeated Ravana's forces.

1.3.3.1.2 THE MAHABHARATA

This Epic narrates the story of a conflict between two branches of the same family (the Kauravas and the Pandavas). The quarrel escalates into a full-scale war which involved gods and men. Although many subsidiary stories have been woven into the main narrative of the Mahabharata, it is the sixth book of the Mahabharata, the well-known Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Lord) (Rosen 2006:90), that became the most read book within the scriptural texts of Hinduism. This book takes the form of a dialogue between one of the soldiers and family member Arjuna, and his charioteer, Krishna, who is regarded generally as the Supreme Being.

The Bhagavad Gita became the central focus of many commentaries, theories, theologies and philosophies about god. Rodrigues (2006:156) is of the opinion that the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita became the foundational text for Vedanta philosophy as well as provided the earliest texts in which the devotional (*bhakti*) approach was introduced.

It was also during this Epic and Classical Period that, according to Kinsley (1993:17), roughly the same time as the Epics, there was a whole genre of literature that concerned itself with the ideal nature of society which were known as the Law Books (*Dharmashstras*).

1.3.3.2   THE LAW BOOKS (DHARMASHASTRAS)

The *Dharmashastras*, according to Patrick Maxwell and Thillayvel Naidoo (1991:60) are believed to have been produced by 'traditional transmitters' of *dharma* (law, morals, tradition) of which the Laws of Manu is the most important. These works focus primarily on social stability affirming that an orderly and stable life is to be desired. *Dharmashastra* is concerned with the right course of conduct in every dilemma. Some basic principles of *Dharmashastra* are known to most Hindus brought up in a traditional environment.

Kinsley (1993:17) aptly describes the centrality of this literature when he says that "it is in this literature that the definition of the ideal society as varna-ashrama-dharma, the duty of acting according to one's stage of life (ashrama) and position in society (varna), is arrived at as most descriptive of Hindu society specifically and of Hinduism in general."

Until now two major and successive periods in the historical and intellectual development of Hinduism as a religion has been discussed. The next period must now be considered.

1.3.4   THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD (600 CE–1800 CE)

According to Kinsley (1993:18) the Medieval Period was characterized by three developments: (1) the rise of devotional (*bhakti*) movements, (2) the systematization of Hindu philosophy, and (3) the rise of Tantrism. A very brief consideration is given to these three developments in this period.

1.3.4.1   THE DEVOTIONAL (BHAKTI) MOVEMENTS

With the introduction of devotion alluded to earlier through the Bhagavad Gita, it was not until the 600 CE that *bhakti* began to dominate the Hindu religious landscape. According to Kinsley (1993:18), "an emotional, ecstatic kind of devotion became increasingly central to Hindu piety." Banerjea (1953:48) considers that

"through the worship an adoration of the devotee, the cosmic character of the Supreme Reality as conceived in the Upanishads was easily and consistently transferred to the chief cult deities of later times." Here again it is noticed the continuity of the Vedic influence on later religious practice in Hinduism.

Together with the rise of this devotional movement, as can be expected, temples began to be built as religious centres for worship, religious instruction and even to house devotees who renounced the world to pursue their service to god.

Kinsley (1993:19) points out that these gods belong generally to one of three strands within the Hindu pantheon: (1) the Shaivite strand, which includes Shiva and members of his family, (2) the Vaishnavite strand, which includes Vishnu and his *Avataras* and (3) the Shakta strand, which includes Hindu goddesses. These strands are reflected in the development of the Puranas.

The development of the Puranic ('ancient stories' or 'stories of old') genre, according to Rodrigues (2006:188), was out of concern for the orthodoxy in relationship to the growing prominence of *bhakti*. Kinsley (1993:19) says that the Puranas were the systematisation of the mythology of the deities worshiped, which is often portrayed in temple artwork.

According to Sarma (1953:35) the Puranas are full of stories of legends and that the authors were interested mainly in the inculcation of what may be regarded as the Hindu view of life.

Other materials concerning customs, ceremonies, sacrifices, festivals, caste duties, donations, construction of temples and images and places of pilgrimage, were included in this genre.

1.3.4.2   PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS (DARSHANAS)

According to Flood (2005:224) the Sanskrit term generally translated as 'philosophy' or 'theology' is *darshana* ('seeing' or 'viewing')*.* The word *darshana,* as John Grimes (1998:109) implies, is "not only vision (which includes insight, intuition, and vision of the truth) but also the instrument of vision (such as viewpoint, worldview, doctrine and philosophical system)." It can also consist of the beholding of a deity (especially in image form), a revered person, or a sacred

object or, as Rodrigues (2006:230) explains, it "is akin to having an audience with the deity, who presides in its temple like a monarch in a palace."

Flood (2005:224) states that *darshana* can refer to both orthodox (*astika*), where the Vedas are recognised as revelation, or to heterodox (*nastika*), where the Vedas are not recognised as authority.

The orthodox *darshanas* were codified into aphorisms called *sutras* ('threads') and which were so condensed that it could only be understood through the use of commentaries. Kinsley (1993:20) correctly claims that it is in these Hindu philosophical texts that considerable diversities of opinions are tolerated, yet, according to Flood (2005:225), it is in the commentaries that one finds much debates and refutations occurring, which emanated from different rival schools of thought.

Hindu philosophy has traditionally been divided into six orthodox (*astika*) and three heterodox (*nastika*) schools (Grimes 2004:541). The *astika* schools are Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta, which accept the authority of the Veda. The *nastika* schools are Carvaka, Jainism and Buddhism, which deny the authority of the Vedas.

It is not the intention to elaborate on these schools of philosophies in this chapter as it will be discussed later in the thesis, but it is suffice to note that the most brilliant and systematic exponent of a particular school of Vedanta known as Advaita Vedanta was Shankara.

The third development in the medieval period, as mentioned earlier, was the rise of the Tantras.

1.3.4.3   TANTRAS

In considering the devotional and philosophical developments and practices in the medieval period, the Tantras, although not totally disregarding the aforementioned, holds the opinion that much of these practices and teachings are superfluous. It offers in return a variety of rituals that is believed to attain liberation from the mundane world. These rituals, according to Kinsley (1993:21), employ mantras

(sacred formulas), *mandalas* (schematic diagrams) and yogic techniques to achieve their goal.

In the last paragraph a few observations concerning what Kingsley identified as the Modern Period in the development of Hinduism must be made.

1.3.5 THE MODERN PERIOD (1800 CE TO THE PRESENT)

According to Kinsley (1993:22), by the 8th CE Muslims entered India and that by the 13th CE Islam dominated North India. This led to the Hindus being ruled by non-Hindus as Islam and later, during the 18th CE, the British dominated India. Due to this domination arose also much castigation against the Hindu tradition, both from the west and also from Hindus themselves.

In retaliation, Hindu reform movements arose during the 19th CE in order to filter what was most central to the Hindu tradition while discarding the rest. In this regard two movements in particular gained prominence: the Brahmo Samaj founded by Ram Mohan Roy in 1828 and the Arya Samaj founded by Swami Dayananda in 1875 (cf. Maxwell and Naidoo 1991:76-79). One can list many other prominent reformists but this would be beyond the scope of the dissertation.

1.4 SYNOPSIS ON THE NATURE OF THE HINDU RELIGION

The foregoing brief introduction to Hinduism clearly indicates that there could be little doubt that Hinduism is a religion that has undergone many systems of refinement and there are still many interpretations as there is no central creed that can identify exactly what Hinduism is. As can also be deduced from this chapter, Hinduism as a religion does not have a historical founder. It is therefore all this freedom of interpretations both from the *astika* and *nastika* traditions that led commentators to conclude that Hinduism is a religion that cannot be absolutely defined.

The philosophy of Shankara should thus be interpreted and assessed against the horizon of the development of Hinduism as a religion. With the understanding of the complexity of the Hindu religion, one can now proceed to articulate the issue that this thesis wishes to investigate.

CHAPTER 2
THE PROBLEM OF INVESTIGATING THE NOTION OF AVATARA IN SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY OF ADVAITA VEDANTA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

To introduce the problem that is encountered in this thesis regarding the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy, it should be noted that many authors, practitioners and scholars of Hinduism have recognised that Hinduism cannot be neatly packed into a theology that can claim a single creed or confession. The general assessment of Hinduism is that it is a combination of different beliefs and practices. Viswanathan (1992:2) says that "Hinduism has no problem facing any type of question...", but, "Instead, it absorbs new ideas like a sponge."

Rosen (2006:xvii) encapsulated the enormity of trying to comprehensively discuss Hinduism in its entirety by stating that "… Hinduism is vast and beyond the scope of any one book…" and as a result one has to "choose an area of emphasis…" It is in light of this statement that the area of emphasis of this thesis focuses on an 8th century CE philosopher, Shankara[3], and his philosophy of non-dualism, known as 'Advaita Vedanta'". Within his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, there are many issues pertaining to his epistemology, theory of causation, the idea of salvation etc. which is also beyond the scope of any book to do justice to his philosophy. It is therefore necessary to choose an area of emphasis within his philosophy for discussion where the emphasis revolves around the notion of Avatara.

2.2 BASIC PROBLEMS IN DEFINING HINDUISM

Hinduism as a religion is difficult to define. Flood (2005:6) says that "because of the wide range of traditions and ideas incorporated by the term 'Hindu', it is a problem arriving at a definition." Rodrigues (2006:4) concurs with Flood that it is difficult to define Hinduism with any amount of precision (see 1.2).

Panicker (2006:18) claims that Hinduism includes within its system a number of beliefs and practices, which is "often mutually contradicting, vague and

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[3] Throughout this thesis its author will maintain the spelling as 'Shankara' unless other authors quoted use a different spelling such as 'Sankara', 'Samkara', 'Sankaracharya or 'Shankaracharya.

amorphous." Flood had a similar view and offered a few examples to express some of these contradictions. He mentions that to some the Veda is accepted as a "revelation", while to others it is not; some postulate a theistic reality that creates, maintains and destroys the universe, while others reject this claim (2005:6). Examples of theistic and non-theistic, dualistic and non-dualistic or modified non-dualism are a case in point that expresses these contradictions and will be discussed in this thesis. It would be difficult to exhaust a compilation of contradictions as expressed by Panicker and Flood, although some schools of philosophy would be considered in this thesis.

Jawaharlal Nehru (Bouquet 1948:9-12) forthrightly claims that Hinduism as a faith is vague and hardly possible to define or to say precisely whether it is a religion or not because it embraces many beliefs and practices often opposed to or contradicting each other. As a matter of fact he says that Hinduism is "all things to all men" (Smith 1987:36).

Mahadevan (1956:12) states that Hinduism is rather like a "league of religions or a fellowship of faiths."

Harshananda (1984:i) concurs with Mahadevan by stating that Hinduism has the capacity to "absorb into itself new ideas without altering the essence of its philosophy … It has sought unity in a variety of cultural expressions."

Flood (2005:6) suggests that part of the problem of definition is due to the fact that:

> Hinduism does not have a single historical founder, as do so many other world religions; it does not have a unified system of belief encoded in a creed or declaration of faith… It is therefore a very different kind of religion in these aspects from monotheistic, western traditions of Christianity and Islam...

Radhakrishnan (1980:24), who promoted a non-dualist form of a Hindu philosophy called Advaita Vedanta, attempted to make gradations in the way of worshipping in Hinduism so that the highest rank would be the ultimate acceptance of Brahman as the supreme reality. Thus he stated that:

Hinduism accepts all religious notions as facts and arranges them in the order of their more or less intrinsic significance. The bewildering polytheism of the masses and the uncompromising monotheism of the classes are for the Hindu the expressions of one and the same force at different levels. Hinduism insists on our working steadily upwards and improving our knowledge of God. The worshippers of the Absolute are the highest in rank; second to them are the worshippers of the personal God; then come the worshippers of the incarnations like Rama, Krishna, Buddha; below them are those who worship ancestors, deities and sages, and lowest of all are the worshippers of the petty forces and spirits.

Lipner (2004:23) claims that most Hindus would reject this order of gradation by Radhakrishnan because most Hindus are theists or religious dualists and the implications of Radhakrishnan's suggestion places their religion in an inherently inferior position to that of the Advaitists.

Even though an attempt has been made to bring some form of structure to Hinduism by Radhakrishnan, this has stirred more controversy. One can therefore conclude from these remarks that Hinduism does not constitute a monolithic structure and that it is a pluralism of beliefs and practices. It therefore becomes a problem to singularly define Hinduism. The result of this, due to its pluralistic forms of beliefs and practices, culminates in different philosophies espoused by generations of philosophers of what the essence and teachings of Hinduism is. This is also true as regards the doctrine and or teaching Avatara within the Hindu tradition.

2.3   TOWARDS A BRIEF DEFINITION OF AVATARA

Miranda (1990:50) refers to the doctrine of Avatara as the characteristic feature of a **theistic** system of thought distinctive in Hinduism. Avatara is a Sanskrit word which can be expressed in English as 'descent'. Pandey (1978:1) and Parrinder (1997:14) implied that the word 'Avatara' means 'to come down', 'to go down' or 'to descend'. Parrinder adds that Avatara is the manifestation of the divine in human

form. Burnett (1992:129) suggests that the etymology of the word Avatara are from two root words, 'ava' meaning 'down' and 'tr' meaning 'to cross over'.

An Avatara can be defined in Hindu philosophy as the ability of god to descend into the human world to address a specific problem. A clear indication of this is to be found in the Bhagavad Gita 4:7 where it states that "Whenever there is a decay of religion, O Bharata, and an ascendency of irreligion, then I manifest Myself" (Sankaracharya 2004:121). Avatara is a fundamental concept in Hinduism in terms of its philosophical and dogmatic pre-suppositions. Historically it portrays the ability to adjust to different paradigms within different historical epochs.

2.4   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF AVATARA IN SHANKARA'S ADVAITA VEDANTA

Masih (1983:99,100) claims that there is no place for god in the Upanishads and that Brahman is not an object of worship. Therefore the very nature of Brahman and Brahma-realization exclude any theism whatsoever.

One of the philosophical systems within Hinduism is the philosophy of Shankara known as radical non-dualism (Advaita). This concept of Advaita teaches that the world, as we understand it, is an empirical world. The only reality is the Ultimate Reality known as Brahman and the Self (Atman) is the same as Brahman. Shankara (2004:34) states in his commentary of the Bhagavad Gita 2:16 ("Of the unreal no being there is; there is no non-being of the real. Of both these is the truth seen by the seers of the Essence") that this implies that "the Absolute Reality is not conditioned by causality; and therefore the series of cause and effect must be illusory." This comment by Shankara leaves no doubt that the Ultimate Reality is not created (cause) and does not create (effect). What one sees is just an illusion.

Narain (2003:9) describes Shankara's understanding of Brahman as that which is "beyond human understanding, is ineffable, relation-less, part-less and is without a second (Advaita)." This is to consider Brahman to be without attribute. Therefore the BU (2.3.6) refers to Brahman as "not this, not this".

Whenever Brahman is designated as "being" *(sat)*, "consciousness" *(cit)* and "bliss" *(ananda)*, in Advaita, these designations must be recognised as a reference to the essence rather than qualifying attributes of Brahman. When these designations are considered as qualifying attributes of Brahman, Deutsch (1985:9) remarks that these attributes should be regarded as "terms that express the apprehension of Brahman by man." (See chapters 7 and 8 for an expanded understanding of Shankara's explanation of this).

If Brahman is understood by Shankara as being without cause and effect as well as relation-less, without a second, without attribute, and if the doctrine of Avatara is considered as the ability of god to descend into the human world, which is regarded by Shankara as an empirical world, then there is already a tension that exists between Brahman as the Absolute Reality and Avatara as this Absolute Reality descending into the world of humans.

Parrinder (1997:50) correctly observes that Shankara's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita which deals with the concept of Avatara consists of short critical notes. These critical comments bear all the signs of his pursuit to emphasise his philosophy of radical non-dualism. Proof of this is to be seen in his comments on the three cardinal passages of the Bhagavad Gita. These passages are found in chapter 4:6-7 of his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita (Sankaracharya 2004:121-122).

Although some commentators such as Mishra (1967:150-153), Zaehner (1973:455) and Minor (1982:150-153) amongst others, argue that these passages alludes to Krishna as an Avatara, Shankara is of the opinion that it is not!

In his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita 4:6, he explains that this text translated means, "… I (*Krishna*), appear to be born and embodied, through my own Maya, but not in reality, unlike others." (Italics are my own). Comments on chapter 4:7 follow a similar translation: "I manifest Myself through Maya."

Following from these two, amongst other commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita, Parrinder 1997:50) clearly states that Shankara seems to deny the reality of the incarnation.

It seems from these discussions that there is absolutely no room for a doctrine of Avatara in the philosophy of Shankara.

2.5 HYPOTHESIS

From the foregoing arguments and the problem stated, there seems to be no space in Shankara's philosophy of Advaita for the consideration of Avataras.

Although Parrinder (1997) dedicates only four pages (page 50-53) to the discussion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy of Advaita, there is scant reference to a systematic development of the notion of Avatar within the philosophies of Shankara. Parrinder (1997:50-53) does refer briefly to the Vedanta Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita as his cardinal point of reference to conclude that Avatara in Advaita "is a concession to religious needs... to gratify his [lord] worshippers" (Parrinder 1997:52).

It is the position of the candidate of this thesis that, if one systematically studies Shankara's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, especially concepts related to his epistemology, theory of causation, concept of Maya and Ishvara, levels of consciousness, as well as the idea of salvation (moksha), one should arrive at a notion of Avatara in his philosophy. This notion may not necessarily be transparent with regards to Brahman appearing as an Avatara, but the notion of Avatara through the concept of Maya and Ishvara in his thought would provide one with material to be investigated.

2.6 METHODOLOGY

The method engaged in is considerably based on literature research as well as available recognised translations of relevant primary sources. The first six chapters follow the construct of the systematic review of literature of both primary and secondary sources in collaboration with the descriptive/analytic method in general. This methodology is employed because the subject matter demands the study of various texts and philosophies that developed over time.

From chapters seven to chapter nine, two of the commentaries that have been attributed to Shankara will be considerably consulted in a critical examination of

his philosophy. The two commentaries are based on the Brahma-Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita.

Due to the voluminous nature of books written on Shankara's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, references to some work by authors are archaic but still relevant to the discussion in this thesis.

There are other sources, such as the Upanishads, that some have credited to Shankara but which are also disputed by others. These are considered where they could be used to assist in argumentation. Karl Potter has delivered extensive work on the authenticity of the many Upanishad commentaries attributed to Shankara. General use has been made of these.

Sanskrit is a phonetic language and requires that, for the correct pronunciation of words, it is correctly transliterated. In this research the acknowledged anglicised forms without diacritical marks will be used. This form therefore will render the name 'Shankara' as 'Sankara' or 'Samkara' and vice-versa depending on the references quoted.

2.7 EXPOSITION OF THE STUDY

The thesis will be structured according to the following chapters:

1. Setting the scene: a brief introduction to Hinduism
2. The problem of investigating the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.
3. The origin and evolution of Hindu deities in the development of the concept of Avatara.
4. The notion of Avatara in the different Hindu philosophies.
5. The life and times of Shankara and the philosopher that greatly influenced thought.
6. Exposition of Shankara's philosophy of radical non-dualism (Advaita Vedanta).
7. Shankara and his concept of Maya as the basis for discussing his notion of Avatara
8. Shankara and his concept of god in relation to Brahman and jivas.

9. Shankara and his notion of Avatara in his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.

10. Conclusion

2.8 VALUE OF THE STUDY

In Shankara's philosophy the pivotal teaching is absolute non-dualism. This translates to mean that there is no second. The concept of Avatara in popular Hinduism is widely believed to be god entering into the world in another form. This thought therefore contradicts Shankara's philosophy of absolute non-dualism, yet in the study of his philosophy he does show glimpses of the Avatara as essential to assist those who are still locked in a state of ignorance.

The value of this study therefore is to systematically examine the philosophy of Shankara with regards to Avatara and to understand at which point in his philosophy the concept of Avatara becomes a necessity for the ignorant to transcend their ignorance to a position of knowledge and thereby becoming Brahman.

In light of chapters one and two, the origin and evolution of Hindu deities and the concept of Avataras will be elucidated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3
THE ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF HINDU DEITIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF AVATARA

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Religion seems to offer humankind a way to get closer to god so as to form a bond between them. It is the desire of humankind, who, knowing that they are mere mortals, strife for immortality, whether in this lifetime or within another sphere of life. In Hinduism this desire plays itself out on many fronts. This complexity of many fronts has led scholars to disagree as to whether Hinduism is polytheistic, monotheistic, kathenotheistic or monistic.

Daniel Bassuk (1987:3) adds to this complexity by introducing the concept of theriomorphic deities. He is of the opinion that, "the phenomenon of God's multiformity, metamorphosis and incarnation was part of the mentality of *homo religious.*" He claims that in India, "ancient religious man connected God with animals which he revered and feared, so he attributed God-like qualities to these animals, creating theriomorphic deities." In support of this claim he refers to the Vedas where the god Indra was manifested in the form of a bull or ram, where the god Varuna comes out of the point of an arrow and becomes manifested as a bull.

Before tracing the origins and evolution of divine descents, known in the Sanskrit as 'Avatara', consideration will be given to the complexities in an attempt to define the term 'Avatara'.

3.2   AN EXPOSITION OF THE CONCEPT OF 'AVATARA'

It is significant to note that the word 'Avatara' was never used in the Vedas, although other words are used which can have a similar meaning. Janmajit Roy (2002:4) says that due to the composite nature of Hinduism, "difficulty confronts us in our attempt to trace the origin and development of the theory of Avatara." He also refers to the fact that scholars are even divided on this issue.

The earliest reference to 'Avatara' as a noun is found in Panini (3.3.120). Even here it is used to describe different deities in the Vedas. Scholars have placed

Panini around 4 BCE and it was during this time that *Avatara* was accepted to mean 'to descend' (Mishra 2000:5).

Prashant Miranda (1990:50) claims that the doctrine of Avatara is indeed a characteristic feature of a theistic system of thought distinctive in Hinduism (see 2.3). Avatara is a Sanskrit word which can be expressed in English as 'descent'. Pandey (1979:1) and Parrinder (1997:14) implied that the word 'Avatara' means 'to come down', 'to go down' or 'to descend'.

An investigation into the development of the term 'Avatara' is well postulated by Bassuk (1997:3). He suggests that Sanskrit terms used to describe the manifestation of the descent of god into the realm of this world evolved from *rupa* (form, figure), *vapus* (having a beautiful form) and *tanu* (a living entity who accepted a material body) to *pradurbhava* (appearance). He continues to elaborate claiming that gradually from these evolutionary terms the Sanskrit word 'Avatara' evolved and that this word is composed of two parts similar to the meaning espoused by Pandey and Parrinder. The finite verb '*avatarati'* means 'he descends'.

This descent was explained by Miranda (1990:50) as "the godhead's crossing over from the celestial regions down to the earth. It is the manifestation of the power of the deity. As a specifically religious term, it signifies both the "descent" of the godhead from heaven and his "appearance" in the form of animals (boar, fish, and tortoise), monster (man-lion), or men with superhuman and divine attributes."

The variant of the verb *Avatara* according to Bassuk (1997:3) is the word *avatarana* in Sanskrit. This term *avatarana* is used to describe an actor making his appearance on the stage from behind the curtain just as the god-man manifest himself from heaven on to the world stage. The word *Avatar* became the anglicised word of *Avatara.* Although a clear indication of Avatara is found in the BG 4:7 (see 2.3) the word 'Avatara' is not used as such.

One can therefore conclude that an Avatara in Hinduism is the manifestation of god in the form of man or animal in this world so as to address a specific problem.

These manifestations have taken many forms which will be discussed more comprehensively (see 3.3.1.1; 3.3.1.2).

3.3 ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION OF DEITIES IN HINDU MYTHOLOGY

Although Miranda (1990:50) correctly notes that the term Avatara is not used in the early works to signify the deity's descent on earth, Bassuk (1993:3) nonetheless suggests that there are a few references to be found in the minor Upanishads. When one considers most of the works on Hindu scriptures, the earliest seminal concept of Avatara is found within the Epics, especially the *Mahabharata* in that section known as the Bhagavad Gita. Even here in the Bhagavad Gita as well as other texts, other words are used to express Avataras such as: *janma* (birth) (BG 4:5); *sambhava* (coming into being) (BG 4:6,8); *srjana* (creation) (BG 5:7); *pradurbhava* (appearance) (MHB 12:326:6); *arista* (dwelling) (BG 9:11; 15:14); *adhisthaya* (consorting with) (BG 6:6).

The intention in investigating the origin and evolution of the Hindu deities and the eventual manifestations of these deities as Avataras, is so that a fine thread can be weaved through the different periods of Hinduism indicating that, from the Vedic period through to the modern period, there is a link to Avataras.

In order to consider the evolution of the deities leading up to the manifestation of Avataras, an attempt will be made to consider this investigation on three levels as indicated by N R Bhatt (2008:97): firstly the decline and fall of the Vedic gods; secondly the rise of Hindu deities in reference to the epics; and finally in reference to the Puranas.

3.3.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE VEDIC GODS

In examining the evolution of the Vedic gods, it must be understood that at a particular point in time certain Vedic gods were regarded as superior to others. As the needs of people changed and increased, so did their understanding of the different gods began to change. This led to the importance of certain gods becoming more prominent and others of lesser importance.

3.3.1.1   THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE VEDIC GODS

Flood (2005:44) maintains that the Vedic universe is populated with supernatural beings of various kinds. There is a divine being associated with every tree and river and some deities were afforded greater importance than others.

According to Mitchell (2001:v) with regards to the Vedic deities, there are no convincing arguments to conclude that these deities were worshipped in the form of images because they were only visualised as having human or animal forms. He explains that "there remains the possibility that some of the lower strata of the population worshipped images in human or animal form and that this practice gradually spread upwards to the other sections of society. At a much later period, Vedic deities were retrospectively given human form and reproduced as images."

Mitchell (2001:vi) suggests that as the Aryans, the bearers of the Vedic religion, proceeded deeper into India, thus making contact with the local inhabitants, the old Vedic religion underwent several changes. Some deities changed their function while others gained or lost prestige.

Bhatt (2008:98) claims that the important Vedic gods arose in order to meet specific conditions in the life of the Vedic people. When these conditions no longer exist, these gods faded into the background and new gods arose to meet new situations. Therefore one can conclude that no Vedic god could claim permanent supremacy. An example is cited by Wilkens (2008:13-14) where Dyaus and Prithivi are regarded as the parents of other gods, who made all creatures, conferred immortality on their offspring and were preservers of all creatures, yet they were superseded by Indra in the worship of the Hindus after their settlement in India.

Wilkens also (2008:99) suggests a second reason that could have contributed indirectly to the decline of the Vedic gods is noticeable in the *Rig Veda Samhita.* This is the rise of kathenotheism or henotheism. Within the Vedic pantheon there is as many as thirty gods among which Indra and Agni occupy the most prominent position. For the Vedic seer, the god from whom he seeks favour for the moment is the highest god. This attitude could have created an atmosphere of scepticism regarding the Vedic gods and could have adumbrated later Hindu sectarianism.

A third contribution to the decline of the Vedic gods is the rise of ritualism during the Brahamana period. Here the Vedic gods became subordinated to the institution of sacrifice. Ritualism could be said to have become a science in itself and grew more complicated. Bhatt (2008:101) rightly remarks that "there was a gradual transfer of the potentiality from the gods to the more mechanical process by which they (the gods) were to be propitiated." In some instances the brahamic priests were more highly regarded than the Vedic gods themselves.

The fourth reason was the prominence of the Upanishads. Flood (2005:83) sees the Upanishads as the continuation of the *Brahamanas* in the interpretation of the rituals. He makes the distinction, though in this sense, there is an increasing importance of knowledge of esoteric correspondence in comparison to the rituals. This is to state that the sections on knowledge take precedence over rituals.

Here the search for the highest philosophical truth became the point of focus. Parrinder (1972:95-96) says that, "In the Upanishads there is a deeper search for the heart of reality." He quotes Dasgupta as saying that "this quest is not the quest of the god of the theists" but "the ultimate essence of our self." Bhatt (2008:101) in this regard states that the Upanishadic thinkers "sought to understand the reality that underlies Vedic gods and Vedic ritual, which after all were mere external and temporary manifestations of that reality."

Maxwell and Naidoo (1991:51) consider the Upanishads as a "movement towards unity (there is one divine reality); a movement towards subjectivity or inwardness (the divine reality is within you); and a movement towards spirituality (the emphasis on *inner realisation* rather than external rituals)." According to Paton (2004:48) some scholars call this process 'the internalisation of the sacrifice' and that it was not a rejection of the sacrifice mentioned earlier.

This idea of the movement towards unity and 'internalisation' is evident in the Brahadaranyaka Upanishad III.ix. 1-9 where Sakalya pressured Yajnavalkya to state how many gods there are. Through the process of reduction from 3306 gods, Yajnavalkya concluded that there is only one. This reduction obviously further suggested the decline of the prominence of the Vedic gods.

In this regard Paton (2004:48) asks what has become of the Vedic deities and answers this by saying that:

> Many of the deities are still quite active and involved - such as Indra, who is engaged in much questioning and dialogue throughout most of both the earlier and later Upanishadic texts. However, while the activity of sacrifice is still presumed, the Upanishads use the deities themselves as aids to a certain kind of knowledge ... The object of that knowledge is no longer the gods per se but the new force called *Brahman*.

This whole idea of *Brahman* began to gain momentum in the Upanishads and it seemed that it was only well understood by those of great intellect (knowledge) and therefore could not be regarded as 'popular religion'. Here the movement from a plethora of gods to a single 'force' known as *Brahman* began to evolve more fully.

It should be mentioned at this point that in the later Upanishads theistic ideas begun to recur. Bhatt (2008:102) suggests that this is an indication of sectarianism but essentially only with reference to Hindu gods like Shiva and Vishnu, rather than with regards to the Vedic gods like Indra and Varuna. This, he says, is the result of the "Hinduisation of the Upanishadic thought."

It is in the Svetasvatara Upanishad where this thought of 'Hinduisation of the Upanishads' is conceived. There, ideas of monism and monotheism are blended and where Rudra is identified with Brahman. This transfer of the attributes of the Upanishadic Brahman to a personal god substantially helped in the popularity of Rudra and Vishnu, who were minor deities in the Vedas (Bhatt 2008:102).

3.3.1.2   THEOPHANIC OCCURRENCES AND MANIFESTATIONS

A glimpse of the gods appearing before men, or given human and/or theriomorphic qualities, is clearly seen in the following hymns of the Rig Veda:

- As gods associating with humans by sharing in the sacraments and feasts (Rg 10.21.1; 1.30.11; 1.139.10).

- Identification of one god with another: "Indra moves multiform by his illusions" (Rg 6.47.18). "They call him Indra, Varuna, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutman. To what is one, sages give many a title they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan" (Rg 1.164.46). "You are Varuna at birth, O Agni. When you are kindled you become Mitra. In you, O Son of Strength all gods are created. Indra is to man who brings oblation" (Rg 5.3.1,2).

A less prominent deity in the Rig Veda, who gains significant prominence in the secondary scriptures of Hinduism, is the god Vishnu. It is in the secondary scriptures that Vishnu assumes the many manifestations that become known as Avataras. Vishnu's manifestations in different forms are to be encountered in the Rig Veda. In one of the hymns a question is directed to Vishnu: "What was there to be blamed in you, O Vishnu, when you declare that you are Sipivista? Hide not this form from us, nor keep it a secret, since you wore another shape in battle" (Rg 7.100.6).

Although the term Avatara is not expressly used in the Vedas, one can glean a similarity with the concept of Avatara, which is mentioned in the secondary scriptures of Hinduism.

With the development and philosophy of the Upanishads and in the course of its evolution, it could be presumed that the Vedas became mythological and ritualistically hieratic as in the Samhitas and Brahamanas, or, in the case of the Upanishads, intellectually abstract.

Flood (2005:103) contends that from about 500 BCE there was a growth of sectarian worship of particular deities. Even though Vedic sacrifice still existed, there was a movement towards the devotional worship of a deity. This practice of devotional worship (*bhakti)* became the religious practice of Hinduism. This movement and its growth are reflected in the epics, and in the mythological and ritual treatises known as the *Puranas.*

The following section (see 3.3.2.1.) will trace the development of the Epics and the Puranas, with special attention to the rise of the gods Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma

culminating in their manifestations as Avataras, especially regarding the gods Vishnu and Shiva. These three gods collectively came to be known as the *tri-murti* (three gods or 'trinity') (Danielou 1991:24). It will also be possible to trace the genealogy of these gods up to the Vedic period. It is here that the thread spoken of (see 3.3.) can be connected.

