

PREFACE :

P R E F A C E

The main objective of the present dissertation is to institute a critical exposition as well as comparative study of the concept of māyā¹ with special reference to three modern Indian Philosophers, namely Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo. By modern Indian philosophy, we mean the philosophical enterprise that is unwilling to break with the past and yet open to the good influences of the novel creeds. A modern thinker of Indian philosophy is said to be one who can stretch the sublime thoughts of old molds without breaking them. In short, a modernist both respects tradition and claims freedom from it. The traditional conception of philosophy in India which is ' Darśana ' denoting both ' vision ' and ' means of vision ' of what is real (Tattva), had its grounding in a sublime spiritual and metaphysical culture. Moreover, such a conception of philosophy had been gifted with a penetrating mystic insight and

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1. It is to be noted here that instead of māyāvāda the concept 'māyā' has been used in the present thesis, because popularly māyāvāda stands for ' Śaṅkara's philosophy, according to which the world we see and we live in is nothing but false (mithyā) from the transcendental standpoint (pāramārthika dr̥ṣṭi). But here our chief purpose is to institute a comprehensive and critical analysis of the significance of the concept māyā not only in Śaṅkara's philosophy but with much more emphasis, in three modern, English-educated Indian philosophers' writings. It is indeed true that for the first time Śaṅkara with utmost zeal and intellectual acumen gifted with deep-rooted spiritual insight formulates a nondualistic philosophy that describes the world as false (mithyā) from transcendental perspective taking a peculiar but amazing recourse to the Vedic-Upaniṣadic concept of māyā. But in most of the ' modern ' writings,

intuitive vision of Truth or Reality. Evidently, unlike the West² where philosophy is mainly considered as a theoretical discipline of academicians, in the time-honoured philosophical tradition of India, Philosophy is not a 'mere intellectual apprehension of Reality' but also an intuitive realization of it that dominates the life of both individual as well as society. Indian philosophy is thus dominated by a consideration of practical necessity of understanding

the term māyā has been used as a real aspect of ^{the} highest Reality (Brahman) and thus for them the status of world is not the same as held by Śāṅkara.

Śāṅkara uses the term māyā to designate the status of the world. For Śāṅkara the world of multiplicity is false. When we cognise the multiplicity of world-show instead of One Brahman it is super-imposition (adhyāsa) . The world is not more than an illusion. But here we are interested to see how and in what background the concept of māyā had been used in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads , then in ^{the} Śāṅkarite Non-dualism and in the writings of modern Indian Thinkers. We are also interested to institute how the modern thinkers' handling of the concept of māyā differ from the older views and howfar their departure is radical. These are the reasons in support of the title of our thesis ' The Concept of Māyā ' instead of māyāvāda.

2. The term philosophy as it is popularly used in the western culture mainly signifies theoretical enterprise with hair-breathing logical analysis of Reality. For this reason, Hume advises us to understand his philosophy as academic philosophy and to leave room for faith so far as the life is concerned. We may remember here Hume's reply to Mr. Boyle, a boarder of the same lodging, at the death of Hume's mother :

how life can be best led.³ The aim of it is rather the satisfaction of an enlightened life with ' far sight, foresight and insight '.⁴ In modern Indian philosophical literature, which is dominated by scientific and secular outlook, we see a revival of the traditional wisdom in a new format in order to suit the changed socio-cultural situation. And as a result of this ungrudging sustained efforts of great thinkers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Professor K.C. Bhattacharyya, Sri Aurobindo, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Dr. B.N. Seal to mention some of the most eminent

Boyle said : " My friend, you owe this uncommon grief to having thrown off the principles of religion, for if you had not, you would have been consoled with the firm belief that the good lady who was not only the best of mothers but the most pious of Christians, was completely happy in the realms of the just ". Hume replied : " Though I throw out my speculations to entertain the learned and metaphysical world, yet in other things I do not think so differently from the rest of the world as you imagine!"
 - John Hill Burton, Life and Correspondence of David Hume Vol. 1.,
 (Edinburgh 1846) p. 293.

