

Ālaya in the Laṅkāvatārasūtra (v. 1)

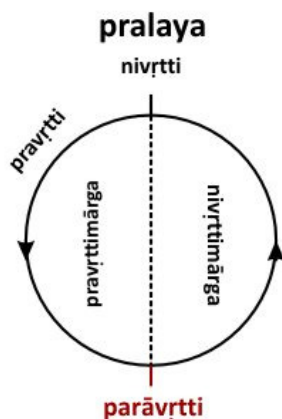
II. Philosophically

The Yogācāra system is presenting us with 8 vijñāna's, evolving from one basic form of consciousness, which is the ālayavijñāna. A common translation of vijñāna in the context of Yogācāra Buddhism would be "consciousness", however, the concept of vijñāna as part of the epistemology of Yogācāra Buddhism, is a specific type of consciousness, a faculty of the mind, which is the counterpart of a specific source of knowledge. The basic principles of this epistemology are comparable to the Saṃkhya philosophy, where every organ of perception has its counterpart in a specific faculty of the mind.

In Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki's *Studies in the Lankavatara sutra* (p. 186), three modes or aspects (lakṣaṇa) of vijñāna are presented:

1. jāti remaining in its original nature
2. pravṛtti evolving
3. karman producing effects

In the state of pralaya, which we could think of as the state before the beginning of the evolution of a human entity, the vijñāna's are absorbed in ālayavijñāna, which is then in its jāti state, its "original nature". (cp. Suzuki, *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, p. xvii-xviii) When the human entity starts to evolve, the vijñānas arise from ālayavijñāna, which is then at the same time in another state, called pravṛtti, i.e. evolving. In yoga philosophy, the terms pravṛtti and nirvṛtti (or nivṛtti) are connected with evolution and involution, pravṛttimārga and nirvṛttimārga being the outward and inward arc of an evolutionary cycle. They indicate cyclic development, first directed outward, where the entity expresses itself through form, and then inward, where the entity gradually becomes a master of its form, and eventually becomes independent of it. The cycle has a turning point in the middle, where development starts turning inward, which in the Laṅkāvatāra is called parāvṛtti, which is literally "turning back". (cp. *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, p. xvii) At this point of revolution, there is an opportunity for the deep mystical realisation of the relation of the entity with its form. This realisation takes place, according to the Laṅkāvatāra, "in the Ālaya, which is the basis of all things", as Suzuki formulates it. (*Studies* p. 184)



In Suzuki's *Studies* (p. 186-187) we find:

The Pravṛttivijñāna is a collective name for all the particular Vijñānas that evolve out of Ālaya, when they are considered from the point of view of evolution, while the Ālaya is the Vijñāna or Citta that remains undisturbed in its native abode.

To make sure that we understand correctly, the Laṅkāvatāra firmly underlines its standpoint concerning ālaya on p. 34-35:

[...] there is no cessation [of Ālaya] in its original form. Therefore, Mahāmati, what ceases to function is not the Ālaya in its original self-form, but is the effect-producing form of the Vijñānas. [...] If, however, there is the cessation of the Ālayavijñāna [in its original form], this doctrine will in no wise differ from the nihilistic doctrine of the philosophers.

If we translate the first sentence of this fragment more in the light of our understanding of the cyclic process, the result could be something like:

[...] and there is no cessation in its aspect of self-origination (svajāti). That which ceases, Mahāmati, is not the aspect of self-origination, but it is the aspect of activity (karman) of the Vijñānas.

[...] sa ca na bhavati svajātilakṣaṇanirodhaḥ | tasmāmahāmate na svajātilakṣaṇanirodho vijñānānām kiṃ tu karmalakṣaṇanirodhaḥ |

The term used here for self-origination is svajāti, own-birth or self-birth, not jāti, birth, indicating the idea of auto-creation and auto-re-creation, showing a quite profound universal philosophical concept. Interestingly, that which is said to "cease" is the karman aspect and not the pravṛtti aspect. In the Book of Dzyan it is stated that evolution never ceases, and that pralaya and the birth of the new universe are just phases of the ever moving evolutionary process. (Note, that in this case the term pravṛtti would have a slightly different meaning than when it is seen as the complement of nivṛtti.)

In SD I, 49 we see that HPB recognized different aspects to the term ālaya:

What are the doctrines taught on this subject by the Esoteric "Buddhists"? With them "Alaya" has a double and even a triple meaning.

