



Critical Analysis Of Buddhist Pratītyasamutpāda Law And The Theory Of Karma

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Abstract:

This paper examines the Pratītyasamutpāda (Dependent Origination) and the theory of Karma, in details, clarifying how they connect two or more things or interdependent and what their philosophical implications are for the human experience. In this doctoral exposition, the Buddhist Scriptures are very critically interacted along with and philosophical treatises so as to discover the learned depths to which these doctrines plunge in relaying their importance to the understanding of one's reality, one's humanity, and the road leading to liberation. Pratītyasamutpāda or the dependent origination is the very foundation of Buddhist thought: that all phenomena arise in dependence upon other factors or elements, thus, indicating impermanence and the interrelatedness of all things, Karma, the law of cause and effect, focusing on the ethical and moral dimensions of existence, where actions, whether physical, verbal, or mental, have consequences shaping future experiences. This paper, therefore, intends to put forth a comprehensive understanding of the Pratītyasamutpāda Law and the theory of Karma, by critically evaluating the interpretations and applications of these concepts across a number of Buddhist traditions to show their relevance in contemporary practice of Buddhism.

Keywords: Pratītyasamutpāda (Dependent Origination), Buddhist philosophy, Twelve Link, Nature of Karma, Importance of Karma, Strengths of Karma, Rebirth, Suffering, Liberation, Interconnectedness, Impermanence, Ethics, Morality.

INTRODUCTION:

Buddhism is an aspect of deep human experience and philosophy that provides answers to several questions on the nature of reality, causality and human suffering. In short, the main themes of Buddhism can be considered as Pratītyasamutpāda (Dependent Origination) and the Theory of Karma, which have explained the modes of existence and the motivations governing human activities as well as their consequences. The first part of Abhidhamma describes the evolution of the Pratītyasamutpāda into the statement of the interdependence and conditionality of all phenomena. The Theory of Karma describes the ethical dimensions of human agency along with its results of consequences. Together, these doctrines form a coherent framework for understanding the entire process of suffering (dukkha), liberation (nirvāna), and the cyclical

existence (samsāra). Here, I want to critically examine these two concepts in respect to their philosophical depths, strengths, practical implications, and limitations.

Pratīyasamutpāda:

Pratīyasamutpāda (Dependent Origination) is one of the terms that enlighten the ultimate truth regarding the phenomena in Buddhism. It is a specific teaching within Buddhism. It deals with the phenomena and all the continuous changes brought by Karma and involves in life itself due to what have called primary or direct causes (hetu) and secondary or indirect causes (pratyāya) forces. It makes believe that all phenomena appears dependent on certain conditions and it dismisses by this its inherent existence or unchanging of anything. This doctrine teaches that all phenomena arise in dependence or the cause and conditions and non-being from innateness. In this context, the Buddha explained the principle of causality which is especially more interesting because it is concerned with suffering and liberation.

The Sanskrit term Pratīyasamutpāda (Pali paticcasamuppāda) means “dependent arising” or “dependent origination”, and it is the basis of the Buddha’s teaching on the process of birth and death. The term is present in the Canon of Theravāda, the more conservative school of Buddhism, and Mahāyāna, the more liberal sect. The Buddha once said: “Those who perceive ‘dependent origination’ (pratīyasamutpāda) will perceive the dharma; those who perceive the dharma will perceive ‘dependent origination’” (Samyutta Nikāya [Samyutta 22, 87] ¹

Pratīyasamutpāda teaches us that all phenomena, including physical objects, mental states and experiences are the result of a series of interdependent causes and conditions. These causes and conditions give rise to each other into a complex network. Nothing is unchangeable or permanent essence in it. Therefore, nothing exists in isolation or as a separate, independent entity.

The traditional formulation of Pratīyasamutpāda is explained through the twelve-linked chain (dvādasānidāna), of Dependent Origination. It is believed in Buddhism that these links comprise with the chain of causes and conditions that give rise to the round of birth, suffering, and rebirth, known as samsāra. The twelve Links of Dependent Origination are:

Ignorance (Avidyā): Ignorance of the true nature of reality.

Volitional Formations (Samskāra): Mental and physical activities.

Consciousness (Vijñāna): Awareness and perception.

Name and Form (Nāma rūpa): The body and mind.

Six Sense bases (Salāyatana): The senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind).

Contact (Sparsā): Sensory contact with the external world.

Feeling (Vedanā): Pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations.

Craving (Trṣṇā): Desire and attachment.

Clinging (Upādāna): Clinging to desires and attachments.

Becoming (Bhava): Rebirth and existence.

Birth (Jāti): Physical birth.

Aging and Death (Jarāmarana): The process of aging and eventual death.

These links explain how suffering arises, wherein ignorance leads to craving and then to attachment, which gives birth to another suffering.

The formula of Pratityasamutpada is beautifully explained in the Mahavagga:

"From ignorance come conformations (Saṅkhāra), from conformations comes consciousness (Viññāna); from consciousness come name and physical form; from name and physical 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 (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 is removed by the complete extinction of desire, it brings about the removal of conformations; by the removal of conformations, consciousness is removed; by the removal of consciousness, name and physical form are removed; by the removal of name and physical 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 be also explained in the following way:

Past Life: 1. Ignorance (Avidyā) 2. Impressions of Karmic forces (saṃskāra)

Present Life: 3. Initial Consciousness of the embryo (vijñāna) 4. Psycho-physical organism (nāma-rūpa) 5. Six sense-organs including mind (saḷāyatana) 6. Sense-object-contact (sparsha) 7. Sense-experience (vedanā) 8. Thirst for sense-enjoyment (Trṣṇā) 9. Clinging to this enjoyment (Upādāna) 10. Will to be born (bhava)

After Life: 11. Birth or Rebirth (Jāti) 12. Old age and death (Jarāmarana) ²

"Atite hetobo panch, idani falpanchkong

Idani hetobo panch, ayating falpanchkong"

Pratityasamutpāda and its Philosophical Significance:

Pratityasamutpāda, the Buddhist principle then challenges against all metaphysical dualisms such as self and other, and existence and non-existence. It is built on annattā (non-self) and impermanence (aniccā), and it denies any permanent, autonomous entity. Such an insight fits well within Buddhistic notion of the Middle Way philosophy, and it ignores extremes of eternalism and nihilism.

