

Māyā is the third ontological entity in Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa darśana. It is also known as *Ajā*, *Avidyā*, and *Prakṛti*. Śrī Rāmānuja calls it *acit*-non-sentient cosmic matter covering all material objects. As the main factor of material causality it is mentioned for the first time in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad अजा ह्येका भोक्तृभोगार्थयुक्ता (१.९), अजामेकां लोहितशुक्लकृष्णां बह्वीः प्रजाः सृजमानां सरूपाः। अजो ह्येको जुषमाणोऽनुशेते जहात्येनां भुक्तभोगामजोऽन्यः ॥ (४.१०) Thereafter, it is mentioned in the Bhagavadgītā as *Prakṛti* source of modifications विकारांश्च गुणांश्चैव विद्धि प्रकृतिसम्भवान् (१३.१९) and as God's divine power दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया (७.१४) or *Māyā* and thereafter in many Purāṇas.

Śrī Rāmānuja accepts neither the view of Śrī Yādava Prakāśa that Brahman itself through its three-fold power or *śakti* undergoes changes and becomes God, individual souls and matter, like sea water that turns itself into waves, forms and bubbles, nor that of Śrī Śankara that Brahman which is eternally unchanging and pure consciousness illusorily appears as the universe due to *Māyā*. He describes *Prakṛti* in the Śrī Bhāṣya (1-4-10) 'Prakṛti is non-intelligent principle, the causal substance, of the entire material universe and constituting the means for the experience of pleasure, pain and for the final release of all intelligent souls which are connected with it from the eternity.

Under *acit*, *jada dravya* Śrī Rāmānuja includes two: (1) Primordial cosmic matter or '*prakṛti*' (2) Kāla. Under *parāk*, *ajada*, *dravya* he

includes Nitya Vibhūti or eternal transcendental realm, a spiritual concept he formulated to explain certain the theological doctrines and Dharmabhūtajñāna, knowledge that is an essential attribute of self.

Prakṛti : प्रकरोत्यस्यां विकारजातमीश्वर इति प्रकृतिः। *Prakṛti* is one which gives rise to many modifications or from which various evolutes come forth. This very important concept of Sāṃkhya Darśana is generally accepted with some modification by all who believe in सत्कार्यवाद i.e. the theory of causation according to which the effect exists in the material cause even before it is produced. This key concept of the Sāṃkhya is found in almost all schools of Bhakti Vedānta including Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism to understand and explain a causal beginning for the physical universe.

Among five metaphysical realities accepted by Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa *Māyā* or the *Prakṛti* is the only non-sentient material i.e. it is absolutely unconscious entity. It is real not phenomenal or indescribable as explained by monist Advaitins. Its causal form like other ontological realities cannot be known by प्रत्यक्ष or perception or by अनुमान or inference. It is to be known by the scripture only but as the effect, (i.e., the material world), it is grasped by perception. Everything we see, hear, touch, smell and taste are the modification of *Māyā*.

This *Māyā* binds both Jīva and Īśvara or the entire class of individual selves and of cosmic selves according to Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism. *Māyā* is the cause of ignorance for both these classes.

According to Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa both the *Akṣarabrahman* and *Parabrahman* are the ontological realities permanently beyond *Māyā*. *Māyā* is the latter's śakti. (S.P. 106) *Māyā* has three Guṇas i.e. qualities of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Due to the combination of these three, in which there is the preponderance of one, various modifications take place.

When *satva-guṇa* is dominant qualities of goodness (HVSS 97 : 19) like knowledge, wisdom, tranquility, mental and physical self-restraint, sense of discrimination, penance, truth, and mercy will arise resulting in giving bliss to individual self and cosmic self. The quality of awareness

according to Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa is the main mark of *sattva*. It leads to detachment from worldly objects of enjoyment. When *sattvaguna* prevails, the inner faculties (*antaḥkaraṇas*) become pure and one can worship God's form pleasantly (HVSS 32), and the fruits of action, performed by a Jīva are experienced during the walking state.

