CHAPTER – III

SANKARACHARYA AND VIVEKANANDA

- A RELIGIOUS APPROACH

3.1 Introduction

Sankaracharya, the famous Advaitin of India, in the eight century, was highly intellectual in thinking and was deliberating on different philosophical issues. He, within a very short period of physical existence, showed his masterly genius through remarkable philosophical reasoning. For him, the act of reasoning is a kind of synthesis and in him we detect a rational synthesis of different Upanisadic doctrines.

The philosophy of non-dualism advocated by Sankara, the great interpreter, highlights nothing but the reflection of the Upanisadic doctrines. So, the theory concerned has been borrowed by Sankara from the Upanisads. But the interpretation and the logic employed by him for the same is original. The writings of Sankara have been found mostly in the form of commentaries, the most renowned one being the Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya, also known as Sariraka Bhasya or Sariraka Mimansa, which includes almost all the doctrines of his non dualism. A few original writings ascribed to Sankara simply represent his general philosophical position, mainly the upanisadic ideas can be found in them.
To Sankara the Ultimate Reality is Atman or Brahman which is Pure Consciousness (jnana-svarupa) or Consciousness of the Pure Self (svarupa jnana) which is devoid of all attributes (nirguna) and all categories of the intellect (nirvishesa). Brahman comprising of its potency or shakti, i.e., maya or mulavidya appears as the qualified Brahman (saguna or savishesa or apara Brahma) or the Lord (Ishvara) who is believed to be the creator, preserver and destroyer of this world which is His appearance.

Jiva or the individual self, for Sankara, is a subject-object complex. The subject-element of the Jiva is nothing more than Pure Consciousness and is called the Saksin while its object-element is the internal organ called the antahkarana which is bhautika as it is composed of all the five elements, with the prior dominance from tejas that makes it ever bound to be active except in deep sleep or states like swoon or trance. Avidya or nescience which causes individuality has been emphasized by Sankara as the source of the internal organ, i.e., the object element of the individual self. He says that when a sense-organ comes into contact with an object, the internal organ in respect of perception, takes the ‘form’ of that object. It is known as the vrtti or the mode of the internal organ. This Vrtti encouraged by the Saksin creates empirical knowledge. The senses maintain the internal organ in the waking state; in dream state it acts by itself; and in deep sleep it is lost in its cause Avidya. Individuality remains in this state also since there is association between Saksin and what is called Avidya. Jnana destroys Avidya in the stage of Moksa or liberation and the Saksin is realized as the Ultimate Reality or the Brahman which it always is.
Maya or Avidya or Ajnanata have been utilized in Sankara’s philosophy in the similar sense. Maya is not pure illusion. It does not denote only the absence of knowledge but the positive wrong knowledge too. It is a cross of both the real and the unreal.

As a matter of fact, maya is indescribable as it is neither existent nor non-existent nor both. It cannot be said to be existent, because the existent is only the Brahman. It is not non-existent as it is responsible for the appearance of the Brahman as the world. It cannot be upheld as both existent and non-existent since this conception is self-contradictory. It is neither real nor unreal (sadasadvilaksana). It is false or mithya, but not a non-entity as like as a hare’s horn (tuchchha). It is positive (bhavarupa). It is potency (shakti). It is also called superimposition (adhyasa). Brahman is the base on which this world is seen through Maya. The very essential unity or non-difference between the jiva and the Paramatman is realized as and when right knowledge arises, Maya or Avidya disappears.

From the empirical point of view, Sankara puts, the world is quite real. It is not an illusion. It is a practical reality. He differentiates between the dream state and the waking state. Things perceived in a dream are quite real as long as the dream lasts; they are sublated merely when we are awake. Likewise, the world is quite real so long as true knowledge does not arise. But dreams are private. They are being created by the jiva (jivasrsta). The world, on the other side, is public as it is the creation of Ishvara (Ishvarasrsta). Jiva is ignorant
regarding the essential unity and treats merely multiplicity to be a fact and mistakenly takes himself as the agent and the enjoyer. Avidya conceals the unity (avarana) and projects upadhis, i.e., names and forms (viksepa). Ishvara never misses the unity. Maya has only its viksepa aspect over him. The Absolute Reality or the Highest Brahma (Para-Brahma) is both the locus(ashraya) and the object (visaya) of Maya. When the individual self or the jiva realizes with the help of right knowledge alone, karma is subsidized, and the very essential unity or the very non-difference between the Jiva and the Para-Brahma or liberation is achieved here and in this life (Jivan-mukti) and the final release (videha-mukti) is gained after the death of the body.

Vivekananda, on the other hand, gives most importance to the concept of religion. He thought that philosophy brought up in relation and he frequently spoke of philosophic religion, i.e., religion sustained by reason. To understand Vivekananda better as a philosopher it is very significant for us to realize his ideas regarding the relationship between philosophy and religion. According to him, true religion is integral with true philosophy. In his historic interpretation on ‘The Ideal of Universal Religion’, Vivekananda regards religion in respect of its components. He said that in every religion there are three parts. First, philosophy part which presents the whole scope of that religion, setting its basic principles, the goal and the means of reaching it. The second part is mythology and the third part is the ritual. Philosophy is then the basis of religion, it is its essence. So, when we speak of Vivekananda’s philosophy we necessarily speak of his
philosophy of religion. Philosophy, according to Vivekananda, is the essence of all religions. He said at the Graduate Philosophical School at Harvard University on 25 March, 1896, that the Vedanta Philosophy, really comprises of all the sects now existing in India. Vivekananda’s meaning of saying is that the religious beliefs of the various religious sects of India have a common philosophical foundation in Vedanta. So, Indian philosophy gives the various religious beliefs of the different Indian sects their unity.

Vivekananda asserts that philosophy should be achieved as the rationale of religion, as the firm intellectual foundation of all religious beliefs. Religion without such a strong intellectual foundation may become a body of superstitions, of fleeting and meaningless beliefs with no bearing on man’s highest spiritual and moral aspirations. True religion, says Vivekananda, must be sustained by reason. The synopsis of this very important statement of Vivekananda on the rational foundation of religion is that philosophy is the science of religion.

Here a question may arise- Is Vivekananda truly a Vedantist philosopher? The meaning of saying that Vivekananda is a Vedantist philosopher does not denote that his philosophy is only an echo of Sankara or Ramanuja. Vivekananda gives a new dimension and a new depth to our Vedanta philosophy and presents it as a philosophy for the modern man. For this we may mention his philosophy as a Neo-Vedantism.

Now, another question may then arise- what is really new in Vivekananda’s Vendanta philosophy? Where is it different from what may be
called traditional or classical Vedanta? When one goes through the whole corpus of our Vedantic texts one sees that Vedanta is not one philosophy, but a collection of several philosophies. Of these various schools of Vedanta philosophy that is, Vedanta of the Non-dualists, Vishishtadvaita Vedanta, of the qualified non-dualists, Dvaita Vedanta, of the dualists and Dvaitadvaita Vedanta, of those who are at once dualists and non-dualists. There are finer and subtler variations of the Vedanta philosophy. Vivekananda does not believe in this fragmentation of the Vedanta philosophy. He takes a holistic view of Vedanta and takes it as a single philosophy. The Dvaitavadi is as good a Vedantist as an Advaitavadi and similarly the Dvaitadvaitavadi is as good a Vedantist as a Vishishtadvaitavadi. The base of the Vedantic philosophy is the Upanisads and Vivekananda affirmed that they represent a variety of philosophical positions rooted in a variety of spiritual sensibility, Vivekananda said that commentators of the middle ages could be accused of a kind of text torturing when they insisted that Vedantic philosophy meant the philosophy they favoured. Vivekananda found in the Upanisadic philosophy a catholicity of spiritual sensibility which gave its universality and this is the foundation of the principle of unity and variety which makes that universality possible.

It is a fact that Vivekananda was an Advaitist and he said that the Advaita was ‘the fairest flower of philosophy and religion’. Instead he never said that the Advaita alone was Vedanta. His Master Ramakrishna taught him that some were dualists and were not able to accept the Advaita which was, for him, the highest
attitude of spiritual life. This pluralism in Vedantic thought is then an important feature of Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta. The most important point of Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta is that it does not reject the material or the mystic world as something from which a Vedantist must run away. It’s true that one must stand strongly on the mystic world to be able to go beyond that world. It is the world where one alone can fulfil one’s spiritual expectations with service to mankind. Another significant characteristic of Vivekananda’s Neo-Vedanta is that it accepts all religions as true and does not disallow any religious belief when it is truly religious. The philosophical base of this type of idea of embracing all religions as concrete is the Vedantic idea of the Oneness of the universe and the oneness of the Supreme Reality. It is this view of man’s spiritual life and spiritual destiny which promoted Vivekananda to believe that this Neo-Vedanta could be the future religion of the world. When he said this he was not in the least an Indian chauvinist. He did not associate his Neo-Vedanta with the name of any Indian prophet as its originator.

The Vedanta philosophy of Vivekananda does not involve a rejection of the material and the human world which was the base of his spiritual endeavour. A Vedantist, a true Vedantist, does not reject the material world as a myth, as an unholy intrusion into the universe of the spirit. When everything is fraught with Brahman, isha vasyamidam sarvam (all this is involved by God) – there can never be an unwelcome trespasser in any sphere of human life. Vivekananda asserts this divinity inhering in the human world at many places in his works
where he summons his people to the ideal of service to mankind. Here attention can be drawn to one of the most memorable of his sayings on this point: it is to be found in his address ‘God in Everything’ delivered in London on 27th October, 1896 and is included in the second volume of his Complete Works ‘The Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world.’ He further adds: ‘The ideal of renunciation nowhere attains such a height as in the teachings of Vedanta. But, at the same time, dry suicidal advice is not intended; it really means deification of the world – giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us and to know what it really is. Deify it, it is God alone.’ He taught Vedanta asks us to renounce the world that becomes a carnival of passions and desires and through such renunciation, to embrace the world of love and service to mankind inspired by that love.

Vivekananda is mostly influenced by Ancient Hindu Philosophy – especially of the Vedanta Philosophy. It can be mentioned that to a very great extent, Vivekananda also is a Vedantist in the true sense of the term. The chief frame of his philosophy of thought and contemplation is derived from the Hindu scriptures – from the Upanishads and the Vedanta. He had utmost faith in the essential unity of all things, i.e., in the fully monistic nature of reality which owes its origin to the Vedanta. Vivekananda’s doctrine of Maya, again, is derived from the same source. The difference between ‘an empirical point of view’ and ‘a transcendental point of view’ that he so frequently makes and to which he refers time and again in order to solve certain apparent contradictions of his thought, is also borrowed from the Vedanta Philosophy.
3.2 Notion of Maya

The notion of Maya has occupied a very significant place in the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. Sankaracharya has made many times a reference to the notion of Maya in his commentaries, and it is clearly seen that Sankara has utilized the terms Maya, Avidya, and Ajnana (Illusory Power, Nescience and Ignorance respectively) in one and the same sense. He has explained Maya thus: “This potential power of the seed is of the nature of Nescience (Avidya) and it is indicated by the word ‘undeveloped’ (Avyakta) and, has the Highest Lord as the basis, and is of the nature of an illusion (Maya) and is the great sleep in which transmigratory Jiva-Selfs, unaware of their own true nature (Rupa) continue to slumber on.”¹ Maya can neither be said as Sat (Existent) nor Asat (Non-existent) and so is something inexplicable (Tattvanyatvabhyamanirvachaniya). Like ‘Time’ it is beginningless (Anadi) but in contrast to it, it is not endless (Ananta), as it distinctly exists only as long as it lasts, but comes to an end when the Truth (viz. that Brahman is the only one reality) is realized. Its creative activity may be said to be same with the creative activity in a dream-state, and just as creations in a dream are contradicted in the waking state, the creations made by Maya are contradicted when the Truth behind has been realized. It is merely co-extensive with the existence of ignorance or empirical knowledge in a man, and it is Brahman in association with its power of Maya, that creates as it were the
illusory world-appearance (Prapancha). An objection is sometimes taken that as it is linked with Brahman, that would lead to the destruction of the doctrine of Advaita, but the Monists retort that the question is not legitimate, because there cannot be any real association between Brahman as such and empty illusory Maya. Because it has been attained as the power of Brahman as Ishvara, i.e. Brahman in its Qualified (Saguna) aspect. In accordance with Sankaracharya, one can realize the truth of non-difference between the jiva –self and the Paramatman or the Brahman behind the world of phenomena through the right knowledge. On the other hand, those who are constantly under the influence of Maya usually think this world of phenomena to be real.

