

BOOK REVIEW : II

Chinchore, Mangala R : *Aniccatā/Anityatā - An analysis of the Buddhist Opposition to Permanence/Stability and Alternative Foundation of Ontology and/or Anthropology*, Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi, India pp. XXV + 247, Price Rs. 345/-

This is a very difficult book to review. There are many places where I am not sure that I have understood the author. Spinoza's Ethics or complex chains of deduction in mathematical logic-in so far as I can follow them - have not strained my mind so much as several passages in the book. This is due partly to the highly abstract character of the concepts discussed, some of the most fundamental in philosophy-particularly Buddhist Philosophy. But partly, I believe, the author's use of highly involved sentences coupled with the paucity of illustrative examples, defeats the understanding. The purpose of the book is to delineate the categorical frame work involved in the Buddhist doctrine of universal momentariness (*Kṣaṇikavāda*). The theme is of great importance and the author highly qualified. The reviewer can never hope to equal the range of her scholarship as revealed in the Bibliography and the references and notes collected at the end of each chapter. I therefore, write these few lines not as a specialist, but as an educated layman who is greatly interested in Buddhism and has done a certain amount of reading on Pali Buddhism, and has reflected a great deal on its central themes.

The notions of *Duḥkha*, *Anātmata* and *Anityatā* are universally regarded as the three pillars of Buddhism. Of the three *Anityatā* is foundational. The first and most extensive chapter is devoted to this important concept and follows a brief introduction. The next chapter is devoted to *Kṣaṇikatā* regarded as an explanatory device to analyse *anityatā*. The third discusses *Kṣaṇabhanga* as the methodological aspect of *Anityatā*. The fourth chapter is devoted to a brief discussion of salient implications of the acceptance of *Anityatā* and its elaboration in the book. When the Buddha declared that every thing was impermanent and therefore full of sorrow, he was enunciating something emphasized by all the higher religions of the world. "Change and decay in all around. I see, thou who

changest not abide with me". Thus opens one of the most celebrated Christian hymns. But when he went on to emphasize the soul-lessness of all things, he was certainly revolutionary. He specially insisted on the *nairātmya* of human beings who were analysed in terms of the aggregation of *Skandhas*. This denial of an underlying soul over and above the strands of the psycho-physical organism has remained central to Buddhism throughout its history. It follows that every thing in the phenomenal world is to be understood in terms of momentary events or occurrences. *Kṣanikatā* therefore, is a logical corollary to *Anityatā*, a further 'unpacking' of the concept which may be regarded as an explanatory device. The author regards the concept of *Kṣanikatā* as the concept of minimal change indispensable to Buddhism and *Kṣanabhanga* as 'the lower most bound understanding of *anityatā*, as a methodological necessity with reference to occurrence of maximal change'. This means, I suppose, specification of the limits of maximum change in a Buddhist frame. They present, as it were, the floor and the ceiling of change, the least that is necessary and the most that can be tolerated.

The best statement of the Buddhist position, perhaps, is to state that the world is a succession of momentary events or occurrences. The usual formulations, that every thing is in a flux or that things are changing perpetually, suggest that there are entities that change, which is misleading. The author's formulation of *anityatā* in the most universal sense, as 'permanent susceptibility to change' has the same defect though I am sure she cannot be accused of this error. And the suggestion of some 'thing' that is liable to change remains even if we hold that even processes are liable to change. In this case, we have to distinguish between the initial uniform phase and the later alteration in the successive phase or phases. But this brings us to a real problem, not just an unfortunate suggestion of the language used by us. Strictly speaking, the Buddhist requires instants which are durationless just as Euclid's points have position without length or breadth. But, if so, as Śamkara argues, causality (even causality of the weaker type in the sense of regularity of succession) will not be possible because no two events or sets of events overlap and hence the only relation possible between them will be one of *mere* succession. If they have distinguishable phases, such as origin, development and dissolution, then

our events are not strictly momentary. Some of the Buddhists 'play into the hands of their opponents by speaking of *cittakaṇas*' which have *Utpāda, sthiti and bhanga*. The discussion of the problem, though not of Śamkara's argument, on p-104 does not enlighten us much 'The contention of the enlightened Buddhists is that the occurrence of change needs to be understood in the minimal sense, it is explanatorily redundant to extend it beyond'. The quotations given in the reference notes amount to the blunt assertion that as soon as an event arises, it passes away. The cause has vanished before the effect arises, etc. It is no help to be told that every change has minimal duration when the question is how this is to be understood.

'Śamkara's critique has many purely dialectical points but there is a real problem. Either duration arises from the succession of durationless events (instants) or events have minimal duration which is conceptually distinguishable into 'Phases', though not either physically or psychologically divisible. I am not making the unreasonable demand that the philosopher specify the minimum duration for every event either by specifying a procedure or by giving paradigm examples. Such an attempt is made by the author (p.p. 104-106), following venerable authorities. But such attempts are unnecessary and unprofitable, considering that science now measures time in micro-seconds. But this adds to our problems of clarificatory analysis. In any case, no philosopher can accept durationless events. This discussion is closely connected with that of causation or causal determination. Indian discussions of it, though providing valuable starting points, are not very illuminating because (1) the examples of these ancient and medieval philosophers are drawn, at best, from protoscience and (2) there was no clear formalization of logical principles. Hence, *vandhyāputra* (a logical impossibility) rubs shoulders with *ākāśakusuma*, causal impossibility (at present), and bathes in *mṛgajala* a causal impossibility-a perceptual error.

