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PROBLEMS AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF THE THEORY OF DṚṢṬISṚṢṬI *

Advâitavedānta is a philosophy of absolute nondualistic Monism. The philosophers of this school hold that the world is false. They maintain that Brahman is acosmic (niṣprapañca)[1] and that the world is a product of *'avidyā'* (misconception).[2] This view when pressed to its logical limit leads to the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi*. In its support, the Advaitins cite the following Śruti passage: Evam evāsmād ātmanaḥ sarve prāṇāḥ sarve lokāḥ sarve vedāḥ (different reading: devāḥ) sarvāṇi bhūtāni sarva eta ātmāno vyuccaranti[3] – "Thus from this self all vital principles, all worlds, all Vedas (different reading: gods), all creatures (or physical elements), all these individual selves are brought forth."

The theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* asserts that objects having a beginning owe their existence to the act of *dṛṣṭi*. *Dṛṣṭi*, if its etymological meaning is accounted for, stands for visual knowledge. Visual knowledge is a sort of direct awareness. Advaitins generally uphold this general sense of direct awareness and accordingly define *dṛṣṭi* as consciousness reflected on the mode (*vṛtti*) of *'avidyā'*.[4] *Dṛṣṭi* or *avidyā-vṛtti* is, therefore, nothing but an illusory percipi. The theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* has two subtle subdivisions. According to one, *sṛṣṭi* (creation) is synchronous with *dṛṣṭi* (percipi),[5] while the other states that *dṛṣṭi* per se is *sṛṣṭi*.[6] Whatever may be the case, the theory maintains that objects have no existence apart from *dṛṣṭi*. Six conventional categories, viz. Jīva, God, Pure Consciousness, difference between Jīva and God, Avidyā and mutual confusion of Avidyā and Pure Consciousness, which are regarded as beginningless, are excluded from its purview. Amongst these, *avidyā* is a metaphysical cosmic principle which evolves *de novo* and with variety. It is the *causa materialis* (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of objects, their generic properties and *dṛṣṭi*. When a person mistakes a rope for a snake, his misconception gets transformed into three things – snake, snakeness and mode of misconception. When these projections of misconception cease they all disappear to reside in misconception, their cause in a latent form. As the misconception lasts longer than others, it is admitted to be their cause. On the 'duration' and 'extension' of the mode of misconception alone the existence of objects depends. By 'duration'

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is meant its lastingness until the rise of the opposing mode or until the breakdown of the assemblage of causes. By 'extension' is meant the perception of the superimposed in accordance with the extension of the substratum. From the standpoint of duration sometimes there is the perception of yellow in the conch shell, and from the standpoint of extension sometimes there is the perception of a mirage ocean in a sandy desert. When such perceptions are contradicted, the existence of objects also ceases. Like the perceptions of a snake in a rope, yellow in a conch shell, mirage ocean in a sandy desert, Jīva perceives the so-called real objects of the world.

As Jīva is a percipient entity, he is called the witnessing self (*draṣṭṛ*). By dint of the power of *avidyā* it is omnipotent and as if non-dual. The world *in toto* is 'grabbed' by it. The witnessing self is also regarded as the substratum of the universe and as such is its *causa efficiens* (*nimittakāraṇa*). It is the agent of numerous creations. Sometimes it assumes the form of a fragrant flower and sometimes the smeller of that flower. Sometimes it turns into a melodious tune and sometimes the musician himself. At times it soars in the sky and at times falls from it. Sometimes it commands high respect for its wisdom and sometimes deserves much censure for its foolishness. At times it plays the part of a thief and at times the part of a judge punishing the thief. The sun, the moon and various other planets and stars – all are part and parcel of it. How wonderful is its projection! Thus the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* presents before us a view which is undoubtedly novel.

