

ŚĀNTARAKṢITA AND KAMALAŚĪLA ON THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALS
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In the intellectual tradition of Indian philosophy the discussions on the problem of universals are divided into two main groups, one is the realistic and other is idealistic (the idealistic view of Buddhist is known as nominalism). The realist school of Nyāya-vaiśeṣika in Indian philosophical system admits seven categories such as *dravya* (substance), *guṇa* (quality), *karma* (action), *sāmānya* (universal), *viśeṣa* (particular), *samavāya* (inherence) and *abhāva* (absence). The universal (*sāmānya*) is the fourth category which is also known as class, genus, etc. It is by nature eternal and inherence in all its particulars. The general cognition of things as ‘cow’, ‘jar’, ‘red’, etc. necessarily proves the existence of universals as real as the common or general properties of particulars. The realist argues that the universal must be regarded as the common characteristic of the particulars in which it inheres. If we do not admit the universal as class or genus or the common properties of particulars, then the general cognition of cow cannot be understood by the word ‘cowness’. It means the general term denotes its particulars and the general properties of all particulars in which the universal (what the general term denotes) is inherent. But, the nominalists do not admit the existence of universal as real entity, universals are mere conceptual constructions and thus they have no reference to the external reality. As opposed to the realist, both Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla maintain that verbal or inferential cognition can be expressed negatively without assuming real universals.

Realism and Nominalism

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school has admitted two kinds of universals – the highest and the lower, Being or Existence (*sattā-jāti*) and substantiality and the rest (*dravyatva*). The first (Being) is the highest universal or summum genus (*parā jāti*)¹ - the universal *par excellence*. Because it is the basis of its entire three - substance, quality and action, and so, for this same reason, it is not a particular at all. In this system the two words *sāmānya* and *jāti* are synonymous;² the universal is defined as a unitary and eternal category inhering and underlying a number of individuals. The other is substance universal (*dravyatva*), the quality-universal (*guṇatva*), the action-universal (*karmatva*) – these are called *aparā jāti* (minor universals). The highest universal acts assimilation which is a special type of function of a universal. The others universals have double function, viz. assimilation and differentiation.³

Śāntarakṣita does not accept this view. He represents the Buddhist nominalism to refute the realist view on universals. After the compellation of examination of *Karma Padārtha* he tries to examine the *sāmānya* (universal). Like

Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita holds that valid knowledge or valid cognitions as instants of new knowledge in the sense that the cognizer knows newly something which to that point was unknown. He admits traditional Buddhist *pramāṇavāda* that mentions two types of *pramāṇa*: perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*). The objects of perception are the particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*), It is only particulars that are considered to be real (the point-instant and causally efficient). The objects of inference, on the other hand, are universals (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), words apply to universals which are mere mental constructs (*vikalpa/kalpanā*). Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla reinterpret the Dharmakīrti's notion *mental construction* (*kalpanā*) as just implicit or explicit verbalization or the association of a word or name to the object, but not association of concept (such as class-concept) with the object, because it might imply objectivity or reality of class-concepts or universals, such as cow-hood. There are two types of construction, one is verbalization (adding of names), and the other is conceptualization (associating class-concepts). Śāntarakṣita admits the first type of construction that is verbalization, while Dinnāga admits both although he denies the essential difference between verbalization and conceptualization.⁴ Universals are verbally possible but causally impossible and would be considered as unreal fictional entities that have no causal efficacy in the world. There are only three categories – substance, quality and action, all other categories have been assumed to subsist in the three categories. The universal or genus is also rejected by the way that considers it as an illustration.⁵ Only ultimate particular is real, universals are nothing but particulars. The universal cannot be admitted as an objective entity above or over the particulars.⁶ In the psychological analysis of our conceptual thought we see that there is no universal as real entity beyond the particulars. Particulars are considered as particulars, not as universals. Individuals are same as particulars which serve the basic feature of exclusion (*viśeṣa eva kecitu vyāvṛttereva hetavaḥ*).⁷

How can the universals be proved?

