CHAPTER THREE

THE THEORY OF NON-I (ANATTĀ) IN PĀLI TEXTS

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Chapter III – The Theory of ‘Non-I’ (Anattā) in Pāli Texts

3.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the concept of ‘I’ (aham) has been discussed in various Vedic texts such as the four Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Āranyakas and Upaniṣads. Just like Sanskrit literature, volumes have been written in Pāli. In this chapter the study is limited only to the Buddhist texts. It may be worth mentioning here that in Buddhist literature the concept of ‘I’ is not much observed. Rather the idea of ‘self’ has been expounded in a different way which shall be discussed later.

3.1. The Origin of Pāli Language

What is Pāli? It is the name of a language. It is the abbreviated name. By this abbreviation is understood the name of the language in which the earliest stratum of the Buddhist texts as they are preserved in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition was composed. The unabbreviated form is ‘pālibhāsa’. In the Pāli language, ‘pālibhāsa’ means ‘the language’ (bhāsa) of ‘the text’ (pāli). The word ‘pāli’ actually signifies not any text but exclusively a ‘sacred text’.

The word ‘Pāli’ is now classified as a literary language. While it is uncertain whether Pāli was ever a spoken language in the sense of a language people use to communicate with each other, Pāli has long been the language in which Theravāda Buddhists chant. It is widely believed that the Buddha spoke either in the vernacular Magadhi or some other middle Indo-Aryan vernacular which was the language of the people near Benares in North-East Central India (now Varanasi) where he resided and taught. Pāli was considered by early Buddhists to be linguistically similar to old Magadhi or even a direct
continuation of that language. However, *Magadhi* is an Eastern Indian language whereas *Pāli* most closely resembles Western Indian inscriptions.¹

*Pāli* belongs to a group of the languages called *Prakrit* which are also known as Middle-Aryan languages. As a member of that group, *Pāli* is characterized by the fact that it cannot be directly derived from *Sanskrit*. Some scholars say that it is the oldest *Prakrit* and that it is also a dead language. It is actually the oldest known *Prakrit*, but it does not seem to be dead. It has always served as a lively medium of communication among the Buddhist monks who have had different first languages.²

*Pāli* is a middle Indo-Aryan dialect or *Prakrit*. It is the most famous as the language in which the scriptures of *Theravāda* Buddhism (also known as *Pāli* Canon or in *Pāli* the *Tipiṭaka*) were written down in Sri Lanka in the 1st century BCE. *Pāli* has been written in a variety of scripts, from *Brahmi*, *Devanagari* and other Indic scripts through to a Romanised (western) form devised by T. W. Rhys Davids of the *Pāli* Text Society.³

P. V. Bapat is of the opinion that as far as our present knowledge goes, we find that the main stock of systematized Buddhist literature, in the original or in translation, is contained mainly in *Pāli*, *Sanskrit* (pure or mixed), Tibetan and Chinese, although the Buddhist texts were also translated into the language of the countries to which Buddhism spread. In the treasure house of Buddhist literature, the *Pāli Tipiṭaka* represents the earliest available and most complete collection of Buddhist sacred literature. It is preserved in three systematic collection namely – *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Sutta Piṭaka* and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*.⁴

In this chapter, the discussion is on the Buddhist concept of ‘*anattā*’. The concept of ‘*anattā*’ was first expounded by the Buddha and it is the crux of Buddhism. Before going into the investigation of the concept of ‘*anattā*’, it is important to throw some light on the explanation of origin and development of *Pāli* literature. Sixth century BC was an age of far reaching religious reforming

¹ <http://www.articleshead.com/show_article/pali/>
² <http://www.chem.pmf.hr/~kazmar/Pali/what.htm>
³ <http://www.articleshead.com/show_article/literary-language/>
⁴ P. V. Bapat: 2500 Years Of Buddhism, p. 122.
activity over the whole of the ancient world. Greece in this period witnessed
the rise of Parmenides and Empedocles. China saw the appearance of Laotse
and Confucius and there was a remarkable intellectual and religious ferment in
India in this period.

This century is an important landmark in the history of the religion of
India. Brahmanism was the leading religion of the country up to this period and
Brahmin priests took the leading parts in all religious ceremonies. People also
used to worship the Yakšas, the Gandharvas, the Vṛksas, Devatās, the Nāgas,
etc. But the rise of Buddhism in the sixth century BC marked the end of the
predominance of the Brahmanic period. The Buddha introduced his religion in
this century. The Buddha was not a mythical figure but an actual and historical
personality who introduced the religion today known as Buddhism.

Before attaining the Buddhahood, he was born in the family of the
chieftain of a Śākya clan and was known as prince Siddhārtha. His father was
Suddhodana who ruled from Kapilāvastu over a small kingdom in the northeast
of the United Provinces and the neighbouring Districts of Southern Nepal and
his mother was called Māyā or Mahāmāyā of the Śākya clan. The prince
Siddhārtha had all conceivable luxuries and sensual enjoyments after his birth
and when he was sixteen years old, he was married to Yaśodharā, the daughter
of king Daṇḍapāṇi of the Koliyan republic and they lived in luxury for several
years and had a son named Rāhula. One day while the prince was on his way to
pleasure garden he saw an old man, he asked his charioteer, Channa about that
man and he was told that that was an old man and every living being was
destined to become like him. The prince felt very sorry at this sight and
returned to the palace. On the second day he saw a sick man. On the third day
he saw a corpse. On the fourth day he saw a person with yellow robe. He knew
from his charioteer that he was an ascetic who had left his home and had no
bindings and was trying to make himself free from the cycle of death and birth.
On seeing these four sights he moved so much that he felt a strong inclination

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5 Kanai Lal Hazra: History of the Theravāda Buddhism in South-East Asia with special reference to
India and Ceylon, p. 9
to leave the world. He realised the impermanence of all worldly things and made up his mind to leave the world and wanted to go to the forest for meditation and to attain the highest immortality.

One day at the age of twenty-nine he secretly left the palace and the family and entered into a search for the ultimate happiness. Many religious thinkers of his day advocated the practice of austerity as a means of attaining this happiness and he tried this method rigorously for six years but failed. Then he came to the conclusion that ultimate happiness could be found neither by sensual enjoyments nor by austerities. After abandoning these, which he called the two extreme paths and following the middle path, he gained insight into the true nature of things and became enlightened, or the Buddha. In this enlightenment, he realised that morality and wisdom were the two main paths for attaining the ultimate happiness or salvation.

After attaining perfect enlightenment, the Buddha started preaching his doctrines or Dhamma to the people. Many people were converted into Buddhism and followed his teachings and became enlightened. The Buddha in order to spread his teaching sent his disciples to different places. Thus during the time of the Buddha Buddhism flourished in several important places in India from Kajangala and Campâ on the east to Verañjâ and Avanti on the west, and from Râjagaha and Vârânasî to Kuśambî, Śrâvasti and Sâketa on the north, as also to the various tribes inhabiting the Himalayan foothills. Buddhism, during the Buddha’s lifetime, was not confined to the limits of Majjhimaṭṭhā. It travelled outside its boundary. It had thus a rapid progress. Before the advent of Buddhism Brahmanism was the leading religion but the Buddha’s commanding personality, his simple method of preaching, his miraculous power and new ideas in his religion played so significant role in the minds of the people of the then India that they gave up their old religious and philosophical ideas and embraced the new religion of the Buddha. They accepted his religion and contributed to its development. The Buddha was born to dispel the darkness of ignorance and to show the world how to get rid of suffering and disease, decay and death and all the worries and miseries of
living beings. The Buddha was the embodiment of all the virtues that he preached. During his successful and eventful ministry of forty-five years, he translated all his words into action. After completing his work of propagating his teachings and organising the monastic institution, the Buddha’s death took place at the age of eighty years at Kusinārā on the full moon day of Vaisākha as did his birth and enlightenment.

The Buddha has passed away but the sublime Dhamma, which he unreservedly bequeathed to humanity, still exists in its pristine purity. Although the Buddha has left no written records of his teachings, his distinguished disciples preserved them by committing to memory and transmitting them orally from generation to generation.

3.2. The Beginning of Pāli Texts

Just after the Mahāparinibbāna of the Buddha, Subhadda, who became a monk in his old age, openly told other monks in Kusinārā: ‘Do not grieve, do not lament. We are happily rid of the Great Śramaṇa. We used to be annoyed by being told: ‘This beseems you, this beseems you not.’ But now we shall be able to do what we like, and what we do not like, we shall not have to do.’ On hearing his speech Mahākassapa, the chief disciple of the Buddha, felt sorry and was anxious about the discipline in the Saṅgha. That is why he gave a proposal that a council of five hundred Arhats should meet to rehearse the teachings of the Buddha. He proposed it in order to establish a canon of the Dhamma and of the discipline of the Saṅgha. After some deliberation the town of Rājagaha was selected for the meeting of the council near the Saṃtiparni Cave of the Vehāra Hill. Ajātasattu, who was the king of Magadha at that time and a firm believer in the Buddhist faith, helped the session of the council and made arrangements for seats and accommodation of the monks who attended the council.

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The procedure followed at the council was a simple one. With the permission of the Sāṅgha, the Venerable Mahākassapa presided the council and asked questions on the Vinaya of the Venerable Upali, who had been mentioned by the Buddha as the foremost of the Vinayadharas. All these questions related to the four Parajikas, the matter, the occasion, the individual concerned, the principal rule, the amended rule as well as to the question as to who would be guilty and who innocent of these Parajikas. In this way the Vinaya text was agreed upon at the Council recited by the Venerable Upali.

The turn of the Venerable Ananda came next. The subject matter of the Sutta Piṭaka, in all the five Nikāyas, was formulated as questions for Ananda who gave appropriate answers. These questions followed the lines adopted in those on the Vinaya – the occasion of the sermons and the person or persons with reference to whom they were given. The answers given by Ananda settled the corpus of Sutta Piṭaka. Thus the Venerable Ananda, the favourite attendant of the Buddha, who had the special privilege of hearing all the discourses, recited the Dhamma or Sutta. The council took place only three months after the Buddha’s parinibbāna and was held about seven months and the work as arranged and settled are ascribed to the collective authorship of the whole council of bhikkhus or monks. There is, however, no mention of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka as having been a subject of discussion at the First Buddhist Council. In later literature however questions were raised regarding the authenticity of the Abhidhamma as an integral part of the Pāli canon, and this is significant.

The second council was held a century at Vesāli after the Mahāparinibbāna of the Buddha in order to examine and suppress the Vajjian monks’ practices of ten points which were regarded as unorthodox by Venerable Yasa. The ten points are as follows:

1. The practice of carrying salt in a horn for use when needed.

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8 P. V. Bapat: 2500 Years of Buddhism, p. 33 – 34.
9 Ibid., p. 34.
2. The practice of taking food after mid-day.

3. The practice of going to a neighbouring village and taking a second meal there the same day, committing thereby the offence of over-eating.

