

RECONCILIATION OF BUDDHIST AND VEDANTIC NOTION OF SELF

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There is a general impression that Buddhism is opposed to the existence of Self or Ātman. Indeed many scholars of distinction maintained that this non-soul theory demarcates Buddhism from Vedāntic philosophy. The Hinayānists, the Mahāyānists, namely Śūnyavādins and Vijñānavādins explicitly denied the existence of soul. In other words, this non-soul theory embraces entire Buddhist philosophical literature. Granted, all schools of Buddhism criticise the existence of Ātman; however, it is equally important to comprehend the notion of 'self' as they understood.

For this purpose, we must look through the arguments set forth by Buddhism against the existence of Ātman, from the days of Buddha to the Mahāyānist thinkers. It seems that the word Ātman for Buddha is nothing but 'ego' i.e. notion of 'I' and 'mine'. The notion of 'self' is here regarded as the cause of misery and bondage. The Buddhists call it 'sat-kāya dṛṣṭi'. When we take anything as a 'self' we get attached to it and dislike other things that are opposed to it.¹ The notion of self is considered as ignorance (Avidyā) and from it proceed all passions. This notion of self is, for the Buddhists, the root cause of all kinds of attachment, and hence of misery and pain. This notion of self which is, the fountainhead of all misdeeds led Buddhists to deny the existence of Ātman. Following this limited concept of Ātman as an 'individual ego', Buddhism in all subsequent phases of its development criticises the existence of Ātman as a false notion of the Vedāntins.

Says Buddha : Anattā (Anātman) means 'non-ego, not-self' i. e. the fact that neither within these bodily and mental phenomena of existence nor outside them can be found anything that in the ultimate sense can be called as self-reliant real ego-entity or personality. "All are impermanent, body, sensation, perception, they are not self".² It is mentioned in the *Samyukta-nikāya*³ that self is nothing else but an aggregate of five *skandhas*, namely aggregate of body (*rūpa*) and four mental processes,—feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), disposition (*saṃskāra*) and self-consciousness (*viññāna*). The five states of the five senses and the mind, the feeling that is related to mind, all these are void of self. There is no self or person or life principle which is permanent. No consciousness of any such permanent changeless entity or eternal principle obtains in man. In the *Majjhima-nikāya*, Buddha condemned the notion of self as an unreal thing imagined only by dull people.⁴ Early Buddhist literature reveals that Buddha admitted the states of consciousness but

not the soul. According to him the union of mental and material qualities makes the 'individual'. The 'self' is nothing but an empirical aggregate. In the *Alagaddūpana-sutta*, it is said that there is no self or anything having the nature of self. Vidhusekhara Bhattacharya, quoting various references in support of the Buddhist denial of self, writes : "The existence of personal 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."⁵

The same notion of 'self (non-ego)' is accepted by the later Buddhists and further elaboration of existence of non-soul theory is solely responsible for the misconception that Buddhism is diametrically opposed to Vedāntic thought.

In denying this notion of the self all the schools of Buddhism are unanimous. T. R. V. Murti rightly pointed out that "there is no Buddhist school of thought which did not deny the Ātman".⁶

Immediately after Buddha, negative approach towards the existence of the soul reached its climax; especially, in Nāgasena, we notice this negative attitude. Nāgasena, like Hume, maintained that the so-called 'self' is nothing but a stream of ideas. It is psychologically impossible to believe in the existence of 'self'. He observes that when we analyse the idea of soul, we wrongly imagine a soul underlying mental states. It is nothing else but a collection of certain qualities which exist together. The soul is a name for the sum total of the states which constitutes our mental existence. The soul or personality is like a stream of river; there is continuity, even though one movement is not the same as another. It is the view of all the Hinayānist schools.

For the Mādhyamikas, 'self' is an unreal entity. Nāgārjuna (c. 2nd cent. A.D.) declares that it is neither identical with, nor different from the five *skandhas*.⁷ When 'I' and 'mine' cease, the cycle of birth and death comes to a standstill.⁸ If the 'self' by the same as the *skandhas*, then it too, like them, will be subject to birth and death and it cannot be known.⁹ Nāgārjuna's followers like Āryadeva and Candrakīrti also treated soul as unreal entity. According to Candrakīrti, Ātman is the root cause of all sufferings and demerits and he says that wise men (*yogi*) should deny its ultimate reality. Śāntideva also states similarly when he says that when we analyse the existence of 'self', nothing should be found ultimately. "Just as when one goes on taking off the layers of a plantain trunk or an onion nothing [ultimately] will remain, similarly, if one goes on analysing the so-called existence of self, ultimately it will be found to be nothing."¹⁰

