

CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTORY :

METAPHYSICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

FOR THE CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ :

I N T R O D U C T O R Y :

THE METAPHYSICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR
THE PROPAGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ

Tracing of the origin and development of the concept of Māyā in
Vedic-Upaniṣadic philosophical tradition; Sāṃkhya view of Prakṛti,
Śākta-Tantra, Bengal-Vaiṣṇava and Nāgārjunian views on allied
concepts explained :

The concept of māyā is as old as the Vedas. The Vedas are said to be the oldest monument of philosophical literature of Indian culture and tradition. The main thoughts of the Upaniṣads which is otherwise known by the name vedānta, may be traced as a gradual development of the vedic tradition from Mantras and Brāhmaṇas through the Āraṇyakas. The key note of the Vedic mantras (hymns) is the spiritual monism and this monistic culture has been nourished and developed very elegantly with poetical zeal in the Upaniṣads.¹ The various gods of

-
1. The term 'henotheism' introduced by Max Müller as a transitional stage from polytheism to monotheism means ' belief in one only god'. Where polytheism believes ' the plurality of god ', monotheism says the Supreme can only be one. But Monism announces an one impersonal ruling over all power that is unmoving.

the Vedas are, as a matter of fact, manifestations of the Supreme God.² Thus ^{to} Rg-veda reads ' ekam sadviprā bahudhā vadanti - the One Real, the wise ^{men} declare as many³. There is the monistic thought from the first Mantra portion to the last Upaniṣadic portion⁴. But a very crucial question crops up here ; If the Reality is one, how do we explain the multiplicity of the universe ? The vedic saints and seers here take recourse to māyā - the magical power of God⁵. Māyā has different connotations in the various texts of India's sacred and philosophical literature. But the term māyā as the explanation of the visible universe is not a modern concept, but it can be found in its primitive meanings in the Rg-veda. The great philosophical tradition of Vedas and Upaniṣads have been the out come of the realisation of Saints and Seers with metaphysical depth and spiritual insight. Dominant philosophical attempts were made to disclose and discover the nature of what is real (tattva) and such an enterprise, very often centres around the self or ātman. The great upaniṣadic statement ' Ātmānam viddhi ' advises the individual to know his true essence, through the realisation of which one can attain the supreme

2. C.D. Sharma : A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1978) p.16

3. Rgveda : 1.164.46. (vol 1, Haraf Prakasani, Calcutta, 1976) p.219

4. "Pādo'hsya viṣvābhūtāni tripādasyāmṛtaṁ divi" - Ibid 10.90.3. vol 2, p.570

5. " Nāsadāsīno sadāsīttadānīm nāsīdrajo no vyomā paro yat /
 Kīṁavarīvḥ kuha kasya śarmnambhaḥ kīṁāsīdgahanam gabhiram //
Ibid 10.129.1. (Of Cit) p.624.

knowledge, the centre of everything. In the R̥gveda we come across the concept of the eternal unity of Existence (Rta) which ' holds in its embrace all that has come to be, a unity in which the non-dynamic Reality which is frequently called Brahman is at once the imperishable spirit in man the ' Ātman, identical to the nature of Brahman'-Ātman , the first principle. This ' Ātman-Brahman orientation ' is one of the special marks of some schools of Indian philosophy that owe their origin and development from the Vedic-Upaniṣadic philosophical realises and this feature distinguishes them from the speculative philosophical novelties of western tradition. Many major philosophical schools of India believe that worldly man is under the nescience (avidyā) and as a result of it the individual takes the objects as real, permanent-which in fact is unreal, impermanent. It is common to all metaphysics that an underlying entity lay beneath the phenomenal world. From this metaphysical quest that soon runs into a division between phenomenal and trans-phenomenal existence, the concept of māyā has been treated with utmost care and importance in the philosophical discourses of the Vedas and Upaniṣads . It has been given a pivotal status despite different connotations in the various philosophical treatises of pre-Śaṅkara , Śaṅkara and post-Śaṅkara philosophical enterprises as well. Notwithstanding the variations in connotations, all texts and commentaries on the texts are agreed that māyā is concerned with the relationship of the phenomenal status of being and the transphenomenal Absolute. Most of the vedāntins-Śaṅkarite as well as Non-Śaṅkarite used it in order to give an explanation of the problem of other worldliness. The phenomenal character of the world is explained in Advaita Vedānta

by the word māyā. It is māyā for the vedāntins, that provides the adjuncts that by conditioning Brahman produces the occasion for the apparent creation of the world.

