

# THE ANALOGY OF JIVAN MUKTA IN VEDANTA WITH THE ARAHANT IN PALI BUDDHISM

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O great hero, O great sage,  
glorious spring of magical powers!  
You have overcome the fear of all hostility.  
I pay homage to your feet, O clairvoyant wise!

.....  
Yet, how is it, O Lord, that your disciple (Godhiko),  
devoted to your teaching, died without  
having attained the ultimate aim of his efforts?

(Godhika Sutta, S IV 23)

In the Upanisads referred to by Śaṅkara in his commentary on Bādarāyaṇa's Brahma Sūtrāṇi there are some references to the early Vedāntic teaching on the *jīvan-mukta*, or a person "liberated while in life". Thus the long introductory paragraph to the third chapter of Pañcāla Upaniṣad summarizes the karmic development and the ultimate requisites for the attainment of this state. In Śaṅkara's *advaita-vedānta* this doctrine is generally admitted and fully developed. Since this doctrine, as elucidated by Śaṅkara, corresponds in several essential characteristics to the attainment of enlightenment in life by the *arahant* as described in the Pali *suttas*, the subject is worth a comparative study of the two terms! '*jīvan-mukta* and *arahant*'. For our purpose, to disentangle some possible and actual misunderstandings of this analogy, a few basic statements by Śaṅkara may suffice to make explicit the historical background of some peculiar mistakes recurrent on the side of authors under prevalently Vedāntist influence approaching this analogy still today in the atmosphere of interreligious dialogues:

In this commentary on Brahma Sūtra 1 3 19, Śaṅkara affirms that in the attainment of mokṣa only individual consciousness is removed (*viśeṣa-vijñāna-vināśaḥ*), but not the consciousness in its totality.

According to the same commentary, 1 4 22, this means only the dissolution of name-and-form which abides in the limiting adjuncts (*upādhi*) and not the dissolution of *ātmā*" (*upādhi-pralayaṃ evāyaṃ nātmā-pralayaṃ* II 1 14).

B S III 3 32 states that persons who have attained release but still "have a certain duty (*adhikāraḥ*) to perform, (continue to live) as long as their duty lasts". In his commentary Śaṅkara mentions examples from the *purāṇas* "that even from amongst these who have realized *brahma*, some acquire other bodies".

Śaṅkara's long comment on S B III 2 21 contains perhaps his most explicit explanation of the doctrine of "final release by stages" (*krama-muktiḥ*):

"It is also understood according to the scriptural instruction that these deep meditations on Brahma as having such forms, have fruit, such as that sometimes it is the destruction of sin, sometimes it is the attainment of power and sometimes *final release by stages (krama muktiḥ)*..."<sup>1</sup>

In Rāmānuja's critique of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vedānta* absolute monism from the standpoint of his theistically 'qualified' (*viśiṣṭādvaita*) interpretation of Vedānta, Śaṅkara's doctrine of *jīvan-mukta* and his *krama-mukti* is rejected in statements as the following:

"The cessation of worldly existence itself is, indeed, salvation... Hence *salvation is not possible while one lives*..."<sup>2</sup>

(Rāmānuja Śrībhāṣyam I 1 3)

When the highest principle of Being, *brahma*, understood here as the God-head, is quoted in the Upaniṣads "as associated with adjunctless (*nirupādhi*) existence, by that are excluded (such qualities as) the non-sentient, the sphere of modifications and the corresponding sentient constituents dependent on them" (ibid I 1 2), and not the *nirguṇa-brahma* as understood by Śaṅkara. According to Rāmānuja,

"since *brahma* as the knower has himself the nature of knowledge (*jñāna-svarūpatvāt*), scriptural passages which declare that knowledge is the nature of *brahma* do not declare that (*brahma*) in its Being is distinctionless and mere consciousness" (Ibid, Mahā-siddhanta 49)—but on the contrary,

"the words *sat*, *brahma* and *ātmā* denote the *paramātmā* having a body". (Ibid 78)

"Otherwise, if this treatise (Badarāyana's *Brahma Sūtrāṇi*) is admitted to be intent upon propounding distinctionless entity (*nirviśesa-vastuḥ*), all these queries would not harmonise...and *brahma* would be the abode of everything inauspicious...and thus would result the state of everything being nothingness (*śarva-sūnyatvam-eva*)"

(Ibid 54 and 63)

—the typical pre-Śaṅkaran reproach to the vedāntic idealist as a "disguised Buddhist" *śūnyavādin*.

An essay to extend the comparison of these antagonistic theses of the scholastic Vedānta theology with the Buddhist teaching on *sa upādi-sesa* and *an-upādi-sesa (ceto—)* *vimutti* should begin with an adequate and

1. For the translation of texts I have consulted V. M. Apte, *Brahma -Sūtra-Shāṅkara-Bhāṣya*, ed. Popular Book Depot, Bombay 1960, and for the context, S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* II, Ch. VIII, section XLIII (*Moksa*).

