



Katha Upanishad

कठ उपनिषद् or कठोपनिषद्

*Representation. Transcendence.
The cinematography of Ashish Avikunthak.*

Amrit Gangar

Upanishads and the Artist

उपनिषद् एवम् कलाकार

Strange as it might seem, whenever I think of the Upanishads, I think of the painter Akbar Padamsee. In a long conversation with him in 2004 at his Prabhādevi (Mumbai) house, Akbar talked about the Upanishads (उपनिषद्) very profoundly; their influence on his worldview and also on his artistic practice, and their interpretation by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. The first question Akbar asked me was about the nature of my approach to interview him and when I said it was much about the Upanishads and his art, his elegant smile suggested that he was pleased with my answer. The entire conversation was in Gujarati, peppered with his Sanskrit. Deconstructing the word Upanishad (or Upanisad), Akbar broadly explained its meaning to me: *Up*(pronounced as ōōp) means near, *ni* means to move forward and *shad* means to sit down, which cumulatively would mean that you should have the company of such people (rishis and savants) who could take you deep into the understanding of life. About *Ishopanishad* (*Isopanishad*), Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Even if all our scriptures were to perish, one mantra of the *Ishopanishad* is enough to declare the essence of Hinduism, but even that one verse will be of no avail if there is no one to live it."¹

Schopenhauer had read the Latin translation of the Upanishads and mentions them in his main work *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), as well as in his *Parerga and Paralipomena* (1851). He found his own philosophy in accord with the Upanishads. Interestingly, the founder of the Analytical Psychology, Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) uses the term 'Self' in his book *Psychological Types* (1921); the self is our life's goal, he said. Later Jung himself said that he had chosen the term 'Self' keeping in mind the Upanishads in particular, in the sense of 'Self' or *ātman* becoming a unifying force, which is beyond time and individuality. Etymologically, as the 19th century Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English lexicon explains the term Upanishad as 'setting to rest ignorance by revealing the knowledge of the supreme spirit; the mystery which underlies or rests underneath the external system of things.' Attached to the *Brahmanas*, the Upanishads, as this lexicon notes, are a class of philosophical writings (more than a hundred in number) and they aim at the exposition of the secret meaning of the Vedas, and they are regarded as the source of the *Vedānta* and *Sāmkhya* philosophies. *Sāmkhya* (सांख्य) is one of the six schools of classical Indian philosophy. Said to have been founded by the sage Kapila, the *Sāmkhya* school is dualistic and atheistic.

Dvaita. Advaita. Purusha.

Prakriti.

द्वैत. अद्वैत. पुरुष. प्रकृति.

Generally regarded as one of the oldest philosophical systems in India, the *Sāmkhya* regards the universe as consisting of two realities: *Purusha* (consciousness) and *Prakriti* (phenomenal realm of matter). Connecting this view with the broader Upanishadic views could lead to a very complex web of discussion around the mysteries of existence - of life and death. As Akbar Padamsee talked further he, in a way, suggested such complexity: the Upanishads recognized the phenomenon of our sensual ability to grasp a representation of the world and this representation holds itself like a veil between the subject and the hidden world of timeless reality, and it is this veil our mystics called *māyā*. Before the advent of Sankara in the 8th century AD, there was a long tradition of philosophical deliberations in India. Sankara's interpretation of the transcendent-self as Brahman or *atman-brahman* is reflected in the culmination of the Upanishadic philosophy of the identity of *atman* and Brahman, along with its logical corollary, the doctrine of *māyā*.²

"It was through Schopenhauer that I first knew about the Upanishads and when I read him for the first time, my God!" Akbar told me.

He also talked about dvaita (द्वैत, dual) and the advaita (अद्वैत, non-dual).

"We all play around within the *dvaita*; we paint within the idea of *dvaita*. You live within *dvaita*, too. We have to be in *dvaita*. But all our ambitions are towards *advaita*. In other words, you have to put your one foot in the *dvaita*, while another in *advaita*. If you enter the *advaita* completely, you will be dissolved. You will lose your material (स्थूल) existence. You won't even need food to survive," said Akbar.³ And then Akbar talked very interestingly about Rāmkrishna Paramhamsa and Ramana Maharishi and his own artistic engagement and practice. He always keeps the Upanishad books with him. In a context, he quotes a stanza from the Bhagwad Gita न कृतत्वं न कर्माणि लोकस्य सृजति प्रभुः। न, which in nutshell, would suggest that you should not run after the results of your actions, just follow your *svabhāva*, your own state.⁴

Svabhāva and Ashish Avikunthak

स्वभाव एवम् आशिष अविकुन्ठक

It is precisely this *svabhāva* aspect that attracts me to Ashish Avikunthak's artistic engagement over the years, of which I am largely familiar with. I personally believe that *svabhāva* plays a स्वनियोगमशून्यं कुरु। स्वभावः key-role in the process of any artistic creation. स्व, *sva* as a pronoun would mean one's own, belonging to oneself. It has the quality of being. It often serves as a reflexive pronoun; *svabhāva* would mean one's own state, an essential or inherent property, natural constitution or innate disposition.

न कृतत्वं न कर्माणि लोकस्य सृजति प्रभुः। न
I would like to include it within अन्तःप्रजा, intuition. भावः is being or existing, It also signifies a sense of contemplation.⁵ The word, सातत्य *sātatyā* has a sense of continuity or continuum. समयः *samaya* suggests time in general; it would also mean 'coming together'. I believe that both *svabhāva* and *samaya* flow in continuum and that *samaya* also has its *sva-bhāva*, its own state and *pra-bhāva*, impression or impact.

For Avikunthak, cinematography is a *temporal* art, more than the *visual*, which significantly is evident in his oeuvre, sharpening up in *Katha Upanishad* (*Katha* follows Bengali phonetics; it is *Katha Upanishad* and as a compound

word, *Kathopanishad*) precursor to his 102-minute single-shot film *Rati Chakravyuha* (2013) nearing completion.

In a certain sense, Avikunthak does look at filmmaking as 'sculpting in time' as Andrei Tarkovsky puts it. His foray into filmmaking was directly an attempt at playing with time – all the four films in *Et cetera* (1998) are directly an attempt at engaging with real time, the fact that they are single shot, unedited films. Why did he choose to grapple with *Katha Upanishad* (*Kathopanishad*) so resolutely?⁶

The story goes back to his younger days at the Kolkata-based Jesuit school, which had a multi-religious leadership training programme, including social work. At this time, he had volunteered to work for about two years at Nirmal Hridaya, the home for the dying run by Mother Teresa's 'Missionaries of Charity'. Very close to Kālighāt, this institution was transformed from a dharmashālā, a sort of caravansary. It was given to Mother Teresa to run her home for the dying, the first institution with which 'Missionaries of Charity' was formed. It was here that Avikunthak had encountered death very closely, when he saw inmates dying before his eyes.

