

CHAPTER V

Concluding Remarks

Several problems may be encountered in connection with the task of understanding the concept of svalakṣaṇa. First, the concept itself is not easy and can lend itself to various interpretations. Again, thinkers of different persuasions would like to question the Buddhists way to defending it. We may now state a few of them.

I. The Buddhists believe that one entity of cognition remains only for a moment and momentary duration is one of the marks of svalakṣaṇa. What may be looked upon as quite perplexing is the fact that the Buddhists subscribe to the view of momentariness of the reals and at the same time hold on to the parataḥprāmānya vāda; the validity or credibility of an individual manifestation of awareness is not svataḥ or intrinsic, but extrinsic or parataḥ. In other words, the datum of an awareness is rendered credible in terms of its causal efficacy. The awareness of water is generally taken to be veridical if it leads us to the successful inclination (saphalapravṛtti - janakatva) i.e. appeasement or quenching of thirst (in

the case of water). Otherwise, it would be taken as false or hallucinatory. Now the problem is that the thesis of svalaksana is somewhat non-congruent with the thesis of saphalapravrtti-janakatva or visamavādiravrtti-janakatva. Since the Buddhists believe that an entity of perceptual cognition persists for a moment, they might find it a little odd, logically of course, to establish the case that svalaksana could be argued for on the ground of causal efficacy. This may be the position because the concept of causal efficacy is a relational notion and thus it should span more than one moment. To verify the causal efficacy or saphalapravrtti-janakatva of an object one needs more than one moment. Persistence of an object for more than one moment is not accepted by them since it goes against one of their metaphysical axioms i.e. sarvam ksanikam. Again one might also say that the Buddhists describe sat in terms of its arthakriyākāritva and this too would lead one to a somewhat related difficulty. The persistence of a perceptual entity cannot be argued for as such since the entity is arthakriyākāri or not is not revealed to perception. The existence of an inferential object can easily be proved in terms of causal efficacy as it persists for more than one moment. From such considerations it can be perhaps said that as sattā of an object and the prāmānya of a svalaksana entity depends on arthakriyākāritva, the

svalaksana is either sat or pramā. I am not sure how would the Buddhist position be justified or substantiated. I have not come across any knock-down arguments through which both the theory of momentariness and that of paratah prāmānya of a svalaksana entity could be established. It is also difficult to put forward any convincing reasons in favour of the conclusion that a svalaksana entity is sat because of its arthakriyākāritva.

II. One may argue that the Buddhist concept of anumāna cannot be taken as informative. It is also uncertain if it could be called 'real' anumāna. When we come to know that there is fire on the hill in terms of the smoke as its mark (linga), the passage of thought carries some novel information to us. So far as the tadutpatti hetu is concerned, the Buddhists position concerning anumāna appears unexceptionable. It becomes problematic when the svabhāva hetu is taken into consideration. To infer treeness on the ground of śimsapātva as the hetu, no new information is imparted. As soon as the śimsapātva is known, the treeness is also known simultaneously. The property of being a tree is inherent in the property of being śimsapā. Hence śimsapātva cannot give rise to a knowledge which is altogether different from it. In the case of tadutpatti hetu, the knowledge of hetu i.e. smoke gives rise to such a knowledge of sādhyā i.e. fire, which is completely different

from the hetu. Hence it is not actually anumāna which literally means 'knowledge attained after the knowledge of other'. There is no such 'after knowledge' for the Buddhists but only simultaneous knowledge. The perfect knowledge of sīmsapā depends on its knowledge of being a tree. Accordingly many thinkers may not concede to the view that svabhāva hetu is the cause of anumāna or tādātmya is the cause of ascertaining vyāpti.

The Buddhists of course may come up with the following defensive arguments. It should be appreciated that the Buddhist's notion of anumāna is slightly different from that of the Naiyāyikas. The Buddhists believe that when any construction or ascription (kalpanā) is made to the perceptual object, it comes under the perview of Anumāna. The real object as divested of any kalpanā remains for a moment before long some mental construction is ascribed to it. It is Anumāna in the sense that kalpanā i.e. name etc. is given only afterwards to an object known (perceptually) earlier. Knowing an object as such is perception and knowledge of the same object with the help of kalpanā is inference. Actually we can decode the real object after we have ascribed some kalpanā on it. With the help of kalpanā we are not knowing absolutely the same object perceived earlier. For surely some moments have passed since we perceived the object when we ascribe kalpanā to it. In this sense any knowledge

through kalpanā is Anumāna or 'after knowledge' in the true sense of the term. The name etc. can give the knowledge of an object which is known perceptually at particular ksana. In this sense, knowing some object through kalpanā is definitely informative. Hence Anumāna is regarded by the Buddhists as a different source of valid knowledge.

