

CHAPTER 6

The Soul

As we have seen during our discussion of the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, a vast majority of the religio-philosophic theories described therein involve some concept of *atta* (soul). Even the materialist annihilationists accepted the existence of *atta* as a fact and tried to explain its annihilation in corresponding terms. In fact, so strong was the influence of this particular concept on Indian thought that Murti, for example, divide the main schools of thought into the Ātmavādin tradition and Anātmavādin tradition.¹ The orthodox tradition was obviously Ātmavādin although many heterodox religions also had their versions of the *atta* concept.

The *Upaniṣads* are very rich in their ātmanistic content and they represent a varied picture of the development of the concept. As everyone would agree the variety of thought in this regard in the *Upaniṣads* is highly complex and hence we will not be able here to devote much time to a study of those developments.² As the Buddhist examination does not directly mention those Upanisadic teachings we will not here be required to do so. But as we come across some Upanisadic parallels to which the Buddhist criticism may apply, we might touch that aspect of the *Upaniṣads* in order to make the picture complete. as Rhys Davids has noted, it is an animistic notion of *atta* in the *Upaniṣads* that corresponds to the Buddhist picture of *atta* drawn for refutation. In the pre-Buddhist Upanisadic background there was a belief that a soul (i.e., some kind of life-element) existed inside the human body. This soul leaves the body during sleep and wanders around. As one's soul is out while he is asleep, one should not be suddenly brought out from his sleep by others, for this would create difficulty for the soul to get back to the body in time.³ As Rhys Davids puts it,

"When the soul has come back to the body, which remains recumbent in dreamless sleep, the soul pervades the whole of it, down to the tips of the

1. Murti, *Central*, p.10ff.

2. For full treatments of the Upanisadic concept of soul, Jayatilke, *Theory*, pp.36-8, 60-3; Orgzian, *The self in Indian Philosophy*, pp.33ff.

3. *Br.U.p.* IV, 3.14.