

**Philosophy and Critical Thinking**  
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**Lecture 37: Sankara's philosophy**

Namaskar to all. Today we will be discussing the Shankara philosophy. The last few classes we have been discussing the Shankara philosophy. In last class we have discussed the idea of self from Sankaran perspective and we also have discussed the concept of Maya from Shankaracharya perspective. Today we are going to discuss a very important concept, concept of Brahman. This concept is a very important in Shankaracharya philosophy because if you have an idea of the notion of Brahman in Shankaracharya, then many philosophies or other philosophy, other concept will be very easy to understand. So, last class we have discussed self and, in this class, I will be discussing the notion of Brahman. Shankara philosophy and his argument is very important all the arguments, but at the same time, we need a lot of time to understand and discuss Shankara argument. This class is on a basic level, therefore, I am discussing this notion from very basic level. It does not mean that this are the only this set of notion and the arguments are the complete notion and argument. Just for an idea since this course is in a undergraduate level, so I will be giving you some idea or very basic idea from Sankaran perspective. However, they are in reference section, books are mentioned and if you are interested you can read more in detail. So, today we are going to talk about what is a Brahman in Shankaracharya philosophy. We have already discussed the notion of Brahman from in Upanishad and in Upanishad there is two kinds of Brahman, one is finite, one is infinite. So, let say the top there is an infinite and then finite. So, infinite is called Nirgun Brahman and then finite is called Sagun Brahman. Nirgun is there is no attribute and Sagun is there is an attribute. Now, what is an attribute? We can talk about an object, but the same time if you are going to talk about an attribute it means also, we are going to limit an object. So, if you see not only the Indian philosophy, then western philosophy where we have talked about Spinoza and Spinoza has argued that if there is an attribute, if there is a thing we are going to determine an object, then it will have to talk about the cause of an object. So, the philosophy you can understand through an argument, how they are arguing. So, argument is goes like this that the idea of Sagun Brahman is finite and finite only means that we can talk about the attributes. We can say he is a lord of law of karma, he is a creator, he is a destroyer everything we can talk about, but about Nirgun Brahman we cannot talk about and that concept is a very important concept here in Shankaracharya philosophy. In the last class as we have discussed how Shankaracharya has argued that self is not the body. We have talked about the Atman and the five different sheaths and now all of them is not self. So, if you are identifying yourself with any of the sheaths for example, I am identifying myself from my body, from my prana, from my mind, from my intellect and so on, then this is an

ignorance. So, only ignorant person can do that. Now, what is the application of this philosophy which we are discussing and then you may ask that okay, how we this philosophy we can like just understand from the practical perspective. Shankaracharya philosophy I believe it is in a very significant in the sense that when you have knowledge about yourself, we can talk a lot about our mental health. So, therefore I believe that all the Indian philosophy is now very significant and it also has an application in your personal life. So, let us understand the idea of Brahman. So, we have discussed the Shankaracharya philosophy in brief when we were discussing about Shankaracharya where we have talked about that how Shankaracharya has argued that only Brahman is the only ontological reality. Now, what is an ontological reality which ultimately is true. Now, if you want to understand the reality and it is an empirical reality and ontological reality. So, we already have discussed in last week that kind of reality. So, there is an on illusory reality, empirical reality and then finally ontological reality. Now, while we are using this word the empirical reality and ontological reality. So, empirical reality or even you just forget this for the moment the Indian philosophy and Shankaracharya, even you take the Western philosophy, they also have talked about the genuine knowledge and the real world or real knowledge. What is reality? What is the real nature of this world or reality? They are all the philosophers not only in India even then of rest they are more interested in reality or genuine knowledge. Now, if you are going to talk about real and unreal, then there is something which is changing. For example, you take the any example of the empirical world and this object in the empirical world is changing. If this thing is changing then it means it is not on the real. Real in the sense that ultimate real. So, when I am saying this object is ultimately real or it has an ontological reality it only means that it is not subject to change. It is not going to change. This is beyond the time person, or place. Now, what they are doing they are thinking of is there anything which is an ultimate real because in this world everything is changing.

