ŠAÑKARA’S CONCEPTION OF THE ULTIMATE REALITY
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CONTENTS

As already stated the Upaniṣads have described both the saprāpaṇca and the niṣprapaṇca aspects of the Ultimate Reality. No doubt the non-dualists like Śaṅkara and his followers, and theists like Jīva Gosvāmin and others have based their conception of Reality ultimately on the declarations of the Upaniṣads, but they have not laid equal emphasis on the saprāpaṇca and the niṣprapaṇca aspects of Brahman. While the theistic teachers including Jīva Gosvāmin have emphasised the saprāpaṇca aspect, Śaṅkara has concentrated his thoughts on the niṣprapaṇca aspect of Brahman.

In order to explain the dualism or pluralism evident in the universe, and to interpret the Upaniṣadic texts describing saprāpaṇca aspect of Brahman, Śaṅkara had to take resort to the doctrine of māyā, which according to Him, is also vindicated by the Upaniṣadic texts.

It is true, that the word 'māyā' as a stuff-principle occurs in the Upaniṣads in some places. But the different interpretations of the term 'māyā', and difference of view with regard to the nature of māyā, gave rise to great philosophical differences.

Śaṅkara of course interpreted māyā in his own way with great logical skill, and with the support of other Upaniṣadic texts.

The Śvetāsvatara-text stating that 'the possessor of māyā creates this universe out of Him, and in it by illusion the other is confined', (1) and again the text 'know māyā to be the

(1) Asmāt māyā srjate viśvametāt tasmiṇcāṇyo māyayā sanniruddah/ Śvetāsvatara-Up. 4. 9.
stuff (of the universe), and possessor of māyā to be the God-head, are sufficient in favour of admitting the doctrine of māyā whatever may be its interpretation. The text 'ānṛtena hi pratyūtāh' (3) - 'because veiled by something false' indicates clearly that there is a false principle which veils reality.

In Rgveda it is said - Indra (God) assumes many forms through his magical powers (māyābhīḥ). Here the word 'māyā' has been used to denote magic or magical power.

In interpreting māyā - the principle which veils reality, Śaṅkara resorted to nāsadiya-sūkta of the Rgveda where it is stated that before creation there was 'tamas' (darkness) which was neither existent nor non-existent - 'Nāsadāsītya sadāsīt tadānīm', and again 'tama āsīt' (4). In fact, Śaṅkara found significant support of his conception of māyā in this Rgveda hymn, and held that māyā is a principle of nescience which, like darkness, veils reality and which is definable neither as existent nor as non-existent (sadasadbhyām anirvacanīyam). And, according to the Śvetāsvatara-Upaniṣad this principle of nescience is the stuff or the upādāna-kāraṇa of the world. The Chāndogya-text 'ānṛtena hi pratyūtāh', as already stated, indicates its nature of falsity and veiling. Since māyā is a veiling principle Śaṅkara equates māyā with ajñāna or avidyā or nescience. It should be noted that it is not something

(2) Mayām tu prakṛtiḥ vidyān māyinantu maheśvaram/ Ibid 4. 10.
(3) Chāndogya-Up. 8. 3. 2.
(4) Rgveda 10. 129. 1.
negative like absence of knowledge, since a negation cannot veil anything or be the stuff of the world. Therefore, māyā or ajñāna is non-negative (abhāva-vilakṣaṇa). Rather, from the empirical standpoint it is a positive force or power containing sattva, tājaa and tāmas. This view is supported by the Śvētāsvatara-text 'Devātmaśaktim sargupairnīghām' (5). This view of māyā has its support also in the Nṛśimhatāpanī-Upaniṣad where it is said "Māyā is of the nature of tāmas or darkness; it is material in nature, it is of the nature of ignorance. It accomplishes jīva and Iśwara through reflection being itself an accomplished entity as nescience. (6).

Besides, being of the nature of magical power, māyā or ajñāna possesses two-fold capacity - one of veiling and the other of projecting. With the capability of veiling it veils the Ultimate Reality which is pure, undifferentiated and acosmic Brahman, and also with the capability of projecting it projects the universe as appearances of the same Reality (7). It is by this power that the undifferentiated Brahman appears as God-head (Iśwara) in contrast with the individual souls or jīvas, who are but reflections of the same Brahman in the minds or buddhi; which were created along with the creation of the universe.

