

**Transformation of Consciousness and Cognition-Only:
Vasubandhu's Perspective (A Study in Vasubandhu's *Vimśatikā-
Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*)**

Shakuntala Bora

Abstract

In *Vimśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*, we see Vasubandhu arguing that all worlds are actually nothing but mind only.

Vasubandhu demonstrates that objects cannot really be regarded as existing. He proves this by showing logical impossibility of regarding object as either a composite whole, or several things, or even as aggregation of atoms.

Vasubandhu illustrates that there are in fact no issues in regarding that objects external to mind do not exist. He also formulates his argument that the so-called objects of cognition are transformation of consciousness. According to Vasubandhu, as a matter of fact, it is through understanding of objects and senses being nothing but mere changes in consciousness that one comes upon cognition-only which leads to knowing of its own selflessness and finally to selflessness of events.

Vasubandhu finally addresses the question of kind of knowledge in the light of everything being cognition-only. In cognition-only where there is no division of the apprehendor and the apprehended, knowledge stays alone which may be compared to the knowledge of the Buddha.

Keywords: *External Objects; Transformation of Consciousness; Cognition-only*

In *Vimśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*, we see Vasubandhu arguing that all worlds are actually nothing but mind only. This he does by proving that objects do not exist and then by demonstrating that what is considered as object and subsequently as subject are nothing but transformations of consciousness. We find Vasubandhu saying that the worlds in their true nature to be cognition-only (*viññaptimātra*). We find him saying: “the three realms of existence are determined as being cognition-only” (Prelude to *Vimśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 1). By cognition, now, Vasubandhu understands nothing else but *citta*, *manas* and *viññāna*: “*Citta*, *manas*, consciousness (*viññāna*), and cognition (*viññapti*) are synonymous” (Prelude to *Vimśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 1). Nevertheless by *citta* he understands *citta* with its associations: “By the word ‘*citta*’, *citta* along with its associations is intended here” (Prelude to *Vimśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 1). By adding the term ‘*matra*’, ‘only’,

Vasubandhu actually insists that there are actually no objects external to the mind. We find him saying: “‘Only’ is said to rule out any (external object) of sense or understanding objects” (Prelude to *Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 1).

Vasubandhu adduces arguments to assert that it is logically not possible to stick to the position that objects external to mind exist.

According to Vasubandhu, a sense object has to be considered either as a whole made of parts or by several things, or it may be regarded as an aggregation of atoms. But, according to him, the object cannot be considered as either a composite whole, of parts or several things, or even as aggregation of atoms. The reason he adduces for saying this is - It cannot be treated as a single thing because the composite whole made up of the parts cannot be different from these parts. That is, an object cannot be whole made of parts as then it will not be a unity being made of parts. The object also cannot be considered as plurality of atoms as single atoms cannot be apprehended and as such their plurality too cannot be accepted. Likewise, the object cannot be treated as aggregation of atoms for existence of single atom cannot really be proved: “The sense field of visible, etc., which consists (in a moment) of a single sense object of a cognition of visible, etc., is either a unity, like the composite whole constructed by the Vaiśeṣikas, or it is several things, from the atomic point of view, or it is an aggregation of atoms. Now, the sense object cannot be a single thing, because one can nowhere apprehend a composite whole which is different from its component parts. Nor can it be plural, because of atoms, since they cannot be apprehended singly. Nor does an aggregation of atoms become a sense object, because an atom as one entity cannot be demonstrated, either” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 11). Vasubandhu gives the reason that existence of atom cannot be accepted when they are considered as constitutive factors of a composite whole - If it is considered that six atoms get attached, then it must be supposed that that atom has dimensions which would destroy its legitimacy of being called an atom: “If there is a simultaneous conjunction of six elements in six directions, the atom comes to have six parts. For that which is the locus of one cannot be the locus of another” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 12a). Vasubandhu says that one cannot assert singleness of something that admits of directional dimensions: “(To assume) the singleness of that which has divisions as to directional dimensions, is illogical