In criticising the existence of 'self', the Vijñānavādins are not far behind the earlier Buddhists. They all took the notion of Ātman as ego-entity and criticise it as a non-existent entity. Let us see how Asaṅga, the great Vijñānavādin criticises the notion of self as mere illusion in his major work, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*. He says that the concept of Ātman is simply a 'pre-conception' or an "illusory concept",¹¹

Like Nāgārjuna, he too asserts that it is neither a spiritual entity nor an aggregate of *skandhas*. Attacking the Vedāntins indirectly, he says that the Vedāntic comprehension of Ātman is not by itself characterised by the correct notion of Ātman. It is also mere misinformation, identifying it with the aggregate of *skandhas* (*duḥsaṁsthitatā*) which is originated from impurities and instability (*kleśa-daurbalya-prabhāvitāt*). In other words, it is neither real nor unreal, but merely an illusion. Therefore, Ātman does not exist.¹² Thus, the liberation is also nothing else but destruction of this illusion or pre-conception.¹³

He strongly criticises the belief in the existence of the so called Ātman and argues as to how is it that the world believing in the conception of 'self' which is simply an illusion, does not see the nature of pain which is constantly attached with the *saṁskāras*. In other words, the world, falsely believing in the existence of 'self' which is a non-existent entity, does not see the root cause of pain produced by *saṁskāras* (which are an operating factor).¹⁴

How deep rooted is this ignorance or darkness which causes the world to misinterpret the play of existence and to perceive the 'self' which is not? In fact it is possible that obscurity prevents us from seeing what is, but does not make us see what is not. He expresses surprise as to what sort of ignorance is this which obscures the truth and makes the world to perceive what is not.¹⁵ He calls the notion of 'self' as baneful.¹⁶ He declared that all *dharma*s are without self, or are *sans* substance.¹⁷ All sorts of pain and sufferings are due to this imaginary notion of 'self'. The 'self', by its very nature, is characterised by pain. It is the root cause of all miseries and sufferings.¹⁸ Really speaking Ātman, which (as a notion) is merely imaginary, does not exist.¹⁹ If Ātman really existed, then there would be either liberation without effort or no liberation at all. Therefore, the imaginary soul does not exist.²⁰ Asaṅga denies the material existence of 'self'.²¹ If it materially exists, then it must be seen like other material things.²² If it is material then it must be subject to destruction like other material things; in that case, it cannot be a permanent entity. If *pudgala* or Ātman exists, then there would be either liberation of all without any effort or no liberation at all.²³ There will be liberation of all without any effort because on seeing the material Ātman, everyone will be liberated. Such, however, is not the case. By perceiving the Ātman nobody becomes liberated. Even those who have realised the highest truth do not accept the existence of Ātman.²⁴ In that case, they may not be able to attain liberation. By merely perceiving the material Ātman nobody is liberated. Thus, there will be no liberation at all. Again, belief in the existence of ātman is the root cause of miseries and 'I' and 'mine' considerations spring from it.²⁵ This belief becomes the root cause of bondage rather than liberation. The Ātman or *pudgala* does not exist in reality. When the *pudgala* or 'self' does not really exist, how can it be taken as seer or a knower or liberator or doer or an enjoyer.²⁶ The notion of self is thus

purely imaginary and does not exist.²⁷ It may be argued that, in some places Buddha himself has preached the *pudgala* or 'self'. But it must be kept in mind that Buddha had preached the existence of 'self' only to attract the simple minded and to encourage them to perform good, and to refrain from evil, deeds; without teaching *pudgala*, it is not possible to preach its consequences and *pudgala-nairātmya*. Excepting this, it has no other significance.²⁸

For Vasubandhu, the follower of Asaṅga, too, the notion of 'self' is the root cause of suffering and it is an unreal entity. He avers that the 'individual self' depends on the *ālaya* and is accompanied by four kinds of suffering : self-notion, self-delusion, self-pride, and self-love.²⁹ It ceases to function when the false notion of the self is destroyed and when the categories of intellect are transcended. Consciousness transcends the duality of the subject (*pudgala-nairātmya*) and the object (*dharma-nairātmya*) both of which ultimately are unreal.³⁰

Even for later *vijñānavādins* like Dharmakīrti (active c. A. D. 620-660) and Śāntarakṣita (c. A. D. 705-762), the notion of Ātman is the root cause of misery and attachment. As long as one is attached to the Ātman so long will one revolve in the cycle of birth and death. Śāntarakṣita clearly maintained that Ātman is nothing but consciousness associated with ego; ultimately it denotes nothing.³¹

Thus, it is clear that the Buddhists, right from the Buddha to Śāntarakṣita, severely criticise the notion of 'self' and it is generally understood in the sense of an individual ego, root cause of passion, misery and attachment and its ultimate existence is denied on that ground. It is variously called, Ātman, Pudgala and Satkāyadṛṣṭi.

