

ŚAṄKARA

THE MAN AND HIS
PHILOSOPHY



T.S. RUKMANI

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This booklet briefly describes how *Advaita* philosophy is a logical culmination of the thought process which began a long time ago and of which one gets an idea in the *Vedas*. The main concepts of this philosophy have found expression for the first time in a systematic manner in the *Gauḍapāda-kārikās*. Śaṅkara coming in the same line of thinkers, polished and chiselled these concepts of Gauḍapāda grounding them on a sure philosophical footing by commenting on the *prasthānatrayī*. Śaṅkara thus laid the methodology for all future Vedānta *acāryas* who had to comment on the *prasthānatrayī* for recognition of their school of thought.

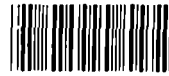
The booklet also attempts a brief outline of Śaṅkara's life history based on tradition. Śaṅkara is not only the *ācārya* par excellence of the *advaita* thought but is also considered to be the author of a number of *bhakti* compositions. The apparent contradiction in allowing bhakti or devotion to a personal God while propagating an uncompromising path of knowledge (*jñānamārga*) for liberation has been explained on the basis of Śaṅkara's philosophy itself.

Whether *advaita* discounts the value of worldly existence is also examined from the standpoint of Śaṅkara's own life. Śaṅkara himself in his personal life, upheld the highest values of truth and integrity and Śaṅkara's own life reinforces the idea that *advaita* in no way makes an individual other-worldly and disinterested in the day-to-day affairs of the world.

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ŚĀṆKĀRA

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T.S. RUKMANI



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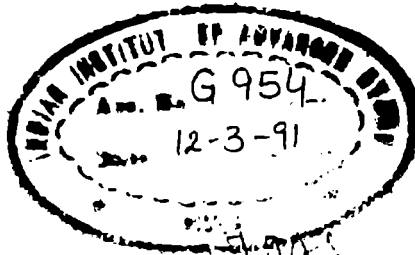
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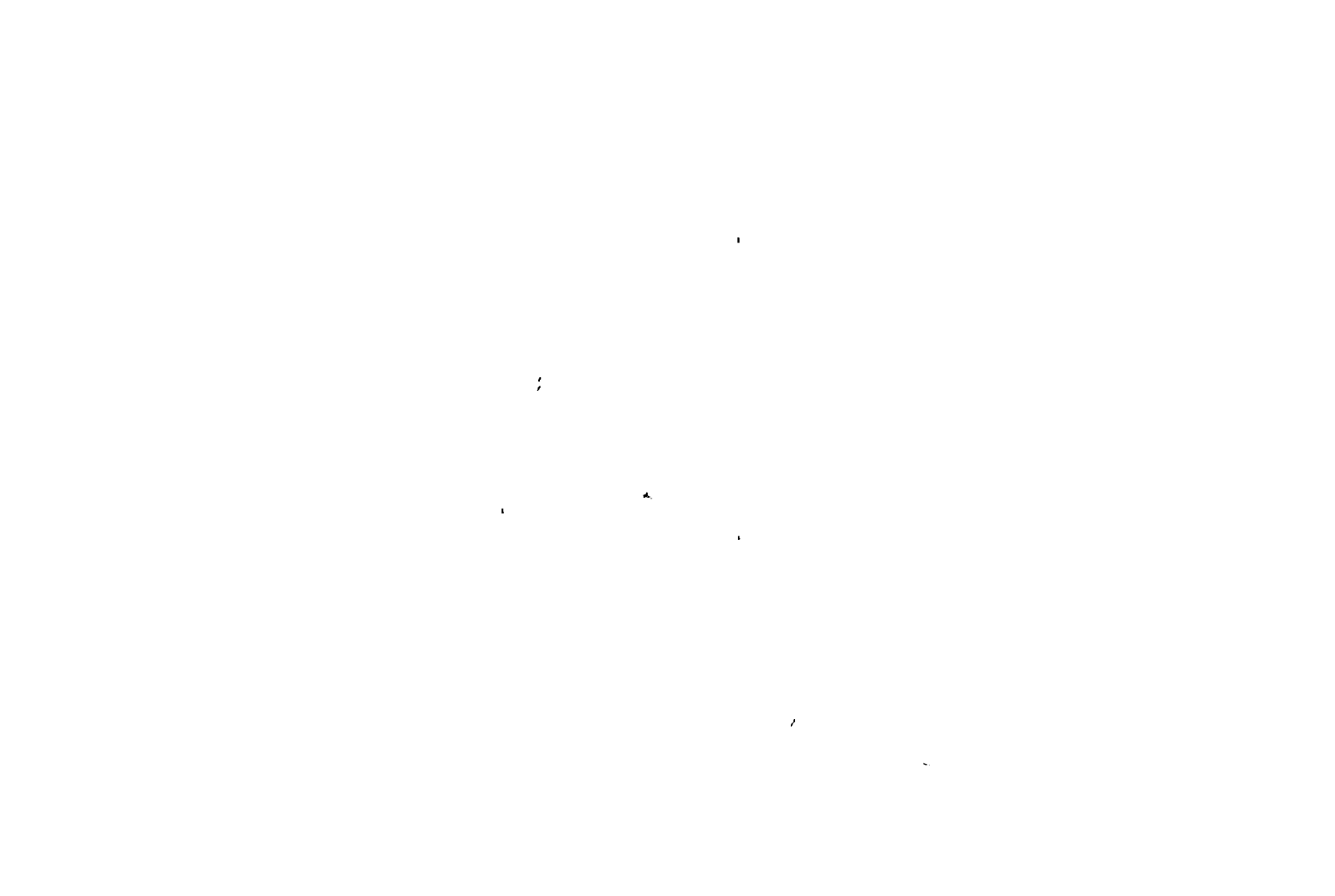
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FOREWORD

The Indian Institute of Advanced Study from its very inception in 1965 encouraged its Fellows to interact among themselves and with outside scholars through weekly seminars. By now, consequently, about two hundred contributions have been made. Some of the papers discussed in these seminars were published by the Institute as 'occasional papers' in the early years of its activity. This publication programme was discontinued till it was revived in 1984.

Dr T.S. Rukmani's *Śaṅkara: The Man and His Philosophy* is being published in the 'occasional papers' series in the hope that it will be of interest to the general reader as well as the specialist.

J.S. GREWAL
Director



PREFACE

The fortnightly seminars at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS) where a fellow presents a working paper which is followed by a lively discussion is something one looks forward to. The discussion is invariably enriching and rewarding.

