

REFUTATION OF ŚAṂKARA'S DOCTRINE OF BRAHMAN

The Bhagavadgītā was the first great attempt to develop a synthetic philosophy of the Vedānta and an advance rejection of the "schoolism" of later Vedānta thinkers. Since then, many saints and mystics have taught this "general Vedānta". Vivekananda's thought was also the same eclectic Vedānta of the Gītā and became so popular in western circles that any spiritual thought coming from India came to be treated as Vedānta. It is often not realised that Vedānta is not one single coherent school, but a heterogeneous mass of several schools. Despite the efforts of the author of the Gītā, several schools sprang up again, each claiming its own doctrine to be the only true knowledge. Śaṅkara sowed the seeds of this "schoolism". Some time, critics of Śaṅkara rose within the Vedāntic fold itself, denounced him as a 'hidden Buddhist', and rejected what has been Śaṅkara's original or special contribution to the Vedānta.

Elements of Dualism in Śaṅkara's Philosophy :

(i) Dualism of Brahman and the World :

Śaṅkara starts with fundamental assumption of the Vedānta that what is real is perfect. This notion of perfection has been stretched by him to its extreme in one particular direction, and he finds that he cannot explain anything of this world on this premise. Brahman is so perfect that it cannot be conceived in any intelligible manner. It is eulogized by negative predicates and pitted against the world. A series of terms which connote sharp oppositions have therefore been used for this purpose. Brahman the subject and world the object are made to stand against one another. Brahman is eternal, pure, intelligent and free¹, while the world is changing, impure, unintelligent and bound. In the chapter on Adhyāsa, Śaṅkara claims that this presupposition is uncontestable. "It is a matter not requiring any proof that the object and the subject.....are opposed to each other as much as darkness and light."² As such these (Brahman and the world)

cannot be identified.”³ Here he affirms, perhaps inadvertently but firmly, the dualistic doctrines which try to establish the ultimate reality of two mutually exclusive orders of being. Like any dualist, he also accuses all those who are disposed to forget this sharp distinction of wrong knowledge due to “non-discrimination”. He is never tired of asking us to discriminate between Brahman and the world as opposites. The aim of his whole chapter on Adhyāsa is to uphold dualism in unequivocal terms. For Śaṅkara, real wisdom consists in realising that :

- (i) Brahman is perfect;
- (ii) the world is imperfect; therefore,
- (iii) the world is not Brahman.

The logic of Śaṅkara’s argument leads to a clear vindication of dualism. At one place (V. S. 2.1.6) some critics points out that the world cannot proceed from Brahman because the two are different in nature. Śaṅkara agrees with the critic that the two are different in nature, but adds that it is still possible just as “non-intelligent hairs and nails proceed from intelligent beings like men, and scorpions and other sentient beings spring from cow-dung.”

Like Descartes, who defined matter and mind in such a way that their interaction became a logical impossibility, Śaṅkara defined Brahman and the world in such a way that there could not be any intelligible relation between the two. Śaṅkara is however not conscious of the contradictions in his writings when at places upholding the dualism of Brahman and the world in one breath, he affirms in the next breath that it is possible to derive the world from Brahman.

- (ii) Dualism of Brahman and Īśvara :

In Śaṅkara’s writings we come across not only the dualism of Brahman and the world, but also the dualism of Brahman itself when he bifurcates the highest reality into Brahman and Īśvara (God), owing to difference in their nature.⁴

- (iii) Dualism of Brahman and the embodied Selves :

He offers another bifurcation of Brahman into the highest Self and the embodied Self : “.between the embodied Self and the highest Self, there is the difference that the former acts

and enjoys, acquires merit and demerit, and is affected by pleasure, pain and so on; while the latter is of opposite nature, i. e., characterised by being free from all evil and the like."⁵ Again, "Brahman whose essence is eternal pure cognition and freedom is 'different from the embodied Self'. The faults of the embodied Self 'do not attach to that Brahman'...Brahman is superior to the individual soul...."⁶

Elements of Monism in Śaṅkara's System :

At other places, however, Śaṅkara expounds a monistic conception of the universe. The Vedānta Sūtra 1.1.2. as commented on by himself declares, without reservations of any kind, that (i) Brahman is the ultimate cause of everything; (ii) The world issues from Brahman, subsists in Brahman and dissolves in Brahman; (iii) The world is differentiated by names and forms only. The substratum is the same: (iv) There are agents and enjoyers which means that there are many souls: (v) The soul enjoy or suffer the fruits of their actions; (vi) Space, time and causation are real and necessary for the operations of the souls: (vii) The nature of this arrangement is inconceivable by the mind.⁷

