



## The Basic Tenets of Buddhist Philosophy- A Study

**P.Prabhu**, Research scholar, Dept. Of Indian Culture and Tourism, Govt. Arts College, Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu  
**Dr.K.Manivannan**, Asst. Professor, Dept. Of Indian Culture and Tourism, Govt. Arts College, Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu  
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### Abstract

*The Buddhist Philosophy is a treasury of rational thoughts with material world. Its teaching emphasise on the practical matters of Morality. The Buddha Philosophical enquiries concern to be interpreted as indicating the inappropriateness of the questions itself; the question is inappropriate in that only the asking of the question but any attempt to answer it can only lead one into the quagmire of idle metaphysical speculation and futile Philosophical disputes , further more importantly, the Buddha's silence is directly awareness about the Nirvana is a state that transcends every mundane experience and hence cannot be talked about; for all talk is possible only within the perceptual- conceptual realms wholly governed by the Doctrine of Dependent Origination, whereas Nirvana is beyond the language and taught.*

**Keywords:** Buddhist Ethics, Ontology, Karma, Non-self (*anatta*), World, Knowledge

### Introduction

The Buddha was primarily an ethical Teacher and not a Metaphysician. He saw his urgent take as that of showing man the way out of suffering and note one of constructing a Philosophical theory about man and the world. The Buddha's teachings therefore lay great emphasize on the practical matters of discipline and conduct leading to liberation through non- attachment and freedom from all Passions. According to Buddha ignorance is the root cause of suffering and it is only by removing ignorance that suffering can be removed. But ignorance is to be combated by Knowledge – insight in to the nature of existence. His thoughts are fully philosophical implications with efforts the ethical values.

### Process of Ontology, Dependent origination, and Impermanence

It is customary to divide Philosophies into substance and process verities – Philosophies of Being and becoming, respectively. The term Ontology means the study of the most general and pervasive traits and modes of existence. Those Ontologies which hold that underlying the seeming Change, variety and multiplicity of existence there are unchanging and permanent entities are known as “Substance Ontology”. On the other hand, those according to which there exists nothing permanent and unchanging, with in or without man, are known as process ontologies also referred to as model Ontologies. In the western philosophers of Permenides , Aristotle, Leibiniz, Spinoza,, Lock and Kant are but a few examples of substance Ontology, where as those of Heraclitus , Henry Bergson, and Alfred North Whitehead are instances of Process Ontology.

On the Indian Philosophical scene, Jainism, Samkhya, and Vedanta are representative of Substance ontology, while the teaching of Buddha is based on Process Ontology. We may



thus say that the Buddha is a Process Philosopher. We shall now present the ground for describing the Buddha's Philosophy as process Philosophy or philosophy of becoming. One of the central teachings of Buddha is the doctrine of Universal change and impermanence. Everything in the world is changing and impermanent. There is nothing that endures and abides eternally, Birth, growth, and decay is the all –pervading features of existence. Things come into being and pass away. The seed germinates, the sprout grows into the plant, the plant becomes the tree, and the trees bear fruit and flower and wither away. The child is born, grows into the adult, suffer sickness and old age, and dies. Mountains arise and crumble away, continents are formed and dissolved, stars appear and disappear, and the face of the earth as well as that of the heavens itself changes.

Thus it appears that no matter when and where we look we find all around as continuous change and impermanence holding sway. Whether there is birth, there is death, wherever there is growth, there is decay, where there is meeting, there is parting; where ever there is a beginning, there is an end, where there is rising, there is passing away. In the light of such inescapable observations, the Buddha taught that change and impermanence are the basic traits of all existence. It is worth nothing that the doctrine of universal change and impermanence follows from the fundamental teaching, namely, the doctrine of Dependent origination, according to which nothing exists unconditional and absolutely – this arising that arises and this ceasing to be, that ceases to be. If anything exists absolutely and unconditionally, than it is incapable of entering into interaction with anything else, for enter into interaction is to undergo change.

Thus, the view that anything exists permanently contradicts the Doctrine of dependent origination. The universal change and impermanence logically follows from the Doctrine of Dependent origination, the foundation of the Buddha's teachings.

### **The Doctrine of Karma**

The Doctrine of Dependent Origination, expressed as the twelve fold chain of causation, contains as links karmic impressions from past existence and rebirth. These two link signify the proposition that the present existence of man is dependent upon his past existence; that is, his present existence is the effect of his thoughts, words, and actions in his past existence. Similarly his future existence is depending upon his present existence. This is precisely the law of karma; every event, is it thought, word and action produces its effects, which in turn become causes for other effects, and so on, thus generating the karmic chain. It easy to see, than that the law of karma is but special case of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination which govern all existence. One from the Doctrine of Dependent Origination is ; if this is that comes to be; from the arising of this that arises; if this is not that does not come to be; from the stopping of this that stopped;. We can now state the law of karma explicitly as an instance of this doctrine; Depending on the past; there is the present and depending on the present, there will be the future. In other words, our present and future are neither capricious nor unconditional, but are conditioned by our past and present, respectively.

### **The Doctrine of Non-Self (Anatta)**

Another consequence of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination is the doctrine of non-



self (*Anatta*). It is an age –old belief in a almost all creatures that there exist in man an eternal and permanent entity variously known as the “soul” the “self” or the “sprit” –in short, there exists in man a Substance called the “soul”. Philosophers as well as primitive people subscribe to this belief. Among the World’s Great religions, Jainism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Teach that the soul of man is an immortal substance. Such great Philosophers as Socrates, Plato, Descartes, and Kant acknowledge the soul as eternal Substance. These Philosophers hold that the soul is the essence of man. Thus, although man’s body changes and perishes, his soul is changeless and immortal, abiding, and immutable. It is the soul which animates the body. The soul is to be equated neither with any part of the body as a Whole. The soul is known in Jainism as the Jiva and in Hinduism as the Atman. In sharp contrast to these philosophies and religions, the Buddha teaches that there is no permanent and enduring entity in man.

According to the Doctrine of Dependent origination, everything exists dependently and conditionally, and we have seen that the fact of universal change and impermanence logically follows from the Doctrine dependent origination. As such, there can be nothing which is permanent and unchanging. Much like David Hume, the Buddha was every man to his deepest recesses and examine whether he could ever become aware of an unchanging entity called “Soul”. All one could become aware of when one thinks of oneself or soul is a sensation, an impression, perception, an image , an feeling an impulse etc., but never a thing or substance called the “Soul”. Accordingly the Buddha analysis man to five groups (*Skandhas*)

1. Form (Matter)
2. Feeling (Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral)
3. Properties (sight, smell)
4. Impulses ( Hate, Greed, etc)
5. Consciousness

A man thinks that he must fall into one or other of these five heaps. The self or soul is simple 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”. To think otherwise is to under a fond but dangerous illusion. Notice also that every one of the *skandhas* is subject to the Doctrine of dependent Origination. And if man is no more and no less than the collection of the *skandhas*, there can be no substances in him material or spiritual. Here it is important dispel a common misunderstanding concerning the Doctrine of *Anatta*.

The implications of Doctrine of *Anatta* to ethics and morality are both striking and far-reaching. It is belabouring the obvious to point out the while man’s material progress is truly understanding, ethically he has made little or no progress. He is no better than his hoary ancestors of the cave and the jungle. Today, as thousands of years ago, he makes war iwth a zest and enthusiasm unmatched elsewhere in the animal kingdom; he is greedily, cruel, wicked, and blood –thirsty, takes pleasure and delight in killing both beasts and his fellowmen, and enjoys inflicting untold suffering and destruction. The reason, it seems to me,



is to be sought in the incompatibility between his ethics and ontology. Almost all Philosophers and religions teach on the one hand that man has a permanent soul or self and exhort him on the other to practice compassion, charity, and above all selflessness. But as long as many believe that he has eternal self or soul, he find it not only difficult but even unnatural to be unselfish, for after all he has been taught that it is in the very nature of things that he has self. No wonder the conflict between Ontological view of what we are and the ethical teachings on how we ought to be leads to a life of doubt, tension, guilt, and anxiety. The Buddha is unique among the teachers of the world in that he not only clearly saw the bearing of Ontology on ethics but also taught an Ontology that is most conducive to the moral development of man. Thus, Buddha's ethics flow free from his Doctrine of *anatta*, which turn is ontologically firmly grounded in the doctrine of Dependent Origination. The remarkable insight of the Buddha is that moral perfection cannot be attained without knowledge (right views) concerning existence. We can see now why right views constitute the first step of the Eightfold path. We can also understand why the Buddha untiringly exhorted men to give up the pernicious illusion of a permanent self. The destruction of this illusion is the first step towards enlightenment, conquest, of suffering, and perfection itself.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the Buddhist ontological premise that the world is process through and through is not an isolated Philosophical preposition. On the contrary, it is fundamental to the whole Buddhist analysis and understanding of man and world. The Buddhist philosophy of life, freedom, wisdom follows as systematic implications of this Ontological premise. For example, Buddhist Psychology and ethics are disconnected reflections on these matters but are logical consequences of the preposition that there are no substances in the world. The concept of identity in the non-trivial sense, which underlies the concept of substance is incompatible with the concept of process, therefore, the concept of soul or ego as a permanent entity is empty and does not refer to any existent. According to the Buddhist Philosophy analysis, only by grounding ethics in a true ontology can man triumph as an ethical being. In such grounding, knowledge, wisdom, freedom, and conduct are inseparable. Buddhist ethics is fully practical application of life.

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