The Taittiriya-Upaniṣad says - 'He, having created (the universe) entered into it.' (8).

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(5) Śvētāsvatara-Up. 1. 3.
(6) "māyā ca tamorūpā ... tadad jādam mohātmakam ... jīvesāvā- bhasena karoti, māyā ca avidyā ca svayameva bhavati/ (Nṛśimhatāpanī-Upaniṣad)
(7) Vākyaśudhā - 13; Vedāntaśāra, Page 41 (Advaitā Ashrama)
But, since entering of the all-pervading Brahman is not possible in an ordinary sense, it must be in the form of reflections as individual souls, as it is found in the Chāndogya text "anena jīvena ātmanā anupraviśya" (9) i.e. entering in the form of the individual living souls.

It is quite clear that the metaphysical clue of the doctrine of māyā explains away all apparent differences between Brahman and individual self, or between Brahman and Nature, or between the Self and the not-Self. The only question remains, whether the absolute monism, or the pure unity of Brahmātman is disturbed by the admission of the principle of māyā or ajñāna. It has been already stated that this principle, admitted by Śaṅkara to explain the apparent variety and difference, is neither existent nor non-existent. Only a second existent can disturb the pure unity of Brahmātman. Since māyā is not an existent, or in other words, since māyā has got only an empirical existence as a principle to explain the empirical world, it cannot disturb the pure absolute unity by any actual dualism. Just as the second moon visualised by a defective eye cannot disturb the unity of the moon, so also the empirical existence of māyā or its projections cannot disturb the ultimate unity (10).

Thus, according to Śaṅkara the unity of Brahman and Ātman (or Brahmātman) is the main theme of the Upaniṣads, since knowledge of

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(9) Chāndogya-Up. 6. 3. 3.
(10) 'ekaścandraḥ saddvātīyavat ... yatra yadadyasastat - kṛtena doṣengunamā vāḥ-pumātrepāpi sa na sambadhyate/
Brahmasūtra - Śaṅkara-bhāṣya 1. 1. 1.
this unity solves the basic individual problems of bondage and evil and leads to the final liberation.

There is another specific result which we attain by this knowledge of the unity of Brahman and Ātman. Brahman as the cause of the world and as world-ground, though unlimited, is somewhat ego-essence distant and uncertain (parokṣa), while Ātman as ego-essence or self, though very near and most certain (aparokṣa), is somewhat limited (paricīrṇa, saddvitiya). As a result of the discovery of the unity of that world-ground Brahman with the personal essence Ātman, the distance and uncertainty of Brahman the world-cause vanishes, being identical with the most certain, immediately perceived ego-essence (Ātman). On the other hand the limitedness experienced in the ego-self vanishes immediately when we realise its unity with the world-cause - unlimited Brahman.

It should also be known here, that as there is immediacy in our experience of evil and bondage, there should be immediacy also in our realisation of the Ultimate Reality to bring about our desired final emancipation (11).

With regard to the texts declaring absolute pure unity of the individual self with the Ultimate Reality, e.g. 'Tat tvam asi' (thou art that), 'Aham ātmā Brahma' (this self is Brahman), etc., it may be objected by other dualistic schools that these texts do not and cannot mean absolute identity, since words and sentences generally mean

(11) 'Brahmāvagatirhi puruṣārthaḥ, nihśeṣasamsāraśvāvidyādyanartha-nivarhanāt'. Brahmaśūtra-Śaṅkarabhāṣya - l. i. 1.
some qualified or related entities. So, the primary meanings (vācyārtha, śakyārtha) of the words like 'tvam' and 'tat' — (ātman and Brahman) cannot admit of absolute identity.

In answer to this objection Śaṅkara and other Advaitins hold that it is not always possible to determine the final purport of sentences only by the primary meanings of words.

In sentences like 'Gangāyām ghoṣa' (the village of the milkman is situated on the Ganges), or 'kākebhyo dādhi rakṣatām' (save the curd from the crows), or 'ṣo'yaṃ Devadatta' (this is that Devadatta), we cannot determine the intended meanings resorting only to the primary meanings of the words. In the first case we have to discard the primary meaning of the word 'Ganga' as water of the Ganges, and we have to understand the meaning as 'the bank of the Ganges' through implication (lakṣāṇā) called Jahallakṣāṇā.

In the second case, we need not discard the primary meaning, viz. crows, but we have to understand the intended meaning by adding something more to the primary meaning — as any creature which might spoil the curd. This is through implication called Ajahallakṣāṇā.