Whatever may be the nature of the ultimate reality and this arrangement, it is certain that all the above characteristics from (i) to (vi) must belong to it. The Sūtra clearly suggests a temporal evolution and involution of Brahman. In another context⁸ while explaining his arguments against the Sāṅkhya doctrine of Prakṛti, Śaṅkara repeatedly asserts that Brahman is the material cause of the world, because (i) the effect is non-different from the material cause; (ii) there is no other substance from which the world could originate; (iii) the effects are not reabsorbed into anything else but their material cause; and (iv) the Scripture says: 'That Itself manifested Itself'. Brahman alone created the world out of Itself. The Sūtra 1.4.26 lays down in quite clear and unambiguous language that this was possible by a process of modification⁹ or transformation of Brahman.¹⁰ It is argued that Brahman and the world are related to each other as the clay and the pots. At another place¹¹ Śaṅkara compares the relation of the world and Brahman to that of the waves, foams, bubbles and other modifications of sea water. Commenting on the V. S. 2.1.24, he says; "Just as milk and water turn

into curds and ice respectively, without any extraneous means, so it is in the case of Brahman also".¹² Again in V. S. 2.3.7, Śaṅkara asserts on the authority of the Scriptures that "the entire world has sprung from the one Brahman, ether being produced first and later on the other elements in due succession",¹³ and it is reiterated "as a settled conclusion" that "before ether was produced, Brahman existed without ether", and "ether has Brahman for its material cause".¹⁴

The above illustrations exemplify a real and temporal process of becoming of Brahman. But side by side with these illustrations and also in other contexts, Śaṅkara rejects the modification theory and cites the scriptural passages which declare Brahman to be absolutely changeless and hence incapable of modification. He argues that "in reality there exists no such thing as a modification".¹⁵ The evolution of the physical world is not a process in time for "whatever is bound by space, time and cause cannot be real".¹⁶ Explaining this idea, Radhakrishnan says: "The temporal is not the real."¹⁷ "Brahman is not a cause, for that would be to introduce time relations."¹⁸ "Śaṅkara supports Gauḍapāda's theory of *ajāti* or non-evolution." The analogy of the seed and the tree is inapplicable, "since organic growth and development are temporal processes."¹⁹ If the numerous scriptural passages which refer to creation, etc., are pointed out, Śaṅkara dismisses these accounts as lower knowledge or *aparā vidyā* which does not constitute the main teaching of the Scripture.²⁰

When Śaṅkara explains the nature of the process by which the world originated from Brahman in positive terms, he upholds the theory of *satkāryavāda* and *pariṇāmavāda*. But he is committed to the view that perfection and process are incompatible. The view that Brahman is the material cause of the world (for which he fought with the Sāṅkhya) becomes intolerable, and he has to confer unreality on the physical world and the world process which he does as the cost of a glaring contradiction.

We have shown above, how in his chapter on Adhyāsa, Śaṅkara is haunted by the spectre of dualism which leads him to separate Brahman and the world without any possibility of interaction like Cartesian Substances. He defines Brahman and

the world in such a manner that he cannot reach Brahman through the world, nor can he come down from Brahman to the world. Having presumed that the world is absolutely imperfect and Brahman absolutely perfect, he goes on to argue that the eternal and the changing, the pure and the impure, the intelligent and the unintelligent, the free and the bound, being opposites, cannot coexist. While the dualist respects the right of the imperfect world to its existence, Śāmkara regards the idea as intolerable. He is not content with declaring the world as imperfect, he goes further and asserts that what is imperfect has no right *per se* to exist; and what cannot exist does not exist. The logic of his denial of the world is like this : " It could not. Therefore it should not. Therefore it did not. Therefore it is not. "

When he fails to explain the world of our experience, the only alternative is to declare it unreal, or a great illusion. The dualistic seeds in Śāmkara's philosophy thus pave the way for illusionism.

The Vivarta View :

Śāmkara's special contribution to Vedānta consists in setting *vivartavāda*, the doctrine of ' mere appearance ', against *pariṇāmavāda*, the doctrine of ' actual transformation. ' According to the *vivarta* view, the cause is not in the effect, but only appears to be so. This doctrine has taken many different forms depending upon the nature of the similes employed to illustrate it. Broadly speaking, it is Illusionism of the following types:

(i) Illusions due to similarity in appearance : " Mother-of-pearl appears like silver. " As already shown, this simile has been used in the chapter on Adhyāsa to uphold the dualism of the subject and the object. Strictly speaking, it cannot be called an illusion since it is not due to any optical defect of the percipient. Technical devices have to be employed by the silver-smith to ascertain the truth. This analogy cannot vindicate the metaphysical doctrine of non-dualism.

