

ESSENTIALS OF SAUTRĀNTIKA PHILOSOPHY

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The followers of the Sautrāntika accept only the sūtras of the Buddha as authentic teachings. They do not accept the texts of Abhidharma composed by Kātyāyānīputra and others as the words of the Buddha or Buddhavacana. When defining Sautrāntika, Yaśomitra says:

kaḥ sautrāntikārthaḥ ? ye sūtraprāmāṇikāḥ,
na tu śāstraprāmāṇikāste sautrāntikāḥ ?¹

Paraphrasing: Who is a Sautrāntika? Those who consider only the sūtras as valid (teachings of the Buddha), not the commentarial literature, are called Sautrāntikas.

Therefore the Sautrāntikas consider only sūtras to be the authentic teachings of the Buddha. As the name itself suggests, the Sautrāntika emphasizes the authority of the sūtra of the Āgamapiṭaka² over the proliferating Abhidharma literature which they saw as the work of later authors and not the authentic words of the Buddha. Sautrāntikas are also called Exemplifiers (*dārśāntika*)³. So in other words, there are reasons for their being called Sautrāntika and Exemplifiers. They are called ‘Sautrāntikas’ because they propound tenets chiefly in reliance on the Buddha’s Sūtras without following Explanatory works (*śāstras*). They are called ‘Exemplifiers’ because they teach all doctrines by means of examples. This is not to say that the Sautrāntika repudiates the Abhidharma piṭaka. Abhidharma philosophy remained a valid system of reflection upon the Buddha’s teachings, but were not as authoritative as the Buddha’s verbatim teachings in the general discourses (sūtras)⁴. Thus the name Sautrāntika, “those who rely upon the sūtras,” indicates a rejection of the authority that



Figure 1. Ācārya Vasubandhu

the Sarvāstivādins bestowed upon their separate canonical Abhidharma collection.

Sūtra is also called Sūtrānta (Pāli: Sūttānta). In other words, the theories propounded on the basis of the Sūtra are called Sūtrānta. The Buddhist philosophy associated with Sūtras and Sūtrāntas are called Sautrāntika. Sūtras are the words of Buddha intended to work for the benefit of sentient beings. Just as a garland may be made either of pearls, golden beads, emerald and other precious stones, Sūtras are also delivered by the Enlightened one to sentient beings of various predispositions and mental inclinations.

So from the above definition, it is clear that among the texts of the Tripiṭaka the Sautrāntikas hold only the Sūtrapiṭaka and Vinayapiṭaka to be the valid teachings of Lord Buddha. They follow the tenets of the Śrāvakayāna, which assert the true existence of both external objects and self-consciousness.

Origin and Development of Sautrāntika

Sautrāntika was an early school of Buddhist philosophy, generally believed to be descended from the Sthaviravāda⁵ by way of their immediate parent school the Sarvāstivādins. Some scholars maintain that Sautrāntika philosophy originated two centuries after the parinirvāṇa of Lord Buddha. According to the Pāli tradition, shortly after the second council held in Vaiśālī, another great council was organized in Kauśāmbhī, where the Mahāsāṅghika sect was founded. This led to the division of the Buddhist Saṅgha into two sects: the Sthavīra, the orthodox ones, and the Mahāsāṅghikas, the liberal ones. Sometimes later, the Mahīśāsaka and Vṛjīputraka sect stemmed from the Sthavīra sect. It is during the same period or century that the Sarvāstivāda sect arose from the Mahīśāsaka sect, which in turn branched off into Kāśyapiya and Saṅkrāntivādī, from which eventually arose the Sūtravādī sect, which was also known as Sautrāntika. In other words, the eighteen Buddhist sects might have developed in approximately the same period. But in terms of their approach to reality, only four philosophical schools came to stand prominent. They are the Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and Mādhyamika.⁶

According to Ācārya Baladeva Upādhyāya the Sautrāntika doctrine is one of the two branches of Sarvāstivāda, the other being Vaibhāṣika.⁷ Some scholars argue that the Vaibhāṣika emphasis on the Abhidharma śāstras was not universally shared by all Sarvāstivādin scholars. Some turned away from the Vaibhāṣika concentration on the Abhidharma compilations and chose to rely solely on the Buddha's direct teachings as preserved in the Sūtras.

For this they became known as Sautrāntikas.⁸ This is the most pragmatic explanation, because unlike the Sarvāstivādins, who assert the existence of things in the three times (past, present, and future), Sautrāntika followers do not accept the existence of past and future, but only the present moment. Therefore, they cannot be called Sarvāstivādins. But unfortunately, the original Sautrāntika texts have been lost now. Very little information about them is available. The Sautrāntika followers' views seem to have appeared in the writings of other schools, such as the *Abhidharmakośa* and so on. However it is clear that some masters of this tradition were keenly interested in criticizing the Vaibhāṣika's central doctrines. Obviously one of them was Vasubandhu.

The Pioneering Exponents of Sautrāntika Philosophy

The Chinese and Tibetan sources maintain that Kumāralāt is believed to have been the founder of this sect. But there were many masters who were called Sautrāntikas, like Ācārya Bhadanta and others, even before Kumāralāt, because Kumāralāt was contemporary with the 2nd century Nāgārjuna.⁹ So here information about the Sautrāntika masters are given chronologically beginning from Ācārya Bhadanta.

Ācārya Bhadanta

Ācārya Bhadanta was the first Sautrāntika Ācārya of Kashmir.¹⁰ He was the contemporary of King Kaṇiṣka. At that time there was a king named Siṃha. Because of his intensive devotion to Buddhism he renounced his kingdom and became a monk called Sudarśana. He practised the teachings sincerely and became an Arhat in no time. Hearing his fame, King Kaṇiṣka visited him and received teachings from him. In the meantime there was a wealthy Brahmin called Sūtra, who used to make offerings to five thousand monks including Ācārya Bhadanta.