This paper on Śaṅkara was also first presented as a working paper at one of these seminars. One takes for granted that Śaṅkara and *advaita* is something which is part and parcel of the Indian ethos. I was in for a rude shock when it was apparent that beyond a vague notion of Śaṅkara being the propounder of the *advaita* philosophy there was not much understanding of the rigorous logic which compelled Śaṅkara to conclude that 'Truth' can only be one without a second, i.e., *Advaita*. This made me try and state the *Advaita* concepts in a manner which would be intelligible to those who are interested in *Advaita* philosophy. I do hope that this small work will help those who have no time to go into Śaṅkara's intricate thinking, given in voluminous works like the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, understand the basic points of *Advaita*. For me it has been a unique experience summarising the philosophy of this stalwart amongst Indian thinkers. It was made possible because of my fellowship at the IIAS for which I am indeed thankful.

T.S. RUKMANI



ŚAṄKARA—THE MAN AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

Śaṅkara's philosophy is what is known as *advaita* and it has captured the imagination of philosophers and scholars all over the world. It is one of the most discussed philosophies and is as relevant today as it was in the years when Śaṅkara propounded it.

To get an idea of its popularity one has to only look at *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Philosophies* Vol. I published in 1981. It lists almost 700 titles on Advaita Vedānta and runs into about 30 pages. This collection is only of well known titles published upto 1965. It does not include books like Raja Rao's *Serpent and the Rope* or Fritz Capra's *Tao of Physics* and also such books which discuss Vedānta as part of their broader framework. Nor does it include books on comparative studies like that between Śaṅkara and other philosophers like Hegel and Bradley. This thus indicates the perennial interest that Śaṅkara's *advaita* has evoked over the centuries and continues to do so right upto the present day.

Dr Radhakrishnan thus describes Śaṅkara in his *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II.

It is impossible to read Śaṅkara's writings, packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of a very fine penetration and profound spirituality. With his acute feeling of the immeasurable world, his stirring gaze into the abysmal mysteries of spirit, his unswerving resolve to say neither more nor less than what could be proved, Śaṅkara stands out as a heroic figure of the first rank in the somewhat motley crowd of the religious thinkers of medieval India. His philosophy stands out complete, needing neither a before nor an after. It expounds its own presuppositions, is ruled by its own end and holds all its elements, in a stable, reasoned equipoise.

It is interesting to note that Somerset Maugham's *Razor's*

Edge is a remarkable exposition of *advaita* for the modern mind. He quotes the *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* at the beginning of this book. The title itself is borrowed from the words '*kṣurasya dhārā niṣītā duratyayā...*' from the same *Upaniṣad*.¹ He further quotes Emerson 'They reckon ill who leave me out, when me they fly, I am the wings; I am the doubter and the doubt, And I the hymn the Brahmin sings', in answer to the question 'who can explain the Infinite in words'?

The character in *Rajor's Edge* poses the problem in the following manner: 'You who are so liberal, who know the world, who've read so much, science, philosophy, literature... do you in your heart of hearts believe in incarnation?' The answer is: 'My dear friend if I did not believe in it life would have no meaning for me.' 'And what is the goal?' 'Liberation from the bondage of rebirth.' The whole book is a remarkable exposition of *advaita* for the modern mind.

Jawaharlal Nehru has this to say of Śāṅkara in his '*Discovery of India*'.

He synthesised diverse currents troubling the mind of India and built a unity of outlook. In his life of only 32 years he did the work of many long lives and left such an impress of his powerful mind and rich personality on India that it is very evident right upto this day. He was a curious mixture of philosopher and scholar, agnostic and mystic, poet and saint, practical reformer and able organiser. On the popular plane he destroyed many a dogma and opened the door of his philosophical sanctuary to everyone who was capable of entering it irrespective of caste or creed.

Thus this sampling proves beyond doubt the continued interest that Śāṅkara evokes not only in the country of his birth but all over the world.

Is this, one may ask, only a reverence for the past which is a way of paying tribute to them? Kālidāsa cautioned us in the *Mālavikāgnimitram*, against accepting everything that is old to be gold and also simultaneously warned us that everything new need not be without any blemish.² It is for the wise to pronounce

judgement on the merits of a work after examining it from all angles.³ It is only those works which can stand the test of time that will continue to fire peoples' imagination for ever. Thus it is that the works of Kālidāsa, Shakespeare, Goethe and others are all time works.

If this is true of literary works, it is but natural that fundamental schools of thought including philosophical schools that shape the thought processes of whole groups of people should continue to guide generations of human beings long after the founder was no more.

Neither literature nor philosophy is independent of a social process. No person is born into a vacuum. Every person by his/her accident of birth into a particular family, religion or country is born into the ethos of a particular culture. Irrespective of the ideology that one may grow into in maturity, the influences of those early impressionable years, where one absorbs a lot from the environment and surrounding as much as from one's immediate family is part of one's heritage. It is in this context that Śaṅkara is important.

Śaṅkara had a mind that was able to delve deep into the *Upaniṣads* and come out with some truly astonishing philosophical ideas. He was able to combine tradition with a new way of radical thinking and laid the foundation for much of the later philosophical thought in India.

Śaṅkara's place is not confined to only scholarly and philosophical circles. There are some thinkers who are like pillars or like threads woven into a cloth. Remove the threads and the cloth will collapse out of existence. Śaṅkara and his place in Indian history and thought is such a one. The entire ethos and culture is permeated with a lot of what Śaṅkara preached and taught; thus it is impossible to understand the psyche of the Indian without understanding the significance of such words as *nirguṇa-brahman*, *saguṇa-brahman*, *māyā*, *avidyā*, *jñānamārga*, *jīvātmā*, *paramātmā*, etc.

The oft-quoted example of the rope and the snake, the implicit acceptance of the divinity of man because of the identity of the *jīvātmā* with the *paramātmā*, the internalising of the understanding of the immortality of *ātman*, which in a sense

has removed the fear of death, are all a contribution of Śaṅkarācārya. What is more important is to know that the internalisation of these values and concepts is widespread—not restricted to the so-called educated elite and is the common heritage of every Indian.

