UNIT-10: GRADE OF REALITY IN ŚAṄKARA PHILOSOPHY

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning objectives.

10.2 Introduction.

10.3 Reality: What it is?

10.4 Truth, Reality and It's forms.

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define reality and grade of reality,
- explain the truth and reality
- analyse the different grades of reality

10.2 INTRODUCTION

We have already found that Sankara emphasizes the monistic tendency in the Upanisads and develops it into a systematic Advaitavāda. He emphasizes the reality of the unconditioned and unqualified (nirguna) Brahman, and regards God, individual souls and the world as appearance due to cosmic nescience (māyā), which is neither real nor unreal, but indefinable.

The ultimate reality is one which is called Brahman or the Atman. Brahman is one, eternal, pure transcendental consciousness. It is the transempirical subject - objectless consciousness, which is not conditioned by space - time and causality, the empirical categories. Brahman - the Atman which is eternal consciousness and ultimate reality is the foundation of the empirical universe. Śaṅkara distinguishes between the ontological reality

and the empirical reality. Brahman - the ontological reality is known by higher knowledge (parāvidya) while the later is known by lower knowledge (aparavidyā).

Brahman, the ultimate reality is the foundation of the empirical universe. But Śaṅkara finds it difficult to reconcile the statements about creation with those, denying the world of multiplicity. Description of Brahman as really devoid of all assignable marks become unintelligible if His creatorship is real. On realization of Brahman, the disappearance of all multiplicity also cannot be understood. The dawn of the knowledge of reality can dispel only the unreal appearing as real, not what is really real. This idea furnishes Śaṅkara with the clue to the mystery of the world. If the world is a mere appearance, like an object in dream or illusion, then the present appearance of the world and its disappearance on the knowledge of reality become intelligible. It is entirely erroneous to suppose that Śaṅkara treats the world as illusory, or as absolutely real. He recognizes the relative, empirical or pragmatic reality of the world. He accords more reality to it than to illusions, which are false, and less reality to it than to Brahman, which is the only ontological reality. Thus the concept of reality and the different grades of reality are importantly discussed in Śaṅkara' advaitavāda.

10.3 REALITY : WHAT IT IS ?

Śaṅkara' advaitavāda regards the only, nondual and one ontological reality which is called Brahman. Brahman- the Atman is the supreme, perfect, absolute reality. Everyone knows the existence of his own self. The existence of the self (atman) which is the self-existent and selfproved, proves the existence of the supreme reality, which is Brahman. Eternal Brahman is the only ontological reality in the empirical self. It is the foundational consciousness, which is the transcendental ground of empirical self and empirical universe.

Brahman is Sat-cit-ananda,- existence knowledge and bliss. It is the only ontological being, infinite, eternal, supreme knowledge and infinite, eternal, supreme bliss. The ultimate reality is immortal, imperishable as

existence, knowledge and bliss are the essential characters of Brahman, and neither It's parts nor It's properties, which distinguish Brahman from the world appearance which is unreal, non-intelligent and of the nature of pain.

Reality is non-spatial, non-temporal, non-causal, and trans - empirical existence. It transcends the past, present and future and cause and effects. It is also free from all differences of space time, substance, attributes, action and the like. It is one attributeless and indeterminate real being. Reality is devoid of all adjuncts and determination such as genus, quality, activity and the other determinations. This reality is only the Brahman, which is the higher Brahman (parabrahman) is devoid of phenomenal determinations. It is noumenal and immutable and transcends all phenomena.

Thus Brahman is the only reality. All else are a mere false appearance. Brahman expanded in the forms of effects, appears as mere names and forms. it is the ontological ground of the manifold empirical world. The entire universe is Brahman itself. It is one. One eternal Brahman appears to be manifold appearances owing to nescience.

