

GENESITIC ROOTS AND PHILOSOPHICAL EVOLUTION OF VIJÑĀNAVĀDA (YOGĀCĀRYA) SCHOOL OF BUDDHISM

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Buddhist *Vijñānavāda* and the Upaniṣadic *Brahmavāda* are interconnected systems of thought as both maintain that *Vijñāna* or consciousness is identical with the Self, the difference lies only on designation. Both forbid reliance on apparent permanency of external objects as all external objects are projection of consciousness. Consciousness is a powerful instrument for the cessation of desire and for fostering the spirit of total reclusion and renunciation. The paper attempts to offer the rational explanation of the underlying significance of the condemnation of external objects by Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and other Mīmāṃsist philosophers.

Key words: *Brahmavāda*, Consciousness, Mīmāṃsist, *Śabdabrahmavādins*, *Sāṃkhya*, Self, Upaniṣadic, *Vijñānavāda*, *Yogasūtra*

The Buddhist philosophers are not satisfied by the excessive emphasis on the absolute destructibility of outer and inner objects in every moment as an effective expedient for bringing about the cessation of craving and longing for worldly objects. They have run to the extreme and ushered in the theory of idealism (*Vijñānavāda*) by repudiating the independent existence of the external objects. The Buddhist idealists maintain that *vijñāna* or consciousness is identical with the self as conceived by the philosophers of the orthodox schools. There is no other static self as a distinct and different entity from consciousness and customary notion of relation of container and content between self and consciousness is only a figment of illusion. All external objects are projection of consciousness.

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They are erroneously cognized as objective reals. This is not a mere unfounded speculations of the Buddhist idealist. On the contrary it is in perfect harmony with the fundamental doctrine of the *Upaniṣad* which has made the following categorical assertion “The universe is nothing but the self”¹. “This universe is nothing but the absolute Brahman”². And it is also repeatedly asserted in the *Upaniṣad* that the self is Brahman and is of the nature of consciousness pure and simple.

A close investigation reveals the fact that both Buddhist *Vijñānavāda* and the *Upaniṣadic Brahmavāda* are interconnected systems of thought. The difference rests only on designation. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, the Mīmāṃsist, has observed that the portions of the different branches of Indian Philosophy which concur with the teachings of the Vedas possess the imprimatur of validity and their probative force in that precisely delimited sphere is not liable to be called in question. And this fact induced him to accept those aspects of Buddhist idealism as veridical which were in conformity with the fundamental tenets of the Vedas. The Vedas has forbidden the placing of reliance on the apparent permanency of external objects. The Buddhist idealists also for the achievement of the same objective have repudiated the generally accepted belief of the existence of outward reals as distinct from and independent of consciousness purporting this, as has already been observed, to be a powerful instrument of the cessation of desire³. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa has made an attempt to offer a rational explanation of the underlying significance of this universal condemnation of external objects. He has opined that the Buddhist idealists have resorted to the agency of predisposition (*vāsanā*) which is not amenable to reason, to account for the manifoldness of consciousness which is, otherwise, sure to remain unexplained in the case of absolute denial of outward things. The Buddhist idealists have preferred to run the risk of making a dogmatic assertion concerning the existence of predisposition out of their supreme consideration for the denunciation of material objects, serving as a device for the production of a sense of complete apathy and indifference. This emphatic denial of the external things by the Buddha was intended to all intents and purposes for fostering the spirit of total reclusion and renunciation. But in later times a sense of relaxation and remission overtook the adherents of Buddhism and they deviated from the lofty ideal as proclaimed and propagated by the Buddha. They became worldly-minded and worldly objects began to receive their care and attention. But despite this aberration they girded up their loins out of their unusual zeal to defend the concept of predisposition as an infallible means to explain the diversity of consciousness. But if the sense of value in the temporal objects remains intact,

then the mere lip-deep repudiation of external objects as apart and aloof from consciousness is bound to sound strange in their mouths.

