

THE CENTRAL PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM

T. R. V. Murti

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A Study of the Mādhyamika System

By
T. R. V. Murti

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THE CENTRAL PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHISM

A Study of the Mādhyamika System

BY

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TO MY REVERED TEACHER

PROFESSOR S. RADHAKRISHNAN

Preface

"ALTHOUGH a hundred years have elapsed since the scientific study of Buddhism has been initiated in Europe, we are nevertheless still in the dark about the fundamental teachings of this religion and its philosophy. Certainly no other religion has proved so refractory to clear formulation." The observation of the late Professor Stcherbatsky made in 1927 (*The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, 1) remains no less true today. It is also a measure of the difficulties which one encounters in this field. The vastness of Buddhism is surprisingly immense. An extensive and varied literature, canonical, exegetical and systematic, covering a period of more than fifteen centuries, is scattered in a score of languages, Sanskrit, Pāli, Tibetan, Chinese and several Mongolian languages. Its complexity is no less formidable; its schools and sub-schools are bewildering in their number and in the twists and turns of their thought. The greatest difficulty encountered is the lack of an accredited tradition of interpretation which might set aright many inaccuracies and shortcomings in our understanding. In spite of these admitted difficulties, a determined attempt should be made to understand Buddhism. This is essential for a correct and fruitful understanding of Indian philosophy and religion on which Buddhism has exercised a profound and permanent influence. Moreover, Buddhism forms the staple culture of the south, east and far-east Asian countries. A study of Buddhism should also prove valuable as a contribution to world-culture. And this may not be without significance in the context of the present-day world.

The Mādhyamika philosophy claims our attention as the system which created a revolution in Indian Buddhism and through that in the whole range of Indian philosophy. The entire Buddhist thought turned on the Śūnyatā doctrine of the Mādhyamika. The earlier pluralistic phase of Buddhism, its rejection of substance and the rather uncritical erection of a theory of elements, was clearly a preparation for the fully critical and self-conscious dialectic of Nāgārjuna. The Yogācāra and Vijñānavāda Idealism explicitly accepts the śūnyatā of the Mādhyamika, and gives it an idealist turn. The critical and absolutist trend in Brahmanical thought is also traceable to the Mādhyamika.

Considering the rôle and the importance of the Mādhyamika, I have ventured to appraise it as the Central Philosophy of Buddhism. Modern literature on the subject is neither too plentiful nor free from misunderstanding. Our standard text-books on Indian philosophy content themselves with a perfunctory treatment of the system. There is a tendency on the part of some critics and historians of thought to dismiss it as nihilism; many even identify it with the Vedānta. Such criticism is as uninformed as it is misleading. Stcherbatsky's book, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa*, is an exception to this. But it is hardly to be expected that in the course of about 60 pages, most of which are devoted to polemic and the elucidation of the conception of nirvāṇa, anything like an adequate exposition of the Mādhyamika philosophy could be made. The present work is an attempt to fill the gap in our knowledge. It is a full study of the Mādhyamika philosophy in all its important aspects.

The book falls into three well-defined but connected parts of unequal length. The first is mainly historical: it traces the origin and development of the Mādhyamika philosophy, its dialectic, as the attempt to resolve the conflict that was engendered by the two main traditions of Indian philosophy, the ātmavāda (substance view of reality) and the anātmavāda (modal view of reality). The anticipations of the dialectic are to be found in the celebrated 'silence' of Buddha, in his refusal

speculate and to predicate empirical categories of the transcendent reality. The development of the Mādhyamika stages and schools of thought and their literature is dealt with at some considerable length. The possible influence of the Mādhyamika on later philosophy, especially on the Vijñānavāda and the Vedānta, is also indicated. The second and main part is devoted to a full and critical exposition of the Mādhyamika philosophy, the structure of its dialectic, the application of the dialectic to the categories of thought, its conception of the Absolute, and its ethics and religion. The chapter on the Application of the Dialectic is chiefly of historical interest and is somewhat technical; it may be omitted on the first reading. The last part of the book compares the Mādhyamika with some of the well-known dialectical systems of the West (Kant, Hegel and Bradley), and undertakes a short study of the different absolutisms (Mādhyamika, Vijñānavāda and the Vedānta) whose different standpoints are not generally appreciated.

There is a measure of risk in comparative studies. No two systems of thought or even aspects of them are quite identical or similar. On the other hand, if they were absolutely unique, we could not differentiate or understand them. My constant endeavour has been to draw distinctions, on even the most important topic, between the Mādhyamika, the Vijñānavāda and the Vedānta. I have also tried to understand the development of thought here in the light of the known development of similar trends in the West. In particular, I have made pointed references to Kant as elucidating aspects of the Mādhyamika. I have tried to be on my guard with regard to the differences in outlook and background of Indian and Western philosophy. In spite of its shortcomings, the comparative method is perhaps the only way by which Indian thought could be made intelligible to the Western reader in terms of the philosophical ideas with which he is familiar.

It is fortunate that we possess not only the basic Mādhyamika texts but practically all the important ones either in the original Sanskrit or as restorations and translations. Help from Tibetan sources would certainly have added to our information of the system, especially about Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka. This is not, however, a serious handicap, as we have Mādhyamika texts in Sanskrit representative of every period right from its inception by Nāgārjuna to Prajñākaramati's *Pañjikā* in the 11th century A.D., when Buddhism practically disappeared from India. Besides, in a system which is a dialectic and no doctrine, such additional information as we may glean from other sources cannot materially affect the main exposition and interpretation of its philosophy.