Let us, then, examine how far this non-soul theory is justifiable and how far Buddha and the Mahāyānists had understood the notion of Ātman of the Vedāntins.

The Hinayānists taking literal meaning of the word 'non-ego' or 'not-self' took a sort of materialist approach reducing Ātman to mere mind and body complex or component of certain elements. It logically derives that the destruction of misery follows the destruction of self or certain component parts. Now this is nothing but sheer materialism. The Mahāyānists adopting idealistic view criticise the existence of self saying that it is an unreal entity or merely an illusory idea. They misunderstood or only partially understood the notion of Ātman of the Upaniṣads and based their criticism on that limited understanding. It is already mentioned in the previous pages that, for the Hinayānists, 'self' is a mere aggregate of five *skandhas*. There is no permanent self which is the perceiver. Śāṅkara rightly pointed out that without a permanent soul acts of perception and memory become impossible. If self is a mere aggregate of five *skandhas* (collection of bodily and mental processes),—these being unconscious,—how can they combine

themselves with one another?³² If there is no intelligent principle as a guide, how can the non-intelligent *skandhas* aggregate in a systematic way? Without permanent entity or soul, there will not be any aggregate and in their absence, there cannot exist the stream of mundane existence.³³ If *avidyā* and other members of the twelve-fold chain of causation can account for the formation of aggregate and mundane life, the insoluble problem is, how the *avidyā* and the like became the cause of aggregates which themselves come into existence subsisting in the aggregates or depend upon aggregates?³⁴ If mind is only successive perceptions, there is nothing that perceives. Without perceiver there can not be consciousness of perception. Radhakrishnan rightly pointed out that the aggregate or bundle of impression could hold no beliefs, make no judgements, commit no errors, entertain no deceptive illusions.³⁵ If there is no perceiver, memory will become impossible. These Buddhists wrongly compare the self with the stream of a river. They forgot that the stream of a river is always flowing and never comes back. If the analogy is correct, we cannot remember past experiences. In fact, past experiences are retained in memory and we can recall them. Śāṅkara pointed out correctly that if the past is recognised in the present, the permanence of the percipient is necessary. Otherwise, it will become difficult to recognise the same man whom we saw yesterday.³⁶ The Hinayānists accepted the difference between thoughts and objects (*nāma* and *rūpa*) but they failed to understand that thoughts can never be thinkers. The 'self' is the knower or subject (*jñātā*) and cannot be identified with 'Me' the mental contents of which are known (*jñeya*). Consciousness itself indicates existence of an agent which is conscious. The existence of 'self' cannot be brushed aside or dismissed merely by saying that there is a continuity or similarity of consciousness. The main question, then, is what is "my" abiding identical 'entity' or 'self'?

The notion of thinking and activity implies that there is an agent whose activity unifies the multiplicity of data or differences into a single whole. This is an order which gives the whole its distinctive and unitary character. This order or agent would have to be the same throughout otherwise it ceases to function as a unifying factor. This unifying permanent principle or agent is called 'self' by the Vedāntins. Without accepting the existence of this permanent principle or 'self', the problem of identity cannot be solved. There is no proper answer for all these objections in the Hinayānists' texts.

Even when accepting the absolutistic or an idealistic standpoint like Mahāyānists, it is not possible to deny the existence of 'self' at an empirical level. Every worldly knowledge is possible only when there is the subject or the knower and the object or the known. Ultimately, there is no subject-object duality but at the empirical level it must be accepted. Really speaking these Mahāyānists did not deny the existence of reality or the true self of the Vedāntins. Their understanding of the concept of Ātman of the Vedāntins is partial. This misunderstanding of

the word *Ātman* of the Vedāntins led them to criticise the existence of *Ātman*. Buddha himself is responsible for this misunderstanding. When Buddha says that the self is the root cause of all sorts of misery and attachment, it is clear that he misunderstood the notion of *Ātman* of the *Upaniṣads*. But his criticism is not against the true notion of *Ātman* described by the *Upaniṣads* which is the pure self, pure consciousness and which is the only reality. Buddha and the Mahāyānists, in one sense or other, accepted Upaniṣadic reality. The *Ātman* of the *Upaniṣad* is called not by the word *Ātman* but by different terms. They used different terminologies instead of the word *Ātman*. It is called *Dharma*, *Bodhi*, *Prajñā*, *Citta*, *Tathatā*, *Tathāgatagarbha*, *Dharmadhātu*, etc. The Mahāyānists like Asaṅga explicitly call Reality as *Buddhātman*, *Paramātman*. The Mahāyānists understood the word *Ātman* in the sense of individual ego or *Jivātman* which is the product of *avidyā* and which is associated with the *antaḥkaraṇa* or *buddhi*. Śāntarakṣita makes it clear when he says that *citta* or pure consciousness associated with ego or *ahamkāra* is called *Ātman*.³⁷

Really speaking Buddha narrows down the meaning of *Ātman* of the *Upaniṣad* taking it in the sense of ego which is the root cause of misery and attachment. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* it is said that it is not for the sake of everything that everything is dear but for the sake of the 'self' that everything is dear³⁸. Seemingly, by taking such types of statements of the *Upaniṣads*, Buddha wrongly understood the *Ātman* in the sense of 'I' and the 'mine' which is the cause of suffering and bondage.

