The concept of Appearance arises as a natural consequence of our enquiry into the concept of ultimate Reality. Ultimate reality means generally the primary form of being or the first principle from which this universe of name and form originates. It is a search for the first principle of this universe. In the history of philosophy, whether in east or in west, we find various attempts to explain this first principle or ultimate reality, such as monism, dualism and pluralism, where attempts are made to explain the ultimate reality as one or two or many. In India, the different systems of philosophy explain the concept differently. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika explain the universe due to some Padārthas and they thus have given a pluralistic explanation of the world. Similarly, the Sāṃkhya-Yoga gives a dualistic explanation as according to them the ultimate stuff is of two, i.e. Puruṣa and Prakṛti. As different from them the Advaita vedāntins like Śaṅkara and his followers and the Visistadvaitavādins like Rāmānuja and others believe Brahman to be the only reality. Thus the Advaita concept of ultimate reality in a sense is in all ways ‘is’ which is uncaused, which undergoes no change and is not dependent on anything. Thus the Vedāntins identified reality with ‘Being’ which is beyond time and space, beyond cause and effect, beyond all distinctions- external and internal.

Now, if reality be pure being, one without a second (Ekaṁ eva advitiyam) then what is the status of the world appearance? Is it a mere appearance without being, a shadow without substance? Surely not. Vedānta
is not like nihilist. Vedānta never view the world as a non-entity. Rather it
cannot without the void doctrine (Sunyavadā) of Nāgārjuna as it is evident in our
study. The aim of Vedānta is therefore, not to prove the unreality of the objective
world, but to maintain the supreme reality i.e. Brahman, underlying the world.

Behind the world appearance, thus there is faint gleam of Brahman everywhere.
Thus in every case of appearance, there always arises the question as to
‘appearance of what’? Thus it is evident that the study of the concept of
appearance is always the study of Reality in the strict sense of the term. For it
is the Real, that makes its appearance. It is for this reason, the notion of
appearance is not different from the notion of reality.

Another question is therefore, regarding the problem of the relation
between appearance and reality, i.e. how the world appearance is related to
the ultimate reality i.e. Brahman. In our ordinary life, we see that appearance is
quite different from reality. A stick appears as bent when emerged in half a
glass of water. But the fact is that it is the same straight stick which is
misconceived by us as bent. In our empirical life, the world appearance is quite
different from Brahman. But in the ultimate analysis, the notion of appearance
and reality are not two distinct entity. Appearance is the superficial or surface
aspect of reality and reality is the content of appearance. In the order of existence
reality is the first, but in the order of knowledge, appearance is the first. That
means we can not know the Reality as it is, we are to know it as it appears to
our senses.

Thus reality and appearances are not two distinct entity but are only
two stages or aspects. Again the relation between the appearance and reality
is of one-sided dependence i.e. the real can exist without the appearance, but
the appearance can not exist without the real. Brahman, the Reality, can exist
as it is, i.e. without being the world appearance. But the world appearance can
not exist without Brahman, just like the rope-snake illusion the snake can not
exist without the rope, but the rope can exist in itself without appearing as
snake. So also with the case of the world appearance. The world appearance
is always dependant on Brahman as its support and a study of the world
appearance is therefore the study of Brahman itself. Therefore it can be said
that Śaṅkara is really a Brahmvādin, though he is closely associated with his
Māyāvāda. Thus his Māyāvāda is only another name of his Advaitavāda as his
Māyāvāda is a necessary corollary of his Brahmvāda.

Śaṅkara is the greatest original thinker that India has ever produced
with so much achievement in Hindu philosophy and religion. Among the various
Indian systems, it is the Advaita vedānta of Śaṅkara that lays systematic
emphasis on the concept of non-duality of ultimate reality.

It would be a mistake to suppose that Śaṅkara was the first to
propound the view of Advaita vedānta and hence a founder of the system.
Śaṅkara, himself, prefers to call himself as Aupaniṣada, thus disclaiming any
originality for his thought. Thus his attitude of honour towards scriptures is the
characteristics mark of his greatness which is the significant mark of ancient
Indian thinkers.

Let us first summarise our whole thesis in brief. The whole work is
divided into seven chapters. The first one is the Introduction, where attempt
has been made to introduce the Vedānta philosophy in its proper perspective.
Vedānta includes all the three Prasthānas, i.e. the Upaniṣads, the Bhāgavadgītā, the Brahmasutra and also their commentaries which are helpful in the study of Brahman. Though there are other advocates of Advaita vedānta like Yājñavalkya, Gauḍapāda etc but it is Śaṅkara who has successfully developed the philosophy of Advaita in a totally new design upon the material supplied by our store house of ancient literature.

In our discussion, we have made a comparative study of Śaṅkara with Bradley, an eminent western philosopher, with whom we find much affinities as well as diversities. Of course there is no question of Śaṅkara being influenced by Bradley. Rather there is every possibility of Bradley being influenced by Advaitavāda of Śaṅkara. Another important comparision is made between Śaṅkara and Buddhism, specially the Sunyavāda of Nāgārjuna. And we have found that there is no borrowal but only an indirect influence of Buddhism through Gauḍapāda, the great grand teacher of Śaṅkara, as Gauḍapāda is highly influenced by the technique and method of Buddhism.

