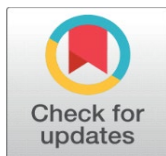
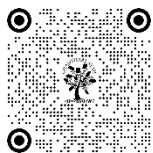


# SHANKAR'S PERSPECTIVE ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF MAYA AND BRAHMA

Dr. Monalisha Biswas 

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Raja Peary Mohan College, Under University of Calcutta, West Bengal



## Corresponding Author

Dr. Monalisha Biswas,  
[monalisabiswas38@gmail.com](mailto:monalisabiswas38@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I will discuss about the Sankara's concept of Maya and Brahman according to the ninth century Advaita Hindu Philosopher Adi Sankara, Maya is an internet power of Brahman and the world is a illusory appearance, Shankar believed that Maya is the empirical reality that entangles consciousness and prevents the unveiling of the truth self, or Brahman. Maya pre-exists and co-exists with Brahman- the ultimate principal, consciousness. Maya is perceived reality one that does not reveal the hidden Principals, the truth reality. Maya is unconscious, atman is conscious. Maya is the literal Brahman is the figurative Upandana the Principle. The basic trend of Indian philosophy is to speculate on the three concepts namely the Individual soul, the World and the Lord. In a way this is also 'trika' except for the difference lying only in, the concept of the world here, instead of 'Pasa'. On these three principles only Acarya founded his theory of the Advaita. In other words, according to Acarya Brahman is eternally present, and except for some difference the individual soul is nothing but Brahman or Siva, and the world or jagat itself means 4that which goes' (gacchati iti jagat) i.e. the substratum of the transient. Naturally the world is perishable and has only temporal existence. Qualitatively the individual Soul and Brahman are alike. This is the evidence enough for the existence of Brahman i.e. the Advaita or non-duality. While founding his theory of the Advaita, Acarya modified the theory of the Ajativada i.e. non-production, as put forward by Gaudapadacarya. Gaudapadacarya denied the existence of the world by declaring that all this duality is due to Maya only, and Advaita is the ultimate reality.<sup>1</sup> He firmly believed that the individual Soul is neither born nor produced. Gaudapadacarya was Sarikaracarya's 'Paratpara Guru'. Govindayati was Acarya's spiritual guide, whose writings are not available today. Gaudapadacarya's 1 s karikas on the Mandukyopanishad are known as 'Gaudapadakarika' a tract on the doctrine of Ajativada. According to him whatever is visible is futile and is dismissed as dream by the rational thinkers.<sup>3</sup> This detailed sketch of the background will enable us to understand how and why Acarya arrived at the theory of Advaita. The contradiction implied in Gaudapadacarya's theory that the visible world is non-existent is only apparent. Significantly enough Gaudapadacarya's use of the word 'Paramarthatah' nullifies this apparent contradiction.

**Keywords:** Maya, Brahma, Perspective, World, Atman, Reality, Conscious, Unconscious, Advaita, Ultimate Reality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A glimpse into the life of Sankaracarya reveals to us that he spent all of his life for the well-being of the society. A doctrine such as the Advaita, based on personal experience may be difficult to live, but, it must at least be approved and accepted by the society. It seems that Acarya has simplified the theory of Gaudapadacarya for the benefit of common man. (Here the word common is used as the synonym for the Sanskrit word 'bala' which means ignorant in a particular subject. The well-known critic Mr. Vasudeosastri Abhyankar declared in his preface to 'Siddhantabindu' that Gaudapadacarya has established not only Ajativada, but that Mayavada also originates from him.<sup>5</sup> It is worth examining % how far Acarya who was a real Brahnavadin but labelled as Mayavadin, made use of Maya. To consider the two concepts pregnant with meaning Brahman and Maya in one research paper is a challenge. A host of questions arise in our mind. Are Maya and Brahman related to each-other? If so, what is the nature of their existence? Do they exist only

on the ontological level? Can it be understood through rational thinking? One may say that Brahman exists on ontological level and Maya can be experienced in day-today life. Others believe that Brahman is either with attributes or without attributes and Maya, which is related to the world, has to have attributes. Saiva system provides another perspective on the relation between Maya and Brahman.

