

BUDDHISM
FOR
Beginners

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INTRODUCTION

Buddhism originated as an alternative tradition to the excessive importance given to rituals and sacrifices in Vedic tradition. It was also a reaction to the gross neglect of the social problems of the time, as well as a revolt against the hegemony of the Brahmins in the society.

The main causes for the emergence of Buddhism are:

Social: A Brahmin centered, caste based, hierarchical set up was prevalent in the society. The authority to interpret the scriptures was vested with the Brahmin. Temples, which were the centres of social life, were controlled by them. Laws of pollution were strictly imposed upon the people of the lower caste. Tribes and Dravidians were out of the caste structure.

Economic: Agriculture and cattle rearing were the main source of wealth and livelihood for the people. Brahmins found out ways and means to exploit the lower sections in the society. Kings were made to perform yagas, yajnas, and digvijayas through which the Brahmins benefited a lot. The ordinary people had to contribute a major portion of their income to the kings, Brahmins, and temples.

Religious: Mode of worship, rituals, and religious ceremonies were interpreted by the Brahmins to suit their interest. The Vedas, Aranyakas, Mimamsas and Upanishads were written to perpetuate the hegemony of the Brahmins. Metaphysical speculations were at their zenith, which was the prerogative of the educated class. Exploitation by the higher castes and the suffering of the ordinary people continued unabated.

It was a time of two extremes: the Vedic, Upanisadic belief in the Absolute supported

by sacrifices, rituals (yajnas) and the materialistic philosophy of the Charvaka. Buddha avoided and negated the extremes, and at the same time integrated the positive elements of these two systems. He negated the existence of the soul and the Absolute, but he accepted the belief in the law of karma and the possibility of attaining liberation. His main concern was the welfare of the ordinary people. Though Buddha himself wrote nothing, the early writings were in the Pali and Sanskrit languages. Buddhist scripture is known as Tripitaka (Sanskrit) or Tipitaka (Pali), Three Baskets or Three Traditions. They are vinaya (Discipline), Sutta (Discourse), and Abhidhamma (Doctrinal Elaboration). Buddha was not interested in speculative or theoretical analysis of phenomena, but he was concerned about finding out practical solutions to problems in life. The influence of the early Upanishads is clear in the teachings of Buddha. Compassion and love were the predominant characteristics of Buddha. Charity was the basis of the Buddhist religion.

Buddhist spirituality has four stages ahimsa (not harming), maitre (loving kindness), dana (giving), and karuna (compassion).

LIFE OF BUDDHA

Gautama or Siddhartha (566-486 B.C), who later came to be known as the Buddha or 'The Enlightened One', was born into a wealthy Kshatriya family, in Lumbini, at the foothills of Nepal. Gautama's father Shudhodana, a Kshatriya of the Sakya clan, was the king of Kapilavastu (present day Nepal), and his mother was Mahamaya. She had a dream, while on her way to her parents' home, that a white elephant entered her womb, and later Gautama was born at Lumbini. A white elephant is an important symbol for Buddhists even today. On the fifth day of the child's birth, 108 Brahmins were invited for the naming ceremony, and he was given the name Siddhartha (Siddha- achieved,

arthagoal; one who achieved his goal). Many predicted that Siddhartha would become either a great king or a great sage. On the seventh day his mother died, and his father married his mother's sister, named Mahaprajapati Gautami. She brought up Siddhartha with love and affection. Gradually, he was called after his stepmother, 'Gautamiputra' (son of Gautami) or 'Gautama' (go-cow/bull, the best; the best cow or bull). The child was delicately nurtured and brought up in palatial luxury. At the age of sixteen, Siddhartha married his cousin, Yasodhara.

At the age of twenty nine, while he was travelling out of the palace, he had four encounters which left a lasting impact on him. He saw an old decrepit man, a sick man, a corpse in a funeral procession, and a peaceful and serene ascetic wandering alone. The first three sights disturbed him, whereas the fourth one gave him hope and peace. After a son, named Rahula (meaning rope or fetter)

was born to him, one night he left home and wandered around for many years. He studied yoga and meditation from two hermits - Udraka Ramaputhra and Alara Kalama. For some time he practised severe asceticism,

realized that it did not help him. Finally, he sat down at the bottom of the Bodhi tree. At the age of 35, during meditation under the Bodhi tree (the tree of wisdom), on the bank of the river Neranjara at Bodh-Gaya (near Gaya in modern Bihar), Gotama (Gautama) attained Enlightenment. In the beginning, he was reluctant to share his experiences with any one for fear of being misunderstood. Gradually, he changed his mind and delivered his first sermon to a group of five ascetics (who were old colleagues) in the Deer Park at Lsipatana, near Varanasi. After this, he taught all kinds of people till the end of his life, irrespective of their caste, religion, or status in society. After preaching and teaching for many years, Buddha attained Nirvana at the age of eighty at Kushinagara in eastern Uttar

Pradesh. Buddha was the only religious founder who did not make any super natural claim. He was simple and humane. Whatever he achieved could be attained by any human person. Every person has the inner potency to become an enlightened one, through constant meditation and a disciplined life. He founded the religion of Buddhism after he attained true wisdom under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya. In his first public address at the Sarnath Deer Park in Benares, Buddha spoke of the four noble truths, which are, (i) the world is full of suffering (ii) suffering is caused by desire (iii) suffering can be removed (iv) in order to remove suffering one has to overcome desire.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Buddha was least interested in metaphysical discourses or dogmas. He was concerned about ethical living, applicable to all sections of people - kings, princes, Brahmans, people of low caste, masters, servants, monks, ordinary people, etc. He taught about the nobility of a religion. The four Noble Truths are the essence of the Buddha's teachings, which he explained in his first sermon to his old colleagues at Isipattana. These noble truths are explained in detail later, in other early Buddhist scriptures.