Thus in the First Chapter, I have tried to introduce Śaṅkara’s philosophy along with its importance in the philosophical map of India. And it becomes clear that Śaṅkara’s advent in India is a necessity of time to save the humanity and to reestablish the Indian culture and civilization on its firm footing.

In the Second Chapter, I have made a historical note of Advaita vedānta in details. An elaborate discussion about Rg veda, the three Prasthānas, i.e. the Upaniṣads, the Brahmasutra and the Bhāgavadgītā and also the philosophy of Gauḍapāda is made in details. And from all these discussions it becomes clear that Śaṅkara is not the originator of Advaitavāda He is only
expounding the voice of his ancestors. Another important point is that though Śaṅkara is not the founder of the system, yet he is not the blind follower of the upaniṣadic thought, rather he reformulated the Advaita vedānta in a new form under the guideline of our ancient scriptures. In my discussion, attempt have been made to highlight the concept of Brahman, the world appearance, the doctrine of māyā etc in the various scriptures such as the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Bhāgavadgītā, the Brahmaṇasūtra and also the philosophy of Gauḍapāda as all these are the influential factor to mould the philosophy of Śaṅkara.

In the Third Chapter, I have tried to explain the nature of the world appearance. This chapter is divided into three parts. As behind the world appearance, there is the ultimate reality as its background i.e. the Brahman, so in the first part I have tried to explain the concept of Brahman. Brahman in Himself is Svarupa lakṣana which can be grasped by only those rare few who have attained the state of Brahmanubhava. And Brahman when viewed from empirical point is Tatattva lakṣana. It is otherwise known as Nirguṇa Brahman and Saguṇa Brahman. Both Saguṇa and Nirguṇa Brahman are not two different entities. The same Brahman is Nirguṇa from transcendental point and Saguṇa from empirical point of view. Saguṇa Brahman is the theistic God which satisfied the religious attitudes of man.

In the second part i.e. the concept of adhyāsa, helps us to explain how Brahman appears as the world appearance. Adhyāsa is that knowledge when there is the superimposition of self on the not-self and not-self on the self. Śaṅkara explains how due to adhyāsa, the world is imposed on Brahman. It is just like the imposition of a snake on a rope where it is not. Thus Śaṅkara
introduces the concept of adhyāśa by which he solved the problem that it is
due to adhyāśa that the world appears in place of Brahman and this adhyāśa
or ignorance about the real nature of the self is very natural to every human
being. And Śaṅkara has very successfully explained this in his ‘Adhyāśabhāsyā’,
which is a very special contribution of Śaṅkara towards Advaita philosophy.

In the third part, I have explained the doctrine of Māyā, which is also
a unique contribution of Śaṅkara. Though Śaṅkara is not the originator of the
concept of māyā, he has developed it under the influence of the three
Prasthānas. Through the concept of māyā, Śaṅkara has successfully explained
the relation between the real and the unreal, i.e. between Brahman and the
world. Thus the world is neither identical to Brahman, nor different from Brahman,
and nor both identical and different from Brahman which is self-contradictory. It
is hence anirvacaniya. And through the doctrine of māyā how Śaṅkara explains
the world appearance as anirvacaniya (indescribable), is made clear throughout
our study of māyā.

In the Fourth Chapter I have made an elaborate discussion about
the various theories of error. Error is a form of invalid cognition, where one
thing is cognised not 'as it is' but as otherwise. Thus in the case of 'rope-snake'
illusion rope is perceived not as a rope but as a snake. The distinctive feature
of rope is missed here due to some defect in the sense-organ or due to some
particular situation which arises there on. This is the generally accepted view of
error.

In Indian philosophy, there arises various explanation of error known
as 'khyāti', where discussion is made on two basic points. One is that error is
the cognition of the unreal as real and the other is that error is the cognition of the real as unreal. And after a careful study of various theories, we find that according to Śaṅkara, error arises due to the superimposition of something on another thing, i.e. in every case of error, there is something real as its substrate. There can not be any appearance without a content. In every case of appearance there arises always the question as to 'appearance of what'. Thus behind the erroneous knowledge of snake there is the rope. Behind the world appearance there is the Brahman as its content.

Śaṅkara uses the term 'anirvacaniya' to explain the world appearance. It is a fact that the world appearance is a false knowledge or erroneous knowledge. But it is erroneous or unreal only when man attains Brahmajñāna which is possible only in the pāramārthika level, otherwise it is a fact of experience in the vyavahārika level, which we experience in life. So it is regarded as anirvacaniya in Advaita philosophy. Thus "anirvacaniya khyāti" accommodates all the rival theories of error as real or unreal in its doctrine.

In the Fifth Chapter, I have tried to clarify about what is the real status of the world appearance. As Brahman is the only reality, then what is the position of the world creation? There must be sufficient explanation of world appearance which we can not deny. So in this chapter I have first explained the concept of world creation and found that Nirguṇa Brahman by Itself is not the cause of the world. It is the Saguna Brahman who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of this world. In order to clarify the relation between Brahman and the world I have discussed about the causation theory and showed that Śaṅkara has accepted the parināmavāda to explain the world creation from the
vyavahārika point of view and that the world is a real creation of God. But in the ultimate analysis there is only vivartavāda which implies that Brahman appears as the world due to ignorance; just like rope appears snake due to darkness or in dim light. Thus both parināmavāda and vivartavāda are accommodated in Śaṅkara in order to explain the world causality without any contradiction.