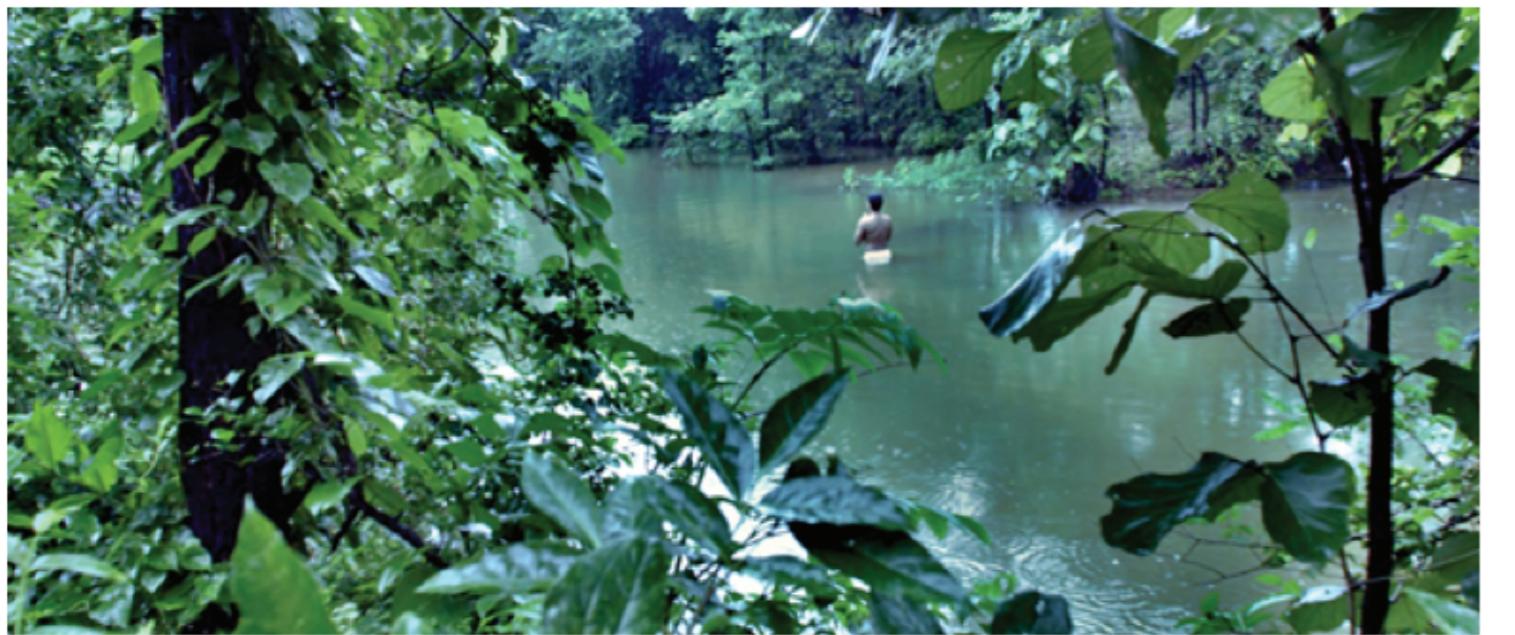
It was at this time that Avikunthak had read several different editions of the Upanishads."I was in class 10 or 11, and that's when I read the texts. I had a lot of

difficulties but since then I have been reading such texts of the Vedantic and Jnanayogic traditions.

They are not so easy to grapple with but I always wanted to make a film on one of the Upanishads, which could have been *Kena* or *Katha* or any other. In fact, all of them had a teacher-disciple or *guru-shishya* dialogue and that interested me. Upanishads were always on my mind and so was filming in long takes, preferably the entire film in a single take. Earlier on, I was impressed by the Hungarian master Miklos Jansco and later the Russian Alexander Sokurov," says Avikunthak. And as he grew up, Karl Marx also entered his consciousness along with activism with Narmadā Bachao Andolan (Save Narmadā Movement), against building of big dams on the river Narmadā, and consequent human displacements. More significantly, the Tantra, traits which are evident in most of his films, more particularly in *Kalighāt Fetish*(1999) that contemplates the ideas of transgression and morbidity connected by the act of transformation leading to death. As he told me, *Kalighāt Fetish* was an outcome of his own interaction with the memory of death and dying. The 'brutality' of animal sacrifice was for him a meditation on the morbidity of death.⁷

Over a decade of an essential time(and space) since 1999 (in fact from his first

film *Et cetera* shot between 1995 and 1998), this 'morbidity of death' gets transformed into a kind of 'profundity of death' in *Katha Upanishad*, from the earthly sacrificial to the transcendently conceptual. But the basic 'enquiry' still moves on from the visceral of *Vakratunda Svāhā* to the vivid.In his forthcoming film *Rati Chakravyuha*, all the six newly wedded couples invite the self-sacrificial death towards the end– as if the so-called 'morbidity' was inescapable. Or perhaps the idea of *death* wanted to acquire a newer meaning. Avikunthak's cinema is essentially the cinema of interiority, though it seems verbose at times, but gradually the 'words' get into their solitary grooves, to their frightening but regenerative voids.



Suvrat Joshi as Nachiketa in *Katho Upanishad*
Production stills from the feature film
82 minutes
4k digital cinema
2011

Kathopanishad, the Text and the Intellectual Inquiry

कठोपनिषद् एवम् बौधिक अन्वेषण

Let me briefly introduce *Kath / Katha Upanishad* (*Kathopanishad*) and see how Avikunthak transforms the text into his cinematography. Structurally, the text consists of two chapters or *adhyāyas* (अध्याय) and each is divided into three cycles / sections or *vallis* (कल्प), containing between 15 and 29 stanzas / verses or *slokas* (श्लोक). The first valli in the first chapter of *Kathopanishad* informs us that the Great Sage Arun, (Vajasravaka, वाजश्रवा) of the Gautam clan had organized a Viswajeet yagya ceremony (विश्वजित यज्ञ), which demanded renouncing all worldly possessions in charity. Vajasravaka had a son named Nachiketa, (नचिकेत, also called Nachiketas) ‘that which is unperceived.’ The *Kathopanishad* text describes Nachiketa as a young boy, a कुमार. While performing the great ritual, the sage gives away all his worldly possessions, mainly cows. Accordingly to Nachiketa, those cows had already outlived their productivity and had been rendered useless by age, and they were not worthy to be offered as donation or gift. He protested to his father, saying ‘to whom will you give me?’ assuming that he had some worth. This he repeated thrice, when his father in anger said, “To Yama (यम), I give you.” This accounts for Nachiketa going to the

abode Yama, the Lord of Death. When Nachiketa reaches there he finds Yama absent and he waits there for three days and three nights.