I have approached my task not as a philologist or an antiquarian, but have tried to reconstruct and recapture the spirit of Mādhyamika philosophy. A history of philosophy is not an out-dated museum piece, but a living exposition of ideas; it is essentially a restatement and a revaluation. It is possible that my critics may not always agree with me in my interpretation of the Mādhyamika and incidentally of many aspects of Indian thought. In philosophy, difference of interpretation is legitimate, and should even be welcome. I shall feel myself amply recompensed if my attempt helps in some measure, in understanding an important phase of Indian thought.

It is with pleasure that I record my obligations. I must first pay my respects to the revered Professor K. C. Bhattacharyya for the general standpoint of my exposition. I have greatly profited by the published writings of Stcherbatsky, Poussin, Winternitz, McGovern, Radhakrishnan, Vidhushekhar Bhattacharyya and many others. Acknowledgement is made of my indebtedness at the appropriate places. This book was first submitted as the Doctoral Thesis for the D. Litt. Degree of the Benares

Hindu University. To my examiners, Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj, Professor Vidhushekhar Bhattacharya and Dr. Benoyatosh Bhattacharyya, I am grateful for their valued criticism and helpful suggestions. I am greatly indebted to my esteemed friends, Acharya Narendra Deva, Professor G. R. Malka (Director, Indian Institute of Philosophy, Amalner), Dr. C. Narayana Menon (Professor of English, Benares University), Sri B. K. Mallik of Exeter College, Oxford and to Mr. A. Alston of New College, Oxford, who read the typescript and offered valued suggestions for improving the style and presentation. The book would have been much more faulty without their help. My deepest and most sustained obligations are to my revered teacher, Professor S. Radhakrishnan. The work was undertaken under his inspiring guidance. He very kindly revised the manuscript and sent me full and most helpful suggestions from Oxford. He has also taken a keen interest in the publication of the book, encouraging me to hope that it may prove a useful work on the subject. I am very deeply indebted to him for all his kindness to me. *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* is respectfully dedicated to him as a token of my gratitude and admiration. Professor Radhakrishnan has done so much to revive interest in Indian philosophy and Buddhist studies.

I am deeply thankful to Mr. K. J. Spalding, Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford and to the late Dr. H. N. Spalding for their encouragement and help. Dr. Spalding did me the honour of attending my lectures on the Middle and Last Phases of Buddhism given during the Michaelmas term of 1949 in the University of Oxford where I was Deputy for the Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics for a year. Dr. Spalding's death is a great loss to the cause of Indian culture.

I am greatly indebted to my young friends, Dr. Rama Kanta Tripathi, Dr. Ashok Kumar Chatterjee and Sri K. Sivaraman for their active help and co-operation in writing the book; I have been immensely benefited by my discussions with them on many topics dealt with in the book.

My thanks are due to the Editor (Professor P. A. Schilpp) and the Publishers (Messrs. Tudor Publishing Company) of *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, to Messrs. George Allen and Unwin, Publishers of *The History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western*, and to the Editors of *The University of Ceylon Review* for permission to reproduce some portions of the articles which first appeared in their publications.

T. R. V. MURTHY

December, 1954.

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Abbreviations

AAA	<i>AbhisamayĀlaṃkāraĀloka of Haribhadra</i> , G.O.S., Baroda.
AK	<i>AbhidharmaKośaKārikās of Vasubandhu</i> , text edited by G. V. Gokhale, JRAS, Bombay, Vol.22 (1946)
AKV	<i>AbhidharmaKośaVyākhyā of Yaśomitra</i> . Ed. by Wogihara, Tokio.
ASP	<i>AṣṭaSāhasrikāPrajñāpāramitā</i> (Bib. Indica).
BCA	<i>BodhiCaryĀvatāra</i> by Śānti Deva (Bib. Ind.).
BCAP	<i>BodhiCaryĀvatāraPañjikā</i> by Prajñākaramati (Bib. Ind.).
BUSTON OR BHB	Bu-ston's <i>History of Buddhism</i> , 2 Parts. Trans. from the Tibetan by Dr. E. Obermiller (Heidelberg, 1931).
CRITIQUE	<i>The Critique of Pure Reason</i> by Kant. Translation by Prof. N. Kemp Smith.
CŚ	<i>Catuḥśatakam of Ārya Deva</i> . Restored into Sanskrit by Prof. V. Bhattacharya, Viśva-bhārati, Śāntiniketan, 1931.
CŚV	<i>CatuḥśatakaVṛtti</i> by Candrakīrti (Commentary on CŚ).
HIL	<i>History of Indian Literature</i> , Vol. II—by M. Winternitz, University of Calcutta, 1933.
IP	<i>Indian Philosophy</i> , 2 Vols., by Prof. S. Radhakrishnan, Library of Philosophy, London.
MA	<i>MādhyamakĀvatāra of Candrakīrti</i> , Chapt. VI (incomplete) Reconstructed from the Tibetan version by Pt. N. Aiyāswāmi Śāstri, J.O.R. Madras, 1929 ff.
MK	<i>Mādhyamika Kārikās of Nāgārjuna</i> . Ed. by L. de la V. Poussin (Bib. Budd. IV).
MKV	<i>MādhyamikaKārikāVṛtti (Prasannapadā)</i> by Candrakīrti. (Commentary on MK) (Bib. Budd. IV).
MVBT	<i>MādhyāntaVibhāga Sūtra Bhāṣya Ṭīkā of Sthiramati</i> , Part I. Ed. by Prof. V. Bhattacharya & G. Tucci (Luzac & Co., 1932).
ŚS	<i>ŚiṣkāSamuccaya of Śānti Deva</i> . Ed. by Bendall (Bib. Buddhica, I).
TS	<i>TattvaSaṅgraha of Sāntarakṣita</i> (G.O.S., Baroda) 2 Vols.
TSP	<i>TattvaSaṅgrahaPañjikā</i> by Kamalaśīla (G.O.S.) (Commentary on TS.)
VV	<i>VigrahaVyāvarttanī of Nāgārjuna</i> . Ed. by K. P. Jayaswal and R. Sānkṛityāyana, J.B.O.R.S., Patna.