When King Kaṇiṣka convened the Sarvāstivādin council, a great commentary was composed and named *Mahāvibhāṣā*. In this *Mahāvibhāṣā* and *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, there were several references to the views of Ācārya Bhadanta whenever there was a discussion of the Sautrāntika view. From this it can be concluded that he was the great Sautrāntika Ācārya and lived even before Kaṇiṣka's council.

Sthavira Dharmottara

In the Chinese tradition, Saṃkrāntivādi, Dharmottariya, and Tāmraśāṭiya were synonyms for the same sect. The Dārṣṭāntika sect was one of the branches of Tāmraśāṭiya, which was also known as Sautrāntika or Sūtravādī. So it was one of the eighteen major sects. The principal Ācārya of this sect is Sthavira Dharmottara. Ācārya Vasumitra in his *Samayabhedoparacanacakraśāstra* mentions that this sect was the outcome of Sarvāstivāda discourses.

Kumāralāta

Kumāralāt¹¹ was born in Takṣaśīla. The King of Kabandha offered him a place to live in his palace, where he composed many excellent works. This author composed a text called kalpanamanda dṛṣṭāntapaṅkti. Kumāralāt is reckoned as one of the four suns of Jambudvīpa, the other three being Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva and Aśvaghōṣa. He was the con-temporary of Nāgārjuna.¹² Hsuen Tsiang writes:

In Taxila (or Takṣaśīlā), the Emperor had built a stūpa at a distance of about 12 or 13 li. This was the very place where Bodhisattva Candraprabha sacrificed his body. There was a Saṅghārāma near the stūpa. It is in disrepair. Some monks lived there. There Ācārya Kumāralāt had composed some of his treatises.

Kumāralāt lived in Taxila. He was genius since his childhood. Detached with saṃsāra

he renounced the world and became a monk. He was immensely devoted to the study of Buddhist scriptures. He used to study 32000 words per day and compose treatises in the same number. He established the Buddhist doctrine as blameless and defeated many heretical teachers. He was expert in debate. He had no problem in understanding commentarial literatures. He has thorough knowledge of them. Personages from different parts of India came to visit and respect him in a befitting manner. He composed at least 20 different treatises. He was the master of Sautrāntika doctrines.¹³

Śrīlābha / Śrīlāta

Śrīlābha or Śrīlāta was a disciple of Kumāralāt.¹⁴ He lived in Kashmir. Possibly he was employed as a professor in the University of Taxila. Hsuen Tsiang has mentioned in his travelogue about him. He had numerous novice monks and monks as his disciples. He used to live in Ayodhyā. At that time Ayodhyā was a centre of learning center. Ayodhyā was also the centre for all kinds of scholars. He composed *Sautrāntika vibhāṣā* to substantiate his theory of Sautrāntika doctrine.

Yaśomitra

Yaśomitra was the follower of Sautrāntika doctrines. He composed *Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā spuṭārthā*. This text is a dazzling jewel of Buddhist philosophy. The Sautrāntika concepts are found in the commentaries of Vaibhāṣika texts. Yaśomitra has elucidated the tenets of the Sautrāntika doctrines of Vasubandhu. The history of Sautrāntika doctrines can be found in fragments in the Chinese texts.

There are several other distinguished masters who advocated the Sautrāntika view, including Vasubandhu.¹⁵ Dignāga and Dharmakīrti also used the Sautrāntika view of Logic (yukti) while they themselves adhered to Yogācāra tenets

which seem to have utilized many theories of the Sautrāntikas.¹⁶

Types of Sautrāntikas

There are two types of Sautrāntikas:

1. Sautrāntikas following scripture
(*āgamānuyāyī*)
2. Sautrāntikas following reasoning
(*yuktyānuyāyī*)

The *āgamānuyāyī* follow and base their knowledge and understanding on the teachings of the sūtras. They chiefly follow Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* (Treasury of Higher Knowledge). The *yuktyānuyāyī* proves the Buddhavacana through logic (*pramāṇa*). Chiefly, they follow Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (A Collection of Instruments of Knowledge) and Dharmakīrti's Seven Treatises on Valid Cognition.¹⁷

Theories and Philosophies

All Hinayāna and Mahāyāna tenet systems assert the two truths (Tib: *bden pa gnyis*; Sanskrit: *satyadvaya*), that is, conventional truth (*saṃvṛtti satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramārtha satya*). Regarding these two truths, Alexander Berzin observes:

Regardless of how the 4 tenet systems, viz. Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and Mādhyamika define them, the two truths always constitute a dichotomy. All knowable phenomena must be members of the set of either one or the other true phenomena, with nothing knowable that belongs to either both or neither of the sets. Consequently, understanding the two truths constitutes understanding all knowable phenomena.¹⁸

Ultimate truth is a phenomenon (*dharmā*) which is able to bear logical analysis from the

point of view of whether it has its own mode of existence without depending on imputation by thought or terminology [for its existence]. A 'functioning thing (*kṛtaka*)', 'ultimate truth (*paramārtha satya*)', and a 'specifically characterized phenomenon (*viśeṣa lakṣaṇa*)' are synonyms. The definition of a truth for an obscured mind (*saṃvṛti satya*) is a phenomenon which only exists through being imputed by thought [or terminology]. 'Non-functioning phenomenon (*akṛtaka*)', 'truth for an obscured mind (*pratibhāsa satya*)', 'generally characterized phenomenon (*sāmānya lakṣaṇa*)', 'permanent phenomenon (*nitya*)', 'non-product phenomenon (*asaṃskṛta*)' and 'false existent (*bhrāmaka sattā*)' are also synonyms.

