CHAPTER-III

ILLUSION IN TANTRIC ART
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From the days of *Veda* its very difficult to describe the reality and illusion as both are two side of the same coin. Yet for the sake of convenience lets see the etymological beginning of the two. If *Veda* is an idea than Tantra is an ideology, the *Veda* is a religion Tantra is a cult if *Veda* is a philosophy Tantra is a science.

Here an attempt has been made to explain illusion. It can not give any logical explanation of the existence and nature of maya and the world of appearance it declares the world to be illusion. But question arises if the whole world is reduced to illusion who is the perceiver of this illusion whose projection is this illusion? Certainly it is neither the projection of *Brahma* or *jiva*.

This illusion had been defined by different people and thinker's since ancient times e.g.

"Wherefrom do all these worlds come? They come from space. All beings arise form space and into space they return: space is indeed their beginning, and space is their final end"

- Chandogya Upanishad

"When This is, That is,
This arising, That arises;
When This is not, That is not.
This ceasing, That ceases"

- Gautama Buddha

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"... there is no difference between samsara and nirvana, either as to dignity or as to substance. Tathata, the sheer ‘suchness’ is made manifest both ways, and for true enlightenment the apparent difference is non-existent”.
  - Heinrich Zimmer

"Human unhappiness results from mankind’s acceptance to the lowest conditions of our own minds. By the practice of Yoga, this condition can be overcome”
  - Patanjali

"... He is without change, self-existent, and ever the same, serene, above all attributes. He beholds and is the Witness of all that is, Omnipresent, the Self of everything that is. He, the Eternal and Omnipresent, is hidden and pervades all things. Though himself devoid of senses, he is the illuminator of all the senses and their powers. The Cause of all the three worlds. He is yet beyond them and the mind of men. Ineffable and Omniscient. He knows the Universe, yet none know Him. He sways this incomprehensible universe, and all that has movement and is motionless in the three worlds depends on Him; and depending on His reality, the world of forms appears as true. We too have come form Him as our Cause. He, the One Supreme Lord, is the Cause of all beings the Manifestation of Whose creative energy in the three worlds is called Brahma”.
  - Mahanirvana Tantra

According to the Tibetan “Book of the Dead” (Bardo Thodol), the Consciousness-principle takes up to four days to separate from the physical body, once the “death-process” has started. Then, for a period of up to forty-nine days and nights, the spirit will experience the Bardos (Intermediate states) until the Transference of Consciousness is completed:

"... there are seven degrees of Maya (Illusions) within the Samsara (Phenomenal), constituted as seven globes of a planetary chain. On each globe there are seven rounds of evolution, making the forty-nine (seven times seven) stations of active existence. As in the embryonic state in the human species the foetus passes through every form of organic structure from the amoeba to man, the highest mammal, so in the after-death state, the embryonic state of the psychic world, the Knower or principle of consciousness, anterior to its re-emergence in gross matter, analogously experiences purely psychic conditions”
  - Evans-Wentz
Surasundari. Stone. Khajuraho
Madhya Pradesh, 950-1050 A.D.
She is the primordial spirit of manifestation, symbol of illusion
Maya
Ref. p. 27-28
The phenomenal world Maya is a Sanskrit word, derived from the root MA. meaning “to shape, produce or create”. Maya is the illusion of the phenomenal world, brought about through the Shakti-Shiva “play” (Lila) manifesting from the Primal Formless Substance into the Tattvas.²

It was with a clitus the Greek philosopher who long back said “you can not step into the same river twice”, it means to say that world is transitory or changing what we called illusion is also relative word. For e.g. a truth can only be expressed and enveloped in words if it is one side or illusory. It all lacks totality, completeness unity when the illusions Buddha taught about the world he had to decide it into Sansura and Nirvana i.e. into illusion and truth into suffering and salvation. Time is not real and so do the world what seems to nothing to us earlier come full of every thing little bit later.

Its due to the illusion which is well depicted in the tantric act. Perhaps they wanted to convey the message that “if time is not real than the dividing line that seems to lie between this world and eternity, between good and evil is also an illusion. The concept of illusion in tantric art is a vague term as interpretation of this nothingness on illusion can be many words do not express thoughts very well. They always become little different immediately they are expressed a little distorted and the meaning can be for one person and full of value or wisdom but for another a non-sense.

