

THE PRINCIPLE OF MĀYĀ IN ADVAITA PHILOSOPHY.

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Māyā has a momentous role in the Philosophy of Advaita established by Ādi Śankara. With the strong foundation of this Māyā only he explains the philosophy of the creation of the Universe from the Nirguṇa Brahman. In a nutshell we can assume that the concept of Māyā is the backbone of this philosophy. In some way or another, It supports in all its essential principles. The word Māyā is not a new creation of Ādi Śankara, for the same appears some sense or in another in the Gīta, in the Upaniṣads and also in the Buddhist Literature. However, Śankara does not accept the concept as such in contrariety with others. All the Indian philosophers extract this basic principle from the Upaniṣads. Śankara too extracts the germ concept from the Upaniṣads and develops it into a more concrete form. Eventhough he had taken the clues from the Upaniṣads through his intellectual cogency it can be said that the principle serves the very purpose of the Upaniṣadic sages.

With the strong support of the principle of Māyā Śankara could systematically defend the philosophy of Vedānta, which in essence is conceptually the Upaniṣads itself –Vedānto nāmopaniṣadpramāṇam. The task which Śankara faced while propounding Advaita Philosophy was to interpret mutually contradictory verses and ideas in the Upaniṣadic statements to a conclusive philosophy. The basic arguments that occur in certain Upaniṣads that Brahman is Saguṇa and in certain others as Nirguṇa brings in contrareity in the thought process.

Some Upaniṣads describe the origin of the Universes described as from the Sat and in certain other elaborations the origin of the Universe is traced to the Asat. Some statements lead to the conclusion that there is difference between the individual Self and the Supreme Self whereas this notion is completely rejected in certain statements. If Śankara had not invariably accepted the principle of Māyā and explained the mutually contradictory verses of the Upaniṣads the biased world sometimes might have neglected the Prāmāṅikata of the Upaniṣads. This might have created a huge lacuna in our cultural heritage.

Only a proper understanding of the principle of Māyā can help one to digest the Philosophy of Advaita in its structured presentation. By introducing the Anirvacanīya character on Māyā Ādi Śankara interprets the character of Brahman both as Nirguṇa and Saguṇa, the difference between Individual Soul and Supreme Soul, the validity of the Universe and its actual non-validity. Like the origin of the Universe from Brahman and the difference of Brahman from the Universe etc. By accepting the principle of Māyā only that he could co-relate all the mutually contradictory statements and could give some validity to it. As the soul occupies this world and the world above on the influence of the very same Māyā etc. and every other principle, the elucidations in the Philosophy of Advaita depends heavily on this very same concept Māyā. So if anyone wishes to study the Philosophy of Advaita in detail no doubt he should be deeply acquainted with the doctrine of Māyā.

Concept of Māyā prior to Śankara

The first utterance of Māyā is seen in the Vedic Saṃhita itself. In the Ṛig Veda there occurs a verse Indro Māyābhihi Pururūpa Īyate¹. In the Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda the same word is used². Brāhmaṇas also use the same terminology. Āraṇyakas being the ex-

planatory versions of the Samhita undisputed need not be said to be without the word reference.

The Upaniṣads contain sufficient instances where the word Māyā is used. Śankara on finding the profuse usage of this word in the Upaniṣads, took the word for his purpose for establishing his theory of Non-Dualism. The word Māyā is used in the Kathopaniṣad³, Muṇḍakopaniṣad⁴, Praśnopaniṣad⁵, Śvetāswataropaniṣad⁶, Chāndogyopaniṣad⁷ and Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad⁸. Apart from all these in the other Upaniṣads along with the word Māyā other synonyms are used such as Prakṛti, Avidyā and the like. The above said Upaniṣads being early dispositions we can assume that the origin of the word Māyā is as old as the Samhita itself. Śankara, on the ground of all these contexts in the Upaniṣads and using his own unparallel wisdom formulates the philosophy of Advaita on the strong basement of this Māyā.