3.3.2 CONCEPTION OF HINDU DEITIES IN POST VEDIC PERIODS

It was mentioned (see 3.3.1.1.) that in the Svetasvatara Upanishad there is a transfer of the attributes of the Upanishadic Brahman to a personal god. Sarasvati Chennakesavan (1980:43) claims that this "process of clothing the abstract Brahman of the Upanishads with flesh and blood and making it into a personality ..., gains momentum in the Epic Age and becomes almost a solid theory of Personalism." It seems obvious that in making this claim Chennakesavan is referring to the *Mahabharata* epic, especially that portion referred to as the *Bhagavad Gita.* More about this will be discussed later (see 3.3.2.1.2.2).

In the further development of Hindu deities, Mitchell (2001:vi) asserts that it is in the Puranas that a compendium "of all that was known about the gods contained in the Vedas and Epics, linking the gods by elaborate genealogies, providing religious instructions, and inserting many interpolations" are contained. He observes that as a consequence of this, subsequent deities emerged as result of the formalisation as found in the Puranas (see 3.3.2.1.3).

Bhatt (2008:104) best sums up the position with regards to the declination of the Vedic deities:

> Therefore, in an atmosphere which was still imbued, to a greater or lesser degree, with Vedism, Hinduism did not stand out as something alien. At the same time, Hinduism, which arose essentially as a popular religion, could not acquiesce in the ritual of Vedic religion as such. It, no doubt, accepted Vedic gods, but assigned to them a subordinate position. Vedic gods, like Indra and Varuna, gave place to the popular gods like Vishnu and Shiva; Vedic ritual was generally superseded by *bhakti, tapas, yoga* and

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samnyasa. This is the religious background of the Epics and the *Puranas*.

The contribution of the Epics and the Puranas will now be considered in the conceptualisation of Hindu deities. This period sees the composition of the Epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which will be treated in the first instance. Secondly the applicable references in the Puranas will be considered. This period is also regarded as the transitional period in Hinduism (Rodrigues 2006:136).

3.3.2.1   THE EPICS

In chapter one an explanation of the two important epics in Hinduism, namely the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* (see 1.3.3.1.) were addressed. Both these epics focus on the deity Vishnu especially in his manifestation as Rama (of the *Ramayana* epic) and Krishna (of the *Mahabharata* epic). Although these two deities are prominent and seem to be emphasised, John Brockington (2003:116) refers to other deities that are alluded to in the epics and which are largely those of the Vedic pantheon.

Due to the nature of the epics being conceived of as a specific literature genre, for the purpose of discussing the evolution of the deities in this context, a deliberate focus will be placed on an allegorical interpretation. It will be correct to state that embedded in these epic texts there is much philosophy and religion to be encountered which also serves as guidelines for an ethical lifestyle.

Attention will be given to the *Ramayana* first as it is understood to be the older of the two known epics.

3.3.2.1.1   THE RAMAYANA EPIC

Although Chennakesavan (1980:44) says that the *Ramayana* is not philosophically important and that it can be regarded more as an 'ethical treatise' there does emerge an allegorical theistic interpretation to which Prime (1997:7) alludes:

> Rama is God incarnate, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. He chose to become human, and for the duration of his human life to

forget his divine identity, or so it seemed. He suffered physical hardships, and, when he lost his beloved Sita, a broken heart. On one level, Rama's journey is an allegory for the journey every soul must make. In becoming human Rama shared in our human suffering and enacted the drama of our lives – each of us endures our own banishment, our own loss, faces our own disillusions, and hopes eventually to learn acceptance of our lot and to find ultimate redemption. Thus to hear or to witness Rama's struggles is to relive our own lives, but in a divine context. Each episode in the story is multi-layered, working through individual karma, or destiny, and the divine lila, or play, of Rama.

Even Rosen (2006:68), although admitting to different regional variants in local dialects of the *Ramayana*, summarises the essence of this epic with an exegetical slant by stating that:

Millions of years ago, the Supreme Lord appeared on earth as a human prince named Ramachandra. Why does God incarnate as human? The story begins when a group of demigods approaches Lord Brahma, their leader, with concerns about a demon king, Ravana, who is plundering the Earth. Because of the demon's austerities, Brahma had given him a boon ... saying that he "could never be defeated in battle, not by god or by any heavenly creature."... However, Brahma's blessings did not mention humans, leaving open the possibility that a highly qualified human, someone more powerful than any other heavenly being or demigod ... could perchance conquer him ... the concerned demigods began to meditate on just how they could use this loophole in Brahma's blessing to put an end to Ravana's reign of terror. At that moment, Lord Vishnu descended, and He assured them that He Himself would incarnate as a human being named Ramachandra, and by so doing He would destroy the evil Ravana. By incarnating as a human, Rama not only enabled himself to

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defeat the demon-king but also set an ideal example for human behaviour.

In both of the above interpretations, the god Vishnu is significant as the incarnated Rama. Brahma is also significant as he appears to be the leader of the demigods. At the end of the main *Ramayana* narrative it is Brahma who leads the assembly of the gods in order to reveal Rama's divinity (Ramayana 6.119). Bassuk (1987:31) also mentions the god Shiva together with Brahma who Ravana wanted to propitiate. Vishnu is referred to as the Supreme Lord by Rosen (2009:69). These three gods, Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma, are also mentioned in the Vedas, but hold a very miniscule position in the pantheon, yet gained prominence in the epics and Puranas, as will be discussed later. From this rendering, glimpses of the concept of Avatara begins to emerge.

Other Vedic gods are also mentioned in this epic. Brockington (2003:118) emphasises that Rama is also often compared to Indra and, with his duel with Ravana, he receives the help of Indra's charioteer, Matali. The deity Agni also plays an appreciative role in returning Sita to Rama after Sita passed through the fire in order to prove her purity.

3.3.2.1.1.1   RAMA AS AN AVATARA OF VISHNU

In the following excerpt from the *Ramayana* of Valmiki there is an indication of Rama being given the title of the prominent gods including Vishnu. He is actually equated to Vishnu.

> He ceased: and Brahmá's self replied:
> "O cast the idle thought aside. You are the Lord Náráyan,
> You are the God to whom all creatures bow.
> You are the saviour God who wore of old, the semblance of a boar;
> You whose discus overthrows all present, past and future foes;
> You Brahmá, whose days extend without beginning, growth or end;
> The God, who, bears the bow of horn, whose four majestic arms adorn;

You are the God who rules the sense and sways with gentle
influence;

You are all-pervading Vishnu Lord who wears the ever-conquering
sword" (Ramayana 6:119).

In the above quotation from the *Ramayana*, although there is a definite association of Rama with Vishnu, the word *Avatara* is not prevalent. Yet the concept of *Avatara* can be deduced.

3.3.2.1.2   THE MAHABHARATA EPIC

As was indicated earlier (see 1.3.3.1.2.) the *Mahabharata* was chiefly concerned with the control of the Kuru kingdom between two sets of cousins which eventually led to open warfare.

Many modern scholars regard the *Mahabharata* as an exploration of the problems involved in establishing the nature of *dharma* (Rosen 2006:117). This is vividly expressed when the Pandavas returned from exile to a hostile Kauravas who refused to settle an agreement made before the Pandavas were sent into exile. Rosen (2006:86) says that the ensuing war included not only the armies, but also involved gods, even Krishna, the manifestation of the Supreme Being.

In light of the *Mahabharata* and its continued war, Chennakesavan (1980:45) could state that, "what was initially a heroic poem becomes a Brahmanical work, and is transformed into a theistic treatise in which Vishnu and Shiva is elevated to the rank of the Supreme" and "in the course of time, a theistic authority."

3.3.2.1.2.1   GODS MANIFESTED THROUGH KRISHNA

In the quotation below, an indication is given of how, from Krishna, many gods appear, as he readies for battle. The word *Avatara* does not appear, yet a manifestation of gods, even some of the gods mentioned in the Vedas, appear from Krishna. An example is found in the following text:

... from his body, that resembled a blazing fire, issued myriads of
gods, each of lightning effulgence, and not bigger than the thumb.
And on his forehead appeared Brahman, and on his breast Rudra.

And on his arms appeared the regents of the world, and from his mouth issued Agni, the *Adityas*, the *Sadhyas*, the *Vasus*, the *Aswins*, the *Marutas*, with Indra, and the *Viswedevas*. And myriads of *Yakshas*, and the *Gandharvas*, and *Rakshasas* also... (MHB 5:131).

The clearest revelation of the nature of god is to be found in the Bhagavad Gita, a small book which emerges from the voluminous *Mahabharata.* In it an intense conversation ensues when Krishna appears as a charioteer to the warrior Arjuna of the Pandavas family. Prior to this event, Rodrigues (2006:148) recalls that Krishna was a family friend to both the Pandavas and the Kauravas. When his help was sought in the battle, Krishna offered his army to the Kauravas and himself as a non-combatant adviser to the Pandavas. The Bhagavad Gita centres on the deep conversation between Arjuna and Krishna while still in the battlefield. Arjuna had serious doubts about going to war with his cousins. It is here that Krishna answers Arjuna's many questions and resolves his doubts about going to war with his cousins.

In the Bhagavad Gita (4:7-8) Krishna reveals his true nature when he says that, "Whenever there is a decay of religion, O Bharata, and an ascendency of irreligion, then I manifest Myself ... Age after age I come into being." It is therefore of the utmost importance for the purposes of this thesis to argue an exegetical exposition of the BG 4:4-8.

3.3.2.1.2.2   AN EXEGESIS OF BHAGAVAD GITA 4:5-8

Since scholars and devotees of Hinduism give a great deal of attention to the Bhagavad Gita locus classicus 4:7-8, an exegesis of this text seems appropriate to provide a few nuances of the key concepts of the passage.

> Verse 4: Later is Thy birth, and prior the birth of Visvasat; how am I to understand that thou taughtest this Yoga in the beginning?
> Verse 5: Many births of Mine have passed, as well as of thine, O Arjuna; all these I know, thou knowest not, O harasser of foes.

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Verse 6: Thou I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet ruling over My own nature, I am born by My own *Maya*.

Verse 7: Whenever there is a decay of religion, O Bharata, and an ascendency of irreligion, then I manifest Myself.

Verse 8: For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the firm establishment of religion, I am born in every age.

In order to place this text in its correct context, verses 5 and 6 are important for this purpose. In these verses Krishna responds to Arjuna's confusion when Krishna said that both of them were present when Krishna spoke the Bhagavad Gita to Vivasvan. In this response Krishna says that, "Many births of Mine have I passed, as well as of thine, O Arjuna; all these I know, thou knowest not, O harasser of foes. Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet ruling over My own nature, I am born by My own Maya."

From this passage, it is immediately clear that Arjuna, although reborn many times, does not have the ability to recall what happened in his past births, whereas Krishna can. This is an indication of the divine nature of Krishna. This may also refer to the fact that Arjuna is subjected to *karma* whereas Krishna was not. Therefore Krishna could refer to his imperishable nature, not corruptible by *karma*, *dharma* or *adharma.*

Bassuk (1987:5) mentions an intended paradox that exists in this passage. From the passage it is noted that on the one hand Krishna is unborn and on the other hand he is born. In the first birth narrative, Krishna is 'unborn of imperishable nature' and in the second narrative, he is 'born of his own Maya'. Mishra (1957:88-104) enters into a very deep exposition on the second narrative. He explains this paradox, especially in the second narrative sequence by saying that:

> ... the Maya of the Lord fulfils two-fold purpose: (1) It remains with the Lord who is above it and helps him to assume a physical form as an Avatara, and (2) under its delusion bhutas assume different

roles in the world. Again it is due to this delusion that the Lord remains concealed from the eyes of the ignorant.

Therefore Arjuna in his ignorance did not recognise that Krishna was actually the Lord.

In verse 6, Krishna declares himself to be the 'Lord of all beings'. Robert Minor (1982:149) suggests that through this declaration, Krishna goes on to declare "his higher place and the doctrine of descent."

The doctrine of descent seems to find its fulfilment in verses 7 and 8. These verses have provided the purpose for the descent of Krishna through his 'own Maya'. Recognised scholars such as Parrinder, Zaehner, Bassuk, Miranda, Flood, Mishra, suggest that these passages provide the clearest formulation of the doctrine and the term '*Avatara*' although the word '*Avatara*' is not mentioned.

The purpose for the descent of the Lord, manifested as Krishna, according to these verses, is to protect the good, destroy the evil and establish righteousness. This is not a once off descent by the manifested Lord, but occurs in every age.

Parrinder (1997:37) suggests that this is the clearest statement of the Avatara doctrine in the Bhagavad Gita. There are other references to this effect in the Bhagavad Gita in 7:24 and 9:11.

Parrinder (1975:39) says that Krishna was "very likely an ancient Indian non-Aryan divinity and was therefore popular with the people. Now he appears as an *Avatara* (descent, 'incarnation') of the Vedic god Vishnu.

Chennakesavan (1980:46-52) offers another perspective of the BG (4:6). His argument is set in an historical development of how the doctrine of *Avatara* came into existence. He offers two explanations for this. The first one is an historical explanation which he refers to as a "counteraction against the influence of atheistic Buddhism" (1980:46). Historically Gautama, as the founder of Buddhism, drew thousands of people into "the orbit of his influence." Hinduism had to counter this movement to bring back the people.

The second explanation was the manner in which the Upanishads insisted upon the "oneness of reality and the immanence of such a reality viewed as God in every object, both living and non-living" (Chennakesavan 1980:47). Therefore every object has an indwelling godliness present. God is therefore *anaratman* (indweller) of every person, although in some there is a greater manifestation of this godliness. It was to establish this truth, according to Chennakesavan (1980:47), that the theory of incarnation was invoked.

By referring to Vishnu as the "Presence of All Beings" within the *trimurti*, Chennakesavan (1980:47) implies that Vishnu was regarded as the god who becomes incarnate. As a result the gradual evolution of human life and its nature is reflected in the ten major incarnations from the fish (*matsya*) to the final Avatara still to come (*Kalki*). *Kalki* is referred to as the "super perfect' human being.

Therefore, according to Chennakevasan (1980:48), when one views an Avatara from a religious perspective, it is seen as a manifestation of the divine in human form. From a philosophical perspective though, it is a 'device' to exemplify that the possibility exists that within the parameters of human limitations a human can reach and practice the highest virtues of a good and acceptable life. The example set by Krishna is proof of this possibility.

It is rather interesting to note how Chennakesavan explains away Krishna as an Avatara as against what is generally accepted. He implies that Krishna should not be understood as a person, but should be understood as an "indwelling spirit" which is personified by the imagination of man.

According to Chennakesavan (1980:51), the Ultimate Reality cannot be limited by birth and death, and therefore by implication, Krishna should not be understood as more than an indwelling spirit. In reference to BG (4:6), Chennakesavan (1980:51) is of the opinion that incarnation here should not be looked upon as physical descent of god in the form of man, but that there is an element of god in everything and that therefore an element of godliness is predominant. It is in this sense that the Avatara becomes the "demonstration of man's spiritual resources and latent divinity."

To prove this theory he quotes the BG (10:37) where Krishna makes reference to himself indicating that he is Arjuna amongst others and identifies himself with all that is "best and good and pleasing in this empirical world" (Chennakesavan 1980:52).

To conclude the exegesis of Chennakesavan on his understanding of the Avatara, he confirms his doctrine of the Avatara as follows: "All that goes to show that an *Avatara* here does not have the same connotation as it developed in the later *bhakti* cults. However, the gem of the idea is there, namely that god is present everywhere. But he is manifested more in one person and less in another and that when a person can be recognised as god, the godliness is fully present in him" (Chennakesavan 1980:52).

However, in considering the above arguments on the exegesis of the BG, and throughout this epic, in the similar vein of the *Ramayana,* the deities alluded to find their origin in the Vedic literature. Some examples are the gods Indra, who serves as both leader of the gods as well as a performer of heroic deed; the five Pandavas were fathered by the gods, an example being Indra, father of Arjuna, and Yudhishthira, the eldest son, was born of the god of Right (*Dharma)* (Parrinder 1997:21); Yama is prominent among the boastings of the warriors; Agni plays an appreciable role in the narrative of the *Mahabharata* and then also the allusions made to Shiva and Vishnu which find their source in the Vedic literature.

Brockington (2003:126) says that the epics had a significant influence on Indian culture, including literature, art and theatre right up to the present day.

Although the views of Shankara on the BG will be discussed in chapter 9, it could be stated here that Shankara described the BG as the "epitome of the teaching of the entire veda. Its purport is spiritual, and so it leads to experience (*anubhara*) of Brahman" (Rangaswami 2012:16).

Once again the fine thread of the evolution of the deities is visible weaving through the Vedic literature to the epics. What is observed though is a definite erosion of the importance of the Vedic deities during this process of evolution.

The *Mahabharata* is followed immediately by another genre of literature known as the Puranas. In the latter, gods and goddesses, encountered in the Epics, become the focus of attention. The result of this is a more significant fading away of the importance of the Vedic deities. Nonetheless the thread continues to weave even through to the Puranas.

3.3.2.2   THE PURANAS

The Puranas, which was an oral tradition that was written down, was influenced by the Epics, Upanishads, Dharma literature and ritual codes. There are numerous Puranas and Rodrigues (2006:188) states that the "foremost concern of the Puranas is to align the world-view of Vedic Hinduism with rapidly expanding *bhakti* theism." Together with *bhakti* theism, these Puranas were also concerned with the creation of the world, destruction and recreation, the world periods and the deeds of heroes and genealogies of individual gods and kings. It also gives prominence to a particular deity as the Supreme Being and use an abundance of religious and philosophical concepts (Shattuck 1999:43). Rosen (2006:139) suggests that the "Puranic texts unabashedly present the Hindu deities in full, with elaborate detail and theology."

According to Shattuck (1999:42), and with whom many scholars would agree, there are 18 great Puranas (Mahapuranas), which are considered scripture by most Hindus, and many lesser Puranas (Upapuranas) which wielded regional authority.

Flood (2005:110) says that the Mahapuranas are classified according to three *gunas* (qualities): *sattva* (purity or quality of light), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (inertia or darkness). There are six Puranas to be found in each category: the *sattva* category contains the Vaishnava Puranas with Vishnu as the central deity; the *rajas* category contains the Brahma Puranas with Brahma as the central deity; the *tamas* category contains the Shaiva Puranas with Shiva as the central deity. These classifications form three sets of six books each.

According to Rosen (2006:141) each of these sets has its association with one of the main gods of India – Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva – which also came to be known as the *trimurti*.

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For the purposes of this thesis, and for the conclusion in substantiation of the origin and evolution of Hindu deities in their manifestations as *Avataras,* due consideration will be given to the Mahapuranas.

Flood (2005:110) contends that the Puranas contain "essential material for understanding the religions of Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma[4], Devi, Agni (god of fire), Skanda (god of war and son of Shiva) and Ganesha (Shiva's elephant headed son)." These Puranas establish the rise and popularity especially of Vishnu and Shiva, two of the gods that were encountered in the earlier writings of Hinduisms. Brahman, according to Rao (2009:9) received worship until the ninth century in common with the other two gods. Later, however, the votaries of Brahman diminished in number and importance and that independent shrines to Brahman were few. Rosen (2006:142) acknowledges that all Puranas extols the virtues of Vishnu and Shiva, but very few refer to Brahma as deity.

Of these three gods Vishnu alone has Avataras. Shiva has offspring such as Ganesh, but no Avataras; Brahma meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, ceased to have any importance with the passage of time.

In light of the above therefore, the two more prominent gods in the Puranas, Shiva and Vishnu, will be discussed.

3.3.2.2.1   SHIVA

With the discovery of the 'Proto-Siva Seal', at Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley, and with the renderings in the Puranas (see 3.3.2.1.3.), one can see the resemblance and close connections with this seal and the characteristics of Shiva depicted in the Puranas, especially with regards to the yogic positions in both these renderings.

The name 'Shiva' is not mentioned in the Vedas and this could be because it was not a god venerated by the Aryans. Wilkens (2008:263) suggests that in order for

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[4] The term 'Brahma' and 'Brahman' are used interchangeably by some authors. In the context of Shankara's Advaita Vedanta, Brahman refers to the Ultimate or Supreme Being that is non-dual. The context will therefore determine which of the two is being referred to. The candidate follows the majority in preferring the term 'Brahman'.

Shiva to gain prominence and to receive greater reverence, he is declared to be Rudra of the Vedas. The earliest reference to Rudra is found in the Rig Veda.

According to Bhatt (2008:71) a very minor position is assigned to Rudra. There are only three full hymns addressed to him. Nonetheless, a clear picture of Rudra is given in the Rig Veda where he is mentioned seventy times in total.

Returning to Wilkens (2008:265) he suggests that Rudra, did not remain a subordinated deity as in the Vedic age, but threw "Agni, Vayu, Surya, Mitra and Varuna completely into the shade" and that together with Vishnu "engrosses the almost exclusive worship of the Brahmanical world."

Lipner (1994:283-4) alludes that on the basis of the *Svetasvatara* Upanishad which exalts Shiva, it could be conjectured that he was a monotheistic cult deity and in time became the "assimilative centre of a vast and many-faceted mythic tradition."

With regards to earlier references to Shiva, Flood (2005:154) maintains that in Patanjali's "Great Commentary" on Panini's Sanskrit grammar, a devotee of Shiva is described as clad in animal skin and carrying an iron lance as a symbol of his god, a possible precursor of Shiva's trident. Even R.G. Bhandarkar (1983:165) claims that there are Shaiva Ascetics in the Mahabharata.

Yet it is only in the Puranas that Shiva is really exalted and developed as a major god in Hinduism. He assumes many forms but never as an Avatara.

3.3.2.2.2   VISHNU

According to Flood (2005:114), in the Rig Veda, Vishnu is the benevolent, solar deity associated with Indra often in fighting the demon Vrita. In one hymn Vishnu takes three giant strides across the universe, the three realms of earth, air and heaven. In this way he seems to be declared 'the preserver' in the Vedas. This forms the basis of a myth in the Puranas where Vishnu is incarnated as a dwarf, covers the earth in three strides and destroys the power of the demon Bali.

In the Vedas and the Upanishads Vishnu is not significantly prominent, but only in the Epics does he become pre-eminent. Rosen (2006:152) tends to propose that

although Vedic references to Vishnu are few, yet they are overflowing with meaning.

Rao (2009:12) mentions that in the Rig Veda Vishnu is a "good friend of the good folk (1, 154, 4) and a compassionate protector (3, 55, 10)." Satapatha-brahamana (3, 7, 1, 17) explores an intimate association of Vishnu with Sun and in the Rig Veda (2, 1, 3) with Agni. It has also been suggested, according to Rao (2009:14) that, during the Vedic times there were iconic representations of Vishnu.

Mishra (2000:21) in examining the origin of incarnation in Indian mythology says that the theory of incarnation is connected with Vishnu.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Bassuk (1987:23) suggests that the unnamed descents of Vishnu developed into various accounts of Avataras as found in the Epics, the Puranas and the Brahamanas. He further claims that in the *Mahabharata* there are three lists of Vishnu's incarnations but that they are inconsistent. First, four Avataras are mentioned, then, two more added and finally a list of ten Avataras are mentioned.

Parrinder (1997:16) proposes that, "with his Avataras, perhaps incorporating Indus Valley or forest divinities, Vishnu emerges as the deity who is to this day the greatest or sole god to millions of Hindus."

The main lore about the Avataras of Vishnu is to be found in the Bhagavata Purana, which is sometimes referred to as the 'Fifth Veda'. Other Puranas also list a number of Avataras, though of course the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are critical sources for the two heroic Avataras of Vishnu, namely Rama and Krishna.

Yesurathnum (1987:46) understands that from the Bhagavata Purana the number of Avataras may be endless. In the Bhagavata Purana (1.3.26-27) it is stated that, "Just as from an inexhaustible lake thousands of streams flow on all sides, so also from the Remover-of-Sorrows (Hari), sum of all reality, come forth countless incarnations."

In the following section a closer examination of the number of Avataras of Vishnu will be conducted.

3.3.2.2.2.1 AVATARAS OF VISHNU

Although the Bhagavata Purana maintains that there is a large number of Avataras, there seems to be an inconsistency of the number of Avataras within it. According to Rao (2009:109) a closer examination of the number Avataras in the Bhagavata Purana reveals that at one place twenty-two Avataras are enumerated, while at another twenty-three and yet at another only sixteen.

The Varaha Purana records ten Avataras and the Sattvata Samhita and Ahirbudhnya Samhita thirty-nine Avataras. The Matsya Purana explains that Vishnu had to appear seven times amongst human beings, in order to expiate the sins of the wicked rulers. The Vayu Purana speaks of ten Avataras of which three are regarded as celestial and other terrestrial. The Garuda Purana, although alludes to innumerable Avataras lists only nineteen.

According to Bassuk (1987:23) and verified by Rao (2009:20) although there is a variance in the number of Avataras there are only ten major or principle Avataras that have been widely accepted. These ten Avataras are:

   i. Matsya (The Fish)
   ii. Kurma (The Tortoise)
   iii. Varaha (The Boar)
   iv. Narasimha (The Man-Lion)
   v. Vamana (The Dwarf)
   vi. Parasurama (Rama with the Axe)
   vii. Rama (Son of Dasaratha)
   viii. Krishna (Yadava Prince)
   ix. Buddha (Prince of Sakyas)
   x. Kalki (The Apocalyptic Avatara)

3.3.2.2.2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF AVATARA DOCTRINES

As this chapter draws to a close, a summary of the characteristics of the doctrines of Avataras is inevitable in order to place into perspective the various beliefs within this Hindu tradition. Parrinder (1997:120-127) summarised the various doctrines

associated with the understanding of Avataras. He mentions twelve characteristics of Avatara doctrines. These twelve characteristics are:

i. In Hindu belief the Avatara is real: it is a visible and fleshly descent of the divine to the animal or human plane.

ii. The human Avataras take worldly birth: this happens in various ways, but through human parents.

iii. The lives of Avataras mingle divine and human: all show humanity even when demonstrating some power of divinity.

iv. The Avataras finally die: death came when the purpose of Avataras' coming was accomplished.

v. There may be historicity in some Avataras: The animal Avataras are mythical but Krishna can claim historicity.

vi. Avataras are repeated: Each Avatara appears when there is a decline of righteousness.

vii. The example and character of Avataras are important: they are moral, noble, active, compassionate and religious.

viii. The Avataras comes with work to do: their great purpose is to restore right and put down wrong. It can range from slaying demons and delivering earth, men and gods.

ix. The Avataras show some reality in the world: they come into the world, live and suffer in it.

x. The Avatara is a guarantee of divine revelation: they give revelations of god. They are 'special revelations', which are both divine teaching and the self-manifestation of the divine to human persons.

xi. Avataras reveal a personal god: In the Vedas men spoke to a god. In the personal revelation of god, god speaks to men in commands and promises.

xii. Avataras reveal a god of grace: in Gita 11:44, god is implored to show mercy and grace, "as father to his son, as friend to friend, as a lover to beloved."

3.4 POSTULATION OF THE FIRM BELIEF AND FAITH IN AVATARAS IN THE HINDU WRITINGS

This chapter traced the evolution of Hindu deities through the rich collection of Hindu writings and scriptures. As was explained in the introduction to this chapter it was not possible to include every Hindu writing or scripture because of the vast volume that is available, but a gleaning of these texts has allowed for sufficient information to postulate the firm belief and faith in the Hindu idea of Avataras. The decline of many Hindu deities have been studied through this research while the rise to prominence of some deities to pre-eminence was explained culminating in the concept of Avataras, which now forms the belief system of popular Hinduism.

In the following chapter a brief analysis is considered of the concept of Avataras in the different Hindu philosophies.

CHAPTER 4
THE NOTION OF AVATARAS IN THE DIFFERENT HINDU PHILOSOPHIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the Hindu writings and scriptures were considered in tracing the evolution of the Hindu deities culminating in the concept of Avataras. In this chapter the discussion will focus on the different schools of philosophy which emerged predominantly from the Upanishadic level of the Vedas (see 1.3.2).

Orthodox Hindu tradition suggests that many of the various philosophical ideas that developed into philosophical traditions emanated from the Vedas, but that a more systematic speculation began with the *Upanishads* (Grimes 2004:535), or, as it is also known, the *Vedanta,* which means "end of the Vedas." Therefore Vendanta philosophy is philosophy that finds its source in the *Upanishads.*

The notion of Avataras within these philosophies will also be investigated with the exception of the philosophy of Shankara (Advaita Vedanta) which will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

4.2 THE EMERGENCE OF THE SHRAMANAS (WANDERING PHILOSOPHERS)

Vedic religion, as is well known, was essentially ritualistic where the Brahmins (priestly class) played an important role. In Burnett (1992:57) view modern scholars consider the introduction of the *Upanishads* to be a reaction against the excessive practice of ritualism.

There were various possible reasons for this response. Some of these reasons were based on the assumptions that:

- During the racial integration of the Aryans with the Non-Aryans of the Ganges Valley there was an exchange of religious beliefs and ideas (see 1.3.1.2).

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- The Kshatriyas (warrior class)[5] reacted to the Brahmins who jealously guarded their knowledge of the *Vedas.* Worthington (1982:13) emphasises that as long as the Brahmins guarded this knowledge and had the monopoly they could exercise power over the rest of the community.

- Changes in the socio-economic conditions which were marked by new towns being built created an environment for trade expansion which increased social interaction between the rural and urban communities. These interactions promoted an attitude of exploration and inquiry (Worthington 1982:13).

In response to these changes in society, wandering ascetics took up itinerant lifestyles in rejection of the direction towards which social life was heading. Rodrigues (2006:119) maintains that these ascetics questioned the pre-eminent status granted to the Brahmins based on their birth as well as apprehension of the sacrificial rituals and costs involved in staging these rituals.

There were various types of ascetics evidenced around the time of the Vedic Samhitas. These were often naked or scantily dressed with dishevelled hair and, according to Rodrigues (2006:119), were "often associated with mortification of the body, the consumption of consciousness-altering substances, and were believed to possess supernormal powers."

It is worthwhile also to note that some of these ascetics were solitary mendicants dwelling deep in the forests while others belonged to sectarian groups dedicated to one or other deity living on the outskirts of towns.

These ascetics, during this period of time, did not really pose a challenge to the Brahminic traditions. Their mystical ascetic practices were believed to have developed their psychic faculties which provided insights which were inexplicable.

According to Burnett (1992:60), the ascetic "understood the deepest of mysteries concerning life and death, the nature of the universe and the nature of himself."

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[5] Within Hinduism there are basically four social classes known as castes (*varnas*). In order of hierarchy, the Brahmin class is at the head, followed by the Kshatriya class (the rulers and warriors), then comes the Vaishyas (the merchants and peasants) and finally the Shudras (the labourers). The 'Untouchables' were outside the system altogether (Burnett 1992:91).

This internalisation could be regarded as an allegorisation of the sacrificial rituals experienced as an internalisation of the rituals thus placing new emphasis on the individual person. This simply means that the person himself became the sacrifice. An example of this internalisation would be the example of fire that is spoken of in the Samhitas: this fire, during this time of the Aranyakas, was now interpreted as the body heat of the person and was no longer seen as the sacred fire as spoken of in the Samhitas. This new meaning involved the sacrificing of hatred, jealously and even greed in the 'fire' of one's own body in the process of contemplation (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn 2009:71).

4.3 THE EMERGENCE OF THE UPANISHADS

It was when certain influential ascetics began to attract disciples around them and when they began to organise themselves with their own codes of conduct while at the same time challenging the 'orthodox' teaching of the times that the *Upanishads* began to emerge (see 1.3.2).

According to Hiriyanna (1964:51) an estimated number of two hundred *Upanishads* are reckoned of which the great majority belongs to comparatively recent times. Sharma (1976:17) proposes that the Muktikopanishad gives the number of *Upanishads* as one hundred and eight.

The term '*Upanishad'* can be construed as an appropriate term as it comes from two root words: *upa* meaning 'near' and *shad* meaning 'to sit' (see 1.3.2). Burnett (1992:60) concludes from this derivative that the words mean 'sitting down near"', as a disciple would sit at the feet of the guru.

According to Rodrigues (2006:121) these ascetics gained support from the rulers and wealthy patrons as well as from the *Kshatriya* and *Vaishya* castes possibly because these two castes felt disenfranchised as a result of the status of the priestly (Brahmin) castes.

Burnett (1992:60) suggests that the *Upanishads* are the first recorded attempt at systematic philosophy. Questions that were raised during this time were of an enquiring nature such as: Where did we come from? Why are we here? By what power do we exist? What is the cause of everything?