When *rajoguna*, the quality of passion, is dominant in the mixture of three, there is the desire for enjoying pleasures in both Jīvas and Īśvaras and the inner faculties (*antaḥkaraṇas*) becomes polluted. It makes meditation and worship of the God's manifest form difficult to practice. During its dominance the fruits of actions are experienced by Jīvas in dreams. The products of it are lust, desires for worldly enjoyment, constant activities. When the quality of darkness (*tamas*) prevails inertia and darkness result. The *antaḥkaraṇa* turns dull and passive, no thoughts arise and Jīva feels emptiness and it experiences fruits of its action in deep sleep. The products of *tamoguna* are laziness, dullness, inertia, or sleep.

The most important difference between Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism and the Sāṅkhya Darśana about the definition or *Prakṛti* is that for Sāṅkhya these three '*Sattva*', '*Rajas*' and '*Tamas*' themselves are *Prakṛti* while for Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism '*Prakṛti*' is the creator, mother of these three qualities and their combination, It itself is not the group or mixture of the three. The Bhagavadgīta also has similar views because it states विकारांश्च गुणांश्चैव विद्धि प्रकृतिसम्भवान् (१३.१९). These *gunas* are produced by *prakṛti*. ***Prakṛti* itself is not these *gunas* or qualities.** Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa calls the *prakṛti* permanent (*nityā*) and unborn (*ajā*) i.e. (SSJV:Ī.51.31).

It should be remembered that among the five ontological realities *Māyā* is also permanent. But it is permanent (*nitya*) in the sense that though it constantly undergoes change yet it is never born or destroyed. This *Māyā* is a real ever-existing, permanent entity. It is not the '*anirvacaniya māyā*' of Śrī Śaṅkara that is beyond '*sat*', '*asat*', and '*sad-asat*'. At the time of *Ātyāntika Pralaya* it enters into the effulgence of Akṣarabrahma in a subtle undifferentiated form and at the time of creation it comes out. (सौक्ष्म्यात्तदनुपलब्धेः सांख्यकारिका-8)

At the time of or final dissolution (*ātyāntika-pralaya*) of the universe all Jīvas and all Īśvaras remain in this *māyā* (i.e., they remain totally inactive like non-sentient objects) with their individual causal bodies (*kāraṇa śarīras*). As Jīvas and Īśvaras are sentient realities and yet they remain inside *Māyā*, it is called '*cidātmikā*'. Among the five realities this is the only one, which is non-sentient (*jaḍa*), but absolutely essential to give corporeality to all *cetana*. Therefore, the *Parama-Samhitā* calls it अचेतना परार्था च नित्या सततविक्रिया। त्रिगुणा कर्मिणः क्षेत्रं प्रकृते रूपमुच्यते ॥ व्याप्तिरूपेण संबन्धस्तस्याश्च पुरुषस्य च। स ह्यनादिरनन्तश्च परमार्थेन निश्चितः ॥ (II.18-19). *Māyā* is - non sentient (*jaḍa*) and yet it is useful to others and is permanent.

The *Māyā* remain undifferentiated in the *ātyāntika pralaya* and so it is called *Avyakta Māyā*, is also called the 'womb' (*yonī*) and the great Brahman by the Gītā in which He puts the seed of creation '*Mama Yonir mahad brahma, tasmin garbham dadhāmyaham*'. (B.G. 14 : 3) It proves beyond doubt that, unlike Śrī Śaṅkara's concept of *Māyā*, this reality is a permanent reality helpful to God in his creation, and not an illusion, rather an *śakti* of God (*Sā etasya sandraṣṭuḥ śaktiḥ sadasādātmikā / Māyā nāma mahābhāga yayedaṁ nirmame vibhuḥ* // Bhāgavatam III 5.25)

- (1) *Māyā* is the attachment for the body and the blood relation from which one must become free by means of service to the Saints and the holy ascetic.

