CHAPTER X: BUDDHISM

The Upanishadic doctrine was, as we have seen in our previous chapter, intended for only a select few. A characteristic feature of Buddha's teaching, on the contrary, was that it admitted no esoteric truths, and was meant for all who were not satisfied with leading a life of natural inclinations. It was "a folk-gospel" as it has been described. Its message was for the plain man, and it accordingly gave rise to a general uplift of great significance. A second divergence was that, while Brahmanism relied overmuch on the instruction given by others, Buddhism laid particular stress on self-reliance and self-effort in knowing the Ultimate Reality. The disciple was asked to think for himself, and to accept others' opinions only after he had been fully convinced of their soundness. That is, it was not dogmatic even in the least. For the rest, early Buddhism was much the same as Brahmanism, and believed in the same cosmological and eschatological views, including the doctrine of karma. The main features of Primitive Buddhism may be summarized as

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1 Note - This chapter is indebted to The essentials of Indian Philosophy - M. Hiriyanna.
follows:

We have seen that in the early Vedic period, man was regarded as distinct from the divine, and that this view had been gradually transformed by the time of the Upanishads into the view that he was himself essentially divine. It is this God-in-man that Buddha understood by atman—neither body nor mind, but spirit. He also believed that, as spirit, it persists here as well as hereafter so that it is wrong to say, as is often done, that Buddha denied the self or identified it with the body and the mind. It, however, represented to him not man as he is, but as what he might or ought to be. In other words, it stood for the ideal self, to realize which there is an innate urge in man. His foremost task in life accordingly is to act in response to it; and the result of so acting, viz. the "weaning out" of his lower nature, of the lust and hate in him, is all that is meant by liberation or nirvana, it is not the annihilation of the self, but only the extinguishing of selfhood. In the ordinary acceptation of the term. Early Buddhism is thus a gospel of hope, and not a gospel of despair as it is commonly represented to be.

But what is the means to such liberation? The Upanishads, whose teaching is nearly the same, lay down a course of discipline for the self becoming Brahman.
But according to one of the two interpretations of them, the lapse of man from his true spiritual state is conceived not as real, taking place in time, but as only apparent. The goal is not therefore anything which is to be reached in fact; it has only to be realized in thought. It thus lays little stress on "becoming", in the sense of attaining what has not yet been attained. The other interpretation of the Upanishads, according to which spirit is self-evolving, is, no doubt, very different in this respect, but there, it is the goal that is represented as important, and not so much the way leading to it, as here. For original Buddhism, it is man as an aspirant after perfection that matters more than man having achieved it. Further, in the Upanishadic view, the immediate means recommended for attaining the ultimate goal, even when it is conceived as growing into Brahman, is yoga. Buddha's emphasis, on the other hand, is throughout on dharma in its ethical sense. It is described as "the lamp of life", and signified perfect conduct or godly living, not a mere code of dogma as it came to do afterwards.

The original form of the creed, thus reconstructed, must contain elements that are hypothetical. It also seems to do less than justice to certain aspects of the teaching of the Upanishads. For example, it
ignores that a dynamic conception of Brahman finds a conspicuous place in them; and it also minimizes the importance attached therein to moral purity in the scheme of discipline for the realization of the Ultimate Reality. However that may be, the point for us to note now is that the teaching of Buddha was positive and constructive. But the negative and analytic view came in course of time to prevail; and, as a consequence of it, Buddhism gradually became thoroughly monastic in character. This transformation had already taken place by the time the systems proper took rise. It forms the chief teaching of the Pali Buddhistic literature whose main features we are now to sketch very briefly. We shall be able to do this best by explaining what is meant by the Four Noble Truths which, according to the Pali canon, formed the subject-matter of the very first sermon Buddha delivered at Banaras. The account that has come down to us of these Truths is now taken to represent, on the whole, a later stage of the teaching - the result of "monkish misapprehension". Their implication is that life is an evil; and their chief aim, to point out how it can be overcome. In these Truths, we have what corresponds to a physician's treatment of a disease - ascertaining the nature of the disease, discovering its cause and setting about its cure by adopting appropriate means thereto. They are:-
1. Life is evil: The whole teaching, as shown by its implied comparison of life to a disease, is based upon a pessimistic view, betokening monkish influence. But even in this later form of the doctrine, evil is not to be taken as the final fact in life. Its pessimism means that life is full of pain and suffering, not in itself, but only as it is ordinarily lived, for the doctrine holds out the hope that they can be completely overcome in the stage of nirvana which can be reached here and now, if one so wills.