Such enquiries led Rosen (2006:52) to state that the *Upanishads* focused on the metaphysics, mystical analyses and reflective expositions and that this was an era of intense philosophical speculation.

The *Upanishads*, as suggested by Karl Potter (2008:3), expressed much ambiguous meanings. This led to several Vedanta philosophies that tried to explicate these meanings leading to different interpretations of these texts. As can be expected, these Vedanta philosophical systems differed amongst themselves, at times quite substantially, culminating in rivalry in the quest to determine which system truly reflects the correct teaching of the *Upanishads.*

4.4   EMERGENCE OF VARIOUS SCHOOLS OF PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

Generally six schools of orthodox Hindu philosophy is now an accepted norm. From the discussion thus far as regards the composition of Hinduism, the emergence of the wandering philosophers and the *Upanishads,* it becomes difficult to impose 'orthodoxy" onto Hindu religion and culture. Hindu philosophy is neatly divided into six schools of philosophy for the sake of systematic exposition.

In an attempt to classify Hindu thought, Richard King (1999:43) alludes to the *astika* (affirmer) and *nastika* (non-affirmer) of Hindu 'orthodoxy' (see 1.3.4.2). "This mode of classification", says King (1999:43) "is usually taken to imply that the acceptance of the Vedas as revelatory knowledge (*sruti*) provides the grounds for distinguishing orthodox Hindu schools from their 'heterodox' rivals – the Carvakas, Buddhists and Jainas."

According to Burnett (1992:176-178), the modern classifications of Hindu philosophy, which are regarded as *astika* (orthodox), are divided into six schools. He categorises these schools as follows:

   i.   Nyaya – School of Logic
   ii.   Vaisheshika – School of Atomism
   iii. Samkhya – School of Dualistic Discrimination
   iv.   Yoga – School of Classical Yoga
   v.   Mimansa – School of Vedic Exegesis
   vi.   Vedanta – School based on the Upanishads

These schools are in turn grouped in terms of their perceived affinities. According to King (1999:45), Nyaya and Vaisheshika are grouped together because they represent the 'empirico-logical' strand of Hinduism; Samkyya and Yoga are grouped together because their focus is on attaining *moksha* (liberation) through isolation of pure consciousness from matter; and finally Mimamsa and Vedanta are grouped together because they approach philosophy based on the exegesis of the Vedas.

In introducing the characteristic of each of these schools of philosophy, an attempt will also be made to determine if there is a notion of the concept of Avataras within these philosophies.

4.4.1 NYAYA SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

The focus of *Nyaya's* ultimate concern is to bring release to human suffering, which results from ignorance of reality. Liberation is brought about through right knowledge.

The founder of *Nyaya* philosophy is accredited to Gautama Akshapada who is believed to have lived during the 2nd - 3rd CE. He was also the author of the aphorisms on inquiry known as the *Nyaya-sutras.*

The word *nyaya* means the collocation of conditions which leads the mind to a conclusion. These conclusions are realised through arguments and reasoning which are either valid or invalid. By means of correct knowledge the correct apprehension of objects are attained. This is why the Nyaya School of Philosophy is concerned with knowledge and the nature of epistemology.

This school of philosophy believed that the Vedas were the source of authoritative knowledge and was therefore categorised as 'orthodox'.

4.4.1.1   CENTRAL THOUGHTS OF NYAYA PHILOSOPHY

Most of the teachings of this philosophy are to be found in the *Nyaya-sutra.* In gleanings from the *Nyaya-sutras*, Akshapada clearly states that:

> Supreme felicity is attained by the knowledge about the true nature
> of the sixteen categories, namely means of right knowledge, object

of right knowledge, doubt, purpose, familiar instance, established tenet, members [of a syllogism], confutation, ascertainment, wrangling, cavil, fallacy, quibble, futility, and occasion for rebuke. (Book 1:1:1).

He refers to the objects of knowledge as soul, body, senses, objects of sense, intellect, mind, activity, fault transmigration (rebirth), fruit, pain, and release (Book 1:1:9).

In Book 1:1:3-7, he lists the means of right knowledge as follows:
- Perception – that knowledge which arises from the contact of a sense with its object and is determinate, unnameable and unerring.
- Inference – that knowledge which is preceded by perception.
- Comparison (analogy) – the knowledge of a thing, through its similarity to another thing previously well known.
- Word (verbal testimony) – the instructive assertion of a reliable person.

In this regard Narain (2003:145,146) says that according to *nyaya* "knowledge is always produced by certain objective collocation of conditions; for example, the cognition of a red rose is caused by the contact of the self and manas, the contact between the sense-organ (the eye) and the object (rose) and the presence of light, etc. The collocation of these conditions ensures the origination of knowledge."

4.4.1.2   LIBERATION AS RELEASE FROM PAIN

According to the *Nyaya-sutra* (Book 1:1:2) release is the successive annihilation of misapprehension (wrong notion), faults (defects), activity, birth and pain. This release, which is regarded as the 'highest good', is attained "when 'true knowledge', is attained, 'wrong notions' disappear; on the disappearance of 'wrong notions' the six 'defects' disappear; the disappearance of 'defects' is followed by the disappearance of 'activity'...; when there is no activity there is no 'birth'; on the cessation of birth there is cessation of pain; cessation of pain is followed by final release."

Release is therefore the absolute deliverance from pain. Akshapada (Book 1.1.2) qualifies this even further by stating that "When there is a relinquishing of the birth that has taken place and the non-resumption of another this condition, which is without end (or limit) is known as 'final release'. This condition of immortality consisting of the attainment of bliss, is called Brahman."

4.4.1.3 THE ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The main proof adduced for the existence of god is found in the enquiry as to the nature of the world. According to Brockington (1996:96) the very nature of the world demands a first cause.

The Nyaya theory of causation defines a cause as an unconditional and invariable antecedent of an effect. Three kinds of causes are distinguished: inherent, or material cause (the substance out of which an effect is produced); non-inherent cause (which helps in the production of a cause); and efficient cause (which helps the material cause produce the effect). God is not the material cause of the universe, since atoms and souls are also eternal, but is rather the efficient cause.

The rationale for stating that god is the efficient cause is to be found in the argument and reasoning that the active cause of the world must have absolute knowledge of all the material for creation and therefore the only one must be god. In this argument god is proved from creation.

According to Grimes (2004:542) since the inception of the *Nyaya* School, there always existed a conflict with Buddhism. One of the conflicts was in the accusation by the Buddhist that, the proof for the existence of god by the *Naiyanikas* (Nyaya scholars), were illogical and based on faulty reasoning.

This accusation gave rise to the *Nyaya Kusumanjali* by Udayana where he provides nine proofs for the existence of god. These arguments have been well summarised by Aatish Palekar (online:[s.a.]) as follows:

1. **Karyat:** The universe is an effect, hence it must have an instrumental cause. This cause is God.

2. **Ayojanat:** Atoms are inactive hence they must be provided with motion by God, which is necessary for their conjunction. Past tendency cannot impart motion to the atoms without God.

3. **Dhrtyadeh:** The creator and the destroyer of the universe is God. It is due to his decision that creation, stability and destruction take place.

4. **Padat:** Words get their power of giving meaning to their subjects from God.

5. **Pratyayatah:** God is the author of the authoritative Vedas.

6. **Shreteh:** Sruti establishes on existence of God.

7. **Vakyat:** Vedic sentences give utterance to moral laws. God is the author of moral laws. Vedic laws are divine.

8. **Samkhya Visesachcha:** According to Nyaya Vaisesika the diatomic structure is not formed of the microscopic substance of two atoms but of their number two. The numeral one is perceptible, but all the other numerals are mental concepts. At the time of creation, the souls, atoms, adrusta, space, time, manas, etc., are all unconscious or unintelligent. For this reason number will be dependent upon the mind of God and will be created by it. In this way it is necessary to believe in the existence of God.

9. **Adrustat:** We experience the result of our actions and our qualities. Actions lead to merit and demerit, and adrusta is the collection of merits and demerits. But the adrusta is unintelligent. Hence, in order that there may be experience of the results of the adrusta there must be God**.**

4.4.1.4 NOTION OF AVATARA IN *NYAYA* PHILOSOPHY

From the discussions of the *Nyaya* philosophy above, especially their focus on the means of knowledge, the object of knowledge, epistemology and theory of causation as well as the determination through logic to prove the existence of god, there is no substantial reference to infer the condition of faith in god as the focus of moksha, other than god as creator who is the efficient cause.

According to Markus Hattstein (1998:14), "A god was originally not named in Nyaya and only came into the system later when it was unified with Vaisesika." This can be borne out by Udayana's Nyaya Kusumanjali, in which proof for the existence of god was argued, which was only formulated about 950 CE.

Even the reference to Brahman in the *Nyaya-sutra,* was that of a condition of immortality consisting of the attainment of bliss. Although *Nyaya* supports the existence of god, it is regarded as monotheistic. In this respect R N Dandekar (1979:121) says that "the god of the Nyaya system is hardly comparable to the personal god of the proper theistic ideology."

Other than *Nyaya* regarding the Vedas as authoritative, there is no evidence of this philosophy expressing a notion of Avatara in its doctrine.

4.4.2 VAISHESHIKA SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

It is a generally accepted fact that Vaisheshika philosophy complements Nyaya philosophy. In many instances these two philosophies are discussed together because of the similarities that exist between them.

According to Grimes (2004:542) the Vaisheshika School was founded by Kanada who was also the author of the Vaisheshikasutra. The name *Vaisheshika* is derived from *vishesha* which means "the characteristic that distinguish a particular thing from all other things." The school of *Vaisheshika* is concerned with the nature of reality (physics and metaphysics). This nature of reality is obtained by knowing the special properties or essential differences of the objects of experience. There are six objects of experience listed by Kanada in his sutra (Book 1:1:4): substance, attribute, action, genus, species and combination (inherence). A seventh that was eventually added was that of non-existence.

4.4.2.1   CENTRAL THOUGHTS OF *VAISHESHIKA* PHILOSOPHY

King (1999:57) summarises the *Vaisheshika* philosophy as being "primarily interested in an analysis of nature .... The *Vaishheshika* displays an interest in investigating the fundamental categories (*padartha*) of reality. How many types of entity make up the world? As such, the Vaisheshika can be seen as a very early

attempt to provide a comprehensive ontological classification or 'inventory' of existence."

This summary by King, being as brief as it is, encapsulates the essence of the Vaisheshikasutra especially the ontological argument. Further in his discussion King (1999:57-8) does mention other important elements that need consideration such as the concept of *dharma* (righteousness) which the Vaisheshikasutra defines as the "object of good."

The Vaisheshikasutra (Book 1:1) deals with the accomplishment and exaltation of the supreme good. The supreme good results from the knowledge of the seven objects of experience (vide supra 4.2.1).

Book 1:1:5. sub-categorises substance into: earth, water, fire, air, ether, time, space, self and mind. In the verses and chapters that follow, the sutra discusses the seven objects of experience in greater detail thus attempting to provide an ontological case explaining existence.

The concept of the atom as being eternal and uncaused is mentioned in the sutra (Book 4:1:1-3). According to Hattstein (1998:13), "Vaisheshika sets out an atomistic interpretation of the world according to which everything (apart from spirit) is composed of atoms that do not become visible until they connect as matter." An example is that of a red apple: the red colour cannot exist on its own, but has to inhere in something.

Another significant contribution by *Vaishehsika* has been the understanding of the soul. Grimes (2004:543) captured the essence of this understanding clearly when he remarked that "... all living beings, human and non-human, have souls that are different from the body, eternal and ubiquitous ... As well, the Vaisheshika system is well known for its attempts to prove the existence of the soul by a series of logical arguments."

As with many other religions and which is similar to the *Nyaya* philosophical thought, the concept of emancipation is also given prominence in *Vaisheshika.* The *Vaishehsikasutra* (Book 5:2:15,18) explains that pleasure and pain results

from contact of self, sense, mind and object. The absolute cessation of pain results in emancipation.

4.4.2.2   NOTION OF AVATARA IN *VAISHESHIKA* PHILOSOPHY

Kanada, in his *Vaisheshikasutra*, begins his philosophy by referring to *dharma* which he considers to be the resultant supreme good (Book 1:1:2). He further claims that the authoritativeness of the Veda arises from its being the word of god or being an exposition of *dharma*. In book 10:2:8 of the *Vaisheshikasutra,* Kanada argues for the authenticity of the Vedas as not being from 'ordinary speakers', in whom there are defects. From these sentences it is clear the regard given to the Vedas. This argument is supported by Madhav Deshpande (2004:521) when he suggests that, "For the ... Vaisheshikas, the Vedas were the words of god and not the words of some human sages about god."

This seems to be the closest that one can deduce the significant involvement of god in this philosophy of Kanada. At the expense of repeating the argument for the notion of Avatara in this philosophy, see the *Nyaya* philosophy for the notion Avatara (see 4.4.1.1).

As with the *Nyaya* philosophy there is no evidence to be found to support the notion of the existence of Avataras in *Vaisheshika* School of philosophy.

4.4.3 SAMKHYA SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

The word *Samkhya,* according to Rodrigues (2006:123), may be translated as 'calculation' or 'enumeration'.

Samkhya philosophy is generally regarded as the oldest system of philosophy. This philosophy is attributed to the Sage Kapil Muni who is alleged to be the founder and also author of the Samkhyasutra which is believed to be lost (Masih 1988:30).

Samkhya is regarded as a system of dualistic realism. According to Chatterjee (1953:206) this dualistic realism are of two ultimate realities that exist independently of each other: a plurality of selves (*purusha*) and infinite matter

(*prakriti*). Krüger, Lubbe and Steyn (2009:86) contend that *purusha* refers to the world of souls and *prakriti* to the material world.

4.4.3.1 CENTRAL THOUGHTS OF *SAMKHYA* PHILOSOPHY

The two ultimate realities that exist independently of each other cannot produce the world system by itself as independent entities. The reason for this is that the self (*purusha)* is pure consciousness and inactive and therefore cannot experience pain, pleasure or desire. On the other hand matter (*prakriti)* has potential of unlimited energy and activity but no consciousness or intelligence.

In order to produce the world system there has to be contact between the *purusha* and *prakriti*. According to Chatterjee (1953:208) "The process of the world's evolution is started by the contact between self, or purusha, and primal matter, or, prakriti. It is through such contact that unconscious prakriti becomes, as it were, conscious and intelligent and evolves the whole world of objects ..."

Prakriti is a composite of three subtle elements called *gunas* (qualities). These elements are *sattva* (representing luminosity, clarity or purity), *rajas* (representing mobility, stimulation, energy and passion) and *tamas* (representing inertia, dullness and heaviness).

According to Grimes (2004:544) originally these gunas are invisible and in a state of equilibrium. When the equilibrium is disturbed through contact with *purusha,* matter evolves. This evolution of matter is described by Grimes (2004:544,545) as occurring in the following order:

> *prakriti, maha* or *buddhi* (intelligence), *ahamkara* (egoism), *manas* (mind), five *jnanendryas* (sense organs: hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell), five *karemendryas* (organs of action: tongue, hands, feet, organs of reproduction, and organs of excretion), five *tanmatras* (subtle elements of color, sound, smell, touch and taste), and five *mahabhutas* (gross elements: ether, air, fire, water and earth). This emanation scheme may be seen as both an account of cosmic evolution and a logical-transcendental analysis of the various factors involved in experience.

To simply explain this process one can say that there is a movement from transcendence to immanence while going through a series of transformations which finally results in the multiform world coming into being.

4.4.3.2   LIBERATION IN *SAMKHYA* PHILOSOPHY

Before the process of evolution, the self was in a state of pure consciousness and inactive and therefore could not experience pain. Due to the contact with the material world the self lost its natural state. According to Chatterjee (1953:209) the aim of *Shamkhya* philosophy is the liberation of the soul (*purusha)* from bondage to the body and matter.

In order to attain liberation, which is the supreme goal of life, is for selves to know to discriminate that the self has nothing to do with matter and that "it lies in man's power to liberate himself by means of a penetrating insight into, and a clear realization of, the nature of his self" (Chatterjee 1953:210).

4.4.3.3   NOTION OF AVATARA IN *SAMKHYA* PHILOSOPHY

Yakub Masih (1988:30) indicates that *Samkhya* philosophy is in many respects a continuation of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* and the early writing of Kapil Muni's text is now lost.

In the Bhagavad Gita, according to Masih (1988:31) *Samkhya* is presented in a theistic form. In other works this philosophy is wholly atheistic. Controversy still exists as to the early nature of *Samkhya.*

If one considers the dual realism of *Samkhya* philosophy and the evolutionary coming into being of the multiform world, logically *Samkhya* has no place for god. Masih (1988:31) supports this notion by stating that, "*Samkhya* explains the whole world and its soteriological purpose through the two principles of *Purusha* and *Prakriti.* The system has no need for god, either in initiating the world process or winning the release of the jivas, or, bondage. Hence, we have to take *Samkhya* as wholly atheistic."

In light of the above argument of the atheistic nature of *Samkhya* philosophy, there cannot be room to postulate an argument for the notion of Avatara in this philosophy or not until the original text does become available.

4.4.4 YOGA SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

This philosophy is largely attributed to Patanjali through his *Yogasutras.*

The word *Yoga* means 'union' which is derived from the Sanskrit word *yuj* meaning 'to unite'. Yogasutra 2.44 seems to suggest that what is conjoined is the individual self with the transcendent self.

Yoga is often grouped together with *Sankhya* because, as Rodrigues (2006:125) explains, "the early articulations of Yoga philosophy are based on the metaphysical system of the *tattvas* associated with Sankhya." The *tattvas* here mentioned by Rodrigues refers to the elements or components of *Prakriti's* evolutionary manifestations.

4.4.4.1   CENTRAL THOUGHTS OF *YOGA* PHILOSOPHY

There is an unmistakeable connection between the *Samkhya* philosophy and *Yoga* philosophy. Masih (1988:32) expresses the relationship of the *Yoga* philosophy with the philosophy of *Samkhya* correctly by suggesting that, "What is true of *Samkhya* is true of Yoga. The only difference is that in Yoga, God has been given a place."

If one has to provide a simplistic difference between *Samkhya* and *Yoga,* then it would be expressed in terms of *praxis* and *theoria.*

Krüger, Lubbe and Steyn (2009:86) suggest that *Yoga* can be considered applied *Samkhya* in that "through a system of mind and body training, the Yoga teaches how one may obtain release from the cycle of births and deaths. The two conditions necessary for the attainment of this goal are detachment from worldly affairs and meditation."

This release from all limitations including death, says Trevor Leggett (1990:2), is not a physical or mental immortality, but by disengaging the true self (*purusha*) from illusory identification with limitations. Then *purusha* stands in its own nature, pure consciousness and inactive.

What this basically means is that *Yoga* attempts to reverse the *Samkhya* view of the evolution of the world through stages until the self re-enters the original state of pure consciousness.

Generally there are eight stages in this process that is defined according to the *Yogasutra 2:29*: Restraints (from injury, falsehood, stealing, lust, etc.), observances (of body cleanliness, contentment, study and devotion to god), posture (series of exercises intended to make the body supple), restraint of vital currents (correct breathing to encourage complete respiratory relaxation), dissociation (to withdraw attention from outward objects to the mind), concentration (to confine awareness of externals to one object for long periods of time, meditation (the uninterrupted contemplation of the object beyond any memory of ego, and Samadhi (a state of deep concentration where the self obliterates the distinction between the mediator and the object).

4.4.4.2   NOTION OF AVATARA IN *YOGA* PHILOSOPHY

The first mention of the word Lord in Patanjali's *Yogasutra* is to be found in Sutra 1:23 "Or by devotion to the Lord." This raises the question as to who is this Lord. In Sutra 1:24 there is an indication of who the Lord is: "Untouched by taints or karmas or their fruition or their latent stocks is the Lord, who is a special kind of Purusha."

The very mention of the word 'special kind of Purusha' means that the Lord is a Purusha but is different from other purushas in that other purushas have come into contact with *prakriti* and as a result was found to be in bondage. Even though through *Yoga* these purushas have regained the state of pure consciousness, the 'special Purusha' was 'Untouched by taints or karmas or their fruition or their latent stocks." Therefore this *purusha* can be regarded indeed as Lord[6].

Georg Feuerstein (1987:391) asks the important question as to the proof that Ishvara exists. He suggests that the aphorism found in Yogasutra 1:25 which says that, "In Him *(Ishvara)* the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed", has generally been interpreted as being the equivalent to the ontological proof of the existence

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[6] The word 'Lord' begins with capital letters in thus thesis because scholars like Flood uses this word when reference is made to a 'Lord' or call upon a god.

of god as proposed by some Christian theologians such as St Augustine and St Anselm.

Chatterjee (1953:221), in response to Yogasutra 1:24, states that "God is the perfect spirit ... completely and eternally free from all actions and afflictions, and their effects and impressions. As such, He is distinguished from all other selves."

It stands to reason therefore that there can never be a notion of Avatara in the *Yoga* philosophy simply because, for the Lord to descend to earth, he would have to be tainted by karma and subjected to the tattvas. Yogasutra 1:24 of Patanjali attests strongly to this conclusion.

4.4.5 MIMAMSA SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

The term *Mimamsa* could be considered as 'interpretation' or 'investigation'. This refers to the tradition that concerns itself with investigating and reflecting upon the meanings within Vedic scripture (Rodrigues 2006:131).

Within the *Mimamsa* tradition two philosophies emerge. The first philosophy became known as *Purva-Mimamsa* which means 'Investigation of the Primary', and *Uttara-Mimamsa* which means 'Investigation of the Latter'.

According to Rodrigues (2006:131) *Uttara-Mimamsa* is better known as *Vedanta* because the focus of this philosophy dealt with the latter portion of the Vedas, the *Upanishads*, while the *Purva-Mimamsa* focussed on the other sections of the Vedas and became known simply as *Mimamsa.*

It is within the philosophy of *Mimamsa* that a true profession of interpretation of the Vedas is to be found. It can be regarded as genuine Vedic tradition. The previous four orthodox philosophies, *Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya* and *Yoga* are orthodox in name only as they do not try to interpret the Vedas nor show any dependence on the Vedas.

In this section therefore, *Mimamsa* would refer to *Purva-Mimamsa. Uttara-Mimamsa* would refer to *Vedanta.* The word *Vedanta* would therefore be used to describe the sixth and final philosophy considered in this chapter.

The origin of *Mimamsa* philosophy can be traced to the *Purva-Mimamsa Sutra of* Jaimini and is based on the Vedas focussing on the ritualistic aspects of the Vedas (Chatterjee 1953:211).

4.4.5.1   CENTRAL THOUGHTS OF *MIMAMSA* PHILOSOPHY

Grimes (2004:546) gets to the heart of the *Mimamsa* philosophy when he says that, "Mimamsa's central concern is 'duty' (*dharma*)."

The opening verse of the *Purva Mimamsa Sutra* lays the foundation of the exegesis of the Vedas regarding rituals: "Now is the investigation into *dharma*."

Flood (2005:237) correctly suggests that, "*dharma* ..., is revealed in the Veda and the investigation into it shows that the Veda is primarily a series of injunctions (*vidhi*) about ritual action."

Therefore the central thought in *Mimamsa* philosophy can be regarded as ritual pragmatism because Vedic knowledge is valuable for the exegete to support ritualistic activity. Based on this thought, Grimes (2004:546) suggests that *Mimamsa* philosophy concludes that, "religious duty is knowable only through the scripture, and the essence of the scripture is injunctions and commandments which tell what ought to be done (*vidhi*) and what ought not to be done (*nisedha)*."

In order to resolve apparent contradictions, absurdities, inconsistencies and ambiguities, the science of exegesis was born in defence and justification of Vedic ritualism.

With this centralised focus on the defence and justification of Vedic ritualism, Chatterjee (1953:213) comments that the gods of the Vedas are not looked upon as living spirits but rather as objects of the act of oblations. He continues further to suggest that, "The primary object of performing a sacrifice is not to please God or gods. Nor is it purification of the self or moral improvement. Rituals are to be performed just because the Vedas command us to perform them."

One is therefore inclined to think as to what greater good does *Mimamsa* aspire to or what benefits does this philosophy offer. Rodrigues (2006:131) answers this by stating that, "The potent benefits (*apurva*) of each dharmic action accrue to the

soul of the patron of the rite, and ultimately result in the attainment of heaven (*svarga*), which was the goal in early Vedic sacrificial religion."

Later, however, practitioners of this philosophy realised that actions, if directed by the desire for enjoyment of objects, causes rebirth and consequent misery (Chatterjee 1953:213). Therefore, instead of heaven, liberation was regarded as the highest end of religion. This liberation is "a state in which the self abides in its intrinsic nature as pure substance beyond the reach of pleasure and pain" (Chatterjee 1953:214).

4.4.5.2   NOTION OF AVATARA IN *MIMAMSA* PHILOSOPHY

Gleaning from the central thought of the *Mimamsa* philosophy and re-emphasising the strong focus on *dharma*, one could use conversional speech to suggest that *dharma* became the god in *Mimamsa philosophy.*

Added to the aforesaid suggestion and considering the fact that *Mimamsa* "believes in the reality of many independent things and beings in the world ..." and to which "reality is a complex whole made up of such entities as physical things, atoms, selves, heaven, hell, and the deities to whom sacrifices are to be performed according to vedic junction", god does not feature as a focus of worship or liberator nor to which one aspires to become.

There is therefore no reason to suggest that there would be the necessity for god to descend to earth as an Avatara to restore *dharma* as the Vedas already fulfils this role.

4.4.6 VEDANTA SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

As was indicated earlier (see 4.5.1.), Vedanta was regarded as *Uttara-Mimamsa,* meaning 'investigation of the latter'. The 'latter' in this instance referred to the *Upanishads*. The term Vedanta, as was suggested, means 'end of the Vedas'. Therefore the *Vedanta* philosophy reflects contemplation based on the *Upanishads.* At times the *Upanishads* are referred to as *Vedanta* and *vice versa.*

According to Narain (2003:1) the reason for using the term *Vedanta* as a synonym for the *Upanishads*, "is the conviction that the knowledge of the Supreme Being of

Self and other related objects is the highest wisdom to which all other kinds of knowledge, those regarding sacrifices, rituals and worship ... are the lower rungs of the ladder leading to the acme, the gnosis contained in the Upanishads."

There are a number of *Vedanta* traditions, among which the *Advaita Vedanta* (non-dualism) philosophy of Shankara is widely known. Some of the other more known systems of *Vedanta* are *Visishtadaita* (qualified non-dualism) of Ramanuja, and *Dvaita* (dualism) of Madhva.

4.4.6.1 CENTRAL THOUGHTS OF *VEDANTA* PHILOSOPHY

All schools of *Vedanta* accept the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutra* and the *Bhagavad Gita* as foundational texts for their tradition. These texts together have become known as the *prasthanatraya* (King 1999:53) and formed the basis for contemplation on questions such as that raised by Pandit Rajmani Tigunait (1983:214) as to, "What is the ultimate Reality ... What is the nature of Self ... What happens after death?"

Grimes (2004:547) states that unlike *Mimamsa,* where the focus was on the ritualistic portions of the Vedas, Vedanta focuses on the philosophical portions of the Upanishads. Together with this focus he also suggests that, "All the *Vedanta* schools agree that the central teaching of the *Upanishads* is that *brahman* is the ultimate principle underlying the physical universe and individual souls." The only difference between the different schools of *Vedanta* is how the world and the soul can be said to be connected with *Brahman.*

According to Swami Nikhilananda (2008:22), the *Upanishads* teach the truth which is unknown to the sense organs such as, "living beings (jivas), the universe (jagat), and god (Isvra)."

If one could describe each of the three main *Vedanta* philosophical thought in one sentence which may reflect this form of 'unity in diversity' then one could argue that: the A*dvaita* (non-dualism) of Shankara considers *Brahman* to be an undifferentiated being in that *Brahman* and the soul (*Atman*) are a unity and everything else an illusion; the *Visishtadvaita* (qualified non-dualism) of Ramanuja considers *Brahman* to be a unity but has two forms which are self and matter; and

finally the *Dvaita* (dualism) of Madhva considers *Brahman* to be a differentiated being and is different from both self and matter.

4.4.6.2   NOTION OF AVATARA IN *VEDANTA* PHILOSOPHY

In the consideration of the other philosophies addressed earlier in this chapter, one could quite easily assume the position these philosophies espoused regarding Avataras through its central teachings about their understanding of god.

Although there may be due consideration given and also possible influences on *Vedanta* philosophy, Tigunait (1983:216) states that, "None of the schools of Vedanta agree with *Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, Yoga ...* regarding the theory of the manifestation of the universe."

In the case of the *Vedanta* philosophy and the different traditions (systems of *Vedanta*) found within it, one has to investigate each of these systems independently to be able to assess with any amount of certainty whether the concept of Avataras is present.

Lott (1987:4) though seems to draw the conclusion that the descent of the Lord in *Vedanta* philosophy is acceptable by saying that, "On a number of points, naturally, they are all in basic agreement. As the Gita explicitly affirms, all agree that the Lord has come to earth many times, in each age, both to establish *dharma* and in response to the needs of the virtuous and those that are devoted to him."

With regards to the philosophies of Ramanuja and Madhva such a conclusion could be readily acceptable and less complicated due to the understanding of *Brahman* as a unity in two forms as self and matter in the former and as a differentiated being which is different from self and matter in the latter, but in the philosophy of Shankara and non-duality it requires much deeper consideration.

Due to the fact that this research focuses on Shankara and his philosophy on *Vedanta* known as *Advaita Vedanta*, wherein the notion of Avataras will be investigated, it is superfluous to discuss this tradition here. This will be given due consideration in subsequent chapters.

In the following chapter consideration will be given to the life and times of Shankara as well as the philosopher who greatly impacted Shankara's thoughts. This introduction to Shankara will serve as the basis in order to introduce and discuss his philosophy on *Advaita Vedanta* in chapter six and then to investigate the notion of Avataras in chapter seven.

4.5 CONCLUDING SYNOPSIS ON AVATARA IN THE PHILOSOPHIES AS PREPARATION FOR DEBATING THE HYPOTHESIS

In this chapter the notion of Avatara was addressed and it has become clear that only in the Vedanta School of Philosophy the concept of Avatara figures and one may say it has a lesser profile as compared to the development of the deities as treated in chapter three. The focus of the study now shifts to the philosophy of Shankara in order to determine how this concept of Avatara is operational in his thinking. Chapter five is an introduction to the life and times of Shankara as well as the philosopher that greatly influenced his thought. The subsequent chapters will argue for the concept of Avatara in his philosophy.

CHAPTER 5
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SHANKARA AND THE PHILOSOPHER THAT GREATLY INFLUENCED HIS THOUGHT

5.1   INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter a brief synopsis was presented on the notion of *Avataras* in the six acceptable 'orthodox' schools of philosophy. When the Vedanta school of philosophy was considered, it was stated that within this school of philosophy there were divergent views available, all claiming to be a correct interpretation of the *prasthanatraya.*

It would not have been possible in this thesis to discuss each of the philosophies within the Vedanta tradition due to the insurmountable research required for this purpose and also that this is not necessary in the context of this thesis. There would be instances though where reference and consideration would be given to other Vedanta philosophers in order to either elucidate or substantiate a concept or thought.

The intention of this chapter seeks to introduce Shankara through a short narrative on his life and times as well as the philosopher, Gaudapada, who influenced his thought through his writings and philosophy. It was the study on Gaudapada's philosophy that deepened Shankara's thoughts on *Advaita Vedanta* making it to be an influential philosophy within the Hindu tradition.

5.2   THE LIFE OF SHANKARA

To compile an accurate biography of Shankara's life is a difficult task indeed. One of the major difficulties is the year in which he was born. If the date of his birth could be correctly determined then many of the doubts surrounding the authenticity of his works would be eliminated.

Klaus K Klostermaier (1998:106), when examining the life and achievement of Shankara, asserted that details of Shankara's life had to "culled from several half-historical, half-legendary accounts" written by some of his disciples and later followers.

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When one begins to research the life and times of Shankara, numerous contradictions in details are uncovered. Govind Chandra Pande (1994:4) states that the biographies of Shankara are "posterior to the Acarya by at least half a millennium."

Due to this huge gap, Pande (1994:4,5) launches a scathing attack on attempted biographies on Shankara and claims that these biographies are a means to an end. He (1994:4,5) observes that:

> These works can only be regarded as the diverse versions of the medieval legend of Shankara, which obscures and distorts his original history through the lavish exercise of a mythical imagination used for the purpose of authenticating and popularizing the influence of many medieval monastic institutions claiming to derive their several traditions from Sankaracarya.