In the third case, which is more subtle, the intended meaning is the identity of Devadatta known at different places in different times, and not the different places and times. Otherwise, the identity which is meant by the appositional use (sāmāṇādhikaranya) 'ṣo'yaṃ ' (He is this, or This is he) becomes absurd, since the meaning of the word 'sa' as a person qualified by a distant place and a different time, cannot possibly be identical with the meaning of the word 'ayam' as a person qualified by present place and present time; for, the
qualifying portions of the meanings are totally contradictory save and except the person qualified by those times and places.

In this case the contradictory portions of the primary meanings must be discarded through \( \text{Jahada-jahilaksana} \) or \( \text{bhaga-laksana} \) (12), and the non-contradictory portions of the primary meanings are retained to mean the identity of the person Devadatta.

In case of the great Vedantic dictums like 'Tat tvam asi', 'Aham Brahmasmi', or 'Ayam atma Brahma', such \( \text{bhagalaksana} \) or the implication of partially retaining the primary meaning, should be resolved to, in order to find out the final import of the Vedic dictums. Since the primary meaning of the words 'Tat' or 'Brahma' as the great omniscient cause of the world cannot possibly be identical with the primary meaning of the words 'tvam' or 'aham' or 'ayam atma' - the individual self immediately experienced as having limited knowledge, so the contradictory portions in the primary meanings of the words must be discarded in order to find out the intended meaning of the dictums as essential unity of Brahman and Atman as pure undivided Consciousness (akhaṇḍa-Caitanya). The common non-contradictory portion in the primary meanings of the pair of words, is pure consciousness which is the true nature or essence of both God and Soul - Brahman and Jīva. This sort of \( \text{Bhagalaksana} \) is also consistent with Śaṅkara's philosophy which holds that omniscience and causality of God-head and limitedness of the individual souls are only super-imposed apparent phases due to nescience.

(12) Tattvopadesa. 36-40; Vedāntasāra. Page 92-93 (Advaita Ashrama)
Therefore, only these apparent aspects have to be discarded and not the real, in order to find out the true meaning of those Vedantic dictums. It is for this reason that this process of partial elimination is called purification of the meanings of the words 'tat' (That) and 'tvam' (thou) - "Tattam-padarthaparishodhanam".

We have already stated that to explain away all saguna Vākyas and texts describing creation, Śaṅkara resorted to the doctrine of māyā. All attributes, all differences, according to him are either appearances due to māyā, or differences due to some adjuncts (upādhi) which again are nothing but illusory creations or projections.

This illusory projection or appearance is called vivarta, in contrast with pariṇāma which means that all creation and causation are actual and real. According to Śaṅkara becoming and causation, though factual for all practical purposes, are not real. They are only vivarta or appearances from the stand point of the Reality. So it is said that the world is vivarta of Brahman, while it is pariṇāma of māyā or nescience, which is a non-negative (13) (bhāvarūpa) factual principle constituted of the three gunās involving all becoming through time, space and causation.

The world cannot be pariṇāma of Brahman - the Reality of pure consciousness, because pure consciousness cannot have any change whatsoever. Change would mean either the change of attributes or of the essential nature. Brahman cannot be said to undergo changes through the change of its attributes, since it is attributeless. Nor is it correct to say that the change of Brahman implies the change of

(13) The word 'bhāva-rūpa' means non-negative because nescience is not positive like Brahman; abhāvavilāsanatvamāttvam bhāvatvopacārata/ Tattva-pradīpikā (Citsukhi) Page 57 (Mīnaya-sagar)
its essential nature because by hypothesis Brahman is pure consciousness. There cannot be any change in the essential nature of Brahman since a change in the essential nature of Brahman would mean its change into something other than consciousness which would render the whole universe blind, rendering all knowledge and consciousness impossible. (jagadāndhyām prasājyeta).

Both reason and Vedantic texts uphold the doctrine of Pure consciousness devoid of all attributes. 'Sākṣī cetā kevalo nirgunaśca' (14) - It is the witness consciousness, alone, and attributeless. The Kaṭha-texts like 'aśabdam asparśam arūpam avyayam', etc. (15) (devoid of sound, devoid of touch, devoid of colour and immutable, etc.) are also indicative of Its attributeless nature.

