

A Study on ‘Consciousness’ with Special Reference to *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* and *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*.

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Abstract

This paper tries to explore a comparative study on consciousness (vijñāna) between the two texts of Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi and Laṅkāvatārasūtra regarding the concept of ultimate truth. According to Yogacāra, consciousness (vijñāna) is the only reality, which designates the basic phenomenon of conscious experience denying the relation between the concept of subject and object. According to Viṃśatikā, the universe is the manifestation of consciousness (vijñāna) and it is equated with mind (mana), citta, and vijñapti, which is a momentary dharma. In Laṅkāvatārasūtra, it designates the mind only (cittamātra). Vasubandhu, in his commentary Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi Trīṃśikā, admits that pure consciousness is the Reality. He denies the existence of external thought. Both texts consider that pure consciousness is the highest reality.

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The concept of consciousness has been explained in different Indian philosophical schools, but their approaches are different. The materialist school of Cārvāka considers that consciousness is an adventitious attribute (*āgantuka guṇa*), which produces naturally in the conglomeration of four gross material elements viz., fire (*tejas*), water (*apaḥ*), air (*vāyu*) and earth (*pṛthivī*). In Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophy, the word '*caitanya*' (consciousness) is not used directly but instead of this word, they use the term *jñāna* or knowledge in which the idea of '*caitanya*' or consciousness is contained. It can be said that the three characteristics of self (*jñātā*, *kartā*, and *bhoktā*) designate the idea of consciousness. For the Sāṃkhya and Yoga school, two major components of world phenomena are mixed up inseparably in the world, and they are *puruṣa* (pure consciousness) and *prakṛti* (matter). The Advaita Vedānta School adopted consciousness as constituting the very nature of the ultimate reality, the non-dual Brahman. The Mahāyāna schools enhance a new aspect to their concept of consciousness, called *ālaya vijñāna*.

Buddhism is a philosophical tradition that is based on the teachings of Buddha. It involves a variety of beliefs and spiritual practices which is interpreted as philosophies. Actually, the goal of Buddhism is to overcome the sufferings (*duḥkha*) caused by desire (*taṇha*) and ignorance (*abidhyā*). There are three jewels in Buddhism, i.e., the Buddha, the *dharma*, and the *saṅgha*². In Buddhism, there are three major schools, i.e., Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Tantrayāna. Yogacāra and Mādhyamika are two divisions of the Mahāyāna school. Both schools deny the external world, but they differ about the ultimate reality. The Mahāyāna school declares the infinite majesty of all living beings and believes that Buddhahood is innate in all.³ It can be said that it is similar to the Upaniṣadic doctrine of One and Absolute Brahman as the Ultimate Reality.⁴ Mādhyamika philosophers believe that all worldly things are empty (*sarvaṃ śūnyam*) and emphasize the Middle Path, which stands for beyond the non-acceptance of the two views concerning existence and nonexistence, eternity and non-eternity.⁵ Actually, it advocates neither the theory of reality nor the

² *Buddham saranam gacchāmi, dhammam saranam gacchāmi, saṅgham saranam gacchāmi.*

³³ Srimadlankāvatārasūtram by Sitansusekharbāgascimarnabagchi; The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, Darbhanga, 1963, p.ix.

⁴ Ibid, p.xi

⁵ . J. Singh in *Introduction of The Concept of Buddhist Nirvāṇa* by Th. Stcherbatsky, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers PVT. Ltd.Delhi,

unreality of the world, which designates merely relativity⁶. Another important school, Yogācāra, emphasizes the practice of Yoga (meditation), which is the most effective method for the attainment of the highest wisdom (Bodhi). They admit that *citta* or *vijñāna* is the ultimate reality, which is realized by yoga (meditation). Major Yogācāra classical texts are *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, *Trisvabhāva-nirdeśa*, *Mahāyāna-samgrāha-śāstra*, *Trimsikā*, *Viṃsatikā*, and *Madhyānta-vibhāga*, and another secondary text related to Yogācāra texts is *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and *Mahāyānasūtralankāra*, which designates consciousness as Ultimate Reality. Now this paper will discuss a comparative study on consciousness with special reference to *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*.

According to the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*⁷ It is believed that Buddha delivered this and that the Buddha is the eternal truth, which is Impersonal Absolute, Tathagatagarbha, Tathatā, and ultimate Reality. The text starts with a dramatic introduction of Buddha in the island of Laṅkā, ruled by Rāvaṇa, who snatched Śītā (Rāmacandra's wife) from the forest. *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* shows that *citta* is the only reality, and the external world is a simple appearance, which arises from false disposition. It considers that the Buddha is the perfect being who has transcended all illusion, and he wants the world's salvation through Bodhisattvas, who are the sons of the Buddha. The Buddha is personal as well as metaphysical⁸. According to *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, Bodhisattvas devote themselves to the cause of Buddhism⁹. Bodhisattvas will clean the *ālavijñāna* that exists at the bottom of all the variations of consciousness, and metaphysically, it is an eternal entity, which is called *cittamātra*, *Tathāgatagarbha*¹⁰, *Tathatā*, *Dharmadhatu*, *nirvāṇa*, *Samatā*, and *advyaya*. It is neither subject nor object; it is beyond change, and it is noble wisdom (*Āryajñāna*) which is realized by an intuitive cognizer. It is *nirvikalpaka*, and after purifying, it brings salvation. This Ultimate Reality is pure consciousness or mind that is treated as One Absolute. In this aspect, it can be said that this conclusion is similar to the concept of Brahman of Advaita Vedānta.