Sankara offered a new significant meaning for the very notion of Maya. In this context, he draws a reference to the Upanisadic tradition where like Gaudapada, he too kept belief in the only ultimate reality in respect of Brahman. But in contrast to Gaudapada, Sankara argues from the sole reality of Brahman to the obvious unreality of the world. It is said that Sankara talked about the unreality of the world of sense experience. He tried to prove the only reality of the Brahman. But, in accordance with Sankara, though the world ultimately becomes unreal, for all practical purposes it becomes real. Brahman appears as the world. Sankara cannot make an easy escape by simply saying that Brahman appears as the transitory world. He has to make it clear and distinct how the real appears as the world. With a view to describing it, Sankaracharya accepts the conception of Maya. In accordance with Sankara, Brahman with the Maya sakti
becomes Isvara who creates the world. For Sankara, Brahman remains the soul underlying reality from the transcendental point of view. There is no reality of Isvara who brings this transitory world into existence. It is merely from the human end that Brahman appears as Isvara.

The doctrine of Maya advocated by Sankara denotes the Divine Power. It may be named as the inherent power found residing in the Supreme Brahman. This maya that resides in Brahman, cannot be put to be one with Brahman nor as something different, similarly as the consuming force of a fire cannot be said as the fire itself. If again, we accept that maya is a separate things or entity then it will lead to duality.

The world of appearance (maya) according to Sankara, is both real and unreal “Belonging to the self, as it were”, says Sankara, “these are names and forms not to be defined as Being Brahman nor different from it. These are the germs of the entire expanse of the phenomenal world.”

From this perspective it may be mentioned that there seems to have superimposition of names and forms on Brahman as pictures are painted on the canvas. When these names and forms have been realized, then the real nature of Brahman comes to be known. The notion of Maya may be said to be the canopy under which resides the phenomenal world of names and form. Names and forms are recognized as unreal as like as a man standing on the edge of a tank, knows his reflection in the water to be unreal.
The universe has no ultimate reality as because the whole objective order of the external universe (maya) resides in the domain of ignorance (avidya), Nescience. To sankara, maya is both the principle of creation as well as creation itself. The doctrine of maya as principle of creation has been identified with avidya. The recognition of the unreal world as real by individual self is owing to avidya.

Sankara puts that the world is ultimately unreal, he never said that it is illusory. Sankara said that the world is, for the time being, a real existence, that is as long as there is avidya. He uses the terms maya and avidya inter changeably. Sankara even ascribes to avidya the similar function which he attributed to maya. Just as maya conceals the true nature of Brahman and puts the various appearance of the world, so, also, avidya poses hindrance to the individual selves from viewing the ultimate reality beyond duality. That is why it is remarked that Sankara identifies the two. It is distinct from the comments and writings of Sankara that he does not seem to assert any difference between maya and avidya.

Sankara seems to realize that some analysis is necessary regarding the contradiction between ego and non ego, subject and object. Brahman and the world requires an explanation to be provided from the attitude of ordinary experience. So, Sankara brings the very notion of maya or adhyasa. Maya is, therefore, the principle that make unification of contradictions and is as such inexplicable and indefinable (anirvacaniya). We may mention that the concept of
Maya advocated by Sankara might be inexplicable but it explains all sorts of contrasts as well as contradictions and relations too.

From the above discussion, it clearly follows that Advaita Vedanta of Sankara is popularly known as Mayavada. Sankara points out that there is merely one Reality and that Reality is nothing but Brahman. But owing to the constant influence of maya, the apparent world appears as different from Brahman, the ultimate Reality. In his Jnana Kanda, Vivekananda has beautifully explained and summed up the basic principles of the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara in the following lines-

“There is but One – The Free- the knower-Self!”

Without a name, without a form or stain

In Him is Maya, dreaming all this dream” 3

From the above expressions it follows that there are three fundamental essences of Advaita Vedanta. There is only one Reality and that Reality is Brahman or Atman. Its only introduction is –it is without a name, a form or stain. Sankara puts forward that the world of multiplicity appears to us is just maya as they do not exist in practice. But the point is that as long as the human beings are under the influence of material existence they are found to see these visions. If we enquire into the root cause of these we will get it in Brahman which is one and the only Reality. To Vivekananda, there is one Atman, One Self, eternally pure, eternally perfect, unchangeable, unchanged. It has no change and all these
changes in the universe are appearances of that one Self. It is maya that is making individuals different from another. According to Advaita philosophy, then, this maya or ignorance or name and form, or, as it has been called in Europe, “time, space and causality”- is out of this one Infinite Existence showing us the manifoldness of the universe; in substance, this universe is one.

Hence, it is seen that the notion of maya constitutes one of the pillars on which Vedanta rests. Here it may be mentioned that in the vedic literature it is understood in the sense of delusion. In the Upanisads, the maya reappeared with a new sense. Shvetashvatara Upanisad explained that the Nature is maya and the Lord Himself is the ruler of maya. The Buddhists have discussed the notion of maya and took the form of idealism. Thus, the maya theory has been outlined from various corners until Sankaracharya established his advaita vedanta attaching much priority to the maya concept. On this notion, with a gentle reaction, Vivekananda put that the transition of the world is not correct. The concept that this world is an illusion comes from the Buddhist philosophers as they did not believe in the existence of world at all. But the maya of Vedanta is neither idealism nor realism, nor a theory. It is a simple statement of fact. Vivekananda said that we see the world with our five organs and if we have another sense we should see something else. If we have still another sense, it would appear as something else. So the universe, therefore, is a mixture of existence and non-existence.

Vivekananda accepts all realities as true though distinction in degree of revelation. In answering the question —why the world has been described as
maya, Vivekananda puts that – maya does not mean illusion if the word illusion has been considered from the sense of opposite of reality. According to Vivekananda, maya denotes merely the relative reality of the world and of the human life. The maya theory does not indicate that the world is pure illusion, rather the fact is that it is full of constraints and contradictions and in this sense it can be explained as unreal or illusory. In this regard, Vivekananda says that the world possesses neither existence nor non-existence. One cannot say it existent as that alone really exists which is beyond space and time, self-existent, therefore, this world is not able to satisfy the idea of existence. That is why we can say that the world possesses just an apparent existence. But the Absolute is free from contradiction.

The term maya now and then is described as similar with ignorance, untruth, attachment to material comforts etc. It was said that the world is maya and therefore it must be avoided and all functions are to be given up. To such asceticism, Vivekananda puts that the world for him comprises of both aspects of illusion and reality, nature and freedom, passion and reason. Vivekananda emphasized activism rather than passivism.

Regarding the question how the Infinite or Absolute appears as the finite Vivekananda drew two relevant theories. (1) Brahmaparinamvada forwarded by Samkhya who differentiated the world of finites as the real transformation of Brahman. (2) Advaita Vedantic ‘Vivarta-vada’ that holds the view that there can not happen the true transformation of Brahman into differentiated objects. We
can see no change of the unchangeable or change of Brahman as such but the appearances of the Brahman to relative awareness. Brahman does not transform into the world but appears as the world or illusory superstition of forms and name on the Absolute. The world has existence merely in respect of relation to the mind. The Absolute has become the universe by being through time, space and causation. The revelation of the Absolute can be said to be the differentiated world to consciousness bound by space, time and causality. In accordance with Vivekananda, the Absolute becomes the universe through space, time and causation…. Time, space and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute can be seen and when it is seen in the lower side, it appears as the universe. The Absolute possesses no time, space and causation.

Thus, a new explanation about maya was given by Vivekananda with the help of which not merely he tried to prove the world. The real nature of the world is something novel in Vivekananda’s philosophy.

But though Vivekananda has expounded and enlarged the maya-Vada of Sankara, he has not subscribed to the Advaita notion of maya without taking any modification. He clearly describes that a lack of proper understanding of the deeper sense of Maya concept appears as an indiscriminate use of the notion has made a lot of harm. For Vivekananda, maya is not a theory for the description of the world. It is simply a statement of facts as they exist. On the other hand, the world we are living, moving and having our existence is full of contradictions. Vivekananda comments that the term maya indicates this contradictory nature of
the world. Since contradiction forms the very backbone of this world, the human beings are incapable of offering any satisfactory and rational description of it. We have been seeing the world which is charming and encouraging; but simultaneously it is also a valley of tears, an abode of death and dejection. Generally the question arise –how can such a puzzling entity be rationally explained? Answering the question Vivekananda puts us innumerable examples with a view to showing the contradictory nature of the world.

The limitation of the power of intellect is a fact which we cannot deny. In this manner we get that intellect creates a confusing state of affairs which has been described cryptically as Maya. In this regard, Vivekananda puts, “Then, there is the tremendous fact of death. The whole world is going towards death; everything dies.

Man still go on seeking pleasure. And this is Maya. Vivekananda, thus, is very clear about his view that maya is an insoluble riddle of the universe. The entire world is engulfed by maya. We cannot go beyond it nor can we survive without it. The whole universe is pervaded by maya. He says that Maya in Vedanta, is neither idealism nor realism, nor is it a theory. It is simply a statement of facts. Maya is not a theory to explain the world, it is simply a statement of facts. The very basis of our being is contradiction. This eternal play of light and darkness- indiscriminate, indistinguishable, inseparable- is always there. A fact, yet at the same time not a fact; awake and at the same time asleep. This is a statement of facts and this is called maya. We are born in this maya, we live in it, we think in it, we dream in it.
It is no exaggeration to hold that Vivekananda well realized Sankara’s Advaita philosophy better than any one else and he did not hesitate to say the same in a very clear and lucid language. He says that Advaita philosophy approves only one thing real in the universe, i.e., Brahman; everything else is out of Brahman by the power of maya. To reach back to that Brahman is our goal. We are, each one of us, that Brahman, that Reality. If we can get rid of this maya or ignorance, then we become what we really are.

From the above discussion, we can see very well two aspects, a negative and positive in Vivekananda’s vedantic thought. He accepted the description of Brahman given by Sankara. It is the conventional attitude to Brahman by the path of negation (neti neti). But in contradiction to it Vivekananda also laid down some positive approaches to Brahman. In his philosophy, the world is not totally negated in Brahman. It is not, as in Sankara’s Advaita it is, that Brahman alone is real and the world is illusory (Brahman satyam, Jagatmithya). But that in a sense the world is also real. This will be clear when we go through the entire philosophy of Vivekananda.

