

The Vedānta Theory of Illusion

By

Debamitra Dey

Introduction:

The various schools of Indian philosophy have established their epistemological viewpoints from the perspective of their metaphysical standpoint. The theory of illusion is not an exception of this. We see that more or less, every school of Indian philosophy has set up their theory of error resting on their metaphysical position. If we critically analyze the nature of error according to these theories, then we will find that there are precisely two kinds of it, 1) existing and 2) non-existing. The theory of error is named as *khyāivāda* in the domain of Indian philosophy and the five divisions of it are mostly acknowledged. They are –*ātmakhyāti*, *asatkhyāti*, *akhyāti*, *anyathākhyāti* and *anirvacanīyakhyāti*. “*ātmakhyātirasatkhyātirakhyātib khyātiranyathā/ tathā anirvacanakhyātirityetat khyātipañcakam.*”¹ If we critically examine these five according to the nature of error, then we can include *ātmakhyāti*, *akhyāti* and *anyathākhyāti* in a particular category, i.e. *satkhyāti* because the followers of these theories admit error as an existing one. The theory of *asatkhyāti* will be considered as the second one. We have to remember that the *Sāmkhya* system has accepted *sadasatkhyātivāda* which means that the error is both existing and non-existing. In this condition, the *Vedāntins* or to say it correctly, the *Advaitavedāntins* have admitted a fourth category of error and that is *anirvacanīya khyāti*. In this paper an effort will be made to present the views of the *Advaita* and *Viśiṣṭādvaita* school in this regard. The theory of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita* school is known as *Yathārthakhyātivāda*. In the following sections we will show two most regarded views of one of the significant system of Indian philosophy, *Vedānta*.

I.

Advaita Theory of Illusion:

In *Advaita* school of philosophy, *Brahman* is acknowledged both as the material and efficient cause. Due to the attachment with *māyā* or *avidyā*, the qualified *Brahman* creates this world and universe. Though this *māyā* or *avidyā*'s existence is not absolute real but as the magic of a magician seems to be real to the spectators, the creations of *māyā* i.e. the world seems to us as real. The *advaitins* have accepted that the reality of an existent object should be determined by non-contradiction. The *Brahma*

is never contradicted either in past or present or future. So the existence of it is absolute real and for this, it is stated as *pāramārthika sat*. They say that what is absolutely non-existent should be considered as non-real or *asat*, such as sky flower. These two, *sat* and *asat* cannot exist in a same locus as they are contrary by nature. Further, the *Advaitins* have categorized the existence or *sattā* into three categories. Brahma is stated as *pāramārthika sat* or absolute real, the world perceived by us is titled as *vyavahārika sat* or pragmatically real and the nacre-silver or rope-snake illusion is mentioned as *prātibhāsika sat* or apparently real.

To institute their metaphysical theory, the *Advaitins* have put great respect following the footsteps of the great Śamkarācārya in their own theory of error, *anirvacanīyakhyāti*. Many scholars have opined that apart from the three categories, the *Advaitins* have acknowledged another fourth category of existence, i.e. *anirvacanīya*.² But to say it profusely, the *advaitins* have used the term to explain the characteristics of this world which is neither real nor unreal. The synonym of *anirvacanīya* is *mithyā*. Due to the ignorance, people assume this world as real. Such as, the soul is completely different from unconscious objects, our body, mind, senses etc. Still, as an effect of our ignorance, we forget the distinction between the real, luminous, conscious self and the unreal objects. As a result of this, we say that 'I am thin', 'I am blind', 'I am happy', 'this is my house' etc. To support this theory, Śamkara has said in his famous *Adhyāśabhāṣya* that "*mithyājñānananimittat satyanṛte mithunīkṛtya ahamidam mamedamiti jāyate naisargiko lokavyavahārah*".³ It denotes that it is the natural behaviour that though the conscious and unconscious and their respective properties are absolutely different from each other. But due to our unawareness, we impose one's property on another. The *Advaitins* opine that this ignorance is without any beginning or origin and it will exist as long the knowledge of Brahma does not arise.

It is the view of the *Advaitins* that the world is illusory and is actually imposed on Brahman. They have expounded it with a common example of illusion, i.e. nacre silver illusion; Śamkarācārya has used the term '*adhyāsa*' to denote illusion. Now to define the term '*adhyāsa*', Śamkara has given the definition of it in his *adhyāśabhāṣya*, '*smṛtirūpāh paratra pūrvadṛṣṭāvabhāsa*'.⁴ Here *adhyāsa* means *ababhāsa* or manifestation. It is an illusion or false cognition of an object cognized in the past in another object cognized later. We see that memory forms due to past cognition and similarly here also *adhyāsa* occurs due to past knowledge.