Now, let us come back to the Shankaracharya philosophy. In last class while discussing the idea of self in Shankaracharya we have talked about the five different sheaths and they see all the time is changing. We talk about the gross body, we talk about the subtle body. These are not beyond the change, the subject to change and therefore they are not real. So, but however Shankaracharya says they are real in empirical sense but in ontologically it is not real. Now, then the question arises what is, is there anything which is ultimately real? Shankaracharya argued that Brahman is the only which is real and has an ontological reality. So, the Brahman is the only thing which is real and everything is real. The Shankaracharya argued that Brahman is existence, knowledge, infinity, pure, supreme, self-existent, eternal, indivisible bliss not different from the individual soul and devoid of interior and exterior. The next point, the Shankaracharya argued that all the universe which is through ignorance appears as of diverse form is nothing else but Brahman which is absolutely free from all the limitations of human thought. So, the idea is this universe, this appearance of this world is caused by ignorance, not on a right knowledge. Now, it does

not mean that this appearance is a different form on the Brahman. It is and is everything is a Brahman. This is what I have been discussing in the last class that when you are identifying yourself, a self means your atman, that is in a real thing. Every other thing is nonsense. So, the Shankaracharya has argued the self and non-self. So, if you are going to identify yourself from the Brahman because that is there are two things and this appearance of this universe is because of this ignorance. So, ignorance is the cause of, maya is the cause of this appearance of this world, this universe. Take an example, suppose there is a clay and out of this clay, one made a jar. Now, no one can demonstrate that the essence of jar is something other than the clay. So, the clay and jar are same. It may appear differently but the essence is same, it is not different. One can argue, oh, jar has a different essence and then clay has another essence. What Shankaracharya is arguing that universe and everything in the world is what is called Brahman. Now, he is presenting an argument, arguing that if this universe which is appearing, let us say that this appearance of this universe or this universe is true, then why we are not able to perceive this universe in deep sleep. Now, what does it mean? We have discussed in the last class about the gross body, subtle body and atman, or let us say the five different sheaths. We have talked about how in a waking state we perceive an object. So, we are in a waking state where your subtle body, your gross body, everything is active. So, for you there is an object. We can perceive things by saying this is X, this is Y, this is Z and so on. Now, when you are sleeping in a dream state, when you are dreaming, your gross body or so when you are dreaming, now whatever this mind has perceived that is there. Mind is projecting everything. Now, next step, the deep sleep, there is no object. We are not able to see anything. Question is, if this universe is real that why not this universe is appearing in deep sleep. It is not appearing in deep sleep because this is now false, like dream. So, Shankaracharya argued that in deep sleep there is no object. There are no object means whatever we are perceiving in dream and in reality, in a dream state, everything is undoing. So, the idea is what Shankaracharya is saying, the rejecting the reality of everything. So, in waking state what you are perceiving, an object, the universe that is like a dream, when you are dreaming what mind has perceived and projecting. Both are unreal, dream and your objects in the waking state, because if it is not, then in deep sleep it was only possible to see things, but we are not doing that. We are not perceiving things in deep sleep and therefore it proves that these are ugly, these are false like dream. What Shankaracharya argued that therefore the universe does not exist apart from the supreme self. So, the universe there is no independent existence of this universe. This is not different from supreme self. Supreme self is Brahman, and the perception of its separateness is false like qualities and has a superimposed attributes any meaning apart from its substratum. It is a substratum which appears like that through delusion. For example, there is a dim light in the room or when you are like walking on a street. So, because there is no enough light, there is a rope on the street or maybe in your room and that rope is appearing as snake. So, this what is substratum, this rope and what a snake is, superimposed. So, this is a substratum which is