(ii) (a) The Mirage : The world is compared to the appearance of water in sandy deserts.²¹ (b) Mistaking the post for a man in the twilight.²² (c) Mistaking the rope for a snake.²³

With the help of these examples of ordinary optical illusions, Śāmkara tries to show that the world is a great illusion. But

the fact is that these faulty cognitions are not due to any eternal ignorance of the *jīva*. They are due to physical conditions which affect the sensations of the percipient. Mirage does not appear in darkness and rope-snakes do not appear in light. Some faulty perceptions may be due to excess of light, others to insufficient light, fog, and so on.

Commenting on the V. S. 1·4·27, Vacaspati says : Brahman is the material cause of the world even as rope is the basis of the appearance of the snake. This simile makes the world as illusory as the snake. Even Radhakrishnan, a great admirer of Śaṅkara, notes with regret that "the illustrations used are unfortunate, in that they suggest that the world is also an illusion even as the appearance of the snake is."²⁴ But Śaṅkara not only suggests, he repeatedly asserts that "this entire apparent world, in which good and evil actions are done, etc., is a mere illusion", and "does in reality not exist at all."²⁵ Again, "The worlds are devoid of substance like the interior of the plantain tree, that appear like magic, water in a mirage, or a city in space..."²⁶ At some places he holds the ignorance of the *jīva*, at others the power of *Māyā*, responsible for it. At some places, he refers to both in one breath.²⁷

(iii) Ignorant men ascribe blue colour to the colourless ether.²⁸ But why does it appear as blue and not as green, etc. ? Even to a wise man the sky appears blue. The blueness of the sky as also the redness of the rising and the setting sun are due to physical causes and are now explained by the laws of spectrometry.

(iv) Cognitions due to optical defects or abnormal bodily conditions ; "The moon although one only appears as if she were double."²⁹

The visual appearance of an object is altered if we squint or if we use coloured spectacles or microscopes. Some optical defects lead to night-blindness, others to colour-blindness. Things appear yellow to a jaundiced eye. But the unusualness of these experiences is physically and physiologically explicable. It is due to some optical complications and not due to eternal ignorance of the percipient. From a few examples of optical illusions, which are quite irrelevant, Śaṅkara concludes that the whole world is a great illusion. Śaṅkara thus commits the fallacy of composition and bad analogies. The explanation of abnormal cognitions is

the task of optics. Śaṁkara's philosophy is a case of unwarranted metaphysical exploitation of Optics.

The World : A Dream Experience :

In his expositions of the doctrine of *vivartavāda*, Śaṁkara has repeatedly compared the empirical world with the individual's dream world. In his commentary on Gauḍapāda's *Kārikā*,³⁰ he seems to emphasize the view that the objects perceived in the waking experience are as false and as non-existent as objects of dream experience. In his commentary on the Vedānta Sūtras, he repeats the analogy of waking life with the "illusory visions" of the dreams.³¹ It is argued that the dream objects are real so long as we are dreaming, so also the empirical world is real only at the empirical level and not when the true knowledge dawns on us.

We know what becomes of the dream world when we wake up, but what happens to the empirical world when we attain the knowledge of Brahman? Does the empirical world also become non-existent? Śaṁkara's reply is :

"—for him who has reached the state of truth and reality, the whole apparent world does not exist."³²

"—when nescience is destroyed, its effect, the world also is eliminated entirely and for ever."³³

"—at the dawn of right knowledge this world appearance will be found to be false and non-existing; it cannot therefore be regarded as real."³⁴

Radhakrishnan writes that "the entire phenomenal world does not exist for him who has realised the Self."³⁵ According to Date, "The dream is cancelled by the waking experience; the waking experience is cancelled by the experience of the Brahman."³⁶

With the removal of ignorance, the soul is supposed to become non-different from Brahman. The empirical individuality disappears. But we have no such parallel in our experience. It is unintelligible how mere removal of ignorance leads to the extinction of individuality. For instance, a student ignorant of The Theory of Relativity goes to a teacher of physics who explains the theory and his ignorance is removed. In this case we say that his ignorance has disappeared, but we do not mean that the student has also disappeared with the disappearance of his ignor-

ance! But according to nondualism, the individuality of the Self vanishes in its non-duality with the Brahman. The English term "identical" has been used to describe this non-dual state. But identical does not mean non-dual. It means only similar in many respects. For example, when we talk of identical twins, we do not mean to say that the two individuals have ceased to be two, although they may have so much in common that it may be practically impossible for strangers to distinguish between them.

