

## PLURALISTIC WORLDVIEW OF BUDDHISM TOWARDS COEXISTENCE

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**ABSTRACT.** *This paper tries to conceive a pluralistic, non-centric, auto-regulated, dialectical and dynamic world view that can accommodate diversity or difference and establish a ground for mutual recognition and coexistence. Universe is a common name for the plurality of auto constructing and destructing continuity of existences in dependence. There is neither uniform purpose nor unity among them. Auto constructing and destructing activities of individual units towards the attainment of their ends are internally determined but as a reaction to the context of existence. Each and every unit is in the process of fulfilling with other units and forming continuity through reactionary relations. Activities are chosen as a reaction to the happenings. This philosophical position is derived through a rereading on the fundamental principles of Buddhism as against the philosophies of integration of Indian orthodox philosophical systems.*

*Most of the Hindu philosophical systems consider oneness and homogeneity as the metaphysical ground for stability and continuity in and through diversity and change. They upheld a spiritual principle called self or **atma** as the permanent reality in and through the momentum of the things of the universe. They differentiated the self from the non-self. But Buddhism which emerged as a critical reaction to Hindu Brahmanism affirmed the reality of momentary existences and denied the existence of self. The causal theory of Buddhism which is known as dependent origination or **pratītyasamutpāda** explains the logical link among the continuous moments in the sequence. Accordingly the impact of the 'moment one' continues to the 'moment two' and goes on the same way. Buddhism illustrates the phenomena through the analogy of continuity of a lamp through many flames. Flame of the past made the flame of the present and it will give way to the future one. They are not one and the same. Though a carrier is not there, the impact is carried over. Though the living beings exist only for a short period, the life is continuous. Though the things are momentary, the universe continues to exist. The past created the present and the present can make the future. Though we cease to be, the spirit of our choices and deeds continue. Thus with all Indian thinkers, Buddhism too accepted the law of karma. We are condemned to be in the present, but we can make the future. Thus the relation among the scattered units towards the formation of cosmos or chaos is in our hand.*

*This paper is an attempt to find the significance of the teachings of Buddha in conceiving the reality of experiential world of plurality and differences as a philosophical source for coexistence especially of humans within themselves and with nature.*

**KEYWORDS:** *dependent origination, momentary existence, no-self theory, law of karma and **karmaphala***

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### **Introduction**

History of nations or communities is an intellectual effort to create one's own legend at the negation of neighbours. It is a mechanism by which they stabilise internal cohesion and defence. They connive with anecdotes of difference and vengeance and indoctrinate their children with them. In that way most of the traditional communities safeguard the customary value system and cultural traits. Sowing the seeds of suspicion and fear of the other is the internal defence mechanism and open dispute and war are the manoeuvres of devising social stratification and hierarchy. They could not be eradicated by modern liberal humanitarianism and internationalism. They are continuously used even by great democratic nations. Deep rooted clannishness is the driving spirit of all communities and nations. The global village is converted as the battle field for supremacy. All are at war with everyone else in the village. It is the need of the time to think of a world view for peaceful coexistence. Simultaneously, we have to take special care to preserve our environment which has been decaying for many years due to excess exploitation for human development. Many humanitarian organizations and dedicated individuals are very seriously thinking of an eco friendly and complementary atmosphere of coexistence and working hard towards the attainment of such a world. This paper is an attempt to frame a philosophy of coexistence of many realities and cultures as differences in dependence. This attempt is modelled after the teachings of Buddha. While thinking of it, we have to also consider the inbuilt drawback of the philosophies of integration which reduces the differences into an all inclusive one reality. The study is based on Indian philosophical traditions.

### **1. Philosophies of integration**

Without applying force, no change takes place. Therefore many philosophers assume the existence of a force, a mover or a creator behind all changes. Whether the mover is external to the moving objects or internal is a philosophical question debated by many philosophers. Gradually the mover behind all changes got much metaphysical and religious status. Philosophers began to perceive coherence within the different degrees or appearances of reality or realities. Some projected unity as the ground of differences and others saw differences as the sustaining force of the oneness. In the midst of many, some affirmed one or the other among them as the foundation of reality at the cost of others. Whether in the West or East, the history of philosophy is the continuous effort to affirm one over the others in order to establish

logical coherency and supremacy. It continues in the social practice of imposing the rules and regulation of the ‘dominant I’ or ‘ego consciousness’ over the others as the logically acceptable norms and happens to be the source of various forms of oppression and exploitation.

