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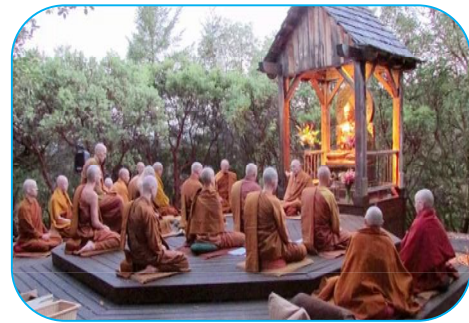
A STUDY OF THERAVADA BUDDHISM'S EGO-FREE SOCIO-POLITICAL DIMENSION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to demonstrate and investigate Theravada Buddhism's doctrine of not-self (anattā) according to the Pali Canon and its commentaries and sub-commentaries, to study Theravada Buddhism's doctrine of not-self (anattā) in the socio-political dimension, and to propose an alternative—the Buddhist way of resolving human problems and conflicts. The research methodology used in this thesis is a descriptive technique, which includes text interpretation, critique, and analysis. The material was gathered from the Pāli Tipitaka and its Commentaries (Atthakathā) and Sub-Commentaries (Tikā), as well as Buddhist publications, scholarly papers from Buddhist philosophy journals, and related literature by numerous Buddhist scholars, including unpublished theses. According to Pali scriptures, 'Anattā' refers to not-self or no-ego, which denies attā or self, soul or ego, both within and outside of beings' bodies and mental experiences. The term anattā was coined by the Buddha to describe His teachings, which rejected the concept of a permanent self. The Buddha's second sermon to His first five followers (pancavaggiya) at Vāranasi, the Anattalakhana sutta, is the first narrative from Buddhist sources that asserts the Buddha rejected the self-theory (anattā).



KEYWORDS : Atta-Self', Ego, Anatman/Anatta -Non-self, non-ego, Nibban- The cessation of suffering and dissatisfaction, Vipassana-Insight meditation

INTRODUCTION

The birth of any religion is a product of the political, social, economic, and religious circumstances in which it emerges. Buddhists are no exception. To understand Buddhism, one must first look into the political, social, economic, and religious circumstances of the time period. During the Buddha's lifetime, significant changes happened in politics, economy, and religion. All of humanity's problems, including social and political ones, can be resolved via inner-realization, according to Buddhism. Every aspect of our life is inextricably linked. The internal lives of humans are the most fundamental. If the mind is deluded and thoughtless, dominated by ignorance, want, and conceit, it is impossible to fully grasp things as they are. Cleaning one's mind and intelligence are prerequisites for dealing with life and living. Buddhist philosophy strives for a harmonious balance of spirituality and materialism.

The Significant Meanings of Anattā

The term Anattā (Sanskrit, Anātman; non-egoism or not self in English) in Buddhist philosophy was first found in the Buddha's second sermon called "Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta" (Discourse on the Characteristic of Not-self). Anattā is regarded as one of the cornerstones of the Buddha's teachings. It is said to be a teaching specific to the Buddha. Buddhist scholars believe that the basic concept, which helps to understand life best, is the concept of anattā. According to Buddhism, anattā is not merely the common property of all men, but of all things, as the Buddha says: "all phenomena are not self (SabbeDhammāAnattā)." The problem of attā-anattā is the main content of Buddhism. It is considered as the most important and the most fundamental characteristic feature of human life. It, therefore, becomes the cornerstone of the other concepts. Most of the Buddhist scholars of East and West hold that the concept of anattā is the essence of Buddhism. It distinguishes Buddhism from other schools of thought. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, a Thai Buddhist scholar, regards the teaching of anattā as the fundamental teaching of Buddhism, and he emphasizes that anattā is a unique concept and separates Buddhism from other religions. Further, he says, "If we know the truth of anattā, we shall completely know all." Nyanatiloka, a Western Buddhist scholar, says that anattā is the central doctrine of Buddhism; it is the only specific doctrine of Buddhism and stands for the entire Buddhist philosophy. He also points out that without the understanding the egolessness of existence, it is not possible to gain a real understanding of the Buddha-word (Buddha-Vachana) and that it is not possible without it to realize that goal of emancipation and deliverance of mind proclaimed by the Buddha.

