

**RECENT RESEARCHES IN  
BUDDHIST STUDIES**

**Essays in Honour of  
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<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* B. 383, A.327.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* B. 384

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* B. 380.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* A. 337.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* A. 328

<sup>87</sup> S. N. pp. 400-1

<sup>88</sup> C. P. R. A. 485. B. 513.

## A Note on the Anatta Passage of the *Mahānidāna-sutta*

Kamaleswar Bhattacharya

The originality of the *anatta* passage of the *Mahā-nidāna-Sutta* of the *Dīgha-Nikāya*<sup>1</sup> has long since struck the scholars working on the Pali Canon. Max Walleser, in his book *Die philosophische Grundlage des alteren Buddhismus*,<sup>2</sup> devoted some interesting pages to this passage. Quite recently, Claus Oetke<sup>3</sup> has subjected it to a searching formal analysis. There are some textual problems ; but these do not really hamper the understanding of the passage. Summarized in the words of one of the latest exponents,<sup>4</sup> this is what it says :

“... after a long exposition of the teaching of Dependent Origination, and a brusque dismissal of various ways in which men think to define a self, as ‘having form’ or ‘formless’, ‘small’ or ‘infinitely large’,<sup>5</sup> the Buddha asks ‘how many ways are there in which (a man can) regard self?’. His interlocutor, the monk Ānanda, answers that there are three : feeling is regarded as identical with self, in the words ‘feeling is my self’ ; or the self is regarded as without feeling, ‘my self is insentient’ ; or neither of these things is the case but ‘my self feels, my self has the attribute of feeling’.

The Buddha declares that it is ‘not fitting’ (*na kkhāmati*) to regard the matter in any of these ways, for the following reasons. In the first case, where self and feeling are identical, he says that feeling is of three types, pleasant, painful, and neutral. With which is the self to be identified, since only one type can occur at any given time ? All three types of feeling are impermanent, causally conditioned phenomena, so that in any case the self would have to be the same, subject to arising and decay. This is an idea so manifestly untenable for the Buddha as to receive no comment. In the second place, where the self was held to be insentient, the Buddha asks, ‘where there is no feeling at all, is it possible that one might say “I am”?’ Since this is not possible, the view is again ‘not fitting’. In the third place, where the self is held to feel, or have the attribute of feeling, he asks a similar question : ‘where feeling is com-

pletely absent °K<sup>6</sup> might one be able to say “this (is what) I am”?’ Here also, since this is not possible, the view is ‘not fitting’.”

Whether or not these different theories concerning the self were actually held,<sup>7</sup> it is clear that they all relate to an *individual* self, to a self that is the “object of the notion ‘I’” (*ahaṃkāra- or ahaṃpratyaya-viṣaya*) as will be said in later times. And it is such theories that are usually rejected throughout the Canon. It is also remarkable that, while rejecting a theory concerning the self, the Buddha shows what a self or the self should be feeling (*vedanā*) is not entitled to being considered a self because it is subject to arising and decay, in other words to the vicissitudes peculiar to all empirical things ; we do not find there an *invariable* self.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, here is a good example of what is known as the “Humean attitude” of the Buddha. Thus compare the famous passage “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are remov’d for any time, as by sound sleep ; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions remov’d by death, and could I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I should be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is farther requisite to make me a perfect non-entity. If any one, upon serious and unprejudic’d reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu’d, which he calls *himself*; tho’ I am certain there is no such principle in me.

But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.”<sup>9</sup>

The Buddha says substantially the same, in his rejection of the second and third alternatives.<sup>10</sup>

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> II : 66 ff. – A first draft of this Note appeared in the *Mahā Bodhi* some years ago
- <sup>2</sup> Walleser 1904(1925): 69 ff.
- <sup>3</sup> Oetke 1988 : 130 ff.
- <sup>4</sup> Collins 1982 : 98-99.
- <sup>5</sup> According to the commentary, these different impressions as to the nature of the *atta* are deductions from *Jhāna* experience. See *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* II : 504 (cf. Rhys Davids 1910 : 61 n. 3).
- <sup>6</sup> About *sabbaso vedanāya asati vedanānirodha* (Oetke 1988 : 142 n. 63), cf. Geiger 1956 : § 76.
- <sup>7</sup> All that seems certain is that the third alternative, viz. that the *ātman* is not feeling (*vedanā*), nor is it without feeling ; it feels, because it has feeling-as its attribute (*vedanā-dhamma*), recalls the later Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory - especially if we assume with Oetke 1988 : 149 that the term *vedanā* in this passage does not designate the second *khandha* but refers to all states of conscious-ness, to all psychic events. We need not follow the commentary, which attempts to bring all the three alternatives into relation with the *khandhas* somehow or other (*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* II : 505-506).
- <sup>8</sup> Cf., e.g., *Chachakka-Sutta* : *Majjhima-Nikāya* III : 282-283.
- <sup>9</sup> Hume 1874 : I, 534.
- <sup>10</sup> This, however, does not preclude the possibility that the Buddha went farther than Hume.

## The Buddha's survey of views

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

One of the major projects undertaken by the Buddha in the Pali *Nikāya* is a systematic exposition and critique of the varieties of speculative views. In numerous discourses the Buddha has sketched the outlines of this project in general terms and applied it to the most widely prevalent philosophical views being circulated among the Indian religious thinkers and teachers who roamed the Ganges Valley in his own time, the fifth century B.C. In several *suttas*, however the Buddha proposes something far more momentous in its implications for human thought; a survey that extends beyond the confines of any particular time and locale and classifies the entire range of humanity's speculative belief systems into a schematism of basic types. Chief among such *suttas* is the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (D.N.I), which elaborates a 'net' (*Jāla*) of sixty-two cases (*vatthu*) said to be capable of containing all possible views on the two principal subjects of metaphysical thought, the nature of the self (*attā*) and the world (*loka*).<sup>1</sup>

So important is this project within the framework of the Buddha's dispensation that the early Buddhist monks who compiled the *Sutta Piṭaka* assigned the *Brahmajāla Sutta* to the prestigious position of the first discourse in the *Dīgha Nikāya* which is itself the first collection of discourses in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. Thus, in terms of its position, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* stands at the entrance to the complete collection of discourses proclaimed by the Enlightened One. This placement seems to reflect in the minds of the compilers, a recognition of the special significance the *Brahmajāla Sutta* bears both intrinsically and in relation to the Buddha's teaching as a whole. It suggests that in the view of the ancient elders who compiled the Canon the message of the *Brahmajāla Sutta* serves as nothing less than a prolegomenon to the entire Buddha-Dhamma itself. To speak figuratively, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* is the sentry at the gateway to the Buddha *Sāsana*, which guards the border separating the Buddha's understanding of reality from all other attempts at a reflective interpretation of humankind's existential situation.

The teachers who composed the original commentaries to the Pali canon also confirmed the importance of the project undertaken in the *Brahmajāla Sutta* by including the 'classification of the diversity of creeds' (*samayantara*) among the four