3. The word ' practical ', as ^{it is} understood in Indian Philosophy is not *used* in the sense that truth is measured in terms of the practices as understood by the pragmatists like James, Schiller and others, but rather that truth is the most dependable guide for practice.
4. S.C. Chatterjee and D.M. Datta : An Introduction to Indian Philosophy (University of Calcutta , 1968) p. 12.

figures of modern Indian culture, Indian thought has got a mark of distinction in now-a-day's global cultural atmosphere.

Philosophy in its broadest sense refers to the conception of life and the world. But like all other historical events, philosophical conceptions are also said to be produced and moulded by religio-ethical conceptions of the prevailing space-time order on the one hand and scientific investigations on the other. No Philosopher can fight shy of the influence of the socio-cultural situation of his time altogether in shaping his philosophical conceptions. To put it otherwise, a philosopher can not appear in a vacuum, his interpretations can not be indifferent to socio-cultural context as well as scientific investigations of his time and the dominant thought currents of his earlier times. Perhaps seeing this, Bertrand Russell calls philosophers as " both effects and causes : effects of their social circumstances and of the politics and institutions of their time, cause (if they are fortunate) of beliefs which mould the politics and institutions of later ages ".⁵ This observation also seems to be relevant with regard to the thoughts of the philosophers , we are going to deal in this dissertation. We shall see that the concept of māyā had its appearance in the philosophical literature right from the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, but it received various interpretations and subsequently moulded its connotation and significance in such a variety of ways that we can not explain or reconcile these without recognising every philosophical interpretation as an outcome of a particular time's milieu, be it Nāgārjuna, Gaudapāda or Śaṅkara of earlier

5. Russell - A History of Western Philosophy, (Unwin, London, 1988 ed.)
preface p.7.

period, or be it assigned to Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo. It is true that the thoughts and feelings that were common to the community or masses in vague and difused forms are being crystallised and concentrated in the philosophical writings of the age. There is also a peculiar genius of Indian Philosophical tradition for converting what it borrows and reconciliating it with the existing one. As a result of this in the Mahāyāna Buddhism we see that it was well-prepared to compromise with Brāhminical tradition as long as its ethical back-ground remained unaffected. Nāgārjuna's philosophical position was in line with Upaniṣadic philosophy. But when Mahāyāna Buddhists tradition lost its vitality, " the monasteries became rich centres of vested interests, and their discipline became lax. Magic and superstition crept into the popular forms of worship " ⁶. Śāṅkara (in the 8th. century) who was often called a disguised Buddhist adopted the practice of Saṅgha in his conception of ' maṭha ' an organisations of sannyāsins . Interpreting the Upaniṣadic concept of māyā, Śāṅkara replaced gradually the blind forces by conscious and rational foundations and offered the prevalling ethical practices a new direction. We shall see ⁱⁿ the main body of our dissertation that Śāṅkara does not disregard the distinction between right and wrong in mundane level rather it offers a more solid rational foundations of ethical ideals. Coming down to the arrival of modern Indian Philosophy, we cannot close our sight to a position that has managed to break up the ancient tradition in many respects most probably on account of the tremendous scientific achievements and discoveries, but has not found another sound alternative. In this milieu,

6. Jawaharlal Nehru - The Discovery of India , Oxford, 1989, (9th impression , J.N. Memorial fund) p. 179.

modern Indian Philosophy started its walking in a self-created path by way of reconciliation of old tradition with the new world order.

There are many erroneous notions about Indian philosophy in the West.⁷ One of such prevalent notion is that an attitude of ' world-negation ' essentially characterises the dominant philosophical thinking in India. As such an attitude of worldnegation or illusoriness of the world we see around us, has been associated with the concept of māyā. This has tempted me to undertake a critical examination of the concept of māyā in ^{the} Samkarite philosophical treatises as well as its modern interpretations by Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo. It is hoped that such a study will serve as a preparation to the reader for an easier assimilation of the contemporary interpretations and applications of the concept of māyā and also to clarify the erroneous notion held by a few modern scholars both Western and

7. A large majority of professional philosophers in West very often makes sweeping remarks about Indian Philosophy. As an instance we may cite a passage from Anthony Flew : " Philosophy, as the word is understood here is concerned first, last and all the time with argument. It is incidentally, because most of what is labelled Eastern Philosophy is not so concerned - rather than any reason of European Parochialism - that this book draws no materials from any source east of Suez ".