2. Cf. *Śrībhāṣya of Rāmānuja—Rāmānujavācitarāṇi Śrībhāṣyam*, edited by R. D. Karmarkar Part I, Catuhsūtrī, Poona 1959.



explicit analysis of the range of at least two sets of key terms by first hand documentation:

- (a) *mukti* in Sanskrit terminology of the Vedānta, *vimutti* and *nibbāṇa* in Pali *suttas*;
- (b) *upadhi* in Sanskrit contexts and *upādi* in Pāli.

Yet the intention of the present note has not been inspired by such a broad ambition. It has been written in response to a request of submitting a merely negative criticism in reference to a typically one-sided and mistaken interpretation due to superficiality in quoting and analogizing basic texts and terms. In the sequel I shall first try to point out the typical background of such mistakes, and then consider the specific case requiring from the opposite side a more careful critical analysis of its historical model.

## II

At Śaṅkara's time the antagonism of Vedāntist scholars to antithetic theses of the Buddhists had already crystallized in its dialectically sharp and static formulation. In the interval between the full scholastic development and differentiation of dogmatic views (*darśana*) of Śaṅkara's and Rāmānuja's systems, only the emphasis of their attacks against the *nāstikas* or negators of their orthodoxies was gradually intensified, and the Buddhists with their *nairātmya* (*anattā*) *vāda*, as a corollary deduction from *sūnyatavāda*, were obviously and generally considered as the extreme *nāstikas*. This remained the classical deadlock in the relations of schools until the end of the 19th century.

Śaṅkara in his commentary of the 4th and 5th *adhikaraṇa* of the II. *adhyāya*, *pāda* 2, *sūtras* 18-32, of Bādarāyana, wrote an extensive critique of the main trends of the already classical Buddhist schools; in short:

"This doctrine (of the Buddhists) consists of a variety of forms, both because it propounds different views, and because of the different mental calibre of the disciples. There are in this three kinds (of disciples) holding three different views. Some are those who hold that all things really exist (Sarvāstivādin realists), some are those who hold that thought-forms or ideas (*vijñāna*) alone exist as real (Vijñāna-vādin idealists), and others again are those who hold that nothing really exists [Śūnyavādins].

"How very much less possible (than the Vaiśeṣika atomism) must it be when (the Buddhists hold in their *kṣaṇa-bhanga-vāda* or theory of momentariness) that all that is cognized by intelligence ...is something which is artificial (*saṃskṛita*) ...while atoms (*aṇu*) have only a momentary existence, and when they are devoid of any such relation in which one is the abode and the other the abider and when there are no experiencing selfs.

"The theory of the doctrine of the reality of external entities was propounded (by the Buddha) because he noticed the predilection of some of his disciples for believing in the reality of external entities, but was never his own view."



The commentary on II 2 22 ff. explains the teaching of (*prati-saṃkhyā*- and *a-prati-saṃkhyā*-) *nirodha* as *vināśa*, i.e. "international destruction of entities". Although the *vaiśāṅkavāda* (corresponding to the Pali *uccheda-vāda*, *materialism*), is clearly distinguished from the *idealism* of *sūnyavāda*, it would go beyond the scope of the present survey of misunderstandings between Vedānta and Buddhism to inquire how far Śaṃkara actually tends to avoid the basic distinction of the correct meaning of *sūnyavāda* from the heretic distortion of *vināśa* (or *ucchedavāda*, which certainly cannot be dubbed 'nihilism' or even 'annihilationism', since neither in Buddhist nor in any other classical system of Indian philosophy can there be found any such entity which could be either 'created' or 'annihilated' in the absurd meaning of the Biblical religions<sup>3</sup>).

It appears from the context of the quoted passages that Śaṃkara also refers to Buddhism rather as *vināśavāda* than as *sūnyavāda*. He might have considered it to be preferable for his argument against the Buddhists to reduce implicitly both negative attitudes, the authentic *sūnyavāda idealism* and the heretical *vināśavāda materialism*, to two possible alternatives in relation to the common denominator of *nirodha* (in the 3rd and 4th Noble Truths of the Buddha) as quoted above. He may have considered his unfortunately correct psychological observation about the *horror vacui* among Buddha's disciples who, unlike their teacher, had a too strong existential "predilection for believing in the reality of external entities".

In his commentary on B S IV 4 2, Śaṃkara, referring to the "final release", quotes the same psychological attitude of the deep existential dread in front of the same *dilemma of the unripe mind* lacking of discrimination between *vināśa* and *sūnyatā* confronted with the existential experience of a free choice as a challenge to *mokṣa*. Śaṃkara's quotation from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (VIII, 9-11) sounds almost the same as the description of the existential dread by the Buddha (Cf. M 22).