Śaṅkara's philosophy cannot be called something completely original and propounded by him for the first time. Gauḍapāda, who is traditionally considered his guru's *guru*, (Govindapāda being Śaṅkara's guru) laid the foundations of advaita through his *ajātivāda* in the *Māṇḍūkyakārikās*. In order to understand many of the theories that Śaṅkara propounded like the world being an appearance and having only a *vyāvahārikasattā*, or that there can be only one Reality logically and therefore the individual self has of necessity to be one with the ultimate Truth and other truths which followed from this basic premise, will become clear if we look at what Gauḍapāda has to say on all these points in the *Gauḍapādakārikās*. Gauḍapāda can be called the first person to systematically state the *advaita* position. Thus Mahāmaho-padhyāya Vāsudeva Shastri Abhyankar summarises the contributions of Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkarācārya as follows:

Whatever Gauḍapāda intended to say in his *kārikās* Śaṅkarācārya has hinted in his *bhāṣya*. Whatever G. merely hinted S. propounded. Whatever G. propounded S. proved by reasoning. Whatever G. proved S. established firmly. Whatever G. hinted as worthless S. treated with contempt. Whatever G. treated with contempt S. condemned outright. Whatever G. condemned outright S. brushed aside unceremoniously. Whatever G. brushed aside, S. threw overboard mercilessly. Whatever G. threw overboard S. destroyed lock, stock and barrel.⁴

The *Ajātivāda* or non-origination theory of Gauḍapāda is based on the following reasons given in the *kārikās*. The first principle is that nothing can change its nature, for any little change will result in its ceasing to be the original entity.⁵ Thus it is made clear that all is existence and unoriginated. 'Whatever

is not there before and is not there in the end must not be existing in the present as well'.⁶ Thus objects experienced in the working and dream states are peculiar to their own states. The objects in a dream are real only to a dreamer and the objects in the waking state are real only to one who experiences them in that state.

The so-called ideas, forms and shapes are all superimpositions on the *paramātman*. While ignorant people may describe the *paramātman* variously the truth is that there is really no creation and it can be described as a castle in the air.⁷ Gauḍapāda's famous *ajātivāda* (theory of non-origination) is stated as 'there is no annihilation, no birth, no one bound to *samsāra*, no one trying for liberation, no one desirous of liberation, no one liberated'.⁸ 'Only *advaita* exists and it is unoriginated and there is nothing distinct or non-distinct apart from *ātman*'.⁹

If there is only the one how did the universe come to be produced he asks and then answers it by demolishing the causal theory itself. Gauḍapāda says that one cannot prove the relation between cause and effect. The relation of cause and effect implies that (i) cause and effect are different, (ii) cause must have existed before effect, i.e., effect must have not existed before being produced.

'In the first case if cause and effect are different anything can be produced out of anything; and in the second case also if the effect did not exist before then it would always remain so. An effect must have its nature similar to that of the cause'.¹⁰ Therefore Gauḍapāda says (i) an existent cannot produce a non-existent, (ii) a non-existent cannot produce an existent, (iii) an existent cannot produce another existent for there would be *vikriya* in its nature during the process, and (iv) a non-existent thing can obviously not produce another non-existent thing.¹¹

Thus when there is no transformation because there is no relation of cause and effect, one reaches the only conclusion that 'there is only one entity which must be unborn, immutable and all pervading'.¹²

One can easily discern the basis of many of Śaṅkara's theories

in the above *ajātivāda* of Gauḍapāda. It is thus correctly said that Śaṅkara built his *advaita* on the foundation laid by Gauḍapāda. But, Śaṅkara, by his genius, was able to reinstate the Upaniṣadic heritage which was almost threatened with extinction due to the efforts of such stalwarts as Aśvaghōṣa, Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu and put it in a strong logical framework. He was also responsible for taking the message of *advaita* throughout the length and breadth of the country. This is also amazing if one recalls the historical and political conditions of the country round about the eighth century A.D.

At this period in India's history the north was reeling under a feeling of deep insecurity. The last of the emperors, Harshavardhana was himself a Buddhist and the country had as yet not recovered from the onslaught of the Hūnas. Though politically this was not true of South India, the decline of *dharmarājya*, with the advent of reform movements like, Buddhism and Jainism, was as much true in the South as in other parts of the country. It was perhaps the strength and vigour of South India between A.D. 550 and 750, which threw up a leader of Śaṅkara's dynamism who with his clear insight was able to weave the various strands of philosophico-religious thought available, into a single strand, and fit it into the traditional heritage without appearing to harm its fundamental tenets.

Going back to the philosophy of Śaṅkara, it is generally stated that Śaṅkara himself summarised his whole philosophy into two lines so that even those who could not get time to read any of his works could still get an idea of this philosophy. Thus he says that 'the only Truth is *Brahman* and the world is an illusion. The self is none other than *Brahman* itself'.¹³

The journey that philosophy took before stating this truth in such a succinct form can be imagined. The seed for such a growth was already sown in the *Nāsadiyasūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*. There, the Vedic *ṛṣi* wonders about the origin of the universe. The first verse of this *sūkta* runs as follows: 'There was neither being nor non-being then; there was not the air nor the heaven which is beyond, what did it contain? Where? In whose protection?

Was there water unfathomable, profound? Who knows truly?'¹⁴

While there are only seven verses in this hymn each one is pregnant with ideas. All known conditions are predicted of that state in which figure darkness, water, heat and the void. It is finally stated that desire is the bond that connects the existent in the non-existent.

The seeds of not only *Vedānta* but even *Buddhism* and *Jainism* can be traced to this *Nāsadiyasūkta*. The ancient ṛṣi pose the problem of the origin of the universe vividly but have no answer to their query. There was no answer to that query at that time neither is there one in this day and age in spite of the tremendous strides that science has made. Physicists are still grappling with the same problem...is the origin of the universe due to a big bang or has the universe always been around they ask. They are divided equally in their opinion about the two options. Thus in spite of years of research and inquiry the present day scientist is not better off in absolute terms as far as this question is concerned. His conjecture is only as good as the intuition of the Vedic ṛṣi.

The *Nāsadiyasūkta*, the tendency to give equal importance to every personified deity known, called as Kenotheism or Henotheism by scholars, statements like 'The one truth is known in many ways'¹⁵ and similar ideas are all working towards reducing the ultimate truth, behind the visible universe, to a single entity.

By the time of the *Upaniṣads* a shift in thought had taken place. The ṛṣi is now increasingly looking inwards within himself in search of the fundamental truth. Since Śāṅkara and the earlier *ācāryas* rely mainly on the *Upaniṣads* to develop the *advaita* philosophy it will be useful to look for clues for *advaita* in the *Upaniṣadic* literature itself. While the period of argumentation and logic is yet to come soon after, in the *sūtras* and *bhāṣyas*, in the *Upaniṣads* we are still in the period of speculation. The search for that true self is conducted through a process of reduction from the gross to the subtle, on the one hand, and through an analysis based on the principle of consciousness, on the other. The nature of the enduring self through all the stages of growth, all mental states and all stages

of experience like waking, dream and deep sleep, engaged the attention of the *Upaniṣads*. The first philosopher to make full use of the three states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep and *turya* (or *turīya*) described in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* and *Chāndogyopaniṣad* was Gauḍapāda.¹⁶ In the waking state the self experiences various objects with the help of the mind and sense-organs; in dream the sense-organs are quietened and the self perceives only with the help of the mind, the subtle objects inside; in deep sleep the sense organs and mind are inactive and the self perceives nothing. Furthermore the experiences of the waking state are contradicted in the dream state and vice-versa; thus, in truth, there is no real difference between the two states.