Before criticising Buddha's and the Mahāyānists' view, it is very important to keep in mind the notion of *Ātman* described by the *Upaniṣads*. In the *Upaniṣads*, *Ātman* is identified with the Absolute Reality or Brahman in the ultimate sense. From the subjective point of view the same reality is called *Ātman* and as Brahman from the objective point of view. In the *Vedānta*, the word *Ātman* is used as a synonym of Brahman or Noumenal Reality. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* clearly states that 'The self is indeed Brahman'³⁹. In other *Upaniṣads* also we find the same type of description. 'He is indeed just this Self, this Immortal, this Absolute, this All'⁴⁰. 'The self is indeed all this'⁴¹. 'It is existence, consciousness and bliss'⁴². 'It is non-dual'⁴³. It is absolute consciousness which is the permanent background of all changing phenomena'⁴⁴. 'There is no difference between *Ātman* and Brahman'. 'That thou art'⁴⁵. All these passages clearly show that *Ātman* is identified with Brahman.

It is important here to note that 'Dharma' the Ultimate Reality called by the Buddha is nothing else but the same *Ātman* described by the *Upaniṣads*. 'Dharma' to him is Reality (*satyam*) itself in a dynamic form, regulating the course of nature like the Brahman or *Ātman* of the *Upaniṣads* which is the basis of all. It is described by Buddha as an unborn, un-made, non-becoming and un-compounded⁴⁶. This is similar to the notion of *Ātman* or Brahman described in the *Kaṭhopaniṣad*. The self is never-born and never dies. It is unborn, eternal, everlasting⁴⁷. Like

the Upaniṣadic seer he calls Reality as immortal or *amṛta*. After attainment of *sambodhi* or enlightenment, Buddha revealed his experience to his five disciples (Pañcavargiya Bhikṣu) as that of immortality declaring that thereby the gates of immortality are opened for all⁴⁸.

The idea is the same as that of the Upaniṣads. In the Upaniṣad, Reality is called Ātman, Immortal, and Brahman;⁴⁹ and in the *Kenopaniṣad* it is also mentioned that, 'when it is known through every conscious state, it is rightly known and one attains eternal life or immortality. Through his own knowledge he gains immortality.'⁵⁰

This immortality can be attained through effort. Buddha himself declared that : "even so, brethren, have I seen an ancient path, an ancient track traversed by the perfectly enlightened ones of former times".⁵¹ His criticism is against the permanence of the empirical ego or Jīva which is separate from Ātman in the Vedānta. The Upaniṣadic notion of Ātman is misunderstood and misrepresented by Buddha and his followers. But in the ultimate sense he accepted the Ātman or the Absolute Reality. Instead of calling his conception of reality as Ātman, he calls it 'Dharma' or 'Bodhi' or 'Amṛta', which in the ultimate analysis only represents a different jargon for the same entity. The Hinayānists taking the literal meaning of Buddha's statement about the self, embraced sheer materialism.

In the Mahāyānists works this misunderstanding of the notion of Ātman of the Vedāntins as individual ego, is explicitly noticeable. They accept the absolute Reality but criticise the existence of Ātman as mere illusion or unreal. Consciousness associated with ego is called Ātman by some of the later Vijñānavādins.

Aśvaghoṣa's Tathatā (Suchness) or Bhūta-tathatā is nothing but Ātman of the Upaniṣads. He recognizes it as Absolute suchness, which, ultimately speaking, transcends everything. But tainted with ignorance it manifests itself as 'conditional suchness'. The subject-object duality is the result of this conditional suchness. When true knowledge dawns, we realise that we are no more finite things but absolute suchness.⁵² This is the self-existent, Immortal Reality, calm and blissful, which must be realised.⁵³ It is beyond the grasp of intellect. This 'thatness' or Tathatā has no attribute and it can only somehow be pointed in speech as 'thatness'. It is neither existence nor non-existence nor both nor neither. It is neither unity nor plurality, nor both nor neither. It is neither affirmation nor negation nor both nor neither. Similar statements are found in the Upaniṣads. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* clearly states that Ātman is ungraspable; it can be expressed as not this, not this.⁵⁴ In the *Māṇḍūkya*, it is described as neither inwardly nor outwardly cognisant, nor on both sides together. It is unseen, ungraspable, indefinable, unthinkable, unpointable.⁵⁵ Dasgupta rightly points out that Aśvaghoṣa being a learned Brāhmin in his early age, interpreted Buddhism in the light of the Upaniṣads.