The basic trend of Vivekananda’s philosophy that has emerged from Jnana Kanda is similar to Advaita Vedanta of Sankara. On the otherhand, in the second part, that is Karma Kanda, we find altogether a different view. The real philosophy of Vivekananda has emerged as a result of the synthesis of maya-Vada of Sankara and the great humanism of Lord Buddha. Thus maya Vada of Sankara has been brought into the pattern of human psychology and basic human
instinct and biological entity. With the help of them Vivekananda explained that life is real, life is earnest and its aim is not death. Thus, it is seen that Vivekananda’s doctrine of maya is derived from Vedanta. In Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta, too the notion of God has been given a place, but there God has been conceived as a product of ignorance and Maya, and as such, is not real from the real point of view- the Paramarthika drsti; but Vivekananda affirms that Absolute and God are not two—that God is not a creation of maya. These differences surely arise owing to ignorance or our limited ways of apprehension, but knowledge means the realization of the irrelevance of such a distinction.

Vivekananda’s doctrine of creation has reference to the doctrine of maya. An estimate of his doctrine of creation, in a sense has reflected the teachings of the neo-Vedantism; and as such, the maya-doctrine naturally makes its appearance in his philosophy. It can’t be denied that Vivekananda borrowed the basic teachings as well as the principles regarding maya from Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, but his concept of maya is not exactly the same with that taught by Sankara. Vivekananda, like Sankara, too has believed that maya is a power of the creator; he also thinks that maya is the principle of change that makes creation possible. Instead in Advaita Vedanta, maya is the power that creates illusion, it has a divine Sakti that possesses the capability of motivating man into believing that the world is real. This position was not sustained by Vivekananda. He put that maya does not necessarily mean being illusory or unreal. The maya concept is
accepted just as a fact regarding the nature of the world, it seeks to express the essential characters of the world as it exists.

Vivekananda declares that the concept of Maya has a reality from the lower point of view only. That means he gets trouble in reconciling the doctrine of maya with that of reality. He is conscious that all sorts of contradictions are to be resolved, and therefore, finally Maya has to be superseded. Vivekananda affirms that the superseding function does not completely negate that which is superseded. Maya gives way, only to find that all the time it was lying within the bosom of the Brahman itself; its being superseded, it does not take away from it its distinctive role that it had been playing so long.

Such explanation of the concept of Maya can also justify the Vedantic description of Maya where it is described neither as real nor as unreal, nor even as real-unreal. It is explained as anirvacaniya. Being influenced by such type of enquiry and analysis on maya in Vedanta especially of Sankara, Vivekananda too offers a similar explanation of maya when he says that Maya can neither be defined as existence or as non-existence. Vivekananda also presents maya somewhere in between Absolute Being and non-being.

3.3 Notion of Brahman

Sankara describes his doctrine as advaita or non-duality. According to him, Brahman or the Ultimate Reality is the Self itself. From the cosmic point of view,
it is sometimes called ‘Brahman’ and from the point of view of individual nature, it has been named ‘Atman’. But ‘Atman’ and ‘Brahman’ have the same characteristics of being consciousness, all-pervading and bliss. Atman is Brahman which is beyond the subject-object duality. In Sankara’s philosophy, Brahman or Atman is the Ultimate Reality.

The Brahman is the Absolute or the Ultimate Reality or the intimate self. Atman-Brahman is one without a second. The multiplicity or duality of this universe is perceived by us, not as many but as one Brahman, the Absolute. All this is Brahman, “sarvam khalvidam Brahma”, says the Upanisads.

The very being of Brahman has been proved as the Self of all beings. The existence of the Self (Atman), which is Self-existent and self-proved, proves the existence of Brahman. The Atman is the foundational consciousness. It is the transcendental basis of the empirical universe. The Atman is Brahman. It is one, eternal universal consciousness which is the only ontological reality. Taittiriya Upanisad says: “satyam jnanam anantam Brahman”. Brahman is the Truth, the Knowledge, the Infinite. Each and everyone wants to receive vision of it as it is all-pervading and the door is open to all to realize it.

In Sankara’s philosophy, Brahman has been explained to be existence, knowledge and bliss. He is infinite, eternal, supreme knowledge, supreme bliss. Existence is knowledge; knowledge is existence, they cannot be separated from each other. Being is consciousness. Consciousness is being. Brahman is infinite, immortal and imperishable. It is not limited by time, space and objects. It is
eternally fulfilled and is of the nature of bliss. Existence, knowledge and bliss are its essential characters. They distinguish Brahman from the world which is unreal.

Brahman is non-spatial, non-temporal, non-causal and trans-empirical existence. It transcends the past, present, and the future, and causes and effects, which are empirical phenomena. It transcends all empirical existence. It is free from all differences of space, time, substance, attribute, action and the like. It is one, attributeless and indeterminate real being. Though it is devoid of phenomenal qualities, it appears to be possessed of attributes. Brahman is devoid of a genus, quality, activity and other determinations. The higher Brahman (parabrahma) is devoid of phenomenal attributes and determinations. It is the supreme reality.

In accordance with Sankara, the self is both known and unknown and the I must be separated from the not ‘I’ which includes not only the external world, the body and its organs but also the whole of understanding and the senses.

Since ordinary man finds it difficult to gain the Real as out of space and time, so they have been taught to think of it as an object endowed with qualities, living in the world and the human self. This knowledge is to serve as a preparation for the higher knowledge.

Each and every urge finds its fulfilment in the self. The dwelling place of Brahman is within one’s heart in which man can attain all his urges and desires.
One enters into the Brahman of the heart when one remains in deep sleep.

One is to realize the self in one’s heart:

Hṛdaya-nāma-nirvacana prasiddhyapi sva hṛdaye

amety evagantavyam

“The main idea of the Advaita (non-dualistic) Vedanta philosophy as taught by the Sankara school in this, that the ultimate and absolute truth is the self, which is one, though appearing as many different individuals.”

From the above analysis we have noticed that Sanka ra, the Advaita Vedantist, believes in the Ultimate Reality or Brahman as one indivisible reality named Brahman. The individual soul or Atman can never be distinguished from the absolute Brahman. The Advaita admits the very oneness between the individual soul or atman and the supreme Reality or Brahman. Those who are committing variety in respect of the Reality suffer a cosmic blunder.

On the other hand, Vivekananda says that Brahman is Infinite Existence (Sat), Infinite Knowledge (Cit), and Infinite Bliss (Ananda). According to Vivekananda, Brahman possesses no name or form. He is not within space, time and causation, i.e., Brahman is beyond these physical factors. Vivekananda affirms that there are two ideas of God-personal and Impersonal. The former God has been explained as having the attributes or the qualities of omnipotence, Omniscience, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of this world of everything, but, of course, God is not being distinguished from that of Atman. On the otherhand,
the Impersonal God is having none of these qualities or attributes. Sankara took personal God or Isvara as determinate (saguna), God, in accordance with him, is the product of ignorance and maya. He is not real from the transcendental point of view. In contrast to this point Vivekananda puts that Absolute and God are not two. God is not the creation of maya, God is all- pervasive, Omnipresent.

Vivekananda again says that the Absolute has being and becoming. The Absolute has become the universe through space, time and causation. Time, space and causation are like means of reaching Absolute and when reached on the lower stage, it is the universe. We get neither time, space or causation in the Absolute as the Absolute is beyond them all. These factors have no real existence though they can not be said to be non-existence since all things of the world are getting manifestation through them alone as the universe. They now and then disappear. When man goes through time, space and causation, the Absolute is found manifesting as many. Thus, it seems that Vivekananda had two different conception of Brahman or Absolute as apparently revealed in the universe and is really expressed in it.

Though like Sankara, Vivekananda admits the Brahman as the sole Reality and the world is unreal in the generic sense, still he made an introduction of a policy of giving and taking. In similar voice with Sankara, Vivekananda rejects the reality of the world though he, in constrast to Sankara, deifies the world. Sankara rejected the world as unreal but Vivekananda did not do so, rather he gives a status of Brahman itself to the world. Vivekananda supplement and
transforms the famous assertion of Sankara ‘All this is nothing’ into “All this is nothing but Brahman”. He in other way transforms and extends the notion of Brahman.

Sankara was pre-eminently a spiritualist, who believed in soul or in an Impersonal God or Brahman. He enunciated his doctrine of the phenomenal world in line with the revelation of the great Rishis, of the Upanisads and, seers of the Vedas. Sankara no doubt emphasized on the ultimate Reality who is Brahman. But the mundane world of existence was not repudiated by him from the vyvaharika attitude. He of course ascribed relative value to the material world of reality. Its significance has been highlighted in redefining the individual soul.

Vivekananda agrees with Sankara about his notion of Reality or Absolute or God. Reality, for Vivekananda is one absolute Brahman. This Brahman is the only all-pervading, immanent Reality. It can be said to be a perfect unity. The Absolute is an indivisible, immutable, comprehensive whole. The Absolute cannot be divided. It does not admit of even internal division. The Absolute is beyond space, time and causation. The Absolute is seen through time, space and causation. But these categories are not a part of the Absolute. The Absolute, according to Vivekananda, is indefinable and so it is unknowable. Man can know merely that, what is limited by human minds. The Absolute cannot be limited by the mind. Otherwise, it will be no more Absolute. It is not the finite. It is a contradiction in terms to know the Reality or the Absolute. This Absolute is not determined by anything else. It is self-existent. The Absolute is Infinite.
Existence, Infinite Consciousness and Infinite Bliss (Sat-Cit-Ananda). He is impersonal, indeterminate, formless and one without a second.

In Vivekananda’s philosophy, the concepts of God and Absolute cannot be said to be two distinct notions. God is, what is called the Absolute substance or the cosmic intelligence that permeates the entire universe. The impersonal Brahman has been treated as the Creator, Ruler and the Destroyer of the world in its cosmic aspect. In this manner, a belief in personal God arises along with the impersonal nature of the Absolute. Personal God is a phase of the Impersonal. To believe in an Impersonal God is a philosophical task. Simultaneously, personal God is essential to fulfill the demand of the religious and spiritual aspirations of man. The distinction between personal God and the impersonal God does not affect the nature of God in any way. God is what He is.

According to Vivekananda, God is the essential unity of each and everything of the universe. To him, the notion of God is necessary. It is the Truth. It is freedom. God is described as the one eternal principle. Man ascribes qualities to God all the best he knows. Hence, Vivekananda says that God is a human God. God is only infinitely greater than man. We must worship God in man so long as we are men. We must transcend our human nature to know God as He is. The highest aim of human beings is God Himself.

Like Sankara, Vivekananda too puts that the Absolute Reality can be described as Sat-Cit-Ananda. The notions of Sat (existence) and Cit (consciousness) have similarity with the Sat and Cit of Advaita Vedanta, but the
concept of Ananda (bliss) is greatly enriched by Vivekananda. Being partly influenced by Buddhism and Christianity. Vivekananda makes ‘love’ the essential core of ‘bliss’. He asserts that ananda is in love.

Vivekananda’s reference to ‘love’ takes us to the consideration of the other aspects of his philosophy of God – to its monotheistic aspect. According to Vivekananda, the absolute – the impersonal Brahman – is looked upon by the mind as the Creator, Ruler and the Destroyer of the world and as its complete Cause. He has also been described as absolute good and loving – as one who is ceaselessly having interest in his creation. Thus, along with the impersonal nature of the Absolute, a faith in personal God too arises.

