

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
Prof. Gyan Prakash
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
IIT ISM, Dhanbad
Week- 08
Lecture 38: Sankara's philosophy

Namaskar to all. Today I am going to discuss the Sankara philosophy. In last class, I discussed the Shankaracharya idea of Brahman and self. Today we are going to discuss the theory of knowledge. As in this course, we have been discussing a theory of knowledge about the means of genuine knowledge, right knowledge, let us say valid knowledge. So, in the first class, when we are discussing about the branches of philosophy, where we have discussed the valid source and valid knowledge. The source is valid, the knowledge is valid. Even in the many Western philosophers has talked about the genuine knowledge and how we can get a genuine knowledge. In Indian philosophy, the philosopher has talked about very detail about the valid sources of knowledge,. Now, Shankaracharya philosophy, since he has talked about a different kind of knowledge, Para knowledge, Paravidya, Aparavidya and so on. Therefore, it is also very important to know that what are the valid source of valid knowledge. So today I am going to talk about the number of valid sources of valid knowledge, according to Shankaracharya philosophy. What we have discussed that there is a distinction between an ontological reality and an empirical reality. So, what is an empirically real and ontological real. So, there is a difference, and this is a difference is what we are in this waking state, we are perceiving is an empirically real mind accept as in a real, but ultimately is unreal. Now, the former, the ontological reality is called true knowledge, it is vidya or higher knowledge, it is called *paravidya*, and the later the empirical reality known as false knowledge, Avidya or lower knowledge of *aparavidya*. So Shankaracharya, we understand in this way that we have talked about the true reality. First is an empirical sense, empirical sense, it only means that in when we are working in day-to-day life, there are object and mind accepts this object as a real object. And that is the way we are performing set of actions. So, for example, there is in a class, there is in a world, there is in a family, there is in a career and so on. So, this is me, this is my world. So, this is what empirically what we are accepting like for example, this is me, my body, when I am referring me, so this is me, this is mine and so on. So, these are the idea is what is an empirical reality, mind accept this is these objects are real and is accepting as an empirical reality. But again, as we have discussed in the last class that all this empirical reality is subject to change. So these are going to change. So, this is changing, what does it mean? It is not ultimately real. Now ultimately real in the sense that since there are so many objects in the world, it is also very important to know for us that what is or is there anything which is beyond this change. I have given one example where suppose you like one actor and actress and this person is playing a different character in different movies.

Now through this character, it is difficult to know about his real personality because this acting and this act is changing in every different movie. Now since you like this person who is acting, you also wanted to know his real personality. I mean, why this person is acting like anything, but I wanted to know in his real personality what he is in a real world. Similarly, the Western philosopher as well Indian philosophers, they are also interested in where ultimate reality or is anything which is beyond the change. So, for everything in this world is changing. So, for us, there is X and then again there are changing. Now the question arise is that is there anything which is beyond this change? If you know something which is ontologically real, then obviously we are like capable of or will be able of performing right set of actions. Now for example, if you bring this idea in Shankaracharya philosophy framework, suppose you are dreaming. So, for you there are so many objects, different objects, and this all objects are unreal. And just in a appearance of unreal, if you are going to perform a set of action, so that that set of action will be in the wrong direction. Wrong direction in the sense that it will lead you where the problem of or bhava-chakra that is in a cycle of birth and rebirth. Now therefore, it is important to know that is there anything which is beyond this change? Something which is not subject to change. Then Shankaracharya given a well in detail that what is self and what is not self. He talked about the five different sheaths and argued that identifying yourself with any of the sheath is not right, is wrong. Wrong in the sense that it is not true. I mean wrong in the sense that this is a wrong identification. And if you are going to do that, that will always lead to this cycle of birth and rebirth because you are going to perform wrong set of actions. Therefore, it is important to know that what is the true reality or ultimately real. So, now there are discussions about the Brahman and Shankaracharya argued that there is a Brahman which is nirguna, nirviśes. So, there is no attribute. For example, there is a cow and a two horn and so on. So you are going to talk about this cow with the attributes. But in nirguna Brahman in terms of nirguna Brahman, there is no attribute. So, the knowledge of this ontological reality. So, there are two kinds of reality. First is reality about ontologically which is ultimately true or which is higher truth or let us say which has an ontological reality, higher level. Where higher level in the sense that which is ultimately true is beyond the change. So that is called true knowledge. That is *vidya* or higher knowledge is called *paravida*. Now what we are talking about the empirical, what we are talking about is our life, it is called false knowledge because this knowledge is not right knowledge. Identifying yourself from any of the sheath is not right knowledge. It is called *avidya*. As Shankaracharya philosophy in last class we also have discussed how the *avidya* is the cause of this appearance. This is a superimposition of this non-self. So, this is called lower knowledge or *aparavidya*. Now, the empirical world including non-self is ontologically unreal. As I said that this appearance is just an unreal. *Avidya* impels the empirical self to identify atman with psychophysical organism. This is superimposition of atman on non-self. So, there is a very clear idea of self and notion of non-self. Where Shankaracharya argued that look this is an atman and these are the non-atman, and due to *avidya* what we

