

Kṛṣṇa's Person and Pedagogy
in the *Gītā* Commentaries of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and
Madhusūdana

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Humanities

2022

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Word Count: 79,950

Abbreviations

<i>Gītā</i>	<i>Bhagavad-gītā</i>
<i>BhP</i>	<i>Bhāgavata Purāṇa</i>
<i>Br. Up</i>	<i>Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad</i>
<i>Ch. Up</i>	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
<i>Tai. Up</i>	<i>Taittirīya Upaniṣad</i>
<i>Śve. Up</i>	<i>Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad</i>

Abstract

The *Bhagavad-gītā* (*Gītā*) is a narrative dialogue between Kṛṣṇa as teacher and Arjuna as pupil. This thesis considers Kṛṣṇa's person and pedagogy in three Advaita Vedāntin *Gītā* commentaries – Śaṅkara's *Gītābhāṣya*, Śrīdhara's *Subodhinī* and Madhusūdana's *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*. There has been no comparative study of how Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana interpret the person and pedagogy of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*. I provide this by asking my primary research question: How does examining the *relation* perceived between Kṛṣṇa's person and pedagogy help us to understand Kṛṣṇa's place in Advaita Vedānta in Śaṅkara's *Gītābhāṣya*, Śrīdhara's *Subodhinī* and Madhusūdana's *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*?

The 'divide' between Advaita Vedānta (non-dualism) and *bhakti* (devotion) is a central question in the secondary literature on Kṛṣṇa in Advaita Vedāntin *Gītā* commentaries. This thesis addresses this divide in a novel way, by asking two key questions to begin with: i) What are the commentators' own questions? and ii) Why is Arjuna drowning, and how can Kṛṣṇa save him? Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana all take the stock metaphor of the ocean of rebirth (*Gītā* 12.7) and apply it specifically to Arjuna, presenting Arjuna 'drowning in the ocean of grief and delusion' as a key intellectual problem. Looking at the questions the commentators set up themselves, we find that each has a key focus. For Śaṅkara it is agency, for Śrīdhara it is the notion of body, and for Madhusūdana it is the concept of personhood. In this thesis, I demonstrate how these themes act both as hermeneutical and pedagogical keys for each commentator's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy in the *Gītā*. To show this, my method will involve a close reading of the Sanskrit commentaries themselves, and socio-religious, intellectual and textual contextualisation.

I argue that, for Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, Kṛṣṇa is not irrelevant or a problem, and does not need to be side-lined. **Kṛṣṇa's person** is fundamental in different ways to his **pedagogical role of rescuing Arjuna** and thus to a soteriology which draws the seeker of Advaitin liberation from the world of rebirth to realisation of that which is transcendent. By demonstrating the significance of the person of Kṛṣṇa for these three Advaita Vedāntin commentators, this thesis provides a resource for thinking about divine embodiment and teacher-pupil relationships, and a new way of understanding the relationship between non-dualism and devotionism in the Advaita Vedāntin tradition.

Declaration

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the funding of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and President's Doctoral Scholarship (PDS) initiative, which has made this PhD possible. I am also thankful for the AHRC Award I received to complete my MA in South Asian Studies at the University of Manchester in 2013.

I am indebted to many people whose love and support has made completing this thesis possible. I am especially grateful to Dr John Zavos, who has been a constant support since I arrived in Manchester as an undergraduate in 2007 and completed my BA (Hons) in Religions & Theology. Many thanks also to Professor Peter Oakes and Professor Alex Samely for showing great interest in my research from the start, and for providing such invaluable feedback along the way. I am most grateful to Dr Valerie Roebuck and Dr Dermot Killingley, who first inspired me to learn Sanskrit. I extend my gratitude to the many contributors to the Sanskrit Traditions in the Modern World (STIMW) Symposium over the years, whose guidance and feedback has helped shape this thesis.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my incredible friends who have supported me through this process over many years, in particular Alison Jackson, Colin Jackson, Rebecca Johnson and Hilary Wilson. A special thank you also goes to Guy Hirst.

I am hugely grateful to my family, in particular my parents, for their love and encouragement. I am also grateful to Chloe Thornton for enduring the journey with me. Special thanks, of course, must go to Daphne.

This thesis could not have been completed without the ongoing support of Kathryn Warren, Ann-Marie McCormack, Natalie Figgins and Wendy Macdonald.

Finally, I express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, for her unwavering support – through it all.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 – Introducing the Problem

This thesis considers the relation between the person and pedagogy of the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa, in three Advaita Vedāntin commentaries on the *Bhagavad-gītā* (*Gītā*) in Sanskrit – Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya* (‘Commentary on the *Gītā*’, c. 700 C.E.), Śrīdhara’s *Subodhinī* (‘The Easy to Understand (Book),’¹ c. 1400) and Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* (‘The Illumination of the Secret Meaning’, c. 1540).

The question of how the transcendent relates to the human is one of the major questions asked across religious traditions. It subsumes further questions such as: if the transcendent is utterly transcendent, then how can we even use language to talk about the transcendent? How can God be transcendent whilst taking on a body? If devotion assumes another who is worshipped, then how can we understand that if there is no ‘other’?

Such questions about the transcendent are also asked in Indian philosophical traditions. In the *Gītā*, the transcendent (*brahman*) acts in the world as the Supreme Lord, taking on a human form and body in Kṛṣṇa. For an Advaita Vedāntin (non-dualist) commentator, this poses a clear challenge. They must interpret Kṛṣṇa – a divine subject who manifests in human form and acts in the world – in terms of their own non-dual position that *brahman* is the sole reality from whom self and world are ultimately non-different. The person of Kṛṣṇa thus marks one of the most problematic tensions in Advaita Vedānta: how can the divine be truly personal, manifesting in human form to be worshipped, and yet ultimately transcendent and non-dual? This question has provided the focal point for much of the scholarship on Kṛṣṇa in Advaita Vedāntin *Gītā* commentaries.

In my own analysis of the *Gītā* commentaries of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, my primary research questions set out to address the ‘tension’ between Advaita and *bhakti* from a new starting point. I begin by asking two key questions:

¹ Could also be translated as ‘Book of the Good Understanding’.

- i) What are the commentators' *own* questions?

I use the word 'question' as a shorthand for what could be argued to be my commentators' own key concerns. To identify these key concerns, I use close reading, for example, of the way they introduce their commentaries.² By looking at the questions the commentators set up themselves, we find that all three present Arjuna 'drowning in the ocean of grief and delusion' as a key intellectual problem. They do this, in various ways, by taking the stock metaphor of the ocean of rebirth (which the *Gītā* itself deploys in 12.7)³ and reapplying it to Arjuna specifically. This yields my second question:

- ii) *Why* is Arjuna drowning, and *how* can Kṛṣṇa save him?

I identify the specific means by which Kṛṣṇa saves Arjuna from drowning, according to Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, through an analysis of some of the broader questions asked by each commentator about Kṛṣṇa himself. For Śaṅkara, how does Kṛṣṇa as divine agent relate to the transcendent? For Śrīdhara, how can we talk about a body for the transcendent? For Madhusūdana, how can we understand personhood in relation to the transcendent? These address my third and main research question:

- iii) How does examining the *relation* perceived between Kṛṣṇa's person and pedagogy help us to understand Kṛṣṇa's place in Advaita Vedānta in Śaṅkara's *Gītābhāṣya*, Śrīdhara's *Subodhinī* and Madhusūdana's *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*?

By stepping away from viewing Kṛṣṇa's presence in Advaita Vedānta as problematic, we find that Kṛṣṇa is in fact fundamental to providing a *solution* to the key intellectual issues raised by the commentators themselves. I argue therefore that the person of Kṛṣṇa has a key pedagogical function for each commentator which we can only detect by taking their own agendas seriously.

² See section 1.5.3.4 on my method.

³ "O son of Pārtha, for those whose minds are fixed on me, I soon become the rescuer from the ocean of death and rebirth". (*teṣāṃ ahaṃ samuddhartā mṛtyu-saṃsāra-sāgarāt | bhavāmi na cirāt pārtha mayy āveśita-cetasām*) || **Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.**

1.2 – Who is Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*?

1.2.1 – Why do my authors have to consider the *Gītā*?

The *Gītā* is a post-Vedic text⁴ which, at a time of rising devotion to the personal God, Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, sought to integrate a variety of ritual and metaphysical approaches into a theistic framework.⁵ The word ‘Veda’ means ‘knowledge’ and refers to the religious literature known as *śruti*, ‘that which is heard’. The *śruti* literature, formally the most authoritative source in brahmanical and Hindu traditions, comprises the four layers of the Veda culminating in the Upaniṣads. Although the *Gītā* is not considered a part of *śruti*, it is one of the most important works of the literature referred to as *smṛti*, ‘that which is remembered’. As Robert Minor tells us, the authority of *smṛti* is accepted on the basis that it is recognised by those who adhere to *śruti* and is not in conflict with the Veda.⁶

The Vedāntins, who ground their theology in the teaching of the Upaniṣads, consider the *Gītā* to be one of three textual sources requiring a commentary, along with the Upaniṣads and the *Brahma-sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa.⁷ These three texts together came to be known as the Vedāntin ‘triple foundation’ (*prasthānatraya*). It is upon this ‘triple foundation’ that systems of Vedānta (literally, the ‘end of the Veda’) are constructed.⁸ A Vedāntin commentator wanting to show the credibility of their interpretation set out to explain each text in relation to the triple foundation. There is virtually nothing about Kṛṣṇa in either the

⁴ Although there is considerable debate as to when the *Gītā* was composed, there is some consensus that it was written around the second century BCE (e.g. J.A.B. van Buitenen (ed. and tr.) *The Bhagavad-Gītā in the Mahābhārata: A Bilingual Edition* (London: Chicago University Press, 2013), pp.6; Arvind Sharma, *The Hindu Gītā* (London: Open Court, 1986), p.3). Jeaneane Fowler notes that the variation in date depends on whether we accept that the *Gītā* was a part of early versions of the *Mahābhārata*, or whether it was inserted into the epic later (Jeaneane Fowler, *The Bhagavad-Gītā: A Text and Commentary for Students* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012, p.xxiv). Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad and Robert Minor argue that the grounds for variations in the academy over its dates suggest a process that took place over either side of the start of the Common Era (Robert N. Minor, *The Bhagavad-Gītā: An Existential Commentary* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1982), p.xxi; Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self, Human Self: The Philosophy of Being in Two Gītā Commentaries* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.xv). Whatever the *Gītā*'s date, it would have been well-established by the time Śaṅkara (c. 700 CE) wrote his *Gītābhāṣya*.

⁵ See Jessica Frazier (ed.) *The Bloomsbury Companion to Hindu Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), pp.12-3.

⁶ Minor, *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, p.xv.

⁷ p.xv. The *Brahma-sūtras* are the elliptical verses held to summarise the meaning of the Upaniṣads which are foundational to the different schools of Vedānta.

⁸ pp.xv-xvi. Whether or not the Vedāntin ‘triple foundation’ was established before or after Śaṅkara is still debated but see Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, ‘Refutation or dialogue? Śaṅkara’s Treatment of the Bhāgavatas’, in (eds.) Brian Black and Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *In Dialogue with Classical Indian Traditions: Encounter, Transformation and Interpretation*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2019), pp.51-65.

Upaniṣads or the *Brahma-sūtras*. Yet the *Gītā* is a text anchored around Kṛṣṇa. For an Advaita Vedāntin commentator to consider Kṛṣṇa specifically from within the triple foundation, it is therefore necessary to look at the *Gītā*.

1.2.2 – Why do my authors have to consider Kṛṣṇa?

Kṛṣṇa presents the Advaita Vedāntin commentator with a clear challenge: making sense of Kṛṣṇa’s presence *as a person* in the *Gītā*. This challenge is symptomatic of a much wider issue. There had been a tension between the paths of *jñāna* (knowledge) and *bhakti* (devotion) since the rise of devotional schools in the history of Vedānta (in the second half of the first millennium CE). This tension generated an internal problem in Indian philosophy, as indicated by Friedhelm Hardy:

The religious history of India is marked by the conflict and the interaction between two major trends: to conceive of the absolute either in terms of a (mystical) state of being or as a personal God.⁹

Hardy adds that Advaita Vedānta is the main representative of the former trend, while emotional Kṛṣṇa devotionalism is the main representative of the latter.¹⁰ These trends appear to be opposing, as while *bhakti* implies a (transcendent) object of devotion, Advaita Vedānta requires there be no subject-object distinction beyond the conventional realm. Much of the secondary literature has approached Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana’s views of Kṛṣṇa in terms of this basic problematic. It was due to this underlying tension, as well as the *Gītā*’s status, that each commentator had to consider the person of Kṛṣṇa in the light of their own Advaita Vedāntin position.

1.2.3 – Why write a *Gītā* commentary?

For Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, considering Kṛṣṇa was fundamental to providing a coherent Advaita Vedāntin interpretation of the presence of a personal deity in a key text.

⁹ Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.13.

¹⁰ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, p.13. Hardy calls the *bhakti* of the *Gītā* ‘intellectual devotionalism’, by contrast with the later ‘emotional devotionalism’ of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* etc. Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana are differently situated in relation to this divide made in modern scholarship.

Each commentator also needed to write a commentary specifically on the *Gītā* in order to develop a Vedānta-grounded Advaita in the context of their various devotional audiences. In Chapter 2, I show that Śaṅkara was writing during a time of increasing temple worship and expanding Bhāgavata (Vaiṣṇava) *bhakti* traditions in South India; Śrīdhara flourished after another key devotional text – the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* – reached Orissa; and Madhusūdana was situated in a sixteenth century Mughal setting where specific types of (Vedānta-related) Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* were developing.

1.3 – The *Gītā* as a root text

1.3.1 – The narrative of the *Gītā*

The *Gītā* is found in the third section of the sixth book of the *Mahābhārata* which, along with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is known as one of the great Indian ‘epics’.¹¹ The *Gītā* also stands as a self-contained text – in terms of its various commentaries, translations and contemporary reception – and is commented on as such by my three authors. Alexandre Piatigorsky points out, in his introduction to van Buitenen’s translation of the *Gītā*, that the text itself has a ‘general and universal’ appeal and a broad teaching.¹² The sorts of issues presented in the *Gītā* as a root text apply across traditions. As Jeaneane Fowler puts it, the story itself has the elements of a modern-day drama: ‘intrigue, love, betrayal, sorrow, joy and dynamic characters’.¹³

The primary story of the *Mahābhārata* is the war between two rival families: the Kauravas (Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons, the eldest being Duryodhana) and the Pāṇḍavas (the five sons of Pāṇḍu, among them Yuddhiṣṭhira and Arjuna). Yuddhiṣṭhira had been cheated out of his kingdom in a dicing game with Duryodhana, resulting in him and his four brothers going into exile for thirteen years. When Yuddhiṣṭhira finally returned from exile, Duryodhana refused to give him back his kingdom. In a final attempt to resolve the dispute, Yuddhiṣṭhira sent his friend and relative Kṛṣṇa. Having to choose between Kṛṣṇa and his army, Duryodhana chose the army whilst Yuddhiṣṭhira’s younger brother, Arjuna, chose Kṛṣṇa. Yuddhiṣṭhira, having failed in his last attempt to avoid a battle, admits defeat.

¹¹ Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, p.xiii.

¹² van Buitenen (ed. and tr.) *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, p.39.

¹³ Fowler, *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, p.xxi.

In the *Mahābhārata* context of the *Gītā*, Arjuna has a dilemma. As the *Gītā* begins, Arjuna looks across the battlefield and sees respected others – family members and teachers – on both his Pāṇḍava side and the rival Kaurava side. Arjuna questions whether he should fight his own kin. In despair, Arjuna drops his bow and turns to Kṛṣṇa, his charioteer. The *Gītā* thereafter is essentially Kṛṣṇa in dialogue with and responding to Arjuna’s despair on the battlefield. The remaining narrative of the *Gītā* consists of Kṛṣṇa urging Arjuna to fight. During this dialogue, Kṛṣṇa reveals himself as God in human form. Arjuna is finally persuaded by Kṛṣṇa to fight, and a battle commences over eighteen days, with all the suffering Arjuna had predicted. As van Buitenen points out in his translation, the *Gītā* provides a ‘unique religious and philosophical context in which [the dilemma of a war which was both just and pernicious] can be faced, recognised and dealt with’.¹⁴

In the triple foundation context of writing a *Gītā* commentary, Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, as *brahmin* renunciators, have a problem too. Arjuna as a *kṣatriya* (warrior) is not representative of their expected audience of *brahmin* students. Neither are my commentators particularly interested in the question of a just war. So, when they teach about liberation, the presence of Arjuna necessarily poses a question.

1.3.2 – *The progressive teaching of the Gītā*

The narrative of the *Gītā* is a conversation between Kṛṣṇa as teacher and Arjuna as pupil. As this narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that the *Gītā*’s teaching itself is progressive. Minor reminds us that the *Gītā* ‘begins in the calm before the storm of the great Bhārata war and, [as the text progresses], moves from the immediate concerns of action in the battle to sublime metaphysics, step by step revealing that Arjuna’s charioteer is not merely his friend but the Supreme Being [...]’¹⁵ Zaehner has similarly pointed out that Kṛṣṇa is not merely a local prince or charioteer;¹⁶ we get to know Kṛṣṇa more and more, and he is ultimately revealed to be God in human form. In one of the key verses of the *Gītā* itself –

¹⁴ van Buitenen (ed. and tr.) *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, pp.5-6. A main concern for modern commentators such as B.G. Tilak and Gandhi, but not of the three I consider here.

¹⁵ Robert Minor, ‘The “*Gītā*’s” Way as the Only Way’, *Philosophy East and West* 30.3 (1980), p.340.

¹⁶ R.C. Zaehner, *The Bhagavad-Gītā* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp.6-7. Although the vocabulary Zaehner uses is influenced by his Roman Catholic background, the point he makes about the *Gītā*’s progressive teaching is relevant. For another scholar who discusses the ‘progressive’ teaching of the *Gītā*, see Franklin Edgerton, *The Bhagavad-Gītā* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p.172.

4.6 – Kṛṣṇa reveals himself to be the transcendent-become-manifest. In 4.6 Kṛṣṇa himself says, ‘Although I am birthless, not subject to change and the Lord of all beings, depending upon my *prakṛti*,¹⁷ **I come to be** through my own power (*ātma-māyayā*)’.¹⁸ Later in the *Gītā* in chapter 11, Kṛṣṇa finally reveals his cosmic form to Arjuna. In 11.47 Kṛṣṇa says, ‘Being satisfied, **I have shown you**, O Arjuna, through the *yoga* of the self, **this supreme form of mine**, excellent, universal, infinite and primeval, which has not been seen before by anyone else’.¹⁹ As the narrative of the *Gītā* progresses, Kṛṣṇa becomes known first as charioteer, then as friend and teacher, but at heart as a manifestation of the ultimate, *brahman*. Kṛṣṇa’s many layers, revealed as the narrative of the *Gītā* progresses, demonstrate the pedagogy of the text in its root form. The layers to Arjuna’s character are also revealed progressively in the root text, as he learns how to act in the world and, implicitly, what it means to be embodied, and how to understand his own personhood. The pedagogical progression already in the *Gītā* as a root text is read with different emphases by Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdāna, and provides the foundation for their own interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy.

1.4 – Literature Review

I have chosen Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdāna as the focus of my analysis to compare the way in which each commentator deals with the person of Kṛṣṇa, given that they are all self-proclaimed Advaita Vedāntins. Śaṅkara is often viewed as the ‘base line’ for Advaita Vedānta. Considering the ways in which Śrīdhara and Madhusūdāna have treated the same root text of the *Gītā*, but in the light of the later influence of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, has highlighted the importance of *bhakti* for these non-dualist commentators. It is by considering these three commentators together that I show how each commentator can be understood in relation to the other two in this thesis.

In the following literature review, I highlight the relation of *bhakti* to Advaita Vedānta as a key question in the literature on my three commentators.

¹⁷ See Chapter 3, section 3.1.6.1 for a definition of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*.

¹⁸ *ajo 'pi sann avyayātmā bhūtānām īśvaro 'pi san | prakṛtiṃ svām adhiṣṭhāya sambhavāmy ātma-māyayā* || My emphasis.

¹⁹ *mayā prasannena tava arjuna idaṃ rūpaṃ paraṃ darśitam ātma-yogāt | tejo-mayaṃ viśvam anantam ādyaṃ yan me tvad-anyaena na dṛṣṭa-pūrvam* || My emphasis.

1.4.1 – Śaṅkara

Śaṅkara was an early eighth century Advaita Vedāntin teacher and commentator from South India. His *Gītābhāṣya* is the oldest extant commentary on the *Gītā*.²⁰ The *Gītā* presents Śaṅkara with a challenge somewhat different from that of the other primary texts he comments on. In Śaṅkara's commentaries on the other two parts of the Vedāntin triple foundation – his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* and his Upaniṣad commentaries (particularly his *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* and *Chāndogya-upaniṣad-bhāṣya*) – it is easier for him to present the individual self as ultimately non-dual. In his *Gītābhāṣya*, however, Śaṅkara must explain the presence of the person of Kṛṣṇa. The starting point for inquiry in much of the contemporary literature on Śaṅkara's view of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* can be divided into four key positions.

1.4.1.1 – Alignment with *māyā*

For many contemporary scholars, divine grace cannot have a role in Śaṅkara's soteriology if it is to truly be non-dual.²¹ The reason for this is that the notion of a personal Lord and the idea of divine grace forges a supposed distinction between 'worshipper' and 'worshipped'. As such, some scholars argue that the transcendent (*brahman*), for Śaṅkara, must be ultimately 'impersonal'.²² These scholars include Madeleine Biarreau, R.N. Dandekar and Krishna Mohan.²³ All three have contended that Kṛṣṇa, being a personal deity, presents a fundamental problem for Śaṅkara as an Advaitin, and must therefore be relegated to the lower realm of *māyā* (often translated as 'illusion'). Although Warren Todd does not explicitly argue that Kṛṣṇa is to be relegated to the realm of *māyā*, he does state that Kṛṣṇa can be '[bracketed from] Śaṅkara's main gnoseological concerns'.²⁴

²⁰ However, as Arvind Sharma points out, the *Anugītā* (the re-presentation of the *Gītā* where Kṛṣṇa begins to teach Arjuna again, found in book fourteen of the *Mahābhārata*) indicates that there was a trend, prior to Śaṅkara, of interpreting the *Gītā* in terms of non-dualism, due to its emphasis on knowledge rather than devotion. Sharma, *The Hindu Gītā*, p.7.

²¹ T.S. Rukmani, review of *The Role of Divine Grace in the Soteriology of Śaṅkarācārya* by Bradley J. Malkovsky, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124.4 (2004), p.813.

²² Bradley J. Malkovsky, *The Role of Divine Grace in The Soteriology of Śaṅkarācārya* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p.xi.

²³ See Madeleine Biarreau, *Études de Mythologie Hindoue* (Paris: Cosmogonies Purāniques, 1981), p.172; R.N. Dandekar, 'God in Hindu Thought', *ABORI* 48-49 (1968), pp.433-65; Krishna P. Mohan, *Śaṅkara's Concept of God* (Mulapet: Nelanutala Publishers, 1978), pp.9 & 34.

²⁴ Warren Lee Todd, *The Ethics of Śaṅkara and Śāntideva: A Selfless Response to an Illusory World* (Cornwall: Ashgate, 2013), pp.7-8.

1.4.1.2 – Divine grace and personalism as key

Rather than relegating Kṛṣṇa to the realm of *māyā*, a handful of scholars argue instead that the notion of a personal Lord and the idea of divine grace in fact play key roles for Śaṅkara in leading to realisation. Paul Hacker, for instance, has argued at length that Śaṅkara does not view the impersonal *brahman* and the personal Lord as totally distinct from one-another.²⁵ Writing half a century after Hacker, Bradley Malkovsky argues that, for Śaṅkara, not only is divine grace key for liberation, but ‘ultimate reality is treated as eminently personal’.²⁶ For Malkovsky, Śaṅkara in his *Gītābhāṣya* does not simply ‘reluctantly [affirm] the reality of divine grace [expressed in the teaching of the *Gītā* itself, but] frequently strengthens by elaboration what the *smṛti* professes about grace’.²⁷ In fact, Malkovsky points out that Śaṅkara even brings up the subject of grace independently in his glosses, where it is not mentioned in the original *Gītā* text.²⁸ Both Hacker and Malkovsky have backgrounds in Christian theology, which could arguably account for why their focus is on divine grace.

1.4.1.3 – Bhakti/Kṛṣṇa as vital to Advaitin realisation

Jacqueline Suthren Hirst argues that the connections Śaṅkara had with Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas, along with expanding temple worship and the growth of popular devotion during

²⁵ Hacker’s point here relates to terminology – in his investigation into the way Śaṅkara uses the term *īśvara* in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, Hacker shows that Śaṅkara does not abide by a clear distinction between a higher *nirguṇa brahman* and a lower personal *īśvara*, a Lord one might expect to be in all cases identified with *saguṇa brahman*. Rather, Hacker shows that in most cases, the term *īśvara* is used synonymously and interchangeably with the term *nirguṇa brahman* and its synonym, *param brahman*. See ‘Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology of Śaṅkara: Avidyā, Nāmarupā, Māyā and Īśvara’, English translation of Hacker’s 1950 article, in Wilhelm Halbfass, *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp.57-100.

²⁶ Malkovsky, *The Role of Divine Grace*, p.xi. See also Bradley J. Malkovsky, ‘The Personhood of Śaṅkara’s *Para Brahman*’, *The Journal of Religion* 77.4 (1997):541-62. Malkovsky points to other authors who hold this position, including Richard de Smet and V.H. Date. While others are sympathetic to this position (namely, T.M.P. Mahadevan and Krishna Warriar), they do not fully support it. See Richard de Smet, ‘Forward Steps in Śaṅkara Research’ (Pratap Seth Endowment Lecture on Śaṅkara Vedānta: Indian Philosophical Congress, 1987), *Darshana International* 26 (1987):33-46; V.H. Date, *Vedānta Explained* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973); T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Superimposition in Advaita Vedānta* (Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985); Krishna Warriar, *God in Advaita* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1977).

²⁷ Malkovsky, *The Role of Divine Grace*, p.333.

²⁸ p.333.

his time, was likely to have affected his view of a personal Lord.²⁹ Hirst maintains that *bhakti* is compatible with Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedāntin framework, providing it is understood in relation to his main concern of *jñāna*. In fact, Hirst holds that a devotional response to Kṛṣṇa's grace is 'an integral part of the progressive mental dedication that finally yields the Advaitin insight'.³⁰ Contrary to Malkovsky, Hirst maintains that, although Advaitin knowledge dawns through understanding the non-dual nature of the personal Lord, divine grace is *not* Śaṅkara's primary focus. For Hirst, Śaṅkara's primary focus is non-dual realisation. Hirst does not go as far as Malkovsky, who argues that ultimate reality is wholly personal, but argues that, for Śaṅkara, *īśvara* (the Lord) and *bhakti* cannot be relegated to the lower level of *māyā*.

1.4.1.4 – Kṛṣṇa and being as vital to Advaitin realisation

Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad takes a similar approach to Hirst, although he places greater emphasis on *being*. For Ram-Prasad, Śaṅkara 'wholeheartedly endorses devotion to Kṛṣṇa'.³¹ However Ram-Prasad also argues that, for Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa is both i) the subject who is the Supreme Being, and ii) being itself which founds all beings.³² In short, Ram-Prasad takes Śaṅkara to be saying that *brahman* is being, in the sense that it renders possible the existence of everything else. So *brahman* is that which cannot be identified with ordinary being or non-being, but becomes that which renders existence possible. Kṛṣṇa is the personalised aspect of this being. We can only understand the *nirguṇa* (without attributes/qualities) nature of *brahman* in and through Kṛṣṇa. For Ram-Prasad, in Śaṅkara's exegesis, *brahman* transcends the categories of *sat* (existent) and *asat* (non-existent) that are evident in the *Gītā*.³³ *Sat* is that which renders possible the existence of everything else and therefore also renders possible the existence of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is *brahman* insofar as Kṛṣṇa is self and *brahman* is self – there is no difference. For Ram-Prasad, Śaṅkara does not attempt to 'explain away Kṛṣṇa within the working out of the significance of *ātman-brahman* identity'.³⁴ However, Ram-Prasad also holds that 'a swing to the other extreme of

²⁹ For more background see Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti* (1983).

³⁰ Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, 'The Place of *Bhakti* in Śaṅkara's Vedānta' in Karel Werner (ed.) *Love Divine: Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism* (Richmond: Curzon, 1993), p.128.

³¹ Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, p.34.

³² p.2.

³³ pp.1-6.

³⁴ p.34.

seeing Śaṅkara's position in the light of a wholly devotional theology of Kṛṣṇa³⁵ is not sustainable'.³⁶

1.4.2 – Śrīdhara

Śrīdhara flourished in Orissa, eastern India, c. 1350-1450 CE, at least six hundred years after Śaṅkara, and was situated in a very different devotional and intellectual climate. There is much less material on Śrīdhara's view of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* than there is on Śaṅkara or Madhusūdana. While there are differing interpretations in the contemporary literature on Śrīdhara's view of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*, these interpretations are primarily generated from the same underlying intellectual question: 'Is Śrīdhara an Advaitin?' This underlying question manifests itself in the literature in various ways, from scholars asking what type of Advaita Vedānta Śrīdhara proposes, to questioning whether Śrīdhara is a non-dualist at all.

1.4.2.1 – Positioning Śrīdhara in relation to Śaṅkara

Ananta Sukla is one of the only authors to write substantially on Śrīdhara. Sukla claims that, in his *Subodhinī*, although Śrīdhara acknowledges that he draws repeatedly on Śaṅkara's work, he clearly departs from Śaṅkara and leans more towards the Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇava tradition.³⁷ For Sukla, Śrīdhara holds that *bhakti* is 'the only way of experiencing reality',³⁸ setting him apart from Śaṅkara's view. Sukla argues that *bhakti* is primary in all three of Śrīdhara's commentaries – on the *Gītā*, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.³⁹ According to Sukla, *Subodhinī* chapter 11 Śrīdhara reveals the meaning of *bhakti* as 'the worship of a manifest form of reality in general, and of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa in particular'.⁴⁰ Sukla claims that, for Śrīdhara, Kṛṣṇa is the highest goal of life and '*bhakti* is the means as well as the end of experiencing Kṛṣṇa'.⁴¹ For Sukla, the key difference between Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara is that Śrīdhara understands *bhakti* as 'an epistemological doctrine that is

³⁵ As we have seen in Malkovsky in section 1.4.1.2.

³⁶ Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, p.34. Here, Ram-Prasad adds that Śaṅkara offers an 'emphatically gnostic reading of the nature and purpose of worship that does not sit easily with pietistic devotion'.

³⁷ Ananta Sukla, *Śrīdhara Svāmī: A Medieval Philosopher of Religion* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2010), p.115.

³⁸ Sukla, *Śrīdhara*, p.119.

³⁹ p.120.

⁴⁰ p.127.

⁴¹ p.133.

specifically advocated by the Bhāgavata religion⁴² whereas Śaṅkara, in Sukla's view, is hostile to the Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas.⁴³

Other scholars have also approached Śrīdhara by comparing him to Śaṅkara. Sudhindra Chakravarti, writing earlier than Sukla, already held that Śrīdhara's aim was 'not to effect a reconciliation between the non-dualism of Śaṅkara and the dualism of theistic Vedāntins of the medieval period, but to teach the doctrine of *bhakti*'.⁴⁴ S.K. De, however, writing in 1942, had viewed Śrīdhara's commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as an attempt to combine Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta with 'the emotionalism of the Bhāgavatas'.⁴⁵ De (probably correctly) maintained that 'devotion to Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa was never considered inconsistent with one's belonging to the Śaṅkara *saṃpradāya*, and [that many Śaṅkarite ascetics had] taught that the stage of Advaitin realisation can be reached through devotional worship of a particular deity as a person'.⁴⁶ For De, around Śrīdhara's time there was a growing tendency of 'tempering the severe monistic idealism of Advaita'⁴⁷ with the devotional worship of a personal god, which Śrīdhara gives clear expression to in his commentaries on the *Gītā*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.⁴⁸ De nonetheless held that, while Śrīdhara acknowledges Śaṅkara's teachings as authoritative, in his *Subodhinī* he presents *bhakti* as 'the best means of Advaita *mukti* (liberation)'.⁴⁹

1.4.2.2 – Positioning Śrīdhara in relation to the Caitanya tradition

Śrīdhara's view of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* has also been interpreted retrospectively, in relation to the later developing Caitanya (Gauḍīya/Bengal Vaiṣṇava) tradition. This is because Śrīdhara's commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* – over and above the root text itself – is deemed to be one of the specific textual authorities for the Caitanya tradition's own approach. Ramakanta Chakravarti looks at Śrīdhara's *Subodhinī* in the context of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the religious movement inspired by Caitanya. Chakravarti notes that, around

⁴² p.130.

⁴³ See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Śaṅkara's attitude towards the Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas.

⁴⁴ Sudhindra Chandra Chakravarti, *The Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism: A Critical Exposition* (Calcutta: Academic Publishers, 1969), p.22.

⁴⁵ Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal, from Sanskrit and Bengali Sources* (Calcutta: General Printers & Publishers Limited, 1942), p.17.

⁴⁶ De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith*, p.17.

⁴⁷ pp.17-18.

⁴⁸ pp.17-18.

⁴⁹ pp.17-18.

the time of Caitanya (1486 CE), Śrīdhara’s commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was ‘steadily gaining popularity in many regions of India’.⁵⁰ Chakravarti also contends that Śrīdhara was ‘mainly responsible for the revision of the theory of *māyā*, as propounded by Śaṅkara in his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras*’.⁵¹ According to Chakravarti’s reading, Śrīdhara equates Kṛṣṇa with *brahman* in his *Subodhinī*, while interpreting *māyā* as an ‘attribute’ of *brahman*.⁵² However, Chakravarti does not give any specific textual references to support this claim. Chakravarti also notes that some of the ‘basic formulations of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism’ were taken from Śrīdhara’s commentaries.⁵³ While Chakravarti has argued that Śrīdhara ‘revises’ Śaṅkara’s theory of *māyā*, Anand Venkatkrishnan has recently contended that Śrīdhara in fact moves away from Advaita Vedānta, precisely because he does not emphasise *māyā* in the same way as Śaṅkara’s successors.⁵⁴

William Deadwyler also approaches Śrīdhara in terms of how he was viewed by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas. For Deadwyler, although Śrīdhara was ‘recognised by the Śaṅkara *saṃpradāya* as one of them [i.e. an Advaitin], he strayed too close to Vaiṣṇava ideas’.⁵⁵ Deadwyler notes that Śrīdhara’s commentaries were deemed controversial at the time, particularly his commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. According to Deadwyler, this was because Śrīdhara recognised a ‘quantitative difference’ between the individual self (*jīva*) and the Supreme Lord (Kṛṣṇa).⁵⁶ So, Deadwyler argues that there is clearly a Mādhva idea in Śrīdhara’s work.⁵⁷ Due to this, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas did not accept Śrīdhara as a ‘real’ Advaitin.⁵⁸ However, Deadwyler notes that, as far as the Vaiṣṇava *saṃpradāyas* are concerned, there is some significant overlapping – the four orthodox (i.e. not Advaitin) *saṃpradāyas* ‘teach basically the same thing: [...] that one is an eternal servant of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, or one of his many incarnations’.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ Ramakanta Chakravarti, ‘Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 5.1 (1977), p.112.

⁵¹ Chakravarti, ‘Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in Bengal’, p.112.

⁵² p.112.

⁵³ p.112.

⁵⁴ See Anand Venkatkrishnan, ‘The River of Ambrosia: An Alternative Commentarial Tradition of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’, *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 11 (2018):53-66.

⁵⁵ William Deadwyler, ‘Saṃpradāya of Śrī Caitanya’, in Steven J. Rosen (ed.) *Vaiṣṇavism: Contemporary Scholars Discuss the Gauḍīya Tradition* (New York: Folk Books, 1992), p.140.

⁵⁶ Deadwyler ‘Saṃpradāya of Śrī Caitanya’, p.140.

⁵⁷ p.140.

⁵⁸ p.140.

⁵⁹ p.140. Note that the actual members of the ‘four’ varied over the centuries. See Kiyo Okita, *Hindu Theology in Early Modern South Asia: The Rise of Devotionalism and the Politics of Genealogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.34-7.

1.4.2.3 – Positioning Śrīdhara in relation to *bhedābheda*

Some scholars position Śrīdhara between Advaita Vedānta and *bhedābheda* ('difference-non-difference', or the view that *brahman* is both different from and identical with the self). Daniel Sheridan makes it clear that Śrīdhara cannot be considered *only* in relation to Śaṅkara,⁶⁰ not least because of the historical gap of over 650 years. He further notes that Śrīdhara, in his commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, attempted to 'move away from the more extreme Advaitic interpretation which Citsukha [c. 1220 CE] and Puṅyāraṇya [date unknown] had proposed'.⁶¹ Sheridan acknowledges that the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Jīva Gosvāmin (c. 1555-1660 CE) accommodated Śrīdhara, just as he had Śaṅkara and Madhva, while arguing that Śrīdhara was heavily influenced by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* itself, away from the tradition of Śaṅkara.⁶² Sheridan explains that Śrīdhara's commentary was received by the tradition of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, where the *Bhāgavata* [*Purāṇa*] grew to be 'read and interpreted through the eyes of [his] commentary'.⁶³ Even in the cases where Śrīdhara's interpretation was rejected as too Advaitin, Sheridan notes that his interpretation would be the 'dialectical starting point for the corrected interpretation'.⁶⁴ In particular, Sheridan argues that Śrīdhara uses interpretative tools developed in Advaita to interpret the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* – a text that was not originally in favour of *nirviśeṣādvaita* ('absolute non-dualism') – in a *viśiṣṭādvaitin* ('qualified non-dualist')⁶⁵ or *bhedābhedin* way. As Sheridan claims, this provided the basis for the Bengal Vaiṣṇavas reading Śrīdhara's commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as promoting their view of *acintyabhedābheda* ('inconceivable difference-non-difference').⁶⁶ In short, Sheridan holds that Śrīdhara is 'halfway to the metaphysical nuances of *acintyabhedābheda*'.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Daniel P. Sheridan, 'Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*', *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 2.3 (1994), p.46.

⁶¹ Daniel P. Sheridan, 'Śrīdhara and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.1.1', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 67.1/4 (1986), p.127.

⁶² Sheridan, 'Śrīdhara and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.1.1', p.127.

⁶³ Sheridan, 'Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*', p.55.

⁶⁴ p.55.

⁶⁵ p.55. Sheridan's translation of this compound – *viśiṣṭādvaita* may also be read as 'the non-dualism of the one with qualities'. Lipner renders its philosophical use by Rāmānuja as 'identity-in-difference', Julius J. Lipner, *The Face of Truth: a Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1986), e.g. pp.135-37.

⁶⁶ But similar to the term *viśiṣṭādvaita* having a second construction as 'the identity in difference of the inconceivable one' referring to the inconceivably marvellous powers of the Lord. See Sheridan, 'Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*', p.55.

⁶⁷ p.58.

Two scholars writing later than Sheridan, whose focus is not Śrīdhara, have also adopted this position. For Kiyō Okita, Śrīdhara's commentaries demonstrate a realist view of the universe, which would place him closer to *bhedābheda* theology.⁶⁸ However, Okita also argues that Śrīdhara's view on *māyā* is closer to Śaṅkara's,⁶⁹ meaning that Śrīdhara would not have been 'dualistic enough' to have been fully embraced by Jīva Gosvāmin.⁷⁰ Okita thus holds a similar view to Sheridan, placing Śrīdhara's view between Advaita Vedānta and *bhedābheda*.⁷¹ Ravi Gupta also shares the view that Śrīdhara leans towards *acintyābheda*, as outlined by Sheridan. For Gupta, contrary to Okita, the clearest evidence of Śrīdhara's shift away from Śaṅkara lies in his 'avoidance of the concept of *māyā*, as delineated in Advaita'.⁷² For Śrīdhara, as Gupta puts it, '*māyā* does not consist of ignorance (*avidyā*) that results from the superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of the world on *brahman*. Instead, it is the veiling, multi-faceted *śakti* (power) of the Supreme Lord, understood in terms similar to *māyā* in theistic Vaiṣṇavism'.⁷³ Gupta argues that, in Śrīdhara's commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.7.6, we find 'nearly all the elements of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava concept of *bhagavān's śakti*'.⁷⁴

1.4.3 – Madhusūdana

Madhusūdana flourished in Benares, North India, in a sixteenth century Mughal context, very different from Śaṅkara's or Śrīdhara's. Although the historical gap between Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara is larger, there is also significant historical distance between Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana. Madhusūdana was writing at a time when the Advaitins in Benares would have been concerned with giving *bhakti* a place in their work, as particular devotional movements grew (Chapter 2, section 2.4.2.3). Notwithstanding the chronological distance, many scholars have positioned Madhusūdana in relation to Śaṅkara's Advaita, asking whether Madhusūdana can be both non-dualist and devotee. A key question in the literature on Madhusūdana is the extent to which he emphasises *bhakti* in his work.

⁶⁸ Okita, *Hindu Theology*, p.123.

⁶⁹ p.123.

⁷⁰ pp.66-7 & 123.

⁷¹ p.123.

⁷² Ravi M. Gupta, *The Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta of Jīva Gosvāmī: When Knowledge Meets Devotion* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p.68-9.

⁷³ Gupta, *The Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta of Jīva Gosvāmī*, p.69.

⁷⁴ p.71.

1.4.3.1 – The ‘social history’ approach

Christopher Minkowski and Andrew Nicholson have located Madhusūdana within a ‘social history’ of Advaita Vedānta. Minkowski has considered the possibility of building an overview of the social history of Advaita Vedānta in early modern India. Minkowski argues that Madhusūdana could be seen to have been participating in a ‘reformulation of Advaita in relation to the variety of lively religious movements of his [time],⁷⁵ in terms that had consequences for the development of Advaita Vedānta in the modern period’.⁷⁶ One of the key advantages of Minkowski’s reconstruction of a ‘social history’ of Advaita Vedānta is that it contributes towards bridging the gap between the ways in which classical and colonially-produced forms of Advaita Vedānta have been studied.⁷⁷

Nicholson, approaching Madhusūdana in terms of social networks, regards Madhusūdana as ‘the culminating point at the end of a long tradition of discourse about the “other” in Indian philosophy’.⁷⁸ Nicholson reminds us that Madhusūdana held that only the school of Advaita Vedānta could be described as ‘orthodox’ and ‘free from interpretive error’.⁷⁹ He also notes that Madhusūdana upholds the distinction between *āstika* (‘believers’) and *nāstika* (‘non-believers’) in Vedāntic interpretation. Nicholson writes that Madhusūdana ‘expands the semantic range of the term *nāstika* and blurs it with the concept of “foreigner”, or even *mleccha* (“barbarian”)’.⁸⁰ Nicholson notes that Madhusūdana’s concern with excluding *nāstikas* ‘dates back to an earlier stage of Vedic ritualism’,⁸¹ showing that Madhusūdana’s interpretation of *nāstikas* as ‘other’ is grounded in an ancient tradition. Although Nicholson’s comments are on Madhusūdana’s *Prasthānabheda*, this gives us a flavour of how Madhusūdana has been viewed generally in relation to Advaita Vedānta.

⁷⁵ Including Mādhva Vedānta.

⁷⁶ Christopher Minkowski, ‘Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History’ in *Religious Cultures in Early Modern India: New Perspectives* (eds.) Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, *Special Volume of South Asian History & Culture* 2.2 (2011), p.223.

⁷⁷ See also the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism Project. Consulted on 7 April 2018. <<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pollock/sks/>> First published online: 2009.

⁷⁸ Andrew J. Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p.165.

⁷⁹ Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p.183.

⁸⁰ p.165. For a scholarly study of Madhusūdana’s impact on a Muslim writer, see Shankar Nair, *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).

⁸¹ Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism*, p.183.

1.4.3.2 – Synthesising Advaita Vedānta and bhakti

Many scholars have approached Madhusūdana in terms of the extent to which he ‘synthesises’ *bhakti* with Advaita Vedānta. This approach has various inflections. In 1923, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, although not looking specifically at Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*, had already pointed out that Madhusūdana speaks of *jñāna* (viewed as the sole path to liberation in Advaita Vedānta) and *yoga* as two different methods for attaining liberation.⁸² Radhakrishnan also noted that Madhusūdana considers the *Gītā* to adopt ‘the three methods indicated in the Upaniṣads, *karma* or work, *upāsana* or worship, and *jñāna* or wisdom, and devotes six chapters to each in succession’.⁸³ In Chapter 5 I argue that, while Madhusūdana does align his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* with these three paths, he primarily structures his commentary around *tat tvam asi* (‘you are that’), the key Advaita Vedāntin *mahāvākya* (‘great sentence’). Moreover, although Radhakrishnan recognised that Madhusūdana quotes from the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*⁸⁴ in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, he did not stress the extent to which he draws on the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha* and the work of Vidyāranya (a fourteenth century Yogic Advaitin). In Chapter 5, I argue that a more nuanced way of reading Madhusūdana’s commentary, as opposed to viewing it in relation to Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta, is to understand how it builds on a specific type of Yogic Advaita. A contemporary scholar, Niranjan Saha, has touched briefly on Madhusūdana’s *tat tvam asi* structuring of his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, but primarily approaches Madhusūdana in comparison with Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, and does not expand on this structuring directly.⁸⁵

Other scholars, rather than focus on *yoga*, *jñāna* and *bhakti* as three ‘paths’, have focused on the extent to which Madhusūdana synthesises Advaita Vedānta with *bhakti*. Eliot Deutsch and van Buitenen have pointed out that Madhusūdana is often credited with being

⁸² Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy, Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1923] reprint 1999), p.344 n.3. It is worth noting that Radhakrishnan held a perennialist view, influenced by the fact that he was writing post-Vivekananda (1863-1902 CE), and was opposed to the ‘uniqueness’ of Christ view held by many colonial figures.

⁸³ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy, Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.554.

⁸⁴ The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* is an eleventh century text attributed to Vālmīki, which accounts the conversation between Vasiṣṭha and Prince Rāma. The *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha* is a reduced form of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.

⁸⁵ Niranjan Saha, ‘Nature of “that” (*tat*) in “That Thou Art” in the *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’, in *Modern Perspectives on Vedānta: Proceedings of the 20th International Congress of Vedānta* (eds.) Girish Nath Jha et al, Bal Ram Singh, R.P. Singh, Diwakar Mishra (Delhi: DK Printworld Ltd, 2012), pp.393-405.

the first to ‘reconcile fully the metaphysical principles of Advaita with the path of *bhakti*’.⁸⁶ Eric Lott has looked specifically at the *Gītā*’s ‘*avatāra* passage’⁸⁷ (4.6-8) to make a similar point. Lott looks in detail at how the term *avatāra* (descent form) has been incorporated into various systems of Vedānta, by examining two main streams of Vedāntic interpretation: the non-dualistic (Śaṅkara and Madhusūdana), and the realistic theistic (Rāmānuja and Madhva).⁸⁸ Lott argues that Madhusūdana’s comment on 4.6-8 supplements Śaṅkara’s comment on the same passage.⁸⁹ For Lott, Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 4.6-8 suggests that *bhakti*, ‘rather than being superseded by the identity experience of true enlightenment, essentially merges into, and is such [an] identity’.⁹⁰ While Madhusūdana is still a Śaṅkaran Advaitin in Lott’s interpretation, he allows much greater import to the ‘Kṛṣṇite love-experience: [...] the *avatāra* is [considered to have] ultimate value, yet as an embodiment is also ultimately unreal’.⁹¹

Sanjukta Gupta offers the only comprehensive overview of Madhusūdana’s philosophical position in English. In Gupta’s view, Madhusūdana offers a ‘theology of pure love for *bhagavān* (the Lord), without losing sight of the concept of the non-dual reality’.⁹² Gupta argues that, in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, Madhusūdana contradicts Śaṅkara who says that *dharma* refers to ‘social duties’, its definition being ‘total renunciation of all actions whether social or religious’.⁹³ She argues that Madhusūdana does not hold that *dharma* entails the renunciation of all actions, as this would discount ‘spontaneous acts of devotion’.⁹⁴ For Gupta, although Madhusūdana emphasises *bhakti*, he does so within his Advaita Vedāntin theology. The scholars who hold that Madhusūdana ‘synthesises’ Advaita Vedānta and *bhakti* have not questioned whether Madhusūdana was an Advaitin, in contrast to the literature on Śrīdhara. This could be because Śrīdhara’s wider work comments on popular religious texts (the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*), while Madhusūdana’s

⁸⁶ Eliot Deutsch and J.A.B. van Buitenen, *A Source Book of Advaita Vedānta* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1971), p.288.

⁸⁷ Note that the term *avatāra* is not used in the *Gītā* itself.

⁸⁸ Eric Lott, ‘The Mythic Symbol *Avatāra* in Indian Formulations,’ *Dialogue & Alliance* 1.2 (1987), p.4.

⁸⁹ Lott, ‘The Mythic Symbol *Avatāra*’, p.6.

⁹⁰ p.6.

⁹¹ pp.6-7.

⁹² Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism: The Philosophy of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.143.

⁹³ Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism* (2006), p.143-4. However, Śaṅkara’s position on *dharma* is more sophisticated than this. See Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, ‘Upholding the World: *Dharma* in The *Bhagavad-Gītā*,’ in Julius J. Lipner (ed.) *The Fruits of Our Desiring* (Calgary: Bayeux Arts, 1997), pp.48-66.

⁹⁴ Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism*, p.144.

magnum opus, the *Advaita-siddhi* ('The Proof of Advaita'), is a ruthless critique of the Mādhvas who were in direct contention with the Advaitins.

1.4.3.3 – Madhusūdana as non-dualist and devotee

In his 1986 doctoral thesis, Lance Nelson examines Madhusūdana's *Bhakti-rasāyana*.⁹⁵ Madhusūdana's argument in the *Bhakti-rasāyana*, according to Nelson, is that *bhakti* is the 'highest goal of life' (*paramapuruṣārtha*).⁹⁶ However, for Nelson, Madhusūdana 'does not present a convincing argument for *bhakti*'s being *paramapuruṣārtha* [as he fails to establish that] *bhagavān* is ontologically equal to *brahman*'.⁹⁷ Nelson contends that this 'makes it difficult to see how *bhakti*, as identified with [*bhagavān*], can be ontologically superior, or even equal, to *mokṣa* (liberation)'.⁹⁸

Further to this, in a separate article, Nelson contends that Madhusūdana's *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is primarily addressed to the Advaitin renunciate,⁹⁹ a position I challenge in Chapter 5. In this article, Nelson argues that the commonly held view of Madhusūdana as a champion of *bhakti*, who successfully integrated devotion and Advaita Vedānta, cannot be accepted without serious qualification.¹⁰⁰ Nelson speaks specifically about Madhusūdana's *Gītā* commentary and argues that its teaching, although representing crucial aspects of the theology of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, actually betrays its 'devotional ethos'.¹⁰¹ Here, Nelson suggests that Madhusūdana's *Bhakti-rasāyana* in fact contradicts his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* – in the former, *bhakti* is presented as the 'highest goal of life', whereas in the latter, *bhakti* is demonstrated to be relevant to the path of knowledge.¹⁰² For Nelson, Madhusūdana remains an 'orthodox Advaitin and [...] incurable scriptural elitist'.¹⁰³

⁹⁵ The *Bhakti-rasāyana* ('Elixir of Devotion') is an independent work which 'attempts [to integrate] non-dualist metaphysics with the devotionalism of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'. Lance Nelson, *Bhakti in Advaita Vedānta: A Translation & Study of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's Bhakti-rasāyana* (PhD, McMaster University, 1986), p.iii.

⁹⁶ Nelson, *Bhakti in Advaita Vedānta*, p.iii.

⁹⁷ p.iv.

⁹⁸ p.iv.

⁹⁹ Lance Nelson, 'Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the "Hidden Meaning" of The *Bhagavad-Gītā: Bhakti* for The Advaitin Renunciate,' *Journal of South Asian Literature* 23.2 (1988), p.83-4.

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, 'Madhusūdana on the "Hidden Meaning"', p.85.

¹⁰¹ p.83.

¹⁰² p.84.

¹⁰³ p.85.

1.5 – My Approach

1.5.1 – Overview

By looking at the literature on our three commentators together, we can see that the secondary writers have largely approached Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana's views of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* from the same starting point – that is, whether non-duality can remain coherent, albeit with different emphases:

Śaṅkara – is non-duality coherent?

Śrīdhara – is Śrīdhara an Advaitin?

Madhusūdana – how can Madhusūdana be both non-dualist and devotee?

Looking at the literature on Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana's approaches to Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* together tells us that the relation between non-dualism and devotion is a central question for all three commentators. In the case of Śaṅkara, we have seen that the key scholars who have considered his approach to Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* have all attempted to explain Kṛṣṇa's presence in a way that is coherent in terms of Śaṅkara's non-dual theology. For Śrīdhara, the various approaches to his view of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* focus on whether Śrīdhara is an Advaitin at all; in particular, scholars have compared Śrīdhara to Śaṅkara, and have positioned his theology in relation to the later developing Caitanya tradition by asking what 'type' of Advaita he proposes. Finally, the literature on Madhusūdana's approach to Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* has primarily focused on how Madhusūdana 'synthesises' Advaita and *bhakti*, and in particular scholars have questioned whether Madhusūdana can be both non-dualist and devotee.

1.5.2 – A new starting point for inquiry

The general polarisation of *jñāna* and *bhakti* in Advaita Vedānta is a key theme in literature on Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana. This thesis addresses the relation of Advaita Vedānta and *bhakti* in Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana's *Gītā* commentaries, but in a novel way. To do this, I propose we first look closely at the questions the commentators raise themselves. I argue that by looking at the commentators' own questions, we learn how

Kṛṣṇa is in fact integral to each commentators' system of pedagogy, rather than the personal presence who presents them with problems relating to theological consistency. In short, my springboard for inquiry will be not to ask what problem Kṛṣṇa might present for Śaṃkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana as non-dualist commentators. Instead, I ask: what problem does Kṛṣṇa *solve* for these three commentators? To show this, there are two key questions I will ask to start with: i) What are the commentators' own questions? and ii) How can Kṛṣṇa save Arjuna from drowning? It is only by looking closely at the commentators' own questions that we learn that all three commentators refer to Arjuna 'drowning'. As Arjuna is drowning, this will be the primary dilemma – raised by the commentators themselves – that I will address in each commentary as I ask what solutions Kṛṣṇa might provide, and seek to answer my third and main research question: iii) How does examining the *relation* perceived between Kṛṣṇa's person and pedagogy help us to understand Kṛṣṇa's place in Advaita Vedānta in these three commentaries?

i) *What are the commentators' own questions?*

The questions raised by Śaṃkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana themselves in their *Gītā* commentaries relate to more general questions asked about the transcendent across traditions. In his *Gītābhāṣya*, one of the key questions raised by Śaṃkara is how language can yield the knowledge that he claims is beyond all words. For instance, in his *Gītābhāṣya* 9.5 Śaṃkara asks, 'But how does he say, "This [i.e. the ultimate transcending all particular beings] is *my* self?"'¹⁰⁴ In his *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara asks how we can make sense of a transcendent *brahman* who acts in the world by taking on a body in Kṛṣṇa. For instance, in his *Subodhinī* 4.6, Śrīdhara specifically asks, 'How can you, having no beginning, have a birth?'¹⁰⁵ In other words, Śrīdhara asks, how can the transcendent take Kṛṣṇa's form? For Madhusūdana, in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, one of the key questions he raises is how the personhood of Arjuna, and of Kṛṣṇa, is to be understood. Madhusūdana does this in a particularly innovative way, throughout his commentary asking, 'Who are you (represented by Arjuna), and who is that (represented by Kṛṣṇa)?' The commentators' own questions on how the transcendent relates to the human echo across many other religious traditions in the world, of very different kinds and metaphysical commitments.

¹⁰⁴ *kathaṃ tu punarucyate 'sau mamātmaiti?*

¹⁰⁵ *anādes tava kuto janma?*

My approach to Śaṃkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana will thus be to take seriously the commentators' own questions and their responses, taking these questions as the starting point for my inquiry. The advantage of this method is that it urges us to examine the structure of each commentary, to look closely at the specific questions asked by each commentator, and to identify each commentator's priorities, as disclosed through a close reading of key passages in the Sanskrit. It is worth noting that the prioritisation of certain questions by Śaṃkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana is not limited to their *Gītā* commentaries, but occurs across their wider work. While some questions may be specific to their *Gītā* commentaries, others arise elsewhere and are given different emphases. For Śaṃkara, the question of divine agency, and agency for the *jīvanmukta* (one liberated while still living) is given much more priority in his *Gītābhāṣya* than in his Upaniṣadic commentaries, probably because it is only in this text that Kṛṣṇa offers a clear model for how the *jīvanmukta* can act. For Śrīdhara, the question of the Lord's grace that is repeatedly raised in his *Subodhinī* is also raised in his commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Śrīdhara also specifically asks how we can view Kṛṣṇa's 'body' in his *Subodhinī*. In Madhusūdana's *magnum opus*, the *Advaita-siddhi*, he is constantly in dialogue with the Mādhyas, who repeatedly charge him with problems of non-dualism. However, in Madhusūdana's *Gītā* commentary, the Mādhyas are not nearly as involved. Instead, Madhusūdana gives priority to the question of how we can understand Kṛṣṇa's personhood in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*.

ii) *How can Kṛṣṇa save Arjuna from drowning?*

By looking at the commentators' own questions, we find a common question asked by Śaṃkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana: why is Arjuna drowning? In the original *Gītā*, Arjuna is not presented as drowning. However, Kṛṣṇa 'saves' Arjuna in the *Gītā* itself through being his friend, by taking *avatāra* form, by being a teacher, and so on. These are the specific ways in which Kṛṣṇa will save Arjuna from 'drowning' in the root text. In their *Gītā* commentaries, Śaṃkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana each take the stock metaphor of the ocean of rebirth and apply it to Arjuna specifically, as I shall show in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. That Arjuna's drowning generates a key intellectual problem for our three commentators is seen in the ways each author uses the metaphor to set out their own intellectual agenda. The fact that the metaphor is located towards the beginning of each commentary demonstrates our commentators' focus on Arjuna's state. Arjuna's drowning is central because each

commentator presents it as the problem to be solved before outlining their own theological agenda – for Śaṃkara, Kṛṣṇa acts as a teacher and models divine agency for Arjuna *because* he must be saved from drowning; for Śrīdhara, Kṛṣṇa manifests the revealing *śakti* of *brahman*, enabling Arjuna to develop his *śuddha-sattvic* understanding, which is required *because* he is drowning; for Madhusūdana, Kṛṣṇa is the pedagogical example of how Arjuna is to come to understand his own personhood, which is required *because* Kṛṣṇa drowns Arjuna himself, forcing him to reconsider his own behaviour.

1.5.3 – My Method

Given the shared intellectual problem of Arjuna’s drowning for Śaṃkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, my approach will be to ask how Kṛṣṇa saves Arjuna from ‘drowning’ in the case of each of our commentaries. This will involve:

- i) A close reading of key passages in the Sanskrit commentaries themselves.
- ii) Socio-religious, intellectual and textual contextualisation, bearing in mind the historical contexts in which these commentators were situated.

I will deal with the issue of context first. Socio-religious contextualisation, while often difficult to establish precisely, may suggest how a commentator’s questions and agenda have been coloured by some of the possible audiences they may have in mind. Intellectual and textual contextualisation, where the data is much stronger, will involve: considering the context of the author’s own work, who they quoted, who cited their work, and the nature of the root text and commentarial material as dialogue forms. This sort of contextualisation, however, can only be done through looking at the original Sanskrit texts themselves, hence my primary method being close reading. In Chapter 2, I undertake a comparative contextualisation of our three commentators, outlined and justified below. In the chapters that follow, the type and extent of contextualisation will, of necessity, vary for each commentator.

1.5.3.1 – Socio-religious context

Socio-religious contextualisation can help us to identify the sorts of audiences our commentators might have had in mind, and how their background might have influenced

their *Gītā* commentaries. It will also provide historical ‘colouring’ for Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana’s various approaches to Kṛṣṇa in *Gītā*. For Śaṅkara, I will consider the growing prevalence of temple worship and the developing influence of ‘the Lord’, drawing on the work of Hirst. For Śrīdhara, I will look at the specific deities worshipped in Orissa during his time, and the potential for gaining political patronage by looking at the authorities and rulers Śrīdhara may have been in dialogue with, drawing on the Orissa Research Project, a systematic source outlining various devotional trends in medieval Orissa. For Madhusūdana, I will consider his social networks in Benares, and whether the construction of new temples and the development of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism would have impacted his view, drawing on the work of Rosalind O’Hanlon, Sheldon Pollock and Christopher Minkowski. It is important to treat the socio-religious contexts of our three commentators together, as this highlights the key issue for all three: the place of devotionalism in relation to their Advaita Vedāntin views.

1.5.3.2 – Intellectual context

The most important contextualisation in this thesis will be intellectual and textual. This is also the approach of Sheldon Pollock in the Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism Project, where the problems of establishing socio-religious context and the importance of intellectual context have been stressed. This intellectual contextualisation will involve locating the key sources and terms my commentators were drawing on, and considering the relevance of any opponents specifically in their *Gītā* commentaries. Although both Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana locate themselves explicitly in relation to Śaṅkara in their *Gītā* commentaries, I will also consider other systems of thought and types of Advaita Vedānta that may have had a bearing on their work.

For Śaṅkara, I will consider how important the role of the opponent is in his *Gītā* commentary. For Śrīdhara, I will question how much he may have been influenced by Citsukha’s earlier Advaitin commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. This will involve considering if there are any Advaita Vedāntin hermeneutical tools that Śrīdhara uses in his own commentary, drawing on the work of Daniel Sheridan and V.A. Sarma. For Madhusūdana, I will look closely at the extent to which he draws on the ‘repertoire’ of terms that had been established by the time that Yogic Advaita had developed, following the work of Vidyāraṇya. This will involve considering Yogic Advaita as part of the variety of Advaita

Vedānta that had been established by Madhusūdana's time, as compared with our previous two commentators, by drawing on the work of James Madaio, James Mallinson and Christian Bouy.

1.5.3.3 – Textual context

In my textual contextualisation, I will consider the importance of the triple foundation – which Śaṅkara likely set the precedent for commenting on – for both Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana. I will also touch on the wider work of our three commentators. In terms of their *Gītā* commentaries specifically, I will look closely at the texts each author quotes to consider which were authoritative for them. This is exactly how our commentators went about doing what they do – commenting on authoritative texts in order to show the credibility of their interpretations. For Śaṅkara, I will consider the texts he quotes in his *Gītābhāṣya* to build his view. For Śrīdhara, I will look at how much he draws on the triple foundation texts in his *Subodhinī* and analyse the extent to which he backs up his comments with Upaniṣadic quotations. For Madhusūdana, I will consider his extensive quoting from Yogic texts in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, showing how he differs in approach from Śaṅkara.

1.5.3.4 – Close reading of the Sanskrit

My close reading of passages from Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana's *Gītā* commentaries in Sanskrit will include analysing the way in which each commentator treats the root text. Śrīdhara, for example, almost always works through short but significant glosses of each word or phrase in every verse in the *Gītā*, including some verses in its first chapter which Śaṅkara almost completely ignores. Śrīdhara only gives longer commentaries occasionally, particularly in his *Subodhinī* chapter 18. Śaṅkara, as in his other commentaries, also works by glossing, but then at times uses the *Gītā* verse as a springboard for a free-standing consideration of opposing opinions on key issues. Madhusūdana not only weaves exact wording from Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara into some of his extended glosses,¹⁰⁶ but also provides extensive sub-commentaries on a wide range of other texts,¹⁰⁷ including *dharmaśāstra* passages and the sources I discuss in Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁶ For example, *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 13.4. See Chapter 5, section 5.4.

¹⁰⁷ For the important of this method of weaving in authoritative sources in Indian philosophical and other texts, see Elisa Freschi and Philipp A. Maas (eds.) *Adaptive Re-Use: Aspects of Creativity in South Asian*

All three commentators have their favoured sources which they quote. My close reading will consider not only which texts are quoted by my commentators, but exactly which points these quotations are supporting, whether there are any cross-references to other texts, and the significance of this for their philosophical position. Particularly for Madhusūdana, I consider how sub-commenting on other texts is key to his *Gītā* commentary forming part of a coherent view. Key too to my close reading will be looking carefully at the way in which each commentator structures their *Gītā* commentary. It is common to assume that *Gītā* commentators divide their commentaries up into ‘thirds’, taking chapters 1-6, 7-12 and 13-18 as three parts of a whole. I shall consider whether my three commentators do follow such a structure, and the significance of this for their reading of the *Gītā*.

The crucial issue of Arjuna’s drowning, discovered by close reading, is raised in the introductions of Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara’s commentaries (relocated to 2.10 for Madhusūdana) which suggests that introductions are particularly important. This view is confirmed by others who close-read such texts. Walter Slaje has pointed out that the significance of the beginnings of commentaries and introductions has been overlooked in the academy.¹⁰⁸ Minkowski has suggested that taking seriously the introductions to commentaries ‘presents the possibility of re-covering the meaning of an intellectual’s action in writing a learned text in Sanskrit’,¹⁰⁹ while Johannes Bronkhorst holds that the introductions to commentaries imply the previous traditions that the commentator may have been aware of or were building on.¹¹⁰ I shall thus consider the introductions to the three commentaries in hand along with their socio-religious, intellectual and textual contexts.

I further include reference to the praise verses (*maṅgalācaraṇas*) which the commentators use to frame their commentaries (Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, Śaṅkara using only one brief *purāṇic* verse), as well as to open and close some or most of their chapters (Śrīdhara,

Cultural History (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017). See also ‘On burglars and making the links: tradition and the re-use of Indic texts’, *Tradition and the Re-Use of Indic Texts*, special issue (guest ed.) Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, *Religions of South Asia* 6.2 (2012):149-60.

¹⁰⁸ See Walter Slaje (ed.) *Śāstrābhāṣa: Inquiries into the Preamble in Sanskrit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008).

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Minkowski, ‘Why Should We Read the Maṅgala Verses?’ in Walter Slaje (ed.) *Śāstrābhāṣa: Inquiries into the Preamble in Sanskrit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), p.2.

¹¹⁰ Johannes Bronkhorst, ‘What was Śaṅkara’s *śāstrābhāṣa*?’ in Walter Slaje (ed.) *Śāstrābhāṣa: Inquiries into the Preamble in Sanskrit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), pp.121-30.

Madhusūdana) or as interpolations at other key points in their work (Madhusūdana). Praise verses act as an important devotional counterpoint in their interpretations.

1.6 – Overview of Key Chapters

The three key chapters in this thesis will tackle each commentator’s approach to Kṛṣṇa’s person and pedagogy in turn. I shall focus on one key topic for each commentator – agency for Śaṅkara, body for Śrīdhara, and personhood for Madhusūdana – as these are the themes emphasised by the commentators, borne out of the very questions they raise themselves.

1.6.1 – Chapter 3: Śaṅkara on Kṛṣṇa’s Agency and Pedagogy

As Śaṅkara’s view of agency has been seen as problematic, there has been little written on agency in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*.¹¹¹ In Chapter 3, by reconsidering the concept of agency in the *Gītābhāṣya* alongside Arjuna’s drowning I shall show how, in Śaṅkara’s view, Kṛṣṇa models divine agency for Arjuna. To consider Kṛṣṇa’s agency, I will draw on Mohanty’s Nyāya-based sequence of action (Chapter 3, section 3.3). Applying this sequence of action provides a systematic way of measuring the extent to which Kṛṣṇa is in fact an agent. In Nyāya, agency is directly linked with the body and desire, whereas for Śaṅkara, providing an account for how one can act in a detached way is crucial. I therefore apply the Nyāya framework of action to Śaṅkara’s view of agency as a ‘litmus test’ for the coherence of his view. In Chapter 3 I also argue that the person of Kṛṣṇa as a teaching figure and model for Arjuna is fundamental for Śaṅkara, whose other major works cannot provide this (Chapter 3, section 3.4.2).

1.6.2 – Chapter 4: Śrīdhara on Kṛṣṇa’s Body and Pedagogy

In demonstrating how Kṛṣṇa saves Arjuna from drowning in his *Gītā* commentary, Śrīdhara seeks to show Arjuna how he can become liberated as a person whose mind is currently impure (*aśuddha*). In Chapter 4, I argue that Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s body is fundamental to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. I demonstrate this by looking closely

¹¹¹ Todd is the exception to this, who compares Śaṅkara with Śāntideva. See Todd, *The Ethics of Śaṅkara and Śāntideva* (2013).

at Śrīdhara’s interpretation of *śakti*, particularly the way in which his interpretation of *śakti* builds on and differs from that of Citsukha. I shall also analyse Śrīdhara’s understanding of how *śakti* relates to the notion of body. From this, I shall look closely at the way in which language about Kṛṣṇa’s body functions, in Śrīdhara’s interpretation. In doing this, I will show how Kṛṣṇa’s *śakti*, for Śrīdhara, is key to leading Arjuna to liberation and the development of his own *śuddha-sattvic* understanding.

1.6.3 – Chapter 5: Madhusūdana on Kṛṣṇa’s Personhood and Pedagogy

In Chapter 5, I demonstrate how Madhusūdana’s structuring of his *Gītā* commentary around *tat tvam asi* is key to him showing how Kṛṣṇa rescues Arjuna from drowning. Madhusūdana looks at the personhood of both Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa by dividing his commentary into thirds around this *mahāvākya*: chapters 1-6 address *tvam*; chapters 7-12 address *tat*; chapters 13-18 address *tat tvam asi*. I argue that Madhusūdana’s structuring of his *Gītā* commentary builds on the progressive teaching of the *Gītā* itself – the ‘layers’ of both Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa *as a person* are revealed as his commentary unfolds. Drawing on Ram-Prasad’s model of minimal selfhood,¹¹² I show how Madhusūdana’s mapping of Arjuna’s transition from problematic personhood to minimal selfhood in his *Gītā* commentary is key to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy.

1.7 – How will my three key chapters address my research questions?

There has, thus far, been no study as to how Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana’s commentaries function pedagogically, nor a study comparing their interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s person and pedagogy. There has also been little focus on Arjuna as addressee in these commentaries. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I show how Kṛṣṇa is vital to saving Arjuna from drowning and Advaitin realisation, precisely *because* it is he who teaches Arjuna in very particular ways. I look at how a developing understanding of who Kṛṣṇa is plays a key part in the progressive pedagogy all three commentators variously identify. While this progressive pedagogy develops from the progressive pedagogy of the *Gītā* itself, each commentator draws out different aspects of the relation between Kṛṣṇa’s person and his pedagogy, according to their own emphases.

¹¹² See Chapter 6 n.13 on ‘minimal selfhood’.

In Chapter 6, I conclude this thesis by revisiting Arjuna’s drowning in each commentary (6.2). I then suggest ways in which we can read the sorts of commentarial texts I have dealt with (6.3). From this, I consider what my thesis tells us about the **person** of Kṛṣṇa (6.4) by demonstrating how agency, body and personhood are hermeneutical and pedagogical keys to understanding Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana’s interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy in the *Gītā* (6.4.1). Here, I use the findings in this thesis to show how *brahman*, being and embodiment are understood by each commentator, and how the person of Kṛṣṇa acts as vehicle (6.4.2). Ultimately, I show how for each commentator, ‘getting to’ *brahman* via the stripping away of individuation is key to their interpretations (6.4.2.3). I then address **pedagogy** (6.5). Here, I look closely at Kṛṣṇa’s progressive method of teaching and Arjuna’s progressive method of learning (6.5.3) by considering why Arjuna is the primary subject (6.5.2), and precisely how and when he can attain liberation (6.5.4), in each commentary. In the final section of my conclusion, I consider how my thesis might provide material for thinking about the key themes of divine embodiment, ‘speaking of’ the transcendent and teacher-pupil relationships, and a new way of understanding *bhakti* in the Advaita Vedāntin tradition (6.6). In order to begin to answer these key questions, I now turn to Chapter 2, where I discuss the different types of contextualisation I use to locate Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, with a view to providing the background to some of the theological questions raised by my commentators.

