



Mine, Me, I: Śamkarāchārya on the Notion of Self and Identity: A Critical Study

Deepak Kumar Sethy*

Abstract

The proposed study aims to explore the concepts of self and identity in the philosophy of Śamkarāchārya, the Vedantic philosopher. This critical study seeks to foreground Śamkara, the account of the self that overcomes the limitations of the physicalist and the mentalist accounts of the human self. It focuses on the questions of the ownership of the self, the stability of identity despite the change, the consciousness and its relation to the self. It explains the notion of self by equating the self with the body or with the mind, which does not explain our sense of owning or possessing a body or a mind. The idea of self can be philosophically analyzed at two different conceptual levels: 1) one can deal with the notion of self at a metaphysical level attempting to understand the meaning and significance of this notion in general; 2) one could also deal with the notion of self along with its contextualities and particularities where one would want to understand particular conceptualization that the individual self undergoes depending upon its contexts and particularities of its situation. I would try to analyze the notion of self and Identity in Śamkara in both these senses. Other questions that arise with regard to self and identity are as follows: what kind of relationship the self bears with its identity, pre-given or constructed? Is there anything essential about the identity of the individual self? If we take up these questions, then the question of

* Centre for Philosophy, JNU, New Delhi, India;
getdeepaksethy@gmail.com

caste and gender also surface in this debate significantly. Conceptually, the self, in Śamkara's thought, is explained concerning the 'not self'. He argues that neither the body, nor the senses, nor even the mind can be equated with the self. That is why *Brahman* has been described negatively as "neti neti-not this not this". What is the natural self and identity that one is experiencing here and now? How do we identify one self? What does it consist of? These are some of the questions that I will explicate in this paper.

Keywords: Self, Identity, Ātman, *Brahman*, Advaita-Vedanta

1. Introduction

This paper centres around two important and interrelated questions in the philosophy of Śamkarāchārya: the question concerning self and identity. It explores how self and identity are mutually implicated and foregrounds the epistemological connection between self and identity in Śamkarāchārya's metaphysics of Advaita Vedānta. Vedānta is one of the important orthodox (āstika) systems of Indian philosophy. The term Vedānta is derived from two Sanskrit words: Veda (knowledge) and anta (end or conclusion). Thus, the term Vedānta is defined as 'the end of the Vedas' or the doctrines that are set forth in the closing chapters of the Vedas. They are also called the Upanishads. The Vedānta theorized by Bādarāyaṇa in the sutra form is called Brahma-Sutra. The commentary written by Śamkarāchārya on Brahma-Sutra is called Śārīraka-bhāṣya, because it deals with the embodiment of the unconditioned self. The philosophy of Śamkara is known as Advaita Vedānta, and it can be traced to the three fundamental sources known as Prasthānatrayīgranthas or the Triple canon of Vedānta. These are the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Brahma-Sutra. The Upanishads are called the revealed texts, (Sruti-Prasthāna) and the injunctive texts (Upadesha Prasthāna). They mark the summits of Veda, which is sruti (the heard, the revealed). The Bhagavad-Gita comes next to the Upanishads. It is called Sādhana Prasthāna (practical text) and the Smṛiti prasthāna (remembered tradition's starting point or axiom). It is given a status which is almost equal to that of the Upanishads. The Bhagavad-Gita occupies a unique place in the vedāntic tradition. A popular verse says thus, "All the Upanishads

are, so to say, cows, the Blessed Lord Sri Krishna is himself the drawer of the milk (milkman), the intelligent, Arjuna is the drinker, the calf (which causes the flow of the milk in the cows), and (when these unprecedented circumstances have come about) the milk which has been drawn, is the Gitā-nectar of the highest order.” (Tilak, 1986, 3) Śamkara describes the Bhagavad-Gita as the essence of the teaching of the entire Veda. The third one of the texts is the Brahmasutra, which is regarded as Nyāya-prasthāna because it sets forth the teachings of Vedānta in logical order. This work is also known by other names, such as Sariraka-sutra since it is concerned with the nature and destiny of the embodied soul, and uttara-mimāṃsā sutra, since it is an inquiry into the final section of the Veda.

The problem of self is considered the most important problem and is discussed broadly in the Brahma-Sutras. Studying the problem of the self without bringing in the concept of identity is an incomplete investigation because the concept of self is inevitably related to the concept of identity. Investigating the nature of the self is related to the investigation of the nature of identity. Here, I will be critically evaluating the concept of self and identity as explained in the Brahmasutra Commentary by Śamkarāchārya.