4. The observance of *Uposathas* in different places within the same *Sīmā*.

5. The practice of doing an ecclesiastical act and obtaining its sanction afterwards.

6. The practice of use of precedents as authority.

7. The practice of drinking milk-whey after meal.

8. The drinking of fermenting palm-juice, which is not yet toddy.

9. The use of a borderless sheet to sit.

10. The acceptance of gold and silver.

The Venerable *Yasa* openly declared these practices to be illegal and immoral in extreme. The *Vajjian* monks became angry and expelled *Yasa* from the *Sangha*. He then appealed to the laity of *Vesālī* and returned to *Kosambī*.\(^1\)

At his request some monks went to *Pātheyya* in Western country and *Avantī* to tell the monks there about the behaviour of the *Vajjian* monks and invited them to assemble and decide the question in order to arrest the growth of irreligion and ensure the preservation of the *Vinaya*.

Next *Yasa* proceeded to approach the Venerable *Sambhūta Sāṇavāsī* of *Ahoganga* Hill and the Venerable *Revata* of *Soreyya*, who were widely and highly venerated and expounded the ten points advocated by the *Vajjian* monks. At the suggestion of *Revata*, the monks proceeded to *Vesālī* in order to settle the dispute at the place of origin and a council with seven hundred monks was held there to discuss the ten practices of *Vajjian* monks and to settle the dispute between the *Vajjian* monks and *Yasa* and his party. In the council the eight members of the selected committee of the council discussed the problem and tried to settle the dispute. The Venerable *Sabbakāmī* was elected president and answered the questions put by *Revata* one by one. Finally they concluded that

\(^1\) *Ibid.*, p. 32.
the ten rules followed by the Vajjian monks were unlawful and invalid and not permissible.

The Second Buddhist Council was held in the reign of King Kālāsoka, a descendant of Ajātasattu. Kālāsoka, though formerly in favour of the Vajjian monks, was prevailed upon to give his support to the Council of the monks. After final judgement, the seven hundred monks engaged in the recital of the Vinaya and Dhamma and drew up a new edition resulting in the Piṭakas.

Just after the Second Buddhist Council some Vajjian monks did not want to remain in the Sangha of the Theravādins or Sīhāviravādins and they formed a new Sangha known as the Mahāsangha and they were known as the Mahāsanghikas or the monks of the great congregation. The second Buddhist Council marked the first division in the Sangha. This was due to differences of opinion relating to the practice of ten rules of discipline by monks. Thus there arose in the Sangha at that time two sects – orthodox and unorthodox. It is very evident that the Second Buddhist Council resulted in a schism in the Buddhist Sangha. After some time these two main sects were divided into several sects till the reign of King Asoka, 236 years after the parinibbāna of the Buddha.

During the time of King Asoka many non-Buddhist, who had no orthodox views in matters of both the doctrine (Sutta) and discipline (Vinaya), became Buddhist monks and entered the Sangha but the Theravādins or the orthodox monks separated themselves from them and did not agree to perform the Uposatha ceremony with them. Owing to this disagreement no Uposatha ceremony was performed at Pātaliputta, for about seven years. The King Asoka sent one minister at Aśokārāma to request the orthodox monks there to do the Uposatha ceremony with other monks. But they refused to do it and many monks were beheaded by the king’s minister. After learning it the king felt sorry for it and asked Moggaliputta Tissa, the oldest and the most learned of the monks, regarding this matter. Then the Third Buddhist Council was held

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12 Ibid., p. 33.
13 Kanai Lal Hazra: History of Theravāda Buddhism in South-East Asia with special reference to India and Ceylon, p. 28.

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at Pataliputta under the aegis of King Asoka. The occasion for this third council was supplied by the need to establish the purity of the Sutta and Vinaya which had been imperilled by the rise of different sects and their rival claims, teachings and practices. The Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa was pained to observe the corrupt practices that had crept into the Sangha and the heretical doctrines preached by sectarians of various descriptions.

The Third Buddhist Council was held by the orthodox monks only at Pataliputta under the leadership of Moggaliputta Tissa. King Aśoka patronised it and supported the orthodox monks. Moggaliputta Tissa thereafter elected a thousand monks, who were well versed in three Piṭakas to make a compilation of the true doctrine. For nine months he worked with the monks and the compilation of the true Tipiṭaka was completed. This Council was held in the same manner and with the same zeal as those of Mahākassapa and Yasa respectively. In the midst of the Council, Moggaliputta Tissa set forth the Kathavatthupakaraṇa wherein the heretical doctrines were thoroughly examined and refuted. Thus ended the Third Buddhist Council in which a thousand monks took part.

The most significant outcome of the Council was that it restored the true doctrine and propounded the Abhidhamma treatise, Points of Controversy (Kathavatthu) during the session of the Council. The authentic Tipiṭaka of Buddhist Canon (Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma) was finally compiled and arranged in its present form by those Arahants of old.

After the conclusion of the Council Moggaliputta Tissa under King’s Aśoka’s patronage sent religious missions to nine different countries for the introduction, development and spread of Buddhism. Mahinda, the son of King Aśoka and Sanghamitta, his daughter, were charged with missionary work in the island of Ceylon. It is to a large extent due to these Dhammadāta activities that Buddhism became the predominant religion of a large portion of mankind.

The session of the Third Buddhist Council and the sending of the religious missions to nine different countries by Moggaliputta Tissa after this council were the most important events in the history of Buddhism. This was
for the first time in the history that the Buddhist monks went to foreign
countries to propagate the teachings of the Buddha. India and the countries,
belonging to the region now known as South and South East Asia, were
familiar with each other from the time of the Buddha.

The progress of Buddhism continued in North-West India during the
rule of the Kushānas who were followers of Buddhism and did a splendid job
for its progress. Kaniska, who is regarded as the greatest of the Kushāna
emperors, occupied the throne in 78 AD.\textsuperscript{14} He held sway over a wide tract of
country including Kabul, Gandhara, Sindh, North-West India, Kashmir and
part of Madhayadesa. A great Buddhist council was held under his patronage.
The king in order to bring unity in the Sangha convoked a council, which was
known as the Fourth Buddhist Council. Some traditions mention that this
council took place in the Vihāra at Kuṇḍalavarna in Kāśmīra. But other
traditions refer to it in the Vihāra of Kuvana near Gandhāra or Jalandhara.\textsuperscript{15}
The king built a monastery for the accommodation of 500 monks who were
called upon to write commentaries on the Piṭakas. The commentary on the
Sutta-piṭaka was composed in 100,000 slokas. The Vinayavibhāsa, a
commentary on the Vinaya, also consists of 100,000 slokas, and the
Abhidharma-vibhāsa, which was composed in the council, also ran to the same
number.\textsuperscript{16} The Sarvāstivāda sect and its many sub-sects took active part in this
council and they organised it. Vasumitra was the president and Asvaghosa was
the vice-president of the council. The chief aim of this council was to collect
manuscripts and to compose new commentaries on the Sutta, Vinaya and
Abhidhamma texts.\textsuperscript{17} The proceeding of the council was thus confined to the
composition of the commentaries.

According to the Chronicles and other traditions of Sri Lanka, three
councils were held in Sri Lanka. The first of these was held during the reign of
King Devānampiyatissa (247 – 207 B.C.). This council was held after the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{16} P. V. Bapat: 2500 Years Of Buddhism, p. 43.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Kanai Lal Hazra: History of Theravāda Buddhism in South-East Asia with special reference to India
and Ceylon, p. 41.
\end{itemize}

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arrival of the Buddhist monks, headed by Arahant Mahinda, the son of King Aśoka. According to tradition, sixty thousand Arahants took part in the assembly and as desired by Arahant Mahinda, the Venerable Ariṭṭha, a Sinhalese monk recited the Buddhist canon. Ariṭṭha is considered to be the first Sinhalese pupil of Mahinda. The council took place at the site of the Thūpārāma in Anurādhapura.

In spite of this, the next council, which was held during the time of king Vaṭṭagāmanī Abhaya (101–77 B.C.) is considered by the Theravāda school, to be the Fourth council. According to the Sinhalese tradition, not only was the Tipiṭaka rehearsed, but also its commentaries were revised. The learned monks decided to hold this synod so that the entire Buddhist canon and the commentaries might be committed to writing. At the end of the council, texts along with the commentaries were inscribed on palm leaves. The Tipiṭaka was for the first time in the history of Buddhism committed to writing on palm leaves in Sri Lanka.

As many as five hundred learned monks took part in the deliberations under the Venerable Rakkhita Mahāthera as president. This is called the Aloka Council as it was held at Aloka Cave in the village of Matale in Sri Lanka. About a century ago, in 1865 A.D., another council was held at Ratnapura in Sri Lanka under the Venerable Hikkaṭuva Siri Sumāngala. It continued for five months and was patronised by Iddamalgoḷa Basnāyaka Nilame.

Buddhism arose in India in about the sixth century BC and soon began to play a vital role in the religious history of that country. The spread of Buddhism to countries outside India can be dated from the third century BC onwards and India played a very vital role in dissemination the message of the Buddha in the neighbouring lands. Buddhism underwent many changes in India, the Mahāyāna replacing the Hīnayāna as the major school of Buddhism from about the first century AD. By the seventh century AD Buddhism was no longer a dynamic force in India and the Hīnayāna school (the Theravāda is a sect of the Hīnayāna school) had all but disappeared. By this time Ceylon
where Buddhism had had an enthusiastic reception and rapid expansion, became the main centre of the orthodox form of Buddhism. Hinayana Buddhism had spread from India to south-east Asia as well and these countries began to look to Ceylon for religious inspiration. The eleventh century AD begins a very significant period in the history of Theravada Buddhism. The common bond of Theravada Buddhism brought together Ceylon and Buddhist South East Asia, Ceylon playing a leading role in the exchange of ideas between them.  

3.3. The Divisions of Pali Canon

The Pali Canon or Tipitaka consists of three sections of the Buddha’s teachings. They are as follows:

1. Vinaya Piṭaka mainly deals with the rules and regulations of the Order of monks (bhikkhus) and nuns (bhikkunis). It describes in detail the gradual development of the Buddhhasasana (Buddha’s Dispensation). It also gives an account of the life and ministry of the Buddha. Indirectly it reveals some useful information about ancient history, Indian customs, arts, sciences, etc. For nearly twenty years, since the Buddha’s enlightenment, no rules were laid down for the control of the Saṅgha. Later, as occasion arose, the Buddha promulgated rules for the future discipline of the Saṅgha. This Piṭaka consists of the five following books:

   i. Parajika Pāli (Major Offences).
   ii. Pacittiya Pāli (Minor Offences).
   iii. Mahāvagga Pāli (Greater Section).
   iv. Cullavagga Pāli (Smaller Section).
   v. Parirara Pāli (Epitome of the Vinaya).  

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18 Ibid., p. 49.
This *Piṭaka* also comprises the following sections:

i. *Pātimokkha* – it gives a list of 227 rules of discipline (originally 152 only) together with atonements for transgressing them.

ii. *Suttavibhaṅga* – it contains explanation of the *Suttas* of the *Pātomokkha* with a short historical introduction. It comprises the *Mahāvibhaṅga* and the *Bhikkhuni-vibhaṅga*.

iii. *Khaṇḍaka* – it is a continuation of the *Suttavibhaṅga* and comprises two divisions – *Mahāvagga* and *Cullavagga*.

iv. *Parivāra* – it is a later composition and seeks to give a resume of the earlier texts.  

