

The Philosophical Trends in Buddhism

Dr. R. Gopalakrisnan, M.A., Ph.D.
Professor and Head, (Retired),
Department of Philosophy,
University of Madras, Chennai—600 005
+91 98411 71138
Email: gopalki_rls@yahoo.com

Abstract

In this paper a study has been made to bring to light the philosophical truths found in Buddhism, an atheistic religion in the world. Originally, the Buddha was a social reformer and an ethical teacher. He refused to answer to the metaphysical queries, but preserved silence to all intellectual inquiries, since they would never serve the purpose in alleviating the afflictions of mankind. His primary concern was to remove the sufferings of mankind and his ultimate concern was to make man absolutely free from any kind of painful existence, which experience is known as the state of nirvana. Buddha was considered as the first analytic thinker in the philosophical circle since he analysed the cause for suffering carefully and systematically without any conscious philosophical activity. In the absence of an absolute being called God and a permanent substance called soul the Buddha was successful in establishing a religion without metaphysical speculations. However, in his approach in analysing the cause for suffering through twelve links, he gave room for certain unique philosophical ideologies such as the theory of momentariness (*ksanika vada*), theory of no soul (*nairatmya vada*), law of karma, the famous middle path etc.

All his preaching have been edited and codified as *Pitaka* works. After his departure from this mortal coil as an immortal and enlightened person, his profound wisdom withstood the test of time and the socio-political climates. Especially his final utterance viz. ‘be a light unto yourself and work out your salvation diligently’ provoked the thinking of the wisdom seekers and opened the floodgates of rational skills among his followers. That statement was interpreted in a two-fold way particularly the term ‘your’ was interpreted as ‘my-self alone’ and the entire ‘humanity’. Based on this division emerged two broader philosophical sections known as Mahayana and Hinayana. Under these two sections four major philosophical schools were developed, two to each section, known as Madhyamika, Yogacara, Sautrantika and Vaibhasika. Though each school vary in their philosophical standpoint and criticise the other schools from logical perspective before establishing their Truths, each school relied firmly on the original teachings of the Master as the real source materials, of course with a manifold interpretations. Thus the true teachings of the Master resulted in multifarious truths both implicitly and explicitly.

The net result of these doctrinal expositions of scholars resulted in the organisation of several conferences dealing with clinching arguments, worthwhile debates and powerful discussions and Buddhism as a religious philosophy. Buddha was made as a God of worship who would grant solace to the earthly tormented souls, five different subjective

qualities known as the *skandhas* were substituted for the soul, several monasteries were constructed all over the globe to preserve, promote, protect and patronize the ideals and practices of Buddhism. In the academic world also this school of thought was included in the curriculum to infuse the vision and mission of Buddhism.

Key words: Noble truths, Enlightenment, Nirvana, Suffering, Middle path, Hinayana, Mahayana, Philosophical Schools, Monasteries, Compassion, Wisdom

Introduction

It is a universal truth that Gautama the Buddha, the ‘Enlightened Person’ did not build any system of thought with mere speculative reasoning especially to elucidate the barren metaphysical matters. His profound silence to all metaphysical or rather supramental discussions shows his unique and exceptional wisdom in seeking remedies to all human melodies. Instead of indulging in unwanted argumentation on matters not related to human existence and for the redemption of mankind, the Buddha insisted not only upon his followers, ardent admirers, but also the laity to resort to the ways and means of alleviating human agonies in this planet. He wanted to eliminate superstitions, useless discussions and irresponsible human style of living. He brought forth rational religion with humanistic touch, practical ethics with noble truths and simple principles of life with higher goals. However, his messages to mankind are not without any philosophical overtones. All his preaching, discourses, advices, instructions, discussions etc. contain implicit philosophical claims, since philosophy extensively deals with the perennial problems of life in the realms of social, political, moral, religious and metaphysical. In Indian Philosophy Buddhism has been classified under the heterodox system (*nastika darsana*), not for denying the existence of a Supreme Reality namely God, but for rejecting the authority of the Vedas since they gave utmost importance to ritualism, along with Carvaka and Jainism.