The renowned scholar Vācaspati Mīśra has clarified the meaning in his famous commentary *Bhāmatī* in an intricate way. He says that, "*avasannoavamato vā bhāsa*

avabhāsaḥ. Pratyayānataravādhaścāsyāvasādoavamāno vā".⁵ In the term 'avabhāsa', the prefix 'ava' means exhaustion or dishonor. According to *Vedāntakalpataru*, the term 'avasāda' in *Bhāmātī* means refutation. The repudiation by the later cognition of the former one is meant by 'avasāda'. 'Avamāna' was clarified as 'yaukītakatiraskāra'.⁶ The *Kalpataruparimāla* has interpreted the term as 'yaukīkatiraskāra icchāpravṛttyadikāryakṣamatvapādānam'.⁷ We can understand it clearly with the example of nacre-silver illusion. In that illusion, a person takes the initiative to have the nacre thinking it as silver, but actually the silver has no utility in real life. So when the illusion of the silver in nacre is refuted then the illusory silver loses its all power to make a person allured. Thus the falsity of cognition or the cognized object is denoted by the term 'avabhāsa'. In this way, the general definition of *adhyāsa* is presented.

Śamkarācārya has founded the theory of *adhyāsa* only to state that this empirical world is actually imposed on *Brahman*. By the definition of *adhyāsa*, the falsity of an illusory object is mentioned. In the nacre-silver illusion, the locus of the illusory silver is nacre. Similarly, *Brahman* is the locus of this illusory world. It can be inferred from the instance of nacre-silver solution that as the illusory silver, this illusory world is nothing but a false one. Though the realists and the materialists do not accept the world as illusory or false but they also admit the cases of illusion, such as nacre-silver, snake-rope etc.

Contextually we would like to analyze the term 'avabhāsa' here. The root or *dhātu* of the word *avabhāsa* is 'bhās' (to expose) and the suffix is 'ghañ'. If the suffix is accepted in *bhāvavācya* or intransitive passive voice, then the term 'bhāsa' means cognition (*jñāna*). But if it is accepted in *karmavācya* or transitive passive voice, then the term will mean cognized object. (*jñeya*).⁸ So by the term *avabhāsa*, both the cognition and the cognized object are expressed. Vācaspati Miśra, the author of *Bhāmātī*, opines that if the term 'avabhāsa' was used simply as a synonym of *adhyāsa*, then it will not be proper as the term is often taken as the exposition of a real object of empirical world. Such as the exposition of blue colour in a blue object. "Avabhāsapadamca samīcīneapi pratyaye prasiddham. Yathā nilasyāvabhāsaḥ, pītasyāvabhāsa ityata āha smṛtirūpa iti."⁹ So if we use the term *avabhāsa* only as the synonym or definition of *adhyāsa*, then there will be an over-pervasion to real objects of empirical word.

Contextually if we critically examine the definition of *adhyāsa*, then we have to analyze other terms of that definition. Now, let us discuss the term *pūrvadr̥ṣṭa*. Here, in the part 'dr̥ṣṭa', the root is dr̥ś (to see) and the suffix is 'kta'. If the suffix is used here in *bhāvavācya* or intransitive passive voice, then the meaning will be previous cognition

and if it is used in *karmavācya* or transitive passive voice then it will mean the cognized object of the past. So finally the term ‘*pūrvadr̥ṣṭāvabhāsaḥ*’ also denote two types of meaning. The first one will be the exposition of a similar cognition of a previous one and the second will be the exposition of a similar object of a previously cognized thing.¹⁰

The other two terms, i.e. *smṛtirūpaḥ* and *paratra* have their own significances in the definition. The addition of these two qualifiers denotes that the cognized object and its cognition need not to be real. Otherwise, by the term *smṛtirūpaḥ*, the essence was presented and thus there will be repetition by the usage of the term *pūrvadr̥ṣṭa*. The reason is if an object is not cognized in the past then its recollection will never be happened. So it is better to state that it is not necessary for the past-cognized object and its cognition to be real. The term ‘*paratra*’ means the locus as well as its conditional existence also. Here, by the term *smṛtirūpa*, it is quite obvious that *adhyāsa* or illusion is not similar with recollection. Moreover neither recognition nor remembrance is on par with illusion i.e. *adhyāsa*. Because, when a person or a thing cognized in the past becomes again the object of present perception, then the recognition happens. But it never happens in an illusion since here the object which was cognized in the past never exists in the present. The cognition of the present existence of the past-cognized object in illusion is nothing but an erroneous one. The difference between the recollection and *adhyāsa* is that the object of recollection never exists in present but in *adhyāsa*, the past-cognized object seems to be present before. So, in the definition of *adhyāsa*, it is mentioned very clearly that *adhyāsa* is alike with remembrance but by its own nature it is never a form of it.