2. Ignorance is the source of evil: The origin of evil is in ignorance (avidya), or not knowing the true nature of the self. We commonly assume it to be an integral something which is other than the bodily organism; and we believe that this self not only persists as long as the organism does but also survives it. According to canonical Buddhism, this is an absolute error, and there is no self other than the complex of the body (rupa) and the mind (nāma). It is sometimes spoken of as consisting not of these two, but of five factors (called skandhas), one of which is the physical body (rupa), and the rest represent different phases of mind (nāma) like cognition and feeling – a view which shows how the spirit of analysis came to prevail more and more. Even in this sense of being a mere complex, whether of two or of five factors, the self is
not permanent. It is undergoing change almost con-
stantly; and, in nirvana, it completely ceases to be.
It is the clinging to this false self, as a result of
our ignorance of its real nature, that explains all
the misery of life as it is commonly lived. Thus
Buddhism, which postulated a changing self as a protest
against a static one as conceived by some at the time,
came in course of time to virtually repudiate it. We
should add that this principle of explanation was soon
extended to other cases, with the result that all
things, and not the self alone, were deemed to be mere
aggregates (saṅghāta) of their respective component
parts. A chariot, for example, is nothing more than
an assemblage of the pole, wheels etc. This is known
as the doctrine of the non-substantiality (nairatmya)
of things.

3. Evil can be overcome; It is possible to remove
this evil, for it is caused, and whatever is caused is
removeable according to this teaching. Given the
cause, the effect follows; (This is the doctrine of
pratitya-samutpāda or "dependent origination").
And, if the one can be removed, the other will neces-
arily cease to be. The fact that life's evil is caused
is exhibited in the form of twelve links, known as
the "chain of causation". The first of them is ignorance
of the true nature of the self, which implies that, as
in the case of the Upanishadic doctrine, evil is radically of the metaphysical type. Of the remaining eleven, it will do to mention only three, viz. craving or thirst (trṣṇā), death and rebirth. That is, man's ignorance gives rise to a selfish craving for things; and unsatisfied craving lead to rebirth after death. It is this recurring cycle of birth and death that should be ended; and the result is nirvana, which may accordingly be described as the cessation of ignorance, of craving or of birth and death. The goal of life is thus conceived here as purely negative while, in the original teaching, it meant the complete development of the higher self, through overcoming the tyranny of the lower. A person who succeeds in breaking through this circle of Saṃsāra can, it was believed, attain the serene composure of nirvana in the present life; and he is, as in Jainism, called an arhan or "the worthy One".

The principle underlying the chain of causation, which was originally formulated to account for the evil of life, was later extended to all things, whether psychical or physical; and they likewise came to be regarded as caused, and therefore as ultimately exterminable. This is known as the doctrine of the impermanence (anityatva) of things.

4. Right knowledge is the means of removing evil: As knowledge is the logical antithesis of ignorance,
enlightenment about the true nature of one's self will remove evil. By this enlightenment, we should understand an inner conviction which, to be effectively secured, requires a long course of previous moral training. Here we find the emphasis which, as we stated earlier, Buddha had once laid on right conduct. But in consonance with the general trend of the development of the doctrine, the emphasis is now shifted on to knowledge or wisdom (prajñā) and meditative practice (yoga) chiefly on the Fourth Truths. It was "a middle path" that it commended - a path like that which Buddha himself is stated to have followed before he attained illumination. These three viz. right conduct (sīla), right knowledge (prajñā) and right concentration (samādhi) are the most important elements in the discipline. It includes five more, and is therefore known as the Eightfold Path; these five are - right resolve, right speech, right livelihood, right effort and right mindfulness.

It is known as the doctrine of momentariness (kāsa-bhāṅga-vāda) because it avers that nothing that is, lasts for longer than one instant i.e. reality according to it, whether material or spiritual, is a flux or a flow (saṅtana). Since none in the succession of states constituting it is static. Hence all our
notions of stability are illusory. "No man can step into the same stream twice" it is said, because the stream in the two moments is only similar and not identical. Objects are ever changing. Even when a thing is not changing into something else, it is not constant, but is reproducing itself and is therefore to be regarded as a series of like forms succeeding one another perpetually as in the case of a lamp flame.

Although Buddhism regarded reality as but an aggregate, it did not deny either external objects or the self (sarvāstivāda). It recognized both, and was therefore fully realistic in its view of knowledge. This feature survives in Hinayana Buddhism; but naturally it is modified in accordance with the new hypothesis of momentariness. Neither external reality, nor the self, consequently lasts longer than an instant. But everything, it is believed, may continue as a series for any length of time, the similarity of its several members, giving rise in our mind to the illusion of sameness or identity. The flame of a lamp appears to be the same in any two moments, but really it signifies two separate states of it, which have no substantial identity. In other words, there are modifications but nothing that endures through them.