The seers and the sages of India were unanimous on the painful nature of mundane existence. Patañjali in his *Yogasūtra*⁴ has placed unqualified stress of the universal nature of human sorrow and suffering. The Buddhist philosophers also have laid bare the omnipresence of pains and miseries. The doctrine of four noble truths as enunciated by the Buddha reveals the grim truth that this world is nothing but permeated with sorrow. Now the problem of the discovery of the way leading to the absolute cessation of sorrow became the supreme problem of the saints and savants, of the prophets and philosophers. In offering an ultimate solution to this problem of vital importance Yājñavalkya has made this revelation, ‘The self alone is to be directly realized through the process of discussion reinforced by unwavering conviction and contemplation. And with the realization of the self everything becomes realized. And this is verily the attainment of immortality or cessation of pain⁵. This utterance of Yājñavalkya is the *fons et origo* of all the schools of Indian Philosophy. It is the main spring from which the different currents of Idealist philosophical thought of Indian philosophers are flowing in different directions. It is the ultimate basis and the foundation upon which the edifice of Idealist philosophical reflections of India has been built. It has inspired the inhabitants of India with a message of hope and promise of the final salvation of mankind from the state of perpetual wretchedness. It embodies ambition and aspiration of the sages and seers of India. It is remarkable to observe that Yājñavalkya after delivering this message to his beloved wife Maitreyī adopted the life of reclusion and retirement. The different branches of Indian Philosophy have reached the end of their quest and culmination by unfolding the deep import and significance of this parting message of the great Indian sage. ‘The immediate realization of pure and immaculate self culminates in the final cessation of all pains and sorrows of human life’ is the *ipse dixit* of Yājñavalkya.

But an appropriate question arises. The awareness of the existence of the self is innate and inherent in every individual being. The notion ‘I exist’ is an a priori conviction and universal in character. And notwithstanding the constant presence of awareness and introspection of the self, human life seems to be fettered in the ever revolving wheel of sorrow and suffering. There is no end of the chain of miseries of mankind. So the utterances of the Upaniṣad that self-realization alone invariably and infallibly results in the absolute cessation of pains are sure to appear

as paradox. But the revelation of the Upaniṣad is that the *prima facie* and normal awareness of the self is not tantamount to the realization of pure and unmingled self. On the contrary, it is the imaginary representation of the self that amounts *ipso facto* to its non-realization. The transcendental intuition of the self alone deserves to be considered as the vision of the pure and immaculate self. Cognition of the imaginary unreal stands on a par with the negation of cognition. So there is no incompatibility in the exhortation of Yajñavalkya when he proclaimed that self-realization should be resorted to for the ultimate cessation of sorrows and miseries of human life. It is the pure and purged self which was in Yajñavalkya's mind at the time of conveying his message. So, it is in accordance to the teaching of the ancient sage of India that philosophers of the different schools had set themselves to the task of determining the genuine and the authentic nature of the self and this fact will furnish the ground for the paramount importance of this problem in Indian Philosophy. In the different branches of Indian thought the salient feature of the self has been examined at considerable length and resulted in the formulation of the conceptions of the self which are in direct opposition to one another. In one school it has been held that self is distinct and different from the body in another, from the body and the sense-organs taken together : in another, from the body sense-organs, mind, and intellect (*buddhi*) : and in another, from primal matter or ignorance which is the *causal* materials of intellect. And there is also divergence of opinions whether the self is a self-luminous entity or is contingent for its revelation on an outer organ; whether it is of the nature of bliss or the negation of it. And the question, "What is the essential nature of pure self"?, has received the utmost consideration of Indian philosophers, exacting their close concentration and attention for its solution.

It is on the direct realization of the pure self that the absolute cessation of sufferings will follow as a natural consequence. This is the fundamental doctrine of the Upaniṣad and this has been the unanimous finding of Indian philosophers. Though the thinkers of the heretical schools have not admitted the validity of the upaniṣadic doctrine still by placing implicit faith on the principle that the self should be realized, have indirectly accepted the upaniṣadic tenet as an ultimate basis of their philosophical speculations. It has been revealed by the Upaniṣads alone that the self-realization is the best and surest means for the final extinction of *weltschmerz*. The revealing of the efficacy and power of self-realization in the matter of permanent cessation of sorrows and sufferings is beyond the bonds of human imagination.

