The Brahma-sūtra does not contain any specific expression that can lead us towards the concept of the unreality of the phenomenal world. Bādarāyaṇa, the author of the Brahma-sūtra does not seem to be admitting the unreality of the phenomenal world. But Gauḍapāda, who flourished after Bādarāyaṇa, being influenced by the full-fledged Buddhistic idealism, admitted the unreality of the phenomenal world. After Gauḍapāda, his disciple’s disciple Śaṅkara emphasized that everything except Brahman is unreal.

The early vedic thought of Monism can be said to have reached its zenith in the Absolutist philosophy of Śaṅkara. The most noteworthy and distinctive characteristic of his philosophy is the synthesis of Realism and Idealism. Exoterically Śaṅkara seems to be a realist, but esoterically he proves himself a great Idealist! From the pragmatic point of view Śaṅkara admits the objective reality of this phenomenal world. While from the transcendental standpoint he considers everything else except Brahman as unreal! Thus it would be rendering
injustice to Śaṅkara to consider him either as just a Realist or as just an Idealist! Of course, he is more of an Idealist, rather Absolutist than a Realist, as he puts forth the Non-dual Brahman-devoid of difference as the sole Ultimate Reality. Śaṅkara's philosophy can be summed up in one sentence as follows: "Brahman is the only Reality, while this phenomenal world (jagat) is unreal (mithyā); jīva is non-different from Brahman." From this, it seems that the very purport of his philosophy is to relegate this world of appearance to unreality (mithyātva), and to accept Non-dual sentiency viz. Brahman as the Supreme Reality.

As Śaṅkara has employed both the empirical as well as the ultimate standpoints to reveal his philosophy, it is necessary to examine his realistic views before we try to peep into his Absolutism. So, at first we shall briefly deal with those passages which show Śaṅkara as a realist.

1. भ्रम सत्यं जगत्मिथ्यत्वं, जीवो भ्रमेऽपि नापि. ।
Saṅkara as a realist:

As Saṅkara considers the worldly dealings as real from the empirical point of view, one can easily say that he does not reject the objective reality of this world of appearance.

Here, we shall present some points which openly show Saṅkara’s attempts to prove the objective reality of the worldly phenomena. Of course, from the empirical standpoint.

(1) In the introductory passage of his commentary on the Brahma-sūtra, Saṅkara states that our day-to-day life is merely based on the subject-object relationship. In the empirical world, all living beings impose the nature and attributes of the subject (the self) on the object (sense organs, body) and vice versa. Thus interrelating the nature and attributes of each other, one thinks ‘I am this’, ‘This is mine’, etc. Such type of behaviour is common to all.¹ And in this respect

¹ Thibaut George - The Vedānta Sūtras
Reprinted (1962) Motihar Banarasidass
beats, men and gods are alike.¹ Superimposition (Adhyāsa) which is considered false from the ultimate point of view, is considered very natural from the empirical point of view. Without superimposition no worldly dealing could be possible. People superimpose the attributes of the body and the sense organs on the self viz. 'I am fat', 'I am thin', 'I am dumb', 'I am deaf', etc.²

The entire complex of worldly dealings is considered as true, as long as the knowledge of Brahman being the self of all has not arisen.³ Śaṅkara has repeated many a time, "We accept that before true knowledge springs forth, the soul is implicated in the transmigratory state, and that this state constitutes the sphere of

1. प्राचीनकालिक सामाजिक अभिवृत्ति

² - Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. I 1.1

3. तस्मात् साधारण दृष्टिकोणातून्नतम तथ्यवादिन: सबौ लौकिको वैदिकस्य व्यवहारः

³ - Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. I 1.1
the operation of perception and so on..."

It is true, that until one has gained true knowledge, one cannot believe this world of appearance to be unreal (mithyā). It is not proper to consider this world as unreal while experiencing it every moment. The man who is captured by delusion, does not understand that he is perceiving a thing, which is not existing as a matter of fact. During the period of delusion, every action of his is considered meaningful! Suppose, man perceives a mirage in a desert. As he is under the influence of delusion, the sight of mirage, running after it etc. are considered to be full of meaning. Only when he realises that it is not water, does he conclude that what he perceived was not real!

Śāṅkara does not condemn the phenomenal world as absolutely non-existent like a hare's horn. It is neither absolutely real, nor is it absolutely unreal. Śāṅkara admits "anirvacaniya-khyāti", as it is not

1. प्रकृतिसारिले प्रातिसारिवा पुरुषमात्रं तत्रात्मात्वाच्च पुनः प्रत्यक्षातिदेशवस्त्रयं तदाभ्याम
   - Br.Sū.Śā.Bhā. IV 1.3
possible to describe the world of appearance. There is no other alternative except accepting the nature of the world as inexplicable. A well-known example of it is of rajju-sarpa. In dim light, one knows a rope as a snake, so the snake that appears instead of rope is neither real nor unreal. It is not real because when one realises that it is a rope and not a snake, the snake disappears. On the other hand, it is not unreal as it was the object of knowledge and created fear in its perceiver.

Similarly, this world of appearance is neither real, nor unreal and hence it is inexplicable. As the world appears during its perception and as it fulfils common usages, it is real. But from the ultimate point of view, it is not real, as nothing else than Brahman can be real. Thus, on the strength of 'anirvacaṇīya-khyāti', Śaṅkara emphasizes that during empirical dealings the world of appearance has got objective reality.

(2) Śaṅkara has described all knowledge including Brahmavidyā as 'vastutahtra'.¹ That is to say, knowledge

¹. तर्क सति खलनापि वस्तुतःतदेव, यूक्तसूचिविषयत्वाद ।
is dependent on the existing thing, and on means of knowledge and not on any man or action. Brahman is self-existent. It does not depend on something else for its existence. Śaṅkara has stated that as in perception knowledge depends on the objects of the perception, similarly Brahmājñāna depends on Brahman itself. ¹

(3) Śaṅkara considers perception valid from the empirical point of view. Through the testimony of perception one can prove the validity of the external world. Various objects such as house, tree, mountain, river, table etc. are proved to be existing by perception.

While refuting the view of the vijnānavādins, that consciousness itself appears as if it were outside, Śaṅkara states that the external objects do exist. According to the vijnānavāda, the external world does not exist at all. Various objects are seen 'as if' they exist outside! So there is the absence of external objects. This should be regarded like a dream etc.