On his return, Yama wanted to atone for Nachiketa’s long wait and grants him three boons. Nachiketa asks for the following: (1) He should be allowed to return to his father alive and that his father should greet him without any anger, (2) He should be instructed as to the proper performance of fire-sacrifice in order to gain immortality, and (3) The secrets about life after death be revealed to him. Yama was reluctant to grant the last boon as it had been even a mystery to the gods. He asked Nachiketa to ask for some other boon and offered many material gains. To Nachiketa, no other boon would do. Yama was secretly pleased with Nachiketa’s commitment and gradually kept elaborating upon the nature of true Self that persists beyond death.⁸ The key of the realization was that this Self was inseparable from *Brahman*, the supreme spirit, and the vital force in the universe. Towards the end Yama tells Nachiketa how life-force moves after death, which in nutshell means: There are one hundred and one arteries in the heart, one of which pierces the crown of the head. Going upward by it, a man at death attains immortality. But when his *prāna* (cosmic energy) passes out by the arteries, going in different directions,

Intellectual inquiry and questioning has always a place in Indian thought – but it can never supersede the direct inspirational transcendent experiential process, which, is also the very basis of all intellectual process and possibility. In the *Kathopanishad*, as A.K. Sarkar maintains, such experiential process was developed by Yama, and communicated to Nachiketa. In describing the transcendent reality further, *Kathopanisad* develops a unique notion, for the transcendent experience is like a great Aswattha-tree with root above and branches below.⁹ This symbolic representation of the transcendent experience as the primal order, descending to the apparent orders of experiential processes, was utilized later in *Bhagavad Gita* to indicate the expressions of Māyā or detached activity-processes. This bright and subtle transcendent One, Nachiketa could discern by the practice of Yoga, and he is said to have attained the ultimate condition of immortality, ‘void of stain and void of death.’ But Yama ends by saying that this Yogic possibility is open to all. The *Kathopanisad*, therefore, prescribes a psychic science of Yoga to be cultivated by all. It is neither an abstract philosophy nor an abstract dogmatic theology. It is a psychological science, in a comprehensive practical sense.¹⁰

During the course of penetrating dialogue, Yama comes out as a master

logician-psychologist.

Seeing Nachiketa’s reluctance to accept things pleasurable, Yama understood the core of Nachiketa’s mind, and his determination to know the ultimate truth which is a process towards a conquest of death. The speciality of Yama lies in developing a novel yogic method, the firm holding back of the senses, then, one becomes undistracted, and becomes directly conscious of one’s transcendent Self, the order of the imperishable, that He is. In that exalted experience, which is deeply psychological, his real nature manifests itself, when one becomes liberated from one’s desires for apparent perishing objects, and thus becomes the immortal Brahman.

At the end of the second *valli*, the original text has *Shāntipāth*, which is neither an epilogue nor an additional chapter, but a prayer to invoke peace:

शान्तिपाठ

ॐ सह नाववतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु । मा विद्विषावहै ।

ॐ शान्तिः । शान्तिः । शान्तिः ।

May He protect both of us. May He nourish both of us. May we both acquire the capacity (to study and understand the scriptures). May our study be brilliant. May we not argue with each other. Generally at the beginning of a class, the teacher and students recite this peace invocation together. Both seek the Almighty’s blessings for study that is free of obstacles, such as poor memory, or the inability to concentrate or poor health. They also seek blessings for a conducive relationship, without which communication of any subject matter is difficult.

The core philosophy of *Kathopanishad* is that the real Self is to be found within oneself, where *Atman* resides, and so does the notion of immortality. The journey to the discovery of the real Self is the goal or the purpose of life. One who has realized one’s own real Self can then realize the cosmic Self, who encompasses the entire universe. For its wisdom, the *Kathopanishad* also becomes relevant to our times, for all times, for that matter. Although it has a mystic attitude of a death-less condition, the process to this transcendent experience of the unmanifest *Purusa* is the path towards immortality; it is of a disciplined yogic path. As Sarkar says, people take the easy way, they choose the ‘preya’ talking about their pet theories rather than choosing the ‘sreya’, which involves discipline or even a kind

of self-analysis, to go beyond the surface orders of things (to immortality). One who develops meditative insight can experience ‘that in which sound is not, nor touch, nor shape, nor diminution, nor taste, nor smell, that which is eternal, and it is without end and beginning... that having seen, from the mouth of death there is deliverance. This process as indicated in *Kathopanishad* is a practical development of the transcendent process of other Upanishads. The story of Nachiketas brings home the fact that one can achieve higher orders of experiential process if one chooses the worthy (or the disciplined ways) instead of the *pleasures of life* (the undisciplined process).¹²

In this sense, Yama refers to two orders of people and their prospects. Those who follow the path of pleasure, are bound by the cyclic processes of life, death and rebirth, but those who follow the yogic way of disciplined life and choose only the worthy, merge into the transcendent *Purusa* (the immortality process). This bright and subtle transcendent One, Nachiketa could discern by the practice of Yoga, and he is said to have attained the ultimate condition of immortality, ‘void of stain and void of death.’ But Yama ends by saying that this Yogic possibility is open to all. The *Kathopanishad* therefore, prescribes a psychic science of Yoga to be cultivated by all. It is neither an abstract philosophy

nor an abstract dogmatic theology. It is a psychological science, in a comprehensive practical sense – a development beyond the existentialist phe-¹³nomenology of Heidegger and others.

Interestingly, the verses in Upanishads, particularly the *Brihadaranyka* ('the great forest of knowledge') *Upanishad*, contain several statements that could be related to psychology.¹⁴

Katho Upanishad, the Film and the Rhythm

आशिष अविकुन्तक का मृत्यु के साथ अग्रगमन 'संवाद'

Some scholars believed that there were two different texts of this Upanishad – one consisting of three chapters, which was the original one and the other had three additional chapters. For his film, Avikunthak has taken the first three chapters and structures the same thus:

।।प्रथम॥	First	17 mins	32 fps
।।द्वितीय॥	Second	58 mins	24 fps
।।तृतीय॥	Third	2 mins	72 fps

This is interesting as it has a certain musicality, a loose raga structure, particularly in terms of लय, *laya*, speed or tempo i.e. the speed at which the camera had captured the enunciations. However, unlike the usual raga structure, Avikunthak puts विलंबित लय, *Vilambit laya* (slow pace or tempo, 24 frames per second, in the middle section) मध्य लय, *Madhya laya* (medium speed, 32 frames per second; in the first section, i.e. extreme left section); while appropriately, द्रुत लय, *Drut laya* at the end (72 seconds, in the extreme right section; 'u' pronounced as in 'put') *Madhya laya* roughly corresponds to speeds ranging from *Moderato* (or *Andante*) to about *Allegretto* or even *Allegro non troppo*. *Drut* ranges



Ram Kumar Bajaj as Yama and Suvrat Joshi as Nachiketa in Katho Upanishad
Production stills from the feature film
82 minutes
4k digital cinema
2011

from Allegro to Prestissimo and beyond. In ancient musicological treatises, musical time (संगीत-समय) was measured with reference to certain non-musical standards such as the average speed of the normal blinking of the eye or the average speed of the normal cawing of the crow.

As I have observed, by the time Avikunthak reaches *Katha Upanishad* during his creative journey, I find his cinematography acquiring a certain *laya* (deep concentration) of its own, a certain musicality, manifesting in the way he pans his camera (there is no question of 'cuts'), its *bhangimā* (gestures). The film's middle section is designed by the Director of Photography, Basab Mullick, while the first and the last parts by Setu; the steadycam operator was Nitin Rao. Though editing the film requires very minimal intervention, Pankaj Rishi Kumar very subtly follows the basic *laya* of the film, the *laya* that well-crafted Hindi dialogues penned by Moloy Mukherjee and Ram Gopal Bajaj are in tune with, accompanied by the entire tonal universe of the film invoked by Dipankar Chaki and Anirban Sengupta's audiography. During the first almost half an hour of the film we don't see any one speak except the birds and the rustle of the leaves – all very muted but elevating like the inaugural *vilambit layaālāp* in a Hindustani raga. The first spoken word we hear is 'Nachiketa',

which is uttered by Yama as he tries to wake up the young man in slumber under a tree. And then gradually the dialogues get negotiated through the lush green forest, turning into a yellow-golden hue in the second section, offering us a perceptual sense of the passage of time.