Primarily the Buddha was an ethical teacher and a social reformer rather than a philosopher. Indian philosophy, on the whole, is seriously concerned with logic and epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and religion. However the main focus of Buddhism is ethics and religion, in unique terms. For, it has been characterised as soulless ethics and Godless religion. To understand this stand point, we have to analyse the concept of momentariness—*kshanikavada*—which is an offshoot of the second noble truth viz. there is a cause for suffering leading to the theory of dependent origination—*pratityasamudpada*. Each aspect of human existence ranging from biological to psychological, birth, death, past, present and future lives etc. is based on each one of the twelve chains and the firm conclusion is ‘nothing is permanent and everything is momentary’. This fundamental presupposition forms the basis for the philosophical trends of early Buddhism that there is no permanent and abiding soul (Atman) subsisting in the psycho-physical organism of a human. Similarly there is no existence for a Supreme Being called God as a ‘person’. The rationale behind such postulation is substantiated from the sermons of the Master: “**Philosophy purifies none, peace alone does.**”

“Surely do I know much more than what I have told you? And wherefore, my disciples, have I not told you that? Because, my disciples, it brings you no profit, it does not conduce to progress in holiness, because it does not lead to the turning from the earthly, to the subjection of all desire, to the cessation of the transitory, to peace, to knowledge, to illumination, to Nirvana.”

“Two things only, my disciples, do I teach—misery and the cessation of misery. Human existence is full of misery and pain. If, instead, we bother about barren metaphysical speculations, we behave like that foolish man whose heart is pierced by a poisonous arrow and who, instead of taking it out while away his time on idle speculation about the origin, the size, the entice metal, the maker and the shooter of the arrow”¹

From the above citations, we can imbibe the truth that the Buddha flourished at a time when superficial and superfluous conceptions of human life were predominantly prevalent. According to the historical accounts, prior to the Buddhist era, the Vedic period witnessed excessive ritualism, continued sacrifices which were affordable exclusively by the affluent people; hierarchy in human livelihood based on the professions leading to social stratification as lower, higher and the highest paved the way for caste menace in the Indian sub-continent. Exorbitant superstitious beliefs prevented people from rationalising natural events which attitude culminated in the worship of many deities and their adoration culminated in social and religious diversifications. The priest class was kept in high esteem as the most dominant class and the ill treatment to the lower strata of the masses added to the agony of common men. In the religious arena, besides rituals and sacrifices, the chanting of holy syllables (mantras) was in terse language whose connotations were difficult to be comprehended by ordinary citizens and they also could not repeat the same. In the philosophical scenario a number of pathways such as action, devotion, yoga, wisdom, etc. were treated as mutually exclusive terms and were suggested as the means for salvation. Each school of thought advocated its specific path and simultaneously denigrating and degrading other means for liberation which intellectually confused the truth seekers to put into successful practice.

At a stage when every section of the society was dissatisfied with the prevailing conditions of life and lived without any right objective in life, the Enlightened Buddha emerged on the stage with the principle of simple living with high thinking leading to extensive humanism and systematic religious disciplines. Any man who is engulfed in sorrows the queries on the nature of the self, the characteristic features of God, nature of the phenomenal world seem to be a mere folly or at best wastage of time. The Buddha pertinently put forth ten questions which have been called “*Avyaktani*” in Pali literature which are as follows:

1. Is the world eternal?
2. Is it non-eternal?
3. Is it finite?
4. Is it infinite?

¹ Sharma, C.D., *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 70.