Etymologically, the Pali word anattā consists of the negative prefix 'an' plus 'attā' (Sanskrit, anātman), meaning not self, non-ego, non-soul, impersonality or non - substantiality.⁸ This term is used as a noun and as predicative adjective to denote that phenomena are not, or are without a self, to describe any and all composite, consubstantial, phenomenal and temporal things, from the macrocosmic to microcosmic, be it matter pertaining to the physical body or the cosmos at large as well as any and all mental machinations which are impermanent.⁹ The term anattā, therefore, refers to not self or non -ego which denies attā or self, soul or ego, neither within the body and mental phenomena of beings, nor outside of them. The Buddha used the term anattā to explain his teaching which rejected the view of a permanent self.

Contemporary View of Anattā Doctrine

It is very necessary to look into the two distinct views, viz. Brahmanism and non - Brahmanism or Śramanism, that were the rivals to Buddhism and prevailed before and during the time of the Buddha. These two schools of thought maintained the existence of self or ego which the Buddha rejected, and disclosed his new doctrine of non-substantiality. In this context, a brief account of these theories is a logical necessity for providing a background for understanding the doctrine of non-egoism or not self of Buddhism.

Non - Brahmanism or Śramanism

During the time of the Buddha, apart from Brahmanism, there were many views referred to in Sāmañña-phala sutta of Dīghanikāya that were distinct from the tradition of Indian Philosophy (Vedic and Upanishad). These schools of thought were referred to as Sramanism and Ājīvaka. The Buddha described these as heretic (titthiya). Specifically, they were six thinkers, namely, (i) PūraṇaKassapa, (ii) MakkhaliGosāla, (iii) AjitaKesakambala, (iv) PakudhaKaccāyana, (v) NigaṇṭhaNātaputta, and (vi) SañjayaBelatthaputta. In other words, they were well known as "a group of philosophers within the ascetic tradition who openly revolted against the Brahmanical, metaphysical and ethical theories and advocated some form of amoralism." Here, we shall study all these ascetic schools of Indian thought in order to understand views (dassanas) what is called right view and wrong view according to Buddhist doctrines.

Ātman and Brāhman in Upanishad

Prior to Buddhism, Brahmanism (Proto-Hindu) pervaded and prevailed in Indian society. The significant evolution of Brahmanism had started from Vedic period to Upanishadic period, specifically in the Upanishads. The spiritual quest was seen as the heart of the school of thought, unlike that of Vedic teaching that emphasized mostly on worship gods. The focus of Brāhmanical thought in the Upanishadic period was on the quest for knowing the self or ego which is to be seen as the essence underlying the whole of reality: both the external world and personality; it was not a personal self, but lays beyond both body and mind, as a transcendent, yet immanent reality that was a person's true nature. Laying beyond empirical individuality it was a universal self, the same in all beings, known as Ātman and Brahman, the dual reality of man and the world according to Hindu Philosophy. The shift of Brāhmanical thought in Upanishad according to Prasad, is the shift of focus. He demonstrates that the nucleus of thought in the Upanishad has been shifted from exteriorization-cum interiorization of experience to interiorization- only of the same, from split of subject into subjective-objective duality to pure subjective oneness. It is a discovery of self, i.e., its cosmic and creative nature that is a discovery of individual self/soul or (Ātman) and the cosmic soul or (Brāhman) immanent in the individual soul.³¹ In other word, Brāhman and Ātman, the two, objective and subjective, the cosmic and the psychical principles, are looked upon as identical. These two concepts are regarded as the two pillars on which rest nearly the whole edifice of Indian Philosophy.

Brāhman

The ultimate reality and the self, Brāhman and Ātman, consist of the entire Upanishadic Philosophy that can be expressed equitably: Brahman=Ātman. The term Brāhman is derived from root brh. 'To grow, to burst forth'. The derivation suggests gushing forth, bubbling over, and ceaseless growth, Brhamattvam. In the Upanishad, the word is used to indicate the supreme reality. Essentially, is the ultimate reality of the Universe. It is the Universal Self of all individual selves, the nucleus of cosmos of all beings, existing permanently, everything proceeding from Brāhman, and eventually returning to Brāhama. The one principle is expressed in the plurality of matter and soul. S.Radhadkrishnan writes the superiority of Brāhman thus:

Upanishad affirms that Brāhman on which all else depends, to which all existences aspire, Brāhman which is sufficient to itself, aspiring, without any need, is the sources of all other beings, the intellectual principle the perceiving mind, life and body. It is the principle which unifies the world of the physicist, the biologist, the psychologist, the logician, the moralist and the artist. The hierarchy of all things and beings form soulless matter to the deity is the cosmos.