What is also interesting to see is the way Avikunthak shifts from the Tantrik Ontological, e.g. in *Kalighat Fetish* (1999) or *Vakratunda Swāhā* (2010) to Vedantic Epistemological in *Katho Upanishad* (2011).

Temporality / Simultaneity

क्षणिकता. समक्षणिकता.

What I find interesting is the way this temporality turns into an implicit state of simultaneity, by which I mean the way the side *layas* pull themselves into the centre, into the , मध्य *madhya*. Allegorically, I also look at the three sections as , त्रिकाल the temporal trinity, becoming unifying one, the आत्मब्रह्म , *atmabrahma*. It would perhaps be inadequate to describe the *Katho Upanishad* presentation at Chatterjee & Lal as a video installation, in its conventional meaning.

In this context, I find it interesting the way C.G. Jung explains his idea of synchronicity in his book *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. He says, "It seems, indeed, as though time, far from being an abstraction, is a concrete continuum which contains qualities or basic conditions that manifest themselves simultaneously in different places through parallelisms that cannot be explained causally, as, for example, in cases of the simultaneous occurrence of identical thoughts, symbols, or psychic states."

For Jung, synchronicity was no more baffling or mysterious than the discontinuities of physics. "It is only the ingrained belief in the sovereign power of causality that creates intellectual difficulties and makes it appear unthink-

ever occur..."

Between its three sections as viewed in the gallery, *Katho Upanishad*, has a certain centripetal power, a unifying one.

The Yama Image

यम का आकार

flesh and blood, very austere and curious. So was location, which could be any forest, 'any place whatsoever' as Gilles Deleuze would say.

As far as I know, there are no visual reference points about the illustrative images of the characters of Nachiketa and Yama to rely on.

In one of Raja Ravi Varma's paintings, *Markandeya*, we see dark Yama from back, riding a buffalo. This image of Yama is generally imitated in popular films, such as *Satyavān Savitri*, whose several versions we find in different Indian languages, including a 1914 silent film of the same name by Dadashah Phalke.

In words, the oldest known version of the story of Savitri and Satyavan is found in the Book of the Forest in the *Mahabharata*, in which Makrandeya tells this layered narrative. When Yudhishtira asks Makrandeya whether there had ever been a woman whose devotion matched Draupadi's. In his reply, Makrandeya related the story of Satyavan and Savitri. Besides, *Satyavan Savitri* there could be other films visually imagining or stereotyping Yama, the God of Death.

While picking up the Kathopanishad text, Avikunthak takes off from such inviting blankness. And he imagines his two characters as we see in the film,



Ram Kumar Bajaj as Yama and Suvrat Joshi as Nachiketa in *Katha Upanishad*
Production stills from feature film

82 minutes
4k digital cinema
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The Location and the Actors

अवस्थापन एवम् अभिनेता

The film was shot in Karjat / Neral, not very far from the city of Bombay / Mumbai. With this forest place Avikunthak was very much familiar as he was active in the Narmada Bachao Andolan around 1992-1993. He calls this place 'a cooperative forest'. About twenty activists got together and bought about sixty acres of land in the tribal area and let it grow as a green forest. Each of them had around two acres. The idea behind buying the land was that the local people could do a little farming and let the forest grow. It was called *vanwādi*, a sort of forest garden. The film's middle section was shot first in winter / autumn, and the second section in monsoon while the third on the Bhandup flyover on the Eastern Express Highway. Avikunthak rehearsed the actors (Ram Gopal Bajaj as Yama and Suvrat Joshi as Nachiketa) for two days on location after many months of rehearsal off-site. Finally, the film was shot on Red digital camera, and thanks to the digital technology, it is now possible to shoot as much as five-hour long single shot film. The last two minute-part of *Katho Upanishad* was shot on Super 16 and was processed in a lab in Mumbai.

Once he got the script ready, he was

looking for actors. There is a relationship between Yama and Kuber, the god of Wealth, they are yaksha figures. Instead of following the conventional imagery, Avikunthak chose an old frail man as Yama. "I searched for that man for six months because the one big challenge was that the old man had to memorize the long dialogues. I met Ram Gopal Bajaj, very well-known in the theatre circles, who had headed the Delhi-based National School of Drama (NSD) in the 1990s. When I met him it turned out that as a young student he had read *Kathopanishad* and he remembered many of its phrases by heart. Then I looked for a young student. Nachiketa in the original text is shown as much younger but I wanted someone older and I found an alumnus of the NSD, Suvrat Joshi in Pune. Though the selection and rehearsal process went on for six long months, I did on-location rehearsal for only two days and then shot the film immediately thereafter." What is also interesting is the way Avikunthak de-dramatizes the dialogues to great extent – they have different intonations as against the normal Indian filmic conventions.

The Third Chapter

तृतीय अध्याय

As we saw in the original *Kathopanishad* text there was no third chapter, instead there was a शांतिपाठ (Shantipāth), the film seems to replace that with a short (two minutes) third section placing it in our time, on a city road. It evokes an idea about a Nachiketa of our times reaching a stage of संज्ञिप्राप्ति (who has attained his desired goal), now being able to penetrate Time in opposition direction – as we see in the reverse movements of his walk towards the camera and the traffic on both lanes moving backwards. The third or the extreme right section is the shortest (2 minutes) and it was shot on 16mm celluloid.

Temporally, this is how Avikunthak explains, "The moment you penetrate time you are endowed with a certain power of reversing your very existence you have. You can go back to your previous life. That is what Buddha does – he talks about himself as an animal. The ability to go back is a very powerful ability and an ability experienced only by the enlightened. What enlightenment does is allows time to collapse. And once you realize that existence does not begin with birth or end with death, which is a linear trajectory, once that collapses, your understanding of everything changes. What I am trying to show

with that movement is that the minute you penetrate time it signifies enlightenment."

Because the moment you bend space and time, the beginning is not the beginning and the end is not the end. Everything collapses. That experience is also beyond representation. What I do with that shot in this film is just capture a glimpse of that possibility. The crucial thing about enlightenment is that you can escape time. That's when Nachiketa says, 'teach me how to go beyond life and death' because life is beginning and death is end, which are fundamentally temporal constructs. So the last chapter is crucial because cinematically I can only represent that."