- 5 Is the body and the self the same?
- 6 Is the self, different from the body?
- 7 Does the Tathagatha take birth again after death?
- 8 Does he not take birth after death?
- 9 Is there rebirth and also no rebirth?
- 10 Are the rebirth and no rebirth both false? ²

As the responses to these questions from the philosophical perspective would not yield any undivided solution, and from the practical standpoint the answers would be futile, the Buddha was reluctant to respond and has not discussed them. However, the discourse, preaching etc. of the Buddha are not without philosophical implications. The doctrine of no-self (anatta), theory of impermanence (kshanika), no-god theory, the law of karma and re-birth are some of the philosophical ideas envisaged by him. Since the Buddha's teachings were of oral transmission, we have to rely upon the compilations, interpretations, commentaries, amplifications, etc. made by his disciples much later. Long after the demise of the Master, The Hinayana literature in Pali (the Tripitakas) was compiled. "Some Buddhists who felt that it did not present the real teachings of the master and contained many horrible misinterpretations of Buddha's teachings, called themselves Mahayanis, dubbing the others as Hinayanis and had a separate literature in Sanskrit"³

The main focus of the Buddha was to prepare the people to lead a spiritual life originating in consciousness of miseries, while the consummation was the discovery of eliminating suffering. In this task he stood as the pioneer in offering certain practical solution for freedom from suffering. Also he was criticised for advocating pessimism since he commences his ideology with the darker side of life. However this critical remark did not withstand since he did not stop merely with the presentation of his thesis, but also offers the synthesis, besides anti-thesis, for the alleviation of human afflictions. Though the doctrine of the Buddha commences with pessimism, it passes through the robust type of optimism and culminates in eternal pragmatism. It is due to the pragmatic significance of his messages he discovered the truths of life through the famous Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold path. To quote him "It is by such a discussion that one can get some gain, it is these that detachment, destruction of passion, the end of miseries, mental peace, knowledge, wisdom and nirvana may be possible"⁴

The essence of the eight-fold path can be condensed in the following three highly practicable codes:

- a) Real Knowledge (prajna) and
- b) Undisturbed concentration (samadhi)
- c) Good conduct (sheela)

It is to be noted here that each one of the doctrine is inter linked. For instance, good conduct is seldom possible without perfect knowledge which is higher than intellectual knowledge. Similarly spiritual knowledge is to culminate in right conduct. Thus the

² Sharma, R.N., *Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, (Agra: Oriental Publishing House, 1986), p.121.

³ Sharma, C.D., *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p.77.

⁴ Sharma, R.N., *Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, p. 122.

Buddha treats both sheela and prajna as complimentary and not contradictory which is really in accordance with the tradition of Indian Philosophy. On the other hand prajna assists the aspirant in annihilating sexual tendencies and ignorant temperaments before awakening deep rooted concentration, i.e. samadhi. Perfection of concentration can be achieved provided the aspirant adheres seriously to the first seven laws in the realm of eight-fold path. Subsequently, pursuing the path of concentration systematically leads to the evolution of true knowledge and right conduct. Meditation on physical defects or bad feeling, resorting to friendliness towards every one, showing sympathy towards the miserable ones and keeping aloofness towards the wicked ones are the essential requirements of attaining nirvana or the highest state of tranquillity. All the above four qualities are called 'Brahma Vihara'. As non-violence has the pre-requisite of both sympathy and friendliness, the Buddha considers non-violence as the significant virtue.

The conception of nirvana cannot be construed as the end of life based on its etymological connotation viz. 'extinguished'. It simply means the extinction of the fires of passions, avarice, jealousy, anger, doubt, etc. Also a few impurities emerging in the mind like sexual, ignorant and affective tendencies are vanquished. Nirvana does not imply abstention from action but from the attachment, repulsion and efforts conjoined to action. To put it more precisely that in the state of nirvana the body exists, but the craving through the body is destroyed. "Having once attained spiritual consciousness permanently, there is no longer any necessity for persisting in a state of concentration and there is no longer any fear of limitation due to actions. Actually according to Buddha, attachment, repulsion etc. when present, cause the action to become a limitation. In its absence there are no impressions created and no limitations like rebirth. As in the case of seeds, the plants grow only when the seed is fresh and not fried when sown, so in the case of actions. Actions performed without attachment do not cause any restrictions. In nirvana the individual's ego is destroyed because its substratum, pain and longing etc. have been completely eliminated. Nirvana is in every conceivable aspect, a state of unrestricted calm. A free person has perfect insight, perfect impassion, pure peace, perfect control, calm mind, calm word and calm actions"⁵