Part One

Origin and Development of the Mādhyamika Philosophy

Chapter One

The Two Traditions in Indian Philosophy

I. The Mādhyamika System—Its Role and Significance

BUDDHISM profoundly influenced the philosophy and religion of India for over a thousand years. It was a challenge to complacency and a call for renouncing dogmatism. It adopted the method of critical analysis (vibhajyavāda) from the very outset.¹ Buddhism occupies the central position in the development of Indian philosophy. Brāhmanical and Jaina systems grew under the direct stimulus of Buddhism. Schools and sub-schools sprang up without number. Doctrines were systematised and details were worked out under this pressure. Great attention came to be paid to logic and epistemology. Precise terminology was evolved, and an immense śāstra-literature came into being. Indian philosophy became critical and richer; it gained in depth and comprehension.

There were sharp twists and turns in Buddhism itself. It had a momentous and varied life. Its schools and sub-schools, judged even by Buddhist standards, are bewildering. The tendency to split and divide itself into sects and sub-sects appeared very early in the history of Buddhism. The seven Councils held from time to time to decide the orthodox creed and to stamp out heresy are evidence of this vitality. The *Kathāvatthu* is perhaps the earliest record in Pāli of the doctrinal differences of the schools. Buddhist historians like Buston and Tāranātha speak of the *Three Swingings of the Wheel of Law* (dharmacakra-pravarttana).

At first the earliest Teaching completely excluded the nihilistic point of view (i.e. everything, and the elements, were considered to be real in themselves). Owing to this an (incorrect) realist imputation could easily grow prominent.

With a view to this (the Buddha) has expounded the Intermediate teaching in which a negativist standpoint predominates. But this (scripture of the latest period) introduces (different degrees of Reality), demonstrating the elements in their imputed aspect (parikalpita) as totally non-existing, the elements in their causally dependent aspect (paratantra-svabhāva) as having a real existence from the standpoint of the Empirical Reality (saṃvṛti), and the two forms of the Ultimate Aspect (pariniṣpanna) as representing the Absolute Reality. It is accordingly that which puts an end to the two extreme points of view, contains the direct meaning (nītārtha) and cannot be an object of dispute. On the contrary, the other two (Swingings of the Wheel of the Doctrine) are of conventional meaning (neyārtha) and can be made an object of controversy. This is the opinion of the Vijñānavādins. . . . The Mādhyamikas however say: "The Lord having begun with the teaching that all elements are devoid of a real essence of their own, that they neither become originated (anutpanna) nor disappear (aniruddha) and by their very nature merged in Nirvāṇa and that they are quiescent from the outset (ādi-śānta), he swung the second Wheel of the Doctrine for the sake of those who had entered the Great Vehicle. This teaching, marvellous and wonderful as it is, demonstrates the principle of non-substantiality and Relativity. . . . According to the Mādhyamikas,¹ the earliest and the latest Scriptures are both

conventional (ābhīprāyika) and only the Intermediate contains the direct meaning.²

Stripped of metaphor and partisan colouring, this means that there were three principal turning points in the history of Buddhism. And these are:

1. The earlier realistic and pluralistic Phase comprising the Hīnayāna schools—Theravāda and Vaibhāṣika (Sarvāstivāda). This can be called the Ābhīdharmika system. The Sautrāntik school is a partial modification of this dogmatic realism;
2. The middle phase or the Mādhyamika system of Nāgārjuna and Ārya Deva advocating Śūnyavāda (Absolutism);
3. The last idealistic phase—the Yogācāra system of Asanga and Vasubandhu and the late Vijñānavāda of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti.