2. *Sutta Piṭaka* consists chiefly of discourses delivered by the Buddha himself on various occasions. There are also a few discourses delivered by some of his distinguished disciples, such as the Venerable Sariputta, Ananda, Moggallana, etc., included in it. It is like a book of prescriptions, as the sermons embodied therein were expounded to suit the different occasions and the temperament of various persons. There may be seemingly contradictory uttered by the Buddha to suit a particular purpose; for instance, to the self-same question. He would maintain silence (when the inquirer is merely foolishly inquisitive) or give detailed reply when he knew the inquirer to be an earnest seeker.

This *Piṭaka* is divided into five *Nikāyas* or Collections, viz.:

i. *Dīgha Nikāya* (Collection of Long Discourses).

ii. *Majjhima Nikāya* (Collection of Middle-length Discourses).

iii. *Sampyutta Nikāya* (Collection of Kindred Sayings).

iv. *Anguttara Nikāya* (Collection of Discourses arranged in accordance with number).

v. *Khuddaka Nikāya* (Smaller Collection).

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The Khuddaka Nikāya contains fifteen works. They are as follows:

a. Khuddaka pāṭha or short passages.

b. Dhammapada or collection of moral precepts in the form of 423 sayings of the Buddha.

c. Udāna or short lyrics, 82 in number, supposedly uttered by the Buddha under strong emotion.

d. Itivuttaka, containing 110 sayings of the Buddha.

e. Sutta Nipāta, containing didactic poems, 70 in number.

f. Vimāṇavatthu or stories of celestial mansions.

g. Petavatthu, a treatise on the departed spirits.

h. Theragāthā, or the gāthās composed by the monks.

i. Therigāthā, or the gāthās composed by the nuns.

j. Jātakas or stories of Buddha’s former births.

k. Niddesa, a treatise on the explanation of the Sutta Nipāta composed by Sāriputta.

l. Paṭisambhidāmagga, or treatise on intuitive insight.

m. Apadāna, or treatise on the legends about arhats or saints.

n. Buddhavaṁsa, a work on the lives of preceding Buddhas and Gautama Buddha.

o. Carīyā Piṭaka, or treatise on Gautama’s deeds in former births or a collection of Jātakas in versified form.²²

3. Abhidhamma Piṭaka is the third main division of the Pāli Canon. The Abhidhamma is, to a deep thinker, the most important and the most interesting, as it contains the profound philosophy of the Buddha’s teaching in contrast to the illuminating and simpler discourses in the Sutta Piṭaka. In the Sutta Piṭaka one often finds references to individual, being, etc., but in the Abhidhamma, instead of such conventional terms, we meet with ultimate terms, such as aggregates, mind, matter, etc.

The conventional teaching (voharadesana) is found in the Sutta Piṭaka whilst the ultimate doctrine (paramatthadesana) is found in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. In the Abhidhamma everything is analysed and explained in detail, and as such it is called analytical doctrine (vibhajjavāda). Four ultimate things (paramatthas) are enumerated in the Abhidhamma. They are ‘citta’ (consciousness), ‘cetasika’ (mental concomitants), ‘rūpa’ (matter) and ‘nibbāṇa’ (nirvāṇa).

The psychological analysis of phenomenal existence is especially dealt with in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The so-called being is microscopically analysed and its component parts are minutely described. Finally the ultimate goal and the method to achieve it are explained with all necessary details.

The main object of the Abhidhamma is to understand things as they truly are. One who knows the Abhidhamma is not a surface seer but a seer of reality. Most exponents of the Dhamma that knowledge of the Abhidhamma is essential to comprehend the Buddha’s teachings generally admit it.

The Abhidhamma Piṭaka is composed of seven books known as Sattapakaraṇa, which are systematic expositions of the doctrine from a strict philosophical point of view. They are as follows:

i. Dhammasaṅgaṇī – enumeration of phenomena.

ii. Vibhaṅga – the book of the treatises.

iii. Kathāvatthu – point of controversy.


v. Dhātukathā - discussion with reference to elements.


vii. Paṭṭhāṇa – the book of relation.²³

The Pāli Tipiṭaka represents the earliest available and the most complete collection of the Buddhist texts that can be broadly be placed between the death of the Buddha (483 BC) and the reign of Vattagamini of Ceylon when it was

first put to writing (30 BC). This voluminous Tipiṭaka, which contains the essence of the Buddha’s teaching, is estimated to be about eleven times the size of the Bible. Since the time and space do not permit to study such a vast expanse of Buddhist literature, this study is limited only to Nikāyas. The following discussion is on ‘atta’ as found in Nikāyas.

3.4. The Concept of ‘atta’ in Buddhism

The usages of ‘atta’ are multiple. But primarily it can be classified into two groups, viz. (1) ‘I’ as personal pronoun. (2) ‘Self’ – the principle of consciousness in me, which we consider as ourselves when we introspect ourselves. The use of ‘atta’ in first sense is very negligible, whereas the second meaning is profound in Pāli texts. Following are a few use of the word ‘atta’ explaining the types of attitudes towards it.

(1) Tiṭṭhati: one who is difficult to be tamed (but) is restrained with the process of restraining, the Valiant, one who is satisfied, one has crossed the doubts, the victorious, one who has set aside horripilation (i.e. fear), is one who is calmed and is self established.25

(2) Dhammati: Irrigators lead the waters; fletchers bend the shafts; carpenters bend the wood; the wise men control themselves.26

(3) Gopeti: just as the rampart of a town is guarded from within and without, guard yourself, do not make the good opportunity pass away.27

(4) Passati: only by moving the lips, he does not understand his self, he walks with his neck stiff, and labours under the conceit that he is better than others.28

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25 Therag. 8.
26 Dhp. 80, Tr. by Nārada.
27 Therag. 653.
28 Therag. 1074.
(5) Purify himself: giving up sensual pleasure, with no impediments, the wise man should cleanse himself of the impurities of the mind.\(^{29}\)

(6) Admonishing against ‘\textit{hanti}’: first, he injures his own self, and then afterwards, injures others, just as the bird which is injured by the bird-snare, injures his own self terribly.\(^{30}\)

These main examples on ‘\textit{attā}’ make clear that the ‘\textit{attā}’ is not an eternal principle but only a self-consciousness, which occurs in mind when one thinks about self. These ‘\textit{attās}’ are not eternal subjects but transient and have both the possibilities, viz. to turn towards worse and also towards good or better.

As for the attitude towards the ‘\textit{attā}’ in such cases, one can say ‘\textit{dammattī}’ is a basic one, that is, to restrain oneself controlled. The final end will be to make the self-fixed and steady. The man whose self is firmly fixed, i.e. composed and calmed is said to be a Buddha.\(^{31}\)

To make one’s self fixed, one cannot call oneself one’s own self,\(^{32}\) and self is not within one’s control. To make the present self-better, one has in the first place to know well oneself,\(^{33}\) and then one has to take the dirt therein,\(^{34}\) i.e. to purify the self.\(^{35}\) One should not injure,\(^{36}\) should not torment one’s self,\(^{37}\) and should guard the self.\(^{38}\)

Such understanding of self leads to the realisation that self is conquered and that one can control one’s self.\(^{39}\) In this process the most reliable thing is our selves because the one who control and one who is controlled both are selves.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{29}\) Dhp. 88, Tr. by Nārada.

\(^{30}\) Therag. 139.

\(^{31}\) Sn. 477; Therag. 5, 7, 8.

\(^{32}\) \textit{attā hi attano nathī} – Dhp. 62, Tr. by Nārada

\(^{33}\) Therag. 171, 172.

\(^{34}\) Dhp. 165, 239, 388, Tr. by Nārada; Sn. 275, 962.

\(^{35}\) Dhp. 88, Tr. by Nārada.

\(^{36}\) Dhp. 355, Tr. by Nārada; Sn. 583, 585, Therag. 139.

\(^{37}\) Sn. 451, 1127, SN. 1-8

\(^{38}\) Dhp. 315, Tr. by Nārada; Therag. 653, 1005.

\(^{39}\) Dhp. 103, Tr. by Nārada.

\(^{40}\) Dhp. 238, Tr. by Nārada; Sn. 501.
Attā was also compared to ‘jīva’, a Sanskrit word for life, soul and life principle. Life principle may be closer to the meaning, as some scholars; for instance, Rys Davids translated it to mean ‘vital principle.’ Others translated it to mean ‘living soul’ which is a reference to person: “There was not a living soul left after the explosion.” In response to the ‘jīva’ not being the physical body, itself, it was asked that “then how does the ‘jīva’ reside in the body?” The Buddha replied by describing the process of gestation, in which the unborn child receives nourishment when the mother eats and drinks normally.

The Buddha says that the form is not jīva, so why does jīva find this body, from where does the body made of bone and lump come? How does this jīva attach itself to the womb (cave)? He further says, ‘First there is kalala, from kalala abbuda arises, from abbuda pesi arises, from pesi ghana arises, from ghana pasakha arises, hair of the head, hair of the body and the nail arise. The mother eats food and drink, because of which the child in the mother’s womb is nourished.’

Having looked into some of the definitions of ‘attā’, let us now look into the concept of ‘anattā’.

The Buddha opposed to the Vedic definition of a self. ‘Ātman’ is a Sanskrit term translated as either self or soul, which is identical with ‘ahamkāra’ in Pāli literature. It is equated with ‘I’ and ‘me’ as well.

In this chapter, we propose to examine the polar opposite, which is ‘anattā’. ‘Anattā’ is a Pāli derivative from ‘anātman’ in Sanskrit, which means non-self, egoless, etc. ‘An’ is a Sanskrit negative prefix for ‘non’, ‘not’, ‘less’, etc.; ‘attā’ is Pāli for ‘ātman’. The concept, and the truth, of ‘anattā’ – i.e., that there is no ‘self’ in all things – was taught by the Buddha as the third aspect of earthly existence. It is continuously linked with the other two, being ‘anicca’ or temporariness and malleability and ‘dukkha’, which has a variety of translations. The concept of ‘anattā’ was first expounded by the Buddha and it is the crux of Buddhism and refers to all dharmas, for instance, ‘sabbe dhammā

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41 SN. I. 206
anattā’ – all Dhammas are without a ‘soul’.\textsuperscript{42} Dhamma here refers not to teachings but to phenomena of the physical world.

3.5. Anicca–dukkha–anattā

The first discourse given after his enlightenment by the Buddha set out the four noble truths. The second stated the characteristic of ‘anattā’ as follows:

"I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Varanasi in the Game Refuge at Isipatana. There he addressed the group of five monks:

"Form, monks, is not self. If form were the self, this form would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible [to say] with regard to form, 'Let this form be thus. Let this form not be thus.' But precisely because form is not self, form lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible [to say] with regard to form, 'Let this form be thus. Let this form not be thus.'

"Feeling is not self...

"Perception is not self...

"[Mental] fabrications are not self...

"Consciousness is not self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to dis-ease. It would be possible [to say] with regard to consciousness, 'Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.' But precisely because consciousness is not self, consciousness lends itself to dis-ease. And it is not possible [to say] with regard to consciousness, 'Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.'