In fact, consciousness cannot reasonably have any characteristics or attributes. If the attributes would pertain to consciousness or be in its intrinsic nature, the attributes would not have been perceived by consciousness as objects. Consciousness cannot reveal itself (consciousness).

For, otherwise, the logical contradiction of the same thing being both the subject and object at the same time (katṛ-karma-virodha), would occur. (16).

(14) Śvetāṉvatara-Up. 6. 11.
(15) Kaṭha-Up. 1. 3. 15.
(B.O.R.I. Ed.)
If the same thing could simultaneously be both the subject and object, then one could have jumped on one's own shoulder, or one could have touched his own finger-tip by the same finger's end.

In no case, be it Brahman or God, this contradiction may be admitted. For that would mean the same thing being both A and not A at the same time (17).

Therefore, as the Vedanta declares consciousness to be the root and one ground of the universe, and since this consciousness must be pure without any attribute, the emanation of this world from that root must be appearance or vivarta which does not require the root-cause or ground to be changed or modified.

Pariṇāma, therefore, is only a tentative theory for practical purposes in the jurisdiction of māyā which involves time, space and actual causation, and is a step to the doctrine of vivarta. As sarvajñātma-muni says - "Vivartavādaśya hi pūrvabhūmīr vedāntavāde pariṇāmavādāh (18)" - In Advaita-vedanta the doctrine of pariṇāma is only a previous step (purva-bhūmi) to the understanding of the doctrine of vivarta.

Of course, all the later theistic philosophers *este* resorted to pariṇāmavāda upholding actual casualty of Brahman with regard to

(17) The objecthood (Karmatva) technically means the item which is affected by the result of some activity inhering in something else (the subject) ("parasamāyeta-kriyāphalasālīmānī Kṛma). This implies that the object must be non-subject. So, the subject would also be different from itself in order to be the object at the same time, which is absurd.

* Bhāmati 1. 1. 1.

(18) Samkṣepa-sārīraka - 2. 61.
the universe. For this purpose they lay more emphasis on the meaning of the word Brahman as originator or evolver. They interpret the root Brh to mean 'to grow' or to 'burst forth' which evidently tends to actual and real creation and modification.

This, they say, is also supported by Śruti-texts which describe real creation, or projection of the world by the supreme Being. There are such innumerable texts to prove real creation or paripāma, as - 'Yathoṣvānavih srjate gṛhnate ca', etc. (19) - just like a spider projects (cobwebs) and withdraws, or "tat tejo asrjata (20) - he created fire, or 'sa tapastaptvā idam sarvam asrjata yadidam kiñca' (21) - after having performed penance (contemplation) he created all these objects whatsoever.

Śaṅkara's answer to this point is that though there might be factual creation as described in the Upaniṣads, the texts describing creation are not there for the purpose of meaning real creation. The texts are there only to help the realisation of advaita. So he asserts - "It should not also be forgotten that these texts describing creation do not mean any reality (real creation), because, they describe only empirical treatment of name and form falsely presented by nescience; the texts are there only to establish the

(19) Muniṣaka-Up. 1. 1. 7.
(20) Chāndogya-Up. 6. 2. 3.
(21) Taittiriya-Up. 2. 6.
unity of the self with Brahman" (22).

To substantiate his view he refers to the mīmāṃsā logic - "Phalavat-sannidhā apahalam tadaṅgam" - which means that a Vedic statement having no specific result described, must be subservient to another Vedic statement which is described to have some definite result (23). The Upaniṣadic texts describing creation do never mention any result of the knowledge of such creation, while all the descriptions of the knowledge of advaita or of Brahmatman as the Ultimate Reality, are invariably followed by a statement of result, such as - "For him (who realises Brahman) there is only that much of delay till his body falls; then he is united" (24) or "Oh, Janaka, verily you have attained fearlessness" (25) or, "one who realises Brahman becomes Brahman Itself" (26), or "He enjoys all desired enjoyments with the all-knowing Brahman" (27).

Therefore, the descriptions of creations which are always, near to the descriptions of advaita, must be 'aṅga' or subservient to the realisation of advaita, having its definite result as absolute fearlessness, or as final emancipation (28).

(22) 'Na ceyam paramārthaviṣayā srsti-śrutih, avidya-kalpitanāma-rūpa-vyavahāragocaravat jñānāt Brahmatmahāvapratiṣṭhātanaparitvāçcetāya jñātā maiva vismartavyam' (Brahmasūtra-Saṅkara-bhāṣya 2. 1. 33.)

