

CHAPTER - 3

THE CONCEPT OF MĀYĀ IN SWAMI

VIVEKANANDA'S PHILOSOPHY :

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(12th January, 1863 - 4th July, 1902)

I. Some preliminary Observations about Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy :

Swami, Vivekananda an inspiring messenger and a tireless activist is mostly known as a preacher and social reformer, a passionate nationalist who gave a new life to the national movement of India. Though not an academic philosopher in the technical sense of the term, Vivekananda was profoundly impressed by the works of western philosophical literature. But his thoughts and ideas that are expressed in his various lectures, letters, essays and reflections represent a philosophy, a philosophy that is based on Vedānta , but at a time his advocacy of Vedānta differs itself from the traditional Vedānta and has some distinctive characteristics. Vivekananda though adheres to ~~the~~ Śāṅkarite Advaita, does not seem to have walked on the Śāṅkarite way of admitting Advaita Brahman as the only Reality and the world of diversity as unreal. In his practical vedānta a reconciliation of jñāna (knowledge) with bhakti (devotion) is found. On account of this, Vivekananda is not ready to accept the Śāṅkarite interpretation that describes God (Īśvara) as the product of māyā . For him there is no intrinsic difference between the concept of Absolute and that of God. His philosophy is advaitic in so far as he holds " he who has attained to this conception of Oneness, has no more delusion "¹. But he does not wholly refuse to admit the role of

1. Swami Vivekananda : Jñāna Yoga (Mayavati, Advaita Ashram, 1930)

upāsana or devotion. He observes that the common people are not in a position to go for total renunciation and are unable to comprehend the abstract reality of Absolute. He suggests the way of devotion for them because of their having over-tone of feeling and emotion. According to Vivekananda both the ways of knowledge (jñāna) and devotion (bhakti) lead to the same end of Brahma-realisation. In view of this before going through the philosophical implications of his speeches and writings, we must remember the picture of our country at his time. That was a time when India was passing a crucial moment. That was a time of growing friction between the Indian people and the British colonialists. A major portion of our countrymen was under poverty and carrying the curse of caste-system. A wave of materialism swept a group of people of our country. They preferred to live according to the ideals of western civilisation. At that crucial moments we heard the roars of Vivekananda " Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached ". He completely realised that the people who were immersed in materialism cannot be attracted at all by the view that the world in which we live and move is nothing but false . He clearly understood that this world-negation theory could not release his poor countrymen from their poverty and the bondage of untouchability. He preached such a philosophy which is not only for the intellectual but also for men in the street. Here lies the uniqueness of Vivekananda. He gave a new interpretation of the Advaita Vedānta which may be called Neo-Vedāntism. The deepest influence upon his thought is obviously of Ancient Hindu philosophy; but it is interesting to note that in a certain sense Vivekananda is influenced by Buddha's life and ideas. He remarks " Buddhism is historically the most important religion, historically and not philosophically - because

it was the most tremendous religious movement that the world ever saw, the most gigantic spiritual wave ever to burst upon human society. There is no civilisation on which its effect has not been felt in some way or other "2.

The religion of Buddha, Vivekananda believes, inspite of its difference from the traditional religion, overflows the whole world for its marvellous love, a love not only for all men but of all living beings. Buddha's universal love for all beings moved Swamiji. For him, Buddha was the boldest preacher of morality, the greatest teacher of equality that the world ever saw. The concept that attracts Swamiji mostly is Buddha's concept of equality of human beings and equal right of them to the knowledge and wisdom. Swamiji thinks " Buddha was the great preacher of equality. Every man and woman has the same right to attain spirituality - that was his teaching. The difference between the priests and the other castes be abolished. Even the lowestⁿ entitled to the highest attainments ".³ It is the gist of Vedas also, Vivekananda opines. The great statement of Upanisad " All is Brahman " also carries the idea of same equality that Buddha teaches throughout his life. Buddha's love for humanity and service towards people inspired Vivekananda. This concept acted as an ' electrifying spirit ' on him. This concept carries the equal weight like the Upanisadic thought ' Thou art that ' - individual self is identified with God. His tribute to Buddha was so high that he could say " Buddha may or may not believe in God; that does not

2. The complete works of Swami Vivekananda Henceforth C.W.V : vol.8.

(Advaita Ashram , Mayabati , 1985) p. 92

3. Ibid , Vol. 4 , p. 98.

matter to me ".⁴ The whole life of Buddha shows the fact clearly that a man can attain to the highest goal through the performance of action. Buddha achieved the highest truth through his tremendous love for all living beings. He did everything for others and absolutely nothing for himself. In an age when men and priest were engaged in discussion the essence of the deity, Buddha discovered what people had overlooked, that misery or evil exists in our life and the cause of our misery is our desire and our selfishness. When the world becomes unselfish all that misery and evil will vanish. When there was too much doctrine, too much belief in our religion, too much rational superstition, a change was needed. Such doctrine produced evil, and a reformation was necessary and Buddha brought such reformation.

