Chapter-III
Treatment of Appearance in Śaṅkara

The fundamental problem of the Advaita Vedānta is to explain how the world appears at all and what is the nature of the world appearance. From our previous discussion, it becomes clear that the Indian philosophers from the time of Vedic religion tried to explain the problem of appearance and the reality behind the screen of appearance. To analyse the concept of appearance it is necessary to analyse the concept of ultimate reality which is the basis of appearance. In this chapter, therefore we will discuss our problem under three parts. The first part will be about the concept of Brahman, the ultimate reality. The second part is the concept of Adhyāsa and the last part is about the doctrine of māyā. So let us start with the concept of Brahman.

I) The concept of Brahman :-

According to the Advaita Vedāntins, Brahman, the ultimate reality is the main purport of all the Upaniṣads. They hold that the Upaniṣads teach a consistent and systematic philosophy and that the significance of all the Upaniṣads lies in the acceptance of non-dual Brahman as the only reality. But that Brahman (is known from the Upaniṣads) (It), being the object of their fullest import”,

Śaṅkara in his Adviata Vedānta explains that Brahman is the sole reality. All that is, is verily Brahman; the world is but an appearance of it. The temporal world exists, but it may not be real in the strict sense. The world is full of changes but the Absolute can not be changed. It is the unchanging, underlying
unity behind all the changes. In fact, change, can not take place unless there is some unchanging unity. Brahman is therefore called “Kutasthanitya”. It is the ground in which the changing world makes its appearance. It is self-sufficient and perfect. It is the unconditioned principle and may be called the noumenal background of the phenomenal world. It is something, which does not need the help of anything else. It is thus self-sufficient and perfect.

It is beyond the reach of mind and all human being and is incomprehensible by our rational thought, but it is perfectly immanent in the world. As immanent, it is knowable per excellence, but as non-relational it can not be known through rational knowledge. The upanishadic description as “Neti Neti” (not-this, not-this), certainly does not mean that Brahman is a mere naught. For the negative description has no meaning apart from a positive background. For in the text, ‘Not so, not so’, the word ‘so’ usually used in connection with something proximate, is seen to be applied in the same way as ‘this’. Thus negation of Brahman denies the gross and subtle form of Brahman as described in the Upanishads, but not the Brahman itself. The negation of Brahman is therefore, associated with the feeling of It as existent.

i) Brahman and Ātman :-

In the Sutra Bhāsya, Śaṅkara says that “The self itself is Brahman”. Thus the relation of self with Brahman is that of identity. To know Brahman is to know the self. Self is the knower and its existence can not be doubted. It is just like ‘cogito ergo sum’ of Descartes. The self, the being of knower, is identical with consciousness. In his introduction to Brahma Sutra, Śaṅkara says that though all objects of knowledge may be a matter of belief and so open to doubt,
the existence of self can not be doubted. Its logical priority has to be admitted.
But unlike Descartes, Śaṅkara is of the opinion that the concept of reality can
not be apriori. The concept of reality in Śaṅkara is the result of our experience
which evolves as an answer to our enquiry into the knowledge of the distinction
of appearance and reality.

Śaṅkara seeks to discover the Absolute, not by transcending the
finite self, but by a deeper understanding of the self within us which is erroneously
taken to be other than the Absolute. His method of discovering the Absolute is
by removing the erroneous notions about the self, which though in fact is the
Absolute, is falsely taken to be finite and relative. The Absolute says Śaṅkara.
exists and is real in the highest sense, because it is the self in us which none

It must be remembered that Śaṅkara's self is not the individual
knowing subject. He does not advocate plurality of the selves. "The Ātman of
Śaṅkara is neither the individual self nor collection of such selves". It is the
Absolute self. It can not be known by any ordinary means of knowledge. It is
the essence of the whole world. This highest ground of the world, which is
named as 'self' or 'Ātman' or 'Brahman' - is called one, eternal, changeless,
attributeless, free from all relations.

ii) The Nature of Brahman :

Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta is an exposition of the eternal nature of
reality or the innermost essence of the world. It is Brahmavidyā. Now, the word
'Brahman' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'Bṛh' which means to grow or let
grow, or to be great. Śaṅkara seems to take the last meaning of the term. The
Absolute is called Brahman because of its greatness. It is known as Brahman because it is most fully accomplished or the greatest of all. Again, Brahman is so called because it is fully grown or because it makes other things grow.

Thus, it is clear that, Brahman is the absolute reality, which is the origin, ground and support of this world. And the meaning of Brahman has already been fixed by the Upaniṣads and the Sutras and Śaṅkara followed that meaning in his Advaita philosophy.

According to the Upaniṣads, Brahman can be defined from two points of view - positive and negative, Saviseṣa and Nirviṣeṣa, Saguna and Nirguna, determinate and indeterminate. The scripture describes Brahman as ‘Neti Neti’ as well as ‘Saccidānanda’. Śaṅkara holds that Brahman may be explained from different standpoints. From the view point of liberated soul, it is unconditioned and from the view point of finite soul, it is the cause of the world.

Thus though Brahman is said to be non-definable (anirvacaniya), there are two definition of Brahman which may designated as essential and accidental (svarupa lakṣaṇa and tatastha lakṣaṇa). The former definition describes Brahman as Saccidānanda and the latter as the cause, sustainer and destroyer of the world. In his latter definition Brahman is helped by mâyā and is officially named as Īśvara (God).

a) Svarūpalakṣaṇa of Brahman:

The essential definition of a thing consists of the essential nature of that thing. Sat (existence), cit (consciousness) and ānanda (bliss) etc are the essential character, which constitute the essential definition of Brahman. The Śruti refers to this definition when it describes Brahman as, “Satyaṁ jñānam
sanantam Brahma". (Brahman is existence, consciousness and infinite) Again, "Vijnanam anandam Brahma", i.e. Brahman is knowledge and bliss. "Anantam Brahmeti Vyajanat", i.e. he knew Bliss as Brahman and so on.

Thus Brahman is Existence, Intelligence or Consciousness and Bliss. These are not attributes of Brahman in the sense that Brahman is spoken of as being qualified by them. It is not that Brahman has existence, intelligence and bliss as its guṇas. Sweetness can not be separated from the sugarcandy. There is no sugarcandy independent of the sugar and qualified by it. Similarly sat and ānanda are all one in substance, Brahman is Existence, Intelligence and Bliss is to imply that Brahman can not be distinguished from non-existence, non-intelligence and non-bliss, i.e. from what is asat, acit and not-ānanda.

**Meaning of Sat, Cit and Ānanda**: 

According to the Advita vedānta 'sat' means truth and that the nature of which never be anṛta or false, which undergoes change, whereas the meaning of 'sat' is always unchanging. Brahman is 'sat' in the sense that its nature is never contradicted (abādhya). That means uncontradicted existence is what is called 'sat' or Brahman.

The term 'sat' further indicates that Brahman is the cause of the world, because the world being an effect, must be produced from particular cause, which is Brahman. In our empirical world we find that the 'clay' which is the cause of the pot etc, is inert. According to the Advaitin, Brahman, being the cause of the world is not inert. So the term 'sat' as the cause is not inert like clay etc. To rule out this contingency, Brahman is defined as jnāna or cit (consciousness) also. The term 'cit' means consciousness itself and not the...
agent of the act of knowing (jnātr). Thus Brahman is called cit which means Brahman is consciousness itself.

