Chapter - I

Introduction

Vedānta is the foundation of the spiritual culture of India. It has kept the Hindu society alive for the past seven thousand years. It is the philosophy of all the important religious sects and groups. In its various phases vedānta represent the progressive thought of man beginning with dualism, passing through qualified non-dualism and ending in absolute non-dualism, the doctrine of the total identity of the subject and object, beyond which human reason, thought and experience can not proceed.

The religion of the Indo-Aryans is generally known as Hinduism or Brāhmanism. Both these words has been coined by western thinkers. The river Sindhu, flowing into the Arabian sea and forming a part of the western boundary of India, was known by the ancient Persians as the 'Hindu'. The Greek borrowed this name, changing it into 'Indos' which much later was converted by the English as 'Indus'. The Greek called the country east of the 'Indos' by the name of India. Its inhabitants became known as Hindus and their religion as Hinduism. Early European travellers and Christian Missionaries coined the word “Brāhmanism” because they found the Brahmin caste dominating Hindu society and religion. This word leads to much misunderstanding among the modern thinkers. But ‘the Hindus prefer to call their religion as the ‘Sanātana Dharma’, the Eternal Religion, because it is based upon eternal principles or the Vaidika Dharma, and the teaching of the Vedas. They prefer to call the country as Bhārata or Bhāratavarṣa, derived from Bharata, an ancient king who was the
son of Dushyanta and Sakuntala. Even in the Viṣṇupurāṇa, there is a beautiful sloka which supplements our points.

‘Uttaraṁ yatsa samudrasya Himādre sraiva dakṣina,
Barsa tad Bāhurataṁ nāma Bhārati yatra santātih’.

“The country which lies to the north of the seas and to the south of Himālayas, is Bhārat and the people of this country are Bhārateyas”

There arose serious misunderstanding regarding this Sanātana Dharma. Actually Hinduism is not a religion proper for which the misunderstanding arises. Rather it is a way of life, as it includes the content of Indian culture and heritage. And therefore Swami Vivekananda has established that Vedānta is not a particular philosophy. It is a universal religion of man. We may quote here the order of Supreme court. When Rāmakrishna Mission claimed to be a separate religion, the Supreme court in the case of Brahmachari Siddheswar Shai vs. state of West Bengal (1995 (4) S.C.C 646) stated thus:

“What becomes obvious and evident from the exhortations of Swami Vivekananda himself, to which we have already referred to, what he proclaimed to the world was that it is the vedānta and vedānta alone that can become the Universal religion of man and it is Hindu religion that is fitted to that role, in that Hindu religion being inclusive and broad enough to include all the ideals of all religions in the world was indeed, the Universal religion.”

Hence Vedānta is to be honoured as a Universal religion which represents the thought and idea of India.
I) Meaning of the term *Vedānta* :-

Among the various schools of Indian philosophy, the *Vedānta* philosophy culminates in its highest spiritual achievement. The glory of *Vedānta* philosophy is expressed in a beautiful verse as:

"Tabat garjānti Śāastrāni jāmboka vipino tathā
Na garjānti mahāsakti jābat vedānta kesāri"

"Just as the fox keep silent in front of the lion, similarly all the other 'Śastras' remain silent in front of the mighty lion-like *Vedānta*".

Now, the term 'Vedānta' literally means the 'end of the Veda', and in this sense it stands primarily for the *Upaniṣads* which are considered as the end of the Vedas both chronologically and also philosophically. Chronologically the *Upaniṣads* are regarded as the end of the Vedas because each of the four Vedas comprises four types of literature, namely, the *Samhitā*, the *Brāhmanas*, the *Āranyakas* and the *Upaniṣads* coming successively. Philosophically also, the *Upaniṣads* are regarded as the end of the Vedas, as they mark the culmination of the vedic speculation and contain the essence of the vedic teachings.

Even, in respect of study also the *Upaniṣads* come last. As a rule, a man study *Samhitā* first, the *Brāhmanas* are required next for guiding him when he entered the house-hold life. Thus, the *Samhitā* and the *Brāhmanas* represent the *Karma-kāṇḍa* or the rituals portion of the Vedas. And the *Upaniṣads* represent the *Jñāna-kāṇḍa* or the knowledge portion which are needed to help man, when he retires from the house hold life and starts the life of *Bānaprastha* and tries to understand the meaning and mystery of the universe. So, even
after the study of the Vedas with other branches of learning, a man's knowledge is not complete till he receives instruction in the Upaniṣads. Thus the Upaniṣads are the last portion of the Vedas from various angles and are therefore regarded as Vedānta.

Sadānanda yogendra defines vedānta as "Upaniṣad-pramāṇam". For a clear understanding of this definition we are to know the meaning of the term Upaniṣad. The term 'Upaniṣad' is derived from the root 'sad' proceeded by the prefix 'upa' and 'ni' and followed by the suffix 'kvip' (upa +ni+sad+kvip). The prefixes 'upa' and 'ni' denotes nearness and certainty respectively, the root 'sad' means 'to loosen', 'to lead' or 'to destroy' and the suffix 'kvip' denotes 'agency'. Thus the term 'Upaniṣad' means knowledge which loosens or destroys the bondage in the form of ignorance by which one certainly leads very near to Brahman, and leads one to liberation (mokṣa).