1. प्रत्ययात्मक प्रमाण विज्ञानवाङ्कान्त्रिकांशुन्तः ।
As a dream, mirage, gandharvanagara etc. are perceived without there being external objects, so are pillar etc. perceived during the waking state, for there is no difference in their being knowledge. So there is no difference between the objects appearing during the dreaming state as well as during the waking state. It is the consciousness that appears as if it were external.

Sāṅkara rejects this view, and emphasizes that external objects do exist. In respect of an already existing thing we do not have the experience. "It is as if it were existing", "It looks like existing". Sāṅkara cites the example that no one says that Visnumitra appears like the son of a barren woman.

1. सांपातात्रिकं दृष्ट्वयम्। यथा हि सांप्नात्रिकं महाचं चेत्तकमन्यतं ज्ञातं। प्रत्ययं विशे श्राथेन विभेन हणुमाणाकाराः सांप्नन्ति। तव जागहितं गौंियं कषिप सांप्नात्रिकं ज्ञातं पवित्रप्रहलोंत्यवस्थवद्ये। प्रत्ययत्वविशिष्णात्।


3. न हि विष्‌यु मित्रं व-च्यापुपुरुवद्वपातिः हृदिर कपिरं सिद्धं।

A thing, which is already existing, is not experienced as though it looks like existing. A man perceiving a rose, does not say that this rose looks like existing. It is absolutely foolish to say like this. Hence in accordance with our direct experience we must admit that the object of perception appears to us as something external, not like something external.\(^1\) It has an identity distinct from its knowledge as it is the object of knowledge and has played its part in the rise of knowledge. Śaṅkara is never tired of repeating that, it is not possible to determine the non-existence of the external objective world, for we experience it.\(^2\) Śaṅkara while presenting the example of our practical life says that a man, who has already eaten food and is satisfied, cannot say that he has not eaten the food.

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1. तस्मां प्रद्धायानुथः तत्त्वमयुपगच्चिमेविविवावभासति हति
   युक्तमयुपगतु न तु विविवेवभासति हति।
   - Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā II 2-28.

2. न सत्त्वमाग्नाने बाध्यं यथायथाया अवसाति शक्ते।
   कस्मात्? उपल्लेशः।
and is not satisfied.\(^1\)

Thus Śaṅkara rejects subjective Idealism (vijñānavāda) with full force and emphasizes the objective reality of the phenomenal world very clearly. Here, it would not be out of place to mention that Śaṅkara firmly holds that the knowledge and the object to be known are different from each other.* While refuting Subjective Idealism, Śaṅkara has stated that for the same reason (i.e. because the distinction of thing and idea is given in (consciousness) the invariable concomitance of idea and thing has to be considered as proving only that the thing constitutes the means of the idea and not that the two are identical.\(^2\)

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1. यथा ति क्रिः प्रज्ञानी पुनः च ध्यायाऽपि तृप्ती च ज्ञात्वा मूर्त्ति सन्नाह च पूर्णे न दा वा तृप्तयोगिति, ना। ।

* According to the 'Sahopalambhaniyama' of Yogācāra Buddhism (subjective idealism) both the knowledge and the object to be known are identical.

2. अतः सन्धीत्वमनन्दिनः पुनः च ध्यायाऽपि पृत्यविषयविराग्योज्ञानप्राप्तव्यवहारः ना पूर्णे च तृप्तयोगिति, ना।

This openly shows that Śaṅkara would not have supported the Drṣṭi-sṛṣṭivāda; which holds that Sṛṣṭi is identical with the Drṣṭi. This we shall examine in details later on.

(4) Śaṅkara has commented upon the process of creation which is discussed in the third pāda (quarter) of the second adhyāya. Bādarāyaṇa has presented the process of creation according to the scriptures. Remaining faithful to the vedic text Śaṅkara has commented upon the order of creation. From the empirical point of view he has accepted creation, as he has admitted the objective reality of this world of appearance.

Śaṅkara has discussed about the origination, sustenance and dissolution of the world. Five elements, namely ākāśa(ether), vāyu (air), teja (light), āp(water) and Prthvī (earth) are produced from the Ultimate Reality. It is stated that it is proved by the scriptures that from Brahman this phenomenal world is originated in the order of ether etc. ¹ Refuting the

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¹. कै: तिमावान्यात्मकाद्वादृढ्यान भागावादविभाज्यतेवचिदानन 
जगज्जातिभिमि निःश्रीयते ।

- Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. II 3-7.
pūrvapakṣa, Saṅkara on the strength of scriptural authenticity proves that the ether is an effect of Brahman.¹

Thus the five elements are originated from Brahman and similarly the intellect and mind are also originated from it. There is no specific order, whether the elements are originated first or the intellect and mind, for it is stated that there is no difference between the sense organs and the elements. If the organs are of the nature of the elements, their production and dissolution occur on account of those of the elements.²

It is immaterial whether the organs are produced first or the elements.³ Now, at the time of dissolution, all the elements are dissolved in the reverse order. That

1. तस्मादुपश्चाय प्रयत्निति प्रसिद्धि ।
   - Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā. II 3-7.

2. .... उन्निष्ठः कारणान्तः यदि वायूमैविकारानि कारणानि, ततो
   मूलायायां व्याप्तिः कारणान्तः वेष्‌ भवति हृति ।
   - Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā. II 3-15.

3. प्रथमं कारणान्तः चर्मं मूलानि, प्रथमं वा कारणान्तः
   चर्मं कारणातीति ।
   - Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā. II 3-15.
is to say, the earth dissolves into the water, the water merges into the fire, the fire into the air.

In this order a subtle element dissolves into a more subtle cause and ultimately everything merges into the most subtle cause viz. Brahman.¹

A doubt may arise that when everything merges into Brahman at the time of dissolution, how could everything emerge again at the time of the new creation. The veda has got its answer. It is declared that no contradiction arises about the name and form in the new world. Śaṅkara has emphasized the sameness of names and forms that take place in the new aeon. Śaṅkara cites the example of man who rises from sleep, continues the same dealings as he indulged in previous to his sleep. Admitting the authenticity of the word of the veda, Śaṅkara states that, therefore the phenomenal world is the same in all the Kalpas and as the Lords are able to continue their previous forms of existence.

