

The Dependent Origination in Buddhism

Dr. (Mrs.) Bela Bhattacharya

The Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppada) is one of the most vital concepts of Buddhism. It may be stated as one of the most subtle teachings of Buddha. It is a mode marked by the simple condition of happening of a phenomenon on the basis of its sole invariable antecedent phenomenon. Generally speaking, the meaning of Paticcasamuppada is 'arising on the grounds of a preceding cause'. It is the causal chain of causation.

Paticcasamuppada-
its various
connotations

Scholars and writers have rendered this term in various ways, such as, 'Dependent Origination' or 'Dependent Arising' or 'Conditioned co-production' or 'Causal Genesis' or 'Conditioned Genesis' etc.

All existence is impermanent. It means becoming. All becoming is subject to the law of causation. Law of causation is the production of an effect out of a complement of causes and conditions. When the causes and conditions disappear, the effect appears. The effect emerges from the destruction of causes and conditions. Causes and conditions are co-related. An effect cannot happen without any cause and conditions.

Cause and
effect

The cause of an effect vanishes, then the effect emerges. The cause cannot exist in the effect. But the cause is always prior to the effect. The effect arises from an aggregate of causes and conditions. A seed is the cause of a plant.

The soil, water, light etc which promote the growth of the plant are its conditions. So a Hetu is the principal cause and a Paccaya is a concomitant condition. Only one cause cannot produce an effect. It is also related with other concomitant conditions to produce an effect. An effect arises from a cause and a complement of conditions. A coconut is the principal cause of a coconut tree, and that tree may be again cause of many a cocanut tree.

The things of the world are neither due to one cause nor those are causeless. Things have many causes. The Law of Dependent Origination is without beginning or end. Causation is dynamic not static. A cause never perishes but only changes as a jar is made from clay. In this case the name clay is lost and the name jar arises.

Cause-dynamic
Paticca (pratitya) means after reaching (prapya) or depending on (apeksya) and samma means right, utpada means arising. Combining all these we get depending causes. This establishes that all things are born of 'Dependent Origination'.

Paticcasamuppada-
its derivation
Buddha attained enlightenment at the foot of the Bodhi tree at Bodh-Gaya, and during the first watch of the night, he thought over the Dependent Origination thus: "when this exists, that comes to be, with the arising of this, that arises, namely, dependent on ignorance, volitional formation, dependent on formations, consciousness etc".

Buddha on
Paticcasamuppada
In the middle watch of the night he thought over the Dependent Origination thus: "when this does not exist, that does not come to be. with the cessation of this that ceases, namely, with the utter cessation of ignorance, the cessation of volitional formations etc". In the last watch of the night, He realised the Dependent Origination thus: "when this exists, that comes to be, with the arising of this, that arises; when this does not exist that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases namely, dependent on ignorance, volitional formations etc. Thus the whole mass of suffering arises. But by the utter cessation of volitional formations and so on...".

This is the ending of this whole mass of suffering. He realised the root cause of all sufferings and sorrows, which is comprised in the second noble truth. Analysing the origin of suffering the Master pointed out that the nidanas (causes) entwine man's consciousness and bind him fast to the gross world full of

pain and sorrow. The nidanas which are held at the root of all sufferings are twelve in number. They are :

1. Ignorance (Avijja)
2. Impression (Samkhara)
3. Consciousness (Vinnana)
4. Mind and Matter (Nama-rupa)
5. Six organs of sense (Salayatana)
6. Contact (Phassa)
7. Feeling (Vedana)
8. Desire (Tanha)
9. Attachment (Upadana)
10. Existence (Bhava)
11. Birth (Jati)
12. Old age and death (Jaramarana)

This is the wheel of life revolving day after day from birth to death and death to birth. The complete casual formula specifies that :

Ignorance conditions impressions
Impression conditions consciousness
Consciousness conditions mind and matter
Mind and matter condition the six senses
The six senses condition contact
Contact conditions feeling
Feeling conditions craving or desire
Desire conditions attachment
Attachment conditions existence
Existence conditions birth
Birth conditions old age and death.

Briefly speaking, the Law of Causation is thus : "with ignorance as condition there arise (volitional) formations ; with formation as condition, consciousness ; with consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality ; with mentality-materiality as condition, the six-fold base with the sixfold base as condition, contact ; with contact as condition, feeling ; with feeling as condition, craving ; with craving as condition, clinging ; with clinging as condition,

becoming ; with becoming as condition, birth ; with birth as condition there are ageing and death, and sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair ; thus there arises this whole mass of suffering. This is called the Dependent Origination¹”.

Let us now explain briefly the twelve nidanas constituting the dependent origination :

Avijja is the non-comprehension of the four Noble Truths, the past, the future, both the past and the future and Dependent Origination.

Avijja It may be identified with delusion. Avijja or ignorance or delusion is one of the root causes of all unwholesome actions. All the wrong deeds are the result of ignorance. Ignorance is enunciated as the first link of the chain of the twelvefold Dependent Origination which can be illustrated by a circle. It is the cycle of existence, bhavachakra. Each and every factor of Dependent Origination can be joined together with the next one in the series. They are all inter-dependent. Nothing is independent or isolated. It is an unbroken process. It gives rise to birth and death.

Samkhara denotes actions which are :

i) meritorious such as offering of gifts and observance of moral precept ; ii) sinful such as killing and stealing and iii) neither meritorious nor sinful such as beliefs in eternalism and annihilationism. The formation of merit consists of thirteen volitions.

These are the eight sense-sphere profitable volitions and five-material profitable volitions. The formation of demerit consists

Samkhara of twelve unprofitable volitions ; the formation of the imperturable consists of the four profitable volitions associated with the immaterial sphere. These three kinds of deeds may be i) Physical, ii) Verbal and iii) Mental. These bring about reactions. The Physical or bodily formation is bodily volition. The verbal formation is verbal volition and the Mental formation is mental volition.

1. The path of purification, Bhikkhu Nanarnoli p. 592.

The physical formation occurs in the body-door and produces bodily intimation. The verbal formation occurs in the speech-door and produces verbal intimation. Volition of direct knowledge is not connected here in these two cases. But the twenty-nine volitions are the mental formations. They arise in the mind-door without originating any kind of intimation.

These formations may be limited or unlimited, high or low, right or wrong, definite or indefinite. Due to lack of true knowledge, a person has the impression. It helps to bring about the happiness of the person. The functions of impressions of previous life of a person help to be born again. It depends on the deeds of the past life of a person. Ignorance generates acts which leave impressions on the individual for determining his future existence. It also creates impressions on the inner organ.

Re-birth in heaven is possible due to meritorious deeds, while non-meritorious deeds cause re-birth in hells and neutral deeds cause birth in the Arupalokas. Ignorance is the cause of formations. The term Samkhara has also another meaning. In the statement 'all compounded things are impermanent', Samkhara applies to all compounded and conditioned things i.e., all things that come into being as the effect of causes and conditions which also act as causes and conditions for other effects.

Vinnana (Consciousness) means here Pratisandhi vinnana (re-birth consciousness) and Pravrtti vinnana (a continuous flow of mental states). Pratisandhi vinnana is of nineteen kinds while Pravrtti vinnana is of thirty-two laukika vipakas (resultants). The word consciousness is sixfold, e.g. eye consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness.

Eye-consciousness is twofold e.g. profitable resultant and unprofitable resultant. Likewise ear, nose, tongue and body are also twofold. But mind consciousness is twentytwofold, namely, two profitable

and unprofitable resultant mind elements, three root-causeless mind consciousness elements and eight-sense-sphere resultant consciousness with root cause, five of the material sphere and four of the immaterial sphere. So are the thirtytwo mundane resultant consciousnesses. Here Vinnana is used in a technical sense. This is the germ of consciousness of the being entering into the womb of the mother, upholding the five elements of the new body. It is the product of the past Karmas (samkhara) of the dying man and of his past consciousness too.

This consciousness is compared to a stream of river which flows from one existence to another. Vinnana is a link between one existence to another. It is also conditioned, and, therefore, is not permanent; consciousness comes into being and passes away yielding place to new consciousness. Thus the stream of consciousness goes on until existence ceases.

Vinnana leads to nama-rupa of the present life of a being. In the present life it is not possible for a being to get rid of ignorance and impressions of past life. Name denotes the non-material or mental constituents of a being while rupa the material only.

Nama-rupa All inanimate objects are included in the term rupa. Name is the aggregates of four mental states, feeling, perception, impression and knowledge derived through sense organs. Rupa denotes the four elements, earth, water, fire and air. It comprises all the material objects. Namarupa are called Pancakhandha.

Salayatana denotes eye-base, ear-base, nose-base, tongue-base, body-base, and mind-base. Caksayatana is the sensitivity of eye, srotrayatana is the sensitivity of ear, ghranayatana is the sensitivity of nose, jihvayatana is the sensitivity of tongue, kayayatana is the sensitivity of body and manayatana is the sensitivity of mind. Manayatana is a collective term for the many different classes of consciousness i.e. for the five kinds of sense-consciousness and the many kinds of mind-consciousness. Hence, five bases are physical phenomena namely, eye, ear, etc., and the sixth

base is identical with consciousness. Manayatana is of thirtytwo laukika vipakas. Nama-rupa are mentioned as the condition of the six sense-organs.

These two Nama and Rupa are the cause of six-sense-organs. By Nama is meant the three khandhas, namely, feeling, perceptions and impressions. Rupa is the collection of the four great elements e.g. earth, water, fire and air, the six objects viz., form, sound, smell, taste, touch, objects of thought and vitality. If there were no mentality-materiality, no sixfold base could arise. Thus mentality-materiality and sixfold base are interrelated and inter-dependent.

Phassa is produced by salayatana. Phassa is of six kinds corresponding to the six kinds of bases. Eye-contact is contact associated with eye-consciousness, ear-contact associated with eye-consciousness, ear-contact is the contact associated with ear-consciousness, nose-contact is the contact associated with nose-consciousness, tongue contact is the contact associated with tongue-consciousness and body base is the contact associated with body-consciousness. But mind contact is associated with twentytwo laukika vipakas. One form of contact is limited to one ayatana. Thus six sense organs are the conditions of contact.

Vedana also is one of six kinds corresponding to the six sense-organs. Vedana born of eye is vedana associated with the eye consciousness, vedana born of ear is vedana associated with ear consciousness, vedana born of nose is feeling associated with nose consciousness, vedana born of tongue is vedana associated with tongue consciousness, vedana born of body is vedana associated with body consciousness and vedana born of mind is vedana associated with thirtytwo laukika vipakas. Feeling may be pleasant, painful and neutral. This feeling is the outcome of contact. Visual and other perceptions are related to feeling in eight ways, as conscience mutuality, support, result, nurtiment, association, presence and non-disappearance. But the mind contact is associated with mind door in the

way only as decisive support. We see that with the arising of contact there arises feeling and it can never be stopped by any power or force. Seeing a form, hearing a sound, smelling an odour, tasting a flavour, touching some tangible thing cognising a mental object a person experiences feeling but we can not say that all beings experience the same feeling with the same objects.

Tanha is born of vedana. Tanha is of six kinds and there are six corresponding sources, i. e. the six doors of the sense-organs, craving for form, craving for sound, craving for smell, craving for taste, craving for touch and craving for mind object. Craving for form is the craving for the visible objects. Similarly, craving for sound is craving for the sound objects, craving for smell is the craving for odours. Craving for taste is the craving for the taste objects, craving for touch is the craving for bodily sensations and craving for dharma is the craving for mind objects. Craving may be of three kinds, e. g., kama, bhava and vibhava. When the craving creates a taste for the objects, it is called craving for sense desires. When the craving is associated with the eternity view and produces an attachment, it is called craving for becoming. When the craving is associated with annihilation, it is called craving for non-becoming.

Tanha leads to Upadana. Upadana is of four kinds ; kama, ditthi, silabata and attavada. Kama-tanha is the cause of Kamupadana. Kamupadana is mental concomitants rooted in greed. Ditthupadana is the wrong view that there is no resultant of the gifts. Silabbatupadana is the belief that ceremonial observances lead to purification or liberation. Attavdupadana is the firm belief in the existence of one's soul or individuality. Upadana is the mental state that clings to or grasps the object.

Bhava is of two kinds ; Kamma bhava i. e. process of becoming and utpattibhava (rebirth) also process of becoming. Kamma

bhava is twenty-nine Kusala and Akusala cetanas (wholesome and unwholesome volitions) and twenty ways of good conduct and of evil conduct associated with these cetanas (volitions). It leads to active side of life. Upadana is the cause of bhava Kamupadana is the cause of kammabhava. Other upadanas viz ; ditthi, silabbata, attavada are the cause of uppattibhava. Uppati bhava is the resultant of thirty-two laukika vipakas and thirty-five cetasikas and the material phenomena produced by Kamma.

Jati means birth which is the appearance of the five aggregates of a being who is reborn. The living being is subject to the desire for re-existence, and takes rebirth in future life. Jati is controlled by kammabhava and not uppattibhava. Rebirth is dependent on certain external circumstances. Becoming is the condition of birth. Here birth means not the actual child-birth, but the appearance of the five aggregates, i. e. material form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness in the mother's womb. This process is conditioned by kamma-bhava. The present birth is brought about by the craving and clinging kamma-volitons of the past births. The craving and clinging kamma-volitons of the present birth bring about future rebirth.

Dependent on birth arise ageing and death. Jaramaranasokapari-devadukkhadomanassa mean old age, death, grief, lamentation and sorrow. These are the causes of rebirth. These come through ageing and death. Birth is followed by ageing and death. Ageing and death are followed by birth, and birth is again followed by ageing and death.

Lastly, Paticcasamuppada is also known as Nidana doctrine or the Paccayakara (related condition). It further means origination of the world-order depending on causes. But from the absolute stand point, it means non-origination at all times leading to

Nibbana, the goal of life according to Buddhism. Evidently, this Paticcasamuppada can well be held as the most cardinal philosophical concept in Buddhism upon which the entire edifice of Buddhist religion is established.