In the Smṛti Granthas also the word occurs many times. In the Bhagavat Gīta which is one of the Praśtānatraya and which has the great emphasis on Philosophy, has mentioned the word so many times⁹]. Gīta says that with the assistance of this triode Māyā becomes the original source of the Universe, as well as the sustainer and finally it brings in the dissolution of the Universe. In the same context it is mentioned that this Māyā is the ground of all the Anarthas and it is also described as Duratyaya i.e. difficult to overcome. The Yogavāsiṣṭha explains Māyā or Avidyā in numerous ways. In this text, this Universe is explained as Svapnika- False like Mirash and it has no validity at all.

Gaudapada, the preceptor's preceptor of Śankara emphatically explains Māyāvada. In his independent treatise Kārika on Māṇḍukyopaniṣad, he had first sown the germs of Māyā doctrine which was explained more clearly by his successor Śankara through his commentaries of Prasthānatraya.

One can see the reflection of the philosophy of Buddhism in the Māṇḍukyakārika. This kind of notion in Advaita such as the description of the world as imaginary and it is like the dream etc. lead people to conclude that Gaudapada is a Pracchanna Baudha. Being established his philosophy on the footsteps of Gaudapada often Śankara himself was also conferred with the very same name. Gaudapada's Ajātivāda is similar with the Vijñānavāda doctrine of the Buddhists. In this context we should keep in our mind that Gaudapada himself questions the philosophy of the Buddhists. This is the answer to the people who ascertain that Gaudapada and Śankara are Pracchanna-bauddhas.

If Gaudapada considers the Dvaitaprapaṅca as mere Māyā, Śankara asserts that it is originated by Māyā yet it has certain reality ie. Vyāvahārikasatyattva, by accepting that in the absolute sense the Universe is Mithyā, has some more quality and is different from the dream state. In this place Gaudapada assigns only the dreamlike status to the world¹⁰. Even though for formulating the doctrine of Māyā Śankara uses the brilliance of Gaudapada, yet for making his philosophy more authentic he had ventured deeply in to the Śrutis and reaso

Māyā according to Śankara

It is already pointed out that Śankara introduced Māyāvāda though it is traditional and he explains it as independent and having well-determined status. He had used the word 25 times while commenting on the Upaniṣads and 60 times in the Māṇḍukyakārika Bhāṣya 40 times in the Gīta Bhāṣya and 30 times in the Brahmasūtrabhāṣya. He also used various synonyms of Māyā in the place of Māyā¹¹-Avidyā, Ajñāna, Avyākṛta, Anvabodha, Tama etc.

Here Sri Śankara explains the various aspects and facets of Māyā.

According to Śankara actually Brahman is Niṣkriya and having no form. When he thinks that one myself shall become many, then with the assistance from Māyā becomes manifold and thus falls into the three stages of life ie. Jāgrat , Swapna and Suṣṭi . So through the assistance of Māyā the Nirguṇa Brahman attains the three sat-tas and after these illusion, when he is dissociated of this Māyā he will become devoid of these three stages. Owing to this Avidyā only Jīva indulges in activities like Vidhi and Niṣedha and attains various lokas. Due to this ignorance it fails to understand the real self and when the influence of ignorance in Jīva fades away then it would understand the real self as its own self and attains Brahman hood.

Śankara accepts the presence of Māyā for refuting the originality of the universe. According to him when we say that the Universe is Mithyā it does not mean that it is asat as that of Sasavi□a□a or Vandhyasuta but Anirvacanīya or indefinable. We see silver on a nacre, it is neither Sat nor Asat. Likewise, this Universe is also like this. Śankara says the world becomes Anirvacanīya because it is caused by this Anirvacanīya Māyā. Both cause as well as the effect is of same quality.

Manifold characters of Māyā

Śankara defines Māyā as Bhāvarūpa, having positive nature, triguṇātmika, having triode nature, Jñānavirodhi, against to knowledge, Anirvacanīya-indefinable, Anādi-having no beginning, Śaktimatta-having full Śakti or having full force, Vyāvahārika-phenomenal and Adhyastata-having the quality of concealing. The followers of Śankara did not accept these qualities, yet according to the contextual situation they had accepted certain qualities and even stressed some qualities. This makes it clear that Śankara had developed Gaudapada's Māyā concept and arrives into its fullness whereas his followers amplified its implications in their logical and

scholastic subtleties.