Further, one could ask why the Buddhists accept Anupalabdhi as a separate type of hetu, which also comes under sāmānyalakṣaṇa. The importance of accepting this type of hetu has been explained earlier. It was shown that this hetu is very essential for proving the absence of an object e.g. Nāsti ghataḥ anupalabdheh. But I think this type of hetu is essential not only for inferring the non-existence of an object but also for inferring the existence of anything. When a tree is known as such in terms of the hetu, śimsapātva, it is also known through another Hetu, vrksānupalabdhi. Even the knowledge of the śimsapātva, the hetu is known through another hetu called Aśimsapātvānupalabdhi. Since the Buddhists advocate the theory of Apoha, they would naturally put forward anupalabdhi as a separate type of hetu which has direct influence in proving the absence of an object as well as its presence. Though it is not mentioned always in the demonstrations of the inferential process yet its importance has to be admitted.

Jayantabhata has argued against the Buddhist theory of perception. According to him, an object ~~of~~ denoted by words cannot be imaginary as the Buddhists think that they are¹ -

The criticism, I think is not viable, for the Buddhists, do not mean to say what Jayanta has taken them to mean. An object persists only for a ksana and hence it has a first order reality. When some mental construction is imposed on the same object, which was in the previous ksanas no longer obtains in the subsequent ksanas. When some name etc. is given to the object, it becomes a different object. Hence the object which is known through kalpanā is not the previous real which existed only for a moment. Though we cannot be said to know the exact nature of that object, we can have an idea of it, and hence it has a second order reality or reality is known indirectly. Inference is accredited by the Buddhists as a source of valid knowledge (pramāṇa). If it fails to provide the right knowledge of an object, it would not be regarded a pramāṇa. By virtue of its being pramāṇa (inference or sāmānyalakṣaṇa), it must provide us with the right knowledge of an object. Hence we cannot say that what is known through kalpanā is unreal. It is true that what is known through it is not as real as svalakṣaṇa.

The Buddhists have resorted to the importance of inferential knowledge which they philosophised or refuted the opponent's views or any other type of lokavyavahāra. On the strength of the traditional image of a Buddhist thinker, the charge brought by the Naiyāyikas against the Buddhists is that they indulge into self contradiction when they formulate the definitions of pratyakṣa as free from determination², does not stand at all. Though as per the Naiyāyikas the expression 'free from determination' is itself a kalpanā, it can be used (as it is also a kind of philosophising or a lokavyavahāra) in order to make others understand the Buddhist notion of pratyakṣa. This definition will have to be considered while ascertaining, when one can be said to have perceptual knowledge. After having-gone through ~~is subject to~~ the definition, ^{is subject to} one realises that an object free from kalpanā perception. But when a philosopher tries to defend himself by way of giving his own view with the help of definition, explanation etc. he will have to have recourse to language or kalpanā or sāmānyalakṣaṇa. Hence the Buddhists, I think, are not at all in a weaker position, if they define pratyakṣa in terms of kalpanāpodhatya.

There is a sense in which the distinction between svalakṣaṇa and sāmānyalakṣaṇa can be considered as having a resemblance with Russell's distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. The

following can be said in support of the construed resemblance. Knowledge by acquaintance is somewhat direct while knowledge by description is mediate. The judgement 'This is a cow' describes the perceptual presentation with the help of the predicate 'cow'. To say that there is something and to say that, 'that something is a cow' are not to be taken as equivalent expression. In the second case, there is the added dimension that the entity presented is a 'cow'. That connotation is something extrinsic to the denotation of the perceptually presented entity. Again, description is a linguistic matter. It may be either true or false, depending on whether the hearer successfully identifies the identity described as that or at another level, the description that 'there is a x such that x is a cow' and the expression 'that x is a cow' - both of these would belong to the domain of mediacy. For the Buddhists, it does not matter whether one comes up with the proposition/function or a proposition. Both of them would fall below the immediacy and non verbal vivacity of a svalaksana.

The sense-data philosophers might say that the svalaksana is a sense-data, with the difference that it does not persist for more than a moment. In this context it is also possible to say that beyond the apparent resemblance, there is perhaps nothing more common about

the two. The sense-data are common between veridical and hallucinatory perceptions. But the svalaksana is definitely sat. It is a genuine piece of knowledge. So if one has to say that the svalaksana is the sense-data like presentation, one should be on one's guard.

