

BUDDHIST AND INDIAN STUDIES

in Honour of

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The Sarvāstivāda Conception of Nirvāṇa

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1. Introduction

The Sarvāstivāda defines *nirvāṇa* or *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* as a disjunction (*visaṃyoga*) from the impure (*sāsrava* ‘with outflow’) dharma acquired through the process of discrimination (*pratisaṃkhyāna*) which is a specific pure *prajñā*.¹ Sthiramati explains that this specific *prajñā* refers to that in the *ānantarya-mārga* (see below) when the acquisition (*prāpti*) of defilement is abandoned, subsequent to which *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* is realized (*sākṣāt-kṛta*)² or acquired (*prāpyte*). *MVS* (163a–164b) enumerates as many as 14 synonyms for *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*, the first and foremost of which is *nirvāṇa*, explained in 4 senses: (i) the absolute exit (*nir*) from all *gati* (*vana*); (ii) the absolute absence (*nir*) of karma of and defilements — the bad smell (*durgandha* = *vana*) and impurities; (iii) the absolute exit (*nir*) from all the forests (*vana*) of *skandha* with their three fires and three characteristics; (iv) the non- (*nir*-) weaving (*vāna*) of the fabric — *vipāka-phala* — of saṃsāric existence. Thus, *Nirvāṇa* as the *summum bonum* of Buddhism is THE *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* which is acquired at the final moment of Enlightenment as a result of which all defilements—and hence all *duḥkha*—pertaining to the three spheres of existence are ceased absolutely, and saṃsāric existence is totally transcended. *MVS* (322a-b) also speaks of this specifically in terms of the abandonment of defilement, the corresponding *jñāna* arisen and the path-structure as follows: “When [the practitioner] is dissociated from the ninth [- final -] grade of bond, the *Vajropama-samādhi* (in which whatever defilements remaining are eradicated without any trace) having ceased and the *anutpāda-jñāna* having first arisen, that abandonment [of defilement] acquired is called ‘abandonment’ (*prahāṇa*), ‘disjunction’ (*visaṃyoga*), ‘cessation’ (*nirodha*), ‘truth’ (*satya*), ‘complete knowledge’ (*parijñā*)—i.e. the complete knowledge which [refers to] the destruction of

1 *AKB*, 3f.

2 *TA* (*U, J*), II, 231

all bonds—‘fruit of the spiritual life’ (*śrāmaṇya-phala*)—i.e. the *arhat-phala*—and ‘the Sphere of *Nirvāṇa* with a remnant of substratum’ (*sopadhi-śeṣa-nirvāṇa-dhātu*) ... When the *skandha*, *āyatana* and *dhātu* of an *arhat* cease and continue no more, [he enters] into the Sphere of *Nirvāṇa* without a remnant of substratum (*nirupadhi-śeṣa-nirvāṇa-dhātu*).

It appears that at the early stages, however, the Sarvāstivāda did not elaborate on the ontological status of the *asaṃskṛta* dharma. It is to be noted that in the *JPS*, one finds only the mention of *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* and *aprasaṃkhyā-nirodha*, but not *ākāśa*. In *MVS*, the various *ācārya* opine differently as regards the *asaṃskṛta*. Thus, Buddhadeva accepts the realities of all the three³; Dharmatrāta denies the reality of *ākāśa*; the Dārṣṭāntika denies the ontological status of all the three⁴. Probably in response to the denial by the Dārṣṭāntika and the Sautrāntika (*AKB*, 93), in the post *AKB* period there had consistently been an additional requirement in the definition of ‘Sarvāstivāda’: A Sarvāstivādin must accept not only the tri-temporal existence of dharma, but also the reality of all the three *asaṃskṛta*.⁵ Saṃghabhadra repeatedly accuses the Sautrāntika of siding with the followers of the ‘sky-flower 空花 (*ākāśa-puṣpa*)’ doctrine — apparently referring to the Sūnyatā-vāda prevailing at the time — in obstinately denying the *svabhāva* of all dharma, including the *asaṃskṛta*.⁶

2. Nature of the *Pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* as *Asaṃskṛta*

AKB (4f) defines “*samskṛta*” as follows: “Conditioned — because they are made (*kṛta*) by conditions co-existing in assemblage—there is nothing which is produced by a single condition”. What is conditioned is what is dependently originated (*pratītya-samutpanna*), and characterized by the 4 characteristics of the conditioned. These 4 — *jāti*, *sthiti*, *jarā/anyathātva*, *anityatā/vyaya* — are real entities which together cause a so-called conditioned dharma to be impermanent — nay, momentary. Saṃghabhadra (T no.1563, 810a-b) explains: “The four characteristics exercise their activities at different stages (*avasthā*): At the time when a dharma is arising, the *jāti-lakṣaṇa* exercises its activity. When [this dharma] has reached the stage of having arisen, the three — *sthiti*, *jarā* and *vyaya* — exercise their respective

3 *MVS*, 662a

4 Cf. *Entrance*, 16, 33, 59. 161f

5 Cf. *Entrance*, 261 f

6 E.g.: *Ny*, 432b

activities at the same time.”