The ancient Vedas come to rest in the metaphysical searching—the searching for the true essence of self. From very early days as recorded in the Rgveda, human mind seeks to find the solution for his quest — ' where is the sun by night ? ' ' where go the stars by day ' ? " Why does the sun not fall down " ? ' What god shall we adore with our obtain ' ? ' Who has seen the first born ' ? The vedic Seers were convinced that there was something, which was not many but one, impersonal and Agni, Indra, Varuna were only the different forms and names of that Supreme. Several passages of Rgveda were devoted to depict the underlying unity that prevails under the apparent multiplicity of the world of phenomena. Agni, Yama and Mātariśvāh are the various names of the same Reality. The entire universe with all its varieties is ' the working of one mind the features of the same face, the blossom upon one tree '. The vedic texts which very often declare that ' the real is one ', use the term ' māyā ' in many hymns (Mantras). It is emphatically conceived as the power to transform oneself or assume strange forms.⁶ In the Rgveda⁷ it refers to a ' mysterious power ' a supernatural

6. Yadatastanvā vāvṛdhāno valānīndra pravruvāno janesu /
Māyetsā te yāni yuddhānyāhurnādya śatruṃ nanu purā vivitse //
Ibid (Of Cit) p. 513

7. Tadinvasya vṛvabhasya dhenorā nāmahirmarmire sakmyṃ goh /
Anyadnyadasuryaṃ vasānāni māyino mamire rūpasmin //
Ibid 3.38.7, vol I (Of Cit) p. 356.

power attributed to the gods. The term māyā is also praised as a ' world-sustaining power '. The famous verse of Rgveda thus reads:-

" Rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo babhuva
tadasya rūpaṁ prāticakṣānya /
 Indro māyā-bhiḥ pururūpa īyate
yuktā hyasya harayaḥ sātā dasā //⁸

Lord Indra by his supernatural powers or māyā is said to assume various forms. Human beings with their discursive reason (avidyā) can not apprehend that forms of variety which are in fact the creation of māyā. In the same Rgveda the term māyā is sometimes used in the sense of cunning and deception, it is said to be the mightiest feature of Asuras, the Non-God, whom the devas (gods) wage in warfare. In the Atharvaveda māyā is described as something born out of māyā . The hymns of Rgveda that describe the fact of creation of the universe often declare that the universe with all its multiplicity is developed out of the ultimate One. The Vedic Seers term - that ultimate Reality ' Hiranyagarbha ' -"which lives in all things and moves them all the real one that blushes in the rose, breaks into beauty in the clouds, shows its strength in the storms and set the stars in the sky "⁹. In the Vedas māyā in short is conceived as a governing principle and Ātman is described as Supreme Reality. Apart from the introduction of māyā the fact of Being on the one hand, and Becoming on the other would remain unexplained. Moreover, Ātman as the Supreme Reality and total non-being, the phenomenal existence that we come across in the Upaniṣads could not be posited with-

8. Ibid 6.47.18. vol 2, (Of Cit) p. 54

9. S. Radhakrishnan : Indian Philosophy vol 1, (George Allen & Unwin, 1989, Indian edition) p.95

out the concept of māyā .

The whole bulk of Vedas is classified into two heads - the sāṃhitā and the Brāhmaṇa - the former is concerned chiefly with Karmas or sacrifices and the later mostly with the self-knowledge or Brahmajñāna. The Upaniṣads which are otherwise known as Vedānta and considered as the nucleus of the most of religious-philosophical systems of India, are engaged to find out the essential nature of the First Principle of the Universe, the term ' Upaniṣad ' means the secret or 'rahasyam'. Deussen puts it as " certain mysterious words, expression and formulæ which are only intelligible to the initiated are described as Upaniṣad ".¹⁰ The Upaniṣad is concerned with the central reality which is absolute, infinite and pure delight . The doctrine of Upaniṣads has come to be known as Brahmavidyā since the sole pursuit of the whole Upaniṣads is to realise Brahman which is variously termed as ' Ātman; Puruṣa; , Īśa etc. " Brahma tallakṣyaṃ ucyate "¹¹

The Ultimate Truth, the Brahman has been described in the Upaniṣads in two ways. The Upaniṣads mention two aspects of Brahman-acosmic and cosmic , the manifest as well as the unmanifest. The one is devoid of attributes - Nirguṇa ; the other is endowed with them, known as Saguṇa Brahman. The passage of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad says:-

10. Philosophy of the Upaniṣads - (Tr. A.S. Geden, T and T Clark London, 1908) p.16

11. " Pranavo dhanuḥ śārohy ātmā , brahmatal lakṣyaṃ ucyate / apramattena veddhavyaṃ , śārvattanmayo bhavet " //

- Mundaka Upaniṣad - 2.2.4, (in S. Radhakrishnan's The

Principal Upaniṣads, George Allen & Unwin, Indian Edition 1989) p. 683.

" It is neither gross nor minute, neither short nor long ; it is neither dryness nor moisture, neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, it is unattached, without savor or odor ; without eyes or ears, without vocal organ or mind, non-luminous, without vital force or mouth, without measure and without interior or exterior ".¹² Whereas in Chāndogya Upaniṣad we find the following statement :-"He who consists of mind, whose body is life, whose form is light , whose thought is truth, whose soul is space, containing all works, containing all desires containing all odours, containing all tastes, encompassing this whole world, being without speech and without concern".¹³ But these two aspects do not create any contradiction. The same reality is viewed from two points of view of the perceiver. Gobindo gopal Mukhopadhyaya says " the two pictures do not make reality dual but leave its unity unimpaired ".¹⁴ The Katha Upaniṣad clearly describes these two forms of Ātmā . " As the same

12. " Etad vai tad akṣaram asthūlam, ananu, ahrasvam, adīrgham, alohitam, asneham, acchāyam, atamaḥ, avāyva anākāśam, asaṅgam, arasam, agandham acakṣuṣkam, aśrotram, avāk, amanah, atejaskam, aparānam, amukham, amātram, abāhyam ; na tad aśnāti kim cana, na tad aśnāti kaś cana.

- Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad - 3.8.8. (OP. Cit) p. 232.

13. Mano-mayaḥ prāṇa-śarīro bhā-rūpaḥ satya-saṅkalpa ākāśātmā sarva-karmā sarva-kāmaḥ sarva-gandhaḥ sarva-rasaḥ sarvam idam abhyātto ' vāky anādarah .

- Chāndogya Upaniṣad , 3.14.2. (Op. Cit) p. 391.

14. Studies in the Upaniṣads (Calcutta Sanskrit College Research Series No. IX , 1960) p. 61.

non-dual after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it burns, so, also, the same non-dual Ātmān , dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever it enters. And it exists also without ".¹⁵ Sri Ramkrishna compares the unconditioned Brahman to the infinite ocean and the conditioned Brahman to the blocked ice. Due to cool the ocean becomes solid ice; again the heat of the sun melts the ice into water. The transcendence of Brahman has no opposition to immanence. Transcendence signifies the real nature of the Absolute, whereas immanent is the view of Reality which is not direct.

The whole enquiry of the Upaniṣads centres round this Brahman or Ātmān, the inmost nature of all things. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad we find that when Yājñavalka wished to go away into the forest he wanted to make a settlement for his two wives - Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī. But Maitreyī urged that whereas the worldly wealth did not give her immortality, she had no need for them. She was rather interested to know the path that leads her to immortality. And Yājñavalka started to pitch her about this Ātmān who is the only reality. The one Supreme consciousness splits up into jīva and Isvara , the subject and the object. This division arises because of the principle of māyā , it is within the womb of māyā . There are some who^{are} wrong in imagining that the doctrine of māyā is an invention of Śaṅkara , it is a later graft upon the old vedāntic

15. Agnir yathaiko bhuvanam pravisto rūpam rūpam prati-rūpo babhūva/
 Ekas tathā sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā rūpam rūpam prati-rūpo bahiśca//
 - Kātha Upaniṣad - 2.2.9 (Op. Cit.) p. 639

philosophy and it does not find any place in the Upaniṣadic statement. The Upaniṣads emphatically declares the complete identity of jiva and Brahman. The great Upaniṣadic statement 'Thou art that' or 'I am Brahman' indicates that the Supreme self is identical with the individual self. This absolute identity comes to a liberated soul who is beyond māyā. It is through the instrumentation of māyā that this division occurs. The term māyā means which measures (miyate anayā). So it is māyā which measures the Absolute. It has a power of concealment, for which the Infinite is concealed and becomes finite. This concealment of Truth is referred in the Upaniṣads again and again. The Īśa Upaniṣad says that the face of truth is veiled by brilliant golden lid and it invokes the grace of the Divine to lift up the golden lid and make possible the perception of the Oneness of beings in the divine soul of the universe.¹⁶ The Upaniṣads tell us that the world where we live^{is} is the world of ignorance, darkness and death; it would be quite different from the world of reality. The famous prayer of Brahadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad thus reads -

From the unreal lead me to the real,

From darkness lead me to light

From death lead me to immortality.¹⁷

16. Hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukham /

Tattvam puṣannapāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dr̥ṣṭaye //

- Īśa Upaniṣad - 15 (Of Cit) p. 577.

17. " Asato mā sadgamaya, Tamāso mā jyotirgamaya Mṛtyormā amṛtam gamaya "

- Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad - 1.3.28 (Op. Cit.) p. 162

It signifies that there is a distinction between reality, light and death , i.e. a distinction between the reality and appearance, transcendental and phenomenal. There are many passages in the Upaniṣads where the world of duality is not regarded as absolute, but only seeming. The one and indivisible reality apparently splits itself. In the Brh̄dāraṇyaka Upaniṣad , which is one of the most significant of Upaniṣads. Yājñabalka teaches that the individual ātman is identical with the spirit in itself, the Supreme Reality - the Universal Ātman . The Upanaṣadic statement ' tattva-masi ' mentions this identity. It declares that the self within us and the Brahman are one and the same. In the opinion of seers " there is no diversity. He goes from death to death, who sees in it, as it were diversity ".¹⁸ The Katha Upaniṣad warns us not to find reality and certitude in the unrealities and uncertainties of the world, and tells us that how people abiding in avidyā , ignorance, thinking themselves blind men led by the blind.¹⁹ We are told in the Svetāśvatāra . Upaniṣad that we get over the world illusion, visvamāyā nivṛtti by the worship of him, by union with him, by entering into his Being. It signifies that the world other