In SD I, 48, at least two aspects (our jāti and pravṛtti) are spoken of:

Alaya, though eternal and changeless in its inner essence on the planes which are unreachable by either men or Cosmic Gods (Dhyani Buddhas), alters during the active life-period with respect to the lower planes, ours included.

Again in SD I, 48, following Emil Schlagintweit (*Buddhism in Tibet*, p. 39), we have the jāti and pravṛtti aspects (or perhaps even the jāti and karman aspects):

[...] the basis of every visible and invisible thing, and that, though it is eternal and immutable in its essence, it reflects itself in every object of the Universe "like the moon in clear tranquil water" [...]

These paradoxes show ālaya remaining in its original nature, and at the same time evolving. This principle explains the phrase in the Book of Dzyan, why in the cosmic night “the alaya of the universe was in paramartha”, in SD I, 47 (stanza 1 śloka 9):

BUT WHERE WAS THE DANGMA WHEN THE ALAYA OF THE UNIVERSE (Soul as the basis of all, Anima Mundi) WAS IN PARAMARTHA (a) (Absolute Being and Consciousness which are Absolute Non-Being and Unconsciousness) AND THE GREAT WHEEL WAS ANUPADAKA (b)?

In HPB’s commentary between brackets, we see that she defines ālaya as the “Soul”, “the basis of all” (Tibetan: kun gzhi), which she identifies with the Anima Mundi. This term refers to Hellenistic philosophy, and connects our investigation into ālaya directly to the third “fundamental proposition” of The Secret Doctrine. Again in SD I, 48, we find:

Alaya is literally the "Soul of the World" or Anima Mundi, the "Over-Soul" of Emerson, and according to esoteric teaching it changes periodically its nature.

The third fundamental proposition, in the Proem, SD I, 17 under (c), states:

The fundamental identity of all Souls with the Universal Over-Soul, the latter being itself an aspect of the Unknown Root; and the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul -- a spark of the former -- through the Cycle of Incarnation (or "Necessity") in accordance with Cyclic and Karmic law, during the whole term. [etc. etc.]

Here we also have the other two aspects, pravṛtti and karman, as Cyclic and Karmic Law. In the case of the universal over-soul, being “an aspect” of the unknown root, we can ask ourselves which aspect of the unknown root (SPACE) it is. Is it a manifested or unmanifested, or even a manifesting or unmanifesting aspect of the Logos? This is not sufficiently clear from this fragment. In the *Theosophical Glossary* under Alaya, we find the following definition:

Alaya (Sk.) The Universal Soul (See Secret Doctrine Vol. I. pp. 47 et seq.). The name belongs to the Tibetan system of the contemplative Mahâyâna School. Identical with Âkâsa in its mystic sense, and with Mulâprâkriti, in its essence, as it is the basis or root of all things.

Here we see that ālaya is identified with the First Logos (mūlaprakṛti) *in its essence*, “as it is the basis or root of all things” (Tibetan: kun gzhi).

In CW XII, 635 (ES Instruction III), we read:

Alaya, the Universal Soul, of which the Manvantaric aspect is Mahat.

and in CW XII, 607:

[...] *Buddhi is a ray of the Universal Spiritual Soul (ALAYA).*

We might derive from these two statements, that the cyclic (“Manvantaric”) aspect of ālaya, which we have called pravṛtti, in cosmic terms is mahat, and in individual terms buddhi. Earlier (in [The Three Logoi \(3\)](#)) we have identified Mahat as the Second Logos. The Universal Soul is apparently in this case the “non-Manvantaric” aspect of ālaya or what we have called the jāti aspect, which must be the First Logos. Then the karman aspect must be the Third Logos. Now we can set up the following table:

| Aspect of ālaya | | Corresponds to | Cosmic |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|----------------|---|
| 1. jāti | remaining in its original nature | First Logos | Universal Soul [Emerson’s Over-Soul, Anima Mundi] |
| 2. pravṛtti | evolving | Second Logos | Mahat [called Maha-Buddhi], Universal Mind [Universal Spiritual Soul] |
| 3. karman | producing effects | Third Logos | |

It may be noted that these conclusions do not in every respect meet the ones from *The Three Logoi*. The differences concern the terms Universal Soul and Anima Mundi. It will be necessary to clear up these differences in a later stage.