Maya—A Conceptual History

Dr Arpita Mitra

AMONG THE MANY SCHOLARLY projects on Indian history and culture that Swami Vivekananda intended posterity to take up was a kind of history of Indian concepts.[1] Such a history would capture the changing meaning of concepts over time. In recent decades, intellectual history has emerged in a big way, especially in the US and Europe, partly out of a critique of the dominance of social history. While it is still new and highly contested there, intellectual history has received even scantier attention in the field of Indology. According to Sheldon Pollock: 'The field of Indology has long been dominated by the old philology, which one could characterize *grosso modo* and not necessarily pejoratively as history without ideas (the history of language or textual change, for example), and the old Orientalism, which can be viewed as ideas without history.'[2]

It is not that no history of concepts was ever written in Indology. Jan Gonda's work on concepts such as *ishvara*, maya, and so on, Prabhu Dutt Shastri's work on maya, or K L S Rao's *The Concept of Śraddhā* would bear witness to the contrary. However, it may not be wrong to say that conceptual history as a systematic and definite discipline with well-defined methods is yet to evolve in the field of Indic Studies.[3] Having pointed out the academic need to pay attention to the history of ancient Indian ideas,

the objective of this essay is rather modest: to present before the reader a brief historical sketch of the concept of 'maya' in Hinduism—a concept without which any discussion on Vedanta is incomplete.

The Meaning of 'Maya'

'Maya' is undoubtedly a difficult concept. It has been commonly understood and translated as 'illusion'. It is true that one of the general meanings of the term is deception. However, the Vedantic concept of 'maya' is a philosophically sophisticated concept, and the general perception of it meaning 'illusion' is wrong. Prabhu Dutt Shastri says: 'The world, says the Maya theory in its correct interpretation, is an *appearance*, not a *mere illusion*, since the latter as such is impossible.'[4] It is important to distinguish between the general usage of the term and the technical usage, both of which, however, seem to overlap at times. The term was not invented by the Vedanta philosophers. It pre-dates both Mahayana Buddhism, where it is used in a specific sense, and the later school of Advaita Vedanta. It is found in the earliest speculations of humankind recorded in the Rig Veda, and appears early in the Upanishads in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, while it crystallises into a specific meaning in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*. It then develops into its final form at the hands of the Advaita Vedantins.

It is worth citing here Swamiji's brief discussion of the history and meaning of the concept:

> Generally it is used, though incorrectly, to denote illusion, or delusion, or some such thing.

Dr Arpita Mitra has a PhD in history from Jawaharlal Nehru University and specialises in Indian intellectual history.

But the theory of Maya forms one of the pillars upon which the Vedanta rests; it is, therefore, necessary that it should be properly understood. I ask a little patience of you, for there is a great danger of its being misunderstood. The oldest idea of Maya that we find in Vedic literature is the sense of delusion; but then the real theory had not been reached. We find such passages as, 'Indra through his Maya assumed various forms'. Here it is true the word Maya means something like magic, and we find various other passages, always taking the same meaning. The word Maya then dropped out of sight altogether. But in the meantime the idea was developing. Later, the question was raised: 'Why can't we know this secret of the universe?' And the answer given was very significant: 'Because we talk in vain, and because we are satisfied with the things of the senses, and because we are running after desires; therefore, we, as it were, cover the Reality with a mist.' Here the word Maya is not used at all, but we get the idea that the cause of our ignorance is a kind of mist that has come between us and the Truth. Much later on, in one of the latest Upanishads, we find the word Maya reappearing, but this time, a transformation has taken place in it, and a mass of new meaning has attached itself to the word. Theories had been propounded and repeated, others had been taken up, until at last the idea of Maya became fixed. We read in the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 'Know nature to be Maya and the Ruler of this Maya is the Lord Himself.' Coming to our philosophers, we find that this word Maya has been manipulated in various fashions, until we come to the great Shankaracharya. The theory of Maya was manipulated a little by the Buddhists too, but in the hands of the Buddhists it became very much like what is called Idealism, and that is the meaning that is now generally given to the word Maya. When the Hindu says the world is Maya, at once people get the idea that the world is an illusion. This interpretation has some basis, as coming through the Buddhistic philosophers, because there was one section of

philosophers who did not believe in the external world at all. But the Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form, is neither Idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory. It is a simple statement of facts—what we are and what we see around us.[5]

Hopefully, we shall be in a better position to appreciate his statement at the end of the present essay.