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1. एवं कृप्या पूर्वसंस्कृतं बलज्ञानसंस्कृतं काृणमर्गित्य एवं कायार्जातं परमकारणं परमशुर्म्यं व अस्मात्प्रति वैलक्षेपी त्योऽक्षायस्य ।

- Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. II 3-14.
they manifest themselves in each new creation, individuals bearing the same names and forms as the individuals of the preceding creations, and owing to this equality of names and forms, the admitted periodical renovations of the world in the form of general pralayas and general creation do not conflict with the authoritative nature of the word of the Veda.\(^1\)

Thus Śaṅkara has without any hesitation discussed the process of creation and dissolution and has also admitted that after dissolution, according to the previous order, the phenomenal world again emerges.\(^2\)

1. Śaṅkara emphasizes all kinds of worldly dealings during a mundane state. It seems that Śaṅkara fully supports the classification of vāraṇa, āśrama etc.

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1. शाङ्करानं भवत्वा चृत्वारपि महामूलपूर्वतत्त्वाभ्यां यथा जगात्मक्यपुरुषाभायां गम्यानां गण्यानां न किं च चतुर्विभागांप्रमाण्यादिविक्रयः
   - Br.Śū.Śā,Bhā. I 3-30.


2. शाङ्करानस्य च सूत्र शिष्याय वस्तुविवेचनाय अस्मातिक्ष्य प्रकरणीः
   - Br.Śū.Śā,Bhā. I 1-1.
This shows that during the empirical existence, all types of worldly dealings are in their proper place. Actions performed in daily life are not meaningless. Even a stick in one's hand can make a cow run away from that person. Śāṅkara accepts qualifications for vedic study, importance of action, morality etc. from the empirical point of view.

Śāṅkara does not reject action (Karma) especially selfless action, which can indirectly lead one towards Brahman. In the fourth pāda of the third adhyāya, it is established that actions, which are co-operative to knowledge, can lead though indirectly, towards the origination of the knowledge. The utility of selfless action is accepted inasmuch as it helps to purify the mind. It by erasing rajas and tamas and by enhancing the force of sattva gives rise to the desire to know Brahman.

Further, Śāṅkara states that by performing actions one goes by the pitṛyāṇa path to the cañḍraloka and

1. वस्माकाश्च दीन्याश्राकनारणिः च फान्ति विषाखाकारोणिः चैति निःस्तिः।

- Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. III 4-35.
after enjoying the fruits of one's deeds, has to be born again to experience the fruits of prārabdha karmas. On the one hand, actions lead one towards pitryāna path, on the other hand, by virtue of the knowledge of Brahman-namely Sagunā Brahman, one goes by the Devayāna path to Brahmaloka and at the time of dissolution, merges into Brahman and thus attains the ultimate goal. This whole process is explained at length in the fourth pāda of the fourth adhyāya. Śaṅkara states that one who meditates and has the knowledge of Brahman-namely of Sagunā Brahman, goes by the Devayāna path and stays in the Brahmaloka, where he enjoys extraordinary powers (except that of creating, maintaining and dissolving the world). And at the time of final dissolution, this soul merges in Brahman and at the

1. इष्टादिकारिणाः पूर्वाटिर्भिः वत्सलेषुभवमिविशिष्ठानाः पुक्कमोगाः तत्त: प्रत्यवोध जन्यायते --

2. गुदुत्पत्याज्ञापयां वर्जयित्वा ज्ञानाभिः भवत्मेऽवै पुक्कां थर्ध्याति ...
   - Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. IV 4-17.
time of a new creation, it has not to come back again in this world. On the other hand, one who has realised Nirguṇa Brahman has not to go anywhere, as he has realised the true nature. It is stated that there is absence of departure for the knower of Brahman.\(^1\) When one realises one's own nature, he has not to go anywhere else. As a matter of fact, jīva is Brahman only, but due to the veil of āvidyā (ignorance), its true nature is concealed. When it is removed, it realises that it is nothing else but Brahman.

Then there is the other path for those, who have not performed good actions or have not known Saguṇa Brahman. It is stated that, those who have not got the right of the Devayāna through knowledge, nor of the pīṭhayāna through actions, for those there is a third path on which they repeatedly return to the existence of small animals.\(^2\)

\(^1\) तस्मादप्राणन्तं प्रक्षेपितं नाशोत्तरस्तं — Br.Śū.Śā.Bha. IV 2-14.

\(^2\) येन विशारदन्तैः प्रक्षेपितविषयं, नापि कर्मणि पित्यायां, तेषां प्राणै दुःश्चतुलयां पञ्चकृतान्ति कृतीयं पञ्चा महतिति — Br.Śū.Śā.Bha. III 1-17.
In short, Śaṅkara admits the usefulness of action and accepts that by performing actions one is able to gain its result accordingly.

(6) From the lower point of view Śaṅkara accepts the necessity of the worship of God (Īs'vara) viz. Saguna Brahman. Due to ignorance, Brahman is worshiped as Īs'vara. From the lower point of view, worship of God is considered as a step for making Brahman enter into the intellect. Worship of Saguna Brahman leads towards the path, that takes the soul to the ultimate goal.

In the commentary on the Brahma-sūtra II 1-14; Śaṅkara has pointed out that from the empirical point of view, omniscience, omnipresence etc. are admitted as characteristics of Īs'vara. It is stated that the Lord's being a lord, his omniscience, his omnipresence etc. all depend on the limitation due to the adjuncts whose nature is Nescience. And the illusive power, viz. māyā of the omniscient Lord, is the germ of

1. तद्यथाविष्णुतम्ब्रुम्ब्रुप्रदुर्भिप्रभुत्रिक्रमिदं नरस्यं न्यायविद्युतिवर्ग्यं सवर्णिकाल्यं च /......

prapañca. Thus, Śaṅkara fully supports the view that the world phenomenon is created by the omniscient Lord. Of course, from the empirical point of view. Accordingly Śaṅkara has stated that all vedānta-texts declare that the Lord (Īśvara) is the only cause of all creation.1 And according to the actions of the souls, Īśvara assigns fruits. Īśvara is the one common cause of the creation of gods, men etc.2 God's position is described by giving the analogy parjanya (rain).3 The peculiar potentialities in the respective seeds are the causes in respect of the creation of the different rice, barley etc; even when rain is the common cause of their production, so the differences between the classes of beings are due to the different merits of the individual souls, even when God is the common cause of creation.4

