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THE THREE TYPE OF CHARACTERISTIC

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ABSTRACT :

If we contemplate even a minute sector of the vast range of life, we are faced with such a tremendous variety of life's manifestations that it defeats description. And yet three basic statements can be made that are valid for all animate existence, from the microbe up to the creative mind of a human genius. These features common to all life were first found and formulated over 2500 years ago by the Buddha, who was rightly called "Knower of the Worlds" (loka-vidu). They are the Three Characteristics (ti-lakkha.na) of all that is conditioned, i.e., dependently arisen. In English renderings, they are also sometimes called Signs, Signata, or Marks.



KEYWORDS : Impermanence of Change (*anicca*), Suffering of Unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), Not -self of Insubstantially (*Anatta*).

INTRODUCTION :

If we contemplate even a minuet sector of the vast range of life's, we are faced with such a enormous variety of life's manifestations that it defeats description. And yet three basic statements can be made that are valid for all inspire existence, from microbe up to the creative mind of a human genius. These features common to all life were first found and formulated exactly 2550 year ago, by the Buddha, who was rightly called "knower of the Worlds" (*Loka-vidu*). They are Three Characteristics (*ti-lakkhana*) of all is conditioned, which are dependently arisen. These three basic facts of all existence are: The first and the third apply to inanimate existence as well, while the second suffering (*anicca*) is, of course, only an experience of the animate. The inanimate, however, can be, and very often is, a cause of suffering for living being: for instance, a falling stone may cause injury of property may cause mental pain. In that sense, the three are common to all that is conditioned even to what is below or beyond the normal range of human perception.

Existence can be understood only of these three basic fact are comprehended, and this not only logically, but in confrontation with one's own experience. Insight-wisdom (*vipassana-pañña*) which is ultimate liberating factor in Buddhism, consists just of this experience of the Three Characteristics or *Tilakkhana* applied to one's own physical and mental processes, deepened and matured in insight meditation.

The Buddha further explains in the *SamyuttaNikaya* III. 44. that " The five aggregates, *bhikkhus*, are *anicca*, impermanent; whatever is impermanent, that is *dukkha*, unsatisfactory; whatever is *dukkha*, that is without *anatta*, Self. What is without Self, that is not mine, that I am

not, that is not my Self. Thus should it be seen by perfect wisdom (*saṃmappaññaya*) as it really is. Who sees by perfect wisdom, as it really is, his mind, not grasping, is detached from taints, he is liberated."

An explanation of Impermanence (*Anicca*)

According to the Theravada, *anicca* is the first of what are often called in Buddhist literature the "Three Characteristics" (*ti-lakkhaṇa*) or the "General Characteristics" (*sāmañña-lakkhaṇa*). *Anicca* is usually treated as the basis for the other two, though *anatta*, the third, is sometimes founded on *dukkha* alone. The normal English equivalent for *anicca* is "impermanent."

The adjective *anicca* (impermanent) is derived in modern etymology from the negative prefix *a-* plus *nicca* (permanent: cf. Vedic Sanskrit *nitya* from prefix *ni-* meaning "onward, downward"). The *Paramatthama-njuṣṣā* (commentary to the *Visuddhimagga*) and also the *Poraṇa-Tīkā* (one of the three commentaries to the *Abhidhammatthasāṅgaha*) agree that "Because it denies everlastingness, it is not permanent, thus it is impermanent" (*naniccantianicca.m*: VisA. 125). The *Vibhaṅginī-Tīkā* and *Sankhepavaṇṇāna* (the other two commentaries to the *Abhs.*) prefer a derivation from the negative prefix *an-* plus root *i* to go: "Cannot be gone to, is un-approachable, as a permanent, everlasting state, thus it is impermanent" (... *naiccam, anupagantabbantianiccam*).

Venerable Saddhatissa in his book entitled 'The Facets of Buddhism' explained that there are 3 aspects of impermanence.

The impermanence of life, the moment and the nature of all conditioned things.