(*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā* 14a)”. This is so, as he sees it is, because something having different dimensions by this very fact indicates divisions: “For one atom, there may be the directional dimensions of being ‘in front’, for another, of being ‘on the bottom’, and if there are such divisions as to directional dimensions, how can the singleness of an atom, which partakes of such divisions, be logical?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-Vṛtti* 14a). Vasubandhu sees the opponent arguing that what they are saying is not what Vasubandhu is claiming them to say but they are only affirming that the aggregates constitute one when they come together: “The Vaibhāsikas of Kashmir say, ‘We are not arguing such an absurdity. It is just when they are in aggregation, that they can join together’” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-Vṛtti* 12b). But, Vasubandhu says, there is no question of aggregates coming together to form a single unit if the aggregates themselves cannot be illustrated as happening due to impossibility of conjunction of atoms: “So the aggregations themselves cannot mutually join together either. For there is no conjunction of atoms, because of their state of having no parts. That is to say, such a thing cannot be demonstrated. So even in the case of an aggregation, which does have parts, its conjunction becomes inadmissible because there can be no aggregation of atoms unless individual atoms conjoin. And so the atoms as one entity cannot be demonstrated” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-Vṛtti* 13).

And dimensions to atoms must be admitted as Vasubandhu sees it as without dimensions light and shade cannot be explained. “Or else, how could there be shade and blockage?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā* 14b). Vasubandhu argues, it is observed that while there is light in one location, there is shade in another location – that is, the light and shade indicate that there are different dimensions to atoms. He also points out the fact of the very feature of different atoms admitted in aggregation indicating they having different dimensions. He says that the feature of different atoms implies obstruction by one atom to another. For without obstruction to one by another all would have become one due to their merging as has been the case of various atoms having one locus. But admitting of obstruction brings in admittance, through the back door, atoms having dimensions. We find Vasubandhu saying: “If there were no divisions as to directional dimensions in an atom, how could there be shade in one place, light in another, when the sun is rising? For there could be no other location for the atom where there would be no light. And how

could there be an obstruction of one atom by another, if divisions as to directional dimensions are not accepted? For there would be no part of an atom, where, through the arrival of another atom, there would be a collision with this other atom. And if there is no collision, then the whole aggregation of all the atoms would have the dimensions of only one atom, because of their common locus, as has been stated previously” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 14b). And it must be the case that light-shade and obstruction is admitted not with regard to aggregation specifically but also with atoms. It must be so if aggregation and atoms are not considered as different: “It may be argued: Why cannot it be accepted that shade and blockage refer to an agglomeration, and not to a single atom? Reply: But in that case, it is being admitted that an agglomeration is something other than the atoms themselves? Objector: No, that cannot be admitted” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 14b). And if the aggregation and atoms are not considered as different, then light-shade and obstruction cannot be admitted in case of aggregation as well: “If it is not accepted that the agglomeration is something other than the atoms, then shade and blockage cannot be demonstrated as occurring in reference to the agglomeration only” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 14c). Vasubandhu says that this in fact raises the question of meaning of sense-objects being in a particular state: “That they are in a state of being sense-objects of the eye etc., in a state of being blue, yellow etc. it is just this which should be investigated” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 14c).

Again, if it is said that blue, yellow themselves are sense-objects, then the question that crops up is whether they are to be accepted as one entity or several. Vasubandhu points out that there has already been discussion of problem of considering them as several: “If a sense-object for the eye, and so on, is accepted in the form of blue, yellow, etc., then are these one entity, or several? Now what follows from this? The flaw inherent in assuming their severalness has already been discussed (in relation to arguments on atomic aggregation)” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 14c). Vasubandhu now addresses the issue of considering them as a unity. He identifies the troubles which would crop up as a result of this. He says that if all are a unity, then there would be no question of gradual attainment of things. Again, there will be no question of apprehension of something near and non-apprehension of something far as apprehension and non-apprehension cannot be applied to one