2. Nature of Self and Identity in the Philosophy of Śamkarāchārya of Self and Identity in the Philosophy of Śamkarāchārya

Śamkarāchārya, in the introduction of *Brahmasutra*, states that “It being an established fact that the object and the subject, that are fit to be the contents of the concepts ‘you’ and ‘we’ (respectively), and are by nature as contradictory as light and darkness, cannot logically have any identity, it follows that their attributes can have it still less. Accordingly, the superimposition of the object referable through the concept ‘you’, and its attributes on the subject that is conscious by nature and is referable through the concept ‘we’ (should be impossible), and contrariwise the superimposition of the subject and its attributes on the object should be impossible. Nevertheless, owing to an absence of discrimination between these attributes, as also between substances, which are absolutely disparate, there continues a natural human behaviour based on

self-identification in the form of 'I am this' or 'This is mine'. "This behaviour has for its material cause or unreal nescience, and man resorts to it by mixing up reality with unreality as a result of superimposing the things themselves or their attributes on each other." (Gambhiranada, 1965, 1) With the introduction of the superimposition, in the beginning, He says that there is always a distinction between the self and the other-self in terms of you and me. With the superimposition of attributes, the self is mistakenly identified with the unreal world. Here, Śamkara confirms the presence of self, and he makes a clear-cut distinction between the reality subject(self) and the unreality of the object (the superimposition on the subject) and the false identification of the subject by the superimposition of an object. After denying the identity of the self from the unreal world and objective superimposition of the identity of self, Śamkarāchārya opens his commentary on *Brahmasutra* with the statement "*athāto Brahma-jijnāsā*" (Vireshwarānanda, 1982, 17). That means now, therefore, we begin the inquiry into the real nature of *Brahman*. This statement is of the existence of pure self, pure identity, free from any impurity, free from any objective imposition, as pure subject and the ultimate truth.

The question of self is an important question to a human being because it is considered the locus of an individual. It is considered that only human being is concerned about the notion of self, not any other being of the world. It is because a human being is self-reflective in nature. As other beings of the world cannot reflect on themselves, or we are not known whether they reflect or not, they are not considered reflective beings. Dr. Radhakrishnan says, "the question of the nature of the self is raised only by human beings. Animals cannot ask this question, and redeemed spirits know the self. Man is not exhausted by body and mind. In the complex of personality, there is something which uses both and yet is neither. The waxing years and the waning strength are quite powerless to dim the spirits." (Radhakrishnan, 1960, 144) Only human beings query about the nature of the self. Mind, body, senses etc does not satisfy oneself in explaining the nature of the self. The self is so powerful that everything like body, mind, senses, etc seem to be dim and powerless before it. In *Vivekacudāmani* Śamkarāchārya says, "The body, organs, *Prānas*, *Manas*, egoism, and so on, all

modifications, the sense-objects, pleasure, and the rest, the gross elements such as the ether, in fact, the whole universe, up to the undifferentiated-all this is the non-self." (Mādhavānanda, 2009, 53) The body, mind, consciousness etc are non-self, and the identity that is burst forth out of the above is not real as well. This identification with the body, mind, etc gives rise to the misery of birth and death, and once this identification with the body, mind etc. is given up, then only one is free from misery and of the cycle of birth and death. This bondage can be destroyed neither by weapons nor by wind, nor by fire, nor by anything else except the wonderful sword of knowledge that comes from discernment and is sharpened by the grace of the lord. According to Śamkara, the source or beginning point of objective identification of oneself is the mind. It is the mind from which all misconceptions about the self begins. The mind gives rise to objective identification and objective identification, which gives rise to duality of things, while Śamkara focuses on the singularity and subjective nature of the self. Mind alone is *avidyā* and the cause of the bondage of transmigration.

The cessation of superimposition and bondage occurs through perfect knowledge that comes from discrimination of self and non-self. The discrimination between the self and the non-self helps one realize one's identity with one's true nature and one's true nature is the identity of *Brahman*. He says, "the realization of one's identity with *Brahman* is the cause of liberation from the bonds of *Samsāra*, by means of which the wise man attains *Brahman*, the one without a second, the bliss absolute." (Gambhirananda, 1965, 98) *Brahman* is attainment according to Śamkara. Attainment of *Brahman* is the liberation and identity of oneself. According to him, once an individual attains the identity, there is no possibility of going back to the level of empirical selves. Identity is the final release of oneself from the superimposition. He says in *Vivekachudāmani*, "Once having realized *Brahman*, one no longer returns to the realm of transmigration. Therefore, one must fully realize one's identity with *Brahman*." (Vireshwarānanda, 1982, 98) Identity with the *Brahman* is the final release of oneself.

According to Śamkara, "the *sruti*, in the dictum 'thou art that' (*Tat-Tvam-Asi*), repeatedly establish the absolute identity of *Brahman* (*ishvara*) and *jiva*, denoted by the terms That (*Tat*) and thou (*Tvam*)

respectively, divesting these terms of their relative associations, then it is the identity of their implied, not literal, meanings which is sought to be inculcated; for they are of attributes contradictory to each other-like the sun and a glow worm, the king and a servant, the ocean and a well, or Mount Meru and an atom." (Radhakrishnan, 1960, 105) This identity that one establishes by the knowledge of discrimination is an absolute identity. Absolute identity means an individual self is totally submerged into the absolute self. An individual self loses all of its objective identity and becomes purely subjective in nature. This subjective nature of self is without any quality and is beyond caste, creed, family and lineage; beyond name and form, merit and demerit; transcending space, time and sense-object. It is single in nature and free from all duality.