The author may be right in insisting on Buddhist opposition to determinism. But determinism, as we understand it, poses no serious problem unless science has elaborated a unitary system with great predictive power. There was no dilemma of determinism for Aristotle or the ancient Indian philosopher. The Buddha certainly insists, in The

Anguttaranikāya, that the law of Karma understood in one way is incompatible with the religious life, and interpreted in another way can make room for spiritual effort. In any case, those who accept basic substances and real universals can allow for freedom by embracing some form of 'Soft determinism'. And part of such a solution, even for an eternalist, will be the Buddhist insistence that 'Causes, do not compel'. All that is required is acceptance of actions not coerced or completely determined, which make a genuine deifference to the course of events, though not to its general architecture.

But the most disappointing aspect of the book, for me, was the near absence of discussion of problems of great human interest—problems of selfidentity and the closely connected problem of the nature of Nirvāna in relation to personal identity even the nature of things which we identify, recognise and reidentify, the problem of dispositions and their status in a world of momentary events. The last is discussed very briefly, tersely (p. 175). And these problems have been discussed with great clarity and forthrightness by Buddhist philosophers, especially *Nāgasena* and *Buddhaghosa*. The latter discusses the mechanism of rebirth in Ch. 17 of '*Viśuddhi Magga*' making it very clear that the *vijñāna* that finds a resting place in new embodiment is *not identical* with the former consciousness (i.e. of the departed person) but arises from it. *Nāgasena*'s discussion of the identity of a person and the use of proper names to refer to them is a classic. Roughly, he regards selves as series of psycho-physical states (*dharmasantati*) each united by causality. If accepted as an explanation of the unity of a person within a life span, it can be extended to cover a sequence of embodiments. Though any number of difficulties remain to be tackled they are not specially for the Buddhist but for all who believe in reincarnation. But, for us, the interesting point is the final conclusion illustrated by the famous analogy of the flame-series, or the candle burning throughout the night. he who is reborn (in relation to the departed person) is 'neither the same nor another'. Not the same as there is no persistent soul, not another because the series is not a random sequence of phenomena. It is not enough to insist tirelessly that for Buddhism substances and essences are anathema. Of course they are; but that does not absolve us from the duty of analysing the 'cash value' of our procedures in

identification, recognition, etc., in moral and social intercourse. The author gives some hope that the problem may be tackled (p. 157, para 2 (iii)). But apart from the insistence that we need not postulate a cogniser, enjoyer, agent, in addition to the cognitions, pleasures and pains and actions, we get no help. We may agree with the insistent assertion, and yet feel that the kind of work begun by Nāgasena and Buddhaghosa should be continued and placed in a new landscape enriched by advances in logical techniques and scientific knowledge. The earlier discussion of identity in the same chapter (see pp 164 to 166) applies only to events.

The problem of personal identity spills over into the problem of the nature of *Nirvāna* and the status of *Tathāgata* after *Mahāparinirvāna*. This is one of the many questions the Buddha set aside as indeterminate (*avyākṛta*) and refused to answer. But whatever may be the significance of his silence, *Nirvāna* has a special importance for the doctrine of *anityatā*. Many feel, rightly or wrongly, that unless some timeless status is given to it, it amounts to no more than selfextinction and getting rid of the patient to get rid of disease. But whatever solution one may accept any philosophical anthropology with Buddhist foundations must give, in outline, some answer to the perplexity. The only place where the author comes near to it is on p. 126 para 2 (b). 'Nirvāna, continued or perpetual significance of Buddha's teaching, importance of three jewels....etc. are also *anitya* although particular understanding and interpretation of them do not cease to be so'. This together with the earlier stated assertion that *anityatā* itself is *anitya*, we are told, would not make any sense in the Buddhist conceptual framework. The latter statement is a verbal frivolity, largely. But the statement about *Nirvāna* I feel should have been discussed a little more extensively. I am not sure I understand either the statement or the explanatory note on p. 136.

The problem of universals and the closely related problem of the status of dispositions is also a major problem about which, like the book, I shall not say much. In discussing the epistemological aspects of *Kṣanabhanga* the author accepts the view that *citta* is a disposition not a quasi-substance. 'On this view it is a fact that we have disposition to selfimaging'. Who are 'We' here? If it makes no sense to ask whose disposition it is, because there is nothing substantive of which it could be

held legitimately. What of our ascriptions of particular dispositions to particular persons? The difficulty about dispositions is that they hover between actuality and non-actuality and must have a locus unless indeed they constitute an independent category (p. 175). If I am convinced that they must have a locus, and momentary events cannot fulfil this role, I may as well modify Buddhism and accept a quasi-permanent subject (pudgala) as some Buddhist realists did. Such a procedure would be consistent and less counter-intuitive than the blunt assertion that it makes no sense to raise such questions. It was suggested to me by the late (Prof.) M.P. Rege, in discussion, that we could ascribe dispositions to occurrents instead of continuants. This is a counsel of despair.

The author quite rightly insists that Buddhism need not necessarily lead to solipsism and that we can go from momentary empiricism to personal empiricism and then interpersonal empiricism (pp. 181-183). We can certainly do so provided we reject the starting point of *Vijñānavāda*. I have a feeling that the author seems to make the fate of Buddhism and *anityatā* depend too closely on *Vijñānavāda*. The latter repudiates the existence of extramental, independent, objects. It may be 'methodological solipsism'; but if each one starts with his own experiences, even other cognition-series are inaccessible. *Ālayavijñāna* is still far away, and when it comes, it will be non-momentary. The *Lankāvatār sūtra* described it as 'Utpāda Sthiti Bhanga varjya', and also 'Vikalpa Prapañca Kahita'. It is strange that the teaching of the compassionate Buddha - which is India's greatest contribution to humanity - was overlaid with such speculative embroidery.

N. G. KULKARNI