⁶ Ibid p.

⁷ This text is full of many difficulties, it is written in a cryptic style, akin to the style of Purāṇas.

⁸ *Srimadlaṅkāvatārasūtram* by Sitansusekharbāgascimarnabagchi; The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, Darbhanga, 1963,p.xii.

⁹ Ibid, p.xii.and Laṅkā,II Shi.85-89.

¹⁰ *Tathāgatagarśabdasaṁśodite ālavijñāna.....Laṅkā* VLp.90- and ibid,p.xii.

Moreover, *Lankāvatārasūtra* has asserted the absolute voidity of the world appearance and explained it into the sevenfold classification¹¹ i.e.,

- i) voidity of distinguishing characteristics (*lakṣaṇaśūnyatā*),
- ii) voidity of nature of things (*bhāvasvabhāvaśūnyatā*),
- iii) voidity of negations of function (*apracaritaśūnyatā*),
- iv) voidity of function (*pracaritaśūnyatā*),
- v) voidity of all things due to their inexpressibility
(*sarvadharmānirabhilāpyaśūnyatā*),
- vi) voidity of the highest order pertaining to the supreme reality attainable by noble enlightenment (*paramārthāryajñānamahāśūnyatā*), and
- vii) voidity of reciprocal non-existence (*itaretaraśūnyatā*).

Another text, *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, is another important work in Buddhism in which twenty verses on consciousness are included. This Vasuvandhu's work *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* has asserted that the universe is *vijñapti* only (*vijñapti mātra*). In here, thought (*citta*), mind (*manas*), awareness, and *vijñapti* are synonyms. *Vimśatikā* and *Trimśikā* are two parts of this book, in which one part, *Vimśatikā* has explains that *citta*, *mānas*, and *vijñāna* have a single meaning¹². In the first paragraph of *Vimśatikā*, the main topic is analyzed in a way that 'the whole of three realms' can be identified as mind only, it is *vijñapti* only, it is *jñāna* only. According to the ordinary meaning of *vijñapti* (in Pali *viññatti*), it is information or the act of informing someone, which is called as 'report' or 'proclamation'¹³. This word is derived from the causative stem (*jñāpaya* or *jñāyapāya*) of the verb root 'jñā', which means 'know' 'with the prefix 'vi'¹⁴. Etymologically, it means the act of causing (someone) to know (something) definitely. According to Sarvāstivādītins, it means *karma*, which is explained as "violation and that derived from it" in *Abhidharmakośa*,¹⁵ and it is explained into three types: mental

¹¹ *Srimadlankāvatārasūtram* by Sitansusekharbāgascimarnabagchi; The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, Darbhanga, 1963,p.xiii.

¹² *Citta mano 'tha vijñānam ekātham*, AKK 2.34 a-band *Samjukta Nikāya* II: 95.

¹³ In the article 'The Meaning of *Vijñapti* in Vasubandhu's Concept of Mind', in the Journal of The International Association of Buddhist Studies, editor –in-Chief by A.K.Narain, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA, 1986, vol- No.1,9.p.7

¹⁴ *Ibid*,p.8

¹⁵ *Ibid*,p9

(corresponding to “volition”), and vocal or bodily (corresponding to Post volition. Vocal or bodily *karma* is further classified into *vijñapti* and *avijñapti karma* (manifest and unmanifest *karma*).¹⁶ Actually, it denotes the ‘act’ which is analyzed into a succession of momentary *dharma*. Nevertheless, Vijñānavādins explained it as the “manifestation to any consciousness,” including that of the agent, which means mental *karma* or *vijñapti*. Sarvāstivādins show that the five aggregates (*skandhas*) are replaced in 75 *dharma*s under the five headings of material form (*rūpa*), consciousness (*citta*), dispositions disjoined with consciousness (*citta-samyukta-saṃskāra*), dispositions disjoined from consciousness (*citta –citta-citta-viprajukta-saṃskāra*), and the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*).¹⁷ Moreover, *manas* is the sixth of six faculties of perception, and it is a stream of causality related to thought moments. Another term, *vijñāna*, indicates awareness, consciousness, cognition, and perception. But in *Vijñaptimātrasiddhi*, Vasubandhu uses these terms *citta*, *manas*, and *vijñāna* use in a synonymous meaning which is the basic phenomenon of consciousness without division of subject-object. The word ‘*vijñapti*’ signifies a “phenomenon of consciousness”¹⁸ a “manifestation”, to consciousness or a “percept”¹⁹. Vasubandhu denies the three realms (*traidhātukam*), i.e., *kāmadhātu* (realm of desire), *rūpadhātu* (realm of forms), and *arūpadhātu* (realm of formlessness), the concept of *paramānus* by which the universe is created, and the three realms are synonymous with *saṃsāra* and with “all conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) *dharma*-s. According to Vasubandhu, the world is nothing but the contents of consciousness. He denies the concepts of *traidhātukam*, twelve *āyatana*-s that are to introduce *pudgala-nairātmya* (no-self) and *dharmanairātmya* (no-self in *dharma*-s), the existence of seventy-two kinds of *dharma*-s. For him, the world is not completely unreal, it is like of dream. It is mind only. This concept indicates idealism that Vasubandhu attempts to assert in *Vijñaptimātrāsiddhi*, and it can be realized through *yoga* and *acāra* (the meditation). According to *Vimśatikā* of *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, it is stated that “*Mahāyāne traidhāukam vijñaptimātratām vyavasthāpyate, cittamātram bho jinaputā traidhātukam iti sūtrat*” that is, “in Mahāyāna it is established that the three folds of the worldly sphere are only the perception (*vijñapti*) of our consciousness. Because in the *sūtra* (sacred book) thus given: - O Buddha’s