The real status of the world is explained by Śaṅkara with the help of his 'level of existence'. Thus from the pāramārthika level there is only one Brahman and no question of world appearance. But in the vyavahārika level Brahman is viewed as the creator of this world and this world is a real one which we experience in life. Hence Śaṅkara never deny the world appearance as false which the critics often misinterpret. Our world is a real world from our vyavahārika view point. But in the ultimate level or in the pāramārthika level, it is an unreal appearance of Brahman. And this is the actual status of the world appearance.

Śaṅkara often uses the term 'mithyā' to explain the world appearance, a term, which the critics misconceive as 'false or illusion'. And therefore we have made an elaborate discussion regarding the concept of 'jaganmithyā' and showed that actually 'mithyā' implies 'anirvacaniya' (indescribable) i.e. neither real nor unreal, nor both and not in the ordinary sense as false or illusion, for which Śaṅkara's philosophy has been badly criticised by the critics both in the east and also the west. Thus the concept of 'mithyā' has a special implication in Śaṅkara.

Thus in our whole study we have tried to highlight that the real status of world is that it is unreal from the point of view of Brahman, but from our
empirical point of view we are experiencing a real world. The real status is thus designated by Śaṅkara as ‘anirvacaniya or mithyā’ i.e neither real nor unreal nor both.

From our above discussion it becomes evident that the concept of world appearance is designated an esteemed position in Advaita philosophy. The world is indeed, very real and meaningful to us. It is a platform where we are borned, perform activity and are rewarded or punished, according to our law of karma. It is in and through the world that the soul can realise its own nature (Atmajñāna) and attain the highest goal of life (Mokṣa). So our Sixth Chapter highlights the concept of mokṣa, types of mokṣa and the way to self-realisation etc. From the discussion of the various systems we have seen that liberation is not an other-worldly attainment or a new attainment. It is a state of self-realisation. Due to ignorance, the soul identifies itself with its adjuncts or upādhis i.e. the body, mind, senses etc. Thus avidyā or ignorance is just like a veil, which cover the true nature of reality or the self, for which man thinks himself different from Brahman and suffer from bondage and it is the duty of man to remove the veil of ignorance and to realise the truth.

It is an undeniable fact that Śaṅkara is an upholder of Jñānamārga for self-realisation, for which the critics misunderstood him. But it is also a fact that he never denied the importance of the other two paths for self-realisation i.e. the service of action and devotion (karma and bhakti). Jñāna is effective only in the pāramārthika level, but in the vyavahārika level karma and bhakti are indispensable for preparing one for self-realisation. Thus action, devotion, meditation, prayer etc are necessary for the ‘mumukṣu’ i.e one who is longing
Now what type of mukti does Śaṅkara prefer? We have seen, according to Śaṅkara, Mokṣa implies self-realisation. And such a state is attainable here in this very life which is called as 'Jivanamukti'. We have such examples of Jivanamukta in India such as Yajñavalkya, Janaka, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, even in present time Ramakṛṣṇa Paramahāmsa, Swami Vivekānanda, Dayānanda Saraswāti and others. In our discussion we thus tried to show that Jivanamukti is not a mere hypothesis, it is a fact in life, for the attainment of which a strenuous physical, mental, moral and spiritual disciplines are needed to be practiced here in this very life. Actually the Hindu view of life on earth is a life of self-realisation and self-purification. Our social system in ancient time was therefore divided into four 'Āśramas' as Brahmācarya, Gārhaṭhya, Vānapraṣṭha and Sannyāsa and in and through these Āśramas, a well disciplined life fit for self-realisation was prescribed in our Indian culture and civilisation. Thus this world is not at all false or illusory, rather it is a real platform, where man practise physical, mental, moral and spiritual disciplines for self-purification to enable himself for attaining the highest end of life i.e. Mokṣa. And after the attainment of Jivanamukti, the self prepare himself for attaining Videhamukti which is also a long spiritual journey. And an elaborate discussion of the path of Videhamukti is also made in our study.

Now let us discuss some misunderstanding of Śaṅkara's philosophy on some important points and also the possible solutions to ventilate the idea about the problem.

Śaṅkara has been misinterpreted by the ardent followers as the
propounder of Advaita vedanta. It is wrongly called as Śaṅkara’s Advaita
dvēnta. But Śaṅkara is not the founder of the system which is clearly explained
by us. He is only expounding the vedāntic doctrine, which is already contained
in our ancient literature. He himself, humbly admitted his indebtedness to the
teaching of Gauḍapāda and also the Ṛg veda and the Prasthānatraya. He
frequently refers to his exposition as “Aupanisadaṁ sāstraṁ”. Infact no
philosophy start on a vaccum. Whatever original philosopher do is to draw
upon the ideas that are current at the time and put them into systematic form by
drawing out their inter connection. So Śaṅkara’s genius is not to be judged as
the originator of an absolutely new idea, but on showing how the other authentic
human experiences, such as critical, aesthetic, religious, moral and spiritual
etc culminates in his philosophy along with his creative power, which he has
done very successfully in his philosophy.