Now, if visible objects are dependent for their existence on the act of *dṛṣṭi* only (*pratītimātraśarīra*) then they would be treated as momentary, and as such the charge against the Buddhist doctrine of momentariness that denies the permanence of entities, the permanence as attested by recognition, would equally be levelled against the *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* theory also. To justify the position of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* it may be pointed out that though the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* does not accept the existence of objects apart from *dṛṣṭi*, it holds that such objects are not fortuitious things but have some definite causes.[7] It advocates 'Satkāryavāda' in the form of 'Vivartavāda'. What is meant is that the effect pre-exists in the cause in a latent form. Buddhists hold that entities are a series of momentary individuals which are produced and destroyed. The implication is that entities exist for one moment only (i.e. during their production) and that they are destroyed at the next moment. According to the Advaitins, on the other hand, entities are durable until their assemblage of causes collapses. A person may see a pot for a long period. This doctrine of

stability is indeed different from the doctrine of momentariness as advocated by the Buddhists. Besides duration there is another point which shows the remarkable difference between the two views. Advaitins hold that effects are but different states of their cause. They are the transformations of the cosmic misconception and as such their nature is indescribable. As the various transformations of misconception and reflections of consciousness take place, there happen the appearances of the visibles. As far as the causal aspect is concerned, the existence of the visibles cannot be denied in *avidyā*. *Avidyā* is the latent and potent cause of the visibles. Buddhist philosophers, on the contrary, refute the existence of causal state of the visibles. They believe in the total destruction (*niranvayanāśa*) of the material cause and maintain that an existent effect is produced from the non-existence of its material cause. The production of a sprout is from the destruction of seed, the so-called material cause. Such a thesis of the Buddhists, who have expounded that an existent thing is produced from a non-existent cause, is parallel to the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* of the Advaitins.

It may be argued against the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* that in common experience we see objects to be produced from definite causes. When a potter makes a pot he takes a lump of clay, wheel, etc., in his hand. When a weaver manufactures a cloth, he takes a bundle of threads, shuttle, etc. From this it is evident that the pot, cloth, etc., have some definite causal conditions and that they are not the direct products of *avidyā*. As they have production and definite cause-effect relations confirmed by common sense, how can it be maintained that they are dependent on *dṛṣṭi* alone? Moreover, if they depend on *dṛṣṭi* only for their existence, the account of their production would be absurd.

This objection has no significant bearing upon the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi*, for the aforesaid objection emphasizes that the relation between cause and effect is a real one. But such a supposition cannot be accepted. The cause-effect relation which we experience in the waking state is no better than the one we experience in a dream. Sometimes in a dream one may notice a sequence of a child being born to a mother. It would, however, be wrong to hold on the basis of this sequence that the mother is the cause and the child is the effect, for they are the products of *avidyā*[8] and are not related by any real bond. Their appearance in a successive series – the appearance of greater duration of cause and shorter duration of effect – are, indeed, indescribable. Dream objects are taken into account by the Advaitins as the direct evolutes of *avidyā*. Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, the most erudite exponent of the theory of

Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi, states that *avidyā* is the material cause of all cases of superimposition.[9] Like the successive dream occurrences, empirical objects such as a pot, a cloth, etc., are also caused and destroyed. Knowledge of pot and objects in essence are all results from *avidyā*. Clay is in essence the creation of *avidyā* and lasts as long as its perception persists. Such is also the case with a wheel, thread, a weaver, etc. According to this theory, the sense object contact is admitted to be produced and revealed simultaneously.

The previous contention of the theory that there is also an order of cause-effect relation in dream implies that both time and space are present as categories in a dream. In common life space indicates the co-existence of a plurality of phenomena[10], whereas time indicates the succession of a plurality of events. There is no doubt that the empirical world exists in both time and space. The human mind is so constituted as to see things in waking life against the background of both these categories – time and space. Now this spatio-temporal world which is determined by causality is as illusory as a dream. Out of *avidyā*, occupation of space by an object or durability of an object or appearance of objects in both time and space is produced; they are all illusory. From such a contention it may now be remarked that the alleged difference between the waking state and the dream, viz., that there is the regular existence of objects, attested by recognition, in the waking state, and that there is nothing like this in dreams, cannot be tenable. Recognition of sameness or durability of an object is also a product of *avidyā* and as such is false. And as long as *avidyā* evolves, there is the world illusion. There is no breach in the series of illusion due to the magical and majestic influence of *avidyā*. In this series subsequent illusions resemble previous ones. The resemblance which behaves as a necessary precondition of illusion is also a construction of *avidyā* and is therefore false.