In its aspect of being a dependently co-produced existent, a conditioned dharma is called a “*samskṛta*” — ‘compounded’, ‘co-produced’, ‘conditioned’. In its other aspect of being a causally productive force, it is also called a “*samskāra*” — ‘conditioning’ or ‘conditioning force’. In direct contrast, the *asaṃskṛta* are neither produced by causes and conditions, nor are they causally productive of other dharma. Saṃghabhadra argues, however, that their reality cannot be denied simply on the ground that they are neither causes nor effects — The Sautrāntika accept causality of past and future dharma but not their reality.⁷ (see also below §§3.2, 3.9)

AKB (14) states that the *asaṃskṛta* are not subsumable under the *skandha* taxonomy, since “*skandha*” means a heap (*rāsi*); and unlike *rūpa* etc., the *asaṃskṛta* do not form separate heaps of “past *asaṃskṛta*,” “present *asaṃskṛta*,” etc.⁸ In Sthiramati’s **tattvārthā*, a question is raised: “If the *asaṃskṛta* are not real entities, it is reasonable that they do not form *skandha*. Since they are asserted [by the Sarvāstivāda] to be existents, why is it not conceded that a plurality of them agglomerate as a heap — an ‘*asaṃskṛta-skandha*’?”⁹ Sthiramati explains:

“There are two signification of a heap: (i) When what exist separately in various locations are gathered together in one place, one calls it a heap. (ii) When tri-temporal dharma are grouped together through our faculty of understanding (*prajñā*) into groups each pertaining to one temporal period, one calls these [groups] heaps. Now, the *asaṃskṛta* dharma have neither of these two signification, how can they be called heaps.”¹⁰

Thus, the essential characteristic of the *asaṃskṛta* dharma is that they are neither temporalized nor spatialized. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they are not distinctly individuated; rather, they exist as a plurality of real entities (*dravya*). Indeed, the Sarvāstivāda maintain that there are as many *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* as there are impure (*sāsrava*—with outflow) dharma.¹¹

Being beyond the space-time dimension, they can neither arise nor cease, and accordingly are not directly involved in any causal process. Nevertheless in conformity with the sūtra tradition which speaks of *śrāmaṇya-phala* and conventional usage, it is permissible to call the *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* a

7 *Ny*, 433b

8 *AKB*, 14; cf. *AsB*, 17

9 *ZY*, 188

10 *ZY*, 188

11 *MVS*, 162a; *AKB*, 4

“fruit of disjunction” (*viśamyoga-phala*) without implying that it is causally produced; and also consider them as a “condition qua object” (*ālambana-pratyaya*) — e.g. as an object of thought of a yogi, and *adhipati-pratyaya* — making an indirect contribution by merely not obstructing.¹²

However, it is only the past and present *saṃskṛta* dharma which have the functions of ‘grasping a fruit’ (*phala-grahaṇa/phala-ākṣepa*) and ‘giving a fruit’ (*phala-dāna*). The former function determines the causal efficacy of a given dharma as the cause for the dharma to be produced subsequently (simultaneously in the case of the *sahabhū-hetu*) as its effect. The latter is the actual producing of the corresponding effect. These two functions are lacking among the future *saṃskṛta* dharma as well as the *asaṃskṛta* dharma. Hence *nirvāṇa* as *asaṃskṛta* cannot be said to have fruits (*sa-phala*). Conclusion: “The way of establishing causes and effects among the *saṃskṛta* is not applicable to the case of the *asaṃskṛta*. Accordingly, a *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* is a cause which is without an effect, and an effect which is without a cause.”¹³

MVS quotes *JPS* to distinguish *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* from *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* and *anityatā-nirodha*¹⁴. The former is not only a *nirodha*; it entails the disjunction from a defilement and the acquiring of the corresponding acquisition of the disjunction.¹⁵ It is also the liberation (*vimukti*) from, and the subduing (*damana*, *viṣkambhana*), abandoning (*prahāṇa*) and transcending (*samatikrama*) of defilements. It is acquired with respect to the impure dharma of the three periods of time. Its further characterization are as follows: It is *kuśala* and so is its *prāpti*; it is *anāsrava* and its *prāpti* is either *sāsrava* or *anāsrava*; it is not bound to any sphere of existence (*apratisaṃyukta*) and its *prāpti* may be bound to *rūpa-dhātu* or *ārūpya-dhātu* or unbound; it is *naiva-śaikṣa-nāśaikṣa* and its *prāpti* may be *śaikṣa*, *aśaikṣa* or *naiva-śaikṣa-nāśaikṣa*; it is not to be abandoned (*aheya*) and its *prāpti* is either to be abandoned through cultivation (*bhāvanā-heya*) or not to be abandoned; it is non-defiled (*akliṣṭa*), and so is its *prāpti* (likewise for the characterization of *sāvadyatva/anāvadyatva* and *parihāṇi/aparihāṇi*); it is without retribution (*avipāka*) and its *prāpti* is either with or without retribution; it is a *mārga-phala* and its *prāpti* may be either *mārga* and *mārga-phala* or neither *mārga* nor *mārga-phala*; it is subsumed under *nirodha-satya* and its *prāpti* is subsumed under the other three *satya*.¹⁶