According to Śamkarāchārya, the word *ātman* or individual self is defined as "The derivation of the word *ātman*, (self), is derived from the root *āp* (to pervade), *ād* (to eat) or *at* (to go constantly). The self is supreme, omniscient, all-powerful, and devoid of all attributes of *samsāra*, such as hunger, and is eternal, pure, intelligent and free; besides being unborn, undecaying, immortal, fearless and non-dual. *Idam* (this) - all that has been described as this world (seemingly), is different, owing to differences in name, form, and action. In the beginning i.e., before the creation of the world (all this was); but one, the self alone." (Panoli, 1991, 455) The *Aitareya* Upanishad, describes the oneness of the self. It says that, in the beginning, that is prior to the creation of the world, there was the self alone, all this and one. It says that this world (seemingly) has been described as comprehending, engulfing, or pervading different owing to differences in name, form and action.

Answering the question, how does this soul originate? Śamkara says that the individual soul is eternal and not created by anyone, but the Brahman enters the intellect and appears as the soul or *jiva*. In reality, the individual soul is identical to the absolute self, or the individual self is the absolute self. From the empirical point of view, the individual soul is different from *Brahman*, but it is identical to Brahman from the transcendental point of view. The individual soul is shown to be one with the supreme self through a process of denial of all worldly attributes. Accordingly, the soul

never has any origin or dissolution. In the Upanishads, the individual soul is not mentioned in most places where the doctrine of creation is explained. "The soul is eternally a cognizer for this very reason (of being free from origin and dissolution)." (Gambhirananda, 1965, 476) The soul is intelligent because it is eternal and also because it is so mentioned in the scriptures. The soul is endowed with eternal consciousness. It has no origin because it is *Brahman* itself, which, while remaining immutable, appears to exist as an individual soul owing to association with limiting adjuncts. Therefore, the soul is eternal consciousness by its very nature.

Therefore, Śamkarāchārya says, "The individual soul has no origin; because the Upanishads do not mention this because its eternity is known from them, and because of other reasons." (Gambhirananda, 1965, 472) The soul does not originate on account of the statement of sruti and the eternity resulting from there. When the self is compared to the sparks, some scriptural passages intimate that the living soul is produced from *Brahman*, Śamkara argues that the self is of the nature of pure consciousness, and it is permanent and not momentary. The self cannot be a series of passing ideas. In such a view, it would be impossible to account for recognising mental states and the enjoying soul. The enjoying soul is looked open not as a limited intelligence but as a reflected intelligence which is inseparably connected with the reflector, that is, the mind. The soul is not a separate entity as different from the self, but the soul and self are synonymous to one another. It means the self is a soul, and the soul is self. "(The self to be realized, heard of, reflected on and profoundly meditated upon is the supreme self), because (this is the meaning gathered) from the correlation of the passages." (Radhakrishnan, 1960, 282) The self should be realized, should be heard of, reflected on and profoundly meditated upon. Knowledge of everything results from the knowledge of the self. Here the doubt arises that by the soul identified with the intellect- that is to be realized, heard of, is it the individual soul? Or is it the supreme self? The above passage refers to the knowledge of the soul both ways. On the one hand, it refers to the individual soul, when it refers to the soul as the enjoyer, but it also refers to the highest soul when the passage talks that all is known when the self is known. When this passage is examined in

proper context, it is correlated with the other passages and parts are seen to be linked with the supreme self. When it is declared that through the knowledge of the self, everything becomes known, it points to the highest self. Self is at the center of the whole universe and altogether a mass of knowledge. The Upanishads state that the self under consideration is the source of this vast expanse of name, form, and action; it only shows that this self is nothing but the supreme self. The Upanishads speak of the self as the goal of the whole universe of sense-objects, senses and internal organs, then it only means to refer this self as the supreme self. The realization etc is concerned with the supreme self.

If the individual soul were different from the highest self, the knowledge of the highest self would not allow the knowledge of the individual soul. Thus, the promise that through the knowledge of one thing, everything is to be known would not be fulfilled. Both partial difference and non-partial difference exist between the two selves. To fulfill the declaration, the individual is made the starting point, keeping the eye only on those of its aspects that are non-different from the supreme self. The teacher Asmarathya thinks that it is with a view to fulfilling the declaration that the start is made with the help of the non-different aspect of the supreme self and the individual self. "Audulomi says that (the statement about the identity of the individual self and the supreme self occurs in the beginning) since this state of identity comes to the soul when it departs from the body." (Mādhavānanda, 2009, 285) The individual soul is said to be in contact with limiting adjuncts, the body, the senses and the mind. Through the practice of knowledge, meditation, etc it becomes purified. Its unification with the supreme self is said to be justified only after it depart from the assemblage of the body etc. Thus, the teacher Audulomi thinks that the start is made with the individual soul in a way as though it is identified with the supreme self. It can be further explained, that just as in this world the river approaches the sea by discarding the names and forms to themselves, so also the individual being approaches the higher self by discarding the name and form belonging to itself.