(23) Brahmasūtra-Saṅkara-bhāṣya 2. 1. 14.

(24) 'tasya tāvadeva cīram yāvan na vimokṣye' tha sampatsye/ (Chāndogya-Up. 6. 14. 2.)

(25) 'abhayam vai Janaka prāpt'o'si' (Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 4. 4. 4.)

(26) 'Brahma veda Brahmaiva bhavati' (Mundaka-Up. 3. 2. 9.)

(27) 'So'ñute sarvāṇkāmān saha Brahmanā vipaścittā (Taittirīya-Up. 2.1)

(28) Brahmasūtra-bhāṣya - 2. 1. 27.
But how can the description of creation from Brahman serve the purpose of the realisation of advaita? In answer to this, Śaṅkara holds that the Śruti-texts like 'Ekadhaivānudraṣṭavyam, neha nānāstī kiṁcana' state that – It is to be realised as one, there is no manifoldness in It. But still, there may be some doubt that though there may be no manifoldness or dualism in Brahman, there might be manifoldness and dualism somewhere outside Brahman i.e. in the world. In order to remove this doubt, according to Śaṅkara, the Upaniṣads declare that there is no scope for such doubt, since, there is nothing – no world outside of, or separate from Brahman. By describing the creation as projection of Brahman Itself, the Upaniṣads mean that there is no possibility of the existence of a world outside Brahman, just as there is no possibility of earthen pots and jars outside clay.

Then by negating dualism and manifoldness in Brahman, the Upaniṣads verily negate all dualism and difference which we experience or anticipate anywhere. Of course, this negation is from the standpoint of the Absolute Reality. All creation and dualism are apparent, the only reality being the non-dual Brahmatman. In this way the texts describing creation are subservient or helpful to the understanding of advaita. (29).

Therefore, the definition of Brahman as being the cause of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world stated in Taittirīya as 'Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante yena jātāni jivanti yam prayantyabhi-samviṣānti', is only a definition from the empirical standpoint, or

a taṭastha-lākṣaṇa (approximate definition). It does not describe the exact nature or true essence of Brahman, but is only an indication of Brahman through apparent marks experienced by us.

The true description of Brahman according to Śaṅkara (30) is 'neti', 'neti' - not this, not this - meaning that Its essential nature is entirely distinct (vilākṣaṇa) from all things experienced whether embodied or bodiless - 'mūrta' or 'amūrta'. All experienced things are but objects (viśaya), while the ultimate Reality is non-object (aviśaya).

There is another definition of Brahman in Taittirīya-Upanisād as 'Satyam Jñānam Anantam Brahma' (31) which is said to be a svārūpa-lākṣaṇa or a definition of Its essential nature. In this definition Brahman is described as Truth (Existence), Consciousness and Infinite.

In order to explain this, Śaṅkara states that the word 'Brahman' denotes the substantive (viśeṣya) while the other three terms denote Its attributes (viśeṣaṇa). Again, he says, though these terms are attributes, they are not ordinary attributes whose characteristic is to differentiate the substantive from other objects of the same class; just as, the adjective 'blue' differentiates its substantive lotus from all other kinds of lotuses only. But, since Brahman is one without any other of the same class, ordinary attributes cannot be applied to Brahman to differentiate it from others of the same class. So, here the three terms satyam, etc. are defining attributes or attributes as अभिविवेच्य.  

(30) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 2. 3. 6.
(31) Taittirīya-Up. 2. 1.
The function of a definition is to differentiate the thing defined from all other things. Therefore, the defining adjectives 'Satyam, Jñānam, Anantam (Brahma) which stand in apposition (sāmāṇādhi-hika-rya) with Brahman refer to one and the same Brahman. But still, this definition cannot indicate the true essential nature of Brahman which is held to be devoid of all characteristics. Though the third term 'anantam' meaning negation of all limitations, is a negative term appropriate to the essential nature of Brahman, the other two terms 'Satyam' and 'Jñānam' should mean through their primary force (sakti) something qualified by the characteristics of truth (satyatva) and knowledgehood (Jñanatva). This Brahman would possess at least these characteristics, which would make Him saguna or saviśeṣa.