"He happens to become blind, he weeps as it were, and is, as it were, destroyed (*nasyati*)."

3. Schopenhauer, in the second edition of his Ph.D. thesis "On the Fourfold Root of the Principal of Sufficient Reason" (1847) quotes the Mahāvamsa, translated by E. Upham in 1833 "from the Sinhalese...", which contains the official interrogatories, translated from Dutch reports, which the Dutch governor of Ceylon conducted with the high priests of the five principal pagodas...about the year 1766. The contrast between the interlocutors who cannot really reach an agreement is highly entertaining...But the Dutch governor cannot possibly see that these priests are not theists. Therefore he always asks afresh about the supreme being, and then who created the world, and other such questions...But they are of the opinion that the world is not made by anyone; that it is self-created, and that nature spreads it out and draws it in again...And so these discourses continue for a hundred pages" All this is due to the inability of the biblically-minded and trained Europeans to understand that only for Buddhists, but for all Indian systems of thought, and even of religious beliefs, and "even for the other two religious existing with Buddhism in China, those of Lao-tse and Confucius, which are just as atheistic", "the world is not made by anyone"—and therefore can also not be "annihilated" by anyone, but only destroyed and reshaped again. Consequently, neither *uccheda* nor *vināśa* can be associated or connotated in Indian contexts as 'annihilation'. (For the above quotation from Schopenhauer, cf. my *Schopenhauer and Buddhism*, BPS, Kandy 1970, p. 32 f.)



Rāmānuja's criticism of Buddhism as *vināśavādo* could only dramatize, in an argument *ad hominem*, the same state of unripe mind at the first glance at the archetypal dilemma: "To be or not to be?"—He could not understand how Buddhism could become attractive to anybody.

"if he were to come to know 'I myself would be no more', by utilizing the means (of release). He would certainly move away even from the introductory talk about salvation."

(Mahā-siddhanta, 44)

It is not difficult to understand the concurrence of various intrinsic and historical circumstances which, in the period of transition from the 19th to the 20th century, awoke, also in India, the awareness of the universal mission of Indian spiritual culture and of its advantages in comparison with the narrowmindedness of obsolete Western dogmatism. the initiative for this approach and absorption of the Eastern heritage came from the West, albeit with conservative reluctances on both sides which have not been got rid of until today.

Considering the intrinsic relation of Vedānta and Buddhism, in the early missionary zeal awaking at that time in India, it was Swami Vivekananda who established a landmark of central importance also for my orientation in this "revolutionary change", as he called it, in East-West relations in the modern history of culture. In the assessment of the internal situation on the Indian side at the historical junction characterizing his own missionary appearance in the West, he described his stance in a talk on "Buddha's Message to the World", delivered in San Francisco in 1900:<sup>4</sup>

"The life of Buddha has an especial appeal. All my life I have been very fond of Buddha, but not of his doctrine...Buddhism apparently has passed away from India; but really it has not. There was an element of danger in the teaching of Buddha... In order to bring about the tremendous spiritual change he did, he had to give many negative teachings. But if a religion emphasizes the negative side too much, it is danger of eventual destruction... The negative elements of Buddhism—there is no God and no soul—died out..."

A broader philosophical framework for a spiritual universalism from the standpoint of the contribution of Indian heritage in it was worked out by S. Radhakrishnan in his *Indian Philosophy* and his subsequent lectures in English universities between the World Wars.

Although Indian thought has been obstinately accused by the West to lack a sense of historicity, yet its tradition to present the development of its classical systems of thought in a scholastic form of gradual integration goes back at least to Śaṅkara, to whom one of the earliest

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 3rd ed. 1959. Vol. VIII, p. 103.



historical surveys in this form is attributed (*Sarva-darśana-siddhānta-saṃgraha*). The same model has been applied by authors of all schools. It consists of an ideal pyramid on whose top is raised the pinnacle of the system followed by the author.

Incidentally, one of the latest manuals of this scholastic form, best known also in the West, Mādhava's *Sarva-darśana-saṃgraha* (written in the 14th century), raised Śaṅkara's *advaita-vedānta* to that position of "the crest-gem of all systems".