As a matter of fact, Vivekananda believes that the religious feeling and expectations of man demand satisfaction, and that demand can be met merely by a personal God. In Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta too the notion of God has been given a place, but there God has been conceived as a product of ignorance of maya and as such, is not real from the real point of view – the Paramarthika drsti. But Vivekananda affirms that Absolute and God are not two – that God is not a creation of maya. These differences surely arise owing to ignorance or our limited ways of apprehension, but knowledge means the realization of the irrelevance of such a distinction. Reality, from the metaphysical point of view, is absolute Brahman, the same Brahman (reality)is, from the point of view of religion, God. Again, the supremely real is too the object of our devotion and worship.
For such reason Vivekananda stresses the all-pervasive character of God. God is omnipresent and is supposed to be existing in everything. "Through His control the sky expands, through His control the air breathes, through His control the sun shines, and through His control all live. He is the Reality in nature, He is the Soul of your soul, nay, more, you are He, you are one with Him."\(^5\)

In the philosophy of Vivekananda, reality and God are not distinct concepts. He combines Abstract Monism and Theism in his thought. From this viewpoint, Vivekananda is a pantheist, and yet God, according to him, is personal. As a result, we find two currents flowing almost side by side in Vivekananda’s philosophy – one that resembles Advaita Vedanta, and the other that reminds one of the theism of the Bhakti-cult. So for Vivekananda, these two currents are not really two currents, they are just two ways of looking at the Reality. But then, an attempt can be made to determine the features of both these aspects of his thought.

Vivekananda, like as an Advaitin, puts that reality is one absolute Brahman. He gave stress on the monistic character of reality to such a great extent that he says that reality is one but not ‘whole’. The idea of a ‘whole’ denotes that there are parts, which, when organized, give the whole. Vivekananda comments as Absolute is perfect unity, and therefore the distinction between whole and parts completely vanishes. The notion of Absolute is arrived at by carrying the process of abstraction to its maximum possible limit, and that explains its strictly monistic character.
Vivekananda firmly believed in God, this faith represents itself that it is, as a matter of fact, impossible to live without a belief in God. He heartily emphasized the very necessity of God concept. He happens to be very serious in stressing on the necessity of God concept. This necessity is quite reasonable to him for the simple reason that an apparent denial of God’s existence is simply impossible. In his view, it is impossible to retain the reality of the world and the soul and to reject the reality of God. According to Vivekananda, God has to be presupposed as the necessary support and ground of both the world and the soul.

Being impressed by Sankara, Vivekananda puts that the universe expresses an essential unity of everything. One has only to think over to detect in a well order that things that look so very different from each other are really and basically one and the same. This is a fact that the reality is one.

From the above analysis, it is clearly reflected that Vivekananda conceived of God more or less in the manner of Advaita Vedanta—but with a difference. This difference follows from the act that Vivekananda is not prepared to admit that theistic descriptions of God are descriptions of God from a lower point of view; in fact, he feels that the Vedantic distinction between Absolute and God is an additional one. According to Vivekananda, God is the essential unity of everything, and as such, is all-pervasive. Therefore, there is no need for making distinctions of any kind, every one is free to perceive Him in whatever manner he likes.
God is described as the one eternal principle. This may lead one to suppose that God is the unchanging and abiding principle in the midst of change, but that is not the exact conception of eternity. God is eternal as time and change are irrelevant to it. Vivekananda has conceived God as supreme Goodness that does not mean mere moral perfection. The question of morality is also irrelevant in God. There is no distinction between good and evil. Divine Goodness, according to Vivekananda, has two sides: First, it means that God is bliss and happiness. Secondly, it implies that it is possible for every individual to be good if he fixes up the supreme Goodness as his ideal and inspiration.

This kind of assertion reminds us another character of God to which Vivekananda has given a unique importance. God, according to him, is a human God. This affirmation apart from being anthropomorphic, represents a very great truth. This indicates that man learns that the spark of Divinity is within himself. Vivekananda is very conscious about the fact that one of the greatest justifications of God notion is the fact that God is able to satisfy our urges and needs, and is able to provide to our life greater vitality and strength. So, some human qualities have been attributed to God with a view to establishing inter-communication. Vivekananda, therefore, says, that God is merciful, just, powerful, almighty. We can approach, pray love Him in return, and so forth. In one word, God is a human God, only infinitely greater than man. He is trying to bring religion within the easy reach of the common people, and he feels that the common man is more interested to the personal than that of the impersonal.
character of God. To Vivekananda man can not describe Him by language. All linguistic attempts, calling Him father, or brother, or our dearest friend, are merely attempts to objectify God, which is not possible. God is the eternal subject of all.

3.4 Notion of Jiva

According to Sankara the individual self or jiva is of the nature of pure consciousness and bliss and is realized in deep sleep. It is unborn and eternal Brahman. It is the object of spiritual quest. It is the non-dual peace (santam advayam), the same throughout (samatam gatam), the self-established (svastha), tranquil and pure (visarada). It is sleepless, dreamless, luminous (sakrd vibhata), all knowledge (sarvajna), shining by itself, and requiring no other light.

It is of the nature of supreme happiness (sukham anuttamam) and release (sanirvanam). It is really indescribable, as it has no name and form (anamakam arupakam).

Sankara asserts that the Self is experienced as the Absolute Reality in the state of turiya. It is raised above the difference of subject and object. The Self is the ever present only reality. All unreal things will vanish, but the self remains unchanged. ‘Turiya is only another name for the self. Nevertheless, the self is here and now, it is the only reality. There is nothing else. So long as
identification with the body lasts the world seems to lie outside us. Only realize the self, and they are not.\(^6\)

Hence, we must accept the existence of the Self. Those who are not accepting the existence of the self, they are denying their own existence. Therefore, truly speaking, the Self or Atman cannot be denied by anybody. The self cannot be an object of knowledge. Everybody is aware of the existence of his own self. Just as the seeing eye does not see itself as it sees other objects, similarly the self, which is the foundation of all knowledge, cannot be known like ordinary objects. But it cannot be denied.

The jiva or the individual soul or the self may, therefore, be named as a fundamental principle and self-proved. The self is the basis of all proofs and also prior to all proofs. The proof of the self or Atman refers to the proof of an eternal Brahman. Atman, therefore, is called Brahman.

To Sankara, the jiva or the self is both known and unknown. The ‘I’ must be distinguished from the not ‘I’ which includes not only the outer world, the body and its organs but also the whole area of understanding.

The ‘I’-thought presents the concept that I am the agent, the perceiver or the enjoyer. But when I realize the non-dual self, the duality between the subject and the object will disappear and so egoism becomes an empty form.

The Atman is known as individual self from the epistemological attitude while it is known as Atman, the highest self from ontological approach. The
Atman as individual self is our own self. The individual soul is believed to be located in the innermost part of the individual. Man is the result of the creativity of the Atman.

The Atman means the core of human personality, the truth of truths (satyasya satyam), the centre of centres (Kendrasya Kendram) in man. The Atman or the jiva may be treated as our true being. The whole formation of the self or the Atman is the Universal consciousness. This Atman, the Highest spirit is the ground of all beings. Purusha is sometimes used for the Atman which is the subjective light of consciousness that is reflected in all beings.

Atman is the all-pervading principle. It is smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest. It is immanent in all the universal entities whether big or small. Being immanent, it still transcends them all. Though dwelling in the body, it is bodiless; though associated with changing things it is not changing. Really analyzing, the individual consciousness is nothing but the all-pervasive principle. The individualization is due to one’s ignorance of one’s true nature which may be called a shadow of the Supreme Being.

Though the individual soul (jiva) is basically the Supreme Being, it is not aware of this fact. The reason is that man is mostly extrovert on account of the outgoing tendencies. When one is able to control the outgoing tendencies of the senses and looks inward one will realize one’s true nature.

The jivas, who are ignorant of their true self, who have not realised the Reality by being introvert through yogic practices and meditation see plurality
here. They consider the diversity as real due to their wrong knowledge. They are always governed by desire. Such ignorant jivas, after death, take up another body as per their knowledge and karma.

Thus, the Upanisads put that to realize Atman, the control of mind and senses are effective means. After achieving true knowledge, one realizes the true nature of Reality.

Sankara and his school draw a difference between the supreme soul and the individual souls. The former is omniscient, omni-potent, omnipresent and is free from the very beginning. But the individual souls are limited in wisdom and are entangled in the eternal round of samsara. The individual souls are not separate from the supreme soul though the former are different from supreme soul from the empirical point of view. The real nature of the supreme atman has been concealed by the upadhis. Ignorance or Avidya imposes the upadhis on the supreme atman for which it regards as an individual atman. The individual soul has no reality as well as it has a reality. The oldest Upanishads recognize only one soul. The atman who alone exists and creates the universe; who as jiva enters into this universe. Ultimately, existence, consciousness and bliss are one. Brahman, from the metaphysical viewpoint, is pure Existence. Epistemologically, It is Pure Consciousness and ethically, it is pure Bliss. It is the Absolute.

The Self appears finite because of our ignorance. The infinite self stands revealed by wisdom. The Advaita Vedanta of Sankara puts that the Divine, the
immutable presence is called svaprapakasa-caitanya, the self-luminous consciousness.

According to Plato, the soul-substance is immortal. He says in the Republic, ‘soul is substance and substance is indestructible.’

Sankara comments that the individual self with its ability consciously realizes its unity with the eternal self. The universal Spirit is the ideal for the individual self for which he strives. The highest goal of life for Sankara, is to realize Brahman. As the Absolute is indescribable the union with the Absolute is also indescribable.

On the other side, Vivekananda deeply gives stress on the potentialities of human individuals. According to him, each and every human individual is an organized unity of the three elements – the body, the mind and the self or Atman. The body is the outward layer of the Self. The mind is the internal layer of the Self. The Self or Atman is the kernel of man. It is the Prime Mover of the body and the mind. It is immaterial in comparison with the body and the mind. The body, the mind and the Self are the three different states of existence of the One whole – Brahman. Vivekananda, sometimes put comment that the body and the mind are nothing but only appearances. The Self is all that exists in the universe. It is the Brahman that appears as different owing to the imposition of name and form. In addition to this, Vivekananda very frequently holds that the world and its individuals are as much real as Brahman. The individual with its every constituent, such as the body, the mind and the self is real. Brahman reveals Itself
into various levels of existence. But, it does not express equally at all the levels of existence. There is a hierarchy of beings. Man is the supreme form of revelation of Brahman in the universe.

In this regard, we get a distinction between the apparent man and the real man drawn by Vivekananda. The apparent man is constituted by the superstructure of the body- mind organism. The Self or the Atman is the real man, the reality. Vivekananda puts that the Real Man is one and infinite, the omnipresent Spirit. The apparent man is merely a limit of that Real Man. Hence the mythologies are true that the apparent man, is only a dim reflection of the Real Man. The Real Man, the Spirit, is not bound by time and space and must, therefore, be free.