Obviously, for Avikunthak, *Katho Upanishad* was not just a narrative text; he wanted us to experience *time*, present becoming present, time acquiring a certain spontaneity, a certain experiential feel. According to him, the first section of the film is about the quest to know, the second about knowing (and hence epistemological) and the third about experience (and hence ontological). It is also to suggest that the Upanishadic text is not a dead thing, it still breathes in and out. And this becomes evident in the gallery space where the *Katho Upanishad*, the film first overwhelms you with its epic triptych width, slowly absorbing you into it with a sense of

Ashish Avikunthak's Ongoing Filmsophical 'Dialogue' with Death

आशिष अविकुन्टक का मृत्यु के साथ अग्रगमन 'संवाद'

contemplation, as your eyes and mind anchor in the middle section where the dialogue between Yama and Nachiketa takes place, and pan across silently right and left and reverse into त्रिकाल, the three tenses, merging into a sense of simultaneity as already referred to, in persistence of vision, and in the spirit of *Cinema of Prayoga*, in their cosmicity. And here we experience *time* – through the monsoon lush green of tree leaves on the left turning into aged brownish in the middle and the urban mortar of the present.



Suvrat Joshi as Nachiketa in *Katho Upanishad*
Production stills from feature film
82 minutes
4k digital cinema
2011

I personally believe that Ashish Avikunthak's *filmsophical* practice falls within this thought-environment. His enquiry into the phenomenon of 'death' (and hence life itself) is ontological-epistemological enquiry, which he embarks upon his technological tools, while aware of their intrinsic capacities and contradictions, and yet anchoring firmly his *filmsophy* on the 'temporal' which, in the process, becomes narrative itself, the so-called 'story' if you like – in its randomness. This randomness could be nestling in a tree, or in an undefined space (whichever) or just in our mind; it is the narrative that keeps defying closures and absolutes, as death is not an end (अंत), it is also a beginning(आरंभ). Interestingly, his discourse, Avikunthak brings in Buddhist and Jaina philosophies (दर्शन). The philosophical speculation around the idea of *darshana* would lead us to explore the cognitive functions and abilities of sense-organs other than the eye.¹⁶

The Upanishads maintain that 'the eye truly is truth' and that 'the eye is truly the root-principle'. Here, visual cognition is accorded a higher status in comparison

to the other sense-born cognitive faculties. Nevertheless, the process of reaching the stage of *darshana* is a complex one: first, in relation to the principle whose *darshana* is being sought after, knowledge has to be gathered at the feet of experienced persons. This constitutes the first stage, that of 'listening' (*sraavana* , श्रवण). Then what has been heard and what has been understood must be pondered over, grasped on the basis of argumentation, logic and reasoning. This constitutes the second stage, that of meditation (मनन , manana). After that, with a sense of concentration and with a mind rid of all afflictions, the seeker must try to enter into the heart of the matter concerned. This constitutes the third stage, that of determined effort (निधिध्यासन , nididhyasana). The stage of *darshana* or direct realisation can never be reached unless these three stages have been properly worked out.¹⁷ The triple-sectioned viewing of Avikunthak's film *Kathopanishad* may not demand such hierarchical process but I would risk a presumption that it does presume a certain viewing-thinking-meditational process from the *rasika*, the appreciator of excellence or beauty, even within a gallery ambience.

Katho Upanishad's engagement with death immediately reminds us of Avikunthak's film *Vakratunda Swāhā* (2009), which was about the suicidal

artist friend Girish Dahiwale. With Girish and other student-artists such as Riyas Komu and Justin Ponmany from Mumbai's J.J. School of Arts, Avikunthak had planned a collaborative manifesto. A collective manifesto about new ways of doing art and critiquing its rampant commercialization was also on cards, over one and a half decades back. Riyas Komu and Justin Ponmany are well-established artists now. Talking about his body of work including *Vakratunda Swāhā* and now *Katho Upanishad*, Avikunthak had always to struggle with himself, with what he had been trying to understand of the world, and that takes him to the texts such as the Upanishad, "which still baffle me and the only way to understand it is by making a film, or dealing with Girish's death by making a film. I am still dealing with what I had dealt with my film *Et cetera*. For me those films are still to come back. I am going back to that form in *Katho Upanishad* and trying to deal with time," says Avikunthak, while continuing his filmosophical encounter with the *notion* (time) and *motion*(movement) of *death*. "I am continuing my conversation with death that runs through all my films; particularly in *Vakratunda*, in a visceral way because it deals with the death of a real person. I am aware of the fact that I am moving from Girish's death to this which in a certain way is connected because I have to eventually speak with Yama."

Ashish Avikunthak. The Mosaic of Thoughts around Time

समय कल्पना और चित्रकुट्टिम्

I am referring to all these different strands of thoughts and views formulated over centuries in India, rather superficially, but to indicate the kind of mosaic they create. Just about time, there are so many different views, e.g. the *Atharva Veda* contains hymns dedicated to time (this essay towards its end quotes one such hymn). Some lines describe *time* to be the cause of the origin, maintenance and destruction of the universe – in a very *triptych* sense of Avikunthak's *Katho Upanishad* being shown at the Gallery Chatterjee & Lal in Mumbai. And this is what I had also meant by the idea of simultaneity. Niyogi Balslev provides a few more interesting examples:

The idea of time as power of the Absolute is ancient and can be seen worked out in the integral philosophy of Kashmir Saivism.¹⁸

It should be appropriate to understand the meaning of the word *kāla*, which in Sanskrit stands for time. Etymologically, the term would mean 'to count' (cf. Latin *calculo*). Thus according to some the word *kāla* signifies that which can count up the age of all. Its root also signifies 'to devour', which leads to the ascription

of the destructive power of time. Thus *kāla* also refers to death. The idea of time as the Supreme Principle or Lord, found in the *Atharva Veda* and in *Vishnu Purana*, can also be found in the *Bhagavadgita*. In the Jaina idea of time, the most minute division is called a *samaya* and it is so minute that there are innumerable *samayas* which occur just in the time taken to wink an eye. This particle of time is called *avail*. Sixteen million, seven hundred and seventy-seven *avails* make 48 minutes, or one *muhurta*. Thirty *muhurtas* make one *divārātra* – a day and a night. Fifteen days make one fortnight while two fortnight (30 days) make one *māsa* (month). Two months make one *rtu* or season. (Though this suggests a calibration of linear time, it shows the micro-manner in which the concept of *time* is explored.)

I think this is how Avikunthak let us perceive the presence (and hence absence) of time – in simultaneity – through three big screens on the gallery wall, the त्रिमूर्ति, united form of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, the Hindu triad – creation, preservation and destruction – going simultaneously in life (and hence death).

The *Katho Upanishad* triptych defies the conventional idea of the video-installation as it provides us a deeper cinematographic experience. Hazily, for its sheer size, it might transport you

back into the history of the moving picture – into the dioramas and the panoramas of yore, and here the distinction between the black box and the white box get blurred, providing an inviting space for a contemplated viewing.

And now let me end with a hymn to Time, the काल :

काले भूतिमसृजत काले तपति सूर्यः।
काले ह विश्वा भूतानि काले चक्षुर्विपश्यति॥।।
काले मनः काले प्राणः काले नाम समाहितम्।।
कालेन सर्वा नन्दन्त्यागतेन प्रजा इमाः॥।।
काले तपः काले ज्येष्ठ काले ब्रह्म समाहितम्।।
कालो ह सर्वस्येश्वरो यः पितासीत् प्रजापतेः॥।।

अथर्ववेद १४ ५३. ६-८

Time created the earth;
by Time the sun burns;
through Time all beings (exist);
through Time the eye sees.
Mind, breath, name, are embraced in
Time.
All these creatures rejoice when Time
arrives.
In Time rigorous abstraction, in Time the
highest,
In Time divine knowledge, is comprehended.
Time is lord of all things, he who was the
father of Prajāpati.