Nāgārjuna, the great Mādhyamika philosopher, also misunderstood the notion of Ātman and criticises it as an unreal entity. But his conception of Absolute Reality or non-dual Tattva or Śūnya is nothing else but Absolute consciousness or Ātman of the Upaniṣads which is indescribable. He defined reality as transcendental or beyond the reach of thought as non-relative, non-determinate, quiescent, non-discursive, non-dual.⁵⁶ Even his conception of Śūnya is the indescribable Ātman or Brahman of the Vedāntins. 'Absolute cannot be called void or non-void or both or neither, but, in order to indicate, it is called Śūnya'.⁵⁷ Here the reality is described in negative terms. Reality which is unconditioned, indeterminate, and incapable of verbal elaboration is not apprehended by thought. Like Upaniṣadic thinkers, for Nāgārjuna language applies only to the finite or phenomenal world.

The same negative description of Ātman is given in the Upaniṣads. Nāgārjuna's definition of reality is similar to the description of Ātman given in the *Māṇḍūkya-upaniṣad*. It is said that Ātman cannot be described, cannot be grasped, is beyond the reach of thought, cannot be designated.⁵⁸ The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* also describes Ātman in negative terms saying that Ātman is not this, not this.⁵⁹ It also describes Ātman as the not gross and the not subtle, the not short and not long . . . the speechless, the mindless".⁶⁰ It is clear that Nāgārjuna accepts the existence of pure self or Ātman of the Upaniṣads but only describes it by the negative term 'Śūnya'.

Nāgārjuna's followers, Āryadeva and Candrakīrti, accept the Absolute Reality. Āryadeva says that Reality is pure Citta or Consciousness. The 'Jewel of Self' is absolutely pure and self-luminous and appears to be impure only on account of ignorance, just as a white crystal appears coloured on account of coloured thing placed near it.⁶¹ Śāntideva's Bodhicitta or Pure Buddha is similar to the notion of Ātman of the Upaniṣads. Pure Citta or Pure Consciousness is the Absolute Reality for Śāntideva.

It is clear that Absolute or Śūnya or non-dual Tattva (*advayaṁ tattvaṁ*) of Nāgārjuna, Pure Citta of Āryadeva, and Pure Buddha of Śāntideva are nothing else but self-luminous Ātman of the Upaniṣads which is indescribable pure consciousness (*cit-prajñānaghana*). Let us examine the Vijñānavādins' view. Even though the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* teaches the two fold selflessness i.e. self-lessness of persons and the self-lessness of things, the reality defined by it is nothing but Vedāntic Ātman or Brahman. It identifies the reality with Tathāgatagarbha or Ālayavijñāna. It says that Tathāgatagarbha or Ālaya is indescribable and transcends all categories of thought.⁶² It tries to distinguish Tathāgatagarbha from Ātman of the Vedāntins on false ground. It says that it is not similar to the Ātman because it transcends all categories of finite thought (*nirvikalpa*) because it is neither affirmation nor negation nor both nor neither, and because it is to be directly realised by spiritual experience while the Ātman leads to eternalism

because it clings to affirmation.⁶³ Even at first sight, no student of Vedānta and Buddhism can fail to understand the superficial and fallacious distinction made by the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* between Tathāgatagarbha and Ātman of the Vedānta.

The Ātman of the Upaniṣads transcends all categories of thought. Ātman cannot be reached by speech and mind.⁶⁴ Ātman is beyond the grasp of intellect and learning.⁶⁵ It is ungraspable, indescribable, and indefinable.⁶⁶ Ātman does not cling to the category of affirmation. In fact no category can adequately describe it. It is attributeless.⁶⁷ That the Ātman is pure existence (*sat*) does not mean clinging to affirmation. It means to indicate the self-luminous 'consciousness self' in limited terms. It is really beyond description of categories of thought. 'Neti, Neti', 'Not this, Not this' clearly indicates the indescribable nature of Ātman or Absolute Consciousness. It cannot be described, but it can be only experienced.

The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, however, speaks of self-realization. Suzuki points out that the idea of self realization is a special feature of the *Laṅkāvatāra*. If there is no self, no reality, no truth, then self realization would not have been preached. It says that: "All things are in their self nature, un-born; mahāmāti, belongs to the realm of self-realization attained by noble wisdom and does not belong essentially to the realm of dualistic discrimination cherished by the ignorant and the simple-minded."⁶⁸ It is also said that Reality is eternal. "The ancient road of Reality, on Mahāmāti, has been here all the time, like gold, silver or pearl, preserved in the mine. Mahāmāti, the Dharmadhātu, abides for ever, whether the Tathāgata appears in the world or not, as the Tathāgata eternally abides, so does the reason (Dharmatā) of all things, reality for ever abides; Reality keeps it in order, like the roads in an ancient city."⁶⁹

It may be noted here that even though Buddhists implicitly accepted the doctrine of Ātman of the Upaniṣads, they hesitated to use the word Ātman explicitly, simply because this terminology belonged to their opponents. Seemingly at the time of the composition of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, there was a trend to preach the Ātman theory explicitly.