Scholars of *Advaita –vedānta* school have categorized *adhyāsa* in various way. Firstly it was categorized into *arthādhyāsa* and *jñānādhyāsa*. When the imposition of an object happens then it is stated as *arthādhyāsa* and when the cognition of it occurs then it is called *jñānādhyāsa*. In nacre-silver illusion, not only the imposition of silver happens but the imposition of the silver’s cognition also takes place which is mentioned just before as *jnanadhyāsa*. We have seen that both *jñānādhyāsa* and *arthādhyāsa* occurs at a same time. It is not possible the occurrence of *jñānādhyāsa* without the happening of *arthādhyāsa* and vice-versa. If these two occurs at a same time then it can be titled as *adhyāsa*.¹¹

There is another division of *adhyāsa* on the basis of conditional property (*upādhi*). This division is also two-folded, *sopādhika adhyāsa* (imposition with conditional property) and *nirupādhika adhyāsa* (imposition without any conditional

property). When a red colored hibiscus flower is kept behind a crystal, then the red colour is imposed on the crystal and as a result, the crystal seems as red. Hence the imposition of a conditional property happens here; it is stated as *sopādhika adhyāsa*. But in nacre-silver illusion, the silver itself is imposed in nacre, not any of its properties. So this kind of *adhyāsa* is called as *nirupādhika adhyāsa*. Again it can be classified into two classes from another perspective. These two classes are imposition of the locus (*dharmī-adhyāsa*) and imposition of the property (*dharmā-adhyāsa*). If we properly compare these two along with another two discussed just before, we will find that *sopādhika adhyāsa* is nothing but *dharmā-adhyāsa* whereas *nirupādhika adhyāsa* and *dharmī-adhyāsa* are same. We have seen that in nacre-silver illusion, the silver i.e. the locus is imposed. Similarly, when the imposition of the body on the soul happens, then actually the properties of body (such as *kartṛtva*, *bhokṛtva* etc.) are imposed on soul. So it is generally perceived that if the imposition of the locus does not happen then the imposition of its properties also do not happen. But we see some exceptional places where in spite of the locus's imposition, the imposition of the properties happen, such as blindness, deafness etc. Here deafness and blindness are properties and the locus is the senses. If it is said that 'I am blind', then the imposition of the dharma happens but not that of the *dharmī*. Apart from the *dharmā-adhyāsa* and *dharmī-adhyāsa*, another third type is also accepted and that is *samvādhādhyāsa* (imposition of relation) because when we say that 'my body', then this kind of imposition is acknowledged.¹²

The *adhyāsa* can be over again classified into two more classes, *kāraṇādhyāsa* and *kāryādhyāsa*. If an error becomes the cause of another error then the former one will be stated as *kāraṇādhyāsa* and the effect of it will be treated as *kāryādhyāsa*. When this particular effect will be the cause of another, then this one also will be treated as *kāraṇādhyāsa*. In nacre-silver illusion, the nacre is *kāraṇādhyāsa* whereas the silver is *kāryādhyāsa*. But from the perspective of absolute reality, this nacre is illusory in comparison with *Brahman*. So then the nacre will be treated as *kāryādhyāsa*. Thus we see that an object which is *kāraṇādhyāsa* in an illusory (*prātibhāsikā*) state that becomes *kāryādhyāsa* in an empirical state. But it is noteworthy that a particular object cannot be *kāraṇādhyāsa* and *kāryādhyāsa* at a same time. The *Advaitins* put an example that hence *ajñāna* is a positive thing it can never be *kāryādhyāsa* (imposition of effect) as the effect must be originated from something. But *ajñāna* is not originated from anything, so it will never be *kāryādhyāsa*. Factually, the imposition of *ajñāna* in *Brahman* is only *kāraṇādhyāsa* and all the other impositions are *kāryādhyāsa* from the perspective of absolute reality.¹³

According to the *Advaita* view, the imposition or *adhyāsa* happens only of a cognized object which is different from the real existing one. They also admit that the imposed object is basically illusory but the apprehension of it occurs directly. But they say that this direct cognition does not happen by our senses and they call it ‘*sākṣibhāṣya*’. We find that to determine the nature and the characteristics of *adhyāsa*, the scholars of various schools of Indian philosophy have expressed their views and these views are regarded in the periphery of Indian philosophy as *khyātivāda*. In the following section of our discussion we will present refutation of *khyātivāda* of other systems by the *Advaitins* and establishment of their own theory, i.e. *anirvacanīyakhyātivāda*.

Refutation of *Asatkhyātivāda*:

It is known to all who are familiar with Indian philosophy that more than three hundred years after the death of Gautama Buddha, the followers of him were divided into four schools due to the difference in their philosophical point of view. They are, the *Sautrāntika* school, the *Mādhyamika* school, the *Yogācāra* school and the *Vaiśiṣṭika* school. Scholars opine that one particular saying of Gautama Buddha acted as the root-cause behind this division. That particular saying is, “*sarvam kṣaṇikam kṣaṇikam duḥkham duḥkham svalakṣaṇam svalakṣaṇam śūnyam śūnyam*”.¹⁴ Actually each school has tried to interpret this statement from their own perspective and thus the division was made.

