A Comment on the Term Ārambana in the Ratnagotravibhāga, I, 9

Jikido Takasaki

The term ‘ārambana’ is one of the technical terms unique to Buddhism. Being equivalent to Pāli ‘ārammana’ and Cl. Skt. ‘ālambana’, it is usually used in the sense of ‘basis of cognition’ or ‘sense-object’, e. g. rūpa as ārambana of caksurviṃśāna, or dharma as that of manoviṃśāna. The usual equivalent to this term in Tibetan and Chinese language is ‘dmigs-pa’ and ‘所緣’, respectively.

What I am going to examine here is whether or not the same meaning mentioned above can be applied to this term used in the Ratnagotravibhāga (RGV), I, 9.

The passage in question is as follows:

tasmāi dharmaṇḍivākarāya vimalajñānāvabhāsatviṣe
sarvārambanarāgarāgadātimiravīrāghātakartre namah / (I, 9, cd)

These lines, being the latter half of the second Kārikā (i. e. ‘basic stanza on which is made the commentary’) of the RGV., refer to the ‘Jewel of the Doctrine (dharmaṇḍa)’ as the Truth of Path (mārgasatya) by means of a simile of the sun (dharmaṇḍivākara, the sun of the Doctrine, or the sun-like Doctrine). The similarity of the Dharma with the sun is, according to the

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(1) As for the meanings contained in the term ārambana and ārammana, see F. Edgerton, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary, q. v. and R. C. Childers, A Dictionary of Pāli Language, q. v. Etymological analysis on the term ārambana in its relation to Pāli ārammana and Skt. ālambana is out of forcus in this article.


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commentary (vv. I, 10–12, and prose section, p. 12), explained in three points, namely 1) purity (śuddhi) by ‘vimala-jñāna’, 2) manifestation (of everything) (vyakti, abhivyaktikaraṇa) by ‘avabhāsatviṣ’, and 3) antidote (of darkness) (vipakṣa, tamaḥ-pratipakṣa) by ‘savrāmandaṇa rāgadosatimiravyāghātakartṛ).

Of these three, the subject concerned at present is the last one. Its detailed explanation given in the commentary (RGV., p. 13) will be summarised thematically in the following table.

\[\text{(vīpakṣata)}\]

\[\text{(K. = terms in I, 9)}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{K. dharmadīvākara} &= \text{savrāmandaṇa rāgadosatimiravyāghātakartṛ} \\
\text{(Tib.} \text{dmigs-pa kun-la chags-pa da} & \text{ñ sd} \text{ān da} \text{ñ rab-rib rnam-par hjoms mdsad...)} \\
\text{Ch. "j} & \text{µ (or} \text{R) µá –LŠÏ•náҒs ˆêØ"Ï"™) (4)} \\
\text{(A) K. timira} & = \text{tamas=svrākāratattvadarśanavibandha} \\
\text{(K.} & \text{savrāmandaṇa rāgadosatimirava)} \\
\text{=abhūtavastunimittārambaṇamanasikāra-pūrvikā} & \text{(I) rāgadesamohōt-pattih, (which, in its turn, causes karman and janman to rise successively.) (II)} \\
\text{(I) abhūtavastunimittārambaṇamanasikāra} & (=ayonīsomanasikāra) \\
\text{(K.} & \text{ārampaṇa)} \\
\end{align*}\]

(4) Tibetan tr. of the RGV., Tohoku No. 4025, Sde-dge Ed., 79b7; Chinese tr., Taisho No. 1611, vol. 31, 823c. Equivalent passage to the following table is found in T. 81a4–81b6, and C. 824b, resp.

(5) ‘timara’ in the Kārikā stands for a) ajñāna or avidyā as the counterpart of jñāna, and b) moha as one of the three kinds of kleśa. C. translates them by ‘堕障 or 蠕障’ and by ‘癡’ respectively, although T., which is of quite a literal character, translates ‘timira’ by ‘gti-mug’ as representing moha. Note that the sun is called ‘timira-cchid, -nāśana, -nud, -ripu, -ari’, etc. in the sense of ‘darkness-breaker’ and the like.

(6) ‘satyaadarśana’ in the text (p. 12, l. 19) is corrected in the light of T. de-kho-na mthoṅ-ba and ‘tattvaadarśana’ in p. 13, l. 17.
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ye bālāḥ (Ignorants, they are ignorant of ‘eka-dhātu’)

1. anusayavantaḥ
   (anusayatāḥ kleśa-paryutthānaḥ)

2. nimitta-grāhiṇaḥ
   abhūtaṁ (=atatsvabhāvaṁ) vastu śubha- (pratīgha-, avidyā-)
   ākāreṇa nimittaṁ bhavati rāga- (dveṣa-, moha-) utpattitāḥ.