Further, if Brahman is defined as existence, knowledge and infinite it may be thought that it is something devoid of any emotive aspect. It is therefore said that Brahman is not only existence, consciousness and infinite, but of the nature of bliss also. It must be remembered that the infinite bliss is not like worldly bliss, which is born of sense-object contact and finite and hence relational. For the bliss of Brahman is infinite and unrelational. According to the Vedāntin Bliss is not an attribute of Brahman, but the essence itself, i.e. Brahman is not blissful, but Bliss itself.  

Now, the question may arise how can the svarūpa or essential nature of Brahman be regarded as the definition of Brahman? A definition comprises the special attributes or dharmas of the thing defined, which distinguish that thing from others. Thus the definition must be different from the essence of the thing defined. That means, the very essence of the object defined can not be regarded as the definition. In the present case, 'Sat-Cit-Ānanda' etc being the very essence of Brahman, the dharmin, can not be regarded as its dharmas (attributes) at the same time and accordingly, They can not be regarded as the definition of Brahman.  

To this, the Advaitins reply that despite the absence of real difference between the essential definition and the object defined, some imaginary difference must be assumed. The attribute 'Satyaṁ-Jñānaṁ-Anantaṁ' etc are assumed as the attribute of Brahman. In reality these attributes form the very nature of Brahman and hence are non-different from it. But being reflected in
the mental modes or vṛttis, they appear as different from Brahman. Sat Cit Ānanda are not the viśeṣana or adjective, qualifying Brahman. Viśeṣana means a quality which distinguishes one entity from another. Thus Brahman is free from all differences i.e. 'Bhedarahitaṁ'. Difference is of three kinds. They are -(1) difference from an object of the same class, (2) difference from an object of another class and (3) internal difference. They are respectively known as sajātiya, vijātiya and svagataḥ bhedas. sajātiya bheda is difference eg. between one mango tree and another mango tree. vijātiya bheda is difference between a mango tree and a neem tree or a rock etc. svagata bheda refers to different parts of the same object like roots, trunk, branches, stacks, leaves etc of a tree.

Brahman has none of these differences. It has no svajātiya bheda as there is no another Brahman from which it is to be distinguished. There is nothing else other than Brahman or other side Brahman making for vijātiya bheda. Therefore, it is said in the scripture, “Sarvam khalu idam Brahman i.e. Brahman is all these. Brahman is one, and there is no multiplicity in it. So Brahman is free from Svagata bheda.

So the terms Satyaṁ, Jñānaṁ etc are applied to Brahman not as visēṣana but as lakṣaṇa or the very essence of Brahman.

b) Tatasthalakṣaṇa of Brahman :-

The Tatasthalakṣaṇa of Brahman is that ‘it is the cause of the world’ or that ‘Brahman is the cause of the origination, sustenance and destruction of the world’. The aphorism “Janmadyasya Yatah” gives the Tatasthalakṣaṇa of Brahman. In the Taittiriya upaniṣad, Bhrigu asked his father Varuna to explain about Brahman. Then Varuna says “Yataṁ varah brahmaḥ kramante namah”
jivani yatprayantābhisaṁvisanti" i.e., "From which all these beings takes birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge — that is Brahman". In the Chāndogya upaniṣad, Brahman is described as Taplan. "Sarva khaluidām Brahma Tājālam śānta upāsit i.e. "All that is Brahman. (This) is born from, dissolves in and exists in That. Therefore one should meditate by becoming calm".

It must be noted that Brahman regarded as the cause here, not in the ordinary sense of cause and effect. He is the cause in the negative sense rather than in the positive. Brahman is the sole reality and if there is anything which can be called the cause of the world, it is Brahman. Thus Advaita vedānta advocates the Brahman-sat-kāraṇavāda.

When we speak of a cause we usually mean either the efficient or the material cause. When Śaṅkara speaks of Brahman as the cause of the world, he maintains that Brahman is the efficient as well as the material cause of the world. Now, if Brahman is the efficient cause, then the question arises what is the material cause upon which it is to be moulded into the form of the world? If it is a material cause also, does it undergo transformation in order to become the world? According to Advaita vedāntin neither there is a second to Brahman, nor does the Brahman undergo any transformation. There is no real transformation of Brahman into the world. He advocates Vivartavāda which will be elaborated later on.

Śaṅkara is credited with the performance of maintaining the Advaita character of Brahman and also the world creation from the Brahman. He takes the world as it is and shows only that it has no reality apart from Brahman.
Though the world comes from Brahman yet there can be no separation between the two.\textsuperscript{27} Separation will lead to dualism and pluralism, which Śaṅkara can never allow in his philosophy.

iii) \textbf{The Concept of Saguṇa and Nirguṇa Brahman} :-

There are two sets of passages found in the Upaniṣads, where Brahman has been described as Nirguṇa and Saguṇa. Thus passage like “Sāksi ceta kevalo Nirguṇaśca” (He is the witness, the animator, the absolute and free from all qualities).\textsuperscript{28} In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad, it is said, “asthulam, anamkāsām, ahrasvāṁ, adirghām, alohitāṁ, asneham, acchaśyām, atamaḥ, avāyu anakāsām, ascungāṁ, arasaṁ, agaridham, acakṣuśkaṁ, asrotṛaṁ. avāk amanah, atejashakāṁ, aprāṇaṁ, amukhaṁ, amātrāṁ, anantaram, abāhyam etc”\textsuperscript{29} (It is neither gross, nor fine, neither short nor long, neither glowing red (like fire) nor adhesive (like water). (It is) neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, unattached, without taste, without smell, without eyes, without ears, without voice, without mind, without radiance, without breath, without a mouth, without measure, having no within and no without). Again in the Māndukya upaniṣad, it is said, “adrśtaṁ, avyayavahāryaṁ, agrāhyāṁ, alakṣanam, acintyaṁ, avyapadesyaṁ, ekatma, pratyayasaram, prapanca-paśamam, śāntaṁ, śivaṁ, advaitaṁ, ...” (It is unseen, incapable of being spoken of, ungraspable, without any distinctive marks unthinkable, unnamable, the essence of the knowledge of the one self, that into which the world is resolved, the peaceful, the benign, the non-dual ...”).\textsuperscript{30} Gauḍapāda says that this Brahman is birthless, free from sleep and dream, without name and form, ever effulgent all thought; no form is necessary for it.
The Svetāsvatara upaniṣad says, 'Niskalam niskriyam sāntam niravadyāṁ niranjanam etc'. The celebrated formula occurring so often in the Brhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad, "neti neti" (not this, not this) and others establish Brahman as devoid of quality, action and difference etc. It is said Brahman being qualityless and actionless, transcends the world, it is not at all concerned with the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world and also with the empirical life of the jivas.

Another set of passages speaks of Brahman as Saguṇa Brahman. It is said that Brahman is endowed with infinite super qualities like Omniscience, Omnipotence, Love etc. It is also said that it creates, sustains, and dissolves the world. For example, "Eśa sarveśvarah eśa sarvajñah, eśontaryāmi eśa yonīn sarvasya prabhavāpyayau hi bhutānaṁ". (This is the Lord of all, this is the knower of all, this is the inner controller; this is the source of all, this is the beginning and the end of beings).