The founder of *Mādhyamika* school was the famous philosopher Nāgārjuna. The followers of him admit that ‘*sarvam śūnyam*’ this particular part of the above saying. Here ‘*śūnya*’ means absolute unreal whose existence is not at all possible. But the question is if everything is absolutely non-existence in their view, then how the cognition of this world can be explained? In reply, they say that all these cognitions are *sāmvṛtik* sat. The term *sāmvṛt* means *avidyā* or false cognition which is existent without any source of origination. Due to this *avidyā*, the world seems to us as real. Similarly in nacre-silver illusion also, the silver seems to us as real which is absolutely non-existent by nature. According to *śūnyavādin*, everything is non-existent, so the cognition, cognized object and the cognizer are also non-existent. They say that when we have the illusion that ‘this is silver’ then the locus nacre is not absolute real as it cannot avoid its destruction. If the nacre is false, then the imposition of the silver is also false and the person having the cognition is also false. If anything has no existence at all, then everything remains in *śūnyatā*. Finally they say everything is non-

existent, so in case of illusion a non-existent's (*asat*) cognition happens. This theory is stated as *asatkhyātivāda*.

According to *asatkhyātivādin* due to *avidyā*, we have the cognition of even an absolute non-existent object. To repudiate this one, it can be asked that do they accept the existence of *avidyā* or not? If the answer is a positive one then the theory that 'everything is non-existent' will be a futile one. But if it is admitted as an absolute non-existent one then it should not have any kind of causal efficacy. If it has no ability to produce effect, then it will not be able to present the world as real also. Factually, whatever is objectified in cognition, nacre or silver, cannot be discarded as an absolute non-existent. It is cognized by everyone that in error, the cognition happens in a direct way but what is absolutely non-existent by its own nature (such as sky-flower etc.) cannot be cognized directly. So be it a piece of real silver or illusory silver in nacre, both should be considered as real since in both cases, the cognition occurs in a clear, direct way. In this way *asatkhyātivāda* can be refuted.¹⁵

Refutation of *Ātmakhyātivāda*:

According to the *Vijñānavādin*, the existence of external object is not real. They only admit the existence of momentary cognition (*keṣaṇīkavijñāna*) and opine that the continuous flow of this momentary cognition (*keṣaṇīkavijñānapravāha* or *ālayavijñānapravāha*) is *ātmā*. Therefore, the existence of *ātmā* or *ālayavijñānapravāha* is also acknowledged. It is their view that cognition is not dependent on the existence of external object. On the contrary it gives a particular form to the object. So there is no external object apart from the cognition. So whatever is exposed in an error, such as silver etc. is nothing but the particular forms of cognition. In nacre-silver illusion, the erroneous silver is also a distinct form of the *ālayavijñāna*, i.e. *ātmā* which is exposed externally as an external object. For this reason they call it as *ātmakhyāti*.

Moreover, the *vijñānavādin* says that as the real silver is also a particular form of *ālayavijñāna* (*ātmā*), the illusory silver is also that. They put their arguments in this way that it is seen to all that among the external objects, only those objects' cognition happens directly which are attached with sense-organs. The external objects which are not in contact with the sense-organs, their cognition do not happen in a direct way. In nacre-silver illusion, the cognition of the silver happens directly but it is not attached with the sense organs. Therefore, we have to admit that this illusory silver is a form of cognition since only cognition can be produced directly without the attachment of the sense-organs. In *Bhāmātī*, Vācaspatimīśra comments that "*sautrāntikanāye tāvat vāhyam*

asti vastu sat, tatra jñānākārasya āropah. Vijñānavādinām api yadyapi na vāhyam vastusat, tathāpi anādyavidyāvāsanāropitam alīkam vāhyam, tatra jñānākārasya āropah.”¹⁶

Regarding the theory of *ātmakhyātivāda*, Śamkarācārya comments in *Adhyāśabbhāṣya* “*anyatrānyadharmādhyāśah*”.¹⁷ Here the term *anyatra* denotes the external nacre and by another term *anyadharmā*, the imposition of the property of *ātmā*, i.e. *rajata* is meant. *Vijñānavādin* opines that apart from internal cognition, no external cognized object is real. Besides this they also state that whatever external object seems to us as existent, that is not true as those cognized object is illusory and only form of cognition. After the erroneous cognition in nacre that ‘this is silver’, another contradictory knowledge arises that ‘this is not silver’. Now the question is what will be contradicted here, the term ‘this-ness’ (*idamtā*) or ‘silver’ (*rajatam*)? Here the silver is the locus and ‘this-ness’ (*idamtā*) is its property. If the locus silver is prohibited then automatically its property will be prohibited too. So here the locus is prohibited, not the property. We have to understand that here the prohibition of silver is not intended; only the exposition that ‘this is silver’ is contradicted. Thus if the exposition of the silver as an externally presented object is acknowledged, then we have to admit that the silver is not at all an external object but a particular appearance of cognition. The Bhamatikara has stated it beautifully, “*rajatasya dharminah vādhe hi rajatam ca tasya ca dharmah idamtā vādhite bhavetām, tad varam idamtā eva asya dharmah vadhyatām, na punah rajatam api dharmī. Tatha ca rajatam bahirvādhitam arthāt antare jñāne vyavatisthate iti jñānākārasya bahih adhyāśah siddhati*”.¹⁸

