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The status of *Brahman*, *Māyā*, and *Jīva* in Sarkar's ontological perspective

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Abstract:

Human beings are developing with increasing complexities including the identity crisis in their daily experiences. In search of the origin of existence, the inquisitive human mind has been confronted with a number of theories. But all the occidental and oriental views have failed to produce a solid platform where Brahman, Māyā, and Jīva can co-exist as the unified theory. The number of discrepancies and ambiguities related to the essence of Brahman, Māyā, and Jīva can leave space for the evolution of an alternative theory. The study will focus on a preliminary attempt to identify the possible modifications and innovations in order to understand the traditional as well as modern views of Brahman, Māyā, and Jīva.

To avoid such ambiguities modern Indian philosopher P.R.Sarkar (1921-1990) followed a convergent way of thinking blending up the existing theories in a synthetic way to explain ontological queries. In order to explain ontological mystery, Sarkar argued Brahman is the composite of Consciousness and energy. This paper will focus on elucidating the essence of Brahman with his three attributional aspects. This paper attempts to critically explore the conception of Māyā and assess its importance in shaping Sarkar's ontology. It further attempts to logically illustrate the depiction of Jīva as an appearance of Brahma. Finally the paper evaluates the concomitance relationship between Brahman and Māyā and the importance of sādhanā (spiritual endeavour) which helps to transcending microcosmic limitations of Jīva.

Key words: Brahman, Māyā, Jīva, Sādhanā (spiritual endeavour), Ontology, Occidental and Oriental views

Introduction: As a pivotal ontological concern, the fundamental quest about *Brahman*, *Māyā*, and *Jīva* has become a subject of enthralling interest to theologians, philosophers, and scientists all over the world. Complexity regarding the ultimate source and destiny of human existence still remains unresolved and demands more comprehensive study. Instead of spectacular advancement, science has failed to answer the purpose, meaning and ultimate goal of these manifested beings (Russell, 1960). These ontological probings formed a plethora of doctrines where a long line of philosophers have engaged themselves to resolve enigmatic ontological queries: who am i? Where do we come from? What is our ultimate

The status of Brahman, Māyā, and jīva in Sarkar's ontological perspective Bedabati Chowdhury
destiny? What is the essence of *Brahman*? Is *Brahman* the final culminating point in the journey of evolution? What is *Māyā*? Are *Brahman* and *Māyā* absolutely two separate entities? How does *Māyā* act? Are *Brahman* and *Jīva* synonymous to each other? What is *Jīva dharma*? How does *Jīva* differ from *brahman*? In pursuit of all these ontological queries a multitude of “ism” has emerged and encountered each other to formulate an unified theory so that *Brahman*, *Māyā*, and *Jīva* can coexist without hampering each other. The constant conflicts among the rival systems of Indian orthodox and heterodox philosophical traditions have paved for the further advancement of the concept of *Brahman*, *Māyā*, and *Jīva*. Subsequently the controversy reaches its highest magnitude through several interpretations.

In Upanishadic literature, *Brahman* is regarded several times as the essence of the entire universe (Olivelle, 1998). Pure Consciousness, supreme being is the ground of all existence, and also underlies in empirical Consciousness (Gupta, 2012). Sankara the towering figure in Indian philosophy (Cronk, 2003) states that *Brahman* is the ultimate truth, except the *Brahman* world is false as it is superimposed by *Māyā* and *Jīva* or individual soul is identical with *Brahman* or cosmic soul. Therefore the doctrine of *Māyā* occupies a pivotal position in Sankara's metaphysics. According to Sankara, *Brahman* is regarded as the existential substratum of all subjects and objects (Deutsch, 2004). For Sankara, the essence of *Brahman* is described by using the metaphor of qualityless, attributeless, motionless, unchangeable, imperishable, infinite, and inactive. In accordance with Sankara's ultimate declaration the pertinent question being posed by his critics is about the attributeless *Brahman* and its relationship with *Māyā* and *Jīva*. In what sense is *Brahman* the creator of the universe and how does one explain *Māyā*, being a power or potency of *Brahman* (Sharma, 2009) is absolutely false and *anīrvacaniya* or indescribable in nature. On what account is *Jīva* identical with *Brahman*? On which ground does the multitude of changing worlds relate to unchanging attributeless *Brahman*? Unlike Sankara, Ramanuja advocates the doctrine of qualified non-dualism which regards the phenomenal diversity as real as *Brahman*. Contrarily, the Samkhya system contains a number of contradictions both in the epistemological and in the ontological realm. In clarifying Samkhya's view on *Puruṣah* as sentient, multiple, inactive, indifferent and isolated principle while *Prakṛti* as insentient, non-intelligent, material cause, producer of effects, and innate power of transformation and manifestation create a multitude of discrepancies in the intellectual society (Sengupta, 1969). Patanjali's metaphysical dualism gives rise to a pertinent question that how transcendent *Puruṣah* can interact with an insentient material *Prakṛiti* (Kang, 2003). Under the veil of *Māyā*, *Brahman* appears as *Jīva* having the characteristics of merit and demerit, pleasure and pain. Therefore, “*Jīva* stands for *anupraveśa* of consciousness in the limiting adjuncts” (Bhatta, 2021). According to Tantra, *Śiva*, the transcendental entity, is the noumenal cause of the phenomenal world while *maya* is considered as the mother of all beings and existence (Singh, 1976). Alongwith the sheer amount of critical investigations a number of interpretations have been highlighted to explore the real essence of *Brahman*, *Māyā*, and *Jīva*; (Kothari, 1981, Tenzin, 2006, Murthi, 2009, Robbinano, 2016, Chandrika, 2019, Bhatta, 2021).

At this juncture, a well-regarded expounder of the Tantra, socio-spiritual revolutionist of the 20th century, Shrii Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (P. R. Sarkar, spiritual name Shrii Shrii Ānandamurti) introduce the world most advanced system of socio-spiritual philosophy based on “*advaitadvaitādvaita*” principle which is non-dualistic in essence but gives space for dualism, pluralism, and spiritual devotionalism. Advocating Tantra-Yoga as a spiritual cult, Sarkar codified rational and scientific socio-spiritual philosophical tenets to elevate physical, mental, and spiritual development of each individual so that each and everybody can achieve their basic requirements. Alongwith his mountainous contributions on linguistic, history, music, economics, education, psychology, biopsychology, cosmology, philosophical discourses and deliberations attempt to bring a purposeful blending between philosophy and facts, between theory and practice, between relative and absolute truth. Fundamentally, Sarkar's teachings on spiritual philosophy are a synthesis of Vedic, Upanishadic, and Tantric philosophies. His most fundamental spiritual discourse, “*Ānanda Sūtram*”¹. ' or "aphorisms leading to Ānanda or divine bliss" is a core text of his spiritual philosophy. The spiritual philosophy of P.R.Sarkar recognises that “*Brahman* is the absolute truth, and the universe is also truth, but relative”. Thus Sarkar explicitly clarified the concept of relative truth as the world is. *Śakti* or *Māyā* is the divine force and inseparable part of *Brahman* that renders the diversified universe in the form of different names, shapes, and colours. His synthetic and rational outlook emphasising *Śiva & Śakti* unification helps us to reconceptualise the true notion of *Brahman*. Thus Sarkar's unified theory of *Śiva & Śakti* enriched us to comprehend the relationship between the cognitive and creative aspects of ultimate reality viz. *Brahman* which is capable of balancing the deep spiritual insights of the east with the scientific and technological capabilities of the west. The purpose of this study is as follows: The second section will stress to elucidate the essence of Consciousness and its triple aspects. The third section will focus on comprehending the pivotal concept of *Māyā*. The fourth section will focus on providing a revealing insight on the status of *Jīva* in Sarkar's ontological perspective.

Brahman & His attributional aspects: Sarkar adheres to the Upanishadic concept of *Brahman* as *Ānanda* or infinite bliss² which is considered as a “meta-empirical state of bliss”³ and is beyond the realm of existence and non-existence, being and non-being. The word *Brahman* is derived from the root *brh* means vast that indicates *Brahman* is such a big entity that cannot be measured. *Brahman* may also be derived from another word *Brmhan*. *Brmhanatvad Brahman* refers to that entity who himself is great and has the capacity to make others great. Sarkar's mystic insight tends to recognise the essence of *Brahman* is significantly *Śiva-Śakti* union (Ananadamurti, 1996). Phenomenologically, *Brahman* is

¹ Ānandamurti in his book *Ānanda Sūtram* (AS: ‘Aphorisms of Bliss’) emphasises philosophical treatise or darshan shastra, spiritual treatise or dharma shastra, and social treatise or samaj shastra in a aphoristic style and in sanskrit language..

² *Ānandam Brahma ityāhuh* (This ānanda is called Brahma) A.S. 2-4.

³ Sukhamaanantamānandam (Infinite happiness is ānanda (bliss).)

The status of Brahman, Māyā, and jīva in Sarkar's ontological perspective Bedabati Chowdhury opined as the composite of Śiva-Śakti⁴. Śiva is frequently equated with 'Cognitive Principle' or 'Citi-Śakti' as pure consciousness, and also an omni-telepathic entity as the ultimate witness of the entire universe⁵ while Śakti is a divine force of Śiva⁶ (Ananadamurti, 1996) and is compared with Prakṛti or cosmic operative principle and Māyā or cosmic creative principle. Śakti is the qualifying principle of Śiva the only function of which is to bind or modify Puruṣa as per Puruṣa willingness. Hence, Śakti is the qualifying principle, and Puruṣa is the object of being qualified.

Śakti consists of three *gunas* (attributes) viz. *sattva* (sentient), *rajas* (mutative), and *tamas* (static), and is liable to coexist within the realm of cognitive principle viz. Śiva. Essentially, Śiva is the transcendental and Śakti is the immanent aspects of the same singular entity viz. Brahman. Although in this dynamic process of evolution both these two principles possess binary opposition, literally they are inseparable and indispensable in nature like fire and its burning capacity. Therefore Sarkar's ontology is dualistic in theory but monistic in spirit.

Unlike Sankaras absolute non-qualified Brahman, Sarkar considers three dimensions of Brahman including *Nirguna*, *Saguna* and *Tāraka Brahma*. Sarkar vividly expressed that *Nirguna Brahman* and *Saguna Brahman* are not absolutely two distinct aspects obtaining higher and lower state of existence, as Sankara suggests, rather, both are implicit and explicit states of Consciousness. Basically *Nirguna* is purely non-qualified or non-expressed state of Consciousness, where his inherent principle, *Prakṛiti* remains unexpressed or *anucchunṣyā*. Subsequently this state of Consciousness is non-qualified or beyond the scope of quality or *gunatita*. On the other hand, *Saguna*, (*gunayukta*) or qualified aspect of Brahman is nothing but the metamorphosed form of Brahman, on account of the crudifying influence of *Prakṛiti* and this metamorphosed or qualified state of Consciousness is known as *Saguna Brahman* and this *Saguna Brahman* always exists within *Nirguna Brahman*. Fundamentally, *Saguna Brahman* is an empirical state while *Nirguna* is a metempirical state of Consciousness. *Nirguna* is equivalent to *nirakṣara* or *avyakta* and *nirviśeṣa* while *Saguna Brahman* is regarded as *Kṣara* or *vyakta* and *saviśeṣa*. The unbridgeable gap between *Nirguna* & *Saguna Brahman* can be rid of through Sarkar's innovative conception of *Tāraka Brahma*. For Sarkar, *Tāraka Brahma* is the tangential point between two states of *Nirguna Brahman* and *Saguna Brahman*⁷. Sarkar's concept of *Tāraka Brahma* is also regarded as "Bhagavān" as who possesses six *Bhagas* or occult powers such as *animā*, *mahimā*, *laghimā*, *iśitva*, *prakāmya*, *vaśitva*, *prāpti*, *Antararyāmitva*. Thus, Sarkar has made

⁴ Śivaśaktyātmakaṃ Brahma (Brahma is the composite of Shiva and Śakti) A.S.1-1.

⁵ Drk Puruṣaḥ darshanaṃ Śaktiśca (Puruṣa is the substantiator, the ultimate witness; (the actional faculty of) Prakṛiti is the act of witnessing (and that which is witnessed). A.S.1-7

⁶ Śaktih Śa Śivasya Śaktih (Śakti (the Operative Principle) is the (force) of Śiva). A.S.1-2

⁷ Bhāvah bhāvātītayoh setuh Tārakabrahma (The bridge between Nirguṇa Brahma and Saguṇa Brahma is called Tāraka (Liberating) Brahma). A.S.1-25

The status of Brahman, Māyā, and jīva in Sarkar's ontological perspective Bedabati Chowdhury
an attempt to reconcile Nirguna Brahman with his functional aspects; those are Saguna Brahman, Ísvara, Bhagavān etc.

Māyā: The whole gamut of Indian philosophy conveys the most significant evidence exploring the position of Māyā in the process of evolution. In Sankara's monistic theory Māyā reveals as an inconsistent principle as Sankara depicted Māyā as "it is not real, for it has no existence apart from Brahman, it is not unreal, for it projects the world of appearance.....And it is not both real or unreal, for this conception is self-contradictory" (Sharma, 2009). Unlike Sankara's Māyā, Samkhyas Prakrti, Sarkar upholds that Śakti or operative principle is the primordial cosmic force of Śiva. In philosophical parlance, Śakti, Prakrti, and Māyā are synonymous but for Sarkar, both Prakrti and Māyā possess a shed of difference according to their significance in the dynamic process of evolution. Fundamentally, Prakrti is the combination of three attributes or gunas; *sattva* (sentient), *raja* (mutative) and *tama* (static). The state of unmanifested primordial force signifies that all three attributes lie in equipoise without dominating others. In the case of Prakrti where the three gunas or attributes, *sattva* (sentient), *raja* (mutative) and *tama* (static), are in the state of equilibrium, such equilibrated *Mulāprakrti* (Primordial Force or Operative Principle) keeps itself away from the process of manifestation. Thus *Prakrti* remains merged into Śiva and does not get the scope to qualify Śiva or *Puruṣa* and hence this state of unexhausted, unexpressed, or *anuchhunyā* Prakrti appears in the name of *Mulāprakrti*. But the moment equipoise among three gunas gets disturbed and lost due to the belligerent nature of the three gunas Prakrti or the primordial unmanifested force is transformed into Māyā (creative principle). "The state of disparity in which *sattva* (the Sentient Force) is greater, is called *Vidyāmāyā* or introversive force and the state in which *tama* (the Static Force) is greater, is called *Avidyāmāyā* or extroversive force" (Anandamurti, 1956). Regarding their subtle relationship Sarkar corroborates the tantrik view that the predominance of Śiva over Śakti. *Prakrti* is merely a tool. Her dexterity depends upon the whims of *Puruṣa*. Therefore, Māyā is always subservient to Consciousness and acts as supervised by Brahman as she is "authorised to act". So to say in Gita, nobody can overcome the influence of Māyā without complete surrender at the feet of *Puruṣa*. For Sarkar, Māyā is ventured as the secondary efficient cause and linking force between material and efficient cause. The creation process would not have been possible if Śakti had remained an inexplicit and unexpressed state. Māyā is thus regarded as mother of all manifested and unmanifested beings and in Tantra she is addressed as *janani*, *mātri*, and *ambā*. Consequently Samkhya's *prakrtipradhānavāda* can be reinterpreted through Sarkar's cosmo-ontological presuppositions.

Jīva: Ontologically, Sarkar differs from Sankara in accepting the concept of *jīva* as identical with *Brahman*⁸ "*Brahman and jīva are identical*", rather the substantial difference between *Brahman* and *jīva* lies in their respective *upadhis* (differentiating qualities) (Anandamurti, 1981). *Jīva* under the influence of *Prakrti* is always bound by several

The status of Brahman, Māyā, and jīva in Sarkar's ontological perspective Bedabati Chowdhury

bindings, suffering from numerous imperfections, and psycho-spiritual weaknesses. As a result of the bondage of *Prakṛti*, *Jīva* tends to acquire reactive momentas or *samaskars* of his own actions⁹. Accordingly, *Jīva* is the subject of psycho-spiritual limitations and always experiences pain-pleasure, sorrow-happiness, and desire-violation. Fundamentally each unit consciousness has its origin in *Saguna Brahman*¹⁰ and remains under the influence of *Prakṛiti* during the phase of evolution. This evolutionary journey indicates the path of non-duality to duality and again duality merges with non-duality. The longing for non-dual *Brahman* is the inherent urge of each and every individual and the attainment of non-dual *Brahman* which helps to get free from the bondage of *Prakṛiti*. As *Jīva* always tries to transcend all these limitations and the bondage of *Prakṛiti* which is the ultimate mission of each and every unit soul. For Sarkar, Salvation is the only path which helps to release *Jīva* from the bondage of *Prakṛiti*. Therefore, *Jīva* has to give sincere effort for practicing *sādhanā* (spiritual practice), sacrifice, and selfless service (Anandamurti, 1958). Thus through sincere practice of *sādhanā*, service, and sacrifice the individual can liberate from the bondage of *Prakṛiti* and become one with non-dual *Brahman*. Unless the practice of *sādhanā* the attainment of supreme merger is quite impossible. Sarkar deliberately advocates only through practice of *sādhanā* (spiritual endeavour) *Jīva* becomes *Śiva*.

Conclusion: The anomalies about the true notion of *Brahman, Māyā, and Jīva* encompasses as a well discussed central issue in the whole gamut of Indian philosophy both heterodox and orthodox systems. The essential concern about the conception of Brahman is based on the inextricable unification not absolute segregation between *Śiva* and *Śakti*. But in most of the cases both the heterodox and orthodox philosophical systems have failed to provide a unified theory where *Brahman* and his operative force viz. *Māyā* can co-exist unitedly. The inevitable consequence of existing dilemmas about *Brahman* is Sarkar's *Śiva-Śakti* unification. Thus Sarkar's bipolar principle of *Śiva-Śakti* can bring a revolutionary change in our traditional interpretations in the realm of ontology, cosmology and soteriology. In consequence with Sarkar's *Śiva-Śakti* union, there has been a unique blending of *Brahman* and his inherent principle viz. *Māyā, Nirguna Brahman* and *Saguna Brahman, Brahman* and *jagat*, as well as *Brahman* and *Jīva*.

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⁹ *Manovikṛtiḥ vipākāpekṣitā samskārah* (A distortion of the mind-stuff waiting for expression (i.e., a reaction in potentiality) is known as a *samskāra*) A.S. 3.4.

¹⁰ *Saguṇāt sṛṣṭirutpattiḥ* (The creation originates from Saguṇa Brahma) A.S. 2-12.

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