



The Philosophy of Phenomenalism with Special References to Sri Narayana Guru and George Berkeley: A Comparative Study

S. Penchalaiah

Department of Philosophy, Dravidian University, Andhra Pradesh – 517 425.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 16 September 2015;

Received in revised form:
3 December 2015;

Accepted: 10 December 2015;

Keywords

Phenomenalism,
Appearance,
Perception,
Cognize of Anirvacaniya,
Indiscrimination .

ABSTRACT

The concept of Phenomenalism is one of the important philosophical problems which are agitated in the minds of philosophers and psychologists. Both Indian and Western Philosophers are enquiry into the essence of the external world. It is a reaction against, Realism and Empiricism. It is a meta-physical and epistemological problem. In our day-to-day life, one directly observes not the physical object as such, but other than some 'thing else'. In the instances of 'mistaking a rope for a snake; or 'a shell for silver; or 'a mirage appears as water pond'. All these instances prove that, one directly observes not the physical objects as it is, but something else. This something else is known as an 'appearance'. It is also called as *Māya* or *Brama*. The contribution of Sri Narayana Guru and Berkeley, to the concept of phenomenalism, which is focus of the present paper and examined. Berkelian philosophy is Immaterialism (*Mayavada*), it is also called as Phenomenalism. It is the principle that makes a thing, appear as 'what it is not'. It is neither real nor unreal nor both. It is indefinable (*anirvacaniya*) and is considered to be of the nature of the existent (*bhavarupa*). Phenomena is ontologically unreal, since, God is the only ontological reality. *Maya* is called unmanifest (*avyakta*), because it cannot be defined as real or unreal. But they exist as unmanifest names and forms or as seed potentialities of appearances. Sri Narayanaguru opines that Appearance is the cognition that in what is not that. It is known as 'Mityajnana'. *Mithyana* means, there are neither something nor nothing and are therefore termed 'mithya'. For instance, the false perception of snake in a rope and a shell appears as silver. The perceptual situation of seeing a snake and the illusory situation of mistaking a rope for snake qualities look alike. He holds that it is a difference of degree and not a difference of kind. The substratum being known, the phenomena disappear. It is an epistemological error. Both philosophers agree that it is difficult to determine the demonstrative knowledge of the external world. If the unknown substratum is necessary to support the sensible thing, then this unknown substratum also need a further support leading to infinite regress (*ad-infinitum*). *Maya* is a concept to analysis in both meta-physical and epistemological perspectives. As meta-physical aspect, *Maya* is real and non-real (*amrvacanyd*) and epistemological aspect, it is an error (*khyati*) or ignorance. The Reality of the physical world is essentially spiritual, for it manifests the activity of spirit and the goodness of God's will. Both philosophers have found that sensations (*Jnanendriyas*) are the basic stuff of all knowledge. The knowledge of the phenomenal world is possible through verification of sense-experiences. But, these experiences of the phenomenal world are innumerable in number, and therefore the verification is not possible in a finite time. Hence, the demonstrative knowledge of the illusory world is not possible. Thus, we have to accept that instead of knowing the phenomenal objects, we can say that we believe the objects.

© 2015 Elixir all rights reserved.

Introduction

Philosophy begins with, an enquiry into the essence of the external world. Indian and Western Philosophers, were agitated the philosophical question that, how many ultimate realities are there in the world? To answer this question, the foremost, Ancient Greek philosopher, by Thales (624 B.C) declares that 'Water' is the only ultimate reality. Anaxamines (588 BC) says 'Air', Heraclites (535 BC), added 'Earth', Empedocles (495 BC) says, 'Fire', Democritus (460 BC) opines 'Ether' as the fifth element. Similarly, Socrates, Plato (427BC) and Aristotle (384 BC) observe that, though these five elements are permanent and eternal but the percipient is not observe these elements as it is. It is something other than what it is. It is called as 'Appearance' or 'illusion' or 'Māya'. From the dawn of philosophical enquiry, philosophers were puzzled at this problem which never agitated the minds of common man. The modern western Philosophers like Berkeley, Kant, Russell and Ayer were also discussed the problem of appearance.