There are certain dimensions associated with the word 'maya': power, inscrutable, mysterious, magical, deception, and pretense. All these connotations have endured over time and have been invoked in different contexts. Let us take a look at the etymology of the word.[6] Prabhu Dutt Shastri writes: 'The word 'Maya' is derived from √mā, to measure—"mīyate anayā iti", i.e., by which is measured, meaning thereby, as tradition has it, that illusive projection of the world by which the immeasurable Brahman appears as if measured. The same root gives further the sense of "to build", leading to the idea of "appearance" or illusion. Sāyaṇa, in his commentary on R.V. [Rig Veda] i. II. 7, too derives the word from "*māḍḍ* māne" (i.e., √mā, to measure).[7] Furthermore: 'Another way to derive it would be "māti (svātmānam) darśayati iti māyā", i.e., "that which shows itself—that which appears to our view (without having any real existence)". This will be from √mā, to show. Hence, the conception of māyā as the causal will power (icchā-śakti or prajñā) may be derived from √mā, to know; and, as the effectual state of the world as illusion, from √mā, to measure, to build, etc.' (30).

Maya in the Vedas

The central debate about the concept of 'maya' in the Vedic texts is whether it means the same thing as what it came to mean when the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta was fully developed at the hands of Acharya Gaudapada and Acharya

Shankara. Opinions on this issue are divided. Simply put, some scholars differentiate strictly between the meaning of the concept as found in the Vedas and as found in later Vedantic philosophy, while others consider the meaning of the term in the Vedic and the later Vedantic contexts to be identical. According to Jan Gonda: 'Both views pronounced by many of our predecessors, viz. that according to which Vedism and Hinduism attached different values to the term *māyā-*, and the "Vedantist theory" according to which the sense of "deceptive appearance, unreality, illusion, magic" is also to be attributed to the relevant passages of the earlier Indian literature, are equally inadequate.' However, 'this term while expressing fundamentally the same sense from the earliest texts to the later periods of Hinduism was in the course of time applied in different connections, used in various religious, philosophical and profane contexts, attributed to different owners, bearers or wielders, that its sense and range of application was deepened, extended and specialized'.[8] We shall be able to judge the issue for ourselves perhaps at the end of the essay. Let us first examine the usage of the term in the Vedas.

The word 'maya' appears in about seventy-five hymns in the Rig Veda in its simple and compound forms. In these hymns, twenty-four times, it occurs in the nominative and accusative form *mayah*. The other forms in which the word occurs are: *mayaya, mayinah, mayabhih, mayinam, maya, mayam, mayi, mayinam, mayini, mayina, mayavina, mayavan, mayavinam*, and *mayavinah*. Of the seventy-five hymns, thirty-five are addressed to Indra, eight to Agni, four to the Ashvins as well as the Maruts, three to Vishve-devah, two to Varuna, two to Soma, two to Mitra-Varuna, two to Dyava-Prithvi, and one each to Ushas, Sarasvati, the Adityas, Pushan, Atri, Jnanam, the Ribhus, Indra-Varuna,

Soma-Arka, Mayabheda, Indravishnu, Prajapati-Vaishvamitra, and Surya-Vaishvanara.[9]

The word does not occur so often in the Yajur and the Sama Vedas, which are basically an adaptation of many mantras of the Rig Veda along with the addition of some new mantras. The word occurs about twenty times, spread over sixteen hymns, in the Atharva Veda. However, its usage in this text is of great import. We shall come to this shortly.

In the Rig Veda, the word 'maya' is not used in the same sense everywhere. The *Nighantu*, an early collection of Vedic homonyms, mentions 'maya' as one of the eleven names of *prajna*, intelligence. Yaska, in his *Nirukta*, mentions the same meaning for 'maya', *prajna*. Shastri points out:

> As a rule, following Yāska, Sāyaṇa in most cases gives the meaning *prajñā*—i.e., energy, mental power as distinguished from physical—but he is not always definite; in fact, he could not be so. … Tradition—as preserved in Sāyaṇa's commentary—tells us that the two meanings *prajñā* and *kapaṭa* are the most common, and sometimes run parallel. For instance, even in the very first hymn (R.V. i. II. 7), in which the word appears as *māyābhiḥ* (and *māyinam*), Sāyaṇa seems to waver between these two meanings, and leaves the reader to make his own choice (8–9).