Pande dedicates a whole chapter of his book analysing different sources with regards to the history of Shankara.

5.2.1 HIS BIRTH

With regards to the dating of Shankara, Sengaku Mayeda (1979:3) alludes to the difficulty of correctly establishing these dates, although he says that it is customary to accept the dates proposed by K.B. Pathak as being 788-820 CE. He (1979:3) also refers to the Hajime Nakamura, who after reviewing and criticising all opinions on the dating of Shankara, proposed that the dates be shifted to 700-750 CE.

Bhattacharya (1982:88) confidently pens the date of Shankara to be 788 – 820 CE although he does not discuss his derivation for these dates.

Pande (1994:41-54) embarks on an elaborate procedure of elimination through structure and theory to conclude that the dates of Shankara could range between 650 -700 CE.

These dates above, and many other dates that were suggested, only further emphasise the difficulty in correctly determining the date of birth of Shankara.

Considering this difficulty one can propose that the most likely period for Shankara is during the 8th century CE.

There is a general consensus that he was born to very pious Nambudiri Brahmin family in a village called Kaladi which is in South India in the state of Kerala, (Mayeda 1979:4). According to Bhattacharya (1982:89) Shankara's parents were devotees of Shiva and his father "indeed *guru* of the living *Shiva*."

5.2.2 HIS CHILDHOOD

Pande (1994:78) repeats the legend that Shankara began to speak in his first year. Bhattacharya (1982:89) says that Shankara learnt Sanskrit before his mother tongue and that only at two years of age did he learn his mother tongue. It was also when he was two years old that, according to Pande (1994:78), Shankara learnt to write. By the third year he is said to have memorised a many of poetries, legend and history and in the following two years learnt a good deal of grammar, rhetoric and logic from the Brahamanas of the time.

According to the *Madhaviya Sankara-vijaya* his father passed away when he was about three years old. Other writers would dispute this as some seem to favour a time before the age of five for the death of his father. It is understood that his father taught him much of what he knew.

There is also general consensus that at the age of five, Shankara performed his *Upanayana*, which is the initiation into student-life, and was sent to the home of a *guru* for formal study. Pande (1994:78) says that in the school of *gurukula* (gurukul is the house of the guru), Shankara mastered the Vedas as well as the six *Angas.* The six *Angas* are: *Siksa* (Phonetics); *Vyakarana* (grammar); *Nirukta* (lexicon, etymology); *Kalpa* (manual of rituals); *Chandas* (prosody); *Jyotisa* (astronomy-astrology).

Bhattacharya (1982:91) confirms that Shankara returned from the *gurukula* two years later, when he was seven, because he had nothing else to learn. Pande (1994:80) seems to suggest that Shankara returned from the *gurukula* in his eighth year after acquiring proficiency in the orthodox systems of philosophy. In order to

accentuate this achievement Klostermaier (1998:106) records that it would have normally taken twelve years to accomplish this feat.

Although Chitralekha Singh and Prem Nath (1996:156) refer to Shankara as an "amazing genius", others have regarded him as an incarnation of *Shiva,* simply because of this unbelievable and extraordinary achievements of this child. Bhattacharya (1982:91) suggests that even scholars, who had heard of Shankara, would visit him and engage with him on matters of grammar and logic, the four Vedas and 'intricate problems' of *Vedanta.* These scholars could not believe that such deep learning could be attained by a child of Shankara's age and that he must be a 'divine soul' in disguises.

Pande (1994:80) suggests that Shankara at the age of eight wanted to renounce the world and become a *samnyasi.* In order for him to become a *samnyasi,* Shankara needed the blessings of his mother who would not concede to this request from Shankara.

A peculiar incident happened one day which rescued him from this predicament. It is understood that while Shankara was bathing in the river, he was caught by a crocodile. He apparently shouted to his mother to release him for renunciation in view of his imminent death. His mother released him, and miraculously Shankara escaped from the crocodile and took the *samnyasi* vow.

5.2.3   SHANKARA AND GOVINDAPADA

According to Pande (1994:81), after taking the *samnyasi* vow, Shankara left home, travelled towards the north to become a "peripatetic mendicant in search of a preceptor." Bhattacharya (1982:98) recounts the long distance that Shankara had to travel on foot through jungles, banks of the river and many towns and villages. It was apparently a hazardous journey.

Eventually on the bank of the Narmada River he met his *guru* Govindapada, who was living in the Narmada forest. It was here that Shankara was initiated into monkhood by Govindapada.

According to Tigunait (1983:217), Govindapada instructed Shankara in the teachings of the *Brahama Sutras* as explained by Vyasa. Govindapada's own *guru*

was Gaudapada who wrote a *karika* (commentary) on the *Mandukya Upanisha* amongst other works.

Most scholars would agree with Tigunait that no works of Govindapada are extant, but that both he and his *guru,* Gaudapada, were greatly respected by Shankara. This can also be attested through Shankara's own writings (Pande 1994:83).

After initiation and proper training in *Vedanta*, Govindapada sent Shankara to Banaras which at that time, according to Klostermaier (1998:106), was the major seat of Hindu learning. It was here that Shankara established himself as a powerful exponent of *Advaita Vedanta* and began gathering disciples around him.

5.2.4 WORKS OF SHANKARA

According to tradition, Shankara composed his commentaries on the *Brahmasutras,* the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*, as well as some other works, when he was twelve years old (Klostermaier 1998:107).

Although many other works have been attributed to Shankara, one has to take cognisance of the arguments of Pande (1994:4,5), where he considers the possibility of obscurity, distortion and numerous contradictions in these works regarding the history and literary works of Shankara.

After a thorough investigation and critical analysis of the literacy works of Shankara, Pande (1998:99-129) concludes that:

> The need for the edition of several texts and for the critical edition of most of those ascribed to Sankara remains a major desideratum in the absence of which definitive stylistic judgements are not always possible. As the texts stand, many of them even contain occasional grammatical lapses which it would be hard to attribute to Sankara himself. This could only reflect faulty publication or preservation.

One is therefore inclined to doubt whether some of the works attributed to Shankara as its author is really authentic.

It is indeed in agreement with this concern of Pande that this thesis would consider and concentrate on the commentaries undisputedly written by Shankara such as the *Brahmasutras,* the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads (the prasthanatraya).* Most scholars on Shankara would agree that these commentaries reflect the basis of Shankara's philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta* and are at times considered as canonical textbooks. The 10 principle Upanishads are also attributed to the pen of Shankara (Prasad 2011:5).

Other original compositions that are attributed to Shankara, yet at times also brought into question regarding his authorship, are works such as *Atmabhoda* (Self-Awareness), *Vivekacudamani* (Crest-Jewel of Discrimination) and the *Upadesasahasri* (One Thousand Instructions). These works serve as introductory textbooks on Vedanta. Potter (2008 119-345) provides a fairly in depth discussion on the authenticity of many other books that are ascribed to Shankara.

Beside commentaries and books written by Shankara, he also composed various hymns to different deities of which the *Bhaja Govindam* is the most well known hymn among them.

Scholars would also agree that the philosopher, Gaudapada, who was the *guru* to Govindapada, who in turn was the *guru* to Shankara, greatly influenced the thinking of Shankara with regards to *Advaita Vedanta.*

Potter (1981:103), when referring to the *Advaitic* tradition correctly postulates that, "The first extant piece of literature that can be safely classified as exclusively Advaitic is attributed... to... Gaudapadacarya."

Pande (1994:149) says with regards to Gaudapada and his influence on Shankara, that, "Of all the pre-Sankara masters of Vedanta, Gaudapada remains the most significant not only because he was the grand-teacher of Sankara but also because his works have survived and hence have continued to exert influence on posterity."

It is therefore in light of such claims that a synopsis of Gaudapada and his philosophy is considered in the following section.

5.2.5 SYNOPSIS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF GAUDAPADA

Advaita Vedanta philosophy is generally associated with Shankara, yet this philosophy taught by Shankara is very old. Sharma (1976:166) confirms this by stating that the earlier works of the "teachers of Vedanta who interpreted the Upanisads in the light of Advaita, though their works are lost ... the Karika of Gaudapada ... is the earliest available work on Advaita Vedanta."

Surendranath Dasgupta (1975:422) says that, "Gaudapada seems to be the most important man, after the Upanisad sages, who revived the monistic tendencies of the Upanisads in a bold and clear form and tried to formulate them in a systematic manner." This also led Shankara to confess that, "the absolutist (*Advaita*) creed was recovered from the Vedas by Gaudapada."

Not many scholars would disagree with Dasgupta on his rendering of the fundamental importance of Gaudapada to *Advaita Vedanta.* The only cause for concern and which is consistently debated is the influence of Buddhism on his thought and whether Gaudapada was not a Buddhist!

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that Gaudapada was influenced by Buddhism to such an extent that Flood (2005:240) suggests that the Buddhist philosopher Bhavaviveka even quoted his Karikas. It must be noted that, although Gaudapada had respect for Buddha and in certain respects he agrees with the Shunyavadins (Mahayana Buddhist theory of negation) and Vijnanavadins (the way of consciousness), it should never mean that Gaudapada was a crypto-Buddhist. Sharma (1976:251) clearly declares Gaudapada to be a "thorough-going Vedantin in and out" and that, "… Mahayana Buddhism and Advaita Vedanata are not two opposed systems of thought, but only a continuation of the same fundamental thought of the Upanisads. He based his philosophy on the Upanisads."

Much of what is known regarding the philosophy of Gaudapada is to be found in his karika on the Mandukya Upanishad which became known as the Mandukya-Karika or Gaudapada-Karika or the Agama-Shastra.

5.2.5.1 SYNOPSIS OF GAUDAPADA'S PHILOSOPHY BASED ON THE MANDUKYA-KARIKA

When referring to Gaudapada's Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad, Mahadevan (1956:142), tries to summarise the thoughts of this Karika by stating that, "Gaudapada expounds the doctrine of the non-dual self through an analysis of the three states of experience, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, exhibits the illusory nature of the world through several arguments and establishes the supreme truth of non-duality which is un-originated, eternal, self luminous bliss."

In light of Mahadevan's summary above, Sharma (1976:242) is of the firm belief that the fundamental doctrine of Gaudapada is the "Doctrine of No-origination." In his explanation he says that, "Negatively, it means that the world, being only an appearance, is in fact never created. Positively, it means that the Absolute, being self-existent, is never created."

One can simply state these postulations in the words of Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi (2006:157) that, "… nothing other than Brahman exists – the whole world is an illusion like a dream."

An enquiry into the thoughts of Gaudapada will have to be conducted via his Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad. According to Aleaz (1996:23), the karika of Gaudapada consists of 215 couplets (Kaika) and is divided into four chapters namely: Agama-prakarana, Vaitathya-prakarana, Advaita-prakarana and Alatasanti-prakarana.

5.2.5.1.1 CHAPTER ONE: TRADITIONAL DOCTRINE (*AGAMA-PRAKARANA*)

The first chapter analyses the three stages of experience (*avasthas*), namely, waking, dream and deep sleep. These stages are experienced at the empirical level. These are the three manifestations of the self. The fourth stage (*Turiya*) establishes that the self underlies and transcends the other three stages. This stage is indefinable and the extinction of appearance (Gaudapada Karika 1:10). Gaudapada considers this duality to be the result of Maya (illusion).

5.2.5.1.2 CHAPTER TWO: UNREALITY (VAITATHYA-PRAKARANA)

The second chapter attempts to prove that the world is an illusion.

In his Karika (II:8) Gaudpada states that in calling the world a dream all existence is unreal. Dasgupta (1975:425) explains this as, "In dreams things are imagined internally, and in the experience that we have when we are awake things are imagined as if existing outside, but both of them are but illusory creations of the self."

An analogy of the above explanation could take the form of a rope and a snake. In the dark a rope can be imagined to be a snake or one could also consider the vision of a mirage, it is not what it is perceived to be. It is the same with the Self; the Self is also imagined by its own illusion in diverse forms (plurality).

5.2.5.1.3   CHAPTER THREE: NON-DUALITY (*ADVAITA-PRAKARANA*)

In his Karika (III:17,18), Gaudapada responds to the dualists by conceding that as an advaitist he also admits duality but that he differs in the sense that duality is confined to the realm of appearances and is not found in reality.

Potter (2008:108,109) provides a good explanation of Gaudapada's Karika (III:1-10) to show non-duality can give rise to apparent duality (e.g. also the Self and self). In these Karikas the analogy of space is used to express the Self (*Atman*) and the self (*jiva*); space is without duality, but can be manifested as portions of space, an example of which is that part of space enclosed in a pot. When the pot is destroyed the space enclosed in the pot merges with the space *simpliciter*, so likewise the *jivas* merge into the Self. This means that the *jiva* is not different from the absolute *Atman*.

Dasgupta (1975:426) explains this duality as a "distinction imposed upon the one (*Advaita*) by Maya."

5.2.5.1.4   CHAPTER FOUR: THE PEACE OF THE FIREBRAND (ALATASANTI-PRAKARANA)

This chapter is basically an enunciation of the Theory of Non-Creation rejecting the concept of god as creator (Chinmayananda 1953:v). The principle result of this theory is that, "so long as one thinks of cause and effect he has to suffer the cycle

of existence (*samsara*), but when that notion ceases there is no samsara"
(Dasgupta 1975:428).

Gaudapada Karila (IV:4) explains that the pre-existing cannot anymore come into existence, since it is already in existence. He attacks the Samkhyan philosophy in his Karika (IV:11) in that if the cause-and-effect relationship is accepted, then the cause will have to become finite and perishable (see 4.4.3.1).

5.3   GAUDAPADA'S CONTRIBUTION TO ADVAITA VEDANTA

In order to conclude this chapter a brief selection from the Gaudapada Karikas will be listed which will illustrate the contribution that Gaudapada made to *Advaita Vedanta.* This list is quoted from Deutsch and Dalvi (2004:158,159).

> I,16. When the empirical self (*jiva*) is awakened from the sleep of beginningless illusion (Maya), it realises the unborn, sleepless, dreamless non-dual (Reality).
>
> I,17. If the phenomenal world were (really) existing then it ought no doubt to disappear. But this (whole universe of) duality is mere illusion: the absolute truth is that of non-duality.
>
> I,18. If anyone merely imagined the world of diversity (to exist). it would disappear (upon the termination of his fancy). This talk (of duality) is only for instruction. There is no duality (when Reality) is known.
>
> II,1. The wise declare the insubstantiality of all things (seen) in a dream because they are within (the body) and are therein confined.
>
> II, 4. As in the dream state so in the waking [*sic*] state, the objects seen are insubstantial because of their being perceived. The difference between them is only that the objects of dream are confined within the body.

II, 11. (Objector's question). If in both states the objects are unreal, who is it that perceives these objects? Who is it that imagines them?

II, 12. The self-luminous Self (*Ātman*) imagines Itself through Itself by the power of its own illusion. It is itself the cognizer of objects. This is the definite conclusion of the Vedānta.

II, 13. The Lord (Self) imagines in various forms the well-defined objects which are in His mind when His mind is turned outward, and (various ideas) when His mind is turned within.

II, 17. As a rope, which is not clearly perceived in the dark, is imagined to be a snake or a line of water, so the Self is imagined in different ways.

II, 18. As definite knowledge of the rope destroys all illusions about it and the conviction arises that it is nothing but a rope, so is the nature of the Self determined.

II, 31. As dream and illusion or a castle in the air are seen (to be unreal), so this whole universe is seen by those who are wise in Vedānta.

II, 32. There is no dissolution and no creation, no one in bondage and no one who is striving for or who is desirous of liberation, and there is no one who is liberated. This is the absolute truth.

III, 15. The creation which has been set forth in different ways by illustrations of earth, metal, sparks is only a means for introducing the truth. In no manner are there any real distinctions.

III, 19. The birthless One is differentiated only through illusion, and in no other way. For if differentiation were real then the immortal would become mortal (which is absurd).

III, 28. There is no birth for a non-existent thing either through illusion or in reality. The son of a barren woman is not born either through illusion or in reality.

III, 46. When the mind does not disappear nor again is dispersed, when it is motionless and without sense-images, then it becomes Brahman.

III, 48. No individual is born, for there is nothing to cause (its birth). This (Brahman) is that highest truth - where nothing is born.

In the following chapter the philosophy of Shankara will be examined with consideration to his concepts related to his epistemology, theory of causation, concept of Maya and Ishvara, levels of consciousness, as well as the idea of salvation (moksha).

CHAPTER 6
EXPOSITION OF SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY OF RADICAL NON-DUALISM (ADVAITA VEDANTA)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

By discussing Shankara's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, the main concepts of his philosophy will be systematically addressed. It is primarily an exposition of the salient features of his philosophy of *Advaita*. A critical analysis will be attempted in chapter seven which examines his philosophy on the notion of Maya and *Avatara*.

It is necessary to reiterate in this chapter that Shankara was not the founder of *Advaita* Vedanta, although the philosophy of *Advaita* is generally associated with him. Potter (2008:6) says, in support of this statement that, "Through the number of diligent scholars, we can now safely say that Samkara did not found Advaita Vedanta ..." Of equal significance is that there were points of distinction between Shankara and these scholars on matters of *Advaita.*

A very broad definition of *Advaita* and one which encapsulates the fundamental core of the philosophy of *Advaita* is provided by Sankaranarayanan (1999:1):

> Advaita is the Truth about the nature of the Supreme Reality, of Man and of the Universe... It is a final experience or realisation... it is a denial of duality... In the last analysis, Reality is only one; of that Ultimate Reality, it cannot be said that there are two. It also denies the disparateness of the Universe and Man from that Reality... It does not, however, deny the *existence* of the Universe and of Man; but only denies their *reality*. They are forms in which Reality *appears*; but they are not real *in the manner in which they appear*. They 'exist'; but they are not 'real.'

This broad definition indeed needs to be expounded upon so as to make it comprehensible to the enquiring mind. It is therefore necessary to provide a brief summary of that which is constitutive in the above broad definition of *Advaita* before delving deeper into the philosophy of *Advaita,* especially the *Advaita* of Shankara.

Potter (2008:6) provides an excellent summary of that which is widely constitutive of *Advaita* philosophy and which is shared and agreed upon by most scholars of *Advaita* including those philosophers that may differ with Shankara on certain aspects of *Advaita.* This summary will provide a launching pad for further discussions on the philosophy of Shankara, as an attempt is made to sieve through and untangle some of the crucial features of his philosophy of *Advaita*.

6.2   A SUMMARY OF THE SALIENT DOCTRINES OF *ADVAITA* VEDANTA

The salient features of the basic Advaita doctrines are well summarised by Potter (2008:6). He divides these doctrines into a theoretical and practical basis. The following two paragraphs, 6.2.1. and 6.2.2. are a summary of these salient features of Advaita Vedanta as postulated by Potter:

6.2.1   THEORETICAL BASIS

- The purpose of philosophy is to point the way to liberation (*moksha)* from the bondage of rebirth (*samsara*).
- Bondage is a product of our ignorance (*avidya*); the true Self (*atman*) is not bound, does not transmigrate, is eternally liberated.
- Bondage is beginningless and operates with regularity as long as ignorance is not removed.
- Since bondage depends on ignorance, liberation is manifested upon the removal of ignorance by acquiring its opposite, namely, knowledge (*vidya*).
- The operation of ignorance consists in its creating apparent distinctions (*bheda*) where none actually exists.
- Therefore knowledge involves awareness that all distinctions are false, especially the distinction between the knower and the known.
- This awareness, which constitutes liberating knowledge, which is free from subject-object distinctions, is pure, immediate consciousness (*cit, anubhava*).
- The true Self is itself just that pure consciousness, without which nothing can be known in any way.
- And that same true Self, pure consciousness, is not different from the ultimate world Principle, Brahman, because if Brahman were conceived as

the   object off Self-awareness it would involve subject-object distinction and, as said above, this is a product of ignorance.

- The real is that which is not set aside as false, not sublated (*badha*), in contrast to products of ignorance, which are eventually sublated.

- [...], it follows that Brahman [...] is the only Reality (*sat*), [...] and [...] is not sublatable, for sublation itself depends on there being consciousness.

- Pure consciousness is experienced during deep sleep; since we awake refreshed, it is inferred that pure consciousness (reality, Brahman, the true Self) is also the ultimate bliss.

6.2.2 PRACTICAL BASIS

The practical basis serves as an indication of the thought process of Shankara when he has to defend some of his philosophical thoughts, especially when he has to explain some difficult passages in the Upanishads and the Epics which seems contrary to his philosophy.

- Since all distinctions are the product of ignorance, any positive account of a path to liberation, involving distinctions, must be ultimately false.

- However, some false views are less misleading than others. By criticising worse views one arrives by stages at better ones.

In an attempt to discuss the above tenets this chapter will focus on those fundamental principles which will set the basis for furthering the argument which will lead to addressing those issues raised in the problem statement of this thesis. Masih (1988:258) claims that Shankara's philosophy comprises three topics. Topic 1: The nature of Brahman; Topic 2: The identity of *jiva* (soul) and Brahman: Topic 3: *Mayavada* (loosely interpreted as 'illusion'). This chapter will address the first two topics. The third topic, *Mayavada*, will be discussed in chapter seven.

Before attempting this discussion on *Advaita,* some very important questions arise from the above definition and what is widely constitutive of *Advaita* (see 6.1). One of the major questions is 'what is reality?' If the Universe and Man, according to *Advaita,* are not real, then what is their status? Are they false? Are they illusions? Do they exist in the first place? In response to these questions Sankaranarayanan (1999:2) offers an answer by stating that, "They too are real, but in a special

sense. They are not real in the manner that the Ultimate Reality is said to be real. But they are not dismissed as illusions."

6.3 TEST OF REALITY

In the course of discussions on the philosophy of *Advaita,* the answers to the above questions would be forthcoming in this thesis. To expound on the response of Sankaranarayanan, different analogies are used to explain 'What is real?' Shankara, through his philosophy of *Advaita* makes reference to three different orders of reality: Absolute / Transcendental (*Paramarthika*), Empirical / Phenomenal / Experiential (*Vyavaharika*) and Illusory / Reflectional (*Pratibhasika*).

The understanding and testing of reality, according to *Advaita*, is based on the criterion of truth. For something to be true, it has to have an element of non-contradiction and has to survive through the three periods of time: past, present and future (Narain 2003:15, 16). In the BSB (2.3.7) an example is used of knowledge, time and knower. It is here that the object of knowledge changes over time, either in the past, present or future, but the knower, or knowing agent remains unchanged, because, according to Shankara, the knower has the nature of being ever present. To understand this in its perspective, Shankara (BSB 2.3.7) says that "when a body is reduced to ashes, the Self is not reduced to nothing, Its nature being such that It is ever present; and precisely because of this it is not possible to conceive of any change in Its nature."

It stands to reason therefore that if the object exists only in one or two periods of time it can be construed to be only partially and not wholly real.

6.4 NATURE AND ORDERS OF REALITY

In the previous section (see 6.3.) reference was made to the three orders of reality which forms the fundamental principle of Shankara's philosophy of *Advaita.* This section will focus on these orders of reality and will provide examples to illustrate these principles. In order to initiate this discussion, the nature of reality would first be investigated. In this way the orders of reality would be better understood.

In addressing the nature of reality, Shankara, in the preamble to his BSB (Gambhirananda (trans) 2006:1), sets the theme of discrimination in its proper perspective. Here he says that:

> ... the superimposition of the object, referable through the concept "you", and its attributes on the subject that is conscious by nature and is referable through the concept "we" (should be impossible), and contrariwise the superimposition of the subject and its attributes on the object should be impossible. Nevertheless, owing to an absence of discrimination between these attributes, as also between substances, which are absolutely disparate, there continues a natural human behaviour based on self-identification in the form of "I am this" or "This is mine." This behaviour has for its material cause an unreal nescience and man resorts to it by mixing up reality with unreality as a result of superimposing the things themselves or their attributes on each other.

In this context, Shankara maintains that discrimination or differentiation (resulting in appearances) is as a result of superimposition which assumes names and forms. This superimposition on a substratum is what is referred to as "mixing up reality with unreality." The meaning of this text and to which would be alluded in the following sections, Shankara holds the view that the substratum upon which superimposition takes place is real and the superimposed is the empirical or 'not real'. Sundara Ramaiah (1982:52) explains this by suggesting that, "The reality of the appearances, according to Sankara, viewed from different standpoints, is neither real nor unreal."

6.4.1 NATURE OF REALITY

Based on the criterion of truth as understood by Shankara that the ultimate nature of truth (reality) is immutable and permanent, Shankara bases this criterion on Gaudapada's explanation of the 'essential Immortal' entity found in his *karikas* (glossary) on the Mandukya Upanishad. In the Mandukya Upanishad with Gaudapada's *Karika* (3.21, 22), it is stated that, "The Immortal cannot become mortal nor can the mortal become Immortal. It is never possible for anything to

change itself in its essential nature and yet remain the same. How can he, who believes that the essential Immortal entity becomes mortal, maintain at once that the Immortal after a modification retains Its own essential nature of Immutability?"

Chinmayananda (1953:221) explains this to mean that it is only the dualist who believes that the Immortal can undergo a change so as to create a world of plurality from the Immortal (Supreme, Brahman, Self).

In the later sections of this thesis, a two level understanding of Brahman would be investigated which will clearly elucidate how Brahman (the Immortal) can "undergo a change so as to create a world of plurality ..." The word 'change' in this instant used by Chinmayananda may not be the correct rendering of what Shankara wishes to express in discussing the creation of the plurality of the universe. The simple reason is that Brahman cannot change. In the BSB (1.1.14) Shankara responds to an opponent who, from an analogy of clay and pots, draws the conclusion that Brahman is capable of transformation, says that, "Brahman is known to be changeless from the Upanishadic texts denying all kinds of change..."

Shankara (Nikhilananda 2000:171), in commenting on these karikas says that it is not possible for a thing to reverse its nature. He uses the example of fire and heat in that fire can never change its character of being hot.

A careful rendering of Shankara's commentary of the Kenopanishad (1.2-8) alludes to the nature of Brahman or Atman, the Ultimate Reality, as transcending space, time and relation. Narain (2003:21,22) summarises the above nature of reality by stating that:

> [the] account of nature of Reality, as professed by Gaudapada and Samkara on the basis of Upanishadic revelations, clearly demonstrates their monistic and substantialist predilections when they affirm that the Absolute Reality, behind the changing forms of phenomena, is immutable, everlasting, eternal, immortal and one.

This qualifies Brahman (also referred to as Immortal, Ultimate Reality, Self), in accordance with *Advaita* definition of 'real', to be regarded as true and real.

6.4.2 ORDERS OF REALITY

The orders of reality, as found in the commentaries of Shankara, are used to explain the status of world-phenomena and its position as against the ultimate nature of Reality. Narain (2003:39) draws a distinction between these 'realities' and what is known as 'absolute non-existence' (*alika*). Examples of absolute non-existence would be things that are incapable of existing in all periods of time such as reference to a 'son of a barren mother' (Mandukya Upanishad 3.28).

It is important to note that in the context of the above understanding of 'realities' and *alika*, the position of *Advaita* vedantists is not a philosophy of illusion but rather a philosophy of 'absolute reality' (Brahman) and 'empirical reality' (appearances). The term 'empirical reality' postulates a position of that which is neither real nor unreal. This position is known in *Advaita* as '*mithya'* and should not be regarded as 'illusion' (Sankaranarayanan 1999:12-13).

Shankara's philosophy of the Ultimate Reality is known as '*paramarthika*'. In the further discussions on Shankara's philosophy of *Advaita* in this thesis, *paramarthika* or the Transcendental Absolute is the only reality whereas all other phenomena are false (*mithya*) (Narain 2003:39). This *mithya* is different from *alika*. This is better explained by the following two orders of reality known as *Vyavaharika* (empirical, phenomenal or experiential) and *Pratibhasika* (illusory or reflectional).

6.4.2.1   PRATIBHASIKA

The word *pratibhasika* means reflectional or illusion. This occurs in the phenomenal or empirical mode of life. This phenomenal or empirical mode of life is regarded as not real rather than unreal. It is the superimposition on the empirical substratum that creates an illusion or a reflection. Shankara in the Samanvaya of his BS (1.1) defines superimposition as, awareness, similar in nature to memory that arises on a different (foreign) basis as a result of some past experience."

An example of this is a reflection in the mirror. Although the reflection is an image of the real, it does not have the same reality of the reflected object. When considered properly, the reflection 'exists', but is not real like the object it reflects

which is real. The 'reality', according to Sankaranarayanan (1999:2-3), in the restricted sense is only, if it can be put so, *reflectional* or *pratibhasika*.

To further entrench the understanding of *pratibhasika* Narain (2003:40) uses illusions created by a mirage, the reflection of silver on a conch-shell and the example of the snake and rope. The snake and rope example is used by Shankara on more than one instance to explain his philosophy of the empirical world.

In this instance it is used to explain the superimposition of a snake on a rope. In this instance the rope is empirically the real support of the snake illusion, the illusion that can only dispelled upon enlightenment through correct knowledge, concluding that it is only a rope and not a snake. Ramaiah (1982:53) explains this correct knowledge as a 'higher level of experience'. Therefore, he says that, "Viewed from a higher level of experience the lower perceptions are unreal. But before the higher experience had set in, the snake was perfectly real for that particular individual." In later sections the individual (*jiva*) will be addressed.

6.4.2.2   VYAVAHARIKA

To explain this 'reality' reference is made to the example of the reflection in the mirror of the previous section. In this example it was noted that the reflection was an image of the real but does not have the same reality of the 'real'. In *vyavaharika* 'reality' this 'real' which is reflected in the mirror is an experienced reality.

Using Shankara's example of the rope and snake, in the *vyavaharika* reality, the rope comes into question. In the *pratibhasika* 'reality', it was only upon correct knowledge that the snake illusion disappears and the rope 'reality' was experienced. Shankara refers to this rope 'reality' as being an empirical reality. This simply means that there is a substratum that gives the rope an empirical reality or what at other times is referred to as 'whole-world-appearance' (Narain 2003:41). Shankara qualifies this in his commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad (2.33). In this commentary he confirms that no illusion "is ever perceived without a substratum. As 'non-duality' is the substratum of all illusions (from the standpoint of ignorance) and also as it is, in its *real* nature, never unchangeable, non-duality alone is (the highest) bliss even in the state of imagination, *i.e.,* the empirical experiences."

This qualification from Shankara suggests that Brahman is the substratum of all empirical reality. Narain (2003:41) explains this when he contrasts the difference between *pratibhasika* and *vyavaharika* by stating that, "[A] distinguishing feature between the two orders of reality [...] is the difference in the characters of their sublation." In the case of *pratibhasika* "the percipient subject (pramata) and its knowledge is not sublated." In the case of *vyavaharika*, "When the true knowledge of Self or Brahman dawns, the whole-world-appearance [...] dissolves." Therefore the nature *vyavaharika* can be defined as, "the appearance caused by the potentialities of the beginningless avidya sublatable only at the true knowledge of Self or Brahman" (Narain 2003:42).

Ramaiah (1982:54), when alluding to the three kinds of reality discussed above, correctly states that these realities are not to be seen as three distinct kinds of realities independent of each other, but as phases or appearances of the transcendent reality which is the sole Reality.

To conclude this discussion on the order of reality, it can be summarised as follows:

- *Paramarthika* – is transcendental, immutable, ultimately and absolutely real. It can never be sublated in any period of time.
- *Pratibhasika* – is reflectional and conditioned by the individual ignorance. It is neither real nor unreal.
- *Vyavaharika* – is empirical (experiential) reality and is determined by Maya[7] (loosely termed as 'illusion'). It is neither real nor unreal.

The discussions above have laid the foundation for the deliberation on the three topics suggested by Masih (see 6.2.1). Before engaging in the first topic on the 'Nature of Brahman', one needs to be certain that such an exercise is possible from the Upanishads.

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[7] Maya will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

6.5   DELIBERATION ON BRAHMAN

The term Brahman, as explained by Deutsch (1985:9), appeared first in the Rig Veda. This term was used for sacred utterances to attain worldly wishes and other desires because it was assumed to have had magical powers. In this regard Brahman could have meant 'spell' or 'prayer'. It was only later in the Brahamanas, according to Deutsch (1985:9) that Brahman signified "that which stands behind the gods as their ground and source." It is only in the Upanishads that Brahman "becomes the unitary principle of all being, the knowledge of which liberates one from finitude" (Deutsch 1985:9).

With this understanding of the term Brahman, and in the discussions thus far in this thesis, words such as the Immortal, Ultimate Reality and The Absolute were used to refer to Brahman. Therefore an enquiry into Brahman is important in the context of these discussions. This enquiry raises two important questions about Brahman: firstly, who or what is Brahman? Secondly, can one undertake a deliberation on Brahman?