Atharvaveda, Tr. Muir XIX 53.6-8.

It is basically Avikunthak's temporal engagement that offers a certain grace

to cinematography, which nowadays is getting increasingly dominated by visual theatricality and superfluous slickness. In one of his reflective Notes, Mani Kaul had mentioned: "Time as attention. Attention as rhythm. The invisible shape of the film."²¹

Avikunthak, as we know, has freed himself from the shackles of the 'capital', of sponsored 'money' as he works as a teacher, saves money and invests it into the production of his films and he has not deviated from this practice since his first film Etcetera (shot on 16mm) during 1995-1998.

What is important for us is the way Avikunthak (along with other thinker-filmmakers such as Kabir Mohanty, Amit Dutta, Vipin Vijay and Arghya Basu) brings back the discourse on cinema around our own philosophies and thoughts, and I think, he is the only one to do so after Mani Kaul, who along with Kumar Shahani, first brought in a deep sense of aesthetic environment within Indian cinematographic मीमांसा , mīmāṃsā, if there was any. They brought in philosophical reflections into Indian cinematographic discourse, which otherwise had remained journalistic, socio-political, political or hagiographic.

अस्तु।

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Katho Upanishad
Gallery installation stills from three –channel video
60 minutes , looped
4k digital cinema transfer to HD video
2012

ANNEXE A

Ashish Avikunthak. Other Upanishads. A Comparative Look

अन्य उपनिषद, अनुषंगिक संदर्भ

For the sake of broad and simple understanding of the broad Upanishadic sweep, let me summarize (from Sarkar) the core views that some of the principal Upanishads (besides Kath and *Brihadaranyka*) present us. (i) The *Taittriya* Upanishad places emphasis on the transcendent existentiality (Brahman) as subtly operative and controlling the apparent orders from materiality to orders beyond mentality; (ii) The *Prasna* Upanishad raises several questions (*prasna*) about the transcendent experience which is also a controlled condition in contrast to the apparent manifest orders of experience. The questions were raised by several disciples, one after the other, to the sage Pippalāda, who did not give any answer to the disciples till they lived a disciplined life with him at his house for a year.(iii) The *Mundaka* Upanishad by its very name, *e*, signifies the shaven head, which symbolises the life of an ascetic. An ascetic is one who is shaven of ignorance, the restrictedness of any sort, as seen in the apparent orders. This Upanishad is somewhat eclectic, but repeats the core of the different Upanishads, in its

special way.(iv) The *Aitareya* Upanishad, like the *Prasna* Upanishad, raises the question of the creation of the universe, but with more details. As in the *Prasna* Upanishad, the creative process is a self-creative process. (v) The *Isa* Upanishad always draws attention to an integral consciousness – of a transcendent overall consciousness as involved in the presentational orders of consciousness, so that the transcendent experiential process can never be construed separately from the presented orders of experiential processes. (vi) The *Kena* Upanishad draws attention to the 'transcendent integral process' as a continuous inspiring basis and possibility of the apparent instruments of knowledge – the mind, the vital process and the sense-organs. (vii) The *Chandogya* Upanishad illustrates that truth lies in the inspirational suggestions.

As one of India's most influential scholars of comparative religion and philosophy, Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan comments in his general view, the *Upanishads* are the concluding portions of the Vedas and the basis for the Vedanta philosophy, a system in which human speculation seems to have reached its very acme. The *Upanishads* have dominated Indian philosophy, religion and life for nearly three thousand years. Though remote in time from us, the Upanishads are not remote in thought.²²

ANNEXE B

Technology. Ontology. Epistemology.

प्रविधि-विज्ञान. तत्त्व-मीमांसा. ज्ञान-मीमांसा.

Ontology is a branch of metaphysics that studies the nature of being, existence or reality. It deals with questions concerning what entities exist or can be said to exist. Some of the principal ontological questions are, "What can be said to exist? What are the meanings of being? What are the different modes and categories of being of entities? On the other hand, epistemology is a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. In this context, I find the way the leading American video artist-philosopher Bill Viola epistemologically contextualizes technology within an art practice and how that could be integrated into a new aesthetic vision.(Later in this essay, I would try and see how different branches of Indian philosophy look at the phenomenon of time.)

Viola places the 'why' aspect very centrally to life itself; and therefore, death, too. With mere 'how' he said, "we have the basis of the illusion that we have understood something simply by rationally describing and analysing its opera-

-tion. By the late twentieth century, issues such as birth and death no longer command our attention after they have been physically explained." How would questioning the 'why' help us? They will lead us into the subjective personal domain of emotions and feelings. And the 'how'? They speak of mechanisms and structures, Viola believed. According to him, questions of 'how' at the close of the twentieth century, were not enough to carry us forward through the millennium. Obviously, it was the inner crisis of the industrialized world that Viola seemed to be concerned with. The crisis emerged from the narrow focus on the individual and on the 'confusing mix of signals and messages swirling around us that do not address a human being's fundamental need to know and live the 'why' of life.

What Viola promises to us was a possibility of integrating new technologies into a new vision. He made us aware of their immense philosophical potential. "The new technologies of image-making are by necessity bringing us back to fundamental questions, whether we want to face them or not. The development of schemes for the creation of images with computers is an investigation into the structure and fabric of the world we observe the participate in." He said that questions of form, visual appearance, and the 'how' of image-making drop away once

an artist is faced with the content of the direct images and sounds of life in his daily practice. "Spend time with a video camera and you will confront some of the primary issues: What is this fleeting image called life? Why are we here sharing the living moment, a moment that is past yet present? And why are the essential elements of life change, movement, and transformation, but not stability, immobility, and constancy?" Perhaps we need to imbue new technologies to this philosophical dimension so that their ruthless commercial teeth don't chew us up completely. And maybe we need to blend why and how into a new 'scientific' vision that our time-in-transition requires.²³ In this context, it should perhaps be interesting to see how ancient India had perceived the elemental world. Unlike Aristotle who considered "rest" to be the natural state of things on earth and that everything was made of some mixture of what he called 'the elements' – earth, water, air and fire, the Indian philosophers and visionaries had seen ākāsh (space) as an additional element, i.e. the *panchamahabhuta* (पंचमहाभूत). As a continuous enquiry, the words how and why are, nevertheless, extremely crucial for our times.

Another American artist whose work constitutes an important elaboration of video poetics that resonates with Indian

philosophy is Daniel Reeves. His video *A Mosaic for the KaliYuga* (1986), for example, depicts technological society going somewhat berserk, while succinctly realizing in its epilogue, the *Vishnu Purana's* prophecy of the contemporary confusion of inner and outer realms. The title refers to a state of existence devoid of true spirituality, in which all values are attached to property and wealth.

