

**SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE RELATION BETWEEN
ŚAṆKARA AND BUDDHISM ***

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I

In the history of Indian Philosophy the relationship of Śāṅkarite Advaita Vedānta to Buddhism has aroused considerable interest among scholars since ancient times. Sometimes it is said that the contents of Śāṅkara's Vedānta are all Buddhistic (*Mahāyāna*) with the outward coverage of upaniṣadic lip- service. In other words, Śāṅkara is 'a Buddhist who pretends to be a vedāntin' and his philosophy is 'Mahāyāna Buddhism in disguise'. Vijñāna Bhikṣu refers to a verse of '*Padmapurāṇa*' where Śāṅkara has been called 'a Crypto-Buddhist' (*Pracchanna Buddha*).¹ Emphasising the points of striking similarities between Śāṅkara's philosophy and Mahāyāna Buddhism, S. N. Dasgupta, in his *History of Indian Philosophy* remarks, "His (Śāṅkara's) Brahman was very much like the *Śūnya* of Nāgārjuna The debts of Śāṅkara to the self- luminosity of Vijñānavāda Buddhism can hardly be overestimated. There seems to be much truth in the accusations against Śāṅkara by Vijñāna Bhikṣu and others that he was a hidden Buddhist himself Śāṅkara's philosophy is largely a compound of Vijñānavāda and Śūnyavāda Buddhism with the Upaniṣadic notion of the permanence of self-superadded".²

But against this appellation of Śāṅkara as a Buddhist in disguise, there are some strong grounds developed by some of the post-Śāṅkara Advaitins. They hold that Śāṅkara who was mastermind behind the 'downfall of Buddhism in India' cannot be called a 'crypto Buddhist'. In support of their contention, many

of them referred to the fact of his using 'bitter and harsh words' for Buddha and Buddhism. In *Pancapādikā Vivaraṇa* Prakāśātman rules out any claim with regard to the Buddhist influence upon Śaṅkara³ and condemns a thinker who talks of the affinities between Buddhism and Śaṅkara's Philosophy as one "who talks something which befits an ignorant man and his case is indeed pitiable".⁴ It is said that Śaṅkara whose mission was to restore the supremacy of Ātman as viewed by the Seers of Upaniṣads could not be friendly with those Buddhists who often say, "even a reasoned argument from the mouth of a follower of the veda looks ugly like a necklace or a string of beads placed on the feet".⁵ However, we had to wait until the arrival of Śrīharṣa for a dispassionate appraisal of Buddhism, because most of the post-Śaṅkara Vedāntins without trying to understand the real significance of the Mahāyāna Buddhism advanced bitter and derogatory remarks against Buddhism and blindly repeated Śaṅkara's arguments.⁶ Śrīharṣa and Citsukha have depicted some similarities between Mādhyamika philosophy and Śaṅkara's philosophy in a novel way. They dispassionately argue that in order to keep the socio-cultural *milieu* of his time though Śaṅkara used the Mahāyāna Buddhists' phraseology, this does not affect his chief concern for the uplift of 'aupaniṣadic' thought. He was not a Buddhist who pretended to be a vedāntin. Here our contention is that it is correct rather to say that since historically Śaṅkara arrived after the glorious time of Mahāyāna Buddhism he could not totally avoid Buddhists' influence. But it is incorrect to characterise Śaṅkara as 'a Buddhist in disguise'. Under this perplexing context, what we intend to discuss here is a critical exploration of different aspects of the issue from the standpoint of history. We shall see that Mahāyāna Buddhism had been influenced by Upaniṣadic teaching and bitter relations between Buddhism and Vedānta were the consequences of the rivalry developed through Sarvāstivādins and Svatantravijñānavādin's philosophy. Instead of making reconciliation, these thinkers posed Buddhism as 'absolutely opposed' to Vedānta. History tells us that Buddha himself protested against the too much of vedic ritualism but he was not militant against the 'Upaniṣadic philosophy'. Before elaborating our contention, we shall try to chalk out some similarities between Śaṅkara's Vedānta with that of Vijñānavāda and Śūnyavāda school of Buddhism and also try to highlight the possible influences of them in the formation of 'Śaṅkara's philosophy'.

II

Śāṅkara who historically figures in the eighth century AD after Śāntarākṣita,⁷ wrote extensive commentaries on different *Upasniṣads* as well as on *Brahmasūtras* of Bādrāyana. In *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* there are clear evidences that he was acquainted with the current philosophical trends of his time. He devoted a large section of his commentary on the refutation of the other philosophies. Among the Buddhists he vehemently criticised both Vaibhāsikas and Sāutrāntikas under the name of Sarvāstivāda, Svatantra-Vijñānavāda of Dinnāga and Śūnyavāda. In criticising the stand of Vijñānavāda of Dinnāga, he has 'Ālambanaparikṣā' in his mind. Among the individual Buddhist philosophers, he criticised Dharmakīrti the great Buddhist Logician. While criticising, Śūnyavāda, he takes up the popular connotation of the word 'śūnya' as 'zero' or 'nothing' and condemns 'śūnyavāda' as 'Nihilism'. He argues that a philosophical position which pictures the empirical world as a transitory show of non-substantial appearances (*śūnya*) is not even worthy of criticism, because absolute unreality of sheer appearances without any underlying reality (*tattva*) to appear is a self-defeating proposition which cannot be defended by any instruments of valid cognition.⁹ But a careful intellectual journey through the writings of Nāgārjuna (2nd century A. D.) and his followers can definitely make it clear that Śūnyavāda is not nihilism; it does not deny the reality of the world altogether. Such a nihilistic interpretation springs from a basic misunderstanding or misconception of Mādhyamika Philosophy. Surprisingly Śāṅkara himself apprehends that Brahman, the Absolute in his philosophy may be misconceived by the ignorant as *nothing* (*śūnya*).¹⁰ Let us cite some of the fundamental aspects of Mādhyamika philosophy which will reveal how close the teachings of Śūnyavāda to Śāṅkara's own teaching and as a result, we shall be logically able to say that Śāṅkara's criticism of Śūnyavāda is only outward and springs from a misconception of the word śūnya and his too much passionate zeal to revive Upaniṣadic Vedānta. Let us begin with the word 'śūnya'.

