

The Concept of the Subtle Body (*Linga-śarīra*) in Brahmanism

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I. THE SUBTLE BODY IN THE UPANIṢADS

In the passages of the Upaniṣads which discuss the Karmic transmigration after man's death, they teach in many ways what is the subject of transmigration. What leaves the body at death, to carry on a life of its own and to keep the continuity of the individual's existence? They name it in various ways.¹⁾

Nāman (name): "When such a person dies, what is it that does not leave him? The name. The name is infinite and infinite are the Viśve-deva-s."

Bṛhad. Up. III, 2, 13.

Prāṇa (life breath): "His prāṇa combined with fire (tejas) along with the self (sahâtmanā) leads to whatever world has been fashioned."

Praś. Up. III, 10.

Water: "At the fifth oblation water comes to be called man (puruṣa). This foetus enclosed in the membrane (sa ulbāvṛto garbhah), having lain inside for ten or nine months or more or less, then comes to be born."

Chând. Up. V, 9, 1.; V, 3, 3.

Puruṣa (person): This Puruṣa is in appearance an exact replica of the corporeal person. It is living inside of the body (śarīra ātmā: *Bṛhad. Up.* IV, 3, 35; antahpuruṣa: *Maitr. Up.* III, 3). It is a golden person (hiraṇmaya-puruṣa: *Bṛhad. Up.* IV, 3, 11; hiraṇyagarbha: *Praś. Up.* V, 5). It is a mannikin in the eye (cakṣusaḥ puruṣaḥ: *Bṛhad. Up.* IV, 4, 1), a pygmy (vāmana: *Kaṭha Up.* V, 3), the thumb-sized person (angusṭha-mātra-puruṣa: *Śvet. Up.* III, 13; V, 8; *Maitr. Up.* VI, 38; *Kaṭha Up.* II, 1, 12-13).

It may be sufficient just to quote one example of the Puruṣa sentence. "He sees the person that dwells in the body, who is higher than the highest life. Hiraṇya-garbha is the self of all the jīva-s travelling in Saṃsāra." (*Praś. Up.* V, 5.) The subtlety and invisibility of such a person is emphati-

1) The quotations from the Upaniṣads are based on Radhakrishnan's edition and translation, if not otherwise indicated. Although there are other editions of the Upaniṣads, Radhakrishnan's edition is valuable as it keeps the traditional views of the native scholars chiefly based on Śaṅkara's *Bhāṣyas*. For a further discussion on the texts of the Upaniṣads, Limaye and Vadekar's critical edition shall be consulted.

cally expressed. “This subtle, ungraspable, invisible one, called the puruṣa, dwells here in the body with a part of himself (amśa), with previous awareness (buddhi-pūrvam).” (*Maitr. Up.* II, 5) “That which is the subtle essence this whole world has for its self. That is true. That is the self. (*Chānd. Up.* VI, 14. 3). “This is my self within the heart (ātmāntar hṛdaye), smaller than a grain of rice, than a barley corn, than a mustard seed, than a grain of millet or than the kernel of a grain of millet.” (*Chānd. Up.* III, 14, 3)

It is noteworthy that Śaṅkara, when he interprets those subjects of transmigration mentioned in the Upaniṣads, rephrases them by the word “liṅga-ātman”.

Water: It implies the subtle parts of all elements which constitute the seed of the body (deha-bījaṇaṃ bhūta-sūkṣmanam). Śaṅkara ad *BS* III, 1, 2; *Chānd. Up.* V, 9, 1.

Life (prāṇa): Prāṇa-śarīra (one whose body is life) is life, made of sign (liṅgātman) as it is filled with two powers of cognition and action.

Śaṅkara ad *Chānd. Up.* III, 14, 2

Hiranya-garbha: This golden person is the essence (ātmabhūta) of all the transmigrating beings; for he is the internal self (antarātman) of all living beings in the subtle form (liṅga-rūpena) and in him, liṅgātman, are all the jīvas strung together (jīva-ghana). Śaṅkara ad *Praś. Up.* V. 5
Śarīra ātmā (the self in the body): The liṅgātman which moves between this and the next word as between the waking and the dream states, through birth and death consisting respectively in the association with and dissociation from the body and its organs.