In answer to this objection Śaṅkara upholds that though in ordinary cases like - 'a large blue lotus' sāmāṇādhi-hika-rya means some qualified object, sāmāṇādhi-hika-rya of the three terms associated with the term 'ananta' negating all sorts of limitations, must mean some undifferentiated, unbounded substantive. (33). This sort of sāmāṇādhi-hika-rya is primary or mukhya, while the other kind referring to some qualified object is 'gauna' or secondary sāmāṇādhi-hika-rya.

This primary kind of sāmāṇādhi-hika-rya meaning something unqualified must be admitted; for, when the advocates of saguna Brahman

(32) 'Lakṣaṇārthatvāt viśeṣanānām .......... Samāna-jātiyabhyya eva ni-vartakānī viśeṣanānī viśeṣya-syā/ Lakṣaṇaṁ tu sarvata eva, yatha avakāśadātrākāśam/'
Taittiriya-Up. - Śaṅkara-bhāṣya, 2. 1.

(33) Śrībhāṣya 1. 1. 1. (Page 55, Nirmayasagar Ed. - Rāmānuja's presentation of advaita view).
state that there is nothing like 'suddha-Brahma' or nirviśeṣa-Brahma (undifferentiated Pure Brahman), they have to admit that the appositional words like 'suddham Brahmac', etc. must mean pure undifferentiated Brahman which is denied by them. Thus, sāmānādhikaranya can and should mean undifferentiated one when the final purport (tātparya) is determined to be such. (34). In case of this definition of Brahman also, since the final purport of the Upaniṣads has been determined to mean undifferentiated Brahman, we have to resort to mukhya sāmānādhikaranya to mean such an undifferentiated one. This kind of sāmānādhikaranya is mukhya or primary, because if the force or tendency of sāmānādhikaranya is towards meaning unity or oneness, then the sāmānādhikaranya leading to mean complete undifferentiated unity should be primary in contrast with the sāmānādhikaranya meaning one qualified substantive.

Thus, to indicate the essential nature of Brahman resorting to the method of mukhya sāmānādhikaranya, the terms Satyam, Jñānam, should be interpreted as meaning pure existence (Brahman) which is devoid of falsity (mithyāvirodhī), and pure consciousness devoid of all insentience (jaḍa-virodhī); or in other words the attributive word satyatva means mithyātvabhava or absence of falsity, and jñānatva means jaḍatvabhava or absence of insentience - the abhāvas (negations) being nothing other than their ground Brahman. (35). And so the terms do not make Brahman qualified with the attributes, but only negate attributes like falsity, insentience, and limitations. The term 'ananta' evidently denotes absence of all limitations which may be of three kinds - limitation by time, limitation by space and

(34) Śrībhāṣya 1. 1. 1. (Page 57 - Nirnayasagar Ed. - Rāmānuja's presentation of advaita view).
limitation by entity, which are the limitations possible. The Ultimate Reality Brahman is devoid of all such limitations.

Being eternal and all-pervading It cannot be limited by time and space; nor is It limited by any entity, since all entities experienced as different from Brahman have got no existence apart from the existence of Brahman. (36). A thing is limited by entity only when some other entity has got an independent existence. A jar is limited by entity because there are entities other than and independent of the jar to limit the existence of the jar. But Brahman is not limited by any entity because the whole world which appears to be different from Brahman is only a superimposition - an appearance of Brahman having no existence independent of Brahman. The existence of a rope though limited by the existence of other things around, is not limited by the illusory snake superimposed upon the rope.

The main reason for admitting a false or empirical principle like māyā was that from the authority of Upaniṣadic texts already mentioned, and through sound arguments Śaṅkara came to the conclusion that the world was a false appearance.

The other metaphysical reason for this conclusion was his conception of Reality which he imbibed from the spirit of the Upaniṣads. According to Śaṅkara and his followers that which is

independent (nirapekṣa) or self-established (svatāḥsiddha) or constant (abādhita) is real. (37). According to them, if there is any meaning of Reality as contrasted with false-hood or unreality, it must be this meaning as stated.

If the meaning of reality is such, then it goes without saying that the world, which is neither self-established, nor independent, nor constant, cannot be real, but must be non-real or false. Everything in this universe is dependent, one upon another. They are all established by consciousness, or by testimonies implying consciousness. All things other than consciousness are changing and perishable, and therefore not constant. Therefore, they are not real. On the other hand, it is only consciousness which is self-established by revealing and establishing every thing else, and is independent of everything. It does not change or perish, because all change and destruction being objects of consciousness cannot pertain to consciousness. Therefore, pure consciousness being independent, self-established, and eternal is the only Reality. Of course, many other reasons for falsity of the world have been adduced by the Advaitins as follows—

The world is false because it is perceived to exist, and then meets destruction (dṛṣṭanaṣṭatvāt), just as an illusory snake is.