Tele:

E-mail addresses: drspenchalaiah@yahoo.co.in

© 2015 Elixir all rights reserved

On the other hand, the Indian, Philosophy prove that, the concept of appearance or Maya is one of the important doctrines in Indian philosophical investigations. Philosophers like, Sri Sankaracārya, Sri Rāmanujacārya, Sri Madhvacarya, Saint Thiruvalluvar, Sri Basaveśwara, Sri Nārāyanaguru and Saint Vēmana were also discussed about the problem of Maya.

Etymologically, the term 'Phenomenalism' refers to the 'observable fact, or event'.ⁱ 'Phenomena' means "cognisable by the senses, or in the way of immediate experience, apparent, sensible, perceptible".ⁱⁱ Aristotle said 'phenomena were the objects of the senses (e.g, sight and sound), as opposed to the real objects understood by the mind'.ⁱⁱⁱ F. H. Bradley observes, Phenomenalism is the theory of Appearance'.^{iv} Our Ancient traditional scriptures, like, Chandogya and Aiterya Upanishads define that, Aad Appearance or Maya is ignorance (*avidya*). It is neither being nor non-being but indefinable. God is real, while maya is unreal.^v Advaita philosopher Sri Sankaracarya opines that 'God is real and World is appearance'.^{vi} A famous radical humanist Saint Vemana says that 'wives and children pain and pleasure, compassion and culture is Maya. Everything is Maya. Other than Maya, there is no real'.^{vii} Philosophers raise the question that, 'Are we see the physical world as it is? To answer this question, philosophers have discussed three important doctrines such as - Realism, Empiricism and Phenomenalism. According to Realism (*Yadhārthavāda*) one perceives the external world objects as it is. These objects are public. Empiricism (*Anubhāvavāda*) opines that sense experiences, (*indriyās*) are alone the cause of the physical objects to perceive indirectly. On the contrary, Phenomenalism (*Māyavāda*) says one directly perceives only an appearance and not the physical object as such. Thus, Phenomenalism is a reaction against, Realism and Empiricism. It is a meta-physical and epistemological problem.

In our day-to-day life, one directly observes not the physical object as such, but other than some 'thing else. In the instances of 'mistaking a rope for a snake; or 'a shell for silver; or 'a mirage appears as water pond'^{viii} or a post box looks like a ghost^{ix} and so on. All these instances prove that, one directly observes not the physical objects as it is, but something else. This something else is known as an 'appearance'. It is also called as Māya or Brama.

The contribution of Sri Narayana Guru and Berkeley, to the concept of phenomenism, which is focus of the present paper and examined. To start with their life, and their works, may be briefly noted. Sri Narayana Guru was born on 20th August 1854, in untouchable Elava (Ezhava) community at Chempazhanti situated near the city of Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala State. Madan Asan and Kutty Amman (Kaliyammam) were his parents.^x When he was a young child, he learned Sanskrit, Malayalam, and Tamil. SNG with all his scholarship, lived as a seer and a Saint. He was a profound thinker, a born poet and a man of the world. Sri Narayana Guru died on 20th December, 1928, in this land of letters. He wrote more than sixty reputed works in Tamil, Malayalam and Sanskrit languages, in different philosophical perspectives. Some of his chief works are: *Advaitadeepika*, 2. *Ahimsa*, 3. *Arivu*, 4. *Asramam*, 5. *Athmaupadesa Sathkam*, 6. *Darsanamdla* 7. *Daivachintana*, 8. *Vedanta ISutram* 9. *Siva Satakam*, 10. *Sadasiva Darsanam*, 11. *Dharmam*.