Śaṅkara ad *Bṛhad. Up.* IV, 3, 35.

Mind (manas): The Liṅga is called mind because mind is the chief factor of the liṅga (manaḥ pradhānatvāt liṅgasya).

Śaṅkara ad *Bṛhad. Up.* IV, 4, 6.

Body (śarīra): Liṅga-śarīra is an aggregation of the subtle elements, accompanied by causes, existing in the life breaths and in the organs.

Śaṅkara ad *Maitr. Up.* III, 2.

Apart from Śaṅkara's interpretation, the word Liṅga as a technical term to denote the transmigrating subtle body appears in several parts of the Upaniṣads.

“The object to which the mind is attached, the Liṅga goes together with the deed, being attached to it alone. Exhausting the results of whatever works he did in this world he comes again from that world, to this world for fresh work”. *Bṛhad. Up.* IV, 4, 6

"The Puruṣa is the enjoyer, the Prakṛti is what is to be enjoyed. Abiding in it, he enjoys. All that begins with the intellect (*mahad-ādi*) and ends with the elements (*viśeṣāntam*),²⁾ being a transformation of the distinction of the Prakṛti with its three qualities is the Liṅga." *Maitr. Up.* VI, 10.

"That which is non-thought (*acitta*), which stands in the midst of thought, the unthinkable, the hidden, the highest, let a man merge his thought there. Then will this living being be without support (*liṅgaṃ nirāśrayam*)"

Maitr. Up. VI, 19.

"He is to be apprehended by his own marks (*svakair liṅgaiḥ*). Some say that the mark of him who is without any mark (*aliṅga*) is as heat and anything pervaded by it are to fire, or what the most agreeable taste is to water."

Maitr. Up. VI, 31

"He who is the yonder person in the sun (*āditye puruṣaḥ*), I myself am he. Verily, that which is the sunhood of the sun is that eternal real. That is the bright (*śukla*), the personal (*puruṣa*), the sexless (*aliṅga*)."

Maitr. Up. VI, 35.

"Of him there is no master in the world, no ruler, nor is there any mark of him (*naiva ca tasya liṅgam*). He is the cause, the lord of the lords of sense organs (*karaṇādhipādhipa*); of him there is neither progenitor (*janitṛ*) nor lord."

Śvet. Up. VI, 9.

"This self cannot be attained by one without strength nor through heedlessness nor through austerity without an aim (*tapaso aliṅgāt*)."

Muṇḍ. Up. III, 2, 4.

"Beyond the unmanifest (*avyakta*) is the person (*puruṣa*), all-pervading (*vyāpaka*) and without any mark whatever (*aliṅga*). By knowing whom, a man is liberated and goes to life eternal (*amṛtatva*)."

Kaṭha Up. VI, 8.

"The *manas* and others (*buddhi*, *citta*, *ahaṅkāra*), the *prāṇa* and others (*apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*, *samāna*), the *sattva* and others (*rajas* and *tamas*), *icchā* and others (*dveṣa*, *sukha*, *duḥkha*), and *puṇya* and others are the five groups. The body consisting of the elements (*dharma-bhūta-ātman*) of these five groups would not perish so far as there is a cognition of (the *Ātman*), since it is understood to be always in the presence of the *Ātman* and since it is nothing but the conditions (*upādhi*) of the *Ātman*. It is called the *Liṅga-śarīra* or the Knot of the Heart (*hṛd-granthi*). The spiritual principle which manifests itself there is called the *Ḳṣetrajña*."

2) Deussen tries to read "mahad-ādi-aviśeṣa-antam liṅgam", removing the *avagraha* mark, since the subtle body extends from the Mahat to the subtle elements (*aviśeṣa*), not to the gross (*viśeṣa*). Deussen: *Sechzig*, p. 337.

mana-ādiś ca prāṇa-ādiś cēcchā-ādiś ca sattva-ādiś ca puṇya-ādiś ca pañca-vargā ity eteṣāṃ pañca-vargānāṃ dharmo-bhūtātmā jñānād ṛte na vinaśyaty. Ātma-sannidhau nityatvena pratīyamāna ātma-upādhir yas tal liṅga-sarīraṃ hṛd-granthir ity ucyate. Tatra yat prakāśate caitanyaṃ sa kṣetrajña ity ucyate. *Sarvasāra Up.* 16³⁾

“Now, assuredly that part of him, which is entirely intelligent (caitāmātra) in every person is the Kṣetrajña which has the marks of conception, determination and self-love (saṃkalpa-adhyavasāya-abhimāna-liṅga), Prajāpati called Viśva. By him as intelligence is his body set up as possessed of intelligence (cetanavat), or in other words this very one is its mover (pracodayiti)”.

