

THE ILLUSION OF IDENTITY OF THE BODY AND THE SELF

In Viśiṣṭādvaita

Almost all the schools of Indian Thought hold the view that the primal mistake that man had committed and which has been the cause of his present migratory and ignorant existence was due to an original ignorance which is of the form of a perceptual illusion, known as *dehātma-bhrānti* or *bhrama*. The explanation as to how it ever happened has not been properly explained, and it is therefore necessary to investigate the causes of this original illusion or present persistent delusion. It would not be an answer to say that since we now raise the question that there is a body or mind apart from the other, and therefore are aware of their difference the illusion that the one is the other is now irrelevant. The philosophical schools excepting the *cārvākas* or materialists who did not have this problem at all, since they did not distinguish between the body and the soul, but only held that the soul is itself a product of the activities of the body and perhaps their constellations with certain nuclei of the combinations of atoms of four kinds, have decided that there was this illusion, *bhrama* which can be resolved only by extricating the characteristics of the soul from the body with which it has been identified. Thus in Buddhism we have the need to discover the *atta*, the permanent¹ conscient or the real from the flux of congregates or aggregates (*skandhas*); in Jainism the soul has to be freed from the karma-matter that has infiltrated into it and has restricted or limited its consciousness inside every way; and in Nyāya Vaiśeṣika the soul has to be perceived as having other characteristics than those of the other categories; in Sāṃkhya the self, the passive witness consciousness, has to realise itself as the passive witness it is and not the active buddhi or prakṛti in which it finds itself to be mirrored; in Advāita Vedānta, the soul has to know itself as always free from the *avidya* which has somehow enveloped it: and in Bhedābheda the soul has to be known as different from the *upādhis* or limiting adjuncts which limit its self luminosity; and in Viśiṣṭādvaita the soul must know itself as self-luminous in itself though its cognitive functional consciousness is contracted by karma and by the body subject to or product of *avidya-karma*. In every one of these cases, we have to discover how the soul deludes itself into believing that it is the body that is itself? The judgment □I am stout□ *sthūloham* is a statement about the physical body, and cannot be considered to be a judgment that reveals the *dehātma-bhrama*, whereas it may be considered to be *ātma deha bhrama*. And this will be the conclusion that will be forced on us as we proceed with the analysis of this problem. But before we try to investigate as to how that is even possible, we shall have to enquire further into this posing of the problem, which almost all thinkers have done.

¹ The original doctrine of Buddhism was Vaibhaja-vāda, which held the above view

How does it ever happen that the characteristics of the soul are perceived as belonging to matter or to the body. This is the main problem. To answer this question, we have to enquire into the nature of the soul. The difficulty is precisely here. If we knew the precise qualities which are exclusively that of the soul and not of any substance other than the soul, we should be able to state it more clearly. The soul, it is agreed, is a consciousness cum self-conscious entity having selfness (*pratyaktva*) oneness (*ekatva*), and agreeableness (*anukūlatva*). The self-consciousness of the soul is of a luminous nature, which is its eternal characteristic. These three qualities are features of the *ahamartha* □□. These characteristics or qualities are in respect of the soul like the □silverness□ of silver.

In the illusion that the body is the *Ahamartha* or self, what we find is that the body possesses these characteristics of selfness and oneness and agreeableness. At least these characteristics are found to be in the ensouled-body, even as is the case of 'silverness' in the nacre. If this were the case, the judgment that we make will have the form 'This is conscious', 'This body is a unity', 'This body is enjoyable', and therefore the body will seek to live and increase and enjoy, This is precisely what we do in our actions; and seek to hold on to the life in this body; we seek to increase and grow, and we cling on to the body as the most enjoyable thing in the universe.

These judgments as it might be noted, not of the same kind as □I am stout □ I am starving □ 'I am so and so', The body in *dehātma bhrama* is seen to have the attributes of the soul, by a kind of a transference of attributes belonging to the soul to the body. Thus nacre is mistaken for silver. What essentially belong to the one are considered to be essential of the other. What are the causes of this transference? Is this transference of attributes of the one to the other due to perceptual defects or mental impositions or transference of previously experienced attributes to one that is similar to it in some manner? Is it a case of *akhyāti*, non-perception of the difference between perceptual content and the memory content, or of *anyathā khyāti*, the mistaken perception of the same order as rope-snake, or is it a case of *akhyāti* again of the form of crystal and rose, which gives the colour to the crystal as in the Sāmkhyā explanation?

