

## The Philosophical Links between ‘Anatta’ to ‘Vijñāna’

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### Introduction

There are plenty of Buddhist traditions throughout the world. The one of the main causes for the arising of these different sects is philosophic problems that these traditions faced time to time in the sāsanic history. This situation can be seen in the Buddha’s time as well as in the later periods of ‘sāsana’. In the Buddha’s time the ‘ātman’ concept was the focal question that he faced. After the demise of the Buddha, about one hundred years later, sāsana got divided into two and subsequently into many sects or groups. At that time, the central question was that if everything is impermanent how could things exist? And how the same person obtains consequence of ‘kamma’ in the next life or lives? All the Buddhist traditions tried to find solution for this question. So, they came up with their own philosophic solutions and they were labeled according to their philosophic interpretations. The terms that they used to denote their philosophic points are different from one another. But, all these terms have been introduced to answer the one main question, that is how things exist if they are subject to change? This is the main issue that is examined by this paper and an attempt made to find out whether there is any unifying factor among various interpretations put forward by different Buddhist traditions.

### ‘Anatta’ and Continuity

Early Buddhism faced the problem of ‘ātman’ equivalent of Pāli ‘atta’. ‘Ātman’ was put forward by the Upanisadic thinkers. They considered ‘ātman’ is an entity having the specific qualities of firmness or stability (dhruva), permanency (nitya), eternality (śāśvata), indestructible. (avināśī) etc.<sup>1</sup>

Upanisadic thinkers identified this as a thumb long, physical substance that lies in all beings, transmigrates from life to life (aṅguṣṭhamātram). It remains unharmed at death, for it is separated from the body.<sup>2</sup> When a being dies the body remains and the ‘ātman’ leaves the body and enters into a new one. Thus, continues the process of existence. This, ‘ātman’ was the main philosophical teaching during the Buddha’s time.

Buddhism sees this ‘atta’ concept as eternalism (sassata diṭṭhi). According to Buddhism eternalism is one extreme. Other extreme is annihilationism. Buddhism rejects these two extremes as both misrepresent reality.<sup>3</sup> To negate this ‘atta’ concept the term used by the Buddha is ‘anatta’, which means that there is no ‘atta’. To denote that there is no ‘atta’ the Buddha analyzed empirical individual into five aggregates (pañcakkhandha). The Buddha using a very simple form of practical logic said:

*“Monks, this form is no –self, this form would not be subject to illness. Had it been so it would have been possible to command, may my form, be in this, may it not be otherwise and so on. But as the form is no-self, therefore, there is no way to*

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<sup>1</sup> *Kaṭhapani - ad*, 4.3.18, “ na jāyate na mriyate vā vipaścīn-nā yaṃ kutaścinnababhūva kaścit. Ajo nityaḥ śāśvatoyam purā ṇo- na hanyate hanyamā ne satire”.

<sup>2</sup> *Kaṭhapani - ad*, 4.3.12.

<sup>3</sup> *Samyuttanikā ya*, ii, p17. “ Kaccā nagottasutta”.

*get from to behave in the way one wants may it be like this: may it not be like this.*"<sup>4</sup>

The same is repeated with regard to the other four aggregates namely, 'vedanā', 'saññā', 'saṅkhāra', and 'viññāṇa'. Five aggregates analysis of the individual is not the only analysis presented in the early suttas to bring out the true nature of phenomena, specially to demonstrate the absence of any thing that could be labeled the individual soul, the 'ātman' or 'puḍgala-ātma'. There are four other such analysis. They are:

1. 'Nāma-rūpa' analysis – the analysis of the individual into name and form or mind and matter.
2. Six elements (dhātu) analysis. -That is the analysis of the individual into four primary elements namely, earth (paṭhavi), water(āpo), heat(tejo), wind(vāyao), space(ākāsa), and consciousness(viññāṇa).
3. Twelve bases or 'āyatana's'. -That is six sense organs and six sense subjects.
4. Eighteen elements. -This is constituted of the six sense faculties and six sense object consciousness arising dependent on the contact between the faculties and objects. For example eye-consciousness (cakkhu viññāṇa) ear-consciousness (sota-viññāṇa) etc.

