

Dependent Origination and the Buddhist Theory of Relativity

By Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya

ABSTRACT

Buddhist theory of Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppāda or Pratītyasamutpāda) is one of the theories with regard to origination of phenomena. This is called the Theory of Causality in Buddhism. Some scholars named it the Chain of Causation. According to early Buddhist and later Buddhist schools, Dependent Origination is called the Middle Way (Majjhimāpaṭipadā). Especially Nagarjuna founded his Central philosophy on the teaching of Dependent Origination. Main characteristic of the teaching of Dependent Origination is that it does not fall into any extreme. Buddha emphatically said that it is the truth of the world. And also he mentioned that whether the Buddhas are born or not this truth is always present in the world (Uppādā vā tathāgatānam anuppādā vā tathāgatānamṛhitā vā sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā idappacayatā paṭiccasamuppādo).

Early Buddhist theory of Dependent Origination was presented as against some theories of origination already existing in India during the sixth century BCE. Pali Nikaya texts record many theories of origination advocated by recluses and Brahmanas during this period. In the Samyutta Nikaya Buddha has taken up four theories of origination out of these. In reply to a question raised by a Brahmana named Acelakasspa with regard to the origin of suffering Buddha expressed his own idea that suffering comes to be depending on causes and conditions (Paticcasamuppannam dukkham).

In early Buddhist texts we find two ways of explaining origination of phenomena. In the first place we have twelve-fold formula applied to human predicament of suffering (Dvādasāṅga paticcasamuppāda) in ascending order and descending order to explain the origin of suffering and its eradication. In the second place we have the theory of relativity regarding the origin of phenomena. For example, Buddha mentioned that a phenomenon comes to be in relation to another phenomenon. This theory was further elaborated by Nagarjuna and by his followers like Aryadeva, Chandrakirti and so forth. Another development of the Dependent Origination is the theory of paccayas. In the Paṭṭhānappakarana the fifth book of the Theravada Abhidharma, twenty four paccayas have been elaborated in a very technical way. Sarvāstivāda (later Vaibhāsika) school accepted only four conditions (Paccayas). Nagarjuna derived the doctrine of emptiness (Sūnyatā) by applying Dependent Origination to phenomena.

Introduction

Buddhist teaching of Dependent Origination provides the necessary basis for understanding, interpreting and analyzing the origin of suffering and phenomena including the world. This is one of the theories of origination in Indian philosophy. There were many theories of origination during the time of the Buddha. Most of them are called causal theories. Some theories are very

deterministic and they cannot be categorized under the theory of causality. Some theories of origination have disregarded cause and effect as valid factors of origination.

Indian philosophy is derived from religious thinking and therefore it is mixed with religious ideas. From the earliest beginning of religious thought seers of India attempted to give a rational explanation as to the origin of phenomena and the universe. Aghamarsana, the first philosopher of the Rgveda thought of a causal process by which the universe was created. He considered Time (*Samvatsara*), Heat (*Tapas*) and Water (*Apas*) as creative principles.¹ According to Aghamarsana, warmth (*Tapas*) is the first creative principle. From this *Ṛta* (*satya-truth, law*) originated. Warmth and *Ṛta* produced darkness (*Tamas*). Water (*Apas*) was produced by darkness. Water produced the *Samvatsara* (year) or the time element. Year produced the sun and the moon, the heaven and the earth, the firmament and the light. Prajāpati Paramestin, another philosopher of Rgveda, advanced a theory of evolution which is based on the element of water (*Salila*). According to Prajāpati Paramestin, everything animate and inanimate in the universe sprang from water (*Salila*).²

