

**Philosophy and Critical Thinking**  
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**Lecture 36: Sankara's philosophy**

Namaskar to all. This week we are discussing Shankaracharya philosophy, a very important philosophy from Indian philosophy. In last class, we have discussed the idea of self from Shankaracharya perspective and we will be continuing this discussion. So, I will be discussing the idea of self in Shankaracharya and I also will talk about the notion of avidya from Shankaracharya perspective. Last class, we are discussing about Atman and then its five sheaths. Now, the whole purpose of explaining this idea is to talk about the self and not self. So, this argument is all about self and not self. Shankaracharya argued that the Atman is nirguna brahman. So, we will be discussing in the next class the notion of brahman in Shankaracharya. However, at this point, you understand in this way that the Atman is Nirguna Brahman. So, atman is nirguna brahman means that all the attributes, all everything is what nirguna brahman has, Atman also has the same set of attributes. Since Nirguna does not have any attribute, therefore atman also does not have any attribute. Idea is, Shankaracharya is basically arguing that realizing yourself is in a way to realizing the brahman. Now, he talked about how it works, how we are identifying our self from body or some other thing. So, this is what he has given a well explanation and argued that all this cover, all this sheath is not I, is not individual self. And what he did, he explained that each sheath and rejected the same time that this is not the self. And finally, he is arguing that atman is the only self. So, when I am saying that this is me, it is not this difference it, but the self. Self is the Atman. Now, this Atman again is appearing or the individual self is the appearance of the individual self because of the notion is called avidya. What is avidya? I will be discussing today. So, let us understand this all the course and so that will be easy to understand even the human body, how this Shankaracharya has talked about the body, mind, subtle body, and the gross body, Atman and so on. So, in first course or in this slide, the top or the first one, this Annamaya kośa. And Annamaya kośa is this body of our is product of food and comprises the material seed. So, this is an Annamaya kośa. If our body is dependent on the food, if you are not going to take this, we may die. So, this is the Annamaya kośa. Next is the Prānmaya kośa and a very important sheath in this system. Now, not only Prānmaya kośa, all the kośa are important, but the Prānmaya kośa plays a very important role. Now, this prana which is also is a life force is coupled with the five organs of action and it is modification of life force. So, there is no one life force and it is modifying either different ways or different pranas. So, there are Prāna, Apāna, Vyāna, Samāna, Udāna. Now, the idea is Shankaracharya arguing, giving an example of gold. So, gold is one, but it can be modified in earring, bangle, anklet and so on. Similarly, the prāna,

the life force also is through the modification performing a different action. So, it is coupled with five organs of action and it plays a very important role in the respective area. So, for example, prana is a perception. Now, apāna has an own work, vayana has a different work, samāna has another different work like circulation and the udāna has an own function. So, these pranas are very important for a human body. However, even Shankaracharya argued that Prānmaya kośa even is not self. So, he rejected the idea of Annamaya kośa that Annamaya kośa is not the self. So, when we are saying that this is me and I am saying this I, so I is identifying this I with Annamaya kośa is not in a right way. Because this body as we have discussed in the last class that body is in a made of union of the five elements and also have discussed the Pañchikaran. Now, this body again is a result of the past action, the state of action which we have performed in the last birth and because of that we have got this body. So, whatever we have impression in the storehouse and we are again performing the state of actions depends on everything we will be getting new body or next body in the next life. So, body will be the product of the impression of the past karmas. Now, what Shankaracharya argued that this body is not the self. So, identify yourself with your body when I am saying look this is me and when I am saying I is my body then Shankaracharya says that is an ignorant person. So, I am not the right person, I do not have the right knowledge and therefore, I am performing state of action. I am identifying myself with body and then performing state of actions and that is that leads to the problem of birth and rebirth. Similarly, Prānmaya kośa, however this Prānmaya kośa plays an important role. Again, this Prānmaya kośa is not self. So, even the Prāna does not take it this prana as a self. The third is the Manomaya kośa and this Manomaya kośa is mind and Shankaracharya argues that the mental shaeth is the fire which fed with the fuel of numerous desires by the five sense organs which serve as priest and sit ablaze by the sense object which act as the stream of oblation bring about this phenomenal universe. So, mind is a play a very important role in Shankaracharya. So, Shankaracharya philosophy the third kośa is a mind, and mind is basically doing everything. Mind is an experiencer, who is experiencing pleasure, pain and so on. So, mind is a doer, mind is an active agent but the same time mind is the cause of many things that we will be discussing. Shankaracharya argued that there is a no ignorance the notion of avidya that is an a very important part of Shankaracharya philosophy and Shankaracharya has used this avidya or maya as a tool of creation. Now, how this philosophy talks about the ignorance that we have to understand. Shankaracharya is arguing that there is no ignorance outside the mind. Now, it is giving an importance or arguing that mind is a reason for the everything. Now, what is an avidya? What is an ignorance? Ignorance is then a not right knowledge. Now, what is the not right knowledge? So, these are the things which we are not have an information of descriptive knowledge when we are not able to understand what is eternal and what is not eternal, what is real, what is not real. So, Shankaracharya is anyway we will come back to the idea of ignorance but what Shankaracharya here is arguing that while discussing five kosas. The Manomaya kośa is an important and avidya is not outside the Manomaya kośa. The mind alone is