Śaṅkara, in consistent with Upaniṣads, upholds two sets of Brahman
as Saguṇa and Nirguṇa, which often creates confusion as to what is the real
nature of Brahman. Is Brahman Nirguṇa or qualityless, actionless and
differenceless; or endowed with quality action and difference ie Saguṇa? The
Vaiśṇava vedāntins and others who are the ardent believer of a personal God
are not ready to accept Brahman as Nirguṇa. They accept Brahman as
necessarily endowed with quality, action, etc. For them the upaniṣadic Brahman
centre round the concept of Saguṇa Brahman. But the Advaita Vedāntins have
satisfactorily solved the problem of the two sets of Brahman. He never
subordinated the Saguṇa Brahman and declared to be meaningless, or that
they donot expose the nature of Brahman. The Nirguṇa and the Saguṇa
Brahman are not two different entities. The same Brahman is Nirguna from transcendental point and from the empirical view point it is Saguna Brahman. Nirguna Brahman is to be realised only to those rare few who cross the empirical level of knowlege and renounce all worldly affairs. Thus only the Brahmajñāni can realize the Nirguna Brahman. The concept of Saguna Brahman is not at all an inferior concept as the opponent thinks. Worship of Saguna Brahman is essential for the māyā-bound jīva which paves the way to self-realisation. For the ordinary mortals Saguna upāsanā is the means to realisation of Nirguna Brahman. So the Advaitic concept of Nirguna and Saguna Brahman are compatible to each other and no conflict arises in Śaṅkara's philosophy.

Regarding the doctrine of adhyāsa we can find the various interpretations of modern scholars, which have also led too much misunderstanding among the scholars. Adhyāsa means perceiving a thing in a substrate where it is not. But it should not be confused as illusion, delusion or hallucination. Śaṅkara uses such examples as nacre-silver, rope-snake etc in explaining the concept of adhyāsa which are really the cases of error, creating much misunderstanding. Śaṅkara, uses these examples only as illustrative of a logical standpoint and nothing else. Moreover illusion is always perceptual but adhyāsa is not always perceptual eg. the superimposition of the self on the not-self and vice versa, which are imperceptible. So the doctrine of adhyāsa is a unique contribution of Śaṅkara to explain the problem as to how the world appears at all; and what is the relation between Brahman and the world.

Śaṅkara introduces the concept of māyā as an explanation of the physical world. This term does not have any fixed and unalterable meaning in
the history of Indian thought. Due to its unfixed meaning Śaṅkara’s doctrine of māyā has been misunderstood and wrongly interpreted by the critics both in west and even in east. Śaṅkara has introduced the doctrine of māyā after a careful and thorough study of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, and the Bhāgavadgītā Brahmasutra and the Māndukya-kārika of Gauḍapāda, by retaining all the important characteristics of the upaniṣadic thought. Śaṅkara introduced the doctrine of māyā to reconcile the upaniṣadic statement about creation and to explain the nature of the universe. Māyā as the power of Brahman is inseparable from him, just as burning power of fire is inseparable from fire itself. When Śaṅkara says that māyā is indeterminable, he only means that it is not possible to determine the nature of māyā in terms of any human category. For, in Śaṅkara’s philosophy ‘real’ means the ‘absolutely real’ and ‘unreal’ means the ‘absolutely unreal’ and māyā can not come under these two extremes, hence it is indeterminable.

Māyā is composed of three gunas as sattva, raja and tama which also creates confusion as to whether māyā is used in the sense of prakṛti of Sāṁkhya. But Śaṅkara never equated māyā with prakṛti. Prakṛti is an independent category or ultimate reality in Sāṁkhya, where as māyā is purely subordinate to Brahman as its power.

Another confusion raised by the critics regarding the two terms- māyā and avidyā is that whether they are used in the same sense or different from each other. And through our discussions we have made it clear that for Śaṅkara māyā and avidyā are one;’ their only difference is in consideration of them from different point of view. From the subjective side, it is called avidyā, since it is
removed by vidyā. From the objective side it is called māyā coeternal with Īśvara. Thus Śaṅkara uses māyā, avidyā, ajñāna etc in the same sense.

Some critics have tried to equate Māyāvāda with Sunyavāda of the Mādhyamikas. But it is not correct. There is a marked difference between sunya and māyā. The sunya has a double significance. It means the relative reality or unreality of the world and its own reality. Though the Sunyavādins do not assert that the sunya exists, yet it is their paramārthasatya or ultimate Reality. The word māyā, on the other hand, though it means the unreality or contradictoriness of the world, does not mean its own unreality. Thus for the Advaitins to say that 'the world is māyā' does not imply that māyā is the ultimate truth. It only means that the world is full of contradiction. But for the sunyavādins to say that 'the world is sunya' implies that sunya is the final truth, for sunya is the essesnce of the world. The position of the Sunyavadin is that the world is full of contradiction and therefore sunya. Thus though both māyā and sunya are used to explain the relativity of the world, yet sunya is used as the ultimate relativity of the Mādhyamikas, whereas māyā is not the ultimate truth for the Advaitins. Hence it is evident that on the basis of the similarity of definition as anirvacaniya both can not be equated.

