BAUDDHAVIDYĀSUDHĀKARĀḤ

Studies in Honour of Heinz Bechert on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday

EDITED BY

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Once More on a Passage of the Alagaddūpama-sutta

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Some years ago, I discussed a passage of the Alagaddūpama-sutta of the Majjhima-Nikāya, where six views relative to ātman are criticized.¹

After scholars such as Hermann OLDENBERG and Helmuth von GLASENAPP had commented upon the last of these six views,² viz., so loko so attā, so pecca bhavissāni nicco dhuvo sassato aviparināmadhammo sassatisamam tath’ eva thassāmi, K. R. NORMAN³ pointed out — though not for the first time⁴ — that it contained ‘actual verbal echoes’ of Chāndogya-Upaniṣad III, 14. Here is what we read in the latter passage:

esa ma ātmāntar hrdaye, etad brahma, etam itah pretyābhishambhavitāsi (ChU III, 14, 4).

Now, Professor NORMAN does not mention a most important fact, namely that the Upaniṣadic doctrine in question belongs to a stratum of thought which is earlier than that represented by the doctrines associated with such names as Yājñavalkya and Uddālaka Āruni. Attributed to Śaṅkara, this doctrine already appears, almost in the same words, in the tenth Book of the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa (X, 6, 3), and bears the stamp of the period between the Brāhmaṇaś and the Upaniṣads. The “attainment” of ātman it speaks of ‘erscheint’ — as DEUSSEN observed long ago — ‘nach Analogie mit den hergebrachten Anschauungen noch als ein Emporsteigen zu himmlischen Regionen, — als wäre der Ātman anderswo zu suchen als in uns selbst.’ Further on, DEUSSEN asked: ‘Wer fühlt nicht den innern Widerspruch dieser Worte, und daß es, wenn der Ātman wirklich meine Seele ist, keines Hingehens mehr zu ihm bedarf!’⁵

Śaṅkara — for whom the subject of this passage is the meditation on “qualified brahman” (saguna-brahman) — says basically the same thing: ‘... The word


⁴ See L’Ātman-Brahman, op. cit., p. 10, n. 4 to p. 9.

ātman does not mean [in this passage] the inmost Self itself. For the genitive mama “my” conveys the meaning of a relation, and in “this I shall attain” is mentioned the relation of the object and the agent [of the action of attaining]. It is without abandoning a little separation that it is stated: “I shall attain ‘this’, i.e. the ātman, after having departed from ‘here’, i.e. from this body.”

From all we know of the attitude of early Buddhism toward Brahmanism, it is not at all surprising to find a criticism of such a doctrine in a text of the Pali Canon. And it is not reasonable to use such texts as evidence of Buddhism’s criticism of the Upaniṣadic doctrine of the ātman.

What is, however, meant by loka in the Pali passage under consideration, loka which is identified with attan? Without entering upon a polemic concerning the so-called Upaniṣadic “identification of the world and the self”, it can be said that similar expressions are found in the Upaniṣads. Thus, Brhadāraṇyaka I, 4, 15: ātmānāṃ eva lokam upāsita; IV, 4, 22: kim prajāyā karisvāmo yesām no ‘yam ātmyāṃ lokah. But, while in the Upaniṣads, this “world” is inner, and to be realized here and now, in our passage, as also in the doctrine of Śaṅkārya, it is paradoxically conceived as the yonder world, to be attained after death.

This view does not take into account the khandha-s, all impermanent and hence painful, with which the common folk identify the ātman. In our text, it is mentioned after the five other views identifying the ātman with the five khandha-s have been enumerated. More explicitly still, we are told in the Pārīleya-sutta of the Samyutta-Nikāya, which presents the doctrine under discussion as an expression of “eternalism” (sassatādhiṭṭhi):

na h’ eva kho rupam attato samanupassati, na vedanam attato samanupassati, na saṅhāḥ na samkhāre na viññānaṃ attato samanupassati. api ca kho evan-ditthi hoti: so atta so loko, so pecca bhavissami nicco dhuvo sasasso aviparināmadhammo ti.11

But can one who says: ‘After death, I shall become perfect ...’ do so without some attachment to the khandha-s, which constitute our individuality? We thus read in the (e)soattā-sutta:

rūpe kho, bhikkhave, sati, rūpam upādāya rūpam abhinivissva evam ditthi uppaṭṭāti: so atta so loko, so pecca bhavissami nicco dhuvo sasasso aviparināmadhammo ti.