But inspite of his highest tribute to Buddha, Vivekananda is not ready to endorse all his thoughts and philosophy. In a context Swamiji says " The life of Buddha has an especial appeal. All my life I have been very fond of Buddha, but not of his doctrine ".⁵ To Swamiji the paths showed by Buddha is a feable attempt at solving human problems. The giving up of the individual self and the non-existent of it makes Vivekananda disagreed to accept Buddhism in its entirety, as he has also great sympathy for the other gigantic philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. Vivekananda realised the danger inherent in the thought of Buddhism. The Buddhist thought in later days was unable to initiate and illumine man by its master's high wisdom

4. Ibid , pp. 136-137.

5. Ibid , Vol. 2 , p. 352.

into despair and desperation and it was proved to be devastating for the society and as a result of this a degradation of all aspects takes place.⁶ Swamiji minds " The most hideous ceremonies, the most horrible, the most obscene books that human hands ever wrote or the human brain ever conceived, the most bestial forms that ever passed under the name of religion, have all been the creation of degraded Buddhism ".⁷ The entire society was turned into the vortex of degradation in the Buddhist time. It was Śāṅkara who ably turned back the mind of man to the spiritual principle of Vedānta. Swami Vivekananda was influenced by the intellect of Śāṅkara who laid stress upon one Ultimate Reality - who is Brahman. The philosophy of Vivekananda is a combination of the ethical approach of Buddhism with the metaphysical vision of Śāṅkara. His Neo-Vedāntism is a philosophy of head and heart, it is the philosophy where he tries to unite the intellect of Śāṅkara with the humanism of Buddha. He wanted to enroll the people in a spiritual militia.

It is not out of context to note that the whole bulk of Vivekananda's philosophic literature comes as an outcome of his unfathomable love for mankind. That is why perhaps he did not bother to evolve any system of philosophy like Kant or Hegel , although the rationalistic and logistic thought currents of western culture has been

6. When Māhāyāna Buddhist 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 " - Jawaharlal Nehru : The Discovery of India ; (Oxford, 1989, 9th impression., J.N. Memorial Fund,) p. 179.

7. Ibid , Vol. 3, (Op. Cit.) pp. 264-265.

reconciled with the basic tenents of Vedānta in his neo-vedānta or as he pleases to call it ' Practical Vedānta '. It is also true that the concept of māyā occupies a very crucial position in the vedāntic literature. But before any kind of discussion of māyā in Vivekananda's thought it is worthwhile to be acquainted not only with the salient features of his philosophy but also with the impact of his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, in shaping his thought and activity. Because Vivekananda's understanding of māyā has been shaped by his general philosophical understanding of the traditional Vedānta philosophy and his handling of the Western Philosophy, frankly speaking he is immensely influenced by Sri Ramakrishna and that is why as it appears even without contradicting the fundamental vedāntic contention he could give an interpretation of māyā that suits the common needs of the day.

II. The primal thought of Sri Ramakrishna and its impact on

Swami Vivekananda :-

It is stated earlier, that the basic concept of Vivekananda's Philosophy is to be found in the life and thoughts of his Guru , Sri Ramakrishna. An inkling of the deepest trend of Indian culture has been a dominating factor in the life of Sri Ramakrishna as well as Vivekananda. Their lives, to put it in philosophical epigram, are reaffirmations of the great message that the highest value of life lies in living realisation of the Spirit at its highest, here and now in this very life. The main outline of Neo-Vedānta was drawn by

Sri Ramakrishna. Vivekananda claimed himself as the voice of Paraham̐sa, he was merely a faithful steward exactly carrying out his master's order. In his own words : " If there has been anything achieved by me, by my thoughts or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped anyone in the world, I lay no claim to it; it was his All that has been weak, has been mine, and all that has been life-giving , strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his word - and he himself " ⁸. Sāradā Devī described Naren, as an instrument of Thākur who makes him write these words for inspiring his children and devotees for doing his work for doing good all the world. ⁹

Ramakrishna was no scholar and hence he can not be called a philosopher in the technical sense, yet he possessed the power of attracting the people even the intellectual like Keshab Chandra Sen, Vidyāsāgar, Bankim Chandra Chattyopādhyay and others great thinkers. His spiritual thoughts that flowed out of the depth of his realisation amazed them. He was a man of realisation which is far from the realisation of the so-called educated person. Keshab Chandra Sen described him as a faithful and most devoted mediator of the perfections of the One formless, infinite Deity, though he worshipped Śiva, Kāli, Rāma , Kriṣṇa .

Ramakrishna was a god-intoxicated man and god is the highest realisation of a human life. God is one, not many, Ramakrishna would not allow any dualism, but he did not rule out the room for personal God. To him the indeterminate Absolute was not basically different from the personal God. These two are only different aspects of the

8. As quoted by Romain Rolland in his The Life of Vivekananda , (Mayavati, Advaita Ashrama , 1979) p. 117.

9. Swami Gambhirananda : The Gospel of the Holy Mother : Śri Sāradā

same Reality. As ' ice ' and its ' water ' are intrinsically the same thing, in the same way the ' personal ' and the ' impersonal ' are the same Being. The absolute could be realised by only the perfect Samādhi. Like the Ākāśa, Brahman is un-modified. Fire appears to be white or red while we throw a white or red substance into it despite the fact that the fire has no colour of its own. There is no dualism between Brahman and Śakti. When He ceases to create, to preserve and to destroy He is called Śakti or Prakṛti and when He is inactive, He is Brahman, the impersonal - who is beyond any description, any word.