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system holds that the different cows are distinct from one another such as they are different from horses, etc. This kind of difference can be proved by the direct perception of particular shape, qualities, action, etc. when the

sense-organs are functioning. It is true that we generally find the universals or class as ‘being’, ‘cow’ etc. in our perception of sameness or commonness (*anugatapratīti*) which is cognized through the sense-organs. The cognition of commonness cannot be possible unless we admit the universals as a general property (e.g. cowness). Uddyotakara mentioned that the universal *cow* is something different from the individual cow, because it is the object of different idea – like colour, touch, etc. and also because it is spoken of as belonging to the particular cows, just as cow is spoken of as belonging to *Budhi* and something different from *Budhi*. The individuals are different from one another because one appears as an individual or a differentiator.⁸ But, Śāntarakṣita replies that the universal has no essence in itself, because it is imaginary fiction. In fact, being, potness, etc. are not found in perception as the function of sense-organs, they are originated from a body of conventions. Even there is no strong evidence in support of it.⁹

When we see a *pot*, we try to identify it as a *pot*, to do it we call it by the name “pot,” to think it as *a pot* in our mind we imagine it, sometimes recall it and recognize it by the statement “this is the pot” – these are also applied to many other particular pots. The question may be raised, how can one thing, being-a-pot, share with many other particular pots? Again, is there any real entity in the external world, over and above the individual pots?¹⁰ The realist answer is that this real entity is universal (*sāmānya*, the commonness), the *potness* that is inherent in all the individual pots. But, Śāntarakṣita does not accept this view. The particulars, according to him, are absolutely distinct from one another and have nothing in common, and so the concept of class or genus cannot be accepted. The particular has special characteristic of causal efficiency which is not found in universals, and so universals cannot be counted by the particulars at all. Both Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla hold that the idea of universal is nothing but conceptual fiction or a mental construction which is however hypothesized as an objective reality existing in its own right independently of the thinking mind (*antarmātrā-buddhiḥ*).¹¹ In order to refute the reality of universals they maintain that universals are subjective constructions but not real entities as realists admit. The whole universe is a flux of momentary particulars. There is no class-concept or universals in this flux, even there is no commonness as identity or similarity in a series of flux of momentary particulars. Even identity and similarity are nothing but products of our imagination;

these are constructed due to our unlimited desires.¹² The concept of commonness is nothing but fictional production of our imagination and it has therefore no reality.

Arguments in favour of Nominalism

Both Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla clearly mention some strong arguments in favour of Nominalism, but these are considered as the idealistic view against Realism. Śāntarakṣita does not accept the realistic view, he says, *Dhātri*, *Haritaki*, etc are fruits, though in their different forms, having capacity to remove different diseases singly or jointly, they can be considered as the preventive medicine of various diseases, yet it cannot be right to argue that there is universal that has the capacity to act these. For this reason, there is no universal or commonness over the fruits by which the various fruitful acts would be possible.¹³ He denies the causal efficiencies of the different medicines are identical. Because some of them are more effective, but some are less, some act more quickly but some act very slowly, some are effective independently, while others act jointly with other materials. The diverse properties however are present in the *Dhātri*, *Haritaki*, etc. There is neither identity of cause nor of effect.¹⁴

Kamalaśīla also rejects the realistic view by saying that it cannot be right to assert that there is a universal which performs the various fruitful activities, even sometimes it is found that the various diseases can be cured in different ways i.e. quickly or slowly, the capacity of removing diseases may be different due to different types of *Dhātri*, *Haritaki*, etc. If there is universal as commonness, the above different results that are found in some cases would not be possible. Only individual particular thing (*Dhātri*) having the capacity of removing diseases can produce fruitful acts, the various fruitful activities would also be possible only by the particular things, not by the universals. Because, universal has no capacity to perform different acts in the diverse properties. The universal that the realist used as class or commonness can be defined through the notion of similarity (*sādrśya*)¹⁵ which is produced by the similarity of function. But it is mere mental-image or conceptual cognition which has no reality.

If cognition is always mental images such as universals, then what is the connection between the real particular and its heterogeneous cognition?