It should be noted that the 'Vedānta' represents not only the 'Upaniṣad' but also the scriptures that leads to the knowledge of Brahman. Sadānanda, therefore adds that the term 'Vedānta' includes also the Brahmasutra, the Bhāgavadgītā and their commentaries; as these works are helpful in the attainment of Brahman-knowledge. Thus the term 'Vedānta' includes- (i) the knowledge of Brahman, (ii) the Upaniṣads which are the scriptures related to the knowledge of Brahman, (iii) the Brahmasutra, the Bhāgavadgītā and also their commentaries which are helpful for the realisation of the Brahmacāṇā. It is for this reason that the Upaniṣads, the Brahmasutra and the Bhāgavadgītā are called the 'Prasthānatraya' of vedānta philosophy. We shall discuss in details about these Prasthānas in our forth coming chapter.
II) Schools of Vedānta

The Upaniṣads are not systematic philosophical treatises but are mainly concerned with the utterances of various spiritual teachers (Ṛṣis) regarding their intuitive insight and direct experience of ultimate reality. For this reason one may find apparently inconsistent statements, different degrees of emphasis on the same idea at different times and sometimes seemingly irrelevant digression. Furthermore, the tense and aphoristic style of the Upaniṣads and the esoteric nature of the subject and their teachings make it difficult to grasp the idea. It is therefore quite possible that in course of time different people with different attitudes interpret the Upaniṣads in different ways as a result of which there arose the necessity of systematizing the fundamental ideas of the upaniṣadic thought. It was Bādarāyana, who first presented the upaniṣadic thought in a systematic way in his celebrated Brahma Sutras, also known as Vedānta-sutra or Śārīraka Sutra. The Brahma Sutra is thus the main source of inspiration for all the vedāntic thinkers. Subsequently various vedāntic thinkers wrote elaborate commentaries each interpreting the Brahma Sutra and the Upaniṣads in their own way. In this manner there arose various schools of vedānta philosophy as - Advaitavāda or Non-dualism of Saṅkara, Visistadvaitavāda of Rāmānuja, Śrikantha and Sripati, Aupadhika Bhedābhedavāda or the theory of conditioned Difference cum-non-difference of Bhāskara, Svābhāvika bhedābhedavāda or the theory of Natural difference cum-non-difference of Nimbārka, Acintya-bhedābhedavāda or the theory of unthinkable difference-cum-non-difference of Baladeva, Suddhadvaitavāda or pure Non-dualism of Vallabha and Dvaitavāda or dualism of Madhvacarya.
Now as our topic is concerned with Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara only so leaving aside other schools, let us concentrate in the philosophy of Advaita vedānta only.

**III) Advaita Vedānta: Non-dualism:**

In the history of Indian philosophical literature, the Advaita vedānta of Śaṅkara acquired such position in the midst of the Vedānta philosophy which need no introduction. At present this system has attained so much celebrity that the term vedānta is often used as a synonym of Advaita vedānta. The leader of this school was the great Śahkarācārya whom we will designate as Śaṅkara, who established it on a strong foundation which glorified as a magnificent achievement of Indian thought and culture, and dazzling like a pyramid above all other philosophical schools. Before Śaṅkara we find the name of ancient thinkers like Yajñavalkya, Kāśikrtṣna, Gauḍapāda and others as the advocates of non-dualism. But now-a-days, the term Advaita vedānta is used to denote the philosophy of Śaṅkara only. This is because Śaṅkara was the first vedāntins who have propounded the doctrine of Non-dualism in a systematic and exhaustive way and who have endeavoured to establish it by refuting all the rival theories. Thus the credit of Śaṅkara lies in his successful attempt at systematization, development, elaboration and methodically philosophical treatment under which the doctrine appeared in a totally new garb.

Śaṅkara, following Gauḍapāda, his great grand teacher, propounded his non-dual philosophy, designated as Advaita. The fundamental point of Advaita is to establish the absolute reality of Brahman which requires the sublation of the world appearance which has derived its existence from the
Absolute i.e. Brahman. Śaṅkara asserts that the visible world is nothing but the appearance of Brahman in a different context. Just as rope-snake is another appearance of rope, so also is the world, an appearance of Brahman. Had there been no rope there would be no rope-snake. Similarly, had there been no Brahman, there would be no world-appearance. Śaṅkara in all his writings equated the term 'Advaita' with Brahman, as the non-dual reality. The term 'non-dual' is meaningful because the visible duality has its place as quasi-real entities. The term 'Non-dualism' is preferred to the term 'monism' because the absolute entity, Brahman is intended to be understood as non-dual. Actually 'monism' is a western concept and can not be equated with 'non-dualism' or 'monism', there is an attempt to reduce all phenomena to a single principle as we find in Bradley, Spinoza and to some extent in Leibnitz and it can be seen in the pre-socratic philosopher Permenides. But for Śaṅkara, in our vyavāhārika level, the world is real and even after the realisation of Brahman, the so called world will not vanish, it will continue to exist without distorting the understanding of Brahman. So the world is not negated, rather its understanding has undergone a change. And therefore we can not say Śaṅkara as a monist rather he is an Advaitin or Non-dualist.

Śaṅkara has been compared to almost all the great thinkers of the world and a large variety of unique creations have been published by the prominent thinkers up till now. Among them Bradley is more significant who comes very close to Śaṅkara. Though there are differences between the two thinkers, the absolute idealism of Bradley carry much resemblance to Śaṅkara on various points. So let us discuss some points on Bradley in reference to his concept of Appearance.
IV) Śaṅkara and Bradley;-

F.H. Bradley (1846-1924) was the most original thinker of Great Britain. His metaphysical thought has become one of the sources of the new British philosophy and ranks very high among the spiritual philosophers in the west.

