I. Introduction

1. General remarks

This study deals with a philosophical inquiry into ‘the nature of person and the problem of personal identity’ based on a particular text known as *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu. The study follows the track of development of the issue in Indian subcontinent in chronological order starting from the Vedic period up to the period to which the text belongs. Indian philosophy has made its own genre in the modern scholarly field of philosophy. Like Greek and Chinese philosophy, it is deeply involved with the history and culture it belongs – distinctive as well as universal. In the process of development, it underwent various kinds of interaction internally as well as externally. Therefore, one should not overlook the historical aspect that reflects this interaction when a study is made on a certain subject of ancient philosophy. Additionally, when the study is much dependent on a specific text, a philological examination becomes indispensable.

Since the Ṛgveda, the idea of person was neither about an individual being nor about the very nature of him. It was about a person as an Ultimate Reality, which is based on cosmological contemplation that had taken place prior to the insights on the individual being. In the Upaniṣadic period, there was an endeavor related to the progress in psycho-physiological way of seeking the self. In those days, especially in early Upaniṣads, the main themes of philosophical inquiry were Brahman, Ātman and Puruṣa, which are inherited from the Vedic period. The significant aspect of Upaniṣadic approach to the
person is that the speculations on the subjective aspect of individuality became a crucial part of it. The main interest of the thinkers of that time was not understanding of the phenomenal world in objective way but realization of the self through the self-reflection.

The teaching of the Buddha, which made an immense impact in the history of Indian philosophy, was in a sense directly against this view. The teaching appeared at the time when the Śramanic tradition was in great expansion on the one hand, and when the status of Brahmā became relatively settled in the Brahmanical tradition on the other hand. More people started to question the then regarded orthodox views on truth. They relied on the variously developed Śramanic approach, which resulted mushrooming of arbitrarily derived views. On the contrary, those who depended on the Brahmanical tradition were keener on clinging to the views of their side. The teaching of the Buddha appears to be a remedy for the both. The Dependent Origination, which discards the reliability on either extreme, avoids any kind of view that finally results either in annihilationism or in eternalism. The doctrine of anātman is especially effective against the deeply rooted view of Ātman that offers a very reliable refuge to the truth-pursuers. Therefore, one who accepts the doctrine of anātman is actually accepting the readiness to refute the firm view of Ātman. Regarding the doctrine of anitya (impermanent) also, an advocate of this doctrine has to face the pressure of explaining the two contradictory realities, i.e. the reality of identity and the reality of transitoriness, in a convincing way. In this context, it can be said that the teaching of the Buddha
is the starting point of a new history of argument related to the problem of identity, whether personal or impersonal.

The nature of person and personal identity as accounted for in early Buddhism is a complex phenomenon. According to the teaching of the Buddha there are only arising and passing away of the five aggregates by the working of causes and conditions; but, none of these five aggregates is identified with the ātman. The five aggregates, which represent a person along with the twelve bases (āyatana) and eighteen elements (dhātu), stand for the conditioned (saṃskṛta) world, or all phenomena. The conditioned is described in clear contrast with the unconditioned (asaṃskṛta). It is also explained by the doctrine of Dependent Origination (pratītyasamutpāda). Thus, it comes that a person, understood by the expression ‘five aggregates’ – whether newly coined or adopted – is conditioned, and is under the law of Dependent Origination. It is further characterized by the Three Characteristics: impermanent, unsatisfactory and insubstantial. With cursory observation, the following questions may take place: Is it possible to study the nature of something which is said to be not existing? Could there be any investigation of a person who is not durable? How can there be the nature of person ascribed with the aspect of axiology if suffering has already been given to its character? Thus, we can say that the study of person in Buddhism comprises a paradox from the beginning. Dependent Origination, the five aggregates (skandha), the twelve bases (āyatana) and the eighteen elements (dhātu) are known as fundamental doctrines of all Buddhist ontology as well as
epistemology. They explain the nature of the person as well as the nature of phenomena in terms of what constitute them even though it is said that they do not really exist.