Kamalaśīla's answer is that the particular things, being point-instant real things, do exist in the things in themselves, not in a class or genus or universal, even not in the notion of commonness. When we have a conceptual cognition of universals, as we have seen or cognized, there is no universal as external real entity, even no commonness in all substances. We cannot assume that dissimilar objects produce similar results. The universal that realist admits as an independent category would be defined in terms of similarity (*sādrśya*), here the similarity is not a similarity of substances, but a similarity of producing effects.¹⁶ The universal, according to Kamalaśīla, is an imaginary fiction or an illusion; it is a mere name that sometimes is also called a mental construction or productive imagination (*kalpanā*) which has no external reality at all. The particular thing, the real thing-in-itself, is neither determined by the universal nor cognized by the faculty of understanding. The real particular is externally point-instant real, but the universal is both empirically internal and unreal. The former is the object of perception, but the latter is the object of conception or inference. Hence, the universal is nothing other than a subjective construction of our mind. Generally, a person who has no knowledge about the difference between *perception* and *conception* very often thinks that the object of conception seems to be externally real. But, this does not prove that names, universals etc. are externally real; because they represent only subjective constructions which are mere projections of imagination.¹⁷ The Buddhist nominalism holds that a name signifies only universal or thought-construct and names are not regarded as direct (i.e. conditional) or adequate expressions of reality, but they are representatives of images or concepts as such they are logical but not real. They are also considered as reflexes or echoes of reality.¹⁸ The fact is that it is happened due to our ignorance originated from beginningless desires (*anādi vāsanā*).

Are universals perceived?

Sometimes the realists argue that the universal has an objective foundation, because a class-concept is grounded in objective reality. So, common properties have distinct reference to the universal apart from the many forms of individuals. But Śāntarakṣita thinks that this view is untenable. A universal is never considered as real entity in our perceptual cognition. This objective foundation of universals is

purely an imaginary construction which cannot prove that the universal is eternal. The realists cannot presuppose the existence of universal without taking particulars; even they cannot postulate the higher universal such as ‘thingness’, the concept of ‘thingness’ would require another universal and that again another, this requirement will continue without any rest and so it is the case of infinity (*anavasthā*). To avoid this problem the realist, like Naiyāyika, admits the universals as a class of *sui generis categories* which have no need for other universals.¹⁹ Śāntarakṣita does not support this view. If there is universal as real entity, then how could it be perceived? Even there is no apprehension by which it would be made.

Like Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita argues that if the universal is regard as an external entity and perceived everywhere, then the case will come where its non-perception in empty space would be unexplainable. Even, if the universals jar, etc. are regard as all-pervasive entities, then they should have to perceive where there are no individuals at all, which is not possible to the realist. If the universal is eternal (*nitya*), as described by the realist, then it is unintelligible how the universal becomes related to the new-born thing or how the universal being eternal becomes pervasive entity in the locus of new-born thing.²⁰ There is no affirmative concomitance (of the notion ‘Being’) with the universal. Because the notion *Being* does not appear at all times. If the notions of Being, etc. are regard as eternal, then why could not the notions appear at all times and all places? Our general cognitions of common notions appear in succession, which are synthetic, produced and destroyed. The thing that is eternal cannot be produced with any effective causal function. All notions of commonness, having no objective basis, are conceptual constructs. The notion of ‘tree’ and such things cannot be based upon the universal. Because things are comprehensive and they appear in succession. Hence, the universal is not possible in the case of what are eternal.²¹ There is no causal relation between universals and general cognitions. The universals cannot be regard as the cause of general cognitions. When the realist admits universals as eternal entities, it is a mere hypothetical assumption. In the case of inference for the existence of universal it is possible to say that neither positive relation nor negative relation between universals and general cognitions is possible. Because eternal entity must be present at all times and its non-existence (negation) is quietly impossible.²²

Further, Kamalaśīla extends this argument by saying that when a thing comes into existence in another place, it is not understood how the universal is perceived there.²³