"Kasakrtsna thinks that the (statement about identity in the beginning of the text is in order) because of the existence of the

supreme self as the individual soul.” (Gambhirananda, 1965, 286) This reveals the existence of the supreme self as the individual soul. The teacher Kasakrtsna opines that the supreme self appears as the individual soul without undergoing any change. Therefore, the statement of non-difference is justifiable. The identity with the supreme self is possible for the individual soul when, after becoming purified through knowledge and meditation, it departs from the body. The notion of self, metaphysically, reflects eternity, indestructibility, immutability, completeness and a mass of homogeneous consciousness. When we affirm the reality of self, we affirm the reality of an eternal Brahman. The reality of Brahman is proved on the ground, that it is the source of the self of everyone.

It is the Self we talk of as the subject. Śamkara distinguishes the self that is implied in all experience from the self, which is an observed fact of introspection, the metaphysical subject or the “I” and the psychological subject or the ‘me’. The object of self-consciousness is not the pure self, the *saksin*, but the active and enjoying individual endowed with objective qualities. “When the five sheaths have been negated through reasoning based upon authoritative scriptural texts, then at the same of the process what remains is the witness, knowledge absolute self.” (Vireshwarānanda, 1982, 247-248) In the embodied state in which the self exists from physical birth to physical death, the self has certain characteristics which do not pertain in the essential nature of the self. Layer after layer of the non-self covers the self and produces nescience of the real self. “when all five sheaths have been negated, the self is apprehended as being the essence of everlasting Bliss, as the indwelling, self-effulgent spirit supreme.” (Radhakrishnan, 1960, 189) When a person is at the one layer, one is not able to realize the unreality of that layer. Only in the next layer one realise the unreality of the earlier layer. Only after reaching the final layer does one realise the unreality of earlier layers. Similarly, when one comes to apprehend the *paramātman*, one realizes how baseless and stupid it was that one had considered himself to be this little *jivātman*.

According to Śamkara, “(The individual soul must be atomic in dimension owing to the mention in the Vedas) of its departure from the body, going (to the next world by following a course), and coming back (from there).” (Tilak, 1986, 478) This verse considers

the dimension of the soul. It says the soul to be atomic. Limitations are being accepted, so the soul must be atomic for its correspondence to the size of the body. As for the Upanishads, they clearly and separately speak of the soul being atomic. The infinitesimally small dimension of the soul refers to the atomic size of the soul. "And the soul is an agent because of the mention (as such) in respect of action; were it not so, there would have been a contrary indication." (Gambhirananda, 1965, 495) It is said that agency belongs to the soul, but to the intellect or *buddhi*, as evident from the use of the word *vijnānam* in the text. The use of the word *vijnāna* with the nominative case ending shows that it has been used here for the soul which is said to perform the various acts. *Vijnāna* and *Ātman* are synonymous, which is evident from the fact that they are seen being alternately used to denote the individual soul. "And (the soul must be an agent) because (a contrary supposition will) lead to a negation of deep meditation (on God)." (Vireshwarānanda, 1982, 497) It is advised to realize the supreme self through 'samādhi' or 'deep meditation'. On account of the non-existence of the individual soul beyond its body, there is no confusion about the results of the actions. The individual soul is a reflection of the supreme lord, on account of the unseen principles being non-restrictive. And it is so even with regard to resolves etc. "But the Upanishads acknowledge *Brahman* as the self and cause it to be understood so." (Radhakrishnan, 1960, 818) The supreme self is to be realized as one's self. And to have contended in the form of 'I m *Brahman*'. Each man is, in essence, the supreme reality, unchanging and unmodified and partless, and yet we speak of the rise and growth of the soul. When the adjuncts give rise individuality to in the different souls of the world, they determine the nature of the body, the caste of the *Jiva*, the duration of life etc. The souls are different on account of these adjuncts and there is no confusion of actions or fruits of action. Even if the individual soul is regarded as an *abhāsa* or reflection only, like that of sun in water. The individuality of the soul is not prejudiced. An individual is composed of the material body and immaterial self, likewise, the identity is also divided as bodily identity and identity of the self. The body that we perceive is destructible in nature and it is like other material bodies. There is a similarity in the function and nature of the material body of two individuals. What distinguishes

an individual from other individuals is the self, not the material body. What is persisting with an individual is the self, not the body. This individual self is finite in nature because it is tied with the finite material body. Once it is released from the grave of the material body, then it mingles with the infinite self and becomes infinite self. "Having reached the 'highest light', the soul becomes manifest in its own real nature because of the use of the term 'in its own' (in the Upanishads). The soul then attains liberation, that being the Upanishadic declaration." (Mādhavānanda, 2009, 894-897) The attainment of release is to manifest the true nature or the absolute identity which is covered by ignorance or *māyā*. The self is free from the stages of the self. "In liberation the soul exists in a state of inseparableness from the supreme self, for so is noticed in the Upanishads." (Gambhirananda, 1965, 898) The self exists inseparable from *Brahman*. The released soul is conscious of itself as inseparable and identical to *Brahman*.