- An Introduction to Philosophy (London, Thames & Hudson, 1971)
p. 36.

Even John Locke made many sweeping remarks on account of his erroneous conception about Indian Philosophy. Here is a passage from Locke :

" Had the poor Indian philosopher (who imagined that the earth also wanted something to bear it up) but thought of this word substance he needed not to have been at rouble to find an

Indian, who brand māyā as " illusion " in the sense of ' imagination ' or ' hallucination '.⁸ Our thesis will endeavour to show that the notion of māyā is a point around which the philosophical thought in India has ever revolved and it is a legitimate philosophical concept as to the reconciliation of the timeless perfection of Pure Being with the perpetual change or becoming of the world of phenomena. In the main texts of our dissertation the explication of māyā and its allied concepts will be dealt with in a comparative spirit mostly within Indian philosophical systems and especially with the traditional Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara.

As to the selection of the philosophies of Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo, it may be urged that the multi-dimensional aspect of the concept of māyā have been fruitfully explored with variation with the meaning of the term ' māyā as illusory ' by the aforesaid thinkers sometimes in building up their philosophical literature and sometime in occasional philosophical discourses in order to clear the misunderstandings of and mispresentations by others. Notwithstanding the fact that except S. Radhakrishnan, the other two - Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, are not academic philosophers, it goes

elephant to support it, and a tortoise to support his elephant, the word substance would have done it effectively ".

- An Essay Concerning Human Understanding , Book II, Ch. XIII, ed. A.C. Fraser, Oxford, 1984, p. 19.

8. Among the Indian thinkers, Prabhu Dutta Shastri had taken the word ' māyā ' in the sense of illusion. In this respect one may see his book : The Doctrine of Māyā in the Philosophy of Vedānta, (London, Luzac , 1911) p. 53.

without saying that all the three great sons of India have fruitfully shown the hollowness of the western allegation against the concept of māyā as ' illusion ' or ' world negating ' principle as it^{is} wrongly understood in the west and in and through the writings of the aforesaid thinkers one may find an engaging, fruitful entry into the heart and mind of India. They weave the thread of māyā into a colourful fabric composed of many interesting ideas that reveal the practical insight into problems of troubled world pre-eminently torn by doubts and convictions of nullity. Among them, Sri Aurobindo is the most daring philosopher of modern India whose unfathomable intuitive penetration has produced a vast realm of philosophical literature on the science of life and " whose metaphysical explanation of the phenomenal world once translated into secular language will be seen to anticipate the postulates of physical science in this century and in the century to come." ⁹ Both Swami Vivekananda and S. Radhakrishnan were chosen for their luminous descriptions of an age-old explanation of the multiplicity and perplexity of the world in modern terms. In the last decade of nineteenth century Vivekananda first opens the close-door-thinking regarding India and her people in the West and in the major half of twentieth century Radhakrishnan has been playing the role of ' Liaison officer between East and West '. ¹⁰ He has successfully shown the bearing of ancient wisdom

9. R. Ryena : The Concept Māyā , (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1962) p. XII.

10. C.E.M. Goad : Counter attacks from the East (George Allen and Union Ltd. London, 1933) p. 38.

of the east upon the perennial problems of existence.

It is, however, incumbent upon any researcher to take note of the legitimacy of the concept of māyā in Indian Philosophy. Our thesis will maintain that from the standpoint of modern interpretations in the hands of Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo, the interpretation of the concept of māyā in the sense of illusion, is in the end incorrect and untenable. The modern thinkers on the contrary, boldly maintain that in the Upaniṣads the term māyā was not used in the sense of illusion but in many other senses. In their tireless and sometimes tiresome analysis of the concept of māyā, the modern thinkers thus manage to put their hands on something deep and correct regarding philosophical import of the concept of māyā.