The fundamental concept of Bradley is the vision of reality as a harmonious undivided whole of experience, in which all aspects of finite experiences are included. The basic point is that, firstly, Bradley's Reality is such an experience which includes not only reason or thought but also feeling and willing, all of which remain merged in an undifferentiated Absolute. Secondly, this Absolute is not conceived by him in a relational form, though it contains all thoughts and things. For Bradley, a relation can not relate two terms, because any such relation should be itself related first with the terms which it tries to relate, before connecting them and in this way it will go ad infinitum. So Bradley opines that 'a relational way of thought- any one which moves by the machinery of terms and relations-must give appearance and not truth'.

The Standard or Criterion of Reality;-

Bradley arrives at the absolute criterion of reality by a long and acute criticism of the notions commonly accepted as valid description of reality. He examines the notions of substance, causality, relation, quality, space, time, change, self etc and declares them to be appearances. But to judge them as non-real or appearance is to require a criterion. Bradley says, "To think is to judge, and to judge is to criticise, and to criticise is to use a criterion of reality". Thus when we reject the phenomena as appearance we are using the criterion
that appearances are 'self-contradictory' and that ultimate reality is known to be such that it does not contradict itself. Thus for Bradley 'non-contradiction' is the criterion of Reality. This criterion is applicable to all our acts of thinking and judging. To establish non-contradictory, self-consistent and individual nature of the real, Bradley proclaims that all appearances belong to reality. According to him, what appears cannot fall outside the real. Thus everything which appears is somehow real. For Bradley it is necessary to ascribe reality to all the appearances in order to save the self-consistency of reality. He says, "The character of the real is to possess everything phenomenal in harmonious form". In this point Śāṅkara differ, as for Śāṅkara, the appearances are not integral part of the Absolute or Brahman. So even if appearances do not possess the element of reality, Brahman do not suffer any limitation. But for Bradley, the Absolute reality has no being apart from the appearance. For this reason, Śāṅkara did not hold the law of non-contradiction to be a criterion of reality, though he admits that non-contradiction is a feature of reality.

As to the knowledge of the Absolute reality, Bradley is of the opinion that it is impossible for us to know the Absolute fully. Our knowledge is essentially relational and hence any attempt to have the positive nature of the Absolute is futile. Kant also holds that the 'Things in-themselves' are unknown and unknowable. According to Bradley, as the Absolute is perfect and unlimited and infinite, and as we are imperfect, finite being, we can not know it in full. He says, "Fully to realise the existence of the Absolute, is for the finite being is impossible. In order thus to know we should have to be, and then we should not exist." This is exactly the Bradleyan way of saying, "Brahmaveda Brahmaiva

\[\text{Brahmaveda Brahmaiva}\]
Bhavati”. In the ‘Thought and reality chapter of his famous book Appearance and Reality, Bradley clearly says that it is impossible to accept the product of thought as equivalent to reality. The absolute is beyond the reach of thought. Here the question may arise, if it is not an object of thought, how can we talk of it? In Brahmasutrabhasya also Śaṅkara raises the question as, if Brahman is known, the enquiry regarding it is not necessary. If unknown no enquiry is possible. He answers it by saying that we have some idea of Brahman, yet the description vary, hence an enquiry is needed.12

Bradley also admits that we have some idea of the Absolute, but this does not imply that the thought is identical with Absolute. Though we can not know the absolute ‘as it is’, yet, we can have an abstract and immediate idea of Absolute, through our finite intellect for which we can speak about the Absolute. It is just like what Śaṅkara declares in his Brahmasutrabhasya.

Thus a close examination of Śaṅkara and Bradley’s philosophy brings out a number of affinities as well as diversities of views between the two. For both of them reality is non-contradictory, non-dual or one, absolute, beyond space and time. Both consider that the worldly objects, including our body, mind etc, are ultimately appearance. The Absolute transcends these categories. For both the Absolute, to some extent, is realisable in our experiences. They both hold that reality appears as the appearances with varying degrees. According to Bradley, there is nothing absolutely real or absolutely appearance. The thing which contains more contradictions is more appearance and less real, while which contains less contradiction is more real and less appearance. Thus Bradley admits the different degrees of reality and appearance Śaṅkara
also agrees that appearances have their degrees, where Īśvara is declared to be the highest appearances. Śaṅkara has accepted pratibhasika sattā vyavahārika sattā and pāramārthika sattā and says pāramārthika is the reality while the other two only appear to be real, they are not actually real. Brahman of Śaṅkara becomes Īśvara when it reflects in māyā, and jīva when it reflects in avidyā, while Bradley's Absolute always remain the same. Again for Śaṅkara Brahman can not be known by thought i.e. by finite mind, but for Bradley thought can know the bare outline of reality, though not in total. Śaṅkara introduces the negative method (the upaniṣadic concept, neti neti) to describe the ultimate reality but Bradley is silent regarding such approach.