The Sautrāntika tenet system also asserts the two truths in their own way. Based on these two truths, they have propounded the following key theories:

- I. Acceptance of external objects (*bahyārtha*) and mind (classification of dharmas into 45)
- II. Theory of momentariness
(*kṣaṇabhāṅguravāda*)
- III. Self-apperception (*svasaṃvedana*)
- IV. Use of epistemology (*two pramāṇas*)

I. Acceptance of external objects (*bahyārtha*) and mind (classification of dharmas into 45)

To establish their theory about external objects and mind, it is helpful to analyze how they refute other's theory while defending their own:

1. Vijñānavādins assert that only mind is an ultimate truth and an entity. Thinking that external objects are truly existent is only an imaginary concept based on delusion. Sautrāntikas strongly repudiate this assertion, saying that if external existence is not established, how imaginary nature can be proven? Since there is nothing outside, how the mind can apprehend them; there must be no mind as well. The Vijñānavādins react to this by saying that it is only due to delusion that external

objects seem to arise, but the Sautrāntika's stand is that this is possible only if there is something actually existent outside. If there is nothing externally, then it would be likened to a barren woman getting a child. The Vijñānavādins also assert that consciousness and external objects are similar. This, according to the Sautrāntika, is fallacious because one for the first time sees a pot (*ghaṭa*) as an external object; consciousness perceives such objects only subsequently. So in other words, there must be an external object for a consciousness to perceive them; the external object comes first, and only then consciousness. That means they are not similar. Therefore, according to the Sautrāntika view, external existence is as valid as the mind itself.

2. The usual example of an external object is a pot (*ghaṭa*) or cloth (*paṭa*). According to the Sautrāntika, a thought consciousness is mistaken with respect to the object appearing to it, i.e. a generic image, because a generic image of a house or pot, for instance, appears to be an actual house, which Vaibhāṣika claims to be ultimately real. A direct valid cognizer, however is not mistaken with regard to either its appearing object or its referent object, which is impermanent. Direct valid cognizers are the ultimate consciousnesses and ultimate truth. The actual object appearing to a thought consciousness is a generic image, an image from memory, an imaginary construct, or in some cases an after-image of an object apprehended by a sense consciousness. This is relative truth, which is illusory.

3. Vaibhāṣika followers believe that through non-distorted senses consciousness perceives external objects as they are: truly existent and solid. But Sautrāntikas strongly refute this concept.¹⁹ According to them, all the dharmas are momentary; one cannot perceive the form of external objects as it is, because it is not the same object that we believe we have perceived — it has undergone many unnoticed changes already. The description of this change will follow later.

4. Sautrāntikas have their own atomic theory. According to them, an atom is the smallest unbreakable particle, which doesn't have directional parts. So as an atom cannot be broken into two, there is no question of two atoms merging with each other. That's why they are called Atomists: because they say an atom doesn't have constituent parts. They are not a like pencil and a hand. The hand comes into contact with pencil, but this is not so in the atom's case.

5. There is no cause (*ahetuka*) for the cessation of the material, because of momentariness. The Vaibhāṣika claims that there must be cause (*sa-hetuka*) for the cessation of the material (*dharma*) because it arose in the past, exists in the present and through a certain cause, will cease to exist in the future. Here the Sarvāstivādins suggest that "everything," that is, all conditioned factors (*dharma*), "exist" and can exert causal efficacy in the three time periods of the past, present, and future. This position was attacked by Sautrāntikas as a violation of the fundamental Buddhist position of impermanence. According to the Sautrāntikas, the past has ceased to exist and the future has not come. It is only present, that is, functioning, and has not ceased yet. A functioning thing and moment are same because things exist just for a brief moment. So there is no point in asserting that the past and the future exist. Actually they are empty; only the present exists.²⁰ That is the truth.

6. The Sautrāntikas accepts only color (*varṇa*) as a form whereas the Vaibhāṣikas regard shapes (*saṃsthāna*) too. For them, the form (*rūpa*) and shape (*varṇa*) are synonymous, which excludes *saṃsthāna*.

7. Every object (*dharma*) creates suffering. All the objects are nature of suffering. Even the pleasure and feeling are also harbingers of suffering because they are conditioned dharmas (*saṃskṛta dharma*).

8. According to Sautrāntikas, there are only two unconditioned dharmas (*asaṃskṛta dharma*): nir-

vāṇa and space (*ākāśa*). According to their view, there is no difference between the two nirvāṇas, viz. *pratisamkhyānirodha* and *aprasamkhyānirodha*.²¹

9. The Vaibhāṣikas accepted the concept of action (*karma*) as operative in the past, present and future. But the Sautrāntikas strongly refute this concept. According to them, an action cannot give its effect in the future, since neither past nor future can exist simultaneously with the present. The past has existed and the future will exist in relationship to the ever passing present, but only the present can actually exist and its existence is momentary (*kṣaṇika*). The Sautrāntikas also rejects the concept of acquisition or appropriation (*prāpti*) and as a holding force in making karma and *viññapti* (the bodily and vocal expression of volition) as a real entity treated as a *rupaskandha*. According to them, *viññapti* as “expression” of thought has no real existence in itself. In fact, it is only the mental action as volition that exists, possessing moral value as good, bad or indifferent. The Sautrāntikas classify volition into three aspects: 1. deliberation (*gaticetanā*), 2. decision (*niścayacetanā*) and 3. impulsion (*kiraṇacetanā*).²² The first two constitute the “action of thinking” (*cetanākarma*), which in effect is volition, manifest as mental reflection (*manaskāra*) or thoughts (*caitta*). They both are the “action of thought” (*manahkarma*). The third aspect, “impulsion” (*kiraṇacetanā*) is twofold: that which impels bodily movement and that which impels speech.