Nāgārjuna used the word '*śūnya/śūnyata*' in order to designate both phenomenal and transphenomenal reality in a somewhat technical sense. In case of phenomena, the word *śūnyata* has two imports. It negatively means the rejection of the uncritical acceptance of the independent nature of worldly things and positively it stands for the dependent, changing nature of objects. It is a simultaneous case of both rejection and revelation. The world is called '*śūnya*',

because it is emptied or devoid of any intrinsic nature of its own (*niḥsvabhāva*). On mundane level we act on the basis of certain standpoints such as, 'is', 'is not', etc. and form different theories of reality. But these empirical determinations are not applicable to the Absolute. To put it otherwise, the world is called *śūnya*, because everything in this world is relative and mutually dependent and in this sense devoid of any self-essence. But the truth of all empirical determinations lies in their indeterminateness or the Absolute which is termed as *Nirvāṇa*. But there is no chasm or gap between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* is the unconditional transcendental ground for the conditional, phenomenal reality called *saṃsāra*. But the difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is not again absolute one; it must be relative, because if we say that this type of relativity or dependence is exclusive or of absolute nature then it would amount to the violation of the rule of relativity itself.. "The one and the same Reality when viewed through causal conditions, is declared to be the world and when these not depending or not appropriating or relative, it is called *Nirvāṇa*".¹¹

It is here where Śāṅkara's view of *māyā* and the world comes closer to Nagarjuna. Śāṅkara holds *māyā* to be beyond the reach of empirical determination which functions through the categories like 'is' or 'is not' (*bhāva*, *abhāva*) etc. We cannot categorise *māyā* as "either real or unreal or real-unreal. Even it is neither real nor unreal". This indeterminable nature is also attributed to the empirical nature of the world which according to Śāṅkara is a product of indeterminable *māyā*.¹² What is the status of the world then? The world enjoys *only a relative status*; it is neither real nor unreal either. It is not unreal (*asat*), because it is a fact of experience, it is not like 'hare's horn'. It can not be called real (*sat*) like *Brahman*, because it is not *trikāla-abādhitā* - devoid of contradictions in three forms of time (i.e., past, present and future). This in turn suggests that the world is not denied by Śāṅkara as an unmitigated negation; rather he admits its relativity reality. By using the word '*śūnya*', Nāgārjuna too points to the relative relativity of the world. It is a misinterpretation that *śūnyavāda* preaches nihilism, according to which everything is unreal. The Buddha himself again and again told his disciples that truth lies neither in *Ucchedavāda* nor in *Sarvāstivāda* but in *Madhyamā pratipāda*. Nāgārjuna and his followers made this statement explicit in their works. The 'middle path' of Nāgārjunian philosophy is not a mechanical combination or meeting point of two extreme alternatives

like Aristotle's 'Golden Mean' which is meant to form a balance between two extremes. It is rather the rising above, going beyond all extreme views in order to see things as *they are* and in this sense it is 'no path' at all in the ordinary sense of the term. Nāgārjuna does not deny that there is a reality (*tattva*) behind this changing, conditional world of appearance. This reality is called *Nirvāna*. S. N. Dasgupta is very much correct when he says that Śāṅkara's "Brahman was very much like the śūnya of Nāgārjuna. It is difficult indeed to distinguish between pure being and pure non-being as a category".¹³

Not only this, both Mādhyamikas and Śāṅkara propounded absolutist systems of philosophy. But the question arises : How do the Absolutists explain the status of the world? The answer to such query, we think, is inherent in both the systems of Absolutism in their comitment to the degrees of truth or reality. What in metaphysical language in Śāṅkara's philosophy called *sattā* (beinghood) in epistemological language of the Mādhyamikas called *satyaṁ* (Truth). Nāgārjuna in the *Mādhyamika-kārikā* says :