The illusion in the art of Tantra painting too deals with the theme,

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meaning, and interpretations of that illusions. Perhaps we had to agree with Stephen Hawking that “the hidden orders or mind of the painter had to be deconstructed to reach the full meaning of inner symbols of Tantra illusions”.

The solidity of edifice depends upon the firmness of foundation and quality of bricks. Tantra principles are very sound on which Tantric system is still sustained since five thousand years.³

The principle of polarity is the foundation stone of Tantra system. The term ‘polarity’ is related to the word ‘pole’. The lexical meaning of the word ‘pole’ is either of the two points of a body in which the attractive or repulsive energy is concentrated, as e.g. in a magnet. Tantra has very uniquely worked out these two poles in the human body which is symbolically represented in Tantric treatise as Shiva-Shakti. Biologically it represents the male female poles which is pre-requisite for any creation.

Tantric principles of polarity works not only at physical level but it also applies at universal level. For Tantra, like human, universe is also an offspring of the Highest Reality.⁴

How this polarity resides in the human body. Every human being contains these two poles within. One is expressed while the other is latent. The externally himself expressed pole indicates either male or female character.

Plate – 13
Diagram of the Unity of the two Principles, male and female
Ref. p. 29
If a person is male, female is already there but in a latent form. Same is the case of female. This new concept in biology is known as b-sexuality. But is not a new notion for a Tantric seer. Ajit Mookerji throws light on this point. “The b-sexual potential exist in equal male-female (M/F) ratio in the reproduction of proory plasm. Visually it has been depicted as the form of Ardhanarisvara (Shiva-Parvati), male and female attributes shown as part of the same body, hermaphroditically joined. The idea that muscularity and feminity are two factors is as illusory as that of the duality of body and soul”.

Shiva and Shakti are the two poles of one thing. Tantra represents polarity but not duality. Shiva and Shakti are not two ultimate Realities but they are identical. This identity has been profusely described in many Tantras. In the Mahanirvana Tantra Lord Shiva emphatically tells Parvati that there is no difference between them. The Suddha Siddhanta Paddhati of Goraksanatha depicts the same-truth by giving the illusions of moon and moon light. As moon light is not different from moon and moon can not exist without moonlight in the same way Shiva and Shakti are identical.5

This identity is also explained with the help of the illustration of creation. In the process of creation Siva is not able to do anything without Shakti. Shiva is considered as corpse (Sava) devoid of sakti. The very first verse of the Saundraya Lahari purports the same view. In which it is declared that

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Plate - 14

The fully created cosmos (Sristi) arising from the union of male and female principles.

Ref. p. 30
without the union of Shiva-Shakti no creation is possible. Not only that but when Siva unites with Shakti only then he usable to do anything. Tantra also reflect the same view. We cannot go ahead without quoting the words of Shri Ramakrishna which are cited by Swami Prabhavananda “Shri Ramkrishna was won’t to say that just as fire and its burning power are inseparable, so inseparable are Brahma and Shakti”. When I meditate upon Reality as at rest, he once remarked, “that is without the activities of creation, preservation and dissolution. I call it Brahma. When I meditate upon Reality as creative I call it Sakti. In either case I am concerned with one and the same truth the difference being only in the name and aspect”.

The Tantric philosophy is based upon monism of Shiva-shakti, the duality involved in the admission of Shiva-Shakti is due to the analytical approach of the mind. They are dualistic in theory but monistic in spirit, and they cannot be separated. This Tantric concept of the Absolute resolves the philosophical dilemma of monism and dualism, of the enigma of mind and matter as well as the problem of Brahman and Maya of the Vedanta.

From these propositions Tantrism then move to its central point i.e., the theory of creation, to explain how from this absolute and undifferentiated cosmic consciousness – Shiva being static principle and shakti the dynamic principle – emerges a material world in which we live and which displays so many diverse forms.6

Plate- 15

Pure Consciousness
From an illuminated, Gujarat.
c. 1700 A.D.
Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda
Ref. p. 31
The universe is created when Shiva awakes his Shakti to transform himself through her, from his undifferentiated and unmanifested state of cosmic consciousness, into differentiated and manifest consciousness in the form of Shakti tattva created beings, Shiva is thus, the efficient cause and primary principle of creation, while Shakti is the operative principle which activates her causal metrix only when “Siva offers an opportunity and grants his divine permission” for her to do so. When shakti does not express her potentiality due to the density of Param Shiva consciousness, every being in the manifest world created by Shakti is endowed with both aspects of Shiva-Shakti, which replicate themselves in oils of further creations.