Ramakrishna had a firm faith in Advaitism which helped him to go straight into the heart of humanity and to put an end to all controversy and antagonism between different philosophical and religious thoughts and systems. For him different religions are but different paths leading to the same goal. He said that every religion is wholly true. Different religions are but different approaches to God.¹⁰

Devi (Sri R.K. Math, Madras 9, 1984) p. 179.

10. In the thoughts of Ramakrishna religion is not like a flower vase in which different species and coloured of flowers plucked from different trees remain. So he did not preach any universal religion which is the outcome of a synthesis of different religious system. Moghal Emperor Ākbar tried to establish a universal religion named 'Din-i-Ilāhi' acceptable to everybody. But it failed to survive after the death of Ākbar. It was based on unsound reasoning. In the opinion of Amiya Kumar Majumder : "universal religion is neither the product of ratiocination or discursive understanding nor an amalgam of the vital elements of different religions produced electically. For one thing, the universal kept apart from the particulars, is a meaningless

Ramakrishna regards that dualism and qualified non-dualism were not sharply opposed and exclusive ways of realisation of truth, but they are different steps leading to the same goal. They are complementary to one another, but not contradictory. The realisation of one's own self in others is the mark of an Advaitin. Ramakrishna feels that the Advaita Sādhana prescribes that men are only outwardly different from one another, all men are basically manifestations of God or Self.

The universe, for Sri Ramakrishna, is not in a state of flux, Brahman has manifested itself as the universe. Brahman and the world are not different. The śakti is represented as the Divine Mother. The same being when^k is viewed from the standpoint of a jñānī, it is called indeterminate but when it is viewed from the standpoint of a bhakta, it becomes having forms and visible. The Brahman minus the universe will be weightless. To him the world is not false. He believes in the essential identity of the two. This identity is like a salt doll when it is dissolved into the sea. Dr. S.C. Chatterjee writes " The Upaniṣadic texts , ' All this is Brahman ' does not mean for him (Ramakrishna) as it does for some Advaitins, that there is not all but only Brahman. For him all are, and are Brahman in different forms ".¹¹ Ramakrishna being a man of love and renunciation taught us the universality or harmony of all different religions.

abstraction . . . ". Understanding Vivekananda , (Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar , 1972) p. 14.

11. Classical Indian philosophies , their synthesis in the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna by S.C. Chatterjee, p. 112 as quoted by T.S. Dutta in A study of Philosophy of Vivekananda, Sribhumi Publishing Company, 1982 , pp. 123-124.

The life and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna influenced Swami Vivekananda largely. Swamiji was able to find the harmonious unity of three schools of Vedānta in the light of the thought of Ramakrishna. Like his master he declares that the three stages of Vedānta philosophy- the Dvaita,¹² Viśiṣṭadvaita and Advaita - each one is necessary. These are three stages of spiritual growth in man. He synthesised these three apparently contradictory schools of Vedānta in a harmonious manner.

III. God and Absolute in the thought of Vivekananda :

Sri Ramakrishna has taught him the nonduality of God-head, and like an Advaitin Vivekananda regards that the reality is one absolute Brahman, who is indivisible, who can not be divided. It is beyond space, time and causation. They arise on account of our way of thought. Absolute can not be attributed by any qualities ; only it can be described as Sat, Cit, Ānanda.¹³ The ultimate Reality is Infinite

12. The term ' dualism ' in Indian philosophy is logically different from the European. In European sense the term denotes a philosophical doctrine which believes two opposite substances material and spiritual irreducible to each other, to be the source of all being. But in Indian Philosophy ' dualism ' means recognising the existence of two worlds - the world of essence and the world of phenomena.
13. Vivekananda's concept of Sat (existence) and Cit (consciousness) are similar to the Orthodox view, but the concept of ' Ānanda ' carries an enriched meaning by him. To him ' love ' is the essential core of Bliss. This concept of ānanda brings about a spiritual movement which would recognise Divinity in every creature and he tells us to worship of ' Śiva in Jīva '.

Existence, Infinite Knowledge and Infinite Bliss. He is without a name, without a form.

Vivekananda regards that Vedānta leads us towards one thought, the unity of all existence, the unity of all things - 'Knowing which everything else becomes known'. The concept of monothesis¹⁴ that develops in ^{the} Vedas transformed into the concept of all pervading one that in the Vedānta Philosophy which is not a systematised thought of one man like Kapila's philosophy but a series of books produced at different times and all streams of thought are found in them.

As an Advaitin, Vivekananda speaks of an indeterminate, impersonal Being who is the only reality. But it is his master Sri Ramakrishna whose life and thoughts enable Swamiji to combine Abstract Monism and Theism. As a result of it, we find that in his philosophy two currents of ' Advaita Vedānta ' and Bhakti-cult ' flow almost side by side. He does not accept the orthodox view that Brahman is only transcendent, pure homogeneous consciousness, transcendent in nature . Swamiji asserts that the Impersonal Brahman when is looked upon by the finite mind He becomes creator, sustainer and the destroyer of the universe. The same Brahman is viewed as supremely good.