According to *Vijñānavādin*’s view, the silver was accepted as a form or appearance of cognition but to refute this theory, it can be asked further that how it would be possible at all? If it was an appearance of cognition, i.e. *ātmā*(as they accept it) then the cognition will be formed like ‘I am silver’ but not like ‘this is silver’. The Bhāmatikāra says “... *sa hi idamkārāspadam rajatam avedayati, na tu āntaram, abam iti hi tadā syāt, pratipattubh pratyayāt avyāyirekāt. Bhrāntam vijñānam svākāram eva bāhyataya adhyavasati. Tathā ca na abamkārāspadam asya gocarah.*”¹⁹ When the erroneous cognition ‘this is silver’ (*idam rajatam*) is contradicted by a following cognition that ‘this is not silver’ (*nedam rajatam*), then only this apprehension occurs that the silver is not present before or to say it precisely, the property ‘this-ness’ is only contradicted. But by the objection of the silver’s externality, it is not proved that the silver is a form of internal cognition. The silver may be contracted as ‘this’ but that does not prove that it is not existent in some other place. So the arguments used by the Buddhist scholars is nothing but ineffective. Here again we may quote the comments of Bhāmatikāra, “*purovartitvapratīṣedhāt arthāt asya jñānākāratā iti cet? Na. asannidhānāgrahaniṣedhāt*

*asannibhito bhavati pratipattub,atyantasannidhānam tu asya pratipattrātmakam kutastyam?”*²⁰
We may add that the Bhāmatīkāra here has adopted the stand of the *Prābhākaras* to say the opposite to the theory of the Buddhist.

Additionally it can be said that there is no logical reasoning behind the formation of that erroneous silver according to *Ātmakhyātivāda*. We cannot say that in nacre-silver illusion, the silver is not at all produced hence if it was so, then its direct cognition will never happen. So we have to admit its origination. But a question may be asked that what is the source of its origination? Is it originated from external object or from internal cognition? The former option is not admissible as the *Vijñānavādin* denies the existence of external object. The second choice is also not acceptable. The *Vijñānavādin* accept cognition as momentary and opine that ‘*ātma*’ or *ālayavijñāna* is a continuous flow of momentary cognition. If an object is existent only for a moment and at the next moment it is destroyed, then it will not be able to produce any effect.

In addition it can also be stated that the cognized silver cannot be accepted as a form of cognition. Because in that case it will be asked that whether that cognized silver is different from the cognition or not? If it is answered that it is identical with it then it should be considered as absurd hence an object cannot be accepted by itself. However, if we admit it as a different one from the cognition that will be also incorrect as the cognition is the producer of that illusory silver. But again the contradiction is that the object of the cognition must be presented before, otherwise the cognition will not take place. However the *Ātmakhyātivādin* insist that here the cognition will be existent before the object and if it is acknowledged then it cannot be said that the illusory silver will be expressed by the same cognition. In this way the theory of the *Vijñānavādin* was refuted.

Refutation of *Akhyātivāda*:

We have stated it before that Śamkarācārya and his followers have adopted the theory of the *Prābhākara* to repudiate the theory of the Buddhists. But like a true logician he has further refuted that also to establish his own view. For that purpose, he has presented the *Prābhākara* theory first and then refutes it. In *Śamkarabhāṣya*, the definition of *Adhyāsa* of the *Prābhākara* is stated as “*yatra yadadhyāsastadvivekāgrahanibandhano bhrama it?*”²¹ By this statement it is denoted that whenever the imposition of a particular object in another one occurs, then there exist difference between the cognition of those objects but as the difference is not acknowledged, the error forms.

The *Prābhākara* does not accept erroneous cognition. It is their opinion that all cognition is valid or true, “*sarvam jñānam samīcīnam āstheyam*” (*Bhāmātī*).²² They say that in nacre-silver illusion, there are difference between the nacre and the silver. But in case of illusion, the cognizer forgets the difference of these two and assume them as a single one. They clarify it by saying that there are actually two types of cognition in this erroneous cognition ‘this is silver’. Here the term ‘this’ denotes the perception while the term ‘silver’ means the recollection of the past- cognized silver. These two cognitions are very much true by own nature. But due to the faults of the sense-organs, the distinction of these two remains unaccepted and as a result of this illusion appears. In *Bhāmātī* it is commented “*tathā ca rajatam idam iti ca dve vijñāne smṛtyanubhavarūpe, tatra idam iti purovarttidravayamātragrahaṇam, doṣavaśāt tadgataśukitvasāmānyaviśeṣasya agrahāt, tanmātram ca grhītam sadṛśatayā samskārodvodhakramena rajate smṛtim janayati.*”²³ When the difference of these two is acknowledged to the cognizer, then his initiative to fetch that illusory silver is restricted. The *Prābhākara* opines that if the cognition becomes contradictory to its own object then we cannot depend on any kind of cognition. In *Bhāmātī* it is mentioned by this statement “*api ca svagocaravyabhicāre vijñānānām sarvatra anāśvāsaprasaṅgaḥ*”.²⁴ As a proof of this an inference was also presented there like this, “*yathārthah sarve vipratīpannah, sandehavibhramāḥ pratyayatvāt ghatādīpratyayavat.*”²⁵ It is the essence of this line that since all cognition is valid, so an error is also a valid one, such as the cognition of a pot.