1. Bhavavdaṁ na Ṛṣaṁśatukam eva gṛihyaṁ vyapakābhāya

2. Ekaṁstāre iva mṛgānandaśūnṣṭaṁ sāyāṃśa kāraṇaṁ kṣaṭitāṁ
   - Br.Sū.Śa.Bhā. II 1-34.

3. Eśasāḥ suḥ punāvadyataḥ
   - Br.Sū.Śa.Bhā. II 1-34.

4. Yathā hi punāḥ śrī śiṣṭā śruṇāvāsyaśūnṣṭe sāyāṃśa kāraṇaṁ kṣaṭitāṁ śrī śiṣṭe
   - Br.Sū.Śa.Bhā. II 1-34.
Thus Īsvara is considered as the sole cause of the things of enjoyment of the soul in the transmigratory state. From the lower point of view, Śaṅkara has established the place of Īśvara and has considered Him as the cause of the creation; and as the giver of the fruits of the actions, that have been performed. The souls, who worship Saguna Brahman viz. God, are entitled to the Devayāna path and after their stay and enjoyment, gain the Brahmaloka.

(7) As Śaṅkara has admitted the objective reality of the phenomenal world, he can be said to have accepted its Vyāvahārika Sattā. Śaṅkara has not banished this phenomenal world as absolutely unreal like a sky flower. Until the dawn of knowledge, the objective reality of the world of appearance is admitted. In his commentary on the first sūtra, Śaṅkara has stated that every one is conscious of his being. No one thinks, 'I am not existing.' Śaṅkara accepts that before the dawn of knowledge, there is the transmigratory state and the

1. सत्वेण ह्यात्मा द्वितिवष यथैति, न नास्मिनि ति।
operation of perception etc.  

Hence, all worldly and vedic dealings have got Vyāvahārika Sattā before the attainment of knowledge.

The above-mentioned points clearly establish Śaṅkara as a realist from the empirical point of view. But if we consider these points from the ultimate standpoint, we find Śaṅkara as an Absolutist.

Since Śaṅkara has commented on the sūtras of Bādarāyana, which reveal nothing else but realism, naturally the commentary on these sūtras seems to be supporting realism at first sight. But esoterically Śaṅkara has put forth his belief supporting Absolutism. At many places he has stated that the reality of the world is accepted from the empirical point of view, but ultimately it is rejected with full force. To remain faithful to every letter of the upaniṣads and the sūtras he has admitted the empirical standpoint over and above his esoteric view. Though he could not restrain

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1. प्राचीनान्तरात्मक रित्वाम्युगमन् ; तद्विवभयत्वाच।

प्रत्येकाद्वित्ववहारस्य ।...

- Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. IV 1.3.
himself from revealing his own belief about the unreality of this phenomenal world, even when he was discussing passage pertaining to creation or the like.

Now we shall deal with those passages, which reveal Śaṅkara as an Absolutist from the ultimate standpoint.

Śaṅkara as an Absolutist:

Śaṅkara has never missed any opportunity to indicate that everything else except Brahman is unreal (mithyā).

At many places at the end of bhāṣya, Śaṅkara has mentioned that the view should be taken from the empirical standpoint and not from the ultimate standpoint.¹

(1) Adhyāsa is Mithyā:

In the introductory passage, Śaṅkara has admitted the phenomenal world as real, as it fulfils practical usages. Now these worldly dealings are based on superimposition (adhyāsa). And superimposition by its nature is misleading. It presents attributes of something in some other place.

Śaṅkara states that the only root cause responsible for this superimposition is Nescience or ignorance

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¹ Br.Sū.Śā.Bhā. II 1-14, II 1-22, II 1-33.
(Avidyā or mithyājñāna). Hence superimposition must be considered as false (mithyā). So all the worldly dealings based on superimposition must be considered as false. That is to say, superimposition is due to Nescience, which is responsible for this world phenomenon, which (the world) does not exist independently of Brahman. So due to superimposition, people consider worldly dealings as real, but they are false as a matter of fact. Under the spell of superimposition one cannot discriminate between the true and the false. As a result one is misguided. Take the example of silver and mother of pearl. In the bright sun-light a person cannot judge properly that the mother of pearl is shining due to sun-light and he takes it to be silver. Similarly in the empirical world, ignorant people cannot judge properly and as a result this world of appearance is superimposed on the Non-dual Brahman.

(2) The Concept of Avidyā:

The doctrine of 'Avidyā' is the only solution by

1. अव्यासो निस्कृत्ति मविरु युक्त "

- Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. I 1-1.
which the riddle of this world of appearance can be solved. In Śaṅkara vedānta, the concept of Avidyā can be considered to be its very foundation stone.

Śaṅkara has reiterated now and then that this world of appearance or seeming duality has sprung forth due to Avidyā only. Śaṅkara states that the only purport of the scriptures is to demolish duality imagined by Avidyā.¹

In his commentary on the Tai. Up. It is stated that the main goal of vedānta is to bring an end to difference imagined by Avidyā, by the knowledge of the Absolute Non-dual Brahman.²

This seeming duality is projected by false knowledge (mithyājñāna vijñābhitam).³ Śaṅkara states that as due to a defect in the eyes, one moon appears as many, so this multiplicity of name and form is brought about

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1. विविधाकल्पकधारन्वृत्तस्तवाच्छासवस्य ।

2. प्रयोजन वाच्या इतविद्याय अविद्या निन्वृत्ति: तत्तत्त्वात्यतिकः।
   सङ्ग्रहः । p.-281

3. भिष्माज्जानविद्यृत्तस्य च नानात्वम्।
   - Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. II 1-14.
by Nescience and should be dissolved by knowledge.¹

Further, it is stated that this transmigratory state
is imagined by Avidyā.²

In short, Śaṅkara admits everything as brought about
by virtue of Avidyā. Transmigration, this seeming multi-
plicity of name and form, creation (sṛṣṭi), Jīva, Isvāra,
scripts—everything is imagined by Avidyā. Each and
everything apart from Brahman comes under the realm of
Avidyā and hence is false (mithyā).

Now we shall briefly deal with the above mentioned,
which are considered false under the realm of Avidyā.

