

Avijjā – The Seed of Dependent Origination

Jeet Baudh

Independent Researcher, India

Abstract: The universe is not governed by the whims of a Creator God or by any other supernatural power or authority. In Buddhism the universe and the life therein are governed by the natural law of Cause and Conditions and conditionally originated phenomena, creating a self –sustaining mechanism. Avijjā (SEED) is the foremost factor in the principle of Dependent Origination. In this paper, we present the principle of Dependent Origination and its pros and cons .The paper is divided into subtitles as the first link of the Dependent Origination, Avijjā- (Ignorance) means Nourishment and Denourishment of Ignorance.

Key words: Ignorance (Avijjā), Micchādiṭṭhi, Paṭṭicasamuppāda, pañcavaggiya, jarā-maraṇa.

Introduction

The would be Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama achieved perfect enlightenment beneath the Pipal tree (Bodhiverksha) on the bank of river Nilanjanā (Phalgu) in Urevellā (Bodhagayā) at the age of thirty five years after the six years meticulous meditation. He enlightened with the principle of Four Noble Truths which he preached throughout his life to all and sundry. After enlightenment he approached Isipaṭṭana, Mirgadive, Sārnāth, near Banaras and delivered his first ever discourse to “pañcavaggiya Bhikkhus” namely – Koddāñña, Mahānāma, Bhadiye, Vappi and Assji. This principle discourse is known as “Paṭṭiccamupāda” or Dependent Origination which consists of twelve links started from Avijjā (Ignorance) and ended with jarā-maraṇa (dotage-death). Buddha throughout his life travelled and preached the people about suffering and how did the people come out from suffering and ultimately achieved “Nibbāna”.

The First Link of the Dependent Origination

The first link of the Dependent Origination or the Cause and Condition Principle is Ignorance (Avijjā). The Buddha explained that the beginning of the existence is inconceivable and the first link is a completely a speculative theory that would lead to mental derangement as prevailed in the world, as for some theistic religions, the creator God is the first cause. For scientist and materialistic, change and sudden arising or accidental occurrence is the origin of the universe. The Buddha rejected these theories at the first instance and explained that all things are governed by “cause and effect” (Paṭṭicasamuppāda) principle. Thereafter a question arises that the first cause too cannot escape of its cause. If yes, then what is the cause of the first cause? In reference to this, existence before the first cause is fall in the trap of false view (Micchādiṭṭhi) which makes an effort to find out a single reason for all sufferings of the world.

But the reality is that existence is conditioned. It is based on many causes and conditions, all which work simultaneously and in intricate correlation which alone leads to truth and turns off the doors of all investigations of reality prevailed such as the speculation of a first cause

in whatever way is an omnipresent god or big bang theory. The seed of any plant developed numerous roots after showing in the earth and having served by water, energy (sun) and air. After that that seed grows so many roots from a single seed and also that seed again produce so many seeds and this chain in going on from several years. Similarly cause condition from causes without any break in a same pattern.

According to The Buddha there is no such thing in the world as a single cause (ekahetuka) or the other extreme of causelessness (ahetuka). Both views generate self centredness and prevent human beings from undertaking altruistic pursuits.

The Buddha preached multiple causes and conditions (aneka hetu paccayā) which works infinite combinations and permutations, producing Dependent Origination (Paṭṭiccasamuppāda). Thus the ultimate origin of things or the first beginning in a beginning-less past is a fragment of imagination. There is only a process of becoming a flux of psycho-physical phenomena. All the phenomena are consequences of prior events or causes and so the chain moves and moves endlessly. The cessation of phenomena causes to cease if the process is reverse.

“Ye Dammā hetu pabbavā tesmhetu thatagato hyadat tesm ca yo nirodhā evam vadī mahāsarmana ti”

Therefore everything that happens in the world is due to the combination and permutation of number of previous causes and all conditioned things come into existence and cease (Uppāda va dhammā nirujjhanti).

Avijjā- (Ignorance) means

Avijjā- Ignorance is synonymous with (Moha) delusion and lack of knowledge or unknowing (Aññāna); it is not only knowing but knowing in a perverted, topsy-turvy way. Not knowing the Four Noble Truths, three characteristics (ti lakkhan) and distortion and concealment of the truth is the nature of ignorance. The opposite of ignorance is true knowledge, insight, right understanding and wisdom.

Ignorance is the main root cause of all evil and continual rebirths. It is the cause of causes for arising of mental defilements. It gives rise bonds to craving, existence, false view, greed, hatred, egotism, conceit and all kinds of other mental defilements.

All unwholesome volitional activities have greed, hatred and delusion as the basic causes. Unwholesome actions in thought, speech and deed spring from the three root cause of ignorance, craving and hatred. A triple stands upright and is stable because the interdependence of the legs. Even so because of the simultaneous arising of these mental defilements, actions as root causes of all unwholesome actions, karma-formations or volitional activities arise.

Thus ignorance, though the first factor in the series is not the sole condition for karma formation, the second factor, with the arising of the root causes, volition and other concomitant factors arise to form a kamma. The first two causal links are conditionally co-produced. They arise together, not one after another.

It is an important to understand that the twelve factors of the chain are not step by step, one after the other, progression or occurrences. The first two factors stand for the past life and constitute the defilement and kamma-vattas. One kammās are generated with arising of mental defilements, there is a tendency for repetition, giving rise to a pattern. This pattern producing tendency and its tremendous significance of forming consequences which too tend to form patterns, explains why the term cycle is used. When a pattern is formed, it tends to work on its own. This is the meaning behind the metaphor “Cycle or wheel”. In the wheel of life, there are wheels within wheels, circular, self-sustaining occurrences that keep the process of birth, death and rebirth move on and on.

Nourishment and Denourishment of Ignorance

Both the Āhāra Avijjā Sutta and the Āhāra Taṇhā Sutta (Aṅguttar Nikāya) deal with ignorance the first factor of Dependent Origination and its ending leading to liberation from sufferings (Nibbāna), the former directly, the latter indirectly. The Āhāra Avijjā Sutta takes ignorance in its general sense, that is, as the first link of Dependent Origination, while the Āhāra Taṇhā Sutta takes the craving for existence as its point of departure or cessation. While the better known twelve factors formula begins with ignorance (avijjā), the Āhāra Avijjā Sutta shows that this ignorance, although it is without beginning, but it is itself conditioned, cause of causes. But the Sutta classes by reversing the process, describing the Dependent Origination of liberation. Craving in practically the same way as the Āhāra Avijjā Sutta does for ignorance.

Conclusion

Ignorance (Avijjā) is first and foremost factor of Dependent Origination just as the seed for the plant. As, in direct perception, seed produce plant similarly ignorance is the cause of causes to origination of the universe. The Buddha’s prima facie teaching is the principle of Dependent Origination, Paṭṭiccasamuppāda which means the conditional origination of all mental and physical phenomena (Nāma-Rūpa), that is, and the entire universe in the same pattern. Paṭṭiccasamuppāda deals with how everything in the universe comes into existence on the basis of cause and conditions relationship principle. In other words Avijjā –ignorance is the seed of the origination and existence of universe.

Bibliography:-

1. The Teaching of Buddha, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundation, Taiwan
2. The Essence of Buddhism ,(2004) Narasu P.L.Winsome Books India, Delhi.
3. The Noble Eight Fold Path,(2000),Manly P.H., Pilgrims Publications, India
4. The Wheel of Life, (2005) Buddharakkhita, Buddha Vachana Trust, India
5. Dhamma Pada (2009) , Sarao KTS ,Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, India