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*Pradeep P. Gokhale*

Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, India

**Mindfulness Meditation and Phenomenological Approach**

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Research Professor in Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath (Varanasi, India), where he has been working since 2012 after teaching and research experience of 31 years at the Department of Philosophy, SP Pune University, Pune (India). Major areas in which his research articles are published are Classical Indian Philosophy, Indian Epistemology and Logic, Indian Moral Philosophy, Social Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion.

# **MINDFULNESS MEDITATION AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

**Pradeep P. Gokhale**

**Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath**

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# Prelude

- Today's talk is based on my paper entitled "The working of Mind in Sati meditation: Some Issues and Perspectives" which I had read in a conference in 2006. I am grateful to Professor Victoria Lysenko who happened to see the paper and thought it to be suitable for the present conference. The paper contained one small section in which I compared Mindfulness meditation with Phenomenological Approach. Today's talk is the version of that paper revised for the present conference.

# Prelude

- When I wrote the paper ten years ago and when recently I tried to revise it, my common feeling has been that though I can claim to be student of Buddhism, my understanding of Phenomenology is in a too immature stage. But in spite of such an immature understanding I have felt a strong fascination for phenomenology and its striking similarity with certain aspects of Buddhism. This fascination is the driving force for the present revised version.

# The plan of today's talk

1. What is mindfulness meditation? (6-11)
2. Four Types of Mindfulness meditation (12-22)
3. Core-features of Mindfulness meditation (23-41)
4. Comparison with Phenomenological Approach: Similarities (44-51)
5. Comparison with Phenomenological Approach: Differences (52-60)
6. The Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism (61-69)

# What is mindfulness meditation?

- We are traditionally told that the Buddha gave us two kinds of meditations viz. *samathabhāvanā* and *vipassanābhāvanā*.
- *Samathabhāvanā* is translated as concentration meditation where one-pointedness of mind is the core factor.
- *Vipassanābhāvanā* is translated as insight-meditation, where one develops a direct insight into the three characteristics of all conditioned objects and also realizes *Nibbāṇa*.

# What is mindfulness meditation?

- *Vipassana* is not found mentioned as a distinct kind of meditation in early Buddhist *suttas*.
- ‘*Vipassanā*’ is taken to mean insight into the true nature of things.
- In this sense *vipassanā* is not a meditation proper. However, it can be considered as a goal of meditative practice. ‘*Vipassanā*’ can be understood as *paññā* (Sanskrit: *prajñā*; insight or wisdom) resulting from a certain meditative practice.

# What is mindfulness meditation?

- The point can be explained in terms of the threefold classification of *paññā*: *sutamayā* (textual/scriptural), *cintāmayā* (rational) and *bhāvanāmayā* (meditational).
- The idea is that what one understands from teachers at the level of scriptural wisdom, one examines rationally at the second level, and meditates on it and understands it directly at the level of meditational wisdom.
- *Bhavanāmayā paññā* in this way can be regarded as the goal of meditation.



# What is mindfulness meditation?

- The question naturally arises as to which kind of meditation is appropriate for this goal. The natural answer, I suppose is that it is the meditation designated by *sammā sati* or the one, which can be called *sati* meditation that is, mindfulness meditation.
- For instance Vasubandhu says in *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*: “The one who has accomplished *śamatha*, should practice mindfulness meditation (*smṛtyupasthāna-bhāvanā*) for the sake of achieving *Vipaśyanā*”. (AK, vi.14ab and AKB on it)

# ***Sati*=Recollection/Mindfulness**

- *Sati* (*smṛti* in Sanskrit) means recollection and also mindfulness. In the context of meditation 'mindfulness' seems to be a better translation than recollection.
- Of course mindfulness is similar to recollection insofar as it is an awareness of something which has already happened in past. But here we are not talking about something happened in remote past, but that in immediate past which is presented to our consciousness almost as something present.
- The situation is like this. Something happens in my life world, and I become immediately aware that such and such thing 'is happening' (though actually it 'has happened' one moment back). Hence there is a mindful awareness of 'something', which immediately follows 'that thing'.

