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## ***Māyā* and Nietzsche: Knowing into Thyself**

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**Abstract:** This paper deals with the existential crisis of human existence in relation to Reality, God, Man and the World. Both in the East and West, thinkers have looked into the matter and have come up with sufficient explanations to the causes of such crises. In the East, the doctrine of *Māyā* appears to be successfully placed to propose suitable explanation to such philosophical enquiry. Theoretically, *Māyā* deals with the experiential inquisition in relation to truth, reality and the world. It states with conviction that the existence into this world is full of contradictions and multiplications. Similarly, in the Western tradition, Nietzsche is also of the opinion that both the subject and object of this existence undergo committed divisions and multiplications. Both *Māyā* and Nietzsche seem to agree on a point that self-realization is the highest form of reality and accordingly, lay emphasis on effort of 'knowing thyself'.

**Keywords:** Reality, Brahman, Man, the World, etc.

Realisation of the objects and situations in this world come through the senses and the realisation that is made on account of the senses are depended on the body. With the death of the body, there is death of the senses and with the death of the senses, the realisation also dies. Now a question arises that, why the sensual realisation cannot be permanent? At this position the theory of *Māyā* provides a convincing answer. It states that this world is a world of appearance and by appearance it is meant that nothing is permanent in this world. In the world of appearance, the realisation made on account of the senses is based on the modifications and divisions of the situations, events and objects. Therefore, it becomes either difficult or impossible to have absolute realisation. Upanisads say that *Brahman* is the ultimate reality and knowing the ultimate reality is the highest goal of human existence. In this regard Brahma sutra states, "*athāto brahma-jijñāsā*" (Radhakrishnan 227), which means that every existence makes attempt to know '*Brahman*'.



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## II

Theoretically, in *Māyā*, the origin of reality has been accepted as one. Observation can be traced in the scriptural text, “*Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*”, which is suggestive of the fact that reality is one but enlightened ones call by different names. At this point a question arises that if the origin of reality is singular then what is its relation with the world of plurality? Several theories have been propounded regarding the sources of plurality. One theory says that the source is one but becomes many, the other says the source is one but appears many and yet another says that the source is not one but many which means that many have come from many, and still another theory says that the source is neither one nor many. The theory of *Māyā* comes into the third category and accordingly it believes that the source of ultimate reality is one which is *Brahman*, unchanging and eternal. *Brahman* is the only reality and everything other than *Brahman* is non-real. And for the matter of that, Śaṅkara says, “*Brahma satyam, jagat mithya*”, which means that Brahman is real and the world of plurality is non real.

The metaphysics of *Māyā* starts with empirical pluralism and terminates at *Brahman*, the ultimate reality. According to the theory, the source of the ultimate reality has been accepted as one. If reality is one then how we experience plurality and for this Śaṅkara, the great scholar of *Māyā* doctrine provides suitable answer, states with authority that the plurality is just an appearance. On the one hand, he accepts ultimate reality as singular while on the other hand, he also accepts the world of plurality. Here it seems that Śaṅkara is self-contradictory but he brilliantly defends himself by just maintaining that the world is real but not ultimately real. Upanisads have adopted the method of *Adhyaropa* (creation) and *apavada* or *laya* (negation) for the purpose of understanding nature of ultimate reality with relation to the world. To explain the plurality, he adopts the metaphysics of Saṅkhya and to prove the world of plurality non-real, he adopts the technique of superimposition (*adhyasa*). *Māyā* is credited with two powers firstly, the power of concealment (*avarana-sakti*) which means *Māyā* hides the existence of reality and secondly, the power of projection (*viksepa-sakti*) where it hides the nature of reality and makes it appear different. The world of plurality is the effect of *Māyā*, here *Māyā* is *adi kāraṇa* of the world. As stated in the scripture, “*Brahman satyam, jagat mithya*”, which means that only *Brahman* is real and the world of plurality is non-real. To arrive at the ultimate reality, it becomes necessary to negate the non-real and this is brilliantly explained in the theory of negation (*laya* or *apavad*).



According to the theory, each effect goes back to its immediate cause, until the effect goes back to its primal cause (*mula kāraṇa* or *ādi kāraṇa*). Here, *Māyā* being the primal cause is also negated. On negating everything that is *mithya*, remains only Brahman as the ultimate reality. In this context, scriptural texts as, “*na iti na iti*” not this, not this are the authority for this position.