Chapter 2

Contextualising Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana

2.1 – Introduction

In this chapter, I offer a historical ‘colouring’ of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana. As established in Chapter 1, the contextualisation here will primarily be intellectual and textual, although I also touch on socio-religious context to offer a flavour of their possible audiences. There is a large historical gap between our three commentators: roughly five hundred years between Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara, and roughly another two hundred years between Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana. Locating our three commentators both in terms of time and geographical location is necessary to establish how their Advaita Vedāntin positions interacted with various forms of devotionism. This is precisely why it is important to treat the contexts of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana together in this chapter – to demonstrate the key issue at stake, which is the place of *bhakti* in relation to their own Advaita Vedāntin positions. Although work has been done on Śaṅkara’s background, there are limited accurate historical sources for his life. There are also very few sources on Śrīdhara, while there is some material on Madhusūdana. Given this, I will build a picture of their lives from what is available.

2.2 – Śaṅkara

2.2.1 – Date and geographical location

The consensus is that Śaṅkara lived *c.* 700 CE. Both A.J. Alston¹ and Hirst² consider the relative dating of other Sanskrit texts and accept this date. Kengo Harimoto has attempted to refine Śaṅkara’s date further, to between 756 and 772 CE, by ‘identifying personal names that appear in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* with historic persons whose existence has been recorded in inscriptions’.³

¹ A.J. Alston, *Śaṅkara on the Absolute: A Śaṅkara Source-book, Volume 1* (London: Shanti Sadan, 1980), p.42.

² For a full debate, see Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, *Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.25.

³ Kengo Harimoto, ‘The Date of Śaṅkara: Between the Cālukyas and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas’, *Journal of Indological Studies* 18 (2006), p.85.

As Śaṅkara's own work does not contain anything explicitly bibliographical, many claims in the literature about Śaṅkara's life are taken from hagiographical stories written centuries after he taught.⁴ Lorenzen refers to 34 different Sanskrit hagiographies of Śaṅkara, and claims there are several 'facts' we can accept about Śaṅkara's life: that he was born into a *brahmin* family from Kerala, that he left home to become a *sannyāsin* (renouncer), that he travelled throughout India with his own disciples defeating rival theologians, and that he established various religious centres – including Śṛṅgeri in the South, Purī in the East, Dvārakā in the West, and Badarikāśrama in the North.⁵ There is some evidence to support this, including Śureśvara (one of Śaṅkara's early followers) referring to Śaṅkara in his *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* 4.44 as 'drāviḍa'.⁶ As Alston points out, the word 'drāviḍa' is the Sanskrit for the English word 'Tamil', but was more broadly used to cover most of the area in India South of the Narmadā River.⁷ Harimoto, using evidence found in inscriptions, shows that Śaṅkara refers to the names of three figures who likely lived at the same time as him. These three figures were connected to the Cālukyas who first appeared in Karnataka, but were also influential in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala which, as Harimoto points out, 'covers much of the area where Śaṅkara was most likely from, and probably active'.⁸

2.2.2 – Socio-religious context

During Śaṅkara's time, devotion to Śiva and Viṣṇu was growing in South India,⁹ and Tamil *bhakti* traditions were expanding.¹⁰ Śaṅkara taught at a time when many of the schools around him were developing their teaching in the light of the growing influence of 'the Lord'.¹¹ Hirst and Hacker¹² have argued that Śaṅkara was at least familiar with Vaiṣṇava views, given that he references Viṣṇu in a range of contexts. In her early work, Hirst

⁴ Hirst, *Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, p.3. For an extensive discussion on the hagiographies purporting to document Śaṅkara's life, see Hirst, *Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, pp.11-19.

⁵ David N. Lorenzen, 'The Life of Śaṅkarācārya', in Fred W. Clothey and J. Bruce Long (eds.) *Experiencing Śiva: Encounters with a Hindu Deity* (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1983), p.156. The fact that Śṛīdhara places a Śaṅkara *maṭha* in Purī also supports that it may have been located there.

⁶ Alston, *Śaṅkara on the Absolute*, p.44.

⁷ p.59 n.112. The Narmadā River is a river in central India known as the 'lifeline of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh'.

⁸ Harimoto, 'The Date of Śaṅkara', p.102.

⁹ For a detailed survey of the rise of devotion see Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti* (1983).

¹⁰ Hirst, *Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, p.26.

¹¹ p.28.

¹² Hacker drew attention to the fact that Śaṅkara (and his immediate disciples) favoured Viṣṇu over Śiva, thus bringing into question the historical assumption that Śaṅkara was a Śaiva. See Paul Hacker, 'Relations of Early Advaitins to Vaiṣṇavism' *WZKS OA* 9 (1965):147-54.

mentions three of these contexts: lists where Viṣṇu is among other *devas*, discussions on ‘the highest place of Viṣṇu’, and comparisons involving Viṣṇu and his images (*pratimā*) or the *śālagrāma* stone.¹³ Hirst also notes that Śaṅkara appeared to be happy to support the temple practices and worship practised by the Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas.¹⁴

In her most recent work Hirst has argued, on the basis of work on the Pāñcarātra tradition, that the specific form and wording of Śaṅkara’s *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 2.2.42-45 could indicate that he was prepared to engage with some of his Bhāgavata discussants.¹⁵ The recent scholarship on Pāñcarātra traditions provides clues as to the identity of these Bhāgavata discussants, suggesting they were ‘Vedically trained *brahmins*, attracted by increasing devotion to Viṣṇu and practising rituals along with their usual *smṛti* rituals in a Pāñcarātra context’.¹⁶ While Śaṅkara could not support the view that ritual is the means to liberation, Hirst suggests that the points of agreement Śaṅkara selects ‘might have functioned as a basis for a further conversation’.¹⁷ Hirst writes:

Developing a Vedānta-grounded Advaita in a South Indian context of intense competition and negotiation between different Vaiṣṇava groups, Śaṅkara takes the opportunity not just to relegate the theology and practice of such groups to Advaita as a positioning strategy, but uses a central text, the *Gītā*, to show how, rightly interpreted, aspects of Vaiṣṇava theology and practice can provide a stepping stone along the way to non-dual realisation.¹⁸

Hirst adds that one of the indications that Śaṅkara appealed to aspects of Vaiṣṇava theology is his mention of the six Vaiṣṇava divine qualities in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 2.2.44-45.¹⁹

¹³ A small round polished stone from the river Gaṇḍakī in which Viṣṇu is worshipped. In Hirst, ‘The Place of *Bhakti*, p.131.

¹⁴ Hirst, *Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta*, p.28. Note that Hirst mentions that Śaṅkara disagrees with the Pāñcarātra theology he discusses alongside the Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas (for example, in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 2.2.37).

¹⁵ Hirst, ‘Refutation or dialogue?’, p.20.

¹⁶ p.20.

¹⁷ pp.20-1. Here, Hirst notes that this interchange would ‘have Advaitin realisation as its long-term goal but would work from the partners’ own experience of identification with the Supreme through rituals designed to train the focus solely on the transcendent in every part of their life’.

¹⁸ p.21.

¹⁹ The six Vaiṣṇava qualities are knowledge (*jñāna*), sovereignty (*aiśvarya*), potentiality (*bala*), power (*śakti*), might (*vīrya*) and splendour (*tejas*).

Although, as Hirst notes, we might expect Śaṅkara to reject these qualities altogether (as *brahman* is *nirguṇa*), he does not, and even introduces the six qualities in his commentaries where the root text does not require it.²⁰ As I show in Chapter 3, Śaṅkara specifically lists these six Vaiṣṇava qualities in his *Gītābhāṣya* introduction, and therefore uses key terms familiar in Pāñcarātra to appeal to a possible audience.

2.2.3 – Textual context

Śaṅkara is said to have written hundreds of works.²¹ As an Advaita Vedāntin commentator wishing to show the authenticity of his interpretation, the most important texts for Śaṅkara to comment on were those comprising the Vedāntin ‘triple foundation’: the *Brahma-sūtras*, the Upaniṣads²² and the *Bhagavad-gītā*.²³ As Hirst notes, it was likely Śaṅkara who set the precedent for including it in the ‘triple foundation’ of texts on which it became mandatory for Vedāntins to comment.²⁴

To establish whether a work was genuinely Śaṅkara’s or not, Hacker developed certain criteria, applying Śaṅkara’s *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* as the ‘litmus test’ for authenticity.²⁵ Although Śaṅkara’s *Gauḍapādakārikās* (containing his commentary on the *Māuṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*) and his independent work, the *Upadeśasāhasrī* (‘Thousand Teachings’) are generally accepted as authentic, Hacker adds the *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇam* to the list of authentic works.²⁶ Malkovsky points out that the *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇam*, although not strictly an Advaitin work, ‘does contain hints of Advaitin teaching [...and] contains an extended section on “the Lord” (*īśvara*)’.²⁷ Leggett has noted that there has been some

²⁰ Hirst, ‘Refutation or dialogue?’, p.17.

²¹ Piantelli’s complete list includes 433 works, although many are regarded as later ascriptions. M. Piantelli, ‘Śaṅkara e la rinascita del Brāhmanesimo’, *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, 4.3 (1977):429-35.

²² As Hirst notes, Śaṅkara wrote commentaries on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Aitareya*, *Taittirīya*, *Kena* (prose and verse), *Kaṭha*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Praśna* and *Īśa Upaniṣads*. Of these, the first two have the most extended commentaries and refutation of opponents, and are the two that Śaṅkara quotes most frequently in his other works. In Hirst, *Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta*, p.20.

²³ Hirst, *Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta*, p.20.

²⁴ Hirst, ‘Refutation or dialogue?’, p.4. Hirst suggests that Śaṅkara may have wanted to demonstrate that aspects of a Vaiṣṇava theology could be interpreted as leading to Advaitin realisation.

²⁵ Hacker’s method involves looking at Śaṅkara’s use of key terms, such as *avidyā* (misconception), *māyā* (illusion), *nāmarūpa* (‘name and form’), and *īśvara* (the Lord). See Wilhelm Halbfass, *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp.57-100.

²⁶ However, T.S. Rukmani strongly argues that the *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇam* is not authentic. See T.S. Rukmani, ‘The Problem of the Authorship of the *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇam*’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 20 (1992):419-23.

²⁷ Malkovsky, *The Role of Divine Grace*, p.20.

debate as to whether Śaṅkara, in his early days, was originally a follower of Pātañjala Yoga.²⁸ It is worth mentioning the *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇam* here due to the extent Madhusūdana later draws on Yogic Advaita, as I demonstrate in Chapter 5.

2.2.4 – Intellectual context

Śaṅkara clearly sought to establish his Advaita Vedāntin view as the correct interpretation of the Upaniṣads, against the opponents he seeks to deconstruct in his commentaries, both contemporary and inherited.²⁹ This is demonstrated most strongly in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, where Śaṅkara addresses his ‘fictive opponents’³⁰ by debating with Sāṃkhya at length, and extensively critiquing Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Yoga, Buddhist, Jain and Cārvāka positions.³¹

Śaṅkara not only deconstructed the views of ‘fictive opponents’, but actively engaged in debate with views held by ‘real life’ historical figures from within an Advaitin framework, including: Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (c. seventh century, a Pūrvamīmāṃsaka older contemporary of Śaṅkara), Maṇḍana Miśra (c. eighth century, *jñānakarmasamuccaya*, within an Advaita Vedāntin framework), and Bhāskara (eighth to ninth century,³² a *bhedābheda* Vedāntin). A key position Śaṅkara refutes is *bhedābheda*, a view represented in the *Bṛhadāranyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* as that of someone called Bhartṛprapañca³³ by Ānandagiri, and a view built on by Bhāskara who in turn critiques Śaṅkara in his own *Bhāskarabrahmasūtrabhāṣya*.³⁴ Bhartṛprapañca is not mentioned in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*. However, one of the key positions taken by Bhartṛprapañca is *jñānakarmasamuccayavāda*,³⁵ also proposed by the

²⁸ For a summary of this discussion, see Trevor Leggett, *Śaṅkara on the Yoga-sūtras, Volume I: Samādhi* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp.xviii-xix.

²⁹ Karl H. Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Volume III: Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṅkara and his Pupils* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), p.19.

³⁰ Hirst tells us that these ‘fictive opponents’, who are unnamed, may well have been actual historical figures, but ‘also function as mouthpieces whose views Śaṅkara (mis)represents in order to show the truth of his Advaitin position’. See Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, ‘Who were the Tārkikas? The Place of Polemic in Śaṅkara’s *Bṛhadāranyakaopaniṣadbhāṣya*’, *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 4 (2011), p.54 & p.71 n.2.

³¹ Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Volume III*, p.19.

³² Bhāskara may have lived several generations after Śaṅkara, although his dates are controversial.

³³ Bhartṛprapañca’s works are no longer extant, so what we know about him is ascertained entirely from references other authors make to his work. See M. Hiriyanna, ‘Bhartṛprapañca: An Old Vedāntin’, *Indian Philosophical Studies* I (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1957):79-94.

³⁴ For a detailed discussion of Śaṅkara’s dispute with the *bhedābhedins*, see Daniel H.H. Ingalls, ‘Śaṅkara’s Arguments Against the Buddhists’, *Philosophy East and West* 3 (1953-4), p.294.

³⁵ Potter refers to *jñānakarmasamuccayavāda* as the ‘combined-path’ view, entailing the idea that the aspirant of liberation must follow both the *karmakāṇḍa* (section of the Veda that deals with ritual action) and *jñānakāṇḍa* (section of the Veda that deals with knowledge) sections of scripture. Not only must both

later Advaita Vedāntin Maṇḍana Miśra. *Jñānakarmasammucayavāda* is a position ruthlessly challenged by Śaṅkara in his *Gītābhāṣya*. Although the *jñānakarmasammucayin* is heavily critiqued in the *Gītābhāṣya*, this particular opponent is crucial to Śaṅkara demonstrating his own argument, which differs rather subtly from this, as I demonstrate in Chapter 3.

2.2.5 – Approach to the *Gītā*

As Hirst has argued, it is unlikely that Śaṅkara was ‘unaffected by a personal Absolute’,³⁶ which is apparent in his works. If we accept that Śaṅkara was indeed a Vaiṣṇava, then the importance of the *Gītā* to Śaṅkara is all the clearer. As Hirst puts it, ‘Śaṅkara [did] not philosophise in a cultural vacuum, but [developed] an Advaitin theology based on *śruti* which [responded] to his contemporary situation’.³⁷ I argue that this is apparent in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*, given the clear emphasis Śaṅkara gives to Kṛṣṇa as the Lord. We can see from Śaṅkara’s devotional context that commenting on the *Gītā* is not just about commenting on the triple foundation, but is about the importance of Kṛṣṇa as the personal Lord.

2.3 – Śrīdhara

2.3.1 – Date and geographical location

As with Śaṅkara, the primary method used to date Śrīdhara is the relative dating of texts, either written by Śrīdhara or texts referring to him. Relative dating places Śrīdhara *c.* 1350-1450 CE. Gode and Aufrecht argued that, for Śrīdhara to write the *Viṣṇupurāṇa-ṭīkā-ātmaprakāśa*, a commentary on Citsukha’s commentary on the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, he must be dated later than Citsukha (1220-1284 CE).³⁸ Other scholars have located Śrīdhara as follows, in relation to later Bengal Vaiṣṇavas who viewed his work as authoritative:

Citsukha (1220-1284 CE)

Vopadeva (1300 CE)

paths be followed, but both are of equal importance in leading to liberation. See Potter (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Volume III*, p.20.

³⁶ Hirst, ‘The Place of *Bhakti*’, p.128.

³⁷ pp.139-40.

³⁸ P.K. Gode, ‘Date of Śrīdharasvāmin, Author of the Commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Other Works’, *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 30.3/4 (1949), p.278. In Chapter 4, section 4.1.3, I suggest that Śrīdhara’s approach to *śakti* makes it clear that he was building on the work of Citsukha.

Śrīdhara (1350-1450 CE)

Viṣṇupurī (1350-1400 CE)

Caitanya (1485-1527 CE)

Rūpa Gosvāmī (1495-1550 CE)³⁹

There is very little evidence to support Śrīdhara's geographical location. However, the evidence available suggests that Śrīdhara flourished in Orissa. Two Oriya texts – the *Vaiṣṇava Līlāmṛta* by Mādhava Paṭṭanāyaka (fifteenth century) and *The History of Dhenkanal (Dhenkāṇāla Itihāsa)* by Ramachandra Nanda (1929) – both claim that Śrīdhara was a contemporary of Pratapabhānudeva, who appointed him as the leader of the Brahmācārī monastery in Purī.⁴⁰ The specific devotional climate of Śrīdhara's time also suggests that Purī was his likely location. The group of *bhaktas* who followed Śrīdhara – including Viṣṇupurī who explicitly refers to Śrīdhara as the authority for his *Bhaktiratnāvalī* – were based in Purī.⁴¹ Moreover, Śrīdhara was a devotee of the Vaiṣṇava deity Nṛsiṃha, the Man-Lion incarnation of Viṣṇu, who has strong links to Purī (see below).

2.3.2 – Socio-religious context

Religious life in Orissa was dominated by the cult of Puruṣottama-Jagannātha, ever since the Jagannātha temple was built in Purī in the twelfth century. The temple's origin and subsequent development saw the introduction of the title 'Jagannātha' ('Lord of the World'), and the rise of this god to the position of state deity in Orissa.⁴²

There are three key elements, central to the development of the Jagannātha cult, significant for our analysis of Śrīdhara: i) the juxtaposition of Viṣṇu and Śiva on a common platform in Orissa, ii) the connection of Puruṣottama (Viṣṇu) with Nṛsiṃha, and iii) the addition of Kṛṣṇa to the 'Jagannātha trio'.

³⁹ Gode points out that Rūpa Gosvāmī quotes from Śrīdhara in his *Padyāvalī*. See Theodor Aufrecht, *Catalogus Catalogorum: An Alphabetical Register of Sanskrit Works and Authors Volume I* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1891-1903), p.669 in Gode, 'Date of Śrīdharasvāmin', p.281.

⁴⁰ Ananta Ch. Sukla, *Śrīdhara Svāmī: A Medieval Philosopher of Religion* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2010), p.14.

⁴¹ Other *bhaktas* who followed Śrīdhara include Mādhavendra Purī and Īśvara Purī. This group of *bhaktas* and their lineage influenced Caitanya. Sheridan, 'Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāna*', p.49.

⁴² Kishore Chandra Mishra, 'Religious Syncretism and the Jagannātha Cult in Orissa', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 61.1 (2000-2001), p.150.

2.3.2.1 – Juxtaposition of Viṣṇu and Śiva in Orissa

In the introductions to all three of his major works – the *Subodhinī*, the *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā*⁴³ (commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*) and the *Ātmaprakāśa* (commentary on the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*) – Śrīdhara names both Mādhava (Viṣṇu) and Umādhava (Śiva).⁴⁴ His *Subodhinī* introduction reads:

I bow to Viṣṇu⁴⁵ and Śiva,⁴⁶ the Lord of the universe, with respect.
Compelled by devotion to them, I compose this explanation of the *Gītā*,
the ‘*Subodhinī*’.⁴⁷

Both deities appear to be important for Śrīdhara, despite many scholars interpreting Śrīdhara in relation to the (later) Vaiṣṇavism of Caitanya. However, contrary to the view of Sukla, this does not necessarily mean that Śrīdhara saw Viṣṇu and Śiva as identical, but rather that Śrīdhara refers to both deities to appeal to the large Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva population of Orissa at the time. The archaeological evidence tells us that twin temples dedicated to both Viṣṇu and Śiva were constructed in Orissa, the first built towards the end of the ninth century.⁴⁸ The joint worship of Viṣṇu and Śiva in Orissa provided the basis for the later ‘Jagannātha trio’⁴⁹ which developed during the Gaṅga period (1078-1434 CE).

2.3.2.2 – Connection of Viṣṇu with Nṛsiṃha

In the introduction to his *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* Śrīdhara writes, ‘I worship Nṛsiṃha’ (*nṛsiṃham ahaṃ bhaje*), the Man-Lion incarnation of Viṣṇu. De and Gupta refer to Śrīdhara as a

⁴³ See also Śrīdhara’s *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* 10.87.25.

⁴⁴ Sukla, *Śrīdhara Svāmī*, p.20.

⁴⁵ Mādhava is a name often used for Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa.

⁴⁶ Umādhava lit. ‘the one agitated by Umā’, referring to the myth in which Umā (Parvatī) arouses desire in Śiva, interrupting his meditation. Śrīdhara plays on the similarity of the names he chooses.

⁴⁷ *śrī-mādhavaṃ praṇāmi umādhavaṃ viśveśam ādarāt |
tad-bhakti-yantritaḥ kurve gītā-vyākhyāṃ “subodhinīm” ||*

⁴⁸ von Steitencron, ‘The Advent of Vaiṣṇavism in Orissa’, in Anncharlott Eschmann, Herman Kulke and Gaya Charan Tripathi (eds.) *The Cult of Jagannātha* (Delhi: Manohar, 1978), p.15.

⁴⁹ The ‘Jagannātha trio’ is generally described as consisting of the juxtaposed gods Viṣṇu (Jagannātha, Kṛṣṇa) and Śiva (Balabhadra, Saṃkarṣaṇa), together with a common Śakti (Subhadrā, Kātyāyanī).

‘devotee of Nṛsiṃha’⁵⁰ on this basis. The Orissa Research Project shows us that Nṛsiṃha played a dominant role in the early development of the Vaiṣṇava Jagannātha cult in Orissa around Śrīdhara’s time.⁵¹ Eschmann has compiled a list of temples in Orissa at the time, and after the deities associated with Jagannātha, Kṛṣṇa and Caitanya, Nṛsiṃha is the Vaiṣṇava god to whom most temples were dedicated.⁵² Specifically, the strong concentration of such temples along coastal Orissa tells us that the identification of Nṛsiṃha with Puruṣottama/Jagannātha was established within Śrīdhara’s purported location.⁵³ As Nṛsiṃha could be worshipped by both Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas,⁵⁴ Śrīdhara’s salutation to Nṛsiṃha could also have been a political move.

2.3.2.3 – The addition of Kṛṣṇa to the ‘Jagannātha trio’

Over time, Jagannātha assumed the character of Nṛsiṃha in Orissa, owing to converted Vaiṣṇavas requiring a ‘furious’ deity.⁵⁵ Once the identity of Jagannātha and Puruṣottama was well established, a further identification was made, that with Kṛṣṇa, owing to Pāñcarātra influence.⁵⁶ As Vaiṣṇavism became more dominant in Orissa, the theology of the Purī deities was systematically developed,⁵⁷ and the Kṛṣṇa incarnation became increasingly popular. This devotion to Kṛṣṇa expanded in Orissa (not just South India and Bengal) during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as a result of the influence of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.⁵⁸ The Kṛṣṇa devotionism that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* brought to Orissa was successful – we know this because the ‘Jagannātha trio’ came to be known as such precisely because of the addition of Kṛṣṇa.⁵⁹ By 1250 CE at the latest, as Tripathi demonstrates, ‘there stood three statues in

⁵⁰ See De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith* (1942). See also Gupta, *The Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta of Jīva Gosvāmī* (2007).

⁵¹ Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi (eds.) *The Cult of Jagannātha*, p.xvi.

⁵² Eschmann, ‘The Vaiṣṇava Typology of Hinduization and the Origin of Jagannātha’, in Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi (eds.) *The Cult of Jagannātha*, p.103.

⁵³ Two Oriya literary sources also support this contention. The *mantrarāja* in both the *Rājajyoga* (comprised in the mid-seventeenth century) and the *Puruṣottama Māhātmya* shows that in the 13th, 14th and at least 16th centuries, Jagannātha was still considered to be Nṛsiṃha. See Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, ‘The Formation of the Jagannātha Triad’ in their (eds.) *The Cult of Jagannātha*, pp.171-2.

⁵⁴ von Steitencron, ‘The Advent of Vaiṣṇavism in Orissa’, p.13.

⁵⁵ Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, ‘The Formation of the Jagannātha Triad’, p.195.

⁵⁶ Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, ‘The Formation of the Jagannātha Triad’, pp.184-5. The Pāñcarātra system was almost ideally able to take up the most important elements of the Jagannātha cult: the main deity Puruṣottama could be reinterpreted as Kṛṣṇa.

⁵⁷ Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, ‘The Formation of the Jagannātha Triad’, p.185.

⁵⁸ G.C. Tripathi, ‘Jagannātha: The Ageless Deity of the Hindus’, in Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi (eds.) *The Cult of Jagannātha*, p.481.

⁵⁹ Eschmann, Kulke and Tripathi, ‘The Formation of the Jagannātha Triad’, p.187.

the temple of Purī which were identified with Kṛṣṇa'.⁶⁰ Alongside the influence of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa devotionalism was well established in Orissa by the time of Śrīdhara.

2.3.3 – Textual context

Śrīdhara was clearly keen to locate himself as a serious Advaita Vedāntin commentator in his *Subodhinī*. He quotes extensively from the Upaniṣads, refers to the *Brahma-sūtras* in a crucial verse (13.4), and sets out to demonstrate in various places how his reading of the *Gītā* is in line with a Vedāntin interpretation of the Upaniṣads. Śrīdhara refers specifically to Śaṅkara in 13.19 as the 'great commentator'.⁶¹

The fact that Śrīdhara makes numerous references to the Upaniṣads in his *Subodhinī*, often after giving his own interpretation of a specific *Gītā* verse, suggests that he views the Upaniṣads as more than just source texts upon which his view is built. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter 4, a key example of this is *Subodhinī* 13.4, where Śrīdhara quotes the *Taittirīya* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads* specifically to demonstrate how language functions. Again, in 4.10 where Śrīdhara is talking about Kṛṣṇa's *sattvic* body – which underpins his overall argument – he grounds his interpretation in the Upaniṣads by directly quoting the *mahāvākya tat tvam asi* of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. Śrīdhara is more than aware of the importance of Vedic texts – for example, in 12.8, where he clearly refers to the Upaniṣads as *śruti*.⁶² In 13.2, Śrīdhara again explicitly says that the Upaniṣads are *śruti*, yet the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* which is also quoted in 13.2 is not described in this way.⁶³ Śrīdhara clearly roots his interpretation in the Vedic tradition (*vedamūlatva*).⁶⁴

Śrīdhara's three commentaries – the *Subodhinī*, *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* and *Ātmaprakāśa* – are all commentaries on texts where *bhakti* is central. The fact that Śrīdhara's main works are commentaries on well-known Vaiṣṇava texts clearly reflects the Vaiṣṇava devotional climate in which he was located. We know that Śaṅkara was writing for a Vaiṣṇava

⁶⁰ G.C. Tripathi, 'Jagannātha: The Ageless Deity of the Hindus', p.481.

⁶¹ Śrīdhara's comment on 13.19 will be explored further in Chapter 4.

⁶² ...*yathā ca śrutiḥ dehānte devaḥ paraṃ brahmā tāraṇam vyacaṣṭe iti* || 'As the *śruti* says, "In death, the Lord teaches of the highest liberating *brahman*" (*Jābāla Upaniṣad* 1).

⁶³ ...*tattvam asi iti śrutyā*... | 'In the *śruti*, "you are that".'

⁶⁴ *Vedamūlatva* refers to using the Veda as the measure of legitimation and orthodoxy.

audience, not least because he refers to the six Vaiṣṇava qualities. Śrīdhara similarly appeals to these six Vaiṣṇava qualities in his *Subodhinī* 4.6, yet he was also keen to appeal to a Śaiva audience, as demonstrated by his extensive quoting of the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, a text whose deity is Rudra-Śiva, and which has been described as a Śaiva *Bhagavad-gītā*.⁶⁵

Śrīdhara's composition of his *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* suggests he was heavily involved in the Vaiṣṇava devotional scene. As Nelson explains, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s position on *bhakti* is, in many ways, radically different from that of the *Gītā* – the text draws its primary inspiration *not* from the Upaniṣads, but instead from the ecstatic devotionalism of the Ālvārs,⁶⁶ poet-saints from South India.⁶⁷ Between the sixth and ninth centuries, the Ālvārs were at 'the centre of a flourishing Vaiṣṇava revival in the Tamil-speaking South [and taught that liberation could only be gained through an] intensely personal love of the deity'.⁶⁸ Hardy reminds us that it was the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that made the regional religion of the Ālvārs available to the rest of India.⁶⁹ He adds that the text became the basis for virtually all further developments of Vaiṣṇava devotional movements in India.⁷⁰ Although Śrīdhara wrote the *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* as a self-standing commentary, the fact that he draws heavily on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in his *Subodhinī* suggests that he was writing for an audience familiar with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

2.3.4 – Intellectual context

Sheridan points out that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was commented on by two earlier Advaita Vedāntins: Citsukha and Puṇyāranya.⁷¹ Citsukha also commented on Śaṅkara's *Brahma-*

⁶⁵ 'un texto que muchas veces se describe como una Bhagavad-gita śivaíta', see David N. Lorenzen, 'Śivaísmo: Heterodoxia y orthodoxia', *Estudios de Asia y Africa* 21.2 (1986), p.264.

⁶⁶ The consensus is that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* derived from the Ālvārs, yet there is some debate as to whether we can establish this with certainty. See J.N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*; J.S.M. Hooper, *Hymns of the Ālvārs* (London, 1929), and R.G. Bhandarkar, 'Allusions to Kṛṣṇa in Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya', in 1A, Volume III, pp.14ff (Poona: Collected Works of R.G. Bhandarkar, 1933).

⁶⁷ Nelson, 'Bhakti in Advaita Vedānta', p.96.

⁶⁸ p.96.

⁶⁹ Hardy, *Viraha-Bhakti*, p.11.

⁷⁰ p.11.

⁷¹ Sheridan, 'Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*', p.47.

sūtra-bhāṣya, and on Śrīharṣa's (c. twelfth century)⁷² *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya*.⁷³ It is difficult to establish how much, or if at all, Śrīdhara may have relied on these earlier Advaitin commentaries on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as they are no longer extant. However, we do know that in the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions that had become popular around the time of Citsukha, the concept of *śakti* (power) was emphasised. As such, in his *Tattvapradīpikā*, Citsukha deals with the challenge of explaining *śakti* within an Advaita Vedāntin context. Citsukha reads *śakti* as a linguistic feature with the capacity of leading us to *nirguṇa brahman*, rather than in terms of personal deities.

Śrīdhara in his *Subodhinī* does not appear to use the term *śakti* as frequently as we might expect him to, given that most of the secondary literature on Śrīdhara places him as the foundation of the later developing Caitanyite tradition, which we know places a strong emphasis on *śaktis* as the marvellous powers of the Lord. However, in Chapter 4, I argue that in Śrīdhara's *Subodhinī* we do find the term *śakti* used in relation to concealing and revealing powers. Given Citsukha's position, it seems that Citsukha's approach to *śakti* likely had an influence on Śrīdhara. While the Vaiṣṇava devotionalism of fourteenth century Orissa had a clear influence on Śrīdhara's work, his *Subodhinī* seeks to relate *śakti* back to *nirguṇa brahman*.⁷⁴ Śrīdhara proves to be an important link between the notion of *śakti* in the sense of words/propositions held by Citsukha, and the notion of *śakti* in the fully devotional sense of concealing and revealing powers of the Lord later held by Madhusūdana.

As noted in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.2.3), Sheridan has argued that Śrīdhara, by incorporating *bhakti* more heavily into his commentaries on the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, may have attempted to move away from the 'more extreme' Advaita Vedāntin interpretations of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* proposed by Citsukha and Puṇyāraṇa.⁷⁵ The fact that Śrīdhara's commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was later relied on as being as authoritative as the

⁷² It was not until Śrīharṣa that the Advaita Vedāntin dialectic became crystallised. Once the methods of argument in the Nyāya-vaiśeṣika system were defined (by writers such as Udayana and Kulārka Paṇḍita), Śrīharṣa set out to establish an even more powerful method of dialectic that could destroy the Nyāya realism that he opposed. See V.A. Sarma, *Citsukha's Contribution to Advaita (with Special References to the Tattvapradīpikā)* (Mysore: Kavyalaya Publishers, 1974), pp.22-3.

⁷³ Karl H. Potter (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Volume XI* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006), pp.605-6. Śrīharṣa's *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya* is a critique of the dialectical and metaphysical system of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy, from the absolutist standpoint of Advaita Vedānta. See Phyllis E. Granoff, *Philosophy and Argument in Late Vedānta: Śrīharṣa's Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khāḍya* (Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 2012).

⁷⁴ In Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.1 I show that Śrīdhara's preferred term is *nirviśeṣa* (without attributes).

⁷⁵ Sheridan, 'Śrīdhara and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.1.1', p.127.

original text itself, by Caitanya and the Gosvāmīs, implies that Śrīdhara was a more ‘moderate *bhaktic* Advaitin’,⁷⁶ promoting a more devotional ‘brand’ of Advaita, as Gupta and Hardy put it.⁷⁷ Sheridan, as we have seen, has pointed out that Śrīdhara uses hermeneutical tools refined by Śaṅkara and Advaita to interpret the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in a *viśiṣṭādvaitin* (non-dualism of the one with qualities)⁷⁸ or *bhedābhedin* (difference-non-difference) way.⁷⁹ Sheridan points out that, in his commentary on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.1.1, Śrīdhara employs an Advaita Vedāntin interpretative device by distinguishing between two sets of characteristic defining properties (*lakṣaṇas*) of the Supreme Lord: *svarūpalakṣaṇa* (‘essential characteristics’) and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* (‘extrinsic or incidental characteristics’).⁸⁰ In Chapter 4, I argue that the terms *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* are also significant in Śrīdhara’s *Subodhinī* and are deployed specifically in 13.4 to explain how language functions in his view. I shall demonstrate that Śrīdhara’s use of the term *śakti* helps make the transcendent accessible to the form of devotion current in his surroundings, yet his use of Advaita Vedāntin interpretative tools alongside the use of such concepts demonstrates that he sought to ground his interpretation of the *Gītā* in Advaita Vedānta.

2.3.5 – Approach to the *Gītā*

Śrīdhara was situated in both a Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva devotional climate, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and devotion to Kṛṣṇa would certainly have been established in Orissa by Śrīdhara’s time. Śrīdhara also locates himself in his *Subodhinī* in relation to Śaṅkara as his authority, claiming in several places that his reading of the *Gītā* is in line with an Advaita Vedāntin reading of the Upaniṣads. These factors all have a bearing on Śrīdhara’s approach to the *Gītā*, and form the foundation for his reinterpretation of Citsukha’s understanding of *śakti*. In Chapter 4, I argue that Śrīdhara’s interpretation of *śakti* in his *Subodhinī* is key to his understanding of how language functions. Citsukha’s earlier interpretation of *śakti* is therefore key to laying the groundwork for Śrīdhara’s own approach.

⁷⁶ p.127.

⁷⁷ Gupta, *The Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta of Jīva Gosvāmī*, p.68; Friedhelm Hardy, ‘Mādhavendra Purī: A Link Between Bengal Vaiṣṇavism and South Indian Bhakti’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1974), p.33.

⁷⁸ *Viśiṣṭādvaita* is the position of Rāmānuja’s (traditional dates: 1017-1137 CE) school of Vedānta. See Lipner, *The Face of Truth* (1986).

⁷⁹ Sheridan, ‘Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’, p.55.

⁸⁰ Or, characteristics extrinsically related to *brahman*. See Sheridan, p.55.

2.4 – Madhusūdana

2.4.1 – Date and geographical location

Madhusūdana did not share any biographical information in his own works, so contemporary scholars have turned to other sources to date him, the majority placing him in the sixteenth century CE.⁸¹ Some scholars have adopted the method of relative dating of other Sanskrit texts in order to date Madhusūdana. Viśvanātha (c. 1626-1708), a Nyāya author,⁸² wrote his *Bheda-siddhi* in response to Madhusūdana's *Advaita-siddhi*, indicating that Madhusūdana must have preceded him.⁸³ The strongest evidence for Madhusūdana's date is Abu al-Fazal's (1551-1602) *Ain-i-Akbari* ('Administration of Akbar').⁸⁴ Written in 1597, this source lists scholars in the court of Akbar (third Mughal Emperor, r. 1556-1605) and includes Madhusūdana,⁸⁵ suggesting he lived around the same time as Akbar.

Locating Madhusūdana geographically is challenging. Scholars have attempted to locate Madhusūdana by finding leads from references made in his own work, and using stories and genealogies kept alive orally. However, both these methods are problematic – Madhusūdana only makes a few passing references to place,⁸⁶ and oral genealogical traditions can rarely be located by scholars.⁸⁷ The most effective method to locate Madhusūdana seems to be to

⁸¹ These include Rajendra Ghose, Gopinath Kaviraj, Prāhlaḍ Divanji and R.D. Karmarkar. See Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, *Advaita-siddhi*, Part I, *The First Definition of Falsity*, critically edited with commentary and Bengali translation, by Śrī Yogendranātha Tarkasāṃkhyavedāntātirtha with an introduction by Rajendranath Ghosh (general ed.) (Kalikātā: Śrīkṣetrapāl Ghosh, 1931), p.115; Gopinath Kaviraj (ed.) *Sarasvatī Bhavana Studies*, Volume II, miscellaneous papers (Benares, 1929), p.117, in Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism* (2006), p.5; Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, *Siddhānta-bindu* (ed. and tr.) Prāhlaḍ Divanji (Baroda: Gaekwad Oriental Series, 1933); Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, *Vedānta-kalpa-latikā* (ed.) by R.D. Karmarkar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1962), pp.xi-xv. Nachane places Madhusūdana slightly later. See Sulochana A. Nachane, 'The Date of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī', *Annals of The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 30.3/4 (1949), p.327.

⁸² Jonardon Ganeri, *The Lost Age of Reason: Philosophy in Early Modern India 1450-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.77.

⁸³ Viśvanātha notes this in his *Goutama-sūtra-vṛtti*. Sanjukta Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism*, p.5.

⁸⁴ Abu al-Fazal, *The Ain-i-Akbari by Abul Fazl Allami* (trs.) H. Blochmann and H.S. Jarrett (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873-1907), pp.537-8.

⁸⁵ The consensus is that this 'Madhusūdana' is indeed Madhusūdana Sarasvatī. For other names of other contemporaries of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī who flourished in the sixteenth century, see James Benson, 'Śaṅkara Bhaṭṭa's Family Chronicle: The Gādhivamśavarṇana', in *The Pandit: Traditional Scholarship in India* (ed.) Axel Michaels, *Festschrift Parameswara Aithal, South Asian Studies* 38 (South Asia Institute, New Delhi Branch, Heidelberg University, 2001), pp.113-4.

⁸⁶ In Madhusūdana's *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* there is also evidence that he may have known and travelled to Gujarat. See 6.34, *tantunāgo nāgapāśaḥ tātanīti gurjaradau prāsiddhaḥ* | However, Madhusūdana may simply be elucidating Śaṅkara's original comment here.

⁸⁷ See Haraprasad Shastri's 1912 article on 'Dakshini Pandits at Benares', cited in Benson, 'Śaṅkara Bhaṭṭa's Family Chronicle', p.105.

consider his social connections (section 2.4.2.1). There is also some evidence to suggest that Madhusūdana interacted with the poet Tulasīdās (1532-1623), famous for his retelling of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* in Avadhi.⁸⁸ Madhusūdana allegedly supported Tulsīdās in the face of criticism from orthodox circles, and helped secure Tulsīdās’ reputation among the *paṇḍits* of Benares.⁸⁹ If correct, this would indicate that Madhusūdana flourished in Benares, as we know that Tulsīdās spent most of his life there. There is also a tradition that states a ‘Madhusūdana Vācaspati’ studied with the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava teacher Jīva Gosvāmī in Benares.⁹⁰ De argues that this could not have been Madhusūdana Sarasvatī.⁹¹ Four counter-reasons could be given. First, of the many ‘Madhusūdanas’ mentioned in the Sanskrit literature, only Madhusūdana Sarasvatī lived in the later sixteenth century.⁹² Second, Jīva flourished c. 1560, meaning that Madhusūdana’s dates would have closely intersected with his. Third, some scholars have held that Madhusūdana was aware of and interacted with the theology of the Gosvāmīs, which would give weight to the tradition that he may have associated with Jīva. Finally, we know that Jīva lived in Benares, suggesting Madhusūdana might also have resided there. Sanjukta Gupta, however, concludes that it is more likely that Madhusūdana was simply a contemporary of Jīva’s elder brother, Rūpa Gosvāmī (d. 1564), and that they were not necessarily aware of one another’s works.⁹³ Benares, however, remains Madhusūdana’s likely location given the *brahmin* networks in which he was involved (see below).

2.4.2 – Socio-religious context

Madhusūdana’s mid-sixteenth century Mughal context in Benares places him in a very different context from Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara. To offer an overview of Madhusūdana’s socio-religious context here, I consider: i) *brahmin* networks and Advaitin interconnections, ii)

⁸⁸ Lance Nelson, ‘Theological Politics and Paradoxical Spirituality in the Life of Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’, *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 15.2 (2007), pp.26-7.

⁸⁹ Jagadiswarananda writes that, when it was reported to Madhusūdana that Tulsīdās was critiqued by the orthodox, Madhusūdana is said to have responded with this verse: ‘This moving *tulasī*-plant has leaves of bliss; its flowers are poetry, kissed by the bee Rāma’ (*paramānandapatro ’yaṃ jaṅgamas tulasītaruḥ; kavītāmañjarī yasya rāmabhramavacumbitā*). In Swāmī Jagadiswarananda, ‘Śrī Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’, *VK* 28 (1941), p.313. For translation see Nelson, ‘Theological Politics’, p.27.

⁹⁰ Nelson, ‘Theological Politics’, p.27. See also De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, p.150, and Ashok Kumar Majumdar, *Caitanya: His Life and Doctrine: A Study in Vaiṣṇavism* (Bombay: Bharata Vidya Bhavan, 1969), pp.89-90 and p.335. But see Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism*, p.148 n.36.

⁹¹ De, *Early History*, p.150 n.3.

⁹² See list of ‘Madhusūdanas’ in Aufrecht, *Catalogus Catalogorum*, p.427.

⁹³ Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism*, p.7.

politics and the Viśveśvara temple, and iii) specific types of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* in sixteenth century Benares.

2.4.2.1 – Brahmin networks and Advaitin interconnections⁹⁴

The work of O’Hanlon, Pollock and Minkowski tells us that, in the (early) sixteenth century, Benares saw an influx of Marāṭha *brahmin* migrants to the city.⁹⁵ These Marāṭha *brahmin* migrants became the intellectual leaders of the city, the leading *paṇḍit* family in sixteenth century Benares being the highly influential Bhaṭṭa family.⁹⁶ We know from the genealogies established by Minkowski that Madhusūdana knew the Bhaṭṭa family,⁹⁷ and that Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa taught Advaitin texts to Mādhava Sarasvatī. We know that Mādhava Sarasvatī was Madhusūdana’s *vidyā-guru* from the introductory verses to his *Advaita-siddhi* and *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*.⁹⁸ Madhusūdana’s connection with the Bhaṭṭa family is significant, as it shows he was linked with the most influential *brahmins* in Benares at the time. Moreover, the majority of intellectual migrant *brahmin* families in sixteenth century Benares were Advaitins – as Minkowski tells us, Advaita Vedānta was the mainstream ‘position’ of the city.⁹⁹

2.4.2.2 – Politics and the Viśveśvara temple

As O’Hanlon tells us, the assemblies that took place within the *brahmin* community of sixteenth century Benares were held in the city’s Viśveśvara (Śaiva) temple.¹⁰⁰ This temple

⁹⁴ Other notable Advaita Vedāntins who flourished in Benares at roughly the same time as Madhusūdana include: Āpadeva (fl. 1610, author of *Bālabodhinī*), Nānā Dīkṣita (fl. 1590, author of *Siddhāntadīpa*), Dharmayya Dīkṣita (fl. 1640, author of *Vyākhyā*), Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita, (fl. 1590, author of *Vākyamālā*, commentary on *Tattvaviveka* of Nṛsiṃha), Rāmāfirtha Yati (fl. 1610, author of *Vastutattvaparakāśikā* on *Brahmasūtra*) and Raṅgojī Bhaṭṭa (fl. 1610, author of *Advaitacintāmaṇi*). See Christopher Minkowski, ‘Advaita Vedānta in Early Modern History’, *South Asian History and Culture* 2.2 (2011), pp.207-9 for a detailed genealogy.

⁹⁵ The Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism Project addresses this time period. Also see Minkowski, ‘Advaita Vedānta’, p.217. Minkowski explains that it is more than likely that particular Advaita Vedāntins may have moved to Benares after coming into contact with teaching traditions in South India.

⁹⁶ Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Speaking from Śiva’s Temple: Benares Scholar Households and the ‘Ecumene’ of Mughal India’, *South Asian History and Culture* 2.2 (2011), p.254.

⁹⁷ Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa established the prolific Bhaṭṭa family. Haraprasad Shastri, ‘Dakshini Pandits at Benares’, *The Indian Antiquary* 41 (1912):7-12. Minkowski reminds us that some caution is necessary in evaluating the pedagogical claims of this chronicle, as it was created by a member of the family to describe their own preeminence. Minkowski, ‘Advaita Vedānta’, p.227 n.32.

⁹⁸ Where he refers to his three teachers: Srīrāma, Viśveśvara and Mādhava.

⁹⁹ Minkowski, ‘Advaita Vedānta’, p.217.

¹⁰⁰ O’Hanlon, ‘Speaking from Śiva’s Temple’, p.255.

was rebuilt during Akbar’s time (the 1570s or 1580s) under the leadership of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa of the Bhatta family.¹⁰¹ O’Hanlon notes that the *brahmin* community of Mughal Benares did not just worship at the temple but were entrusted with making legal decisions.¹⁰² Madhusūdāna would thus have been part of a community entrusted with legal decision-making processes. J.N. Farquhar recounts an alleged meeting between Akbar and Madhusūdāna, where Madhusūdāna suggested that *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* (merchant groups) should also be allowed to join particular Daśanāmī orders, which were previously made open only to *brahmins*. According to this tradition, Akbar – known for his ‘liberal’ rule¹⁰³ – accepted Madhusūdāna’s suggestion.¹⁰⁴ As I argue in Chapter 5, Madhusūdāna’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is concerned with establishing Arjuna’s eligibility – as a *kṣatriya* – for receiving Kṛṣṇa’s teaching that would otherwise only be received by a *brahmin*.

2.4.2.3 – Kṛṣṇa-bhakti

One of the forms of Kṛṣṇa-bhakti that emerged during sixteenth century Benares was the ecstatic *bhakti* of the Gosvāmīs. It is possible that Madhusūdāna might have known Jīva Gosvāmī. Madhusūdāna’s Advaitin contemporaries in Benares were also engaging in devotionalism – Raṅgoji Bhaṭṭa, for instance, identified Kṛṣṇa in his *Advaitacintāmaṇi* as ‘both the Supreme Being and his *iṣṭadevatā*’.¹⁰⁵ The fact that *bhakti* movements were becoming more prevalent in Benares at this time may explain why Madhusūdāna was among other Advaitins in Benares who were concerned with promoting Advaita, yet endeavoured to give *bhakti* a place in their work. Another Advaitin in Benares at the time, Rāmāśrama, argued for the authority of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* by appeal to the personal authority of figures recent and contemporary to himself: Appayya, Mādhava Sarasvatī, Madhusūdāna,

¹⁰¹ p.264.

¹⁰² p.254. See also Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Letters Home: Benares Pandits and the Maratha Regions in Early Modern India’, *Modern Asian Studies* 44.2 (2010), p.228 and Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘The Social Worth of Scribes: Brahmins, Kāyasthas and The Social Order in Early Modern India’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47.4 (2010):563-95.

¹⁰³ Diana L. Eck, *Benares: City of Light* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p.83.

¹⁰⁴ J.N. Farquhar, ‘The Organisation of the Sannyāsis of the Vedānta’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (July 1925), p.483. See also William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.30-3. See also Matthew Clark, *The Daśanāmī-Sannyāsīs: The Integration of Ascetic Lineages Into Order* (Boston: Brill, 2006), pp.228-32. Akbar is often referred to as being an instrumental figure in the supposed ‘ecumenical revival’ of Mughal Benares. However, Akbar’s acceptance of Madhusūdāna’s suggestion could just be a common hagiographical trope, used to present Akbar as ‘ecumenical’ by being in dialogue with *brahmins*.

¹⁰⁵ Minkowski, ‘Advaita Vedānta’, p.228 n.69.

Pūrṇendra and Brahmendra.¹⁰⁶ This is important for two reasons. First, it suggests that Madhusūdana – along with his potential contemporaries – viewed the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as authoritative. Second, the fact that Rāmāśrama appealed to Madhusūdana suggests that Madhusūdana had influence on his peers and was not just responding to the current debates of his time.¹⁰⁷

2.4.3 – Textual context

Madhusūdana was a prolific author, said to have written 20 works – although the authorship of some of these is contested.¹⁰⁸ Although Madhusūdana adopted various writing styles across his works, his primary agenda was to defend Advaita Vedānta. The *Advaita-siddhi*, Madhusūdana’s most extensive work, was committed to working within a Navya-Nyāya framework to settle the ongoing dispute between Advaita and Dvaita Vedānta.¹⁰⁹ In Madhusūdana’s other works, he clearly aligns himself with the key founding teachers of Advaita Vedānta. In his *Vedānta-kalpa-latikā*, Madhusūdana explains he sets out to defend the positions of Śaṅkara and Sureśvara.¹¹⁰ In his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* specifically, Madhusūdana locates himself in relation to Śaṅkara as the *bhāṣyācārya* (i.e. in 13.12).

Madhusūdana clearly aligned himself with the commentarial tradition of Vedānta. In his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* specifically, Madhusūdana extensively quotes the Upaniṣads and the *Brahma-sūtras*. In his *Siddhānta-bindu*, Madhusūdana begins by referring to the *mahavākya tat tvam asi* of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.¹¹¹ In his *Siddhānta-bindu*, *Advaita-siddhi* and *Vedānta-kalpa-latikā*, Madhusūdana draws the Upaniṣads and *Brahma-sūtras*, which

¹⁰⁶ Christopher Minkowski, ‘A Guide to Philological Argument in Early Modern Benares’, in *Epic and Argument in Sanskrit Literary History: Essays in Honour of Robert P. Goldman* (ed.) Sheldon Pollock (Delhi: Manohar, 2010), pp.124-6.

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed explanation of the intersection between religion and politics in sixteenth century Benares see John Stratton Hawley, ‘The Four Sampradāyas: Ordering the Religious Past in Mughal North India’, *South Asian History and Culture* 2.2 (2011):160-83. For the influence of Madhusūdana’s work in certain Indo-Islamic contexts, see Shankar Nair, *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), ch.2.

¹⁰⁸ V. Sisupala Panicker notes that Aufrecht gives a list of 22 works attributed to Madhusūdana in his *Catalogus Catalogorum*, while S.N. Dasgupta lists 18 and P.C. Divanji only lists 10. For a full list of Madhusūdana’s works (both authentic and dubious) see V. Sisupala Panicker, *Vedāntakalpalatikā: A Study* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1995), p.9.

¹⁰⁹ Madhusūdana allegedly learnt Navya-Nyāya in Navadvīpa under Mathuranātha Tarkavāgīśa (fl. 1575), a great logician. See Madhusūdana, *Siddhānta-bindu* (ed. and tr.) Divanji, p.xvii; Jagadiswarananda, ‘Śrī Madhusūdana’, p.309.

¹¹⁰ Madhusūdana, *Vedānta-kalpa-latikā* (ed. and tr.) Karmarkar, verse 1.4, p.2.

¹¹¹ See Chapter 5, section 5.4.

demonstrates that he took seriously the necessity to comment on the texts that Śaṅkara established were necessary for a Vedāntin commentator to comment on. Madhusūdana's extensive quoting from the Upaniṣads aligns him directly with the Vedāntin commentarial tradition and sets him apart from commentators who drew *primarily* on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* for their scriptural authority – namely Caitanya and the Gosvāmīs.

Madhusūdana does, however, align himself slightly differently in his various works. This is particularly clear in his *Bhakti-rasāyana*,¹¹² where he aligns himself with the devotionism of the Vaiṣṇavas and comments heavily on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.¹¹³ The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is crucial to Madhusūdana's context for two key reasons. Firstly, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was crucial to most inflections of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* in North India.¹¹⁴ Secondly, it is considered authoritative for devotionists whose positions Madhusūdana may have seen himself in competition with – primarily, Caitanya and the Gosvāmīs. Since the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *bhakti* were crucial to Madhusūdana's intellectual environment, he had to show how his Advaita Vedāntin interpretation of the *Gītā* and other texts could incorporate this. As I shall argue in Chapter 5, in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* Madhusūdana shows that *bhakti* is necessary in leading Arjuna towards what is to be realised through hearing the *mahāvākya* 'you are that'.

2.4.4 – Intellectual context

One of the key developments between Śaṅkara and Madhusūdana is the rise of Yogic Advaita. In contemporary scholarship, both Bouy and Mallinson have pointed out that there was a broad use of terms associated with *yoga* incorporated into Advaita Vedānta.¹¹⁵ Building on this, Madaio has shown that a number of different traditions by Vidyāraṇya's time would have been drawing on a common 'repertoire' of sources, including Advaitic and

¹¹² Madhusūdana refers the reader to his *Bhakti-rasāyana* in several places in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* (primarily in chapter 18), indicating that this is his more targeted commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

¹¹³ This is also the case in Madhusūdana's *Bhāgavata-prathamaśloka-vyākhyā*.

¹¹⁴ The sixteenth century theologues of Caitanya and Vallabha suggest that it is actually Viṣṇu who is a (partial) incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. Edwin Bryant, *Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God (Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa Book X)* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p.xiii.

¹¹⁵ For an overview of the development of Yogic Advaita in detail, see Christian Bouy, *Les Natha-Yogin et les Upaniṣads* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1994) and James Mallinson, 'Haṭhayoga's Philosophy: A Fortuitous Union of Non-Dualities' *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42 (2014):225-47.

Yogic texts.¹¹⁶ Madaio argues that, while Andrew Fort had ‘initially signalled the turn towards *yoga* in medieval Advaitin literature’,¹¹⁷ Vidyāraṇya’s *Jīvanmuktiviveka* is part of a wider trend of Yogic Advaita, demonstrating that ‘the *yogic* traditions of the period were more diverse than the works Fort [originally] analysed’.¹¹⁸ Madaio also notes that ‘the widespread utilisation of *yoga* during the medieval period is [...] made plain in the theological sources Vidyāraṇya cites’.¹¹⁹ The reason that this is important for Madhusūdana is because of the ‘intellectual repertoire’ demonstrated by Madaio. If there were common ways of thinking about the body, disciplining the body and the mind, and forms of meditation by Vidyāraṇya’s time, then Madhusūdana would be working with particular vocabulary associated with Yogic Advaita.

One of the texts that Madhusūdana extensively quotes in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*.¹²⁰ There are, according to the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*, two ways through which *brahman* can be known: i) through *jñāna*, and ii) through *yoga*, which involves controlling the action of the mind. In his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 5, Madhusūdana draws directly on the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*’s seven stages of *yoga*, which turn out to be a fundamental part of his progressive understanding of who ‘you’ is. Madhusūdana also draws on the work of Vidyāraṇya in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*. Vidyāraṇya built on the philosophy of the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha* in two of his major works – his *Pañcadaśī*¹²¹ and *Jīvanmuktiviveka*. Madhusūdana directly refers to both texts in his *Gītā* commentary. Vidyāraṇya’s position differs from Śaṅkara’s by prescribing, in addition to knowledge, the necessity for *yogic* disciplines, based on the *Bhāgavad-gīta*, the *Yoga-sūtras* of Patañjali, the *Gauḍapādīya Kārikās*, and the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Madhusūdana’s position appears similar to Vidyāraṇya’s, in his stressing of the necessity of *yoga*. Madhusūdana’s reference to Vidyāraṇya in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is particularly crucial – Madhusūdana interprets the *sākṣin* (witness) with direct reference to the witness in Vidyāraṇya’s *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, which will form a key part of my argument in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁶ James Madaio, *Advaita Vedānta as Narrative Theology: Emplotment, Soteriology and Senses of Self in the Jīvanmuktiviveka* (Ph.D., University of Manchester, 2016), p.75.

¹¹⁷ Madaio, *Advaita Vedānta as Narrative Theology*, p.73. See Andrew O. Fort, ‘Liberation while living in the *Jīvanmuktiviveka*: Vidyāraṇya’s Yogic Advaita’ in *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought* (eds.) Andrew O. Fort and Patricia Y. Mumme (Albany: SUNY Press, [1996] 2002), pp.135-55.

¹¹⁸ Madaio, *Advaita Vedānta as Narrative Theology*, p.73.

¹¹⁹ p.74.

¹²⁰ Also quoted extensively in his *Advaita-siddhi* and *Siddhānta-bindu*.

¹²¹ As Madaio points out, the authenticity of the *Pañcadaśī* is debatable. See Madaio, *Advaita Vedānta as Narrative Theology*, p.43 n.138.

2.4.5 – Approach to the *Gītā*

Madhusūdana’s context in sixteenth century Benares clearly had an impact on his approach to his *Gītā* commentary. Madhusūdana is careful to align himself with Advaita by commenting on the triple foundation and stating Śaṅkara’s authority, made explicit in the way he structures his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* around the *tat tvam asi* of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the most important Advaitin *mahāvākya*. The fact that Madhusūdana draws directly on the seven stages of *yoga* found in the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*, to tell us who ‘you’ really is, demonstrates the influence of Yogic Advaita on his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*. The influence of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* on Madhusūdana is evident in his frequent quoting from it, particularly in support of *bhakti* being preliminary but necessary for Arjuna as a seeker of liberation.

2.5 – Conclusion

In this chapter, the importance of textual and intellectual context for Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana has been highlighted. This contextualisation will primarily inform my approach in the forthcoming chapters, while the socio-religious context offers a historical backdrop for my three commentators. Treating the socio-religious context of my three commentators together in this chapter has highlighted the fact that all three commentators, as self-proclaimed Advaita Vedāntins, were clearly faced with interpreting the *Gītā* in the context of their various devotional audiences. The question of how Advaita and *bhakti* relate is thus apparent by looking at the very socio-religious contexts in which my three commentators were situated.

Considering the intellectual and textual context of my three commentators together in this chapter has highlighted that commenting on other authoritative texts was key to their building their views. However, I have shown that it is the *specific* context of each commentator that directly informs their interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy in the *Gītā*, and the specific way in which Arjuna is saved from drowning. In Chapter 3, I show that Śaṅkara repeatedly engages with his *jñānakarmasamuccayin* opponent to clearly present his view of Kṛṣṇa’s divine agency, and show how this is modelled to Arjuna. Further to this, the importance of key Vaiṣṇava (and Pāñcarātra) traditions for Śaṅkara is demonstrated in the

importance of one-pointed devotion as part of Arjuna's progression towards liberation in the *Gītābhāṣya*. In Chapter 4, I argue that Śrīdhara's reinterpretation of Citsukha's earlier understanding of *śakti* underlies his understanding of Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* body, which proves key in Śrīdhara's making the transcendent accessible to Arjuna. In Chapter 5, I argue that the way in which Madhusūdana draws on key terms already systematised within the development of Yogic Advaita is key to his understanding of personhood.

Chapter 3

Śaṅkara on Kṛṣṇa's Agency and Pedagogy

3.1 – Introduction

The *Bhagavad-gītā* is a devotional work. Much of the literature on our first author, Śaṅkara (c. 700 CE), therefore begins analysis of his commentary by asking whether his Advaita Vedāntin interpretation can be coherent in the light of the *Gītā*'s devotionalism. In this chapter, I seek to address the tension between Advaita and *bhakti* in Śaṅkara's *Gītābhāṣya* by asking the two key questions I outlined in Chapter 1. First, I consider the questions Śaṅkara himself asks in his commentary and show how he introduces and subsequently structures his *Gītā* commentary around Kṛṣṇa's agency. Second, I look at Śaṅkara's perspective on Arjuna drowning. By close reading of the *Gītābhāṣya* on agency, I argue that Kṛṣṇa's divine agency is used to show how Arjuna can be saved from drowning, as Kṛṣṇa progressively models this agency for Arjuna.

3.1.1 – Why is Arjuna drowning?

Right from the start, in the introduction of his *Gītābhāṣya*, Śaṅkara emphasises that Arjuna is drowning:

Although he (the Lord) has no purpose of his own, through wanting to show kindness to beings, he taught the twofold *dharma* of the Veda to Arjuna who was drowning in the ocean of grief and delusion.¹

Śaṅkara takes the stock metaphor of the ocean of rebirth (*Gītā* 12.7) and applies it specifically to Arjuna from the outset showing that Arjuna's drowning is presented by Śaṅkara as the key problem to be solved. 'Drowning in the ocean of grief and delusion' represents both Arjuna's despair on the battlefield, where he faces the dilemma of whether to fight his own family, and the predicament of all beings.

¹ *sva-prayojanābhāve 'pi bhūtānujighṛkṣayā vaidikaṃ hi dharma-dvayam arjunāya śoka-mohamahodadhau nimagnāyopadideśa ||*

3.1.2 – Why is agency a key topic for Śaṅkara?

Agency is an important topic for Śaṅkara for three key reasons. First, agency is key to the narrative of the *Gītā* itself. In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa in his descent form as a person must act in the world, as is shown specifically in chapter 4 where Kṛṣṇa provides himself with a body. Acting in the world means being an agent, so the concept of ‘agency’ is given by the very narrative of the *Gītā*. As the *Gītā* itself presents us with Kṛṣṇa as a person who acts and a character with agency, Śaṅkara’s major focus on agency is not just a commentarial imposition.

Second, agency is the primary focus of Śaṅkara’s introduction, where Śaṅkara sets up Kṛṣṇa’s teaching in terms of the twofold *dharma* he has already taught as the agent-Lord who manifests and orders the world from the very beginning.² As we can see from the passage above, Arjuna has not yet received this teaching, which is why he is drowning. The importance of agency for Śaṅkara is thus given in the way he introduces his *Gītā* commentary, as his opening sentence shows:

That Lord, having created the world and wishing to secure order therein, first created the Prajāpatis, such as Marīchi and so on, and made them understand the *pravṛtti-dharma* spoken of in the Veda, the *dharma* characterised by action. He then created others such as Sanaka and Sanandana, and made them understand the *nivṛtti-dharma*, the *dharma* of renunciation, characterised by knowledge and detachment from worldly objects.³

Although it is often assumed that the *Gītā* itself encompasses a threefold structure (of *karma*, *jñāna* and *bhakti*), Śaṅkara rather perceives the *Gītā* to have a twofold scheme of *pravṛtti-dharma* and *nivṛtti-dharma*.⁴ This twofold *dharma* refers to the two ‘paths’ to liberation. For Śaṅkara, *pravṛtti-dharma* refers to the path of action whereby a person achieves worldly success through performing rituals and social duties, which then leads to

² Cf Chapter 1, section 1.5.3.4 on the importance of close-reading introductions.

³ *sa bhagavān sṛṣṭvedaṃ jagat | tasya ca sthitim cikīrṣuḥ marīchyādīn agre sṛṣṭvā prajāpatīn pravṛtti-lakṣaṇaṃ dharmam grāhayāmāsa vedoktam | tato 'nyān ca sanaka-sanandanādīn utpādyā nivṛtti-lakṣaṇaṃ dharmam jñāna-vairāgya-lakṣaṇaṃ grāhayāmāsa ||*

⁴ Hirst, ‘The Place of *Bhakti*’, p.124.

nivṛtti-dharma, the path of renunciation of all actions which leads to liberation (*niḥśreyasa*).⁵ As such, for Śaṅkara, *nivṛtti-dharma* is viewed as the direct means to liberation. Yet in order to follow the path of *nivṛtti-dharma*, a person must be a literal fourth stage renouncer, who has renounced all actions. Arjuna, as we know, is a *kṣatriya* and therefore a *karma-yogin*. This means that Arjuna cannot follow the path of *nivṛtti-dharma* in his current state, and must therefore follow the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*. Agency is therefore a key topic for Śaṅkara in his *Gītābhāṣya*, as Kṛṣṇa’s teaching is directed to saving Arjuna who must continue to act in the world. As I will show, this teaching is revealed progressively throughout Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya* in terms of Kṛṣṇa’s agency: Arjuna progresses towards liberation as Kṛṣṇa’s teaching on, and example of, agency unfolds. Agency is thus not only a theme in Śaṅkara’s introduction, but one of the main themes around which his whole commentary is structured.

Third, the fact that Śaṅkara primarily engages with one particular opponent – the *jñānakarmasamuccayin* – in his commentary demonstrates agency to be a primary focus. The *jñānakarmasamuccayin* aims to demonstrate how to act in the world (i.e. how to be an agent), and claims that liberation is only attained through a combination of action and knowledge.⁶ In other works, such as his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, Śaṅkara deconstructs the views of many different opponents. That Śaṅkara constantly engages with this one opponent in his *Gītā* commentary flags agency as central here. Śaṅkara’s sustained focus on this opponent indicates that their positions differ rather subtly, as Śaṅkara deems it necessary to explain how they differ throughout his commentary. Śaṅkara first raises the dispute in *Gītābhāṣya* 2.10. Up to this point, Śaṅkara’s comments are minimal. He then immediately re-emphasises Kṛṣṇa’s teaching on the twofold *dharma* – the key focus of his introduction – by refuting the view of his *jñānakarmasamuccayin* opponent. Śaṅkara’s extended comment on 2.10 begins, ‘Grief and delusion are therefore the causes of the cycle of rebirth. They cease by nothing other than knowledge of the self, preceded by the renunciation of all actions’.⁷ Against this, the *jñānakarmasamuccayin* claims, ‘The conclusion of the whole *Gītā* is that liberation is attained by knowledge together with actions, such as the *agnihotra* and so on, prescribed by the Vedas (*śruti*) and the *smṛtis*’.⁸

⁵ p.124.

⁶ Cf Chapter 2 n.35 for a definition of *jñānakarmasamuccaya*.

⁷ *ataḥ saṃsāra-bīja-bhūtau śoka-mohau | tayoś ca sarva-karma-saṃnyāsa-pūrvakād ātma-jñānāt nānyato nivṛttir iti*

⁸ *agnihotrādi-śrauta-smārta-karma-sahitāt jñānāt kaivalya-prāptir iti sarvāsu gītāsu niścito ’rtha iti*

After engaging with the *jñānakarmasamuccayin* in 2.10, Śaṅkara immediately brings the focus back to Arjuna being saved from drowning, *because* Arjuna has not correctly understood the teaching on the twofold *dharma* (2.11). Here, Śaṅkara uses his opponent to highlight Arjuna’s confusion about action and knowledge. Once Śaṅkara has outlined that liberation comes from knowledge alone, he reiterates the problem of Arjuna’s drowning:

That being the case, the Lord Vāsudeva found that for Arjuna, whose mind was confused about *dharma*, who had false cognition, and who was drowning in the great ocean of delusion, there could be no other rescue than through the knowledge of the self. Intending to rescue Arjuna from that, he said, ‘(You grieve for) those who are not to be grieved for’, and so on, in order to introduce the knowledge of the self.⁹

As in his introduction, Śaṅkara again inserts the drowning metaphor here, as it is not in *Gītā* 2.10-11.¹⁰ Śaṅkara now uses this metaphor to show how Arjuna too is trapped in *samsāra* (rebirth), and makes explicit that the teaching on the knowledge of the self is given specifically to Arjuna in order to rescue him. As Śaṅkara intimates in 2.11, Arjuna is drowning because he is confused about *dharma* – he does not know what ought to be done, or how to be an agent. Arjuna requires Kṛṣṇa’s teaching on the twofold *dharma*; Śaṅkara sets up his commentary for Arjuna to receive it.

3.1.3 – *Why has agency been perceived as problematic for Śaṅkara?*

Although agency is a major topic for Śaṅkara in his *Gītābhāṣya*, it is – from the point of view of Advaita Vedānta – clearly problematic. Action in the world normally entails the

⁹ *tatraiva dharma-saṃmūḍha-cetaso mithyā-jñānavato mahati śoka-sāgare nimagnasya arjunasya anyatrātma-jñānād uddharaṇam apaśyan bhagavān vāsudevaḥ tataḥ kṛpayā arjunam uddidhārayiṣuḥ ātma-jñānāyāvatārayann āha*

¹⁰ Śaṅkara also uses the ‘drowning’ metaphor in 6.5, in the penultimate praise verse in *Gauḍapāda-kārikābhāṣya* and in a clearly pedagogical context in *Upadeśasāhasrī* Prose Section 1.10. Here, Śaṅkara presents the teacher asking the pupil, ‘Who are you?’ The pupil replies, ‘I am the son of a *brahmin* belonging to such and such a family. I was a student (householder), and now I am a wandering ascetic. I want to escape from the ocean of *samsāra*, which is infested with the great monsters of birth and death’ (*sa yadi brūyāt – brāhmaṇaputraḥ adonvayaḥ brahmācāryāsama, grahastho vā, idānīmasmi paramahaṃsaparivrāt saṃsārasāgarāt janmāmṛtyumahāgrāhāt uttīrṣuriti ||*) Śaṅkara, *Upadeśasāhasrī* (tr.) Swāmī Jagadānanda (Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1941).

conditioning of bodily and mental states of awareness within the world of superimposition, which results in attachment. Kṛṣṇa, on the level of being both manifest human and cosmic Lord, cannot be attached to the world if non-dualism is to remain tenable. This is because Kṛṣṇa is ultimately *nirguṇa brahman*. As Kṛṣṇa acts in the world in the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa's agency is a problem that Śaṅkara encounters in the root text itself. Moreover, in the *Gītābhāṣya*, Kṛṣṇa acts specifically as teacher in his embodied form. The very fact that Kṛṣṇa *acts* as teacher generates my intellectual problem, and is the reason that agency is a major question for Śaṅkara.

3.1.4 – Śaṅkara on Kṛṣṇa's agency and pedagogy

This chapter seeks to uncover what Kṛṣṇa's agency tells us about Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedāntin pedagogy. I propose that, in his *Gītābhāṣya*, Śaṅkara's pedagogical method works by showing i) how Kṛṣṇa models divine agency for Arjuna, and ii) how this modelling functions progressively throughout the text.

I demonstrate specifically that Kṛṣṇa models divine agency for Arjuna on two levels: as cosmic Lord, and as manifest human. Kṛṣṇa models his divine agency as cosmic Lord through self-disclosure and, as manifest human, through being the lived exemplar of detached action in the world. These levels of modelling are revealed as Śaṅkara's *Gītābhāṣya* progresses and they mirror the progressive nature of the *Gītā* itself.¹¹ As we know, Śaṅkara holds that liberation comes from knowledge, preceded by the renunciation of all actions. Since Arjuna cannot yet renounce all actions, I argue that for Śaṅkara, Arjuna learns how to work towards becoming a detached agent through Kṛṣṇa modelling divine agency. The first example of this explicit modelling appears in Śaṅkara's comment on 2.10:

For fulfilment of the aim of life, (the action) of the knower (*vidvas*) is like the action of Lord Vāsudeva (performing) his duties as a *kṣatriya* – (it) does not get combined with knowledge – because both are free from ego

¹¹ Cf Chapter 1, section 1.3.2.

(*ahaṃkāra*) and desire for results. Indeed, one who knows reality does not think, ‘I am acting’, nor does he desire its result.¹²

Here Śaṃkara uses Kṛṣṇa, as Lord Vāsudeva, to model detached action for a *kṣatriya* (i.e. Arjuna). Rather than dismissing *pravṛtti-dharma* as fundamentally problematic, Śaṃkara focuses his commentary on this path, using it as a pedagogical device for leading Arjuna towards liberation. For this reason, Śaṃkara must very carefully distinguish his position from that of the *jñānakarmasamuccayin* who holds that combining action and knowledge simultaneously leads to liberation. Śaṃkara, by contrast, holds that, although *nivṛtti-dharma* ultimately leads to liberation, because Kṛṣṇa’s teaching is delivered from within the conventional world, following *pravṛtti-dharma* leads one progressively towards the goal of *niḥśreyasa*. The difference is subtle – hence the great lengths of Śaṃkara’s explanation.

Śaṃkara’s view of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy as progressive is revealed in the structure of his commentary itself. After the introduction focused on the twofold *dharma* taught to the drowning Arjuna, the commentary, as we shall see, progressively shows how Arjuna can move from problematically attached agency to appropriate, detached agency. This is only possible with the help of Kṛṣṇa, the subject of one-pointed devotion, who is crucial to demonstrating how Arjuna can become liberated. Many scholars have argued that Kṛṣṇa presents a fundamental problem for Śaṃkara as a non-dualist commentator, as we saw in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.1.1). Warren Todd, looking specifically at Śaṃkara’s use of the six Vaiṣṇava qualities applied to Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītābhāṣya*, argues that because these qualities are denied in Śaṃkara’s other works (including *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 2.2.44-45), Kṛṣṇa does not feature in Śaṃkara’s ‘main gnoseological concerns’.¹³ I argue that, rather than posing a problem for Śaṃkara, Kṛṣṇa is in fact key to offering a solution.