# ***Sati*=Recollection/Mindfulness**

- In *Satipṭṭhānasutta* (*Majjhimanikāya*) and also in *Mahāsatipṭṭhānasutta* (*Dīghanikāya*) the word used for this kind of meditation is *anupassanā*. Literally *anupassanā* also means seeing/ observing/ becoming aware of something, immediately after that something is presented before consciousness. (The word *anussati* used in the works such as *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaho* and *Visuddhimagga*, conveys a different sense, that of reflection or contemplation rather than mindfulness.)

# Four types of mindfulness-meditation

- As it is well-known, the Buddha in the sermons on mindfulness classified *sati* or *anupassanā* into four kinds:

**1. Mindfulness of bodily objects (*kāyagatā sati*)**

**2. Mindfulness of sensations (*vedanānupassanā*)**

**3. Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*)**

**4. Mindfulness of doctrinal factors (*dhammānu-passanā*)**

# 1) Mindfulness of bodily objects

## *(kāyagatā sati):*

- The following meditative practices are included under this heading:
  - One vigilantly observes in-breathing and out-breathing as they happen from moment to moment.
  - While performing various bodily activities one is aware of them.
  - One internally observes one's body part by part and notices its loathsomeness.
  - One observes dead bodies in different conditions.

## 2) Mindfulness of sensations (*vedanānupassanā*)

- According to the meditative practice included under this heading, one observes different parts of the body internally and checks the kinds of feelings or sensations one experiences there.
- The sensation may be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Again it may be gross or subtle, worldly or unworldly (*sāmiṣa* or *nirāmiṣa*).
- One has to observe how the sensation arises and passes away. No reaction is to be made even if the sensation may be pleasant or unpleasant.

### 3) Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*)

- Our mind, like other things, undergoes transformations.
- At times it may be concentrated, at times it may be disturbed, it may be having desire, aversion or delusion, it may be happy or unhappy, free or bound.
- Under this type of meditative practice one has to be aware of the state of mind at any point of time vigilantly and also see how it arises and passes away.

### 3) Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*)

- A question can arise regarding the working of mind in *cittānupassanā*. How is mindfulness about mind or about a mental state possible? The mindfulness about mind seems to imply the duality of minds: The mind (that is, cognition) which is aware and the mind (that is, cognition) or mental state of which it is aware.
- For explaining this kind of situation at least four models are available in Indian philosophy.



### 3) Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*)

- (1) **Succeeding Cognition Model:** If cognition or a mental state occurs at one moment, the direct cognition of that occurs at the next moment. (Nyāya position). Naiyāyikas call it *anuvyavasāya*. The Buddhist notion of *anupassanā* seems to have the same connotation.
- (2) **Dualistic Model:** At the first moment *buddhi* (internal cognitive faculty) assumes the form of object. At the next moment *Puruṣa* (the Seer, witness-consciousness) is aware of the *buddhi*. (Sāṅkhya model accepted by Yoga and Vedānta)

### 3) Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*)

- (3) **Inferential Model:** Though cognition of an object can be direct (for example, perceptual cognition), the cognition of that cognition is not direct. It is based on inference or postulation.(Bhāṭṭa-mīmāṃsā)
- (4) **Self-illumination Model:** Cognition is self-illuminating. Cognition of cognition occurs at the same time when one has the cognition of an object. (*Svasaṁvedana*) (Buddhism (particularly the epistemologies of Dinnāga and Dharmakīrti), Prābhākara-mīmāṃsā)

### 3) Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*)

- The question about mindfulness of mind is whether it follows the model of ‘succeeding awareness’, (*anuvyavasāya* or *anupassanā*) or that of self-illuminating cognition (*svasaṃvedana*).
- Buddhists are generally inclined to self-illumination model because they say that mind and mental state are inseparable. There cannot be pleasure without pleasure-awareness, though there can be table-awareness without a real table. This position is similar to Husserl’s position that in the case of consciousness of an external object the actual object is transcendent whereas in the consciousness of a mental state, the actual mental state is necessarily immanent.

### 3) Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*)

- But self-illumination model has a difficulty when we are particularly talking about mindfulness meditation. For example we have to distinguish between being angry and being aware of one's own anger. If we are not mindful enough, we may be angry, but not 'aware' that we are angry. In fact mindfulness of mind specifically prescribes that. If anger arises in my mind, immediately, which means at the very next moment, I should be aware that an angry mind has arisen.