18. Manasaivānudraṣṭavyam , naiha nānāsti kiṃ cana /
mrtyoḥ sa mrtyum āpnoti ya iha naneva paśyati //
- Brh̄daranyaka Upaniṣad - 4.4.19. (Of Cit.) p. 277

19. Dūramete viparīte visūcī avidyā yā ca vidyeta jñātā /
Vidyābhīpsinaṃ naciketasam manye, na tvā kāmā bahavo lolupantaḥ//
- Katha Upaniṣad - 1.2.4. (Op. Cit.) p. 609.

and

Avidyāyām antare vartamānāḥ, svayam dhīrāḥ panditaṃ manyamānāḥ/
Dandramyamānāḥ pariyanti mūḍhāḥ, andhenaiva niyamānā yathāndhāḥ//
Ibid 1.2.5. (Op. Cit.) p. 609

than Him is māyā - which is not real. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad calls this māyā as the power of god - god is māyin. He is never separate from this power, but He is in eternal conjunction with it. Cognition, will and activity - all these are quite natural to God. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad thus reads :-

Māyām tu prakṛtiṃ viddhi, māyinaṃ tu mahesvaraṃ /
Tasyāvayava-bhūtais tu vyāptaṃ sarvaṃ idaṃ jagat //

- that is to say, prakṛti is māyā and the wielder of māyā is The Great Lord. The whole world is pervaded by beings that are part of the Lord.²⁰

It is stated in the Mundaka Upaniṣad that as a spider sends forth and draws in its thread, as herbs grow on the earth, as the hair develops on the head and body of a living person, so from the imperishable arises here the universe.²¹ He creates all, smells all ,

20. Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 4.10. (Op. Cit.) P. 734.

21. Yathōrṇa-nābhiḥ sṛjate gr̥hate ca, yathā pṛthivyām oṣadhayas sambhavanti /
Yatha sataḥ puruṣāt keśalomāni tathākṣarāt sambhavatiha viśvaṃ //
- Mundaka Upaniṣad - 1.1.7.

and

Tapasā cīyate brahma tato'nnam abhijāyate annāt prāno manah ' satyaṃ lokāḥ karmasu camṛtam - Mundaka Upaniṣad - 1.1.8.
(Op. Cit.) p. 673.

tastes all, he has pervaded all, silent and unaffected.²² It is indeed true that the Upaniṣads invoke that the world of perpetual procession of events that we perceive, feel and cognize must be ultimately identical with the Brahman. As from a lump of clay all that is made of clay is known, as from an ingot of black iron all that is made of black iron is known, so that when we achieve the supreme knowledge everything is achieved, we know everything. But only who is beyond the māyā knows the truth.

There is no doubt that the tendency of the Upaniṣadic Seers was to declare the complete identity of the Supreme Ātman and the ātman of individual. It is an admitted fact that the Upaniṣads were not written by one writer or by those philosophers who belong to the same school, but were composed by different Seers of different times. So the Upaniṣads do not represent a conceptual system of philosophy as visions of the Seers. When the world of diversity attracts their minds they declare that they all are Brahman. To put it in the words of Dr. S.N. Dasgupta - " They do not notice even the contradiction between the Brahman as unity and nature in its diversity ".²³ But we must remember that though there are different shades in the development of the conception of Brahman in the

22. " Sarva-karmā sarva-kāmah sarva-gandhah, sarva rasah sarvam idam abhyatto'vāky anādarah, eṣa ma ātmāntar hrdaye etad brahma, etaṁ itah pretyābhisambhavitāsmīti, yasya syāt addhā na vicikitsāstīti ha smāha sāndilyah, sāndilyah.
- Chāndogya Upaniṣad , 3.14.4. , Ibid p. 392.

23. A History of Indian Philosophy , vol I, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass , 1975) p. 48.

Upaniṣads, but there is no doubt that the strongest current of thought is that the Ātman or Brahman is the only reality and other than Brahman all the diversities are unreal. That thought as established by Śaṅkara in the later time, is the foundation of the doctrine of māyā which is rather hinted in the Upaniṣads.²⁴ And in the Vedic-Upaniṣadic tradition (as it is evident from the texts) at large the words māyā , avidyā , ajñāna are frequently used as very nearly or synonymous.²⁵ Other words like Adhyāsa, Mulāprakṛti, Tulāvidyā, Mulāvidyā etc. have been more recklessly used by later vedāntins. Śaṅkara himself has used all these as interchangeable terms. The concept of māyā , ajñāna is responsible for the cognition of multiplicity in the relative world.

24. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka states that there is in it no diversity. One sees diversity owing to ignorance.

Manasaivānudarastavyam , naiha nānāsti kiṃ cana mṛtyoh sa mṛtyum āpnoti yā iha nāneva paśyati. - 4.4.19. (Op.Cit) p.277.

25. Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad also describe the same by the word māyā.