"What do you think, monks -- Is form constant or inconstant?"

"Inconstant, lord."

"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"

"Stressful, lord."

"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'"

\textsuperscript{42} Dhp. 279.
"No, lord."
"...Is feeling constant or inconstant?"
"Inconstant, lord."...
"...Is perception constant or inconstant?"
"Inconstant, lord."...
"...Are fabrications constant or inconstant?"
"Inconstant, lord."...
"What do you think, monks -- Is consciousness constant or inconstant?"
"Inconstant, lord."
"And is that which is inconstant easeful or stressful?"
"Stressful, lord."
"And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: 'This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am'?"
"No, lord."
"Thus, monks, any body whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every body is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'
"Any feeling whatsoever...
"Any perception whatsoever...
"Any fabrications whatsoever...
"Any consciousness whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every consciousness is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: 'This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.'
"Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple grows disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with fabrications, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, 'Fully released.' He discerns that 'Birth is depleted, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"
That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of five monks delighted at his words. And while this explanation was being given, the hearts of the group of five monks, through not clinging (not being sustained), were fully released from fermentation/effluents.  

After examining and analysing the psycho-physical constitution of man (nāma and rūpa in Pāli), the Buddha realized that they were, first of all, impermanent, suffering and non-self (anicca–dukkha–anattā). In fact according to Buddhism man consists only of five aggregates (khandhas), four of which are mental namely vedanā, or sensations, which are momentary emotional states; saññā, or perception, arising from thought processes; sankhārā, or mental formations; and viññāṇa, or consciousness. All five aggregates are subject to dependent causation, temporariness and change. None of these can match the Vedic description of an eternal and unchanging self. The Buddha admonished that ‘one with the right view’ could enter the stream. He then would achieve enlightenment after seven rebirths. “One with the right view” refers to anyone, whether man or woman, who understands that the body and mind are compounded and that, thus, at any moment in the future, those compounding aggregates will separate. This is the core of ‘anicca’: Whatever has come together and formed, will also separate.

Since this disintegration will happen at any moment, anxiety over change particularly sudden and undesirable change in either body or mind will arise. That is the core of ‘dukkha’ or ‘suffering’. Finally, since both of these are uncontrollable and unpredictable, then any permanent self, which may otherwise determine the existence does not exist. That is the core of ‘anattā’.

It is worth mentioning that such enlightened evaluation exists through modern science. Astronomers discovered the forming and extinction of stars and star systems; medical professionals are confronted with phenomena such as tubers and other physical outgrowths, dysfunctions, sudden illnesses, etc. In

43 SN XXII.59 – Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta: The Discourse on the Not-Self Characteristic.
their educated analysis, they speak of various causes for these phenomena but they never referred to a permanent self or a soul.

3.6. Soul and Body

Psychology owes its root from ‘psyche’ which was Greek word for ‘soul.’ But, in view of modern psychology, the modern application of the word is ‘mind.’ Modern psychology is a large science dealing with various aspects of thought, volition, perception and so on. These were the mental aggregates expounded by the Buddha several thousand years before the advent of psychology. Modern psychology has found much about the human mind but it has found no clues about the existence of the self.

In at least modern speech context, ‘soul’ refers to individual or person as perceived by others; e.g., “You are a very kind soul” is spoken of someone who is very thoughtful of others and “you have no soul” is spoken of someone who is cruel and vicious. The term “soul mate” is used to describe the ideal life partner but “life mate” or “life partner” is more appropriate.

In any case, the aforementioned data indicate that anātta is a correct view. If there is ātman that is permanent, it is certainly absent from worldly existence. If it is blissful, it is likewise absent, since worldly life is filled with suffering.

Man and other animals consist only of mind and body, but not a soul, which would wander from one life to another. Mind and body affect each other in various ways. A certain physical existence requires a certain mental experience: the body of an animal cannot and will not support the thought processes, etc., of a human being. The Buddha determined that body could not be ‘self’. Body was first of all impermanent. Since it was impermanent, it caused suffering and what caused suffering was not the self. Having established that body was ‘anattha’, the Buddha continued that the mind and its four aggregates were also impermanent, subjected to change, caused suffering and could not be considered as self. We cannot argue that it is permanent, devoid
of change or causes unhappiness. Furthermore, since the body is the result of several conditions and was at one time created, it neither ‘belongs to anyone’ nor will remain in the future.

3.7. Ego and Self

The ego is explained as an aggregate of the *khandhas* – a complex of sensations, ideas, thoughts, emotions and volitions. The Buddha categorically explains the *khandhas* as subject to dependent origination. When one arises, the other arises; when one ceases, the other ceases. Since ‘ego’ is subject to change and causality, it cannot be a self. The principle of this doctrine is given in a short formula of four lines as below:

When this is, that is (*imasmim sati idam hoti*);
This arising, that arises (*imassuppada idam uppajjati*);
When this is not, that is not (*imasmim asati idam na hoti*);
This ceasing, that ceases (*imassa nirodha idam nirujjhati*).

This equation may be put into modern explanation as follows:

When A is, B is;
A arising, B arises;
When A is not, B is not;
A ceasing, B ceases.

As mentioned above, the term ‘self’, ‘man’ and ‘animal’ are relative to one’s perception and consciousness. To some, man is a type of animal. Man desires the same basic existence as the birds and beasts. To others, man is other than an animal. Man is intellectual whereas the other animals are instinctual.

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44 P. Lakshmi Narasu: *Essence of Buddhism* p. 171
45 MN III. p. 63; SN II. p. 23, 70, 95; Ud. 2.
The Buddha admonished that the body may be considered as self by the ignorant man, because the body had a longer life than the mind. Body is composed of four principle elements namely air, fire, water and earth. These are simplifications of the four tendencies and composites of body: solids, liquids, gases and heat. However, the body is still impermanent and a cause of unhappiness; therefore, it cannot be a self.

The Buddha says, ‘Better it would be to consider the body as the ‘Ego’, rather than the mind. And why? Because this body may last for 10, 20, 30, 40 or 50 years, even for 100 years and more. But that which is called ‘mind’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘thinking’, arises continuously, during day and night, as one thing, and as something different again it vanishes.’

The Buddha further expounded that self did not exist in any part of the body, that the part mentioned was neither the self nor belonged to anyone. The bhikkhu (monk) was advised not to seek the self or its existence therein, or neither in the functions thereof, nor to think that it belonged to him. In fact, an eye is only an eye, an ear only an ear, etc. They may at sometime cease to function and thus cause sorrow, and later may cease to exist as well.

The Buddha has said, ‘It is said that the world is empty. But why does one call the world empty? Because the world is empty of an Ego (attā), and of something belonging to the Ego, therefore the world is called empty. But which are things that are empty of an Ego? Empty of an Ego are eye and visible objects, ear and sounds, nose and odours, tongue and tastes, body and bodily impressions, mind and mind-objects.’

The Buddha declared, in his own words, that he merely taught the truth of dukkha, its causation and its cessation – ‘This only I teach. Sorrow and its end to reach.’

This quotation stipulates directly that the Buddha did not consider the existence and non-existence of the self as vital to his dhamma or teaching. To begin, he taught that all things are temporary and subjected to change. Body

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46 SN. XII. 61
47 Ibid., XXXV. 85
48 MN. 22
and mind are subjected to such influences as illness, tension, stress and external influences. He continued to teach that the concept of a self to which man attaches himself later induces man to suffer, when either body or mind begins to change.

In this context, the Buddha did not clearly define ‘self’. He did not speak of its existence either. He simply identified that this supposition leads to suffering. At one time, he taught a wanderer named Vacchagotta who enquired as to the existence and non-existence of ‘self’; but, wisely, the Buddha remained silent. He preferred not to confuse the man further, perceiving clearly that Vacchagotta was confused at the time of enquiry. In addition, the Buddha refrained from taking stand on the issue for the reason that it was against his doctrine of ‘middle way’. By supposing that the self existed, he would be labelled an eternalist and by taking the opposite view, he would be labelled an annihilist. The Buddha intended to remain in between these two. Instead, he merely explained that the self was neither permanent nor blissful, as was taught in Vedic literatures. He explained, further, that anyone who perceived of self in any form merely, erringly, conceived of the five aggregates (pañcakkhandhas).

The Buddha says, ‘All philosophers and divines who conceive a self in various forms, all those conceive the group of five (as the self) or one or another of them. Which are the five? Herein an ignorant worldling conceives materiality, feeling, perception, formations or consciousness as the self; or the self as the owner of any of the group; or that group as included in the self; or the self as included in that group.’

The famous scholar Vasubandhu had later recorded such a dialogue between Venerable Ānanda and the Buddha as to the cause for being silent on the subject, as follows: Vātsiputrīya, the believer of another school of philosophy insists that some kind of Individual must exist, since Scripture declares: “to maintain dogmatically ‘I have no soul’ is a wrong dogma.”

Vasubandhu replied that to maintain that there is a Soul is likewise improper, because the Abhidhammists declare both these views to be

49 SN. XXII, 47.
inadmissible extremes. On the one hand, the belief in the one would make the Buddha an eternalist; on the other hand, the belief in the other would make him annihilist. Both views were labelled ‘micchādītthi’ (heretical). He then refers to the same dialogue with Vatsa: ‘O Ānanda! If we declare that there is a real Soul, we shall fall into the extreme of Eternity, and if we declare that there is no (empirical) Self, we shall fall into the extreme of Nihilism.’

The Buddha admonishes his disciples thus: ‘Give up what does not belong to you! Such giving up will long be conducive to your weal and happiness. And what is it that does not belong to you? Materiality, feelings, perception, formations and consciousness — these do not belong to you and these you should give up. Such giving up will long be conducive to your weal and happiness.’

By expounding that the five aggregates were impermanent and led to suffering, it may be supposed that he claimed that ‘Ego, self, man, animal, etc. are merely conventional terms and do not refer to any real entity.’

3.8. Mind and Self

Immanuel Kant’s analysis of the mind converges with Buddhism, in so far as he admitted that there was no permanent entity. Personality, itself, is a vague concept. The following quotation is offered as an argument against the personality being considered as self: ‘If anyone after serious reflection without prejudices, thinks he has any other idea of himself, I confess I can no longer reason with him. It is possible that he may perceive something simple and permanent which he calls himself, but as for me, I am quite sure I possess no such principle.’

In accordance with Buddhism, Kant refuted the same concept as the ‘eternity of selfhood’ taught in the Upaniṣads. His contemplation of the self

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50 Theodore Tscherbatsky: The Soul Theory of the Buddhist, p. 47
51 SN. XXII, 33
52 Collected Essay: The Three Basic Facts of Existence, III. Egolessness, p. 42
53 P. Lakshmi Narasu: Essence of Buddhism, p. 170 – 171
was inseparable from either perception or consciousness, and his realization was that mind is perpetually thinking and perceiving.

'Self in any form, particular or absolute, one or many, cannot be conceived apart from identification, without which no meaningful statement can be made about it, and any identification is always wrong.'