and the same thing. There would also be the problem of regarding development of different species. Furthermore, one also cannot deny the inability to admit separateness as gap in them through space cannot be denied. There is also the issue of admitting of non-apprehension of subtle things if singleness of object is admitted. Vasubandhu says: “If one entity as sense-object for the eye, with no separations, and no severalness, were constructed, then one could not arrive at anything gradually on the earth: that is, there could be no act of going. For, even with placing down as foot once, one would go everywhere. There could be no apprehension of a nearer ‘part of something’ and a non-apprehension of a more removed ‘part’, simultaneously. For a concurrent apprehension and non-apprehension of the same thing is not logical. There would be no special development for species that are separate, such as elephants, horses, etc., and since they would all be one in that case, how could their separation be accepted? And how can they be accepted as single, anyway, since there is the apprehension of an empty space between two of them? And there would be no reason for the non-seeing of subtle water-beings, since they would be visible in common with the more apparent” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 15). Vasubandhu now says that if atoms are admitted, then divisions of characteristics also must be accepted for without division of characteristics their otherness from each other cannot be maintained. “As otherness in entities is constructed if there is a division of characteristics, and not otherwise, so when speaking from the atomic point of view, one must by necessity construct divisions, and it cannot be demonstrated that they (the atoms) are in any way of one kind” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 15). Having proved that severalness of objects cannot be maintained and now having demonstrated that even unity cannot be accepted, Vasubandhu claims that he has shown that even states cannot be regarded as objects. This he takes as an opportunity to claim that all that is there is only cognition. He says: “With their unity undemonstrated, visibles’ etc’s. state of being sense-objects of the eye etc., is also undemonstrated, and thus cognition-only is demonstrated” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 15).

However, issues may come up regarding not having objects. Vasubandhu places the probable argument of opponent regarding problems of not having objects: If there are no external objects, then cognition regarding an object could

have arisen anywhere at any time which is not the case. Again, such cognitions necessarily would not have arisen for people living in same place and same time but would have occurred to one individual consciousness as happens in case of seeing of things which are not there by a person with a disease. Further, it is observed that objects of cognition serve purposes which cannot be and are not performed by objects of dream indicating that they exist unlike dream objects. In other words, the restrictions observed with regard to objects of cognition suggest that the objects are truly available and cannot be said to be not existing. It is said by Vasubandhu: “What is being said: if the cognition of the visible etc., arises without any object of visible, etc., why is it that it arises only in certain places, and not everywhere, and even in those places, why is it that it arises only sometimes, and not all the time? And why is it that it arises in the moment-series of all that are situated in that time and place, and not just in the moment-series of one, just as appearance of hair etc., arises in the moment series of those afflicted by an optical disorder, and not in the moment series of others? Why is it that the hair, bees, etc., seen by those afflicted by an optical disorder do not perform the functions of hair etc., while it is not the case that other hair, etc., do not perform them? Food, drink, clothes, poison, weapon, etc., that are seen in a dream do not perform the functions of food etc., while it is not the case that other food etc., do not perform them. An illusory town does not perform the functions of a town, because of its non-existence, while it is not the case that other towns do not perform them. Therefore, with the non-being of an object, any restriction as to place and time, any non-restriction as to moment-series, and any capacity which has been performed, would be illogical” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 2). As a reply Vasubandhu says that with regard to even dreaming, certain restrictions regarding the objects themselves and the place and time where and when they are seen are observed. He says: “Now how is this? In a dream even without an (external object) of sense or understanding, only certain things are to be seen: bees, garden, women, men, etc., and these only in certain places, and not everywhere. And even there in those places, they are to be seen only sometimes, and not all the times. In this way, there may be restrictions as to place and time” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 3a). Regarding the fact that general nature of objects of cognition need not indicate their existence, Vasubandhu says

that the *preta*-s experience the same rivers of pus and urine which happens, he says, due to similar ends to be suffered. That is, similar cognition of objects happen to different moment-series as these moment-series are supposed to experience similar objects. We find Vasubandhu saying: “For all the *preta*-s who are in a similar situation due to similar retribution for action, and not just one of them, see a river filled with pus. With the expression ‘etc.’ rivers full of urine and feces, guarded by men holding clubs or swords, and other such perceptions, are included also. Thus, non-restriction as to moment-series in regard to perception is demonstrated even with an external object of sense or understanding being non-existent” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 3c). And again, results or effects may happen even without object of cognition existing. Vasubandhu gives the example of night emission which happens without there really being a woman. He says: “A case of being affected in a dream is like where semen is released even without a couple’s coming together” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 3c). Thus, Vasubandhu says that it is not necessary to assume external objects to explain restrictions. Restrictions can be demonstrated regarding cognition only: “So, by these various examples, the four-fold restriction as to place and time, and so on is demonstrated” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 3c)”. Vasubandhu reiterates the feature of restrictions of place, time, general availability, and effect without external objects with another example from hell. He says that hell-guardians are observed in hell by all or everyone in hell. Additionally, everyone in hell suffers in spite of the fact that there are in reality no hell-guardians to punish. He says: “Just as seeing of hell-guardians etc., by those experiencing a hell-state (and with all expression ‘etc.’, the seeing of dogs, crows, moving mountain, and so on, is included) is demonstrated with a restriction with place and time for all of those experiencing a hell-state, and not just for one of them. And just as their torment inflicted by them is demonstrated through sovereignty of common retribution for their individual actions, even though the hell-guardians, and so on, are really non-existent. So the four-fold restrictions as to place and time is to be known as demonstrated in yet another way” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 4c). However, Vasubandhu sees the trouble in accepting the information that there are hell-guardians for punishing people. He explains that the concept of hell-guardians is not logical. The reason is that if one is in hell, one is supposed to suffer. But these