avidya and the cause of the bondage of transmigration. So, mind is basically is cause. Now, bondage is the sense that when you have no right knowledge and you are identified yourself with something else with not self and then performing set of action. Now, if you are performing a set of action with wrong notion, with wrong knowledge that leads a bondage, that leads to the cycle of birth and rebirth. So, Shankaracharya's whole idea is that avidya plays a important role where because of avidya there is an a world and we are behaving differently. We are performing set of action with this ignorance. Now, Shankaracharya argued that in dreams when there is no actual contact with the external world, the mind alone creates the whole universe consisting of the experiencer and the like. Similarly, in the waking state also there is a difference. Therefore, all this is the projection of mind. So, what Shankaracharya is arguing that basically mind is playing an important role and give an example of waking state and a dream state. So, when we are in waking state what we are doing we are looking at different object for us there is not different objects. In a dream state there is no object but still this mind is projecting this objects different objects. Now, Shankaracharya is arguing that without an absence of the object, mind is projecting things and therefore even in a real and or waking state whatever the mind is projecting again that appearance is not real that is an unreal appearance. Because Shankaracharya argued that this world is unreal, Jagat is unreal. Now, again when we have the dreamless sleep or deep sleep when the mind is reduced to its causal state there exists nothing as is evident from universal experience. So, this is what he has argued that if the body is active or mental in waking state your physical body is active your gross body is active your subtle body is active. So, when we are waking state, we have both is an active. So, when we are in waking state this is everything is an active state. Therefore, there is an object in the world. Now, if the gross body is inactive. So, whatever this mind whatever subtle body has seen what is however this has done we have perceived we have an idea that is there. Mind is projecting. If even the subtle body or even this mind is inactive however let me tell you the mind is the body is not one, but mind is a power to who is projecting everything. So, when even that is inactive, the mind is inactive, and even the body is inactive, then there is no object, and that is the proof that in this world, there is no object, and this is there because of this mind. Next is in a Vijñānmaya kośa is an intellect and the buddhi. So, the buddhi with its modification and the organ of knowledge forms the Vijñānmaya kośa or knowledge seat of the agent. So, this Vijñānmaya kośa or buddhi it takes all kind of decision here. Now, finally is an Ānandmaya kośa and Ānandmaya kośa is the blissful sheath and is that modification of the ignorance which manifest itself catching a reflection of an atman which is a bliss absolute whose attributes are pleasure and the rest which appears in a view when some objects agreeable to oneself present itself. So, this is a self-explanatory where we have talked about Ānandmaya kośa. Now, let us understand here the two things the gross body and the subtle body. For Shankaracharya argued that the five organ of action such as speech, the five organs of knowledge such as the ear, the group of five pranas, the five elements ending with ether together with buddhi and the rest as also ignorance, desire and