The Shiva-Shakti can not be known through reasoning but only through intuition, upon which the Tantric practices are based.\(^7\)

Shakti, the female principle, plays an important role in Tantric theory of creation perceived as a primordial force, a womb (yoni), a casual matrix which skews all matter and endows it with form, colours and other attributes, called Prakriti.

The Tantrik theory believes that when the Shiva shakti is in an extremely dense and deep state of consciousness and before he wills her to manifest him, the shakti is called Mula-prakrti. The theory further holds that Shakti in the state of prakrti is endowed with three potencies, called gunas:

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1. *Sattva* (sentient);

2. *Rajah* (mutative)

3. *Tamah* (static)

Moreover, where *Shakti* is in state of *prakrti* all three gunas are reposed in an equilibrium and therefore, the *shakti* is inactive, remains unmanifested, represent merely a potency as an operative principles of *gunas*, the *Shakti* transform a herself into *Maya*, the creative principle, heralding thus the next stage in the process of creation.

*Shakti* is thus polymorphic, being an operative principle as *prakrti*, as well as creative principle as Maya. If *Shiva* had not transformed his *Shakti* from the operative to creative prevent as *Maya*, the universe would have remained locked in the cosmic consciousness of *Shiva-Shakti* as a mere potentiality.  

We have already seen that *shakti* which is the operative principle of *shiva*, is polymorphic with many potencies, and that when *Shiva* transforms her into a creative principle she becomes known as *Maya*, and functions as *Shakti* causal matrix creating material universe and obscuring its true nature at the same time.

Thus it is *maya*, because she is the creative principle of *Shakti* who brings about the transformation of the eternal consciousness of *Shiva* into

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individualized and finite consciousness of all beings created by her. Siva is individualized in all finite and temporal beings.

Moreover L.P. Singh states that Param Shiva according to Kashmiri Siwaism, had not one but two forms of Shakti, one called Vidya Maya and the other Avidya-Maya.

The Vidya Maya helps the devotees of Tantrism to evolve from his/her crude and limited consciousness and merge into the cosmic consciousness of Shiva.

The Avidya Maya performs the opposite function, i.e., it transforms the cosmic consciousness into finite and temporal subjects and objects of this universe. In addition, it veils the true nature of this process by giving them an illusion, a "false consciousness", that they are independent and have nothing to do with the eternal Shiva, obscuring as well as the true nature of the universe and crudifying Shiva in his manifest form of material world. Maya is thus the source of man's ignorance of the divinity residing in him and the world he lives in, of his ego, selfishness, arrogance and aggression.

In order to obscure the true nature of the universe as a manifested Shiva created by her, and imbue all created beings with "false" consciousness of self, as subject and object and with ignorance, Maya employs five of her powers (Kuncukas), or sheets of illusion.

1) Kallaa limits the omnipotent powers of Shiva in their manifest form.

2) Vidya limits the scope of knowledge
3) Raja causes attachment to material objects

4) Niyali limits the freedom and will to act and limits movement and action.

5) Kaala limits time and makes all living creatures mortal.

The Tantra theory of Evolution believes that the evolutionary process is Shrouded by the Cosmic Maya, i.e., ignorance, to be properly understood at the present state of evolution of humanity which is in its very early stage. The expanding knowledge, the jnana, of the empirical sciences and the development of a higher state of consciousness will dispel this cosmic Maya. In a series of Seven lectures Stephen Hawking explores the question of the possibility of the universe being created by an act of God. In his work Hawking says that “one possible answer is that God simply chose that the universe should be in a smooth and ordered state at the beginning of the expansion phase. It appears that the universe evolved according to well-defined laws. These laws may or may not be ordained by God, but it seems that we can discover and understand them.”

The Tantrik theory holds that it will be the science, the knowledge (Jnana), which Hawking and other scientists are applying in their work, which ultimately will dispel the Cosmic Illusion (Maya), enabling thus the humans to discover these. God’s laws, know Him directly and realize that they are an internal part of this being.⁹