Radhakrishnan in his *Indian Philosophy* follows the same traditional model with the obvious intention to present to the historically minded Western philosophy of his time an integral whole of a millenary slow and careful uninterrupted development as against the disintegrated leaps, contradictions and failures of the discontinuity typical of Western culture. For Radhakrishnan's "modernization" of the model (in the Indian meaning of this term, designating a trend that had steadily and slowly developed and become predominant in the course of the second millennium of our era)—it is characteristic and important for the sequel of our context that he tends to raise also the critical and actual value of Rāmānuja's theistic and theological version of Vedānta above the philosophical rationalism of Śaṅkara's idealist monism. Thus Rāmānuja and his teachings with a stronger popular and devotional appeal to the broader average of religious Vedāntins do not represent the beginning of decadence of the primeval Vedic and Vedāntic standard, but on the contrary a higher level, at least in its vitality, than Śaṅkara's system, more consequent in its rational orthodoxy. It is important to single out this tendency, because in the sequel of the modern Indian *theological philosophy* until today it seems to prevail more and more uncritically as against a stricter and more sober interest in fundamental *philosophical* problems. It is equally important to repeat at this turning point how much closer Śaṅkara's understanding of the topic in the title of our survey was to the authentic Buddhist meaning and importance of the attainment of arahantship. I cannot dissociate later doubts on this point by Indian authors from this fact of Rāmānujan influence, as much as the Mahāyānic (and most radically Chinese<sup>5</sup>) underestimating of the historical origins and structures of the Buddhist World view reveals still closer and deeper roots also for this element of the "modern" distrust of the authenticity of any primeval moral, religious and philosophical values.

"The authentic exposition of truth (*saddhammo*) will not disappear until its counterfeit appears in the world."... It is the same as with pure gold...

(S XVI 23)

Should we call "counterfeit" the open, explicit, and in so far honest, ignoring of the direct sources of basic Buddhist doctrines? "Modern"

5. Particularly characteristic for this tendency seems to me the Vimalakīrtinīrdeśa Sūtra and its traditional popularity in China, pointed out by P. Demiéville in his concluding remarks added to the French translation by M. Lamotte, *L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti*, Louvain, Bibliothèque de Museon, vol. 51, 1962.



Indian authors who for some reasons, mainly as historians of philosophy and religion, have to include this "negative" (*nāstika*) heterodoxy into their all-encompassing hierarchical pyramids of world views (*darśana*), are becoming more and more aware of the fact that their knowledge of Buddhism from hostile information contained in millenary standardized criticism common to all orthodox trends of their precursors, cannot any longer be considered as reliable enough, nor as self-sufficient as a basis to support the weight of their modern universalist trend, especially in confrontation with the aggressively intolerant Western-based scepticism against all sacred traditions.

It is understandable also that this awareness has become most conspicuous in the strongest universalist school of comparative philosophy, established by Radhakrishnan. And yet, *noblesse oblige*, and empty statements of one's own shortcomings and superficiality cannot serve as apology. With time, however, such statements and shortcomings tend to become worse and worse among Radhakrishnan's continuators and disciples, even when they do not hide them but boldly profess that their non-verified correctness is based on the authority of their teacher.

Although Radhakrishnan's interpretation of both the basic Pali sources and the later development in the Sanskrit Buddhist literature (which should not be simply confused with the popular Mahāyāna religions and the more or less specific "scriptures" peculiar to each of them), in two separate parts of *Indian Philosophy* I, was well founded and documented with references from primary sources, yet his basic conception and often forcible tendency to curb them down to the common denominator of his conception of pan-Hinduism have often been criticized as unacceptable to Buddhists<sup>6</sup>, and in time rejected on the principle of fairness and authenticity also by genuine Vedāntists, especially of the *advaita* trend, as dangerous adulteration and a failed attempt of a compromise achieving nothing more than to compromise both sides involved in it.<sup>7</sup>

Considering only the Buddhist aspect of the situation thus created at the middle of the century, one of the lowest ebbs on the highest level of the school can be scored out from two books of M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (1932) and *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (1949). After two extensive presentations of Indian philosophy to interested Western scholars, by Surendranath Dasgupta (*A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I first appeared in 1922) and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (*Indian Philosophy*, Vols. I-II, 1923-1927), Hiriyanna wrote first a shorter, congested and digested version of basic tenets in the *Outlines*. The success of this first book has been widely recognized as useful for students. After the War he undertook to write a still shorter and easier digestible presentation for still more superficial readers in *The Essentials*. At the same time he wished also to amend some shortcomings of the first work, especially in his recognition concerning his lack of

6. Cf. K. N. Jayatilke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, Allen & Unwin, London 1963.

7. Cf. T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Gaudapāda, A Study in Early Advaita*, Ch. IX. "Gaudapada and Buddhism". University of Madras 1960.



proper knowledge of Buddhism. He admits that his presentation in the *Outlines* was limited only to two aspects in the development of Buddhist doctrines—pre-Mahāyānic and Mahāyānic. But in the meantime C. A. F. Rhys Davids had discovered and reconstructed the “third” stage, which actually had been the first and only authentic teaching of the Buddha himself. It did not at all correspond to Pali *suttas* as preserved in the Theravāda tradition, which should be considered as a distorted amplification of the Buddha’s original “Sayings”. These “Sayings”, as pruned by Mrs Rhys Davids contain e.g. no trace of a denial of the eternal Self (*nairātmya*, Pali *anattā*), but remain strictly in keeping with the primeval orthodox ‘catholic’ teaching of the earliest Vedāntic doctrine in the Upanisads. In the allowable exegesis of this new “modern” authority there must not remain any traces of what Vivekananda so very spontaneously and frankly recognized as the main feature of the Buddha’s “revolutionary change”.