The exact nature of the world appearance can be understood best in his concept of anirvacaniyakhyāti. As we know error or khyāti is that, where something is presented not "as it is" but as "otherwise". In consistent with this concept, Śaṅkara viewed that the world appearance as anirvacaniya, which is a case of error of judgement. But here also confusion arises as to the exact meaning of the term "anirvacaniya". Generally anirvacaniya means unutterable
unspeakable or indeterminable etc. In this sense, the barren woman’s son, square circle etc. are anirvacaniya, as these are indescribable. But Śaṅkara never used the term in this sense. For him real is what is absolutely real and unreal means what is absolutely unreal. And the world appearance is neither absolutely real, nor absolutely unreal, nor both real and unreal and hence indescribable i.e. anirvacaniya.

Though Śaṅkara’s name is associated with the vivarta view of causality we have seen that he is an advocate of both parināmavāda and vivartavāda. The world according to him, is a transformation (parininma) of Īśvara’s māyā, but it is also an appearance (vivarta) of Brahman. Now the question is how the world creation as both parināma and vivarta is compatible with Advaitic doctrine? But in Śaṅkara’s philosophy it is not at all a problem. For parināma ad vivarta if taken separately are dogmatic and one-sided. Again both the theories are not applicable at the same time to the world causality. The correct view is that from the phenomenal point of view, the world causality is parināma i.e. the world is a real creation of God and from the ontological point of view, the world is a vivarta i.e. the world is the unreal appearance of Brahman, which is due to māya.

Śaṅkara explains the real status of the world with the analogy of three level of existence. They are the prātibhāsika, the vyavahārika and the pāramārthika level. The world appearance has only a relative reality i.e. the vyavahārika level of existence, as different from pāramārthika level, which is the level of ultimate reality and also the prātibhasika level which is absolutely non-existent like sky-flower, barren women’s child etc.
The recognition of these three level of existence is purely based on the value, nature, standard and empirical order of phenomenal world, in response to an evaluating scale. In this scale, the highest value is no doubt the eternal existence, which is pure consciousness and unalloyed bliss i.e. Brahman. But in the lower level of existence, value persists in varying degree, attributing to empirical entities in their substratum. Thus in the scale of value, the absolute value is the pāramārthika sattā i.e. Brahman and there are innumerable grades of empirical values starting from the illusory manifestation like shell-silver which are of prātībhāṣika sattā to the higher level like the world appearance which is of vyavahārika Sattā. Thus in Śaṅkara's philosophy, nothing is absolutely unreal, everything of this world has taken part in the concept of ultimate reality, and this is the point of his objective idealism as different from the subjective idealism of Viśiṣṭādvaita.

In explaining the concept of mokṣa Śaṅkara has beautifully explained the concept of bondage as the encirclement of the self by the not-self, which is due to avidyā. Thus the self is covered by the five layers or kośās. These are the annamayakośa, pānāmayakośa, manomayakośa, viññānamayakośa and the ānandamayakośa. It is very difficult for the self to overcome this false knowledge and to get free himself from these kosas, except those rare few who attain Brahmavāda.

It is a fact that Nirguṇa Brahman can be attained only through jñānamārga, but we can not ignore the fact that Śaṅkara accepts the vyavahārika level which Śaṅkara gives a high status for self-realisation and self-purification, Thus the vyavahārika level i.e. the world appearance is very meaningful for
self-realisation and actions, devotions, meditation etc. are effective in destroying ignorance and to prepare oneself for self realisation.

Advaita vedāntin advocates the two types of liberation or mukti-Jivanamukti or liberation while still alive and Videhamukti or disembodied liberation. The concept of Jivanamukti of Advaitin has been seriously attacked by the opponents, specially the Dvaita vedāntins. For the Dvaita vedāntins mokṣa means oneness with Brahman, which is possible only in disembodied state i.e. after death. But for the Advaitins mokṣa is self-realisation and such state can be attained, while still living on earth. So the concept of Jivanamukti is not at all a mere hypothesis, rather it is a fact in life as we can trace the example of such a yogi like Buddha, Mahāvira, Rāmakriśṇa paramahamsa, Vivekānanda, Dayānanda Saraswati etc.

Another charge is that Śaṅkara’s Philosophy instigates man towards inactivity that Śaṅkara was against karmas of all kinds, and this has made the people lazy and averse to all useful activities. But we can not support this view, and in order to make the point clear, we are to observe the historical situation of his time. That Buddhism which had ruled the country over a thousand years, had horribly degenerated. The decadent form of Buddhism had given rise to many diabolic practices in the name of religion. Again, the Mimāṃsakas like Prabhākara, Kumarila Bhatta and Mandana Misra were trying to revive the Vedic religion by resuming the ceremonials of the Karma-Kāṇḍa. Infact, over emphasis on Vedic rituals was responsible for the innovation of Buddhism and Jainism. The upanisadic concept of Jñāna-mārga was also ignored by these thinkers. The mistakes committed in the pre-Buddhistic period were about to
be repeated. It was at this juncture that Śaṅkara appeared in India. While establishing the Advaita vedānta on the firm footing of the Upaniṣads, he also took extraordinary pain to establish that one should not plunge into Karma Kāṇḍa. Karma can not be the goal of life. Here by karma, he meant the ritualism of the vedic Karma Kāṇḍa, and not work in general. Otherwise, if he believed in no-work culture then how can we justify the tremendous volume of works done by him within a short period of his life. Even he travelled the length and breath of the land twice, established the four monasteries in the four corner of India. He got renovated and rededicated many temples in India and arranged for their maintenance on a permanent basis. Hence the criticism that he was responsible for the passivity of the people is totally inapplicable. In none of his teaching Śaṅkara does encourage an inactive life- a life indifferent to duties and responsibilities of our phenomenal existence. A life of inaction and Tāmasikā indifference is a formidable obstacle to the realisation of the true self. Śaṅkara's teaching to humility is really the encouragement for acquisition of knowledge, the performance of duties, the ennoblement of character, the cultivation of love, sympathy, fellow-feeling, service and sacrifice towards humanity. Karma is the earnest performance of duties according to one's capacity and station in life as taught by Śaṅkara in the Varnāśramadharma, as the necessary preparation for self-realisation. Again the state of Jivanamukta is a beautiful example of a Karmajogi which is sufficient enough to prove that Śaṅkara is not an upholder of inactivity.