The second Sutra of the Brahmaṣutra states that the Brahman is that from where this world originates etc. The same idea has been expressed in the Chāndogya upaniṣad where Brahman is described as Tajālaṇ. The full description of Brahman as the creator sustainer and destroyer of this world is given in the Taittiriya upaniṣad.
Now, the problem before us is what is the real nature of Brahman. Is Brahman Nirguna or qualitiless, actionless and differenceless, or is it endowed with quality, action and difference? The Vaishnava vedantins and others who are believer of a personal God hold that Brahman is necessarily endowed with quality action etc. They hold that Nirguna Brahman simply speak of the essence of Brahman with the cosmic quality eliminated from it, though in reality, Brahman is never devoid of quality etc. That means according to those thinkers the significance of the upanishadic Brahman centre round the concept of Saguna Brahman.

The Advaita vedantins, on the other hand hold that Brahman is essentially Nirguna and Niskriya. In the Brahmastra Bhasya Sankara says “Na sthānato api parasyobhayalingam sarbatra hi” 37 Even from place a two-fold characteristic can not (be predicated) of Brahman, because throughout (the scriptures teach It to be otherwise i.e. without any qualities). Thus Nirguna Brahman is the metaphysical principle of the universe. It appears to be Saguna and Sakriya only when it is endowed with maya. The Svarupa lakshana, discussed above, speaks of the absolute nature of Brahman as Nirguna and Niskriya, while the Tatastha lakshana deals with the Saguna aspect. Brahman denoted by the Svarupa lakshana is Nirguna and Niskriya, because It is akhand or indivisible and is not at all concerned with the world-process, and Brahman denoted by the Tatastha lakshana is Saguna and Sakriya, because it is endowed with qualities like Omniscience, Omnipotence etc and is concerned with the world process.
When Nirguṇa Brahman is associated with the guṇa ridden Māyā it is spoken of as Saguṇa. It is conceived of as having a form, a name, of having qualities and of acting in relation to the world. Then what is an abstract principle in the Nirguṇa aspect, becomes a concrete person in the Saguṇa aspect. “What is qualitiless is spoken of and endowed with qualities like Goodness, Grace, Beauty etc. What is nameless is given a number of names as Siva, Vishnu, Rāma, Kṛiṣṇa, Devi etc”.36

Thus, the Advaita vedāntins try to bring out a consistency among the two sets of upaniṣadic passages spoken about by subordinating the Saguṇa passages to the Nirguṇa passages. This does not, however, mean that the Saguṇa passages are meaningless or that they do not expose the nature of Brahman, because the Saguṇa passages also, in the ultimate analysis, signify the nirguṇa Brahman through laksana or implication. This means that cosmic activities like creation, sustenance etc, can not exist in any other reality except Brahman. It is Brahman endowed with Māyā that performs these activities. That is why, the Saguṇa passages also ultimately imply the Nirguṇa Brahman.

The Nirguṇa and the Saguṇa Brahman are not two different entities. The same Brahman is Saguṇa and Nirguṇa viewed from two different standpoint. From the transcendental standpoint Brahman is Nirguṇa, while from the empirical viewpoint, it is Saguṇa Brahman or Ṛṣvāra, i.e. Brahman endowed with maya and is the agent of creation, sustenance etc of the world. The difference between the Nirguṇa and Saguṇa Brahman is therefore, only a difference of viewpoint; there is no actual difference between them.
Nirguna Brahman is not for the man bound by ajñana. It is meaningful only to those rare few, who are bold and fearless, ready to renounce all duality. It is he, who has come out of the darkness of ajñana into the light of jnana that can realise it. It becomes a felt experience for him transcending all phenomenal categories. "The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman and he attains the Highest". Thus in the Brahmanubhava state, man can realise the Nirguna Brahman and only in this state, the concept of Saguna Brahman is lost sight of.

iv) The Religious Predicament:

The Saguna Brahman is connected with the religious predicament which involves the duality of deity and devotee, and is sustained by it. In the goal of religious endeavour which is mystic experience, the devotee is merged in the deity. Here the Saguna Brahman is called God or Isvara, who is the highest Reality to the man of religion. God is as real and supreme to the devotee or the upāsaka as the Nirguna Brahman is to the Brahmajñāni. Those who are not able to climb to the abstract heights of contemplation and realisation of the Nirguna Brahman are the worshipper of the Saguna Brahman.

Thus according to Śaṅkara, there are two orders of Brahman, the Nirguna and Saguna. The former is Parā or higher Brahman and the latter is Apara or lower Brahman. It is a fact that except the gifted few, endowed with divine personality the path leading to the realisation of the Nirguna Brahman is through the Saguna Brahman. The aspirant, who has earned the divine grace of God by unwavering devotion to Him, can attain the Nirguna Brahman by jñāna, born of instruction (upadeśa). Isvara is the highest preceptor of the supreme Truth and it trained the devotee to develop an attitude of detachment towards the world, freed it of its entanglements and habituates it to unfettering concentration so necessary for Brahman realisation.
Thus it is clear that Saguna Brahman or God is not meaningless or an inferior concept. In the vyavahārika level, where the world is very real, God is a fact of reality to us all. But in the pāramārthika level, the question of the reality of God does not arise.

From the above analysis it is clear that the concept of Saguna Brahman is not an inferior one as it often conceived by the opponent. It is an essential concomitant of Nirguna upāsanā, worship of Saguna Brahman is essential for the māyā-bound jiva. So the Saguna Brahman is real and essential in the vyavahārika level, as real as the Nirguna Brahman is in the pāramārthika level. That is why “an unparalleled Advaitin that Śrī Śaṅkara is breaks forth into devotional lyrics of ecstatic content in praise of the several aspects of the Saguna Brahman in the course of his Vyavahārika pilgrimages to the holy shrines of India”.

The Upaniṣadic passages about Saguna Brahman have two purports: one is about Brahman associated with māyā, which is false; the other is about pure Brahman devoid of all limitations, which is real. Of these two purports, the knowledge of Saguna Brahman does not give rise to liberation, it only helps the worshippers (upāsaka) to attain the highest state of Nirguna Brahman, through the purification of the mind. Thus God or Saguna Brahman is the production of human brain in the laboratory of religion. “In the sphere of religion man chastens himself by morality, orients his body, mind and soul to the Divine calling out to It in petition and prayer to lift him from the slough of dispond to the ethereal realms of his natural freedom”.
Hence, the Advaitic concept of *Saguṇa* Brahman has significance only with the empirical phase of Brahman, and it is only a human concept applicable in the sphere of vyavahārika world. But it cannot be applied in the ultimate stage of the *Nirguṇa* Brahman where one transcends every distinction and limitation and where the language of the vyavahārika world is stilled in silence. Hence the Advaitic truth about *Saguṇa* Brahman have reference to the vyavahārika reality only and is inapplicable in the pāramārthika realm. But this inapplicability does not imply invalidity. For most mortals *Saguṇa* upāsanā is the means to the realisation of the *Nirguṇa* Brahman.