And yet, despite such recognitions of “modern” authority, other, not less authoritative representatives of the same neo-Hinduist school, who obviously had a wider interest and therefore a better knowledge of the disputed sources and heretical “interpolations”, were not satisfied with such Anglo-Brahmin statements, but saw in the elimination of such basic texts as the Brahmajāla or Poṭṭhapāda Suttas (I and IX of the Dīgha Nikāya fundamental collection) first of all a danger of adulteration and distortion of their own Vedāntic position. Above all the authentic *ātmā-vāda* appeared endangered by Mrs Rhys Davids most ‘catholic’ baptism. There has never been on the authentic ground of Indian culture any imaginable possibility of such a sectarian version which would try to bring Vedānta and Buddhism to the same common denominator after a millenary feud documented on both sides on such solid grounds as mentioned also in the superficial survey from which we started above.

It was Radhakrishnan’s most authoritative disciple specialized in Buddhist studies, Prof. T. R. V. Murti, who for the Indian side resolutely and thoroughly rejected the rootless interference of Mrs Rhys Davids in the first chapter of the introductory part of his main work, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (pp. 20-35) in 1955. The following reference may suffice for our argumentation:<sup>8</sup>

“In attempting to bridge the difference between the Upanisads and Buddha, we would have immeasurably increased the distance between Buddha and Buddhism.

“For, it is possible to adduce against one textual citation which affirms the *ātman*, ten or twenty which deny it with vehemence.”

Thus far, for his favourable account Murti received a wholehearted recognition of all authentic Buddhists. Yet, this is only the critical introductory part of his work. The core of his positive approach to

8. 2nd ed., Allen & Unwin, 1960, pp. 25 and 33.



the problem is based on a different turning point from which he undertakes to reformulate a deeper tenet of the neo-Hinduist trend in defence of Radhakrishnan's fundamental thesis aiming at reintegration of Buddhism into the broader Brahmanic tradition on a higher developed historical level. To that effect Murti transferred the weight of his own *Central Conception* to a later but doubtlessly authentic beginning of the independent history of Buddhist philosophy inaugurated by Nāgārjuna (2nd-3rd cent. A.C.).

Notwithstanding this, Murti's first steps beyond the said turning into the field of independent Buddhist philosophy and its interpretations of the basic layer of doctrines established in religious sects, may call forth serious suspicious of careful observers *sine ira et studio*, even if not versed in the historical depths and intricacies of the specific subject. Having thoroughly rejected in the introductory chapter one shallow and more than doubtful "modern" outsider's authority, Murti commits himself immediately in his next step by a dangerous and not less uncritical leap to a dialectical reversal, confessing without the slightest critical caution his full support for the arbitrariness of another not less disputable modern authority, that of Professor Radhakrishnan, as "unerringly" correct. Murti's confession of faith implying the consequences for the rest of his thesis on the whole of Buddhist philosophy, and also its typically Mahāyānist mystical underground, laid down at the outset of this positive part of his work in dogmatic keeping with this notorious authoritarian ground, is formulated in the proposition (on p. 48):

"Buddha did not doubt the reality of Nirvāṇa (Absolute)."

This is not the place for the disquisition on the consequences of this new formulation of realistic absolutism. It may suffice to remind the reader of its incompatibility with Śaṅkara's psychological explanation of the motive (in existential dread) of such negative absolutism clinging to the empty concept of "Reality", while surreptitiously mistaking the Buddha's *śūnyavāda* (the starting point of Nāgārjuna's philosophy) for the anti-Buddhist (and rather commentarily inflated) *vināśa* or *ucchedavāda*. In fact, Murti's thesis on this point has been often characterized and resolutely criticized as an untenable doctrine of the "negative absolute".<sup>9</sup>

After this turning point in the discussion of both the wider and the closer scope of problems concerning the topic under discussion, since the middle of the century the battle of views seems to continue on considerably lower levels in a scattered fragmentation of barren disputes and camouflaged skirmishes, just as in the case which gave the initiative for the present considerations on a much wider and deeper problem.

9. Cf. E. Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, Tome III, p. 1227 f. Louvain 1970.—K. K. Inada, *Nāgārjuna, A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Tokyo 1970, pp. 9-10.—A. Bareau, *L'absolu en philosophie bouddhique...* Paris 1951. (Ref. "la fuite de l'absolu").—Bhikkhu Nānajīvako, "Hegel and Indian Philosophy" in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, 1976, Vol. III, No. 3, University of Poona, pp. 303-310.