Ātman

The term Ātman is generally translated into English as self. Sometimes translated into ego, its menacing is to breathe.' It is the breath of life. According to Radhakrishnan, Ātman is the principle of man life, the soul that pervades his beings, his breath, Prāṇa, his intellect, prajñā, and transcends them. In the essence, the ChāndogyaUapnishad stated that the self transcends the bodily self of the materialists and also the self which experiences dreaming and dreamless sleep. The Self is independent of the body and on the dissolution of the body, the self is not annihilated. The Upanishadic thinkers identified this as the subtle principle, the non-physical substance that lies in all beings, and transmigrates from life to life. It remains intact, unharmed at death, for it is separate from the body. Being non-physical, it does not get affected at the time of destruction of the body at death. Virtually, Ātman is the ground of reality underscoring the conscious beings of the individual, the inner cause of human spirit. Thus, Ātman is the highest reality of the Jīva or individual personality.

Brāhaman and Ātman

According to the Upanishad, Ātman is not different from Brāhman. To realize the self is to realize Brāhman. This is because the self or Ātman is identical with brāhaman. Brāhman, the first and Ultimate principle of the Universe is realized through Ātman. Ātman is the same principle as known in man. The former stands for transcendent unity, the latter for the immanent unity. In a sense, Brāhaman is the essence of the universal soul; Ātman is the essence of individual soul. And the two are one and the same. Brāhaman is Ātman.⁴¹ This identity of the ultimate reality and the self is briefly expressed by the famous sayings "That art thou (tat tavamasi)," "I am Brāhman (ahambrāmaasmi)" and "Not thus, not thus' (netineti)." In addition, in the compound word, "unity of Brāhman and Ātman" is described the fundamental thesis of the Vedanta system. Thus, the realizing of Ātman amounts to the realization of Brāhman. In truth, he who knows the supreme Brahman becomes Brahman himself." This is to say that realization of Brahman is the attainment of Moksha. This knowledge does not lead to liberation but is liberation itself. This is the ultimate goal of man according to the Upanishads, and the supreme reality of Hinduism. Apparently, this dual reality of man and the world in Upanishadic philosophy was named as externalism (sassatavāda) by the Buddha.

Rejection of Permanent Identity by the Buddha

Theravada Buddhist scholars unanimously insist that all kinds of permanent self-called Ātman, or transcendental ego are rejected by the Buddhist.

Whatever be the theories about the atman held
by the various thinkers during the time of the Buddha and
thereafter, the Buddhist Doctrine of anattā, as preserved
in the Theravada tradition, contradicts them all in all-embracing sweep.

This argument shows that the doctrine of not-self denies not only the self within the personality but also the substance of the phenomenal world. For the Buddhists, everything is empty of self-reality. Nothing exists in itself, for each existence is conditioned by causes outside itself. Since all phenomena have nothing substantial or perdurable in them, they are in a condition not of static being, but of perpetual becoming (bhāva). The entire Buddhist scriptures clearly affirm of the Buddha's rejection of the permanent ego inside the body of all living-beings, transmigrating repeatedly to a new body in the same identity when the old one disintegrates, as permanent ego or self. The first and foremost sermon of the Buddha is that "pubbe Ananusutesu Dhammesu (the reality unheard before) in Dhammacakkappavattanasutta" which indicates that the Buddha sees the whole phenomena in a new perspective, different from the traditional way of understanding the nature of all things in this world, that is, there is no permanent substantiality, self, or ego. In other words, the Buddha's new perspective has been seen as a process of continuing being (santati -bhāva), as a flux, and as a dynamic force in every moment, nothing static, simply continuing in every step under space and time. According to the Buddhist texts, the first edifice source that vividly proves that the Buddha refutes the permanent ego and explores the new face of reality to this world is that anattalakhanastta, the second sermon the Buddha preached to his first five followers (pancavaggiyas) at Vāranasi. The essentiality of this sutta emphasizes on the impermanent-existence or not-self, nothing but the stream of continuity in every moment, seen as the function of mind and body-relationship, called five aggregates⁵⁶ (pañca-khandhasskt.Pañca-skhandhas): They are corporeality (rūpakhandha) feeling (vedanā khandha) perception (saññākhandha) mental formation (sañkhārakhandha) and consciousness (viññākhandha). The Buddha regards these five aggregates as not self (anattā). Apart from the five aggregates, the doctrine that asserts that the Buddha denies self or ego is the natural law (dhamma niyāma): all conditioned states are impermanent (sabbesañkhārāniccā,) all conditioned states are subject to oppression (sabbesañkhārādukkhā), and) all phenomena are not self (sabbedhammānattā), or known as the three characteristics (tilakhaṇa), aniccata: impermanence, instability, and inconstancy; the condition of arising, deteriorating, and disintegrating, ii) dukkhatā: the tension, stress and conflict within an object due to alteration of its determinant factors preventing it from remaining as it is; the internal nature of things imperfection, and anattatā:) the condition of anattā - not self; the condition of