1. *Dukkha*: there is 'Suffering' in the world.
2. *Samudaya*: the arising or origin of 'Suffering'.
3. *Nirodha*: the cessation of 'Suffering'.

4. *Magga*: there is a path leading to the end of 'Suffering'.

The First Noble Truth: Dukkha

The term Dukkha, usually translated as 'suffering', does not communicate the full implication of the word as used in the Buddhist scriptures. Because of the misleading and unsatisfactory translation of the term, many people consider Buddhism as pessimistic. But in fact, Buddhism objectively regards a world of reality (*yathabhutam*), and suggests ways and means to attain peace, happiness, and tranquility. The word *dukkha* has a deeper meaning like 'imperfection', 'impermanence', and 'emptiness', in addition to the ordinary meanings of suffering, pain, sorrow, misery, etc. Though the Buddha presented *dukkha* as one of the four noble truths, he did not negate happiness in life. He accepted both material and spiritual happiness. Three factors are important with regard to life and enjoyment of sense

pleasures; they are attraction or attachment, dissatisfaction, and freedom or liberation. Desire is the cause of suffering; desire leads to the means for satisfaction; and satisfaction leads to pleasure or pain, and disappointment. The cycle of birth and death is a necessary outcome of desire. The concept of *dukkha* can be understood from three aspects:

1. *dukkha* as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*): birth, sickness, old age, death, separation from the beloved, grief, distress, etc.,

2. *dukkha* as produced by change (*viparinama-dukkha*): vicissitudes in life,

a happy or a pleasant feeling that will change sooner or later and then produces pain, suffering or unhappiness.

3. *dukkha* as conditioned states (*samkhara-dukkha*): A being or an individual has five aggregates of attachments.

The five aggregates are the following: a) The aggregates of matter (*rupakkhandha*) are the first aggregate. The four basic elements of the universe, their derivatives, the sense organs and their corresponding objects in the external world are included in the aggregate matter. b) The second one is the aggregate of sensations (*vedanakkhandha*) and is six in number. The sensation we obtain through our senses and mind are included in this category. In Buddhism, unlike in other traditions, the mind is considered as a sense faculty or organ and not as spirit. c) The third one is aggregate of perceptions (*sannakkhandha*) and is six in number in relation to the six internal faculties. d) The fourth one is the aggregate of mental formations (*sankharakkhandha*) which include all volitional activities, both good and bad. e) The fifth is the aggregate of consciousness (*vinnanakkhandha*), based on

the six internal faculties and their corresponding objects in the world. Consciousness is not spirit in Buddhist philosophy. These five aggregates together constitute the being; there is no other realist behind these aggregates to experience dukkha. Though the first noble truth is dukkha, statues of the Buddha always present a serene, calm, compassionate, and smiling face.

The Second Noble Truth, *Samudaya*: The Arising Of *Dukkha*

The oft repeated explanation of the second noble truth is: 'It is 'thirst' which produces re-existence and re-becoming, and which is bound with passionate greed. It finds fresh delight, now here and now there, namely, 1. Thirst for sense-pleasures, 2. Thirst for existence and becoming and 3. Thirst for nonexistence. The 'thirst', desire, or craving manifested in different forms in human life give rise to suffering and continuity of life. But

desire, though the immediate and all-pervading cause, cannot be considered as the first cause, because everything is relative and inter-dependent. 'Thirst' (tanha) depends on sensation, and sensation depends on contact for its origination; hence it is a circle that goes on and on, which is known as 'dependent origination' (paticcasammupaada). Most of the economic, political, social, and ethnic problems are rooted in the interest of a person or a group or a nation.

The Theory of *Karma*

Thirst as a cause for re-existence, and re-becoming is closely connected with the theory of Karma and rebirth. Four factors are involved in the existence and continuity of being. They are, i) ordinary material food, ii) contact of the sense organs with the external world, iii) consciousness, and iv) mental volition or will. Mental volition is karma; it is the root cause of existence. Mental volition (centan) is the desire to love, to re-exist, to

continue, to become more and more. This comes under one of the five aggregates which are called mental formations. Both, the case of the arising of dukkha as well as the destruction of dukkha, are within us. Whatever has the nature of arising within dukkha has the nature of cessation within.

There is a basic difference between the kamma (Pali) and karma (Sanskrit) as generally understood in Buddhist tradition. The theory of karma in Buddhist philosophy means 'volitional action'; it means neither the action nor the result of the action. Volitional acts can be good or bad. First, volition, or karma produces either good or bad effects; the result of these actions is to continue in the good or bad direction within the cycle of continuity (samsara). The result of the action will continue to manifest in the life after death. But an Arhant is free from impurities and defilements, thus he/she has no rebirth.

