

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SŪTRĀTMĀ OR THREAD-SOUL.

The metaphysical explanation of mutual help.—The common Sūtrātmā.—The One through the many.—Individualities within individualities.—The pragmatic bearing of these metaphysical considerations.—Endless progress.—Various illustrations of the idea of Sūtrātmā.—Triplets of aspects.—Questions as to justification of effort and possibility of avoiding joy and sorrow.—Replies.—The three functions of the Sūtrātmā.—Its distinction from the Paramātmā.—Its identity with the Jivātmā.

(The outcome, the practical application of all the knowledge thus acquired, is and should be 'mutual help' in the daily life of the world. This leads to further considerations).

Mutual help, the notion that this person can help me, in any way, were impossible, were there no difference apparent between I and another, on the one hand; and were there no real element of union, no thread of unity, of identity, between them, along which the help could pass from the one to the other, on the other hand. Because there is no real difference of one and another, therefore for the One Self, indeed, the idea of

help, helping or being helped, is non-existent, impossible, meaningless. The thought of assistance is possible amongst selves separated and individualised by embodiment in eṭaṭs and united by the Common Self. The chaplet in which many beads are strung together on one thread is a good illustration; or the plant that bears many seeds. It is a one and a many at the same time.

By reflexion of this abstract and universal principle in every concrete embodiment thereof, a pseudo-infinite series arises. Every vyākṛti, 'manifested' individuality, is also a jāti, 'genetic,' (an archetypal idea), a genus, and *vice-versa*. In the domain of the limited and successive, whatever appears as a particular, concrete, separate, definite individual as compared with its 'higher,' vaguer, more fluid and indefinite and comprehensive 'type' or 'genus,' is also, in turn, itself such a 'type' or 'genus' to lower individuals.¹

The Oneness that pervades and holds together a saṃsāra, a world-system, the being and individuality of its Mahāviṣṇu, is its Sūtrātmā, its group- thread- net- or web-soul. From the transcendental standpoint, the Idea expressed

¹In all this we may see the 'practical' application, to superphysics, of the metaphysical (logical) principles ascertained by the *Vaiśeṣhika* system.

by the *Praṇava* is the *Sūtrātmā* of the Endless World-process as a whole.

The *Sūtrātmā* is the regulator of the system, the organism; it is that which defines and characterises it, rules and governs it and sets the dominant law of its activities, operations, functionings. We say, 'I am a *brāhmaṇa*,' 'thou art a *brāhmaṇa*,' 'he is a *brāhmaṇa*'—here, *brāhmaṇa*, the idea connoted by the word, is the *sūtra* or thread, and I, thou and he are the beads which, strung thereon, make up the rosary of the whole class or caste. It is evident here that one 'active' idea, one function, one characterising occupation or activity, makes the type or genus—'active' because existence, manifestation, realisation, act-uality, is by action. It is also obvious that in the Universal or Absolute, there can be no distinction of genus and individual or singular, but only in the particular and successive. When these words, genus and individual, whole and part, *samaṣṭi* and *vyāṣṭi*, are used at all in connexion with the Universal Whole, they signify only the distinction between the One and the Many. The One is the Whole, the All; imitation and reflexion thereof, by and in the successive, is the type, the genus. The many is the parts; the reflexion of this is the pseudo-infinity of manifested individuals. And all such

individuals are bound together, brought into relation and connexion with each other, in wider and wider bonds of unity, by larger and larger, more and more comprehensive 'thread-souls,' 'group-souls,' 'over-souls'. Were it not so, relations of love and hate between individuals belonging to different genuses, races, kingdoms, worlds, would not be possible (and, as a fact, do not come into play till they are brought into living relation with each other by the sweep of vitality, *prāṇa*-currents, of the larger individuality's consciousness, through that thread, that nerve-strand, on which both are strung. Two nations in different parts of a planet remain incognisant of and apathetic to each other, till the consciousness of the planetary hierarch sweeps through both and makes them simultaneously cognisant of and therefore at once capable of sympathy and antipathy towards each other. Without a commonness of consciousness, of pursuits, of interests, love and hate, co-operation or competition, are equally impossible).