It may be argued that within this theory objects of the waking state have been shown to come within the scope of *dṛṣṭi*. This being so, the theory allows no room for the empirical; in other words, it does away with the distinction between the illusory and the empirical, which is valued so much even by the adherents of Advâitic thought. In the empirical state, objects, sense organs and mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) exist prior to the rise of perception. *Antaḥkaraṇa* assumes the form of the external object through sense contact. But in the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* it is difficult to explain the *modus operandi* of the sense object contact. In illusions such as 'this is silver', 'this is a snake', etc., the mother-of-pearl is mistaken for silver, the rope is mistaken for a snake, etc.

These illusions are caused by the tripartite operation of sense object contact, memory traces (as to silver, snake, etc.) and the vitiating condition otherwise known as '*doṣa*' – defect (e.g., attachment, dim-light, etc.). In each of these illusions the 'this' serves as a ground of illusion. But if that ground is regarded as having no existence outside the fold of perception, then how can there be sense contact with it?

The above argument is accepted by the Advaitins. Their reply is that ordinarily they do not obliterate the distinction between the empirical and the illusory. Nevertheless, they controvert the supposition that the empirical enjoys a status superior to the illusory. In their thesis they admit three grades of existence, viz. empirical (*vyāvahārika*), illusory (*prātibhāsika*) and transcendental (*pāramārthika*). Amongst these, the first two depend solely on *dṛṣṭi* for whatever existence they have, and as such have no reality independent of *dṛṣṭi*. Nevertheless, it is possible in this view to make a distinction between the *prātibhāsika* and the *vyāvahārika* in the following way: the *vyāvahārika* is a product of *avidyā* only, whereas the *prātibhāsika* is occasioned by both *avidyā* and other auxiliary defects.[11] Advaitins, however, point out that though from an empirical standpoint it may be held that the three factors – sense contact etc., are involved in ordinary illusion, no seriousness can be attached to these three factors by the wise. The wise is one who has acquired greater insight about the ultimate truth – one who has only logically, not directly, apprehended the identification between *satya* and *anṛta* in each object. To the wise the real mark of illusion is simply the identification between two entities – *pāramārthika* and *apāramārthika* (*mithunībhāva* between *satya* and *anṛta*), between consciousness and *avidyā*. This mark of illusion is not rejected in the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi*.

It may be argued that the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* banks heavily on dream. It is contended that all visible insensate objects are false like dreams. But a dream, it may be argued, is a memory of real objects of the waking state. As such, how can it be held that dream objects are false?

This above objection does not stand scrutiny. The supporters of the theory point out in reply that objects perceived in dreams after all exist directly in front of the dreamer. A thing perceived as lying directly in front of its perceiver cannot be treated as an object of memory. Memory is a cognition resulting only from corresponding unconscious traces and it never presents the object as a percept. But a dream does present its object as a percept. Hence it is not memory. A dream is not a replica of a past perception. It is a

state of direct awareness. Dream objects do not come in contact with the empirical sense organs, for they remain inoperative in sleep. Though the wise know that dream objects are illuminated by the witnessing self and that there can be no contact with any empirical sense organ, yet to people of less intelligence dream objects appear to be caused by the sense organs. In a dream where the empirical sense organs cease to operate, activities such as a loud scream, movement, acceptance etc., appear as perceptions common to the waking state. From these activities of the sense organs, which are indescribable in character, it is to be concluded that a dream cannot be called the memory of a waking state. Besides, it may be pointed out that in the waking state the awakened person sometimes may have retrospective knowledge (*parāmarśa*) – 'I have seen a peculiar dream'. To see a dream with the help of *avidyā-vṛtti* is an immediate experience.[12] More arguments may also be adduced in support of the contention that a dream is a direct experience. In a dream, even things never experienced in a waking state appear. This proves that a dream is a state which is not equivalent to memory. Here, of course, attention might still be drawn to the phenomenon that the root impression of entities that are perceived in a previous birth are instigated in dreams. But such arguments are wrong if one takes into account cases such as the experience of cutting off one's own head, etc., where the stimulation of root impressions is out of the question.