For Asaṅga, Absolute is Pure Consciousness (Cittam). It is non-dual. It is beyond the purview of speech or expression and indeed, it is indescribable.⁷⁰ It is neither existence nor non-existence, neither affirmation nor negation, neither production nor destruction, neither increasing nor diminishing, neither pure nor impure; it is a characteristic of Reality.⁷¹

These descriptions of Asaṅga do not differ from Vedāntic description of Ātman or Brahman which is beyond the grasp of intellect, speech and which is pure consciousness. Asaṅga goes a step further than earlier Buddhists and calls Absolute Reality as Pure Ātman and even Paramātmā. "Understanding the true meaning of the doctrine of Śūnya and Nairātmya, the enlightened ones (Buddha) transcend the

individual existence and realises the Pure Soul (Śuddhātman) and thus, become one with the Universal Soul.⁷² “When one realises this world to be merely a composite of *saṃskāras* (forces) and also realising the baneful existence of Ātman, he becomes one with Universal Soul.⁷³ Here, when Asaṅga says that the notion of Ātman is baneful, it applies only to individual ego because Reality, according to him, is pure consciousness and which by its very nature is self-luminous. All impurities are adventitious.⁷⁴ Reality is styled in different terms by Asaṅga, like Viśuddha-tathatā, Dharmadhātu, Śuddha-citta and Anāsrava-dhātu. He declares that Reality is Pure Existence (Anāsrava-dhātu). It is pure Tathatā (Viśuddha-tathatā), Thatness which is Ātman for Buddhists. It is the highest soul or Paramā-tman for the Buddhists.⁷⁵ Like the Vedāntins, he proclaims that different rivers merging in the ocean become one with it; similarly, the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas merging in the Absolute Reality (Buddhatva) became one with it.⁷⁶ It is similar to the statement of the *Chāndogya* which clearly states that : “as rivers which flow into the sea disappear in the mighty water (ocean) and lose their name and form, so does the wise soul become absorbed in the Transcendent Person and loses its name and form. When the souls are merged in the Real they cannot discriminate from which bodies they came.⁷⁷ Similar statement is found in the *Pāśnapaniṣad* also.⁷⁸ It is clear that by not mentioning the word Ātman, Asaṅga indirectly accepted the Ātman of the Vedāntins which is pure consciousness and the only reality. He denied only individual ego and not pure consciousness, Ātman.

Vasubandhu, younger brother and follower of Asaṅga, also admitted Reality as Pure Consciousness which transcends subject/object duality. *Vijñapti-mātratā* is Reality for Vasubandhu. It is self-luminous non-dual Reality. Later Vijñānavādins, like Dharmakīrti and Śāntarakṣita (who are called Sautrāntika-Vijñānavādins by some writers) accepted that Reality is pure consciousness. Dharmakīrti, clearly says that the Reality, which is pure consciousness, is beyond all words, names, and concepts.⁷⁹ Śāntarakṣita, as has been earlier mentioned, criticises Ātman associated with ego or Ego-self (*ahankāraśrita-cittam*). Reality for him is one without a second. It is Citta which is self-luminous, consciousness and free from all impurities, impositions.⁸⁰ Like later Vedāntins, he explicitly maintained that realisation of pure self is true knowledge. Even he uses the word selfrealisation i.e. *viśuddhātmadarśana*.⁸¹

We can now draw the conclusion from all these Buddhist statements that Ātman of the Upaniṣads is generally misunderstood as Individual Ego or Buddhi or Jivātman as associated with ego, *māyā* or ignorance, and, on the other hand, the real Ātman or Brahman of the Vedāntins understood or called by different terms like Dharma, Bodhi, Tathatā, Dharmadhātu, Prajñapti-mātra, and Pure Citta. The ego (*ahankāra*) is condemned not only by the Buddhists; in fact all the schools of Indian Philosophy condemned it as an obstacle in the path of self-realisation. The conflict, between the Buddhists and the later Vedāntins originates

from the misunderstanding of the word Ātman by the Buddhists. One can easily make out from the critical survey of conception of non-soul theory of the Buddhist texts, that Buddha himself is greatly responsible for this misunderstanding. Principally, there is no difference between the Ultimate Reality of the Vedāntins and the Buddhists. Due to this misunderstanding created by Buddha, they *sans raison* fought with each other on the philosophical battle field. C.D. Sharma had rightly pointed out that : “had Buddha refrained from committing an error of commission in degrading the Upaniṣadic Ātman to the level of the empirical ego and also an error of omission in not identifying his Bodhi or Prajñā with the Upaniṣadic Ātman or Brahman, the age-old battle regarding the Nairātmyavāda fought without any reasonable ground by the Buddhists and the Vedāntins on the soil of Indian philosophy would have been surely avoided.”⁸²