The practical or pragmatic bearing of the above considerations is that there are in the World-process, grades after grades, stages after stages, to be passed through, endlessly. There is no finality anywhere. It can never be said by any *jīva*, "There is nothing more left to do after this". Nor, at the same time, on the

other hand, is any wish, any craving, any fevered effort, for any particular state, grade or office, allowable. A *jīva* may become a *Brahmā*, a *Viṣṇu*, or a *Shiva*; what then? Or he may become a *Mahā-Brahmā*, or a *Mahā-Viṣṇu*, or a *Mahā-Shiva*, or a *Mahā-Rudra*, or a *Maheshvara*; what even then? The 'whole of pseudo-infinite particulars' is as far from being achieved then as ever. To the view of still greater and ever greater Hierarchs they would all be as atoms are to us. Hence no craving and no competitive striving for any grade of this endless hierarchy can arise within a *jīva* that knows. He will only do the duty of the hour diligently, without joy or sorrow, fear of loss or hope of gain, elation or depression; for he knows that all things, all offices, all duties are equally important, none more or less than any other; that he himself is *Brahman* in whatsoever condition he may find himself to be in the endless curves and revolutions of the World-process; that the Wheel of All-Becoming has brought him and again will bring him each and every condition and experience, high and low, of inevitable necessity, in rotation, at some time and place or other, for *karma* of every kind must happen in the life of every *jīva* and bring its consequence with it unfailingly.

The idea of the thread-soul, the *Sūtrātmā*,

may be expressed in other ways, as thus: The unity of this *samsāra* or world-system, defined and limited by one cycle, succession, order or law, by the oneness of its ruler or law-giver, its *Mahā-Viṣṇu*, is its *sūtrātmā*. The *Mahā-Viṣṇu* is the *sūtrātmā*.¹

Or, again, it may be said, the ideation, the *buddhi*, of *Mahā-Viṣṇu*, that "all this world-system should be carried on by such and such methods, on such and such principles"—this is the *sūtrātmā*. The *niyama*, law, ground-plan, design, architectonic, of a world-system is its

¹ This corresponds or amounts to the 'group-soul' of theosophical literature, and also to the 'oversoul' of some mystic writers of the West. Of course, distinctions may rightly be drawn between these, as also thread-soul, web of life, etc. But these distinctions are distinctions of aspect only, not of thing. Each individual, in so far as it is a continuous individuality, which, as such, manifests, time after time, in separate and successive sheaths, is a 'thread-soul'. Inasmuch as each of the sheaths of this individual, at any given time, is made up of a number of other individuals (sheaths), which he holds together, he (or it) may be called a group-soul, an oversoul. The network of the *prāṇa*-desire of the 'group-soul' which holds together the smaller 'individuals,' which make up the larger's body, on any plane, is the web of life on that plane. See the next footnotes also, for other aspects of the subject.

sūtrātmā.¹ It should be borne in mind that every law-giver is in turn himself given a law and set a rule by a higher law-giver and ruler, and is therefore not an independent or omnipotent 'law unto himself'. Therefore is it said that every law is subordinated and subsumed under higher law; that what is law for one is not such for another; that all laws are mutually related; and so forth. (The expression 'law unto himself' has significance and truth only thus, that the Supreme Self is obviously a law unto Itself, there being none other existing beside It to set It any law; and an individual person may be said metaphorically to be a 'law unto himself' only in the aspect and to the extent of his having realised his identity with the Supreme Self).²

¹ This would correspond to the theosophical conception of 'the web of life,' the buddhic network; it has to be remembered that, in a certain sense, each inner or subtler body acts as such a net or web, holder and supporter, to the particles of the next denser; and even within each body we may distinguish an inner and an outer, endlessly, (see *The Science of Peace*, p. 210, *et seq.*). The nervous system with the currents of prāṇa flowing along it, would be the physical and literal web of life of the physical body.

The aspect of the 'thread-soul'; the 'individuality' that persists birth after birth; according to

From all the above it follows that there are sūtrātmās within sūtrātmās, and others within them, endlessly.

It has been said before that the brāhmaṇa-type is the thread-soul of all brāhmaṇa individuals. It is the same with each one of the three other castes. Also with each one of the kingdoms of the minerals, vegetables, animals, etc. Also, again, with each one of the endless yonis, genera or species, or sub-species, included within each. Briefly, the 'unity' of each 'pseudo-whole' is a thread-soul.¹

theosophical literature the 'causal body' on which the mental, astral and physical bodies of birth after birth are strung; the kāraṇa-and-sūkṣhma-sharīra of the current *Advaita-Vedānta*—is not expressly mentioned here. But it will be seen that it is also only an aspect of the group-soul as said above. The 'simultaneous' aspect is the group-soul; the 'successive' aspect is the thread-soul. The 'web' or 'thread' is obviously made up of strands. Taken separately and successively the strands and the knots or beads through which they pass make the sūtrātmā passing through many births. Taken all together they make the group-soul.

¹ See preceding notes. The 'unity' of the 'pseudo-whole' of the whole biography of a jīva through all his seven or eight hundred[human] births in the course of one round, is its 'causal body';

Thus then every Īshvara is sūtrātmā to his world, and, in turn, is an individual jīva in the world of a higher sūtrātmā. A brahmānda, a viśhva, a jagat, a samsāra, each successively corresponds to a sūtrātmā.