Udayanācārya, one of the great thinkers and the foremost logicians of India, has expounded at great length in the *Ātmatattvaviveka* (ĀTV) the profound significance of this solemn proclamation of the *Bṛahadāraṇyaka* together with its bearings and implications in the kindered systems of thought. He has stated in *expressis verbis* that the import of the teaching of the Upaniṣad is that the realization of the self is the primary condition of emancipation⁶. And this immediate realization of the self involves three-fold successive phase viz. : (1) analytical or conceptual thought (*śravaṇa*) (2) ratiocination (*manana*) and (3) meditation (*nididhyāsana*). The analytic stage consists in the analysis of the nature of the concept of self as afforded by the pronouncements of the Upaniṣads. The ratiocinative phase implies the anticipation of the possibility of the self as signified by the upaniṣadic proclamation by resorting to arguments which are in conformity with them. And the final stage implies meditation intended for the realization of the self. When the analytical or conceptual thought, ratiocination, and meditation converge to and concentrate on one focal point, viz., the self, it becomes directly revealed as an *ex consequenti*. This direct realization or vision of the self is equivalent to emancipation.

As one sets out to meditate upon the self in the first stage the whole cosmic order appears as something outward and external to the self. And this has led to the emergence of the *Mīmāṃsā* system of thought which has placed utmost emphasis on the performance of the Vedic rites serving as a vehicle of salvation. If there were no extra-mental objects, as is usually presupposed by the Buddhist Idealists, then all activities connected with the performance of the sacrifices and ceremonies will be brought to a standstill. It is on the existence of the concrete and tangible sacrificial objects that the performance of the Vedic rites invariably depends. Inclination towards these external objects has been responsible for the appearance of Carvāka Materialism which is the reality of this mundane life. And this is clearly in conformity with and deducible from the utterances of the *Kaṭhōpaniṣad* which runs very cleverly as follows: “Svayambhū envied the senses by making them disposed towards outer objects as a sequel of which everybody sees outward things and not the internal self”⁷.

The deep significance of this upaniṣadic revelation is that in this stage the senses owing to their natural propensity towards the sensible objects become deprived of the faculty of realizing the self. And this has prepared the ground, as has been indicated above, for the rise of the rise of the Materialistic philosophy

of Cārvāka, which has repudiated the existence of the immaterial self as transcending material phenomena. Now the attitude of the Mīmāṃsists that the performance of the Vedic sacrifices as the means of achieving emancipation has been denounced in unequivocal terms by the Upaniṣad. It has been declared: 'The sages having sons and grandsons and desirous of material objects by the performance of sacrifices met with death. While other sages possessing sagacity attained immortality proceeding beyond the domain of rites'⁸. In the second stage, on account of the gradual progress in the course of his meditation on the self, the meditator realizes the self in the form of objectives reals. In this plane, the universal and the omniform nature of the self becomes revealed to him and this has led to the formulation of the philosophical doctrine entitled *Brahmaparināmavāda*, that is to say, to regard all entities as the modification of Brahman. It views Brahman as a dynamic and immanent principle and all pluralities as the different and diverse modes of its transformation. And this phase is the forerunner and precursor for the rise of Buddhist idealism in which there is a downright denial of outer objects. The appearance of the self in manifold forms and its identity with them has been declared by the following words of the Upaniṣad : " This whole universe is of the nature of the self"⁹. At this state, the meditator should not feel flattered that he has reached the end of his spiritual quest. The language of the Upaniṣads is precise and positive on this point. It has laid down in clear and indubious terms that the self is radically different and distinct from the sensible objects. The declaration of the Upaniṣad runs as follows : "The self is neither of the nature of odour or taste nor is of the nature of sight or hearing"¹⁰. It has vetoed the sameness of the self with the form of outward appearances. And as a consequence of this the meditator of the self gradually realizes the negation of outer objects. In this phase of contemplation the sensible objects odour and the like are verily *non est* and only the pure self alone absolutely unrelated and unmixed with the appearances reveals itself. And this is the initial or the preliminary stem towards the realization of the goal of human life which has been disclosed by the vedic doctrines. This condition has been called by Udayanācārya as the doorway or entrance of the highway leading to the fruition of the supreme truth as unfolded and expanded by the Vedānta¹¹.