All the worldviews generally explain the relationship between the three entities which are the God, the Man and the world and on the basis of the established relationship among these entities, the philosophical tradition attempts to arrive at the source of ultimate Reality. Now a question arises: what is the relation among *Brahman*, the individual self (*jiva*) and the world (*jagat*)? Different views are held on this matter. Śaṅkara holds the view that universal Self is identical with the individual self while on the other hand, Ramanuja says that the individual self is eternally one with and also different from the universal self. And still on the other hand, Madhava holds the view that the individual self is eternally different from the universal self. At this position the scriptural text, “*tāt tūvam āsi*” takes the authority to deal with the matter which means that, ‘that art thou’, the individual self (*jiva*) is not separate from the universal self but is identical with the universal self. The individual self (*jiva*) is the *aṁśa* of *Brahman*. In this regard the analogy of fire and flames could be drawn. As the flames are the part of the fire with the same properties as that of the fire similarly, the individual self (*jiva*) is identical with the universal self (*Brahman*). The individual self, putting on the empirical dress has forgotten its true nature.

Several techniques have been mentioned in the Upanisads to find the real nature of self (*jiva*). In the second chapter of Taittirīya Upanisad, the technique of inquiry into the five sheaths has been explained. In the empirical condition, the human self (*jiva*) is conditioned by five sheaths (*kośa*); those of matter (*annamaya-kośa*), of vitality (*prāṇmaya-kośa*), of mind (*manomaya-kośa*), of intellect (*vijñānamaya-kośa*) and of bliss (*ānandamaya-kośa*). These sheaths are arranged one inside the other with the *annamaya-kośa* as the outermost and the *ānandamaya-kośa* as the innermost one. In relation to the five sheaths, three bodies of the individual self are explained. While the sheath of matter is the gross body (*sthūla-śarīra*); the sheath of vitality, mind and intellect constitute the subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*); and finally, the sheath of bliss is its casual body (*kāraṇa-śarīra*). It is further said that the five sheaths or the three bodies are the not true nature of the individual self (*jiva*) and the individual self (*jiva*) must be discriminated from them. The individual self conditioned by *avidyā* (ignorance), identifies



itself with the body, mind, intellect and so on. Further in relation to this, Mandukya Upanisad explains another technique for bringing out the true nature of the existence. It explains that, in the empirical condition, the individual self (*jiva*) has three kinds of experience (*avasthā-traya*)- waking, dream and sleep. The involvement of the self (*jiva*) in the triple stream of experiences takes through adjuncts (*upadhi*) with which the self is associated. *Viśva* and *Taijasa* are the names given to the self at the waking and dream state respectively. They are subject to both ignorance and error because of non-apprehension (*agrahaṇa*) as well as mis-apprehension (*anyathāgrahaṇa*) of truth in their empirical experience. While on the other hand, *Prājña* is the name given to the self at the deep sleep level and is subject to non-apprehension (*agrahaṇa*) of the truth due to *avidya*. The involvement of the self in all the three state of experiences is only *aupādhika* and not natural (*svābhāvika*) or real. The self (*jiva*) in this world, conditioned by the categories and adjuncts, identifies itself with the non-self and becomes incapable to be in state of having the realisation of '*aham brahmāsmi*'. On negating everything that is *mithya*, remains only *Brahman* without any second. In this context, scriptural texts as, "*na iti na iti*" not this, not this are the authority for this position. When the self realizes the truth by negating the false notions associated with the self (*jiva*), he attains the fourth state, *turiya*. At this state the individual experiences his identity with the universal self.

