



Exploring Metaphysics of Unconscious (Ālaya- vijñāna): Thinking through Vasubandhu

Dr Pankaj Srivastava *

* Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Abstract

Unconscious refers to a hidden side of one's personality to which an individual is unaware but it influences all his/her thoughts, feelings and actions. In the west, Freud was the pioneer who discerned the unconscious aspect of human personality and developed a systematic theory of the unconscious mind. In India, seekers (rishis & yogis) through their meditative practices visualised various factors (unconscious) which play a significant role in the making of one's psyche (chittā) Notably, Vasubandhu is considered to be one of the most prominent and influential thinkers who developed metaphysics of unconscious known as ālaya-vijñāna. This study explores the nature of the unconscious (ālaya-vijñāna) and its relationship with consciousness reading through Vasubandhu' treatise popularly known as Vijñāptimatratasiddhi.

This research paper has three main objectives: first, to understand the metaphysical framework of Vasubandhu concerning nature of consciousness. Second to explore the structure of unconscious (ālaya-vijñāna): how unconscious becomes the seat of all mental dispositions, tendencies, desire (*vāsanā*) clinging and grasping (*upādān*). How does it influence different aspects of personality such as cognitive, affective and connotative? Third, to analyse reciprocal causality between unconscious and consciousness against the backdrop of Buddhist' idea of dependent origination.

Keywords: Ālaya-vijñāna, Saṃskāra, Cognition, Conceptualisation, Tendencies, Dependent Origination,

Introduction

Consciousness is the essential feature of human mind. It manifests distinctively in one's personality through his/her thoughts, emotions/feelings and actions. But surprisingly, often consciousness is tinted by inner tendencies, dispositions and proclivities hidden in the unconscious mind. Human mind has two dimensions: conscious and unconscious. They are interwoven in such a way that one cannot comprehend the former without taking into account the complexities of the latter. When 'a' is conscious of the object 'b' it means that 'a' makes some sense about the intended object 'b'. Hence, primarily consciousness participates in forming new concepts. At the same time, one's subjectivity pertaining to tendencies, memories, emotions and instincts, unconsciously, influences his/her immediate awareness (of the intended object). Therefore, both predispositions of subjectivity and immediate awareness have a dialectical relationship since they influence each other in the development of different levels of understanding.

* Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Panjab University, Chandigarh



In this context, this paper invokes the metaphysics of Vasubandhu who belonged to the Vijñānavāda school of Buddhism. According to Vijñānavāda consciousness is the only reality (vijñāptimatratā) which flows in unbroken stream of mind throughout multiple lifetimes. For Vasubandhu external objects are the only projection of consciousness. They do not have the independent status. He discusses three modes of transformation of consciousness such as cognitive consciousness (Pravṛtti-vijñāna), ego centre (manas/ 'I-ness') and store-consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). Further, cognitive consciousness is explained in terms of six specific modalities-visual, audio, olfactory, gustatory, tactical and mental cognitive awareness based on five senses and mind. Mental cognitive awareness such as thinking and reflection etc. takes place in association with two kinds of dharma (moment): moment t_1 of sensory awareness (immediate consciousness) as well as a reflection on this sensory awareness that is moment t_2 (vitākkavīcāra). It manifests in expression that "such and such sensory awareness has occurred". As (Sharma 2007:7) points out 'these dharmas are not static. They are undergoing incessant change. No dharma can stay for any duration of time'. Significantly, five forms of sensory awareness are individually separate and distinct. Ego centre (manas) with mental afflictions conceives different fields and consequently evokes reflexive awareness to take place in the form that "such and such awareness of an object takes place." Hence, the mind is a medium whereby thought itself as a linguistic process is constructed. Mental cognitive awareness arises through manas which is already conditioned by the unconscious (Saṃskāra). 'I consciousness' (manas) is formed two ways: one is with reflexivity of mental cognitive awareness that "I know that I am knowing something." Second various deep-seated tendencies in store consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) are responsible for conceptual or ideational proliferation of the self-identity ('I – consciousness' or 'I am') otherwise, self for Buddhists is nothing but merely five aggregates-saṃskāra, vijñāna, nāma-rūpā, vedanā and tṛṣṇā.

The cognitive process and reciprocal relationship of different modes of consciousness can be explored in its depth by reading Vijñāptimatratāsiddhi of Vasubandhu.

Consciousness reading through Vijñāptimatratāsiddhi

Vijñāptimatratāsiddhi consists of two parts: Viṃśikā and Triṃśikā. Viṃśikā is a concise treatise of twenty-two verses while Triṃśikā comprises of thirty verses. The main purpose of Viṃśikā is to establish that there is no external object and only consciousness is the reality which manifests in different forms. The first verse of Viṃśikā states:

Everything in the world is 'consciousness only' (vijñāptimatratā) as all the objects in the world are unreal because of their false appearance like the object of hallucination¹.