After deep sleep one gets up with the feeling 'I slept very well, I did not perceive anything'. Thus the sense-of-I, due to *avidyā* or ignorance is still present in that state as well. Therefore this also cannot be the highest reality says Gauḍapāda. This leads to the conclusion that the highest truth will have to be something transcending the above three states and Gauḍapāda calls it the *turya* or fourth which is unoriginated and the same always.

Śaṅkarācārya and the later commentators expand this later into a full-fledged theory of the witness or *sākṣī* present in all the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep experience.

Statements like 'I am *Brahman*'.¹⁷ 'That you are'.¹⁸ '*Brahman* is *Ānanda*'.¹⁹ '*Brahman* is knowledge'²⁰...called the *mahāvākyas*, are paving the way that would logically lead to the one and only truth called *Brahman*, not different from the enduring *jīva* entity or the self in man. Thus the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* summarises this truth as 'The great endless infinite reality is but pure intelligence'. 'The same *Upaniṣad* again describes the ultimate in these words 'Through what should one know that owing to which all this is known...through what O Maitreyi, should one know the knower?'²¹

Building on these blocks Śaṅkara develops his unique theory of *adhyāsa* or superimposition. Though Gauḍapāda mentions the rope-snake illusion²² and hints at *adhyāsa* it was left to Śaṅkara to build the theory in all its details to fit the

fundamentals of *advaita* philosophy. He explains the principle of *adhyāsa* in his preamble to the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*. The two key words he uses there are *asmatpratyaya* and *yusmatpratyaya*, the subject and the object; the former is characterised by awareness and its sphere is the notion of 'I' while the latter covers all the objects. There is an erroneous identification of the properties of those two on each other which is *adhyāsa*, according to Śaṅkara.²³ To give an example, when one says 'I am this body' the body as such is superimposed on the self conceived of as 'I' i.e. the separateness of the body and the self is forgotten. Similarly when one says 'This is my body' the attributes of the body are superimposed on the self i.e. the attributes are mixed up. And this mixing up or *adhyāsa* is itself *avidyā*; its opposite or the ascertainment of the nature of the *vastu* (real entity) by separating the superimposed thing from it is called *vidyā*.

What is important to remember in *adhyāsa* is that the substance on which there is a superimposition is not affected in the least by the qualities of the thing superimposed. The standard examples to grasp this truth are given from day to day experience as when one mistakes a rope for a snake or a piece of shell for silver. The snake in the rope-snake example is the superimposed on the rope which is the underlying reality. It is due to *avidyā* and is realised the moment *vidyā* or *viveka* dawns that this is not a snake but just a rope.

Having established *Brahman* as the one and only Truth Śaṅkara discusses the lower truths under which come God, the world of hopes and aspirations, subject and object, cause and effect. While *Brahman* is the *pāramārthikasattā*, the *vyāvahārikasattā* comprises the above. The one is real, the other unreal, nay illusion itself. Śaṅkara following his guru, has one more level of reality, the *prātibhāsika* (imagined). *Prātibhāsika* is imagined as the objects in a dream. Compared to the *prātibhāsika* the *vyāvahārika* lasts longer. Thus the world of experience, of name and form, though lasting longer than the objects in a dream, is also an illusion, to be transcended by the *bādhakajñāna* (sublating knowledge) of the *pāramārthikasattā*, *Brahman*.

One criticism levelled against *advaita* is that it proclaims the world in which we all move and act to be unreal. This unfortunately is a misunderstanding of the philosophy. *Advaita* only states that ontologically the ultimate Reality belongs only to *Brahman*. And it is only from the standpoint of the ultimate Reality *Brahman* that the world has no reality. As long as self-realization does not take place the world of experience has all the reality in a worldly sense.

Looked at differently, *Brahman* is what appears as the world and therefore the appearance is true for all purposes till such time as Brahman realization does not take place. It is only from the epistemological standpoint of a higher experience and knowledge of the Absolute Reality that the world is called unreal.

As long as one is under the influence of ignorance the world has all the reality that one supposes it to have. It is like a dream-tiger. A dream-tiger frightens the dreamer who knows it is unreal only on waking up and not while dreaming of it. Similarly till knowledge dawns the world of experience is real for all practical purposes and is thus called the *vyāvahārikasattā*.

The next question that automatically arises is the nature of *Brahman*, the *pāramārthikasattā* and its relationship to the world, the *vyāvahārikasattā*. We can know what *Brahman* is, not, says Śaṅkara, for to know what *Brahman* is, is not knowing him in fact. Gauḍapāda also describes the *ātman* in negative terms.²⁴ Śaṅkara describes *Brahman* in his *Daśaślokī* as 'It is not one it is non-two; it is not absolute, it is non-absolute; it is not *sūnya*, it is not *aśūnya*; what can I say about that established in *Vedānta*'?²⁵

Though in truth *Brahman* cannot be described, an attempt is made in order to explain its relationship with the world. *Brahman* can be described in two ways: (i) with reference to its intrinsic nature (*svarūpalakṣaṇā*) and (ii) with reference to its accidental nature (*taṭasthalakṣaṇā*).

Brahman's essential nature is expressed as *saṁcidānanda svarūpa* composed of the three words *sat* (existence) *cit* (consciousness) and *ānanda* (bliss). One cannot go into the

elaborate reasoning by which *Brahman* came to be associated with these three words, here.²⁶

Sat expresses an unique existence in the sense that there is no other reality like it or unlike it. *Cit* stands for spiritual consciousness per se, where there is no distinction between knower, known and knowledge. 'It is not possible to deny knowledge, for the denial itself is a form of knowledge-like assertion. Similarly it is not possible to deny being, for the denial and one who denies assert their being. Thus being is self-existent, and self proved (*svayamsiddha*) and knowledge is self-luminous (*svayamprakāśa*) and also illumines the object known (*paraprakāśaka*)'.²⁷

As for *ānanda* it is a deep state of bliss which consists in self-realisation. The acquisition of worldly pleasures and the seeking of happiness points to the fact that happiness is one's nature. 'One spontaneously feels blissful in gaining oneself'.²⁸ In other words pleasure is not in the object sought but in fulfilling oneself. Thus in self-realisation or in the ultimate fulfilment there is supreme bliss (*ānanda*) which is the nature of *Brahman*.