The realist holds that both the universals and particulars are apprehended in our sense-perception. The Nyāya School of Indian Realism maintains that both particulars and universals are perceptual facts. The Buddhist philosophers like Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti, on contrary, maintain that universals are never apprehended through our sense-perception, because they are mere thought-constructs, only particulars are perceived, because they are objects of perception. Śāntarakṣita supports the previous antirealist view on the problems of universal. He incorporates this view by positing that after sense-perception there is no immediate cognition of universal, because the cognition of universal is not the result of sense-object contact, but a work of understanding. The cognition of universal is cognized when the present data of sense is associated with the past data which is recalled in memory.²⁴ If the universal is considered as an external fact or an objective entity like particular, then its cognition would have been produced immediately after the sense-object contact. But, the actual fact, what in fact happens, is not so. The universal is not objectively perceived, but subjectively conceived; it is, therefore, not a real entity.²⁵ However, the idea of universals, several arguments of the existence of universals, ontological discussion about universals, etc may be continued, but these are falsified by our perceptual experiences. In fact, there is no locus where the universal exists as a perceptual entity.

The realist maintains that the universal exists in the external world as an independent category (as a separate unit) invariably connected with all the individuals in which it is present.²⁶ Kamalaśīla rejects this view by asserting that the point-instant real thing in its essential nature is unutterable. The absolute particular, in other words, is not however touched by the dialectic of the understanding. Because, it is momentary in its own nature, the pure object of sensation is the thing-in-itself which cannot be determined by conceptual cognition or inferential knowledge. As a matter of fact, the image of our conception or the projection of our imagination is often understood as universal or name or class etc. It represents the

picture of thought-construction which apparently seems to be externally real as people generally consider it, but as a matter of fact, it has no external reality at all. The universal, therefore, cannot be perceived or even exist by itself apart from its particulars; otherwise it would have to be regarded as baseless.²⁷

There is no inherence relation between the universal and particulars

The realist would strongly claim that there is a certain relation between the universal and its particulars, which is inherence (*samavāya*). There is a common notion with reference to the individual objects of a class; it would not be possible without the real existence of universal. Śāntarakṣita does not accept this relation between the two. If the universal *cook* is something entirely different from the individual persons, then it should be present in the new born child also, who also could be conceived of *as a cook*. But the fact is that this is not really possible in the case of newly born child. Again, when the act of cooking is destroyed as soon as it is produced, having its not lasting nature, the universal cannot subsist in it when the act itself is destroyed.²⁸ If it (universal) is possible like the idea of *being* (existence), then it does not subsist in the certain substratum i.e. the new child just born. The universal like *being* does not appear at all times. He adds one more point: If commonness is established by the common act, then the time will come when the notion should not be there when one is not engaged in the act of cooking. The attribute of commonness (*anugatadharma*) which belongs to every individual cook is ultimately different with other individuals; they are not same in time and space. We apparently think that the same attribute resides in all individuals, but it is not true, one's same attribute which resides in itself does not reside in the other. Therefore, the same attribute cannot be the cause of the notion of commonness. This reason is also right to prove that there is no inherence relation between the universal and particulars, because of the defective character of their relationship. The inherence relation called also 'inherence in the inherent (*samaveta-samavāya*) is not possible, and it, therefore, is not cause of commonness or the perception of common notion (*anugatapratīti*). When it is established by the realist (like Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika) on the basis of the inference that suffers from the fallacy of undistributed middle, it, therefore, cannot be established as a real entity.²⁹

Import of words (Direct and indirect meaning of a word successively)