Conjoint perception of body and the soul, even without similarity is said to be the cause of this illusion. It is presupposed, perhaps, just like the conditioned-reflex theory that the presence of one factor alone will bring about the reaction specific to the other. This explanation is ingenious but it cannot alone solve the problem of transference. The conjoint experience of stoutness and selfness as in the *ātmadeha-bhrama*, and the conjoint experience of selfness and its attributes in its embodied state as in the *dehātma-bhrama*, are less explanations of the phenomena than descriptions. For it is clear that in the case of nacre and silver, there is a perceiver extraneous to the body who experiences their togetherness and is conditioned in his responses whereas in the case of the *dehātma-bhrama* is by oneself of oneself with

one's body which one utilises and experiences. There is thus no possibility of explaining the self introspective activity implicit in the attribute of *pratyaktva* as belonging to the body. It is difficult to experience the fact that the body is in itself self conscious, even at the first look, which is precisely the locus of the illusion. Further the joint apprehension of subject and object in consciousness or cognition is not the special characteristic of the illusory experience only, but of all experiences. Thus this cannot be an explanation of the *dehātma-bhrama*. A further difficulty in all perceptual explanations of this *dehātma bhrama* is that the terms here are not perceived by the senses. Thus the difficulty of even considering that this is a *bhrama*. More truly it can be called *bhrānti* — a hallucination, the projecting of one's thoughts into the perceptual field by innervation of consciousness. But this alternative seems to be unacceptable to all schools.

Further the main characteristic of an illusion is not a manufacture of new entities, but rather it is the accentuation of certain features of an object which are superficial, to the level of importance and value. Thus the form of the snake, the reflective nature of the nacre, the penetrability of light rays through transparent crystal are real facts. There are possibilities of similarity in objects belonging to one particular order, and that is why illusions are paired, that is to say it is a rope that looks like a snake, it is nacre that looks like silver, it is crystal that looks coloured, and not all other objects. This pairing-phenomenon is of great value. This theory thus realizes that there are real factors in illusion: a thing is an illusion not because of absence of the factors which make it look like another with which it is mistaken, but because such similarities are frankly useless for the purpose of action or realization when taken as the other. This is the *Yathārtha khyāti* theory in a nutshell. But this view cannot be an explanation for the *dehātma-bhrama*, for it would be pleading for the real possibility of mistaking the body for the soul because of the actual but useless similarity between the two soul and body. This indeed it cannot admit for the metaphysical theory of Viśiṣṭādvaita upholds a radical distinction between soul and matter, the one being material, unconscient, and the other always, conscient and self-luminous possessing the attributive consciousness-function. (*dharmabhūta jñāna*).

There is, however, here a possibility of holding that it may not be the *pratyaktva* that occasions the illusion or the unity of characteristics but its other attribute *anukūlatva*, agreeableness, which is the cause. Thus in analysing the characteristic attributes of the soul which identifies itself with the body or rather which later finds its own characteristics in the body and thus considers it to be the self, or soul, we find that the illusion has its basis in *anukūlatva* rather than in conscientness, *jñāṛtva*. For the fact is that perception is always of that in which we are interested or that which is agreeable, and is decidedly, as in nacre not interested in the thing but in the silverness which it mistakes for real silver. The personal interest for satisfaction of the physical demand and spiritual demand is thus clearly available in all activities that man does. The *ānukūlatva* of the soul, agreeableness that it finds in itself, is reflected

also in the body which subserves the pleasure-principle.' It is this perception of the agreeable and serviceable *ānukūlatva*, that is the cause of the illusion. The soul and the material world and the body that one has are, all enjoyable things serviceable to the Lord, this is the common denominator in their qualities. This is the reason why the soul is capable of aligning itself with the body, and thus deluding itself into believing that there is no difference between itself and the body. The failure of the body will lead to the failure of the soul, and thus it can be seen that any illusion is based not only on the actual contactual relation in which the body and soul are found, but also on the actual perception of qualities, special to the soul being found to be available in the body itself. For instance the body has also *pratyaktva*, an individuality, differentiation, from the surrounding objects with which it may share materiality, but which are never interpreted to be itself. Similarly there is the unity, *ekatva*, the oneness which is in this case not mere oneness of conscient existence but the oneness of unity of diverse organs. Thus the actual illusion has sufficient reason to occur. Thus we find that illusion has a real ground as the illusion is due not in so far as there are not qualities or attributes the self has in it, but only in so far as those qualities are not particularly its, that is to say, *asādhāraṇa*-attributes, attributes which belong to it exclusively and not to others. It is this particular attribute-ness or *asādhāraṇatva* of these three attributes of *pratyaktva*, selfness, *ekatva* and *anukūlatva* that now have to be investigated. Of these *pratyaktva* is special to the self in a manner in which even *anukūlatva* is not.

