

### BOOK REVIEW : III

**Chinchore, Mangala R. : *Anattā/ Anāmatā : An Analysis of Buddhist Anti-Substantialist Crusade*, 1995, Delhi - India, Sai Satguru Publications - A Division of Indian Book Centre, 40/5 Shaktinagar, Delhi, 110 007, pp. xx+ 196, Price : Rs. 300/-**

This book is published way back in 1995 in the Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica series and deserves attention of the scholars for the simple reason that it contains discussion of one of the most important Buddhistic themes that have closer affinities with the transformations that have taken place in the philosophical debates of the West during the modern and post-modern era. The author herself does not seem to be aware of this. A study of *anattā* or *anāmatā* could be construed as a Buddhistic deconstruction of Vedic and Upanishadic metaphysics of *attā* and *āmatā* by adopting linguistic approach. This observation is made not so much to highlight any major lacuna in the approach of the author to the study of Buddhistic anti-substantialist crusade as to emphasize the need of addressing the view of language which Buddha held in contrast to the view of language to be found in Vedas and Upanishads and which could possibly be placed at the centre in our comprehension of the three vital themes of Buddhism viz., *Duḥkha*, *Anattā* and *Anityatā*. I am not suggesting that Buddha was effecting anything like contemporary linguistic revolution as such but it is certain that he had an altogether different world-view in general and of human life in particular, for the expression of which philosophical language of Vedas and Upanishads was not, according to him, suitable at all. Nor do I want to propose any programme for comparative philosophy which, I know for certain, is a very difficult terrain strewn with prides and prejudices.

The significance of the job which is undertaken by the author in the book under review is nevertheless of great value because while in the West non-sustantival interpretations of reality have appeared a number of times (from Heraclietus to Whitehead), in India Buddha and his school of thought is exclusively the only one to stand in undaunting opposition to all other schools of thought, both of orthodox and heterodox variety, which have invariably taken substantialist view of reality including human persons.

The author therefore gets rightly interested in the full-scale landscape of inter-school controversies and the intra-school discussions on the theme of *anattā*, which is chosen by her obviously following the traditional outlook, as one of the three pillars of Buddhism. The Introduction and the First chapter of the book are completely devoted to labouring two points: i) *Duḥkha*, *Anattā* and *Anityatā* are the main pillars of Buddhism, they are independent of each other but nevertheless there is an interrelationship between the three of them, and ii) considerations are articulated by Buddha and his followers to justify the acceptance of *anattā* as an independent pillar of their philosophy. Regarding first point, it is not clear as to what the author is upto when she talks of independence of each of the pillars from the remaining two. One can easily grasp their disintinctive posture in presenting a vision of reality which is totally different from the one that was available in the Vedic and Upanishadic literature. Surely they cannot be considered as logically independent of each other. If they are logically independent then there is no philosophical gain in assuring readers that they are *independent* and yet they have an inter-relationship that can be logically accounted for. Issue of their independence becomes thus a pseudo issue. The fact is that the three concepts are the off-shoots of the view of reality that emerges from a more basic concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* - a concept that is most fundamental to Buddhism - the concept which is not empty but which receives its filling from experience of change in the world. *Pratītyasamutpāda* is thus the only pillar of Buddhism. But it's a historical fact that this concept which was later on developed into a full-fledged causal theory lost its centrality. The off-shoots got prominence and the root lost its bearing in the abyss of abstract and abstruse metaphysics of later times. It can be argued that the three so-called pillars of Buddhism, in the context of human reality, follow logically from the *pratītyasamutpāda* theory of change and that, therefore, one should not ignore the heuristic maxim that wherever one can work out logical relationships one should not create problems which one cannot manage and see through. The book is not however designed to pass any such judgment on the history of Buddhist thought but just to depict it as faithfully as possible keeping in focus the concept of *anattā*, in the fervent hope of showing i) that the concept of