On the other hand, Bishop George Berkeley, (1685-1753) was a native of Ireland. He was a "Modern Phenomenalist". Berkeley was man of mark, and a man of thought. He advocates the Theory of Appearance (*Maya*) in his major works, like: 1. *New Theory of Vision* (1709), 2. *A Treatise of Principle of Human Knowledge* (1710), 3. *Three Dialogues* (1713) and 4. *Alciphron* (1732). Berkeleyan philosophy is Immaterialism (*Mayavada*), it is also called as Subjective-Idealism or Phenomenalism. He classifies Immaterialism of two kinds- Meta-physical and Epistemological. Meta-physical Immaterialism is a proposition about 'reality', according to which is the final analyses only 'minds exist'. Epistemological Immaterialism is a proposition about knowledge, according to which, our knowledge of object is really knowledge of the quality and relationship of 'subjective-experiences'. These two philosophical theories constitute as Phenomenalism or Brama.

Phenomenalism is, the principle that makes a thing, appear as 'what it is not'. It is neither real nor unreal nor both. It is indefinable (*anirvacaniya*) and is considered to be of the nature of the existent (*bhavarupa*). Appearance is, beginningless (*anadi*). The objective form of the world is mere transformations brought about by the indescribable stuff of maya, which is not 'being' but dependent on being.^{xi} It is that which is responsible for the illusory world.^{xii}

SNG has faith in God. He hopes that everybody would immerse in the deep ocean of the glory of God. He is the friend of the Universe (*lokabandhu*) and protector (*gopta*) of mankind. God is the embodiment of existence or truth. God is the creator, preserver and sustainers of the world (*tajjatan*). The world is born out of Him, sustained by Him, and absorbed in Him. He creates empirical objects, for the enjoyment and suffering of the individual souls. God is the controller of the phenomenal world. Appearance is God's power or energy, the source of the names and forms, which are modified into the phenomenal world, which are neither real nor unreal but indefinable. Appearance is cosmic nescience. On the other hand, Berkeley observes that phenomena is ontologically unreal, since, God is the only ontological reality. Maya is called unmanifest (*avyakta*), because it cannot be defined as real or unreal. But they exist as unmanifest names and forms or as seed potentialities of appearances.

According to Berkeley, there are two kinds of minds - Finite and Infinite. Similarly, objects are also of two kinds- perceived objects and unperceived objects. Further he also made a distinction between the finite being (man) and the infinite being (God). The finite being or the finite mind will be perceive[^] the perceived objects through family of sense-experiences (*Indriyadubhāvajnana*) On the other hand, the most powerful being - God perceives[^] the unperceived objects.^{xiii} Thus, Berkeley introduces the concept of God in order to explain the existence of unperceived objects.^{xiv} Berkeley's philosophical dictum is 'to be is to be perceived' (*Esse est percipi*), which means objects exist as long as they are under perception. To quote, Berkeley, 'When I say the table, I write on exist as long as under my perception. I am out of the room; I cannot perceive the same object'. He says, If I were be there, I would have seen such and such objects. For Berkeley, God is the cause of causes to create the phenomenal world.^{xv}

SNG opines that, God is like an artist, accomplished it, with all its artistic varieties. The whole universe became manifest from the God.^{xvi} God is the creator, sustained and destroyer of the world.^{xvii} God is the creator of the phenomenal world.^{xviii} God is essential and plays an important part in the realm of Maya.^{xix} Sri Sankaracarya, opines that 'God alone is Real, and that the world is Unreal'.^{xx} God removes Maya and He grants supreme union. Similar to SNG, Berkeley also opines that the infinite being and infinite mind only removes the appearance of the phenomenal world. The reason is that