Thus when we say that we perceive the self as the body, *dehātma bhrama* is due to the fact that we perceive the attributes of the soul in the body and thus mistake it for the soul. But this position, whilst explaining the illusion and its possibility does not really answer the metaphysical or epistemological proposition as to how the self, a cognizing entity, which is, according to all thinkers, a conscious and self-conscious entity, *svasmai svena sadā bhāsmān*,, ever gets this kind of delusion or illusion that it is the body which it occupies and controls. This is impossible. What is possible is that the body is perceived by the self itself as its own, its *prakāra*, as belonging to it and sharing its perpetuity; unity, selfness and serviceableness and agreeableness. The attribute, namely, the body, is perceived as the substrate, the ground, *viśeṣya*. Thus the original illusion must be due to this *ātma-deha-bhrama* rather than due to *dehātma-bhrama*. This is precisely what makes it possible for us to understand the transference of self-characteristics to the attribute or *prakāra*. But it may be asked as to whether even this is possible, since self-conscious entity can never be without its self-consciousness?

This is certainly an important question, and requires to be investigated. If the self-luminosity of the self is something having reference to the manifestation in its consciousness of the entire world of objects including its own body, then no illusion can possibly occur at all. For everything will be perceived as the content of the subject's consciousness. The transference of its own attributes or specific qualities to

the body will be impossible. Thus self-luminosity can only mean the perception of itself alone as a conscient being having the characteristic qualities of *pratyaktva* and *ekatva* and *anukūlatva*, and not anything else. This will not even include the perception of the *asādhāraṇatva* of these qualities in relation to itself, for these qualities alone in their bare quality-ness (*viśeṣaṇatva*) are perceived. If so how is it possible for it to know that these qualities are specific to itself and to nothing else? The self or soul in its selfness thus is cognizant only of its selfness and unity and agreeableness to itself, because it is not mere *nirviśeṣa-vaṣṭu* that it perceives, such perception or experience being impossible. But knowing that these qualities are specific to it alone, *asādhāraṇa* comparison with other experiences or relations would have to be had, and this is achieved by it not as a self-luminous being but as a being having consciousness as an attribute, *dharma-bhūta-jñāna*. This is the fundamental distinction between *dharmi-bhūta-jñāna* and the *dharma-bhūta-jñāna*. Thus it is that *dharma-bhūta-jñāna* helps- not :only the understanding of the objects outside the individual, the perception of the body and its states, but finally its acts reflexively in so far as it reveals to the soul its own qualities as specially related to it. The illusions then are to be referred to the *dharma bhūta-jñāna* activities rather than to the *dharmi-bhūta-jñāna*. The *asādhāraṇatva* or specificity of these three attributes of selfness, oneness and *anukūlatva* is the one thing that has to be discovered, and it is the one thing that is not perceived at once, and thus there occurs the illusion.

Thus we find that the true source of the illusion called *ātma-deha-bhrama* consists not in the veiling by primeval *adhyāsa*, or ignorance, nor yet a beginning less karma, but in the two-fold limitation of the soul; (i) the privateness and exclusiveness and self-enjoying nature of the *dharmi-bhūta-jñāna* which does not even apprehend its *aṇutva*, or *kaṛtva* attributes but only its *pratyaktva*, selfness, and *ekatva*, oneness, and *anukūlatva*, which makes it impossible for it to know that these attributes are exclusively its own rather than of the body it tenants, and (ii) the *dharma-bhūta-jñāna* which due to limitation due to beginning- less karma and its consequent *avidyā*, does not apprehend this specific exclusiveness of these attributes *pratyaktva*, *ekatva* and *anukūlatva* and *jñāṛtva* and others of the self, and thus causes the delusion or illusion that the body is the self or soul.