From birth to death and in between, every aspect of life is in a flux. Nothing is still; everything is changing from moment to moment. Like a wheel of a cart that only touches the road surface at only one point, life is only present for only a fraction of a moment in its present form before it changes again. Similarly, all conditioned things are in a complete flux. We may accept that change is taking place from moment to moment but it happens so rapidly that unless we take time to reflect deeply and hard, it is difficult to notice these changes. Almost like cartoon frames on a projectionist's screen. Each frame is superseded by a slightly different frame so rapidly that we perceive it as the continuous movement of a cartoon character, not as individual frames. Likewise even though things around us are changing from moment to moment, all we see is 'permanence'. That is until there is a change so massive, perhaps catastrophic that we cannot ignore it. Like the death of a loved one. Then the truth of *anicca* hits us home. We realise that *anicca* has been around us all the time; only we chose to ignore it. Everything changes with time: buildings, structures, mountains, kings, queens and the entire world. This is then one of the facts of life- whether it is the life of a human being, a plant or the universe itself.

Anicca or impermanence is first characteristics of *Tilakkhana* in the Buddhist doctrine. *Anicca* is usually treated as the basis for the other two, thought *anatta* the third, is sometimes founded on *dukkha* alone. The *nicca* or impairment is derived in modern etymology from the negative prefix *a + nicca*, a convert to *na*, means no, *nicca* means permanent. "*naniccantianiccan*". It is not permanent, thus it is impermanent.

The word *Anicca* is a household word in every Buddhist country. It means impermanence. Another word often jointly used by the Lord Buddha is "*viparinamadhammo*" meaning "the nature of change." Impermanence or change is a fundamental concept in Buddhism. Without a realization of it there can never be any rather true insight through which we can see things as they really are.

The Buddha teaches that we can only understand *Dukkha* and *Anatta* through an understanding of *Anicca*. The Buddha however has chosen *Dukkha* as the central point of a realization of the truth. This choice is a very skillful method of explaining the realities of life. It is the knowledge of *Anicca*, impermanence, that heals *Dukkha*, suffering. By understanding *Anicca*, we come to understand that there is no permanent entity underlying our life (*Anatta*).

A lack of this right understanding will certainly result in finding oneself in the wild jungle of perverted perception, polluted thought and tainted view (*Sanna, citta, ditthivipallasa*). A failure to comprehend this truth, *Anicca*, will also leave one unprotected from the false notion of self or soul which dangerously underlies any wrong view. Unnecessary disappointment, despair, and

frustration in our daily life often stem from ignorance of the law of nature, which is change or impermanence. It is therefore very important indeed for each and every of us to understand the nature of change or impermanence in order to face problems courageously in our daily lives; in order to learn how to compromise with one another; in order to reduce unnecessary tensions in our relationships; in order to be in harmony with nature and live a happy life; and in order to make ourselves more and more wise as time goes by.

Principle definitions given in the Suttapitaka are as follows. "Impermanent, impermanent" it is said, Lord. What is impermanent?" Five aggregates are impermanent, "Materiality (*rupa*) is impermanent, *Radha*, and so are feeling (*vedanā*) and perception (*saññā*) and formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

Herein, the five aggregates are the impermanent. Why? because their essence is rise and fall and change. Impermanent is the rise and fall and change in those in same aggregates, or it is their non-existence after having been; the meaning is, it is the breakup of produced aggregates through their momentary dissolution since they do not remain in the same mode. Contemplation of impermanence is contemplation of materiality, etc., as 'impermanent' in virtue of that impermanence. One contemplation impermanence processes that contemplation. Again 'All is impermanent. And what is the all that is impermanent? The eye is impermanent, visible objects (*rupa*) eye consciousness eye-contact (*cakkhu-samphassa*)... .. whatever is left (*vadayita*) as pleasant or unpleasant or neither unpleasant-nor-pleasant, born of eye-contact is impermanent. (Likewise with the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind)' or, quite succinctly, All formations are impairment" and whatever is subject to origination (*Samudaya*) is subject to cessation (*nirodha*).

"The 'all' phenomena are impermanent; when this is seen by means of wisdom, one becomes disgusted with suffering. This is the path of clarity. What is revolutionary about the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence is that it is extended to include everything.

The exposition of unsatisfactoriness (*Dukkha*)

Dukkha is the second of the 'Three Characteristics' (*ti-lakkhana*). It is sometimes treated in its own right thought more usually based upon the first (*anicca*) as consequence of that (*anatta*).