These, along with the analysis into five aggregates, constitute the five types of analyses. Though these analyses are done for different purposes, one of the main objectives of these analyses is to bring into focus that there is no soul, a self in the individual. To uphold the no-soul theory early Buddhism implemented a very meaningful method. It is:

*"O monks, how do you think: form is permanent or impermanent? Venerable sir, impermanent. If anything is impermanent is it satisfactory or unsatisfactory? Venerable sir, unsatisfactory. If anything is unsatisfactory and impermanent is it possible to it as 'I' 'my' 'soul of mine', venerable sir it is impossible."*<sup>5</sup>

This shows that the term 'anatta' in early Buddhism has been used to point out the individual selflessness. But when it was needed to denote the 'anatta' with regard to the world the term 'suñña' was used in early Buddhism. For instance, Mogharājasutta of the *Suttanipāta* very clearly explains the world's 'anatta' using the term 'suñña'. The Mogharāja asks the Buddha: "...him that looks the world in which manner, does the king of death not see? The Buddha replies: "Mogharāja, being ever mindful, look upon the world as void having rooted out the dogmatic view of the self-thus one would cross over death; him that looks upon the world in this manner, does the king of death not see."<sup>6</sup> This is a purposeful use of the word 'suñña' to convey the idea that there is no substance in anything that is in the world. The world is devoid of any kind of an entity. In the same meaning the term 'suñña' has been used by the Buddha as reply to Ven. Ānanda's question. Once Ven. Ānanda asked the Buddha: "Venerable sir, it is said: empty is the world, empty is the world, in what way venerable sir is it said: empty is the world?" The Buddha replied: "It is Ānanda, because it is empty of self and what belongs to self that it

<sup>4</sup> *Vinaya*, 1, P 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Vinaya*, 1, p 14, "taṃ kimaññatha bhikkhave, rūpaṃ niccaṃ vā aniccaṃ vā ti?. Aniccaṃ bhante. Yampanā niccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ vā sukhaṃ vā ti?. dukkhaṃ bhante. Yampanā niccaṃ dukkaṃ vipariṇā madhammaṃ, kallanna taṃ samanupassitu ṃ 'etaṃ mama', 'eso hamasmi', 'eso me attā 'ti'?, nohetam bhante."

<sup>6</sup> *Suttanipā ta*, stanza, 1116. Mogharā ja asks : " kataṃ lokaṃ avekkhantaṃ maccurā jā na passati?". The Buddha replies : " suññatao lokaṃ avekkhassu Mogharā jā sadā sato-attā nu diṭṭhiṃ ūhacca evaṃ maccu taro siyā , evaṃ lokaṃ avekkhantaṃ maccurā jā na passati".

is said; 'empty is the world'<sup>7</sup>. This usage of 'suñña' is very clearly philosophic in meaning and brings out the most earliest feature of the early Buddhist world-view that there is nothing independent, discrete, self-existent, uncaused or permanent.

It is clear that these two terms 'anatta' and 'suñña' have been used in early Buddhism in two different contexts. Though these two terms are same in basic meaning of soullessness, their usage and emphases are quite different. The former emphasizes individual soullessness while the latter emphasizes the soullessness of the world. So, it is important to note that former is more specific while later is in more wider sense including all the things in the world. In other words the later conveys all phenomena.

It is interesting to note that somewhere else the term 'anatta' has been used in the same wider sense. For instance in the Maggavagga of the *Dhammapada* mentions: "All dhammas are without soul" (sabbe dhammā anattā'ti).<sup>8</sup> Here, 'dhamma' means all phenomena. In this context, the term 'anatta' is not restricted into the individual, but it goes beyond it and sometime it includes all the phenomena.

When we consider the common usage of the term 'anatta' it is very clear that it is mostly used in the sense of individual soullessness. Such usage is due to the fact that in the Buddha's time the main problem was the individual soul or 'pudgala-ātma' concept. So, the Buddha used the term 'anatta', perhaps may be he thought that is the most suitable term for it.