Most of the Hindu philosophical systems consider oneness and homogeneity as the metaphysical source for stability and continuity in and through diversity and change. Averse from the *Advaita Dipika* of Sri Narayana Guru summarizes the above concept:

None other than the causal substance  
Is what underlies effects:  
As what is real in waves  
Is water alone.<sup>2</sup>

Vedanta philosophers consider the reality that which is the sole foundation of every manifestation as Brahma. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, one of the oldest Upanishad defines Brahma as “That out of which all these creatures are born, being born by which they live, (and again) having departed into which they enter, seek to know That. That is Brahman.”<sup>3</sup> That, the source of everything, is also considered as the inner spirit or pure consciousness of every being. It is named as *atma* or *puruṣa* that is self. Indian philosophers upheld this spiritual principle as the permanent reality in and through the momentum of the things in the universe. Yet, they considered the association between the transient and the transcendent as perverted and that is to be corrected.

Most of the Indian philosophical systems look inclusive. But the inner attitude is the negation of the other. Self is an adventitious quality of the beings in the world. And the unification of the self with the world is accidental. Therefore the real Being of beings exists always outside the beings and appears inside the beings as a conflict to themselves. It is a self negation in a being. Indian thinkers developed philosophical systems and theological interpretations to overcome the difficulties implied in the accidental union of soul with the world. They tried to claim that the self is actually not present in the being in its original nature but only as a reflection, that too, illusory or accidental. Union, simply, is a misunderstanding. If the self luminous, self conscious reality is not aware of itself and falling into the world, is a self contradiction. Similarly the Self or the Being, if becomes, becoming becomes the nature of reality.

## 2. Problems of the philosophies of integration

Our understanding of the self is a self in bondage. An enquiry on the bondage of the self ends in the discovery of past glory of the self and the regaining of the past glory is a legend promoting deep seated clannish spirit. The individual selves are realising their glory of ‘oneness’ by negating the body. Claiming common source of

<sup>2</sup> Muni Narayana Prasad, 2008:263.

<sup>3</sup> Taittiriya Upanishad, III:1 1.

origin as a necessary ground for coexistence is clannish in approach and self defeating. It means that I as a member of a clan need to promote only the interest of the brothers of my clan. Similarly, the outsiders of my clan should be treated as untouchable as they do not belong to mine. One will be comfortable with one's own gain and will exploit the other without any conscience.

Most of the Indian philosophical systems deny the existence of the experiential world and affirms a transcendental being. The other is used for the benefit of the self and thrown away after use by claiming that it is fake and dangerous. For example, we shall consider *Sāṃkhya* philosophy. *Sāṃkhya* accepts the reality of *Prakṛti* (material principle) along with *Puruṣa* (soul). "*Prakṛti* is a very subtle, mysterious and tremendous power which evolves and dissolves the world in a cyclic order."<sup>4</sup> But *Sāṃkhya* philosophers consider *Prakṛti* as something untouchable. According to *Sāṃkhya*, the relationship of *Puruṣa* with *Prakṛti* as something should not have happened. *Puruṣa* lives with *Prakṛti* waiting for right time to divorce her and attain freedom. Is not the coexistence with suspicion and hatred? *Puruṣa* cannot be at home with *Prakṛti*.

Philosophy that sees the essential oneness of reality swallows the differences that we experience. Such reductionism is contrary to our experience and denies the individual uniqueness. When we think of a philosophy for peaceful coexistence, we have to conceive a type of philosophy that recognizes and respects all with their differences. Otherwise we are falling into the trap of dominant philosophy imposing itself on all.

### 3. Buddhist world view

This is a search for a philosophy that affirms the uniqueness and importance of each and every being and at the same time accepts the value of complementary relations of life affirmation with the spirit of coexistence. Buddhist doctrines are found to be suitable as a theoretical model to develop a philosophy of complementary pluralism having different units in dependence as the ontological ground for the transient existence of plurality of realities. This may help us to form a philosophy of coexistence that accepts differences in dependence.

Buddhism, one of the Heterodox Philosophical Systems of India, is also a popular religion and cult. Philosophically, early Buddhism held an anti- metaphysical position and later, to defend it, many philosophical schools emerged with strong metaphysical intricacies. Buddha found that the metaphysical approach to the solution of the human problems derails the ethical solution. The great virtues like *maha karunya* and *ahiṃsā* (great compassion and the principle of non- killing) are not the outcome of the metaphysical discourse. Who can involve in a debate over a world view or sources or process of knowledge when the life- experience is filled with suffering and misery? "When a house is on fire, it must be extinguished by water. A man, who is pierced by the arrow of grief, must draw it out."<sup>5</sup> Buddha considered

<sup>4</sup> Chatterjee and Datta, 2007:242.

<sup>5</sup> Salla sutta, pp. 581,584; quoted in Sinha:282.

speculation as a deviating activity from the actual solutions and compared the action with the contemplation of a person, who was inflicted by an arrow, on the source, nature, effect and so on of the injury, instead of removing it and doing the first aid. Buddha like some Upanishadic seers remained silent to the metaphysical questions. In *Samyutta Nikaya* 44:10, there is a description of an incident of Buddha remaining silent to the questions on the existence of self raised by the wandering monk Vatsagotra. After the departure of the monk, he told his disciple Ānanda on the reason for his silence, “If ... I had answered... ‘There is a self,’ then, Ānanda, I would have sided with the ascetics and brahmins who teach eternity. And if ... I had answered... ‘There is no self,’ then, Ānanda, I would have sided with the ascetics and brahmins who teach annihilation.”<sup>6</sup> Silence is not merely a strategy, but explains the indescribable nature of reality. Describing the indescribable is a useless exercise, diverting one from what one is supposed to do. Metaphysical is describable, because it deals with a reality that is permanent. Reality is definable, because it is clear and distinct. Buddhism is anti metaphysical. It deals with indescribable. Reality is indescribable, because reality is changing. When the object of knowledge changes, no definition is possible, we can have expressions related to the experience of the moment.

Core principles of Buddhism such as theory of suffering, momentary existence of reality, denial of self, yet salvation (nirvana) and the theory of dependent origination lead to confusing philosophical positions. The continuity through impermanent realities, being spiritual without having soul, continuity even after death without a continuing reality are all put Buddhist metaphysicians into difficulty and followers puzzled. The unconventional nature of Buddhist theories is one of the major reasons for the development Buddhist epistemology and metaphysics. It forced the followers of Buddha to interpret them as if they are logically conceivable.

The fundamental principle of Buddhism is ‘*sarvam dukkha*’ means every experience is sorrowful. This is the first noble truth. The four noble truths are related to different levels of experiences with suffering. He teaches in the *Sermon of Benares*:

Suffering, this noble truth, must be recognized;  
 the origin of suffering, this noble truth, must be avoided;  
 the cessation of suffering, this noble truth, must be realized;  
 the way leading to the cessation of suffering, this noble truth, must be practiced...<sup>7</sup>

Four noble truths are the fundamental principles of Buddhism. We do everything in pursuit of happiness, but ends in sorrow. Whenever I do something to attain happiness I am over conscious of (my) self and inclined to be selfish. Thus, attachment is the reason for suffering. “It is the thirst leading to rebirth, which accompanied by delight and passion, finds enjoyment here and there, namely, thirst

<sup>6</sup> Erich Frauwallner 2010:21-22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.:15.

for desire, thirst for becoming, thirst for annihilation.”<sup>8</sup> . All the theories of Buddhism are around the concept of *dukkha* or suffering. Everything that we possess remains with us only for some time. Everything that we enjoy lasts for a short duration. Even the enjoyer undergoes various moments of physical and mental modifications. No one is able to retain ones equanimity or happiness permanently. Everything connected with world comes and goes. Everything is subject to change and leads to suffering. No entity has an eternal existence. As they appear they disappear. The error in us is that we consider our appearance as something real and permanent. Though our experience denies it, we continue to hold the opposite by claiming that there is something permanent in us that transcend the impermanent which undergoes no change when everything changes. Buddha denies such a self.

For Cārvāka materialism, the doctrine of momentary existence had been the ground for holding the hedonist ethical principle. As the life is short and there is no self to enjoy the fruits in the life after, indulge in pleasure that is immediate and intense. But Buddha concluded the other way. Indulge oneself in pleasure ends in displeasure. Anything of excess is dangerous. He taught his disciples to avoid extremes and choose the middle path. Without following either the extreme devotion to the pleasure of desires or extreme physical and mental mortification one has to seek enlightenment.<sup>9</sup>

Buddha accepted a person as bodily and mentally. According to him human personality is consisted of five factors or groups of life which are called *skandhas*. “Just as the word *chariot* is used when the parts are put together, so one speaks in everyday life of a *being* when the groups (*skandha*) are present.”<sup>10</sup> Buddha analysed human nature into five factors, namely the physical body (*rūpa*), sensations and feelings (*vedanā*), cognitions (*sañña*) character traits and dispositions (*sañkhāra*) and consciousness or sentiency (*viññāṇa*). .. Specifically the doctrine makes no mention of a soul or self, understood as an eternal and immutable spiritual essence..<sup>11</sup> Buddhism is very unique in using the term *dukkha* (suffering) instead of the conventional usage of *bandha* (bondage). Suffering is a physical or mental condition of undergoing pain. On the contrary, bondage is placing somebody under control which clearly refers to the bondage of an eternal soul. Suffering can be removed and one can be liberated from bondage. When the control is removed, one gets liberation, but suffering can be removed only by curing the cause of suffering.

Buddha argued that he could not find any evidence of the existence of either the personal soul (*atman*) or its cosmic counterpart (*brahman*). “Instead his approach was practical and empirical, more akin to psychology than theology.”<sup>12</sup> Yet Buddha was not a materialist reducing mental act as a by-product of matter. Both mental and material coexists as complementary. They exist as depending factors. There is a beautiful discourse in the *Milindapañha* (The Questions of Menandros) II,2,8;§62

<sup>8</sup> Erich Frauwallner 2010:14.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 74-75.

<sup>11</sup> Damien Keown 2000:47.

<sup>12</sup> Damien Keown 2000: 48.

between Buddhist monk Nāgasena and Greek king Menandros, in which Nāgasena describes that the factors can exist together with the other only. Accordingly no independent existence is possible:

The king spoke: “Nāgasena, you have spoken of name and form. What therein is name and what is form?”

“The coarse material, O great king, is therein form, and the subtle, mind and mental factors, is therein name.”

“For what reason, Nāgasena, is name alone, or form alone, not reborn?”

“These factors, O great king, are supported by one another and therefore arise only as a unity.”

“Give an example.”

“If, for example, O great king, the egg-yolk did not arise from a hen, then the egg-shell would not arise, for both egg-yolk and egg-shell are supported by one another and therefore their arising takes place only as unity. Just so, O great king, if name did not arise, then also form would not arise, for both name and form are supported by one another and therefore their arising takes place only as unity.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Buddhism, there is no being but only becoming. It is usual to think of a being without becoming, sometimes of becoming of being but it is unusual to think of the possibility of becoming without a being. Being is identified with the essence that undergoes no change. It is commonsensical to ask a question on the becoming of what. Buddhism considers becoming as essenceless possibilities.

Though Buddhism is not accepting the existence of self, it resembles with Hinduism in believing in the theory of rebirth and final salvation or nirvana. Similarly, causal theory of India, that is, the law of karma is accepted by Buddhism as well. The law of karma plays a very important role in Buddhism as a directive principle of causal trajectory. The law of karma speaks of a law governed nature in which everything happens in a causal and determined order. No being can escape the impersonal cosmic mechanism. “The present existence is shaped and determined by the deeds (karma) of a previous existence, which itself was the result of the deed of a prior existence, and so on in a beginningless series of lives submitted to the blind determinism of strict retribution.”<sup>14</sup> Thus the anti- metaphysical position of Buddha himself is metaphysical as the law of karma is a metaphysical theory. But Buddhism reinterprets the law of karma in the way that it is in consonant with its theory of no-self and the doctrine of impermanence. Action accelerates momentum and the next momentum is born out of the action of the previous momentum. It is not the same wave that reaches the shore. We are accustomed to think of a permanent entity that remains as the static ground for changing realities. But Buddha conceived the continuity without a permanent reality called self. Usually in Hinduism, any reference to the law of karma is clubbed with transmigration of the soul. But Buddhism,

<sup>13</sup> Erich Frauwallner, 2010:79.

<sup>14</sup> R. De Smet and J. Neuner, 1997:153.

instead, uses the term rebirth. Consequences are born due to the impacts of prior conditions or causes. Nāgasena explains it to the Greek king Menandros,

The king spoke: “Nāgasena, who is reborn?”

The elder spoke: “Name and form, O great king, are born.”

“Is it the same name and the same form that are reborn?”

“No, O great king, it is not the same name and the same form that are reborn. However, O great king, with this name and this form, one accomplishes good or bad deeds and, through these deeds, another name and another form is reborn.”<sup>15</sup>

The causal theory of Buddhism which is known as dependent origination or *pratītyasamutpāda* explains the logical link among the continuous moments in the sequence. Accordingly the impact of the ‘moment one’ continues to the ‘moment two’ and goes on the same way. Buddhism illustrates the phenomena through the analogy of continuity of a lamp through many flames. Flame of the past made the flame of the present and it will give way to the future one. They are not one and the same. Though they are not one, and exist in different moments, they establish the continuity. Though a carrier is not there, the impact is carried on. Though the living beings exist only for a short period, the life is continuous. Though the things are momentary, the universe continues to exist. The past created the present and the present can make the future. The spirit of our choices and deeds continue even after we cease to be. “Karma is not a system of rewards and punishments meted out by God but a kind of natural law akin to the law of gravity.”<sup>16</sup> The path through which the impact (*karmaphala*) moves is not predetermined but strictly within the causal and logical order without a permanent enjoyer of fruit or bearer of impacts.

The non- Buddhist concept of the law of karma and *karmaphala* is actor centric or self centred and therefore actor is inclined to be selfish. The tendency of the actor will be personal reward-seeking, not public welfare-seeking. In Buddhism karma and its *phala* continues to be without having an essential link between *kartha* and *bhokta* (actor and enjoyer), because the same actor ceases to be, but the effect is reborn. Thus all who are in the present is responsible for the future. We are condemned to be in the present, but we can make the future. Thus the relation among the scattered units towards the formation of cosmos or chaos is in our hand. “Reality is a relationship.”<sup>17</sup> Movement is the nature of relationship. It is a movement of or from one to the other with a reciprocal movement. One affects the other, but the other is not for me. If the other is for me, it is a mode of making the other a useful object for me. But genuine relation is detached, neither for nor against, but simply an enjoyment or fulfilment. The enlightened one acts but not enjoying the fruits but the effects of his/her good deeds transforms the environment. This is nirvana. Nirvana is usually defined as cessation of the cycle of births and deaths, that is the annihilation of suffering. But it

<sup>15</sup> Erich Frauwallner, 2010:77.

<sup>16</sup> Damien Keown, 2000:37.

<sup>17</sup> J. Krishnamurti, 2005:142.



is to be understood positively. Nirvana is not an absolute non existence of reality but absolute presence of the reality in and through everything without form and matter. It is like the presence of salt in the dish after being dissolved. It is not its own existence but the Existence. Nirvana is the dissolution of the self into the reality without losing its unique identity. Salt is dissolved in the dish, but salt is tasted in the dish. Emptying the self makes one selfless and the fruits of the selfless actions bear fruit in everything. This selfless behaviour in the world is the *maha-karunnam* or great compassion that Buddhism refers about.

#### **4. Conclusion: A philosophy of coexistence of diversities with differences**

This paper is an attempt to find the significance of Buddhist philosophical insights in conceiving the reality of experiential world of plurality and differences as a philosophical source for coexistence especially of humans within themselves and also with nature. A pluralistic, non centric, auto- regulated, dialectical and dynamic world view aims to shed ego-centrism and move to others as spreading of light everywhere. Universe is a common name for the plurality of existences which together make the existence possible. Individual units do their activities to attain their ends as internally determined but as reaction to the context of existence. Each and every unit is in the process of fulfilling with other units, thus forming continuity through reactionary relations. On the contrary, the philosophies of integration, knowingly or unknowingly, retain an attitude of arrogance and dominance ready to accommodate all within like an ocean swallowing all rivers into itself. The philosophy of pluralistic coexistence is like the spices and other recipes in a curry: everything into everything else and makes the dish tasty. All factors or individual units have to forgo the self centric attitude or ego consciousness and relate with the other. Thus they are retaining their individuality and at the same time form their collective existence.

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