Advaita Vedanta: Sankara on Brahman, Adhyasa

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Introduction

The Vedanta may be regarded as the end of the Vedas in different senses:

1. as the last literary products of the Vedas.
2. as studied after other Vedic Literature.
3. as the culmination of the Vedic culture.

Advaita Vedanta is also a school of Vedanta philosophy. Here we will study the conception of Brahman and Adhyasa according to Shankara.
Advaita Vedanta

- The *Advaita Vedanta* focuses on the following basic concepts: *Brahman*, *atman*, *vidya* (knowledge), *avidya* (ignorance), *maya*, *karma* and *moksha*.

- *Vedanta* recognizes the six *pramanas* (sources and criteria of valid knowledge) on the basis of the *Mimamsa* school of Kumarila Bhatta.

- They are as follows: (1) Perception (*pratyaksha*) (2) Inference (*anumana*) (3) Testimony (*shabda*) (4) Comparison (*upamana*) (5) Postulation (*arthapatti*) (6) Non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*)
Epistemology

Knowledge and truth are of two kinds: the lower one and the higher one. The lower, conventional knowledge and truth is referred to as *vyavavahrika satya*. It is a product of the senses and the intellect. The higher one is referred to the *paramarthika satya*. It is absolute. It is beyond words, thoughts, perception or conception. It is in no way, related to the senses and the intellect. It is non-perceptual and non-conceptual. It is a product of sublime intuition and "divine vision". The higher knowledge and truth brings about radical transformation in an individual so it is soteriological.
Brahman

*Brahman* is the Ultimate, Supreme Reality. *Brahman* is eternal. *Brahman* is beyond words. It is beyond names and forms. *Brahman* can not be perceived nor could it be described by words. It is beyond senses and intellect. It is indefinable. However, if at all it has to be described; *Brahman* can be considered as Pure Consciousness.
Sat-Chitta-Ananda

- In Vedanta philosophy, the svaroop of Brahman is referred to as Sachchidananda. Brahman is Sachchidananda i.e. **Sat-Chitta-Ananda** (Pure Existence-Pure Consciousness-Pure Bliss).

- **Brahman** is eternal, immutable, inexpressible and unthinkable pure-existence, but it is not the cause or the creator of the universe.
Maya

- Shankar, on the basis of shruti, reason and experience, has made an assumption relating to an imaginative power of Brahman which is called Maya. It has many names like Avidya, Ajnana, Avyakta, Adhyas, Upadhi, Vivarta etc.

- According to Shankar, Maya expresses itself in two ways: concealment (avarana) and projection (vikshepa). The phenomenal world as it appears is nothing but vivarta (superimposition) of Brahman
Adhyas (illusion and ignorance)

- In fact, Shankar leads us from phenomenon to noumenon, from *adhyas* (illusion and ignorance) to *Advaita*.

- *Adhyas* literally means superimposition. In Shankar’s Vedanta, superimposition is of prime importance. The entire worldly behaviour would be impossible without presupposing *adhyas*.

- To Shankar, *adhyas* is false knowledge. It is the coupling of real and unreal. It is the identity of the unreal superimposed and the real substratum. The superimposed object is by nature false. It appears as real when it is superimposed on a real substratum.
Shankar also propounds two types of *adhyas*. First is known as *Swarupadhyasa* wherein one object is superimposed on another object. For example, the superimposition of snake in the rope. The second kind of *adhyasa* is called *Sansargadhyasa*. Here the attributes of external objects are superimposed on the Self or *Atman*. The second type of *adhyasa* has gained a special significance in Advaita Vedanta.
Conclusion

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