¹⁶ Ibid, p.

¹⁷ Ibid,p.10

¹⁸ Ibid,p.11

¹⁹ Ibid,p.11

sons, the three folds of the worldly sphere are only the phenomenon of our mind (*citta*).²⁰ Actually, this doctrine here refers to the book of Ten-grades of Bodhisattva (*Daśabhūmikasūtra*). It is stated that *cittamātram*” looks in the sixth grade, where it is thus mentioned; “*Tasyavaṃ bhavati, citta-mātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukam,*” i.e., “For him (Bodhisattva) Who has attained the sixth grades thus realized, that the three folds of this worldly sphere are only the phenomenon of mind.”²¹ Therefore, it can be said that this is the fundamental appeal of *vijñapti mātratā* theory. These ten grades of Bodhisattva (*daśabhūmi*) refer especially to the sixth *bhūmi*, and Bodhisattva is not only Śākyamuni, but it specifies all human beings. In *Daśabhūmika*, ten grades are considered as i) *pramuditā* (filled with joy) iii) *vimalā* (rejecting impurity), iv) *prabhākari* (sending light), v) *arcishmati* (flaming intellect), vi) *adhimukhi* (realization), vii) *dūraṅgamā* (far-reaching), viii) *acalā* (immovable), ix) *sādhumati* (sweet intellect), *dharmameghā* (dharma-cloud). The first *Pramuditā* (filled with joy), the sixth *adhimukhi* (realization), and the eighth *acalā* (immovable) are most important to grow up the spiritual life of Bodhisattva or all human beings.

Moreover, it may be said that in *Vijñaptimātrasiddhi*, Vasubandhu establishes the basis of deep spiritual experiences by which all human beings can conceive the transcendental divine wisdom and become enlightened after the realization of the unreality of those objects as they truly are, like a dream. Vasubandhu shows in *Trīṃśikā* that all human beings will realize the highest reality and will expose the eternal truth of human nature.²²

In this paper it has been discussed the concept of consciousness (*vijñāna*) from the standpoint of *Vijñaptimātrāsiddhi* and *Lankāvatārasūtra* in which consciousness (*vijñāna*) is the ultimate reality, and the Bodhisattva can realize it through the world –illuminating pure wisdom. Although *vijñāna* and *vijñapti* have been analyzed in *Viṃśatikā* and *Trīṃśikā* of *Vijñaptimātrasiddhi* in different ways that the term *vijñapti* means the perception of some particular objects, and *vijñāna* highlights the perceiving consciousness²³. Both texts have emphasized the void of the worldly object that appears as real and have discussed the journey of spirituality. Moreover, both texts focus on the Ultimate Reality as pure consciousness

²⁰ Echo-lab.ddo.jp, [http:// Echo-lab.ddo.jp](http://Echo-lab.ddo.jp), the article *Vijñaptimātratā Doctrine as a Systematical Explanation of Bodhisattva's Life* by Kizow Inazu in the Journal of vol.6 no.2 p.996.

²¹ Ibid p.995

²² The Concept

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or mind that is treated as One Absolute. Both texts have established the deep spirituality by which all human beings can conceive the transcendental divine wisdom. Comparatively, it can be said that *Lankāvatārasūtra* highlights the term mind, and *Vijñaptimātrasiddhi* focuses on the term *vijñapti*. *Lankāvatārasūtra* absolute voidity of the world's appearance, and explained it into the sevenfold classification. On the other hand, in *Vijñaptimātrāsiddhi*, Vasubandhu focuses on denying the concepts of *traidhātukam*, the twelve *āyatana*-s that are to introduce *pudgala-nairātmya* (no-self) and *dharmanairātmya* (no-self in *dharma*-s), and after denying the external objects, he has established that the *citta*, mind, *vijñāna*, and *vijñapti* are synonymous and *citta* or *vijñāna* is the ultimate reality.

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