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# Maya and Avidyain the Bhagabata Purana

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**ABSTRACT:** One of the most popular and widely circulated Purana is the Bhagabata Purana. This Purana occupies a unique position in the religious as well as philosophical literature of India. The Bhagabata Purana is the most valuable treatise of the Vaisnavas from the stand point of theological and philosophical aspects. Here in this paper I tried to discuss how Maya and Avidya functions in our life by coating some information's from the said Purana.

**KEYWORDS :** Maya, Avidya, Prakriti, Isvara

## I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of *mayais* very old. In the *Rgveda* and in the Upanisads the word *mayais* very often used. Even the Mahayana Buddhas also advocate the doctrine of *maya*. Though the doctrine of *mayais* very old yet it is mainly associated with the name of Sankara. In the Puranas especially in the Vaisnavite Puranas *mayais* described as a power of Visnu and is treated elaborately in these Puranas. *Maya*, as a power of God has been accepted in the Vaisnava Vedanta schools of Ramanuja etc. But it is Sankaracarya who has given a pivotal position to *mayain* his scheme of thought. The concept of *maya* occupies such an important position in this philosophy that the Advaita Vedanta system has come to be denoted as *Mayavadain* latter times. Let us now discuss the concept of *mayaas* advocated by Sankaracarya.

Sankara used the terms *maya* and *avidya* more or less synonymously. It is on the basis of this theory that Sankara and his followers establish the difference-less and quality-less Brahman as the only ultimate reality. Sankara regards *mayaas* a power of *Isvara*.<sup>1</sup> *Maya* signifies a material causal potency, which accounts for the material world. Sankara describes *mayaas* beginning-less and as consisting of three *gunas*, viz., *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Its existence is inferred from its effects, i.e., the world appearance. It is said in the *Vivekacudamani*,

*anadyavidyayatriginatmikapara/*

*karyanumeyasudhiyamamayayajagadidamprasuyate//*<sup>2</sup>

Sankara further says that *mayais avyakta* or indeterminate, as it is neither existent nor non-existent, nor both.<sup>3</sup> *Maya* cannot be described as distinct or as non-distinct from *Brahman*. *Maya* cannot be different from *Brahman*, for if it were so dualism will be the result. *Maya* is not non-different from *Brahman*, since identity is not possible between the conscious and inert. *Maya* cannot be regarded as existent or real like *Brahman*, since it is contradicted later by right knowledge. *Maya* is not absolutely non-existent or unreal like a sky flower since it is the cause of the world. It cannot be both existent and non-existent, since existence and non-existence are contradictory and as such cannot be the nature of the same thing. Hence, it is not possible to determine the nature of *mayain* anyway. Accordingly it is called *anirvacaniya* or indeterminate.<sup>4</sup>

It has already been mentioned that Sankara uses the terms *maya* and *avidyain* almost identical sense. But some of his followers have distinguished between *maya* and *avidya*. Radhakrishnan points out that "when we look at the problem from objective side, we speak of *maya* and when from the subjective side, we speak of *Avidya*. Even as *Brahman* and *Atman* are one, so are *maya* and *avidya* one."<sup>5</sup> According to Vidyarnya Muni, *mayais* the *upadhi* (adjunct) of *Isvara* where pure *sattva* predominates; while *avidyais* the *upadhi* of the *jiva* and in it impure *sattva* predominates.<sup>6</sup>

*Maya* has two functions or powers, viz., *avaranasakti* (power of concealment) and *viksepasakti* (power of projection). By its power of concealment *maya* or *avidya* conceals the real nature of the self and by the power of projection it projects the manifold world in place of *Brahman*, who is one without a second.<sup>7</sup>

In this way, in Sankaracarya's view, *mayais* a causal power, which explains the world appearance. "Maya is the energy of *Isvara*, his inherent force, by which he transforms the potential into the actual world. His *Maya*, which is unthinkable, transforms itself into the two modes of desire (*kama*) and determination (*samkalpa*). It is the creative power of the eternal God, and is therefore eternal; and by means of it the Supreme Lord creates the world,"<sup>8</sup> However, it must be remembered that in Sankara's view *mayais* not a real power, it is *anirvacaniya*. It does not possess any well-defined character.