Dr. S.N. Sinha in his article “Reality and Appearance in Śaṅkara and Bradley” has beautifully compared the concept of appearance in Bradley in relation to māyā doctrine of Śaṅkara as- māyā of Śaṅkara and appearance of Bradley seem to be analogous, because māyā has co-existence with Brahman just an appearance has with Reality. Māyā is eternal and depends upon Brahman, similarly, appearance is eternal and depends upon reality. Śaṅkara's Brahman does not depend upon māyā as Bradley's reality does upon appearance when the latter says that ‘reality with out appearance would be nothing’. Dr. Sinha even equate the avidyā of Śaṅkara with the error of Bradley, as both affect the individual. But while avidyā is removed by jñāna, error is 'made truth by division and rearrangement'. It means avidyā or ajñāna vanishes for him who obtain jñāna, but error is transformed into truth by rearrangement. The same is the case with appearance and reality. According to Bradley all appearances merge into reality i.e. diversities or unrealities change into unity.
or reality, while according to Śaṅkara, they (appearances) do not change into reality. Rather they vanish as the darkness vanishes in the presence of light. This means there is the change of attitude, not of the object. At the dawn of knowledge our attitudes towards the worldly object change into Brahman.

As to the aim of philosophy we can see that both Śaṅkara and Bradley follow their own conception of philosophy or metaphysics. As an Indian philosopher, the aim of Śaṅkara's Brahma-jijñāsa is the removal of avidya and the attainment of mokṣa, whereas as a western thinker, the aim of Bradley is the intellectual satisfaction. On the whole, Śaṅkara is a metaphysician as well as theologian because for him Brahman is not only the ultimate reality, but also the God from the vyavahārika standpoint who creates, sustains and destroys this world. Bradley is simply a metaphysician who is concerned with reality only.

Śaṅkara's conception of Brahman is based on the śrutis (revealed text), yukti (reason) and anubhuti (experience). Śaṅkara does not go beyond the limits of Upaniṣads and Brahma-sūtra, thus following the ancient tradition. Bradley's conception of the Absolute seems to be a logical postulate only, an idea of reason. It is not a fact of human experience. More over Bradley is not so particularly interested in the ancient tradition. His philosophy seems to be limited within the human understanding.

Śaṅkara flourished in the eighth century A.D. (788-820) and Bradley flourished in the latter part of the nineteenth century (1846-1924). So there is no possibility of Śaṅkara being influenced by Bradley, rather an inquisitive thinker may enquire about whether Bradley was influenced by Śaṅkara's
philosophy. For Bradley was a thinker of that period when British ruled India and the eminent scholars of Europe were attracted towards Indian philosophy. Great Orientalists like Max Muller, William James, Paul Deussen, George Thibaut and many others took keen interest in Indian culture and civilization and Sanskrit language. They tried to present it in European language, particularly in German and English. The two philosophies of India—Vedānta and Buddhism were spread in Europe at the hand of these scholars which continued up till now. As a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, Bradley was in constant touch with the academician of Oxford, and therefore it is not unnatural that he was aware of the vedāntic thought of India. Of course, it is very difficult to prove it as there is no such reference in Bradley’s writings. However, whether Bradley was acquainted with vedāntic philosophy or Śaṅkara’s Advaitavāda is a very difficult topic which needs another philosophical investigation. So we will not waste our time with this topic. This much we may confidently say in conclusion that both the scholars were the most outstanding exponent of absolute idealism in their respective countries with so much akin in their idealism.

V) Śaṅkara and Buddhism :-

Śaṅkara seems to have been influenced by the idealistic thought of Buddhism. But how far he comes under the influence of Buddhism is a disputed question. Among the various schools of Buddhist philosophy, viz, the Sarvasthivādins, the Vijñānavādins and the Mādhyamika, Śaṅkara seems to be very close to Mādhyamika philosophy of Nāgārjuna. So our discussion will be confined to the influence of Nāgārjuna on Śaṅkara.
The Madhyāmika is an advayavāda and the vedānta is an Advaitavāda. Advaya is knowledge free from duality of the extremes of ‘is’ and ‘not-is’ being and becoming and their derivatives. It is knowledge free from conceptual distinction. ‘Advaita’ is knowledge of a differenceless entity—pure Being, Brahman. Advayavāda is solely a dialectical approach, the Advaitavāda is ontological approach. The aim of both the philosophy is the attainment of one, ultimate Reality, of course with a difference. Advaita is an enquiry of Brahman-knowledge i.e. Brahma-jijnāsa or Brahma vidyā. Advayavāda is not the knowledge of any entity or Being. It is the consciousness of its own activity or function. It is a thorough going negative dialectic.

Nāgārjuna (2nd century A.D) is generally regarded as the founder of Madhyamika school. Besides Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Chandrakīrti, Kumārajīva and Santideva are among the most illustrious supporter of this school. The literal meaning of the term ‘Madhyamika’ is ‘the force of the middle way’. The Madhyamika avoids all extremes, such as eternalism and annihilationism, self and non-self, matter and spirit, body and soul, substance and process, unity and plurality, affirmation and denial, identity and difference in general all dogmatic and exclusive dualisms and treats the Middle way in the true spirit of the teaching of the Buddhas. Nāgārjuna thus gives a new orientation to the views of the Buddhist. Of course, it is not to be assumed that Nāgārjuna has preached something totally new, but he explained it with his own standpoint. He is an independent thinker of Buddhist philosophy. “Instead of following the triadic principles of the Tripitaka-Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma— or the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma and Sāṅgha— as taught by the Buddha for the realization of
the Truth (Nirvāṇa), Nāgārjuna applies his dialectic method to make the people understand and not merely believe the futility of the worldly things they care for". Where Buddha introduces the triadic code of Śīla, Prajñā and Samādhi to be practised for the realisation of the ultimate reality, Nāgārjuna applies his dialectic to understand the goal. Where as Buddha kept silent in answering the metaphysical question, Nāgārjuna uses his symbolic logic of negativism or 'not this' and 'not that'. Thus where Buddha denies to be positive about the nature of the things, Nāgārjuna affirms the emptiness or the sunyatā of the things. Thus both Buddha and Nāgārjuna aims at the permanent cessation of suffering but through different paths, one through the ethical code and the other applying the dialectic.

