

Re-vitalizing Law of Causation in the context of Contemporary World Economy

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Abstract:

Buddhism or Buddhist philosophy incorporates the teachings of Gautam Buddha, which mainly involves the system of logic and dialectic to find out the reality of all worldly phenomena and human life. The Buddha analysed and questioned the contradictions of existing social and spiritual thoughts of his time that gave birth to new ideas or paths leading to proper Salvation. The Buddha identified *Aniccā/Anitya* (Impermanence), *Dukkā/Duḥkha* (suffering) and *Anattā/Anātman* (No-self), the *Trilakshan* as three characteristics of existence. *Anitya* means the impermanent nature of all matters and phenomena (life, object, idea etc). *Dukkha* means suffering, the world which is full of suffering i.e. from birth to death, whatever lies within is suffering, which is also impermanent in nature. *Anātman* means No-self, there is no independent self. According to Buddha the karmic actions colour the human consciousness which is responsible for all the activities that we perform and reap results accordingly. If a being is guided with right knowledge, it leads to perform good karmic activities and vice-versa. If there is something which controls our life and can be manipulated, then every being should be perfect and equal in size? However, it is clearly not so. Hence, karma and right knowledge are the driving force behind every fate of humans or all kinds of living creatures in nature.

Thus, in order to understand the theory behind these regulations of different karmic forces, it seems appropriate to revitalize the understanding of the Buddhist theory of Law of causation or the Doctrine of Dependent origination or *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (in Pali). Therefore, this Paper is yet an attempt to elaborate the doctrine of dependent origination in detailed manner and underline its relevance as an essential for contemporary world economy in order to achieve the Buddhist ideal of peace and prosperity in contemporary time by keeping in view the Primary text like *Mahāvagga* and several other secondary sources.

Keywords: *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, Buddhist economics, world economics, suffering, peace and prosperity.

Introduction

According to Buddhism, what constitutes a being is five aggregates the *Pañcaskandha* which are *Rūpa* (matter), *Vedanā* (feelings/sensation), *Samjñā* (perceptions), *Samskāra* (volitions) and *Vijñāna* (consciousness). *Rūpa* (matter) is the derivatives of earth (Pṛitvi), Water (Apo), Fire (Tejo) and Air (Vayu) elements with their transformational properties such as; solidity, fluidity, heat, and motion, which works depending upon the natural way of transformation in the Nature or in other words, it is the physical form of matter which we perceive through our sensory agencies (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and skin/body). The derivatives of our sensory agencies produce sensation or an image of the nature of matter which is either pleasant or unpleasant. It is the result of the mind when connected to this physical world. The next is a matter of perception; unlike the raw feeling of sensation, perception is the recognition and identification of what is being experienced, allowing us to label and conceptualize objects based on their characteristics. After that, there come volitions which are also known as mental formations. Volitions are the intentional deeds performed by an individual, especially the mental one. It is also known as karma, and it is these volitional actions that condition and shape our future mental constructs and experiences. At last, consciousness which is conditioned or dependent on the above-mentioned four aggregates is the bare awareness that registers the presence of an object, whether it's a sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, or a mental phenomenon.

According to Buddhism, the notion of permanence of anything is rejected; everything is conditioned, including mind, matter, and being. These five aggregates, or what constitute a being, when clung to, are suffering, which is known as *Dukkha*, and this suffering is endless like a river stream which is flowing continuously. With the nature of an object, consciousness also transforms, and so does the suffering. The consciousness which leads to attachment with worldly matters and phenomena does so through the arising of craving and clinging, which is suffering. So, like matter and consciousness which are conditioned, suffering is also conditioned.

Buddha elaborated the conditioned arising of suffering and the way out in the Doctrine of Dependent Origination, *Paṭiccasamuppāda* in Pali and *Pratītyasamutpāda* in Sanskrit. It is also known as the law of causation. In this great teaching of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, the Buddha describes the *Dwadasnidan chakra*, and that explains how a being is trapped in worldly phenomenon or suffering, and also the way out of it.

Historical background

The historical origination of the Doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* can be found or mentioned in Bodhi-Katha, in the Mahakhandaka-Vagga of Mahāvagga text of Vinay-Pitaka. The Mahāvagga opens the account from the day *after* the Buddha immediately *realized* the great enlightenment under the bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya. Out of the total of ten chapters, Bodhi Katha is the first one (mentioned chapter) in which the theory of dependent origination is mentioned.

The account opens as, at that time the blessed Buddha dwelt at Uruvelā, on the bank of the river Neraṅgarā at the foot of the Bodhi tree (tree of wisdom), just after he had become Sambuddha. The Blessed One sat cross-legged at the foot of the Bodhi tree uninterruptedly during seven days, enjoying the bliss of emancipation.

Then the Blessed One (at the end of these seven days) during the first watch of the night fixed his mind upon the Chain of Causation, in both direct and in reverse order.