It is to be noted that Śaṅkara, while distinguishing between dream experience and waking experience, remarks that the former is a memory while the latter is an apprehension and that the falsity of the waking experience cannot be like the dream experience.[13] But this remark does not imply that he himself thinks the dream to be memory proper. On the other hand, he opines that all is illusory.[14] Even the dream experience is no exception to this.[15] From this it is clear that the dream is an illusory experience.

Now we are confronted with a problem. Usually the experience of the waking state contradicts the experience of the dreaming state. But according to the theory, the waking experience is also liable to contradiction. If such a position is maintained, it becomes difficult to find a case of false experience. Besides this, another fault may be shown against the Advaitins. The last (redeeming) knowledge that would sublate world perception, being itself a perception, cannot have a better status than being open to contradiction. In this way, if uncontradicted valid perception is also subject to contradiction, then doubt – which is bound to follow – will lead to infinite regress. However,

these allegations are of no consequence to the supporters of the theory, who reply that world appearance is subject to contradiction only when we come to know the true nature of reality. Knowledge must be essentially grounded in reality. Thus proper knowledge alone negates the world illusion. The charge that this knowledge would also be subject to doubt is similarly refuted. It is said that the last (redeeming) knowledge per se is the nature of Brahman and that hence it is of an intuitive character. That intuitional knowledge of identity is not illusory but valid, since it results in the cessation of *avidyā*, and cannot be contradicted further.[16] Doubt as to the validity of knowledge results only when certain defects operate in the genesis of knowledge. But as far as the knowledge of Brahman is concerned, there is the cessation of all defects and hence no doubt can arise. The cessation of *avidyā* is held as the integral, non-dual, absolute truth; it is the non-contradicted realisation. There is no inconsistency in inferring such a possibility. Amongst the three types of *vṛtti* – *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti*, *avidyā-vṛtti* and *vikalpa-vṛtti* – the realisation of the ultimate truth belongs to *antaḥkaraṇa-vṛtti*. It is the only *pramā* (knowledge). *Avidyā-vṛtti* (mode of misconception) is known as *jñānabhāsa* (illusion). It may be called a *pramā* (i.e. may be *pramā-kalpa*) also insofar as it is not contradicted.[17] *Vikalpa-vṛtti* is a notion of mind by which a non-existing entity such as a sky flower is communicated through Śabda.

A problem again rises about the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* in respect to such issues as the preceptor, Veda, rejoicing in heaven or punishment in hell, bondage, liberation, etc. It may be argued against the theory that it denies the utility of a preceptor, Veda, Vedic concepts of virtue and vice, etc., and of liberation that is believed to be the result of personal instruction and initiation by a competent preceptor. If the preceptor, Veda etc., are all Jīva's own projection, then who or which will impart truth to whom? The reply is that the Jīva's *avidyā* evolves as dream preceptors who give spiritual instruction and initiation to many an illusory Jīva. Phenomena such as liberation, bondage, etc., are not real events; they take place only as illusion and can be well explained if we take into consideration dream happiness, etc. The dream itself or the percipient Jīva himself may also be deemed as the preceptor. The dream preceptor can demonstrate the falsity of the world and the absolute nature of the real. Similarly, the illusory Veda also can teach the means of liberation. Its validity can be accepted insofar as its content is not contradicted. No incongruity arises in accepting the concepts of virtue and vice which reside in the mind. The mind is identified with *avidyā* for it is superimposed on con-

sciousness. As the *avidyā* of the percipient Jīva evolves, so do the provisions of heaven, hell, bondage and liberation from an individual body, etc. According to this theory, nobody has so far attained any liberation or absolute knowledge. Thus the theory, to all intents and purposes, prefers Ekajīvavāda which means to say that only one Jīva is real or principal while others are illusory, i.e. projections of his *avidyā*. On the liberation of that principal Jīva depends the liberation of all other Jīvas. Since nobody knows who that principal Jīva is, everybody should endeavour without taking recourse to idleness to realise that great ideal.

