

THE CONCEPT OF MAYA IN THE ADI GRANTH

The concept of Māyā has a unique place of the Indian philosophical theories. Several writers and thinkers of various schools of thought have used this concept. In the *Vedas*¹ and the *Upanishads*² it is used in a variety of ways. In the *Gīta*³, Māyā is the power of the Brahman. In Buddhist thought too Māyā plays an important role. Saṅkara makes Māyā a pure philosophical principle, and uses it in the sense of ignorance, illusion, appearance and also as the material cause of the world. The Tantras⁴ use Māyā in the sense of power of the Supreme Reality. In the teachings of Gorakh Nath⁵ also there are references to Māyā. Thus almost all systems of religious thought have used the concept of Māyā. Even the teachers of Bhakti cult did not lag behind in expressing their own ideas about Māyā. The Sikh Masters were also well aware of this concept and gave sufficient prominence to it in their teaching. In this paper an attempt is made to elucidate what Grainthasahib has to say on Māyā.

In the Sikh scripture the word Māyā is used in several senses. It has been used in the sense of wealth. "You gather Māyā and are therefore accursed."⁶ "This wealth is Māyā, the great illusion"⁷. "She is the daughter of sea (Laxmi)"⁸ "The pandit instructs others but himself trades in Māyā."⁹ "Relatives and attachment with them are also Māyā." "There is no need to take pride in Māyā. Father, mother, sister and other relatives will not go with you."¹⁰ "The desire for Māyā attaches us with wife, sons and kins"¹¹. "Father and mother love their children immensely, but all attachment is Māyā."¹² "Māyā's thick relations with the three guṇas have been sufficiently highlighted in the *Ādi Granth*. "The three modes of Māyā make you yelp."¹³ "The Vedas say that Māyā has three attributes."¹⁴ "It (Māyā) has yoked us to the three modes."¹⁵ "Māyā of the three guṇas pervades everywhere due to attachment."¹⁶ "By reading the Vedas and the Śāstras you are bound to the Māyā of the three attributes and are engrossed in blind strife."¹⁷ It is also used in the sense of passionate life. "In the third part of night, when you are young, you are agitated and lured away by Māyā."¹⁸ The Gurus hit

at the polytheist Hindus while defining it in these words, "Belief in gods and goddesses is the source of Māyā. This belief led to the creation of the Smṛtis and the Śāstras."¹⁹ Sense of duality is also Māyā. "When one has the sense of duality, the mind is swayed by the poison of Māyā."²⁰ It is also a great impediment. "Whatever I decide in my mind, it does not allow me to fulfil it"²¹. "It does not permit me to gather virtue and continence".²² It is the source of all. "Believing Māyā, the source of all, men are swayed by doubt."²³ The Sikh Gurus further define Māyā in these words, "What is Māyā? Māyā is when one is bound by pleasure and pain and acts in ego".²⁴ "It is the power of the Lord and is the cause for the birth of this world. Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva are the sons of Māyā."²⁵ The composers of the *Ādi Granth* were well aware of the universal pervasiveness of Māyā and they said, "It is spread through the expression of pleasure and pain and infringes us through hell and heaven. Gods, welth, desire for glory, greed, intoxication, ego, attachment with sons, wife, worldly possessions, beauty, cattle, sweet sounds, all enveloping darkness of five desires, doing good deeds in ego, renunciation, austerities, pride in caste, avocation, culture etc., come under the sway of Māyā."²⁶