The *mahāvākya* "Tat Tvam asi", "That thou art" (Chhāndogya Upanishad) put forth the existence of two distinct selves that are: the individual self and the absolute self. The word 'thou' refers to the individual self-identified and conditioned and limited by the empirical body. The word 'that' refers to the reality beyond the limitations of the material body, world etc. It looks like the above *mahāvākya* proves the existence of the individual self and its identity. It also proposes the existence of an absolute self which is distinct and opposite from the nature of the individual self. It is because the individual self and the absolute self have distinct qualities which cannot be merged with one another. This proves the existence of the individual self. There cannot be an identity between 'thou' and 'that'. 'Thou' implies the pure consciousness underlying men, and 'that' implies the Brahman's pure consciousness. The identity that exists between the two is very difficult to grasp because these two define two totally opposite qualities.

3. Identity of the Individual Self

The identity that Śamkara proposes is absolute identity, that is an identity of an individual submerged in the identity of *Brahman*. Here, an individual self loses all of its nature and mingles with the

ultimate self (*Brahman*). Śamkara believes that the nature of *Brahman* is non-dual and that is why his philosophy is called *Advaita*. *Advaita* upholds the view that reality is non-relational. The non-relational reality is nothing but a pure identity (*Brahma Satyam*). It is pure identity because the world of consciousness is non-different from Brahman (*Jivo Brahmoiva Nāparah*), while the world of the non-conscious object is a mere illusion (*Jagat mithyā*). It does not accept any kind of duality in its metaphysics. According to it, there is only one reality, and everything else beyond that is an illusion. *Advaitin* interprets the relational consciousness, whether internal or external, as the working of ignorance. This work impresses the empirical mind that makes knowledge of the external world possible. This knowledge cannot give us access to the nature of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, which is relation-less; it is pure consciousness, distinct from any relational consciousness. It is the inherent self-contradiction within the concept of relationship that has led the *Advaitin* to institute the relation of *tādātmya* or *svarupa*. The realities of the self have been regarded by them as being identical with that of *Brahman*. The identity that lies at the empirical level is an illusion and it has nothing to do with the identity that is at the transcendental level. *Advaitin* shows that relations are unreal, the identity that lies at the empirical level is also unreal and they hold good only for the empirical world. It is unable to grasp the transcendental reality at the empirical level, which is non-dual, non-relational and which is ultimately real; the Absolute is supra-relational. It is only after reaching at the transcendental level one realizes the unreality of empirical level.

Accordingly, *Advaitin* believes that *Brahman*, the transcendental reality, is an undifferentiated whole, an undifferentiated consciousness and not partite in nature. Following closely certain trends in the Upanishads, *Advaitin* thinks that *Brahman* should be conceived as cosmic (*nisprapanca*). Its reality is not essentially related to anything other than itself, within or without. *Brahman* is thus regarded as the wholly non-dual or the wholly one, to which nothing belonging to the world can be strictly predicated. This non-predication of anything positive to *Brahman* is illustrated in the negative description of Brahman as 'not this, not this' (*neti-neti*). Therefore, *Brahman* is devoid of all determinations. It is pure being, consciousness and bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*), not in the adjectival sense,

lest they may be mistaken for attributes of *Brahman*, but as experienced by the realized person. Therefore, *Brahman* is not an object of knowledge, rather it is pure knowledge itself. There is no knowing *Brahman*, rather there is only being *Brahman*. There is nothing besides, outside or within it. It cannot be described in terms of anything other than itself, because it does not enter into any relational process of knowledge. *Brahman* intuition is not a cognition in the form of a subject and object relation. It can only be known in a non-relational form. What does *Advaitin* means by supra-relational absolute? He means by it positively a unity transcending all differences, negatively it is a denial of the ultimacy of all relational forms of experience, as applied to the Absolute.

Brahman, to the Śamkarāchārya, is the perfect being, with no trace of any becoming. All becoming is symptomatic of imperfections inherent. Hence, all the categories of finite relational knowledge are applicable only to the universe, which is finite or determinate. What is more, the absolutely real *Brahman* would lose its self-hood, if it ever were to become an object of relational knowledge. For that very reason, *Brahman* does not admit of any substance attribute relation which is the characteristic mark of all empirical knowledge. Likewise, *Brahman* does not also admit of the kind of relation obtaining between the part and whole; it is spoken of as the impartite (*akhandā*). *Advaitin* builds on this original intuition of the relation-less, difference-less *Brahman*. *Brahman* is not only without any difference (*bheda*) but he is also without any activity, or movement, without any parts, unconditioned and absolute and having no distinguishing element in it, a simple homogeneous entity. *Brahman* is one indivisible. In short, *Brahman* does not admit within itself any difference either *sajātiya*, *vijātiya* or *svagata*.