What characterises one's encounter with svalaksana are its ineffability and directness. On the other hand, predicative knowledge is knowledge by description something a-posteriori. The passage from the givenness of a svalaksana in acquaintance to the descriptivist construction that something is of some sort is said to be an inferential one. One need not quarrel over the nature of the inferential process. But this much is certain that one's awareness of a svalaksana as something given and one's awareness of that something is of some sort are typically different.

Buddhism has often been said to be a philosophy of particulars as opposed to the philosophy of universals. A particular that cannot be described in terms of the predicate is a svalaksana. There is a ring of realism when the svalaksana is said to be such. Of the British Empiricist thinkers Berkeley is taken to be a philosopher of the particular³. Now when Berkeley talks about an idea, he is definitely talking about something that is sat. But one cannot be very sure about the Berkelean sat

which is an idea, can ever be satisfactorily interpreted in realistic terms. One can at most say that a Berkelean idea is a primary datum of awareness. This becomes clear if one tends to compare Berkeley's concept of idea with that of David Hume. The latter's idea is not a primary datum. Let us ask if Hume's impression of sensation is a svalaksana. If an impression of sensation be so interpreted that it cannot be grasped through a language, then of course it is so. But perhaps the case is not that simply be proved. All that one can say is this that non-mentality or the satness of a svalaksana is not adequately parallel by an impression of sensation. Even though Hume says that an impression of sensation is a matter of fact, it is after all a content of the mind. But a svalaksana can hardly be called a content of the mind. There is something extramental about the concept itself. Or else it would be engulfed and shrouded over by the construction of kalpanā. Coming back to Berkeley's case, it is clear that an idea is a mental entity and cannot in any way stand in comparison with the Buddhist notion of svalaksana.

After all to know a thing is to know it as it is, or as Kant would have said noumenon. This is the grand sense of the word 'know'. That it cannot know thing noumenally is the tragedy of the human situation. The Buddhists look upon it as a kind of spiritual disease or

bhavaroga. So the concept of the svalaksana apart from its epistemic privacy has a therapeutic employment. Predicative knowledge generates habits of the mind and we tend to expect the same again, each time we encounter a real entity. The uniqueness of the given is played down in difference to the old, the known. By ascribing the same predicate to a number of things we are deluded to be guaranteed by the universe. A universal, psychologically speaking, is something that is old and familiar and at the same time is for ever. It gives us not only epistemic certainty but also emotional security. The great appeal of the theory of the universal may lie in the psychological make up of the cognitive agent. Apart from the fact that a theory of universals or sāmānya may or may not be interpreted in the above manner, there is no denying the fact that the concept of svalaksana has a conceptual linkage with such notions as tathatā (thatness) or viewing or seeing the world as yathābhūta (as it is). If this be true then svalaksana can be construed as the first step towards the ontology of the tathatā. Again as the later Buddhist thinkers of Mahāyāna persuasion have distinguished truths into paramārthika and saṃvṛti, one may hazard the following. The word saṃvṛti means cover. To this belongs the domain of the inferential knowledge. Predicates closing up the real given in perception, the paramārthika level of truth is a disclosure as Martin

Heidegger would say, "of the real nature of thing". These two tier system of truth may have developed into the concept of the world as Māyā and as Brahman at the hands of Samkara. But the dichotomy is ancient enough somehow or other, however much the predicating knowledge and inference may be important for our daily use and pragmatic consideration. Man has felt that the face of truth is covered by a golden mask, as one of the oldest upaniṣad puts it. So the task of philosophical wisdom, if not of philosophy as ordinarily understood, is to remove the mask and stand before truth face to face⁴. This is a bold adventure and the Buddhist notion of svalaksana as distinguished from sāmānyalaksana could be a step towards it.

Usually the Buddhist Epistemological position is said to be nominalistic. But nominalism is a critical notion. In the Western tradition, nominalism is generally opposed to realism. Both realism and nominalism have ontological as well as well as epistemological significance. E.g. Plato is both an ontological as well as epistemological realist. But in recent years, realism is used for an epistemological position. Moore, e.g. is taken as a paradigm case of a realist thinker. The Nyāya position has a good deal of affinity with Moore's epistemological views. Supposing one takes Moore's paper on 'A refutation of Idealism' to be a case for realism then there are schools of Buddhists thought, that may come nearer to

Moore's idea of realistic position. The Sarvāstivādins, e.g. are referred to as realists. But they are in points of facts realists in ontology.