As mentioned, 'maya' is not used in the same sense throughout in the Rig Veda. There are some marginal meanings as well. For instance, in 5.31.7, the word means 'a young woman', and according to Shastri, this meaning is unconnected with the predominant meanings of the term. However, Shastri argues that the two chief meanings attributed to the word in the text are 'power', *prajna*, literally knowledge, and 'deception', *kapata* or *vanchana*. He further argues that wherever the word stands for power, the idea of mystery necessarily accompanies it; the word is always used in the sense of a mysterious power of the will.

In the Rig Veda, the term is often used in connection with the marvels of nature, including the appearance of daylight and the creation of the world. Mitra and Varuna are said to cause the sky to rain by their maya. Maya is different from the power of ordinary men; it is a kind of 'incomprehensible ability'. What maya can produce is incredible. In this sense, it may not always be real. The term is often used in connection with a god's ability to transform his external appearance. Thus, it is by virtue of his maya that Indra can assume any form. In the Atharva Veda, we find that the possession of maya or this incomprehensible ability is especially attributed to the asuras. The Jaiminiya Brahmana recounts the story of two asuras who possessed such great maya that they were able to cook rice on 'non-fire'.

Gonda notes that in the Vedic literature, the concept of 'maya' as power was a neutral concept. It is not that it had an obligatory negative connotation associated with it. In order to specify the good or bad nature of the usage of 'maya', further qualifications were required: the Maruts bring rain and are benefactors of humankind; hence, they are *su*-maya, that is, 'of good maya'. Malicious beings moving through the air are *durmayu*, that is, they use bad maya. Gonda further notes: 'In the Atharvaveda, the association between asuras and māyā has not yet completely assumed the character of a union of powers antagonistic to the interests of men and the devas who champion their cause. ... But the more the asuras were believed to be 'powers of darkness' the more māyā—though essentially coming within the above definition—was by the authors of the brāhmaṇas viewed in a special light.'[10]

The word 'maya' occurs in different forms in the Shatapatha Brahmana, where it means a kind of wondrous power. Here, Sayana explains 'maya' as *aghatita-ghatana-shaktih*,[11] that is, the power to make the impossible happen. It is

Sri Ramakrishna's Painting by Swami Tadatmananda

worth noting here that in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, Swami Saradananda records Sri Ramakrishna's interactions with Tota Puri and mentions the latter's characterisation of 'maya' as *aghatanaghatanapatiyasi*, that is, 'one who is adept at making the impossible happen.'[12]

The Atharva Veda represents a different state of society from that of the Rig Veda. According to Shastri, the mysterious or magical element of the power that is maya is emphasised even more in the Atharva Veda. Unlike as in the Rig Veda, the sense in which the word is used in the Atharva Veda is very clear and there can be no doubt about it—it is used throughout to mean magic or illusion. According to Gonda:

> The "mystic" text AV. 10, 8, 34 seems to furnish us with a starting-point for the "special" sense of the term under consideration in later Indian philosophy. Making an attempt to elucidate the relation between the One that is the All and creatures, whether gods or men, the poet resorts

to two images: the creatures rest and originate in the concealed 'centre' of the universe which also is represented as a lotus flower, the roots of which remain hidden in the waters, whereas its stalks spread in the visible world. But if, the poet observes, we would like to ask whence this situation has arisen, the answer must be: māyā.[13]

Maya in the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* contains an important reference to maya: 'The Atman transformed itself in accordance with each form … That form of the Atman was for the sake of making the Atman known. … The Lord on account of maya … is perceived as manifold.'[14] In the *Prashna Upanishad*, the reference to maya is of a different kind: 'The *brahmaloka* is meant for those who are without crookedness, falsehood and maya', understood in this context as pretence.[15]

Then the famous reference to maya appears in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*: 'The ruler of maya [*mayi*] projects this world. And because of maya, it becomes bound in it as a separate entity, as it were. One should know that Nature [*prakriti*] is surely maya, and the supreme Lord [*maheshvara*] is the ruler of maya [*mayinam*].'[16] Also in another mantra, there is a minor reference to maya: 'The one Deity rules the mutable and the soul. And from the repeated meditation on the Self, union with and contemplation on Reality, there comes about, at the end, the cessation of maya in the form of the universe [*vishvamayanivritti*]' (1.10). The word *vishvamaya* here means *jagatprapancha*, the universe.