The second verse can be understood in the context of a debate on the status of an object.



If the consciousness is without external objects, then there would be no regulation with regard to space and time, there would be the non-observation of regulation of moment series and there would be no determination of actions prompted (by particular experience).²

There has been an intense debate among the Realists and Vijñānavadins on the issue of the ontological status of an external object. Broadly, there are two views: first (Realists) holds that objects exist in the external world. The second (Vijñānavadins) denies the reality of external objects and argues that external objects are merely a mental projection. Vasubandhu proposed his doctrine of 'consciousness only' as well as mentioned possible objections raised by the realists as opponent thesis (purvapaksa)³ and then refuted all objections.

In this context we may read second verse that mentions the objections: First, if the consciousness of form (of object) is without any reference to external objects then the consciousness of that form is produced everywhere and not in a particular space and time. Any experience (of object) occurs within a particular time and space where an object is placed. For instance, an experience of a fish occurs within the background of water (space), Therefore, all people present at a particular space and time experience the same sort of thing/object. Subsequently, if the existence of external objects is denied then there would be no regulation of space and time. Second, if the external object is denied then the qualities of an object such as 'blueness' and 'redness' do not belong to an object rather they belong to individual consciousness. Resultantly, an observer gets the impression of blueness and redness in his moment series and this would not be visible to others who are present there with him/her (an observer). This is just like the case of an individual suffering from eye disease (cataract) sees two moons in place of one but this is not the case with common men having normal vision.

The last part of the second verse raises the issue of functional viability (kṛtyakriyā). In case external objects are merely a manifestation of consciousness and do not have their independent status then objects (images) are merely appearances like illusory objects of hallucinations or illusions. They do not have functional viability (kṛtyakriyā). For example, a double moon seen by a person suffering from eye disease (cataract) or a mirage seen by a person in the desert does not function.

Thereafter third, fourth, fifth and sixth verse try to refute the above objections using an analogy of dream state of consciousness, myths of ghosts, hell and heaven etc.

The production of appearances at particular times and places is established, just as in the case of dreams. The production of appearances across different minds is established, just as in the case of hungry ghosts Because all of them [i.e., all hungry ghosts] experience a pus-river, and so on.⁴



The causal efficacy of objects of appearances is established just as in the case of nocturnal emissions. All four constraints on appearances are established as in the case of hell. Through the perception of the wardens of hell, etc., and through torture at their hands.⁵

Concealing coming together (birth) (occasion), heaven as follows also hell accordingly. No hell ghosts from which suffering perceived.⁶

If that very action (effect) therein: actual coming together (birth) (occasion) thus, By the wise, change also; How not so state of consciousness?⁷

Objects in a dream are not real but are seen in particular places and times. They cannot be seen all of the time (i.e., when one is awake). So Spatio-temporal determination is possible even when there are no real corresponding external objects of perception by referring to the dreaming state of consciousness. Therefore, regulation of time and space is maintained. The indeterminacy (non-exclusiveness) concerning mental continuity/ (various mind) streams (of individuals) is admitted as in the case of *pretās* (hungry ghosts in hell), who share the same visions. The *pretās*, having the same kind of *karma*, end up sharing the same fate in hell and thus share the same visions and experiences. The third objection that the performance of a specific function takes place during dreaming is logical as in the case of nocturnal emissions or the ability of demons to torture those in hell. Thus, the four factors (specio- temporal determination and functional viability) are demonstrated.

Vasubandhu refuted all objections by giving analogy of ghosts sharing same life-word and dreaming state of consciousness where everything appears to be real and it has also casual effects on embodied consciousness unless one attains waking state. But one may ask if consciousness is the only reality, why and how consciousness manifests in many forms (external objects) since in the process of cognition there is always consciousness (*Vijñāna*) and objects of consciousness (*Vijñeya*). To address this question, Vasubandhu has taken new route that is more esoteric, cryptic but based on his meditative & spiritual practices. He wrote *Triṃśikā* to explain metaphysical structure of unconscious. He hypothesised the idea of store consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) as a primordial source to our cognitive consciousness as well as ego centre (*manas*). As Yamada (1997:166) observes:

Where there is the *vijnapti*, there is the dichotomy (*vikalpa*) of *vijnana* and *vijneya*, the latter of which is merely a manifestation (*abhasa*) of the primary *vijnana*. The cause of such a dichotomy is due to the transformation (*parinama*) derived from the karmic impressions (*vasana*) inherent in our mental functions. This is the structure of our mental faculties as seen by Vasubandhu.