3.1.5 – Outline of Chapter

To demonstrate exactly how Kṛṣṇa models divine agency for Arjuna in Śaṃkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*, I give an overview of my interpretation of ‘agency’ in the light of various

¹² *yathā bhagavato vāsudevasya kṣatra-dharma-ceṣṭitaṃ na jñānena samuccīyate puruṣārtha-siddhaye tadvat tat-phalābhisaṃdhy-ahaṃkārahāvāsyā tulyatvād viduṣaḥ | tattvavin nāhaṃ karomīti manyate na ca tat-phalam abhisandhatte*

¹³ Todd, *The Ethics of Śaṃkara and Śāntideva*, pp.7-8. Hirst, however, has argued that this is an inaccurate interpretation. See Hirst, ‘Refutation or dialogue?’, pp.51-65.

approaches to agency in the literature. This will show how I use ‘agency’ as a heuristic category, which can help us to understand the pedagogical character of Śaṅkara’s commentary. Following this, the remainder of the chapter will consider the following:

1. Detached agency in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*
2. How, in Śaṅkara’s view, is Kṛṣṇa’s agency divine agency?
3. How is Kṛṣṇa as an agent needed in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*?

3.1.6 – Mapping approaches to agency

3.1.6.1 – Body and agency

In his *Gītābhāṣya*, Śaṅkara uses various words for ‘body’ (mainly *śarīra* and *deha*). Śaṅkara does not use one specific term for agency. The words *kartṛtva* and *kartā*, usually translated as ‘agency’ and ‘agent’, can be found along with *kārya* and *karma*, usually translated as ‘that which is to be done’ and ‘action’. As there is no one term for ‘agency’ in Śaṅkara’s commentary, the concept ‘agency’ relates to a broader conceptual cluster of terms related to acting in the world. I propose to use the term ‘agency’ heuristically – not as a static term, but as a malleable concept that is constantly developed in Śaṅkara’s commentary.

In the literature on the *Gītā*, there have been various approaches to the body and how it relates to ‘mineness’. I use the term ‘body’ here to refer both to the body in its physical form, but also to the psycho-physical complex of a person. I also use the term ‘mineness’ here to refer to ‘I-ness’, or ego (*aḥaṃkāra*) – a mental faculty which, like the body, is also part of the psycho-physical complex.¹⁴ These key terms appear in the *Mahābhārata* and similar texts, and are later developed in various ways, including the influential model of the Sāṃkhya school. In the *Sāṃkhyakārika*¹⁵ there are two independent realities: *prakṛti* and

¹⁴ For Ram-Prasad’s discussion of whether ‘I’ picks out the self, see Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, ‘Situating the Elusive Self of Advaita Vedānta’, in Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson and Dan Zahavi (eds.) *Self, No Self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), pp.217-38. Consulted on 10 September 2020.
<<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199593804.001.0001/acprof-9780199593804-chapter-9>> First published online: 2010.

¹⁵ The Sāṃkhya school’s earliest surviving text. Translated along with a commentary into Chinese by Paramārtha some time between 557-569 CE, it would have been well known by the sixth century CE, so

puruṣa. *Prakṛti* is material nature, and contains twenty-three components, including the intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahaṃkāra*) and mind (*manas*). *Puruṣa* is consciousness. In Sāṃkhya, mental processes are ‘conscious only to the extent they receive external “illumination” from *puruṣa*’.¹⁶ The relationship between the psycho-physical complex (including the body and the ego) and *puruṣa* is interpreted differently in various schools of Indian philosophy. Below, I survey approaches to agency, ranging from interpretations of agency in the *Gītā* itself, to how Śaṃkara’s interpretation of agency in the *Gītā* has been viewed.

Some have argued that the body is sufficient for agency. Thomas Metzinger adopts the ‘no-self’ stance, and contends that his position is comparable to Śaṃkara’s.¹⁷ For Metzinger, the fact that there are different bodies, each acting as a locus of a stream of consciousness, is sufficient to explain how we are able to distinguish between ourselves and others.¹⁸ Metzinger holds that ‘mineness’ as a cognitive state stems from the bodily apparatus of cognition, and this bodily apparatus sets one agent apart from another. As such, for Śaṃkara the body is sufficient for agency. Others have claimed that a disembodied force is necessary, but not sufficient, for agency. Matthew Mackenzie, writing about agency specifically in the *Gītā*, argues that ‘the efficacy of any action depends on far more than the will of a disembodied, independent “doer” [...but requires] lived embodiment’.¹⁹ So any sense of ‘mineness’ for Mackenzie relies on the fact that a person is embodied. However, Mackenzie argues that, although agency is located in the body, the body alone cannot act and requires *puruṣa* (consciousness).²⁰

My understanding of the body in relation to agency in Śaṃkara’s *Gītābhāṣya* is based on Ram-Prasad’s position. Ram-Prasad argues that, for Śaṃkara, a ‘person’ is both i) the specific locus of consciousness, conditioned by the states of bodily and mental awareness,

predating Śaṃkara (Gerald Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya: An Interpretation of its History and Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, [1969] 2011), p.4.)

¹⁶ Paul Schweizer, ‘Mind/Consciousness Dualism in Sāṃkhya-Yoga Philosophy’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53.4 (1993), p.850.

¹⁷ Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-model Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: A Bradford Book, 2003), pp.549-50.

¹⁸ Metzinger, *Being No One*, p.549.

¹⁹ Matthew Mackenzie, ‘The Five Factors of Action and the Decentring of Agency in the *Bhagavad Gītā*’, *Asian Philosophy* 11.3 (2001), p.144.

²⁰ Mackenzie, ‘The Five Factors of Action’, p.144.

and ii) the ‘contingent manifestation of [the] general, “witnessing” consciousness’.²¹ It is the specific locus of consciousness, i.e. the individuated consciousness which is made up in part by the body, that is penultimate, and eventually ‘transcended [by] “de-individuatedness”’.²² For Ram-Prasad, knowledge is effected through the physical apparatus of the body, and is a ‘specifiable mental state (or set of states), and both body and mind are individuating’.²³ I hold that the ‘individuatedness’ of a person, which results from being conditioned by the states of bodily and mental awareness, is what constitutes problematic, attached agency for Śaṅkara. However, once the person is ‘de-individuated’, their ‘individuatedness’ is transcended by Advaitin realisation, and they model appropriate, detached agency, in Śaṅkara’s view. As Arjuna progresses throughout Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*, I suggest that his transition from problematic (individuated) agency to detached (de-individuated) agency is progressive. There is a clear unfolding path towards detached agency for Arjuna, which is learnt through Kṛṣṇa modelling his divine agency.

3.1.6.2 – Desire and agency

Kṛṣṇa advocates ‘desireless action’ for Arjuna in the *Gītā*. In response to Arjuna’s despair on the battlefield in *Gītā* 3.19, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to perform action without attachment:

So, always non-attached, perform the task to be done: for the non-attached person practising action reaches the highest.²⁴

Kṛṣṇa’s advice to Arjuna is to act, but without desire for results. However, as Christopher Framarin tells us, a ‘desire’ (*rāga*), by definition, ‘disposes the agent towards joy and disappointment, depending on whether the desire is satisfied or frustrated’.²⁵

Many scholars on the *Gītā* argue that action must be motivated by desire. Framarin refers to both Rajendra Prasad and S.A. Desai. Prasad views the contradiction entailed in the

²¹ Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, ‘Knowledge and Action II: Attaining Liberation in Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā and Advaita Vedānta’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28.1 (2000), p.31.

²² Ram-Prasad, ‘Knowledge and Action II’, p.35.

²³ p.35.

²⁴ *tasmād asaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara |
asakto hy ācāraṁ karma param āpnoti pūruṣaḥ ||*

²⁵ Christopher Framarin, *Desire and Motivation in Indian Philosophy* (Routledge Hindu Studies Series, 2009), pp.93-4.

phrase ‘desireless action’ literally and holds that, as desire is a necessary condition of action, ‘if Arjuna gives up all desires, he cannot do any intentional action’.²⁶ Desai, similarly, holds that the ‘motiveless action [in the *Gītā*] is an impossibility’.²⁷ Jagat Pal suggests that, in the case of the *Gītā*, to avoid the notion of ‘desireless action’ being contradictory, ‘desire’ is not to be understood literally, and instead is an umbrella term that incorporates various sub-groups of desires.²⁸ As Framarin explains, for Pal, this means that ‘the injunction to act without desire is an injunction to act without a certain kind of desire. This leaves another subset of desires available for motivating action’.²⁹ In short, many scholars agree that it is an analytic truth that action is motivated by desire.

Some scholars, including George Teschner and Simon Brodbeck, have attempted to get around the contradiction implied by the notion of ‘desireless action’. Teschner distinguishes between action that is intentional and non-intentional. He argues that the action Kṛṣṇa asks Arjuna to perform in the *Gītā*, including going to battle, is *not* to be understood as intentional action.³⁰ Brodbeck adopts a similar position to Teschner, suggesting that while many behaviours *are* intentional, and as such leave an entrapping *karmic* residue, the unattached actor’s are not.³¹ Brodbeck points out that much of the debate surrounding ‘desireless action’ depends on the word *saṃkalpa* (often translated as ‘intention’ or ‘purpose’), ‘which denotes a motivational aspect commonly allied with desire’.³²

Others have argued that purposes can exist *without* desire. Framarin is the key advocate of this approach, and leans towards an anti-Humean analysis of action, critiquing both Teschner and Brodbeck. Hume argues that desire is necessary for action. Desire, however, always attaches a person to action and its results. To address this dilemma, Framarin explains that a person can also have purposes, drawing on the distinction the Vedāntin Maṇḍana Mīśra makes between *rāga* (desire) and *icchā* (purpose):

²⁶ Rajendra Prasad, *Vaṛṇadharmā, Niṣkāma Karma and Practical Morality: A Critical Essay on Applied Ethics* (New Delhi: DK Printworld, 1999) p.60 cited in Framarin, *Desire and Motivation*, pp.6-7.

²⁷ S.A. Desai cited in Robert Minor, *Modern Indian Interpreters of the Bhagavad Gītā* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), p.149 and Framarin, *Desire and Motivation*, p.7.

²⁸ Jagat Pal, ‘The Concept of *Niṣkāma Karma*: Teleological or Deontological?’, *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 28.2 (2001), p.216.

²⁹ Framarin, *Desire and Motivation*, p.8. See Jagat Pal, ‘The Concept of *Niṣkāma Karma*, pp.215-25.

³⁰ George Teschner, ‘Anxiety, Anger and the Concept of Agency and Action in the *Bhagavad Gītā*’, *Asian Philosophy* 2.1 (1992), p.61.

³¹ Simon Brodbeck, ‘Calling Kṛṣṇa’s Bluff: Non-attached Action in the *Bhagavad Gītā*’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32.1 (2004), p.93.

³² Brodbeck, ‘Calling Kṛṣṇa’s Bluff’, p.85.

Since an agent can act without a desire for *phala* (results) in the case of *nitya-karmas* (obligatory daily rituals), it follows that a desire for some end of action is not a necessary condition of action. When an agent acts without a desire for some end, it does not follow that they act without a *prayojana* (purpose), however.³³

For Framarin, some purposes will have desire, but they don't *have to* entail desire. Framarin takes the position that the only way to make sense of the *Gītā*'s 'desireless action' is to hold that you can have a purpose that doesn't have a desire embedded in it. Desire does not therefore play a 'necessary role in motivating action'.³⁴ As Framarin puts it, 'If Kant can deny that all action is motivated by desire, then surely Kṛṣṇa can too'.³⁵

Also holding that purposes can exist without desire is Mohanty. Specifically in the case of Nyāya, Mohanty summarises the three cognitions that 'jointly bring about a desire': i) that one can achieve the desired good by performing the action, ii) that one can perform the action, and iii) that 'no greater harm will befall the agent in performing the action'.³⁶ If any one of these three cognitions is absent, there is 'no desire in the person'.³⁷ For Mohanty, Kṛṣṇa offers a 'deontic interpretation'³⁸ of action: 'the injunctions are to be followed as duties, and the consequences stated are not intended to be motivating factors'.³⁹ This suggests that Mohanty holds that desire is not necessary for one to perform actions. I propose that, as Framarin has argued, purposes can exist without a necessarily embedded desire in the *Gītā*. To demonstrate this, in the case of Śaṅkara's interpretation of both Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa's action, I differentiate between the following senses of 'desire' for the remainder of this chapter: i) desire₁ – in the sense of *rāga*, which is the desire for results (*phala*) and ii) desire₂ – desire reconstrued as purpose (*icchā*), whereby a purpose need not necessarily entail a desire₁.

³³ Framarin, *Desire and Motivation*, p.93.

³⁴ p.93.

³⁵ p.16.

³⁶ J.N. Mohanty, 'Dharma, imperatives and tradition: towards an Indian theory of moral action', Chapter 1 in Bilimoria, Prabhu and Sharma (eds.) *Indian Ethics: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges*, Volume 1 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.60.

³⁷ Mohanty, 'Dharma, imperatives and tradition', pp.60-1.

³⁸ p.77.

³⁹ p.77.

3.2 – Detached agency in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*

In the *Gītābhāṣya*’s two ‘drowning’ passages (introduction and 2.11), Śaṅkara explicitly states that Kṛṣṇa gives the teaching on the twofold *dharma* to save Arjuna (and beings). If, as I contend, Śaṅkara’s pedagogy functions by Kṛṣṇa progressively modelling to Arjuna how he can become a detached agent, a *yogin* in preparation for liberation, our next task will be to investigate detached agency in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*. I therefore consider in turn: i) problematic (attached) agency (primarily of the ritual agent); ii) appropriate (detached) agency for Arjuna as a *yogin*; and iii) appropriate (detached) agency, as modelled by Kṛṣṇa.

3.2.1 – Problematic (attached) agency

Right from the beginning of his *Gītābhāṣya* (2.10), we get a sense of what constitutes problematic agency for Śaṅkara:

Even when they act according to their own *dharma*, their actions of speech, mind, body, and so on, are surely motivated by desire for results, together with the ego.⁴⁰

Problematic agency, then, is to do with desire₁ and the misconception that the self is an agent, an ego-‘I’, and therefore the one who experiences results. Attached agency is problematic for Śaṅkara as it is linked with getting particular results (his critique of Pūrva Mīmāṃsā ritualists). Arjuna suffers grief imagining the shame of fighting relatives and teachers will redound on him and wants to abandon his own duty (*sva-dharma*) as a *kṣatriya*. Śaṅkara’s Kṛṣṇa obliquely highlights the problems surrounding Arjuna’s view of agency: false cognition, desire₁ for results, not performing one’s own *dharma*, and attachment.

Commenting on 18.66, the ‘summary’ of the *Gītā* according to Śaṅkara, he reiterates and generalises this view:

⁴⁰ *sva-dharme pravṛttānām api teṣāṃ vān-manah-kāyādīnām pravṛttiḥ phalābhisamdhī-pūrvikaiva sāhaṅkāra ca bhavati*

Just as in this life *dharma*, *adharma* and the experience of their results are caused by the identification (of the self) with the aggregate of the body and so on, and desire, hatred and so on, so also it was the case in the previous birth, and even in the previous life. Therefore it can be inferred that past and future births are without beginning and are the result of misconception.⁴¹

The key problem perpetuating attachment, indeed *samsāra* itself, as Śaṅkara explains, is misidentification of the self with the body and desire₁. For Śaṅkara, attached agency results from a person being ‘individuated’, as we saw in Ram-Prasad’s model. Attached agency is therefore problematic agency as far as Śaṅkara is concerned, as it is linked with desire₁ for results, which keep a person bound.

3.2.2 – *Appropriate (detached) agency: Arjuna becoming a yogin*

Since Arjuna, the *Gītā*’s narrative focus, cannot yet renounce all actions, Śaṅkara lays the ground, from the start of his *Gītābhāṣya*, for Arjuna to work progressively towards liberation by initially following the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*. In his introduction, Śaṅkara explains, ‘The purpose of the *Gītā* is the highest good (*niḥśreyasa*), characterised by the overcoming of rebirth with its cause(s)’.⁴² He then states, ‘And this comes to be through *dharma* in the form of being grounded in knowledge of the self, preceded by the renunciation of all actions’.⁴³ Directly following this, Śaṅkara makes it clear that Arjuna can attain this *niḥśreyasa* – nothing other than liberation – without being a literal renouncer:

Although this *dharma* characterised by action (*pravṛtti-dharma*) is laid down with the end/goal of worldly success (*abhyudaya*)...when it is practised with the mind on worship of the Lord, free from a view to the results, it (this *dharma*) is for the purification of the mind, and for the one with purified mind, it is indeed to be understood (*pratipadyate*) as being

⁴¹ *yathāsmiṁ janmani dehādi-saṁghātābhimāna-rāga-dveṣādi-kṛtau dharmādharmās tat-phalānubhavaś ca tathāhite ’tītatare ’pi janmanīty anādir avidyā-kṛtaḥ saṁsāro ’tīto ’nāgataś cānumeyah*

⁴² *tasya asya gītā-śāstrasya saṁkṣepataḥ prayojanaṁ paraṁ niḥśreyasaṁ sa-hetukasya saṁsārasya atyantoparama-lakṣaṇam*

⁴³ *tac ca sarva-karma-saṁnyāsa-pūrvakād ātma-jñāna-niṣṭhā-rūpād dharmād bhavati |*

the cause of the highest good, through attaining fitness for foundation in knowledge and by being the cause of the arising of knowledge.⁴⁴

We would assume, for Śaṅkara, that *pravṛtti-dharma* leads only to ‘worldly success’ (*abhyudaya*), while *nivṛtti-dharma* leads to *niḥśreyasa*.⁴⁵ However, this passage clearly sets out the possibility that, in Śaṅkara’s view, the highest good (*niḥśreyasa*) can be attained gradually by one who initially follows the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*. Śaṅkara thus specifically targets Kṛṣṇa’s teaching towards Arjuna, who must begin with *pravṛtti-dharma*, being a *kṣatriya* who continues to act in the world. It is through following this path that Arjuna can attain liberation through working progressively: Śaṅkara clearly states here that, if Arjuna acts in a detached way, with one-pointed devotion, his mind will become purified through following *pravṛtti-dharma*, which generates foundation in knowledge (*jñāna-niṣṭhā*), even liberation.

The first six chapters of Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya* are key to outlining Arjuna’s path towards detached agency. In his extended comment on 2.10, Śaṅkara builds on the twofold *dharma* teaching outlined in his introduction. He distinguishes between ‘foundation in knowledge’ (*jñāna-niṣṭhā*) and ‘foundation in action’ (*karma-niṣṭhā*). The former is based on the wisdom of reality (*sāṃkhya-buddhi*), the latter on the wisdom of *yoga* (*yoga-buddhi*).⁴⁶ Śaṅkara makes it clear that Arjuna, being a man of action, can still attain liberation despite not yet having knowledge:

But, if they are not knowers of reality, then this is the explanation: Through offering actions to the Lord, Janaka and others remained fixed in perfection (*saṃsiddhi*), characterised either by the purification of the mind or the rise of knowledge. The Lord will speak of this in, ‘(The *yogins*) perform actions for the purification of the mind’ (5.11). After stating, ‘A person achieves worldly success by worshipping him through his own actions’ (18.46), he will speak again of the foundation in knowledge of a person who has attained success, as is said in, ‘(Know...from me...that

⁴⁴ *abhyudayārtho 'pi yaḥ pravṛtti-lakṣaṇo dharmo...īśvarārpaṇa-buddhyānuṣṭhīyamānaḥ sattva-śuddhaye bhavati phalābhisandhi-varjitaḥ śuddha-sattvasya ca jñāna-niṣṭhāyogyatā-prāpti-dvāreṇa jñānotpatti-hetutvena ca niḥśreyasa-hetutvam api pratipadyate*

⁴⁵ See Śaṅkara’s *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 1.1.1.

⁴⁶ *jñāna-karma-niṣṭhayor vibhāga-vacanād buddhi-dvayāśrayayoh...*

process through which) one who has achieved success attains *brahman*'
(18.50).⁴⁷

Straight after distinguishing between foundation in knowledge and foundation in action, Śaṅkara takes the time to explain how one who does not yet have knowledge can still attain *brahman*, liberation.⁴⁸ The passage above indicates how Arjuna, like the famous king Janaka, can, by performing his own *dharma* but dedicating all actions to the Lord, purify his mind, and become fit for *jñāna-niṣṭhā*. It is from this 'foundation in knowledge' that liberation is attained.

In this crucial first extended comment, Śaṅkara himself signposts forward to chapters 5 and 18, demonstrating that Arjuna's path towards liberation is to be laid down as his commentary progresses. Introducing chapter 4, Śaṅkara explicitly states, 'This *yoga*, spoken of in the previous two chapters, characterised by foundation in knowledge connected with renunciation, can be achieved by means of *karma-yoga*'.⁴⁹ As such, Śaṅkara explicitly sets up Kṛṣṇa's teaching for Arjuna as a *karma-yogin*. When we reach chapter 5, Śaṅkara outlines the stages by which Arjuna can attain liberation as a *karma-yogin* in his self-standing comment introducing 5.27, 'At each stage, the Lord said and will say that *karma-yoga* performed with dedication to the Lord, to *brahman*, by devoting all actions to the Lord, leads to liberation through the stages of purification of the mind, attainment of knowledge, and renunciation of all actions'.⁵⁰ To progress through these stages, Arjuna must first dedicate actions to Kṛṣṇa, by renouncing desire₁ for results and become a *yogin*.

It is not only the one who is actionless (a literal fourth stage renouncer) who is a *sannyāsin* (renouncer) and a *yogin*. According to Śaṅkara, the man of action who performs his own *dharma* and *nitya-* and *naimittika-karmas* (obligatory and occasional actions), as opposed to *kāmya-karmas* (optional actions), can also be called a *sannyāsin* and a *yogin*, using the terms in a secondary sense. This allows Śaṅkara to avoid the charge of his

⁴⁷ *atha na te tattva-vidah | īśvara-samarpitena karmaṇā sādhana-bhūtena saṃsiddhiṃ sattva-śuddhiṃ jñānotpatti-lakṣaṇāṃ vā saṃsiddhiṃ āsthitā janakādaya iti vyākhyeyam | etam evārthaṃ vakṣyati bhagavān sattva-śuddhaye karma kurvanti iti | svakarmanā tam abhyarcya siddhiṃ vindati mānavaḥ ity uktvā siddhiṃ prāptasya punar jñāna-niṣṭhāṃ vakṣyati – siddhiṃ prāpto yathā brahma ity ādinā*

⁴⁸ *Gītābhāṣya* 18.50 *ad loc.*

⁴⁹ *yo 'yaṃ yogo 'dhyāya-dvayenokto jñāna-niṣṭhā-lakṣaṇaḥ sa sannyāsaḥ karma-yogopāyaḥ*

⁵⁰ *karma-yogaś ca īśvarārpita-sarva-bhāvenesvare brahmaṇy ādhāya kriyamāṇaḥ sattva-śuddhi-jñāna-prāpti-sarva-karma-sannyāsa-krameṇa mokṣāya iti bhagavān pade pade 'bravīt vakṣyati ca*

jñānakarmasamuccayin opponent that action and knowledge in combination lead to liberation. By referring to the man of action as a figurative *sannyāsin* and *yogin*, Śaṅkara makes it clear that this particular man of action is different from the man of action who does not renounce attachment to results. Śaṅkara refers to the man of action who acts without attachment as a ‘figurative *yogin*’ in 6.2:

His being a ‘*sannyāsin*’ is due to him having renounced desire for the results of actions; and his being a ‘*yogin*’ is from him executing actions as constituent parts of *yoga* or from his renouncing desire for the results of actions which are the cause of confusion of the mind. Both are used in a figurative sense. Indeed, his being a *sannyāsin* and a *yogin* are not intended in the primary sense.⁵¹

Here Śaṅkara intimates that Arjuna, although not a literal fourth stage renouncer, can be referred to *figuratively* as a *sannyāsin* and a *yogin*, as he can renounce attachment to the results of actions. Later in this comment, Śaṅkara explains the similarity between *karma-yoga* and ‘real renunciation’, stating that both entail the renunciation of desire₁ for results.

In 6.4, Śaṅkara makes the transition from speaking about the figurative *yogin* to discussing the ‘real renouncer’. In his gloss on 6.27, Śaṅkara refers to the ‘*yogin* whose mind is pacified’ as a ‘*jīvanmukta*’:

“Supreme”, unsurpassable, “happiness comes only to this *yogin* whose mind is pacified, whose *rajas* is pacified”, whose *rajas*⁵² and defects of delusion, and so on, have been eliminated, “who has become *brahman*”, who is liberated while still living (a *jīvanmukta*), who is sure that *brahman* is all, and “who is taintless”, who is without *dharma* and *adharmā*, and so on.⁵³

⁵¹ *karma-phala-saṅkalpa-saṅnyāsāt saṅnyāsitvaṃ yogāṅgatvena ca karmānuṣṭhānāt karma-phala-saṅkalpasya ca citta-vikṣepa-hetoḥ parityāgād yogitvaṃ ceti gaṇam ubhayam | na punar mukhyaṃ saṅnyāsitvaṃ yogitvaṃ cābhipretam iti*

⁵² The energetic strand (*guṇa*) of psycho-physical reality, *sattva* (purity) and *tamas* (dullness/darkness) being the other two.

⁵³ “*praśāntamanasaṃ*” *prakarṣeṇa śāntaṃ mano yasya saḥ praśāntamanās taṃ praśāntamanasaṃ* “*hi enaṃ yoginaṃ sukhāṃ uttamaṃ*” *nitiśayam* “*upaiti*” *upagacchati* “*śānta-rajasam*” *prakṣīṇa-mohādi-kleśa-rajasam ity arthaḥ* “*brahma-bhūtaṃ*” *jīvanmuktaṃ brahmaiva sarvaṃ ity evaṃ niścayavantaṃ brahma-*

Identifying ‘this *yogin* whose mind is pacified’ as ‘*jīvanmukta*’, Śaṅkara tells us that the person who renounces all actions freeing the mind from delusion is liberated while still living. Śaṅkara, following *Gītā* 6.46, adjures Arjuna to *become* a *yogin* of this kind:

The *yogin* is “higher”, superior, “than men of action” – action means the *agnihotra*, and so on – superior to those who follow them. Because of this, “therefore do you become a *yogin*, O Arjuna”.⁵⁴

Arjuna, a man of action and *kṣatriya* who commissions the *agnihotra*, is eligible to *become* a *yogin* whose mind is pacified. Śaṅkara implies that Arjuna can only become a *yogin* whose mind is pacified in a future life, once he has worked towards liberation. This is precisely why it is vital that Śaṅkara differentiates his position from that of his *jñānakarmasamuccayin* opponent. While the *jñānakarmasamuccayin* holds that action and knowledge in combination lead to liberation, Śaṅkara contends that the path of action (*pravṛtti-dharma*) can lead to the highest good (*niḥśreyasa*), but *not in this life*. Although Arjuna can gradually work *towards* liberation in this life by following the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*, it will not be until he has become a *yogin* whose mind is pacified in a future life that he can attain knowledge which alone leads to liberation. I argue that it is Kṛṣṇa who not only teaches but models the process by which Arjuna can become a detached agent: by renouncing desire₁ for results, by purifying the mind, which eventually leads to renouncing all actions.

3.2.3 – *Appropriate (detached) agency: Kṛṣṇa*

Kṛṣṇa’s agency is a key focus for Śaṅkara from the beginning of his *Gītābhāṣya*:

Although he is by nature eternal, pure, knowing and free, not born and imperishable, the Lord of all beings, he appears as if he possesses a body

bhūtam “akalmaṣaṃ” dharmādharmādi-varjitam || I use double inverts in translations to indicate the terms used in the *Gītā* itself which the commentator then glosses by synonym or explains in longer paraphrase.

⁵⁴ “*karmibhyaḥ*” *agnihotrādi karma tadvadbhyo* “*adhiko*” *yogī viśiṣṭo yasmāt “tasmād yogī bhavārjuna”*

through his own *māyā*, as though he is born, as though he is acting for the sake of the world.⁵⁵

From Śaṅkara's introduction, we learn that Kṛṣṇa is 'eternal, pure, knowing and free' (*nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta*) – this is one of Śaṅkara's favoured terms for both the Lord and the transcendent *brahman*.⁵⁶ Yet Kṛṣṇa also *appears* 'as if he possesses a body' (*dehavān iva*) and 'as though he is born' (*jāta iva*), signalling forward to 4.6. There, the *Gītā* presents Kṛṣṇa as the birthless (*janma-rahita*) manifestor of the universe, who nonetheless takes birth. Śaṅkara glosses: 'appear to become embodied, as though born, "by means of my own *māyā*", but not in reality like an ordinary person'.⁵⁷ Both passages indicate that Kṛṣṇa's agency as manifest human is to be understood from within the conventional world. At the same time, Śaṅkara sets Kṛṣṇa as embodied apart from those bound in *samsāra* by distinguishing Kṛṣṇa's body from that of an 'ordinary person'.

Shortly after, in *Gītā* 4.13, Kṛṣṇa explains that as cosmic Lord he creates the four ideal social groups (*cāturvarṇa*). Śaṅkara raises a hypothetical objection to this. The opponent asks how Kṛṣṇa can be the agent of creating the four ideal social groups if he is the eternally free Lord. Śaṅkara, glossing, responds, "Even though" I am "the agent of that [act]", from the conventional world of *māyā*, still, from the highest standpoint, "know me" to be "a non-agent", and therefore also know me to be "eternal", not subject to rebirth'.⁵⁸ Śaṅkara stresses that Kṛṣṇa's agency is to be understood from a conventional perspective. Glossing 4.14, Śaṅkara explains why Kṛṣṇa is, in reality, a non-agent:

Due to a lack of egoism, those "actions do not taint me", by becoming instigators of the body, and so on. And "for me, there is no desire for the results of those actions". However, in the case of those in rebirth, who identify with the self in the form, "I am the agent", and desire actions and also their results, these actions will clearly taint them. Due to the absence

⁵⁵ ...*ajo 'vyayo bhūtānām īśvaro nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāvo 'pi san sva-māyayā dehavān iva jāta iva lokānugrahaṃ kurvan lakṣyate* ||

⁵⁶ As Hirst notes, Śaṅkara refers to the transcendent *brahman* as *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* in his *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 1.1.1 p.11; 3.2.22 pp.625-6 and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* 1.1.1 p.5; 1.4.7 p.78; 4.3.18 p.455; 4.4.12 p.513. See Hirst, 'The Place of *Bhakti*', p.128.

⁵⁷ "*saṃbhavāmi*" *dehavān iva bhavāmi jāta iva "ātma-māyayā" ātmano māyayā na paramārthato lokavat* ||
⁵⁸ *yady "api" māyā-saṃvyavahāreṇa "tasya" karmaṇaḥ "kartāram" api santam "mām" paramārthato "viddhy akartāram" ataeva "avyayam" asaṃsāriṇam ca mām viddhi* ||

of these, actions do not taint me. Also, any other one “who knows me thus” as their own self, and knows ‘I am not an agent, I have no desire for the results of actions’, “he is not bound by actions”. Also for him, actions are no longer the instigators of the body, and so on.⁵⁹

As a detached agent, Kṛṣṇa does not misidentify with or desire₁ the results of his actions. They therefore yield no binding factors creating (re-)embodiment, unlike for the person trapped in rebirth by desire₁. However, nicely, Śaṅkara emphasises that the one who knows Kṛṣṇa as a non-agent, without desire₁ for results, will no longer have their actions give rise to a body either. Rather than his body arising from his past actions, we know that Kṛṣṇa’s body, for Śaṅkara, is born ‘through his own *māyā*’ (*sva-māyayā*) (introduction and 4.6), and that Kṛṣṇa is in reality *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta*. For Śaṅkara, who Kṛṣṇa is (i.e. the one who is eternally free) is fundamentally linked with how Kṛṣṇa teaches and demonstrates how to be a detached agent in the world.

3.3 – How, in Śaṅkara’s view, is Kṛṣṇa’s agency divine agency?

In this section I show how, in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*, Kṛṣṇa models appropriate, detached agency for Arjuna precisely by *being* a divine agent. I will argue this by asking: for Śaṅkara, how does Kṛṣṇa’s behaviour as the Lord model the type of agency he more broadly models to Arjuna? Moreover, how does Kṛṣṇa as divine agent teach Arjuna how to work towards detached agency? I will demonstrate that, for Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa’s divine agency is a key pedagogical tool used to model how to act in the world for Arjuna. In this way, pedagogy is shown to be a central part of Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedāntin theology.

To assess what Śaṅkara says about Kṛṣṇa’s agency in his *Gītābhāṣya*, I propose to use a version of Mohanty’s Nyāya-based sequence of the ‘incitement to action’ as an analytical framework. Mohanty notes that this sequence is generally accepted in Indian philosophy as representing the sequence of action:

⁵⁹ “*na māṃ*” *tāni* “*karmāṇi limpanti*” *dehādy-ārambhakatvenāhamkārābhāvāt* | “*na*” *ca teṣāṃ* “*karmanām phale me*” *mama* “*sprhā*” *trṣṇā* | *yeṣāṃ tu saṃsāriṇām ahaṃ kartety ābhimānaḥ karmasu sprhā tat-phaleṣu ca tān karmāṇi limpantīti yuktam* | *tad-abhāvān na māṃ karmāṇi limpantīti* | *evaṃ* “*yo*” *’nye* *’pi* “*mām*” *ātmatvena* “*abhijānāti*” *nāhaṃ kartā na me karma-phale sprheti* “*na karmabhir sa badhyate*” | *tasyāpi na dehādy-ārambhakāni karmāṇi bhavanti* ||

knowledge	desire	will to	motor effort	the action
<i>jñāna</i>	<i>cikīrṣā</i>	<i>pravṛtti</i>	<i>ceṣṭā or yatna</i>	<i>kārya</i> ⁶⁰

Although Mohanty’s sequence derives from a different school of thought (i.e. Nyāya), this is not necessarily problematic. While Śaṅkara and Nyāya take radically different ontological positions (non-realist and realist, respectively), at the conventional level only, there is a sense in which Advaita is realist.⁶¹ In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa acts in the world of rebirth, which belongs to the conventional realm. Śaṅkara accepts this and handles it in realist terms, on a conventional level. Given that the Nyāya sequence of action represents the main contemporary realist understanding of agency, I suggest that we use this model heuristically, to see if it sheds any light on who Kṛṣṇa is as an agent in the *Gītā*, as understood by Śaṅkara. This is not to say that Śaṅkara himself overtly uses this model in his commentary, but that it can function as a useful device.

I therefore analyse how Śaṅkara’s explanations of Kṛṣṇa’s agency might map onto the five moves in Mohanty’s sequence of action and how this is modelled to Arjuna. Earlier, we saw that many writers on desire and action in Indian philosophy contend that ‘action is motivated by desire’ is an analytic truth. My endeavour is to challenge this position by reassessing the notion of ‘desire’ itself, in terms of Mohanty’s sequence of action. I will then apply this to Śaṅkara’s view of Kṛṣṇa’s divine agency in the *Gītā*. I propose that using and reinterpreting Mohanty’s sequence as a framework for analysis offers us a different view of how Śaṅkara sees Kṛṣṇa’s agency in the *Gītā*, which i) rescues a different concept of agency for Advaita Vedānta, ii) moves us away from regarding Śaṅkara’s usual view of agency as problematic, and iii) demonstrates that Śaṅkara uses Kṛṣṇa’s divine agency as a key pedagogical tool.

3.3.1 – What is Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge (*jñāna*)?

Knowledge relevant to this theory of action primarily consists in the cognition that something is to be done (*kāryatājñāna*).⁶² To use Mohanty’s model, we must therefore relate Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge specifically to the cognition of ‘what is to be done’ (*kāryatā*). We can

⁶⁰ Mohanty, ‘*Dharma, imperatives and tradition*’, p.60.

⁶¹ For Śaṅkara’s view as to why external objects are required to explain experience, see Daniel H.H. Ingalls, ‘Śaṅkara’s Arguments Against the Buddhists’, *Philosophy East and West* 3.4 (1954):291-306.

⁶² Mohanty, ‘*Dharma, imperatives and tradition*’, p.60.

construe the knowledge Kṛṣṇa has on three levels. First, there is Kṛṣṇa’s (non-tautological) knowledge as the non-dual *brahman* that self is self.⁶³ Second, there is Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge as Lord of the cosmos that knowledge of the self *needs* to be taught. Third, there is Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge as manifest in human form that the teaching on the non-dual self is possible, i.e. it is possible for Arjuna to receive Kṛṣṇa’s teaching. It is on this third level that Kṛṣṇa has the knowledge he has *because* he knows he is nothing other than *brahman*, yet is able to teach Arjuna on a human level within the conventional world.

In Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*, Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge that the non-dual *brahman* simply is consciousness (self) is introduced soon after Kṛṣṇa takes on a body in 4.6, and prior to Arjuna being taught how to become a ‘figurative *yogin*’ in chapter 6. 4.24-5 is key for Śaṅkara. In his extended comment on 4.24, Śaṅkara uses the silver-nacre analogy in order to demonstrate that there is nothing other than *brahman*, while what is other than *brahman* is the result of misconception. Then, in his comment on 4.25, Śaṅkara quotes several Upaniṣadic passages to support this:

“In the fire of *brahman*”: the word *brahman* is that which is spoken of in sentences such as, ‘*Brahman* is reality, consciousness, infinite’ (*Tai. Up.* 2.1), ‘Consciousness, bliss, *brahman*’ (*Br. Up.* 3.9.28), ‘The *brahman* that is immediate and manifest – the self of all’ (*Br. Up.* 3.4.1), which is devoid of all *dharma* and *saṃsāra*, such as hunger, thirst, and so on, and which is without characteristics – as stated in, ‘Not this, not this’ (*Br. Up.* 4.4.22).⁶⁴

Br. Up. 3.4.1 equates *brahman* with the ‘self of all’. Śaṅkara quotes *Tai. Up.* 2.1 and *Br. Up.* 3.9.28 to show that *brahman*, being none other than the self, is knowledge/consciousness itself. He then quotes *neti neti* (‘not this, not this’) from *Br. Up.* 4.4.22 to demonstrate that this *brahman*, who is the self of all, is without qualities. Śaṅkara reiterates this at length in chapter 13, where Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna what exactly is to be

⁶³ Of course, Kṛṣṇa is strictly beyond ‘knowledge that’ but simply is that which is labelled as ‘*jñāna*’ or ‘*caitanya*’ when language has to be used. Śaṅkara makes this clear in his key passages on language elsewhere, e.g. *Taittirīya-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* 2.1.1, ‘*brahman* is reality, consciousness, infinite’ (*satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*) and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* 2.3.6, ‘Not this, not this’ (*neti neti*). See below.

⁶⁴ “*brahmāgnau*” *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma* (*Tai. Up.* 2.1) *vijñānam ānandaṃ brahma* (*Br. Up.* 3.9.28) *yat sākṣād aparokṣād brahma ya ātmā sarvāntaraḥ* (*Br. Up.* 3.4.1) *ity ādi vacanoktam aśanāyāpipāsādi-sarva-saṃsāra-dharma-varjitam neti neti* (*Br. Up.* 4.4.22) *iti nirastāśeṣa-viśeṣaṃ brahma-sabdenocyate*

known. In 13.12, refuting the position of his *jñānakarmasamuccayin* opponent once again, Śaṅkara has his opponent claiming that, if *brahman* is really *nirguṇa*, then he surely cannot be spoken of with qualities such as ‘being and non-being’ (*Gītā* 13.12). In reply, Śaṅkara claims that the object of knowledge (*jñeyam*) – *brahman* – is in fact only indicated by the negation of qualities: ‘For, in all the Upaniṣads, *brahman*, the object of knowledge, has been indicated apophatically in “not this, not this” (*Br. Up.* 4.4.22)’.⁶⁵

Kṛṣṇa, however, can be known in both manifest and unmanifest forms, as Śaṅkara makes clear in chapter 7, once he has outlined Arjuna’s path to becoming a ‘figurative *yogin*’ in chapter 6. Introducing 7.13, Śaṅkara explicitly says that Kṛṣṇa himself, being the self of all, is *nirguṇa*:

The world does not know me, the Supreme Lord, even though I am eternal, pure, knowing and free by my own nature, the self of all beings, *nirguṇa*, and the cause (i.e. destroyer) of burning up the seed of the defect of rebirth.⁶⁶

Here, Śaṅkara clearly identifies the self of all beings (*sarva-bhūtātmanāṃ*), which is *nirguṇa*, with ‘Me, the Supreme Lord’ (*māṃ parameśvaram*). Crucially Śaṅkara uses the term *nirguṇa* here, whilst presenting Kṛṣṇa as eternal, pure, knowing and free by nature (*nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāvaṃ*), indicating that Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge as Lord is grounded in his being *nirguṇa brahman*. As we saw earlier, Śaṅkara also uses the phrase *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* to describe Kṛṣṇa in his introduction. In fact, Śaṅkara uses this specific phrase in several further key passages in his commentary (4.5, 9.11, 15.17) – in 15.17, once more Śaṅkara states that Kṛṣṇa, the *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* one spoken of in the Upaniṣads (*ukto vedānteṣu*), is the supreme self (*paramātman*). So we can see that, for Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa himself is *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta*, ultimately as self of all and *nirguṇa*.

One of the strategies Śaṅkara uses actively to remind us of this involves Kṛṣṇa’s self-declarations. In 14.27, Śaṅkara takes Kṛṣṇa’s claim in the *Gītā*, “I am the *pratiṣṭhā* of

⁶⁵ *sarvāsu hy upaniṣatsu jñeyam brahma neti neti (Br. Up. 4.4.22) ...viśeṣa-pratiśedhenaiva nirdiśyate*

⁶⁶ *evaṃ-bhūtam api parameśvaram nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāvaṃ sarva-bhūtātmanāṃ nirguṇaṃ saṃsāra-doṣa-bīja-pradāha-kāraṇaṃ māṃ nābhijānāti jagad ity*

brahman”, whose meaning is much contested by commentators, and explains Kṛṣṇa’s ‘I’ (*aham*) as the ‘inner self’ (*pratyagātman*) in which *brahman*, the supreme self, dwells.⁶⁷ He continues:

The inner self is ascertained to be the dwelling-place of the supreme self whose nature is immortality etc through the perfect knowledge which is/as the supreme self... And the power of the Lord by which *brahman* manifests and acts for the purpose of favouring his devotees etc, that power which is indeed *brahman* is I – the meaning is that power and power-possessor are non-different.⁶⁸

So Kṛṣṇa, being none other than *nirguṇa brahman*, knows that he is none other than the self and manifests to favour his devotees as such.

Secondly, then, Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge as the cosmic Lord is that knowledge that the self is self *needs* (in the injunctive sense of ‘action which is to be done’ (*kārya*)) to be taught. Śaṅkara explains the need for the teaching in his introduction:

Over a long time, due to the arising of desire in its aspirants, when *dharma* was being overpowered by *adharma* caused by the understanding of discrimination being disregarded, and *adharma* was increasing, the first agent, Viṣṇu, known as Nārāyaṇa, wishing to maintain order in the world, came to be known as Kṛṣṇa, produced in Devakī by Vasudeva, for the sake of preserving the ‘earthly *brahman*’ of the *brāhmaṇas*.⁶⁹

Here, Śaṅkara explains that Kṛṣṇa provides himself with a body because the *need* for the teaching is apparent, due to the ascendancy of desire₁ which leads to misconception and keeps a person bound. So, like Arjuna who is drowning, others who are attached and

⁶⁷ “*brahmaṇaḥ*” *paramātmāno* “*hi*” *yasmāt* “*pratiṣṭhāḥam*” *pratitiṣṭhaty* *asminn* *iti* *pratiṣṭhāḥam* *pratyagātmā* | See Chapter 4, section 4.2.3.2.

⁶⁸ *amṛtādisvabhāvāsya paramātmānaḥ pratyagātmā pratiṣṭhā samyagjñānena paramātmatayā niścīyate...yayā ceśvaraśaktiyā bhaktānugrahādiprayojanāya brahma pratiṣṭhate pravartate sā śaktir brahmaivāḥam śaktiśaktimātor ananyatvādy abhiprāyaḥ* |

⁶⁹ *dirghēṇa kālenānuṣṭhātṛṇām kāmodbhavād dhīyamāna-viveka-vijñāna-hetukenādharmaṇa abhibhūyamāne dharme pravardhamāne ca adharme jagataḥ sthitiṃ paripipālayiṣuḥ sa ādi-kartā nārāyaṇākhyo viṣṇur bhaumasya brahmaṇo brāhmaṇatvasya rakṣaṇārthaṃ devakyāṃ vasudevād aṃśena kṛṣṇaḥ kila sambabhūva* ||

entrapped in *samsāra* require a teacher. In response to this, Śaṅkara explains that it is precisely the cosmic Lord, the ‘first agent’ (*ādi-kartā*), who ‘came to be as Kṛṣṇa’ (*kṛṣṇaḥ kila sambabhūva*). This clearly demonstrates that for Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa, as cosmic Lord, is the one who knows that the teaching that self is self *needs* to be given. Kṛṣṇa thus models divine agency at two levels here: as ‘first agent’ in the form of Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa, who establishes and creates, and as divine agent in the form of Kṛṣṇa as manifest human, who models divine agency for the sake of teaching.

The need for the teaching is reiterated in a crucial verse, just before Kṛṣṇa takes on a body in 4.6. In the preceding verse, Śaṅkara explains that Arjuna ‘does not know’ (*na vettha*), because his knowledge is obstructed by *dharma* and *adharmā*. Then, Śaṅkara explains that Kṛṣṇa *does* ‘know’ in his gloss of 4.5:

Besides, “O scorcher of enemies, I know”, I possess an unobstructed power of knowledge, because by my own nature I am eternal, pure, knowing and free.⁷⁰

Śaṅkara’s gloss of ‘I know’ with *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* patently demonstrates that, in his view, Kṛṣṇa has the knowledge he has *because* he is the eternal, pure, knowing and free Lord. As Kṛṣṇa manifests himself in the world in the very next verse, Śaṅkara’s gloss shows that Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge as manifest human is grounded in his knowledge as cosmic Lord – who knows that the teaching that self is self is needed. This is reiterated in 4.7 where Śaṅkara explains in his gloss that Kṛṣṇa takes on a body because of the decline of *dharma*:

“O scion of the Bhārata dynasty, whenever there is decline”, loss, “of *dharma*” consisting of the social groups and stages of life of living beings, which leads straight to the goal of worldly success (*abhyudaya*) and the highest good (*niḥśreyasa*), and “increase”, rise, “of *adharmā*, then I manifest myself”, through *māyā*.⁷¹

⁷⁰ *ahaṃ punar nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāvatvād anāvāraṇa-jñāna-śaktir iti “vedāham” | he “parantapa”*

⁷¹ “*yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir hānir varṇāśramādi-lakṣaṇasya prāṇinām abhyudaya-niḥśreyasa-sādhanasya “bhavati bhārata abhyutthānam” udbhavo “adharmasya tadātmānaṃ sṛjāmy ahaṃ” māyayā*

Here, the *Gītā* has Kṛṣṇa addressing Arjuna and stating that he manifests himself in the world because of *dharma*'s decline. Śaṅkara reintroduces his twofold approach to *dharma* here, indicating once more that following *dharma* can lead to the 'highest good' (*nihśreyasa*), not just worldly success. Kṛṣṇa as the cosmic Lord knows that, for this, the teaching that self is self is required, Arjuna first requiring the teaching on how to act in a detached way.

Thirdly, Kṛṣṇa's knowledge as manifest human in the world is knowing that giving the teaching of the knowledge that self is self is possible. Glossing 9.11, Śaṅkara explains that Kṛṣṇa in his embodied form is fundamentally still the self of all:

“Not knowing my supreme existence”, my supreme reality as the self which is like space, although more pervasive than space, as “the Supreme Lord of beings”, the great Lord of all beings who is one's own self, “fools”, the non-discriminating, “disrespect”, disregard “me” although I am by my own nature eternal, pure, knowing and free, the self of all beings, and “have taken on a human body” relating to a human, i.e. when I act with a human body.⁷²

Here, Śaṅkara directly glosses Kṛṣṇa's 'me', in terms of taking on a body, with *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* – the exact phrase used to directly describe both *nirguṇa brahman* and Kṛṣṇa as cosmic Lord in his true nature. For Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa's knowledge as manifest human is grounded in his knowledge as the cosmic Lord, and ultimately his knowledge/undifferentiated consciousness as the non-dual *brahman* who is the self of all.

We have already seen that 7.13 is a key verse for this. Shortly after, in 7.18 Śaṅkara explains who it is that can attain this knowledge of the self:

Why is this? Because the “one who has knowledge” is the “very self”, not different from me. This is “my thought”. “For”, with a “concentrated

⁷² *evaṃ māṃ nitya-śuddha-buddhamukta-svabhāvaṃ sarvajñaṃ sarva-jantūnām ātmānam api santam “avajānanty” avajānāṃ paribhavaṃ kurvanti “māṃ mūḍhā” avivekinaḥ | “mānuṣīm” manuṣyasambandhinīm “tanuṃ” deham “āśritam” manuṣyadehena vyavaharantamity etat paraṃ prakṛṣṭam “bhāvaṃ param” ātma-tattvaṃ ākāśa-kalpam ākāśād apy antaratamam “ajānanto mama bhūta-maheśvaraṃ” sarva-bhūtānāṃ mahāntam īśvaraṃ svātmānam*

mind”, having his mind focused, “I am Vāsudeva, the Lord, and none other”, that one who has knowledge “is set on” the path, he is set upon accomplishing/going to “me alone”, to the supreme *brahman*; who am the “unsurpassed goal” to be attained.⁷³

Śaṅkara’s gloss makes clear that the goal is non-dual realisation, and that knowledge that self is self is what makes this goal attainable. His comment builds on the many self-declarations Kṛṣṇa makes throughout the *Gītā*. In this verse, Kṛṣṇa says that ‘the one who has knowledge’ (*jñānin*) is the ‘very self’ (*ātmaiva*). First Śaṅkara glosses ‘very self’ with ‘not different from Me’ (*nānyaḥ mattaḥ*). Then, he explains that ‘the one who has knowledge’ is absorbed in the idea, ‘I am Vāsudeva, the Lord, and none other’, picking up Kṛṣṇa’s comment in *Gītā* 7.19 that ‘the one who has knowledge’ realises that ‘Vāsudeva is all (*sarvaṃ*)’.⁷⁴ For Ram-Prasad, *Gītābhāṣya* 7.18-19 is an example of the ‘self’ acting as the ‘linguistic signifier of the subject that renders inquiry...possible’.⁷⁵ Ram-Prasad argues that, in these verses, Kṛṣṇa is ‘centered by Śaṅkara through the identification with self’.⁷⁶ For Ram-Prasad, Śaṅkara reads Kṛṣṇa expressed as a personal god as ‘the mapping of self on self’.⁷⁷ Through Kṛṣṇa’s self-identification as self, the knower recognises his own identity as such.

I propose that there is, in addition, a further pedagogical layer to Śaṅkara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s self-declarations. In the example above in 7.18, Kṛṣṇa’s self-declaration is part of a progressive teaching on divine agency, modelled to Arjuna. Read in the context of Śaṅkara’s first six chapters, we can see that Śaṅkara uses Kṛṣṇa’s self-declarations to model the knowledge Arjuna can progressively work towards attaining. The very fact that the journey to knowledge is clarified here by Śaṅkara as being set ‘on a path’ indicates that Kṛṣṇa models who Arjuna *could* become, once he progresses to knowledge. This modelling is set up in chapter 2 where Śaṅkara lays the ground for Kṛṣṇa’s teaching to be given. Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa specifically for a description of the one who is ‘firm in knowledge’

⁷³ *tatkasmādityāha | “jñānī” “tvātmaiva” nānyo matta iti “me” mama “mattaḥ” niścayaḥ | “āsthita” āroḍhuṃ pravṛttaḥ “sa” jñānī “hi” yasmād aham eva bhagavān vāsudevo nānyo ’smītyevaṃ “yuktātmā” samāhita cittāḥ san “māmeva” paraṃ brahma gantavyam “anuttamāṃ gatim” gantuṃ pravṛtta ityarthāḥ ||*

⁷⁴ *bahūnāṃ janmanām ante jñānavān māṃ prapadyate | vāsudevaḥ sarvaṃ iti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ ||*

⁷⁵ Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, p.8-9.

⁷⁶ p.9.

⁷⁷ p.9.

(*jñāna-niṣṭhā*) in 2.55. In reply, Śaṅkara explains Kṛṣṇa’s description of the person ‘firm in knowledge’ by stating that the instruction on ‘foundation in knowledge’ is to be provided *both* for the fourth stage renouncer, and for the *karma-yogin*. Kṛṣṇa as divine agent both teaches and models this knowledge.

3.3.2 – How can we see Kṛṣṇa’s desire (*cikīrṣā*)?

The next ‘step’ in Mohanty’s sequence of action is *cikīrṣā*, which he translates as ‘desire’.⁷⁸ This poses Śaṅkara with the clear problem of Kṛṣṇa being attached to the results of his actions, if we interpret Kṛṣṇa’s *cikīrṣā* as desire₁. However, I propose we can read *cikīrṣā* in terms of desire₂, adopting Framarin’s approach (outlined in section 3.1.6.2). As such, we can understand the ‘desireless action’ Kṛṣṇa models to Arjuna in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya* as action that is without desire₁ – which it must be according to the *Gītā* itself – but not necessarily action that is without purpose.

As non-dual *brahman*, Kṛṣṇa is *nirguṇa*, and therefore has no desire or purpose. However, as cosmic Lord, Kṛṣṇa does have a purpose – to show kindness, or to act for ‘the welfare of the world’ (*lokasaṃgraha*), as we saw in the *Gītābhāṣya*’s initial drowning passage:

Although he (the Lord) has no purpose of his own, *through an intention to show kindness to beings*, he taught the twofold *dharma* of the Veda to Arjuna who was drowning in the ocean of grief and delusion. For *dharma*, grasped and followed by those who have an abundance of (good) qualities, will spread (literally, ‘go’) widely.⁷⁹

The term *anujighṛkṣā* (‘desire to show kindness’) is the desiderative of a causative. Grammatically, the desiderative mood indicates ‘wanting to’. Mohanty’s term ‘*cikīrṣā*’⁸⁰ is also in the desiderative mood, which grammatically expresses desire. However, there is a difference between a desiderative grammatical form in the Sanskrit, and a problematic

⁷⁸ Mohanty, ‘*Dharma*, imperatives and tradition’, p.62.

⁷⁹ *sva-prayojanābhāve ’pi bhūtānujighṛkṣayā vaidikaṃ hi dharmā-dvayam arjunāya śoka-mohā-mahodadhau nimagnāyopadideśa guṇādhikair hi grhīto ’nuṣṭhīyamānās ca dharmāḥ pracayaṃ gamiṣyatīti ||*

⁸⁰ Root √*kr*, ‘to do/make’.

attaching of desire in the case of Kṛṣṇa performing actions.⁸¹ Given this difference, if we read Kṛṣṇa's *cikīrṣā* as desire₂, we see that Kṛṣṇa can have a purpose that need not have desire₁ embedded in it. In the above passage, Kṛṣṇa's purpose as cosmic Lord is to 'show kindness', while his purpose as manifest human is to give Arjuna the teaching on the twofold *dharma*. Kṛṣṇa's purpose as cosmic Lord is reiterated later in Śaṅkara's gloss on 9.29:

“I am equal”, the same “towards all beings. To me, there is none to be hated, none dear”. I am like fire: as fire does not remove cold from those who stand at a distance, but removes it from those who creep near, similarly I show kindness to devotees, and not others. “But those who worship me”, the Lord, “with devotion, they exist in me” by their own nature – they do not exist in me due to my desire.⁸² “And I also” naturally “exist in them”, not in others. Therefore there is no hatred towards them.⁸³

This gloss shows that, in the way Kṛṣṇa deals with the cosmic order of things, he is without desire₁ as *rāga* (*na mama rāga-nimittam vartante*: ‘They do not exist in me due to my desire’). Nonetheless, while Kṛṣṇa as cosmic Lord is without desire₁ for Śaṅkara, he is not without purpose, which is to show kindness to his devotees through teaching in his human form. This is important, as it grounds how Kṛṣṇa acts as teacher in how he acts as cosmic Lord. This gives us a tangible way of understanding Kṛṣṇa's desireless action without the need for desire₁ to play a necessary role in motivating action.

Once we reach chapter 4, Śaṅkara stresses how Arjuna should act in a detached way, and without desire₁. In his extended explanation of 4.19, returning to the twofold *dharma*, Śaṅkara speaks specifically of the actions of those who follow each path without desire₁:

If they are performed by one engaged in actions (*pravṛttena*), then they are for the welfare of the world, and if they are done by one who has withdrawn from actions (*nivṛttena*), then they are only for the purpose of

⁸¹ Cf Nicholas Lash, ‘The purification of desire’ in J.J. Lipner (ed.) *The Fruits of Our Desiring: an enquiry into the ethics of the Bhagavad Gītā for our time* (Calgary: Bayeux Arts, 1997), pp.1-10.

⁸² Gambhirananda's translation, ‘due to my love’, misses the point.

“*samas*” *tulyo* “*haṃ sarva-bhūteṣu | na me dveṣyo 'sti na priyaḥ*” | *agnivad aham dūra-sthānām yathāgniḥ śītam nāpanayati samīpam upasarpatām apanayati | tathāhaṃ bhaktān anugrḥṇāmi netarān | “ye bhajanti tu mām” īśvaram “bhaktyā mayi te” svabhāvata eva na mama rāga-nimittam vartante | “teṣu cāpy aham” svabhāvata eva varte netareṣu | naitāvatā teṣu dveṣo mam ||*

maintaining the body, [for the one] “whose actions are burnt in the fire of knowledge”.⁸⁴

4.19 of the *Gītā* itself explains that actions performed by one who is learned while still embodied are ‘devoid of desires and their motivations’ (*kāma-saṅkalpa-varjitāḥ*). Importantly, *saṅkalpa* can mean the motivation or intention to perform a ritual action for its outcome. Śaṅkara distances ‘the knower of *brahman*’ from this. For such a one following the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*, actions are performed only for the welfare of the world (*loka-saṅgrahārthaṃ*). For the one following the path of *nivṛtti-dharma*, all actions have been renounced, and are therefore performed only to maintain the body (*jīvana-mātrārthaṃ*) till death. Neither acts out of desire₁. This tells us that Arjuna, a man of action following the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*, can continue to act in the world in a detached way for the welfare of the world, without motivation for results or desire₁, but not necessarily without purpose. *Gītā* 12.4 emphasises that those who act for the welfare of all beings attain Kṛṣṇa.⁸⁵ Śaṅkara corroborates this by citing 7.18, ‘The one who has knowledge is the very self’, such *lokasaṅgraha* implying that Arjuna’s acting for this purpose, but without desire₁, is key to him attaining liberation. To attain this, in 4.19, Kṛṣṇa is not suggesting that Arjuna becomes a literal renouncer. Instead, he is modelling behaviour in the *dharmic* context of the world for Arjuna so that Arjuna can progress towards realisation, as is made clear in 12.4, where one who is ‘of this kind’ will ‘attain me alone’.

3.3.3 – How can we see Kṛṣṇa’s ‘will to’ (*pravṛtti*)?⁸⁶

So far, we have established that Kṛṣṇa’s *cikīrṣā* can be understood in terms of purpose existing without desire₁, therefore retaining the coherence of Kṛṣṇa as divine agent who acts in the world to model desireless action for Arjuna. The next step in Mohanty’s sequence of action is *pravṛtti* (‘will to’). For Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa has no ‘will to’ action, on the level that he is non-dual *brahman*, and none other than the self. However, Kṛṣṇa clearly has a ‘will to’ i) establish *dharma* as the cosmic Lord, and ii) maintain/re-establish *dharma* as manifest

⁸⁴ *pravṛttena cel loka-saṅgrahārthaṃ nivṛttena cej jīvana-mātrārthaṃ taṃ “jñānāgni-dagdha-karmāṇaṃ” ... |*

⁸⁵ “*prāpnuvanti mām eva sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ*”

⁸⁶ Śaṅkara of course uses the term *pravṛtti* in a related but different sense when talking about *pravṛtti*- and *nivṛtti-dharma* as the two paths of the *Gītā*.

human. We learn this right from the beginning in his introduction which is worth quoting now at length:

The Lord, having manifested the world and desiring its stability, having manifested the Prajāpatis, such as Marīci, in the beginning, caused them to grasp the *dharma* characterised by action. And then, having produced others like Sanaka and Sanandana, he caused them to grasp the *dharma* of non-action, characterised by knowledge and renunciation.... Over a long time, due to the arising of desire in its aspirants, when *dharma* was being overpowered by *adharma* caused by the understanding of discrimination being disregarded, and *adharma* was increasing, the first agent, Viṣṇu, known as Nārāyaṇa, wishing to maintain order in the world, came to be as Kṛṣṇa...⁸⁷

A little later, Śaṅkara continues:

Although this *dharma* characterised by action is enjoined with the end/goal (*artha*) of worldly success aimed at the social groups and stages of life, and is the cause for attaining the abode of the gods, when it is practised with the mind on worship of the Lord, free from a view to the results, it (this *dharma*) is for the purification of the mind, and for the one with purified mind, it is indeed to be understood (*pratipadyate*) as being the cause of the highest good, through attaining fitness for foundation in knowledge and by being the cause of the arising of knowledge. And therefore intending/having in view this aim (*artha*), it is said: “Having placed actions in *brahman*,” those “*yogins*” with restrained minds “who have control/victory over their senses, perform action for the purification of the self, having abandoned the connection (with results)”.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *sa bhagavān sṛṣṭvedaṃ jagat tasya ca sthitiṃ cikīrṣur marīcyādīn agre sṛṣṭvā prajāpatīn pravṛttilakṣaṇaṃ dharmam grāhayānāsa vedoktam | tato 'nyās ca sanaksanandanādīn utpādya nivṛttidharmaṃ jñānavairāgyalakṣaṇaṃ grāhayāmāsa | dvividho hi vedokto dharmah pravṛttilakṣaṇo nivṛttilakṣaṇas ca...dīrghena kālenānuṣṭātrīnām kāmodbhavād dhīyamānavivekavijñānahetukenādharmeṇādhībhūyamāne dharme pravardhamāne cādharṃ jagataḥ sthitiṃ paripilāsayiṣuḥ sa ādikartā nārāyaṇākho viṣṇur...kṛṣṇaḥ kila sambabhūva |*

⁸⁸ *abhyudayārtho 'pi yaḥ pravṛtti-lakṣaṇo dharmo varṇān āsramāṃś coddīśya vihitaḥ sa ca devādi-sthāna-prāpti-hetur api sann īśvarārpaṇa-buddhyānuṣṭhīyamānaḥ sattva-śuddhaye bhavati phalābhisandhi-varjitah śuddha-sattvasya ca jñāna-niṣṭhāyogyatā-prāpti-dvāreṇa jñānotpatti-hetutvena ca niḥśreyasa-hetutvam api*

In this passage, Śaṅkara explicitly refers to Kṛṣṇa as cosmic Lord causing the first beings to grasp the *pravṛtti-dharma* ‘laid down’ or ‘enjoined’ (*vihita*) in the Veda. Kṛṣṇa’s will to action, as the Lord, is in turn to lay down the correct interpretation of *pravṛtti-dharma* in the *Gītā*.⁸⁹ The full passage here shows how Śaṅkara outlines Kṛṣṇa’s will to action as manifest human as re-establishing the teaching given in the Veda, not only how to act according to *varṇāśramadharmā*⁹⁰ and how to attain heavens, but how to act in a purificatory way, so that you can understand the highest good (*niḥśreyasa*), which is knowing that *brahman* is none other than the self. As such, Śaṅkara’s understanding of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching as manifest human here is in accordance with the Veda, particularly its *jñānakāṇḍa* (section on knowledge). The reason that Kṛṣṇa can give the teaching on *pravṛtti-dharma* is therefore not just that he takes on a body in the world. Rather Kṛṣṇa can give this teaching because, as the cosmic Lord, he is the one who establishes the four *varṇas* (4.4), and so on. In other words, Kṛṣṇa as cosmic Lord establishes the system on which he is giving the teaching, and then models how to operate within it in his embodied form. This is precisely how Kṛṣṇa models how to be an agent and act within the world, for Śaṅkara. Kṛṣṇa’s will to action can therefore be construed on three levels. As non-dual *brahman*, Kṛṣṇa has no will to action, as he is none other than *brahman*. As cosmic Lord, Kṛṣṇa’s will to action is to establish the Vedic *dharma* he re-lays down in the *Gītā*. As manifest human, Kṛṣṇa’s will to action is to give the specific teaching on how to operate within and through the *dharmic* system.

For Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa’s will to action as manifest human clearly underlies what Arjuna, as a ‘figurative *yogin*’, is meant to do and understand in order to progress. At the end of his commentary (in 18.66), Śaṅkara explicitly states that scriptural injunctions to act are valid for the one who seeks liberation:

Indeed, the Vedic texts prescribing actions are not an invalid means of knowledge because, by producing current consecutive inclinations by

pratipadyate | tathā cemam evārtham abhisandhāya vaksyati “brahmaṇy ādhāya karmāṇi” (5.10).
yatacittā” (5.7) *jitendriyāḥ | “yoginaḥ karma kurvanti saṅgaṃ tyaktvātma-śuddhaye”* (5.11) *iti ||*

⁸⁹ In 15.15, the *Gītā* refers to Kṛṣṇa as *vedāntakṛt*, maker of the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara rather explains him as *vedāntārthasampradāyakarṭṛ*, maker of the correct teaching of the meaning of the Upaniṣads/Vedānta.

⁹⁰ Duties associated with the ideal social groups.

eradicating previous consecutive inclinations, they are meant for producing the will (*pravṛtti*) to turn towards the inmost self.⁹¹

Here, Śaṅkara makes it clear that scriptural injunctions are indeed permitted, prior to realisation. This is because, by acting according to scriptural injunctions, the seeker of liberation will gradually purify the mind, which later leads to knowledge of the self. To be clear, at the very end of chapter 16 of the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna that the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) for what is to be done and not done is the scripture (*śāstra*). In *Gītā* 16.24 Kṛṣṇa explains, ‘After understanding (your) duty as presented by scriptural injunction, you ought to perform (your duty) here’.⁹² Glossing this verse, Śaṅkara writes, “‘Here’ indicates the realm of the performance of ritual action’.⁹³ As Ram-Prasad points out, Śaṅkara takes Kṛṣṇa to be ‘[drawing] the boundaries within which action is to occur’.⁹⁴ Ram-Prasad explains that, for Śaṅkara, ‘here’ means in this conventional world, which is where scriptural injunctions are performed by the seeker of liberation.⁹⁵ For Arjuna, who still acts in the world, his will to action through scriptural injunctions is valid in the conventional world. However, as Śaṅkara reiterates throughout his commentary, it is *through* following scriptural injunctions, acting without attachment, and dedicating actions to Kṛṣṇa that Arjuna can progress towards liberation. Kṛṣṇa’s divine agency, in re-establishing the *dharmic* system within which Arjuna operates, therefore has a pedagogical function for Śaṅkara – Arjuna is led towards the goal (*niḥśreyasa*) as a man of action who is taught how to progress within this system by following his own *dharma* according to scriptural injunctions.

3.3.4 – How can we see Kṛṣṇa’s motor effort (*yatna*)?

Although Kṛṣṇa as non-dual *brahman* clearly does not perform motor effort, he does perform motor effort as both cosmic Lord and manifest human. As cosmic Lord, Kṛṣṇa’s motor effort establishes the four *varṇas* (4.4) and the *dharmic* system within which people operate in the conventional world. As manifest human, Kṛṣṇa’s motor effort is to provide

⁹¹ *na caivaṃ karma-vidhi-śruter aprāmāṇyam pūrva-pūrva-pravṛtti-nirodhenottarottarāpūrva-pravṛtti-jananasya pratyagātmābhimukhyena pravṛtṭy-utpādanārthatvāt*

⁹² *jñātvā śāstra-vidhānoktaṃ karma kartum ihārhasi*

⁹³ “*iha*” *iti karmādhikārahūmipradarśanārtham iti*

⁹⁴ Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, p.99.

⁹⁵ p.99.

himself with a body, to maintain this *dharmic* system and to be able to teach Arjuna and others, as we saw from the beginning of Śaṅkara's commentary earlier: 'That first agent, Viṣṇu, known as Nārāyaṇa, wishing to maintain order in the universe, came to be as Kṛṣṇa...'⁹⁶

Importantly, Śaṅkara goes on to draw a clear parallel between the relationship of Kṛṣṇa as Lord and *māyā* at the cosmic level, and Kṛṣṇa and his individuated body at the individual level:

The Lord, always possessed of divine knowledge, sovereignty, potentiality, power, might and splendour⁹⁷ controls *māyā*, composed of the three *guṇas*,⁹⁸ which belongs to him as Viṣṇu, the first cause. Although he is by nature eternal, pure, knowing and free, not born and imperishable, the Lord of all beings, he appears as if he possesses a body through his own *māyā*, as though he is born, acting for the sake of the world.⁹⁹

Here Śaṅkara says, 'as though he possesses a body...as though he is born' (*dehavān iva...jāta iva*). But, as we have seen above, although Kṛṣṇa takes on a body in the conventional world, he is actually the eternally free Lord. It is only 'through his own *māyā*' (*sva-māyayā*) that it *appears* as though he has a body. This is the key difference between Kṛṣṇa's body, and the body of the person bound in *samsāra*. Kṛṣṇa freely provides himself with a body as a result of his own choosing, whereas the body of the person bound in *samsāra* is the result of their past actions. Both need a body to perform motor effort. But whereas Kṛṣṇa merely needs a body to be able to speak, appear present and guide Arjuna towards liberation, Arjuna, like other *samsārins*, requires a body as the locus of experience through which to work out his *karmic* inheritance and pursue the path towards the liberation Kṛṣṇa teaches.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ *jagataḥ sthitim paripipālayiṣuḥ sa ādi-kartā nārāyaṇākhyo viṣṇur...kṛṣṇaḥ kila sambabhūva* ||

⁹⁷ The six qualities of Viṣṇu in most Vaiṣṇava theologies. As we saw in Chapter 2, Śaṅkara's numerous references to these six qualities in his *Gītābhāṣya* suggest the devotional audience he would have been seeking to draw in.

⁹⁸ For a definition of the three *guṇas*, see Chapter 4 n.2.

⁹⁹ *sa ca bhagavān jñānaiśvarya-śakti-bala-vīrya-tejobhiḥ sadā sampannas triguṇātmikāṃ vaiṣṇavīm svām māyāṃ mūla-prakṛtiṃ vaśīkṛtya ajo 'vyayo bhūtānām īśvaro nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāvo 'pi san sva-māyayā dehavān iva jāta iva lokānugrahaṃ kurvan lakṣyate* ||

¹⁰⁰ As in Nyāya. See Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation in Classical Indian Thought* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.66.

Kṛṣṇa’s function as embodied teacher in the conventional world is developed in 4.6-7.¹⁰¹ Śaṅkara’s position is grounded in the *Gītā* itself, as his comment on 4.6 shows. He remarks on the Lord being born ‘as it were’ (*iva*):

“Although I am birthless, not subject to change”, although I myself have an undiminishing power of knowledge, “although being the Lord”, the natural commander “of all beings”, from Brahmā to a tuft of grass and so on, by controlling my own *prakṛti*, the *māyā* of Viṣṇu made up of the three *guṇas*, under whose control exists the whole world, and deluded by the world one does not know one’s own self – Vāsudeva – “by controlling my own *prakṛti*, I come to be”, appear to become embodied, as though born, “by my own *māyā*”, not in reality like an ordinary person.¹⁰²

Śaṅkara reiterates here what he stated in his introduction. Kṛṣṇa takes on a body ‘by [his] own *māyā*’ (*ātma-māyayā*) as in the original *Gītā* verse, which Śaṅkara then glosses with, ‘not in reality like an ordinary person’ (*na paramārthato lokavat*). Kṛṣṇa has no need for a body for the working out of *karmic* results, but *does* have a need to provide himself with a body to which he is not attached in order to teach. He thus models to Arjuna that having a body performing ‘motor effort’ is not in itself binding; the delusion of misidentification with it is.