In the above quotation, there is adequate allusion that 'self' is usually referred to in relation with 'other' and is merely a relative term as used in such identification. If that relationship ceases, if there were no 'other' with whom to relate, there would be no more meaning for 'self.' Identification is wrong because one perceives it without its cause or cessation, and supposes that it is true.

3.9. A Contrast

Debate has ensued about whether or not the Buddha disclaimed a belief in a higher concept of selfhood like 'paramātman'. Such a concept is contained in classical Hinduism and the animistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Buddha taught that one transcends human limits by accumulating merit, supposing that the so-called Brahmanical deities were once human and had been rewarded for great past merit, they were 'deified' by their followers, much as Jesus was by his later. Such was believed by a majority of people. However, the Buddha did not establish the existence of supernatural entities as referred to above.

Some scholars believe that the Buddha believed in this existence or state was the following: ‘There is an unborn, unoriginated, unmade uncompounded; were there not, there would be no escape from the born, the originated, the made, the compounded.'

A few Vedic scholars have tended to believe in ‘transmigration of the soul’. Basically, this concept states that the soul remains constant and is subject

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54 Collected Essays: The Three Basic Facts of Existence p. 99
55 Ud. VIII, 3
to ‘wandering’ or ‘saṁsāra’ (the existence of cycle of birth and death), whereas the subsequent body or life varies. Neither the Buddha nor modern science has accepted this idea as truth. Furthermore, some Western scholars have discovered that transmigration was a pre-Vedic non-Aryan (aboriginal or Dravidian) concept borrowed by the Brāhmaṇas.

Throughout the ages scholars have sought to identify this with the ‘blissful self’ of the Upaniṣads. The Buddha was at variance with this concept, so one ought not to suppose that this refers to any unconditioned entity. It may be debated that the meaning of ‘nibbāna’ is ‘immortality’ since one is beyond the cycle of rebirth. But the Buddha merely taught that anyone who practiced his teachings diligently and gave up the idea of ‘self’ could transcend the cycle of death and birth. We should emphasize herein that, in his day and even nowadays, the best environment was the holy life.

The following Chachakka Sutta in Majjhima Nikāya shows the Buddha’s explanation of six external and internal senses of a human being:

"I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's Monastery. There he addressed the monks:
"Monks!"
"Yes, lord," the monks responded to him.
"Monks, I will teach you the Dhamma admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end; I will expound the holy life both in its particulars & in its essence, entirely complete, surpassingly pure -- in other words, the six sextets. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak."
"As you say, lord," the monks responded.
The Blessed One said: "The six internal media should be known. The six external media should be known. The six classes of consciousness should be known. The six classes of contact should be known. The six classes of feeling should be known. The six classes of craving should be known."
"The six internal media should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? The eye-medium, the ear-medium, the nose-medium, the tongue-medium, the body-medium, the intellect-medium. 'The six internal
media should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the first sextet.

"The six external media should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? The form-medium, the sound-medium, the aroma-medium, the flavor-medium, the tactile sensation-medium, the idea-medium. 'The six external media should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the second sextet.

"The six classes of consciousness should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. 'The six classes of consciousness should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the third sextet.

"The six classes of contact should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. 'The six classes of contact should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the fourth sextet.

"The six classes of feeling should be known.' Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at
the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. 'The six classes of feeling should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the fifth sextet.

"The six classes of craving should be known." Thus it was said. In reference to what was it said? Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the ear & sounds there arises consciousness at the ear. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the nose & aromas there arises consciousness at the nose. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the tongue & flavors there arises consciousness at the tongue. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the body & tactile sensations there arises consciousness at the body. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact
as a requisite condition there is feeling. With feeling as a requisite condition there is craving. 'The six classes of craving should be known.' Thus it was said. And in reference to this was it said. This is the sixth sextet.

"If anyone were to say, 'The eye is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable. The arising & falling away of the eye are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that 'My self arises & falls away.' That's why it wouldn't be tenable if anyone were to say, 'The eye is the self.' So the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Forms are the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...Thus the eye is not-self and forms are not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Consciousness at the eye is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Contact at the eye is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Feeling is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self, feeling is not self. If anyone were to say, 'Craving is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable. The arising & falling away of craving are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that 'My self arises & falls away.' That's why it wouldn't be tenable if anyone were to say, 'Craving is the self.' Thus the eye is not-self, forms are not-self, consciousness at the eye is not-self, contact at the eye is not-self, feeling is not self, craving is not-self.

"If anyone were to say, 'The ear is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...

"If anyone were to say, 'The nose is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...

"If anyone were to say, 'The tongue is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...

"If anyone were to say, 'The body is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...

"If anyone were to say, 'The intellect is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable. The arising & falling away of the intellect are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that 'My self arises & falls away.' That's why it wouldn't be tenable if anyone were to say, 'The intellect is the self.' So the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Ideas are the self,' that
wouldn't be tenable...Thus the intellect is not-self and ideas are not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Consciousness at the intellect is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Contact at the intellect is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self. If anyone were to say, 'Feeling is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable...Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self, feeling is not self. If anyone were to say, 'Craving is the self,' that wouldn't be tenable. The arising & falling away of craving are discerned. And when its arising & falling away are discerned, it would follow that 'My self arises & falls away.' That's why it wouldn't be tenable if anyone were to say, 'Craving is the self.' Thus the intellect is not-self, ideas are not-self, consciousness at the intellect is not-self, contact at the intellect is not-self, craving is not-self.

"This, monks, is the path of practice leading to self-identification. One assumes about the eye that 'This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.' One assumes about forms...One assumes about consciousness at the eye...One assumes about contact at the eye...One assumes about feeling...One assumes about craving that 'This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.'

"One assumes about the ear...

"One assumes about the nose...

"One assumes about the tongue...

"One assumes about the body...

"One assumes about the intellect that 'This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.' One assumes about ideas...One assumes about consciousness at the intellect...One assumes about contact at the intellect...One assumes about feeling...One assumes about craving that 'This is me, this is my self, this is what I am.'

"Now, this is the path of practice leading to the cessation of self-identification. One assumes about the eye that 'This is not me, this is not my self, this is not
what I am.' One assumes about forms...One assumes about consciousness at the eye...One assumes about contact at the eye...One assumes about feeling...One assumes about craving that 'This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.'

"One assumes about the ear...

"One assumes about the nose...

"One assumes about the tongue...

"One assumes about the body...

"One assumes about the intellect that 'This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.' One assumes about ideas...One assumes about consciousness at the intellect...One assumes about contact at the intellect...One assumes about feeling...One assumes about craving that 'This is not me, this is not my self, this is not what I am.'

"Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one relishes it, welcomes it, or remains fastened to it, then the underlying tendency to passion lies latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats one's breast, becomes distraught, then the underlying tendency to resistance lies latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one does not discern, as it actually is present, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance lies latent within one. That a person -- without abandoning the underlying tendency to passion with regard to a feeling of pleasure, without abolishing the underlying tendency to resistance with regard to a feeling of pain, without uprooting the underlying tendency to ignorance with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, without abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing -- would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: such a thing isn't possible.

"Dependent on the ear & sounds...
"Dependent on the nose & aromas...

"Dependent on the tongue & flavors...

"Dependent on the body & tactile sensations...

"Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one relishes it, welcomes it, or remains fastened to it, then the underlying tendency to passion lies latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one sorrows, grieves, & laments, beats one's breast, becomes distraught, then the underlying tendency to resistance lies latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one does not discern, as it actually is present, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, or escape from that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance lies latent within one. That a person -- without abandoning the underlying tendency to passion with regard to a feeling of pleasure, without abolishing the underlying tendency to resistance with regard to a feeling of pain, without uprooting the underlying tendency to ignorance with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, without abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing -- would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: such a thing isn't possible.

"Dependent on the eye & forms there arises consciousness at the eye. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one does not relish it, welcome it, or remain fastened to it, then the underlying tendency to passion does not lie latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, beat one's breast or become distraught, then the underlying tendency to resistance does not lie latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns, as it actually is present, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, & escape from that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance does not lie latent within one. That a person -
through abandoning the underlying tendency to passion with regard to a feeling of pleasure, through abolishing the underlying tendency to resistance with regard to a feeling of pain, through uprooting the underlying tendency to ignorance with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, through abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing -- would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: such a thing is possible.

"Dependent on the ear & sounds...
"Dependent on the nose & aromas...
"Dependent on the tongue & flavors...
"Dependent on the body & tactile sensations...
"Dependent on the intellect & ideas there arises consciousness at the intellect. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there arises what is felt either as pleasure, pain, or nor pleasure nor pain. If, when touched by a feeling of pleasure, one does not relish it, welcome it, or remain fastened to it, then the underlying tendency to passion does not lie latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of pain, one does not sorrow, grieve, or lament, beat one's breast or become distraught, then the underlying tendency to resistance does not lie latent within one. If, when touched by a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, one discerns, as it actually is present, the origination, passing away, allure, drawback, & escape from that feeling, then the underlying tendency to ignorance does not lie latent within one. That a person - through abandoning the underlying tendency to passion with regard to a feeling of pleasure, through abolishing the underlying tendency to resistance with regard to a feeling of pain, through uprooting the underlying tendency to ignorance with regard to a feeling of neither pleasure nor pain, through abandoning ignorance and giving rise to clear knowing -- would put an end to suffering & stress in the here & now: such a thing is possible.

"Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple grows disenchanted with the eye, disenchanted with forms, disenchanted with consciousness at the eye, disenchanted with contact at the eye, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with craving.
"He grows disenchanted with the ear...
"He grows disenchanted with the nose...
"He grows disenchanted with the tongue...
"He grows disenchanted with the body...
"He grows disenchanted with the intellect, disenchanted with ideas, disenchanted with consciousness at the intellect, disenchanted with contact at the intellect, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with craving. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully released. With full release, there is the knowledge, 'Fully released.' He discerns that 'Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.'"

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted at his words. And while this explanation was being given, the hearts of 60 monks, through no clinging (not being sustained), were fully released from fermentation/effluents.56

Concerning the individual or ego as the ‘vedāgu’ – internal knower which sees all that there is to see, hears all that there is to hear, etc. Buddhism’s notion holds that it cannot explain mental phenomena. As in the case of vision, both the eye and the visible object must exist. Then, there is cognition and sensual impact which precedes sensation. Only sensation, perception, consciousness, etc. exist; what is called ‘self’, the substratum of that mental activity, cannot be found. In sum, Buddhism accepts the existence of internal sense but not as ‘self’ or ‘ego’. This is a direct contradistinction to the Vedic and Upaniṣadic concept that the ‘self’ is a separate, permanent, unchanging, eternal entity. Much later in our history, modern psychologists found evidence of these functions but did not uncover evidence if there is the existence of an ‘ego’. The Buddha rightly understood that all phenomena, including our existence, were temporary and changing. This state, innately, refutes any idea of an unchanging self.

56 MN. 148 – Chāchakka Sutta: The Six Sextets

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The Buddha explicitly warned that the idea of such a self was a wrong or heretical viewpoint or ‘sakkayaditthi’ as he called it and that it prevented the bhikkhu from being a ‘sotâpatti’ (the first state of sainthood in Buddhism). It may or may not be synonymous of the ‘âtman’. It is worth mentioning that the principle teaching of the Buddha was that ‘anattâ’ was linked with ‘anicca’ (anitya in Sanskrit). Again, ‘a (n)’ is a negative prefix and ‘nitya’ means permanent or lasting.