### 3) Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*)

- Perhaps the discrepancy can be solved by distinguishing between awareness in general and mindful awareness. According to self-illumination model, if any mental state arises in me, I am simultaneously aware, however faintly, of the mental state. This could be understood as pre-reflective self-awareness. But pre-reflective self-awareness may not be mindful awareness. The practitioner of mindfulness meditation may be mindfully aware of the mental state at the next moment (or sometimes at the same moment.) It could be a kind of reflective awareness.

## 4) Mindfulness of doctrinal factors (*dhammānupassanā*):

- A question can be asked about the meaning of the term *dhamma* in *dhammānupassanā*. I have argued in the original paper that the word *dhamma* here does not mean phenomena or things in general or objects of mind, but the meaning of the word as ‘doctrine’ is most significant here. Dhammas in this context stand for the doctrinal elements such as hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), aggregates (*khandā*) and four noble truths (*ariya-saccāni*).
- The practice of *dhammānupassanā* really means developing awareness of doctrinal factors as they are exemplified by our day-to-day experiences.

# The core features of mindfulness meditation

- Broadly speaking there are three core features, which are shared by most of the types and sub-types of *sati* meditation. They are (i) Objectivity (ii) Realization of impermanence and other common characteristics and (iii) Dynamic, yet passive awareness.
- Let us consider them one by one.

# Core-features: (i) Objectivity

- One of the important features of *sati* meditation is that there is an emphasis on observing various aspects of one's own nature and other things objectively and on avoiding subjective elements such as attachment, clinging, , lust and grief.
- In other words, there is an emphasis on 'seeing the things as they are'. Just to cite one specimen:  
    "A disciple while walking understands – 'I am walking', while standing, understands –'I am standing' ....."



# Core-features: (i) Objectivity

- This reminds us of Tarski's well-known example of the correspondence theory of truth: "The cat is on the mat" is true if and only if the cat is on the mat. To stretch the simile the Buddha is expecting us here that our mindful awareness should correspond exactly with the way the things are. In other words, the Buddha is applying the correspondence theory of truth, which is primarily epistemological, for moral-soteriological purpose.

# Core-features: (i) Objectivity

- In the case of *sati* meditation ‘the thing as it is’ can be understood as *svabhāva* or *svalakṣaṇa*. Vasubandhu, while describing mindfulness meditation, says, “One examines body, sensation, mind as well as doctrinal factors in terms of their unique characteristics and general characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*)”. (AKB, vi.14).
- Here a unique characteristic of a phenomenon is its own nature or *svabhāva*.

# Core-features: (i) Objectivity

- Here it should be noted that just as Vasubandhu's *svalakṣaṇa* is different from (Kantian) 'thing in itself', it is also different from Dharmakīrti's *svalakṣaṇa* (unique particular). The former is expressible in words whereas the latter is not.
- Another important feature of *sati* meditation is that there is an emphasis in it on changing nature of phenomena.
- This is seen in on all the four kinds of *satis*.

## Core-features: (ii) Impermanence and other common characteristics

- 1) In *kāyagatā sati* one is aware of various bodily states and functions as they occur and change.
  - 2) In mindfulness of sensations (*Vedanānupassanā*) one is aware of pleasant, painful and neutral sensations as they arise and pass away.
  - 3) In mindfulness of mind (*Cittānupassanā*) one is aware of various mental states as they arise and pass away.
  - 4) Similarly in the mindfulness of *dhammas* (doctrinal factors), particularly those like hindrances (*nīvaraṇas*) and aggregates (*skandhas*), one is aware of the factors as they arise and pass away in one's psychic life.
- Thus one is directly aware of impermanence of phenomena in various *sati* meditations.

## Core-features: (ii) Impermanence and other common characteristics

- The awareness of impermanence (*anityatā*) has also implications to the other two characteristics of the respective objects, viz. soul-less-ness and unsatisfactoriness (*anātmata* and *duḥkhatā*) of meditation.
- It may be noted here that the doctrine of *trilakṣaṇa* (three characteristics) is central to early Buddhist theory of reality and the concept of *vipassanā* also incorporates the insight into the three characteristics.
- The three characteristics are interconnected. In *Anattalakkhaṇasutta* the Buddha shows how *anattā* nature of the conditioned objects is the root of impermanence. Similarly unpleasantness is inferred from impermanence (which is directly known) and *anattā* nature is derived from both, i.e. impermanence and unpleasantness.