The question that arose with the early Buddhist teachings of 'anatta' and 'suñña' is, if the individual and the world is devoid of a soul how could things continue to exist: how can 'kamma' and rebirth be explained? Who will bear the consequence of 'kamma' done in this life when it is matured in next life or lives? How will one obtains rebirth from this life to the next life? The reply provided by the early Buddhism is that 'kamma' and rebirth can be explained by the dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda). According to the dependent origination 'viññāṇa' transmigrates from one life to another. These basic teachings 'anatta' 'suñña' and 'paṭiccasamuppāda' etc., did not pose any obstruction to early followers in their attempt to understand reality. They very clearly perceived them and put an end to continuation of 'saṃsāra'.

### **'Anicca' Continuity and Dhamma Theory**

About one hundred years after the demise of the Buddha this situation changed. Among the monks there arose different views regarding the operation of 'anicca' 'kamma' and rebirth. If everything is impermanent (anicca) and changeable, how 'kamma', rebirth and so on could operate? The main reason for this divergent views was the monks inclination towards logic and reasoning (takka-pariyāhataṃ vīmaṃsānucaritaṃ). They disregarding experience depended on logic and reasoning, attempted to interpret fundamental teachings of early Buddhism. The Puggalavādins<sup>9</sup> perhaps, may be the first group who came forward with the concept of 'puggala' to find an answer for the question pertaining to the operation of 'anicca', 'kamma' and birth. They maintained that it is the 'pudgala' (a person) who is the carrier of aggregates and who bears consequence of 'kamma', memory and so on throughout the 'saṃsāra'. They

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<sup>7</sup> *Samyuttanikā ya*, iv, p54. "Lokasutta".

Ven. Ānanda asks: "suñño loko suñño lokoti bhante vuccati, kittā vatā nu kho bhante suññolokoti uccati?" The Buddha replies: "yasmā ca Ānanda suññaṃ attena vā attanyea vā tasmā suññolokoti vuccati"

<sup>8</sup> *Dhammapada*, stanza 279, "Maggavagga" " sabbe dhammā anattā 'ti -yadā pañña ya passati, atha nibbindat dukkhe-esa maggo visuddhiyā "

<sup>9</sup> Note: Original Sanskrit Texts of Pudgalavādins are disappeared. Their views and teachings are available in some other Sanskrit and Pali texts such as *Abhidharmakośa* and *Kathā vatthuppakaraṇa*. Perhaps some of the Chinese and Tibetan translations of their original Sanskrit texts are preserved.

said the connection between ‘puḍgala’ and five aggregates is like fuel and fire.<sup>10</sup> They pointed out that the fire reside neither outside of the fuel nor within it. In the same manner ‘puḍgala’ is neither the same nor different from the five-aggregates. These Puḍgalavādins strove to prove their new concept giving reference to the early suttas. They cited references where the Buddha preached about ‘puḍgala’ and five aggregates. For instance in Bhārahārasutta of the *Samyuttanikāya*, there is reference to the ‘burden’ and ‘burden carrier’. The burden is five aggregates while the carrier is the person ( puḍgala) <sup>11</sup>.

Responding to this new concept of ‘puḍgala’ the other monks criticized their view saying that these Puḍgalavādins are the ‘heretics within the ‘sāsana’ (antascara tīrthaka) because they secretly entrenched the soul concept (atta) in the teaching with their ‘puḍgala’ concept. Rejecting the Puḍgalavādins’ ‘puḍgala’ concept the three groups of monks came up with the new concepts for answering the question of how ‘anicca’, ‘kamma’ and rebirth could be explained? They are Theravāda Ābhīdhammikas, Sarvāstivādins, and Sautrāntikas. Theravāda Ābhīdhammikas analyzed the empirical individual and the world into four groups and named them as ‘paramattha dhamma’.<sup>12</sup> By the term ‘paramattha dhamma’ the Ābhīdhammikas meant that things cannot be further analyzed or these are represent the last level to which the individual and the world could be analyzed. In this interpretation the ‘paramattha dhammas’ were given more importance. As a result of this, later Theravāda Ābhīdhammikas admitted an entity or substance which is not dividable.<sup>13</sup> With this analysis of ‘paramattha dhammas’ they could easily reject the ‘atta’ concept (individual soul) as well as the ‘puḍgala’ concept, but it made them to accept certain kind of indivisible elements, which formed individual and the world. Perhaps, this may be the what led the later Ābhīdhammikas to posit the existence of pure elements. (suddha dhammā pavattanti).<sup>14</sup> This situation has been clearly explained by Prof: Y. Karunadasa as follows:

*“In the Ābhīdhammic exegesis this term paramattha is defined to mean that which has reached its highest (uttama), implying thereby that the dhammas are ultimate existents with no possibility of further reduction. Hence own-nature (sva-bhāva) came to be further defined as ultimate nature (paramattha-svabhāva)”.*<sup>15</sup>

Sarvāstivādins came up with the concept of ‘sva-bhāva’ (self-nature). According to them dhammas have two characteristics as ‘sva-bhāva’ and ‘kāritra’. They said that the changeable part of the dhammas is ‘kāritra’ while the unchangeable part (own-nature) of dhammas is persisting throughout the ‘saṃsāra’. Sarvāstivādins emphasize the tri-temporal existence of the dhamma. To substantiate this tri-temporal existence of dhamma they referred to the Bhaddekarattasutta of the *Majjhimanikāya*. Citing this sutta they said that the Buddha has very clearly mentioned the dhammas exist in all periods. The sutta says:

*“The past should not be followed after, the future not desired. What is past is got rid of and the future has not come. But whoever has vision now here, now there, of*

<sup>10</sup> Dutt, N., (1978) p185.

<sup>11</sup> *Samyuttanikā ya*, iii, p25, “Bhā rahā rasutta” “Katamoca bhikkhave bhā ro? Pañcupā dā nakkhandhā tissa vacanīyam... katomoca bhikkhave bhā rahā ro? Puḍgalaotissa vacanīyam...”

<sup>12</sup> Narada Thera, (1956) p6, “ tathā vutthā bhīdhammatthā -catudhā paramatthato,- cittaṃ cetasikaṃ rūpaṃ- nibbā namiti sabbathā ”.

<sup>13</sup> *Abhīdhammatthasaṅgahā -Vibhāvīnī-Tīkā*, p 4, “paramo uttamo aviparito attho paramattho”.

<sup>14</sup> *Visuddhimagga*. p517, “ *Kaṅkhā* vitaranavisuddhiniddeso”,

“ kammassakā rako natthi vipā kassa ca vedako- suddha dhammā pavattanti evetaṃ sammadassanaṃ”

<sup>15</sup> Karunadasa, y., (1996), p19.

*a present thing. Knowing that it is immovable, unshakable, let him cultivate it. Swelter at the task this very day... ”<sup>16</sup> (Middle Length Sayings, p. 233)*

Sautrāntikas<sup>17</sup> introduced the theory of ‘one faculty’ (eka-rasa- indriya). It is this faculty that goes from life to life with the seed of ‘kamma’, memory and so on. With this ‘one faculty’ concept Sautrāntikas found answers for the question of how dhammas exist though they are impermanent. These groups of monks tried to find answers for the question of how ‘kamma’ and rebirth operate within the frame of ‘anicca’. As mentioned above the Theravāda Ābhidhammikas, Sarvāstivādins and Sautrāntikas rejecting the individual soul turned towards the substantial interpretations. With these interpretations they tried to explain how ‘kamma’ and rebirth come to an operation though they are impermanent. So, these interpretations came under one line which is known as the ‘dhamma theory’.

### **Mahāyāna Interpretation of ‘Dhamma Theory’ and Continuity**

This ‘dhamma theory’ was criticized by another group of monks as an entity, essence or a soul on dhammas. They thought that this is another kind of soul concept introduced into Buddhism. So, they compiled sutras against this and some important sutras of them were known as Prajñāpāramitāsūtras. Through these sutras they pointed out that there is no soul in dhammas. As mentioned above it is clear that in the Buddha’s time the main philosophical question was the existence of individual soul, but in the period of Prajñāpāramitāsūtras compilation the main philosophical problem was substance of dhammas (dharmātma). So, these sutras highly focused to emphasize the absence of substance in dhammas (dharmanairātmya). Traditionally it is understood that the main difference between traditional Buddhism and Mahāyāna is that the former lays more emphasis on the individual soul while the later emphasizes the absence of substance in dhammas. To denote this view the term used in Mahāyāna texts is ‘śūnya’ or ‘śūnyatā’. For instance, in A-ṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtras it is explained as “*Monks, the form is void*” (rūpaṃ bhikkhave śūnyaṃ). These Prajñāpāramitāsūtras lays more emphasis on ‘śūnya’ and perhaps it caused misunderstanding of ‘śūnya’ as nothingness.