The thought contents in Buddhism are not mere speculation for the sake of enriching one's knowledge. Rather, right knowledge is rightfully valued by the Buddhists not as an aim in itself, but as a means to attain deliverance from miseries. As a result of reducing Buddhist teaching to a coherent system, scholars have gone astray which resulted in great difficulties in understanding the concept of nirvana. They construed the idea of nirvana as a negative entity since they had been misled by many utterances in the scriptures. A proper understanding of nirvana will make us conclude that it is not a metaphysical concept but a soteriological Absolute since it offers comforts and solace in final redemption especially to those who want to obtain deliverance from the world. Reasoning can seldom be of any use in comprehending the concept of nirvana, but it is subjected to experience. The experience of nirvana is purely subjective and hence it is ineffable, i.e. cannot be communicated to others. For, no language can adequately describe the merging of the individual into the

⁵Ibid, p. 125.

Absolute. However, the Buddhists could not refrain from expressing the nature of the Absolute in positive terms like every mystic. This attitude of the Buddhists had paved the way for many interpretations, sometimes wrong ones which are contrary to the non-communicable nature. These kinds of positive explanations of nirvana cannot vouchsafe that it is an ontological reality or even a kind of paradise.

“In order to understand such terms as “highest bliss”, “the other shore”, the refuge”, “the goal”, which terms with many others have been used to indicate nirvana, one has to realise the problem which the mystic has to face when desiring to speak of the Absolute. His experience is of such an overwhelming intensity that he feels himself completely transformed by it. In comparison everything else dwindles to nothing. He cannot but remember continually this supreme moment. How great is his desire to tell others of the felicity which he has felt! He knows that no words are capable of describing the ineffable content of his experience, for language is bound to the earth, to human existence. Therefore the mystic makes use of an indirect way of expression. He cannot say what the Absolute is, but he can say what it is not. Its most essential characteristic is its fundamental difference from all things mundane. In this world everybody is subject to death: Nirvana, however, is said to be immortal place (*amatapadam* or *amatam padam*),⁶ From birth to death life is suffering (*dukkha*); Nirvana on the contrary is supreme bliss (*paramam sukham*),⁷ free from birth and becoming (*ajata, abhuta*)⁸. Empirical life offers no shelter, no refuge; Nirvana is called the island (*dipa*),⁹ the shelter (*lena*), the protection (*tana*), the refuge (*sarana*),¹⁰ and the goal (*parayana*).¹¹ Life is impurity; Nirvana is purity (*suddhi*).¹² Many other terms are used in connection with Nirvana, but none of these words contains a description or definition of Nirvana. They only point to the other shore (*para*).¹³ If we subject these terms to a careful examination, we see that they convey either an antithesis to the conditions of *samsara* or a negation of these. For instance, bliss is the antithesis of suffering. In human life or even in a heavenly paradise no bliss exists, because in these states no everlasting bliss is possible and according to the Buddhists everything that has an end is suffering. On earth the immortal and the unborn are unthinkable because here below one perceives the universality of birth and death. Bliss, immortality and the unborn are words that do not correspond to real things which a human being can know or see. The mystic who has experienced the state of Nirvana makes use of these words exactly for this reason. However inadequate they may be, they are the only means which language can offer him to express that which essentially cannot be put into words because words are only capable of denoting the realities of empirical life”¹⁴

⁶ *Dhammapada* 21, *Udanavarga* IV.1.

⁷ *Majj. Nik.* I: 508, *Dhammapada* 203-204, *Udanavarga* XXVI, 6-7.