10. As regards the fruit of action, the Sautrāntikas claim that the maturing of *karma* as the “fruit” or effect of volition can be described in terms of the mental series. An action which is a thought linked with a particular volition, is momentary, has no real duration as explained by the Sarvāstivādins. It disappears the very moment it is committed, but it impregnates (*vāsanā*) the mental series (*cittasantāna*). This is a starting point with a particular power or potentiality (*śaktiviśeṣa*). The impregnated series undergoes an evolution (*pariṇāma*) of varied periods of time and culmi-

nates in the final transformation mement (*viśeṣa*), which forms the state of result (*phala*). The evolution of the series is likened to the process in which a seed keeps growing slowly until it matures as a fruit. The other tenet holders argue as to what happens when the series is interrupted, as for example in suspended meditation like formless meditation (*ārūpyadhyāna*) and in death. The Sautrāntikas reply that in case of this type of complex mind or suspended meditation, there still exists the subtle consciousness (*sūkṣmacitta*). They argue that when the functions of the complex mind are absent, as for instance, a state of suspended meditation, the state that is devoid of thought in the sense that the the series is interrupted, but in fact that absence does not indicate total interruption because subtle thought continues to exist, serving as a repository of all the seeds (*sarvabīja*) deposited by the complex mind. As the series evolves, the seeds mature and produce their “fruit”. As the subtle consciousness is the sustainer of these new or matured seeds, it is also called the “consciousness of retribution” (*vipākaphalaviññāna*), the same consciousness which the Yogācārins call the “store consciousness” (*ālayaviññāna*). From the time of birth to the moment of death this subtle mind forms the continuity of the series and it transmigrates from one life to another, taking up different reincarnations. Once it reaches the moment of entering *nirvāṇa* it is cut off and completely extinguished.

9. Classification of Dharma

The Sautrāntikas has a different classification of the phenomena (*dharma*). The Vaibhāṣika exponents believe that there are 75 dharmas; the Yogācārins enumerate 100 dharmas.²³ While the Sautrāntika follows the fundamental Buddhist theory of “no self” (*anātma*) they reinterpret the earlier theory of *dharmas* of which the five aggregates (*pañcaskandhas*) are composed. Individual personality mistakenly apprehended as a true self or *atma* is essentially a nonentity (a “no self”), which is definable as a constant flux of elemental psychophysical particles, momentarily compos-

ing themselves under the effect of *karma* as the five aggregates divisible into 43 dharmas²⁴ including two unconditioned dharmas, i.e. *nirvāṇa* and space. Due to the lack of Sautrāntika literature, generally, it is very difficult to obtain the list of 43 dharmas. But a rare Sautrāntika text in Tamil language entitled, *Śivajñānasiddhacāra*, a text by Aruṇandīśivācārya, has a list of the Sautrāntika dharmas. All these dharmas are subsumed under five aggregates. Alternatively, they can also be subsumed under *rūpa*, *citta*, *cetasika*, *nirvāṇa*. In this way the Sautrāntika dharmas can be classified in the following way²⁵ :

- (1) Form (*rūpa*) = 8 (4 *upādāna* + 4 *upādāya*)
- (2) Feeling (*vedanā*) = 3 (pleasure, pain and neutral)
- (3) Perception (*saṃjñā*) = 6 (5 senses and a *citta*)
- (4) Consciousness (*vijñāna*) = 6 sense consciousnesses
- (5) Mental formation (*saṃskāra*) = 10 virtuous + 10 non virtuous
- (6) Unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) = 2 (*nirvāṇa* + space)

1. Form: According to Sautrāntikas, Form or matter is twofold: Primary (*upādāna*) and Derived (*upādāya*). According to the Abhidharmakośa, the primary elements are earth, water, fire and wind. The derived forms (*upādāya*) are also fourfold: they are solidity, humidity, heat and motion.²⁶

2. Feeling: Feeling (*vedanā*) is threefold: 1. pleasant, 2. painful, 3. neither painful nor pleasant.²⁷

3. Perception or Ideas: Perception (*saṃjñā*) is the grasping of characteristics (*nimitta*). The grasping of the diverse natures — perceiving that this is blue, yellow, long, short, male, female, friend, enemy, agreeable, disagreeable, etc. is *saṃjñāskandha*. One can distinguish six types of *saṃjñā* according to the sense organs including the mind.²⁸

4. Consciousness (*vijñāna*): The Sautrāntikas assert that there are six consciousnesses: According to the Abhidharmakośa by Vasubandhu, consciousness is the impression (*vijñapti*) relative to each object, the “raw grasping” of each object. The aggregate of consciousness is the six classes of consciousness: visual (*caḥṣu*), auditory (*śrota*), ol-factory (*ghrāṇa*), taste (*jivhā*), touch (*kāya*) and mental consciousness (*mano*).²⁹

5. Volition or impulses: Volitional constructs or mental formations (*saṃskāras*) are everything that is conditioned (*saṃskṛta*); Saṃskārasandha are the *saṃskāras* different from the other four skandhas i.e. *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *vijñāna*. According to the Abhidharmakośa, a volitional construct is by definition the factor which creates future existence. The Lord Buddha also said that the *upādānaskandha* called *sams-kāra* is so called because it conditions things, i.e. because it creates and determines the five *skandhas* of future existences.³⁰ According to Sautrāntika, there are 20 mental factors or volitional constructs (*saṃskāras*)³¹. They are 10 virtuous constructs and 10 non-virtuous constructs.³²

The unconditioned dharmas, i.e. *nirvāṇa* and space, have already been described.

II. Theory of momentariness (*kṣaṇabhāṅguravāda*)

Everything in the phenomenal world, according to the Buddha, is characterized by impermanence. This doctrine of impermanence was later advanced by the Sautrāntikas as the doctrine of momentariness of everything. The universal theory of impermanence is presented slightly differently by Sthāvīravādins and Sarvāstivādins i.e. Vaibhāṣikas. They say, “a thing arises, remain constant and ceases to exist.” But the Sautrāntikas, who have a different version of events, say that the interpretation is slightly wrong. Things never remain constant. Something vanishes as soon as it arises. According

to Sautrāntika, one real thing cannot exist at the same time in many places; neither can the same reality be real at different times. That's why every conditioned dharma is momentary. Everything in the phenomenal world is in flux in the sense that it comes into existence at one moment and goes out of existence at the next. Thus there is an uninterrupted flow of causally connected momentary entities of the same kind, the so-called *santāna*. In other words, the cessation takes place without cause (*ahetuka*). If it were not the case, then the dharmas would remain constant and changeless. To prove this theory, Stcherbatsky writes:

Nobody will deny that when a jar has been broken to pieces by a stroke of the hammer it has ceased to exist. But beyond this obvious empirical change there is, as stated above, another, never beginning and never stopping, infinitely graduated, constant change, a running transcendental ultimate reality. The creation of the jar out of a clump of clay and its change into potsherds are but new qualities, i.e. outstanding moments in this uninterrupted change. There is nothing perdurable, no static element in this process. An everlasting substantial matter is declared to be pure imagination, just as an everlasting substantial Soul.³³

In this way, this logic could have repudiated at one single stroke: a creator god, the eternal matter of the Sāṃkhyas and Vaiśeṣikas, and the whole wealth of metaphysical entities imagined by different critiques of the theory of impermanence and momentariness. So in one brief moment, inconceivable changes occur.

