



## Sankara's concept of Brahman

**Nida Fatma**

(Research scholar)

'Department of Philosophy, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh'

Email: nidafatmaphd@gmail.com

### **Abstract:**

In this research paper I will discuss Shankara's concept of Brahman. The philosophy originated by Adi Shankara is known as 'Advaita' or 'non-dualism'. It is not that he was the first teacher of Advaita the other teachers before him being the sages like Yajnavalkya, Uddalaka, Gaudapada and many others, But Shankara's intellectual treatment made it more logical and systematic. Shankara follows the monism embeds in the Upanishads and declares that Brahman is the only ontological Reality everything else is just name and form. It is attributeless, indeterminate and without a second. It can be only conceive as Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. Shankara believe Brahman is the only reality and everything else is only an illusory appearance, the world is only an appearance in the Brahman like the snake in a rope and is not ultimately real. Advaita Vedanta affirms the oneness of existence, the divinity of the soul and the harmony of all religions. Brahman is the main concern of Advaita Vedanta; in this paper I will clarify the nature of Brahman in the light of Advaita Vedanta. Normally the principle teachings of Shankara's Advaita are asserts as Brahman is ultimately real, the world is false appearance on Brahman and the jiva is essentially identical with Brahman.

**Keywords:** Advaita, Vedanta, Upanishads, Monism, Brahman.

### **Introduction:**

Vedanta is the establishment of the profound culture of India. It has kept the Hindu society alive for as far back as seven thousand years. It is the logic of all the significant religious orders and gatherings. In its

different stages vedanta speak to the dynamic idea of man starting with dualism, going through qualified non-dualism and closure in supreme non-dualism, the regulation of the absolute character of the subject and item, past which human reason, thought and experience can't continue. The religion of the Indo-Aryans is commonly known as Hinduism or Brahmanism. Both these words have been instituted by western scholars. The stream Sindhu, streaming into the Arabian Sea and framing a piece of the western limit of India, was referred to by the old Persians as the 'Hindu'. The Greek obtained this name, transforming it into 'Indos' which a lot later was changed over by the English as 'Indus'. The Greek called the nation east of the 'Indos' by the name of India. Its occupants ended up referred to as Hindus and their religion as Hinduism. Early European voyagers and Christian Missionaries instituted the word 'Brahmanism' since they found the Brahmin standing overwhelming Hindu society and religion. This word prompts much misjudging among the cutting edge masterminds. Be that as it may, 'the Hindus want to call their religion as the 'Sariatana Pharma', the endless religion, since it depends on everlasting standards and the educating of the Vedas. They like to call the nation as Bharata or Bharatavarsa.

Among the different schools of Indian philosophy, the vedanta philosophy comes full circle in its most astounding otherworldly accomplishment. Presently, the term 'Vedanta' truly implies the 'end of the Veda, and in this sense it stands essentially for the Upanisads which are considered as the end of the Vedas both sequentially and furthermore rationally. Sequentially the Upanisads are viewed as the end of the Vedas in light of the fact that every one of the four Vedas contains four sorts of writing, specifically, the Samhita, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanisads coming progressively. Rationally, the Upanisads are viewed as the end of the Vedas, as they mark the perfection of the vedic hypothesis and contain the embodiment of the vedic lessons.

In the history of Indian philosophical literature, the Advaita vedanta of Sankara acquired such position in the midst of the Vedanta philosophy. At present this system has attained so much celebrity that the term vedanta is often used as a synonym of Advaita Vedanta. The leader of this school was the great Shankaracharya whom we will designate as Shankara. Who established it on a strong foundation which glorified as a magnificent achievement of Indian thought and culture, and dazzling like a pyramid above all other philosophical schools. The term 'Advaita Vedanta' is used to denote the philosophy of Shankara only. This is because Shankara was the first vedantins who have propounded the doctrine of Non-dualism in a systematic and exhaustive way and who have endeavored to establish it by refuting all the rival theories. Thus the credit of Shankara lies in his successful attempt at systematization, development, elaboration and methodically philosophical treatment under which the doctrine appeared in a totally new garb.

Shankara, following Gaudapada, his incredible fabulous instructor, propounded his non-double rationality, assigned as Advaita. The key purpose of Advaita is to build up the total truth of Brahman which requires the sublation of the world appearance which has gotten its reality from the Absolute for example Brahman.