माया तु देहेऽहंबुद्धिर्ममता दैहिकेष्विति।
विज्ञाय सा प्रयत्नेन हातव्या साधुसेवया ॥ ५ ॥

HVSS 262 : 5

मायेति। देहे। अहंबुद्धिः दैहिकेषु। ममता ममत्वबुद्धिः। माया। इतीत्यम्। विज्ञाय। सा माया। तु। साधुसेवयाऽहंममत्वरूपमायावर्जितसाधूनां निश्छिन्न संसेवनेन। प्रयत्नेन प्रहातव्या ॥ २६२-५ ॥

- (2) The second important definition of *Māyā* as given by Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa, '*Māyā*' is attachment for any one in the world; except for God.
- (3) Giving the third definition He says : '*Māyā*' is the fundamental element that is responsible for continuity of world. It is physical love

or passion that man has for woman and woman has for man resulting into the perpetuation of universe.

- (4) Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa then gives easiest definition for *Māyā* by defining it as ‘anything that is an obstacle to a devotee when he meditates upon the God.’

Alternately it means according to Śrī Swāminārāyaṇa wealth, women or anything if it does not become an obstacle in meditation of God, it is not *Māyā*. This *Māyā*, which is very difficult to remove, can be destroyed by dissolution of the universe mentally by knowledge (*jñāna-pralaya*). It is the state of individual understanding where by *prakṛti-puruṣa* and all the entities evolved thereof do not come into view and an aspirant sees only pure *Caitanya* within which only the God resides. No other entity remains. In other words, all influences of *Māyā* get destroyed/dissolved as if the *ātyāntika-pralaya* has taken place for that individual.

एषा ज्ञानस्थितिः प्रोक्ता ज्ञानप्रलय इत्यपि।
साक्षात्कृष्णे मनःस्थैर्यदेव तत्प्राप्तिरञ्जसा ॥ ८ ॥

HVSS 24 : 8

एषेति। एषोक्तप्रकारा। ज्ञानस्थितिः। ज्ञानेन भगवत्स्वरूपेऽवस्थानरीतिः। प्रोक्ता। एषः। ज्ञानप्रलयः। इत्यपि। प्रोक्तः। प्रकृतिपुरुषतत्कार्याणामस्यां स्थितावीक्षणाभावादस्याः स्थितेर्ज्ञानप्रलय इत्यपि सञ्ज्ञा प्रोक्तास्तीत्यर्थः। अञ्जसा तत्त्वतः। तत्प्राप्तिरेवंविद्यस्थितेरुपलब्धिः। साक्षात्कृष्णे प्रत्यक्षे श्रीकृष्णभगवति। मनःस्थैर्यदेव। एकान्तिकभावसहितेन श्रीकृष्णमाहात्म्यज्ञानाभ्यासेन तत्र मनसः सम्यक् स्थिरीभावादेवेत्यर्थः। भवेदिति शेषः ॥ २४-८ ॥

This is final liberation even when a person is alive. it is called *jīvanamuktī*.

We must note here that two concepts of Śrī Rāmānujācārya connected with *jada dravya*, *prakṛti*, or *māyā*. They are not found having the same connotation.

- (1) *Nitya-Vibhūti* : In Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, *Nitya-Vibhūti*, or transcendental spiritual realm is made up of *śuddhasattva* or pure *sattva* known as *paramapada*. This concept of *Nitya-Vibhūti* is not there in Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism.

(2) *Kāla or Time* : Kāla in the Viśiṣṭādvaita is acetana, non-sentient, real, eternal, enjoying the same status as prakṛti and exists along with it is distinct from Īśvara (the Highest Reality) but co-exists, with Him since both are Vibhu (infinite) However like other ontological entities it is the Śarīra of Īśvara in the technical sense (Chari S.M.S. 2000 : 96).

In Śrī Swāminārāyaṇism, the exact position of Kāla is not clearly defined and discussed. Only it is mentioned that Kāla is Saṅkalpa Śakti of God (VGFS 12).