It is to be noted in this connection that our thesis is not confined to the expository survey only, it has been gifted with critical and comparative analysis so that the views developed here should not be vitiated by any kind of dogmatism. Keeping this in mind, we shall advance some arguments from our own standpoint, sometimes in criticising Śaṅkara's position and sometimes the positions of modern thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan etc. Though one may not agree with all these arguments to be forwarded in defence of our statement, one may find intellectual pleasure by going through the reasoning which may seem to be interesting, convincing and cogent to him. How far I am successful, may be judged by the scholars in the field ^{but} my arguments, ^{I feel} can be of interest to the general reader as well as to professionals. In this respect our thesis humbly claims to be open-ended one.

In the preparation of this thesis, I have made use of the original sanskrit texts mostly for first two chapters and the original writings of Swami Vivekananda , S. Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo for other chapters. And for this reason, I have included a large amount of commentarial material in original language. Besides, I have made use of the standard writings on the subject published in recent times. My indebtedness to the works consulted is, I trust, sufficiently indicated in the footnotes.

Apart from a long preface, our thesis will be divided into six broad chapters. The name of the broad chapters are as follows :

- CH - 1 - INTRODUCTORY : THE METAPHYSICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ.
- CH - 2 - THE CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ IN ^{THE} ŚĀMĀKARITE ADVAITA VEDĀNTA.
- CH - 3 - THE CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ IN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S PHILOSOPHY.
- CH - 4 - THE CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ IN SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN'S PHILOSOPHY.
- CH - 5 - THE CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ IN SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY.
- CH - 6 - CONCLUSION AND CRITICAL REMARKS.

Again, each of the above chapters is divided into different sections and sub-sections which are given in detail in the text of the thesis.

Now I feel it a solemn duty to express my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. Raghunath Ghosh, Reader in Philosophy, University of North Bengal under whose competent guidance and loving supervision this

research work was taken up, conducted and completed. I owe my debt to Pandit Paresh Chandra Pañcatīrtha of Dārikānāth Catuṣpāthi, Alipurduar, West Bengal, with whom I studied the Sanskrit texts. I also express my sense of gratitude to Swami Lokeswarananda of Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Calcutta, Swami Mukhyānanda of Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Professor Sushanta Sen, Deptt. of Philosophy & Religion, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan and Sri R. K. Acharyya, Reader in Philosophy, Ramkrishna Mahavidyalaya, Tripura with whom I had the opportunity to discuss some of the problems dealt with in this thesis and I was immensely benefited by their discussions. I am also grateful to all my past teachers in general (and to Professor Sibjiban Bhattacharyya in particular for his classes in Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark) for their initiation to grow my interests in the inherent richness of Indian Philosophy.

I am thankful to all the library-staff of Vivekananda College, Alipurduar College, Visva-Bharati, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Ramakrishna Mahavidyalaya, Tripura, for extending their helps in different times and to the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, for granting me financial assistance under the Minor Research Project in Humanities and Social Sciences.

I also take the opportunity to thank all my colleagues and friends of Vivekananda College, Sri S.K. Bhowmik (Rtd. Principal of Alipurduar College) and Sri Kalyan Banerjee for their encouragements and helps.

I deem it a proud privilege to express my sense of gratitude to Professor Bimalendu Bhattacharyya and Professor (Mrs.) Anima Bhattacharyya, Deptt. of Geography, North Bengal University, Sri Rathin Sengupta and Mrs. Tapati Sengupta (my maternal uncle and aunt) for their constant inspirations and helps.

I find no appropriate words to express my indebtedness to my Parents, Parents-in-law for their blessings and encouragements.

I am also grateful to my husband, Dr. Dilip Kumar Mohanta for his critical reading of various portions of the first draft of the thesis and for helping me to refine my text throughout the entire writing.

Finally, I acknowledge the delightful distractions provided by my son, RK(রক) who suffered much on account of my off and on staying away from him for a quite long period.

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