the finite being only perceives the limitation of things with in the space and time. God removes the appearances. Appearance is the cognition that in what is not that.^{xxi} It is known as 'Mityajnana'. Mithyana means, there are neither something nor nothing and are therefore termed 'mithya'. For instance, the false perception of snake in a rope and a shell appears as silver. Really snake is not a piece of rope; and yet a piece of rope is mistaken for a snake, similarly, silver is not a piece of shell, yet a piece of silver is mistaken for a shell.^{xxii} Further SNG says, illusory and perceptual situations share certain qualities. In the instance of mistaking a rope for a snake, one's initial responses are the same. The perceptual situation of seeing a snake and the illusory situation of mistaking a rope for snake qualities look alike. Hence, SNG holds that it is a difference of degree and not a difference of kind. The substratum being known, the phenomena disappear. It is an epistemological error. SNG and Berkeley's opinion that, it is difficult to determine the demonstrative knowledge of the external world. If the unknown substratum is necessary to support the sensible thing, then this unknown substratum also need a further support leading to infinite regress (ad-infinitum).^{xxiii} Both philosophers accepted that, God alone is the cause to create these ad-infinitum experiences. They said "Everything we see, hear, feel or any wise perceive by sense, being a sign or effect of the power of God".^{xxiv} God arranges the succession of events according to His own fiat of will.

Similarly to Sri Narayana Guru, and George Berkeley, a famous German Modern Phenomenalist, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) also contributed the philosophy phenomenism in his masterly works such as, *A Critique of Pure Reason* and *A Critique of Practical Reason*. He classified the world is of two kinds-1. 'Phenomena and 2.Noumena'. The phenomenal world, of experience, one observes only an illusion or Maya.^{xxv} On the other hand, the Noumenal world is the real world, which deals with the *God(Brahman)* Self and things-in-themselves The knowledge of the Noumena is real, where as the knowledge of the phenomena is (appearances or Maya)^{xxvi} or unreal.

Sri Sankaracarya observes that there are three stages of realities Pratibhasika (physical), Vyavaharika (psychical or empirical) and Paramarthika (transcendental or spiritual). In pratibhasika stage, it is real, in empirical stand, it is not real and in spiritualistic point of view it neither real nor unreal, but it is indiscriminative (*anirvacaniya*). Further, he opines 'aidya or ignorance is directly the cause of the illusion. Maya is the source of the physical world. In the instance of a rope appears as a snake, SNG quote "I Consciousness enters both knowledge and the body, On one occasion a understanding is true; on another untrue/Thus one who can discern should understand".^{xxvii} The understanding of the very basis of truth is an epistemological error. The creation of the world is an illusory product of Maya. The whole world originated from the power of Maya like the rope for a snake or shell for a silver.^{xxviii} Maya is the Prime material cause of the world. It creates all Phenomena, which is not different from God.^{xxix} Maya is neither existent nor non-existent, nor partaking of characters; neither some, nor different, nor both; neither composed of parts, nor an indivisible whole, nor both. Maya is extremely wonderful and cannot be described in words.^{xxx}

Both Sri Narayana Guru and Berkeley agreeing the concept of Maya in the following points. 1. A phenomenon has existence only when it is experienced because it is formed by the synthesis between the materials of the mind and senses (*indriyas*) The real nature of the phenomenon is mental and not relative to experience. 2.Qualities of phenomenal world objects also depend upon knowledge. 3. Appearance of object in phenomenal form.4. There is nothing, which comes in between the phenomenon and the knowledge of it. It is however, possible that some confusion might occur owing to serve factors. 5. Maya is that which is not. 6. Maya is intermediate. It is neither real nor unreal 7.Maya is the power of God. It does not exist in God seed forms. It is merely His desires or wish. 8. Maya is of two kinds - Para and Apara. Paramaya creates the subtle organs of self-consciousness like the 'sense of cognition' action, the mind, the intellect etc. The Maya, by which the gross world that is the object of the senses is particularly created, is named aparamaya.^{xxxi} 9. The only one true, there is non-other which is true; untruth appears as true. 10. Appearance is responsible for all the woes of the world.

Berkeley holds that, God is the ultimate reality, to create the phenomenal world (Immaterial world or appearantal world). His ideology was found in Sri Narayana Guru's concept of Maya that, God is an artist to create the phenomenal world of His well and wish. Both accepted that God is 'Real' and the world is 'Unreal'. Both philosophers vehemently refuted, the realistic philosophy that, objects are perceived directly. They accepted that one directly observes not the physical objects as it is, but, something other than what it really is not. Both were theistic and spiritualistic philosophers.