Brahman is devoid of all differances-homogeneous, heterogeneous and internal. There is no other reality, which is similar or dissimilar to it and which is differ from one another, as branches, leaves, flowers and fruits differ from one another in a tree. Brahman is absolutely undifferentiated pure identity. There is no other realities except Brahman, which is limitless and infinite. This ultimate reality is the Inner self of all creatures, the Atman of all knower is Brahman.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.No. 1: Fill in the Blanks:

a) The only non dual and one ontological reality is _____

b) Brahman is _____

Q. No. 2: What is Reality ?

Ans. _____

_____

Q. No. 3: What is the meaning of Sat-cit-ānanda?

Ans. _____

_____

Q. No. 4: What is nature of Brahman ?

Ans. _____

_____

10.4 TRUTH, REALITY AND IT'S FORMS

Truth is freedom from contradication, which is never sublated. Absolute truth can never be contradicted. It is constant and unalternable existence. The ultimate truth is absolute, independent, eternal existence. Therefore, it is one, pure, transcendental, trans-empirical being. It is absolutely positive, absolutely simple, absolutely indeterminate. Brahman is the only absolute truth as well as absolute reality.

As the ultimate reality is absolute existences Brahman is only absolute existence, while other appearance is relative existence. Brahman is not both indeterminate and determinate. It is indeterminate in itself, but appears to be determinate owing to the limiting adjunct of cosmic nescience and its products. As indeterminate and undifferentiated, Brahman cannot assume different forms. Brahman is in itself non-different but appears to be different, God and the individual self, the worshipped and the worshipper,

for the sake of prayer. But such kind of empirical duality is an empirical appearance due to ignorance. One Brahman free from limiting adjuncts is the object of intuition and when it is conditioned by the limiting adjuncts it is the object of worship. Phenomenal God (Isvara) is the object of worship, while indeterminate Brahman is not the object of worship, since it is beyond actor and activity. When the knowledge of the identity of Brahman dawns, all knowledge of duality vanishes. Indeterminate Brahman is realized by supra-intellectual intuition. In this sense, two fold Brahman is known, Brahman free from all adjuncts and Brahman qualified by the adjuncts of empirical name and forms.

10.5 GRADES OF REALITY

Śaṅkara recognizes three grades of reality Viz- (1) Ontological or transcendental (paramarthika) or absolute, (2) Empirical (vyavahārika) or practical ordinary experience, (3) Illusory (pratibhasika) realities. These three theories of grades of reality is known as Satta-traividhyavada.

Firstly, It is the absolute truth, It is pure existence which reveals itself through all experiences, and is neither contradicted nor contradictable, is the ontological reality (paramarthika satta). Brahman is this pure existence, the ontological absolute reality.

Secondly, the grade of reality is the empirical (vyavahārika) reality. The objects that appear in our waking experiences, the world in space and time and subject to causality, the particular and changing objects which form the basis of our ordinary or practical life, but which are contradicted by the dawn of the intuitive knowledge of the Brahman, are the empirical reality (vyavatrarika satta). Thus the world of our experience is the empirical reality. Thirdly, the third grade of reality is the illusory (pratibhāsika) realities. The objects that only appear momentorily in illutions and dreams, are contradicted by other experiences are the illusory realities (pratibhāsika satta) e.g. the illusion of snake in a rope or the dream experiences. The illusion of snake in a rope is only temporary and this illusion is not universal since all persons donot simultaneously experience this kind of illusion.

Of the three grades of reality, the first one represents the absolute

truth, the other two are false due to dosa. The difference between Vyavahārika and pratibhāsika is that the dosa of the Vyavahārika perception is neither discovered nor removed until salvation, whereas the dosa of the pratibhāsika reality which occurs in many extraneous forms (such as defect of senses, sleep etc.) is perceived in the world of our ordinary experience is much temporary than the Vyavahārika. But just as the vyavahārika world is regarded as a phenomenal modifications of the ajnana, as part from our subjective experience, so, the illusion (e.g.a snake in a rope) is also regarded as a modifications of avidyā, by the agency of the dosa.