Nāgārjuna's philosophy is Sunyavāda. ‘Sunya’ does not imply ‘nothingness’ or ‘voidness’ as it is commonly understood. ‘Sunya’ is used as a symbolic term by the finite to the infinite. We the finite being can not say anything about the ultimate Reality. The Absolute is neither existent nor non-existent, nor both existent and non-existent, nor different from both existent and non-existent. Dr. S. Radhakrisnan says, “To the Mādhyamikas reason and language apply only to the finite world. To transfer the finite categories to the infinite would be like attempting to measure the heat of the sun by the ordinary thermometre. From our point of view the absolute is nothing. We call it sunyam, since no category used in relation to the conditions of the world is adequate to it.”

15
If we go through the historical background of Buddhas philosophy, we will find that soon after the death of Lord Buddha, the original teachings of Buddha began to lose its charm due to malpractices of its followers, as a result of which there arose so much misinterpretations of the original teaching of Lord Buddha. Nāgārjuna's philosophy of sunyata aims at the correction of error and to free it from wrong application, and to reestablish it in accordance to the original teachings. Dr. S. Radhakrisnan therefore rightly says that Madhyamika teaching of Nāgārjuna bears the real teaching of Lord Buddha. He says, "The Madhyamika is an ancient system which can be traced to the original teaching of Buddha".\(^{17}\)

That there is a close relationship between Śaṅkara and Buddhism has been the subject of considerable debate since ancient times. Dr. T. R. V. Murti rightly expressed that both the Madhyamika and Advaita vedānta belong to two different tradition- the ātman tradition of the Upaniṣad and the anātman tradition of the Buddhist.\(^{18}\) So it is very difficult to understand how philosophers belonging to the ātman-tradition could derive its doctrine from those of the opposed anātman tradition. The vedāntins accept the reality of Brahman or Ātman in conformity with the upaniṣadic tradition where as the Buddhist denies the reality of the Ātman. Even the difference between Śaṅkara and Nāgārjuna are also striking. For Nāgārjuna the world is like a mirage or a dream which have no reality what so ever. But for Śaṅkara even false creation must have some reality. Both differ in their method and approach. The approach of Śaṅkara is positive where as that of Nāgārjuna is negative. One is spiritual and the other is logical, dialectical. Nāgārjuna says that he has no thesis of his own to defend
But Śaṅkara has a definite thesis to support, as his aim is to realise the Absolute (Brahmajijñāsa). Again, the Nirvāna of Nāgārjuna is purely negative, but for Śaṅkara mokṣa is a positive, blissful state characterised by permanence or immortality (amṛtatva).

That Śaṅkara is influenced by Buddhist cannot be denied though both of them belong to different tradition. Both of them are united in some significant points. The level of existence has been recognised by both of them. The Vijnānavādin accepts three level of existence—parikalpita, paratantā and parinispāṇa or pāramārtha. Śaṅkara also has admitted prātibhāṣīka, vyavahārika and pāramārthika level in his philosophy. Corresponding to the vyavahārika and the pāramārthika of Śaṅkara, we find in Nāgārjuna the sānvin and pāramārtha level. The treatment of world appearance is supported by both Śaṅkara and Nāgārjuna. For both the world is subject to change and therefore not real. Śaṅkara explains the world appearance with his concept of māya whereas Nāgārjuna takes the help of the concept of sunyata.

It is a misleading concept that Buddha preaches his doctrine against the ancient Indian literature. It is not the fact that the vedic literature has nothing to do with Buddha's teaching. Rather, it is evident that Buddha read all the Upaniṣads and pre-upaniṣadic texts, digested their truth and rejected the misunderstanding about them. "The Buddha never preaches against the Upaniṣads, but the misinterpretation of the Upaniṣads". His ethical code like Śīla, Prajñā and Samādhi, and the Fourth Noble Truth i.e. the 'Astāṅgikamārga' are in conformity with the Upaniṣadic teaching and are akin to Yoga philosophy. Even his pessimistic attitude towards the world are familiar with Śāmkhāva...
system. As Buddha was fed up with the traditional dogmatism of Hinduism, he asked his followers not to believe anything blindly, not even the upanisadic teaching. Dr. S. Radhakrishnana has remarked, "Buddhism, we might say, is a return of Brāhmanism to its own fundamental principle". Nāgārjuna, as a sincere follower, contributed towards the original Buddhism to reorient it by washing away all the various misinterpretation of the post Buddhists philosophers like the Vaibhāsika realism, Sautrāntika idealism etc. The background of Saṅkara is familiar with that of Nāgārjuna. Saṅkara is also fed up with the malpractises of ritualism, vedic karmakārīdas prevalent at that time and reoriented the Hinduism on its firm root of the Prasthānatraya. Hence both Saṅkara and Nāgārjuna have the same background of its origin, which can not be ignored.