guardians being guardians are seen not suffering and in fact cannot suffer. If they suffer, they are going to lose the status of being guardians. But as they do not suffer, their being in hell is not acceptable. In other words, the very meaning of *being in hell* loses its meaning with regard to them. This illustrates the fact that they cannot really be there. He says: “Because they are illogical. For to assume that these kinds of hell-beings have an external existence is not logical. This is so because they don’t feel the sufferings there themselves, or if they tormented each other mutually, there would be no difference in situation between those experiencing a hell-state and the hell-guardians, and if they mutually tormented each other having equal make-ups, sizes and strengths, there would be no fear in experiencing a hell-state, and since they could not stand the burning suffering of standing on a ground made of heated iron, how could they be tormenting others? And how could there be an arising of those not experiencing a hell-state, together with those who are?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 4c).

Vasubandhu now proceeds to formulate his argument that the so-called objects of cognition are transformation of consciousness. To do this, he puts forth a likely argument of the opponent and while replying advances his own case. Vasubandhu suggests the probable opinion of the opponent: Actions of those experiencing hell-state give rise to material elements (*bhūta viśeṣa*) which may be cognized as hell-guardians. Now, the activities of these hell-guards may not really be happening and may be regarded as hallucinations on the part of those seeing the various movements. But this would not annihilate the fact that the hell-guards are really born from certain activities of the people experiencing hell-state. We find Vasubandhu saying: “Then it is because of the actions of those experiencing a hell-state, that special material elements arise, which have special qualities as to colour, make-up, size, and strength, and are cognized as hell-guardians etc. That is why they are constantly transforming in various ways, and appear to be shaking their hands, etc., in order to instill fear, just as mountains that look like sheep appear to be coming and going, and just as thorns in forest of iron-silk cotton trees, appear to be bowing down and rising up again. And yet it is not that (these phenomenon) are not arising” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 5). Vasubandhu now says that there is no need to suppose emergence of material elements (*bhūta*). According to him, rather

than speculating emergence of these elements, it is more logical to say that consciousness itself has changed. He says: “Why is a transformation of consciousness itself due to (past) actions not accepted, and why in are material elements constructed?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 6). Vasubandhu’s argument for saying that elements are not supposed to be considered as results of actions of experience of hell-state is that – as impressions (*vāsanā*) which cause actions are in consciousness-series only, the results of these actions observed are also supposed to happen in there alone: “Because it is through their action that such an arising and transformation of material elements is constructed for those experiencing a hell-state, and inasmuch as impressions through actions enter together into their consciousness-series, and not anywhere else, why is it that that effect is not accepted as being such a transformation of consciousness taking place just where the impressions themselves do? What is the reason for an effect being constructed where there is no process of impression?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 7). It is not proper to say that results are taking place elsewhere than where the past action effecting, i.e., impressions are. It is rather sensible to say that results are taking place where the impressions themselves are - that is, there are transformations or changes in consciousness only. We find Vasubandhu arguing: “It is being constructed that the process of impressions from actions takes place elsewhere than does its effect, and it is not being accepted that that it exists there where the impressions take place: Now what is reason for this?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā* 7).