Here the idea of a 'moment' (skt: *kṣaṇa*) must be explained. The Sautrāntikas seem to have shared the Sarvāstivādins' (Vaibhāṣikas') conception of the *kṣaṇa* as the smallest indivisible unit of time, but presented their usage of the term differently by adapting the mode of existence of conditioned dharmas to the theory of momentariness. The term "kṣaṇa" or moment was used in the ordinary

sense of a very small unit of time. In some contexts, it may be understood as a precisely defined unit of time. Alexander von Rospatt observes:

The *kṣaṇa*'s measure was by one Abhidharmic strand fixed by correlating it to larger units of time. Thus it was determined to be precisely 1/120th of a *tatkṣaṇa*, which corresponds to 1/75th of a second.³⁴

There are many similes and illustrations which demonstrate how fast things move within such a short and inconceivable span of time. The most obvious example is snapping of the fingers. If there is a strong man, he may take 65 *kṣaṇas* (i.e. just under a second) to snap his fingers.³⁵

It is said that within the short span of time during which an arm is bent or stretched, the Buddha endowed with supernatural power moves from the realm of human beings up to the highest point within the sphere of existence.³⁶

According the Pāli sources, a material entity (Pāli: *rūpadhamma*) lasts 17 times as long as a moment corresponding to one mental entity (Pāli: *cittakhaṇa*).³⁷ Similarly, the five *skandhas* or aggregates of being are repeatedly produced and destroyed in every moment.

Because these entities succeed upon each other so fast that this process cannot be discerned by means of ordinary perception, and because earlier and later entities within one *santāna* are almost exactly alike, we come to conceive of something as a temporally extended entity even though it is in truth nothing but a series of causally connected momentary entities. The Tibetan Kagyüpa monk Gampopa, while describing impermanence, also proves this point thus:

Impermanence is seen in the vanishing of the instant moment, each and every moment. The first moment of this world does not exist in the second moment. Each moment seems to be similar, and because of this seeming similarity, we are deluded and perceive them as the same, like the flowing of a river.³⁸

Some examples of momentary events:

1. *Cinematography*: Just as the rapid projection of distinct pictures evokes the illusion of continuous action on the screen, so too does the fast succession of distinct momentary entities give rise to the erroneous impression that the world around us exists continuously without undergoing destruction and being created anew at every moment.
2. *(The Referent of a) Person's Name*: The old thin Devadatta is certainly not identical with the young, healthy and fat Devadatta, yet we say "this is that Devadatta".
3. *River*: The course of Brahmaputra may change due to devastating flood current; even then we say, 'this is that Brahmaputra.'
4. *Building*: A building built fifty years ago may undergo radical change; still, we say, 'This is that building'.
5. *Nails and Hairs*: Though our hairs and nails grow and are cut off, we are of the idea that the same hair and nails are persisting.
6. *A Candle's Flame*: The flame of a candle changes every moment, but it seems to us that the same flame is persisting all the while.

In this way, according to this doctrine, all objects of the world — our bodies, ideas, emotions and all the external objects around us — are destroyed every moment and are replaced by similar things generated at the succeeding moment, which are again replaced by other similar things at the next moment, and so on.

From the seventh century onwards, this theory of momentariness had begun to be much emphasized by Buddhists, especially by the Sautrāntikas. Particularly, after Śāntirakṣita of 8th century and Ratnakīrti of the 10th century supplied a strong logical basis for this doctrine, great emphasis has been laid on it by later Buddhists.

According to this developed doctrine, things are regarded as existing for one moment only and undergoing destruction at the next moment. A thing is destroyed immediately after acquiring its being (*ātmalābha*); *utpāda* or origination is followed by *nirodha* or destruction. This destruction of an entity is spontaneous and requires no additional cause.

III. Self-apperception (*svasamvedana*)

The Sautrāntikas assert that the ultimate truth which functions is only the present. The past has ceased to exist and the future hasn't arisen. Everything is happening at the present time. That's why things are undergoing the process of change at the very present moment only. This is called momentary transience of the external and mental phenomena. According to the Sautrāntikas, this is what impermanence is all about. It asserts that the past is only memory and the future is just imagination. There is just origin and cessation, occurring at the very present moment, as contrasted with the Three Times theory propounded by the Vaibhāṣikas. So they do not exist at all. They are called Relative Truths (*samvṛti satya*). The followers of Sautrāntika tenet systems describe this through the theory of self-apperception (*svasamvedana*). This postulation has already added a fillip to the development of the Yogācāra theory of Mind Only (*Vijñaptimātra* or *Cittamātra*) which aggrandized and developed this theory to its zenith. So whenever this theory receives criticism, the Yogācārins are prompt to defend this through their own logic. The general definition of apperception is the mind seeing the mind itself or self-consciousness. To establish the theory of self-apperception, some of the criticisms against this theory produced by other schools, especially those of the Madhyamika, and the answers and proofs given by the Sautrāntikas and Yogācārins exponents, are presented here.

Question: *If the illusion-like forms that appear to the mind have no external existence, then, since there can be no object to cognize, how can the mind arise?*

If, according to you, it does arise, then by what valid cognition is it beheld and established?