*anattā*, in the course of time as the Buddhistic thought eventually developed, “gained more and more preponderance and articulate emphasis in such a way that the other two pillars of Buddhism seem almost to spin and revolve around it” (p.1) and ii) that there are inter-school debates between Buddhists and non-Buddhists and intra-school debates between the Buddhists themselves in which repudiation of substantialist stand is taken, and that these debates shed a good deal of light on the points of strength as also on the points of weakness in the Buddhistic considerations upholding *anattā*. In the first chapter the author very rightly chooses a very wide canvass of Dārshanīc thought in India and tries to develop a perspective for the analysis of *anattā* and the Buddhistic reasoning behind it. Anchoring her analysis in Buddhistic view that everything has a perpetual susceptibility to change and drawing its consequences of uncertainty with regard to future, author does well to show how the Buddhistic conception of the real stands out and falls apart from all other conceptions of it fabricated and accepted by other trends of Indian philosophical thought. She also argues that since for Buddhists change presupposes permanent and irrevocable susceptibility to change nothing can be said to be constant and permanent. At which point of time or particular moment change will occur or materialise cannot be predictably determined. Continuity, thus, is not a primary and constitutive feature of reality for Buddhists. She extends the argument further by claiming that by treating ‘perpetual susceptibility to change’ as the necessary condition ever fulfilled for anything to be real, maximalistic interpretation of change (*kaṣaṇabhanga* or momentariness) is inevitable. Since it’s a logical consequence, it cannot be ignored by us. Buddhists insist upon it as an invulnerable point of strength of their view of reality. They however do not refuse to accept continuity in its derivative functional and practical utility. For Buddhists, one has to bear in mind, the crux of continuity lies in some sort of resistance to change which is always exterior to thing that is for ever susceptible to change. The observation made by the author that this central and seminal contention of the Buddhists is either overlooked or misconstrued by the critics who belong to substantialists camp, deserves our attention. She is also at pains to see that some times some Buddhists also, though mistakenly, fall prey to the temptation of advocating continuity as primary and constitutive feature of reality, which brought forth somewhat

caustic reaction from their own Buddhist colleagues. The second and the third chapter are intended to develop all this argumentative discourse in a systematic manner but the actual presentation takes a rather hazy shape. The second chapter depicts the Buddhistic opposition to substantialist thesis considering in detail different versions of the latter as found in Cārvāka materialism, Jaina ontology - the two heterodox perspectives of reality, and Advaita Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā - the four orthodox perspectives of reality. It is interesting to note that none of the participating schools in this debate accord substantial reality to God. The whole debate is thus this-worldly. In analysing the positions of the non-Buddhistic perspectives, the author has made certain remarks with rugged confidence that may give rise to some difference in interpretations. There is no need to go into details of these since that won't affect very much the final substantialist characterisation lent to them. The Buddhist refutation is also presented with precision to the point fully supported by footnotes, references and explanations wherever necessary. But on reading the whole chapter one may get away with the feeling that it's the author who speaks more than the thinkers themselves, and that the arguments could have been articulated much better. Critical evaluation also leaves a good deal desirable. In the third chapter, author turns to intraschool debates which kept engaged the Buddhistic participants themselves in the task of lacing the non-substantialist thesis with refinements and subtleties since philosophical anthropology was also of primary concern to them. The author pin-points the reasons for the primacy of philosophical anthropology and develops major forms of understanding of *anattā* doctrine by later scholars of Buddhism. The author concentrates on i) Pudgalvāda ii) Skandhavāda iii) Abhidharmavāda iv) Vijñānavāda and v) Śūnyavāda. The presentation is more of historical nature, though it does indulge in somewhat semi-critical analysis of issues involved. Extension of '*anattā*' thesis to human reality is bound to create problems for their epistemological, logical, social, political and moral enterprises because they presuppose identity of human individuals right from their birth to the moment of their passing away from this world. How do we pass from the privileged access to one's own subjective experiences (sensations) to objective discourse having universal and, in some contexts, normative dimensions? Basic at issue is the problem of

other minds. There is no problem in philosophy which is more important than the problem of other minds and there is no concept that is more crucial than the concept of human action. Shorn of transcendentalism and substantialism how did Buddhist thinkers address this problem? Some scholars (e.g. Anand Coomarswamy) have suggested that in understanding what Buddha said, one must note that Buddha's meaning of almost all crucial terms is very very different from the meaning of the same term used by the scholars of the orthodox schools, and to be able to comprehend it is the real clue to our understanding of Buddha. Assuming that we are somehow able to do this, the question will still remain : Shall we have better understanding of individual and the society in which he lives in order to realise his moral goal of emancipation? or Shall we aggravate our philosophical difficulties? Any way, what is emancipation? Shall we be able to see it clearly through when there are hermeneutic differences among the Buddhists themselves? Whether inter school controversies or intra-school controversies, the basic question is, Why of these controversies? There cannot be any purely theoretical purpose-truth for truth's sake or knowledge for knowledge-sake. Philosophical revolutions are never purely theoretical formulations. They have a sociological perspective and anthropocentricity. Philosophical arguments do not emerge in vacuo. The punch of the Buddhistic arguments can be brought out only in the context of the total purpose of the perspective which they wanted to develop-presentation of a completely new vision of the universe and the human life on naturalistic and positivistic grounds-first ever expression of renaissance and humanism on moral and rational grounds. Buddhism presented clash with Vedic view and way of life. The debates within the school itself are dialectically important insofar as they serve the purpose of self-criticism and the search for identity. They become dry and arid when they get far too removed from the original purpose.