We, thus, see that the word 'maya' is a polysemic term, which was the norm with most Sanskrit words. Different meanings of the word coexist, albeit these meanings are related—in an ordinary context it means pretence, while when spoken of in the context of Brahman or *ishvara*, it means power and the factor that is responsible for the appearance of manifoldness. We further see that as early as the time of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, it was already conceived that the singular Reality, *Brahman*, appears as manifold on account of maya. One might argue that there is a continuity of idea from the Vedic times in the sense of maya being inscrutable power, producing incredible things, and more subtly, that power, which is responsible for producing a different and non-real form.

We see that in the Vedas, maya was the special power of the devas and the asuras to do incredible things; while in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, maya is the power of the supreme Lord and is also equated with prakriti. Gonda is of the opinion that the use of the terms 'maya' and *mayin* in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* that eventually developed into the well-known later philosophical concept of maya is essentially same as the usage found in the oldest Vedic texts.[17] He further points out that the later Upanishads too express the same view about maya as the power of the Lord. In the *Nrisimha-tapaniya Upanishad*, for instance, maya is no other than the power of Nrisimha. The term 'maya' in fact appears in several other minor and later Upanishads.[18]

Gonda further argues:

In contradistinction to the opinions advanced by other scholars, I would defend the thesis that the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad—which chronologically comes after the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, but before the Bhagavadgītā—represents a stage of development in Indian thought, in which the germs which had come up in the preceding period and from which the various philosophical view or metaphysical doctrines of the generations to come were to develop, had already reached the first stage of growth without differentiating in any considerable degree.[19]

And, 'this māyā is … no formula to express the unreality of the world. It only expresses the

impossibility of man's understanding its character and the power of its creator' (171).

We next come to the Gita, whose references to maya are well-known. Sri Krishna says that though he is unborn and eternal and is the Lord of all beings, by being established in his own prakriti, he accepts birth through his own maya.[20] Sri Krishna describes his maya as divine, *daivi*, consisting of the gunas, and hard to overcome; only those who take refuge in him can cross over this maya (7.14). And in the next verse, he says that the evil-doers, who are deprived of knowledge by maya, follow the way of the asuras and do not worship him (7.15). Finally, he makes the famous declaration: 'The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, and by the Lord's maya causes them to revolve as though mounted on a machine' (18.61). In the Gita, once again, we see that it is maya that is responsible for making the impossible possible—the supreme Lord who is without birth and death, appears as a human being of flesh and blood through maya. Maya is a property of the Lord—it is the *Lord's* maya through which the Lord works; that is why maya is divine. Maya is difficult to overcome and obstructs right knowledge.

Maya According to Acharya Gaudapada

There is yet another debate regarding maya: some scholars argue that the later Vedantic concept of maya was not native to Vedic thought—it was either a complete innovation on the part of the Vedantic thinkers or 'an import from Buddhism'.[21] This is, once again, an extreme view. Acharya Gaudapada is known to have first formulated a kind of doctrine of *mayavada* in Vedanta, and it is true he had his share of Buddhist influences. The debate whether Acharya Gaudapada was a covert Buddhist or not is outside the purview of this article.[22] For

Acharya Gaudapada

our purposes, it is sufficient to note that while Acharya Gaudapada was influenced by the Buddhist doctrines of Madhyamika and Yogachara, the paramount difference between Vedanta and Buddhism remained that Buddhism did not talk about the Atman, which is an Upanishadic teaching and which Acharya Gaudapada upholds. In fact, while on many points, Acharya Gaudapada agrees with Mahayana thinkers, on many other points, he criticises their philosophy and attempts to show how Vedanta offers a more sound and better understanding. Mahayana does liken the world to a dream, to maya, mirage, flash of lightning or froth. However, we shall see in the course of this essay that the Vedantic concept of maya evolved in a distinct way of its own.