action, these eight things make up what is called the subtle body. So, this is what the bundle of these things is in a subtle body. The subtle body includes the five organs of action, the five organs of knowledge, the group of five pranas which we have discussed, the five elements ending with ether we have discussed while discussing the idea of Pañchikaran. Again, the buddhi, ignorance, desire and action. So, this is what is called a subtle body. So, when we are talking about the gross body and the subtle body, so this is what we call subtle body. Now, gross body is what we have to say that bones, skin and bloods, everything and this is the subtle body. This is how Shankaracharya had talked about the “Linga-sharira”, the gross body and subtle body and then we also have one causal body and then we have the atman. Now, what is ignorance? Ignorance of our real nature as the blissful self leads to desire which in turn impels us to action entirely countless suffering. The whole idea is that because of this ignorance, we are performing set of action not in the right direction and that is the reason that we are in the situation, we are in the problem of birth and rebirth and there is a suffering. So, ignorance is basically playing an important role here where we are forced to or we are let us say the impels to us this ignorance to action. Shankaracharya argued that the subtle body is also called the “linga” body which is produced out of the element before their subdividing and combining with each other, is possessed of latent impression and causes the soul to experience the fruit of its past action. So, the subtle body is basically responsible for everything. Now, what is subtle body? Subtle body as we have discussed that the eight things, bundle of this eight thing is the subtle body. Now, in subtle body, this is in a possessed with the latent impression, the one thing and it causes the soul to experience the fruit of its past experience. The soul experience to the fruits of its past actions. The subtle body is basically it has another the impressions and now this subtle body is worth also experiencing the fruit of or the subtle body is the causes the soul to experience the fruit of its past action. In Shankaracharya philosophy, subtle body is the instrument for all activities of the Atman. So, basically through subtle body, this is what we are doing. Now, let us come back to what is the notion of Avidya and Maya. What Shankaracharya argued that this Avidya, a notion of Maya is the power of Lord and she is without the beginning. Now, he is describing the nature of Maya and he argued that the Maya is without any beginning. So, there is no starting point of Maya. We cannot talk about that, okay, this is a starting point and again this is made of the three gunas and Maya is superior to the effect. She is inferred by one of clear intellect only from the effect, she produces. So, we are only able to understand about the Maya from its effect. So, if you want to understand what is Maya and knowledge of Maya is only possible through inference. So, if you see this set of effect and through this effect, we can infer that there is something called Maya. So, knowledge of Maya is only possible through this inference and this inference is based on its effect, Maya effect which Maya produces. It is she, who brings forth the whole universe. So, this Maya is, as I said in the first slide that how in Shankaracharya, Maya is used as a tool of this creation., so, this whole world, this universe is appearing because of Maya. So, Maya is then a cause of this appearance of this world.

Now, Shankaracharya argues that Maya is neither existent nor non-existent, nor parting of both characters, neither same nor different nor both, neither composed of parts nor an indivisible, whole or nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words. So, Shankaracharya's idea of Maya is, he is saying that we cannot define the Maya. If you ask whether it is an existent or not, he does not have any answer. If you ask whether this is different and same, no answer composed of parts or an indivisible whole or both. So, she, Maya is what Shankaracharya argued that is called indescribable, is we cannot describe in words. This is what Shankaracharya says that Maya is anirvacaniya, we cannot describe the nature of Maya, but we can have a knowledge of Maya through its effect and based on the effect, we can infer about the Maya. So, there is a Maya is a knowledge and then source is the inference and how we are inferring based on the Maya effect. Now, in the last slide, as we have discussed that concept of Maya or Maya is composed of or made up of three gunas. Now, three gunas are the Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. So, this Maya is made of three gunas. Now, we will see this effect of this gunas. So, Shankaracharya argues that Rajas has its Vikṣepa-sakti. So, Vikṣepa-sakti or projecting power, which is of the nature of an activity and from which the primeval flow of activity has emanated. From this also mental modification such as attachment and grief are continually produced. So, Vikṣepa-sakti plays an important role in Maya or Maya has this power to project something. So, let us understand the effect of Tamas, then we will understand how this world is appearing. Shankaracharya argues that Āvṛti, or veiling power is the power of Tamas, which makes things appear other than they are. So, because of this Rajas and Tamas, suppose there is an object called T and because of this gunas, it is considering the real identity of T and projecting something else that is P. So, there is a T, but T is appearing as P because of the two powers. One is covering and another is projecting on this object. So, like for example, there is a rope and rope appearing as snake. So, the idea of snake, it is coming from where from you. So, if suppose you have not idea of snake, you have not read, you have not experienced, you have not seen, you have not heard about this snake, then even in the dim light, that rope will never appear as snake. So, the idea is that the idea of snake is where in the name. Now, let us understand this argument in the Sankarian framework. He says that because of this Maya, there is something which is appearing as something else. So, there is a Brahman, and this Brahman is appearing as another universe because of this Maya. Because this Maya is made of this three gunas and three gunas has power to conceal and project. And it is the reason that this world is appearing like this. There is a reason that even this is unreal, but there is an appearance of this world. Shankaracharya argues that the traits of pure Sattva are cheerful and the realization of one's own self, supreme peace and contentment, bliss and aesthetic devotion of the Atman by which the aspirant enjoy bliss everlasting. So, this is what the power of Sattva and Shankaracharya argued that all three gunas are there. So, for the given example of the muddy water. So, if muddy water is there, it does not mean that it is not, that is not a clean water or there is no clean water. If you purify, you will get the pure water. Similarly, sattva, rajas, tamas are there. It does not mean