(2) *The Concept of Adhyāsa* :-

From our previous discussion, we have seen that Śaṅkara has depicted Brahman, in consistent with the upaniṣadic literature, that Brahman is the ultimate reality which is of the nature of "Existence, Consciousness and Bliss". It is ‘ekamevaṇvitiyam’, and everything else- this world of multiplicity is unreal, is a mere appearance; the individual soul (jiva) is identical with Brahman. The jiva or the individual soul is also of the nature of infinite existence, consciousness and bliss and is pure, eternal, ever free and self-luminous. Thus identity of the jiva and Brahman is clearly stated by the scriptures in texts like, ‘Thou art That, O Svetaketu’,43 ‘I am Brahman’44 and ‘the self alone is to be meditated upon’ etc.45

Then the question naturally arises: if jiva is identical with Brahman, then why the empirical jiva does not realise its real nature as identical with Brahman and perceives itself as different from it, since in this empirical jiva, existence, knowledge and bliss appear as limited. The empirical jiva does not realise its
pervasiveness and feels itself to be confined by the mind-body complex, and feels itself to be possessing limited knowledge and limited bliss. As a result, the jiva behaves as endowed with kaṛtrṭva (agency), bhokṭṛṭva (enjoyership) etc, which are quite contrary to its real nature. Further, the jiva perceives this manifold phenomenal world as real and distinct from Brahman though in reality it is not so and behaves it as if a real world.

Hence, the problem before the Advaitin is that: why is the real nature of the soul not revealed and why does the self appear as endowed with contradictory nature? To solve this, Śaṅkara has introduced the doctrine of adhyāśa or superimposition, where he solved the problem that it is due to adhyāśa or superimposition between the self and the not-self that the real nature of the self is not revealed to us. Adhyāśa, on its part is caused by ajñāna or māyā (nescience) which conceals the real nature of the self and makes it appear in a different way. Thus, ignorance is the root cause of the non-revelation of the real nature of the self, that the jiva forgets its real nature and superimposes the self on the not-self and vice versa. This mutual adhyāśa of the self and the not-self is at the very root of the jivahood of the self. Hence the concept of adhyāśa occupies a very important role in the Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara.

I) Adhyāśa in Ordinary Experience

In our ordinary life, we have the experience of superimposition, when a nacre appears as silver or a rope appears as a snake. Here, nacre and rope are real on which the false silver and the false snake are superimposed respectively. With the superimposition of silver and the snake on the nacre and the rope, the attributes of the former is also superimposed on the latter. In the
same way, the knowledge of the silver and the snake are also superimposed on the knowledge of the nacre and the rope respectively. This implies that superimposition occurs in two ways, viz, superimposition of an object (artha) on another object and that of one knowledge (jñāna) on another knowledge. Thus adhyāsa arises as a result of the admixture between the real and the unreal. In the experience of the silver on the nacre, there is an intermixture of both the nacre, the real and silver, the unreal. Similarly, in the rope-snake case, there is the intermixture of the rope, the real, and the snake the unreal. And as a result of this intermixture, the erroneous cognition like 'This is silver', 'This is snake' etc. arises.

II) The Meaning of Adhyāsa :-

The term 'adhyāsa' comes from two words- 'adhi' and 'āsa'.40 The former stands for adhisthāna or substrate and the latter for 'based upon'. Adhyāsa also means as 'adhyāropa'. The term 'adhyāropa' means 'the act of attributing some state or quality to a thing falsely or through mistake'.47 Thus literally “adhyāsa means superimposition in the sense of mistaken ascription to something of an essential nature or attributes not belonging to it”.48 It is thus perceiving a thing in a substrate where it is not. “It is a lack of discrimination, and is false knowledge”.49 It consists in perceiving the attributes of one thing in another thing.50

In Adhyāsabhāsya, Śaṅkara gives a detailed definition of adhyāsa thus, “Śmṛṭirūpaḥ paratra purvadṛśavabhāsaḥ”.51 This definition is applicable to all cases of erroneous cognitions of nacre as silver, rope as snake etc. This means that the object of superimposition must be experienced before
(purvadrśta). And this experience is kept in memory in the form of sarśkāras or impression and is reproduced (smṛṭirupa) at the moment of superimposition. As a result the object of earlier experience is superimposed on another object. Actually the real definition of Śaṅkara is “Adhyāso nāmo atahsmintadbuddhirīti avocama”.62 The other terms of the definition viz. ‘smṛṭirupa’ and ‘purvadrśta’ are introduced in the definition only to explain the concept of superimposition more clearly and to refute the objections raised against the Advaitic concept of superimposition.

This definition of superimposition given by Śaṅkara has been explained in details by the latter Advaita vedāntins like Padmapāda, Prakāśatmayati, Vācaspati Misra, Niṛsirīhasrama and others. They have endeavoured to explain all the cases of superimposition and also to meet all the possible objections raised against the Advaita view of superimposition.

Vācaspati Misra in his commentary 'Bhāmati' uses the term ‘avabhāsa’ in order to define adhyāsa. ‘Avabhāsa’ implies “the knowledge which is contradicted by other knowledge”.63 According to Vācaspati Misra, the revised definition of superimposition is as “Smṛṭirupah paratra purvadrśtavabhāsaḥ”.64 In this broad definition, the term ‘purvadrśta’ (experienced before) means that in the case of superimposition, the object of superimposition must necessarily be experienced before. A person, who have no experience of silver before, can never imposes silver on a nacre. The impression of the silver experienced before remain in the memory of the mind and is reproduced at the time of the perception of the nacre. This perception of silver in the nacre is completely a new object created at that very moment which is similar to the object perceived before.
From this, it is clear that adhyāsa is not pratyabhījña. In pratyabhījña, the object first perceived is the same when it is perceived in the second time. In adhyāsa, on the other hand, the recalled part of the object eg. silver is not actually presented to the eye. Again in pratyabhījña, the two perceptions are with reference to one and the same object. But in adhyāsa they refer to different objects. Thus ‘adhyāsa’ is of the nature of smṛti, while pratyabhījña is not only smṛti but also pratyakṣa, as in pratyabhījña the object is presented to the senses, which is not the case in adhyāsa. So, “Smṛtimūpa, here means that (knowledge), the object of which is not presented to the sense”.

Again, superimposition is not pure recollection, but it is similar to recollection. Thus superimposition can not be a pure recollection (smṛti) in view of the fact that in superimposition, the object is perceived in the front, whereas in the recollection the object is never perceived.

Vācaspāti Miśra further holds that the expression ‘dṛṣṭa’ in ‘purvadrṣṭa’ does not imply that the object perceived earlier must be a real one. Whether the object is a real or not it does not matter, what is necessary is simply the prior knowledge of the object. For instance a man may have the knowledge of snake, from a real snake or from the artificial snake in the shop or the description of snake from the book. Thus only description of snake is sufficient to superimpose the snake in the place of rope.

So, it is not necessary that there must be a real snake which is superimposed on rope. So also, to superimpose the world appearance on Brahman, it is not necessary that the world must be a reality. It is sufficient that we have a knowledge of snake or world, it need not necessarily be real. Nor
again, is it necessary that the object as a substratum of superimposition should be before us. For example, the sky (ākāśa) which is not visible to the senses becomes a substratum for superimposition, by the unthinkable people who imposes blueness, spherical shape etc and expresses such that “The sky is blue”, “The sky is spherical”.

Now the question is what is adhyāsa? For Śaṅkara adhyāsa means either that the not-self is superimposed on the self or vice versa. It is the appearance of a thing where it is not. Śaṅkara clarifies his view with such examples as ‘the nacre and the silver’, ‘the one moon appearing as double’.