⁸ *Ud.*: 80, *Itiv.*37.

⁹ *Samy.Nik.* IV: 372.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Samy. Nik.* IV: 373.

¹² *Samy.Nik.*IV: 372.

¹³ *Samy. Nik.* IV: 369.

¹⁴ Jong. J. W. De., *The Absolute in Buddhist Thought: Essays in Philosophy*, (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1962), pp. 57-58.

The last utterance of the Buddha before he left the mortal coil and attained immortality, viz. “all the constituents of being are transitory; work out your salvation with diligence.”¹⁵ Formed the basis for the division of Buddhism as two major sects known as the Mahayana and Hinayana. The Buddha would not have thought that his final statement would have resulted in the emergence of philosophical schools with multifarious concepts and doctrines. However, both the sects did not deviate from the original teachings of the Master, but their interpretations yielded to many philosophical schools. Thus the later Buddhism vouch safe the veracity that Buddhism is not merely a religion but contains plenty of philosophical doctrines as well. Particularly the term ‘your’ in his final statement gave room for two-fold connotation i.e., ‘my self alone’ (Hinayana) and ‘the entire human race’ (Mahayana). The fundamental difference between these two major sects is seriously concerned with the idea of liberation. According to the former (Theravada), liberation is negative and egoistic—cessation of my suffering alone. Allegorically, it is a small country boat which can accommodate only one person. On the other hand Mahayana reinforces the idea of salvation as positive and altruistic i.e. not negation of sorrows but a positive state of blissful existence. In Indian Philosophy, except the Carvaka, all the schools advocate that liberation implies the absence of pain culminating into a state of bliss—ananda.

Under these two sects,

1. the Mahayana promoted two schools known as
 - a. Madhyamika—Shunyavada—nihilism
 - b. Yogacara—Vjnanavada—subjective idealism

1.a Madhyamika or sunyavada:

This school envisages that reality is to be understood in terms of the Middle path thereby avoiding the extremes of existence and non-existence, affirmation and negation and eternalism and nihilism. Though the literal meaning of the term ‘*sunya*’ is ‘void’ or negative abyss, it significantly connotes ‘indescribable’ since reality is neither existent nor non-existent. As it transcends all intellectual comprehensions, it is designated as the Absolute, and is indescribable and is devoid of plurality. Jaina philosophy reality is considered as relatively indescribable (*syad avaktavyam*) – relatively it exists, does not exist, both exists and does not exist, but indescribable.

Nagarjuna, the eminent philosopher of this school, had promulgated two kinds of truths, namely, empirical truth (*samvritti satya*) which is based on ignorance, attachment, doubt etc. which becomes transient and perishable; the other is the transcendental truth (*paramartha satya*) which is absolute and is to be experienced leading to nirvana. According to him, those who do not know the distinction between these truths cannot understand the subtle secrets of Buddha’s teachings. In the Upanishads also two kinds of truths are advocated such as *vyavaharika* (waking state) and *paramartha* (transcendental or pure existence) which have been developed by Sankara with another term *pratibhasika* (dream or illusory experience contradicted by actual experience in the waking state).

¹⁵Mahaparinirvana Sutra VI: 1.

Nagarjuna establishes that from the transcendental stand point the doctrine of dependent origination is itself nirvana. Without the application of deduction or induction it has been stated that there is neither negation nor origination, nor annihilation, nor eternity, nor sunya and all the multiplicity dwindles into nirvana. As cause and effect are relative, but only having empirical validity, motion and perception become impossible. No substance can exist and hence no qualities.

The views expressed by Nagarjuna to substantiate the philosophy of Madhyamika system are the exact replica of Sankara's philosophy who has been characterised as the 'prachanna bauddha'—Buddha in disguise. The only distinction is that Sankara admits the Nirguna Brahman as the only reality which is none other than Atman. Sunyavada has been called by Sankara as nihilism (Vainasika) since it is contrary to all proofs. But according to Nagarjuna, 'sunya' is relative and hence there is no eternal positive absolute or absolute nihilism. Thus Madhyamika Buddhism strictly adheres to the Middle path. For, Nagarjuna attempts to prove the non-existence of everything from the transcendental point of view and so reality is neither eternal nor non-eternal. But from the

1.b Yogacara School---Vijnanavada.