3.10. The Concept of ‘I Am’

Buddhism emphasizes that without the utter removal of the ‘I am’ conceit, the final deliverance is not possible. However, this concept is as deep rooted as the animistic idea of a separate godhood is in the other religions mentioned earlier. It has been fixed into our consciousness over centuries and many people continue to hold onto it. Consequently, the truth of ‘anattâ’ is, according to Buddhist teaching, one of all truths the most difficult to realize. Nonetheless, the Buddha taught the follower a simple procedure for recognizing ‘anicca’ by reminding his followers (bhikkhus) to observe the rising and cessation of their thoughts, etc., and to recollect their sources.

The Buddha says, ‘Here a monk abides contemplating rise and fall in the five categories affected by clinging thus: ‘Such is materiality, such its origin, such its disappearance, (and so with the other four).’ ‘Cultivating this kind of concentration conduces to the eradication of taints (âsavakkaya).’\(^{57}\)

The conceit of ‘I am’ is said to cease as a contemplator realizes the truth that body, mind and the aggregates are devoid of self.

The Buddha says, ‘Consciousness (mind) is egoless. Also the causes and conditions of the arising of consciousness, they are likewise egoless. Then, how could it be possible that consciousness having arisen through something which is egoless, could ever be an Ego?’\(^{58}\)

\(^{57}\) DN.33
\(^{58}\) SN. XXXV. 141
In addition, the conceit of ‘I am’ is called a delusion, and so with the idea that ‘self is substantial’ or ‘self is unsubstantial’, etc.

The Buddha further declares that ‘I am’ is a delusion. ‘This I am’ is a delusion. ‘Corporeal shall I be’ is a delusion. ‘Uncorporeal shall I be’ is a delusion. ‘Endowed with perception shall I be’ is a delusion. ‘Without perception shall I be’ is a delusion. ‘Neither with nor without perception shall I be’ is a delusion. Delusion is a sickness, an ulcer, a thorn.”

3.11. Nibbāṇa

Furthermore, the perfection of ‘nibbāṇa’ (nirvāṇa) cannot be compared with this ‘paramātmana’. In reality, ‘nibbāṇa’ refers to the total expiation from suffering, including death and rebirth, only. There is no connection with any supernatural being. Beside this, the Buddha held that dependent origination, and karma, affected even the ‘devaloka’ (heaven). Devas, or the gods, themselves have a temporary abode. Since, by merit, they became gods, it follows that by one demerit, they could become humans or less in some other existence.

Delusion is often confused with the terms ‘deception’ and ‘deceit.’ A deception or a deceit is performed unilaterally by the deceiver in order to confuse the other; a delusion is usually a pervading mental state which deceives only the mind of the afflicted person. It conceals the truth from his mind and makes him think that the otherwise is true. Therefore it is anathema to the concept of a permanent and blissful self, to cultivate the perception of anicca. It is essential to establish the right view. The follower, a bhikkhu or novice more than a layman, would thereby realize that all phenomena are dependent upon various causes, change accordingly, cause misery or at least discontent and, therefore, cannot be considered as a self.

The Buddha says, ‘Perception of impermanence should be cultivated for the elimination of the conceit ‘I am’, since perception of not-self becomes

59 Ibid., XXXV. 207
established in one who perceives impermanence, and it is perception of not-self that arrives at the elimination of ‘I am’, which is extinction (nibbāna) here and now.60 And ‘It is impossible that anyone with right view should see anything (or idea; dharma) as self.’61

3.12. Anattā as accessed through Anicca and Dukkha

Anattā is the third of three aspects of common existence as opposed to the holy or monastic life, as viewed by the Buddha. The others are ‘anicca’ (impermanence) and ‘dukkha’ (unsatisfactoriness) respectively. To illustrate the contrast between Vedic belief and the Buddha’s ideas, each of these concepts will be examined. In the Pāli Nikāyas, each aspect was separate and ‘anicca’ was taught first.

‘Atta’ as used in the Pāli texts is a reflexive and relative pronoun referring to a person or being. ‘An’ is again a negative prefix. It is argued therefore that the self referred to is equivalent to the English ‘self’ as in ‘self-awareness’ or ‘oneself.’ In pointing out to the community that ‘all that is suffering is not-self,’ the Buddha meant merely that the bhikkhu should not grasp onto anything as self, which is impermanent and causes suffering: See the things conditioned as extraneous (other) and not as being a part of oneself.

It has already been explained how the Buddha saw worldly phenomena as impermanent. He debated that among all that was impermanent, how an unchanging and impermanent entity could exist. If there were a core that does not change, then the object around it would not change either. But it is widely accepted until today that change is part of existence. Growth and evolution are necessary changes; illness and death are undergoing changes as well. Otherwise, a child would be a child forever. A seed would never become a tree. This change is termed ‘anicca.’ Since all of life is this way, a permanent individuality or entity, which denies change cannot exist.

60 Ud. IV, 1
61 MN. 115
Having established that all life is impermanent and changes constantly, the experience of sorrow and dissatisfaction arises. One realizes that the body, the physical, material object, will change as described above. Children start to mature; at adolescence, they start to assume duties, as they must help their parents, attend classes, etc. There is also the influence of their parents, not only teaching but also the erroneous method of discipline and the expectation that the child should take up his father’s profession. These problems stem from the misconception of egoism (aḥamkāra) and cause undue misery to children and affect their minds as they grow. Next, add to these the various pains of growth, illness and so on. So, easily, one may find in his/her own lives the evidence that impermanence and sorrow exist.

The Buddha teaches that impermanence was suffering and suffering was non-self. By declaring that whatsoever was or caused suffering was not self, the Buddha repudiated the Vedic idea that “the ātman was bliss.” However, scholars argued that the Buddha indirectly indicated to the contrary, or that “since suffering is not self, then bliss is self.” In point of fact, the phrase ‘sabbe dharmā anattā’ indicated that no self exists anywhere, in anything.

Firstly, S. Collins supposes that the Buddha followed the tradition of the seekers of truth by leaving home and family to discover the truth of existence. The truth he discovered was that “sabbe dharmā anicca, sabbe aniccā dukkha, sabbe dukkha anatta.” Secondly, S. Collins supports that “courtesans and the like” – the “like” referring to wives, children, possessions, etc. – cannot cause much happiness. In the event, a courtesan ran away with property later. Beyond this lies the second tradition, that of renunciation. Thirdly, ‘inner beatitude’ here is non-Buddhist term referring to contemplation. In total, one leaves aside the worldly pleasures to find inner peace and happiness through meditation or yoga. Therefore, the interpretation of the Buddha’s advice is to ‘contemplate on the dhamma (of temporary existence).’

Some scholars contended that the Buddha accepted the “search for the self.” One scholar worth the mention was George Grimm, who believed that ‘anattā’ really meant ‘attā.’ Grimm believed that the Buddha insinuated the
true meaning of self through enumerating what it was not. He quotes from the Mahāvagga, thus,

"Which is of greater importance, O youths, to search for this woman or to search for your ‘I'?"  

Insight into the interpretation of searching for the soul or the self in Buddhist terminology is found through the analysis of S. Collins as pointed out by Ikuro Hattori. Here is a clear-cut interpretation: 'The Buddha is simply reiterating the universal message of religious teachers that happiness is not to be found in external pleasures, courtesans and the like, but in some more profound inner beatitude."  

The Buddha says, ‘However, bhikkhu, understanding that ‘rūpa' (body) is impermanent, alterable and absent of desire and subject to destruction, those who see that rūpa, former and present, is alterable and absences of desire, as it is, with right knowledge, vanish the grief, lamentation, pain and distress. Vanishing them, they are not worried, not being worried they dwell in happiness, dwelling in happiness they are said Tadanganibutto."  

The Buddha also says, ‘The learned and noble disciples does not consider materiality, feeling, perception, formations or consciousness as self; nor the self as the owner of these groups; nor these groups as included within the self; nor the self as included within the groups. Of such a learned and noble disciple it is said that he is no longer fettered by any group of existence, own or external. Thus I say.'  

The Buddha exhorted the follower to first contemplate seriously about anicca, since it permeates all phenomena. He declared further that, having established this in one’s mind, one loses desire for the sensual existence, i.e., luxury, etc. Seeing that all existence is not eternal, one must certainly realize that such pleasures only lead to sorrow and then release them. A follower becomes indifferent to his existence and finds peace with it.

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62 George Grimm: *The Doctrine of the Buddha – A Religion of Reason and Meditation*, p. 114
63 Ikuro Hattori: *A Study of Certain Concepts of Substantial Existence in Buddhism*, p. 182
64 SN. III. p. 42 – 43, Khandha-saṃyutta, Atadipavaggo
65 SN. XXII, 117
When we look at life on a point by point basis, in modern context, we can see plainly the reality of this teaching one desires to create a comfortable lifestyle, and to do so he must first find a stable home. First, he thinks about it; second, he looks for a readymade building or desires to build it. The existing place is imperfect and he has to improve it, or the location is unsuitable and he later moves from it. If he builds or improves the house, he must spend much money. So, the anguish of hard work arises. Later, his house has a problem and needs repair. The anguish from inadequacy and impermanence sets in. Besides, he has to work harder to pay for repairing the damage and the pain of added labour and expenses arises.

If we suppose that the house is secure, the builder thinks about establishing a family. He or she must find a suitable mate, and so on. He establishes his family and the labour and the pains with it increase and multiply. Child rearing is difficult and needs time and patience. We have already mentioned that the parent imposes his ideas and interests upon his children. If his child refuses, argument ensues. That argument may be resolved peacefully or it may end with a divided opinion, which will cause uneasiness to children.

At this juncture, one can perceive easily how life of pleasure finally leads to pain and displeasure. Pain ensues, subsides and is succeeded by brief pleasure; that too subsides and more pain ensues and so on.

Hereupon, let us take up a threefold debate. The first part is that “self is feeling”. Feeling has three types: *sukhavedāna*, or pleasant; *dukhavedāna*, or painful; and *asukhādukkhavedāna* or neutral. Furthermore, feeling and sensation is subjected to rising and subsiding. The argument follows that “if the self is *sukhavedāna*, the moment that such a feeling subsides, the self no longer exists.” This is so for painful and neutral sensations as well.

What actually occurs is that a pleasant or painful sensation arises and ceases, without any relations to a self, particularly a permanent one. Therefore, self is impermanent and consists of the aforesaid sensations and is subjected to rise and cessation.
The second argument assumes more neutral ground: ‘Self is neither feeling nor not-feeling.’ Self is perceived to be identical to the body and that self is indeterminable whenever feeling is absent from the body, or that the conception of ‘I am’ cannot be set.

The final argument is that ‘self is not feeling but has feeling.’ But in this case, with total extinction of feeling, there can be no reference to ‘I am.’