The positive nature.

According to Śankara the Universe is Vivarta of Brahman. Yet he accepts Pariṇāmavāda and Satkāryavāda to a certain extent. Vivarta implies Upādānaviṇamasattaka Kāryāpattiḥ i.e. here the quality of the effect is totally a different entity. For example, when a rope is seen as a snake the snake is having the reality –Prātibhāsika. And the rope –the cause is having the quality of Vyāvahārika. Likewise, when Brahman changes as the world, the world is only having the reality –Vyāvahārika. Actually the origination is not from pure Brahman but from Brahman associated with the Māyā. If Māyā is not accepted as Bhāvarūpa, the very origin of the Universe can not happen. It is because the world having name and form cannot come out from a principle which is not Bhāvarūpa. There is good example for showing that the Māyā as well as its product Universe both are Bhāvarūpa—when a man awakes from the sleep he feels ‘I have slept well and did not know anything’. If Māyā is not bhāvarūpa one cannot feel like this. For, experience should not be Abhāvarūpa but only Bhāvarūpa. In the state of deep sleep one’s ignorance comes to its peak point. Hence Māyā is Bhāvarūpa or having positive character.

Prakāśātmayati, the author of Vivaraṇa establishes the positive nature of the Māyā through perception. According to him I am ignorant; I do not know myself or anybody else. Through these perceptions only one can affirm the positive nature of Māyā. Not only this, through Anumāna also he affirms the positive nature of Māyā. He says Sarvam ca Kāryam Sopādanam Bhāvarūpatwāt Ghatādivad.. One more reason that Māyā is Brahmāsṛta hence it is Bhāvarūpa. Not only Prakāśātman but also Vācaspatimiśra, who is the author of Bhāmati, also accepts Māyā as Bhāvarūpa. In his commentary on the Devatādhikaraṇa, at the time of Mahā Pralaya all the Antaṅkaraṇas

will become devoid of Vṛttis and all those will merge in to the Avidyā as subtle things with Vāsanas. Again when proper time comes and with the assistance of the desire of the Lord each and everybody emerges with the respective Vāsanas. Hence Māyā is Bhāvarūpa.

Triode nature of Māyā

Māyā like the prakṛti of the Sāṅkhya is has three qualities like Sattva, rajas and Tamas. These three qualities are Happiness, Sorrow and Delusion respectively. The nature of Sattvaguṇa is Prakāśa, illumination, Rajas is action and Tamas is control. The whole world which is originated from this Māyā having this triode nature also has the three qualities. As it is natural that the qualities of the cause will definitely carried over to the effect, Brahman being Nirguṇa has not any qualities such as Sattva etc. The origin of the species is as follows-from this Māyā associated with the Sattva quality arise gods, from Rajas human Beings and from Tamas animals etc.

Jñānavirodhita –opposite to Knowledge

Avidyā and Knowledge both are mutually different in nature. Like light and darkness, these two never exist in a common base. Avidyā is the cause of Samsāra. Through knowledge one can get rid of this Avidyā and thereby can attain release from the grip of Samsāra. Karma occurs where there is ignorance. So it is different from knowledge. Knowledge is the sole and only means to release. Even though Avidyā is a positive entity it will disappear on the rise of knowledge. As one sees darkness with light, likewise one sees Māyā through knowledge.

Māyā indefinable-Anirvacanīya

For Śankara, Avidyā is neither Sat nor Asat. He asserts that Satcenna nivṛtyata asatcenna pratīyeta ie. if Māyā is sat it will not

be negated and if it is Asat it will not be experienced. Hence it is neither Sat or Asat i.e. Indefinable. While one attains knowledge, through Śruti and experience, one can understand that all the Loukika vyavahāras happen while he is in Avidyā. Hence we should give certain entity to this i.e. Vyāvahārikasattvatva. So one cannot say this Vyavahāra is Asat or imaginable or Asat as a hares horn. One cannot say that Māyā has no limbs; for if it has no limbs how can it undergo change. Even then one cannot say that it has certain limbs, for it has no separate existence from Brahman. Always Māyā rests upon this Brahman, for while acquiring knowledge it will disappear along with this so-called Universe.