are doing, we are identifying atman with non-atman which is not self that we are saying this is called superimposition. So, this superimposition is false because ultimately it is unreal. Avidya is a false knowledge of self in the mind-body aggregates which is not self. Vidya is true knowledge of atman as distinct from mind-body aggregate. So, avidya is when you are talking about the atman in terms of mind-body, and *vidya* is a true knowledge of the atman as distinct from the mind-body aggregate. Now, in Shankaracharya, atman is a witness of all. So, if you can recall what we are talking about the five sheaths. So, atman in center if you can recall that picture atman is in center and all the five sheaths. So atman is what is a witness because for Shankaracharya, atman is nirguna brahman. There is atman is nirguna brahman means there is no attribute. So even atman cannot do anything cannot feel anything. It is not a doer, it is not an experiencer, it is not an active agent. So, this is the atman and but it witnesses everything. Now the atman, now the superimposition of self on non-self is called Adhyāsa, because this is in a false superimposition. So, when you are identifying this self with not-self mind-body aggregate is called false superimposition or adhyāsa in Shankaracharya philosophy. Now what I also would like to mention here that Shankaracharya argued that the brahman can be only known through this “*Neti-Neti.*” Now what is neti neti? Neti neti is, not this, not this, neti not this neti and so on. So, neti neti not this not this. So this what we are doing we are negating all the properties conceptions limitations and identities attributed to brahman. So, when you are saying is thus God has this attribute, not this, and this not this any attribute any conception you take. If you take any attributes so what they are going to then you negate they are going to negate everything. Basically, that negation of every all the properties is negation of all the Avidyā and then what is left is called Brahman. Now, Shankaracharya argues that knowledge of brahman is first acquired from the scripture which is shruti which we have discussed while discussing the shruti and smriti which is confirmed by reasoning and which culminates in intuition or integral experience. Now Shankaracharya argues that shravan hearing, manan, reflection and meditation, nididhyasan lead to intuitive apprehension of Brahman. Now I would like to mention here that Shankaracharya argues that about the vidya or knowledge of the ontological reality is only possible by scripture because it is not possible to know the ultimate reality, to know the ontological reality by any means of the knowledge. Therefore, if you even you want to understand through means of knowledge it will be it will not be able to understand because that is beyond that I mean we cannot understand that through any means of knowledge and that is the reason that Shankaracharya says the knowledge of Brahman is only possible through scriptures. So, scriptures are means of knowledge of brahman. Now Shankaracharya also argued that scripture is authoritative because it embodies intuition of the absolute reality. So, whatever it is in a mention like for example about the brahman is right, right in the sense that it has an authority and through this scripture it is an possible of apprehension of brahman through sravan, manan and nididhyansan. Here, manan there are “*tark*” als reasoning also are included in reflections. So hearing, reflections and meditation is a way to get this hearing reflection and meditation