Another interesting criticism is that Śaṅkara's philosophy teaches ascetism and disassociates a man from society. That Śaṅkara has doing
everything for Sannyācism and nothing for the house-holders. Now what had he done for the Sannyāsins? Śaṅkara instructed vairāgya and tyāga (renunciation), sama and dama (control of the mind and the senses) and through sādhana for the attainment of the highest knowledge. He prescribes all these practices as prerequisites for Brahmajñāna. Since these practices are not possible for the house-holders, he hold that Sannyāsa (total renunciation) is a pre-requisite for Brahmajñāna. But Śaṅkara is not quite indifferent to household life, as he has so much to speak towards vyavahārika level. What the Advaitins aim is actually not escaptism from the society, but the obliteration of the desires and passion which stand as a mighty hindrance for the free growth of the spirit. The social life is not lost sight of. A socially disciplined life in accordance to the ideal of Varnāśramadharma is the precious advice of Śaṅkara towards the man on earth, as has already been explained in our VIth chapter. Such a Yogi, who have nothing to do for his personal interest, spent his life for the conservation of the social order (loka-saṁgraha). Thus the perfect man lives and dies not for himself, but for mankind. Thus ‘Śaṅkara asks us to be in the world, but not of it even as a drop of water is on the lotus leaf, without getting mixed up with it’. Thus a true and perfect man live amidst the society and do not flee from the society or from life, Śaṅkara’s advice towards the house-holders are not to plunge into the family life but to encourge cittasuddhi (purification of the mind) through the performance of Niskāma-Karma (selfless action) and thus become eligible for true jñāna. And we should not forget that almost all the work he did, was for the use of house-holders and not for the sannyāsin. So we can not support the view that his philosophy benifited only the Sannyāsins and not the house-holders.
Another charge is that Śaṅkara has declared jñāna to be the final means of liberation, and that bhakti and karma have only a secondary place as means of liberation. If it is granted that liberation in Śaṅkara is due to the very idea of one’s true nature, then it must follow that jñāna which dispels that wrong idea is the only effective means to get rid of that bondage. This path of knowledge is not open to all, but only to those selected few who endeavour to it in the prescribed way. Thus liberation can be attained only through Jñānamārga. But the importance of karma and bhakti is not denied by Śaṅkara which Śaṅkara gives a high status for self-purification or preparation for self-realisation. The preliminaries to the attainment of such knowledge are a mind purified by the sanskāras of karma and well informed by the instruction imparted by a competent Guru. One has to acquire the grace of God and come near to God by intense devotion to Him. Again the performance of niskāma-karma meditation, etc. are effective in destroying ignorance and to prepare oneself for self-realisation. Thus in the spiritual journey to liberation, karma and bhakti are not useless, they are also equally important for the purification of mind.

The Bhakti school of the middle ages severely criticised Śaṅkara’s view on God, soul and the world. They made religion more emotional than intellectual. They have thus contributed much towards the national culture of India. But none could dislodge Śaṅkara from his unique position as the thought leader of India. Śaṅkara by emphasizing the impersonal or superpersonal character of the absolute has really supplies all the religious systems with a philosophical basis and brought out unity and harmony among them all. The concept of personal God which is applied by different religions in their own
point of view, creates a diversity of opinion among the religious sects and alienates the sects from one another. It is these differences which is the main source of bigotry, fanaticism, narrowness of outlook and bitter antagonism among the followers of particular religious communities. It is the main reason why there arises disturbances in human society, opinions differ among the religionists and many irreligious acts prevail in the society in the name of religion and God. Śaṅkara, like other religious preachers, did not found any particular religious sect. Rather he is honoured by history as the founder of universal religion of India which is the massage imparted by Swami Vivekananda towards the world:

Another charge is that there is no place of God in Advaita vedânta. God is relegated to an inferior place in the conception of Nirguna Brahman and therefore, the system can not satisfy the urge of religion. Religion in order to be dynamic and vigorous and to play an important part in our life, needs the cultivation of a sincere and earnest faith in, and a deep and sincere love, admiration and reverence for a personal God- a God whom we regard as the sole source of all phenomenal existence, to whom we are under absolute obligation for the performance of our all types of duties and with whom we aspire for personal intercourse. In the absence of the belief in such a Divine personality, no sincere love, admiration, awe, reverence for God, no deep sense of obligation to Him, no genuine consciousness of supreme Being are possible. It is due to sense of duty to God, that all our activities to the higher spiritual plane are regulated. All our domestic, social and political duties as well as all our acts of charity, sympathy and kindness are converted into religious duties. Thus love and devotion to the God guides and regulates and refines and sublimes all our activities whether physical or mental.
It is a fact that Śaṅkara’s Advaitavāda taught that Brahman is impersonal and attributeless (Nirguṇa) and who is formless, nameless, qualityless and actionless etc. As such, it can not perform the creation etc of the world which are associated with the theistic conception of God. Thus God is relegated to a secondary status and is viewed through vyavāharika point of view. Thus religion has given a secondary status in Śaṅkara’s Advaitavāda. But the question is can such a lower type God be the basis of any dynamic and effective religion?