The full-scale investigation on identity and continuity took place in the Abhidharma Buddhism when dharmas were meticulously analysed. Concerning the problem of personal identity, Sarvástivādins also thought of and worked out the notion of personal identity with their own interpretation of the theory of causality. According to the Sarvástivādins, a person cannot be endowed with different kinds of mind, e.g. good (kūśala) and bad (akuśala) – these are included in the category called cittasamprayuktasāṃskāra (factors of sāṃskāra associated with mind) – at the same time. But, their attainment (prāpti) being unassociated with mind (viprayukta) can co-exist, and thus cause the rise of different kinds of dharmas in favorable circumstances. According to Conze, the prāpti is an evasive term that stands for a relation which keeps together the elements of one stream of thought, or which binds a dharma to one stream of consciousness; it sails very near the concept of person or self since it implies a support of the continuity that forms a personal identity.

An understanding of personal identity involves a question of perennial human concern. Locke, the first among the major philosophers regarded as empiricists, defines a ‘person’ as follows:

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1 Cf. Ch'eng Shih Lun (成實論, S. Satyasiddhiśāstra), T. 32, p.249a13-16. “Study this treatise for getting knowledge of the person and the dharmas. As it is said in the sūtras: The world has two kinds of people. One is wise, the other is stupid. If one does not fairly distinguish the dharmas of the skandhas, the dhātu, all the āyatana the twelve dependent origination, cause and effect, etc. then one is called a stupid person,”

2 Jaini (1959a) p.245.

... a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it; it being impossible for anyone to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive.4

It is the identical consciousness that is considered as responsible for the personal identity, because, 'identity' requires something constant that works like a base, or a receptacle, integrating multitude of non-identical incidents and things. Hume, on the other hand, focuses on the mental process that makes up the personal identity. The personal identity is explained based on his ideas on the perceptions and the principles of their relation. The relations of resemblance of perceptions assisted by the memory and the relations of causation are considered to be responsible for the production of uninterrupted progress of our thought when the successive existence of a mind or thinking person is assumed.5 Hume regards 'oneself' as nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement.6 This is how he finally views personal identity:

... all the nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties. Identity depends on the relations of ideas; and these relations produce identity, by means of that easy transition they occasion.7

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4 Locke (1975), p.211.
May be, he was in a similar position with the Abhidharmaists when thus declaring. His speculative analysis on the concerned matter seems to have similarity on certain points with Abhidharmaists who had struggled for centuries to give satisfying answers to those questions concerning personal identity – especially with the Sarvāstivādins who had produced a series of standard texts that covers few centuries, supplementing and modifying their views.

Vasubhandhu, who belonged to the Sarvāstivādin school in the later period of Abhidharma Buddhism and who must have gone through all the discussions pertaining to Buddhism, was not satisfied with the theories of the Sarvāstivādin – even with the latest authoritative views of Vaibhāṣikas. In Abhidharma-kosaṭṭhāsaṅga, he shows that his final resort regarding the explanation of personal identity is the seed (bīja) theory. His achievement allows a reader to go nearest to the point of philosophical barrier. Through the study, we come to grope genuine teachings of the Buddha in a different way, that is, by going through the process the Abhidharmaists went in a compact way, and then trying to find out the last reliable answer, just as the author does.

2. The ‘person’ in Indian Philosophy

It is difficult to pick up a Sanskrit word exactly fitting to the English word ‘person’. Or rather, it should be said vice versa: it is difficult to select an English word precisely matching to the Sanskrit words like ātman, puruṣa, pudgala etc. Their meanings are all comprehensive and even different depending on the school and the age they belong to. The representative
meaning of ātman is ‘self’ or ‘soul’, but sometimes it means ‘body’ or ‘nature’ according to the context. The word puruṣa, generally standing for a ‘male man’, means the cosmic or primordial Person as the Ultimate Principle in the Rgveda. After the equation with Ātman and Brahman noticeably shown in early Upaniṣads, which can be traced back to Atharvaveda, and having passed through the mid-Upaniṣads period, puruṣa treads its own path leading to one of the two main principles of Śāmkhya system. Pudgala is not seen in Vedic tradition. In Jainism, it means ‘materiality’; in Buddhism, it is ‘person’. Rhys Davids asserts that the word puggala (P.; Skt. pudgala) emerges only in Pāli works of BCE. It appears in a compound form also, with purisa (Skt. puruṣa) forming purisa-puggala.¹⁸

We may say that puruṣa or pudgala is more suitable for conveying the meaning of person in lexicological sense. However, in Indian philosophy, ātman is the most powerful and comprehensive word that indicates person. The word ātman, on the whole, can cover other words meant for identity of person. Thus, when we talk about person in this study, it is rather close to the concept of ātman, which also contains the meaning of reflexive pronoun. But, it should be noted that in Abhidharma texts of northern tradition, the word pudgala is used consistently for indicating person. This is because it had different connotation the user of the word wanted to emphasize, which distinguishes the word from other synonyms, especially the ātman.