appearing like snake because of the delusion. Similarly, this universe or this appearance of this universe is because of Maya, because of Avidya. But that is not different from the Brahman. Shankaracharya argued that everything is what is Brahman. Whatever a deluded man perceives through mistake is Brahman and Brahman alone. So, whatever we are perceiving in this world that is just Brahman, only Brahman. Shankaracharya argued that there is no differentiation of knower, knowledge and known which is infinite, transcendent and essence of knowledge absolutely. So, basically, he is arguing about the subject-object duality. So, for example, in our waking state, we are saying that I can, I know object X, for example, mobile, for example, table. So, knower, subject and then object and then knowledge. Shankaracharya argued that even in the situation all three is not three different people. Everything is same and that is Brahman. Now, he also in his book *Vivekachudamani*, he argued about the mahāvākya, and in sruti, it is mentioned mahāvākya about like, for example, Thou art That. Now, that thou and that become one when thou has been purified according to the dictate of the scriptures. For example, if you take the example of the last class where we have talked about the self and the different sheaths. When you will purify, your mind. So, a purification of mind means you have realized pure essence identity, there is no difference. So, thou and that become one. So, thou here again is so finite and what we call that is infinite. So, there is difference. So, there are one is infinite and when we are saying thou, this is finite. Let us say, “Aham brahma asmi.” You are that. So, now here is when you are saying this, ‘thou’ is a finite and ‘that’ which is an infinite. So, there are two things. For example, is a thou and that. Now, when we are purifying us because finite is we have in this in Jiva, we have this notion that “I” is a we are considered as in some time as a body, or prana or mind. Now, because of this, we are in this situation. So, this is a finite and that which is an infinite. Now, though they are of different nature or nature of like the finite and one is infinite, yet in their proper essence, they are equal. So, we are talking about there is ocean and there is well. So, in Upanishad, there are like say an argument where they are arguing about the Jiva and then as Brahman where there is an argument that how the Atman is Brahman. Now, they are giving an example of like well and the ocean. So, one is a finite and one is an infinite. But in essence, they are same. It is not different. Now, this contradiction, because one is saying this, one is ocean, one is infinite and I am like finite. This contradiction between them, between though and that is created by superimposition, and is not something real. So, what we are doing because of this ignorance, we are taking this, these two things in a different nature. Thinking one is finite, one is infinite. But in reality, there is a no two different things, they are same thing. So, the Atman is not different from Brahman. But even we believe or as appearing that we are different from Brahman because of the Maya, and this superimposition in the case of Isvara is Maya which is the cause of Mahat and the rest, and in the case of Jiva, consist of five sheaths which are effect of Maya. So, here Shankaracharya has talked about. Now, the Nirgun Brahman which we have been talking with Shankaracharya argued that the Brahman is ontologically real. Now, Isvara, which is Saguna Brahman, lord and Jiva, what

they are? They are because of Avidya, Maya. And ultimately, the only Nirgun Brahman is real. Now, these two are the superimposition of Isvara and the Jiva respectively, and when these are perfectly eliminated, there is neither Isvara or Jiva. So, when we are in this situation, the situation is this in the effect of Maya, then we have an idea of Jiva and the idea of Isvara, lord. But when we are purifying your mind or this ignorance, this Avidya is going to eliminate perfectly or completely, then there is no Isvara nor jiva, only Brahman is real. So, Shankaracharya in his philosophy, as he has been arguing that only Brahman is the only reality, and Brahman is one. He argues that neither this gross nor the subtle universe being imagined. They are not real like snakes in the rope, like dream. So, this is what even the last slide we have discussed that. Then waking state, we are perceiving things or in dream, everything is not real, unreal. Similarly, when you are perceiving the rope as a snake, both thing is not real. Not real in the sense that they are one, it is Brahman. That is the reason that being imagined, they are not real. So, even there is a snake or there is a Brahman and because of Maya, there is a universe or there is appearance of universe, and this appearance of universe is ultimately unreal. It is not real. So, as we can take an always an example about the dream, whatever we are dreaming is not real. So, we take an, give an example that we are some, says that this is that Devadatta. For example, you meet a Devadatta and then or you saw the Devadatta few days back and then you are again for you there is the same person. So, you are saying this is that Devadatta. The identity is spoken of eliminating the contradictory persons. So, in the sentence, "thou art that," the wise man must give up the contradictory elements on both side and recognize the identity of Isvara and Jiva. Noticing carefully the essence of both which is knowledge absolutely. So, when we are talking about the different identity, it is what Shankaracharya is saying this in an unreal. And the wise man must give up this this criterion on both side and recognize the identity of the real nature of this one. He argues that all modification of clay such as jar, brick which are always accepted by mind as a real, but is nothing more than the clay. So, even there is a clay and it is appearing in a different form like a brick, like in jar. And we are accepting, our mind is accepting this in an unreal, but in a essence it is not real and ultimately even it is not different from the clay. As jar is not different from clay, the brick is not different from clay. Therefore, this modification what we are taking as a real, is not real. Again, I gave an example as the place and things that you see in a dream are unreal. Suppose you are dreaming, thinking of a different place and I am under yourself, you are doing something. Now, when we dream is over, what you realize that, that is unreal. So, always we have like different type of dream and sometime weird place we are going, but when this is not over and when you are in the wakeful state, you realize that how does your dream is unreal, and there is no difference there. I mean when you and you are a dream, it is the same. As in dream mind creates, so Maya creates everything in this body, senses, prānas, and ego, everything, but everything is unreal. So, because of Maya, there are a different set of things, this universe, the five sheaths. So, but in reality, and ontologically, everything is unreal. Everything is not. As Shankaracharya has argued that the diversity