We have said that the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* acknowledges two existences – one illusory and the other transcendental. But even so, one might still find some fault. In sound sleep or in dissolution (*pralaya*), when root impressions are not operative and hence *avidyā* does not throw projections, the absence of the visibles is to be admitted by reason of the absence of perception or of the percipient Jīva. Can such a contention be appropriate? If this contention is legitimate, then how can one's return to world experience be explained? So, it is better to hold that, although in sound sleep or in dissolution there is absence of perception by the percipient Jīva, there cannot be absence of empirical objects. If the absence of them is endorsed, then the stealing of cloth by dacoits from the body of the person who has fallen asleep or the return to world experience of the Jīva, who in dissolution has been identified with Brahman, becomes an impossibility. These, however, are not serious objections to the advocates of the theory which holds that in a dreamless sleep or in dissolution there is consciousness. In dreamless sleep or in dissolution, knowledge as determined by objects does not exist but consciousness in essence exists. Hence it is to be understood that as Hiraṇyagarbha – the principal Jīva – has not attained a sleep-like or dissolution-like state, his experience of the world goes on uninterrupted. But once he experiences the sleep-like or dissolution-like state, the visible world would simply become a blank. It is also maintained that in a dreamless sleep or dissolution knowledge determined by effectual objects does not exist, but it exists in the causal aspect of objects so that it cannot surpass the fold of *avidyā*.[18] The adherents of the theory drive home their point that it would be preposterous to hold that in a dreamless sleep knowledge exists and objects also exist. If any partiality is shown towards it, then it would be difficult to understand why one is not the illuminator of the other? The theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* propounds that one Jīva is absolute in essence. His egotism is illusory. And other stable or unstable individuals are also illusory, thanks

indeed to the suicidal yet self-centred concept of the theory. The charge of solipsism does not here hold good. That charge would be warmly welcome by the Ekajīvavādins or Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭivādins. According to a theory where other unsleeping individuals are illusory, the act of perceiving the sleeping individual by them is nothing but illusory. The reply to the objection in respect to dissolution, is that in dissolution, dreamless sleep, or swoon,[19] differentiations of little knowingness and omniscience, of little powerfulness and omnipotence etc., which we make in wakeful life between Jīva and God are not wholly destroyed, but are simply not perceived. If according to the objection non-perception be the criterion of non-existence, then in dissolution due to non-perception there will be non-existence of the division between Jīva and Brahman. And thus release will be the natural course. But such a contention certainly goes against Śruti which hammers home the point that the liberated person never returns to the mundane world. The solution offered by the Advaitins to this anomaly is that though in dissolution the difference between little knowingness and omniscience, etc., are not perceived, they are known through inference only. It has already been stated at the outset that the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* is not applicable to the six conventional beginningless entities. In dissolution and dreamless sleep Jīva does possess causal subtle states, called impressions, etc., but cannot perceive them. Similarly, no inconsistency arises as regards virtue, vice, and weight (*gurutva*) which, being imperceptible, lie outside the realm of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi*. However, it cannot be argued that subtle states such as root impressions cannot be taken into account during dissolution because of the doctrine that existence is based only on *dṛṣṭi*. Subtle states cannot but be admitted to exist owing to the non-destructibility of the visibles before the dawning of the realisation of the ultimate truth. Those states are nothing but inferrables, and the theory thus stands faultless.

From what we have said so far, it may appear to some that the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* resembles the Berkeleyan view: "to be is to be perceived." The theory under discussion, as the very name suggests, asserts that objects the percipient subject takes to be externally existing are not, in truth, extramental entities, but are dependent on the act of perception. The comparison holds, in a sense, and it may even be said that our theory is more radical in this respect, inasmuch as it asserts that not only outer objects but also other Jīvas are not intrinsically real but derive whatever being they have from the act of *dṛṣṭi*. It may be noted that the important difference between the two views is that while Berkeleyan idealism accepts that there are many souls, the

theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi* does not. Moreover, according to Berkeley not only the soul but its states also are real; on the other hand, the Advaitins hold that only Pure Consciousness is real. The act of *dṛṣṭi*, insofar as the element of *avidyā* is concerned, is the most important feature of the theory of *Dṛṣṭisṛṣṭi*. As far as we know there is no parallel doctrine in any idealistic system of the West.