3. The methodology

Since the main subject of this study is based on the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, some consideration is required regarding the following question: Is it possible to understand the genuine meaning of the ancient text? There has been strong tradition of commentary in Indian literature as well as in Buddhist literature. Traditionally, scholars have followed this tradition and have shown their great faith in it. But, it should be considered that it is the commentators who make this tradition to be carried on. As Mcdonell points out, interpretation takes place when the original content becomes obscure; interpreters start to work when the meaning of the original is no longer fully comprehended:

The commentators, therefore, simply preserved attempts at the solution of difficulties, while showing a distinct tendency towards misinterpreting the language as well as the religious, mythological and cosmical ideas of a vanished age by the scholastic notions prevalent in their own.⁹

Buddhaghosa gave enormous influence to the Theravādin tradition like Śaṅkara to the Vedānta school. Some times his interpretation has been treated as if more reliable than the original meaning of the sūtra. Not only his works, other commentaries and Abhidhamma texts of southern tradition share the same authoritative position though they are later development to the Nikāyas. The northern tradition has also transmitted their Āgamas, Abhidharma texts and commentaries, but they were not preserved in the original form like those of the Theravādins as to receive the privilege. The point to be emphasized

⁹ Mcdonell (1900), p.49.
here is that, like any other sects in sectarian Buddhism, the Theravādin was also one of the sects, even though they are believed to be reliably authentic than others as their name shows. But, this does not mean that their commentaries are more credible than other sources. We are studying Buddhist texts through the eyes of modern time. We can refer to the commentaries, but it could not be a final solution to our inquiry, the inquiry that belongs to us.

The following are the principles of the method adopted here: 1) This study is based on the original text. However, it does not intend to have an accurate, precise understanding of the text. It tries best to avoid any distortion of original meaning that could have come out from various interpreters. 2) This study follows chronological order. Through this order we could see the current thoughts of different times related to our subject-matter; and through it we will be able to verify that the history of Buddhism is not exceptional to dialectical process of the history. 3) This study is a critical study. There should not be a sanctuary in it. I think this attitude is crucial especially when we deal with the philosophical matter related to religion. It should be checked continuously whether one is unknowingly being inclined to a certain view or not. 4) Lastly, we should remind of us that the scope of this study is only up to the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya. This study does not go beyond it. Due to copious works under the name of Vasubhandhu, we often mix up his ideas together without discriminating whether the idea belongs to earlier or later part of his work. The Abhidharmakośabhāṣya is obviously his earlier work. He wrote this

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10 See footnote 10 4, Chapter III.
before his conversion to Mahāyāna Buddhism. Thus, we should not expect later developed theories attributed to him from this text.

4. Scope and material of the study

This study, as mentioned above, starts from the Vedic literature and goes through the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads predating the Buddha centered on the concept of person before we proceed to the early Buddhism. This is needed for the better understanding of what the Buddha taught and intended for on the concerned matter. However, the study of the Brahmanical texts predating the Buddha is done here neither in exhaustive nor in scrupulous manner. It is done only to the extent that the historical context is formed for the proper understanding of the teaching of the Buddha. For that, it is not only Brahmanical tradition that is important, but also Śramanic tradition. There was prominent movement of Śramaṇism like Jainism, Ājīvika, Cārvāka etc. at the time of the Buddha. However, in the present study, only Brahmanical tradition is dealt with. Dealing with the Śramanic tradition requires further detailed and vast investigation that does not fit to the present study. Thus, various texts will be cited only from the Brahmanical tradition, that is, from the Rgveda up to Kaṭha Upaniṣad in Chapter II.