12 *Ny*, 428c

13 *MVS* 429a

14 According to Sthiramati *TA* (U.J, I, 283), *ācārya* Āryadāsa arguing that Nirvāṇa signifies cessation, goes so far as to include both *apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* and *anityatā-nirodha* as *nirvāṇa*

15 *MVS*, 161a

16 *MVS*, 161b-c

3. Proof of the Reality of Nirvāṇa

For the Sarvāstivāda *nirvāṇa* or *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* is a distinct positive entity (*dravyāntara*) — an ontologically real force that is acquired by the practitioner when a given defilement is completely abandoned.¹⁷ In fact, this real force acts to ensure that the *prāpti* of the defilement so abandoned will absolutely not be able to arise any more¹⁸. Skandhila’s definition clearly brings out this dynamic function: “The cessation through discrimination is that which causes the non-production of *duḥkha* — [A real entity which is a positive presence:] like a dike holding back the water or a screen blocking the wind.”¹⁹ The following are the main Vaibhāṣika arguments for its reality (*Ny*, 430a–434b):

1. The sūtra says, “Among all dharma — those which are *saṃskṛta* or those which are *asaṃskṛta* — detachment is supreme.”²⁰ Here the *asaṃskṛta* are mentioned — in the plural — as among the dharma, and therefore cannot be non-existent. What are non-existent do not have the nature of dharma. “How can a non-existent be said to be supreme among the non-existents? It is empirically observed that among dharma which have their self-characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*), some are said to be superior, others inferior. Thus *nirvāṇa* definitely exist as distinct entities, which sustain their self-characteristics and hence called dharma” (cf.: *svalakṣaṇa-dhāraṇād dharmah* / *AKB*, 2).

2. The essences and functions of *rūpa*, *vedanā*, etc. which exist as a series, are empirically observable. Those of *nirvāṇa* which do not exist as a series, are subtle and difficult to perceive. Nevertheless, when as a result of diligent contemplative practices the *bhāvanā-mayī prajñā* arises in the practitioner, the true essential nature and functions of *nirvāṇa* are realized by him. Indeed, at the moment when he comes out from the contemplation, he exclaims: “Wonderful is *nirvāṇa*, it is cessation (*nirodha*), calmed (*śānta*), excellent (*praṇīta*) and exit (*nihsaraṇa*).” These specific characteristics of *nirvāṇa* which are experientially verifiable by the practitioner prove their very existence as real entities. In fact, characteristic and essential nature are one and the same thing. We may also note here the *MVS* doctrine that what pertain

17 *MVS*, 432c

18 Cf. *TA* (U.J), I, 219

19 *Entrance*, 146

20 Cf. *Āṅguttara-nikāya* II, 34; etc.

to the Absolute Truth (*paramārtha*) are the universal principles directly cognized (*abhi-sam-√i*) by the *ārya*.

3. There are certain sūtra which explicitly say that *nirvāṇa* exists. Thus, a sūtra says: "O monks! there is definitely the unborn. If this were not, there would not be an end to birth-death and *duḥkha*. As there is the unborn ..." (cf. Itivuttaka, 43). Also: "There is an abode (*sthāna*), an exit"; "I see that there truly is the real category (*padārtha*) of *asamskṛta*, namely Nirvāṇa"; "It is called *nirodha* on account of the *nirodha* of the five aggregates of grasping"; "There are three *dhātu* — *nirvāṇa-dhātu*, *samskṛta-dhātu*, *asamskṛta-dhātu*"; "There is a *nirodha-dhātu*"; "There is the born (*jāta*), there is the unborn (*ajāta*)"; "There is the *āryasatya* of *duḥkha-nirodha*"; "I know directly the abode of security (*kṣemāyatana*, *kṣema-gati*)"; etc.

The Sautrāntika and others, of course, deny that these sūtra statements constitute proof of *nirvāṇa* as a real entity. Thus, "There is the unborn" refers not to a real entity, but simply the discontinuity of the birth (*janmāpravṛtti*) of existents; it means simply: "there is the cutting off of the series of the born". Saṃghabhadra replies that it is only when the unborn is conceded to be a distinct real entity that it is meaningful to say "there is." Besides, if there were no such entity, the Buddha should have simply said "there is the discontinuity of the born." Moreover before the path is arisen, there is no 'cutting off of the series'; when the path is arisen, there is; again there is not, when an *ārya* retrogresses in giving rise to defilements — thus the cutting off of a series should not be *asamskṛta*. To show its unreality, the Sautrāntika also cites the simile in the sūtra which likens *nirvāṇa* to the extinction of the flame of a lamp. The Vaibhāṣika, however argues that this simile does not contradict their view-point: The extinction referred hereto is the *anityatā-lakṣaṇa* which exists as a real *viprayukta-samskāra* dharma, distinct from the flame. Besides, this simile is made with reference to the time of entering into the *nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa* when all remaining *upadhi* are completely cut off.