In the verses 9 and 10 of the chapter IV we thus read :

Chandāmsi yajñāḥ kratavo vratāni, bhūtaṃ bhavyaṃ yac ca vedā vadanti,

asmān māyī sṛjate viśvaṃ etat tasmīns cānyo māyayā saṃniruddhaḥ . - verse No. - 9.

māyāṃ tu prakṛtiṃ viddhi, māyinaṃ tu maheśvaraṃ ;

tasyāvayava-bhūtais tu vyāptāṃ sarvaṃ idaṃ jagat . - Verse No.10 - (Op. Cit.) p. 734.

Here it is said that Brahman projects the universe through the power of its māyā . Again, in that universe Brahman (as the Jīva) is entangled through māyā . It is the very nature of illusion to give an appearance of reality to both the mirage and the phenomenal universe.

However, for the sake of comprehensive account of the evolution of the concept of māyā it is interesting to note how the allied concepts of māyā have been viewed in the non-vedic-upaniṣadic philosophies on the one hand, and in the different philosophical systems of non-saṁkarite orientation on the other. It is said that Gaudapāda, a south Indian teacher of Vedānta and the Grand teacher (Teachers' teacher) of Śaṁkārachāryya inherits many salient features of Buddhism in his interpretation of the Māndūkya Upaniṣad.²⁶ Although historical background of ' Śaṁkara's advaita vedānta may be traced in the philosophy of Gaudapāda, Śaṁkara's interpretation, as a matter of fact largely differs from Gaudapāda. Among the allied concepts of māyā, the samkhya view of Prakṛti, Tāntrika's conception of māyāśakti, Bengal vaiṣṇava's conception of māyā and Nāgārjuna's view of Samvṛtisatya are austoundingly remarkable.

In sharp contradistinction with Śaṁkara, the Sāmkhya system posits a ' cause of the world ' (allied concept of māyā of Advaita) in its doctrine of Prakṛti. Prakṛti and Puruṣa are the two ultimate realities recognised by the Sāmkhyas. Prakṛti is defined in the Sāmkhya system as ' the equilibrium of the three gunas ' - sattva,

Īśa Upaniṣad also describes ignorance (māyā, avidyā) in the following verses.

Anyad evāhur vidyayā anyad āhur avidyayā iti śuśruma
dhīrānām ye nastad vicacakṣire. - verse No. 10

Vidyām cāvidyām ca yas tad vedobhyām saha
avidyayā mrtyum tīrtvā vidyayāmṛtam-asnute. - verse No. 11

Maitrī Upaniṣad 7.9 also states that by this (ignorance) men declare that the inauspicious is the auspicious, and that the auspicious is inauspicious, as if by enchantment they see the false as the true. - (Op. Cit.) p. 855.

rajas and tamas .²⁷ Puruṣa , according to the Sāṃkhyas, is intelligent but inactive while Prakṛti is active but non intelligent. For the evolution of the world the activity of Prakṛti must be guided by the intelligence of Puruṣa. Puruṣa by itself is neither mukta (liberated) nor baddha (bound). The knowledge of Puruṣa as distinct from Prakṛti leads to Kaivalya or liberation. Īśvarakriṣṇa describes Prakṛti as qualified by the words triguṇātmikā ,²⁸ avivekī , object of Puruṣa's enjoyment (viṣayah Sāmānya) non-intelligent (acetanaṃ) and always ready to produce the world of objects. Puruṣa , on the other hand, is just opposite to this.²⁹ Like the māyā of Śāṃkara, Prakṛti may be said indefinable,

26. See: 2 S.N.Dasgupta : A History of Indian Philosophy vol 1, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass 1975) p. 422.

27. Sattva-rajastamasām sāmāyāvasthā prakṛtiḥ prakṛtermahān mahato-
hṅkārōhṅkārāḥ Pañcatanmātranyubhayamindriyaṃ tanmātrebhyaḥ
sthūlabhutāni puruṣa iti Pañcavimsatiganah. sūtra . 1.61.
- Sāṃkhya-Pravacanasūtra of Kapila (Tr. by Upendranath
Mukhopadhyaya, Basumati corporation Ltd., N.D.) p. 35

28. The word ' guna ' has many senses, such as quality, essence etc. when we say the table is brown ' here ' brownness ' is a quality of the Table (substance) the word ' guna ' is understood in this sense in the Nyāya-vaīśeṣika philosophy. But in the Sāṃkhya philosophy, the word ' guna ' means ' essence ', the substance Prakṛti is nothing over and above these three gunas.