4. Critical Comments and Conclusion

In response to the question of the fundamental nature of the ultimate reality, Śamkarāchārya's *Advaita* holds the view that reality in essence is non-relational. This reality is termed as pure identity (*Brahma Satyam*) in the sense that the world of consciousness is non-different from *Brahman* (*jivo Brahmoiva*), though the world of the non-conscious object is a mere illusion (*Jagat Mithyā*). It does not accept any kind of duality in its

metaphysics. According to it, there is only one reality and all forms of non-duality are no more than an illusion. This is the essence of the *Advaita* philosophy. According to *Advaita*, the ultimate reality is non-relational and non-dual in nature. *Advaitin* interprets the relational consciousness that is consciousness marked by duality, whether internal or external, as the working of ignorance. It is due to ignorance that the empirical mind knows the multiplicity in the external world. But it remains ignorance, though it does masquerade as knowledge for it cannot give us access to the nature of *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, which is relation-less; it is pure consciousness, distinct from any relational consciousness. It is the inherent self-contradiction within the concept of relationship that has led the *Advaitins* to institute the relation of identity or *tādātmya* or *svarupa*. The 'realities' of the self and the world have been regarded by them as being identical to that of *Brahman*. *Advaitin* shows that relations are unreal, that they hold good only for the empirical world. The relation is possible while there is a duality of the relata, but when there is no duality, then there is no relation possible. Ignorance of the true nature of reality makes it impossible to grasp the transcendental reality, which is non-dual, non-relational and which is ultimately real. So, the question of ignorance and its antithesis to knowledge becomes important for *Advaita*. Knowledge in *Advaita Vedānta* is held to be both self-luminous and self-valid; it reveals its own existence as soon as it is born and is not lighted up by any other illuminating factor. Its self-luminosity is referred to as an auto-illumination. Hence its existence is ever known. Further, its validity is guaranteed by the factors which bring about knowledge, and no extraneous factors are ever required to ascertain its validity. Hence *Advaitin* argues that the intuition of the ultimate reality is the absolute knowledge, it can only be of immediate experience. Such an immediate experience of the ultimate reality is possible because the ultimate reality is pure-consciousness; its knowledge is not the one characterized by the duality of subject and object but transcendental without a division in the consciousness.

Accordingly, *Advaitin* believes that *Brahman*, the transcendental reality, is an undifferentiated whole, an undifferentiated consciousness. Following closely certain trends in the Upanishads, *Advaitin* thinks that *Brahman* should be conceived as a cosmic

(*nisprapanca*). Its reality is not essentially related to anything other than itself, within or without. *Brahman* is thus regarded as the wholly non-dual or the wholly one, to which nothing belonging to the world can be strictly predicated of. This non-predication of anything positive to *Brahman* is illustrated in the negative description of *Brahman* as 'not this, not this' (*neti-neti*). Therefore, *Brahman* is devoid of all determinations. It is pure being, consciousness and bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*), not in the adjectival sense, lest they may be mistaken for attributes of *Brahman*, but as experienced by the realized person. Therefore, *Brahman* is not an object of knowledge, rather, it is pure knowledge itself. It is pure subject in nature and here the subject-object duality ceases out. There is no knowing *Brahman*, rather there is only being *Brahman* or becoming *Brahman*. There is nothing besides, outside or within it. It cannot be described in terms of anything other than itself, because it does not enter into any relational process of knowledge. *Brahman* intuition is not cognition in the form of a subject and object relation. It can only be known in a non-relational form. It now goes without saying that criticism of relational understanding of reality is not merely a corollary of a non-dualistic metaphysics, as many *Advaitins* imagine, it is also one of the presuppositions of the same metaphysics. We could even say that it occupies central importance in *Advaita* philosophy. It is but natural if *Advaitin* thinks that the supra-relational rests on the validity of this criticism of relation. What does *Advaitin* mean by supra-relational absolute? He means by it positively a unity transcending all differences. Negatively it is a denial of the truth of all relational forms of experience, as applied to the Absolute. Relations are true only for the empirical world but, from the metaphysical point of view, they are unreal: they do not hold good in respect of the ultimate reality. By implication, relations cannot give us any metaphysical truth but only practical epistemic truths that have no final metaphysical significance.

According to Śamkara, the nature of self cannot be determined within the limits of the body itself. The self is non-relational, non-dual and static in nature because it has no attributes that one could hold onto. Here one could ask, is the body in which I am located in is of no use at all and no self at all? Furthermore, if the body is not a manifestation of who I am, then why does the unequal positioning of hierarchies exist in the Chaturvarna system? This kind of