Volition, thirst, or the desire to exist, to continue, to be reborn is a tremendous force in each living being. A human person is a combination of the five aggregates, which is a combination of physical and mental energies. These energies arise, decay, and die in a person each moment. These energies once produced will continue in a series, even after death. Buddhists do not believe in a permanent substance like a soul, which takes a new life after death. But the volitional actions give rise to energy which will give rise to another act, and so it goes on and on. As long as there is the 'thirst' to exist, the cycle of continuity (samsara) continues.

The Third Noble Truth: *Nirodha*, 'The Cessation of *Dukkha*'

There is emancipation or liberation from suffering, which is known as the third noble truth (dukkhanirodha ariyasacca.) Liberation is popularly known as Nirvana (in Pali-Nibbana). Nirvana is the total 'extinction of

thirst'. How can we understand Nirvana? Nirvana is the absolute, supra-mundane experience; hence language is not sufficient to explain it. Like the neti, neti approach in Advaita Vedanta, Nirvana is also explained in negative terms like, Tanhakkhaya or extinction of thirst, Asamkhata or un compounded or unconditioned, Viraga or absence of desire, Nirodha or cessation, Nibbana or blowing out or extinction.

The cessation of continuity and becoming is Nibbana. Extinction of the 'thirst' does not mean self-annihilation, because there is no self in Buddhism. Nibbana is the annihilation of the false idea of the self; it is the annihilation of ignorance (avijja). Nibbana is not a negative experience but is the 'absolute truth', which is beyond duality and relativity. Truth is that nothing is permanent; everything is dependent on the other. The realization of this is 'to see things as they are' (yathabhatam). Once the wisdom dawns, the continuity of samsara is broken and the

mental formulations are no more capable of producing any more illusions. Nirvana can be attained during one's life time itself, one need not die. Nirvana is the highest state of experience one can attain; it is 'happiness without sensation'.

The Fourth Noble Truth: *Magga* - The Path

This is also known as the 'middle path' because it avoids the extremes - happiness through sense pleasures and happiness through severe asceticism. The entire teaching of Buddha can be summarized into the eight fold noble path. They are the following: a) right understanding, b) right attitude of mind, c) right speech, d) right action, e) right conduct, f) right effort, g) right attention, and h) right meditation. The eight divisions will help a person to grow in ethical conduct (*sila*), mental discipline (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*panna*). Ethical conduct consists of right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Similarly right effort, right

mindfulness, and right concentration form mental discipline. Compassion (karuna) and wisdom are the two essential factors for a person to be perfect. Wisdom is the quality of the mind or intellect, while compassion is the quality of the heart. An integrated development of the two aspects will enable a person to understand things as they are. Understanding, in Buddhism, is of two kinds. They are, grasping a thing based on the given data, which is called 'knowing accordingly' (anubodha), and seeing a thing in its true nature, which is called penetration (patvedha). Everyone who follows these can be liberated from the bondage of matter and suffering.

THE DOCTRINE OF SOUL (*NON-ANATTA*)

Most of the religions pre-suppose the existence of a soul. Buddhism is unique in denying the existence of a soul or atman. The ideal of ego or self is with the aim of self protection and self preservation. These are basically selfish desires. The concept of anatta is closely connected with the doctrine of the five aggregates and dependent origination. The concept of self can be analyzed as a combination of the five aggregates. There is nothing permanent; everything is conditioned, dependant, and relative.

Buddhism originated at a time when there were two predominant trends in the intellectual milieu of India, i.e., the powerful and popular spiritualistic thinking, and materialistic thinking. The former accepted the authority of the Vedas while the latter

rejected it. Almost all religions accepted the existence of a soul, whereas materialism strongly rejected the existence of a soul. Buddhism did not follow any of the prevalent trends but followed the middle path. Buddhism was an exception, in denying the existence of a soul, but at the same time it rejected the materialistic philosophy. The idea of an ego or a self in any religion is with the aim of self-protection and self-preservation. Self-protection necessitates the existence of God, and self-preservation necessitates the existence of self. These two are basically selfish desires. The concept of anatta is closely connected with the doctrine of the five aggregates and dependent origination. The concept of self can be analyzed as a combination of the five aggregates. There is nothing permanent; everything is conditioned in dependence and relativity.

According to the doctrine of the conditioned, and according to the analysis of being as five

aggregates, the idea of an abiding, immortal substance in man or outside (whether it is called atman, 'I', soul, self, or ego) is considered a mere false belief, a mental projection. This is the Buddhist doctrine of Anatta, no-soul or no-self. Nowhere in his teachings, did Buddha mention the existence of a soul. In Dhammapada Ch. XX verses 5, 6, and 7 negate the existence of soul in clear terms. "All conditioned things are impermanent. All conditioned things are dukkha. All dhammas are without self." The basic factors of a human person cannot account for the existence of a soul. The physical material is impermanent, whatever is impermanent is the cause of suffering, and whatever is suffering is non-self. Similarly, sensations, mental formations, and consciousness cannot constitute the self because all these are transient.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD

The concept of Buddhism refutes the idea of a God who throws the sinners into everlasting torments. In fact, the Buddhists believe in the existence of an enlightened being, who vows to save all sentient beings from their sufferings. The concept of enlightenment is principally concerned with developing a method to escape from the illusions of the materialistic world. Generally, we use the term 'God' to designate a supreme power, who is the creator of the entire universe and the chief law-giver for humans. The God or Almighty is considered to be concerned with the welfare of His creations and the 'moksha' or salvation for those who follow His dictates. Different religions and sects follow this God differently by different names, but as far as Buddhism is concerned, it has a different perception for Him.