It is possible to say that the Buddhist *apoha* theory of meaning in all phases of its development is radically nominalistic in intention.³⁰ The Buddhist nominalism considers the very old but an important question, does the general term stand for something that is objectively real? Śāntarakṣita, as a great successor of Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti, holds that a general term does not express particulars (because they are limited in numbers), nor the relation between the universal and particulars, nor the universal itself. The particular thing or the object of perception (the thing-in-itself or *svalakṣaṇa*) cannot be cognized by the notion of commonness (*amugatapratīti*). The universal is only a name with negative connotation in general, which does not stand for anything. The class-concept or the universal serve only the purpose of exclusion of differentiation of a class from another class, the meaning of a general term is determined not by the notion of commonness but by its exclusion of other referents.³¹ A *cow* is called *cow* not because it is included in the universal *cowness*, but because it is different from other which are not *cow*. The particular is not made by the universal. The particular *cow*, for example, cannot be expressed by the universal *cowness*; even the particulars do not include one another, because they are mutually distinct in time, space, potentiality, etc. Hence, there is no universal as real.³²

According to Śāntarakṣita, a word directly produces only a reflection (thought-image) of an object; it is the positive meaning of this word. Though the reflected object of this reflection is completely imaginary (*kalpita*) and has only phenomenal aspect in verbal knowledge, yet it has no external reality at all. The same word, on the other hand and in another way, indirectly refers to the thing that is qualified by the negation of opposition (the exclusion of others). The two processes are based on the two types of negation i.e. ideal or conceptual (*Buddhyātman*) and objective (*Arthātman*). Whatever is imposed upon the verbal cognition as a reflected object must be excluded from other things. Hence, there is no real objective factor that is expressed by word. One question may be raised here, if no word can express the objective factor, then how is it that the old master (Dinnāga) has declared that it is only a certain part of the thing that is expressed by the exclusion of others? The answer is that when the master said that ‘a certain part of the thing that is expressed

by the exclusion of others', here 'the certain part of the thing' means the reflected object qualified by the exclusion of other things.³³ Finally, in order to reconstruct the *apoha* theory of meaning he accepts both direct (positive) and indirect (negative) meanings of a word and this double functions of a word is occurred successively, not spontaneously.³⁴

Conclusion:

Some modern thinkers think that there are three distinct stages in the development of the *apoha* theory: The negativists (*pratiśedhavadīn*) like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, the positivists (*vidhivadīn*) like Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla, and the synthetists (*samanvayavadīn*) like Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti.³⁵ They claim that Śāntarakṣita is a positivist (*vidhivadīn*). Because, he accepts the positive meaning of word. But, Mark Siderits strongly claims that Śāntarakṣita is not a positivist.³⁶ When Śāntarakṣita accepts the positive meaning of word, it is actually understood in terms of negation. As a matter of fact, a word performs two functions - the one denoting directly the concept corresponding to it, and the other of implying the negation of the contrary concepts. In this double function of word, the former is affirmative and latter is negative. He holds that whatever is directly expressed by word, from the aspect of illusion, is often apprehended as positive entity, but it is not ontologically admissible as real positive. Rather it is a representation or a reflection (*pratibhāsa*) which is considered as an effect caused by the word. Thus, it would be better to assert that he is a representation or reflection theorist (*pratibhāsavadīn*).

Notes:

1. *Tatra sāmānyam dvividham – paramparam ca. Tattvasaṃgraha Pāñjikā* (Hereafter *TSP*), Commentary on Verse- 708 of *Tattvasaṃgraha*.
2. Before rejecting the real existence of universals Kamalaśīla mentions the realistic view on universals i.e. the two words *sāmānya* and *jāti* are synonymous (*jātaya iti sāmānyāni*, - *TSP*, 13.707).
3. Mookerjee, Satkari. *The Buddhist Doctrine of Universal Flux*, op. cit. p. 87; Cf. *Tattvasaṃgraha*, (Hereafter *TS*, edited by Swami Darikadas Shastri, 1981, verse 709-11.
4. Matilal, B. K. *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar*, p.15-16.
5. *Dravyādiṣu niśiddheṣu jātayo'pi nirākṛtāḥ. padārthatrayavṛttā hi sarvāstāḥ parikalpitāḥ*. - *TS*, 13.707.
6. *Sāmānyaviśeṣayoḥ svarūpam*, *TS*, 13.70.
7. *TS*, 13.711.
8. *Nyāyavārtika*, 2.2.61; cf. *TS*, 13.714-19, Jha, G. N. (Trans.), *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita*, Vol.1, p. 407.