These historians of Buddhism, Buston (1290-1364) and Tāranātha (1574-1608), were neither too near nor too far removed from the movement, and hence they could comprehend it as a whole. The Mādhyamika is the turning-point of Buddhism. It is the central or the pivotal system. Like Kant in modern European philosophy, the Mādhyamika system brought about a veritable revolution in Buddhist thought. "It never has been fully realized," says Stcherbatsky with regard to this system,

what a radical revolution had transformed the Buddhist church when the new spirit, which however was for a long time lurking in it, arrived at full eclosion in the first centuries A.D. When we see an atheistic, soul-denying philosophic teaching of a path to personal Final Deliverance consisting in an absolute extinction of life, and a simple worship of the memory of its human founder, when we see this superseded by a magnificent High Church with a Supreme God, surrounded by a numerous pantheon and a host of Saints, a religion highly devotional, highly ceremonial and clerical, with an ideal of Universal Salvation of all living creatures, a Salvation not in annihilation, but in eternal life, we are fully justified in maintaining that the history of religions has scarcely witnessed such a break between new and old within the pale of what nevertheless continued to claim common descent from the same religious founder.¹

In metaphysics, it was a revolution from a radical pluralism (Theory of Elements, dharma-vāda) to an absolute absolutism (advaya-vāda). The change was from a plurality of discrete ultimate entities (dharmāḥ) to the essential unity underlying them (dharmatā). Epistemologically, the revolution was from empiricism and dogmatism (dṛṣṭi-vāda) to dialectical criticism (śūnyatā or madhyama pratipad). Ethically, the revolution was from the ideal of a private egoistic salvation to that of a universal unconditional deliverance of all beings. Not mere freedom from rebirth and pain (kleśāsavaṇa-nivṛttiḥ) but the attainment of Perfect Buddhahood by the removal of ignorance covering the real (jñeyāvaraṇa) is now the goal. The change was from the ideal of the Arhat to that of the Bodhisattva:² Universal love (karuṇā) and Intellectual perfection (prajñā or śūnyatā)¹ are identical. The Theoretic and the Practical Reason coincide.

In Religion, it was a revolution from what was almost a positivism to an absolutistic pantheism. Religion is the consciousness of the Super-mundane Presence immanent in things, the consciousness of what Otto happily calls the 'mysterium tremendum'. Early Buddhism (Theravāda) was not a religion in this sense. It was an order of monks held together by certain rules of discipline (vinaya) and

reverence for the *human* Teacher. It enjoined a very austere moral code, primarily for the ordained. But there was no element of worship, no religious fervour, no devotion to a transcendent being. No cosmic function was assigned to Buddha; he was just an exalted person and no more. His existence after parinirvāṇa was a matter of doubt; this was one of the inexpressibles. The rise of the Mādhyamika system is at once the rise of Buddhism as a religion. For the Mahāyāna, Buddha is not a historical person. He is the essence of all Being (dharmakāya); he has a glorious divine form (sambhogakāya) and assumes at will various forms to deliver beings from delusion and to propagate the dharma (nirmāṇakāya). The essential unity of all beings became an integral part of spiritual life. Worship and devotion to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas was introduced, possibly owing to influence from the South.²

This laid the foundation for the last development in Buddhism—the Tāntric phase. Tāntricism is a unique combination of mantra, ritual and worship on an absolutist basis. It is both religion and philosophy. This development occurred in Brāhmanism too, influenced no doubt by the corresponding development in Buddhism.

The *Śālistamba Sūtra* says¹: "Whosoever sees the Pratītyasamutpāda sees the Buddha, and whosoever sees the Buddha sees the Dharma (Truth or Reality)." Nāgārjuna expresses himself similarly in his *Mādhyamika Kārikās*²: "One who perceives truly the Pratītyasamutpāda realises the four sacred truths—pain, (its) cause, cessation and the path." Buddhism has always been a Dharmic theory³ based on the Pratītyasamutpāda, and every Buddhist system has claimed to be the Middle Path. Pratītyasamutpāda has, however, received different interpretations at different times. The early Buddhism of the Ābhīdharmika systems took it as denying the permanent Ātman (substance) and once establishing the reality of the separate elements. Pratītyasamutpāda is the causal law regulating the rise and subsidence of the several elements (dharma-sanketa). The middle path is the steering clef of Eternalism (substance or soul) and Nihilism (uccheda-vāda, denial of continuity). The Mādhyamik contends that this is not the correct interpretation of the doctrine. Pratītya-samutpāda is not the principle of temporal sequence, but of the *essential dependence* of things on each other, i.e., the unreality of separate elements (naissvābhāvya, dharma-nairātmya). The entire Mādhyamika system is a re-interpretation of Pratītyasamutpāda.⁴ It is now equated with Śūnyatā—the empirical validity of entities and their ultimate unreality.¹ The middle path is the non-acceptance of the two extremes—the affirmative and the negative (the sat and asat) views, of all views. In the Vijñānavāda, Śūnyatā is accepted, but with a modification. The formula is: That which appears (the substratum, i.e., vijñāna) is real; the form of its appearance (the duality of subject and object) is unreal.² The middle path is the avoidance of both the dogmatism of realism (the reality of objects) and the scepticism of Nihilism (the rejection of objects and consciousness both as unreal).³

An intelligent reading of the development of Buddhist thought shows the Mādhyamika system having emerged out of a sustained criticism of the Ābhīdharmika schools, which themselves grew out of the rejection of the ātmavāda of the Brāhmanical systems. It is thus a criticism of both the ātma and anātma theories. An analogous position in the West is that of Kant in modern philosophy. His *Critique of Pure Reason* is primarily a criticism of Empiricism, which itself was a rejection of the standpoint of Rationalism with regard to the origin and scope of knowledge. The Yogācāra Idealism is made possible by the Śūnyatā of the Mādhyamika, just as the Idealism of Hegel is indebted to Kant's *Critique* for its

understanding of the function of Reason.