lead to intuitive apprehension of brahman. Now Shankaracharya talks about the true reality as we have discussed the ontological reality and the empirical reality. Ontological reality is only possible through a scripture. So, if you want to understand what is the ontological reality or ultimate reality so the scripture which is a revealed by scripture which is divinely revealed is the only way to know the ultimate reality. So, scriptures are only means of the knowledge of brahman. Now second part is a empirical reality. Now empirical reality then also we are here which talks about the knowledge the subject and object and so on. Now we are going to talk about the empirical reality. Here according to Shankaracharya there is a distinction between the knower, the known and the means of knowledge as empirical. So, if you take it in ontologically everything is same it is not different but in an empirical there is a distinction because empirical life depends on upon the distinction. So, it is empirical life we are like saying this is X this is Y and so on. This is a subject this is an object this is knowledge and so on. So, this is what Shankaracharya arguing that this is a distinction between the subject and an object. So, knower and the known and the knowledge. Now, here it is again important to know what are the valid knowledge what are the right and valid source. So, if there is a valid means of knowledge, then we will whatever we have we will get the valid knowledge. Source is valid knowledge is valid. Let me remind you one example which I have given while discussing this valid knowledge. For example, after this class or maybe in the evening time you are taking a walk. If you are walking in the evening time you are walking and as you saw someone like asking for help, and this person is or asking for help or asking for money. Now what you did you, out of kindness you helped this person give some money. Now this person is very happy and then said oh you are so kind. So let me give you a very important information we found X or we found alien on X planet. Now your reaction okay fine. Thank you for your information. Now you are not accepting this knowledge because for you this is not the right source. These are not right source. This is for an example, then I will tell you that what are the sources how you can explain how you can talk about the sources valid source. Now next morning you got the information from different source for example a television or something. So, you are accepting this knowledge, because you believe or you believe that this source is a valid source. Therefore, whatever your information is getting for the valid source for you the knowledge is valid. So, this is what just an example to understand that we give a lot of importance to the sources. If the means is right or valid this means is valid the source is valid. If means is not valid source knowledge is not valid. So, this is what we call Pramanas as I said the means of knowledge. Now Shankaracharya has talked about different pramanas and we will be discussing this pramana what are the valid sources for valid knowledge. So first Shankaracharya said, the perception is the right source of knowledge and in Indian philosophy, whether you take it in a orthodox and heterodox all of them have accepted perception as the valid source of valid knowledge. Sankara also argued that this perception is the valid source and for the valid knowledge. Now what Shankaracharya argued that the Brahman is eternal consciousness and when it is determined by internal

organ, it is called subject consciousness or Jiva, it is an empirical self. Now, in external perception when you are like receiving an object so what they are saying that mind goes out to an empirical object through a sense organ and is modified into its form. Suppose there is an object, like for example a table and when I am perceiving an object so according to this philosophy mind is going out. Mind is going out means the through sense organ and taking its shape, this empirical object shape, this modified into this form and this mental mode assuming the form of the object is called Vritti. So, this is how we perceive an object this is how we have a form of an object an idea of form of an object. Now there are two kinds of perception as mentioned in Shankaracharya is indeterminable, Nirvikalp, and determinate, Savikalp. Now I am like discussing this perception and theory of perception in Shankaracharya philosophy very basic level. There are so many concepts which we are not discussing here because this course is on a very basic level so just to have an idea that what are the things it is mentioned in perception, I am just explaining those things. However, the theory of perception in Shankaracharya is a lot of argument and there are many other concepts which is important discussing in very basic level. Now there are two kinds indeterminable and determinate nirvikalp and savikalp. Nirvikalp for example in last class we are talking about that I am that, *Aham brahma asmi*. So, these are the indeterminable perception where there is a no subject and object, and determinate is an I know jar or I know table is a determinate perception. Second one, is an inference and inference is produced by the knowledge of invariable concomitants, the *Vyapti*. Now this we have a discuss in detail even while discussing about in western philosophy. Take it an example of Hume, and when we are discussing about the Indian philosophy, we also have discussed Charvaka that how he rejected the idea of *vyapti*, the sense that we cannot establish a relation between this X and Y, and therefore we cannot argue that X a cause of Y. So this causal relation cannot be established therefore inference is not possible. So, we cannot infer suppose there is from here you saw from window there is a smoke and you are saying, there is a fire. So, there is a fire is knowledge and what is the source of this knowledge is inference. So, Charvaka will say inference is not possible because this cause-and-effect relation this smoke, that is not possible. A possible in the sense that if you are going to establish the relation between this cause and effect the fire and smoke you have to check all the past present and future event of fire and smoke and that is not possible since that is not possible therefore you cannot establish relation causation relation between smoke and fire and that is the reason that we cannot infer based on perception of smoke about fire. Now, Shankaracharya believed that the inference is the right source of knowledge and the inference is produced by knowledge of invariable concomitants and this is, *Vyapti* is known by observation on concomitants it can be a once and twice or many times or multiple times. So, inference is the right source of knowledge. For example you saw a smoke and after perceiving a smoke you saw there is a knowledge of fire you are saying there is a fire. So, there is a fire is knowledge and the source of this knowledge inference. Shankaracharya says that this source is a valid source. Now, third is comparison

