

Chapter 5

Conclusion

We are now at the end of our journey and it will not be without profit if we cast a glance over the ground that we have covered in the preceding pages. The examination of the problem that we undertook to discuss in these pages, has given us a valuable solution of the problem of universal and also as to why the problem was found insoluble by many competent thinkers who had to improvise novel methods to achieve what turned out to be impossible. We may now summaries the results of our inquiry. We would only state the general conclusion without repeating the arguments. The question with which we started was "*whether one can ponder over the existence of universal in either realist sense or nominalist sense or both?*" or, in other words "*whether the generality of our experience, thought, and language had any basis in external reality?*" or "*whether our classifications and the usage of general words had any objective foundation or not?*" We examined in this connection three theories advanced by three different systems of thought and found the first two of them (Extreme realism of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsā) to be entirely

unsatisfactory, and the third Buddhist nominalism to be quite satisfactory.

In the extreme realism of both the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the Mīmāṃsā, there is neither any evidence for the existence of universal essences apart from the particular, nor any logical necessity of postulating them in order to explain our classification of things. The fault of the realists lies in their believing these subjective fictions like universals to be ontological realities existing in perfect independence of thinking mind. And the greatest difficulty is that of explaining the relation of universal to particulars. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and the Mīmāṃsā tried to answer them, but succeeded only in making certain dogmatic assertions without providing a satisfactory explanation of the difficulties. We therefore rejected extreme realism as an unsatisfactory and untenable theory of universals.

Unlike, extreme realism, we found Buddhist nominalism to be quite satisfactory. This theory recognizes no objective bases for general conceptions and designations. All class-concepts, on this theory, are thought constructions having their sources in the innate conceptualizing tendency of the mind. This theory is rooted in a particular ontology, the ontology of unique momentary particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*). The difficulties of the realist position, the Buddhist maintains can be avoided by regarding the universal as a thought construction (*apoha*) i.e., by reducing universal to semantic functionality by substituting in its place the double negation theory

"*Apohavāda*". Thus, the question of the relation of this thought-construction (*apoha*) to the particulars would not arise at all, as it is a nonentity. Moreover, the Buddhist insists that the relation between the external reality and thought-image is a case of the non-comprehension of difference (*bhedāgraha*). Externality of the thought image consists in the non-comprehension of the difference of the external (from the internal) and not in the comprehension of the identity of the external (with the internal), because identity of thought-image (which appears as internal) is not possible with the unique particular. If identity between the two be accepted, it will mean comprehension of the unique particular in a perceptual judgment which is impossible, hence the Buddhist insists on holding it to be a case of *bhedāgraha* and not a case of *abhedāgraha*.

Further, according to Buddhist, the exact connotation of a word is not grounded in an objective reality. A word only generates a conceptual image in the mind of the subject and this conceptual image is hypostatized as an external fact. Now the question arises – “*If the meaning be only a subjective concept, then how could it be communicable to one another?*” The concept of one is not the concept of another and so cannot be known by any two persons, simply because concepts and ideas are not amenable to perception by a different subject. How could, then, verbal convention be apprehended with regard to these concepts, simply because no two persons can have the same concept and even if it be possible, there is

no means of knowing that the concepts of one is possessed by another?

Santaraksita replies that the difficulty would have been actually insurmountable if the conceptual image was confined within its limits and had not extra-subjective reference. Though in reality the speaker and the hearer are conversant with what is their private possession, both of them think that they understand the objective reality, and the cause of illusion being similar in both, there is no difficulty in inter communication, just as two persons suffering from ophthalmic see two moons and when one communicates his experience to the other, his word is believed to refer to an actual fact. Language is therefore a convenient instrument for communication of concepts, which however are fictitious representatives of reality, because language always requires conceptual mediation and hence can never be free from distortion.

In this way, it may be concluded that the theories of the Buddhist and of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school lie mainly in their emphases on one aspect or the other. Whether the universal is considered to be positive and real according to the realist, or negative and unreal according to the Buddhist, its function is admitted to be two-fold by both of them, i.e., (i) inclusion of the common objects of a class (*anuvṛtti-pratiti*), and (ii) exclusion of the objects belonging to all other classes (*vyāvṛtti-pratiti*). A universal will be meaningless unless it performs both the functions of inclusion and exclusion. Without the idea of exclusion, inclusion

itself is inconceivable. A cow cannot be conceived even positively without the exclusion of horses and others. Thus, the realist while emphasizing the positive aspect has got to admit that the universal has the negative function of exclusion as well. Similarly the Buddhist, although holding *apoha* (counterpart of the universal) to be of a negative nature cannot deny its positive aspect.

Thus, it is clear that the problem of universals is one of the central avenues of philosophical inquiry about the world, the way we know it, the norms to which we should conform and more. And it cannot be completed without a reference to Buddhist *apoha* doctrine, as it has opened our eyes to the fact that objective universal is not possible.