Notes & References

1. T.R.V. Murti, *The central Philosophy of Buddhism*, p. 17.
2. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 218.
3. *Saṃyukta-Nikāya*, p. 54.
4. Kevala paripūro bālādhammo, *Majjhima Nikāya*, 1.1.2.
5. *Basic conception of Buddhism*, p. 7.
6. Murti, *Central.*, p. 7.
7. M.K. X-15.
8. M.K. XVIII-4.
9. M.K. XVIII-7.
10. *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, IX-75.
11. Bhrama eṣa tu utpanno yeyamātma-dr̥ṣṭiḥ, MSA, VI-2, Com.
12. *Tasmānnāstyātmā*, MSA, VI-2, Com.
13. Na cātmadr̥ṣṭiḥ svayamātmalakṣaṇā na cāpi duḥsamsthitatā vilakṣaṇā. Dvayanna cānyad bhrama eṣa tāditaḥ tataśca mokṣo bhramamātra saṃkṣayaḥ. MSA VI-2.
14. Kathaṃ jano vibhramamātrāśritaḥ paraiti duḥkhaprakṛtiṃ na santatāṃ. MSA, VI-3.
15. Katamoyamidṛśastamaḥ prakāro lokasya yadvidyamānaṃ pratītyasamutpādamavipaśyannavidyamānamātmānaṃ nirikṣate. Śakyam hi nāma tamasā vidyamānamadraṣṭuṃ syānna tvavidyamānaṃ draṣṭhumiti. MSA, VI-4, Comm.
16. Anarthamayātmadr̥ṣṭiḥ. MSA, XIV-37.
17. Sarve dharmā anātmānaḥ. MSA, XVIII-101.
18. Satkāyadr̥ṣṭiḥ kleśalakṣaṇo hyeṣa saṃkleśo, yaduta ahaṃ mameti. MSA, XVIII-92. Comm.
19. Parikalpita ātmā nāsti. MSA, XVIII-81, Comm.
20. Ayatnamokṣaḥ sarveṣāṃ, na mokṣaḥ pudgalosti vā. MSA, XVIII-103,

21. Dravyato nāstīti vaktavyaḥ. MSA, XVIII-92, Comm.
22. Yadi dravyato asti tasya karmāpyupalabhyate. Yathā cakṣurādīnāṃ darśanādi lakṣaṇaṃ ca rūpaprasādādi. Na caivaṃ pudgalasya, Tasmānna so asti dravyataḥ. MSA, XVIII, 92.103. Comm.
23. Ayatnamokṣaḥ sarveṣāṃ na mokṣaḥ pudgalo asti vā. MSA, XVIII-103.
24. Tathā hi sarveṣāṃ na dṛṣṭasatyānāṃ ātmadarśanaṃ vidyate. MSA, XVIII-103, Comm.
25. Sati cātmani avasyaṃ ahaṃkāra mamakārābhyāṃ ātmatṛṣṇayā cānyaīśca tannidānāiḥ kleśairbhavitavyamiti. Ato api mokṣo na syāt. MSA, XVIII-103, Comm.
26. Nairarthakyāt ato draṣṭā yāvanbhoktā na yujyate. MSA, XVIII-96.
27. Sraddh-nusāryādi pudgala vyavasthānata ityasati dravyato astitve kasmāddeṣitaḥ ? MSA, XVIII-101. Comm.
28. Saṃkleśa vyavadāne ca avasthā chedabhinnake. Vṛtti santānabhedo hi pudgalenopadarśitaḥ. MSA, XVIII-102. Comm.
29. Ātmadṛṣṭyātmanamohātmanātmāsneha. TMS-6.
30. Tathā pudgala nairātmyapraveśo hyanyathā punaḥ. Deśanā dharma nairātmya praveśaḥ kalpitātmana. VMS-10.
31. Ahaṃkāraśrayatvena cittamātmeti gīyate. *Tattvasaṃgrha*. Vol. I, p. 304.
32. Samudāyināṃ acetanatvāt. (B. S. B. II 2-18).
33. Tasmāt samudāyānupapattiḥ. Samudāyānupapattau ca tadāśrayā lokayātrā lupyeta. (B. S. B. II-2-18.)
34. B. S. B. II-2-19.
35. *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I.
36. B. S. B. II-2-25.
37. Ahaṃkāraśrayatvena cittamātmeti gīyate. *Tattva-saṃgraha*. Vol. I, p. 204.
38. Na vā are sarvasya kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati, ātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati, (Bṛh. Up. II. IV. V.)
39. *Ayamātma brahma*. Bṛ. Up. II. 5.19 and Māṇḍ. Up. 2.
40. Sayoyamātmā, idamamṛtaṃ, idaṃ brahma, idaṃ sarvaṃ. (Br. Up. II. V. 1-14.)
41. Ātmaivedaṃ sarvaṃ. (Chh. Up. u. XXV. 2.)
42. Satyam, Jñānam, anantaṃ brahma.
43. Advaitam, (Māṇḍ. Up. 7.)
44. Brahmaivedaṃ viśvaṃ. (Māṇḍ. Up. II. 2. 11.)
45. Tattvamasi. Chh. Up. VI. XVI. 3.)
46. Ajātaṃ, akṛtaṃ, abhūtaṃ, asaṃskṛtaṃ. (Udāna.)
47. Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācit. (Kaṭh. Up. I. II. 18.)