Thus Śaṅkara believes that all appearances of reality in the world appearance was really derived from the reality of Brahman, which was self-luminous in all our experiences. The world appearance is an illusory creation, but the sense of reality of it, is a misattribution (anyathakhyati) of the characteristic of the Brahman to it. Thus, Śaṅkara regards that Brahman alone is the truth and the reality which manifests itself as the reality of all our illusory world experiences.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. No.5: Write about Śaṅkara's different forms of Brahman.

Ans. :_____

_____

Q.No. 6 : What is the theory of satta-traividhya?

Ans. :_____

_____

Q.No. 7: Explain the different grades of reality.

Ans. :_____

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Q.No. 8 : What is the difference between the vyavahārika and the pralibhāsika sattva?

Ans. :_____

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10.6 LET US SUM UP

- Śaṅkara emphasizes the reality of the unconditioned and unqualified Brahman and regards God, individual souls and the world as appearance due to cosmic nescience (māyā).
- Śaṅkara distinguishes between the ontological reality which is known by higher knowledge (paravidya) and the empirical reality, which is known by lower knowledge (apara vidya).
- The ultimate reality - the Atman is the eternal consciousness which is the foundation of the empirical world.
- The ultimate truth, which can never be contradicted is the ultimate reality. It is the constant and unalternable existence.
- Bahman is Sat-cit Ananda. Existence, knowledge and bliss are the essential character of Brahman i.e. It is the only ontological being, infinite, eternal, supreme knowledge and eternal supreme bliss.
- The concept of reality and its different forms and the different grades of reality are emphasized in Sankara's philosophy.
- The first grade of reality is the absolute truth. Brahman is the pure existence which reveals itself through all experiences and is neither contradicted nor contradictable, is the ontological (paramarthika satta) reality.
- The world of experience is the empirical (vyavahārika satta) reality, which is the second grade of reality. The objects that appear in our experience, the world in space and time and subject to causality, the changing objects, which are the basis of our ordinary or practical life are the empirical reality.
- The objects that appear momentorily in illusions and dreams are contradicted by other experiences are the illusory reality (pratibhāsika satta), the third grade of reality.



10.7 FURTHER READINGS

1. Radhakrishnan, S. Indian philosophy, Vol-II : London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., New York, Humanities. Press-INC.
2. Sinha, Judunath,(1988). Outlines of Indian philosophy New Central Book Agency (P) Ltd., 8/1 Chintamoni Das Lane, Calcutta-700009
3. Chatterjee, S & Dutta, D.M.(1984). In Introduction to Indian Philosophy. University of Calcutta, Publisher Eight Print
4. Dasgupta, N. Surendra. A history of Indian philosophy, vol.-1Motilal Banarsidass.



10.8 ANSWAR TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No. 1: a) Brahman b) Sat-Cit-Ananda

Ans to Q. No. 2: The only one eternal, infinite, permanent, real, pure transcendental, unconditional truth or reality and foundation of the empirical universe is called Reality.

Ans to Q. No. 3: Sat-Cit- ananda means existence, knowledge and bliss. Sat means permanent existence, Cit means knowledge and Ananda means bliss, which are the essential character of Brahman.

Ans to Q. No. 4 : According to Śaṅkara the only, non-dual and one ontological reality is Brahman. It is the supreme perfect, absolutely reality. The Atman is the ontological reality which is Brahman. Brahman is one, eternal, universal consciousness. Brahman is Sat-Cit-Ananda - existence, knowledge and supreme bliss, which are the essential character of Brahman. As the supreme reality, Brahman transcendes all empirical phenomena i.e. the past, the present, the future and causes and effects. It is also free from all differences of space and time, substance, attributes, action and the like. It is one attributeless and indetermenate real being. Brahman is devoid of all adjuncts and determination such as genus, quality, activity and other

determination. The higher Brahman is Nirguna Brahman while Brahman is qualified by names and forms of empirical world is Saguna Brahman. Nirguna Brahman is (para Brahman) is nonmenal and immutable and transcendes all phenomena. One eternal Brahman appears to be manifold appearances owing to nescience. It is the ontological ground of the manifold empirical world.