fight like even in a dream when we are of the original, there are many different objects. So, but when dream is over, everything is gone, when you realize that how this is everything is unreal. Similarly, this world when you, the appearance of the world, this universe, itself which is not an atman, I am saying in terms of the non-self which is an effect of Maya, it appears as a real, but when you remove the Maya, everything will disappear. Because in reality, only Brahman is real, nothing else is real. Now, such imagination as “thou” or this take place through the defect of the buddhi. So, this is a job of, this is the effect of, this is the work of buddhi, this is the effect of Maya, but this defect, this defect in the sense that we are taking this thou and this, and two different thing in nature, that is a defect in buddhi. Brahman is one and attribute less. Now, this is what I have been arguing that from the Shankaracharya perspective, Brahman is one. It is not a different many and many same. So, Brahman is one and it is attribute less. I mean, there is no attribute, it is called Nirguṇa, and indeterminate, which is nirviśeṣa, real being. So, nirgun Brahman is sat, which is attribute less, Nirguṇa and nirviśeṣa, there is no determinate, this is indeterminate. Though Brahman is attribute less, it is said to be not with the empirical attribute for the sake of prayer. So, when we are talking about the Isvara as in the real for the sake of prayer. But in the Isvara and Jiva are empirical realities. Ontologically, Isvara and Jiva both are not real in Shankaracharya philosophy. Shankaracharya argues that Jiva is not a part of Brahman since Brahman is devoid of parts. It is not modifications of Brahman since Brahman is unchangeable. So, here it is a very important point. So, Brahman is one and attribute less. Now, one should not take it as Jiva as a modification of Brahman or a part of Brahman. Appearance of Jiva is because of Maya. So, Brahman is everywhere and the superimposition is what is this universe. So, this is not that Brahman is taking the shape or this is a modification of Brahman or this is a part of Brahman. Shankaracharya says that this is because of Maya. Take an example, just as space limited by a jar is not different from the infinite space. So, suppose there is a nice jar and in the space is limited by this jar and the space in the jar is not different from the infinite space. Similarly, the empirical self is not different from Brahman. They are same. In the Shankaracharya philosophy, if you take the limitation, theory of limitation or theory of reflection, both is there. Theory of limitation is when you are limiting things like for example, take an example of this jar and a space and then we identify the different, but in reality, it is not different, it is in the same. Similarly, the Jiva which is a finite, it is not different for infinite. Now, the theory of reflection is that Brahman is in a reflection where for example, there is a pot full of water and there is a sun who is reflecting where in this water. So, ignorant person, we take this reflection as in a real sun. So, similarly, what we are doing, we are taking it as a different. Buddhi where it is reflecting in this buddhi, it is also taking as a real. So, this is how the Shankaracharya has talked about the theory of limitation and theory of reflections. So, theory of limitation is where take an example of jar where you have talked about the space, this limited space and then finally the infinite space. Similarly, the Jiva is a finite and then Brahman is infinite, it is not two different things. Similarly, we also have in last class to

talk about the theory of reflections. So, in conclusion, as we have discussed, the Shankaracharya argues that only Brahman is one and the real and everything is an unreal. And he has argued that how Jiva because of Maya, and identifying himself with the different path and different path and different sheaths, and identifying with different sheaths is not right thing or it is an ignorance. Because of ignorance, we are doing that and Shankaracharya has showed in well in detail that how each sheath is subject to change and therefore it is not so eternal. Therefore, it cannot be real. It is unreal. So, Shankaracharya argued that only Atman is self which is Brahman. And this is how he showed that everything the appearance of universe and then self is unreal.

Thank you so much. This talk was based on the Indian philosophy and VivekChudamani of Sri Shankaracharya translated by Swami Madhvanandan and Swami Turiyansda. Thank you so much for your kind attention. We will be continuing this talk in the next class as well. Thank you. Thank you so much.