Vasubandhu has demonstrated that there are no problems in accepting objects having no existence and that all objects are transformations of consciousness. These proofs make way for his assertion that the so-called objects are mere appearances and actually are only cognition. He says: “All this is cognition-only, because of the appearance of non-existent object, just as there may be the seeing of non-existent nets of hair by someone afflicted with an optical disorder” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 1).

However, certain other conclusions emerge from the consideration of there being no objects.

Vasubandhu inquires whether it is possible to have perceptions etc., if there are in fact no objects. Vasubandhu's answer is in the negative – there can be no perceptions etc. Vasubandhu formulates the issue in the following way: “But with an object of sense or understanding not existing, how can there be any cognizing which can be termed ‘direct perception’?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*15). In the light of there being no objects and what is known being merely appearance, Vasubandhu considers knowing to be something like as in a dream: “Cognizing by direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) is like in a dream etc.” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*16). But, he proceeds to say that in that case the means of knowledge lose meaning. His argument is that by the time the mental visual object is apprehended, the object being merely mental does not continue and thus there is no direct perception of the object. We find him saying: “When cognition through direct perception arises in the form ‘This is my direct perception’, the object itself is already not seen, since this distinguishing takes place only through a mental consciousness, and the visual consciousness has already ceased by that time, so how can its being a direct perception be accepted? This is especially true for a sense-object, which is momentary, for that visible, or taste etc., has already ceased by that time” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*16). In other words, Vasubandhu has demonstrated the impossibility of means of cognition. He says: “And when it occurs, the object is already not seen, so how can it be considered a state of direct perception?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*16).

Vasubandhu sees opponent arguing that if there are no objects and as such no perception etc., of objects, then there also cannot be remembering of these objects. In other words, remembering indicates that there must be objects. But, Vasubandhu tells that remembering is not necessarily related to perception etc., of objects. There is perception with regard to appearances: “It has been stated how perception occurs with its appearance” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā*17). Thus there being the experience, remembering happens which also helps in discrimination of sense-objects. That is, remembering cannot be used to assert existence of objects. He says: “A mental perception arises with the discrimination of a visible, etc. when that appearance is linked with memory, so an experience of an object cannot be demonstrated through the arising of a memory” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 17b).

Vasubandhu, foresees the argument that may arise when sense-objects are treated as appearances. He sees the opponent telling that one is not aware of dream-like quality of sense-objects in the sense that while in case of dream-objects people are aware of they being so, in case of sense objects it does not happen. This proves that sense-objects are not mere appearances. Vasubandhu reminds that the unreality of dream objects is understood only by someone who has woken up from dreams. Likewise, the unreality of objects of waking state or discriminations can be understood only by those who have transcended to supermundane knowledge. He says: “Just as people when they are asleep in a dream have their faculties concentrated on impressions of appearances of discriminations which appear differently than they do later, and, as long as they are not awake, do not understand the non-being of objects of sense and understanding that were not, just so when they become awakened by the attainment of a supermundane knowledge free from discriminations, which is the antidote to these (discriminations), then they truly understand the non-being of these sense-objects through meeting with a clear worldly subsequently attained knowledge” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*17c).

If it is accepted that perception occurs due to transformation in a consciousness series only and not because there is an object existing, then there cannot be certainty of having a perception. Vasubandhu puts the argument of the opponent: “If, through a special transformation of ‘their own’ moment-series, perception with the appearance of objects of sense or understanding arise for beings, and not through special objects themselves, then how can any certainty as regards perceptions be demonstrated from association with bad or good friends, or from hearing about existent and non-existent events, since there can exist neither association with the good or bad, nor any real teaching?” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*17c). For Vasubandhu certainty is determined because of mutual influence of experiences. We have him saying: “For all beings there is certainty of perception through a mutual sovereign effect of perception on one another, according to circumstances. ‘Mutually’ means ‘each affecting the other’” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*18a). This again may give rise to another question - If there are in fact no objects, then how differences regarding effects resulting in waking state and in dream state is seen: “If a perception is without an object, just like a dream, even for

those who are awake, why is it that in the practice of the beneficial and unbeneficial there will not be an equal result from desirable and undesirable efforts, for those who are asleep and those who are not?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]*18a). Vasubandhu says that it is not the object that determines the results but the state of mind. According to him, in the state of dream *citta* is affected by torpor while in the waking state it is not so and as such the results of actions of dream and that of waking state are different. He says: “*Citta* is affected by torpor in a dream, so their results are different” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā* 18b).

