Dharmanairātmya in the Vyākhyāyukti

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Introduction : The main topic of the *Vyākhyāyukti* (VyY) Chapter 4 is to prove the Mahāyāna to be the teaching of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*). In its last section, the author Vasubandhu discusses how to interpret the well-known Mahāyāna doctrine of *sarvadharmaniḥsvabhāvatā* or “the absence of own-natures of all *dharma*s ‘elements’”, which was at that time one of the biggest issues disputed between Vasubandhu and the Śrāvakas including some of the Mahāyānists. Indeed, according to Vasubandhu, this doctrine has a specific intention which some of the Mahāyānists do not understand. However, Vasubandhu does not totally deny the doctrine as it is but rather he interprets it as meaning that all *dharma*s lack their conceptualized natures. Furthermore, Vasubandhu explains that this doctrine constitutes the definition of the Mahāyāna teaching of *dharmanairātmya* “*selflessness of dharmas*”. Whether or not one can understand this meaning of *dharmanairātmya* is, according to him, a criterion on which he/she is called a bodhisat tva or a Śrāvaka.

1. Vasubandhu's twofold understanding of *sarvadharmaniḥsvabhāvatā* :

It is true that Vasubandhu interprets *sarvadharmaniḥsvabhāvatā* as the doctrine of indirect meaning (*neyārtha*) and, on the other hand, the teachings provided in the *Samādhinirmocana-sūtra* and *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* as of direct meaning (*nītārtha*). However, he does not gloss the teachings cited from these *sūtras* and instead gives his own interpretation of the phrase “*sarvadharmaniḥsvabhāvatā*” as follows :

“[Śrāvaka (Śr)] : Why were such words taught as, you need to say, having no literal meaning (**yathārutārtha*) ? [Vasubandhu (V)] : First, why then was it taught in the verse [of the Śrāvakayāna tradition] that ‘After killing father and mother,...’ ? [Śr] It should certainly be explained in order to teach that the natures of desire (**trṣṇā*) etc. is similar to [those of] mother etc. [V] (1) These [teachings] such as “all *dharma*s lack their own-natures, do not arise, nor perish” should also be

explained. Why? [That is] for the purpose of removing the adherence by the ignorant [to their thought] that [*dharma*s] of conceptualized nature exist. In order to remove the adherence by those having defective eyes by nature [to the thought] that [*dharma*s] of conceptualized nature exist, [it is explained that] they do not exist. (2) Likewise, it should certainly be explained that the [above teaching “all *dharma*s lack their own-natures, do not arise, nor perish”] has no literal meaning. Why? [That is] for the purpose of removing the adherence by those who do not understand condensed statements [to their thought] that there exists no *dharma* of inexpressive nature. Thus, both the extreme of superimposition (**samāropa*) by some people and the extreme of denial (**apavāda*) by others are abandoned.¹⁾

First, the Śrāvakas ask the reason why those words, which require the Mahāyānists to explain that they have no literal meaning, should be taught. Vasubandhu then asks in return the reason why such words as “after killing father and mother,..... he/she becomes sinless” should be taught, which, having no literal meaning, require the Śrāvakas to interpret as meaning that after vanishing karmic existence (**karmabhava*) and desire (**trṣṇā*),..... he/she becomes sinless. To this question the Śrāvakas reply that they should certainly be taught in order to make it clear that the natures of mother and father are similar to those of desire and karmic existence respectively.²⁾

Likewise, according to Vasubandhu, the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiḥsvabhāvatā* indeed has an indirect meaning that there exists the *dharma* of inexpressible nature. However, Vasubandhu also stresses the necessity of teaching the doctrine of indirect meaning for the purpose of removing the adherence by the ignorant to their thought that *dharma*s of conceptualized nature exist. The above teaching, according to his elucidation, means that all *dharma*s of conceptualized nature lack their own-natures, i. e. do not exist. This argument is succeeded by section 2.

On the other hand, the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiḥsvabhāvatā* has also an indirect and important meaning as mentioned above. In this respect, the teaching should be also explained as having no literal meaning. It is so explained in order to remove the adherence by those who do not understand condensed statements (*mgo smos pa mi shes pa, *anudghaṭita-jñā/ *udghaṭita-ajñā*)²⁾ to their thought that there exists no *dharma* of inexpressive nature. This argument is succeeded by section 3.

2. Dharmanairātmya in the Vyākhyāyukti : After the above discussion one scripture is cited and Vasubandhu then moves on to the following discussion in which the term “*dharmanairātmya*” appears for the first time in this treatise. The discussion obviously succeeds to the above-cited first interpretation of the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā*, which is confirmed by Guṇamati’s *ṭikā* (VyYṬ).³⁾ (In the following citation the words in square brackets are given from VyYṬ)

“[Śr] If [, for the purpose of removing the adherence by the ignorant (to their thought) that the *dharma*s of conceptualized nature exist, (the teaching) that “all *dharma*s lack their own-natures, do not arise, nor perish”] should certainly be taught, why in the Śrāvakayāna was the [same teaching] not taught to the Śrāvakas? [V] To them it should not be taught. [Śr] Why? [V] They should not be lead to the belief in the *dharmanairātmya* because they should avert themselves (from the transmigration).⁴⁾”

Dharmanairātmya in VyY means the non-existence of *dharma*s of conceptualized nature which, according to Vasubandhu, constitutes the purpose of teaching *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā*. Vasubandhu distinguishes the Mahāyānist from the Śrāvakas by the fact that the latter does not transmit the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā* in their scriptures.

