

An Examination of the Panchaskandas

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We are given five terms as the basis of Buddhistic psychology, and there have been various schools of interpretation. Instead of accepting, or rejecting any of these views, let us examine what may come of them in the light of some methods of contemporary logicians and scientists.

The terms are **rupa** (translated as “form” or visible body); **vedana** (feeling, “sensation”); **prajna** (“cognitism”); **samskara** (“impressions”); **vijnana**—the interpretations of which are various. But there are some questions that might be asked, especially whether any verbal or logical translation of a Sanskrit term equally conveys an idea of the psychological or other process involved.

Buddha formulated **sama-drishti** which is to say, the universal outlook which is concomitant with the enlightenment-experience. This is an all-embracing outlook, not a particularizing one. He also advocated **arya-dharma**. One is never sure whether or how much of what is called Buddhism is or is not a part of **arya-dharma**.

The only too little known mathematical philosopher Cassias Keyser has formulated the “doctrine of doctrines.” According to him a **doctrine** was a series of related categorical propositions and propositional functions which could be used to explain phenomena, or the universe. It had to be self-consistent but it could be contradictory to any other **doctrine**. Doctrines of the whole are more or less incomplete. But one cannot combine other doctrines because of the rejection of certain axioms.

Spinoza endeavored to explain the universe by utilizing Euclidean methods. This has resulted in a very marvelous verbal-logic which has little to do with the world of experience, finite or a-finite. The rise of non-Euclidean geometry brought thinkers face to face with the laws of thought. This development reached a high point in the mathematics of Cantor who laid down systems of numbers:

- a. Integers, or **finite** terms;
- b. Omegas, or transfinite terms; finite but unbounded, a-finite;
- c. Alphas, or infinite terms.

The series of relations, the operations of order, harmony, consistency, etc., are different in each of these classes. But despite Einstein’s formulation of a finite-but-unbounded world, we are still in the confusion of types and mix both logics and metaphors. Bertrand Russell who did so much theoretical work on “the confusion of types” was quite unable to practice it in psychology.

Most Western writers on Buddhism are still attached to the Aristotelian logic, and influenced by Euclid. They fail to consider that “thing”-reasoning is quite different from “operational”-reasoning, but that the latter is in harmony with the Buddha’s injunctions. Besides this, all such opinions are **darshanas**. An imagined or conceived “nirvana” makes **sama-drishti** an impossibility.

Given a certain number of Euclidean axioms, we can build up a certain kind of universe. Given, instead, five chemical elements, we have quite a different series of results. And within the field of chemistry, the results say, of an Inorganic Chemistry of iron, sulphur, hydrogen, oxygen and sodium seems very limited in contrary with an Organic Chemistry of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and sulphur.

Lacking **sama-drishti**, our scientists and those metaphysicians who are constantly proclaiming themselves the proponents of “science” fail to explain why water has properties not found in hydrogen and oxygen; why rust is so different from iron or the substances which attack iron; why there is a sudden appearance of a type of “magnetism” in iron; etc, etc.

Those who have learned about five Platonic solids will note that one of these is curvilinear (the sphere), while the others are rectilinear. And when one comes to the consideration of the Panchaskandas, we must not only note that one (at least) may be curvilinear, but that the processes which are involved are not in the least like Euclidean processes, but of a totally different order.

We can begin with a geometry of lines and so determine points, figures and planes. We have to accept the lines intuitionally (following Browser, the great mathematical philosopher.) Our system of Physics and perhaps all sciences is also based on similar “intuitions.” And in Physics itself we find that different kinds of light, interfering with each other, cause shadow-phenomena.

So we come to the Buddhistic consideration of the skandas and we find that each alone becomes **sunya**, we adopt the **sama-drishti** point of view. So when it is said that rupa is emptiness, vedana is emptiness, etc., we are faced with a situation similar to that of the physicist. But the operational vedana, meeting the operational-rupa does produce a phenomena.

One can here make a sort of cross

		Rupa	
	Prajna		Vedana
		Samskara	

Every activity of our life may be associated with a sensation. There are two types of sensations which we may call “conscious” and “non-conscious.” The former utilize the cerebrospinal nervous system, the latter the autonomic nervous system. The muscles associated with the former have a totally different sort of striation than the muscles associated with the latter. The heart is different having a cross-striation or grill.

So here an explanation is given. We are consciously examining a world seemingly without—this is a vedana operation. But if we hypnotize a person we may find experiences lodged in the “sub-conscious” of which he was not aware. There are millions of things going on around us of which we are seemingly insensitive. This shows that not only do the vedana-experience (vedana-rupa) affect us, but also a series of non-vedana experiences affect us, which may be identical with prajna.

Until recent times Western psychologists were building rupa-vedana-samskara systems. They could not explain tropisms, instincts, impulses, impressions, intuitions and inspirations. Levi-Bruhl has shown that the “undeveloped” man does not consider himself apart from his environment. Goerer, in his *Africa Dances* shows clearly the existence of a rupa-prajna-samskara system. We also have a different sort of psychology in the mold (vide *Leben*) where man does not act as a cognate individual.

But in the consideration of the mind and the samskaric operations, due emphasis has not been placed on the phenomena that light-rays—following a parallel—striking a revolving ceiling or mirror, are not simply bent or reflected. Every connection, conscious or unconscious, produces an altera-

tion in our finite mind. Not only that but those operations affect both ourselves and the universe around us. No doubt it is this system of samskaras that has its parallel in the effects on the convolutions of the brain and nervous system and on the biological-chemistry thereof. But these some samskaras produce all these impressions which bring age, illness, pain and suffering. It is not that rupa, vedana, samskara or prajna do these things, but the complicated results of procedure make samskara the seemingly final arbiter of our affairs. The result is: **Karma**.