4. Some abhidharma masters concede that *nirvāṇa* exists, but only as a relatively real (*prajñaptisat*). The Sarvāstivāda argues that if it is conceded to exist, it must be accepted to exist as an absolutely real (*dravya-sat*, *paramārtha-sat*); for a real supporting basis — on which *nirvāṇa* is designated as a relatively real — cannot be found. The *samskāra* cannot serve as this basis for designating *nirvāṇa* as their cessation. For in this case *nirvāṇa*, like its basis, would have to be a thing whose nature is to be abandoned, defiled, with outflow and impermanent — completely

contradictory to the nature of *nirvāṇa*. Moreover, logically speaking, the *samskāra* being opposed in nature to *nirvāṇa*, cannot be the basis of the latter: There has never been a relatively real dharma which is opposed in nature to its very supporting basis; as in the case of light and darkness. Furthermore, since *nirvāṇa* is conceded to be the cessation of the *samskāra*, the latter cannot serve as the basis — it is not observed that light has darkness (its extinction) as the basis. Besides, it is also illogical in view of the fact that when the *samskāra* are existing, there is no cessation: A person who is non-detached, so long as he is still having defilements like greed etc., cannot be said to have the cessation of these defilements. It is only when the defilements no more exist in him that he realizes *nirvāṇa*. Conclusion: If *nirvāṇa* has any reality, it must be a real entity in itself, not a mere designation derived from any basis. (Cf. the last argument to that employed in Ny (624c ff.) in establishing that the past and future dharma are not just designations on the basis of the real present dharma. Also cf. ADV, 278)

5. Some assert that *nirvāṇa* is unreal because a knowledge (*jñāna*) necessarily has an object, and for them "the *prajñā* which perceives *nirvāṇa* (*nirvāṇālambanā prajñā*) has name (*nāman*) as its object. Saṃghabhadra refutes this, pointing out that it would lead to the consequence of *mithyā-dṛṣṭi* and *samyak-dṛṣṭi* being mutually accomplishing: "A *samyak-dṛṣṭi* comprehending *nirvāṇa* as being *śānta* and *nitya* would become a *dṛṣṭy-upādāna*, since all names are impermanent. A *mithyā-dṛṣṭi* vilifying *nirvāṇa* as being impermanent in nature would become a *samyak-dṛṣṭi*, since it would be an understanding in conformity to reality. Those who hold that *nirvāṇa* is devoid of any essential reality would never concede that name is a non-existent; those who hold that *Nirvāṇa* has an essential nature would never concede that name itself is *nirvāṇa*."

6. If *nirvāṇa* were not a real entity, how can the receptive beings give rise to delight in *Nirvāṇa* and disgust towards *samsāra* — there cannot be inferiority or superiority among non-existents. (The implication here is clearly that *nirvāṇa*, as much as the conditioned dharma, are real forces which can impact on the mental streams of sentient beings.) Moreover, it would mean that the Buddha had been deluding the receptive beings; for he would have been speaking of the non-existents in the same manner that he spoke of the existents. A further implication would be that a view that denies the reality of *nirvāṇa* would be a *samyak-dṛṣṭi*. (Cf. preceding argument.)

7. The opponents argue: The Buddha in the sūtra explicitly states that “all” dharma are comprised in the twelve āyatana (*Samyutta, IV, 13*), and also that these twelve āyatana are *sa-prapañca* and *anitya*. Now, if *nirvāṇa* is a real existent and is permanent, the Buddha would have distinguished it from the twelve āyatana. Saṃghabhadra answers: In the same context, the Buddha further speaks of all the twelve āyatana as being with-burning (*sa-dāha*) — i.e. having the heat of defilement. Now, surely the *ārya-mārga* is included in the twelve āyatana and yet it is certainly devoid of the burning of greed etc. Why then does the Buddha not distinguish it from the other dharma? Thus, it must be understood that the Buddha in this context refers to the twelve āyatana which are with outflow. Hence the opponents, by quoting the above sūtra cannot establish the unreality of *nirvāṇa*.