Shankara declares that the noticeable world is only the presence of Brahman in an alternate setting. Similarly as rope-snake is another appearance of rope, so additionally is the world, an appearance of Brahman. Had there been no rope there would be any rope-snake. So also, had there been no Brahman, there would be no world-appearance. Shankara in the entirety of his works likened the term 'Advaita' with Brahman, as the non-double reality the term 'non-double' is important in light of the fact that the obvious duality has its place as semi genuine elements. The term 'Non-dualism' is wanted to the term 'monism' on the grounds that the supreme element, Brahman is expected to be comprehended as non-double. Actualiv 'monism' is a western idea and can't be compared with 'non-dualism' and 'monism', there is an endeavor to decrease all wonders to a solitary standard as we find in Bradley, Spinoza and somewhat in Leibnitz and it tends to be found in the pre-socratic rationalist Parmenides. Yet, for Shankara, in our vyavaharika level, the world is genuine and even after the acknowledgment of Brahman, the supposed world won't disappear, it will keep on existing without twisting the comprehension of Brahman. So observe world isn't nullified, rather its comprehension has experienced a change. Also, hence we can't state Sankara as a monist rather he is an Advaitin or Non-dualist. Shankara's reasoning of Brahman alongside his tenet of Atman and Maya depend on his perusing of Upanishads, as we probably am aware Shankara was an extraordinary pundit on the different Indian religious writings: He composed analyses on Upanishads as well as on Geeta and other sacred text, His acclaimed book Shankara Bhasya is a discourse on some suktas of Upanishads that have philosophical credit.

Brahman is the main concern of Advaita Vedanta. The main teaching of Shankara's Advaita are expressed as Brahman is ultimately real, the world is a false appearance on Brahman and the jiva is essentially identical with Brahman. In Advaita philosophy the world is the self-alienation of Brahman an eternally negated objectification of the unobjective reality. The world is an apparent manifestation (vivarta) of Brahman and a substantial transformation (parinama) of nescience inherent in Brahman. The scripture declares that Brahman is existence (satya), consciousness (jnana) and endless (ananta) it is birthless (ajam), deathless (amaram), and eternal (nityam), it is one without a second-'ekamevaditiam' and indescribable in words and unknowable to the mind-'avamgmanasagocaram'.

The Upanishads describe Brahman as 'ekamevaditiam' means one without a second. It is of the nature of Saccidananda i.e. existence, consciousness and bliss. The Upanisadic statements like "satyam jnanam anantam Brahman" means Brahman is truth, knowledge and infinity. "Vijnana anandam Brahman" which means Brahman is knowledge and bliss, and "anando brahma vyajanat" means He knew bliss as Brahman, clearly pointed Brahman as the nature of sat, cit, ananda and ananta. The Advaita Vedantins define two types of definitions of Brahman, Svarupalaksana or essential and Tatasthalaksana or accidental. The essence of a thing constitutes its essential definition sat, cit, ananda and ananta are the essential definitions of Brahman. The terms sat, cit etc are explained by Shankaracharya in his commentary "Taittiriyaopanisad". According to Shankaracharya 'sat' means truth, since does not make any distinction between existence (sat) and reality (satyam).

The Advaitin explains away the apparent disparity and contradictions in the following way; the Upanishads prescribe two forms of Brahman a higher one (para) without attributes and without activity, change and modification and a lower one (apara) which has all the attributes and activities mentioned in some passages. This lower Brahman is God who is a blend of Brahman- the attribute-less reality and maya or avidya which is an indeterminable entity. The soul too is a blend of the higher Brahman and mind a product of avidya. The world is a false appearance of Brahman. It comes to this that God, soul and the world are the apparent diversifications of Brahman the attribute-less entity. The factor that is responsible for the above apparent diversifications is known maya or avidya.

Shankaracharya has accepted Nirguna Brahman as the Ultimate Reality. This Ultimate Reality is Nirvikara (immutable), partless, eternal, indestructible, indefinite and all pervading and permeating. It is imperceptible and is beyond our comprehension and expression. The Nirguna Brahman is obviously higher than the Saguna one and it cannot change for it is aja, unborn. Shankaracharya believes that the Upanisadic observation 'tat tvam asi' is literally true and that the soul is identical with the higher reality. But he finds both the Bhagavadgita and the Sutras of Badarayana speaking of the jiva as an 'amsa' of the Highest Reality.

