

MĀYĀ-REALITY ?

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It has been interesting to note how *Māyā* traversing a long path through the Vedic age finally became a full-fledged concept in Śankara's system. From the Rgvedic mantras till Śankara, *māyā* has been given different connotations *but Śankara's treatment of the concept has set many rethinking on the status of the concept seriously.

In Śankara's system, *māyā* stands for spatio - temporal reality. Since spatio - temporal reality is only an aspect of reality, it could not be assigned the eternal existence and hence in that context *māyā* came to be known as 'mithyā'. An eternal existence to my, Śankara felt, would bring in duality along with the eternal existence of Brahman which hurts his monism. Therefore, it was not possible to attribute *māyā* with a positive existence. But it is also not fair to assign a negative existence to *māyā* since, it is temporally true. In this sense, the term 'mithy' used for *māyā* by Śankara, means the temporal truth or an apparent truth.

This is clear in the discussion concerning 'adhyāsa in Brahmasūtra'. As temporal truth falls short to account for ultimate truth, *māyā* in the context of ultimate truth has no reality according to Śankara, "māyā mātramidam dvaitamadvaitam paramārthatah." *Māyā* as it stands for the world of senses and lies within man's comprehension, cannot define reality. Lest it itself be taken as the concept of reality Śankara objects to a positive existence for my.

That the denial of *māyā* in the context of knowing ultimate truth is a necessary postulate in Śankara's system is quite evident from the above. Whether on the contrary the acceptance of *māyā* in the same

context really causes an embarrassment deserves examination. Symbolically *māyā* presents the world with distinctions or as Śankara calls them 'bheda buddhi' which according to him sees reality in a distorted way. Hence it becomes the reality as it appears and not as it is. Śankara vehemently argues that appearance is not reality since it hides the true nature of reality.

But what is 'behind' appearance? If 'behind' appearance lies the reality, then appearance is reflecting reality or presenting reality. There could not be a 'behind' or 'inside' or 'outside' of reality. If my image is reflected in the mirror it does not in any way mean that behind the reflection or appearance it is not me but someone else. My image in the mirror reflects me alone. Or, when it is said that a certain man is 'virtuous', any particular act of his in a specific time and space does not make him so, but his behaviour through a series of acts only can define him as virtuous. His acts in totality thus define him more really which if alienated from him, would mean nothing.

The problem of appearance or *māyā* as non reality in the context of ultimate reality is as embarrassing as the latter part of the above example. 'Appearance or *māyā* as non-reality in the context of ultimate reality is as embarrassing as the latter part of the above example. 'Appearances' should be understood to express reality equally truly. Then the question would be - Is the sum total of a few appearances or manifestations the reality? Certainly, reality could not be viewed thus. In fact the 'appearances' are as infinite as the concept of reality. When through a 'particular 'appearance' reality is said to be manifesting itself, it does so by becoming the very 'structure of that appearance' it happens to be the very constituent of the 'appearance' and in that context ceases to be an 'appearance' as such. The dualism of appearance and reality therefore disappears.

In case, it is one and the only 'appearance' then the question arises, what after that. Since, reality does not exhaust itself after this single appearance, and since there is no end to the series of appearances

at any time, there is no question of ‘transcending’ them and reaching the reality. Reality is inherent in these ‘appearances’. It can be known through so called ‘appearances’. Ānandagiri had said “Vṛttimad-antahkaraṇopahitatventāmano jñātvam, na svataḥ?” (that Ātman becomes the subject when associated with antahkaraṇa). Antahkaraṇa here stands for appearance. Bṛhadāranyaka says “Tad aikṣata, bahusyām prajāyeti” (the self thought, let me be many) ‘many’ which stands for appearances is not used in the sense of ‘other’ or ‘something different’ but refers to reality itself. The manifold appearances of the self are reality itself, it is not opposed to reality, the two terms are synonymous.

Śankara’s classification of ‘Vyāvahārika satya’ and ‘pāramārthika satya’ was to account for *māyā* as practical or apparent truth and Brahman as the ultimate truth respectively. Now this dualism gets dissolved once it is made clear that apparent truth and the ultimate truth are one and the same. Śankara must have been aware of it. But he was also aware that human mind has inherent limitations. It is inclined to *bhedabuddhi* and hence, arose the occasion for this paradigm where he had to describe *māyā* as both ‘sat’ and ‘asat’ and therefore, ‘anirvacanīya’.

For Śankara there was no way other than this, since, “you cannot explain the sea to a frog in a well, the creature of a narrow sphere....”. Similar was the idea when Śankara said “Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithyā ’ or when he said that one should transcend these appearances and reach Brahman. The Upaniṣad also declares in the same way:

“Hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukhaṃ tat tvam pūṣan apāvṛṇu satyadharmya dṛṣṭaye pūṣannekāre yama sūrya prajāpatya vyūha rasmī n samūha tejah yatte rūpam kalyāṇatamam tatte paśyā mi yo sarveṣu puruṣaḥ sohamasmi.”

(The fact of truth is covered with a golden disc. Unveil it, O pūṣan, so that I who love the truth may suit. O pūṣan, the sole seer, O controller, O sun, offspring of prajā pati, spread forth your rays, and

gather up your radiant light that I may behold you of loveliest form. whosoever is that person (younder) that also am I).

Here the term 'golden disc' (Hiraṇmayena pātreṇa) does not describe an 'appearance' which is hiding the reality but describes one and same reality itself. This is emphasised at the last part of the hymn, - 'yo' savapsu puruṣah so hamasmi'. The prayer is to enable man to 'see' the reality which otherwise cannot be seen by man because of his own limitations. The term apihitam suggests limitations.

In this context Śankara's usage of the Śrutivākya 'Aham brahmāsmi' is the most noteworthy, which shows that the so called 'appearance' no more haunts reality. It is reality itself. If it is taken as 'appearance' and reality, then it would be meaningless. Śankara says: "aham brahmāsmi tyevamādinām vākyaṇām brahmātmaikatvavastu pratipādanaparah padasamanvayah pīdayeta"

Then it would imply that if the 'appearances' were not to be there it would still signify the reality in the same way as it did so with the 'appearances'. Therefore, it is neither the 'appearances' nor the absence of 'appearances' that either define or hide the reality.

Notes & References:

*For māyā and its different interpretations, please vide Ruth Reyna's "The concept of māyā from the Vedas to the 20th Century.

**Yuṣmadasmatpratyayagocarayoh viṣayaviṣayinostamahprakāśavadviruddhasvabhāvayoritaretarabhāvānupapattau siddhayam taddharmānamapi sutarāmitaretarabhāvānupapattirityatosmatpratyayagocare viṣayini cidātmake yuṣmatpratyayagocarasya viṣayasya taddharmānam cādhyāśah, tadviparyayeṇa viṣayinastaddharmānam ca viṣayedhyāso mithyeti bhavitum yuktam - Brahma SūtraŚankara bhāṣya I. Introduction

- (1) Vedāntasāra, Śankarabhāṣya on ii 17.
- (2) Commenting on Tait. Up. II I.
- (3) Chāndogya Up.IV 2.3.

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- (4) Waley : 'Clung Tzy', Mystic Moralist and Social Reformer.
Ch. XVIII
 - (5) Kena Up.15, 16. * Tr. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan
 - (6) Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up. 1.4.10
 - (7) Brahmaśūtra Śāṅkara Bhāṣya 1. 3.
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