This misunderstanding can be clearly seen when Prajñāpāramitāsūtras were translated into Chinese. In these Chinese translations the term ‘bēn wu’ which means originally non-existence or really non-existence was used for the term ‘śūnya’. So, Chinese scholars misinterpreted ‘śūnya’ as non-existence or in other words nothingness.<sup>18</sup> By the time of Nāgārjuna, who was the founder of Madhyamaka philosophy, there were two main problems, they are (i). the ‘dhamma theory’ and (ii). misunderstanding of ‘śūnya’ as nihilism.

### **Madhyamaka Śūnyatā**

Nāgārjuna, writing his magnum opus, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, explained the concept of ‘śūnya’ in more logical and philosophical manner. The main aim of his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is to negate the ‘dhamma theory’. As discussed above there were three main such groups namely Theravādins, Sarvāstivādins and Sautrāntikas whose teachings more favored a substantial view. But, in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* references in only to ‘sva-bhāva theory’ of Sarvāstivādins and makes no references to the

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<sup>16</sup> *Majjhimanikāya*, III, p187, “ atītaṃ nanvā gameyya- nappatikanke anā gataṃ -Yadaṭītaṃ pahnaṃ taṃ -appattaṃ ca anā gataṃ-Paccuppanaṃca yo dhammaṃ- tatha tatha vipassati- asamhīraṃ asaṃkappaṃ taṃ vidvā manubrhave”.

<sup>17</sup> Note: Sautrāntika’s Original Texts are also not available it is said that they are preserved as Chinese and Tibetan translations

<sup>18</sup> Dhammajothi, M., (2010) pp 73-76,

other theories. Nāgārjuna very cleverly rejecting the ‘sva-bhāva’ teaching in his book, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* highlights the void of dhammas, using the term ‘śūnyatā’. Scholars such as T.R.V. Murti holds the view that this ‘śūnyatā’ concept is a new innovation of later Mahāyāna Buddhism specially the great master Nāgārjuna and it was quite unknown to the early Buddhism. He compares it to the Copernican revolution and indirectly says that whole early Buddhism was turned upside down by this new approach<sup>19</sup>. Stcherbatsky also holds a view similar to that of Murti and he said that the term ‘śūnyatā’ is an innovation of Māhāyana, an innovation made necessary by the course of philosophic development. Professor W.S. Karunaratne has clearly pointed out the early Buddhism was quite aware of the ‘śūnyatā’. The Professor said: “*Stcherbatsky’s statement that the term śūnyatā is an innovation of the Mahayana is remarkable for the ignorance it betrays of the facts of early Buddhism. The literal and philosophical senses of this terms are already clearly attested in Pāli texts...*”<sup>20</sup> The question that should be examined is why Māhāyana Prajñāpāramitāsūtras and Nāgārjuna chose the term ‘śūnya’ instead of ‘anatta’. As explained at the beginning, in early Buddhism, ‘anatta’ was used more frequently to denote the soullessness of individual, while ‘suñña’ was used to show the absence of substance in the world. Since, the philosophic question by the time of Prajñāpāramitāsūtras and Nāgārjuna was as seen by the popularity of the ‘sva-bhāva theory’ of Sarvastivādins. Prajñāpāramitāsūtras and Nāgārjuna preferred to use the term ‘śūnya’ to negate the ‘atta’ or substance in dhammas as well as individual soul. It is known as ‘dharmanairātmyatā’.

In response to the view of misinterpretation of ‘śūnyatā’ as nihilism, Nāgārjuna said that ‘śūnyatā’ is not a nihilism<sup>21</sup>. This idea was brought to China with the translation of Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and his other books by Kumārajīva. Kumārajīva introduced a new term ‘xing kong’ which means ‘sva-bhāva śūnyatā’ instead of the previous term ‘běn wu’ which means really or originally things do not exist. So, the Chinese interpretation of ‘śūnyatā’ got corrected.