Strengths of Pratītyasamutpāda:

- a) Pratītyasamutpāda specifies the causal mechanism of suffering so that the form of suffering applicable to it can be isolated and dislodged;
- b) Not only human experience but the entire conditioned phenomena of such psychological process, cosmological patterns, etc; and
- c) An understanding of actions and consequences as interdependent further cultivates ethical mindfulness and compassion.

Crucial areas of criticism:

Pratītyasamutpāda particularly has been criticized as being too deterministic as a fundamental concept in Buddhism. Some people seem to judge that an individual becomes bound so that he has no control over his life until the intertwined causes set in motion by the process come to an end. Some people think about it as quite One criticism is that the concept might be overly deterministic, suggesting that difficult to understand and lacks empirical evidence to support its claims. In short:

- a) Critics claim that causal rigidity of Pratītyasamutpāda undermines individual agency, and raises questions about moral responsibility;
- b) The twelve links are neither agreed by all as either literal or symbolic which leads to different interpretations and causes confusion; and
- c) Though very informative, Pratītyasamutpāda primarily concerned with conditioned things and provides little information about the ultimate reality or unconditioned state.

Nature of Karma and its Conceptual Overview:

The Buddhist concept of Karma is built upon the foundation of causality; karma is primarily concerned with ethical intentionality i.e. (cetana). Karma refers to volitional actions which bring about results concomitant to those actions; the experience given now and in future lives is therefore affected. Unlike determinism, Buddhist Karma emphasizes the interaction of actions, motives, and conditions.

Philosophical importance of Karma:

Karma itself hangs the bridge of ethical behaviour and spiritual advancement, asserting that individuals who claim to be the creator of destiny for himself. It also easily goes on to connect with Pratītyasamutpāda; because only through actions are the effects continued over the whole cycle of samsāra. ³

Strengths of Karma:

- a) The theory of Karma brought out the dimension that every individual must take responsibility for himself / herself and not blame fate or some saviour external to the individual;
- b) It is consonance with how modern psychology has come to understand habitual patterns and conditioning as determinants of behaviour; and
- c) Karma demonstrates the ethical dimension of causation that volitional action goes on the chain of existence.

Criticisms:

- a) Critics question with the issue of reincarnation; since karmic results do not manifest in one lifetime compared to others, in the absence of a permanent self;
- b) Fatalistic attitudes can arise from the misinterpretations of karma while it does not allow one to transparent ethical behaviour; and
- c) Sometimes, this teaching is abused to endorse social hierarchies or pain, claiming that one is paying for something done in a previous life, disregarding structural elements.

Karma and Pratītyasamutpāda Relation:

Pratītyasamutpāda and Karma are mutually congenial, the former speaking generally about causality and the latter about its ethical dimensions. Together, they provide a comprehensive understanding of the circularity of existence (samsāra) and the path to liberation. While Pratītyasamutpāda identifies craving and ignorance and they are identified as the foremost causes of suffering, Karma emphasizes the ethical consequences of the actions within this framework.

However, the difficulties between the traditions involve the interpretation. It seems that the doctrine of non-self (anattā) contradicts the karmic continuity, and thinkers like Nagarjuna have summed up matters by arguing that emptiness (suñyatā) of all phenomena, - which for him includes Karma – should be seen as a conceptual tool rather than a metaphysical reality. ⁴

Together Pratītyasamutpāda and Karma embrace realities existentially and ethically such as they can be operationalized in reducing suffering, fostering mindfulness, and cultivate virtues. It integrates causality, morality and phenomenology, making these doctrines work as given in the subtle description of human experience between themselves.

The philosophical controversy, however, is the fact that karma and anattā fail to denote a lasting self upon which to hinge considerations of responsibility or continuity. A simple understanding of karma states that it is even deterministic or punitive, seriously distorting the ethical weight of this doctrine. These doctrines belong in the socio-cultural atmosphere of ancient India, thus calling for a leading work in its contexts of the present.

Relevance of Pratītyasamutpāda and Karma for the modern world:

Both Pratītyasamutpāda and Karma aspects have an active relevance in dealing with today's worldwide problems – from environmental calamities to psychological health-problems. As they point towards interdependence, these two aspects go hand in hand with ecological views, intentionality and mindfulness are included in psychological and therapeutic practices. However, their adaptation to atmosphere and country should be as careful as possible to these concepts into their philosophical density as well as cultural origin. ⁵

Conclusion:

The theories related to Pratītyasamutpāda and Karma form the basis of Buddhist thought. They illuminate causality, ethics and liberation with their fullest essence. Their philosophical influence or impact is extraordinarily massive, as is their practical relevance, but they also raise questions of critical reflection around such issues as determinism, moral responsibility, and cultural adaptability. Engaging with such challenges allows Buddhism to enrich and re-invent itself across new and current contexts.

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