According to them Brahman is the possessor of energy and Maya is the energy itself. Another possibility is that Brahman is the end and Maya is the means to that end. The last, but not the least important view is that of Sankaracarya to whom Maya and Brahman are the foundation of threefold existence. Keeping all these things in mind, I believe that the challenge is worth accepting. Acarya's Bhasya texts (commentaries) are the basis for this study, because there are violent disagreements among scholars with regard to the authenticity of the authorship of some Prakarana texts and the stotra texts. There is no such difference of opinion in case of Adi Sankaracarya's bhasyas. This paper intends to explore concept of Maya and Brahman as propounded by Acarya.

## 2. CONCEPT OF MAYA

Maya is that by which something is measured is the well-known definition of the term Maya (Miyate anaya iti Maya) But words have many meanings and sometimes they are rather more important than the etymological ones. Same is the case with Maya the term Maya has been used in different senses one hundred and fifty four times starting from Rgveda upto Aranyakas. Acarya has used the term Maya fifty times in his bhasyas. There is no intention to use this statistical data for drawing any conclusion, However, it is only on five occasions that he has made a serious attempt at defining the term Maya. We will try to find out the reasons why he has used the same at other places.

The fundamental question is why it is necessary to presume the concept of Maya. There are many theories regarding the theory of the universe. Physicists advocate the theory of evolution. Religious minded people who live with faith believe that the Lord has created the universe. Whereas a philosopher like Acarya strongly asserts that the existence of the world itself is an illusion. According to him Brahman is the only reality. In order to reckon with the existence of the visible world Acarya had to accept the concept of Maya. Even before Acarya, the first Vaidika literature has taken cognizance of the concept of Maya, and later Gaudapadacarya has also mentioned it. It is crystal clear that the concept of Maya does not originate from Acarya, as it is generally believed, but the credit of putting it in the proper perspective, certainly goes to him.

The references to Maya, in Acarya's bhasyas, where he tries to define the same will be taken into consideration first. The emphasis is on thematic connections rather than the chronological order. This obviously calls for a change in order in which Acarya has commented on the Upanisads, Bhagavad Gita and Brahmasutras. The first definition of Maya will be found in Brahmasutrabhasya.<sup>6</sup>

Reflections on the idea that the cause of the world is not Prakrti as upheld by the Samkhyas, but Brahman and Brahman only, begins in B.S.I.4.1.1. In this connection the well-known citation from Svetasvatropanisat 'Mayam tu Prakrtim Vidyat'(Sve.IV.10) occurs in the third aphorism. Here Prakrti means the unmanifested i.e. Avyakta, While explaining the word Maya Acarya comments

that Maya is unmanifested in a specific sense i.e. it is neither real nor unreal.<sup>7</sup> According to Acarya Prakrti and Maya are not synonyms. The word 'tattva' and 'anyattva' which mean 'sat' and 'asat' for Acarya are used as technical terms here. Whatever is omnipresent is 'sat' and that which is non-existent is 'asat' e.g. skyflower (kha-puspa). It follows that Maya is neither 'sat' nor 'asat' i.e. 'tattva' and 'anyattva'. Prof. Ramamurti Sarma in his book on Sankaracarya<sup>8</sup> concurs with many critics who have misread Acarya in their belief that the words Maya, Prakrti, Ajnana, Pradhana Avidya, Akasa, Aksara as synonyms.

Another definition of Maya can be found in the Bhasya of Acarya on G.K.IV.58. The attributes of Atman are just like something created by Maya. They are not there in principle. Acarya deliberates 'is Maya vastu? Not at all; Maya can never be.<sup>9</sup> The definition somewhat similar to this occurs in Sveta. I.9. Maya is indescribable, because it is not 'vastu'<sup>10</sup> - The term 'vastu' is very significant. The reason is that one of the successors of Acarya -Sadanandayatindra, who belongs to the fifteenth cen.A.D. has explained the term 'vastu' as 'Eternal, Conscious; of the nature of Bliss, Everlasting and only one Brahman. All other entities are 'avastu'<sup>11</sup>. Vedantasara, the 'Prakaranagrantha' of Sadananda is based on the bhasyas of Acarya. Acarya's statement about Maya becomes more clear, if the word 'vastu' is taken in this specific sense. The reference is that Maya is something which does not exist as 'vastu'. The verb 'vidyate' is significant. It also means to experience. A statement similar in meaning is found in Kenopanisat, 'One, who says that he knows, has knowledge only

on the theoretical plane, and one, who says that he does not know, is capable of experience.<sup>12</sup> Taking this specific meaning of the root 'vid' into consideration we may infer that perhaps Acarya wanted to suggest that Maya cannot be experienced directly.