When we remember that Buddhism repudiates the idea of an enduring substance, we see that the self
(ignoring for the moment the physical element entering into its make-up) should be conceived in it as a continuous stream of ideas. If so, it may be asked how the Buddhist can account for facts like memory, which involves reference to the past. The answer is that, when a particular idea constituting the self of a particular moment disappears, it does so after leaving its marks behind and that the self of the next moment is consequently informed by it through and through. That is, the self of a person at any instant, though not the same as it was at a previous instant, is not quite different from it. It is by this subtle, and not quite convincing, distinction that moral responsibility is maintained to belong to an individual for what he does. The criminal who is punished may not be the same person that committed the crime; but yet he merits punishment, it is argued, for being a continuation of the criminal, he cannot be considered as another.

As regards external reality, which also is conceived as momentary, each member of the series constituting an object is called a sva-leksana — a term which literally means "like itself" or "unique". It represents a bare particular. If it still appears as characterized in some manner, says as blue or sweet, that characteristic is purely an illusion. The predi-
cates, which all represent universals or common features like qualities and actions, are called \textit{samanya-laksanas}. They are really figments of the mind which appear transferred to the object—constitutives of our thought, and not of the external world on which it is directed. The \textit{sva-laksanas}, which are the ultimate basis of external reality, may be taken to stand for the data of sense like colour or taste; only we should remember that the momentary sensation is, to take particular instances, merely "blue" or "sweet" and not something that is qualified by "blueness" or "sweetness". The number of \textit{sva-laksanas}, which are the ultimate facts of the outer world, is infinite. The conception of an external thing in this school accordingly is that it is a series of particulars or aggregates of them which are really devoid of all characteristic, although they appear to possess them.

So far we have spoken of Hinayāna Buddhism. The Mahāyāna form of it is represented by two schools, both of which are idealistic. According to some, called the Yogācāras, knowledge points to no external object whatsoever. There is only the self, conceived as a stream of ideas much as in Hinayāna Buddhism; but none of the ideas is here regarded as having any objective counterpart. Since the doctrine thus reduces all reality to thought, it is named \textit{Vijñāna-Vada} or
"the theory of the sole reality of ideas". One of the chief arguments in support of this view is based upon the inseparable connection that is observed to exist between knowledge and object. There is no knowledge that does not refer to an object, and there is no object that can be conceived except as known. This necessary association between them, it is said, shows that there is no need for treating them as distinct, and that the so-called object may well be regarded as an aspect or form of knowledge itself. The idealism of the school consists in this explanation of objects as but states or forms of the "mind", if we may use that word for the series of ideas which here constitutes the self, the assumption of these forms by the mind is due to the revival of former impressions (vāsanā) left on it by previous experience; and the diversity of perception is explained, not by diversity in the presented objects, but by that in the nature of the revived impressions.

Such an explanation may sound strange, for it may be thought that the original impression at least must be due to an external object. But this objection is warded off by two arguments. First, it is denied that the impressions have any origin in time. They are literally beginningless. Secondly, it is pointed out
that impressions are left on the mind not merely by valid knowledge caused, as it is commonly assumed, by a corresponding object outside it but also by error, for example, the fancied perception of a ghost. To suppose that every mental impression should be finally traceable to an external object, actually existing, is to beg the very question at issue. So, even if there were a beginning to any series of impressions it would not establish the existence of a real object corresponding to it at any time in the past.

The doctrine is analogous to what is described in modern philosophy as subjective idealism or subjectivism. The chief objection to it is that it places all experience on a level with dreams. In other words, it abolishes the distinction between truth and illusion, since in both alike there is no object outside knowledge. But it is hardly a defensible position. We infer the falsity of dreams by comparing them with waking experience. If the latter also is likewise false, we may ask by what experience it is shown to be so. Whatever the answer of the Yogācāra to this question may be, his position becomes untenable, for he will have to admit either that there is a higher kind of knowledge which is not false or that waking experience itself is true. Further, as a consequence of rejecting external objects, the subjectivist must deny the existence of all selves besides his own, for, if there is no reason to believe in external physical
objects, there can be none to believe in other people except as part of his dream. The doctrine will thus be reduced to solipsism, or the theory that there is only a solitary self and that everything else is mere fancy. It is clear that such a theory, though it cannot be logically proved to be wrong, stultifies all the presuppositions of practical life and puts an end to all philosophical controversy.