Dve satye samutpāśritya buddhānām dharmadeśanā /

Loka samvṛtisatyaṁ ca satyaṁ ca paramārthataḥ //

('Dharma' in Buddha's teaching should be understood resorting to both conventioanl and absolute truth).¹⁴ Prajñākarmati in *Bodhicaryāvataraṇāṅgikā* explains *paramārthasatya* which is otherwise known as '*akṛtrimāṁ vasturūpaṁ*' (*things-in- itself*) as something which remains beyond the reach of our conceptual knowability. Candrakīrti, a commentator (of 7th century A. D.) on *Mādhyamikakārikā* makes a subdivision of *samvṛtisatya* into '*alokasamvṛti*' and '*lokasamvṛti*' - seeming truth and functional truth. When we perceive a rope as "rope" and a snake as "snake" we say that our cognitions are true. These are facts of our empirical determinations or '*lokasamvṛti*'. But when our senses do not function properly, we have illusory cognition of a 'snake' in a 'rope' or of dream objects or a perception of 'double moon', we say that our cognitions are *mithyā* or false. It is '*alokasamvṛti*'. *Samvṛtisatya* which has functional value in the phenomenal world is also called *vyāvahārika satya* and is considered as a means (*upāya*), a ladder for reaching the goal (*upeya*) namely *paramārthasatya* (Absolute Truth).¹⁵

It is interesting to see here how Śāṅkarite Advaita Vedānta deals with

the hierarchy of existence or truth and how close it comes to the Mādhyamika's account. To the Śāṅkarite Advaita Vedāntins, there are three kinds of existence - *pāramārthika* (absolute), *vyāvahārika* (conventional) and *prātibhāsika* (illusory or seeming). Absolute existence belongs to Brahman, conventional existence to the world and seeming or illusory existence to 'silver in a nacre' or 'snake in a rope' etc. or in dream objects.¹⁶ The reality of the world is *vyāvahārika* or conventional/functional, because the world is considered as something which remains uncontradicted till the realization of one's identity with Brahman.

What seems to be important here is that both the Mādhyamika and the Advaita Vedānta systems of philosophy being absolutistic in nature have felt the necessity of admitting the degrees of truth or existence. And the account of conventional truth by the later Mādhyamikas are at par with the Śāṅkarite Advaita Vedānta. The difference between the two is only of linguistic phraseology. Candrakīrti's subdivision of '*alokasamvṛti*' corresponds to the *prātibhāsika* and '*lokasamvṛti*' to *vyāvahārika* levels of truth of the Advaitins. In Advaita Vedānta the world is considered as false. Though Śāṅkara distinguishes between seeming reality (*prātibhāsika sattā*), and the phenomenal reality (*vyāvahārika sattā*), the distinction between them is not absolute. Ultimately both these 'realities' are subsumed under one category, that is, false (*mīthyā*). The apparent snake is false, for it does not exist in rope, its substratum; it vanishes when the rope is cognised. Similarly the world is seen as false the moment Brahman, its substratum, is directly realized.¹⁷ The Absolute truth which is known by the words '*tathatā*' or '*sūnyata*' in the Mādhyamika philosophical literature is non-conceptual, non-conventional, uncontradicted for all times. The absolute reality (*Paramārtha sattā*) which is known as *Ātman* or *Brahman* in the Advaita Vedānta is also beyond the reach of all concepts and conventions, remains uncontradicted for ever. For the absolute reality, the Mādhyamikas use the term '*advaya*' whereas the Advaitins use the term '*advaita*' and both surprisingly enough mean that the absolute is '*non-dual*'.¹⁸ So far as the degrees of truth is concerned, the difference between the Mādhyamikas and Śāṅkara seems to lie in their respective approach to uphold the Absolutism on the one hand and to sustain the relative existence of the world of our experience on the other. Śāṅkara develops an ontological approach where the emphasis is not like the Madhyamikas on 'the correct attitude of our knowing' but unlike the Mādhyamikas on 'the thing known'.¹⁹ For Śāṅkara, when '*aparokṣānubhūti*'

takes place, all the differences get vanished, “the knowing faculty too gets concentrated and lost in it (*Brahma vida brahmaiva bhavati*).²⁰ The difference between the Mādhyamikas and Śāṅkara seems to lie in their respective approaches, not in the thing or content to be approached.²¹ For the Mādhyamikas when reason gets despair, the hour of truth discloses. These striking similarities might have led scholar like B. M. Barua to remark : “Was Śāṅkara’s Philosophy itself possible or intelligible without reference to Buddhist philosophies, the Mādhyamika in particular, which flourished in South India? The question, as we are now persuaded, must be answered in the negative”.²²

III

In the historical phases of the evolution of the Buddhist thought after Nāgārjuna of the 2nd century A. D., momentum given by Asanga and Vasubandhu of the fourth century A. D. made some distinction. Like Nāgārjuna they uphold that Reality is non- dual. But unlike Nāgārjuna they positively declare that the Reality is Vijñaptimātra or Pure consciousness which is the permanent seat of changing states of empirical existence. Vasubandhu who was honoured as Second Buddha, had been a sarvāstivādin in his early period of life and authored ‘*Abhidharmakośa*’. It is said that he was later on converted to Vijñānavāda by his elder brother Asaṅga and he wrote his revolutionary treatise called *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* which comprises *Vimśatikā* and *Trimśikā*. The author wrote commentary on *vimśatikā* and Sthiramati wrote commentary on *Trimśikā*. In the former part Vasubandhu criticises the atomic view of the world as propounded by Sarvāstivādins and Vaiśeṣikas and in the latter he exhibits his positive philosophy. To him Pure Consciousness is the ultimate reality, *Ālayavijñāna* is the reality from vyāvahārika standpoint, Klišṭa Manovijñāna is the individual being and the world occupies the status of *Viśayavijñapti*.