To invalidate this theory it is stated that the illusory silver’s cognition happens in a direct way. So if it is said that actually it is the memory of the past-cognized silver then the illusioned person’s direct cognition is contradicted. Because the recollected silver’s cognition is never direct but always indirect as the object does not exist at the time of recollection. Another point is that the term *bhedāgraha* means non-realization of the difference which is a negative factor. A negative factor is not able to produce any initiative which is very much seen in illusion. If a person has no knowledge about a certain thing, he will not be inclined to that object. In deep sleep, we do not see any kind of initiative of a person as at that time he has no knowledge of any object. So *bhedāgraha* or non-realization of the difference cannot be the reason behind an illusioned person’s initiative.

If the *Akhyātivādin* further argues that due to the similarity the nacre is appeared as silver. They may summarize the whole thing by saying that due to the non-realization of the difference of nacre and silver and due to the similarity between these

two (such as glittering etc.), illusion appears. At that time a person has the same initiative to get that illusory silver as it would be in case of real silver. But it may be asked to them that what is the nature of the similarity? If it is answered that both these cognitions, perception and recollection, (expressed by these two terms, ‘this’ and ‘silver’) are similar with the cognition of real silver then it will not be justified. Because the *gavaya* (nilgai) is similar with cow but no one has the same initiative to a nilgai as that to a cow. What is more, no one ever says that a *gavaya* is a cow. Similarly here also a person who has the initiative to receive the silver, he will not be inclined to get an object similar with the silver. On the contrary he will definitely take the initiative assuming it as real silver. In *Bhāmatī* it is stated in this context “*tatra na tāvat samīcīnajñānasadṛśī iti jñānam samīcīnajñānavadhyavahārapravarttakam. Na hi gosadṛśah gavayah iti jñānam gavārthinam gavaye pravarttayati.*”²⁶ In this way, the *Akhyātivāda* theory of the *Prābhākara* was also refuted.

Refutation of *Anyathākhyātivāda*:

As we have told earlier, Śamkarācārya and Bhāmatīkāra Vācaspati Mīśra, both have repudiated their opponent’s theory one after another and they have adopted to choose one’s theory as a tool to refute another. To refute the theory of the *Prābhākara* they have used the theory of the *Naiyāyikas*, i.e. *Anyathākhyātivāda* and later the *Advaitin* has refuted that also. Śamkarācārya has presented *anyathākhyātivāda* like this, “*anye tu yatra yadadhyāsastasyaiva vipaīta dharmatvakalpanāmācakṣate iti.*”²⁷ In nacre-silver illusion, we have to assume an opposite property of the nacre, i.e. silverness. It is quite obvious that silverness does not exist in nacre at all but due to the faults of our sense organ, silverness gets the attachment with the nacre and shows the object presented before as silver. According to the definition of invalid cognition (*apramā*), ‘*tadabhāvavati tatprakārah anubhavah ayathārthah*’,²⁸ hence the property silverness does not related with the nacre by the relation inherence, so if the nacre is cognized as silver then it is an invalid cognition. The *Naiyāyika* says that the cognition ‘this is silver’ (*idam rajatam*) is a qualified cognition. Here the term ‘this’ is noun which is actually the nacre and ‘silver’ is its qualifier. But when that illusory cognition arises that ‘this is silver’ there neither the valid cognition of nacre or silver happens. Due to the perception of glittering presented in nacre, the recollection of silver arises. After that, due to complication (*jñānalakṣaṇāsannikarṣa*), the attachment of silverness seems to be existent in the object presented before and the illusory perception of silver occurs. It is known to all that in case of ordinary perception, due to the relation between the object and the sense-organs the cognition happens. But the *Naiyāyika* view is that illusion cannot be same as ordinary perception. But like an extraordinary perception,

the object exists far away in illusion also. So the *Naiyāyika* opines that in illusion, such as nacre-silver or snake- rope one, the cognition of the illusory object happens due to complication. In an ordinary perception, the perception happens directly because the object exists there at that time. But here in spite of the illusory object's presence at the time of perception, the cognition occurs. So it cannot be classified under ordinary perception hence it is better to accept it as extraordinary one happened due to complication.