ANNEXE C

Epistemology

ज्ञान-मीमांसा

Indian branches of philosophy have several different ways of logically approaching or obtaining knowledge. *Advaita Vedānta*, for instance, accepts the following ,प्रमाण *prāmanā* or the means to reach the stage, viz. *pratyaksha*, प्रत्यक्ष , the knowledge gained by means of the sensesअनुमान , *anumāna*, the knowledge gained by means of inference; उपमान ,*upamāna*, knowledge gained by means of analogy; *arthapatti*, अर्थपत्ति knowledge gained by superimposing the known knowledge on an appearing knowledge that does not concur with the known knowledge;अनुपलब्धि, *anupalabdhī*, non apprehension and scepticism in the face of non-apprehension and agama, the knowledge gained by means of texts such as *Vedas*, also known as *sabda pramāna*, शब्द प्रमाण . According to the *Sāmkhya* school, knowledge is possible through three *pramāna*, viz. *pratyaksha*, direct sense perception; *anumāna*, logical inference and *sabda*, the verbal testimony; while *Nyāya* school would accept the following means or *pramāna* for obtaining knowledge, perception called *pratyaksha* occupies the foremost position in the *Nyāya* epistemology,

perception; *anumāna*, logical inference and *sabda*, the verbal testimony; while *Nyāya* school would accept the following means or *pramāna* for obtaining knowledge, perception called *pratyaksha* occupies the foremost position in the *Nyāya* epistemology, perception is of two types, one, ordinary or लौकिक , *laukika* or साधारण , *sādhārana*, which, in turn, is of six types, viz. visual – by eyes, olfactory – by nose, auditory – by ears, tactile – by skin, gustatory – by tongue and mental – by mind; extraordinary or अलौकिक , *alaukika* or अ साधारण *asādhārana*, which, in turn, is of three types, viz. सामान्यलक्षण, *sāmānyalaksana* i.e. perceiving generality from a particular object;ज्ञानलक्षण, *jñānalaksana*, when one sense organ can also perceive qualities not attributable to it, as when seeing a chilli, we know that it would be spicy; and *yogaja*, when certain human beings from the power of योग, *Yoga*, can perceive past, present and future and have supernatural abilities, either complete or some. Also there are two modes or steps in perception, viz. निर्विकल्प , *nirvikalpa*, when one just perceives an object without being able to know its features, and सविकल्प, *esavikalpa*, when one is able to clearly know an object. There is yet another stage called *pratyabijnāna* प्रत्यभिज्ञान , when one is able to re-recognize something on the basis of memory.

Inference or *anumāna* is one of the most important contributions of *Nyāya*. It can

of two types, inference for oneself, i.e. , *svārthanumāna*, where one does not need any formal procedure, except perhaps the last three of the five steps enumerated above; and inference for others, i.e. परार्थनुमान , *parāthānumāna*, which requires a systematic methodology of five steps. Inference can also be classified into three types पूर्वावत् *purvāvat*, i.e. inferring an unprecedented effect from a perceived cause; सेसावत् , *sesāvat*, inferring an unperceived cause from a perceived effect and *sāmānyatodrsta*, when inference is not based on causation but on uniformity of co-existence.Comparison,loosely meaning *upamāna*, is the knowledge of the relationship between a word and the object denoted by the word. It is produced by the knowledge of resemblance or similarity, given some pre-description of the new object beforehand. Word or *sabda* are also accepted as *pramāna*. It can also be of two types, *vādika* (Vedic), which are the words of the four sacred Vedas, or can be more broadly interpreted as knowledge from sources acknowledged as authoritative, and *laukika*, or words and writings of trustworthy human beings. Epistemologically, the *Vaisesika* school accepts perception (*pratyaksha*) and inference (*anumāna*) as valid sources of knowledge.

ANNEXE D

Reflections on Time: Jaina, Buddhist and other views

समय विमर्शः बौद्ध, जैन और अन्य दर्शन

How does Jainism view time? According to Jainism, the universe is the product of anantakāla(अनंतकाल) , time which has no beginning and no end. It is conceived as an incessant flow. Under the influence of an independent element of time, a thing undergoes change. Time is the name of that order of momentary changes, which a thing undergoes by its very nature. No change in matter involving aggregation or disintegration is conceivable without time. Times, according to Jainism, are not a collection of indivisible, inseparable parts as are the other substances. In a real sense, it is the *prayāya* or modification of a substance. Or one may say it is the duration of the states of substances or *dravyas*.²⁴

And Buddhism? The Buddhist claims that an entity perishes and is replaced by another at every instant. The idea of time as instant and its inseparability from being – as instantaneous – is the key to the Buddhist conceptual structure. The Buddhist doctrine of universal momentariness (क्षणिकवाद) is of vital importance for an appraisal and understanding of this novel philosophical

perspective, which emerged in the history of Indian philosophical thought with the rise of Buddhism.²⁵ I am referring to these philosophies of time very broadly and simply just to indicate the complexities that Avikunthak's body of philosophical work could lead us into, as also to indicate how cinematography could (I am using this term in a Bressonian sense, and not as work of a cameraman) deepen itself under the skin of its visual surface, evoking a certain transcendental temporal sense. While discussing his films, Avikunthak often refers to Indian ontology and epistemology. Besides Buddhist and Jaina views, he also talks about the *Nyāya* and *Vaisesika* and other branches of philosophical dispositions. A study of the problem of time in Indian philosophy is of special interest in connection with the *Nyāya* and *Vaisesika* schools of thought. As Anandita Niyogi Balslev says, "It is here that one comes across a bold realistic view of time. These schools, advocating a pluralistic metaphysics, focus on the reality of time as vital to their entire conceptual framework. Their philosophical stand regarding the problem of time is distinctly different from that of other schools, not only outside of the pale of Brahmanical tradition but also within it."

The main difference between the *Nyāya* and the *Vaisesika* schools lies in their orientation and emphasis. The *Vaisesika*

deals with metaphysical questions, whereas *Nyāya* concentrates mostly on logic and epistemology. "The *Nyāya-Vaisesika* philosophers maintain time is inferred as the basis of such notions as priority (*paratva*), posteriority (*aparatva*), of simultaneity (*yaugapadya*) and succession (*ayaugapadya*), of quickness (*ksipratva*) and slowness (*ciratva*). In other words, the above are the grounds (*linga*) for the inference of the existence of time. With reference to Avikunthak's *Kathopani-shad* triptych the key-word for me is 'simultaneity' though slightly in a different context, about which I will talk a little later.

The conceptual frameworks of the atheist *Sāṅkhya* and the theist *Yoga* schools have many essential features in common. Although these schools operate within a basic ontological structure, the common point of agreement between them is their denial of the *Nyāya-Vaisesika* view of a unitary time as an absolute and objective existence, as one among the ultimate real entities constituting a metaphysical pluralism.²⁶ *Advaita Vedanta*, considered as representing the culmination of the Brahmanical tradition, rejects the pluralistic metaphysics of *Nyāya-Vaisesika* as well as the dualism of *Sāṅkhya-Yoga*. As the very term *advaita* signifies, a systematic effort is made to construct a metaphysical structure on the basis of the idea that the real is non-dual. This under-

-standing which the *Advaita Vedānta* maintains to be the final goal of all the teachings of the revealed texts of the Upanishads, has led to a rigorous formulation of the conception of the non-dual real Brahman – as timeless, which reduces on the other hand all duality i.e. difference to a problem of ‘appearance’. Avikunthak’s *Kathopanishad* triptych draws us into this debate as far as the issue of time and overall philosophy of life (and death) is concerned.