question puts Śamkara's position of non-dualistic absolute identity nature of self into the dilemmatic situation. The above question can be understood by examining the conversation between Śamkara and an outcast in the text *Manishapanchakam*. The conversation begins like this: One day, Sri Śamkara was walking towards the temple of lord Vishwanātha in Varanasi along with his disciple. An outcast was walking towards him on the same street. Sri Śamkara asked the outcast to move away from his path. The sweeper replied to him back with some questions. His question deals with the identity and distinction between body and self. The outcast replied back to Śamkara, "O great the twice born! What is it that you want to move away by saying, 'go, go'? Do you want the body made up of food to move away from another body made up of food? Or do you want the consciousness to move away from consciousness? (Do you wish to move matter from matter, or do you mean to separate spirit from spirit? You have established that the absolute is everywhere - in you and in me, yet you want me to get away from you as if I were different)." (Sethumadhavan, 1) Is there any difference between the reflection of the sun in the water of the Gangā and its reflection in the water in a ditch in the quarters of the outcasts? Or between the space in a gold pot and in a mud pot? What is this illusion of difference in the form, 'this is a Brahman, and this is an outcast' in the indwelling self, which is the ripple-free ocean of bliss and pure consciousness. The indwelling self, which is identical with the supreme self whose nature is bliss and pure consciousness, is the same in all creatures." (Radhakrishnan, 1960, 1)

In the above question, the outcast projects two different viewpoints, the first viewpoint is: Is it matter or body you are to move away from another body? If it is 'matter' that Śamkara wants to move away from his path, then is Śamkara identifying oneself with the material body? If 'yes' then it will be contradictory to Śamkara's own concept of self as a non-material entity or spiritual entity. Śamkara himself does not identify the nature of the self with the material body or the location of the self is not a material body. If Śamkara attempts to identify oneself with the material body then in Śamkara nature of self would be hierarchical, dual and relational in nature. This would compel Śamkara to deviate from his earlier notion of self as absolute non-dualistic. If one identifies one's self

with one's material body, then he will be considered as a materialist but Śamkara is not a materialist. Material identification of Śamkara goes against his spiritual notion of transcendental self. Śamkara does not, hereby, accept any materialist nature of the self.

Another viewpoint is, is it the spirit which Śamkara asks to move away from another spirit? If it is 'spirit' that Śamkara wants to move away from his path, then Śamkara is identifying outcast as another spirit. This means that when Śamkara identifies outcast with other distinct spirits, then again, it acts contradictory to Śamkara's own notion of non-dual Brahman. Śamkara's notion of self as non-dual does not admit any duality of spirit, which resides in distinct bodies. If Śamkara accepts this duality, then there will be an internal difference, which will put his position into question. Accepting the existence of other spirits goes against his notion of non-dualism.

Again, Śamkara's explanation of degree or levels of self does not solve Śamkara's reaction to outcast to move away from his path. Because it is not the outcast who asks Śamkara to move away, but it is Śamkara who is asking the outcast to move away. Here, Śamkara, who is the enlightened one, asks an outcast to move away from his path. Here, Śamkara considers the outcast as the other, while the outcast does not consider Śamkara as the other. It is defined in Bhagavad-Gita that, "The enlightened see the same Self in the Brahmana endowed with learning and humility, the cow, the elephant, the dog and the outcaste." (Mohanty, 1993, 2) As Śamkara is the enlightened one, he should not view the outcast as distinct from him, nor should he account for the bodily identity, which the sweeper is being located as he is born to a particular Sudra family. Śamkara's typology of the self does not account for Śamkara's response to a passerby who happened to be in a lower cast.

Brahman does not admit to any substance attribute relation, which is the characteristic mark of all empirical knowledge. If the self is attribute-less, then why are our feelings generated in the form of our senses? If self is attributed less, then how can one realize the unreality of *vyavahārika Satya* after reaching the level of *paramārthika Satya*, because realization is also an attribute even though it is positive or negative or neutral? According to Śamkara, *Brahman* does not admit any kind of relation obtaining between the part and

whole; it is spoken of as the impartite (*akhanda*) and complete whole. *Advaitin* builds on this original intuition of the relation-less, difference-less *Brahman*. *Brahman* is not only without any difference (*bheda*), but he is also without any activity, or movement, without any parts, unconditioned and absolute and having no distinguishing element in it, a simple homogeneous entity. *Brahman* is one indivisible. In Śankara, the absolute is not a synthesis but a pure identity. It is this category of identity which is the basis of his refutation of all relations and the consequent differences. His logic is based on the concept of identity (*tādātmya*). Hence, it may be suggested that *Advaitin's* thought that *Brahman* is the 'sameness' of reality cuts at the root of all dualism, mind and matter, world and spirit, subject and object, part and whole etc. It explains why *Advaita* does not rest satisfied with a mere refutation of the category of difference but proceeds to assert the sameness of the Being. For it is possible that those, who reject difference, make for a doctrine of identity-cum-difference within a concrete universal; not for *Advaitin* is the fascination of a concrete universal.