Here, we shall discuss Acharya Gaudapada's doctrine of maya to see how the concept evolved in his philosophy. The word occurs in sixteen passages of his *Mandukya Karika*. Let us consider some prominent usages. By likening the world

to objects seen in a dream, Acharya Gaudapada gave Advaita Vedanta its characteristic flavour. It is in the context of this dream-like, apparent, and essentially non-real phenomenal world that we encounter an important usage of the word 'maya' in his work: '*Svapnamayasarupeti srishtir anyair vikalpita*; by others it is imagined that creation is comparable to dream or magic.'[23] Here, maya denotes that which does not exist in reality. Acharya Gaudapada also refers to maya as the beginning-less cosmic illusion, *anadimaya*, which, as if puts individual souls to sleep. Then, we have his famous statement: '*Mayamatram idam dvaitam advaitam paramarthatah*; all this duality that is nothing but maya, is but non-duality in reality' (1.17). That is, the multiplicity of this world is mere illusion and the ultimate reality is non-dual.

Now, how was this illusory appearance of the world brought about? Acharya Gaudapada says: 'The self-effulgent Self imagines itself through itself by the power of its own maya' (2.12). In other words, it is maya that causes the appearance of the non-existent world of multiplicity. That which is *sat*, ever-existent, can never be born. Its apparent birth is only intelligible through maya and not in reality. Without the concept of maya, there can be no doctrine of *ajatavada* or non-origination. T M P Mahadevan writes: 'Gauḍapāda employs several expressions to indicate the illusory nature of the world and its things: māyā, vaitathya, mithyā, kalpita, ābhāsa, viparyaya, saṁvṛti, etc. Māyā is that which is responsible for the world-illusion. It covers the real Self and projects the non-real world. To the one who has Brahman-intuition, however, māyā is that which is not' (149).

Thus, Acharya Gaudapada uses the term 'maya' in different senses. In the verse starting with the words '*mayamatram idam dvaitam*', the word 'maya' seems to mean mere appearance.

Again, Acharya Gaudapada also considers maya to be that force or factor that is responsible for creating the appearance of the phenomenal world. Thus, maya is both the false appearance of the phenomenal world as well as the power that is responsible for this appearance.

Maya According to Acharya Shankara

If the Ultimate Reality is One, how do we perceive multiplicity? Acharya Shankara gives the same answer as Acharya Gaudapada: through maya. In *Vivekachudamani*, Acharya Shankara describes *avidya* or maya as the power of the Lord, *paramesha-shakti*, as beginning-less, *anadi*, and made up of three gunas, *trigunatmika*. It is by maya that the phenomenal universe is produced. Maya can only be inferred from the effects it produces. Further, it is neither existent nor non-existent nor both. It is neither same nor different nor both; neither composed of parts nor an indivisible whole nor both. It is indescribable, *anirvachaniyarupa*. Just as the mistaken idea of a rope as a snake is removed by the discernment of the rope, similarly, maya is destroyed by the realisation of the pure one-without-out-a-second Brahman.[24]

Thus, maya is the power of the Lord; it is maya that creates the appearance of the phenomenal world; and it is indescribable. Maya has two aspects: one that obscures, *avarana*, the real Self—this is the rajasic element within maya, which is composed of three gunas, and the other that projects, *vikshepana*, the non-self—this is the tamasic element. Acharya Shankara says that the truth of the Self is hidden by maya (65).

Acharya Shankara seems to equate maya and *avidya* (108). There is a debate both within the Vedantic tradition and in the academia if maya and *avidya* are the same thing or are different. There is also a debate within post-Shankara Vedanta regarding the locus of *avidya*.

Chandradhar Sharma captures well Acharya Shankara's conception of maya:

> Māyā or Avidyā is not pure illusion. It is not only absence of knowledge. It is also positive wrong knowledge. It is a cross of the real and the unreal (satyānṛte mithuni kṛtya). In fact, it is indescribable. It is neither existent nor non-existent nor both. It is not existent for the existent is only the Brahman. It is not non-existent for it is responsible for the appearance of the Brahman as the world. It cannot be both existent and non-existent for this conception is self-contradictory. It is called neither real nor unreal (sadasadvilakṣana). It is false or mithyā. But it is not a non-entity like a hare's horn (tuchchha). It is positive (bhāvarūpa). It is potency (shakti). It is also called superimposition (adhyāsa). A shell is mistaken as silver. The shell is the ground on which the silver is superimposed. When right knowledge (pramā) arises, this error (bhrānti or bhrama) vanishes. The relation between the shell and the silver is neither that of identity nor of difference nor of both. It is unique and is known as non-difference (tādātmya). Similarly, Brahman is the ground on which the world appears through Māyā. When right knowledge dawns and the essential unity of the jīva with the Paramātman is realised, Māyā or Avidyā vanishes.[25]