Like Sankara, Vivekananda too identifies the real nature of Atman with Brahman itself. Atman is basically identical with Brahman, the Absolute. “Atma ca Brahma”. The real man is the soul, Self, Atman that is nothing but Brahman. Essentially, there is no difference between man and man. Man is divine. The elaborate Vedanta philosophy was reduced by Vivekananda into two basic principles:

1. The divinity of man

2. The essential spirituality of life.

Behind all diversity the Self is the only Reality. To Vivekananda, the apparent diversity does not affect the real nature of man. The Self, by nature, is pure. It
reflects Itself from the lowest worm to the highest and most perfect being. It is beyond all thought. It is beginningless and endless. It is immovable, intangible, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent Being. The Self is formless, all-comprehending and all-pervading in nature. As it is formless, It cannot be confined in space. It acts through the mind and the body. Hence, action can be seen in and through them.

To Vivekananda, each work we do, each thought we think, produces an impression on the mind. This impression is called Samskara. As the samskara acts on mind, Atman imagines Itself to be taken from place to place. But, Atman has nothing to do with the mind and samskaras. The bondage is due to the identification of the Atman with the moving nature and its products. The nature moves prior to the Atman. The Atman possesses the representation of this movement. The Atman thinks ignorantly that It is moving. Then, the Atman is in bondage. But, when It finds that It never moves, then It attains freedom. The jiva is the Atman in bondage. The jiva gets revelation in higher or lower forms as per the law of reincarnation. The individual self or soul travels through higher and lower forms, migrating from one to another in accordance with the Samskaras. It receives to freedom merely in the highest form. Man is the highest of all forms.

The universe is a projection of Brahman. The very being of the universe has been found in Brahman. It moves on to go back to the source. The case is similar with the soul. The universe being projected from Brahman passes through all sorts of forms of life, lower and higher. And ultimately it is in mankind. Man
is the nearest approach to Brahman. The soul realizes its oneness with Brahman in man. The soul returns to its source - Brahman. The movement towards Brahman is the great struggle of life. In nature and in each and every form of life, the struggle is the movement to go back to the centre and be at rest. Vivekananda puts that all struggle and competitions in respect of lives of animal, plant, man’s social life and everywhere else and relations of the eternal struggle to regain the lost equilibrium.

In this context, Vivekananda asserts that there must be something permanent behind the functions of the mind, body and sense-organs to unify all the different impressions. That is called the soul of man. There is a soul behind the universal mind in the universe called God. It is the soul of man to the individual. This soul of man remains the same amidst all changes. The universe witnesses both change and changelessness. The soul, the mind and the body are not three separate existences. The organism made of these three is really one. It is the same thing which appears as the body, as the mind and as the thing beyond mind and body. But, at the same time, it is not all these. One sees the body, is unaware of the mind, does not see the soul. For one, who sees the soul, the body and the mind disappear. One who is engaged in motion and change never sees the unchanging Absolute. Similarly, one who sees the unchanging Absolute, motion and change disappear to him. So, there is one existence appears as many and pervades the entire universe. The Reality is of the Self, Soul and Atman. As the Self is a perfect unity, it is not subject to evolution and change. It is the link
among all beings. The Self is good essentially. It is indivisible and infinite. Man is essentially the Self. Man is infinite. The limitations in which he exists, are not constituting his real nature. He struggles forward through the limitations until he reaches the infinite nature of him.

Vivekananda puts that the real nature of man is freedom. The realization of the real nature of man is the ultimate human destiny. The ultimate goal is the re-union with God-with the divinity which is the real nature of man. Man is essentially free. But, he must discover his freedom. Vivekananda calls upon to realize the innermost being. He was convinced that all of us, consciously or unconsciously are marching towards the goal-the realization of the Self-towards freedom. This point of Vivekananda has similarity with that of Sankara. Vivekananda’s concept of the soul is very near to man. Man, in Vivekananda’s philosophy, has a prominent role to play with as Vivekananda declares that his philosophy needs man to highlight as centre of religious as well as social reformations.

Vivekananda enquires into the reality in his own way. In accordance with him, the real in man is a sort of a ‘concentration of spiritual energy’. Man, to him, is a spirit. The word ‘spirit’ has a negative and a positive import. Generally speaking, the negative import is given more importance, as it is believed that the thinking regarding spirituality is not an ordinary one, of course, that is different from the empirical one. Vivekananda does not reject these implications of the word ‘spiritual’. Man in his eye view, is not what he ordinarily appears to exist.
Moreover, Vivekananda too stresses that man is spiritual in positive terms also-as he represents some sorts of expectations and desires which only he is able to conceive. He has spent much time and energy in his life tenure with a view to determining the spiritual characters of man; Vivekananda’s emphasis on that notion, i.e., spirituality, is so large that even the bodily aspects of man get spiritualized.

The picture of man, thus, in the philosophy of Vivekananda may be said to be an united one of both physical and spiritual. He never neglected the importance of the physical nature of man. Vivekananda’s asking in regard to man to awaken own spirituality presupposes that there is a side of man which is somewhat different from and yet akin to his spiritual nature. That may be named as his physical nature.

The nature of man comprises of bodily, the biological and the psychological aspects. The fact is that the body itself represents the physical nature of man. Vivekananda believes that man is superior to other beings owing to the physical capacities. The brain-system yields man a distinction from every other species and with a unique status in the world. Again, according to Vivekananda, this unique character in man is due to the presence of spirituality in him. Though Vivekananda does not pose against the physical side reality in respect of man, he believes that this expresses merely his inferior nature. His real nature consists in his capacity of going beyond his own physical nature. Vivekananda explains the true nature of man as Soul-Force of Atman. Explaining
Atman, Vivekananda has freely used even additional expressions. Referring to Gita, Vivekananda explains the Atman thus, “It is the self, beyond all thought, one without birth or death, whom the sword cannot pierce or fire burn, whom air cannot dry or water melt, the beginningless and endless, the unmoving, the intangible, the omniscient, the omnipotent Being, that it is neither the body not the mind, but beyond them all.” Through such description of the true nature of man Vivekananda brings to light at least two unavoidable characteristics of the Atman. Firstly, he says that this character of man has similarity with that of Divine nature; and secondly, it is clear that it is not an easy task to yield an exact analysis of this aspect of human being- especially in a language that we as ordinary finite individuals are capable of using as well as understanding.

As a Vedantist in real sense of the term, Vivekananda has expressly forwarded the similar voice in identifying the real nature of Atman with Brahman itself. The reasons for which Vivekananda identifies the two are said to be similar to the reasons offered by Vedanta. The important point is that unless these two are identified, the strict monistic character of reality cannot be maintained. Soul, as for example, can’t be a part of the One, because in that case the One will become union with parts within itself. Individual souls can’t be regarded also as manifestations of the Absolute as even in that case they would become separate realities over and above the Brahman. So, their difference is only apparent though they are basically identical.

Vivekananda attempts to make a difference between the real and the apparent natures of souls in different ways. He repeatedly says that apparent
nature does not affect the true nature of man. The self or soul is, in fact, one allcomprehending existence, and it merely appears to be manifold.

According to Vivekananda, we can be aware of this ‘identity through certain experiences and realizations as pointers towards this. The very realization that nature provides is almost a challenge to human being, and that human beings can unveil the mysteries of the nature, is itself an evidence of his Divine Nature. Moreover, that man has intrinsic capacity to go ‘beyond’ may be said to be another evidence of this fact. If we go deep into human life either collectively or individually, we shall detect that there is no upper limit- no boundaries which can be put around him and beyond which he cannot proceed. Man’s quest for what is truth knows no bounds. He wants to acquire knowledge, to strengthen his personality by doing something good and noble, and yet he can still go ahead. This ability of self-transcendence is itself an important proof of the basic oneness of the Atman and Brahman.

Yet, Vivekananda happens to think that to understand the real nature of man, our capacity of understanding, realizing and mind-body mechanism together with our embodied existence are not adequate. Men have merely glimpses of their powers of their superhuman capabilities. Man’s various spiritual pursuits can assist to make them realize this essential aspect of their nature.

Here, one question may be raised, if the soul is identical with the Brahman, why do we, then, have the experience of the plurality of soul? If the
identity is a fact, then monism is also a fact, and a strict monistic system cannot have a place for many souls. This problem begets related many other problems—the problems as to the plurality of souls, the problem regarding the relation between mind and body etc.

To solve these problems, Vivekananda takes recourse to the Vedanta, but with a difference. According to Vivekananda, the one Atman neither comes nor goes, it is neither born, nor does it die. So, the question of its re-incarnation does not arise. Following Vedanta especially that of Sankara, Vivekananda too believes that the Atman is, as a matter of fact, never deluded. The same Atman distinctly becomes aware in the state of realization about the dilution of selves and this illusion itself is a sporting play of the Atman.

Notwithstanding such a description of the Atman appears to be exactly same to that of Vedanta. Vivekananda affirms unlike Vedanta, that the finite aspects of human beings should not be regarded as fully untrue. So far as finite human beings ignorantly believes in the reality of the embodied state and in the plurality of selves, this aspect has a reality for him. The development, therefore, of mankind consists not in a complete negation of this aspect, but in its being raised and perfected. An ascetic who denounces and freely suppresses his material requirements and demands may be a great man, but he also is great who is able to raise his bodily aspects to perfection.

It follows that freedom is the real nature of man. Freedom cannot be said to be a character or a quality belonging to the soul; it forms the very essence of
the soul. A quality or a character and to which it belongs are different things, but freedom never belongs to soul, the soul is freedom.

From the above discussion, it is clear that to Vivekananda, freedom reflects the very essence of the soul, and in this way, soul is not really in bondage.

Like Sankara and the ancient Indian thinkers. Vivekananda too keeps faith that soul survives death of the body and that this survival supposes firstly the form of rebirth and finally the realization of immortality, of complete freedom. Thus, rebirth, in Vivekananda’s thought is an aspect of immortality and the ultimate realization of immortality would mean finally getting out not only of this world but also of the cycle of births and rebirths. Vivekananda suggests that the ultimate destiny of man must consist in freedom from the state of bondage, true immortality can be attained merely when this ‘cycle’ from the birth to rebirth is finally stopped. Like the ancient Indian thinkers Vivekananda too believes in it.

Vivekananda had sustained that the jiva is an individual and the sum-total of all jivas is the Isvara. In the jiva, avidya or nescience is predominant but Ishvara (God) controls Maya and independently project this world of moving and immovable things out of Himself. He said that Brahman transcends both the individual and collective aspects, the jiva and Isvara. In Brahman there is no part. Brahman is not a distinct and separate substance from the jivas and Universe. The qualified monists hold that it is Brahman that has transformed itself into
jivas and the Universe. The Advaitins, on the contrary, maintain that jiva and the Universe have been merely superimposed on Brahman. But in reality, there has been no modification in Brahman. The Advaitin puts that the universe consists only in name and form. When, through meditation and other practices, we realise that names and forms are mere appearances then only the transcendent Brahman remains.

Being a Vedantist in real sense of the term, Vivekananda identifies the true nature of Atman with Brahman itself. He has maintained that all attempts at understanding the nature of the Infinite through external nature are a failure. It is only the study of the internal nature, namely the analysis of the human soul that can help us to understand God. To him, we must say that the soul is immortal, pure, omnipresent and omniscient. Like Advaita Vedanta, Vivekananda, too, maintains that the self, the Atman is in everybody amongst us, and so it is omnipresent. He says that the Atman never comes nor goes, is never born nor dies. It is a nature moving before the Atman, and the reflection of this motion is on the Atman, and the Atman ignorantly thinks, it is moving, and not nature. When the Atman thinks that, it is in bondage, but when it comes to find it never moves, that it is omnipresent, then freedom comes. The Atman in bondage is called jiva.