8. When *duḥkha* is ceased, a *pratisamkhyā-nirodha*—distinct from *duḥkha* and *mārga* — is acquired. It is this that is called *nirvāṇa* (432c 12–3). If there were no *nirodha* which exists as a real entity, then an *arhat* ought to have defilements and one at the *śaikṣa* stage ought to have been freed from defilements, since the moment (known as *vimukti mārga*) following that at which the *prāpti* of the defilement is abandoned (known as *ānantarya-mārga*) would not be different. In fact, it is this real entity arising at the following moment that functions as a force absolutely preventing the *prāpti* of the defilement so abandoned from linking up the defilement with the individual series (*saṃtati*). That is, *pratisamkhyā-nirodha* is not a mere concept; it is a real force that absolutely prevents the re-arising of the defilement.

9. *Nirvāṇa*, if unreal, could not have been subsumed as one of the Noble Truths — the *nirodha-satya* — a non-existent cannot be predicated as ‘true’ or ‘false’. An *ārya*, in his *abhisamaya*, sees truly all the four Truths. Now since *prajñā* cannot arise with regard to a non-existent object (this is the articulated position of the Vaibhāṣika²¹), it would be topsy-turvy to say that an *ārya* sees a non-existent object. Moreover, with regard to a non-existent which absolutely defies all verbal qualifications, how can the *ārya*, in his spiritual realization say “This is cessation of *duḥkha*”? It is observed in the world that the demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that’ are applicable only to existent things. Furthermore, all this will amount to the denial of the existence of the

21 Saṃghabhadra defines an existent (*sat*) as that which can serve as an object for the arising of *buddhi* (Ny, 621c–622a)

Third Truth. Besides, if *duḥkha-nirodha* signifies the mere absence of *duḥkha*, there need only be the mention of *duḥkha-nirodha-gāmini-pratipat* (the Fourth Truth) — the mention of *mārga-satya* suffices to indicate the absence of *duḥkha* that it counteracts — if it does not result in the absence of *duḥkha*, why is it said to be a counteractive path?

4. *Pratisamkhyā-nirodha, Prāpti, and Spiritual Liberation*

The proposition that there are as many *pratisamkhyā-nirodha* as there are objects of junction (*samyogavastu*)²² — i.e. attachment on account of our defilement — is consistent with the Sarvāstivāda view that spiritual liberation is a gradual process dependent on the gradual abandoning of defilements. It is argued: If there is only one single *pratisamkhyā-nirodha* or *nirvāṇa*, then at the time when the practitioner first gains insight into *duḥkha-satya* and thereby realizes the *pratisamkhyā-nirodha* of the corresponding defilement, he would have at the same time realized the cessation of all defilements. Consequently it would be futile for him to further cultivate the counteraction of the remaining defilements.²³

The same proposition also entails that all sentient beings realize a common *nirodha* corresponding to the particular defilement. But this raises important questions as recorded in *MVS*: When sentient beings realize *pratisamkhyā-nirodha*, do they together realize a common one or do they individually realize a different (i.e. identical but distinct) one in each case? In the former case why is *Nirvāṇa* said to be the unique (*asādhāraṇa*) Dharma? Moreover, when one sentient being realizes *Nirvāṇa* all beings should also acquire it at the same time — which entails that liberation comes about automatically without any effort! On the other hand, if sentient beings each realize a different *nirodha*, why is *Nirvāṇa* said to be non-similar (*asabhāga*). Furthermore, how is one to understand the sūtra statement that liberation of the *tathāgata* and that of the others are not different?²⁴ The *MVS* compilers answer is that “when sentient beings realize *pratisamkhyā-nirodha*, they realize a common one. However, though the *Nirvāṇa* is in actual fact common as an entity, it is said to non-common in respect of its *prāpti* since the *visamyoga-prāpti* arises separately in the series of each individual.” It is

22 Cf. *AKB* (4): *yāvanti hi samyogadravyāṇi tāvanti visamyogadravyāṇi*

23 *AKB* (4): *anyathā hi duḥkhadarśanaheyakleśanirodha-sākṣātkaraṇāt sarvakleśanirodhasākṣātkriyā prasajyeta* /; cf. *MVS* (161c–162a)

24 *MVS*, 162a-b

only when the *prāpti* of *Nirvāṇa* arises in a particular individual that he is said to have acquired/attained *Nirvāṇa*.²⁵

The above explanation given by the Sarvāstivāda spells out the important role that *prāpti* plays in spiritual attainments. Any religion or philosophy which posits a transcendental absolute needs account for the way in which the empirical is related to the transcendental. In the Sarvāstivāda perspective, the relationship is effected by *prāpti*, a real force existing in its own right, which connects a dharma to a given series. The dharma then is one possessed by that particular individual. In abandoning a defilement, two final moments are involved: In the first moment known as *ānantarya-mārga*, the *prāpti* of the defilement is severed. In the second moment known as *vimukti mārga*, the *prāpti* of the corresponding *pratisamkhyā-nirodha* arises, and the practitioner is said to have realized the *nirodha*.