DIRECT ORDER - Ignorance (*avijjā*) springs *forth* the mental dispositions (*samkhāras*); from the *samkhāras* springs consciousness (*viññāna*); from consciousness springs name-and-form (*nāma-rupa*); from name-and-form spring the six provinces (*salayatana*); from the six provinces springs contact (*phassa*); from contact springs sensation (*vedanā*); from sensation springs thirst (*tanhā/trsnā*); from thirst springs attachment (*upādāna*); from attachment springs existence (*bhava*); from existence springs birth (*jāti*); from birth springs old Age (*jarā-mara*) and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair. Such is the origination of this whole mass of suffering.

REVERSE ORDER - by the destruction of ignorance, which consists in the complete absence of lust, the *samkhāras* are destroyed; by the destruction of the *samkhāras* consciousness is destroyed; by the destruction of consciousness name-and-form are destroyed; by the destruction of name-and-form the six provinces are destroyed; by the destruction of the six provinces contact is destroyed; by the destruction of contact sensation is destroyed; by the destruction of sensation thirst is destroyed; by the destruction of thirst attachment is destroyed; by the destruction of attachment existence is destroyed; by the destruction

of existence birth is destroyed; by the destruction of birth old Age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair are destroyed. Such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.

When the real nature of the things is clear to the ardent or meditating brahman, all the doubts fade away, since he realizes what is the actual nature and what its cause. Since he realizes the actual nature of things, he stands dispelling the host of Mara like the sun illuminates the sky.

Dependent origination

The Four Noble Truths-Dukkha (suffering), Samudāya (the arising or origin of Dukkha), Nirodha (the cessation of Dukkha), Magga (the way leading to the cessation of Dukkha)-and the Doctrine of the law of causation are the foci from which Buddhist philosophy is derived. Buddha realized that the cycle of birth and rebirth, which is known as Bhāvacakka or the wheel of becoming, is suffering. If a person or being finds a way out from this *Cakra*, suffering will come to an end. In the Doctrine of Dependent Origination, the Buddha explains the in-between elements, *i.e.*, the Nidanas, from birth to rebirth, which hold a sentient as well as an ordinary being in the cycle of repeated becoming.

This doctrine is explained with the help of the Dwadasnidanchakra, the chain of twelve Nidanas of causation and arising. The arising of each one is conditioned on the previous one. The Buddha described this conditioned arising as:

When there is this, that is. With the arising of this, that arises. When this is not, neither is that. With the cessation of this, that ceases.

The twelve links or Nidanas as mentioned above are the results of our appearance or entrance in this World, which are regulated both on an individual and collective basis or by the volitional activities of all living creatures (including humans) and Nature itself. Humans, especially under the grip of Ignorance, bind deeply with worldly pleasures that eventually gave birth to a false sense of self, soul, ego, attachment, *etc.*, which *sow* the karmic seeds that somehow polluted the *Citta* (consciousness). This ignorance and *volition* are elements of previous births, and they can also be freshly created volitional activities of the present life that are polluting the consciousness with the false conceptions of this external world.

Since consciousness is polluted and ideas that are attached to the false notions of this physical world *actually carry* the tendency to be reborn, but here again a condition lies: if the ardent *practitioner* is quite wise and mindful enough of his present karmic tendencies, he/she can take full charge of his life and life-bound sufferings. Therefore, the Buddhist purpose of being mindful, or the reason behind laying more emphasis on being mindful of one's actions, is just to keep the Consciousness pure by preventing it from generating any new *Saṅkhāras* that become the cause for another birth. However, if consciousness is polluted due to ignorance or lack of rational understanding, it leads to blind or false attachment. This attachment imprints the tendencies of becoming of being again, or *Bhava*. The tendency of becoming results *in* rebirth. From rebirth, the whole cycle of Dwadasnidan continues till death or even after death in different realms such as God, Demi-God, Human, animals, hungry ghost, and hell.

This cycle of rebirth is a continuous process until the evil of ignorance is uprooted or destroyed. This evil can be destroyed by humans rather than any other creatures in the six realms. Therefore, life as a human is highly precious in this World, not only to understand the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to the cessation of suffering, but it is equally important to walk on those prescribed *paths*. Therefore, the Ariya-Atthangika-Magga, namely:

1. Right Understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*)
2. Right Thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*)
3. Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*)
4. Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*)
5. Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)
6. Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*)
7. Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*)
8. Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)

These are all small, practical yet incremental steps to be taken care of if one is to come out of all kinds of worldly bondages or suffering.