Earlier in this chapter, we referred to a text in which the Buddha remarked that an unenlightened person (puthujjana) would regard self as the body on the ground that its age was longer than the mind; however, it is pointed out that neither body or mind are permanent. Thus, the second argument is refuted. In other words, ‘whatsoever is conditioned by not-self cannot be self.’

But again, the Buddha did not teach what is the self, but only what is not-self. By deduction, one may draw conclusions that after going through a list of aggregates and causes, there “must be one item remaining which can be ‘self’.” We should point out that, in perspective with Buddhism, neither modern science nor modern psychology has been able to conclude that the soul or self really exists.

The Buddha says, ‘The five Groups of Existence are impermanent, woeful and egoless. And also the causes and conditions of the arising of these groups of existence are impermanent, woeful and egoless. How could that which has arisen through something impermanent, woeful and egoless as its root be itself permanent, joyful and an Ego?’

On the aspect of ‘ahamkāra’ (egoism), various contemporary Indian teachings with Buddhism have also tried to eradicate selfishness or egoism and simultaneously tried to deduce what was a ‘pure ātman.’ They sifted through all that was not-self, or egoistic, but maintained that the remainder was the self.

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66 G. P. Malalasekera: Truth of Anattā, p. 11
67 SN. XXII. 18 – 20
68 Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu: Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree, p. 12
Self and ego have become synonyms, whereas originally, the former was mostly a reflexive meaning. It is said that to some extent self-consciousness leads to egoism and leads to the feeling of ‘I and mine.’ In the narrower, more negative sense of self-consciousness, it usually does; but that is actually defined as self-centeredness or self-interest, or plainly as selfishness. Self-consciousness in the broader sense refers to the awareness of oneself in relation to others—that is, one’s speech and actions not only affect oneself but also affect others. That is the core of the teaching of vacikamma (speech and its effects) and kāyakamma (physical actions and their effects).

‘Sabbe dhammā anattā’ deserves some varied approach here, since what is categorically referred to as ‘dhammā’ means only the conditioned and aggregated things. This phrase may be one of the most expressive of Buddhist ideology. On one hand, it has been considered a straightforward denial of the existence of a permanent self or soul, as expressed earlier in this chapter. On the other hand, it is argued that this sentence can be explained syntactically and philosophically.

The Buddha’s insistence that all phenomena of existence depend upon physical and mental aggregates has been a forthright attempt to determine the causes of suffering and thereby the extinction of it. Foremost is the grasping to a concept of a permanent individuality or soul. The contention originates from two-fold interpretation.

From the point that ‘sabbe dhammā’ refers to the body (rūpa) and mind (nāma) and the aggregates aforementioned, which together form the majority of matters, it is obvious that since they are impermanent by nature, then ‘sabbe dhammā anicca.’ From this point, the existence of any permanent self is denied.

It is then a subject of interpretation that the aforementioned dhammā are not-self and that a self exists apart from them. The Buddha’s principle objective other than pointing the way out from our suffering was to show how all worldly phenomena are compounded, temporary and subjected to dissolution or cessation.

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69 Ibid., p. 13

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A third analysis is presented that ‘sabbe dharmā anattā’ relates to self-consciousness. By referring to the personal and reflexive sense of self in this sentence, the Buddha urged his community to be aware of what each member was and was not. This is a mere exercise in self-awareness, other than the type that causes egoism. So one must see the things conditioned as extraneous (other) and not as being a part of oneself.

In many religious and philosophical works, a higher or supernatural entity is referred to with a capital ‘S’. In the New Age, called the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Spiritual Maturity, which stipulates like Buddhism that firstly, there is no higher being or God to which we need to turn for salvation and that secondly, we are totally responsible for our actions (the law of kamma), the Self refers not to a permanent or supernatural being but to an evolved and spiritual human being, endowed with compassion and intuition (as opposed to conscience). It reflects upon the Buddha’s teaching that one becomes a ‘deva’ (god) through great merit and lofty human attributes; but there is neither direct nor indirect reference to a permanent being. One strives to become this being; one strives further to sustain it. If one fails or gives in to lower or baser actions, this being-ness is still subjected to cessation.

Later in his lifetime, the Buddha exhorted his community to accept any theory of a soul which does not entail suffering and impermanence, but after interrogating his community, everyone agreed unanimously that no such theory existed. It can be concluded that since clinging to such a theory causes suffering, then one should release it.

3.13. Anattā as explained in Milindapañha

Explaining the nature of phenomena, there is the notable dialogue between a King Milinda and a venerable monk called Nāgasena. To begin, Nāgasena replies that ‘Nāgasena (and others) is a generally accepted term, a designation in common use and that no permanent individuality (soul) exists.’
This is a straightforward explanation of name as applied to an object. ‘Nāgasena’ applies to a ‘being’ composed of body and physical aggregates, and mind and mental aggregates. These are always impermanent and in flux.

After a person is born, his progenitors assign a name to him or her: in this case, Nāgasena. Since the compound called a person is not lasting, any concept attached to it is not either, whether a name, a nationality, a race, creed or whatever. The body of that individual is produced in a country, which also is not permanent and feels no attachment to it until later in life. That is, he is taught to be proud of his country by his society, which has already received this mis-education. Nationality, etc., is an egoistic attachment to a place and so on.

Herein, the Buddha informs his community that there is no reality, whether absolute or otherwise, to any of the references above mentioned. They are what modern psychology refers to as ‘mental constructs’, i.e., mental formations. In the above quotation, soul is also mentioned. It is relative and conventional use only, referring to ‘man’ or ‘person.’ The Buddha warns the community that these appellations are ‘mere words’ (habits of speech with no greater meaning) and empty. Designation is a reference to conventional or relative sense of the word, as we have mentioned earlier about ‘soul.’

Furthermore, reference to family, caste, etc., stands to prove that such concepts do not actually exist. It is foolish and uneducated to cling to them as being ‘self’. Some writers of the new age define enlightenment as seeing beyond the limits of race, etc. Man is altogether one species.

The conversation between King Milinda and Nāgasena goes on as follows:

Nāgasena asked the king Milinda: ‘How then, Sire, did you come, on foot or in a chariot?’

The king replied: ‘I did not come, Sir, on foot. I came in a carriage.’

‘Then if you came, Sire, in a carriage, explain to me what that is. Is it the pole that is the chariot?’

‘I did not say that.’

‘Is it the axle that is the chariot?’

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'Certainly not.'

'Is it the wheels, or the framework, or the ropes, or the yoke, or the spokes of the wheels, or the goad, that are the chariot?'

And to all these the king still answer no.

'Then is it all these parts of it that are the chariot?'

'No, Sir.'

'But is there anything outside them that is the chariot?'

And still he answered no.

'Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no chariot. Chariot is a mere empty sound. What then is the chariot you say you came in? It is a falsehood that your Majesty has spoken, an untruth! There is no such thing as a chariot! You are a king over all India, a mighty monarch. Of whom then are you afraid that you speak untruth?'

And Milinda the king replied to Nāgasena and said, 'I have spoken no untruth, Reverend Sir. It is on account of its having all these things – the pole, axle, wheels, framework, ropes, yoke, spokes and goad – that it comes under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of "chariot"'

Then Nāgasena said, 'Very good, Your Majesty has rightly grasped the meaning of "chariot." And just even so it is on account of all those things – the thirty two kinds of organic matter in a human body and the five constituent elements of being – that I come under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of "Nāgasena".  

The above conversation clearly shows that Nāgasena explained that 'chariot' is a name given to a conglomerated object, a means of transport, and that in any one of its parts there is no identity as 'chariot.' A spoke, a hub, a screw, etc., is only itself and not a chariot. In like manner, a hand, a foot, an eye, nose, etc., are not-self. It is therefore a wrong view (micchādiṭṭhi or sakkāyadiṭṭhi) to conceive that any one of these is 'self.' Before compounding, it was not a self and it will not be after it is disassembled, even as the chariot is only a chariot when it is fully assembled.

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70 Milindapañha II.1.1
“To these (five sets of elements) different names are given, such as ‘sentient being’, ‘man’, ‘Manu’s progeny’, ‘child’, ‘life’, ‘soul.’ If with respect to them the expression is used “he sees this object with his own eyes” it is a false imputation (assertion) [there being no one possessing eyes of his own]. In common life with respect to them such expressions are used as “that is the name of this venerable man”, “he belongs to such a caste and such a family, he eats such food, this pleases him, he has reached such an age” These, O Brethren! Are mere words, mere conventional designations.”71

The realization of Vajira Bhikkhuni, who understood the aggregates as demonstrated by the simile of the chariot, is outstanding as an example of the knowledge of the nature of existence. We may add that the opinion of Mara could well mean the opinions of the ignorant, common people and of the opponents of Buddhism. No one sane enough nowadays would even conceive that the smallest component of any object carries the identity of the object. There is only the potential to combine and form objects. In the same light, the atom cannot be identified as a molecule or as any one of the larger objects it compounds. Nor can any one germ be considered as a disease. If it were possible, then only one germ would be needed to infect a man or a beast.

One must inevitably realize that even as a bolt, an axle and so on compound to form what is generally known as a chariot, “the whole is the sum of all its parts.”

There is another famous kathā about four blind servants who must describe an elephant to their master. Each one holds a distinct part of the elephant; the trunk, the ear, the belly and so on. The tale continues that they returned home and told him “the elephant is this, the elephant is that.” Each one believed that the whole could be assessed from one part. As everyone today is aware, the elephant cannot exist until all the parts combine.

After inception, there is conception and the parts of the embryo take form. When the whole has been assembled and the consciousness occurs, we call that being ‘person’ or ‘man’. But the mind and senses are very mutable and

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71 Theodore Stcherbatsky: The Soul-Theory of the Buddhist, p. 26
change quickly. At some time in the future, the senses may become useless. The eye may become either partly or totally blind; the ear may be deaf in the same way. Whenever they fail, they affect the quality of a person’s life and lead him or her to sadness. Furthermore, the moment the physical life ends, the senses, the mind and all mental qualities cease. Whatevsoever has distinguished the man from the beast no longer exists, so the individual also ceases.

It is puzzling that there could have been those who believed and insisted “I am the eye” and “the eye is the self.” Even in modern analysis, no one is ready to accept it. Just as one knows that the axle, etc., of a chariot is not a whole chariot, he knows and understands that the part of the eye are not a whole eye, nor is the eye in its entirety a whole body. It is only an eye.

Firstly, that all compound objects require formation indicates a temporary state of existence. Secondly, the tendency to change, especially suddenly, indicates unhappiness. Lastly, beside that they are impermanent, which denies the existence of any permanent individuality, the first two marks combine to indicate that they cannot be a self.

Concerning the indirect references to anattā in the Nikāyas, one reference is outstanding as closest to the meaning: ‘asara’, which means unsubstantial. Some translations of the teaching of anattā refer to lack of substance (sara) in all matters, including existence as a whole. The translation for sara is a ‘core.’ Notice the selection:

‘One does not find any substance in the existence, just as it is impossible to find flower on the fig trees, abandon this and the opposite shores, as a snake quits its old worn-out skin.’