The analogy of the dream is inappropriate. It suffers from misplaced emphasis and shows poverty of Śaṅkara's logic. If a dream-state is judged and rejected from the empirical stand point, then the ultimate reality should also be judged by the empirical criterion, otherwise we commit the fallacy of the ambiguous middle. C is considered to be unreal when judged from the point of view of B which is taken to be real in relation to C. But the same B is declared unreal afterwards which is a violation of the simple logical law of identity. Śaṅkara proves the unreality of one state by contrasting it with that which later on he declares to be equally unreal. There is no sense in comparing or contrasting one unreal with another unreal.

(v) *The Doctrine of Reflection :*

In his commentary on V. S. 1, 1. 2., Śaṅkara upholds the reality of the individual souls as agents and enjoyers. But in the chapter on Superimposition, he asserts that Superimposition which appears in the form of wrong conception, is the cause of individual souls appearing as agents and enjoyers.³⁷ Again, commenting on V. S. 2·3·50, he puts forward the analogy of the sun reflected in the ripples or jars of water. The individual soul is to be considered "a mere appearance of the highest Self, like the reflection of the sun in the water." In the V. S. 3·2·18, he repeats the analogies of the reflections of the sun and the moon in waters.

When we examine the reflection theory of the relation of Brahman and the *jivas*, we find that it suffers from many shortcomings. Firstly, Brahman the unchanging, has been compared with the sun which is a changing entity. Both the sun and the ripples are impermanent. The analogy makes Brahman as non eternal and changing as the sun.

Again, the appearance of a reflection depends upon the sun sending real light rays into real ripples which occur in real water. There are no ripples without water, and no reflection without a medium distinct from the Sun. But Brahman, *ex hypothesis*, has no other, since it is One without the Second.

Water is not the sun and without water reflections are not possible. Śaṅkara talks only about reflections, and does not realise that water has also to be explained.

The Sāṅkhya system had its Reflection Theory, and Śaṅkara found it useful and adopted it without realising its full implications. The reflections are not immortal or beginningless. They come into existence, stay for a while and disappear for ever. The reflections are not transferred from one ripple to another, or from one pot to another. When a pot is broken, the reflection pertaining to it ceases to exist. It is not absorbed by the Sun, but is lost for ever into non-existence. The doctrine of reflection is not in harmony with the doctrine of Karma and Rebirth (Which Śaṅkara accepts) according to which, on the destruction of the body, the *jīva* is transferred to some other body. The doctrine of reflection seems to be more in harmony with that part of the Cārvāka philosophy which holds that soul, if any, vanishes with the destruction of the body, than with the doctrine of an eternal, immortal Self which migrates from one body to another.

Śaṅkara adopts a number of similes, without realising their inherent weakness so long as it suits his purpose. At one place (V. S. 3.2.20) his imaginary critic points out that the reflected image of the sun dilates when the surface of the water expands; it contracts when the water shrinks; it trembles when the water is agitated; it divides itself when the water is divided. Here Śaṅkara is unable to face the criticism of the Reflection Theory. But instead of admitting the poverty of the Reflection Theory itself, he talks about the shortcomings of the philosophic method of argument by analogy in general and thus makes a *reductio ad absurdum* of his fundamental methodology.

Higher Brahman, Lower Brahman and Creation :

In Śaṅkara's system, the pure Brahman is permanently excluded from even the reflection-creating work lest its purity

perfection should be affected. He therefore creates a new category of Brahman whom he calls Īśvara or Lower Brahman. At some places, Śaṅkara compares this Lower Brahman with a magician who projects unreal phenomena : " As the magician is not at any time affected by the magical illusion produced by himself, because it is unreal, so the highest Self is not affected by the world-illusion."³³ But this analogy does not add any lustre to the glory of Brahman. If the creation of illusions or appearances is the only task of the Creator, it is incompatible with his godliness. One of Descartes' arguments to prove the reality of the physical world is that God being good. He would not allow us to suffer an experience of eternal delusion. It is the Satan's character to deceive others, not God's. Śaṅkara eulogizes Brahman for the very virtue that Descartes condemns as vice.

Again, the Scripture says³³ : " Brahman thought ' Let Me be Many, let Me grow forth ' .." The becoming of Brahman therefore cannot be a delusion since it was willed by pure consciousness. Even an ordinary human being would not say : " Let me have dreams. Let me see snakes instead of ropes. Let me have false experiences ".

Instead of explaining the nature of the world process, Śaṅkara tries to explain it away. He finds the best solution in the denial of the process itself, and therefore, while the reality of the cause is affirmed, the reality of the effects is denied. But it would be like saying that while clay is real, the pots are unreal.

In western philosophic thought, we come across Leibniz's arguments against the ultimate reality of material substance, and Berkeley's arguments against the reality of the physical world, which are far more intelligent and forceful than Śaṅkara's arguments derived from the analogies of dreams, illusions and reflections.