The notion of *prāpti* is also invoked to explain away the apparent contradiction involved in stating that the *nirvāṇa* is a *phala* — *viśamyoga-phala* — though it is not causally produced by the spiritual path. Saṃghabhadra explains:

“Worldlings collectively sanction the name ‘*phala*’ with regard to the accomplishment through effort of what has been longed for. Death is most distressful for men; accordingly it is Deathlessness (*amṛta* = *Nirvāṇa*) that men most long for. What is so longed for, when realized through the efficacy of the path, is called a *phala*. It is said to be without a cause (*ahetuka*) since the path is not any of the six causes for the *asaṃskṛta pratisamkhyā-nirodha* to be acquired. *Pratisamkhyā-nirodha* is not a *phala* [causally] produced by the path (the *ānantarya-mārga*); it is a *phala* realized by virtue of it. The path is not a generating cause for the *pratisamkhyā-nirodha*; it is a cause of realization. Hence, between the two — the path and the *nirodha* — one cannot definitely speak of a cause-effect relationship or otherwise. ... [As a matter of fact, the *prāpti* of the *nirodha* could be considered the *phala* of the path], since the path is the homogeneous cause (*sabhāga-hetu*) — or also said to be the co-existent cause (*sahabhū-hetu*) — for the *prāpti* of the *nirodha*. Nevertheless, this is not the *phala* directly sought after by the *ārya*. It is with the *nirodha* to be acquired in mind that the *ārya* practises the *ārya-mārga*. Accordingly, the specific *phala* of the path is none other than the acquired *nirodha*; not the *prāpti* of *nirodha*, since it is not for the sake of the *saṃskṛta* that an *ārya* practises the *ārya-mārga*.”²⁶ (Cf. *MVS*. 341a)

²⁵ *MVS*, 162b

²⁶ *MVS*, 428c; cf. *AKB*, 91f

The Sautrāntika in this connection raises a question (*Ny*, 432c): What cause is there to ensure that a specific *prāpti* is linked to a specific *nirodha*? — What ensures that one acquires a particular *pratisamkhyā-nirodha* and not another one? Saṃghabhadra replies that there is in fact no need for a specifying cause: By the power of one *mārga*, the defilements are ceased *en bloc* and the disjunction is acquired *en bloc*. Or, it is the very nature of things (*dharmatā*) that that which acquires (i.e. the *mārga*) and that which is acquired (i.e. the *viśamyoga*) are specifically related. Or, it is the path through which the defilement is abandoned (*prahāṇa-mārga*) that is the specifying cause; for it is by virtue of the path that the arising of the acquisition of disjunction is induced — the *nirodha* of the defilements to be abandoned through a specific path cannot be acquired through a different path. A further question: “There is a plurality of *pratisamkhyā-nirodha* acquired through one and the same *prahāṇa-mārga* — what specifying cause is there to enable us to say this is [the *pratisamkhyā-nirodha*] of *rāga*, this of *dveṣa*, etc.?” To this, Saṃghabhadra answers similarly: “All the [defilements] to be ceased, constituting a given category, are abandoned through a single path; the disjunctions acquired having the same *prāpti*, what need is there for a specifying cause? Or, as mentioned before, by virtue of the nature of things, the relation is not confused: From the beginning, there exists between *rāga* etc. and the [corresponding] *nirodha*, a specific, non-confused relation by virtue of the nature of things. Since at the time when the *prahāṇa-mārga* arises, the [*pratisamkhyā-nirodha*] are acquired *en bloc*, there is nothing wrong even if there is no specifying cause.”

5. The Sautrāntika Conception of *Nirvāṇa*

By way of contrast, we may here outline the Sautrāntika conception which Saṃghabhadra vehemently repudiates. The Sautrāntika (and others) maintain that *nirvāṇa* is a mere concept referring to the absence of *duḥkha* on account of the absolute non-arising or abandoning of defilements due to the absence of the defilement-seeds (*kleśa-bija*).²⁷ For them, *pratisamkhyā-nirodha* is “the non-arising — by virtue of the force of *pratisamkhyā* — of [any] other proclivity at the time of the cessation of the arisen proclivities and of birth.”²⁸ The acquisition of *nirvāṇa* is explained as the acquisition of a

²⁷ *Ny*, 430b

²⁸ *AKB* (P.92) *utpannānuśaya-janma-nirodhe pratisamkhyābalenānyasyānutpādaḥ pratisamkhyā-nirodhaḥ/*

personal basis (*āśraya* = *skandha-saṃtati*) absolutely opposed (*atyanta-viruddha*) to the defilements which would arise and to future existence.²⁹

In *AKB*, it is in a similar manner that the Sautrāntika explains *prāpti* as a mere concept. There the Vaibhāṣika argues that *prāpti* must be a real entity without which one would not be able to differentiate an *ārya* from a *prthagjana*: An *ārya*, even when he possesses worldly thoughts at times, is different from a *prthagjana* because he has the *prāpti* of the *ārya dharma*. The Sautrāntika, however, argues that the validity of the distinction does not require such an ontological entity called *prāpti*. The distinction is made in terms of the difference in the personal basis: The whole personal basis of an *ārya*, as a result of his spiritual attainment, is totally transformed (*parāvṛtta*) to be pure, fully purged of all potencies (*bija*) for defilements. As such, there will absolutely be no more arising of any defilement for him. Such an *ārya* is said to have abandoned the defilements.³⁰