Now in the same fashion the view point of Buddhist idealists has been profoundly influenced by this traditional conception of immanency. The Buddhist idealists have resorted to this mode of argument for the verification of their won fundamental postulate. It is an undeniable fact that they have not stated in *expressis*

verbis that monism of consciousness (*Vijñānavāda*) either directly or indirectly stands in need of confirmation by accredited ground of immanency, but a mature reflection will bear out the truth of our point. The Śabdabrahmavādins or the Kālakāranavādins have not also confessed their reliance on the *Sāṃkhya* view of immanency as a sure touchstone for the substantiation of their theories. But this omission cannot alter the brute fact. An unbiased appraisal of the results of our investigation will bring home the unimpeachability of our contention that the ground of immanency was implicitly banked upon as the chief support of their doctrines. In the same manner the Buddhist idealists (*Vijñānavādins*) also maintain that all existents per se are permeated by consciousness and as such cannot be visible as disunited and disconnected with it. As the earthen-wares are not perceivable unrelated with the earth universal, precisely in an identical way no content can be revealed as chopped off and detached from consciousness. So it follows exhypothetical that all contents are one and identical with consciousness. They are the outward manifestation of the form of consciousness which is the fundamental principle of all things. Although consciousness projects itself in worldly state (*Samśāradaśā*) into manifold appearances. In emancipation the continuum of consciousness absolutely dissociated from its contents flows an ad infinitum. It has been emphasized repeatedly by the Buddhist idealists that the streams of consciousness which is in a state of perpetual flux remains completely unaffected its contents and moves on for eternity is entitled to *nirvaṇa* or the state of salvation.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Ātmaivedam sarvam. Chānd, Up. VII. 25.*
2. *Brahmaivedaṃ sarvam. Mund. Up. II, 2.11*
3. See *Puruṣa* hymn of the RV 90, *puruṣa evedaṃ sarvam yad bhūtam yac ca bhayam; vijñānamatrākṣanabhaṅganairātmyādivadānāṃ apy upniṣadarthavādaprabhavā tvaṃ viṣayeṣvātyantikam rāgaṃ nivartayitum ity upapannaṃ sarveṣāṃ pramaṇyaṃ – Tantravārttika*, vol. I, p. 168.
4. *pariṇāmatāpsaṃskāraduḥkhair guṇavṛttivirodhāc ca duḥkham eva sarvaṃ vivekinaḥ. YSU (Yogsūtra)*, II, 15.
5. *ātma va are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo et seq. Brh. Up. IV 5, 6-15.*
6. *ĀTV (Āmatattaviveka)*, p. 935.

7. *upāsyamāne ca tasmin prathamam bahirarthā eva bhāsante yānāśritya karmmi māmsopasaṃhārah cārvākasamutthānam ca tatpratipādanārtham ca parāñci khāni tyādi. ĀTV, p. 935. See also parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayaṃbhūs tasmāt parān paśyati nāntarātman-kathā. Up. II, I.*
8. *taddhānāya param karmabhyah ityādi. ĀTV, p. 935, Cf. also ṛcaś ca Brāhmanāni cā pavargābhivādini bhavanti ṛcaś ca tāvat: karmabhir mṛtyum ṛṣayo niṣedhuḥ prajā-vanto draviṇam icchamānāh athāpare ṛṣayo manīṣiṇaḥ param karmabhyo, mṛtatvam-ānaśuḥ; quoted in the Vātsyāyanbhāsyā on NS, IV. 1.59.*
9. *ĀTV, p. 935, Vide also ātmai ve'dam sarvam. Chānd. Up. VII, 25, 20.*
10. *ĀTV, p. 935: cf also aśabdamaspars', arūpamavyam tatha, rasaṃ nityam agandhavac ca yat. Katha Up I. 3, 15.*
11. *yamāśritya vedāntadvarmātropāsaṃ hārah – ĀTV, p. 935.*