Almost all the sects of Buddhism do not believe in the myth of God. Indeed some of the early Indian Mahayana philosophers denounced God-worship in terms which are even stronger than those expressed in the Theravada literature. Some later Mahayana schools, which flourished outside India, ascribed some degree of divinity to a transcendent Buddha, considering living Buddhas to be a manifestation of the Adi Buddha. But even then it cannot be said that the Buddha was converted into a Divinity comparable to the God of the monotheistic religions. In the Brahmajala Sutta and the Aggaa Sutta texts, the Buddha refutes the claims of Maha Brahma (the main God) and shows Him to be subject to karmic law (i.e. cosmic law). Even long-lived Maha Brahma will be eliminated in each cycle of inevitable world dissolution and re-evolution. In the Khevadda Sutta, Maha Brahma is forced to admit to an inquiring monk that he is unable to answer a question that is posed to him, and advises the monk to consult the Buddha. This

clearly shows that Brahma acknowledges the superiority of the Buddha. The Buddha is viewed as some kind of a god figure. In the Theravada tradition, the Buddha is regarded as a supremely enlightened human teacher who has come to his last birth in the samsara (the Buddhist cycle of existence). But, Mahayana traditions, which tend to think in terms of a transcendental Buddha, do not directly make a claim for Buddha as God. Thus the Buddha cannot be considered as playing a God-like role in Buddhism. Rather, Buddha is concerned as an enlightened father of humanity

SECTS OF BUDDHISM

Mahayana: Mahayana Buddhism developed its own canon of scripture, using much that was included in the Theravada canon, but adding other Mahayana Sutras which contain the bases of their peculiar beliefs. Among these the best known and most widely used are the famous Lotus Gospel and the SukhavatiVyu-ha which are the scriptures especially of the pure land sects. The path followed by the Gautama is thus the Mahayana - 'the great vehicle' or vehicle of the Bodhisttva (bodhisattva-yana). The Mahayana movement claims to have been founded by the Buddha himself, though at first confined to a select group of hearers. Many of the leading teachers of the new doctrines were born in south India, studied there, and afterwards went to the North; one of the earliest and most important being

Nagarjuna and other major sutras circumstantially connected with the south.

During the life-time of the Blessed One (Buddha), he was already highly venerated and his aid was invoked by his disciples in their spiritual struggles. A simple cult developed about the relics of the Blessed One very early. His body was burned, and the ashes and bones distributed among the disciples. Shrines were built to house those relics, some of them very elaborate and expensive; for example, the very impressive one that has his head. Images of the Buddha representing him in meditation under the Bodhi tree became common. At first they were conceived of simply, as subjectively helpful. Veneration of the relic had the effect of calming the heart. Later arose the belief that such a reverential act was good in itself and would result in securing merit.

Pilgrimages

made to sacred spots associated with him would likewise benefit one and would result in karma.

Given the characteristic Hindu background, it was natural that for all practical purposes Gautama should soon become a god, though not theoretically called so. Given likewise the characteristic Hindu speculative philosophical interest, attempts to explain the relation of the Buddha to the ultimate reality of the universe naturally began to be made, almost from the start. According to the Mahayana, reality is beyond the rational intellect or beyond the four categories of understanding. And they say that the world is real and relative, and the absolute reality only appears as the manifold universe. Plural is not real. The Mahayana concept of liberation is not merely for one, but is meant for all. The ideal Bodhisattva defers his own salvation in order to work for the salvation of others. And they also hold that nirvana is not a negative

state of cessation of misery, but is positive bliss.

Hinayana: The Hinayana or lesser vehicle has been more moderate in its doctrine of the person of the Buddha. He is theoretically neither a god nor a supernatural being. His worship or veneration is helpful, but not essential, to the achievement of the salvation goal. This is to be reached by something like the process Gautama taught, namely, meditation on the four noble truths and the keeping of the Dharma; in short, becoming a monk, for one could not carry out all the requirements and live an active life in the day-to-day world. Thus the number to whom salvation lay open was comparatively small. It was this fact which caused the followers of the Mahayana school to call the older school the 'little vehicle'. Not many could ride at a time. Mahayana, on the other hand, made salvation universally possible for achievement.

The goal of the Hinayana was to become an Arhat, that is, to arrive at Nirvana in the present life; an ideal of salvation of the self, with no reference to the welfare of others, and thus an egoistic ideal. That of Mahayana was of a more altruistic sort. It was to become a Buddha; and theoretically, at least, anyone might aspire to reach Buddha-hood. To be sure, he would not reach it in one single lifetime, but there was elaborated a definite series of steps, ten in all, through which one must pass before arriving at the goal. One who had taken the vow of future Buddha – hood was called a Bodhisattva, and he need not be a monk. Here was a clear-cut difference from the Hinayana School - a layman might aspire for the highest goal. But the most notable difference was the fact that in becoming a Bodhisttva , one became (after passing a certain stage) a great ‘cosmic helper’ or saviour, dedicated to the saving of mankind. Men came to rely on the help of such ‘great beings’ in their search for freedom.

Along with this idea came a change in the conception of the Buddha. Gautama became but one in a great line of Buddhas, behind whom stood the eternal Buddha – the Dharmakaya - a conception similar to the old Hindu Brahma manifest in Vishnu or Siva. There were five principal Buddhas, of whom Gautama was one. One Buddha, Maitreya, was yet to come.

