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Doctrine Of Pratityasamutpada In Buddhist Philosophy

Gourav Dwivedi

Master Of Arts (Philosophy)

Government Maharaja Autonomous

P.G. College, Chhatarpur,(M.P.)

There is a spontaneous and universal law of causation which conditions the appearance or all events, mental and physical. This law (dharma or dhamma) works automatically without the help of any conscious guide. In accordance with it, whenever a particular event (the cause) appears, it is followed by another particular event (the effect). "On getting the cause, the effect arises." The existence of everything is conditional, dependent on a cause. Nothing happens fortuitously or by chance. This is called the theory of dependent origination (Pratityasamutpada in Sanskrit and Paticcasamuppada in Pali).

This doctrine is contained in the Second Noble Truth which gives us the cause of suffering, and in the Third Noble Truth which shows the cessation of suffering. However, Dr. Sibnath Sarma is of the opinion that there is room for doubting as to whether Pratityasamutpada falls within the Second Noble Truth or leads to the Third, or the other way round. Sometimes it appears that all the Four Noble Truths are merely the corollaries of Pratityasamutpada. This problem could be solved if we could precisely know what was the exact enlightenment that dawned upon Gautama when he became the Buddha - an issue on which the Buddhist scriptures simply do not agree."

The Meaning of Pratityasamutpada:

Pratityasamutpada, etymologically means origin of something on getting something. "Samutpada means appearance or arising (pradurbhav) and Pratitya means after getting (Prati + i + ya); combining the two we find, arising after getting (something)." It may also mean that every object or being is subject to dissolution. Those dissolved appear again and again. The root T stands for going, so that the barest meaning of Pratityasamutpada turns out to be that going or getting of something produces some other thing, that something is produced when some other thing has occurred. Here, then, the production of one thing is dependent on the occurrence of some other thing which is naturally its antecedent."Hence, the English version of Pratityasamutpada is "dependent origination" or "dependent causation". The relation between the antecedent and the

consequence is one of dependence. However, the exact nature of this dependence is obscure. Buddhist scholars, perhaps, have not given proper attention to this aspect of their philosophy.

The Buddha was not ready to accept anything dogmatically. He was very well-versed in Brahmanic philosophy and the idealism of the Upanishads. He was also aware of materialistic philosophy. He practiced yoga. However none of the above could satisfy him. He wanted to develop a philosophy which is undogmatic and practical.

The Buddha was not interested in the deep metaphysical questions which are very difficult to answer. For him an effort to answer these questions is a useless exercise. His whole attempt was to discover a law by means of which the practical problems of life and existence could be solved. He did it by discovering the principle of Pratityasamutpada. This view, as Buddha himself makes clear, avoids two extreme views: on the one hand, eternalism or the theory that some reality eternally exists independently of any condition and on the other hand, nihilism of the theory that something existing can cease to be. Buddha claims therefore to hold the middle view, namely, that everything that be perceive possesses an existence but is dependent on something else, and that thing in turn does not perish without leaving some effect.

Buddha attaches so much importance to the understanding of this theory that he calls this the dhamma. "Let us put aside the question of the beginning and the end", he says, "I will teach you the dhamma: That being thus, this comes to be. From the coming to be of that, this arises. That being absent, this does not happen. From the cessation of that, this ceases." "He who sees the paticcasamuppada sees the Dhamma, and he who sees the Dhamma, sees the paticcasamuppada." It is again compared to a staircase, by mounting which one can look round on the world and see it with the eye of a Buddha. It is the failure to grasp this standpoint which, Buddha asserts, is the cause of all our trouble.

The formula of Pratityasamutpada is beautifully explained in the Mahavagga:

"From ignorance come conformations (Sankhara), from conformations comes consciousness (Vinnana); from consciousness come name and corporeal form; from name and corporeal form come the six fields; from the six fields comes contact (between the senses and their objects); from contact comes sensation; from sensation comes thirst (or desire); from thirst comes clinging (to existence: upadana); from clinging (to existence) comes being (I bhava); from being comes birth; from birth come old age and death, pain and lamentation, suffering, anxiety and despair. This is the origin of the whole realm of suffering. But if ignorance be removed by the complete extinction of desire, this brings about the removal of conformations; by the removal of conformations, consciousness is removed; by the removal of consciousness, name and corporeal form are removed; by the removal of name and corporeal form, the six fields are removed; by the removal of the six fields, contact (between the senses and their objects) is removed; by the removal of contact, sensation is removed; by the removal of sensation, thirst is removed; by the removal of thirst, the clinging (to existence) is removed; by the removal of clinging (to existence),

being is removed; by the removal of being, birth is removed; by the removal of the birth, old age and death, pain and lamentation, suffering, anxiety, and despair are removed. This is the removal of the whole realm of suffering.

This causal chain may also be explained in the following way:

Past Life:

1. Ignorance (avidya)
2. Impressions of Karmic forces (samskara)

Present Life:

3. Initial Consciousness of the embryo (vijnana)
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 (trana)
9. Clinging to this enjoyment (upadana)
10. Will to be born (bhava)

After Life:

11. Birth or Rebirth (jati)
12. Old age and death (jara-marana)

Later Buddhism, as Rhys Davids notes, does not pay much heed to this theory. But Buddha himself says that this theory is very profound. We have seen already how this theory is applied to the solution of the question regarding the origin of misery, as well as to that regarding the removal of misery. We shall see just now how profound in its many-sided implications this theory is in some other respects as well.

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