3. ārambaṇa-caritaḥ (ārambaṇa-kurvaṁtaḥ)
   rāgadveśamoha-nimittam ayathābhūtam ārambaṇaṁ kurvanti.
   teṣām
   ayoniśomanasikāraḥ samudācarati (=cittam paryādātāti).

(II) sarvākārakleśakarmajanmanasamkleśasamudayaḥ. (K. rāgadoṣatimira).

(B) K. timira vyāghatakartṛ
   =sarvākāratattvadarśanavibandha-pratipakṣa
   = (ekadhātu-yathābhūtadarśana)
   sa (=dhātu) tathādraṣṭavyo yathāparigaveṣayan na tasya kiṁcīn
   nimittaṁ ārambaṇaṁ vā paśyati.
   =sarvadharma-samatā-abhisamābodha

   by samatā-jñāna of the two:
   1. asato (=abhūta, ayathābhūta) nimitta-ārambaṇasya adarśanaṁ
   2. sato yathābhūtasya paramārthasatyasya darśanam.
   (sa yadā na nimittam nārambaṇam vā paśyati tadā bhūtaṁ paśyati.)
   =avikalpa-jñāna (dharmākāyaprāptihetur darśanabhāvanāmārgaḥ)
   (dharma as mārgasatyā or virāgahetu) (7)

Thus we are told, by these passages, of the process of origination of ‘sam-
kleśa’ (duṣkha in general, or samsāra) and the method of its removal.

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(7) The Busshoron (佛性論 *Buddhagotraśāstra, BGS.*) (Taisho No. 1610) has a
similar passage to this RGV. passage in a condensed form under the head
of ‘virāgahetu’ (離欲因) in the chapter on ‘yoga’ (總攝) (Chap. V. of Sec-
tion IV), (Taisho vol. 31, 801b). It says: ‘真見暗障’(tattvadarśanavibandha)
is consisting of ‘1. 具足想, 2. 煩惱難, 3. 業難, and 4. 果報難’. Of these, 1. is
for A-I, and 2-4, for A-II in the table.
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has come out of this table is that ‘ārambāṇa’ in the Kārikā is interpreted as ‘abhūtavastunimitārambāṇamanasikāra’, i.e. ayonisomanasikāra, which, being a technical term in the RGV., is equivalent to ‘vikalpa’ in the orthodox Vijñānavāda. The Chinese equivalent to this term seems therefore to be ‘覺觀’ in the sense of ‘wrong discrimination’, i.e. vikalpa. While the Tibetan version has the usual word ‘dmigs-pa’ for it.

How then is ‘ārambāṇa’ able to represent the whole process contained in a compound ‘abhūtavastunimitārambāṇamanasikāra’? In the light of the commentary, this compound is to be resolved in the way that the manasikāra whose ārambāṇa is the nimitta of the abhūta-vastu, or the manasikāra which takes abhūta-vastu-nimitta as its ārambāṇa’. For ‘ārambāṇa’ here, the Tibetan version has ‘yul’ (=viśaya). It may be correct though its relation to other component words in the compound is not clear. On the contrary, the Chinese version translates the whole compound into ‘取不實事相 虚妄分別念’ and ‘ārambāṇa’ seems to be replaced by a verb ‘取’ (to take). The same translation is used for ‘nimittam bhavati’. ‘......nimittam......ārambāṇam kurvatām’ (不實事相), and also for ‘na nimittam (na) ārambāṇam vā paśyati’ (不取相). In these cases the Tibetan version uses ‘dmigs-pa’ for ārambāṇa.

Thus the Chinese version always implies a subjective or functional sense in ‘ārambāṇa’, while the Tibetan, an objective sense. From the context in Skt., however, both ways are not incorrect, one being an implied meaning, the other, a literal translation. It relates fundamentally to the character of ārambāṇa. The term ārambāṇa is a name for all the dharmas when viewed

(8) vikalpa ucyate karmakleśasamudayahetur ayonīsomanasikāraḥ, RGV., p. 12, l. 3.
(9) ‘覺觀’ is usually used for ‘vitarka-vicāra’. There are observed in the Chinese tr. of the RGV. other two cases where ‘観’ seems to be used for ‘ārambāṇa’. Namely, 1) ‘心所念観’ for ‘cittārambāṇa’ (RGV., p. 25, l. 2); and 2) ‘無観’ (without perception?) for ‘nirālamba’ (supportless) (RGV., p. 110, l. 14).
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as the objects of विज्ञान. It is called अराम्भान because विज्ञान works depending upon it (अ/राम्भ=अ/लंब, to hang down, to depend upon). Chinese '所縁' is its literal translation. At the same time, अराम्भान is not a purely objective thing itself (वास्तु), but is that which is perceived in the mind, i.e. idea, thought or concept. Tibetan 'dmigs-pa' makes this sense. And thus 'अराम्भानम्ख्र or वार' can be translated into 'to perceive, cognise, imagine, graspe, take in mind, etc.' Chinese '觀' (to perceive) and '取' (to take, graspe) can also be construed in this way. As this function is basic for that of manasikāra, which is in its turn the cause of samklesa, the Kārikā makes अराम्भान represent the whole process of origination of manasikāra. It is not the difference of terminology or word meaning but that of contextual interpretation that caused difference between Chinese and Tibetan version.