When ‘atta’ was negated the question arose in early Buddhism as to how ‘kamma’ and ‘punabbhava’ exist. In the same way, when the ‘sva-bhāva’ or substance of dhammas was rejected, the same question arose. So, the answer given was the same by Nāgārjuna, and he compared ‘śūnyata’ with pratītyasmutpāda. Nāgārjuna said “*whatever that is dependent arising we say that is emptiness.*”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Nāgārjuna very clearly explains his ‘śūnyatā’ giving reference to Kaccānasutta of *Samyuttanikāya* preached by the Buddha to the master Kaccāna. Nāgārjuna said: “*according to the instruction to Kaccāna, the two views of the world in terms of being and non-being were criticized by the Buddha, for similarly admitting the bifurcation of entities into existence and non-existence.*”

Through the dependent origination Nāgārjuna explains interdependence of things and reveals the voidness of things. According to Nāgārjuna things have no independent existence so, things are interrelated. As things are interrelated they are void. Hence, it is very clear that Nāgārjuna proclaims voidness of the things through their interdependence. He said: “*saṃsāra is nothing essentially different from nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa is nothing essentially from saṃsāra*”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Murti, T. R. V., (1955) p 123.

<sup>20</sup> Karunaratna, W. S., (1988) p 169-170.

<sup>21</sup> *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, chapter, 17, stanza, 20. “Śūnyatā ca na cocchedaḥ –saṃsā raśca na śā vataṃ”

<sup>22</sup> *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, chapter, 24, stanza, 18. “Yaḥ pratītya samutpā daḥ śūnyatā ṃ tā ṃ pracak -mahe- sā prajñaptirupā dā ya pratipasaiva madhyamā”.

<sup>23</sup> *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, chapter 15, stanza, 7. “Katyā yana vā de cā stīti nā stīti cobhayaṃ-Pratisiddhaṃ bhagavatā -bhā vabhā vavibhā vinā”.

## Yogācāra Vijñānavāda

Another sectarian of Māhāyana tradition was represented by Yogācārins who came up with the theory of 'Vijñāna' as the solution to the problem of how 'anicca' 'kamma' and 'punabbhava' could be explained without 'atta'. When Yogācārins studied the reply for this, they found that the 'śūnyatā' concept has been cause for misunderstanding of Buddhism as nihilism. Though Nāgārjuna very clearly emphasized 'śūnyatā' is not a nihilism, its etymological meaning was rather suggestive of nihilism. So, 'śūnyatā' was misunderstood as nihilism. Because of this misunderstanding of 'śūnyatā' put forward by the Madhyamaka, Buddhist philosophy turned towards negativism.

This situation is seen by Yogācārins and they thought this is not the real teaching of the Buddha. So, with the 'vijñāna' concept they preferred to find a more positive answers for the aforesaid question. They divided 'vijñāna' into three aspects (i). 'Pravṛti vijñāna'(saḍindriyavijñāna). (ii). 'Manana vijñāna', and (iii). 'Ālaya vijñāna'. 'Manana vijñāna' is the nature of 'vijñāna' in which is deeply rooted the feeling of myself. This 'manana vijñāna' is made by 'ālayavijñāna' to connect it with 'pravṛti vijñāna' or 'saḍindriya vijñāna'. 'ālayavijñāna' is the aspect of consequences that bears aspect of consciousness that all seeds of 'kamma', memory, and so on, transmigrating throughout the 'saṃsāra'. In that sense it is called 'sarvabījaka', which means store-conciseness. Laṅkāvatārasūtra explains that 'ālayavijñāna' is like the sea while 'pravṛti vijñāna' is like the sea waves.<sup>24</sup> This simile reveals the importance of 'ālayavijñāna' when one experiences phenomena. As all the waves are created based on the sea, all the mental and physical experience are based on the 'ālayavijñāna'. Yogācārins emphasized more the function of the 'vijñāna' when one experiences the world.