Now, a vital question can be raised- if the soul is identical with the Brahman why do we have experience of the plurality of soul? In reply Vivekananda says, quite in a different way from that of Vendanta that the
plurality of selves and the experiences of births and death are only apparent. Like the Vedantist, he also believes that the Atman is never deluded. In the state of realization, the Atman clearly becomes aware that plurality of selves is an illusion and this illusion itself is a sporting play of the Atman. But unlike Vedanta he asserts that the finite aspect of man should not be treated as completely false. According to him as long as man ignorantly believes in the reality of the bodied state, this aspect has a reality for him.

From the above discussion, we have found that Sankara’s way emphasized more through intellectual pursuit—the study of the Upanisads, the Brahma Sutra and the Bhagavadgita than in introspection and meditation. He succeeded through the realization of identity of individual self-consciousness with the universal soul-consciousness, Atmajnana-Brahmajnana. ‘Thou art that’, ‘Tat Tvam asi’ was Sankara’s greatest revelation of the Upanisadic truth. The ultimate aim of life in accordance with Sankara, is not to find God but to attain Moksa.

Sankara has identified self or jiva with Brahman or the Absolute Reality and as he has asserted, the realization of the true nature of self is the realization of Brahman which remains the one and the only Reality. Sankara has described the nature of the Self in the following passages—

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Svaym brahma svaym visnu} \\
\text{svaymindrah svaym sivah} \\
\text{svaym visvamidam sarvam} \\
\text{svasmadanyanna Kincana.}
\end{align*}
\]
The Self is Brahman, the Self is Visnu, the Self is Indra, the Self is Shiva; the Self is all this universe. Nothing exists except the Self.

Sankara, no doubt, laid more stress on one ultimate Reality, i.e., Brahman. But the mundane world of existence was not repudiated by him from the vyavaharika standpoint. He, however, attached relative value to the material the world of reality.

Like Sankara, Vivekananda emphasized on Atmajnana, on our acquiring the habit of Atma-Vidya, of seeing all beings as one Self. Being taught from the Upanisads, Vivekananda took the identity of all jivas as they were aspects of the Paramatma, Vivekananda, being basically an advaitin, differs at several points from Sankara. Unlike Vivekananda, Sankara believes in the ultimate Reality of Indeterminate Brahman and ultimate falsity of the Determinate Brahman. In accordance with Sankara, Brahman is ultimate Reality, the world is an illusion and the jiva is essentially identical with Brahman. To him Brahman alone shines in Its purity, and everything else is totally rejected in the ultimate stage of spiritual realization. But Vivekananda differs from Sankara on this fundamental issue. To him, nothing is rejected at the ultimate stage, everything shall be viewed in its proper perspective. He did not accept Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta blindly. Vivekananda reoriented and expanded Sankara’s Vedanta having borrowed some new light from Buddhism and having received the eternal truth of religion as expressed and experienced by his spiritual Guru Sri Ramakrishna as follows –
1. God is one

2. He is worshipped by many through different systems, the systems that evolve to suit their individual taste and temperaments.

3. “Religion is One- religions are many.”


5. Jiva is Shiva

6. Unity of existence- identification even with non-living as well as with living beings. Thus, Vivekananda has not rejected jiva in the ultimate stage of spiritual realization.

**3.5 Notion of Moksa**

For Indian view of life, ‘satyam sivam Sundaram’ is the ultimate goal of life. Proper understanding of this ideal leads to Moksa or salvation, Moksa or salvation means attaining eternal life. Salvation means the attainment of complete bliss. It denotes the complete identity or the conscious realization of Brahman is the Atman. The aim of Moksa or salvation is to understand true nature of the Self, i.e., the non-difference between the jivatman and the paramatma.

Sankara has explained that the self is nothing more than the Absolute Reality or Brahman which is basically itself pure being (sat), pure consciousness (cit) and pure bliss (ananda). According to Sankara, the self or Brahman is the only reality without a second. The world has been represented through its
phenomenal characters of multiplicity, therefore, it is not real. To Sankara, the only reality is Brahman and the world is nothing but an appearance of Brahman. But the phenomenal character of the world appears as real for us. Avidya, maya or ignorance conceal the true nature and character of Brahman and it appears that the world is real. Brahman has been mistaken as the of plurality by the individual selves owing to avidya or ignorance.

But, in practice, there is no plurality at all In accordance with Sankara avidya, nescience or maya is the cause of the bondage of jiva. Avidya plays an important role in the conception of the individual jiva. Sankara maintains that owing to bondage, the self becomes incapable of recognizing the ultimate Reality. The jiva for his apparent limitation cannot discriminate the knowledge of the nature of reality. In this respect, D.K. Tripathi says, Sankara holds that the world is true in this Samsara, which, sprouting from the seeds of acts, karma, grows in the field of avidya, i.e., it is an appearance resting on ignorance alone. To Sankara, the pure Atman becomes the senses, body, mind which appear as the finite self owing to upadhis. But how this happens not answered, and so, it is Maya. Being influenced by nescience or adhyasa, the jivas make a dualism between the subject and the object. It leads to the confusion in the state of appearance. In our day to day life, we sometimes mistake a rope to be a snake under the cover the darkness. While true knowledge arises or the cover of darkness is removed, the actual nature of the rope is revealed. Likewise, when ignorance or avidya is destroyed the pure divine nature is known or the true soul
stands self revealed even as gold shines when freed from the impurities which affected it, or a the stars shine in a cloudless night, when the day which overpowers them disappears. Moksa Sankara puts, is a matter of direct realization of one’s own self. But the self-realisation or liberation is gained only by right knowledge. That which is real in the absolute sense, immutable, eternal, all penetrating like akasa, exempt from all change, all satisfying, undivided, whose nature is to be its own light, in which neither good nor evil, nor past nor present nor future has any place, this incorporeal is called liberation.

Moksa or liberation is not the destruction of the plurality of the world, but it is only the removal of the sense of plurality. It simply means the disappearance of false approach of this universe. The desires of man is merely withdrawn form the external objects and he is transmuted and turned to the identity of Atman with Brahman. For the realisation of the Atman, man transcends all relation to the empirical object. To Sankara, the realization of the true nature of Brahman or attainment of Moksa is the end of phenomenality of the finite self. Brahman can not be regarded merely as a being or consciousness; it is the object of striving. “Brahmatmaikatva or the realization of the identity with the infinite reality, is the final end of life, the proper food of every soul, and the only supreme value.”

Sankara upholds that for the realization of the Ultimate Reality, knowledge is necessary. Sankara accepts the doctrine of ‘my station and its duties’ or the discipline of karma-yoga of Gita after attaining the nature of highest perfection. He prefers the practice of four basic goodness (sadhana-
(1) Nityanitya-vastu-viveka

(2) Ihamutrartha-phala-bhoga-viragah

(3) Sama-damadi sadhana-sampat

(4) Mumuksuttva

These four-fold disciplines are discussed as –

(1) Discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal. Or one has to determinate what is real and what is unreal. The condition amounts to the realization that Brahman is real and the world is illusory.

(2) Freeing oneself from the desire of non-eternal things here and hereafter.

(3) Withdrawing one’s mind and senses to cultivate the six virtues, viz. sama (calmness), dama (restraint), uparati (withdrawal), titiksa (forbearance), samadhi (concentration) and sraddha (faith). T.M.P. Mahadevan explains the six virtues as –

“Sama is calmness of the mind which means fixing the mind on its goal after making it see, the defects in the host of objects.”

Dama is restraint, i.e., making the sense-organs stay in their loci after withdrawing them from external objects.

Uparati is withdrawal of the mental modes from external objects and not letting them go towards those objects again.
Titiksa is forbearance. It is keeping the mind unswayed by all sorts of sorrow, making it bear equally the opposites of life such as pain and pleasure, praise, and blame. Samadhi is concentration, it stands for fixing the mind always in the pure Brahman, without letting it stray away.

Sraddha is faith in the teaching of scripture and preceptor, being firmly convinced of their truth.

(4) Lastly, mumuksuttva or longing for liberation. It is the intense desire for liberation from the bondage of this world. It is a deep feeling of nothingness and vanity of this worldly life.

After acquiring the knowledge of four virtues, one is to perform a course of training, consisting of three stages. The three stages help man in attaining the right knowledge. These three stages are: (1) sravana, (2) manana and (3) nididhyasana.

Sravana literary means hearing. This is chiefly related to the knowledge of identity of the jiva with the Brahman. Sankara writes, “Thus when instructed by a teacher, versed in the traditional language, as being not all different from one’s self, Brahman is comprehended well”.

Manana means rational reflection. It is the proper understanding of the study of the non-duality by means of reasoning through patient and persistent inquiry.

Nididhyasana means meditation. This is the stage of realization of Brahman. It overcomes all the mental difficulties in the realization of Brahman. According
to Sankara, the path of realization of perfection is still far away from the meditator unless the vision of truth dawns upon the consciousness of being.

The state of attaining right knowledge is equivalent to liberation. The right knowledge is equivalent to liberation. The right knowledge indicates knowledge of the absolute identity between the jiva and Brahm. In accordance with Sankara, such a state is possible even in this life which is called ‘jivanmukti’. Such liberated person is absolutely rid of all the notions of duality and has achieved Isvarbhava. He is out of the affection of pleasure and pain. He is perfectly free from egoity, desires and detached from worldly objects. The liberated person realizes his very unity with Brahman.

For Advaita Vedanta, to attain the state of liberation or the Moksa, one will have to cultivate Brahma-jnana which has been regarded as the primary ways to liberation. Sankara, in this context, holds the approach that karma is an auxiliary process to jnana but it is not a primary means to achieve moksa. In the Vivekacudamani Sankara observes, “Karma is for the purification of the mind and not for the perception of Reality. The gaining of Reality, is through inquiry and not through crores of karmas.”

“cittasya suddhava karma na tuvastupalabdhye
vastusiddhirvicarena na kimcit karmakotibhih.”

From the above explanation, it is followed that right knowledge, i.e., knowledge of non-difference between the jiva and the Brahman, is the stepping
stone of attaining liberation or moksa. Moksa or liberation has been viewed from two perspectives. Jivanmukta state and videhamukta state. Sankara says each and every man can attain jivanmukti which means liberation or mukti in this life.

Sankara says that the two types of karmas-sancita and the kriyamana are completely destroyed. The third type of karma, i.e., prarabdha karma continues to motivate the bodily activity but the man of jivanamukta remains completely detached and unaffected by it.

In accordance with Sankara, in respect of moksa, jivanmukta state is very essential followed by Videhamukta state after death. When jivatman completely realizes his true nature of identity with Brahman, that state of life is called moksa by Sankara.

Vivekananda explains the spiritual truths so that man can be enlightened on the problem of human existence. According to him, the goal of life is to be one with the Absolute Reality. In contrast to Western thinkers Vivekananda drew a distinction between mind and spirit or atman. To understand the real nature of this atman which is called jiva in bondage is the aim of life. Spirituality according to Vivekananda, is the way of attaining moksa. He recognized four ideals of human life – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksa. These all require satisfaction. But spiritual realization or Moksa is the ultimate aim that is sought to be attained with the help of either of these values.