Ans to Q. No. 5 : Brahman is of two forms - indeterminate and determinate. Actually, as the absolute reality Brahman is not both indeterminate and determinate. It is indeterminate in itself, but appears to be determinate owing to the limiting adjuncts of cosmic nescience and its products. As indeterminate and undifferentiated, Brahman cannot assume different forms. When Brahman appears to be different God and the individual self, this kind of appearence, the empirical duality is due to ignorance. Indeterminate Brahman free from limiting adjuncts is the object of intuition and when it is conditioned by the limiting adjuncts, it becomes the object of worship, it is called the form of determinate Brahman.

Ans to Q. No. 6 : Śaṅkara recognizes three grade of reality which is known as the theory of Satta- traividhyavada-the theory of three grades of reality. These three grades are Ontological (paramārthika), Empirical (vyavahārika) and the Illusory (pratibhāsika satta).

Ans to Q. No. 7: In the theory of three grades reality, Śaṅkara recognizes the three grades of reality viz, Ontological, empirical and illusory.

Firstly, the first grade of reality is the absolute truth. It is pure existence, which reveals itself through all experiences, which is neither contradictable nor contradicted i.e. pure knowledge and pure bliss ; It is the only ontological reality. Therfore, Brahman the absolute reality is the only paramārthika satta.

Secondly, the second grade of reality is the empirical (vyavahārika) reality. The objects that appear in our waking experiences, the world in space and time and subject to causality and which are contradicted by the intuitive knowledge of the Brahman are the empirical reality (vyavahārika satta).

Thirdly, the illusory realities (e.g. the illusion of snake in a rope or the dream experiences) are the third grade of reality, is called the pratibhāsika

satta. This kind of experiences are only temporary i.e. appear momentorily, this illusion is not universal since all persons donot simultaneously experience this kind of illusion.

Ans to Q. No. 8 : The difference between the vyavahārika satta and the paramārthika satta is that though both two are false appearance due to dosa, the dosa of the vyavahārika satta which is the experience of the world is neither discovered nor removed until salvation, where as the dosa of the pratibhāsika satta which occurs in many extraneous forms (such as defects of senses, sleep etc.) is perceived in our ordinary or illusory experience is much shorter than the vyavahārika satta. The vyavahārika world is regarded as a phenomenal modifications of the ajñana, as part of our subjective experience, but the illusion (e.g. a snake in a rope) is also regarded as a modifications of avidyā.



10.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very short questions

Q. 1 What is the Absolute reality?

Q. 2. Is Atman the Brahman?

Q. 3. What is the meaning of Sat-Cit. Ananda?

Q. 4. What are the two folds/forms of Brahman? ery short questions

Q. 5. What is the Saguna Brahman ?

Q. 6. What is the Nirguna Brahma ?

Q. 7. Is Brahman object of worship ?

Q. 8. What is the theory of three grades of reality ?

Q. 9. What is the paramārthika satta ?

Q. 10. What is the vyavahārika satta ?

Q. 11. What is the pratibhāsika satta ?

Q. 12. What is the anyathākhyati ?

B. Short questions : (Answer in about 150 words)

Q. 1. Why Brahman is the absolute reality ?

Q. 2. What do you mean by Parā Vidyā and Apara vidyā ?

Q. 3. What are the indeterminate Brahman and determinate Brahman ?

Q. 4. What are the three different grades of reality ?

Q. 5. Explain the vyavahārika satta and pratibhāsika satta ?

C. Long questions (Answer in about 300-500 wards)

Q. 1. Explain Śaṅkara's concept of reality ?

Q. 2. Explain the two folds/forms of Brahman.

Q. 3. Explain Śaṅkara's theory of the three grades of reality.

Q. 4. What is the pratibhāsika satta ? How is it differ from the vyavaharika satta?

Q. 5. Write the difference between vyavahārika satta and pratibhāsika satta.

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