14. Vivekananda analysed that the Vedas , which represent the most ancient literature are addressed to a large number of deities like Indra, Varuna, Mitra etc. But it is also found that each deity is taken or treated as the manifestation of the Supreme Being and not contenders for supremacy. The Vedic monotheism gives a deity as a ruler of the universe and a moral guide.

God is not a creation of māyā . God and absolute are not two. Such a distinction arises from our ignorance and our limited ways of apprehension.

Vivekananda understood that the religious urges and aspiration of common man could be satisfied by a personal God. Vivekananda gives a metaphysical attribute to God. He thinks that love is a method of " the realisation of the divinity through devotion to, and love of a Personal God ".¹⁵ The whole universe with its vastness, harmony and the grandeur lead us to suppose that there must be an architect, an intelligent designer of it, an ancient poet , a poet who writes the whole universe with His Infinite Bliss.¹⁶ He feels no need for making a gap between God and Absolute. He recognises the value of the path of bhakti which accepts the personal God as its main postulate and this path leads to the highest goal. A question may arise in this context : Is this path in accordance with the Advaita Vedānta ? Here we must remember the fact once again that in the view of Sri Ramakrishna the same reality is nameless and formless. Brahman for the Jñāni or the man of philosophic insight , the Ātman or the pure self for the Yogīn who is in meditation and Bhagavān or Personal God who is in devotion. Like his master he accepts the personal God as the highest possible reading of the Absolute by the human mind. He says that the human consciousness is one of the elements in the make up of all the objects of our perception and conception, internal as well as external. Taken in this light, Īśvara, in spite of his being anthro-pomorphic, is not unreal. Bhakti Yoga is a path of love. There are two stages of Bhakti : - (a) The preparatory or gaunī and (b) the

15. Ibid., Vol. V (Op. Cit) p. 292.

16. Jñāna Yoga (Op. Cit.) p. 148.

supreme or parā . In the former stage there remains a danger of fanaticism which brings hatred and jealousy in the heart of devotee that we find in Hinduism or Mohammedanism or Christianity. But in the upper stage such a fanaticism vanishes and there is no fear of any hideous manifestation of fanaticism. " Here there is no violence, nothing to give up, nothing to tear off, as it were, from ourselves, nothing from which we have violently to separate ourselves." ¹⁷ In this stage the full blaze of love comes, the devotee becomes one with the infinite, he realises the beautiful and inspiring truth that love, the lover and the beloved are one. Vivekānanda regards that what Vedānta teaches to us is that to take the whole world is full of God. It is He who is in the child, in the wife, and in the husband. It is He who is in the good and no less in the bad. He exists in the sin and in the sinner as well. Everything is covered with the Lord. At the commencement of one of the oldest of the Upa-
niṣads we read : " whatever exists in this universe is to be covered with the Lord ". ¹⁸ Vivekananda's conception of God is basically based on this thought.

Echoing the voice of Śāṅkara, Vivekananda admits that Brahman who is perfectly formless, qualityless and distinctionless is the only reality but it is true that such conception may be achieved through constant devotion, faith, constant meditation of a personal God. But he thinks that the concept of personal God stands on a better base when strengthened by the concept of Impersonal God. A

17. Ibid. Vol. III, p. 71.

18. Īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṃ yatkiñca jagatyāṃ jagat ;
 Tena tyaktena bhujñīthā mā gr̥dhaḥ kasya sviddhanam.
Īśa Upaniṣad (The R.K. Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park,)
 Tr. by Swami Lokeswarananda.- Verse No. 1, p. 5.

generalisation ending in the concept of personal God can never be universally acceptable. For when we call for a personal God, He must be attributed by all merciness and all goodness. But we find that the world is full of good and evil. That follows that eventually there is a personal Devil who is the source of everything that is evil. But this metaphysical dualism goes against the teaching of the Upaniṣads. Hence we must admit an impersonal God who is beyond good and evil. Good and evil are related to the phenomenal world. What is good to me, and what I call bad, other may call it vice-versa. The fire that burns the child, may cook a good meal for a starving man. By the concept of impersonal God the personal God will remain but on a better basis. The personal God is the highest reading that can be attained to of that impersonal by the human intellect. It was Vivekananda who brings out the teachings of the Advaita that remains hidden in the scriptures and the monasteries in everyday life. He thinks that the sense of 'unity-in-diversity' is not a theoretical dogma merely. The worship of humanity for him is a programme of spiritual practice which can lead a man to the highest goal that is the goal of 'God-realisation'.

IV. The Nature of the world - the cosmos :

The cosmos which was rejected by Śaṅkara as unreal gets the status of Brahman itself in the hands of Vivekananda. He tries to remove the metaphysical gap which is created by the Śaṅkarite Vedantins between Brahman and the world and that causes insurmountable difficulties in explaining the relation between them. He recognises both as real. In his philosophy the famous assertion of Śaṅkara

" Brahman is all " is transformed into " All this is nothing but Brahman ". He gives the world also a status of reality. As an Advaitin , God is the only real principle to him, and therefore, creation is nothing but the expression of the Infinite in finite forms.¹⁹

Vivekananda expressed that the struggle between materialism and idealism is a result of misunderstanding. For him, mind and matter are homogeneous. In his opinion this homogeneity is the substance, the reality. To explain this view he gave an example : " Take two different substances, say a piece of glass and a piece of wood, grind them up together fine enough, reduce them till there is nothing more to reduce, and the substance remaining appears homogeneous. All substance in the last analysis are one. . . . ".²⁰ For him it is only a higher materialism to believe that mind is all, that thought is all.