Brahman is indeterminate (nirviklpa). It is unlimited and Transcendental, the essence of Brahman is Absolute knowledge. According to Shankara the nature of Brahman cannot be expressed by any positive description, since that will make it finite. Both our mind and speech can express only limited things. He says that Brahman beyond the reach of our mind and speech. Act quality mode of action whereas Brahman is devoid of all these. Hence, we cannot describe Brahman (avayakta), Brahman is the Supreme Being beyond the range of all speech and is beyond the reach of our mind. Shankara says, Brahman is nirvisea, the soul is identical with Brahman and the world is non real on the basis of the texts of the Bhagavadgita and the Visnupurana.

“na tadasti vina yatsyat maya bhutam caracaram”.

There is no entity either movable or immovable. This text implies that Brahman is nirvisea and the objects of the world are non-real as they receive their existence and manifestation from it.

“ksetrejnām cap imam viddhi sarvaksetresu bhārata”.

Brahman is the pure consciousness is identical with the soul immanent in all the bodies.

“Pratyastamitabhedam yat sattamatramagocaram

Vacasam atmasamvedyam tajjnanam brahmasamj nitam”.

Brahman is of the nature of consciousness which is free from all duality and which is mere existence. It transcends all speech and it is self luminous.

Shankara says that such a description only aims at Nirguna Brahman, thus they are definitions per accidents just as, when we say that which is the snake is the rope, Snake indicates the rope owing to the illusory connection between the two. Shankara says that, these words of limitations are imaginary and not real. They are used only for convenience of contemplation for otherwise it is difficult to meditate on the all-pervading Brahman. Shankara accepts the Upanisadic distinction of Para and Apara Brahman. While the indeterminate Brahman is the higher Brahman, when it is conditioned by Maya and ascribed a personal aspect, he is the lower Brahman. The higher Brahman is above the dualism of name and form, but when the same reality, for the purpose of worship is distinguished by differences or other, it is the lower Brahman. In the highest realization where the subject is no longer separate from the object, Apara Brahman does not fare. But in the present conditions of knowledge Ishvara or lower Brahman is the highest object of truth.

Shankara is the propounder of monism, According to him there is only one reality which is indeterminate and non-dual. He takes the stand on the Upanisadic view that 'All is Brahman' (Sarvam Khalvidyam Brahman). But this non-dual Absolute, being indeterminate, indescribable beyond speech and mind is beyond the grasp of ordinary mind, only by going beyond mind and speech one can realize this indeterminate Brahman. The finite minds can never reach the heights of it. The moment we try to bring this Brahman within the categories of intellect, we try to make this ultimate subject an object of our thought and thus miss its essential nature, it then no longer remains the unconditioned indeterminate Brahman but becomes conditioned by space time and causality. Brahman conditioned by Maya is called Ishvara or God or Saguna Brahman. This is the highest conception of the Absolute that we finite men can have. Thus we reconcile his absolute monism with the practical standpoint, Shankara accepts the Upanisadic distinction between Para Brahman and Apara Brahman. Para Brahman or Higher Brahman is the unconditioned indeterminate and attribute-less Absolute (Nirguna Brahman), while Ishvara or God is the Apara Brahman or lower Brahman, which is also called determinate Brahman or Saguna Brahman. Saguna because we ascribe human qualities and attributes to Him and make him a personal God for our own purpose, As Saguna Brahman He is the concrete universal. He is the object of worship and devotion, inspirer of moral life and is the final heaven of everything. He is the Lord of Maya while, Para Brahman is knowledge itself, God is a knower, for he is confronted with an object to be known.

Brahman is beyond activity and inactivity, Ishvara cannot be changeless and inactive. Being empirically real, he must be ever acting. He is the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of this universe. God creates the universe out of himself, and at dissolution draws the entire universe towards Himself. He is the controller of both soul and matter, but here it should be kept in mind that though God goes out as the universe and return to himself, the alternations belong to his body alone and not to His essential nature. Ishvara's oneness is not impaired by self expression in the many. God is both the world and beyond it. This way Shankara has explained both the immanence and transcendence of God mentioned in the Upanisads. As the immanent inner ruler He rules from within, for He is the soul of souls. Again He also transcends the universe as the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of this universe.