It is possible to perceive the initial stages of the dialectic in the direct teachings of Buddha himself.⁴ Buddha pronounced some problems to be insoluble or inexpressible (avyākṛta). This is the so-called agnosticism of Buddha. Criticism is the very essence of Buddha's teaching. He was aware of the antinomical character of Reason. His refusal to answer questions about the beginning and extent of the world or of the unconditioned existence of the soul (jīva) and the Perfect Being (tathāgata) was the direct outcome of the awareness of the conflict in Reason. It is at the same time an attempt to transcend the duality of Reason. Dialectic was born. To Buddha, then, belongs the honour of having suggested the dialectic first, much before Zeno in the west. Dialectic, as will be shown later, is the consciousness of the total and interminable conflict in Reason and the consequent attempt to resolve the conflict by rising to a higher standpoint. In a conflict there are at least two principal alternative views, totally opposed to each other in their solutions of the problems of existence and value. The two view points were the ātma and anātma systems, like the systems of Rationalism and Empiricism before Kant.

In Buddha, the dialectic is but suggested; as the conflict of viewpoints which engenders the dialectic had not yet developed. The dialectic in its systematic form is found in the Mādhyamika; for by that time the divergent views had been cultivated and formulated into well-knit systems—as the Sāṅkhya, Vaiśeṣika and the Vaibhāṣika. There is no doubt, however, that the Mādhyamika dialectic is the systematised form of the suggestions made by Buddha himself. Buddha resolves the conflict by an intuitive perception of the Real as non-dual (advaya); the Mādhyamika does it by turning Reason against itself, through the dialectic.

The development of the Advaita Vedānta offers us a close parallel on the ātma tradition. The Upaniṣads affirm Brahman (Absolute Spirit) as the sole reality of the world. The Upaniṣadic seers reach this absolutism not so much through reasoning as by inspiration. They are more suggestive than systematic. The Advaitism (Non-dualism) of Śaṅkara is established on a dialectical basis by the criticism of the Sāṅkhya, the older Vedānta and other systems. For its dialectical technique the Vedānta is clearly indebted to the Mādhyamika.¹

A system which engendered this revolution in Indian philosophy and religion deserves to be studied with more sympathy and attention than has been accorded to it. There is a tendency on the part of some critics and historians to dismiss the Mādhyamika system as nihilism or as identical with the Vedānta. Such criticism is as uninformed as it is misleading. An attempt is made in the following pages to study the Mādhyamika system in all its aspects—historically, analytically and comparatively. This may throw light on the development of Indian philosophy, especially of the absolutist (advaita) trends. A study of the Mādhyamika system may prove of value intrinsically as it is a critique of a philosophy.

II. The Two Traditions¹ in Indian Philosophy— Their General Nature

There are two main currents of Indian philosophy—one having its source in the ātma-doctrine of the Upaniṣads and the other in the anātma-doctrine of Buddha. They conceive reality on two distinct and exclusive patterns. The Upaniṣads and the systems following the Brāhmanical tradition conceive reality on the pattern of an inner core or soul (ātman), immutable and identical amidst an outer region of impermanence and change, to which it is unrelated or but loosely related. This may be termed the Substance-view of reality (ātma-vāda). In its radical form, as in the Advaita Vedānta, it denied the reality of the apparent, the impermanent and the many; and equated that with the false. The Sāṃkhya did not go so far; still it inclined more towards the substantial, the permanent and the universal. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, with its empirical and pluralist bias, accords equal status to both substance and modes. Not only did these systems accept the ātman, but what is more, they conceived all other things also on the substance-pattern. The ātman is the very pivot of their metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. In epistemology, substance makes for unity and integration of experience; it explains perception, memory and personal identity better than other theories. Bondage is ignorance of the self or the wrong identification of the non-self with the self (ātmany anātmādhyāsa). Freedom is the discrimination between the two.

The other tradition is represented by the Buddhist denial of substance (ātman)² and all that it implies. There is no inner and immutable core in things; everything is in flux. Existence for the Buddhist is momentary (kṣaṇika), unique (svalakṣaṇa) and unitary (dharmamātra). It is discontinuous, discrete and devoid of complexity. The substance (the universal and the identical) was rejected as illusory; it was but a thought-construction made under the influence of wrong belief (avidyā). This may be taken as the *Modal view of reality*. The Buddhists brought their epistemology and ethics in full accord with their metaphysics. Their peculiar conception of perception and inference and the complementary doctrine of mental construction (vikalpa) are necessary consequences of the denial of substance. Heroic attempts were made to fit this theory with the doctrine of Karma and rebirth. Avidyā (ignorance), which is the root-cause of suffering, is the wrong belief in the ātman and prajñā (wisdom) consists in the eradication of this belief and its attendant evils.