To these Buddhas is accorded worship, as also to the Bodhisattvas, or great beings who are known to be especially helpful. To them prayer is made; upon them centre love, loyalty, and devotion. One among the (Buddhas), Amitabha, came to be in an unusual degree the object of faith and devotion, and to him prayers were made. His powerful name was repeated countless times, for so meritorious was he that there was a strange potency in its mere repetition. According to them, you must be a light unto yourself (atmadipo bhava) and they also say that liberation is meant for a person and by

oneself. The Arhathood is attained through a difficult path of self help and Nirvana is extinction of all misery.

PREFACE

This book, the philosophy of Buddhism, introduces the main philosophical notions of Buddhism. It gives a brief and comprehensive view about the central teachings of Lord Buddha and the rich philosophical implications applied on it by his followers. This study may help the students to develop a genuine taste for Buddhism and its philosophy, which would enable them to carry out more researches and study on it. Since Buddhist philosophy gives practical suggestions for a virtuous life, this study will help one to improve the quality of his or her life and the attitude towards his or her life.

INTRODUCTION

Buddhist philosophy and doctrines, based on the teachings of Gautama Buddha, give meaningful insights about reality and human existence. Buddha was primarily an ethical teacher rather than a philosopher. His central concern was to show man the way out of suffering and not one of constructing a philosophical theory. Therefore, Buddha's teaching lays great emphasis on the practical matters of conduct which lead to liberation. For Buddha, the root cause of suffering is ignorance and in order to eliminate suffering we need to know the nature of existence. Also, Buddha insisted that all those who accept his doctrines must accept it only after rigorous reflections and only after all doubts and perplexities are overcome. Here, the philosophical implications of Buddha's teaching must be taken into serious consideration.

The philosophical system of Buddhism does not assume a systematic form. We cannot make a sharp distinction between the philosophical, religious, and ethical notions of Buddhism. The reason behind it is that the philosophical notions were developed in the background of ethical and religious notions. We may find many overlapping ideas from the previous chapter 'Buddhism as Religion', such as the noble truths, the eightfold path, the doctrines of soul, the doctrine of karma, etc. All these imply profound philosophical insights as they imply great religious insights.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The four noble truths are the most important principles of Buddhism. We need to take into serious account these principles, whether we speak about Buddhism as a religion, or Buddhist philosophy, or any other serious study on Buddhism. Here, only a brief description of the four noble truths is given, to start our study on the 'Philosophy of Buddhism.' The four noble truths are explained in detail in the chapter 'Buddhism as a Religion.' We may have to refer back to the portion there for more details. The four noble truths of Buddhism are as follows:

Life is Full of Suffering (Dukkha): According to the first noble truth all forms of existence are subject to suffering. For Buddha it is a universal truth. All known and unknown facts and forms of life are associated with suffering. Birth, sickness, old

age, death, anxiety, desire, and despair, all such happenings and feelings are based on suffering. Buddhism recognizes suffering at three levels, such as the suffering we experience in our daily life, like, birth, sickness, old age, death, despair, pain, desire, etc. (dukkah-dukkhatta), suffering caused by the internal mental conditions and the activities of the sense organs (samkara-dukkhatta), and the suffering caused by the impermanence of objects and our relation to them (viparinama-dukkhatta).

Suffering has a Cause (Dukkha samudaya):

Everything in this cosmos has a cause, and nothing exists and happens without a cause. If this is the case, suffering should also have a cause. Buddhism explains suffering through a chain of twelve causes and effects, commonly known as the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (pratityasamutpada). In the final analysis, the root of all miseries is desire (Tanha). Desire is all pervasive. Desire for possession, enjoyment, and a separate

individual existence are some of the virulent forms of desire.

Cessation of Suffering (Dukkha nirodha): If suffering has a cause, the seeker has to destroy this cause to stop suffering. So desire has to be extinguished to stop suffering. Nirvana is the state of being without suffering. It is a state of supreme happiness and bliss.

Ways to Destroy Suffering (Dukkha-nirodha-marga): The ways to destroy suffering consists of the practice of the eightfold virtue ,such as, Right View, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Awareness, and Right Concentration. In the practice of all these virtues one has to avoid extremes and follow the middle path.

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH IN BUDDHISM

The eightfold path is the practical application of the four noble truths. They are also closely connected to the fourth noble truth as a means to destroy suffering. Following are components of the eightfold path of Buddhism.

Right View (Samyak-dristi): It consists of the grasp and acceptance of the four noble truths, rejection of the fault doctrines, and avoidance of immorality resulting from covetousness, lying, violence, etc.

Right Aspirations (Samyka-sankalpa): It implies thought on renunciation, thought on friendship and good will, and thoughts on non-harming.

Right Speech (Samyak-vac): It inspires one to speak truth primarily, and to speak gentle and soothing words for the benefit and wellbeing of others. It also promulgates one to avoid falsehood, slander, harsh words and gossip.

Right Conduct (Samyak-karma): The Buddha intends by right conduct the practice of five moral vows namely, non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non-stealing (asteya),

Right Livelihood (Samyag ajiva): It consists of the avoidance of a luxurious life and the acceptance of occupations which do not involve cruelty and injury to other living beings. The Buddha exhorts to avoid occupations like sale of alcohol, making and selling weapons, profession of the soldier, butcher, fisherman, etc.