It was not surprising for me to find a symptomatic flare up in a short elliptic and evasive essay on a fragment of the problem formulated in the title of the present paper. It is worthwhile some attention on the Buddhist side for the following two reasons:

1. It appeared in *Pāli Buddhist Review* 3, 3, 1978, under the Sanskrit, and not Pāli, title, "The distinction between *sopādhiseṣa* and *nirupādhiseṣa* Nirvāṇa", in order to reaffirm the emphasis on the thesis that "it can be suggested, even asserted, that 'The state called Nibbāna could be lost'". This boldly asserted statement is immediately followed by the verifying example (*drṣṭānta*) in the Godhika Sutta, S IV 23, though without any nearer reference to the *wording* of the text.

2. Thanks to the sarcasm of human fate in such ventures (expressed by old Romans in the proverb: *Habent sua fata libelli*), the groundless thesis, formulated in a puzzle of false implications concealing the key term of the original Pāli source, suggests too strongly its coincidence with the purpose of *Māro pāpako* contained in the same Sutta and quoted in the motto of the present paper; the more so as the whole riddle is most thoroughly and pedantically solved and confuted in the next following pages of the same issue of the *Pāli Buddhist Review*, provided only that we clearly unriddle the authentic Pāli term in the *drṣṭānta* of the fallacy in logical inference. The title of the second, fully reliable and self-supported (seven times longer) paper on the same, but correctly identified, topic is:

"*Cetovimutti, Paññāvimutti and Ubhatobhāgavimutti*" by Lily de Silva. The author of the first quoted paper is Arvind Sharma.

The critical term, discussed by both authors using, fortunately, the same *drṣṭānta* of the Godhika Sutta to exemplify their theses is *sāmayikā cetovimutti*. This designation has been identified wrongly, arbitrarily and implicitly by the author of the first paper with *sopādhiseṣa nirvāṇa*.

As we shall see in the more extensive documentation in the next chapter, the expression *sāmayikā cetovimutti* or "temporary mind deliverance" does not occur only in this exceptional case of the Godhika Sutta, but has also a general terminological meaning in the phenomenology of Buddhist meditation, especially as a stage in the progress of *jhāna*.

In the arbitrary speculation based on this Sutta in the first paper there is no trace of the standard term *cetovimutti* in its elaborate meaning as explained in the second paper. The author of the first paper refers to the Godhika Sutta in the first section of his article, while the author of the second quotes and explicates the same text in the sequel of the documentary specification of "Types of Vimutti", under the heading "Cetovimutti—Temporary".

Let us quote first the *prima facie* documentation on which Mrs de Silva elicits her elucidation of the term:



"The Saṃyutta Nikāya (...) records that Godhika could not retain the *cetovimutti* which he won six times, and when he attained it on the seventh attempt, he committed suicide. In the Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta (M I 351) Ānanda reasons out that *cetovimutti* is subject to conditions and therefore to change as well. Seeing the impermanent, unsatisfactory and substanceless nature of this *cetovimutti* one must develop intuition and eradicate obsessions (*āsavānaṃ khayam*) in order to gain final emancipation.

A detailed instruction how to proceed toward this attainment is given by the Buddha, in connection with the practice of the *jhānas*, in the Mahāsuññata Sutta (M 122).

The author of the first paper, ignoring all this primary documentation, starts his exposition by quoting Edward J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, Ch. X, "Release and Nirvāṇa", pages 121 and 131 only, as his first authority. Then he rejects the statement of Nalinaksha Dutt in *Early Monastic Buddhism*, who "clearly implies that there can be no lapse from the state of Nirvāṇa", reproaching him in an astonishingly bold way (considering his own disrespect for source material and terminology) that "no source is stated by Dutt". After this "critical" introduction and the immediately following mention of the Godhika Sutta as the *dr̥ṣṭānta* for his thesis, he goes over to the acknowledgement of Rune E. A. Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvāṇa* (appeared 1969) as his ultimate and only clearly and explicitly quoted authority adduced in his favour.

At this point I feel it necessary first to defend E. J. Thomas's better deserved authority against such superficial allegations.

In the two places quoted by Sharma, referring to footnotes on pp. 121-2 and 131-2, Thomas warns the reader against taking uncritically for granted the meaning of the terms singled out at the end of our chapter I, concerning "the distinction between *nirvāṇa* and *parinirvāṇa*," and also *upādi* (Pali) and *upadhi* (Sanskrit). In both cases Thomas is critical of the PTS Dictionary and finds that Childers was more correct and reliable.

1. "*Pari*—compounded with a verb converts the verb from the expression of a state to the expression of the achievement of an action: *nirvāṇa* is the state of release; *parinirvāṇa* is the attaining of that state. The monk *parinirvāṇī*, 'attains Nirvāṇa', at the time of enlightenment as well as at death."