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10 Cf. Brahmāsūtra I, 2, 4, with Śaṅkara’s bhāṣya.
11 na tv ātmasabdaṁ pratyagāmaṅgovacayeta, mamei saṅgheyaṁ sambhāndhārhapratyāyakativād etam abhisamhaviṭṭhāyati ca karmakartriṇaṁ reṣi dhiṣṭ ... antardhanam iṣad aparigjayavidvaitam ātmānām ito ‘smi caḥ charitiṁ pretyāhibhāsambhaviṭṭhāyāṁ uktam. Chāndogyonipātanadīnāḥ II, 1, 4, 174. (The editions of the Upaniṣads, with Śaṅkara’s commentary, quoted here are those of the Anandārama Sanskrit Series, Poona, second edition, 1902.)
12 See, e.g., L’Ātman-Brahman, op.cit. (n. 2), ch. III.
13 Ibid., p. 36.
14 Ibid., p. 14, n. 7.
15 Samyutta-Nikāya III, p. 98.
16 Ibid., pp. 182–183. See also the passage of the Alagaddūpama-sutta itself at Majjhima-Nikāya I, pp. 138–139.
17 See “Dūtthāmatum Matum Viññātaṁ”, loc.cit., p. 11 and n. 3.
18 Brhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad II, 4, 5; IV, 5, 6.
19 Cf. Deussen, op.cit., p. 73.
20 Brhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad III, 4. — vispaṭṭam śīre gṛhitvā yathā gām darśaya, Śaṅkara ad loc., p. 441.
22 Ibid., III, 4, 2.
23 Ibid., III, 7, 23.
24 Ibid., III, 8, 11.
The four empirical “ways of knowledge”, *drṣṭi, śrūti, mati, vijiñāna* (vijñāti), are recognized in Buddhism as well as in the Upanisads. But the Absolute is beyond them. The *drṣṭi* that Yājñavalkya speaks of with reference to the *ātman* is a “seeing” of a different kind. It is the vision of the Absolute, which cannot even be properly called a vision, being beyond the subject-object split. Echoes of the four stages of spiritual knowledge mentioned by Yājñavalkya are also found in the Pali Canon.

Scholars have been prone to see polemics against the Upanisads in Buddhist texts when they actually talk about different matters, or even when they say the same thing. The Buddha’s rejection of the views that identify the *ātman* with the *khandha*-s (*eso ‘ham asmi*) cannot be interpreted as a rejection of the *tat tvam asi* of Uddalaka Aruni, which, correctly understood, implies the negation expressed by the Buddha (*n’ eso ‘ham asmi*).

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22 “Dhitum Sutam Mutam Viṁśatam”, loc. cit., p. 12-13. Saṅkara’s disciple Sūryesvara gives an interpretation of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* passage which differs from the Master’s. See *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttika* with Anandaśākha’s *Ṣātrprasakādākā*, Poona, 1892-1894 (Anandaśākha Sanskrit Series, 16), pp. 1068 ff., vv. 212 ff. But that is a different matter, and it does not affect our standpoint here.

23 In one instance, at least, the Buddha’s words have been attributed to his opponent against the Tradition, and at the risk of absurdity simply because the idea expressed by those words does not tally with the scholars’ own notion of Buddhism. See L’Ātman-Brahman, op. cit., p. 54, n. 2; also my review of C. A. Scherrer-Schaub, *Yuktisāstikāvrtti* in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1994), p. 392. Others have, more modestly, relegated the same words to a ‘precanonical’ or ‘pre-Hinayānistic’ Buddhism.

24 Norman, loc. cit., p. 23.


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Nāgārjuna’s Logic*

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Some years ago Claus Oetke published several articles¹ dealing with the arguments and teaching of Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikās (MMK) and Vigrahavyāvartanī (VV). In these articles he corrected a number of mistaken notions that existed in connection with these texts, and analysed their most important arguments. He dedicated a whole article to one type of argument, which recurs frequently in Nāgārjuna’s work.² This article, the problem it studies and the solution it offers, is the subject of this paper. The type of argument concerned has the following structure: There can be no entities of a certain kind F that are G, and there can be no entities of the same kind F that are not-G. An argument of this type can only lead to the conclusion that there cannot be any entity of the kind F, provided, of course, that the premises are correct. It is here, however, that the difficulties begin.

Let us consider an example. It occurs in the first verse of chapter 21 of the MMK, where it is stated that there is no destruction without or together with production, and that there is also no production either without or together with destruction. Oetke draws in this connection attention to what he calls the “temporal-atemporal ambiguity” — there is no destruction while there is production, but there certainly is destruction later on — and observes: “the fallacious character of the argument, if based on the ‘temporal-atemporal ambiguity’, is so obvious that it seems quite improbable that the author of the MMK should not have noticed it”. Indeed, saying that there is no destruction without production means that there is no destruction that has not been preceded by production; the statement that there is no destruction together with production, on the other hand, means that the two do not occur simultaneously. Oetke then concludes: “we must either assume that Nāgārjuna being well aware of the unconnectedness of his reasoning intended for some reason to present such an argument here or assume that his argument was subject to tacit presuppositions which either strengthened the force of the reasoning or made the aim of the proof weaker than it appears to be”. The

* This article is the somewhat belated outcome of a seminar on Nāgārjuna organised by Prof. T. E. Vetter at Leiden University in 1979/1980. See in this connection Vetter, 1982; 1982a.

¹ See the bibliography at the end of this article.