48. Amṛtamadhigataṁ uparuta tessaṁ amṛtassadvārā.
—*Vinayapiṭaka, Mahāvagga. I. 1.7. Comm.*
49. Bṛh. Up. II. V. 1-14.
50. Pratibodhaviditaṁ mataṁ amṛtatvaṁ hi vindate, also vidyayā vindate-mṛtam (Kaṭh. Up.)
51. *Samyuktanikāya*, “Nāgarasūtra”, p. 36.
52. Sharma, C. D. : *Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 85.
53. Śāntam, Śivam, kṣaimapadam, acyutam tat,
—*Saundarānanda*, XVI, 26.27.
54. Neti, Neti, Bṛh. Up. 4.5.15.
55. Nāntaḥ prajñam, na bahiḥ prajñam, nobhayataḥ prajñam. adṛśyam, agrāhyam, alakṣaṇam, acintyam, avyapadeśyam. (Māṇḍ. Up. 7.)
56. Apparapratyayaṁ śāntam, prapañcāḥ aprapañcataṁ, nirvikalpaṁ anānārthaṁ etat tattvasya lakṣaṇam (M. K. XVIII-9.)
57. Śūnyamiti na vaktavyaṁ aśūnyamiti vā bhavet. Ubhayaṁ nobhayaṁ ceti prajñaptiyarthaṁ tu kathyate. (M. K. XXII-11.)
58. Māṇḍ. Up. 7.
59. *Neti neti*. (Bṛh. Up. IV-IV-22, and IV-V-15.)
60. Bṛh. Up. III-VIII-8.
61. Cittaśuddhiprakaraṇa, 27-28.
62. Suzuki : *Lañkāvatāra*. p. 47-48.
63. Suzuki : *Lañkāvatāra*. p. 77-78.
64. Naiva vācā na manasā prāptuṁ śakyaḥ. (Kaṭh. Up. II-VI-12.)
65. Na medhayā na bahunā śrutena. (Kaṭh. Up. I-II-22.)
66. Māṇḍ. Up. 7.
67. Nirguṇaḥ. (Śvetāśvatara Up. VI-II.)
68. Suzuki : LAS, p. 56.
69. Suzuki : LAS, p. 124.
70. MSA. XI-13.
71. MSA. VI-1.
72. Śūnyatāyāṁ viśuddhāyāṁ nairātmyānmārga lābhataḥ. Buddhāḥ śuddhā-tma lābhitvāt gatā ātmamahātmatām. MSA, IX-23.
73. Vihāya yānarathamayātmadṛṣṭiḥ mahātmadṛṣṭim śrayate mahārthām. MSA, XIV-39.
74. Mataṁ ca cittaṁ prakṛti prabhasvaram sadā tadagantukadoṣadūṣitam. MSA, XIII-19.
75. Viśuddhatathatā sa ca buddhānāṁ ātma . . . Buddhānāṁ anāśravedhātau paraṁātmā vyavasthāpyate. MSA, X-23, Com.
76. Samudraviṣṭaśca bhavanti sarvāḥ ekāśrayā eka mahājalāśca. . . Buddhatva-viṣṭaśca bhavanti sarve ekāśrayā ekamahāvabodhāḥ. MSA, IX-83, 85.

77. Imāḥ saumya nadyaḥ purastānprachaḥ syandante paścāt-pratīcyastaḥ-
Samudrat Samudrameva abhiyānti Samudra eva bhavati tā yātha tatra na
Viduraymahamasmiti.
78. Pra. Up. VI-5
79. Pramāṇavārtika, p. 88, 93.
80. Prakṛtyā bhāsvare citte. Tattvasaṁgraha Vol. II 35,38.
81. Tadeva hi. tajjñānam yadviśuddhātmadarśanaṁ Tattva Saṁgraha, Vol.
II 35-38