For Śaṅkara, the reality, simply is. But in our attempt to know the reality, our knowledge refers this or that characteristic to it, which actually is not. Thus all our thought struggles to know the real, to seek the truth, but unfortunately it can know the reality only by relating the reality to something other than itself. All knowledge of the finite things are in a sense the negation of pure being, since objects are imposed on the one eternal Subject. The most important example of adhyāsa is thus the confusion of subject with object where we attribute to the subject, the activity, agency and enjoyment etc, where it is not. In the beginning, therefore Śaṅkara says, “Object (viṣaya) and subject (viṣayin) having as their province the presentation of the ‘thou’ (yusmat) and the ‘I’ (asmat) are of a nature as opposed as darkness and light”.

By subject and object, what Śaṅkara wants to imply is that Ātman and non-Ātman, i.e. the transcendental reality and empirical existence. The object includes the individual age, bodily organs and material world etc. The subject is the ultimate consciousness on which the whole world of consciousness
depends. The very nature of pure consciousness is that it can not reveal itself apart from being manifested as object of consciousness through a mental state (vrtti).

Now, it seems that adhyāsa or superimposition is not possible i.e. we can not superimpose upon the subject the attributes of the object and vice versa. Śaṅkara says, "............. it is wrong to superimpose upon the subject—whose self is intelligence, and which has for its sphere, the notion of the Ego—the object whose sphere is the notion of the Non-ego, and the attributes of the object, and vice versa to superimpose the subject and the attributes of the subject on the object". 62

Apparently, it seems that adhyāsa or superimposition is not possible i.e we can not superimpose upon the subject the attributes of the object and vice versa. "Inspite of this', Śaṅkara says, 'it is on the part of man a natural procedure (Naisargika Lokavyavahārah)- which has its cause in wrong knowledge- not to distinguish the two entities- (object and subject) and their respective attributes, although they are absolutely distinct, but to superimpose upon each other the characteristic nature and the attributes of the other and thus coupling the real and the unreal, to make use of expressions such as 'That am I' 'That is mine'. 63 Thus such type of false knowledge (mithyā-jñāna-nimitta) of pairing together, the true and the untrue, i.e. the subjective and objective is inborn (Naisargika), and owing to this inborn ignorance, which is unspeakable and without a beginning, attributes like mind, body, senses etc. which are products of ignorance are superimposed on the self, and it behaves as if it is an agent, enjoyer, possessed of parts or organs of body- although it is none of these in reality- and thus becomes an object.
Superimposition of the not-self on the self can be understood more clearly from some examples as given by Śaṅkara himself. Due to this innate ignorance, we superimpose on the interior self, the attributes of the not-self. When for instance, one says, 'I am ill' when his son or wife is ill. "Attributes of the body are superimposed on the self, if a man thinks of himself (his self) as short, stout, lean, fair, as standing, walking or jumping". Attributes of the sense organs are superimposed on the self, when man expresses as, "I am blind", 'I am one-eyed', 'I am deaf' etc. Attributes of the internal organs are superimposed when he considers himself, subject to desire, intention, doubt, determination and so on. Thus there is the superimposition not only of the form 'I' but also of the form 'mine'. The former is the superimposition of substance (dharmin) and the latter is the superimposition of attributes (dharma). "Thus the procedure of the notion of the Ego (i.e. the internal organ) is superimposed on the interior self, which in reality, is the witness of all, the modifications of the internal organ and vice versa the interior self, which is witness of everything is superimposed on the internal organs the senses and so on. In this way, there goes on this natural beginningless and endless superimposition, which appears in the form of wrong conception, is the cause of individual souls appearing as agents and enjoyers (of the result of their actions) and is observed by every one".

It is thus the reciprocal superimposition of the self and the not-self and of the attributes of the one on the other, that there is the bondage of the soul which is the pure subject. The jiva acts and enjoys because there is the wrong identification of the self with the inner organs and body and its experiences. Thus, the agency, enjoyership, ownership etc are superimposed on the self. As a result, the soul is bound in the region of samsāra and there is the subsequent sufferings.
Ill) Is the Doctrine of Adhyāsa a Case of Illusion:

In adhyāsa, we take one object for another. For example, nacre is cognised as silver or a rope is cognised as a snake. These are actual cases of illusion. Now, since these examples are the cases of illusion, the traditional interpreters have often misinterpreted the doctrine of adhyāsa as a doctrine of illusion. But we cannot support this view. Though these are the cases of illusions, no doubt, yet Śaṅkara uses these examples, "as illustrative of a logical standpoint and nothing else". Moreover, illusion is always perceptual. But adhyāsa is not always perceptual, e.g., the superimposition of the self on the not-self and vice-versa, which are imperceptible. "Thus illusion and superimposition are different and it cannot be held that Śaṅkara's doctrine of adhyāsa is a doctrine of illusion."

Śaṅkara opens his celebrated commentary on the Brahmāsūtra with the elaborate discussion of the adhyāsa. His Adhyāsabhāṣya is a challenge in the history of philosophy and he accepts this challenge so boldly that no philosophy could reach his philosophical height and his Māyāvāda is the direct corollary of this challenge. The concept of adhyāsa at once explains the phenomenality of the world and the non-duality of Brahman. In the post-Śaṅkara period the schools of Advaita Vedānta like Vivaraṇa and the Bhāmati etc have elaborately discussed on the concept of adhyāsa. So our next point is about the doctrine of Māyā which is also an important contribution of Śaṅkara in the history of Advaita philosophy.
The doctrine of māyā is the keystone of Śāṅkara vedānta. It is the theory which stands as the mile-stone of the Advaita concept of ultimate reality.

The main problem that disturbed the Indian philosophers was to find out the relation between the real and the unreal. What is the relation between the Brahman and the world or how the world appearance is connected with Brahman? For Śāṅkara the question is an illegitimate one and is unnecessary to answer. A relation presuppose two distinct things and if Brahman and the world are to be related, they must be distinct from each other and in that case the Advaitism will be interrupted. So it is impossible to explain the relation between Brahman and the world. According to Dr. S. Radhakrisnan, "The real is never known to have any relation with the unreal. The world somehow exists and its relation to Brahman is indefinable (anirvacaniya)". Thus the relation between Brahman and the world is such that the world is not identical with Brahman, nor different from Brahman, and not both identical and different from Brahman which is self-contradictory. It is hence anirvacaniya.

Every religious philosophy holds the view that the finite is rooted in the infinite and that both are connected from the time eternity and yet no system till today can logically establish the relation between the two. No system can adequately explain how the world appearance is bound up with the Absolute. However long the chain of our reasoning is, however strong our argument, yet the explanation of the rise of finite world out of the bosom of the infinite, the origin of the world process from the infinite Brahman remain a fact capable of no further explanation.
It is Śaṅkara, who boldly and logically announced the doctrine of māyā as an explanation of the relation between the world appearance and Brahman. It was the versatile genius of Śaṅkara, which could adjust the position of real Brahman and unreal world, through the help of his concept of māyā. So the main contribution of Śaṅkara to Indian philosophical history is his doctrine of māyā. Through the theory of māyā, Śaṅkara proved that Brahman is the only absolute reality and the world is an appearance. Thus the remarkable quality of Śaṅkara's philosophy is that he did not discard the world as such, while establishing his Advaitavāda, he only advocated that the world is not permanently real. It is worth mentioning that by saying the world is māyā or mithyā, Śaṅkara did not prove the negation of the world. Furthermore, accepting māyā as sakti of Paramātman, Śaṅkara finds a suitable solution for the complicated problem of the creator and the creation.