Seemingly, to strengthen the doctrine of *Vijñāptimatratasiddhi*, Vasubandhu has given the foundation of *ālaya-vijñāna* which evolves bifurcating itself into two dimensions: subjective (*vijñāna*) and objective (*vijñeya*). For Vasubandhu, various types of consciousness have



reciprocal causality in the sense that they nurture and fuel each other for making dichotomy of subject and object in the life-world (Samsāra)

Cognitive Structure of Consciousness

As phenomenologists maintain that consciousness is always directed towards the objects of experience. According to Vasubandhu, the inherent characteristic of the mind is such that it always conceptualizes and dichotomises the world of experience into subject and object.

Triṃśikā begins with sayings:

If there occurs whatsoever kind of conceptualization [upacārā] regarding self [ātman] and element [dharma], it happens in the form of the transformation of vijñāna⁸.

Conceptualization takes place concerning both the self (ātman) and the element [dharma]. The important issue is - what really it means by 'transformation' (parināmā). It may be understood within the Buddhist framework of Dependent Origination (Pratītyasamutpāda). The nature of consciousness ever-changing in the universal flux of time. The transformation of consciousness is the change of one's consciousness in temporal sequence. The vijñāna at the present moment [t-2] is the result of the vijñāna of the past moment [t-1] and at the same time the cause for the future moment [t-3]. By the cause-and-effect relationship, the vijñāna is changing from one moment to another moment. According to Sthirmati transformation means to change (anyathātvam). At the very moment at which the moment of cause comes to an end the effect different from the moment of cause comes into being. This is transformation (parināma)⁹. Both cause and effect have no separate entity (niḥsvabhāva) and the relationship between cause and effect is that of neither discontinuity (niḥsvabhāva) nor continuity (anuccheda aśāsvata).

The 2nd verse (of Triṃśikā) further explains the three modes of consciousness. They are repository consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), ego centre (manas) and cognitive consciousness (visaya vijñapti). It further explains –

That which occurs depending on it and clinging to it (ālaya vijñāna) is the vijñāna called mind [manas] and the nature of which is deliberation [manana]. Among them [three modes of parinama] the different fruition is the consciousness called the repository [ālaya] the all-seed container [sarva bijaka].¹⁰

Accordingly, ālaya-vijñāna is the root of all other sorts of consciousness. But interestingly, it is not static but ever-changing from moment to moment like a torrent of water. It contains all the karmic impressions (vāsanā) stored in the seed (bija) which produce its effects. Ālaya-vijñāna manifests itself in such a way that mental fabrication of subject and object take place. Hence, the first mode of transformation occurs because of ripening of the karmic cause and



subsequently ālaya-vijñāna is stimulated. It is followed by the second [manas] and third mode of transformation (cognitive consciousness).

15th and 16th verse further explain –

The five-sense consciousness (vijñāna) arise in the root consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) in accordance with the circumstantial cause [pratyaya] either together or alone; just like a wave in the water.¹¹

At all times there is the rise of the mind consciousness with the exception of unconsciousness achieved by thoughtless meditation two kinds of concentration (one being asajni samapatti and the other being nirodha samapatti), and unconscious sleep and faint.¹²

Sthirmatti in his commentary¹³ considers the first mode of transformation (from karmic impression to ālaya-vijñāna) as cause transformation (hetu-parināmā) and the second and third mode of transformation as (phal-parināmā). On account of the first mode of transformation (ālaya-vijñāna), the dichotomy of object and subject (grāhya-grāhakā) arises. It implies that subject and object are not two different things but rather two different dimensions of consciousness. Further, the theory of ālaya-vijñāna is established and justified within the framework of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) by referring to karma impression (vāsanā).

Metaphysical Structure of The Unconscious (Ālaya-vijñāna)

Vaubandhu postulates root consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) to build his metaphysical system of consciousness. Ālaya vijñāna is considered to be responsible for all kinds of attachments, clinging and grasping as well as for the bifurcation of subject (grāhakā) and object (grāha) in a cognitive process. Ālaya-vijñāna is primarily an embodiment of karmic, affective and cognitive endowments from previous lives which can be understood as seeds and the appropriation of the predispositions.