According to this school of thought under Madhyamika Buddhism, all things exist only in consciousness and the aspirants can know this truth only through several yogic practices before attaining Buddhahood. Here we can notice the transition from metaphysical analysis of reality to psychological realization. The unique conception of this school is '*alayavijnana*' which means the *citta* (the intuitive mind) which pervades all living beings. This trend reinforces the view that both the external and internal worlds are the manifestations of the *alaya*. It insists that through spiritual experience the aspirant will transcend dualism of subject and object and has to identify with consciousness. Reality is *Dharmakaya*—the perfect pure consciousness. Name, form and formless attributes are nothing but the mere transformation of pure consciousness. Hence external things become non-existent since *vijnana* is the only reality. Vijnana has two kinds of consciousness viz. personal consciousness (*pravrtti vijnana*) and absolute consciousness (*alaya vijnana*). The followers of this system do not accept the empirical self as ultimately real as pure consciousness or universal consciousness is the only reality. It is self-enlightened.

Some scholars equate *Vijnanavada* with subjective idealism of Berkeley, but others deny this contention and hold that this philosophical school subscribes to absolute idealism. Strictly speaking there is hardly much difference between *alaya vijnana* and the self as developed in the Upanisads. Only the empirical world is momentary and the Reality is neither momentary nor eternal. But from the empirical standpoint it is eternal, immortal and permanent. The world is the manifestation of the *alaya vijnana*. The major dictum of this school is that whatever is eternal is bliss and whatever is momentary is misery. As *vijnana* or consciousness alone is eternal and imperishable, it is blissful.

2. Hinayana has developed two schools known as:

- a. Sautrantika—representative realism—bhahyanumeyavada
- b. Vaibhasika—direct realism—bhahyapratyaksyavada

2.a Sautrantika School—*Bahyanumeya vada*

Under Hinayana division, the philosophical sect that maintains that reality of the external world is known through inference is Sautrantika. This school is based on the Sutta Pitaka scriptures. The scholars belonging to this school deny the theories of non-existence of external objects and all knowledge is in the consciousness. According to this school of thought, there is no identity between the object and its knowledge since both exist simultaneously. For instance, while perceiving a book, we experience the existence of the book outside of us and the presence of its knowledge in us. If there is no distinction between the book and the perceiver, one would say, ‘I am the book’ which is absurd and awkward hence the object is different from knowledge. Again, there is no direct perception of the objects, but only the knowledge of their appearance. Only through inferential knowledge we are able to distinguish among the objects of perception.

This school denies the idea of causality, time etc. and believe in the self-evident nature of knowledge. To them the world has no existence before origination and after destruction and hence it is not eternal. Nirvana is a state of absence of defilements or *klesas* and the destruction of *kasayas* (impurities). Actually nirvana means ‘to be extinguished like the lamp. All the dharmas or subtle elements are totally annihilated. As a result, the aspirant attains the stage in which there is no klesa in the attainment of any new dharma. This school of thought is known as representative or indirect realism—*bahynumeyavada*.

2.b Vaibhasika School—*Direct Realism*

Another Hinayana school is *Vaibhasika* School which accepts the reality of both consciousness and matter which constitute the dharmas. All perceptible things are real and hence there is no eternal soul which is imperceptible. All the objects in the world are constituted of atomic compounds. Again, all perceptible objects are the conglomeration of imperceptible atoms. According to this school, if all the external things are known through inference as explained by the Sautrantika School, then nothing can be known by perception and the epistemological device – perception will be a misnomer. Further, to maintain that all the external things are inferred to obtain knowledge is self-contradictory. In the absence of perception there can be no relation of concomitance between the major premise and the minor premise without which inference becomes seldom possible. The existence of objects is accepted and they are conceived only through perception.