The Buddhist school called Yogācāra are often referred to as a case of Idealism simpliciter (pure), but there are a variety of Idealists. Plato is called an Idealist in a sense which cannot perhaps be ascribed to Berkeley. Plato's use of the word Idea is different from its use at the hands of the Empiricists, such as Berkeley, Locke and Hume. Kant also used the word 'Idea' in the First and the Third Critiques, e.g. freedom is an Idea of Reason, the beautiful is an Idea of the imagination. So we find that to say that a system of thought is idealistic is not descriptive enough to identify the system. Samkara, in his Bhāṣya criticized the Vijñānavādi position and called them vaināśika or nihilists, and as regard to his own position he says that it is Vastutantra (realist) which may roughly be translated as realism. But which sort of realism it is — Platonic or Nyāya type. It is not easy to answer. But people at large look upon Samkara as an Idealist. Kant looked upon himself as transcendental Idealist and criticized Berkeley as Idealist of a materialist sort. So the point is that the philosophical labels, such as realism, Idealism etc. are ambiguous enough to the point of unsatisfactory and cannot be safely depended on as a descriptive guide to the thoughts of

different thinkers.

But anyone who peruses through the history of philosophy will be struck by large resemblance between thinkers. There was a time in India when the Kantian distinction between noumena and phenomena used to be construed as parallel to the Samkara's distinction between paramārthika and vyavahārika realities. Prof. T.R. Murti has taken this view again in the history of Indian philosophical thought. The Nyāya position is described as a case of realism by Prof. Radhakrishnan and Prof. P.T. Raju.

Early Buddhism is said to be a case of ethical Idealism. Whether or not, one accepts this description, there are grains of truth in such affiliation and this may be readily granted. Accordingly, let us consider the case of nominalism. This term is hardly ever used in any text book of Indian philosophy. But the term nominalism may serve us well in capturing the spirit of Buddhist epistemological as well as ontological thought than Idealism. As opposed to the socalled realism of Nyāya, nominalism is a critical concept much in use in the Western epistemological discussion. It is used in contrast to the realistic position and generally employed to describe the thoughts of these thinkers who are sceptical about the possibility of our knowledge of entities denoted by

general terms. Amongst the empiricist thinkers of the West, Berkeley is taken to provide a case for nominalism. We are of the view that Buddhist epistemological thinking has strong nominalistic likenesses. Their argument in support of Svalaksana as a mode of knowledge and also as an entity encountered in perception, in spite of various other nuances would be unexceptionally be taken as an instance or a variant of nominalism. This is a matter of our conviction but what we really mean by nominalism has already been explained in details in the previous chapters.

Philosophy is an open-ended concept. The nature of the discipline is such that it does not allow, ideally of course, any point of view to be taken as final. It is always possible in philosophy to have alternative standpoints. No point of view is absolute and whatever view appears to have been settled and disposed of by its theoretical opponents is forever dead and like the mythical birds 'sphinx', it rises again from its ashes. This may be said about the views of the Buddhist thinkers. However convincing and devastating Jayanta's critique of the Buddhist position might have been it does not follow that the issue has been settled for good. It is a contingent fact of history that the Buddhist ways of thought had ceased to be there in the country, when the Naiyāyikas hold their sway over its mind. It is often said that

Samkara had routed the Buddhist thinkers from out of India. It is a gross exaggeration. The great ācārya may have entered into debate with minor Buddhist scholars, but he never did have any encounter with the Buddhist thinker of the stature of a Dharmakīrti, or a Dinnāga or a Nāgārjuna. At least no historical evidence is there to support the commonly held view. In a recent paper, by Prof. B.K. Motilal, it has been shown that the Navya-Nyāya had degenerated into sophistry owing to a lack of feed-back from the Buddhist side. This only shows that the Nyāya critique of Buddhism need not be taken as the final verdict of the Buddhist position philosophically, though historically it might have been that. The tradition of Indian philosophy is constituted in terms of a dialogue between the purva pakṣa and the uttarpakṣa. And if the purva pakṣa comes to be historically non-existent, the uttar pakṣa wins ex-parte. We have all through tried to pick up the basic issues of svalakṣana and sāmānyalakṣana and considered them in the light of the epistemological and ontological motivation of the Buddhist way of thought. We are all through tried to be fair and independent of any prejudice in respect of the Buddhist - Naiyāyika debate. We have brought in the Naiyāyika views only to highlight the Buddhist position. We have done that because a critical background sharpens the

focus of philosophical position. We have not denied the historical case viz. that of Baudha and Nyāya views. They are the philosophical obverses of each other. But our primary intention has been a philosophical one. Hence our evaluation needs be judged accordingly.

REFERENCES

1. Chapter III, p. 144 (of this dissertation)
2. Chapter III, p. 149 Ibid.
3. See my article 'George Berkeley and the Problem of Universal', Indian Philosophical Quarterly, July 1982.
4. Hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitam mukham | Tat tvam
pūṣannapāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dr̥ṣṭaye || 15.
Isāvāsyopanisad.