The terminology employed here is after the best Jaina epistemological treatises. Philosophical views, they say, are principally two—the dravyārthika naya (substance-view) and paryāyārthika naya (modal view).¹ Each view, carried to the extreme, denies the reality of the other. One emphasises the universal and the continuous to the exclusion of the changing and the different, and *vice versa*. The Vedānta is cited as the exponent of the extreme form of the *Substance-view*,² and Buddhism (Tathāgatamatam) represents the exclusive Modal view.³

The Jaina ostensibly reconciles these two opposed views by according equal reality to substance and its modes. There is no substance without modes nor modes without substance.⁴ Reality is manifold (anekāntātmakam); it is not of one nature; it is unity and difference, universal and particular, permanent yet changing.⁵ The Jaina shaped its epistemology on this pattern and formulated the logic of the disjunction of the real (syādvāda). This view may be said to constitute the third stream of Indian philosophy—lying mid-way between the two extremes of the ātma—and anātmavādas. Seemingly partaking of both, it was essentially un-Brāhmanical and un-Buddhistic. It was un-Brāhmanical, as it accepted a changing ātman¹ and even ascribed different sizes to it; no Brāhmanical system could ever accept that.² It was un-Buddhistic too, as it accepted a permanent entity, ātman, besides change. *A*

such, the Jaina found favour with neither. The synthesis of two views is a third view, and is not a substitute for them. The Jaina system exercised comparatively little influence on the course of Indian philosophy, and was little affected by other systems. Jainism has remained practically stationary down the ages.

Indian philosophy must be interpreted as the flow of these two vital streams—one having its source in the ātma doctrine of the Upaniṣads and the other in the anātmavāda of Buddha. Each branched out into several sub-streams with a right and a left wing and several intermediary positions. There were lively sallies and skirmishes, but no commingling or synthesis of the two streams. Throughout the course of their development they remain true to their original inspirations. The Brāhmanical system took the real as Being, Buddhism as Becoming; the former espoused the universal, existential and static view of Reality, the latter the particular, sequential and dynamic; for one space, for the other time, is the archetype. The Brāhmanical systems are relatively more categorical and positive in their attitude (vidhimukhena), while the Buddhists were more negative (niṣedhamukhena). Again, the former are more dogmatic and speculative, the Buddhists empirical and critical. Subjectively minded Buddhism is little interested in cosmological speculations and constructive explanations of the universe. The Brāhmanical systems were bound to an original tradition; they all accepted the authoritarian character of the Veda. Buddhism derives its inspiration from a criticism of experience itself. The tempo of development was quicker and intenser in Buddhism than in the Upaniṣadic tradition.

Absolutism (advaitism) came to be established in each tradition by an inner dynamism, by the necessity to be self-consistent. Advaitism must be distinguished from monism, which just asserts the existence of a single reality. Advaitism (non-dualism) expressly denies the reality of duality. And this is done, not by positive arguments, but by the negation of appearance. All absolutism is based on the dialectic.

Monism had already been reached in the Upaniṣads, and this was carried on by the older Vedānta with the help of a systematic exegesis (mīmāṃsā). It did not find it necessary to deny the reality of the world nor of the efficacy of works (karma). The monism of the *Brahmasūtras* was compatible with difference and change. All this underwent a change in Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara who consistently deny difference and change. They uphold non-dualism as the truer meaning of the Upaniṣads.

Contemporaneously or slightly earlier, there occurred a revolution in the Philosophy of Language and an absolutism of the Logos (Sabda-Brahma-vāda) through an analysis of the symbol of consciousness was reached by Bhartṛhari in his *Vākyapadīya*.

This revolution in the Upaniṣadic tradition was not attained without outside help. Absolutism in Buddhism (both the Mādhyamika Śūnyatā and Yogācāra Vijñapti-Mātratā) actually preceded it by several centuries. There is ample evidence not only of precedence but of influence as well. Gauḍapāda appears to us as the Brāhmanical thinker boldly reformulating the Upaniṣadic ideal in the light of the Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda dialectic. But there was more borrowing of technique than of tenet. The Vedānta philosophers did not and could not accept the Buddhist metaphysics—its denial of the self, momentariness etc.; but they did press into service the Mādhyamika dialectic and the Vijñānavāda analysis of illusion. No absolutism could be established without the dialectic and a theory of illusion.

The Yogācāra, though it severely criticised the Mādhyamika conception of Śūnyatā, was yet directly

and immediately influenced by the Mādhyamika. Its difference with the latter was with regard to the nature of the Absolute. While the Mādhyamika refused not only to characterise it—which absolutism does—but also to identify it with anything in experience, the Vijñānvādins identified it with Consciousness. It only makes for confusion to ignore the different conceptions of the Absolute in the Vedānta, Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda systems; at least the approaches are different. There is no doubt that it was the Mādhyamika dialectic that paved the way for the other Absolutisms.

The Śūnyatā of the Mādhyamika is the necessary implication of his dialectic, and the dialectic is the maturity of criticism which was born with Buddhism. The rise of sects and schools helped and hastened the birth of the dialectic.

The immediate emergence of the Mādhyamika dialectic must be traced to the rise of the systems of philosophy like the Sāṃkhya, Vaiśeṣika and Nyāya on the one side and the Ābhidharmika philosophy on the other. As they were diametrically opposed to each other, and yet as every one of them claimed to give us the true and only picture of reality, it must have dawned on men, already critically minded like the Buddhists, that speculative systems of thought are mere conceptual construction: they profess to lead us to the real but succeed in landing us in appearance; they claim to be knowledge, but in fact sense are only illusion. This awareness of the utter subjectivity of our conceptual devices is the birth of the dialectic.

III Upaniṣads and Buddhism

Since the opening of the Buddhist scriptures to the Western world, it has become almost a stereotyped opinion among orientalists to regard Buddha as carrying on the work of the Upaniṣad seers. Indian philosophy is interpreted as having evolved out of one single tradition—the Upaniṣadic. Buddhism and Jainism are treated as deviations rather than as radical departures from the Upaniṣadic tradition (ātma-vāda). Such an interpretation is not fully alive to the vital differences and exclusive attitudes inherent in the Brāhmanical and the Buddhist systems. It tends towards *oversimplification*.