29. Trigunāmvivekī viṣayah sāmānyam acetanaṃ Prasavadharmī /
Vyaktam tathā Pradhānam Tadviparīta-stathaca pumān //
-- Sāṃkhyakārikā //

See. Sāṃkhyakārikā of Īśvarakriṣṇa ,
Ed. By Purnacandra Vedānta Cuncu - sāṃkhyabhusana. (West Bengal
State Book Board, 1983) p. 99.

since so long as the reals composite , it do not combine no demonstrable attribute belonged to it with which it could be defined. Māyā or ajñāna in Vedānta , is also described as ' Sadasadbhyāmanirvacaniyām triguṇātmakam Jñānavirodhī bhāvarūpaṁ yatkinçiditi ' that is, ignorance is described as something positive though intelligible, which cannot be described either as being or non being which is made of three qualities and is antagonistic to knowledge.³⁰

From what has been explained above, it is evident that the advaitic concept of māyā or avidyā or ajñāna is essentially different from the Sāṁkhya view of Prakṛti. Unlike Advaita Vedānta the sāṁkhya advocates a dualistic system where Prakṛti is described as real. For the Sāṁkhya, when a person attains ' emancipation ' by cancelling the illusion arising from ' aviveka ' (non-discrimination) between puruṣa and Prakṛti, Prakṛti stands real as before, whereas in Śāṅkara's non-dualistic philosophy (Kevalādvaita) when a person is emancipated, māyā (avidyā , ajñāna as it is verily described in the Advaita texts) not only ceases to operate on him but is itself cancelled '. Both māyā and Prakṛti are described as ' triguṇātmikā ' (composed three attributes). But in Sāṁkhya's system of māyā is wholly Brahman- dependent.

30. " It may be noted here that the word ' something ' (Yatkinca) has a special significance. It is not used to denote its indescribable nature, nor its antagonism to knowledge and truth as these ideas have been well expressed by separate phrases. Its special significance is to posit ignorance as the source or cause of illusion ".

- Vedāntasāra of Sadānanda Yogindra , Tr. Swami Nikilananda, (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1978) p. 21.

Apart from the superficial affinity of the Sāṃkhya view of Prakṛti with Śaṅkarite view of māyā, and the fundamental differences between the two, even some other vedāntic schools have also somewhat modified interpretations of the term māyā.³¹

'Śākta-Tantra' which sometimes goes by the name 'Practical Vedānta', deals with the concept of māyā not as unconscious (jada) as it is conceived by Śaṅkara, but as a real aspect of Śiva Himself.

The Tāntric culture tries to represent a wonderful synthesis of Being and Becoming by integral unification of Śiva and Śakti, the former stands for Being, the static aspect and the latter for the becoming, the changing aspect of the Ultimate Reality. Thus in the 'Tantra māyā-Śakti' is viewed as real and here lies a sharp difference of Tāntric interpretation of māyā from the Śaṅkarite interpretation as 'sadasadbhyāṃ anirvācyā'.³² The world of multiplicity is false (mithyā) for Śaṅkara. On the contrary, Śākta-Tantra views the world as Śiva's experience and therefore it is real.³³ The

31. Since our main contention in this dissertation is not to show the differences of Śaṅkara's view from other traditional schools of Vedānta, but to show the differences of interpretations at the hands of modern Indian thinkers, we shall not go into detail of different philosophical systems' analysis of it. Here simply from expository standpoints, the concept has been introduced.

32. See: Sir John Woodreffe's : Shakti and Shakta (Fourth Ed. Ganesh and Co. Ltd., 1951) p. 71.

33. In sociological sense the Śiva is reportedly used as ' male ' and ' Śakti ' as female principle. This interpretation is not acceptable to the Tantric tradition. Śiva (Being) and Śakti (becoming) or māyāśakti are the real aspects of integral Reality. In Śākta Āgama , mind and matter are described as in the ourselves conscious but ' appear as unconscious by the

Tāntric culture assumes a real casual connection between Siva (Being) and jagat (world). We thus come across the simple grand dictum yadihasti, tad anyatra - what is here is there. And " the Ābhāsa of Tantra is a form of vivarta, distinguishable however from the vivarta of Māyāvāda . Because, in the Āgama whether Vai-
snava, Śaiva or Śākta, the effect is regarded as real whereas according to Śaṅkara, it is unreal".³⁴

Not to speak of Tantra only, even Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism, according to which the highest category is Kṛṣṇa (the Lord), describes māyā as one of the three śaktis (energies) of the Lord. Māyāśakti in Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, is an unconscious principle (īdā-
ravya) comprising the three attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas. Apart from the conception of three attributes, the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism has little affinity with Śaṅkara's view. For Śaṅkara ' sadasa-
danīrvācyā ' is māyā whereas Gaudīya Vaiṣṇavism conceives māyā as a real power of the Lord (Bhagavān).³⁵ Besides, māyāśakti Kṛṣṇa has svarūpa-śakti and Ksetrejñāśakti , the former consisting of sandhini, saṁvit and Hiādīnī (roughly corresponds to Existence-
Consciousness and Bliss) and the later is the jīva. In Bengal Vaiṣṇavism of Chaitanya , which is also known as Acintya-bhedābh-
edavāda, the power through which God imanifests Himself as the

veiling power of consciousness itself as māyāśakti ' - (Niṣedha vyāpāra rūpā Saktih) - For an elaborate discussion one may see Dr. U. Das' Sastramulak bhāratīya Saktisādhana ' (in Bengali), (Visva Bharati, pub. 1984.)

34. Woodroffe, Shakti and Shākta (ibid) p. 72.

35. Īśāvaimukhyena pihitam jīvaṁ māyā pidhatte, ghaṭenāvṛtam dipāṁ Yathātama avṛnoti " - Tattva-Sandarbhā of Jiva Goswami ed.