It can be asked furthermore that what is the nature of *jñānalakṣaṇā sannikarṣa*? The *Naiyāyika* may answer that first the sense-organ is attached with the mind and then the mind gets contact with the soul. As cognition is a quality of the soul hence it remains there by relation of inherence. Moreover the illusory nacre is the object of the cognition, so they also possess a kind of relation which is stated as *viśaya-viśayibhāva*. But it is quite obvious that this is nothing but elaboration. So the *Advaitin* does not admit this explanation. They say that the impression formed due to the past cognition of silver remains latent in our mind. It is expressed only when it is aroused by some special causes and here these causes are similarity, such as glittering etc.

In *Bhāmātī*, Vācaspati Miśra has obstructed the theory of *anyathākhyātivāda* and finally has established the *Advaita* theory of error, i.e. *anirvacanīyakhyātivāda*. Some scholars have opined that it was not properly done by Vācaspati Miśra which is not true.²⁹ As he is a commentator of *Advaita* system hence he cannot accept *anyathākhyātivāda*. The *anyathākhyātivādin* accepts both the locus and the imposed one as real and same. But the *anirvacanīyakhyātivādin* cannot accept the imposed one as real. In the refutation procedure of *ātmakhyāti* and other theories, it was already proved that the imposed object is not real by nature. The *Advaitins* raise some questions to the *Naiyāyikas* that what is meant by the term 'anyathā' (different manner)? Is it the different manner of the cognition or the object? If we choose the first option then the cognition will be in the form of silver but the object is nacre which is contradictory to our belief. It is a common rule that the expressed one and the object of cognition will be the same. Again if we say that here the different manner of the object is meant then also it will not be justified. The *Advaitins* put his argument in this way that the different manner of an object may happen in two ways; one, if the nacre becomes identical with the silver and the other option is if the nacre becomes the silver. The first one is not at all acceptable since nacre and silver are absolute different by their own nature. The second one is also futile because if the silver was really an effect of the nacre then the subsequent contradictory cognition will never arise. The pot is an effect of clay, but we never have a contradictory cognition after the formation of pot

that ‘it is not a pot’. The *anyathākhyātivādin* still may comment that the different manner happens to the expression which is the result of illusion. But the *Advaitins* still put an objection by stating that the expression remains same both in illusion and valid cognition of silver. In both cases the cognition occurs in this form ‘this is silver’. For these reasons the term *anyathā* (different manner) becomes ineffective.

The Establishment of *Anirvacanīyakhyātivāda*:

We have presented earlier that the *Advaitins* have repudiated the other theories of illusion and finally have established their own theory, *anirvacanīyakhyātivāda*. The *advaitins* say that not due to the complication or *jñānalakṣaṇa sannikarṣa*, but as an influence of *avidyā*, the illusory silver appears in the nacre for a periodical time. The illusory silver cannot be stated as real (*sat*) as it will be definitely contradicted later. It also cannot be titled as unreal (*asat*) since it has the ability to produce the initiative in a person. As it is neither *sat* nor *asat* hence it is called as indescribable (*anirvācya*). The *Advaitin* opines that the illusory silver cannot be titled as unreal or *asat* because an unreal object such as sky-flower etc. cannot produce any effect. Even we cannot accept a third option as *sadasat* because these two properties are contradictory by nature, so they cannot exist in a same locus. As the illusory silver is indescribable by nature, the world is also indescribable because it is also imposed on *Brahman*. In the primary part of our discussion, we have presented the viewpoint of *Advaita* school and now we will present the opinion of *Bhāmatikāra*. In *Bhāmatī*, it is stated that “*anyasya anyadharmakalpanā anṛtatā, sa ca anirvacanīyatā iti adhistāt upapāditam. Tena sarveṣāṃ eva parīkṣakānāṃ mate anyasya anyadharmakalpanā anirvacanīyatā avaśyambhāvinī iti anirvacanīyatā sarvatantrasiddhānta ityarthab*”.³⁰ The essence of this statement is in every definition of illusion given by other school, it is clear that in error, the imposition of the property of a particular object happens on another and this is *anṛtatā*, i.e. *anirvacanīyatā*. So, it is inevitable to accept *anirvacanīyatva* in case of *adhyāsa* or illusion.

II.

***Viśiṣṭādvaita* Theory of Illusion:**

The *Viśiṣṭādvaita* school of *Vedānta* system differs in many cases from the theories of the *Advaita* school and the theory of illusion is not an exemption of this. The *Viśiṣṭādvaitavādin* does not accept *anirvacanīyakhyātivāda* given by the *Advaitins*. On the contrary, they present their own theory which is quite unique by nature.