The third definition of Maya can be found in the Prasnopanisat. Acarya does not explicitly talk about the twofold power of Maya viz. covering (avarana) and disclosing (viksepa), but it is implied in this definition. Maya means that which reveals itself differently and behaves differently, whose conduct is of illusory nature.<sup>13</sup> The use of the word 'Eva' is significant here, which suggests that at any cost Maya does not reveal its own nature, not only this but, it reveals itself in the reverse form and consequently the individual soul gets involved in duality. The epithet 'mithyacararupa' clearly reflects its illusory nature.

In the commentary on G. K. IV. 59 Acarya further explains the term Maya. The analogy of the illusory seed and its illusory sprouting used by Acarya can be accepted for the sake of argument. In the same way the soul is not subject to the law of birth and decay.<sup>14</sup> The peculiarity of this definition lies in the fact that Acarya felt the need to use analogy in order to explain the concept of Maya.

The last definition is found in Sambandhabhasya of Svetasvataropanisat. It is stated that the difference between the entities is due to Maya in the same way in which the reflection of the sun in the water.<sup>15</sup> It is significant that in both the places Acarya takes the help of analogy.

Except for these five definitions there is no further attempt of defining Maya, however, some words used by Acarya indirectly refer to Maya. This enables us to draw certain inferences. The first of these references will be found in B. S. I. 3.5.19. The Lord is only one, omniscient and eternal like the anvil, the plurality is only due to Avidya, in the same way in which magic helps the magician appear in different forms.<sup>16</sup> A similar reference is found in Bhagavad Gitabhasya - VI.35, where it is clearly stated that all this duality is superimposed on that One (who is without the second, conscious, Blissful, Supreme Being).<sup>17</sup> While commenting on the fourth sloka of the fifteenth chapter of Bhagavad Gita, Acarya has pointed out the peculiarity of Maya in two words. 'Who is He? The Lord is like the magician, who, with the help of his magic creates an illusory world, that is Maya, and Maya is old (purani) and has been experienced over years (cirantani)'.<sup>18</sup>

The word 'cirantanf' is popularly mistaken to mean eternal (everlasting), however, the etymological meaning stands in contradiction with the popular meaning. The word does not preclude the possibility of the end, but it implies that the end may come in distant future. Probably Acarya wanted to suggest that the origin of Maya cannot be traced, but coming out of Maya is possible only when one experiences Brahman. While commenting on the sixteenth sloka of the same chapter Acarya describes the various features of Maya, Maya is enigmatic, deceiving, obliquely operating.<sup>19</sup>

In the commentary on the well-known citation from Sveta 'Mayam tu Prakrtim vidyat' (sveta - IV. 10) Acarya finds out the difference between the apparently synonymous concepts viz. Maya and Prakrti. He proclaims there that the superimposition of the snake on the rope is just one of the many superimpositions that pervade the world.

While commenting Acarya does not forget his role of the commentator This may be one of the reasons why Acarya's commentaries are treated as authentic. The third important point with regard to Maya is the compromise that commentator makes with the text. When the text fails to justify Acarya's view of Maya he takes this position. In all there are seven references in Bhagavad Gita where Acarya proclaims that Maya is equal to Prakrti.<sup>20</sup> But in Bhagavad Gita where the word Prakrti occurs (B. G. IX.8) Acarya keeps the word as it is and does not try to equate it with Maya. At some places he uses the epithets like 'Vaisnavi' or 'Bhagavatah' before the word Maya to show how Maya is different from what it means to him.