Answer: The eye consciousness that apprehends form has two aspects: an other-cognizing aspect that is only conscious of objects distinct from consciousness, and a self-cognizing aspect that only apprehends the consciousness itself and which we call a valid self-cognizer. A self-cognizer is always a non-deceptive consciousness and is the mind that establishes the existence of the eye-consciousness of form and so forth.³⁹

Examples and proofs to assert apperceptions

1. *Lamp*: a lamp is able to illuminate both itself as well as other external objects clearly. In a similar way, the mind is able to be conscious of both itself and other phenomena.
2. *A Clear Crystal*: A piece of clear crystal is able to appear as blue when placed upon a blue object which is other than it. Its appearing as blue is thus dependent upon something other than it. Lapis lazuli, on the other hand, does not need to depend on anything else in order to appear as blue; by its nature it appears as blue. Similarly, the eye consciousness and so forth are necessarily related to objects that are other than consciousness, whereas self-cognizers exist as consciousness without being related to objects other than consciousness.
3. If the eye consciousness and so forth do not have a self-cognizing quality, then in future how would it be possible to remember them? We do not simply remember the object but are also able to recollect the consciousness that apprehended it. From this, now it is proven that apart from apprehending an object other than itself, consciousness can also see itself. Due to the process of memory, the existence of self-cognizers can be established.
4. When a person looks into the distance, he

is able to see a small object such as a needle or a tree or a plant; needless to say, he will be able to see a mountain that is near. Similarly, after one has attained samatha and other conditions, it is a possibility that he will gain clairvoyance and can easily see the minds of other people that are far away. If so, why can he not see his own mind which is so close to himself?

5. If there is no self-cognizer, then how can consciousness be established as existent? If so, then perceptions of forms, sounds and so forth should be refuted.

In this way, through different reasonings, the Sautrāntikas and the Yogācārin Ācāryas establish their theory of self-apperception.

IV. Use of epistemology (*two pramāṇas*)

The unique feature of the Sautrāntika school is its logic, which was then used to defend their theory against the criticisms showered by other Buddhist schools and non-Buddhist schools. This logic was later highly developed and crystallized by Yogācārin followers. Ācārya Dignāga had played a great role in the development of the Sautrāntika logic. Later Dharmakīrti also fine-tuned it to its apex. After Dignāga developed a strong Buddhist logic, it was then possible to distinguish Buddhist logics from the Vedic ones.⁴⁰ Victoria Lysenco, in researching Buddhist logic, noted that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti adopt a Sautrāntika standpoint, presupposing the existence of external objects, while in other parts of their work, they shift their ontological frameworks and move to a Yogācāra's rejection of external objects. Regarding this, Prof. Tripathi says:

Although Dharmakīrti, in the initial chapters of the *Pramāṇavārtika*, establishes Mind Only, in the rest of chapters, he describes things from the standpoint of the Sautrāntika. Therefore, even if they are the proponents of Logical Mind Only (yuktyānuyāyī), there is

Figure 2. *Acarya Dignaga*

not a shadow of doubt to identify them as leading Sautrāntika Ācāryas as well.⁴¹

According to Dignāga's major epistemological work *Pramāṇasamuccaya* (A Collection of Instruments of Knowledge), only two instruments of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) exist; *pratyakṣa*, or perception, and *anumāna*, or inference, and each of them has its own subject matter.⁴²

Pratyakṣa deals with what Dignāga calls *svalakṣaṇa*, literally, that which characterises itself, a particular characteristic or pure particular — something absolutely unique, singular and most important, momentary (*kṣaṇika*). As *svalakṣaṇas* are ultimately real (*paramārtha sat*) and inexpressible, to experience them means to experience reality as it is.

The object of the other *pramāṇa*, inference (*anumāna*), is constituted by conceptualizations, verbalizations, reflections and other products of mental constructions (*kalpanā* or *vikalpa*) that Dignāga calls *samanyalakṣaṇa* — a general characteristic that is applicable to many objects or

Figure 3. *Acarya Dharmakirti*

distributed over many instances. *Samanyalakṣaṇas* are endurable and not subject to change; for this reason they are regarded as only relatively real (*saṃvṛtisat*).

Conclusion

Sautrāntika philosophy is one of the four pillars of Buddhist philosophy: Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and Mādhyamika. Even if the Sautrāntikas accept the validity of Sūtra only, it doesn't mean that they reject Abhidharma altogether; they merely say that the Abhidharma is not necessarily the word of Buddha (*buddhavacana*), because they claim that all the contents of Abhidharma are subsumed in the Sūtras. The Sautrāntika tradition can not be called Sarvastivāda even if it stemmed from it, because unlike the Sarvastivādins, they assert the existence of only the present moment. For them, things in the past and the future are only imaginary concepts (*prajñaptisat*), only the subtly momentary things in the present are real

(*dravyasat*), which also soon turn into the past. So their interpretation of the existence of things is in terms of the generic image of the mind. This theory, called *svasaṃvedana*, and many others were the seed from which Yogācāra subsequently grew. The Sautrāntika theories are presented in the Yogācāra system in a more revamped and consolidated form with all its discrepancies corrected. Their advanced theory is that the *svasaṃvedana* works because there is a presence of storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). The Sautrāntika proves their position either through the buddhavaṇa (*āgamānuyāyī*) or through sharp logic and epistemology (*yuktyānuyāyī*). The Buddhist logic is a main feature of Sautrāntika. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti were known for their sharp Buddhist logic which no non-Buddhist theories could withstand.

Generally, Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika schools are reckoned as Hīnayāna schools whereas

Yogācāra and Mādhyamika schools are Mahāyāna schools. The term Hīnayāna or Mahāyāna, pejorative as it may appear, is not intended to disparage the lower schools or glorify the higher schools, but is related to a practitioner's motivation. These differentiations have nothing to do with the Buddha's wisdom as all of these four schools represent it, the understanding of which seems to grow exponentially in each of the schools. To understand higher philosophy, one must have thoroughly understood lower theory. Mahāyāna philosophies also cannot be comprehended without the thorough understanding of both Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika, which have been designated in the academic world as Hīnayāna philosophies. In this way, from the womb of Hīnayāna philosophy, the philosophical theories of Mahāyāna had the opportunity to develop. To put it another way, all four philosophies have to be gradually followed and thoroughly understood.