things being void of a real abiding self. Lastly, the doctrine of the Dependent origination (paticcasmuppāda, or itappaccayatā). Ignorance (avijjā) mental formation (saṅkhāra) consciousness (viññāna) mind and matter (nāma-rūpa) six-sense base (saḷāyatana) contact (passa) feeling (vedhanā) craving (taṇhā) clinging (upādāna) becoming (bhava) birth (jāti) decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain grief and despair (carāmarāṇa, sokaparidevadukkhato manassupāyāsa. all these factors move, and flux under the law of causation, nothing arises without cause and effect; no unseen power behind this process of all things in the Universe.

Anatta and the Problem of kamma

Kamma is one of the most important concepts that constitutes the salient feature of Buddhism, and it functions as the central motif in the most fundamental features of classical Indian philosophy. The Law of Kamma emphasizes the regularity of human actions and their effects in the sense that actions done are considered to lead to appropriate effects. Good actions lead to good effects or good experiences and bad actions will have bad effects in return as the Buddha says:

you reap what you sow. "According to the seed that's sown, so is the fruit ye reap therefrom. Dou of good will gather good, dou of evil. Whatever a man becomes is the result of what he did in the past because deeds are one's own, beings are heirs to deeds, deeds are matrix".

Etymologically, the Pali word 'kamma' is derived from the root 'kr' or 'kṛi' (Sanskrit) meaning to do, to commit, or to perform, deed, act, action, or business. Kamma, therefore, literally means action, something we do or perform.

In the book called 'Good, Evil and Beyond' written by P.A. Payutto. He explains kamma by classifying it into four categories:

- i) Kamma as intention: Essential karma is intention which includes volition, will, choice and decision, or the energy, which lead to action. Intention here refers to whatever that instigates and directs all human actions.
- ii) Kamma as conditioning factor: Karma is a component in the whole life process, being the agent, taking direction in life. Kamma in the sense of 'saṅkhāra' appears in the Doctrine of Dependent Origination, where it is described as the agent, which directs the mind.
- iii) Kamma as personal responsibility: It refers to the manifestation of thought through speech and action, that is, behavior forms an ethical perspective, either on a narrow, immediate level, or on a broader level, including the past and the future.
- iv) Kamma as social activity or career: In this respect, karma is concerned with the perspective of social activity, in the light of work, labor, or profession, such as farmer, artist, merchant, servant etc.

In general, kamma is divided into two main categories: wholesome and unwholesome. At the same time human beings can be differentiated through the goodness and badness of their own kamma. It means that kamma that a person performs classifies what kind of person he is. The Buddha himself divides karma ethically into two different classes, wholesome kamma (kusalakamma) and unwholesome kamma (akusalakamma). With regard to characteristics of the two kinds of karma, wholesome kamma is an action, which is spiritually beneficial, and morally praiseworthy, whereas unwholesome kamma is an action, which is spiritually harmful and morally blameworthy.

It should be noted that Kamma, according to the Buddha, is intention (cetanā), and this word includes will, choice and decision, the mental impetus

which leads to action. It refers to all kinds of volitional actions through body (kāya), speech (vācā) and mind (mano). As it is said in the AṅguttaraNikāya by the Buddha: "Monks! Intention (cetanā), I say, is kamma. Having volition, one creates kamma through body, speech and mind."

Thus, the human world is the world of intention, because of intention the

world progresses; intention is the creator and mover of the world. In Vāsetṭha Sutta the Buddha says, "The world is driven by kamma."

The teachings of kamma and not-self (anattā) seem to contradict each other. In this connection, two questions arise thus: if a man is merely the combination of five khandhas in which there is no essential substance, (1) who is the doer of kamma and the receiver of its result? (2) At the end of this life, who dies and will be reborn? These doubts are not simply enquiries of the present time, but have existed even before the time of the Buddha. The Buddha was once asked: "We know that body, feeling, perception, volitional impulses and consciousness are not self. If so, then who is it who receives the results of the kamma made by this 'not-self'?" The Buddha reproves the questioner by saying:

Bhikkhus, it may be that some foolish people in this Teaching and Discipline, with mind fallen into ignorance and confused by desire, might conceive the teaching of the Master to be rationalized thus: 'We know that body, feeling, perception, volitional impulses and consciousness are not-self. If that is so, who is it who receives the results of the kamma created by this 'not-self'? All of you now, having been thoroughly instructed by me, consider these matters: is form permanent or impermanent?

"Impermanent, Lord."

"Is what is impermanent (a cause for) happiness or suffering?"

"Suffering, Lord"

"Of that which is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and normally subject to degeneration, is it proper to say that 'this is mine, this is me, this is my self'?"

"No, it is not proper, Lord."

"For that reason, form, feeling, perception, volitional activities and consciousness, of whatever description, are merely form, feeling, perception, volitional activities and consciousness. They are not 'mine,' not 'me,' not 'myself'. Reflect on this as it is with wisdom. The learned, Noble Disciple, seeing in this way, does not attach to form, feeling, perception, volitional impulses or consciousness. He is free of those things, and has no further task to do."

At first the Buddha points out to the questioner that the question is wrong, for, once we personalize the problem by asking, 'who' meaning, "what person or self is or will be the performer and experiencer of the kamma and its result", the confusion usually follows.

Anattā and the Problem of Nibbāna

The term 'Nibbāna' is frequently and popularly used in religious matters, for Nibbāna is their ultimate aspiration or the supreme goal. It is "absolute extinction of that life-affirming will be manifested as Greed, Hatred and Delusion, and convulsively clinging to existence; and therewith also the ultimate and absolute deliverance from all future rebirths." The Buddha emphatically states that just as there is suffering there is also cessation of suffering, this is the conception of freedom from suffering. The Pāli word 'Nibbāna' (Sanskrit: Nirvāna)¹⁸⁸ is having two sources: one is based on Ni+Vāna and another is on Ni+Vā+Na. The former derives from 'Ni', which is a negative particle, and 'Vāna' meaning 'weaving' or 'craving'. This craving (taṇhā) serves as a cord to connect one life with another. It is called 'Nibbāna' in that it is a departure (ni) from that craving which is called 'vāna', lusting.

In conclusion, we may state that the term 'Nibbāna' may be defined through various interpretations as far as conventional expression of the state of Ultimate Truth is concerned. Its

meaning conveyed by each of them points to the same thing, that is, the state of all suffering and its cause – craving (taṇhā) which is compared to the fuel of the round existence (saṃsāra) is totally extinguished, and the state of supreme happiness is obtained.

CONCLUSION

Despite various criticisms and opposing perspectives created by theistic religions, Buddhism, as a religion without a God, morality without a permanent soul, a system of virtuous ideas, and an Order to accommodate the Buddha's students, had flourished all over the world.

Due to ego-centrism on a collective level, a few traditional theistic religions still spend a significant amount of money on rituals, festivals, and festivities, as well as engage in feuds with other religious systems. Political upheaval, social and economic instability, moral degradation, linguistic fanaticism, racial discrimination, caste discrimination, religious fundamentalism, and other issues plague the modern world. Instead of being revered with reverence and perfect knowledge, scriptural texts that are holy in nature are misread or misunderstood.

The principle of impermanence is the edifice on which the Buddha's doctrines' superstructure stands. It would be nonsensical to think of a permanent and all-encompassing spirit when everything is on the move and changing all the time. In Buddhism, the doctrine of momentariness paves the foundation for subsequent theories such as no-soul, no god, and kamma.

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