**Meaning of Māyā :-**

The word māyā does not have any fixed and unalterable meaning in the history of Indian thought. While Yakṣa's Nighantu equated it with prajñā or intelligence, Sayāna noted that its most common meaning in the Rg veda are prajñā and kapata (decret). In an off quoted verse of Rg veda māyā means the power to transform oneself into strange forms. In the Rg veda, this word has been used in a sense which comes very near to the meaning adopted in the Advaitic writings, "When grown to fullness by bodily form thou didst wander among mankind proclaiming thy strength; O' Indra; then all thy battles of which men tell were but a product, a creation of māyā. For never hast thou yet, either today or in former times, found an enemy".
Among the principal Upaniṣads, the Brhadāraṇyaka (2-5-19) repeals the sense given in the hymns of the Rg veda, where it means the magical power. In the Svetāsvatara upaniṣad the word has been used entirely in a different sense and it means the power of Maheśvara and here prakṛti has been given as synonym of māyā. In the Bhāgavadgītā, māyā either means sākti of Īśvara or Traigunātmaka prakṛti.

The above mentioned bird's eye view of māyā presents a background for understanding the doctrine of māyā of Śaṅkara. Again Śaṅkara finds a clear background for his doctrine in the Māndukya-kārikā of Gauḍapāda, the great grand teacher of Śaṅkara. Gauḍapāda has used the term māyā as many as sixteen times, in the Māndukya-kārikā. But one thing is clear that though the philosophy presented by Śaṅkara is very much similar to the philosophical ideology of Gauḍapāda, but Gauḍapāda’s dream like similarity to māyā and the waking world, is not at all acceptable to Śaṅkara, who emphatically support the phenomenal reality of the world created by māyā and he clearly refutes the dream like character of the external world in his Brahmastrutra Bhāsyā.

The literal meaning of the world ‘māyā’ is highly significant. The word ‘māyā’ is a combination of two words, ‘mā’ and ‘yā’ which implies ‘not’ and ‘what’ respectively and taken together it means, “that which is not”. Thus the statement that “the world is māyā” means that it is an appearance of Reality in a form which is not its essential and ultimate nature and has no being after the dawn of right knowledge.

Śaṅkara describes māyā as the root cause of the world appearance. In most cases, Śaṅkara has used the term ajñāna, avidyā, māyā, prakṛti, avyakta
etc as synonymous. Thus māyā or ajñāna occupies a pivotal position in Advaita vedānta as it is regarded as the cause of all multiplicity and empirical activity. In the word of A. K. Warrier, “In fact the entire world of appearance, the sphere of multiplicity, the scene of life, its bondage, suffering and liberation falls within the boundless realm of māyā”.

We may mention here the different significance of the term māyā as used in Advaita philosophy.

(1) That the world is not self-explanatory shows its phenomenal character which is signified by the word māyā.

(2) The problem of relation between Brahman and the world has meaning for us who admit the pure being of Brahman from the intuitive standpoint and demand an explanation of its relation to the world, which we see from the logical standpoint. We can never understand how the ultimate reality is related to the world of plurality, since the two are heterogenous and every attempt at explanation is bound to fail. This incomprehensibility is brought out by the term māyā.

(3) If Brahman is to be viewed as the cause of the world, it is only in the sense that the world rests on Brahman. While the latter, is in no way touched by it, the world which rests on Brahman is called māyā.

(4) The principle assumed to account for the appearance of Brahman as the world is also called māyā.

(5) If we confine our attention to the empirical world and employ the dialectic of logic, we get the conception of a perfect personality, Isvāra, who has the power of self-expression. This power or energy is called māyā.
(6) This energy of Isvara becomes transformed into the upādhi or limitation, the unmanifested matter (avyakta prakrti) from which all existence issues. It is the object through which the supreme subject Isvara develops the universe (Brahmasutra Bhāsyā - 11.1.14, 1.4.3, 11.2.2)\textsuperscript{76}

The concept of māyā is not a mere hypothesis, as it is based on the facts of experience. We find in our experience that the reality of a thing is different from its appearance. To the passengers in a fast moving train the trees, houses etc. appear to be running backwards; when the clouds move in the sky, it looks as if the moon is moving. A stick which is burning at one end, when revolved rapidly, produces the impression of a circle of fire. These experiences happen in our everyday life which are natural to us. As M. K. Venkatarama Iyer says, “the disparity between appearance and reality is mainly due to the intellectual apparatus owing to these limitations things appear to us other than what in reality they are”.\textsuperscript{77} According to Ṣaṅkara, it is the Māyā, which breaks up the original picture of reality and gives a distorted picture of it, and this fact is experienced by us in every field of activity.

**The Two Functions of Māyā**

For the Advaitins māyā works as a power of Brahman. Since it is the power of creating world appearance, in presenting the erroneous cognition, this power functions in two ways- one is called Āvaraṇa sakti or the power of obscuring or veiling or concealing. The other is the Vikṣepa sakti or the projecting or distorting power.

According to Śaṅkara Māyā signifies both the illusive and a creative power which the Svetāsvatara upaniṣad calls Devatma sakti.\textsuperscript{78} He further
amplifies the concept of māyā by distinguishing two powers of it, rather two ways in which it operates in the Vivekacūḍāmāni. Thus māyā is constituted of the three guṇas and acquire the power of their respetive functions. Thus it is said — "She has her guṇas as rajas, tāmas and sattva, named after their respective functions. 79 Rajas has its vikṣepa sakti or projecting power80 and the veiling power is the power of tāmas, which makes things appear other than what they are.81 This power of concealment is the cause of the jīva’s transmigration and starts the action of projecting power (vikṣepa).82

The two powers are described by Śaṅkara as that for which a person wanders in the world by falling into the clutches of these powers.83 Māyā obscures the Self and projects the world. In the rope-snake example, the real nature of the rope is obscured and an appearing snake is projecting on it. It must be remembered that māyā never obscures the not-self. For the obscuration of the not-self (object), there is neither evidence nor fruit. Only an intelligent being’s nature can be obscured. Self or Brahmān is obscured.

Here the question may arise, how can the limited, non-eternal and inert ajñāna obscure the self which is unlimited eternal and of the nature of consciousness. To this, the Advaitin reply that just as a small patch of cloud obscured the sun, so also the limited ajñāna having obscured the intelligence of the cogniser seems to obscure the self. Actually the small patch of cloud could not obscure the sun for all time. Similarly ajñāna can not conceal the self for all time. It seems to cover it for a limited period till the right knowledge dawn. It is pure Āṭṭa which is "clear like water, yet in conjunction with Rajas and Tamas, it makes for transmigration. The reality of the Ātman becomes reflected
in Satta and like the sun reveals the entire world of matter”. So it is due to satta, which inhere in māyā, that man can overcome the veil of ajñāna, just like the sun revealing the entire world by overcoming the veil of clouds.