### III

Similarly, Nietzsche who happens to be one of the greatest modern European philosophers understands that the decay and degeneration of life at large could be attributed to the extraordinary gap that has been created between the thinking and action. For the matter of that, the subject and object of this existence or the cause and effect could be seen widely separated from each other. And when an individual come to the understanding about the cause of such a loss, we find that the apprehension and comprehension of the human categories such as cultural situations, social conditions and religious circumstances at large could be held widely responsible. In this regard it could be said that religion in the modern times is the most decadent having been deprived of any judicious will to put forth the facts in favor of faith and acceptance. According to Nietzsche, Christianity fails to fulfill the mission both in regard to the individual and the society as well. Thus, Christianity does not have any fulness about the experiences of its practitioners and subscribers rather it leads to deception from the insubstantial worth



of imageries in the name of holy trinity, blessedness, deliverance, repentance, and the like. Christianity has been charged as a religion which preaches about world and life negation. In its religious ideals, it lay emphasis more on the life in the other world than life in this world. Thus, the followers deny any real existence to world and life in it and accordingly, develops an attitude of mortification of the will to live and finally renounces all the activities which aim at making living better into this world.

Nietzsche holds the view that both the subject and object of this existence are typically selfish in that each has vested interest in its perception. Christianity, for Nietzsche, is a religion of fear. Fear of punishment is the operational tool in the business of religion where love for God and love for others is not spontaneous but is the outcome of the fear of the injury that could be inflicted upon the followers. Thus, it does not occur to Nietzsche as possible for any individual to have genuine love for all. Nietzsche further makes critical assessment of the morality of modern man and accordingly says, "Morality in Europe these days is the morality of herd animals" (Beyond Good and Evil 90). It takes tremendous courage for an individual to be oneself. In this scheme of morality, an individual is not confident about himself, neither about his actions nor about the results of his actions and in his inability to stand for himself, adopts the 'herd morality'. Modern man experiences an existential crisis where he suffers from the lack of 'freedom of will'. There is divorce between man and his actions. Here religion appears to be failed miserably in its mission to serve as a lighthouse for the civilization to seek meaning in life. Now a question arises who is in position to have realization about himself and about the world which is total and complete. For, this Nietzsche answers that Zarathustra is such an authority who lives life to its fullest and, whose actions are not guided by external objects and symbols rather his actions lay stress on the perfection of the inner self. Such actions reflect committed devotion where thinking and acting are one and the same.

#### IV

Man, in his rationalistic approach towards life is ignorant about himself because he knows what is changing in him from one moment to another. For example, Nietzsche says in the preface of his book, "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge- and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves- how could it happen that we should ever find ourselves? It has rightly been said: where your treasure is, there will your heart be also, ... there is one thing we really care about from the heart-



bringing something home.... So we are necessarily strangers to ourselves”.( On the Genealogy of Morals 15). Our ignorance is such that we are aware only of the apparent without having any close proximity with our true nature which is unchanging and eternal. We have engaged ourselves only in gathering the material wealth. Śaṅkara observes in Vivekachudamani that, “*Brahma Satyam Jagat Mithya, Jivo Brahmaiva Naparah*”, which means that Brahman is real and the world of plurality is non real and there is no difference between Brahman and the individual self. Man is not passive as an animal or plant but an active thinking being who is on a spiritual journey determined to shape his nature for higher purposes. In Brhad-aranyaka Upanisad 1.3.28, we are told that, “*asato ma sad gamaya, tamso ma jyotir gamaya, mrtyor mamrtam gamaya*” (Radhakrishnan 162). From this observation it is understood that one has to move from unreal to real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. One’s growth must evolve from gross to subtle, from lower to higher and from sensual to rational and from rational to spiritual. To recognize *Brahman* as the highest reality is to attain liberation. As in *Māyā*, so in Nietzsche an idea is configured that knowing oneself is possible when one is in constant journey of self-transcendence until he reaches his full potential and realizes his true nature which the world of appearances hid or falsely projects. And such knowing happens when one becomes aware of oneself spiritually instead of falsely identifying oneself with the limiting adjuncts of name and form. Mystic experiences make suggestion about such realization where one enters in the stream of life, full of harmony and finds its reality in a higher and nobler prospect. At this stage one is free from the limitations of the bodily senses or the constraints of the intellect. Mystic experiences don’t make suggestion about an escape from the earthly life rather encourage an individual to treat his body and mind as the means to realize the higher reality. Such experiences don’t lay emphasis on the images, symbols or the objects perceptible to the senses but point to the realization where the knowledge, the knower and the known becomes one. On having such realization man identifies his primordial unity with the supreme reality. And, the proposition made in the Upanisad, ‘*Aham Brahmasmi*’ finds suitable authority to take its position in this regard.



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