Likewise, the differences obtaining in Buddhism itself are overlooked or minimised, and an attempt is made to treat it as one system. This mistake, however, is not made in the case of the systems (Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika) deriving their inspiration from the Vedas. Such attempt engenders partisan spirit in writers; they begin taking sides with one or the other school of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, and consider *that* as *the* teaching of Buddha. There is again the *fallacy of over-simplification*. This prevents a correct understanding of the development of Buddhist philosophy. The dialogues of Buddha, as preserved in the Pāli Canons, are suggestive; they are as little systematic as the Upaniṣadic texts. Buddhist systems grew out of them much in the way the Brāhmanical systems grew out of the Upaniṣads. Buddhism is a matrix of systems,¹ and not a unitary system. It does not exclude legitimately different formulations. For a correct and fruitful understanding of the development of Indian philosophy, it is necessary to admit not only the difference between Buddhist and Brāhmanical systems of thought, but also internal differences within Buddhism itself. This would be evident if we consider the nature and development of the Upaniṣadic and Buddhist thought.

The entire Vedic teaching may be construed as knowledge of the deity (devatāy vidyā). The Devatā (deity) is the super-natural personality or essence activating things from within. It is an unseen presence (parokṣa), not overtly perceived, but felt to be the guiding and controlling spirit within. In India, Varuna, Agni and other Vedic gods are not mere natural forces personified, as interpreted by Western scholars. It would be truer to understand them as personalities. Each deity has a characteristic external manifestation, such as thunder and lightning in the case of Indra. Prayers for favour could be addressed to them as they were deities and had power over phenomena; and as personalities they could be gracious. The devatā has both a cosmic (ādhidaivika) and a microcosmic (ādhyātmika) signification. In the Upaniṣads, 'deva' and 'ātman' are often used as interchangeable terms.² Impelled by its own dynamism, there was a two-fold movement in the deepening of the devatā-knowledge. At first the deity is understood as the soul or inner essence of things,³ the same logic led to the search for a deeper and innermost deity of deities. This is the movement towards monotheism which is an admitted feature of the Ṛg Vedic hymns. It may be truer to say that the insight into the innermost deity, variously called Virāṭ, Prajāpati or Hiraṇyagarbha,⁴ was implicit from the beginning. The characterisation of each deity (Indra, Agni, Viṣṇu etc.) as the highest God in turn, the so-called Kathenotheism, is evidence of the awareness of the unity of Godhead. The Vedic religion of devatās is not so much a polytheism as a pantheism.

Side by side with this, there was the movement to identify man and his spiritual functions with the deity. In the Vidyās and Upāsanās, notably in the Vaiśvānara-vidyā and the Onkāra Upāsanā, we can clearly see the process of identification of the aspects of the individual with the macro-cosmic divinities. Here too was the same search for unifying the several psychic functions in a deep principle underlying them all.¹ That principle is found in Vijñāna (Consciousness) and Ānanda (Bliss). The next step is to identify the essence of the subjective with the reality of the objective. This is expressed in the sentences like, 'I am Brahman', 'That thou art'. Difference between the self and Brahman is looked down upon.² This could be done, for both are transcendent (devoid of empirical determinations), and yet are the basis of all. 'Tat tvam asi' (That thou art) sums up the final teaching of the Vedas.

The mode of the development of Vedic thought consists in accepting the ātman as an inner core of things, and then to deepen this insight till a logically stable position was reached. The true self is identical with the Absolute (Brahman).³ Later systems try to synthesise this original intuition in their own way; but they all take the ātman (Substance) as the basic reality.

In the dialogues of Buddha we breathe a different atmosphere. There is a distinct spirit of opposition, if not one of hostility as well, to the ātmavāda of the Upaniṣads. Buddha and Buddhism can be understood only as a revolt not merely against the cant and hollowness of ritualism—the Upaniṣads themselves voice this unmistakably—but against the ātma-ideology, the metaphysics of the Substance-view. Buddha nowhere acknowledges his indebtedness to the Upaniṣads or to any other teacher for his characteristic philosophical standpoint. Although Brahmā, the deity, is referred to several times, Brahman (the Absolute) is never mentioned. Buddha always considers himself as initiating a new tradition, as opening up a path never trod before.¹ In the *Brahmajāla*, the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* and elsewhere, current philosophical speculations are reviewed; and all of them are rejected as dogmatic (diṭṭhivāda) and as inconsistent with spiritual life. This is not the way of or

who continues an older tradition. It is not correct to hold that the differences are religious and practical, although they are put up as philosophical.²

If the ātman had been a cardinal doctrine with Buddhism, why was it so securely hidden under a bushel that even the immediate followers of the Master had no inkling of it? The Upaniṣads, on the other hand, blazen forth the reality of the ātman in every page, in every line almost. Buddha came to deny the soul, a permanent substantial entity, precisely because he took his stand on the reality of moral consciousness and the efficacy of Karma. An unchanging eternal soul, as impervious to change would render spiritual life lose all meaning; we would, in that case, be neither the better nor the worse for our efforts. This might lead to inaction (akriyāvāda). Nay more; the ātman is the root-cause of attachment, desire, aversion and pain. When we take anything as a self (substantial and permanent) we become attached to it and dislike other things that are opposed to it. Sakkāyadiṭṭhi (Substance-view) is avidyā (ignorance) *par excellence*, and from it proceed all passions. Denial of Satkāya (ātman or Substance) is the very pivot of the Buddhist metaphysics and doctrine of salvation.³

The oft-recurring strain in the Pāli Canons is that things are transitory:

How transient are all component things;
Growth is their nature and decay.
They are produced; they are dissolved again;
To bring them all into subjection that is bliss¹
Decay is inherent in all component things;
Work out your salvation with diligence.²

This is the last speech of the Tathāgata, and must therefore be taken as summing up his life-teaching.