Satyananda Goswami (Pub. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1985) p.71.

material world is called māyā-śakti and is regarded as God's external power (Bahiranga Śakti). According^{to} Jīva Goswami, the author of Satsandarbha and a noted commentator on Sri Rūpa Goswami's Ujjvalanilamani and Bhaktirasāmṛta - sindhu, the avidyā is constituted by separation from the Lord, and the liberation (mukti) can be achieved only through turning towards the Lord and this can be fulfilled by ' Prema ' and ' Bhakti ' - unconditional love of an devotion to Lord. Bāladeva Vidyābhūšana, a commentator of Jiva Goswami's ' Tattva-sandarbha ' is of the opinion that there is ' Anādi Bhagavad Vaimukhya ' in the first place and then māyā .³⁶ A.K. Raychoudhury summarises the main contention of the Bengal Vaisnavism regarding māyā in the following passage. " Māyā thus deludes the Jīva and causes his bondage, Māyā is real, so her delusion too is real. When jīva is released, māyā is not destroyed, Bhagavān knows and sees that māyā deludes the jīva. He out of generosity (dāksīnya) towards her, does not obstruct herein her work. She is only different.³⁷

36. It may be noted here that Śruti is regarded as the highest proof by Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta and Vaisnavism of Bengal. But by Śruti Śaṅkara understands the Vedas and Upaniṣads whereas Bengal Vaisnavism means Bhāgavata purāna. In the opinion of Jīva Goswami, the vedas are vast and some important portions of the vedas are not extended to us (lupta and gupta). Therefore it is not wise to rely upon them absolutely for authenticity. Kṛṣṇa daipāyana Vedavyāsa is famous, because for the first time he systematised the vedic hymns and summarised them. He also elucidated the inner philosophical relevance discovering the commentary on vedic hymns - that is the Bhāgavata. In view of this Jiva Goswami claims that Bhāgavata is the more authentic source where we can get the real philosophical teachings of Śruti. For Jiva Goswami, Bhāgavata is said to be the summary of the teachings of the vedas, the Puranas and Itihāsa (sarva pramāṇam cakravartī bhūtam).

37. A.K. Raychoudhury, the Doctrine of Māyā, (Calcutta , Dasgupta &

Among the non-vedic philosophical tradition such a concept of cosmic ignorance (avidyā) can be said to have gained a popular acceptance with Mahāyāna Buddhism in general and the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism in particular. Nāgārjuna a second century Buddhist dialectician ruthlessly exposes the absurdity of all metaphysical theories (d r s t i s) concerning the nature of Reality by bringing out blatant self-contradictions inherent in their nature. He tries to show that the real nature of objects can not be explained either in positive or negative terms. Our intellectual faculty which very often functions through concepts and discussive categories cannot reveal the true nature of reality. With the help of the most devastating dialectics (prasaṅga) ever written, he has shown the hollowness of the claim that everything has its own nature (sarvam svalakṣaṇam). For him even an worldly thing cannot be explained since, the concepts and categories that we use in describing the worldly things, are devoid of any intrinsic nature of their own (niḥsvabhāva). All things of the world are conditionally originated and last so long as the condition does not cease to exist. A thing can not be said to be either real or unreal or both real and unreal or neither real nor unreal. Reality is thus called śūnyatā .³⁸ Nāgārjuna's view is known as madhyama (middle) view, because it avoids the two extreme views of eternalism (Śāśvatavāda / Nityatāvāda) and Ucchedavāda or absolute

Co. 1950) p. 182.

One may also notice the following verse in this regard : "Tarya eva tatra karttṛtvam, Bhagavataḥ tatra udasinatvam "

- Tattvasandarbhā. Ibid

38. Mādhyamika Kārikā Chapter : 24, Kārikā , 18.

unreality of things.³⁹ Samsāra or the world we see before us is for Nāgārjuna relative, conditional and dependent. This appearance of the world or samsāra is empirically true (samvrtisatya), the Śūnyata is the Absolute truth (pāramārthikasatya). In the Madhyamika-Śāstra⁴⁰ we read thus :

Ye'nayor na vijānanti vibhāgaṃ satyayor dvayoh ;
te tattvaṃ na vijānanti gambhīraṃ buddha-śāsane.

(Mādhyamika kārikā 24/9)

Now if the reality of the world from transcendental standpoint can not be established, it could not have been originated and was never originated. This view of non-origination of the world and man (ajātivāda) was taken over by Gaudapāda, the first articulated Advaita philosopher before Saṃkara . A crucial question may be cropped up here : Is the world of appearance different from the ultimate Reality ? Here Nāgārjuna replies that we cannot describe it although it can be ' shown ' ; it is śūnya,⁴¹ inexplicable. But

39. Ibid

40. Buddha's teaching of Dharma depends on twofold nature of truth— one is empirical and the other is transcendental. The former is meant for the ordinary people and the latter for the enlightened. The former is only the stepping stone to the attainment of the latter. The transcendental truth which is otherwise known as nirvāna , śūnyatā etc. can be realised only as the denial of what is known in ordinary experience.