For Śaṅkara, the ordinary mortal, who could neither conceive nor realise Brahman in its Nirguṇa essence, God or Saguṇa Brahman is the highest object of meditation and devotion. The devotee or the believer in Advaita vedānta who have not acquired Advaitic anubhava, are in the favour of his devotion or in the intensity of his religious practices. Religion and the God of religion are vary real and ultimate to him who is not yet a Brahmavit. There is no question of inferior God or any comparative estimate of highest principle in that level. Śaṅkara himself establishes ‘mathas’, a place of God worship, in different sacred spots of our land, reestablished and purified the six ways of worship in the supreme God and composed hymns in praise of God and Goddess. So the question of anti-religious is null and void in Śaṅkara’s Advaitavāda.

The most dangerous criticism against Śaṅkara’s Advaitavāda is his concept of ‘Jaganmīthya’, which is misconceived by the critics as that the world is false or illusion. If the world is false, then all our striving for power, prosperity and happiness in the life, all our evdeavour of nature are due to our ignorance and hence meaningless. All our activities are then born of ignorance. A truely
wise man, who has learnt to look upon the world in its reality, will abstain from doing all kinds of activities, whether physical or intellectual. Thus the activities and achievements of man which are honoured by society as the best performance for the benefit of humanity upon which the progress of our national character depends, upon which the advancement of our social, political and economic interest depends, are seems to be altogether unworthy or useless to the man of true wisdom and knowledge.

Now what does Śaṅkara mean by his doctrine of falsity of the world? In our whole discussion, we have made it clear that Śaṅkara no where assigns any subjective validity of the world. The world of our experience is as real as the personal God, they are governed by the physical, moral and spiritual laws of the omnipotent and omniscient Lord. The illusoriness of the world does not mean the non-existence, but a non-self-existence, their relative contingent dependent, non-eternal existence. Brahman alone is self-existent, the world is 'Mithyā' which means relatively real or unreal i.e. anirvacaniya, a case which is already made clear by us. Hence the ultimate mission of every human being is to discover Brahman in himself, to know Brahman behind the world appearance.

Critics have often remarked that Ethics can have no legitimate place in the Advaita system of philosophy. Since Brahman is the only reality, so all distinctions including the distinction between right and wrong, good and bad are meaningless. But this objection is also baseless as it is pointed out by the Advaitins that the validity of moral distinctions are accepted from the empirical point of view. As Mokṣa is the highest end of human life, so the highest importance is attached to the realiation of Brahman in one's very life.
contribution of moral activity to the path of self-realisation is never denied in Advaita. For a spiritual aspirant, the practice of moral law is essential for purification of body and mind. So Advaita Vedântins are not against moral or ethical disciplines. In our VIth chapter we have clearly explained the Advaitic scheme of ethical disciplines, where special importance is given in the practice of ‘Sâdhana Catustaya’ which is undoubtedly the path of moral discipline.

The gist of the Advaitic ethics is contained in the two ways, viz: self-denial and love. The ethical ideal of the Advaita is not confined to mere peaceful coexistence but extends to the realisation of the one identical truth in all. The Advaita has the message of Universal love for the discordant humanity on social and political levels. It is hoped that the ethical appeal of the Advaita will elicit a fruitful response from the contemporary mind.

Now regarding the problem of relation between Brahman and the world, the real solution is that for Śaṅkara it is not at all a problem. For him Brahman is neither an aggregate of appearance, nor their fused unity or harmony. It is really a matter of shifting of our consciousness or attitude. When we realise Brahman, the multiplicity of the world is not experienced. When we are world-conscious, we do not experience Brahman as such. Brahman-consciousness and world-consciousness are two orders of experience of the same reality. It is just like the child who behaves the hundred rupees note like an ordinary paper. But when the child realises its value, his behaviour will be totally changed. When man realises Brahman he will no longer evaluate the world to be of any importance, his attitude will be totally changed.
Thus the problem of one and many, which is very difficult to understand, is solved by Śaṅkara very easily. According to Śaṅkara many or the multiple appearances are ontologically non-different from One i.e. Brahman. The multiple universe is superimposed on Brahman which cease to be when ignorance is removed. Thus an appearance differ from Brahman only in name and form and not in being ontologically separate from Brahman. Thus the unity of Brahman remains unaffected by the multiplicity of appearances. The illustration of 'ocean and the wave' etc is sufficient to explain the position. The analogy of 'rope-snake', 'shell-silver' etc which are so often used by Śaṅkara to explain world-appearance, are responsible to certain extent, to create misunderstanding that the world is an illusion, by overlooking his other examples like 'gold and golden ornaments', 'clay and pot' etc. But the world is not illusory in the sense in which 'rope-snake' illusion is meant. So such expressions are to be accepted by us only as a manner of expression and nothing else.