Nature of Māyā :-

Māyā or ajñāna occupies a pivotal position in Advaita Vedānta as it is regarded as the cause of all multiplicity and empirical activity. That is why all the adherents of Advaita Vedānta have dealt with the concept of māyā in details. Regarding the essential nature, there is no difference of opinion among the Advaita Vedāntins, as all have followed Śaṅkara in this respect. Of course, some differences of opinion have developed among the later Advaita Vedāntins on some minute issues like its āśraya (locus), number and so on. Now let us examine some of the important points regarding the nature of māyā.

(I) Māyā as the Energy of God :-

For Śaṅkara, “Īśvara is Brahman conditioned by Māyā”. Māyā is His energy, inherent force, by which He transforms the potential into the actual world. As a power of Īśvara, māyā is inseparable from Him just as the burning power of fire is from fire itself. In Gauḍapāda kārikā, māyā indicates the power of Īśvara or God to bring about an appearance to imagine things. “The absolute, together with this principle of Māyā or svabhāva, which is the unmanifested (avyaktaṁ), is the Īśvara ‘who sends forth all the centre of consciousness”.

Thus māyā is a cosmic power which is the principle of creation.

(II) Māyā as the Finitising Principle :-

Māyā is the finitising principle which provides the dynamics of the One appearing as the many. As Brahman by itself is inactive, an activating
agency must operate on it to make it appear as the many. In the rope-snake illusion, the rope lies on the ground inert in itself. The man's ajñāna in conjunction with the limitations of insufficient light and his psychological state to be frightened comes to play on the rope and makes it appear to him as a snake. Similar is the case when a man mistakes a mother of pearl as silver. The frightened man run away from the snake, the avaricious one goes towards the seeming silver. All life's actions are based either on aversion like a cow going towards a man extending a handful of grass on it or running from one who wields a stick.87

Ajñāna, therefore is the agency, making the substratum appear differently from what it is causing either joy or sorrow. Even so “to make the nirguṇa and niskriya Brahman which is the adhisthāna of the universe appear as the manifold of the objects of the world filled with joy and sorrow, a finitisising agency must function and that is Māyā”. 88

Māyā makes the one Brahman appear as the many i.e. the world or Jagat. How does it happen? How did the rope seem to be a snake? It is due to the ajñāna of the deluded man. The ajñāna conceals the rope, from the man and make him see it as a snake. It first effected a concealment of the rope and simultaneously projected the snake, as it were, from out of the rope. Concealment (āvaraṇa) and projection (vikṣepa) are the two complementary effects of the activity of ajñāna. Similarly, from the general nature of mankind, Brahman is concealed and the world is projected to them. At the dawn of right knowledge (samyakjñāna), the projection is amulled along with the concealment, and the rope is seen as it is. In the same way, on attaining Brahmaajñāna, the reality behind the manifold world is seen as the One unitary Brahman.
(III) Maya-anadi :-

Maya is beginningless (anadi). It is not possible to say when the association of maya with Brahman started. It is as old as the history of the world and no one can say when the world appearance began. Its origin is beyond our comprehension, for we are subject to this maya. We must transcend maya to know its origin. This is possible only those rare few who have attained the Samyakjnana or true knowledge of Brahman. When that state is attained, maya is liquidated and there will be no need to discuss its origin. Hence maya is beginningless (anadi).

But though maya is anadi, it is not ananta, without an end. Maya can be annulled by Brahmajnana, for after the realisation of Brahman, the magic show of the phenomenal world will disappear. So maya though anadi, but has an end (santa).

(IV) A Positive Entity-Bhavarupa :-

The Advaita vedantin regard ajnana or maya as a positive entity and not a negative one. Philosophers like the Naiyayikas and the Vaiseshikas maintain that ajnana is nothing but the non-existence of knowledge (jnanabhava), as the prefix 'non' in 'ajnana' (na-ajnana) means non-existence. Hence according to them, ajnana can never be a positive entity. But the Advaita vedantin argue that the prefix 'non' has other meaning also, such as similarly (sadrshya) contradiction (virodha) etc. Hence ajnana is not jnanabhava but jnanavirodhi i.e., antagonistic to knowledge. According to the Advaita vedantins, ajnana can not be a negative entity, since it is the material cause of the world. For, as the material cause can not be contradictory in nature to its effect, the cause of
this universe of positive nature can not be a negative character. So the word 'positive' has been used here simply to mean that ajñāna is something other than the non-existent, ajñāna is not absence of knowledge (jñānābhāva). It is 'something' (yuktinicit) and positive (bhāvarupa).

(V) Māyā is Indescribable (Anirvacanīya) :-

Māyā is avyakta or indeterminable i.e. devoid of any well defined nature. For it is neither existent nor non-existent nor partaking of both these characters, it is neither different from Brahman nor non-different nor both, it is neither composed of parts nor partless (i.e. an indivisible whole) nor both.

Ajñāna, can not be regarded as existent or real like Brahman since it is contradicted later on by right knowledge. Nor is it absolutely non-existent or unreal like a sky flower, since it produces effect and is an object of our direct experience as "I am ignorant". Again, ajñāna can not be both existent and non-existent, since existence and non-existence being mutually contradictory can not remain in the same object at the same time.

Again ajñāna can not be different from Brahman, since in that case it will involve dualism. Nor is it non-different from Brahman, as identity is not possible between the conscious Brahman and inert ajñāna. Since difference and non-difference is mutually contradictory, both of them can not be the relation between Brahman and ajñāna.

Ajñāna is not composed of parts, since in that case it will become an effect and will consequently, cease to be the primal cause. Nor is it partless, because it is inert and is modified into the manifold objects of the world. It can not also be both composed of parts and partless, as these two positions are
contradictory to each other. Thus it is not possible to determine the nature of ajñāna or māyā in any way. Therefore it is called anirvacatiya (indescribable).

Now the question may arise, why is māyā indeterminable? In answer to this we may say that in Advaita vedānta, indeterminable or indescribable i.e. anirvacaniya means that it is not possible to determine the nature of māyā in terms of any human categories. It is our inability to bring māyā under any ordinary category. In fact, ‘real’ means here the ‘absolutely real’ and ‘unreal’ means the ‘absolutely unreal’ and māyā can not come under these two extremes, hence it is indescribable.

(VI) Māyā is Triguṇātma

Māyā is composed of three gunas (triguṇātma). Māyā is like the prakṛti of Sāṅkhya, which is composed of three gunas as Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. In the Svetāsvatara upaniṣad, the term ‘Māyāni’ is used in the sense of the prakṛti of Sāṅkhya. Thus māyā refers to prakṛti and Māyin to Maheśvara. Again in the Vivekacudāmani, Śaṅkara explains in a poetic manner that “She has her guṇas as rajas, tanas and sattva, named after their respective functions.”

But it must be remembered that māyā can not be equated with prakṛti of Sāṅkhya. “Māyā is the first cause of the phenomenal world and consequently corresponds to the prakṛti or the pradhāna of the Sāṅkhya system.” But there are some fundamental difference between the two, which we can not forget. The pradhāna of the Sāṅkhya system is conceived of as the source of the universe which is independent of the puruṣa. But, in Advaita, māyā is considered as the primordial cause of the universe which is dependent on...
Brahman. While commenting on the Brahmasutra Śaṅkara, points out that the Advaitins do not follow the line of argument of the Sāṁkhya in accounting for the rise of the universe. So it is not proper to equate the Advaita concept of māyā with the Sāṁkhya concept of prakṛti or pradhāna. Māyā or avyakta is a helper, as it were, to Īśvara in His creation, and hence such an avyakta dependent on the Lord is the main significance of the nature of māyā in Śaṅkara.