Samghabhadra refutes the Sautrāntika conception (*Ny*, 430a ff.): (i) The *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* so-defined does not differ from the non-arising owing to the deficiency in conditions. (ii) Spiritual cultivation would be in vain, since there can also be non-arising without the *ārya-mārga*. (iii) The dharma destined not to arise are like those which have become past, unable to rearise — even when their seeds have not been abandoned — why then the need to cultivate the path? In the Sarvāstivāda system which holds that *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* are realized separately through the gradual abandoning of the defilement and *duḥkha* pertaining to the three periods of time, dharma which cannot arise — owing to *aprasaṃkhyā-nirodha* having been acquired — still need to be abandoned through further cultivation, as their *prāpti* obstruct *nirvāṇa*. (iv) If *nirvāṇa* is merely a non-arising, how can one speak of acquiring it? It is not logical to answer that through the acquisition of the counteraction (*pratipakṣa*) there is the realization of a transformed personal basis as described above. For then, at the very moment when one first acquires the *ārya-mārga*, one ought to have acquired *nirvāṇa* of the defilements counteracted by the path, since at this very moment one would have acquired such a personal basis. The practitioner abiding subsequently in the *śaikṣa-mārga* would have already become an *asaikṣa*. This would render any further cultivation futile. The Sautrāntika tries in vain to avoid this consequence by saying that such a personal basis is not acquired until one has

29 *Ny*, 431a

30 *AKB*, 63: *āśraya-viśeṣād etat sidhyati/ āśrayo hi sa āryāṇām darśanabhāvanāmārgasāmarthyāt tathā parāvṛtto bhavati yathā na punas tatpraheyāṇām kleśāṇām prarohasamartho bhavati/ ato' gñidagdhavṛhivad abijibhūte āśraye kleśāṇām prahīnakleśa ityucyate /*

absolutely abandoned the seeds of defilements, and that this occurs only after the arising of the *ānantarya-mārga*. For in that case, the seeds of defilements not being opposed to the *āryamārga* of the first moment, ought to be likewise unopposed to those of the subsequent moments — which means that an *asaikṣa* would have defilements! This fallacy cannot be avoided by the Sautrāntika which teaches that the seeds of defilements are merely the transformation of the series (*saṃtati-pariṇāma*) serving as the supporting basis of the defilement, and that *Nirvāṇa* is merely the non-arising of defilement. Given this teaching, what distinct dharma are there which are opposed to what dharma and which are unopposed to what dharma? The Sarvāstivāda doctrine is free from this fallacy, for it teaches that *prāpti* are distinct entities in themselves. They are unopposed to the *kṣānti* at which moment the defilement is abandoned, and opposed to *jñāna* at which subsequent moment the *prāpti* of disjunction arises: The *jñāna* arises at the same time as the *prāpti* of disjunction which is opposed to the *prāpti* of the defilements. Furthermore, when the *ārya-mārga* of the moment is about to arise, the body of the worldling (*prthagjana-kāya*) is about to perish; when the former arises the latter is relinquished. What distinct seeds of defilements apart from this body are there which are said to be unopposed to the first *ārya-mārga* but become opposed to the subsequent ones — the paths being not different?³¹

6. Conclusion

In the Sarvāstivāda perspective, there are as many *nirvāṇa* or *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* as there are impure dharma. These are ontologically distinct real entities. Their reality is not even dependent on the criterion of causal efficacy in the space-time dimension; but on the fact that they can impact on the mental streams of beings. Each *nirvāṇa* — via *prāpti* — acts to ensure the absolute non-arising of the defilement counteracted by the *ārya-mārga* by virtue of which the *prāpti* of the *nirvāṇa* is induced; and each is experiential by the *ārya* as having distinct characteristics (§§2, 3.2, 3.6, 3.9).

'*Nirvāṇa*' in the sense of the ultimate spiritual realization of the Buddhist practitioner refers to the *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* realized when all

31 Similar definitions of *prahāṇa* and *nirvāṇa* — with Mahāyāna overtones — in *Abhidharma-samuccaya* (Pradhan P, ed., 62), *Abhidharmasamuccaya-bhāṣya* (N. Tatia, ed., 42), *Triṃśikā-vijñapti-śāstra* (S. Levi, ed., comment on last 2 stanzas), etc.

the *kleśa* and *duḥkha* pertaining to the three periods of time are completely abandoned (*Ny*, 430b). Though all practitioners acquire the same *nirvāṇa* corresponding to a given impure dharma, each individual's experience of *nirvāṇa* is unique by virtue of the *prāpti* that links the *nirvāṇa* to him. *Prāpti* — though conditioned in itself but neither mental nor material in nature — in fact plays the important role of relating the unconditioned to the conditioned. It is the *sine qua non* for man's experience of *Nirvāṇa*.