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NOTES

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[1] Adhyāropāpavādābhyāṃ niṣprapañcaṃ prapañcyate. – Quoted in *Vivaraṇaprameya-saṃgraha*, p. 655.

[2] Avidyābījaprasūtaṃ vedyaṃ bāhyam. – Śaṅkara's Commentary on *Māṇḍūkya* 1.12, p. 435.

[3] Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad 2.1.20, p. 115.

[4] . . . vṛttyupahitacāitanyam eva dṛṣṭi-śabdārthaḥ. – *Advâitasiddhi*, p. 535.

[5] Ayam eko dṛṣṭisamasamayā viśvasṛṣṭir iti dṛṣṭisṛṣṭivādaḥ. – *Siddhāntaleśasaṃgraha*, p. 483.

[6] Anyas tu dṛṣṭir eva viśvasṛṣṭiḥ . . . dṛṣṭisṛṣṭyādivādaḥ. – *Ibid.*, p. 484.
Ātmany eva jagat sarvaṃ dṛṣṭimātraṃ satattvakam
udbhūya sthitim ādāya vinaśyati muhur muhuḥ. – *Vedāntasiddhāntamuktāvalī* 22, p. 104.

[7] . . . kāraṇātmanā sthāyitvasvikārāt. – *Advâitasiddhi*, p. 534.

[8] There is another view among the Advâitins, which holds that dream objects are the modifications of mind (*cittavikṣepa*). According to this view the modifications of mind are cognised by *avidyāvṛtti*. The former view, of course, explains that both objects and *avidyāvṛtti* are the evolutes of *avidyā*. (Mana eva . . . anye. – *Siddhāntabindu*, p. 2).

[9] *Siddhāntabindu*, p. 150.

[10] Bāhyānām anyonyapariccheḍyatvam iti. – Śaṅkara's Commentary on *Māṇḍūkya* 2.14, p. 445.

[11] . . . avidyātirikta-nidrādidoṣajanyatayā eva prātibhāsikatvam iti kecit. – *Siddhān-taleśasaṃgraha*, p. 451.

[12] . . . rathādeḥ smṛtimātrābhyupagame ratham paśyāmi svapne ratham adrākṣam ityādy anubhavavirodhāpatteḥ. – *Vedāntaparibhāṣa*, p. 54.

[13] Api ca smṛtir eṣā yat-svapnadarśanam. . . . anubhavatā. – Śaṅkara's Commentary on *Brahmasūtra* 2.2.29, pp. 555–56.

[14] *Ibid.*, 3.2.3, p. 589.

[15] Tasmān māyāmātram idaṃ svapnadarśanam. – *Ibid.*, 3.2.3, p. 692.

[16] Na ceyam avagatir anarthikā bhrāntir iveti . . . bādhakajñānāntarabhāvāc ca. – *Ibid.*, 2.1.14, p. 461.

[17] In the definition of knowledge if non-contradiction be the special feature, then the case of perception of *avidyā* may be called knowledge. When a person before his final release perceives his *avidyā*, the mode of *avidyā* stands for his knowledge, as it were, (*pramākalpa*), because it is not contradicted.

[18] *Gauḍabrahmānandī* (Laghucandrikā), p. 534.

[19] The distinction among dissolution, dreamless sleep and swoon is that in dissolution there is no *avidyā*-assuming illusory perception (*avidyākārā avidyāvṛtti*) at all because of the fact that no recollection of it is possible afterwards. In dreamless sleep and swoon there are *avidyā*-assuming illusory perceptions: For, in waking life recollection of them is possible. In dreamless sleep a simultaneously supporting knowledge (*samūhālambanajñāna*) relating to the three entities, viz., *avidyā*, happiness and witnessing self occurs; but in swoon, though there are references to *avidyā* and witnessing self, no reference is made to happiness at all.

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