Concluding the discussion, that Maya is a concept to analysis in both meta-physical and epistemological perspectives. As meta-physical aspect, Maya is real and non-real (*amrvacanxyd*) and epistemological aspect, it is an error (*khyati*) or ignorance. The Reality of the physical world is essentially spiritual, for it manifests the activity of spirit and the goodness of God's will.^{xxxii} Both philosophers have found that sensations (*Jnanendriyas*) are the basic stuff of all knowledge. The knowledge of the phenomenal world is possible through verification of sense-experiences. But, these experiences of the phenomenal world are innumerable in number, and therefore the verification is not possible in a finite time. Hence, the demonstrative knowledge of the appearantal world is not possible. Thus, we have to accept that instead of knowing the phenomenal objects, we can say that we believe the objects.

Notes and References

- ⁱ New Columbia Encyclopaedia. 2126
- ⁱⁱ English Dictionary, Vol. VII.P.772
- ⁱⁱⁱ New Columbia Encyclopaedia. 2126
- ^{iv} Broadely, F. H. Appearance and Reality, p.36
- ^v Chandogya Upanishad, viii, 14; Aiterya Upanishad.iii, 23
- ^{vi} Samkaracarya, Brahmasutrabhasya, 2.1.16
- ^{vii} V. Udayasankar, Vemana Vedasuktulu (Telugu), P. 31
- ^{viii} A. J. Ayer, Phenomenalism, Procceeding Aristototelian Society, Vol, 47, 1947-48
- ^{ix} SNG, Darsanamala, iv. 4.6
- ^x Kumaran Moorkoth, Biography of Narayana Guru,p.66, Calicut, 1971
- ^{xi} Dasgupta, History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. II, P. 110
- ^{xii} Sveteswara Upanishad, 4. 10
- ^{xiii} Berkelet, George, Siris, P. 247
- ^{xiv} Berkeley, A Treatise on the Principles of Human Knowledge.89 Mary Edition, 1713
- ^{xv} Berkeley, Alciphron, p. 346
- ^{xvi} SNG Darsanamala 1.10
- ^{xvii} SNG Ibid, 2.5
- ^{xviii} SNG Daivacintanam. 2, Gurukula Foundation, Verkala, 1981
- ^{xix} SNG Atmopadesasatakam. Swami Vimuktananda, Sri Sankaracarya Advaita Ashraram Calcutta, 1982
- ^{xx} Sankara, Brahmasutrabhasya, 2.1.16
- ^{xxi} SNG, Daivasatakam, v.6
- ^{xxii} SNG Darsanamala, 4.8.10 & Jananinavarathnavanjari, v 4, G. Sri Sankara Printing Works, Porli, 1971
- ^{xxiii} Ibid, PP. 67-70
- ^{xxiv} Ibid, P. 148
- ^{xxv} Immanuel Kant, A Critique of Pure Reason, P. 245
- ^{xxvi} Immanuel Kant, A Critique of Practical Reason, P. 421
- ^{xxvii} SNG Atmopadesasatakam, v.68. Sachidanada Swami (tran)Eranakulam, 1966
- ^{xxviii} SNG Darsanamala, 4.9, SNDS, Trust, Varkala, 1967
- ^{xxix} SNG Ibid, 3.8
- ^{xxx} SNG, Sri Narayana Gurudeva Kritikal,P. 110
- ^{xxxi} SNG, Darsanamala, 4.7 Swami Vidyanaanda(tran) commentary
- ^{xxxii} Ibid, 247

Journals

1. *Mind*, Vol 13 : The Phenomenalist Theory of the World, by Willis
2. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (PAS)* :
 - i. Vol. 15,1914-15 : Phenomenalism by CD. Broad
 - ii. Vol. 39,1938-39 : Phenomenalism by G.F. Stout
 - iii. Vol. 47,1947-48: Phenomenalism by A.J. Ayer.