Creation:

We have already stated that from the empirical point
of view Śaṅkara has admitted the objective reality of
this world (jagat), and has also discussed its creation
according to the scriptures.

1. एवंस्त तिमिर्नामेकस्त्रूप-सबदविषयाकृति अवर्णिन
नामसमप्र-वै विषया पुरविशिष्टमय इति

2. अविक्षिप्तिकल्पसंसा यत्व...
But from the ultimate standpoint Śaṅkara has rejected creation (srṣṭi) as false (mithyā); and has stated that srṣṭi is projected by āvidyā. In his commentary on the Brahma-sūtra II 1-33 following Bādarāyaṇa, he says that there is no purpose behind this creation. It is merely a play. As in the empirical world, a king or his minister acts and wanders without any purpose—just for fun, so is the case with creation.¹ Further, it is stated that as respiration occurs very naturally without depending on any extraneous purpose, similarly the activity of creation is performed by God naturally as a play.²

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1. यथा लोके कस्यविद्यापौष्णणस्य राजाः राजामत्यस्य वा व्यतिरिक्तं हिन्दित्त्वोवजनम्भिज्ञाय केवलं तत्तास्माः प्रृथ्वी: कृष्णविहारे: पुष्पिनी ।।...। – Br.Sū.Śā. Bhā. II 1-33.

2. यथा च्रं च्युतायुप्रांतावाक्षिणम्भिज्ञाय आयुं हिन्दित्त्वोवजनं रघुवादेव संपन्नस्ति । यथो श्रस्यम्यस्यसपीदव हिन्दित्त्वोवजनान्तरं रघुवादेव केवलं तत्तास्माः प्रृथ्वीविश्वति ।। – Br.Sū.Śā. Bhā. II 1-33.
Thus creation is compared with a play. And play is always without any ulterior intention except that of pleasure. But at the end of his commentary on the Brahma-sūtra II 1-33 Śaṅkara has stated that the scriptural passages describing creation are not true from the ultimate stand point; for these worldly dealings of name and form are projected by Nescience (avidyā).¹ For it should not be forgotten that the main purport of scriptures is to indicate Non-duality.²

The upanisāads speak of the emergence of the world from Brahman not because it is their purport to indicate the reality of the creation. Their only intention behind statements describing creation is to state and emphasize the oneness and Non-duality of Brahman and that nothing exists apart from Brahman.

Vācaspati, commenting on Śaṅkara's commentary on the Brahma-sūtra II 1-33, has emphasized this point, that Srṣṭi is not real (pāṁarthikī), so no intention behind it is required. Furthermore, it has taken place

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1. न इति परमाधिविषया पृथिवित्रुः, विविधाकलितविद्वामस्माभवहारतः।
   गौरुचार् -
   -Br.Sū.Śā.Bhā II 1-33.

2. न्यायमपवलुकानादन्तस्य नैव विन्यासः।
   नैव विन्यासः।
   -Br.Sū.Śā.Bhā II 1-33.
due to beginningless Āvidyā. And Āvidyā is active by its very nature. So it does not require any intention. Vācaspati has cited analogies of the illusion of two moon, fiery circle and gandharvanagara; such illusions have no intention behind them; and has put srstī on the same footing as the illusion of two moons, fiery circle, gandharvanagara.¹

The commentary of Śaṅkara on the Brahma-sūtra II 1-14 throws some light on this concept of creation. Śaṅkara has presented his view as supported by the Ĉā. Up;² that this seeming duality is brought about by speech.

Here, it would not be out of place to mention that Śaṅkara has also discussed about the examples of the

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1. अविद्या वै वै निर्माणाधीन सृष्टिकृतं नस्तःप्रयोजनम्।
   अविद्या रचनाविरिक्तः। विविधे च मधुवतः रूप
   कारोऽनुष्ठीति न प्रयोजनप्रार्थिते। न हि रवि ग्रहः
   गंगा विस्मये। सतहित्स्युज्ञा नरिति।
   - Bhāmati on Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā II 1-33.

2. यथा स्रोतेष्ठ मृत्तिष्ठेन सर्व पृथ्वीं विज्ञातं खाद्यवज्राद्यगुणं
   विकर्षों नाममध्ये पृथ्वीकृत्वेव सत्यम्।
   - Ĉā. Up. VI 1-1.
clay and pot, water and ripples, which might lead one
to support the theory of transformation (pariṇāmavāda).
But this is not acceptable. In the commentary on the
Brahma-sūtra II 1-14 Saṅkara has discussed this point
very clearly. In the Chā. Up. it is stated that by
knowing the clay, its effects namely pot, etc. are
known, as they are modifications brought about by speech
and only the clay is real. Commenting on this Saṅkara
has stated that the pot, dish etc. which are the
effects of clay are made out of clay and so are not
different from clay, but are clay only. Difference is
brought by speech. As a matter of fact, there is no
difference, but the clay alone is there. From this
analogy, the absence of the entire body of effect,
independently from Brahman is understood.¹ It is stated
that the distinction of enjoyers and enjoyables appear-
ing in this manifold world is not real from the ulti-
mate point of view, because it is to be understood that
the effect, consisting of ether and so on, is non-different

¹. इत्यवचनविवेकः कायमत्तीन्त्यापाय इति गमये।
    - Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā II 1-4.
from its cause, namely Brahman. The effect
does not exist apart from its cause. This prapāṇca
consisting of enjoyables and enjoyer does not exist
independently of Brahman.\(^1\) The statement of the Čā. Up.
that the difference in the manifold world is brought
about by the speech (vācāraṇbhānaṁ) indicates the un-
reality of all the effects.\(^2\) Śaṅkara has asserted that
manifoldness is projected by mithyājñāna (wrong knowledge).\(^3\)

Śaṅkara regards this prapāṇca as unreal from the
ultimate standpoint. His only concentration is centered
on proving Non-duality, that is to say the oneness of
this world of appearance with Brahman. A doubt has been
raised that oneness and manyness could both be real. As
a tree is considered one but it is manifold if viewed
as branches etc. So the Sea is one in itself but mani-
fold as waves, foam etc. And clay is one but manifold

\(^1\) Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā. II 1-14.
\(^2\) Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā. II 1-14.
\(^3\) Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā. II 1-14.
if viewed with regard to the jars and dishes made of it. Saṅkara puts aside this view by stating that the expression 'as clay they are real' asserts that the cause only is real while the expression 'having its origin in speech' declares the unreality of all the effects. Thus examples of clay, water etc. are not to be understood as favouring the theory of transformation. Their purport is to show that name and form are modifications i.e. appearances of Brahman, and have no reality apart from Brahman, which is the sole reality. As the existence of the snake in the rope at any period of time is merely māyā, similarly, the appearance of the manifold world at any period of time, viz. origination, sustenance and destruction is just unreal. The manifold world appears to be real only as long as āvidyā is there. Rightly speaking, it does not exist at any period of time, as nothing exists except Brahman.