But one has to understand that the three—*sat*, *cit* and *ānanda*—are not three qualities of *Brahman*, but its essential nature. Looked at ontologically we realise the Being or *sat* aspect of *Brahman*. From the epistemological viewpoint *Brahman* is revealed as *cit* or consciousness. And from the point of view of the highest value *Brahman* is *ānanda* or bliss itself.

As for the world it is described as the accidental nature of *Brahman*. That from which the origination, preservation and annihilation of the world takes place is *Brahman*. This is discussed by Śaṅkara under the second sūtra of the *Brahmasūtras*.²⁹ *Brahman* who is without attributes and is the Absolute cannot be a cause of the world as then he will cease to be without attributes; the world cannot also be uncaused which then will land us in a duality like the Sāṅkhyas, for it will have to be another reality itself. That will render absolutism meaningless.

Śaṅkara therefore works out an explanation which steers clear of the Sāṅkhyan *satkāryavāda* and Nyāya's *asatkāryavāda*

or *ārambhavāda* and arrives at what is known as *vivartavāda* or the doctrine of appearances. The basis for *vivartavāda* is also 'adhyāsa' or superimposition; one can say that *vivartavāda* is only an extension of the theory of *adhyāsa* or superimposition. There are some scholars who would argue that *adhyāsa* and *vivarta* are both two sides of the same coin—one being an epistemological explanation while the other being an ontological explanation of the same phenomenon. *Vivarta* is in other words only an appearance, it does not introduce any change in the real thing and the thing always remains unaffected and unchanged. The changes are only appearances, are only names and forms. The standard example from the world for this is that of the clay from which the pot is made; the change of earth into pot is merely a nominal one; the pot as pot is still an earthen pot and it is only the earth which is real, the pot being secondary in the real sense. This is *vivarta* or appearance of the pot in the clay like the appearance of the snake in the rope.³⁰ What has to be borne in mind here is that, from the absolute point of view the world is but an appearance. But when the absolute is associated with *māyā* then creation of the world is inevitable.

Creation is a beginningless activity. Śāṅkara is not concerned with giving a metaphysical doctrine about the origin of the world. Creation is the manifestation of that which exists in an unmanifest form in *Īśvara* also known as *Saguṇa Brahman*. The absolute when associated with *māyā* is called *Saguṇa brahman* or *Īśvara*. What is the nature of this *māyā* is the next question? Starting with the rope-snake example one can get an idea of the nature of *māyā*. Thus when one sees a snake in the rope one cannot say whether the snake here is real or unreal. As long as one does not realise the illusion the snake exists, it is sublated only when one realises that it is a rope and not a snake. Thus the status of the snake here cannot be called real as it disappears when the real rope is seen; but it is not totally false for the one who saw it reacted to it as he would have on seeing a real snake. An unreal object like a round-square or a horse's horn cannot be a matter of experience. Therefore the snake-experience is neither real nor unreal, nor both as that

would be a contradiction.

Śaṅkara does not address himself to the origin of creation, but he explains in detail how one can understand creation, sustenance and destruction through the concept of *māyā*.

Therefore Śaṅkara describes *māyā* as neither *sat* nor *asat* and it is *anirvacanīya*.³¹ This then is also the nature of the universe. According to Sureśvarācārya – ‘All entities of the universe whether of the cosmic or super-cosmic order and even within the former of the empirical or illusory nature, are only diverse appearances, appraised as so many real or illusory entities from the view-point of relativity and arising from and lasting upto the termination of *māyā*’.³² However *māyā* has no reality to constitute a limit to *Brahman* while it has the power to conceal *Brahman* and make it appear as the world. *Avidyā* arises on the basis of and with reference to *Brahman*.³³

This *māyā* concept finds mention in *Gauḍapāda Kārikā*.³⁴ *Māyā* has the power of obscuration (*āvaraṇa*) and the power of projection (*vikṣepa*). The *āvaraṇaśakti* conceals the real *Brahman* and the *vikṣepaśakti* projects the unreal world along with the individual souls.

The *Pañcadaśī* thus says that *māyā* transforms the immutable *Kūṭastha*, the ever-associationless *ātman* phenomenally into the form of the universe.³⁵ The introduction of *māyā* solves partially the causal fact in the coming into being of the universe. But the appearance of the world is a puzzle and scholars are not uniform in understanding the association of *māyā* with *Brahman*.

Thus there are various explanations for this like (1) the concrete appearances of the universe are projections on the unchanging *Brahman*; they are not the effects and *brahman* is not the *upādāna* or material cause, (2) *Brahman* and *māyā* are jointly the cause of the world, *Brahman* the unchanging cause and *māyā* the changing cause (in *Padārthanirṇaya*), (3) *Brahman* is the material cause through the instrumentality of *māyā* (*Sarvajñātman*), (4) *Māyā associated with Brahman* produces the world (*Vācaspati Miśra*).^{35a} There is also the opinion that *māyā* is the real material and not *Brahman* who is beyond cause and effect. Śaṅkara advocates the doctrine of

Abhinnanimittopādānakāraṇavāda, i.e., God or *Īśvara* is both the material and efficient cause of the universe. Thus then the world comes into being through the association of *māyā* with *Brahman*. The moment knowledge dawns experientially that all this is *Brahman* it ceases to exist. 'Neither the existence nor the destruction of *māyā* is a concrete fact but its existence is presumptuous or suppositional and its sublation is epistemological. So it may be concluded that all appearances whether empirical or illusory are projected out on the strength and in the light of the underlying appearances of reality (*cidābhāsas*) by *māyā*, which also is merely an appearance and only apparently associated with the former as its undeniable logical counterpart until the realisation of its pure non-dualistic nature'.³⁶ Thus the world has only a *vyāvahārika* nature and ceases to be the moment there is the realisation of the ultimate truth.