that sattva is not there. So, if you purify, you will get this sattva gun. The sattva gun is the pure, where you can get the realization of oneself. This is what I have been saying in this class that as Shankaracharya argued that a stupid means a person who does not have a right knowledge, through delusion, identifies himself with the reflection of citta caught in the buddhi with its superimposition. So, delusion, because of delusion, what we are doing, we are identifying ourselves with not self. So, self and that not self and what because of this delusion, because of this maya, what we are doing, we are identifying ourselves with other thing, which is not self. Shankaracharya argued that bondage is the superimposing of notion of self on the non-self and this is due to ignorance. This is what I have been saying. If you take the five sheaths because of the ignorance, what we are doing, we are identifying ourselves with this body and performing set of actions. Now, when I have a notion that I means my body, then that can lead you to perform a many different sets of action, which is not in a right action or action not in right direction, and right and wrong in the sense that when the realization of a self, so when or if you want to get rid of this problem, the chakra of cycle and recycle of birth and rebirth, then it is an important to remove your ignorance first. It is an important to purify your mind. Without purification of mind, you may not be able to recognize, you may not be able to realize yourself and this is what I say that this is because of this bondage, there is a superimposing of notion of self on the notion of non-self. So, if even you are going to identify the self with any of this four- five sheaths, that is not the right thing, because self is something which is different from all the seats. Shankaracharya argues that jiva is the individual self and the atman is the transcendental self. So, when we are talking about an empirically, this is an individual self. But ultimately, ontologically, the atman is reality. Jiva is the construction of maya or avidya. So, because of maya and avidya, we are taking us as an individual self. Shankaracharya argued that jiva has a gross body, which we have discussed what is a gross body, subtle body, we also have discussed what is subtle body and then causal body is maya and avidya. So, because of this causal body, there is a universe for us and this appearance of this universe is not right or is unreal. Now, Shankaracharya is arguing this what, this is Shankaracharya arguing that the notion of I is created by the buddhi, which is extremely deluded by ignorance and which is perceived in this body as I am such and such, when that egoism is totally destroyed, one attains an unobstructed identity with problem. So, the idea is if you take this whole philosophy of this Shankaracharya and then idea is that he talked about the I is when you are identify yourself with a body or any of the seed that is because of the ignorance. Now, Shankaracharya arguing that the notion of I is created by buddhi. So, intellect is who is creating this notion. But again, the cause of this is in maya or because of maya, we are, when we are talking about the individual self, we are identifying our self with the non-self. And this is because of this set of action, because of this wrong information, wrong knowledge, we are also performing set of actions. But when we will realize that I, which is just not this non-self, which is self, so non-self is your five seed and self is atman. So, atman is only self. When you are identifying the self with the non-self, then you are in the

problem. For example, if I am saying, oh look, I am jnana and this is when I am saying I, I am always referring to my body. Shankaracharya will say this, you are ignorant person. You do not have the right knowledge. Even you are like identifying with your prana, life force, again that is not right information. If you are going to identify yourself with your mind, again there is no right knowledge. Because this all this actions, it led it to where to perform set of actions and which resulted in the problem with this cycle of this birth and rebirth. If you are going to identify yourself with your intellect or Ānandmaya kośa, what Shankaracharya is saying is, any of this option is not right. So, I is or self is an atman, which is real. And if you ask me what is the atman, so in Shankaracharya atman is Brahman. So, this is what it is written that when you attain that there is no difference, an unobstructed identity with the Brahman, then only you will be able to achieve that state, and that is only possible when egoism is totally destroyed. If egoism is destroyed, then you will be able to realize that how the self is identity and with the Brahman. So, this is what the Sankacharya has talked about the self. So, in conclusion, the creation of self or the idea of self is because of maya. A maya plays an important role in Sankacharya philosophy. However, it will be a more clear for you when we will be discussing what is Brahman and how this idea of Brahman we have an idea of this world or idea of I, the individual self. So, I will be continuing this discussion in the next class as well, and hopefully, in this class, I will be discussing about what is the nature of Brahman and how Shankaracharya has talked about the appearance of the world. And again, the role of maya.

So, thank you so much for your kind attention. This talk was based on mainly Vivekachudamani of Shankaracharya and the book Indian Philosophy by Jadunath Sinha. Thank you so much. Thank you for your kind attention. Thank you.