The Illogic of Mayāvāda :

And yet, Śaṅkara could not absolve himself from the responsibility of explaining even the reflection-making process. He thought that the doctrine of Māyā was a good explanation for this difficulty. This Māyā is declared to be the inherent power

of Brahman by which what should have been impossible has become possible. The relation of Brahman and Māyā is unique since it cannot be understood by any intelligent man. It is that of neither identity nor difference, nevertheless it acts as a medium for the projection of the world of plurality.⁴⁰ Śaṅkara says that its mode of operation is indescribable and indefinable. The climax of absurdity is reached when after inventing the category of Māyā he finds difficulty in relating it to Brahman because Brahman is too perfect to need any such category, and expresses doubt about the very existence of Māyā when he declares that Māyā cannot be defined as real or as unreal.⁴¹ Yet he goes on talking about Māyā. He transfers all the evils and imperfections of the world to Māyā and thinks that he has thereby saved the perfection of Brahman. But if Brahman and Māyā are inseparable, as is often declared, then Brahman contains the seeds of error and illusion in itself.

The doctrine of Māyā as pure agnosticism is quite harmless. Even a materialist could seek refuge under it. Without declaring life and mind as illusions or mere reflections, the materialist could say that appearance of life and mind is inexplicable and therefore due to the Māyā Matter. "The ways of matter are unimaginably wonderful," remarks Prof. Hoyle.⁴² The doctrine of Māyā is therefore only a sanctuary of ignorance and does not reveal any special merit of its author.

Some people think that since Śaṅkara has criticized the Buddhist subjectivism,⁴³ it cannot be said that he denies the reality of the world. But this is a poor advocacy of Śaṅkara's cause. It makes only a virtue of inconsistency.

The bifurcation of Brahman into higher and lower is another inconsistency in Śaṅkara. It is said that Īśvara becomes unreal only for him who has realised his oneness with Brahman. But then the question arises: "What is the ontological status of Īśvara?". Īśvara seems to be a superfluous category invented to explain the world of illusions or reflections, because Śaṅkara does not want the real Brahman to do that job.⁴⁴ If, therefore, the concept of Īśvara is true, his concept of Brahman is redundant. And if the concept of Brahman is true, there can be no place in Śaṅkara's system for Īśvara, world or creation. The admission of both the entities lead to confusion. The concept of Māyā was invented by

Śaṅkara to defend himself against this confusion of his own making.

Śaṅkara could have declared straightaway that the world is unintelligible without inventing a number of absurdities which sometimes support, sometimes oppose, each other. In a consistent monistic system, there is no need to multiply basic entities. The application of Ockham's Razor would wipe out all entities other than Brahman from his system.

Defending Śaṅkara's explanation. Ruth Reyna suggests⁴⁵ that in modern science "the phenomenal world is held to be neither real nor unreal and at the cosmic level is non-existent".

It is true that matter at the lowest physical level has ceased to be 'sensible', but matter does not cease to be material when it becomes too thin. Dean Inge writes :⁴⁶ The decomposition of material particles is not a valid argument in favour of a spiritual as opposed to materialistic view of ultimate reality. Although I hold that ultimate reality is 'spiritual', not material, I cannot admit that matter dissolved into radiation is more 'spiritual' than matter in a solid or liquid state. We may refuse to call it any longer matter, but this is not a refutation of materialism..” James Jeans remarks : “...as to what, if anything, it (matter) was before it was matter we know nothing.”⁴⁷

Śaṅkaras' appeal to Scriptures and Svānubhava :

When Śaṅkara fails to argue consistently, he brings in Scriptures to lift us above reasoning. Reason is fallible and is to be rejected if it is not in conformity with the Scriptures. He is sure that his doctrine of Brahman is vindicated by the Scriptures. He upholds the scriptural saying that knowing Brahman and becoming Brahman (*Mund. Up.* 3.2.9) are the same. But if knowing Brahman is becoming one with Brahman, it is not possible to detach oneself again from that unity (like the salt doll which enters water) in order to report back about that unique experience of Brahman. If Śaṅkara's interpretation is valid, then Scriptures cannot be the source of valid knowledge. For, on Śaṅkara's theory, we cannot say that the authors of the Upaniṣad had the knowledge of Brahman since that state involves becoming one with Brahman, a state from which there is no return journey to this world.

The Sutra 1-3-19 describes immortality and fearlessness among the characteristics of Brahman. While commenting on this Sutra, Śaṅkara forgets that fear and courage are personal qualities. How can they apply to Brahman which is devoid of all qualities ? The concept (that Śaṅkara gives here) is human, too human !

There are several schools of Vedānta, and each appeals to the same Scripture for the truth of its doctrine although different from that of Śaṅkara. From a mere reading or study of these various systems, it is not possible to sort out the one which alone is true.