Right Effort (Samyak vyayama): It includes the effort to avoid the rise of evil and false

ideas in the mind, the effort to overcome evil and evil tendencies, the effort to acquire positive values like attention, energy, tranquility, equanimity, and concentration, and the effort to maintain the right conditions for a meritorious life.

Right Awareness (Samyak Smrti): It represents the awareness of the body (breathing positions, movements, impurities of the body, etc.), awareness of sensations (attentive to the feelings of oneself and of the other), awareness of thought and the awareness of the internal functions of the mind.

Right Concentration (Samyak Samadhi): The practice of one pointed contemplation leads the seeker to go beyond all sensations of pain and pleasure, and finally to full enlightenment. It happens in four levels. In the first level, through intense meditation the seeker concentrates the mind on truth and thereby enjoys great bliss. In the second level

the seeker enters into supreme internal peace and tranquility. In the third level, the seeker becomes detached even from the inner bliss and tranquility. In the fourth level, the seeker is liberated even from this sensation of bliss and tranquility.

The first two of the eight-fold path, namely, right view and right resolve, are together called Prajna, because they are related to consciousness and knowledge. The third, fourth, and fifth, namely, right speech, right conduct, and right livelihood, are collectively known as Sila, because they deal with the correct and morally right way of living. The last three, namely, right effort, right awareness, and right concentration are collectively known as Samadhi, because they deal with meditation and contemplation.

THE DOCTRINE OF DEPENDENT ORINATION (*PRATITYA- SAMUTPADA*)

The doctrine of dependent origination is central to Buddhist philosophy and is connected to the second noble truth - suffering has a cause (Dukkha Samudaya). According to Buddhism everything in this world has a cause. There is a cycle of twelve such causes and corresponding effects which governs the entire life of human beings. It is called Bhavacakra, the cycle of existence. This universal law works automatically without the help of any conscious guide. This doctrine is the main principle in Buddha's teachings. Other notions, such as the doctrine of karma, the theory of momentariness, and the theory of nonsoul are based on this doctrine.

Pratitya-samutpada is a middle path between sasvatvada (the principle of

eternity) and uchedvada (the principle of annihilation). According to sasvatvada, some things are eternal, uncaused, and independent. According to uchedvada, nothing remains after the destruction of things. By maintaining a middle way between both these principles, pratitya-samutpada holds that things have existence but they are not eternal and they are not annihilated completely. The twelve links of pratitya-samutpada are as follows:

Ignorance (Avidya): Ignorance is caused by desire. It is the substratum of action and the basis of ego (jivahood). Ignorance causes the individual to think of himself as separate from the entire world. This leads to attachment to life and thus to suffering.

Predisposition (Samskara): Samskara is caused by ignorance. Predisposition means a disposition preceding to or preparing to certain activity. Also, it can be understood as the attitude and aptitude of the past Karma.

Samskara is also known as fabrication. There are three types of fabrications namely bodily fabrications, verbal fabrications, and mental fabrications.

Consciousness (Vijnana): Consciousness is caused by predispositions. There are six types of consciousness, namely, eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and intellectconsciousness.

Name and Form (Namarupa): It is the psycho-physical body in the womb of the mother caused by consciousness.

Sense Organs (Sadayatana): The sense organs are caused by name and form. There are six sense organs such as the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the skin, and the mind.

Contact (Sparsa): Contact with the object of enjoyment is caused by sense organs. Sometimes it is said that the eye is due to

seeing and not that seeing is due to the eye, and similarly in the case of every organ.

Feeling or Sensation (Vedana): Feeling or sensation is caused by contact with the objects of enjoyment. Feeling or sensation is of six forms, such as, vision, hearing, olfactory (sensation), gustatory sensation, tactile sensation, and intellectual sensation (thought).

Craving (Trsna): The craving or thirst for enjoyment is caused by the actual experience or sensation of enjoyment. It is due to craving that a person blindly longs for worldly attachments. There are six forms of cravings, such as, cravings with respect to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and ideas.

Attachment or Clinging (Upadana): The clinging to sensory enjoyment is caused by the craving for such enjoyment. There are four types of clinging, namely, sensual

clinging, view clinging, practice clinging, and self clinging.

Becoming (Bhava): It is the will to be born caused by clinging or attachment. It includes thoughts and actions which are responsible for rebirth. There are three kinds of becoming, such as sensual becoming, form becoming, and formless becoming.

Birth (Jati): Birth (also rebirth) is caused by becoming (bhava). The jiva is caught up in the wheel of the world and remains in it till it attains nirvana. It refers not just to birth at the beginning of a lifetime, but to birth as a new person, which is the acquisition of a new status or position.

Old Age and Death (Jaramarana): Old age and death are caused by birth. Rebirth causes the whole chain of the worldly sufferings. After a man is caught in the wheel of the world, diseases, old age, suffering, death, etc. recur.

The twelve links of the doctrine of dependent origination can be divided into three classes, namely, the past, the future, and the present. Ignorance and predisposition are due to the past life. Consciousness, name and form, sense organs, contact, feeling, craving, and clinging are connected to the present life. Finally, becoming, birth, and old age and death are of future life.