But Śāṅkara while criticising Dinnāga (5th Century A. D.) and Dharmakīrti under the general name vijñānavāda has in fact criticised svatantravijñānavāda, according to which the momentary unit of consciousness is the ultimate reality. Like Hobbes in the west, the Svatantravijñānavādin advocated nominalism and for explaining the problem of identity they spoke of the fact of similarity. It is precisely here Śāṅkara directed all his criticism which goes by the general name Vijñānavāda. A close study of Vasubandhu’s work which evidences his

originality, vigour and philosophic insight immediately points to the fact that it does not have any fundamental difference with that of Śaṅkara's view developed in the latter half of the 8th century A. D. Śaṅkara's view of Nirguṇa Brahman may roughly correspond to Vasubandhu's 'Pure Consciousness' or Vijñaptimātra, Īśvara or Saḡuṇa Brahman to *Ālayavijñāna*, Jiva to *Kliṣṭa Manovijñāna* and *jagat* to *viṣayavijñapti*. Śaṅkara's charge of subjective idealism is applicable to svatantravijñānavāda according to which consciousness is momentary and things of the world are 'modifications of our sensations or mental states. They criticised the notion of permanent self and considered changing psycho-physical cogglomeration as the so called self. In absence of any permanent principle like Pure Consciousness they try to explain the fact of identity by resemblance (*sādrśya*). Śaṅkara's criticism here resembles the Neo-Kantian's argument against the Sensationalists in the west.

But it seems to be mysterious that Śaṅkara does not criticise Vijñānavāda of Vasubandhu and Asaṅga. We know from the historical evidences that Śaṅkara's time was a period of 'mutual animosity, hatred and distrust' in extreme form among the Buddhists and the Hindus. It might have been the case that he himself could understand that there is nothing substantial to differ from Mahāyāna Buddhism. Any explanation regarding the relation of Śaṅkara's Philosophy with Buddhism would remain incomplete unless we discuss Gauḍapāda's contribution. Because it is Gauḍapāda (6th century A. D.) whom Bhāvaviveka, a junior contemporary of him, recognised as an independent philosopher and praised for his dispassionate, impartial spirit of interpretation. It is said that in Gauḍapāda's works, the best that is in Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu is contained. Gauḍapāda, who flourished about the period 780 A.D., wrote a commentary on the *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* in verse and clearly explicate the nondualistic teaching of upaniṣad. Gauḍapāda was the teacher of Govindapāda who happened to be the teacher of Śaṅkara. He agrees with Nāgārjuna in maintaining that from ultimate standpoint it is impossible to accept the doctrine of origination. According to him "there is neither dissolution nor creation, neither any bounded self, nor any practising saint; neither a person striving for salvation nor an emancipated self. This is the essence of truth".²³ In his *bhāṣya* on *Maṇḍukyakārikā*, Śaṅkara remarks that the words like creation and dissolution are meaningful only with reference to an existent thing. Since plurality does not exist at all, the question of creation is meaningless.²⁴ Śaṅkara

also tells us that Gauḍapāda is in complete agreement with the Vajñānavādins in holding the unreality of the external objects and the reality of Pure Consciousness.²⁵ Like Vijñānavādins, Gauḍapāda placed dream states and actual states on almost equal footings. This is perhaps the reason that some interpreters accused Gauḍapāda who pretended to be a vedāntin was actually a Buddhist in disguise. But on the contrary our contention is, that definitely Gauḍapāda was influenced by Mahāyāna Buddhism as propounded by Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu but the whole metaphysical framework of the Mahāyāna Buddhism was to a great extent based on Upaniṣads. So there is no harm on the part of Śaṅkara in being influenced by the Upaniṣadic teachings through great Mahāyāna masters and advocating explicitly the upaniṣadic non-dualism. As an independent philosopher whose business consisted largely of interpretation, Gauḍapāda inherited the non-conflicting aspects of Buddhism with Upaniṣads and worked for the revival of upaniṣadic thought in an independent way that might suit the order of the age. However, Sankara was very much keen to picture Gauḍapāda as an advaitic master and did not mention many of Gauḍapāda's explicit references to Buddhism. Historically Gauḍapāda's time was later than the great Buddhist masters like Aśvagoṣa, Nāgārjuna, Aśaṅga and Vasubandhu. Scholars like S. N. Dasgupta tried to show that Gauḍapāda's teaching as Buddhistic from his Kārikās. In the fourth chapter of his Kārikās he says that "he adores that great man who by knowledge as wide as the sky realized (*sambuddha*) that all appearances (*dharma*) were like the vacuous sky (*gaganopamaṁ*)".²⁶ This resembles '*katham ca gaganopamam*'.²⁷ Moreover, Gauḍapāda expresses his profound adoration to Lord Buddha in his Kārikā no IV, 2.4, when he says that "the Buddhas have shown that there was no coming into being in any way (*sarvathā Buddhairajātiḥ paridipitaḥ*)."²⁸ All these might have led S. N. Dasgupta to state that Gauḍapāda himself was possibly a Buddha and one according to whom, the fundamental philosophical framework of Upaniṣads "tallied with those of Buddha".²⁹ Śaṅkara on the contrary, concludes his commentary on *Gauḍapādakārikā* expressing his adoration to the great Gauḍa depicted him as one who "by churning the great ocean of the Veda by his great churning rod of wisdom recovered what lay deep in the heart of the Veda, and is hardly attainable even by the immortal gods".³⁰