ॐ bhavatu sarva maṅgalam ॐ
ॐ May all beings be happy ॐ

Notes and References

1. Swami Dwarikadas Shastri (ed.), *Ācārya yaśomitram kṛta sphuṭārthā vyākhyopetam ācārya vasubhandu viracitam svopajñabhāṣyasahitam abhidharmakoṣam*, Vol I, (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati Publications, 1970), p. 15. According to Sanskrit Grammar, the words in question here are in the singular form whereas the answers are given in the plural form.
2. This is a Sarvāstivādin Sanskrit version of the Tripiṭaka. Parallel to its counterpart in Pāli literature, the Sarvāstivādins have their own five texts: 1. *Dīrghāgama*, 2. *Madhyamāgama*, 3. *Kṣudrakāgama*, 4. *Samyuktāgama* and 5. *Ekottarāgama*,
3. Collette Cox argues that proponents of Sarvāstivāda or Vaibhāṣika may have labeled them pejoratively as Dārṣṭāntika. Robert E. Buswell, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol II, (New York: The Gale Group, Inc., 2004). There was also a Sautrāntika Ācārya named
4. Dārṣṭāntika. According to Prof. Ram Shankar Tripathi, a separate Sautrāntika sect called Darṣṭāntika was named after him.
5. Richard King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 88
6. That is, there were eighteen different schools that developed a couple of centuries or more after the *parinirvāṇa* of Śākyamuni Buddha. The Sthaviravāda is one of them, from which the Sautrāntika also stems.
7. Ram Shankar Tripathi, *Sautrāntika Darśanam*, (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1990), p. 3. *bhagavato buddhasya parinirvāṇānantaram tatpravartitaḥ saddharmah anekāsu śākhāsu samvikasitaḥ | tattvavicārādṛṣṭyā pramukhāni catvāri darśanaprasthānāni sam-*

- vikasitāni | tathā hi - vaibhāṣikāḥ sautrāntikāḥ, yogācārāḥ, mādhyaṃikāś ca ||*
7. Baldev Upadhyaya, *Bauddha-Darśana-Mīmāṃsā*, (Varanasi: Caukhambha Vidyabhavana, 1978) , p. 183
 8. Tarthang Tulku, 'Light of Liberation: A History of Buddhism in India, *Crystal Mirror* Vol. VIII, (New York: Dharma Publishing, 1992). p. 288.
 9. Lama Chimpa & Alka Chattopadhyaya, *Tārānātha's History of Buddhism in India*, (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970). p. 117.
 10. In Taranatha's *Gyagar Chöjung*, there was a mention of First Sautrāntika Ācārya during the time of Kaṇṣka but Ācārya Bhadanta's name was not mentioned. But the pronoun like the first Sautrāntika mahā bhaṭṭaraka Sthavira of Kashmir definitely occurs in his *Chöjung*. See: *Ibid.* p. 92. Somewhere Bhadanta is identified with Dharmatrāta. But clearly this is not possible because Dharmatrāta was a pioneering teacher of Vaibhāṣika not Sautrāntika
 11. Somewhere, he is also mentioned as Kumaralābha, a corruption of Kumaralāta.
 12. Chimpa et al., *op cit.*, f.n. 9.
 13. Quoted in Ram Shankar Tripathi, *Bauddha Darśana Prasthāna*, (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1997), p. 81.
 14. Upadhyaya, *op cit.*, f.n. 7, p. 185.
 15. Before converting to Vijñānavāda Mahāyāna Buddhism, Vasubandhu used to be inclined towards the Sautrāntika view. Therefore although he propounded Vaibhāṣika principles in his Abhidharmakośa, he left no stone unturned in rejecting anything which is against the Sautrāntika view.
 16. Both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti were the logical Yogācāra Followers. They did not accept the principles of eight consciousnesses, however. Since the Yogācāra system advanced and upgraded both logic and the self-apperception (*svasaṃvedana*) theory of the Sautrāntikas, these two Ācāryas also used the Sautrāntika system in presenting their logic. There are some scholars who claim erroneously that both of them were Sautrāntikas, not Yogācārins, just because they find them listed among the Ācāryas of the Sautrāntika. However, according to the Tibetan traditions recorded in Indian Buddhist Pandits, they not only enriched the Mahāyāna literature on logic, but also followed the tantric Mahāyāna and composed some tantric texts as well. See: Lobsang N. Tsonawa, *Indian Buddhist Pandits from "the Jeweled Garland of Buddhist History"*, (Dharmashala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1985), pp. 39-41, and pp. 46-52. Merely by adhering to the wisdom as understood by the Sautrāntikas doesn't mean that one becomes Hīnayānic.
 17. Geshe Lhundup Sopa & Jeffrey Hopkins, *Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*, (London: Rider and Company Limited, 1977), p. 92. The seven logical texts of Dharmakīrti are: *Pramāṇavārttika*, *Pramāṇa-viniścaya*, *Nyāyabindu*, *Hetubindu*, *Vādanyāya*, *Sambandhaparīkṣā*, *Santānanantarāsiddhi*.
 18. Article posted on the Alexander Berzin's website (URL: http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/sutra/level5_analysis_mind_reality/truths/2_truths_vaibhashika-sautrantika.html). We can find the original verse in Ācārya Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*, which runs thus: *arthakriyāsamartha yat tadatra paramārthasat | anyat saṃvrtisat proktaṃ te svasāmānyalakṣaṇe ||* See Dvarika Das Shastri (ed.), *Pramāṇavārttikam*, (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1968), p. 100.
 19. Upadhyaya, *op cit.*, f.n. 7, p. 189.
 20. Upadhyaya, *Ibid.* p.191. Prof. Upadhyaya has quoted from the *Mādhyamakavṛtti: tathā sautrāntika mate atītā anāgatam śūnyam anyed śūnyam.* (*Mādhyamakavṛtti*, p. 444).
 21. Ācārya Vasubandhu defines space and these two *nirvāṇas* thus: *..tatrākāśamanāvṛtiḥ || 1:5|| pratisaṃkhyānirodho yo visamyogaḥ pṛthak pṛthak| utpādātyantavighno'nyo nirodho'pratisaṃkhyayā ||1:6||* See: Ācārya Narendra Deva (trans.), *Abhidharmakośa*, (Allahabad: Hindustan Academy, 1958), p. 10. For a English Translation of Abhidharmakośa see: Louis De La Vallee Poussin, *Abhidharmakośa Bhāṣyam*, Vol I-IV, (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988-1990). Similarly, Ācārya Ghoṣaka also gives a similar definition: *pratisaṃkhyānirodhaḥ katamaḥ | sāsravānāsra vaprājñābalena sarvaprāyojanaprahāṇe vimokṣa prāptir ucyate pratisaṃkhyānirodhaḥ |*