Prof. W. S. Karunaratne mentions that ‘the polytheism of the Rgveda is itself based on the recognition of the uniformity of the nature which in its turn clearly implies some form of belief in the existence and regularity of cause and effect.’³ He considers this as the first attempt made by Vedic seers in giving a causal explanation to events occurring in the nature. Both Aghamarsana and Prajapati Paramestin attempted to show the evolution of the world and phenomena through a causal pattern. According to Satapatha Brahmana, the existence of phenomena and the world are derived from the seed of desire and it emphasizes that material and efficient causes of the universe are linked to Prajapati and his procreative urge.⁴ During the Aranyaka period we can see a further systematic development of the theory of cause and effect. Aitareya Aranyaka mentions that the cause and effect are the same.⁵ We can see a further development of the theory of causality in the Upanishad period. The Katha Upanishad traces the manifested world to an unmanifested (*Avyakta*) ultimate spiritual principle (*purusha*).⁶ Prof. W.S. Karunaratna mentions at least seven theories of causality advocated by pre-Buddhist teachers and contemporaries of the Buddha in his *The Theory of Causality in Early Buddhism*: (1) *Adhiccassamuppādavāda*, (2) *Niyati-sangatīvāda*, (3) *Saktivāda*, (4) *Ārambhavāda*, (5) *Satkāryavāda*, (6) *Satkāranavāda* and (7) *Anekāntavāda*.⁷

Pali Nikaya texts mention many theories of origination advocated by recluses and Brahmanas. Buddha, before advancing his theory of Dependent Origination, made his comments regarding some of these theories. In the *Acelakassapa sutta* of the *Samyutta Nikaya*, Buddha rejected four theories of origination as unsatisfactory.⁸ The ascetic *Acelakassapa* put forward four theories of origination of suffering and wanted to know Buddha’s answer to them. As *Samyutta Nikaya* records, these four propositions are as follows: Is suffering self caused? (*Kinno kho bho Gotama, sayamakataṃ dukkhaṃ ti?*), Is suffering externally caused?

(Kinnu kho bho Gotama, paramkatam dukkhan ti?, Is suffering self and externally caused? (Kinnu kho bho Gotama, sayam katan ca param katan ca dukkham?), Is suffering neither self caused nor externally caused but spontaneously caused? (Kim pana bho Gotama, asayamkāram aparamkāram adhiccasamuppannam dukkhan ti?) Buddha's answers to these four questions were in negative. It means that the Buddha did not accept these propositions as valid theories. Buddha did not go into a deep discussion of these questions as they exhibit metaphysical characteristics.

Buddha's Criticism of Four Theories of Origination

Apparently, Acelakassapa was perplexed by the answers given by the Buddha. In his simple exposition Buddha emphatically pointed out that the first proposition is nothing but eternalism (Sassatam etam pareti). This indicates that the cause and effect are the same (So karoti, so patisamvediyati). Buddha saw this as an extreme view, the view of perdurable and everlasting soul advocated by Upanishad philosophers. The second proposition is nihilistic (Ucchedavāda) and it exhibits the irregularity (aññathatā, no relationship between the cause and effect) of the cause and effect. Thus two major theories of causality accepted by Indian philosophical schools are extreme theories, according to Buddhism. (Buddhist theory of causality is the middle way).

The first theory of causality found in Pali texts is sayam katam (self-caused). It is generally translated as self-causation by scholars.⁹ Later this theory was developed systematically by Sāmkhya school of philosophy in India and named it Satkāryavada. In Nagarjuna's words Satkāryavāda is Svatoṭpatti which is Sayam katam, according to early Buddhist sutras. Sāmkhya idea of Satkāryavāda is a metaphysical theory of causality. There are two main principles of Sāmkhya theory of causation, i.e. the effect (karya) is pre-existing in the cause and the cause (karana) and effect (karya) are identical. The idea of self-causation (Satkaryavada) can be found in the Rgveda in its rudimentary form. Brahma, the creator, himself is called Svayambhū which means self-become or self-created.¹⁰ Here we find the idea of self-causation. The concept of Svadhā, the inherent procreative energy in phenomena, was later ascribed to the all powerful creator in order to establish the idea of creation of the universe by God. Thus the natural procreative energy in phenomena was considered as the procreative power of God. Thus early theories of natural evolution of phenomena were integrated with the power of God.¹¹

The concept of Self-causation (Satkāryavāda) can be derived from the Vedic idea of Svayambhu which indicates the identity of cause (kāraṇa) and effect (kārya) and the pre-existence of effect (kārya) in the cause. Therefore, it is appropriate to think that the Sāmkhya philosophers formulated their theory of Satkāryavada on the Vedic idea of Svayambhu (Self-caused or self-created.). Buddha did not do a vehement criticism of this theory due to the fact that it was a metaphysical idea.¹² But, Nagarjuna in his Mulamadhyamikakarika pointed out the weaknesses of this theory. In the first chapter of the Mulamadhyamikakarika, Nagarjuna mentions above four theories of origination in his own words: Svata