Samdhinirmocana-Sutra¹⁴ describes that ālaya-vijñāna possesses all the seeds of past karmic impressions (saṃskāra). It enters into the mother's womb, evolves within saṃsāric existence by the two-fold appropriation (upādāna): First is an appropriation of the material sense-faculties along with their supports (sādhiṣṭhāna-rūpīndirya-upādāna). Second is the appropriation (upādāna) which consists of the predispositions (vāsanā) toward profuse imaginings (prapañca) in terms of conventional usage (vyavahāra) of images (nimitta), names (nāma) and conceptualizations (vikalpa) (nimitta-nāma-vikalpa-vyavahāra-prapañca-vāsanā-upādāna). Schmithausen (1987: 48) points out that 'accepting the presence of alaya-vijñāna in ārūpyadhātu... inevitably implies that ālaya-vijñāna has to transcend its original character of mind sticking or hiding in corporeal matter, which is also the rationale of its name'. In the form of the two appropriations, the ālaya vijñāna maintains an intimate and essential relationship with the animate body, while at the same time it transmits the predispositions or impressions



stemming from past cognitive experience. It is an ongoing basal consciousness which, like the organic processes, is both produced by and preserved the impressions of its own past developmental processes. According to Vasubandhu's philosophy that the notion of "body" is nothing but the perception of body (embodied consciousness): the inner consciousness of the body is the base of the body itself. Ālaya-vijñāna is closely related with bodily existence in the sense that during a meditative state when all mental process is supposed to be halt, bodily/physiological process remains to stimulate ālaya-vijñāna. Hence as long as one is alive consciousness takes up or appropriates the body (the material sense faculties). In response to the conception of ālaya-vijñāna Schmithausen (1987:30) rightly points out: 'indeed it transforms the notion of seeds of mind lying hidden in a corporeal matter to a new form of mind proper.' This depiction of ālaya-vijñāna as a simple hypostatisation of the seeds cannot be regarded as distinctive vijñāna unless it is systematically related to the traditional six modes of cognitive awareness. Waldron (2003) in his analysis of ālaya-vijñāna raises many questions concerning the status of ālaya-vijñāna and its relationship with pravṛtti vijñāna. He points out:

On emerging from the attainment of cessation, how do these six forms of "arising cognitive awareness" arise again from the seeds that are within this ālaya-vijñāna? And where or how does this ālaya-vijñāna function outside of that attainment of cessation? Is it a discontinuous kind of cognitive awareness that like the bhavanga citta only occur when the manifest modes of cognitive awareness do not or does it continuously occur throughout all states of mind? If the latter then how are the seeds that are associated with this new kind of vijñāna related to the traditional six kinds of cognitive consciousness? And in what way might this ālaya-vijñāna function as a vijñāna itself as a distinctive species of cognitive awareness? (Waldron 2003: 93)

Samdhinirmocana Sūtra initiates the reintegration of the diachronic dimension of vijñāna about saṃsāric continuity – rebirth, the maintenance of the animated body, and the perpetuation of karma in the form of seeds – with the synchronic analysis of mind focusing upon momentary cognitive processes. Ālaya-vijñāna provides the constant support and basis for the supraliminal cognitive modes, while they in turn "heap up" (ācita) and "accumulate" (upacita) in the newly fashioned citta, the "mind with all the seeds" (sarva-bījakam cittam).

The ālaya-vijñāna finds its support in the material sense faculties to which it clings and it is nourished by the predisposition towards imagining (prapañca) of name, images and so on. Both of which in turn are taken up and appropriated by it. Hence, ālaya vijñāna grows and increases based upon two appropriations – mental sense faculties with their physiological supports and the mass of cognitive and affective conditioning of past karmic impressions. But at the same time, these two appropriations persists only because ālaya- vijñāna continuously appropriate them this is the diachronic dimension of ālaya- vijñāna.

In the Samdhinirmocana Sūtra, ālaya vijñāna is characterized firstly, as a key link in one of the rebirth sequences within that series, secondly, as the active, affective sense of "attachment," or "grasping," a key psychological factor in perpetuating saṃsāric life. Sutra states:



This consciousness (vijñāna) is also called the appropriating consciousness (ādāna-vijñāna) because the body is grasped (grhīta) and appropriated (upātta, or ātta) by it. It is also called the “ālaya-vijñāna laya” vijñāna because it dwells in and attaches to this body in a common destiny (ekayogakṣema-arthena). It is also called mind (citta) because it is heaped up (ācita) and accumulated (upacita) by [the six cognitive objects, i.e.] visual forms, sounds, smells, flavors, tangibles and dharmas.¹⁵