In spite of the meticulous and rather tedious exercise made by the author, on points of the logic of the arguments, it is difficult to decide whether Buddhism fared better or the non-Buddhistic schools did better. The task becomes extremely difficult especially when we read and try to learn about these controversies after a lapse of about 15 to 20 centuries of interval. We have only texts before us. Difficulties of interpreting the texts get

greatly enhanced because we are now living in a world which is completely different from theirs. We are living in a world which has seen Copernican, Cartesian, Newtonian and Einsteinian revolutions in Physics and Astronomy, also renaissance and Kant's Rousseauistic Revolution, Liberal Utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill and the Gandhian thought of Svarāj through non-violence. There are corresponding philosophical shifts in our ways of thinking. Developments in Logic, Language studies and philosophies of science and mathematics have enhanced in a challenging way the demands for precision and semantic transparency. Because of the non-substantialist crusade and Buddha's silence over some *avyākṛt* questions, the general impression about Buddhism is that it is anti-meta-physical. One has to note however, that as observed by Hiriyanna, "though there is no explicit metaphysics in his teaching, there is a good deal of it in an implicit form." (*Outlines of Indian Philosophy* 1951, p. 138) I see no prospects for metaphysics on either side of the parties to these controversies. Autonomy of the Philosophical anthropology naturally gets to the centre of the stage and the author has done well to emphasize its primacy and to develop the corresponding narrative in the later schools of Buddhism. Having exposed weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the non-Buddhist ontologies of Indian origin and having considered importance of issues concerning philosophical anthropology, the author has suggested the possibility of resolving them without embedding or anchoring in any sort of ontology, substantial or transcendental. The author is not explicit as to whether they can be resolved independent of Buddhist non-substantialistic framework either. The fourth chapter, which is final one, depicts some implications of which, according to the author, the following ones deserve our attention. She is very brief and sketchy in her statement. After referring to some misunderstandings about Pudgalvāda, Skandhavāda and Abhidharmavāda, she expresses her soft skepticism about the epistemological project of Vijñānavāda in according primacy and autonomy to much-aspired for philosophical anthropology. With Vijñānavāda, as the author puts it succinctly "the issue assumes the form of inquiry into the epistemology of the primacy on the one hand and the epistemological foundations of the primacy on the other" (p.171). As the investigations proceeded along the lines within the fold of Buddhism "some of the serious kinds of weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the Buddhism resulted out of

revision and reinterpretation of Vijñānavāda subsequently.” p. (172). Finally the author anchors her hopes for salvaging Buddha’s teachings by way of reinterpreting them and realizing their continued relevance, obviously for modern times. She has come to make some interesting comments on the Buddhistic notions of *Nirvāna* (emancipation) - the individuocentric and sociocentric models, and *Nairātmya Darshan* - which, according to author, is a singularly pregnant expression used to convey the quintessence of Buddhism by some later Buddhists. As a skeptical reviewer, I keep my fingers crossed in view of the semantic opacity from which the two notions considerably suffer.

I have found this book to be extremely difficult for review, not because I am not a well-versed Buddhistic scholar, nor again because I am not possibly a very good student of Indian Philosophy as well but because of the formidable style of language in which the book has been written. The style is repetitiously tiresome and laborious enough. Highly involved grammatical structures could have been avoided allowing the thought underneath to have its natural and unpendantic expression. Scholarly treatises should not be very cheap but they need not be so difficult either as to defeat readers’ capacity to comprehend. Buddha’s teachings are perhaps the greatest contribution of our land to the World Thought. We must see to it that we do not make it inaccessible because of our own style of expression and pedagogy.

*“The only way to speak the truth is to speak lovingly”.*

*I shall add - “through one’s writings as well.”*

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