**Avidyā and Māyā**:

There arises a confusion regarding the two terms- māyā and avidyā which are so often used in Advaita vedānta, whether they are different in meaning or used in the same sense. Generally a distinction is made between the two terms in our empirical life. It is believed that māyā is the cause of projection and avidyā is the cause of obscuration. There are some Advaitins who hold that māyā and avidyā are different from each other and they have given their own explanation. Vidyāranya, a follower of Advaita vedānta, states that, "the reflection of Brahman in māyā which is made of pure sattva is Īśvara while the reflection of Brahman in avidyā in which rajas and tamas are also present is the jiva or the individual" (Pañcadasī-16.17). Thus in Vidyāranya's Pañcadasī, we find a clear distinction between avidyā and māyā. He tries to establish that māyā is the adjunct of Īśvara, whereas avidyā is the adjunct of the jiva (Pañcadasī-16.17). A clear distinction between avidyā and māyā is seen even in the later exponents of these schools like the author of Prakatartha Vivaraṇa, Sadānanda Yogendra and others.

In the 'Brahmasutra Bhāṣya' Śaṅkara does not make a distinction between avidyā and māyā. For Śaṅkara the tendency of viewing things as
many which is really one is avidyā, is common to all human beings. "This tendency to confuse the transcendental and the empirical standpoint or adhyāsa however erroneous, is natural to the human mind. It is the result of our cognitive mechanism". Thus avidyā is a mental tendency, it is the fall from intuition, the mental deformity of the finite self which disintegrates the divine into a thousand different fragments. Avidyā is what Deussen calls, "the innate obscuration of our knowledge". Avidyā is thus, the unconscious subjective tendency of the finite minds, which shuts us from our Godlike existence and make us appear as finite being. The appearance of Brahman as the world is due to our avidyā even as the appearance of the rope as the snake is due to defective senses.

For Śaṅkara, avidyā does not imply the individual ignorance, but it is the impersonal force which transcends all individual consciousness which is the same as māya. Śaṅkara does not make any distinction between jiva and Isvara. For him the distinction is like the difference between pot-ether and ether-at large. When the pot is removed, then the ether will merge in the ether-at large. So also the jiva is different from Brahman only due to limiting adjunct which is the result of ignorance. Thus the individual self is not different from God, the individual soul has no reality of its own. It is superimposed on the supreme Self due to ignorance.

For Śaṅkara māya and avidyā are one and the same. The difference between them is only considering them from different point of views. When we look at the problem from the objective point of view, then we speak of māya and when the same is viewed from subjective side we have the avidyā. Thus just as the one and the same reality is viewed as Brahman and Ātman, so also māya and avidyā are the different names of the one and the same power of ignorance.
In Vivekaçūḍāmani, Śaṅkara’s attitude towards māyā and avidyā is very clear. It is said, “Avidyā (nescience) or Māyā, calls also the undifferentiated power of the Lord. She is without beginning, is made up of the three guṇas, and is superior to the effects (as their cause). She is to be inferred by one of clear intellect only from the effect; she produces. It is she who brings forth this whole universe”. This avyakta is ofcourse, not identical with the pradhāna of the Sāmkhya, as has repeatedly been explained. For while māyā is dependent on Brahman, avyakta is independent of puruṣa in Sāmkhya philosophy. Again the Vedāntic concept of māyā is the power of Lord (paramesa śakti), but the Sāmkhya prakṛti is inert, insentient.

So it is clear that though the terms avidyā and māyā are used in different senses by different followers of Advaita, yet in Śaṅkara, we find that the term māyā, avidyā, ajñāna etc are used in the same sense. Avidyā and māyā represent the subjective and the objective elements of the one fundamental fact of experience. From the subjective side, it is called as avidyā, since it is removed by vidyā (knowledge), from the objective side it is called māyā, since it is coeternal with the supreme Being or Īśvara.

The word avidyā is translated into English as nescience or ignorance. In this sense, it means the natural incapacity of man, with his ordinary limited intelligence to comprehend the Eternal Absolute called Brahman, which is unknowable by the senses or such other means of knowledge. If avidyā means ignorance as commonly understood, a philosopher like Śaṅkara could not have said that the “Avidyā is the power of Lord”. Śaṅkara uses avidyā as synonymous with adhyāsa or superimposition. So all the misunderstandings regarding
avidyā arises due to the attempt to interpret the term in modern terminology, which should not be done by us.

Thus from our above discussion we come to the conclusion that according to Śaṅkara Brahman is the only reality and that the phenomenal world necessarily an unreal appearance of Brahman. Now something is proved to be unreal when it is perceived to be so. But it is not the case with world appearance. We are experiencing a real world. The world may be an appearance to those who have realised the Brahman, but for others like us it is a real creation of God. Thus in conformity with the upaniṣadic tradition Śaṅkara has successfully accommodated the concept of Nirguṇa Brahman and Saguṇa Brahman. Both Nirguṇa and Saguṇa are not two different entities. The same Brahman is Nirguṇa from transcendental point of view and Saguṇa from empirical point of view. His Saguṇa Brahman thus helps to develop the religious attitude of the devotee.

Śaṅkara with the introduction of his concept of Adhyāsa, which is a bold step indeed in the history of Indian philosophy, have successfully explained the phenomenality of the world and the non-duality of Brahman and His Māyāvāda is a direct corollary of his Advaitavāda. The adhyāsa is described as the false knowledge of ascribing the self as not-self and not-self on the self and thus illegitimately transferring the properties (dharma) of the one on the other constitutes the subject matter of discourse. This false knowledge is described by Śaṅkara as the most basic and fundamental, veiling all our knowledge is natural and is rooted in our very existence as a human being which is explained by Śaṅkara in his precious ‘Adhyāsabhāsyā’ Śaṅkara has propounded his Māyāvāda in conformity with the Upaniṣadic tradition. The upaniṣadic seers
felt the mystery of creation, the inexplicability of the world. The world can not be real at the level of Brahman. Even the world can not be denied as non-existence. Bādarāyana in his commentary on Brahmasutra try to reconcile this problem of reality and unreality. Śaṅkara and other commentators also tried to reconcile the problem in their own way. But it is Śaṅkara who have satisfactorily solved the problem through his doctrine of Māyā, which is evident throughout our discussion.

To understand the exact nature of the phenomenal world, we have to analyse the exact nature of error. For it is due to error that something is presented not 'as it is' but as 'otherwise'. The concept of world appearance is a case of erroneous knowledge where Brahman is presented as otherwise case of knowledge. The problem of error, therefore, has been given sufficient importance in Indian philosophical system and Advaita vedāntins also developed its own theory of error as 'anirvacaniyakhyāti' by considering other theories in the introduction of Brahmasutra, Śaṅkara has mentioned the various theories of error existing in different systems. So these theories deserves more attention in order to understand Advaitin’s anirvacaniyakhyātivāda in our next chapter.
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3) B. S. S. III.2-22.
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5) 'Aparokṣatvāt ca pratyagatmāprasidhaiḥ'. ibid. 1.1.1.
6) 'Jīvo Brahmaiva na paraḥ'.
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11) S. B. on Taitt. Upa. 2-1.
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