By considering all these points we can not deny that Saṅkara has been influenced by the Buddhist tradition. But influence does not necessarily means acceptance or borrowing of doctrines. T. M. P. Mahadevan in his article "Radhakrisnan and Buddhism" rightly says, "That too is influence which stimulates the system of thought to modify, revise or even re-affirm their original standpoint". In this sense only we may accept the view that Saṅkara is influenced by Buddhists thought. Saṅkara in his philosophy uses some phrases which are familiar in Buddhist literature. A close analysis reveal that there has been borrowing of technique rather than tenets by the Vedāntin from the Mādhyamika. The Mādhyamika technique of reaching the real by negating the unreal seems to influence the vedāntist. Yet we can not support the view of borrowing. For it is natural that a thinker or a writer may be influenced by his preceding thinkers and literature. Even for the purpose of criticism also we
must be acquainted with the fundamentals of that system. Sankara was undoubtedly acquainted with the important thinkers of his time for which we cannot blame his philosophy as a borrowing or regard him as a crypto Buddhist.

Lastly, there is direct evidence of Gaudapada being influenced by the Buddhist ideology. The Alatasānti prakarana of Gaudapada's Karika is full of Mādhyamika tenets. The similarity between the 4th chapter of Karika and the Mādhyamika work can be explained under three heads: (i) use of technical terms which have significant meaning only in Buddhists philosophical literature, (ii) verse, which are almost verbatim quotations or adaptations from well-known Mādhyamika and Yogacāra works; and (iii) such doctrines as non-originating the non-predicability of the four kinds of alternatives of the real, the object as the creation of the mind etc.²²

From these points, it is clear that Gaudapada developed his Advaitic philosophy in the light of Mādhyamika and Yogacāra doctrine. Mahadeven in his article 'Radhakrisnan and Buddhism' has clearly explained that Gaudapada has indisputable Buddhist influence. The 4th chapter of the Kārikā *begins with a salutation to Buddha and ends with another and there is no reference to the ātman or the Upanisadic text here*.²³ As we know Gaudapada is the great grand teacher of Śaṅkara to whom Śaṅkara owe much in his Advaitic philosophy. And hence it is quite natural that there is an indirect influence of Buddhist teaching through Gaudapada. However, this point will be made clear in our next chapter where discussion will be made about Gaudapada.
Our conclusion about the ontological status of the world appearance will be that the Madhyamikas regard the world appearance as unreal from the application of their central teaching of Dependent Origination (pratityasamutpāda) that they are without any inherent nature i.e. nissvabhāva i.e. sunya. Where as for the vedāntins the world appearance is not fully unreal for there is a permanent substratum underlying the world appearance i.e. Brahman. Such reality can not be proved by the dialectical method and this is the significant landmark for which Śaṅkara esteemed as the world famous philosopher.

VI) The Date and Time of Śaṅkara :-

In order to realise the greatness and genuineness of Śaṅkara it is very essential to have an idea about the date and time and also the environment in which he worked.

The date of Śaṅkara is still a controversial matter. The ancient scholars in India took less interest in the historical records for which it often creates misunderstanding regarding their source. Yet it is the concensus of opinion that he flourished after Buddha. The dates assigned to him vary from 6th century B. C. to 8th century A. D. As there is no historical record so the date of Śaṅkara is to be determined in terms of dates mentioned in different literary works which are related with the authors and philosophers of whom Śaṅkara makes use or on the basis of any definite historical data whom Śankara refer in any context. Considering from all these points, V. Raj Gopal Sharma calculated the exact date of Śaṅkara after thorough investigation that the year of birth of Śaṅkara is 788 A. D. and the year of his mahāsamādhi is 820 A. D. i.e. his span of life is only 32 years. We may also accept this date which is based on scientific investigation.
Whatever may be the exact date of Śaṅkara, it is evident that he lived at a time when vedic religion faced a critical situation brought about by quarreling sects and by fanatics with unholy zeal and degrading practices. After the death of the last Buddhist king Harshayardhana, Buddhism, which was at one time, the widespread dominant Dharma, had distorted itself into subtle negativistic philosophies and was degenerated on its moral plane. The development of Buddhist ‘Tāntricism’ with its various groups was also another cause of its defaulter. The vedic religion too, was also distorted due to the supremacy of Buddhism. In the meantime, various systems of philosophy had sprung up, advocating their own views of life and reality, which were mostly partial and sectarian, based upon mere emotions or intellectual cognitions and not on experiential Truth. On the orthodox side, the Sāṅkhya-Yoga and Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika propounded their own systems of thought entirely based upon reasoning independent of the Śruties, paying only their homages. The Mīmāṃsā introduced the ‘karmakānda’ of the Vedas and interpreted the Śrutī wholly in terms of ritualistic karma and attracted the people towards enjoyment earthly and heavenly. There were also the heterodox schools like Jainas and Buddhhas and the materialistic Brāhaspatyas- better known as Lokāyatas, the influence of whom can not be ignored. Besides these philosophical schools, there were also the religious schools with various novel notions and practices, such as Tāntrikas and Kaulas, the Kāpālikas, Kālamukhas, Pashupatas, Pancaratras, Gāṇapatyas and the Sauras. Thus all the diverse line of thoughts created a nebulous situation, be it from politically as well as socially, philosophically as well as religiously.
The advent of Śaṅkara was therefore a necessity of time who served as a saviour of Hinduism to unite the entire state in the field of religion, culture, and philosophy.

The aim of all great thinkers of this land (Bhārata) is to preserve the variety and to subordinate it to an over-riding unity. Such attitude has created harmony out of all diverse thought and faith displaying their basic difference from other land and other religion where attempts have been made to reduce to a single uniform faith even at the point of the sword. Now a days, this so called tendency of unification has grown amongst the new generation even in our land which needs cooling down. We can trace out the unique struggle throughout the life of Śaṅkara to establish humanity, based on reason and free discussion with an appeal to the heart and mind of the people. Thus the main purpose of Śaṅkara was to unite the humanity on the strong foundation of vedānta, of course without destroying the integrity of the prevalent faith.