Vivekananda maintains that Pravritti and Nibritti are the two powers which are working in the life of man. Pravritti resolves towards the word ‘I’ and ‘mine’,
it includes all those materials which always enriches ‘Me’ by matter, name, fame etc. Nirvitti resolves aways all these mundane object meant for physical satisfaction. When the pravirtti of man begins to disappear, there begins morality and religion. To Vivekananda, perfection denotes the very self-abnegation in man. This self-abnegation is the uniting point of Karma, Bhakti and Jnana Yoga. He opines that anybody should not take the idea that he can do a little for the world. Vivekananda in this context observes – “The world does not require any help from you. It is sheer nonsense on the part of any man to think that he is born to help the world….. Each one of our Yogis is fitted to make man perfect even without the help of others because all have the same goal in view.”

According to Vivekananda, Freedom or Mukti, Truth and God are synonymous. Those who are free, only they can attain true love and do beneficial works. That is why his life and teaching were directed towards stressing on freedom and also he appealed to the people all over the world to realize freedom. All other works, disciplines or sadhanas must be originated to that purpose and justified on that ground.

The concept of Mukti advocated by Vivekananda is a mighty and all – inclusive ideal. Vivekananda observes “Liberation is only for him who gives up everything for others whereas the others who tax their brains day and night harping ‘my salvation’ wander about with their ruined present and perspective. Selfishness is the great sin, one who thinks that he will get mukti before others is a selfish man…..” Vivekananda wanted all people to shun all kinds of
selfishness. A man received great happiness and peace of mind for dedicating his life for the service of others. He did not expect for his own salvation or Mukti.

According to Vivekananda, when a man achieves realization nothing is visible to his physical appearances. The realized soul merely becomes conscious of his divine nature. Physically everything remains as usual, the only change happens in his approach towards life and the universe. He performs his assigned duties like a normal human being as his corporeal requirements are related. In this context, Sri Ramakrishna comments – “One does not grow a pair of horns after realization. What takes place in him is an inner transformation. His attitude towards the world changes, his emotions become chastened and refined and his reactions and responses to outer situation and inner responses become entirely different from those of ordinary human being who perceive the divine essence. And his self-knowledge makes him realize his own identity with all…”

In this way, Vivekananda emphasized the very importance for the regeneration of man’s individuality. His concept of individuality possess a spiritual basis in essence. Each individual is a spirit living in a body. The realization of this consciousness and manifestation of the individual spiritual content is the same with the universal unity that is the only truth – believed to be the end of all Indian religio-philosophical systems. Man’s deal should be to go beyond the limits of egoism and enter gradually into the great and unlimited empire of individual thought and cosmic unity. Vivekananda observes that spiritual idealism should be given appropriate importance so as to bring the spirit
of harmony and universality. He said – “You will go to hell if you seek your own salvation! Seek the salvation of others if you want to reach the highest. Kill out the desire for personal mukti. This is the greatest spiritual discipline.”

According to Vivekananda, the liberated person is ‘He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the distressed, really worships Shiva,… He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples… talking about Shiva’s beautiful eyes and nose and other features…. He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children – must serve all creatures in this world first.’

Unlike Sankara, Vivekananda has advocated the idea of collective liberation as opposed to individual liberation. He puts that if we feel oneness with all we can not go forward without taking all with us. This idea of collective liberation envisaged by Vivekananda has a clear similarity with the Buddhistic ideal of Boddhisattva. But, in Sankara’s exposition, we do not get such a practical idea on Mukti or Moksa. Though Sankara has made difference between jivanmukta and videhamukta, a practical mass-concerned concept of liberation has been given no importance. Vivekananda says that liberation is the highest stage. A beautiful explanation regarding liberation has been made from the utmost practical point of view.

But in Sankara’s philosophy, a conventional description regarding liberation is found. Asserting on jivanmukta, Sankara puts that after the exhaustion of
jivanmukta one attains the state of Vedehamukta which is depicted to have attained after death in Sankara’s analysis Vivekananda accepted the basic structure of Advaita philosophy of Sankara but innovated it with other things. In other words, he never identified himself with Sankara’s Advaita philosophy, particularly on the question of maya-vada of Sankara.

Vivekananda too admits the possibility of the realization of immortality in the embodied state itself. He even makes distinction between ‘Jivanmukti’ and ‘Videha-mukti’. Vivekananda’s explanation of the Jivan-mukta is, also, more or less, like the Vedantic narration of it. The jivan mukta although in body, cease to identify himself with the body. As a result, the requirements of the body and the senses do not indicate actions. He then, starts doing without passion, and he is no longer interested in having things for himself. His behaviour will not be regulated by possession, acquisition etc. The performed activities will not affect him. Thus, he sustains his embodied existence so long as the Karmas determining the body are not completely consumed. He, then, gains the position of bodiless immortality. Now, a question can be raised: Does Vivekananda believe in the possibility of universal redemption (sarvamukti)? Does he suggest every jivana mukta has to keep on working till every one is saved?

Vivekananda is not so distinct in this respect. He advocates the value of altruistic task, but at times, one feels that even doing good to others and doing service to mankind are treated as ways for man’s own act of realization. Thus, in
accordance with Vivekananda, the ultimate destiny of an individual is the realization of immortality.

Vivekananda’s philosophy of Vedanta received from his Master Sri Ramakrishna Pramhansa is the same as was taught by Adi Sankara. It is true that Vivekananda has said in some places that illusion is not the proper word for maya. But this is to be understood in the sense in which the word illusion is commonly utilized as meaning nothing, pure nothing. The word is nothing in the sense of sunya, that is true. But Vivekananda himself has utilized the term illusion and illusoriness with reference to maya elsewhere, so it all depends in what sense we understand the meaning of the term.

Vivekananda, to a question once put to “Can jiva seva (service to beings) alone give mukti?”, replied, “jiva seva can give mukti not directly but indirectly through the purification of the mind. The danger in any sect is want of zeal. There must be constancy (nistha), or there will be no growth. At present it has become necessary to lay stress on Karma.”

Vivekananda was influenced by the ideal known as the concept of Sarvamukti when he expresses “when I used to roam about all over India practising spiritual disciplines, I passed day after day in caves absorbed in meditation. Many a time I decided to starve myself to death because I could not attain mukti. Now I have no desire for mukti. I do not care for it even as a single individual in the universe remaining in bondage.”
3.6 Conclusion

From the above analysis it is followed that some of the basic ideas of Vivekananda’s philosophy are derived from the Vedanta. It can be said to a very great extent, he is a Vedantist. Though all the Brahmanical systems are derived from the Upanisad, there is justification to hold that only the Advaita – Vedanta represents the real heart of the Upanisads. Sankara explains that the world is ultimately an illusion. It is due to ignorance that the world appears to us real. But from the point of view of infinity, it is not so. The entire system of Advaita Vedanta can be summarized in a half verse. “Brahma satyam, jagat mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah.” It means Brahman is the only Reality, the world is ultimately false and the individual soul is non-different from Brahman. Brahman and Atman are synonymous terms. The individual selves, on account of their inherent avidya imagine themselves as different from Brahman.

It is a fact that Vivekananda being influenced by Sankara has developed Advaita Vedanta as a true source of philosophical as well as spiritual contemplation of life. It is here noteworthy that both the Advaita Vedanta and the Madhymika system developed as criticism of the Samkhya and the Abhidharmika system respectively. The idealist Vedanta represents monism by criticizing Samkhya dualism. Goudapada and his successor Sankara revolutionized the Vedanta, by introducing the theory of appearance – Vivarta Vada. They rejected the earlier conception of the Samkhya of a real
transformation of the absolute into phenomena – Parinamavada and asserted non-dualism as the true teaching of the Upanisad.

Advaitism is the conscious rejection of duality and difference as illusory. Brahman is established by the denial of dualism. Sankara emphasizes that from the phenomenal point of view the world is quite real. It is not an illusion. It is a practical reality. He draws difference between the dream state and the waking state. Things seen in a dream are quite true as long as the dream lasts; they disappear when we are awake. Similarly, the world is quite real so long as true knowledge does not dawn. But dreams are private. They are creations of the jiva (jivasrsta). The world is public. It is the creation of Ishvara (Ishvara srsta). Jiva is ignorant of the essential unity and takes only diversity as true and wrongly regards himself as agent and enjoyer. Avidya conceal the unity (avarana) and projects names and forms (viksepa). Ishvara never misses the unity. Maya has only its Viksepa aspect over him. The Highest Brahman (Para Brahma) is both the locus (ashraya) and the object (visaya) of Maya. When the Jiva realizes through knowledge and knowledge alone, karma being subsidiary, this essential unity is seen. Liberation is attained here and now (jivan-mukti) and final release (videha mukti) is obtained after the death of the body.

This is a short summary of Sankaracharya’s philosophy. He too is considerably influenced by Buddhism according to some philosophers. He keeps in his philosophy as the best that was in Mahayana Buddhism. Sankara uses so many words, especially in his Upanisad-Bhasya, which were commonly used in
the Mahayana literature. But outwardly Sankara seems to be an enemy of Buddhism. Gaudapada had love and respect for Mahayana. Sankara has nothing but strong and even bitter words for it. Sankara observes that there are three important schools of Buddhism – the Sarvastivada, the Vijnanavada and the Shunyavada. He avoided shunyavada by taking the word shunya in its popular sense and easily dismissing shunyavada as nihilism.

Sankara agrees with the Shunyavadins and the Svatantra-Vijnanavadins in maintaining against Sankhya, that if the effect were real and if it really pre-existed in the cause, then it is already an accomplished fact and its production will be a vain repetition. Sankara agrees with them, against Nyaya Vaishesika, that if the effect were a non-entity, it would be like hare’s horn and its production would be impossible. We have seen that for the Svatantra-Vijnanavadin asatkaryavada is a misnomer for he does not advocate the production of a non-entity. Reality itself, to him is efficient causation. Sankara, however, agrees with the Shunyavadin, against Svatantra-Vijnanavadin, in maintaining that causation in a real sense is an impossibility.

Sankara like Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti challenges the distinction of parts and whole. The whole can be neither a mere aggregate of parts nor can it be something apart from parts. The whole cannot abide in all the parts taken together, for then it would not be perceived as it is impossible to perceive all the parts. According to him, God is not the ruler of Primordial Matter and souls. He says – if God is merely a ruler and makes, according to His sweet will, some
persons great, some ordinary and others low, then He will be rightly charged of being actuated by partiality, attachment and hatred and hence He will be one like us and no real God. Sankara maintains Brahma-Karana-vada as he recognizes that Brahman is the cause of the world. But his theory is called Brahmavivartavada because it takes the world to be only phenomenal appearance of Brahman. Sankara is opposed to Brahma-parinamavada. For him, the world is neither a real creation by Brahman nor a real modification of Brahman. Brahman associated with its power maya is the ground on which the phenomenal world is super imposed. When true knowledge dawns and the essential unity of the jivatman with the Paramatman is realized, the world appears false. He repeatedly says that discursive intellect cannot attain Reality. Brahman cannot become the object of perception as it has no form, and it does not lend itself to inference and other means, as it has no characteristic mark. According to him, Svanubhava or Svanubhuti or immediate experience or direct self-realisation is the same as Pure Consciousness. Here finite intellect becomes one with the Absolute which is Pure consciousness. It can be, then, remarked that the Ultimate standard of truth in Sankara’s philosophy is immediate spiritual realization in its truer sense.