1. "मुखिस्तवः सत्यम् " यहि प्रकृतिमात्रस्य दृष्टान्ते सत्यत्वावधारणात्।
   वाचाराम्यमान्यस्त्रित्रे विद्यारङ्गात्यमान्यस्त्रित्वाभावानन्।

2. पायामात्र दृष्टिगतस्त्रित्रे विद्यारङ्गस्त्रित्रे रन्जन।
One thing is noteworthy here that Śaṅkara has not used the analogy of the firey circle (alāta cakra) for establishing the unreal character of this world of appearance. On the other hand, in the Gaudapādaskārikā, Gaudapāda has presented the analogy of firey circle to emphasize the unreality of the world and to establish Ajātivāda. The only possible reason for not presenting such an analogy could be that Śaṅkara wanted to emphasize the objective reality of the world of appearance from the empirical point of view. According to Śaṅkara it is not possible to totally denounce the objective reality of the world to admit the world as real independently of Brahman. This notion is mentioned as 'anirvacanīya khyāti', as we have seen already.

Śaṅkara solves the puzzle of the description of the phenomenal world, rather of its creation, by the theory of adhyāropa-apavāda (superimposition and negation). A well known analogy is that of the arundhati star. The star of arundhati is too small to perceive. So one points out the nearer star and then shows that it is not the

1. G.K. IV 47 to 50.
star of arundhati, but the other smaller one is the star of arundhati. Similarly at first the creation is imposed and then it is negated.

As we have stated before that since Sāṇkara admits the objective reality of phenomenal world, he has not used any term that shows the absolute unreality of the world. In the Vivekācūḍāmaṇi the term 'Asat Kalpa' is used, but there is a difference of opinion about its authorship.

Vedic and worldly dealings relegated to the realm of Avidyā:

Sāṇkara admits vedic and worldly dealings meaningful from the empirical point of view. But from the ultimate standpoint they are said to be fully within the realm of Avidyā. Again and again, Sāṇkara has said that before the dawn of knowledge both the type of dealings are possible; but after sūt réalisation there

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1. क्षत्कत्स विक्त्स्य विज्ञानीक्षणानि ।
   Vivekācūḍāmaṇi 400(ab)

2. "It is improbable that Sāṇkara wrote the Vi...."

'A Study of Sāṅkarācārya',
Poona.
can be no much dealing based on duality.

Sāṅkara states that the embodiedness of the self is caused by wrong conception.¹ And all kinds of worldly dealings are also performed by a wrong conception.
Therefore the transmigratory state does not remain as before after self-realisation.² Furthermore he states that the Śruti passage³ speaks of the absence of dealings of the type of perception etc. after the dawn of knowledge.⁴ He does not hesitate to say that even scriptures fall within the realm of Avidyā as even they are based on the concept of duality.⁵

1. तस्मान्निमश्याप्रत्ययनिमित्ताशरीरित्वम्...
2. .... तस्मान्नायवात्त्वामात्मावस्य यथापूर्वः संसारित्वम्।
3. 'यत्र त्वस्य सर्वमात्मयामूलत्वेन कं प्रेषिते'
   - Br.Up. II 4-14.
4. प्रथोपेत प्रत्ययाचार्याङ्कौशङ्किति।
   - Br.Śū.Śa.Bhā. IV 1-3.
5. 'वेदा शैवा:। ४।३ २२। इति वचनाविषयं एवास्मामः
     शौर्यभावः प्रथोपे।'
   - Br.Śū.Śa.Bhā. IV 1-3.
The *jīva* (individual soul) is non-different from Brahman. But due to ignorance it experiences differentiation from Brahman. It is stated that *jīva*hood is caused by Avidyā, and it is dependent on its limiting adjunct (upādhi) viz. buddhi. Furthermore, it is stated that the relation of an individual soul with its limiting adjunct (buddhi) is due to wrong knowledge (mithyājñāna). As long as its (individual soul's) connection with the buddhi, its limiting adjunct lasts, so long the individual soul remains as experiencing transmigration. Thus, limited by buddhi and other adjuncts due to Nescience, an individual soul feels

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1. अविधानिनिपिवधाव


2. उपाधि नौहि विव जीव हस्तुकापु


3. अष्टि च मित्तानान्तुर सरि यमात्तमो द्वुपाधिः कुम्भ:।


4. यावैद्ये वायु क्षुपाधिः कङ्कालवज्रीवस्य शिवत्व रस्षारित्स्य च।

separation from the Supreme self viz. Brahman. As soon as its connection with buddhi etc. ceases, it is non-different from Brahman.

It is stated in the commentary on the Brahma-sūtra II 3-46, that just as the light of the sun or the moon which pervades the entire space becomes straight or bent as it were when the limiting adjunct with which it is in contact, such as a finger or the stick, is straight or bent, but does not really become so; and just as the ether, although imagined to move as it were when jars are being moved, does not really move, and as the sun does not tremble, although its image trembles when you shake the cup filled with water in which the sun's light is reflected; so the Lord also is not affected by pain, although pain can be felt by that aspect of him which is called the individual soul, as presented by Nescience, and limited by the buddhi and other adjuncts.¹

¹. यथा वाकाशी घटा दिषु गच्छन्तु गच्छन्त्वं चिमात्मावतां चपि न परमात्माने कार्यं, यथा बोद्धवात्सिद्धिमानागुणां च्यािं कुलदु: तस्य निष्कृतिः कम्पते, स्वविग्नात्माप्रत्युपस्थितार्थे कुक्कुटवधु-पलिते जीवसभ्यः हि स्त्रयायामानि चन्द्रं न तद्वाब्द्वीज्ञात न ह्यते।
The Brahma-sūtra II 3.50 declares that the jīva is an ābhāsa (appearance). The ācāryas have explained this sūtra differently. So it is difficult to say what Bādarāyaṇa must have meant by the term 'ābhāsa'. Saṅkara has stated that the jīva is a reflection of the Supreme Self, the individual soul is to be considered a mere appearance of the highest self, like the reflection of the sun in the water...