Maitr. Up. II, 5; V, 2.

What is meant by the term Liṅga in those passages of the Upaniṣads is a body of transmigration, which is subtle (sūkṣma), unmanifested (avyakta), spiritual like Mahat, without any mark (aliṅga), without support (nirāśraya), and which is to some extent similar to the Kṣetrajña, Prajāpati or Sūtrātman (*Bṛhad. Up.* III, 7, 2–3). In some other parts, the relation of this subtle body and the finer food and the channel or the connecting link (nāḍī) through which it goes up is explained. (*Bṛhad. Up.* IV, 2, 3; *Chānd. Up.* VI, 1–5; VIII, 13, 1; *Subāla Up.* II, 1; IV, 1; V, 9). The details of the distinction among the Upaniṣadic words which connote the soul or the individual like puruṣa, prāṇa, jīva, ātman kṣetrajña or bhūtātman in the relation to the subtle body are far from easy to follow. For our further investigation of the idea of subtle body, it should be remembered that almost all the quotations about the subtle body are found in the Upaniṣadic sentences which are connected in a greater or less degree with the Sāṃkhya thought.

II. THE SĀMĀKHYA THEORY OF THE SUBTLE BODY

In the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* of Īśvara-kṛṣṇa, the subtle body (liṅga) is discussed in the following four verses:⁴⁾

XXXVIII: The subtle elements are non-specific; from those five proceed the five gross elements; these are known as specific, being variously tranquil, terrific and delusive.

tanmātrāṇy aviśeṣāḥ tebhyo bhūtāni pañca pañcabhyaḥ/
ete smṛtā viśeṣāḥ śāntā ghorāś ca mūḍhāś ca //38//

3) The writer used the edition published by B. Tubini: *Sarvasāropaniṣad* and translated the passage consulting Deussen: *Sechzig*, p. 625.

4) The text and translation is based on Suryanarayana Sastri: *The Sāṃkhya-kārikā of Īśvara Kṛṣṇa*, pp. 70–73.

XXXIX: The specific is three-fold, as subtle bodies, as gross bodies born of parents, and as the great elements. Of these, the subtle bodies are constant, while bodies born of parents perish.

sūkṣmā mātā-pitrjāḥ saha prabhūtais tridhā viśeṣāḥ syuḥ/
sūkṣmās teṣām niyatāḥ, mātā-pitrjā nivartante //39//

XL: The subtle body, formed primevally, unimpeded, constant, composed of intellect and the rest down to the subtle elements, incapable to enjoyment, migrates because of being endowed with dispositions.

pūrvōtpannam, asaktam, niyatam, mahad-ādi-sūkṣma-paryantam/
saṃsarati nirupabhogaṃ bhārair adhivāsitaṃ liṅgam //40//⁵⁾

XLI: Just as a picture does not exist without a substrate or a shadow without a post or the like, so too the cognitive apparatus (intellect, etc.) does not subsist supportless, without what is specific (i.e., a subtle body).

citraṃ yathā'śrayam ṛte sthāṇv-ādibhyo vinā yathā chāyā/
tadvad vinā viśeṣair na tiṣṭhati niraśrayaṃ liṅgam //41//