Another important point is that the term Māyā has been translated into English as 'illusion' for which the critics ascribe the classical Advaitic thinkers as world-negating, pessimistic and unproductive, for which Śaṅkara's philosophy of appearance is misunderstood as 'the world is illusion' or 'the world is false'. Such misconception is responsible for our attempt to translate the Sanskrit terms into English, which does not reflect the appropriate meaning of the term. Such type of translation often creates confusion and misunderstanding, that instead of solving the problem, they give rise to confusion and queries. So it is safe to view an Indian problem from the original point of view as used in Sanskrit words and not to view it from Western point of view by making use of
Our lack of interest and also the lack of proper study in Sanskrit language is also responsible for which we are going away from our original texts which are written in Sanskrit language, that contributes our deficit of knowledge in understanding Śaṅkara's philosophy in its proper perspective.

The most important point to be noted is that whether the world is real or not is a very misleading question. The vital question should be that to whom the world is real, phenomenal or illusory? We may refer here beautiful verse from Pañcadasī as,

\[
\begin{align*}
&Tucchānirvacaniya ca \\
vāstavi cetyasau tridhā; \\
Jñeya māyā tribhirbodhaiḥ \\
srautayauktikalaukikaiḥ
\end{align*}
\]

Meaning, “The man in the street deems the world of avidyā real indeed, it alone as real; the intellectualist accounts it as neither real nor unreal, the man of spiritual insight discards it as naught or tucchā".3

So the question of the worlds being real or unreal is one of evaluation or axiology, and that its answer is altogether relative to the spiritual insight of the individual concerned.

Śaṅkara is, no doubt, the greatest thinker, that India has ever produced, who have contributed a lot towards philosophical history of India. One of the important contribution of Śaṅkara is his doctrine of Maya, which he introduces to solve the problem of one and many. Though various philosophers before Śaṅkara have tried to explain the relation between Reality and world creation, it is only Śaṅkara who with the introduction of the doctrine of maya.
have answered the question of the relation between Brahman and the world satisfactorily.

Another important contribution of Śaṅkara is his doctrine of Mokṣa or liberation. The Upaniṣads no doubt, declare that the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman itself. But it is Śaṅkara, who has given a strict metaphysical definition of mokṣa as consisting in the destruction or removal of avidyā or ignorance (Avidyānivṛtti). This definition of mokṣa directly leads to the doctrine of Jivanamukti and Śaṅkara is probably the first Hindu philosopher who clearly announced the doctrine of Jivanamukti in its proper perspective. Śaṅkara is certain about the identity of self with Brahman (Jīvo Brahmaiva na parah). So he is confident that self-realisation is possible here in this very life. The only delay in self-realisation is the delay in the process of removal of our ignorance (avidyā), for which every man must be aware. Since self is identical with Brahman, so the self is the most immediate reality to us and hence the self can be realised only through immediate experience. This immediacy of experience is surely not our ordinary immediate knowledge which we get through sense experience and which is always related with subject-object dualism. Thus self-knowledge is immediate in the sense of being identical with Brahman (Brahmadeva Brahmaiva bhavati), which is experienced by only a Jivanamukta.

In the cultural history of India it is the genius personality of Śaṅkara, who have mould and reshape the entire destiny of its people. This young Advaitin whose span of life is only 32 (thirty two) years, integrated the entire land from Kashmir to Kanya-kumari and from Dwaraka to Puri by establishing four monestery. This 'Bhāratabhumi' was integrated religiously, morally and spiritually into one land by this young philosopher, and have regarded it as a 'sacred land'.
(punya-bhumi), where even Gods aspire to be born here. For this is the only holy land, our ‘Karmabhumi’ for where man can pave their way to liberation, the way to self-realisation.

The impact of Śaṅkara's philosophy in India is so great that the entire renaissance is rooted into his philosophy starting from Rāmmohan Roy, through Rāmakrīṣṇa paramahāṁsa, Vivekānanda, Tagore, Gandhi, K.C. Bhaṭṭachārya, Sri Aurovindo, Radhakrishnan and others. Inspired by Śaṅkara's concept of self as freedom itself, Bala Gangadhar Tilak declared that 'Freedom is our birth right' and which became our single aim and slogan against British rule and India won freedom and our freedom movement was really guided by the Neo-vedāntins. Gandhian concept of Swarāj is also to be mentioned here. Even today after passing twentieth century, the impact of Śaṅkara vedānta is still fresh and living on the mass of our country.

Śaṅkara's whole life was devoted to bring about a healthy atmosphere in the society, based on high moral and spiritual values. All his activities were meant for 'Loka - Saṅgraha'. If 'Māyāvāda' meant total unreality of the world, then how can we justify all his actions, which are meant for the betterment of the society? Therefore, we may conclude that Śaṅkara is one of those rarest of world teachers whose message are still lively, relevent, irrespective of time and place for the peace and harmony of humanity.

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References


2) Quoted from Radhakrisnan S. Indian Philosophy. Vol-II. P-633


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