In order to answer the first question, a response to the second question needs to be attempted: can one undertake a deliberation on Brahman?

Shankara, in his BSB (1.1.1) states categorically that, "[...] it is logically possible for a man who has studied the Upanishads to undertake a deliberation on Brahman without deliberation on the religious rites." Further, based on that same aphorism, Shankara says that, "the Brahman to be inquired into [...] is a pre-existing entity" and that, "[...] Vedic texts speaking of Brahman give rise only to Its knowledge."

Shankara suggests in the BSB (1.1.1) that, "[F]or getting a direct knowledge of Brahman one should undertake a deliberation on the Upanishadic texts."

Now that it has been established from the BSB that one can undertake a deliberation on Brahman, the first question comes into effect: Who or what is Brahman?

6.6   NATURE OF BRAHMAN

When asked by an opponent as to what can be a definition of Brahman, reference was made to the BS (1.1.2) where it is stated that, "That (is Brahman) from which (are derived) the birth etc. of this (universe)." Together with this aphorism, Shankara also refers to the TU (3.1.1) to provide an answer and to complete the preferred meaning of this aphorism in the BS.

In the TU (3.1.1), upon Brigu's request that his father, Varuna, teach him about Brahman, Varuna says that, "Food, vital force, eye, ear, mind, speech – these are aids to the knowledge of Brahman. [But] crave to know well that from which all these things take birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge. That is Brahman."

By way of explaining the different Sanskrit words in the aphorism (BS 1.1.1) and taking into account TU (3.1.1), Shankara explains the whole meaning of the BS (1.1.1) to be:

> That omniscient and omnipotent source must be Brahman from which occur the birth, continuance, and dissolution of this universe that is manifested through name and form, that is associated with diverse agents and experiences, that provides the support for actions and results, having well-regulated space, time, and causation, and that defiles all thoughts about the real nature of its creation.

Shankara, in this explanation, simply states that Brahman is the source from which the universe has its existence and yet It is not related to anything that can be grasped. Further to this explanation, Shankara (BSB 1.2.1) says that, "It [Brahman] [is] outside the range of sense-perception. The senses naturally comprehend objects, and not Brahman." In this context Brahman is presented as the cause of the origin of the universe.

According to Shankara BSB (1.1.3), Brahman is also omniscient. He makes reference to the emergence of the Rig Veda stating that Brahman is responsible for its emergence and the source of all kinds of knowledge.

What has been described thus far about Brahman is related to what appeals to the senses, what is imposed upon Brahman, what is extracted from the Vedas, Upanishads and other scriptures. These definitions only satisfy the quest for the knowledge of Brahman. The reality of the matter is that Brahman cannot be confined to a definition.

The Upanishads have described Brahman as 'one without a second' (CU 6.2.2) as indescribable and beyond any human category of thought or speech. According to Masih (1988:259-260), the most common way of speaking about Brahman is that it is, "*Satyam* [Truth]*, Jnanam* [Knowledge]*, anandam* [Infinite]" (TU 2.1.1). In the BU (2.3.6) it is stated, "Now therefore the description (of Brahman): 'Not this. Not this'. Because there is no other and more appropriate description than this 'Not this.'"

Shankara, in commentating on this description, says that these words refer to something that has no distinguishing marks such as name, form, action, species or qualities. Therefore Brahman cannot be described as, "It is such and such." Another important comment by Shankara on this aphorism is that when Brahman is described in such terms as, "Knowledge, Bliss, Brahman (BU 3.9.28(7)), and Pure, Intelligence (BU 2.6.12)", then name, form and action is superimposed on Brahman. He proceeds further to suggest that, "When we wish to describe Its true nature, free from all differences due to limiting adjuncts, then it is an utter impossibility. Then there is only one way left, viz. to describe It as 'Not this, not this.'"

Shankara concludes his commentary on this aphorism by stating, in response to an objection as to whether it is fair to describe Brahman thus, that, "Because there is no other and more appropriate description (of Brahman) than this Not this, not this', therefore this is the only description of Brahman."

In response therefore to the questions as to, "Who or what is Brahman", it can be concluded, according to our discussions thus far on Shankara's understanding, that Brahman is neither, "Who or what", and can never be described. Shankara does though give a brief glimpse to a two level understanding of Brahman, one on which can be described. These two levels of Brahman will be discussed later.

6.7 NATURE OF SELF

In the previous section, the nature of Brahman was discussed. Although all forms of defining Brahman was, according to the Upanishads, indescribable, based on empirical reality, a definition nonetheless was attempted. In the case of the self, which, at times is referred to as the *jiva* or *Atman* and at other times even soul, a definition is necessary. In this definition, the questions that need to be answered are: What is the self? What is the 'I' or the self of man? Is the physical body the answer? No! An example is when a part of one's body is cut off one does not refer to that part of the body as 'I'! One makes a distinction between that part of the body and 'I'. But one would refer to that part of the body as 'mine'. The reason for this is because the ego relates to that part of the body. The ego expresses possession. Therefore that part of the body is not 'I' but 'mine'.

Menon (2007:18) says that according to Shankara the 'I' has four meanings: (1) the inner consciousness or knower, (2) the inner organ (*antahkarana*), (3) the ego and (4) the *jiva* or soul. The first 'I', the inner consciousness or knower, is regarded by Shankara as the 'Self'. Here we can make a distinction between the 'Self" with a capital 'S' and 'self' with a small letter 's'. It is the individual person who is referred to as the 'self' which, according to Menon (2007:18), can be the *antahkarana* which is described as the material, thinking and perceiving mind, or the ego, which is a physical thing with attributes and finally the *jiva* or soul which is like a spirit that can leave and enter the body upon death and reincarnation. The 'Self' is none of these. The 'Self' according to Shankara is the knower of all (MUS 1.6).

6.7.1 BRAHMAN AND SELF AS IDENTICAL

According to Sankaranarayanan (1999:25), "the real 'I' of every man, his true self, which in Vedantic language is called the *atman* [...] [is] in the man's innermost being. These other things, from the ego to the body all function outward; but man's true self is deep down in his recesses and is seated inside. It can be apprehended only when a man looks into himself freed from all external diversions and enticements." This comment from Sankaranarayanan seems to refer to the indescribable Brahman. As discussed earlier, Brahman is only realised when all forms (states) of appearances are dissolved through real knowledge (*jnana*).

Therefore in *advaitic* philosophy the 'I' or Self is identified with Brahman. In the CU (5.11.1), the question is asked, "Which is our Self? Who is Brahman? Shankara responds by suggesting that the words Self and Brahman are the adjectives and substantives of each other. This means that when one is describing the Self, Brahman becomes the adjective and in so doing substantiates the Self and vice versa. In this way, according to Shankara, "the Self is indeed Brahman, and Brahman is surely the Self, without duality."

In the CU (6.8.7) the father says to his son, Svetaketu, "That which is this subtle essence, all this has got That as the Self. That is Truth. That is the Self. Thou art That, O Svetaketu." Shankara explains that the 'subtle essence' in this passage is actually a reference to Existence, the Source of the universe. From our discussions earlier (see 6.5 and 6.6), Existence or in this case, 'subtle essence' is a reference to Brahman. In essence, therefore, what the father is saying to Svetaketu by using the word "Thou art That", is that Svetaketu is 'That' (Existence or Brahman).

To return to the question asked at the beginning of this section, 'What is the self?' and 'What is the 'I' or the self of man?' Shankara answers these questions emphatically by stating that the Self is Brahman.

There are a number of Upanishadic passages that categorically states that the Self and Brahman is one: "[...] and this all are Self' (BU 2.4.6); "All this is but Brahman" (MU 2.2.2); "The Self indeed is all this" (CU 7.25.2); "There is no difference whatsoever in it" (BU 4.4.19).

Therefore Deutsch (1985:48) could refer to the Self as "that pure, undifferentiated self-shining consciousness, timeless, spaceless, and unthinkable, that is not different from Brahman..."

6.7.2 SELF EXPLAINED IN DIFFERENT STATE OF EXISTENCE

In empirical reality, the Self, just like Brahman, is perceived to be individual souls (*jiva*). This is due to the superimposition on the 'Self' (BSB 2.3.50). Deutsch 1985:51) explains this relation between the *jiva* and the Self as a combination of reality and experience. He (1985:51) suggests that the *jiva* is 'reality' "as far as

Atman is it's ground; it is "appearance" so far as it is identified as finite, conditioned, relative."

In order to explain how the 'Self' becomes many it is explained through the analogy of sleep and dreaming states. This analogy dominates Gaudapada's *Karikas* of the Mandukya Upanishad.

This analogy is also taken up by Shankara to explain the influence of *Mayavada* as found in his BSB (3.2.3). In this aphorism it is stated that, "But the dream creation is a mere Maya, because of its nature of not being a complete manifestation of the totality of attributes."

This concept of Maya becomes the bedrock upon which Shankara is able to explain the difficulties encountered in his philosophy with regards to the 'existence' of the empirical world.

6.8   AN OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER 6 AND A PREVIEW OF CHAPTER 7

With the conclusion of this chapter it must be reiterated that volumes could be written on Shankara and his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. This chapter, though, served the purpose to introduce the main tenets of his philosophy with regards to the nature of Brahman and the Self whilst understanding the nature and orders of reality as conceived by Shankara.

In the following chapter (chapter 7) on *Mayavada* much of Shankara's expositions are explained which lends itself to an understanding of which is to be regarded as purely ontological in relation to the cosmological in his philosophy of *Advaita* Vedanta. This seventh chapter on *Mayavada* therefore forms the third and concluding topic on the philosophy of Shankara as expressed by Masih (see 6.2.2).

CHAPTER 7
SHANKARA AND HIS CONCEPT OF MAYA AS THE BASIS FOR DISCUSSING HIS NOTION OF AVATARA

7.1   INTRODUCTION

What has not been gauged thus far in this thesis with regards to Shankara's *Advaita Vedanta* is the link in the relationship between the Ultimate Reality (*paramarthika*), and the non-real and empirical worlds of *pratibhasika*, *vyavaharika* and *jivas* (individuals) (see 6.4.2.1; 6.4.2.2; 6.7).

According to Masih (1988:199) both Jainism and Buddhism found that it was impossible for the undifferentiated Brahman to explain the world of differentiated things and Jivas. The operative word, in this criticism of Shankara's understanding of the relationship between Brahman and the world of differentiated things, is the word 'impossible'. This is probably one of the greatest challenges faced by Shankara in his philosophy: to prove how the undifferentiated Brahman relates to undifferentiated things.

To support the above criticism further, the study thus far, and inherent in Shankara's philosophy, has shown, on the one hand, that Brahman (the non-dual, Ultimate Reality), is indescribable, attributeless, actionless and formless while, on the other hand, the world, as understood by man (*jiva*, soul,) can be perceived as discrimination.

To add to this dilemma, Ramanuja, according to Chennakesavan (1980:64), disclaims this doctrine of Shankara somewhat with the suggestion that Brahman does have qualities. Ramanuja, from a text in the Mundaka Upanishad, describes Brahman as "He who is all knowing which can only mean that the essential characteristic is that Brahman has knowledge" (Chennakesavan 1980:64).

In order to cement this thought of Brahman with knowledge, Ramanuja, in his exposition of the Vedanta Sutras, states clearly, on page five, that the word Brahman denotes the highest person who is:

> essentially free from all imperfection and possesses numberless
> classes of auspicious qualities of unsurpassable excellence. The

term Brahman is applied to anything which possesses the quality of greatness but primarily denotes that which possesses greatness of essential nature as well as qualities in unlimited fullness and such is only the Lord of all. Hence the Lord of all is that Brahman.

Therefore in contrast to Shankara, Ramanuja endows Brahman with essential qualities of greatness, perfection and knowledge amongst others. Hence Ramanuja stands in contrast with Shankara's philosophy of an undifferentiated Brahman!

Nonetheless, the *advaitic* understanding is that this undifferentiated Brahman is the creator of the world. The following assertions are made from the different Upanishads to prove this statement. In the BU (2.1.20) it is stated that, "[…] so from this Self emanate all organs, all worlds, all gods, and all beings." The CU (6.2.3-4) states, "That [Existence] saw, 'I shall become many. I shall be born.'" In the AU (1.1.2) it is stated that, "He created these worlds" and last but not least, as there are many other references in the Upanishads, the BSB (1.1.2) states that, "That (is Brahman) from which (are derived) the birth etc. of this (universe)." These texts in the Upanishads all substantiates that Brahman created the empirical world. There are also texts in the *smriti* such as the BG (7.6), "Know that all things have their birth in these [inferior and superior nature]. So, I am the source and dissolution of the whole universe." The question is: how can this Brahman that is indescribable, attributeless, actionless and formless create the universe or more philosophically, how do we explain the reality of the world around us emanating from such a Brahman?

This question finds expression in the criticism by the Buddhist and Jain scholars with regards to the undifferentiated Brahman of Shankara as seen earlier in this section. In reply to these criticisms, Shankara makes a distinction between a 'lower' Brahman and a 'higher' Brahman. These distinctions can be found in the following aphorisms: Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.8; Maitri 5.15.22, 36; 7.8; Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 2.3.1-3; Svetasvatara Upanishad 7.3. This distinction is discussed further in 7.7. It is sufficient to mention at this time that it is this 'lower' Brahman which Shankara refers to as Ishvara and that the phenomenal world is due to Maya*.* More information regarding these concepts will be discussed later.

In light of the above discussions, Sankaranarayanan (1999:46), in the quest to understand the link between Brahman and the empirical world poses this question: 'What is the *modus operandi* of the transition of the One to the Many?' The One here would refer to the undifferentiated Brahman and the many will refer to the differentiated things and the *jivas.*

7.2   BRAHMAN AND THE WORLD

The relationship between Brahman and the empirical world can be described by the term *vyavaharika* (see 6.4.2.2). This means that the relationship between Brahman and the empirical world is similar to the relationship between appearance and reality as seen in the example of the snake-rope illusion (see 6.4.2.2). But is the empirical world an appearance of Brahman?

According to Masih (1988:269) the empirical world is an appearance of Brahman because Brahman 'appears as such to a jiva under the influence of *avidya* [ignorance]." He cautions though that according to *Advaita* there is "no change or transformation of Brahman into the empirical world."

Considering the example between rope and snake: the rope appears as a snake, yet when correct knowledge is applied, the snake disappears, not only does the rope remain, but nothing happens to the rope. It remains what it is: a rope! However, as suggested by Masih (1988:270), the rope serves as the "support or ground on which the snake is superimposed to appear as a snake. In the same way, the empirical world does not affect Brahman, as long as it lasts, nor, is there any change in Brahman, as soon as there is Brahman-realisation in a jiva."

7.2.1   BRAHMAN NOT THE CAUSE OF THE EMPIRICAL WORLD

The above relation between Brahman and the appearance of the empirical world is inaccurately construed as if Brahman is the 'cause' of the empirical world. Brahman cannot be the cause of the empirical world as He remains unchanged and unaffected by the appearance and disappearance of the empirical world once the *jiva* attains knowledge of Brahman.

7.2.1.1 SHANKARA'S VIEW: THROUGH IGNORANCE AND NESCIENCE

Since Brahman remains unchanged, as seen above, the question that needs to be asked then is the manner in which the empirical world comes into being. According to Shankara, the empirical world comes into being through ignorance and nescience. By further interrogation, the question is: where does nescience emerge from? To Shankara this nescience is beginningless and indescribable (Masih 1988:270). This indeed is a great 'paralysing shortcoming of the system as Ramanuja and many other subsequent critics of Advaita has understood this to be unimaginable' (Masih 1988:270).

7.2.1.2 RAMANUJA'S VIEW: SOUL AND BODY (QUALIFIED NON-DUALISM)

Ramanuja seems to postulate the theory, in contradiction to Shankara, in that he says, "Brahman is the soul, and, the whole of the jivas and world is said to be his body" (SBH. 2.1.9). In his SBH 1.1.1, Ramanuja maintains that the plurality of the world depends on Brahman becoming many as found in the CHH U 6.2.3. It is for this reason that Ramanuja's philosophy is known as qualified non-dualism because to him, the non-dual nature of reality is qualified in the sense that reality 'consists of a unity that contains within it internal differences' (Adams 1988:35). To explain this relationship, Brahman, the world and the soul are eternally related with the world and the soul existing with Brahman and therefore also dependent on Brahman.

7.2.1.3 BHARTRHARI'S AND MANDANA'S LINGUISTIC VIEW: UNIVERSE AS CREATION OF BRAHMAN AS WORD

Bhartrhari (5th century CE), one of the older philosophers, or more accurately, a linguist, was probably one of the most influential figures in the establishment of linguistic analyses. King (1999:47) contends that Bhartrhari strongly believed that language is not only a philosophical tradition, "but remains the most important *darsana* since it is the task of the grammarian to preserve the purity of the Vedic message and prevent the corruption of the language ..."

From the above emotional attachment to linguistics, one can expect that Bhartrhari would more likely than not believe that creation is the result of the creative power of the word (*shaba*). Mandana, according to Potter (2008:54), seems to lean

towards Bhartrhari's thesis above, and appears to be that Brahman "is consciousness, that consciousness is the power of speech." The conclusion follows that "Brahman is of the nature of speech; the whole universe is a manifestation (*vivarta*) of speech." Therefore for Bhartrhari, the manifold universe is a creation of Brahman as word.

7.2.1.4   MADHAVA'S VIEW: BRINGING TOGETHER THE NON-DUALISTIC AND LINGUISTIC THEORY

Madhava (1882:219) assumes a likeness to Bhartrhari's theory, similar to that of Mandana, where he clearly brings together the non-dualistic theory and the use of words to express manifoldness. In this way he is able to express how the one can appear as many. He explains this view as follows: Brahman is the thing denoted by all words; and this one object has various differences imposed upon it according to each particular form; but the conventional variety of the differences produced by these illusory conditions is only the result of ignorance. Non-duality is the true state; but through the power of 'concealment' [exercised by illusion] at the time of the conventional use of words a manifold expansion takes place (Madhava 1882:219).

In the Vedas it can be seen how much significance is attached to the creative power of the word. In Rg 10.71.7 Vac, the goddess of speech as creator receives adulation. In Rg 1.164.35 the relationship between Brahman and speech is evident where the text implies that speech is the final abode of Brahman. In the Vakyapadiya 1.9, with regards to cause of the universe, Bhartrhari describes the sacred syllable Om as the 'source of all scripture and the common factor of all original courses'.

7.2.2 UNDERSTANDING CAUSE AND EFFECT IN DISCUSSION OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAHMAN AND THE WORLD

In discussing this relationship between Brahman and the world, an understanding of cause and effect must be comprehended. Generally that which produces is called the cause and that which is produced from the cause is known as the effect (Kar 1985:113). When reference is made to a 'causal relation', then two things are involved which includes a cause and an effect as stated above. When the BS (2.1.4) states that, "Brahman is not the cause of the universe owing to the

dissimilarity in the nature of this universe…" one may ask whether there is a 'causal relationship' between Brahman and the world.

This aphorism seems to contradict other aphorisms of the Advaitic as seen from previous aphorism mentioned above where it is clearly stated that Brahman is the cause of the universe (AU 1.1.2).

7.2.2.1   DISCUSSION OF WHETHER BRAHMAN IS THE CAUSE OF THE UNIVERSE OR NOT

Shankara refutes the understanding and exegesis of BS 2.1.4., especially when the non-advaitists, referred to in this passage, use this aphorism to entrench their belief that Brahman is not the cause of the world. In the first chapter of the BSB, Shankara proved, through the discussions and deliberation of Brahman, that the Upanishadic texts (*shruti*) are in agreement in proving Brahman as the cause of the universe. This is deduced from the BSB (1.4.28). In chapter two of the BSB (2.1.1-12) Shankara also proves, in the face of opposition, that some of the *smriti* texts support this view.

The objection, as indicated as that of the opponent in chapter two of the BS (2.1.1), makes reference to some of the *smritis* wherefrom they clearly state that, "[…] the omniscient Brahman [as] the cause of the universe is untenable." Shankara's response was that it is not entirely so. He mentions a few examples of *smriti* texts which supports the notion that Brahman is the cause of the universe. In his discourse of BSB (2.1.1) Shankara quotes the following *smriti* texts without giving any references. He says that:

> After commencing about the supreme Brahman with the words, 'That which is that subtle, inscrutable entity', and stating, 'for He is called the indwelling Self of all beings, and the witness of the bodies', it is declared, 'from that arose, O best among the Brahmanas, the Unmanifested, possessed of the three *gunas'*. Similarly it is said elsewhere, 'O Brahmana, the Unmanifested gets merged with the attributeless Purusa [Self]', and 'Therefore hear this again in brief: The eternal Narayana is all this. At the time of creation, He projects everything, and eats it up again at the time of

dissolution.' These are statements in the Puranas. This also occurs in the Gita where it is stated: 'I am the origin and dissolution of the whole universe' (VII.6). And the Apastamba has this with regard to the supreme self: 'All things, counting from space, originate from Him; He is changeless and He is eternal' (*Dharmasutra* I.viii.23.2).

Shankara, by referring to these *smriti* texts, is of the opinion that there are *smriti* texts that expresses Brahman as the cause of the universe (BSB 2.1.1). Because of this Shankara's accepts that Brahman is the cause of the universe. In his view, therefore, the Upanishadic thesis is valid (BSB 2.1.9).

This relationship between Brahman and the world does not seem to be a dilemma for Madhva who conceived of the philosophy known as Dvaita. Madhva's philosophy depended on an uncompromising concept of dualism. This is confirmed by Chennakesavan (1980:67), who is of the opinion that Madhva believed in the complete transcendence of god. By implication then god cannot be the material cause of the world and as such has to be different from individual souls and the material world. Further to this implication, according to Chennakesavan (1980:67), each individual soul is different from the other and together they are different from material objects.

Now that it has been established by Shankara that both the *sruti* and *smriti* texts support the notion that Brahman is the cause of the universe, the problem still persists as to how this is possible drawing from our deliberation of Brahman thus far, especially if Brahman is "one without a second" (CU 6.2.2.)? To answer this enquiry, one needs to investigate the causal relationship between Brahman and the world.

7.2.3 THE CHARACTER OF THE CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAHMAN AND THE WORLD

The BS (1.1.2) defines Brahman as "that from which the universe has its birth etc." This definition could mean two things. The one is that Brahman is the **material cause** in the sense that Brahman is the clay or the gold; the other is that Brahman is the **efficient cause** in the sense that Brahman is the cause of the pot from the material clay or the cause of a necklace from the material gold. This idea could be

considered to be extended by the notion that it is the effect of both the material and efficient cause.

The BSB (1.4.23) answers this question by stating that, "Brahman must be the material cause as well ..." Shankara, in commenting on this aphorism, confirms that Brahman is both the material and efficient cause. Brahman as efficient cause is to be found in the BSB (1.4.23) where reference is made to the absence of any other 'ordainer'. To support his thesis that Brahman is the material cause, Shankara uses the aphorism from the CU (6.1.4) which clearly states that the material cause is the reality: "[...] as by knowing a lump of earth, all things made of earth become known: All transformation has speech as its basis, and it is name only. Earth as such is the reality." It was already concluded in previous sections that Brahman is the only reality and therefore if earth is the reality in the above example from which discrimination emanates, then by common deduction Brahman is the material cause of the world.

Ramanuja understands creation as the transformation of Brahman's body from the subtle to the gross level of manifestation. King (1999:227) explains that this transformation does not affect Brahman in his own intrinsic form, but that when Brahman and his body 'exist in a subtle form it is known as in 'the causal state ...'

The world is created when Brahman transform himself into a manifested form which then becomes known as the 'effect' state. The effect therefore is only a changed state of the cause but all this still remains essentially Brahman. This kind of transformation leads Dasgupta (1988:200) to explain that the effect is only:

> a changed state of the cause, and so the manifested world of matter and souls forming the body of god is regarded as effect only because previous to such a manifestation of these as effect they existed in a subtler and finer form. But the differentiation of the parts of god as matter and soul always existed, and there is no part of Him which is truer and more ultimate than this.

It would therefore seem that Brahman is both the cause and effect of the universe.

According to Adams (1988:48) Madhva sees god as "the efficient cause of the world only, acting on Prime Matter (prakrti), the material cause which is eternally different from him. God acts on, but does not create prakrti, which is co-eternal with Him."

To summarise the position of Shankara thus far in regard to Brahman and the world, it can be concluded that Brahman is the material and efficient cause of the effect, which is the universe with discriminations.

The above discussion still does not answer the dilemma that Shankara has to address, which is: how can this Brahman that is indescribable, attributeless, actionless and formless cause the universe? As an initial means towards attempting to resolve this dilemma two theories predominant in Vedanta will be examined.

7.2.3.1 THEORIES REGARDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAUSE AND EFFECT

There are two theories that shed light on the dilemma of the above discussions. According to Deutsch (1985:28), the relationship between Brahman and the world can be explained in terms of *satkaryavada* (effect pre-existent in cause) and *vivartavada* (cause, appearing as an effect)*.*

7.2.3.1.1 THE SATKARYAVADA THEORY

The causal theory known as *satkaryavada* (*sat* –real; *karya* – effect) is the view held by the Samkhyas. This theory promulgates the idea that "the effect is not a new origination, but is pre-existent in the cause" (Sankaranarayanan 1999:18).

According to the Samkhyas the effect is only a transformation of the cause in which it exists in a manifested form and existed as well as in a nascent form prior to creation (Narain 2003:189). Therefore it can be deduced that the effect is not in the cause as such, but is only latent in it and has to be brought out so that what is latent becomes patent. Simply stated, by way of an example, the pot is the manifestation of the clay in which it pre-existed.

The question now arises as to what happens to the cause when that which was latent in the cause now becomes patent? According to Sankaranarayanan

(1999:19), the Samkhyas maintain that the cause does not disappear when the effect is produced. Rather, "It persists in it. What *was* the cause is *now* the effect." By deduction therefore the discussed theory renders the cause and effect futile because the distinction between the two is meaningless as the cause and effect cannot be identical.

In the Abhidharma school of Buddhism, the opposite of the *satkaryavada* theory was adopted. This theory became known as *asatkaryavada.* This theory simply states that the effect 'does not exist (in its cause)' (King 1999:206). The trajectory that led to this understanding is the basis of the Buddhist belief that there is no all-powerful creator especially in their concept of non-origination.

On examination of Ramanuja's idea of creation, he leans towards the *Samkhya* understanding. Dasgupta (1988:200) notes that Ramanuja considers that the effect:

> is only a changed state of the cause, and so the manifested world of matter and souls forming the body of god is regarded as effect only because of previous to such a manifestation of these as effect they existed in a subtler and finer form. But the differentiation of the parts of god as matter and soul always existed, and there is no part of him which is truer or more ultimate than this.

Although Ramanuja was much later than Shankara, he uses this theory to oppose Shankara's understanding of causality. Two of the most important reasons why Shankara rejects the *satkaryavada* theory are that: this causal theory is based on a non-intelligent cause, which cannot give rise to this planned universe and, that there exists a dualism of Purusha and Prakrti (Masih 1988:253).

In response to the *satkaryavada* theory of *Samkhya*, Shankara proposes the theory of *vivartavada.*

7.2.3.1.2   THE VIVARTAVADA THEORY

The *vivartavada* theory can be considered a variant of the *satkaryavada* theory in that it affirms the effect pre-exists in the cause (BS 2.1.18) in the sense that it is the cause which **appears** as the effect (Sankaranarayanan 1999:20). In this way

Sankara is able to explain the manifestation of phenomena (the effect) from Brahman (the cause) (BSB 2.1.7).

Narain (2003:192) elaborates on this theory, thus making it more intelligible, by saying that, "The world-phenomena ... are only an anirvacaniya [inexplicable] appearance of Brahman and not its actual transformation. Though the creation of the world in this view too is a manifestation, yet the concept of manifestation is different from the philosophy of manifestation of Parinamavada [*satkaryavada*]. The manifestation in Vivartavada is anirvacaniya, whereas in Parinamavada it is real."

From the above discussions the following can be deduced: Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, that is indescribable, attributeless, actionless and formless, is regarded by Shankara as the material cause, the efficient cause which produces the effect, which in this case is the phenomenal (empirical) world. The truth is that the world is not separate from Brahman; it has no independent existence. The effect is non-different from the cause. In other words, "the effect is appearance, the cause alone is real" (BS 2.1.4). Puligandla (1975:218) encapsulates this thought by inferring that what Shankara is actually saying is that, "the empirical world depends for its existence upon Brahman. Therefore the empirical world does not have an independent reality."

The above discussion on the causal relationship between Brahman and the world prompts one now to establish the link between Brahman and the empirical world.

7.3 SHANKARA'S SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF THE LINK BETWEEN BRAHMAN AND THE WORLD

In the CU (6.2.2.), Brahman is regarded as 'One without a second' and as 'Existence'. The question raised in this aphorism is, "By what logic can existence come out of non-existence if only Existence was in the beginning?" The suggestion here is that Existence (Brahman) cannot be derived from pre-existing being or non-being (see 7.2.1.1.1). The BS (3.2.9) also states that Brahman cannot be derived from anything less general. Therefore by deduction one can say that Brahman (also referred to as It) was, is, and will be (past, present and future; see 6.3.), meaning that It is not created.

On the other hand two critical aphorisms in the Upanishads render Brahman as creator of the world (AU 1.1.2.; BSB 1.1.2. (See 7.1.)). From the test of reality (see 6.3.) regarding the world phenomena and specifically from the discussion on *vyavaharika* (see 6.4.2.2.), it was seen that the substratum (Brahman) and superimposition (empirical world) was regarded as absolute reality and empirical reality respectively. Shankara was therefore faced with this dilemma of explaining the creation of the universe from Brahman.

Ramanuja and Madhva did not have to contend with this dilemma due to their understanding of the relationship between Brahman and the world. For Ramanuja, Brahman is the absolute reality which includes within him matter and finite spirits as his integral self and that the world is a real creation of Brahman out of eternal matter which obviously exists in him (Morgan 1953:229).

In the case of Madhva there are two ultimate categories of reality: Brahman who is absolutely independent of anything and the individual selves and material objects which are absolutely dependent on Brahman and as such is the creator, preserver and destroyer of all things (Morgan 1953:224 – 225).

Shankara nonetheless resolves his dilemma through the development of a philosophy known as Maya (BSB 3.2.3). This is probably the most distinctive teaching of Shankara and yet one of the most controversial in respect of explaining the theory of how Maya brought into 'existence' the empirical world!

7.4   INVESTIGATING THE ORIGIN OF THE TERM MAYA

The term 'Maya' was not a term developed by Shankara due to the fact that the word 'Maya' can be gleaned from the *smriti* and *sruti* texts. According to Goudriaan (1978:1), the idea of Maya is present as an important element in Indian religious history. He quotes exhaustively from both *smriti* and *sruti* texts to prove that the idea of Maya is not Shankaran. Shankara though used the idea of Maya to defend his philosophy of absolute non-dualism. Although the gist of the meaning of Maya is found in his philosophy, he is at pains to prove this comprehensively from his expositions in defence of his philosophy of *vivartavada* (see 7.2.1.1.2).

An investigation of the occurrences and concept of the term Maya in the Vedas and Upanishads will first be conducted. Thereafter an investigation into Shankara's concept of Maya will be attempted together with those philosophers like Ramanuja and Madhva who were critical and disagreed with Shankara's concept of Maya with regards to his exposition in justifying his philosophy of *Advaita*.

7.4.1 OCCURRENCES OF MAYA IN THE RIG VEDA AND BHAGAVAD GITA

The concept of Maya has its roots in the Rig Veda. According to Shastri (1911:6-7), there are 101 references made to the concept of Maya in the Rig Veda. For a comprehensive list of references to Maya in the Rig Veda, see Appendix 1. He elaborates further by suggesting that the word Maya in the Rig Veda has two chief meanings: power and deception. In his opinion, the various passages in which Maya means 'power', the idea of 'mystery' is associated with it. This means that it is not any physical power, but a 'mysterious power of the *will*' (Shastri 1911:10). This power of the will is the willpower to achieve one's goal. In such an interpretation, the rendering of the word Maya, cannot be termed 'illusion'.

The relation of the concept of Maya to the main Vedic gods, especially Indra and Agni, is described by Heimann (1964:90) as '*pururupavat*' which means 'having many forms'. Heimann continues to say that because of this, "their capacity of assuming many forms simultaneously and successively, they are ... called Maya-*vat* or *mayin* – a term generally translated as 'sorcerer' or 'fraudulent illusionist' (though Maya, a derivative of the root *ma*, 'to measure', indicates only that many measurable, visible forms, *mayas*, all transitory in their existence, are ascribed to them). Their measurability, visibility and manifoldness are a reflection or manifestation of the Ultimate, but never the Ultimate itself. This lies before, and after, all its emanations. The *Summum Bonum* is hidden while manifested in apparent multiformity." In a sense, Maya, as indicated above, can be interpreted as the basis for the *Pratibhasika* (see 6.4.2.1.) and *Vyavaharika* (see 6.4.2.2.) orders of reality.