But Saṅkara has not specifically accepted either the theory of appearance (ābhāsavāda) or the theory of reflection (pratibimbavāda) for explaining how Brahman can appear like the jīva, and for explaining the empirical experiences of different individual souls.

But later, on the basis of the explanation of Saṅkara, his followers interpreted it in both the ways. As it is stated that ābhāsa is due to Avidyā, it can be assumed that Saṅkara might have meant that the jīva is

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1. अभास स्व च

- Br.Śū. II 3.50.
a reflection of sentiency in Avidyā. In the commentary on the Cha. Up, Śaṅkara has stated that the jīva is a reflection of God brought about by the relation of man is perceived in the mirror and as the sun is reflected in the water. So it can be said that he favours the pratibimbavāda. On the other hand, analogies indicating the appearance theory (ābhāsavāda) and the limiting theory (avacchedavāda) are also found. It is stated that the lord differs from the soul which is the product of Avidyā, in the same way as the real magician standing on the ground differs from the illusive magician holding a sword and climbing up in the sky by means of a rope, or as the free unlimited ether differs from the ether of a jar which is determined by its limiting adjunct.

1. जैत्य यिनं नाम देवताया आमासपत्तम | भुस्मादिदृशमात्र संसाधिति ।

2. यथा मायाविन्यसंसारं भूलत्सृणाकासपरिचित । स एव मायावी परमार्थस्य पूर्विक्षोवन्य ।

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2. यथा मायाविन्यसंसारं भूलत्सृणाकासपरिचित । स एव मायावी परमार्थस्य पूर्विक्षोवन्य । यथावता घटकाशुपारिचितिक्षो-हनुपावि विपरिचिति वालाशोन्यः।

- Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā, I 1-17.
So we can not state with certitude that Śaṅkara favours either the theory of reflection or of appearance or of limiting theory.

Īśvara (Saguna Brahman):

According to Śaṅkara, Īśvara (Saguna Brahman) is not the Ultimate Reality, as it is also imagined by Avidyā.

From the lower point of view, Īśvara is believed to be the ruler of all the living beings. God is a casual agent in all activities as we know from the scriptures.¹

But from the higher point of view, the reality of Īśvara like that of the jīva is rejected. It is stated in his commentary on the Brahma-sūtra II 1-14 that the Lord's being a lord, his omniscience, his omnipotence, etc. all depend on the limitation due to the adjuncts whose self is Nescience, in reality none of these qualities belong to the Self whose true nature is cleared by right knowledge, from all adjuncts whatsoever.²

Some Śruti passages describe Brahman as having attributes;¹ on the other hand some others as without having any attributes.² This is so because from the lower point of view, Saguna Brahman that is to say, Brahman having attributes is to be worshiped as the Almighty Lord (Īśvara). But that also comes under the realm of Avidyā.

From the ultimate stand point, Brahman is devoid of attributes, for according to the scriptures Brahman is to be ascertained only as devoid of attributes and not as having attributes.³

Thus, according to Śaṅkara's philosophy both the Jīva and Īśvara are imagined by Avidyā. Now, a question may arise that if the jīva and Īśvara are both imagined by Avidyā, then what about this world of appearance?

1. जीवकथा सर्वकामः सर्वकथः सर्वसः

2. नैति नैति

3. क्षणिकार्मिकः ग्रामावर्तिक्यः न क्षानिकः
It is also imagined. But by whom? By the jīva or by the Supreme Self? Who is the creator of this world of appearance?

Creator of the world of appearance:

From the ultimate standpoint, this world of appearance is negated. But before the dawn of knowledge, its objective reality is admitted.

Since the creation is denounced from the ultimate point of view, it must be falsely imagined. But by whom? Could the world be constructed by Brahman who is eternally free from all imagination and is self-sufficient. The Upaniṣads repeatedly declare that these five elements are brought about by Brahman. On the other hand it could be said that this phenomenal world is falsely imposed as there is only Non-duality. Then who is the one responsible for such a superimposition? Is it imagined by God or by the jīvas or by just one principal jīva to whom others are subservient. Or is there only one jīva and everything is imagined by it?

We can not get any answer to such question from Śaṅkara's thought. Only while discussing about the dreaming state, it is stated that the jīva imagines
the dreaming creation. Śaṅkara has quoted a statement from the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣada (Br. Up.) and has admitted that the dreaming world is a construction of the jīva. The Br. Up. does not clearly state that the dreaming world is created by the jīva. Nevertheless, its context indicates that it is the jīva, who creates the dream world. It is stated that there are no chariots, no spans, no roads. But he projects from himself chariots, spans, roads... For he is a creator. Thus quoting the Brahma-sūtra Śaṅkara declares that the jīva is the creator of the dreaming world. But ultimately the jīva is nothing else but Brahman. So who is the creator? The question remains almost unsolved, even for a dream. Nevertheless Śaṅkara seems to regard the jīva as projecting the dream-creation.

1. जीव ख्यातं कामान् निर्मितः संकीत्यी। स्वर्ग विकृत्य स्वर्ग
विनिमृय सैनं मासा क्योतिः तु प्रकाशिति '। भू ५ ३ ५। हदि


English Translation by Hume Robert Ernest.
'The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads; P.134,
fifth impression (1962), Oxford University Press.
It seems that this problem of creation and its creator was immaterial for Śaṅkara, rather for all idealistic philosophy. Śaṅkara's main concern was to establish the Non-dual Brahman as the Ultimate Reality and everything else as unreal. Once this point is established, the question of giving a plausible explanation for the world of appearance and its diversity arises. We can find no clear hint in respect of this from the writings of Śaṅkara. Afterwards, Śaṅkara's followers framed theories for the explanation of the world of appearance and the multiplicities of the jīvas, which we shall discuss in later chapters.