— See — Mādhyamika Śāstra , Chap. 24, Kārikās 8-9.

41. The word ' Śūnyatā ' when used in the context of the empirical or the mundance level of Reality, has two imports — one negative and the other positive. Negatively it means the denial of the uncritical acceptance of the unconditional nature of phenomenal things, and positively it means the revelation of the conditional, changing nature of objects. In fact the doctrine of śūnyatā

this does not construe the sense that the phenomenal (saṃvṛti) and the noumenal (asaṃvṛti or nirvāna) truths are two different entities set against each other .⁴² As Nāgārjuna puts it. " The one and the same Reality when viewed through the category of cause and conditions is called the world, and when these causes and conditions are disregarded, it is termed as Nirvāna".⁴³ All empirical determinations as they are all conditional and mutually dependent, are śūnya in the sense of having no intrinsic nature of their own (niḥsvabhāva). Eventually, the truth of all determinations lies in their indeterminations. But since indeterminateness is devoided of all determinations, it is also called śūnya . In Nāgārjuna's philosophy the word śūnya , māyā and avidyā ⁴⁴ are interchangeable.

in the mundane level (vyavahāra) is intended to provide a rational explanation of the fact of change or becoming as it is usually called in philosophical terminology - which is an obvious experienced fact of the phenomenal world.

-- For an elaborate analysis of concept of śūnyatā, one may see Dr. Sushanta Sen's article entitled " The concept of multidimensional Śūnyatā " (The Visva Bhārati Journal of Philosophy Vol. XXII , No. 2, 1985.

42. " Nirvāṇasya ca ya kotih sā kotih Samsārasya ca " .
- Nāgārjuna , Mādhyamika - Kārikā , ch. 25, Kārikā No. 20.
43. Ya ājavam javibhāva upādāya pratītya vā /
Sa apratītya anupādāya Nirvāṇam upadiśyate //
- Ibid , Kārikā No. 9
44. As regards the nature of avidyā (ignorance) " the Śāstra quotes a Śūtra, in which the Buddha tells that ignorance is not an entity (with an independent nature of its own) residing either inside or outside, it does not have a coming

The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras⁴⁵ emphasise the teaching that the exact nature of things ever remains unchangeable, unaffected by our discursive and imaginative constructions and convey this teaching with the examples of illusion (māyā).

In the Laṅkāvatārasūtra the author, frequently uses the word māyā in order to explain the niḥsvabhāvatva (devoid of any self-essenceness) of the world. When he says : " Those who see that things exists or that they do not exist, do not see the truth, for all things are called māyā ; because they are unreal like lighting flash . . . because they are not born, yet appear to be and as the world is neither different from reality, nor identical with it, and though the world is treated as māyā, māyā is said to be not without reality ".⁴⁵ Besides Nāgārjuna, Aśvaghōṣa, a noted-Buddhist philosopher also uses the word māyā in the sense of magical power and some other Pali Buddhist writings also used the term ' māyā ' in the sense of ' deceitful conduct '.⁴⁶

At any rate, the introductory inclusion of the multidimension usage of the term māyā or ajñāna and its allied concepts from Vedic-Upaniṣadic literature to non-vedic Upaniṣadic philosophical treaties, shows that the concept itself is a very legitimate and

nor going, neither a birth nor an extinction, for there is not anywhere any definite entity with an ultimate nature of its own called ignorance ".

- Nāgārjuna's Philosophy as presented in the Mahāprajñā-Pāramitā Śāstra by K. Venkata Ramanan.

(The Harvard - Yenching Institute, Cambridge, 1966)

45. R. Reyna: The Doctrine of Māyā (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1962) p.11; See also : P.T. Raju : Idealistic Thought of India, (Cambridge Harvard University Press 1953) p. 243.

46. A. K. Raychoudhury : The Doctrine of Maya (Calcutta, Dasgupta, 1950) P. 105.

pivotal concept in the philosophical enterprise of India. Professor R.K. Sinari went a step further and says that māyā is central even in the day-to-day-struggles of the people in India.⁴⁷ Perhaps for this reason, this key concept has been used in different stipulated as well as reprotive senses at the hands of different philosophers from ancient days to modern times for the explanation of the existence of oneself and of the mysterious perplexity of the world around us.

47. " The notion of māyā is a point around which the philosophical thought in India has ever revolved. At some stage or other in his life, an Indian makes it a point to bruch aside a frustrating experience, a hopelessly incurable situation, even the day-to-day fact of existence, as perishable māyā. With the passage of time and with the ever stable impact of the Upanisadic Weltanschauung on the Indian mind, the word has acquired so popular and persuasive a usage that most often in the Indian's life , and literature both poverty and richness, sickness and health, failure and success, danger and safety, death and life, are banished indiscriminately as merely diverse facts of māyā ".

-- R.K. Sinari : The Structure of Indian Thought (Sringfield, Illinois : Charless C. Thomas 1970) P. 131.