

Status of the External world in Early Buddhist Philosophy

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ABSTRACT: *Status of the external world is a vital problem in philosophy, east and west. All important philosophies right from very early period, have analysed this problem from different point of view. With its history of more than two thousand five hundred years, Buddhism has made significant contribution towards solving this problem. Gautama, the Buddha in his 'Meditation' realizes the real truth of the world that all things of the world are dependent. On the other hand nothing exists independently. Everything of the world arises on getting some other things and exists depending on the different conditions. Everything of the world arises through this universal law. Things of the world are new at each and every moment and no two moments are identical. It is because; every moment things depend on different condition for existence. All things of the world are change at each and every moment. There is change, but there is no changing thing. The world is momentary. So the world is impermanent. There is no identity; there is only a continuity of life. Change is the reality and impermanent is the law of universe. Neither the world is real nor unreal, it is only becoming. The world is dynamics. Causality plays a vital role in the whole world. There is no permanent being in the world, there is only becoming.*

KEYWORDS: *External world, Dependent Origination, Momentary, Impermanent, Becoming, Dynamics*

I. INTRODUCTION

The essence of Buddhist philosophy is the awareness and transcendence of human suffering. Enlightened awareness of suffering is the foundation of Buddhist philosophy and also Buddha dharma. Basically, early Buddhism explains the human suffering and its cause that every one suffers and everything is the cause of suffering. This is the truth and basic principle of the external world. But suffering is not the end of life, there is the way to the extinction of suffering. Extinction of suffering can be effected by removing and destroying the causes of suffering. This is the realization of highest goal of life and in Buddhist terminology it is known as 'Nirvana'. Whenever Buddha explained the human suffering and its cause, he also said about the status of the world. In early Buddhism, the status of the external world can be analysed from three points of view- (1) Everything is suffering (2) Everything is transient and (3) Everything is unsubstantial or soulless. These three are the basic principles of the world and original teachings of the Lord Buddha. Buddha says, "Sarvam dukham, sravam anityam and sarvam anatman."¹ All things of the world are subject to decay and death, impermanent and empty of being or beingless. Buddha says, "there are three things, O king which you cannot find in the world and what are the three-that which, whether conscious or unconscious is not subject to decay and death that you will not find, that quality of anything (organic or inorganic) which is impermanent that you will not find. And in the highest sense there is no such thing as being possessed of being."² He again says that space and Nirvana these two do not fall under decay and death, impermanent and being. Nirvana is not a product of anything and no cause for its origin has been declared. Therefore, Nirvana is not the result of any cause.

Buddha explains the world through the law of dependent origination, which is known as 'pratityasamutpada' in early Buddhist philosophy. The etymological meaning of pratityasamutpada is origin of something on getting something. 'Samutpada' means appearance or arising and pratitya means after getting. Combining the two, we find arising after getting. The general theory of pratityasamutpada (dependent origination) is applicable on all the elements of the world. But it is not explicitly mentioned in the early literature of Theravada.

II. EARLY BUDDHIST VIEW'S ON THE STATUS OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD

The First Principle of the External World is that everything of the world arises on getting some other things. All entities of the world depend on some other things for their origination and existence. On the other hand, nothing exists independently and whatever exist it depends on some other things. The nature of dependent originations is like a network, which is silently happening in the world. Everything of the world arises through this universal law. This law can be expressed by the logical term “that being present this becomes, from the arising of that this arises. That being absent this does not become, from the cessation of that, this ceases.”³ Logically also this law can be explained. Suppose in the same series of the casual connection A, B, C and D are the external objects- here, D arises depending on ‘C’ ‘C’ on ‘B’, ‘B’ arises, depending on ‘A’ and ‘A’ arises on getting some other things and so on. Here, Buddhists points out that whenever A is the cause of B, but the same A does not transmigrate into B or the same A will not transmigrate into B after its death or destruction, and which one is transmigrating from A to B, is only the Karma or cause of A. Everything comes out in the world through this law. Thus, the world is the discontinuous continuity process (*vicchinna pravaha*). “The death of a living being is not end; at once another life begins to go through a similar process of birth and death and thus repeats the round of life over and over again.”⁴ Buddha explains this process by another example. He points out that from a burning flame of a lamp another flame can be lighted but the first flame is not the same with the second one. Similarly, everything arises on getting some other thing but same thing does not transmigrate into another thing.

Second principle of the external world is that things are not only dependent for origination, but also they depend on different conditions at each and every moment for their existence. Every moment the burning flame of a lamp depends on the new oil and oxygen. Every moment of oil and oxygen is a new oil and new oxygen. Similarly, every moment things depend on the different conditions and no two moments are identical. Every moment of conditions of a thing is the new condition. Things are new at each and every moment and at no two moments are identical. Therefore, things are momentary. A thing is only a force, a cause and a condition. Things are products of conditions. Conditions are the immediate agreements of objects for their existence. Everything co-operates with other things and they are mutually dependent for their origination and existence. Things exist depending on different conditions and this one is also the condition for some other things at the same time in the world. The world is an interdependent process. In the process of the world every effect becomes in turn a cause. On the other hand, there is nothing without a cause. The cause necessarily produces an effect. The effect in its turn is transformed into a cause, a cause into an effect and vice versa. This process goes on infinitely. The process of dependent origination has no any beginning and it has no any end. . Everything of the world is dependently originated. No originated entity is the beginning part of this world. Things have no ultimate origination. The Buddha positively states. “The origin of phenomenal existence is inconceivable, and the beginning of beings obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving is not to be discovered.”⁵ For all beings, the cause ever becomes the effect, and the effect becomes the cause and so on. Here no one cause is the prime or beginning cause of the world, because that cause arises depending on some other cause and so on. In the circle of cause and effect a first cause or beginning is in conceivable. “The wheel of cosmic order goes on without maker, without known beginning continuously to exist by nature of concatenation of cause and effect.”⁶ The world is continuous whole and one. The universe emerges without a creator without a known beginning and would remain forever under the influence of cause and effect. “Neither is the world finite, nor is it infinite.”⁷

The world is impermanent’ and it is the third principle of the external world. Things are dependent for origination and depending on different conditions for existence. A thing cannot continue to exist in the same condition for two consecutive points of time and undergoes changes in an endless series. “Things are different in every moment. Difference of time is difference of thing; at no two moments is a thing identical. It is because; every moment things depend on different condition for existence. Existence is momentary”⁸ All is flux, a stream of becoming. The world is impermanent. But, there is a successive relation in between one moment to another moment in the continuous change and we perceive the same thing. There is no permanent entity or being running through these ever-changing entities. All individuals are series of momentary states of consciousness. So, all things are impermanent and are constantly changing. According to the early Buddhism, there is no identity; there is only a continuity of life. Identity is another name of continuity. There is only a continuous succession of bodily and mental changes. The changes are causally connected with one another. “All things undergo the changes indicated in utpada (origination) sthiti (staying) jara (growth) and nirodha (destructions).”⁹ All originated objects, whether divine or human, whether animal, vegetative, or mineral, are subject to an invariable law of change as they are subject to the law of causation. Thus, from the empirical point of view, things, which appear through our sense experience, are real. In experience we found a real unchanging world. But in reality it is impermanent. Permanence of a thing is an illusion, like the oneness of the flame or of the stream. According to Buddhism, human life is a process of continuous becoming of the psychophysical

phenomena and belief in a constant and permanent self in the individual is a superstition. Change is the reality and impermanence is the law of the universe. The whole world is subject to change and in every respect it is impermanent. Therefore, the world is neither real nor unreal and whatever is real it is only the universal change of the world. Existence is a flux. A thing is a point instant, having neither a 'before' nor an 'after' it has no space temporally, there is no duration, cessation is inherent to things and is entire (alutuko nir- anvago vinasah).¹⁰ The world that is appearing behind us is not our thought construction. It has existence but its existence is momentary. Whatever is subject to origination is subject also to destruction. When this is destroyed, that is also destroyed, is another principle of pratyasamutpada theory and relevant to the status of the world. Destruction is not the end of object; at once another arises by the similar process of cause and condition. "Verily this world has fallen upon trouble; one is born and grows old, and dies, and falls from one state and springs up in another."¹¹

Buddhists theory of dependent origination is based on the law of causation. The law of causation explains what is happening, what else happens, what is not happening, what else does not happen. Of these two phenomena, the former is called the cause and the later is effect. There being the cause, there is the effect and there being the absence of the cause, there is the absence of the effect. It is believed that in the process of causation something changes into another. But according to Buddhist, a thing does not change into another, because a thing is, what it is and cannot become something else. There is change; there is no changing thing. In their view, causation means the uniform succession of two events of which the antecedent is the cause and the consequent is the effect. The Buddhists hold that every event internal or external is determined by its previous event. There being some event another event is sure to follow. The whole universe is conditioned by causes. Every event comes into being depending on its previous conditions.

It is believed that the cause continues to exist in the effect. Clay is said to be continuing to exist in the jar and the seed in the sprout. But according to Buddhist, the cause is destroyed before the production of the effect. Therefore, the cause does not continue to exist in the effect. Their view is that it is only after the destruction of the seed that the sprout arises. Therefore, the law of causality has got two aspects – (1) external and (2) internal. In the external aspect, this gives an explanation to the causation of material things by holding that when the antecedent conditions are present, the effect comes into being. When seed, air, soil, heat etc. are present, the sprout is sure to come. If any of these necessary conditions is missing, the sprout will not arise. In the internal aspect the law of causation gives an explanation to the life process. It seems that Buddhism believes in immanent causality, in which a substance appears to be manifested as its qualities. Causation is dynamic, it is not static. Now, the question is that if the world is momentary, how can we define the existence of the world? In early Buddhism 'existence' is defined as arthakriyakartya or practical efficiency. It means the capacity of producing something or effecting some change in the existing order of things. Therefore, an entity is called existence if it can produce some effect. The seed is said to exist, since it can produce shoots. It is found in Buddhism that the production of an effect can be accounted for only by holding that causal efficiency is the characteristic of 'existence'. This causal efficiency is momentary. Therefore, things must be regarded as having momentary existence. Buddhists agree that since the effect is impermanent, the power of production must be impermanent. So, whatever is existent is momentary. In early Buddhism causality is nothing; it is only the karma or action of things. On the other hand karma is nothing; it is only another name of causality. Every karma necessarily produces the fruit either good or bad. Good karma produces good result and bad karma produces bad result. The past influences the present and the past and present influence the future. The present is the result of past karma and the future will arise by the law of past and present karma. The variety in the world is due to karma

III. CONCLUSION

1. The world is a process of dependent origination. Everything arises depending on some other things and exists depending on different conditions. The world is an interdependent process. Everything is mutually dependent for origination and existence. It is a continuous process. Relation constitutes the world. Relativity is the essence of origination, existence and destruction of the world. Thus, the world is conditional, relative and devoid of independent reality.
2. The world is momentary. All things change constantly at every moment and two moments of a thing are not the same. All existence are essenceless and impermanent. The world is new at each and every moment and no two moments are identical. It is so because at every moment things depend on different conditions for their existence. Thus, there is no identity; there is only continuity of life. Identity is another name of continuity.

3. The world is neither real nor unreal, it is only becoming. The world is dynamic. 'The world is real' is not true because the world changes constantly in every moment and in every respect it is impermanent. 'The world is unreal' is also not true because it is not non-existence, but its existence is momentary. The world is becoming without the being. The world is a succession of transient phenomena. There is no permanent being. The world is becoming. From the epistemological point of view, early Buddhism asserts that the knowledge which occurs through our sense organs is not the true knowledge of things. Therefore, the external world which is appearing behind us is not the real world. In our practical life we find a real unchangeable, permanent world. But in reality the world is impermanent. It is changing at every moment and in every respect the world is impermanent. Thus, the phenomenal world is not real (*Satah apramanya*) but it has ontological reality (*paratah pramanya*) or the knowledge of reality of the world is true knowledge which is obtained only after false knowledge has occurred. Factors of validity of knowledge are different from the own giving rise to knowledge.

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