As the sense organs are material they try to know their respective objects actually without contacting them. In such knowledge no external link between the sense organs and the objects is perceived. Due to certain defects in the sense organs, there may be difference in the knowledge attained through them, By coming into contact with the external world, a kind of *samskara* occurs in the sense organs, By these *samskara* the *chitta* is enlightened and there is the manifestation of consciousness in it. Then arise in the *chitta*, different types of knowledge. According to this School of thought, a *pramana* has been defined as the way of getting knowledge directly. Both perception- *pratyaksa* – and inference-

anumana are considered as right knowledge (samyagajñāna) and through these two all the human values (puruṣārthas) are attained.

The world subtly consists of skandha (change), āyatana (substratum of knowledge) and dhatu (subtle elements). The so called soul—jīva is made up of five skandhas which are as follows:

1. Rupa—physical body of the jīva.
2. Vedana—feelings of pleasure, pain, etc.
3. Sañña—various types of knowledge.
4. Saṃskāra—tendencies born out of the previous birth.
5. Vijñāna—consciousness

Āyatana are twelve in number including the sense organs, mind and their six objects. The Buddhist thinkers do not admit the soul since it is not perceived by the senses nor is it the object of any senses. Dhatu—subtle elements existing independently, twelve āyatanas and six types of consciousness. Nirvāṇa is the final attainment made possible to an arhata through the path of truth. It is one, independent, eternal and substratum of knowledge. Neither distinction nor division is allowed in it. It is both uncaused and the nature of existence—bhava rūpa.

Conclusion

Buddhism has been characteristically defined as ‘Nirvāṇa Buddhism’ since the ultimate attainment is nirvāṇa through mystic experience. The idea of silence insisted by the madhyamikas is an indication to realise the ineffable nature of mystic experience and their seemingly nihilistic reasoning are only meant of clear the way for their mystic experience.

The Yogacara School, with its emphasis on consciousness alone as the only reality, offers promptly to the process of purification of the inner being which is an essential requirement for the progression of mystic experience. This idea can be testified by citing from the Buddhist texts the following:

“To abstain from all evil, to do good, and to purify one’s mind, is the teaching of Buddhism”¹⁶

The rest of the entire teachings of Buddhism, whether the early Buddhists teachings or the latter philosophical investigations by the scholarly monks of Buddhism centre round this phenomenal doctrine of the experience of nirvāṇa through the way of ‘vision’ and the way of ‘meditation’. However all the commentators are really indebted to their Master, the noble Buddha for initiating philosophical speculations through his hectic contemplations and relevant revelations? What are all the metaphysical views seriously viewed by the Buddha were gradually introduced with logical justification, epistemological explanation, ethical ratification, religious affiliation and social concern. The Buddha himself was revered, venerated and even adored as God incarnated Person and was offered prayers, rituals and respectful worships. Five elements-- objective and

¹⁶ Dhammapada 183, Udanavarga XXVIII, I, Digha Nik. II, 49, Mahāvastu III: 420.

subjective-- known as the skandhas such as rupa, vedana, sanjna, samskara and vijnana have been substituted for the human soul (jiva). This approach resulted in the establishment of a glorified religious system of thought throughout the world paving the way for academic discussions, debates and spreading the messages of the master in a manifold way. Several social, cultural, religious and educational institutions emerged to patronise, promote, preserve and protect the ideals and praxis of Buddhist tradition. Monasteries also grew to train the monks to make this religious philosophy as a living faith. Even kingdoms embraced Buddhism and gave royal patronage to Buddhism.

References

- Sharma, C.D. *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987.
- Sharma, R.N. *Essentials of Indian Philosophy*. Agra: Oriental Publishing House, 1986.
- Jong. J. W. De. *The Absolute in Buddhist Thought: Essays in Philosophy*. Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1962.