There are philosophical schools from Spencer onward, let us say, to Carnap, which have unduly emphasized the rupa-vedana-samskara system. The methods by which 606 and the Salk-vaccine were discovered fall in line here. But is that true of the really great scientific discoveries? It is not true of the way in which Oersted discovered the relation between electricity and magnetism; or Crocker, the tubes; or Roentgen the X-ray; or Becquerel radioactivity. These were distinctly rupa-prajna-samskara operations. They “just happened,” and happened despite the effects and thoughts of the scientist involved.

But we have not exhausted the field. How about Darwin? The independent discovery of the modern theory of evolution by Darwin and Wallace, in identically the same **psychological** environment shows that there is an **integral** element in the mind of man. This is **vijnana**. **Vijnana** may make use of the scenes, or outside world, or inside world, but it sees “wholes,” not just lines or broken surfaces.

At this point it must be observed that, following a sort of analogy with the platonic solids, the samskrita-system is that of a revolving wheel, and is necessarily finite in its results. It is associated with the building up and retention of the “false ego.” Without it, the other worlds are seemingly without limit. Let us examine them:

Rupa. Read any book on science printed in 1896. Now takes into consideration the whole new worlds of atomic and sub-atomic discoveries, the rise of scientific cosmology, the doctrine of archebi-osis, etc., and the revisions made concerning the so-called “conservation of matter,” and we find something entirely different. If there are such revolutionary changes in 60 years, can we be sure that any conclusion, other than **rupa** is **sunya** is valid?

Vedana: During the class session recently there was a terrific sound like an explosion. It appears that that this was associated with the now supersonic phenomena. The study of Psychophysics demonstrates that the human ear responds to just certain range-pitches. There are varying sensitivities within those regions to which some respond and some do not—this can be easily determined if one attends the Monday night lectures on the music of India, the Southeast and Far East Asia. But not much attention has been paid to the sounds that the dog is sensitive to.

We are just beginning to recognize this world of sound vibration; we can better turn to our light-responses. But here there are even more difficulties. Light has been so restricted to the human eye responses and to the accompanying confusion that those eye-responses are generally about the same as the color-responses that different types of eyes are regarded as “abnormal.” This is a totally **a priori** conclusion that has unfortunately been determinate in the scientific world. When Dr. Ladd-Franklin demonstrated in no unmistakable terms that Helmholtz was not entirely correct in either the physics or physiology of sound, she went through something of a modern Galilean experience. (e.g., she is not mentioned in Korzybski’s *Science and Sanity*.)

Over a century ago a certain Viennese Count Reichenbach investigated the eye-sight of psychics and abnormal people. He found that several seemed to see electric and magnetic vibrations. This was before the time of Maxwell; instead of being welcomed the learned gentleman was hounded as a charlatan. Herz and Marconi have come and gone and we have several new electronic sciences, but there has been no compensation or repentance for this act.

Forty years ago the budding British genius Moseley substituted the X-ray for the eye in the investigation of the spectra of the chemical elements and came up with the law of atomic numbers which seems to be one of the few laws of nature actually accepted as a law. (Moseley is not mentioned by Korzybski either). Consequently we have a very restricted idea of light-responses and the limitations to which we have restricted ourselves both in practice and in philosophical abstractions from scientific knowledge.

What is the conclusion? Vedana, if considered alone, will be found to be nothing but **sunya**. And the human-eye-vedana, or the human-ear-vedana, can only lead to series of samskaras which re-acts within a limited world. This precludes any vijnana activity, and so our learning will remain until we “see” beyond it.

Samskara: This is a very difficult subject to write about. It is all well and good to say, that for whatsoever we saw, we shall equally reap. Or, to every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. We do receive impressions, we do not keep the mind blank, we do react. And these reactions have a duo-fold result, one series on the human personality, and the other in the universe which appears to be outside it—in other words samsara. So long as we do not practice **sama-drishti** and **samyak-sambodhi** we remain there. This, in the terminology of Christ, is the world of sin. And we are stuck with it.

Prajna: This also leads to emptiness unless one or two changes take place in our whole field of operations. It is very well to say; “Whatsoever ye do to the least of these my creatures, ye also do it unto me,” or “ji-ji-mu-ge,” or “People of the world, you are as the branches of the trees and the leaves of the branch” (Abdul Baha). This is beautiful nonsense-philosophy unless it is carried over into the psychological field.

There is one respect in which science is far superior to metaphysics and that is the willingness on the part of some scientist—perhaps many—to accept conclusions of others, especially when fortified by suitable laboratory data. In other words, one no longer depends upon direct-ego-experience. In philosophy one too often builds up some ego-dialectic system and imports it by force of will. What does it prove? **In the end it can only prove that such prajna is emptiness.**

In love and in compassion there is a different attitude. The dichotomy between **karuna** and **prajna** is for explanation only. This would suggest that there are elements or aspects of prajna which do not necessarily lead to samskara. In Ashvaghosa there is detailed explanation of the performing of processes. Sufism proposes that the samskaric system is practically identical with the ego-system. And it is possible to live and to live in a more wider sense when we refuse to reach, when we refuse to be harnessed by every little experience of the everyday life.

Vijnana: Although the Vijnana operations seem to be free from samskara, they are not always free from maya. The point of view presented by Aurobindo seems to be that Vijnana operations belong to the overman; Prajna-operations, properly purified, are in the realm of superman.