Kṛṣṇa also shows his divine agency to Arjuna in his cosmic disclosure in chapter 11. Kṛṣṇa emphasises how difficult it is for him to be seen in this way (11.52-53). According to *Gītābhāṣya* 11.54, Arjuna then asks: ‘Again, how is it possible [for you to be seen]?’¹⁰³ In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa replies, “Through one-pointed devotion (*ananyayā bhaktyā*)”. Śaṅkara explains that such devotion, never focused elsewhere than on the Lord, is the point where nothing other than Vāsudeva is perceived by the organs,¹⁰⁴ a model for Arjuna’s own *yatna*.

¹⁰¹ Hirst, ‘The Place of *Bhakti*’, p.137.

¹⁰² “*ajo ’pi*” *janma-rahito ’pi* “*san*” *tathā* “*avyayātma*” *akṣiṇa-jñāna-śakti-svabhāvo ’pi san tathā* “*bhūtānām*” *brahmādi-stamba-paryantānām* “*īśvara*” *īśana-śīlo* “*api san*” | *prakṛtiṃ svām mama vaiṣṇavīm māyām triguṇātmikām yasyā vaśe sarvam idaṃ jagad vartate* | *yayā mohitaṃ jagat sat svam ātmānaṃ vāsudevaṃ na jānāti* | *tām* “*prakṛtiṃ svām adhiṣṭhāya*” *vaśīkṛtya* “*sambhavāmi*” *dehavān iva bhavāmi jāta iva* “*ātma-māyayā*” *ātmano māyayā na paramārthato lokavat* ||

¹⁰³ *kathaṃ punaḥ śakya*

¹⁰⁴ *bhagavato ’nyatra prthaṅ na kadācid api yā bhavati sā tv ananyā bhaktiḥ sarvair api karaṇair vāsudevād anyan nopalabhyate*

By such devotion and by means of Kṛṣṇa’s universal form (*viśvarūpaprakāra*), which Arjuna has been privileged to see, Kṛṣṇa can be known, seen as he really is, and entered – as liberation.¹⁰⁵ Śaṅkara also expands the *Gītā*’s references to one-pointed devotion elsewhere. In 8.22, he says it is ‘characterised by knowledge which is one-pointed and relates to the self’ (*jñāna-lakṣaṇayānanyayā ātma-viśayayā*).

In 14.26, Śaṅkara states that *both* the literal fourth stage *sannyāsin* and a person of action¹⁰⁶ can become fit for ‘becoming *brahman*’ – which Śaṅkara glosses as ‘liberation’ – through unwavering devotion to Kṛṣṇa.¹⁰⁷ So Arjuna, a *karma-yogin*, can progress towards liberation by performing one-pointed devotion to Kṛṣṇa, gradually moving from being individuated (by perceiving difference with his sense-organs) to being de-individuated (by knowing that he is none other than the self).

3.3.5 – What then is Kṛṣṇa’s action (*kārya*)?

In Mohanty’s model of the ‘incitement to action’, *kāryatā*, the action which is to be done, is the outcome of the causal sequence of the previous four steps (variously interpreted by different Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā thinkers). I argue that the form of the word *kārya*, ‘what is to be done’, does not limit Kṛṣṇa’s action, but in fact supports my argument that Kṛṣṇa can have a desire₂ (in the sense of purpose (*icchā*) rather than *rāga*) that does generate his volition to put in the mental and bodily effort which culminates in the action to be done. For Kṛṣṇa, that action is primarily to teach. I have argued that this action has a twofold ‘purpose’: i) to give the teaching on non-attached agency for Arjuna, and ii) to act as a model for *how* Arjuna can become a detached agent: through knowing Kṛṣṇa, acting with detachment, and practising one-pointed devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

Nonetheless, while Kṛṣṇa’s action as cosmic Lord and manifest human is to teach Arjuna about non-attached agency and to show and model it respectively, as non-dual *brahman* Kṛṣṇa does not perform any actions whatsoever. In chapter 13 Śaṅkara focuses on the fact that the non-dual *brahman*, the self which is to be known, does not really act at all, although

¹⁰⁵ “*draṣṭuṃ*” *tattvena tattvataḥ* “*praveṣṭuṃ ca*” *mokṣaṃ ca gantuṃ*

¹⁰⁶ *yatiḥ karmī vā*

¹⁰⁷ *bhūyāya brahma-bhavanāya mokṣāya* “*kalpate*” *samartho bhavati*

it seems to do so in each person (each individuated locus of consciousness, as we have called it above). In his extended comment on 13.14, Śaṅkara writes:

The idea is that that which is to be known (*jñeyam*) appears as though it is performing action, due to the qualities and functions of all the organs. As is said in the Upaniṣadic text, “It moves, as it were, it shakes, as it were” (*Br. Up. 4.3.7*).^a

Nevertheless, on what basis is it not understood to actually be performing action? Hence, he (Kṛṣṇa) says: It is “without all the sense organs (*indriya*)”, without any instruments.¹⁰⁸

Śaṅkara has just specified that *indriya* includes all instruments of knowledge – external and internal organs, as well as *buddhi* (intellect) and *manas* (mind) – in other words the entire conglomerate of the individuated agent superimposed on consciousness and through which consciousness appears to act. Now, he uses the word *iva* (‘as it were/as though’) to demonstrate how the non-dual *brahman*, the self devoid of all such instruments, merely appears to perform actions – just as in 4.6 Śaṅkara says that Kṛṣṇa, as non-dual *brahman*, merely appears to have a body that performs actions.

This key notion is fundamental to Śaṅkara’s pedagogical interpretation. Throughout his commentary, Śaṅkara hints that Arjuna should renounce all actions, as they are not really actions anyway. Right from 5.12, Śaṅkara states that Arjuna can attain liberation progressively. He comments, ‘The sentence is completed (by the idea) that [liberation is attained]¹⁰⁹ through the stages of the purification of the mind, the rise of knowledge, the renunciation of all actions, and foundation in knowledge’.¹¹⁰ So Arjuna, by acting according to his *dharma* in a detached way, with one-pointed devotion, can attain purification of the mind, which is followed by the rise of knowledge, and then the renunciation of all actions. In his extended comment on 13.2, Śaṅkara explains that, for the one who has knowledge, there are no actions anyway:

¹⁰⁸ *sarvendriya-guṇābhāsaṃ sarvendriya-vyāpārair vyāpṛtam iva taj jñeyam ity arthaḥ | dhyāyatīva lelāyatīva (Br. Up. 4.3.7) iti śruteḥ | kasmāt punaḥ kāraṇān na vyāpṛtam eveti grhyata ity atah āha “sarvendriya-vivarjitaṃ sarva-karaṇa-rahitaṃ ity arthaḥ ||*

¹⁰⁹ Śaṅkara glosses *śantiṃ* (‘peace, indifference to pleasure or pain’) with *mokṣākhyāṃ* (‘called liberation’).

¹¹⁰ *sattva-śuddhi-jñāna-prāpti-sarva-karma-saṃnyāsa-jñāna-niṣṭhā-krameṇeti vākya-śeṣaḥ*

For the knower who has seen the changeless self, engagement in action is impossible due to the absence of desire for results. So, when the activities of the combination of the body and organs end, it is figuratively called ‘renunciation’.¹¹¹

Here, Śaṅkara speaks of the ‘enlightened’ (*vivekī*) person who he also describes as ‘rare’: ‘...discrimination arises only in some enlightened, rare person. For this rare one, among many people, at this moment comes to possess discrimination’.¹¹² However, Śaṅkara’s use of the term ‘figurative’ in relation to the enlightened, rare person’s non-action works in a similar way, but in a different direction, to his calling Arjuna a ‘figurative *yogin*’ in chapter 6. The ‘rare’ person, the enlightened person who has nothing left to renounce because he is unattached, is a ‘figurative renouncer’ as he is still said to renounce (as a renouncer) to show that he does not become re-attached. Arjuna, not yet a *yogin* or renouncer, is called one proleptically, as we saw above, to motivate him to give up attachment to results. Indeed, even for Arjuna as a *karma-yogin*, once knowledge is achieved through stages, there is no action to be done, due to the self no longer being identified with the body.

This is reiterated in Śaṅkara’s gloss of 18.73:

Now, “I stand” under your teaching “with (my) doubts eradicated. I shall follow your words”. By your grace I have achieved the goal. The notion is, there is nothing to be done, as such, for me.¹¹³

Here, Arjuna specifically tells Kṛṣṇa that he has reached the point where he is no longer deluded, as he has realised the self. Śaṅkara emphasises that the idea (*abhiprāyaḥ*) is that, for Arjuna, there is nothing more to be done (*na me kartavyam*). As we saw in 13.14, the *kṣetrajña*, the self to be known who is none other than the Lord (cf 13.2),¹¹⁴ is described as

¹¹¹ *viduṣaḥ punar avikriyātma-darśinaḥ phalārthitvābhāvāt pravṛtṭy-anupapattau kārya-karaṇa-saṃghāta-vyāpāroparame nivr̥ttir upacaryate*

¹¹² *...kasyacid eva vivekopapatteḥ | anekeṣu hi prāṇiṣu kaścīd eva vivekī syāt, yathedānīm...*

¹¹³ *athedānīm tvac-chāsane “sthito ’smi gata-saṃdeho” mukta-saṃśayaḥ | “kariṣye vacanaṃ tava” | ahaṃ tvat-prasādāt kṛtārthaḥ na me kartavyam astīty abhiprāyaḥ*

¹¹⁴ *īśvara-kṣetrajñāikatvadarśī...*

acting ‘as it were’ by Śaṃkara. Arjuna, having no actions to perform, is spoken of in a similar way by Śaṃkara. 18.10 is a key example generalising this:

The person eligible for rites and duties who, having attained the purified self by stages through the practice of *karma-yoga* in the way outlined previously, has realised that his own self is the actionless self, which is without modifications such as birth, and so on, “having renounced all actions in his mind, by not doing or causing (others) to act at all” (5.13), attains steadfastness in knowledge characterised as “actionlessness”.¹¹⁵

For Śaṃkara, through Kṛṣṇa teaching about himself as Lord and non-dual non-agential self, and through Kṛṣṇa modelling the action which is to be done which is really non-action, Arjuna can indeed reach the point of renouncing all actions, despite being a *kṣatriya*. Using the lens of the Nyāya-based sequence of action has thus enabled us to tease out the different facets of Kṛṣṇa’s action in the world and helped us to lay bare the pattern Śaṃkara provides for (and through) Arjuna.

3.4 – How is Kṛṣṇa as an agent needed in Śaṃkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*?

Kṛṣṇa’s modelling divine agency is a key pedagogical device for Śaṃkara for three key reasons. First, there is no other text in which Śaṃkara offers a model by which the seeker of liberation can *progressively* work towards detached agency, from within the context of the conventional world. Second, Kṛṣṇa’s divine agency offers a model for how a person should *behave* once they are liberated but still living – behaviour which is not specifically modelled by other teaching figures in Śaṃkara’s works. Third, there is no other teacher in Śaṃkara’s other key works and commentaries that can model specifically *divine* agency.

3.4.1 – Modelling divine agency for Arjuna

I propose there is a further layer to Śaṃkara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. Kṛṣṇa, by modelling how Arjuna can progress towards detached agency, also models how Arjuna

¹¹⁵ *yo ’dhikṛtaḥ puruṣaḥ pūrvoktena prakāreṇa karma-yogānuṣṭhānena krameṇa saṃskṛtātmā san janmādi-vikriyā-rahitatvena niṣkriyam ātmānam ātmatvena sambuddhaḥ saḥ sarva-karmāṇi manasā saṃnyasya naiva kurvan na kārayan āsīno naiṣkarmya-lakṣaṇām jñāna-niṣṭhām aśnuta ity etat*

should behave once he does become liberated while still living. Although Śaṅkara seems to suggest that Arjuna cannot become a *jīvanmukta* in this life, he *does* show how Arjuna can become a *jīvanmukta* in a future life, having worked towards liberation progressively.

As demonstrated in section 3.2.2, it is in *Gītābhāṣya* 6.27 that Śaṅkara uses the term *jīvanmukta*, in the past participle form. As Nelson reminds us, although the actual term *jīvanmukta* had not become a technical term by Śaṅkara's time, the *concept* of being liberated while still living is certainly present in Śaṅkara's *Gītābhāṣya*.¹¹⁶ The majority of the examples picked out by Nelson showing the liberated person (*mukti*) being discussed are in *Gītābhāṣya* chapter 3. As Nelson notes, in *Gītā* 3.20-26, Kṛṣṇa 'invites us to reflect on the parallels between his mode of action as God, and that of the liberated sage'.¹¹⁷ In the *Gītā* verses themselves, Kṛṣṇa refers to his own action in the cosmos being a model for action (for example in 3.22).¹¹⁸ It is in the verses that follow, beginning with his introductory comment on 3.25, that Śaṅkara explicitly states that Kṛṣṇa is the one who instructs the 'knower' (*vidvas*):

Like I (do), if you or someone else possesses the conviction of having attained all that is to be attained, and are a knower of the self, you must continue to act for the benefit of others, even if there is no obligation to do so.¹¹⁹

Here, we Kṛṣṇa as the Lord instructs those who are liberated but still living by specifically teaching them how they can continue to act in the world. However, while Nelson points out that Śaṅkara does indeed refer to Kṛṣṇa modelling for the *mukta*, he makes no reference to Kṛṣṇa's modelling applying to Arjuna, nor to this modelling functioning both progressively and pedagogically for Arjuna as a seeker of liberation.

¹¹⁶ Lance Nelson, 'Living Liberation in Śaṅkara and Classical Advaita: Sharing the Holy Waiting of God', in Andrew O. Fort and Patricia Y. Mumme (eds.) *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), p.21.

¹¹⁷ Nelson, 'Living Liberation', p.41.

¹¹⁸ *na me pārthāsti kartavyaṃ triṣu lokeṣu kiṃcana |
nānavāptam avāptavyaṃ vartaiva ca karmaṇi ||*

¹¹⁹ *yadi punar aham iva tvaṃ kṛtārtha-buddhiḥ ātmavid anyo vā tasyāpi ātmanaḥ kartavyābhāve 'pi
parānugraha eva kartavya ity ||*

Although Arjuna is not directly addressed in 3.25, we saw in section 3.2.2 that Arjuna is clearly adjured to become a *yogin* of the kind who is a *jīvanmukta* in *Gītābhāṣya* 6.46. As we saw at the beginning of Chapter 3 (in section 3.1.4), it is in 2.10, a key verse for Śaṅkara, that he explicitly draws a parallel between Kṛṣṇa’s action as the Lord and the action of the liberated person:

For fulfilment of the aim of life, (the action) of the knower (*vidvas*) is like the action of Lord Vāsudeva (performing) his duties as a *kṣatriya*...because both are free from ego (*ahaṁkāra*) and desire for results.¹²⁰

The fact that Śaṅkara refers explicitly to Kṛṣṇa’s action not just as cosmic Lord, but as manifest human and specifically as a *kṣatriya*, demonstrates that Śaṅkara uses the worldly action of Kṛṣṇa to help Arjuna understand his worldly action once he becomes a *jīvanmukta* – explaining that he can still act in the world but without attachment. Nonetheless, for Śaṅkara, the action of the knower is fathomed in divine terms, and Kṛṣṇa’s action as manifest human being grounded in Kṛṣṇa’s action as cosmic Lord. I therefore argue that the reason Kṛṣṇa is the only one who can model unattached action through *divine agency* for Arjuna, once he is liberated, is due to the parallel that emerges between Kṛṣṇa as the cosmic Lord (3.25) and Kṛṣṇa as a human acting in the world as a warrior (2.10). The fact that 2.10 (above) is the verse where Śaṅkara reintroduces the drowning metaphor, first described in his *Gītābhāṣya* introduction, is significant. Kṛṣṇa’s modelling in 2.10 is framed in relation to Arjuna as pupil at the point where he is struggling in *saṁsāra* and confused about *dharma*, but is progressively shown how he can eventually become a *jīvanmukta*.

3.4.2 – Teaching figures in Śaṅkara’s other works

Kṛṣṇa the teacher modelling appropriate, detached agency for Arjuna is central to Kṛṣṇa the teacher leading Arjuna towards liberation. Śaṅkara needs Kṛṣṇa to act on multiple levels as a teacher, as he can be the only model of divine agency. Although other teaching figures appear in Śaṅkara’s works, Kṛṣṇa is the only teacher able to model specifically *divine*

¹²⁰ *yathā bhagavato vāsudevasya kṣatra-dharma-ceṣṭitam...puruṣārtha-siddhaye tadvat tat-phalābhisamdhya-ahaṁkārahābhāvasya tulyatvād viduṣaḥ ||*

agency. This is because Kṛṣṇa is not only a teacher in his embodied form, but also teaches at the level of being the cosmic Lord who is none other than the non-dual *brahman*.

In his survey of *jīvanmukti* in the work of Śaṅkara, Fort points out that the closest Śaṅkara comes to full descriptions of the liberated person (*mukta*), besides in his *Gītābhāṣya*, are found in *Upadeśasāhasrī* Prose 1.2 and 1.6, where the student seeking liberation and the teacher (*ācārya*) are both characterised.¹²¹ In *Upadeśasāhasrī* Prose 1.2, the student seeking liberation is characterised as being: indifferent to all that is transient, without desire for a son, wealth, or worldly things, endowed with control over the mind and the senses, compassionate, etc.¹²² In *Upadeśasāhasrī* Prose 1.6, the teacher: understands different sides of arguments, shows compassion and an intention to help others, is versed in the scriptures, remains unattached to seen and unseen enjoyments, is a knower of *brahman* and is established in him, etc.¹²³ While these two key passages summarise Śaṅkara's view of the attributes of the liberated being, they also refer specifically to the teacher.

Both Nelson and Fort refer to *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.12, where the *brahmin* renouncer is urged to approach a teacher for the highest knowledge.¹²⁴ Śaṅkara, in his commentary on this verse, says that this teacher should be approached and questioned. In his *Kaṭha-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* 1.3.14, Śaṅkara explicitly states that the ignorant should approach the teachers who know the self, taught as 'I am that'. Nelson and Fort also specifically draw attention to *Chāndogya-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* 6.14.2, where Śaṅkara states that a teacher leads one to liberation by taking off the 'blindfold' of delusion.¹²⁵ In his comment on this verse, Śaṅkara explains that the 'blindfold' refers to the delusion that one is the body. The 'blindfold' can only be removed by the teacher who knows the self. So for Śaṅkara, as Fort points out, one freed by the teacher from delusion arrives at realisation of the self, no longer blindfolded by misconception (*avidyā*).¹²⁶ Moreover, as Hirst points out, this passage illustrates the point that 'the person who has a teacher knows' (*ācāryavān puruṣo veda*) and

¹²¹ Andrew O. Fort, *Jīvanmukti in Transformation: Embodied Liberation in Vedānta and Neo-Vedānta* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), p.34.

¹²² Fort, *Jīvanmukti in Transformation*, p.34.

¹²³ p.34.

¹²⁴ *parīkṣya lokāṅkarmacitānbrahmano nirvedamāyānnāstyakṛtaḥ kṛtena | tadvijñānārtham sa gurumevābhigacchetsamitpāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahmaniṣṭham ||* Fort, *Jīvanmukti in Transformation*, p.34; Nelson, 'Living Liberation', p.25.

¹²⁵ Fort, *Jīvanmukti in Transformation*, p.41; Nelson, 'Living Liberation', p.25.

¹²⁶ Fort, *Jīvanmukti*, p.41.

in his commentary Śaṅkara stresses the role of the teacher.¹²⁷ Fort also draws on the example of Śaṅkara's *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* 2.1.20, where he illustrates his point by telling the story of an abandoned prince.¹²⁸ The prince was raised as a hunter, not knowing of his royal descent. Śaṅkara compares the prince not knowing who he is to the embodied being not knowing they are the self. For Śaṅkara, the realisation of their true identity, in both cases, is only possible with the help of a compassionate teacher.

Śaṅkara makes repeated references to the importance of the teacher throughout his works. However, the role of the teacher in the examples above is primarily to teach about the nature of liberation itself, as opposed to the *behaviour* of a liberated person, or indeed the behaviour of a person seeking liberation but still in the conventional world – such as Arjuna. As Fort has suggested, Śaṅkara in the majority of his commentarial material places much more emphasis on liberation (*mukti*) than how the liberated person (*mukta*) might conduct themselves.¹²⁹ It is clear, therefore, that a teacher who models how to act in the world once you are liberated would be extremely helpful for the pupils Śaṅkara is trying to teach. As I have also shown, a teacher who models *how* you can become liberated in the first place is also necessary. Although the teaching figures in Śaṅkara's other works are required to lead the willing pupil towards realisation, these teachers do not, I contend, perform the specific role of modelling appropriate behaviour, whether for the seeker of liberation *or* for the person who has achieved liberation but still acts in the world.

There are many Upaniṣadic teachers that Śaṅkara refers to: Uddālaka Āruṇi who teaches Śvetaketu in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Śāṅḍilya in the *Chāndogya*, and Yājñavalkya in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, to name a few significant examples.¹³⁰ Three key points could be made here. Firstly, none of these Upaniṣadic teachers can specifically offer a model for how a person can continue to act in the world once liberated. This is because although Upaniṣadic teachers can speak about liberation, they do not speak in detail about how a person can both become liberated and continue to act in the world once liberated. The reason for this brings us to my second point. I suggest that the Upaniṣadic teachers cannot model agency for the liberated person, in the same way Kṛṣṇa *can because* he is a divine agent. As

¹²⁷ Hirst, *Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, p.60.

¹²⁸ Fort, *Jīvanmukti*, p.41.

¹²⁹ p.34.

¹³⁰ See also Brian Black, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India: Priests, Kings and Women in the Early Upaniṣads* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007).

I have argued, the reason that Kṛṣṇa can model how to act in the world is because his action as manifest human is grounded in his being both cosmic Lord and non-dual *brahman*. It is only because Kṛṣṇa is the Lord that he can provide himself with a body and model action for Arjuna in the world, without compromising non-duality. We saw in the previous section that, by applying Mohanty’s sequence of action to Kṛṣṇa’s action in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*, Kṛṣṇa is able to model action for Arjuna *because* he is the Lord.

Thirdly, and linked with this, while any Upaniṣadic teacher can certainly model the unattached self, in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya* it is Kṛṣṇa as divine agent who best models the self as being none other than *brahman* in a narrative form. In his comment on 13.12, Śaṅkara writes:

“I will declare”, I will thoroughly describe, correctly, “that which is to be known”, the knowable. In order to entice the hearer through addressing the senses, the Lord speaks of its result: “By knowing which (the knowable) one attains immortality”, meaning he does not die again. “Without beginning”, one who has a beginning is *ādimat*, and one who does not have a beginning is *anādimat*. What is that? The “supreme”, greatest, “*brahman*”, that which has been discussed as the knowable.¹³¹

Here, the ‘knowable’ is the supreme *brahman* without beginning, initially conceptualised as the cause of all, but as Śaṅkara goes on to say later in his comment, beyond being (*sat*) and non-being (*asat*). So *brahman* is being discussed here in a cosmic context, within the *Gītā* itself. Ultimately, the supreme *brahman* (*param brahma*) has no attributes, but because we are thinking from within the conventional world, Kṛṣṇa is conceptualised as the knowable. Śaṅkara makes this clear in his comment on 13.18, where he describes the one who has ‘correct knowledge’:

All of this has been stated in order to conclude the meaning of the Vedas and the meaning of the *Gītā*. Who is capable of this correct knowledge? It

¹³¹ “*jñeyam*” *jñātavyam* “*yat tat pravakṣyāmi*” *prakarṣeṇa yathāvat vakṣyāmi* | *kiṃ-phalam tat iti prarocanena śrotur abhimukhīkaraṇāyāha yaj jñeyam* “*jñātvāmṛtam*” *amṛtatvam* “*āśnute*” *na punar mriyata ity arthaḥ* | “*anādimat*” *ādir asyāstīti ādimat nādimat anādimat* | *kiṃ tat?* “*param*” *niratiśayam* “*brahma*” *jñeyam iti prakṛtam* |

is said: “my devotee”, who assigns [the fact of] being the self of all to me who am the Lord, the omniscient, the highest teacher, Vāsudeva, whose conviction has been saturated with the idea that whatever he sees, hears or touches is all indeed Lord Vāsudeva. “After knowing this”, the correct knowledge spoken of before, he “approaches my state”, the state of being the supreme self, that state of mine. He achieves liberation.¹³²

For Śaṅkara, then, Kṛṣṇa as divine agent makes it narratively easier to ‘get to’ *brahman*. Given that Śaṅkara speaks specifically of the devotee becoming qualified for liberation in his comment above, I suggest that Kṛṣṇa models the *brahman=ātman* equation narratively for a pupil. Kṛṣṇa’s divine agency is therefore important for Śaṅkara’s pedagogy because the Upaniṣadic teachers, despite being able to model the unattached self, are not able to give their teaching from within the context of the conventional world in being the Lord and *nirguṇa brahman* for pupils seeking liberation such as Arjuna.

3.5 – Conclusion

As we have seen, Śaṅkara opens his commentary by stating that Arjuna is ‘drowning in the ocean of grief and delusion’. To save Arjuna from drowning, Śaṅkara states that Kṛṣṇa gives Arjuna the teaching on the twofold *dharma*. Arjuna must be taught how to become a detached agent in order to be rescued, and he is able to work towards detached agency by following Kṛṣṇa’s model of divine agency, a key pedagogical device for Śaṅkara.

The fact that Śaṅkara focuses his commentary on teaching Arjuna how to follow the path of *pravṛtti-dharma* is significant. We saw above that Śaṅkara heavily criticises his *jñānakarmasamuccayin* opponent in numerous places.¹³³ The final occurrence is in his extended explanation of 18.66 where Śaṅkara asks, ‘In this scripture, the *Gītā*, has knowledge or action been confirmed as the supreme means to the highest good, or is it

¹³² *etāvān sarvo hi vedārtho gītārthaś copasamhṛtyoktaḥ | asmin samyag-darśane ko ’dhikriyata ity ucyate – “mad-bhaktō” mayīśvare sarvajñe parama-gurau vāsudeve samarpita-sarvātma-bhāvo yat paśyati śṛṇoti spṛśati vā sarvam eva bhagavān vāsudevaḥ ity evaṃ-grahāviṣṭa-buddhir mad-bhaktāḥ sa “etad” yathoktaṃ samyag darśanaṃ “vijñāya” mad-bhāvāya mama bhāvo mad-bhāvaḥ paramātma-bhāvas tasmai “mad-bhāvāya upapadyate” mokṣaṃ gacchati ||*

¹³³ The key places where Śaṅkara engages with his *jñānakarmasamuccayin* opponent are 2.10, the introductions to chapters 3, 5 and 6, chapter 13 and chapter 18.

both?’¹³⁴ This echoes 2.10 – Śaṅkara’s very first key comment – where he outlines the position of the *jñānakarmasamuccayin* before refuting it, showing the important framing role this debate plays, not least in seeking to show the subtle differences in their positions. As I have argued, rather than refute the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*, Śaṅkara in fact focuses on this as Arjuna’s path to liberation. It is therefore crucial for Śaṅkara, as a non-dualist, to reiterate how his position differs in concluding his commentary:

Śaṅkara: Someone might doubt that, as both knowledge and action have been instructed as things to be done (*kartavyatva*) they might indeed be the cause of the highest good in combination.

Opponent: Again, what was the result of the examination (*mīmāṃsā*) in this regard?

Śaṅkara: Is it not indeed this: ascertaining which of all these is the cause of the highest good? Therefore this must be examined (*mīmāṃsya*) more carefully. However (*tu*), knowledge of the self is the only cause of the highest good. Through the removal of the idea of difference, it culminates in the result that is liberation. The idea of difference between action, agent and result is always active regarding the self, due to misconception. ‘My action, I am the agent, I shall perform this action for its result’ – this form of misconception has been active from time without beginning. The destroyer of this misconception is the knowledge whose focus is the self, in the form, ‘I am this alone (*kevala*), non-agent, without action, without result; there is none other than myself’, because when (this knowledge) arises it destroys the idea of differences which are the cause of the performance of action. The word ‘however’ (*tu*) above is used to dismiss the two other explanations. This dismisses the two other views by showing that the highest good cannot be attained by actions alone, nor by a combination of knowledge and action.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ *asmin gītā-śāstre parama-niḥśreyasa-sādhanam niścitam kiṃ jñānam karma vā āho ’svid ubhayam iti*

¹³⁵ *evaṃ jñāna-karmaṇoḥ kartavyatvopadeśāt samuccitayor api niḥśreyasa-hetutvaṃ syād iti bhavet saṃśayaḥ kasyacit kiṃ punar atra mīmāṃsā-phalam?*

The last is, once again, the position of the *jñānakarmasamuccayin* and a further lengthy argument ensues. Śaṅkara of course refutes the idea that liberation can be attained through a combination of action and knowledge. However, as Kṛṣṇa’s teaching is delivered from within the conventional world, and as Arjuna cannot renounce all actions as he is a *kṣatriya*, Śaṅkara both maintains that following the path of *pravṛtti-dharma* can lead to knowledge and that knowledge of Kṛṣṇa’s identity as self enables Arjuna to act without misidentifying himself with the individuated locus of consciousness claiming ‘mineness’.

In this, the *Gītā* itself is a unique text for Śaṅkara, as Kṛṣṇa’s presence as teacher on two key levels – as the cosmic Lord, and as manifest human – provides us with a way of thinking about how Arjuna (representing the seeker of liberation) can act in a detached way and work towards liberation. This is not available in Śaṅkara’s other major works, even when we consider the teachers in some of his Upaniṣadic commentaries. For Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa is the only available model for Arjuna precisely *because* Kṛṣṇa is the Lord. Although other teachers may be able to teach and model on a human level, they are not able to model *divine* agency as Kṛṣṇa does for Arjuna.

The very fact that Śaṅkara sets out his commentary with Arjuna drowning as a key problem to be solved in this way demonstrates that his commentary itself is framed around his progressive teaching method. This progressive teaching also takes cognisance of Śaṅkara’s likely socio-religious background, as we saw in Chapter 2. A rise in Vaiṣṇava devotional movements and clues in his commentaries suggest that an audience Śaṅkara wanted to attract would have included Vaiṣṇavas. In his *Gītābhāṣya*, Śaṅkara works in key terms used widely in Vaiṣṇava traditions (including but not limited to Pāñcarātra) to make it appeal to his audience, not least in his introduction, the importance of which we have seen throughout:

*nanv etad eva eṣāṃ anyatamasya parama-niḥśreyasa-sādhanatvādvadhāraṇam | ato vistīrnataram
mīmāṃsyam etat | ātma-jñānasya tu kevalasya niḥśreyasa-hetutvam | bheda-pratyaya-nivartakatvena
kaivalya-phalāvasānatvāt | kriyā-kāra-ka-phala-bheda-buddhir avidyayātmani nitya-pravṛttā mama karma
aham kartāmuṣmai phalāyedaṃ karma kariṣyāmītyam avidyānādi-kāla-pravṛttā | asyā avidyāyāḥ
nivartakam ayam aham asmi kevalo 'kartākriyo 'phalaḥ | na matto 'nyo 'sti kaścid ity evaṃ-rūpam ātma-
viṣayaṃ jñānam utpadyamānam karma-pravṛtti-hetu-bhūtāyā bheda-buddher nivartakatvāt | tu-śabdah
pakṣa-vyāvṛtṭy-arthah | na kevalebhyah karmabhyah na ca jñāna-karmabhyāṃ samuccitābhyāṃ niḥśreyasa-
prāptir iti pakṣa-dvayaṃ nivartayati*

The Lord, always possessed of *knowledge, sovereignty, potentiality, power, might and splendour*, controls root-*prakṛti, māyā*, composed of the three *guṇas*, which belongs to him as Viṣṇu, the unborn one.¹³⁶

As we saw in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.2), the italicised qualities listed above are the six qualities attributed to the Lord in Vaiṣṇava traditions. The fact that Śaṅkara also refers to these six qualities in his commentary on *Gītā* 7.1, 10.9, 10.15 and 11.3 suggests that he was appealing to the growing number of Vaiṣṇavas present. Moreover, it is in the following sentence in his introduction that Śaṅkara says Kṛṣṇa, as manifest human, ‘appears as if he possesses a body...as though he is born’ (*dehavān iva...jāta iva*). So Kṛṣṇa as the Lord with these six qualities is fundamentally linked with the way in which Kṛṣṇa as manifest human models divine agency. Kṛṣṇa’s modelling divine agency both as the Lord and as manifest human is thus grounded in Śaṅkara’s wider teaching strategy of drawing in his various audiences, including Vaiṣṇavas. In the *Gītābhāṣya*, Śaṅkara shows his audience how we can have an interpretation of detached action in the world, from an Advaita Vedāntin point of view, out of a key text. By demonstrating the centrality of Kṛṣṇa to Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedāntin pedagogy, I have shown a new way of understanding the relation of devotionism and non-dualism in Śaṅkara’s *Gītā* commentary.

¹³⁶ *sa ca bhagavān jñānaiśvarya-śakti-bala-vīrya-tejobhiḥ sadā sampannas triguṇātmikāṃ vaiṣṇavīm svām māyāṃ mūla-prakṛtiṃ vaśīkṛtya ajo |*

Chapter 4

Śrīdhara on Kṛṣṇa's Body and Pedagogy

4.1 – Introduction

Śrīdhara (c. 1350-1450 CE) flourished in Orissa and lived some 650 years after Śaṅkara, in a very different regional, devotional and intellectual climate. Nonetheless, it was one which retained access to Śaṅkara's *Gītā* commentary.¹ Although considerably less work has addressed Śrīdhara's socio-religious background than Śaṅkara's, the evidence we do have indicates that Śrīdhara was writing in a particular devotional climate in Orissa. As outlined in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.3-4), Śrīdhara's main works are commentaries on well-known Vaiṣṇava texts, which certainly suggests he was writing to appeal to a Vaiṣṇava devotional audience. However, below I locate a hint that he may also have intended to appeal to those with Śaiva leanings.

There has been very little work in the academy specifically exploring Śrīdhara's view of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* (see Chapter 1). Within the limited material available, two key questions arise in the literature: was Śrīdhara an Advaitin? If so, what 'type' of Advaita Vedānta did he propose? Given Śrīdhara's socio-religious context and the influence of the *Bhāgavata Purāna* around his time, the very question of how *bhakti* relates to his Advaita Vedāntin position is key. I begin my analysis of Śrīdhara's view of Kṛṣṇa in his *Subodhinī* by asking, again, the two key questions set out in Chapter 1. First, what questions does Śrīdhara himself ask? This chapter will be structured around the topics Śrīdhara highlights himself, in relation to Kṛṣṇa's body. Second, how does Kṛṣṇa save Arjuna from drowning? I argue that it is Kṛṣṇa's teaching, particularly in relation to his descent form that, for Śrīdhara, is the vehicle for Arjuna's rescue. Śrīdhara interprets Kṛṣṇa's 'coming to be' in the *Gītā* in terms of Kṛṣṇa taking on a *śuddha-sattvic* form. It is Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* form that functions pedagogically for Śrīdhara, in terms of i) Kṛṣṇa modelling how Arjuna can develop his *sattvic guṇa*² and therefore approach *śuddha-sattva* himself, and ii) the language of *śuddha-*

¹ As Śrīdhara's quotations and allusions, particularly *Subodhinī* 13, show.

² In Sāṅkhya, there are two independent realities: *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* (see Chapter 3, section 3.1.6.1). *Prakṛti* is the original producer of material nature, and is composed of three essential qualities (*guṇas*): *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (passion), and *tamas* (darkness). In Advaita Vedānta, *prakṛti* is none other than *brahman* (*puruṣa*) when properly understood, but retains a *guṇic* view like the *Gītā*'s at the conventional level.

sattva – the way in which Kṛṣṇa’s descent form is actually spoken of – providing a way of speaking of the transcendent in conventional terms.

4.1.1 – Why is Arjuna drowning?

In the introduction to his *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara states that it is Kṛṣṇa who rescues Arjuna:

It was indeed here that the supremely compassionate Lord, the son of Devakī, descended out of affection for³ the whole world, when his feet were worshipped by all. He rescued Arjuna – who was intent on giving up his own *dharma* and taking that of another, due to his discrimination being taken away by grief and delusion, resulting from ignorance of reality – from that ocean of grief and delusion, **with the boat being the teaching** on secret knowledge of *dharma*.⁴

Śrīdhara makes it clear from the outset that the intellectual problem he faces is how Arjuna can be saved from drowning in the ‘ocean of grief and delusion’ (*śoka-moha-sāgara*). Just like Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara introduces the stock metaphor of the ocean of rebirth (*Gītā* 12.7) and applies it specifically to Arjuna. Śrīdhara also uses this metaphor in the praise verse⁵ following 2.72:

He who lifted up his devotee Arjuna, who was drowning in the ocean of grief, by teaching him the *yoga* of discrimination⁶ – that Kṛṣṇa is my refuge.⁷

In this praise verse, Arjuna the devotee is drowning (*nimagña*) in the ocean of grief (*śoka-paṅka*),⁸ and Śrīdhara explicitly states, ‘Kṛṣṇa is my refuge’ (*kṛṣṇaḥ śaraṇaṃ mama*).

³ Or, ‘for the welfare of’.

⁴ *iha khalu sakala-loka-hitāvatāraḥ sakala-vandita-caraṇaḥ parama-kāruṇiko bhagavān devakī-nandanas tattvājñāna-vijṛmbhita-śoka-moha-bhraṁśita-vivekatayā nija-dharma-parityāga-pūrvaka-para-dharmābhisandhinam arjunam dharma-jñāna-rahasyopadeśa-plavena tasmāc choka-moha-sāgarād uddadhāra ||*

⁵ On the importance of introductions and praise verses in commentaries, see Chapter 1, section 1.5.3.4.

⁶ Or, the ways of knowledge and action (see *Subodhinī* 3.3).

⁷ *śoka-paṅka-nimagñaṃ yaḥ sāṅkhya-yogopadeśataḥ |
ujjahārārjunam bhaktaṃ sa kṛṣṇaḥ śaraṇaṃ mama ||*

⁸ Vireśvarānanda’s translation, p.80, misses the metaphor.

Śrīdhara’s ‘drowning’ passages illuminate three key points. First, Arjuna is drowning *because* he has not yet learnt discrimination (*viveka*) between the self and the body, is not performing actions according to his own *dharma* (*sva-dharma*), and is therefore ignorant of reality (*tattvājñāna*-). Second, in both passages, the vehicle of Arjuna’s rescue is precisely Kṛṣṇa’s *teaching*. This demonstrates that there is a clear link between Śrīdhara’s soteriology of rescue and his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. Third, Śrīdhara refers specifically to Kṛṣṇa in his descent (*avatāra*) form in both passages. As such, Arjuna’s rescue from drowning is linked to him taking refuge in or worshipping at the feet of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is refuge (*śaraṇa*) precisely in his manifested, gracious bodily form. Kṛṣṇa being refuge, and the giver of compassion and affection, is therefore directly linked to his descent body. As I shall demonstrate, in Śrīdhara’s *Subodhinī* it is through Kṛṣṇa’s specific grace, for which his specific body is the vehicle, that Arjuna learns to develop an understanding of who Kṛṣṇa is, by which he can prepare for realisation.

4.1.2 – Why is body a key topic for Śrīdhara?

In the *Gītā* itself, Kṛṣṇa first speaks of taking on a body in 4.6, which Śrīdhara glosses:

“Depending upon”, adopting “my *prakṛti*”, which consists of pure *sattva*,
I descend by my own will, in a form of very pure and excellent *sattva*.⁹

This is Śrīdhara’s first interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s specific, descent body as being a pure (*śuddha*) *sattvic* body. He continues this throughout his *Subodhinī*, referring to Kṛṣṇa’s specific descent body as purely *sattvic* in 4.10, 7.24, 9.11 and 14.27, for instance. This is important for two key reasons. First, Śrīdhara is the first of our three commentators to refer to Kṛṣṇa’s body as *sattvic*. In the *Gītābhāṣya*, Śaṅkara does not describe Kṛṣṇa’s body directly in *guṇic* terms.¹⁰ Second, because Śrīdhara claims that Kṛṣṇa’s descent body comprises *śuddha-sattva*, this initially implies that his body is a *guṇic* body, made up of the same ‘stuff’ as human bodies are. We would not expect a self-proclaimed Advaita Vedāntin

⁹ “*svām*” *śuddha-sattvātmikām* “*prakṛtiṃ adhiṣṭhāya*” *svikṛtya viśuddhorjita-sattva-mūrtyā svecchayāvatarāmi...*]

¹⁰ Śaṅkara prefers to use *iva* (‘as it were/as though’) and speaks of Kṛṣṇa controlling his *māyā*, which consists of the three *guṇas* – see Chapter 3, section 3.3.4.

commentator to refer to Kṛṣṇa’s body, even in its descent form, as a *guṇic* body. However, as I will show, Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* body is not interpreted by Śrīdhara as being a *guṇic* body as such – instead, *śuddha-sattva* is what is closest in nature to the transcendent, but can still be spoken of in conventional terms. Kṛṣṇa’s body is a key topic for Śrīdhara because it is through his specific *śuddha-sattvic* body that Kṛṣṇa acts particularly in the world, and reveals himself specifically in his manifest form to Arjuna. It is through Kṛṣṇa’s specific action in this body that Kṛṣṇa gives his grace to his devotee, Arjuna. It is through Kṛṣṇa’s grace as available in his particular descent form that Arjuna learns who Kṛṣṇa is. It is also in hearing about this descent form that future devotees are able to learn about Kṛṣṇa.

4.1.3 – Why is śakti in relation to body important for Śrīdhara?

To show why *śakti* is important in relation to body for Śrīdhara, it is necessary to outline Śrīdhara’s link to Citsukha. As we saw in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.4), Śrīdhara, in addition to his *Gītā* commentary, wrote a commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As Sheridan points out, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was commented on by two earlier Advaitins: Citsukha and Puṇyāraṇya.¹¹ Citsukha also commented on Śaṅkara’s *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, and on Śrīharṣa’s (c. twelfth century)¹² *Khaṇḍana-khaṇḍa-khādyā*.¹³ Citsukha, like Śrīharṣa, sought to demolish the positions of previous commentators, often by rejecting every possible formulation of a particular idea.¹⁴ However, unlike Śrīharṣa, Citsukha also presented Advaitin reformulations, considering them from the point of view of the various *pramāṇas* (means of knowing) in turn.¹⁵ This was especially critical in the case of the concepts of *svataḥ-prāmāṇya* (‘self-validity’) and *śakti* (‘power’ or ‘capacity’).¹⁶ Although Śaṅkara used the term *jñāna-śakti* for Kṛṣṇa’s unobstructed power of knowledge as the unborn Lord,¹⁷ and *māyā-śakti* for the Lord’s creative power,¹⁸ it was left to other Advaitins

¹¹ Sheridan, ‘Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’, p.47.

¹² See Chapter 2 n.72.

¹³ See Chapter 2 n.73.

¹⁴ For an excellent example, see Paul Kuepferle, Sukharanjan Saha and Karl H. Potter (summarisers.) ‘Citsukha: *Citsukhī* or (*Pratyak*)*Tattva(pra)dīpikā*’, in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies Volume XI, Advaita Vedānta from 800 to 1200* (ed.) Karl H. Potter (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006), pp.607-702, esp. pp.608-42.

¹⁵ See Sarma, *Citsukha’s Contribution*, for examples from Citsukha’s *Tattva-pradīpikā* throughout.

¹⁶ John C. Plott, ‘Citsukha’, in *Global History of Philosophy, Volume 5* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), p.177.

¹⁷ *Gītābhāṣya* 4.5/6 *anāvaraṇa/akṣīṇajñānaśakti* contrasted with Arjuna’s own power of knowledge impeded by *dharma* and *adharmā*: *dharmādharmavibaddhajñānaśakti-*

¹⁸ E.g. Śaṅkara’s *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 2.1.14.

to develop the concept of *śakti*.¹⁹ Citsukha, in particular, aware of Navya-Nyāya's discussion of sentence cognition,²⁰ was faced with interpreting *śakti* formally.

Svataḥ-prāmāṇya means 'self-certification' or 'the self-validity of knowledge'.²¹ In this view, a cognition does not require any external confirmation of its validity from a further source (unlike in Nyāya). In both Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta, *svataḥ-prāmāṇya* refers especially to the self-validity of *śruti*.²² Citsukha shares this view, also holding that *śruti* passages refer to *brahman* through what he calls their 'own capacity' (*sva-śakti*).

Śakti, for Citsukha, is primarily the capacity of each word to convey meaning, activating this meaning in the context of a sentence.²³ *Śaktis* therefore must be multiple, just as words are multiple. As Citsukha accepts the self-validity of *śruti*, his medium for knowing *brahman* (*śruti*/language) must be able to provide the sufficient conditions for valid cognition of *brahman* to arise without need for further external validation. However, as an Advaitin, Citsukha also wants to remove all duality, and for all language to point to *brahman*, who is indivisible. Given his understanding of language, Citsukha therefore needs to show how *śruti* can do this by operating through the multiple *śaktis* of words in sentences.

First, Citsukha defends the notion of *śakti* as a word's capacity against the critique that it is an unnecessary explanatory concept.²⁴ He draws on the *pramāṇa* of *śruti* as an example, citing *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.8 on 'the supreme power of him [the Supreme Great Lord of lords in *Śve. Up.* 6.7]' (*parāśya śaktiḥ*),²⁵ a verse Śrīdhara will later use when discussing how scriptural language of the transcendent works.²⁶ The use of the genitive in *Śve. Up.* 6.8, Citsukha argues, shows that power (*śakti*) is not identical with the power-possessor, so the

¹⁹ Sometimes in conversation with the grammarians (Sthaneswar Timalsina, 'The Brahman and the "Word Principle" (Śabda): Influence of the Philosophy of Bhartṛhari on Maṇḍana's *Brahmasiddhi*', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37.2 (2009):189-206).

²⁰ Madhav Deshpande, 'Sentence-Cognition in Nyāya Epistemology', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 20 (1978), p.196.

²¹ 'A valid cognition is not generated by a cause different from the cognitional apparatus (or sufficient condition) which generates it. It is indeed of itself'. The standard definition as given by Citsukha in his *Tattvapradīpikā*, Sanskrit cited by Sarma, *Citsukha's Contribution*, p.104 n.136: *vijñāna-sāmagrījanyatve sati tad-atirikta-hetv-ajanyatvaṃ pramāyāḥ svatastvaṃ nāma*.

²² Surendranath Dasgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy, Volume 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.169.

²³ Cf Sarma, *Citsukha's Contribution*, p.107.

²⁴ The charge of the Prābhākara Mīmāṃsaka, his main opponent here. Sarma, *Citsukha's Contribution*, p.95.

²⁵ Sarma, *Citsukha's Contribution*, p.106. Citsukha also quotes *Śve. Up.* 1.3 to establish that the Lord's *śaktis* are multiple.

²⁶ See section 4.3.1.1.

concept is not redundant. Citsukha also draws on the *pramāṇa* of inference to show the existence of fire's invisible capacity to burn.²⁷ From this, he argues that the idea that a word too could have a specific supersensible capacity is not incoherent. Such a capacity, according to Citsukha, enables the individual words of a sentence, its 'building blocks', to bear on the meaning of the sentence, the 'building'.²⁸

Now, like other Advaitins, Citsukha held that propositional sentences operate in two ways. In the former, a sentence can be seen as describing a subject which has attributes or qualities. But that sentence can also be seen as designating the bare referent of a sentence, the simple identity of that to which it refers (its *akhaṇḍārtha*).²⁹ In the latter, rather than ascribing qualities to an object, words act by rejecting their opposites. In the sentence, 'The moon is that which has a brilliant light', the word 'brilliant' excludes that which is dull, 'light' that which is darkness, so both bear on the single subject of, and give knowledge of, the moon.³⁰ In the sentence, 'Brahman is reality, consciousness, infinite' (*satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*), the words similarly exclude unreality, unconsciousness and limitation from, and give knowledge of, *brahman*.³¹

With this in mind, we go back to Citsukha's concept of *sva-śakti*. Where the capacities of words linked together form the sufficient conditions for a single meaning to arise (its *akhaṇḍārtha*), that meaning is deemed to be manifested by 'own power' (*sva-śakti*). Through the *sva-śakti* of its multiple words and sentences forming a single whole,³² *śruti* therefore has the capacity to do what it needs to: designating the identity of its single referent. However, for the Advaitin, the only truly bare referent is the indivisible *nirguṇa*

²⁷ *vahnir adviṣṭhātindrīya-sthiti-sthāpaketarabhāvāśrayaḥ guṇatvattvāt ghaṭavat*, cited in Sarma, p.107 n.142. 'Fire is the locus of an existent which is beyond the senses, is different from elasticity, and does not exist in two places, i.e. elsewhere, because it possesses qualities, like a pot'. In other words, fire's specific capacity to burn, which is invisible but not elasticity (another invisible capacity), is not something separate from it, rather it is a quality of it, its possessor, just like a pot possesses various qualities which all belong to the one pot.

²⁸ The terms are Matilal's, explaining the Bhaṭṭa theory of sentence meaning known as *abhihitānvaya*, taking the meaning of words first and then connecting these for the sentence meaning. By contrast, the Prābhākara theory of *anvitānvaya* stressed that meaning arises from the sentence as a whole, hearing its syntax. See B.K. Matilal, *The Word and the World* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.108. Citsukha subscribed to the former (Sarma, *Citsukha's Contribution*, p.107).

²⁹ Sarma, *Citsukha's Contribution*, p.101.

³⁰ See Kuepferle et al, '*Citsukhī*', p.652.

³¹ Sarma, *Citsukha's Contribution*, p.103. Here Citsukha builds on an approach used by Śaṅkara (Hirst, *Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, pp.148-49) and his pupil, Sureśvara, while drawing on later Advaitin understandings of *lakṣanā*.

³² The principle of *ekavākyatā* is widely accepted in Vedānta.

brahman. So, for Citsukha, John Plott claims, the notion of *sva-śakti* ‘makes it possible for every logical proposition concerning every possible concept or Upaniṣadic scripture to refer back to *nirguṇa brahman*’.³³

In summary, then, for Citsukha, words can lead to *brahman* through their *śaktis*. While *śaktis* still operate in the conventional world of *māyā*, they can point to that which is beyond. Essentially, for Citsukha, *śakti* functions on the level of words/propositions, and *sva-śakti* allows all words to point back to *nirguṇa brahman*. As Sarma puts it, for Citsukha, ‘the validity of the *śrutis* is independent and absolute [...] the Vedānta passages point to *brahman*, on the strength of their own capacity (*sva-śakti*)’.³⁴

In later Advaita, we find that *śakti* develops a more cosmological (sometimes theological) meaning. Although the idea that *avidyā* has many forms (*ākāra*) is first seen in Citsukha,³⁵ this notion was later developed by Madhusūdana who, as Nelson points out, substituted Citsukha’s term *ākāra* with *śakti*.³⁶ As Fort notes, Citsukha discusses three forms (*ākāra*) of the ignorance trace (*leśa*).³⁷ Nelson summarises these forms as follows: ‘The first creates the illusion that the universe is real. The second causes us to take the various constituents of the empirical world seriously as having practical utility. The third is responsible only for the bare apparatus (*pratibhāsa*) of the forms of objects in immediate perception’.³⁸ Citsukha’s view was then later developed by Madhusūdana, who distinguished between revealing (*āvaraṇa-*) and concealing (*vikṣepa-*) *śakti*.³⁹ As Nelson explains, the former ‘is responsible for manifesting all the forms and phenomena in creation, [while] the latter performs the function of obscuring the unchanging reality that underlies the whole’.⁴⁰ By contrast, although Citsukha held that there were various forms of *avidyā*, the notion for which he employed the term *śakti* was a formal one, in relation to words/propositions and what they indicate. Between Citsukha (c. 1220 CE) and Madhusūdana (sixteenth century

³³ Plott, ‘Citsukha’, p.178.

³⁴ Sarma, *Citsukha’s Contribution*, p.105.

³⁵ Fort, *Jīvanmukti in Transformation*, p.67.

³⁶ Nelson, ‘Living Liberation’, p.33.

³⁷ Fort, *Jīvanmukti in Transformation*, p.68.

³⁸ Nelson, ‘Living Liberation’, p.33.

³⁹ For earlier discussions on concealing and revealing, see Allen Wright Thrasher, *The Advaita Vedānta of Brahma-Siddhi* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), pp.63-75; Sthaneswar Timalisina, ‘Bhartrhari and Maṇḍana on “Avidyā”’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 37.4 (2009):367-82, pp.374-5; Gianni Pellegrini, ‘“Old is Gold”: Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s Way of Referring to Earlier Textual Tradition’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 43.2-3 (2015):277-334, p.303 on Padmapāda.

⁴⁰ Nelson, ‘Living Liberation’, p.34.

CE), two salient understandings of *śakti* continued to develop: first, Citsukha's understanding of *śakti* functioning in a formal sense (that of words/propositions and what they indicate); and second, Madhusūdana's understanding of *śakti* functioning on a more cosmological and epistemological level (with ignorance/*māyā* having concealing and revealing functions). Later again, the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava (Caitanyite) tradition develops a fully theological notion of Kṛṣṇa's powers.⁴¹

In Śrīdhara's *Subodhinī*, I contend, we find an interesting link between these different interpretations of *śakti*. As I shall demonstrate, Śrīdhara develops an understanding of both concealing and revealing power, albeit not in a standard Advaitin form. This approach, I argue, enables us to understand how Śrīdhara interprets Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* body as having a pedagogical function, namely as a model for Arjuna. Key to understanding precisely how Śrīdhara demonstrates that Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* body acts in this way, and thus makes the transcendent accessible to Arjuna, is his theological understanding of *līlā* (divine play) as having the power to reveal. Kṛṣṇa's body functioning pedagogically in Śrīdhara's interpretation is, I argue, fundamentally tied to Kṛṣṇa's power – specifically in the form of his *līlā*.

For Śrīdhara, Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* body certainly models a way for Arjuna as devotee to develop his own pure *sattvic* form. I also propose that the specific *language* Śrīdhara uses to talk about Kṛṣṇa's body – the language of *śuddha-sattva* – functions pedagogically. Although Śrīdhara himself does not use the term *śakti* specifically in the sense of words/propositions indicating *nirguṇa brahman* – as Citsukha does – we know from the second praise verse of his commentary on the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* that he was aware of Citsukha's work. Naming him there indicates the importance of Citsukha for Śrīdhara:

After clearly looking up to the explanation composed from the mouth of the blessed expert Citsukha, Śrīdharasvāmī the ascetic, drinking the honey from the lotus which is the feet of the true teacher, properly composed the explanation of the essence of the blessed *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, called the

⁴¹ See Lance Nelson, 'The Ontology of Bhakti: Devotion as Paramapuruṣārtha in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and Madhusūdana Sarasvatī', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): pp.356-60. The notion of *śakti* also had theological/cosmological significance in tantric traditions, Vaiṣṇava as well as Śaiva.

‘Illumination of the Self’ (*Ātmaprakāśa*), which holds all wisdom by (following) his path (*tanmārgena*), for the purification of his own mind.⁴²

This comment is key in grounding our analysis of Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy in Śrīdhara’s specific intellectual context. Citsukha held that words, through their *śaktis*, point to the ground of all: *nirguṇa brahman*.⁴³ Śrīdhara in his *Subodhinī*, as I will show, holds that we can stretch language to point beyond the realm of the *guṇas* to that which is beyond. This is because language can function in a ‘purifying’ way. Despite the fact, therefore, that Śrīdhara does not apply the term *śakti* specifically to the function of words themselves, he certainly holds that language can point to that which is beyond. Furthermore, Śrīdhara also holds that the purification of the mind is key to Arjuna progressing to knowledge, and that this is modelled by Kṛṣṇa in his descent body. The reference to purification of his own mind (*svadhīśuddhaye*) in the praise verse above demonstrates the importance of ‘purification’ for Śrīdhara. Śrīdhara’s intellectual positioning in relation to Citsukha is therefore necessary to bear in mind as we consider the way in which Śrīdhara interprets both Kṛṣṇa’s body, and the function of language about that body.

4.1.4 – Mapping terms for ‘body’

As we saw above, Śrīdhara refers to Kṛṣṇa’s descent body as purely *sattvic* (4.6). Śrīdhara sets Kṛṣṇa’s descent body apart from ordinary human bodies in his *Subodhinī*, which we can clearly see when we map his terms for ‘body’. Śrīdhara uses a cluster of body-related terms, some of which are not found in either Śaṅkara’s or Madhusūdana’s commentary. These terms fall broadly into two categories. First, we have ‘body’ in the sense of the misidentified, physical human body. Śrīdhara’s terms here include *deha* (body), *śarīra* (body) and *manuṣya* (person, human). Second, we have ‘body’ in the sense of Kṛṣṇa’s specific descent body. The terms Śrīdhara uses specifically for Kṛṣṇa’s descent body include *mūrti/-mūrti* (form, manifestation; that which is made of), *avatāra* (descent), *rūpa* (form), *svarūpa* (own form) and *tanu* (body). Also related to this cluster are: *-ātmika* (having the

⁴² *śrīmaccitsukhayogimukhyaracita-vyākhyāṃ nirīkṣya sphuṭaṃ tanmārgena subodhasaṃgrahavatīmātmaprakāśābhīdhāṃ | śrīmadviṣṇupurāṇasāravivṛtiṃ kartā yatīḥ śrīdhara-svāmī sadgurupādapadmamadhupaḥ sādhu svadhīśuddhaye ||*

⁴³ We can see this as a kind of purification by exclusion.

form of), *-maya* (composed of), *pratimā* (image) and *vighraha* (image/shape). Śrīdhara sets Kṛṣṇa’s descent body apart from ordinary human bodies by his use of these specific terms. Nonetheless, we know that Kṛṣṇa’s body *looks like* a human body from the narrative of the *Gītā* itself – for instance, where Kṛṣṇa is described as having four arms in his manifest form, indicating that his body resembles a human body (see 9.11 below).

4.1.5 – Mapping terms for ‘śakti’

Śrīdhara’s *Subodhinī* does not use the term *śakti* as frequently as we might expect, given that the majority of secondary literature on Śrīdhara places him as the foundation of the later Caitanyite tradition, which we know puts a strong emphasis on *śaktis* as the ‘marvellous powers of the Lord’ – a definition that clearly departs from Citsukha’s.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, *śakti* in the sense of the Lord’s power plays an important role in the *Subodhinī*, and Śrīdhara has a number of related terms aside from *śakti* itself. These include *māyā* (illusion), *yogamāyā* (*yogic* power), and *līlā* (divine play). The reason this cluster of terms is important for Śrīdhara is twofold. First, it is through Kṛṣṇa’s own power or play that he manifests in his descent form. In other words, Kṛṣṇa’s body is not a *karmic* body, but comes to be through his own will (*svecchayā*). Second, it is Kṛṣṇa’s descent form that has the power to reveal, though now it is the power to reveal his descent form to the devotee.

The technical Advaitin terms for concealing and revealing powers, *āvaraṇa-śakti* and *vikṣepa-śakti*, were not Śrīdhara’s preferred terms. In the *Subodhinī* he never uses *vikṣepa-śakti*, and uses *āvaraṇa-śakti* only once (14.8). Nonetheless, he *does* indicate that the Lord’s power has both concealing and revealing functions. Śrīdhara often uses the term *yogamāyā* to indicate the Lord’s power to conceal (7.25, 9.5, 9.7 and 11.47), taking his lead from *Gītā* 7.25. Glossing 7.25, he writes:

The reason for their ignorance about him [the Lord] is being stated – “I am not visible”, I do not become manifest “to all”, to the world, but to my devotees alone, since I am “covered (*samāvṛta*) by *yogamāyā*”. “*Yoga*” means device/skill – some inconceivable play of my wisdom, the ability to make the impossible, possible – that indeed is “*māyā*”. Therefore,

⁴⁴ The Caitanya tradition, however, is more interested in Śrīdhara’s *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* than his *Subodhinī*.

hidden from reality by this, ignorant of my own nature, “this deluded world does not know me, the unborn, the imperishable”.⁴⁵

Here, Kṛṣṇa’s *yogamāyā* is described as ‘concealing’ (*samāvṛta*) in the *Gītā* itself. However, Śrīdhara’s elaboration is telling. By adding that *yoga* is the ‘inconceivable play of my wisdom that is indeed *māyā*’ and has ‘the ability to make the impossible possible’, he incorporates the view that that which projects the apparent world is precisely that which conceals it, resulting in ignorance (*ajñāna*), and attributes both to Kṛṣṇa. Perhaps too ‘the ability to make the impossible possible’ is the ‘play of Kṛṣṇa’s wisdom’ *unveiling* reality for his devotees.

Śrīdhara himself supplies the term *yogamāyā* later in his *Subodhinī*, to refer to the power of the cosmic Lord as the creator, sustainer and end of all (9.5-7). Echoing 7.5, Śrīdhara has Kṛṣṇa speak of his “divine power” as the ‘skill which has the ability to make the impossible possible [...] the grandeur of my *yogamāyā* is beyond all reasoning’.⁴⁶ Here, Śrīdhara explains how all beings can subsist in Kṛṣṇa while he remains unattached (*asaṅga*).

Aside from *yogamāyā*, Śrīdhara uses the specific term *āvaraṇa-śakti* in *Subodhinī* 14.8:

The meaning is: “Know *tamas* to be born of ignorance”, arising from that part of *prakṛti* which has the power of concealment (*āvaraṇa-śakti*), thus “deluding”, confusing, “all embodied beings”.⁴⁷

Although *tamas* being deluding ignorance is supplied by the *Gītā* itself, it is Śrīdhara who links this ignorance with *āvaraṇa-śakti*, the power to conceal. Ultimately, this is Kṛṣṇa’s power acting through the *guṇas* of *prakṛti* – here, *tamas*. Specifically, then, in terms of his action in the cosmos, Kṛṣṇa’s power as cosmic Lord is referred to using several key terms: *māyā*, *yogamāyā*, and *āvaraṇa-śakti*.

⁴⁵ *teṣāṃ svājñāne hetum āha “sarvasya” lokasya “nāhaṃ prakāśaḥ” prakāṣo na bhavāmi kintu mad-bhaktānām eva | yato “yogamāyayā samāvṛtaḥ” yogo yuktir madīyaḥ ko ’py acintyaḥ prajñā-vilāsaḥ sa eva māyāghaṭamāna-ghaṭanācāturyaṃ anayā sacchannaḥ ataeva mat-svarūpājñāne “mūḍhaḥ sann ayaṃ loko ’jam avyayaṃ ca māṃ na jānāti” ||*

⁴⁶ *yuktim aghaṭaḥghaṭanā-cāturyaṃ madīya-yogamāyā-vaibhavyāvīrtarkyatva-...na kiñcid viruddham*

⁴⁷ *“tamas tv ajñānāj” jātam āvaraṇa-śakti-pradhānāt prakṛty-amśād udbhutam “viddhi”ity arthaḥ | atah “sarv”eṣāṃ “dehināṃ mohanaṃ” bhrānti-janakam...*

Although Śrīdhara does not use the technical term *vikṣepa-śakti* in his *Subodhinī*, he does use the term *līlā*, an important term in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.⁴⁸ It is important to point out that, in the *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara only uses the term *līlā* in reference to Kṛṣṇa's specific descent form.⁴⁹ We first see the term *līlā* in Śrīdhara's gloss of 2.12, where he speaks of 'the body associated with my divine play' (*līlā-vidraha*) which is sometimes manifested and sometimes hidden (*kadācid...āvīrbhāve tirobhāve*). Later in *Subodhinī* 7.24, Śrīdhara again uses the term *līlā*, this time to contrast Kṛṣṇa's freely chosen forms with the enforced bodies (*deha*) of other gods, emphasising again both Kṛṣṇa's transcendence and the failure of the ignorant to discriminate:

Hence, they (mis)perceive me, the Supreme Lord – who, **through (my) play, manifests in multiple bodily forms, made of very pure and great *sattva***, for the sake of the protection of the world – as the same as the other gods with material bodies, formed by their own actions.⁵⁰

Śrīdhara thus plays with the ideas of concealing and revealing in a variety of ways, while only using the technical term *āvaraṇa-śakti* once. Importantly, while Kṛṣṇa's power as cosmic Lord projects the very universe which conceals reality from the ignorant, Kṛṣṇa's specific *śuddha-sattvic* descent form manifests/is revealed (*āviṣkṛta*) *through* his divine

⁴⁸ E.g. *BhP* 7.7.34:

*niśamya karmāṇi guṇān atulyān
vīryāṇi līlā-tanubhiḥ kṛtāni |
yadātiharṣotpulakāśru-gadgadam
protkaṅṭha udgāyati rauti nṛtyati || My emphasis.*

'When (a devotee) hears of (Lord Vāsudeva's) incomparable kingly deeds, (his) heroic actions (done) **through the bodies of his play** [e.g. Kṛṣṇa and other descent forms], sobbing tears of great delight, he sings with an open throat, praises and dances'.

BhP 10.52.36:

*evam samprīṣṭa-sampraśno
brāhmaṇaḥ parameṣṭhinā |
līlā-grhīta-dehena*

tasmai sarvam avarṇayat || My emphasis.

[*BhP* is commenting on the questions Kṛṣṇa in his human form asked to greet a *brahmin* messenger from Rukmiṇī (his future wife):]

'The *brahmin* being courteously questioned **by the Supreme Being who had taken a body through his *līlā* (play)** explained everything to him'.

⁴⁹ However, in the *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā* (also 'Śrīdharī'), following the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s use, he also uses *līlā* for the Lord's cosmic actions of origination, preservation and destruction too, e.g. introducing 3.5.23 *tatra sṛṣṭilīlāṃ varṇayatam tataḥ pūrvāvasthāmāha...* 'Then to describe (his) play of origination, (the text) next speaks of its previous state [i.e. of the universe before manifestation when there was nothing separate from the Lord to be seen]'. *Śrīmad Bhāgavata-mahāpurāṇam 'Śrīdharī'-ṭīkopetam* (ed.) Ramateja Pandeya (Delhi: Chaukhamba, 2017), p.200.

⁵⁰ *ato jagad-rakṣaṇārthaṃ līlayāviṣkṛta-nānā-viśuddhorjita-sattva-mūrtiṃ māṃ parameśvaraṃ ca sva-karma-nirmita-bhautika-dehaṃ ca devatāntara-samaṃ paśyanto || My emphasis.*

play (*līlayā*). In turn, it is precisely through having the power to reveal his nature as Supreme Lord that Kṛṣṇa, in his descent form, is made known to the devotee.

4.2 – Kṛṣṇa’s descent form

Having reviewed the central themes around which Śrīdhara focuses his *Subodhinī*, I now consider how Śrīdhara interprets Kṛṣṇa’s ‘coming to be’ in the *Gītā*, both in terms of a) Kṛṣṇa’s descent form, and b) the way language about Kṛṣṇa’s descent form works.

4.2.1 – Kṛṣṇa’s śakti and action in the world

In the *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara interprets Kṛṣṇa as always acting through *prakṛti*, but in different ways: i) via the *guṇas*, which is his creative and sustaining action in the cosmos, and ii) via the specific body, which is his particular action in the world. Both types of action require *śakti*, but in order to act in a particular situation in the world, Kṛṣṇa also requires a body.

4.2.1.1 – Cosmic form: creative action (via the *guṇas*)

Kṛṣṇa as Lord acts in the cosmos through *prakṛti*. In chapters 7 and 13, the two key places in the *Gītā* where Kṛṣṇa speaks of higher and lower *prakṛti*, Śrīdhara makes it clear that we are to read *prakṛti* – in the sense of material nature – as the Lord’s *śakti* through which he acts. In *Gītā* 7.4, Kṛṣṇa says that *prakṛti* is divided into eight categories. Śrīdhara glosses ‘my *prakṛti*’ with ‘my power (*śakti*) called *māyā*’.⁵¹ Śrīdhara returns to explaining that *prakṛti* is the power of the Lord in 13.19:

Thus, “the field (*kṣetra*), as it is, and whatever it is like” (13.2), has been explained so far. But now, by describing *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* as being the cause of *saṃsāra*, what has been declared previously, “What its modifications are, when it appears, and what its powers are” (13.3), is being explained in the following five verses (13.19-23) [...] If it is the case that both *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* might both have a beginning, then a different *prakṛti* must be their creator, which would lead to [the fallacy of] infinite

⁵¹ “*me prakṛtir*” *māyākhyā śaktir*

regress. Hence, “know the two [i.e. *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*] as beginningless”. “*Prakṛti*”, being the power of the Lord, who has no beginning, is itself beginningless. “*Puruṣa*”, also being a part of that [the Lord], is indeed without a beginning. As the great commentator on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śaṅkara, has established this in his expert composition, the beginninglessness and perpetual existence of the Supreme Lord, and his powers, is not discussed by us. “Know the modifications”, such as the body and the sense-organs, “and the *guṇas*”, the modifications of the *guṇas*, such as pleasure, pain and delusion, “as generated from *prakṛti*”.⁵²

Interestingly, Śrīdhara here claims that Śaṅkara has already established the ‘beginninglessness and perpetual existence of the Supreme Lord, **and his powers**’ (*parameśvarasya tac-chaktīnām cānāditvaṃ nityatvaṃ ca*). However, while in Śaṅkara’s comment *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* are indeed identified as the Lord’s two ‘*prakṛtis*’ without beginning, Śaṅkara makes no mention of the Lord’s ‘powers’ (*śakti*).⁵³ Śrīdhara, by contrast, glosses ‘*prakṛti*’ as ‘the **power** of the Lord’ (*īśvarasya śaktitvāt*). Śrīdhara clearly departs from Śaṅkara here, even while invoking him for legitimation. Śrīdhara then reiterates in 13.30 that *prakṛti* ‘has the form of the Lord’s power’.⁵⁴ In reading *prakṛti* in this way, Śrīdhara makes clear that the Lord’s creative action in his cosmic form is performed through his power (*śakti*).

4.2.1.2 – Descent form: particular action (via the specific body)

In the *Subodhinī*, the transcendent not only acts creatively in the cosmos, but also acts particularly in the world through Kṛṣṇa, who takes on a specific body to intervene. This type

⁵² *tad evaṃ “tat kṣetram yac ca yādṛk” cety etāvat prapañcitam | idānīm tu “yad vikāri yataś ca yat | sa ca yo yat-prabhāvaś” cety etat pūrvaṃ pratijñātam eva prakṛti-puruṣayoḥ saṃsāra-hetutva-kathanena prapañcayati pañcabhiḥ [...] tatra prakṛti-puruṣayor ādimatve tayor api prakṛty-antareṇa bhāvyaṃ ity anavasthāpattiḥ syāt | atas “tāv ubhāv anādī viddhi” | anāder īśvarasya śaktitvāt “prakṛtir” anādīḥ | “puruṣo” ’pi tad-aṃśatvād anādir eva | atra ca parameśvarasya tac-chaktīnām cānāditvaṃ nityatvaṃ ca śrīmac-chaṅkara-bhagavad-bhāṣya-kṛdbhīr atiprabandhenopapāditam iti nāsmābhiḥ prayatante | “vikārāṃś” ca dehendriyādīn “guṇāṃś ca” guṇa-pariṇāmān sukha-duḥkha-mohādīn “prakṛteḥ sambhavān viddhi” ||*

⁵³ In *Gītābhāṣya* 13.3 Śaṅkara, constrained by *Gītā* 13.3 describing the *kṣetrajña* as “*yat-prabhavaḥ*” (“the one who possesses powers”), does say that *prabhāvāḥ* (plural) are the powers of the *kṣetrajña*, created by (superimposed) adjuncts (*upādhiḥ śaktayaḥ*). In other words, they are illusory and, in the context of 13.2, probably refer to all the superimposed adjuncts of mind-body through which the embodied self functions.