Parallel references of this concept culled from relevant literature when compared with the above can be of great value to the readers for a better understanding about this term. According to the Tantras, "Śakti is both Māyā, that by which Brahman creating the universe is able to make itself appear to be different from what it really is, and Mūla Pṛakṛti, or the unmanifested state of that which, when manifested, is the universe of name and form. It is the primary so-called the material cause."²⁷ Gorakh Nath²⁸ maintains that Māyā is like a tree which has no branch, root, leaves or shade. It grows without water. In spite of this, people are very much desirous of getting its fruit." Banerji²⁹ explains the same thing in a different way in these words, "Gorakh Nath regards Māyā as a form of expression of the human individuality. It appears to consist in giving undue importance to one's own individual self and its interests for that reason dealing falsely with others." According to Kabir, "Māyā is like the shadow. When we try to catch it, it runs away. He who runs away from it, it never leaves him. It sticks to him."³⁰ He further maintains that, "It is the mother of ignorance. Due to this ignorance the

individual moves in the world fearlessly. The world is an illusion. *Māyā* has bound every body.”³¹ Namdeva’s view of *Māyā* pertains to wealth and passionate attachment to the satisfaction of five senses. “The fish without caring for her life jumps towards the hook, eats her food and is caught by the fisherman; the man is attracted towards gold and woman and falls a prey to the cycle of birth and death; the bee collects honey, but cannot enjoy it, and also the man hankers after wealth, but all these pleasures are temporary. The hoarded *Māyā* in the form of wealth and fame remains in this world.”³² Dadu also echoes similar ideas, “My mind is a culprit. It does not obey me. It is immersed in the love of gold, woman, attachment, ego, anger, sex and is after the satisfaction, of five senses. It does not bother about the ultimate end i. e. death.”³³ “Whatever we see around, is the mirage of *Māyā*. Man is attracted towards its glow and beauty and regards it as true.”³⁴

The above account of *Māyā* contained in the *Ādi Granth* as well as the contemporary and near contemporary sources shows that *Māyā* is viewed in three ways, namely : (i) It hides the true nature of Truth from our view; (ii) It presents untruth as truth and (iii) Makes us believe untruth as Truth. In the Siddha literature, *Māyā* is the Śakti of the Śiva., while Śiva is the static element. In the Nāth cult she limits the view of the Highest Reality. When the concept of *Māyā* began to be adopted by the leaders of the Sant Math, its old connotation as preached by the Sāṃkhya system, Sāṃkara, the Siddhas and the Nāths, was sufficiently enlarged and changed. The Sāṃkhya view that *Māyā* is eternal, was totally rejected by the Sants including the Gurus. The view of Sāṃkara was partially accepted by them in their hymns here and there. The view that *Māyā* is the Śakti of the Lord which gives birth to the whole world, as preached by the Siddhas and the Yogis, was accepted by the Gurus to some extent. Thus, it appears that the concept of *Māyā* found synthesis of several prevailing views in several respects according to the teachings of the Gurus. The Gurus placed before their readers their concept of *Māyā* which was easily intelligible to them like their other doctrines and principles.

Dept. of Correspondence Course,
Punjab University, Chandigarh.

Rajkumar Arora

I. P. Q...7

NOTES

1. The term Māyā, as used in the Vedas, means primarily mysterious, awesome, wonder working power which produces effects and transcends human understanding (Paul David Devanandan, *The concept of Māyā*, p. 23).
2. To them belongs this stainless Brahma world, in whom there is no crookedness and falsehood, Māyā (illusion). Prasanopanishad, 1, 16.
3. The Gita, vii, 25.
4. The limiting power of Reality by which its unmeasured Being consciousness is measured, and its nature is made thinkable in terms of forms and categories has been called Māyā (*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, p. 229).
5. *Gorakh Bani*, pp. 139-40.
6. The *Ādi Granth*, p. 42.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 230, 279, 437.
9. *Ibid.*, p. p. 56, 116.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 647.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 1140, 1260.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 1126.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 366.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 371.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
27. John Woodroffe *Introduction to the Tantra Sastra* pp. 10-11
28. *Gorakh Bani* 153.
29. *Philosophy of Gorakh Nath*, p. 147.
30. *Sant Bani Samgraha* (Kabir) 1, p. 124
31. *Bijak Sakhi*, p. 227.
32. *Sant Bani Samgraha*, II, p. 32.
33. Ksitimohan Sen, *Dadu ki Bani*, II, p. 48.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 116.