It is not difficult to understand why Saṃghabhadra's arguments for the reality of *nirvāṇa* — totally transcending the space-time dimension as it does — are not always cogent. Some obviously are contingent upon the Sarvāstivāda postulates and presuppositions. Ultimately, apart from some scriptural passages in their favour, the Sarvāstivādins cannot but appeal to the authority of spiritual insight: "Its self-nature can only be personally realized by the *ārya*. This much, though, can be said: There exists a distinct entity which is permanent and wholesome. That is called a disjunction and a *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*."³²

Abbreviations

- AKB = P. Pradhan ed., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* (Patna, 1967)
 ADV = P. S. Jaini ed., *Adhidharmadīpa* (with *Vibhāṣāprabhā vṛtti*) (Patna, 1977)
 Entrance = K. Dhammajoti, *Entrance into the Supreme Doctrine* (Colombo, 1998)
 JPS = *Jñānaprasthāna-śāstra* (T no. 1544)
 MVS = *Abhidharma-mahā-vibhāṣā* (T no. 1545)
 Ny = **Nyāyānusāra* (T no. 1562)
 TA (U,J) = M. Shogaito, *Studies in the Uighur Version of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya-ṅkā Tattvārthā*, vol. I (Kyoto, 1991)
 ZY = 藏外佛教文獻 (Beijing, 1995), vol. I

32 AKB (92) *āryaireva tatsvabhāvaḥ pratyātmavedyaḥ / etāvattu śakyate vaktuṃ nityaṃ kuśalaṃ cāsti dravyāntaram/ tadvisamyogaścocyate pratisaṃkhyā-nirodhaśceti/*

The Structure of the *Mahāvastu-avadāna*

Satoshi HIRAOKA

I

Although there is no doubt that the *Mahāvastu-avadāna* (*Mv.*, edited by Émile SENART, 1882–1897, 3 vols.) occupies an important position in the study of Indian Buddhism, as yet it has not received sufficient attention.¹ There are some factors that have delayed the study of the *Mv.*: Its massive volume, diverse contents, philological difficulty,² knotty structure to mention but a few. Moreover, the formation process of this text remains unknown. The *Mv.* itself tells us that it belongs to the Lokottaravāins of the Mahāsāṃghikas and it has been regarded as a crucial text for the study of the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism because of its developed notion of the Buddha.³ However, just because it is a product of Sectarian Buddhism does not necessarily mean that the *Mv.* itself predates the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is not hard to imagine that such a voluminous text had been compiled over a long period of time, and some parts of this text may even predate the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism.⁴ Furthermore, one story explicitly leaves traces of the influence

- 1 Cf. BYŌDŌ, Tsūshō 平等通昭, *Indo bukkyō bungaku no kenkyū* 印度仏教文学の研究, Yokohama: Indogaku kenkyūsho 印度学研究所, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 38–39; MIZUNO, Kōgen 水野弘元, *Mizuno Kōgen chosakushū: Bukkyō bunken kenkyū* 水野弘元著作集: 仏教文献研究, Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1996, vol. 1, p. 296, n. 1.
- 2 Philological issues are discussed in detail in YUYAMA, Akira 湯山明, "Mahāvastu-avadāna — Genen hihanteki kenkyū ni mukete — Mahāvastu-avadāna — 原典批判的研究に向けて [Mahāvastu-avadāna — Towards a New Critical Edition—]," *Sōkaidaigaku kokusai bukkyōgaku kōtō kenkyūsho nenpō* 創価大学国際仏教学高等研究所年報 [Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 1998], 1999, pp. 21–38.
- 3 See for example FUJITA, Kōtatsu 藤田宏達, *Genshi jōdoshisō no kenkyū* 原始浄土思想の研究 [A Study of Early Pure Land Buddhism], Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970, pp. 365–375 and 411–414; SHIZUTANI, Masao 静谷正雄, *Shoki daijō bukkyō no seiritsu katei* 初期大乘仏教の成立過程, Kyoto: Hyakkaen, 1974, pp. 35–36; HIRAKAWA, Akira 平川彰, *Hirakawa Akira Chosakushū: Shoki daijō bukkyō no kenkyū I*, 平川彰著作集: 初期大乘仏教の研究 I, Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1989, vol. 3, pp. 293–296; KAJIYAMA, Yūichi 梶山雄一, *Buddakan no henshen* 仏陀観の変遷 [Development of the Concept of the Buddha], *Bukkyōdaigaku sōgō kenkyūsho kiyō* 佛教大学総合研究所紀要 [Bulletin of the research Institute of Bukkyo University] 3, 1996, pp. 5–46, esp. p. 24.
- 4 BYŌDŌ points out that the compilation of this text began after the 2nd century B.C. and ended