19. It is interesting to note in the passing that Rabindranath also obliterates any exclusive distinction between the finite and the infinite. All the evolutionary stages for Rabindranath, are finite expressions of what is infinite. In the Gītāñjali we read thus :

" Thou, the Infinite in the finite,
singst thine melody . . .

.

it is so sweet.

With the self-elevation (Lilā) of
thine formless beauty,

The kingdom of heart blossoms in
variegated hue

--- fragrance, song and rhythm ".

(as quoted by Dilip Kumar Mohanta in his article entitled :
Rabindranath on Man and his freedom, Tattva-Darśana , Vol. 2,
No. 4 , Madras, 1985-86.)

20. The complete works of Vivekananda , vol. VI (Op.Cit.) pp. 91-92.

He said that in a certain sense he also was a materialist, since he believed in only reality, and that was what the materialists wanted to say; the difference is that what they call matter, he called it God. The materialists admit that out of matter everything has come, whereas he said that all that created have come out of Brahman. He opines that, if the world is a means towards attaining the next, how can it become unreal ?

In order to illustrate the creation Swamiji resorts to a diagramme²¹ -

(a) The Absolute

(c) Time

Space

Causation

(b) The universe

The Absolute (a) has become the universe (b) by passing through Time, space, and causation. (c) The concept of the universe, he explained, includes not only the material world but also the mental, the spiritual world, heavens and earth and in fact, everything that exists here. Mind is the name of a change, and body is the name of another change and so on, and our universe is composed of all these changes.

The Absolute in the view of Vivekananda is beyond space, time and causation. The idea of space exists with the presence of "external changes" in the universe, hence it can not be in Absolute; similarly the idea of time can not be there as it exists with obligatory presence of mind and thought and the Absolute being strictly one the

21. Jñāna Yoga , (Op. cit) pp. 119-120.

question of motion and causation can not be arisen there. All these begin to operate after the degeneration of the Absolute into the phenomenal and not before. Our will, our desire, and all these things always come after that. Space, Time, Causation are mere forms in the philosophy of Vivekananda. They are not independent existence. The idea of time changes with every change of our mind. It is completely relative. The same time may appear to one as very long, and to another as very short. It is entirely dependent on our state of mind. In the same way the spatial dimensions depend on our angles of vision. It is so with causation. It is also dependent on our mind. What is cause from one point of view, it is effect from another point of view. It follows that space, time and causation have no independent entities. Vivekananda says that they are just forms in and through which the creation takes place. But it does not mean that he regards them as false or unreal.²² He points out the analogy of ocean and waves. Though the waves are not other than the ocean, when the waves subside, the forms vanish. They are the same as the ocean, but this does not indicate that the forms of the waves are false. As long as the waves exist, the forms are there and we are bound to see them.

22. Vivekananda was very fond of Kantian writings. It may be that Vivekananda was influenced by Kant. Like Kant he admits Space, Time and Causation are mere forms which are not transcendently real. They do not have anyⁱⁿ⁻dependent existence. We can not conceive them other than the worldly objects. We cannot have any idea of abstract space or abstract time or abstract causation. But like Kant Vivekananda does not regard space and time as apriori forms of intuitions.

Vivekananda asserts the reality of the world. The world to him is not an illusion. He reacted tangently against any attempt to consider the world as illusion. He feels that it is not the intention of Vedānta to say that the world is unreal. The world has no permanent value or character, it is constantly changing and varying, transitory and temporary.²³ For Vivekananda the universe is the manifestation of the Absolute. The Absolute is present everywhere, but He does not manifest itself equally in all the levels of existence. The command " Love every one as your own self " becomes meaningful when the oneness of Being pervades the universe. We then easily understand that while injuring another I am injuring myself, in loving another I am loving myself. The narrow individual ego that creates hatred, jealousy, misery and other evils vanishes when this oneness of Being is realised. A potential divinity that is hidden in human being determines his course of progress. Swamiji says that man never makes progress from error to truth but from lower truth to higher truth. He represents a theory of evolution which speaks of a gradual transformation of man from its limited finite nature to the infinite existence-consciousness-bliss.

23. Sri Govinda Gopal Mukhopadhyay comments , "The world is not asat, non-existent because it is verily a fact of experience, as the Vedānta-Sūtra expressly declares ' Nā bhāva upalabdhaḥ '. It is mithyā only in the sense that it has got a superious reality. It's reality is not genuine, because it does not be-
 long to it, but is only delegated to it by something else . . .
 Even those who advocate the reality of the world can never assert that the world is of the same order of reality as the Absolute " - Studies in the Upaniṣadas , (Sanskrit College, 1960) p. 56.