The practical standpoint Ishvara or God is the highest point of reverence, the description of God as Creator etc rest on our ignorance or Avidya. Thought can never overleap the distinction of subject and object, Brahman as indeterminate is devoid of all kinds of distinctions external as well as internal. When viewed through Maya or Avidya Brahman which is essentially a non-dual Reality appears as Ishvara (Personal God) Jiva (the individual soul) and Jagat (the World). According to Shankara the essence of Brahman is Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. These are His essential characteristics for Svarupa Laksana whereas description of Him as the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer are merely accidental description or Tatastha laksana. If a shepherd plays the role of a king then he is the king so long he remains on the stage, Similarly, the description of God as the Creator of the World is true only from the practical point of view, so long as the world appearance is regarded as real. Creatorship of world does not touch his essence, just as loss or gain of a kingdom does not affect the actor who is playing the king on the stage, or just as a rope is not affected by the illusory character of the snake, the concept of Saguna Brahman is also necessary for it has its own importance. It is necessary to explain the changeful universe. Brahman is immutable, but we come across changes in the universe. This changing universe cannot be traced to Prakriti, which is unintelligent. By itself the unintelligent Prakriti cannot cause anything without the aid of an intelligent Spirit, it is only through the power of an intelligent subject, God the object or prakriti develops the whole world. Not only that, to posit prakriti by the side of Brahman as an ultimate category would be to limit the nature of Brahman, which is without the second. The only way is to posit a 'Saguna Brahman', an Ishvara who combines within himself the nature of both being and becoming, the unattached Brahman and unconscious Prakriti. Ishvara combines the two principles of Brahman and Prakriti.

According to Shankara God is both the material and efficient cause of the world, in our experience we do not find the material cause to be conscious enough to be the efficient cause, it does not possess knowledge, Shankara says that it is not necessary that it should be here the same as in experience. For this subject is known by revelation and not inference. When we rely on scriptural statements it is not necessary for us to conform to experience.

## **Conclusion:**

To conclude I would like to say, the central position of the Advaita Vedanta tradition is that in reality there is no difference between consciousness and the universe, no real distinction between the individual the entire universe and God, Brahman. Advaitin declare that the universe is a manifestation of one undifferentiated reality, expressed as Brahman, neuter in gender it literally means 'growth', 'development', 'swelling', or the "supreme transcendental and immanent Reality or the one Godhead. Various passages in the Upanishads and Bhagvad-Gita affirm that Brahman has attributes (Saguna) but without any suggestion that this is a provisional fact about Brahman. Brahman says, "May I be many, may I grow forth". Whereas Shankara appeals to shastra passages (e.g. Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.6) states that Brahman is Nirguna. Shankara

describes the nature of Brahman as such, “that which permeates all, which nothing transcends and which, like the universal space around us, fills everything completely from within and without, that supreme non-dual Brahman- “that thou art”.

Brahman the one is a state of being, It is not a ‘He’ a personal being, nor is it an ‘It’, an impersonal concept. Brahman is that state which is when all subject/object distinctions are demolish. Brahman is ultimately a name for the experience of the timeless plenitude of being. Brahman is identifying by Advaitins as Saccidananda, as ‘being’ (sat), ‘consciousness’ (cit), and ‘bliss’ (ananda). These are not so much qualifying attributes of Brahman as they are the terms that express the apprehension of Brahman by man. Saccidananda is a symbol of Brahman as formulated by the mind interpreting its Brahman experience.

Shankara says Brahman is Nirguna, Brahman is the ultimate supreme reality, Brahman is eternal, Brahman is beyond words. For Shankara, Maya is an inherent power of Brahman. Shankara takes the world as unreal and explains its unreality by using the Doctrine of Maya. Shankara’s view of unreal appearance of the world of multiplicity is known as Brahmavivartavada. The world is Maya, since it is not the essential truth of the infinite reality of Brahman. The Brahman together with Maya is Ishvara.

#### Reference:

1. Mishra L.P. (1998). The Doctrine and Discipline of Avaita Vedanta,
2. Brahma-sutra bhasya.3.2.22: tasmāt brahmavassanoyam pratisedho (i.e. neti, neti) na abhāvavasanaity adhyavasyamah.
3. Taittiriya Upanisad, 2.1.1.
4. Katha Upanisad, 1.2.18.
5. Bhagvadgita, 2,19-21.
6. Vivekacudamani, verse no. 134.
7. Taittiriya Upanisad,2.1.
8. B.U,3.9.28.
9. T.U,3.6.
10. The Making of Vedanta, T.G Mainker Pp 124.125.
11. Bhadvadgita, 10.39.
12. Bhagvadgita, 13.2.
13. Visnupurana ,6.7.53.
14. Indian Philosophy vo.2, by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan p 510.