⁵⁴ *īśvara-śakti-rūpāyāṃ prakṛtau*

of action requires both *śakti* and a body. Kṛṣṇa's descent form is first mentioned in *Gītā* 4.6. Śrīdhara's comment, crucial to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy, as we saw briefly above, is now worth quoting at length:

Now, how can you, having no beginning, have a birth? And how can the imperishable have repeated births, as said in "I passed through many lives" (4.5)? And how can you, the Lord, devoid of merit and demerit, be born like the individual self? Therefore it says (4.6), this being the case, "Although I am birthless", also, although I am the self "not subject to change", of an imperishable nature, also "the Lord", devoid of dependence on *karma*, "I come to be through my own *māyā*", I exist with the completely undiminishing power of knowledge, strength, energy and so on. For this reason, it is asked: But how can you, who are without a subtle body consisting of sixteen parts, have a birth? "Depending upon", adopting "my *prakṛti*", which consists of pure *sattva*, I descend by my own will, in a form of very pure and excellent *sattva*.⁵⁵

Śrīdhara's fictive dialogue again contrasts birth due to the results of action with Kṛṣṇa's taking a specific body requiring his power. The way Śrīdhara glosses "through my own *māyā*" is key. The compound *samyagapracūyuta* ('completely undiminishing') could govern either '*śakti*' ('power') or '*jñāna-bala-vīryādi*' (knowledge, strength, energy and so on). If the former, it would mean that Kṛṣṇa's power is undiminished by him coming into being. If the latter, it would mean that Kṛṣṇa's knowledge, strength, energy and so on are undiminished by him coming into being. Either way, Śrīdhara makes a strong statement about Kṛṣṇa's transcendence.

Moreover, by appealing to the qualities 'knowledge, strength, energy and so on', Śrīdhara may be appealing to both a Vaiṣṇava and a Śaiva set of qualities. We could certainly read *-ādi* (etc) as referring to the paired attributes of the six Vaiṣṇava qualities of *jñāna* (and

⁵⁵ *nanv anādes tava kuto janma? avināśināś ca katham punaḥ punar janma yena "bahūni me vyatītāni"-ity ucyate? | īśvarasya ca tava puṇya-pāpa-vihīnasya katham jīvavaj janmety? ata āha [Gītā 4.6] satyam evaṃ tathāpi "ajo 'pi sann ahaṃ", tathā-"avyaya"-ātmāpy anaśvara-svabhāvo 'pi san, tathā "īśvaro" 'pi karma-pāratantrya-rahito 'pi san "sva-māyayā sambhavāmi" samyag apracyuta-jñāna-bala-vīryādi-śaktyaiva bhavāmi | nanu tathāpi ṣoḍaśa-kalātmaka-liṅga-deha-śūnyasya tava kuto janmeti? ata uktaṃ | "svām" śuddha-sattvātmikāṃ "prakṛtiṃ adhiṣṭhāya" svīkṛtya viśuddhorjita-sattva-mūrtyā svecchayāvatarāmi...||*

aiśvarya, ‘sovereignty’), *bala* (and *śakti*, ‘power’) and *vīrya* (and *tejas*, ‘brilliance’). However, since the list selects only *jñāna*, *bala* and *vīrya* (compare the compound *jñāna-bala-kriyā* from the Rudra-Śiva-leaning *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.8 which Śrīdhara quotes in *Subodhinī* 13.13 – see 4.3.1.1), it is possible that there may be an allusion to a Śaiva set of qualities too.⁵⁶ We already know that the juxtaposition of Viṣṇu and Śiva was specific to medieval Orissa,⁵⁷ so the fact that Śrīdhara may appeal to both Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas here, as in his initial praise verse, would make sense in this context.

Kṛṣṇa’s body is clearly set apart from ordinary human bodies by Śrīdhara. In *Subodhinī* 4.6 (cited above), Śrīdhara references the subtle body (*deha*) found in Sāṃkhya – he explains that it consists of sixteen parts (the five organs of knowledge, the five organs of action, the five vital forces (*prānas*), and the ego/mind (*ahaṃkāra* or *manas*)). The key difference between the subtle body and Kṛṣṇa’s body is that, while the first is a carrier of *karmic* results, the second is not. As Śrīdhara explains in 4.6, Kṛṣṇa’s body is not a *karmic* body, and his manifestation is freely chosen – this is made clear by Śrīdhara’s use of the phrase ‘by my own will’ (*svecchayā*). Śrīdhara therefore makes the distinction between the human body and Kṛṣṇa’s body explicit by his specific use of terms. In 4.6, he refers to the ordinary subtle body using the term *deha*, while Kṛṣṇa’s body is arguably referred to using the term *mūrti*. The Sanskrit is ambiguous at this point, reflected in my translation: ‘I descend by my own will in a form of very pure and excellent *sattva*’.⁵⁸ The compound, *viśuddhorjita-sattva-mūrtyā*, could adjectivally qualify *svecchayā*, indicating that Kṛṣṇa’s *will* has the form of/consists of (*-mūrti*) this rarefied type of *sattva*. Alternatively, it could stand alone as a noun, to indicate that Kṛṣṇa descends/comes to be ‘with a form/“body” (*mūrti*) of very pure and excellent *sattva*’. Although the first seems more likely in 4.6, 9.11 gives support to the second. Here Śrīdhara presents Kṛṣṇa’s words as a response to why people fail to worship him as the Supreme:

⁵⁶ Śaṅkara prefers to abbreviate the six Vaiṣṇava qualities as: *jñānaiśvaryaḍi*. For a Kashmiri Śaiva example where the six Vaiṣṇava qualities were mapped onto the qualities of Śiva, see Mark S.G. Dyczkowski (ed.) *The Stanzas on Vibration: The Spandakārikā with Four Commentaries* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p.362.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 2, section 2.3.2.1.

⁵⁸ *viśuddhorjita-sattva-mūrtyā svecchayāvatarāmi*

Although my “body” is made of pure *sattva*, fools despise...its “human” form which I “have resorted to” according to the request of my devotees (*bhaktecchā-vaśāt*).⁵⁹

Here Śrīdhara unambiguously describes Kṛṣṇa’s body (*tanu*) as being composed of pure *sattva*. It appears to have a human form (*manuṣyākāra*) and hence the foolish assume it to be like theirs and not worthy of worship. Kṛṣṇa’s body (*mūrti, tanu*), the free response to his devotees through his own will in coming to be, is marked off from the ordinary human *saṃsāric* body (*deha*), compelled to be reborn while failing to worship Kṛṣṇa (*Subodhinī* 9.20).

Referring to such a *deha*, Śrīdhara alludes to a Sāṃkhyan model of the gross and subtle body, as we saw above in 4.6. Sheridan reminds us that Śrīdhara also references Sāṃkhya in his *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā*. For instance, in 2.9.34, Śrīdhara gives what Sheridan calls a qualified non-dualistic Sāṃkhyan explanation of how existent beings evolve from the gross and subtle elements, concluding: ‘My [*bhagavān*’s] elements are existent (*sattā*)’⁶⁰ – that is, they derive their existence from, and are ultimately non-different from, the Lord. However, the *Subodhinī* shows that the foolish do not recognise that, because the Lord’s descent body is made of pure *sattva*, it is not affected or brought about by past *karmic* action, and is therefore different from ordinary bodies made up of these elements, both gross and subtle.

We have seen that the form that is freely chosen by Kṛṣṇa is described by Śrīdhara as ‘a form of very pure and excellent *sattva*’ (*viśuddhorjita-sattva-mūrti-*). *Sattva* (the pure) is one of the three basic strands (*guṇas*) making up *prakṛti* in the *Gītā*’s cosmology, (also in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Sāṃkhya), alongside *rajas* (the energetic) and *tamas* (the dull). In different combinations, these *guṇas* form the subtle and gross elements affecting every aspect of psycho-materiality. The worship of fools who fail to recognise Kṛṣṇa is identified as *tamasic* (9.11).

⁵⁹ *mūrkhā* “*mām*”...*avamanyate*...*śuddha-sattva-mayīm api* “*tanuṃ*” *bhaktecchā-vaśān* “*manuṣya*”*ākārām* “*āśritav*”*antam* ||

⁶⁰ Sheridan, ‘Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’, p.64.

The first evolute of *prakṛti* is the *buddhi* (intellect), followed by *antaḥkaraṇa* (inner organ), both of which Śrīdhara may refer to as *citta* (mind). *Buddhi* consists only of *sattva*⁶¹ and so is the purest aspect of living beings and closest to the transcendent. Before Śrīdhara, many Advaitins regarded the *buddhi* as the place in which pure consciousness (self) could be reflected. As such, it is the site of both the misidentification of mind-body with self and where they can be disentangled.

Although Śrīdhara does refer to Kṛṣṇa’s body as a *sattvic* body in the *Subodhinī*, the term *sattva* when used in this context is always qualified with the term *śuddha* (pure) or, as here, with the strengthened form *viśuddha* (very pure). Following the first mention of Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* body in 4.6, Śrīdhara consistently refers to Kṛṣṇa’s form using this same phrase throughout his *Subodhinī*. In his comment on 4.10, Śrīdhara says, ‘through my descent forms of *śuddha-sattva*’ (*śuddha-sattvāvātāraiḥ*); in 7.24, Śrīdhara refers to the Lord as having manifested in ‘multiple bodily forms made of very pure and excellent *sattva*’ (*nānā-viśuddhorjita-sattva-mūrti-*); in 9.11, Śrīdhara says that Kṛṣṇa’s body is ‘composed of pure *sattva*’ (*śuddha-sattva-mayī*); in 14.27, Śrīdhara’s Kṛṣṇa declares that he ‘consists of pure *sattva*’ (*śuddha-sattvātmakatva*). I contend that these qualifications indicate that the body of Kṛṣṇa, on whom *prakṛti* depends, transcends even the ordinary pure strand of *sattva*. Nonetheless, that Śrīdhara consistently and frequently describes Kṛṣṇa’s descent form as composed of *śuddha-sattva* in key passages throughout his *Subodhinī* suggests that this is central to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, as I shall demonstrate below.

4.2.2 – Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* body as the vehicle for grace

We have already seen that, in the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa acts as Lord in the cosmos, which is the result of his creative action. Śrīdhara makes it clear that Kṛṣṇa’s grace is generally available in this cosmic form. In 10.2, Śrīdhara mentions Kṛṣṇa’s creative action in the cosmos along with grace (*anugraha*):

“Neither the gods nor” even “the great sages” like Bhṛgu and others “know my” excellent being – my manifestation through multiple ‘glories’, though I am birthless. This is the reason: “For I am the” cause or “origin of all the

⁶¹ So ‘*sattva*’ can be a synonym for ‘*buddhi*’.

gods and great sages entirely”, through all means, as their creator and as the author of their intellect etc. Therefore without my grace no-one can know me. This is the meaning.⁶²

In 10.8, Śrīdhara makes it clear that the discriminating (*vivekin*) who are firm in their love (*prīṭiyukta*) for Kṛṣṇa do recognise him as the cause. The context suggests we can read 10.2 as indicating that Kṛṣṇa’s grace is available in his cosmic form, as creator of the universe. However, Śrīdhara also points out that even gods and ordinary sages do not understand Kṛṣṇa as he is their ultimate creator, so he needs to use his grace as manifest through his descent form for it to be made available. So, while Kṛṣṇa’s grace is indeed present in the shape of the cosmos, it largely goes unrecognised – which is why Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* body is so vital.

Indeed, it is *primarily* Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* descent form that is the vehicle for grace, for which the terms Śrīdhara uses are normally *prasāda* and *anugraha*, although a complex of other terms helps build the picture: *karuṇā* (compassion), *kṛpā* (tenderness) and so on. Our first indication of this comes right at the beginning of Śrīdhara’s introduction, which we quoted above:

It was indeed here that the supremely compassionate (*parama-kāruṇika*) Lord, the son of Devakī, descended out of affection (*hita*) for the whole world, when his feet were worshipped by all.⁶³

Right from the outset Śrīdhara establishes that, out of his great compassion (*karuṇā*) and grace/affection/favour (*hita*),⁶⁴ Kṛṣṇa manifests himself in the world in his descent body in order to make himself available to the whole world (*sakala-loka*). Soon after Kṛṣṇa’s particular descent form is mentioned in 4.6, in 4.10 Śrīdhara emphasises that it is Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* manifestations that are the vehicle for grace (*prasāda*):

⁶² “me” *mama prakṛṣṭam bhavaṃ janma-rahitasyāpi nānā-vibhūtibhir āvirbhāvaṃ “sura-gaṇā” api “maharṣayo” ’pi bhṛgv-ādayo “nā” jānanti | tatra hetuḥ – “ahaṃ hi sarva-devānāṃ maharṣiṇāṃ cādiḥ” kāraṇam, “sarvaśaḥ” sarvaiḥ prākāraiḥ utpādatatvena buddhy-ādi-pravartakatvena ca | ato mad-anugrahaṃ vinā māṃ ke ’pi na jānanti arthaḥ ||*

⁶³ *iha khalu sakala-loka-hitāvatāraḥ sakala-vanditacaraṇaḥ parama-kāruṇiko bhagavān devakī-nandanas...*

⁶⁴ Or, ‘for the welfare of’.

Having known my supreme compassion, namely that I maintain *dharma through my manifestations of pure sattva*, “many”, for whom desire, fear and anger have “gone away”, ceased, because of the absence of disturbances, attain “my being”, identification with me, being “cleansed”, purified from all the taints of ignorance and its results, “through knowledge” *received through my grace*, and “austerity”, their own duty which causes its ripening (the *dvandva* makes a singular of these two). They are “absorbed in me”, their minds on me alone, “taking refuge in me”.⁶⁵

This comment is crucial to Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, as it is through the grace given in Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* form that Arjuna can develop a ‘purified’ understanding, which is necessary for knowledge.

Such knowledge is gained by seeing Kṛṣṇa as the ‘self of all’ (*sarvātma*), linked again with Kṛṣṇa’s descent form being the vehicle for grace. As Śrīdhara explains in 6.30:

Worshipping me as the self of all beings is the primary means to knowledge of the self as such. It says: “He who sees me”, the Supreme Lord, “everywhere”, in all beings, “and sees all” living beings, “in me, for him I am not lost”, I do not go out of sight, “and he is not” out of sight for me. The meaning is, having been present before the eyes, having been seen through compassion, I favour him being looked at/visible.⁶⁶

It is Kṛṣṇa’s descent form, his *śuddha-sattvic* body, which can be present before the worshipper’s very eyes, looking at him graciously (*krpā-dṛṣṭyā*) and showing compassion/kindness (*anugrah*).

⁶⁵ *ahaṃ śuddha-sattvāvatārair dharma-paripālanam karomīti madīyaṃ parama-kāruṇikatvaṃ jñātvā “vītā” vigatā “rāgabhayakrodhā” yebhya ste vikṣepābhāvāt | “manmayā” madekacittā bhūtvā “mām evopāśritāḥ” santo mat-prasāda-labhyaṃ yad ātma-jñānam ca tapas ca tat-paripāka-hetuḥ sva-dharmaḥ tayor dvandvaikavadbhāvaḥ | tena “jñāna-tapasā “pūtāḥ” śuddhā nirastājñāna-tat-kārya-malāḥ santo “madbhāvaṃ” matsāyujyaṃ prāpta “bahavaḥ” |*

⁶⁶ *evambhūtātma-jñāne ca sarva-bhūtātmayā mad-upāsanaṃ mukhyaṃ kāraṇam ity āha yo mām iti | “mām” parameśvaraṃ “sarvatra” bhūta-mātre “yaḥ paśyati” | “sarvaṃ ca” prāṇi-mātraṃ “mayi” yaḥ “paśyati” | “tasyāhaṃ na praṇaśyāmy” adṛśyo na bhavāmi | “sa ca” mamādṛśyo na bhavati | pratyakṣo bhūtvā krpā-dṛṣṭyā taṃ vilokyānugrḥṇāmīty arthaḥ ||*

It is also out of grace that Kṛṣṇa in his descent form chooses to reveal his universal form, showing who he really is as Supreme Lord. Śrīdhara makes this clear in 11.47:

O “Arjuna”, why are you afraid when “being gracious”, *out of compassion*, “I have shown you this supreme”, highest, “form of mine through” my “own *yoga*”, *through the power of my yogamāyā*. Its superiority is stated: “excellent, universal,” comprising all, “infinite” and “primeval”, this form of mine “which has not been seen before by anyone else”, by any other except a devotee like you.⁶⁷

As we saw in section 4.1.5, although Śrīdhara had not fully adopted the terms *āvaraṇa*- and *vikṣepa-śakti*, *Subodhinī* 7.25 presents *yogamāyā* as that which *conceals*, and as Kṛṣṇa’s power at the level of his being the cosmic Lord. However, in Śrīdhara’s comment above, Kṛṣṇa’s descent body *discloses* his universal form through the power of *yogamāyā*, which is explicitly stated to be a means of grace. While at the cosmic level Kṛṣṇa’s *yogamāyā* is that which *conceals* reality, here Śrīdhara shows that Kṛṣṇa’s *yogamāyā* in his descent form is that which *reveals* the universal form, showing who he really is as Supreme Lord. Moreover, Śrīdhara’s gloss above emphasises that the Lord, in his universal form, cannot be seen ‘by any other except a **devotee** like you’ (*tvādrśād bhaktād anyena na drṣṭam*). This highlights the fact that *bhakti* is the means through which Kṛṣṇa can give this manifestation. In 11.47, Arjuna is addressed specifically. Through *bhakti*, Arjuna’s perception is changed as he sees Kṛṣṇa not only in his descent form, but in his universal form as well. As I shall show below, it is through *bhakti* in response to Kṛṣṇa’s grace that Arjuna can then progress to the knowledge that leads to realisation.

4.2.3 – *Bhakti: Arjuna as devotee*

As we saw previously, Śrīdhara holds that Kṛṣṇa’s power (*yogamāyā*) in his form as cosmic Lord refers to the power of *māyā*, a power that simultaneously conceals him. Śrīdhara

⁶⁷ he “arjuna”, kim iti bibheṣi? yato “mayā prasannena” kṛpayā tavedaṃ “param” uttamam “rūpaṃ darśitam, ātmano” mama “yogād” yogamāyā-sāmārthyāt | paratvam evāha – “tejo-mayaṃ viśvam” viśvātmakam “anantam ādyam” ca “yan” mama rūpaṃ “tvadanyena” tvādrśād bhaktād anyena “na pūrvaṃ drṣṭam” tat ||

introduces 7.14 by posing a question asked by Arjuna puzzling over this issue: ‘Then who does know you?’ (*ke tarhi tvāṃ jānanti?*). Śrīdhara writes:

“This divine”, world-transcending, meaning, very marvellous, “*māyā* of mine”, the power of the Supreme Lord, “made of the *guṇas*”, composed of the modifications of the *guṇas* such as *sattva*, and so on, is “difficult to cross”, to overcome. For this is widely known. Nevertheless, “those who resort to”, worship, “me alone” – **‘alone’ means ‘with undeviating devotion’** – “cross over this *māyā*”, although it is difficult to overcome. Then these beings know me. This is the meaning.⁶⁸

With the *Gītā*, Śrīdhara holds that, while Kṛṣṇa is made generally available in the cosmos via his *māyā*, here, becoming free from *māyā* is an extremely difficult task. What it requires is to know who Kṛṣṇa really is. In other words, the subject to be understood is the transcendent, which is concealed by the *guṇas*, which are a product of Kṛṣṇa’s *māyā*. How, then, can Arjuna or the devotee access the transcendent, given that Kṛṣṇa’s *māyā* functions as concealing? The *Gītā* says it is those who approach Kṛṣṇa alone (*mām eva prapadyante*) who can cross *māyā*. With a nice twist, however, Śrīdhara makes clear his view that it is only those who worship (*bhajante*) Kṛṣṇa *constantly* who overcome *māyā*. For, he says, ‘the word *eva*, “alone” means “with undeviating devotion”’ (*evakāreṇāvyabhicāriṇyā bhaktyā*). Those who practise like this are the ones who come to know (*jānanti*).

4.2.3.1 – Worship of Kṛṣṇa’s revealing *śuddha-sattvic* form

As made clear in 6.30 above, the subject of worship in the *Subodhinī* is Kṛṣṇa as the self of all. We have also seen, in 7.14, that Kṛṣṇa is made generally available through his creative action (through the *guṇas*). In 7.24, Śrīdhara refers to Kṛṣṇa being worshipped in his *specific* form. This form, as we have seen, is made available in the world through Kṛṣṇa’s particular action. Commenting on 7.24, Śrīdhara explains:

⁶⁸ “*daivī*” *alaukikī* | *atyadbhutety arthaḥ* | “*guṇa-mayī*” *sattvādi-guṇa-vikārātmikā* “*mama*” *parameśvarasya śaktir* “*māyā duratyayā*” *dustarā* | *hi prasiddhametat* | *tathāpi ye* “*mām eva*” *ity evakāreṇāvyabhicāriṇyā bhaktyā* “*prapadyante*” *bhajanti* “*te māyām etāṃ*” *dustarām api* “*taranti*” | *tato māṃ jānanti...* || My emphasis.

“The ignorant think of me, the unmanifest”, who am beyond this cosmic manifestation, “as becoming manifest”, as “attaining” the state of a human, a fish, a tortoise, and so on. The reason is, “They do not know my supreme state”, my own form. What is its being? It is “imperishable”, eternal, that than which nothing superior exists. **However, (though) through play (I), the Supreme Lord, (have) manifested in multiple bodily forms made of very pure and excellent *sattva* for the protection of the world, the foolish-minded (mis)perceive me as the same as other gods with material bodies, formed by their own actions.** They do not honour (me) very much; on the contrary, they worship other gods only for a fast result, in the manner explained above, and attain “a perishable result” (7.23).⁶⁹

Śrīdhara’s comment here is crucial to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. He points out that the foolish and ignorant only see Kṛṣṇa’s external body – whether currently or in previous descents as the tortoise which held up the earth, the fish which rescued Manu from the flood and so on. Consequently, they do not understand who Kṛṣṇa really is – the Supreme Lord. Śrīdhara goes on to imply that those who are *not* ignorant worship the Lord in pure *sattvic* forms. Moreover, Śrīdhara specifically speaks of the ignorant not respecting Kṛṣṇa much in his pure *sattvic* form. This pure *sattvic* form, Śrīdhara explains, is ‘revealed through my play’ (*līlayāviṣkṛta-*). We saw in section 4.1.5 that in 2.12, Śrīdhara also uses the term ‘play’ (*līlā*) in reference to Kṛṣṇa’s specific descent body:

It is not the case that “I”, the Supreme Lord, “did not exist at any time”, ever, even though the body associated with my divine play (*līlā-vigraha-*) has been revealed and concealed. I indeed exist because I am without beginning.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ “avyaktaṃ” prapañcāītaṃ “māṃ vyaktiṃ” manuṣya-matsya-kūrmādi-bhāvaṃ “prāptam abuddhayo manyante” | tatra hetuḥ – “mama paraṃ bhāvaṃ” svarūpam “ajānantaḥ” | katham-bhūtam? “avyayaṃ” nityam na vidyate “uttamo” yasmātaṃ bhāvaṃ | **ato jagad-rakṣaṇārthaṃ līlayāviṣkṛta-nānā-viśuddhorjita-sattva-mūrtiṃ māṃ parameśvaraṃ ca sva-karma-nirmīta-bhautika-dehaṃ ca devatāntara-samaṃ paśyanto manda-matayo māṃ** | nātīvā driyante pratyuta kṣipra-phalaṃ devatāntaram eva bhajanti te cokta-prakāreṇa “antavat phalaṃ” prāpnvantīty arthaḥ || My emphasis.

⁷⁰ yathā “ahaṃ” parameśvaro “jātu” kadācit līlā-vigrahasyāvīrbhāva-tirobhāvato “nāsam” iti tu naiva | *api tv āsam eva anādītvāt*

Both *Subodhinī* 2.12 and 7.24 are key examples of Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s specific *śuddha-sattvic* form as having the power to *reveal*. Not only is Kṛṣṇa’s manifestation in a specific body made possible ‘*through* his divine play’ (*līlayā*), but it is this very manifestation that has the power to reveal. We know that Kṛṣṇa’s body, as the manifestation of the transcendent, is still a product of Kṛṣṇa’s *māyā*. However, the fact that Śrīdhara describes Kṛṣṇa’s specific body in 7.24 as ‘made of very pure and excellent *sattva*’ is crucial to his theology of Kṛṣṇa. The purest *sattva* is what is closest in nature to the transcendent (see section 4.2.1.2). This is precisely how Kṛṣṇa is able to become involved in the world – through his pure *sattvic* body. Śrīdhara therefore interprets Kṛṣṇa as providing a way of making the transcendent available to the devotee. The ‘me’ that is being worshipped in 7.14 *is* the transcendent, but *through* Kṛṣṇa’s pure *sattvic* body, which has the power to reveal.

4.2.3.2 – Arjuna’s developing *śuddha-sattvic* understanding

In section 4.1, we saw that Śrīdhara’s introduction sets up the problem of Arjuna requiring rescue from the ocean of grief and delusion. According to Śrīdhara, the reason Arjuna is drowning in the first place is that he lacks knowledge, since he has not learnt to discriminate between the self and the body. I propose that Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* form is central to Śrīdhara’s interpretation of the soteriology of Arjuna’s rescue, precisely because Arjuna requires purification of his own *sattvic* element: his mind. In his *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara progressively demonstrates how Arjuna can purify his mind, to gain a ‘purified’ understanding of the self, which will eventually become central to his progress as a true *bhakta* of Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīdhara’s focus on purification as a process indicates that Arjuna is his main referent, in terms of pedagogy. Śrīdhara refers to the purification of the mind (*sattva-śuddhi*) throughout his *Subodhinī*, but makes clear from the outset that Arjuna specifically requires this. At the beginning of *Gītā* 3, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa why he should continue to act if knowledge (*jñāna*) is superior to action (*karma*). In 3.3, Śrīdhara explains the twofold approach (*sādhana/prakāra*) to liberation, *karma-* and *jñāna-yoga*, as being stages (*bhūmi*). The latter is for those whose inner organ is already pure (*śuddhāntaḥkaraṇa*). The former is for those who, aspiring to this latter stage, still require mental purification. Arjuna, being a *kṣatriya*, is eligible for the path of *karma-yoga*, as his mind is currently impure. Towards the

beginning of his *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara repeatedly states this, emphasising that Arjuna should perform actions without attachment and with dedication to Kṛṣṇa alone, in order to attain the mental purity necessary for knowledge.⁷¹ This is first indicated in 2.39:

If, in having been taught thus, the unmediated reality of the self does not exist for you, then “hear about this” mental attitude,⁷² in respect of *karma-yoga*, aiming for the unmediated reality of the self (*ātmatattvāparokṣārtham*) through the purification of the inner organ. “Endowed with” which “attitude”, the inner organ purified through *karma-yoga* dedicated to the Supreme Lord, “you will” completely “abandon”, renounce, “the bondage” comprising “action” by the unmediated knowledge obtained through his grace.⁷³

Śrīdhara thus makes clear from the outset that those who do not yet have direct realisation must perform actions offered to Kṛṣṇa (*parameśvarārpita*) to gain mental purification, so they become ready for the knowledge which kindles realisation. Śrīdhara repeatedly uses compounds such as ‘*īśvarārādhana*’ and ‘*parameśvarārpita/ārādhana*’ in chapter 2 when speaking of Arjuna performing actions.⁷⁴ This demonstrates that actions must be performed for the sake of the Lord, indeed as worship (*ārādhana*) of the Lord, if Arjuna is eventually to progress to unmediated knowledge attained through the Lord’s grace (*prasāda*).

We know that Kṛṣṇa’s teaching on how purification of the mind can lead to knowledge is directed to Arjuna specifically. In 5.1 Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to tell him whether action or renunciation of action is for him. With relatives facing Arjuna across the battlefield, in 5.2 Śrīdhara has Kṛṣṇa offering a different sword:

But I tell **you**, who misidentify the body with the self, to practise *karma-yoga*, which is the means to the knowledge of the supreme self, once the doubt created by grief and delusion over slaying relatives etc has been cut

⁷¹ On actions for mental purification: 3.4,7; 4.39; 5.2,6; 6.3,20.

⁷² *buddhi* – frame of mind.

⁷³ *evam “abhihitā”yām api tava ced ātma-tattvam aparokṣam na bhavati tarhy antaḥkaraṇa-śuddhi-dvārā ātma-tattvāparokṣārthaṃ karma-yoga “tv imām” buddhiṃ “śṛṇu” | yayā “buddhyā yuktaḥ” parameśvarārpita-karma-yogena śuddhāntaḥkaraṇaḥ san tat-prasāda-labdāparokṣa-jñānena “karma” ātmakaṃ “bandhaṃ” prakarṣeṇa “hāsyasi” tyakṣyasi ||*

⁷⁴ 2.39,40,41,46,47,48,50,51,52,72.

off with the sword of the knowledge distinguishing self from body...“Both renunciation and the performance of detached action lead to the highest good” only when performed in accordance with the different stages (*bhūmi*) of one’s progression...⁷⁵

Śrīdhara adds that knowledge of the self is reached by one who has become ‘pure-minded’ (*śuddha-citta*) through performing (detached) action (*karma-yogena*). Śrīdhara thus crucially ties the notion of ‘purity’ to the teaching of action and knowledge being part of a progressive teaching directed towards Arjuna. Śrīdhara’s comment above shows that the key teaching of the *Gītā* on action and renunciation, for him, is part of Kṛṣṇa’s progressive teaching and therefore Arjuna’s progressive learning. ‘Purification’ is key to this progression for Śrīdhara.

In relation to Arjuna’s purification, Śrīdhara uses the terms *krama* (stage) and *bhūmi* (step/stage) to indicate a progressive method of learning. This is in continuity with his wider use of these terms throughout the *Subodhinī* when he explains that passages where action and renunciation are apparently described as different ‘paths’ are properly read as stages on the way to understanding. Arjuna’s purification thus acts as a kind of ‘case study’ for what Śrīdhara sees as Kṛṣṇa’s more general pedagogy of progression. For instance, in relation to the *Gītā*’s key theme, Śrīdhara explicitly refers to action and knowledge as ‘stages’ (*bhūmi*) when introducing 4.41:

Grounding in *brahman* is of two kinds – comprising action and knowledge – taught in the (previous) two chapters as former and latter stages as summarised in these two verses...⁷⁶

Similarly, in the praise verse at the end of chapter 5, Śrīdhara reiterates the fact that Kṛṣṇa teaches in stages:

⁷⁵ *api tu dehātmābhīmāninaṃ tvāṃ bandhuvadhādinimittaśokamohādikṛtam enaṃ saṃśayaṃ dehātmavivekajñānāsinaṃ chittvā paramātmajñānopāyabhūtaṃ karma-yogam ātiṣṭheti bravīmi... “saṃnyāsaḥ karma-yogaś ca” ity etāv “ubhāv” api bhūmikā-bhedena samuccitāv eva “niḥśreyasaṃ” sādhayataḥ... | My emphasis.*

⁷⁶ *adhyāya-dvayoktāṃ pūrvāpara-bhūmikā-bhedena karma-jñāna-mayīṃ dvividhāṃ brahma-niṣṭhām upasaṃharati dvābhyām...*

I bow down to the omniscient Hari, who stated their combination in sequence/stages, thus removing the doubt that there is a choice between action (*yoga*) and knowledge.⁷⁷

Introducing 5.4, Śrīdhara reiterates that action and renunciation are to be practised in sequence, according to the devotee’s ‘stage of progress’ (*krama-samuccayaḥ*).⁷⁸ Similarly, in 5.8, Śrīdhara states that the one who performs detached action becomes a ‘knower of reality’ (*tattvavit*) ‘in stages’ (*krameṇa*).

More specifically, the notion of ‘purification’ is integral to Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy of teaching by progression/sequence in Śrīdhara’s presentation, as 5.7 makes clear:

Although through the stage (*krameṇa*) of *karma-yoga* and so on, *brahman* might have been attained, actions performed following this might in fact cause bondage. Anticipating this doubt, it says: “He who is engaged in *yoga*”, and therefore “whose *ātman*”, i.e. mind, “is completely purified”, and therefore “whose *ātman*”, i.e. body, “is under control”, and therefore also whose “senses are under control”, and thus “whose self (*ātman*) has become the self of all beings” – this person, “although performing actions”, for the sake of the world’s welfare or natural actions, “is not stained”, is not bound.⁷⁹

Here, Śrīdhara stresses to Arjuna how purification is key to progression in stages (*krameṇa*). He glosses the *Gītā*’s own description with sequential terms (*ata eva...ata eva...tataḥ...*) to show that, to reach the stage of detached action, the seeker must be ‘completely pure’ (*viśuddha*) in mind. There are further examples of Śrīdhara’s notion that becoming pure is tied to progression in stages. In 6.25, Śrīdhara emphasises that controlling the mind should happen ‘by staged practice/repetition’ (*abhyāsa-krameṇa*). In his extended comment on

⁷⁷ *vikalpa-śaṅkāpohena yenaivam sāṅkhya-yogayoh |
samuccayaḥ krameṇoktaḥ sarvajñaṁ naumi taṁ harim ||*

⁷⁸ Lit. ‘accumulation of stages’.

⁷⁹ *karma-yogādi-krameṇa brahmādhigame saty api tad-uparitanena karmaṇā bandhaḥ syād evety āśaṅkyāha
– yoga-yukta iti | “yogena yuktaḥ” | ataeva “viśuddhātmā” cittaṁ yasya saḥ | ata eva “vijitātmā” śarīraṁ
yena | ata eva “jītānīndriyāṇi” yena | tataś ca “sarveṣāṁ bhūtānām ātma-bhūta ātmā” yasya sa loka-
saṅgrahārthaṁ svābhāvikaṁ vā karma “kurvann api na lipyate” ||*

13.24, Śrīdhara specifically states that the eight steps of *yoga* should be ‘practised in sequence’ (*krama-samuccaye*).

Kṛṣṇa’s teaching (and Arjuna’s learning) by progression has a further layer in Śrīdhara’s *Subodhinī* – that of Arjuna’s progression as a *bhakta*. In *Subodhinī* 6.47, Śrīdhara has Kṛṣṇa adjuring Arjuna to be a devotee (*mad-bhakta bhava!*), one who worships him as the Supreme Lord Vāsudeva, the best of those engaged in *yoga* (*yoga-“yukteṣu” śreṣṭha-*). Right at the end of his commentary, with an uncharacteristically long comment on the final verse (18.78), Śrīdhara summarises his interpretation of the meaning of the *Gītā* for all who seek ‘freedom from bondage’. In doing so, Śrīdhara clearly refers to Arjuna *as devotee* who can learn *progressively* through Kṛṣṇa’s teaching:

The heart of the *Gītā*’s meaning is that, for one who is devoted to the Lord, knowing the self through his grace (*prasāda*), freedom from bondage may easily occur. For in verses such as “That Supreme Person, O Pārtha, is attained by one-pointed devotion” (8.22); “But through one-pointed devotion I can be [known] in this form, O Arjuna” (11.54), through which it is heard (*śravaṇāt*) that devotion to the Lord is the best means for liberation, it is clearly recognised that the cause of liberation – linked with knowledge arising from his grace which is only an intermediate concern – is devotion with him as sole end.⁸⁰

Pointing back to 8.22 and 11.54, Śrīdhara reminds his wider audience that Arjuna, being directly addressed (particularly by the use of the vocatives, “O Pārtha”; “O Arjuna”), has been the exemplar and primary recipient of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching, told explicitly by Kṛṣṇa to be his devotee (6.47). Like him, they can progressively reach their end: *first* through purifying action (here assumed) which leads to knowledge through grace, as we also saw earlier. But this knowledge is now explicitly described as *preparatory*, ‘only an intermediate concern’. The *primary* means (*sādhakatama*) to liberation, Śrīdhara stresses, legitimated by the *Gītā*’s teaching whose heard authority (*śravaṇāt*) is here paralleled with that of *śruti*, is devotion

⁸⁰ *bhagavad-bhakti-yuktasya tat-prasādātma-bodhataḥ | sukhaṃ bandha-vimuktiḥ syād iti gītārtha-saṅgrahaḥ || tathā hi – puruṣaḥ sa paraḥ pārtha bhaktyā labhyas tv ananyayā | (8.22) “bhaktyā tv ananyayā śākya aham evaṃvidho ’rjuna” | (11.54) ityādau bhagavad-bhakter mokṣaṃ prati sādhatamatva-śravaṇāt tad-ekānta-bhaktir eva tat-prasādotha-jñānāvāntara-vyāpāra-mātra-yukto mokṣa-hetur iti sphuṭaṃ pratīyate |*

with the Lord as sole end. For Śrīdhara, *bhakti* is thus key to Kṛṣṇa’s teaching by progression both as method and as culmination.

This is also made clear in Śrīdhara’s gloss of 18.56, which is introduced with the comment that liberation results from worship (*ārādhana*):

That liberation results from worship of the Supreme Lord through one’s own actions is concluded: “Performing all actions” – all actions are obligatory, occasional and optional actions⁸¹ – in stages as described previously, “taking refuge in me”, me being the only refuge, not results such as heaven, “he attains through my grace the everlasting”, beginningless, “imperishable”, eternal, “supreme” state of Viṣṇu surpassing all.⁸²

Śrīdhara’s gloss here indicates that liberation is attained through worship of Kṛṣṇa, which forms part of a sequential progression of stages leading to this goal. The fact that Śrīdhara specifically says here ‘by stages, as described previously’ (*purvokta-krameṇa*), alludes to the progression for the devotee from action towards knowledge. *Bhakti* is therefore fundamentally tied to learning in stages for Śrīdhara, showing that this is a further level on which Śrīdhara interprets Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy as progressive.

How, then, does Śrīdhara interpret Kṛṣṇa’s modelling for Arjuna’s purification as a devotee? We know that, for Śrīdhara in the *Subodhinī*, Kṛṣṇa’s specific body is made of *śuddha-sattva*. 14.27 is one of the key places where Kṛṣṇa’s body is described in this way:

The reason for this is being explained [*Gītā* 14.27]: “For” thus “I am the resting place”, image (*pratimā*), “of *brahman*”, I am simply *brahman* condensed, just as the solar orb is light condensed. Similarly, “of imperishable”, eternal, “immortality”, liberation, being ever free. Just as “of the permanent *dharma*”, which is the means to this [liberation], being

⁸¹ The three classes of ritual actions according to Pūrvamīmāṃsā.

⁸² *sva-karmabhiḥ parameśvarārādhanaḍ uktaṁ mokṣa-prakāram upasaṁharati sarva-karmāṇīti*: “*sarva-karmāṇī*” *nityāni naimittikāni ca karmāṇi purvokta-krameṇa sarvadā* “*kurvāṇaḥ mad-vyapāśrayaḥ*” *aham eva vyāpāśrayaḥ āśrayaṇīyo na tu svargādi-phalaṁ yasya sa* “*mat-prasādāc chāśvatam*” *anādiṁ*, “*avyāyam*” *nityaṁ sarvotkr̥ṣṭaṁ* “*padam prāpnoti*” ||

that which consists of pure *sattva*. Similarly, I am the resting-place “of the one-purposed”, undivided “happiness”, because my sole form/nature is supreme bliss. Therefore because my devotee will certainly become ready for my state, it has properly been stated that he is fit for becoming *brahman*.⁸³

14.27 is a crucial verse whose initial words, “For I am the *pratiṣṭhā* of *brahman*”, have divided Vedāntin commentators of all kinds. *Pratiṣṭhā* literally means ‘ground’ or ‘foundation’. How can Kṛṣṇa be the foundation of *brahman*? Śaṅkara solves this by giving *pratiṣṭhā* the meaning *pratyagātman*, ‘inner self’ (see Chapter 3, section 3.3.1). Madhusūdana emphasises that the word *brahman* operates in its primary meaning (*vācya*-) to denote the conditioned *brahman* as the source etc of the universe. *Pratiṣṭhā* is that which exists or grounds, so can be equated with ‘I’, the unconditioned Vāsudeva, ‘the supreme unconstructed, unconditioned one, consisting of being, consciousness and bliss, indicated (*lakṣya*-) by the word “that”.’⁸⁴ So Madhusūdana, like Śaṅkara, twists the *Gītā*’s words to give an Advaitin interpretation.

Significantly, however, Śrīdhara glosses Kṛṣṇa’s claim to be *brahman*’s *pratiṣṭhā* with the simple word *pratimā*, ‘image’, taking *pratiṣṭhā* in its related sense of ‘resting place’: “For I am the resting place”, image, “of *brahman*” (“*hi*” *yasmād* “*brahmaṇo* ’*haṃ* *pratiṣṭhā*” *pratimā*). For Śrīdhara, Kṛṣṇa is speaking of his specific manifested body here,⁸⁵ as he clarifies with the statement, “being that which consists of pure *sattva*” (*śuddha-sattvātmakatvāt*). The very fact that Śrīdhara follows this key statement by emphasising that his devotee (*sevin*) ‘will certainly (or even ‘inevitably’) become ready to attain my state’ (*mad-bhāvasyāvaśyaṃbhāvi*-) tells us that preparing the *sattvic* element (the mind) to become pure, and therefore closer to Kṛṣṇa’s own pure state, is key to realisation. Therefore,

⁸³ *tatra hetum āha* [Gītā 14.27] “*hi*” *yasmād* “*brahmaṇo* ’*haṃ* *pratiṣṭhā*” *pratimā ghanībhūtaṃ brahmaivāham* | *yathā ghanībhūtaḥ prakāśa eva sūrya-maṇḍalaṃ tadvad evety arthaḥ* | *yathā* “‘*vyayasya*’ *nityasya* “*amṛtasya*” *mokṣasya* “*ca*”, *nitya-muktatvāt* | *tathā tat-sādhanasya* “*śāśvatasya ca dharmasya*”, *śuddha-sattvātmakatvāt* | *tathā*-“*ekāntikasya*” *akhaṇḍitasya* “*sukhasya*” *ca pratiṣṭhāham paramānandaikarūpatvāt* | *ato mat-sevino mad-bhāvasyāvaśyaṃbhāvitvād yuktam evoktam brahma-bhūyāya kalpata iti* ||

⁸⁴ *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 14.27 *brahmaṇas tat-pada-vācyaśya sopādhikasya jagad-utpatti-sthiti-laya-hetoḥ pratiṣṭhā pāramārthikaṃ nirvikalpalpakaṃ sac-cid-ānandātmakaṃ nirupādhikaṃ tat-pada-lakṣyam ahaṃ nivikalpako vāsudevaḥ pratitiṣṭhati*... See further Chapter 5 on the significance of ‘you are that’ for Madhusūdana.

⁸⁵ Cf *Subodhinī* 18.22 where he says that *tamasic* knowledge takes the Lord who is the self to be wholly confined to a single body (*deha*) or image (*pratimā*), and section 4.2.3.1 above on a similar deluded view.

via Kṛṣṇa’s specific revelation in the world, Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* descent body provides a model for Arjuna who, through purifying his mind and being a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, can attain ‘that which consists of pure *sattva*’. Śrīdhara referring to the devotee becoming *ready* to attain Kṛṣṇa’s state implies that purifying the mind is preparatory for realisation, suggesting again that Śrīdhara interprets Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, as directed to Arjuna specifically, as functioning progressively.

Śrīdhara’s take on the phrase ‘becoming *brahman*’ (*brahma-bhūya*) in 14.27 is particularly important. Minor points out that, in the *Gītā*, there are four senses in which the term *brahman* is used: i) *brahman* is the state experienced in liberation, both in this life and after death, ii) *brahman* is *prakṛti*, iii) *brahman* is the Veda, and iv) *brahman* is Kṛṣṇa.⁸⁶ It appears that ‘becoming *brahman*’ in 14.27, for Śrīdhara, refers to the devotee ultimately attaining a state of consciousness which is identical to Kṛṣṇa’s own state. The reason for this is that, throughout the *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara refers to several states that a human being experiences that are deemed *sattvic* or *sāttvika*, ‘the [state of being] pure’. Crucially, Śrīdhara also refers to Kṛṣṇa – for instance, in 14.27 above – as ‘that which consists of pure *sattva*’ (*śuddha-sattvātmakatvāt*). So, ‘becoming *brahman*’ for Śrīdhara here is attaining a state of consciousness with Kṛṣṇa as its goal, as the devotee is becoming closer in nature (being *sattvic*) to the way in which the divine manifests (being composed of *śuddha-sattva*). In his *Subodhinī* 18.51, Śrīdhara also defines what he means by ‘becoming *brahman*’:

“Endued” with “a very pure understanding”, with a *sāttvika* understanding, already described, completely purified in the manner explained above, “controlling the mind”, making that very understanding determined, “with” *sāttvika* “tenacity”, relinquishing “sense-objects such as sound, and abandoning pleasure and displeasure” with respect to them – these words are to be construed with, “He is fit for becoming *brahman*” in 18.53.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Minor, *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, p.98.

⁸⁷ *uktena prakāreṇa “viśuddhayā” pūrvoktayā sāttvikyā “buddhyā yukto dhrtyā” sāttvikyā “ātmānam” tām eva buddhiṃ “niyamya” niścalāṃ kṛtvā “śabdādīn viṣayāṃs tyaktvā” tad-viṣayau “rāga-dveṣau vyudasya” buddhyā viśuddhayā yukta ity ādīnāṃ brahma-bhūyāya kalpata iti tṛtīyenānvayaḥ ||*

Here, Śrīdhara directly equates ‘becoming *brahman*’ with the devotee developing a *sāttvika* understanding – this is how the devotee comes closer to the divine become manifest as Kṛṣṇa in his purest, *sattvic* body. The key here is that the devotee is purified of ordinary human agency, becoming more like the transcendent as manifest in Kṛṣṇa. By this, Śrīdhara demonstrates how Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* body acts as a model for Arjuna who himself is Kṛṣṇa’s devotee – the characteristic of Kṛṣṇa’s body (being composed of pure *sattva*) acts as exemplar to Arjuna, who requires purification of his mind, to come closer to being purely *sattvic* himself. In his comment on 18.65, which in Śrīdhara’s view is the ‘summary’ of the *Gītā*, he explains:

“Fix your mind on me”, think of me, “be devoted to me” alone, “bow to me, and worship me” alone. Living in this way, “you shall come to me” through knowledge attained by my grace.⁸⁸

In 18.65, Śrīdhara uses the phrase ‘living in this way’ or even ‘being present in this way’ (*evaṃ vartamānaḥ...*) – this implies that, living with the focus Arjuna has developed (of *śuddha-sattva*) dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, he can attain knowledge through Kṛṣṇa’s grace. It is Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* form that is the precise mode of this grace. As we have seen so far, Śrīdhara interprets Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy as progressive: preparing the *sattvic* body in itself does not constitute non-dual realisation, but is a condition that helps Arjuna work towards receiving Kṛṣṇa’s grace. Arjuna can therefore work towards *śuddha-sattva* by purifying *his sattvic guṇa*.

Although Śrīdhara only uses the term *jīvanmukta* once (in 6.28),⁸⁹ he makes it clear that it is the *yogin* who has realised *brahman* who can become a *jīvanmukta*. 6.28 precedes 6.30, a key verse for Śrīdhara where Kṛṣṇa takes on a body to be the specific vehicle for grace, which is what enables the *yogin* to realise *brahman*. Although Śrīdhara does not explicitly state *when* Arjuna can become liberated, there are several key places in his *Subodhinī* that suggest Arjuna’s devotion to Kṛṣṇa will enable him to become a *jīvanmukta*. In 15.7, Śrīdhara addresses Arjuna, stating that for the one who has attained Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-svarūpa*

⁸⁸ “*man-manā*” *mac-citto* “*bhava*” | “*mad-bhakto*” *mad-bhajana-śīlo bhava* | “*mad-yājī*” *mad-yajana-śīlo bhava* | “*mām*” *eva* “*namaskuru*” *evaṃ vartamānas tvaṃ mat-prasādāt labdha-jñānena* “*mām evaiṣyasi*” *prāpsyasi* [...]

⁸⁹ The verse after Śaṅkara’s sole use.

(‘pure essential nature’), there is no return.⁹⁰ In 18.51, as we saw above, having a *sāttvika* understanding is tied to ‘becoming *brahman*’ (*brahma-bhūya-*) – ‘becoming *brahman*’ is then, in 18.53, tied to the Advaitin sense of ‘I am *brahman*’, which is tantamount to becoming liberated (also in 14.26-7). Śrīdhara also claims, in 18.41, that the meaning of the *Gītā* is ‘summarised’, and this is liberation through the grace of Kṛṣṇa.⁹¹ As seen earlier, in the final verse of his *Subodhinī* (18.78) Śrīdhara directly states that, providing Arjuna is a Kṛṣṇa-*bhakta*, he can be liberated in his current life through learning in stages.

4.3 – Language about Kṛṣṇa’s body

4.3.1 – Śrīdhara’s use of definitions

So far, we have seen that the characteristic of Kṛṣṇa’s descent body is *śuddha-sattva*. I will now show how, for Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, understanding the characteristic of Kṛṣṇa’s descent body is closely tied to being able to speak about it. At one level, Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy revolves around his very exemplification of being *sattvic*. However, for Śrīdhara, there is another level to this: language about Kṛṣṇa’s body functions pedagogically by pointing to that which is beyond.

4.3.1.1 – Śrīdhara’s language of the transcendent

In the *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara identifies the supreme *brahman* as *nirviśeṣa* (without attributes) in 13.12 and 13.27. *Nirviśeṣa* is Śrīdhara’s preferred term for the supreme *brahman*, although he does quote passages from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* where the specific term *nirguṇa* is used (13.22). The sense in which *brahman* is without qualities and beyond is outlined in three key verses in the *Subodhinī* (13.12-14), where Śrīdhara reads the *Gītā* to show his own understanding of the “supreme *brahman*”:

“I will declare that which is to be known”. The result of this knowledge is being presented, in order to cause the listener to fully understand. “Having known” that which is about to be explained, “one attains immortality”,

⁹⁰ *viduṣāṃ tu śuddha-svarūpa-prāpter nāvṛttir iti*

⁹¹ [...] *apekṣāyāṃ sva-svādhikāra-vihītaiḥ karmabhiḥ parameśvarārādhanaṭ tat-prasāda-labdha-jñānenety evaṃ sarva-gītārtha-sāraṃ saṅgrhya pradarśayituṃ prakaraṇāntaram ārabhate [...]*

liberation. What is that? “Beginningless”, meaning it has no beginning; “the supreme”, unsurpassed, “*brahman*”. If ‘*anādi*’ alone had been used as a *bahuvrīhi* compound, then it would mean *anāditve*. Then the addition of the suffix *-mat* would be related to metre. Or, the two words may be separated as: *anādi* + *matparam* [rather than *anādimat param*], in which case the meaning is “My, Viṣṇu’s”, supreme form, which is without attributes (*nirviśeṣa*), which is *brahman* (is beginningless). This is indeed being stated: “Which is said to be neither being nor non-being”. That which is the object of a valid means of knowing is said to be “being” using a positive ascription, but that which is the object of a negation is said to be “non-being”. But (*brahman*) is different from both of these, because it is not an object [of knowledge].⁹²

Śrīdhara’s second explanation here is key. Considering the alternative possibilities for construing the Sanskrit already pointed out by Śaṅkara and other earlier Vedāntins,⁹³ Śrīdhara opts for the latter. He explains that it is the *param*, or supreme form of Viṣṇu, the form without attributes, which is *brahman*. So, the supreme *brahman* is indeed without qualities but is identified with Viṣṇu. To show the sense in which *brahman* is beyond, the key phrase Śrīdhara glosses is ‘neither being nor non-being’. *Brahman* is different from *sat* (being – applied, he says, to objects whose existence can be positively established, i.e. through the *pramāṇas* of perception, such as inference; verbal testimony) and different from *asat* (non-being – applied to ‘negated’ objects, i.e. those which cannot exist, such as the son of a barren woman; a sky lotus). This is because *brahman* is not an object of any kind, real or fictive. This echoes Ram-Prasad’s understanding of Śaṅkara’s (much longer and more

⁹² “*yaj jñeyam tat pravakṣyāmi*” | *śrotur ādara-siddhaye jñāna-phalam darśayati* – “*yad*” *vakṣyamānam jñātvā amṛtam*” *mokṣam prāpnoti*” | *kiṃ tat?* “*anādimat*” | *ādiman na bhavati iti anādimat* | “*param*” *niratiśayam* “*brahma*” | *anādi ity etāvataiva bahuvrīhiṇā anāditve siddhe pi punar matupaḥ prayogaś chāndasaḥ* | *yad vā* – “*anādīti mat-param*” *iti ca pada-dvayam mama viṣṇoḥ param nirviśeṣam rūpam brahmety arthaḥ* | *tad evāha* “*na sat na cāsad ucyate*” | *vidhi-mukhena pramāṇasya viśayah sac-chabdenocyate* | *niśedhasya viśayas tv asac-chabdenocyate* | *idam tu tad-ubhaya-vilakṣanam, aviśayatvād ity arthaḥ* ||

⁹³ The *Gītā* says: *anādimatparam*. This can be split up either as *anādimat param* or as *anādi matparam*. Regarding the former, ‘*an-ādi*’- ‘without beginning’, used as an adjective with ‘*param*’ (supreme), would be sufficient in itself to indicate the beginninglessness of the Supreme. But, as Śaṅkara points out, this would make the suffix *-mat* (‘-possessing’) redundant. So it must be put in to make up the right number of syllables in the line. Taking the latter, which avoids redundancy, changes the meaning since *an-ādi* then governs *mat-param* – ‘Me, the Supreme’. Śaṅkara rules this out as contrary to a strong Advaitin reading of the rest of the verse.

technical) Advaitin exegesis in his commentary *ad loc* of how *brahman* transcends the categories of *sat* and *asat* that are also evident elsewhere in the *Gītā*.⁹⁴

In *Subodhinī* 13.13, Śrīdhara questions how *Gītā* 13.12 might be reconciled with the Upaniṣadic verses he considers to lie behind *Gītā* 13.13. He writes:

But, if *brahman* is neither characterised as being nor non-being, then the *śruti* [verses], such as “All this is truly *brahman*” (*Ch. Up.* 14.1), and “All this is *brahman* alone” (*Nṛsiṃha Uttaratāpanīya Upaniṣad* 7.3), would be contradicted. Having raised this doubt, the text establish(es) it [*brahman*] as being the self of all through its inconceivable power, as is well-known from *śruti*, for instance, “The power of the supreme is declared to be manifold, and knowledge, strength and action are described as belonging to its own nature” (*Śve. Up.* 6.8)...⁹⁵

There are several points worth noting here. First, Śrīdhara’s preface to his answer as to how the Upaniṣadic verses he quotes can be reconciled with what is said in 13.12 is through *brahman*’s being *sarvātman*, ‘the self of all’. For Śrīdhara, *nirguṇa brahman* is the one who is ‘the self of all’,⁹⁶ and this sort of language is used to speak of the transcendent elsewhere in Śrīdhara’s *Subodhinī*. Second, Śrīdhara understands the three Upaniṣadic statements that he quotes here from within the world of construction/as part of the devotional world. His third quotation, from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, states that ‘the power of the supreme is declared to be manifold’. ‘Power’ is in the singular (*śaktiḥ*), but is *declared* (*śrūyate*) to be manifold (*vividhā*), is *talked of as being manifold*. This is the very verse Citukha drew on to justify his understanding of the power/capacities of words to denote, connect together and refer to a single bare referent, the indivisible *brahman* (section 4.1.3). Śrīdhara here indicates that *that brahman* is the self of all by its singularity being expressed as multiplicity.

⁹⁴ E.g. 2.16. Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, p.2.

⁹⁵ *nanv evaṃ brahmaṇaḥ sad-asad-vilakṣaṇatve sati – “sarvaṃ khalv idaṃ brahma” “brahmaivedaṃ sarvaṃ” ityādi-śrutibhir virudhyeta ity āśaṅkya – “parāśya śaktir vividhaiva śrūyate svābhāvīkī jñāna-bala-kriyā ca” ityādiśruti-prasiddhayā acintya-śaktyā sarvātmatāṃ tasya darśayann...*

⁹⁶ Although the *Subodhinī* 13.13 appears in line with classical Advaita Vedānta on this basis, Śrīdhara goes on to say that the self achieves its all-pervasiveness through its *acintya-śaktyā*, its ‘inconceivable power’ (used in the instrumental case). Although Śrīdhara notes that the notion of *śakti* is strongly grounded in the *śruti* (he quotes the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.8), this is a marked departure from Śaṅkara who *rejects* the idea that Kṛṣṇa is *brahman*’s supreme power (*parā śakti*) in *Gītābhāṣya* 13.12.

Third, Śrīdhara's quotations here are worth looking at as a set. Śrīdhara quotes from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* repeatedly (much more than Śaṅkara does in his *Gītābhāṣya*). This primarily indicates that Śrīdhara seeks to demonstrate how his interpretation is in line with an Advaita Vedāntin interpretation of the Upaniṣads, and that Kṛṣṇa's teaching is in line with the Upaniṣadic texts. However, the key deity in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* is Rudra-Śīva, the supreme whose power (*śakti*) and qualities (*jñāna-bala-kriyā*) Śrīdhara here aligns with Kṛṣṇa's. This could further hint at his aim to appeal to both Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas just as the contemporary images in the Purī temple in Orissa did – a suggestion possibly strengthened by his second quotation. The form of the *mahāvākya*, “All this is *brahman* alone”, which Śrīdhara adds to the *Chāndogya*'s more famous form, “All this is truly *brahman*”, can be found in *Nṛsiṃha Uttaratāpanīya Upaniṣad* 7.3. This is the second part of one of the later, minor sectarian Vaiṣṇava *Upaniṣads*. Its first part, the *Nṛsiṃha Pūrvatāpanīya Upaniṣad*, identifies the Man-Lion Nṛsiṃha (one of Viṣṇu's descent forms), as *parabrahman* and as Śaṅkara (i.e. Śīva).⁹⁷ In Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2.2), we saw that worship of Nṛsiṃha was common in Orissa and that Nṛsiṃha may well have been Śrīdhara's chosen deity. Śrīdhara may then have been familiar with this Upaniṣad in his personal meditation practice, which may give us a further clue to the context in which he was writing an Advaitin commentary on *brahman* as self of all.

Fourth, and most importantly, the language Śrīdhara uses to speak of the transcendent here is the language of the world which nevertheless points past itself to that which is *beyond*. This is demonstrated in Śrīdhara weaving a developing understanding of the function of language, as closely tied to essential (*svarūpa*) characteristics, into his *Subodhinī* as it progresses. I argue that it is this that gives us the hermeneutic key to a deeper understanding of language, and the significance of Kṛṣṇa's body.

⁹⁷ *Upaniṣad 1*, verse 12 speaks of immortality (*amṛtatvam*) as ‘the fruit of the knowledge of Nṛsiṃha spoken of in the Yajur Veda [the Veda to which this text became attached]’. It speaks of:

*ṛtaṃ satyaṃ paraṃ brahma puruṣaṃ narakesari-vigrahaṃ kṛṣṇapaṅgalam |
urdhvaretam virūpākṣaṃ śaṅkaraṃ nīlaloḥitam ||
umāpatih paśupatih pinākī hy amitadhyutih |*

tīśānaḥ sarvavidyānām īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām brahmādhipatir brahmaṇo 'adhipatih ||

‘Truth, reality, the supreme *brahman*, the Person, in the form of the Man-Maned, the tawny Kṛṣṇa; the one who retains semen, Virūpakṣa, Śaṅkara, the blue and red-[throated] one [i.e. Śīva]; the husband of Umā, the Lord of creatures, the Bow-bearer [Śīva]; the one with immeasurable splendour, the sun of all forms of knowledge, the Lord of all beings, the master of Brahmā, the master of *brahman* [i.e. the Veda]’. Sanskrit text from *The Vaishnava Upanishads with the Commentary of Sri Upanishad-Brahma-Yogin*, A. Mahadeva Shastri (ed.) (Madras: Adyar Library (Theosophical Society), 1923), p.183.

4.3.1.2 – Defining the *sthitaprajña*

Towards the beginning of his *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara comments on Arjuna asking Kṛṣṇa to state the characteristic/definition of the *sthitaprajña* (‘one grounded in wisdom’). Śrīdhara writes:

Wanting to know the characteristic of the one grounded in wisdom, spoken of in the previous verse, “Arjuna said” – “Of the one grounded in concentration”, arising from his own nature; of the one whose wisdom or intellect is thus grounded, unwavering, “What is the speaking? (i.e. what language is to be used?” “Language” (*bhāṣā*) is that by which (something is) spoken of, insofar as it is a definition (*lakṣaṇa*). The meaning is, By what definition is the one grounded in wisdom spoken of? Similarly, the meaning is, “What is one grounded in wisdom?”, “What kind of speaking, sitting and wandering might he do?”⁹⁸

Here, Śrīdhara explains ‘speaking’ (*bhāṣā*) in terms of giving a ‘definition’ (*lakṣaṇa*). In the following verse (2.55), Śrīdhara explains:

In this way, these methods of knowledge for the aspirant are the natural characteristics of the established one (*siddha*). So, in speaking of the characteristics of the one who is (already) established, he does indeed speak of the methods of knowledge supporting them till the conclusion of the chapter.⁹⁹

Here, Śrīdhara uses *lakṣaṇa* as ‘characteristic’. The fact that Śrīdhara uses the term *lakṣaṇa* in his comment on 2.54-55 both as ‘definition’¹⁰⁰ and as ‘characteristic’¹⁰¹ indicates that the method of learning/practice (*sādhana*) needed for *jñāna* is the definition of the innate

⁹⁸ *Subodhinī* 2.54: *pūrva-slokoktasyātma-tattvajñāsya lakṣaṇam jijñāsuḥ “arjuna uvāca” – “sthitaprajñāsyeṭi” | svābhāvike “samādhau sthītasya” ata eva “sthitā” niścalā “prajñā” buddhir yasya tasya “kā bhāṣā”?* *bhāṣyate ‘nayeṭi “bhāṣā” lakṣaṇam iti yāvāt | sa kena lakṣaṇena sthita-prajña ucyaṭe ityarthah | tathā “sthitadhīḥ kiṃ” katham “bhāṣaṇam āsanaṃ vrajanaṃ” ca kuryād ity arthaḥ ||*

⁹⁹ *atra ca yāni sādhasya jñāna-sādhanaṇi tāny eva svābhāvikaṇi siddhasya lakṣaṇāni | ataḥ siddhasya lakṣaṇāni kathayann evāntaraṅgāni jñāna-sādhanaṇy āha yāvāt adhyāya-samāpti |*

¹⁰⁰ *bhāṣyate ‘nayeṭi “bhāṣā” lakṣaṇam iti yāvāt – “Language” (bhāṣā) is that by which (something is) spoken of, insofar as it is a definition (lakṣaṇa)’.*

¹⁰¹ *svābhāvikaṇi...lakṣaṇāni – ‘natural characteristics’.*

characteristics developed in the one who has already attained *jñāna* and is grounded in wisdom, the *sthitaprajña*. In other words, it is the innate characteristics of the *sthitaprajña* which give us a definition of what it is to be a *sthitaprajña* and show how to become one.¹⁰² As such, characteristics and providing a definition as a method of learning are fundamentally linked for Śrīdhara, and this is stated towards the very beginning of his *Subodhinī*.

4.3.1.3 – Defining yoga

Śrīdhara first uses the technical term *svarūpalakṣaṇa* in his commentary on 6.20-23. He introduces the term here to demonstrate the essential characteristic of *yoga*:

Then what is the primary (*mukhya*) meaning of the word *yoga*? In answer to this question, the text shows that perfect concentration is defined by both by its essential characteristic and its result, and that this is the meaning of the word *yoga*, in the next three verses, starting with – That specific state “in which the mind controlled” by the practice of concentration “gets settled”. By this the essential characteristic/definition (*svarūpalakṣaṇa*) of *yoga* is stated.¹⁰³

Here, Śrīdhara clearly states that the *svarūpalakṣaṇa* of *yoga* gives us the definition (*lakṣaṇa*) of what proper *yoga* is. So for Śrīdhara, a primary meaning is given in terms of both the *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and the *result*. The *svarūpalakṣaṇa* is the essential or innate characteristic, and so the definition of the primary meaning of a term is linked with the innate characteristic it designates.

This links back to Śrīdhara’s comment on 2.54, where an innate characteristic (*svābhāvika...lakṣaṇa*, i.e. a *svarūpalakṣaṇa*) was clearly linked with providing a definition. Śrīdhara thus essentially shows how the technical term, *svarūpalakṣaṇa*, works in his view:

¹⁰² Śrīdhara lists more of the ‘characteristics’ of the *sthitaprajña* in his comment on 14.22.

¹⁰³ *tatra mukhyo yogaḥ ka ity apekṣāyām samādhim eva svarūpataḥ phalataś ca lakṣyaṇ sa eva mukhyo yoga ity āha yatreti sārḍhais tribhiḥ | “yatra” yasmin avasthā-viśeṣe yogābhyāsenā “niruddhaṃ cittam uparatam” (cf 6.20) bhavatīti yogasya svarūpa-lakṣaṇam uktam |*

by linking innate or fundamental characteristics with definition. Śrīdhara continues in his comment on 6.20:

This (*yoga*) is also defined by its result, i.e. obtaining what is desired. “In which” particular state one sees “the self alone” but not the body, and so on, “by the self”, by the purified mind. And “seeing”, “one is satisfied in the self” alone, but not in the sense-objects...¹⁰⁴

Śrīdhara makes it clear that the *svārūpalakṣaṇa* definition of *yoga*, as the settling of the controlled mind, while different from, is also fundamentally linked with the result of the process of *yoga* – that is, seeing the self alone, through the mind becoming purified. So, the process of purifying – that is, settling the mind – which fundamentally defines *yoga*, is the very method of producing the result, here seeing the self alone. Similarly (above), the *sthītaprajñā*, defined as ‘one grounded in innate concentration’, becomes the exemplar of a method (*sādhana*), a learning process, and its result. Given this, we can see how Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, for Śrīdhara, entails the *svārūpa* definition of *yoga* essentially referring to Arjuna’s *sattvic* element, i.e. his mind, becoming purified, as we saw earlier.

4.3.2 – Language about Kṛṣṇa’s descent form

We have seen that – in 2.54, 6.20-23 and 14.22 – Śrīdhara clearly links *svārūpa* characteristics with providing both a definition and a method for proceeding. We have also seen the importance of the language of *śuddha-sattva* for Śrīdhara throughout his *Subodhinī*. Thinking specifically of Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* form, I suggest that *śuddha-sattva* is to be understood as Kṛṣṇa’s *svārūpa* characteristic, given that it is innate to his freely chosen (*svecchayā*) manifestation body. As we saw in 2.54 and 6.20-23, a *svārūpa* characteristic is clearly linked with its definition. As such, Kṛṣṇa provides the characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*), *śuddha-sattva*, which can then be spoken of, thus giving a language for talking about his manifestation. What, then, is the connection between *this* language – the language of *śuddha-sattva* construed as the manifest Kṛṣṇa’s *svārūpalakṣaṇa* – and speaking of the transcendent?

¹⁰⁴ [...] *iṣṭa-prāpti-lakṣaṇena phalena tam eva lakṣayati* | “*yatra ca*” *yasminn avasthā-viśeṣe* | “*ātmanā*” *śuddhena manasā* “*ātmānam eva*” *paśyati na tu dehādi* | “*paśyaṃś*” *ca* “*ātmany*” *eva* “*tuṣyati*” | *na tu viṣayeṣu* [...]

4.3.3 – The language of *śuddha-sattva*

To demonstrate how the language of *śuddha-sattva* is linked to speaking of the transcendent, Śrīdhara introduces two Advaita Vedāntin technical terms – *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* – in his commentary on 13.4. Prior to *Gītā* 13.4, in 13.1-3, Kṛṣṇa differentiates the *kṣetra* (‘field’, that is the mind-body), from the *kṣetrajña* (‘knower of the field’, that is the individual embodied self). It is in 13.4 that Kṛṣṇa explains where this teaching comes from. In *Subodhinī* 13.4, Śrīdhara comments on the *Gītā*’s use of two terms – *sūtra* and *pada* – to justify his use of the terms *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa*:

“It has been sung [...] through the *sūtras* and *padas* on *brahman*”, (i) the *sūtras* on *brahman* are those (sentences) by which *brahman* is taught (*sūtryate*), i.e. indicated (*sūcyate*) such as “Or from where these beings arise” (*Tai. Up.* 3.1) – sentences/passages from the Upaniṣads which are concerned with extrinsically related characteristics/definition through incidentals (*taṭastha-lakṣaṇa-parāṇi*). Moreover, *padas* are those such as “*Brahman* is real(ity), conscious(ness), infinite” (*Tai. Up.* 2.1) by which *brahman* is resorted to (*padyate*), understood, known directly, which are concerned with its essential characteristics/definition of its own nature (*svarūpa-lakṣaṇa-parāṇi*) [...]

Or (ii) the *Brahma-sūtras*, beginning with “Then therefore the desire to know *brahman*” are to be understood [by ‘*sūtras* on *brahman*’/], *padas* (their) words such as “By thinking; no *śruti* text” (*Brahma-sūtra* 1.1.5)¹⁰⁵ (and) “The self of bliss, due to repetition” (*Brahma-sūtra* 1.1.12), by which *brahman* “is approached/understood”, is determined “with reasons”, by reasoning with the purpose of securely determining, The rest is the same.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Understood, e.g. by Śaṅkara in his commentary on *Brahma-sūtra* 1.1.5, to refer to the rejection (*na*) of the Sāṃkhyan idea of material *prakṛti* as the *upādāna-kāraṇa* (substantive cause) of the universe because no Upaniṣad (*aśabdām*) holds this but all make it clear that the substantive cause is the self/*brahman* which thinks/is conscious (*īkṣateḥ*).

¹⁰⁶ “*bahudhā gītām*” [...] “*brahmaṇaḥ sūtraiḥ padaiś ca*”, (i) *brahma sūtryate sūcyate ebhir iti brahma-sūtrāṇi* “*yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante*” (*Tait Up* 3.1) *ityādīni taṭastha-lakṣaṇa-parāṇy upaniṣad-vākyāni, tathā ca brahma padyate gamyate sāksāj jñāyata ebhir iti padāni svarūpa-lakṣaṇa-parāṇi* “*satyaṃ jñānam*

In explanation (i), Śrīdhara imports the nominal verb *sūtryate* from the noun *sūtra* in the *Gītā* verse, and glosses it as *sūcyate* (‘is indicated’). This suggests that, for Śrīdhara, the sentences of the Upaniṣads (‘*sūtras*’) which he quotes are of a particular kind that speak of characteristics of *brahman* which do not actually belong to *brahman*, but are incidental to his nature (*taṭasthalakṣaṇa*). Śrīdhara then gets the verb *padyate* from *pada* in the *Gītā* verse, which he glosses with *gamyate sākṣāj jñāyata* (‘is understood, is known directly’). He then explains that such Upaniṣadic ‘words’ (*padas*) refer to the essential characteristics of *brahman* (*svarūpalakṣaṇa*). So, in 13.4 (i), Śrīdhara refers to *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* as the concern of ‘*sūtras*’, while *svarūpalakṣaṇa* is the concern of ‘*padas*’. The former are Upaniṣadic sentences concerned with incidental characteristics, such as *brahman* being the creator/originator, since causality is only attributed to *brahman* from a conventional point of view; it is not innate. By contrast the latter, also Upaniṣadic sentences such as “*brahman* is real(ity), conscious(ness), infinite”, are concerned with *brahman*’s essential characteristics: reality, consciousness and infinity, much discussed from Śamkara’s time on in both Advaita and other forms of Vedānta.¹⁰⁷ Śrīdhara’s triple gloss in 13.4 (i) uses the sense of *pad-* as ‘to resort to’, as one does to *brahman* through direct knowing. The fact that Śrīdhara uses the term *pada* to refer to *brahman*’s essential properties (*svarūpalakṣaṇa*) suggests that Śrīdhara is pointing out the **words** that refer to *brahman* directly – so, we might then read *Tai. Up.* 2.1 as “*brahman* is real(ity), *brahman* is conscious(ness), *brahman* is infinite”. Each of these words designates *brahman*’s *svarūpalakṣaṇa*. Explanation (ii) does not explicitly use these technical terms, but reads the *Gītā*’s key words this time as referring to passages from the *Brahma-sūtras* which support the understanding of *brahman* gained in the Upaniṣads cited in explanation (i), and then says, ‘The rest is the same’.

anantaṃ brahma” (*Tait Up* 2.1) *ityādīni* [...] **(ii)** *yad vā “athāto brahma-jijñāsā” (Brahma-sūtra 1.1.1) ityādīni brahma-sūtrāṇi gr̥hyante, tāny eva brahma padyate niścīyate ebhir iti padāni, tair “hetumadbhiḥ” “īkṣater nāśabdam” (Brahma-sūtra 1.1.5) “ānandamayo ’bhyāsāt” (Brahma-sūtra 1.1.12) ity ādibhir yuktimadbhir viniścītārthaiḥ | śeṣaṃ samānam || (i) and (ii) indicate the two explanations Śrīdhara gives in his comment on Gītā 13.4.*

¹⁰⁷ For the early use of the terms *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* and *svarūpalakṣaṇa* by the Advaita Vedāntin, Padmapāda (c. 820) in his *Pañcapādikā* commentary on Śamkara’s *Brahma-sūtra* commentary, in relation to origination and the sentence, *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma*, respectively, see Jonathan Edelmann, ‘Śrīdharasvāmin’, in: *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online* (eds.) Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar and Vasudha Narayanan. Consulted on 26 March 2019. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_1010068425> First published online: 2018, pp.5-6/12.