9. *Asāraṃ tadidaṃ kārya prakriyāmātravarṇanam, na tu tajjñāpakamkiñcit pramāṇamiha vidyate.* - TS, 13.720-21.
10. Siderits, Mark. et.al (eds.), *Apoha: Buddhist Nominalism and Human Cognition*, 2011, Pp.1-2.
11. TS, 13. 734, cf. TSP, *ibid*; Mookerjee, S. *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*, Pp.91-92.
12. Dravid, Raja Ram. *The problem of Universals in Indian Philosophy*, p. 61.
13. TS, 721-24, see also Jha, G. N. (Trans.) *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita*, p.408.
14. TS, 724-26, Jha , G. N. *ibid*; Dravid, *The problem of Universals in Indian Philosophy*, p.64.
15. *nānābidhavyādhipyāvarttanāsamarthyādhyāsītā bhavantyantarenāpyanugāminam. na hi tatra sāmānyameva tathāvidhāmarthakriyām sampādayatīti yuktam vaktum;na sāmānyamasti.* - *Tattvasaṃgraha Pañjikā* (Hereafter TSP), 722-23.
16. *tullyapratyavamarśāderiti, ādiśabdena sallillasandhāraṇādvyarthakriyāsāmartha parigrahaḥ.* - TSP, 724; cf. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, vol. I, Pp.445-46
17. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I, p. 447.
18. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. I, p. 458.
19. Mookerjee, S. *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*, p.94.
20. TS, 805-6, cf. PV, 3.152-56, see Dravid, *The problem of Universals in Indian Philosophy*, p.67.
21. TS, 776, 810-11, cf. G. N. Jha (Trans.) *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita*, p.429, 444-45, please see Dravid, *Ibid*, Pp.71-72.
22. TS, 773-76, see also Dravid, *The problem of Universals in Indian Philosophy*, p.66-67. *ghatādivyaktiśunyedeśe ghatādivastuprādurbhāve sati te jātimeḍā ghatatvādayaḥ katham tatra ghatādau ddaśyante varittante ceti na gamyate = nāvabuddhyata iti yāvat.* - TSP, on 805 of TS.
23. *tatsaṅketamanaskārāt sadādipratyayā ime, jāyamānāstu lakṣyante nākṣadyāpṛtyanantaram.* - TS, 13. 728 .
24. TS, 13. 730, see Dravid, *The problem of Universals in Indian Philosophy*, p. 92.
25. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, Vol. 1, p.444.
26. *na hi jāterāśrayagrahanamantarena kevalāyā grahanam = avasthitirvāsti; anāśritatvaprasaṅgāt.* - TSP,755; Jha, G. N. (Trans.) *The Tattvasaṃgraha of Śāntarakṣita*, Vol. 1,1986,p.421.
27. *na tu naṣṭhakriye tatra lakṣitāpi na vidyate* -TS, verse 754.
28. T S, verses 756-59, cf. G. N. Jha, (Trans.) Vol.1, loc. cit. p.422; Shastri, D. N. *Critique of Indian Realism*, Pp.329-30.
29. Siderits, Mark. 'Word Meaning, Sentence Meaning and Apoha', p. 140.
30. TS, verses 870 cf. PS, 5. 33; Singh, B. N. *Bauddha-Tarkabhāṣā of Mokṣakaragupta*, p. 117.
31. TS, verses 870; Mishra, R. K. *Buddhist Theory of Meaning*, p.105-6.
32. TS, 1070-71.
33. Misra, Prabhat. *Śabdārthatattvabindu*, 2003, p. 24.-25.
34. Katsura, Shoryu. 'Jñānaśrimitra on Apoha', in *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology*, p.188; see also Mookerjee, S. *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*, 2006, p. 132.
35. Siderits, Mark 'Was Śāntarakṣita Positivist?', in *Buddhist Logic and Epistemology*, p. 225.
36. Sharma, T. R., 'Analysis of Word and Meaning in Madhyamika Philosophy', p. 316-317.

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