His theory of evolution is not equal to Darwin's theory of evolution which considers the progress as a result of struggle for existence and competition, but according to Swamiji evolution is the progression of the rudimentary elements into their more clearly expressed forms. In the final stage of progress man realises himself as Brahman, identifies himself as universal consciousness. But Vivekananda is not swallowed by an all engulfing Absolute. For Vivekananda the finite individual is a manifestation of Brahman. He says " we now see that all various forms of cosmic energy, such as matter, thought, force, intelligence and so forth, are simply the manifestations of that cosmic energy".²⁴ He asserts that the whole universe is not a creation but an evolution, an evolution of nature leading step by step to the manifestation of the Absolute. Modern Science and Advaita conclude that no external beings or existences are required to explain what is going on in the universe. The modern law of evolution shows that everything comes from within. It follows that every evolution must have an involution. We can only get the amount of energy out of a machine when we have put that into it, otherwise the machine cannot work. So nothing can be produced out of nothing. Vivekananda takes the doctrine of evolution from Patañjali's theory on " in filling up of nature ".²⁵ The struggle

24. Jñānayogo , (Op. Cit.) p. 241.

25. The Complete Works of Vivekananda , vol.5 (Op. Cit.) pp.277-278
It means " The change of the specie into another is attained by the infilling of nature ", i.e. we are progressing from one specie to another, and that man is the highest species.

for life, the struggle for existence and natural selection they all are rigorously applied in the lower order of nature, in the human order, all these are in a retrogression rather than a contribution to progress.

The involution and evolution are going on through the whole of nature. The whole series of evolution from the lowest manifestation of life to the highest, indicates, that it must have been the involution of something else. Swamiji believes that ' the perfect man ', ' the freeman ' ' the God man ' involved in the cell of the protoplasm and the cosmic intelligence evolves itself, until it reaches in the end of perfectman that man called ^{is} the ' Christman ' by the christians the ' Buddha man ' by the Buddhist and the ' Free ' by the Yogis. Thus every evolute of the universe, either it is matter or mind or consciousness is only the manifestation of the Absolute. He thinks that man is the highest being in the universe. The individual is not an illusory being but a real one with the constituent of body, mind and soul. By individuality Swamiji says that we are not yet individuals. It is the only Spirit

Swamiji regards that the struggle for existence theory is neither the cause nor the effect, but as simple as a thing on the way. Any kind of competition or struggle cannot bring any progress for the man. Through competition one may conquer, but at the same time thousands are deprived. It may not be a healthy sign of any civilized society. Swamiji says that when there is a fire in a theatre only a few can escape. Most of the audiences would be crushed. Therefore, struggle remains only through our ignorance, it is not necessary for our progress.

that is the individual and we are trying to express this individuality. The changes that are going on are evolutions of nature and manifestation of spirit. Swamiji illustrates : " suppose there is a screen ~~is~~ hiding you from me, in which there is a small hole through which I can see some of the faces ; before me, just a few faces. Now suppose the hole begins to grow larger and larger, and as it does so, more and more of the screen before me reveals itself and when at last the whole screen has disappeared, I stand face to face with you all. You did not change at all in this case ; it was the whole that was evolving, and you were gradually manifesting yourselves ".²⁶ Nature is like that screen. It is the God, the purity, the infinity that manifests itself more and more within our own self. The human life is the great centre, the wonderful poise, and the wonderful opportunity to realise that purity, that perfection and it is the great truth that this human birth is the greatest birth we can have.

Naturally a very pertinent question may be raised here : If the world is as real as Brahman, the Brahman being the all-inclusive only reality and the world and Brahman are homogeneous what is the implication of saying it māyā ? Does Vivekananda admit the world as māyā and if yes, in what sense ? The forthcoming section will discuss some of these types of queries.

26. C.W.V. , Vol. II, (Op. Cit) p. 81.

V. Māyā is a statement of fact explained :

The doctrine of māyā is introduced by the Orthodox vedāntins in order to solve the problem as to how ' One ' becomes many. This particular issue is approached by Swami Vivekananda from a rather different standpoint. He preferred to provide a practical application to the Vedāntic doctrine of māyā rather than to go into the details of the theoretical aspect of it. According to Swamiji, the world is not to be denied. Men are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. The motto of an Advaitin is " All is Truth ". Romain Rolland says : " He (Swamiji) does not reject any one of the proposed attempts at explanation, but from each he seeks to extract the grain of permanent reality ".²⁷

From this standpoint Vivekananda's views regarding the concept of māyā is to be understood. The concept of māyā is neither idealism nor realism, even it is not a theory. He regards it a simple statement of facts of what we are and what we see around us.²⁸

The term ' māyā ' has been used sometimes as a power or Sakti by virtue of which God can create the world of names and forms. This power like the magical powers, does not affect Brahman . Again when it is said that the ' world is māyā ', it is used to express the indescribable nature of the world which is not sat or asat.

27. The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel, (Op. Cit.)
p. 180.

28. C.W.V. , Vol. 2 (Op. Cit.) p. 89.

Vivekananda is in ^{the} same place with ^{the} Śāṅkarite followers who admit that māyā as a power of the creator, he also believes that māyā is the principle of change, a śakti which makes creation possible. But he goes far from them where they describe māyā as a power that creates illusion, it is that power on account of which man thinks this illusory multiplicity of the world as real. In the thought of Swamiji, the term ' māyā ' is not to be used in this sense. His concept of māyā does not negate the world at all. In other words, on the contrary to ^{the} traditional Śāṅkarite interpretation that is, world negation theory, Swamiji's interpretation negates the theory that negates the reality of the world.