Although they also contain distinct affective implications, these synonyms (paryāya) reflect the primarily somatic nature of the type of basal consciousness which the early descriptions of the ālayavijñāna suggest. As such, they refer to functions traditionally attributed to vijñāna of preserving the continuity of (mostly embodied) individual existence throughout a lifetime and over many lives, as well as allowing for the continuous transmission of karma and kleśa, in the guise of the “mind which possesses all the seeds.” But it is through its relationship with the traditional six cognitive processes that the ālaya vijñāna is “heaped up”, signifying the important role that the ālaya-vijñāna plays within the momentary processes of mind and initiating its eventual integration into the synchronic Abhidharma analytic. Ālayav-vijñāna consists of all sorts of "seeds," which is a metaphorical notion. Although the notion of "seed" can be traced back to the ‘Nikāya’ and ‘Agama’ literature, it was directly inherited by the early Yogācāra thinkers of the Sautrāntika school. They contended that when the action (karma) gets momentarily perished, it perfumes (vāsāna) the consciousness-stream (cittasaṃtāna) thereby creating extraordinary potentiality. This potentiality ripens through a period of evolution in the consciousness stream.¹⁶ As a result, through the perfuming of action, a "seed" is transformed into a "sprout" and finally turns into a "fruit".

By adopting such a mode of metaphorical thinking, the early Yogācarins viewed store-consciousness as the "container" of all karmic and psycho-linguistic "seed". In a given condition, a "seed" can be actualized into an object-in-perception which, in turn, by the activities of the other seven dimensions of consciousnesses leaves its residual force in the store-consciousness. It can be understood as a cycle of reciprocal causality where the object-in-perception results from the actualization of "seeds", and conversely the "seeds" result from the perfuming activities of the six-fold perceptions. Metaphorically, the notion of "seeds" must be comprehensive enough to account for the formation of all things perceived and experienced. As seen in Asanga's Māhāyānasamgraha, a Yogācārā text written earlier and commented by Vasubandhu, the "seeds" are divided into three categories, (1) those perfumed by discourse (abhilapavāsanābija) (2) the conception of self (atmādrśtivāsanābija), and (3) the members of becoming (bhāvaṅgavāsanābija).¹⁷ Those under the category (2) cause the formation of ego-consciousness, those of category (3) cause rebirth, while those of the first category cause perceptions including sense-objects and their respective sense-organs.¹⁸ Significantly these categories are reciprocally interconnected. The desire for conceptualisation (upāyā) results in binaries of subject and object, self and others and outer and inner. It causes the idea of self



(manas) and attachment with self (as individual ego) further causes bondage in this world. Notably, Store consciousness ultimately become the ground of manas and all cognitive consciousness.

Unconscious as the ground of Manas (I-Consciousness)

According to Vasubandhu, manas refers to self-consciousness. It exists by taking the ālaya-vijñāna as its support. It means that manas conceives alaya vijñāna as “I – am” (self) and it is always associated with four kleśas (delusions) which are self-regard, self-ignorance, self-conceit, and self-love. The manas is also associated with five senses and participates in various activities such as mental attention, conceptualizing, cognition and volition. Manas represents a state of self-consciousness where one develops the ongoing sense of self-existence/ self-identity. Self-view refers to the view of a composite self that means that it is a construction of the “I” by taking the aggregate of various elements and viewing it as an essential self. Self-view means that one takes the “I” to be real-self when in fact it is impermanent and lacking inherent essence. Self-ignorance refers to the obscuration of reality. It is mental factors that project a reality in a distorted form and make it difficult to visualize the true nature of reality. Indeed, it is the source of all afflictions. It is the most original and deep-seated aberrant function. Self-ignorance is a mental factor that not only functions at the level of manas but also throughout the prior five consciousnesses and thinking consciousness. Self-conceit is a mental function wherein one takes great pride in oneself and look down on others. Conceit refers to a state of consciousness wherein one’s own worth is exaggerated at the same time others are degraded to generate a feeling of superiority. Self-love means self- craving. Craving is a kind of mental factor that attracts us towards whatever object we find appealing. Accordingly, self-love is a state of mind wherein one is firmly attached to the constructed self in such a way that it becomes one’s identity (self- identity).

Accordingly, the source of the cognitive consciousness is deep-rooted in manas and ālaya vijñāna and conversely giving support to them. The innate tendency for conceptualization about phenomena and attachment to phenomena are embedded in ālaya vijñāna as they were initially part of the psychic endowment [ūpādāna] of ālaya vijñāna in samdhinirmocana sutra (i.e., as the predisposition toward profuse imagining in terms of conventional usage of images, names and concepts, nimittā- nāmā –vikalpā –vyavahārā – prapañca – vāsanā – ūpādāna). These are closely associated with and ingrained in the secondary level of transformation (manas). Hence these afflictions are continuously present in each moment and become a basis upon which further afflicted and ill-informed thought, feelings and action evolve and persist but at the same time, it is maintained that these afflictions cannot prevent karmically skilful states of mind (kuśala dharma) from ever arising. One can stop karmic formation and attain nirvana by skilful means. Stcherbatski (1975:26) observes: ‘Buddhist literature is full of statements which go to



show that nirvana is a transformed state personality and consciousness. The transformation is described in negative terms as destruction of *tṛṣṇā*, (craving) and *āśava* (obsessions) and in positive terms as the emergence of *prajñā* or *sambodhi* (transcendental wisdom) and *shanti* (peace).