Now, if there are no objects, as Vasubandhu has demonstrated, there remains cognition-only, another concern comes up. If there is only cognition, then there cannot be body and speech. And if this is the case, then there also cannot be killing of the body and subsequently one who has killed the body also cannot be held responsible for killing of the boy. Vasubandhu puts the question in the mouth of the opponent: “If all this cognition-only, there cannot be body or speech for anybody. So how can the dying of sheep who have been attacked by shepherds, take place? If their dying takes place without the shepherds having done anything, how can the shepherds be held responsible for the offence of taking life?” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 18b). As Vasubandhu understands death of the body which for him is nothing else but discontinuity of aggregates may take place due to cognition only just as loss of memory, dreams, being possessed of spirits may happen due to psychic powers. We find Vasubandhu saying: “Just as there may be modifications in others, such as loss of memory, the seeing of dreams, or being taken possession of by spirits, by the mental control of psychic powers. As in the case of Sāraṇa’s seeing dreams through Mahā-Kātyāyana’s mental force, or, as in the case of vanquishing of Vemacitra through mental harming coming from the forest dwelling seers. In the same way, through the force of a special cognition [perception] of another, a certain modification of the aggregate-series, destroying its life-force, may arise, through which dying, which is to be known as name for a discontinuity in the aggregate-series taking part in an organism, takes place” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 19). Vasubandhu continues in his assertion that harming basically is mental in nature. He says: “If it is not accepted that the dying of beings can occur through the force of a special cognition [perception] in others, how is it

that the Exalted One, in order to demonstrate that mental harm constitutes a great offense, questioned Upāli when he was still a householder, as follows: ‘Householder? Through what agency were the Daṇḍaka, Mātaṅga, and Kaliṅga Forest made empty and sacred, as has been reported?’, and Upāli replied, ‘I heard that it happened through the mental harming of seers, Gautama. If this situation were constructed as not taking place through a mental harming, and it were to be said that those sentient beings that were living in the forest were destroyed by non-human spirits that had been propitiated as if they were seers, how could it be demonstrated by this passage that mental harm through mental action is a greater offense than bodily or verbal harm? This passage demonstrates that that the dying of so many sentient beings came about only through a mental harming’ (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 20).

Vasubandhu, however, sees the problem of saying that there exists no object and all that is apprehended is mere transformation of consciousness. This would make what we apprehend mere appearances of objects. He in fact says so: “the appearance of non-existent object” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā*-[*Vṛtti*] 1). Vasubandhu sees the opponent arguing that scriptures would not have referred to them as being talked about them by the Buddha had they been mere appearances: “If consciousness were only of the appearance of visible, etc., and there were no objects of visible, etc., the existence of the sense fields of visible etc., would not have been spoken of by the Exalted One” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā* 7). Vasubandhu says that the Buddha would talk about them, as he talked about spontaneously-generated being, to the one getting introduced to *Dharma*: “speaking of sense fields of visible etc., was intended for those to be introduced to *Dharma*, just as in the case of spontaneously generated beings” (*Vimśatikā-Kārikā* 8). According to Vasubandhu, the Buddha talked about sense-objects and sense-organs to demonstrate that there is actually no self but only non-discontinuity of *citta*-series. And the non-discontinuity of *citta*-series is explained with the help of sense-fields by the Buddha. Vasubandhu says: “This was done with the intention of indicating the non-discontinuity of the *citta*-series in the future. ‘There is neither a sentient being, or self, but only events along with their causes’ has been stated by the exalted One. Thus, statements were made by the Exalted One regarding the existence of sense-fields of visible etc., with an intention