The next question of philosophical interest is the nature of the individual self which experiences and participates in the world (the *vyāvahārikasattā*). It is here that the doctrine of '*upādhis*' (adjuncts), is introduced. The *jīva*, according to Śaṅkara is the self itself but has been limited by the *upādhis*.³⁷ *Jīva* is not a part (*amśa*) of *Brahman*,³⁸ it is not a modification of *Brahman* (change) but *jīva* is *Brahman* conditioned by *avidyā*. Like an actor who dons various parts and plays various roles the reality appears differently, as different centres of experience, through *avidyā*.³⁹

Some later philosophers make a distinction between *māyā* and *avidyā*. *Māyā* is considered the cosmic counterpart of *avidyā* which is associated with individual selves. Śaṅkara seems to use both the words synonymously. The agency thus belongs to the *jīva* and it is the *jīva* limited by *avidyā* which is the agent (*kartā*) and experiencer (*bhoktā*) in the world. Everything here is dependent on the *upādhis*. The two theories of *avacchedāvacchedavāda* and *bimbapratibimbavāda* are used to effectively explain the relation between *jīva* and *brahman*. While *jīva* is like space limited by a pot, house, etc., *Brahman* is unlimited space. So also *jīvas* are the reflection of *Brahman* in *avidyā* like the reflection of the sun in water.⁴⁰ Gauḍapāda uses the analogy

of pot-limited space and also hints at the reflection theory.⁴¹ 'Śaṅkara uses the analogy of reflection and that of pot-defined ether in order to make clear the adventitious nature of *jīvatva*'.⁴² The *jīvas* exist only as long as *vidyā* does not dawn on it. Once *vidyā* dawns and its identity with *Brahman* is realised, the *upādhis* disappear and the knower is *Brahman* himself.⁴³ Since this knowledge is different from ordinary knowledge it is described as *aparokṣānubhūti*.⁴⁴

This state of realisation is known as *mokṣa*. *Advaita Vedānta* allows for this state to happen while living in the world itself. This is known as the *jīvanmukta* stage. This is so because the *prārabdhakarma* (or deeds that have started giving their fruits) has to go through its full cycle even if Brahma-realisation happens in between.

The *jīvanmukta* concept in *advaita* is again something which needs a little clarification. In this context another allied question is whether 'individual liberation' is at all possible when there is only one Reality *Brahman* and that is the same as *jīva*.

Appayya Dikṣita propagates the idea of 'universal liberation'.⁴⁵ This is based on the dual interpretation of the *adhiṣṭhāna* of all phenomenal appearances. It can either be 'Ābhāsa of Consciousness or Consciousness non-differentiated from Ābhāsa'.⁴⁶ If the *adhiṣṭhāna* or support is the former then all other secondary appearances like the world, individual selves and so on are appearances of this primary appearance and only they will disappear when there is direct perception of the support which is *Saguṇa Brahman* or *Īśvara*. And the ultimate realisation of *Brahman* can take place only when the primary *avidyā* or *ābhāsa* is sublated which will lead to the liberation of all *jīvas* and the 'sublation' of the whole world.

But if one takes the support or *adhiṣṭhāna* to be of the latter kind (Consciousness non-differentiated from *ābhāsa*) then the realisation of *Brahman* when *avidyā* is got rid off and 'annihilation of its appearance in *avidyā* as well as its product, the mind, constituting the individual soul, would be intelligibly admissible'.⁴⁷ To Sureśvarācārya this does not appear to be much of a problem as to him *ābhāsa* being an appearance pure and simple, is sublated on the realisation of *brahman*. Thus he

does not subscribe to the liberation of all on the liberation of the one.⁴⁸ 'According to Sureśvara it is not a case of destruction but that of sublation and sublation is altogether different from destruction in as much as the former has for its counter-correlation or antithesis appearance and is non-concrete, non-factual and nothing other than realisation of Reality, whereas the latter has for its counter-correlation some concrete object factual and independent'.⁴⁹

The question of liberation for one or for all does not engage the attention either of Śaṅkara or of a large number of the later commentators. But the nature of one who is liberated while still living is a special category in the *advaita Vedānta* and is common to the *Sāṅkhya-Yoga* school as well.

Śaṅkarācārya calls him a *jīvanmukta* whose *prārabdha-karma* has not still completed giving its fruits.⁵⁰ While the accumulated (*sañcita*) and *kriyamāṇa* (accumulation of karma due to present action) *karma* are annihilated on the attainment of liberation (*mukti*), the *prārabdha-karma* 'must be admitted to run its complete course in full power through *bhogas* like the force of a darted arrow'.⁵¹ It is like an arrow already discharged or like the potter's wheel already set in motion'.⁵²

But what about the nature of experience of a *jīvanmukta*? It is generally said that 'the *jīvanmukta* lives in the world but he is not of it'.⁵³ While acting or while going through the residual *prārabdha-karma* he is unattached and is a '*sthītaprajña*' as described in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.⁵⁴ 'To his synoptic vision there is neither action nor agent, neither enjoyment nor enjoyer. He revels in the bliss of non-difference that has not come to be, but which was, is and will ever be'.⁵⁵

In keeping with the *lokasaṅgraha* (welfare for all) tradition it is sometimes argued that the *jīvanmukta* concept is essential for imparting *advaita* instruction to others as well, so that the truth may be realized by all.

This *jīvanmukta* stage is succeeded later by *videhamukti* or *mokṣa* on the passing away of the body, once the *prārabdha-karma* is exhausted.

Of course from the standpoint of *paramārtha*, bondage and freedom are both false. *Mokṣa* is not an end to be achieved

(*sādhya*) but it is an established state (*siddhāvasthā*). The example of Karṇa who was born as Kaunteya but who thought that he was Rādheya is often quoted to illustrate this point. When Karṇa was told he was really Kaunteya, he did not become Kaunteya which he always was, but of which he was unfortunately ignorant. It was a revelation to him. Similar is the case with the *jīva*. Thus the *Ātmapañcakam* states 'I am unborn hence whence my birth and death; I am not *prāṇa* hence whence my hunger and thirst? I am not *citta* hence whence my *śoka* and *moha*? I am not a *kartā* hence whence my *mokṣa* and *bandha*'.⁵⁶

Another important question is what is the nature of *Brahman* that one arrives at, at the time of *brahma* realisation. Many commentators have tried to answer this though it did not seem to bother Śaṅkarācārya to whom perhaps it was too obvious to need any explanation.

Brahma realisation puts an end to the 'empirical life and all it entails' and the content 'is the consciousness, not conditioned by any empirical object, but appearing in and conditioned only by the pure psychosis (*vṛtti*) of the *mumukṣu* having for its content and modified and modelled after that consciousness alone, but not objectifying that Consciousness in any way'. And even this last stage of *vṛtti* goes away of itself when *Brahma* realisation takes place by a flash of experience called *pratyakṣānubhūti*.