## Core-features: (ii) Impermanence and other common characteristics

- In Sarvāstivāda literature fourth characteristic namely *śūnyatā* is added to the list of three.
- We have seen Vasubandhu's statement that in mindfulness meditation one examines phenomena in terms of their unique characteristics and general characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*).
- Now under general characteristics he includes "impermanence (*anityatā*) of the composite objects, unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhatā*) of the defiled objects, and void and soulless nature (*śūnyatā* and *anātmatā*) of all things."

# The problem of emptiness

- Meaning of the term *śūnyatā* is an important problem in Buddhist philosophy.
- It seems that in Theravāda as well as Sarvāstivāda it is to be taken as an offshoot of *anityatā* and *anātmatā*.
- In *cittamātratā* school it refers to unreality of the external world.
- In Mādhyamika Buddhism it stands for *niḥsvabhāvatā* or essencelessness.
- These diverse meanings of *śūnyatā* are relevant for phenomenological interpretation of Buddhism. That is because for realist schools of Buddhism *śūnyatā* is the common 'essence' (*sāmānyalakṣṇa*) of all phenomena, whereas for Mādhyamikas it indicates that things have no essence.

## **Core-features: (iii) Dynamic yet passive awareness**

- The third feature of *sati* meditation is almost a corollary of its two features namely objectivity and focus on impermanence. It is that the consciousness, which operates in *sati* meditation is dynamic, yet passive. This appears to be paradoxical but the paradox can be resolved in the following way.



# How is it dynamic?

- As we have seen, the consciousness in *sati* meditation takes note of phenomena as they are. But the expression 'as they are' does not refer to anything static. It refers to things that happen, occur, that is, arise and pass away. Again consciousness, which takes note of the changing phenomena, is not itself constant but it changes with the object. Hence *sati* consciousness is existentially dynamic.

## How is it passive?

- As we have seen, *sati* consciousness does not construct or create the object, but simply receives it as it is given, or 'describes' it without distorting it. Generally creation or construction or distortion of an object is caused by passions or attachment. *Sati* awareness on the other hand is detached, dispassionate awareness. It is passive in moral-psychological sense.

# How is it passive?

- Though the terms *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*, which are central terms of Buddhist ontology, are originally used in Sarvāstivāda ontology, they are used with a different sense from the meaning they assumed in Dharmakīrti's epistemology.
- According to Sarvāstivāda ontology *svalakṣaṇa* means own character or *svabhāva* of a thing. (Grammatically it will be derived as *karmadhāraya* or *tatpuruṣa* compound)
- As against this *svalakṣaṇa* according to Dharmakīrti means unique particular or self-characterized particular. (Grammatically it will be derived as a *bahuvrīhi* compound)

# How is it passive?

- *Svalakṣaṇa* of Sarvāstivāda can be expressed in subject predicate form. It can be expressed by a judgment.
- *Svalakṣaṇa* of Dharmakīrti cannot be expressed in a judgment.
- Dharmakīrti calls unique particular the ultimate reality and regards it as the object of immediate awareness which is non-judgmental or non-propositional.
- He distinguishes this awareness, which he calls *pratyakṣa–pramāṇa*, from the judgmental awareness or mental construction (*vikalpa*) which immediately follows the non-judgmental awareness.

# How is it passive?

- Unlike Dharmakīrti's *pratyakṣa-pramāṣa*, mindful meditative awareness is a judgmental awareness.
- As we have seen, while describing mindfulness of bodily postures, the Buddha says, "A disciple while walking understands, 'I am walking' and so on.
- This does not mean that this mindful awareness must have an explicit propositional form.
- But it can be understood as a thought, a mental picture one draws for oneself, which is expressible by a proposition.

# How is it passive?

- The cognition contained in *sati* meditation is descriptive and it does not have evaluative content.
- While observing bodily movements one has to treat all types of movements alike. No movement is special or more important.
- While experiencing and judging sensations, all sensations are to be treated as of equal value: whether a sensation is pleasant or painful or neutral, whether it is gross or subtle.