Because of the significant position in understanding the contents of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, especially in relation to the nature of person and the problem of personal identity, much effort has been made in the study of early Buddhism. Before we proceed, it would be proper to delineate the scope of ‘early Buddhism’ here. Some say that early Buddhism indicates Sthavira or
Hīnayāna Buddhism in contrast to Mahāyāna Buddhism. And, some others say that early Buddhism should be meant for the original teaching of the Buddha and that of his direct disciples. Neither of them can be said to be correct. The first assertion, in any case, does not hold good since the meaning of the term ‘Sthavira Buddhism’ or ‘Hīnayāna Buddhism’ itself is too vague and broad to be connected with the expression ‘early Buddhism’. The second assertion is related to the problem of reliability of the canon itself. It is generally believed that the Theravādin Tripiṭaka is most authentic in terms of preservation of the discourses of the Buddha. However, it is assumed that there is some chronological difference in it. Some scholars like Nakamura attempted to distinguish earlier and later portions in the canons in accordance with the original teaching of the Buddha or that of his direct disciples and the teaching which had been standardized by the monks. But, in actual fact, it is very difficult to sort them out since even in the same sūtra there are contents belonging to different times. Thus, it is difficult to follow the assertion that early Buddhism should mean the original teaching of the Buddha and that of his direct disciples based on the attempt to sort them out from the early Buddhist texts. In this study, the early Buddhism is not circumscribed in precise manner. It roughly covers the Nikāyas, the Āgamas and the Vinayās. In spite of defective elements related to the canons, the ‘early Buddhism’ according to us stands on those canons, depending much on the content of the text.
It is likely that the four among the five Nikāyas were compiled together in the same period after the reign of king Aśoka.\textsuperscript{11} The four Āgamas contained in Chinese Tripiṭaka corresponding to those, however, are not like that. It is believed that many of the Buddhist sects of the northern tradition such as Sarvāstivādin, Dharmaguptaka and Mahāsāṃghika had kept the canons of their own in Sanskrit. The translation of the four Āgamas into Chinese had been carried out by different translators from the texts belonging to different sects in different time—between the second half of the fourth century CE and the beginning of the fifth century CE. Since the four Āgamas of the Chinese Tripiṭaka are not of the same origin, the sūtras consisting respective Nikāyas and Āgamas do not tally. Comparatively late works are also included in the Āgamas since it had been compiled later than the Nikāyas.\textsuperscript{12}

Although Pāli Nikāyas and Chinese Āgamas are the two main sources in the study of early Buddhist concept of person, the prime reference is from the Nikāyas, as it is preserved in integral form and is the earliest available source for the study of Buddhism. Commentaries of the Nikāyas are basically not considered here unless they give crucial hint. It is unfair to treat them as early Buddhist text since they are under the strong Abhidharmic influence of the Theravādin School. Moreover, their dates are much later than the compilation of the Nikāyas.

Unlike the Nikāyas and the Āgamas, Abhidharma texts focus on analyzing the dharma explicitly. This is why the sectarian Buddhism is also called

\textsuperscript{11} Nakamura (1987), p.32.
Abhidharma Buddhism. It seems that the Abhidharma texts were produced in almost all the schools of Buddhism. But, most of the texts we have at present belong to the Theravādin of the southern tradition written in Pāli, and to the Sarvāstivādin of the northern tradition translated into Chinese or Tibetan from Sanskrit. The details will be discussed in Chapter IV.

The main text of the present study is the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya written by Vasubhandhu. The philological examination of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya is made in introductory manner. It does not seem to fit to the present study to go deep into philological arguments. It was believed that the original Sanskrit texts of the Abhidharmakośa and the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya were lost until Rāhula Saṅkrtyāyana discovered both the Sanskrit texts in Tibet, 1934. In 1946, V. V. Gokhale published the Abhidharmakośa in Roman script. P. Pradhan edited the full Sanskrit text of Abhidharmakośa and Abhidharmakośabhāṣya in Devanāgarī script in 1967. The whole text of Abhidharmakośavyākhyā was edited in Roman script by U. Wogihara in 1932-36. The Abhidharmakośavyākhyā together with Abhidharmakośa and Abhidharmakośabhāṣya was edited in Devanāgarī script by Dwarikadas Shastri, 1970-74. In this study the editions of Pradhan and Shastri will be used. There are two translations of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya in Chinese Agama. One is A-p’i-ta-mo-chu-she-shih-lun 阿毘達磨俱舍論 (阿毘達磨俱舍論) translated by Paramārtha (Chen-ti, 眞諦),\(^{13}\) and the other is the A-p’i-ta-mo-chu-she-lun (阿毘達磨俱舍論) by Hsuan-tsang (玄奘).\(^{14}\) These sources are utilized too.