Prof: Kalupahana is of the view that misinterpretation of Yogācārins occurred at the hands of Chinese translators when they translated Vasubandhu's *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* into Chinese. The Chinese translators have given it a more viññānic sense.<sup>25</sup> These Chinese translators mistranslated the term 'vijñaptimātra' (wei liao bie) of Vasubandhu as 'vijñanamātra' (wei shi) into Chinese language. Vasubandhu's 'vijñaptimātra' means 'ideation only'. But Chinese translators not only mistranslated it as 'vijñanamātra' but also misinterpreted it as an idealism which negates the existence of the things. Later on when Sylvan Levi translated the Chinese *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* into English, he followed the same meaning and this tradition came to be considered as 'Vijñānavāda'.

**So, why the Chinese translators used the term 'vijñanamātra' (wei shi) for 'vijñaptimātra' (wei liao bie) is an open question to investigate by scholars.<sup>26</sup>**

This Vasubandhu's view of 'vijñaptimātra' can be compared with the Madhyamaka 'śūnyatā' concept. As mentioned above Nāgārjuna sees 'śūnyatā' through interdependence and interrelatedness of the things. According to him there is no-thing in the absolute sense which can be taken as an essence or substance of the dhammas. In the same manner Vasubandhu sees everything in the world as a ideation only ('vijñaptimātra'). That knowledge is called 'parikalpita'<sup>27</sup>. Yogācārins say that the second step of knowledge is 'paratantra'. It is a knowledge which arise through the understanding

<sup>24</sup> *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, chapter, 25, stanza 20.

“nirvāṇasya ca yā kotih –saṃsārasya ca- Na taoyrantaraṃ – kiñcitsusūk • amamapi vidyate”

<sup>25</sup> *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, Sloka, 100.

<sup>26</sup> Kalupahana, D. J., (1976) p 189-190. (see Ven. Dhammajothi's article “Mind Only or Ideation Only: An Examination of Yogācāra Philosophy and Its Chinese Interpretation”

<sup>27</sup> *Triṃśatikā*, 23 sloka, “Trividasya svabhāvasya-trividam niḥsvabhāvatam-Saṃdhā ya sarvadharmā nā ṃ-deṣitā niḥsvabhāvatā”

of interrelatedness of the things. This 'paratantra' knowledge is based on 'vijñāna'. In explaining this they pointed out why the same young girl is viewed by a young man, a tiger and an arhant differently. A young girl for a young man is a sensual object, while for a tiger she is food. At the same time she only is a heap of five aggregates for an arhant. So, the same object, is being viewed by different persons in different manner because they perceive it according to their seeds of 'vijñāna'. Therefore, the empirical world is decided by the 'vijñāna'. In that sense empirical world is only an ideation created by 'vijñāna'. It does not mean that the empirical world does not exist. Nāgārjuna's 'śūnyatā' also does not mean the empirical world is not existing, he meant only the absence of the entity of the empirical world. So, philosophically both these teachers pointed out the same meaning, but in different terms. Nāgārjuna used the term 'śūnya', while Vasubandhu used the term 'vijñaptimātra'. Nāgārjuna said 'śūnyaṃ idaṃ' and Vasubandhu said 'vijñaptimātramevetad'<sup>28</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Above discussed facts show the evolution of Buddhist philosophy from 'anatta' to 'vijñāna' and how different Buddhist sects tried to find answer for the one central question, that is how can 'anicca', 'kamma' and 'punabbhava' be explained without the 'ātma' concept. Though the Buddhist scholars approached in varied the focal question is same. For instance early Buddhism wanted to deny the individual 'atta' concept, while sectarian groups tried to explain how things exist though they are impermanent. They introduced many philosophical concepts but they were labeled as substantialists. To rescue Buddhism from this substantial approach Māhāyana scholars brought two new theories such as 'śūnya' and 'vijñāna'. So, it is critical that all these Buddhist traditions tried to explain the existence of 'kamma' 'punabbhava' memory and so on more closely to the early Buddhism. In doing this these sects depended on logic, reasoning and language, while early Buddhism used sensory perception aided by extra-sensory perception. Thus, these Buddhist sects innovated different views, though their aim is the same.

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<sup>28</sup> Kalupahana, D.J., (1987) p 134.



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