The Advaita Vedāntin technical terms Śrīdhara brings into his comment on *Gītā* 13.4 are key to his theology, as they also appear right at the beginning of his *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā*. In his comment on 1.1.1 of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Śrīdhara explains:

His *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* are described in this verse. Now the *svarūpalakṣaṇa* (essential characteristic) is “*satyam*” (the real). ...Although a false evolution, the evolution of the three constituents of *māyā* – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* – formed into the elements, organs and divinities, is “not false”, is real “in this”, in *brahman* [i.e. not in itself]. So the one through whose reality (the evolution) is understood to be as if real is “the supreme reality”.¹⁰⁸

Shortly after, Śrīdhara gives an example of a *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* characteristic:

Now the *taṭastha-lakṣaṇa* is stated – “(that from whom the universe is) born, and so on (*Brahma-sūtra* 1.1.2)”.¹⁰⁹

Just as we saw in his comment on 13.4, where *brahman*'s *svarūpalakṣaṇa* characteristics are ‘reality, consciousness, infinite’ (*satyam jñānam anantam*), in his comment above on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.1.1, Śrīdhara explains that *brahman*'s *svarūpalakṣaṇa* characteristic is ‘reality’ (*satyam*). Similarly, *brahman*'s *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* characteristic in Śrīdhara's comment on 13.4 was being the creator/originator (he quotes *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.1), and in his comment on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.1.1 above, *brahman*'s *taṭasthalakṣaṇa*

¹⁰⁸ *tam eva svarūpa-taṭastha-lakṣaṇābhyām upalakṣayati | tatra svarūpa-lakṣaṇam – “satyam” iti | satyatve hetuḥ – “yatra” yasmin brahmaṇi “trayāṇām” māyā-guṇānām tamo-rajah-sattvānām “sargo” bhūtendriya-devatā-rūpo “mṛṣā” satyaḥ | yat satyatayā mithyā-sargo 'pi satyavat pratīyate tam “param satyam” ity arthaḥ |* Interpreting *BhP* 1.1.1 as giving the *hetu* (reason) to support the inference of the implied *sādhyā* (statement to be proved), Śrīdhara then gives the supporting *dṛṣṭānta* (reason) – the standard Advaitin example of the mirage, something appearing in that which is other than it and becoming confused with it: *atra dṛṣṭāntaḥ – “tejovārimṛdāyām yathā vinimaya” iti | vinimayo vyatyayo 'nyasminn anyāvabhāsaḥ | sa yathā 'dhiṣṭhānasattayā sadvat pratīyate ity arthaḥ | tatra tejasi vāribuddhir marīcitoye prasiddhā | mṛdi kācādau vāribuddhir vāriṇi ca kācādibuddhir atyādi yathāyathamūhyam |* ‘The example is: “like the mixing of light, water and earth”. “Mixing” is transmutation, appearing as other in another. The meaning is that this thus appears as if real due to the reality of the foundation. The idea of water (appearing) in light is well-known, in the water of a mirage. The idea of water (appearing) in earth looking like glass etc, and the idea of glass etc (appearing) in water is a confusion of what is not thus with what is thus’.

¹⁰⁹ *taṭastha-lakṣaṇam āha – janmādīti*

characteristic is being that from whom the universe is born (*janma*). Śrīdhara cites *Brahma-sūtra* 1.1.2 on origination, widely held to summarise the same *Taittirīya* verse.¹¹⁰

In his comment (i) on 13.4, once he has distinguished between *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* passages, Śrīdhara then explains the *Gītā*'s references to 'reasons' (*hetu*) with further passages. *Brahman*'s *svarūpalakṣaṇa* is about *brahman*'s reality (*sat* is reality). *Brahman*'s *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* is about *brahman*'s causality (i.e. being the source of all). The passages, such as "This (universe), dear one, was Being alone in the beginning," which give the reasons (*hetu*) link *svarūpa* and *taṭastha* – the very point at which causality erupts is from reality, which is none other than *svarūpalakṣaṇa*.¹¹¹ So, although that which is indicated by the *svarūpalakṣaṇa* does not in itself become the cause, we can speak of causality as an incidental or extrinsic characteristic, which in turn directs us back to the transcendent *brahman*.

As we have seen for the *sthitaprajña*, *yoga*, and *brahman*, *svarūpalakṣaṇa* in all cases is used by Śrīdhara for both 'essential characteristic' and 'definition'. So Śrīdhara shows that the nature of the form in which Kṛṣṇa comes to be can be described in a way which enables us to understand Kṛṣṇa as transcendent of the *guṇas*. Moreover, as we saw above, Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme, and is clearly shown as the Lord of all, and the source of all. So Kṛṣṇa certainly teaches that he, in his *śuddha-sattvic* form is none other than the Lord who is the source of all. In other words, language that describes *brahman*'s *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* is also properly applicable to Kṛṣṇa.

For Śrīdhara, it is clear in his *Subodhinī* that he is far more concerned about providing a theology of Kṛṣṇa than of *brahman*. Śrīdhara, as we have seen, focuses heavily on being a devotee of the Lord, and does not focus as heavily on *brahman*. He does, however, still seek to ground his interpretation of the *Gītā* in Advaita Vedāntin interpretation, by using the technical terms *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* to relate his interpretation back to *nirguṇa brahman*, and references to *tat tvam asi*. We have seen that Śrīdhara, by using the technical term *svarūpalakṣaṇa* in his comment on 13.4, states that 'reality, consciousness, infinite' (*satyaṃ jñānam anantam*) is *brahman*'s *svarūpa* definition – from Śrīdhara's

¹¹⁰ See e.g. Śaṅkara's *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 1.1.2.

¹¹¹ *kiñca hetumadbhiḥ "sad eva somyedam agre āsīt"* (*Ch. Up.* 6.2.1)...(*Ch. Up.* 6.2.2) (*Tai. Up.* 2.7) *ityādi-yuktimadbhiḥ*...

previous examples, we can assume that these are the characteristics of *brahman's* own nature. Kṛṣṇa's descent body can be understood to have the *svarūpa* characteristic of *śuddha-sattva*, this being his innately chosen manifestation body. I propose that the specific language of *śuddha-sattva*, used to define Kṛṣṇa's descent body, is key to Śrīdhara's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy. The very fact that Śrīdhara not only describes Kṛṣṇa's descent body as *sattva*, but specifically *śuddha-sattva* indicates that this 'purifying' characteristic – *śuddha* – also functions as 'purifying', by taking language from the conventional world, and using it in a 'purifying' way to speak about Kṛṣṇa's descent form. The language of *śuddha-sattva* therefore analogically purifies language, by talking in terms of the *guṇas*, which give us the best sense/understanding from within the conventional world, but pointing to that which is beyond the *guṇas*.

Further, *brahman's svarūpa* definition is *satyaṃ jñānam anantam*, as we saw above. If we read this in a purified, stretched form, these characteristics – particularly *ananta*, which itself can be read in the sense of being 'pure' because it is limitless – themselves point to that which is beyond language. Language about Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* form which gives us a way to stretch language to point beyond suggests we can do the same here. Although Śrīdhara does not use the specific term *śakti* in the same sense as Citsukha does – that words, through their powers, designate that single reality which is beyond – understanding the way language functions in the *Subodhinī* is central to Śrīdhara's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's Advaitin pedagogy in the *Gītā*. Śrīdhara still understands language as pointing beyond, to the ground of all. One of Kṛṣṇa's key pedagogical strategies, as interpreted by Śrīdhara, is therefore to take the kind of form which enables us to use language which we normally use about ordinary bodies, but to say that we cannot use it in a conventional way: we need to use purified language – that of *śuddha-sattva* – just as, when we are talking about *brahman*, we have to use language which points beyond, to its ground. Kṛṣṇa himself, in his *śuddha-sattvic* form, therefore becomes the pointer to *brahman* which is beyond.

4.3.4 – *Tat tvam asi*

Śrīdhara, by referring to *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma* as *brahman's svarūpalakṣaṇa* in his comment on 13.4, indicates that he seeks to ground his interpretation of the *Gītā* in

Advaita Vedānta, this sentence being key in Advaita Vedāntin exegesis.¹¹² Just before this, in his comment on 13.2, Śrīdhara writes:

“And know the *kṣetrajñā*”, the individual self subject to rebirth, “to be” in reality “me” alone, entered into all bodies (*kṣetra*),¹¹³ for my nature is spoken of as the aspect of consciousness indicated by the *śruti*, “you are that” (*Ch. Up. 6.8.7*).¹¹⁴

Satyam jñānam anantaṃ brahma and *tat tvam asi* are frequently taken together in Advaita Vedāntin interpretations. Although, as we shall see in Chapter 5, *tat tvam asi* is a major theme for Madhusūdana and not given as much emphasis in Śrīdhara, it is nonetheless threaded through Śrīdhara’s *Subodhinī* in key passages. In his comment on 13.2 above, Śrīdhara refers to Kṛṣṇa’s own nature, *spoken of (mad-rūpasya uktatvāt)* as ‘an aspect of consciousness’ (*cid-amśena*), which is what is implied by *tat tvam asi*. Crucially, Śrīdhara makes exactly the same connection in his central comment on 4.10 (see section 4.2.2 above). This is the passage where Śrīdhara explains that Kṛṣṇa’s specific *śuddha-sattvic* form is the vehicle for grace. Śrīdhara then refers to *tat tvam asi* immediately following this:

Therefore, in “I know them all” (4.5) and the verses that follow, the Lord and the individual self, the two referents of “that” and “thou”, with knowledge and ignorance as their (respective) limiting adjuncts, have been taught. Since the Lord is eternally pure as he is without ignorance, and the individual self (becomes) pure, by having ignorance destroyed through the knowledge obtained by the grace of the Lord, it is to be understood that their identity spoken of here is in the aspect of consciousness (*cid-amśena*).¹¹⁵

¹¹² E.g. Śaṅkara’s *Taittirīyopaniṣadbhāṣya* 2.1.1. See J.J. Lipner, ‘Śaṅkara on *satyam jñānam anantaṃ brahma*’, in P. Bilimoria and J. N. Mohanty (eds.) *Relativism, Suffering and Beyond: Essays in Memory of Bimal K. Matilal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.301–18.

¹¹³ Lit. ‘field’, but understood as the mind-bodies of *prakṛti*.

¹¹⁴ [...] *ta ca “kṣetrajñāṃ” saṃsāriṇaṃ jīvaṃ vastutaḥ sarva-kṣetreṣv anugataṃ “mām” eva “viddhi” | tattvam asi iti śrutyā lakṣitena cid-amśena mad-rūpasyoktatvāt* | He continues: ‘The knowledge of this is praised to encourage effort...because it is the cause of liberation’: *ādarārtham eva taj-jñānaṃ stauti [...]moksahetutvāt...*

¹¹⁵ *tad evaṃ: “tāny ahaṃ veda sarvāṇi”-ity ādinā vidyāvidyopādhibhyāṃ tat-tvam-padārthāv īśvara-jīvau pradarśyeśvarasya cāvidyābhāvena nitya-śuddhatvāj jīvasya ceśvara-prasāda-labdha-jñānenājñāna-nivr̥tteḥ śuddhasya sataś cid-amśena tadaikyam uktam iti draṣṭavyam ||*

For Śrīdhara, the reason we can speak of *tat* and *tvam* as identical is because of the individual self's (*jīva*) purification, and the Lord's purity. The very fact that Kṛṣṇa is described as 'pure' in relation to the term *cit* in this passage demonstrates that this is another way of talking about the *svarūpalakṣaṇa* of the transcendent. Moreover, Śrīdhara uses the term *aṁśa* ('aspect') in reference to *cit* to qualify the notion of *aikyam* ('oneness'). So Śrīdhara is not saying that the individual self simply *is* consciousness, nor that it is a 'part/portion' of or dependent on ultimate consciousness. Rather he affirms its identity (*aikyam*) with that ultimate consciousness, in its aspect *as* consciousness, insofar as it is *cid-aṁśena*, like the Lord. This indicates that for both the individual self and for Kṛṣṇa, it is precisely by being who they are in the most pure way that each can be that they give the language to talk of the identity at the heart of the Advaita Vedāntin reading of *tat tvam asi*.

The identity statement, *tat tvam asi*, appears to be key to understanding Śrīdhara's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's teaching methods. It is discussed by Śrīdhara at length in *Subodhinī* 13. I argue, therefore, that this chapter is key to unpacking Śrīdhara's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy. In 13.11, Śrīdhara glosses the key terms as follows:

Referring to the self, "knowledge of the inner self", is present knowledge: "constancy", or being ever focused on it, i.e. always making firm the purity of the referents of "that" and "you" (in the sentence, "you are that").¹¹⁶

Here, Śrīdhara refers to 'making firm', or 'being grounded in', the purity or clarified understanding (*śuddhi*) of the referents *tat* ('that') and *tvam* ('you'). This shows that the process of purification is key for Śrīdhara in establishing to what the terms *tat* and *tvam* refer. Interestingly, there is a slight variation in the Sanskrit in the *Eight Commentaries* critical edition of Śrīdhara's *Subodhinī*. In this version, the Sanskrit reads: *tvam padārtha-śuddhi-niṣṭhatvam ity arthaḥ* ('making firm the purity of the referent "you"'). In this

¹¹⁶ *ātmānam adhiḥkṛtya vartamānaṁ jñānam "adhyātma-jñānam" | tasmīn "nityatvam" nitya-bhāvaḥ | tattvam padārtha-śuddhi-niṣṭhatvam ity arthaḥ... || Sanskrit text here from Vireśwarānanda. Note that in the Greta online text in roman, the Sanskrit reads: *tattvam padārtha-buddhi-niṣṭhatvam ity arthaḥ...* ('Reality/truth is being grounded in understanding the referents'). Although this version is very unlikely to be correct, given what we have shown above, if the Sanskrit does indeed read *buddhi* rather than *śuddhi*, we can still read Śrīdhara's exegesis of 13.11 in terms of the purification of the mind/understanding, since, in his comment on 13.10, Śrīdhara explicitly refers to preparation through *vivikta* (solitude) as being calming for mental purification (*śuddhacittaprasādakara*). It follows that 13.11 would be building on the notion of purification in the previous verse.*

version, only *tvam* is referred to – not *tat* and *tvam*.¹¹⁷ However, even if we read *tvam* alone in the Sanskrit, the theme of purification still clearly applies to Kṛṣṇa modelling a method of purifying the mind, but also to understanding language through a process of purification by clarification and stretching – here, understanding the referent of *tvam*. Both language and that to which it refers, Upaniṣadic *mahāvākyas* and the mind-body of Arjuna modelled on that of Kṛṣṇa, are to be purified to achieve liberation. It is to the ‘purified’ version of Arjuna that the ‘purified’ version of *tvam* correctly applies.

Further, given that in chapter 13 of his *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara discusses the whole phrase *tat tvam asi* explicitly, it would follow that his comment on 13.11 contributes to this exegesis, whether it refers to *tvam*, or to *tat* as well. I argue that this is part of Śrīdhara’s own holistic teaching strategy, developed from his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s words, insofar as the notion of purification is integral to understanding *tat tvam asi* too. The notion of purification not only applies to language, but to what the language refers to. We can therefore see that the notion of purification applies not just to Arjuna as a ‘case study’, but is integral to the whole process of understanding language in an Advaitin way, and gaining Advaitin understanding for the devotee with a purified mind.

4.3.5 – Recitation of the *Gītā*

There is a further layer on which Śrīdhara builds to draw his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy together: this is to do ultimately with *bhakti* and the practice of recitation. Śrīdhara flags this through the praise verses with which he characteristically ends each chapter of his *Subodhinī*. This is a technique that is used specifically by Śrīdhara (not at all by Śaṅkara and rather variably by Madhusūdana).¹¹⁸ Śrīdhara’s praise verses summarise

¹¹⁷ Vireśwarānanda’s text/reading possibly amends the *Eight Commentaries*’ choice for consistency.

¹¹⁸ In his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, chapters 1, 8, 12 (on *bhakti*), 16 and 17 have no praise verses at all. Neither do chapters 2-4 which each concludes with a verse summarising its content. 5 and 6 have brief indications of praise, 9 praises devotees of Govinda (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) and 10 expresses the author’s own exhilaration. 11 has a long set omitted by the translator. 14 praises Kṛṣṇa as the son of Nanda, who is the supreme *brahman* removing bondage. 15 has a long praise verse and 18 a standard set of verses praising Madhusūdana, the *Gītā* itself and Madhusūdana’s teachers. In addition, his commentary begins with praise verses, as does chapter 7 and, most remarkably, chapter 13, which praises first *yogins* who meditate and then starkly contrasts them with the author’s own praise of the river Yamuna, site of Kṛṣṇa’s play in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (see Jacqueline Suthren Hirst and Rosie Edgley, ‘Addressing Plurality in Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s *Gītā* commentary’, in (eds.) Brian Black and James Madaio, *Pluralism and Plurality in Classical and Contemporary India* (London: Routledge, forthcoming)).

the teaching of the chapter in a simplified form,¹¹⁹ and are almost always to do with *bhakti* specifically. For Śrīdhara, these praise verses reconceptualise the *Gītā*'s chapters into a context of devotion that is congruent with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Śrīdhara's praise verse at the end of chapter 2 reiterates the fact that Arjuna is drowning, and must take refuge (*śaraṇa*) in Kṛṣṇa, 'taking refuge' itself being a characteristic *bhakti* phrase. In the praise verses at the end of chapters 3, 6 and 9, Śrīdhara focuses specifically on Kṛṣṇa as teacher, i.e. what Kṛṣṇa is actually doing, in a devotional context. For instance, at the end of chapter 6 Śrīdhara writes:

I am devoted to that Mādhava, the highest bliss, the treasure of the devotees – he (Kṛṣṇa) who taught the *yoga* of the self to the best of the *bhakti* practitioners.¹²⁰

Śrīdhara's inclusion of praise verses indicates a further level of holism in his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy. While these praise verses flag the importance of *bhakti* for Śrīdhara throughout, they also indicate a holistic, progressive way through the *Gītā* that is incorporated into a wider universe of grace, one which includes recitation through which Kṛṣṇa's name in turn becomes embodied and more widely accessible to future devotees. Right at the end of his *Subodhinī*, in chapter 18, Śrīdhara states the importance of hearing the *Gītā* and recitation. In his comment on 18.2, Śrīdhara directly quotes from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which, as we know, is of central importance for him:

As it is said (by the Lord) in the *Bhāgavata*, "Perform actions until you are tired of them, or until you have developed a veneration for hearing/listening to stories about me, and so on".¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Kṛṣṇa also teaches by simplification in one of the key verses in the *Subodhinī* – 13.4. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna 'What has been taught in detail by these texts, and is hard to condense, I shall tell you in brief' (*tad evam etair vistareṇoktaṃ duḥsaṅgrahaṃ saṃkṣepatas tubhyaṃ kathayisyāmi*). The fact that Kṛṣṇa is shown to simplify the teaching in 13.4 in particular – where language is discussed at length – may indicate that Kṛṣṇa is trying to help to devotee to understand.

¹²⁰ *ātma-yogam avocad yo bhakti-yoga-śiromaṇim |
taṃ vande paramānandaṃ mādhavaṃ bhakta-sevadhim ||*

¹²¹ *tad uktaṃ śrī-bhāgavate –
tāvāt karmāṇi kurvīta
na nirvidyeta yāvata |
mat-kathā-śravaṇādau vā
śraddhā yāvan na jāyate || (BhP 11.20.9)*

Śrīdhara also explicitly states that recitation of the *Gītā* can reveal Kṛṣṇa, in his atypically long comment on 18.70:

The result for one who has studied (the *Gītā*) is stated – “And he who will study”, repeat as with *japa*, “this sacred, righteous dialogue between us” – Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna – “will be sacrificing to me through the knowledge sacrifice”, which is the best of all sacrifices. “This is my opinion”. Although that one simply repeats the *Gītā*, without even comprehending its meaning, still – hear this from me – he is revealing me alone. Similarly, in the world, when anyone utters someone’s name at any time, the latter thinks that it is he who is called and comes to that person. In the same way, I will be near for the one (who, in reciting the *Gītā*, recites my name). Just as I was pleased simply by the repetition of my name by people such as Ajāmila and Kṣatrabandhu, I will also be pleased with him (who recites the *Gītā*).¹²²

He emphasises that even a devotee who cannot reflect on or explain Kṛṣṇa’s teaching can just recite it and thus Kṛṣṇa’s name under his breath (*japa*, a form of Vedic recitation). Since this possibility of reciting is always available everywhere, Kṛṣṇa is no longer limited to a particular manifestation speaking to Arjuna. Not only does he become available when devotees recite the *Gītā* itself, the conversation held between the two of them, but wherever a devotee pronounces Kṛṣṇa’s name. This is a key part of worship for Śrīdhara, demonstrating the reason *bhakti* is flagged progressively in the praise verses, and ultimately given such emphasis right at the end of his commentary. Śrīdhara’s final comment, in 18.78 (as we saw in section 4.2.3.2), is also consonant with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (indeed the story of Ajāmila’s devotion is found in its sixth canto). The very fact that Śrīdhara emphasises the importance of recitation right at the end of his *Subodhinī* brings our

¹²² *paṭhataḥ phalam āha “adhyesyata” iti | “āvayoh” śrī-kṛṣṇārjunayor “imam dharmyaṃ” dharmād anapetaṃ “samvādaṃ yo” ’dhyesyate japa-rūpeṇa paṭhiṣyati “tena” puṃsā sarva-yajñebhyaḥ śreṣṭhena “jñāna-yajñena” “aham iṣṭaḥ syāṃ” bhaveyam “iti me matiḥ” | yady apy asau gītārtham abudhyamāna eva kevalaṃ japati | tathāpi mama tacchṛṇvato mām evāsau prakāśayati buddhir bhavati | yathā loke yarcchayāpi yadā kaścit kadācit kasyacit nāma grhṇāti tadāsau mām evāyam āhavayatīti matvā tat-pārsvam āgacchati | tathāham api tasya sannihito bhaveyam | ata eva ajāmila-kṣatrabandhu-pramukhānām kathañcin nāmoccāraṇa-mātreṇa prasanno ’smi | tathaiḥ asyāpi prasanno bhaveyam iti bhāvah ||*

discussion back from talking about language as pointing to that which is *beyond*, to the very embodiment of this in practice.

4.4 – Conclusion

Śrīdhara introduces his commentary by stating that Arjuna is drowning in the ocean of grief and delusion. Key to Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy is the fact that Arjuna’s drowning is reintroduced in 2.72, in relation to ‘taking refuge’ (*śaraṇa*) in Kṛṣṇa. I have argued that, using praise verses at the end of each chapter, Śrīdhara flags *bhakti* as both method and culmination of the process started with mental purification, for Arjuna. Moreover, there are several hints in the *Subodhinī* that Śrīdhara’s background is indeed reminiscent of the Kṛṣṇa-based cult at Jagannāth in Purī, which also incorporated a Śaiva image as we saw in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2.1). The hints in the *Subodhinī* that this is the case include *maṅgalācaraṇas* (praise verses), ‘double readings’ with both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva interpretations, and choosing Upaniṣadic grounding specifically in the *Śvetāśvatara*, but in ways that point towards the transcendent (for example Śrīdhara’s comment on 6.8). I have shown that these clues point not only directly to the importance of a particular context for his Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*, but to the significance of Kṛṣṇa’s manifest form as conceived by Śrīdhara, and how it leads pedagogically to realisation.

I have argued that Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy can be broadly conceptualised in terms of i) Kṛṣṇa’s descent body, and ii) language used to describe Kṛṣṇa’s descent body. We have seen how, through modelling his *śuddha-sattvic* form, Śrīdhara’s Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna how he can purify his mind, which is essential for giving the knowledge which leads to realisation. It is also clear that the essential characteristic of Kṛṣṇa’s descent body – being *śuddha-sattva* – is fundamentally tied to giving a language for speaking about the transcendent. Kṛṣṇa thereby gives a language for speaking about that which transcends the world of *saṃsāra* from which Arjuna needs rescuing.

I have suggested that Śrīdhara interprets Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy as progressive. I use the term ‘progressive’ not just in the sense that Kṛṣṇa’s teaching itself unfolds as the *Gītā* progresses, but to refer to the developing understanding seen in Arjuna throughout Śrīdhara’s commentary specifically. As such, there are several ‘layers’ to Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. First, we have Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna in the *Gītā* itself. Then, as a second

layer to this, we have Śrīdhara's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna. Similarly, as a first layer where 'body' is concerned, we have Kṛṣṇa 'coming to be' in the *Gītā* itself (4.6). Second, we have Śrīdhara's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's 'coming to be' as taking on a form composed of *śuddha-sattva*. It is on this second level of pedagogy, I hold, that Śrīdhara understands Kṛṣṇa's teaching as progressive. By revealing himself in the world, as interpreted by Śrīdhara, Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna to purify his mind and perform one-pointed devotion, which leads to knowledge through Kṛṣṇa's grace.

I argue from this that Kṛṣṇa's manifest *śuddha-sattvic* form acts as a crucial hermeneutical key for Śrīdhara. To understand how Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* form functions in this way, I have used *lakṣaṇa* as a springboard for interpretation (as in section 4.3.1.2). Firstly, I argue that Śrīdhara's hermeneutical key to Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy is Kṛṣṇa's teaching about his manifested form and true nature as *brahman*. There are three key layers to this, for which *lakṣaṇa* is our starting point for interpretation. The first is based on *svarūpalakṣaṇa*, as designating an essential characteristic. Just as the essential nature of the *sthitaprajña*, *yoga* and *brahman* is indicated by *svarūpalakṣaṇa* definitions (as I demonstrated in section 4.3.1), Kṛṣṇa's essential nature is indicated by the definition of his manifest form as *śuddha-sattva*. 'Śuddha-sattva' therefore provides the seeker with a language to use to understand Kṛṣṇa's manifest nature (in other words, who Kṛṣṇa is). Further to this, *śuddha-sattva* uses the language of the everyday/conventional world (of the *guṇas*). Yet by adding the qualification *śuddha* (sometimes even *viśuddha*), along with the denial that Kṛṣṇa's birth is affected by *karma* (as a normal *prakṛtic/guṇic* birth is), Śrīdhara shows that language is being stretched, or 'purified', here beyond its normal use. Moreover, if it is the case that terms from the everyday/conventional world can be used to indicate Kṛṣṇa's (manifest) nature which transcends that world, it is also the case that terms from the everyday/conventional world – such as *satyam*, *jñānam* and *anantam* – mediated through the authoritative triple foundation sources, can be used to indicate *brahman's* essential nature which, as *nirguṇa*, transcends that world.

The second layer to Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* form being Śrīdhara's hermeneutical key relates to *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* as designating an incidental characteristic. Śrīdhara points out that Kṛṣṇa identifies himself in his *śuddha-sattvic* form in the *Gītā* as the source of all, that is, the cause. Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* form is thus described in language which indicates a key incidental characteristic of the transcendent/*nirguṇa brahman*: causality, which is a key

notion linked with supporting the argument for *brahman*'s reality/existence in the triple foundation (Upaniṣads, *Brahma-sūtras* and *Gītā* itself). I have argued that language about the *śuddha-sattvic* Kṛṣṇa as source of all can thus be seen as providing supporting evidence for the reality of *brahman* to which this language points, as Kṛṣṇa himself teaches.

The third layer to Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* form being Śrīdhara's hermeneutical key relates to *lakṣaṇa* as indicating a method (*sādhana*) or result (*phala*). The term '*sthitaprajñā*', while indicating the nature of the one grounded in concentration which is innate, also provides an example of the *method* by which one may become a *sthitaprajñā*: that is, by practising concentration until it becomes innate. The term '*yoga*', while indicating the process of mental purification, also indicates its *result*, which is mental calm as a result of purification. The term '*śuddha-sattva*' applied to Kṛṣṇa certainly indicates his nature, but for the devotee who wishes to understand his true nature as Kṛṣṇa's also indicates a *process* required to start to transcend the *guṇas* – a process of purification and its result. I have argued that, just like '*sthitaprajñā*' and '*yoga*', '*śuddha-sattva*' is a term which recommends a course of purifying action geared towards a desired result. I have also argued, in parallel to this, that '*bhakti*' is clearly understood in the *Subodhinī* as both the method and culmination of the process started with mental purification. This third layer is therefore critical to understanding Śrīdhara's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy as *progressive*.

I argue that Śrīdhara's hermeneutical key is paralleled in Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy as modelled in action. In parallel with the language which can be used to signal a method and result, in addition to his essential nature, Kṛṣṇa exemplifies the result of transcending the *guṇas* in his action, which is cosmic and grace-giving in his manifestation. He does this according to his will and play (by choice). The seeker can also transcend the *guṇas* by pursuing detached action dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, understanding who Kṛṣṇa really is, and therefore being able to receive Kṛṣṇa's grace.

That the *śuddha-sattvic* form is Śrīdhara's hermeneutical key to Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy as a signifier of purification is also confirmed in his exegesis of the key *mahāvākya*: *tat tvam asi*. As we saw in 4.10 and 13.11 (in section 4.3.4), purification for Śrīdhara applies on two levels: to a method of purifying the mind, as directed and modelled by Kṛṣṇa, but also to the process of understanding language, or understanding the referent of *tvam*. I contend that Śrīdhara makes it explicit that it is both language, and that to which language refers, which

are to be purified in order to achieve liberation. It is precisely by both the individual self and Kṛṣṇa being who they are in the most pure way that each can be that they give the language for interpreting the identity statement *tat tvam asi* which is at the heart of Advaita Vedānta.

Finally, it is worth noting that also key to Śrīdhara's exegesis of *tat tvam asi* is being able to speak of consciousness (*cit*) as 'oneness' (*aikyam*), the basis of the identity of the Lord and Arjuna. It is not insignificant that, as we saw in his comment on 13.13, Śrīdhara indicates that *śaktis* and multiplicity ultimately point back to oneness. This is reminiscent of the work of Citsukha, of whom we know Śrīdhara was at least aware. Śrīdhara seems to use Citsukha by holding that language has different referents but really refers only to *brahman*/oneness. However, I suggest that Śrīdhara goes beyond Citsukha in that he speaks not only of words pointing to *brahman*, but of the process of purifying not only language but the individual self in order to understand *tvam* correctly.

Chapter 5

Madhusūdana on Kṛṣṇa’s Personhood and Pedagogy

5.1 – Introduction

Madhusūdana Sarasvatī (sixteenth century CE) was a prolific writer who spent most of his life in Benares. As we saw in Chapter 2 (section 2.4.2.1), although the ecstatic *bhakti* of the Gosvāmīs featured in the city, Advaita Vedānta was the mainstream ‘position’ of sixteenth century Benares. The ‘divide’ between *bhakti* and Advaita Vedānta, and the relative extent to which Madhusūdana emphasises *bhakti* in his work, has been a key focus in the scholarship to date.

To address this very ‘divide’, my analysis of Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* will again begin with the two key questions I outlined in Chapter 1. First, I consider the questions Madhusūdana himself asks in his *Gītā* commentary. By demonstrating how Madhusūdana structures his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* around *tat tvam asi*, a key Advaita Vedāntin *mahāvākya*, I shall demonstrate that Madhusūdana’s primary concern is to establish who ‘that’ (*tat*) and ‘you’ (*tvam*) are, and what ‘you are that’ (*tat tvam asi*) means. Second, I look at Madhusūdana’s view of Arjuna drowning. Through close-reading the *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* on personhood I argue that, for Madhusūdana, Kṛṣṇa’s personhood is key to Arjuna’s developing understanding of ‘you’.

5.1.1 – Why is Arjuna drowning?

Just as Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara claim in the introductions to their *Gītā* commentaries, for Madhusūdana too, Arjuna is drowning. Madhusūdana introduces the metaphor in 2.10:

“To him”, to Arjuna who, having approached the battle with determination, was “in the middle of the two armies”, overwhelmed by delusion and despair, which was opposed to that (i.e. determination). “Hṛṣīkeśa”, the Lord and the inner controller of all, “laughing as if”, like drowning him in the ocean of shame, by illuminating his improper behaviour, said “these words”: “Those are not worthy to be grieved for”,

and so on, which had a deep meaning and illuminated his improper behaviour. But he did not disregard him. This is the meaning.¹

Madhusūdana’s gloss here highlights two key points. First, Madhusūdana explicitly states that Arjuna is drowning in the ocean of shame *due to his ‘improper behaviour’*, implying that Arjuna has not understood what constitutes *proper* behaviour. Second, Madhusūdana states that the one who is *making* Arjuna drown is in fact Kṛṣṇa, the Lord and inner controller of all. This is fundamentally different from the way Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara present Arjuna’s drowning – for them, Arjuna is certainly drowning, but is not actively put in this predicament by Kṛṣṇa. These two key points show us that, from the beginning of Madhusūdana’s commentary, Kṛṣṇa’s drowning of Arjuna is used pedagogically. For Madhusūdana, Arjuna is drowning because he has not understood his own personhood (what it means to be a ‘you’), and it is by drowning Arjuna that Kṛṣṇa puts Arjuna in a position where he must re-evaluate his own personhood.

5.1.2 – Why is Madhusūdana’s *tat tvam asi* structure important?

In his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* introduction (8-10), Madhusūdana clearly outlines how he structures his commentary around the most important Upaniṣadic *mahāvākya* (found in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7 etc): *tat tvam asi*:

But there in the first section, the pure self is defined as what is to be investigated in relation to the meaning of the word “you”, through the path of action and its renunciation. In the second (section), the meaning of the word “that”, the Lord who is supreme bliss, is ascertained through the path describing being grounded in devotion to the Lord. And in the third (section), the meaning of the sentence (“you are that”) is described clearly as the identity of the two (“you” and “that”). So, here also (in the *Gītā* as in the Veda) there is mutual connection of these (three) sections.²

¹ “*senayor ubhayor madhye*” *yuddhodyamenāgatya tad-virodhinam viśādam mohaṃ prāpnūvantam “tam” arjunam “prahasann iva” anucitācaraṇa-prakāśanena lajjāmbudhau majjayann iva “hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ” sarvāntaryāmī bhagavān “idaṃ” vakṣyamāṇam aśocyān ity ādi “vacah” parama-gambhīrārtham anucitācaraṇa-prakāśakam uktavān na tu apekṣitavān ity arthaḥ |*

² *tatra tu prathame kāṇḍe karma-tat-tyāga-vartmanā | tvam-padārthe viśuddhātma sopapattir nirūpyate || dvitīye bhagavad-bhakti-niṣṭhā-varṇana-vartmanā |*

In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6, ‘you’ is initially Śvetaketu, the pupil, and ‘that’ the self as originator of the cosmos with whom Śvetaketu is gradually brought to understand his true identity. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Madhusūdana uses a similar model but develops it differently. Introduction 8-10 above indicates how, for Madhusūdana, chapters 1-6 of his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* reveal the meaning of ‘you’ (*tvam*). I argue that *tvam*, in Madhusūdana’s interpretation, is a pedagogical exposition, showing not just who Arjuna is on the battlefield, but who he *can become*, and finally who he really is – as none other than ‘that’ (*tat*). *Tvam*, for Madhusūdana, is targeted throughout his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* whereby its meaning shifts and develops as the text unfolds. The *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*’s structuring around *tat tvam asi* is a clear indication that Madhusūdana’s aim is to show how his commentary is in line with *tat tvam asi* as a key Upaniṣadic teaching. This is confirmed in his introduction 5-6 where Madhusūdana holds that the three *kaṇḍas* reflect the same three concerns as the Veda³ – underlining his concern to demonstrate that the *Gītā* is indeed a Vedānta scripture.

I also challenge Nelson’s claim that *tat tvam asi* for devotionalists is problematic.⁴ Nelson has argued that Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is directed specifically to the Advaitin renunciate.⁵ I argue that, although Madhusūdana’s *tat tvam asi* structure gives a strongly Advaita Vedāntin way of reading the *Gītā*, and although the Advaitin renunciate is certainly important, the Advaitin renunciate is not Madhusūdana’s primary subject. Madhusūdana’s clear focus is on Arjuna, and the ways in which he can work towards realising minimal selfhood. Although Madhusūdana makes it clear that realisation of minimal selfhood can certainly be reached by the standard Advaitin study route of *śravaṇa* (hearing), *manana* (reflection) and *nididhyāsana* (contemplation) – and those who follow this route are the iconic *tat tvam asi* understanders – by foregrounding Arjuna, he is determined to show how Arjuna can become liberated without being a renouncer. The fact that Madhusūdana spends

bhagavān paramānandas tat-padārtho ’vadhāryate ||
trātīye tu tayoraikyam vākyārtho varṇyate sphuṭam |
evam apy atra kāṇḍānām saṁbandho ’sti parasparam ||
³ *ekam ekena ṣaṭkena kāṇḍamatrūpalakṣayet |*
karmaniṣṭhājñānaniṣṭhe kathite prathamāntyayoḥ ||
yataḥ samuccayo nāsti tayor ativirodhataḥ |
bhagavadbhaktiniṣṭhā tu madhyame parikīrtitā ||

⁴ Nelson, *Bhakti in Advaita Vedānta*, pp.1-2.

⁵ Nelson, ‘Madhusūdana on the “Hidden Meaning”’, pp.83-4.

so much time addressing Arjuna also demonstrates how central Kṛṣṇa's role in rescuing him is.

Madhusūdana's structuring of his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* around *tat tvam asi* tells us that the sentence itself is key.⁶ In creating a picture of who 'you' (*tvam*) and 'that' (*tat*) are, Madhusūdana brings in other sets of texts where particular systems of thought have already been established. This, I argue, is integral to his progressive pedagogy and the way he builds a system around the *Gītā* as root text. To do this, Madhusūdana quotes most extensively from Yoga texts, including Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtras* (second-third century CE), the *Laghu-Yogavāsīṣṭha* and Vidyāranya's Yogic Advaita *Jīvanmuktiviveka* (fourteenth century CE). Madhusūdana often clearly shows how the quotations he uses from such texts are in line with the *śruti* texts themselves. I argue that commenting on these sorts of texts within his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is key to Madhusūdana building a progressive picture of 'you', and mapping Arjuna's transition from individuation to selfhood. I also argue that Madhusūdana shows how his commentary is in line with *tat tvam asi* in terms of *bhakti*, which is revealed to be a preliminary exercise that prepares Arjuna for hearing the Upaniṣadic sentence.

5.1.3 – Why is personhood a key topic for Madhusūdana?

The very structure of Madhusūdana's *Gītā* commentary around *tat tvam asi* clearly indicates the importance of personhood in his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy, hence my focus here. Chapters 1-6 are critical to revealing the developing sense of 'you' (*tvam*), and begin with Arjuna being identified as psycho-physical person, struggling in *samsāra*. Arjuna is shown how he can progressively work towards becoming a *jīvanmukta* of the highest kind who has established *tattvajñāna* (knowledge of reality), *manonāśa* (mental quiescence)⁷ and *vāsanākṣaya* (destruction of latent tendencies) together, who is ultimately none other than the *sākṣin* (witness). At different points in his commentary, Madhusūdana aligns Arjuna both with the path of *kramamukti* (liberation in stages), and with the *bhakta* who can become liberated while still living. In each case, it is Kṛṣṇa's personhood that is key to Arjuna's progression. Arjuna being drowned by Kṛṣṇa thus has a clear pedagogical function for

⁶ See Chapter 1, section 1.4.3.2 on Niranjan Saha's mention of this structure without direct analysis. See Saha, 'Nature of "that"', pp.393-405.

⁷ See James Madaio, 'The narrative shape of orthopraxy: storytelling, *dharma* and the path to liberation in Advaita Vedānta', *Journal of Hindu Studies* (2021):1-52 n.31.

Madhusūdana, and it is precisely because Arjuna is drowning in the first place that he must reconsider his understanding of his own personhood, which begins with the mapping of ‘you’ from chapters 1-6.

5.1.4 – Madhusūdana on Kṛṣṇa’s personhood and pedagogy

In his *Gītāgūdhārthadīpikā* chapters 7-12, Madhusūdana builds a picture of who ‘that’ (*tat*) really is by revealing Kṛṣṇa’s many layers: as the one who manifests in the cosmic cycle, as where *māyā* is grounded, as the perceiver, as the Supreme Teacher, and as the witness. A complex picture of who Kṛṣṇa is therefore emerges, yet it is ultimately revealed that Kṛṣṇa is none other than *nirguṇa brahman*. Chapters 7-12 are *bhakti*-oriented, and it is in this middle section that Kṛṣṇa is the overt teacher and exemplification of being the witness. I argue that Madhusūdana’s starting point for interpreting Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, in terms of *tat*, is Kṛṣṇa’s personhood. It is Kṛṣṇa *as person* who is the subject of Arjuna’s devotion. Kṛṣṇa’s personhood is thus the key pedagogical tool for showing Arjuna how he can progress, through *bhakti*. As Madhusūdana takes us through the layers that reveal who Kṛṣṇa really is, resulting in Kṛṣṇa being revealed ultimately to be none other than *nirguṇa brahman*, we can see that it is *bhakti* that has led ‘you’ to this point, where it is realised that ‘you’ are nothing other than the self as witness. Once we reach chapters 13-18, we are certain that *bhakti* prepares ‘you’ for hearing the *mahāvākya*. Chapter 13 demonstrates how the sentence itself – *tat tvam asi* – points directly to Kṛṣṇa, as the subject of devotion *and* the subject of the Upaniṣads, at both a linguistic and ontological level, as I show below.

Kṛṣṇa’s role as ‘teacher’ is fundamental to Madhusūdana’s theology, as his repeated use of the term shows. It is only by Kṛṣṇa’s *teaching* and *modelling* that he demonstrates being ‘that’ to Arjuna, who is seeking to develop his understanding of himself. Indeed Arjuna is saved from drowning *by* Kṛṣṇa as teacher, the very one who made him drown in the first place. *Tat tvam asi* in Madhusūdana’s commentary is only fully understood when Arjuna has been taught by Kṛṣṇa, who models himself as ‘that’ which is to be known.

5.1.5 – Mapping approaches to personhood

To date, none of the philosophical surveys focused on Madhusūdana concentrates on his understanding of personhood. One key trend, particularly pertinent in the work of Nelson,

concentrates on the tension between the paths of *jñāna* and *bhakti* in Madhusūdana’s work, and whether or not it is possible that Madhusūdana be both non-dualist *and* devotee.⁸ Sanjukta Gupta’s substantial study argues that the particular synthesis Madhusūdana makes between Advaita Vedānta and *bhakti* ‘does not lose sight of the non-dual reality’.⁹ However, despite such work, there has not yet been a study of Madhusūdana’s understanding of personhood, nor has there been a critical analysis of the coherence of this in an Advaita Vedāntin context. I contend that, given that Madhusūdana structures his *Gītā* commentary around *tat tvam asi* as the most important sentence from the Upaniṣads, it is worth seriously considering who *tvam* and *tat* actually refer to.

One author who has written more extensively on personhood, but in relation to Śaṅkara, is Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad. Ram-Prasad has also written on selfhood and personhood in relation to Advaita Vedānta more generally, considering how Advaita Vedānta both ‘affirms a unified consciousness (which might be called a self), and rejects the intuition that “I” picks out that self’.¹⁰ In this regard, Ram-Prasad positions himself between Dan Zahavi’s theory of a ‘minimal self’, and Metzinger’s stance that ‘consciousness generates a model of a phenomenal self, so the construction of an illusory self is transparent to consciousness itself’.¹¹ For Ram-Prasad, the self in Advaita Vedānta is ‘like Metzinger’s in taking the first-personal perspective as an illusion, but also like Zahavi’s in insisting on a minimal subject, a consciousness reflexively aware of its own presence’.¹² In short, Ram-Prasad understands selfhood minimally as the consciousness which is necessary for personhood to operate.¹³

⁸ See Nelson, ‘Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the “Hidden Meaning”’, pp.73-89 and Nelson, ‘The Ontology of *Bhakti*’, pp.345-92.

⁹ Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism*, p.7.

¹⁰ Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, ‘Situating the Elusive Self of Advaita Vedānta’, in Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson and Dan Zahavi (eds.) *Self, No Self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011), *Abstract and Keywords*. Consulted on 10 September 2020.

<<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199593804.001.0001/acprof-9780199593804-chapter-9>> First published online: 2010.

¹¹ Ram-Prasad, ‘Situating the Elusive Self’, *Abstract and Keywords*. Consulted on 10 September 2020.

<<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199593804.001.0001/acprof-9780199593804-chapter-9>> First published online: 2010.

¹² Ram-Prasad, ‘Situating the Elusive Self’, *Abstract and Keywords*. Consulted on 10 September 2020.

<<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199593804.001.0001/acprof-9780199593804-chapter-9>> First published online: 2010.

¹³ I ‘minimal selfhood’ in this sense, following Ram-Prasad’s interpretation, in Advaitin terms, of Zahavi’s notion of the minimal self. ‘Minimal selfhood’ simply *is*, and is what allows any functionality at all. It can never be ‘attained’ or be the object of anything (see Chapter 3 n.63 for an example of when language has to be used for that which is strictly beyond language).

In his *Divine Self, Human Self*, Ram-Prasad highlights the overarching problem of the *Gītā* – the question of how to act *dharmically*, i.e. should Arjuna go and fight? Ram-Prasad argues that Śaṅkara takes little notice of this, because for him, personhood is about individuality and individuated characteristics, as we saw in Chapter 3. These individuated characteristics all belong to the realm of not-being, so are fundamentally different from selfhood.¹⁴ Clearly, Śaṅkara’s sense of self is rather a minimalist one, which Ram-Prasad compares to the transcendental selfhood of Kant and Husserl.¹⁵ Ram-Prasad’s position is certainly helpful in relation to Śaṅkara. In this chapter, I apply Ram-Prasad’s model of ‘minimal selfhood’ (from an Advaitin lens), to my reading of Madhusūdana’s *Gītā* commentary to demonstrate the pedagogical importance of personhood for Madhusūdana. I argue that personhood is precisely the tool by which Madhusūdana shows how Arjuna can transition from individuation to selfhood.

In the following, I use Madhusūdana’s own threefold structure – *tvam*, *tat* and *tat tvam asi* – as the basis of my analysis, starting with the ‘layers’ of *tvam*.

5.2 – *Tvam*

5.2.1 – *Arjuna as the ‘you’*

Like Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara, Madhusūdana accepts a Sāṃkhyan view of the psycho-physical person.¹⁶ When confused with the self through superimposition, misidentification and attachment, this is nothing other than what we might call the *saṃsāric* ‘you’ trapped in rebirth. Early on in 2.14 Madhusūdana has Kṛṣṇa adjuring Arjuna:

Do not know yourself as the sufferer by superimposing identity on the sufferer...¹⁷

The true ‘you’ is the self, as he explains just before:

¹⁴ ‘Not-being’ here in the sense that, for Śaṅkara, everything other than consciousness, *brahman*, self, is not ultimate reality. See Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, pp. 2-6 & 19-28.

¹⁵ Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, pp.87-8.

¹⁶ See e.g. *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 7.4.

¹⁷ *dukhitādātm(y)ādhyāsenātmānaṃ dukhinaṃ mā jñāsīr...*

...just as there is no difference due to the serial arising and destruction of states of the body, because *you*, the embodied, one only, are eternal, so also (it is) with the simultaneous acquisition of other bodies, because *you* are all-pervading, one only...¹⁸

That Arjuna initially represents the *samsāric* ‘you’ in need of teaching, is implied in 3.3:

In line with the different states, in the form of purification and non-purification of the mind, two kinds of firmness have been taught to the very same one, **you** (*tvām*): “This knowledge of the self (*sāṃkhye buddhiḥ*) has been described to you. But you must listen to this (knowledge) in relation to *yoga* (of *karma*)” (2.39). Thus, since both are useful to the very same one according to their different stages (of progress) (*bhūmikā-bhedena*), it is not redundant to give the teaching (to the very same person) despite differences in eligibility.¹⁹

Which teaching Arjuna should follow – *karma-yoga* or *jñāna-yoga* – will depend on his progression towards selfhood, since Madhusūdana clearly holds that the paths of *karma-yoga* and *jñāna-yoga* are not to be practised in combination,²⁰ but rather in **stages** (*bhūmikā*). Right at the end of his comment on 3.3, Madhusūdana writes, ‘The Lord will say, until the conclusion of the chapter...“Hence you (Arjuna) will become (*bhaviṣyasi*) fit for knowledge through the purification of the mind attained by performing actions without desire, indeed”.²¹ Madhusūdana also comments, ‘By addressing him as “faultless”, the Lord points out that Arjuna is fit to be taught’.²² By addressing Arjuna directly as a *kṣatriya* trapped in *samsāra*,²³ stating that he will *become* capable of eradicating desire through the

¹⁸ 2.13 ...*athavā dehina ekasyaiva tava yathā krameṇa dehāvasthotpattivināśayor na bhedaḥ | nityatvāt, tathā yugapat dehāntaraprāptir api tavaikasyaiva vibhutvāt...*

¹⁹ *citta-suddhy-asuddhi-rūpāvasthā-bhedenaikam eva tvām prati dvividhā niṣṭhoktā | eṣā te 'bhīhitā sāṃkhye buddhir yoge tv imāṃ śṛṇu (Gītā 2.39) iti | ato bhūmikā-bhedenaikam eva praty ubhayopayogān nādhikāra-bhede 'py upadeśa-vaiyarthya ity abhiprāyaḥ |*

²⁰ Madhusūdana refers to Śaṅkara’s position before commenting on *Gītā* 3.3, demonstrating that he follows Śaṅkara’s critique of the *jñānakarmasamuccayin*.

²¹ *ataḥ kāma-rāhityenaiva karmāṇi kurvann antaḥ-karaṇa-suddhyā jñānādhikārī bhaviṣyasīti yāvad adhyāya-samāpti vadiṣyati bhagavān ||*

²² *he 'naghāpāpeti sambodhayann upadeśayogyatām arjunasya sūcayati |*

²³ Arjuna is addressed a *kṣatriya* in Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 2.10, 3.7,20,30, 6.43,45, 18.36-7,41,48.

purification of the mind, Madhusūdāna introduces Arjuna as the primary subject who requires Kṛṣṇa's teaching.

5.2.2 – *Who is the dharmic person?*

Kṛṣṇa's diagnosis of Arjuna's problem is inappropriate, *adharmic* behaviour. What, then, constitutes *appropriate* behaviour for Madhusūdāna? The term *sva-dharma* (one's own *dharma*) is first introduced by Madhusūdāna in 2.31, soon after he has explained why Kṛṣṇa is drowning Arjuna in 2.10:

Now, with a view to destroying the delusion of Arjuna himself – originating in defects like compassion, and in the form of the appearance of his own *dharma*, called fighting, as *adharmic* due to the extent of injury, and so on, in it – the Lord makes him understand that fighting, although beginning with injury, and so on, is not *adharmic*, because it is his own *dharma*.²⁴

This interpretation of acting appropriately, according to *dharma*, is standard. However, we have seen that 'Arjuna's own inappropriate behaviour is brought to light by the Lord as if to create shame in order to create discrimination'.²⁵ Kṛṣṇa thus encourages Arjuna to reconsider the way he looks at things, including *dharma*.

Madhusūdāna in fact reiterates the 'drowning' metaphor, first seen in 2.10, in 6.5:

"With the self", with the mind engaged with discrimination (*viveka*), "one should raise" up "one's self", from that ocean of *saṃsāra* in which it is drowned, meaning one should procure its absorption in *yoga* by

²⁴ *samprati yuddhākhye sva-dharme hiṃsādi-bāhulyenādharmatva-pratibhāsa-rūpam arjunasyaiva karuṇādi-doṣa-nibandhanam asādhāraṇaṃ bhramaṃ nirākartuṃ hiṃsādimattve 'pi yuddhasya sva-dharmatvenādharmatvābhāvaṃ bodhayati bhagavān sva-dharmam apīti |*

²⁵ *lajjām utpādayitum iva vivekam utpādayitum arjunasyānucitācaraṇaṃ bhagavatā prakāśyate...* | See section 5.5.1 on Arjuna's drowning.

abandoning attachment to objects. But “one should not lower”, drown in the ocean of *saṃsāra* “the self”, by attachment to objects.²⁶

Here, Madhusūdana re-states – in the concluding chapter of the first third of his commentary – that ‘drowning’ (*nimagna*) in the ‘ocean of *saṃsāra*’ (*saṃsāra-samudre*) results from being attached to objects. Although a person might act appropriately according to their *sva-dharma*, until attachment is removed they will remain in *saṃsāra*.

The fact that Madhusūdana innovatively brings in *yoga* here – particularly given that 6.5 reiterates our key drowning metaphor – points to the importance of Yogic Advaita in the *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, specifically in terms of building a picture of how personhood is understood. His extensive quotations from Vidyāraṇya and the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*²⁷ – underline this,²⁸ showing that Madhusūdana goes well beyond Śaṅkara, who holds that being a ‘knower’ is enough for liberation. Although Madhusūdana’s interpretation of acting *dharmically* in the world may be technically standard in terms of Advaita Vedānta, the way in which he *uses* the *dharmic* agent in chapters 1-6 of his commentary, to problematise Arjuna’s understanding of personhood, is innovative.

5.2.3 – *Who is the yogin?*

Although Arjuna may have figured out how to act appropriately in the world, he still faces the problem of how his attachment and desire for results can be eradicated. Madhusūdana directly addresses this problem in *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 6, which is primarily orientated around explaining who the *yogin* is. It is here we learn that sub-commenting on Yoga texts is key to building Madhusūdana’s picture of the ‘you’, many of his comments including glosses of Patañjali’s *Yoga-sūtras*. For instance, in 6.2:

For it is said, “*Yoga* is restraint of the modifications of the mind” (*Yoga-sūtra* 1.2). There are five types of modifications: *pramāṇa* (means of

²⁶ “*ātmanā*” *viveka-yuktena manas-“ātmānam” svam jīvaṃ saṃsāra-samudre nimagnaṃ tata “uddharet” | ut ūrdhvaṃ haret | viṣayāsaṅga-parityāgena yogārūḍhatām āpādayed ity arthaḥ | “na” tu viṣayāsaṅgena-“ātmānam avasādayet” saṃsāra-samudre majjayet*

²⁷ Used also in his *Advaita-siddhi* and *Siddhānta-bindu*.

²⁸ See Chapter 2, section 2.4.4.

knowing), *viparyaya* (misapprehension), *vikalpa* (doubt), *nidrā* (sleep) and *smṛti* (memory) (*Yoga-sūtra* 1.6).²⁹

Here, Madhusūdāna quotes Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra* to assert that *yoga* is restraining the mind from undergoing modifications. Madhusūdāna then explains, in turn, each modification of the mind by quoting *Yoga-sūtra* 1.6. Madhusūdāna is, however, careful to ground his quoting of Yoga texts in Upaniṣadic texts – in 6.2, *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.22 – to support his statement that a person must renounce attachment to the results of actions. Again, in 6.26, Madhusūdāna explicitly states that Pātañjali Yoga is grounded in the *śruti*:

And this type of *yoga* has been declared by the *śruti*: “[...] They consider that ‘keeping the senses steady through meditation’ is that *yoga*. One then becomes attentive, for *yoga* is subject to growth and destruction” (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.3.10-11).³⁰

Following this, Madhusūdāna immediately again quotes *Yoga-sūtra* 1.2:

And the aphorism, “*Yoga* is the restraint of the modifications of the mind” (*Yoga-sūtra* 1.2) is indeed rooted in [the *śruti*].³¹

By quoting the *Yoga-sūtra* alongside the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, Madhusūdāna justifies drawing on *yoga* to build a picture of who the *Gītā*'s *yogin* is. His explanation continues into 6.28, where his commentary is substantial, continuing to sub-comment on texts other than the *Gītā* and gloss them within his explanation. By doing this, Madhusūdāna constantly re-states that the specific type of *yoga* he advocates – eight-limbed Pātañjali Yoga – is Upaniṣadic.

Madhusūdāna's incorporation of Yoga texts into his *Gītā* commentary – particularly in chapter 6 – helps us to understand what kind of *yoga* he advocates for the seeker of

²⁹ *tathā hi – yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ (Yoga-sūtra 1.2) pramāṇa-viparyaya-vikalpa-nidrā-smṛtaya iti vṛttayah pañca-vidhāḥ |*

³⁰ *etādṛśaś ca yogaḥ śrutyā pratipāditaḥ – [...] tāṃ yogam iti manyante sthirām indriya-dhāraṇām | apramattas tadā bhavati yogo hi prabhavāpyayau (Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.3.10-11) iti |*

³¹ *etan-mūlakam eva ca yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ (Yoga-sūtra 1.2) iti sūtram |*

liberation. In his extended explanation of 6.25, Madhusūdana glosses a verse from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* following Vidyāraṇya’s earlier use:

“The tranquil self” (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.13) is that which is free from both these egos and is without qualities, which is the essence of the one consciousness. One should control the great self, the universal intellect, into that one. Thus, should one control that cause – the unmanifest (*avyakta*) – of that (the great self). As such, the pure self without qualities, which is indicated by the word “you” (*tvam*) becomes directly realised.³²

Here, Madhusūdana draws on terms developed in Sāṃkhya. His gloss of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* supports his explanation, showing the importance of the psycho-physical person, in Sāṃkhyan terms, for Madhusūdana’s basic understanding of ‘you’. More importantly, what we see emphasised in Madhusūdana’s commentary (as in 6.25) is the *yogic* framework of a person, as developed before him in Yogic Advaita,³³ where mental restraint is vital to go beyond the attachments of the *dharmic* self to manifest the true ‘you’. This becomes even clearer as Madhusūdana draws extensively on Yogic Advaita texts to explain the three stages of *jīvanmukti* itself, which is integral to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy in the *Gītā*.

5.2.4 – Who is the *jīvanmukta*?

Madhusūdana holds that *yogic* practice is key to a person developing their understanding of self and attaining *jīvanmukti* (liberation while still living). Introducing chapter 3, Madhusūdana summarises how a person can become a *jīvanmukta*:

First comes firmness in selfless works (*niṣkāma-karma*). Then comes purification of the mind. Then comes renunciation of all actions, led by tranquillity (*śama*), restraint (*dama*), and so on. Then comes firmness in devotion (*bhakti*) to the Lord, along with deliberation on the Upaniṣadic

³² *tābhyām ahaṅkārabhyām vivikto nirupādhiḥ “śāntātmā” sarvāntaś cid-eka-rasas tasmin mahāntam ātmānaṃ samaṣṭi-buddhiṃ niyacchet | evaṃ tat-kāraṇam avyaktam api niyacchet | tato nirupādhiḥ tvam-pada-lakṣyaḥ śuddha ātmā sāḅātḅṛtau bhavati | See Jīvanmuktiviveka 3.7.1/3.8.1.*

³³ See also Mallinson and Bouy on Yogic Advaita beyond Advaita Vedānta (Mallinson, ‘Haṭhayoga’s Philosophy’, pp.225-47 and Bouy, *Les Natha-Yogin et les Upaniṣads*).

sentences. Then comes firmness in knowledge of reality (*tattvajñāna*), and the result is liberation while still living (*jīvanmukti*), which arises through the cessation of ignorance consisting of the three *guṇas*, and continues until the end of the experience of the results of *prārabdha-karma*.³⁴

Here, Madhusūdana explains that once a person has *tattvajñāna* (knowledge of reality), they become a *jīvanmukta*. Once a *jīvanmukta*, a person continues to perform actions in the world but without attachment – so no longer identifies the self with the psycho-physical *guṇic* person. Madhusūdana, in his comment on 4.20, glosses the *Gītā*'s description of action without attachment, and applies this description to the *jīvanmukta*:

“Even though” one who has reached such a state (of having abandoned attachment) and is a *jīvanmukta* is “engaged in actions”, Vedic or ordinary, awakening from this state – even though, under the control of *prārabdha-karmas*, he appears to the world to be engaged in undertaking actions, with their appendages and subdivisions, “he” from his own perception “in reality does not do anything”, [actions] having been sublated by the perception of the actionless self.³⁵

Prārabdha-karma, the reason that the *jīvanmukta* is still ‘engaged in actions’ despite having attained *tattvajñāna*, refers to results of past actions that are currently manifesting – in other words, are ready to be experienced and need a body for this to occur. This already-initiated *prārabdha-karma* cannot be avoided, even by the knower. As these results must fully run their course, embodiment persists.

5.2.5 – The *Laghu-Yogavāsīṣṭha*'s seven stages of yoga

To reveal who ‘you’ is, at the level of being a *jīvanmukta*, Madhusūdana draws on the *Laghu-Yogavāsīṣṭha*'s seven stages of yoga. I argue that drawing on these seven stages is

³⁴ *tathā hi-ādau niṣkāma-karma-niṣṭhā | tato 'ntaḥkaraṇa-śuddhiḥ | tataḥ śama-damādi-sādhana-puraḥsaraḥ sarva-karma-saṃnyāsaḥ | tato vedānta-vākya-vicāra-sahitā bhagavad-bhakti-niṣṭhā | tatas tattvajñāna-niṣṭhā tasyāḥ phalaṃ ca triguṇātmakāvidyā-nivṛtṭyā jīvan-muktiḥ prārabdha-karma-phala-bhoga-paryantam |*

³⁵ *evambhūto jīvanmukto vyuthāna-dasāyām “karmaṇi” vaidike laukike vā-“abhipravṛtto” “api” prārabdha-karma-vaśāl loka-dṛṣṭyābhitaḥ sāṅgopāṅgānuṣṭhānāya pravṛtto 'pi sva-dṛṣṭyā “naiva kiṃcit karoti sa” niṣkriyātma-darśanena bādhitatvād iti*

key to Madhusūdana showing how a person can work towards becoming a *jīvanmukta*. It is by laying out these stages that Arjuna is given the vision of the sort of *yogin* he can become, and how he can work towards a correct understanding of *tvam* ('you'). Madhusūdana first alludes to the seven stages in *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* introduction 24-27:

Knowledge of reality (*tattvajñāna*), mental quiescence (*manonāśa*), and eradication of latent tendencies (*vāsanākṣaya*) – when these three are practised together, liberation while still living (*jīvanmukti*) becomes established. Total renunciation of all actions as a result of enlightenment is explained in the *śruti* for this reason – that there may be effort for completing that very part (among those three) which was not completed before. Once the mind is first restrained through *savikalpa-samādhi*, *nirvikalpa-samādhi* may come to be, which has three stages. In the first the person awakes by themselves, in the second they are awakened by others. In the last they do not awake at all; they remain always absorbed.³⁶

Here, Madhusūdana explicitly refers to the final three stages of *yoga*: stages 5, 6 and 7, as outlined in the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*. These final three stages are described by Madhusūdana, as in the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*, as 'stages of *jīvanmukti* itself'.³⁷

All seven stages are first referred to together by Madhusūdana in his extended comment on 3.18 where he explains, 'This kind of knower of *brahman* has been described by Vasiṣṭha in terms of seven different stages'.³⁸ Following this, Madhusūdana then directly quotes the passage from the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha* where these seven stages are outlined:

The stage of knowledge called *śubhecchā* (desire for liberation), is said to be the first; the second is *vicāraṇa* (reflection); the third is *tanumānasā*

³⁶ *tattvajñānaṃ manonāśa vāsanākṣaya ityapi |
yugapat tritayābhyāsāj jīvanmuktir dṛḍhā bhavet ||
vidvatsaṃnyāsa katham etad artha śrutau kṛtam |
prāgasiddho ya evāṃśo yatnaḥ syāt tasya sādhanē ||
niruddhe cetasi purā savikalpasamādhinā |
nirvikalpasamādhis tu bhavet atra tribhūmikāḥ ||
vyuttiṣṭhate svatastvāddye dvitīye parabodhitāḥ |
ante vyuttiṣṭhate naiva sadā bhavati tanmayāḥ ||*

³⁷ Cf 6.43.

³⁸ *etādṛśo brahma-vid-bhūmikā-saptaka-bhedena nirūpito vasiṣṭhena –*

(ability of the mind); the fourth is *sattvāpatti* (experience of reality); then comes *asaṃsakti* (non-relationship); the sixth is *padārthābhāvanī* (absence of objects); the seventh is called *turyagā* (total absence of the perception of duality) (*Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*, *Lavaṇa-upākhyāna* 13.113-14).³⁹

Following this quotation, Madhusūdana himself explains that the first three stages of *yoga* (*śubhecchā*, *vicāraṇa* and *tanumānasā*) constitute the waking state, and the fourth stage (*sattvāpatti*) constitutes the dreaming state. In the first three stages, the world appears with plurality and individuation, meaning that personhood is problematic. In the fourth stage, personhood is still problematic because, although the *yogin* who has reached this stage is called a ‘knower of *brahman*’ (*brahmavit*), they still require *tattvajñāna*, *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya*.

The final three stages of *yoga*, ‘the different stages of *jīvanmukti* itself, explained previously, in the third (chapter)’,⁴⁰ are presented in 6.43 as stages of how the *yogin* emerges back into the world after being in states of meditative concentration (*samādhi*). At stage 5, (*asaṃsakti*, or the sleeping state), the *yogin* emerges (awakes) by himself, due to *prārabdhakarman*. Although the *jīvanmukta* at stage 5 may have achieved *tattvajñāna*, mental activity still intervenes.

At stage 6 (*padārthābhāvanī*, or the state of deep sleep), the *yogin* is referred to as a ‘greater knower of *brahman*’ (*brahmavid-varīyān*). The *yogin* who has reached stage 6, although starting to practise *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya* simultaneously (having already achieved *tattvajñāna*), can still be awakened by someone else. Madhusūdana quotes the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha* again, suggesting that the *yogin* at stage 6 may still, to an extent, be individuated: “(In the sixth stage) he (the *yogin*) might perceive just some difference, or he may not perceive anything whatsoever” (*Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*, *Yoga-saptabhūmikā-upākhyāna* 80-1).⁴¹

³⁹ *jñāna-bhūmiḥ śubhecchākhyā prathamā parikīrtitā |
vicāraṇā dvitīyā syāt tṛtīyā tanu-mānasā ||
sattvāpattis caturthī syāt tato 'saṃsakti-nāsikā |
padārthābhāvanī ṣaṣṭhī saptamī turyagā smṛtā || iti |*

⁴⁰ *pañcama-ṣaṣṭha-saptama-bhūmayas tu jīvanmukter avāntara-bhedā iti tṛtīye prāg-vyākhyātam*

⁴¹ *kiṃcid evaiṣa sampannas tv athavaiṣa na kiṃcana |*

5.2.6 – The *jīvanmukta* as exemplar of minimal selfhood

The *yogin* who has reached stage 7 is called the ‘highest knower of *brahman*’ (*brahmavid-variṣṭha*). It is only once the *yogin* has reached stage 7 that there is no perception of duality whatsoever. Madhusūdana directly quotes from the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha* in 3.18:

“The seventh stage of *yoga* is called liberation without a body (*videhamukti*)” (*Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*, *Yoga-saptabhūmikā-upākhyāna* 43.81).⁴²

Madhusūdana then quotes *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 11.13.36 on inebriation and 3.28.38 on no further rebirth directly before quoting *śruti*:

“Just as the lifeless skin of a snake is cast off and lies on the ant hill, so this body lies. Then this (self is) disembodied, immortal, life, *brahman* alone, light alone” (*Br. Up.* 4.4.7).⁴³

Madhusūdana thus reinterprets the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* in the light of the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha*, using *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* as a bridge. Although the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* passage clearly refers to bodiless liberation after death in its original context, Madhusūdana reinterprets the meaning of *videhamukti* here as bodiless liberation in this life without any perception of duality, and in this respect follows Vidyāraṇya’s view.⁴⁴

At stage 7 (*turyāga*), in contrast to stage 6, the *yogin* does not emerge from *samādhi* either by themselves or through the efforts of others, as Madhusūdana affirms in 3.18:

Stage seven – the state of *turīya* – is the state of *samādhi* from which, due to the complete absence of the perception of difference, he (the *yogin*) does not emerge either by himself or by others. He remains always self-

⁴² *videha-muktatā tūktā saptamī yoga-bhūmikā* |

⁴³ *tad yathā 'hinirlyayanī valmīke mṛtā pratyastā śayītaivam evedaṃ śarīraṃ śete 'thāyam aśarīro 'mṛtaḥ prāṇo brahmaiva teja eva iti* |

⁴⁴ Madaio, *Advaita Vedānta as Narrative Theology*, p.86.

absorbed everywhere as a mass of complete supreme bliss alone, without his own effort, with his bodily functions controlled by others, due to his organs of vitality being under the control of the highest Lord.⁴⁵

At stage 7, the *jīvanmukta* does not possess consciousness of the body. For this person, there is no awareness of anything separate whatsoever. The passage from the *Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha* quoted above also makes this clear:

“That one (the *yogin*), after being established in the sixth stage, should achieve the seventh stage [...] In the stages of *yoga*, this is the climax, it is beyond words and is tranquil (*śānta*)” (*Laghu-Yogavāsiṣṭha* 43.80-1).⁴⁶

The ‘tranquil self’ from the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* is again referred to here. This tranquil self has no individuation whatsoever, meaning that the *yogin* at stage 7 satisfies Ram-Prasad’s model of selfhood as minimal condition and can thus be an exemplar of the minimal self. The *jīvanmukta* teaches *only* by being an exemplar of minimal selfhood, only by being there, and does not actively engage in any way in the world.

5.2.7 – Arjuna becoming the highest yogin

One of the primary ways in which Madhusūdana builds a systematic and progressive understanding of Arjuna’s personhood is through his explanation of the *Gītā*’s vocative addresses to Arjuna.⁴⁷ As we saw in 3.3, Arjuna is addressed as a *kṣatriya* who can progress towards liberation through desireless action. When we reach chapter 6, Madhusūdana repeatedly refers to Arjuna as a *yoga-bhraṣṭa*,⁴⁸ for instance in 6.43:

⁴⁵ *yasyās tu samādhy-avasthāyā na svato na vā parato vyutthito bhavati sarvathā bheda-darśanābhāvāt | kintu sarvadā tanmaya eva sva-prayatnam antareṇaiva paramēśvara-prerita-prāṇa-vāyu-vaśād anyair nirvāhyamāṇa-daihika-vyavahāraḥ paripūrṇa-paramānanda-ghana eva sarvatas tiṣṭhati | sā saptamī turīyāvasthā |*

⁴⁶ *śaṣṭhyāṃ bhūmām asau sthitvā saptamīṃ bhūmikām āpnuyāt [...] agamyā vacasāṃ śāntā sā sīmā yoga-bhūmiṣu || iti |*

⁴⁷ Cf Jacqueline Suthren Hirst and Rosie Edgley, ‘Addressing Plurality in Madhusūdana Sarasvatī’s *Gītā* commentary’ (forthcoming).

⁴⁸ One ‘failed in *yoga*’ (*Gītā* 6.41).

O “descendent of the Kurus”, as a *yoga-bhraṣṭa* who has been born into a family of pious and wealthy people, for you too the attainment of knowledge will be easily achieved due to your past impressions.⁴⁹

We know from the battle context of the *Mahābhārata* that the ‘descendent of the Kurus’ is Arjuna. In 6.43, Madhusūdana refers again to the *Laghu-Yogavāsīṣṭha*’s seven stages of *yoga* first comprehensively introduced in 3.18. By reintroducing them in 6.43 where Arjuna is addressed directly, Madhusūdana appears to suggest that Arjuna can indeed become a stage 7 *jīvanmukta* (i.e. a *yogin* of the highest kind), albeit in a future life.