In the *Advaita* framework, what seems philosophically indefensible is its distinction between the two realms of human experience - the transcendental and the phenomenal. The critics of relation and, more importantly, of difference seem to be quite keen on maintaining the difference between the two realms of human experience and introducing a dichotomy within the core of experience itself. All our philosophical enterprise should begin. There cannot be any synthesis of the transcendental truth and the relative truths, as the relative truths are required to be sublated ultimately in the transcendental height of existence. It is not enough to state that truth is not a matter of synthesis but of identity. The fact that *Advaita* makes a distinction between the transcendental and empirical truths cannot exonerate *Advaitin* from the responsibility of relating them both to human experience. On the contrary, *Advaita* does not find any continuity between the higher and the lower realms of human experience. How at all would we speak of them as higher and lower if they are not referred to as a unity of experience? The transcendental truth of *Advaita* is not only transcendental, in the sense that it stands above the immanent order of space and time, but also in the sense that the immanent order does not really exist for it. How then do we begin our

philosophical enterprise with something that is non-existent? On the contrary, if it is even claimed that transcendent appears as the immanent under the sway of ignorance, and therefore the latter has no ultimate significance, how can it be the starting point of our philosophical enterprise in all earnestness and seriousness?

According to the Upanishads, the individual self stands self proved and is always immediately felt and known. There is absolute certainty about the existence of one's own self and there can be neither doubt nor denial regarding its existence. The real nature of the self is pure consciousness, self-shining, self proved and always the same. The notion of self that one experiences in day-to-day life are something which has a development. It is not initially there at the time of birth. It arises in the process of social experience and activity. Here, a self can be called a process of development. Here, an individual's self-effort, freedom, understanding, responsibility etc. play an essential role in creating the nature of one's self that is distinct from other and unique in itself. This is absent at the time of birth, but due to social interaction, an individual's self-effort arises as a result of his relations to individuals and the process. A self is said to arise by gestures, conduct, act, attitude, language etc. These things differentiate oneself from another. An individual's own self-effort in creating one's own identity plays an important role in establishing the notion of self and identity.

The individual experiences himself as such, not directly but indirectly, from the particular standpoint of other individual members of the same social group or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience. Self experiences himself indirectly because first he is an object to himself as the others are objects to himself. There are two general stages in the full development of the self. In the first place, the individual self is constituted simply by an organization of the particular attitudes of other individuals towards himself and toward one another in the specific social acts in which he participates with them. In the second stage, the full development of the individual self, the self is

constituted not only by an organization of these particular individual attitudes but also by an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which he belongs. It is a structure of attitudes which goes to make up the self. This is how the development of self proceeds. Self reaches its full development by organizing these individual attitudes of others into the organized or group attitudes and by thus becoming an individual reflection of the general systematic pattern of social or group behaviour in which it and the others are all involved - a pattern which enters as a whole into the individual's experience in terms of these organized group attitudes which, through the mechanism of his central nervous system, he takes toward himself, just as he takes the individual attitudes of others. Each of the selves is different from everyone else, but there has to be a common structure so that we may be members of a community at all. We cannot have rights unless we have common attitudes about what we have acquired as self-conscious, which makes us such members of society and gives us selves.

Selves can only exist in definite relationships with other-selves. No hard and fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others. Since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience only so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into experience also. The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group, and the structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behaviour to which he belongs, just as does the structure of self of every other individual belonging to this social group. A self cannot only be described in terms of its own self but also by others. The existence of oneself is as important as the existence of another self to whose relation it is compared, seen, known, identified etc.

Self can be said to be a unit of globalization. It enters global circularity as a unit. This unit is a part of the global system, it represents itself in various aspects. It is the subject and object of the globalized rational society. There is commodification and materialization on the one hand and on the other, the self is the center of powers, institutions, and so on. In this whole process self-identity assumes significance in the process of globalization as it

impacts upon social, cultural and economic life of people in different societies. Globalization may differ depending upon the nature of contact that the process of globalization may have with concerned societies or cultures as to whether such contact is broad based covering a range of social, cultural and economic life of people or it impacts upon selective aspects of their social, cultural, economic or other aspects of life. The process of globalization which involves a tremendous exposure of personal, local, sub-regional and regional social entities to the forces of market and finance on the one hand, and to other access to revolutionary means of communication and media not only influence but also energizes the latest aspirations to re-invigorate and refashion their identities. In this sense, instead of being a threat to such identities, the globalisation process has become a means for their construction. The degree of globalisation's threat to identities depends accordingly on the approach that we take or perceive.

There is homogenization taking place in several aspects of the life of the people due to globalization, but this process also accelerates the growth of self- World Commission on the Social Dimension of globalization, A fair globalization Creating Opportunities for all, consciousness, self-identity and cultural identities. The development of an identity in the process of globalization is a complicated convergence of socio-political, psychological and philosophical processes. To realize the role of self-identity, a workable conceptualization is needed. We propose enumerating the resistance to the negative aspects of globalization that globalization is inevitable and we have to develop to the extent that it can encompass globalization. While, in the philosophy of Śamkara, the notion of self and identity are always there from the time of birth, our whole life is the search for that original notion of self. It is essentialized nature of the identity of the individual self that surpasses the mundane notion of identity of an individual self. It is neither an individual's self effort nor the social interaction that makes any change or development in creating the identity of an individual self. Here, in Samkara, it is not creating the identity of the individual self, but it is finding out the identity of the individual self that is veiled by ignorance.

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