The Puranas speak of *mayaas* a real power of God. The *VisnuPurana* identifies *mayawith avidya*. In the part V of the *VisnuPurana* while describing the birth of Sri KrsnaParasara alludes to this *mayaas Mahamayaand Yoganidra*. *Mahamayais* also termed as *avidyaor* ignorance as she causes delusion to the whole world. Explaining these terms Wilson says, "Yoganidrais the sleep of devotion or abstraction, the active principle of illusion, personified, and also termed *Maya* and *Mahamaya*, also *Avidyaor* ignorance. In the *DurgaMahatmya* of the *MarkandeyaPurana* she appears as *Devi* or *Durga*, the *Sakti* or bride of *Siva*; but in our text as *Vaishnavi* or the *Saktiof Visnu*."<sup>9</sup> Hence, *Mahamayaor Yoganidrais* the great energy of *Visnu*, which causes illusion to this world. This *Vaisnavimayaor Mahamayais* also described as *Durga*, *Ambika*, *Vedagarbha* etc., and is identified with *GoddnessSakti*.<sup>10</sup>

This *mayais* the cause of transmigration. Self, which is eternal, becomes entangled in the worldly process of birth, death, old-age etc., because of this *maya*.<sup>11</sup> It is because of *mayathat* the sense of 'I' (*aham*) and mine (*mama*) is produced in the *jiva* and the *jiva* revolves in the whirlpool of selfishness and pride.<sup>12</sup> *Maya* produces the notion of self which is actually the not self and causes bondage to the ignorant *jiva*.<sup>13</sup>

The *VisnuPurana* mentions *avidyaas* a power of *Visnu*. *Visnu* has three powers viz. *Parasaktior the cit-sakti*, *Ksetrajnasaktiand avidyasakti*. *Parasaktiis* the highest power of consciousness. *Ksetrajnasakti* sustains the selves and *avidyasakti* creates this world.<sup>14</sup> *Avidya* conceals the all-pervasive *Ksetrajnasakti* and because of this *avidya* the individual self becomes subject to the sorrows and sufferings of the world.<sup>15</sup> This *avidyais* actually the inability to understand the nature of the self.

*Avidyais* also described in the *VisnuPuranaas* consisting of five-fold nature, viz., *tamas*, *moha*, *mahamoha*, *tamisra* and *andhatamisra*. *Tamasis* the perception of the not-self such as the body, sense-organs etc., as the self. *Moha* consists in the notion of property or possession and consequent attachment to children etc. Addiction to the enjoyments of senses is called *Mahamoha*. *Tamisrais* impatience or anger. The fifth kind of *avidya*, i.e., *andhatamisra* consists in the fear of privation or death.<sup>16</sup>

In this way the *VisnuPurana* describes *mayaas* identical with *avidya* and as the cause of all sorrows and sufferings of the *jiva*. In this sense *mayaor avidyais* similar to Sankara's concept of *mayaor avidya*. But there is a great difference also. In the *VisnuPurana*, *mayais* never described as unreal or *anirvacaniya*. It is a real power of *Visnu*. As has been mentioned earlier *mayais* identified with the Goddess *Saktior Durga*. *Visnu* creates this world with the help of *maya*, which is His own *Sakti*.<sup>17</sup>

## II. THE BHAGAVATAPURANA ON MAYA :

In the *BhagavataPuranamayais* described as *anirvacaniya* and is identified with *Prakrti*.<sup>18</sup> *Maya* is here described as a power of God. Speaking about the creation of the world the *Bhagavatasays* that the creation is the result of *maya*. Before creation only God existed. He desired to be many and accepted the three *gunasviz., sattva, rajas* and *tamas* by his *maya*.<sup>19</sup> The Lord of *mayainfluenced Kala* (time), *karman* (action) and *svabhava* (nature) by his *maya*.<sup>20</sup> Hence, *mayamakes* the One appear as many, the non-dual as dual.

In another place the *Bhagavatasays* that *Brahman* or God, who was alone before creation, became bifurcated in the forms of *maya* and the *jiva* reflected in *maya*. The former is known as *Prakrti* and the latter is called *Purusa*.<sup>21</sup> *Maya* is also described as the power that creates, sustains and destroys the universe.<sup>22</sup> *Maya* is the cause of both *vidya* (knowledge) and *avidya* (ignorance).<sup>23</sup>

The nature of *maya*, according to the *Bhagavata*, is like the appearance of something even when there is no object. This universe of diversity is totally false but appears due to *maya*.<sup>24</sup> The word '*maya*' is derived from the root *ma*, which means to form or to build and means the capacity to produce forms.<sup>25</sup> The *Bhagavata* also posits *maya* in the same sense. It is that power of God which manifests non-existent objects but is not manifested itself.<sup>26</sup>

Just like Sankaracarya the *Bhagavata* also maintains that the one Reality appears as many due to *maya*. Just as the single moon appears manifold when reflected in the ripples of water, similarly one Supreme Being appears as many when reflected in *maya*.<sup>27</sup> In some place the *Bhagavata* also says that the *jivais* non-different from God, but yet it thinks itself different due to *maya* and suffers all sorrows and pains.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, though the *Bhagavata Purana* conforms to the *Visnu Purana* in some points regarding the nature of *maya*, there are also a few differences as is clear from our foregoing discussions.

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