Introducing 6.45, worth quoting at length, Madhusūdana specifically explains how Arjuna, as a *yoga-bhraṣṭa*, is eligible for knowledge:

A *yoga-bhraṣṭa* who dies when in the first stage, having indeed been born into a lineage of great kings which is the cause of various errors – (if that birth is) separated from the latent tendencies of many kinds of experiences, transcends eligibility for rites and duties (and) becomes eligible for knowledge due to the prevalence of the residual impressions of knowledge previously attained. Then how much more should it be said that a *yoga-bhraṣṭa* – who, after dying while in the second or the third stage, once the experience of objects is at an end, is born into a lineage of great kings or, if no experience at all is needed, is born into a family of *brahmins* who are knowers of *brahman* – becomes liberated from the bondage of rebirth as a result of becoming eligible for knowledge by transcending the eligibility for rites and duties, attaining the result of that (knowledge) by practising the disciplines that are required for it.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *he kuru-nandana tavāpi śucinām śrīmatām kule yoga-bhraṣṭa-janama jātam iti pūrva-vāsanā-vaśād anāyāsenaiḥ jñāna-lābho bhaviṣyatīti*

⁵⁰ *yadā caivaṃ prathama-bhūmikāyām mṛto ’pi aneka-bhoga-vāsanā-vyavahitam api vividha-pramāda-kāraṇavati mahārāja-kule ’pi janma labdhvāpi yoga-bhraṣṭaḥ pūrvopacita-jñāna-saṃskāra-prābalyena karmādhikāram atikramya jñānādhikārī bhavati tadā kim tu vaktavyam dvitīyāyām tṛtīyāyām vā bhūmikāyām mṛto viśaya-bhogānte labdha-mahārāja-kula-janmā yadi vā bhogam akṛtvaiva labdha-brahma-vid brāhmaṇa-kula-janmā yoga-bhraṣṭaḥ karmādhikārātikrameṇa jñānādhikārī bhūtvā tat-sādhanāni sampādya tat-phala-lābhena saṃsāra-bandhanān mucyata iti*

This tells us that, for Madhusūdana, *varṇāśramadharmā* impacts our understanding of what constitutes a person. However, Madhusūdana also shows how, under certain circumstances (namely the exhaustion of the results of actions), *kṣatriyas* as well as *brahmins* can be eligible for realisation. Here, Madhusūdana may seem to imply that, although Arjuna cannot become a stage 7 *jīvanmukta* in his current life, he *can* if he dies at stage 3 and is then born into either a (nother) lineage of great kings or a *brahmin* family, of knowers of *brahman*. This indicates that showing how Arjuna can become liberated is Madhusūdana’s focus, and through establishing Arjuna’s eligibility, Madhusūdana demonstrates that Kṛṣṇa can give Arjuna the teaching.

In Madhusūdana’s introduction 24-27, he makes it clear that the *yogin* who practises *tattvajñāna*, *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya* together does not return to rebirth. Madhusūdana addresses Arjuna about such a *yogin* in 6.32:

O “Arjuna, one who”, “in comparison with the self” – the analogy is by holding one’s own self as an exemplar – “sees everywhere” in all living beings “the same” equal “whether in terms of happiness or sorrow”, who, being empty of hatred, does not bring about another’s disadvantage just as he does not bring about his own disadvantage, and who, similarly being empty of desire, brings happiness to others in the same way as he brings to himself, “that *yogin*”, a knower of *brahman*, through being tranquil due to the expulsion of (desire), “is considered superior to” better than the previous one (who has not achieved *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya*). Therefore, one should put in a great effort to practise *tattvajñāna*, *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya* together.⁵¹

Crucially, in 6.46 Madhusūdana aligns Arjuna with such a *yogin*, showing that Arjuna is explicitly addressed as eligible to become a *yogin* of the highest kind, providing he progresses through the stages of *yoga*:

⁵¹ “*ātmaivaupamyam*” *upamā tenātmadrṣṭāntena* “*sarvatra*” *prāṇi-jāte* “*sukhaṃ vā yadi vā duḥkhaṃ samam*” *tulyaṃ yaḥ* “*paśyati*” *svasyāniṣṭaṃ yathā na sampādayati evaṃ parasyāpy aniṣṭaṃ* “*yo*” *na sampādayati pradveśasūnyatvāt evaṃ svasyeṣṭaṃ yathā sampādayati tathā parasyāpīṣṭaṃ yaḥ sampādayati rāgaśūnyatvāt* “*sa*” *nirvāsanāyopasāntamanā* “*yogī*” *brahmavit* “*paramaḥ*” *śreṣṭho* “*mataḥ*” *pūrvasmāt he* “*arjuna*” | *atas tattvajñāna-manonāśa-vāsanākṣayañānam akramam abhyāsāya mahān prayatna āstheya ity arthaḥ* |

Now, in order to enjoin *yoga* accompanied by the pre-eminent arousing of confidence (*śraddhā*) in Arjuna, the *yogin* is praised in “Than the ascetics”: “A *yogin* is higher than the ascetics, and is even held to be higher than those of knowledge. And a *yogin* is higher than those of action. Thus, Arjuna, be a *yogin*” [...] Even higher than those who have direct knowledge but are not *jīvanmuktas* – because of the absence of *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya* – is the *yogin* who is a *jīvanmukta* and engages in *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya*. This is my thought. Because of this, “therefore” you who are a *yoga-bhraṣṭa* now (*idānīm*) by *tattvajñāna*, *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya*, practised at the same time with higher and higher effort “be”, “a *yogin*”, of the kind spoken of previously: a *jīvanmukta* who is considered the highest *yogin*, by the ripening of means.⁵²

Here, Arjuna (referred to as ‘you’ (*tvam*)) is addressed directly as both a *yoga-bhraṣṭa* **and** as potentially a *yogin* of the highest kind. Not only is Arjuna eligible to receive Kṛṣṇa’s teaching, but he is eligible to becoming the highest *yogin*: a *jīvanmukta* who practises *tattvajñāna*, *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya* together.⁵³

It is by referring to Arjuna directly as a *yoga-bhraṣṭa* that Madhusūdana establishes his eligibility for receiving Kṛṣṇa’s teaching. Madhusūdana’s gloss of the *Gītā*’s vocative in 6.46 – “O Arjuna” means “O pure one”⁵⁴ – helps to build a picture of who Arjuna is, this gloss occurring at exactly the point in his commentary where he shows that Arjuna is pure of rituals and should learn to become a *jīvanmukta*. The fact that Arjuna is ‘pure’ reflects

⁵² *idānīm yogī stūyate ’rjunam prati śraddhātīśayotpādanapūrvakaṃ yogaṃ vidhātum tapasvibhya iti | tapasvibhyo ’dhiko yogī jñānibhyo ’pi mato ’dhikah | karmibhyaś cādiko yogī tasmād yogī bhavārjuna [...] evam aparokṣajñānavadbhyo ’pi manonāśa-vāsanākṣayābhāvād ajīvanmuktebhyo manonāśa-vāsanākṣayavattvena jīvanmukto yogy adhiko mato mama saṃyataḥ | yasmād evaṃ “tasmād” adhikādhika-prayatnabalāt tvam yoga-bhraṣṭa idānīm tattvajñāna-manonāśa-vāsanākṣayair yugapat-sampāditair “yogī” jīvanmukto yaḥ sa yogī paramo mata iti prāg-uktaḥ sa tādṛśo “bhava” sādhana-paripākāt | My emphases.*

⁵³ Note Madhusūdana’s nicely ambiguous placing of the word ‘*idānīm*’: Arjuna is **now** a *yoga-bhraṣṭa* who can become a *jīvanmukta* in (a) future (life); or Arjuna, having been a *yoga-bhraṣṭa* in a past life and currently being born in a lineage of great kings can **now** practise the three disciplines: *tattvajñāna*, *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣaya* to be a *jīvanmukta*, a *yogin* of the highest kind.

⁵⁴ *he ’rjuneti śuddheti sabodhanārthaḥ*

the fact that he is eligible to receive Kṛṣṇa’s teaching in his current life, even if he cannot yet become the highest *yogin*.

In the very next verse, 6.47, concluding chapters 1-6, Madhusūdana shifts the focus towards *bhakti*:

Although the difficulty of the practice of *yoga* and the effort in devotion are the same, he alone who is my devotee is higher than those devoid of devotion to me. The meaning is that you who are my highest devotee will easily be able to become the highest of those whose minds are controlled.⁵⁵ Therefore, in this chapter, the parameters of *karma-yoga*’s causes of mental purification have been shown and then *yoga* and its components for the renunciation of all actions done have been described and the means for the overcoming of the mind preceded by the rejection of objections have been taught, and the section on action, describing the meaning of the word ‘you’, has been completed. Following this, *bhakti-yoga* is summarised in “the one with faith who worships me...” (6.47) and the next group of six chapters is begun for ascertaining the meaning of the word “that”: the Lord Vāsudeva, who is to be worshipped.⁵⁶

There are several points 6.47 illuminates. First, 6.47 is directly addressed to Arjuna, as indicated by ‘you will be able to become’ (*bhavitum śakṣyasi*). Second, it is Arjuna as the *yoga-bhraṣṭa* (6.46) who is addressed here as being Kṛṣṇa’s ‘highest devotee’. As I shall argue below, Kṛṣṇa as the subject of *bhakti* is fundamental to Madhusūdana’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy in terms of the possibility of Arjuna attaining liberation in his current life. Third, Madhusūdana reiterates here that the first six chapters establish the meaning of *tvam*, and ties this directly to Arjuna being addressed and his progression via *yoga* being

⁵⁵ Madhusūdana’s explanation of *yuktatamaḥ* (*sarvebhyaḥ samāhitacintebhyo yuktebhyañ śreṣṭhaḥ*) in the previous sentence.

⁵⁶ *samāne ’pi yogābhyāsa-kleṣe samāne ’pi bhajanāyāse mad-bhakti-śūnyebhyo mad-bhaktasyaiva śreṣṭhatvāt tvam mad-bhaktāḥ paramo yuktatamo ’nāyāsena bhavitum śakṣyasīti bhāvaḥ | tad anenādhyāyena karma-yogasya buddhi-śuddhi-hetor mārṇyādāṃ darśayatā tataś ca kṛta-sarva-karma-samnyāsasya sāṅgam yogam vivṛṇvatā mano-nigrahopāyam cākṣepa-nirāsa-pūrvakam upadiśatā yoga-bhraṣṭasya puruṣārtha-śūnyatāśānkām ca śītilatayā/vatā karma-kāṇḍam tvampadārthanirūpaṇam ca samāpitam | atahparam śraddhāvān bhajate yo māmiti sūtritam bhaktiyogaṃ bhajanīyaṃ ca bhagavantam vāsudevam tat-padārtham nirūpayitum agrima-madhyāya-ṣaṭkam ārabhyata iti śivam ||*

summarised. This further supports my contention that for Madhusūdana it is Arjuna, rather than the Advaitin renouncer, who is the primary subject of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy.

5.2.8 – Person as witness

In 6.36, Madhusūdana directly refers the reader to Vidyāraṇya’s *Jīvanmuktiviveka* when mentioning the *sākṣin*:

So when *saṃsāra*, connected to the witness because of non-discrimination, gets removed through direct realisation of discrimination, one becomes the highest *yogin*, a *jīvanmukta*, when even the innate modifications of the mind, sustained by *prārabdha-karma*, are removed through persistence in practising *yoga* [...] The remaining details are to be scrutinised in the *Jīvanmuktiviveka*.⁵⁷

Madhusūdana, directing the reader to the *Jīvanmuktiviveka* for a full explanation of his own position,⁵⁸ suggests he is familiar with this text, where Vidyāraṇya stresses that the self is a witness, and not a *dharmic* agent. In 1.10.4, for instance, Vidyāraṇya writes, ‘He who understands the highest state as the witness of all, distinct from the body and senses, the absolute consciousness, self as bliss, self-luminous – he is one beyond *varṇāśrama*’.⁵⁹ Madhusūdana adopts a similar position on the witness, when he indicates that 6.29 reveals the true meaning of ‘you’: ‘In this way, he [Kṛṣṇa] first speaks of the existence of what is implied by the word “you” (*tvam*)’.⁶⁰

“He sees”, makes immediate, the self – one, all-pervading, innermost consciousness, the witness, the highest reality, a mass of bliss, “existing in all beings”, in all bodies moving and not moving as the enjoyer – discriminated from things witnessed, whose forms are unreal, insentient,

⁵⁷ *tasmāt sākṣi-gatasya saṃsārasyāviveka-nibandhanasya viveka-sākṣātkārād apanaye 'pi prārabdha-karma-paryavasthāpitasya cittasya svābhāvikīnām api vṛttīnām yogābhyāsa-prayatnenāpanaye sati jīvanmuktaḥ paramo yogī [...] avaśiṣṭaṃ jīvanmukti-viveke savistaram anusandheyam ||*

⁵⁸ And his frequent use of Vidyāraṇya’s ideas and wording.

⁵⁹ *yaḥ śarīrendriyādibhyo vibhinnaṃ sarvasākṣiṇam | pāramārthikavijñānaṃ sukhātmānaṃ svayaṃ prabhum paraṃ tattvaṃ vijānāti so 'tivarṇāśramī bhavet |* Translation in: Robert A. Goodding. *The Treatise on Liberation-in-Life: Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Jīvanmuktiviveka of Vidyāraṇya* (Austin: University of Texas, 2002), p.110.

⁶⁰ *tatra prathamam tva-pada-lakṣyopasthitim āha sarveti*

limited, suffering. “And in” that “self”, the witness, he sees “all beings”, the objects witnessed, imagined to be objects of enjoyment through a superimposed relationship – for it is impossible for there to be any other relationship between the witness and the witnessed – which are unreal, limited, insentient, suffering, as discriminated from the witness.⁶¹

Here, Madhusūdana makes it clear that the self is not an agent, precisely because the self is, in reality, none other than the witness. It is due to misconception, and the resulting misidentification of the self with the body and the external world, that the quality of being a ‘doer’ or an agent gets superimposed onto the self. Indeed, as he shows in 7.14 (see below), even the very notion of the *jīva* (and the Lord) as witness is superimposed. As he establishes that Arjuna is told to become the highest *yogin*, Madhusūdana signals how Arjuna is able to reach this point, with Kṛṣṇa’s help, where all superimposition is realised for what it is – including even, eventually, the notion of the witness itself.

There is, then, a fundamental difference between ‘you’ as witness and the previous conditioned understandings of ‘you’ we have seen in *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 1-6. It is the conditioned ‘you’, the *ahaṃkāra* (ego, ‘I’-sense), that experiences ordinary mental states, which makes ‘you’ an agent, the *vāsanās* (latent tendencies) impelling a person to action which must be eliminated before direct realisation can be achieved.⁶² We saw earlier that the stage 7 *jīvanmukta* is the highest *yogin* and exemplar of minimal selfhood. In 6.36 above, Madhusūdana equates the highest *yogin* with the witness. In 6.29, Madhusūdana states that ‘you’ (*tvam*) fundamentally represents the self as none other than the witness. It is only this ‘you’ as witness that satisfies Ram-Prasad’s model of selfhood as minimal condition.

5.2.9 – *Who is tvam?*

I argue, then, that Madhusūdana’s understanding of ‘you’ is clearly progressive, as mapped out in chapters 1-6 of his *Gītā* commentary. From the drowning passage in 2.10, Arjuna is

⁶¹ “sarveṣu bhūteṣu sthāvara”-jaṅgameṣu śarīreṣu bhokṛtṛayā sthitam ekam eva vibhum ātmānaṃ pratyak-cetanaṃ sākṣiṇaṃ paramārtha-satyam ānanda-ghanaṃ sākṣyebhyo ’nṛta-jaḍa-paricchinna-duḥkharūpebhyo vivekena “īkṣate” sākṣātkaroti | tasmimś “cātmani” sākṣiṇi “sarvāṇi bhūtāni” sākṣyāṇy ādhyāsikena sambandhena bhogyatayā kalpitāni sākṣi-sākṣyayoḥ sambandhāntarānupapatter mithyā-bhūtāni paricchināni jaḍāni duḥkhātmakāni sākṣiṇo vivekenekṣate |

⁶² See on the ‘tranquil self’ in 6.25 above.

taken through the various understandings of ‘you’. Once ‘you’ understand yourself as the highest *yogin*, previous understandings of ‘you’ are removed, just as other conditioning factors are removed from the *samsāric* ‘you’. It is then realised that ‘you’, as the highest *yogin*, are in fact none other than the witness, with any sense of ‘I’ removed. So the word *tvam* in the Upaniṣadic sentence is revealed to be not only the *jīva* who is struggling in *samsāra*, but who ‘you’ can *become*, when seen from a conventional point of view where the pedagogy begins. Arjuna is the ‘you’, who is taught how to progressively shape himself towards becoming the ‘you’ he really is, illustrated precisely through Madhusūdana’s interpretation of the *Gītā*’s vocative addresses to Arjuna, both as *kṣatriya* and as *yoga-bhraṣṭa*.

5.3 – *Tat*

Towards the end of the first third of Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, he introduces what ‘that’ (*tat*) refers to in 6.30: ‘Having therefore established the meaning of the word “you” in its purity, he establishes the meaning of the word “that” in its purity’.⁶³ In 6.30, Kṛṣṇa speaks of ‘the one who sees me everywhere’.

Madhusūdana glosses Kṛṣṇa’s ‘me’ with ‘the Lord, the meaning/referent of the word “that”’ (*īśvaram tat-padārtham*) who, as ‘the one in whom the limiting adjunct of *māyā*, the cause of the whole manifestation, subsists, is to be distinguished from limiting adjuncts by the *yogin* who realises him directly through perception born of *yoga*’.⁶⁴ It is as Madhusūdana reveals the referent of ‘you’ that he also begins to reveal the referent of ‘that’: the Lord, Kṛṣṇa – a process that chapters 7-12 continue.⁶⁵

I have shown that, in chapters 1-6, Madhusūdana’s focus is Arjuna, and how he can become liberated without being a renouncer. In chapters 7-12, Madhusūdana moves from holding that Arjuna, as a *yoga-bhraṣṭa*, can become liberated but only in a future life, to demonstrating that, through Kṛṣṇa’s grace, Arjuna can in fact become liberated while still living. The key pedagogical tool for Arjuna’s progression, in Madhusūdana’s interpretation,

⁶³ *evam śuddham tvam-padārtham nirūpya śuddham tat-padārtham nirūpayati yo mām iti*

⁶⁴ “yo” *yogī* “mām” *īśvaram tat-padārtham aśeṣa-prapañca-kāraṇamāyauḥpādhikam upādhi-vivekena* “sarvatra” [...] “paśyati” *yoga-jena pratyakṣeṇāparokṣīkaroti*

⁶⁵ *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 7 introduction, see 5.3.2 below.

is Kṛṣṇa’s personhood, through whose many layers Kṛṣṇa now reveals himself as *tat* and, through this, is able to teach Arjuna (the ‘you’). These chapters reveal an emerging understanding of who ‘that’ is, whereby *bhakti* is revealed as the means that has led ‘you’ to understanding yourself as ‘that’ – the realisation that ‘you’ are none other than the self as witness. Introducing chapter 10, Madhusūdana refers to the focus of chapters 7-9:

Therefore, in the seventh, eighth and ninth chapters, the reality of the Lord meant by the word “that”, both with and without attributes, has been seen.⁶⁶

Importantly, Madhusūdana thus shows in the middle third of his commentary that the Lord – Kṛṣṇa – is both *saguṇa* (with qualities/attributes) and *nirguṇa* (without qualities/attributes). I argue that it is Kṛṣṇa in his human form, as a manifestation of *saguṇa brahman*, who functions as the key pedagogical tool in Madhusūdana’s interpretation of Arjuna’s progression through *bhakti* here.

5.3.1 – Kṛṣṇa’s many layers

Madhusūdana shows how Kṛṣṇa, who is Arjuna’s friend, relative, charioteer and teacher explains that, unlike ordinary human beings who are *bound* by the world of *māyā*/rebirth, Kṛṣṇa *freely* takes a body to restore *dharma* and teach Arjuna, the ‘you’. In 4.6 – also key for Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara – Madhusūdana explains this:

Then how can [Kṛṣṇa] assume a body? [Kṛṣṇa] answers in the second half (of the verse): “Depending upon my *prakṛti*, I come to be”. By ruling over, by bringing under control, through the manifestation of consciousness, *prakṛti*, called *māyā*, which is possessed of various diverse powers, which makes the impossible possible, which is “my own”, an *upādhi* (conditioning factor) of mine, I am born: associated verily with the

⁶⁶ *evaṃ sapta-māṣṭama-navamais tat-padārthasya bhagavatas tattvaṃ sopādhikam nirupādhikam ca darśitam*

different modifications of that [*māyā*], I become possessed of a body and “born”.⁶⁷

Here, Madhusūdana highlights the fact that Kṛṣṇa can freely take on a body, because *māyā*, which has everything else in its power, is under Kṛṣṇa’s control – both in him taking a four-armed human body, but also as Lord of the cosmos, as in 11.32:

“I am Time”, the Supreme Lord, with the limiting adjunct of the power of action, am the destroyer of all, who has now become grown. Hear the reason for which I have become active: “become active”, at this time, “to destroy”, to devour, “people” like Duryodhana.⁶⁸

Kṛṣṇa’s action is described by Madhusūdana here with a past participle (*upāhita*) indicating a ‘limiting/conditioning adjunct’, which is his power (*śakti*). So, we can see that Kṛṣṇa’s acting in the world – both through taking on a body *and* manifesting in his cosmic form – is possible through his *śakti*.

With this parallel, Madhusūdana paints a similar picture to Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara but as with Śrīdhara, Madhusūdana holds a view which becomes important in later Advaita: that *māyā* has powers of both revealing/manifesting the cosmos and concealing/hiding its source, the ‘that’ which is the current topic of investigation, as 7.14 shows:

“Mine”, of the controller of *māyā*, the highest Lord, the cause of the entire universe, all-knowing and all-powerful. Belonging to me, it (*māyā*), dependent on me, accomplishes the world’s creation etc. *Māyā* impedes the appearance of the real, and is the cause of the appearance of the not-real. It has two powers – concealing and revealing. It is misconception, the (root)-nature (*prakṛti*) of the whole manifestation, as *śruti* says: “You

⁶⁷ *katham tarhi deha-grahaṇam ity uttarārdhenāha “prakṛtiṃ svām adhiṣṭhāya sambhavāmi” | prakṛtiṃ māyākhyāṃ vicitrāneka-śaktim aghaṭamāna-ghaṭanāpaṭīyasīm “svām” svopādhi-bhūtām “adhiṣṭhāya” cid-ābhāsenā vaśīkṛtya “sambhavāmi”*

⁶⁸ *“kālaḥ” kriyā-śakty-upahitaḥ sarvasya saṃhartā parameśvaro “asmi” bhavām īdānīm “pravṛddho” vṛddhiṃ gataḥ | yad-arthaṃ pravṛttas tac chṛṇu “lokān” duryodhanādīm” samāhartum” bhakṣayitum “pravṛtto” ’ham ihāsmi kāle*

should know that *prakṛti* is indeed *māyā*, and the Supreme Lord is certainly the ruler of *māyā*” (*Śve. Up.* 4.10).⁶⁹

Here, Madhusūdana introduces the idea of *māyā* as having the power (*śakti*) to both conceal (*āvaraṇa*) and reveal (*vikṣepa*).⁷⁰ This is also the case in 9.8, where Madhusūdana explains how the whole manifestation is subject to the force of the concealing and revealing powers which are the causes of adherence to misconception, egoism, attachment and aversion.⁷¹

5.3.2 – The Personhood of Kṛṣṇa

The main focus of chapters 7-12, according to Madhusūdana, is Kṛṣṇa as the subject of *bhakti*. Structurally, then, *bhakti* is shown to be preparatory to, but necessary for, direct realisation (which is established in chapters 13-18). Here, I argue that it is Kṛṣṇa *as a person* and manifestation of *saguṇa brahman* that is key to Madhusūdana’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy of *tat*.

The initial six chapters of Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* conclude in 6.47 with a shift towards *bhakti*, which is reiterated in the initial praise verse in chapter 7:

I bow to the blessed son of Nanda who is absolute supreme bliss, without devotion to whom there is no liberation, and who is the one to be served by all the *yogins*.⁷²

Here, Kṛṣṇa is referred to as ‘son of Nanda’, an explicit reference to his descent form. Directly following this, Madhusūdana outlines that chapters 7-12 are focused on explaining *tat*:

⁶⁹ “*mama*” *māyāvinaḥ parameśvarasya sarva-jagat-kāraṇasya sarvajñasya sarva-śakteḥ sva-bhūtā svādhīnatvena jagat-sṛṣṭy-ādi-nirvāhikā | māyā tattva-pratibhāsi-pratibandhenātattva-pratibhāsa-hetur āvaraṇa-vikṣepa-śakti-dvayavaty avidyā sarva-prapañca-prakṛtiḥ “māyām tu prakṛtiṃ vidyān māyinaṃ tu mahēśvaram” (Śve. Up. 4.10) iti śruteḥ*

⁷⁰ See also *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 4.5, 4.6, 5.15-6 and 14.8.

⁷¹ *tasyāḥ “prakṛter” māyāyā “vaśād” avidyāsmitā-rāga-dveṣābhiniveśa-kāraṇāvaraṇa-vikṣepātmaka-śakti-prabhāvāt*

⁷² *yad-bhaktiṃ na vinā muktir yaḥ sevyāḥ sarva-yoginām | taṃ vande paramānanda-ghanaṃ śrī-nanda-nandanam ||*

...Now in the middle six (chapters) whose core is teaching the *brahman* to be meditated on, the referent of the word ‘that’ has to be explained. So the seventh chapter is commenced for explaining the worship of the Lord stated previously (in 6.47): “Among all the *yogins*, the one with faith who worships me with his mind fixed on me, is in my view the best of the *yogins*”.⁷³

Right from the start of chapter 7, then, we can see how Kṛṣṇa (the Lord) as the focus of *bhakti* is fundamentally tied to Madhusūdana’s interpretation of the pedagogy of *tat*. Madhusūdana goes on to say, in his gloss of 7.1, that Arjuna as the seeker of liberation ‘takes refuge in me (Kṛṣṇa) alone’ (*mad-āśrayaḥ*), by practising *yoga*/concentration of the mind outlined in chapter 6. It is the *yogin* from chapter 6, now to be understood as the *bhakta*, who makes Kṛṣṇa the subject of their devotion. Moreover, the fact that Madhusūdana introduces Kṛṣṇa’s comment here by explaining that it is ‘out of his supreme compassion’ (*parama-kāruṇikatayā*) that Kṛṣṇa offers Arjuna these answers, indicates the importance of Kṛṣṇa’s grace.

In his extended comment on 7.14, Madhusūdana elaborates on his interpretation of ‘taking refuge’ in Kṛṣṇa:

Even though (the *Gītā*) should have said: “They see (me)” (*prapaśyanti*), “They take refuge (in me)” (*prapadyante*)⁷⁴ suggests: Those who, taking sole refuge in me, pass their days thinking constantly of me alone, the Lord Vāsudeva, endowed with such qualities as being the essence of infinite beauty in its totality, the dwelling-place uniting all the divisions of time, the splendour of whose two lotus-like feet surpasses the beauty of a new lotus, the cowherd who bore up the mountain called Govardhana in sport, whose mind is absorbed in the play at Vṛndāvan, delighting in constantly playing the flute, the slayer of groups of wicked ones like Śiśupāla and Kaṁsa, whose feet rob all the beauty possessed by new rainclouds, whose

⁷³ ...*adhunā dhyeya-brahma-pratipādana-pradhānena madhyamena śaṭkena tat-padārtho vyākhyātavyaḥ | tatrāpi – “yoginām api sarveṣāṁ madgatenāntarātmanā | śraddhāvān bhajate yo mām sa me yuktatamo mataḥ” (Gītā 6.47) iti prāg-uktasya bhagavad-bhajanasya vyākhyānāya saptamo ’dhyāya ārabhyate |*

⁷⁴ The *Gītā*’s actual verb.

form totally comprises supreme bliss, transcending the material world of Brahmā – they, with minds drowned in the ocean of great bliss which is love for me, are thus not overcome by any of the modifications of the *guṇas* of *māyā*.⁷⁵

Here, Madhusūdana refers explicitly to Kṛṣṇa in his manifest form as person in the world. This is directly in line with the descriptions of Kṛṣṇa as the cowherd in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Significantly, Madhusūdana states that the verb used by the *Gītā* here, *prapadyante*, ‘take refuge (in me)’, should be read as *prapaśyanti*, ‘see (me)’ – as *yogin* visualisation, but also maybe alluding to Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practice where devotees visualise Kṛṣṇa’s play imagining themselves to be present.⁷⁶ As we saw in Chapter 2 (section 2.4.2.3), one of the specific types of devotionism prevalent in sixteenth century Benares was Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* including the ecstatic *bhakti* of the Gosvāmīs.⁷⁷ The Gosvāmīs maintained an intense hostility towards Advaita Vedānta, as they were trained in traditional Vaiṣṇava theology, which was committed to the refutation of non-dualistic thought.⁷⁸ In particular, the Gosvāmīs refuted Advaita Vedāntin interpretations of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, despite building on Citsukha’s Advaitin commentary (see Chapter 4). The tension between *bhakti* and Advaita Vedānta in Madhusūdana’s Benares would have been palpable, suggesting Madhusūdana’s potential agenda for incorporating this type of *bhakti* into his work.

Similar language – referring directly to Kṛṣṇa as a person – is used elsewhere in chapters 7-12. In 8.22, Madhusūdana states that ‘one-pointed devotion’ (*ananya bhakti*) to the ‘Supreme Person’ (*paraḥ puruṣaḥ*) is ‘characterised by pure love’ (*prema-lakṣaṇa*). Here, Madhusūdana possibly co-opts ‘*preman*’, a term which, as love of the divine, is strongly

⁷⁵ *prapaśyanīti vaktavye prapadyanta ity ukte 'rthe mad-eka-śaraṇāḥ santo mām eva bhagavantaṃ vāsudevaṃ idṛśam ananta-saundarya-sāra-sarvasvam akhila-kalā-kalāpa-nilayam abhinava-pankaja-śobhādhika-caraṇa-kamala-yugala-prabham anavarata-veṇu-vādāna-nirata-vṛndāvana-kṛīḍāsakta-mānasa-heloddhṛta-govardhanākhyā-mahīdharaṃ gopālaṃ niśūḍita-śiśupāla-kaṃsādi-duṣṭa-saṅgham abhinava-jalada-śobhā-sarvasva-haraṇa-caraṇaṃ paramānanda-ghana-maya-mūrtim ativairiṅca-prapañcam anavaratam anucintayanto divasān ativāhayanti te mat-prema-mahānanda-samudra-magna-manasas tathā samasta-māyā-guṇa-vikārair nābhībhūyante |*

⁷⁶ See David Haberman, *A Study of Rāganuga Bhakti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷⁷ S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers Ltd, 1942), p.121.

⁷⁸ Caitanya perhaps had some sympathy for Advaita Vedānta not shared by his followers. See Stuart Elkman, *Jīva Gosvāmī's Tattvasandharbha: A Study on the Philosophical and Sectarian Development of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Movement* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986).

linked with the ecstatic Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* of Caitanya and the Gosvāmīs.⁷⁹ Indeed, commenting on *Gītā* 11.2 where Arjuna addresses Kṛṣṇa as ‘lotus-petalled eyed’, Madhusūdana elaborates lyrically, then says (Arjuna’s) fulsome description (*atīsayollekha*) of Kṛṣṇa’s immense beauty (*atīsaundarya*) is out of exceedingly great pure love (*premātīsayāt*).

Yet as 7.14 implied, this personal Kṛṣṇa is supreme bliss, beyond the phenomenal world, the personal God ‘with attributes’ (*saguṇa*) of whom Madhusūdana says in 7.29:

“Resorting to me”, taking refuge in me – who am the sole means to that (putting an end to sorrows), and who am the Lord with attributes (*saguṇa*) – after turning away from all others, “they”, becoming pure in mind in stages, “know” me, the supreme “*brahman*”, the source of the universe, the substratum of *māyā*, pure, without attributes (*nirguṇa*), indicated by the word “that”.⁸⁰

Kṛṣṇa’s personhood is thus central to Madhusūdana’s interpretation of the pedagogy of *tat*. It is *through* devotion, taking refuge in, or ‘seeing’ *saguṇa brahman* that ‘you’ can progress, through *bhakti*, to the end of *nirguṇa brahman*. It is Kṛṣṇa’s descent form/*avatāra* as a manifestation of *saguṇa brahman* that enables the devotee to focus on who Kṛṣṇa really is.

5.3.3 – Kṛṣṇa as the subject of *bhakti*

In chapter 9, Madhusūdana elaborates on the identification made throughout the *Gītā* itself – that Kṛṣṇa is the subject of *bhakti*. In *Gītā* 9.13-14, different types of people are described. According to Madhusūdana, 9.14 is addressed to those who go to an *Upanisadic* teacher and keep Kṛṣṇa in mind constantly when studying the Upanisadic sentences. Although we know that Kṛṣṇa is the subject of devotion in the *Gītā*, Madhusūdana’s comment on this verse makes it clear that Kṛṣṇa is also the subject of the Upaniṣads for those able to follow the standard Advaitin study route:

⁷⁹ Tamil Krishna Goswami, *A Living Theology of Kṛṣṇa Bhakti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.202. Śrīdhara never uses this term in his *Subodhinī*.

⁸⁰ [...] *tad-eka-hetuṃ māṃ saguṇaṃ bhagavantam “āsṛitya”-itara-sarva-vaimukhyena śaraṇaṃ gatvā ... “te” krameṇa śuddhāntahkaraṇāḥ santas taj-jagat-kāraṇaṃ māyādhiṣṭhānaṃ śuddhaṃ paraṃ “brahma” nirguṇaṃ tat-pada-lakṣyaṃ māṃ “viduḥ”* |

“Constantly” always “praising me”, who in my own form am *brahman* presented by all the Upaniṣads – by determining the sense of the Vedānta sentences, having approached a teacher who is intent on *brahman*, and through repetition of *Om* and recitation of the Upaniṣads at times other than when approaching a teacher – making me the subject of the action of *śravaṇa* in the form of study of the Vedāntic *śāstras*, as it were.⁸¹

Kṛṣṇa, then, is what is taught in all the Upaniṣads, none other, as 9.14 says later, than ‘the knowledge, “I am *brahman*”, direct realisation generated by the Vedānta sentences which bears on the undivided [i.e. *nirguṇa brahman*], the direct cause of liberation’.⁸² This is a strongly Advaita Vedāntin reading of the verse. I contend, however, that within such a framework, Madhusūdana aims to show how *bhaktas* (rather than only Advaitin renunciates) can attain liberation and that Kṛṣṇa’s teaching of Arjuna is central to this goal.

Once Madhusūdana has explained, in 9.14, that Kṛṣṇa is none other than the subject of *bhakti* – and of the Upaniṣads – he introduces other texts to support his explanation, including the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Patañjali’s *Yoga-sūtras*, and the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*. Quoting the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* directly, Madhusūdana begins to outline what he understands by devotion, quoting the classic nine forms of devotion observed in Kṛṣṇa traditions:

Hearing about, chanting his name, and remembering Viṣṇu, serving respect (at his) feet, worshipping, saluting, serving, considering a friend, and offering self-dedication (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.5.23).⁸³

Madhusūdana brings in this specific passage, along with *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.23 on the ‘highest devotion to God’ (*deve parā bhaktiḥ*) to reveal his interpretation of *īśvara-*

⁸¹ “*satataṃ*” *sarvadā brahma-niṣṭhaṃ gurum upasṛtya vedānta-vākya-vicāreṇa gurūpasadanetara-kāle ca praṇava-japopaniṣad-āvartanādibhir “mām” sarvopaniṣat-pratipādyam brahma-svarūpaṃ “kīrtayanto” vedānta-śāstrādhyayana-rūpa-śravaṇa-vyāpāra-viṣayīkurvanta iti yāvat*

⁸² ...*yadvedāntavākyaṃ akhaṇḍagocaraṃ sākṣātkārarūpaṃ ahaṃ brahmāsmīti jñānam...sākṣān mokṣahetuḥ...*

⁸³ *śravaṇaṃ kīrtanaṃ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇaṃ pāda-sevanam | arcaṇaṃ vandanaṃ dāsyam sakhyam ātma-nivedanam* || A classic verse in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* where the nine forms of devotion observed in Kṛṣṇa traditions are outlined.

praṇidhāna, a term found in *Yoga-sūtra* 1.23. Thus initially Madhusūdana links *Yoga-sūtra* 1.23 with his own focus on *tvam*:

And as Patañjali has said, “From that arises direct realisation of the internal consciousness, and even the destruction of obstacles” (*Yoga-sūtra* 1.29). “From that”, i.e. from *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, arises the direct realisation of the internal consciousness implied by the word “you” (in “you are that”), and the destruction of obstacles and hindrances. This is the meaning of the aphorism.⁸⁴

‘From that’ (*tataḥ*) (*Yoga-sūtra* 1.29) refers to the previous verse, *Yoga-sūtra* 1.28, ‘Through repetition of that, its meaning is manifested’.⁸⁵ *Japaḥ* is recitation done under a person’s breath, here repetition of the syllable *Om*. It is Madhusūdana who equates ‘*tataḥ*’ with *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, understood from his *Śvetāśvatara* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* quotations as deep Kṛṣṇa-inflected *bhakti*, thus justifying its translation in this context as ‘profound devotion to the Lord’. Madhusūdana’s quoting of *Yoga-sūtra* 1.29 within 9.14 shows him building a systematic commentary.⁸⁶ Elsewhere in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, Madhusūdana also quotes passages from the *Yoga-sūtra* to build up his *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*-influenced interpretation of ‘profound devotion to the Lord’.⁸⁷ Crucially, in most interpretations of the *Yoga-sūtra*, *īśvara-praṇidhāna* could not be translated as ‘profound devotion to the Lord’.⁸⁸ For Patañjali, in a *Yoga* context *īśvara* is a *puruṣa* of a special kind, and *īśvara-praṇidhāna* bears no resemblance to loving devotion. *Praṇidhāna* can just mean ‘mental focus on’, *īśvara-praṇidhāna* meaning ‘focus on pure awareness’, with repetition of *Om* a meditative technique for this. For Madhusūdana, however, *īśvara* is clearly Kṛṣṇa, the subject of *bhakti* and of adorations from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (remembering him,

⁸⁴ *patañjalīnā coktam tataḥ pratyak-cetanādhigamo 'py antarāyābhāvaś ca (Yoga-sūtra 1.29) iti | "tata" īśvara-praṇidhānāt pratyak-cetanasya tvam-pada-lakṣyasyādhigamaḥ sāksātkāro bhavati | antarāyānām vighnānām cābhāvo bhavatīti sūtrasyārthaḥ |*

⁸⁵ *taj-japaḥ tad-artha-bhāvanam |*

⁸⁶ In 6.28, he also quotes *Yoga-sūtra* 1.23: *īśvara-praṇidhāna vā*, here in a more obviously Yogic context linked with the repetition of *Om*, a preparatory separation of inner consciousness (Madhusūdana’s ‘you’) from *prakṛti*.

⁸⁷ In 8.12-14, Madhusūdana quotes several *Yoga-sūtra* verses, including 1.23, to support the need to focus on Kṛṣṇa constantly, to remember him in life and in dying. While the verb *smarati* occurs in *Gītā* 8.14, Madhusūdana’s use of *smaraṇa* (remembering) recalls *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.5.23 as above. In 12.13-14, Madhusūdana links *Yoga-sūtra* 2.45 ‘success in *samādhi* (comes from *īśvara-praṇidhāna*)’ to Kṛṣṇa’s kindness (*sukara*) in speaking of *saguna* meditation.

⁸⁸ Hartranft, for example, translates it as ‘orient[-ation] (*praṇidhāna*) toward the ideal of pure awareness (*īśvara*)’. Chip Hartranft, *The Yoga-Sūtra of Patañjali* (London: Shambala, 2003).

singing his name and so on). *Om* is *brahman*, who is Kṛṣṇa. As I shall show shortly, focusing on *Om* at the end of your life takes you to the world of Kṛṣṇa, one of the ways in which a person can become liberated.

We have seen how Madhusūdana reinterprets *īśvara-praṇidhāna* as Kṛṣṇa-inflected *bhakti*, which allows the *bhakta* to focus on ‘you’. I argue that this type of *bhakti* prepares the devotee to understand the sentence *tat tvam asi* – with the help of Kṛṣṇa’s grace. At the end of chapter 12, itself focused on *bhakti-yoga*, Madhusūdana describes the type of *madbhaktaḥ* – ‘devotee of mine’ – who is *priyaḥ me*, ‘dear to me’. This is set out in 12.13-19, and summarised in 12.20:

Although it (this immortal *dharma*) is a characteristic of the knower insofar as it is the fulfilment of his own nature – since the one who follows this immortal *dharma* with faith is very dear to Lord Viṣṇu, the highest Lord – it (the immortal *dharma*) should be followed with effort by the one who wants to go to the supreme state of Viṣṇu, insofar as it is a means to knowledge of the self for the one seeking liberation who wants to know the reality of the self.⁸⁹

Here, Madhusūdana is contrasting ‘the knower’ (*jñānavat*, the one who already knows, the meditator on the imperishable/*nirguṇa brahman*) with ‘the one who seeks liberation’ (*jijñāsu*, implicitly the meditator on the ‘conditioned’ *brahman*, often the one devoted to Kṛṣṇa).⁹⁰ Madhusūdana is explaining why the virtues outlined in *Gītā* 12.13-19 are both innate to the knower and are to be cultivated by the one who wants to know (the devotee of Viṣṇu). The immortal *dharma* discussed in 12.20 is specifically described as a characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) of the knower, but is also recapitulated as applying to the one who *seeks/wants* liberation. This verse is key for two reasons. First, as we saw in 2.10, Arjuna is the one who is drowning due to his *adharmic* behaviour, and therefore seeks liberation. In 12.20, Madhusūdana explains that following the immortal *dharma* with devotion is a *means*

⁸⁹ *yasmād dharmāmṛtam idaṃ śraddhayānutiṣṭhan bhagavato viṣṇoḥ parameśvarasyātīva priyo bhavati tasmād idaṃ jñānavataḥ svabhāva-siddhatayā lakṣaṇam api mumukṣuṇātma-tattva-jijñāsunātma-jñānopāyatvena yatnād anuṣṭheyaṃ viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padaṃ jigamiṣuṇeti*

⁹⁰ Meditators on the ‘conditioned’ *brahman* are differentiated in various ways in chapter 12.

(*upāya*) to knowledge of the self, implicitly directed to Arjuna, the ‘you’. Second, 12.20 is the last verse of the middle third of Madhusūdana’s commentary:

Therefore the meaning of the word “that” is to be construed as capable of congruence with the meaning of the Vedāntic *mahāvākya* which leads to liberation, because (its) result is liberation.⁹¹

This comment shows us that, if chapters 7-12 are *bhakti*-oriented to Kṛṣṇa (the ‘that’) as Madhusūdana claims they are, then it is clear that *bhakti* prepares ‘you’ – i.e. Arjuna as devotee – for what is to be directly realised through the *mahāvākya*: ‘you are that’ in chapters 13-18. It is thus by focusing on Kṛṣṇa in his form as a manifestation of *saguṇa brahman* that Arjuna can prepare himself for hearing the Upaniṣadic sentence.

At the end of *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 9, as elsewhere in Madhusūdana’s commentary, it is stated that it is ‘through the Upaniṣads’ that liberation is attained. Verses 9.30-34 are centered on *bhakti*, with 9.34 reading, “Have your mind fixed on me as my devotee”. Straight after his commentary on 9.34 ends, Madhusūdana’s concluding verse-affirmation reads, ‘Those whose minds have become purified by tasting the nectar of the lotus-feet of Govinda immediately cross over the ocean of *saṃsāra* and see the great light; they understand the highest goal by means of the Upaniṣads, cast off delusion, know that duality is like a dream, and reach untainted bliss’.⁹² Madhusūdana could not be more explicit that those Kṛṣṇa-*bhaktas* who see the highest goal do so *by means* of the Upaniṣads. Crucially, however, Madhusūdana is clear that this does not necessarily need to be via the standard Advaitin path of *nirguṇa brahman*. Commenting on 12.6-7, Madhusūdana makes the one who seeks liberation the focus:

For those, all of whose obstacles have been removed by meditation on the one with qualities (*saguṇa brahman*) – without the instruction of a teacher and without the trouble of the repetition of hearing, reflection, meditation and so on – through the self-manifesting Upaniṣadic sentence with the help

⁹¹ *tato mukty-upapatter mukti-hetu-vedānta-mahāvākya-rthānvaya-yogyas tat-padārtho ’nusandheya iti |*

⁹² *śrī-govinda-padāravinda-makarandāsvāda-śuddhāśayāḥ |
saṃsārāmbudhim uttaranti sahasā paśyanti pūrṇaṃ mahāḥ |
vedāntair avadhārayanti paramaṃ śreyas tyajanti bhramam
dvaitam svapna-samaṃ vidanti vimalāṃ vindanti cānandatām ||*

of the Lord’s grace, due to the removal of ignorance and its effects through the arising of the knowledge of reality, at the end of their enjoyment/experience of power (*aiśvarya*) in the world of Brahmā, through the arising of the supreme liberation, attain the fruit of the knowledge of *brahman* without qualities.⁹³

Here, Madhusūdana’s focus on *saguṇa brahman* is key to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy – specifically Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy of *tat*. In his explanation of 12.6-7, Madhusūdana clearly pinpoints as possible objects of meditation manifestations of *saguṇa brahman* – Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu or in his descent forms. He describes Kṛṣṇa as ‘having two or four arms’ (*dvibhujam caturbhujam vā*); as being ‘in the form of a Man-Lion, or of Rāghava (Rāma)’ (*narasiṃha-rāghavādi-rūpaṃ vā*); and as ‘one whose lotus-like hands are decorated with a conch, a lotus, a club, and a discus’ (*dara-kamala-kaumodakī-rathāṅga-saṅgi-pāṇi-pallavaṃ*). As with the Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, here it is Kṛṣṇa’s personhood, i.e. his descent form as a person, that is the key tool which leads the devotee of *saguṇa brahman* to the same result as the follower of the path of *nirguṇa brahman*. Madhusūdana clearly indicates that devotees who have received Kṛṣṇa’s grace are able to attain liberation through the Upaniṣadic sentence, as the sentence is self-manifesting and helped by Kṛṣṇa’s grace. 12.6-7 makes clear that the *bhakta* is not, ultimately, inferior to the Advaitin renunciate.

Such liberation, however, comes after the ‘world of Brahmā’ (*brahma-loka*), according to 12.6-7. Madhusūdana also refers to the world of Brahmā in *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 8.16, citing *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.15.1, ‘He reaches the world of Brahmā. He does not return’. Earlier, he glossed 8.15:

The meaning is they do not come back again because they are “great selves”, whose minds are without the impurity of *rajas* and *tamas*, being of pure *sattva*, in whom has arisen true realisation, who “have attained”

⁹³ *saguṇopāsanayā nirasta-sarva-pratibandhānām vinā gurūpadeśam vinā ca śravaṇa-manana-nididhyāsanādy-āvṛtti-kleśam svayam āvirbhūtena vedānta-vākyeśvara-prasāda-sahakṛtena tattvajñānodayād avidyā-tat-kārya-nivṛttyā brahma-loka evaiśvarya-bhogānte nirguṇa-brahma-vidyā-phala-parama-kaivalyopapatteḥ |*

the supreme, “the highest perfection”: liberation at the end of experience
*in my world (mal-loka-bhogānte).*⁹⁴

Madhusūdana’s parallel could imply that the world of Brahmā is the world of Kṛṣṇa.⁹⁵ If so, Madhusūdana recasts the general *Purāṇic* cosmology of the world of Brahmā in terms of how he interprets devotion to Kṛṣṇa. In other words, Madhusūdana holds that, if devotees undertake devotional practices (including repetition of *Om*), this will give them birth into the world of Brahmā – now seen as the world of Kṛṣṇa – and from that world they will not be reborn again. This is how Madhusūdana understands liberation in stages (*kramamukti*) in the technical sense.

Importantly, Arjuna is addressed directly here. Madhusūdana comments:

Through the two words of address – “Arjuna” and “Kaunteya” – it is revealed that, due to his own nature and doing, he (Arjuna) is pure so can attain knowledge. This is the rule: Those who attain the world of Brahmā through devotional practices resulting in liberation in stages, for those alone there arises liberation with Brahmā after the attainment of true realisation in that world.⁹⁶

At this point, in Madhusūdana’s view, the text holds that Arjuna, who is not yet a *jīvanmukta*, can pass into the world of Kṛṣṇa/Brahmā at death and never be reborn due to his previous practices. Madhusūdana’s focus here is on who Arjuna *can become*, in this world of Kṛṣṇa, i.e. liberated through *bhakti* and Kṛṣṇa’s grace. Devotees get perfect knowledge in the world of Brahmā, now seen as Kṛṣṇa’s, having been devoted to Kṛṣṇa. By giving standard *śruti* passages (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.15; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.15.1; *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* 4.4.22) to support his view, Madhusūdana grounds his understanding of *kramamukti* in standard Advaita Vedānta. *Bhakti* here is preparatory, but is also the final ‘gift’ (the Lord’s help) for Madhusūdana. By explicitly stating in 12.6-7 that

⁹⁴ *punar nāvartanta ity arthaḥ | yato “mahātmāno” rajas-tamo-mala-rahitāntaḥkaraṇā śuddha-sattvāḥ samutpanna-samyag-darśanā mal-loka-bhogānte “paramāṃ” sarvotkṛṣṭāṃ “samsiddhiṃ” muktiṃ “gatās” te*

⁹⁵ Cf *hiranya-garbha-loka-bhogānte* in 8.5.

⁹⁶ *atrārjuna kaunteyeti sambodhana-dvayena svarūpataḥ kāraṇataś ca śuddhir jñāna-sampattaye sūcitā | atreyam vyavasthā | ye kramamukti-phalābhirupāsānābhir brahma-lokaṃ prāptās teṣāṃ eva tatrotpanna-samyag-darśanānāṃ brahmaṇā saha mokṣaḥ |*

the Vedāntic sentence (*tat tvam asi*) manifests by the Lord's grace, Madhusūdāna is also claiming that *bhakti* is in line with the wider context of the Upaniṣads.

Although, in 8.15, Arjuna is addressed as eligible for *kramamukti*, I argue that Madhusūdāna's interpretation of the *Gītā*'s vocative addresses to Arjuna in chapters 7-12 (and 13-18) *also* aligns Arjuna with the *bhakta* to suggest that he can even become liberated in his current life, through Kṛṣṇa's grace. As Hirst and I have argued elsewhere, Arjuna's devotion to Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* is characterised by Madhusūdāna in terms of *preman* (pure love), both that of a *niṣkāmbhakta* (desireless devotee) and of a *niṣkāmaśuddhapremabhakta* (desireless devotee with pure love, like the *gopīs*) (7.16).⁹⁷ In 9.28, Madhusūdāna follows the *Gītā*'s vocative 'O Arjuna' (9.27) with the comment that Arjuna will 'become free even while living' (*jīvaṇṇ eva vimuktaḥ*), providing he dedicates all actions to Kṛṣṇa, i.e. is without desires of his own. This suggests that Arjuna, who was previously adjured to become a *yogin* of the highest kind (6.47) – that *yogin* being a *jīvanmukta* (6.43) – can now attain this as a *niṣkāmbhakta* of pure love, here and now. Moreover, I suggest that, in the metric exhortation to worship Kṛṣṇa which Madhusūdāna inserts in 15.19, directly after his reference to *bhakti* being characterised by *preman*, Arjuna is implicitly included in the second personal plural address addressed to *śuddhapremabhaktas*:

O you who are skilful in good works, constantly worship the one who takes descent-form again and again to destroy the burden on the earth, whose form is consciousness and bliss, the essence of the *śruti*'s words with the splendour of a raincloud, the garland of the women of Vraja [*gopīs*], the other shore of the ocean for those who have become wise.⁹⁸

For Madhusūdāna, showing how Arjuna as a *bhakta* can come to understand *tat*/'that', with Kṛṣṇa's help, is key. This is carried through to chapter 18, where Madhusūdāna refers to

⁹⁷ 'The word "and" has the sense of including the desireless devotee of pure love of whatever kind in "the knower".' (*ca kāro yasya kasyāpi niṣkāmapremabhaktasya jñāniny antarbhāvārthah*) Jacqueline Suthren Hirst and Rosie Edgley, 'Addressing Plurality in Madhusūdāna Sarasvatī's *Gītā* commentary' (forthcoming).

⁹⁸ *cid-ānandākāraṃ jalada-ruci-sāraṃ śruti-girāṃ
vraja-strīṇāṃ hāraṃ bhava-jaladhi-pāraṃ kṛta-dhiyām |
vihantuṃ bhūbhāraṃ vidadhad-avatāraṃ muhur aho
tato vāraṃ vāraṃ bhajata kuśalārambha-kṛtinaḥ ||*

Arjuna specifically as a *bhakta* and non-renouncer (18.66).⁹⁹ In 18.63, the ‘summary’ of the *Gītā* in Madhusūdāna’s view, Arjuna is addressed as a non-renouncer who is eligible to attain *tattvajñāna* (knowledge of reality as ‘you are that’) through Kṛṣṇa’s grace. For Madhusūdāna, Kṛṣṇa taking form as a person, so that the *bhakta* as ‘you’ can understand he is ‘that’ is Kṛṣṇa’s key pedagogical tool for leading Arjuna as a non-renouncer to liberation, whether in his current life or a future life. It is through *bhakti* that Arjuna can work towards realisation and hearing the *mahāvākya* from Kṛṣṇa, and this *here* is Madhusūdāna’s focus – rather than the standard Advaitin study route. Nelson has argued that *bhakti*, although important in Madhusūdāna’s commentary, ‘is ultimately made subordinate to the path of knowledge and, in deference to orthodoxy, forced to accommodate itself to traditional Vedāntic discipline’.¹⁰⁰ I contend that, rather than being subordinate, *bhakti* is preparatory but necessary in leading ‘you’ to understanding who ‘you’ really are. As such, Madhusūdāna’s interpretation of the role of *bhakti* in the *Gītā* is not just in deference to Advaitin orthodoxy but has its own specific pedagogical function.

5.3.4 – Kṛṣṇa as witness

We have already seen, in 6.29 and 6.36, that Madhusūdāna equates the *sākṣin* with both the *jīva* and the Lord. This parallel is key. As Kṛṣṇa is none other than the witness, he can exemplify being the witness to Arjuna, the ‘you’ who seeks liberation and is developing his understanding of his true nature as person – and witness. Glossing Arjuna’s question to Kṛṣṇa in 6.39, Madhusūdāna directly links Kṛṣṇa being the witness with him being the Supreme Teacher (*parama-guru*):

“Other than you”, the omniscient Supreme Lord, the creator of the *śāstras*, the compassionate Supreme Teacher. Since no other sage or god, who is not omniscient because they are not the Lord, can, by giving the appropriate reply, be “the destroyer”, the remover, of “this doubt” relating to attaining the next world by a *yoga-bhraṣṭa*, therefore you alone, the

⁹⁹ *dharmāḥ santu na santu vā kiṃ tair anyasāpekṣair bhagavadanugrahād eva tv anyanirapekṣād ahaṃ kṛtvārthaḥ bhaviṣyāmīti niścayena paramānandaghanamūrtim anantaṃ śrīvāsudevam eva bhagavantam anulakṣaṇaṃ bhāvanayā bhajasva, idam eva paramaṃ tattvaṃ nāto ’dhikam astīti vicārapūrvakeṇa premaprakarṣeṇa sarvānātmacintāśunyayā manovṛtṭyā tailadhāravat avacchinayā satataṃ cintayet ity arthaḥ*

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, ‘Madhusūdāna on the “Hidden Meaning”’, p.81.

direct witness of all and the Supreme Teacher, are able to dispel this doubt of mine.¹⁰¹

Here Madhusūdana refers to Kṛṣṇa, the ‘that’, specifically as the witness and the Supreme Teacher. Everything is an object of perception to Kṛṣṇa, the overseer (*upadraṣṭā*) of the senses and the direct witness (*pratyakṣadarśī*) (9.6). As the witness, Kṛṣṇa is the direct seer (*draṣṭā*) through and of all living beings, and therefore through and of Arjuna. As *parama-guru* Kṛṣṇa can exemplify being the witness, a model of who ‘you’ can shape yourself towards becoming. Madhusūdana’s reference to the *yoga-bhraṣṭa* in 6.39 supports this interpretation since Arjuna – aligned with the *yoga-bhraṣṭa* (as shown above) – is eligible to become the highest *yogin*. Moreover, Kṛṣṇa as witness is talked about in terms of being the seer of all things. As the source of *māyā*, Kṛṣṇa knows its nature as other than the witness. This suggests that the witness-devotee, seeing all things in Kṛṣṇa, comes to understand Kṛṣṇa as the source of all *māyā* and separates the witness from what is seen. For Madhusūdana, it is by ‘visualising/seeing’ Kṛṣṇa as he is through *bhakti*, and focusing entirely on Kṛṣṇa, that Arjuna can understand the sentence *tat tvam asi*, through Kṛṣṇa’s grace. It is thus through focusing on Kṛṣṇa as a person that Arjuna can reach an understanding of himself as ultimately none other than the witness.

Madhusūdana’s extended comment on 7.14 is key to his understanding of Kṛṣṇa as witness. Here, Madhusūdana reveals that consciousness with the limiting adjunct *māyā* (*māyopādhicaitanyam*) is in fact the witness:

Consciousness with the limiting adjunct *māyā* – which applies to both the Lord and the *jīva*, like a face applies to the face reflected and the reflection – is considered to be the witness. By that alone, *māyā* which is superimposed on itself is revealed, and all of its results. So, the word “divine” is used by the Lord meaning ‘witness’, but the word “mine” is used meaning ‘Lord’ as the (face) reflected (*bimba*).¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ “*tvad anyah*” *tvat parameśvarāt sarvajñāc chāstra-kṛtaḥ parama-guroḥ kāruṇikād anyo ’nīśvaratvena asarvajñāḥ kaścīd ṛṣir vā ’devo vāsya yoga-bhraṣṭa-para-loka-gati-viṣayasya “saṁśayasya cchettā” samyag-uttara-dānena nāśayitā hi yasmān “nopapadyate” na sambhavati tasmāt tvam eva pratyakṣa-darśī sarvasya parama-guroḥ saṁśayam etaṁ mama cchettum arhasīti*

¹⁰² *bimba-pratibimba-mukhānugata-mukhavac ceśa-jīvānugataṁ māyopādhicaitanyam sākṣīti kalpyate | tenaiva ca svādhyastā māyā tat-kāryam ca kṛtsnam prakāśyate | ataḥ sākṣy-abhiprāyeṇa “daivī”-iti “bimba”-īśvarābhiprāyeṇa tu “mama”-iti bhagavatoktam || I have translated māyopādhicaitanyam in line*

For Madhusūdana, then, both the Lord and the *jīva* are consciousness constrained by *māyā*. Where the *bimba* is the original, the one to be reflected (i.e. Kṛṣṇa as the Lord), the *pratibimba* is the reflection (i.e. the *jīva*).¹⁰³ Yet both the *bimba* and the *pratibimba* share the same set of features: consciousness, as mediated through the limiting adjunct *māyā*. So both the Lord and the *jīva* (Arjuna as one of many refractions) share being the witness.¹⁰⁴ It is precisely because the Lord is the witness that he can show Arjuna how to be the witness. So Madhusūdana says “divine” refers to the witness and points to consciousness beyond, while “mine” refers to Kṛṣṇa as Lord of *māyā*, but also as Supreme Teacher standing in front of Arjuna. Fundamentally, 7.14 separates the consciousness which is beyond from the consciousness which is in Kṛṣṇa standing before Arjuna – just as Arjuna has to learn to discriminate what is *not* his true self from what *is* his true self.

Just as in 7.14, in his comment on 7.4, Madhusūdana states that ‘this *prakṛti*, the power of the highest Lord called *māyā*, is manifest/perceptible due to being revealed by the witness’.¹⁰⁵ This follows Madhusūdana’s comment on 7.3, that ‘you’ can learn about who the Lord really is (*tattvataḥ*) – non-different from the inner self (*pratyag-abhedena*) – directly through great sentences (*mahāvākyas*) such as *tat tvam asi* ‘taught by teachers’ (*gurūpadiṣṭa*). So Kṛṣṇa being the witness making known what is other than the witness/true self is key to Madhusūdana building a picture of who ‘that’ is. Just as with ‘you’, Madhusūdana’s developing picture of ‘that’ is key to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy.

5.3.5 – Kṛṣṇa as *nirguṇa brahman*

At several points throughout his commentary, Madhusūdana equates Kṛṣṇa with *nirguṇa brahman*, as in his gloss of “that *brahman*” in 7.29:

with the Bombay edition. Cf *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 9.7: ‘The one who is simply consciousness (*-caitanya-mātra*), the witness of everything (*sarva-sākṣi*), is not an experiencer (*bhoktr*)’ (*tasya sarva-sākṣi-bhūta-caitanya-mātrasya bhoktrtvābhāvāt*)

¹⁰³ *yadyapy avidyāpratibimba eka eva jīvas tathāpy avidyāgatānām antaḥkaraṇasaṃskārānām bhinnatvāt tadbhedenāntaḥkaraṇopādhes tasyātra bhedavyapadeśaḥ...* ‘Although the *jīva* which is the reflection of misconception is one only, here (*Gītā* 7.15-16) teaches about the plurality of those whose inner organs are different due to difference in impressions of those inner organs understood from (the point of view of) misconception’.

¹⁰⁴ As Sanjukta Gupta explains, Madhusūdana’s view is an *eka jīva* version of Advaita. For a full discussion, see Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism*, p.84.

¹⁰⁵ [...] *iyam aparokṣā sākṣi-bhāsyatvāt prakṛtir māyākhyā pārameśvarī śaktir*

“They know” me, “that” “*brahman*” without attributes, the cause of the universe, the abode of *māyā*, pure, the highest, indicated by the word “that”.¹⁰⁶

Madhusūdana thus identifies ‘that *brahman*’ as cause of the universe, abode of *māyā*, indicated by the word ‘*tat*’ – all of which we have seen are layers of who Kṛṣṇa is – but above all, as *nirguṇa*, without attributes. Similarly, in 8.5:

“He”, that worshipper, at the end of his enjoyment in the world of Hiranyagarbha “attains” “my state”, my nature, the state of *nirguṇa brahman*.¹⁰⁷

Madhusūdana first emphasises that Kṛṣṇa can be seen as both conditioned and unconditioned *brahman*. Ultimately, however, Kṛṣṇa is *nirguṇa brahman*. It is ‘*nirguṇa-brahma-bhāvaṃ*’ – ‘the state of *nirguṇa brahman*’ – which is ‘*madbhāvaṃ*’. Kṛṣṇa, for Madhusūdana, thus describes his *own* state as that of *nirguṇa brahman*. The world of Hiranyagarbha mentioned here is the world of Brahmā. We saw above that Arjuna can reach the world of Brahmā (which has been reconceptualised by Madhusūdana as the *world* of Kṛṣṇa), and then progress beyond that to liberation – here the *state* of Kṛṣṇa, of *nirguṇa brahman*.

Although the middle third of his commentary reveals multiple key layers to who Kṛṣṇa is, Madhusūdana maintains his Advaita Vedāntin position by referring these layers back to Kṛṣṇa as none other than *nirguṇa brahman*. Through their *bhakti* orientation, chapters 7-12 reveal a progressive understanding of ‘that’, whereby Kṛṣṇa is the exemplification as well as the overt teacher of being the witness. We thus gradually discover the layers of personhood that reveal who Kṛṣṇa is for Madhusūdana. We first learn that Kṛṣṇa takes on a body and acts in the world, then is the one who manifests in the cosmic cycle, then is where *māyā* is grounded, then is the subject of *bhakti*, and then is the witness which is *nirguṇa*

¹⁰⁶ “*taj*” *jagat-kāraṇaṃ māyādhiṣṭhānaṃ śuddhaṃ paraṃ “brahma” nirguṇaṃ “tat”-pada-lakṣyaṃ māṃ “viduḥ”*

¹⁰⁷ “*yāti sa*” *upāsako “mad-bhāvaṃ” mad-rūpatāṃ nirguṇa-brahma-bhāvaṃ hiranya-garbha-loka-bhogānte yāti prāpnoti*

brahman – bhakti has led ‘you’ to this point, where it is realised that ‘you’ are nothing other than the self as witness. I argue that, although Kṛṣṇa may be divine body and divine agent, the fact that Kṛṣṇa exemplifies being the witness to Arjuna means that he is demonstrating to Arjuna what minimal selfhood really is – that is, Kṛṣṇa as witness and *nirguṇa brahman* is ultimately without characteristics/qualities, and Arjuna must work towards removing characteristics/qualities in order to become liberated.

5.4 – *Tat tvam asi*

I have argued that, together, understandings of Arjuna’s personhood (as ‘you’) and Kṛṣṇa’s personhood (as ‘that’) are crucial to preparing for an understanding of ‘you are that’, by pointing to that which is *beyond*. In Madhusūdana’s view, it is chapters 13-18 that reveal the identity of *tat* and *tvam* as *the sentence meaning* (introduction 10).¹⁰⁸ In introduction 18, he continues:

When the mind becomes freed from faults, the idea of reality arises from the (Upaniṣadic) sentence. From the very word (of the Upaniṣad) arises direct realisation beyond construction.¹⁰⁹

The point itself is common. In his *Siddhānta-bindu*, Madhusūdana writes, ‘The great Vedāntic sentences alone – “you are that” and “I am *brahman*” – are competent to generate knowledge of that self’.¹¹⁰ Significantly, right from the outset, Madhusūdana tells us that the *mahāvākya*, from which arises direct realisation, is structured into the *Gītā*. How then does *tat tvam asi* in the *Gītā* yield knowledge of that which is ‘beyond construction’, as Madhusūdana clearly contends, given that words have a cognitive function?

In chapter 13 of his commentary, the first chapter of the final third, Madhusūdana differentiates between what we may call indirect and direct language, closely following

¹⁰⁸ *ṛtīye tu tayor aikyaṃ vākyārtho varṇyate sphūṭam |*

¹⁰⁹ *kṣīṇadoṣe tataścitte vākyāt tattvamatir bhavet |*

sākṣātkāro nirvikalpaḥ śabdād evopajāyate ||

¹¹⁰ *tasya cātmatattvasya tattvamasyahaṃ brahmāsmītyādivedāntamahāvākyaṃ eva pramāpakam ||*

Śrīdhara’s wording but subtly altering it.¹¹¹ *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 13.4 is worth quoting at length. First, Madhusūdana explains how language works *indirectly*:

“And indeed through the *sūtras* and *padas* on *brahman*”. The *sūtras* on *brahman* are those (sentences) by which *brahman* is taught (*sūtryate*), is indicated (*sūcyate*), is explained/conveyed as something through an overlay (*vyavadhāna*); (these are) the Upaniṣadic sentences which are concerned with extrinsic characteristics, such as “That from which these beings are born, by which they live when born, that which they approach and enter” (*Tai. Up.* 3.1.1).¹¹²

Like Śrīdhara, Madhusūdana takes the *Gītā*’s term, “*brahma-sūtras*”, as designating the Upaniṣadic sentences that refer to the properties of *brahman* which do not actually belong to *brahman* – *taṭasthalakṣaṇa*, or ‘extrinsic characteristics’. He identifies these, with a longer version of the quotation Śrīdhara gives from *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.1.1, as being the origin, sustainer and end of the universe – which are extrinsic because *brahman* does not actually change, so they do not designate *brahman*’s nature. Adding three small words to Śrīdhara (*kiṃcid vyavadhānena pratipādyante* – ‘something is taught by overlay’), Madhusūdana clarifies that such sentences teach or convey *brahman* by superimposing extrinsic characteristics on *brahman*, and so indicate *indirectly* the reality of that on which they are superimposed.

Madhusūdana then continues, in 13.4, to identify language which works to convey *brahman* *directly* or, as it really is (*sākṣāt*). He glosses the *Gītā*’s term “*pada*” and quotes Śrīdhara’s explanation (i) more or less verbatim:

Moreover, *padas* are those (passages) such as, “*Brahman* is reality, consciousness, infinite” (*Tai. Up.* 2.1.1) by which *brahman* is directly

¹¹¹ See Chapter 4, section 4.3.3. Note that in *Gītābhāṣya* 13.4, Śaṅkara speaks of sentences indicating *brahman* (*brahmaṇaḥ sūcakāni vākyāni*) and so their words are said to make *brahman* known as self (...*brahmasūtrapadair ātmā jñāyate*). By contrast, for Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, it is the sentences speaking of extrinsic characteristics that indirectly speak of *brahman*, for Madhusūdana explicitly by superimposing these characteristics on *brahman*, while the sentences concerned with *svarūpalakṣaṇa* are those which speak directly. Śaṅkara makes no such twofold division.

¹¹² “*brahma-sūtra-padais caiva*” *brahma sūtryate sūcyate kiṃcid vyavadhānena pratipādyata ebhir iti brahma-sūtrāṇi* “*yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante | yena jātāni jīvanti | yat prayanty abhisamviśanti*” | *ityādīni taṭastha-lakṣaṇa-parāṇy upaniṣad-vākyāni*

explained/conveyed, (and) which are concerned with essential characteristics.¹¹³

I return to this below. First though we note Madhusūdana's next move. Elaborating Śrīdhara's use of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2, important to him as it initiates the *tat tvam asi* passage, Madhusūdana stresses how the *Gītā*'s next term, “*hetumat*”, refers to reasoning embedded within *śruti*:

...by those “*sūtras* and *padas* on *brahman* which contain reasons (*hetumat*)”.¹¹⁴ Reasoning (in the passage which) begins, “O dear one, in the beginning this was existence alone, one only, without a second”, sets out the view of the *nāstikas*, “Some say, ‘What?! In the beginning this was non-existence alone, one only without a second. Therefore, existence should come from non-existence’, (and then) says, “But how, indeed, O dear one, might it be,” he said, “How could existence come from non-existence?” (*Ch. Up.* 6.2.1-2).¹¹⁵

Finally, and subtly altering Śrīdhara by importing part of his explanation (ii) here, Madhusūdana only then explains the *Gītā*'s adjective “*viniścita*” as qualifying all three previous terms. This implies not just that the local reasoning exemplified above is coherent, but that the wider context of all these types of passages form ‘a single passage’, a harmonised reading of the Upaniṣads as a whole:

And (it has been) sung in many ways by (sentences etc) “which are convincing” (*viniścita*), which are conclusive, which establish a meaning beyond doubt, due to the opening and closing forming a single passage (*ekavākyatā*).¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *tathā padyate brahma sāksāt pratipādyata ebhir iti padāni svarūpa-lakṣaṇa-parāṇi “satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma” ityādīni*

¹¹⁴ Taking *lectio difficilior* of Bombay edition.

¹¹⁵ ...*tair* “*brahma-sūtraiḥ padaiḥ ca hetumadbhiḥ*” “*sad eva saumyedam agra āsīd ekam evādvitīyaṃ*” *ity upakramya* “*taddhaika āhur asad evedam agra āsīd ekam evādvitīyaṃ tasmād asataḥ saj jāyeta*” *iti nāstika-matam upanyasya* “*kutas tu khalu somyaivaṃ syād iti hovāca katham asataḥ saj jāyeta*” *ityādī-yuktīḥ pratipādayadbhir...*

¹¹⁶ “*viniścitair*” *upakramopasaṃhāraika-vākyatayā sandeha-śūnyārtha-pratipādakair bahudhā gītaṃ ca* | Cf *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 18.63 on need to understand the *Gītā*'s own *ekavākyatā*.

We return now to Madhusūdana’s quotation of ‘*satyam jñānam anantam brahma*’ (‘*brahman* is reality, consciousness, infinite’). In what way could the individual words *satya*, *jñāna* and *ananta* denote *brahman*’s essential characteristics (*svarūpa-lakṣaṇa*) without entailing duality?

A long history of debate within and beyond Advaita had dealt with this, starting with Śaṅkara’s long discussion on *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1.¹¹⁷ We know that, in the *Advaita-siddhi*, Madhusūdana adopts Citsukha’s notion of *akhaṇḍārtha*,¹¹⁸ the undivided or integral meaning of a sentence whose multiple non-synonymous words denoting apparently multiple characteristics really bear on a single subject. In the *Advaita-siddhi*, Madhusūdana applies this to ‘*satyam jñānam anantam brahma*’.¹¹⁹ Each term drops the unwanted connotations of its primary denotation to use its secondary power of implication (*lakṣaṇāvṛtti*) to bear only on *brahman*: not unreality, not limited by misconception and without any limitation whatsoever. In the *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*, Madhusūdana takes this for granted.