(self-causation), Parata (external causation), Dvābhyam (self causation and external causation) and Ahetutah (from no-cause or spontaneous origin).¹³ Buddha saw two extremes in Indian philosophy and religion. Buddha interpreted self-causation as the extreme of eternalism and the external causation as the extreme of nihilism. According to Satkāryavāda, if the cause and effect are the same or identical, cause continues to be the same throughout its existence without a break. This means that the person A is always A throughout his existence in the Samsara.¹⁴ This is not compatible with the Buddhist teaching of Middle Way. On the other hand, external causation, according to Buddha, is the second extreme, that is the extreme of nihilism. This theory advocates that cause and effects are two different entities and effect (karya) does not exist in the cause (karana) before its production. According to this theory person A is B in the life to come, that is to say, entirely two different persons. Buddha rejected these two theories of causality as unsatisfactory and advocated the theory of Dependent Origination which is neither extreme of eternalism nor the extreme of nihilism. Therefore, Buddhist theory of causality is the Middle Way (Majjhima Patipada) as it stands midway between these two theories. Buddha emphatically said in the Acelakasspa sutta that He having discarded two extremes preaches the Dhamma in the middle.¹⁵ In this respect he refers to the twelve-fold formula of Dependent Origination. This means that Buddhist theory of Dependent Origination is the Middle Way which was logically and dialectically interpreted by Nagarjuna in his Central Philosophy. When the question as to by whom this body is made was asked from Bhikkhuni Sela her answer was that it is neither self-made nor wrought by another.¹⁶ Here Pali words Attakatam (self-caused) and Parakatam (caused by others) refer to Satkaryavada and Asatkaryavada respectively.

Mulamadhyamikakarika and other Madhyamika texts open with a critique of causality. Causality is the central problem in Indian philosophy. Murti states that Madhyamikas paid a special attention to the theory of causality because of the fact that the teachings of the Buddha revolves upon the pivot of Paticcasamuppada.¹⁷ The Madhyamika system was founded by Nagarjuna on Buddha's teaching of Dependent Origination. All Indian philosophical and religious systems paid a special attention to the theory of causality except Materialists (the Svabhavavadins) who advocated the chance with regard to the origin of phenomena.

Nagarjuna in his Mulamadhyamikakarika rejected these four theories of origination like the Buddha.¹⁸ First he took up the Samkhya theory of Self-causation (Satkaryavada). His criticism is that if the effect (kārya) exists in the cause (kāraṇa) there is no production as the effect is already produced. It is a reduplication of the cause. According to Nagarjuna, production means a new entity coming into being which was not before. Regarding the identity of cause and effect we have to say that cause and effect are two things. Logically, if the cause and effect are identical, how can one function as the cause and the other as the effect.¹⁹ Nagarjuna says that 'Identity of cause and the effect (act and the result) is utterly untenable; if so there would be no difference between the doer and the thing done.'²⁰ The theory of Satkāryavada leads us logically to a non-acceptance of diversity. According to Tatvasangraha Panjikā, the whole universe would be deffernceless (ekatvam).²¹

The second theory, the Asatkaryavada (external-causation) advocates that cause and effect are not identical and the effect does not exist in the cause before its production. Buddha criticized this theory on the ground of nihilism (uccheda). In the Samyutta Nikaya²² Buddha said to Acelakassapa that one acts and another experiences amounts to annihilation (Uccheda). The Buddhist theory of karma is not compatible with the idea of external causation (param katam) due to the fact that it has no place for moral responsibility. The person is not responsible for what he did in his past lives. Therefore, this theory is against the law of karma in Buddhism. One major problem associated with this theory is that we cannot establish the identity of the person newly born with the person passed away.

Early Buddhist Notion of Causality

As we mentioned earlier, the early Buddhist teaching of causality is not an extreme theory but it is the Middle Way²³ which steers clear from eternalism (Sassatavāda) and nihilism (Ucchedavāda). Bhikkhu Assaji in reply to Sāriputra's question regarding the doctrine he believes said that Dharmas are originated by causes (Ye Dhammā hetuppabhavā). According to the Buddha this is the eternal truth of the world.²⁴ All Buddhist schools accept the central position of Patīccasamuppāda. Canonical texts reveal that Buddha's enlightenment consisted in the acquisition of insight into the Dependent Origination.²⁵ Mahāvagga Pāli of the Vinaya Pitaka mentions that the Buddha immediately after his enlightenment reflected on Dependent Origination in ascending order and descending order.²⁶ In the Mahavaggapali (of the Vinaya Pitaka) this is called Sahetudhammam.²⁷ In the Mahāhatthipadopama sutra and Sālistamba sutra it is recorded that 'whoever sees the Patīccasamuppāda sees the Dhamma and whoever sees the Dhamma sees the Patīccasamuppāda.'²⁸ Buddha emphatically mentioned that 'Due to non-realization of Dependent Origination people are entangled in this Samsaric existence.'²⁹ The theory of Dependent Origination provides the necessary basis for three signata, impermanence, suffering and no-soul.

The term Patīccasamuppāda is a compound noun of paticca and samuppāda which means on account of arising or coming into being. This indicates that phenomena thus born are not independent but inter-dependent. Further the gerund Paticca gives the meaning of relativity.³⁰ In the Pali sutras we find four characteristics of Dependent Origination: Tathatā (objectivity), Avitathatā (necessity), Anaññathatā (invariability) and Idappaccayatā (conditionality).³¹ The first characteristic Tathata indicates that it is the truth of the world. Some Upanishadic thinkers considered change and the Buddhist theory of causality as a mental construct which had no truth value. They maintained that causation was merely a matter of words and fabrication having no objective reality. Buddha did not formulate this theory and it was not made by anybody else. It is the truth of the world ever present and what the Buddha did was to discover it.³² In this respect the Samyukta Agama records a question as to who formulated this theory of causality, the Buddha or any other person. Buddha pointed out that this pattern of causality is

ever present in the world.³³ Kalupahana points out that *Tathatā* in early Buddhist texts means correspondence and characteristic of causality. It corresponds to what is found in nature.³⁴ In Mahayana Buddhism the word *Tathatā* was used in the sense of true essence, actuality, truth or ultimate reality. It was used in the sense of *Satya*.³⁵

The second and third characteristics *Avitathatā*, *Anaññathatā* necessity and invariability respectively emphasize the regularity of the theory of causality in Buddhism. It means that certain set of conditions produce an effect which is not completely different from the cause. This does not mean that the cause and effect are the same and the cause and effect are completely different. This is one of the basic assumptions of the Buddhist causal theory. According to Buddhism, the production process is governed by the law of nature (*Dhammaniyāmatā*). Cause and effect are in the same category. This does not mean that cause and effect are the same as in the *Sāṃkhya* School of philosophy. *Anaññathata* clearly indicates that effect is not completely different from the cause. When we apply this to a person newly born it indicates that he is neither the same person nor a different person (*na ca so na ca añño*). *Avitathatā* and *Anaññathatā* exclusively indicate the regularity of the process of production.

The fourth characteristic of the causal theory is *Idappaccayatā* (conditionality). This is the most important of all characteristics of Dependent Origination. This word, *Idappaccayatā* has been used as a synonym of *Paticcasamuppāda* in Pali texts without any other qualifying word. The characteristic of conditionality implies that the Dependent Origination does not fall into the extreme of determinism because of the fact that phenomena come into being only when there are necessary conditions (*Paccayas*). For example a seed cannot produce a sprout when there are no necessary conditions (*Paccayas*) like heat (*unha*), earth (*pathavirasa*), moisture (*sineha*) and so forth.³⁶ According to the commentary of *Samyutta Nikaya*, 'From the condition or group of conditions that give rise to such states as decay (*Jarata*) and death (*Marana*), there is said to be conditionality.'³⁷ The characteristic of conditionality places Buddhist theory of causation midway between fatalism (*Niyativāda*) and accidentalism (*Yadrccāvāda*).

Two terms very closely related to *Paticcasamuppāda* are *Hetu* (cause) and *Paccaya* (conditions). In its original sense both *Hetu* and *Paccaya* mean the cause. Two terms were used in the Pali *Nikāya* texts interchangeably. But later Buddhist schools understood *hetu* as cause and *paccaya* as supporting causes or conditions. There is no big problem in interpreting *hetu* as cause. But scholars interpreted and understood *paccaya* not as a synonym of *hetu* but as supporting conditions for *hetu*. Monier Williams defines *pratyaya* as a co-operating cause; the concurrent occasion of an event as distinguished from its approximate cause.³⁸ Early Buddhist texts did not make a distinction between *hetu* and *paccaya*. There are many words used in the sense of *hetu* (cause) in the Pali *Nikaya* texts. *Buddhaghosa* has given a list of Pali words occurring in the Pali sutras in the sense of *hetu*: *paccaya*, *hetu*, *karana*, *nidana*, *sambhava* and *vibhava*. Further, he states that although the words are different they express the same meaning.³⁹ In the *Mahatanhasankhaya* sutra of the *Majjhima*

Nikaya Buddha said to Bhikkhu Sati that the consciousness does not arise without necessary causes or conditions (Aññatra paccayā natthi viññānassa sambhavo).⁴⁰ In this sutra the term Paccaya occurs in the sense of hetu (cause). In early Buddhist texts, therefore, Paccaya occurs in the sense of cause as well as conditions.

Sanskrit Buddhist schools postulate six kinds of hetu (cause) and four kinds of pratyayas. Pratyayas (conditions) are the factors that generate all Dharmas. Six kinds of hetus are Karana-hetu (primary cause), Sahabhu-hetu (co-existent cause), Sabhaga-hetu (identical cause), Samprayukta-hetu (associated cause), Sarvatraga-hetu (universal cause) and Vipaka-hetu (cause of retribution). Yasomitra says that there is no distinction between hetu and pratyaya and both are synonymous.⁴¹

Later Buddhist schools, especially Abhidharma philosophy of Sarvastivada and Theravada, developed a theory of Paccaya. These two schools understood and interpreted Hetua as the cause and Paccaya as conditions or supporting elements to the cause. Thus Sarvastivada (Vaibhasika) developed four Pratyayas: Hetu, Alambana, Anantara (or Samanantara) and Adhipati. Madhyamika philosophy also accepts four Pratyayas. Theravada Abhidharma developed a very complicated theory of twenty four Paccayas in its exposition of Dependent Origination.

In the sutras of the Pali canon, especially, in the Samyutta Nikāya Nidānavagga,⁴² the Twelfefold Formula starting from Avijja (Avidya skt) (ignorance) has been designated as Paticcasamuppāda. In the Mahāvagga Pāli of the Vinaya Pitaka we read that the Buddha during the first week after his enlightenment was reflecting on the Paticcasamuppāda in ascending order and in reverse order. In that we find the twelfefold formula of Dependent Origination.⁴³ According to early Buddhist texts, Paticcasamuppāda is the twelve-fold formula. Buddha applied strictly this formula to show how suffering comes to be and ceases to be. In this respect the Buddha did not want to apply it to phenomena other than human beings. But Arya Sālistamba Sutra, a Mahayana text, has applied the Dependent Origination to working of seeds in generating sprouts.⁴⁴ The twelve-fold formula runs as follows:

Avijjā paccayā samkhārā	(due to ignorance dispositions come to be)
Sankhāra paccayā viññānam	(due to dispositions consciousness comes to be)
Viññāna paccayā nāmarūpam	(due to consciousness name and form come to be)
Namarūpa paccayā salayatanam	(due to name and form six sense faculties come to be)
Salāyatana paccayā phasso	(due to six sense faculties contact comes to be)
Phassa paccayā vedanā	(due to contact feeling comes to be)
Vedanā paccayā tanhā	(due to feeling craving comes to be)
Tanhā paccayā upādānam	(due to craving grasping comes to be)
Upādāna paccayā bhavo	(due to grasping becoming comes to be)

	to be)
Bhava paccayā jāti	(due to becoming jati comes to be)
Jāti paccayā jarāmaranam	(due to birth decay death grief
soka parideva dukkha	lamentation dejection and despair
domanassa upāyāsā sambhavanti	come to be).

Even though the formula of Dependent Origination starts from ignorance (Avijjā) it is not the first cause like Sāmkhya theory of Prakṛti (Primordial element). Buddhaghosa in his Visuddhimagga has clearly said that this is not like the Pakati (primordial element) advocated by Pakativādins (Sāmkhya philosophers).⁴⁵ This formula was used in ascending order to demonstrate how suffering comes to be. When it is used in the descending order it shows how suffering ceases to be.

In Pāli Nikāyas we find another way of explaining Dependent Origination. In this respect the Buddha did not use the twelve-fold formula. Instead he explained it in a symbolic way. Without referring to any phenomena he said:

‘Iti imasmim sati idam hoti, imassa uppādā idam uppajjati
Imasmim asati idam na hoti, imassa nirodhā idam nirjjhāti’⁴⁶

When this is that is, this arising that arises
When this is not that is not, ceasing this that ceases.

The grammar of this formula is that these short sentences have been constructed by the Buddha in the locative case (Sattamī Vibhakti) which indicates that a phenomenon comes to be in relation to another phenomenon. This can be called the general theory of Paticca Samuppāda (Dependent Origination). Instead of the Pāli word Paticca the verb ‘Sati’ has been used in the locative case to indicate the relative origin of phenomena. Buddha illustrated this by giving examples. In the Samyutta Nikāya we read that depending on darkness the element of light (Ābha dhātu) exist. Depending on form (or matter) the element of space (Ākāsānañcāyatana dhātu) exists.⁴⁷ In this respect Buddha used both Paticca and Sati to indicate relative origin and their relative existence of phenomena. Relativity in Buddhism has been explained in terms of the existence of two contradictory phenomena in relation to each other. What we derive from this is that phenomena are interdependent and they have no independent existence. Walpola Rahula says that if phenomena are interdependent and has no independent existence we cannot talk about free-will.⁴⁸

In the analysis of rupa (material elements) Buddha has pointed out that four great elements (Cattāro Mahābhūtā) and their derivatives exist in relation to each other. And also, according to Sarvastivada teaching, Paramanus (Atoms) exist in relation to each other, as Paramanus cannot exist independently. Nagarjuna said that we can talk about Nirvana only in relation to Samsara. Both Samvrti (Convention) and Paramartha (Absolute) exist in relation to each other.

In the Yogacara philosophy relativity of subject and object has been emphasized. While accepting the reality of the subject, Vijñānavādins rejected the

reality of the external world. They said that the external world is nothing but manifestation of consciousness (Vijñāna) and therefore, it does not really exist. They accepted the absoluteness of subjectivity which is Vijñāna. This Vijñāna was divided into eight: six empirical consciousnesses, Klistha Vijñāna (defiled mind or manana) and Ālaya Vijñāna (the Store Consciousness). In the Vijñaptimatratāsiddhi it is stated this way.

“Vijñaptimātram evetad asadarth āvabhāsanāt
Yathā taimirikasy āsat kesacandrādi darsanam”⁴⁹

Everything in the external world is only a reflection of consciousness (because there is the appearance of non-existent objects). It is just like a person who is suffering from an ophthalmological disorder (Taimirikasya) sees hair, moon and so forth which do not really exist.

And also the three natures, Parikalpita (Imagined), Paratantra (Dependent nature) and Parinispāna (Absolutes) exist in relation to each other.

Nāgārjuna elaborated this theory of relativity in his treatises. He made use of it to negate all philosophical theories. In his Ratnavali⁵⁰ he emphatically mentioned that ‘Asmim sati idam bhavati, hrasve dīrgham yathā sti. (When this is that is. It is as when short is there long is there too.) This means that when we talk about something short (Hrasva) we do it in relation to long. Even though we do not mention it that relationship is already there. Nāgārjuna used two terms Svabhāva and Parabhāva. He said in his Mulamādhyamikakārikā both Svabhāva and Parabhāva exist exclusively in relation to each other. When we talk about Svabhāva we do it in relation to Parabhāva. Nāgārjuna pointed out both Svabhāva and Parabhāva, have no independent existence and therefore, both are Sūnya.⁵¹ Candrakīrti in his commentary (Prasannapadā) on Mulamādhyamikakārikā has defined Idampratyaayatā in the sense of relativity.⁵² Like the Buddha, Nāgārjuna elaborated the mutual coexistence of Atta (soul) and Attaniya (that which belongs to soul).

Nāgārjuna further emphasized that if phenomena are interrelated we cannot talk about existence. In the ultimate analysis they are empty (Sunya). Sunya does not mean the absolute nothingness. It is the absence of self-existence or absence of independent existence.

Regarding the theory of evolution of Dharmas in the Sarvāstivāda School of philosophy, four views have been postulated by four prominent teachers of the school. Vasubandhu has recorded these views in his Abhidharmakosa (and Sphutarthabhidharmakosavyakhya) and he has made a kind of assessment.⁵³ According to Buddhadeva’s theory of change, three times, present, (Vartamana), past (Atita) and future (Anagata) are distinguished and determined in relation to each other. Thus past is called past in relation to present and future. Present is present in relation to past and future and future in relation to past and present. Buddhadeva gives a simile of a woman who is the mother in relation to her daughter and who is the daughter in relation to her mother. This theory was established in relation to the prior and the posterior Dharmas.⁵⁴

Notes

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- ¹ Rgveda, 10.190
² Rgveda, 10.129
³ Karunaratne, W. S. , The Theory of Causality in Early Buddhism, p. 2 (published by Indumathi Karunaratne, 1988, Sri Lanka)
⁴ Satapatha Brāhmana, II, 5.1, 1-3
⁵ Aitareya Āraṇyaka, II, 1.8.1
⁶ Katha Upanishad, III, 10,11
⁷ Karunaratne, W. S. Ibid., p.7
⁸ Samyutta Nikāya, Vol. II. P. 18
⁹ Kalupahana, David J., Causality, University of Hawaii Press, 1975, p.6; Murti, T. R. V., Central Philosophy of Buddhism, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1960, p. 133
¹⁰ Satapatha Brāhmana, 11.5.8.1; SBE 26.253
¹¹ Kalupahana, David J., Ibid., p.7
¹² Buddha was not interested in metaphysical speculations. Buddhist Middle Way and metaphysics are not compatible. Buddha set aside Ten Metaphysical Questions raised by recluses and Brahmanas without giving answers. Middle Way (Majjhima Patipada) has the language problem too. Language is always dualistic.
¹³ Mūlamādhyamikakārikā, Pratyaya parīksā (Chapter I)
¹⁴ When we apply the Sāmkhya theory of causality to a human being regarding his rebirth after his death, we can see that according the Samkhya system soul is a permanent and indestructible entity which passes from one life to another. So the person throughout his existence in the Samsara is identical. This means that the person A is A in his entire Samsaric existence. Buddha criticized this view as an eternalist conception. According Buddhism, it is not the same person but he is not completely different person either (na ca so na ca anno). The person newly born is a new person who has links to previous existence. In this respect the Buddha interpreted this problem from the point of view of Middle Way.
¹⁵ ‘Ete te, Kassapa, ubho ante anupagamma tathāgato majjhena dhammam deseti avijjā paccayā samkhārā, samkhāra paccayā viññānam, viññānapaccayā nāmarupam’ Samyutta Nikaya, Vol. II, p. 19-20
¹⁶ ‘Naidam attakatam bimbam naidam parakatam agham Hetum paticca sambhūtam hetbhangā nirujjhati.’ Samyutta Nikāya, Vol. I. p. 134
¹⁷ Murti, T. R. V., Central Philosophy of Buddhism, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1980, p.166
¹⁸ ‘Na svato nā’pi parato na dvābhyām nā’pyahetutah Utpannā jātu vidyānte bhāvāh kva ca na keca na.’ Mulamādhyamikakārikā, I. 1
¹⁹ Na hi yad yasmād avyatiriktam tat tasya kāryam kāranam vā yuktam, bhinna-laksanatvāt kāryakāranayoh. Anyathā hidam kāryam idam kāranam vety asamkīrana-vyavasthā katham bhavet. Tatvasangraha Pañjika, p. 22
²⁰ Mulamādhyamikakārikā, XX. 19,20 (Murti’s translation)
²¹ ‘Sarvam eva ca visvam ekarūpam syāt.’ Tatvasangrah Panjika, p.23
²² ‘Añño karoti añño patisamvediyat’iti sassatam etam paret. Samyutta Nikaya, Vol. II. P. 20
²³ In Buddhism there are two aspects of Middle Ways: one is the ethical middle way which is related to the path of practice. This is the practice of self-mortification and the indulgence in sensual pleasures. The other aspect of middle way is philosophical which the Buddha illustrated as Paticcasamuppada (Dependent Origination).
²⁴ ‘Uppādā vā tathāgatānam anuppādā vā tathāgatānam thitā vā sā dhātu dhammatthitā idappaccayatā Paticcasamuppādo.’ Samyutta Nikaya, II. 25

- ²⁵ Majjhima Nikāya, I. pp. 167-168
- ²⁶ Vinaya. I. .2
- ²⁷ ‘Yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā
ātāpino jhāyato brāhmanassa
athassa kankhā vapayanti sabbā
yato pajānāti sahetudhammam’ Vinaya. I, p.2; Udāna. P.1
- ²⁸ ‘Yo Paticcasamuppādam passati so dhammam passati, Yo Dhammam passati so
paticcasamuppādam passati.’ Majjhima Nikāya, Vol. I. p.190; Sālistamba Sūtra, p.
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- ²⁹ Dīgha Nikāya, II. 55; Samyutta Nikāya, II. 92.
- ³⁰ Yāyam bhikkhu ābhādhātu ayam dhātu andhakāram paticca paññāyati, yāyam
bhikkhu subhadhātu ayam dhātu asubham paticca paññāyati, yāyam bhikkhu
ākāsañcayatana dhātu ayam dhātu rūpam paticca paññāyati ... , Samyutta Nikāya,
II.p.150
- ³¹ Samyutta Nikāya, Vol. II, p. 26
- ³² Samyutta Nikāya, Vol. II. 105-106, Lankāvatāra sūtra, pp.143-144
- ³³ Kalupahana, David J., Causality, p.92
- ³⁴ Kalupahana, David J., Ibid., p. 93
- ³⁵ Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary, p. 248
- ³⁶ ‘Yathā aññāram bījam khetto vuttham virūhati
Pathavirasañ ca āgamma sinehañ ca tadūbhayam’
Samyutta Nikāya, Vol. I. p.134
- ³⁷ Yathā vuttānām etesām jarāmaranādīnām paccayo vā paccayasamūhato vā
idappaccayā’ti vutto.’ Samyutta Nikāya Atthakathā, Vol. II, p. 41
- ³⁸ Williams, Monier, Sanskrit English Dictionary, p.673
- ³⁹ ‘Paccayo hetu kāranam nidānam sambhavo pabhavo ti ādi atthato ekam vyanjanato
nānam.’ Anguttara Nikāya Atthakathā, 2. 154
- ⁴⁰ Majjhima Nikāya, Vol. I. p. 258
- ⁴¹ ‘Hetūnām pratyayānām ca kah prativisesah. Na kascid ity āha...hetuh pratyayo
nidānam kāranam nimittam lingam upanisad iti paryāyah.’ Abhdharmakosa Vyākhyā,
I. p. 188
- ⁴² Samyutta Nikāya, Nidāna Vagga (Part II) early sutras
- ⁴³ Vinaya I. p. 2
- ⁴⁴ Ārya Sālistamba sūtra
- ⁴⁵ Visuddhi Magga, p. 525
- ⁴⁶ Majjhima Nikāya, Vol. III. P.63; Samyutta Nikāya, Vol. II. pp. 28, 95
- ⁴⁷ Samyutta Nikāya, Vol. II. p. 150
- ⁴⁸ Rahula, Walpola, What the Buddha Taught, p. 54
- ⁴⁹ Vijñaptimatratāsiddhi, Vimsatikā, 1
- ⁵⁰ Ratnāvalī, I. 48 (edited by Moratuwe Sasaratana, Colombo, Sri Lanka 1970)
- ⁵¹ Mūlamādhyaṃikakārikā, I. 10
- ⁵² Kalupahana, David J, Causality, p.55
- ⁵³ These theories are Bhāvānyathāvāda (Dharmatrata), Laksanānyathāvāda (Ghosaka),
Avasthānyathāvāda (Vasumitra) and Anyathānyathāvāda (Buddhadeva).
- ⁵⁴ ‘Pūrvāparam apeksyā nyonya ucyate.’ Abhidharmakosabhāṣya, V. 26; Tatvasangraha
Pañjikā, p. 504