

AN OLD MISUNDERSTOOD MAXIM

For the understanding of the old maxim: *alābhe mattakāśinyā dr̥ṣṭā tiryakṣu kāmītā*, Jacob¹ relies upon the explanation supplied by a Raghunātha which runs:

*Yatrādhikārthalābhe'lpārthe pravṛttir na doṣāyeti vivakṣāyām tatrā-
lābhe mattakāśinyā dr̥ṣṭā tiryakṣu kāmīteṭi nyāyaḥ / mattakāśinī
strīviśeṣaḥ //*

On the basis of this explanation he translates the maxim: « Failing to obtain a lovely woman, affection is seen (to have been lavished) on animals ». The literal meaning of the maxim is, no doubt, even as Jacob feels, « very stupid », even quite obscene and hurtful to civilized consciousness. But when we see that the maxim is quite popular among old philosophers like Udayana (10th cent. A.D.) and Ānandabodha (11th cent. A.D.) who employ it in their important works to explain some recondite problems, it cannot be brushed aside with contempt. The contextual meaning it derives in these learned texts removes all the baseness which can be attributed to it on the basis of its literal sense.

While rejecting as impossible the view that there is positive and permanent (*nitya*) bliss (*sukha*) in the state of liberation (*mokṣa*), Udayana² says:

*Durantaṁ ca tat / tad abhisandheḥ sukhasaṁskārasahakāritayā tad
udbhaye viśiṣṭasukhābhilāṣiṇo vaiṣayike'pi pravṛttisaṁbhavāt /
« alābhe mattakāśinyā dr̥ṣṭā tiryakṣu kāmīte » ti udāharaṇāt //*

* Retired Reader in Linguistics, University of Poona, Sanskrit Dictionary Project, Deccan College, Poona.

1. *Laukikanyāyāñjali*, Bombay, 1907, I.7.

2. *Ātmatattvaviveka*, Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1939, p. 922.

Śaṅkaramiśra³ explains the passage as follows:

*Nityasukhābhilāṣiṇo vaiṣayikasukhe'pi abhilāṣaḥ syāt / sa ca mok-
ṣavirodhīty arthaḥ / utkr̥ṣṭābhilāṣe tad aprāptāv apakr̥ṣṭābhilāṣe
dr̥ṣṭāntam āha / alābheti /*

Raghunātha-Siromaṇi's⁴ explanation here runs:

*Tan nityam sukham / abhisandheḥ kāmānāyāḥ / utkr̥ṣṭasukhe kāmā-
nāyām tad asampattāv apakr̥ṣṭe'pi tatra kāmānā jāyata iti / atra
dr̥ṣṭāntam āha / alābha iti //*

In almost a similar context the Vedāntin Ānandabodha⁵ quotes this maxim in support of his statement:

*Paramo hi brahmānandaḥ / ... tathā ca tad gocaro rāgaḥ katham
alpīyasyānekaduḥkhasambhinne sāmsārike sukhe pravartayet / tad
alābhe kadācid anyatra pravṛttir bhavet / «alābhe mattakāmi(śi?)
nyā dr̥ṣṭā tiryakṣu kāmata» ti cet / bhavaty evam kasya cin na
tu sarvasya mahārambhasyāvyagramanaso vasīkr̥tendriyagrāmasya
prakṛta evārthe pravṛttisambhavāt / tādr̥śa evādhikāri mokṣaśāstre
vivakṣitaḥ / na ca sarvādhikāraṁ kim api śāstraṁ sambhavati //*

The Vedāntins do accept positive bliss in the state of liberation. The bliss obtained on reaching the state of Brahman is indeed Supreme (*paramo hi brahmānandaḥ*). But this is possible only to the right aspirant who has the necessary equipment for the purpose. He must have subjugated his senses, and his mind must be concentrated on the goal. Lesser men than he, not so equipped and lacking in determination, are liable to be swayed by lesser pleasures which they mistake to be the real and the highest which is the object of their quest. This is what is indicated by our present maxim which, in its philosophical set up, would mean «contentment in a lower prize when the highest is either unrecognized or impossible to obtain».

3. *Kalpalatā*, p. 924.

4. *Didhiti*, p. 925.

5. *Pramāṇamālā*, Chowkāmbā Sanskrit Series, Benares, 1907, pp. 1-2.