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But to us who consider philosophy in somewhat modern sense, as a science of interpretation it is not important whether someone was a Buddhist or

a Hindu in faith. What is historically more significant is to see that every thinker is a product of certain age. In Indian philosophical heritage it is equally true. It is difficult to deny that the metaphysics of upaniṣads maintained its survival in and through different phases of historical changes, and in that historical spheres of change, no philosopher could avoid the influence of his earlier masters' voices. In such a historical juncture Gauḍapāda appeared as a product of the meeting point of upaniṣadic Hinduism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Śaṅkara as he was, in the like manner influenced by Gauḍapāda's teachings that depict no rivalry between Upaniṣads and Buddhism regarding metaphysical foundation. But by this, we are not sufficiently empowered with historical facts to say that he was a Buddhist in disguise. He was a committed Vedāntin who enriched his methodology from the teachings of great Buddhist masters.

IV

If we look into the matter from the point of view of history, then it seems to be more cogent to say that the fundamentals of Mahāyāna Buddhism are largely the philosophy of Upaniṣads in disguise. Again, if there were no fundamental difference between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Upaniṣads, why was there so much of 'animosity and hatred' between the two approaches recorded in history? What could be the possible grounds on the part of Śaṅkara to be much vocal, to use so many harsh languages and to advance hostility against the Buddhists ?

To get a cogent and comprehensive reply, we think, we are to go back again to history itself. In India unlike the west, the line of demarcation between philosophy and theology is so thin that most of the times one overlaps other and makes it's philosophy theological and theology philosophical. Buddha himself was not fond of philosophical questions, rather his main interest was to put human beings on reasoned ground of moral uplift. He was totally disgusted with the rigidity of rituals and corrupt practices like casteism, 'with the sacrifices in which animals were butchered' and 'supremacy of the Brahmandom'. But he was not militant against the Upaniṣadic teachings. It was only after his death and during the 5th century A. D., that Dinnāga became very eager to place the philosophical aspects of Buddhism as a completely independent system and depict it as totally opposed to the Vedānta philosophy of Upaniṣads. During the

period of the 6th century A. D. Dharmakīrti instead of highlighting the philosophical richness of Vasubandhu which is very close to Upaniṣads, along with his criticism of Mimāṃsakas and Naiyāyikas “widened the gulf between Buddhism and Vedānta created by Dinnāga”.³¹ Then during the period of its 8th century Śāntarakṣita and his disciple Kamalaśīla, like Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti, criticised Vedānta for its declaration of ‘Consciousness to be permanent’. Moreover, it was a time in India’s cultural history when in the absence of any great masters of Nāgārjuna’s or Vasubandhu’s stature, Buddhism was being deprived of getting patronage of the throne and wealthy in society. At the time of Aśoka, Buddhism spread rapidly almost all over India and many other countries as well. Soon after this, degeneration set in and degrading practices grew in Buddhism. Śaṅkara was born and lived in an era when the Buddhist “monasteries became rich centres of vested interests and their disciples became lax, and magic and superstition crept into the popular forms of worship”.³³ Śaṅkara himself being a product of such historical situation ‘has nothing but bitter and strong remarks for Buddhism’.³⁴ It is indeed true that thoughts and feelings that are common to the community or masses in vague and difused forms get crystallized and concentrated in the philosophical writings of any given period. And Śaṅkara as a philosopher is no exception to this.³⁵ Śaṅkara is surely one of such fortunate philosophers who tactfully interpreted the concepts of Upaniṣads, gradually replaced the blind forces by conscious and rational foundations, and offered the prevailing ethical practices a new direction. We should not forget that Śaṅkara was also a product of a particular socio-cultural *milieu*.

It is true that Śaṅkara was influenced by Buddhism. But it is one thing to say that the influence of Buddhism upon Śaṅkara can not be ignored; and it is completely different thing to say that he was a Buddhist who pretended to be a vedāntin or a crypto Buddhist. We do not deny that Śaṅkara’s conception of *matha* was an adoption of *saṅgha* of the Buddhist culture. He travelled throughout India and established four *mathas* (monastaries) in order to bring harmony among the diverse thought-currents that were prevalent in the Indian society. He felt it necessary to formulate a philosophy which was not only a direct interpretation of Upaniṣadic texts but also different from Buddhism. To strengthen our claim that Śaṅkara was an independent thinker of Upaniṣadic heritage with originality, vigor and insight, we shall cite a few instances where he not only differs from