Cognitive Consciousness and Mental Cognitive Consciousness

In early Buddhism, consciousness (*vijñāna*) is analysed into six categories: five sense-perceptions (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touch) and mental-perception (*mano-vijñāna*).¹⁹ These perceptions arise when the two conditions, sense-faculties and their respective sense-objects are present. For instance, a visual perception arises when eyes and something visible (*rūpa*) are present. Similarly, mental perception arises when there is a mind (*mano*) and a mental object (*dharma*). The sum of six perceptions, including sensory and mental perception, is named "cognitive consciousness". *Yogācārarins* claim that both sense-faculties and sense-objects are merely manifestations (*pratibhāsa*) of consciousness; they are merely perceptions without referring to external objects.²⁰ Mental cognitive awareness cannot be considered as a permanent, abiding agent or self it is merely a process that arises in accordance with certain conditions. As in the early Buddhist tradition, especially *Sayuta Nikāya* (IV 69)²¹ mentions-

In dependence on the mind the mental phenomena [*dhamma*] there arises mental cognitive awareness. the mind is impermanent changing becoming otherwise; mental phenomena are impermanent changing becoming otherwise. [Bodhi 2000]

The text indicates that all forms of *vijñāna* are seen to certain conditions that give rise to them. That is to mean they occur rather than act. When an object appears in a sense field and impinges upon its respective sense faculty that specific kind of cognitive awareness comes up automatically. Consequently, as cognitive awareness does not act it does not in and of itself accrue karma. Only intentional activities generate karma. Even though intentional activities are almost inevitable activated by the affective accompaniments of cognitive consciousness which occurs without them yet consciousness itself is not the cause of karma rather it is the process of conceptualization and affective associations that is solely responsible for karmic impressions. Cognitive awareness arises depending on the one hand on specific objects within a particular cognitive domain as well as on the other hand on karmic formation (*saṃskāra*) such as the sense faculties the result from previous karmic activities. Even apparently simple sensory cognitive awareness, therefore, depends upon the pattern and structure garnered from past experience at the same time that it continuously arises in conjunction with present objective phenomena.

Interdependence of Unconscious and Consciousness

The structure of mind involves two levels of consciousness: unconscious (*ālaya vijñāna*) and cognitive consciousness (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*) which has a reciprocal causal relationship in the sense



that both are inter-dependent and evolve in relation to each other. The first level of consciousness (ālaya vijñāna) refers to underlying unbroken stream of consciousness whereas the second level signifies consciousness in terms of six modalities of cognitive consciousness which momentarily arise in association with discrete cognitive objects. This reciprocal relationship also exists between cognitive consciousness and emotional affliction (manas). This relationship and function of the unconscious and consciousness can be explored in its depth within the Buddhist framework of dependent origination. In Majjima Nikāya (ii 32) the notion of dependent origination is described in a very simplistic term as follows –

When this exists that comes to be with the arising of this that arises. When this does not exist that does not come to be; with the cessation of this that ceases
(Ñānamoli 1995)

This idea of causality is neither solely simultaneous nor exclusively sequential but it is a theory of concomitant conditionality, it is to mean when this exists that arises or when condition A exists effect B arises or its negation, where condition A does not exist effect B, does not arise. The structure of dependent origination consists of twelve factors in a life cycle of an individual. These are ignorance, karmic formation, consciousness, name and form, sense spheres, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth and ageing and death. The very first link ignorance can be understood with reference to four noble truths as ignorance concerning suffering, the cause of suffering, cessation of suffering and the path leading towards their cessation. Ignorance signifies that in previous lives one is unable to know the dissatisfactory nature of worldly existence itself. Ignorance conditions the arising of karmic formation (saṃskāra). Karmic formation means a formative structure of body, mind and speech. It signifies different formations which have been formed from past actions and also the formative actions that give rise to future formations. Karmic formation conditions the arising of consciousness. Consciousness refers to six modes of sensory and mental cognitive awareness. It is considered a rebirth consciousness in the sense that it descends into a newly forming fetus in the mother's womb. In Digha Nikāya (II 62 f) it is mentioned in the form of a dialogue between Buddha and Ananda-

I have said that consciousness conditions name and form.... Were, Ananda, consciousness not to descend into mother's womb, would name and form coagulate there?'