directed at people to be introduced to the *Dharma*” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 8). And sense-fields is nothing but, as Vasubandhu explains, transformation of consciousness. Regarding sense-object we find him saying: “A cognition with the appearance of visible arise from the own seed, that is, through a special transformation (in the consciousness series)” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 9). But, the seed is the sense organ wherefrom the object which is the appearance arises. We find him saying: “In respect to such a cognition, the Exalted One spoke in terms of the sense-field of the eye and the visible, in respect to the seed and the appearance which arises, respectively. In the same way, a cognition with the appearance of the tactile sensations arises. In respect to such perception, the Exalted One spoke in terms of sense fields of the tactile body and tactile sensations, in respect to the seed and the appearance which arises, respectively” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 9)”. However, Vasubandhu declares that the *seed* from which the objects had their appearance, themselves are stage of transformation consciousness. He says: “the own seed, that is, through a special transformation (in the consciousness series)” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā vṛtti* 9). In other words, sense-fields is transformations of consciousness. But, as Vasubandhu understands, any transformation of consciousness is merely the imagined: “transformation of consciousness is an imagination and as it is imagined, it does not exist” (*Triṃśikā* 17). This makes the eye etc., which are seeds unreal and the objects which are appearances from the seed also unreal. Now, as one sees that the sense-fields are not there, one also comes to see that there cannot be the six consciousness that depend on the sense-fields. In other words, there being no consciousness, there is no self now. Thus, as Vasubandhu sees it, an explanation that deals with unreality of sense-fields helps one in understanding selflessness of personality (*pudgala-nairātmya*). He says that as one comes to see that there is no seer, no hearer, no smeller, taster, toucher, or thinker, one comes to see the selflessness of personality. We find him saying: “If the sense fields are taught in this way, people will enter into an understanding of selflessness of personality. The group of six consciousnesses evolves because of duality. But when it is known that there is not any one seer, (any one hearer, any one smeller, any one taster, any one toucher), or any one thinker, those to be introduced to *Dharma* through the selflessness of personality will enter

into an understanding of selflessness of personality” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 10a).

Vasubandhu proceeds to say that through this understanding of objects and senses being nothing but mere changes in consciousness one comes upon knowing of selflessness of events. Therefore, we find him saying that teaching of sense-fields is for entry into selflessness of events (*dharmā nairātmya*). Vasubandhu says: “And in yet another way, this teaching is entry into the selflessness of events” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā* 10b). According to him, as one comes upon selflessness of the constructed self by seeing that there are no objects and senses, likewise by seeing that there is no self one comes upon the selflessness of cognition of that ‘self’. And it is this knowing that brings with it the selflessness of events. Vasubandhu says: “It is selflessness in reference to a constructed self, i.e., all those things that constitute the ‘own-being’ believed in by fools, that is the constructed with its ‘object apprehended’ and ‘subject apprehenders’ etc..... In the same way, one penetrates the selflessness of cognition-only itself in reference to a ‘self’ constructed by another cognition, and through this determination of cognition-only, there is entry into the selflessness of all events” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 10c). According to Vasubandhu, it is selflessness of cognition that can lead to selflessness of events and not the understanding that everything is transformation of only cognition or that there is no self. He says that had it been the case, then ‘cognition-only’ or ‘cognition of no self’ would become an object of cognition contradicting cognition-only. He says: “Otherwise there would be an object for this other cognition because of a cognition itself (i.e., either ‘cognition-only’ or ‘the cognition of self’ would be a real object), there would be at least one cognition which has an object consisting of another cognition, and the state of cognition-only would not be demonstrated, because of cognition’s state of having objects” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 10c).

Now, Vasubandhu addresses the question of kind of knowledge in the light of everything being cognition-only. If everything is *citta*-only, in knowing mind, what it is that knows and what it is that is that is known. Regarding the knowledge of other minds, Vasubandhu says that it is like knowing one’s own mind: “The knowledge of those who understand others’ *citta*-s is not like an object. And how is this? As in the case of a knowledge of one’s own *citta*” (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā* 21a).

And so far as knowing one's own mind is concerned, the mind known cannot be treated as an object. And thus far, they may be treated as non-knowing. For, knowing involves not yet giving up of division or discrimination of subject and object. This would make knowing of the worlds, in their true nature, which is cognition-only without object. Thus we find Vasubandhu considering such knowing as knowing that may be compared to knowing of the Buddhas where there is no knowing of an object. Vasubandhu says: "It is just like in the case of the scope of Buddhas which comes about through the ineffable Self. Thus both of these knowledges, because of their inherent non-knowing, are not like an object, because it is through the state of an appearance of something which appears differently than it does later that there is a state of non-abandonment of the discrimination between object apprehended and subject apprehendor" (*Viṃśatikā-Kārikā-[Vṛtti]* 21b).

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