Śaṅkara has been unanimously recognised as the greatest philosopher that India has ever produced, we know the example of Alexander the great invader, who is honoured by history as the great conquerer of the world by his mighty force, well equipped with mighty sword. But Śaṅkara is a single individual, who, well equipped with intellect conquered the heart of men and established an empire of the Universal spirit of Love on the basis of spiritual idealism. Swami Vivekananda has established the vedānta philosophy on the throne of universal religion. The fruit conquered with the force of sword lasts only for a period as we find in the case of Alexander, where as the conquerer of heart lasts for time eternal as is the case with Śaṅkara.
Sankara has been attributed as the author of a large number of works. He is reputed to have composed all his major writings before he was twenty four. After that he may have composed some devotional and philosophical works (stotras). Swami Mukhyananda has given a list of about 153 works of Sankara where all the possible writings are included under three heads as: (a) Bhäsy granthas (23), (b) Prakarana and upadesha granthas (54) and (c) Stotru-stuti granthas (76).

It is a fact that as too many works have been ascribed to Sankara which is hardly possible for a man who lived only 32 years, so it naturally creates suspicion among the critics as to the authenticity of these writings. The diversity in the character of these writings is another point which also creates confusion. Another point may be that all the Heads of the Mathas are designated as Såñkarâchârya which also creates misunderstanding of the authority of Adi-Såñkara. Modern critics, therefore are reluctant to admit the genuineness of the traditional list of writings.

Without going into details, this much we can say that for a genius like Såñkara, it is not at all a difficult task to compose so many works. Secondly he travelled so widely in the country and composed his works in different states in different situation that there may be difference in style, language and varieties of subjectmatter in his writings. However the greatness of Såñkara should not be judged by the number of his writings, but on their quality, their depth of expression and spirit of reality etc which should be taken into account. So leaving aside the contradictions, our attention should be on the constructive
works of Śaṅkara. Modern critics often criticise Śaṅkara only from the writings of his Bhāsyā granthas i.e. the Prasthānātrayas and the commentary of the other works, overlooking his other masterpiece i.e. in 2nd and 3rd categories mentioned above and thus underestimate him sometimes as an atheist, sometimes as against morality, sometimes as world-negating etc. All these points will be made clear by us through out our discussion. Now in order to highlight the Advaita theory of appearance, let us concentrate on Śaṅkara’s principal works which are relevant to our purpose. In our approach we will find that though there are a respectable number of original works of Śaṅkara yet his best thought can be traced out in his commentaries on the Prasthānātraya, the Upaniṣads, the Brahmasutra and the Bhāgavadgītā. The Upaniṣads supply him the fundamental material of his Advaita philosophy that Brahman is the only reality in the midst of different phenomenal manifestation, the Brahmasutra enriches him to systematize the teachings of the Upaniṣads and establish the one Brahman on a rational basis and the Gītā provides the techniques for the practical realisation of that reality in a harmonious manner. Gītā is regarded as the Yoga śāstra or Samanvaya śāstra which gives him the scope for a practical application of that philosophy in life and thought. Thus the Prasthānātraya form the basic foundation of Śaṅkara’s philosophy. Among his original works, Vivekacūdāmani, Upadeśasahasri, Aparokṣānubhuti, Sarvavedāntasiddhānta sāraśamgraha, Vākyāsudha, Ātmabodha, Pañcikarana, Prapañcāsārastantra etc are most important which help to propagate his philosophy of non-dualism:

Śaṅkara’s Brahmasutrabhāṣya has a galaxy of commentators such as Vācaspali Misra (Bhāmati), Amalananda Swami (Kalpataru) and Appayya
Dikṣhita (Parimala). Infact, vedānta śāstra now implies Brahmasutra along with all these commentaries i.e. Śaṅkara’s gloss, Bhāmati, Kalpataru and Parimala.

In order to establish his philosophy and to maintain the tradition of vedānta, Śaṅkara set up four monasteries (mathas) in four corner of india. These four mathas are Jyotirmatha at Badarikāśrama, Govardhanamatha at Puri, Sringerimatha at Sringeri and Sāradamatha at Dvāraka. It is said that the Kānci-Kāmakathimatha at Kanci was also established by him.

VIII) The Necessity of the Present Study:

In the history of Indian philosophical thought, the Advaita vedānta of Śaṅkara has acquired such an esteemed position, which need no explanation. Directly or indirectly, so much has been written on Śaṅkara, that any fresh attempt to write on Śaṅkara seems to be mere repetition. Yet it is seen that his philosophy has been greatly misunderstood by the critics and the followers alike. Most of the medieval and modern scholars on vedānta have divergent and at the same time contradictory interpretations on various aspects of Śaṅkara’s philosophy. There are innumerable instances of over estimation or under estimation and of dogmatic acceptance or blind rejection of his philosophy. Therefore it seems to us that a proper perspective for understanding his philosophy in original is very much essential, which inspires for undertaking the proposed research.