There is another question about अराम्भान. It is namely what is the difference between निमित्त and अराम्भान or between निमित्तम्यङ्र and अराम्भानम्ख्र or वार as observed in such sentence as 'तस्याकिंचिन निमित्तम्यङ्र अराम्भानम्यङ्र वा पाश्यति' (he perceives neither its nimitta nor अराम्भान). Once these two terms are combined with singular case-ending and with an adjective 'asat' (asasat ca निमित्ताराम्भानसया). As for the function 'निमित्तम्यङ्र ग्राह (bālas are nimittagrāhin), the commentary says: abhūtam वास्तु शुभाकरेणा निमित्तम्य भवति रागोपत्तिताह. It means: (to the

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(12) 'dmigs-pa' originally means 'to fancy, imagine, conceive', etc. As noun it has two opposite meanings, 1) 'function to conceive' as used for Skt. 'upalabdhi', or 'upalambha', and 2) 'that which is conceived' as used for 'ārambana (ālambana). The former is probably a derivation of the present tense in active voice, while the latter, of the past tense in passive voice (like p.p.p. in Skt.)

(13) Cf. note 9. '心所念観' (that which is perceived by the mind) shows a more accurate use. But 'sarvacitattraārambānavigata' (used as an epithet to tathāgata) may also mean 'avikalpa'. In the same way 'nirālamba', being an adjective to ākāśa, can be translated into 'inconceivable', 'invisible'.

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ignorants) unreal thing 'is characterised' by the mental mode (akāra) of being pleasant due to the rise of Passion. Thus this function is to be called 'characterisation of a thing by this and that mental mode' and 'nimitta' has a similar character to 'ārambana' being a kind of reflection in the mind, though it belongs to a thing as its feature or mark. As a matter of process, this 'characterisation' proceeds to 'cognition' (ārambanaṁ/kr), and hence, without the former, there is no function of the latter. This may be the reason why both terms are mentioned sometimes side by side, sometimes in a compound. In this point it is also possible to understand Chinese '取相' as the translation of 'nimittam/graḥ' in which is implied the next function 'ārambanaṁ/kr'.

To clarify further these points discussed above, I will consult with a passage from the Prajñāpāramitāsūtra, which is regarded by the RGV. commentator as the authority for this passage on 'the Dharma as the Truth of Path' (sa khālv eṣa dharmakāyaprātiḥetur avikalpajñānadarśanabhāvanamārgo vistārena yathāsūtram Prajñāpāramitānusārenānugantavyah, p. 13, l. 19–20). The RGV. text has no quotation from the said scripture, nor refers to the portion or chapter used as the authority. But, from the context, the portion concerned is in the chapter on gratification and maturing (anumodana-parināmanā-parivarta), taking the Aṣṭasāhasrikā (ASP) for example, the Chapter VI. This chapter teaches the realisation of 'inconceivability (anupallamba)' of everything as the inevitable condition for maturing towards the

(14) The BGS (see note 7) defines '具足想' (complexed thought, which corresponds to 'abhātavastunimittārambana' in the RGV.) as '以隨眠煩惱為因，五塵欲為緣，不正思惟爲俱起因，此三具足故名具足想' (It makes anuṣaya-kleśa its cause, affection to pancārthah (?) its condition, and ayoniśomanasikāra its samudācāra-hetu. As it is accompanied by these three, it is called a complexed thought). Here the affection to objects probably signifies either nimittam/graḥ or ārambanaṁ/kr. While, instead of 'na tasya kiṃcit, etc.', the BGS says 'neither '想 (manasikāra) nor '境 (viṣaya)', and comments that '境' means parikalpita, and '想', paratantra (i.e. dlayavijñāna, vi-kalpa). Here too, either or both of nimitta and ārambana are implied by '境'.
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Perfect Enlightenment (anuttarāyāṃ samyaksamābodhau pariṇāmanā), and is, according to the Abhisamayālaṅkāra (AA) and the Āloka (AAA), said to belong to the second Abhisamaya, ‘mārgajñata (the Wisdom of Path). It may well correspond to the RGV. passage entitled ‘avikalpa-jñāna-darśana-bhāvanāmārga’.