2. Thomas might have agreed with the equation of terms and their meaning in the transposition used in their Sanskrit form by Sharma in the title of his article, *soṇādhiseṣa* and *nirupādhiseṣa* as referring to the connotations of *mokṣa* or *vimutti*, more adequately and precisely analysed in the quoted paper of L. de Silva, but even this under a critical reserve. Thomas points out that it is the commentator, though not of the text used as *dr̥ṣṭānta* in the case under review, but in the commentary of Dhamma-

pada 89, who explains the words "attained Nirvāṇa" as attained by the two attainings of Nirvāṇa (...), 1. that which is with a remainder of substrate of rebirth after reaching arahatship and getting rid of the course of the depravities, and 2. that which is without remainder of substrate of rebirth ... What is to be understood by this substrate of rebirth has been disputed, for in Pali the term is *upādi* and in Sanskrit *upadhi*." (This passage is quoted in full also in Sharma's article.)

With reference to Chānd. Up. VIII, 11, 12, Thomas remarks in the same context that "Buddhism makes no such confident assertion as this" (i. e. that "when he is without the body he is not touched by pleasure and pain"), "nor any positive statement at all about the final state of the released". Such statements again are attributed to the commentators. This, and nothing more, is Thomas's introduction to his reference to the Godhika Sutta. Almost prophetically for our case Thomas added to his presentation of this case another warning:

"Psychological theorizings...do not tell us anything more about the fundamental question ... The distinction of two kinds of Nirvāṇa is probably such a development" (in exegetical literature).

Thus no other authority remains for the thesis that it can be not only suggested but "even asserted" on the basis of "the story of Godhika" that "the state called Nibbāna could be lost",—except the one just quoted in the article, taken from Johansson's book, p. 74.

Looking more carefully even into this last authority, it appears that Johansson in his context may not have been unaware of the last quoted statement by Thomas. Being actually a psychologist and not a teacher of *takka-mīmāṃsā*, or "logical analysis", whose "perfection of knowledge" is based on "mere faith alone" (cf. Saṅgārava Sutta, M 100), Johansson ventured to take a step farther, despite Thomas's warning, though without particular dogmatic insistence, in formulating his hypothesis by association induced by the psychological impact of another Pali text, S II 239:

"Monks, even for a monk who is an arahant with his obsessions destroyed, I say that gains, favours, and flattery are a danger."

From this Johansson deduces, unlike Thomas, the conclusion: "The state called Nibbāna could be lost"—and this is all.

It would be redundant here to enter any further into the much more adherent detailed analyses contained in the next-page article by Mrs de Silva. In the concluding chapter I shall limit myself to quote, far from the pretention to be exhaustive, a few direct references from the Sutta Piṭaka concerning the direct question: Can the attainment of Nibbāna be lost? For this basic material I am indebted to Ven. Nyāṇaponika Mahāthera's extensive documentation.



1. For the purpose of a closer survey of this specific problem as it appeared at an early stage of historical development, an adequate stance presents itself in the perspective of the first few centuries of Buddhist history, at the time of Asoka, in the redaction of the Abhidhamma book of the Kathāvatthu. In the first chapter, question two formulates the problem:

“Can an arahant fall away from arahantship?”  
(*Parihayāti arahā arahatā ‘ti*)

The answer affirms that “there is no single instance in the texts, where such a case is reported of any monk”.<sup>10</sup>

The Commentary gives a list of heretical sects which insisted on a positive answer: Sammitiyas, Vajjiputtakas, Sabbatthivādins and some Mahāsaṅghikas.

2. With reference to the critical term *sāmayikā cetovimutti*, misinterpreted in the case of Godhika, it has been mentioned earlier in the present survey that the Mahāsuññatā Sutta, (M 122) gives detailed instructions how to proceed from this temporary attainment toward the “permanent and unshakable” (*asāmayikam vā akuppan’ ti*) deliverance. The intermediate temporary attainment is explained in direct connection with the progress in the stages of *jhāna*. The stress of the whole explanation of this stage is on the statement:

“Indeed, Ānanda, that a bhikkhu delighting in company, ... delighting in society, ... should enter upon and dwell in either the temporary, or the permanent and unshakeable, delectable mind deliverance—that is not possible...”<sup>11</sup>

The Commentary on the same text quotes Paṭisambhidā-magga, Vimokkha-kathā:

“The four *jhānas* and the attainment of the four formless (spheres)—this is called temporary release”; and! “The four noble paths, the four fruits of ascetic life and Nibbāna—this is the permanent deliverance.”<sup>12</sup>

In the same connection Nyānaponika Mahāthera remarks:

“The Paṭisambhidā-magga has another pair of synonymous terms: *saṁaya-vimokkha* and *asaṁaya-vimokkha*” (occasional and not any longer occasional release). “Its Commentary has a very clear explanation of these, ... substantially the same as that in the Commentary to M 122.”