- apratisaṃkhyānirodhaḥ katamaḥ | anāgatasya hetubhir ucpādyasyānutpattinapratisaṃkhyānirodhaḥ | ākāśam katamat | arūpāyatanam apratighātaḥ darśānān arhatocyate ākāśam ||*. Both can be paraphrased in English in this way: Space is “that which does not hinder.” *Pratisaṃkhyānirodha* is disjunction from the *āsrava dharmas* one by one through the power of wisdom. *Apratisaṃkhyānirodha* is an extinction which is different from “disjunction”. It consists of the absolute hindering of the arising of future dharmas. It is so obtained, not by the comprehension of the Truths, but by the insufficiency of the causes of arising.
22. Tadeusz Skorupski, “Sautrāntika”, in Mircea Eliade *et al.* (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol 13, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 86-88
 23. For the classification and listing of the Yogācārin dharmas, see: Vasubandhu, “Śatadharmavidyāmukham”, *Buddhist Himalaya*, Vol. XI, Combined Issue 2001-2007, (Lalitpur: Nagarjuna Institute of Exact Methods), pp. 58-59.
 24. It is surprising that books on Sautrāntika, like *Sautrāntika Darśanam* in Sanskrit by Prof. Ram Shankar Tripathi, *Bauddha Dharma Darśanam* and others do not mention the classification of dharmas according to the Sautrāntika system.
 25. Upadhyaya, *op cit.*, f.n. 7, p. 191.
 26. Narendradeva, *op cit.*, f.n. 21, p. 20. The verse reads: *bhūtāni prthivīdhātur aptejo vāyudhātavaḥ | dhṛtyā-dikarmasāmsiddhāḥ kharaśehoṣṇateranāḥ ||1/12||*
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
 30. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
 31. According to *Dharmasaṅgraha* of Ācārya Nāgārjuna, there are two *saṃskāras*: 1. *saṃskāras* concomitant with mind (*cittasamprayukta saṃskāra*), 2. *saṃskāras* not concomitant with mind (*cittaviprayukta saṃskāra*). The Vaibhāṣika accepts *cittaviprayukta saṃskāra* like attainment (*prāpti*) etc. as well but the Sautrāntika does not. They assert that they are just perceptions (*prajñaptisat*), not objectively true (*vastusat*). The *cittaviprayukta* dharmas are attainment, nonattainment, equal lot, non-discernment, meditative absorption, life, birth, aging, existence, impermanence, assemblage of names, assemblage of words and assemblage of letters. See: Tashi Zangmo and Dechen Chime (trans.) *Ācārya Nāgārjuna's dharmasaṅgrahaḥ*, (Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 1993), p. 16.
 32. Due to lack of Sautrāntika resources, the list of 20 *saṃskāra dharmas* can not be given here.
 33. Theoder Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic* Vol I., (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1996), p. 95. Here Stcherbatsky describes Śāntaraṣita's stand on the theory of momentariness.
 34. Alexander von Rospatt, *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness: A Survey of the Origins and Early Phase of this Doctrine up to Vasubandhu*, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1995), p. 99
 35. This illustration is given by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakośabhasya: balavatpuruṣaccaṭāmātrena pañcaśaṣṭiḥ kṣaṇā atikrāmāntyityābhidhārmikāḥ*
 36. Rospatt, *op cit.*, f.n. 34, p. 100. Alexander von Rospatt provides many similes and illustrations from the Sthaviravāda, Sarvāstivāda, Sautrāntika and other doctrines to demonstrate how fast things move.
 37. Bhadantācariya Buddhaghōṣa, *Visuddhimagga*, (Singapore: Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre), p. 714. Here is the Pāli text: *rūpe dharanteyeva hi soḷasavāre bhavaṅgacitta uppajjitvā nirujjhati |*. All the full texts of Pāli Tipiṭaka can be browsed and downloaded from the website: <http://www.tipitaka.org>.
 38. Gampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, (New York: Snowlion Publications, 1998), p. 85. (Translated into English by Khenpo Könchog Gyaltzen Rinpoche and edited by Ani K. Trinlay Chödrön)
 39. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Meaningful to Behold*, (London: Tharpa Publications, 1989), p. 298 (A translation of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Śāntideva into English).
 40. Tripathi, *op cit.*, f.n. 13, p. 111
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
 42. *ke punas te dve iti saṃśayitasya praśnāvasara idam ucyate - pratyakṣamanumānam ceti, pratyakṣānumāne*

eva te dve pramāṇe, na tvanye eva kecid dve iti| atra vyākhyāne na bhavati yathoktadoṣāvakaśah || Ernst Steinkellner. *etal.*, *Jinendrabuddhi's Viśālāmalavatī Pramāṇasamuccayaṭīkā*, (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2005), p. 24. There are 4 *pratyakṣas* according to Sautrāntikas : 1. Sensory direct perception (*indriyapratyakṣa*), 2. Mental di-

rect perception (*mānasa pratyakṣa*), 3. Apperception (*svasaṃvedana pratyakṣa*) and 4. Meditative direct perception (*yogī pratyakṣa*). Similarly, there are two inferences (*anumāna pramāṇas*): 1. Self-Inference (*svārthānumāna*), 2. Other-inference (*parārthānumāna*). For details about the Sautrāntika epistemology, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 107-113.

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