(a) Devotion to Īshvara, (b) meditating on him as sūtrātmā, endeavoring to compass the essential contents of his consciousness by means of all the arts and sciences (in the ordinary condition; and by dhyāna and reception of the image of that larger whole in the carefully cleaned and steadied mirror of the smaller whole, one's own chitta or mind-atom, in yoga-meditation), and (c) helping to carry on the work of the World-process in accordance therewith—all these things are one and the same, (that is, are the ethical, intellectual and practical aspects of one and the same state of consciousness. Devotion, wisdom, sacrifice; desire, cognition, action; emotion, knowledge, practice; religion, science-and-philosophy, altruism; these correspond and go with each other).

just as his astro-mental body is the 'unity' of all the changing states of his physical body in one birth, from beginning to death. If the 'principle' enunciated above is carefully borne in mind many apparent inconsistencies will be seen to be only different aspects and correspondences and reflexions of the same fact on different planes.

It may be asked here: Why is there any need to endeavor to strive after such knowledge (even ordinarily and with detachment, so to say, as distinguished from the 'fevered effort' spoken of a little while ago), seeing that everything is already provided for in the Eternal Becoming?¹ Also, to say that such knowledge brings joy and lessens sorrow does not seem correct, seeing that sorrows are experienced, as a fact, by the knower, the wise man, also?

The reply is, briefly, this: The striving is also included in and provided for and rendered necessary by the same Eternal Becoming, for every jīva, at the turning-point of each cycle. And the joy and sorrow that, no doubt, must continue to come to the jīva so long as it remains embodied in denser or subtler sheath, even after it has achieved the knowledge of the Self, are, yet, more chastened in their nature, and have no longer

¹ This question is but another form of the old, old doubt as to how karma (*pre-assumed* to mean overwhelming doom and fate and irresistible pre-destiny, can be reconciled with any effort at all. The reply is the true metaphysical one: If we would believe in a pre-destiny then effort is also included therein; this is true from the standpoint of the Whole. Otherwise, from the standpoint of the limited, karma is not such resistless fate, but only a limited cause, to be met with new causes, *i.e.*, efforts.

the same overwhelming power that they had before to carry him off his feet irresistibly and away from his duties. With the gain of such knowledge, the *jīva* attains true free-will. He becomes *sva-tantra*, self-dependent. He can resist surges of joy and sorrow, he can deliberately circumscribe the limits beyond which they shall not go. This is his power of *avarodha*. He can also deliberately permit himself to experience and follow them; this is *anurodha*. Utter lack of restraint is *ārodha*. This, in an emotional reference.

Generally, the activity of a *sūtrātmā* may be regarded as threefold: (a) *avarodha*, limitation, definition, of its own limits in time, space, self-definition, definition to itself of the type or aspect of the World-process that it is going to manifest, (b) *anurodha*, pursuing, following out, becoming, carrying out in succession, the business of the World-process in the particular aspect previously defined, (c) *ārodha*, the disregard and negation of both these (*i.e.*, 'letting oneself go' without regard for others or for consequences, behaving as if there were no others to take into account, or, from another standpoint, behaving in a manner as if all others were so intimately interdependent with oneself that there was no need for restraint or concealment or reserve and exclusion, and no possibility

of complete de-finition and severance from them in time, space and motion). These three may be regarded as respectively corresponding to A, U and M.¹

The distinction between the *Paramātmā* and the *sūtrātmā* may be put thus: The Three, I, This and Not, taken together in Their Infinite Significance, constitute the former; with *limited* sense, denoting and connoting particular contents, they make *sūtrātmās*. In another way: AUM, the triune sound, utterly transcendent, indicates the former; *aham-eṭaṭ-na*, limitedly transcendent, transcendence on the verge of or connected with limitation is *sūtrātmā*.

The work of *śṛṣhti*, 'emanation,' creation, evolution, proceeds by means of *sūtrātmās*. In the AUM, the *Paramātmā* may be said to correspond with the A, the *sūtrātmā* with the U, and that which is born from them, the destructible, the transient, the negatable world-systems, with the M. From another standpoint, the *sūtrātmā* may be

¹ 'The Ring-Pass-Not,' 'Fohat,' and 'Ālaya' (?) of *The Secret Doctrine* may be regarded as aspects of these three functions of the *sūtrātmā*. The group-soul, the thread-soul proper, and the 'web of life' may also be regarded as respectively in correspondence with A, U and M, or *ātma*, *manas* and *buddhi*.

said to correspond with the M, inasmuch as it is the all-pervading nexus which holds together the contents of a world-system; but here, in this particular context, emphasis is laid on its aspect of law and order, and so it is said to correspond with the U.