Goudriaan (1978:1) adds another dimension to the word Maya by suggesting that there is a strong 'magical' connotation to the term. Through the execution of Maya

one can trick one's adversary. He does concede though this 'magical' tradition of Maya is often overshadowed by the metaphysical connotation of the term.

Ramanuja on his commentary in the BG 7.14 indicates that Maya serves as a veil behind which god is 'hidden'. Here he mentions that the function of Maya causes the real nature of the Lord to disappear. Goudriaan (1978:19) refers to the commentary of Nilakantha on BG 7.14 wherein Nilakantha calls the Maya:

> a mirror created by phantasy in the Pure Intelligence (*cit*) in which no difference between god and soul exist. The false representations created by this mirror overpower or subjugate the individual soul which in reality is no other thing than a reflection of that Pure Intelligence, and obscure that reflection.

In BG 7.13 the world is deluded by the three *gunas* which is due to the Maya of god (BG 7.14). In BG 7.15 evildoers are deluded as their insight is removed by Maya. Shankara comments on the BG 7:14 by stating that Maya deludes all beings (BGS).

There are other passages that can be quoted to signify the existing and meaning of Maya before and after Shankara. Of interest would be the understanding of the term Maya among other philosophers of the day. A brief overview will be given of a few better known philosophers and their concept of Maya.

7.4.2 MAYA AS UNDERSTOOD BY OTHER PHILOSOPHERS

It has by now been well established that the term 'Maya' is certainly not a Shankaran terminology. This term was used by Shankara, as would be discussed later, to resolve a particular dilemma within his philosophy of *Advaita*. Before engaging Shankara's use of Maya, a brief survey will indicate how other philosophers that have preceded and come after Shankara used this term.

7.4.2.1   GAUDAPADA

In chapter five of this thesis, a synopsis of Shankara's *paramaguru*, Gaudapada's philosophy was provided (see 5.2.5). It would be fruitless to repeat this philosophy

here. In the context of the discussion in this section though, it is suffice to note his understanding with regards to Maya.

Gaudapada used the term 'Maya' to explain his main doctrine on the theory of no-origination. In GK 1.16 Maya is referred to as 'beginningless'. It renders the idea of Maya being a beginningless phenomenon. This theory renders the entire world of duality as merely an appearance exactly the same as an illusion. In his commentary on the MU 2.12 and again in MU 2.19, Gaudapada likens the concept of illusion to Maya. Shankara was seemingly having great difficulty in explaining: if Maya is beginningless, then surely Brahman cannot be the only reality?

It is for one of these reasons that Shaha (1987:100) assumes that Gaudapada is leaning towards the Buddhist idea of non-origination as well as the fact that, in Buddhist literature, Maya always had the meaning of illusion. Gaudapada as a result of this regards Maya as a beginningless deluding power (Shaha 1987:100) so as to suggest that the world, due to this deluding power, is an empirical one. Shankara seems to have relied much on Gaudapada's concept of Maya as will be discussed later. Hence, Deutsch and Dalvi (2004:157) indicate that Gaudapada appeals to the doctrine of Maya to explain this dialectical critique of causation and no-origination.

In his *karika* he explains the illusory nature (Maya) of the pluralistic world and in so doing attempts to define Maya. To untangle his understanding of Maya, he explains this concept through the four experiences (states) of man: the waking state, the dream state, dreamless sleep and liberation.

Maehle (2007:152), in reference to Gaudapada's different states, explains it as follows: the waking state is unreal because it is negated in the dream state, whereas the dream state is unreal because it is negated in the waking state. When we are awake, we believe the dream experience to be unreal; when we are dreaming we believe the waking world to be unreal; when we are dreaming we believe the waking world to be unreal.

In respect of the above exposition, Maehle (2007:152) concludes that the waking and dream worlds are unreal and that in return both these states do not exist in the

deep sleep state and *vice-versa*. Therefore Maehle contends that according to Gaudapada all three states are illusionary [Maya]. They exist, yet do not exist. As a result Maya in terms of the above is also inexplicable.

The fourth state is a state of non-duality (*Advaita*) where there is oneness with Brahman. Gaudapada explains this concept in his *karikas* 1.11-18 and 2.1-15.

Klostermaier (2007:161) explains these four states as follows:

> The first and lowest stage of awareness is *jāgarita-sthāna*, the normal state of being awake and hence open to sense perception and rational thought. The human spirit is poured out into a multitude of objective things, bound to space and time and to the laws of the physical universe.
>
> *Svapna-sthāna*, the dreaming state, "in which one cognizes internal objects" is already higher, because the human spirit is no longer subject to the laws of the physical world or bound to space and time. A person now herself creates the world in which she moves, she steps out of the limitations of physical nature by creating whatever the mind conceives.
>
> *Suṣupti*, profound and dreamless sleep, is the third state, higher again than the dream. It is a "blissful state," a state of unification in which the spirit is no longer scattered over a profusion of objective and subjective things, but there is no consciousness of this unification and bliss.
>
> *Turīya*, the fourth state, is beyond all that: it is neither perception of external nor of internal objects, neither knowledge nor ignorance, it is without describable qualities, it is supreme consciousness of consciousness, a cessation of all movement and all multiplicity, complete freedom. It is the self.

Although the above attempt to explain Maya in terms of causation (cause and effect), it remains a very difficult concept to understand. As Gaudapada promulgates the theory of non-origination and non-duality, then the question that desperately needs an answer is: Where does Maya originate from? To this question there is no sufficient answer other than the answer of the four states described by Klostermaier above, which is really indescribable.

7.4.2.2   RAMANUJA

Ramanuja understands the world and souls to be a true but imperfect picture of Brahman (Arapura 1986:87). If Brahman is both cause and effect (see 7.2.1) then there can be no illusion due to ignorance. It is for this reason, according to King (1999:227), that Ramanuja criticises Shankara's concept of Maya. To clarify this, Ramanuja uses an aphorism from the Brhadaranyaka, which expresses how the soul and the body is related to Brahman and why therefore Maya cannot be conceived as an explanation of this relationship. It is stated in the aphorism that, "He who, dwelling in all things, whom all things do not know, whose body all things are, who controls all things from within – He is your soul, the Inner Controller, the Immortal" (Brhadaranyaka 3.7.15).

Adam (1988:34) provides an excellent explanation of the above aphorism. He contends that:

> before creation the world and souls exist within the Brahman as distinct yet related realities. The world exist as unformed, undifferentiated primordial (prakrti), while souls retain their individuality, despite being compressed to the point that name and form are perceivable. Creation occurs when the Brahman emits the world and souls from himself and enters into them as their Inner Controller, in the manner of soul to body.

Therefore this aphorism and explanation by Adam provides an excellent reflection on Ramanuja's philosophy of Brahman, the world and souls which allows no room for Maya involvement. He therefore does not grapple with the kind of dilemma that Shankara has to.

Ramanuja, although he criticises Shankara's concept of Maya, believes that Maya should be understood in its Vedic usage to rather denote 'the wonderful effects and manifestation of prakrti' (Sri Bhasya 1.1.1).

7.4.2.3 MADHVA

Madhva does not hold an Advaitic tendency in his worldview. He rather presents a strict dualist philosophy (two orders of reality). To him god, the world and souls are seen as eternally different from each other. He believes that Brahman is the creator (efficient cause) of the world and that he did not undergo any transformation in order to bring the world into existence. The material world is a manifestation of prakrti (King 1999:228). Therefore the difference which is experienced in the world is not an illusion but a reality. If Maya is expressed as an illusion, as is very often done, then it stands to reason that Madhva will reject the concept of Maya.

7.4.3 DISCUSSION OF VIEWPOINTS ON SHANKARA'S UNDERSTANDING OF MAYA

In recognising the concept of Maya from the perspective of the above philosophers, attention will now be shifted to understanding Shankara's concept of Maya in relation to how he understands the relationship between Brahman and the world.

7.4.3.1 EDWARD GOUGH

Gough (1979:47) refers to Maya as an "illusion projected by an illusion" and as such an unreal reality. According to him (1979:48), it is Maya that "presents the manifold experience." He considers Maya and Brahman to have co-existed from "everlasting to everlasting" and that this co-existence, both in association and union, is eternal.

Although Maya pre-exists with Brahman, Gough (1979:47) affirms that Brahman is not thereby "any the less the one and only being." He likens this to that of a future tree that pre-exists in the seed of the tree, "without the seed becoming any the less a one and only seed."

With regards to the creation, Gough (1979:49) holds the opinion that one should understand that the world "proceeds, not from Brahman *per se*, but from Brahman reflected on Maya*."*

His understanding is that Maya*,* in its totality, is the "limited counterfeit of Brahman, or the power of Ishvara, the Mayavin ..." and therefore "the limitations of the illimitable Brahman are derived from this limited counterfeit" (1979:49). It is then in this limitation that discrimination is perceived.

7.4.3.2   RADHAKRISHNAN

Radhakrishnan (1914:413) is totally opposed to the concept of Maya as interpreted by Shankara. He does concede though that the doctrine of Maya, which he regards as the illusory character of the finite world, is viewed today as an essential part of the Vedantic systems. Even though this is so, he does acknowledge that Oriental Studies are "divided in their opinions concerning the revelation of the Maya doctrine to the Vedantic system of philosophy."

Radhakrishnan (1914:432) holds the view that the Vedas, the earlier Upanishads and Vedants Sutras do not suggest any theory of Maya*.* He does admit that Maya is the pivotal principle of later Shankara Vedanta. He comments that the reason for this was that these philosophers were 'forced to postulate deities behind the natural forces."

Radhakrishnan's refutation for the theory of Maya is found in the following rebuttals:

- Whereas the Advaitins insist that the accounts of creation as found in the Vedas and early Upanishads were "concessions to ... the ignorant masses" because they were not able to understand "this lofty philosophy of the reality of Brahman and the illusory nature of the world", he questions why then is the reality of the world emphasised repeatedly in almost all the Upanishads (1914:438).
- That the theory of Maya was the invention of later Vedantins (1914:439).
- That the plurality of realities is a contradiction of terms. Reality is an organism furnished with a multiplicity of organs and manifestations of life

(1914:440). The one cannot be real and the other unreal. The Absolute is a single, all-inclusive system.

- That the finite [that which is limited to the world] is real as part of the Absolute (1914:440).

- That it is Brahman that imparts its being to the world. But from this it does not follow that our life is a mere dream and our knowledge of the world a mere phantasy. However imperfect and inadequate it may be it is a real knowledge of a real world (1914:441).

- That the object of our knowledge is limited, finite and only partial. It is not as real as the whole. This does not mean that our knowledge is false. We do not know Brahman fully, but we know it partially (1914:442).

- That the early Vedantin does not deny reality to the finite, but grants Brahman a reality that embraces the reality of the finite world (1914:442).

It is not difficult to conclude therefore that Radhakrishnan does not entertain the theory of Maya. His systematic approach in rebutting the theory of Maya can easily be extracted from the above objections and reasons.

When seen in comparison to Shankara's systematic approach, it seems that there is a different approach to interpreting the Upanishads. This will be clearly seen when investigating the theory of Maya in Shankara's philosophy.

7.4.4 MAYA IN SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY AS REFLECTED IN HIS COMMENTARY OF THE BRAHMA SUTRAS

From the discussions thus far regarding the origins of the term Maya it can be deducted that Maya was not a new development in the thought of Shankara. How then should Maya be understood in the philosophy of Shankara? O'Neil (1980:93) is of the opinion that one must "begin to see Maya within Shankara not only as it has been seen by his opponents or later critics but within the context of 'an inquiry into Brahman'. O'Neil (1980:174) has done exactly this by listing the occurrences of Maya from the Brahma Sutra commentary (BSB) of Shankara. Due to the fact that this chapter centres on Shankara and his notion of Maya, the relevant commentary of Shankara in relation to each aphorism where Maya is mentioned and where it is implied would be fully quoted (see Appendix 2).

Shankara, in the above references to Maya to be found in his commentary of the Brahma Sutra, conceives of Maya to be related to terms such as: appearance, ignorance (*avidya*), superimposition (*adhyasa*), power, deception, illusion and falsehood. According to Shaha (1987:176) the distinction between ignorance and superimposition in the context of the inquiry into Brahman, is very little. It is only that of "cause and effect." He continues with this train of thought by inferring that superimposition is only ignorance manifested which translate to superimposition being a product of ignorance. Tigunait (1989:223-224), in discussing the concept of Maya*,* lists a number of characteristics of it. These characteristics appear in Appendix 3.

What needs to be addressed now is the question raised by Sankaranarayanan (1999:46) in respect of Shankara's philosophy *Advaita*: what is the *modus operandi* of the One to many? In the following section an attempt is made to answer this question. In so doing Shankara's reference to the two levels of knowledge will also be discussed.

7.5 UNDERSTANDING THE 'RELATIONSHIP' BETWEEN BRAHMAN AND MAYA IN SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY

In 7.2.1 above, the concept of Maya*,* as understood by a few philosophers, was briefly discussed. It would be ill-advised to comprehensively discuss their philosophy because of the depth of the arguments one has to engage in to understand their concepts of Maya. It would be therefore, advisable to rather focus on Shankara in this section and his understanding of Maya.

Generally, when dealing with the relationship between Brahman and Maya in *Advaita*, terms such as ignorance, appearance, superimposition, power, deception, illusion and falsehood are prominent (see 7.4.1.; 7.4.2.; 7.4.3).

According to Narain (2003:203) the concept of Maya with its different meanings as mentioned above is, in truth, "the matrix of creation, differentiation and the projection of name and form. It is the principle of becoming and appearance through which the undifferentiated, impartite and undiversified Brahman become differentiated, diversified and manifold in form of world-phenomena." It was also seen that in the Rig Veda (see 7.4.1) Maya is spoken of as 'creative power'. One

of the clearest text expressing the connection of Maya to 'creative power' and ignorance is BSB 1.4.3 where Shankara responds to the admission of the opponent that Pradhana (primordial nature) as cause of the universe.

To understand Shankara's response, one has to refer to the previous aphorism where Shankara explains the BU 1.4.7: This universe was then undifferentiated. He says that this shows that this very world, diversified through names and forms, "was at the beginning in a state of latency, devoid of differentiation into names and forms, and hence fit to be called undifferentiated" (BU 1.4.7).

With this background information, his response to his opponents will now be understood. According to Shankara, the theory of Pradhana as the cause is subject to the:

> "Supreme Lord, but not as an independent thing because Brahman is the ground of the universe" (BSB 1.1.22). That state has to be admitted, because it serves a purpose. Without that latent state, the creatorship of god [Ishvara] cannot have any meaning, inasmuch as god cannot act without His power (of Maya) ... Why? Because liberation comes when the potential power (of Maya) is burnt away by knowledge. That potential power, constituted by nescience, is mentioned by the word unmanifest. It rests on god, and is comparable to magic.

Basically the response from Shankara is that Brahman is the substratum from which Ishvara was the cause of creation through Maya. One only realises that Brahman is the substratum when Maya is 'burnt away by knowledge'. Shankara also mentions that it is because of "possession of ignorance by the individual soul that all kinds of empirical behaviour continue forever (BSB 1.4.3)."

The state in which Brahman is consciously associated with Maya to create the universe is called Ishvara (god) as mentioned above. Tigunait (1983:225) says that this combined state of Maya and Brahman appears as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. Similarly Atman appears as jiva and that from the cosmic point of view Maya is one, but from the individual point of view it is many

(BU 2.5.19). Ontologically, though, Brahman is 'One without a second' (BSB 3.2.32).

It can now be concluded from the discussions thus far, that Maya cannot have a co-eval status with Brahman; nor can it have an independent existence apart from Brahman, but does make Brahman "into the empirical universe of multi forms and patterns" (Sankaranarayanan 1999:51).

Before proceeding to the manner in which Shankara defends his philosophy of absolute non-dualism, a summary is necessary to bring together the salient features of his philosophy and also how he addresses the dilemma regarding the relationship between Brahman and Maya.

7.6 SUMMARISING THE SALIENT FEATURES OF SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY AND THE DILEMMA OF EXPLAINING 'THE ONE TO MANY'

It is necessary at this point to summarise the salient features of Shankara's philosophy of absolute non-dualism as discussed thus far before investigating how he resolves the ontological status of Maya.

Shankara's philosophical system was identified as absolute non-dualism. This means that there is only one undifferentiated Absolute Reality that is real at all times, past present and future. The discriminations perceived by the *jivas* are explained as 'not real' rather than as 'unreal' or 'false'. The example of the rope and snake allegory explains this phenomenon.

Shankara believes that only Brahman is real, without attributes and qualities. Brahman is 'One without a second'. The world is superimposed upon this Brahman creating an appearance known as *mithya,* which at times is incorrectly translated as 'illusion' whereas it should be translated as 'not real'. As a result of this, Shankara adopts the *vivarta* view of causation which means that there is no cause and effect and that Brahman as the cause is real. This posed a significant dilemma for Shankara as there had to be an explanation of why humans perceive discriminations if discriminations do not exit. This dilemma causes Shankara to introduce his doctrine of Maya. Maya can best be understood as misperception, ignorance of the true nature of things and even wrong knowledge. It is only

through right knowledge that Maya can be 'removed' and then Brahman realisation is achieved.

This brings the ontological status of Maya into the equation. The best way for Shankara to define Maya was to say that it is neither existent nor non-existent. If Maya was existent, then his philosophy of absolute non-dualism becomes questionable because there would be another reality. If non-existent, then the empirical world would not exist.

To resolve this dilemma Shankara posits the idea of two levels of truth which includes two aspects of Brahman.

7.7 RESOLVING THE DILEMMA: TWO LEVELS OF TRUTH IN SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY

In the deliberation on the relationship between Brahman and Maya in the 7.5, Maya was instrumental in the 'creation' of the empirical world. Although it was noted that Brahman is 'one without a second', yet through Maya, Brahman was credited with the 'creation' of the empirical world, thus leaving the impression of a contradiction with the declaration of Brahman being 'One without a second'. Shankara resolves this dilemma with the introduction of a two level understanding of Brahman: Brahman with attributes known as Saguna Brahman and Brahman without attributes known as Nirguna Brahman. It is not necessary to discuss in detail these two levels of understanding of Brahman as much has already been covered in the previous section on Brahman and Maya (see 7.5) and reference will also be made to it in 8.2. Suffice to mention though that Shankara states that there are many texts which make a distinction between the subject matters of ignorance and knowledge (BSB 1.1.11). Ignorance in this case will be Saguna Brahman and knowledge will be Nirguna Brahman.

7.7.1 SAGUNA BRAHMAN

Saguna Brahman is described as Brahman with attributes. This is so because the BSB (1.1.11) confirms that Brahman is the cause of the universe and the ordainer of the masters of the organs. With reference to Shankara's commentary on this aphorism, he refers to Saguna Brahman as "possessed of the limiting adjunct constituted by the diversities of the universe which is a modification of name and

form. In BSB 1.3.13. Shankara infers that Purusha is Saguna Brahman (see 7.6 where Brahman is associated with Maya to conceive Purusha) and is worthy of meditation. In BSB 4.3.10. and 4.3.11. Shankara refers to Saguna Brahman as 'conditioned Brahman' and by inference regards it as lower Brahman. A return to this discussion on Saguna Brahman will be necessary when the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy is investigated.

7.7.2 NIRGUNA BRAHMAN

Nirguna Brahman, according to the same aphorism (BSB 1.1.11), states that it is devoid of all conditioning factors and opposed to Saguna Brahman. It is the state of pure bliss and absolute consciousness, free from all adjuncts and attributes (Masih 1988:302). The MU 1.1.4-5 clearly postulates that the attainment of the "highest [knowledge] consists merely in removing ignorance, and nothing more."

7.8 PREPARATION ACCOMPLISHED IN LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR ADDRESSING THE NOTION OF AVATARA IN SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY

This chapter addressed some of the critical issues which Shankara had to address in order to maintain his Advaitic stance in the face of explaining the involvement of Brahman in the empirical world. His solution was to take the concept of Maya as found in the Rig Veda and the Upanishads and mould it in such a way, without losing much of its meaning as presented in the Rig Veda, to resolve the dilemma of how Brahman can be both the cause and effect as well as the efficient cause of the empirical world.

An attempt to explain Maya was eloquently expressed by Bhaskarananda (2011:loc 294) as follows:

> As long as you are aware of this world, you cannot deny the
> existence of Maya, which is the cause of this world. Therefore
> during your waking experience you must admit that Maya exists.
> But when you have the fourth experience, the experience of
> Nirguna Brahman, the world that you experience in the waking
> state ceases to exist along with its cause, Maya. That's why
> Advaita Vedanta holds the position that Maya is inexplicable. It

can neither be said that Maya really exists nor can it be said that it
does not exist.

Therefore an understanding of Maya as well as what has been discussed this far, and more specifically this chapter, was to lay the foundation for addressing the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy. The following chapter will therefore refer to what was discussed here and in earlier chapters to provide the necessary information in addressing the problem set out in this thesis.

CHAPTER 8
SHANKARA AND HIS CONCEPT OF GOD IN RELATION TO BRAHMAN AND *JIVAS*

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The manner in which the discussions in 7.7 concluded could be construed as insufficient to do justice to Shankara's explanation of the two levels of reality. This was done intentionally so as to allow a smooth transition from chapter seven to this chapter where Shankara's idea of the twofold reality will be sufficiently discussed so as to extricate by way of deduction whether the notion of god and thereafter Avatara can be identified in this dialectic of the twofold reality.

Subsequent to Shankara's position on the concept of the twofold reality (Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman) other philosophers, through their understanding of Brahman and Brahman's relation to the world, voiced their objections by virtue of their own stated understanding of Brahman's relation to the world. The other views are not implicit but are deduced based on their philosophical understanding of Brahman and the world.

In the following section Shankara's view of the two levels of reality will be discussed and should be seen as a continuation of the discussion in 7.7. Thereafter the views of other philosophers who disagree with Shankara's view will be stated.

8.2 SHANKARA'S VIEW OF THE TWO LEVELS OF REALITY EXPLAINED FURTHER

The effective role Maya assumed in creating this 'two levels of reality' in Shankara's philosophy (see 7.5) was observed in the previous chapter.

The two levels of understanding of Brahman mentioned in 7.7 are referred to by Shaha (1987:108) as Shankara's 'dialectic of twofold reality'. Shaha goes to the extent of stating that most of the modern scholars regard this 'dialectic approach to reality' as the "central point of his [Shankara] philosophy." In trying to express how Shankara views these two levels of understanding of Brahman, Solomon (1969:229) articulates it by suggesting that Shankara was a "realist from the lower

(i.e. empirical) point of view and an absolutist from the higher or the absolute (i.e. transcendental) point of view."

Many other arguments can be introduced to reinforce other aspects of Shankara's philosophy, but the concept of the 'dialectic of twofold reality' is indeed a most unique method of countering controversies related to an absolute non-dual metaphysical explanation of experiential tendencies related to an empirical world.

Although a clear indication of Shankara's 'dialectic of twofold reality' are to be found in a few of his commentaries, at least two texts of two of these commentaries, the BU 3.5.1. and BSB 1.1.12, are referred to here.

In the BU 3.5.1, Shankara clearly states that there is:

> no contradiction between the two views. We do not maintain the existence of things different from Brahman in the state when the highest truth has been definitely known ... Nor do we deny the validity, for the ignorant, of actions with their factors and results while the relative world of name and form exists ... In fact all schools must admit the existence or non-existence of the phenomenal world according as it is viewed from the relative or the absolute standpoint.

In the above quotation on the distinction between Saguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman, Shankara, although clearly defined by him, maintains that there is no contradiction between these two levels of understanding of Brahman, except for the ignorant. In this way Shankara was able to explain the 'existence' of empirical reality while maintaining his philosophy of absolute non-dualism.

In the BSB 1.1.12 Shankara clearly refers to two aspects of Brahman: one which possesses limiting adjuncts and the other devoid of all conditioning factors. The one, with limiting adjuncts, is constituted "by the diversities of the universe which is a modification of name and form", while the other is devoid of this.

Although in these two texts one has a very lucid reference to the 'dialectic of twofold reality' of Shankara, the question is whether the understanding of the

'dialectic of twofold reality' was acceptable to other philosophers that came after Shankara? In the discussion that follows a critical examination of two of the foremost adversaries of Shankara will be addressed.

Thereafter the discussion lends itself to investigate where the possible seat of the notion of Avatara could be found in the philosophy of Shankara.

8.3   VIEWS OF OTHER VEDANTA PHILOSOPHERS NOT IN AGREEMENT WITH SHANKARA'S VIEW ON THE TWO LEVELS OF REALITY

It is expected, as was mentioned in 1.1, that Shankara's philosophy stands in absolute contrast with the more popular beliefs of Hindus, especially of the traditional devotional (*bhakti*) system as well as within the Vedanta tradition. It is therefore appropriate at this point to consider the two most prevalent views of other Vedanta philosophers who stand in contrast to Shankara's two levels of reality.

8.3.1   VIEWS OF *VISHISHTADVAITA* VEDANTA (QUALIFIED NON-DUALISM)

Ramanuja (see 7.4.2.2) was a great exponent of the *Vishishtadvaita* School of philosophy. This school of philosophy does not make a distinction between levels of reality. Rather, as found in 7.2.1.2, Brahman is the souls while the jivas and the world are said to be the body. Therefore, in this relationship, god is independent and souls and matter are dependent on god. In this regards, Masih (1988:432) contends that Ramanuja excludes the possibility of a "difference-less Brahman." Grimes (1990:13) agrees with this notion of "difference-less Brahman" when he states that Ramanuja "supports differentiation, but rejects separateness" and that *Vishishtadvaita,* as a school of philosophy in the Vedanta tradition, understands the world to be real "in common experience ..., [but] it can never be said to be illusory from any standpoint."

Flood (2005:244) lays the matter to rest by suggesting that Ramanuja rejects the notion of manifold experience as being an illusion which is caused by ignorance and as such, rejects the concept of a lower level of truth. Rather, Ramanuja, according to Flood (2005:244), believes that the one and many are real and that the many is Brahman's manifold 'mode of expression'.

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Finally, although Ramanuja clearly espouses non-dualism, this is not absolute non-dualism, but a non-dualism which is qualified. The qualification exists in the understanding that, although Brahman is independent (non-dual), soul and matter are dependent on him. Hence there is no room for levels of reality as espoused by Shankara.

On the other extreme the views of dualism is propagated as an attack on Shankara's absolute non-dualism. This form of dualism came to be known as *Dvaita* Vedanta.

8.3.2 VIEWS OF *DVAITA* VEDANTA (DUALISM)

The well-known exponent of this tradition was Madhva who established a new interpretation of Vedanta. As can be determined from this term, he stands directly in conflict with Shankara's absolute non-dualism and accuses Ramanuja of "compromising too much with Advaita" (Klostermaier 1998:119).

Madhva maintains that the only correct interpretation of the Hindu scriptures is a dualistic interpretation. He insists that there is an eternal distinction between the Atman (soul) and Brahman, whom he refers to as Lord (Flood 2005:246).

According to Madhva (Flood 2005:246), each thing and phenomenon in the universe is itself and unique and therefore cannot be reduced to something else, as in the case of Shankara, where these phenomena can be reduced to and explained as an illusion. While each thing is unique there are five radical differences between human beings, matter and the Lord (Klostermaier 1998:119). Each thing is an absolute entity in itself (Morgan 1953:225).

The above understanding finds its position in what is termed "the doctrine of Reality" (Tapasyananda 2003:128). This doctrine of Reality has two aspects: an independent and a dependent aspect. The independent aspect is Brahman and the dependent aspect is the soul and primordial matter. Shastri (1911:119) regards the dependent and independent aspects as the ultimate principles of Madhva's dualism. Yet, although these distinctions exist, nothing can exist outside the Lord's will (Flood 2005:146).

Madhva's religious thought combines dualism with theism and can therefore be regarded as dualistic theism. Due to Madhva's understanding and interpretation of scripture, and the refinement in his philosophy as against Ramanuja and Shankara, based on dualistic theism, he vehemently cannot accept Shankara's two level of reality.

Now that a critical examination of the philosophies of Ramanuja and Madhva towards Shankara's concept of the two levels of reality was briefly discussed, a return to the notion of Avatara in the dialectic of twofold reality of Shankara is advanced.

8.4 THE SEAT OF AVATARA IN THE 'DIALECTIC OF TWOFOLD REALITY' OF SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY

After resolving the dilemma of how Brahman can 'exist' at two levels (see 7.5., 7.7. and 8.2.), Nirguna Brahman (see 7.7.2.), being described as free from all adjuncts and attributes, cannot be associated with any form of discrimination. Thus the notion of Avatara, by implication, cannot have its seat in Nirguna Brahman because Avatara has been described as a theistic system of thought in Hinduism (see 2.3).

If Avatara cannot have its seat in Nirguna Brahman, the alternative will be to investigate whether, in Shankara's philosophy, Avatara has its foundation in Saguna Brahman. The rationale for this possibility lies in the fact that Saguna Brahman has been described as the lower Brahman with attributes (see 7.7.1). Probably a more appropriate question to ask is whether there is a concept of god in Shankara's philosophy at all. The purpose for this question is because Avatara was defined as the manifestation of god in the form of man or animal in this world (see 3.2. the last paragraph). The term 'this world' in Shankara's philosophy would be a reference to the empirical world which came into being through the concept of Maya (see 7.7).

Therefore in the following discussion the notion of god will be investigated in Shankara's philosophy. If the notion of god can be established then the notion of Avatara as a consequence could possibly be determined.

8.4.1 THE NOTION OF GOD IN SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY: THE EMERGENCE OF ISHVARA

It has already been established in Shankara's philosophy that there is one non-dual Brahman (see 6.6). It is this non-dual Brahman through Maya that is responsible for the empirical world consisting of discriminations (see 7.5). However, Maya leaves Brahman untouched and unaffected by its diversifying agency. Maya veils the essential nature of Brahman and makes Brahman appear as the empirical world of manifold objects and individual *jivas* (Masih 1988:300).

Brahman through Maya can therefore be understood to have created this empirical world which is referred to by Shankara as the lower reality also known as Saguna Brahman (see 8.1. and 8.2). Thibaut (1904:26), in concluding that the material cause of the world is Brahman associated with Maya, also states that Brahman in this aspect is "more properly called Isvara, the Lord" (see also Masih (1988:301), Sharma (1996:189), 7.1. and 7.5).

According to Masih (1988:301) and Sharma (1996:189) this 'Ishvara' as such, is considered to be relative and not ultimate. Thus conditioned by Maya, the Saguna Brahman (Ishvara), "comes to be known as a personal Being" (Masih 1988:301). This fundamental principle is found in the BSB 1.1.12 where Shankara states that the supreme Self "which after creating all forms and then giving them names, (enters into each as individual souls and) continues to utter those names ..." With this in mind Thibaut (1904:31) could infer that the Brahman of Shankara "is in itself impersonal, a homogenous mass of objectless thought, transcending all attributes; a personal God it becomes only through its association with the unreal principle of Maya, so that - strictly speaking - Sankara's personal God, his Isvara, is himself something unreal."

It is within this same vein of thought that Sharma (1976:280) could state, with regards to the 'personal Being' mentioned by Masih in the previous paragraph, that Ishvara is god and the personal aspect of the impersonal Brahman (Nirguna Brahman).

With Ishvara being considered as god who is the personal aspect of the impersonal Brahman, and as long as a person (*jiva)* operates at the empirical

level, King (1999:216) advances the theory, and also suggests that Shankara maintained this view, that the world "is created by God (Ishvara)."

This is indeed a significant statement made by King and therefore one needs to understand the phenomenal character of god in the philosophy advocated by Advaita or it may lead to wrong conclusions and confusions. Therefore the following section will attempt to explain the significance and character of Ishvara, who is also rendered as god, in Advaita.

8.4.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ISHVARA (GOD) IN ADVAITA

Although the phenomenal character of Ishvara is quite evident from the discussions in 8.4.1., some critics have missed the significance of Ishvara altogether. As suggested by Sharma (1976:280), there is a belief among these critics that Ishvara in Advaita is "unreal and useless." This is possible if one misunderstands the concept of Maya in Advaita.