No one has been able to convey the content of the ultimate reality to ordinary mortals in their language. But any positive statement about ultimate reality should have at least the utility of a hypothesis which should be simple and capable of deductive development. If this world cannot be deduced from Brahman, then Brahman ceases to have even the value of a hypothesis. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, declares that even a blade of grass is Brahman,⁴⁸ but Śaṅkara would treat it as a fallacy of superimposition due to non-discrimination of the attributes of Brahman and the world.

Śaṅkara also appeals to *Svānubhava*, one's own experience. But here also the great ones differ. Rāmānuja heard the voice of God telling him that identity was in and through difference.⁴⁹ Tukārām claims to have seen God but he says : " Advaitism pleases me not.⁵⁰ The omniscients of Jainism preached the ultimate duality of *jiva* and *ajiva*. Buddha did not say the same thing as Śaṅkara. The leaders of other schools of Vedānta of the post-Śaṅkara period do not subscribe to Śaṅkara's formulations.

Radhakrishnan writes : " Both Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja were great exponents of the Vedānta...and yet their results show striking differences. Their conclusions reveal their visions, their respective apprehensions of truth."⁵¹ If Radhakrishnan's statement is true, it only shows that either of the two had 'defective'. At another place, Radhakrishnan writes. : " Śaṅkara's view that the problem of reality and appearance remains for us finite souls a riddle is the result of greater maturity of thought."⁵² It is, however, not clear on what grounds Radhakrishnan ascribes greater maturity to Śaṅkara than to other teachers of

Vedanta. If Śaṅkara's doctrine is true, it cannot be known to be so except by those hypothetical Brahman-jñānis who have become so inextricably fused with Brahman that they are no more 'they'.

Concluding Remarks :

Śaṅkara was not interested in the problem of becoming. The fundamental presupposition with him was that process and perfection are incompatible. He tried to reconcile these two ideas after declaring that they were incompatible. The alternative was to declare the empirical world as unreal or illusory. But he tried at the same time to superimpose Advaita on dualistic foundations. If he had been consistent, he should have uncompromisingly held, like Madhava, that the world and God are different. If he wished to prove that the world is unreal, he should have declared it unreal in every way, as unreal as circular square. But he does not do so. He compares the world to dreams, reflected images, illusions and hallucinations and in the next breath he brings in the analogies of clay and pots, etc. He goes on heaping similes over similes but forgets to note that all these similes do not illustrate any one coherent metaphysical doctrine. The examples of clay and pots, gold and ornaments, milk and curd lead to the affirmation of *parināma-vāda*; the examples of mirage and rope-snake lead to illusionism; the examples of sky-castle and magical phenomena lead to hallucinationism; the example of dream-states describes certain psychical phenomena under certain physiological conditions, while the examples of reflected images in the ripples describe an ordinary optical phenomenon.

Unfortunately all the above analogies were used in the Upaniṣads to explain the relation of Brahman, souls and the world. The writers of the Scriptures could not anticipate the great confusion to which the different analogies lead. The later *achāryas* were not bold enough to declare that these analogies were meant only to be popular examples to convey philosophy to a layman. On the contrary, they elevated the sacred analogies to the status of serious arguments in support of rival metaphysical systems. The critics could easily see that the Scriptures were the products of loose thinking on matters which demanded a more serious and logical approach. Śaṅkara also indiscriminately used

all these similes which led to the controversy of *pariṇāmavāda* and *vivartavāda*. He succeeded only in bringing to light the consequences of the defective methodology of the Scriptures. Consequently, every attempt by later Vedāntists to find harmony in the Scriptures led to greater and greater exposure of confusion not only in the writings of Śaṅkara but also in the original scriptures.

The main problem for Śaṅkara, as for all Vedānta, was to show whether and how the dualism of the physical world and the *jīvas* could be mitigated in the all embracing unity of Brahman. There were therefore two simple questions before him, viz.

- (i) how Brahman became (or becomes) matter ? and
- (ii) how Brahman became (or becomes) the *jīvas* ?

The Upaniṣads and all later Vedānta explained (i) by *pariṇāmavāda*. Theoretically, *pariṇāmavāda* should have been enough to explain the evolution of the physical world. Śaṅkara does not seriously challenge it because the Scripture says so. He himself labours hard to explain cosmic evolution in terms of *pariṇāmavāda* as far as he can go with the help of scriptures. Suddenly he executes a somersault and deviates from the stand in two ways :

- (i) by declaring that ultimately all is illusion;
- (ii) it is a lower type of knowledge, and therefore its teaching is not the main business of scriptures.

He thus takes away a very important portfolio of the scripture writers.