The following is an extract of the passages where the terms ‘vastu’, ‘ākāra’, ‘nimitta’, ‘ārambāna’, etc. are used.

1. tatra bodhisattvayānikah pudgalo yair vastubhir anumodeta (or pariṇāmayet) yair ārambānair yair ākārais tac cittam utpādayet, api nu tāni vastunī tāni va ārambānāni te va ākārās tathāpalabhyeran yathā nimitta-karoti. (ASP., p. 332)

Here ārambāna is mentioned along with ‘vastu’ and ‘ākāra’ being the concept of object depending on which the citta starts to work, and this mental action is called ‘nimittvkr’. To this question, Bodhisattva Maitreya gives answer to the questioner Subhūti with negation saying that these vastus, ārambānas and ākāras are not conceived (na upalabhyante) as are ‘characterised’ (nimittyvkr), that is, not existant in reality. Haribhadra in the AAA, commenting on this portion, says that alambanani (for ASP. ārambānani) means ‘śilādīskandhah sarvadharmāh’ (all the dharmas grouped into śīla and others), ‘ākārāh’ means ‘tad- (=alambanānām) grahanaparicchedāh’ (kinds of their cognition), and ‘citta’ means ‘vikalpa’, the cognizer.

2. yadi so ‘saṃvidyāyānāṃ vastu asaṃvidyāyānāṃ ārambāṇam ārambāṇ-kuryān nimitt-kuryāt, tat katham asya saṃjñāviparyāyasā citta-viparyāyāso drṣṭiviparyāyo na bhavet. (p. 333)

Here is taught that to make ārambāna or nimitta on the unreal thing or object is the cause for the three kinds of erroneous conception (viparyāsa), viz. that on account of saṃjñā, of citta, and of drṣṭi. The AAA comments

(15) The text used here is the Abhisamayālaṅkāraloka, ed. by U. Wogihara (Tokyo, 1936), in which are combined the ASP and the AA together. Cf. Tib. (ASP), Lhasa Ed., Case 29 (Brgyad-ston) 125a 7f; Chi. Taisho vol. 7, 791b f(4th pariṣat), 880c f(5th pariṣat) (大般若); vol. 8, 547c f(小般若), etc.

(16) viz. śīla, samādhi, and prajñā. (C. 三學)
that ‘alambani/kr’ means ‘to make the individual characteristic its sense-object (svalaksanavisayikaraṇa)’, while ‘nimitti/kr’ means ‘to distinguish the general feature (sāmānyarūparapiṇiccheda)’. And further, giving definition to the three kinds of viparyāsa, says: ‘sāmjña’ (notion, idea) is ‘of the nature of abstracting nimitta (nimitta-udgrahana-ātmikā), ‘citta’ (mind) is ‘vijñāna’ which catches alambana ‘(alambanagrahaka-vijñāna), and ‘dṛṣṭi’ (view) is ‘of the nature of distinguishing ākāra’ (ākārapariṇicchedarūpa), otherwise called ‘prajñā’ which has the nature of judging (saṃsāra-ātmikā).

These definitions are more or less common to the Abhidharma treatises and are accepted traditionally. They are acceptable to the RGV passages, too. Thus we come to conclusion that ‘nimittam/graḥ’, being identical with ‘nimittiv/kr’, is the function of ‘sāmjña’, general characterisation, on the basis of which there arises the function of vijñāna or vikalpa (=manasikāra) characterised as ‘ārambanām/kr’ (discriminative cognition), which again gives rise to the succession of saṃklesa being bondage (vibandha) to the true perception (tattvadarśana); and that, being the object of vikalpa, ‘ārambana’ used in the RGV, has no special meaning other than the usual form ‘alambana’, nor ārambana as translated into Chinese ‘所縛’.

Before closing the article, it may be my duty to give a translation of the Kārikā passage in question. It is as follows:

“I bow before the sun of Doctrine
Which, with rays of light of the immaculate Wisdom,
Destroys all kinds of darkness
(In the forms of) passion, hatred (and ignorance)
With respect to the basis of cognition.”

(17) e. g. for ‘sāmjña’, see Stcherbatsky, op. cit., p. 15; for ‘prajñā’ ibid. p. 84.

(18) Its modes (ākāra) are told as three, viz. subha, pratigha, and avidya. ‘ākāra’ here may be defined as ‘nimittagrahāṇaprakaraṇa’ being prakaraṇa of sāmjña. (In the Vijnānavāda, ākāra is always ‘alambanagrahāṇaprakaraṇa’)

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