**"The word Maya occurs in seventeenth different places within quotations. Hence future discussion is not needed".**

So Acarya puts forth his concept of Maya in four ways. It is interesting that while defining Maya, Acarya seems to take a dubious position. So that we are at a loss to make any positive or negative statement about the nature of Maya, and hence we are also compelled to say that Maya is indescribable (anirvacanfy). While describing the salient features of Maya, Acarya states that the plurality of the world is due to Avidya; like the jugglery of the juggler : The explanation in Bhagavad Gita Bhasya that duality caused by Maya is itself an illusion can be directly linked up with Gaudapadacarya's statement that this duality is there because of Maya and the non-duality is Real.<sup>22</sup> The use of the adjectives 'Vaisnavi' and 'Bhagavatah' shows how skillfully Acarya as a commentator has deliberated on the concept of Maya. After having considered the concept of Maya let us now examine the concept of Brahman.

### 3. CONCEPT OF BRAHMAN

Brahman is the ultimate goal of Advaita Vedanta. The term itself implies expansion. Rejaneesha in his book 'Meghvina barase dhara' opines that Brahman is in neuter gender because it is neither feminine nor masculine.<sup>23</sup> There are about three hundred seventy four references, to the term Brahman in the commentaries of Acarya. For him the word Brahman has four different meanings. The first one is spell (mantra). It occurs in B. G. IV.32 - in this way various rituals evolved through the mouth of Brahman i.e. Veda etc.<sup>24</sup>

The second meaning is Brahmin caste. Br. Up. believes "In the beginning there was Brahman.<sup>25</sup> Considering the superior position of Brahmins, Acarya reflects of the word Brahman to Brahmin.<sup>26</sup> No further discussion of the two meanings is essential.

The third meaning of the word Brahman is creator (Prajapati). It is found in B. G. VIII. 17. Taking this from the statement in B. G. that one day of Brahman is equal to one thousand yugas.<sup>27</sup> Acarya asserts that Brahman means Prajapati. All the three meanings given by Acarya, the commentator, are logically derived.

The most important meaning of the word Brahman is the ultimate aim - Para Brahman. Prior to this Acarya gives the option of Apra Brahman. With the help of these two concepts of Para and Apra Brahman the nature of Brahman is clearly revealed.

The amazing intelligence of Acarya is reflected in the systematic reconstruction of his experience of Advaita achieved at the cost of the worldly pleasures. Acarya acknowledges in his Adhyasabhasya, preface to Brahmasutrabhasya, that duality is natural (saha-ja). One who thinks are fully can easily understand it. The terms dark, fair in the statement such as, 'I am dark, I am fair', actually denote the complexion of the body and not of the soul. When one speaks in terms of 'I, me and mine', it is clear that he does not mean the body. In expressions like my pen, my book, my body the object is separated from the subject. It is quite obvious that the body is perishable. In practical life when we say that someone is dead we indirectly accept the fact that there is something other than the body and it is that which activates the body. That is Soul, which so naturally united with Brahman, but because of its embodiment appears to be dual in form. In his commentaries Acarya is very clear about this view.

In B. S. I. 1.6.11 Acarya Declares that Brahman can be known in two ways. One is endowed with names, forms and is subject to change and plurality, and the other is devoid all these qualities.<sup>28</sup> In Br. Up. there is a statement that Brahman is of two forms <sup>29</sup> It is possible to describe Brahman which is omniscient, omnipotent, because of its dual form - visible - invisible, mortal -immortal., it emanates from the five elements and is bound by the law of cause and effect, with the result that it receives various impressions. Brahman becomes liable to all practical affairs due to the law of cause and effect. The same Brahman when stripped of all these qualities becomes the object of revelation. Such Brahman is unborn, ageless, immortal, fearless, and beyond the capacity of language to understand and analyze it. Because of its non-duality one can only say what it is not: The word 'vfwā' signifies that Brahman can exist only in two forms viz. 'Para' and 'apara'<sup>30</sup> on the basis of which Acarya might have presumed two levels of existence - empirical and transcendental. Here one might question the validity of the idea that the world is perishable, if Brahman can be experienced on the empirical level. If it is so, then the world will be imperishable. In that case what will be the basis for Acarya's absolute monism? I think Acarya has satisfactory explanation for this dilemma. Acarya exemplifies this with the help of an analogy. For the carpenter, who works with his tools, the awareness that he is the doer, brings unhappiness, whereas the loss of this awareness brings happiness. Similarly the soul caught in the net of duality becomes unhappy on account of the same awareness in both the states of dream and waking, but when it unites itself with Brahman in the state of deep sleep, it becomes happy.<sup>31</sup> In other words unhappiness is the consequence of the awareness of the action which in turn is caused by dualism. It follows that Acarya denies certainty to duality and consequently to the world. What remains is consciousness (Caitanya) only, which is manifested through the embodied soul (Jiva)- Acarya proclaims this union of the soul and Brahman in B. S. I. 1.1.1. There he points out that Brahman is ever pure, awakened, liberated, omniscient, omnipotent. The word Brahman by its very root 4bruh' signifies that which is all pervading and hence not subject to the laws of the empirical world. The existence of the soul in every body endorses the existence of Brahman. Everyone can experience the presence of the soul, however, it is impossible to be a non-entity. Therefore, soul is Brahman.