svatantravijñānavāda but also from Gauḍapāda and Vasubandhu. Again, before concluding our survey, we shall dismiss the claim of some post-Śāṅkara philosophers that Śāṅkara gave a fictitious status to the world.³⁶ The use of the word 'tuccha' (insignificant) for the world in *Daśaśloki* by Śāṅkara³⁷ we think, is somewhat context-oriented and to keep this usage in the proper context we would dismiss the claim that, for Śāṅkara, the world is fictitious. We have seen that against 'svatantravijñānavāda's position of 'to be perceived by the mind is to be a portion of the mind' (*sahopalambhaniyama*), Śāṅkara develops several arguments. In his *Brahma-sūtrabhāṣya* 22, 28, he argues for the difference between objective cognition and the objects in cognition (*tasmād artha-jñānayorbhedah*). The object of cognition is not the cognition it produces. Further, when Dinnāga says that 'internal consciousness itself appears as if it is something external', Śāṅkara refutes it by saying that 'if there were no external world how can we say that consciousness appears as if it is something external'? All these show that Śāṅkara was very eager to establish his system of philosophy in a way that would make it distinct from Buddhism. The concept of one eternal Brahman was not enough to mark this borderline. The urgency was felt more perhaps for another reason, that is, Vasubandhu (A. D. 420-500) in his '*Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*' advocated a type of idealism which seemed to be very near to the non-dualism of the Upaniṣads. Being an independent philosopher with profound originality³⁸ Śāṅkara differs from Vasubandhu and even from Gauḍapāda. Unlike Vasubandhu and Gauḍapāda who placed dream states and actual states on almost equal footings, Śāṅkara in explaining the *sūtra* 2.2.29 of *Brahmasūtra* endorsed the view that the mundane level of reality cannot be likened to a dream. The apprehension of the external world in every act of perception cannot be denied. Here he is on the same platform with the realists and the pragmatists in admitting the existence of an external world outside and independent of the subject and judges the validity of knowledge by practical results.

Even if it were argued that Śāṅkara's description of the world as 'tuccha' in 'Daśaśloki' is a clear cut instance for 'his leaning towards Buddhism', we do not subscribe to it from the consideration of historical *milieu*. We also think that because of their richly suggestive character Śāṅkara's writings seem to 'accommodate diverse interpretations with an apparent ease'. We would propose to interpret his view on 'tuccha' in the following way : when a person has

experienced one's essential identity with Brahman, he would not attach any significance to the world as apart from Brahman. It has deep epistemological implications. Even the very method of 'not this', 'not this' (*neti neti*) in the gradual process of spiritual development, all the means of knowledge (such as, perception, inference, even scriptural testimony) and different types of scriptural injunctions - all these would become insignificant, because they are like a ladder which can be thrown away after climbing to the roof. By no means does this mean that they are mere thought-constructs or fictitious.

From the whole bulk of foregoing discussion, we are led to the conclusion that Śāṅkara was not a Buddhist in disguise but a committed Vedāntin who openly declared his philosophy to be the 'aupaniṣadic' philosophy. Since he was flourished after the great masters of Buddhism, his thoughts were influenced and he did enrich them from the Buddhistic thought-currents without sacrificing the cream of the Upaniṣadic teachings of the oneness of reality which is otherwise known as Ātman. His explication of the hierarchy of existence is similar to Mādhyamika's view of the levels of truth. A more significant aspect of this hierarchy of truth is that the earliest account of it may be traced in initial form in the Upaniṣads.³⁹ The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad's* explanation of Brahman as 'Truth of truths or Being of beings - *'satyasya satyaṃ'* is to be considered as the seed of such gradation to be developed throughout different stages. So in this particular case also instead of saying that Śāṅkara only imitated what had been said by Mādhyamikas we prefer to say that both Mādhyamikas and Śāṅkara represented only distinctive phases of the same hierarchy of truth contained initially in the upaniṣads. But Śāṅkara's criticism of Śūnyavāda as nihilism is not correct and this has been frankly admitted by Śrīharṣa. Some writers on Indian Philosophy believe that there might have been some thinkers who took the world as *śūnya* or unreal. And Śāṅkara while criticising śūnyavāda might mean their view. However, there is no work or historical evidences in this regard extended to us. It is indeed true that Śāṅkara to a great extent was influenced by Vasubandhu's thought through Gauḍapāda. But Vasubandhu in turn declaring Pure Consciousness as the Reality only developed the philosophical germs contained in the Upaniṣads and brought Buddhism closer to Vedānta. So when Śāṅkara characterises his philosophy as 'the philosophy of upaniṣads, he in fact does not undermine the Buddhist philosophers like Aśvaghoṣa, Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu. Buddhism which came as a protest against corrupt rituals in the

name of spirituality in Hinduism and advanced a reformation in society, philosophically founded by these thinkers without any genuine opposition to Upaniṣadic metaphysics. Śaṅkara also in his zeal to revive upaniṣadic thought protested against the orthodox and dogmatic Hīnāyanists and too much subjectivism of Svatantravijñānavāda. Śaṅkara historically figured in a time when there were explicit 'enmity, hatred and mistrust between Buddhism and Vedānta and it would happen to be very difficult to think dispassionately about Buddhism. It is only explicit in Śrīharṣa (A. D. 1000-1100) because historically he flourished in a time when "Buddhism was ousted and the struggle died down"⁴⁰. All these may lead us to close our survey by saying that instead of considering Buddhism and Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta as 'opposed systems', let us claim that there are different phases of development of the same non-dualistic metaphysics from the Upaniṣadic period to the time of Śaṅkara. However, it is true that sometimes the same thought current was disturbed and diverted towards other directions in the midway, but ultimately credit went to Śaṅkara who revived it and set the direction alright. Modern scholars of Indian Philosophy have the apprehension that "there was a far greater influence of the Upaniṣads on the Mahāyāna sūtras than what is supposed till now"⁴¹.