Śaṅkara saw that *pariṇāmavāda* could explain the origin, existence and multiplicity of the *jīvas*. Since his motive was to deny the multiplicity of the *jīvas*, he introduced *vivartavāda* for this purpose and we have seen how he made *vivartavāda* perform this job.

When Śaṅkara extended the doctrine of *vivarta* to explain the physical world, it led to an all embracing Illusionism. Śaṅkara could not foresee the future difficulties of this approach. After Śaṅkara, the controversy between *pariṇāmavāda* and *vivartavāda* assumed serious dimensions. His devotees ran into difficulty and were now on the defensive. They have been lamenting to this day over this "unfortunate controversy" and suggest

that the *vivarta* and the *pariṇāma* views are compatible with one another. They have not realised that the question of the compatibility of the *vivarta* and *pariṇāma* views is quite irrelevant and they miss the spirit of Śaṅkara's approach. It is wrong to suppose that their compatibility would vindicate monism. In fact there is no necessary relation between the *vivarta* and *pariṇāma* views. The former denies, and the latter affirms the reality of the world.

The devotees of Śaṅkara have failed to realise that these two doctrines have two different purposes, and were brought forward to explain two fundamentally different segments of reality, viz., the *ajiva* and the *jiva*. *Pariṇāma* was meant to explain the *ajiva* or the physical world, and *vivarta* to show the unreality of the *jivas*. *Pariṇāma* was not used to show the unreality of the *jivas* and *vivarta* could not be made to explain the evolution of the physical world. It is therefore irrelevant to ask whether the two could be compatible. The question of their compatibility cannot arise in Śaṅkara's system. They are the results of a dualistic approach. Śaṅkara's system is not the *advaita* of matter and *jivas*. It was made to give a false appearance of monism.

Śaṅkara's motive was only to establish the non-duality of the *jivas* and Brahman by employing the similes of *vivarta*. Śaṅkara does not show equal concern to uphold the identity of the physical world and Brahman. Although he accepts the doctrine of *satkaryavāda* and sometimes uses the similes of *pariṇāmavāda* he shudders at the logical consequence of this approach which would make the world the effect of Brahman in the same way in which the pot is the effect of clay. Consequently, there is the subterfuge of *māyāvāda*.

The question whether the *jiva* is identical with Brahman or not is too speculative and cannot be settled except at the level of omniscience. It is regrettable that those who were supposed to be omniscient differed so much among themselves. Moreover, those who claimed to know their minds better, only created a mess in philosophy. It is surprising to note why Śaṅkara made such a big issue of the relation of *jiva* and Brahman and was content to ignore a very vital part of metaphysics, viz., the evolution of the universe. The V. S. 1.4.14⁵³ points out the discrepancies in the scriptural passages which enumerate the

successive stages of evolution of the world. Śaṁkara, in his reply, does not deny the contradictions. On the other hand, he asks us to ignore these contradictions, which he says, "matter little", since it is not the main object of the Scriptures to teach about creation.⁵⁴ At one place he goes so far as to maintain that there are many perfect men (Siddhas) whose intuitions are mutually contradictory. In such cases Scriptures are the court of final decision.⁵⁵ Śaṁkara means that the *Siddhas* or "perfect men" who were not scripture-writers were not-perfect. Besides being a highly illogical statement, it is the most indefensible argument. To maintain that perfect men may also disagree is very surprising. We may legitimately ask as to why it was difficult for omniscient beings to give a definite, agreed and uncontested doctrine of the evolution of the universe and the existence of the *jivas*. The fact that they failed to do so, clearly shows that the authors of these scriptures were short of omniscience.

Śaṁkara narrowed down the sphere of metaphysics by devaluating a very important function of metaphysics. In fact, the material cause or the forerunner of matter has to be pointed out and related to the ultimate reality. The ordinary mortals cannot say as to what matter was before it became matter. The forerunner of matter may have been some sort of matter or spirit or some neutral stuff. But whatever it was, creation was certainly due to a process of evolution, condensation or densification of that unitary substance if we uncompromisingly stick to a monistic interpretation of the world. If the ultimate reality is spiritual, then it should also be capable of becoming matter.

Śaṁkara does not want to face the question "How Brahman became matter?" and tries to kick it with contempt. We come across negative answers in his writings to the question "Can Brahman become matter?" on the ground that there cannot be any intelligible relation between the two as they are opposed to each other as light and darkness. The question, "Did Brahman become matter" therefore automatically fall to the ground.