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\(^{13}\) T 29, No.1559, pp.161-310.
\(^{14}\) T 29, No. 1558, pp.1-160.
There are a number of translations in modern times. A French translation of the Abhidharmakosabhāṣya, primarily based on the Chinese translation by Hsuan-tsang, was carried out by Louis de la Vallee Poussin, and was published from 1923 to 1931. It is a great accomplishment in the history of modern Buddhist studies. No proper study on the Abhidharmakosabhāṣya can be accomplished without making reference to this translation. Th. Scherbatsky translated the ninth chapter, the Pudgalaviniścaya, into English from Tibetan under the title The soul theory of the Buddhist in 1920. Recently, James Duerlinger also translated the same chapter from the Sanskrit text under the title of “Refutation of the theory of selfhood: A resolution of questions about persons”.\textsuperscript{15} For the study of the Pudgalavādin in the Pudgalaviniścaya, some Chinese translations of Sanskrit texts will be dealt with. They are: The San Fa Tu Lun 三法度論 (Tridharmakāśāstra)\textsuperscript{16}, the Ssu A Han Mu Ch'ao Chieh 四阿恆暮抄解,\textsuperscript{17} the San Mi Ti Pu Lun 三彌底部論 (Sāmmitiśyāntīyaśāstra)\textsuperscript{18} and the Lū Erk Shih Erk Ming Liao Lun 律二十二明了論 (Vinayadvīṃśatīvyāśāstra).\textsuperscript{19} They are known as the works of the Pudgalavādins. Unfortunately, at present, we do not have any original Sanskrit text of the Pudgalavādin. Due to the lack of the material and abstruse Chinese writings, studying Pudgalavāda itself is extremely exhaustive. Bhikshu Thich Thien Chau has done this exhaustive work. His book, The literature of the personalists of Early Buddhism, was of much help when translation was needed.

\textsuperscript{15} Duerlinger (1989).
\textsuperscript{16} T 25, No.1506 pp.15-30.
\textsuperscript{17} T 25, No.1505.
\textsuperscript{18} T 32, No.1649.
\textsuperscript{19} T 24, No.1461.
5. The aim of the study

Nobody can deny that Vasubhandhu is as revered a master of Mahāyāna Buddhism as Nāgārjuna. But, unlike Nāgārjuna, Vasubhandhu was already a very famous scholastic monk of so-called Hīnayāna Buddhism before his conversion to Mahāyāna Buddhism. His representative work of those days is none other than the *Abhidharmakosabhāṣya*. This situational position attributes a unique character to the text. May be, the proverbial saying, “Kośa eight years, Vijñaptimātratā three years”, in Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition in East Asia reflects that. It shows how difficult it is to study the *Abhidharmakosabhāṣya*, and that the text should be studied thoroughly before setting off for the Vijñaptimātratā.

It seems that ‘the nature of person and personal identity’ is an unavoidable issue in the stream of Buddhist fundamental inquiries. The Sarvāstivādin, one of the most controversial sects in the history of Buddhism, had also engaged itself with the issue seriously. As will be mentioned in Chapter IV, Vasubhandhu wrote the text based on the views of the Vaibhāṣikas with the critical view of the Sautrāntika—a Buddhist sect which gives authority only to the sūtras—and then converted to the Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore, the study of *Abhidharmakosabhāṣya* offers another direction of understanding the early Buddhism as well as the Mahāyāna Buddhism. That is to say, the text allows the reader to go through the relevant discussions in Abhidharma Buddhism briefly, which appeared not satisfactory to certain issues, and which, therefore, drove one to contemplate on the correct meaning of the teaching of the Buddha. On the basis of this, one could be on the path closer to the point
where the early Buddhism and the Mahāyāna Buddhism meet each other in
different perspective. The present study, therefore, aims to have an
understanding of the position of the concerned matter, i.e. the nature of person
and the problem of personal identity, specifically in the
Abhidharmakośabhāṣya. This is further expected to contribute to the
understanding of the matter in the context of Abhidharma Buddhism,
Buddhism in general and Indian Philosophy.