The modern etymology *dukkha* is derived either from the prefix *du+* the termination-*ka*. The word *dukkha* is one of those Pali terms that cannot be translated adequately into English. In fact, there is no equivalent in any other language. The word *dukkha* in ordinary usage means 'sufferings' 'pain' 'unsatisfactoriness', 'ill', 'sorrow' or 'misery'. The word *dukkha*, however, includes all that, and more. Nevertheless, the word *dukkha* in the first Noble Truth, represents the Buddha's view of life and the world, so that it means not only ordinary sufferings but also includes the deeper meaning of impermanence, imperfection, emptiness and untranslated, for convenience sake both the words suffering and *dukkha* will be wherever possible.

The Buddha is regarded as the peerless physician (*Bhisakka*) who is perfectly able to diagnose the illness of beings. He says: the world is established in suffering, is founded on suffering (*dukkhelokopatitthito*) The suffering of life on one can deny or ignore, but one must understand the suffering of life (*parinnatabba*). The origin of suffering, craving (*tanha*) must be uprooted (*pahatabba*). The end of suffering, that is the cure, Nibhana (*nirodha*), should be released (*sacchikatabba*), in the remedy or the path (Noble Eightfold Path) should be applied (*bhavetabba*). It is as physician that he first diagnosed the illness. Next he discovered its removal and lastly applied the remedy.

This is the one of the method of exposition of the Four Noble Truth taught by the Buddha as following:

Now, this, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of Suffering (*dukkha-ariya-sacca*) Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, to be united with the unpleasant is suffering, to be separated from the pleasant is suffering, not to get what one desires is suffering. In brief the five aggregates of attachment are suffering.

Now, this, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering (*dukkha-samudaya-ariyasacca*):

It is this craving which produces rebirth (*ponobhavikā*), accompanied by passionate clinging, welcoming this and that (life). It is the craving for sensual pleasures (*kāmatanhā*), craving for existence (*bhāvatanhā*) and craving for non-existence (*vibhāvatanhā*).

Now, this, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (*dukkha - nirodha-ariyasacca*):

It is the complete separation from, and destruction of, is very craving, its forsaking, renunciation, the liberation therefrom, and non-attachment thereto.

Now, this, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-patipadā-ariya-sacca*).

So not understanding *Dukkha* in its true sense means not understanding Buddhism itself. As a result, you could be cherishing a pessimistic attitude, not just towards Buddhism but probably towards your own life as well.

The word *Dukkha* is not only keyword to the Four Noble Truths but to the other important teachings of the Buddha as well i.e. The Three Characteristics of the World (*Ti-lakkaṇa*) which is the Buddhist view of the this world and The Philosophy of Dependent Origination (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*) which is the Buddhist understanding of how things work and relate to one another for their very existence. *Paṭicca-samuppāda* is also interpreted at a psychological level to explain the origination of suffering. The formula of (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*) is thus explained in the Mahavagga:

Paṭicca-samuppāda simply teaches the conditionals, or dependent nature, of all the manifold mental and physical phenomena of existence; of everything that happens, be it in the realm of the physical or the mental. *Paṭicca-samuppāda* shows that the sum of mental and physical phenomena known by the conventional name "person" or "individual" is not at all the mere play of blind chance; but that each phenomenon in this process of existence is entirely dependent upon other phenomena as conditions; and that therefore with the removal of those phenomena that form the conditions for rebirth and suffering, rebirth and therewith all suffering will necessarily cease and come to an end. And this, as already stated, is the vital point and goal of the Buddha's teaching: deliverance from the cycle of rebirth with all its woe and suffering. Thus *Paṭicca-samuppāda* serves in the elucidation of the second and third noble truths about the origin and extinction of suffering, by explaining these two truths from their very foundations upwards, and giving them a fixed philosophical form.

The exposition of Not-self (*Anatta*)

Atta saranaanan n asaranā

"Soul as a refuge with none other as refuge".

"Atta' ca me so saranaṃgati ca"

"The soul is the refuge that I have gone unto".

Anatta is the last of the Three Characteristics (*ti-lakkhana*) or General Characteristics (*sāmaṇṇa-lakkhana*). Like the 'teaching of four Noble Truths, it is the teaching particular to Buddhas' (*Buddhanaṃsamukkamsikadesana*).

The Buddhist term *Anatman* (Sanskrit), or *Anatta* (Pali) is an adjective in *sutra* used to refer to the nature of phenomena as being devoid of the Soul, the ontological and subjective Self (*atman*) which is the "light (*dipaṃ*), and only refuge" Of the 662 occurrences of the term *Anatta* in the *Nikayas*, its usage is restricted to referring to 22 nouns (forms, feelings, perception, experiences, consciousness, the eye, eye-consciousness, desires, lamentation, mental formations, ear, nose, tongue, body, lusts, things unreal, etc.), all phenomenal, as being Selfless (*anatta*). Etymologically *anatta* consists of the negative prefix *an-* plus *atta* (*na-not+atta-self*), not self and

soulless and ego less and impersonal are often used for it. There may be some who are surprised when a person speaks of “*the Buddha's not-self.*” The reason why the Buddha is particularly specified here is that His not-self means differently from those of other doctrines, on matter how similarly some of them teach. What is all about not-self in other doctrines will be described in the sections following this one.

The Buddha's not-self has a broad, general meaning of neither seeing self or ego in anything nor seeing that entity as self or ego. What should be seen most definitely as self is entity that is not illusory and exists by itself without being conditioned, touched, or done something upon. This is referred to in the religious term as *asañkhātadhamma* (the conditioned state), which is apposite to *sañkhātadhamma* (the unconditioned things). Examples are all the worlds and mundane things, both physical and mental. Regarding this principle, there is a Buddha's saying;

*“Sabbe dhammānattā” ti, yadāpaññāyāpassati;
athanibbindatidukkhe, esamaggovisuddhiyā”.*

“The ‘all’ dharmas are not the Soul; when this is seen by means of wisdom, one becomes disgusted with suffering. This is the path of clarity. *sabbedhammānatā*, which means all entities are not self. To elaborate, all are just dhammas or entities, being wholly natural. They can be divided into two categories, namely, the conditioned (*sañkhātadhamma*) and the unconditioned (*Asañkhātadhamma*) as mentioned previously.

Conditioned things are phenomenal. They can appear and let us perceive them through our eyes, ears, tongues, bodies, or minds. We are capable to communicate with or study them by a material or physical means. Dhamma or entities in this category are all illusion, for they consist of many things in aggregation, fall under the power of time, and have shapes and sizes that are bound to change ceaselessly. We call all of them *sañkhātadhamma*, which is comparable to a phenomenal.

CONCLUSION

The concept of the three characteristic of life is deep and challenges the way most people have come to regard their life and relationships. Many find it a difficult notion to accept. However if one contemplates deeply it is easy to see the connection between these three basic facts of existence. Because of impermanence, there is suffering. Suffering can only be eliminated through non-attachment. Impermanence also rules out the possibility of a personal soul or entity inside the human.

The world we live in is so materialistic that it is increasingly becoming harder to accept the reality of the three basic facts of existence. When one carefully studies them one can see that these are simply facts of life and not a set of rules formulated by anyone. They are universal truths. This understanding can illuminate one's life at any age. An example is given in the *Dhammapada*.

Even if a room has been in darkness for a thousand years, bringing a candle into it will make it bright, and the room will not stay dark just because it has been so for such a long time. *Anicca, Dukkha* and *Anatta* are universal truths that apply to everyone at whatever time of their life. The principle of ‘the Three Characteristics’ is considered the common law of nature bound to the world we live in. It is believed that whether the Buddha emerges or happens in the world or not, this natural law always exist. Therefore, in some Buddhist traditions, the reverence of doctrinal principal is more accepted and emphasized than that of the personal- even the significance of Buddha.

However, still, he is revered as the one who discovered, enhanced, and declared it to the world. Nonetheless, it seems the theory of ‘*tilakkhaṇa*’ has been undergone through several alteration and enhancement through a long history since the time of the Buddha. Apparently the term seems to be more vividly described in the ‘commentaries’ era when Buddhist scholarly works sprung prosperously in Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand approximately 1,000 years after the demise of the master. Buddha merely refers to these three characteristics by calling it ‘*dhamaniyāma*’ which appears in the ‘*tipitāka*’

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