The world is false because it is visible or knowable (dṛṣyatvāt), just as an nacre-silver is.

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(37) Abādhita-svayamprakāśataivāya, sattā, sā ca svarūpamsa
cidatmanāḥ (Bhāmatī- I. 1. 1. Page 25 N.S. Ed.)
Therefore, according to Śaṅkara the world is vivarta or an appearance like a snake falsely superimposed on a rope. Ajñāna or ignorance being the upādāna or stuff of the world, the world vanishes when the ignorance is sublated. Thus, according to Śaṅkara, the world is a paripāma or modification of ajñāna or nescience, but it is a vivarta or appearance of Brahman, which means that Brahman appears as the world without undergoing any mutation or change.

It has been stated that Śaṅkara explained away the texts of creation as subservient or helpful to the realisation of the unity of Brahman. With regard to the texts describing the Ultimate Reality as endowed with supreme powers and attributes, e.g. 'parāśya saktir - vividhaiva śrūyate', or Yaḥ sarvaajñāha sarvavit', or, 'sarvarasaḥ sarvagandhah', etc. Śaṅkara says that they are in the Upaniṣads either for the sake of meditation, or for the purpose of offering the negata (pratiyogin) of the negations (niśedha) like 'neti' 'neti', 'nirguṇaḥ', etc. describing the true nature of the Ultimate Reality.

In the Upaniṣads there are many prescribed meditations or upāsanā where the ultimate Reality has been described with various attributes in order to bring about some desired results for the meditator. So, it may be concluded that the description of attributes and qualities of Brahman in other places are mostly for the purpose of such meditation in order to produce some definite result as stated in the Upaniṣads. "Tam yathāyathopāsate tad eva bhavati"(38) - one becomes that in what manner one meditates upon Him - is the general dictum with regard to meditations of Brahman. Therefore,

(38) Taittirīya-brahmana; cf. Mudgala-Up. 3. 3.
the statements of attributes and qualities or powers are not there to mean their absolute Reality with regard to the Ultimate Reality, but they are there to supply attributes or items for meditation of Brahman.

In some places, where there is no injunction for any meditation nearby, so as to enable us to connect the attributes with meditation, the texts depicting attributes and forms simply supply items (negate) for the subsequent negations, or negative descriptions of the Ultimate Reality. As in the case where Brahman has been described as having two forms embodied (mūrta) and bodiless (amūrta), they are described there only to be negated subsequently by the ultimate description of the true nature of the Reality as 'not this', 'not this' (neti neti). (39).

In this way Śaṅkara maintains that the saguna vākyas are not in the Upaniṣads to mean absolute reality of the guṇas, but they serve other purposes as stated. Of course, the above explanations of the saguna vākyas have been necessary only because guṇas or attributes with regard to the Ultimate Reality have already been proved to be apparent or empirical. So, the final import of the Upaniṣads is the Reality of the acosmic or nisprapāṇca Brahmatman which has been repeatedly stated all over the Upaniṣads. 'Mṛtyoh sa mṛtyumāpnoti ya iha nāneva pasyati' (40) 'He meets death after death who sees anything like difference here', or, 'aśabdam, asparsam, arupam avyayam, nicājaśtam mṛtyumukhāṁ pramucyate' (41)

(39) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 2. 3. 6.
(40) Kaṭha-Up. 2. 1. 10.
(41) Ibid 1. 3. 15.
'knowing Him one is freed from the clutches of death, - Him who is devoid of sound, devoid of touch, devoid of colour, etc.', or the Brhadāraṇyaka-text like - anantaram abāhyam na tad asnāti kāścana na tad asnāti kaścana' (42) - 'devoid of inside or outside; - It does not enjoy anything, nor is It enjoyed by any one, - and such other innumerable Upaniṣadic texts are enough evidences to prove the niṣprapañcā nature of the Ultimate Reality. The four great dictums or mahāvākyas, and many such clear texts indicate the main theme of the Upaniṣads as the pure undifferentiated identity of Brahman and Ātman.

(42) Brhadāraṇyaka-Up. 3. 8. 8.