is Upmana. Now comparison is means of the knowledge of similarity. Now for example you saw a cow I mean you have an idea or you have seen this cow perceived a cow in your village or in your town. Now you went where in the forest you saw first time the wild cow. Now you have an idea of cow because you have seen now you are comparing this idea of cow with this wild cow. So, you are saying it is like cow. So, this is like cow is a knowledge, and this is not possible through perception because that cow is not here. So, this knowledge similarity cannot be acquired of perception since cow is not present to the eyes. Therefore, we cannot say that oh this is cow and this is like cow. We cannot argue like that or argue in the sense that we cannot have a knowledge like that because this cow is not there, it is not present. So, when I am saying this is like cow, it is not possible by inference, it is not possible by perception. So, this knowledge is only possible by comparison also called upamana. So Shankaracharya also argues that comparison is the right source of knowledge. The fourth one is Presumption, Arthapatti and this is a very important and unique source of knowledge. So arthapatti is the supposition of the premises, reason or cause from the conclusion, consequence or effect. It is like the framing of a hypothesis from given facts. So, this postulation of a hypothesis to explain the inexplicable fact is called Arthapatti. Now what is that? For example, suppose a person is known not to eat in the daytime and it gets stout. So, if this person is stopped eating at daytime but still this person is like fat. Now what does it mean? It means that this person eats when, in night time. So, eating in night time or he eats in his night time, this knowledge is not possible through any of the other means of knowledge. For example, perception because you are not perceiving this person eating in night time. Second, inference is not possible. Third, comparison also is not possible. Now since you know that this person does not eat in daytime but still this person is like getting stout. These things you have to explain that and finally what you are doing is saying this person, what he does is he eats in night time. So, eating in night time is a valid knowledge and the source is the presumptions or Arthapatti is the valid source. As Shankaracharya argues this is the right source of knowledge. Now the non-apprehension, another valid source of knowledge. Non-existence is known by non-apprehension or non-cognition. A non-apprehension is the unique pramana which cognize negation. Now for instance, the knowledge of non-existence of a jar on the ground is known by non-apprehension. So, I am saying like there is a no jar on the ground. The question is what is the source of this knowledge? So, perception is not possible. Perception cannot say that there is no jar because perception only can talk about the ground. Is it jar or not jar? Perception cannot say. I mean through perception we cannot know that oh there is jar or there is no jar. So non-existence of a jar on the ground is only possible by non-apprehension. Here what we do, we perceive cognize negation and Shankaracharya argues that this is the valid source of knowledge. And the last one, the Shankaracharya argues for the testimony. Agama is a valid source of our valid knowledge. Now, a sentence referred to an objective relation is a valid source of knowledge. Now but however, Shankaracharya has talked about there are four conditions required in order to convey a meaning because

any sentence cannot arise in a right source. So, if it is conveying a meaning, Shankaracharya talked about the four conditions. First, it must have a syntactical connection among its essential parts. This is very important. Second, the verb must demand a subject, a transitive verb or object and the like. Third, a sentence must have a fitness or compatibility of meaning among its parts. And four, the objective relation conveyed by a sentence must be free from contradiction. For example, he wets the ground with fire, is a contradiction. So that is the reason that this sentence is not right it is not fulfilling all the four criteria, condition. Therefore, this sentence is not right source of knowledge. then a contradiction. So, this is how a Shankaracharya has talked about different source of valid knowledge.

In conclusion, we have discussed the valid source of knowledge according to Shankaracharya in very basic level just for an idea that what are the sources and how we can get a knowledge and how the Shankaracharya has an argument for the valid knowledge. Yeah. So, thank you so much for your kind attention. This talk was based on this Indian philosophy by Jadunath Sinha. Thank you so much for your kind attention. Thank you.