3. Those Mahāyānists who do not understand condensed statements :

After some disputes between Vasubandhu and the Śrāvakas, the following argument is placed. The “some Mahāyānists” in this quotation is considered to correspond to the above-mentioned “those who do not understand condensed statements” found in the second interpretation of the *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā*.

“Furthermore, there occurs the above-mentioned dispute with some Mahāyānists who explains that [the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā*] has literal meaning, saying, “the Blessed One taught that all [*dharma*s] do not exist as [having] their own-characters (**svalakṣaṇa*), but on the conventional level *dharma*s exist.”⁵⁾

Vasubandhu here criticizes some Mahāyānists who, taking the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā* as it is, deny the existence of the *dharma* of inexpressible character.

4. Conclusion : In VyY, Vasubandhu established his own standpoint as a Mahāyāna-Yogācāra differentiated from both the Śrāvakas and some Mahāyānists by

the twofold interpretation of the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā*.

First, he recognizes the direct purpose of the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā* by interpreting it as meaning that all *dharma*s of conceptualized nature do not have their own-natures, i. e. do not exist. This interpretation also constitutes the meaning of *dharmanairātmya*. Secondly, according to him, whether one understands this meaning of *dharmanairātmya* or not is a criterion on which the Mahāyānists are distinguished from the Śrāvakas. Thirdly, on the other hand, he marked his standpoint off from that of some Mahāyānists who, taking the teaching of *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā* as it is, deny the existence of the *dharma* of inexpressible nature.

《Texts and Abbreviations》 VyY: *Vyākhyāyukti*. P: No. 5562, D: No. 4061. VyYT: *Vyākhyāyukti-ṭikā*. P: No. 5570, D: No. 4069.

1) VyY, P. Si 125a3-8. D. Zi 107a5-107b2: ci'i phyir gang dag sgra ji bzhin gyi (P: gyis) don ma yin no zhes de skad bstan dgos (P: om dgos) pa'i tshig de dag bstan zhe na/ re zhig tshigs su bcad pa las/ pha dang ma ni bsad byas shing zhes bya ba de lta bu la sogs pa bstan pa ji lta bu yin/ de ni gdon mi za bar bshad par bya ste/ sred (D: srid) pa la sogs pa ni ma la sogs pa dang 'dra ba'i chos nyid yin par bstan pa'i phyir ro zhe na/ chos thams cad ni ngo bo nyid med pa/ ma skyes pa ma 'gags (P: 'gag) pa zhes bya ba de lta bu la sogs pa 'di yang bshad par bya'o// ci'i phyir zhe na/ byis pas kun tu (D: du) brtags pa'i ngo bo nyid yod pa nyid du 'dzin pa bsal ba'i phyir ro// rang bzhin gyis mig skyon can du gyur pa dag la kun tu (D: du) brtags pa'i rang bzhin (D107b) de yod pa nyid du 'dzin pa bsal ba'i phyir de med pa nyid yin pa dang 'dra bar de sgra ji bzhin gyi (P: gyis) don ma yin no zhes 'di skad kyang gdon mi za bar bshad par bya'o// (P: ins de) ci'i phyir zhe na/ mgo smos pa mi shes pa rnams brjod du med pa'i ngo bo'i chos med par 'dzin pa bsal ba'i phyir ro// de ltar na kha cig gi (PD: ni) sgro 'dogs pa'i mtha' dang/ kha cig gi (PD: ni) skur ba 'debs pa'i mtha' spangs pa yin no// 2) VyY, P. Si 114a7 D. 97b5: tshigs su bcad pa las 'byung ba yang/ sred pa ni ma/ las kyi srid pa ni pha zhes byas (P: bya ba) nas bshad de/ skyed pa po yin pa'i phyir ro// 3) VyYT, P. Si 154b4-7. D. Zi 271a6-271b1. 4) VyY, P. Si 125b3-4. D. Zi 107b4-5: gal te de skad don mi za bar bstan par bya ba yin na/ ci'i phyir nyan thos rnams la yang nyan thos kyi theg par de skad ma bstan zhe na/ de dag la ni de skad bstan par mi bya'o// de (D: om de) ci'i phyir zhe na/ de dag ni chos la bdag med pa nyid la mos (P: mo) pa la gzud par mi bya ste/ skyo bar bya ba yin pa'i phyir ro// 5) VyY, P. Si 128a8-128b1. D. Zi 110a-4.5.

《Key Words》 Vasubandhu, *Vyākhyāyukti*, *dharmanairātmya*, *sarvadharmāṇiṣvabhāvatā*
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