# How is it passive?

- This attitude of mindfulness meditator seems to follow Wittgenstein's picture theory of proposition.
- According to this theory a true proposition or a thought depicts a fact truly, it does not go beyond that.
- Rather, it cannot say anything 'higher,' it does not and cannot attach any value to the fact. And this is important for *sati* meditation also.

# How is it passive?

- The common message of Wittgenstein's picture theory and the Buddha's *sati* meditation seems to be: "If we look at the facts of the world objectively then we do not find 'values' (which are nothing but the projections of our subjective attitudes) anywhere in it"
- Paradoxically enough, this attitude of not attaching importance to facts is itself an 'important' attitude because through the development of this attitude one reduces one's attachment towards the world.
- The Buddha as a moral psychologist was aware of this value of developing value neutral approach to reality. Wittgenstein's picture theory does not have this implication.



# How is it passive?

- Of course the core features of *Sati* meditation I have described are not common to all the meditative practices included in *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. Some are value-loaded (for example, awareness of hindrances and enlightenment-factors in *dhammānupassanā*) , some involve imagination and go beyond pure objectivity (for example observing dead bodies in *kāyagatā sati*). I am not focusing on them for the present purpose.

# How is it passive?

- The value neutral descriptive approach which is a core feature of a mindfulness meditation, is closely comparable with phenomenological approach of Husserlian phenomenology.
- There are important similarities and differences between phenomenological approach and *sati*-meditational approach to the world.

# Phenomenological approach and Sati- meditation: Agenda of comparison

- Here I will first try to bring out similarities between Husserlian phenomenology and Sati-meditational approach.
- Then I will talk about differences between the two.
- But then the question can be asked whether the differences are so glaring that the whole exercise of understanding Buddhism in phenomenological terms will be rendered futile.
- Here it can be claimed that phenomenology can be and has been done in various ways and probably Buddhist phenomenology would not be Husserlian but of some other type.
- It will be then suggested that within Buddhism different models of phenomenology are possible.
- Let us first see how Sati meditation approximates to Husserlian phenomenology.

# Similarities:1

- Both are exercises with consciousness and concerned with what is immediately given in consciousness.
- Husserl insists that consciousness is essentially intentional. It is always consciousness of something.
- In mindfulness meditation too one exercises mindful consciousness as consciousness of something- be it a bodily state or process, a sensation, a state of mind itself or a doctrinal factor as exemplified in experience.
- There is no reference to consciousness without object anywhere in the description of *Sati* meditation.

# Similarities:2

- The nature of consciousness with which both the approaches are concerned, is judgmental or propositional.
- It is expressible in language. Though there may be difficulties in expressing the experience in clear and distinct terms it is not something which cannot be expressed at all.
- In this sense the experience in both is not ineffable or mystical.

# Similarities:3

- The existence of what is beyond consciousness is bracketed in both.
- *Sati* meditation as discussed in the *suttas* like *Satipaṭṭhānasutta* occurs as a part of Theravāda Buddhism and the Theravāda Buddhism is realistic in its world view. However, although the existence of the external world is accepted as a background, it is bracketed in most of the practices of *Sati*-  
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# Similarities:4

- In both the approaches we are not primarily interested in the nature of the world as it may be accepted or believed to be there.
- But we are interested in the objects or phenomena as they are directly given to consciousness.
- Here the distinction between what is immanent and what is transcendent to consciousness becomes important. Both phenomenology and *Sati* approach are concerned with what is given as immanent.
- What is transcendent to consciousness is not denied but set aside or put into a bracket.

# Similarities:5

- Hence the method of bracketing has an important role to play in both the approaches.
- Here bracketing is distinguished from denying and doubting.
- Hence the practitioner of Mindfulness meditation may not accept or deny or doubt the existence of God, soul or life after death. But he is supposed to bracket these ideas while practicing meditation.



# Similarities:6

- It is interesting to note that Mr. S. N. Goenka, the founder of Vipassanā International Academy, in his *Vipassanā* meditation course often asked the meditators to suspend the belief in God or *Ātman* and not to accept or deny or doubt their existence.
- This is in tune with the spirit of bracketing the existence of the world and other transcendent objects in phenomenology.

