Preface

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

Now the concept of Appearance is such a topic which needs greater depth of comprehension, in view of the fact that in the Advaita philosophy Brahman is regarded as the only reality and everything else, this world of manifoldness is unreal, allowing no room at all for any second reality (Brahma Satya, Jaganmithyā). Thus the empirical world, in which we live move and have our being, which is a fact of our everyday experience, seems to be false or 'mithyā' in Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara. So what is the nature of the world appearance, what are its explanation, how can it be significant at all, what is
the status of the world, what is the importance of this world in the attainment of our highest goal i.e. mokṣa? These are the very important points which needs sufficient explanation. It seems to us that due to partial interpretation, erroneous acceptance, careless colouring, conflicting and contradictory opinions and wrong estimation that Śaṅkara’s concept of Appearance is yet shrouded in mystery and my present thesis is a humble attempt to highlight all these points.

The enquiry into the concept of appearance is in a sense an enquiry into the concept of ultimate reality. Every case of appearance is related with the question as ‘appearance of what’? It is the Real that makes its appearance. Thus the notion of appearance and reality are two phases of the same reality. In the order of existence, reality is the first, and in the order of knowledge, appearance is the first. The relation between appearance and reality is of one sided dependence. Reality can exist without appearance but appearance can not exist without Reality. Brahman can exist without the world, but the world appearance cannot exist without Brahman. Thus Śaṅkara’s concept of appearance is in a sense, an enquiry about Brahman ‘Brahma-jiśnāsā’ and his ‘māyāvāda’ is a direct corollary of his ‘Brahmavāda’.

To explain the world appearance Śaṅkara has introduced the terms like mithyā, māyā, avidyā etc which are synonymous. These Sanskrit words are used in a technical sense in Advaita philosophy. And the critics often misinterpreted their exact meaning by making use of translation into English as illusion, false etc, for which they often criticised Śaṅkara as illusionish world
negating, pessimistic and unproductive. Thus the critics who have not taken much care and pain to acquaint themselves with the original Sanskrit words, have wrongly interpreted the concept of appearance of Śaṅkara. Under such circumstances, the present work is an attempt to present Śaṅkara's concept of appearance in its proper perspective to bring out analytically and critically, various points related to the topic, to wash away the confusion of the modern student of Indian philosophy.

The present thesis comprises of Seven chapters. The first chapter is Introduction. Here attempts have been made to introduce Śaṅkara's philosophy along with its importance in the philosophical map of India. A comparative study of Śaṅkara with Bradley and Buddhism are also made here. In the Second chapter, I have made a historical note on Advaita vedānta, the Rgveda, the three Prasthānas- the Upaniṣads, the Brahmaṣutra, the Bhāgavatī and also the philosophy of Gauḍapāda in details, as these are the influential factor to mould the philosophy of Śaṅkara. In the Third chapter, the nature of world appearance are discussed. This chapter is divided into three parts- the first part is related with the concept of Brahman, the second part is about the concept of adhyāsa and the third part is about the doctrine of māyā. The Fourth chapter is related with the explanation of world appearance as 'anirvacaniya', where various theories of error in Indian philosophy are discussed. The Fifth chapter is about the status of the world appearance and in dealing with the problem, the concept of world creation, level of reality as
pāramārtika, vyavahārika and the prātibhāsika; the causation theory as pārināmavāda and vivartavāda etc are discussed. Thus the real status of the world appearance seems to be that from the pāramārtika level, there is only Brahman and no question of world appearance is there. But in the vyavahārika level God is the creator of this world and this world is a real one which we experience in life. The real status is designated by Śaṅkara as 'anirvacaniya' or 'mithyā' i.e. neither real nor unreal nor both i.e. indeterminable. In the Sixth chapter, the concept of mukti, the concept of bondage, two types of mukti—Jivanamukti and Videhamukti, the various ethical and spiritual path leading to mukti etc are discussed. Thus in this chapter attempt is made to highlight the importance of the world appearance for the pursuit of self-realisation and self-purification. The Seventh chapter is conclusion, where the summary of the whole topic, a critical estimate along with my own opinion are presented.

Though modern positivistic and linguistic scholars find no importance and they have nothing to say in support of man’s spiritual aspiration, yet the traditional idealistic thought of India headed by Śaṅkara will continue to count for the Indian culture and civilization, till man continue to cherish higher spiritual values. Of course we can not deny that traditional idealistic thought of India needs reinterpretation and reorientation. Contemporary philosophers like Vivekānanda, Tagore, Gandhi, Radhakrisnan have done a lot in this field. And for this reason today after passing twentieth century, the impact of Śaṅkara vedānta is still fresh and living and relevent on the mass of our country.
It is a fact that any fresh attempt to write on Śaṅkara is quite meaningless taking outside the previous mentioned thought and interpretation done by renowned scholars. Throughout my whole study, I have tried to present Śaṅkara's philosophy of Appearance analytically and critically on the basis of some available work of Śaṅkara and the various works on Śaṅkara, done by both medieval and modern scholars with a hope to remove doubt, misconception and to attract the modern scholars on Vedānta.

Now it is the pleasant task of acknowledging my indebtedness and gratefulness—

First of all, I am deeply indebted to Dr. Manisha Barua, under whose supervision I have completed this work. I must also record special debt of gratitude to all the Faculty members of the Philosophy Department, G.U.- Dr. D. K. Chakravarti, Dr. (Ms) N. Sarma, Dr. S. N. Sarma, Dr. G. Sarma, Dr. (Ms) B. Begam, and Dr. S. Goswami for their advice and kind help.

I gratefully acknowledge the help, inspiration and cooperation of Dr. G. C. Sarma (Rtd.) Principal, Arya Vidyapeeth College and express my thanks to the staff and the students of Philosophy, Arya Vidyapeeth College with whom I have been experiencing my professional skill and art.

My deep sense of gratefulness goes to my husband Dr. P. C. Sarmah and to my children who had to sacrifice a lot for the completion of my study.

I am really grateful to the U.G.C. for providing the 'Teacher's Fellowship' for prosecuting Ph.D. I am highly grateful to the staff of K. K. Handique Library,
G.U.; Departmental Library, Philosophy G.U. Arya Vidyapeeth College Library
and National Library, Kolkata.

My special thanks goes to my daughter Matoo and Mr. Rajib Chaudhary who helped me in the typing.

Last but not the least, I am remembering the valuable inspirations of all my well wishers whose name could not be included here.

(Ms. Neelima Goswami
Lecturer, Dept. of Philosophy
Arya Vidyapeeth College
Guwahati – 781016