While some of the main points in the *Advaita* system have been discussed briefly above, it is not possible to deal with all the aspects in a paper like this. The usual criticism against *Advaita* is that it is highly esoteric and difficult to believe. Śaṅkara is talking an extremely spiritual language. He makes it very clear that his teachings are meant only for those who have the following four qualifications:

1. an aspirant should be able to distinguish clearly between what is permanent and what is non-permanent,
2. he should not desire to enjoy any fruit of his action either in this world or any other possible world after his death,
3. he should have the qualities of sense control, both internal

and external, a high degree of tolerance for extremes, tranquillity and other spiritual qualities.

4. lastly, he should have an unquenchable thirst for *mokṣa*.⁵⁷

It is only such an aspirant who can even start the practice of *advaita Vedānta* and finally succeed in Brahman realisation.

What do we know about the life of this Ādiśaṅkara with whose name *Advaita* is associated. Born to Sivaguru and Āryāmbā in a place called Kaladi in Kerala, Śaṅkara had mastered all the *Vedas* and the various *Śāstras* by the age of eight. He became a *bālasannyāsī* soon after and started his journey to acquire real knowledge in which he succeeded under the tutelage of Govindapāda on the Narmada river banks. Govindapāda was the disciple of Gauḍapāda the famous *ajātivāda* exponent. Having mastered the *advaita* philosophy and having written the various commentaries expounding this philosophy, Śaṅkara started on his journey throughout the length and breadth of the country to win over people to the *Advaita* thought.

Śaṅkara had to vanquish a number of opponents, chief among them being the famous Maṇḍanamiśra, the *karma-kāṇḍin*. As Maṇḍana was the foremost *guru* and religious preceptor at that time, all the biographies of Śaṅkara mention in great detail the debate which took place between these two stalwarts—one a *karmakāṇḍin* who believed in the supremacy of *karma* even to the extent of denying the very need to posit a God, and the other a *jñānī* bent on converting this man to believe in the supremacy of *jñāna* as the sole means to gain realisation about the final truth.

The debate went on for 21 days they say. The referee was chosen to be Saraswatī, also called Bhārati and Sarasvāṇī, the wife of Maṇḍana, herself a scholar of no mean merit.

Some interesting points made during this debate reveal the thinking of Śaṅkara with regard to the *Vedas* and with regard to his own philosophy. While the universe is out there and individuals also are working out their lives according to their *karma*, there is still his free will which can break out of his previous *vāsanās* and enable him to realise his oneness with

Brahman.

Śaṅkara makes a bold statement that even the *Veda* cannot be considered an authority if it goes counter to the observed facts. Thus he says 'even if hundreds of vedic sentences affirm that fire is cool and does not give light they do not become an authority on this point'.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that Gauḍapāda also makes such a statement in his *kārikās*.⁵⁹ Śaṅkara mentions in the course of his debate a humorous incident that happened at Varanasi. While Śaṅkara and his disciples were going for a bath in the Ganges, an elephant ran amuck and in order to escape it Śaṅkara and his disciples ran for safety. One *pandit* who was a regular at all Śaṅkara's meetings (discourses) asked Śaṅkara later, why he ran away from the elephant, for after all it was a false (*mithyā*) elephant. Śaṅkara, in reply, said that he was impressed by the question. He rounded up the answer by saying 'The elephant as you say was *mithyā* (false) and so was my running'.

Anyway after a long and interesting debate Maṇḍanamīśra was converted to Śaṅkara's *advaita* and it is said that he became Sureśvarācārya in his new order. When Śaṅkara established his *Dharmapīṭha* (or *maṭh*) at Dwaraka he asked Sureśvarācārya to take charge of it. Śaṅkara also established *maṭhs* at Badari with Toṭakācārya (Giri) at its head; it is called the *Jyotirmaṭha*. At Puri in the East he established a *Dharmapīṭha* and appointed Padmapādācārya in charge of it; and in the South at Sṛṅgeri he established his fourth *maṭha* and appointed Hastāmālaka as its first *ācārya*. He is said to have attained *samādhi* at the age of 32 after accomplishing the task of establishing *Advaita* throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Śaṅkara, apart from being a brilliant thinker and philosopher was also a poet of no mean calibre. He handles the Sanskrit language with great ease and mastery. There is a clarity of thought matched with lucidity in expression in his writings, which are numerous. Besides the *prasthānatrayī*⁶⁰ works, Śaṅkara is considered the author of the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, *Daśaślokī*, *Pancikaraṇam*, *Aparokṣānubhūti*, *Ātmabodha*, *Vākyavṛtti* and many more works. Besides there are a number of *stotras* or verses in praise of the *guru*,

Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Bhavānī, Annapūrṇā, Viṣṇu, Gaṅgā and so on—including the famous *Bhajaḡovindam*.⁶¹

One important question which is raised in connection with Śaṅkara's *bhakti* compositions is about the reconciliation of these praises to a personal God from one who is the propunder of *Nirguṇa Brahman*. But there is no problem here. Śaṅkara's *Advaita* admits, as we have seen earlier, a lower level of reality called the *Saguṇa Brahman*. Even if some would like to stop at that level of emancipation it is their choice says Śaṅkara. The prerequisites that are expected in one who aspires to *Nirguṇa Brahma* realisation are, as already mentioned, not easy to follow.

Therefore Śaṅkara opens the other paths to those who have still not reached that level. The advantage in following the other paths is that the aspirant will slowly become fit for the pursuit of the path of knowledge or *jñānamārga*. Thus one who follows the *bhaktimārga* can develop concentration (*citta-ikāgryam*) and the one who follows the *karmamārga* will be able to get rid of the impurities in his mind (*buddhiśuddhi*). This can be compared to the *saṃprajñāta* and *asaṃprajñāta* yoga of Patañjali's *atāṅgayoga*. While Patañjali advocates only *asaṃprajñāta-yoga* as a means to *kaivalya* he describes in detail *saṃprajñāta-samādhi* and the various *siddhis* that come in its wake. Thus there is absolutely no contradiction in advocating the path of knowledge on the one hand, and allowing on the other hand, such people who want to come to *jñāna* through the path of *karma* or *upāsanā* which is another name for *bhakti*.

Śaṅkara in his own life, on one or two occasions, behaved in a manner which appears incompatible to the philosophy he preached. In the famous Caṇḍāla episode immortalised in the *Maniṣāpañcakam*, Śaṅkara behaves like any orthodox brahmin of that time. He had to be reminded of his own philosophy by the Caṇḍāla. Thus the Caṇḍāla asks Śaṅkara—'O Brahmin, whom are you asking to get away? Your body is the product of food so is mine. Are you asking one product of food to clear the way for another? Or, are you asking pure consciousness to get away from pure consciousness. In brief, we are both the same. Then whom are you asking to clear the way for another?'⁶²

Again Śaṅkara's coming back to perform the last rites of his mother does not fit in with the *Sannyāsa dharma* and is also against the *advaita* philosophy. He justifies it by the promise he had given her to be near her during her last days. Perhaps he felt that he had not looked after her when she needed him. Is there an echo of sadness in the verses addressed to *Devī* where he asks for her forgiveness in the *Devīparā-dhaksamāpaṇastotram*?