Śankara defines Māyā as

Sannāpyasannāpyubhayātmikano
 Bhinnāpyabhinnābhyubhayātmikano
 Śankāpyanankābhyubhayātmikano
 Mahatbhutānirvacanīyarūpaḥ ¹²

Powers of Māyā

Māyā has two powers one is - Āvaraṇaśakti and the other is Vikṣepaśakti i.e. the power of concealment and projection. Āvaraṇaśakti is Tamomaya and Vikṣepaśakti is Rajomaya. For explaining the power of Āvaraṇaśakti an analogy is expounded by certain Advaita scholars as a piece of cloud conceals the vision path of the seer of the sun and the seer imagines that the small part of the cloud conceals the sun which is remaining thousands of Yojanas away. Likewise, the concealing power of Māyā conceals the real nature of the Brahman, whose very nature is nothing but Saccidānanda¹³. The power of projection of Māyā makes the Brahman to appear as the Sthāvaras like bubbles originating in the water. It is just like on the concealed rope snake etc are projected. Thus Māyā creates the whole world beginning with Ākaṣa out of the concealed Brahman.

Nature of Superimposition of Māyā.

Superimposition is the product of ignorance. Śankara uses the term Adhyāsa as a synonym for Avidyā. In his AdhyāsaBhāṣya he says Tametametallakṣaṇamadhyāsam Panditaḥ Avidyeti manyante. He defines Avidyā as Parāra Pursdṣtavābhāsaḥ, Atasmin Tadbudhihi, Anyasmin Anyadharmāvabhāsa. He explains Adhyāsa in this way. Adhyāsa is born from Avidyā which is the cause of all evils. Ignorant persons due to Ajñāna of Tamoguṇa sees Ātman on Anātma like body mind, sense organs etc. One sees a snake on the rope due to his Ajñāna on the rope and the snake [Vivicyajñānan] The bondage is caused by the Mīthyājñāna of the Asat on the Sat.

There are differences of opinion regarding the nature of Adhyāsa, among the Philosophers. All of them are unanimous in the belief that Adhyāsa is of the nature of Asataya and Anarthakari. Various philosophers developed many theories in connection with this Adhyāsa. They are known as Khyātis.

Ātmakhyātirasatkhyātirakhyātikhyātiranyatha
Tathānirvacanīyakhyātirityetat khyāti pañcakam
Yogācāro mādhyamikāstathā mīmāmsakopica
Naiyāyikoadvaitinaśca khyātiretah kramajjaguh.

Śankara proposed Anirvacanīyakhyāti. For him, all the Loukika vyavāhāras are of the nature of mingling of real and unreal objects together. It is actually seeing another thing in the place of one thing. Here one fails to see the original thing and sees another thing in its place. For example, when one says I am black he simply attributes the quality of the body ie. blackness on the Self. Here the quality of the non-self is attributed on the Self. Actually there is total difference between the qualities of the Self and the non-self. Both are like light and darkness ie. totally different.

The concept of Māyā of Śankara in the different schools of thoughts.

The so called followers of Śankara interpreted his philosophy according to their own perspectives then presented it as their intellectual status co to the public. Each follower proposed the philosophy in unique way. Among them there are three major divisions. They are Bhāmati, Vivaraṇa and Vārtika. These are known as three major Prasthānas. Each Ācārya claims his philosophy to be closest to that of Śankara. Some Ācāryas believed that action is needed for Vividiṣārthata and others are of the opinion that karma is needed for Vidyārthata while some held that for Self-realization mind is essential. Others opine that only Śabda is needed. Some accept Śravaṇa and the like as Vidhi others do not accept this. Some accepted Nididhyāsana as a means. Some accept Pratibimbavāda, others Avacedavāda, some others Ābhāsavāda. Some accept Ajñāna as Āśraya and also different from the Self, others do not. They accept both are as the same. Some accepts Mūlāvidyā while others never accept.