From all the foregoing, it will be clear that the *sūtrātmā* itself is the *jīvātmā*.¹ And

¹ See preceding footnotes as to the 'thread-soul proper'.

NOTE:—One of the frequent charges against metaphysic is that its exponents use too many words, with too vague, indefinite, incoherent and even inconsistent ideas. This charge may or may not have some truth and value when preferred against the majority of the 'current' and 'extant' philosophies, and also those portions of works of material or physical science which deal with basic principles—for there is not much to choose between them. But when we are dealing with a teacher like Gārgyāyana, with his comprehensive grasp of the infinite and the infinitesimal, his profound insight into the very heart-pulsation of the World-process, we have to apply other standards of criticism. To brush him aside with a light remark is thoughtlessly to put away from ourselves the vision of truth. When he piles up too many words, one on another, as if they were synonyms, we have to remember that though they may at first sight seem dissociated, yet a common element runs through them all and allies together their various connotations and makes them

the other penultimates, *Pratyag-ātmā*, *Mūla-prakṛti*, *Daivī-prakṛti*, etc., arise out of the Logion in similar fashion. In reality, however,

all but different aspects of one fact. When we can discover this common element, we shall find that light has been thrown simultaneously on etymological and psychological facts as parallel to each other, that philology hides a large amount of philosophy within itself. Also, as to the apparent indefiniteness of the ideas intended to be expressed, it should be understood that this is not a defect or an inability of the author, but part of the nature of the ideas themselves. If we want 'definiteness' we come at once to the sensuous, the concrete, one apart from other ones. But these we can only *sense*. If we would *understand*, understand the *relation* between discrete things of sense, we must emphasise in our consciousness the aspect of the abstract, the universal, the *common*, which also is present there, inseparably from the concrete. But this *common* element is, perforce, by inevitable nature, the *opposite* of *definite*, definite in the sensuous sense which the 'concrete mind,' the outward-turned intelligence craves after and which only it can appreciate. The nexus, that which holds together others, must always be less definite, less exclusive, less separatist than those which it holds together. Pieces of wood are definite in shape, but the water in which they all float is not so definite in shape; clouds are more definite in shape and color, but the air in which

Nor thread of life, nor flowers of births
and deaths,
Nor intertwinéd rosary of beads,
Nor genus, species, type, nor singular,

they all float is less so; masses of various gases are more or less definite in shape and some in color also, but the ether in which they all float is not such. Let us recognise that lack of sensuous definiteness is part of the characteristic of metaphysical ideas. The final idea, I-This-Not, is the most in-definite, and most inclusive of all opposites. But the sensuously in-definite is not non-existent. Indeed, it is more intensely existent than the definite. Ideals have the most important and far-reaching consequences. Different ideals and beliefs lead to different kinds of mokṣha. And the range of the feeling of 'personality,' from the most intensely-pointed and other-resistant condition of maṇas, to the widest and most all-other-embracing condition of budḍhi, explains all possible varieties of practice and belief. The 'Problem of Personality,' one of the most important aspects of the 'Problem of the Why and How of the World-process,' is essential to study and solve. As usual, it and the Ultimate Problem are intimately connected and throw light on each other by action and reaction. On the Path of Descent, the forthgoing, as the consciousness becomes more and more intensely attached to a more and more *definite*, concrete, clear-cut body, it becomes more and more concrete, scientific, divi-

Nor Whole, nor part, nor one, nor many is It.
Not universal, not particular,
Not limited and not unlimited,
Eternal Naught and Endless Wonderment.

sive, individualistic and downright and downward, in thought, emotion and action. If it endeavors to understand subjective problems at all, it takes corresponding views and declares the ultimate problem insoluble, declines to recognise Itself, commits suicide. On the other Path, that of Ascent and Inturning, it becomes more and more abstract, metaphysical, all-inclusive, universalistic and upright and upward, in thought, emotion and action. It necessarily endeavors to solve the world-problem, and always must solve it, for it has only to see Itself, which nothing can prevent its doing, once the wish to do so arises within it. To the first form, the second form will often and naturally seem too vague in thought, over-tolerant in emotion, easy-going or indolent in action, even when the behavior under judgment is the result, not of tamas but of saṭtva. To the second form, if it should happen to have moved very far away from the junction-point and should have unfortunately lost (as it should not lose) memory of its own first form, that first form will appear erring and hard and restless. Thus on the 'degree' of our feeling of 'personality' depends very largely the nature of our views, especially on subjective questions.