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 never claimed the glory to be the founder of the system. He humbly admitted his indebtieness to the teaching of Gauḍapāda and also the
ancient Indian literature like Rgveda, the Upaniṣads, the Bhāgavadgītā and the Brahmasūtra. In fact no philosophers can start on a vacuum. A philosopher's genius exhibits itself not so much in inventing absolutely new ideas, but in showing how the existing ideas in the field hang together as a consistent system. Śaṅkara's genius lies not as the copying stone on the vedāntic lore that was current for a very long time but was also shown that all the other authentic human experience such as the critical, moral and the religious etc culminate in his theory of the Absolute. But even today, some advocates of Śaṅkara, take much pain to show that Śaṅkara's philosophy are already there in the upaniṣadic doctrine. It is due to the partial interpretation, erroneous, careless calculation, conflicting and contradictory opinions mixed with prejudice and superstition that Śaṅkara's philosophy is yet shrouded in mystery.

Today, in the modern century, there grows a tendency among the scholars, to look towards the west, thinking the western culture and civilization to be the best and are influenced by the western culture and encouraged by western patrons, unhesitatingly pass argument against Śaṅkara without proper understanding and thorough study of original philosophical literature. It is due to lack of interest and devotion and also the lack of proper knowledge of Sanskrit literature that has brought us away from our original texts which are written in Sanskrit language. Thus our deficit of knowledge in understanding the original text which are written in Sanskrit is also responsible for misunderstanding and misinterpretation, as we often take the help of translation which may not be appropriate. It is often found that attempt has been made to look to an Indian philosophical problem through a spectacle coloured with western philosophical
interpretation or western terminology. But this type of viewing a particular problem or attempt to translate some particular Sanskrit terms which have their specific significance, into English, often create confusion and misunderstanding, and instead of solving the problem, they often give rise to confusion and further queries. So it is safe to view an Indian problem with an Indian spectacle rather than to view it with a coloured spectacle borrowed from the west.

Another important point is the sequence of time, which is very essential while making any judgement. The norms and values of the present day should not be applied to judge a person who lived so long back. Our judgement must take into account the time and the claim of the prophet's work. And the critics often miss the historical importance of the great personality of Śaṅkara and pass ridiculous comment.

Again, question may arise as to if Śaṅkara is meant for his historical period, then he is surely not meant for modern age. Then our reply will be that such question may be applicable for the ordinary man on earth, but every great teacher of humanity attract the attention of the society on certain eternal values which are relevent for all times. And the relevence of Śaṅkara must be judged on that standard only.

The basic problem which is much needed to be highlighted in Śaṅkara is his concept of world appearance. A charge has been often brought by the critics that Śaṅkara has treated the world merely as an appearance or as an illusion. And the critics find an appropriate and admirable support in a short but beautiful half verse which runs as "Brahma Satya Jaganmithya Jivo Brahmaiva na paraḥ" i.e. "Brahman is the only reality, the world is false, the individual self
is non-different from Brahman. The current belief is that Śaṅkara’s Advaitavāda unmistakably teaches us the falsity of the world, that Brahman being considered to be the only reality, everything in this world appearance are unreal and false.

Like all normal thinkers the vedāntic sages, who propound the concept of “Jagamithyā” are aware of the fact that this beautiful world in which we live, move and have our being, is a real world. They also know that when we wake up, it is not that we wake up as if from a dream and discover that yesterday’s event in time and space did not actually occur. Then the question naturally arises as to why do the Advaitin use the expression ‘mithyā’, ‘māyā’ ‘avidyā’ etc. in order to explain the world appearance?

Śaṅkara introduced the concept of māyā, mithyā, avidyā etc. which are synonymous, to explain the world appearance. These terms have not 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. Again, the concept of ‘māyā’ has been translated into English terminology as ‘illusion’. This fact has led the critics to ascribe classical Advaitic thinkers as world negating, pessimistic and unproductive. To western Orientalists and to Indian themselves who have not taken the care and pain to acquaint themselves with the original Sanskrit literature, the word ‘māyā’ connotes nothing but utter illusoriness of the world. Wrongly understood in this sense, Śaṅkara’s explanation of world appearance has unfortunately been the target of much adverse criticism, not only from west, but even by eminent Indian scholars, all down the ages from Ramanuja in the eleventh century down to Sri Aurovindo in the twentieth.
So the basic problem, which we are to make clear in our whole study is the problem of 'Jaganmithya' which is often misunderstood as 'the world is illusion' or 'the world is false'. Śaṅkara uses the term 'māyā' to explain the world appearance. The word used in Sanskrit for explaining 'māyā' is 'mithyā' which perhaps does not reflect appropriately its English translation as illusion or false. Such type of translation often create confusion and misunderstanding, that instead of solving the problem, they take us away from its origin. So the present work will make a sincere attempt to present Śaṅkara's philosophy of appearance in its proper perspective and bring together analytically and critically various points of view which have confused the modern scholar.
References

1) Quoted from 'Ātmabodha' Introduction. P-6
2) Visnupurāṇa.
4) "Vedānta nāmo Upanisad pranātan"- Vedāntasāra. P-8.
5) S. B. Int. on Kau Upanisad.
8) ibid. P-119.
9) ibid. P-120.
10) ibid. P-123.
11) ibid. P-140.
12) B. S. S.- 1.1.1.
15) Quoted from Jha R. C. The Vedāntic and the Buddhist Concept of Reality as Interpreted by Śaṅkara and Nāgārjuna. P-102
17) ibid. P-643.
19) Quoted from Jha R. C. The Vedāntic and the Buddhist Concept of Reality as Interpreted by Śaṅkara and Nāgārjuna. P-119
21) Quoted from Coward. Studies in Indian Thought. P.P.-240-241
22) ibid. P-246.
23) ibid. P-246.
26) ibid (Notes and Appendix II). P-xlix.

# # # # #