'No, Lord.'

'Were consciousness, having descended into mother's womb, to depart would name and form come to birth in this life?'

'No Lord.' (Walshe (trans.) 1987)

'Name- form' refers to physiological and psychological dimensions of human experience. It represents the basic process of the human mind and body. Name- form conditions six sense sphere. Six sense sphere signifies six sense organs (the five senses plus mind) and six sense objects. Hence there is a total of six pairs of sense organs and sense objects: eye and visible



object, ear and sound, nose and odour, tongue and taste, body and touch and lastly mind and mental objects. Contact arises when something impinges upon any of sense organs. In simplistic terms, contact means the relationship between senses and objects. Contact conditions feeling. Feeling refers to a link whereby contact or sensation is experienced as a pleasant unpleasant or neutral feeling. Feeling conditions craving. Craving refers to a link whereby one is longing for the object which gave pleasant feeling in the past. Craving conditions grasping (ūpādāna). Ūpādāna signifies a substratum through which an active process is kept alive. There are four types of ūpādāna: grasping to sensual pleasure [kāṃūpādāna], grasping to views (diṭṭhūpādāna), grasping to rules and regulation (sīlabbatūpādāna), grasping to a theory of self (attavādūpādāna). Becoming can be understood as repeated birth in future (āyatim punabbhava-abhinibbatti) into any of the three realms of existence. It conditions jati (birth).

Birth is explained in Saṃyukta Nikāya II 3 as –

The birth of various beings in the various orders of beings, their being born decent [into the womb], production the manifestation of the aggregates, the obtaining of the sense spheres. this is called birth. (Bodhi 2000)

‘Aging and death’ is the last link of twelve member series.

In this twelve-member cycle, karmic formation and consciousness can be taken as the core members in the sense that the whole cycle can be explained in terms of the reciprocal relationship of karmic formation and consciousness.

Conclusion

This paper deliberated on metaphysics of Vasubandhu reading through his treatise on Vijñāptimatratasiddhi. Vasubandhu being an idealist believed that consciousness is the only reality and argued against the existence of external objects but for establishing metaphysical structure of consciousness, he mostly relied on unconscious (ālaya-vijñāna) that became the foundation of his philosophy. Various types of consciousness (such as cognitive consciousness, ‘I- consciousness’ (manas) and store consciousness) have reciprocal causality since they give rise to each other. Buddhists understood the Life cycles of an individual against the backdrop of dependent origination as due to karmic formation (saṃskāra) one comes into being (vijñāna) but notably he/she is not only acquiring a new sentient body that has name and form but also contributes towards the growth of karmic formation. Hence, consciousness has two dimensions- past impressions contained in store -consciousness and present cognitive awareness and both are interconnected due to various types of predispositions (vāsānā).

The study highlights that store- consciousness (ālaya vijñāna) may be understood in terms of three kinds of impressions/predispositions [vāsānā]- speech (abhilā-pavāsānā), self-viewing (ātmadṛṣṭi-vāsānā) and existence (bhavaṅga-vāsānā). These refer to correspondingly cognitive, afflictive and psycho-ontological dimensions of store-consciousness (ālaya- vijñāna). Past actions (karma) and experiences continue to influence the present cognitive process on account



of the predisposition of speech. Language permeates in all types of cognitive awareness. The habitual pattern of conceptualization always taints cognitive awareness. Self-viewing as an innate tendency continuously inflames self-centred notions that colour every thought and deed. Further, existential desire (bhavaṅga vāsanā) epitomizes the continuation of existence (saṃsāra) which is represented as impressions of the twelve factors of existence in the series of dependent origination.

Though the postulation of store consciousness seems to be speculative and esoteric yet one cannot deny the reality of the unconscious dimension of our personality connecting to various predispositions, tendencies and inclinations which always affects our consciousness. Even if we do not believe in the transmigration of life still these dispositions such as speech (abhilāpavāsanā), self-viewing (ātma-dṛṣṭi- vāsanā) and existential desire (bhavaṅga-vāsanā) play a significant role in constructing our worldview (saṃsāra).