NOTES

- * The authors are indebted to Professor K. P. Sinha, Department of Sanskrit, Assam University, Silchar for his comments on the earlier draft of the paper and also for his suggestions for the improvement of the paper.
1. The verse of the *Padmapurāṇa* reads as : 'Māyāvādamaśchāstrāṃ pracchanāṃ Baudhameva ca' - See : A. K. Ray Choudhury : *The Doctrine of Māyā* (Calcutta, Dasgupta & Co., 1952), p. 184.
 2. S. N. Dasgupta : *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol., 1 Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1992, edition, p. 493-4.
 3. See : *Pañcapādikā Vivaraṇa* (Ed. R. Shastri, Benaras 1892), p. 84.
 4. See: C. D. Sharma : *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1994 edition), p. 312.

5. See : *Tattva-saṅgraha* (3376-7) of Śāntarakṣita, Ed. by Pt. K. Krishnamacharya, Gackwad Oriental Series, Baroda, 1926), See also C. D. Sharma, *Ibid*, p. 333.
6. Unlike other post-Śāṅkara advaitins, Śrīharṣa tries to revive the long lost glory of the great advaitic master Gauḍapāda who speaks of the affinities of his view with that of śūnyavādins. For Sriharṣa like Gauḍapāda, Śūnyavāda does not mean 'nihilism'. Again he openly admits the affinities of his dialectical arguments with that of śūnyavādins . That 'Advaita Vedānta and Śūnyavāda are *not* two opposed systems of philosophy', is expressed in his book. He says : Tathā hi yadi darśaneṣu śūnyavādānirvacaniya pakṣayor āśrayanam tada tāvad asnūṣām nirbādhaiva sarvathāpathinatā, - *Khaṇḍanakhāṇḍakhāḍya* (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Book Depot, Benaras, 1914), pp. 229-30.
7. Śāntarakṣita appears just before Śāṅkara in the 8th century. He and his disciple Kamalaśīla like Diñnāga and Dharmakīrti criticised other schools of thought and Vedānta particularly for its acceptance of Consciousness to be permanent and in this way they instead of supporting Vasubandhu's stand pictured Buddhism and Vedānta as absolutely opposed systems of thought.
8. Diñnāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣā* (Reconstructed by N. Aiyaswami Shastri, Adyar Library, 1941) is not a pioneer work on Vijñānavāda. Unlike Vasubandhu of '*Vijñāptimātratāsiddhi (trīmaṣikā)*' where he depicted Consciousness (will) as the ultimate Reality, Diñnāga considered momentary consciousness as reality. Śāṅkara vehemently condemns it in the general name of Vijñānavāda. But Śāṅkara's criticism cannot touch Vijñānavāda of Vasubandhu.
9. *Śāriīrakabhāṣya* on *Brahma-sūtra* 2.2.31, 'Śūnyavādi pakṣastu sarvaprāmāṇya-vipratīṣṭhā itī tannīrākaraṇāya nādaraḥ kriyate, Na hi ayam sarvaprāmāṇyaprasiddho lokasya vyavahāro 'nyat tattvamanādhigamya śakyate pahanotum, apavādābhāve utsarga prasiddheḥ'.
10. See Śāṅkara's commentary on *Chāndyogya Upaniṣad*. Chapter VIII. 'Digdeśagunagati phalabheda śūnyam hi paramārthasad advayam Brahma mandabuddhinām asadiva pratībhāti'.
11. Ya ājavamjavibhāva upādāya pratītya vā so pratītya anupādāya nirvānam upadiśyate. - *Mādhyamikakārikā*, Verse No. 9 Ch. 25. (Eng. Tra. Th. Stecherbatsky: *The Concept of Buddhist Nirvāna*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), p. (Text) 43.
12. See: Sanghamitra Dasgupta : Is Māyā the material cause of the world? *The Vedānta Kesari*, Vo.. 83, August, 1996, p. 305.
13. See : *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, p. 493.