It would not be out of place to mention that Gauḍapāda has also not clearly stated as to who is responsible for the creation. He has stated that at first the jīva is imagined and then this phenomenal world is imagined.¹ But by whom? Whether it is imagined by the Supreme Self or by an individual Soul? This point is not clearly mentioned. It seems that it was

¹. जीवं कल्याणः पूर्वं तत् पावान्मूच्यामिन्यात् ।

- G.K. II 16(ab)
immaterial for Gauḍapāda also, as he emphasized the theory of non-origination (ajātivāda).

While discussing about the dreaming and the waking state, Gauḍapāda has compared them and has put them on the same footing. On the other hand, Śaṅkara clearly distinguished both the states while refuting subjective Idealism. In the dreaming state, an individual soul creates the things by imagination, which again vanish away while waking. On the other hand, in the waking state one perceives things which are actually there before its perceiver and do not vanish away. Śaṅkara has stated that the things of the dreaming state are negated by the waking state, "I wrongly thought that I had a meeting with a great man, no such meeting took place, but my mind was dulled by slumber, and so the false idea arose"... but the thing viz. pillar etc. of which we are conscious in the waking state are never

1. न स्नप्नार्थित्यवज्ज्यामुन्मूर्त्यं मातुमृहिन्ति: ।
   ..... वैषयः हि मृति स्नप्नागहितिम्: ।

   - Br.Śū.Śā.Bhā. II 2-29.
negated in any state. Furtheron, while the dreaming state is a reminiscence, the waking state is an experience.

Sāṅkara thus seems to hold that the dreaming world is constructed by the jīva; but the objective world is a construction of God. While discussing the Devayāna path and the position of the soul on its way towards liberation, Sāṅkara has stated that the soul enjoys all the powers except of the creation of the world, which proves that the objective world is created by God.

1. **Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā.** II 2-29.
2. **Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā.** II 2-29.
3. **Br.Śū.Śā. Bhā.** IV 4-17.
Hence it can be stated that both individual superimposition as well as cosmic superimposition play an important role in the world construction. We can state in later terminology that the dreaming state is a production of an individual superimposition (vyāstī Avidyā) and the waking state is a production of cosmic superimposition (samaśī Avidyā).

**Locus (Āśraya) of Avidyā:**

Whether Śaṅkara regards the jīva as the locus (Āśraya) of Avidyā, or Brahman as the locus is the main query with which we are concerned. In the Bṛāhma-śūtra Śaṅkara Bhāṣya we do not find this point emphasized clearly. Śaṅkara has not specifically stated whether the jīva or Brahman is the locus of Avidyā. It seems that Śaṅkara is not much worried about the problem of Avidyā. This problem has been taken up by Maṇḍana Miśra and later Śaṅkaraites. Nevertheless, Śaṅkara considers Avidyā to be a cosmic power responsible for this objective world as well as for the individual souls; for without Avidyā playing its part multiplicity could not have been experienced.
At one or two places Śaṅkara has touched this problem.

In his commentary on the Brahma-sūtra IV - 1-3 Śaṅkara has imagined a questioner asking, "To whom does Avidyā belong?" Śaṅkara replies, "It belongs to you, who are asking such a question." The questioner replies that the scriptures declare that the individual self is identical with the Supreme self. Śaṅkara says, "Then you are enlightened. Ignorance does not belong to any one."¹

Śaṅkara seems to consider Brahman as the locus of Avidyā. It can not be said that Brahman which is knowledge in itself is opposed to Avidyā, as Avidyā itself is illuminated by Brahman. And Avidyā is opposed to right knowledge but not to Brahman of the nature of pure knowledge or sentience. Hence Avidyā acts owing to its illumination by Brahman.

Now another question may arise that if Avidyā is illuminated by Brahman, then whether it is its power or its very nature or something else. In the Brahma-

¹ Br.Sū.Śā. Bhā. IV 1-3.
Siddhi this very same inquiry is put forth.¹

But Saṅkara is not interested in discussing such questions, for as a matter of fact, Avidyā does not exist at all! According to Saṅkara, Avidyā is unreal, for otherwise it could not be destroyed by knowledge.

Nevertheless, Saṅkara has at times indicated that Brahman is the locus of Avidyā. In his commentary on the Brahma-sūtra I-4-3; he has stated that casual potentiality is of the nature of Nescience, it is rightly denoted by the term 'undeveloped'; it has the highest lord for its substratum...² Thus Saṅkara seems to hold Brahman as the locus of Avidyā.

As stated already, when Avidyā itself is admitted as unreal, there was no need for discussing whether

¹ नाविन्द्र क्लमं: समावः, नात्मन्तिकपु, नात्मन्तमस्ती, नापि सती।
- Brahma Siddhi - Brahma Kānda. प-९.

² विषया स्पिका ति कै ज्ञातिकिर्याकिल्पनिन्दिष्टा परमेश्वराभ्या मयामयो यथासुपितः।...
- Br.Śū.Śā.Bha. I 4-3.

English translation by Thibaut George
'The Vedanta Sūtras' Part-1, P.243, (1962)
Motilal Banarasidass.
Brahman or the jīva is the locus of avidyā. After Śaṅkara, his followers started a serious inquiry into this as they felt that for communication with rival thinkers a rational and exact theory would have to be put forth in respect of such problems.

This problem of locus and object of avidyā aroused much thinking amongst the Śaṅkaraites. Some hold Brahman as the locus of avidyā and through it the theory of drṣṭi-drṣṭi developed. On the other hand, the drṣṭi-drṣṭi-vāda evolved gradually when Śaṅkara's followers put forth the problem of the locus of avidyā and especially when they regarded the jīva as the locus of avidyā and even cancelled the God-entity!

Conclusion:

Summing up, we may conclude that it is Absolute Idealism that is revealed in Śaṅkara's philosophical writings.

Śaṅkara seems to be against subjective Idealism, which strongly denounces the objective reality of this world of appearance. On the other hand Śaṅkara's philosophy puts forth Absolutism, which admits only Brahman as the eternal, unchanging, sentient ultimate
Reality. Since everything is Brahman, that is to say, since Brahman pervades everywhere, there remains nothing to negate. Of course, Śaṅkara holds everything unreal (mithyā), independently of Brahman.

Thus, we do not find any expression that could clearly support the Drṣṭi-sṛṣṭivāda. Of course, we may find hints, which indicate that Śaṅkara would have supported the Sṛṣṭi-drṣṭivāda if he was asked to pinpoint the issue.