In earlier investigations (see 6.4.2.2.) the concept of vyavaharika made reference to the illusory nature of the world. This idea of illusion was explained through sublation where the example of the rope and snake was used. In this example the snake was perceived to be real but upon knowledge dawning, the snake 'disappears' and only the rope remains.

It is in the same manner the significance of Ishvara must be understood. Sharma (1976:280) explains this as follows: Ishvara becomes 'unreal' only for *him* who has realised his oneness with Brahman by rising above speech and mind. For us Ishvara is all in all. Finite thought can never grasp Brahman. And therefore all talks about Brahman are really talks about Ishvara. Even the words 'unconditioned Brahman' really refer to 'conditioned Ishvara', for the moment we speak of Brahman, He ceases to be Brahman and becomes Ishvara.

Malovsky (2001:55) seems to have a different view of Shankara's understanding of Ishvara, in relation to Nirguna and Saguna Brahman. He maintains that Shankara interchanges the use of Ishvara to describe either the Nirguna or Saguna Brahman.

In the next section a more elaborate and explanation is given of how other scholars differ from the more conventional understanding of Ishvara in relation to Nirguna and Saguna Brahman.

8.4.2.1   ISHVARA AS NIRGUNA AND SAGUNA BRAHMAN: VIEWS OF OTHER SCHOLARS

When reading the commentaries of Shankara especially on the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita, confusion may arise as to which Brahman Shankara is referring to. This confusion may result in misunderstanding the position of Shankara and therefore reading into his commentaries that which is not intended. The following scholars seem to highlight and explain this problem.

Malovsky (2001:55) accuses Paul Hacker of not abiding by this clear-cut division of a Nirguna and Saguna Brahman. The suggestion here, according to Malovsky, is that in most cases, Ishvara is used synonymously with the Nirguna Brahman. As a matter of fact, Malovsky explains that "Samkara [will not] shy away from attributing activities to the Nirguna Brahman that one would expect to have ascribed only to a personal Lord. [An example of this understanding is to be found in the BSB 2.1.1]... It is therefore important to take the precise context in which Samkara uses the term [Ishvara]."

Nelson (2000:313) also tends to lean towards such an interpretation. He intimates that scholars have for a long time noticed that Shankara uses the term Brahman interchangeably with Ishvara, as well as with Narayana and Vishnu which "are personal names derived from mythology."

With the above discussions on the relationship between Nirguna Brahman, Saguna Brahman and Ishvara, the author of this thesis tends to support the views of Sharma (1976:280) (see 8.4.2.), Mahadevan (1968:56) and Masih (1988:305). Their understanding is presented in the following paragraphs:

- For Mahadevan (1968:56) there are not two Brahmans. He explains this as follows: when god is referred to as lower (*apara*) Brahman, what is meant is not that Brahman has become lower in status as God, but that god is Brahman,

looked at from the lower level of relative experience. There are two forms of Brahman and not two Brahmans.

- Masih (1988:305) shares the same view as Mahadevan above when he examines the relationship between Brahman and Ishvara. His understanding is that Shankara maintains a very close relationship between Ishvara and Brahman. In this regards he quotes from the Vedanta Sutras (IV.3.90) to prove his claim. According to him, the commentary by Shankara on this relationship states the following: as the lower Brahman is in proximity to the higher one, there is nothing unreasonable in the word 'Brahman' being applied to the former (i.e., Ishvara) also.

- Bhaskarananda (2011:loc 117) explains these two forms of Brahman as follows:

  > It is like a person looking at the blue sky through three pairs of glasses – red, green and pink ... In reality these colors are projected by the viewer's colored glasses on the sky. The sky does not change its own color at all. Similarly the finite minds of people, like so many colored glasses, project their limitations on Nirguna Brahman. Thus, the changeless, impersonal and infinite Nirguna Brahman appears to acquire limitations like personality ... The idea of a Personal God or Saguna Brahman is therefore not the ultimate truth about God. It is a relatively lower concept of God.

- Finally, Shankaranarayanan (1999:112) basically applies the same theories as Mahadevan, Masih and Bhaskarananda in his understanding of the relationship between Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. He considers Nirguna Brahman, who is

paramarthika (see 6.4.2.) and transcendent, when viewed through vyavaharika (see 6.4.2.2.) lenses, to appear as Saguna Brahman, who is called Ishvara. Then he continues this thought in and expresses that to the "ordinary mortal who can neither conceive nor realize Brahman in Its Nirguna essence, Saguna Brahman is the highest object of conception, meditation and devotion" (Shankaranarayanan 1999:112).

Therefore, for Shankara, Ishvara and *jiva* are the inexplicable appearance of Brahman as Saguna Brahman and as such Ishvara is god only to the *jiva* who is tied up in ignorance (see BSB 1.1.12). Hence Masih (1988:309) could state that Ishvara "is the ground of EW [empirical world] and jivas in the first instance, and Brahman is the final substratum of everything." This *jiva* referred to here, is regarded as the embodied soul (individual souls) which is like the 'spirit' embedded deep within a body which can leave and enter the body upon death and reincarnation (see 6.7; 6.7.2.) or as the BU (3.4.1.) maintains: this is your self that is within all.

Of importance though, in understanding the significance of Ishvara in Advaita Vedanta, Shankara views god (Ishvara) as the Saguna Brahman, who through His Maya created the empirical world. With this established fact that god certainly features in Shankara's Advaita philosophy, albeit at a lower level, there are other passages in the Upanishads that indicate the creation of other gods as well (BU 1.4.6; BU 3.1-10; BSB 1.3.26-28).

In order to have a better understanding of how Brahman, Ishvara and the *jiva* are associated to each other, the next section (8.4.3.) will briefly state this relationship.

8.4.3 THE RELATIONSHIP OF BRAHMAN, ISHVARA AND *JIVA* TO EACH OTHER

In 6.7. of this thesis the nature of Self and self (*jiva*) was addressed briefly. Although there were a few references to the relationship of the Self to Brahman and how the self should be understood at the empirical level, in this section the relationship between Brahman, Ishvara and the individual self is discussed. This is necessary due to the fact that now that a better understanding of Maya is

comprehended, it becomes valuable to indicate the effect that Maya projects in understanding the relationship between Brahman, Ishvara and the *jiva.*

Nikhilananda (2008:87) aptly explains the relationship of Nirguna Brahman to the *jiva* and Ishvara as follows:

> Each individual soul is Brahman, the Absolute. Its real nature appears to be limited by the upadhis[8] of the sense-organs, the mind, the prana[9], and so forth, all created by ignorance, or avidya. Under the influence of the cosmic illusion, which is capable of making the impossible possible, the attributeless Brahman becomes... the Supreme Lord [Ishvara] and the jiva, or individual soul.

8.4.3.1   THE RELATIONSHIP OF BRAHMAN (NIRGUNA) AND *JIVA*

If each individual soul is Brahman, then there can be no relationship between Brahman and the individual soul. It is like suggesting that one can have a relationship with oneself! But it could be said, as Shankara mentions, that it is only the "supreme Brahman Itself, which while remaining immutable, appears to exist as an individual soul owing to association with limiting adjuncts" (BSB 2.3.18).

For the purpose of convenience of understanding, the term 'relationship' would be used to explain this association of Brahman (as understood by Shankara in BSB 2.3.18) with *jivas* (see also 6.7)*.* According to Masih (1988:295), Shankara refers to three kinds of relation between Brahman and a jiva. These three kinds of relations have given rise to three theories namely: Semblance Theory (*abhasavada*), Reflection Theory (*pratibimbavada*) and Limitation Theory (*avacchedava*). These theories all seek to show the non-difference between Nirguna Brahman and the *jiva.*

8.4.3.1.1   REFLECTION THEORY (*PRATIBIMBAVADA*)

This theory finds its expression in the BSB 3.2.20. This aphorism states: Since Brahman has entered into limiting adjuncts, it seems to participate in their increase

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[8] A term of Vedanta philosophy denoting a limitation imposed upon the Self or Brahman through ignorance.
[9] The vital breath which sustains life in a physical body.

and decrease. The illustration and thing illustrated have propriety from this point of view.

Shankara interprets this aphorism in relation of the Brahman to the *jiva* especially in its participation in actions and emotions of the *jiva.* He proceeds by to explain "It seems to participate in their increase and decrease" by using the example of the reflection of the sun on water. He explains this as follows: Inasmuch as the reflection of the sun in water increases with the increase of water, and decrease with its reduction, it moves when the water moves, and it differs as the water differs. Thus the sun conforms to the characteristics of the water; but in reality the sun never has these.

Therefore the relationship between Brahman and the *jiva* is likened to the sun (Nirguna Brahman) conforming to the characteristics of the water (*jiva*) but that in reality the sun (Nirguna Brahman) never has these characteristics of the water (*jiva*). Masih (1988:296) sums up the intention of this explanation in that the "Brahman appears to participate illusorily in the actions and feelings of the Jivas."

8.4.3.1.2   LIMITATION THEORY (*AVACCHEDAVA*)

The limitation theory, as the name suggests, refers to the limitations of the *jiva.* This is found in the BSB 2.1.13. which states that, "If it be argued that the distinction between the experiencer (of happiness or sorrow) and the things experienced will cease when the (experienced) objects turn into the experiencer, then we say that such a distinction can well exist as observed in common experience."

Shankara interprets this aphorism of the relation between Brahman and *jiva* by comparing it to the sea and waves. He explains it as follows: Thus though foam, ripple, wave, bubble, etc. which are different modifications of the sea, consisting of water, are non-different from the sea, still amongst themselves are perceived actions and reactions in the foam of separating or coalescing. And yet the foam, wave, etc., do not lose their individuality in relation to one another, even though they are modifications of the sea and non-different from it, which is but water. Again, even though they do not lose their individuality in one another, they are never different from the point of view of their being the sea.

Similarly, as Shankara continues, the experiencer and the things experienced, never get identified with each other, nor do they differ from the supreme Brahman. Although the experiencer is not a transformation of Brahman ... it has been stated that the Creator Himself, without undergoing any change has become the experiencer by entering into Hid product (the body), still some differences accrues to one who has entered into the product, owing to the presence of the product which serves as the limiting adjunct.

Another example which clearly explains the limitation theory is the example of space in a pot in relation to space outside it. The space in the pot is limited by the pot, although it is the same as the space outside the pot. Originally it was all expansive space, but when the potter made the pot, in the recess of the pot was space. Therefore Brahman becomes like the space within the pot which is the same as Brahman outside the pot. It is just that the Brahman in the pot is limited, but it is still Brahman. The *jiva* therefore in the pot is limited but is the same as Brahman outside the pot.

8.4.3.1.3   SEMBLANCE THEORY (*ABHASAVADA*)

The final theory is the Semblance Theory. This theory, as explained by Sankaranarayanan (1999:66), uses the example of a crystal and a red flower. The crystal, which is colourless, appears as red when the flower is in close proximity to it.

This explains the relationship between Brahman and the *jiva.* Brahman is the colourless crystal and the red flower is the upadhi [limiting adjunct]. The upadhi effects the change in the appearance of Brahman as the *jiva* (Shankaranarayanan 1999:66).

The important point in all these examples cited above supports the notion and teaching of Shankara that Brahman and the jiva are one.

8.4.3.2   THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISHVARA AND *JIVA*

The relationship between Ishvara and the *jiva* in turn is different. This has to do with the intervention of Maya. Nikhilananda (2008:88) explains that the relationship between Ishvara and *jiva* lies in the fact that whereas Ishvara controls Maya, the

individual soul is controlled by Maya. In this case the individual soul accepts Maya as being real. As a result of this Nikhilananda (2008:88) could state that the "Upanishads admit the empirical reality (vyavaharika sattva) of the jiva and deal with its characteristics, wanderings, and final deliverance."

One could therefore conclude by implication that Ishvara becomes a personal god to Shankara and this god is also the creator of the universe. This idea of a creator god is inferred from BSB 1.1.20 where Shankara declares that even for god "there are many forms created at His will out of Maya for the sake of favouring the aspirants, as is declared in the Smriti, 'O Narada, it is a Maya, created by Me, that you see Me in this form possessed of all the substances and qualities. You must not understand me thus.'" In the context of this aphorism, the statement made suggests that no matter in what form Brahman assumes through Maya, one should come to the realisation that it is ultimately the Absolute Brahman (Nirguna).

According to Warrier (1977:57), Ishvara, *jiva* and the world together form an unbroken pattern and that the question of the temporal priority of anyone of them over the other does not exist. Yet the *jiva's* goal in life, states Warrier (1977:57), is to "get out of this triangular predicament by virtue of the saving knowledge of God [Sv 6.20]." This, 'to get out', can be construed as liberation which Shankara insinuates is granted by the grace of Ishvara (BSB 2.3.41).

Nelson (2007:312), in his exposition of BSB 2.3.41, insinuates that Shankara considers the jiva to be "totally dependent on the Lord's grace for both the experience of *samsara* and the knowledge that effects *moksha*." For Warrier (1977:58), this 'redeeming function' of Ishvara "constitutes the *raison d'etre* of the phenomenon of *Avatara* or incarnation."

This 'redeeming function' can be construed as liberation of the *jiva* from its bondage due to ignorance as a result of Maya. The term for this liberation in Hinduism is known as *moksha.* To understand how this liberation occurs at the empirical level is the point of discussion in the next section (8.4.4).

8.4.4   THE LIBERATION OF THE *JIVA* ACCORDING TO SHANKARA

In this section a discussion on the liberation of the *jiva* from bondage is investigated briefly. From the previous discussion (8.4.3.2. last paragraph), the term 'redeeming function' was branded as liberation or *moksha* which, as was understood, is a function of Ishvara.

This 'redeeming function' finds its explanation in Shankara's interpretation of the BS (3.2.5). This aphorism states: From the meditation on the supreme Lord, however, becomes manifest that which remains obscured; because the souls' bondage and freedom are derived from him.

It is important to quote Shankara's interpretation of this aphorism in totality as it provides an insight into his understanding of the *jiva* (soul) and how liberation is achieved and the involvement of Ishvara in this redemption. Shankara's interpretation is as follows:

> ... Though the soul and god may be related as the part and the whole, still the soul is directly seen to be possessed of attributes opposed to those of God... but though present, this similarity remains hidden, since it is screened off by ignorance. That similarity, remaining hidden, become manifest in the case of some rare person who meditates on God with diligence, for whom the darkness of ignorance gets removed, and who becomes endowed with mystic powers through the grace of God [Ishvara]... But it does not come naturally to all and sundry... Because "from him", i.e. owing to God, are "his", of this creature, "bondage and freedom", bondage that comes from the ignorance about the nature of God and freedom that comes from the knowledge of His reality. To this effect occurs the Upanishadic text, "On the realization of the Deity (i.e. Brahman with attributes), all the bondages (i.e. such evils as ignorance, desire, etc.) fall off; on the eradication of these evils, there is complete cessation of birth and death. But (as compared to bondage and freedom) the third thing (viz mystic powers) occurs as a result of meditation on Him (with

attributes), and after the death of the body comes unsurpassable divinity, and after that one becomes the Absolute with all the desires fulfilled" (Sv I.11). There are also other texts of this kind.

In this exposition of Shankara, it is clear that liberation of the *jiva* is due to the 'grace of god [Ishvara]' which arises from meditation on Ishvara. Once this liberation has been achieved, the *jiva* becomes one with Brahman (Nirguna – the Absolute).

8.5 RESUMÉ

It was important in the context of this thesis to establish how god (Ishvara) and the *jiva* come into existence because this understanding assists to better comprehend the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy. Therefore, with the understanding of how the 'dialectic of twofold reality' unfolds in the philosophy of Shankara, an attempt to establish whether there is a notion of Avatara in his philosophy will now be made.

CHAPTER 9
SHANKARA AND HIS NOTION OF AVATARA IN HIS PHILOSOPHY OF ADVAITA VEDANTA

9.1   INTRODUCTION

In the research thus far, there were no references made where a solid conclusion could be drawn of the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy, even though the Upanishads and the Vedanta Sutra were consistently consulted. In this chapter the Bhagavad Gita will be predominantly consulted, especially the introduction by Shankara.

In chapter 8, the concept of god (Ishvara) and the relationship with Brahman and *jiva* were firmly established in Shankara's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. Ishvara is not only the creator of the empirical world, but also the creator of other gods as well (see 8.4.2. paragraph 6). Further to this ability to create, Ishvara, according to Masih (1988:309) and Bhaskarananda (2011:loc 135), is also regarded as the preserver and destroyer. For Bhaskarananda, creation, preservation and destruction "go hand in hand in this world." Similarly, Masih (1988:309) considers Ishvara alone as the "one single cause from whom follow origination, sustenance and retraction of this world (Vs 1.4.23)."

These three 'functions' of Ishvara is expanded in the following section where these 'functions' are referred to as 'aspects' of Ishvara.

9.2   ASPECTS OF ISHVARA

Due to this creative ability of Ishvara, Mahadevan (1968:31), Waite (2010:loc 1464) and Bhaskarananda (2011:loc 135), refers to this as the three basic aspects of Ishvara namely: (1) creator aspect, (2) preserver aspect and (3) destroyer aspect. As creator Ishvara is known as Brahma, as preserver Ishvara is known as Vishnu and as destroyer Ishvara is known as Shiva.

Mahadevan (1968:31), when referring to the different sects and schools of philosophy that existed at the time of Shankara, suggested that every sectarian god was also an aspect of Ishvara. He claimed that in Ishvara "all the Gods find their culmination" and that the "worship of any one of these aspects, or even any

lower expression of the Godhead, will eventually lead the worshipper nearer the goal." The reference to 'goal' here is 'Brahman realisation' or moksha.

Gough (1979:56), in commenting on other aspects of Ishvara, seems to draw on Shankara's understanding of a hierarchical structure of emanations. In this hierarchical structure he mentions that, "Brahman in his hierarchical emanations as Ishvara, Hiranyagarbha, and Viraj, is the Sagunam [*sic*] Brahma [*sic*]."

Therefore, when aspects of Ishvara are mentioned, it has to be examined and understood from the perspective of qualified Brahman (Saguna Brahman). It is within this second level of reality that the following invocation from the Puranas must be comprehended. This invocation is found in Shankara's introduction to the Bhagavad Gita wherein a sense of the hierarchical emanations mentioned by Gough above could be deduced:

> Nayarana is beyond the Avyakta;
> From the Avyakta the Mudane Egg is born;
> Within the Mundane Egg, verily, are these worlds
> And the Earth made up of the seven Dvipas (BGS 1)

In order to understand the above extract in relation to the aspects of Ishvara, the following section will analyse this extract and draw conclusions which will place the concepts of Narayana, Avyakta, Mundane Egg in its correct perspectives. This approach will assist in untangling the web of references made to other aspects of Ishvara such as Vishnu, Narayana and Krishna, to which Shankara alludes to later in his introduction to his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita. Further to this, it may also provide a sense of the notion of Avatara in his philosophy.

9.2.1   AN ANALYSIS OF THE INVOCATION QUOTED BY SHANKARA IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO THE BHAGAVAD GITA

Before embarking on the analysis of the invocation quoted by Shankara, an idea of the relationship of certain gods and deities to each other may provide a better understanding of how and why Shankara mentions the names of certain gods in his introduction to his BGB. In this instance one is mindful that Shankara was well aware of the Pancaratra system of belief when he wrote the introduction to his

commentary on the BG. In the BSB 2.2.44-45 Shankara refutes the teachings of the Pacaratras although certain aspects of the doctrines are retained like the concept of *vyuha* (division), who are four in number: Vasudeva, Samkarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. According to Shankara's account Samakarsana stands for the individual soul, Pradyumna for the mind and Aniruddha for the ego and Vasudeva as god.

According to Dasgupta (1952:56-57) this explanation by Shankara is rare and cites many other literature to qualify this statement without refuting Shankara's explanation.

Flood (2005:112-121), though, does provide an excellent brief into how some of these deities, which are mentioned in Shankara's introduction to the BGB are related to each other. The following are direct quotes from his excellent research on these relationships.

- Vishnu/Narayana/Krishna
  The early history of the development of Vishnu and his worship is highly complex. In this history Vishnu becomes fused with other, originally independent deities, and the traditions which focused upon the deities became merged in the Vaishnava tradition ... Literature in Sanskrit attests to the existence of a number of originally independent deities – and cults focused upon them – who became fused with Vishnu, particularly Vasudeva, Krishna and Narayana (Flood 2005:112).

  Yet in spite of the diversity of traditions within the Vaishnava fold, there are certain features which are held in common:

  o The Lord is the 'Supreme Person' (purusottama) with personal qualities (Saguna), rather than an abstract absolute (Nirguna).
  o The Lord is the cause of the cosmos, he creates, maintains and destroys it.
  o The Lord reveals himself through sacred pictures, temple icons, in his incarnations (avatara (*sic*)) and in saints (Flood 2005:116).

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Early Vaishnava worship focuses on three deities who become fused together, namely Vasudeva-Krishna, Krishna-Gopala and Narayana, who in turn all become identified with Vishnu. Put simply, Vasudeva-Krishna, and Krishna-Gopala were worshipped by groups generally referred to as Bhagavatas, while Narayana was worshipped by the Pancaratra sect (Flood 2005:118).

- The cult Narayana

  The cult of Narayana is another important ingredient in the fusion of traditions which forms Vaishnavism. Narayana is a deity found in the *Satapatha Brahamana* where he is identified with the cosmic man (*Purusha*) ... His name according to *Manu*, means 'resting on the waters', and in the *Narayaniya* section of the *Mahabarata* he is the resting place and goal of man, both of which are characters of Vishnu. Narayana appears in the *Mahanarayana Upanishad* (composed around the fourth century BCE) which praises him as the absolute and highest deity who yet dwells in the heart. In the *Mahabarata* and in some Puranas, he is the supreme being, lying like Vishnu, on a giant snake in an ocean of milk. According to a late text of the eleventh century, the *Kathasagaritsagara,* Narayana dwells in his heaven of 'white island' where he lies on the body of sesha with Lakshmi sitting at his feet. Here Narayana has clearly become identified with Vishnu. Vishnu is therefore a composite figure. (Flood 2005:121).

The relationships between deities mentioned above will have a bearing on some of the names featured in Shankara's introduction to his commentary of the BG. The above understanding will assist in placing these deities in the correct perspectives as they are mentioned by Shankara in his commentary on the BG.

With this understanding of the deities above, a return to the focus of this section will now be considered which is: An analysis of the invocation quoted by Shankara in his introduction to the Bhagavad Gita.

In his introductory remarks of his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita (see 9.2.), Shankara clearly states that this invocation is a verse from the Puranas which refers to the *Antaryamin*. This *Antaryamin* is regarded as the 'Inner Guide and

Regulator of all souls'. Similarly, in the BSB 1.2.18, Ishvara is also known as the *Antaryamin.*

9.2.1.1 ANALYSIS OF *ANTARYAMIN* AS THE 'INNER CONTROLLER': THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISHVARA AND NARAYANA

Waite (2010:loc 1457) explains that this *Antaryamin* is the "common principle that governs all forms. It is both material and efficient cause ... This 'inner controller' is *Ishvara*."

This contribution from Waite can find its origin in Shankara's commentary of the BU 3.7.3. The aphorism is as follows: He who inhabits the earth, but is within it, whom the earth does not know, whose body is the earth, and who controls the earth from within, is the Internal Ruler, your own mortal self.

Commenting on this aphorism (BU 3.7.3.), Shankara explains that the body of the deity of the earth "are regularly made to work or stop work by the mere presence of the Lord as witness. Such an Isvara, called Narayana, *who controls* the deity of *the earth*, i.e. directs her to her particular work, *from within, is the Internal Ruler."*

It should be noted that in this explanation *Antaryamin* is none other than Ishvara, who, according to Shankara, is also known as Narayana. In 9.2. (the last paragraph) the god Narayana was given a brief mention. Narayana would become more significant as the study of the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy is sustained.

The above aphorism (BU 3.7.3) is then repeated (see BU 3.7.4-23) but with reference to water, fire, sky, air, heaven, sun, quarters, moon and stars, ether, darkness, light, all beings, nose, organ of speech, eye, ear, mind, skin, intellect, and organ of generation.

The aphorism (BU 3.7.23) concludes by describing the 'Inner Controller' as:

> He is never seen, but is the Witness; He is never heard, but is the
> Hearer; He is never thought, but is the Thinker; He is never
> known, but is the Knower. There is no other witness but Him, no

other thinker but Him, no other knower but Him. He is the Internal
Ruler, your own immortal self. Everything else but Him is mortal.

As at the concluding commentary by Shankara on the BU 3.7.3., similarly at the conclusion of the commentary on these aphorisms (BU 3.7.4-23), Shankara confirms that the 'Inner Controller' is Ishvara.

In the case of Narayana, and by way of the following mathematical equation, it can be concluded, that in the understanding of Shankara, Ishvara is Narayana: if A=B and B=C, then A=C. In the context of the above commentary of Shankara, if the 'Inner Controller' (A) = Ishvara (B) and if Ishvara (B) = Narayana (C) then the 'Inner Controller' (A) = Narayana (C).

The above conclusion that Ishvara, according to Shankara, is Narayana, and in turn is the *Antaryamin* is supported by Shankara's commentarial remarks in his introduction to his commentary of the BG where he unequivocally states that "Narayana is the *Antaryamin.*"

To further strengthen this argument that Narayana is god the creator, just as Ishvara is, Shankara mentions that, in the introduction to his commentary on the BG, not only is Narayana is his favourite god but is also, "in the popular conception, the Creator." This 'popular conception' is used by Shankara to show that the Purana (archaic history), the Itihasa (ancient traditions) and the Bhagavad Gita all teach one and the same doctrine. This conception being that Narayana "is the *Antaryamin*, the Divine Being in whom all embodies souls have their being."

From the above analysis, the determination can be made that Shankara considers Narayana to be Ishvara in the conceptualisation of the *Antaryamin.* One should not forget though to remember that these analyses relate to the hierarchical emanations mentioned by Gough (1979:56). In his comments on other aspects of Ishvara, he seems to draw on Shankara's understanding of a hierarchical structure of emanations, where Brahman, in his hierarchical emanations as Ishvara, Hiranyagarbha, and Viraj, is the Saguna Brahma. Henceforth the study continues to establish these hierarchical emanations with Narayana being confirmed, as above, to be the Avyakta (the Unmanifested Being).

9.2.1.2   NARAYANA CONSIDERED BEYOND AVYAKTA

In 9.2.1.1., it was established that Narayana is the *Antaryamin* and, according to Shankara, should be considered as Ishvara. Ishvara, as has been mentioned earlier (see 8.4.3.2.), created and controls Maya (BSB 1.1.20).

The second level in the hierarchy of emanations is that, Narayana, the Antaryamin, is beyond the Avyakta. The term Avyakta means 'unmanifest'. According to Shankara, in commentating on the BSB 1.4.3., he refers to the 'unmanifest' as "the potential power, constituted by nescience." This 'potential power' mentioned here is none other than Maya. Therefore, by way of deduction, if Avyakta is the 'unmanifest', and the 'unmanifest' is Maya, then Avyakta is Maya.

Other scholars such as Comans (2000:249) and Roodurmun (2002:143) also establish from Shankara's works that Avyakta and Maya are both referred to as the 'unmanifest' and 'potential power'.

This fact that Avyakta is Maya, is confirmed by Shankara in his introduction to the BG. In this introduction he states that Narayana is not "a creature of the Avyakta but far transcends it. It is the Avyakta, - the Avyakrita, Maya, the undifferentiated matter, - out of which, when in apparent union with Isvara, is evolved the principle of Hiranyagarbha here spoken of as Anda or the mundane egg." From previous references (for an example, see 8.4.3.2.), it is seen that Ishvara controls Maya. Therefore Maya cannot become 'manifest' without Ishvara. When Maya does become 'manifest' it is manifested in names and forms.

The aphorism is therefore very explicit in stating that, "Narayana is beyond Avyakta."

The following section would analyse the rest of the emanations together as they are clearly explained in Shankara's introduction to the BG.

9.2.1.3   OTHER HIERARCHICAL EMANATIONS MENTIONED IN THE APHORISM

In the previous section Narayana was seen to be beyond Avyakta and therefore in the hierarchical scheme of emanations it is first. Narayana is then followed by

Avyakta while in the remaining emanations that follow, the invocation states that from the Avyakta "the Mundane Egg is born."

According Shankara's explanation, the 'Mundane Egg' is a reference to Hiranyagarbha which evolved from the union of Ishvara and Maya or one could insinuate to be also the union between Niranyana and Avyakta. Hiranyagarbha therefore forms the third level in the hierarchical emanations of the aphorism.

The 'Mundane Egg' (Hiranyagarbha) is in turn composed of five simple rudimental elements and the intermingling of these elements give rise to the next level of emanation known as Viraj of "which are formed the earth and all the other *lokas* or inhabited region" (Sankaracharya 2004:1,2).

Shankara's introductory commentary on the BG concludes the hierarchical emanations with the seven insular continents.

From the above analyses of the hierarchical emanations it is was established that Narayana (Ishvara) assumed the highest level, followed by Avyakta (Maya) then by the Mundane Egg (Hiranyagarbha), and within the Mundane Egg, due to the 'intermingling' of the seven rudimental elements, Viraj is born and then finally the insular continents.

This then concludes the analysis of the Puranic verse quoted by Shankara in his introduction to his commentary on the BG. From this analysis it was shown that there is certainly a hierarchical emanation of aspects of Ishvara. This analysis was necessary as preparation for the investigation into the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy. The different aspects of Ishvara as Saguna Brahman is significant as will be discovered in the next section when the focus shifts to Shankara's notion of Avatara.

9.3   THE NOTION OF AVATARA IN SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY

In 3.3.2.1.2.2. an attempt was made to exegete the classical text of the Bhagavad Gita (4:7-8) which makes reference to the concept of Avatara. This exegesis was not conducted from the perspective of Advaita Vedanta of Shankara. This would have been a futile exercise as much of the exegesis would have had to rely on an

understanding of Shankara's philosophy. Now that the fundamental tenets of his philosophy have been analysed, it is appropriate to turn to his commentary of the Bhagavad Gita to establish whether there is a notion of Avatara existing in it.

9.3.1 SHANKARA: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS INTRODUCTION TO HIS COMMENTARY ON THE BHAGAVAD GITA

With the analysis of the invocation used by Shankara to introduce the first part of his commentary on the BG sufficiently examined, the focus now shifts to other important comments made by Shankara in the later parts of the introduction to this commentary. These comments will have a bearing on his notion of Avatara in his philosophy.

The introduction to Shankara's commentary lays bare the methodology with which he proposes to commentate on the BG. Much of what he explains in this commentary on the BG, has a bearing on how all the aphorisms should be interpreted. Warrier (1977:58) tends to support this comment when he suggests that the concept of god "gains in breadth and depth of significance in the *Gita* [BG] which Samkara interprets on strictly Advaitic lines."

Now, subsequent to the invocation and his commentary thereupon, Shankara immediately begins to explain the 'twofold Vedic religion' which seems to lay the foundation for further discussions and how the BG should be approached so as to be understood. Thereafter he considers the purpose for the divine incarnation and the manner in which moksha can be attained.

Firstly consideration will be given to the 'twofold Vedic Religion' and thereafter the divine incarnation and then the manner in which moksha can be attained.

9.3.1.1 SHANKARA AND THE 'TWOFOLD VEDIC RELIGION'

A reference to a 'twofold Vedic Religion' can be deduced from the orthodox Aryan Vedic tradition which was in the beginning "essentially *Pravrtti-dharma,* but later on, partly through inner evolution and more through an influence of Muni-Sramanas [see 4.2] it developed *Nivrtti-dharma* as a tendency within its fold." (Pande:261). It could be said that Shankara's 'twofold Vedic Religion' may have had a similar reference.

The 'twofold Vedic Religion' as espoused by Shankara was regarded by him as the 'The Religion of Works' (*pravrtti*-dharma) and 'The Religion of Renunciation' (*nivrtti-dharma*). This 'twofold Vedic Religion', as suggested by Shankara in his introduction to the BG, came about after the creation of this world.

Sawai (1992:120), when referring to this 'twofold Vedic Religion' spoken of by Shankara, interprets it as "the forms of correct life." In this instance the two forms of life are: *jnanayoga*, which is the *dharma* characterised by non-action (*nivrtti-dharma*) and *karmayoga*, which is the *dharma* characterised by action (*pravrtti-dharma*).

Further to this, Sawai (1992:120) mentions that, in relation to Shankara's philosophy of Advaita, *pravrtti-dharma* leads to bondage and *nivrtti-dharma* leads to emancipation.

In order to bring stability to this world, the Lord created the Prajapatis who were regarded as 'lord of creatures', a deity who becomes the creator god (Flood 2005:45).