Notes

¹ I cite Kochumuttom's transliteration of the Sanskrit verses, that is based on Sylvan Lévi, Sylvain (ed.), 1925. *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi: Deux Traités de Vasubandhu: Viṃśatikā (La Vingtaine), Accompagnée d'une explication en prose, et Triṃśikā (La Trentaine), avec le Commentaire de Sthiramati*. Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion. Pages 1-11. I also cite English translation of verse from *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* by T R Sharma (Sharma 1993:52- 119)

Viṃśikā, K.1:

Vijñaptimātram evedam asadarthābhāsanāt/
Yathā taimirakasya-asatkeśa candra-ādi darśanam//

² Ibid, K. 2:

na deśakālaniyamaḥ santānāniyamo na ca /
na ca kṛtyakriyā yuktā vijñaptir yadi nārthataḥ //

³ This is a unique tradition in the debates of Indian philosophy. It involves building a deep familiarity with the opponent's point of view before criticizing it.

⁴ Ibid, K. 3

deśa-ādi-niyamaḥ siddhaḥ svapnavat pretevat-punaḥ/
santāna-aniyamaḥ sarvaiḥ pūya-nadī-ādi-darśane//

⁵ Ibid, K.4

svapna-upaghātavat kṛtya-kriyā narakavat punaḥ/
sarvam naraka-pālādi-darśane taiś-ca-bādhane//

⁶ Ibid, K.5

Tiraścām sambhāvaḥ svarge yathā na narake tathā/
Na pretānām yatas-tajjam duḥkham na-anubhavanti te//

⁷ Ibid, K.5



Yadi tat-karmabhis-tatra bhūtānām sambhāvas-tathā/
Iṣyate pariṇāmaś-ca kim vijñānasya na iṣyate//

⁸ Triṃśikā, K.1:

Ātma-dharma-upacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate/
Vijñāna-parināmo'sau pariṇāmaḥ sa ca tridhā//

⁹ Bhāṣya, 16, 1-2: ko''ya pariṇāmo nāma/ anyathātvam/ kāraṇa-kṣaṇa-nirodha-sama kālah kāraṇa-kṣaṇa-
vilakṣaṇaḥ kāryasyātma-lābhaḥ pariṇāmaḥ/ Cf. Mahāyānasūtrāṅkāra (ed. Sylvain Levi 1925), 150, 23:
pariṇāmo hi nāmānyathātvam/ (from Vasubandhu's commentary); and AK-vyākhyā, 148, 4: ko'yaṃ
pariṇāmo nāmeti/ Sāṃkhyānaṃ pariṇāmāśaṃ kayā pṛcchati/saṃtater anyathātvam iti/.

¹⁰ Triṃśikā, K.2:

Vipāko mananākhyāśca vijñaptir-viśayasya ca/
Tatra-ālayākhyā vijñānam vipākaḥ sarvabījakam//

¹¹ ibid K.11:

pañcānām mūlavijñāne yathāpratyaḥ udbhāvaḥ/
vijñānānām saha na vā taraṅgānām yathā jale//

¹² ibid K.11

Mano-vijñāna-sambhūtiḥ sarvadā-asañjñikād-ṛṣe
Samāpatti-dvayān-mūrchanād-api acittakāt.

¹³ Sthiramati, Bhāṣya, 18, 6-7: tatra hetu-pariṇāmo yā ālayavijñāne vipāka-niṣyanda vāsanā-paripuṣṭiḥ/ see:
*Tridhika-bhāṣya of Sthiramati. S. Levi (ed.) (1925), Vijñaptimatratasiddhi, Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré
Champion*

¹⁴ Saṃdhanirmocana-Sutra (V. 2) Sanskrit reconstruction by Schmithausen (1987:356 n 508) (savabījakam
cittam) *vipacyate saṃmūjrcchati vṛddhiṃ vipultām apādyate*. See: MSg I.2: "The consciousness (*vijñāna*)
containing all the seeds is the receptacle (*alaya*) of all dharmas.

¹⁵ See E Lamotte (ed. And trans.) (1935) Saṃdhanirmocana-Sutra (V. 3)

¹⁶ See Etienne Lamotte, "Introduction" to *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa: the Treatise on Action by Vasubandhu*,
English translation by Leo M. Pruden (1988:28)

¹⁷ See: Asanga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, T. 31.137.b; E. Lamotte (1973: 80-81)

¹⁸ See: Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasamgrahabhasya*, T. 31.336.c; E. Lamotte (1973: 80-81)

¹⁹ The term *mano-vijnana* has been rendered in various ways. K.N. Jayatilleke rendered it as "internal
perception" or "introspection" in his *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (1963: 436). Walpola Rahula
(1959:23), another leading scholar in the field of early Buddhism, translated it by "mental consciousness". See
his *What the Buddha Taught*.

²⁰ *Vimsatika*, IX

²¹ See: *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*. (Bodhi (trans.) 2000).

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