THE DOCTRINE OF MOMENTORINESS (*KSHANIKA- VADA*)

According to kshanika-vada, everything is momentary, relative, conditional, and dependent. It is also known as the doctrine of impermanence (*anityavada*). Buddhism teaches that the world and its objects are not permanent, but momentary. The universe is a constant chain of change. The basis of the Doctrine of Momentoriness is the Doctrine of the Dependent Origination. Every object comes into existence from an antecedent condition and gives rise to a consequent object. It is comparable to the flame of a lamp, where the flame is merely the continuity of successive flames. A flame exists only for a moment, but it gives rise to the next flame.

For Buddhists, the material world and its objects are not merely impermanent and

transient, but they also exist only for a moment. This doctrine is ultimately to dissuade people from placing confidence in the world and persuade them to renounce it for the permanent status of Nirvana. It avoids two extremes: eternalism and nihilism. Thus, it is a middle path where the world is neither a being nor a non-being.

The Buddhist philosophers have given several arguments in support of the doctrine of momentariness. Of these, the most important argument is known as Arthakriyakaritra, the argument from the power of generating action. According to this principle, whatever can produce an effect has existence, and whatever cannot produce an effect has no existence. It means that as long as a thing has the power to produce an effect it has existence, and when it ceases to produce an effect, its existence also ceases. Again, one thing can produce only one effect. If at one time a thing produces an effect and at the next

moment another effect or no effect, then the former thing ceases to exist.

THE DOCTRINE OF *KARMA*

The law of karma is that every event produces its effects, which in turn become causes for other effects, generating the karmic chain. The doctrine of dependent origination links karmic impressions from past existence and rebirth. These two links signify the proposition that the present existence of a man is dependent upon his past existence - the effect of his thoughts, words, and actions in the past life. Similarly the future existence is dependent on the present existence. According to the law of karma, our present and future are neither capricious nor unconditional, but are conditioned by our past and present.

THE DOCTRINE OF NON-SOUL (*ANATTA*)

The doctrine of non-soul (*anatta*) is another important philosophical notion of Buddhism which is a consequence of the doctrine of dependent origination. There is a belief in almost all the cultures and religions that there exists in man an eternal and permanent entity, variously known as the 'soul,' the 'self,' or the 'spirit.' According to Buddhism, one cannot become aware of an unchanging entity called 'soul' and all one can become aware of when one thinks of one's self or soul is a sensation, an impression, a perception, an image, a feeling, or an impulse. The Buddha analyses men into five groups (*skandhas*), namely, form (matter), feeling (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral), perceptions (sight, smell, etc.), impulses (hate, greed, etc.) and consciousness. Anything a man thinks he is or he has, fall under one of these groups. The self

or soul is simply an abbreviation for the aggregate of these skandhas, and not some entity over and above the aggregate. Thus there is no distinct substance known as the 'self' or 'soul.' There is a mistaken understanding that through the doctrine of anatta the Buddha denies man as a self or a soul. What he denies is the belief that there exists behind and beyond the skandhas a self or a soul which is permanent and unchanging. Buddha acknowledges the changing self, but rejects the unchanging substantial self. (For details refer to the title 'The Doctrine of No Soul (Anatta)' in the chapter 'Buddhism as a Religion')

PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS OF BUDDHISM

Since Buddha did not give answers to many of the vital philosophical issues, his followers tried to find answers to such questions. These attempts, in turn, gave rise to different philosophical directions and schools. The differences of opinion and doctrines emerged immediately after the death of Buddha. It is believed that there existed thirty such Buddhist philosophical schools. But only four of them survived and are traditionally known. They are as follows:

The Vaibhasika School: The Vaibhasika derives its name from its exclusive emphasis on a particular commentary, the *abhidhammamahavaibhasa* of Abhidhamma. In the true spirit of the doctrine of dependent origination, the Vaibhasika holds that reality is pure flux and change. This school belongs

to Hinayana. The Vaibhasika speaks about the existence of the mental and the non-mental realities. It teaches that we can really know the external entities and the world outside. This notion is known as *bahya-pratyeka-vada*. This school holds onto pluralism, realism, and nominalism. According to Vaibhasika, the world is in reality as it appears to us. The ultimate constituents (*dharma*) of reality are the same as those which make up the world of our empirical experience. Since they hold that the *dharma* is ultimate and independent of our consciousness, Vaibhasika is realism. Vaibhasika is pluralism as it asserts *dharma* as distinct and irreducible. For Vaibhasika, the reality is particular and is devoid of any universal unchanging entities. Thus Vaibhasika can be considered as nominalism too.

The Sautrantika School: The name Sautrantika, derived from the fact that it gives greater importance to the authority of the *sutra-pitaka* of the Pali Canon. This school

also belongs to Hinayana Buddhism. The Sautrantika subscribes both the mental and the non-mental reality. The important difference between both these schools is that while the Vaibhasika maintains direct perception of the external objects, the Sautrantika holds the inference from the perceptions which are representations of external objects.

The second important difference between the Sautrantika and Vaibhasika is that unlike the Vaibhasika, the Sautrantika distinguishes between the world as it appears to us (phenomena) and the world as it is in itself (nomena). Here Sautrantika denies the absolute, ultimate, and independent ontological status of dharma. Another point of disagreement between the Sautrantika and the Vaibhasika is concerned with the nature of the relation between successive pointinstants of existence. For the Vaibhasika the past, present, and future are equally real. The reason is that the present, which is

admittedly real, cannot be the effect of an unreal past and the cause of an unreal future. Contrary to this, the Vaibhasika's point is that the point-instant which has no duration cannot causally bring about its succeeding point-instant. For, the cause and effect cannot be simultaneous.