'Here in this world O mother,
many are thy guileless children,
but restless am I among them all,
And so it is nothing very strange
That I should turn myself from thee
yet surely it were impossible that thou
would ever turn away from me
A wicked son is sometimes born but an
unkind mother there (never can) be.⁶³

Thus Śaṅkara's life has many facets. If, on the one hand, he appears to negate life and urges one to look for the underlying truth, on the other hand, his own life is an example of the values that one is asked to practise in this world in order to make living here and now fruitful. Qualities of compassion, love, filial duty, and simplicity were the hallmarks of this intellectual giant who strode the Indian scene like a colossus in the time he lived.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The path to Brahma-realisation is very difficult to tread. It is like the sharp edge of a knife.
2. पुराणमित्येव न साधु सर्वं न चापि काव्यं नवामित्यवद्यम् ।
3. आ परितोषात् विदुषां न साधु मन्ये प्रयोगविज्ञानम् ।
Kālidāsa-Abhijñānaśākuntalam
4. Karmarkar *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā* p. XLVIII.
5. *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā* III. 21., IV. 29.
6. *Ibid.* IV. 31., II. 6.
7. *Ibid.* IV. 28., II. 31.
8. *Ibid.* II. 32, IV. 48.
9. *Ibid.* III. 18.
10. *Ibid.* prakarana IV.
11. *Ibid.* IV. 40.
12. *Ibid.* III. 18.
13. ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवोब्रह्मैव नापरः ।
14. *R̥gveda* X. 129.
15. एकं सत् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ।
16. *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā prakarana* II.
17. अहं ब्रह्मास्मि ।
18. तत्त्वमसि ।
19. आनन्दो ब्रह्मेति व्यजानात् ।
20. विज्ञानं ब्रह्म ।
21. विज्ञातारं अरे केन विजानीयात् येन इदं सर्वं विजानाति तं केन विजानीयात् ।
22. *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā* II. 17.
23. इत्यतोऽस्मत्प्रत्ययगोचरे विषयिणि चिदात्मके युष्मत्प्रत्ययगोचरस्य विषयस्य तद्धर्माणां चाध्यासः ।
24. *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā*-III. 26.
25. न चैकं तदन्यद् द्वितीयं कुतः स्यात्र वा केवलत्वम् न चाकेवलत्वम् ।
न शून्यं न वाशून्यमद्वैतकत्वात् कथं सर्ववेदान्तसिद्धं ब्रवीमि ।।
26. Cf. V.P. Upadhyaya *Lights on Vedānta* pp. 50-81.
27. Cf. Kulkarni (Ed.) *Study of Indian History and Culture Adī Śāṅkara* p. 27.
28. *Ibid.* p. 27.
29. जन्माद्यस्य यतः ।
30. वाचारम्भणं विकारे नामरूपं मूर्तिकेति सत्यम् ।
31. तत्त्वान्यत्वाभ्यां अनिर्वचनीयाः सदसद्विलक्षणा अनिर्वचनीया ।
32. V.P. Upadhyaya, *Ibid.* p. 83.
33. *Ibid.* p. 82ff.
34. *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā* III. 19.
35. *Pañcadaśī* VI. 133.
35. अविद्यासहितब्रह्मोपादानं जगत् ब्रह्मणि एवास्ति तत्रैव च लीयते ।
36. V.P. Upadhyaya, *Ibid.* pp. 95-96.
37. *Brahmasūtra* I. 2.6. & I. 3.5, 7.

38. Ibid. II. 3.43.
39. नामरूपरचितदेहादि उपाधिनिमित्ताः भेदाः न पारमार्थिकाः ।
सदेकं एव वस्तु अविद्यया नटवत् अनेकधा विकल्पते ॥
40. Brahmasūtra II. 3.50.
41. Gauḍapāda-Karikā III. 3-5, 7-8.
42. Brahmasūtra Śāṅkarabhāṣya II. 3.50 & III. 2-22.
43. ब्रह्मवित् ब्रह्मैव भवति ।
44. Pañcadaśī I. 64.
45. Sivādvaita-Nirṇaya cf. V.P. Upadhyaya, Ibid. p. 246.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid. p. 247.
49. Ibid. p. 248.
50. Brahmasūtra III. 3.32. IV. 1.19 and Śāṅkarabhāṣya on it.
51. Ibid. IV. 113-16 and V.P. Upadhyaya, Ibid. p. 249.
52. V.P. Upadhyaya, Ibid. p. 250.
53. T.M.P. Mahadevan *The Philosophy of Advaita*, p. 285.
54. स्थितप्रज्ञस्यकाभाषा समाधिस्तस्य केशव ।
स्थितधीर्किंप्रभाषेत किमासीत ब्रजेत किम् ॥
55. T.M.P. Mahadevan, Ibid. p. 285.
56. नाहं जातो जन्म मृत्यू कुतो मे नाहं प्राणः क्षुत्पिपासे कुतो मे ।
नाहं चित्तं शोकमोहौ कुतो मे नाहं कर्ता बन्धमोक्षौ कुतो मे ॥
57. नित्यानित्यवस्तुविवेकः, इहामुत्रफलभोगविरलकः, शमदमादिषट्कसंपत्तिः मुमुक्षुत्वं ।
58. न हि प्रत्यक्षविरोधे श्रुतेः प्रामाण्यं, न हि श्रुतिशातमपि शीतोमिः अप्रकृशः इति ब्रुवत प्रामाण्यं उपैति ।
59. निश्चितं युक्तियुक्तं च यतदभवति नेतरत् ।
60. The Upaniṣads, the Brahmasūtra and the Bhagavadgītā are jointly called the Prasthānatrayī.
61. These are all works in praise of various gods and goddesses and therefore are not strictly conforming to advaitic thought and criticism.
62. अन्नमयादन्नमयं अथवा चैतन्यमेव चैतन्यात् द्विजवर दूरीकर्तुं
वांचसि किं ब्रूहि गच्छ गच्छ इति ।
63. पृथिव्यां पुत्रास्ते जननि बहवः सन्ति सरलाः
परं तेषां मध्ये विरलतरलोऽहं तव सुतः ।
मदीयोऽयं त्यागः समुचितमिदं नो तव शिष्ये
कुपुत्रो जायेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति ।