Māyā, which is of the nature of saitva-ajas-tamas, is called ajñāna, avidyā, prakṛti, pradhānā according to the various contexts. This was the topic of our earlier essay.¹

Consciousness conditioned by total ignorance is called Īśvara, and the same consciousness when conditioned by individual ignorance is called Prājña. From this total ignorance described rightly as the total causal ignorance, rise the subtle and the gross bodies. Consciousness conditioned by both the total causal ignorance and the total subtle universe is called Hiranyagarbha; the consciousness conditioned by both the individual causal body and individual subtle body is named Taijasa. This very same consciousness when conditioned by total causal ignorance, total subtle universe and the total gross universe is termed Virāt; the consciousness conditioned by individual causal ignorance, individual subtle body and individual gross body is named Viśva. Let’s put these terms Īśvara, Prājña, Hiranyagarbha, Taijasa, Virāt, and Viśva mathematically:

1. Īśvara: Consciousness + total causal ignorance
2. Prājña: Consciousness + individual causal ignorance
   a. Hiranyagarbha: Consciousness + total causal ignorance + total subtle universe
   b. Taijasa: Consciousness + individual causal ignorance + individual subtle body
   i. Virāt: Consciousness + total causal ignorance + total subtle universe + total gross universe
   ii. Viśva: Consciousness + individual causal ignorance + individual subtle body + individual gross body.

¹ Refer to the essay Māyā in the July 2003 issue of Tapovan Prasad.
This introduction, filled with too many terms, is certainly full of hitherto unexplained concepts. This was only to give a bird’s eye view of the various topics and concepts that we will study in the near future. In this essay our focus will be on Īśvara and Prājña.

**Māyā and Avidyā**

Though ignorance is one, it can be seen from two aspects – individual and total. In Sanskrit, we use the word ‘vyaṣṭi’ to indicate the individual aspect and the word ‘samaṣṭi’ to indicate the collective or the total aspect. For example, ‘free’ is the individual aspect (vyaṣṭi) and forest is the collective aspect (samaṣṭi). A drop of water is the ‘vyaṣṭi’ aspect and ocean is the samaṣṭi aspect. Book is the vyaṣṭi aspect and library is the samaṣṭi aspect. One rupee is the vyaṣṭi aspect and a hundred rupees are the samaṣṭi aspect! In the same way avidyā is the vyaṣṭi aspect and māyā is the samaṣṭi aspect of ignorance. We can summarily say that individual māyā is avidyā and total avidyā is māyā. From now onwards, in the context of ignorance, we shall for convenience of explanation use māyā for samaṣṭi and avidyā for vyaṣṭi.

**Īśvara and Prājña, Brahman and Ātman**

Both māyā and avidyā are associated with Consciousness – they have the pure sat-cit-ānanda-vastu as the substratum. When we speak of Consciousness with respect to māyā as its conditioning, we call it Īśvara; when we talk of the same Consciousness with respect to avidyā as its conditioning, we call it prājña.

---

1 The words samaṣṭi and vyaṣṭi are derived from the Sanskrit root ‘as’ which means ‘to pervade’. When the prefix ‘sam’ is added to ‘as’, it becomes ‘of total pervasion’ and when the prefix ‘vi’ is added to ‘as’, the meaning changes to ‘of limited pervasion’.

2 Though all teachers of Vedānta recognise the concepts of samaṣṭi and vyaṣṭi some do not accept that the terms māyā and avidyā should respectively mean the samaṣṭi and vyaṣṭi aspects only. They opine that only the context can determine whether these terms are used as samaṣṭi or vyaṣṭi. The author of this essay also favours this opinion. Hence the mention of ‘convenience of explanation’ in the essay.
But what about pure Consciousness, which is unconditioned? Does it also have different names? Yes. When we talk of the pure Consciousness unassociated and unconditioned by māyā it is called Brahman and the same pure Consciousness unassociated and unconditioned by avidyā is called Ātman. Please note that pure Consciousness is one and homogeneous. So Brahman is Ātman and Ātman is Brahman as both of them are pure Consciousness only. If thus, Brahman and Ātman, are one and the same – the pure Consciousness only, then why have two different names at all, as though they both are different? This would be the natural question of any serious student. These two different names are given to analyse and differentiate at the cosmic and individual levels the various concepts of Vedanta like māyā – avidyā, Īśvara – jīva, Hiranyagarbha – tajāsa etc. for a student who has begun his intellectual and spiritual journey using the adhyāropa and apavāda methodology of Vedānta.

Nature of Īśvara

Even though both māyā and avidyā are essentially ignorance, characterised by sattva-ajas-tamas, yet because of the association with Īśvara and prajña they have different properties. The same knife in the hands of a doctor saves life but in the hand of the murderer it takes life!

Vedānta-sāra of Sri Swami Sadananda makes this amply clear

इस्माम्व सम्प्रेस्त उत्क्रृष्ट-उपाधितया विशुद्ध-सत्त्व-प्रधानता ।

Iyaṃ samaśṭih utkṛṣṭa-upādhitayā viśuddha-sattva-pradhānā.

This collective ignorance (māyā) being an adjunct (or conditioning) of the Highest, i.e., Īśvara, is characterised by the predominance of very pure sattva.

1 For adhyāropa and apavāda methodology of Vedanta refer to June 2003 issue of Tapovan Prasad.

2 The word ‘prāṇa’ refers collectively to the five prāṇa-s: prāṇa, apāṇa, vyānā, udāna and samāṇa. At the same time, it is also the name for the first of the five prāṇa-s. In the same way Īśvara the word, refers collectively to all the three aspects of the totality: Īśvara, Hiranyagarbha and Virāt, but at the same time it is the name of the first aspect also.
The knife is a potential danger for a child, but not so for its mother – she uses it in the kitchen for many purposes, with ease. Since māyā is wielded by Īśvara, it loses its power to bind. Tamas and rajas are overpowered by sattva, thus making māyā very pure. This is technically called viśuddha-sattva-pradhānā i.e. predominated by pure sattva. Sattva being the cause of knowledge and since māyā is dominated by sattva, māyā cannot delude Īśvara. Īśvara remains as the māyā-pati, the Lord of māyā. He thus remains as GOD, the G-enerator of the cosmos, the O-rganiser of the cosmos and the final D-estroyer of the cosmos. He becomes sarvajñā - omniscient, sarveśvarā - omnipotent, sarvaniyantā - universal controller.

**Designations of Īśvara**

Because of being sarvajñā, sarveśvarā and sarvaniyantā, He is designated variously as Īśvara, Jagat-kāraṇa and Antar-yāmin. Let us have a look at Subodhini, a commentary on Vedānta-sūtra, which defines these designations of Īśvara briefly and beautifully.

1. Īśvara: the Lord or Ruler

Sarveśām jīvānām karma-anurūpa-ipsita-phala-dārtvena īśvarāḥ iti ucyate – Since He gives the fruits of actions to all the jīvas as per their actions (and thus rules and lords over them) He is called īśvara.

2. Jagat-kāraṇa: the Cause of the Cosmos

Sarvasya cara-acara-ātmaka-prapañcasya vivarta-adhīṣṭh ānatvena jagat-kāraṇam iti vyapadiśyate – since Īśvara is the very non-changing substratum of the world characterised by the moving and the unmoving, he is called Jagat-kāraṇa or the cause of the universe.

---

1. But jīva is 'māyā-dāsa, the servant of māyā'. In a lighter vein Īśvara is GOD and jīva is an (under) DOG.

2. Cara-acara i.e. moving and unmoving, is an idiomatic expression in Sanskrit which just means 'all that is there', 'the whole without any exception'.

Tapovan Prasad 29
3. Antaryāmi: the inner-controller

Sarveśaṁ jīvānāṁ antarhrdaye sthitvā buddhi-niyamakatvēna antaryāmi iti ucyate – staying within the hearts of all jīvās, He propels and controls the intellect of all. Therefore He is called Antaryāmi or the inner-controller.

**Nature and Designations of Prājña**

Now that we have elaborated on māyā – the samaṣṭi ajñāna and Īśvara, let us see avidyā – the vyāṣṭi ajñāna or the individual ignorance and prājña which is the Consciousness conditioned by avidyā.

Vedānta-sāra explains the nature of avidyā:

इयम् वयाृ्तिः निक्रृष्ट-उपाधित्वः मलिन-सत्त्व-प्रधाना

The individual ignorance (avidyā) being the adjunct (or conditioning) of the lowest i.e. jīvā, is characterised by the predominance of impure sāttva.

If māyā was a knife in the hands of the wise mother, avidyā is the knife in the hands of a restless ignorant child! In the case of the jīvā’s avidyā, sāttva is overpowered by rajas and tamas. This impure sāttva is technically called malina-sattva-pradhānā, i.e. dominant with impure sāttva. Because of avidyā being impure, it deludes the jīvā, binds him to samsāra and mercilessly buffets him up and down in the cycle of birth and death. The jīvā is characterised by alpa-prajñā – limited knowledge, anīśvratvā – absence of lordship, and niyamya-katvā – the nature of being controlled.

And this jīvā i.e. Consciousness having avidyā as its upādhi (adjunct or conditioning), is called by a single name, as prājña – prāyēna ajñā – ‘one who is mostly ignorant or almost ignorant’.

1 Contrast this with the Māyā of Īśvara which is viśuddha-sattva-pradhānā
2 Contrast this with Īśvara who is sarvajña, sarvesvāra and sarvaniyānā
3 Unlike Īśvara who has got three different names Īśvara, Jagat-kāraṇa and Antar-yāmin.
He gets this name because of his experience of deep-sleep. In deep-sleep all that the prājña is aware of is only the complete absence of everything. And because he is aware of this ‘absence’ he is called almost ignorant and not totally ignorant for even the knowledge of absence is knowledge.

**Suṣupti and Pralaya**

The essential state of experience for the prājña is the state of suṣupti or deep-sleep where the prājña exists with its sole conditioning of avidyā. Herein, as we have described above, who experiences nothingness. The essential state of experience of Īśvara is when who is with his conditioning of māyā. That state is called pralaya. Compared to suṣupti or the individual deep-sleep we can say that this is a cosmic-sleep. Herein all the inert world of names and forms and the sentient jīvas lie in an undifferentiated homogeneous state. Just as suṣupti or the individual deep-sleep is at the individual level so too pralaya or cosmic dissolution is at the universal level where all the gross and subtle worlds are dissolved into the causal or ‘seed’ form at the end of each creation.

---

1 Prājña is also explained as prakṛṣṇa ajñāḥ exceedingly ignorant’. But here also the word ‘exceedingly’ is to be taken in the sense of ‘almost fully’ and not ‘absolutely’.

---

As far as I am concerned I hold on to none; none holds on to me. I sing my song and pass your gate. Under your balcony, I cannot wait and sing. I run like a shuttle between the yajnasalas till the last chord is sung out. I will sing on...on...on! until the strings burst, until the body of the instrument wears off, rubbed against my willing shoulders.

Swami Chinmayananda
## Conclusion

Let us summarise all the ideas and the terms we have seen in this essay in the form of a tabular column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Īsvara</th>
<th>Prājña</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upadhi—the</td>
<td>Māyā</td>
<td>Avidyā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conditioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. sarvajñatva—total knowledge</td>
<td>a. alpajñatva—limited knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. sarveśvaratva—total lordship</td>
<td>b. antiśvaratva—absence of lordship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. sarvaniyamakatva—controller of all</td>
<td>c. niyamyakatva—nature being controlled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Īśvara (Lord)</td>
<td>a. Prājña—‘almost ignorant’ or ‘exceedingly ignorant’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Jagat-kāraṇa (cause of the universe)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Antar-yāmin (inner-controller)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of</td>
<td>Pralaya</td>
<td>Suṣupti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure unconditioned</td>
<td>Brahman</td>
<td>Aṭman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consciousness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important that one understands these basic concepts thoroughly, because the essays which follow will be based on these concepts and these terms will be referred to quite often.

---

**SWEET THOUGHT**

*The springs from which our behaviour manifests are called vasanas.*

Swami Chinmayananda

---

Swami Chinmayananda

August 2003