The six principal schools that developed in the Brahmanical tradition are *Sāṅkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyāya*, *Vaisesika*, *Purva-Mimāmsā* and *Uttara-Mimāmsā*. “Remaining faithful to the basic intuition of the Upanishads – the reality of the immutable Ātman – they venture to formulate and explain the phenomenon of change in diverse ways. In their effort to interpret and systematise the Upanashadic ideas these schools developed different metaphysical structures.”²⁷ On the contrary, The *Chārvāka* materialists hold a radically different view of Being and Time; they reject the doctrine of the soul. The materialists held consciousness to be a by-product of matter. Death of the physical body meant a complete cessation of the stream of consciousness. The Buddhist, as also the Jaina philosophers were operating with the idea of a beginningless consciousness-continuum, which does not cease with death.²⁸

End Notes

- 1 *The Mahatma Defends Faith Against Bigotry*, Amrit Gangar, *The Speaking Tree*, *The Times of India*, 3 March 1999. The *Isha Upanishad* (इशोपनिषद्, Ishopanishad) is one of the shortest of the Upanishads, consisting of 17 or 18 verses in all, but is historically one of the principal (मूर्ख) Upanishads.. It is considered revealed scripture (Sruti) by diverse tradition within Hinduism. It is significant for its description of the nature of the supreme being (Ish).
- 2 *Seeking to Define an Elusive Maya*, Amrit Gangar, *The Speaking Tree*, *The Times of India*, 12 May 2000.
- 3 Free translation from Gujarati by this author.
- 4 *Amrit Gangar in conversation with Akbar Padamsee*, Navneet Samarpān, Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, November-December 2004.
- 5 *Bhāvas* are either स्थायिन्, primary, or व्यभिचारिन्, subordinate. The former are eight or nine, according as the *Rasas* are taken to be; each rasa having its own स्थायिभाव, *stayibhāva*. I would like to embed ‘intuition’ within the overall *bhāva* of *sva*. *Svabhava Flowing Into Streams: In Continuum – Interrogating Avant-garde and the Wave*; Amrit Gangar, paper presented at the Yale University (USA) seminar, 2010.
- 6 The *Katha Upanishad* (Katha follows Bengali phonetics) is one of the principal Upanishads, figuring as number 3 in the canon of 108 Upanishads. It is likely to have been composed after the 5th century BCE.
- 7 *Amrit Gangar in conversation with Ashish Avikunthak in Cinema of Prayoga: Indian Experimental Film & Video 1913-2006*; Eds. Brad Butler and Karen Mirza, London: no.w here, 2006.
- 8 C.G. Jung said, “the self is our life’s goal, for it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality.” *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Collins and Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963.
- 9 The Ashwattha or the sacred tree as referred to *Bhagavad Gita* is an emblem of the ‘Tree of Life’, the symbol of the never-ending universe. Commencing in the unknown, the universal, the beginningless and endless, the rootless root of all-being, the tree is thus reversed.
- 10 *Dynamic Facets of Indian Thought: Vedas to Auxiliary Scriptures*, Volume One, Anil Kumar Sarkar, Manohar Publications, Delhi: 1980.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 This Upanishad looks at the reality as being indescribable and its nature to be infinite and consciousness-bliss.²⁹ Human beings are seen as the synthesis of the organ of speech, mind, prāna (cosmic energy) and the twin cosmic

desires of differentiation and unison. The cosmic energy is thought to integrate in the microcosm various sensations including sound, smell and sight and in the macrocosm integrate the individual and the universe.

15 Developed (and being theorized) by this author, *Cinema of Prayoga* or *Cinema Prayoga* is a term that attempts to deepen the spirit of *prayoga*, the so-called experimentation, wherever it occurs. While it seeks out our own Indian roots, it is also a bid to enlarge the historical scope of the Western sense of Experimental and to make it more inclusive of *prayoga* cinematographic practices connected to, but historically outside it. In general terms, *Cinema Prayoga* has the quality of being intuitive and congenial, capable of achieving a certain unity of emotions that is profound, both formally and metaphysically. As the loosely equivalent Sanskrit word for the English ‘experiment’, *prayoga* has several different connotations, including design, device, plan; application, employment (esp. of drugs and magic); use, exhibition (of dance), representation (of drama), recitation. I would argue that *prayoga* is a practice of filmic interrogation and a quest toward a continuing process of time (and space). Ashish Avikunthak is one of the most significant *prayoga* artists. *CinemaPrayoga* is not an exclusive or East versus West proposition based on producing cultural binaries or on geographic segregation; its main thrust is on certain intrinsic qualities that cinematography should carry in her womb.

16 *Darshana* is a key word in Indian philosophical discourse. It is used, colloquially, to mean optical vision, the sense of sight. But the sage-poets use the same word to imply the higher sight that is made possible by the inner eye, the cognitive process of ‘spiritual realisation’. Thus the sages, poets or yogis who have had an imperceptible and clear realization of such supersensuous things as the soul or the Supreme Soul are called *drastr* or seers.

17 *Opening the inward eye*, Amrit Gangar, *The Speaking Tree*, *The Times of India*, 10 October 1998.

18 In the *Puranas*, one finds the idea of the four *yugas* – *satya, treat, dvapara and kali* – along with that of the world-cycles, which provide a vision of vast expanse of time in astronomical terms. Thus the *Brahmānda Purana* dramatically describes the four *yugas* as the four faces of time, which are said to create and destroy all beings. Again, the idea that the solar motion is the basis of time-divisions is found in the *Agni Purana*. In the *Mahabharata* one comes across the well-known simile where time is described as the wire-holder (*sutradhāra*) of the universe, permitting events and preventing them from taking place. Time is thus responsible for the order and sequence of events. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* refers to the view, which held time to be the cause of everything.

19 Ibid.

20 *Concepts of TIME: Ancient and Modern*; Ed. Kapila Vatsyayan, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Sterling Publishers, 1996.

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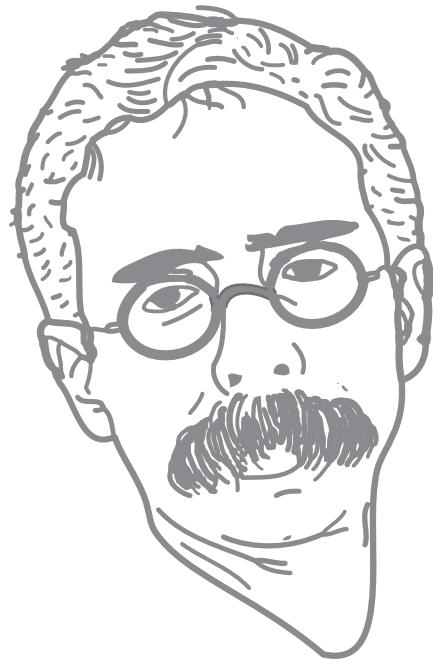
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