In his interesting monograph, *The Basic Conception of Buddhism*, Professor V. Bhattacharya concludes, after a searching analysis, that the denial of the self is the basic tenet of Buddhism. He says: "Thus and in various other ways, too many to be mentioned, the existence of a permanent Self or ātman, as accepted in other systems, was utterly denied by the Buddha, thereby pulling down the very foundation of desire where it can rest."³ Another distinguished scholar, the late Professor Stcherbatsky, is equally emphatic about this.

When Buddha calls the doctrine of an eternal self 'a doctrine of fools' it is clear that he is fighting against an established doctrine. Whenever in his Sermons he comes to speak about Soullessness or Wrong Personalism (satkāyadṛṣṭ) a sense of opposition or even animosity is clearly felt in his words. This doctrine along with its positive counterpart—the separate elements that are active in life and whose activity must gradually be suppressed till Eternal Repose is attained—is the central point of the whole bulk of Buddhist teaching, and Mrs. Caroline Rhys Davids remarks, "how carefully and conscientiously this anti-substantialist position had been cherished and upheld." We may add that the whole of the history of Buddhist philosophy can be described as a series of attempts to penetrate more deeply into this original intuition of Buddha, what he himself believed to be his great discovery.⁴

We are now in a position correctly to indicate the relation between the Upaniṣads and Buddha. Both have the same problem, Pain (duḥkha), and they see it in all its intensity and universality. Phenomenal existence is imperfection and pain. Both again are one in placing before us the ideal of a state beyond all possibility of pain and bondage. The Upaniṣads speak of it more positively as a state of consciousness and bliss (vijñānam ānandaṁ brahma). Buddha emphasises the negative aspect of

Nirvāṇa is the annihilation of sorrow. Both have to speak of the ultimate as devoid of empirical determinations, as incomparable to anything we know; silence is their most proper language. They also agree that no empirical means, organisational device, sacrifice or penance, can bring us to the goal. Only insight into the nature of the real can avail. For the Upaniṣads, the ātman is real; only identification with the body (kośas), the states or any empirical object, is accidental. By negating the wrong identification, its unreal limitations, we can know its real nature. Ātman is Brahman; there is no other to it. No fear, aversion or attachment could afflict it.¹ To realise the self (ātmakāma) is to have all desires satisfied (āptakāma), and thus to transcend all desires (akāma).²

Buddha reaches this very goal of desirelessness, not by the universalisation of the I (ātman), but by denying it altogether. For, only when we consider anything as permanent and pleasant, as a self, do we get attached to it and are averse to other things that are opposed to it; there is then bondage (saṃsāra). The attā is the root-cause of all passions, and this notion has to be rooted out completely to attain Nirvāṇa. For the Upaniṣads, the self is a reality; for the Buddha it is a primordial wrong notion, not real. The highest experience, brahmānubhava, the Upaniṣads take not as the annihilation of the 'I', but of its particularity and finitude. In fact, we realise the plenitude of our being there as bhūmā (whole). Buddha was impressed by the negative aspect of the highest trance-states as devoid (śūnya) of intellect, consciousness etc. Both reach the same goal of utter desirelessness, but through different means. The spiritual genius of Buddha carved out a new path, the negative path.

There are observations in Professor Radhakrishnan's writings which indicate the difference between Buddha and the Upaniṣads: "If there is a difference between the teaching of the Upaniṣads and that of Buddha, it is not in their views of the world of experience (saṃsāra) but in regard to their conception of reality (nirvāṇa)."¹

The fundamental difference between Buddhism and the Upaniṣads seems to be about the metaphysical reality of an immutable substance, which is the true self of man as well. . . . It is true that Buddha finds no centre of reality or principle of permanence in the flux of life and the whirl of the world, but it does not follow that there is nothing real in the world at all except the agitation forces.²

Is not a *fundamental metaphysical difference* the source of all other differences? If Buddhism is "only a restatement of the thought of the Upaniṣads" with a new emphasis,³ it is desirable to emphasise the 'emphasis,' especially because it is of a fundamentally metaphysical nature. The Upaniṣads and Buddhism belong to the same spiritual genus; they differ as species; and the differentia are the acceptance or rejection of the ātman (permanent substance).

IV Was There a Primitive Buddhism Affirming the Ātman?

Attempts have been made by not an inconsiderable section of orientalist to discover a primitive Buddhism—the actual teaching of the master as distinguished from later scholasticism and monastic elaboration. Some, like Poussin, Beck and others,⁴ aver that Yoga and practice of virtues formed the original teaching of Buddha which scholasticism later on transformed into a soul-denying creed.

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