The difference of opinion on Māyā and Avidyā.

If Śankara used Māyā and Avidyā as synonyms his followers seeking justification from the various contents used or made by Śankara, proposed various theories in this regard. The founder of Vārtika Prasthāna, Sureśvara, who accepts the theory of Ābhāsavāda does not see any difference in Māyā and Avidyā. He used Avidyā, ajñāna, tama, Moha, Mahāmoha, Anavabodha and Abodha as synonyms for Māyā and Avidyā. In Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad Bhāṣya he says thus: 'Svatstvavidyābhedotra manasapi na vidyate.'¹⁴

The founder of Pratibimbavāda also does not recognize any difference in Māyā and Avidyā. Śankara's direct disciple and the

founder of Vivaraṇa –Padmapāda accepts through Śruti Smṛti and Purānas. Accordingly, as explained in the Śvetāśvataropaniṣad Bhāṣya through Ātmasākṣātkāra, the ignorance i.e. Avidyā will cease and the same Ajñāna is nothing but Māyā¹⁵. The one and only Māyā due to the power of Vikṣepa is named as Māyā and with the power of concealment Avidyā. Yet actually both are two sides of the same coin. The founder of Bhāmati and the originator of Avacedavāda, Vācaspatimiśra also accepts the same view that both the Māyā and Avidyā are the same.

Unity and Diversity

Owing to Māyā whether it is one or many there are difference of opinions among the followers of Śankara itself. Sureśara in his Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣya vārtika introduces certain scholars who accept Māyā having two diversities-Naisargikī Avidyā and Āgantuki Avidyā. Without explaining the name of the scholars he himself refutes the idea.

Prakāśātmayati does not accept the diversity of Avidyā. But the view of Vācaspati is different from that of the other two. In this regard Vācaspati thinks closely with Maṇḍanamīśra. He accepts diversity among the individual souls. Here each Jīva has its own separate Avidyā. While explaining the Sūtra Tadadhenatwāt, he explains we do not accept Avidyā as one as in the case of Sāmkhya. Avidyā Pratijīvam Bhinnah. According to him then only the idea that if one Jīva attains Brahmajñāna, his ignorance falls and he attains Brahmanhood.

The abode of Avidyā or Māyā

There are differences of opinion among the followers regarding the abode and object of Avidyā. No object in this earth can sustain without any abode or resting place. So at this moment we have to discuss the matter on the abode of Māyā. Sureśvara accepts that

the abode of Māyā is nothing but Brahman. For illustrating the same he shows an example: if there is an illusion the basic source will become both the Āśraya of the object and the illusion. Here opinion Vācaspati has a different view. He opines that the Āśraya of Avidyā is Jīva and Viṣaya of Avidyā is Brahman. In the commentary on Samanvayādhikaraṇa, he says that Brahman is Nitya Śuddha, Budha and Mukta. Hence in Brahman there is no chance of Āśrayatva of Avidyā. So, only in Jīva we can ascribe the Āśrayatva of Avidyā. Nāvidyā Brahmāśraya kintu Jīve, Satu Anirvacanīya Ityuktam Tena nityaśudhamevaBrahma¹⁶.

Conclusion

Māyā is the foundation on which the whole philosophy of Advaita is situated. By introducing the same Sri Śankara could maintain the most relevant philosophical aspect of Unity in diversity, by introducing which he could establish the universal brotherhood and which had gained him applause over the whole universe, for tying the whole Universe with the one string irrespective of caste, creed or Religion. The contemporary world is seriously desolate by struggles and mutual rivalries. This is one of the greatest and indubitably rare lessons that the Vedic literature bestows on the present day strife-torn humanity. The Vedas have declared that all men are sons of the same Immortal father. But due to ignorance or Māyā man fails to recognize the same.

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