The *Viśiṣṭādaitavādin* rejects the term *anirvacanīya* by stating that it is conflicting to colloquial behaviour. They say that the existence of an indescribable object is not proved by any *pramāṇa* hence its cognition is also not acceptable. It is known to all that an object will be either real (*sat*) or unreal (*asat*). Apart from these two, another third option is not at all admissible as no one ever cognizes that kind of object. So the argument regarding the theory of the *Anirvacanīyakhyātivādin* becomes wasted. Scholars have opined the theory of the *Viśiṣṭādvaitavādin* as *satkhyāti* but it is not similar with theory of the *prābhākara*s. The *prābhākara* accepts that two kinds of cognition arise in case of error, recollection and perception. But Rāmānuja does not accept that. According to him, a qualified cognition forms in illusion. Still it differs from the view of the *Naiyāyikas*. The *Naiyāyika* says that the nacre is cognized in another way and as a result of it the illusory silver is perceived. But the *Viśiṣṭādvaitavādin*'s observation is due to the process of *pañcīkaraṇa*, the primary five elements (*pañcabhūta*) exist everywhere. If we agree on this, then it should be acceptable that some part of silver also exist in nacre. For this reason, when we perceive those parts of silver in nacre in illusion, the cognition of silver arises. But it may be asked by the opponents that if we agree the thought of *Vijñānavādin*, then why a subsequent contradictory cognition arises which obstructs the illusory silver? The *Vijñānavādin*'s answer is the nacre-part exists in a greater quantity in nacre whereas the existing silver-part is less than that. The silver-part is cognized in greater quantity due to the faults of our sense-organ. But later when the nacre-part is cognized then the silver-part is contradicted. Still it is noteworthy that since some part of silver exists in nacre following the rules of *pañcīkaraṇa* or *trivītkaraṇa prakriyā*, the cognition of silver in nacre is not false. Rāmānuja has stated this in his *Śrībhāṣya*, “*śuktyadau rajatādeśca bhāvah śrutyaiiva coditah/ rūpyaśuktyadinirdeśabbhedo bhūyastvabhetukah/ Kadāciccakṣurādestu doṣācchuktyamśavarjītah/ rajatāmśo grhītoato rajatārthī pravarttate/ doṣahānau tu śuktyamśe grhīte tannivartate/ ato yathārtham rūpyādi-vijñānam śuktikādiṣu.*”³¹

It is seen that Śrībhāṣyakāra Rāmānuja has refuted specially the theory of *Anirvacanīyakhyātivāda* by the *Advaita* school and has established his own theory *yathārthakhyāti*. ‘*atah sarvam vijñānajātam yathārthamiti siddham*’.³² We see that he did not bother to repudiate other theories of error given by different school. We can infer from this that as the *Anirvacanīyakhyātivāda* was established by refuting all other theories hence he chose only the *Advaitins* as his sole opponent. Probably one of his statements supports this also, “*khyatyantaranām dūṣaṇāni taistairvādivireva prapañcitaniti na tatra yatnah kṛyate.*”³³

End –Note:

- 1) *Nyāyadarśana*, Phaṇībhuṣan Tarkavāgīśa, p.207, see the footnote.
- 2) *A Critique of the Theories of Viparyaya*, Nanilal Sen, p. 206
- 3) *Vedāntadarśanam*, edited by Kalivara Vedantavagisa, *adhyāsabhāṣya*, p.7.
- 4) *Ibid.*
- 5) *Ibid*, *Bhāmatīkā*, p.8.
- 6) *Vedāntakalpataru*, p.18.
- 7) *Ibid*, *Parimalatikā*, p.18.
- 8) *Advaitavāda o Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*, p.255.
- 9) *Vedāntadarśanam*, edited by Kalivara Vedantavagisa, *adhyāsabhāṣya*, *bhāmatī*, p.8.
- 10) See the footnote 8.
- 11) *Ibid*, p.256.
- 12) *Ibid.*
- 13) *Ibid.*
- 14) *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, p.12.
- 15) *Advaitavāda o Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*, p.259-260.
- 16) *Vedāntadarśanam*, edited by Kalivara Vedantavagisa, *adhyāsabhāṣya*, *bhāmatī*, p.11.
- 17) *Ibid*, *adhyāsabhāṣya*, p.7.
- 18) *Ibid*, *bhāmatī*, p.11.
- 19) *Ibid*, p.12.
- 20) *Ibid.*
- 21) *Ibid*, *adhyāsabhāṣya*, p.11.
- 22) *Ibid*, *bhāmatī*, p.13.
- 23) *Ibid.*
- 24) *Ibid.*
- 25) *Ibid.*
- 26) *Ibid*, p.14.
- 27) *Ibid*, *adhyāsabhāṣya*, p.11.
- 28) *Tarkasamgraha*, see the definition of *apramā*.
- 29) *Advaitavāda o Viśiṣṭādvaitavāda*, p.267.
- 30) *Vedāntadarśanam*, edited by Kalivara Vedantavagisa, *adhyāsabhāṣya*, *Bhāmatī*, p.15.
- 31) *Śrībhāṣya*, edited by Yatindradas Ramanujacarya, *prathama pāda*, *jijñāsadbhikarāna*, *prathama sūtra*, p.204.
- 32) *Ibid*, p.211.
- 33) *Ibid.*