The term Prajapati, according to Wagebaar, Plukker and Parikh (2008:1009), is applied to Brahma (an aspect of Ishvara; see 9.2.) as the "active creator of the universe. But is generally to these ten sages, as fathers of all beings that the name Prajapati is most commonly given. They are Marici, Atri, Angira, Puatsya, Pulah, Kratu, Vasisihht, Pracetas or Daksh, Bhrigu and Narad..."

According to Shankara these Prajapatis were created to ensure stability in the world by "causing them to adopt" the *dharma* (virtuous path) which is characterized by action (rites and duties) as revealed in the Vedas. This path is regarded by Shankara, in his comments on the introduction to the BG, as the "Pravritti-Dharma, the 'Religion of Works.'"

He then continues to state that after the creation of the Prajapatis, the Lord "created others such as Sanaka and Sanandana." These two sages are two of four sages born of the god Brahma. According to Lochtefeld (2002:592) these sages were "paradigms of asceticism." The other two sages are Sanatana and Sanatkumara.

Lochtefeld (2002:592) asserts that "Brahma, in creating these sages, commands them to begin the work of creation, but they are so detached from worldly concerns that they refuse to do so. They are celibate their entire lives, study the Vedas from childhood and always travel together."

According to Shankara (2004:2), these sages were created to adopt the dharma characterised by renunciation and distinguished by knowledge and detachment.

In presenting this 'twofold Vedic Religion', Shankara confirms that it is this that maintains order in the universe. Malovsky (2001:337) explains that these dharmas, which is meant for the stability of the world, is the "direct means to both secular and spiritual welfare of living beings."

Shankara concludes his discussion on the 'twofold Vedic Religion' by stating that this is what leads directly to "liberation and worldly prosperity" and that it has "been practiced by all castes and religious orders ... – from the Brahmanas downwards [meaning for a long period of time] – who sought welfare", or as Malovsky (2001:337) suggest: who aspire after the highest.

For some reason this order became destabilised after a long period of time and it had to be stabilised.

9.3.1.2   RE-ESTABLISHING ORDER IN THE WORLD THROUGH INCARNATION

When, after a long period of time, according to Shankara, religion (dharma) was overpowered by irreligion (adharma) or as Potter (2008:295) interprets it, "When *dharma* gave way to *adharma*", and adharma was on the increase, it was "then that the original Creator (Adi-karta), Vishnu, known as Narayana, wishing to maintain order in the universe, incarnated Himself as Krishna" (Sankaracharya 2004:2,3).

The reason for this incarnation is so that the "earthly Brahman, of spiritual life on earth" can be preserved. In the footnotes of the introduction, the term 'earthly Brahman' meant the "Vedas, the Brahamanas, and yagnas or sacrifices." The reasoning is that it is only through the preservation of spiritual life that the Vedic Religion can be conserved.

Again, according to the footnotes, and as regards the comment of 'incarnation' Sankaracharya 2004:3), the words used for incarnation was *amsena sambabhuva* which means 'partial incarnation'. As such, Shankara views Krishna as a partial incarnation of Vishnu.

An abstract of the above discussion, according to Malovsky (2001:338), can be summarised as follows:

> After creating the world and its inhabitants the Lord imparted a twofold dharma. The dharma of action, when followed correctly would lead to the acquirement of earthly goods, whereas the purpose of the dharma of renunciation and detachment was the attainment of liberation, a purely spiritual goal. In both dharmas a good is revealed to be followed by all human beings; only a deviation from both dharmas would harm the universe order intended by the Lord.

Shankara (2004:2) then goes on to say that this universal order deteriorated due to inordinate human desire. By laying the cause of the world's troubles at the feet of the human race, i.e. in human craving, we note that Shankara does not impute this deviation from the divine order to a divine predestination, but to human free will. And it is to the human free will that the Lord appeals, by appearing as the teacher Krishna, whose mission is to persuade people to return to the original dharma and thereby find liberation (Malovsky 2001:338).

This is the first and clearest indication of the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy. Although the word Avatara is not used (see 3.3.) the context in which Shankara refers to Krishna and the relation of Krishna to Vishnu leads one to consider very strongly that Krishna is indeed an Avatara of Vishnu, albeit a partial Avatara.

In reference to the context and his ontological arguments, as discussed in this thesis thus far, where does Shankara place Krishna, as an Avatara, in his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta? The next section would attempt to answer this

question by providing a brief summary of the level at which Shankara understands an Avatara to be operational.

9.4 SHANKARA AND HIS ACCOMMODATION OF AVATARA IN HIS PHILOSOPHY OF ADVAITA VEDANTA.

In 2.3. it was stated that a clear indication of Avatara, or the seminal reference to Avatara, is to be found in the BG 4:6,7. These aphorisms will now be examined from Shankara's perspective so as to understand how the concept of Avatara, and in this instance, Krishna as an Avatara, fits into his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.

The verse in BG 4:6 states the following: "Though I am unborn, of imperishable nature, and though I am the Lord of all beings, yet ruling over My own nature, I am born by my own Maya."

Shankara's (2004:121) comment on this verse is based on the illusive nature of Krishna as he understands it and as it fits into his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. He exegetes this verse with the following statement:

> Though I am born, though by nature my power of vision (*jnana-sakti*) is undecaying, though I am by nature the Lord of all creatures from Brahma down to grass, yet ruling over my nature – Prakriti, Maya of Vishnu, which is made up of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, to which this whole universe is subject, and by which deluded, the whole world knows not Vasudeva, its own self, - I appear to be born and embodied, through my own Maya, but not in reality, unlike others.

In order to explain the commentary of this verse, in light of Shankara's philosophy, a return to some of the basic concepts mentioned earlier in this thesis as regards Shankara's understanding of creation (cause and effect) will be discussed.

The most important phrase in this comment by Shankara is the last part which says, "I appear to be born and embodied, through my own Maya, but not in reality, unlike others" (Sankaracharya 2004:121).

The first part of this phrase "I appear to be born" is similar to the *vyavaharika* form of reality (see 6.4.2.2.) which is empirical reality determined by Maya and is neither real nor unreal. It can also be equated to the *vivartavada* theory (see 7.2.1.1.2.) where the cause appears as the effect. This also then reverts to Shankara's explanation of the two levels of Brahman (see 7.7). In 7.5. the inexplicable Maya was instrumental in the creation of the world thus giving rise to the twofold reality discussed in 8.1.

Therefore, to understand this comment from Shankara the *vyavaharika* form of reality, the *vivartavada* theory and the concept of Maya must take into consideration. In this sense, when the whole phrase is considered, it would mean, as Lott (1987:4,5) suggests that, "For Sankara the avatara is thought to function primarily at a didactic or revelatory level ... It reveals the truth lying behind the veil of illusion which obscures reality."

Krishna was not a real embodiment of "God's ultimate being, but was merely an 'as if' [appears to be] embodiment. In the Gita itself, Krishna had declared that his avatara is effected by [his] own *maya* (*sic*)" (Lott 1987:5). The fact that the concept Maya is mentioned in this verse and that Maya is of significance in Shankara's philosophy (see chapter 7), Krishna falls directly into Shankara's Advaitc explanation of Saguna Brahman (see 7.7.) in the sense that Krishna is not Nirguna Brahman because Krishna declares himself to be the 'Lord of all beings'. This concept 'Lord of all beings', to which Krishna alludes to could be construed to be the same as the Prajapatis (see 9.3.1.1).

Therefore for Shankara, although his philosophy is absolute non-dualism, he is able to accommodate the concept of Avatara but only at the lower level, the level of Saguna Brahman. The question is: Why would Shankara want to accommodate the notion of Avatara in his philosophy? The following section will attempt to answer this question.

9.4.1 THE PURPOSE OF ACCOMMODATING AVATARA IN SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY OF ADVAITA VEDANTA

In order to understand why Shankara accommodates the notion of Avatara in his philosophy, the next verse of the BG, 4.7, provides a reason. This verse states

that "Whenever there is a decay of religion, O Bharata, and an ascendency of irreligion, then I manifest Myself" (BGB 4:7).

According to Krishna, in this verse, he only manifests himself whenever dharma is overpowered by adharma. Dharma refers to religion and adharma to irreligion (see 9.3.1.2). This was indeed the reason given by Shankara in his introductory comments on the BG where he clearly indicated that, "When, owing to the ascendency of lust its votaries, religion is overpowered by irreligion ..."

Thereafter he considers the incarnation of Krishna to preserve the "earthly Brahman" (see 9.3.1.2). It is interesting that Shankara refers to the Avatara as the means to preserve the 'earthly Brahman." To understand this comment one must note the path to liberation which Shankara proposes. It is known that for Shankara the only path to moksha is the path of knowledge as the following aphorism alludes to: liberation comes when the potential power (of Maya) is burnt away by knowledge (BSB 1.1.22).

By now it is understood that Krishna 'exists' only at the lower level of Shankara's twofold reality concept. Liberation therefore for the *jiva* would mean attesting to the dharma of works. It is the dharma of renunciation which leads to complete cessation of samsara or transmigratory life and its cause and not the dharma of works (Sankaracharya 2004:4). According to Shankara the attainment of moksha consist of "a steady devotion to the knowledge of the Self, preceded by the renunciation of all works." This system came to be known as *jnana marga* (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn 2009:82). The notion of Avatara assists the devotee in the path towards attaining moksha. This path is known as *bhakti marga* (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn 2009:83).

Therefore, for Shankara (2004:6), the BG expounds this twofold Religion, whose aim is to attain moksha. It expounds specially the nature of the Supreme Being and Reality known as Vasudeva, the Parabrahman, who forms the subject of the discourse.

According to Dasgupta (1975:436), Shankara has throughout his commentary on the BG, "demonstrated that those who should follow the injunctions of the Veda

and perform Vedic deeds [Religion of Works], such as sacrifices, etc., belong to a lower order". It is for these that Shankara considers the concept of Avatara as part of a process to liberation. Avatara therefore remains a concession to those that are still veiled in Maya and thus consider the world to be real.

Shankara offers the concept of Avatara as a means for the un-enlightened, through *bhakti*, to attain knowledge (*jnana*) and thereby eradicating Maya. In eradicating Maya, the Soul merges with Brahman, or rather the Soul reaches Brahman realisation. Herein lies moksha, the ultimate destiny of the enlightened *jiva.*

CHAPTER 10
CONCLUSION

10.1 INTRODUCTION

It was indicated, on a few occasions, that Hinduism is complicated and difficult to define (see 1.2). This thesis seemed to have justified such a remark, even though it was able to reflect systematically on the notion of Avatara in Shankara's philosophy. The research must be seen as a fine thread weaving its way through a maze in Hindu philosophy and theology in order to place Shankara's philosophy within the correct perspective so as to understand where Avatara finds its seat within orthodoxy and Advaita Vedanta.

10.2 FOCUS OF THESIS

This thesis focused only on the relevant thoughts in Shankara's Advaita Vedanta which reflected on his notion of Avatara. This is not an admission that all has been said with finality on this subject as there are other thoughts of Shankara such as the concepts of Desireless Desire (Nishkama Karma), Nature of Consciousness, the Nature of the Ego, the Nature of Moksha, the Doctrine of Jivanmukti, the role of *bhakti*, etc. which would have had a bearing on the theme of this thesis, but which would not have altered the conclusion of this research. To have all these themes and thoughts incorporated into this research would have diverted the central focus of the hypothesis which this thesis set out to investigate.

10.3 SHANKARA'S PHILOSOPHY OF ADVAITA VEDANTA

Shankara's philosophy, as this thesis has proven, teaches absolute non-dualism (see 6.2). This means that there is only Brahman and none other. In order to explain why and how a person experiences the world, or, to state it differently, "how the undifferentiated Brahman relates to 'undifferentiated' things", Shankara latched onto the concept of Maya (see 7.1; 7.4). In this way Shankara was able to link the Ultimate Reality (Brahman – *paramarthika*) with the empirical world understood in terms of *pratibhasika* (reflectional or illusion) and *vyavaharika* (reflection which is not an illusion but neither is it real) (see 6.4).

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Maya, for Shankara, was related to terms such as appearance, ignorance, superimposition (e.g. the snake and the rope), power, deception and falsehood (see 7.4.4.), yet with these descriptions, Maya is regarded by Shankara as inexplicable (see 7.8).

10.3.1 SHANKARA: CREATION AND INCARNATION

It is in this manner that Shankara could account for the creation of the world in that Brahman, the absolute non-dual Reality, created the world but through Maya (see 7.6) the inexplicable. The result of this 'creation' developed into what came to be known as the 'two levels of truth', or two levels of Brahman: the Saguna Brahman (lower level) and Nirguna Brahman (higher level) (See 7.7.; 7.7.1.; 7.7.2). Saguna Brahman became known as Ishvara (god) (see 8.4.1.) who was deemed as the creator and controller of the world and everything in it (See 9.2. 9.2.1.1). According to Shankara's comments on the BSB, he mentions that other gods were created (BSB 1.3.26-28), but these gods were aspects of Ishvara (see 9.2). One of these aspects of Ishvara was Vishnu (9.2). Vishnu, as an aspect of Ishvara, is regarded as the creator and it is as the creator that Vishnu "incarnates Himself (*sic*) as Krishna" in order to restore "the earthly Brahman"[10] (Sankaracharya 2004:3).

10.3.2 SHANKARA AND HIS WORKS

The works and writings of Shankara are indeed many, some of which are regarded as authentic while others are questionable. There are also many critics, some of who have been mentioned in this thesis, such as Ramanuja and Madhva, who could not align themselves with Shankara's Advaita Vedanta and as a result presented some of their own ideas about god and Brahman, the Self, cause and effect and so forth.

Secondly Shankara's philosophy courted controversy and yet it is widely respected and debated among scholars more than the populous. This thesis treaded on academic principles, and where necessary engaged some of the controversial themes, yet remained within the mainline orthodox understanding of Advaita Vedanta of Shankara.

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[10] In the footnote of Shankara's commentary on the BG 'earthly Brahman' is referred to as the 'Vedas, brahamanas, and yagnas or sacrifice'.

10.4 RESUMÉ

Finally, to conclude the main thrust of this thesis, the candidate has found it necessary to provide a thorough and systematic exposition of Shankara's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta in order to explain the existence of the notion of Avatara in his philosophy. The candidate experiences that other research has the mentioning of Avatara in the philosophy of Shankara (Pandey (1978); Lott (1987); Miranda (1990); Parrinder (1997) Mishra (2000)); but the candidate follows a systematic methodology to provide sufficient evidence based on an exposition of Shankara's philosophy for the notion of Avatara in his philosophical systems.

As such the systematic exposition of Advaita Vedanta of Shankara in this thesis also lends support to Parrinder's (1997:53) assertion of the role religion plays in attaining moksha and why it was necessary for Shankara to concede to the Avatara notion (see 2.5).

Parrinder maintains that religious devotion "contradicted all the monism that Shankara taught" and that it was apparent that many of his followers "engaged in fervent worship to a personal god." With these statements above Parrinder concedes, and which is apparent from this thesis, that for Shankara "religious worship was simply a means to an end beyond itself."

It was a means for the *jiva* to purify its mind in preparation for knowledge which removes the veil of illusion (Maya) and Ishvara so as to be one with Brahman, the Absolute, thus attaining moksha.

Appendix 1

Occurrence of Maya in the Rig Veda

1. **mayah** (nominative and accusative plural twenty –four times)

   I.32.4; I.117.3; II.11.10; II.27.26; III.20.3; III.53.8; V.2.9; V.31.7; V.40.8; VI.18.9; VI.20.4; VI.22.9; VI.44.22; VI.45.9; VI.58.1; VII.1.10; VII.98.5; VII.99.4; VIII.41.8; X.53.9; X.73.5; X.99.2; X.111.6

2. **mayaya** (instrumental singular nineteen times)

   1.80.7; I.144.1; I.160.3; II.17.5; III.27.7; IV.30.12; IV.30.21; V.63.3; V.63.7; VI.22.6; VII.23.15; VII.41.3; VII.104.24; IX.73.5; IX.73.9; IX.83.3; X.71.5; X.85.18; X.177.1

3. **mayinah** (accusative plural and genitive singular of mayin fifteen times)

   I.39.2; I.51.5; I.54.4; I.64.7; I.159.4; II.11.10; III.38.7; III.38.9; III.56.1; V.44.11

   VI.61.3; VII.82.3; VIII.3.19; VIII.23.14; X.138.3

4. **mayabhih** (instrumental plural thirteen times)

   I.11.7; I.33.10; I.51.5; I.151.9; III.34.6; III.60.1; V.30.6 ; V.44.2; V.78.6; VI.47.18; VI.63.5; VII.14.14; X.147.2

5. **mayinam** (accusative singular of mayin ten times)

   I.11.7; I.53.7; I.56.3; I.80.7; II.11.5; V.30.6; V.58.2; VI.48.14; VIII.76.1; X.147.2

6. Maya (three times)

   III.61.7; V.63.4; X.54.2

7. **mayam** (accusative singular three times)

   V.85.5; V.85.6; X.88.6

8. **mayi** (nominative singular of mayin three times)

   VII.28.4; X.99.10; X.147.5

9. **mayinam** (three times)

   I.32.4; III.20.3; III.34.3

10. **mayini** (two times)

    V.48.1; X.5.3

11. **mayina** (instrumental singular of mayin)

    VI.63.5

12. **mayini**

   V.48.3

13. **mayavina**

   X.24.4

14. **mayavan**

   IV.16.9

15. **mayavinam**

   II.11.9

16. **mayavinah**

   X.83.3

Appendix 2

Occurrences of *Maya* in the BSB (O'Neil 1980:174).

1. BSB (1.1.20.): In answer to the objection that the reference in the Upanishad to such forms as the possession of golden beard etc. does not befit God, we say: Even for God there may be forms created at His will out of Maya for the sake of favouring the aspirants, as is declared in the Smriti, "O Narada, it is a Maya, created by me, that you see me in this form possessed of all the substances and qualities. You must not understand me thus."

2. BSB (1.2.6.): The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the heart of all beings, causing all beings by His Maya to revolve, (as if) mounted on a machine.

3. BSB (1.3.19.): The supreme Lord is but one – unchanging, eternal, absolute Consciousness; but like the magician He appears diversely through Maya, otherwise known as *Avidya* (ignorance). Apart from this there is no other consciousness as such.

4. BSB (1.4.3.): That potential power, constituted by nescience, is mentioned by the word unmanifest. It rests on God, and is compatible to magic. It is a kind of deeper slumber in which the transmigrating souls sleep without any consciousness of their real nature ... sometimes it is called Maya as in, "Know Maya to be Nature and the master of Maya to be the great God" (Vs.IV.10). That Maya is surely unmanifest, for it can neither be ascertained as real nor unreal.

5. BSB (1.4.9.): Know Maya to be Nature (material cause), and the master of Maya to be the great Lord (Sv.IV.10).

6. BSB (2.1.1.): It has been shown in the first adhyaya that the omniscient Lord of all is the cause of the origin of this world in the same way as clay is the material cause of jars and gold of golden ornaments; that by his rulership he is the cause of the subsistence of this world, just as the mayavi is the cause of the subsistence of the Maya.

7. BSB (2.1.9.): This manifestation of the Highest Self, by its existing as the Self of the three conditions, is – like appearance of a snake etc. in a rope – but a (mayamatram) mere illusion.

8. BSB (2.1.21.): Just as the mayavi by his free will effortlessly retracts or withdraws the Maya spread by himself ...

9. BSB (2.2.29.): A thing perceived in a dream by one is contradicted (on his waking) ... there is a similar contradiction or cancellation in the case of Maya also. A thing perceived in a waking state – a pillar for instance – is never in the slightest cancelled or contradicted in that state.

10. BSB (3.2.3.): But it (viz. The dream world) is mere Maya, on account of its nature not manifesting itself with the totality (of the attributes of reality).

11. BSB (3.2.17.): Oh Narada, when you see me as endowed with the attributes of all beings it is only Maya of my own creation, but you should not understand me as being such (in reality).

12. BSB (3.2.1.): Here a doubt arises whether in the dream condition creation is real as in the waking state or whether it is Maya.

13. BSB (3.2.4.): Being merely Maya there is not even a whiff of ultimacy or truth about a dream, if it be said, (we reply) that it is not the case. As it is explained in "the non-difference of them results in the words like beginning etc.." (BS.2.1.14) the entire world of phenomenon is mere Maya. The mere Maya character stated or ascribed to this creation (of dream) is therefore of a special kind or simply special.

14. BSB (3.2.6.): Therefore it is sustainable that dream is of the nature of mere Maya.

15. BSB (2.3.6): It is not intelligible that scripture, like any man shall determine a thing by statements which are *delusively* false or deceitful.

16. BSB (1.1.17.): The mayavadin *par excellence* is one that stands on the ground different from the other mayavadin that appears to climb into the sky on a rope with a sword and leather in his hand.

17. BSB (2.1.28.): It is seen in the world also that gods, mayavin and others create without destruction of their own forms the diverse elephants, horses, etc.

18. BSB (2.2.7.): In the case of the Highest Self however there is a distinction because of apathy or detachment (in respect of things) and its own native and creative tendency being contingent through Maya.

Appendix 3

Characteristics of Maya (Tigunait 1989:223-224)

1. Maya is unconscious and opposed to the conscious principle Brahman, but it is neither real nor independent.

2. Maya is an inherent power of Brahman, through which Brahman veils itself. It is inseparable and undifferentiated from Brahman. Maya is neither identical with Brahman, nor different from Brahman, nor both.

3. Maya is beginningless.

4. Maya is both positive and negative, though it is not real. It is positive because it projects the world of plurality, and it is negative because it conceals the real, nondual nature of Brahman that is perfect knowledge and bliss. These two aspects of Maya are known respectively as *avarana-sakti*, the power of concealment, and *viksepa-sakti*, the power of projection. In other words, through its aspect of concealment Maya hides the purity and originality of Brahman and Atma, and through the power of projection it produces the world qualified by names and forms. Thus Maya can be said to be noncomprehension as well as miscomprehension.

5. Maya is indescribable because it is neither real, nor unreal, nor both real and unreal. It is not real because it does not have any independent existence apart from Brahman. It is not unreal because it is the actual power by which Brahman manifest itself as this apparent universe. It is also not both real and unreal because the conception of real and unreal in the context of one thing at one time is self-contradictory. From the standpoint of the world, Maya is comprehended as real, but from the standpoint of the absolute Reality it is unreal. Thus it is neither real nor unreal, nor both real and unreal. Because of its complex nature it is indescribable.

6. Maya is relative. The one absolute Brahman appears in many forms, and its power of becoming finite is called Maya.

7. Faulty cognition or mistaking one thing for something else is a form of Maya (*bhranti*). Seeing a snake in a rope or silver in a shell are examples of this.

8.   Maya is removable. By right knowledge or proper understanding, the understanding called Maya can be removed. Confusing a rope for a snake is rectified through a correct apprehension of the rope.

9.   The substratum of Maya is Brahman, yet Brahman is untouched by it. Thus Maya is the power of the absolute Brahman. It has no independent existence, but rests in Brahman. From the practical point of view, however, it is not totally illusion. There are certainly some differences between hallucinations, illusions, dreams, and the experience of the waking state. Compared to the experience of dreams, the experiences of the waking state are more real, but from the absolute point of view, hallucination, illusions, dreams, and the experience of the waking state are all equally unreal.

Each of the above characteristics of Maya, as listed by Tigunait, finds substantiation either in the Rig Veda (see 7.4.1.) or in the BSB (see 7.4.3).

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SUMMARY

Advaita Vedanta, as a philosophy, is also known as radical non-dualism and therefore cannot accommodate a concept such as an Avatara. The concept Avatara can best be described, yet not comprehensively in the English language, as 'incarnation'. Although the teaching of this philosophy was not established by Shankara, one could confidently admit that he firmly established it as a philosophy to be reckoned with.

Advaita Vedanta, being a philosophy focused on radical non-dualism, in that it states: There is none other than the Absolute Brahman, could not conceive of any other than Brahman. This being is so, the world and everything in it, including humans and Avatara should never exist; yet in the philosophy of Shankara it does 'exist', albeit at an empirical level. This is possible because of the following arguments presented by Shankara in support of an empirical reality.

- The first argument is based on the understanding of what reality is. According to Shankara, the understanding and testing of reality is based on the criterion of truth. For something to be true it has to have an element of non-contradiction and has to survive through the three periods of time: past, present and future. In other words it must be immutable and permanent. For Shankara, Brahman is the only reality (paramarthika) and everything else is false: it is neither real nor unreal (e.g. the world and everything in it).

- The relationship between Brahman and the empirical world can be described by the term *vyavaharika*. This relationship is similar to an example of a rope and a snake. In this example, the rope appears as a snake for one that views this from a distance. Yet when one gets closer, one realises that it is not a snake but a rope. It can therefore be said that the snake was a superimposition on the rope. The rope was real but the snake was false. From afar the snake looked real but is in reality unreal or not real. Similarly Shankara explains the relationship between the world and Brahman. The world is a superimposition on Brahman. Upon correct

knowledge, the world disappears and only Brahman remains. The world, one can therefore say, is an illusion.

- This illusion according to Shankara is brought about by *Maya* and is related to terms such as: appearance, ignorance, superimposition, power, deception and falsehood. For Shankara this is the principle of becoming and appearance through which the absolute non-dual Brahman becomes diversified and manifold.

- The state in which Brahman is therefore consciously associated with *Maya* to create the universe is called Ishvara (god). This causes an ontological dilemma for the status of *Maya*. The best way for Shankara to define *Maya* was to say that it is neither existent nor non-existent. If *Maya* was existent, then his philosophy of absolute non-dualism becomes questionable because there would be another reality. If non-existent, then the empirical world would not exist. To resolve this dilemma Shankara posits the idea of two levels of truth which includes two aspects of Brahman, Nirguna Brahman (Absolute Brahman) and Saguna Brahman (Brahman with attributes (Ishvara) or one could say 'a superimposed Brahman').

- Ishvara (Saguna Brahman), being the 'superimposed Brahman' has other aspects emanating from it. According to Shankara the three most important emanations are Brahma (creator), Vishnu (preserver) and Shiva (destroyer). The Brahmasutras have also confirmed that there were other gods created as well.

- With this creation of the world, other created beings were responsible for the preservation of dharma (duties) in this world. When adharma began to overpower dharma, something had to be done to bring stability in the world. For this reason, Vishnu incarnated himself as Krishna. This incarnation became better known in Hinduism as Avatara.

- It was necessary for Shankara to concede to the Avatara notion, because many of his followers worshipped an aspect of Ishvara. His theory was that the worship (*bhakti*) of other gods and deities was simply a means to moksha, but cannot directly attain moksha. The purpose for *bhakti* was a way to prepare the devotee to be purified so as to acquire knowledge, which, according to Shankara, removes *Maya* (veil of ignorance) thus liberating the *jiva* from bondage to attain Brahman realisation or moksha.

- Finally, in considering and understanding radical non-dualism, this research has proven that, within his philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, Shankara is forced to incorporate and utilise the concept of Avatara within the ambits of the Hindu religious tradition. This then constitutes the finding of this research.

OPSOMMING

Advaita Vedanta, as 'n filosofie, word ook as radikale nie-dualisme beskou en kan derhalwe nie 'n konsep soos 'n Avatara akkommodeer nie. Die begrip Avatara sou die duidelikste, hoewel nie volledig nie, as 'inkarnasie' beskryf kon word. Alhoewel die leerstellinge van hierdie filosofie nie deur Shankara begrond is nie, kan dit tog bevestig word dat hy dit as 'n filosofie om mee rekening te hou, deeglik vasgelê het.

Advaita Vedanta as filosofie fokus op nie-dualisme daarin dat dit die volgende stelling onderskryf: Daar is geen ander as die Absolute Brahman, geen ander as Brahman kan bedink word nie. Omdat dit so is, moes die wêreld en alles daarin, met inbegrip van /insluitende die mense en avatare, nooit bestaan het nie; tog in die filosofie van Shankara 'bestaan' dit wel, ten minste op empiriese vlak. Dat dit moontlik is, word deur Shankara ter ondersteuning van 'n empiriese werklikheid met die volgende argumente vasgelê:

- Die eerste argument berus op die begrip van die werklikheid. Shankara is van mening dat die begrip en toetsing van die werklikheid op die kriterium van waarheid berus. Om waar te wees, moet 'n element van nie-teenstrydighede voorkom en moet dit deur die drie periodes van tyd, naamlik verlede, hede en toekoms voorkom. Met ander woorde, dit moet onveranderlik en permanent/blywend wees. Vir Shankara is Brahman die enigste werklikheid (paramarthika) en is alles anders vals: nog werklik, nog onwerklik (bv. die wêreld en alles daarin)

- Die verhouding tussen Brahman en die empiriese wêreld kan deur die term *vyavaharika* beskryf word. Hierdie verhouding is vergelykbaar met die voorbeeld van 'n tou en 'n slang. In hierdie voorbeeld kom die tou soos 'n slang voor wanneer iemand wat dit van ver af beskou, maar sodra 'n mens egter nader kom, is dit duidelik dat dit nie 'n slang nie maar wel 'n tou is. Dit is dus moontlik om te beweer dat die slang 'n superponering van die tou was. Die tou is werklik maar die slang vals. Van ver af lyk die slang werklik,

maar is in werklikheid onwerklik of nie-werklik. Op dieselfde wyse verduidelik Shankara die verhouding tussen die wêreld en Brahman. Die wêreld is 'n superponering op Brahman. Met die ware kennis verdwyn die wêreld en slegs Brahman bestaan. Die wêreld is dus om dit so te stel, 'n illusie.

- Volgens Shankara word hierdie illusie deur *Maya* voortgebring en hou verband met terme soos voorkoms, onkunde, superponering, mag, misleiding en valshede/leuens. Vir Shankara is hierdie die beginsel van wording en verskyning waardeur die absolute nie-dualistiese Brahman diversifieer en menigvuldig word.

- Die staat waarin Brahman bewustelik met *Maya* geassosieer word om die heelal te skep, word Ishvara (god) genoem. Dit veroorsaak 'n ontologiese dilemma vir die status van *Maya*. Shankara is van mening dat die beste manier om *Maya* te definieer, is om te bevestig dat dit nóg bestaan, nóg nie bestaan nie. Indien *Maya* bestaan, sou sy filosofie van absolute nie-dualisme bevraagteken kon word, omdat daar 'n ander werklikheid sou bestaan. Indien dit nie bestaan nie, dan sou die empiriese wêreld ook nie bestaan nie. Om hierdie dilemma te oorkom, stel Shankara die idee van twee vlakke van die waarheid voor wat twee aspekte van Brahman insluit, naamlik Nirguna Brahman (Absolute Brahman) en Saguna Brahman (Brahman met eienskappe (Ishvara) of 'n sogenaamde 'gesuperponeerde Brahman').

- Ishvara (Saguna Brahman), synde die gesuperponeerde Brahman beskik oor ander eienskappe wat daaruit voortkom. Shankara is van mening dat drie belangrikste uitvloeisels Brahma (skepper), Vishnu (onderhouer) en Shiva (verwoester) is. Die Brahmasutras het ook bevestig dat daar ander gode wat ook geskep het, bestaan.

- Met die skepping van hierdie wêreld was ander geskape wesens verantwoordelik vir die bewaring van die dharma (pligte) in hierdie wêreld.

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Toe adharma dharma oorweldig het, moes iets gebeur om stabiliteit in die wêreld te bring. Om hierdie rede het Vishnu homself as Krishna inkarneer, en hierdie inkarnasie het in Hindoeïsme as Avatara bekend geword.

- Sy teorie was dat die aanbidding (bhakti) van ander gode en godhede bloot 'n weg tot moksha was, maar nie 'n direkte bereiking van moksha nie. Die doel van bhakti was 'n manier om die aanhanger voor te berei om gereinig te word om sodoende kennis verkry, wat volgens Shankara Maya (die sluier van onkunde) verwyder om sodoende die *jiva* te bevry om die Brahman werklikheid of moksha te bereik/verkry.

- Ten slotte, in die oorweging en verstaan van radikale nie-dualisme, het hierdie navorsing bewys dat, binne die filosofie van Advaita Vedanta, Shankara forseer word om die begrip van Avatara in die bestek van die Hindoegodsdienstradisie te inkorporeer en te gebruik. Dit bevestig die bevindinge van hierdie navorsing

KEYWORDS

Hinduism

Shankara

Advaita Vedanta

Avatara

Brahman

Ishvara

Vishnu

Maya

Moksha

Jiva

Soul

KERNWOORDE

Hindoeïsme

Shankara

Advaita Vedanta

Avatara

Brahman

Ishvara

Vishnu

Maya

Moksha

Siel