



Śankarite Concept of Human Nature

Śankarācārya

(788 AD)

- Advaita: nondualism/monism
- The individual self is absolutely identical with Brahma
- Brahman ātman identity
- Individual self is finite but has the potential to realize the whole
- Brahman is pure existence which has no dependence on a second thing. It is self-established, irreducible, immutable, and free of space, time, and causation.
- The appearance of the universe (only Brahma is real)
- Two tiered reality:
 - a) The conventional intersubjective empirical reality (*vyāvahārikasattā*) that comprises the universe
 - b) The ultimate reality (*pāramārthikasattā*) of nondual existence that is *brahman*

The problem with human nature (hence the solution)

- The impact of maya
 - Maya as a power of Brahma; indistinguishable from Him (*Mayavi*)
 - The magician's show deceives only the ignorance; not himself
- Superimposition: the fundamental problem of ignorance
 - we falsely identify with “I”, construct the possessiveness of “mine”, and then cling to them.
 - We mutually superimpose consciousness on to our mind-body, and the mind-body on to consciousness
 - This error conceals one's fundamental nondual nature
 - The epistemic failure of mutual superimposition is caused by ignorance (*avidyā*).
 - Śaṅkara identifies *avidyā* as the root cause of all existential suffering
 - Owing to this error, we trust unreal things such as material gains, social status, pleasures...

The solution proposed:

- Freeing oneself from maya and identifying the Brahman within is the way out
- Turning to ‘pure consciousness’
- The study of Vedanta helps destroying ignorance
 - Four-fold preparations are required in this regard:
 - Try to discriminate between eternal & not eternal
 - Give up desires towards mayic objects
 - Control mind to gain detachment, patience, & concentration
 - Ardent desire for liberation
- The study of Vedanta involves three-fold processes
 - Listening to the teacher’s instructions (*Śravaṇa*)
 - Reflecting on instructions using reasoning till all doubts are clarified (*manana*)
 - Repeated meditations on the truths (*nididhyāsana*)
- Realizing the Brahman-ātman identity is the solution
- The lives of people who realized this serves as worthy ideal to the society
- Furthermore, it makes oneself convinced of the meaning of life