Crucially, for our purposes, *tat tvam asi* is grammatically similar.¹²⁰ In the *Advaita-siddhi*, the integral meaning of *satyam jñānam anantaṃ brahma* is shown to be the ultimate referent of *tat*, which in turn helps to yield the *akhaṇḍārtha* of ‘you are that’.¹²¹ Madhusūdana uses complex technical arguments to defend his position. The *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* takes a different approach. I have demonstrated above that Madhusūdana uses the whole text to show how the referent of ‘you are that’ turns out to be the transcending consciousness of both Arjuna (*tvam*) and Kṛṣṇa (*tat*). However, at various points, Madhusūdana uses the term ‘*akhaṇḍa*’ to refer to that transcendent. Most explicitly, in 5.16, he explains how misconception (*ajñāna*), with its powers of projecting and concealing (*āvaraṇa-vikṣepa-śaktimat*), is to be sublated (*bādhita*). It is

by knowledge of the self which arises from the great sentences of the Upaniṣads taught by a teacher, direct realisation of the unconditioned, ...whose single focus is the pure entity which is reality, consciousness,

¹¹⁷ Hirst, *Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta*, pp.145-51.

¹¹⁸ *Advaita-siddhi* quotes *Tattva-pradīpikā* 1.19, ‘while discussing and defending another pivotal issue: the definition of the indivisible meaning (*akhaṇḍārthalakṣaṇa*) arising out of great Upaniṣadic sentences’ (Pellegrini, “Old is Gold”, p.312).

¹¹⁹ Gupta, *Advaita Vedānta and Vaiṣṇavism*, pp.57-9.

¹²⁰ *sāmānādhikāraṇya*: sentence with terms in the same case.

¹²¹ Gupta, pp.57-8.

bliss, *undivided*, single delight, whose non-differenced nature is the referent of ‘that’ and ‘you’ when purified.¹²²

That Kṛṣṇa is integral to this is clear in 7.14:

Those who “worship me” make me alone, devoid of all limiting conditions, the self, which is consciousness, bliss, reality, undivided, their focus, by the removal of all ignorance and its results...whose nature is direct realisation of the unconditioned, which arises from the sentences of the Upaniṣads...¹²³

The parallel between the straight Advaitin language in 5.16 and the devotionally-coloured context of 7.14 could not be more explicit. Moreover, as we saw in his gloss on verse 9.14, Madhusūdana clearly states that Kṛṣṇa is not only the subject of devotion, but is also the subject of what is taught in the Upaniṣads – “Constantly praising me”, who in my own form am *brahman* presented by all the Upaniṣads...¹²⁴ We also saw – in 7.29 and 8.5 – that Kṛṣṇa is none other than *nirguṇa brahman*. So too in 5.16 and 7.14, knowledge of the *akhaṇḍa* with whom Kṛṣṇa is equated comes through the Upaniṣadic passages (*vedānta-(mahā)vākya*). Considered in the light of Madhusūdana’s comment on 13.4, if we apply *akhaṇḍārtha* to the sentence *tat tvam asi*, the single substantive it refers to is the self, *nirguṇa brahman*, who is in fact Kṛṣṇa, the subject of the Upaniṣads. *Akhaṇḍārtha*, when applied to *tat tvam asi*, at the level of the sentence *and* at the level of what the sentence refers to *is* Kṛṣṇa – the subject of devotion, the topic of the Upaniṣads, consciousness, *nirguṇa brahman*.

If what *tat tvam asi* refers to on both a linguistic and ontological level *is* Kṛṣṇa, we can apply Madhusūdana’s explanation of 13.4 to chapters 13-18 more generally. Madhusūdana’s understanding of *tat tvam asi* is compounded at the very end of his commentary. His comment on 18.65 clearly reiterates that the sentence *tat tvam asi* is how direct realisation is attained. The verse reads, ‘Your mind fixed on me, you must be my

¹²² ...ātmano jñānena gurūpadiṣṭa-vedānta-mahāvākya-janyena...nirvikalpaka-sākṣātkāreṇa śodhita-tat-tvam-padārthābheda-rūpa-śuddha-sac-cid-ānandākhaṇḍaikarasa-vastu-mātra-viṣayeṇa...

¹²³ mām eva sarvopādhi-virahitaṃ cidānanda-sadātmānam akhaṇḍaṃ ye prapadyante vedānta-vākya-janyayā nirvikalpa-sākṣātkāra-rūpayā ... sarvājñāna-tat-kārya-virodhinyā viṣayīkurvanti

¹²⁴ “mām” sarvopaniṣat-pratipādyam brahma-svarūpaṃ “kīrtayanto”

devotee, my worshipper, you must respect me. You will come to me alone. I promise you this reality. You are dear to me'.¹²⁵ In his explanation, Madhusūdana directly quotes the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*:

[...] If devotion consists of these nine characteristics, directed towards Lord Viṣṇu by a person, then I consider this to certainly be the highest learning (*BhP* 7.5.23).¹²⁶

Significantly, this passage is from the very same verse of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which Madhusūdana quoted earlier in 9.14. Madhusūdana's explanation of *bhakti* spans his entire commentary, not just the middle third. Drawing further on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.5.23 here, Madhusūdana refers the reader to his *Bhakti-rasāyana*, indicating that these 'nine characteristics' of Vaiṣṇava devotion have been discussed in detail in this text. This is another way in which Madhusūdana's system is built in this particular commentary – by referring to systems established elsewhere, as we saw also with the Yogic Advaita material of Vidyāraṇya in *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 6 and the *Advaita-siddhi* discussion assumed in 13.4.

Ultimately, as was the case in chapters 7-12, in 18.65 (directly following the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* quotation) Madhusūdana emphasises that direct realisation is ultimately produced by the Upaniṣadic sentence. He addresses Arjuna directly:

Having your mind fixed on me as a result of the rise of affection for me, through the constant performance of *dharma* for the Lord, “you will come to” attain “me alone”, through my realisation produced by the Upaniṣadic sentence.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ *manmanā bhava madbhakto madyājī mām namaskuru |
mām evaiṣyasi satyaṃ te pratijāne priyosi me ||*

¹²⁶ *...iti puṃsārpitā viṣṇau
bhaktiś cen nava-lakṣaṇā
kriyeta bhagavaty addhā
tan manye 'dhītam uttamam ||*

¹²⁷ *evaṃ sadā bhāgavatadharmānuṣṭhānena mayy anurāgotpattyā manmanāḥ san “mām” bhagavantaṃ
vāsudevameva “eṣyasi” prāpsyasi vedāntavākyaajanitena madbodhena*

Right at the end of his commentary, Madhusūdana reiterates the sentiment we learnt in chapters 7-12 – that *bhakti* prepares Arjuna (the addressee in 18.65) for direct realisation, which is produced only by the Upaniṣadic *tat tvam asi*.

Although Madhusūdana draws on other texts in order to establish his system, he ultimately grounds his commentary in the *śruti*. As we saw earlier, Nelson has argued that *tat tvam asi* is fundamentally problematic for devotionalists and that Madhusūdana successfully combining *bhakti* with Advaita Vedānta ‘cannot be accepted without serious qualification’.¹²⁸ I propose, however, that Madhusūdana’s structuring of his commentary around *tat tvam asi*, and with *bhakti* being preparatory, has demonstrated that the sentence itself is central to his reading of the *Gītā*. In his comment on 18.65 above, the pedagogy I have argued is presented by Madhusūdana is neatly summarised. Through *bhakti*, and through acting *dharmically*, which Arjuna is forced to do by being drowned by Kṛṣṇa in the first place, Arjuna is prepared for direct realisation. This direct realisation, as stated above, arises from *tat tvam asi*, which yields a single meaning, which is Kṛṣṇa.

Significantly, in his explanation of 13.4, Madhusūdana includes the very passage from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that is the original context of *tat tvam asi* (i.e. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2). I have argued that *tat tvam asi* is used pedagogically by Madhusūdana, and we can apply his explanation of what we may call direct language in 13.4 not only to how we read chapters 13-18, but to how we read his entire commentary. What is particularly interesting is the fact that Madhusūdana repeatedly uses the phrase ‘direct realisation’ (*sākṣātkāra*).¹²⁹ For instance, right at the end of the middle third of his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*:

Therefore [...] it is possible to directly perceive the reality which forms the content of the great Upaniṣadic sentence. Since liberation follows logically from this, therefore one should seek for that meaning of the word “that”, which is capable of being construed logically with the meaning of the Vedāntic *mahāvākya*, which leads to liberation.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Nelson, *Bhakti in Advaita Vedānta*, pp.iii-iv & 1-2.

¹²⁹ Madhusūdana uses the phrase *sākṣātkāra* numerous times in his *Gītā* commentary, a phrase which does not appear anywhere near as often in the work of Śaṅkara or Śrīdhara.

¹³⁰ *tad evaṃ [...] vedānta-vākya-rtha-tattva-sākṣātkāra-sambhavāt tato mukty-upapater mukti-hetu-vedānta-mahāvākya-rthānvaya-yogyas tat-padārtho ’nusandheya iti* | My emphasis.

Here, Madhusūdana stresses that the referent of the *mahāvākya* itself is direct realisation of reality, and this can only be achieved by seeking the meaning of ‘that’, who is Kṛṣṇa. This passage strongly reflects the fact that Madhusūdana’s use of *tat tvam asi* is pedagogical, whereby ‘you’ realise that you are none other than ‘that’, direct realisation. The problem with ordinary perception or realisation is that it immediately implies an object. However, as direct realisation has no subject or object, there can be no duality creeping in. Indeed, *sākṣātkāra* is literally from the root *kr + sākṣāt*, which means ‘to make direct’, so direct realisation can be understood as direct disclosure.

The phrase ‘direct realisation’ is first seen in Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* introduction: ‘From the very word (of the Upaniṣad) arises direct realisation free of constructions’ (*sākṣātkāro nirvikalpaḥ śabdād evopajāyate*).¹³¹ Similarly, glossing 13.11, Madhusūdana writes:

Because one who is established in discrimination becomes fit for knowledge of the meaning of the sentences. “Of the experience of reality”, of direct realisation, “I am *brahman*”, whose cause is the Vedāntic sentence(s).¹³²

‘Direct realisation’, in both cases, is what the word/verbal testimony (*śabda*) or sentence(s)/entire text (*vākya*) of the Upaniṣad refers to. So, when understood in the light of Madhusūdana’s interpretation of 13.4, ‘direct realisation’ is what the *akhaṇḍārtha* of *tat tvam asi* is – Kṛṣṇa as consciousness.

The fact that ‘direct realisation’ is the *akhaṇḍārtha* of *tat tvam asi* is important for three key reasons. First, on a structural level, *tat*, *tvam* and *tat tvam asi* form the very structure of Madhusūdana’s commentary – the entire text is centered around the meaning of the sentence. Second, Madhusūdana ultimately defines ‘you’ as the witness, which is the case precisely because there is no subject/object perception involved in the grounding consciousness of direct realisation. Third, *tat tvam asi* reveals who Kṛṣṇa really is – as

¹³¹ Cf use of ‘without construction’ (*nirvikalpa(ka)*) in 5.16 and 7.14 above.

¹³² *viveka-niṣṭho hi vākyaārtha-jñāna-samartho bhavati | “tattvajñāna” syāhaṃ brahmāsmīti sākṣātkārasya vedānta-vākya-karaṇakasya...*

linked with direct realisation and as teacher giving pedagogical instruction so that Arjuna can transition from individuation to selfhood.

5.5 – Conclusion

The *Gītā* itself addresses various types of people. Although Madhusūdāna's *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* also addresses various types of people, I have argued that the main subject is Arjuna. This is made clear right from the outset – in 2.10, we learn from Madhusūdāna that Kṛṣṇa is the one who actively 'drowns' Arjuna, and in doing so exposes his 'improper behaviour'. This gives us three initial clues for analysing Madhusūdāna's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy in the *Gītā*. First, Arjuna (the 'you') is the one who is being drowned here, which tells us that he is the primary subject who requires Kṛṣṇa's teaching. Second, to be rescued, Arjuna must learn what constitutes *appropriate* behaviour – this requires Arjuna to reconsider his view of his own personhood (what it means to be a 'you'), which gives us a way of reading that is directly linked to how Arjuna can progress. Third, the very fact that Arjuna is drowned by Kṛṣṇa himself shows the possibility, and importance, of Kṛṣṇa helping and ultimately being the giver of grace – this emerges as central to Arjuna becoming liberated through *bhakti*, and it is grace by which the *mahāvākya tat tvam asi* self-manifests.¹³³ This final point is crucial in pinpointing Arjuna as the primary subject in Madhusūdāna's commentary. The emphasis Madhusūdāna places on *bhakti*, particularly in the middle third of his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* where he directly addresses the meaning of *tat* ('that'), indicates that the main subject is not the Advaitin renunciate, as has been argued by Nelson. The key reason for this is that *bhakti*, although preparatory, is also *instrumental* in leading Arjuna, the 'you', to the realisation that he is none other than the self as witness. Although Madhusūdāna seeks to demonstrate that his commentary is in line with the key Advaita Vedāntin *mahāvākya* (as is indicated by its very structure), it is also directly addressed to Arjuna who is the 'you' and devotee who can attain liberation, but *not* via a standard Advaitin route – and this does not make him inferior. Madhusūdāna seeks to demonstrate how Arjuna has a place here, and can realise minimal selfhood albeit not via the standard Advaitin route of *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. The fact that Madhusūdāna incorporates the *bhakta* into an Advaita Vedāntin pathway clearly demonstrates that *bhakti* is central to his reading of the *Gītā*.

¹³³ 12.6-7. See Chapter 5, section 5.3.3.

I have argued that Madhusūdana’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy in the *Gītā* can be broadly conceptualised in terms of personhood being a hermeneutical key on three levels: for understanding i) *tvam* (‘you’), ii) *tat* (‘that’), and iii) *tat tvam asi* (‘you are that’). *Tat tvam asi*, then, is the pedagogical tool in Madhusūdana’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy in the *Gītā*. As we know, Madhusūdana explains in his introduction 8-10 that he structures his commentary around *tat tvam asi*. As this pedagogical tool is embedded in the very structure of Madhusūdana’s commentary, it functions progressively as the narrative unfolds. We can see how personhood as a hermeneutical key ‘maps’ onto each key third of Madhusūdana’s commentary: *tvam* (‘you’) maps onto *karma*, in terms of what constitutes an unsatisfactory person; *tat* (‘that’) maps onto *bhakti*, in terms of devotion to the Supreme Person; *tat tvam asi* (‘you are that’) maps onto *jñāna*, in terms of establishing direct realisation – which is none other than the realisation of minimal selfhood.¹³⁴ Although Madhusūdana’s commentary has been analysed by scholars in terms of *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*, while this structuring is important, I have argued that these three are *means* to Madhusūdana’s *primary* focus of each third, which is structured around *tat tvam asi*. Taking each third in turn, I have shown how we can read Madhusūdana’s commentary, by using personhood as a hermeneutical key, as follows: in the first third, chapters 1-6 which are *karma*-oriented reveal that by learning to act in a detached way, Arjuna (the ‘you’) learns who he *can become*, once he realises the true meaning of ‘you’. In the middle third, chapters 7-12 which are *bhakti*-oriented reveal that by devoting himself to Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna can come to know who ‘that’ really is. It is at this point that Kṛṣṇa’s personhood itself functions as a pedagogical tool by which Arjuna, as a devotee of Kṛṣṇa as a manifestation of *saguṇa brahman*, can progress towards hearing the *mahāvākya* with the help of Kṛṣṇa’s grace. In the final third, chapters 13-18 which are *jñāna*-oriented reveal how Arjuna can finally come to understand the meaning of the Upaniṣadic sentence: direct realisation, the *akhaṇḍārtha* of *tat tvam asi*, which is Kṛṣṇa. So while Nelson has argued that *bhakti* is ultimately made subordinate to knowledge in Madhusūdana’s commentary, I have argued that rather than being subordinate or secondary to the *mahāvākya*, *bhakti* is in fact crucial in preparing the primary focus of Madhusūdana’s commentary – Arjuna (the ‘you’) – for the transition from individuation to selfhood.

¹³⁴ The ‘mapping’ of ‘you’, ‘that’ and ‘you are that’ in terms of *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna* in Madhusūdana’s commentary is consistent throughout. As we have seen, Madhusūdana uses the same quotations to draw his points together across the ‘thirds’ of his commentary.

Central to Madhusūdana using personhood as a hermeneutical key is the way in which he draws on other texts in his commentary. It is clear that *tat tvam asi* is the most important of these for Madhusūdana. However, we have also seen that Madhusūdana quotes heavily from both Yoga and Bhakti texts, at times referring the reader to other texts of his own (i.e. the *Bhakti-rasāyana*) and the texts of other commentators (i.e. Vidyāranya's *Jīvanmuktiviveka*). Drawing on terms and concepts already systematised elsewhere, for instance in Yoga and Yogic Advaita texts, is central to Madhusūdana building a picture of *tvam* ('you') in the first six chapters of his commentary. Although Madhusūdana draws on various other texts, he is intent on grounding his commentary in the *śruti* texts. For Madhusūdana, the meaning of *tat tvam asi*, although supported by texts such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, is ultimately grounded in the Upaniṣads. Essentially, the quoting of other texts by Madhusūdana is part of progressively working towards direct realisation, yet his final interpretation of the sentence, 'you are that', itself is grounded in the *śruti*.

Madhusūdana, I argue, interprets Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy as progressive. Madhusūdana uses the *Gītā*'s vocative addresses to Arjuna to build a picture of how he can become liberated, meaning that Arjuna's understanding of 'you' develops as the text unfolds. By drawing on Ram-Prasad's model of minimal selfhood, we can see how Madhusūdana carefully maps Arjuna's transition from problematic personhood to minimal selfhood from the very beginning of his commentary. Madhusūdana shows how both Arjuna's personhood (as the 'you') and Kṛṣṇa's personhood (as the 'that') together are crucial to understanding *tat tvam asi*, thus leading *beyond* – to the realisation of minimal selfhood. *Karma* can only lead Arjuna (as the 'you') to develop his own understanding of himself through Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna how his understanding of 'you' can develop. Similarly, *bhakti* can only lead Arjuna (as the 'you') to understanding the meaning of 'that' because Kṛṣṇa reveals who 'that' is himself, in order to teach Arjuna. It is only once Arjuna comes to understand who *tvam* ('you') really is, and who *tat* ('that') really is – as none other than the witness and *nirguṇa brahman* – that *tat tvam asi* is ready to be understood as indicating consciousness beyond.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 – Revisiting Arjuna’s Drowning

I started this thesis by highlighting the fact that each of my three *Gītā* commentators, Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, purposely attaches the stock metaphor of drowning in the ocean of rebirth to Arjuna, Lord Kṛṣṇa’s interlocutor in the *Gītā*. While they do so at different points in their commentaries, they each frame Arjuna’s drowning as an intellectual dilemma in order to introduce Kṛṣṇa’s teaching in different ways. Taking this as my starting-point, I have argued that my three commentators interpret Kṛṣṇa’s presence as working towards a **solution**, as opposed to presenting a problem for their Advaita Vedāntin positions, and that the soteriology of Arjuna’s rescue is directly linked to their interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy.

This thesis provides a novel approach for understanding the relationship between non-dualism and devotionalism in Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana’s *Gītā* commentaries. As outlined in Chapter 1, there has not yet been a study of the person of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* commentaries of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, nor has there been a study of the way in which they interpret Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. By considering how these commentators interpret the person of Kṛṣṇa from within their Advaita Vedāntin frameworks, I have shown that the relation of *bhakti* to Advaita Vedānta is a fundamental question at the heart of these three Advaita Vedāntin *Gītā* commentaries. To show this, I have taken Arjuna’s drowning in each commentary as my key springboard for inquiry, and the source of my two initial questions:

- i) What are the commentators’ own questions?
- ii) Why is Arjuna drowning, and how can Kṛṣṇa save him?

Exploring these led me to formulate my third and main research question:

- iii) How does examining the *relation* perceived between Kṛṣṇa’s person and pedagogy help us to understand Kṛṣṇa’s place in Advaita Vedānta in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*, Śrīdhara’s *Subodhinī* and Madhusūdana’s *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā*?

By beginning my analysis by considering Arjuna's drowning, I have found that each commentator offers a coherent interpretation of how *bhakti* can be incorporated into their Advaita Vedāntin interpretation of the *Gītā*. Moreover, through a close reading of the Sanskrit commentaries, I have argued that scrutinising the way in which my commentators view the *person* of Kṛṣṇa points to their primary agenda being the interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's *pedagogy*. My method of looking at the commentators' own questions, and analysing why Arjuna is drowning and how Kṛṣṇa can save him, has laid the groundwork for my central argument: that Kṛṣṇa is not irrelevant, a problem, or something to be 'bracketed out'. For Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, Kṛṣṇa's person is fundamental, in different ways, to his pedagogical role of rescuing Arjuna, and thus to a soteriology which draws the seeker of Advaitin liberation from the world of rebirth to realisation of that which is transcendent.

6.2 – Outline of Chapter Structure

In this concluding chapter, I begin by suggesting how to read this sort of commentarial text (6.3), drawing on the methods I have used in this thesis. I then consider exactly what Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana tell us about the **person** of Kṛṣṇa (6.4). To do this, I start by explaining the way in which the concepts of agency, body and personhood can function as hermeneutical keys for my three commentators (6.4.1). From this, I consider what my commentators tell us about *brahman*, being and embodiment (6.4.2), by considering the person of Kṛṣṇa as vehicle (6.4.2.1), the role of language in relating embodiment to the transcendent (6.4.2.2), and the importance of 'getting to' the transcendent (6.4.2.3).

Following this, I then focus on **pedagogy** (6.5), by revisiting the layers/levels of Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy, as interpreted by my commentators (6.5.1). This will involve demonstrating how Arjuna offers a lens through which we can look closely at the significance of Kṛṣṇa for Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana. To do this, I address Arjuna as my commentators' primary subject (6.5.2), Kṛṣṇa's progressive method of teaching and Arjuna's progressive learning (6.5.3), and Arjuna and liberation (6.5.4). Finally, I consider how this thesis might provide a resource for thinking about divine embodiment, the function of language and teacher-pupil relationships as key themes, in addition to offering a new way of understanding *bhakti* in the Advaita Vedāntin tradition (6.6).

6.3 – How to read this kind of commentarial text

Looking at the intellectual and textual context of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana has been crucial in helping me focus on their interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s person and pedagogy.¹ In particular, considering the ways in which my commentators weave previous commentaries and other key texts into their *Gītā* commentaries has proven key to i) looking at how they build coherent readings, ii) giving clues about their interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, iii) shaping where I have found my hermeneutical keys, and iv) highlighting the respective importance of agency, body and personhood as key to understanding how each views the person of Kṛṣṇa.

I have demonstrated how looking carefully at why Śaṅkara deals with his key opponent, the *jñānakarmasamuccayin*, in such detail in his *Gītābhāṣya* shows the significance of agency in his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. I have also indicated that the way in which Śrīdhara positions himself in relation to Citsukha is not insignificant, and that this positioning forms the foundation for his interpretation of *śakti* in relation to Kṛṣṇa’s body, and the function of language about Kṛṣṇa’s body. I have also shown how Madhusūdana’s use of key terms and ideas synthesised by other commentators – particularly in Yogic Advaita and Vidyāraṇya’s *Jīvanmuktiviveka* – proves key in building a progressive picture of ‘you’ (*tvam*), which is central to his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy.

The way in which Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana refer back to Śaṅkara and earlier Advaitin commentators, in order to accept or modify their authority, is also key to building their views (e.g. Śrīdhara’s reading of 13.19, where Śaṅkara is invoked for legitimation before Śrīdhara introduces *śakti* to his understanding of Kṛṣṇa as the Lord). Their quoting of the

¹ Socio-religious contextualisation has its limitations, but has offered historical ‘colouring’ of my commentators’ audiences. As we saw in Chapter 2, the influence of Vaiṣṇava devotional movements around Śaṅkara’s time is reflected in the fact that he describes Kṛṣṇa using terms found in certain Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava traditions, e.g. the six Vaiṣṇava qualities attributed to the Lord referenced in Śaṅkara’s introduction and 4.6, possibly appealing to particular contemporary *brahmins* attracted to Viṣṇu worship. Śrīdhara appeals to the qualities *jñāna-bala-vīryādi* (knowledge, strength, energy, and so on), and thus positions himself to appeal to what could be interpreted as both a Vaiṣṇava and a Śaiva set of qualities (4.6). For Śrīdhara, the Orissan context of the Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* in his commentary is indicated by such clues as: double readings, praise verses, and choosing Upaniṣadic grounding specifically in the *Śvetāśvatara*. Madhusūdana shows that there is a place for Kṛṣṇa-*bhaktas* in Advaita Vedānta, not just in the Caitanyite tradition or Mādhva Dvaita Vedānta, by opening up the path to liberation for *bhaktas* directly.

Bhāgavata Purāṇa is also significant, and indicates that this text had, by Śrīdhara's time, become recognised as an important source. For Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is quoted specifically where they seek to ground their understanding of *bhakti* as congruent with other key sources (e.g. *Subodhinī* 18.70 where Śrīdhara stresses the importance of recitation of the *Gītā*; *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 3.18 where Madhusūdana quotes the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, alongside the *śruti*, to support his inclusion of the stages of *jīvanmukti* he quotes directly from the *Laghu-Yogavāsīṣṭha*). The *Laghu-Yogavāsīṣṭha* is quoted at length by Madhusūdana, and he uses specific terms already systematised in what is referred to as 'Yogic Advaita'.² The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* is another key text referred to by all three commentators, to ground their interpretations in the *śruti* but in different ways (for instance, Śrīdhara departs from Śaṅkara by claiming that the notion of *śakti* is grounded in the *Śvetāśvatara* in his reading of 13.13).

A close reading of the Sanskrit has been key to my method. Through my close textual analysis, I have shown that the introductions to Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana's *Gītā* commentaries are key to framing their positions. I have also highlighted the importance of looking at the way each structures their commentary. For Śaṅkara, his *Gītābhāṣya* is structured around the twofold *dharma*, which is outlined right from the start. For Śrīdhara, although there is no explicit reference to the structuring of his commentary in his introduction (by contrast to Śaṅkara and Madhusūdana), his whole commentary is framed around *bhakti*, and the praise verses at the beginning and end of each chapter flag this by showing *bhakti* as both progressive and cumulative. For Madhusūdana, *tat tvam asi* is declared (in his introduction 8-10) to be the primary focus of chapters 1-6, 7-12 and 13-18, respectively. There has previously been no substantial study of the significance of this structuring,³ Radhakrishnan's unnuanced claim that each third focuses respectively on 'the three methods of...*karma* or work, *upāsana* or worship, and *jñāna* or wisdom',⁴ becoming standard. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated that while it is indeed the case that Madhusūdana outlines the structuring of his commentary around *both* *tat tvam asi* and *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*, it is the former that is his primary focus, with the latter being 'mapped' around this (see 5.5). Madhusūdana's exegetical principle here is partly about aligning the *Gītā* with the

² Madaio, *Advaita Vedānta as Narrative Theology*, p.75.

³ See Chapter 1, section 1.4.3.2, on Niranjana Saha's mention of this structure but without additional analysis. See Saha, 'Nature of "that"', pp.393-405.

⁴ Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy, Volume I* (1993), p.554. See Chapter 1, section 1.4.3.2.

Veda: by claiming that the three *kaṇḍas* reflect the same three concerns as the Veda (introduction 5-6), Madhusūdāna is showing how the *Gītā* is indeed a Vedānta scripture, delivered by Kṛṣṇa. Although Madhusūdāna does not use praise verses (*maṅgalācaraṇas*) as extensively as Śrīdhara does, they do appear in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* and, significantly, are used to emphasise the *person* of Kṛṣṇa in key passages (15.19, 18.66 and, significantly, 18.78, providing his final framing).

Through my close reading, the importance of ‘key verses’ in chapter 18 of each commentary is clear: for Śaṅkara, it is 18.66 that summarises the teaching of the *Gītā*; for Śrīdhara it is 18.65 and 18.78; for Madhusūdāna it is 18.63. It is in these key verses that my three commentators most clearly suggest both *when* and *how* Arjuna can become liberated – the culmination of their interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. Interpreting the *Gītā*’s vocative addresses to Arjuna certainly contributes to both Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara’s interpretations but is a central pedagogical strategy for Madhusūdāna in particular. While, for Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara, the vocative addresses are used to focus on Arjuna, for Madhusūdāna they are used to show how Arjuna, at different points in the text, is aligned with a particular route to liberation.

6.4 – What does my thesis tell us about the person of Kṛṣṇa?

6.4.1 – Agency, body and personhood as hermeneutical keys

6.4.1.1 – What do I mean by a hermeneutical key?

It is from within the conventional world that Arjuna, or the devotee seeking liberation, can receive Kṛṣṇa’s teaching. Thinking in terms of ‘levels’ or ‘layers’ of pedagogy, we can conceptualise a ‘hermeneutical key’ in the following terms: on one level of pedagogy, we have Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna in the *Gītā*. On a second level of pedagogy, we have the commentators’ interpretations of Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna in the *Gītā*. It is to this second level that I apply the notions of agency, body and personhood as hermeneutical keys in the sense that they provide a gateway for our deeper understanding of these texts.⁵

⁵ See Chapter 6 n.23 for a potential third level of pedagogy: the commentators’ own.

I argue that agency, body and personhood provide keys, or primary ways, to unlock how each commentator understands both the meaning and significance of the *Gītā*. In addition, they are keys to the ways in which, from within the conventional world, my commentators show how the **goal** – the transcendence of living within the conventional world – is to be attained. Importantly, they are both the explicit hermeneutical keys which I employ in my own scholarly analysis and, I hold, implicit hermeneutical keys used by my commentators themselves. While agency, body and personhood are not necessarily categories that the *Gītā* pinpoints itself, nor do the commentators explicitly name them as such, I have identified them, respectively, as my commentators’ own preferred ‘keys’ by using my own method. This identification and demonstration of the ways in which these particular hermeneutical keys function forms part of my original contribution to knowledge. Further to this, these hermeneutical keys not only function as exegetical keys, but as pedagogical keys as well. They not only enable my commentators to read and comment on the *Gītā*’s significance, but to show how the text provides a method of teaching for the seeker of liberation. I demonstrate this through my own method of focusing on Arjuna, and on the way these understandings of different aspects of who Kṛṣṇa is as a person show how he both articulates in words and models himself what each commentator perceives as the *Gītā*’s core teaching.

6.4.1.2 – *Why agency, body and personhood?*

There are two primary reasons I have pinpointed agency, body and personhood as my key themes: i) based on the **structure** of the commentaries themselves (Śaṅkara structuring around the twofold *dharma*; Śrīdhara structuring around repeated references to Kṛṣṇa’s descent body; Madhusūdana structuring around *tat tvam asi*), and ii) the drowning passages, and **why Arjuna is drowning** (as linked specifically to agency, body and personhood). My choosing agency, body and personhood is rooted in my overall method: focusing on the commentators’ own questions, and asking why Arjuna is drowning in each *Gītā* commentary.

For Śaṅkara, first, although agency is key to the narrative of the *Gītā* as a root text (Kṛṣṇa being an agent in the world; Arjuna being about to fight), the twofold *dharma* is a central theme in terms of the structure of his commentary, and one that is returned to throughout. Second, agency is given particular focus in Śaṅkara’s introduction and is directly linked to the passages where he inserts the drowning metaphor, which is attached to Arjuna having

not received the teaching on the twofold *dharma* (introduction, 2.10 and 6.5). Third, Śaṅkara's only key opponent is the *jñānakarmasamuccayin* (who claims that liberation is attained by a combination of action and knowledge), indicating that agency is a significant theme.

The theme of body for Śrīdhara also arises in part from looking at the structure of his *Subodhinī* around praise verses, which re-focus on Kṛṣṇa's body at the end of almost every chapter. Secondly, Śrīdhara refers specifically to Kṛṣṇa's descent body in the drowning passages (introduction and 2.72), seeing Kṛṣṇa's bodily form as 'refuge', meaning Arjuna's rescue is directly linked to him worshipping at the feet of Kṛṣṇa. Thirdly, it is *through* Kṛṣṇa's specific *śuddha-sattvic* body that Kṛṣṇa acts particularly in the world and reveals himself in his manifest form to Arjuna. It is also through Kṛṣṇa's grace, available in his descent body, that Arjuna can learn who Kṛṣṇa is.

It is also the very structure of Madhusūdana's *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* that locates the theme of personhood. For Madhusūdana, first, the structuring of his commentary around *tat tvam asi* suggests personhood is his *primary* focus (introduction 8-10). Second, where Madhusūdana inserts the drowning passage (2.10), Arjuna's drowning is due to his 'improper behaviour', which immediately puts the focus on Arjuna, as key subject, as a 'you'. Third, the fact that Kṛṣṇa actively puts Arjuna in the position where he must reconsider his own behaviour highlights the importance of considering personhood (i.e. what it means to be a 'you') for Madhusūdana.

6.4.2 – Understanding brahman, being and embodiment

The person of Kṛṣṇa can only be understood in terms of his ultimate identity as cosmic Lord, self and *nirguṇa brahman* (which I return to in 6.4.2.3). Here, however, I focus on Kṛṣṇa, as **person** standing in front of Arjuna on the battlefield.

6.4.2.1 – The person of Kṛṣṇa as vehicle

Each commentator's interpretation of *Gītā* 4.6 is key to their interpretation of the person of Kṛṣṇa. This is not surprising, as 4.6 is the verse in the *Gītā* where the significance and mode of Kṛṣṇa's taking on a body/'embodied-ment'/manifestation in the conventional world is

first explicitly raised. The key similarity in my commentators' interpretations of 4.6 is their focus on the **person** of Kṛṣṇa as vehicle, which demonstrates that Kṛṣṇa is not to be 'explained away' or side-lined. Where my commentators differ is in their interpretations of precisely *how* the person of Kṛṣṇa acts as vehicle.

When we look at exactly what each commentator says in 4.6, we learn that it relates to my key themes of agency, body and personhood. For Śaṅkara, in his *Gītābhāṣya* 4.6 where Kṛṣṇa takes on a body by his own *māyā*, Kṛṣṇa *appears as though (iva)* he is born, as though he becomes embodied, and is set apart from an 'ordinary person'. Yet in reality Kṛṣṇa is *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* (eternal, pure, knowing and free). As we saw in Chapter 3 (section 3.3.4), the key phrase in Śaṅkara's gloss of 4.6 is *iva* ('as it were/as though'). Śaṅkara highlights the fact that Kṛṣṇa has no need for a body for the working out of *karmic* results,⁶ but *does* have a need to provide himself with a body to which he is not attached in order to teach. The function of Kṛṣṇa as **embodied teacher** in the conventional world is developed by Śaṅkara in 4.6-7. For Śaṅkara, the levels at which Kṛṣṇa's teaching operates map onto his twofold purpose: Kṛṣṇa models in his cosmic form through showing (as in chapter 11), and models in his manifest human form by acting in the world, as well as by the content of his teaching. It is Kṛṣṇa's descent body which models detached action in the conventional world that acts as vehicle. As we saw in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.1), there are various ways in which Śaṅkara's interpretation of Kṛṣṇa has been approached in secondary literature, and many scholars view Kṛṣṇa as posing a problem for Śaṅkara. Todd has explicitly said that Kṛṣṇa can be '[bracketed from] Śaṅkara's main gnoseological concerns'.⁷ I have argued that Kṛṣṇa is neither bracketed out nor side-lined, but in fact offers a **solution** for Śaṅkara through acting as vehicle in his human form.

Śrīdhara offers a different interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's descent form, in that he describes Kṛṣṇa's specific, descent body in his *Subodhinī* 4.6 as *śuddha-sattva* (just as he does in 4.10, 7.24, 9.11 and 14.27). *Śuddha-sattva* is closest in nature to the transcendent, but still spoken of in conventional terms. It is this specific *śuddha-sattvic* body that allows Kṛṣṇa to act particularly in the world and reveal himself specifically in his manifest form to Arjuna. Kṛṣṇa's specific body is also the vehicle for grace. We can see that the mapping of terms

⁶ I.e. Kṛṣṇa's descent body is freely chosen, as a result of his own will (introduction and 4.6).

⁷ Todd, *The Ethics of Śaṅkara and Śāntideva*, pp.7-8.

throughout the *Subodhinī* reflects this: *mūrti* is used to refer to Kṛṣṇa’s body; *deha* refers to ordinary human bodies. In 4.6, for Śrīdhara, for Kṛṣṇa to act in the world requires both *māyā* and a body – although Kṛṣṇa’s body is freely chosen, just as is the case with Śaṅkara and Madhusūdana. It is through Kṛṣṇa’s specific grace, for which his body is the vehicle, that Arjuna learns to develop an understanding of who Kṛṣṇa is (4.10; 6.30). As purification of the mind is key to Arjuna progressing to knowledge, this is modelled by Kṛṣṇa in his descent body. Kṛṣṇa taking on this specific *śuddha-sattvic* form provides a way of making the transcendent available to the devotee.

For Madhusūdana, in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 4.6 – like Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara – Kṛṣṇa is able to freely take on a body because *māyā* is under Kṛṣṇa’s control. In chapters 7-12, Madhusūdana focuses on the many layers of Kṛṣṇa’s personhood: he freely takes on a body in the world, is Lord of the cosmos, but is ultimately the non-dual *brahman*. Madhusūdana specifically establishes that it is Kṛṣṇa in his human form, as a manifestation of *saguṇa brahman*, who functions as the pedagogue. While this part of Madhusūdana’s interpretation is in line with Śaṅkara and Śrīdhara’s, for Madhusūdana, it is specifically the level of Kṛṣṇa’s being a person and manifestation of *saguṇa brahman* that is key to his pedagogy of *tat*. It is also devotion to this form of Kṛṣṇa (the subject of chapters 7-12) that is key to Arjuna’s progression – precisely why we see a shift towards *bhakti* in chapter 7. In other key verses (i.e. 7.14 and 8.22), Madhusūdana refers to Kṛṣṇa explicitly in his manifest form, as a person in whom Arjuna must take refuge, which resonates with descriptions of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and could be construed as in line, and competition, with Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava discourse.

6.4.2.2 – *The role of language*

Although the **person** of Kṛṣṇa is key for each commentator, and clearly acts as vehicle, the way in which each is able to ‘speak’ about Kṛṣṇa, or relate the person of Kṛṣṇa to the transcendent, as an Advaita Vedāntin, is key to their theologies of Kṛṣṇa. Specific phrases or characterisations are used by all three commentators as a key technique to set Kṛṣṇa’s descent body apart from ordinary human bodies. These contribute to the way in which my commentators relate Kṛṣṇa as embodied to Kṛṣṇa as *nirguṇa brahman*: for Śaṅkara, it is *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta*; for Śrīdhara it is *śuddha-sattva*; for Madhusūdana it is *satyaṃ jñānam anantam*. These phrases are also used to ‘speak of’ the transcendent, in terms of

Kṛṣṇa's descent body: for my three commentators, speaking about Kṛṣṇa's descent body gives a way of speaking of/pointing to that which transcends language.

Śaṅkara uses the phrase *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* to refer to both Kṛṣṇa as the Lord *and* the transcendent *brahman* throughout his works, including his *Gītābhāṣya*.⁸ This key phrase, found in Śaṅkara's introduction and 4.6, is used to differentiate Kṛṣṇa's descent body from ordinary *guṇic* human bodies. As we saw in Chapter 3 (section 3.3.1), Śaṅkara uses the term *nirguṇa* in conjunction with Kṛṣṇa being *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* (7.13). In 9.11, Śaṅkara uses *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta* to refer to *nirguṇa brahman*, Kṛṣṇa as cosmic Lord, *and* Kṛṣṇa's descent body. This shows that who Kṛṣṇa is – at all levels – is grounded in him being the transcendent *brahman*. Further to this, Śaṅkara also interprets the self as acting as the 'linguistic signifier' that renders inquiry possible, as has been pointed out by Ram-Prasad.⁹ Ram-Prasad also refers to this as the 'mapping of self on self'.¹⁰ I have argued that there is a further pedagogical layer to Śaṅkara's interpretation of the self acting as 'linguistic signifier' here: Kṛṣṇa's self-declarations, for Śaṅkara, are part of a progressive teaching on divine agency, that is modelled to Arjuna. I have shown how these self-declarations model the knowledge Arjuna can progressively work towards attaining. Specifically, these self-declarations model who Arjuna *can become*, by saying he 'is set on' a path (such as in 7.18).

As we saw in Chapter 4 (sections 4.1.2 and 4.2.1.2), Kṛṣṇa's *śuddha-sattvic* body, for Śrīdhara, is not a *guṇic* body as such; *śuddha-sattva* is that which is closest in nature to the transcendent but can still be spoken of. Although Śrīdhara does refer to Kṛṣṇa's body as a *sattvic* body in his *Subodhinī*, it always has the qualifier *śuddha* (pure) or *viśuddha* (very pure). The same phrase is used in every single reference to Kṛṣṇa's body in Śrīdhara's commentary. Śrīdhara also refers to Kṛṣṇa as the 'self of all' when linking him to being the vehicle for grace in his specific bodily descent form (6.30 and 11.47). For Śrīdhara, understanding the characteristic of Kṛṣṇa's descent body is closely tied to being able to speak about it. The specific phrase *śuddha-sattva* is linked to speaking about the transcendent, and this is shown by Śrīdhara through his use of the two key Advaita Vedāntin technical exegetical terms: *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* (13.4). Just as the essential

⁸ Cf Chapter 3, section 3.2.3 n.56.

⁹ Ram-Prasad, *Divine Self*, p.9.

¹⁰ p.9.

nature of *brahman* is made directly known through its **essential characteristics** (*svarūpalakṣaṇa*), so the essential nature of Kṛṣṇa’s descent body is made known through the definition of his manifest form as *śuddha-sattva*. In turn, the one who knows Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-svarūpa* gains liberation (15.7), implying that the essential nature of Kṛṣṇa’s descent body provides the clue to his essential nature as the transcendent itself.

Moreover, the qualifier *śuddha* (or even *viśuddha*) shows the stretching, or ‘purifying’ of language beyond normal use. For Śrīdhara, both the individual self and Kṛṣṇa being who they are in their most pure way is what gives the language to talk of the identity statement at the heart of Advaita Vedānta: *tat tvam asi*. Further, as source of all Kṛṣṇa embodies the *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* (incidental or extrinsic characteristic) of *brahman* as originator. This points to, and enables us to speak of, *brahman’s svarūpalakṣaṇa* as the real, the consciousness which is the basis for asserting ‘you are that’. Sheridan has argued that, in his commentary on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.1.1, Śrīdhara uses the Advaita Vedāntin distinction between *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* to interpret the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in a *viśiṣṭādvaitin* or *bhedābhedin* way.¹¹ However, I have argued that these two key technical terms are used by Śrīdhara, in his *Subodhinī*, to relate the language of *śuddha-sattva* back to *nirguṇa brahman*, and that this is a key move Śrīdhara uses in order to ground his interpretation of the person of Kṛṣṇa in Advaita Vedānta. While Okita and Sheridan have argued that Śrīdhara lies somewhere between Advaita Vedānta and *bhedābheda*,¹² I argue that in his *Subodhinī* Śrīdhara uses key Advaita Vedāntin technical terms rather precisely to ground his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy in Advaita Vedānta. Moreover, although I have shown that Śrīdhara does not use the term *śakti* in his *Subodhinī* in precisely the same sense as Citsukha (as referring to the function of words themselves), he *does* seek to show how we can stretch language to point to that which is beyond: *nirguṇa brahman*.

13.4 is also a significant verse for Madhusūdana, who follows Śrīdhara’s approach (and much of his wording) in his commentary. This is the key verse where Śrīdhara introduces the terms *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṭasthalakṣaṇa* together. As I demonstrated in Chapter 5 (section 5.4), in 13.4 Madhusūdana differentiates between what we may call direct and indirect language, which proves key to his interpretation. For Madhusūdana, *brahman* is

¹¹ Sheridan, ‘Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’, p.55.

¹² Okita, *Hindu Theology*, p.123; Sheridan, ‘Śrīdhara and his Commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’, p.58.

made known *directly* through the *svarūpalakṣaṇa* (essential characteristics) spoken of in Upaniṣadic sentences such as “*brahman* is reality, consciousness, infinite”; *brahman* is made known *indirectly*, its existence *indicated* by the *taṣṭhalakṣaṇa* (extrinsic characteristics) spoken of in passages on origination etc. It is both direct and indirect language (using *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *taṣṭhalakṣaṇa*) that are key to relating Kṛṣṇa’s descent body to the transcendent *brahman*. We know that, in the *Advaita-siddhi*, Madhusūdana adopts Citsukha’s notion of *akhaṇḍārtha*,¹³ and applies this to *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma* (‘*brahman* is reality, consciousness, infinite’). In *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* 13.4, Madhusūdana also refers to the context in which *tat tvam asi* is taught. As demonstrated in Chapter 5 (section 5.4), for both *satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ brahma* and *tat tvam asi*, the *akhaṇḍārtha* is *brahman* as self, that which is beyond. The single substantive referred to by both sentences at a linguistic and ontological level is *nirguṇa brahman*, who is none other than Kṛṣṇa.

6.4.2.3 – ‘Getting to’ the transcendent

Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana use various thematic models to conceptualise the ‘stripping away’ of individuation/characteristics needed for Arjuna to realise his true identity as non-dual self. The key point to bear in mind for each commentator is that Kṛṣṇa delivers his teaching to Arjuna from within the conventional world. Each commentator lays out this ‘stripping away’ in line with his key focus: for Śaṅkara, it is conceptualised as starting with the removal of attachment; for Śrīdhara it is conceptualised as the process of purifying the mind; for Madhusūdana it is conceptualised as gradual progression towards the realisation of minimal selfhood.

As we saw in Chapter 3 (section 3.2.1), it is the ‘individuatedness’ of a person that constitutes problematic, attached agency in Śaṅkara’s *Gītābhāṣya*. By contrast, Śaṅkara says that Kṛṣṇa, being the ‘self of all’, is *nirguṇa*. Kṛṣṇa’s knowledge as the Lord is grounded in him being *nirguṇa brahman*¹⁴ – as in 7.13 (above), where we saw that Śaṅkara uses the term *nirguṇa* in conjunction with Kṛṣṇa being *nitya-śuddha-buddha-mukta*.¹⁵ ‘Getting to’ *nirguṇa brahman*, for Śaṅkara, involves starting out by showing Arjuna how

¹³ Cf Chapter 4, section 4.1.3 and Chapter 5, section 5.4.

¹⁴ Cf Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.

¹⁵ Cf Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.

he can become detached, and Śaṅkara frames this around agency. The key thing Arjuna must understand is that he is none other than the self (which is *nirguṇa brahman*), and it is Kṛṣṇa who provides him with the understanding for *nirguṇa brahman*, by modelling the stripping away of agency. For Śaṅkara, Kṛṣṇa as divine agent best models the self as none other than *nirguṇa brahman* in narrative form,¹⁶ making it narratively easier to ‘get to’ *brahman*. I have also demonstrated how Kṛṣṇa’s divine agency is key to Śaṅkara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy on a further level: Upaniṣadic teachers are unable to give their teaching from within the context of the conventional world in being the Lord and *nirguṇa brahman* as, while in the conventional world, are not divine. Kṛṣṇa as *nirguṇa brahman* models the *brahman=ātman* equation more clearly than the Upaniṣadic teacher who can model the unattached self, but not *brahman=ātman* narratively for a pupil (see Chapter 3, section 3.4.2). As we saw in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.1.2), Malkovsky has argued that personalism and divine grace are indispensable for Śaṅkara in leading to non-dual realisation. Malkovsky goes as far as to argue that Śaṅkara introduces references to Kṛṣṇa’s grace where the root text does not require it. Although I have argued that the person of Kṛṣṇa is crucial in showing Arjuna how to ‘get to’ *brahman*, Kṛṣṇa’s teaching is always ultimately grounded in Kṛṣṇa at the level of being *nirguṇa brahman*, which is Śaṅkara’s primary concern. I also argue that, while grace is crucial for Śaṅkara (as demonstrated in 11.47 and 18.73), it is part of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, where *nirguṇa brahman* is the ultimate goal.

In Chapter 4 I demonstrated that, as an Advaitin, Śrīdhara too identifies the supreme *brahman* as being without attributes, for which his preferred term is *nirviśeṣa* (13.12; 13.27), although he does directly use the term *nirguṇa* quoted from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*.¹⁷ For Śrīdhara, the key thing Arjuna must understand is that he is none other than the self – Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna this by using the theme of purification which strips away unwanted qualities. I have demonstrated that, in the *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara equates ‘becoming *brahman*’ with the devotee developing a *sāttvika* understanding (18.51), free from taints. However, the way in which the devotee does this and so comes closer to his true identity is through emulating Kṛṣṇa in his purest, *sattvic* body. Kṛṣṇa’s body thus has a key function, as it is through this body that Kṛṣṇa models for and provides Arjuna with the understanding required for Advaitin realisation. Moreover, as we saw above, in the *Subodhinī*, Śrīdhara

¹⁶ Cf Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.

¹⁷ For Śrīdhara’s use of these terms see Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.1.

shows how language can be ‘stretched’ to point beyond the realm of the *guṇas* to that which is beyond.¹⁸ This theme of purification, as I argued in Chapter 4, applies on two levels – first, to a method of purifying the mind, as modelled by Kṛṣṇa; second, to the process of understanding language through purification, i.e. understanding the referent of *tvam*. Put simply, to reach the transcendent, both the terms of Upaniṣadic *mahāvākyas* and the mind-body of Arjuna are to be purified.

For Madhusūdana, Arjuna’s progression towards the transcendent is perhaps most evident on a structural level. Once we are taken through the progression of *tvam* (‘you’) in chapters 1-6, Madhusūdana reveals the many layers of who Kṛṣṇa is in 7-12, before addressing *tat tvam asi* in 13-18. This progression begins with Kṛṣṇa as descent manifestation of *saguṇa brahman*, to Kṛṣṇa as witness, and finally as *nirguṇa brahman*. Madhusūdana introduces the specific term *nirguṇa* beyond his glosses on *Gītā* verses that use the term (e.g. 7.29, 8.5) (see Chapter 5, section 5.3.5). Devotees who have received Kṛṣṇa’s grace are able to attain liberation through the Upaniṣadic sentence, *tat tvam asi*, as the sentence is self-manifesting (12.6-7). I have argued that devotees are able to attain liberation, for Madhusūdana, without following the standard path to *nirguṇa brahman*. In Arjuna’s case specifically, Madhusūdana clearly shows how Kṛṣṇa as person provides Arjuna with the understanding for *nirguṇa brahman*, by modelling minimal selfhood, and showing how to progress to this point. It is the ‘stripping away’ of individuation/characteristics that is necessary for Arjuna to realise minimal selfhood. In 7.29, as we saw in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.2), Madhusūdana makes it clear that Kṛṣṇa’s personhood is central to his interpretation of *tat*, and the development of *tvam*. It is thus Kṛṣṇa as *saguṇa brahman* that enables Arjuna as devotee to focus on Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa’s personhood is the key tool which leads the devotee of *saguṇa brahman* to the same result as the follower of *nirguṇa brahman*.

6.5 – Understanding pedagogical issues/pedagogy

6.5.1 – Layers/levels of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy

For each commentator, Kṛṣṇa functions as pedagogue on two levels: i) as manifest human in his descent form, and ii) as cosmic Lord. I have argued that it is on the level of Kṛṣṇa as

¹⁸ Cf Chapter 4, section 4.3.3.

manifest human in his descent form that my three commentators interpret Kṛṣṇa's pedagogy in terms of their key concepts of agency, body and personhood. Kṛṣṇa's agency, body and personhood – at the level of Kṛṣṇa being manifest human – act not only as hermeneutical keys, but as **pedagogical keys** for accessing an understanding of Kṛṣṇa both as cosmic Lord and *nirguṇa brahman*.

6.5.2 – Arjuna as primary subject

By looking at Arjuna, we are offered a different lens for approaching the issue of how significant Kṛṣṇa is in these Advaitin commentaries. For each commentator, Arjuna is made the primary subject of the teaching – initially as a *kṣatriya* who is eligible for *karma-yoga*. Our first clue that Arjuna is the primary subject is that he is specifically attached to the drowning metaphor, by each commentator: for Śaṅkara, Arjuna is drowning as he is confused about *dharma*; for Śrīdhara, Arjuna is drowning because he has not learnt to discriminate between the self and the body; for Madhusūdana, Arjuna is drowning because he has not learnt what 'proper/appropriate' behaviour is, i.e. how to be a 'you'.

We saw, in Chapter 3 (section 3.2.2), that at the beginning of his *Gītābhāṣya*, Śaṅkara lays the ground for Arjuna to work progressively towards *niḥśreyasa* (the highest good) by initially following the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*. Specifically, in 14.26, *both* the fourth stage renouncer *and* Arjuna as a *karma-yogin* are eligible to become fit for 'becoming *brahman*' (*brahma-bhūya*), which Śaṅkara glosses as 'liberation, through one-pointed devotion'. Although Śaṅkara of course speaks of liberation for the *brahmin* renouncer, I have shown how he also clearly addresses Arjuna, who is given a different route. Similarly, as we saw in Chapter 4 (section 4.2.3.2), in his *Subodhinī* 3.3, Śrīdhara explains the twofold path (of *karma-* and *jñāna-yoga*) in terms of stages (*bhūmi*) for those of pure and impure minds, respectively. By this, Arjuna who is addressed as eligible for *karma* due to his mind currently being impure, is given a place. The *Subodhinī*'s focus on purification as a process indicates that Arjuna is Śrīdhara's primary focus. I also demonstrated, in Chapter 5, how Madhusūdana in his *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* aligns Arjuna at various points of the text with various routes to liberation. I have argued that the *Gītā*'s vocative addresses to Arjuna are central to Madhusūdana's mapping of these routes. As I argued in Chapter 5 (sections 5.1.2 and 5.3.3), disagreeing with Nelson who sees Madhusūdana's *Gītā* commentary as a text

specifically aimed at Advaitin renunciators,¹⁹ Arjuna is explicitly *not* addressed as an Advaitin renouncer. Rather, I have shown that Madhusūdana clearly focuses on Arjuna to offer a direct path to liberation for non-renouncer *bhaktas*.

6.5.3 – Kṛṣṇa’s progressive teaching and Arjuna’s progressive learning

I have argued that the progression of the narrative structure of the *Gītā* as a root text is used consciously by my three commentators to underpin their interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy, through which the pupil who seeks liberation is drawn towards full understanding. Both Kṛṣṇa’s teaching and Arjuna’s learning are progressive. My three commentators claim to be Advaita Vedāntins, with a focus on knowledge/realisation (*jñāna*) of *nirguṇa brahman*. The fact that they each try to write Advaitin commentaries of different kinds on a text which has such a strong narrative insistence on a *kṣatriya* about to go into battle highlights their key dilemma. I argue that my commentators can either try to side-step this issue, or turn it into an opportunity to address new audiences not only comprised of *brahmin* renunciators. All three commentators emphasise who Arjuna *can become*, by outlining the sort of progress he can make. In addition to this, the focus is also on who Arjuna can learn about in the third person (as the commentaries are not *only* for *kṣatriyas* and non-renunciators).

As Arjuna progresses through Śaṅkara’s commentary, his transition from problematic (individuated) agency to detached (de-individuated) agency progresses with the narrative. Arjuna begins as a misidentified person. In 2.10, where Arjuna’s delusion is first extensively commented on along with his drowning, Śaṅkara signposts forward to chapters 5 and 18, demonstrating that Arjuna’s path towards liberation is to be laid down as the commentary progresses. There is, in the *Gītābhāṣya*, a clear, unfolding path for Arjuna which is learnt through Kṛṣṇa modelling his divine agency. This demonstrates how thinking about agency in a conventional sense can help Arjuna progress towards detached agency and (in a future life) become a *jīvanmukta*. Through this progressive pedagogy, Śaṅkara retains *jñāna* as his priority and avoids *jñānakarmasamuccaya*.

¹⁹ Nelson, ‘Madhusūdana Sarasvatī on the “Hidden Meaning”’, p.83.

Arjuna’s learning is also framed progressively in the *Subodhinī*. Śrīdhara shows how Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna how he can purify his mind, to gain a ‘purified’ understanding of the self, which will eventually become central to his progression as a true *bhakta* of Kṛṣṇa. *Bhakti* is key to Kṛṣṇa’s teaching by progression, both as a method and as culmination (18.56) and is therefore fundamentally tied to both teaching and learning in stages for Śrīdhara. Śrīdhara indicates that liberation is attained through devotion to Kṛṣṇa, which forms part of a sequential progression of stages leading to this goal.²⁰ I have argued that the notion of purification is integral to Śrīdhara’s interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s method of pedagogy, in terms of teaching by progression/sequence (as demonstrated in 5.7, 6.25 and 13.24). Śrīdhara also weaves into the *Subodhinī* a developing understanding of the way language functions to delineate the essential (*svarūpa-*) characteristics of a series of terms as his commentary. We are taken through definitions of the *sthithaprajña*, *yoga*, Kṛṣṇa’s *śuddha-sattvic* body, until we reach *nirguṇa brahman*. I have also argued that *bhakti* is central to Kṛṣṇa’s teaching via progression: the praise verses at the beginning and end of each chapter of the *Subodhinī* flag the importance of *bhakti* as progressive, and indicate a progressive, holistic way through the *Gītā*, which is emphasised right at the end in 18.78. I argue that, for Śrīdhara, *bhakti* is a method and culmination of the process started with mental purification.

The structuring of Madhusūdana’s commentary around *tat tvam asi* indicates a clear notion of progression in terms of his interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy and Arjuna’s learning. By using personhood not only as hermeneutical, but as pedagogical key, we learn how Madhusūdana’s structuring of his commentary around *tat tvam asi* is fundamentally linked with *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*. In chapters 1-6, which are *karma*-oriented, Arjuna learns who he *can become* once he realises the true meaning of *tvam*. In chapters 7-12, which are *bhakti*-oriented, Kṛṣṇa as a person, as a manifestation of *saguṇa brahman*, functions by revealing how Arjuna can progress towards *tat tvam asi* by knowing who *tat* really is. In chapters 13-18, which are *jñāna*-oriented, Arjuna is finally able to understand *tat tvam asi* by direct realisation. The shift towards *bhakti* beginning in chapter 7 indicates this notion of progression clearly. This notion of progression is framed in terms of Arjuna’s understanding of ‘you’ as fundamentally tied to Kṛṣṇa’s unfolding method of teaching and modelling. For Madhusūdana, Arjuna is taught progressively how he can move from the ‘you’ that is stuck

²⁰ Liberation by the progression of practice is not to be confused by *kramamukti* in the technical sense of ‘liberation in stages’.

in *saṃsāra*, to the *dharmic* ‘you’, to *yogin*, to *jīvanmukta*, then to witness. This is set up right from the start in 2.11, where Madhusūdana refers to Arjuna’s delusion as both personal to him as a *kṣatriya*, and representative of that of ‘the everyday activity of all beings’. In chapters 1-6, which are *karma*-oriented in Madhusūdana’s interpretation, ‘you’ is clearly targeted and defined progressively: previous understandings of ‘you’ are gradually removed for Arjuna.

6.5.4 – Arjuna and liberation

Although each commentator demonstrates that Arjuna’s learning is progressive, this is to different ends. For Śaṅkara, Arjuna can indeed progress *towards niḥśreyasa* by following the path of *pravṛtti-dharma*, but the implication is that he cannot become liberated in his *current* life. For Śrīdhara, Arjuna requires purification, and appears to be eligible to become liberated in his current life, providing he is a *Kṛṣṇa-bhakta*. For Madhusūdana, Arjuna is initially aligned with being a *yoga-bhraṣṭa* in chapter 6, where it is indicated that he can become a *jīvanmukta* in a future life. However, later in his commentary, Madhusūdana aligns Arjuna as *kṣatriya* with being eligible for liberation in his current life, providing he receives Kṛṣṇa’s grace.

Each commentator uses a key strategy to deal with the dilemma of Arjuna in the root text, and how he can still become liberated without being an Advaitin renouncer. For Śaṅkara, it is decoding figurative language; for Śrīdhara, it is seeing Arjuna as a *Kṛṣṇa-bhakta*; for Madhusūdana, it is presenting Arjuna as the recipient of Kṛṣṇa’s grace.

I have argued that, for Śaṅkara, Arjuna as a man of action and *kṣatriya*, can become a *jīvanmukta* (Śaṅkara’s gloss on ‘a *yogin* whose mind is pacified’ in 6.27) but only in a future life, once he has worked gradually towards liberation through progression of practice. For Śaṅkara, the path of action (*pravṛtti-dharma*), for which Arjuna as a *kṣatriya* is qualified, cannot itself yield *niḥśreyasa*. The key strategy Śaṅkara uses to ‘get around’ the problem of Arjuna being a *kṣatriya* is figurative language. In chapter 6, Śaṅkara reads the *Gītā* as using the terms “*sannyāsin*” and “*yogin*” in both a primary/literal and a secondary/figurative sense. Only a formal renouncer can literally be a *sannyāsin* or a *yogin* in Śaṅkara’s view. So, he holds, when Kṛṣṇa refers to the man of action as a *sannyāsin* and *yogin*, he must be speaking figuratively. The figurative sense sets apart the man of action

who does renounce attachment to results from the man of action who does not. Arjuna, although not an actual renouncer, is referred to figuratively as a *sannyāsin* and *yogin* as he does renounce results (also in 13.2). Śaṅkara construes the *Gītā* as transitioning from speaking about the figurative *yogin* to discussing the ‘real renouncer’ in 6.4. At the end of the chapter, in 6.46, Śaṅkara reads the *Gītā*’s vocative address to Arjuna as showing that he *can* become a *yogin* of this kind (whose mind is pacified). Chapter 13 is also key for Śaṅkara: from 13.14 onwards, he makes several slippages, moving between talking about the real renouncer and talking about the man of action who renounces actions in a ‘figurative sense’. This is a key strategy that allows Śaṅkara to show how Arjuna, by acting in a detached way, with one-pointed devotion, can progress to knowing who Kṛṣṇa really is, and eventually attain liberation in a future rebirth as a *brahmin* renouncer, by following Kṛṣṇa and the path of *pravṛtti-dharma* now (11.54 and 18.66).

In the *Subodhinī*, although there are very few explicit mentions of *when* Arjuna can attain liberation, Śrīdhara does indicate in several key places that Arjuna *can* attain liberation in his current life, providing he is a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. This is a key strategic move. Although Śrīdhara also only uses the term *jīvanmukta* once (in 6.28), it is the *yogin* who has realised *brahman* who is a *jīvanmukta*. The placing of this reference is crucial, as it is in 6.30 that Śrīdhara’s Kṛṣṇa says he takes on a body to be a specific vehicle for grace, which enables the *yogin* to realise *brahman*. As we saw in Chapter 4, there are several further verses where Śrīdhara indicates that Arjuna can become liberated in his current life, including 15.7, 18.51, 18.53 and 18.78.²¹ As we saw in Chapter 1 (section 1.4.2.1), both Chakravarti and Sukla have argued that Śrīdhara’s primary focus was on *bhakti*. However, I have shown how, while *bhakti* may be both method and culmination of a process, this is part of providing a progressive path for Arjuna, i.e. the purification of *tvam*. For Śrīdhara, the end is still *nirguṇa brahman* (13.12-14),²² and *bhakti* is both means and end for the purpose of including Arjuna. *Bhakti*, I argue, is presented in the *Subodhinī* in order for Śrīdhara to show how his devotional interpretation is grounded in *nirguṇa brahman*, i.e. as an Advaita Vedāntin interpretation.

²¹ For an explanation of these verses, see Chapter 4, section 4.2.3.2.

²² See Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.1.

Madhusūdana’s strategy is to present Arjuna as the recipient of Kṛṣṇa’s grace. Although, by the end of the text, Arjuna is told he *can* progress to liberation in his current life, Madhusūdana explicitly states in chapters 1-6 that Arjuna *cannot* yet become a *jīvanmukta*. 6.46-47 is key for Madhusūdana, who shows how Arjuna, addressed as a *yoga-bhraṣṭa*, may become eligible to become a *yogin* of the highest kind – that is, a *jīvanmukta* who practises *tattvajñāna*, *manonāśa* and *vāsanākṣāya* together. Yet at this early point in the text, the emphasis is that this cannot happen in Arjuna’s current life. As such, Madhusūdana effectively ‘maps’ Arjuna’s progress, up to a point, in terms of the *yoga* stages, indicating that he cannot attain the seventh and final stage of exemplifying minimal selfhood in his current life, due to *prārabdha-karma*. It is not until later in his commentary that Madhusūdana makes the move to arguing that Arjuna *can* become liberated in his current life. In 18.65-8, Madhusūdana allows the option for Arjuna, as a *yoga-bhraṣṭa*, to be liberated in his current life through Kṛṣṇa’s grace. This is reiterated in 18.66. *Bhakti* is demonstrated to be key to Arjuna’s progression towards *tvam*/the realisation of minimal selfhood, as it is from chapters 7-12 (where the focus is on *bhakti*) onwards that Arjuna is given the option of being liberated in his current life. *Bhakti*, for Madhusūdana, thus ‘stretches’ both ways: back to *karma*, and forward to *jñāna*. Arjuna’s understanding of *tvam* is precisely *tattvajñāna* – knowledge of the reality, ‘you are that’. However, in terms of the minimal selfhood of the stage 7 *jīvanmukta* (in *Gītāgūḍhārthadīpikā* chapter 6), that *yogic bhūmi* is now replaced by Kṛṣṇa’s grace being its ‘guarantor’ in chapter 18.

6.6 – Understanding *bhakti* within the Advaita Vedāntin tradition

The question of how the transcendent relates to the human is a major question in Indian philosophy and occurs across traditions. The so-called ‘divide’ between *bhakti* and non-dualism has been a key focal point in the secondary literature on Advaita Vedāntin *Gītā* commentaries. The central question of this thesis is rooted in this very divide. By focusing on Kṛṣṇa’s person and pedagogy in the *Gītā* commentaries of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, I have shown that each commentator weaves *bhakti* into their Advaita Vedāntin approach in various ways. Here, I locate the key themes that this thesis has addressed, and I consider the wider implications of the findings of this thesis for understanding *bhakti* in relation to Advaita Vedānta more generally.

The key themes this thesis has explored are i) divine embodiment, ii) ‘speaking of’ the transcendent, and iii) teacher-pupil relationships. Firstly, the focus of this thesis on the **person** of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* commentaries of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana has centered around the theme of divine embodiment. Each commentator seeks to show how the transcendent can take human form. Within the theme of divine embodiment, key questions that arise in these three commentaries include: what does it mean to talk about a ‘body’ for the transcendent? How is the transcendent able to act in the world? What does it mean for the transcendent to act in the world? Directly related to the theme of divine embodiment is also the question of how Kṛṣṇa’s ‘body’ relates to ordinary human bodies. Looking at our commentators’ interpretations of the person of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* urges us to consider the difference between ordinary human bodies, and a divine ‘body’ that looks like a human body. Looking specifically at the concepts of agency, body and personhood has also highlighted how the transcendent-become-manifest may be understood to function in the world.

Secondly, this thesis has centered around the theme of the role and function of **language** – in other words, how we can ‘speak of’ the transcendent. One of the fundamental questions my commentators must address is how we can speak of the transcendent who is beyond/without qualities, using everyday terms. As I have shown, Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana each have a specific set of strategies to deal with the issue of relating embodiment to the transcendent via conventional language. These strategies include: adding qualifiers, using figurative language, using definitions to remove misconceptions, and taking ordinary language and showing how it can be ‘stretched’ to point to that which is beyond. An overarching question linked to this key theme is the relation between language used to describe the divine-become-manifest, and language used to describe the transcendent. By looking at Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana in particular, I have explored some of the ways in which language can point to that which is ‘beyond’ words.

Finally, looking closely at the person of Kṛṣṇa has been central to considering another key theme in this thesis: the nature and function of teacher-pupil relationships. The relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna has been at the forefront of my analysis. To look at the way in which this sort of teacher-pupil relationship functions in Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana’s commentaries, I have pinpointed the various layers or levels of pedagogy at play. Distinguishing between the two key layers of pedagogy I have addressed and adding

a third²³ – first, the layer of Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna in the *Gītā*; second, the commentators’ interpretations of Kṛṣṇa teaching Arjuna in the *Gītā*; and, thirdly, the commentators’ own forms of pedagogy – has provided the framework for my analysis of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana’s interpretations of Kṛṣṇa. In addition to this, taking into consideration the progression in the *Gītā* as a root text has been key to uncovering the **progressive pedagogy** in my commentators’ particular interpretations of the *Gītā*. In this thesis, we have seen that my commentators deploy various tactics to show that their pedagogy is progressive, including but not limited to: showing how the transcendent-become-manifest models for the pupil, acts as exemplar, addresses the pupil (in our case, Arjuna) directly or implicitly, and shows who the pupil can learn about in the third person. It is also the narrative dialogue of the *Gītā* itself that is key to my commentators’ interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. The story of the *Gītā* unfolding through a conversation between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna offers my commentators a specific context for delivering their interpretations of Kṛṣṇa’s teaching – that is, the context of the conventional world. In highlighting this, my thesis has demonstrated how my commentators’ particular audiences are addressed through a progressively unfolding narrative dialogue between teacher and pupil.

This thesis has demonstrated how Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana all take an analogy already in the *Gītā* itself – drowning in the ocean of rebirth – and apply it to Arjuna directly. My method of close reading the Sanskrit has not only involved translating passages from the commentaries themselves, but has required looking closely at the way in which these commentaries are structured, including the importance of introductions and praise verses. My hermeneutical and pedagogical keys of agency, body and personhood, drawn from the commentators’ own questions, were located in part from a close analysis of the structure of each commentary in relation to the *Gītā* as a root text. From this, I have suggested ways in which we might read this sort of commentarial text, including asking how a commentator builds a coherent reading and pinpointing the key hermeneutical strategies they use to build a systematic reading.

²³ A third level of pedagogy would be each commentator’s own pedagogy. Hirst has argued convincingly that Śaṅkara’s mode of commenting is in itself a form of pedagogy and that this can be seen across his corpus (*Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching*, pp.8-10). To consider the wider issues of how Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana build a pedagogy one would need to look across their works as Hirst has done for Śaṅkara. This thesis is a key building block for further work on the commentators’ own pedagogy.

Overall, by looking at Arjuna’s drowning as a fundamental pedagogical device, this thesis has offered a study of Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana’s interpretations of Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* that is anchored in an analysis of the person of Kṛṣṇa. All three commentators, by introducing Arjuna as ‘drowning in the ocean of grief and delusion’ at the beginning of their commentaries, turn Kṛṣṇa’s presence in the *Gītā* into an opportunity to incorporate *bhakti* into their Advaita Vedāntin interpretative frameworks. This indicates a clear link between the commentators’ soteriology of Arjuna’s rescue and their interpretation of Kṛṣṇa’s pedagogy. By drawing attention to the person and pedagogy of Kṛṣṇa in these three Advaita Vedāntin *Gītā* commentaries, I have shown how each commentator can be understood in relation to the other two.

The key findings of this thesis contribute to a new understanding of the relationship between non-dualism and devotionalism in the Advaita Vedāntin tradition. The *Bhagavad-gītā* is a text that allows Śaṅkara, Śrīdhara and Madhusūdana, as Advaita Vedāntin commentators, to address new audiences that would otherwise not be explicitly addressed in their other works. The scholarship on Advaita Vedāntin *Gītā* commentaries to date has largely focused on the key issue of what has been seen to be a ‘divide’ between non-dualism and devotionalism. This thesis, placing the person of Kṛṣṇa at the forefront of its analysis, has demonstrated a new way of looking at devotionalism within the Advaita Vedāntin tradition.

O son of Pārtha, for those whose minds are fixed on me, I soon become
the rescuer from the ocean of death and rebirth.

तेषामहं समुद्धर्ता मृत्युसंसारसागरात् ।
भवामि न चिरात्पार्थ मय्यावेशितचेतसाम् ॥

Bhagavad-gītā 12.7

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