Buddhist law of causation, an essential for contemporary world

The above-discussed doctrinal details clearly indicate the relevance of dependent origination as a "means" if one is expecting to achieve an end. The crisis humankind is trapped in is now visible to the naked eye, especially after the deadly, bloodthirsty Covid outbreak. The destruction it caused was not less than a nuke's deadly capacity. The world order collapsed like a multi-story building falling apart after detonation. The lives lost erased the thin line between so-called developed, developing, and underdeveloped nations. The chaos and pain humankind underwent in the recent past is much greater than any word in human vocabulary *can describe*. Many conspiracy theories surfaced after the outbreak, pointing towards a lab experiment which cost lives beyond numbers. Even if we ignore those theories, the simplest explanation too points towards the distorted equilibrium between nature and humankind. The losses of human lives have also indicated before the consequences of unchecked human aspirations. The two world wars, Cold War, and many imperialist wars waged by the so-called developed nations on smaller and backward colonies were nothing more than their ambition of becoming rich by exploiting local and aboriginal resources. These ambitions further developed into competitions among colonizers, which became more disastrous and *now define* the new boss of the world economy. The unhealthy market competition has been talked about in academia many times in the last few decades.

E. H. Schumacher, in his book "Small is Beautiful," lucidly narrated the dangers of a competitive market economy, which empowers a few beings to accumulate unchecked wealth, ultimately leaving millions of people in the darkness of poverty. The existing market economy, which can also be termed the Western economy, is based on cultivating desires, which according to Buddhism is the root cause of suffering. The desire for profit-making is what we can summarize as the contemporary economic goal. There is only limited or negligible space for ethics in modern Western economics. The Western economic man is allowed to consider the interest of others only if it serves his/her own interest, at least in the long term. On the contrary, Buddhist economics suggests reducing human desires and getting away from the trap of consumerism by practicing the *Pañcasīla*.

The socio-economic crisis that developed *from* the gap between resources and *the majority* of humankind is still deepening and leading this planet towards a worst destructive end. In order to avoid this nightmare, one should essentially understand the cause behind this tendency. Since it is established that the desire for profit-making is the only goal of the modern-day market economy, what we need is to talk about its nature and consistency. The very nature of competing companies is well known, as they will not hesitate to *cannibalize* each other just to raise the bar on the market graph. Their profit-making is dependent upon the exploitation of natural resources, which are limited on the planet. If the exploitation of natural resources continues at the present pace, the day is not far when our upcoming generations will study about them in books only. The environmental implications of this scarcity will be hazardous, and the extent of damage is beyond our imagination.

Here comes the role of the Buddhist law of causation as a "means" which is essential in order to make us understand the temporary or impermanent and destructive nature of the profit-making market economy, and also the principles of a sustainable and progressive Buddhist economic model which is based on (I) minimizing suffering, (II) simplifying desires, (III) non-violence, (IV) genuine care, and (V) generosity.

As discussed earlier, the Buddhist law of causation talks about the conditioned arising of suffering in this material world. The first link, *i.e.*, ignorance, is not knowing about the true nature of things we crave or desire for. The true nature means the impermanent nature of material *things*, as whatever profit we acquire will not go beyond a limit. Since no humans are immortal, they will also not be able to take benefit from whatever material things *they acquire* in one's life. The biggest lesson that Covid has taught us is, when we saw the declining enterprises, that nothing is permanent, so why to die or kill for things which will only be on paper and providing you a sham fame? The more one is involved in fulfilling material desires, the more *craving* will nourish, which again will build mental attributes aligned towards this only, and subsequently it will blur the picture of devastation until *it is* very close.

Buddha stressed many times regarding the extreme ends. The dialectic process in the journey of his enlightenment beautifully narrates about the needs for a beautiful and joyful achievement. The Bodhi or wisdom which transformed him from Siddhartha to Buddha was also dependent on the joyful mental state after getting rid *of* both the extreme practices. We humans, claimed to be the most advanced species among many on this earth, need to look *at* ourselves as one of the refugees who has been provided *with* some time to spend on this planet and must contribute with some compassion, love, empathy, and equanimity.

Conclusion

Therefore, the law of causality is highly essential for two major reasons: one is to make oneself aware of the certain misconceptions of both Self (Ego or the permanent existence of I) and the World; and the second major reason is to make oneself aware of the Path or the Formula through which we can separate or solve the puzzle of both compounded and un-compounded elements that are co-conditioned by several chains of karmic interlinks. The Buddha describes that the emergence of everything is conditioned, be it matter, mind, or being, and there exists a chain which is rotating, and every worldly phenomenon exists within this invisibly rotating chain. The doctrine therefore specially focuses on the observance of the arising and ceasing nature of things, and only humans possess the better power or faculties among all the beings in the Six Realms to better understand the working of both human life and Nature itself, and the

driving karmic forces behind them, which are not visible for the common man until and unless he makes an effort to understand and to realize the root cause of suffering. If ignorance is defeated, then suffering will naturally come to an end. However, modern society is totally running in the exact opposite direction by indulging in so many degrading elements like greed, ego, and competition, which results in day-to-day increasing violence and social unrest. Therefore, Buddhist principles of Causation or Dependent Origination offer a scientific and rational way to learn more about humans, Nature, and related emotions to build a better world for upcoming generations.

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