The Yogacara School: This school belongs to Mahayana Buddhism. There are two different accounts of the origin of the name Yogacara of this school. According to one account, the followers of this school emphasized yoga (critical enquiry) along with acara (conduct). According to the other, the adherents of this school practiced yoga for the realization of the truth, that reality is of the nature of consciousness. The core of the doctrine of the Yogacara is that consciousness (mind) alone is ultimately real. Thus, external objects are regarded as unreal. For Yogacara, all internal and external objects are ideas of the mind. Thus, it is impossible to demonstrate the independent existence of external objects.

The philosophers of this school are known as the advocates of consciousness (vijñānavāda). Yogācāra offers another argument to deny the independent existence of the external object, which seems to be a criticism to the Sautrāntika and the Vaibhāsika. It argues that if there is an object outside, it must be indivisible, partless, and atomic, or divisible and composite. If it is the former, it cannot be perceived since atoms are too minute. If it is composite, we cannot perceive all the parts and the sides of the object simultaneously. Thus, in either case the existence of the external objects is denied. Another important argument against the existence of the external objects is based on the doctrine of momentariness. The Yogācāra points out that, since objects are not substances but durationless point instants, it is difficult to understand how a momentary object can be the cause of consciousness. If it is the cause of consciousness, there must be a time lapse between the arising of the object and our consciousness of it.

The Madhaymika School: This school also belongs to Mahayana Buddhism. The literal meaning of the term Madhaymika is 'the farer of the Middle Way'. The Madhaymika avoids all the extremes, such as, eternalism and annihilationism, self and non-self, matter and spirit, unity and plurality, and identity and difference. The founder of this school is supposed to be Nagarjuna of the second century CE. Aryadeva, Candrakirti, Kumarajiva, and Santideva are the other prominent figures of this school. One of the most important insights of Nagarjuna is the origin and nature of philosophy and philosophical conflicts. For him, knowledge is the means by which man seeks to unite the self and the other. Knowledge is propositional, and propositions are constituted of concepts, and concepts refer names (nama) and forms (rupa). Hence, the reality which philosophers create in their knowledge is the reality of names and forms, and not reality as it is in itself. The Madhaymika claims that concepts and

conceptual systems are relative to each other. They cannot stand by themselves and generate truths. Consequently, no system can claim absolute truth and validity. The truth of each system can be relative and partial. Nagarjuna teaches that it is absurd to speak about reality as true or false. Reality simply is. The emptiness (Sunyata) of concepts does not entail the emptiness of the reality. What he means by Sunyata is not that reality is nonexistent or illusory, but only that it is devoid of any entities which we think. The Madhyamika claim that unlike the other three schools, their philosophy is very close to the teachings of Buddha. The notion of relativity and sunyata (emptiness) are none other than the doctrine of dependent origination which Buddha emphasized.

Nagarjuna brings the notion of two types of truths: the lower truth and higher truth. He calls the phenomenal truths as lower truth, since we cannot find any absolute truth in this world. All phenomenal truths are relative,

conditioned, and valid within particular domains of our perceptual-conceptual experience. The higher truth is beyond percepts and concepts, ineffable and defying all descriptions. It is absolute, supramundane, and unconditional. It is grasped through intuitive insights.

SUM UP

The aim of philosophy is to ultimately lead man to find the meaning of his life and existence. It is true to its core in the case of the philosophy of Buddhism. The four noble truths that Buddha proposes touch the very existence of humans, which leads one to understanding the sufferings and miseries of life, and to go beyond to attain nirvana, a perfect state of happiness and bliss. The eightfold path of Buddhism is moreover a daily guide for everyone to lead a virtuous life. The doctrine of pratityasamutpada is a reasonable description about the cycle of human life. The doctrine of momentoriness has profound philosophical implications in the present scenario, where people chase the momentary pleasures of the world without realizing its impermanence. The doctrine of non-soul or more precisely the denial of a permanent soul would be a unique notion of

Buddhist philosophy. Apart from all these, we find a logical sequence in the entire philosophy, where different ideas are mutually connected and related. The four noble truths are the basis of Buddha's teachings and from this follow all other notions such as the eightfold path, the doctrine of dependent origination, the doctrine of momentariness, the theories of karma, non-soul, rebirth, etc. The various theories of the different philosophical schools are a direct evidence to understand the richness of Buddhist philosophy, and how seriously the study on the teachings of Buddha is carried out. Even today, deeper and wider study is done on the various themes of this philosophy to explore the new horizons of the meaning it contains.

KEY WORDS

Anatta – The Buddhist doctrine of non-soul.

Duhkha – The Sanskrit term *dukkha* is almost translated as suffering. According to Buddha, life is full of suffering and the goal of human life is to get out of suffering by removing ignorance. The four noble truths of Buddhism are closely linked to the concept of *dukkha*.

Karma - *Karma* is categorized within the groups of causes in the chain of cause and effect, where it comprises the elements of action. Buddhism links *karma* directly to the motives behind an action.

Kshanika-vada – The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentoriness.

Nirvana – The Buddha describes *nirvana* as the perfect peace of the state of mind that is

free from craving, anger, and other afflicting states.

Skandhas - The aggregates or components that come together to make an individual.

Sunyata – Often translated as emptiness or void. According to Nagarjuna “The greatest wisdom is the so-called *Sunyata*.”

Pratitya-samutpada –The Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination

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