10. Cf. Nyānatiloka, *Guide through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, 3rd ed., Kandy, BPS, 1971, p. 64.

11. *So va’ Ananda bhikkhu saṅgaṇikārāmo...gaṇārāmo...sāmāyikaṁ va kantam cetovimuttiṁ upasampajja viharissati, asāmāyikam vā akuppan’ti, n’etaṁ jhānam vijjati*

12. *Cattāri ca jhānāni catasso ca arūpasamāpattiyo ayaṁ sāmāyiko vimokkho’ti*  
*Cattāro ca ariyamaggā cattāri ca sāmāññaphalāni nibbānaṇa ayaṁ asāmāyiko vimokkho*

3. Apart from all these stages of "paths and fruits" in the progress of relative attainment, the ultimate aim, Nibbāna, is described in an often repeated standard description:

"As soon as craving has been abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, done away with, so that it is no more liable to arise future, then that bhikkhu is accomplished, with cankers destroyed, who has lived out the life, done what was to be done, laid down the burden, reached the highest true goal, destroyed the fetters of being and is rightly liberated through final knowledge."<sup>13</sup>

4. Among many reference in Pali texts concerning the topic of the unavoidably hard ascetic way requisite for those who may earnestly strive to reach first a temporary, and then progressively the final release from the worldliness of life in *samsāra*, I wish to lay the final and decisive stress on an advice given in the Rhinoceros Sutta (Khaggavisāṇa, Sutta-Nipata 54), containing, according to the Commentaries, the advices of several *pacceka-buddhas* for the purification of mind by the strictest means and ways of ascetic and hermitic life in deepest solitude. It indicates also the unavoidable toil of the final release by stages (*kramamukti*, on which, as we have seen, also Śaṅkara's strict and consequent rationalism insisted):

"It is impossible for him who is delighting in society to reach (even) to temporal release..."<sup>14</sup>

The importance of this reference in its wider context is significant for the ethical background of our survey, from its non-Buddhist beginning to its end in "modern" Buddhist and quasi-Buddhist interpretations. This poem, most beautiful for its deep and extensive structure in ancient Pali poetry, has notoriously been disliked and neglected by such interpreters due to their false understanding and generalization of the Buddha's "middle way" as the way of easy going mediocrity. It confirms the positive value of the call of conscience (*vip̐paṭisāro*), confronting those who look in the exegesis of 'semantic differentials' for a subterfuge in counterfeits, motivated by their most legitimate fear that palm trees in their own gardens should not remain cut off "stumps done away with, no more liable to arise in future", just because their owners happened to be born in Buddhist families, or, in the case of Westerners, for the lack of more "transcendental" gurus.

## Conclusion

1. Rāmānuja, in rejecting Śaṅkara's theory of *nirguṇa Brahma* or Absolute Being as impersonal and without specific qualities or attributes, reduced the highest principle of pure being to a worldly-minded Godhead endowed with specific differences (*viśeṣa*) of an archetypal personality. Since not even the Godhead was conceivable without such specific

13. Cf. Mahā-Vacchagotta Sutta, M 73

14. *Aṭṭhāna'tam saṅgaṇikāratassa yaṃ phassaye sāmayaṃ vimuttiṃ*



qualifications, it was still less admissible to consider the possibility of a human being attaining a state of perfection released from the 'limiting adjuncts' (*upādhi*) and becoming a *jīvan-mukta*, 'liberated while still in life.'

2. Murti identified the Buddhist ideal of *nirvāṇa* with the Vedāntic conception of the Absolute Being, but *reduced* still further the *being* of the 'Absolute' to 'Reality' (i.e. to 'Thingness', if this Latin term should be translated into English in its strict sense, as it was adequately translated by the French positivists in their meaning of *Chosisme*).

3. Sharma tries now to apply the same reductive principle of dubious and false identification to the Buddhist idea of *arahant*, reducing it to the disputable Vedāntic interpretation of *jīvan-mukta*, not in its primary meaning as it was understood still by Śaṅkara, but rather in keeping with Rāmānuja's attempt to *reduce this dogma to the zero point*. Even if Sharma does not go so far, his doubt of *sopādhiseṣa nirvāṇa*, not without analogies in some Mahāyāna Buddhist schools and 'heresies', shows a tendency deeply rooted in the history of Hindism, to restrain the possibility of attaining the ideal of the Buddhist *arahant* into a state of existence *post mortem* (or 'Realm' of ghosts).

But why? Since the dogmatic assertion of this attainment could hardly be considered as seriously verifiable, even from the standpoint of modern psychology, is it not simply because of the "human-all-to-human feeling of reluctance against a "freedom" to which man is "sentenced" by the incomprehensible destiny —*avijjā*—of his divine-all-too-divine descendance—and fall—as described in the Brahmajāla Sutta, the opening text of the Buddha's Long Discourses?