The Advaita which Vivekananda teaches is, in essence, the same gospel whose comprehensive exposition we owe to Sankaracarya. Vivekananda is convinced that the perception of duality is due to maya and the personal God is merely relatively true and the experience of the non-dual Brahman which is knowledge can only be possible after the removal of ignorance. Vivekananda
himself stressed the need for sravana, manana and nididhyasana in all the four yogas. As explained in the jnana-yoga with the two-bird analogy, only knowing and the simultaneous removal of ignorance leads to the experience of the non-dual Brahman. This state of liberation can never be attained by any number of actions, nor even by intense devotion to the personal God, nor even by intense concentration of raja-yoga which aims at a merger. Yoga can only control the mind but the final dissolution of mind is only possible by the knowledge that the real ‘I’ is identical with the Impersonal Self which is Brahman or Atman. While explaining the state of Jivanmukta, Vivekananda says that he does not worship a personal God. The jivanmukta’s work is good work attributed to his past samskara, the exhaustion of which ends in Videha-mukti. His state of Samadhi does not involve duality. The four Yogas have no purpose in his case. The activity or the Samadhi state of the jivanmukta pertains only to his body, not to the self, and is seen by others only. Therefore, karma, bhakti, raja-yoga or jnana-yoga as seen in the perfect ones are not the same as the four means seen in an aspirant. The former is sadhya (what is attained) whereas the latter is only sadhana, the means. As explained earlier, karma leads to bhakti, bhakti to dhyana and finally jnana-yoga alone is the last stage in the gradation. The realization of the meaning of the real ‘I’ or the major text “that thou art” alone can lead to the final experience.

A close study of Vivekananda’s philosophy will reveal that he was influenced by Sankara. Like an advaitin, he also says that reality is one Absolute Brahman.
Brahman is eternal, eternally pure, eternally awake, almighty, all-merciful, omnipresent, formless, partless. Brahman is beyond space, time and causation.

Vivekananda, like an Advaitin, says that reality is one Absolute Brahman. He also describes the Absolute as Sat-Cit-Ananda. The concepts of ‘Sat’ (existence) and ‘Cit’ (consciousness) are similar to the Sat and Cit of Advaita Vedanta. But concept of Ananda (Bliss) has been greatly adorned by Vivekananda. He conceives the cosmos more or less in Sankara’s way. According to Sankara, creation is unreal from the transcendental point of view. Vivekananda has maintained that God is the only real principle, God’s creation, is an aspect of God. He says that the creation has to take place through time, space and causation. Time, space and causation are not metaphysical realities, because they are not independent existences.

In maintaining the reality of the world Sankara escapes the difficulties by calling ‘Jagat Mithya’. Vivekananda asserts the reality of the world and feels that Vedanta does not intend to say that the world is unreal. He thinks that the word mithya means that which has no permanent value. If it is understood in this sense, all difficulties disappear. Vivekananda seems to be in favour of perpetual creation. He says that creation is timeless having no beginning or end. The Universe is just a manifestation of God.

Vivekananda as a Vedantist has borrowed his maya – doctrine from Advaita Vedanta but his conception is not exactly similar to that of Sankara. Like Sankara he also believes that maya is a power of the creator, the principle of change. But
in Advaita Vedanta maya is the power that creates illusion. It’s the Divine power. Vivekananda does not accept this view. According to him, maya is just a fact about the nature of the world. The Vedanta says that maya is the power of God through which the world-illusion is created.

Like a Vedantist, Vivekananda identifies the true nature of Atman with Brahman itself. According to him, we must say that the soul is immortal, pure, omnipresent and omniscient. Like the Advaita, Vivekananda also maintains that the self, the Atman is in everybody among us, and so it is omnipresent. The Atman in bondage is called jiva. He says that the real nature of man is freedom. He also says that freedom means self-determination. More or less in a Vedantic style, Vivekananda states that the apparent incompatibility of Karma and freedom is only apparent. According to the Advaita, when the soul becomes perfect, it must become one with Brahman, the Absolute.

Being inspired by Sankara, Vivekananda admits that religion is the source of inspiration and strength of life. Religion comes from within and never from outside. This is the consequence of the belief in the ‘Vedantic Oneness’. Instead of the saying of Sankara regarding the world as maya, i.e., mithya (false notion), Vivekananda holds that if there is anything, it is only humanity. We should worship man because God is manifested in him. He has visualized that Humanism consists in the worship of every man as the living God… “Thou art all that exists, a wonderful living God who is the only fact in the universe.”

Man is the highest being that exists. According to Vivekananda, we can have no
conception of God higher than man. Hence our God is man and man is God. The most distinctive feature in Sankara’s Advaita philosophy is that our intellect cannot conceive the totality of God. When every knot of his heart vanishes, one realizes….That thou art (I am Brahman). Similarly, Vivekananda explains that man does not conceptualize God out of his own brain. He can only see God from within in the capacity of his own imagination

Like Sankara, Vivekananda holds that God dwells in the heart of man…. ‘the soul of our soul, the Reality in us.’ This is the metaphysical explanation of the personal God. Ishvara is thus with form and without form. Vivekananda, hence, like John Stuart Mill, admits that personal God cannot be demonstrated. Vivekananda conceives Ishvara as the Atman as seen by mind. The highest name is thus the ‘Om’. In God we are all one.

The very idea of God in accordance with Vivekananda, is love. ‘I am Thine, I am Thine’, exhibits that we can see God everywhere. Self is the eternal truth. When the mind is free. I am free too. The Upanishads thus declared that the ‘Atman, Self, is same as Brahman…. The Lord. It is the mysterious power of the maya which makes us to see it as different. Thus opines Sankara that the self is prior to the stream of consciousness, reality and illusion. Love for loves’ sake without any fear is the quintessence of Advaita Philosophy. Thus, Vivekananda explains that his religion means expansion and expansion means realization and perception in the highest sense. Man has to ‘realise’ the divinity which will ultimately lead to an infinite material and spiritual progress.
For Sankaracharya, god is only an appearance of the Absolute which exists only within maya. Like Sankara, Vivekananda too holds that within the impersonal exists all the various persons beginning with the lowest atom up to the Personal God, whom we kneel down to pray. Vivekananda’s God is a necessity for the common mass since one can conceive the Impersonal only within concrete forms. This is the essential necessity of every religion from the dualistic standpoint.

In advaitism ‘I and my Father’ become one. Here Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is more emphatic in holding that God preserves its necessity till the end of the cosmic process. God is not ‘higher reality’ but the ‘highest reality’ in every relation to the cosmos and the finite being. As to the relation between God and Absolute. Vivekananda explains that God is a circle with its circumference nowhere and center everywhere. When we talk of God we speak of Him through this universe. When we speak of Him beyond every empirical limitation, He is the Impersonal Being. Thus God is only the cosmic aspect of the same Impersonal Being. God is an infinitized human being.

Vivekananda like Sankara holds that God cannot be identified with the Absolute. The Absolute is conceived by Vivekananda in the Impersonal form. He conceives God so long we are human, we must have a humanized God. This is the unique characteristic in Vivekananda’s religious philosophy in conceptualizing religion as a living principle. Sankara made an attempt to maintain the orthodoxy of the Vedas while Vivekananda has tried to free it from
the clutches of a section of the privileged. For Vivekananda, worship is talking to God. This is the practical aspect of all worship. The real worship is in the pure heart for Vivekananda. These external practices have value to develop our internal purity. Worshipping is not trading. Everything that is desired for personal benefit is transitory. Hence Vivekananda has rejected vedic worship as it encouraged fulfilment of personal desire. There must be a constant strive to control the lower nature until the victory over the material is achieved. So, for Vivekananda. Reality in every man, must become the object of worship. To this view of Vivekananda, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan asserts that Truth is not truth until the seeker personally appropriates it. This is ‘subjectivity’ of truth. The self has to be realized like a fruit on the palms of one’s hand, thus opined Vivekananda.

Vivekananda’s spiritualistic humanism is determined by the Upanisadic dictum- I am Brahman. Humanity for Vivekananda is immortality. We are all immortal as parts of the whole. Here he differs from the very philosophy of Sankara’s absolutism. According to Vivekananda, the self-sacrifice given in shastras can merely lead us to the state of jivan-mukti…. ‘Freedom while living’. Every knowledge thus has to be aided by practice without any emblems of ….ism’. Thus Vivekananda has dedicated his life for a man-making religion. This living principle has dominated his social order.

The noteworthy point is that Vivekananda is departing from the essence of classical Advaita Philosophy, i.e. basically of Sankara’s advaitism. Vivekananda could bring down the Brahman through Isvara to mankind with the light of his
Practical Vedanta. For him the real practical side of Vedanta does not destroy the world. But it explains in showing the real individuality. Romain Rolland observes that Vivekananda, like his master conceives a religion of today. On the top stands the prophet of the period declaring that maya is an intermediate form between the equally absolute Being and non-Being. His clarion call for mankind is to awaken the lost individuality which lies inherent as eternal spirituality. Thus Vivekananda, as a Karma-Yogi has actualized the feeling of Brahman in the sphere of his desireless activities unlike Sankara, who has conceived Brahman by the intellect alone in his Advaita Philosophy. It was Sri Ramakrisna Paramahamsa’s religious enthusiasm which encouraged Vivekananda to preach the ideology of ‘Practical Vedanta’. In the long run, it is seen that the service of the ‘millions of oppressed Narayanas’ has become his life’s motto than the direct experience of Brahman in the Nirvikalpa Samadhi because in Advaitism the Jivatma is only a revelation. So, it is only a delusion. Within our consciousness we are all dualist. Beyond that we are all Advaitins.

Sankara, on the other hand, holds that though non-difference of the finite selves from Brahman is the ultimate truth (Jivo-brahmaiva naparah), the jiva being under the sway of avidya or maya, fails to realize this truth. Only when right knowledge dawns dispelling ignorance that the jiva recognizes Brahman in him. But this knowledge is not an end to itself, rather it may be said that knowledge serves the purpose of a means for the highest realization, the realization of identity between the seeker and the sought, the jiva and Brahman.
To become identified with Brahman is the goal of the finite being, to attain proper knowledge regarding the world and the multiplicity around him is the way for achieving that goal. Sankara hopes that the practical earthly life also, can be transcended. From such a transcended point of view, everything connected with the world turns out to be false and unreal.

Vivekananda very emphatically says that the world possesses its reality, that is it is real so long as we, the finite selves, are dwelling. Every finite being, says Vivekananda, can realize the latent infiniteness within him to proceed from jivan-mukti to Videha-mukti. He unlike Sankara accord to the world reality instead of saying Jagat-mithya. Only Brahma satyam notion, according to Vivekananda, cannot serve the required purpose of the true identification of the finite self with the Infinite Self, the Brahman. Vivekananda does not support Sankara’s view as to the relative existence of the created world. For Sankara, the world exists merely in relation to Pure Consciousness. Pure consciousness is the ground on which the world-appearance is superimposed. Abstracted from that relation of dependence on Brahman, the world is a non-entity, just as the rainbow is a non-entity if viewed in abstraction from the raindrops. Vivekananda says that the world can never just be a relatively true entity, it has both empirical and transcendental reality, i.e., it is the reality where man can realize his true nature and character of his own self, i.e. the non-difference between the finite self and the Infinite Self.
From the above discussion, it is followed that some of the basic ideas of Vivekananda’s philosophy are, no doubt, derived from the classical Vedanta but regarding certain views he can claim originality sustaining his independent position in thinking and highlighting a lot of philosophical issues. So, it can be said to a very great extent that he is a neo-Vedantin.

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