Mayavada After Acharya Shankara

Post-Sankara Vedantins elaborated on the concept of maya (292–7). A principal debate among them was if maya and *avidya* are same or different. Most treat the two as same and distinguish between the two aspects of *avarana* and *vikshepana*. The adherents of the other school treat maya and *avidya* as distinct entities—the former being positive, absolutely dependent on and inseparable from Brahman, of which it is the shakti, while the latter is entirely negative and is defined as ignorance.

For Mandana Mishra, maya and *avidya* are

Acharya Shankara

same. According to him, *avidya* is maya and *mithyabhasa*, false appearance. Furthermore, there are two kinds of *avidya*—absence of knowledge, *agrahana*, and positive wrong knowledge, *anyathagrahana*. Another debate is regarding the locus of *avidya*. For Mandana and Vachaspati Mishra, the individual *jiva* is the locus of *avidya*, whereas for Acharya Sureshvara, Acharya Padmapada, and Prakashatman Yati, Brahman is the locus of *avidya*.

Mandana developed Acharya Shankara's description of maya as indescribable, *anirvachaniya*. According to Mandana, maya or *avidya* is neither the characteristic nature, *svabhava*, of Brahman nor an entity different, *arthantaram*, from Brahman. 'It is neither real (satī) nor absolutely unreal (atyantamasatī). If it is the

characteristic nature of something else, then whether it is identical with or different from it, it is a reality and cannot be called Avidyā. On the other hand, if it is absolutely unreal, then it is like the sky-lotus and can serve no practical purpose which in fact it does. It is therefore indescribable (Anirvachanīyā) as it can be described neither as existent nor as non-existent. And all philosophers in order to be consistent must necessarily accept it as such' (292).'

Vimuktatman also maintains that maya or *avidya* is neither identical with nor different from nor both identical with and different from Brahman. Acharya Padmapada says that *avidya* is a beginning-less, *anadi*, material, *jadatmika*, power *shakti*. For Shriharsha, *avidya* is positive, material, and indescribable as real or unreal. For Vidyaranya too, *avidya* is a beginning-less power, which is neither real nor unreal.

Conclusion

Thus, we see that the concept of maya is as elusive as maya itself! However, inferring from its usage, it is possible to discern the historical evolution of this concept in Hinduism. And on the basis of this historical examination, it is possible to argue that the *core* meaning of maya remained more or less the same through Vedic and Vedantic usage. We need to think about the way we understand the historical evolution of ideas. The Vedic concept of maya is certainly not identical to the Vedantic concept. However, we can see that the germ of the Vedantic concept was already present in its Vedic counterpart. What accrued later to the concept was its full-fledged philosophical dimensions. Gonda argues for the adoption of 'a 'central' or 'fundamental meaning' which underlies all uses of the term in Vedic, Vedantic, pre-, and non-Vedantic Hindu texts after a thorough philological examination of all relevant instances. And according to him, this central meaning is 'incomprehensible wisdom and power enabling its possessor, or being able itself, to create, devise, contrive, effect, or do something.'[26]

What was earlier the inscrutable and wondrous power of the devas became the inscrutable and wondrous power of Brahman itself, and thus evolved one of the concept-pillars of Advaita Vedanta. The final form of the concept as it developed at the hands of the Advaita Vedantins[27] has been beautifully described by Eliot Deutsch:

> In Brahman-experience (*nirvikalpa samādhi*), … there is the awareness … that 'anything beside Brahman lacks full reality'.
>
> It follows, then, that the existence of, or our perception of, an independent, substantial world of real objects, persons, and processes must be grounded in some pervasive error. We take the unreal for the real and the real for the unreal. This is *māyā*.
>
> Whenever the 'I', 'me', or 'mine' is present, according to Advaita, there also is *māyā*. …
>
> Whenever we transform the impersonal into the personal, that is, when we make Brahman something or someone who cares, we bring about an association of the impersonal with *māyā*. *Māyā* is the ontic-noetic state wherein limitations (*upādhis*) are imposed upon Reality.
>
> All attachments, aversions, fears, dreams, and semidreams are touched with *māyā*. All memories, cognitions, percepts, and logics are grounded in *māyā*. *Māyā* is whenever we fail to realise the oneness of the Real.
>
> And *māyā* is beginningless (*anādi*), for time arises only within it; it is unthinkable (*acintya*), for all thought is subject to it; it is indescribable (*anirvacaniya*), for all language results from it. The level of Appearance is thus *māyā*.[28]   ॐ

Notes and References

1. The subtitle of the article is inspired by the

discipline of *Begriffsgeschichte*—the history of concepts or conceptual history, which is of German origin and is a distinct genre of history of ideas with its own methods and set of problems (See Melvin Richter, 'Begriffsgeschichte and the History of Ideas', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48/2 (April-June 1987), 247–63). In contrast to its predecessor *Ideengeschichte*, history of ideas, *Begriffsgeschichte* attempts at relating concepts to their contexts. It is also different from the earlier philological analyses of the history of individual words. However, there has also been a trend of writing histories of philosophical terminology and philosophical problems, excluding their social history. Given the specific set of problems we encounter while relating the development of ideas to their context in the case of ancient Indian ideas, this essay will focus on the conceptual history of maya without delving into its context of social history.

2. Sheldon Pollock, 'Is There an Indian Intellectual History? Introduction to "Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History"', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 36/5–6 (October 2008), 534.

3. The issue of *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 36/5–6 (October 2008) was precisely an attempt at addressing the question of theories and methods in Indian intellectual history.

4. Prabhu Dutt Shastri, *The Doctrine of Māyā: In the Philosophy of the Vedānta* (London: Luzac, 1911), ix.

5. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.88–9.

6. For further details on etymology of maya, see Jan Gonda, *Four Studies in the Language of the Veda* (The Hague: Mouton, 1959).

7. *The Doctrine of Māyā*, 29.

8. Jan Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997), 165–6.

9. For details, see *The Doctrine of Māyā*, 6–8.

10. *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, 169.

11. *The Doctrine of Māyā*, 16.

12. Swami Saradananda, *Shrishriramakrishnalilaprasanga* (Bengali), 2 vols (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1960), 1.168.

13. *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, 169.

14. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.5.19.

15. *Prashna Upanishad*, I.16.

16. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 4.9–10.

17. See *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, 170.

18. For details, see *The Doctrine of Māyā*, 117–9.

19. *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, 170–1.

20. See Gita, 4.6.

21. As per Hermann Jacobi, the first person to argue that maya-*vada* is a Vedantic adaptation of Shunyavada was V A Sukhtankar (See Hermann Jacobi, 'On Mayavada', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 33/1 (January-March 1913), 51–4). However, this is in fact a very old argument. Bhaskara, the tenth-century Vedantin who upheld the *bhedabheda* view, was of the opinion that the doctrine of maya-*vada* arose due to the influence of Mahayana Buddhism (See Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 340). Again, Radhakrishnan cites the instance of *Padma Purana*, where Ishvara says to his wife, Parvati: 'I, myself, goddess, assuming the form of a Brahman, uttered in the Kali age the false doctrine of Maya, which is covert Buddhism, which imputes a perverted and generally censured signification to the words of the Veda and inculcates the abandonment of ceremonial works and an inactivity consequent on such cessation' (S Radhakrishnan, 'The Vedanta Philosophy and the Doctrine of Maya', *The International Journal of Ethics*, 24/4 (July 1914), 433).

22. Surendranath Dasgupta goes to the extent of claiming that Acharya Gaudapada was in fact a Buddhist and not a Vedantin. Swami Nikhilananda has systematically refuted his arguments with evidence. For details, see *The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), xii–xxii.

23. Acharya Gaudapada, Karika on *Mandukya Upanishad*, 1.7.

24. Acharya Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, 108-10.

25. *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, 252–3.

26. *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, 166.

27. Vedantins of other schools do not necessarily accept maya. Acharya Ramanuja, for instance, propounded his sevenfold objections, *saptavidha-anupapatti*, to the doctrine of maya.

28. Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1969), 28–9.