14. See : *Mādhyaṃikakārikā*, Ch. 24, Verse No. 8.
15. Vyavahāramanāśritya paramārtho na deśyate/Paramārthamanāgamyā nirvānaṃ nādhigamyate// (without a recourse to conventional truth, the absolute truth cannot be understood It is impossible to realize nirvāna without understanding the absolute truth). See : *Mādhyaṃikakārikā*, ch. 24, Verse 10; also see the vṛtti (*Prasannapadā*) by Candrakīrti thereon :
- Tasmād nirvānādhigamopāyatvād avāśyameva yathāvasthitā samvṛtiḥ ādaveva abhyupeyā bhājanamiva salitārthinā'. (Suppose someone wants to drink water, he should use pot to reach his goal. Similarly, in understanding the Buddha's teaching, one must take recourse to conventional truth if one wants to attain nirvāna, the absolute truth. See : *Prasannapadā*, commentary on *Mādhyaṃikakārikā* (Ed. P. L. Vaidya Mithila Institute, Darbhanga, 1960) p. 216.
16. 'Trividam sattvaṃ - pārmārthika, vyāvahārika, prātibhāsikañceti; pārmārthika sattvaṃ Brahmaḥ, Vyāvahārikaṃ sattvamakāśadeḥ, prātibhāsikaṃ sattvaṃ sūktirajatadeḥ, Tatha "gataḥ san" iti pratyakṣa vyāvahārikasattva viśayuttvena prāmānyam' - See : *Vedānta-Paribhāṣa* of Dharmarājādharindira, Eng. Trans by Swami Madhavananda : Advaita Ashram, Calcutta 1993 (4th Ed., 7th Imp.) p. 81.
17. For details see : Sanghamitra Dasgupta's article entitled, "Is Māyā the material cause of the world", *The Vedānta Kesari* Vol. 83, august, 1996.
18. For details see : T. R. V. Murti : *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, (George Allen & Unwin Ltd. London, [2nd Ed], 1960) p. 217.
19. *Ibid*,
20. *Ibid*, also see *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, III-II-9.
21. See the author's article entitled : Levels of Truth in Mādhyaṃika with a note on Advaita Vedānta, *The Essence*, Vol 4, 1996.
22. *Prolegomena to a History of Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 19 as quoted by A. K. Raychoudhury in *The Doctrine of Māyā*, (Calcutta, Dasgupta & Co. 1952) p. 186.
23. 'Na nirodho na cotpattirna baddho na ca sādhdhakaḥ/ Na mumukṣurṇa vai mukṣa ityēsā paramārthatā// See *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā Śāṅkarabhāṣya* 2, 61, 32, by Durgachararī Sāṅkhya Vedānta Tirtha. For English rendering, see Hemanta K. Ganguly, *Radicalism in Advaita Vedānta* (Calcutta, Indian Publication Society, 1988), 63.
24. *Ibid*

25. 'Vijñānavādino buddhasya vacanam bāhyārthavādidipakṣapratīṣedhaparam ācharyena anumoditam' - See Śāṅkarabhāṣya on *Gauḍapāda Kārikā* IV, 27.
26. S. N. Dasgupta: *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, *op. cit.* p. 423.
27. *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* Ed. by B. Nanjio, Kyoto, 1923, p. 29.
28. S. N. Dasgupta : *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, p. 423.
29. *Ibid*
30. *Ibid*, p. 422. See also Śāṅkara's Commentary on *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā*, Anandasrama edition, p. 214.
31. See : C. D. Sharma : *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1994 Reprint), 332.
32. Two instances may be cited to exemplify how much moral degradation was prevalent in the then Indian society. Traditional Hindus used to consider their Buddhist counterpart in the society with hostile feelings and hatred. Mīmāṃsā which dealt with the karma portion of the Vedas was complementary to the latter part of the Vedas or Upanisads. A Mīmāṃsākā commented : "Because Buddha taught his doctrine to fools and śūdras, therefore, it is clear that his teachings were false like a counterfeit coin" A Buddhist also said : "Long time has passed and women are fickle by nature. So it is very difficult to ascertain the purity of Brāhmana race". these instances are recorded in Śāntaraksita's '*Tattvasaṅgraha* 3155, 3156. (Ed. Pt. K. K. Krishnamācharya. Gaekward Oriental Series, Baroda, 1926); also see : C. D. Sharma (1994), p. 333.
33. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Oxford, 1989 edition)p. 179.
34. C. D. Sharma (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 334.
35. In this context it is interesting to mention what B. Russell, says in Preface of his '*A History of Western Philosophy*. Philosophers are, according to Russell, "both effects and causes; effects of their social circumstances and of the politics and institutions of their time, cause (if they are fortunate) of beliefs which mould the politics and institutions of later days". - (London, Allen & Unwin, 1988 Ed. Preface) p. 7.
36. The chief exponent of this view is Prakāśānanda (A. D. 1500- 1600), the author of *Vedāntasiddhāntamuktāvali*. Madhusudana Sarasvatī in *Advaitasiddhi* explains the theory of *ḍṛṣṭisrṣṭi* propounded by Prakāśānanda . According to Prakāśānanda, 'when the knowledge of Brahman dawns, the world becomes absolutely zero. All distinctions are thus, ultimately valueless, the so-called functional reality of the world being non-different from any imaginary or fictional reality

- (*alīkamevameva vyavahārikatvaṁ*). The world is not even an indeterminate reality but a case of total fiction just like a chimera. See : Sanghamitra Dasgupta; Vivartavāda Vs. Dṛṣṭi-sṛṣṭivāda : Some Reflections. *The Vedānta Keśari* Vol. 84, August 1997.
37. 'Jagat tuccham atat samastam tadanyat. For details see : H.K. Ganguly : *Radicalism in Advaita Vedānta*.(Calcutta : Indian Publishing Society, 1988) p. 93.
38. If the task of a philosopher is interpretation, then Śāṅkara is an excellent interpreter. On the one hand, he is unwilling to break with the past and yet open to the socio-cultural changes around him. He could stretch the sublime thoughts of old molds without breaking them and in this sense, in spite of his respect for tradition, he could claim freedom from it.
39. See : *Bṛhadārṇyaka Upaniṣad* - II. III. 6.; also see : Radhakrishnan : *The Principal Upaniṣads* (London, Oxford Univ. Press. 1989 Edition).
40. C. D. Sharma (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 334.
41. See : G. C. Pande : *Life and Thought of Śāṅkarāchārya* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1994) p. 270. The influence of the upaniṣads upon Mahāyānasūtras may be a subject for investigation from the point of view of history. The discussion on this aspect does not lie within the scope of the present paper.