According to Īśvarakṛṣṇa, there exists a multiplicity of individual souls denominated by the term Puruṣa. Those Puruṣa-s, though they are the bearers of the individual personality, are lacking in almost all the characteristics which are usually thought of as constituting human personality. The personal functions of the individuals are attributed, instead, to a subtle body—Liṅga. It is termed Liṅga, because it is the “mark” by which the different Puruṣa-s are distinguished. It is the mark (liṅga) or visible appearance, indicating the existence of something not accessible to perception (aliṅga; avyakta). Liṅga contains all the physical principles except the material principles which composes the mortal body in each existence. It accompanies the soul during its course through the cycle of transmigration and continues to exist till salvation is attained. It is constituted of mahat, ahaṃkāra, manas, ten indriya-s, and five tan-mātra-s. On account of its association with the buddhi, which bears the impress of virtue, vice, and other intellectual defects and accomplishments, it becomes itself associated with these, just as a cloth obtains fragrance through its connection with campak flowers of sweet odour; and hence it suffers successive rebirths, till the buddhi becomes dissociated from it by the attainment of true discriminative knowledge.⁶⁾ The *Sāṃkhya-Pravacana-Sūtra* introduces

5) “The constancy of the subtle body is relative; it is not eternal like Spirit, for it is created; but it lasts from the original creation to the final deluge. It is unimpeded in its activities being subtle, it can enter into stones. This subtle body is called Liṅga (literally what is merged), because, being caused, it is bound to be merged in its cause at the deluge.” S. Sastri, *ibid.*, p. 71. Here the Liṅga is explained as the Mergent Body. Cf. tadvad vinā viśeṣair in other texts.

6) For this description of the Sāṃkhya idea of the Subtle Body, I owe to Dasgupta: *History*, vol. III, p. 305; Johnston: *Early Sāṃkhya*, p. 41f; Nandalal Sinha: *Sāṃkhya-Pravachana-Sūtram*, III, 9.

the idea of ātivāhika or the Vehicular Body (V, 103), which is no other than the subtle body. The *Vṛtti* of Aniruddha on this *sūtra* teaches the necessity of admitting this ātivāhika-śarīra, saying: "Since there can be no movement of names without a seat or vehicle, a vehicle should be affirmed for the purpose of manas getting to another body at death. The very same vehicle is the Vehicular Subtle Body."⁷⁾ Vijñānabhikṣu in his *Bhāṣya* to the same *sūtra* (V, 103) prefers to use the word Liṅga-deha for the subtle body and says that the subtle one's being a body should be understood to be either by reason of its being the seat of *bhoga*, experience, or by reason of its being the seat of the reflection of Puruṣa.⁸⁾ He says that this subtle body is like a little tapering thing no bigger than a thumb, and that yet it pervades the whole body, just as a little flame pervades a whole room by its rays, quoting the scriptural authority from the *Kaṭha Up.* VI, 17, and also from the story of Yama's extraction by force of Puruṣa of the size of the thumb in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Sāṃkhya-Pravacana-Sūtra* III, 6–16 discusses how from one single Liṅga manifold individuals arise. Although, at the beginning of creation, the Liṅga exists as one and one only, in the form of the upādhi or external investment of Hiranya-garbhā, yet afterwards takes place manifold division into parts (vyakti-bheda) by the forms of individuals. It is compared to the relation of a father to his children. Just as there is of the one single Liṅga-deha of the father, a manifold division into parts in the forms of the Liṅga-deha of a son, a daughter and so on.⁹⁾ The cause of this differentiation is the Karman, the cause of experience, of other Jīva-s or incarnate Puruṣa. (*Sūtra* III, 10) To use the phrase in the *Mahābhārata*, this Liṅga-deha is the Karma-ātmā Puruṣa, that is, Puruṣa enveloped by Karman.

karmātmā puruṣo yo'sau bandhamokṣaiḥ prayujyate/
sa saptadaśakenāpi rāśinā yujyate ca saḥ//*Mbh.* Mokṣa-dharma¹⁰⁾ XII,
13755b—13756a.

Quoting an Upaniṣadic authority: "The Vijñāna directs the sacrifice and it directs the Karman-s also (vijñānaṃ yajñaṃ tanute, karmāṇi tanute'pi ca, *Tait. Up.* II, 5, 1)", Vijñānabhikṣu tries to show that all Karman-s belong to the Liṅga. The Liṅga here is called Vijñāna, because of its having Buddhi, called Vijñāna, as principal among its components. (*Bhāṣya ad Sāṃkhya-Pravacana-Sūtra* III, 14.) Though this *Sūtra* of the Sāṃkhya School and the

7) Quoted in Sinha, *ibid.* p. 285.

8) Dasgupta, *History*. vol. II, p. 305.

9) Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 289; p. 484.

10) Sinha, *ibid.*, p. 484.

Bhāṣya of Vijñānabhikṣu were composed in quite a later period, we can find here in the exposition of the Subtle Body (*Liṅga-deha*) an interesting parallel of terminology with the Vijñāna-vāda School of Buddhism. *Tad-bijāt* (*Sūtra* III, 3); *upabhoga* (III, 5), *tad-adhiṣṭhānāśraye dehe* (III, 11); *nirāśrayaṃ liṅgam* (*Bhāṣya* III, 12); *vāsanā* (*Bhāṣya* III, 12); *savijñāna* (*Bhāṣya* III, 14).¹¹⁾

As to the size and nature of the Subtle Body, the *Sūtra* teaches that it is atomic (III, 14); it is formed of finer food (III, 15); Even though it is a corporate or ponderable substance, it does not stand independently, it is necessary for the Subtle Body to be associated with a mass. Just as, notwithstanding that it causes illumination, on account of its being corporate or ponderable, the sun cannot be the Ātman itself. (*Sūtra* III, 13); Just as the movement of the king's cooks among the kitchens is for the sake of the king, so is the migration of the Subtle Body for the sake of the Puruṣa. (III, 16).

Here is a difficulty for the Sāṃkhya idea of the Subtle Body as the subject of transmigration. It is in the beginning for the purpose of explaining the personal diversities developing out of the Unmanifested (*avyakta*) Puruṣa that the *Liṅga* is supposed in their system. But, the Subtle Body itself is one (*eka*), Unmanifested (*avyakta*) and still relying in turn on the force of the Karman for the manifold individualization. So, the part or importance allotted to the Subtle Body is comparatively vague as a seat or as a place of abiding: *adhiṣṭhānāśraya-deha*, or as a sheath: *kośa*. What is a need for the establishment of the Subtle Body different from the aggregation of the gross bodies and also from the *manas*, *buddhi* or the *jīvātman*? This is the point raised from the side of the Yoga School who holds the *citta* of all-prevading, who tries to explain the situation without the hypothesis of any such body like the *Liṅga* or *Sūkṣma-śarīra*. The *Sāṃkhya-Pravacana-Sūtra* and its *Bhāṣya* have made a hard effort to work out an explanation what is the body of support or vehicle:

The *Liṅga-śarīra* stands not, by itself, without the *Adhiṣṭhāna-śarīra*, just like a shadow and like a picture.

na svātantryāt tad-ṛte chāyāvac citravac ca//*Sūtra* III, 12.

In this verse, the product of the *tan-mātra-s* (i.e., the *Adhiṣṭhāna-śarīra*, and not the *Liṅga-śarīra*) is the designate of the word "Subtle", by comparison with the Body produced from father and mother. The same aggregate of elements that has been declared to endure as long as the *Liṅga* lasts,—the

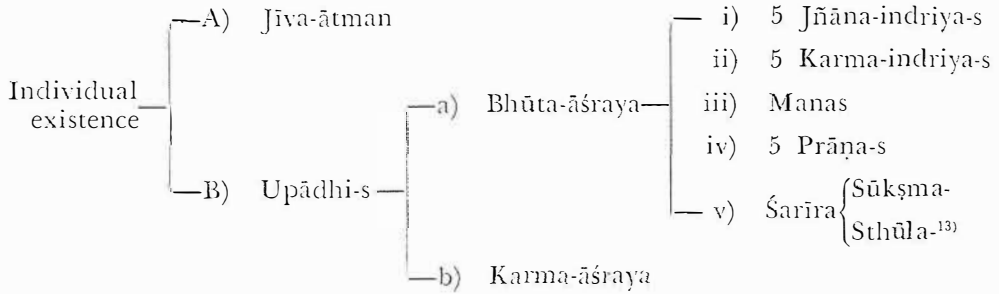
11) Sinha, *ibid.*, pp. 281-294.

very same is the Body which is the adhiṣṭhāna of the Liṅga.

(*Bhāṣya* III, 12).¹²⁾

III. THE SUBTLE BODY IN THE VEDĀNTA PHILOSOPHY

The Vedānta of Śaṅkara and his school makes a distinction between the supreme soul (parama-ātman) and a multitude of individual souls (jīva-ātman; śarīra-ātman). The supreme Ātman is omniscient, and omnipresent; the individual Ātman-s are limited in wisdom, power and capacity of movement and are confined in the eternal cycle of Saṃsāra. But, at the same time, each of those individual Ātman-s is in full and complete measure the supreme Ātman itself. Its real nature is concealed by the limiting conditions (upādhi) imposed upon it by ignorance (avidyā). The organs that compose the individual existence are explained by the following table:



What becomes of individuals after death? Chiefly based on the description of the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*, Śaṅkara and the later Vedāntins developed their doctrine of transmigration and emancipation. At death, the Indriya-s first enter the Manas; the Manas then enters the Mukhya-Prāṇa; the Mukhya-Prāṇa enters the soul to which is adhering the moral qualification (Karma); the soul then enters the Sūkṣma-śarīra. After all these have come together in the heart, the point of the heart becomes luminous in such a way as to light up the path, and the Udāna escorts the soul with the Upādhi-s from the body. From the body of those possessing the lower knowledge, the soul goes through the artery of the head; from the body of the ignorant, it goes through the hundred and other principal veins of the body (*BS* IV, 2, 17). The soul of a person possessing the higher knowledge does not go out at all.¹⁴⁾

12) Sinha, *ibid.*, pp. 288-290.

13) Among these upādhi-s, which convert Brahman into the individual soul together with the activities and sensations of the soul, the gross body, together with all the things and relations of the external world, is not included. The gross body is resolved at death into the elements. Deussen, *Outline*, p. 29.

14) See Deussen: *Outline*, pp. 28ff.

Though there is quite a frequent usage of the term *liṅga* in the *Brahma-Sūtra*, none of them refers to the Subtle Body. (*liṅga*: *BS* I, 1, 22; I, 3, 15; I, 4, 17; 20; II, 3, 13, 15; III, 2, 11; 26; III, 3, 44; III, 4, 34; 39; IV, 3, 4; IV, 4, 21). It is only through the commentaries of Śaṅkara and others that we come to understand that some of the passages in the *Brahma-Sūtra* refer to the Subtle Body. (*BS* I, 4, 1; III, 1, 1-7; III, 3, 30; IV, 2, 8-11).

“We must understand that the soul when passing from one body to another is enveloped by the subtle parts of the elements which are the seeds of the new body. (*deha-bījair bhūta-sūkṣmaiḥ saṃpariṣvaktāḥ*) . . . What there is compared to the action of the caterpillar (*Bṛhad. Up.* IV, 4, 3) is not the non-abandonment of the old body but merely the lengthening out of the creative effort whose object is the new body to be obtained, which new body is presented by the Karman of the soul.”

Śaṅkara ad *BS* III, 1, 1.¹⁵⁾

“The soul, when moving from one body into another is enveloped by those subtle rudiments of the elements from which the new body is produced. (*jīvo dehāntara-āraṃbha-hetubhir bhūta-sūkṣmaiḥ saṃpariṣvaktāḥ*) It thus appears that the soul moves towards a new embodiment, together with the subtle rudiments from which the new body springs.”

Rāmānuja ad *BS* III, 1, 1.

“Now this going of the *Prāṇa-s* is not possible without a base; hence we infer that water also—mixed with parts of the other elements—goes from the old body to the new one, serving the purpose of supplying a base for the moving *Prāṇa-s*. For the *Prāṇa-s* cannot, without such a base, either move or abide anywhere; as we observe in living beings. . . . And on account of that preponderance of the water, the word ‘water’ implies the subtle parts of all the elements which constitute the seed of the body. . . . On the other hand, the soul could not go at all if we denied to it the limiting adjunct formed by the *Prāṇa-s* (*prāṇōpādhipratyākhyane*), and without the latter it could not, in the new body, enter into the state of fruition.”

Śaṅkara ad *BS* III, 1, 3-5.

15) The writer consulted the translation of the two *Bhāṣyas* made by G. Thibaut. *SBE* Vols. 34, 38 & 48. In the succeeding passages, Śaṅkara refutes the ideas of the other systems, saying: “All hypotheses which owe their origin to the mind of man only are to set aside because they are contradicted by scripture. So the opinion of the *Sāṃkhya-s* that the Self and the organs are both all-pervading, and when obtaining a new body only begin to function in it in consequence of the Karman; or the opinion of the *Bauddha-s* that the Self alone without the organs begins to function in a new body, and that as the body itself, so new sense-organs also are produced in the new abode of fruition; or the opinion of the *Vaiśeṣika-s* that the mind only proceeds to the new abode of fruition; or the opinion of the *Digambara Jainas* that the individual soul only flying away from the old body alights in the new one as a parrot flies from one tree to another.” Śaṅkara ad *BS* III, 1, 1.

“The word ‘body’ denotes that the nature of which it is to be the attribute of a soul, and thus extends in its connotation up to the soul. The meaning of the section therefore is that it is the soul which moves enveloped by water and the other rudimentary elements.”

Rāmānuja ad *BS* III, 1, 6.

“What the term ‘avyakta’ denotes is the subtle causal body (sūkṣmaṁ kāraṇātmanā śarīram).¹⁶⁾ Anything subtle may be spoken of as ‘Undeveloped’. The gross body indeed cannot directly be termed ‘undeveloped’, but the subtle parts of the elements from which the gross body originates may be called so, and that the term denoting the causal substance is applied to the effect also is a matter of common occurrence.”

Śaṅkara ad *BS*. I, 4, 1.

“The warmth may reasonably be attributed to the subtle body which may abide in some part of the gross body and into which the warmth of the entire gross body has withdrawn itself.” Rāmānuja ad *BS* IV, 2, 11.

There is no fundamental difference in the idea of the Subtle Body between Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, except that the latter emphasizes more the role of the Īśvara as the controller of the Karmic transmigration. Both agree in admitting the existence of the unchangeable Subtle Body, which is the germ (bīja) of the body itself, the sheath (kośa), the chariot (ratha) for the soul, which is material (tanutva), atomic in size (aṇu), invisible and transparent (svaccha). Together with Manas, Indriya-s, Prāṇa-s and the variable principle of the Karman, it forms the limiting conditions (Upādhi-s) of the soul. It is constituted of the five fine particles of the gross elements of matter (bhūta-sūkṣmaiḥ). (Śaṅkara ad *BS* III, 1, 1–7). However, how the Subtle Body is related to the Gross Body is not definitely described. It is explained just metaphorically to be related to the Gross Body as the seed to the plant, or as the functions of seeing, hearing, etc. to the physical eye and ear. (Śaṅkara ad *BS* II, 4, 1–22). In the later development of the Vedānta philosophy, they come to make distinctions of the superior Subtle Body and the inferior one, or of the Subtle Body as an aggregate and as individuals.

“And from these unquintuplicated elements arises the Liṅga-śarīra, that makes possible the going to another world, that subsists until release, that is associated with Manas, and Buddhi, and is conjoined with the five-fold Sense-Organs, the five-fold Motor-Organs and the five-fold Vital Airs.

16) In the later Vedānta philosophy, they teach the three-fold theory of bodies together with the fourth state of Turiya. The Brahma is illusory associated with the following bodies: Firstly, with a causal body; secondly, with a subtle body; thirdly, with a gross body; and a fourth state is that of the unassociated pure Brahma, which is technically styled ‘The Fourth’. Jacob: *A Manual*, p. 74.

“And the Subtle Body is of two kinds, as superior and inferior. The superior is the Subtle Body of Hiranyagarbha; the inferior is the Subtle Body of these like us. Of these, Hiranyagarbha’s Subtle Body is spoken of as Mahat-tattva, and the Subtle Body of those like us as Ahaṅkāra.” *Vedāntaparibhāṣa* by Dharmarāja Adhvarin 31–32.¹⁷⁾

“Here also all the subtle bodies, viewed as one, form an aggregate like a forest or a reservoir; and, viewed severally, are also individuals like a tree or a water-drop. Spirit, as conditioned by this aggregate, is termed Sūtrātman because it runs through all; Hiranya-garbha, because of its power of knowing and desiring; and Prāṇa because of its power of acting. This samaṣṭi belonging to it, viz., the triple sheath beginning with the sheath of self-consciousness (vijñāna-maya-kośa), being subtler than the gross universe, is termed its subtle body, and as its dream-state, retaining as it does, the impressions of the waking state. It is on account of the last reason that it is described as the place of dissolution of the gross world. Spirit as limited by the corresponding vyaṣṭi is the Taijasa since it has for its adjunct the internal organ in which ‘fire’ predominates. . . . Both the Sūtrātman and the Taijasa then experience subtle objects through modes of Manas as stated in scriptural texts like ‘Enjoying the subtle is the Taijasa’ ”. *Vedānta-sāra* of Sadānanda 14.¹⁸⁾

IV. CONCLUSION

The Subtle Body is a concept of the bodily vehicle that the soul rides on in the cycle of transmigration. It is termed Liṅga or Liṅga-śarīra because it is the “mark” to differentiate the individual souls. It is termed Sūkṣma-śarīra too, as it is subtle and beyond our perception.¹⁹⁾ These terms do not appear in the Upaniṣads except for one instance in a rather late and more sophisticated Upaniṣad called *Sarva-sārōpaniṣad*. The Upaniṣadic thinkers inquired into the essence and the principle of individual continuity and named it in various ways, say, ātman, puruṣa, prāṇa, agni, kṣetrajña, sūtrātman, vijñā-

17) Suryanarayana Sastri ed. & tr.: *Vedāntaparibhāṣa*, nos. 31–32.

18) Hiriyana ed. & tr.: *Vedāntasāra*, pp. 50–51.

19) In the *Laws of Manu*, they make a distinction of two kinds of bodies:

“That substance, which gives a power of motion to the body, the wise call Kṣetrajña, or Jivātman, the vital spirit; and that body, which then derives active functions, they name Bhūtātman, or composed of elements.”

yo’syātmanah kārayitā tam kṣetrajñam pracakṣate/
yaḥ karoti tu karmāṇi sa bhūtātmōcyate buddhaiḥ//XII, 12.

“Another internal spirit, called Mahat, or the great soul, attends the birth of all creatures embodied, and then in all mortal forms is conveyed a perception either pleasing or painful.”

jīva-samjñō’ntarātmā’nyaḥ sahaajāḥ sarvadehinām/
yena vedayate sarvaṃ sukhaṃ duḥkhaṃ ca janmasu//XII, 31.

Haughton: *The Institutes*, p. 408.

namaya-kośa, rathin, hiraṇyagarbha or others. Though some of the names indicate their inclination to understand the principle of individuality as a vehicle, case-box or seed, their interest was not to discern the mechanism further. It was in the Sāṃkhya philosophy that they tried to inquire into the mechanism how the Avyakta-puruṣa develops itself into manifold individuals. The Subtle Body came to be held from a necessity that the Buddhi cannot exist without a supporting body or a base. In the interval between one death and another birth, it requires a supporting body. In the Vedānta school the concept of the Subtle Body was held chiefly for the explanation of the abode or base of the Jīva-ātman in transmigration and emancipation. How the soul, the spiritual principle, can transmigrate from one life to another without any common universal ground of material? Śaṅkara introduced fully the idea of the Subtle Body in his interpretation of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahma-Sūtra*. He interprets the Subtle Body as an aggregation of fine atomic particles to carry the seed of the body. In India, the mechanism of transmission of potentiality through lives has been a theme of perpetual philosophical inquiry. The concept of the Subtle Body held in the Brahmanical philosophical circles presents an interesting parallel, both in terms and content, with the Manomaya-kāya or Ālaya-vijñāna theory of later Buddhist philosophy.²⁰⁾

20) The present paper is a preliminary study to examine the philosophical and religious situation in India to encourage the formation of the Buddhist idea of the Intermediate State (antarābhava) between life and death and the Body of Transmigration.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ĀnSS.: *Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series* (Poona)
- BS.: *Brahma-sūtra*
- Brhad. Up.: *Brhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*
- Chānd. Up.: *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad*
- Maitr. Up.: *Maitrī- or Maitrāyaṇa-Upaniṣad*
- Mbh.: *Mahābhārata*
- Muṇḍ. Up.: *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*
- Praś. Up.: *Praśna-Upaniṣad*
- Śvet. Up.: *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad*