UNIT 8: BUDDHISM: THEORY OF MOMENTARINESS (KSANIKAVĀDA)

UNIT STRUCTURE

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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- describe Dependent origination
- analyse the theory of Momentariness
- explain the concept of No-soul theory

8.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the concept of momentariness. But before we discuss about the theory of Momentariness, we should discuss the concept of Dependent Origination or Pratityasamutpada. The doctrine of Dependent origination is considered as the foundation of all the teachings of Buddha. It is contained in Buddha's Second Noble Truth which says that there is a cause of suffering and in the Third Noble Truth which says that there is cessation of suffering. For Buddha, suffering means sam?sa?ra and cessation of suffering means Nirvana. After observing the impact of disease old age and death on human beings Buddha left his home to find

the solution of the misery of the earthly life. As a solution of this problem he found Pratityasamutpada. It is the central teaching of Buddha and his other teachings can be easily deduced from it.

8.3 GENERAL IDEA ABOUT BUDDHISM

Traditionally, Indian philosophy is classified into two broad classes: Astika(orthodox) and Nastika (heterodox). In case of Indian philosophy, by Astika or Vedic we mean those philosophical schools which believe in the authority of the Vedas. Again, by Nastika we mean those philosophical schools that do not believe in the authority of the Vedas. Among the nine philosophical schools Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Mimamsa and Vedānta are know as Astika and Carvaka, Jainism and Buddhism are known as Nastika philosophies as they refuse to accept the authority of Vedas as infallible.

Thus, Buddhism does not accept the authority of the Vedas and is non-vedic in nature. Buddhism is the elaboration of the teachings of Buddha. In reality, Buddha was an ethical teacher who preached orally. His teachings may be found through 'Tipitaka'or 'Three Baskets of the Law'. These three pitakas are: (i) Vinaya Pitaka, (ii) Sutta Pitaka and (iii) Abhidhamma Pitaka. Vinaya Pitaka deals with the discipline of the order. Sutta Pitaka is considered as the compilation of the utterences of Buddha. Again, Abhidhamma Pitaka deals with philosophical discussions.

Generally, according to the Upanisads the eternal Atman or Brahman alone is real. It is the transcendental reality, consciousness and bliss. On the other hand Buddha taught that everything is impermanent; there is no permanent soul or self. The soul is an impermanent mind-body-complex. There are no permanent substances except impermanent qualities. Our life is full of suffering, even the whole world is full of suffering. Suffering is because of our will to live. Again, will to live is due to ignorance. Ignorance is the false knowledge of impermanent as permanent. It is the root cause of all suffering. The aim of Buddha's teaching is to remove ignorance and attain nirvana on this earth.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: State whether the following statements are true or false:

a. Buddhism accepts the authority of the Vedas.(True/False)

b. Buddhism is the elaboration of the teachings of Buddha.(True/False)

c. Buddha, the ethical teacher preached orally.(True/False)

d. Buddhism accepts the existence of soul.(True/False)

e. The aim of Buddha's teaching is to attain NirvâGa.(True/False)

Q 2: What is the root cause of suffering according to Buddha?

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Q 3: What did Buddha teach?

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8.4 DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

Dependent origination or Pratityasamutpada is that doctrine which asserts that whatever exists arises from causes and conditions. Because, everything is conditional and dependent on a cause. Nothing happens by chance. Pratityasamutpada means arising (Samutpada) after getting (pratitya). It means production of an effect is possible under a complement of cause and conditions. If the cause and conditions disappear, then only the effect appears. From the destruction of the cause and condition the effect emerges. Every object of thought is necessarily relative. The twelve links of the Causal Wheel of Dependent Origination may be mentioned as follows:

1. Ignorance (Avidy?)

2. Impressions of karmic forces (samaskara)
3. Initial consciousness of the embryo (vijñana)
4. Psycho-physical organism (nama-rupa)
5. Six sense organs including mind (Sadayatana)
6. Sense-object contact (sparsha)
7. Sense-experience (vedana)
8. Thirst for sense enjoyment (trsna)
9. Craving to the enjoyment (upadana)
10. Will to born (bhava)
11. Birth or rebirth (jāti)
12. Old age and death (jarā-marana).

Among these twelve links the first two are related to our past life, the last two to future life and the rest to present life. Hence, it is considered as the cycle of birth and death. It is the vicious circle of causation. This circle never ends with death. Death is regarded as the beginning of a new life. It is called Bhava-chakra. The twelve links of dependent origination can be destroyed only when its root cause ignorance is destroyed.

The doctrine of Pratityasamutpada opposes to Accidentalism, Naturalism, Fatalism and Supernaturalism. Because, according to Accidentalism, an event is an accidental happening and it denies the law of causality. Again, Naturalism holds that an effect is produced due to its own inherent nature. Fatalism also states that all things good and bad are predetermined by Fate. Further, Supernaturalism holds the view that an event is generated by the supernatural intervention of God. Hence, Buddhism accepts that all existences physical and psychical are subject to the law of universal causation. Nothing is uncaused and eternal.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What does Pratityasamutpâda mean?

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Q 5: Why does Pratityasamutpâda oppose Accidentalism?

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Q 6: Why did Buddha mention 'nothing is uncaused and eternal'?

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8.5 THEORY OF MOMENTARINESS OR KSANIKAVADA

The doctrine of 'Pratityasamutpada' focuses the Buddhist theory of the transitory nature of things. All things according to Buddha are subject to change and decay. As everything originates from some condition, it disappears when the condition ceases to be. Many poets and philosophers have stated about the transitoriness of life and worldly things. This view got the status of the theory of Impermanence in Buddha's teaching. His followers developed it as the theory of momentariness. 'Momentariness' means everything has conditional as well as non-permanent existence and things last not even for short period of time, but exist for one partless moment only.

According to Buddha there is nothing permanent in this universe. For him the body, sensation and consciousness are impermanent and sorrowful. None of them is substantial. They are appearances empty of substance or reality. Impressed by the transitoriness of objects, the ceaseless mutation and transformation of things Buddha formulated a philosophy of change. He established that life is nothing but a series of manifestations of becomings and extinctions. All things change. There is nothing human or divine which is permanent. For example, the flame maintains itself unchanged in appearance, every moment it is another and not the same flame. The stream is sustained in its flow by ever new waters. The becoming of all is the central fact of Buddhism. Absolute reality is not the property of anything on earth.

Identity of objects is only another name for continuity of becoming. A child - a boy - a youth - a man - an old man are one. The seed and the tree are one. The banyan tree a thousand years old is one and the same plant with the seed out of which it has grown. It is the succession that gives the appearance of an unbroken identity. The seeming identity from moment to moment consists in a continuity of moments which we may call the continuity of an ever changing identity. To account for the continuity of the world in the absence of permanent substratum, Buddha announced the law of causation and made it the basis of continuity. The law of universal causation with its corollary of the eternal continuity of becoming is the chief contribution of Buddhism to Indian thought. In Buddha's view existence is transformation. It is a series of successive states. All things undergo changes indicated in utpada (origination), sthiti (staying), Jara (growth) and nirodha (destruction).

The theory of impermanence held by early Buddhism is developed by Buddha's followers into the view of Momentariness. But it may be stated here that the concept of impermanence is different from the concept of momentariness. Because, when we say 'things are anitya or impermanent', it is different from saying that things are momentary or Ksanika. Buddha clearly distinguished the momentary character of mental processes from the impermanent nature of non-mental reality. When the momentary character is extended to all existence we get the ksanikavada. The followers of Buddha believed that all existence is momentary. Permanent existence for them is a contradiction. It may be mentioned that the theory of momentariness is the most important theory of Hinayana school of Buddhism. According to it everything is subject to birth and death, to production and destruction, to creation and decay.

For Buddha, existence is impermanent. All things mental and physical are transitory. There is neither being nor non-being but becoming. Everything is becoming, changing, flux. The world of becoming is governed by the law of Causality (Pratityasamutpada). All individuals are series of momentary states of consciousness. The theory of momentariness is corollary of Dependent Origination. Things depend

on their causes and conditions. As things are relative, dependent, conditional and finite, so they must be momentary. If we say that a thing arises depending on its cause is to admit that it is momentary, for when the cause is removed the thing will cease to be. That which arises, that which is born, that which is produced must necessarily be subject to death and destruction. Again, which is subject to death and destruction is not permanent. Besides, which is not permanent is momentary. The No-soul theory is based on it. When everything is momentary, the soul is also momentary and therefore relative and false. There is no permanent soul but only succession of momentary mental processes. Thus, everything lasts only for a moment.

8.6 CRITICISM OF MOMENTARINESS

The theory of momentariness is criticized by many thinkers. Because, if we accept the view of momentariness, then we have to admit causation and continuity with their correlates of permanence and identity or resolve the world into a devil's dance of wild forces and give up all attempts at comprehending it. Sankara pointed out the inconsistency between causation with its implication of permanence and the theory of momentariness.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Mention whether the following statements are true or false:

a. Theory of momentariness is based on Pratityasamutpâda. (True/False)

b. According to Buddha everything is permanent and eternal. (True/False)

c. Buddhism holds that the idea of permanent existence is a contradiction. (True/False)

d. For Buddha, everything lasts for a moment only. (True/False)

e. Buddha denied the substantiality of the objects. (True/False)

Q 8: What is the theory of Momentariness?

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8.7 CONCEPT OF NO-SOUL THEORY

One of the most valuable theories of Buddhism is the No-soul theory. Generally, there is a common belief that in human being there is an abiding permanent substance called soul (atman). It persists through all the changes that overcome body and exists before birth and after death. Again, the soul is believed to migrate from one body to another. But with the theories of conditioned existence and universal change Buddha denied the existence of soul. According to Buddha, man is only a conventional name for a collection of different constituents, the material body (Kaya), the immaterial mind (manas), and the formless consciousness (vijñjna). Just as a chariot is a collection of wheels, axles, shafts etc., the existence of man is dependent upon this collection and it ceases to exist when the collection breaks up. The soul or the ego denotes nothing more than this collection.

The theory of 'No-soul' may have two types of meaning: (i) The self is an aggregate of impermanent mental and bodily processes; (ii) The world is unsubstantial and void. The soul is impermanent. It is series of successive mental and bodily processes which are impermanent. It is a stream of cognitions. There is a continuity of constantly changing mental processes in it. The self is an aggregate of body and four kinds of mental processes, feeling, perception, disposition and self-consciousness.

Hence, the meaning of Buddha's No-soul theory is that the world is unsubstantial and soulless. All eternal things are aggregate of changing qualities. All forms of existence, material and psychical are impermanent and soulless. The concept of soul is replaced by that of an unbroken stream of consciousness. As the present state of consciousness inherits its characters from previous ones, the past continues in the present through its effect. Thus memory becomes explicable even without a soul. This theory of the non-existence of soul (Anatma vada) has an important role in understanding the teachings of Buddha.

Again, for Buddha, from a psychological point of view, man may be considered as a combination of five kinds of changing states called 'Pañca-skan?dhas'. These are: (a) Form (rupa) which consists of the different factors that we perceive in this body having form; (b) feelings (vedana) of pleasure, pain and indifference; (c) perception including understanding and naming (sañjñ?); (d) tendencies generated by the impressions of past experience (samskaras) and (e) consciousness (vijñ?na). The last four are known as Nama. Thus, there is no eternal soul in human being except this 'nama-rupa' combination.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What are the two types of meaning of Buddha's 'No-soul theory'?

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Q 10: What is soul according to Buddha ?

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8.8 LET US SUM UP

- According to Buddhism everything is impermanent in this universe.
- Buddha's theory of impermanence was developed by his followers as the theory of Momentariness.
- For Buddha life is nothing but only a series of manifestations of becoming and extinctions.
- Everything is changeable, impermanent and flux.
- The law of universal causation with its corollary of the eternal continuity of becoming is the chief contribution of Buddhism to Indian thought.
- According to Buddhism permanent existence is self-contradiction.