# Similarities:7

- Both the approaches exhibit ‘scientific temperament’ (in a broad sense) of their respective authors.
- It is through this scientific approach that they try to have direct access to reality
- The expression ‘to the things’ (‘zu den sachen’) suggests this. The corresponding expression in Buddhism is *yathābhūtavastudarśana*.
- It is significant here to note that Satyanarayan Goenka, whose interpretation of the Buddha’s message is based on *Satipaṭṭānasutta*, describes the Buddha as a scientist, neither a religious leader nor a speculative philosopher.

# Similarities:8

- In *Kesamutti sutta* of the *Anguttaranikāya* (popularly known as *Kālāma-sutta*) the Buddha asks Kālāmas not to go by hearsay, rumours, tradition, scriptures, supposition, speculative reasoning, appearances, notions or by personal authority but to accept or reject a view on the basis of one's own experience.
- This implies a presupposition-less approach which is supposed to be a core feature of phenomenological inquiry.

# Differences:1

- In spite of these close similarities; *sati* meditational approach differs from phenomenology in some fundamental respects.
- One important difference is as follows. Though both the approaches exhibit scientific temper as suggested above, the goals of the two inquiries are different. The goal of *sati*-meditational approach is emancipation, i.e., realization of *nibbāṇa*, whereas the goal of the phenomenological inquiry is creation of a philosophy as rigorous science.

# Differences:2

- Another important difference is about the role that 'essences' play in the two approaches.
- Though prima facie anything that appears in consciousness can be called a phenomenon, the phenomena in technical sense according to the phenomenological approach are the essences.
- Essences are those which make the objects what they are.
- The essences are grasped through intuition and phenomenology is a reflective exercise to investigate into these essences.

# Differences:2 (Cond.)

- In *sati* meditation, on the other hand, one deals with empirical phenomena directly given to one's senses or to one's mind.
- While doing so one does not bracket their existence or factuality though one brackets their apparently substantial or enduring character. A *sati* meditator investigates into empirical phenomena in terms of their *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*.
- Now *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* can be called uncommon and common essences of the things.
- But a *sati* meditator does not concentrate on essences for their own sake. The essences for the meditator are only the tools of understanding the empirical and psychical reality.

# Differences:3

- One difference, which remains at this level, is that the Buddhist goal is not essentially intellectual whereas that of phenomenology is.
- For Buddhist meditators the intellectual wisdom (*cintāmayā paññā*) is a step towards the final goal which is the wisdom based on meditation (*bhāvanāmayā paññā*).
- A phenomenologist would probably stop at intellectual wisdom.

# Differences:4

- The ontological status of essences can be a major differentiating point between the two approaches.
- Husserl is vehemently against the constructivist approach to essences. According to him the essences are real and they can be directly grasped by consciousness through intuition.
- Buddhists are not unanimous on the status of essences. In Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda, it seems, the essences are not challenged, but they are given instrumental value to understand the reality, which is transitory. In Sautrāntika and Yogācāra and also in Mādhyamika, there is a tendency to deny ontological status to essences.
- For Dharmakīrti, for instance, essences have logico-linguistic status, but no ontological status. They are conventionally real (*saṃvṛti-sat*) and not ultimately real (*paramārtha-sat*).
- This will lead to a model of phenomenology different from Husserlian phenomenology.



# Differences:5

- Another differentiating point is the status of ego.
- Husserl in '*Ideas*' goes on excluding various objects of belief, by using the method of reduction (epoche).
- He distinguishes between empirical ego and transcendental ego, which he also calls pure ego.
- Empirical ego according to him is a constituted ego and it is not real. Here his view is compatible with the Buddhist no-self doctrine.
- But he refuses to exclude pure ego, or transcendental ego which according to him is behind any act of consciousness.
- The position seems to be like that of Vātsīputrīyas who regard puggala to be the necessary subject behind all cognitions and actions.
- Other schools of Buddhism deny '*ātman*' in all forms. They would deny even the so-called transcendental ego which is supposed to unite different acts of consciousness.