Vivekananda is of opinion that the term ' māyā ' has been manipulated by most of our philosophers. It is used generally to denote illusion or dellusion which is not correct. The theory of māyā was manipulated a little by Buddha in the sense of Idealism. Though Vivekananda does not mention the name of Śāṅkara as a thinker who uses the word māyā as illusion, but it is evident from his writings that Swamiji never accepts the world in which we live in as illusion as held by ^{the} Śāṅkarites, rather he grants relative status of the world. To him what is real (Brahman) is manifested in the multidimensional hues in the world. The manifestation itself as a matter of fact is not different from the manifested. It is monism, since it recognises Brahman as the only reality. The world is only the evolutionary form of the involutionary Reality.

We get the world only through the doubtful medium of the mind and senses. Our mind is limited, it can not go beyond certain boundaries. It is the very condition of our knowledge that no man can go

beyond the limits that are put upon him by the laws of time, space and causation. The world only exists in relation to them. If they change, it also changes. We see this world with our five senses, but if we had another sense, it will appear to us as something different . It has therefore no unchangable, immovable, absolute reality. It is an undefinable mixture of reality and appearance. Our whole life is a contradiction. In his lecture entitled "Māyā and Illusion " he quoted from the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad " Know nature to be māyā and the Ruler of this māyā is the Lord Himself ".²⁹ In the early stage whenever it is said that the world is māyā, at once people get the idea that the world is an illusion. But the māyā which forms one of the pillars on which the Vedānta rests , Vivekananda thinks, is neither idealism nor realism, nor is it a theory.

For Vivekananda the phenomenal world has a relative existence. It is a mixture of being and becoming , of existence and non-existence. There is always a contradiction in knowledge. We think that we can know everything, but our limitation of knowledge is a fact that can not be denied. All our work is in a circle, we can not go beyond that circle. Death is an inevitable end of everything, all our skills, our progress, our achievement, our varieties and reforms are ended when death comes, yet we desire to live, we think we shall live eternally. Yudhiṣṭhira , one of the eminent characters of the Mahābhārata was once asked " what is the most surprising thing in this world " ? He replied " Everyday people are dying around us and

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

yet men hope that they will never die ". It is a statement of fact and Vivekananda remarks, this is māyā . Again, good and bad are not two cut and dried, absolutely separate, rather they are very relative to each other. We can not do good to others, except through the medium of evil. Animals are living upon plants, men upon animals, the strong upon the weak.³⁰ This is going on every where. We say that in the long run, everything will be good. But we cannot get any answer that why should good come out of evil, but not be done through good alone ? There is no solution of this problem. The fire that burns a child , may cook a good meal for starving man. These are all māyā . Māyā denies any categorical statement with regard to the perplexity of the world.

This notion of māyā as explained by Vivekananda may be interpreted in the following way for our better understanding.

It is a remarkable fact that Vivekananda has described māyā as a statement of facts as they exist. To him, the very basis of our being is contradiction. Let us ponder over this concept. It seems to us that the nature of an object or an aspect of something which seems to me as real is not the total picture of that parti-

30. Tagore also depicts such heierarchy of worldly existence in one of his dramas named ' Visarjana '. In the speech of Raghupati, the dark, perhaps the darkest side of the worldly existence is described to Jayasingha. Raghupati describes the world as ' mahāhatyāśālā ', this world is a place of cruel slaughterers.
- Rabīndraracanāvalī , Vol. I , (Visva Bharati , 1393 B.S.), p.560.

cular object. What seems to us good in one aspect may be evil in another aspect and the vice-versa. In this way each and every object, or each and every incident can be interpreted. Even behind the smiling face of an individual there might be the shadow of sorrow or weeping. The object which is seen is to be taken as partially real, but not totally. In this way, any statement of fact is not complete, but incomplete. To Vivekananda, the characteristic features of an object are not to be taken as final. There might be an opposite picture on the other side. Hence, no position or no character is final. This in fact, is inherent character of an object. This concept of māyā is in conformity with the etymological meaning of the term which comes from the root ' mā ' (meaning to measure) . That which limits something is māyā , which indicates the veiling character of it. The object as it seems to us gives a partial picture of the object , and hence it hides other picture of the same. That is why, each and every statement of fact is māyā. As this interpretation of māyā is represented to the persons who are believers of materialism trained in Western culture , it is described as relativity but not as illusion. Afterwards he has shown that as māyā has got a positive character represented in different phenomenal objects created by the Divine, it is to be taken as power of the Divine.

In the attitude of Vivekananda this paradox of our lives is māyā. It is nothing but the statement of facts. The whole world, our total experiences are going through this tremendous contradiction . It denotes that wherever there is good, there must also be

evil, wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow. It is impossible to deny this fact. His very intention is to say that these all are māyā only, the real fact of our life that we can not avoid anyhow, we are born in this māyā , live in it, think in it, we dream in it.