The second development on the idealistic side is nihilism, the doctrine of the Madhyamikas, which denies the reality not only of external objects but also of the self. It supports this conclusion by pointing out that the notion of things, physical as well as psychical, is riddled with contradictions and that they cannot therefore be accepted as real. Of the several arguments adduced in this connection, we shall refer to one that is based upon the Buddhistic view of causation. According to it, as we know, there is nothing that is uncaused; and the Madhyamika points out that the notion of an object originating is inconceivable, whether we regard it as existent or not prior to origination. In the former case, it does not require to be produced; in the latter, it is impossible to produce it, for nothing cannot be made to become something. It means that the notion of causation itself is a delusion; and since, according to Buddhism,
there is nothing that is permanent, we should perforce conclude that the whole universe is self-discrepant and illusory. Nāgārjuna, the greatest teacher of this school, says "There is neither being, nor cessation of it; there is neither bondage, nor escape from it" - (Madhyamika-kārikā, 16,8). This doctrine is therefore known as "the doctrine of the void" (sūnya-vāda).

But it is necessary to add that the above explanation of all experience as a delusion is only from the ultimate standpoint. The doctrine grants a sort of reality (samurtri-satya) to the subject as well as the object; and they are held to be real, relatively to the activities of everyday life. It does not deny that we know, feel and act; only it holds that the final significance of it is nothing, because all is void. For this reason, the name of "relativism" will bring out its character better than "idealism", But we may question, whether the Madhyamika can at all speak of a realm of relativity when he recognizes no reality that is absolute. Moreover, the denial of the self or mind altogether is impossible, for to think of the absence of all consciousness is itself a state of consciousness and therefore points to the persistence or the irrepressibility of mind.
We have described the Mādhyamika school as maintaining that the Ultimate Reality is the void or vacuity-in-itself. The majority of modern scholars who have studied this school of thought are of opinion that "the void" (sūnysa) here means only that it is nothing, as it were, since it is altogether incomprehensible. This view is supported by the Mādhyamika definition of the Ultimate Reality, viz. that it neither "is" nor "is not", nor "both is and is not", nor "neither is nor is not".

"Na Sat nāsat na sadasat na cāpyanubhayātmakam Catuskoti-vinirmuktam tattvam Mādhyamikā viduh".

It excludes all conceivable predicates, including that of non-existence; and the ultimate has accordingly to be viewed as beyond all conception, and not as absolute nothing. Such an interpretation is, indeed, logically involved in the doctrine, since the negation of everything, without implying a positive ground (avedhi) is inconceivable. According to this interpretation, the doctrine ceases to be finally relativistic, for it accepts an Absolute, though it may regard it as altogether ineffable. It may be stated that there is evidence to show that the Yogācārasas also admitted an absolute consciousness or universal self in addition to the particular egos and their respective ideas
referred to in the account given above. According to these alternative interpretations, the goal of life in Mahayana Buddhism is merging in the Absolute, not annihilation as it would otherwise be, and as it generally is according to Hinayana Buddhism.

Now as regards the practical discipline leading to the final goal. The Hinayana scheme is virtually the same as in canonical Buddhism. But the Mahayana form of it has modified it profoundly, in two important respects. The attainment of liberation by the individual has ceased to be the ultimate aim; and the person that succeeds in acquiring enlightenment is expected to work for the good of his fellow men, instead of remaining satisfied with his own nirvana. Such a person is called a Bodhisattva (literally, "wisdom-being"). This ideal, with its emphasis on the welfare of others, far excels the other one of the arhat who is concerned chiefly, if not solely, with salvation for himself. Buddha is represented to have been a Bodhisattva in many of his former lives; and we shall indicate best the love and compassion which are the characteristic features of this ideal by citing the saying which tradition ascribes to him, viz. that he would willingly bear the burden of everybody's suffering, if he could thereby bring relief to the world. Secondly, while the Hinayana was atheistic and looked upon Buddha as
essentially a human being, though divinely gifted, the Māhāyāna gradually came to deify him and adopted devout worship of him as a means to salvation. In these developments, Māhāyāna Buddhism has been considerably influenced by theistic Hinduism. "We see here the influence of the doctrine of bhakti, known to us from the Bhagavadgītā, and it is most probable that it was the Bhagavadgītā itself which influenced the development of the Māhāyāna". - Winternitz, History of Indian Literature Vol. II p. 229.