# Differences:6

- There is one more issue and it is the intensionality of consciousness.
- According to Husserl consciousness is intensional and it is essentially so or necessarily so.
- In the exercise of mindfulness meditation one is always conscious of something. But the intensionality of consciousness is not unanimously accepted as the necessary aspect of consciousness in Buddhism.
- For example in the formless meditation called *ākiñcanyāyatana*, one is conscious of 'nothing'. Can the consciousness be called intensional in that state?
- In Cittamātratā school, finally consciousness should be free from subject-object duality. Can such a freed consciousness still be called intensional?

# Differences:7

- At a more general level we can raise a question about the nature of phenomenology as a presupposition-less inquiry.
- A phenomenological exercise is intended to be free from presuppositions. It is possible, however, that a phenomenologist while developing such a presupposition-less approach may invite or allow certain presuppositions, consciously or unconsciously.

# Differences:7

- Hence, the existence of essences, existence of pure ego and intensionality of consciousness may be regarded as presuppositions of Husserlian phenomenology, which for Husserl were not presuppositions but something essential to a correct understanding of consciousness.
- For another phenomenologist they may not be so essential.

# Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism

- As compared to most of the other schools of Indian philosophy, Buddhism carries most minimum presuppositions.
- But within Buddhism we can arrange different schools in terms of degrees of their ontological commitments.
- In other words we can have degrees of presupposition-less-ness within Buddhism which can give rise to different models of phenomenology.

# **Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism**

- Mind, which is the same as consciousness, is central to all the schools. But what is given to this consciousness and how it is given; similarly what is not given but only constructed differs from school to school.

# Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism

- In Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda, essences play a more constructive role.
- In Sautrāntika and Yogācāra there is a tendency to regard essences as mental constructs and to give them more and more negative role. They do this by developing the doctrine of *apoha*.
- Mādhyamika school questions all essences which is made possible by using *prasaṅga* method.

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- In Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda, consciousness is understood not as a uniform unit but a complex whole. It contains many factors-factors common to all minds (sarvacitta-sādhāraṇa) such as contact (*sparśa*), recognition (*sañjñā*), volition (*cetanā*) and life-faculty (*jīvitendriya*). This idea is close to Merleau Ponty's idea of perception as a gestalt.



# Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism

- In Sautrāntika and Yogācāra schools consciousness tends to be regarded as more atomistic and simple. Particularly perceptual cognition is defined as non-judgmental (*nirvikalpaka*). Hence these schools are more difficult to be captured in terms of Husserlian or Merleau Pontian phenomenology.

# Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism

- We have seen that mindful consciousness according to *Sati*-meditation is judgmental or propositional. Moreover, it is essentially embodied consciousness. It could be argued that *Sati* –meditational approach is closer to Merleau Ponty's phenomenology than to that of Husserl.

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- However, the similarity between them cannot be stretched too far.
- Here the question is whether we can make sense of *kāyagatā sati* (mindfulness of body) in Merleau Ponty's framework.
- That is because *Kāyagatā sati* involves developing an objective awareness of body and parts and activities of the body. Merleau Ponty's phenomenology of body does not make room for such an objective awareness.

# Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism

- “Merleau-Ponty draws the distinction between the objective body made of muscles, bones and nerves and the lived body, that is, the body that we experience in pre-reflective awareness. He argues that the lived body is not an object that can be perceived from various perspectives, left aside or localized in objective space. It cannot even be represented because, on his view, representing the body necessarily involves adopting an objective stance on the lived body. The objectified body could then no longer anchor the way we perceive the world”. (“Bodily Awareness”, by de Vignemont, Fréacute, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, the article revised on October 7, 2015)

# Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism

- Moreover, Merleau Ponty seems to look at body as a composite whole (which exists over and above its parts).
- Buddhists on the other hand look at body as a combination of elements ('saṅghāta') which does not have its identity over and above the elements.

# Possibility of Different Phenomenological Models within Buddhism

- The contrast between the two approaches corresponds with the contrast between their aims.
- For instance Mindfulness of body in Sati-meditation is aimed at freedom from our clinging to the body, removing the sense of 'I and mine' associated with the body.
- Merleau Ponty's inquiry does not have this goal. He seems to aim at understanding the close connection between our consciousness and body, but not at going beyond that.

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