In his commentary on the well-known sloka of Kenopanisad, "if you say - you know it"<sup>33</sup>, Acarya begins by considering the possibility of various forms of Brahman, since the word 'dabhranV (small) is used here. His speculations lead him to the conclusion that the act of naming inevitably leads to duality. Duality does not exist in Reality. A man



cannot live without the act of naming as the world is full of diversity of forms. Diversity gives identity to entities which are otherwise in complete union. Acarya has put the same systematically in his ideology. According to Acarya Brahman is beyond the capacity of the five senses viz. the sense of hearing, touch, smell, taste and sight, to experience. Curiously enough with the help of words only forms made possible by words.<sup>34</sup> References like these concept of Brahman. He takes for granted two forms of Brahman one of which is in the form of soul (jiva) on the empirical plane and the other on the transcendental level. Acarya had firm faith in the existence Brahman therefore, he explicitly puts forth that Brahman helps every other things come into being, whereas Brahman is not born of anything else.<sup>35</sup> It goes without saying that Brahman is self-sufficient.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The commentaries of Acarya have no evidence for us to say that Maya and Brahman are two separate concepts, completely independent of each other. They are certainly related to each other. According to Acarya, Maya is neither real nor unreal because it vanishes as soon as one experiences Brahman. Therefore, Maya is indescribable - (anirvacaniya). Acarya was Kevala-Advaitin, still he himself has visualized two forms of Brahman - Supreme Being and lower Brahman. Lower Brahman is the effect (Karya). The effect is subject to destruction. Accordingly the Karyabrahman or lower Brahman merges with the Supreme Being. Acarya has very brilliantly established the temporal existence of Maya, and everlasting Brahman. It is worth noting that Acarya probes deep down into the concept of Maya, whereas he refrains from discussing Brahman in detail. The reason is that Maya is the means to an end, i.e. Brahman. When the true nature of Maya dawns on one's mind, the illusory nature of world becomes clear, leaving only Brahman behind. As previously mentioned, these two concepts hold true not only on the ontological level. Unless and until one experiences Brahman it remains a matter of reasoning only. The lower Brahman or Brahman having attributes can be known through symbol worship of Chandogya Upanisad - VII 2.2 To VII 14.2. Acarya explains it with the help of branch and moon maxim (sakha-candra nyaya). It is crystal clear for Acarya that Brahman is superior to Maya. It seems that he does not accept the energy and possessor of energy relation (Sakti-Saktimat sambandho) Eventually there is no alternative other than to accept the view that Maya is the means and Brahman is the end. Though Maya is the means it has no place in worship or meditation either for Acarya. His only intention was to understand the nature of Maya. The realization of the futility of Maya is followed by the futility of dualism. This culminates in the experience of Brahman, on the transcendental plane. Acarya's speculations begin with the assumption that the knowledge of the thing is to know the abstract principle behind it. Chandogya Upanishad has already endorsed this view in the well-known analogy of the clay and the pottery made of the clay. Pots made of clay may be of different shapes and sizes and may be used for different purposes, but the clay is the common element in all of them<sup>36</sup> and this can be experienced.

It can hardly be doubted that Acarya wants to establish Brahmapada. His construction of the same is perfectly logical, however, people concentrate on Maya only. They cannot accept whole-heartedly the existence of the soul, nevertheless, they do hesitate while denying it absolutely. Thus Brahmapada recedes in the background unfortunately and Acarya comes to be labelled as Mayavadin.

#### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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