Māyā is an indeterminate form between the absolute Being and non-being. It is Relative.³¹ Of course the theory of relativity had not seen the light during Vivekananda's day. He only uses it incidentally. Māyā is not existence since it is the sport or lilā (self-elevation) of Brahman and as we can not deny its existence, hence it is not non-existence. Māyā is a positive fact of experience. It can not be absolutely non-existent; a creative force can not be absolutely zero - from the ultimate view point. To put it otherwise, it may be said that our language that functions through categorical concepts of existence and non-existence are incapable of defining māyā . The place of māyā for Vivekananda is somewhere in between categorical existence and non-existence. So he sometimes calls it indescribable.

Vivekananda admits that māyā has a reality from the lower point of view only. But he never uses the word ' illusion ' as the english synonym for the word ' māyā '. In his opinion it is erroneously explained as illusion. When the universe is said to be māyā , it also has to be explained as being illusion. The attempt to translate the word in such a way is neither happy nor correct.³² This

31. Romain Rolland prefers to put it as this term " Relativity " - The life of Vivekananda as the universal Gospel - (Op. cit.) p. 181-182.

32. C.W.V. , Vo. II, (Op. Cit.) p. 105.

universe is not unreal. His master Sri Ramakrishna did not treat the world as illusion. Ramakrishna realised that if the self exists then the non-self must also be existed . Vivekananda has learned from his guru to take the universe as a play of Brahman. The other name of this play is māyā . The universe has its significance - " in freedom it rises, in freedom it rests, and into freedom it melts away ".³³ Nothing in the universe is to be rejected. The beautiful play of hide and seek of sorrows and joys are quite natural, without them the life will be ugly indeed. For him the worldly matters are so important that he can tell easily " Bread ! Bread ! I do not believe in a God who cannot give me bread here giving me eternal bliss in heaven " !³⁴ He realises that material civilisation is necessary to create work for the poor people. It is not an obstacle to spiritual realization.

However, Vivekananda remains silent why is there this māyā at all ? He has ruled out any ' how ' or 'why' regarding ' māyā '. He wants to emphasise the fact that the entire phenomenal world is under the power of māyā .His heartiest interest was to ' delude the countrymen with spiritual strength and ideals '. He believes that if māyā is illusion, then it is illusory in this sense that the veil of māyā covered our very self . As a result our real nature is unknown to us and we are misled and we make distinctions of ' I ' and ' You ' ; we have to shun the veil of māyā to

33. C.W.V. Vol. II (Op. Cit.) p-125.

34. The letters of Swami Vivekananda (Mayavati Advaita Ashram, 1977 , 4th Impression) p. 141.

realise the inner-most being who is the ' fountain head ' of all existence, when we are under the māyā . We see the phenomenon and do not see God. When we see God, this universe vanishes. In the case of illusion, when we perceive a rope in the place of a snake there are not two things - a rope separate and a snake separate. We never see the real and the false at the same time. When we perceive the rope we do not perceive the snake at a time, again when we perceive the snake we do not see the rope at all. We are all born monists. We always perceive the one. A true Advaitin realises that there is but one Ātman , there can not be two. The one existence when is seen through the senses is called the world, the world of thoughts and ideas and when it is seen in its true essence it appears as the one infinite Being. As soon as we realise that behind everything the same divinity exists; we feel that in injuring another we are injuring ourselves, in loving another we are loving ourselves. The sense of duality brings hatred and jealousy, misery, struggle and other so called evils. From the realisation of oneness springs that principle of Advaita morality which Vivekananda called ' self-abnegation ' ³⁵. He regards that when a man has become ready to give up his life for the lowest beings, he has reached at that perfection which the Advaita wants to attain. The whole phenomenal world will be disappeared for him. It will

By ' self-abnegation ' Vivekananda means the realisation of the true essence of a man through the cancellation of his individualised self, his little personalised self which makes him different from others and this is the cause of all his miseries.

35. C.W.V. , Vol. I , (Op. Cit.) p. 364.

be disappeared in the sense that he will not see the world as a world of misery or pain but as full of existence, consciousness and bliss. And this state is called in vedānta the state of Jīvanmukti , the living freedom. In this state the ignorance is vanished yet the body remains, Therefore, a Jīvanmukta can do work, but he will not be deluded. 'Mukti' in Vivekananda's thought means freedom from one's own narrow outlook by way of having a broader one within the phenomenal world. For this he can become self-less, fearless and sensitive to others. This is the goal of the vedānta , consciously or unconsciously the whole universe is going towards that goal.

To sum up , it may be said that Vivekananda maintains a sharp difference in interpreting māyā from the traditional Advaitic understanding without contradicting the basic theme of it. This is to be considered as a great plus point to the Practical Vedānta of Swamiji. Māyā in traditional Vedānta is considered as the power of Saguna Brahman (God) " through which the world-illusion is created. Vivekananda would add that the power in itself is neither good nor bad, it is neutral. . . . Māyā's neutral nature can be retained only if māyā is conceived as the name for the fact of contradiction apparent in the world ".³⁶

36. B.K. Lal : Contemporary Indian Philosophy (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass , 1992) p. 18.