There is abstractly reference to a ‘soul’ in that sara refers to one’s nature, but there is nonetheless no reference to anything permanent. Or it refers to the world at large or the physical body. The quotation closes with the exhortation to abandon any thought that it is the self, or in permanence. Many of the scriptures close with such an exhortation, and this is a clear-cut reminder

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that the Buddha’s mission in the world was primarily to show how to alleviate
the suffering of existence.

Further reference is made to the three characteristics as being both
taught separately and independent of each other. The clarity in defining
‘anattā’ was done in relation to the other two, and due to there being some
connection later.

The following quotation serves to analyse the meaning and/or existence
of a soul in terms of other phenomena:

“The sun and the rain, what can they do
Regarding space eternal?
 Efficient towards the skin they are.
 If the soul is similar to skin
 It must be non-eternal
 If it be similar to space
 It shall be inefficient.” — Sarvadarśanasāṅgraha II"73

Sun and rain have little relation with space but have direct effect on the
skin; but all three are non-eternal; therefore, in comparing the soul to the skin,
the Buddha asserts that the ‘soul’ would not be permanent. In comparing it to
space, the soul may be “vast’ or limitless but it would then be “inefficient.”
Later on, many thousand years after the Buddha’s death, there were
philosophers who likened a God with space. They claimed that it was
“omniscient and all-seeing” for that reason. The Nikāya literature made further
reference to attā through other similes, such as ‘issara’ and ‘suñña.’ The latter
is referred to frequently in the Mahāyāna texts and will be discussed in detail.
On ‘issara’ being similar to attā, we found the following text:

‘The great sage said that all aggregates which are conditioned or all
existences which we come across are not issara.’74

73 Theodore Stcherbatsky: Soul-Theory of Buddhism. p. 83
74 Therigāthā, 713
Now, concerning the concept of ‘suñña’, which has been held in Mahāyāna, ‘suñña’ has been implied twice. One is the direct sense of ‘emptiness’ and the other is the Buddhist sense of ‘mindfulness and wisdom.’ The following Theravāda text gives it brief reference:

‘Consider the world as empty, being always mindful, remove speculation about the self and one overcomes death in this way. The king of death does not see the man who considers the world like that.’⁷⁵

Notice that ‘suñña’ is considered as a simile for ‘atta’ and that, again the Buddha concludes by exhorting his bhikkhus to contemplate on the emptiness that is this world. Emptiness has often been used to mean ‘which has no real meaning, value, feeling, etc.’ One can suppose that the Buddha warned against holding the idea that the world had any real meaning, although his meaning is closer to ‘self’.

The second sense of this term means ‘absence of egoism and selfishness’⁷⁶ and the state is likened to being in the ‘heart’ of the dhamma. The dhamma was emphatically opposed to egoism. The concept was fully called suññata and was compared to wisdom. It is written, ‘we have the mindfulness and wisdom that can extinguish dukkha.’⁷⁷ With the extinction of egoism and selfishness, the desired qualities spoken of in the dhamma arise.

However, this is as difficult to grasp for the common lay believer as ‘anatta.’ Through one’s own experiences or witnessing others’, the layman or laywoman becomes aware of the impermanence which pervades life in the mundane world: A loved dies or falls ill, property is lost, stolen or damaged and so on. From the uncertainty and change in life, one perceives that it is cause of suffering; although he or she holds to that suffering as one’s own. But the concept of voidness, save that expounded above in the second sense, is hard to understand. One must join the holy life to understand it; but, again, then and now, in some Buddhist countries, some men or boys joined for less noble reasons.

⁷⁵ SN.1119
⁷⁶ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree, p.19
⁷⁷ Ibid., p.20

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3.14. Conclusion

From the abovementioned data, one may invariably conclude that the concept of ‘anattā’ is corroborated even by science and psychology today. The ‘self’ is vague and is referred to only individually. It is with the small ‘s’ and not with the big (‘S’) one. Most of the things in the world are actually devoid of anything, which resemble the Self referred to in the Upaniṣads. We have discussed that the Upaniṣadic Self or ātman was blissful, eternal and unchanging. We can observe even with the physical eyes that everything around us is limited, subject to change and decay and causes suffering or dissatisfaction at one time or another.

The Buddha taught the existence of suffering, its causation and its termination as his primary doctrine. For him, the holy life of an ascetic was the most suitable solution: one turns away from a thing which causes suffering—family, possessions and properties, luxury goods, etc. and looks inward. Eventually, one finds mental tranquility or nibbāna. However, there is a controversy regarding the nature of nibbāna. Many people believe that it is achieved when the body and mind are dead. Mahāyāna stipulates that nibbāna is a state of ultimate peace accessible even in this life, through detachment and wisdom. For the Buddha, the whole root of the evils in the world – hatred and greed – primarily depended on wrong thinking about existence. He believed that egocentrism was one of the worst ideas, since it led to a false sense of possession. The thrust of his philosophy may be summarized, as ‘nothing should be held onto as a self.’

However, although he varied with the Vedic/Upaniṣadic descriptions of ‘ātman’, and believed that egoism was at root of the suffering, he taught about the three marks of existence to lead the way from suffering.

Anattā was taught in relation to anicca and dukkha, as the third part of a formula about common, mundane or worldly existence; ‘sabbe samkharā aniccā’ (all conditioned things are impermanent) – ‘sabbe samkharā dukkhā’, 208
or ‘sabbe anicca dukkha’ (all that is impermanent is suffering) and ‘sabbe dharmas anatta’ (all dhammas have no self). In his observations of the ‘known universe’ or world, the Buddha never beheld a single thing to be lasting, and formulated his concept of anicca. From worldly existence around him, he saw that anything in the lives of these persons that succumbed to this change and impermanence finally caused suffering. But he held that so long as we cling to the false concept of ‘ego’ or ‘self’, then we also accumulate or bring suffering upon ourselves. Therefore, he concentrated on the theory that the way to proceed was to first eliminate the false concept of ego.

The most salient aspect of anatta is that with this doctrine the disease of egoism (ahamkara) and its symptoms recede and vanish. Following that the suffering provoked by them also ceases to exist. This is the core of nibbana. It is possible even in one’s life whenever one realizes that all his suffering arises from the fact (that he assumed it upon himself egoistically): ‘I am suffering, suffering is mine,’ and so on.

To be concise, with egoism, one accepts suffering as ‘his or her own.’ That is ultimately unreal. In explanation, the Buddha remarked that “suffering arises and suffering subsides.” It has no self. It is as impermanent as happiness and all other experiences in the mundane world. Therefore, it is most essential that one merely observes this birth and death and learns indifference. This can be done with the awareness of non-self (anatta) as base. Then, the attitude becomes “I am not suffering, suffering is not mine.” If strictly practiced, the practitioner may achieve ‘satori’ (Japanese, glimpse of enlightenment or nibbana) or ‘nibbana in earthly existence’, which is lasting tranquility.

Forthrightly, the truth of existence is that life is both impermanent and filled with misery; henceforth, there can be no being, entity or self that refutes either of these states. ‘Whatever cannot last causes suffering and is not (worthy to be) a self.’ It is also worth mentioning that among all of the Buddha’s contemporaries, no one could agree as to the nature of self, world or universe.

Glasenapp asserts, ‘Negation of an imperishable atman is the common characteristic of both the Lesser and Greater Vehicle (Hinayana or Theravada,

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and Mahāyāna, respectively) and there is no reason therefore to assume that Buddhist tradition, which is in complete agreement on this point, has deviated from the Buddha’s original teaching.78

The Buddhist doctrine of rebirth should be distinguished from the theory of reincarnation, which implies the transmigration of a soul and its invariable material rebirth. Buddhism denies the existence of an unchanging or eternal soul. If the immortal soul, which is supposed to be the essence of man, is eternal, there cannot be either a rise or a fall. Besides one cannot understand why different souls are so variously constituted at the outset. To prove the existence of endless felicity in an eternal heaven and unending torments in an eternal hell, an immortal soul is absolutely necessary. Otherwise, what is it that is punished in hell or rewarded in heaven?

According to Buddhism mind is nothing but a complex compound of fleeting mental states. One unit of consciousness consists of three phases namely arising or genesis (uppāda) static or development (thiti), and cessation or dissolution (bhāṅga). Immediately after the cessation stage of a thought moment there occurs the genesis stage of the subsequent thought-moment. Each momentary consciousness of this ever-changing life-process, on passing away, transmits its whole energy, all the indelibly recorded impressions to its successor. Every fresh consciousness consists of the potentialities of its predecessors together with something more. There is therefore, a continuous flow of consciousness like a stream without any interruption. The subsequent thought moment is neither absolutely the same as its predecessor – since that which goes to make it up is not identical – nor entirely another – being the same continuity of kamma energy. Here there is no identical being but there is an identity in process. Every moment there is birth, every moment there is death. The arising of one thought-moment means the passing away of another thought-moment and vice versa. In the course of one life-time there is momentary rebirth without a soul. It must not be understood that a consciousness is chopped up in bits and joined together like a train or a chain.

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78 H. Von Glasenapp: Vedānta and Buddhism, p. 154
But, on the contrary, it persistently flows on like a river receiving from the tributary streams of sense constant accretions to its flood, and ever dispensing to the world without the thought-stuff it has gathered by the way. It has birth for its source and death for its mouth. The rapidity of the flow is such that hardly is there any standard whereby it can be measured even approximately. However, it pleases the commentators to say that the time duration of one thought-moment is even less than one-billionth part of the time occupied by a flash of lightning. Here we find a juxtaposition of such fleeting mental states of consciousness opposed to a superposition of such states as some appear to believe. No state once gone ever recurs nor is identical with what goes before. But we worldlings, veiled by the web of illusion, mistake this apparent continuity to be something eternal and go to the extent of introducing an unchanging soul, an attā, the supposed doer and receptacle of all actions to this ever-changing consciousness. The so-called being is like a flash of lightning that is resolved into a succession of sparks that follow upon one another with such rapidity that the human retina cannot perceive them separately, nor can the uninstructed conceive of such succession of separate sparks. As the wheel of a cart rests on the ground at one point, so does the being live only for one thought-moment. It is always in the present, and is ever slipping into the irrevocable past. What we shall become is determined by this present thought-moment. If there is no soul, what is it that is reborn, one might ask. Well, there is nothing to be reborn. When life ceases the kammika energy re-materializes itself in another form.

Birth is the arising of the psycho-physical phenomena. Death is merely the temporary end of a temporary phenomenon. Just as the arising of a physical state is conditioned by a preceding state as its cause, so the appearance of psycho-physical phenomena is conditioned by cause anterior to its birth. As the process of one life-span is possible without a permanent entity passing from one thought-moment to another, so a series of life-processes is possible without an immortal soul to transmigrate from one existence to another. Buddhism does not totally deny the existence of a personality in an empirical sense. It only
attempts to show that it does not exist in an ultimate sense. The Buddhist philosophical term for an individual is *santāna*, i.e., a flux or a continuity. It includes the mental and physical elements as well. The *kammika* force of each individual binds the elements together. This uninterrupted flux or continuity of psycho-physical phenomenon, which is conditioned by *kamma*, and not limited only to the present life, but having its source in the beginningless past and its continuation in the future — is the Buddhist substitute for the permanent ego or the immortal soul of other religions.