Instead of explaining how Brahman became matter, Śaṁkara treats matter only as the untouchable in Philosophy. Many later Vedantists gave proper accommodation to matter in their metaphysics. In his *Life Divine* Aurobindo has condemned

those who negate this world. He declares in unequivocal terms that "Matter also is Brahman," and deals with the various stages of cosmic evolution. In fact it is the chief task of metaphysics to explain this world (and everything therein) from and to the ultimate reality by whatever name we may call it. The "hidden dualist" in Śaṅkara led him to widen the hiatus between Brahman, world and the *jivas* to such an extent that it became absolutely unbridgeable within the framework of his system. Śaṅkara thus contributed a lot of confusion to Vedānta and Indian Philosophy.

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NOTES

1. *The Vedānta Sūtras*, Part I, p. 25. E. T. by G. Thibaut, in the *Sacred Books of the East Series*, Vols. XXXIV and XXXVIII, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1962. Hereafter referred as V. S. I and V. S. II.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
3. *Ibid.* p. 3; also 1.1.4 : The purport of the Scripture is "to show that Brahman as the eternal subject is never an object. . . ." *Ibid.* p. 32.
4. *Ibid.* 2.1.14, pp. 329, 330.
5. *Ibid.* p. 115. V. S. 1.2.8.
6. *Ibid.* pp. 344, 345, V. S. 2.1.22.
7. *Ibid.* p. 16.
8. *Ibid.* 1.4.23-26, pp. 285-7; V. S. 1.4.23.
9. *Ibid.* p. 287.
10. S. Radhakrishnan : *The Brahma Sūtras*, p. 331. Allen and Unwin, London, 1971.
11. V. S. I, p. 319; V. S. 2.1.13.
12. *Ibid.* p. 347.
13. V. S. II, pp. 16, 17. (2.3.7).
14. S. Radhakrishnan : *The Brahma Sūtras*, 2.3.7; p. 399.
15. V. S. I, p. 320, V. S. 2.1.14.
16. S. Radhakrishnan : *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 528.

17. Ibid., p. 528.
18. Ibid. p. 535.
19. Ibid. p. 567.
20. V. S. I. 1.4.14, p. 265. Also see *Mundaka Up.* 1.2.
21. Ibid. 2.1.14, p. 324. Also see *Mundaka Up.* 1.2.12; *Brh. Up.* 4.4.6.
22. Ibid. 1.3.19, p. 185.
23. Ibid. 2.1.9, p. 312.
24. *The Brahma Sutras*, p. 332.
25. V. S. I, p. 345, V. S. 2.1.23.
26. *Mundaka Upanishad Bhasya* : 1.2.12, in *The Eight Upanishads*, vol. II, p. 109, Advaita Ashram.
27. V. S. I, p. 345; also see p. 32, V. S. 2.1.23.
28. Ibid. 1.3.19, p. 190; also see *Brh. Up.* 4.4.6.
29. Ibid. pp. 5-352.
30. 1.17; 2.1.12. Referred in Dasgupta's *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 6.7.28.
31. V. S. I. 2.1.9, p. 312; also 2.1.14; 2.1.28, pp. 324, 353.
32. *Mundaka Upanishad* : 1.2. p. 95.
33. *Advaitasiddhi*, referred by S. N. Dasgupta in *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 444.
34. *The Brahman Sutras*, 2.1.14, p. 348.
35. *Vedanta Explained*, Vol. II, p. 455. Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973. Second Edition.
36. V. S. I. p. 9.
37. Ibid. p. 312; also see 2.1.29, V. S. 2.1.9.
38. Ibid. 1.1.5, pp. 47-8, from *Ch. Up.* VI. 2.
39. Ibid. p. 345; also see 1.1.4, p. 32. V.S. 2.1.23.
40. Ibid. 1.4.3, p. 243; also see 2.1.14. pp. 328-9.
41. *Man and Materialism*, p. 67, Allen and Unwin, 1957.
42. V. S. I, 2.28-32.
43. V. S. 2.1.14, pp. 329-330; also see p. cxxiv. f. n., and Dasgupta's *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 39.
44. *The Philosophy of Matter in the Atomic Era*, p. x. Asia Publishing House, Delhi, 1962, also see p. 82.
45. *God and the Astronomers*, p. viii, Longmans, 1933.

47. His article in *Evolution in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, p. 20, Blackie and Sons, London, 1925 (A collected work).
48. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol XLVIII, p. 156.
49. Quoted by C. D. Sharma in *Indian Philosophy*, P. 486, Nand Kishore and Sons, Banaras, 1952.
50. Quoted by R. D. Ranade in his *Mysticism in Maharashtra*, p. 330, Poona, 1933.
51. *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, pp. 666-667.
52. *Ibid.* p. 586.
53. V. S. I, pp. 263-5; also see 2.1.14, p. 327.
54. *Ibid.* p. 265.
55. V. S. I, 2.1.1, p. 294.